

All That Glistens

FOUR
SHORT
PLAYS

AHON GOOPTU

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Four Short Plays

by

Ahon Gooptu



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For Dimi,
with whom I share my earliest memories of watching,
studying, and writing about theatre

ALL THAT GLISTENS

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FOREWORD

I started writing plays when I was 16, when I was attending an all-boys' school in Kolkata, India. I started writing plays because I felt the need to create roles for people with whom *I* identified, living in a society that I felt proud to live in. I started writing plays to play out scenarios that I was too scared to live out in real life.

Six years later, I continue writing plays for the same reasons albeit under different circumstances. Toward the end of 2019, when I was at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center for a semester, one of my freshly written one-act plays got a staged reading during Playwrights and Librettists Week. At the end of that week, I told myself and my cohort, "I am not a playwright." That's proof enough that I lie to myself quite a bit and find some joy in looking back at how naïve past Ahon had been.

Most of the pieces in this collection were written during the COVID-19 pandemic (with the exception of *Labor Day*, which I wrote first at the O'Neill). Much like the rest of the world, I, too, have experienced isolation, depression, the loss of several loved ones, and a longing for intimacy amidst radical changes in politics and society in this past year. Writing these stories have provided me a sense of grounding, stability, and joy in an otherwise unprecedented time. I hope you find a bit of yourself in these characters and know that you're not alone in your struggle.

**Looking
For**

CHARACTERS

E. Mid-to-late 20s, he/him. Brown. Migrant in the US. Secure in life with his high-paying corporate job. Lonely.

VERS4NOW. Early 20s, he/him. White. US American. Barely making ends meet, monetarily. A player.

TIME

Evening, around dinner time on a weekend.

SETTING

A dining-and-living room in a really nice apartment. It's really, *really* nice, especially for a person in their late 20s to be living in, on their own. A dining table, with at least two chairs, set for a romantic date. A loveseat, some small desks and shelves with lots of souvenirs and tiny decorative items furnish the space. There is a kitchen, or at least the implication of one just off-stage. We don't necessarily have to see it, but we should know it's there. There is a door, which is the entrance to this nice apartment and a coat rack/closet just by that same door.

ON PUNCTUATION AND DIALOGUE

The dashes (“—”) at the ends of lines of dialogue are intentional and are meant to not only cut the character off from speaking (and almost immediately being followed by the other character) but also break up the characters' respective thoughts into different fragments. Overlapping is encouraged in these moments to facilitate quick pacing.

The characters speak their thoughts and what's in their minds. Nonetheless the dialogue should feel like a conversation, regardless of how uncomfortable or cringey or disjointed it might feel at times.

“It’s My House” by Diana Ross plays on the speaker while E, wearing an apron, goes around the kitchen — perhaps adding spices or occasionally stirring or tidying up — and sings along for the most part, with a skip in his step. He is shamelessly alone.

During this sequence, he sets a pretty flower in a slim vase, placing it in the middle of the table, and fiddles for a bit, making sure it is equidistant from each plate that has already been set on either end.

He eventually takes off his apron and goes offstage to change. After a moment or two, the sound of the doorbell ringing, followed by muffled groans from E, offstage. He emerges in his bare essentials, checks the clock (or his watch) and panics around the room, tending to some finishing touches. The doorbell rings again. E frantically finds his phone and changes the music to something soothing and “romantic.” It doesn’t have to be in English. It doesn’t have to have words. The doorbell rings a third time, this time twice successively. E takes a moment to breathe and calm his nerves. Then, he heads for the main door. He looks back at the room before opening it and checks that everything is in order.

E: *(with giggling excitement)* This will do for tonight.

He opens the door.

(speaking gradually faster and faster)

...oh OH no PLEASE DON’T LEAVE PLEASE COME BACK— I can’t afford to lose another one this month PLEASE— I AM SO LONELY please come back— oh yeah haha sorry about the no clothes that’s because I was just having a crisis-cum-panic fever in there right before I—

VERS4NOW enters, wearing a coat, kissing **E** and shutting him up.

VERS4NOW:

E:

VERS4NOW: Shh. You don't have to say anything, E. I know, I *know* you enjoyed that.

E: Please come in before you kiss me anymore without my consent in my apartment on our second date.

*E closes the door as **VERS4NOW** enters, still wearing his coat.*

VERS4NOW: (*in awe looking at the apartment*) Oh, *what* have we here — I was starting to doubt my plans for this evening, but this, (*sinister*) *this* changes things.

E: Roam around on your own accord, will you? Give yourself the home tour I'm not going to give you while I go and throw something on. I am literally soooo embarrassed right now.

E exits to his room.

VERS4NOW: Please! *Take* your time while I... set up! For tonight. Wow, this is *more* than comfortable. This will do for tonight.

He looks around for a bit and then spots the loveseat. He takes out a (not too long or thick) black rope from inside his coat and places it just under the loveseat, mostly hidden from sight. Similarly, he takes out and places a black collar and leash amidst the room décor so that they're not easily spottable. As he does this, he begins

grabbing some small items and pocketing them in his unusually large coat pockets. He takes out his phone and eagerly texts.

Oh, baby, get ready. Have I found the perrrrrrfect place for tonight!

E enters, dressed for dinner. **VERS4NOW** hastily puts away his phone in his pant pocket.

E: I gave you so much time to look around and you couldn't even find the coat closet. Let me offer to keep it away for you given the chivalrous gentleman that I am.

VERS4NOW: No, don't take my coat with your things in it. I will keep it away.

He goes and carefully puts away his coat.

E: Reverse chivalry, how cute.

(speaking gradually faster and faster and simultaneously busying himself)

So can I tell you about what we're eating and perhaps just bring out the first thing we're eating so that we don't have to engage in anymore small talk cuz I'm still really anxious that everything is going to fall apart even though you seem really nice and there is no reason to suspect you?

VERS4NOW: *(promptly)* I was going to tell you how good everything smelled so that you didn't suspect anything but so glad you asked.

E brings the soup to the table.

E: A heavy and creamy bisque to fill up your appetite so that you don't want to eat too much of the main dish, which is a mostly flavourless white specialty with a side of boiled mediocrity that you will love and I will endure, and, to end,

we will share an expensive store-bought decadent Dutch delicacy, because why the fuck not.

VERS4NOW: Necessary small talk as I pretend to be staring into your eyes because that's just how my culture has raised me to behave. Oh, man, I am so fucking excited for tonight, you have no idea.

E: (*with triggered panic*) Tonight, what do you mean, excited for tonight?

VERS4NOW: Well, you're not supposed to actually know—

E: Panic! I'm inexperienced and don't want to go any further—

VERS4NOW: Oh shit—

E: — how do I even say that?

VERS4NOW: — you're getting uncomfortable.

E: I said I'm looking for "Dates" and "Networking" on Grindr, I honestly thought that would be enough—

VERS4NOW: Can't have that, can't have that. Need to retrack, need to retrack—

E: — maybe I should just use Tinder next time— if only I could be discreet on there, I just can't risk people at my job finding out I'm—

VERS4NOW: — hey, at least I'm not one of those racist fucks on the app who would never tap back a brown dude—

E: — if only Tinder had the tag and Looking For features from Grindr to make it easier for straight people who are questioning...

VERS4NOW: — does thinking I'm not racist make me racist?

E: Straindr?

VERS4NOW: Is that racism or colorism?

E: Strindr?¹

VERS4NOW: A half-assed compliment about how “excited for tonight” really just means *this*: you, me, and this lovely dinner catered to my taste palette?

