

KISMAT
(Fate)

by

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EXT. VILLAGE (INDIA) - DAY

Kites fly above the minarets of temples and mosques. Morning prayers from the loudspeakers echo in the dirt streets below.

An old, turbaned man sits on a chair under a *jamun* [java plum] tree. He starts to doze off, his eyelids barely open.

A group of village children peer around the corner, waiting. Once the old man falls asleep, the children sneak out and climb up the *jamun* tree. They use sticks to knock the purple fruit off the branches.

Startled awake, the man grumpily yells.

VILLAGE ELDER
(in Punjabi)
Patience! Let them ripen!

The children giggle and climb off the tree in retreat.

One mischievous little girl gathers the fallen fruit from the ground and gives the man a handful of *jamun* as she runs to catch up to her group of bandits.

The darkened silhouette of his figure keeps his bearded face hidden from view. He peels the *jamun* fruit with a knife. Fruit flies crowd over his hands as the juice drips onto the dusty, reddish soil.

INT. SIKH TEMPLE - DAY

A silk veil hides the beautiful face of an Indian-American bride, SIMRAN (28). Her gold jewelry and nose chain contrast her brown skin. The vibrant, red *mehndi* [henna tattoo] stains on her hands match her traditional red wedding dress.

A priest performs the *Anand Karaj* [Blissful Event], or Sikh wedding ceremony, reciting scripture.

PRIEST
(in Punjabi)
"They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together. They alone are called husband and wife, who have one light in two bodies." [GGS 788]

The turbaned groom, JASDEEP (30), sits to the right of his bride, cross-legged in front of the holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The bearded priest ceremonially fans the pages of the holy book, reciting the verses aloud.

The priest finishes an *ardās* [Sanskrit for "petition made by an inferior to a superior"], his loud voice bellowing across the crowd. Immediately after, the *ragis* [choir] sing a wedding hymn to the beat of a *sitar* and *tabla* [drum].

A decorative, silk shawl, or *pulla*, symbolically bonds the groom and bride together. The bride's father places one corner of the *pulla* into the groom's hands and the other corner into the bride's hands, signifying the father giving his daughter away.

In a clockwise direction, the couple circle around the holy book -- the groom leading his bride as she grips the shawl.

Her red lipstick and smile shine throughout.

Over a hundred friends and family are seated, dressed in formal Indian attire. Each take a turn to approach the couple with money in hand, holding the bills out and circling them over the heads of the couple as a gesture of luck, before gently pushing the money into their newlywed hands.

The bride's decorated hands, stained with her red *mehndi* tattoos. Ivory wedding bangles. Gold jewelry on her feet. Red flower petals on the floor of the temple. Dollar bills in large denominations shower down.

The music of the *sitar* and *tabla* increases in pace and volume as they near the end of the wedding ceremony.

EXT. CALIFORNIA - DAY

The green, wooded hills of San Mateo, California. The water of the San Francisco Bay is calm. The Golden Gate Bridge, Twin Peaks, and Sutro Tower emerge from the fog.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - DAY

An older Punjabi woman, GRANDMOTHER (70), is in the kitchen cooking down equal amounts of semolina wheat flour, clarified butter, and sugar into *parshad* [offering] -- the equal amounts emphasizing the equality of men and women.

Grandmother is wearing a cream-colored *salwar* [dress]. Her silver bangles clink and clank as she stirs the steel pot with a wooden spatula. She will present this batch of *parshad* at the temple for their Sunday-morning visit as an offering.

Her face and hands are wrinkled from decades of household duties, of constant cooking and cleaning, and subservience to her husband.

As she stirs, she recites an old Punjabi folktale to her son, HARPREET (30), a handsome, Indian-American man who exhibits all the typical traits of his Punjabi ancestry -- tall and strong -- and the apple of his mother's eye.

Grandmother recites "The Story of a Murakh" [or "The Story of a Fool"] as her son listens silently.

As their hands tire, they alternate and take turns stirring, to prevent the sweet flour and butter mixture from burning at the bottom of the pot as it turns a caramel brown.

GRANDMOTHER

(in Punjabi)

One night, a man is late in visiting his lover and she gets angry and asks him what kept him. He innocently tells her that he is late because he was visiting his mother. And deep within the woman starts to grow the poison of resentment and jealousy.

The man sees this jealousy and assures her of his true love and dedication to her. The woman asks him if he loves her more than he loves his own mother, and he replies, "Yes, of course. I love you more than anything else in this world. I would do anything for you."

But the woman does not believe him. And the jealous lover decides to test his love and asks him to give up his mother's heart.

The man reluctantly returns to his mother's house and tells her of his lover's request. His mother tries to warn her son of the woman's jealousy, but blinded by love, he does not listen.

After all, the mother loves her son so much that she agrees to whatever he says. The mother sacrifices herself and rips her heart out from her chest and gives it to her son, wrapped in a *rumal* [handkerchief].

(MORE)

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

As the man runs back to his lover's house with his mother's heart, his foot gets caught by a loose stone and he trips and falls to the ground, his mother's heart slipping out of his hands.

From the bloodstained handkerchief, the man hears the concerned and worried voice of his mother, "Son, are you alright? Are you hurt?"

Returning to his lover's house, the man gives her his mother's heart. But she is disgusted by his actions. "If you can kill your own mother, then you can kill me too!" she says.

The once-jealous lover leaves the foolish man. He was a *murakh*, a fool, and he too, will die alone.

TITLE: KISMAT

INT. BUNGALOW - DAY

A well-manicured, Craftsman-style bungalow in the outskirts of San Francisco. The kitchen, living room, bedrooms, and backyard are quiet.

In the master bedroom, a man and a woman playfully tease each other in bed, kissing and whispering.

Harpreet holds the woman, MICHELLE (30), in his arms. His brown calves entangled with her long, slender legs. Her white skin flows in stark contrast to his dark brown tan-lines. Her red hair covers her face and she purses her lips, attempting to blow it out of her eyes flirtatiously.

She gets goosebumps and red marks on her skin wherever he touches her. They kiss and interlock hands as the warm morning light streams through the open curtains.

Michelle slowly breaks her hand free from his grip and shows a particular interest towards the silver *kara* [bracelet] on his wrist. She spins it around with her fingers.

MICHELLE

Does this have a special meaning?

HARPREET

It's called a "kara" -- it's a Sikh tradition and I first got one at our temple when I was little.

She plays with the *kara*, moving her fingers up his arm.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

It's a protective ring to guard the sword arm of warriors during battle.

MICHELLE

And what battle will you find yourself in now?

A telephone ring breaks the silence. The answering machine beeps and the thick, North Indian accent of an older man, undoubtedly Harpreet's father, fills the hallway.

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

Harpreet -- you are late! It is nine o'clock already! Why do you never answer your phone? We will wait ten more minutes.

Harpreet jumps out of bed and pulls on his navy trousers, looping in a brown belt as he searches for his shoes, scattered across the floor of the room.

He puts on a button-down white shirt and tucks it into his pants, leaning over the bed to kiss Michelle on the lips. He holds the kiss a few seconds longer than normal, and she grabs him by the collar and tries to pull him back into bed.

HARPREET

No, no! I'm late. They're leaving for the temple in ten minutes.

MICHELLE

You're never late. Do you think someday you'll take me to the temple, too?

HARPREET

Before or after I tell my father that we've been dating for almost a year? And that you moved in?

MICHELLE

Almost a year?

Michelle relents and winks, buttoning the top of his shirt before loosening her grip. Their anniversary is approaching.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

And say hi to *Mama-ji* for me!

Harpreet shuts the front door of the house and gets into his car. He looks in the rear-view mirror and adjusts his collar, feeling the stubble on his face. He starts the car, puts it into gear, and backs out of the driveway.

Inside, Michelle sits on the edge of the bed and looks outside, listening to his car fade into the distance.

Cleaning up the remnants of the adventurous night before, she picks up the black-laced lingerie off the foot of the bed. A pair of stockings are nearby. She washes them in the bathroom sink, squeezes them dry, and hangs them against the breeze of the bathroom window, cracked open.

Michelle walks into the kitchen and fills a kettle with water to steep a cup of tea. As she waits for it to boil, she holds her hand to her stomach, and stares out at the backyard, wild and unkempt, green with overgrowth.

An empty, red hummingbird feeder hangs idle in the middle of the garden.

Back in the bedroom, she sits at the desk and pulls a letter out of the drawer. On a notepad, she pens a response and clips a recipe from a magazine article. She slips her letter and recipe clipping into an envelope, licks the envelope, and thumbs on a stamp.

The whistle of the tea kettle blends-in to the bellow of a ship's horn, arriving in the San Francisco Bay.

EXT. CAR - MORNING

There is still fog in the streets of San Francisco as Harpreet merges onto the Junipero Serra Freeway, out from the suburbs towards the city. Red brake lights illuminate the water vapor lingering in the air.

A calm Sunday morning drive with a news segment from the local NPR station plays on the radio, "And that's 'The California Report' for this Sunday, May 1st for KQED Public Radio. Thanks for listening and have a lovely morning. Support for KQED comes from --"

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

A long stick of incense burns slowly. A piece of ash breaks and falls away, smoke swirling upwards into the air.

GRANDFATHER (70), is the meddling patriarch of the family. He is tall and bearded, dressed in a traditional *kurta* [tunic], and a thick, wool blazer. His hair is long and he ties it into a bun, awaiting his blue-colored turban. His beard is white with the faintest of hints of the pepper of his youth.

As he stares out the window, he sticks the end of his unraveled turban fabric into his mouth. Biting into the cloth, he slowly uses his hands to wrap his turban around his head in a practiced, ritualized motion.

Grandmother is in the kitchen, also looking out the window in anticipation of her son. She's preparing a spice mix for her *chai masala*, slowly separating the spices out individually, grinding them in a mortar and pestle.

As Harpreet steps inside, he removes his shoes, leaving them at the door. Grandmother kisses her only son on the forehead and they embrace with a hug.

HARPREET

Hey *Mama-ji*.

GRANDMOTHER

(mix of Punjabi-English)

Behta [son], have you had some *chai* this morning?

Harpreet sits down.

HARPREET

No, not yet.

GRANDMOTHER

I will make some. You look tired. Have you been sleeping enough?

Her old, wrinkled hands rub his eyes. She fills a pot with water and turns the gas stove to high. She scoops in a spoonful each of black tea and *chai masala*.

As the water starts to boil violently, Grandmother pours milk into the pot. She reaches for a black marker and starts to write on a set of three ceramic jars resting on the counter.

HARPREET

What are you writing?

GRANDMOTHER

Tea, *chai masala*, and sugar.

She carefully labels the jars, writing the exact proportions for her *chai* recipe on the back of the largest jar.

HARPREET

Who is this for?

GRANDMOTHER

It's for your *Daddy-ji*. I think I will convince him to start making *chai* on some mornings when I am too tired.

HARPREET

But he never cooks or makes anything for himself... And you never let him, either.

Grandfather walks into the kitchen, his hands interlocked behind his back, brimming with impatience. Without acknowledging his son, he quietly picks up a heavy sack of wheat flour from the pantry and heads for the door.

GRANDMOTHER

Hai rabba [Oh God]! Let your son take those. You will hurt yourself.

Grandfather ignores her chiding and heads outside with the large 25-lb bag of flour. He motions for his son to follow him. Harpreet grabs a second bag of flour and quickly follows after his father down the stairs.

GRANDFATHER

Why do you never answer your phone when I call you?

Grandfather sets down the bag of flour.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Run back upstairs and finish loading up the car.

Harpreet loads the trunk of the car with two bags of flour and two more gallons of milk -- all offerings for the temple.

Back inside, Grandmother quickly turns the jars around to hide their new labels. And just in time, she quickly lifts the teapot to prevent the *chai* from boiling over the edge.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

I'll warm up the car. We're late.

GRANDMOTHER

Let him drink his *chai* first.
There's no appointment for the
Gurdwara [temple].

Ignoring her, Grandfather leaves the room and she pours the tea through an iron-meshed strainer into two cups, spilling some slightly. The brown, *masala chai* slowly drips down the side of the porcelain teacup, leaving a stain. She puts a teaspoon of honey into each and hands the cups to her son, wiping away the spill and stain with her bare hand.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Stir it well. All the honey is
still at the bottom.

Harpreet nods in the affirmative, stirring.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Did you have breakfast?

HARPREET

No, I came here straight from bed.

Grandmother opens the refrigerator and pulls out a pink-colored cardboard box -- traditional Punjabi sweets. She breaks the plastic tape that sealed it shut and pulls out a yellow *ladoo* [round-shaped sweet]. She breaks it in half and gives half to her son, who inherited her sweet tooth.

GRANDMOTHER

How is your friend... Michelle?

Harpreet looks at her shyly with surprise and tries to read her true intentions. She smiles and turns to look out the window, not saying a word. Grandfather is abruptly back at the door, as impatient as ever.

GRANDFATHER

We are late! What are you smiling
about, *Tarsem*?

She eats the other half of the *ladoo*.

EXT. CAR - MORNING

Grandmother sits in the backseat of the car while her husband drives, their son in the passenger seat. She adjusts her *chunni* [silk headscarf] to hide her white hair. Grandfather occasionally looks back in the rear-view mirror at his wife, who nurses the occasional cough.

INT. SIKH TEMPLE - MORNING

The parking lot of the *Sikh Gurdwara Sahib* in San Jose is crowded. As they walk towards the main temple, Harpreet reaches for his wallet. Grandfather quickly stops him.

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

No. Take this.

Grandfather hands his wife and son several dollar bills each for their donations, to be made inside.

HARPREET

(in English)

Dad, you know I'm not a child anymore. I have a job and you should let me pay for once--

GRANDMOTHER

(mix of Punjabi-English)

You'll always be our child, no matter how old you get or what you do... Or even when you have children of your own.

Grandfather smirks at the thought of grandchildren.

Inside, Grandfather greets many men with the respect of folded hands, followed by handshakes, mutually reciprocated.

The temple is as much of a place of social hierarchy and class -- a place to see and to be seen -- as much as it is a place of worship, despite any teachings of austerity.

Harpreet carries a sack of flour and his mother follows with the pot of *parshad*, a hint of pride in her smile. She has successfully immigrated to a distant land and raised a strong, successful, young man.

They remove their shoes and wash their hands. Harpreet and the other men without turbans cover their heads with *rumals* [handkerchiefs] and women adjust their *chunis* and *shawls*.

There is a line of worshipers waiting to pray. Typical offerings of flour, milk, and fruit are placed at the side of the altar. Worshipers slip monetary donations into a wide, bronze vault built into the ground, taking turns bowing to the ground in prostration in front of the holy book.

As Grandmother bows to the ground, she sits up on her knees, and holds out her *chunni* between her extended hands -- her gesture of pleading with God, begging, or asking for something in secret.

After bowing, the family receives *parshad* in paper napkins and sit separately -- although there are no writings that indicate anything except equality, the conservatism of Sikh men means gender segregation prevails -- men sit to the left and women and children sit to the right.

As they listen to the *kirtan* [sermon], children sneak away from their parents to go play outside, shyly making new friends. Babies cry and are hushed. Old men sit outside, gossiping. There are swords and pictures of martyrs -- a hint of a history of a violent, revolutionary past -- and of the political roots of the Khalistan separatist movement.

Grandmother closes her eyes and prays, silently mouthing the words to the hymns being read through the loudspeakers. Her body gently sways with the rhythm of the choir.

