

NEW DELI

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FADE IN

EXT. OLD DELHI - INDIA - BUSTLING STREET - DAY

The buildings are weather-stained and, in parts, ramshackle.

Rundown small cars, auto rickshaws and motorbikes churn out smoke, scurry like ants, fight their way as best they can.

STREET BAZAAR:

Indian Rap Music blares from a sound system somewhere, TRADERS go about their business.

In their midst, baseball-capped AADI GANGULY (23), hip-hops with other YOUNG MEN - admired by a few female ON-LOOKERS.

A DRUG DEALER (age indeterminate) appears from the crowd.

DRUG DEALER

Aadi my man. How is the old baba?

Aadi stops dancing. The On-lookers retreat.

DRUG DEALER (CONT'D)

Kill two birds. Ease the old man's pain, live the life of a prince.

Aadi appraises the disheveled, emaciated interloper who proffers a small plastic bag of white powder. Aadi hesitates, turns back to his friends who stare him down.

The Drug Dealer looks about at the chaos and circumstances.

DRUG DEALER (CONT'D)

When you are desperate, Aadi.

Aadi teeters on resigned defeat. His cell phone rings.

AADI

Baba?

His face turns dour. He urgently crosses the street, choreographing his way through the traffic with complete disregard for his safety, and makes his way among the throng, oblivious to the vehicular damage left in his wake.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

A humble apartment, decorated with images of Ganesh, photos of Gandhi and past Indian Prime Ministers, a small library.

Aadi, cap off, seated on the edge of a bed, holds the withered hand of his frail FATHER (60s) who beckons him closer. Despite a faltering voice, his English is impeccable.

FATHER

The time has come, my son.

Aadi's eyes moisten.

AADI

Time ...?

He squeezes even harder. The old man winces at the pressure, retracts his hand.

FATHER

Is of the essence, yes.

AADI

Arrangements need to be made then.

Father waves a hand dismissively.

FATHER

I have made them already, Aadi.

AADI

You made them already?

FATHER

Of course. You have never met him.

AADI

Him? You talk as if you have?

FATHER

When I was much younger. It was a heavenly affair.

Aadi, eyes agape, slowly looks to the heavens, mouths his Father's words.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Now you can get to see him, too.

AADI

My maker?!

FATHER

Your maamaa jii!

AADI

Maama jii? So, when you say "it is time..."

FATHER

Time to stop all this dancing in the street and accept the scholarship.

AADI

But I must care for you.

FATHER

Bah, I have had my time. Here is your chance to complete your degree. Create something wonderful, a special palace for a special princess maybe.

Aadi bows his head respectfully.

The Father turns to a bedside stand. There is a small carved teak casket and an envelope resting beside an old photo of a young married Indian couple. He picks up and gently shakes the casket. The sound of grit inside.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Your mother's wish was to see again her big brother. Now you can see him for her. He has agreed to put you up.

AADI

Yet still there will be expenses.

He stands and goes to the window, looks out to the

STREET BAZAAR:

where the Drug Dealer fights off two Older Women brandishing bolts of colorful fabric.

FATHER (O.S.)

Aadi, we are never that desperate. Here.

BEDROOM:

Aadi turns back to see his Father, with a laboured hand, proffer the envelope.

Aadi opens it. It is crammed with bills in US currency.

EXT. BROOKLYN NEW YORK - STREET IN COBBLE HILL - DAY

Cars and trucks go about their business as they pass by the Taj Delicatessen. Parked at the curb, a not-so-well-maintained black town car.

INT/EXT. TAJ DELICATESSEN - DAY

Behind the counter, RANA SANTOORI (60), a handsome Indian, sporting a white handlebar mustache, farewells an OLD INDIAN WOMAN customer, laden with a bag of groceries.

All the while Rana keeps an eye on another in the store --

A bruiser of a man, CAIN (40s), roams the haphazard array of stock: a pyramid of cans here; a stack of soap powder in amongst packaged foodstuffs. Hardly room to move.

Cain grabs some chocolate bars from a display, approaches the counter. He rips the wrapper from one, drops it on the floor and with a menacing stare, eats the bar in front of Rana.

He swallows and immediately thumps his chest in discomfort, pats his pockets - to no avail.

CAIN  
You sell Nexium?

Rana shakes his head.

CAIN (CONT'D)  
Call this dump a deli?

He turns and approaches the exit. Undaunted, Rana calls.

