

Chaos Theory

A Play

By

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**The Playwright is a member of The Dramatists Guild of
America**

Principal Characters:

Mukesh "Michael" Singh -Indian. The manners of a very proper, very out-of-date Victorian Englishman. He ages.

Sunita Sen - Indian. A rather attractive woman of strong character and substantial will. Embraces Change. She ages.

Amit* - Indian. Constantly kind, excessively idealistic, always gentle. He ages.

Elizabeth- Irish-American. The epitome of a bleeding-heart liberal.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

New York City. 2000. Sunita's apartment. Classical music plays in the background. The apartment is overwhelmed with books. There is a bar trolley with whisky and glasses, a small table with a chess game set up. Mukesh Singh, 52, academic, in an outdated suit, and Sunita Sen, 51, graceful, are running around tossing the ball back and forth and engaging in some verbal duel.

Mukesh: Everything that grows holds in perfection but a little moment?

Sunita : Sonnet 15.

Mukesh: Life's uncertain voyage?

Sunita : Timon of Athens.

Mukesh: They said an old man is twice a child?

Sunita : Hamlet.

Mukesh: Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth?

Sunita: Sonnet 146.

Mukesh: If music be the food of love, play on?

Sunita : Twelfth Night, Act I, Scene I.

Mukesh: Your wit's too hot, it speeds too fast, twill tire?

Sunita : Love's Labor's Lost, Act II, Scene I.

Mukesh: Praising what is lost makes the remembrance dear?

Sunita : All's Well That End's Well, Act II, Scene..

Mukesh: Never mind, never mind, you win.

The game stops. He pulls out a wallet.

Mukesh: How much was it for...twe

Sunita : Nope.

Mukesh: Ok Ok fifty, here's fifty...count it you wench.

She does.

Mukesh: I can't believe this Sunita, - you're actually counti -do you think I'd cheat you out of a few dollars?
[She nods] I'm tired of this game every Thursday.

Sunita : This was your bloody idea!

Mukesh : That was years ago. We didn't have arthritis then. We should switch to scrabble and monopoly.

Sunita : Even my kids don't play those games and I think you forget- between the two of us, we are a hundred and fifteen years old.

New Delhi, India 1965. A garden of a home. Sunita, then 17, sits. Mukesh, then 18, enters with flourish.

Mukesh: (drunk, loud) What a piece of work is man!

Sunita: (annoyed) Oh God!

Mukesh : (drunker, louder) *The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.*

Sunita: Drunk man delights not me.

Mukesh:(sees her, proclaiming)Ha! *'These violent delights have violent ends'*.

Slight pause.

Mukesh: It's from Measure for Measure by William-

Sunita: It's from Romeo and Juliet. Are you a fool?

Mukesh: Excuse me?

Sunita: Like a Shakesperean jester, pretending to be a jester.

Mukesh: Oh sure, yes- Dogberry at your service.

Sunita: The jester in Much Ado in actually Benedict.

Mukesh: Actually not, the-

Sunita: Why aren't you dancing?

Mukesh: I was - with this girl Kamini, attractive but shaded in idiocy. (points in the direction of the house)

Sunita: I don't see her.

Mukesh: I think she said her name was Kamini or...canopy - Indian names are so hard to remember. Why aren't you-

Sunita: I don't make my body go through vague contortions.

Mukesh: So you just sit here all alone like a banished hermit. Try some?

[Gives Sunita his hip flask]

Sunita: I can't it's too adventurous for me... this is sufficient.

Mukesh: What are you eating?

Sunita: A samosa- they are in the kitchen. (finishing it) Want one?

Mukesh: I don't indulge in native culinary experimentation.

Sunita: By native you mean...?

Mukesh: Indian. Naturally. '*The native provinces*' as Rudyard Kipling defined us.

Sunita: By *us*, you mean-

Mukesh: Indians. The unwashed masses. Naturally.

Sunita: Naturally. So you're one of those.

Mukesh: One of who?

Sunita: (correcting) Whom.

Mukesh: What? Anyways, these aperitifs are usually festered with disgusting spices. What's the libation?

[Sipping from her drink and spitting it out]

Mukesh: Tea! After 10 pm! Sacrilege- (thinks) unless you're a tea taster.

Sunita : It's Thursday after 10 pm, which means we have class tomorrow. Besides, the principal, I mean it's his house.

Mukesh : Oh! The principal's beside himself, running into curtains and the new first-year women, the latter on purpose. He's got one of these too and his is just raw whisky, no soda.

Sunita : Whisky and soda- is that something an eighteen year old should carry around?

Mukesh : Certainly not- it's morally wrong to be drinking whisky and soda. I drink whisky with 3 cubes of ice - the proper way- but it would look too conspicuous here.

Giving her his drink.

Sunita : I can't, the servants may be looking, gossip about students, especially us new ones, gets around.

Mukesh : The servants have stolen enough gin to keep them pissed drunk and passed out on the street for days.

Sunita : Who are you? Do you work for a whisky company that's promoting Shakespeare at Indian colleges.

Mukesh : Oh how terribly rude, Mukesh Singh, First-year as well, which is no bloody incredible revelation, since, well, this is the 1965 First Year's welcome party, I mean I can't be a pastry chef or a lepidopterist, then I'm certainly in the wrong place aren't I?

Sunita : [Laughs] Hi Mukesh, welcome to Delhi University-

Mukesh : You sound like a Concierge.

Sunita : It's nice to meet you too.

Mukesh : Michael, you can call me Michael.

Sunita : Why?

Mukesh : It sounds English.

Sunita : Where are you from?

Mukesh : Calcutta.

Sunita : Ah! Home of English refuse, Land of Victorian fossil.

Mukesh : Hey, hey...It's not a crime to like things that sound and feel English, everyone deserves a colonial hangover, long live the British Empire, queen Victoria, cricket clubs, Churchill, all that.

Sunita : Ah! Dead you know.

Mukesh : What is?

Sunita : All of it, Churchill last to go, too much brandy.

Mukesh: Well it's a new world then - ours to rewrite through a fresh lens, starting tomorrow, the first day of an "education" - what a word. What a fucking word.

Sunita: You sound like a librarian on acid.

Mukesh: C'mon have some?

[She takes a swig]

Sunita : It's bitter.

Mukesh : But the drunkenness that follows is sweet. Remember, ideas, other peoples, are merely weapons to keep us confined within our own minds. Imagination, ours and only that will give us an education. The greatness of all learning lies in the originality of one. Bertrand Russell I think, but then I'm drunk - it could be Oscar Wilde.

Sunita : You've read Russell and Wilde?

Mukesh : Amongst everything else.

Sunita : What do we have here, a budding Socrates - you're here to study philosophy - BA in Philosophy.

Mukesh : What a terrible judge of character, remind me tomorrow never to be friends with you - someone that misses obvious connections doesn't deserve my affection - PG Wodehouse said that.

Sunita : English then, BA Honors in English.

Mukesh : How'd you guess?

Sunita : You drink too much, misquote a lot and talk far too much rubbish.

Mukesh : Something tells me I'm going to dislike you immensely.

Sunita : What's the something?

Mukesh : Reason. A man's weapon.

Sunita : Your *something* is right. But something tells me you won't go away easily.

Mukesh : What's your *something*?

Sunita : Instinct.

Mukesh : A savage thing this instinct- a woman's weapon, a man's mirage. And does the keeper of this instinct bear a name?

Sunita : Oh, how equally savage - Sen, Sunita, you can call me Sunita, its better.

Mukesh : From Delhi then?

Sunita : Born and raised.

Mukesh : I guessed - you look annoyingly third-world.

Sunita : We like things that sound and feel Indian here, capital city, own flag, independence, vernacular language, Nehru, sitar, Mughal Empire and all that. We've been independent for eighteen years now but the news probably hasn't reached Calcutta.

Mukesh : Then most certainly admitted as an English honors as well eh?

Sunita : How'd you guess?

Mukesh : You sound too patriotic to be studying anything else.

[Nat King Cole's Quizas floats into the garden]

Mukesh : You must dance.

Sunita : No.

Mukesh : I can plead.

Sunita : How?

Mukesh : On bended knee.

Appropriate gesture.

Sunita : Then I could be persuaded.

She extends her arm.

Mukesh : This song is one of my favorites.

Mukesh draws her close with exuberance.

Sunita : Yes - I can tell from the excitement.

They start dancing.

Mukesh : So we do share a few things in common.

Sunita : Nat King Cole?

Mukesh : Instinct. Who's Nat King Cole?

Sunita : This isn't one of your favorite songs?

Mukesh : I've never heard it before.

Sunita : I am beginning to see a pattern here.

Mukesh : Do you want to play a game?

Sunita : At our age?

Mukesh : Its for all ages, it's a quotation game, I quote a line from a Shakespeare play, you guess the work.

Sunita : Challenging my knowledge of fiction are you?

Mukesh : No of fact. Tracing a pattern amongst all the knowledge stored in your mind. If you lose, you owe me five rupees.

Sunita : This is vandalism. How about chess? You play chess?

Mukesh: Everything that grows holds in Perfection but a little moment?

Sunita : [Quickly reacts] um - Sonnet 15.

Mukesh: Very good. Life's uncertain voyage?

Sunita : [Pause] Timon of...of Athens?

Mukesh : Shit. Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth?

Sunita : Sonnet 146?

Mukesh : (nervous) They say an old woman is twice a child?

Sunita : Hamlet. Looks like someone owes me money.

Mukesh : Can I start an account? We'll add five rupees as an outstanding debt.

Sunita : Fine. Be careful -looks like it might be much more than five rupees once we're done.

Mukesh : We're done then.

Sunita : No- we're just getting started.

Mukesh : Fuck.

Sunita : Ask me more.

Mukesh : Um - er- Friends, Romans...

Sunita : You can do better than that.

Mukesh : I've never quite met - I mean, no one's ever beaten me. I must admit I'm surprised by this.

Sunita : There will be other surprises 'Michael'.

Back to Sunita's apartment in New York, 2000.

Mukesh: You're old, I'm just distinguished.

Sunita : That must be the difference then.

Mukesh : But at least you remember your Shakespeare, I mean over and above the years of reading this Sanskrit crap.

Sunita : [walks over towards the drinks trolley] That "Sanskrit crap" Prof. Mukesh, is Indian Civilization - The Cultural Growth of the Subcontinent - Course 313- an "advanced" course mind you -and only brilliant professors can teach it. Like, um, me - music? [Pours herself a drink]

Mukesh : What sort of music?

Sunita : I'm listening to Indian Classical musicians

Mukesh : Indian Classical? Who the hell listens to that? Are you taking drugs?

Sunita : What?

Mukesh : Consuming cheap liquor?

Sunita : No no...I like it; I am actually fond of it... Zakir Hussein is fun stuff after long day of lecturing uninterested brats.

Mukesh : Do you read any of Macaulay's essays?

Sunita : Lord Macaulay?

Mukesh : No Macaulay Culkin, of course Lord Macaulay, you stupid moron - Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, Head of The Supreme Council of India, 1834 - 1838.