INT. SIKH TEMPLE (KITCHEN) - AFTERNOON

In a separate building, hundreds sit cross-legged on the floor and eat *langar* [free, communal meal]. Men and women are busy in the kitchen, stirring huge pots and making thousands of *rotis* [flatbreads] by hand.

The occasional fly buzzes about the food hall and the audio feed of the *kirtan* is transmitted in from the adjoining prayer hall, the sounds mixing with the dozen ceiling fans whirring overhead and the voices of the patrons below.

At the far end of the food hall, Simran and her mother and father eat lunch. She steals glances at Harpreet from across the room.

SIMRAN'S FATHER

Beti, can you get me more *chai*?

SIMRAN

Han-ji [yes, formal].

Simran waits her turn in the buffet line, slowly moving towards the hot *chai* dispenser.

She catches herself looking over at Harpreet again. He notices and looks back at her, and she quickly shifts her gaze back at her elderly parents. She blushes and tries to hold back a smile.

Simran's father approaches Grandfather in the food hall.

They fold hands and embrace, mouthing the usual greeting of "*Sat sri akaal*," but their conversation is inaudible over the background noise of a busy lunch service.

Simran's father sits down besides Grandfather and they seem to discuss something important.

In the open kitchen, Harpreet and his mother are performing *sewa* [selfless service]. A large steel container holds 100 lbs of wet dough, and Grandmother and a handful of elderly women shape little balls of dough with their hands.

The next stage of the assembly falls to a younger group of women, in which Harpreet is the only man. Using rolling pins and loose flour, the dough balls are made into circular flatbreads, before being passed over to the large griddle to be cooked.

Simran stealthily enters the kitchen and taps the shoulder of a teenage girl working next to Harpreet, whispering something into her ear. The girl smiles and vacates her spot. Simran quickly takes up the abandoned post and grabs a rolling pin.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

Looks like our parents know each other?

HARPREET

Yea.

SIMRAN

I'm Simran. Nice to meet you.

HARPREET

I'm Harry. Nice to meet you.

The elderly women continue their quiet gossip and pretend not to notice the romance unfolding before their eyes.

EXT. SIKH TEMPLE (PARKING LOT) - AFTERNOON

With the day of worship coming to an end, Grandfather and his son walk ahead in the parking lot. Grandfather pulls an envelope out of his jacket pocket and hands it to his son.

HARPREET

(in English)

What's this?

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

It's not money. Open it later.

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

On a secluded beach in Half Moon Bay, the couple walks across the sand. The sunrise paints the dunes a golden hue. Harpreet and Michelle sit on a blanket and enjoy a picnic. An open bottle of wine, cheese, and a plate of Middle Eastern food.

HARPREET

Wow. Your hummus recipe is delicious. It tastes exactly like my mom's recipe.

MICHELLE

Really?

HARPREET

She puts toasted *jira* [cumin seeds] in hers, too. Not super traditional, but her own twist.

The couple quietly enjoys their meal and stare out at the waves.

Michelle sits cross-legged, Indian style, and Harpreet lays beside her, reading a book. Under her wide-brimmed sun hat, her red hair blows in the wind, Her skin freckles just short of burning in the blistering summer sun.

MICHELLE

I've been worrying about the situation with your father. I can sense things are going to get difficult.

Waves crash. Harpreet sits up.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

But I've never been this happy in my entire life. And all I want is for you to be happy, too.

HARPREET

I am happy--

Harpreet attempts to speak, but she shushes him.

MICHELLE

We should be able to talk to each other about anything. And there will be times when things are hard for me, and I'll need you to push harder. And sometimes things will be hard for you, and I will need to take up the slack and push harder.

The couple looks towards the water.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

It just feels like you're bearing the brunt of this, shielding me from things.

HARPREET

I'm not--

MICHELLE

If we're going down the wrong path here, I don't want to drive you away from your parents.

HARPREET

You're not driving me away from anything.

MICHELLE

If your life will be happier, and smoother, without me messing things up in it, then--

Now Harpreet shushes her.

HARPREET

Stop. I've never been happier. Before you, I realized I've felt alone my entire life.

Michelle listens intently.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Growing up, I've been too Indian for Americans, and too American for Indians. But I'd like to think I'm the best of both cultures. My mom adores you, but I'm not sure my dad understands any of that. He might not ever come around.

MICHELLE

I don't want to drive you away from him...

HARPREET

You're not. I love you. And maybe someday he'll accept me -- accept us -- but you're my priority. We're both going to have to work hard for this to work, but I know we'll make it work.

Michelle takes his hand and grasps it tightly.

MICHELLE

We're a team. You're not alone
anymore.

EXT. FARM - SUNRISE

Before sunrise. A dozen run-down cars are parked along a dirt road in the middle of Watsonville farm country, not far from the Pacific Coast's Highway 1. The dust hangs in the air from a passing semi-truck.

The only turbaned figure, Grandfather towers above the other farmhands around him, of mostly Latinx origin. The workers stand in their own groups, chatting in Spanish, awaiting their instructions for the day.

FARMER

(in Spanish)

Strawberries today. Keep your faces covered. Drink water. If you faint, you go home. Your break is at lunch. Today we're flushing the irrigation lines. If you find a leak, flag me down!

The workers disperse. Grandfather and a handful of others pile into a red, rusty, 1980s pick-up truck with the "TOYOTA" paint fading on its rear tailgate.

Hours later, in the heat of the summer sun, Grandfather is hunched over, harvesting strawberries. His skin has darkened, clothes drenched in dirt and sweat. A bandana covers his mouth, a miserable attempt to avoid the dust and pesticides.

Around noon, the farm-workers gather around an unmarked, nameless food truck. Grandfather gestures his usual order. Unable to find shade, he joins his coworkers leaning against the truck, quickly eating his plate of chicken tacos, grilled onions, and extra jalapeños.

Back in the fields, an open water pipe flows freely into an irrigation ditch. He cups his hands and drinks from the fountain, water dripping from his parched lips, down his white beard and onto the dusty soil.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO (OFFICE) - NIGHT

For Harpreet, daylight in the office turns into night. It is Saturday and he is the only person in the building.

In the exterior of the skyscraper, the lights on his floor are all dark, while his office light shines alone.

INT. BUNGALOW - EVENING

Water boils in a large pot. A mess of handmade pasta and flour are scattered about the countertop.

Harpreet is wearing a blue apron, the sleeves of his white button-down shirt rolled up. Michelle is wearing a red dress. The couple holds a large, Italian-style dinner party. The voices and laughter of friends.

Salad greens and radicchio are being washed in the large, country-style basin sink. Harpreet quickly whips up a vinaigrette with olive oil, Dijon mustard, red wine vinegar, salt and a crack of black pepper. He gently dresses the salad in a bowl and plates it with a practiced ease.

Separately, he quarters a bowl of ripe, red strawberries. He tosses them gently in balsamic vinegar, arugula, and sunflower seeds.

A sauté pan is filled with *agnolotti* pasta and a sauce quickly emulsifies as he tosses and stirs with the hot, starchy water.

A voice of a friend shouts from the group and into the open kitchen.

DINNER FRIEND

Hey chef, how come you never cook us Indian food?

HARPREET

(laughs)

I'm so sick of Indian food! And it's really easy to make!

DINNER FRIEND

It's definitely not easy!

While they banter, Harpreet cleans his station, wiping the counter with a neatly-folded tea towel.

HARPREET

Once you learn how to make the base, like an Indian version of *soffritto* or *passata*, you'll know how to make everything--

Michelle's facial expression shows that she's heard this line before. She interrupts him.

MICHELLE
 (groans)
 Don't get him started!

His friends laugh.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
 But his Indian cooking is the best!
 He learned from his mom.

DINNER FRIEND
 You have to teach us your mom's
 recipes!

Michelle looks at Harpreet with delight and agreement,
 mouthing to him silently.

MICHELLE
 (mouthing)
 See!

As dusk sets in, they enjoy their dinner party with friends,
 wine glasses in hand. Platters of antipasti, roasted
 vegetables, pasta, and salad being passed around.

The group of friends continues their own conversations and
 Michelle leans over and whispers into Harpreet's ear.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
 You promised me that you'd teach me
 how to cook more Indian dishes...
 just like the recipes your mom
 taught you?

HARPREET
 I will!

MICHELLE
 Or better yet, perhaps a lesson
 from your mom?

HARPREET
 I'll introduce you to her soon. She
 can't wait to meet you.

MICHELLE
 What have you told her about me?

HARPREET
 Everything. How we met. What you do
 for work. About your family. And--

Michelle looks on in anticipation.

HARPREET (CONT'D)
 (in Punjabi)
Main tenu pyar karda han.
 [I love you]

She smiles and knows exactly what he means, and whispers it back to him -- she's been practicing her Punjabi.

MICHELLE
 (in Punjabi)
Main be tenu pyar karti hai.
 [I love you too]

The green of the garden slowly fading as five or six hummingbirds swarm around the red hummingbird feeder outside, mirroring the lively dinner feast indoors.

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

The next morning, in the hallway of the empty bungalow, the telephone rings and the answering machine beeps -- Grandfather's voice pierces the air.

GRANDFATHER
 (in Punjabi)
 Your mother has several heavy boxes that must be moved. I can manage, but you know how she is. And maybe we would both like to see our son's face more than just once a month when you take us to temple.

Grandfather pauses hesitantly, revealing his true intent.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)
 And I have something urgent I need to talk to you about. Bring the envelope.

The recording stops.

EXT. CAR - MORNING

Sitting in his parked car, Harpreet opens the envelope his father had slipped him earlier at temple.

To his surprise, he finds several photos of the beautiful Indian woman he caught stealing glances at him at the *Gurdwara*. The same woman, Simran, who sneakily introduced herself in the temple kitchen during *sewa*.

There is a letter describing Simran's background in detail. She teaches at a nearby elementary school, she's twenty-eight years old, of average height, and has a Masters of Education.

Harpreet quickly stuffs the photos and letter back into the envelope before stepping out of the car.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

Harpreet rejects arranged marriage

Harpreet climbs the staircase to his parents' apartment. He instinctively removes his shoes at the door and hugs his mother.

The TV in the background is playing a classic Bollywood film, *Shri 420*, with the infamous song "Mera Joota Hai Japani" ["My Shoes are Japanese"], highlighting the newly-independent and internationalist India of the 1950s.

GRANDMOTHER

You're early. I'm still making lunch. Your father is out running errands.

HARPREET

Do you need any help?

GRANDMOTHER

No, sit!

In the kitchen, Harpreet takes a seat at the table and watches his mother finish assembling lunch. He places the envelope on the table.

HARPREET

Do you know about this?

GRANDMOTHER

(sighs)

Yes.

HARPREET

Does he know about Michelle?

GRANDMOTHER

Not completely. Don't argue with him today. Just keep your cool and play along.

HARPREET

We've been dating for a year. And I love her.

She smiles and shapes a ball of *roti* dough with her hands.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

She's well-educated. She has a good job. A good family -- and her parents adore me. Is her only mistake that she's a *gori* [white]?

GRANDMOTHER

Be patient. We will convince your father slowly.

HARPREET

Don't we have distant relatives who had mixed marriages? My great uncle? They settled in Yuba City?

GRANDMOTHER

Yes. Mexicali, not Yuba City. In the 1940s. They were some of the first Punjabis in California.

HARPREET

They married Mexican women?

GRANDMOTHER

It was complicated. Back then, Indian men couldn't own land or marry white women. And there were no Indian women here. The men worked hard farming in the Central Valley and sent money back home.

Grandmother rolls out a *roti* [flatbread] with a rolling pin.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Your father will argue that religion, culture, language, and diet are important for a match. That it will make your life easier.

HARPREET

Of course it will make life easier. But the easy path is not always the right path.

GRANDMOTHER

Life is hard as it is. But--

HARPREET

How happy have you been with dad? How many Punjabi couples have we seen who are constantly fighting, unhappy?

GRANDMOTHER

(reluctantly)

You know your father is difficult.

Grandmother gently places a *roti* onto the hot griddle and it immediately puffs up. She flips it to brown the other side.

HARPREET

When I used to be bullied in school for being different, for my brown skin or being the only Indian in class -- you remember what you used to tell me?

GRANDMOTHER

Everyone is equal, boys and girls. The color of their skin doesn't matter.

HARPREET

And you used to recite a specific *gurbani* [scripture]?

GRANDMOTHER

(in Punjabi)

"From one clay has the Creator made countless shapes, sizes and colours. Neither are the vessels badly made, nor does the Creator lack any skill." [GGS 1349-1350]

HARPREET

We are all equal... And *rotis* aren't too different from *tortillas*, are they?

Grandmother laughs as she flips a *roti*.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Their kids. Dalip and all them? They were half-Mexican, half-Punjabi?

GRANDMOTHER

Yes. They spoke a mix of Spanish, Punjabi, and English at home. We visited them in Mexicali when you were little. Do you remember?

HARPREET

Yea. We had a lot of fun together as kids, playing out in the fields and on their dirt bikes. Why did we lose contact with them?

GRANDMOTHER

Your father didn't like them...
Why do you think?

The front door slams shut and Grandfather walks into the kitchen.

GRANDFATHER

I didn't like who?

Grandmother and Harpreet look at each other in surprise.

GRANDMOTHER

Nothing -- shall we eat lunch?

CUT TO:

Grandfather is seated on the floor in the living room, cross-legged, the envelope resting in front of him, apparently ready to talk business with his son.

Grandmother serves *chai*, the steam rising from the cups. She looks worried and sneaks a signal at Harpreet, seated across from his father on the sofa. She quietly mouths a warning for him to keep his cool.

GRANDFATHER

Did you look at those photos?

HARPREET

Yes. But I'm not ready yet--

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

You graduated university five years ago, you have a good job, you bought a house. Your mother and I think it is long past the time for you to get married. It is time to settle down.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh *baba*, let it go!

GRANDFATHER

How much longer will we wait? He is getting old. What will people say?

HARPREET

I'm thirty years old. And I don't care what people say.

Grandfather continues his matchmaking and points at the photograph.

GRANDFATHER

Simran. The girl says she cannot find a single fault in you. Her family stands behind her. They have all noticed you at the *Gurdwara*. She wants to formally meet you and move forward with the engagement.

HARPREET

I am not interested in *her*.

Grandfather turns to his wife in anger.

GRANDFATHER

He is not interested, he says. Not interested? We have a family reputation to uphold!

GRANDMOTHER

He is already seeing a nice girl. Let it be.

GRANDFATHER

Nice girl? Who is this nice girl?

HARPREET

We've been dating for almost a year. I've tried to tell you before.

GRANDFATHER

Is she Indian? Is it that *gori* [white woman] that the neighbors told me about?

HARPREET

Her name is "Michelle."

GRANDFATHER

At least she is not black or Muslim, eh?

HARPREET

"There is only one breath; all are made of the same clay; the light within all is the same" [GGS 96]

GRANDFATHER

Don't you dare quote scripture to me. Who do you think you are to tell me about *Sikhi*! I just want you to be able to stand tall--

HARPREET

All those years of "Sunday School" and Punjabi lessons at the Gurdwara were a waste? You think going to temple every week and throwing a few dollars around and donating food is important than the teachings?

GRANDFATHER

Back home, I was a *sarkar* [boss or landowner of tenant farmers]. I was the first person people came to for advice, for help, for money, for permission. And now look. My own son won't listen to me! My own son lectures me!

