

The Lunchbox  
by

Ritesh Joginder Batra

OVER BLACK -

The sounds of early morning - a rooster crows, a milk man rings his bicycle bell, and a train chugs on tracks, another train joins in the morning symphony...

FADE IN:

Two Mumbai Local trains pass each other in the morning haze.

SHOTS:

- Pigeons, hundreds of them, on a rooftop, all the same colors and stripes
- People, in hordes, descend upon a railway platform, the morning commute in office pastels and whites, indistinguishable, just like the pigeons
- A LUNCHBOX DELIVERYMAN aka a DABBAWALLAH, in stark white lugs a wood tray filled with lunchboxes over his head
- Lunchbox Delivery Men, hauling lunchboxes, hop on to a train as it departs
- At another station, the train slows down, people get off

The montage continues as LUNCHBOXES get in and PEOPLE get out, at times it is the other way around.

The conveyor belt of the city transports Lunchboxes and People...In and out, up and down. Its like the people are the Lunchboxes.

Finally - a LUNCHBOX DELIVERYMAN, focused, navigates a bicycle laden with lunchboxes through the busy Mumbai traffic. This is Ila's Dabbawallah.

INT. ILA'S ROOM - DAY

A neck tie sits over a little girl's eyes like a blindfold, this is YASHVI, 6, as her mother tries to pull the neck tie down over her head. Finally she succeeds, and tucks it under the collar of Yashvi's school uniform and fastens it.

The mother- ILA, 30s, pretty, frantically readies Yashvi for school. Next, she puts Yashvi's socks over her little feet.

ILA

Look both ways before you cross the street.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (CONT'D)

People drive like crazy these days...And be very careful on the way back too...ok?

Yashvi nods along. A pressure cooker WHISTLES. Ila looks to the kitchen. This is a modest but comfortable apartment, the little girl's room has a lot of toys in it- old and new, and her own art work on the walls.

ILA (CONT'D)

Don't walk under a tree...branches fall in the monsoons.

YASHVI

But its not raining now...

ILA

It can start raining again, can't it?

A horn BLARES.

Ila looks out the window - Three storeys down - an autorickshaw converted into a school bus blares its horn again, CHILDREN are packed like sardines in it. The whistle of the pressure cooker goes off again. Ila looks between the kitchen and the school bus, torn. Meanwhile Yashvi finishes tying her shoe laces and runs out the room.

Ila watches from the window - Yashvi runs across the street to the rickshaw, looking both ways.

The pressure cooker whistle shrieks, calling out to Ila. Ila rushes to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ila is over the cooking range by the window. The cooking range is brand new, it stands out in this kitchen.

She pops open the pressure cooker and tastes the daal. She cringes, disappointed. Ila A voice from above -

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

Did you remember all the masalas?

Mrs. Deshpande, the voice of experience. Ila shouts out the window -

ILA

No auntie, I forgot...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
I knew it from the first whistle  
itself...

Ila grabs her spice box from the shelf, opens it, she scans  
the little compartments for the missing spice.

MRS. DESHPANDE (CONT'D)  
Here you go...

At the window, a basket has been lowered down by rope from  
the floor above.

ILA  
Thank you Auntie...

Ila grabs the bottle of the spice from it, and the basket is  
pulled up again. She sprinkles it over her daal.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
Just a little bit does  
it...remember, the way to a man's  
heart is through his stomach.

Ila laughs, not really believing it.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I am serious, don't believe me now,  
but one day you will see...

Ila mixes in the new addition, whiffs of steam rise up.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
...Mmmm...there...its perfect...One  
bite of this and he will build you  
a Taj Mahal.

Close on Ila, she laughs

ILA  
Taj Mahal is a tomb auntie...

MRS. DESHPANDE  
(embarrassed-)  
...Yes, I knew that...

Ila glances out the window, the DABBAWALLAH- parks his  
bicycle laden with lunchboxes in the compound.

Ila grabs the three tiered metal lunchbox from the counter.  
The doorbell rings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She pours daal in one tier, dry mixed vegetables in the other, and two rotis in the last one. And secures it shut.

INT. DOORWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ila opens the door to - the DABBAWALLAH, 40s, slim and beaten down by the Sun and hard work, he wears stark white, and a white Nehru cap sits on his head. He has been waiting.

DABBAWALLAH

Madam...

Ila hands him the lunchbox.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

A bead of sweat trickles down the Dabbawallah's forehead as he cycles with a load of lunchboxes, weaving through traffic, slowing down for pedestrians that cross in front of him, avoiding a pothole every now and then...

CLOSE ON. Ila's lunchbox, it peeks out of the jute bag dangling from the handle bar along with several other lunchboxes.

INSERT TITLE - 'THE LUNCHBOX'

LUNCHBOX POV. - The city is a labyrinth of noises, traffic, big streets, and small alleyways... The Dabbawallah cycles on with an air of urgency.

INT. KANDIVILI STATION -MOMENTS LATER

A hub of DABBAWALLAHS on a busy platform. All in the same white uniform, white Nehru caps over their heads, some even wear the same mustache.

Our Dabbawallah passes the dabbas one-by-one to the others. The Dabbawallahs check the code of colors and symbols on each lunchbox with the air of experts.

They sort and load the lunchboxes on to large wood trays, thirty five to a tray. This is an exercise in precision.

A Mumbai Local chugs in, and the flurry of sorting activity on the platform culminates right on time.

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CONTINUED:

As people jump on and off of the local train, the Dabbawallahs launch themselves into the packed local, carrying the wood trays loaded with lunchboxes over their heads.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

We are in the train with a Dabbawallah, a different one, but wearing the same clothes, cap and mustache as every other dabbawallah.

The train heads South towards the business district. Along the way, when it stops at a station, wood trays are passed out and new trays loaded with lunchboxes are passed in. All within the few seconds that the train stops.

INT. CHURCHGATE STATION - LATER

The train chugs into the last station on the western line. Here, the dabbas are unloaded and the reverse process of sorting them from the wood trays to the jute bags that hang from bicycles begins.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

A dabbawallah pushes a handcart down the streets of South Bombay with jute bags full of dabbas.

INT. OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

A Dabbawallah deposits a bunch of dabbas in the reception area of WESTERN RAILWAY INSURANCE CLAIMS OFFICE, a large enterprise of 9 to 5 drudgery.

Close on - the lunchboxes sit at the reception, PEOPLE pass in front of them - delivery men, nervous sales people, and even more nervous job applicants. A PEON comes in and grabs all the waiting dabbas by their handles, several in each hand. He walks into -

INT. DESK FARM - CONTINUOUS

Endless rows of desks. The Peon walks down one row, depositing dabbas on desks in his wake.

The Peon puts the lunchbox on to a desk with a thump. SAAJAN FERNANDES, 56, salt and pepper hair, and the moustache and bearing of a jaded bureaucrat. He looks up from his work, regards the lunchbox and then goes back to his file totaling numbers, and making small check marks on the papers.

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It all looks mind numbing, but Saajan does it with the speed of someone who has been checking numbers all his life. The lunchbox sits on his desk, waiting.

MR. SHROFF

Mr. Fernandes...

The boss - MR. SHROFF, 40s looks into the cubicle. He wears a suit over a crisp shirt. He is flanked by SHAIKH, 30, a man with an easy smile and the eagerness of a new recruit.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

Mr. Fernandes, this is Mr. Shaikh, Shaikh...Saajan Fernandes.

Shaikh leans in eagerly and offers his hand, Saajan has no choice but to give him a weak handshake.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

Mr. Shaikh used to work in Saudi Arabia as a chief accountant in a small firm. He will take over your responsibilities when you leave us next month...He comes with good references...

SHAIKH

Very pleased to meet you sir... Shaikh beams. Saajan gives Shaikh a quick nod.

MR. SHROFF

I had him join us early, I need that you train him in...all that you do in Claims...

A beat of silence as Saajan merely nods but doesn't say anything. Mr. Shroff breaks the silence -

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

OK then, I will leave you both to it. Thank you gentlemen...

Shroff leaves but not before patting Shaikh on the back, as if to wish him luck.

SHAIKH

Mister Shroff speaks very highly of you sir.

Shaikh beams, Saajan merely nods and starts to tinker with his calculator again.

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SHAIKH (CONT'D)

He says you have been here for  
thirty five years?

SAAJAN

Yes...

SHAIKH

That's a long time, you will surely  
be missed here...I am sure...

Saajan looks at him for a small beat - he won't be missed. He  
nods nevertheless as he punches numbers in the calculator.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

How do you feel sir?

SAAJAN

What?

SHAIKH

I mean...your golden years are  
about to start...How does it feel?

Saajan looks at Shaikh, not too pleased at him.

SAAJAN

Fantastic

Shaikh smiles

SHAIKH

When can we begin the training sir?

Saajan indicates at the lunchbox.

SAAJAN

It's lunchtime. And then I have a  
lot of work...Why don't you come  
back at say...four forty five?

SHAIKH

Four forty five sir, good. Thank  
you sir...Nice to meet you.

Shaikh leaves.

INT. CANTEEN - MOMENTS LATER

GROUPS of employees chat as they gorge on their lunch. The  
buzz of the lunch crowd, much like a fish market fills the  
room.

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CONTINUED:

Saajan enters with the lunchbox and a bottle of water, he walks past several tables and finds a spot in the corner, away from everyone else. He extracts the 3-tiered lunchbox from the container, and opens the boxes up one by one. Steam rises from the daal, still hot.

Saajan takes it in, surprised. He leans in and inhales, his eye glasses steam up. He wipes them clean. Next, as he examines the texture of the fluffy rotis, his surprise only heightens. He takes a bite of his food, it is ecstasy. He glances at the other tables, people are busy chatting and eating from their own 3-tiered metal lunchboxes. Saajan takes quick bites. The bottle of water sits on the table, untouched as Saajan gorges on the food. We stay with him for several beats as he eats.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - LATER

Empty lunchboxes lie to the side. A dabbawallah picks them up.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The dabbawallah pushes his handcart down the streets of South Bombay, laden with the lunchboxes he just picked up.

EXT. CHURCHGATE STATION - DAY

Dabbawallahs sort through thousands of lunchboxes and load them on to large wood trays.

INT. CHURCHGATE STATION - DAY

A dabbawallah carries a wood tray filled with lunchboxes down the platform.

INT. LUGGAGE COMPARTMENT - DAY

Trays filled with empty lunchboxes sit by the door, as the train chugs north. Nearby, the dabbawallahs sit in a circle, singing animatedly, unlike their race against time in the morning.

INT. ILA'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - LATER

Ila sorts through the laundry bucket. Turning the clothes inside out, she separates the whites from the colors, creating two mountains of clothes. A cooking show plays on the radio- a recipe for paneer.

The doorbell rings. Ila runs to the door, today will be the day...

INT. ILA'S DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

Ila answers the door to - the Dabbawallah

DABBAWALLAH

Madam...

He hands her the lunchbox back, and takes off just as fast. Ila's hand goes up and down, she is surprised at how light the lunchbox is. She shakes it, curious, she opens it up at her doorstep itself - every compartment is empty.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ila goes to the window.

ILA

Auntie...auntie...

Mrs. Deshpande's voice comes in from above.

MRS. DESHPANDE

What happened?

ILA

He ate it! Not only did he eat it, he finished it, he licked it clean!!

A beat, Mrs. Deshpande is just as surprised as her. And then-

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

(laughs-)

Didn't I used to tell you? This is just the beginning...you will see...