RANA  
That will cost eighty-five cents.

Cain returns to the counter, eyeballs Rana.

Rana deftly lowers his hand beneath the counter.

Cain slaps a dollar bill down and resumes his exit. At the door, he does a last survey, cringes at the sight of cracks in the walls, paint peeling from the ceiling.

CAIN  
No wonder old man Epstein wants out.

Rana returns his hand to the counter top and regards Cain disdainfully as he heads out the door.

STREET OUTSIDE

On the sidewalk, Cain nearly collides with ALICE HOOPER (50).

He removes another chocolate bar from his overcoat pocket and goes to the parked black town car, the passenger window down.

Cain tosses the chocolate bar to the passenger, PRESTON (IRONSEID) JUNIOR (40-ish), suited up in Armani, plenty of bling about him.

Cain gets behind the wheel of the car. It squeals away into traffic as the wrapper is tossed from the passenger window.

Alice gives them a disapproving look, enters the Deli.

DELICATESSEN - CONTINUOUS

Alice goes to the refrigerators, addresses Rana in a distinctive Irish brogue.

ALICE  
Mornin' to ya Mister Santoori.

Rana looks at the clock on the wall - it's well past midday.

RANA  
And to you Miss Hooper.

Alice selects a carton of cream and, with a spring in her step, goes to the counter.

ALICE  
What's with the bruiser?

Rana shrugs dismissively.

RANA  
Looking for a drug store.

ALICE  
The streets dried up?

Rana feigns a smile, changes the subject and refers to the carton of cream.

RANA  
Not like the young ones, eh, getting your groceries cheaper over the line?

ALICE  
On-line.

Rana hikes his shoulders, whatever.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
I like the personal service.

Rana twirls the ends of his white handle-bar mustache.

Alice places a bill on the counter ensuring that her hand brushes Rana's hand resting there. He blushes.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
Besides, you're practically family.

He smiles tightly, but turns his attention to ...

THE ENTRANCE where Aadi holds a small duffle bag, a backpack crimping his short, embroidered kurta.

Aadi makes a final check of his cell phone, puts it in the front pocket of his jeans, lingers nervously, as if casing the joint.

RANA  
I hope you have money in your pocket.

AADI  
Very little at this stage, sir. But I am hoping that is but a temporary state of affairs.

Aadi's hand goes swiftly to the back pocket of his jeans.

Rana whips a hand gun from under the counter.

Aadi freezes in fear with an envelope held in his hand.

AADI (CONT'D)  
No no no, sir. I am simply looking for maamaa jii Rana. That is all.

Alice raises her eyebrows at Rana.

AADI (CONT'D)  
I am Aadi Ganguly. I am here to complete my studies as an architect. I am to start tomorrow.

This is out of left field for Rana.

RANA  
Tomorrow?

AADI  
Circumstances delayed my arrival.

RANA  
Circumstances?

AADI  
I believe my father wrote to you.

RANA

He did. Some time ago. But --

Aadi gives a surreptitious glance toward Alice.

AADI

I see. I should spend another night  
at the YMCA?

Rana does his best to allay the young man's misgivings.

RANA

No no. We're not -- No no.

Alice takes her cue and moves a little away from him.

Rana stands awkwardly a moment. He turns to Alice.

RANA (CONT'D)

My late sister's child. So young.

Alice prods Rana, addresses him sternly.

ALICE

And so needing a roof over his head.

RANA

Of course. Of course.

Rana moves to the entrance and embraces the much taller Aadi. It's an awkward maneuver with all the luggage, and the gun in Rana's hand comes precariously close to Aadi's nose.

Eyes a-poppin', Aadi eases the muzzle away from his face with the envelope, which he offers to Rana.

AADI

A small contribution to assist in  
this regard.

Rana leads a shell-shocked Aadi back to join Alice.

RANA

My nephew. An architect.

Alice relieves Rana of the hand gun, briefly assesses its weight, places it on the counter, picks up her cream.

Passing Aadi, she places a hand on his shoulder, shakes her head pitifully.

As she exits, she chances another glance at the weapon.

Rana closes the door after her, flips the OPEN sign to CLOSED, returns and again hugs Aadi who is unnerved by the sight of the weapon on the counter.

INT. RANA'S APARTMENT ABOVE DELI - DAY

SPARE BEDROOM

More a spice warehouse than a bedroom. Beneath a pile of old clothes, a small, child-size bed. Some other basic furniture.