HARPREET

(yelling)

I've always listened to you! You controlled my schooling. You vetoed my university choices. Then I graduated, got a job, and moved out! Then you pushed me to buy a house, so I bought a house! And now you--

GRANDFATHER

And now look how well off you are! You listened to me and you've done well for yourself! Because of me!

HARPREET

I'm a grown man! I'm an adult! I moved out, I don't live here anymore. You forget that.

GRANDFATHER

I forget? Why did your mother and I move to America? Why did we sell the store in India? And our farmland? Why did I break my back to send you to private school? To university? For you to disrespect me and behave like this?

Harpreet stands up and walks into the kitchen, trying to control his temper. Grandmother is seated in the kitchen, hiding her face in her hands. Grandfather grabs his arm.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Sit down and shut up--

HARPREET

You and mom argue all the time.
Every Punjabi couple we know
fights. Everyone is unhappy. Do you
honestly want the same for me?

GRANDFATHER

Sit down! I told them "yes" and you
will meet the girl. End of
discussion.

Grandfather forces the envelope into his son's hands.
Harpreet walks away, pausing in the door frame. He lets the
envelope drop to the floor in quiet protest and slams the
front door behind him.

Grandmother presses her temples -- the stress clearly taking
a toll on her health -- triggering a new headache and a small
coughing fit.

GRANDMOTHER

(in Punjabi)

The harder you push the boy, the
harder he will push back...
But he's right, isn't he?

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Simran sits at her desk in her classroom, grading papers. Her
cell phone buzzes with a new, unknown number.

SIMRAN

Hello?

HARPREET

Hey! Simran? This is Harpreet -- I
think your dad has been talking to
my dad?

Simran tries to hold back her giddiness. She pulls out an
envelope from her desk and looks at a photo of Harpreet, on
the other end of the line.

SIMRAN

(smiles)

Yes! It's nice to hear from you. We
met at the *Gurdwara* the other day--

HARPREET

I'm sorry, I just wanted to say
that I think there has been some
sort of misunderstanding.

(MORE)

HARPREET (CONT'D)

My dad was wrong, and I'm already
seeing someone else--

SIMRAN

Oh--

HARPREET

You seem like a wonderful person
and I'm sorry about the confusion.
I think our parents got a little
carried away.

SIMRAN

Yea. Well, you know how... Indian
parents can get.

HARPREET

(laughs nervously)

Yea--

SIMRAN

Well, thanks for calling--

HARPREET

Best of luck to you.

SIMRAN

You too.

Frustrated, Simran sets down her phone. Outside in the
schoolyard, children play. The sounds of recess drown out the
sound of their teacher as she breaks down crying.

She returns the envelope to her desk drawer, beside a stack
of second and third choice envelopes. She pulls another out,
but doesn't open it. Her parents will be relieved -- after
all, she was getting "old."

She picks up the phone and dials her mother.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

Mama-ji...

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

Before sunrise, a light clicks on at 4 AM and illuminates the
dark, cramped apartment. Grandfather slowly rises by lifting
his legs out of bed and calls after Grandmother.

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

Tarsem! Wake up.

Grandmother is on a separate bed, a sign of the enduring conservatism of their marriage. She is wearing a set of pajamas and slips her Indian dress over them, the morning far too cold to bear without layers.

Grandfather fumbles an AM-FM radio on his nightstand and a traditional *gurbani* [proverb] streams from the buzzy, static-filled speakers as the two start their morning ritual.

Grandmother washes her face in the bathroom and makes her way to the kitchen to brew their morning *chai*. She prepares two pieces of toast, browning them with *ghee* in a cast-iron pan. She spreads a layer of apricot jam on each, silently mouthing the words of the prayer to accompany the AM broadcast.

GRANDMOTHER

(in Punjabi)

Waheguru. Waheguru. Waheguru.
[Wonderful teacher, or God]

The two eat their breakfast together as Grandfather pages through the morning newspaper. The rhythmic slurping of *chai* and clinking of the teacups on their tea plates.

Grandfather reduces the volume of the radio broadcast and reaches into his desk for the *Guru Granth Sahib* [holy book]. He unties the knot on a bandana which protectively wraps the book and sits on the floor, cross-legged.

Grandmother lights a stick of incense, carefully sitting a few feet behind her husband, hands folded, as he reads aloud.

After their morning prayers, Grandfather bathes and re-ties his turban -- an elaborate process of unraveling his washed yardage of blue turban cloth, biting on the edge of the cloth and clenching it tightly in his teeth as he loops the cloth snugly around his head.

GRANDFATHER

I am going to the store. Where is
the grocery list?

Grandmother hands him the list.

GRANDMOTHER

Be sure the vegetables are fresh.
You'll stop by the *Gurdwara* for
lunch, too?

Grandfather grabs the hand-scribbled grocery list, grunts in the affirmative, and steps out of the apartment. She locks the front door and quickly picks up the phone in the kitchen.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - AFTERNOON

Michelle climbs a flight of stairs in a nicely-manicured apartment complex in Redwood City. She is carrying a bag of groceries in a large, cloth tote bag. She looks at the slip of paper in her hand and scans the doors of the hallway.

Hearing a gentle knock, Grandmother answers the door.

MICHELLE

Mama-ji!

Michelle quickly bends to the ground and reaches for Grandmothers' feet, attempting to perform *pairi pona* [or *pranāma*] as a gesture of respect for elders. Grandmother grabs her shoulders and embraces her with a hug instead.

GRANDMOTHER

Come inside my dear.

Without needing a reminder, Michelle quietly takes off her shoes at the door and follows Grandmother into the kitchen -- this is clearly not her first visit.

MICHELLE

How long is *Baba-ji* out for today?

GRANDMOTHER

He has many errands -- a stop at the senior center, lunch at the temple, and grocery shopping -- don't worry, we have five or six hours before he comes home!

MICHELLE

(nervously)

Someday, I hope I can finally meet *Baba-ji*.

GRANDMOTHER

Harpreet and I are slowly working on him.

MICHELLE

Here's what looked fresh in the Indian store today. And I stopped by the farmers market across the street.

Grandmother's eyes widen in excitement as both women huddle over the bag. Michelle pulls out eggplant, potatoes, tomatoes, and a handful of aromatics.

GRANDMOTHER

Perfect for an eggplant *sabji*
[vegetable dish]. We call it
bartha! It's Harpreet's favorite.

Michelle endearingly hugs Grandmother.

MICHELLE

Thanks again *Mama-ji* for teaching
me all of your family recipes. I
know this will make Harpreet very
happy someday.

GRANDMOTHER

You mean, after he gets upset about
us keeping our little meetings a
secret, behind his back?

They both laugh.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Shall we start with the *thurka*?

MICHELLE

Is "thurka" what Harpreet refers to
as "soffritto?"

Grandmother laughs as she starts dicing an onion.

GRANDMOTHER

Yes, he's told me that before. He
learned how to cook Italian food
watching TV as a little boy. And he
took a year of study-abroad in
Rome.

MICHELLE

Oh? Yes, he told me about his
study-abroad. And *Baba-ji* was not
happy to let him go away so far?

GRANDMOTHER

He's our only son. His father can
be over-protective.

They multi-task while conversing, washing the vegetables and
prepping the herbs.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Did you know that when Harpreet was
a little boy, he used to get sick
and tired of eating Indian food
every day, so he started
negotiating a compromise.

MICHELLE

A compromise?

GRANDMOTHER

We made a compromise to cook Indian food no more than five times a week. And we would learn to cook something completely different on the weekends. Italian, Mexican, Middle Eastern. He was so picky as a child!

They both laugh.

MICHELLE

Not much has changed! What about *Baba-ji* -- did he eat Harpreet's cooking?

GRANDMOTHER

Yes! He wouldn't admit to it easily, but he loved everything Harpreet cooked. He needs to be won over slowly.

Michelle pulls a tupperware container of okra and onion *sabji* from the tote bag and shows Grandmother, hoping to win her approval, too.

MICHELLE

I made this yesterday. Harpreet was surprised. Would you taste it?

Grandmother grabs two forks, hands one to Michelle, her eyes opening wide with delight as she tastes the okra dish.

GRANDMOTHER

It's delicious!

They cut the eggplant in half and score the flesh before drizzling them with olive oil and putting them in the oven. One chops the cilantro while the other stirs the sizzling pots. Finally, they combine the *mise en place*.

The dishes come together quickly and the scene unfolds into Grandmother teaching Michelle how to press *roti* [flatbreads] over the gas flame -- the surface of the bread erupting into tiny, crispy bubbles.

Lunch is served and the two eat at the kitchen table. Eggplant *bartha*, yellow *daal*, yogurt sauce, *roti*, and Michelle's okra *sabji*.

After lunch, Grandmother boils water for *chai*. The markings in her elaborate handwriting visible in both Punjabi and English on the mason jars.

After taking a sip of *chai*, Grandmother retrieves something from the bedroom.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)
Beti [daughter], I have something
 for you.

Grandmother returns with a box containing a red, tailored Indian dress in a modern, stylish cut.

MICHELLE
 Oh! Please, this is too much.

GRANDMOTHER
 Do you know what "*beti*" means?

Michelle smiles and nods.

MICHELLE
Han-ji [yes, formal].
 Thank you so much *Mama-ji*.

She knows it means "daughter," as she holds the silk dress up against her body. A ship blows its heavy foghorn. The tea kettle whistles loudly.

INT. CLASSROOM - EVENING

Simran slowly flips through a tall stack of homework, writing comments and marking mistakes in red ink. Frustrated, she packs her bag, and pauses at the door before turning off the classroom lights.

EXT. SIKH TEMPLE - NIGHT

Simran drives to the *Gurdwara*. The orange and white lights of the city glimmer behind her in the dark night sky.

Inside the main prayer hall, the empty temple is eerily quiet on a weekday night, free of worshippers.

There is no sermon being recited over the loudspeakers. Simran falls to her knees in front of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. She extends out her arms, palms facing upward, draped by her silk *chunni*. She begs for guidance with an *ardās* of her own. Tears stream from her face.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

Grandfather and Grandmother sit on the floor. The TV streams a live broadcast of the prayer service directly from the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. They become entranced, their bodies moving with the rhythm of the chanting, their heads covered, kneeling cross-legged on prayer rugs.

When the broadcast finishes, they stand up and stretch.

GRANDMOTHER

(in Punjabi)

Look at all the things we have for
lunch today!

Grandmother places the reheated leftovers on the table, alongside with Michelle's okra *sabji*.

GRANDFATHER

This tastes really good...
It's even better than normal!

GRANDMOTHER

Yes. It's a little different.

GRANDFATHER

Must have used a different *masala*?

GRANDMOTHER

(smiling)

Perhaps. That must be it.

Foregoing utensils, they eat with their hands, dipping their *roti* in *daal* and scooping the *sabji*.

GRANDFATHER

This okra is really something else.
Delicious! But I don't remember
picking any up from the store.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh? I got it from the neighbors.

Grandmother smiles and holds back a laugh -- not wanting to reveal that their son's American girlfriend cooked the okra.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO (OFFICE) - AFTERNOON

In a busy high-rise in the Financial District, Harpreet stares out of his office window before returning to his desk.

Several computer monitors are filled with colorful data and charts -- Bloomberg Terminal, Form 10-Q quarterly SEC filings, and spreadsheets.

Well-dressed office workers walk past the open door to his private office.

INT. BUNGALOW - EVENING

As the day winds down, both Harpreet and Michelle prepare and eat a simple dinner together. After their meal, Michelle wipes down the kitchen and Harpreet washes the dishes. She hugs him from behind, kissing the back of his head.

In the bedroom, their naked bodies are intertwined. Hands tightly interlocked. Rough kissing. Heavy breaths. Sweat. His hands leave red marks wherever he touches her delicate body.

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

Harpreet and Michelle are still in bed in the later hours of the morning. They speak softly in whispers and make each other smile. The sudden ring of a telephone breaks the silence and the answering machine picks it up.

In hoarse Punjabi, Grandfather's angry voice expresses his disdain for Michelle -- the *gori* or "white woman."

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

I promise you, the *gori* will leave
you someday.

Grandfather pauses, searching for the right English words.

Harpreet quickly scrambles out of bed towards the answering machine in the hallway, but it is too late. Grandfather's thick accent switches between Punjabi and broken English.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

(in English)

She is using you. She is taking
advantage. She sees your job. Your
house. Your bank account.
Soon you will see. She will take
everything and leave you--

Harpreet picks up the receiver, too late to prevent Michelle from hearing the tirade against her.

HARPREET
 (in Punjabi)
 Father...

In the bedroom, Michelle sits up in the bed, holding her knees against her chest in obvious discomfort.

In the hallway, to no avail, Grandfather pleads with his son.

GRANDFATHER
 (in Punjabi)
 Son, please. I am your father. I only have your best interest at heart. You had your fun with this girl, now is the time to move on.

His tone quickly shifts to anger.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)
 If you do not listen to me, you are no longer my son. No longer your mother's son.

HARPREET
 Please, just listen to me--

GRANDFATHER
 Think before you speak. Careful. There is no coming back from this.

HARPREET
 I cannot be more clear. I will not marry a stranger because you tell me to. I am in love, and I am happy with my life. If you could just give her a chance--

With his anger at its peak, Grandfather threatens his son if any attempt at all is made to communicate or keep in contact hereafter, and immediately hangs up.

GRANDFATHER
 Do not come to my house again. You are not my son, you are my shame.

The severing of all ties. Harpreet is alone in the hallway, half-naked and heart-broken, holding the telephone. He rests his forehead against the wall and sets the receiver down.

In the backyard, the territorial hummingbirds fight. The red hummingbird feeder sways gently from side to side as the hummingbirds dive and attack, preventing one another from sitting at the feeder. There is no wind in the trees.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

Grandmother lays in her bed, her back to the door, crying softly to herself as Grandfather paces about the house.

GRANDMOTHER
What have you done?

Her coughing fits last longer as she tosses and turns in bed. His anger still lingering, Grandfather barks, demanding his morning tea.

GRANDFATHER
(in Punjabi)
Tarsem! Get up. Make us some *chai*.

Grandmother does not get out of bed that day.

INT. IN-LAWS APARTMENT - MORNING

A rundown apartment complex. The working class neighborhood on the East Side. Palm trees and dirty sidewalks. A dark-skinned Indian man (55) and Indian woman (50) welcome Simran and her parents inside with folded hands.

Simran is there inevitably with her second choice envelope -- a man named Jasdeep, who is still in India. These "relatives" are here negotiating a marriage proposal on his behalf.

SIMRAN'S FATHER
(in Punjabi)
And the boy is your nephew?

JASDEEP'S UNCLE
Yes. He's still in India, finishing his studies.

SIMRAN
But he's 30 years old?

Jasdeep's uncle smiles and directs his response at Simran's father instead, avoiding eye contact with Simran.

JASDEEP'S UNCLE
He got a late start. He worked a few years in-between. He's finishing his exams now.

Chai and snacks are served as Jasdeep's alleged uncle and aunt speak with a hint of overt sweet-talk and manipulation.

JASDEEP'S AUNT
Here, *Beti*. Have some sweets.

Simran waves the plate off, turning it down.

SIMRAN

What kind of engineer is he?

JASDEEP'S UNCLE

He studied "mechanical"
engineering.

As they drink their *chai*, family history is searched, a dowry is agreed upon, and a long-distance engagement is hastily made. They are, however, quick to show their true intentions.