E:

VERS4NOW:

E:

VERS4NOW:

E: Crisis averted.

VERS4NOW: Crisis averted.

*They both dive into their bowls of soup together.
Then, after a moment—*

E: Dinner talk, dinner talk, dinner talk.

VERS4NOW: Soup is great, like actually, really, fucking great, wow, it's such a pity that I have to wait so long for the next course.

E: I'm so glad you like it. Maybe next time I can make more food that *I like*.

VERS4NOW: A compliment about the location of the

¹ Rhyming with Grindr.

apartment as a distraction from me asking about the cost of the apartment.

E: Uhhhh, not money talk... I know this place is a luxury, I *know* my job in corporate is evil—

VERS4NOW: Like I care about evil!

E: — but I'd just rather not talk about it. I want to talk about *you* and *your* day—

VERS4NOW: Quick boring response about my day— ha!

E: — and your beautiful, sparkling eyes—

VERS4NOW: Just *look* at how big this place is for *one* person—

E: — yeah, so you can only imagine how lonely it is when you're the *only* person living here—

VERS4NOW: — pacify by suggesting he must have friends on his floor—

E: — not really—

VERS4NOW: — or in the building—

E: — that stuff doesn't come as easy to me—

VERS4NOW: Fuck it— how thin are the walls? Can you hear your neighbours? More importantly, can they hear you?

E:

VERS4NOW:

E: No... not really.

VERS4NOW: Okay, perfect. Sugar-coat it with how I've never had walls thick enough to block the sound of my neighbours banging every night.

E: Your profile says you're looking for "Right Now," you think I don't know what that means? Your neighbours hear you just as much as you hear them.

E gathers himself.

But smile through it. You're here, aren't you? I just have to keep it together and keep your attention.

VERS4NOW: Pity you're so hot, dude. Maybe in another timeline we'd fuck.

E: Oh my gosh, I *like you* like you, too!

VERS4NOW: (*as charming as can be*) Bet you'd think I was memorable.

E: Oh. You're not like other guys.

VERS4NOW's phone buzzes with the distinct Grindr notification sound (to E, perhaps, it's just a vibration; perhaps he doesn't hear the notification sounds).

Why is your phone buzzing?

VERS4NOW checks it, responds with a smirk on his face, but doesn't actually reply to the notification.

(his anxiety skyrocketing)

Who's texting you? Why did you react like that?

VERS4NOW: What the fuck, why is your face like that?

E: What are you not telling me?

VERS4NOW: Ummm.

E: WHAT ARE YOU HIDING maybe I should bring out the entrée—

VERS4NOW: No no no— we can't have that— stall stall stall

E: — why do you want to wait do you NOT LIKE MY FOOD what the fuck WHY do YOU HATE ME

VERS4NOW: Umm umm umm I don't knowwww some bullshit about recovering from this exquisite red pepper bisque mmmmmmmmm pls work

E: Exquisite?! Okay blush blush, I'll wait — no rush!

VERS4NOW: EXAAAAACTLY noooooooo rush, now we're on the same page!

*Two successive Grindr notification sounds.
VERS4NOW checks his phone.*

You're gonna ruin the plan, man! Fuck!

E: Deep breaths to counter my anxious thoughts. Maybe some wine will open you up. I will bring over some wine.

E brings over a bottle of wine.

VERS4NOW: Shit, that's an expensive bottle. Maybe I should save it. Ummmm, how about some new crap about how I'm six months sober?

E: Oh! Felt like you should have told me that before I made the purchase—

VERS4NOW: Perhaps some reverse psychology to enforce it— so feel free to have some yourself, you know?

E: What's the point if you won't share it with me? I can have wine on my own any night of the week.

VERS4NOW: Hit it on the nail with some persistence...

E: I'll get the sparkling water. We can share that together.

VERS4NOW: ...and scene!

Three successive Grindr notification sounds.

VERS4NOW checks his phone again.

E: If you have somewhere else to be, just tell me. I can have this WINE and this STEAK and this RIJSTEVLAAI² on my own.

VERS4NOW: Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuck

E: Naïve, *naiiiiiive* E thinking having “Dates” and “Networking” in his Looking For would perhaps be a better move to avoid the d-bags.

VERS4NOW: FUCK! Girl, we're doing this NOW! Or never.

VERS4NOW holds **E** and brings him to the loveseat.

E: Of course, you don't want to be here. You're probably just horny for your next hook-up and want to get out of here.

VERS4NOW: Call me out, I guess.

VERS4NOW starts semi-cuddling him, in a position in which he can be texting on one hand

² Pronounced RA-ISH (like rice) -tev-lai.

without E noticing.

E: He thinks he can just comfort me with his—— oh...?

VERS4NOW: You're right, you're right—

E: He can— no, this is nice—

VERS4NOW: — I am “probably just horny”—

VERS4NOW *continues texting, unbeknownst to E.*

E: — so glad I tapped you that night—

VERS4NOW: — but I have plans for tonight—

E: — even though you didn't even show your face in your profile, I still tapped you, and if that sculpted torso of yours hadn't tapped back—

VERS4NOW: — and I'm not getting out of here—

E: — otherwise who knows how much solo wine and wank time I'd be having tonight.

VERS4NOW: — 1205 Waterford Court, apartment... 15?

E: Apartment 16.

VERS4NOW: Apartment 16!

E: You're not like the others, vers4now. You're——

VERS4NOW: — much worse.

VERS4NOW *drops his phone and grabs the rope from underneath the loveseat to strangle*

E *with.* He begins choking **E** and there are a few moments of struggle. The gasps and breaths from **E** might sound like noises you might hear in the bedroom, they might not. But this isn't **VERS4NOW**'s first time, so it doesn't take long for **E** to be rendered unconscious.

Once the deed is done, **VERS4NOW** ties **E**'s arms with the rope. He grabs the collar and leash and puts the collar around **E**'s neck. He then drags **E** to a room offstage. Meanwhile, his phone blows up with several consecutive Grindr notification sounds until **VERS4NOW** comes back onstage to the dining area.

VERS4NOW clears the table and replaces them with plates with the steak and the expensive bottle of wine. He goes over to his phone and then to the door. He looks back at the room before opening it and checks that everything is in order. A moment of pride, punctuated with a sinister smile or laugh.

This will do for tonight.

He opens the door.

Steak?

END OF PLAY

*Arsenic and
Wet Lace*

CHARACTERS

EUNICE. 97 years, she/her. Any ethnicity. The only surviving member of her generation in the family. Stubborn. Unhappily alive. Sort of senile. Unnaturally fit for her age.

WAYNE. 63 years, he/him. Eunice's nephew. Same ethnicity as her. Owns and runs a boutique chocolate shop. Barely keeping it together. Not as agile as his aunt.

TIME

6 a.m.

SETTING

A boutique chocolate shop in Manhattan. Vast and pristine. Mirrors and display shelves all around. Now sells more than just chocolate, as is evident from some signs on stage. **“NEW: RIJSTEVLAAI!¹ A decadent Dutch pudding tart”** is the most prominent one. The floor is empty, wide open, and looks slippery because of how pristine and clean it is. A wooden door on one side of this room has a glass circle in the centre to see through it. It swings open both ways. It is the entrance to the kitchen.

ON PUNCTUATION AND DIALOGUE

There is one sequence with excessive dashes (“—”) at the end and beginning of successive lines of dialogue. Overlapping is strongly encouraged in this sequence but in a way that every word is still clearly heard — they're important!

