

STILL AND STILL MOVING*

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Writers Bloc 3

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CHARACTERS

PARTHO: Mid-40s, a writer

ADIL: 19 – 21, a student

RISHI: 15 – 17, Partho's son

A CHORUS of supporting roles, to be divided between between 7 – 9 actors.

A NOTE ON THE DESIGN

The play is set in several varying locations.

The Delhi Metro Train Compartment appears significantly through the play. It could be constructed on a level Upstage or as a dividing corridor around Centre according to the discretion of the director and designer.

Partho's house is represented by a Guest Room through the first half of the play, making way for another room – his Bedroom – later on. There should be something amorphous about the identity of these rooms, almost as if one turns into another without much fuss.

All other locations should be played out with minimal and movable sets.

A NOTE ON THE 'LOOK'

The most persistent stage direction in this play is the 'Look' – one character looking at another. Each of these moments must be read as a significant action, as crucial as dialogue or movement.



PROLOGUE

Winter. Night.

A man, PARTHO, speaks at a book launch.

The din of a small crowd.

The occasional flash of cameras.

PARTHO: Don't ask me about the book. Every time I am asked something, about this book, I find myself dancing around the question. That's typical of writers, isn't it? ... That and our remarkable ability to quote other writers.

Beat.

Like Eliot ... "Love is most nearly itself" ... this is entirely out of context, of course ... "is most nearly itself / When here and now cease to matter. / Old men ought to be explorers / Here or there does not matter / We must be still and still moving / (*Beat*) Into another intensity."

Long Pause.

Lately I find myself talking about trains ...The order of things as observed from a train window. Clarity improving only with distance, the violent speed of the tracks colliding and parting ... Sleeping and waking, finding everything around you exactly the same and everything outside changed.



1.

Summer. 2008.

Lights come up on a portion of a Delhi Metro underground train compartment: silver poles, red and black hand-rests, white light.

A young man, ADIL, stands, peering at his reflection on the train's glass window. He examines the length of his hair.

Another MAN stands close to him.

An announcement on the speakers:

VOICE: 'Please beware of pickpockets in the train or in the station area. The next station is Central Secretariat.'

The MAN turns to ADIL. They speak in Hindi.

MAN: Student?

ADIL *nods.*

MAN: *Aaj bheed kuch zyada hai. Aam taur pe iss time pe itne log nahi hotey. Subah aur shaam ko... haan. Shaam ko sab log ghar ja rahe hotey hain, ek saath. Shaam ko agar baithne ki jagah naa miley toh mein mind nahi karta... par dopahar ke dhai baje toh seat milni chahiye. Aaj kuch chal raha hai, kya?.*

He stares at ADIL.

ADIL: I think *ab aasaan ho gaya hai* ... with the Metro. *Log jagen ja rahe hain jahaan unhe jaana nahi hota. Kyunki they can.*

MAN: *Tourist ki tarah. Mein nahi. Mere paas faltu cheezon ke liye time nahi hai. Saara din paseena bahata hoon aur din khatam hone pe ghar jaana chahta hoon... apne bachon ke paas. Saale ronu hain... bigde hue.. par mein apni evenings unke saath bitata hoon. Kyunki mujhe aisa karna chahiye. Kissi din tum bhi samajh jaoge.*

He laughs.

ADIL does not respond.

MAN: *Papa kya karte hain?*

ADIL: *Papa?*

ADIL *is pushed by someone from behind.*

ADIL: *Wo... yahan nahi rehte.*
 MAN: *Nahi rehte? Lucky! Waise, karte kya hain?*
 ADIL: *Business.*

The MAN nods.

MAN: *Good. Very good. I respect that. Mein tumhare papa ki respect karta hoon.*
 ADIL: *Aap unhe jaante bhi nahi hain.*
 MAN: *Haan lekin mein aise aadmi ki respect kar sakta hoon, jo ki kaam karta hai. Tumare liye kaam karte hain na? Taaki tum yahan padhai kar sako... iss metro mein safar kar sako.*
 ADIL: *Actually ... mere papa -*
 MAN: *Tum unke liye khade hoge?*
 ADIL: *Sorry?*
 MAN: *Agar wo is metro mein aye, tumhare papa jaisa koi aadmi, kya tum usse apni seat doge?*
 ADIL: *Agar unhe baithne ki zaroorat hai toh haan...*

The MAN nods.

MAN: *Sab kehte hain hum modern hotey jaa rahe hain... change ho raha hain... 'Modern' ... Bakwaas! Humare bachon ke bheje mein kooda bhare jaa raha hai. Mera beta... ek number ka gadha hai ... Matlab usse patang tak udaani nahi aati... Aur meri respect nahi karta... Mujhe toh nahi lagta.*

Pause.

Tum apne father ki baat sunte ho?

ADIL *does not look at him.*

ADIL: *Sunta tha ... Wo ab nahin rahen.*

The MAN stares at him for a few seconds, then turns away.

A Metro Announcement:

VOICE: *Central Secretariat Station. Mind the gap.*

The train compartment empties; only the MAN remains, staring after ADIL.

2.

The Guest Room in Partho's house.

Late Summer. Mid-afternoon.

ADIL sits opposite a mirror, wrapped in a sheet, reading a letter.

PARTHO stands behind him, cutting his hair.

ADIL: Consent.

PARTHO: Hm?

ADIL: For ... 'Consent *to*' or 'Consent *for*'?

PARTHO: Consent to ... Adil's participation.

ADIL: Okay ... You have to sign.

PARTHO: I will. I'm just going to take a little bit, an inch off the back?

ADIL: Yes, thanks.

PARTHO continues to trim ADIL's hair from the back.

PARTHO: What happens at a 'Culture Forum'?

ADIL: Debates, discussions ... street theatre.

Pause.

There is a theme. 'The Story in History'. Manipulations of historical material, what is the responsibility of educational boards, text books, working towards unbiased readings ...

PARTHO: The Story is History.

ADIL: *In*. In History.

PARTHO: Look down, please ... Are you going to present something? A paper?

ADIL: No. I won't be ... There are others.

PARTHO: You don't feel strongly about the subject?

ADIL: I feel the same as everyone else. But conferences, you know ... There is a lot of talking and clapping. People try to demonstrate how clever they are and how stupid everyone else is. Humorous anecdotes. Applause!

PARTHO: But there is student representation, if it's a forum -

ADIL: The students are the worst, man. Everything is "subaltern" and people will say anything in the name of 'Marxism'. It's like there is an aggression which does not correspond to ideology.

PARTHO *moves to ADIL's right.*

PARTHO: Trimming the sides.

ADIL: Okay ... Where I did my PUC, there were student strikes all the time. Whenever they were unhappy they started chucking stones at windows. And one of my profs used to say: 'They don't want anything to change actually. They just like to hear the sound of glass breaking.'

PARTHO: Maybe the time of intelligent debate is over. This is the Age of Cacophony, the loudest voice wins. The sound of breaking. And the moderates sulk in the corner.

Pause.

Are you going to sulk in the corner?

ADIL: I don't like shouting.

PARTHO: You prefer quiet determination. Does that work?

ADIL *looks at him.*

PARTHO *snips off a last bit of hair.*

They clean up.

ADIL: You know, I found a copy of your short stories. In Daryaganj. You didn't tell me about this one.

PARTHO: Second hand? Somebody got rid of it.

ADIL: Somebody passed it on. Now it's mine.

Pause.

I like it. My favourite till now is 'The Bulletin'.

PARTHO: Why is it your favourite?

ADIL: I don't know ... There is something. I think it has 'quiet determination'.

PARTHO: It does?

ADIL: Guess it's from your college days, the story.

PARTHO: Shall I sign?

PARTHO *signs the letter.*

ADIL *looks at him.*

ADIL: You'll need to add ... 'Local Guardian'.

PARTHO: Okay. In parentheses?

ADIL: Yes. Fine.

PARTHO: So – I don't understand why you are actually going, because you don't seem to be convinced of the purpose of this thing, the forum.

ADIL: It's not the forum I'll be going for ... That weekend is Diwali and my birthday and I wanted to get out of D.U. Out ... of the city. The travel and stay is subsidised so –

PARTHO: Don't you want to spend your birthday with someone?

Pause.

ADIL looks at him.