JASDEEP'S UNCLE (CONT'D)

After marriage, you will need to
sponsor him for his *greencard*.
The process can take a few years.

SIMRAN'S FATHER

Yes. Yes, we will sponsor him
immediately.

Simran interjects, pleading with her father and mother.

SIMRAN

Daddy-ji, I'd like to meet him
first... Before I say yes?

JASDEEP'S AUNT

But *Beti*, it is not a woman's place
to ask...

Simran's mother pipes up with a quote from the holy book.

SIMRAN'S MOTHER

(in Punjabi)

*"Why curse women, from whom all the
greatest of men have been born?
None can exist without a woman."*
[GGS 473]

SIMRAN'S FATHER

My daughter is educated. And
therefore strong-willed. What harm
could be done if she visits India
and meets the boy?

The future in-laws look at each other, and reluctantly agree.

JASDEEP'S UNCLE

Alright. You are more than welcome
to stay with our family in India.
When do you plan to visit?

Simran takes a bite of a yellow *ladoo* [round-shaped sweet] and flashes her bright smile at her mother, silently thanking her for supporting her first, and likely only win, against her future in-laws.

INT. AIRPLANE - AFTERNOON

Simran's head is perched between a pillow and the window seat of a Boeing Dreamliner 787. The muffled, incessant buzzing of the jet engines. The cumulus, cotton-like clouds float outside the plane window. She sleeps through her flight.

EXT. TRAIN FROM DELHI (INDIA) - AFTERNOON

Simran wipes the sweat from her brow as she looks out the iron bars of the moving train, her first visit to her mother's homeland. Shantytowns of corrugated metal fly past the window. Graffiti in brightly-colored Brahmic scripts. The air is hot and dusty.

A traditionally-dressed Hindu woman, and her two children sit across from Simran. The woman has a red-colored dot on her forehead called a *bindi*, or third eye.

The children are unable to avert their gaze from the well-dressed Indian-American sitting across from them. A foreigner in her parents' country, they stare at Simran innocently. Simran brushes her hair aside and adjusts her orange *chunni* [headscarf], smiling at the curious children.

Outside, the train roars through thousands of acres of burnt farmland. The charred, black fields smolder as farmers raze the land for the planting season. Smoke engulfs the train.

EXT. BANYAN TREE (INDIA) - MORNING

Waiting under the shade of a banyan tree, Jasdeep sits on his Royal Enfield Classic 350 motorcycle, helmet resting on the handlebars. His face is buried in his smartphone.

Simran approaches the distracted Jasdeep.

SIMRAN
(in Punjabi)
Sat sri akaal.

JASDEEP
Sat sri akaal! Simran?

SIMRAN

Yes! You must be Jasdeep?

JASDEEP

Yes. Nice to meet you! How was your flight?

SIMRAN

It was a long flight, but I slept through most of it.

JASDEEP

My family tells me that this is your first time in India?

SIMRAN

Yes, it is.

An awkward pause. The two nervously fumble through small talk, despite their upcoming engagement.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

How were your exams?

JASDEEP

(nervously)

They were fine. The results will come in soon.

SIMRAN

Mechanical engineering?

JASDEEP

Chemical.

Jasdeep quickly pivots the conversation. Perhaps he will have better luck as her local tour guide.

JASDEEP (CONT'D)

Are you hungry, have you eaten?
Would you like to go into town for some *chaat* [street food]?

SIMRAN

Sure. That sounds lovely.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Michelle and Harpreet visit Stanford Hospital in Northern California for a routine, first-trimester ultrasound.

Harpreet helps Michelle lay on her back, and the nurse applies a gel on Michelle's uncovered stomach.

NURSE

It's not too cold, is it?

Michelle shakes her head. The nurse moves the ultrasound unit on Michelle's belly, coordinating her movement to the screen. The couple hold their hands tight and look at the screen.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Would you like to know the gender
of your baby?

Harpreet and Michelle look at each other and laugh.

MICHELLE

Not yet.

During the sonogram, the sound and image of the baby's heartbeat is loud and fast, like the flapping wings of a hummingbird suspended in the air.

CUT TO:

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

A lone hummingbird floats above the red feeder, its wings flapping and buzzing loudly in the air, as it extends its beak into the nectar. The heartbeat of the baby in utero still audible.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Michelle sits at her desk with her morning cup of *chai*.

She opens a letter from Grandmother with recipe cards and writes a response of her own. She includes a handful of photographs of her life with Harpreet -- vacation and travel photos, as well as the monochrome scan from her ultrasound.

EXT. STREET (INDIA) - AFTERNOON

Simran and her fiance explore a loud, open-air bazaar. The crowd moves shoulder to shoulder, intertwined with bumper to bumper traffic, cars and scooters.

JASDEEP

Have you had a *golgappa*?

SIMRAN

No, what's that?

They stop at a food cart and peer over the dirty window.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)
Oh, a *pani puri*?

JASDEEP
In Punjab we call it a *golgappa*.

Jasdeep signals an order. The street vendor assembles a line of *puri* [puffed crepes], and stuffs them with potatoes, chickpeas, lentils, and chutney.

As the roadside chef serves up each *puri*, he dips them in a spicy tamarind-mint broth.

SIMRAN
Wow! These are delicious. Much better than the ones back home!

JASDEEP
Some things are better left original. This is my favorite *golgappa* shop in town.

Walking side by side, the couple meanders. Aggressive shopkeepers yell from their shops. Street kids beg for money.

JASDEEP (CONT'D)
So you teach primary school?

SIMRAN
Elementary school, yes. I teach fifth grade.

Hesitant, she continues.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)
What do you plan on doing, career-wise, after moving to the states?

JASDEEP
I plan on taking a job at Dow Chemical here in India while I wait for my *greencard*. And then hopefully transfer to their U.S. office.

SIMRAN
(laughs)
Well, I was never any good at chemistry!

As they continue walking, their hands brush into each other, barely restraining themselves from holding hands.

JASDEEP
How about some *kulfi* [ice cream]?

SIMRAN
It's almost like you're trying to
win me over -- with food?

Jasdeep cracks a smile and raises both his hands.

JASDEEP
(laughing)
I am! You caught me, red-handed.

They stop an ice cream vendor with outdoor seating, filled with the romance of other couples. They share a *kulfi falooda* [ice cream with rice noodles], topped with rose syrup.

Jasdeep flirtatiously takes a photo of her, smiling, and she grabs his phone and reciprocates.

His phone suddenly buzzes with an incoming message, and she hands it back to him.

SIMRAN
Cute photo. Here. Looks like you
got a text message.

Her future fiancée doesn't flinch.

JASDEEP
It must be my mom... Or my cousin.

He looks at his phone.

JASDEEP (CONT'D)
Yea. They're asking if you're still
leaving for Amritsar in the
morning?

SIMRAN
Definitely.

JASDEEP
Would you like me to accompany you?

SIMRAN
(hesitantly)
No. I think I need to make this
special trip myself.

He looks both disappointed and relieved.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

But thank you though. I'll see you
as soon as I get back?

JASDEEP

Definitely.

INT. GOLDEN TEMPLE (INDIA) - AFTERNOON

Deep blue water surrounds the *Harmandir Sahib* [Golden Temple] like a moat, shimmering with the sunrise. The gold-clad walls reflect on the water.

Peering through marble arches of traditional Indo-Saracenic style, the enormity of the temple is visible from afar.

A crowd flows through the arches, pausing at the entrance to slowly bend and touch the ground in a gesture of respect. Among the temple-goers, Simran pauses in the middle of the arch, her figure a dark silhouette against the gold and blue.

In the east corner of the temple grounds, Simran joins a group of women and bathes in the holy water in a private, white-slatted enclosure.

Dhoti-clad men bathe outside, clinging to slippery iron chains as they wade further out into the water, fully able to wash away their sins out in the open.

In her traditional Indian dress, head covered with her *chunni*, Simran walks across the saffron-colored carpet into the main temple. She bows down in front of the holy book and whispers an *ardās* [prayer]. She once again begs God to guide her on the right path, ahead.

The kitchen of the *langar* hall is smoky. Enormous cooking vessels, hundreds of kilos of capacity each, fueled by wood burning stoves. The holy men stir the pots of *daal* and *sabji* with long paddles, reciting prayers on their lips.

Simran eats lunch in the *langar* hall with other worshipers.

EXT. GOLDEN TEMPLE (INDIA) - NIGHT

After sunset, the water surrounding the Golden Temple turns a dark blue, almost black. The brisk weather of fall is a reminder of the season of *Diwali* [Hindu festival of lights].

On the water's edge, there are thousands of *diyas* [small clay pots]. Their cotton wicks burn with the fuel of *ghee* [clarified butter], bathing the water in deep, orange hues.

A *diya* signifies purity, the presence of light casting away the evils of darkness.

Simran lights two *diyas*. In the gentle night breeze, one *diya* flickers violently, while the other burns bright and strong.

EXT. BANYAN TREE (INDIA) - AFTERNOON

Returning to his village, once more under the safety of the banyan tree, Simran waits for her rendezvous with her fiance. She looks down at her phone and calls her mother.

SIMRAN

Mama-ji, I feel so foolish. We met and talked, but I still don't know anything about this man that I'm supposed to marry.

SIMRAN'S MOTHER

(in Punjabi)

Beti, what do you need to know?

SIMRAN

We only talked about superficial things. What about -- what does he see as a woman's role in marriage? How will he get a job in the states? Does he want kids?

SIMRAN'S MOTHER

These are all things you figure out as you go. Your father and I did not even meet before we were wed.

SIMRAN

This is too important. How can we just figure these things out--

SIMRAN'S MOTHER

Simran, I did not even see what your father's face looked like until our wedding day.

SIMRAN

But Mom--

SIMRAN'S MOTHER

All marriage is made up of compromise. You build love slowly. It will grow, like a plant. You don't need to ask him too many things right now or you'll scare him off, like--

SIMRAN
Like the last boy?

Jasdeep arrives on his motorcycle and removes his helmet.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)
Mom, he's here. I'll talk to you
later.

SIMRAN'S MOTHER
Wait. Your father wants to talk to
you--

SIMRAN
I can't mom, I have to go.

Jasdeep looks over at her and smiles, still mounted on his motorcycle. He does not have an extra helmet.

JASDEEP
Did you tell *Mama-ji* I said hello?

SIMRAN
(awkwardly)
Yes -- hey, do you want children?

Taken aback, Jasdeep laughs, and pauses.

JASDEEP
Of course. I've always wanted two
or three. Do you?

SIMRAN
Yes.

Still surprised at the conversation, he stares at her. Without another word, she mounts his motorcycle behind him and he fires up the engine.

EXT. MOTORCYCLE (INDIA) - AFTERNOON

A dirt-stained country road that cuts through the villages and farmland of rural Punjab. Simran is on the back of Jasdeep's motorcycle, tightly gripping onto his body from behind, helmetless.

Her head braces against his back and her long hair flies in the wind behind them. Her *chunni* [headscarf] unravels from her neck and floats up in the air as the motorcycle speeds off into the distance. It slowly falls to the ground.

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE (INDIA) - MORNING

The Maiya Ceremony:

The empty veranda and courtyard of a large communal home in the heart of Punjab. A teenage, Indian girl carefully fashions a *rangoli* design on the ground, creating geometric patterns using rice, flour petals, and colorful spices. A stool is placed near the design, facing eastward.

Family members, neighbors, street kids and passerby alike participate in the pre-wedding ceremony of covering the faces, arms, and feet of the bride and groom in a wet, yellow mixture of turmeric, mustard oil, and *besan* [chickpea flour].

Guests are given a *gaana* [auspicious red thread], which they are instructed to tie around their wrists for good luck.

The bride and groom are led away with a tray in their hands, heads covered with a handkerchief or *chunni*, and reward their guests with sweet yellow rice, lovingly scooped onto hungry cupped hands.

The Mehndi Ceremony:

In the evening, string lights hang across the courtyard and give off an orange glow. Lots of laughter, dancing, and clapping along to traditional Punjabi songs, led by the older, maternal women.

Surrounded by candles, a woman applies *mehndi* [henna tattoo] on Simran's outstretched hands, palms facing upwards.

WEDDING PARTY WOMAN

(in Punjabi)

Since you are American, we'll do a modern pattern on your right hand.
And a more traditional Indian stain on your left hand.

Simran smiles, holding her hands steady. On her left hand, the woman applies a traditional pattern, a simple circle of deep red color. On her right hand, an intricate, maze-like modern pattern that is more fashionable.

Her wrists are adorned with a set of *chooriyan* [ivory bangles], typically worn for a few days before and after the wedding. They keep slipping down to her hands, as the artist tries to finish applying the *mehndi*.

The Baraat Ceremony:

Outside the house in a narrow alleyway, music from a brass band echoes loudly. The groom rides a white horse.

Both are decorated handsomely in ceremonial costume. The groom is wearing a turban and carries a sword. The procession of men, family members, neighbors, and little children march to the beat of the *dhol* [drum].

At the designated meeting place in the center of the village, the groom and bride's respective parties conduct a *milni* [merger], meeting and greeting each other with warm embraces, symbolizing the unification of the two clans. Simran's mother and father are both tearful and full of joy as they mingle with their future in-laws.

To bring the pre-marriage ceremony to a close, Simran cups her *mehndi*-stained hands and throws a handful of raw rice over her shoulder.

INT. SIKH TEMPLE (INDIA) - MORNING

In India, the color "red" symbolizes marriage and "white" symbolizes death.

The traditional Indian wedding from before continues.

Simran's father takes the *pulla* [shawl] and places one corner into the groom's hands and the other corner into the bride's hands, signifying the father giving his daughter away.

In a clockwise direction, the couple slowly circle around the holy book -- the groom leading his bride as she tightly grips the shawl.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL (INDIA) - NIGHT

The newlyweds celebrate on the dance floor. *Bhangra* music. Simran spins around clockwise, her red dress twirling in unison. Her gold jewelery glimmers. The wedding party dances late into the night.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - MORNING

In their neighborhood park, Grandfather walks ahead as Grandmother trails slowly behind. They find a bench and quietly sit, looking at the view of the city. Grandmother feeds nectar to the wild morning hummingbirds from the palm of her hand.

Under the cloak of the morning fog, Grandmother pulls a letter out of her coat and quietly dispatches it into the post. Turning away, Grandfather pretends not to notice.

INT. BUNGALOW - EVENING

Almost nine months pregnant, Michelle is in the bedroom, reading a book in bed. Harpreet lays next to her, working on his laptop. They share the same comfortable silence as his parents.

Tears silently fall down her eyes, but she does not sob. He sets his laptop aside and looks at her, worried.

MICHELLE

What if this isn't what you wanted?
If we moved too fast? What if your
parents were right? I don't want
you to think that I trapped you.

HARPREET

You trapped me? From the shape
you're in, it's probably the other
way around!

She cracks a smile and he reaches over to wipe her tears.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Between you and the day this little
one is born -- will be the day that
I finally get everything I wanted
in life -- and the only two things
I will ever care about. Ever.

Through her outstretched belly, the baby kicks and pushes its hands and feet, trying to reach out, little limbs struggling against her skin. They both laugh in amusement.

MICHELLE

Here. Feel this.

She grabs his hand and puts it against her belly.

HARPREET

Have we decided on a name yet?

MICHELLE

Hah! You're changing the subject.