¹ Pronounced RA-ISH (like rice) -tev-lai.

Sounds of pots and pans and the like banging or falling on the ground offstage. Also from offstage, witch-like laughter from EUNICE and groans from WAYNE.

EUNICE: (*offstage*) There's no reason to keep me here!

She barges in through the kitchen door. She is dressed in a lovely white lace dress, with sleeves, that goes down to her knees, and a bow in her hair. She wears flats and has a big bowl in her hands.

Let me go! Darling, please.

WAYNE, *wearing a floury apron, follows through the door, out of breath.*

WAYNE: Auntie E, if you don't hand it over, I am going to—

EUNICE: What? Come after me. In that condition? Ha! Wahnathon,² if you try to stop me, darling, I will throw this (*holding up the bowl in her hand*) E V E R Y W H E R E. Now, we don't want *that*, do we?

WAYNE *is unsure how to respond. He can't have it thrown everywhere.*

No, (*witch laughter*) didn't think so. Now listen to me.

WAYNE: No, *you* listen to me. It is six in the morning and I was supposed to get everything in the freezer at 5:30. I will deal with your end-of-life crisis *after* my rijstevlai is in the freezer.

EUNICE: Darling, you can't make rijstevlai without the rice, (*fiddling with the bowl*) now, can you?

² Pronounced WAWN-a-thon.

WAYNE: Auntie E, please put the rice down. I'm begging you.

EUNICE: I read last night in a magazine *how much* arsenic rice contains. And not washing it keeps the arsenic content in it untouched. Which means eating enough of these grains can be my way out of here!

WAYNE: Y-you... c-can't be serious.

EUNICE *slowly takes a grain of rice out of her bowl and bites into it. We hear the crunch and with every crunch, WAYNE gets more and more uncomfortable. EUNICE crunches on another grain of rice. And another. Fed up, WAYNE storms out of the shop and goes through the door, back into the kitchen. EUNICE quickly follows him to the door and shows herself crunching on the raw rice through the glass circle. Then, she stops all of a sudden and hurries back to where she was standing earlier, adequately distanced away from the door. WAYNE barges in with the end of a hose in one hand and the majority of the lag, coiled up, in the other. He points the end of the hose toward EUNICE.*

WAYNE: Now, if you don't hand my rice over this instant, I *will* get you wet.

EUNICE: That's a tad bit dramatic, Wahnathon, isn't it?

WAYNE: If dramatic is what it takes to counter senility, then so be it. You are impossible to deal with!

EUNICE: Oh, I know (*witch laughter*). Why do you think your mama and Uncle Frank left me? It wasn't old age, darling. It was senility caused by yours truly.

WAYNE: So, what? I'm your next victim?

EUNICE: Darling, don't you see I'm trying to do you a favour here?

WAYNE: In what way is putting your death on my hands a favour?!

EUNICE: I can think of exactly three ways.

WAYNE: Auntie E, as much as I despise you at this very moment, I don't want you to die, I just—

EUNICE: NUMBER ONE!

WAYNE: — need the rice because—

EUNICE: I'm out of your hair and reunited with Doreen and Frank—

WAYNE: — the dough has been out for too long with the milk—

EUNICE: — which I've been looking forward to for EIGHTEEN YEARS!

WAYNE: — and it's getting soggy.

EUNICE: NUMBER TWO!

WAYNE: And the rice needs to be WASHED—

EUNICE: YOU INHERIT EVERYTHING, darling—

WAYNE: — and washed WELL before it goes into the dough—

EUNICE: — books, furniture, clothes, JEWELLERY—

WAYNE: — you can't just keep eating raw rice— w-what am

I supposed to do with your JEWELLERY???

EUNICE: And most importantly—

WAYNE: I don't want your jewellery! I WANT MY RICE!!!

EUNICE: NUMBER THREE! No one else today has to have your disgustingly dense rijstevlaai, darling. I'm going to eat *all* the rice you have. And the arsenic is going to grant ALL three of *your* wishes.

As EUNICE goes to take another grain of rice to eat, WAYNE unscrews the nozzle at the end of the hose and releases the water directly at his aunt. EUNICE holds on to the bowl like dear life, trying to protect it from the water, and crouches forward in order to prevent herself from falling.

WAYNE: WILL YOU FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE SHUT UP AND LISTEN TO ME, YOU OLD HAG?

WAYNE lets go of the hose, dropping it on the floor, and walks toward EUNICE to grab the bowl of rice from her. They fight for it. EUNICE is more stable than WAYNE but not stronger. WAYNE yanks the bowl away from his aunt.

Now, *where* were we?

The momentum of the yank sets him off balance and the wet, slippery floor sends him to the floor. He drops the bowl in the process, sending the rice everywhere.

EUNICE: Who're you calling old hag, darling? (*witch laughter*)

As WAYNE struggles to get up, EUNICE crouches once again and stealthily tries to gather up the grains of rice from the drier parts of the floor.

Mmmmm, yes. Come to mama. Here I come, Doreen. Buckle up, Frank!

WAYNE: Stop— STOP! Aunty E, you can NOT just eat raw, unwashed rice like that!

EUNICE: Wahnathon, darling, it has quite a lovely crunch to it. Do let me enjoy my breakfast, dear. Your shop doesn't open for another hour and I am simply famished.

WAYNE crawls over, gathers all the rice that he can, and begins shoving it in his mouth.

Darling, no. Don't you dare take my way out of here.

WAYNE continues to stuff his face.

That's mighty selfish of you, dear. Come on now, hand over my arsenic!

WAYNE: *(as clear as he can, given there is raw rice in his mouth)* No! No arsenic for you today. You think this is going to send you to mama and Uncle Frank? You're going to get food poisoning and I'm going to have to take care of you. THIS IS NOT GOING TO KILL YOU. So, you listen to me here. I need to go and freeze my rijshhtaaaaa—

Before WAYNE can finish, EUNICE grabs him and pries his mouth open in an attempt to take the rice out before he swallows them.

EUNICE: You give me my dose of arsenic back to me, darling. I'm getting out of here today, whether you like it or not. Yeeessss, come back to me, my deadly minions.

In the struggle, WAYNE tears a bit of lace from EUNICE's sleeve and shoves it in her face to let go of his mouth. This gives him a chance to grab her and get up with her. He takes off his apron and brings the coiled-up section of the hose toward her and ties her to it, using his apron. He reattaches the nozzle to the hose and speaks directly to EUNICE.

WAYNE: I will deal with you *after* everything is in the freezer.

On his way to the kitchen, WAYNE removes the “NEW: RIJSTEVLAAI! A decadent Dutch pudding tart” signs from the room. He groans while doing this. He exits.

After a while, EUNICE begins chewing the wet lace in her mouth. She enjoys it.

EUNICE: *(witch laughter)*

END OF PLAY

LABOR
DAY

CHARACTERS

SACHI. 20s, she/her. Migrant in the US. Pregnant.

JOSH. 20s, he/him. US American. Father of the child.

AMARI. 20s, any pronouns (see ON CASTING). Immigrant in the US. A delivery nurse.

TIME

Mid-day.

SETTING

A delivery room in Chicago. The space is furnished with a delivery bed, a table with a jug of water, cups, files and papers, a couple of chairs, and a section for running tests. Closer to the bed is a stand with a lot of the equipment that may be required for the delivery.

ON CASTING

Most ideally, a woman of South Asian / East Asian / Latin American descent will play the role of **SACHI** and a person of Middle Eastern / North African / South Asian descent will play the role of **AMARI**. It is *imperative* that these roles be played by people of colour, preferably people who are *not* US American citizens (**SACHI**) or are first-generation US American citizens (**AMARI**).