Friends?

ADIL: *Haan.* Going with a friend.

Beat.

PARTHO: Girlfriend?

ADIL smiles.

PARTHO touches the side of ADIL's face with two fingers.

PARTHO: If you need to shave, I have an extra razor ...

ADIL: I'll be off, actually. I have to write a tutorial on the Opium Wars.

PARTHO: Stay. You can work here. I'll supply the tea.

ADIL: I didn't get my books.

PARTHO: I have plenty.

ADIL laughs.

PARTHO: No? Not the right books?

ADIL puts the letter in his knapsack, gets ready to leave.

PARTHO: You didn't sleep much.

Pause.

Were you comfortable? The diwan is a bit lop-sided. You could have –

ADIL: It was fine. I'll sleep. I can sleep on the bus if I get a seat.

PARTHO: You'll take a bus?
 ADIL: Rickshaw. Bus. Then Metro. Following the progress of public transport.

They laugh. They look at each other.

ADIL: It'll become lots easier when they complete the Metro lines.
 PARTHO: I've hardly been ... on the Metro.
 ADIL: You rarely come that side -
 PARTHO: Yes ... I don't ... venture - you know I feel odd, because the way the seating is, I don't know ... disconcerting.
 ADIL: Everyone is ... mostly in their own head on the train. Ya, you have the feeling that someone is staring at you. But you can't help it in the silence, I guess. People are looking at each other.

A short silence.

They look at each other.

ADIL: In two years I'll be able to take the Metro all the way to Gurgaon.
 PARTHO: Two years.

Pause.

Will you?

ADIL *looks at him, shrugs.*

3.

Days later. Diwali.

Lights come up on PARTHO, sitting in his house, going through pages of a manuscript.

Music plays: a song by Miriam Makeba.

PARTHO sips on a glass of whiskey and makes edits to the page with a pencil.

ADIL *at a phone in his college hostel.*

Hostel boys celebrating Diwali.

Sporadic flashes of light, the sound of firecrackers.

ADIL *dials a number and waits, then -*

PARTHO *'s cellphone rings. He stares at the number for a few seconds, then picks up.*

PARTHO: Hello.
 ADIL: Hello, Hi ... It's Adil speaking ...
 PARTHO: (*louder*) Hello!
 ADIL: Adil here.
 PARTHO: Adil.
 ADIL: I'm out of balance.

Beat.

On my phone.
 PARTHO: Right. This ... Is this a Delhi number?
 ADIL: Ya ... I'm still here. The trip was cancelled. So I didn't go.
 PARTHO: Oh ... What -
 ADIL: I'm here at the Residence. There is some house party going on ... Everyone's having tea and *jalebis*. I thought I would call to tell you -
 PARTHO: Hold on.

He turns the music down to low.

Lights flash in ADIL's face.

PARTHO: Sorry.
 ADIL: Are you working? I hope I didn't disturb ...
 PARTHO: No, you didn't ... Why was the trip cancelled?
 ADIL: It was ... uh ... It wasn't.

Pause.

PARTHO: Hello ... Adil?
 ADIL: I just didn't go. You know, I felt a bit of a hypocrite ... So I dropped out.
 PARTHO: Are you going somewhere else?

ADIL: No. Here. I decided to stay ... I was thinking of doing something on Saturday night.

PARTHO: To celebrate.

ADIL: Yes.

Beat.

PARTHO: Come here?

Beat.

ADIL: My friends, we were making a plan ...

PARTHO: Okay. A party?

ADIL: Something, yes. Will you be free?

PARTHO: I don't know. Where will you be?

ADIL: That's the thing. I'm not sure ... We didn't find a place yet. We're trying one of our LGs, I guess. But mostly all of them have kids.

Pause.

Firecrackers.

PARTHO: How many of you?

ADIL: What?

PARTHO: How many? In your group?

ADIL: Oh ... Eight. Ten at the most.

Beat.

ADIL: Eleven, with you.

PARTHO: Hm ... I'll have to see Adil.

ADIL: Okay.

Beat.

PARTHO: You'll be twenty?

ADIL: Yes. Maybe I'll be ... another person.

More firecrackers.

The music from Partho's room faintly.

Lights Fade.

4.

The Guest Room in Partho's house.

Early Morning.

ADIL is hung-over, crouched on the floor, trying to assemble the pieces of a broken glass.

There is someone on the bed, covered by a sheet, unconscious.

PARTHO stands in the doorway.

PARTHO: Whose bike is that, in the compound?

Pause.

Adil -

ADIL: I was going to move it. I forgot.

PARTHO: I told you they could park outside the gate. Near the park. Outside the gate.

ADIL: I forgot.

PARTHO: Adil, don't worry about the glass -

ADIL: I'll fix it. It's so stupid. I was trying to, we were dancing ... um ... and Parul, my friend Parul, she ... It wasn't her fault.

ADIL stands, stumbles, steadies himself.

He looks at PARTHO.

ADIL: I can't fix it.

PARTHO: You can't fix it.

ADIL: I'll throw it away.

PARTHO: It doesn't matter, Adil. It's one glass. Drink some water.

ADIL: Sorry.

PARTHO: Shall I get you a glass of water?

ADIL: Five glasses ...

PARTHO: You want five -

ADIL: Five glasses are broken.

Pause.

PARTHO: Okay. Five glasses. That's okay.
 ADIL: Sorry.
 PARTHO: We'll clean up later.
 ADIL: We cleaned ... We did it ... uh ... already, I wanted to do it before you came back ... I used the ... the garbage bag from the kitchen but it tore because Poddar put the beer bottles also ... um ... so it was heavy ... so it tore. So I put that bag in another bag ... with the broken glasses, in another bag -
 PARTHO: Adil, sit down. We can sort it out later.
 ADIL: We cleaned it, man ... Partho. Poddar and me. Before we slept.
 PARTHO: Who is Poddar? ... Where is he sleeping?

Pause.

Is that Poddar's bike outside?
 ADIL: I'll move the bike. I forgot, I'll just -
 PARTHO: Adil, sit down. On the bed.
 ADIL: Poddar is sleeping on the bed.

PARTHO *steps into the room. He sees PODDAR asleep on the bed.*

A short silence.

ADIL: Shall I move the bike?
 PARTHO: It's okay. You need to drink water. And sleep. Sleep in my room.
 ADIL: I'm okay.
 PARTHO: Where were you sleeping before?
 ADIL: Partho ...
 PARTHO: Hm?
 ADIL: Thanks ... for the house.
 PARTHO: It's fine, Adil.
 ADIL: We wouldn't have broken so many glasses if you were here, you know ... My friends were excited to be here. One of them, she really loves your writing ... You know what was she telling me ... She said you used to have a ponytail and I said that's not possible, because he is my uncle and I have known him forever ...
 ADIL: I told them you're my -
 PARTHO: Okay.
 ADIL: Uncle, you know. My guardian.

Pause.

ADIL: Poddar puked.
 PARTHO: Adil. Later.
 ADIL: He puked. He drank so much ... because ... He was lying on the bed and he thought the thing was ... Shit ... I left the present here, your present that you gave me ... Because Poddar never drinks a lot, so he puked ... on the present.
 PARTHO: On the ...
 ADIL: Into the present.

Long pause.

PARTHO: Where is it?
 ADIL: He thought it was a bucket.
 PARTHO: It's a lamp shade.
 ADIL: It has a handle ...
 PARTHO: To hang it up, Adil. From the ceiling. With a bulb.
 ADIL: I know.
 PARTHO: You said you wanted a hanging light, for your room.
 ADIL: I wanted it. I want ... It ... He thought it was a bucket. Sorry.

Pause.

I washed it.
 PARTHO: It's made of paper.
 ADIL: Shit.

He sits down on a chair.

ADIL: Partho ... Sorry, Partho. He apologised to me, Poddar, he woke me up to say 'Sorry'.
 PARTHO: You were sleeping in my room?

Pause.

Where did you sleep?

They stare at each other.

ADIL: I was taking care of Poddar.

PARTHO *stands very still.*

ADIL: Should I come with you, Partho?
 PARTHO: No.

ADIL: I can sleep on the diwan.

PARTHO: Sleep here.

ADIL: It's my birthday.

Pause.

PARTHO: Happy Birthday.

