

AIR

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FADE IN:

EXT. SLUM - KERALA STATE, INDIA - ESTABLISHING

The Kerala Backwaters - an enormous web of canals, rivers, lakes - are still and silver in the dusky light. Mangoes hang over the river's edge as we encounter bits of plastic and glass bottles caught in its roots. Even cluttered, it's peaceful. A doll is tangled in the weeds, smiling at us.

SOUNDS FILTER IN, jarring against the stillness.

SCREAMS.

CALLS FOR HELP.

Panted legs SPLASH into the river, dunk buckets, then rush out again, making room for the next.

RED-ORANGE flames reflect across the water as we PULL UP and finally see the shack that is on fire. The flames have consumed everything.

THE MANAGER (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)
(calm, indifferent)
*I tell you what to do to protect
you.*

Silhouetted, black against the raging red, is THE MANAGER, 40s, puffing on a cigar as he watches the house burn.

Nearby, another man weeps on the ground - clearly the owner of the burning house. Other spectators hold him back.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
(so everyone can hear)
*Pay what you owe. It's very
simple... like I want to be here
either.*

NEARBY

A FATHER, pregnant MOTHER, and five daughters watch, frozen. The Father's clothing is singed. His bucket drips.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
*What a lovely family you have, Mr.
and Mrs. Shudra. Namaste, girls.*

The eldest four daughters tuck behind their parents, but the youngest ADITI, 5, brings her hands together at her chest.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Namaste.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

Ah, a child with respect. At least you produced one of those.

Mother pulls Aditi closer. Aditi notices the body language.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

(whispered)

Did I do wrong?

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

Yes, is something wrong?

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

No. Just shaken from the fire, sir.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

Only those who don't pay their Dashamamsha have any reason to fear. A man with such a beautiful family would never be so selfish.

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

Of course not, sir.

As The Manager leaves, a powerful cramp RIPS through Mother's body. She moans. They rush quickly away.

EXT./INT. SHUDRA HOME - NIGHT

Older women gather outside, peeking in as Mother paces rhythmically around the very sparse single-room house.

The Shudra children play outside as Father flutters nervously around his wife. Aditi hangs upside down from the roof, peeking through the window.

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

Just a little while longer. We'll have our son.

A smile. Mother's excited too. The MID-WIFE shoos the crowd of women away.

MID-WIFE (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)

It's nearly time. Good pacing. Good girl. Take a deeper breath now and push.

Mother pushes until a new shrill wail pierces the silence.
Mother lays back, crying with relief and joy...

...but the Mid-Wife's smile fades quickly as she examines the baby and wraps it.

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

How is he?

MID-WIFE (IN MALAYALAM)

She's healthy. A gem.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)

It's a boy... The doctor in the city told us so.

She offers Mother the most beautiful baby we've ever seen, angelic in her newness... but neither parent takes her.

Mother looks away, devastated. Sees Aditi.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)

Aditi, go fetch me mango leaves for tea, ya?

Aditi hesitates for a single moment - and is off like a shot.

The Mid-Wife reads the room. She hugs the baby lovingly. The silence between the new parents is heavy, terrible.

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

I'll say it if you won't. We can barely feed the ones we have. What happens when we have to pay the Manager our Dashamamsha? A few years of sacrifice for a son who could contribute would have been worth it.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)

I'll eat less.

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

You barely eat as it is.

MID-WIFE (IN MALAYALAM)

I can take her to a children's home in the city. Tell the others she died in childbirth.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)

Let me hold her, at least--

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)
*--No. Sneak her away while she's
 quiet so the neighbors won't hear.*

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
Tell them her name is Kali. Please!

The Mid-Wife takes a rice sack from the corner and tucks the baby inside.

As the Mid-Wife leaves, she steps around Aditi, who enters clutching a fistful of mango leaves. Aditi pauses. Sees her mother's empty arms.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
There's my good girl. Come here.

Father takes the leaves from her. Weeping, Mother pulls Aditi to her bosom, and holds her.

FADE OUT.

A FLASH OF AN EMBROIDERED MANGO YELLOW SARI

INT. SHUDRA HOME - DAY - WEEKS LATER

A pot of RICE. Mother hands out portions, then eyes her meager rice. Everyone sits inside except Aditi, who sits in the doorway.

ADITI (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)
Amma, there's a princess outside!