AMARI may be cast as male, female, or non-binary. If casting as a man or woman, the decision must be a conscious and active one. It will change the dynamic of the room.

ON PUNCTUATION AND DIALOGUE

The slashes (“/”) indicate punctuation by deep, heavy breathing on **SACHI**'s part. This type of breathing is meant to create an inconsistent underlying rhythm, especially during her contractions. However, these are only suggestive and can be played with.

AMARI is given gender-neutral pronouns (they/them) in the script. Based on casting decisions, replace gender pronouns in the dialogue as necessary.

SACHI *is on the bed, wearing a hospital gown, her hair tied up in a notably red scrunchie.*
AMARI, *the nurse, wears scrubs and sneakers, clinical gloves on their hands, and has a stethoscope and lanyard around their neck. They are helping*
SACHI *get through her contractions.*

AMARI: Come on, just deep breaths

/ you got this

/ that's it

/ there you go

/ one more, here we go

/ Sachi, let's go

/ there it is

/ okay, keep breathing. I just need to quickly check on Doctor Roy.

SACHI *keeps breathing.* **AMARI** *goes to the telephone and dials an extension.*

Hello? Is Doctor Roy—? Still? Okay. Thank you.

AMARI *turns to SACHI, who's still struggling to breathe consistently. They can't tell her the truth.*

Sachi, he's on his way. He's stuck in traffic due to the... protests.

A shared moment of awkwardness and disbelief.
AMARI *returns to SACHI.*

Goodness knows what's next in this god forbidden country.

Don't worry. He'll make it here in no time. But we've just got to keep doing our part here, okay.

/ now, come on, breathe for me

/ yes, there, that's it

SACHI *makes a gesture with her hand.*

What? Oh, yes.

AMARI *goes to the table and brings SACHI a cup of water.*

Here you go.

SACHI *gulps it down.*

Do you need anything else?

SACHI *returns the cup to AMARI.*

Are you sure?

AMARI *places the cup back on the table and returns to SACHI.*

Is Jake— no, wait— Josh? ... Yes, Josh! Is he going to be in the room?

SACHI: Yes, I think he's on his way.

AMARI: That's good. It's good to have someone by your side. It's literally the most difficult moment of your life.

SACHI *stops breathing. It is a distinctive stop.*

Sachi? Are you okay?

AMARI *realizes what they just said.*

Shit. I'm sorry I said that. I shouldn't have. Sachi, forgive me, I— it completely slipped my mind. There's just a lot on my—

SACHI: You're— you didn't— it's fine.

AMARI: Is there anything I can do?

SACHI: Tell me about what's going on with you. Remind me that there are things happening outside this room. Happier things.

AMARI: I don't know if you want to hear—

SACHI: Please?

AMARI: I really don't know about "happier" ...

SACHI: *(smiling)* Try.

AMARI: What do you want to know about?

SACHI: Anything. Anything at all. Just say something to take my mind off of all this.

AMARI: Umm... They cancelled *Criminal Minds*. Did you ever watch that?

SACHI *makes it known with facial and hand gestures that she's probably seen parts of a couple of episodes.*

Oh, it is such a good show. It's been with me through thick and thin. And Spencer Reid— I mean Matthew Gray Gubler— most people don't see it, I guess, but he can do whatever he wants with me.

AMARI *realizes what they just said.*

Sorry, that was inappropriate. I'm going to shut up now.

SACHI: No, Amari, please. I don't care about appropriate. I mean, you've seen my— we're way past all that.

They share a chuckle.

What do you like most about it? *Criminal Minds*. Besides Spencer Reid, of course.

In the following, AMARI stays busy with tasks, perhaps measuring SACHI's vitals and taking various notes on a clipboard while still talking to her.

AMARI: It's just how real it is. They don't try to overdo the antiques and mystiques. They don't try too hard to be funny. They're real people with real work-life problems and they're trying to get to the bottom of the problems they're facing. It's almost like us, the audience, being placed as a wallflower in their rooms and just watching them as they think through their cases. It's just one of the best things that our generation has witnessed on television. And I understand why it's being taken off the air, but that doesn't mean I'm okay with it.

SACHI: That's so special. That you have that... relationship with something... and the people, who made that something, don't even know that it is so close to your heart. It's a little funny, isn't it?

AMARI: I guess so. Huh. I'd never thought about it that way.

SACHI: Do you prefer to watch it alone? The show, I mean.

AMARI: Yes, for the most part. Sometimes my brother and I watch together, but otherwise, yeah.

SACHI: Do you have anyone... *else* you'd watch with?

AMARI *starts.*

I'm sorry— that was inappro—

AMARI: No, that's fine. And, no.

An awkward pause.

SACHI: Tell me more about your brother? What's his name?

AMARI: Okay! Sachi coming at us with all the questions today! It's cool, don't worry, I'm here for what you need. Well, my brother, Ali, he just got a job. He's an Uber driver now. Which is just perfect for him, you know? He's in the final stage of the 12-step and he's been doing so well. It's the perfect release for him. I am so proud of him.

SACHI: If you don't mind me asking, how did he find the strength to—?

AMARI: To be honest, a lot of it was just me pounding on him to change his ways. It's practically just us at this point, so we don't really have too many other people to bank on. So, we look out for each other, you know what I mean?

SACHI: Hmm. Is he older?

AMARI: Yeah, he is. By three years. But we go back and forth looking after each other. I mean, who else will, right?

SACHI: Right.

A lingering moment of unasked questions...

...until the door swings open and JOSH enters.

About time!

AMARI: Look who it is!

JOSH: Hey, hey. Sorry I wasn't here earlier. It's just that—

SACHI: — Traffic, I know.

AMARI *makes a facial gesture aimed at JOSH, prompting him to just go along with it.*

JOSH: *traffic, yeah. Right. The protests! Of course. (to AMARI)* And how are you?

JOSH *offers his hand and realizes that AMARI is wearing gloves that have been places. A moment of awkwardness, primarily for JOSH, who finally takes away his hand from AMARI, who smiles.*

AMARI: I'm good, thank you for asking. But there's someone else here who'd love to keep talking to you. I'll give you two a moment.

AMARI *puts away anything that might be in their hands and takes off their gloves.*

(to SACHI) And you keep breathing for me, yes? We're almost there. I'll be back with Doctor Roy any moment now.

AMARI *exits.*

JOSH: How are you doing, love?

SACHI: How do you think I'm doing? I'm ready to be done with this.

JOSH: Right. Hey, it's the same scrunchie from the night we—

SACHI: Is it?

SACHI *takes off the scrunchie and inspects it.*

Was it *this* one? I thought it was that striped one.

JOSH: Nope, it was definitely this one. I remember.

SACHI: Huh.

JOSH: So, there was—
/ woah is everything okay?

***JOSH** catches **SACHI**'s hand as she struggles for breath and takes the scrunchie from her in the process.*

/ oh it's a —
/ do you need any —?
/ huh?
/ the table?
/ ohhhh
/ there you go
/ woah. That was a big one. You must be really close, huh?

...

Sorry. I'll— yeah, okay.

...

...

Hey, Sach. There's something that you need to—

SACHI: J, just— if you're not going to help, just—

JOSH: Alright then.

***JOSH** finds a chair in the room and seats himself. Maybe he fiddles with the scrunchie. Maybe not. It eventually finds itself on **JOSH**'s wrist. **JOSH** and **SACHI** exist in silence for a while. **JOSH**, a bit longer.*

SACHI: Is Neil coming?