He walks out of the door.

ADIL remains seated.

Lights fade out.



5.

Lights come up on a Metro Train Compartment.

Late Night.

TWO MEN alone on the last train home, asleep.

MAN 1 *wakes up as the train comes to a halt, stares ahead, then notices MAN 2, asleep on his shoulder.*

A Metro Announcement in Hindi and English.

VOICE: 'Vishwa Vidyalaya. This train will not go any further.'

MAN 1 *turns to MAN 2, and slowly and gently displaces his head from his shoulder. MAN 2 remains asleep.*

MAN 1 *walks towards the exit door of the compartment.*

The announcement repeats.

VOICE: 'Vishwa Vidyalaya. This train will not go any further.'

MAN 1 *stops, walks to MAN 2 and nudges him.*

MAN 1: Boss ...

MAN 2 *wakes up with a start.*

MAN 2: Sorry.

MAN 1: Vishwa Vidyalaya.

MAN 2 *looks around, somewhat disoriented.*

MAN 2: *Itni jaldi ... ?*

MAN 1 *moves to leave.*

MAN 2: Sir ... *Paani hoga?*

MAN 1 *hands him a bottle of water. MAN 2 drinks, not putting his lips to the mouth of the bottle.*

MAN 1 *watches.*

MAN 2 *returns the bottle to MAN 1. They look at each other.*

From off stage, the whistle of a METRO TRAIN GUARD.

MAN 1 *exits. MAN 2 lingers for a moment, searching for the right exit, then leaves.*

Lights go down on the train.

6.

Partho's house.

Morning.

A boy, sixteen or so, lies on the unmade bed, his legs hanging off the side. He is RISHI, Partho's son.

PARTHO *stands by him.*

PARTHO: Eat before you leave. The cab will be here in half an hour. I've told him Panchsheel, okay? ... Home ... Don't pay him, just keep the receipt and give it to me later.

RISHI *does not respond.*

I've put some money in an envelope ... for the shoes. Get some good ones. Try them out, make sure the arch is right for your foot.

RISHI *does not respond.*

Were you comfortable last night? The diwan is a bit lopsided.

RISHI *does not respond.*

Tell me when you've bought the shoes. We'll have a game at the club, to break them in ... if I can find my racquets.

RISHI *straightens up suddenly.*

RISHI: Someone is waiting for you ... Downstairs. Your assistant.

PARTHO: My Assistant?

BOY: He said he was your Assistant.

PARTHO: Who said?

Pause.

Downstairs?

PARTHO *leaves the room quickly.*

Lights come up ADIL, standing still in the driveway.

Traffic.

PARTHO *enters.*

They stare at each other.

PARTHO: You didn't call, Adil.

ADIL: You didn't answer.

PARTHO: That was Monday ... Monday, I didn't answer. It's been a week. You need to call ... before.

ADIL: Sorry ... You know, I came to say that. Sorry ... I mean for the misunderstanding that night. I feel I must have hurt you but I came here to clear that, because it was a misunderstanding. Poddar is my friend. He knows about us.

PARTHO: *About us?* What does he - Okay, a misunderstanding, Adil. Maybe I reacted badly but this is something quite difficult for me, for both of us I'm sure.

ADIL: Partho ...

PARTHO: We both should -

ADIL: Partho. Please ... Tell me something real. Who is the guy ... upstairs?

Pause.

Replacement?

PARTHO: Adil, quiet, okay? Quietly.

ADIL: It's alright. I said I am your assistant. I'll say what I should. Partho, sir, what do you need? ... Photocopies, printer cartridge? Tell me something real, man. Is he another Nephew ... like me? That's what you told Mishri Lal, right?

PARTHO: Mishri Lal is a watchman, Adil ... Like you tell them I'm your local guardian.

ADIL: Them. I tell them! But what do you tell me, Partho?

PARTHO: Not now ... I'll tell you, talk to you. But right now this is delicate, Adil. This will break.

ADIL: What will break?! Right now, I think ... What is there? What is happening? We met ... and, and, and I come over to your place. We talk, I ask you questions, I read your books, eat your French toast, you cut my hair ... and you ... *you* were looking at me, when I was sleeping in your room on the diwan. I could see you Partho, your face near the bed ... lamp. And you were

pretending to read ... And I thought, 'I'm in the room. When is he going to touch me?'

Pause.

Hide and seek? That's it?

PARTHO *looks at him, takes his hand.*

PARTHO: Look -

ADIL *moves to leave abruptly but PARTHO grabs his hand, makes him stay.*

PARTHO: Wait -

ADIL: Forget it.

PARTHO: Just, Adil, hold ... Hold on.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: You'll walk out of the gate very easily, I know ... And I won't see you again.

ADIL: Happened before?

PARTHO: Let me ... Give me a moment here, please.

He looks at ADIL.

PARTHO: I wasn't pretending to read. I was looking at you. I was looking, okay. Your face, it crushes me. I feel reckless. I feel something, quite ... mad. That hasn't happened before. I ...

Pause.

He's my son. Upstairs. I have a son. I should have said that before. It feels silly now but -

ADIL: Partho ... When I come here it means I want to be here, right? Understand that. So you need to tell me -

PARTHO: I know that.

ADIL: You need to tell me ... Or it will explode in my head. And I won't know what you want.

Pause.

PARTHO: And if I want everything?

ADIL looks at him.

Traffic, much louder now. Then the sound of a steam train.

Lights Fade.



7.

Winter. A few months later.

Lights come up on PARTHO's Bedroom.

Mid-afternoon.

PARTHO sits reclining to one side. ADIL is lying face down with his feet on PARTHO's lap.

ADIL is without a shirt, covered by a shawl.

Light flashes on them as if from a TV screen.

The sound of the steam train persists, then fades to Silence.

PARTHO watches the TV screen and then turns to ADIL. He holds ADIL's leg by the shin.

ADIL *wakes up with a start, wipes the drool off his mouth, turns to look at PARTHO and then at the TV.*

ADIL: The sound is off.
 PARTHO: You fell asleep.
 ADIL: Were you watching in silence?
 PARTHO: I've seen it a thousand times.
 ADIL: Watching me?

Pause.

PARTHO *smiles. He adjusts his position on the diwan. PARTHO brings ADIL's foot up to his neck.*

He quotes from a famous scene in Kamal Amrohi's film Pakeezah:

PARTHO: 'Maaf ki jiyega, itifaqan aapke compartment mein chala aaya tha ... Aapke paon dekhe, bahut haseen hai. Inhe zameen par mat rakhiega'
 ADIL: (corrects him) 'Utariyega'
 PARTHO: Acha ... 'Inhe zameen par mat utariyega ... maile ho jayenge.'
 ADIL: Wah!

They look at each other.

ADIL: You have to?
 PARTHO: Shortly. I can drop you to a point.
 ADIL: I'll go later. I have to bathe. And sleep more.
 PARTHO: You didn't sleep enough?

ADIL *smiles, gently nudges PARTHO's face with his foot.*

ADIL: You still haven't told me.
 PARTHO: What?
 ADIL: Tell me.
 PARTHO: It's not an interesting story ...
 ADIL: Say.
 PARTHO: You know when I was fourteen, there was a Spanish boy who came to live in our house. Seventeen ...
 ADIL: Partho!

Pause.

PARTHO *looks at him, leans forward a little and is pushed back by ADIL's foot.*

PARTHO: She was there, Adil. She was around. I don't know what else to say. I was twenty-five and it all seemed to be happening. I had written a book, so I was meeting people. I met her. She had crazy hair and beautiful hands, the hands of a potter ... and I was in love with her. For years. Her strangeness. Her spirit.

ADIL: You got married.

PARTHO: Yes, we got ... I thought it was a reasonable decision. At the time, I wanted to be reasonable. And we had a son. Nothing seemed strange about that ... then. We held him. We were holding him together, for years.

Beat.

And then we came apart. I went to live with my mother. She was alone at that point. Both of us were.

ADIL: She knew ... Your mother?

PARTHO: I had to tell her. Maybe she knew already but I told her.

ADIL: What happened?

PARTHO: Nothing. She sat there in her kaftan, peeling potatoes. Didn't say anything. She died later. Seven or ten years later. I was still waiting to hear from her.