Sunita : Not recently, I mean he's not exactly up there with Memoirs of a Geisha or Bridget Jones's Diary. I don't randomly pick up essays from the late eighteenth century unless I have to.

Mukesh : Anyway, he wrote an essay entitled, "Culture and Indian Civilization in the late 19th century" where he said that a Raag or Raaga, as we know it in the west, was appropriate only at funerals because it created a sense of gloom that was a good weapon against enemies like the Dutch.

Sunita : Macaulay didn't actually say that did he?

Mukesh : Of course not.

Sunita : So you just made that up to prove your point?

Mukesh : Exactly - the art of good teaching my friend is knowing a little and lying a lot.

Sunita : You are absolutely incorrigible - well what would you listen to?

Mukesh : Classical, the real thing, I mean western classical.

Sunita : Debussy, Brahms, Strauss?

Mukesh : Chopin- I'd like to listen to Chopin. The Nocturnes - Opus 9-

Sunita : No 2 - the Andante- yeah-yeah. Last chance - Sitar?

Mukesh : I'll leave.

Sunita plays the Chopin.

Sunita : Asshole.

Mukesh :Hey - hey - bad language.

Sunita :You know it's your loss if you don't listen to Indian music - it's absolutely divine.

Mukesh : I don't really understand what they are saying and it's too noisy.

Sunita : Given your way, you'd whip every Indian school student, till they could swiftly pronounce complex English words - like - "juxtaposition" or "Connecticut".

Mukesh : [getting the point] English, madam - the lingua franca. Language of the masses. The Vatican of words for heretics of comprehension. Solves the damn problem these Indians have always had of too many languages. If I had to learn every Indian language to communicate, therefore, with every Indian - I'd never get laid.

Sunita : You don't get laid anyway [interrupts a Mukesh retort] Tell me, you've lived in Delhi haven't you?

Mukesh : What kind of question is that- you know I have.

Sunita : You speak Hindi.

Mukesh : Never in public and I only admit it to a few people.

Sunita : What about Hindi music, Bollywood music... it's very popular in the west now, with the young.

Mukesh : So what? Do you think after being a professor of Elizabethan English for twenty years I should start jumping up and down like a deranged taxi driver dancing to loud Bollywood music?

Sunita : It's better than jumping up and down like a deranged English professor screaming that every Indian needs to speak English.

Black. A crackled radio announcement.

Radio Announcer: Good evening ladies and gents. All India Radio wishes its listeners a happy and prosperous 1967. May this year bring you all the joys that 1966 didn't. And to celebrate the New Year, we have for our wonderful young people whose college results come out today, a new song by Mr. Elvis Presley entitled "You ain't nothing but a hound dog."

Elvis is heard, only the first line of "Hound Dog". We are outside the Delhi University in 1967. Sunita and Mukesh, both in their early twenties, enter.

Sunita : First Division?

Mukesh : Missed it by a point - you?

Sunita : 92%.

Mukesh : Is that first division?

Sunita : No it's just passed, of course it's first division you nitwit - and with first class honors.

Mukesh : Is that enough?

Sunita : I only needed 80%.

Mukesh : Boston University, you said?

Sunita : It's a small school somewhere near Boston.

Mukesh : Of course. That small school near Boston. When do you leave?

Sunita : Sometime next month

Mukesh : Ah.

Sunita : And you? Plans?

Mukesh : Well I don't know - I may travel through England for a bit, where I really belong, and then I'm thinking of applying for Ph.D. programs in the US.

Sunita : You didn't tell me you were thinking of a Phd program in the US.

Mukesh : I -um-

Sunita : You're going to apply to Harvard aren't you? You sly dog.

Mukesh : There's no such guarantee that- I mean it's not- I'm thinking- why not apply and- I mean it's expensive but because it *is* Harvard, there's the stamp and-

Sunita : So we may meet again.

Mukesh : Maybe...

Mukesh : Hey I heard they have this new band in England now with girlie haircuts they call themselves the Beatles.

Sunita : Like the insects... are they any good?

Mukesh : No, just a one hit wonder, couple of catchy tunes but they won't last very long.

A college student enters.

Mukesh : Hey call that Fresher, hey you, Fresher, come here?

Amit : Yes.

Mukesh : Yes sir when you talk to us? What subject? Eco or Maths?

Amit: Neither, English sir, English Literature.

Mukesh : Oh! Our department. Who let in someone as ugly as you without asking us?

Amit: Are you seniors, sir?

Sunita : Of course, we are you idiot, you don't recognize us?

Amit : No I just got here.

Mukesh : Stand on one leg and sing us a song.

Amit : What?

Sunita: Yes and take off all your clothes while you're at it.

Mukesh : Yes, that too.

Amit : What?

Mukesh : Yes, take off all your clothes, stand on one leg,
sing a song and go and sing it to that girl
Over there

Amit : But sir,

Mukesh : But what - your little piece of rodent excrement,
you tiny piece of fungus ridden breadcrumb, you lowly
bastard nephew of a dying dog, you smelly globule of armpit
sweat - how dare you "but sir" us?

Amit : Are you seniors or graduates?

Mukesh : "Are you Graduates...sir", you ungrateful pile of
cat feces. Yes we are graduates.

Amit : Then I don't have to do this - they warned me. [Runs
away] fuck you. Fuck off. Fuck you both - Ha ha ha he
he...

Mukesh : Hey - whoa- Hey- come back you little piece of
shit - you dirt...[as if to say dirty little scoundrel]

Sunita : It's no use Mukesh- he's gone.

Mukesh : Could you believe the cheek of that kid, it's
unbelievable what freshers can get away with
nowadays.

Sunita : They don't have to fear us anymore you know, we
are graduates, that means gone, history, just another
name on the alumni list.

Mukesh : Or etched on to the best actor award at the Inter-
college Drama Festival, huh? [Teasing]

Sunita : Which you did not deserve. Clearly the judges were
asleep or seducing each other, I mean my performance
of a Flamenco dancer was...

Mukesh : Why are you going to America?

Sunita : What?

Mukesh : To America, why America?

Sunita : I don't know.

Mukesh : You must have a reason.

Sunita : Well, I mean I am getting a full scholarship to do a Ph.D.

Mukesh : Yes but it's odd to go to America to teach, isn't it? I mean not too many Indian professors there I'd assume.

Sunita : I'm sure it's preferred to be Indian when teaching Indian history and civilization. They think you'd know more about your own history.

Mukesh : What a completely incorrect idea.

Sunita : Isn't it? But that's not why I'm really going. I think -I think I'm looking for something. I don't know what that is yet but once I get there I'll have the freedom to search for it. Some sort of order - you know to learn things and teach them. There are so many books to be read, so many opinions to grapple with. That's why American Universities are great, all this freedom, everything open to some interpretation that breeds other interpretations.

Mukesh : Wow! Sounds like you'll be pretty busy interpreting.

Sunita : Hey do you want to come over, have tea and watch the television, my father just got one, and it's very good, some people call it a "TV", a lot of people are getting interested in watching it, some say someday it may even be as popular as the radio.

Mukesh : Rubbish, just another marketing gimmick, discovered by some sleazy man trying to make quick buck. Besides, I have to meet Kamini for ice Cream and find out how she did.

Sunita : Right. Ok, so I'd better be going then. I had no idea the last day of college would end like this and here, now. I mean you have a picture of it in your mind but it is never the same in reality.

They hug

Mukesh : Stop being so bloody dramatic, there are Freshers watching.

Sunita : Right. Sorry. See you. This is the first time I feel that separation means something. Separate but Equal though.

Mukesh : Good quote, yours?

Sunita : Never. Title of a new movie, just released. I have seen it, of course.

Mukesh : Of course. Hey Sunita?

Sunita : What?

Mukesh : Maybe we will meet in America.

Raises his Coke bottle to a toast.

Sunita : Maybe [**Raises her Coke bottle too**] - "I have always believed that all things depended upon Fortune, and nothing upon ourselves" [**They drink together**].

Mukesh : John Keats, "Ode To A Nightingale". Goodbye, Sunita.

Sunita : - Hey Muk, wait! - [Talking to an absent Mukesh] It was Lord Gordon Byron, you stupid buffoon, 1823, I think, from "Untouched Love - A Fragment".

Black. Sunita's apartment in 2000.

Sunita: I remember how wrong you were about the Beatles. Idiot.

Mukesh : (getting irritated) Shut up- what time is it?

Sunita : Why - have you to call some student of yours you are sleeping with? What's her name?

Mukesh : Victoria.

Sunita : Disgusting.

Mukesh : It's Platonic.

Sunita : How Platonic?

Mukesh : Well, some discussion on Plato, then mostly gin and tonic.

Sunita : Disgusting.

Mukesh : I'm joking- it's just innocent phone chats- nothing really.

Sunita : Which reminds me, I don't have your new number.

Sunita starts pulling something out of her pocket.

Mukesh : What's that?

Sunita : Oh! This. This is a Palm Pilot, it's one of those things nowadays you know, to keep your addresses, that sort of thing; they call it a digital organizer.

Mukesh : I know what the fuck it is - I meant what the hell are you doing with one of these - you're supposed to be a middle-aged impoverished intellectual in pursuit of higher knowledge - not a video game freak.

Sunita : Very hip, you know, for a professor of Indian Literature, to be up with the modern technologies. Anita told me it's the latest one out there - it's the Palm VII or VIII or Maybe X, the higher the number - the more powerful it gets - like your English kings. They say I can "surf the web" with this or I could "browse the web", its up to me, really.

Mukesh : Who are *they*?

Sunita : You know, they, them, the people who spend a lot of time doing this sort of stuff - young people, people in offices, everyone other than us. It's a new millennium for God's sake, there's a whole different world out there.

Sunita's cell phone rings.

Sunita : Hello. Yes this is she. Aha - Hm. I - that's unfortunate. Is he all right? Yes, yes I understand. Aha. Yes, well unfortunately I can't do that - it is class policy that it has to be turned in by Monday. [Disconnects telephone]

A girl just got her living-breathing boyfriend into a fictitious yet almost fatal car accident and all over an easy five-pager on Rushdie.

Mukesh : I know that excuse - let me guess, she said she is calling from the hospital, she is crying, hysterical-

Sunita : While in reality she is probably lying on her boyfriend's couch-

Mukesh : They are having lots of unprotected sex-

Sunita : - And smoking strange illegal substances.

Mukesh : Teenagers!!! Bloody bastards! By the way, how are yours? I don't see them home?

Black. We go to New York City. Night. 1981. A Car. Mukesh is driving, Sunita, is pregnant.

Sunita: I hate my husband.

Mukesh: Have I ever told you how much we have in common?

Sunita: He is missing an important event.

Mukesh: It's only his first child.

Sunita: What's flight delay *due to unnatural causes*?

Mukesh: There's a fucking blizzard in Canada ...aren't you lucky I'm in town.

Sunita: You're the last man I'd call in a crisis.

Mukesh: But you still did-breath...