JOSH nods 'no'.

Did he get called back?

A 'yes'.

Classic. I don't think I remember the last time I saw him. Well, he better get it this time. Otherwise, you'll have to pick up more shifts at work and we all know how that goes.

Nothing.

J? Okay, don't start a pity party right now. I physically cannot deal with that right now. *In case* you forgot, I'm still in the middle of your previous favour.

Beat.

Gosh, J. When I told you to shut up, I didn't mean this. This is not helpful!

JOSH: Sach, you were right.

SACHI: Yeah, I usually am. Which time are you referring to?

JOSH: About—

AMARI *enters with haste.*

AMARI: Sachi, there's been a change of plans.

SACHI/JOSH: What?

AMARI: Please don't freak out. We will—

SACHI: Freak out? Why? What's wrong?
Amari? Just— just tell me.

AMARI: Doctor Roy has been in an accident.

SACHI: What?!

JOSH: Fuck.

SACHI: Is he okay?

AMARI: He will be okay, don't worry. Our priority here is you.

SACHI: Okay, but who is going to— aaahhhhhh

///

AMARI approaches SACHI and checks her dilations, as JOSH holds on to SACHI through her contraction.

AMARI: I don't know if we have time to brief someone new about your situation.

JOSH: What does that mean?

AMARI: I— I—

SACHI: Aaaaaahhhhhh

AMARI: Sachi, I—

SACHI: You! You know it— you know everything—

AMARI: Me? Yes, I do. Although...

AMARI looks confusedly at their lanyard.

...I don't know if I'm allowed to—

JOSH: Sach, are you sure you want—

SACHI: J, they know everything there is to know. Amari, you've done this before, right?

AMARI: I mean, I've *been* there countless times when it's happening but I've— I've— never actually—

SACHI: Just go tell them that you need to be the one doing this. I don't trust anyone else—

JOSH: Are you a hundred per—

SACHI: I need you— now, please
/ / /

AMARI: Yes, *yes*, we're going to do this together. I'll be right back. Josh, keep holding on to her, please.

AMARI *exits.*

JOSH: Fuck.

SACHI: What now?

JOSH: This really can't be happening.

SACHI: Yeah, J. It's finally happening.

SACHI *looks at JOSH, manages a smile.*

Our product of a stupid, stupid night.

JOSH: Come on, it wasn't that stupid. You know you helped both of us more than you think.

SACHI: You keep saying that.

JOSH: Because I mean it. And in more ways than one.

SACHI: You really mean that?

JOSH: Yes, of course I do.

SACHI: Stupid, kind of wonderful night.

JOSH: Yeah. Wonderful. (*hesitatingly*) Speaking of... Sach, I—
I— Neil— he's—
Neil is not coming.

SACHI: Yeah, I know, J. You told me. But he'll have to be better with his scheduling after today. I know you guys will figure it out. You usually work out something. That's why I could never do it.

/ ... J?

/ ...

JOSH: He's not coming back, Sach.

SACHI: What are you saying?

JOSH: He left. For good.

SACHI: What?!

JOSH: That's why it took me so long to get here. I was trying to make sense of the situation. Of everything. And figure out what to do. Because now, it's not just about me. Or about me and Neil or any of us. We have a whole other person to worry about. And— and—

SACHI: J, this is — this is
/ ridiculous. What the actual fuck? And what? You just let him walk away? Today, of all days?

JOSH: What the—? Would you rather have had him walk out on me and the baby, six days in or six weeks in?

SACHI: No, J. I would have rather the baby have two responsible and committed parents for life. Is that too much to ask? I mean, I didn't ask for this, J. None of us did. That night was just supposed to be the three of us. It was supposed to just fun and fucking and, guess what, we fucked too hard and we fucked up. I mean I guess it helped you with

whatever you were going through but we had too much fun cuz BAM the next thing I remember is me crying next to you with the positive in my hand and not knowing what to do. You know I didn't want to go through with it all just to give him a life like mine, always searching for answers. But then— then you came through. You came through, J. You figured out a solution. I felt like I was doing the right thing by not getting it— And then you found out that you were positive too. Fuck, I don't remember the last time either of us felt comforted by a positive. But you were there, J. Neil wasn't, but you were. And every time I feared something was up between the two of you, I asked

/ I asked, J!

/ the least you two could have done is just have been honest with me! Is that too much to ask for? I don't know, J. You literally

/ aaaaahhhhhh

/ could not have picked—

/ AMARIIIIIII

/ — a worse time to break this to me

/ for FUCK's sake! Where are they?

/ now, J. Tell me you have a plan.

JOSH: I— I— I don't know, Sach.

SACHI: / J, I'm going to— kiiiiiaahhhhhhhh

AMARI enters, now with a lab coat on top of their scrubs and spectacles on their face, all official and professional and ready to go.

AMARI: Okay, we're going. (to **JOSH**) Go sanitize your hands from the dispenser on the wall.

JOSH: I don't—

AMARI: / Sachi, how are we doing?

/ yes, yes, I know, I know, we're going to do this together,

okay?

/ hey, hey, look at me

/ look at me, Sachi

/ everything's going to be, okay, yeah? I got you.

SACHI: Oooooooooof!

AMARI: That's good, hey, that's great

/ Come on, you're doing fantastic

/ Oh, I see you've let your hair down

/ YES, that's it

/ Ow ow ow ow

/ Josh, can you come and—?

/ Josh? JOSH!

JOSH: I don't know if she wants me to—

AMARI: What the—?

JOSH: Well, I just—

SACHI: (*squeezing AMARI's* **AMARI:**

hands extremely tightly)

J. What. Is. Your. Plan.

Ow ow ow ow ow

JOSH: / Sach, I don't know, you can't just put me in the spot like that—

SACHI: Are you fucking
kidding me?

AMARI: Woaaaaahkay!

AMARI: This is not helpful! Whatever *this* is, I don't care. The mother needs to focus here and I am here to best serve her and the baby. Now, Josh, if you're not going to be of any help, I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

/ ...

/ Sir! It is not good for the baby. Please.

JOSH *panics and takes over from AMARI.*

JOSH: (to **SACHI**) But I don't have a solution, love. I don't.
What are we going to do?

SACHI: Aaaaaaaahhhhhh I don't know, (*re: baby inside her*)
ask *him!* He seems to have an opinion on the situation!

AMARI *looks into SACHI under the blanket.*

AMARI: / The heck?

JOSH: What?

AMARI: No, nothing. It's just more complicated than I
expected.

SACHI: What do you mean? Amari, what's wrong?

AMARI: His butts seem to be coming out first, instead of his
head. Sachi, you're going to have to push even harder.

SACHI: I can't, I can't
/ ...

JOSH: Yes, you can. Here, love. Hey, listen to me. You got
this, okay? You're doing so great. You've been so fucking
brave for so long. This is the home stretch, okay? And I'm
not leaving you here on your own, okay?

SACHI *nods 'yes'.*

Okay! Now, push!
/ Push!

SACHI: Aaaaaaaahhhhhh *you* do it for me!

AMARI: That's good, that's good.

/ Keep pushing!

/ KEEP PUSHING!

SACHI: J, you have to keep him. I can't, you know I can't.

JOSH: Sach, he needs two parents to— no, focus on pushing now. We can figure it out later—

SACHI: / No, not later, J. You gave me your word.