Pause.

And now the terror is in having to tell him.

Lights come up on RISHI, standing by himself in tennis gear. He holds a racquet and swings it occasionally, adjusting his hold on the handle now and then.

ADIL: How will you tell him?

PARTHO: Slowly.

He looks at ADIL.

PARTHO: Not slowly. It never happens slowly. I taught him to cycle, I wanted to make sure ... about the balance. I thought we could do it slowly ... but he wanted the wind in his face, so I pushed and when he fell it was my fault. When they threw him into the pool, into the deep end, he was slapping the water. I felt ... He was slapping me.

Pause.

ADIL: But he learned to cycle. Learned to swim.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: I should go.

ADIL: Wait! What about that Spanish boy?

PARTHO *laughs.*

PARTHO: He. His name was Ari. He ... He stayed at our place for a few months, on some exchange programme. On the weekends we would take off our shirts, listen to his records and talk about swimming. When he left, he gripped me around the back of my neck. I thought later it might have meant that he loved me.

ADIL: What kind of grip?

PARTHO *holds ADIL's shin firmly.*

PARTHO: Like this.

RISHI *examines his racquet.*

RISHI: Baba?

ADIL's foot slides down PARTHO's chest. PARTHO continues to grip his shin.

PARTHO: This.

ADIL: Stop, Partho.

ADIL's foot reaches PARTHO's stomach.

ADIL: You have to go.

PARTHO: I'll be a little late. I'm allowed to be a little ...

ADIL tries to pull his foot back.

PARTHO: A grip like this.

RISHI: A grip like this?

ADIL pulls his leg free.

PARTHO leans in towards ADIL, who holds him back for a moment, then kisses him briefly but completely.

PARTHO *lingers a moment then walks out of the room.*

ADIL *curls up on the diwan.*

Lights go down in PARTHO's room.



8.

The changing room of a sports club.

Late Afternoon.

PARTHO *walks to RISHI, stands beside him and corrects his grip.*

PARTHO: Your index finger ... should be pointing upwards, curl it around and hold. Like ... Tight. Like that.

PARTHO *packs RISHI's tennis gear while the boy changes his clothes.*

PARTHO: You play with your wrist. That's why it hurts.

RISHI: I hate tennis.

PARTHO: You started late. The other boys have been playing since they were seven. You'll get better. You need to ... You can't suddenly decide you hate something.

RISHI: I can decide when I like something.

Lights come up on a Metro Compartment. A few men stand jammed together as if being pushed from all sides.

PARTHO: Where do you have to go?

RISHI: C.P. Ma'll pick me up from Wengers.

PARTHO: Do you want to take the Metro?

RISHI: Six thirty, Baba ... There'll be office crowd. It gets really jam-packed.

TWO MEN struggle for space on the Train. They speak intermittently, punctuating the conversation between PARTHO and RISHI.

MAN 1: Easy, easy. Please. What is the hurry?

MAN 2: I'm being pushed. From behind.

MAN 1: There's no space ... You are upon me. *Upar se aa rahe ho.*

MAN 2: You want space, take a taxi.

MAN 1: You're teaching me what is taxi? I don't know what is taxi? I can go outside the metro, take money and take a taxi, okay - don't teach me about taxis inside the metro!

MAN 2: You'll be more comfortable.

MAN 1: I'm not talking to you! Why're you talking to me??

PARTHO: It's still better than Bombay. At least it's air-conditioned.

RISHI: That's worse. ... It smells of sweat. They wear those shirts, that synthetic material and it stinks the place up.

PARTHO: I was going to C.P. last week. Bloody crowded train ... I had a man's face pressing against my back, his stubble was taking root in my skin. I adjusted myself, my position so my elbow dug into his ribs. I don't know why, because of the suffocation. He ... He was shorter than me. I could just about see his eyes and the bridge of his nose ... and there seemed to be an apology there, on his face, because he couldn't help it. We were tightly packed ... and then we stopped, the momentum carried us out on to the platform. I wanted to apologise but he ran up the escalator. He probably didn't care.

The MEN continue to struggle.

MAN 2: The train is crowded. Adjust.

MAN 1: You talk properly, okay. Have some respect.

MAN 2: I do respect ... Uncle ... Or I wouldn't be talking.

MAN 1: Uncle? You're calling me 'uncle'. Whose uncle?? Nobody is uncle here, okay!

RISHI: Sometimes I feel like they do it on purpose.

PARTHO: Who?

RISHI: The guys, when they push up against you and then they'll be breathing on your neck.

PARTHO *reaches for his RISHI's hair.*

PARTHO: You just have to adjust. It's because it's too crowded.

RISHI: They do it purposely. The pressing.

PARTHO: Oh! They can't help it, Rishi.

RISHI: Ya, but some guys get a kick out of it. They even smile at you.

PARTHO *looks away.*

RISHI *has finished changing*

PARTHO: Fine, I'll call for a cab then.

Lights fade simultaneously over both areas.



9.

Summer 2009.

The Delhi Pride Parade.

Late-afternoon.

Colour, band music, the sense of a murmuring crowd on the streets.

ADIL, *standing with a few FRIENDS.*

An Urdu poem by Iftikhar Naseem, recited on a megaphone,

VOICE: Mere baba
 sab kahte hain
 meri shakl
 aap se miltii-jultii hai ...

Feedback, crackle

 meri aankhen
 meri pashaani
 mere hont'

Feedback, crackle

VOICE: '... mera lahjaa
 baaten karne ka andaaz
 uthne-baithne
 chalne-phirne ka andaaz

ADIL *turns, searches for someone.*

VOICE: '... mere haathon ki harkat
 sab kuch aap hi jaisa hai
 maine suna hai beta
 baap ki nasl ka vaaris hota hai ...'

Echo, feedback

ADIL *turns back.*

VOICE: 'maine sunaa hai beta

baap ki nasl ka vaaris hota hai
 mere zehn mein ek savaal ubhartaa hai
 main jo bilkul aap par hoon ...

Loud feedback

... to phir meri tarjiih-e-jins
 aapse kyuun is darja alag hai'

Adil's FRIENDS start to move away, disappear.

ADIL remains, standing still.

Lights change. Drums fade out.

10.

Weeks later.

An office in ADIL's college.

Noon.

ADIL and PARTHO sit on one side of a desk; an empty chair on the other side.

ADIL: This is like your story.

PARTHO: Which story?

ADIL: 'The Bulletin'. In the ending, the boy has been called to the college office for writing a letter ... Ajit, that's his name, right? Ajit is in the office ... 'Dead chuffed'.

Pause.

I didn't know what it was, 'chuffed', because people don't say that generally. I checked it out in the dictionary.

PARTHO: My father used to say it. He learnt his English from a man named Gordon. My English has scars.

ADIL: 'Chuffed' ... I thought the meaning was something totally different.

He laughs, leans in towards PARTHO.

PARTHO *pushes him away self-consciously.*

PARTHO: Who am I, again?

ADIL: Jalan ... Sachin Jalan.

PARTHO: Right ... Your Dean mentioned he was calling from college. I almost stumbled ... Jalan. What does he do?

ADIL: I don't think there will be a quiz.

Pause.

He has a company. Ball-bearings.

They laugh.

PARTHO: I should have worn a tie.

ADIL: You should have said 'Wrong Number'.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: What was it about, the letter?

ADIL: The High Court judgment. 377.

PARTHO: What did you write?

ADIL: It doesn't matter.

PARTHO: What, specifically, did you write, Adil? I'd like to know why I'm here, in this false pretence, why Mr. Jalan had to leave his ball-bearing business and drive up to North Delhi ... on a Wednesday.

ADIL: You weren't at the Pride March.

PARTHO: I told you I wasn't coming.

ADIL: I know. But I saw a guy in a mask. I thought he might be you ... There was some resemblance in the posture. I was looking at him for some time.

PARTHO: And it wasn't me?

ADIL: It wasn't.

PARTHO: How did you know?

ADIL: Because I've studied you.

Pause.

It was something, Partho, to be there. I was feeling, in a way ... You know I'm not particularly engaged or anything. There have been some meetings about Section 377 on Campus and I mostly don't attend. It's a private thing for me, how I feel and who I want to be with, but like, I went to the march, and then

few days later there was the High Court judgement. Even in D.U. there was something, not a tidal wave, but a kind of energy, an awareness of this thing that has happened. I was feeling like this might be a moment for somebody, you know. To be able to talk about it ... Maybe somebody will have a conversation with their father.