Ila smiles.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Saajan is holed up behind his desk. He glances at the office clock- It is 4:45. He peers down the hall. Saajan's POV. - Shaikh has been intercepted, he chats with someone, a mile a minute.

Saajan reaches for his bag, this is his chance.

He sneaks out the cubicle, and walks in the opposite direction. He glances over his shoulder - Shaikh is still busy talking. Saajan turns the corner and circles around, he makes his way to the reception, taking quick strides. He looks over his shoulder as he exits, making sure...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan exits the office, without as much as a nod or a goodbye to anyone.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Saajan has made his escape, he walks past Flora Fountain, and the High Court building... Walking alongside the rest of the evening commute all in the same direction - like items going down an assembly line. He walks past a STREET ARTIST perched on the footpath, painting deftly. The Artist has several paintings on sale, all identical of the scene in front, the traffic, hordes of people. Saajan strides past him like the rest of the evening commute.

INT. TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan stands in the crowded compartment as the train makes its way North.

At every station, people jostle to get in and out in mere seconds, the people are the lunchboxes. Nearby, TWO BEGGAR CHILDREN, one plays the harmonium, the other sings. A Yuppie in wire frame glasses, in office clothes chats, animated, in the background.

Saajan struggles to stay awake as the train chugs northward.

BEGGAR

Pardesi pardesi...jaana nahin...

INT. BANDRA STATION - LATER

Saajan alights the train at a crowded station, jostling and pushing a sea of commuters to get out. He walks down the platform.

EXT./INT. BUS STOP - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan boards the bus from the bus stop outside the station, the number 211 bus. Saajan stands in the crowded bus, holding on to the handlebar.

The beggar's song, perhaps in his head, continues over all this.

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - LATER

A song plays at Mrs. Deshpande's house above.

SONG

Pardesi pardesi...jaana nahin...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ila mumbles, singing along as she puts finishing touches to her make up. The doorbell rings. Ila, now with a touch of make-up, subtle yet noticeable, she looks beautiful.

On her way to the door, she screams out the window-

ILA

Auntie, turn off the music Rajeev is here...

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

OK...

The music goes off.

She opens the door with a smile.

ILA

How was your day?

Standing in front of her is RAJEEV, 30s, he wears metal framed glasses and a crisp shirt and pants, the attire of a yuppie executive, trying too hard. He is her husband. Rajeev walks in, past Ila, without noticing her make up, the earrings dangling from her ears.

ILA (CONT'D)

Did you like the lunch today?

Ila follows him, as they walk into -

INT. ILA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rajeev dumps his briefcase on to the bed and takes off his shoes.

RAJEEV

It was very good.

Ila is surprised at the low key response. She takes his shoes and puts them in the drawer for shoes...

ILA

Just good?

RAJEEV

Good like everyday...

ILA

So what was it?

Rajeev laughs, amused at her question, at the test, he thinks for a beat,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAJEEV  
Cauliflower...

Rajeev's phone rings.

RAJEEV (CONT'D)  
(into the phone-)  
Yes...yes...I just got  
home...Ok...hmmm...

As Rajeev talks on the phone, Ila leaves the room.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ila stands by the window sill. We can still hear Rajeev talking on the phone in the other room.

RAJEEV (O.S.)  
...Yes...yes...I agree,  
hmmm...yes...

Ila calls out to Mrs. Deshpande.

ILA  
Auntie...auntie...

No response. Ila waits by the window sill as Rajeev's phone conversation comes in.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Saajan walks, he is on the streets of Bandra, he walks past an old Church. He goes past the wall that demarcates the church compound.

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

This is no fancy restaurant, a cheap establishment. The OWNER sits at a counter, he sees Saajan approaching and stiffens, as if working up his defenses. A pyramid of identical metal lunchboxes is stacked up behind him, all with the same green covering as Ila's Lunchbox.

OWNER  
What now Sir?

The Owner looks at Saajan warily bracing himself for what is to come, the two men have sparred many times before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN

I am retiring at the end of this month. This will be the last month of my dabba service...

OWNER

Ok, I will note it.

SAAJAN

I will settle at the end of the month.

OWNER

OK'ing problem.

Saajan hovers at the counter. The Owner eyes him warily.

SAAJAN

...The dabba was very good today.

OWNER

What!?

SAAJAN

The dabba was good. Maintain the same standard...

Saajan walks out with a quick, curt nod. The Owner looks on in shock, reeling from the compliment. He turns to one of his WAITERS.

OWNER

(scoffs-)

Who would have known...lets make cauliflower again tomorrow?...

EXT. SAAJAN'S HOUSE: RANWAR VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

This is an old nook in the middle of the city, houses rather than buildings. A surviving pocket of old charm, holding out against the sky scrapers.

A group of CHILDREN with cricket gear wait around in front of the house.

Saajan walks in and unlocks the door. One of the children, the batsman - Anne D'SOUZA, 10 musters the courage, the other children congregate behind her, backing her up.

ANNE

Good evening Mr. Fernandes...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan fumbles for his keys, not bothering to reply.

ANNE (CONT'D)  
Can we...have our ball? Our ball  
went into your balcony...

Saajan opens the gate.

SAAJAN  
Do I look like your servant?

ANNE  
No.

Little Anne blinks, the children look up to Saajan in fear.

SAAJAN  
If you play in front of my door  
again, I'll chase you down the  
street...

With that Saajan enters the old house and BANGS the gate shut.

Little Anne and his friends are still reeling from the outburst, no one makes a move.

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ila, Rajeev and Yashvi sit at the dinner table watching TV an inane singing show plays. Yashvi plays with her food. Ila eyes Rajeev, he is into the show.

We stay with them for many beats as they eat together, and yet they all eat alone...

PRE-LAP - the sound of a running tap.

ILA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Ila does dishes at the sink. The sound of the game show on TV comes in from the living room.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
Ila...Ila...oh Ila...

Ila turns the tap on so her conversation does not carry to the next room, goes to the window.

ILA  
Yes auntie...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
 You called me before? I was  
 changing Mr. Deshpande's  
 diaper...How did it go? What did he  
 say!?

ILA  
 Nothing auntie...

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
 Nothing?

ILA  
 My dabba went to someone else,  
 someone else liked it, and finished  
 it...

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
 But they never deliver it wrong,  
 its impossible...

YASHVI  
 Ma, is there something sweet?

Yashvi peeks into the kitchen, how long has she been standing there? She looks at the running tap and then at Ila.

EXT. SAAJAN'S BALCONY - NIGHT

Saajan stands on his balcony and smokes. Ranwar village around him, the skyscrapers creeping in beyond. A white tennis ball that came into the balcony lies on the floor.

Laughter comes in from somewhere. Saajan looks across the courtyard into the house next door, the dinner table has been set at the D'Souza household. More laughter.

Saajan watches through the D'Souza's window, he looks at the food they are eating, the dishes that lie on the table and they pile on to their plates...

And then, Little Anne D'Souza, the same girl that Saajan had scolded earlier, appears at the window. Their eyes meet.

Saajan. Little Anne bangs the window shut on Saajan looks away and takes a deep drag of his cigarette.

CUT TO:



INT. SAAJAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Saajan reads a yellowed paperback and eats from take out polyethylene bags, it all looks very unappetising, the opposite of his lunch in the day.

CUT TO:

THREE MUMBAI LOCALS CRISSCROSS, THE CONVEYOR BELT OF THE CITY AT WORK AGAIN...

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Saajan stands with the rest of the commute, rocking to the motions of the train. The chugging of the train is flogging the spark of the life out of these people, and its only morning. Oblivious to its effects, Rajeev chats with someone far in the background.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Saajan works in his cube, doing the same thing as the day before. Shaikh approaches.

SHAIKH  
Good morning sir...

Saajan looks up from his work.

SAAJAN  
Good Morning.

SHAIKH  
How are you sir?

Saajan merely nods, as his fingers work the calculator.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
I came by yesterday, at four forty five...you were not here. I was here.

SAAJAN  
You were late.

SHAIKH  
(confused-)  
No sir...four forty five I came...

SAAJAN  
You were late.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan is buried in his work. Shaikh hovers at Saajan's desk for a beat, he has no choice -

He looks at the file the Saajan is working on.

SHAIKH  
Are these claims files sir?

SAAJAN  
This is the Claims department.

Shaikh laughs, as though Saajan has cracked a joke.

SHAIKH  
Can we start the training today  
Sir?

SAAJAN  
I am busy, lets talk after lunch.

SHAIKH  
Why don't I just come by after  
lunch?

SAAJAN  
OK...

SHAIKH  
For sure you'll be here right?

Saajan doesn't respond.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
OK sir...see you after lunch...

Shaikh departs, Saajan's look of disdain follows him.

INT. CANTEEN - LATER

The canteen is filled with the lunch crowd. Saajan sits alone, away from everyone else. He opens up the lunchbox, steam rises up from the food, the aroma hits him. And instantly, he is seduced by it. He takes a bite of the food, and very quickly one roti is finished. He goes for another, and comes up with a folded piece of paper instead. He looks around- is someone playing a prank on him? Laughter at another table.

Saajan unfolds it curiously - it is a letter-

ILA (V.O.)  
Hello, I hope you are enjoying the  
food...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan glances around, just the busy chattering lunch crowd around him. He continues reading.

ILA (V.O.)  
Thank you for polishing off this  
dabba yesterday...

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - EARLIER THAT DAY

Steam rises from the pot, onions fry in another pan. It is hot in this kitchen.

ILA (V.O.)  
...It was the best thing that  
happened to me in years...

Ila stands over the cooking range.

ILA (V.O.)  
For a few hours I thought my  
husband ate the food I cooked for  
him, he wiped it clean and would  
come home and tell me that it was  
very good.

VARIOUS SHOTS - Of Ila's hands as she crafts this meal. Its like she has infused herself in this food. We see only her hands as a complete picture of her emerges in Saajan's mind.

ILA (V.O.)  
Of course none of those things  
happened. But for a few hours they  
happened over and over, inside my  
imagination...And in return for  
that I am cooking for you  
again...Just this once. Today its  
paneer, my husband's favorite, I  
hope you enjoy it. Ila.

Ila folds the note, once, twice...

ILA  
Auntie...I am not sure we should  
send this...

MRS. DESHPANDE  
You owe a thank you...

ILA  
What if it goes to Rajeev?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. DESHPANDE

Let it go, yesterday he ate someone else's food and didn't even notice...let him notice today...

ILA

So should I write something else?

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

Keep it short!

Ila pauses for a beat and then - She tucks the folded note between the two pieces of bread.

INT. CANTEEN - CONTINUOUS

The note that is in Saajan's hands now, he is intrigued.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - LATER

The dabba is back in Ila's hands. She opens it, and once again every compartment is polished clean. In the last one she finds - a piece of paper. She unfolds it - A reply. Ila looks at the piece of paper, incredulously, she turns it over and examines both sides to make sure...

ILA

Auntie...auntie..

Mrs. Deshpande's voice comes in from above -

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

What is it?

ILA

I got a reply

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

A reply!? I told you he would get a jolt...and write back...

ILA

Its not Rajeev's handwriting.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

What does it say?

Ila reads from the note -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA

'Dear Ila, the food was very salty today.'

MRS. DESHPANDE

What else does it say?

ILA

Nothing, just- 'Dear Ila, the food was very salty today.'

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

No thank you...no namaste...no nothing?

ILA

Just - 'Dear Ila, the food was very salty today.'