Sunita: I am breathing...what are you- a midwife?

Mukesh: Not like a pregnant woman, you are not breathing like one.

Sunita: Reflecting on your pregnancy?

Mukesh: I saw it in a movie - Jesus of Nazareth, Peter Ustinov as Joseph and his wife, what's that broad's name?

Sunita: Maggie Smith.

Mukesh: Jesus's mother wasn't Maggie Smith.

Sunita: Mary.

Mukesh: Mary - right in some barn in suburban Bethlehem huffing and puffing like a rhino and here you are whimpering as if you've given birth every Thursday.

Sunita: Keep your eye on the damn road, one accident could be bad enough.

Mukesh: An accident? Does that mean there's a bastard in our midst? Or should I say, in your midst - is it mine?

Sunita: And when would that opportunity have arisen?

Mukesh: Some night in my deep slumber you could have taken undue advantage of my unconsciousness.

Sunita: I'd rather consciously take advantage of livestock. What's the huge crowd on Central Park West? Another protest against that Khomenei fellow?

[Mukesh switches on the radio.]

Radio voice: "And his wife Yoko , hearing of the former Beatles' assassination outside his apartment building , The Dakota, was rushed back on a special plane to New York City. John Lennon was one of the greatest rock stars of our era and his assassin Mark Chapman was a devout fan of..."

[Mukesh switches it off.]

Sunita: Oh God!

Mukesh: One has to conclude thus that Strawberry Field's aren't forever. It's a tragic day [looks at Sunita]...so far.

Sunita: [Looking at her stomach]See what a dangerous world welcomes you - **[Car makes a sharp turn]** Watch out!

Mukesh: I have everything under control.

Sunita: We're in a stolen car, you've never driven, you're drunk, you're carrying my husband's *expired* license - *you're in fucking control of what exactly?*

Mukesh: Not stolen. Uninformed absence turns into theft only when knowledge breeds suspicion - sleep allows for neither. The Dean was asleep. His car will be returned before he realizes that it's been turned into an ambulance.

Sunita: Or a graveyard. You could've told him.

Mukesh: One frantic call, the words "help" and "me" next to each other - where was the time? And what the fuck are you implying with *never driven*- I've been taking lessons- you *know* that. Wench.

Sunita: The Dean's kind enough to let you stay in his house for God's sake- couldn't you wake him up and say it was an emergency!

Mukesh: I can't wake him up, he needs sleep. Tomorrow is my final round interview with a panel of Senior English professors which he chairs- big day.

Sunita: So you STEAL his car keys and run!

Mukesh: You're making this sound like some crime.

Sunita: It bloody well is! Robbing a Buick from the most influential academic supporting your candidacy to teach at Columbia - good move.

Mukesh: Fuck off! He has children.

Sunita: And I bet they were delivered without him resorting to theft. Tomorrow morning, your chances of the new job-gone! Tenure at Harvard- gone! Jail! Jail! Gang violence! Arson! Jail!

Mukesh: Shut the fuck up. Your husband's gone too- At least I have an explanation.

Sunita: So does he - Noam Chomsky's lecture in Montreal. Mount Sinai is three blocks up.

Mukesh: What destination is that to give birth in? - Makes me feel like a rabbi in a racecar.

Sunita: [stops herself from laughing] Careful! -I don't want my child to be the result of a bad joke.

Mukesh: I'm just trying to bring up the little girl with a good sense of humor.

Sunita: The grammatically correct term is bring in and it's a boy.

Mukesh: Got a name?

Sunita: Mukesh.

Mukesh: I might have a friend with that name

Sunita: I might too.

Mukesh: Names are words you know and words have consequences.

Sunita: You just drove by the hospital you nitwit.

Mukesh: Shit.

Sunita's apartment in 2000.

Sunita : Mukesh is taking pottery classes in Soho and Anita is in rehearsal for an off Broadway gig.

Mukesh : Mukesh taking pottery classes [bewildered], has he become a gay?

Sunita : Gay.

Mukesh : What?

Sunita : Not a gay. No one can become a gay, that's incorrect grammar.

Mukesh : I'm sorry; I'm not up with the nuances of homosexual idiom, even for an English professor. Too old fashioned you see.

Sunita : Someone can be gay or not gay, not a gay. However one can be a lesbian or just lesbian. The women control everything; even English grammar [pause] but no.

Mukesh : No what?

Sunita : I don't think he is- he is just trying to be more sensitive for the women. Like you used to play the piano for me or was it for Elizabeth, I was never sure.

Mukesh : Lets leave my ex-wife out of this - I'm in a good mood. So you admit you were mildly impressed by the piano maestro who could sooth your pretty ears?

Sunita : I was just impressed because you could read Christopher Marlowe's Faustus at twice the speed as everyone else, not understand a word and then convincingly make up stuff about what it all meant.

Mukesh : That's what teaching is about, isn't it? Other people's words...our profession is about other people's words. Game?

Sunita :] But what about our opinions? You see, like you, no one really has a clue what these great books, poems and plays really mean because they don't mean anything. Hamlet wooing Ophelia in Act III - what does it symbolize?

Mukesh : Shakespeare is using politics in relationships as a backdrop for politics in Post-Catholic England and that symbolizes the birth of the new world.

Sunita : That's what we teach and its balls!

Mukesh: Balls! What kind of language is that?

Sunita: Your kind.

Mukesh: Now Now...

Sunita : Shakespeare wrote that because he wanted to have a scene where Hamlet and Ophelia have some good old fashioned humping, that's all - no metaphysical imagery, no surrealist thought, no religious rebellion - none of the rubbish we think it means- just Hamlet unable to control his testosterone in a Scandinavian garden with the virgin daughter of a nobleman. And yes I'd love a game.

They begin a chess game.

Mukesh : That's what makes him a great playwright.

Sunita : His ability to write a good sex scene?

Mukesh : No but to leave it open to many interpretations even after all these years.

Sunita : Too many interpretations, sir, too many. Chaos. Tell me Mukesh what do you really know?

Mukesh : Many things.

Sunita : About literature?

Mukesh : (offended) I have read many thousands of books. [She is about to interrupt but he continues] You see what you are forgetting is that it is our job to find order through the chaos so that our students can see only the order, and we have sifted through the chaos for them. That's why they pay \$ 50,000 a year or some ridiculous amount to the university.

Sunita : All that money so we can regurgitate to our students a clean and concise world, a black and white world.

Mukesh : Exactly. Don't forget you also have to let them think. If you are any good at what you do, your students should look for answers, the search is part of being a student.

Sunita : But you've already told them the answer.

Mukesh : Exactly. You know what they should know and they know what you want them to know but now what you want to know is how they know what they know which is what you've wanted them to know all along and yet what do they do to know it - that's the mystery? Check

Sunita : What on earth are you talking about?

Mukesh : I don't know but I think you know, no?

Black. We go to the Steps of Harvard University Library, 1972, late night.

Mukesh : Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright,

In the forests of the night...

Sunita : Truest treasure is fleeting;
it sparkles for a moment, then goes.
It does not tell its name; its tune.

Mukesh : What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy...
[Pause] I hate poetry!

Sunita : Sssshhhh!

Mukesh : What?

Sunita : I'm trying to memorize.

Mukesh : You'll been trying to memorize for the last 6 years.

Sunita : Tagore doesn't read in English.

Mukesh : Or perhaps you can't read English.

Sunita : Translators can explain hijackers using sign language but when it comes to poets...

Mukesh : You should try this fucking Blake poem- verse written on some serious acid -

Sunita : It's your Masters dissertation topic.

Mukesh : I don't enjoy it.

Sunita : You chose it- "Understanding The Romantics in the context of Modernism".

Mukesh : How else could I date that Irish poetess? You know...the brunette who's now humping that Afro-Hungarian deconstructionist.

Sunita : Her poems - the ones you brought to me- they were awful.

Mukesh : Her fingers were lovely.

Sunita : So the greater purpose of wanting to do a Harvard MA in English Literature is skirt chasing?

Mukesh : I'm sure there's another purpose but I can't find it. 'Find meaning in Blake's metaphorical allusions', says Professor Davis. Well fuck you, Professor Davis- and your Pulitzer. I bet Blake himself has no idea - after taking all those LSD's, no wonder there's a "tyger tyger burning bright". Look at this... 'What the hammer? And what the chain? In what furnace was thy brain?' Where was his brain?

Sunita : You've got five hours to figure it out, if you want that Magna.

Mukesh : Summa- madam.

Sunita : Isn't your GPA 3.6?

Mukesh : 3.8

Sunita : (factual) You've taken 34 Masters classes and gotten two B's.

Mukesh (offended) One. What have you been smoking?

Sunita : B minus in Afro-Caribbean literature-

Mukesh : Yes the Wide Sargasso Sea was too wide to keep me awake.

Sunita : -And B in Shakespeare's Ideas- Course 234.

Mukesh : A+, How could you even suppose that I'd get a B in Elizabethan drama? I *am* Elizabethan drama.

Sunita : A minus then - I remember you messed up somewhere.

Mukesh : Oh that - I did my final paper on Much Ado About Nothing.

Sunita : And that's what it was, wasn't it?

Mukesh : (gives Sunita a look) Yes - sixty wasted pages on why I think Benedict of Padua is better lover than Romeo. Regardless, a masterpiece.

Sunita : And?

Mukesh : And like all masterpieces, treated with mild amusement by the present generation. That asshole medievalist Dr. Lewis gave me a C which messed up the overall course grade. If I ever become famous, I will run over his wife.

Sunita : He doesn't have a wife- she was run over five years ago.

Mukesh: Oh!

Sunita : And he's not an asshole. He gave me an A+ on my "fascinating introspective glimpse" into the tragic irony that is Richard 3.

Mukesh : He's an asshole. He never understood my concept of unspoken love- why Beatrice and Benedict have a greater love than the soap operatic drivel that is Romeo and Juliet. A love out of words - the purest form, not of bodies and sweat like nowadays but of two minds, ideas playing with each other - a passion much fierier than fire. It is as it is in life, about missed connections. You see, I was contending that Shakespeare, the comic unlike his own whiny sonnet side, and like maybe - (thinks) Blake in this poem, never intended love to be about "a perfect chemistry" -but rather an "imperfect physics" - Hmm, I like that, I might throw it in the paper tomorrow.

Sunita : But this Blake poem is about Tigers?

Mukesh : Who cares? It's too late now to find out what the Tigers mean- - they could mean the Chinese Olympic pole vaulting team for God's sake! No one fucking knows! So I'm going to say, the tigers represent love and then talk about my concept of unspoken love.(thinks) I'm a genius! (scribbles things down)

Sunita : Don't say you came up with it. It sounds too smart. In the exam, you'll need to attribute the concept to someone famous. Unspoken Love is explained by-

Mukesh : - Lord Gordon Byron in his Essay on...

Sunita : No! no! Everyone with a proper English education has a leather bound Byron next to the television, if you've got to lie, get esoteric.

Mukesh : TS Eliot?