Harpreet holds his ground and begs his question with a stare.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

If it's a boy, how about an Indian
name?

HARPREET

I was thinking more like Jason or Kevin. *Mama-ji* told me those were the names she wanted for me.

MICHELLE

Oh?

HARPREET

Dad wouldn't let her choose, so they went with his choice of "Harpreet."

MICHELLE

You never told me that before. Harpreet means "God's love," right? That isn't such a bad name.

HARPREET

Growing up, an American name would have made my life easier. Kids tend to bully kids with weird names.

MICHELLE

But when we met, you told me you actually loved your real name?

HARPREET

It's something that I grew into. Sometime after high school, maybe in college. When I actually started accomplishing things. My name finally became worth something.

MADELEINE

Is that why your friends still call you Harry and not Harpreet?

HARPREET

I guess it kind of stuck. Old habits die hard?

MICHELLE

You're not going to like this, but I was thinking about the middle name taking after your father. Most Punjabi names can be used for both sexes, can't they?

HARPREET

Why would you even consider that? After everything he's done?

MICHELLE
We'll win him over slowly.

Ignoring her, he continues.

HARPREET
How about the traditional "Singh"
or "Kaur" for a middle name?
Those mean "Lion" or "Princess."
The gurus intended to help rid
people of the caste system and
promote equality by having those be
the more "universal" surnames.

MICHELLE
"Singh," like your middle name?

HARPREET
Yep. Jason Singh sounds pretty
good? The name I never had--

Michelle cuts him off with a gasp of pain. She feels a
stronger kick in her stomach.

MICHELLE
And if it's a girl?

HARPREET
Madeleine.

The baby's footprint becomes visible as it kicks against the
stretched skin of Michelle's stomach.

MICHELLE
I didn't know this was a
negotiation! Sounds familiar?

In bed, they continue watching the tiny hand and footprints
push outward from her stomach, an impatient baby perhaps
hoping to get out soon. They interlock their hands together.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

At Stanford Hospital, Michelle goes into labor. As she is
transported through a hallway on a medical gurney, the lights
overhead pass by faster and faster. She slips in and out of
consciousness. Her red hair turns dark, clinging to her face,
drenched in a mixture of sweat and tears.

In her private room, she cries and Harpreet tries his best to
console her, overtaken by emotions himself. She takes labored
breaths, wheezing. As she musters half a smile, he squeezes
her hand harder.

Doctors and nurses quietly consult and whisper among themselves.

NURSE

She's wheezing, labored breathing.
It' starting to affect the baby.

DOCTOR

Her vitals are OK for now. Let's
give her a few minutes. Prepare for
a "C-section."

The cardiac monitor's beeping starts to increase. Michelle clutches her chest and gasps. The doctors perform an emergency cesarean section.

Waiting nurses with warmed hands quickly take hold of the baby, MADELEINE, and wrap her in a hospital blanket.

NURSE

Her oxygen levels are dropping. And
her left leg is completely swollen.

DOCTOR

She's clotting. 40 milligrams of
"Heparin Enoxaparin."

The nurse quickly unpacks a vial and fills a syringe, handing it to the doctor.

NURSE

Sir, we'll need you to leave for a
few minutes.

The nurses guide Harpreet towards the door. The curtains close as he leaves the bedside of his wife, slowly letting go of her hand, with tears falling from his face. Michelle's eyes are barely open, her breathing is deep, asthmatic.

An eternity later, in the empty waiting room, the doctor approaches Harpreet.

DOCTOR

I'm very sorry. We had to perform
an emergency C-section. Your wife
developed blood clots in her legs.
Your baby daughter is healthy, but-

-

Harpreet looks at the doctor in disbelief as he struggles to find his words.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

When we sent you out of the room,
we gave your wife an anticoagulant.
It appears that a clot broke off
and traveled into her lungs. She
passed away from a pulmonary
embolism. Again, I'm very sorry.

HARPREET

But, Doctor--

DOCTOR

I have a grief counselor on the
way. Do you have any family I could
call? You shouldn't be here alone.

HARPREET

No, I don't.

CUT TO:

The empty hospital bed, Michelle's figure still imprinted
into the hospital bed. Bloodied sheets and latex gloves
abandoned, crumpled inside out.

With his newborn daughter in his arms, Harpreet weeps
uncontrollably. The baby's eyes squirm against the bright,
sterile lights of the hospital.

In the hospital hallway, he slowly regains control of himself
and dials a number on his phone. Grandfather's voice answers.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

(in Punjabi)

Father, you were right.

(in English)

Today, she left me.

Grandfather does yet fully comprehend what he has just heard
and Harpreet immediately hangs up, not affording his father
even the slightest opportunity to respond.

EXT. BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Harpreet drives home from the hospital in the dead of the
night, fog all around him. Baby Madeleine is in a baby-seat,
peacefully sleeping. Harpreet stops the car in the driveway
and stares ahead, on the verge of breaking down.

Inside the house, he attempts to put Madeleine in her crib,
in her own separate room, but she starts crying as soon as he
sets her down [a mother's pulse and heartbeat is important
for newborns].

He gently picks up baby Madeleine and walks back into the master bedroom and sits on his bed, gently rocking her back and forth on his forearm, supporting her head with his hand.

He is exhausted and lays Madeleine down in his own bed -- within the larger imprint of his missing wife -- the bed sheets still tossed aside from the night before, when she went into labor.

He carefully lays down beside Madeleine as she sleeps. He curls his legs against his stomach and watches her breathing. He does not fall asleep, both of fear and of misery.

The light of the morning slowly appears outside in the quiet garden. A small, young hummingbird perches on the feeder.

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

Warm water slowly fills the large, basin-style kitchen sink. Harpreet slowly lowers his daughter into the water for her first bath. She seems surprised by the sensation, her tiny body wriggling and writhing. He gently wipes her body with a washcloth lathered with baby shampoo.

As the sink is drained and the water level retreats, Harpreet dries his daughter and brings her back into her bedroom. He lays her in her crib, clean and warm, and gently changes her into a new diaper far too big for her body. Generous heaps of baby powder.

Before dressing her, he ties a black thread around her waist to ward off a wayward onlooker's *nazaar* [superstition of the evil eye of jealousy], perhaps a bit too late.

INT. SIKH TEMPLE - AFTERNOON

Harpreet takes Madeleine to the *Gurdwara* to follow the Sikh tradition of "baptizing" the newborn with an *ardās* [prayer] from the head priest.

The temple is empty and the lone priest carefully fans the pages of the holy book, pre-recorded incantations of afternoon prayers streaming out of the loudspeakers.

Harpreet lays a baby blanket on the ground with one hand while carefully straddling Madeleine over his shoulder. He sets her down on her back and approaches the head priest with a respectful gesture, hands folded.

HARPREET
(in Punjabi)
Sat sri akaal.

The priest has a slight limp and slowly approaches Harpreet with a look of suspicion.

PRIEST
Sat sri akaal.

HARPREET
 Could you perform an *ardās* [prayer]
 for my newborn?

PRIEST
 And where is the mother?

HARPREET
 It is just me.

The priest pauses, confused and judgemental.

PRIEST
 Newborn? What is the name?

HARPREET
 Yes. Her name is Madeleine Kaur.

The priest struggles with the American pronunciation.

PRIEST
 Mad-eleine?

The priest looks at baby Madeleine and reaffirms his judgment of her mixed-race identity -- half white and half brown -- and of Harpreet's actions leading up to single fatherhood.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
 And my son, how about a small
 donation?

Harpreet is taken aback with surprise. Surely, nothing in the holy book mentions solicited "donations" as a requirement for any sort of traditional ceremony.

Baby Madeleine lays on her blanket, her voice cooing gently. Harpreet reluctantly reaches for his wallet and hands money to the priest.

Madeleine rolls over to the edge of the blanket as the microphone buzzes -- the priest recites the ceremonial birthday prayer in a voice of disinterest.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
 (in Punjabi)
 With my palms and feet pressed
 together, eyes closed, I offer my
 prayer.

(MORE)

PRIEST (CONT'D)

If it pleases you, God, help and fulfill me. On this day, please bless Madeleine Kaur...

He butchers his pronunciation of "Madeleine." Shameless and undismayed, the priest continues the prayer ritual.

The priest takes his *kirpan* [ceremonial dagger] and slices through the *parshad* [sweet semolina offering], handing Harpreet his ceremonially-blessed serving in a paper napkin.

Harpreet takes a small thumb of *parshad* and feeds baby Madeleine the tainted, bribed offering. He eats the rest himself, and wipes his hands. She kicks her feet and a silver bracelet on her ankle rustles.

Harpreet does not wait for the prayer to finish as he picks up Madeleine and walks out of the temple as the priest continues his practiced recital to completion.

SUPERIMPOSE: TEN YEARS LATER

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

On a cold foggy morning, the entire neighborhood seems to be fast asleep.

Dark-haired, MADELEINE (10), has grown into a clever, charming, beautiful little girl. She shares the best features of both her Italian-American mother and her Indian-American father, who lovingly calls her "Mads," for short.

In pink pajama bottoms and a sweater that might be a size too small for her age, Madeleine is in bed, the sheets kicked to her feet, hair a mess, tossing and turning.

An alarm clock rings at 7:00 AM. Harpreet wakes up and looks at the opposite side of his large bed, empty and untouched. He makes his way down the hallway, tip-toeing as to not wake-up a sleeping Madeleine.

In the kitchen, he prepares a breakfast of buttered toast with an apricot marmalade, a soft-boiled egg, and *chai*. Harpreet stares out the backyard window into the garden, slowly savoring his quiet breakfast.

He shaves, showers, and dresses himself in a starched shirt, navy blazer, and wool trousers. He gives his cap-toe Oxford shoes a quick polish and brush. He fumbles with his tie.

He scribbles a note and gently places it on the floor in front of Madeleine's bedroom, "Office. Will be home for lunch. Love you Mads!"

He lets his daughter sleep-in late on Sunday mornings and finds his empty office on weekends a distraction or refuge from the loneliness of his personal life.

The garage door opens. As his car pulls out of the driveway, Madeleine sneakily opens her eyes for a quick peek out the window. The coast is clear -- she was awake the entire time.

Harpreet drives through the weekend morning city traffic.

Static-filled news coverage from the local NPR station also hints that today is a weekend, "This is Weekend Edition from NPR News. And in other news, the U.S. Census is rolling out nationwide this week. These forms will look a bit different than past decades for people who marked the 'white' box for their race--"

INT. SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Harpreet stares at the computer monitors in his office, killing time. He occasionally flips through manila envelopes and jots down notes by hand on a yellow, legal-sized notepad.

His office window has a view of the waterfront. Hundreds of people below shop at the outdoor farmers market. Ferries return from their cross-bay voyages.

Looking at his wristwatch, he notices that it is almost lunchtime, and picks up the phone to calls his daughter.

HARPREET

Hey Mads. Sorry, I'm swamped with work. There are leftovers in the fridge. Can you warm them up in the microwave?

MADELEINE

(disappointed)

OK.

HARPREET

I'll be home in a few hours. We'll have dinner together. Take care, don't go outside alone, OK?

MADELEINE

OK.

HARPREET

Love you. Bye.

MADELEINE

I love you too, dad.

He hangs up and continues looking out the window. As the hours pass, the afternoon turns into evening, and the sky darkens. The Bay Bridge lights up as he puts on his blazer and starts his drive back home at sunset.

INT. BUNGALOW - EVENING

The neighborhood is dark. The headlights and tail-lights of the car illuminate the garage red as Harpreet slowly slips the transmission into first gear and turns off the engine.

In the backyard, the hummingbirds are in a feeding frenzy.

Harpreet sets the his briefcase down by the front door. He finds Madeleine laying on her stomach, her head propped up with a pillow, fully absorbed by the movie playing on TV.

Books and toys are scattered about on the living room floor. She abruptly confronts her father.

MADELEINE

You think I don't notice that when we have leftovers in the fridge for me to eat, you all of a sudden have a project or a deadline and you stay late at work?

HARPREET

... Mads?

MADELEINE

(upset)

Sometimes you don't even come home. But when the fridge is completely empty and there's nothing for me to have for dinner, you always somehow make it home?

HARPREET

It's just a coincidence, Mads.

MADELEINE

It feels like you're avoiding me. Why don't you want to see me dad?

HARPREET

What? Of course I want to see you.
You're the only person I have in
this world.

MADELEINE

And you're all I've ever had.
Period. And if you don't--

Harpreet hushes her, picks her up, and hugs her tight.

HARPREET

I'm sorry. I promise I will be
around more often.

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

On Monday morning, Madeleine wakes up a bit early. She shuts off her alarm clock at 6:28 AM, not yet giving it a chance to ring. She lies in bed grumpy and half-asleep, until she realizes something and her eyes widen.

With a sudden sense of urgency, she leaps out of bed and sprints across the hall. She leaves damp footprints across the length of the house as she makes her way towards her father's bedroom, barely making a sound.

She reaches for his alarm clock and turns it off before it hits 6:30 AM. Her father still sound asleep, Madeleine smiles and celebrates her early-morning success as she makes her way into the kitchen, a twirl in her step.

Madeleine uses a chair to extend her reach into the upper kitchen cabinets. She attempts to make her father's usual breakfast of toast, soft-boiled egg, and *chai*.

On the spice rack, she sees a bottle labeled "masala" and dumps it into the black tea steeping on the stove, before adding milk.

Minutes later, she is startled by a loud noise. Her father stumbles into the kitchen, half asleep.

HARPREET

Why was my alarm off? Is it Sunday?

MADELINE

It's Monday.

Panic in his eyes.

HARPREET

Get dressed! You can still make it to school on-time.

Madeleine shrugs.

MADELINE

OK. Here, I made you breakfast.

She hands her father a cup of *chai*, and walks to her room.

He stands there, still perplexed, and takes a sip, only to immediately spit it out into the kitchen sink.

Madeleine dresses in the standard private-school uniform -- tartan skirt, stockings, and white collar shirt. Her father snacks on the toast as they head out the front door.

HARPREET

Thanks for breakfast, Mads. But you used the *garam masala* for the *chai*.

Outside, Harpreet still looks like a train-wreck.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

My briefcase. I'll be back--

Distracted momentarily, he turns his back to retrieve his briefcase inside. When he returns, Madeleine has disappeared. He searches frantically, peers into the neighboring yards, and walks out into the street and looks east, then west.

He suddenly spots her. Madeleine is hiding in the car, on the floor of the front seat, her feet curled up against her stomach, hidden from view.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Mads! I thought you disappeared. I went looking all over!

Nonplussed, her expression remains gloomy.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

She takes a deep breath and sighs.

MADELEINE

Daddy-ji, I need some time off. Away from school. To think about things.

She catches her father off-guard. Surely, she must have planned all of this out ahead of time.

HARPREET

What are these things you need to think about?

He looks at his wristwatch and slowly paces the driveway, thinking, until he reluctantly agrees.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Fine. Get back inside. Lock the door. And clean up your mess in the kitchen!

As her father endures the morning commute, Madeleine goes into her room and changes back into her pajamas. She finishes her breakfast, dipping her triangular toast into egg yolks. She takes a sip of *chai* and also spits it out, an expression of "yuck" on her face.

Madeleine moves into the garage and starts foraging through several boxes until she discovers what she's looking for -- a worn old box with her mother's name on the shipping label that contains a hummingbird feeder.

A product pamphlet falls out of the box and it contains a simple recipe: "two cups of water to one cup of sugar."