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

Wait a minute...

Mrs. Deshpande trails off.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He doesn't like salt does he!? Lets give him something else tomorrow...

Mrs. Deshpande's basket is lowered by rope. On it - hot chilies.

ILA

Auntie...no...I will tell the dabbawallah that its going to the wrong address and...

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

What do you mean? What does he think? The gall! Not even a thank you!

ILA

Auntie, I don't like all this...

MRS. DESHPANDE

Its not like you know him...

Ila hesitates for a beat as she considers the chilies on the basket.

Mrs. Deshpande shakes the basket, urging her to take the chilies.

INT. FILING AREA - DAY

Saajan searches for some files.

SHAIKH

Good afternoon sir, how are you?

SAAJAN

Good

SHAIKH

I went to your desk sir, didn't find you there, so I came here...

Saajan keeps looking for his files.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

I saw you in the canteen, in the corner table...I wanted to come over and sit with you, but you were reading something so I didn't want to disturb.

No response. Shaikh presses on-

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

What a wonderful aroma from your tiffin box sir...waah! I could taste the food by just the whiff of it...

Saajan offers no opening, Shaikh valiantly tries again.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

Very wonderful aroma sir, you are a lucky man, your wife must be a very good cook.

SAAJAN

My wife is dead.

Saajan goes into his cubicle leaving Shaikh hanging behind, and tongue tied. Shaikh sighs in defeat, he could kick himself.

EXT./INT. BUS - LATER

The evening Sun spreads an orange hue over the sky. overcast. A soft drizzle falls over the city. It is Saajan sits in the c.

He walks past the church and then past its adjoining cemetery.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His pace slows, he glances over the cemetery wall, scanning the gravestones, there are flowers on some of them... He keeps on walking, leaving the cemetery behind.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Saajan looks to his watch. It is a little past noon. He peeks out of his cubicle, down the aisle. The peon approaches - distributing dabbas along the way.

The lunchbox lands on his desk.

Curious, Saajan unzips it and takes in the aroma, the aroma of Ila's food. His neighbor eyes him quizzically.

He gets back to work. But only for a beat or two, intoxicated by the aroma.

Much to the surprise of his Neighbor, Saajan closes his file shut, and turns the calculator off, takes the lunchbox in his hand and takes off.

INT. CANTEEN - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan opens up the dabba, and spreads out the boxes of food. He takes in the aroma. Before he eats, he first checks between the rotis. He finds nothing. He checks under the last roti, again, nothing. Saajan puts the container down, and takes a bite of the food in front of him and chews on it. He coughs violently, and reaches for the water bottle, and gulps some water down.

He goes back to the food, the spices bring tears to his eyes, yet he keeps eating.

INT. ILA'S DOORSTEP - LATER

The doorbell rings, Ila answers it.

DABBAWALLAH

Madam

The dabbawallah hands her the dabba and takes off. Once again it is light, Ila feels the weight of it.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ila stands by the window sill, the empty dabba, polished clean, sits on the counter. She reads Saajan's reply - in neat meticulous hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
 Dear Ila, The salt was fine today,  
 the chili was a bit on the higher  
 side...But I had two bananas after  
 lunch...

EXT. BANANA CART - DAY

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
 ...They helped to extinguish the  
 fire in my mouth,...

Saajan stands by a banana cart munching on a banana, several  
 flies buzz around him, the banana cart is busy with people  
 and flies.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
 ...And I think it will also be good  
 for the motions.

Saajan flicks a buzzing fly away as he eats.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A fly comes in and hovers over Ila's letter. Ila flicks it  
 away and reads on -

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
 There are so many people in the  
 city who eat only a banana or two  
 for lunch...

EXT. BANANA CART - DAY

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
 ...It is cheap and it fills you up.

Saajan looks to the other people eating bananas around him  
 Some are LABORERS, others OFFICEGOERS. He munches on the  
 banana.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ila gapes at Saajan's abrupt letter, she turns it over to  
 make sure there is nothing on the other side.

INT. ILA'S ROOM - NIGHT

The street sounds of Saajan's letter slowly fade away... and  
 we come back to Ila's reality.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Its like Saajan's letter was a brief outing outside of this flat, too brief.

Rajeev snores, Yashvi lies in the middle of Ila and Rajeev. Ila stares up at the rotating ceiling fan, sleepless.

CUT TO:

INT. CANTEEN - DAY

Many old ceiling fans creak in the canteen.

Below - Saajan sits at this usual table. He opens up the lunchbox. And the compartments one by one. He checks between the rotis again, and this time he uncovers a note. Saajan opens the note up and reads -

ILA (V.O.)  
Hello, My husband came home late  
last night...

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S LIVING ROOM - PREVIOUS NIGHT

Ila and Yashvi sit at the dinner table doing homework.

ILA (V.O.)  
...He did not said a single word.

Rajeev changes out of his office clothes. Ila eyes him from the dinner table.

INT. ILA'S ROOM - EARLIER TODAY

Rajeev - in a crisp shirt combs his hair in front of a mirror, grooming himself with great care.

ILA (V.O.)  
...This morning after my husband  
left for work and my daughter for  
school...,I started cooking with  
Mrs. Deshpande...

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - EARLIER TODAY

Ila cooks, adding garlic to golden brown fried onions, chopping vegetables...Mrs. Deshpande's basket is lowered from above, Ila grabs spices from it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (V.O.)

Mrs. Deshpande lives in the flat above us. Her husband has been in a coma for the past fifteen years...It's not exactly a coma.. One morning she found him staring at the ceiling fan. Since then he does just that...stares at the ceiling fan all day long until he falls asleep at night, and then the next morning he opens his eyes and stares at the same fan again. Nobody can get a word out of him, even the doctors have given up.

Ila adds a spice to the food, and stirs it in.

ILA (V.O.)

Mrs. Deshpande never switches the fan off...It is an old model Orient ceiling fan.

As Ila stirs, swirls form on the gravy, like a rotating fan.

ILA (V.O.)

Mrs. Deshpande thinks it sustains him, it keeps him alive.

The gravy boils, bubbles form on its surface and it rises. Ila turns the flame off. And the surface calms...

ILA (V.O.)

Once, when the electricity went, The fan stopped...

INT. CANTEEN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan pauses and looks up, the fan above him has stopped moving. He glances around, all other fans rotate with gusto.

Saajan goes back to reading the letter, intrigued.

ILA (V.O.)

Mr. Deshpande's eye balls disappeared behind his sockets and his heart beat slowed...

Saajan wipes sweat from her brow.

ILA (V.O.)

Luckily the lights came back on...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A whir comes in, Saajan looks up, the fan above him is working again.

He goes back to reading

ILA (V.O.)  
 Since then Mrs. Deshpande has  
 installed a generator...Mr.  
 Deshpande stares at the ceiling  
 fan, my husband stares at his  
 phone...

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - EARLIER TODAY

VARIOUS SHOTS - Ila prepares the dabba as usual, and inserts a note into it, between the two rotis.

ILA (V.O.)  
 ...As though life has no meaning...

Ila mumbles to herself

ILA  
 What do we live for?

BACK TO:

INT. CANTEEN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan reads the note. The weight of Ila's question over the buzz of the canteen.

Saajan puts the note down and takes a bite of Ila's food, it is ecstasy. He savors it as he munches on it thoughtfully.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Ila waits by the window sill, she looks as the dabbawallah cycles in and parks his bicycle.

INT. ILA'S DOORSTEP - MOMENTS LATER

Ila opens the door before the Dabbawallah can ring the bell. He pauses, surprised, and hands her the lunchbox.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Ila stands by the window sill, the empty dabba, polished clean, sits on the counter. She reads Saajan's reply -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
Dear Ila, Your husband sounds like  
a very busy man. Life is very busy  
these days...

INT. STREET - LATER

Saajan walks to the station along with the rest of the evening commute down the assembly line that is Mumbai, his voiceover continues

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
There are too many people, and  
everyone wants what the other  
has...

He walks by large hoardings advertising - LOW INTEREST HOME LOANS, SPECIAL OFFERS ON ELECTRONICS...

INT. TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan stands in the packed local.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
Years ago, you could find a place  
to sit in the train every now and  
then, but these days...no chance.  
Its always packed.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
If Mr. Deshpande wakes up, he will  
see the difference and probably go  
back to his Orient ceiling fan...

An OLD MAN, perhaps Mr. Deshpande, looks away from the camera as though he is dying to get home and get back to his Orient ceiling fan.

Camera pans to Saajan, it is a standing room only crowd in this bus, Saajan holds the handlebar and stands along with the commute.

SAAJAN  
When my wife died, she got a  
horizontal burial plot. I tried to  
buy a burial plot for myself the  
other day, and what they offered me  
was a vertical one.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN (CONT'D)

I have spent my whole life standing  
in trains, and buses, now I will  
have to stand even when I am dead.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ila reads the letter standing by the window sill.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

Why don't you have another child?  
Sometimes having a child can help a  
marriage...

The letter is not signed. Ila looks out the window, the note  
in her hand.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Saajan walks the streets of Bandra, he walks past the church.  
But instead of walking past the cemetery, this time he  
enters.

INT. CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan walks past rows of graves. We stand back and watch  
from far - as Saajan goes towards the back of the cemetery.  
He stops at a grave that sits on an overgrown patch of grass,  
not visited in a while, and looks at the grave stone.

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rajeev puts his suitcase on to the bed and takes his shoes  
off.

ILA

I have left Yashvi at her friend's  
place today...she wanted to spend  
the night.

RAJEEV

Hmmm...good.

Ila is in a salwar kameez that is a little tight.

ILA

You got late in the office today?

RAJEEV

Where else?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA  
How is this?

She displays her outfit out to him. Rajeev looks her over in a matter of factly way

RAJEEV  
Its nice...

ILA  
You remember it? I wore it at the honeymoon...have not worn it since Yashvi...still fits, doesn't it?

Rajeev nods in agreement, it is a little too tight.

ILA (CONT'D)  
I thought if you came early today, we could go out somewhere...

RAJEEV  
I was in the office...they are closing the books for the financial year, there is a lot of work...

ILA  
Three months ago was also the financial year end...no?

Rajeev sighs, as he looks through his closet.

RAJEEV  
How can the financial year end twice in the same year? That was the quarter end.

ILA  
I was thinking today...when we came back from the honeymoon we had no idea Yashvi was on the way, for two months we didn't know...

She laughs to herself as she feels her womb, she is in a different time. A beat.

ILA (CONT'D)  
You didn't make much money when Yashvi was born, and then she brought us luck...didn't she?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAJEEV

(laughs-)

These days things are so expensive,  
luck is not enough. And why do you  
keep making me cauliflower for  
lunch...did you buy it in bulk?

ILA

Rajeev, what if Yashvi had a  
sibling?...

RAJEEV

You had a sibling, what happened...

Rajeev catches himself mid-sentence. Ila backs off,  
wounded. Rajeev tries to make up

RAJEEV (CONT'D)

Don't make cauliflower  
everyday...it gives me gas.

Rajeev walks into the bathroom, The shower comes on. Ila  
remains, with his dirty clothes.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAAJAN'S BALCONY - NIGHT

Saajan stands on his balcony. He looks across, the  
D'Souza's window is closed shut. He cannot see much through  
the tinted window panes, just hear music and the muffled  
laughter of the family. He goes back to smoking his  
cigarette.

The laughter comes in again, Saajan kills the cigarette and  
goes into the house.