Pause.

It was an open letter to my father. On the college bulletin board.

PARTHO: They knew it was you?

ADIL: They had some suspicion ... I didn't deny it. What would be the use of that? The funniest thing ... the first thing the Dean told me was that he would be informing my dad about this. I told him that, 'Sir, my father is no more'. He was just looking at me in silence, and said: 'Then what is the use of this letter, my boy.'

He laughs.

ADIL: So he made me speak to my mom.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: What did she –

ADIL: I offered to send her the letter. She said she wasn't interested in politics. Asked if my attendance was going to be affected.

Pause.

She thinks: as long as I am enrolled, you know, I'm doing okay.

He smiles, shakes his head.

PARTHO *is about to reach for ADIL's hair.*

A MAN walks in abruptly. He is the DEAN of the College Hostel.

PARTHO *stands.*

DEAN: Hello ... Sorry, you are waiting. Will you please give me few minutes more. I have some people outside. Just ... I'll finish that.

PARTHO: That's fine, Sir.

DEAN: Mathur, please. Just five minutes. Sit, sit ... I'll be back.

He exits quickly. PARTHO sits down.

ADIL: You don't have to call him 'Sir'.
 PARTHO: I think Jalan would be respectful.

ADIL looks at him.

ADIL: Did you call your father 'Sir', Partho?
 PARTHO: My father liked dogs more than people, Adil. He lived with them on a tea estate. Something about loyalty. Every couple of months he would send me documents, with little black 'x's ... 'Sign Here' ... He wore a hat, drove an army jeep and had a small garden of bonsai plants. I couldn't understand him. I suppose he felt the same way ...
 ADIL: Did you tell him you were gay? In your scarred English?
 PARTHO: When I published my first novel I sent him a copy and a letter. He wrote back, a note, typed on his Remington. It said: 'Good effort.'
 ADIL: You say everything so neatly.
 PARTHO: Is that an insult?

Pause.

No, I didn't tell him.
 ADIL: But you can tell your son.

PARTHO turns to him.

PARTHO: Adil ... I'm glad you went for that Pride March, and that it feels like things are happening to you, around you. And I'm sure that you wrote a sharp letter ... *fierce*, as you are. But you have to stop lecturing me about father-son relations, okay? Because you don't have ... because you don't know. There are no epiphanies -
 ADIL: Partho, I'm saying -
 PARTHO: I know you're angry that I didn't come, because I didn't feel like I needed to be there. Things seem like they're moving where you are, Adil. I can see that it ... that it ... grows you. But your father isn't here.
 ADIL: That makes it easy?
 PARTHO: That makes it different.
 ADIL: Partho, man ... I'm not lecturing. But sometimes it feels like you're just fine with status quo and you don't think about it.
 PARTHO: *Think* about it! Adil, it plays everyday in my head. Some days he says, "Fuck! Baba, do you think I'm ignorant!" ... Sometimes he walks out of the room ... But the worst, the worst is when I think that nothing will happen. There is only silence ... Because I know what that's like.

A Silence.

They don't look at each other.

The DEAN enters again, takes the seat opposite PARTHO and ADIL.

MAN: Apologies. I had ... It was something urgent ... Mr. Jalan, is it?

He stretches out his hand, PARTHO meets it.

PARTHO: Yes ... Jalan.

Lights fade.

11.

August. Rain.

Late Night.

ADIL's college hostel room.

A group of BOYS appear. An air of playful menace.

BOY 1: Intro.

ADIL stares at them.

Intro. Quick, tick tock tick.

ADIL: Adil Ghani Khan ... Second year -

BOY 1: *Nahin, bhai.* Not the Standard Version. I want the Chandy remix.

A silence.

BOY 1 sits. He is the leader of the pack.

BOY 1: I've just heard a lot about it, you know ... Chandy was bragging that it was sexy, one of his best compositions. Adil Ghani Khan, right? That's what he told me ... Not enough creative intros this year, Adil, because they are all boring bastards, so come on, please ... do it once.

ADIL: You are?
 BOY 2: He is a Super Senior.
 ADIL: Which means?
 BOY 1: Which means you do it with heart. Do it quickly and We. Will.
 Fuck. Off.

ADIL feigns a smile.

ADIL: Okay ... I'm Adil.

He looks around the group.

ADIL: I'm Adil.
 I'm A-dildo.

The boys giggle and egg him on.

ADIL: I'm a dil-doe a deer, a female deer.
 I'm a ...

Pause.

They stare at him.

ADIL: I'm A-dil-doe a deer a female ... Dear ... Sir, I am writing to inform you that your son has been caught with a-dil-doe a deer a female ... dear Sir, I am writing to inform you that your son has been caught with ... a-dil-doe a deer a female ... Dear Sir, I am writing to inform you that your son ...

Beat.

Fine?
 BOY 1: Outstanding. For this ... For this we would like to give you a return gift, for your hard work. Please accept it without formality.

The BOYS quickly encircle ADIL.

They grab him by his limbs and begin to strip him.

The BOYS locate bottles of shampoo, shaving foam, toothpaste, talcum powder. They take turns in applying a hideous mixture of bathroom products to ADIL's genitals.

He is tickled occasionally but does not shout or resist.

Simultaneously: lights come up on the Room in PARTHO's house.

He begins to change sheets on the bed and places a towel and a bottle of water by the bedside.

The BOYS continue to defile ADIL.

BOY 1: Dear Sir, your son, a dildo, doe a deer ... Dear Sir, dear sir,
deeeear sir ...

PARTHO looks into a mirror, straightens his hair, exits.

Lights dim on the Room in PARTHO's house.

The BOYS empty the contents of the toiletries and begin to leave quickly, without ceremony.

One of them lingers for a few seconds. ADIL looks at him. The BOY hands ADIL his towel and leaves.

ADIL remains still for a few moments. Then he puts on his pants.

Lights fade.

12.

The Bedroom in PARTHO's house.

Late Evening.

ADIL stands by the bed. He changes his clothes.

A moment later, PARTHO enters with a towel.

ADIL barely looks at PARTHO through the scene.

PARTHO: This one doesn't smell of mothballs so much.

ADIL: It's fine, thanks.

Pause.

I'll stay for two days or so.
 PARTHO: You can stay longer ...
 ADIL: I have tests -
 PARTHO: ... if you want to.
 ADIL: I have tests coming up. Haven't studied. I thought I'll move to my LG's after. Nothing ever happens at his place. It'll be quiet.
 PARTHO: It can be quiet here.

ADIL puts on a sweatshirt in silence.

PARTHO picks up ADIL's underwear from the floor

PARTHO: Was it some kind of initiation?
 ADIL: You could say. Happens to first year guys mostly. In the first term ...You generally don't get lifted after that. That's what they call it. 'Lifting'. You don't get lifted later, unless it's your birthday and your friends wish to decorate your balls.
 PARTHO: Did you know these guys?
 ADIL: Well ... I've seen them sometimes. You know, everyday you pass people in the corridor.
 PARTHO: So, you think it's because of ...
 ADIL: Maybe.
 PARTHO: ... the letter.
 ADIL: Friendly visit to the homo.

PARTHO looks at him.

ADIL: You know, it wasn't the lifting. I got lifted once before, in my first week ... It didn't surprise me really that it happened. But there was a guy in the group. I've seen him sometimes. I'd seen him ... at the Pride March.

Pause.

Didn't seem like he was a bystander there.
 PARTHO: It was the same man?
 ADIL: The same boy. He emptied my toothpaste. I spoke to him later. Told me that they didn't mean it 'personally' ... Then he tried to convince me that my Block Tutor was poisoning dogs and said we should piss on his door at night.

ADIL sits down on the bed.

PARTHO: It's not surprising.

ADIL: It's not?

Pause.

It should be at least a little bit surprising.

PARTHO: I mean, it's a mask ... A hiding place.

ADIL: Like your house?

PARTHO: Adil ...

ADIL lies down on the bed.

ADIL: Sleep. Can I just sleep?

PARTHO: Yes, okay ... I'll be upstairs.