In the kitchen, Madeleine boils two cups of water in a kettle and waits. When the kettle whistles, she quickly adds one cup of sugar to it and waits for it to cool.

Sighing impatiently, she tests the temperature by dipping her little fingers into the nectar.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO (OFFICE) - MORNING

Harpreet sits alone in his office, typing away at his keyboard, staring at earnings reports and financial charts on his screens. The telephone in his office rings.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

Madeleine opens the sliding door and steps out into the cool mist of the morning. Walking out into the middle of the yard, she takes a thin metal rod with a circular hook, and tries to poke it into the damp ground. She finds a brick and manages to hammer the rod into the soil.

CUT TO:

INT. SAN FRANCISCO (OFFICE) - MORNING

In his bustling office on a weekday morning, the phone rings and Harpreet is greeted by a new, yet familiar voice on the other end -- Madeleine's schoolteacher, Simran.

SIMRAN

Hello. Could I speak with Harry Singh? I'm calling from Saratoga Elementary. This is Madeleine's teacher.

HARPREET

Yes?

SIMRAN

This is her first absence and I haven't heard from her parents. Is she doing OK?

HARPREET

I'm sorry. She hasn't been feeling well.

Pausing, he debates adding more *masala* to the story.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

And she's had a bit of a temperature. I'll have her back as soon as she gets better.

SIMRAN

I'm sorry to hear that. Please tell her hello and that her classmates miss her. And please be sure to have her back in class as soon as she's feeling better.

HARPREET

I will. Thank you for calling--

SIMRAN

And if she's not going to make it to class tomorrow, I can drop off her homework?

CUT TO:

EXT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

Madeleine pours the cooled sugar water into the hummingbird feeder and carefully snaps on the red lid.

She carries the feeder outside and hangs it up in the middle of the yard on the hook.

Back inside, she closes the door and sits down on the floor. She stares out at her solemn hummingbird feeder and impatiently asks herself:

MADELEINE
Where are they?

INT. BUNGALOW - EVENING

Before night falls, Harpreet faces traffic on the drive home.

The house is dark, the blinds and curtains to the backyard are closed, as if to hide Madeleine's earlier adventures.

HARPREET
Why did you close the blinds so early? There's still light out.

Madeline shrugs.

MADELEINE
How was your day?

Harpreet shrugs.

They prepare and eat dinner together and all throughout, few words are exchanged between the two. Only quick glances of understanding.

HARPREET
Did you get much thinking done today?

MADELEINE
A little bit.

After dinner, Madeleine brushes her teeth. She lays in bed and flips through a novel, minutes away from nodding off.

Harpreet is sitting at the desk in the master bedroom, his work files illuminated by his desk lamp. He nurses a glass of scotch whiskey over ice.

He walks past Madeleine's room and tucks her in, kissing her on her forehead, quietly setting her book on her bookshelf.

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

The alarm clock in Madeleine's room buzzes loudly at 7:00 AM and Madeleine quickly turns it off. She leaps off her bed and runs across the hallway -- she jumps and crash-lands into her father's bed, like a bird dive-bombing into water.

HARPREET

Good morning *Babelet*. Thanks for the wake-up call today.

MADELEINE

Good morning *Daddy-ji*. Do you need a few more minutes?

HARPREET

(yawning)

Yes.

Harpreet starts to nod off again, snuggled against his daughter.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Are you ready to go back to school today?

Madeleine smiles and laughs, rubbing her face against his, and confidently declines.

MADELEINE

Nope. Not yet.

She snuggles against her father and as he starts to drift back into slumber, she softly slaps his face.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

But you have to go to work today, *Daddy-ji*. So wake up!

Not long afterwards, Madeleine peeks out the front window and watches her father's car pull out of the driveway.

She opens the blinds in the living room. Light streams into the house and to her surprise, a bustling hummingbird metropolis seems to have formed overnight in her backyard.

She smiles and nearly falls over with happiness.

Resting her chin on her hands, she stares out into the yard at the hummingbirds that seem to so easily soar through the morning fog, their needle-like beaks piercing the air like the radio antennas of Sutro Tower.

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

Madeleine continues her curious search of the house. She climbs a heavy chair to explore the upper shelves of the closet in her parent's room, far out of reach.

Among her mother's belongings, she finds a box full of red turban cloth. Hidden away, she finds handwritten letters, recipe cards, and magazine clippings.

She flips through the stack of letters and pictures of her mother and father fall out -- of their youth and travels -- and pictures of the grandparents she has never met.

INT. BUNGALOW - AFTERNOON

A gentle knock on the door startles a napping Madeleine, who had fallen asleep amidst all the excitement in the backyard.

She quickly gathers the letters and pictures strewn across the floor, and glances out the window to reconfirm her earlier discovery.

MADELEINE

Yes! *She's* still there!

A lone hummingbird is still perched atop the red feeder. Madeleine runs stealthily towards the front door as the doorbell rings.

From the inside, the mail slot opens and her two little eyes peer out. Simran bends down to meet Madeleine at eye level.

SIMRAN

Hello, Madeleine! How are you feeling today?

MADELEINE

Hey Mrs. Simran! I'm still feeling a little under the weather--

Madeleine suddenly realizes her lack of costume and props.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

I'll be right back!

She dashes to her room and dives into her closet -- she grabs the wool blanket from her bed and wraps it around her body like a burrito. She pulls a wool cap down to her ears for good measure.

Her schoolteacher is patiently standing outside with an armful of books when the front door slowly cracks opens.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

Would you like to come inside and have some tea? I'm only a little contagious.

Her schoolteacher laughs and accepts, stepping inside.

SIMRAN

Yes, that would be nice. Are your parents home?

MADELEINE

Dad is at work. But he calls and checks up on me.

While Madeleine prepares the tea, Simran wanders into the living room and sets the heavy pile of homework and books down on the desk.

On the walls, she takes note of the paintings of the first and last Sikh Gurus, *Guru Nanak Dev Ji* and *Guru Gobind Singh Ji*. She spots the disheveled pile of letters and photos.

As she recognizes Harpreet's familiar face, her mind makes the connection to their past meetings. She picks up a photo and studies the face of the very man she brushed into ten long years ago at the temple, nearly marrying.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

That's my dad. He's single.

The schoolteacher quickly puts the photo back on the desk.

Both Madeleine and Simran sit and look out the rear window into the backyard, clearly enjoying the extraordinary spectacle of hungry hummingbirds in the afternoon.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

Did you know that hummingbirds are attracted to the color "red?"

SIMRAN

I see. But why are they fighting? Look! Look at that big one! He's chasing everyone else off!

MADELEINE

The ones with the bright feathers are the men. The dull ones are the women or children.

SIMRAN

So the men are chasing the other hummingbirds off?

Madeleine and her schoolteacher take a sip of tea. The hummingbirds continue chase each other, fighting over territory and nectar.

MADELEINE

See that one? I call him the "bully." He puffs himself up so big and acts so tough. But really, he's no bigger or stronger than anyone else. It's all just an act.

SIMRAN

Well, you'll see that boys at school can be just like that too!

MADELEINE

Grown-ups, too.

Simran smiles, but Madeleine keeps her attention focused on the warring hummingbirds outside.

The schoolteacher sneaks a glance at the photograph of Harpreet when Madeleine interrupts her with a curious question.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

Where do hummingbirds sleep?

INT. SIMRAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The schoolteacher returns to her apartment, grocery bags in hand. She stocks the refrigerator and sits in the kitchen. Distracted, she dials her phone. Harpreet answers, annoyed.

HARPREET

Hello?

SIMRAN

Hey! This is Madeleine's homeroom teacher. I dropped off her homework today.

Their tones suddenly switch. Suddenly the schoolteacher is in control and Harpreet finds himself in trouble.

HARPREET

Oh--

SIMRAN

However, I'd like to speak with you, in-person. It doesn't seem like Madeleine is actually sick?

Harpreet is caught off-guard.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

We have parent teacher conferences coming up next week. I have you scheduled for Friday.

HARPREET

I'll be there. Thanks--

SIMRAN

Please remember to bring by her completed homework.

EXT. BUNGALOW - EVENING

Harpreet discovers a note on the floor, written with neat handwriting, colored ink: "Hiding in the fort. Use the secret password."

Pillows, blankets, chairs, and the coffee table are part of the elaborate fort, precariously constructed in the living room. A blanket reveals what appears to be the entrance.

HARPREET

Knock knock.

MADELEINE

What's the secret password?

HARPREET

(playfully)

Hmm... I don't know...

MADELEINE

(playfully annoyed)

... Dad!

HARPREET

Rasmalai? [sweet dessert]

Harpreet crawls on all four on the ground and fumbles into the fort, knocking over some pillows, attempting to chase Madeleine. They both laugh as she crawls away and he knocks his head on the table.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Ow!

Still laying on the ground in the ruins of the pillow and blanket fort, father and daughter have a heart-to-heart conversation.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Look Mads. You're going to have to go back to school. I can't let you stay home forever.

MADELEINE

Why?

HARPREET

You have assignments. And homework. And your friends. You can't hide forever, you have to put yourself out there in the world again.

Madeleine looks at her father, carefully listening.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

The both of us, we are far too alone as it is.

She sighs and lays her head on the carpet in defeat.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Your grandmother used to say, "Everything can be taken away from you, except your education. Your education will always remain with you, no matter what."

MADELEINE

Did you like school when you were my age?

HARPREET

(hesitantly)

Not so much. I didn't have many friends. But you know what your teacher Mrs. Simran said?

Madeleine raises her head curiously.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

She said your classmates and friends miss you.

MADELEINE

Really?

HARPREET

So first thing tomorrow morning. Back to school. Deal?

MADELEINE

Deal.

He grabs the red cloth from the ruins of the pillow fort.

HARPREET
Where did you find this?

MADELEINE
Your closet. In a box full of--

HARPREET
Mom's things.

MADELEINE
You're not mad?

HARPREET
No, I'm not mad. I miss your mom a lot. Do you know what this is?

She shakes her head.

HARPREET (CONT'D)
This was for a turban. Your grandmother gave it to me to wear at our wedding, which didn't happen the way we were hoping it would.

MADELEINE
How did you and mom get married?

HARPREET
Not in a *Gurdwara*. Your grandfather forbade it. So we got married at city hall.

MADELEINE
I wonder what you would look like in a turban?

Harpreet folds the red cloth and leads Madeleine to the large mirror in the hallway. A little rusty, he follows the steps that Grandfather had taught him years ago, slowly wrapping the turban around his head.

HARPREET
In India, the color "red" signifies the color of marriage. Brides wear a red dress, the *henna* on their hands is red, the *bindi* on their forehead is red...

MADELEINE
What about "white?"

HARPREET

In western weddings, "white" means purity. But in India, the color "white" is usually reserved for mourning, for funerals.

MADELEINE

Did you know that hummingbirds are attracted to the color "red?"

She curiously watches her father carefully tie the turban around his head in the mirror.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

Can we go to the *Gurdwara* [temple] next Sunday?

Harpreet is slightly taken aback and takes a few seconds to conjure up a response.

HARPREET

There are too many people who go to the *Gurdwara* on Sundays that I'd like to avoid... and not all of them go just to pray.

MADELEINE

(confused)

But, if they don't go to pray... Then what do they go for?

EXT. AIRPORT - AFTERNOON

Simran drives to San Francisco International Airport to pick up her new husband, still wearing her wedding *chooriyan* [ivory bangles].

She spots her husband, Jasdeep, arriving at the terminal. He approaches her with a blank expression on his face, lacking any joy or relief at the years it took to reunite stateside.

He carries a bouquet of red roses as Simran runs and hugs him, kissing him briefly. He seems distant, hesitant. She grabs the flowers herself.

SIMRAN

For me?

Jasdeep flashes a reluctant smile.

JASDEEP

Yes.

SIMRAN

You must be tired? Shall we get you home?

Jasdeep picks up his suitcase and follows the Simran. The car ride home is awkward and silent, as he stares out the window.

INT. SIMRAN'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

As they enter the apartment, Jasdeep leaves his suitcase at the front door, and heads straight to the bathroom, slamming the door. Simran looks on with concern, perplexed by his suddenly-introverted behavior. Behind the closed door, she attempts to talk to him.

SIMRAN

Should I make an early dinner? I made *daal* and okra *sabji* -- your favorite?

Jasdeep runs the water and looks at himself in the mirror, leaning against the counter. He grimaces, and opens the door.

JASDEEP

I'm exhausted, I just need to sleep.

SIMRAN

Oh. Sure! Here's our room. We can unpack together, later.

Simran leads him into their bedroom. She puts his suitcase in front of the closet. He sits on the edge of the bed, staring at the ground, avoiding eye contact.

JASDEEP

I'll talk to you tomorrow.
Goodnight.

Simran kisses the top of his head, and lets her hand linger on his shoulder before leaving, closing the bedroom door behind her.

SIMRAN

Goodnight.

In the kitchen, she stares out the window into the distance and knows something is wrong. She places the red bouquet of roses into a clear, glass vase and fills it water.

She prepares dinner for herself and quietly eats it alone, just as she's done the past few years, despite her new husband now sleeping in the adjacent room.

In the bedroom, her husband's eyes are wide open. He sends a text message on his phone.

INT. SIMRAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In the middle of the night, Simran lays on her side of the bed, her back to her husband. Her eyes are wide open and her body is draped by the moonlight from the open curtain. The night is hot, sweat gleaming on their brown skin. A box fan is running in the background.

Jasdeep slides over and reaches his hand across her legs. They don't say a word. He pulls her body close to his. The sheets slide off. She straddles him, taking off her combed-cotton shirt. Her breasts push up against his body and they kiss for the first time since reuniting at the airport.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOLDEN TEMPLE (INDIA) - NIGHT

Back in Amritsar, on the water's edge of the Golden Temple, the flame of Simran's *diya* burns bright and strong. A burst of wind extinguishes the flame of the second, weaker *diya*.

INT. SIMRAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bright morning sunlight. Simran wakes up alone in bed. The white sheets are kicked aside. Her long hair partially covers her breasts. The box fan is still running.

She puts on a bra and t-shirt, ties her hair, and stumbles into the living room to look for her missing husband.

Jasdeep is nowhere to be seen, and the front-door is ajar, barely cracked open. Shuffling noises in the hallway outside.

SIMRAN
(confused)
Jasdeep? Jassy...

Down the flight of stairs, she recognizes Jasdeep's uncle from her engagement several years earlier, hurriedly carrying a suitcase, her husband following behind him. He gestures for his uncle to continue, and Jasdeep climbs back up.

Jasdeep's uncle quickens his pace down the stairs and gets into a waiting car, below.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

What is going on? Where are you going?

JASDEEP

Bhenji [sister], stop.
Please don't make a scene.

SIMRAN

Bhenji? Sister? You're my husband.
You *fucked* me.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

What is this? I just want to talk.

JASDEEP

I'll call you when I get home.

SIMRAN

Home? This is your home. What are you doing?

Jasdeep grabs her wrists and pushes her back inside.

JASDEEP

Go back inside.

Inside her apartment, Jasdeep shuts the door. Simran sobs, her hair sticky from her tears and sweat.

SIMRAN

(yelling)

If you leave me, I'll divorce you
and your *greencard* will be revoked!
You lied. You lied about your
education. You're not an engineer,
are you? You didn't even complete
high school did you--

JASDEEP

If I'm so stupid, how did I end up
here in America? Maybe you're the
stupid one, married to me?