EXT. SHUDRA HOME - DAY

The woman in the mango sari stands out like a spotlight, her hair soft, her skin wheatish, protected from sunlight. She stands beside a Rolls Royce that matches her skin.

The Shudra daughters join the crowd of people gathering to gawk at her... but there's something familiar about her.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
...Rashmi?

RASHMI, late 30s, hugs Mother. The girls are shocked.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Uma! I missed you.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
Come say hello to your Aunt.

Five pairs of hands press together at their chest.

SHUDRA DAUGHTERS (IN MALAYALAM)
Namaste, Aunty.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
Watch out, they'll ruin your sari.

Rashmi yanks them all in. There's little space left for Aditi to hug her, so she goes behind Rashmi and takes hold of a sheer embroidered sari layer. She runs her fingers over it, underneath it. It's the nicest thing she's ever seen.

BACK OF SHUDRA HOME

Mother leads her family to a ladder on the side of the house that leads to the roof. Aditi climbs it and holds her hands out so that Father can pass her Rashmi's suitcases.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
The roof?

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
I wish we could offer better, but we're a little crowded. Our youngest is happy to have you, though, aren't you, Aditi?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Yes, ma'am!

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Why is she on the roof?

Mother and Father share a knowing look.

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)
...She... needs the fresh air.

EXT. SHUDRA HOME - ROOF - NIGHT

Aditi piles pillows onto a mat for her guest, then adjusts them, ever the good host. She crosses to the edge, and peers over as Rashmi talks in hushed tones on a cell phone.

RASHMI (INTO PHONE, ENGLISH)
 I couldn't take another moment in that house... If I hadn't left, he would have killed me...
 (beat, re: Shudra home)
 I'm safe. I'm with family. I couldn't leave without saying goodbye.

She notices Aditi watching - Aditi ducks out of sight. Hides under a blanket and peeks as Rashmi climbs to the roof. Rashmi knows exactly where Aditi is hiding, but plays along.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Now, where could she be? Where could my naughty niece be?

Naughty? Aditi throws off the blanket, deeply offended.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
How dare you, ma'am. I'm a good girl! Amma says so!

Aditi turns away, crossing her arms, blocking Rashmi out.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Aw. I was just playing.
 (begrudgingly)
...You're a very good girl.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Yes. I am. Now, go to sleep please. Tomorrow is the best day of the week.

EXT. FOOD MARKET - DAY

Color everywhere. A vendor grills flayed mangoes. A giant bull, covered in colorful handprints, flowers and a bell around its neck, strolls through. *Ding-Ding*.

They come to a jalebi vendor and Rashmi buys each girl one.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
Say "thank you."

SHUDRA DAUGHTERS (IN BROKEN ENGLISH)

Thank you!

A crowd moves through...

...separating Aditi from her family. The people seem to move like a FAST TIDE around her, swirling, confusing.

Her jalebi falls. It is smashed by a passing man.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Amma?

Bodies move past quicker, becoming a blur. The edges of her vision begin to fog. Her breath and heartbeat rage - *THA-RUMM, GASP, THA-RUMM, GASP* - blocking all other sounds.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

AMMA! AMMA! AMMA!

People scatter away from the screaming, panicked 5-year-old.

Mother approaches, embarrassed, very aware of the eyes of those chattering and gawking on the sidelines.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)

That's enough, Aditi. I'm here.

RASHMI

What's wrong with her?

MOTHER

She does this for attention.

(beat, in Malayalam)

Please, Aditi!

Rashmi bends down in front of Aditi, and holds her face in her hands. Aditi tries to pull away, but Rashmi holds.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)

Aditi, listen to your heartbeat, ya? Is it angry?

(Aditi nods)

You know where your heart isn't angry? In the place with no walls. Can you find that place? Close your eyes. Go on.

Aditi reluctantly closes her eyes.

EXT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD - DAY

The greenest field any of us has ever seen. Stretching away into eternity. Aditi finds herself alone... and her heartbeat subsides, until all we can hear is breeze in the long grass.

RASHMI (V.O. IN ENGLISH)
Did you find it, baby?

EXT. FOOD MARKET - NOW

Aditi opens her eyes, finds herself back in the market. Aditi nods, shocked, elated, and much calmer.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
*Now that you've found this place,
you can always find it again the
way I just showed you, okay?*
(beat, to Mother)
She's claustrophobic?