INT. SAAJAN'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan sits alone at his dinner table and eats, as he reads  
an old yellowed paperback. The house is so silent, Saajan  
can hear himself munching. He stops and swallows the food  
down, as he turns the page.

INT/EXT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Another day, another commute. Saajan stands on the bus to  
Bandra station, holding on to a bar. Around him - the morning  
commute - officegoers, students. The bus is hopelessly stuck  
in the morning traffic. Horns blare everywhere. Saajan looks  
to his watch, it is - 8:45. He wades through the crowded bus  
and gets off.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Saajan walks in a hurry, taking long strides past the stalled traffic.

INT. AUTORICKSHAW - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan's autorickshaw, stalled in the traffic.

AUTO RICKSHAW DRIVER  
 Bus, rickshaw, aeroplane,  
 everything gets stuck in the  
 Mumbai traffic sahib...

Saajan peeks ahead impatiently.

AUTO RICKSHAW DRIVER (CONT'D)  
 This road is blocked from the  
 morning...A woman jumped off with  
 her little girl from that highrise  
 building ahead...

Saajan freezes, instinctively

SAAJAN  
 What was her name?  
 The woman's name...

AUTO RICKSHAW DRIVER  
 What do I know sahib? I am not  
 related to her.

The driver is more than eager to share gossip. Saajan peeks out of the rickshaw, he sees only traffic

AUTO RICKSHAW DRIVER (CONT'D)  
 She must have some family  
 problems...Do you know someone in  
 that building?

Saajan shakes his head, no. They remain stuck in traffic for a beat or two, Saajan tries to peer ahead, sees only traffic.

An ambulance siren draws closer, and an ambulance zips past them going in the opposite direction.

Saajan peeks out from the other side of the rickshaw. The ambulance draws away, siren blaring, Saajan looks on.

The wait is even more excruciating now.



INT. OFFICE CUBICLE - LATER

Saajan sits in his cubicle, working. He peers down the aisle between the desks every now and then, checks his watch. Finally, he spots the Peon distributing dabbas. He waits nervously for the Peon to come into his cubicle. THUMPS as lunchboxes land on various tables. This is taking awhile.

THUMP. The Peon deposits a dabba on his desk and moves on. Saajan waits for a beat till the peon is out of earshot, he then grabs the dabba, and quickly unfastens it. He unzips the case and breathes in. The aroma of Ila's food hits him and he lets out an AUDIBLE sigh of relief.

INT. CANTEEN - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan sits alone at his usual table, his back to the lunch crowd. He reads from a piece of paper.

ILA (V.O.)  
Hello, this morning I switched the radio on after my husband left for work and my daughter left for school.

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S ROOM - LAST NIGHT

Ila is alone in her room, going through a trunk. She flips through old photographs of a young man- her brother.

ILA (V.O.)  
When my brother died...everyone said he should have had courage...so what if he failed in his exams...he should have had courage...What must have gone through that woman's mind...

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ila takes her bangles, chain and earring off...

ILA (V.O.)  
She must have taken all her jewelry off...bangles, earrings, chain...

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Ila walks up towards the roof hand in hand with Yashvi.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (V.O.)  
It must have been so hard to go up  
to the roof with her daughter...

YASHVI  
Mummy, where are we going?

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Ila ties the blindfold over Yashvi's eyes. Her hands tremble as she secures the blindfold with a second knot.

The moon shines down on them, silence, except for the wind. Ila carries Yashvi to the ledge, the wall that separates the small terrace from the drop down to the street below.

She looks over the ledge - five stories down...the empty street.

ILA (V.O.)  
Doesn't it take courage to jump  
from tall buildings?

SHAIKH (O.S.)  
Sir...sir...

BACK TO:

INT. CANTEEN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan looks up, Shaikh stands in front of him.

SAAJAN  
I am busy... actually.

SHAIKH  
When do we start the training sir?

SAAJAN  
Its lunchtime, come later

Saajan goes back to his letter. Shaikh still hovers over him.

SHAIKH  
They told me not to expect anything  
from you.

Saajan looks to Shaikh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

Everyone did...they told me you are a bitter old man, a selfish person...that you won't teach me nothing.

A beat as the two men glare at each other. Saajan, a man of a few words in normal circumstances, has no words now.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

My name is Aslam Shaikh, and I am an orphan...I gave myself this name. I have taught myself everything I know.

Shaikh's eyes well up as he talks, his voice cracks with emotion.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

And I can teach myself this job too, I don't need you to teach me anything...Whether you teach me or not, I will learn it. I am here to tell you that.

A long beat, as Saajan reels from the outburst. Shaikh walks away.

SAAJAN

Listen...

Saajan calls out from behind, Shaikh pauses tentatively and turns.

SAAJAN (CONT'D)

Go to my cubicle...on the table are the files from the Ahemdabad sector ...calculate the claim amount, prepare the pay orders, and send them to Accounts...

Shaikh breaks into a smile.

SHAIKH

Yes sir, why not sir, thank you sir...

SAAJAN

Ok

SHAIKH

Right away sir...I will finish it and be back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAAJAN

No...you don't come back...go and work.

SHAIKH

Right away sir...

Shaikh leaves with a sense of purpose. Saajan goes back to the letter.

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ila reads Saajan's letter.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

Dear Ila, Please don't think like that...Things are never as bad as they seem. One day I was on the train on my way to work...

And we see just that-

INT. TRAIN - ONE DAY

Saajan in the jam-packed morning local. the door, sandwiched by the crowd. He stands close to He is weirded out by a strange sensation below.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

...And then suddenly I felt something. Someone touching me...down...down there you know...

He scans the people around him - An OLD WOMAN- toothless, smiles at him.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

And then I felt it again...

The Toothless Old Woman smiles at him again.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

And again and again...Mahim came and went, then Matunga, Dadar...Mahalaxmi, Bombay Central...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The train stops and starts, the Old Woman remains smiling at Saajan each time he glances in her direction. He is trapped.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
 ...Then, I finally mustered up the  
 courage to look down...

Saajan looks down and much to his surprise he sees - a file. The Man in front of him holds a file wedged between his legs, so his hands are free to hold the handlebars. The file has been hitting up against Saajan's crotch this whole time.

We stay with Saajan and his realization for a beat. Despite himself, he smiles at the Old Woman, she smiles back - her toothless smile.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ila laughs as she reads the letter, despite herself. She folds the note.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
 Are you laughing?

ILA  
 Yes auntie...I remembered a joke...

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
 Tell me the joke...will you?

Ila thinks fast.

ILA  
 I forgot.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
 You forgot!? Soak five almonds  
 everything and eat them in the  
 morning...its a tonic for memory!

ILA  
 I will, right away auntie...

EXT. CIGARETTE STALL - LATER

Saajan buys cigarettes, waits for his change.

SHAIKH (O.S.)  
 SIR! SIR!

Shaikh comes in from nowhere.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
To the station sir?

Saajan nods.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
I get off at Bombay Central...I  
live in Dongri...And you sir?

SAAJAN  
Bandra

They stand alongside in silence for a couple of beats.

SHAIKH  
Sir, please don't mind...one of the  
office girls says...she saw you  
kick a cat out of your way while  
walking...

Shaikh hesitates

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
...She said it came under a bus but  
you kept on walking...?

Silence from Saajan, Shaikh in deep regret over his question.

SAAJAN  
Actually, it was a blind man. He  
asked me for directions...I pushed  
him and he came under the bus...

Shaikh looks at him, incredulous.

SAAJAN (CONT'D)  
So you better be careful.

Saajan walks off.

SHAIKH  
Give me a cigarette...

Shaikh quickly buys Saajan's brand and runs to catch up with him.

They walk on together.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
You were joking,...right?

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan and Shaikh have found seats in the crowded local. They sit side by side as the train heads north.

SHAIKH

How long have you lived in Bandra sir?

SAAJAN

The same place...always.

Shaikh opens up his brief case on his lap. Inside- along with office files, there are vegetables- onions, potatoes, carrots, coriander, and a knife. Shaikh proceeds to chop onions as he talks.

SHAIKH

I grew up in Dongri, we just got our house, Meherunissa and I...until last year I was in Saudi, then on one of my trips back I met Meherunissa and just stayed.

Saajan eyes Shaikh expertly chopping onions into the suitcase. Shaikh notices his surprise.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

(laughs-)

Meherunissa works very far sir, in Mulund. By the time she's back, its very late, so I chop the vegetables in the train and cook when I reach home. Everything is ready by the time she comes...She doesn't know how to cook anyway sir.

Shaikh proceeds to chop the potatoes.

SAAJAN

Where did you learn how to chop vegetables like that?

SHAIKH

I used to work in a restaurant in Saudi sir, do the accounts, cook, clean, everything...all in one.

Shaikh smiles. He keeps chopping fast.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

It used to be long days, accounts  
in the morning, then in the kitchen  
all day, and cleaning at night.  
Now, I have my evening free so I  
cook and wait for Meherunissa,  
sometimes we go for a walk. What do  
you do in the evenings sir?

Saajan contemplates the question for a beat and then -

SAAJAN

I watch TV...sometimes...

Shaikh does a double take, he takes in the emptiness of  
Saajan's evenings...

SHAIKH

Why don't you come over to our  
place for dinner?

Saajan smiles, uncomfortable, not used to getting an  
invitation and to responding to one.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

Today I am making pasanda sir...

SAAJAN

Pasanda what's that...

SHAIKH

Its a mutton dish sir, we make it  
with fine chopped pieces...I am a  
specialist in it...

Saajan smiles

SAAJAN

I will come sometime...

SHAIKH

Sir, please come today sir...

SAAJAN

Today as in now?

SHAIKH

(insists-)  
Yes sir, you must...

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

SAAJAN

No, not today, I have some important work, I'll come some other time...

SHAIKH

Next time for sure sir?

SAAJAN

Yes...yes...

The train comes to a stop at a station.

SHAIKH

See you tomorrow sir...

Shaikh closes his suitcase of vegetables shut, and takes off. Saajan looks on. SOMEONE ELSE takes Shaikh's spit instantly. The train moves again, Saajan sits there, reflecting on his encounter.

INT. SAAJAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Saajan rummages through a stack of side drawers - Old show pieces, rusted metal tins, old newspapers. And then he finds what he is looking for - beneath all the old junk, a bunch of old video cassettes, some cracked.

He wipes the dust off of them and reads the labels. Saajan looks over an old VCR, the kind where the tape slot pops up, he inserts a tape and watches it from the couch.

The laughter track plays as an old sitcom begins.

INT. CANTEEN - DAY

Saajan sits alone at his usual table and unfolds Ila's note, he eats as he reads it.

ILA (V.O.)

Hello, last night my husband came back from the office late. Then he got a call and had to go back to the office...

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S ROOM - LAST NIGHT

Ila is alone in her room, going through a trunk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (V.O.)

After Yashvi fell asleep, I was alone so I started going through my old things...Things that I had brought with me when I got married...

Ila finds an old lined note book

ILA (V.O.)

I found my mother's old recipe book, it has all my grandmother's recipes in it, written in her own hand...

Ila leafs through the book.

ILA (V.O.)

I looked through it to see what I should cook today...I found this recipe...

BACK TO:

INT. CANTEEN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan reads the letter.

ILA (V.O.)

My grandmother's special spring apple subzi, they are in season these days. I think you will like it.

Saajan takes a bite, it is ecstasy.

SHAIKH

Sir...

Instinctively, Saajan tucks Ila's note away.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

May I join you?