Aadi breathes in the atmosphere.

RANA

Sorry about the mess. But since receiving the letter, I've been under pressure.

Aadi looks for elaboration but Rana quickly changes subject.

RANA (CONT'D)

And how is the old professor?

Aadi's eyes tear up.

RANA (CONT'D)

I see. The "circumstances".

Rana moves to console him with an awkward man hug.

Aadi wipes away the tears, brightens up, rummages through his backpack and withdraws a small, carved teak casket. He rattles it like a maracas.

RANA (CONT'D)

Ashes?

AADI

Mother and Father.

RANA

But the Ganges?

AADI

My itinerary did not allow a visit. But I will ensure they eventually find rest in the sacred river.

RANA

And at the airport --?

AADI

Sacred Hindu musical instrument.

Rana shakes his head in disbelief, gathers up the old clothes from the small bed.

RANA

An heirloom. Your mother and I shared this bed in our younger years. Before she was betrothed.

Rana catches Aadi's eyes and offers an empathetic smile.

INT. AADI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the unlit room, Aadi lies gingerly on top of the bed, street noises drifting in.

INT. AADI'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Aadi, feet overhanging the end of the bed, stirs.

He stretches away his aches and pains, negotiates the junk on the floor, offers namaste to an image of Ganesh on the wall alongside a photo of a young Indian boy standing with a younger Indian girl in traditional Hindi attire.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

At the stove, Rana pours creamy mixture onto a skillet, spreads it into something resembling a thin crepe.

Aadi, in jeans and hoodie, swings from the bottom of the stairs and enters the kitchen, offers a polite cough.

Rana surreptitiously closes an Indian cookbook on the table, pushes it out of sight, and bids Aadi be seated.

Aadi offers his customary namaste as Rana serves a plate of messy pre-cooked crepes.

RANA

Traditional oats dosa... If you're hungry. And no animals were killed in their making.

This pleases Aadi.

Rana gapes as Aadi devours the breakfast, smiles at his nephew's moan of approval.

He pours teas from a pot, adds plenty of cream and two teaspoons of sugar to each cup. He turns back to the stove, does a double take when Aadi adds two extra spoons of sugar.

AADI  
At what time does trading start?

RANA  
Never mind me. You better get your  
own business sorted.

AADI  
It was sorted yesterday.

Aadi finishes off his crepes, gulps some tea, stands.

AADI (CONT'D)  
Today I begin in earnest.

He bounds up the stairs.

Rana turns from the stove. The plate is empty.

RANA  
(aside)  
If you're hungry.

He picks up the plate, examines it in the light. It's squeaky clean. He reaches up about to store it in the overhead cupboard when Aadi, shouldering a backpack, re-appears.

In one fluid movement Rana instead packs it with the soiled dishes in the ancient sink, turns on the faucet.

Aadi stands there nervously.

AADI  
"Kay sera sera".

Rana is not quite sure what to make of this. Aadi hikes his shoulders and does the briefest of Bollywood dance moves.

Rana shakes his head in bewilderment. He picks up a pre-packed lunch container and hands it over.

After an awkward moment, Aadi accepts it, offers thanks, takes a final gulp of tea and departs the deli.

Rana stands befuddled as he watches Aadi exit, oblivious to the sink about to overflow!

INT. LECTURE THEATER - MORNING

Aadi locates an isolated seat toward the back, amidst a sea of students of varying ethnic backgrounds.

A few rows in front is VANESSA EPHRON (23) seated next to the handsome but boorish BENJAMIN (23), and a few of his Disciples.

Vanessa turns to survey the scene, nodding to a few peers.

Aadi, sits rigid and self-conscious. There is an air of the Adonis about him which causes Vanessa to take a second breath before turning back to face the lectern.

The lecturer, PROFESSOR KYOCHU approaches a lectern out front and the class comes to order.

The Japanese Prof's grasp of the English language is poor, has difficulty with the "R"s and the "L"s.

PROFESSOR KYOCHU

Welcome to final semester topic.  
There are many fine heritage building  
in this city, fallen into disrepair  
and crying out for TLC --

Some of Benjamin's Disciples snigger at the Professor's difficulty with the language.

PROFESSOR KYOCHU (CONT'D)

We must never forget our heritage.  
In few days will be given details ...

But Aadi focuses on Vanessa's jet-black Romany locks.