Sunita : Eliot has opinions on everything, esoteric.

Mukesh : Schaupenhauer on Literature?

Sunita : What on earth do the Germans know about love?

Mukesh : All this deceit will catch up with me - I'll be found out and thrown out. Why are we Indians always thinking of cheating, at everything?

Sunita : We think of lying at everything. Cheating is something we have to do to follow up on the lying.

Mukesh : They have these things in America called Honor codes.

Sunita : It only applies to the honorable. If these universities are foolish enough to assume that when you quote someone in a paper, that person might actually have quoted it, it's their stupidity, not yours.

Mukesh : But if they get a sniff of deceit, it's deportation! Maybe jail.

Sunita : Relax- always rely on why you started doing this in the first place...

Mukesh : I transferred from Oxford because I won a McMillan scholarship. Harvard gives the McMillan only to the best English student in-

Sunita : You transferred because of me.

Mukesh : What?

Sunita : Didn't you?

Mukesh : I certainly did not.

Mukesh : For dalliances with other women then. So go back to them when in trouble...quote Virginia Woolf.

Mukesh : Hmmm...think of an essay she may have written that no one could possibly have heard of?

Sunita : Shakespearean Love, a Chaos - no, how about this - Unspoken Love- The Opposite of Romance?

Mukesh : Ooooh! Intensely believable - And a publication?

Sunita : The- The Pari- no - The Milan Literary Journal of Love and... no - The Milan Literary Journal of Human Desires.

Mukesh : Nice! Milan! Nice! Completely fictitious?

Sunita : Well I'm sure there are literary journals - just not in Milan and just not focusing on all human desires.

Mukesh : You'll make an excellent liar.

Sunita : Good - that's a skill in our profession - as opposed to plagiarizing, which, according to the Harvard Code of Conduct book, is sin.

Mukesh : No fear of that here - you can't copy texts that don't exist.

Sunita : Good point - If you get away with this, I hope to refer to fictitious fiction for my Tagore paper.

Mukesh : Woolf, Virginia [See Appendix A - scholar, critic [definition of scholar and critic from Karl Marx, see definitions Index A- (a thought) maybe I should use my own voice, say that I made up the theory -talk about how I feel?

Sunita : No one cares about your feelings or your theories - theories come from well-known people, preferably older - with beards- you're not famous - at least ten thousand copies have to be sold before you're quotable by academics. Just keep lying.

[It starts raining]

Mukesh : It's tedious to live under the constant flow of other people's words.

Sunita : At least one day it will provide an income so we don't live under the constant flow of water.

Mukesh : Maybe we should develop the concept of unspoken love under a roof - my roof?

Sunita : It's 2 am -I was thinking of getting some hot samosas and tea from that 24 hour Pakistani deli - they make them fresh-

Mukesh :What do Pakistani samosas have that I do not?

Sunita : Is that one of your pick up lines?

Mukesh : Well if I wished to pick you up, I'd just do so wouldn't I?

Physically picking her up and running around in the rain.

Sunita : Muk - ha ha-let me down. This is juvenile. By the way, I'm a little afraid of Virginia Woolf, maybe you should use...

Mukesh : Shut up and let me carry you to a better place.

Sunita : Allen Ginsberg, Collected Poems, 1965?

He puts her down, they are completely drenched.

Mukesh : Mukesh Singh, Last Day before Masters finals at the Widener Library steps, 1972.

Sunita : You can't quote yourself- that's cheating.

Mukesh : Once in a while, it's ok - it's ok to have things to say.

Sunita : You have things to say?

Mukesh : About one thing - the one thing that all these poets don't know how to say.

Sunita : What thing?

Mukesh : Amid the chaos -a pattern- a constant - a constant is important.

Sunita : And I'm that?

Mukesh: You're that.

Slight pause. They inch closer.

Mukesh: We should go.

Sunita: (*Surprised*) Oh! (*Reacts*) Oh! Yes...yes we should...where should we? (slight pause) go?

Mukesh: Um. I'll go. You can-

Sunita : No- I should go - get some sleep before my paper. I don't think I can stay with you.

Mukesh : Yes...yes of course, you must. You must *not* stay I mean... Go! The paper's important.

Sunita : It's an important paper.

Black. We go to New York City in 1986-two different classrooms at Columbia University. Mukesh and Sunita teach classes concurrently.

Mukesh: Never seek to tell thy love
Love that never told can be;

Sunita: O friend, when you come to my gate,
an unknown hidden flower's scent will startle you.
Let this moment be my gift.

Mukesh: William Blake wrote this wounded love poem in 1825, two years before he died. It was a confession over a woman he was always close to and yet closed to. The poem tells of the disaster of his confession of love for her. Can anyone tell me who-

[Talking to a student we don't see] What are you doing Mr. Dakar? Why are you making your pencil perform miniature gymnastics? And what are you wearing? I don't care if its 1986 Mr. Dakar, if you're dressed like that someone in your family better have died recently. Well, I'm sorry that you're bored, shall I do some magic tricks to entertain you? - Tell you what, how about I make that B- you have for the course vanish and reappear as an F. Do you hate the romantics? Do you prefer a form a literature in violent opposition to what I'm teaching? Are you a Dadaist or Surrealist? Bit of a Breton? What? You're American!! I meant Andre Breton you goat. Tell me have you read the Blake poem? You meant to? I meant to climb Mount Everest

Mr. Dakar but I haven't done it, have I? Tell me have you read anything? Ah! You don't let other people's creative side interfere with yours, charming answer, How about Shakespeare? You know most of the stories- lovely- then this should be easy for you, tell me Macbeth was the King Of? **(Waits for the student's answer)** Of course, Greece or Rome or one of those old Byzantine places. This is like trying to reason with cement. Mr. Dakar, you are a gigantic waste of vacant space, an unnecessary burden on the world's resources of oxygen, an aberration of a human being -a nothing, God's idea of a human semi-colon in the sentence of life. Get out of my class, and preferably the general vicinity of Manhattan before your stupidity causes someone physical harm.

Sunita: The Gift is one of his shorter earlier poems. It's also one among the forty-five I asked you to read over the weekend - which I hope you have, have you?

[Slight pause] I will take the silence to mean an overwhelming yes. And since you are so well verse with eastern verse, Shelly...

[Also talking to a student we don't see.] What would you say The Gift represented? You liked it. How nice- but that's a feeling young lady- I asked you what you *thought*. It was kind of powerful in a positive sort of way. As opposed to what? Powerful in a negative sort of way, you mean like a genocide? **(waits for answer)** Yes, the poem was open to a lot of interpretations, and yes it was because it had subtext within which wasn't easy to grasp, but that's why we call it *subtext* my dear. **(waits for another answer)** Did the class hear that? Shelly says that the poem was kind of freeing because she has a boyfriend and when she reads poems like this, it reassures her that being in a good relationship doesn't have to be a stressful thing. Shelly...thanks for that insight.

Mukesh: Keep in mind that love during the renaissance wasn't all Edmund Spenser, it-

Sunita (to class): Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, India's foremost literary figure - in my opinion an overrated man, often mistakenly hailed as "Gurudev" or the "The Guru of Gurus"...

Mukesh: ...was an undying magnificent force of love, inside a person, never spoken, that never become a touch or a scent or a marriage. Just an idea of perfection, created with you

and the romantic idea, in your head, of an imagined life. It is a passion of such magical grasp that no modern notions of commitment however long can even touch a fraction of how these Romantics pined for their women-forever. To me, this longing is a step away from my definition of perfection. A very small step. Consider;

Sunita: Pay particular attention to how Tagore loves things and how he sees things loving him back. His idea of perfect love lay in the fleeting, the shadow, the absent. His lovers met in smoky silhouettes within dark halls, for minutes and the memories of those times haunted them like unfinished ghosts with better things to do. Making them hollow, forever numb, forever with something left to say. To me, as love, that isn't enough. It just isn't enough. For analysis, take -

Mukesh: Consider-*'She walks in beauty like the night Of cloudless climes and starry skies'*-

Sunita: *'Love remains a secret even when spoken, for only a lover truly knows that he is loved.'*

Mukesh: Or Shakespeare -*'So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee'*.

Sunita: Or from Tagore's Fireflies, *'In love I pay my endless debt to thee for what thou art.'*

Mukesh: Compare with Tagore, the rubbish Indian poet, *'Let my love, like sunlight, surround you and yet give you illumined freedom.'*

Sunita: Compare with the incomparable Byron, *'When we two parted in silence and tears, half broken-hearted, to sever for years, pale grew thy cheek and cold, colder thy kiss; truly that hour foretold, sorrow to this.'*

Mukesh: Of course Byron, *'The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave, the moon, their mistress, had expir'd before;*

Sunita: Think of sadness -*'The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air'*,

Mukesh: *'And the clouds perish'd'*

Sunita: *'Darkness had no need of aid from them'*

Mukesh: *'She was the Universe'*. You see, a love complete.

Sunita: A love complete, yet somehow a fraction- *'In secret we met, in silence I grieve-'*

Mukesh: *'That thy heart could forget, thy spirit deceive-'*

Sunita: *'If I should meet thee-'*,

Mukesh: *'After long years,'*

Sunita: *'How should I greet thee?'*

Mukesh: *'With silence and tears?'*

Back to Sunita's apartment in 2000.

Sunita : I think its hypocritical for leading institutions to provide subjects completely irrelevant to what its graduates will spend the rest of their lives practicing.

Mukesh : A vocation, Sunita, a vocation like hunting or Accounting, can always be picked up.

Sunita : But not learnt?

Mukesh : Learning, my friend, knowledge -is not about facts but interpretations- how we imagine facts, distort them from experiences. Our classrooms are becoming video game parlors- bytes are replacing Byron- bigger buildings for computer sciences, smaller budgets for the classics, I-

Sunita : Listen; I don't really care about why no one reads Don Juan and how that affects your silly little scotch-drinking lifestyle. My problem is with what we teach than how we're treated.

Mukesh : Well by the look of that nice new cell phone, I'd say you're treated very well.

Sunita : I'm very well respected you know, at least around here. And checkmate.

Mukesh : Oh! I'm sure you are - respect in the non-essential academic departments, in their "Indian History" department which I'm assuming is what 2 maybe 3 people and a large storage room turned into a classroom. Can I finally have a drink now - whisky please, raw with...

Sunita : 3 cubes of ice - I haven't forgotten. [Pause]
You've been drinking it since our first year at Delhi University.

Mukesh : 20 years ago.

Sunita : 30.

Mukesh : What? It's been that long?

Sunita : We're old Mukesh. I can still remember you - walking in with those bright hopeful teary eyes -- full of this intense hunger for knowledge, a disturbed sense of humor and a complete inability to date women.

Mukesh : Fuck off! You don't remember Kamini; we used to go out for ice cream.

Black on New York City in 2000. We are in a bookshop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1975. A set up for a book-reading. The small audience includes Sunita (in a sari), and three empty chairs next to her.