MOTHER
That's what I said. Attention.

Mother hurries them all away, as the other people gossip. In the b.g., we see The Manager has seen everything.

INT. SHUDRA HOME - NIGHT

Rashmi has bought food for them. The girls delight in having such an abundance before them. Smiles all around. Even on Aditi, who stands in the doorway, looking guilty.

Aditi notices Mother packing trash into a small bag.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Amma, I will take it out.

Aditi rushes away with the trash and returns. Rashmi watches.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
I'm going to go clean the rugs.

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)
My good girl.

Mother gives her cheek a gentle caress - all the reward Aditi is seeking. Again, Rashmi watches, this time with concern.

EXT. SHUDRA HOME - ROOF - NIGHT

Aditi and Rashmi lie face to face on the mound of pillows.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Is the place with no walls always there?

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Yes.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
How did you find it?

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
It's a secret. You have to promise not to tell.
(beat, Aditi nods)
I'm going away tomorrow. I'm going to live in the place with no walls forever... and uncle is not coming.

Aditi doesn't quite understand.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
That's silly.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
He wanted me to always do what he said, think what he thought, be who he wanted me to be. I refused. I said, "no more!"

This is blasphemy. Aditi's never heard of such a thing.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
So, I hid a part of myself away in a secret place so no one could have it, so a part of me would always be free. Even if I was very sad, that part would be happy. Even if I was scared, that part would be brave.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Did uncle like that?

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
He never asked if I liked being treated that way. A woman needs to claim herself before someone else thinks they have the right to.

Rashmi sits up, reaches for her mango sari. She stretches it between her hands.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Here, Aditi. Rip this.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
What?!

Rashmi shoves one end of the sari into Aditi's hand.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
*No one is stopping you. Go ahead!
 Be naughty.*

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
I'm allowed?

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
No, you're not! Do it anyway.

Aditi shoves the sari away, but smiles.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
You're crazy, Aunty.

Aditi lays down against Rashmi, who gently plays with Aditi's hair. Aditi's eyes quickly flutter closed.

EXT. SHUDRA HOME - ROOF - DAWN

Aditi's eyes flutter open to the sounds of ARGUMENT from below. She peers down, sees her sisters hiding in a tree nearby. They motion for her to stay quiet.

Aditi wedges her feet, leans, hanging over the roof's edge.

INT. SHUDRA HOME - DAWN

Her upside down head pops into view in the window, as Mother, Father and Rashmi argue with THE MANAGER.

RASHMI
*Take my watch. They can't possibly
 owe that much.*

The Manager snaps the watch away the moment she unclasps it.

THE MANAGER
*I'll tell you how much they owe.
 Seven is a lot of mouths to feed -
 You're welcome.*

FATHER (IN MALAYALAM)

Please. Just a few more days. Sir at the brick yard says I can have extra hours.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

This is why I had sons, and only the two of them. Of course, daughters have a delicacy that sons do not have.

The Manager sees Aditi watching. He smiles.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

Perhaps we can come to another arrangement. My embroidery factory needs more workers.

(to Aditi)

You want to help your family, don't you girl?

RASHMI

Take my car. It's a classic. Only twenty like it in India.

THE MANAGER

So you can have me arrested for stealing? Please.

(beat, in Malayalam)

Come here, girl.

Aditi disappears and reappears a moment later. She doesn't enter the house. He kneels at the door.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

If you came to work for me, it would help them out a great deal. Would you like that?

Rashmi shoves between them, pulls Aditi behind her.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)

No, she wouldn't. She's not going anywhere. Uma, say something.

Mother is frozen. We can see she so desperately wants to reach out for her youngest... but she keeps a hardened front.

THE MANAGER

This isn't your decision, bitch.

RASHMI

If they won't stop this, then it is absolutely my responsibility.

THE MANAGER

Why? Your pretty face took you out of your caste, but you will always be shudra.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

*I want to help my family, sir.
Don't listen to her. She's crazy.*

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

(to Mother and Father)

Then there's the deal. Her for everything you owe. Fewer mouths to feed. No outbursts. You can even keep the watch.

He tosses the watch into the dirt.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

(cherry on top)

And I won't collect a Dashamamsha from your family again...

A silent, telling look passes between Mother and Father. It's too good an offer to pass up...

MOTHER (IN MALAYALAM)

(voice cracking)

Be a good girl and everything will be all right, okay?