Saajan nods. Shaikh produces two bananas from inside a plastic bag. Saajan looks at his meager lunch.

SAAJAN

Here, try some.

He pushes Ila's subzi forward. Shaikh takes a bite.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH  
Its great sir!

He chews slowly, concentrating.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
Who cooks your food sir?

SAAJAN  
A restaurant near my house...

SHAIKH  
Sir, book a lunchbox for me as well...

SAAJAN  
I can't, its going to shut down soon.

SHAIKH  
Such great food, and its going to shut down!?

Saajan ponders for a beat.

SAAJAN  
...There is no value for talent in this country.

SHAIKH  
Yes sir, you are absolutely right!

He proceeds to take one more bite, and then another, almost gorging the food down.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ila reads Saajan's letter.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
Dear Ila, the spring apple subzi was very good. Even better than my favorite - eggplants... Yesterday, even I found something from many years ago...I found old TV shows that my wife used to record...you must have been a child when they played on TV or not even born yet...

Ila, offended at being called a child.

CUT TO:

INT. SAAJAN'S HOUSE - LAST NIGHT

Saajan rummages through the old things in a drawer. Beneath everything else he uncovers - dusty video cassettes. He wipes the dust off, and tries to read the yellowed labels on them.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
My wife used to love them...

The yellowed labels in neat hand read - 'Humlog', 'Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi', 'Nukad'...There are many tapes.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
She would watch them again and again. It used to make me very annoyed... Especially on Sundays...

INT. SAAJAN'S LIVING ROOM - LAST NIGHT

Saajan stands outside the video shop, smoking.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I never watched them with her. But yesterday...I don't know why, I wanted to see them.

Saajan watches an episode of 'Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi', an old TV show.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I watched for hours...

He sits on the couch and gazes intently, impassive, the laughter track plays after each joke.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I went through them show by show, episode by episode...

Day breaks...

INT. SAAJAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The morning light floods the room.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
And then finally after staying up all night...I realized what it was that I was looking for...

A show still plays on the TV, but Saajan is not on his couch anymore. The room is empty, smoke comes in through the iron bars.

EXT. SAAJAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Saajan is outside, looking at the TV through the iron bars of the window. Saajan puffs on his cigarette as he watches his TV inside, one of the 80s shows still playing on it.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

Every Sunday when she watched the shows, I was outside, repairing my bicycle, or just smoking...and I'd glance through the window every now and then...just for a second...

Saajan's POV.-Of the TV playing 'Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi'

SAAJAN (V.O.)

...I would see her reflection on the TV screen, laughing...laughing at the same jokes over and over...each time as if she was hearing it for the very first time...I wish... I had kept on looking back then...

Saajan takes a deep drag from his cigarette and keeps on watching the TV from outside for several beats.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ila finishes reading Saajan's note. She folds it, and looks out the window, contemplating what she just read.

INT. CANTEEN - NEXT DAY

Saajan opens up the dabba. Out of nowhere, Shaikh joins him, seating himself across the table.

SHAIKH

Hello sir, I sent all those pay orders to accounts...

He is now wearing a more sober shirt like Saajan's, this is not lost on Saajan.

SAAJAN

OK

Shaikh removes fruits from a plastic bag.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH

Today sir, I have got you bananas  
and apple.

Shaikh offers him an apple. Saajan knows what Shaikh wants-

SAAJAN

Here, have some...

He pushes Ila's food forward.

SHAIKH

No no sir, you eat.

SAAJAN

It is too much for me, have some...

Shaikh doesn't need much convincing. He happily goes for a  
roti, and uncovers - Ila's note, tucked between the two  
rotis.

Saajan eyes the note, embarrassed.

SAAJAN (CONT'D)

What is this?

SHAIKH

Sir... seems to be a paper..

Saajan takes it in his hands and examines it as though it was  
a foreign object he has never seen, then he tucks the note in  
his pocket and eats as though nothing happened. Shaikh eyes  
him suspiciously.

The WATERBOY passes, just in time

SAAJAN

Can I have some water please...?

As the Waterboy pours the water-

SAAJAN (CONT'D)

How the food?

SHAIKH

I love this...

Saajan grabs a second roti and starts eating as if nothing  
happened.

INT. SAAJAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Saajan reads Ila's note from the safety of his desk, as though he were reading a comic book in class.

ILA (V.O.)

Hello, my mother loves the old TV shows. She still talks about them sometimes...I wanted to say...you should not smoke. My father has lung cancer...They say you lose five minutes for every cigarette you smoke. When the pain gets very bad, my father says he should have smoked thousands more so he would not have to go through these years. I hope you don't mind me saying this...

Saajan folds Ila's note, and tucks it under a file in the corner. Music begins and carries over to...

EXT. SAAJAN'S BALCONY - NIGHT

Saajan stands on his balcony holding an imaginary cigarette in his hand, and taking deep drags from it and blows the imaginary smoke in the air.

Then he pauses, and puts his hands behind his back. He inhales deeply, taking in the evening air, then he exhales. He does it again, and again, the music mounts as Saajan takes fresh air into his lungs.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Ila washes the eggplants in the sink.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

Ila...oh Ila...

Ila turns the tap off.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Did you get my carrots?

ILA

Yes auntie

Ila grabs the bag of carrots as Mrs. Deshpande's basket is lowered to her window. She places the carrots in the basket and takes the money that Mrs. Deshpande has placed on it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (CONT'D)

Here there are. They were for just  
ten rupees...

As the basket is pulled up-

MRS. DESHPANDE

What else did you get?

Ila glances at the eggplants she is washing.

ILA

Nothing else auntie.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Ila sorts through the laundry bucket - her's, Yashvi's and Rajeev's clothes. Turning the clothes inside out, sorting the colors from the whites.

She picks up one Rajeev's work shirts and turns it inside out. She is about to place it in the pile it belongs, but she hesitates and then she sniffs at it, and then again, just to be sure. She pulls out another one of Rajeev's shirts from the laundry and sniffs at it. A realization dawns.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI - DAY

Ila is in a taxi with Yashvi, still in her school uniform. Ila looks out at the city flashing by, she is still visibly upset, this is not lost on Yashvi.

EXT. DILAPIDATED BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

The taxi stops outside an old building. CHILDREN play cricket in the street.

Ila and Yashvi exit the taxi. We see them go up the stairwell-exposed by the broken plaster, as the taxi pulls away.

EXT. ILA'S PARENTS FLAT - MOMENTS LATER

ILA'S MOTHER, 60s, slim, in a simple sari opens the door.

A house that has seen better days, everything is now faded and falling apart. The wall paper covers up the leakage on the walls, but only barely. Ila and her Mother sit alongside on the frayed sofa.

At their feet - Yashvi sits and plays with one of Ila's old dolls.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

ILA'S MOTHER

(in hushed tones-)

The new medicine is good for the pain but it is ruining his liver...he feels groggy and sleeps most of the day but at least he doesn't moan in pain anymore. The doctor has said that he has to be very regular with this, if he stops...very soon life support will be the only option...I only give him soft foods now...

ILA

(interrupts-)

Do you need some money?

ILA'S MOTHER

No, we are fine.

ILA

How much will the medicine cost?

ILA'S MOTHER

We are fine beta, don't need any money, I have...some...

ILA

How will you buy the medicine?

ILA'S MOTHER

If my son was still alive, I would have to ask no one for money...

ILA

I'll...ask Rajeev...

ILA'S MOTHER

No beta...don't...we are the girl's side...does it look nice? Asking for money all the time...

Ila sees her point, she is about to reveal her own predicament, when-

ILA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

OK, if you insist, but don't tell your father this...That should cover the cost of the medicine for this month...Next month, something will turn up...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She indicates at the room, where Ila's father is. Ila watches her father from down the hall-

Inside a bedroom, lies an OLD MAN with a drip over his bed, this is ILA'S FATHER, his breathing labored ...

ILA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Go and see him...I will wake him up.

ILA  
No ma, we should get back home...

At their feet, Yashvi makes the old doll mimic her grandfather's position on the bed.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ila stands at the window looking at the street below.

Yashvi plays a game of pretend blind man's bluff with the old doll, she has tied a blindfold over the doll's eyes.

Ila spots the dabbawallah slowing down, and getting off of his bicycle. He makes his way up with Ila's dabba.

The doorbell rings, Ila goes to the door. Yashvi's game continues, as Ila retrieves the Dabba from the dabbawallah.

Ila comes back with the empty dabba, and sits on the dining table. She opens up Saajan's note. Close on Ila as she reads the note-

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
Dear Ila, you won't believe what happened to me on the way to work yesterday...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - YESTERDAY EVENING

Saajan and Shaikh walk towards the station.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
In the evening as I was walking to the station with Shaikh...Shaikh and I, we work together...

They walk past the Street Artist as he deftly draws up the busy scene in front of him. Saajan pauses to look at his work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I stopped to look at a painter's  
works. All his paintings are  
exactly the same...

Saajan looks - Several rows of paintings hang - they are  
exactly the same scene - the busy traffic and the hordes of  
people in front of them...

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
But when I looked close, real  
close...

Saajan peers at the paintings closely, as his eyes scan over  
the paintings, he begins to see...

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I saw that they were different.  
Each slightly different from the  
other, a different car here, a  
different man day dreaming on the  
bus there...a stray dog gallantly  
crossing the street...whatever  
caught the painter's fancy on that  
day...

Saajan stops scanning the paintings and picks one up.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
In one of them, I even saw  
myself...At least I think it is me.

Saajan looks closely at the painting he just picked up - it  
could be him.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - LATER

MOS\_ - Saajan stands in the crowded compartment with Shaikh,  
Shaikh talks, a mile a minute, Saajan holds the painting,  
wrapped in newspaper, close to his chest.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
And then when I reached my  
station...

INT. AUTORICKSHAW - CONTINUOUS

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I treated myself to an  
autorickshaw.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan sits in the rickshaw as it zips in and out of streets, he looks up at tall buildings, rows of shops.

The painting still tucked under his arm.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

The old houses of boys I used to play with when I was a child are gone now...my old school too...

He looks at new mall as they ride past.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

But some things are still the same...the old post office is still there...and the hospital where I was born, and where my parents died...and my wife...

Saajan's POV. The hospital flashes past... They ride through the streets as Saajan looks on...

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

We are back with Ila as she reads the letter.

SAAJAN (V.O.)

Life is strange...I think we forget things if we have no one to tell them to...

CUT TO:

INT. AUTORICKSHAW - YESTERDAY

AUTO RICKSHAW DRIVER

Sir, did you say something?

Saajan sits in the autorickshaw as it navigates the narrow streets to his home.

SAAJAN

What?

AUTO RICKSHAW DRIVER

Did you just say something?

SAAJAN

No...

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ila folds the letter. She looks at Yashvi playing blind man's bluff with the doll still.

ILA  
Don't...don't cover her eyes like that...

YASHVI  
But I am playing blind man's bluff...

ILA  
The dolly must be tired of shutting her eyes so tight...

Yashvi ponders, this makes sense to her.

ILA (CONT'D)  
Should I tell you what we used to play?

Yashvi smiles

YASHVI  
What?

Ila removes the blindfold from the doll and contemplates it

ILA  
We used to play house with it... I used to play the papa, and your uncle used to play the mummy, my wife...

Ila and Yashvi smile at the memory...