Announcer's voice [from offstage - very colonial and British]: Hello Ladies and Gentleman and welcome to an Evening with novelist Gotham Holkar at The Ashanti Bookshop, here in Cambridge, Mass. I am Bubbles Patel of INDUS Culture Forum for artists, we provide a cultural forum for artists in India and US - (emphatic) hence INDUS. Hope you're enjoying the free wine and samosas. As the Nobel Prize winning Indian poet Tagore said, culture is...

Mukesh enters with Elizabeth (21). She looks grungy.

Mukesh : Fuck! [As he stumbles over people, making his way to Sunita] Bloody Hell, sorry, excuse me.

The Audience: Shhhhhh!

Mukesh (To Sunita): Hey, hey I I'm here.

Sunita : [embarrassed] Be quiet, I can see.

Mukesh : This is Elizabeth.

Sunita : Sit down!

The Audience: Shut Up!

Elizabeth: It's nice to meet you - I've heard so much about... you're all he talks about when he isn't pontificating about Literature. I've been so excited this past month-

Sunita : Yes.

Mukesh : This is *the* Elizabeth though, I mentioned her, remember, the-

Sunita : Stop being nervous, you talk too much when you're nervous.

Mukesh : Where is he?

Sunita : Late.

Mukesh : Are you dumping him then?

Sunita : No- he has a nice nose.

Mukesh : A nice nose is a better reason to date someone than punctuality?

Sunita : Sleep with.

Mukesh : What?

Sunita : I had to.

Mukesh : Was he offering you tenure?

Sunita : No but a huge sickle.

Mukesh : I bet he was.

Sunita : Not like that- as part of a Hammer and Sickle rally in Cambridge, he's a communist - Harvard Communist Club, there was a certain innocence about it.

Mukesh : An innocent sickle - really Sunita, do I have to hear this?

Sunita : Also the eyes - a suffering pupil.

Mukesh : A moron you mean - D's and F's?

Sunita : Pupils in the eyes you idiot- dilated, laden with sorrow, he's idealistic- it gets me hot.

Mukesh: That's sick.

Sunita : Like me, he also sleeps late.

Mukesh : I sleep late.

Sunita : You sleep with -um-(trying to remember Elizabeth's name)

Mukesh : Nevertheless, I...

Elizabeth: Elizabeth. With a z.

Mukesh : A name, does he have one? Is it Sleptin or Shagherov?

Sunita : Amit.

Mukesh : What kind of a Russian name is that?

Sunita : It isn't - Communists are like pop music- not restricted to geography.

Mukesh : He's just like us.

Sunita : Yes a Ph.d student.

Mukesh : I meant Indian.

Sunita : Except he's not a prick. He ponders over the human cruelty of everyday. It's genuine.

Mukesh : How Buddhist of him. What's he doing at Harvard? Starting his own religion?

Sunita : He's studying philosophy.

Mukesh : A communist philosopher in 70's America- that'll get him a job anywhere.

Sunita : Shut up- he's writing a novel.

Mukesh : Who isn't?

Sunita : No no he's actually writing one.

Mukesh : Some heartfelt fecal matter about a commie protagonist in a capitalist world going mad or some such nonsense- I'm sure of it.

Sunita : (to Elizabeth) So - how did this affair to remember begin?

Elizabeth: Well, he asked me out for dinner after his lecture on unspoken love- he had this really cute cravat on- Blake, we were doing the romantics.

Sunita : And now you're doing the one doing the romantics.

Elizabeth: [confused] Huh?

Sunita : [To Mukesh] Your student?

Mukesh: Well I...

Elizabeth: He is also my advisor.

Sunita : Lucky you- to have his advice in class and in the bed (corrects it) at home.

Elizabeth: [misunderstanding] Yes - he wants me to go to journalism school.

Sunita : Does he? Mukesh - you talent scout you- I can completely see how you see NBC written all over her.

Mukesh : [changing the topic] The cravat was from Saville Rowe.

Sunita : Right - the cravat.

Elizabeth: - it was of the queen or the King or something, very regal you know like the British Monarchy sort of regal.

Mukesh : Well it wasn't all that really, just something silkish I threw around my neck and-

Sunita : Shut up - (To Elizabeth) you were saying...

Elizabeth: How could I possibly refuse after he got me flowers and the Tennyson anthology...

Mukesh : Heliotropes.

Sunita : Withers quickly.

Mukesh : The Tennyson doesn't.

Elizabeth: And he's so British.

Mukesh : English you mean my dear, I mean I wouldn't want to act like someone from Wales, or God forbid, Scotland.

Sunita : A pseudo-anglophile you mean, he's actually from Calcutta my dear.

Elizabeth: Where?

Sunita : Very dirty place, east.

Elizabeth: East as in India?

Sunita : (confused) Yes - where else?

Mukesh :I told you I was born there, remember, the most cultured of all cities, like the Prague of the east.

Sunita : Well you don't hear of the black hole of Prague do you?

Elizabeth: I think I've seen some pictures of Calcutta, lots of poor starving children, naked- they looked so sad.

Mukesh : They're very well-fed kids - just modeling. What you saw was all trick photography darling - Japanese technology.

Announcer: The reclusive Mr. Gotham Holkar, India's celebrated post-colonial author is the winner of the Commonwealth Prize and a Booker for his debut novel, both of which he refused to accept. The reasons for his refusal are explained vaguely in a now famous letter he wrote to the Times titled "The Brown Identity " where he accused the Judges of celebrated book awards of being Western Imperialists, Homos and Spies.

Elizabeth: I think I can bear some dirt and heat for that cute posh accent, I find it so...

Sunita : Sophisticated.

Elizabeth: Yeah, yes exactly I mean I'm from Parry, Oklahoma and no one in Parry speaks so fine.

Sunita : Well, speaks well.

Elizabeth: Yeah - see what I mean, you all Indians know this stuff in English, which words sounds nice next to the other, that sort of thing.

Sunita : You mean grammar.

Elizabeth: Yeah - and it's so well pronounced.

Sunita : Enunciated.

Elizabeth: Right.

A man enters. Amit, (29), in a Mao jacket.

Amit: Hi Sunita! I'm so...

Sunita : Sorry?

Amit: Yes - I'm very...

Mukesh : You're late.

Amit: I thoroughly apologize, have you been...?

Sunita : We've been waiting a while now. (To Mukesh) This is Amit.

Mukesh : I'm sorry to hear that - Slept late?

Amit: What?

Sunita : This is Mukesh.

Amit: Oh-yes-right-I've heard that.

Mukesh : You mean about me, you've heard about...

Amit: The name before- I have a cousin.

Mukesh : I'm sure if he has my name, he's a great mind.

Amit: He's in prison, tax fraud.

Elizabeth: I'm Elizabeth, with a z.

Sunita: Oh yes- sorry.

Announcer: The reclusive Mr. Holkar has been accused of beating up interviewers, public urination in houses of worship, and the kidnap and torture of a fellow Indian writer for describing herself a magical realist. He attributes his sporadic nature to his years at Delhi University which he describes as "an Auschwitz-like" experience.

Sunita : [whispers] You're girlfriend is a fine catch. It's like walking around with a book of basic virtues with breasts.

Mukesh : Thank you - between wit and gullibility, I choose well.

Elizabeth: What?

Sunita : [Immediately] The Breasts of India Or Have We been Sucked? -Holkar's new novel - have you read it?

Elizabeth: Yes, loved it - specially the part where the British General stealing the Kohinoor Diamond gets burnt to death in a huge vat of Chicken Tikka Masala- I cried - the moment had an openness without being closed to other possibilities.

Amit: Thanks. I thought so too.

Bubbles: Mr. Holkar has decided to change his name to Gotham after his fascination for his newly adopted home, New York City. If you are addressing him at the book signing which will follow, please address him as Mr. Gotham.

Amit: There was lots of traffic Sunita, there were protests in Chinatown.

Mukesh : You mean Chinese people?

Amit: Yes.

Mukesh : Protesting?

Amit: Um-right - disgruntled with Nixon going there, trying to make peace you see.

Mukesh : You were trying to make peace?

Amit: Nixon is -

Mukesh : This upsets you?

Amit: Its very disturbing, for this inferior generation of feudalists led by clowns like Kissinger, to understand the higher mind of Mao.

Elizabeth: Wow! Good words.

Mukesh : You live there?

Amit: China, someday.

Sunita : Chinatown.

Amit: Of course.

Elizabeth: Nice- it's a good way to learn Chinese.

Mukesh : Cheaper is it?

Amit: I have a lot in common with my comrades there. The only place I can find solace in this capitalist whorehouse of a college town.

Mukesh : That's a relief; I thought you had a part-time job as a take-out boy and delivered beef wantons.

Amit: NO! What do you mean? I am a strict Vegan.

Mukesh : What is a Vegan - is that someone who lives in Vegas?

Amit: Are you trying to be funny?

Elizabeth: A Vegan is someone who eats no living animal or its derivatives.

Mukesh: Thanks darling.

Sunita: Amit is moving to New York with the publication of his second novel.

Mukesh : Second one huh? I thought-

Sunita : And I with him.

Mukesh : What?

Amit: She is contemplating- I have my fingers crossed.

Mukesh : Good. Pity New York City isn't further away.

Sunita : I might get an offer as an Associate Professor in the Indian History department, tenure track, of course. Columbia.

Mukesh : (angry) Bugger off the lot of you to all that concrete - you'll hate it. It'll be like living in a jail and paying rent for it.

Amit: No no-

Elizabeth: New York City has the Empire State Building.

Sunita : I'm sure you'll show up there too like a dog without purpose. You're like a human boomerang, recklessly wayward but always coming back to me.

Mukesh : Never! - Not unless I'm chained and pulled there by wild horses and shot dead before I reach, besides

Elizabeth and I are building something beautiful right here in Boston.

Elizabeth: See, he's so sensitive - always thinking of our future.

Sunita : [mocking him] you soft little cuddly teddy you...

Elizabeth: My little honey bunches of oats...

Mukesh : [As both women start tickling him, he quickly changes the topic] look, his bio says he has grazed in our pastures, Delhi University, class of 1970.

Amit: English Honors, I must have been a fresher when you and Sunita were just about graduating, I was heckled a lot by Seniors.

Announcer: And thus without much further ado, on this 30th day of April, 1975 - I present, reading from his newest work, the ever controversial- Mr. Gotham Holkar...

Amit gets up and takes the author's chair. There is some applause.

Mukesh: What the fuck?

Sunita: I told you it was a double date at a book reading.

Mukesh: Yes but I didn't know it was *his* book! What happened to Gotham Holkar?

Sunita: That's Amit's pen name.

Mukesh: Fuck.

Elizabeth: You're dating Gotham Holkar- that's so cool.

Mukesh : This idiot has won all those awards- I must stop reading novels.

The Audience: Quiet!