PARTHO moves to the door, turns the light off.

ADIL: Will you leave the door open?

PARTHO looks at ADIL for a moment then walks towards him.

He sits down on the bed. ADIL moves slightly to allow PARTHO room to lie beside him.

PARTHO lies down very carefully. He puts a hand in ADIL's hair.

ADIL: You can hold me, Partho. I haven't been raped.

PARTHO pulls ADIL towards him.

ADIL: I just smell like a Chemist shop.

Lights fade.

13.

A security check line at the Metro Station.

A row of men pass through a metal detector and are frisked by a Metro guard. It is routine.

A series of announcements on the station loudspeaker, repeated as a loop.

VOICE: Walking on Metro track or defacing Metro property is a punishable offence ... Please inform the nearest official about any suspicious person ... Please do not befriend any unknown person ... Please do not keep your baggage unattended ... The first car of every train is reserved for ladies only. Male passengers are requested not to travel in this car. Doing so is a punishable offence ... Use Smart Card to avoid queues and have 10 % discount. Smart Cards are available at the Customer Care centre ...

Lights fade as the line of men passes through security.

14.

Winter.

New Years Day. 2010.

Outside a house in South Delhi.

Music from inside and the occasional clamour of drunk college singing.

PARTHO stands outside, cellphone at his ear.

ADIL rushes out, looks left and right, sees PARTHO and grabs him from behind.

PARTHO: Who?! Adil ... Fuck, I've been waiting forty minutes. Your phone is unreachable, obviously ... and I keep dialing like an idiot.

ADIL: Happy New Year. Happy ... New. Year.

Beat.

Sorry.

PARTHO: My ears are falling off.

ADIL covers Partho's ears with his hands.

PARTHO: It's not that easy. You think it's as easy as warm hands, Adil. You said midnight -

ADIL: Eh ... Partho. Make a new year resolution ... This year I am going to be more forgiving.

ADIL turns PARTHO around.

PARTHO: What's wrong with you? Will you put something on?

PARTHO *takes his muffler off, wraps it around ADIL.*

ADIL: I'm okay. I'm warm. I've been dancing ... Come ... Come in and dance with me.
 PARTHO: I have to go soon, Adil. Have a train in ... (*he hugs ADIL*) Happy New Year! I've been waiting to see you.
 ADIL: I'm here.
 PARTHO: Are you having a fun?
 ADIL: Are you upset?
 PARTHO: (*shaking his head*) Cold.

ADIL *pulls his hand, ushering him towards the house.*

PARTHO: Can't Adil. Train is at five.
 ADIL: Dance till four ... then go. I'll take you to the station.
 PARTHO: No, you don't have -
 ADIL: I'll take you there. I'll take you.

Beat.

PARTHO: I have to pick up the boy. He won't wake up.

ADIL *nods.*

ADIL: Was it a good night?
 PARTHO: Yes. Quiet ... It was a quiet night. We made some rum punch. He talked to me about a girl. He's crazy about her ... Asked me for some romantic advice. That took me by surprise.

Beat.

I wanted to tell him I'm no good.

ADIL *smiles, looks at PARTHO.*

ADIL: I saw him.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: When?
 ADIL: Last week. I came early. I thought he might still be there so I was waiting in the park. He came out ... Guess he didn't know how to unlock the gate, so he jumped over.
 PARTHO: It's a tricky lock.
 ADIL: I walked up to him.
 PARTHO: Did you?
 ADIL: Ya ... I said: Hello Rishi. You won't believe it but I'm your ... Step Daddy.

PARTHO *laughs and playfully slaps ADIL.*

PARTHO: Right.

Pause.

PARTHO *looks at* ADIL.

PARTHO: Did you really see him?

ADIL *looks at him.*

PARTHO: Why didn't you say?

ADIL: Relax, Partho ... Will you please come inside, have a drink. With me. No one has to see you ... I'll make you invisible.

ADIL *conceals* PARTHO's *face with the muffler.*

ADIL: Invisible man. See. One drink.

Beat.

PARTHO: One drink.

ADIL: And one dance.

PARTHO: I have two left feet, Adil.

ADIL: Ya, but you got some moves.

He imitates PARTHO's *awkward dancing.*

PARTHO: That's not fair. I'm certainly a little more graceful than that.

ADIL: So come and show us. Dance with the gang.

PARTHO: With the gang or for the gang?

ADIL *steps back.*

An awkward silence.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: Adil, I'm cranky, okay ... I've been waiting outside. I didn't mean that.

ADIL: I think you did.

Adil's friend, PODDAR rushes out of the house

PODDAR: Adil, *aaja bhai* ... Babbi's fallen asleep in the bathtub.

He notices PARTHO.

PARTHO *adjusts the muffler, not concealing his face any more.*

PODDAR: Hi ... Sorry
 ADIL: (*introduces*) Partho. Poddar.
 PODDAR: Ya. Partho.

He hugs PARTHO.

PODDAR: Happy New Year!
 PARTHO: Happy New Year!
 PODDAR: Join us, man, please.
 ADIL: He thinks he can't dance.
 PODDAR: What the fuck, *yaar!* Nobody can.

He puts his arms around PARTHO, begins to jump and jostle him about.

PARTHO tries to resist then humours him slightly, dancing awkwardly.

PODDAR moves to dance with ADIL. They dance like friends, close.

PARTHO continues to move strangely a few steps apart, then stops and watches them.

Lights fade out.

15.

Winter.

Weeks later.

Late evening.

PARTHO and his editor VED stare ahead, looking at projections of book covers. VED drinks consistently from a bottle of water.

VED then turns to PARTHO, stares at him for a moment.

VED: Partho, maybe if you said something we could move ahead.
 PARTHO: I don't care for them.
 VED: Okay.
 PARTHO: Not a fan.
 VED: Why?
 PARTHO: Why specifically?
 VED: Specifically. Give me ... a reason. We've been staring at them for three hours.

PARTHO *looks at the image.*

- PARTHO: I don't know ... I just have a few issues with how this is being imagined, by the designers.
- VED: Okay, I've got a notebook. (*rummages through his things*). Let's ... I'm going to write down. February 10th. 'Partho's Issues.'
- PARTHO: Come on, Ved ...
- VED: This one. Start with this one.
- PARTHO: I ... (*looks at it closer*) I'm not even sure what this is supposed to be. It's confusing.
- VED: "Con ... fu ... sing". Next, this one?
- PARTHO: (*shrugging*) It's too neat. The expression is too well formed. If you look at how -
- VED: "Too ... Well ... formed."
- PARTHO: Is this really necessary?

VED *nods. Gestures to the third cover image.*

- PARTHO: I cannot believe that you're remotely serious about this. I mean, who is this ... You might as well have a little pink sticker on there saying 'Contains Gay Sex'. Is there absolutely no room for some subtlety -
- VED: Partho. You're being strangely naïve about this process. I'm going to remind you again that this is a business meeting not a literary ... or art appreciation class.
- PARTHO: Do you like this?
- VED: I'm not talking about this ... It's not familiar. Your book is not familiar. But we have to be able to sell it, so that it's on the shelf, people buy it ... Hopefully like it. If you're lucky maybe it gets made into a movie ... with John Abraham, taking his towel off.

PARTHO *laughs.*

- VED: Make it easier. For yourself ... This?

PARTHO *looks at it carefully.*

- PARTHO: I don't mind it. I'd prefer it if there were fewer elements ... in apposition.

VED *stares at him then writes in his notebook shaking his head.*

- PARTHO: What?

VED: It's me that has to relay that to the designer and she's going to think I'm a fart.

PARTHO: It has possibilities.

VED: You know what ... I'm going to make you a ... (*draws in his notebook*) Here. This is what your cover should be.

He tears the sheet out, crumples it and throws it to PARTHO. PARTHO looks at the drawing.

PARTHO: What is that? A heart.

VED: No. It's a bum ... Two cheeks. In apposition.

PARTHO *smiles, stares at the drawing. VED looks at him.*

VED: What is this book about?

PARTHO: What do you mean? You've read it ...

VED: No. I mean ... If you were to distil it down to a word, three words.

Pause.

PARTHO: It's about ... It's about the nature of -

VED: Don't say 'love'.