INT. CANTEEN - DAY

Saajan sits on his regular table in the canteen. He opens up the dabba. In the first compartment he finds - eggplant! He smiles. He opens up the other compartment, and retrieves Ila's note from between the two rotis. He looks around to make sure Shaikh is not approaching, and then unfolds it.

ILA (V.O.)  
Hello, you are right, life is strange. I think my husband is seeing another woman.

Saajan pauses

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (V.O.)

At first I thought I should confront him, but then I realized I don't have the courage. I also found out that I don't have the courage to leave him, because I have nowhere to go...That is not completely true because I do have one place to go...

Saajan leans forward, uncomfortable.

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ila and Yashvi sit in bed, the old doll lies in front of them. They are drawing - a scenery in Yashvi's drawing book - snowcapped mountains, endless meadows, animals, singing birds...

ILA (V.O.)

My daughter learnt in school the other day, that in Bhutan everyone is happy, they don't measure themselves in money, but with something called Gross National Happiness. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had that here?

BACK TO:

INT. CANTEEN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan munches on the eggplant. He is distracted as he eats. The food he usually gorges down is almost untouched today. And then he puts the roti down and stops eating. He just sits there, the lunch crowd buzzes around him.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Ila's Lunchbox on a wood tray by the door of the luggage compartment, its strap dances to the wind and to the chant of the dabbawallahs, as they sing to their deity...

Prelap- doorbell

INT. ILA'S DOORSTEP - LATER

Ila answers the door. The dabbawallah hands her the lunchbox.

DABBAWALLAH

Madam...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ila takes it in her hands. She feels how heavy it is. The dabbawallah takes off.

INT. ILA'S LIVING - MOMENTS LATER

Ila unfolds Saajan's note and reads it. Ila gapes at it, surprised. She reads the note over again.

INSERT NOTE - 'What if I come to Bhutan with you?'

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - LATER

Saajan gazes outside the window absentmindedly as he and Shaikh ride the train home together. Shaikh peers at him.

SHAIKH

You look very distracted today  
sir...Is everything OK?

SAAJAN

Shaikh...Have you been to Bhutan?

SHAIKH

Bhutan? I have only been to Saudi  
sie...

SAAJAN

I have been thinking...instead of  
Nasik, maybe I should go retire in  
Bhutan...

SHAIKH

(smiles)

I have only been to Saudi. But  
Bhutan might be good...our one  
rupee is equal to five there...

A beat

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

And my mother always says -...  
sometimes the wrong train can take  
you to the right station.

Saajan looks at him for a beat, thoughtful

SAAJAN

Your mother? You told me you were  
an orphan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH

I am sir, but when I say -'my mother always says...' people take it more seriously... And it feels good...

Saajan smiles, he looks out the window again.

INT. SAAJAN'S BALCONY - NIGHT

Saajan sits on an old rocking chair tunes an ancient radio. A lot of intermittent static, he tunes past several stations.

RADIO

You are listening to radio Bhutan...

More static A Bhutanese song comes in. Saajan leans back and listens, moving his foot to the beat of the music.

INT. CANTEEN - DAY

The Bhutanese song continues over- Saajan reading Ila's note.

ILA (V.O.)

Hello, How can you come with me to Bhutan? I don't even know your name.

Saajan smiles, almost blushes.

SHAIKH

How are you sir?

Music ends.

Saajan tucks the note in the pocket of his shirt as Shaikh seats himself across.

Saajan pushes the food forward. Shaikh takes in the aroma.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

You are glowing today sir...You look ten years younger, touch wood.

Shaikh munches on the food, enjoying each morsel.

SAAJAN

Your mother always says...sometimes the wrong train can get you to the right station?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

SHAIKH

My mother is always right sir.

Wide on - they eat together in the crowded canteen.

SAAJAN

How is the food?

SHAIKH

I love this.

INT. ILA'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Ila unfolds Saajan's note, and reads it. She suppresses a smile.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ila goes over to the kitchen window, clutching Saajan's note in hand.

She calls out the kitchen window.

ILA

Auntie...

A beat. Mrs. Deshpande's voice comes in from above

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)

What?

ILA

Would you have a tape?  
Of that movie...Saajan...

MRS. DESHPANDE

Maybe...Why?

ILA

Just...I remembered the songs this  
morning...they were good...no?

MRS. DESHPANDE

They are OK...just average...

Ila hesitates for a beat

ILA

Can you play that tape for me now?

MRS. DESHPANDE

One second...wait...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ila waits. After a few beats, a song comes in...

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

A nasal voice sings -

TAPE

My heart is so crazy, it has the  
audacity to love you...oh my  
Saajan...Saajan...Saajan...

Ila makes chai and hums along.

TAPE (CONT'D)

..Oh my Saajan...Saajan...Saajan...

INT. TRAIN - LATER

BEGGAR

...Saajan...Saajan...oh my  
Saajan!...

TWO BEGGAR CHILDREN, one plays the harmonium, the other  
sings. Saajan is by the door in the crowded train.

BEGGAR (CONT'D)

My heart is so crazy, it has the  
audacity to love you...but it is  
scared to say so...

Saajan leans out of the train, and feels the breeze going  
through his hair, as the beggar children sing, and Shaikh  
looks on - amused.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The song continues from Mrs. Deshpande's tape. Ila composes a  
letter sitting on the dining table, her back to us.

INT. CANTEEN - DAY

The crowded canteen. Saajan opens up the dabba, he looks  
around to make sure Shaikh will not pop by, and then he  
unfolds Ila's note and reads.

ILA (V.O.)

Hello, Yesterday, Mrs. Deshpande  
played this tape...of the movie  
'Saajan'. A strange coincidence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan smiles.

ILA (V.O.)

Mrs. Deshpande has every Hindi movie audio tape, she doesn't have a CD player...or an Mp3 player. She is keeping the audio cassette industry alive all by herself.

The next line is scratched off several times over. Saajan looks closely trying to read. But he cannot. He reads on-

ILA (V.O.)

You must be trying to figure out what I scratched off...

Saajan nods

ILA (V.O.)

Well, I don't know...this is very strange. Us. Like this. I can't tell you things, I mean there is so much I can tell you, because its easy to write. But the thing that I scratched off, I can only tell you in person...

Saajan gapes at the note.

ILA (V.O.)

I think we should meet. Do you know Kullad café in Matunga? I heard they have very good kheema pao...My favorite...

Saajan laughs

ILA (V.O.)

Should we meet there? At one tomorrow?

Saajan checks his watch in anticipation.

PEON (O.S.)

Saajan sir...

The Peon stands over him, Saajan has no idea for how long he has been here. He quickly tucks the note in his pocket.

SAAJAN

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PEON

The boss has called you.

SAAJAN

I will come after lunch

The Peon lingers on-

PEON

It is urgent.

SAAJAN

I will be there in a minute...

Saajan sits there and contemplates whether he should eat before he sees the boss or not.

CUT TO:

INT. BOSS'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Saajan enters. Shaikh is already there, downcast. Saajan looks at him, something is terribly wrong. Mr. Shroff is menacing behind his desk. They are silent for a beat as Mr. Shroff examines a file.

MR. SHROFF

Fernandes, have you seen these files of the Ahmedabad sector?

He tosses the files across the desk. Saajan picks one up.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

I had a meeting with the accounts department today. The most embarrassing meeting of my life!!

Saajan flips through the file.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

They said, its like our Claims department does not exist! How could we not find such an obvious mistake in the accounts!?

Mr. Shroff's voice trails off in anger.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

Mr. Shaikh's initials are all over the place. And to think I was going to have this man replace you!?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan looks to Shaikh, he could break down crying at any moment.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)

I need you to review this, stay all night if you must, fix it. And as for you Mr. Shaikh, get out of my sight, your incompetence...

SAAJAN

It is my mistake sir.

Mr. Shroff is taken aback, and so is Shaikh.

SAAJAN (CONT'D)

I reviewed this, I asked Shaikh to initial because we were working together. But it's my mistake.

MR. SHROFF

Fernandes, you don't have to defend him.

SAAJAN

I am not defending him sir.

Mr. Shroff is still not buying it, he looks at Shaikh.

MR. SHROFF

Thirty five years of service and you have not made one single error...

Saajan stands his ground.

SAAJAN

Sir, you know I would not defend anyone.

A beat, Mr. Shroff relents-

MR. SHROFF

OK Fernandes, I will handle the accounts department.

Shaikh, still reeling from the close call, nods.

SHAIKH

Its OK sir, no problem.

As they leave-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MR. SHROFF

And one more thing...Why do these files smell of vegetables - onions, potatoes...even garlic...

Instinctively, both shrug. Shaikh looks away, avoiding Saajan's eyes, he wipes the files with his sleeve.

Saajan shrugs, feigning cluelessness, as they leave the office.

INT. CANTEEN - LATER

Saajan works in the canteen, empty now, fixing the accounts. A PEON mops in the background. Shaikh enters, tentative, and seats himself across from Saajan.

SHAIKH

Thank you sir, you saved my life sir...

Saajan stops, angry

SAAJAN

Don't ever cut vegetables over the office files.

SHAIKH

OK sir, I will put a plastic bag over the files and cut...

Saajan glares at him

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

OK sir, no vegetables.

Saajan lowers his voice

SAAJAN

And these are not the accounts of an udipi restaurant in Saudi, these are government records! If you cannot do this, leave!

SHAIKH

(insists-)

Sorry sir. I won't leave. You will teach me...?

Saajan glares at him for a few beats.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN

Did your mother also tell you to  
get a real job with fake degrees

Shaikh looks away, guilty as charged.

SHAIKH

My mother must have got confused...

SAAJAN

What kind of a person are you Mr.  
Shaikh!?

SHAIKH

Why don't you come over for dinner  
sir?

Saajan cannot believe him, he looks at Shaikh, he should be  
angry but he likes this guy.

SAAJAN

Unbelievable Mr. Shaikh,  
unbelievable...

SHAIKH

Sir, you are coming for dinner,  
right?

INT. SHAIKH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A one room dwelling, the kitchen to the side, in the corner  
of the room. And yet it looks cozy, like a home. Saajan and  
Shaikh, and Shaikh's wife- MEHERUNISSA, 20s, pretty. They sit  
around the floor and eat.

SHAIKH

Have more chicken sir...

SAAJAN

Its very good, everything is  
great...

SHAIKH

Its my own recipe sir, different  
each time...

MEHERUNISSA

My father warned me...don't marry  
this man, he will make you cook,  
tie you to the stove...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH

He is a very dangerous man sir, her father, he hasn't smiled since the nineteen eighty three world cup. He is a sour face like Prithviraj Kapur from Mughle-Azam...

They laugh.

MEHERUNISSA

What does your wife do sir?

SHAIKH

I am sorry sir, she doesn't know.

SAAJAN

Its OK Shaikh.  
(to Meherunissa-)  
My wife is dead.

MEHERUNISSA

I am sorry.

They go back to eating, an uncomfortable silence hangs over them.

SAAJAN

But I have a girlfriend.

MEHERUNISSA

You!?!...

SAAJAN

Yes...

An awkward beat.

MEHERUNISSA

What is her name?

Saajan feels strange saying this, he takes his time as he munches on his food.

SAAJAN

Ila.

SHAIKH

I knew it sir! The dabba, the notes, Bhutan...

Its like the air is back in the room. Saajan looks at both of them sitting in front of him.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

SAAJAN

When did you both get married?

SHAIKH

The thing about marriage sir is that sometimes it feels like 35 years, sometimes 25, sometimes 10 and at time it feels like yesterday...