Amit: (Coarse, husky voice) Thank you Bubbles - Ahem - Good Evening. Death - what, where is it? You know, Kafka had

once said that death is the only objective reality and that got me thinking for a while, about depression and loneliness, then I ate some pomegranate and while staring at it's seeds, this...this poem, a glimpse in my mind's eye, in fragments, starting piecing together. The idea around the death of a collective- a cruel death of a nation. This verse I am going to read is part of an epic poem , like a post-modern Mahabharata or Gilgamesh - it is something that has a lot of pain, like childbirth, like our nation, our mother-homeland, the sweat in our pores, like burning fat. I wrote it after crying for 3 nights straight. It means a lot to me. It came from voices in my head, many of them in languages I didn't know.

Buries his face in his hands as if crying.

Mukesh: Oh! My God!

Amit: It's called...*[Slight Pause]* Your Tiranga and MY Vagina. The Tiranga, as you all know, are the three colors of the Indian flag.

A few acknowledgements of deep understanding from the audience.

Gotham Holkar: So hear goes...

He has a very old notepad in his hand. He tries to begin twice but doesn't. Then he hides his face.

Mukesh: Is he having a seizure?

Sunita: Sssh!

Gotham Holkar: (suddenly) FUCK! [Pause] BHARAT! Murder! Rama, Krishna, Kumbha Karna. Homer. Catillus. FUCK! [Pause, screams] Beckett!!!

This universe is nothing. I Love you.. Progressive rock. [Screams again] Oh! Fuck it

Drops of blood, each split, each experience, each, acid trip, passed on, surviving, an honor.

Later to the liberation, later to his, his, country, own, own me,

Gandhi, bureaucracy - [screams, elongates] Har-a-a-mi

Slave - A Nation. A mother. Her tears. Rape me. My blood is fucking me. I look at it-it is saffron. Me. I. Am all.

[as if he's finished a Hindu prayer] Om Nama Shivai

[Stands up] [In an Italian voice] Mama Mama - [As he runs, screaming] Vaginaaaaaaaaa - AAAAAHHHHH!

Runs out of the book reading, in tears. Total silence. Then some clapping, followed by more clapping, followed by wild standing ovation.

Sunita : Is it over?

Elizabeth: I suppose so.

Mukesh : I need a gun or some sharp weapon to bludgeon him with.

Elizabeth: Its great- his sense of self and the almost fluid rejection of structure -the arrogance to be angry - his love for India is evident - a beautiful cruelty.

Sunita : I am assuming you two are a couple because of your artistic differences and not in spite of them.

Mukesh : I'm demanding a refund! What an asshole!

Sunita : That asshole asked me to marry him.

Mukesh : What?

Sunita : Yesterday.

Mukesh : You're fucking joking! What did you say?

Sunita: Maybe. But that didn't stop me from-

She shows him the ring on her finger.

Elizabeth: Oh! Congratulations- that's so nice. You'll be Gotham Holkar's wife. You'll read his early drafts for free.

Mukesh : (to Elizabeth) Let's go love- (to Sunita) I'm still demanding a refund!

Black on 1975. A Civil Court in New York, summer 1979. Mukesh and Amit are in suits, Sunita is in a sari. Amit is signing a marriage register.

Amit: There! Your turn.

Sunita : [Looking at the register] Hmmm...

Amit: [pointing] Right there darling.

Sunita : Get away, away, vamoose, I need space.

Amit: I'm supposed to stand next you, for now and ever, it's assumed we get along since we're marrying each other.

Mukesh : Getting angry are we?

Sunita : I'm just a little nervous that's all.

Sunita : [Starts reading the document. Mumbling to self but loud enough for audience] Will be in legal matrimony till death...

Mukesh : Forever relegated to domestic chores, this is it - the big leap ... you're now the freshman of married life [as if to evoke fear] oooh!

Sunita : Shut up.

Mukesh : Driving you crazy isn't it - not the mistress of the your world anymore.

Sunita : If you love me darling, you'll please kill him - forget the honeymoon - make that our wedding present. Who asked you to be here anyway?

Mukesh : I received a special invitation from the groom and jumped on a *greyhound*, thank you very much.

Amit: No- Thank You.

Mukesh : As a *witness*, I'll have you know! I am sort of like his *best man*, if there be such a thing in the rituals of agnostic Communist nuptials.

Amit: There is. And you are.

Mukesh : And it happens to be a convenient day as I have an interview at an Ivy League university right here in Manhattan. Yours.

Sunita : You scheming bastard.

Mukesh : Surely language like this is disallowed in a courtroom! (To Amit) What a shame - brides nowadays, all that sixties liberal thinking has fucked them up I tell you...

Sunita : [Mumbling] Will share all material possessions... [Loud] my books, especially the philosophy ones, are mine and that's that you hear, as is the music system, and I keep my bank account.

Amit: So it is

Sunita : [thoughtful] hmm..hmmm..in sickness and health, without prejudice or malice...[makes a face as if she's read something horrible] [Reading again] To have and to hold...

Mukesh : That should read to wash and to fold. [To Amit] You kept this marriage registration a quiet affair. I was expecting a few more-

Amit: We wanted to make it special.

Sunita : He's lying -we don't have any other friends.

Amit: That's not true, I have that one fellow, Barry, from the Communist club, he couldn't come, he's in prison.

Sunita : [continues to read] And upon the presence of material witnesses, before the District Court of Lower Manhattan, we do foreswear, hereby on the 20th of July 1979, blah blah, written above thus...oh! Oh! [aloud] And if any person or persons, PRESENT HERE, shall have objections of any nature to this union may they speak now or forever hold their silence...

[looks at Mukesh]Well...

Mukesh : Read the fine print.

Sunita : [Looking at Mukesh]Right. [Looking at Amit] Where do I do this? - Sunita Bharti Sen - done!!

Amit: [celebratory] Yes!!!

Mukesh : Well congratulations is in order I suppose, I brought some champagne.

Amit: How kind.

Sunita : Muk- don't overdo it, [Amit Tries to kiss her] Please!

Amit: Can't a husband get a first kiss from his wife?

Sunita : No.

Amit: Why?

Sunita : You've kissed me before haven't you?

Amit: Yes.

Sunita : Well just try to remember what that was like and derive joy.

Amit: What do you mean?

Sunita : We're not going to flutter our eyes in coy romantic blush and drive away in a love-mobile.

Mukesh : Actually I was going to say, we should grab the subway to West Broadway because traffic-

[Another attempt at a kiss]

Sunita : Calm down -later-please.

Mukesh : Whatever happened to romantic bravery -stealing a love that legally was yours, like a Knight in shining...suit.

[Amit conjures up courage, grabs Sunita and kisses her vehemently]

Sunita : What the...

Amit: [nervous] This is all right to do - we've signed papers that make this all right.

Sunita : Now that you've embarrassed us enough, let's just pick up whatever dignity we have left and creep home.

Mukesh : And they lived wearily ever after.

We move to Mukesh's flat, Boston. December 1980. It is generally a careless intellectual place except for a nice piano which Mukesh plays. Elizabeth walks about with a glass of wine, wearing something Indian, preferably a salwar-kameez.

Elizabeth: Thanks for dinner.

Mukesh: (raising his glass) To you.

Elizabeth: It's only an internship with NBC.

Mukesh: It's a beginning- how was my cooking?

Elizabeth: Fabulous. Quirotic.

Mukesh: You mean Quixotic?

Elizabeth: Yeah- that's it.

Mukesh: Good word that one- quixotic.

Mukesh carries on playing, Elizabeth walks around and touches his shoulders.

Elizabeth: What is it?

Mukesh: It's a piano.

Elizabeth: Duh! I'm not an idiot, I meant what is it the piano's up to?

Mukesh: A sonata.

Elizabeth: That's different from an Operetta isn't it?

Mukesh: Yes very.

Elizabeth: Who wrote it? Chopping?

Mukesh: He did actually, very good, but it's pronounced Chopin.

Elizabeth: I prefer Chopping.

Mukesh: As you wish. He prefers Chopin I think.

Elizabeth: I saw the Oklahoma City Philharmonic once.

Mukesh: Wow.

Elizabeth: Yeah. They came to the Parry town hall. They played a concerto. It was oh!...like awesome. I went and bought Leila Fletcher's Piano Course, Level II but my yoga schedule never let me practice. I love concertos...or a waltz. Is this a concerto or a waltz?

Mukesh: It's neither. It's a sonata, like I said before. This Sonata is known as The Nocturnes. Opus 9, No. 2. Arguably, the saddest music ever written for fingers.

Elizabeth: It's very good -I've never heard it before.

Mukesh: Liar! Bill played it for you when he proposed.

Elizabeth: He did? I can't tell, all pianos sound the same. (thinks) Hey...how did you know?

Mukesh: I read in his letters.

Elizabeth: That's, like, not nice...spying. I bet you don't know what I said in reply.

Mukesh: Well, you've left him, you're here...and in love with me, so my guess would be you said no.

Elizabeth: You think you know everything Mr. Smarty pants, don't you?

Mukesh: Just about, except...

Elizabeth: Yes.

Mukesh: What you'd say if someone did it again?

Elizabeth: Played the piano for me? I'd think it was cute.

Mukesh: No, I *am* playing the piano for you, I meant asked you the same question.

Slight pause.

Elizabeth: So what are you asking exactly?

Mukesh: I'm asking you to marry me - on New Year's Eve 1979. What would you say to that?

Elizabeth: I'd say - I'd say- Oh! My God- I'd be delighted. Like, wow. And New Year's eve- its, like the 80's tomorrow, or something. It's going to be, like, beautiful.

Mukesh: I just want you to know that you don't have to marry me just because I'm advising you to do so - the advisee - professor relationship doesn't have to stretch this far.

Elizabeth: I totally understand. This is personal.

Black on 1980. We go to Mukesh's Apartment - Boston - 1984. There are many packing boxes around and all the furniture is covered in white cloth. Mukesh sits on his couch, drunk, watches a newscaster on TV (on mute) and drinks scotch. Several empty bottles of scotch sit in front of him - he looks distraught. An old Bollywood song plays gently in the background. It is Kishore Kumar's "Yeh Shaam Mastani". Thunder. Sunita enters.

Sunita : Right - I'm here to help.

Mukesh jumps up and dashes to change the music.

Sunita : Ha! Caught you.

Mukesh: Fuck.

He changes the music to Nat King Cole's Quizas. He sings the words, badly.

Sunita : [*Even louder*] Pathetic!

He sings some more.

Sunita : It's no use - your "native" preferences have been exposed - Kishore Kumar isn't it? That's who you spend your worst days with...

Mukesh : Today's the best day of my life.

Sunita shuts off the music.

Sunita : 16 years as Associate Professor at Harvard- people would die for it - but it's good- they'll never make you full professor. Where's the offer letter?

Mukesh pulls out a letter from his trouser pocket.

Mukesh : Thank You New York, New York.

Sunita : Don't start thinking Columbia is going to be a joke. Full tenured professor of Renaissance English doesn't mean you can lie around in a pool of scotch all day.

Mukesh : : No, no - damn serious - bloody serious! And I'm going to take it seriously. The Dean said I'm one in a million, he said. It...it was the toughest selection process in years. And this has nothing to do with her. (Points to the TV) Even though she's moved there - low-life, two-timing harlot.