PARTHO: I wasn't going to -

VED: You were going to say 'love'. The nature of love.

PARTHO: No. I had an entirely different word in mind.

VED: What?

Pause

VED: What word?

PARTHO: Grace.

VED *looks at him, drinks his water.*

They both stare ahead.

The sound of a train. Lights come up on TWO MEN on the Metro. They are dressed in working clothes and seem to be carpenters or labourers. They stand facing each other, close. One of them is positioned with his back against the steel bar and his arms around the waist of other.

MAN 1: *Maine bol diya usse, bhenchod! Seedhe bol diya. Bola – sun be ... Agar tune mujhe sahi order nahi diya toh bhenchod meri kya galti hai? Nahi?*

MAN 2: *Hm.*

MAN 1: *Aur pata hai wo kya bola? Pata hai?*

MAN 2: *Kya?*

MAN 1: *Kuch nahi. Kuch bol hi nahi paaya. Tatte haath mein aa gaye, chutiya saala.*

MAN 2: *Shhh ...*

PARTHO *looks at* MAN 2.

A Metro Announcement in Hindi and English.

VOICE: The next station is Central Secretariat.

MAN 1: *Meine chhod diya ... Par rula dena chahiye tha usse.*

MAN 2: *Tu usse rula dega?*

MAN 1: *Subah phone karoonga, pehli cheez aur boloonga saaley tu site pea a ke mil mujhe... phir dikhata hoon mein kiss kaam ka hoon... saala... phir kuch kar ke dikhaye ...*

MAN 2 *looks out the window.*

MAN 2: *Pahunchne waale hain.*

MAN 1: *Tujhe lagta hai maine kuch galat kiya? Nahi na... Kiski galati thi?*

MAN 2: *Teri galati nah thi.*

Pause. MAN 1 *smiles to himself.*

MAN 1: *Sun.*

MAN 1 *pulls himself up to the shoulder of the other, then whispers something in his ear.*

Their embrace gets tighter. MAN 2 *smiles blissfully*

Lights fade out on the train.

16.

Weeks later.

Late evening.

The Room in PARTHO's house.

ADIL sits on the bed with his legs folded. He is dressed nice, for a party – a Polo neck shirt and pants.

PARTHO is undressing.

They have both been drinking.

PARTHO: Gurgaon wasn't meant to look pretty ... never really the plan. It's a concrete village ... built for working people. So, I suppose it has functional value.

ADIL: Now that I can take the train here, it hits me ... How one city changes to another.

PARTHO: I love that you call it 'train', almost as if you lived in another place.

ADIL: You pass Ghitorni, all those farms and greenery and then it disappears ... For some time there is open land, the army land around Arjangarh ... barren ... small winding roads ... and then Gurgaon rises up from the ground ...

PARTHO: ... like a garbage heap.

ADIL: Stone. And metal ... And glass. So much glass, Partho.

PARTHO: But it looks pretty at night ... All cities look pretty at night.

PARTHO has taken his shirt off and wrapped himself in a shawl.

He looks at ADIL who stares at the floor, somewhat transfixed.

PARTHO: Tired?

ADIL nods 'No'.

PARTHO walks to him and tugs at the collar of his Polo neck shirt.

PARTHO: You can keep this. It looks good on you.

Beat.

Now take it off.

ADIL gets up from the bed. He does not undress and moves now with a restless energy.

ADIL: I spoke with Ved quite a bit.

PARTHO: He likes you ... He said you're inquisitive in the right way.

ADIL: He's excited about your book.

PARTHO: Anxious. Ved is mostly anxious about my book. I suppose that is his job.

ADIL: He asked me ... He was wondering if the character is based on me. I started laughing and told him I haven't read the book.

PARTHO: He's ... He shouldn't be asking such things.

ADIL *nods.*

PARTHO *drinks from a bottle of water.*

ADIL *looks at him.*

ADIL: Is it?

PARTHO *looks at him.*

ADIL: Me?

PARTHO: When you read it you can make up your own mind.

ADIL: Partho, man ... Tell me.

PARTHO: How am I supposed to answer this ... Yes ... YES ... Fuck, Adil - I spend my time with you. I love you. I write about a man in love with another, how can it not be something of you ... But is it *about* you?

ADIL: Don't get all ... I'm asking because I didn't know.

PARTHO: You should trust that I have placed distance.

ADIL: I feel sure that you have. I'm sure ...

PARTHO: Does it feel like I don't share things with you?

ADIL: No ... it's not that you don't share with me.

Beat.

But you won't share me. You've written this book. I'm so happy that you did. And even if I've not read it I know it must be something to have written it. But ... like, I don't know if it will change anything.

PARTHO: I don't know what you expect, Adil. It's a novel, you know ... and no matter how much blood and sweat and sperm that's in there, it ... it does not encapsulate me ... or you.

ADIL: This is not about the book.

PARTHO: What is it about?

Pause.

PARTHO: Adil?

ADIL: You know, I told you something ... About that time, on my school trip ... Sleeping next to my teacher, when he touched me. And not telling anyone about it. But I told you ... and like, it's been seven years since that happened.

Beat.

But telling you changes me.

PARTHO: I know it does. It has ... I want to tell him. I will.

ADIL: Maybe you will. But then you'll feel *that* is enough.

PARTHO: What do you want, Adil?

ADIL: What do you want?

Pause.

PARTHO: I want you to come here, please. Sit down. With your feet on the bed.

ADIL *does not move.*

ADIL: Remember, you said ... You said you wanted everything. Thing is ... I think you'll be too scared to find out what that actually is. And I'll keep letting it go.

ADIL *walks to the bed, sits beside PARTHO.*

A silence.

PARTHO: How do we get here? It happens again and again, like a loop.

ADIL: Most of the time there is nothing like this ... that I could imagine. Being here.

PARTHO *holds his hand.*

ADIL: But then I wish I could see you outside, you know? I feel as if I should be able to see you when I want, show you off ... Not wait for a sign always that it's okay to text you now, see you now, okay to meet these people here but stay away next weekend because ... I'm like Meena Kumari waiting for the train.

Pause.

It's not what I want ... For myself ... I can't be like a secret, Partho. It's not that I feel like I want to move on, but I can't ... I won't stay.

Long Pause.

PARTHO: Stay tonight ... Will you? ... Please.

PARTHO *places his hand under ADIL's shirt, on his stomach.*

ADIL *holds PARTHO's hand.*

PARTHO *suddenly begins to sing in a half-broken voice.*

PARTHO: 'Ye mulaaqaat badi der ke baad aai hai ...

ADIL *tries to put his hand over PARTHO's mouth. They struggle as PARTHO continues to sing.*

PARTHO: 'Aaj ki raat vo aaye hain badi der ke baad
Aaj ki raat badi der ke baad ...'

PARTHO *lets ADIL muffle him.*

Silence.

They are still.

Lights fade out.



15.

Early Summer.

A few months later.

Mid-afternoon.

Somewhere outdoors. The sound of people and traffic every now and then.

PARTHO and RISHI, *eating kathi rolls.*

PARTHO: Do you want something else?

RISHI *mumbles with his mouth full.*

PARTHO: What?

RISHI: Full.

PARTHO *barely touches his food. He stares at RISHI.*

RISHI: Baba ... Stop it! I can't eat if you look at me like that.

PARTHO: Sorry ... I just. You should say something.

RISHI: What? ... I don't know ...

PARTHO: No, okay. It's okay. I'm not going to pressurise you.

Pause.

RISHI: I think Prateek is gay.

PARTHO: Your roommate?

RISHI: Ya, he wrote something in the school magazine, when the whole High Court thing was going on ...

PARTHO: Right.

RISHI: ... and that teacher killed himself.

PARTHO: In Aligarh?

RISHI: Ya. Like an awareness piece. And then we had a lady who came and gave a talk.

PARTHO: Has he talked to you about it?

RISHI: No, not talked. But he told me he's not into dames a while back. I thought he meant like monks ... but once I woke up in the middle of the night and he was sitting on the floor next to my bed.

Beat.

He was just looking.

PARTHO: You think he likes you?

RISHI: I don't know. He hasn't said anything.

PARTHO: You're still close?

RISHI: Ya ... I guess. It doesn't really come up.

PARTHO *nods.*

PARTHO: Does it make you feel strange?