MEHERUNISSA

Why don't you have some more sir?

Shaikh piles food on to his plate, against Saajan's resistance

SHAIKH

Its my recipe sir...

SAAJAN

I will, I will

SHAIKH

You are not eating at all...

CUT TO:

EXT. BALCONY - LATER

Saajan and Shaikh stand in the common balcony outside, and eat kheer in silence. The traffic sounds come in from below.

Shaikh clear his throat.

SHAIKH

Sir, I wanted to ask you something...

Shaikh hesitates.

SAAJAN

Go on...

SHAIKH

You asked just now - when we got married?... I lied to you. We are not married.

An awkward silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

Meherunissa's family was against her marrying an orphan, and add to that, someone short and dark like me...so she ran away. But she never wanted to get married without her family...so we are not married...yet.

SAAJAN

(uncomfortable-)

I am sorry, I didn't know...I won't tell anyone.

SHAIKH

No no sir, what I wanted to ask you is something different... we are getting married in a few days... her family has agreed now!

Shaikh laughs

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

Her family is big sir, nine brothers and sisters, their husbands and wives, children, uncles, aunts, everyone will be there...and there is no one from my side. I wanted to ask...if you wouldn't mind...being a witness from my side.

Saajan is overwhelmed by Shaikh's proposal.

SAAJAN

Me?

SHAIKH

If Ila madam can also come with you..?

Saajan contemplates this.

SAAJAN

Of course, we...we will come.

Shaikh beams

SHAIKH

Thank you sir. Her father insists on giving me a scooter. I refused to take any dowry, he says its a gift for my promotion...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAAJAN

Your promotion? But I am not going to retire...

A beat, Shaikh gapes at Saajan.

SAAJAN (CONT'D)

I was thinking...of not taking the early retirement, I will talk to the boss and ask him to make you my assistant. So your promotion might not happen yet...

SHAIKH

(interrupts-)

That is one more good news for me today sir! What could be better!

Saajan smiles, relieved.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

Just don't mention it to my father-in-law when you meet him, else he will take the scooter back...

Saajan laughs

SHAIKH (CONT'D)

I will tell Meherunissa the good news?... Thank you sir!

Shaikh hurries inside. Saajan is left outside on the balcony, he looks at the city below. Music begins and continues into...

INT. SAAJAN'S ROOM - DAY

Saajan fixes his tie in front of the mirror attached to the ancient wardrobe. The music continues, the piano anticipating the big meeting...

He notices a patch of white he missed shaving on his cheek.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Saajan enters the bathroom. He examines the patch he missed shaving and inhales deeply, he stands watching himself in the mirror for a beat. The music fades.

He then applies shaving cream and leans into the mirror with a razor in his hand, and starts to shave the stubble off of a spot on his chin that he had missed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRE-LAP - The sound of a train chugging on tracks.

INT. TRAIN - LATER

Saajan stands in the crowded Bandra local on his way to work, he is somber. The train rocks him back and forth along with the rest of the morning commute. A YOUNG MAN stands up from his seat.

YOUNG MAN  
Uncle, would you like to sit?

Saajan snaps out his thoughts.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)  
Yes, you uncle, you want to sit?

Saajan shakes his head, no.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)  
No, please sit uncle, I am getting off at the next station anyway.

Saajan regards the seat that has just been vacated for him. He sits.

Close on - Saajan as he sits, resigned to the motions of the train. An OLD MAN eyes him as he takes the empty seat.

Saajan rocks to the rhythms of the train.

INT. OFFICE - LATER

The rhythms of the train carry over into the office.

The peon is handing out dabbas. Saajan sits at his cubicle over files and papers strewn over his desk. Saajan remains glued to his seat, working on his files, writing furiously.

MR. SHROFF  
Fernandes?

The train sounds fade away.

Saajan looks up, Mr. Shroff peeks into his cubicle.

MR. SHROFF (CONT'D)  
You wanted to talk to me?

SAAJAN  
No sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. SHROFF

My secretary said you wanted to talk to me.

SAAJAN

It was a question about the invoices from China...I solved it...

Mr. Shroff looks at him, unconvinced.

MR. SHROFF

OK Mr. Fernandes.

He leaves. Saajan looks to his watch.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

The place buzzes with the chatter of the lunch crowd. Ila sits at the corner table alone, fidgeting nervously. She scans the place, it is crowded, lots of people wait for a table.

A waiter stops by.

WAITER

Order please.

ILA

Give me a minute...

The waiter hurries away, impatient. Ila looks to the door, it opens, yuppie officegoers come in laughing. She is disappointed.

She looks to her watch. Wide - every table occupied, Ila is the only one sitting alone.

She fidgets nervously. She gulps on water.

The impatient waiter passes by again, eyeing her with annoyance.

INT. ILA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ila lies in bed, wide awake as Yashvi and Rajeev sleep. She is in deep thought.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The peon distributes dabbas as he walks down the rows of desks. He leaves one on Saajan's table with a HOLLOW THUMP. Saajan looks up from his work, he regards the Dabba. He picks it up tentatively. Once again, his Neighbor peeks over with interest.

It is very light, he shakes it. He unscrews the top and opens it up, pulling out the three tiered tiffin box. He opens the first box, its empty. And the third is empty as well. The second, also empty, Saajan sits there with the empty lunchbox in front of him.

SAAJAN  
(pre-lap)  
Dear Ila,....

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - LATER

Ila stands by the window sill and reads Saajan's note.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I got the lunchbox today, there was nothing in it...and I deserve that. Yesterday, you waited in the restaurant for me...for a long time... But before that, that same morning, I...forgot something in the bathroom...

CUT TO:

INT. SAAJAN'S ROOM - YESTERDAY

Saajan in front of the mirror, feels the missed spot on his chin.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I went back in to get it...

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Saajan stands there and looks at himself in the mirror.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
And the bathroom smelt the same, exactly the same as it used to after my grandfather had been in the shower. It was like my grandfather had been there...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Close on - Saajan's reflection. He picks up the razor, he leans into the mirror, and starts to shave the stubble off of a spot on his chin that he had missed.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
But he had not, it was just me...

Saajan examines his chin to make sure he took care of the missed spot.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
Just me and the smell of an old man.

Saajan steps to the middle of the bathroom, looking around, just him and the smell of an old man. The trains chugs come in.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - YESTERDAY

Saajan stands in the crowded Bandra local as it goes North.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I don't know when I became old...Maybe it was that morning...maybe it was many many mornings ago...and maybe if I had forgotten something in the bathroom before I would have found out sooner...

YOUNG MAN  
Uncle, would you like to sit?

The scene we have seen before plays out again.

Saajan regards the seat that has been vacated for him.

Cut to- he is sitting on it.

He sits there rocking with the motions of his train.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
Life kept on going and lulled me with its motions, I kept rocking back and forth as it threw me left  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAAJAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
and then it threw me right...and  
then before I knew it...

BACK TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Saajan stacks up the lunchbox again-

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
...No one buys yesterday's lottery  
ticket Ila.

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ila still reads the letter by the window.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I came to the restaurant while you  
were waiting.

Ila pauses, surprised, she thinks, recreating the scene at  
the restaurant in her mind, scanning the faces of the lunch  
crowd...

INT. RESTAURANT - PREVIOUS DAY

SAAJAN  
There you were...

Saajan's POV. Ila sits shuffling nervously, alone, looking  
around.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
...Fidgeting with your purse,  
drinking all that water...

Ila does just that, she gulps a glass of water.

SAAJAN (V.O.)  
I wanted to come up to you and tell  
you all this in person. But I just  
watched you wait...You looked  
beautiful.

Ila taps the floor with her heel impatiently, she does look  
beautiful.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

SAAJAN (V.O.)

You are young. You can dream. And for some time, you let me into your dreams. And I want to thank you for that...

Ila sits there waiting, Saajan sits there watching her. We stay with them in that restaurant, for several beats.

INT. WEDDING HALL - DAY

Claps

Meherunissa's RELATIVES clap and cheer.

PHOTOGRAPHER

A photo with the witnesses please...

They gather together for a photo - The Happy Couple in the center, and the witnesses - A PRIEST, THE BRIDE'S FATHER, an old man with a prominent black mark on his forehead from praying five times a day, this man never smiles, and Saajan.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

Smile please...

Meherunissa's father doesn't.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

One...two...three...

The camera flashes.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Now a photo with everyone! The girl's side to the right, and the boy's side to the left please...

One by one, Meherunissa's family comes into the frame, following the instructions - sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews... As the right side to the couple swells, gradually the camera pans, and they get pushed from the center to the edge of the frame.

Finally, Saajan stands on the left edge peeking into the picture, by the happy couple, the only one on the boy's side. On their right is Meherunissa's entire clan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)  
Smile please...One...two...three...  
The camera flashes again.

CUT TO:

EXT. DONGRI - MOMENTS LATER

Shaikh and Saajan stand outside, waiting to hail a passing taxi. The wedding guest chatter in the background.

SHAIKH  
You are going sir...feels like a  
drought has hit the city...

SAAJAN  
This is the new scooter?

Saajan indicates at a brand new Kinetic Honda that stands at a distance, a garland of marigolds over it, and roses stuck all over.

SHAIKH  
Yes sir...but if you stay, I will  
tell my father-in-law that there is  
no promotion and return it...

Saajan laughs

SAAJAN  
Taxi...

As the taxi drives up and stops in front of them.

SAAJAN (CONT'D)  
Goodbye Shaikh.

Saajan makes his way to the taxi. Shaikh musters courage steps forward.

SHAIKH  
Sir...When I came in the train with  
you for the first time sir,...that  
day I did not have first class  
pass. I spent the whole journey  
till Bombay Central praying that  
the T.C doesn't show up and catch  
me...and what would you think of me  
then?

Saajan looks at him, quizzically.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
But the next day itself I got a  
first class pass made.

Saajan smiles. He pats Shaikh, awkward.

SAAJAN  
You will be a good husband Shaikh.

SHAIKH  
Thank you very much sir.

Saajan gets into the taxi and puts a cigarette between his  
lips.

SAAJAN  
(to the taxi driver-)  
Wait a minute.  
(to Shaikh-)  
Come to Nasik sometime...

The taxi takes off, leaving Shaikh standing, looking on.

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sounds of the mid-day traffic come in from below. Ila does  
laundry, absent mindedly.

A TELEPHONE RING pierces through everything, Ila keeps  
dusting, she is in another World as the phone rings...

Ila goes for the phone, we stay with the dirty clothes.

ILA (O.S.)  
...Hello...Ma...go to the  
neighbors. I am coming...

The sound of phone going back to the cradle. Ila's sobs come  
in.

INT./EXT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

Ila is on the back seat as the taxi races to her parent's  
house.

ILA  
Stop right here...ahead, on the  
right.

The TAXI DRIVER slows down and comes to a stop.

TAXI DRIVER  
Eighty rupees...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ila pays and gets off the taxi. The driver leans out and turns his taxi meter off. Ila walks away.

EXT./INT. PARENT'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ila enters her parent's house, outside - a sea of slippers and sandals.

The place is packed with MOURNERS. The somber silence that happens in a presence of dead body, some whispers fly around. Ila's Mother and Ila sit side by side in silence. Ila glances into the bedroom - Ila's Father's dead body is being wrapped in a white sheet by ORDERLIES, as they wrap up all the medical paraphernalia around him.

ILA

Rajeev is on his way. He was in a meeting...he will come straight to the crematorium...