Sunita : [Sees television on] Oh! Can't get her out of the house even after all this eh? What's she blabbering about? [Turns up volume]

Newscaster: "And President Reagan knows better than anyone that this year, 1984, will be the toughest of his fresh second term given the delicate nature of US - Iran relations. This is Elizabeth Singh for International Newfirst, New York.

Sunita : [looking at the TV] My God she's looking fat, must be eating well, all your alimony money. In due time I'm sure she'll drop the excess... and the last name.

[Switches off TV]

Mukesh : Thank God it's over.

Sunita : Was she there or covering this Reagan nonsense.

Mukesh : She was there -with some new love interest -a blonde NBC cameraman- looked more tanned than (thinks) me- claimed they met on a "breaking story".

Sunita : A breaking story leads to a broken marriage! (slight pause) Sorry. So how was it, the actual signing of the divorce papers?

Mukesh : A fucking party, how do you think?

Sunita : Right.

Mukesh : She wanted more.

Sunita : How much more? She's taking almost everything it appears.

She looks around to survey the situation.

Sunita : Your books? You get to keep the books, yes?

Mukesh : Yeah- what'll she do with those- she doesn't know all the letters of the alphabet. The settlement was the best I could finagle.

Sunita : Alimony deals are a bitch to negotiate.

Mukesh : I don't think I can do another one of these for the rest of my life.

Sunita : 'Marriages can either be prisons or islands', Gertrude Stein I think.

Mukesh: I've bowed out with dignity, haven't I?

Sunita : Of course- and alive. That's important. Alcoholic, a little destroyed with all the infidelity and arguments and without employment...

Mukesh: Hey...hey...

Sunita : But alive. And a new job near me. So which boxes are coming with us?

Mukesh : What boxes are what?

Sunita : I'm here to pick you up. I figured I'd - that Boston must be lonely-you could stay with us for a few months in Brooklyn - you don't start till the end of the summer- explore the city - we've got an extra bedroom.

Mukesh: Explore the city? Who am I - Christopher fucking Columbus?

Sunita : Look, Amit and I chatted. You could orient yourself by roaming around the university - have coffee with me. Read. Watch French movies. You aren't exactly in the happiest of moods to be alone. Now if you were clever enough to actually have some friends, *anywhere*, I wouldn't care so much but given you don't-

Mukesh : Lies- you just want to get away from it all. From all of him. You're my Mrs. Dalloway. You're here to change my life in one day. I'm your poet. But remember, eventually, the poet must die. The poet must not be alive only to make you happy. Virginia Woolf killed the poet.

Sunita : That's rubbish Mukesh, I drove to Cambridge to have a word about your pathetic lifestyle and your slovenly, unkempt, drunken- (beat) He called didn't he? Did he?

Mukesh : Maybe.

Sunita : [Conspiratorial] look - it's - it isn't what you think - I've only run away for a while- I haven't left him. I need to sort out some things. Feelings. He's still there, In New York I mean - I've left -it's only been a day - the kids are in boarding school - they don't know - only he does - it's rude to call it a separation I suppose, not till I start paying my own rent.

Mukesh: You don't love him Mrs. Dolloway. You never did.

Sunita : Stop being silly, Mukesh - You cant say all this - and to me. Not now. When will you get it? 97% of a relationship is just hanging around, the other 3 is your notion of romantic love, your 3 percent wasn't worthy of demanding that my world revolve around it. Married people build things, habits, like sweaters and children, dinner parties and joint checking accounts, institutions, permanence.

Mukesh: Go build then- why come here?

Sunita : I remembered a man. A man in a cravat quoting Hamlet, a misfit, a childish clown, curious, vulnerable, who wasted most of his life in search of perfect literature yet taught it with disdain, someone I see through sometimes more than I see myself, someone who dismissed most of modernity as worthless but loved those within it like Paris his Helen, a resigned man forever solving a puzzle, a fallible dreamer, always following patterns - one in particular - of denial, of restrained words, of hiding away his loves. I thought I have to go and tell that man that...tell him that I have- before it's too late- that I-

Amit storms in.

Amit: Sunita!

Sunita :Amit!

Amit:It's time Sunita - lets go home. I've come to take you back.

Sunita :I was - we were just talking.

Amit: It's all right - I've heard it, what you feel, how you feel it.

Sunita : You have?

Amit: About us - me. I'm sorry for not saying what I should everyday, I'm not very good with emotion, Marx said emotion is only a stumbling block to human achievement so I try and avoid it. Yet, you -you see through me, your eyes are daggers, they capture it all, as if you can swim in my mind, socialize with my thoughts. Let words free us, then

darling. I will talk more-to you-about everything- my dirtiest desires. Don't leave me again, come home - we'll give it all a fresh start.

Sunita looks puzzled.

Sunita: You were saying...?

Mukesh: You should go.

Sunita: Right.

Amit: Come then, its late.

Mukesh: It's very late.

Black on Boston in 1984. We are in New York City, 1995. Sunita's apartment. Amit and Sunita are arranging plates and such around a dining area that has been set up to be festive. They wear party hats. Confetti, curly strings and other party accoutrements decorate the room. The OJ Simpson trial plays on the background on a television.

Amit: The New Yorker has asked me to do an article on the cultural implications of this trial.

Sunita: The cultural implications are simple- a bunch of bastards at TV networks make billions from this perversion and sell you pills and grills in the commercial breaks.

Amit: Sometimes I think you don't understand America at all.

Sunita: Sometimes I think I understand it too well.

Amit: Did you pay the Con Edison bill?

Sunita: No.

Amit: But it's the first. We discussed this. I have set up a check of the exact electricity bill amount to be generated every month through the bank of a sequential

check number. It will arrive, has arrived, to your office desk. I have set it up like that. All you have to do is drop it in the mail which is adjacent to your office. The Con Edison address is a peeled sticker which I have created and enclosed in the very same envelope. You had to stick and post. Postage is done at a bulk adjusted rate and stamped, as per my negotiation with the post office. I have organized it to be simple and so we don't have a delay because the Federal Electricity Rules say that more than 15 days, and a consumer has less rights to-

Sunita: I didn't pay the fucking bill, Amit, ok, I'm not as organized as you. I forgot. People forget.

Amit: What's really bothering you?

Sunita: I think this is stupid.

Amit: He will love it.

Sunita: He's fourteen.

Amit: So?

Sunita: Our son is a teenager - he should act like one- listen to rock music- which fourteen year olds' birthday party involves parents with party hats organizing board games? He will think we are idiots. His friends will laugh at him- he's at that age- precarious.

Amit: But his friends are all geeks- like him.

Sunita: That's the point, we should encourage him to do something different. Meet some girls, play a sport, anger rowdy boys, fight. We shouldn't be throwing him a birthday party.

Amit: He asked us to. And I think he has a girlfriend.

Sunita: That girl Amy who reads the encyclopedia? She is worse than him- have you seen the size of her glasses.

Amit: Still- she comes over, they play chess. She's a champion or something.

Sunita: You think its normal for a fourteen year old to spend his birthday preparing for a spelling bee contest that's six months away?

Amit: Would you rather have him drinking outside malls and stealing money from us for crack?

Sunita: It would be a start. At least I could ground him.

Mukesh enters dressed like Darth Vader.

Mukesh: The door was open.

Sunita: What the fuck is going on?

Mukesh takes off his helmet.

Mukesh: He loves Star Wars. I'm surprising him. We're going to have a saber fight later on.

Sunita: You are an idiot.

Mukesh: (sees the TV) Oh! The OJ trial. He's a crap actor.

Amit: The New Yorker has asked me to do an article on the cultural implications of this trial.

Mukesh: The cultural implications are simple- a bunch of bastards at TV networks make billions from this perversion and sell you pills and grills in the commercial breaks.

Amit: That's what Sunita-

Mukesh notices a book on the table.

Mukesh: And what do our famous authors read, hmmm...

Amit: Don't worry about that. It's nothing.

Amit grabs it from him.

Mukesh: That was 'How to Get rich using technology' wasn't it- wonder what Lenin would say about that?

Amit: Let's drop it shall we?

Sunita: Amit wants to spin something within the worldwide web - he reads books like that all day- isn't that what they call it, the web? Tell him.

Amit: It's nothing. I'm contemplating starting a website called www.karlm Marxwillbeback.com. It's a chat room.

Mukesh: We need a computer nowadays to chat? What happened to the good old bar?

Amit: It's a place for communists of all sorts to get together and chat.

Mukesh: Wasn't that the point of the Soviet Union?

Sunita: Yes but this will take up a lot less space, I think.

Amit: I don't want to talk about it. Be useful and help us prepare the punch. I've put in the exact proportions of ingredients necessary. Why are two hours early?

Mukesh: Where is the rotten bastard?

Amit: He's at a Spelling Bee prep course with his girlfriend.

Mukesh pulls out a toy light saber that lights up. He is swooshing it around.

Mukesh: He doesn't need a prep course- I'll teach him. Sunday afternoons in the park, we'll walk around and I'll teach him *lascivious* and *progenitor* and *pterodactyls*. If he fucks up, I will beat him with this- if he gets it right, I will give him a disc of Brahms 4th movement. He likes Brahms. Wait- what girlfriend- he didn't say anything to me.

Sunita: It's nothing to talk about. She has the social skills of a corpse. And not even accidentally attractive.

Amit: They are cute together- both with big glasses- I hope they marry.

Sunita: You will make my son completely dysfunctional.

Amit: (to Mukesh) He plays Chopin for her- that's why I am also thinking of some piano lessons for him. His guidance counselor thinks he has a natural ear for notes.

Sunita: Fuck the natural ear for notes! What about an unnatural ear for rowdiness? I want him to grow up to be Humphrey Bogart and you're both turning him into Stephen Hawking.

Mukesh: Leave it to me. Wednesday nights are good. I've heard him play- he's rubbish. In ten of fifteen years, he may be amateur concert level but that would mean rigorous training. No food, that sort of thing. So Sundays for spelling in the park, Wednesdays for music at home. In some years, there's a man in him yet.

Sunita: He's 14!!!

Mukesh: Mozart was touring Europe with concerto's at 9.

Sunita: He was also dead at 33. I'd prefer my son to outlive me.

Mukesh: What kind of a Godfather am I going to be if I can't be God-like to the boy?

Amit: Exactly.

Sunita: He already has weak eyes because you insist on bringing him those classics every week.

Amit: Classics are necessary- imperative. The history of Western classical literature- Horace, Euclid-

Sunita: Shut up- you sound like a pompous novelist.

Amit: I am a pompous novelist.

Mukesh: I didn't tell him to finish all of Proust in a week- he did it.

Sunita: I want to see porn under my son's bed, not Proust. If you're going to teach him everything, I'd like you to teach him some naughty things as well.

Mukesh: I'll see what I can do about that. I'm not very familiar with where to acquire pornographic products.

Amit: Sunita!