SIMRAN

They'll deport you--

The man slams Simran against the wall and wraps his hands around her throat, choking her.

JASDEEP

If you do that, I will kill your
mom and dad. And I'll kill you--

He lets go of her, and she slides to the ground, sobbing uncontrollably.

JASDEEP (CONT'D)

Until I get my *greencard*, you'll do nothing.

As he leaves the apartment, she quickly locks the door and latches it shut, sliding back onto the floor in grief, crying, yelling.

SIMRAN

Kutta! [derogatory, dog/bitch]

Downstairs, Jasdeep gets into the car. They attempt to drive off, but get stuck behind a line of cars at a red light.

Simran runs towards the car and pounds on the window. Her *chooriyan* [wedding bangles] break apart and the ivory and red pieces fall to the ground. The car is still stuck behind traffic and she pounds harder, punching the glass.

He lowers his window slightly and she pushes her arm inside and forcefully unlocks the door. He braces for her to strike.

Simran spits in his face, tosses the bouquet of roses into his lap, and slams the door shut just as the car speeds away.

On the kitchen counter, the vase of flowers is empty. A single rose petal rests on the counter, having fallen by the wayside.

INT. BUNGALOW - AFTERNOON

Two schoolgirls walk home from a day at school. Harpreet opens the front door to the two smiling faces of Madeleine and her classmate, excitedly chatting.

MADELEINE

Hey *Daddy-ji!*

CLASSMATE

Hey *Uncle-ji!*

HARPREET

Hey girls! How was school today?

He pats Madeleine's friend on the head, and gives Madeleine a kiss as both girls run into the living room. They throw their backpacks aside. School-related items are scattered all over the floor like a trail of clues.

MADELEINE

We had a substitute. Mrs. Simran
wasn't there today.

CLASSMATE

I wonder if she's sick?

The two girls lay flat on their stomachs in the living room and watch cartoons -- their coloring books and crayons spread out in front of them.

Harpreet makes the girls an after-school snack of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Two glasses of milk. The sound of cartoons fill the normally-quiet house.

HARPREET

Hey girls! How's your homework
coming along?

MADELEINE

Can you sign this field trip
permission slip?

HARPREET

Where are y'all going?

CLASSMATE

Angel Island!

HARPREET

That was one of my favorite field
trips when I was your age.

MADELEINE

Daddy-ji, can you chaperone?

HARPREET

Sure. You really want me to?

He smiles and signs the permission slip. The girls return their attention back to their homework.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - AFTERNOON

A crowded MUNI bus comes to a stop and Grandfather climbs in, briefly flashing his purple-colored senior citizen pass.

Everyone on the bus stares ahead, expressionless. Grandfather pulls the signal-cord and exits through the rear.

He fills a hand-basket at a corner Indian store. Groceries in hand, he pays at the register.

Back at home, Grandfather unpacks the groceries. In their 50+ years of marriage, he seldom found himself in the kitchen. He attempts to prepare a makeshift lunch of yellow *daal* [lentil soup] and *roti* [flatbread] for his ailing wife.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

In their private room at Stanford Hospital, Grandfather sits beside Grandmother. She has been bedridden for the past several months and it is no secret from her appearance that she is slowly dying of both disease and old age.

Her nightstand is littered with plastic prescription bottles. Grandfather unpacks his attempt at lunch.

GRANDFATHER
(in Punjabi)
Here, sit up. Have some *daal* with
some *roti*.

Grandmother appears to be upset, and refuses.

GRANDMOTHER
No.

GRANDFATHER
You have to eat. You need the
energy.

GRANDMOTHER
Listen. I'm getting close to the
end. I've begged you for years. Do
you want me to keep begging--

GRANDFATHER
Tarsem--

GRANDMOTHER
(louder)
No! Do you not have any shame?
Bring me my son.

Grandfather doesn't acknowledge her request. He stares out the window -- anywhere except into his wife's eyes.

He continues his attempt to feed Grandmother. He blows on each spoonful, cooling them before they touch her lips.

GRANDFATHER
Here. Just eat a little.

GRANDMOTHER

All those years of you complaining
about my *rotis*, and look how round
yours came out.

Her wrinkled hands grasp his, and with a certain sense of understanding, they look into each other's eyes.

After lunch, Grandfather packs the dishes and plugs in an electric kettle of water for their afternoon *chai*.

After their meal, Grandfather wets a cotton towel and gently presses it against her face. He rubs her arms and her legs, and grips tightly onto what is left of their life together.

As he sits back down, he finally relents to her request.

GRANDFATHER

Theek hai [yes, I will].

INT. BUNGALOW - MORNING

Harpreet teaches Madeleine how to cook traditional Indian dishes using his mother's old recipes. They too, however, fail at making perfectly round *rotis* [flatbreads].

He takes a large mixing bowl and adds wheat flour and water.

HARPREET

Here. Knead this dough.

MADELEINE

How do you know how much water you need to add?

HARPREET

Do it by feel. If you add too much, you can always add more flour to balance it out. Add everything little by little.

Madeleine adjusts accordingly. Little hands knead a mixing bowl full of wet dough like a practiced professional.

He smears a finger of *atta* [flour] onto Madeleine's cheek. She giggles in delight, and tries to do the same to her father's cheek.

On to the next steps, they make small dough balls and use a rolling pin to roll out the dough into circular shapes.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

I have to admit that I never really got this step right. It was the one thing that your Grandmother wasn't able to get me to perfect... I always mess up and make the *roti* into squares instead of perfect circles!

Madeleine gives the rolling pin a try.

MADELEINE

(flustered)

I don't think I'll get it either.

HARPREET

With practice, you'll get it. You were raised at the hands of babysitters, but I've tried my best to leave my mark on you, like your grandmother did on me.

Madeleine continues with the rolling pin. He reads out of a recipe book and teaches her how to make a *paratha* [potato-stuffed flatbread].

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Let me show you how to make an *aloo paratha*.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

It's important that you learn these recipes. Your Grandmother learned from her mom, and then taught me. And now I'm teaching you.

They fold the *paratha* dough into layers.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

You'll grow up to be self-dependent. You won't need anybody else.

MADELEINE

Like you, *Daddy-ji*?

The *paratha* browns and rises on the griddle, glistening with olive oil. They both laugh at the holes in their pile of imperfectly-round *rotis* and *parathas*.

They tear bite-size pieces of *paratha* with their bare hands, Indian-style, and use them to scoop their *daal* [lentil soup], *sabji* [masala veggies], and *dahi* [yogurt].

HARPREET

I just got an idea! I'll take you to learn from the experts.

MADELEINE

The experts?

HARPREET

Practice makes perfect. Change into some clean clothes and grab your *chunni* [headscarf].

Madeleine runs to her room and quickly gets ready while her father quickly cleans the mess in the kitchen.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Madeleine! Are you ready?

MADELEINE

Almost!

HARPREET

We have a bit of a drive. We're going to be late!

Madeleine walks out of her bedroom in a pair of clean clothes. Her hair is tied back and she covers her head with her silk *chunni*.

MADELEINE

Why do we always have to go to the *Fremont Gurdwara*? *Tulsi* and her parents always go to *El Sobrante* on Sundays. We don't know anyone there!

HARPREET

Never mind that -- this is the one we've always gone to.

MADELEINE

Do grandma and grandpa go to that one?

Harpreet winces, and quickly changes the subject.

HARPREET

Do you think you'd finally like to give the Punjabi lessons at the *Gurdwara's* "Sunday School" a try?

MADELEINE

(in Punjabi)

No *Daddy-ji*, I don't need Punjabi lessons... I speak it just fine with you!

INT. SIKH TEMPLE - MORNING

During the first stanza of the closing *ardās* [prayer], the crowd awakens suddenly and jumps to their feet -- the older men and women slowly lag behind. The final *ardās* is announced loudly and repeated by the crowd as they bow and touch their foreheads to the ground.

CROWD

*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji
Ki Fateh* [Wonderful Teacher's
Khalsa, Victory is to the Wonderful
Teacher]

The prayer service ends and *parshad* is handed out by the *sewadar* [volunteers].

In the temple kitchen, Harpreet drags a suddenly-shy Madeleine into the huddle of elderly Indian women, shaping little balls of dough with their hands -- just as his mother used to teach him.

Madeleine quickly progresses to the next steps -- rolling out the dough with a rolling pin with loose flour. A familiar face squeezes in next to her, although father and daughter are too busy concentrating on their rolling pins.

SIMRAN

Hey guys!

MADELEINE

(surprised)

Mrs. Simran!

Harpreet and Simran smile and nod towards each other.

HARPREET

I didn't know you came to this *Gurdwara*?

SIMRAN

You didn't?

The older women hold back their smiles, not quite sure what to make of the situation unfolding at the dough table.

Simran gives Madeleine some tips about her technique, and Harpreet quietly watches on, the only man in the kitchen.

MADELEINE

I can't get them perfectly round.
And *Daddy-ji's* not helping either!

SIMRAN

Let the rolling pin slowly rotate
the dough. That's the secret to
getting a perfectly round *roti*.

Madeleine's technique improves, and Simran smiles at Harpreet. The rolled *roti* dough is passed over to the large griddle and puffs up, before it is buttered with *ghee*, wrapped in foil, and put into a cooler in large batches.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO (RESTAURANT) - NIGHT

In a crowded, bustling restaurant in San Francisco, Harpreet and Simran sit at a small table with a view of the open kitchen. The sous-chef plates dishes in the background.

SIMRAN

You don't recognize me from before,
do you?

HARPREET

What do you mean? We've met before?

The schoolteacher bluffs.

SIMRAN

Maybe in a past life?

Harpreet looks on curiously.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

Or probably just at the *Gurdwara*,
in passing, like the other day.

HARPREET

We don't go to temple very often.
Madeleine's been insisting. I used
to go to the one in *El Sobrante*
growing up.

SIMRAN

You grew up here too?

HARPREET

Born and raised. San Jose. I moved up to the city after college. What about you?

SIMRAN

I was born in India, but my parents moved us here when I was five. What about your parents? They must go to temple often?

Harpreet pauses.

HARPREET

I'm not sure. We lost contact. We're kind of estranged.

SIMRAN

I'm sorry.

He brushes it off, unperturbed.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

Is it inappropriate to ask about Madeleine's mother? She only ever talks about you, but she never mentions her mom--

HARPREET

She passed away.

SIMRAN

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry.

HARPREET

It's OK. Single Indian dads raising daughters alone aren't that common.

SIMRAN

Look, you're doing an amazing job. She's one of my favorites.

She takes a sip of wine.

SIMRAN (CONT'D)

I know I'm not supposed to say that. But she's extremely curious, and well rounded. She's really far ahead of the rest of the class in reading and writing.

HARPREET

Thank you. That's more to her credit than mine.

(MORE)

HARPREET (CONT'D)

I don't push her quite as hard as
my parents pushed me.

A waitress checks on them. Inaudible, the two order multiple tapas plates and share a bottle of wine. The restaurant is still loud and full of patrons at closing time.

The two stroll down the street, smiling, hands and shoulders gently brushing against each other.

SIMRAN

Well, this is me.

HARPREET

I didn't know you lived nearby?

SIMRAN

Would you like to come up for *chai*?

INT. BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Later than usual, Harpreet drives home and sneaks across the house. He checks Madeleine's room, but finds it empty.

To his surprise, a rather clever Madeleine is already sleeping in his bed. He stands there in the dark, his arms crossed in surprise, weighing his options.

He notices her pattern of breathing -- her tiny body spread out, taking up as much space as possible on his large bed.

Harpreet showers and quietly sets the alarm. As he slips beneath the covers, she startles him by breaking the silence.

MADELEINE

You shouldn't work so late,
Daddy-ji. You'll burn yourself out.
Then what will we do?

She yawns, moves over and makes room for him, and finally rests her head on his stomach as he lays down beside her. They both sleep the length of the night.

In the morning, Harpreet wakes up alone. Madeleine is nowhere to be seen. Though the air is hot and he is sweating, Harpreet is unable to lift himself out of bed.

On his right hand, a small bulge appears in the middle of his palm. As he pushes his thumb down on it, the bulge starts to move. A bead of blood emerges and a soft red material starts to unfold out of his open palm.

He panics, pushing against the covers and kicking his feet.

A buzzing noise grows louder in the distance. A red flower bulb has now fully formed out of his palm. A hummingbird flies straight through the hallway and into his room.

Harpreet stays relatively still as the hummingbird dips its beak to the nectar of the red flower in his palm. Just as quickly, he opens his eyes and wakes up from his dream, the aperture of his pupils constricting.

He checks the heels of his hands and they appear normal.

Alone in an empty bed, he sits there thinking before he glances at the alarm clock.

HARPREET

Mads must have turned off my alarm clock again.

Madeleine is in the living room, watching the hummingbirds in the backyard. This morning was not real, he thinks to himself. But was last night real? [It was.]

MADELEINE

Good morning, *Daddy-ji*.

EXT. ANGEL ISLAND - MORNING

Madeleine's fourth grade class takes a field trip to explore Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay, a former immigration detention center for immigrants arriving from Asia.

The children, parents, and schoolteacher gather at Pier 41.

Madeleine and the other children are dressed in their school uniforms. Each child has a backpack, a brown paper-bag lunch, and plenty of snacks.

The children are organized into two lines with a buddy system and attendance is taken. Harpreet stands off to the side as the schoolteacher calls each student by name.

On the ferry, the water is choppy and the wind blows Simran's hair. The children are preoccupied with views of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate.

On Angel Island, the children hike a dirt path in a single-file line, kicking up the dust. Panoramic views of the bay.

The dark, reinforced-concrete detention center in China Cove is dark, naturally lit. The children run wild and explore.

Madeleine finds poetry carved into the wooden walls. With her little fingers, she traces the foreign characters, originally written by Chinese immigrants detained in the early 1900s.

At noon, the group wanders onto the beach and the children set aside their backpacks for their lunch break.

SIMRAN

Don't run too far, stay together
and remember your partners!

But it's too late -- the class scatters in all directions.

The faces of the children point downwards, running about the beach and collecting the shells that have washed ashore.

Simran and Harpreet lock eyes briefly and they quickly look away. They walk slowly walk the beach, whispering among themselves while keeping a watchful eye on the children.

The wind whistles past the trees.

EXT. GOLDEN GATE PARK - EVENING

Madeleine and Harpreet are out for a post-dinner walk in Golden Gate Park. The fog envelopes the greenery and the Golden Gate Bridge slips in and out of the mist.

MADELEINE

Dad? Why do they call it the
"Golden Gate Bridge" if it's not
really golden?

HARPREET

I don't know, Mads.

In the distance, Grandfather approaches them, after avoiding each other for years. Harpreet protectively buffers Madeleine behind his body, and she clutches his coat and curiously peers at the towering, turbaned figure of her Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

(in Punjabi)

Is that... your daughter?

Grandfather tries to take a better look at the little girl, but his son defensively shields her. Grandfather straightens up and his face turns serious.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Your mother is in the hospital. She
doesn't have much time left. She
wants to see you.

HARPREET

What's wrong? Where?

GRANDFATHER

You can ask her yourself. Stanford.

Harpreet looks on with shock, and Grandfather sighs as he repeats his unanswered question, pointing at the little girl.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Is that your daughter?

Without answering, Harpreet whisks her away, a blank look of regret on his face as he's trying to comprehend what unfolded. Madeleine looks back at Grandfather, who shares the same expression of regret as his retreating son.