RISHI: Prateek?

PARTHO: No. About me, Rishi.

RISHI: No ... I don't know. A bit, maybe. But I feel weird to think of you with a dame also ...

PARTHO: A dame!

RISHI: A lady ... Just, you know what I mean, Baba ... Can you stop interrogating me!

PARTHO: I'm not interrogating ... I want to understand how you feel.

RISHI: Why?

PARTHO: Why!

PARTHO *sits down.*

PARTHO: Because when you got lost in Howrah Station, you know, when you were three years old, I lost my mind ... Isn't it strange? The most vivid memory I have of your childhood is of you not being there. We were running up and down the platform shouting your name ... When we found you, Ma picked you up and was hugging you, walking in front. You looked at me over her shoulder. You were looking right at me, and I couldn't, I just, I was so scared I began to weep. And that made you smile. Like you knew.

Pause.

Like you knew at that moment you were the most beautiful thing in that station.

RISHI *looks at him, PARTHO turns to him.*

PARTHO: Do you remember that?

RISHI: No ... But you keep reminding me. I think you made it up.

PARTHO: I didn't make it up.

RISHI: That's what you do, Baba. You make up stories. And then you tell them like it's a movie.

PARTHO *looks at him.*

PARTHO: They're not. They're nothing like a movie.

Long Pause.

RISHI: Baba?

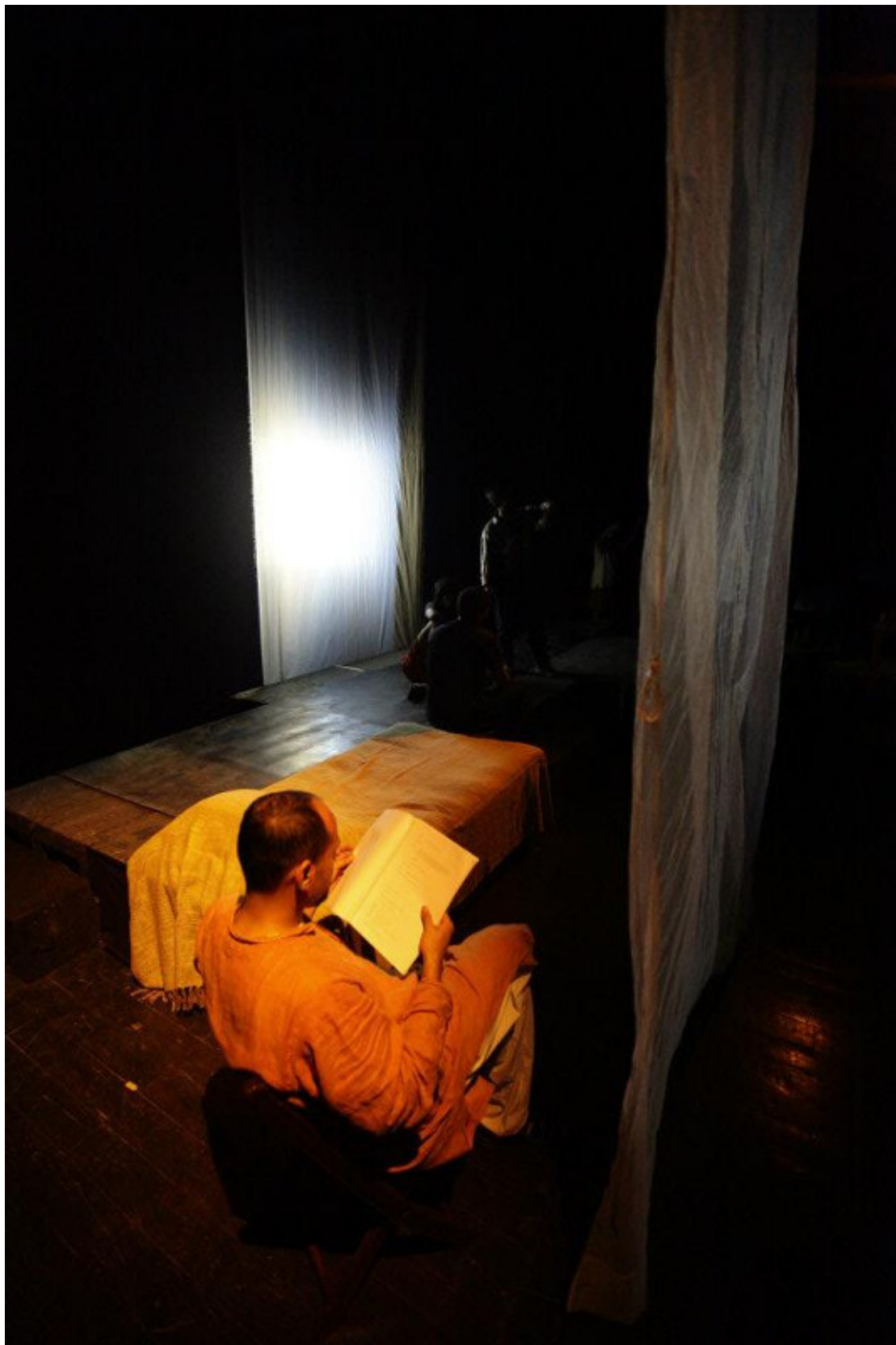
PARTHO: Hm?

Beat.

RISHI: What's his name?

The murmur of people and sound of traffic escalate then fade to silence.

Lights fade out.



EPILOGUE

Two Years earlier.

Summer 2008.

Lights come up inside and around a Metro train, stalled at a station.

ADIL is aboard the last train of the night.

PARTHO stands on the platform.

They have both been drinking.

ADIL: You got a token?

PARTHO: Yes.

ADIL: But you won't be taking a train ... You paid unnecessarily.

PARTHO: It's fine. I walked you to the platform. We were in the middle of a conversation.

ADIL laughs.

A YOUNG MAN gets on the train, finds a place.

ADIL: You have a high value for conversation.

Pause.

We came for free dinner.

PARTHO: Sorry?

ADIL: My friend and me. We came to the book launch because of the free dinner. He's been doing it quite a few times. This time I tagged along ...

Beat.

You must be shocked.

PARTHO: I'm not shocked.

ADIL: That was our motive. To eat. But I enjoyed it. I mean the reading and discussion.

PARTHO: Not the food?

ADIL looks at him.

A MAN *gets on the train finds a place.*

A Metro announcement in Hindi and English.

VOICE: 'There will be a slight delay to this service. We apologise for the inconvenience.'

ADIL *smiles and shrugs.*

ADIL: Please, sir. You shouldn't wait.

PARTHO: 'Partho', please.

ADIL: Partho ... Partho. Don't tell your friend, okay ... about our deception. I'm sure he's written an excellent book. And it was really a different experience for me ... Drinking wine and beer with all these ... literary types ... Wine! Now I'm properly sophisticated.

Pause.

Aur aapke saath jo baatchit hui – it was really interesting, Partho.

PARTHO: More interesting than the fish fingers, I hope.

ADIL *laughs.*

ADIL: I think you should get on the train.

PARTHO: Why?

ADIL: *Arey*, you have a token. You deserve to take a trip. The Metro owes you a service.

PARTHO: A delayed service ... I live in Gurgaon. In the opposite direction.

ADIL: Then take a train in the opposite direction.

PARTHO: With company?

ADIL: What?

PARTHO: Nothing.

ADIL: Okay, Partho-ji. As you wish.

Pause.

PARTHO: You should come home some time ... when you're free. I can lend you some books.

ADIL: Your books?

PARTHO: Books I own, yes.

ADIL: And which you have written?

PARTHO: Will you read them?

ADIL: Most definitely.

A Metro announcement.

VOICE: 'Please stand away from the doors.'

They both take a step back.

PARTHO: You have my number.

ADIL: I'll remember it.

PARTHO: Did you save it on your phone?

ADIL: I'll remember.

Another MAN rushes on to the train, finds a place.

ADIL looks at PARTHO and smiles.

ADIL: Final chance.

PARTHO: For what?

ADIL: For you to go somewhere.

PARTHO: Where?

Pause.

Where should I go?

They look at each other.

The announcement repeats.

VOICE: 'Please stand away from the doors.'

Everyone is still.

Lights fade to black.