Sunita: Find out. I didn't suffer for nine months to give birth to a frail pianist who dresses like the captain of an intergalactic spacecraft, spells xenophobe in Portugese and marries Virginia Woolf. Can't you take him gambling or something?

Mukesh: I know a Dominican professor who is into off-track betting.

Sunita: Good. Horse racing, the dog track, cock fights will also do. I read that there was illegal gambling in Queens. He might enjoy that- craps, poker.

Mukesh: We could rob a used book store. I know the owner, so he won't mind if I return the books later.

Sunita: Good, good - it's good real life experience.

Amit: Stop it.

Sunita: How about some contact sports? Boxing- wrestling- don't you know any big wrestling things on tv? Get some beer and pizza and watch with him and his friends.

Amit: Our son shouldn't drink beer.

Mukesh: There's some sumo wrestling lecture at University.

Sunita: Take him and then take him to a bar and buy him a shot.

Amit: AHHHHHH!!!!

Sunita: I want that boy to breathe, to see things, to be reckless and young. If he wasn't so fucking clumsy as an athlete, I would tell him to abuse minorities and run- I might tell him anyway.

Amit falls.

Amit: Oh God!

Sunita: Stop acting- you just don't understand what I mean about being young.

Mukesh: I don't think he is

Amit flops about the floor.

Sunita: What?

Mukesh: Acting.

Amit: Aaaaahhhhh! Aaaahhhhh!

Sunita: What the hell-

Mukesh: Is he breathing?

Sunita: Bleeding? He isn't bleeding.

They rush over to him. Amit stops flipping about and is still.

Sunita: The heart- I knew it. The fucking heart- it's in his family.

Mukesh: What's the protocol in a circumstance like this?

Sunita: Do something Mukesh.

Mukesh: Right- a hospital- what? 911?

Sunita: Something. Take charge.

Mukesh: Fuck.

Sunita starts pumping Amit's chest.

Sunita: Wake up, Amit, wake up you bastard it's your son's birthday. Amit, please! Please! Call an ambulance!

Mukesh: (into telephone) Hello - this is an emergency- don't put me on fucking hold- hello!

Sunita: Save him- I'm helpless without him- I love him.

Mukesh: I know.

Sunita: Not like the way you think I do...I do.

Mukesh: I see.

Mukesh drops the phone, picks up Amit.

Mukesh: Fuck- he's fat.

Sunita: What are you doing?

Mukesh: Taxi to Mount Sinai- quick!

Black on 1995. We are back to Sunita's apartment in 2000.

Sunita : Why Mukesh?

Mukesh : Why ice cream?

Sunita : Why did you come here?

Mukesh : You invited me, like you've invited me every Thursday for the last five years. Ever since Amit died- right there actually, behind this kitchen table.

Sunita : No I don't mean now, I mean why all of this? Why the United States? Why academics?

Mukesh : Because I loved literature - you loved literature. What's with these questions?

Sunita : I have to admit I often think how great it would be to be teaching in India.

Mukesh : Listen after 3 whiskies' I am not going to listen to an existentialist green card crisis.

Sunita : Even after all these years, you don't listen to me. I told you I wanted to teach.

Mukesh : Of course - teach. Teach in spider-infested classrooms in schools built by the British and now in a state of ruin. For a 300 rupee salary which is what, a buck, 2 bucks something like that. You'd quickly forget that palm pilot when you spend sleepless nights in a cockroach-infested apartment in Calcutta.

Sunita : Don't be so cynical. I just think it would be nice to be actually have effect on a young mind, even if it meant a few sacrifices. We don't teach here in America

anymore. It's publish or perish, some groundbreaking research, petty skirmishes amongst colleagues, schmoozing with the Chair, partying with some administrator, grants for hip topics, Islam or Communists or whatever the fuck is the flavor of the month, Where's the dedication to one field of study over a lifetime? Whose teaching the undergraduate student? Some drunken Graduate student?

Mukesh : They are only undergraduates Sunita - they are not complete human beings.

Sunita : Stop being clever and think. Think what are we doing with our time? Looking for cash by proffering up some ethnic aberration- some Guggenheim fellowship to spend a year studying tribal lunatics dancing in Rajasthan or deformed puppets in Manipur and then writing some book on it so that a bunch of New York academics can think how poetic and exotic it all is. But what do we really do with that grant money? Hang out in some big Indian city at some English club, drinking tea with the family - maybe going once to see the puppets and lunatics in some emaciated village. Is that any way to fit in to the west? Hiding our modernity? Is this what free thinking has led us to? Peddling our ethnicity to justify our jobs?

Mukesh: Maybe for you. I teach Shakespeare.

Sunita: And look at you. Languishing after all these years as a junior Professor. Obscure, ignored and allowed to just be. Where are your colleagues who focused on *Indian myths in Western Literature* or the *Power of India in the English Novel*? Chairs of English Departments somewhere. And you still have the job that a smart thirty-year-old gets. Why? Because you want to teach fucking Edmund Spencer. Mukesh, you maybe absolutely brilliant but you are rejected. You know it. You know how famous you'd be asking for grants on subjects like *Indian writers In English* or *Postcolonial Thought or Subaltern Studies* or some nonsense like that, as long as you harped on how bad the English fucked us up.

Mukesh: But they didn't.

Sunita: No one cares about the truth. You were colonized. It must have sucked. Write about it. Simple. Don't worry about shades of grey. Why do national stereotypes matter so much? Because they do. You may know more about Hamlet or Beowulf than any Anglo-Saxon but they will always find you

fit enough to teach VS Naipul or '*Shakespeare Compared With The Ramayana*' or some such comparative shit. I'm repeating but that's how the world is broken up Mukesh, not what you can do but where you're from and how you sell it- at least in academia. Maybe it's different for widget makers or bankers. If you were less drunk all the time, you'd see this for what it is.

Mukesh: I do. I also know that it's not a common picture in the west. The Indian versed in Western classics. There are too few of us. We stay quiet. The model Indian is wrapped in myth and magical realism.

Sunita: That's why I am going somewhere where he is not. Maybe.

Goes to take the glass away from her.

Mukesh : That's it - No more booze for you. Look, forget all this rubbish about work, there's something I've been wanting to tell you. I think-

Sunita : This will come as a shock to you but I have made a decision too.

Mukesh : And what's that?

Sunita : I'm going back.

Mukesh : What, where?

Sunita : To Sudan, where the fuck do you think? To India.

Mukesh : [[Appropriate pause, stumbling] Whoa, you, you can't do that, what do you mean, the kids and your house and cars and your position, the money - you're sixty years old for god sake! You'll die of syphilis in a week, you haven't lived there for 300 years, and you can't even speak the language.

Sunita : Yes I can, I think. I'm leaving Mukesh, The kids of course are going to be here, its best, jobs and all that plus they may not like it, with the weather. They will visit of course, very often and there's email now. I've bought a small house in Bangalore and I'm talking to the Vice Chancellor about a teaching job at the local University - it should work out.

Mukesh : Why?

Sunita : I'm looking for something. I don't know what it is yet but I'll have the freedom to search for it. Some sort of order. Still.

Mukesh : You have fucking order...leading professor, good mother, reasonable widow, eclectic apartment...

Sunita : But the one thing- a constant-

Mukesh : You're not a mathematical equation!

Sunita : I always thought of some idealism. One idea, one person, one - one thing to live for, bettering it would better me.

Mukesh : Well there's always one thing to hold you back. There's always-

Sunita : Yes?

Mukesh : Teaching.

Sunita : Right. (sighs) I'm disillusioned with having to live between things I suppose. Straddling ideas and cultures, being some ambassador, putting up some front, explaining chicken curry or British rule.

Mukesh : That's xenophobic cowardice of the worst sort- It's nonsense! Not joining a melting pot just because it *is* a melting pot. Mixing is all that's left.

Sunita : But at least the place is mine. One thing that is mine. How I have loved it and it has loved me back hasn't changed. Everything holding still in some ideal state. Thirty years. Perhaps idealism is equilibrium. Maybe the way we we were and want to be are the same.

Mukesh : Are you an idiot? Which India were you in - the one from Merchant Ivory movies? The country is an American theme park now- cell phones and soap operas and fast foods and phone sex companies. It's capitalist chaos- worse than here because it's the first phase-they are just finding everything money can do.

Sunita : Maybe I'm looking to go back to live in an old dusty photograph that was lying in the first place. Maybe to understand something, you have to go away from something else.

Mukesh : You sound like a self-help Guru for expatriates.

Sunita : Maybe it isn't that hard. Maybe simplicity is simple. Maybe love for something is as simple as saying I love-

Mukesh : So this has been planned for many years.

Sunita : Just this last year - Amit had been wanting this for many years - I'm the one who held him back - noble profession and all that. I feel I could go back and redeem some things. He always wanted to see The Lake Palace. I could for him.

Mukesh : This is our last Thursday meeting, no more games.

Sunita : Don't make it sentimental, you have no emotions so don't fake it; you said it, no more games.

Mukesh : Saved the best friend for last?

Sunita : I didn't want to tell you earlier - I thought tonight would be special.

Mukesh : I can't believe you're doing this [**she comes very close to him**]. I think you're crazy, [**she comes even closer**], I think you're like a little girl with her first Barbie- you're- I know you will find what you want.

Sunita : Every loss is a gain somewhere else-it keeps things equal.

Mukesh : You mean separate but equal.

Sunita : Go live life - we've been too close too long.

Mukesh : We've never been away from each other since...since Harvard?

Sunita : Before that. [Pause] It's been a while.

Mukesh : And what a while it's been.

Sunita : I always thought you came here for me. I always thought you did everything for me.

Mukesh : I should've said something - at some point - something.

Sunita : Then say something - there's nothing to lose now. There never was.

[Mukesh tries. Says silent.]

Sunita : You still can't. After all these years, not a single word of your own.

Mukesh : Those women- Kamini, Victoria, all of them, they don't exist. They were never there.

Sunita : I know.

Mukesh : Elizabeth - the marriage- it didn't mean anything.

Sunita : I know.

Mukesh : In life - a pattern - the one thing - a constant - a constant is important.

Sunita : Am I still that?

Mukesh : You're that. You always were and will be.

Sunita : I'll see you before I leave.

Mukesh : Of course.

Sunita : And Mukesh?

Mukesh : Yes

Sunita : You will never know what you could have been, this is your chaos.

Mukesh : You knew who I was; that is yours.

Sunita pours equal proportions of whisky into 2 glasses, hands one to Mukesh; they raise it as a toast.

Sunita : "Parting is such sweet sorrow. If we do meet again, we shall smile, if not this parting was well made."

They drink together.

Mukesh: Shakespeare - Hamlet, Act III, Scene II. Good night Sunita.

He Leaves.

Sunita : Muk - Hey you Idiot! After all these years, he still won't admit I was better at Shakespeare than he was, It's from two separate plays, you illiterate baboon, Romeo & Juliet and Julius Caesar. Separate plays and yet connected words. It feels like the words flow together [pause], separate but equal.

-----**End of Play**-----