/ I can't just— oooooof! You know—

JOSH: Hey, I didn't think Neil would actually leave me. He is the one who—

AMARI: Guys, seriously? When he's literally coming out of the womb? This isn't exactly the ideal first thing you want your child to hear.

SACHI: Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh

AMARI: Okay, Sachi, we have his butts—

SACHI: I should have just gone ahead with the abor-
shaaaaaaaaahhhh

AMARI: / Yes, we have legs—

SACHI: We should have filed for adop-shaaaaaaaaahhhh

AMARI: / Just a bit more, yes

JOSH: You're doing great, love. Come on, you're almost there.

SACHI:

Aaaaaaahhhhhhhh

Fuuuuuuuuuuck meeeeee

/////

AMARI:

Yes, oh no, the head!

YES, Sachi! Focus, Amari, just

Oh my god! He's here!

*Baby J cries. AMARI cuts the umbilical cord, then goes over to cleanse the baby.***AMARI:** Time of birth: 4:34 p.m.**JOSH:** Oh my god, Sach. He's here. He's actually here.**SACHI:** It's over. It's finally over.**JOSH:** You did it, love.**SACHI:** I did it. I actually did it.*AMARI brings over Baby J, wrapped in a blanket.***AMARI:** Here he is.*AMARI hands Baby J over to SACHI.***SACHI:** Thank you. Wow.**JOSH:** He's beautiful.**SACHI:** He really is...*Beat.*

Amari, when will we know if he is... positive?

AMARI: Give me a couple of minutes to set it up. After we have his sample— well, the next step is in a couple of weeks.

You knew that, right?

SACHI: Yeah, it's just that— we don't know if we'll be there with him in a couple of weeks.

AMARI: Right, about that...

SACHI: I'm sorry the C-section did not work out— I just—

AMARI: Hey, don't apologize. The mother's health is just as important as the baby's, but...

SACHI: I know, but I feel like I didn't give him his best option. And now with—

AMARI: Hey, you did great with the situation, okay? What you just did? That's really hard. And I know it's not really my place to, but all I'm saying is... please reconsider. Really think it through before you make your decision. Okay? I'll go get things ready for the test.

AMARI goes back to prepare.

JOSH: He has your eyes.

SACHI: Come on, no, he does not.

JOSH: Yes, he does.

SACHI: You can hardly even see them— oh! My gosh. Hey there, little one. Hey. Oh, you're so innocent. You have no idea what you've just walked into. No, you don't, do you? You're just a little baby. Yes, you are. And you came from inside me. Yes, you were inside me for a very, very long time. It was not fun, no, it wasn't.

JOSH: Come on, Sach. Cut him some slack. He was literally just born.

SACHI: Yeah, I know. I was there for it, actually.

JOSH: He's so precious.

SACHI: I know— maybe we—

A cell phone rings.

AMARI: Sorry, excuse me.

In the following, JOSH and SACHI talk to each other while AMARI is on the phone. The two conversations take place simultaneously.

AMARI: Hello?

JOSH: You were saying?

SACHI: Are you sure you can't—?

AMARI: Slow down, Ali, slow down, I can't hear a word. No, I can hear you. But you need to slow down so that I can actually understand you.

JOSH: Sach, how could I? I am in no situation to take him home and do it all on my own.

...

But, maybe you can?

SACHI: J, no. I couldn't. I hardly have my life together— I mean this baby is a perfect example of how not in control of my life I am.

AMARI: What?

SACHI: Ironic, isn't it? *(to Baby J)* Hey there.

AMARI: Deported? When?

SACHI: No, I got you, I got you, hey now. Gosh, J, look at him.

AMARI: When?!

SACHI: I just want to bring you home with me.

AMARI: Just a couple minutes back? (*Checks clock.*) 4:34? You're kidding. No, they didn't. Baabri-Ma, too?

JOSH: Well, then, why don't you? We can figure it out together.

AMARI: Please tell me they didn't take Chikoo and Piku.

SACHI: You think?

AMARI: Fuck.

JOSH: Yes, we could do it... Right?

AMARI: That's everyone, Ali. That's everyone.

SACHI: I want to... I really want to, J.

JOSH: Can I hold him?

SACHI *hands Baby J over to* **JOSH.**

AMARI: So now?

JOSH: Hey, there, bub. Hey, baby J, oh. You're so pretty. Yeah, he definitely has your eyes. Prettiest ones I've seen. I don't think I've ever met such a quiet baby. Wow. You're not a whiner, are you, baby J?

SACHI: He definitely gets that from you.

A shared chuckle, followed by growing panic on SACHI's part.

J. What have we done? Fuck. FUCK!

JOSH: Sach. Just breathe...

SACHI: I'm done breathing! I've been doing it for hours. Is it too late to file for adoption?

JOSH: Sach, you don't want to do that. We've been over this.

SACHI: What's the timeline? Wow, you'd think *I'd* know that.

JOSH: Sach, listen. Listen to me!

AMARI: Ali, are you there?

JOSH: I'm not letting you do that. You would never forgive yourself.

SACHI: I know, but—

JOSH: No but's.

JOSH *shares a moment with Baby J. Then with SACHI.*

AMARI: What are we going to do now?

SACHI: It's the only option we have right now!

A lingering moment of silence...

...broken by Baby J's crying. AMARI returns to the room, mentally. While they wrap up their phone call, JOSH tries different things to make the baby stop crying, even trying to distract him

with SACHI's red scrunchie.

AMARI: Hey, I have to go. Yeah, I am. It was my first. Yeah, it was. Thanks, yeah it did. But it's much more complicated now with— no, the baby...seems fine. Yeah, she is, too. Okay, hey, I really have to go. Bye. Ali, thanks for calling.

AMARI keeps their phone aside and comes over to JOSH to take Baby J.

Hey, there, little one. I got it.

Baby J hand-over. JOSH and SACHI look at each other and then at AMARI with Baby J.

Hey, bud, hey. I got you. I got you. Yeah, there we go. Shh, shh, shh...

AMARI notices the parents looking at them with Baby J.

What?

SACHI: Nothing, you're just so good with him.

AMARI: Did you guys figure out what you want to do?

SACHI: I think adoption might be the only way out of this.

JOSH: The only reason Sachi agreed to carry the baby to term was because my partner and I had agreed to raise him together. And he just left me, so...

AMARI: And what about the two of you? Can't you—?

SACHI: Trust me, we want to. But we can't. We're in no place to do this. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be fair on him.

AMARI: What about this is right or wrong or fair or unfair?

No, hey, look, none of this is my business. It really isn't.

But this child has two parents right now. Two people who, up until an hour ago, promised to give him a home. And right now, all three of you are in the same room. That's not something you just take for granted, okay? Both of you have somewhere to go back to and now you have something to keep you going. You can find a compromise and—

SACHI: But it's not just about—

AMARI: You meet each other halfway and give your child the life he deserves. You don't just abandon him the moment he comes into the world. *That's not right. That's not fair.* No, you didn't plan for this situation. I completely understand that. But you work around it. You work with it. You *make* it work. That's what parents do. Sachi, earlier today you made a bizarre request to me. And I thought you were crazy to have trusted me with this whole situation. I really did. But it worked out fine, right? And now I'm making one to you. To both of you. And asking you to trust me one more time. He needs you. Now, more than he ever will.

AMARI hands over Baby J to JOSH again.

Just keep rocking him for me, yeah? I know you'll make the right call.

AMARI goes back to get the test set up. JOSH and SACHI may take turns rocking Baby J during this next section.

SACHI: I can't believe I'm about to do this.