Before they can fully say goodbye, the Manager turns Aditi around and marches her out of the house.

RASHMI

Go after her!

MOTHER

You don't know how hard it's been!

RASHMI

Don't pass your suffering onto your daughter.

Rashmi leaves and Mother draws inward, a ball of shame and impotence on the floor.

EXT./INT. IDLING COVERED TRUCK BED - DAY

The Manager lifts Aditi into the back of a covered truck, where she sees 5 cowering girls. Aditi doesn't understand.

The back of the truck is locked into place and Aditi turns to wave at her sisters and Mother and Father...

...but as the truck pulls away, it's Rashmi who appears, legs like missiles underneath her as she races after the truck.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Aditi, remember what I said! Hide yourself away. I'll come for you!

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
It's okay, Aunty. I'll be back soon! Be good!

Rashmi falls farther behind, but she never stops running.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL CITY-DESERT - ESTABLISHING

Just building after factory after warehouse. Stretching forever. Unclean and still somehow sterile. At the border between the normal city and the industrial desert...

...A gate is opened and the truck trundles through. So close to civilization it's criminal.

LINGER...

...as the tall wrought-iron fence...

...slides back into place.

EXT. FACTORY COMPLEX - ESTABLISHING

A house on one side, covered in windows, welcoming and bright, trees and flowers and mangoes, across from a massive windowless brick building with a PADLOCKED SLIDING DOOR.

Boys - DRUPADA, 15, and BALA, 8 - watch as the truck parks. Dru isn't interested, plays on his cell phone as the MALE WORKERS unlock the padlocked door and the back of the truck.

THE MANAGER
 Get the door open, Ghulam.

Aditi gets down willingly and waves to Bala who waves back, but the other girls have to be yanked out of the truck.

THE MANAGER
 Back into your room. Now!

Aditi turns to see The Manager barking at someone inside the dark of the brick building.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - ESTABLISHING

A narrow "office-like" anteroom that leads down a hall to the right -- where the male workers stay. Iron bars and an open cell-like door lead onto the factory floor. 20-ft high walls, rolled mat beds stacked in a corner, sewing machines fill half of the space. A massive open skylight in the center of the ceiling is the only source of light, aside from small cracks in the walls here and there.

On the right as Aditi peeks in, she sees three wooden trunks.

Back in what is clearly a "bathroom," Aditi sees girls and women, aged 8-16, watching.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
(to Aditi)
Go on. Get in.

Aditi tentatively steps in. The building's big enough not to be terrible for her... but we can tell she's ill at ease.

THE MANAGER
(to older girls)
Show them how to use the machines,
and get back to work.

The sliding door slides back into place and is LOCKED... and, clearly following an old routine, those who have been here longer come forward and pick up the new girls.

ESHA, 10, maternal even this young, smiles warmly as she picks Aditi up.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
If you need help call out for Esha.

INT. SEWING MACHINE SECTION - LATER

The WHIR from sewing machines with metal pedals fills the air as Aditi stands by Esha's station and watches her thread the machine with fine golden silk thread and expertly begin to embroider the edges of a long piece of emerald-green fabric.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
*You'll only do the border for now.
Then you give it to me.*

Esha's machine stalls. She artfully cuts the fabric free, threads the golden thread through a free needle.

Her hands FLY across the cloth, skillfully finishing what the machine could not.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
Repeat after me...
 (in English)
 Thread.

 ADITI
 Tread.

 ESHA
Thh-Thh-Thread.

 ADITI
 Tha-read.

 ESHA
 Needle. Sewing Machine.

 ADITI
 Needle. Sooin Matcheen.

Esha holds up her finished embroidery - a golden blossom.

 ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
You will learn to do this from me.
Would you like that?

Aditi can't nod fast enough. It's magic, pure and simple.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

The sun has passed over the skylight and disappeared. Naked bulbs have flicked on around the room. Aditi is laboriously outlining a stencil with stitches on a throwaway piece of fabric.

Esha finishes a sari, delicately folds it, and carries it to a plush packing box by the cell doors.

 KANTI (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)
Nitika, you idiot!

KANTI, 10, dangerously beautiful for a little girl in this place, shoves her 5-year-old NITIKA away. Nitika has spilled something all over the sari, ruining it.