MADELEINE

Who was that?

HARPREET

Your *Baba-ji* [Grandfather].

MADELEINE

What did he say? Something about *Bibi-ji* [Grandmother]?

Harpreet doesn't respond, and he continues walking, tugging on her hand as she trails behind, stealing glances at her Grandfather's figure growing smaller in the distance.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

Are you ever going to tell me why you're mad at *Baba-ji*?

HARPREET

I wasn't mad at him. Your Grandfather was upset about me falling in love with your mom.

MADELEINE

Why?

HARPREET

It's complicated. He wanted me to marry someone he chose for me. But your mom and I loved each other. So we eloped--

MADELEINE

E-loped?

HARPREET

We ran away and got married. And then we had you!

MADELEINE

Grandpa never forgave you?

HARPREET

He was angry. We stopped talking then. Your Grandmother, though...

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Harpreet rushes to the hospital and attempts to find his mother. He enters her room and finds her alone, sleeping.

He slowly reaches for her wrinkled hands, covered with IV lines. Startled, she opens her eyes. Her voice is too soft to hear as she struggles to find her words.

GRANDMOTHER

(smiles weakly)

Beta [my son]...

HARPREET

Mama-ji, I'm so sorry. I would have come earlier had I known--

Grandmother shushes him.

GRANDMOTHER

You know the way your father is.

HARPREET

I need you to know that what really happened with Michelle--

Grandmother's eyes light up when she hears her daughter-in-laws name.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Michelle and I had gotten married. Michelle didn't leave me, she died during childbirth. But we had a baby girl, she survived.

GRANDMOTHER

Beta, why did you not tell us the truth before?

HARPREET

Dad would never have accepted us.

GRANDMOTHER

The baby would have softened your father's heart. Is she -- is she here now?

HARPREET

No. She's at school. I'm sorry--

GRANDMOTHER

What's her name?

HARPREET

Madeleine.

Grandmother smiles at the beautiful name.

GRANDMOTHER

To tell you the truth, Michelle and I used to write to each other. And she would visit and we would cook together. She was picking up some Punjabi words too--

She laughs and reminisces, but has a coughing fit.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

And she would tell me about you two. How happy you both were.

HARPREET

I suspected it. Did you like her?

GRANDMOTHER

Beta, I loved her. She was your match.

Tears start to well-up. She tightens her grip on his hand.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

We would exchange letters and photos. And when she stopped writing, it broke my heart.

HARPREET

I'm sorry.

GRANDMOTHER

I didn't know what happened.

Grandmother starts weeping. She grasps his hands tightly and wipes away her tears and pulls him close.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

That poor girl. *Kismat mare hai.*
[Our fate is bad].

HARPREET

Mama-ji, I've wasted so many years
away from you. All because I went
against his wishes.

GRANDMOTHER

Beta, you needed to live your own
life. She was your match.

HARPREET

What are we going to do about these
missing years? I have so much I
need to learn from you, to ask you.
I messed everything up.

GRANDMOTHER

You didn't mess anything up. Let's
start anew, today. I would like to
meet my beautiful granddaughter,
Madeleine.

HARPREET

I promise. I will bring her today,
after school. I love you. And I'm
so sorry--

She grabs his arm.

GRANDMOTHER

Please. Do not say sorry. You were
not wrong. You must forgive your
father.

Grandfather is sheepishly hiding around the corner, avoiding
confronting his estranged son.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

But you must go now. Your father
will be back soon.

As Harpreet exits the hospital, Grandfather makes his way
inside and greets his wife. Grandmother has a hard time
collecting her thoughts and deciding what words to use.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Gurdial...

Her eyes feel heavy. She insists again on speaking with him.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)
 (in Punjabi)
 Come closer. For it is something
 important about our son...

Grandfather does not object, his hands resting on hers just as his son had held, minutes earlier. But before she can speak further, she slowly drifts away and falls asleep.

GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)
 It is not too late...

Grandfather brushes her hair aside and touches her forehead.

GRANDFATHER
 Rest. You can tell me later...

Grandfather sits for a while longer and then retrieves his grocery bag. The food is still warm as he carefully arranges it on the table, ready for when she wakes up.

He thinks to himself about how, after her nap, they will both eat the food together and enjoy an afternoon *chai*. He plugs in an electric tea kettle and sets out two cups.

The wrinkled, folded hands of grandmother shake slightly as she is dying of a terminal illness, her lips casting off one final *ardās* [prayer].

GRANDMOTHER
Waheguru. Waheguru. Waheguru.

Raspy, deep breaths. Trembling hands.

A nurse enters the room and smiles politely at Grandfather. She checks Grandmother's vitals and turns off the silent cardiac monitor.

The nurse writes onto her clipboard, declaring Grandmother's death at 3:01 PM.

The tea kettle in the hospital room whistles loudly.

A ship's fog horn blows in the distance.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Harpreet rushes through the halls of the hospital, gripping Madeleine's hand as she tries to keep up behind him. She tightly grasps a bouquet of red flowers.

They find Grandmother's bed, and entire room, clean and empty. Madeleine looks up at her father in confusion.

Inaudible, he approaches the nurse's desk and talks to the nurses. His hand loses its grip of Madeleine's hand, falling to the side. He stares out the window of Grandmother's empty room, expressionless, trying to keep his composure.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

The tea kettle hisses gently on the stove. Carefully-marked tea, sugar, and spice jars -- precise measurements carefully etched with black Punjabi and English characters.

Grandfather sets two cups on the kitchen table, despite the fact that the apartment is empty and he is all alone. He breaks the silence by suddenly calling out for Grandmother.

GRANDFATHER

Tarsem! The *chai* is ready!

Again, impatiently, he calls out louder -- the tea is getting cold and they will be late for their morning walk. Pausing, he calls again, angrily.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Tarsem!

But he faces only a long, drawn-out silence.

Suddenly, Grandfather pushes away the chair and table and stomps into the bedroom. The warm, red wool scarf that Grandmother would wrap around her neck is draped against the corner of her bed.

The tea kettle whistles loudly.

He reaches to open his wife's desk drawer, and pulls out a small, locked box.

Among the personal possessions the hospital had returned in a sealed plastic bag, Grandfather finds a key attached to Grandmother's necklace. He inserts the key and opens the box.

He finds letters and photographs exchanged between Grandmother and the *gori* [white woman], all right under his nose.

As he sorts through nine months of memories, he no longer feels anger. He looks at the photographs of his son with his daughter-in-law -- the woman he had despised for so long and who he had blamed for taking away his son.

There are pictures of their travels, pictures with friends, and pictures of their marriage and her pregnancy, of which Grandfather had absolutely no idea of until he saw little Madeleine in the park.

With this new discovery, he is taken aback and realizes that perhaps he is not entirely alone in this world.

He picks up Grandmother's scarf. Sitting on her empty bed, he pulls it to his face and breathes in deeply, smelling what remains of the scent of his wife. He cries loudly, not caring if anyone hears him, screaming into the scarf.

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

High tide at a secluded beach off the San Mateo coast. The sun is rising. A salty haze covers everything. Grandfather walks along the beach, tightly gripping a container of ashes.

Grandfather walks into the water as the waves aggressively slam into the coast. He slowly lets the ashes out, which scatter with the wind and into the water around him.

He continues walking deeper into the tide, and pauses, before making a slow retreat. Seagulls float in the wind.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S APT - MORNING

Back in his apartment, Grandfather mutters something incomprehensible to himself as he fumbles around the empty apartment, seemingly lost and confused.

GRANDFATHER
(in Punjabi)
It is not too late...

He repeats the words to himself. He sits on Grandmother's empty bed, picks up the phone, and dials a phone number he had often forced himself to forget. His hands tremble. A voice on the other line breaks through the static.

HARPREET
Hello?

Grandfather is not able to speak, holding back tears.

HARPREET (CONT'D)
Daddy-ji? [Father?]

Grandfather hangs up the phone without saying a word.

EXT. FARM - SUNRISE

The migrant farm workers gather on the dirt road, awaiting the start of their shift. A new arrival, Jasdeep, wanders through the crowd of Spanish-speakers.

The head farmer is wearing cowboy boots and a dirt-stained, Oakland A's baseball cap. He whistles loudly with his fingers, gesturing to Grandfather as a quick introduction.

FARMER
(in Spanish)
El Indio! [The Indian]

Jasdeep approaches Grandfather, surprised to see another Indian in the group of Latinx migrant workers.

JASDEEP
(in Punjabi)
Sat sri akaal.

The two Punjabi men shake hands.

GRANDFATHER
(in Punjabi)
You're new. Just arrived in America?

JASDEEP
Yes, it's been a few months.

GRANDFATHER
Which city are you coming from?

JASDEEP
Ludhiana. And you?

GRANDFATHER
Jalandhar.

Grandfather pauses and looks at the surrounding farmland.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)
You left Punjab and came here for this?

JASDEEP
Amreeka hai [it's America]. Just waiting on my *greencard* paperwork.

Grandfather nods and smiles.

CUT TO:

Grandfather sits in the cargo bed of the red, Toyota pick-up truck. He is surrounded by other migrant workers, their faces equally wrinkled, sunburned, dirty from their labor.

A young girl, sitting next to her mother, looks up at Grandfather curiously, innocently. The pick-up kicks up dust behind it as it drives through the fields. She watches him.

INT. BUNGALOW - AFTERNOON

In the kitchen, with Madeline wearing a small chef's apron and nudging closely against her father, she watches him page through her Grandmother's recipe book and set potatoes in a pressure cooker to boil.

Bored, she decides to stand on his toes and grab his hands. Practiced in mischief, he knows what to do, and holding her hands upwards, waddles to the other side of the kitchen. Both laughing, he lifts her up and sets her on the countertop.

HARPREET

Today, I'm going to teach you how to cook "*California samosas*."

MADELEINE

I've had *samosas* before, but what makes these "*California samosas*?"

HARPREET

When your Grandmother first arrived in Yuba City in the 70s, her in-laws had a tradition of making *samosas* using flour tortillas as the wrappers. Kind of an "East meets West," a mix of cultures.

MADELEINE

Like you and mom?

HARPREET

And like you.

MADELEINE

Let's do it.

HARPREET

Grab the *loondani* [spice box]. Can you name all the spices in there? Have you been practicing?

MADELEINE

Duh!

Madeleine points gingerly at each circular spice container in the spice box.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

(in Punjabi)

*Loon, lal mirch, haldi, dhania,
garam masala, jeera, louong,
illachi, cinnamon, and bay leaf!*
[salt, red pepper, turmeric,
coriander, cumin, cloves, cardamom]

HARPREET

Well done! So let's get started making the *samosa* filling. First we toast the cumin seeds and coriander seeds in olive oil.

While supervising Madeleine over his shoulder, he quickly dices an onion with a chef's knife.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Next up, we sauté the onions.

Madeleine stirs the aromatic, Indian *soffritto* mixture.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

And finally, we mash the potatoes with our hands, and stir them in.

He pulls out the potatoes, simultaneously juggling and peeling them, piping hot. Madeleine follows along.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Careful, they're hot!

With the steam still rising from the potatoes, Madeleine mashes them using her little hands, while Harpreet starts heating the tortillas.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

Here, let me show you how to make the first one. Watch carefully. You'll make the rest.

MADELEINE

Okay!

He quickly whips a slurry of flour and water and brushes the edges of the flour tortilla with the paste. He puts the potato filling in the middle and folds the tortilla into a triangle, carefully crimping and sealing the edges shut.

HARPREET

Make sure you seal the edges so oil won't get in once we fry them.

MADELEINE

Han-ji [yes, formal].

Madeleine nods, and quickly takes over. Her triangular-shaped *samosas* are perfect in form. And the two carefully fry their first batch of testers in canola oil.

MADELEINE (CONT'D)

Yum!

HARPREET

This was your Grandmother's favorite *chaat* [snack]. She really loved these with *chanay* [masala chickpeas] and *imli* [tamarind] chutney.

MADELEINE

What's *chaat* mean?

Harpreet pulls apart a *samosa*, still hot, and gives half of it to Madeleine. They devour it.

HARPREET

Indian street food. Or snacks. And she typically only made these on special occasions, or when guests were visiting.

MADELEINE

But what's the special occasion today? Is anyone visiting?

HARPREET

No, *Sweets*. As always, it's just you and me. Just the two of us.

Suddenly the doorbell rings. The two glance at each other about their positive premonition. Madeleine darts towards the front door, her footsteps pounding across the wooden floor.

INT. BUNGALOW - AFTERNOON

Grandfather drives across the city to his son's house. His hand trembles as he checks to see if he's arrived at the exact address he had scribbled down on a piece of paper.

He whispers to himself, repeating his wife's final words.

GRANDFATHER

It is not too late...

Grandfather makes his way up the lawn, carrying a small wooden crate of *jamun* [java plum] fruit. He rings the doorbell and immediately straightens his posture when he hears footsteps running across the wooden floor inside.

The mail flap flips open, and two eyes peer out.

The door opens slowly, and standing there before him is a beautiful little girl -- his granddaughter.

MADELEINE

(mix of Punjabi-English)

Sat sri akaal, Baba-ji.

I'm Madeleine.

He looks at her in surprise, and before he can respond, she grabs his hand and guides him inside. He sets the box of fruit on the counter.

In this moment, father and son and granddaughter are united for the first time in ten years, all seated nervously in the living room, making [inaudible] small talk.

As Madeleine prepares a pot of *chai*, they are surprised by yet another knock on the front door.

This time, Harpreet answers the door and finds a smiling Simran, dressed rather elegantly, holding a pile of books.

Harpreet welcomes Simran inside and quietly informs her that his father is visiting. She looks at him in surprise.

SIMRAN

Really? I should go... I'll let you guys talk. I don't want to intrude.

Simran freezes in self-conflict, but Harpreet insists.

HARPREET

No! Please join us. I don't think he'll mind.

He grabs her reluctant hand and leads her inside. As they approach the living room, they quickly let go of their hands, letting them drop to their sides.

Harpreet introduces her to Grandfather, and they both pause.

HARPREET (CONT'D)

(in Punjabi)

Baba-ji, this is Madeleine's teacher, "Simran." She came to drop by her homework, but I invited her to stay for dinner.

Both surprised, Grandfather and Simran play along and feign ignorance, pretending not to know each other after all.

SIMRAN

(hands folded)

Baba-ji.

Simran joins Madeleine in the kitchen and helps her to prepare the *chai*. They finish frying the *samosas* while father and son look on, sitting side by side at the counter.

MADELEINE

Shall we sit outside?

Everyone agrees in unison.

GRANDFATHER

Yes, it is a beautiful day outside.

Madeleine pushes a chair against the counter, climbs on it, and reaches for the extra plates and silverware in the cupboards -- she has to set the outdoor patio table with more than two plates for the first time in her life.

Simran whispers to Harpreet, playfully.

SIMRAN

You and your father share a lot of the same mannerisms.

HARPREET

Oh?

The family pass around the platters of *California samosas*, topped with *chanay* [chickpeas] and *imli* [tamarind] chutney, garnished with cilantro, diced onions, and splashes of Tapatio hot sauce.

Madeleine pours piping hot *masala chai* into ceramic mugs. They sit in the backyard and eat an early dinner together as the evening sunset approaches the golden hour.

They sip their *chai*, watching the hummingbirds in the garden.

CUT TO BLACK.