JOSH: Sach, do you think I could do it? Without Neil?

SACHI: What?

JOSH: All those times you asked me if everything was okay between the two of us— when we were fighting and arguing and having doubts— what’s the worst scenario you imagined?

SACHI: J, I was hoping we wouldn’t be in *this* exact situation. That’s really what I was afraid of.

JOSH: I know that. But... did you, even for a moment, think I could do it alone?

SACHI: J, I— I don’t...

JOSH: Just be honest. You must have at least thought about it.

SACHI: No.

JOSH: No, you didn’t think about it or—?

SACHI: NO. As in I did not think you would be able to do it. Not on your own. Neil was the one source of stability in your life. When I felt uncertain about the two of you, I got scared. That’s why I kept pestering you, trying to make sure you guys were okay. So that we wouldn’t be living *this* exact moment.

JOSH: Really?

SACHI: I’m sorry.

JOSH: No, I’m sorry. I know — I know this was what you were dreading.

SACHI: Still. I got lucky. I ended up with Mamma and Papa who cared for me and gave me the best life they could. I made some lifelong friends at Garden High and then came here, to the US, met you and our Mee-ow gang at Northwestern, did the whole reporter thing at the Tribune. I still have a family to call my own. Who knows if he’ll have that?

JOSH: We can hope for the best, though. Right now, I don't think *we* can give our child that.

SACHI: Do you think my mom said those words right after I was born?

Beat.

AMARI: I think I'm ready for him here.

JOSH carries Baby J over to **AMARI** and returns to **SACHI**. **SACHI** and **JOSH** hold on to each other while **AMARI** talks with Baby J.

AMARI: You're so tiny, little one. Shh, there, there. Don't worry, you have people who care about you. You'll be looked after, now won't you? Now, now, this is going to hurt just a little bit but you're a brave one. You just made it out here into this world.

SACHI: He has no idea what's coming.

AMARI injects. Baby J cries.

AMARI: Now let's not get all fussy. You can't say anything. You haven't learned how to, little one. You're just a little human being. Yes, you are.

SACHI: I wouldn't want anyone to have to live that life. I mean, look at me. Just look at us!

AMARI: Yeah, I know. I wish you had a say, too. I wish you were in charge of your life — of where you go — or don't.

SACHI: But I guess we have to do what we have to do. Circle of life, huh?

AMARI: Funny how it works, isn't it, little one? One moment you think you have somewhere to go back to. And then, the next—

AMARI has what they need. They pick up Baby J and turn back to face the parents.

— it's all uncertain.

A moment of vulnerability. It is not a quick moment.

As SACHI starts to speak about what she thinks is a unanimous decision, JOSH interrupts with the scrunchie in hand.

SACHI: We have to—

JOSH: I think I—

SACHI looks confusedly at JOSH, who, despite the unprecedented circumstances, feels ready to embark on something on his own for the first time in his life.

An acknowledgement of their decision.

END OF PLAY

at the
end
of the
tunnel

CHARACTERS

AMMA.¹ 80, she/her. South Asian. Ma's mother (ma) and Sahyr's² maternal grandmother. Used to be a professor of Shakespeare. Now suffering from a galloping dementia.

At home. In the same space as Ma. Wears a nightgown.

MA. 50, she/her. South Asian. Sahyr's mother and Amma's only daughter and currently her sole caregiver.

At home. In the same space as Amma. Wears traditional salwar kameez³ (tunic and loose trousers).

SAHYR. early 20s, he/him. South Asian. Feels the pull to return home (the one he grew up in).

Currently at home in another country. Wears comfortable home clothes.

TIME

Diwali and after.

SETTING

Two separate, designated spaces on stage signify two separate, distinct setting locations. These two spaces don't overlap because they can't. Over the course of the play, they will have a clear boundary separating them.

ON DIALOGUE AND PACING

The dialogue is separated on each page of the script that follows in order to clarify the geographical spaces in which they are being spoken. Despite geographical distance, characters often finish each other's thoughts and sentences. When

¹ Pronounced UMM-ma

² Pronounced SAA-hir

³ Pronounced SUL-waar kuh-MEEZ

performed, the dialogue between characters should sound like one voice speaking. The absence of punctuation between successive characters' dialogue is intentional and suggestive of moments of overlapping dialogue, where there shouldn't be any breaths between characters' lines of dialogue... i.e. *a very quick pace!* The words should create a rhythm. The language is the music.

For example, the following lines of dialogues should be delivered without much breath in between, as if it were one thought:

SAHYR: I wish

MA: you were here.

DIYAS⁴

Three spotlights illuminate the characters on their respective first lines. The light around SAHYR gains circumference. It is vast and bright, emphasizing how alone he is in his space. Far away from him, MA and AMMA exist in their shared space. In the following, AMMA comes closer to MA with every line of her dialogue. As the scene proceeds, the light around them shrinks, their space feeling even smaller than it is.

SAHYR: I don't think
you're listening.

MA: I don't think you're
listening.

AMMA: I don't think
you're listening!

SAHYR: The flight is
non-refundable.

MA: So what, you just
won't

SAHYR: I want to, you
know I want to.

MA: Then it's not a
question.

AMMA: I have a question!

SAHYR: What if we

⁴ Pronounced DEE-yaz (soft d).

AMMA: What if I

SAHYR: just wait a couple
weeks

AMMA: bring over the
diyas and

SAHYR: I'm still figuring
out the money, I can't

AMMA: help you light
them.

MA: Whatever, sure.

SAHYR: Ma, I

AMMA: I will go.

AMMA walks off to get the diyas.

MA: I have to go.
Ma, I

SAHYR: I love

MA: Ma, where are - *what*
are

SAHYR: you.

AMMA approaches MA with a stack of diyas.

AMMA: The diyas.
I said I would bring

SAHYR: the diyas.

MA: Careful, careful! Don't drop them.

AMMA: Don't drop them.

MA: Don't drop, stop.

AMMA: Stop, don't drop.

AMMA *places the diyas where the two spaces separate.*

MA: The *diyas*.

AMMA: (*mishearing, forgetting, making arbitrary connections*) *Diyas, diyas, dyas, dyas. Das. Das!*⁵
DAS! I can call Das. I will call Das!

MA: (*gesturing to the diyas*)
Not *Das*, ma. *Diy*-as.
You wanted to light them.

SAHYR: (*eager to help*) I can light them.

MA: You're not here.

AMMA: (*like a student*)
Present, ma'am! Present!

SAHYR: I'm *trying* my best.

MA: I'm trying my *best*.

⁵ Pronounced daas or daash.

SAHYR: We can do it together.

Together, SAHYR and MA light matches to light the diyas in the space between them, accompanied by a soundscape of several matches being lit simultaneously.⁶ Perhaps this sound is in AMMA's head. AMMA realizes what's happening – the diyas are being lit! – and goes over to SAHYR and MA. She sits on the floor like a little girl, a little away from the diyas, her gaze fixed on them.

As SAHYR and MA light more diyas, AMMA rises, lifts up her nightgown slightly, and playfully steps alternatively on the sides with SAHYR and MA, like a child.

This takes time.

The soundscape gradually gains more layers of matches being lit. The dementia gallops. Both the sound and AMMA's child-like excitement overwhelm the scene.

Once the diyas are lit, SAHYR and MA look at AMMA together. She is happy, carefree, tottering among the lit diyas.

Then SAHYR and MA look at each other. They are so close yet so far, separated by the diyas. They extend their right hand towards each other. But they can't touch. They feel the barrier of the light.