The older girls murmur, some with fear, some with judgment, as they console Kanti, who is freaking out.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
 (to Aditi, consoling)
*It's all right. The little one is
 still learning.*

GHULAM, 40s, a rough man with greedy eyes, SLAMS a baton on the cell bars.

GHULAM
 Shut up!

Silence from the girls. They freeze, as if they take care not to move very much around him.

THE MANAGER (O.S.)
 That's all right, Ghulam.

Ghulam trundles back out of sight as The Manager steps in. Aditi sees Kanti's eyes grow wide with fear as she tucks the ruined sari behind her.

THE MANAGER
 Very good, girls. Finish packing please. We have a new order... shameless tight jeans from America.

The older girls come forward with saris, which they delicately fold and place in the packing crate. Each crate has 20 compartments - one per sari.

One sari is missing.

THE MANAGER
 Where is the last? Come on.
 (beat)
 Now.

Kanti gently moves forward, giving Nitika the evil eye. She presents the ruined sari to The Manager.

THE MANAGER
 Ghulam! Get back in here--

KANTI
 --Wait! Please! It was an accident!

Ghulam peers in. The Manager shoots him a "hold" gesture.

THE MANAGER
 Really...an accident.
 (beat)
 Ghulam, a mango, please.

We turn away to watch Aditi:

Aditi stops chewing. The color drains from her face... as she starts to understand.

The Mango sits like a dead thing in her hand as every lash off-screen causes her to FLINCH.

After a moment, the lashing ends and the male workers gently lift Nitika off the table and lay her down on the floor.

THE MANAGER

(re: Kanti)

Her too. For lying. Not the back,
remember. She's worth more pretty.

Ghulam nods to the two male workers, who yank Kanti farther onto the table so only her feet dangle off. Ghulam aims for her feet, rears back with the baton and--

--Aditi FAINTS. As she - as we - fall to the dirt floor we:

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

Aditi sits up to see an EMPTY FACTORY - no other girls, no table, no Manager. She's alone. EXCEPT, the sound of the LASHING echoes through the space.

Aditi leaps to her feet, abandoning the mango where it lay...

...as under her feet the bare floor begins to PRICKLE. Almost like a sound wave under her, with every lashing. She jumps like an electrified cat every time.

THE MANAGER (V.O. IN ENGLISH)

Ghulam. That's enough. You'll tear
her feet off. How's she going to
work then?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - EVENING

Aditi's eyes snap open where she lays on the floor...

...as a long stream of blood enters frame, flowing right for her face.

She sits up and Esha is quick to turn Aditi against her dress to cover her eyes.

THE MANAGER

(to other girls)

You'll start on the jeans
tomorrow... We're still short one
sari.

He and the men leave. The older girls jump into action.

OLDER GIRL #1

You, get the scraps. You, find the
last bit of alcohol you have.

(to Esha)

You're fastest.

OLDER GIRL #2

(re: Aditi, disdain)

What about that one?

ESHA

Leave her to me.

Esha gently grabs Aditi and corrals her toward Esha's sewing machine. Esha picks up the stencil Aditi was learning on and hands it back to her.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)

Keep me company?

Aditi takes it, watches as Esha pulls a red silk sari from a basket by her machine and begins to hand embroider it.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

Aditi has finished a not-terrible blossom on her scrap piece of fabric...as Esha cuts the thread on a gold blossom on the edge of the red silk sari. She stands and CRACKS her back in a way no 10-year-old should.

Aditi watches Esha rush to the shipping crate, and tuck her piece into the last open spot.

ESHA

(out into the men's
section)

It's done!

The two male workers haul the crate out... then almost immediately come back in, one carrying a pot of rice and bowls, the other carrying a pot of lentil dal and a large stack of naan.

Esha comes and collects Aditi as the men leave, and they both approach the group of girls.

Aditi sees Nitika is dead asleep on her stomach, scraps on her back already bleeding through. Kanti's still crying, her feet heavily bandaged. If looks could kill...

MOMENTS LATER

It's an assembly line. The older girls serve rice, dal and naan to everyone...but when it's Aditi's turn they give her a half portion, no naan, and turn away coldly.

Aditi tries sitting with the others, but one of the Older Girls quickly yanks her up by her wrist, pulls her to a far corner and sits her down to eat by herself.

OLDER GIRL #2 (IN MALAYALAM)
The Manager's girls eat here...