They sit in silence for a few beats. Ila's Mother regards the dead body.

ILA'S MOTHER

I am hungry, I am craving parathas...

Ila looks to her mother.

ILA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

I didn't eat breakfast this morning, I was making breakfast for him...

Her Mother goes on.

ILA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

I was always worried, of what would happen to me when he passed away, he was so unwell lately...But now, I just feel hungry...

Ila's Mother laughs, surprised at herself. Some of the mourners give disapproving glances.

ILA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

I never loved him.

ILA

(interrupts-)

Ma..

But her mother goes on-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA'S MOTHER

Maybe in the beginning I did, when you were born...For many years now...twenty five years I think...I have not loved him...but I made breakfast for him, every morning. Lunch. Dinner....breakfast, lunch, dinner...

Ila looks away, contemplating her own life. Her Mother sighs deeply.

ILA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

When your brother died, that old ambulance with a red light had come, those old Matador buses...what one has come now?

Ila snaps out of it.

ILA

The new one, with the blue light...

Ila's Mother's stomach growls, loud. She falls into a silence again.

Ila looks at her mother, and then at her father's dead body. Close on - Ila, a grim resolve comes over her. She looks to the exit.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Ila glances at the street below every now and then, checking. Finally, she sees - the dabbawallah cycles into the building.

INT. ILA'S DOORWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ila opens the door, before the Dabbawallah can ring the doorbell.

DABBAWALLAH

Madam...

The dabba is in Ila's hand, but she doesn't hand it over. She swallows slowly, trying to come up with her strange request -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA

I want to ask you...the dabba...it has been going to the wrong address...

The dabbawallah is surprised.

DABBAWALLAH

That is impossible madam, we never deliver to the wrong address...

ILA

It has not been reaching my husband...it goes somewhere else...

DABBAWALLAH

Harvard people came and did a study on us...we always deliver right they said and you say we deliver wrong?

ILA

My dabba has not been reaching my husband! I am telling you the truth...

DABBAWALLAH

(with confidence-)

The king of England has also come, he has seen our delivery system, invited us to his wedding...

Ila sighs, exasperated.

DABBAWALLAH (CONT'D)

We never deliver to the wrong address madam, never.

ILA

My lunchbox has not been going to the right address...

DABBAWALLAH

It goes to the right place...

Ila puts the lunchbox in his hands and indicates at the code on it

ILA

I want the address of the building it goes to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The Dabbawallah looks at her like she is crazy. Ila stands her ground, determined.

INT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

Ila sits on the back seat of the taxi. It slows down in front of a school, and stops.

ILA  
One minute...

Ila runs in. We stay in the taxi. Moments later- Ila runs out of the main gate, with Yashvi in tow.

They get into the taxi and it races off.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ila strides into the office.

Ila She turns the corner, walking fast. She is confronted by the endless rows of desks as far as the eye can see. Ila looks around.

She leans into a desk - a MAN on the phone.

ILA  
Where does Saajan Fernandes sit?

The Man points her down the hall. Ila walks down tentatively, past the other desks. She is met with strange looks as she walks down to Saajan's cube -

Shaikh is on the phone with Meherunissa. Ila clears her throat. Shaikh looks up at her.

ILA (CONT'D)  
They told me this is Saajan  
Fernandes's desk...

Shaikh looks at her.

SHAIKH  
(into the phone-)  
Hold for a minute...  
(to Ila-)  
Saajan sir left...

ILA  
Where can I find him?

SHAIKH  
He...he left for Nasik.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ila looks away, the news sets in.

She stands there for a beat in front of him, exposed, the people around looking at her, some peep over their desks curiously.

She nods and makes a move to leave.

SHAIKH (CONT'D)  
You are Ila madam?

CUT TO:

INT. VICTORIA TERMINUS PLATFORM - DAY

The bustling platform of the station. A train waits at the platform, the train to Nasik. People check for their names on reservation lists pasted to the compartments, long good-byes at the door, Coolies hauling luggage stride past, a choir of vendors...

BISLERI MAN  
Bisleri bisleri bisleri....

SANDWICH SELLER  
Sandich...sandich...sandich...

Saajan sits at the window of the 1st class, non A/C compartment, watching the commotion outside. The train horn blares, the first signal to go, people hurry into the train, the coolies strain their muscles, the vendors shout louder...

SANDWICH SELLER (CONT'D)  
Sandich...sandich...sandich...

Saajan removes a cigarette from his pocket and lights up.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan smokes by the window, he eyes the coupe he is in, his suitcase at his feet, above - a chain and the sign - 'TO STOP TRAIN PULL CHAIN' & 'RS. 10,000 FINE'

OLD MAN (O.S.)  
Young man, can you help me?

Saajan looks - an OLD MAN, 80s has entered the coupe hauling a heavy suitcase.

Saajan jams his cigarette into a plastic coffee cup reluctantly, and gets up to help him with the luggage. As Saajan struggles to shove the heavy suitcase underneath the seat-

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
Cigarettes are no good, when you  
are my age you will realize...

Finally Saajan succeeds in stowing away the suitcase and goes back to his seat.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
Thank you.

Saajan merely nods. The Old Man is not discouraged, he plops himself on the seat across from Saajan.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
So you are going to Nasik?

SAAJAN  
Yes

OLD MAN  
Are you shifting there?

Saajan smiles at him.

SAAJAN  
Yes.

OLD MAN  
I moved years ago, I come to meet  
my son every now and then, but I  
just can't wait to go back. This  
city is shit...the filth...the  
crowds...look...look at all this...

He indicates at the bustling platform outside.

The train horn blares, Saajan is alarmed, the train pushes off from the platform and picks up speed. The Old Man laughs. Saajan gapes at him.

Saajan gapes at the Old Man, who in turn is looking out at Bombay wistfully.

As the train gathers speed, Saajan looks at the Old Man's wrinkled hands, and his fingers crooked by arthritis.

Saajan looks away, out the window, the city passes by.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Shaikh rides his scooter, weaving through the evening traffic. Ila sits behind. They ride in silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shaikh pulls to a stop in front of taxi stand. Ila and Yashvi gets off of the scooter.

ILA

Thank you...

She walks away.

SHAIKH

Ila madam...I am sorry.

Ila looks at him, embarrassed. And then gets into the taxi with Yashvi. As they depart-

Shaikh waits for a beat and looks on after them, and then he kick starts his scooter and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANWAR VILLAGE - DUSK

The children of Ranwar play street cricket in the last few minutes of day light.

CHILD

Come on boys!

Claps all around as the bowler, little Anne D'Souza takes the crease. Anne runs up the crease and hurls the ball, the batsman swings his bat and makes contact, a CRACK. The ball flies, all eyes on it. It hits Saajan Fernandes's padlocked gate, the old lock swings from side to side. The children break into cheers.

The ball rolls to the ground.

A pair of familiar shoes stop the ball. Saajan puts his suitcase down and picks up the ball, he looks to his gate. And to the children - they quiet down instantly. Little Anne is in the lead, the other children congregate around him, backing him up. Little Anne looks on with dread at Saajan Fernandes standing in front of his house with the ball in hand.

ANNE

Good evening Mr. Fernandes...

Silence

ANNE (CONT'D)

We thought you left...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Saajan regards them and the ball.

SAAJAN  
I left...but then I came back.

KID  
Why?

Saajan looks down at the kids, they gape at him in silence. The question lingers and then-

SAAJAN  
You play here...just don't break my windows OK?

He tosses the ball over to them. The children are taken aback, they look at him, speechless. A beat.

ANNE  
Thank you Mr. Fernandes.

Saajan unlocks the gate, and enters his home. The children go back to their game.

INT. ILA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The smoke from Ila's cooking. She stirs the daal on the stove.

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
Ila...oh Ila...

ILA  
Yes auntie?

MRS. DESHPANDE (O.S.)  
Everything is OK? I was calling out to you before...

ILA  
I had gone to the market...

MRS. DESHPANDE  
I got worried...

ILA  
Everything is fine auntie.

MRS. DESHPANDE  
You know Ila... what I did today? I cleaned your uncle's fan... I cleaned a moving fan...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She laughs with glee. Ila glances out the window in her direction listening to her glee, scared by it.

EXT. SAAJAN'S BALCONY - NIGHT

The buzz of the Bombay traffic comes in from a distance. Saajan takes a drag of his cigarette, he looks at the city around, and the sliver of the Sea that he can see, the Sun is almost gone, its dying rays on the water...

Saajan takes another deep drag of his cigarette, and exhales heavily.

Soft music comes in from somewhere. Saajan looks across- Little Anne D'Souza waves at him from his window. Saajan raises his hand and acknowledges her. Anne goes to the family dinner, leaving the windows wide open.

Saajan looks - The D'Souzas are gathered around their dinner table, chatting animatedly, poking fun at each other, laughing. Saajan watches this family ritual play out, transfixed. He has front row seats now. The D'Souza family breaks into laughter again. Saajan looks on at the D'Souzas across for several beats as music begins and continues over-

CUT TO:

INT. ILA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rajeev snores, his back to Ila. Yashvi sleeps between them. Ila lies, wide awake.

Ila takes off her jewelry one by one as the music continues - her chain, bangles, earrings...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET BELOW - DAY

The school bus autorickshaw honks, and the music fades. Yashvi looks up and pauses.

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ila watches her from above, she waves back. She indicates to Yashvi to cross the street. Yashvi goes over to the other side. The metal gate of the autorickshaw closes and it races off. Yashvi's little hand pops out through the gate and keeps waving, Ila waves back as the autorickshaw pulls away. Close on Ila.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILA (V.O.)  
Hello, you must have reached  
Nasik...

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Saajan holds on to a handle bar and hangs out of a compartment, packed with the morning commute. The wind ruffles his hair. He wears white shirt and jacket, reserved for special occasions.

ILA (V.O.)  
This morning you must have made  
your tea...

EXT. STATION - CONTINUOUS

ILA (V.O.)  
Or you must have gone for a morning  
walk.

Saajan walks out the station and into the crowd of Dabbawallahs sorting lunchboxes. He pauses, and looks around,... Finally, he approaches a group of Dabbawallahs with purpose.

We watch as Saajan strikes up a conversation. The dabbawallahs congregate around Saajan as he inquires, one or two more dabbawallahs join the group. Saajan and the Dabbawallahs talk, and we watch from a distance.

Ila's voice over plays over all this.

ILA (V.O.)  
I woke up this morning and sold all my jewelry. Some bangles, a chain, earrings. Its not a lot... but I have heard that our one rupee is five in Bhutan, so we will be OK for a while. And after that...we'll see. When Yashvi comes back from school, we will take the afternoon train.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ila is still at the window, looking out.

ILA (V.O.)  
Perhaps I will send you this  
letter, and your new postman will  
deliver it to you. Or perhaps, I  
will keep it and read it again  
years from now. I had read  
somewhere that sometimes the wrong  
train can get you to the right  
station... Lets see.

INT. BOMBAY LOCAL - LUGGAGE COMPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The dabbawallahs sing, chanting to their deity...

Saajan sits in a circle of dabbawallahs in the train, on their afternoon commute to return the empty lunchboxes. They clap and sing. Saajan looks out the window in anticipation, the next station is his destination.

BACK TO:

INT. ILA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The dabbawallah's chorus continues over Ila as she still stands at the window, looking out.

She stands there and listens intently as though she can hear the chants, there is much to do before she leaves, and so little time...

FADE TO BLACK:

CREDITS ROLL