SAHYR: I wish

⁶ These are traditional clay diyas, each with a cotton wick dipped in oil, and thus require matches to be lit.

MA: you were here.

AMMA: The light brings us closer. *It brings hope.*
We are here because of the light.

The sound of a timer goes off.

SAHYR: The bharta.⁷

MA: The bharta.

SAHYR and **MA** momentarily walk offstage.

AMMA: It's done! Shall we add the egg?

EGGS

SAHYR returns with one hard-boiled egg and **MA** with two, giving one to **AMMA**. They all sit facing the audience equidistant from each other and begin peeling. **AMMA** takes time peeling hers. Once peeled, **SAHYR** and **MA** cut the egg carefully in different ways, using their nails and fingers. **AMMA** stares at her egg suspiciously. In the following, she is gradually reminded of a different version of herself: a professor of Shakespeare.

AMMA: What, you egg?

She is intrigued by this egg and by what she just said.

⁷ Pronounced bHur-ta (Berta with a Bh, soft t).

What... you egg?

She almost has it – but needs just a moment more.

You egg. You EGG. You—

*A light bulb moment. [Scottish play!]
Shakespeare! Of course!*

Sahyr. We studied
Shakespeare together,
didn't we? I taught you.
M – Mey – Mer? – Merch
– Merchuh! *Merchant of*
Venice, was it?

SAHYR *doesn't acknowledge this. He can't hear AMMA. They are not in the same world. In the following, AMMA uses the manual slicing of her egg to work through the words of the text she is remembering and reciting. She speaks as the professor of Shakespeare as she once was but struggles to connect past with present. She searches for SAHYR with her words.*

Was it not?

...

It was *Merchant*, it must have
been. Am I
misremembering?
Why do I forget everything
now, shona⁸? Amar⁹
shona. Where are you? It's
been so long, shona.
Sahyr?

⁸ Pronounced SHOW-na.

⁹ Pronounced AA-maar.

No response.

SAHYR!

Still no response.

No, it *was Merchant*. I am
sure now, yes. I taught
that courtroom scene. Not
just to you but to so many
of my students. For *years*.
Forty years — that same
scene.

...

...

“The quality of mercy is not
strain’d,
It droppeth as the gentle rain
from heaven
Upon the place beneath:

SAHYR: “It is twice blest;

MA: “It is twice blest;

AMMA *gradually spirals. Her egg isn’t just
being sliced now, it is being crushed and tarnished.
It gradually disintegrates into nothing. It is all over
the floor and she pursues these crumbs, in a vain
attempt to find a meaning, perhaps an answer to
her problems, in them.*

AMMA: “It blesseth him
that gives”

...

gives
that gives
that *gives*

...

him that givesssss

sssss
sh sh sh shhhhhhhh
shhhhhheeee SHE that
gives
SHE that GIVES

A heavy breath from AMMA.

MA: And she that TAKES

SAHYR: It is TWICE blest

AMMA: She that gives

MA: And she that takes

SAHYR: It is twice blest

AMMA: She that gives

MA: And she that takes

SAHYR: It is twice
blest

AMMA:
given

MA:
taken

HELP

A sudden stop. AMMA begins howling like a dog, pacing and moving around the space that she inhabits with MA. After a moment or two, perhaps AMMA is the dog, relentlessly pursuing her imaginary ball around the stage.

MA: We didn't know what it
was.

SAHYR: Ma didn't tell me.

MA: Not at first.

SAHYR: I was here, far
away, unable to grasp
what was going on.

MA: Telling him — telling
anyone — would speak it
into existence. Would make
it come true.

SAHYR: Make what—
make WHAT come true?

*AMMA circles back to MA and stops her
howling, her arms holding on to MA's arm for
support. She is stooping, butt back, knees bent,
trying to shit but is unable to. She tries harder and
harder, groaning in the process. No release.*

SAHYR: Did I need to come
home? Right that instant?

*AMMA transitions from holding on to arm
support to leaning against MA's body.*

I could've taken time off
school. I could've helped
you when you needed
me most.

*The lean escalates to a fall, followed by a curling
up of AMMA's body on the floor. MA goes down
to her, propping AMMA's head against her chest.*

MA: Ma,

open your mouth, ma,
 yes, good
 Now here, look at me,
 LOOK AT ME
 MA, LOOK
 Here, Ma, LOOK HERE
 Okay, now swallow just
 swallow, *swall-low*
 I need you to SWALLOW

MA takes **AMMA**'s hand and brings it to her own throat so she can feel her swallowing. In vain, for **AMMA** continues caressing **MA**'s throat instead of actually swallowing.

SAHYR: Hello, Air India?
 Could I move up my flight,
 please?

HOME

SAHYR takes one of the diyas in his hand. In the following, he "travels" home by blowing out the flames from the diyas that divide the two spaces, thus breaking the barrier. The diya in his hand will remain lit throughout this journey. Movement should be devised to accompany **SAHYR**'s 25-hour journey home, capturing the essence of long flights and endless in-airport walking during layovers. Simultaneous to **SAHYR**'s journey, we witness **AMMA**'s final disintegration. Sharp, short recurring movement should be devised to make more evident her dementia and decline, to the point that she is unrecognizable as a healthy woman. **MA**'s dialogue may be repeated to make time for **SAHYR**'s and **AMMA**'s devised

movement.

MA: SWALLOW, Ma, *small-
LOW*

I *need* you to SWALLOW
PLEASE

Here, look at me, watch me
open my mouth and here,
do you feel this, right here,
YES

MA!!!

Do you hear me, Ma?

I don't think you're listening
to me, Ma

You need to listen to me

I *need* you to listen to me

SWALLOW, MA,

SWALLOW

Ma, please

Ma, I—

I—

HOPE

SAHYR: The diagnosis wasn't anything macabre. In
fact, it was just bad luck

MA: worse than bad

SAHYR: the worst, actually.

There was nothing we could do.

It was

MA: an unfortunate trickery
of the mind

SAHYR: an illness beyond
the cure of medication.

...

All that mattered was that I
was

AMMA: Home.
You're home.

*SAHYR has now travelled to MA and AMMA's side of the stage. AMMA recognizes SAHYR, if only for a moment. Then, AMMA mumbles deliriously, swiftly racing through specific moments of her life, across time, her words not making much sense to either MA or SAHYR, who talk over her.*¹⁰

AMMA: I didn't steal the
— not her, no, I'm her
mother — the mangoes
— Didi, here, I'm *here*
— a boy? I'm going
to be a — no, I want
strawberry!!! — I will
come with, wait — choo
choo — I miss him every
day — you come in this
way — blue blue blue —
sooo pretty —
Strawberry

SAHYR: And she was

MA:

SAHYR:

MA: as good as gone.

¹⁰ The dashes ("—") in Amma's delirious dialogue indicates a change in time and memory. The delivery of the words and phrases in each of these fragments should depict distinctly different emotions and feelings because they stem from different moments in Amma's life. Also note that the separation in the dialogue here (Amma's on the left, Ma's and Sahyr's on the right) is not based on physical space (i.e., staging), rather, these lines of dialogue are separated to indicate when the characters speak simultaneously.

AMMA's mumbling gradually decreases in volume and vigour, transitioning to a laboured breathing pattern. And then to nothing.

SAHYR: Ma, I——

MA: I love you.

The air is silent and still for a moment or two.

SAHYR: The light brings us closer. We are here because of the light.

MA: If only it brought us——

SAHYR blows out the flame from the last diya in his hand.

END OF PLAY

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