Aditi watches the girls from afar as she nibbles on her bit.

LATER

The two male workers collect everything. The girls set about laying out sleeping mats.

Aditi stands apart, watching.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
Aditi, come here. You'll sleep by me.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
It's time to go home.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
It's all right. Just come here--

--it seems to dawn on Aditi as she looks at the other girls getting comfortable on their floor mats... she peers around at the walls, which suddenly seem to shrink closer to her.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
(panicking)
...It's...time to go home! I want Amma!

Esha and the older girls eye each other nervously. Esha goes to stand up--

--and Aditi SPRINTS for the sliding door.

ANTEROOM

She's so fast, Ghulam doesn't even realize she's passed him until she's BANGING on the sliding door.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
*Work is done! It's time to go HOME!
 Open the door! Open it!*

GHULAM (IN MALAYALAM)
Get away from there!

He grabs for her -- she slides out of his grasp, still POUNDING on the sliding door.

He raises the baton--

THE MANAGER (O.S.)
 Ghulam!

Ghulam backs away. Aditi pauses just long enough to watch The Manager emerge from the darkened hall, like a bogeyman.

THE MANAGER (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)
What's the matter here?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
*Work is over. I want to go home.
 I'll come back tomorrow. Open the
 door, please, sir.*

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
Good girl, you are home.

He caresses her cheek. Aditi POUNDS on the door again.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
AMMA! AMMA! AUNTY! PLEASE AUNTY!

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
ADITI!
 (his tone cows her)
*Go to bed. You've seen what we do
 to bad girls.*

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Good girls get to go home.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
*And so you shall. One day, when
 you've paid off your family's debt
 to me.*
 (she's unsure)
Three...Two...

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Please!

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

One!

He nods to Ghulam, who indelicately lifts Aditi off her feet. She still reaches for the sliding door as he carries her

TO THE TABLE

Ghulam tosses her onto it. He goes to turn her over--

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

*No. She's one of the pretty ones.
Feet only.*

Ghulam nods. The two male workers lift her higher onto the table like they did Kanti.

Off-screen, the first lashing hits her feet. NATURAL SOUND CUTS OUT. Aditi doesn't even scream. She's in shock.

RASHMI (V.O. IN ENGLISH)

I hid a part of myself away...

As the lashing ends, she's carried limp, almost in a dream state...

...toward the three trunks. Her eyes GO WIDE as he opens one and drops her in. She nearly leaps out, pain be damned -- Ghulam shoves her back in.

He SLAMS the lid down and locks it.

INSIDE THE TRUNK

Aditi FIGHTS, harder than we've ever seen her fight before. SCREAMING-SCREAMING -- but we don't hear it.

OUTSIDE THE TRUNK

The trunk ROCKS angrily, like it's possessed by a demon, as if the beast within is feral. The men and girls eye each other nervously -- no one's ever reacted like this before.

If we could hear her screaming it might be unbearable...

INSIDE THE TRUNK

RASHMI (V.O. IN ENGLISH)
 In a secret place so no one could
 have me.

It's all too much for Aditi. She begins to SHAKE VIOLENTLY, her eyes roll back, white foam begins to trickle from the corner of her mouth.

OUTSIDE THE TRUNK

Everyone stops to watch as the trunk begins to VIBRATE from her seizure.

Ghulam skitters back - maybe she is possessed - but The Manager eyes the box like one might a dancing bear or a contortionist -- he's fascinated.

INSIDE TRUNK

As Aditi slips into unconsciousness, we enter:

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

She's laying where the trunk would be. Her feet are bloody...

...she struggles to stand, but when she's finally up, we see she is hovering an inch or two off the ground.

THE MANAGER (V.O. IN ENGLISH)
 Leave her in there. We'll see if I
 have my good girl back in the
 morning.

Aditi closes her eyes tightly and tries to will the green endless field back. It BLINKS back and forth between the empty factory and the green field several times...

...but the walls crash back down permanently.

Aditi crumples, crying. Through smeared eyes she sees the uneaten mango lying on the floor. She hand-digs a hole in the dirt floor, and buries it.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL CITY-DESERT - NIGHT

A wheatish rolls royce pulls slowly up to the factory gate.

INT. RASHMI'S ROLLS ROYCE - NIGHT

A dirty STREET KID sits beside Rashmi in the passenger's seat. The Street Kid points at the gate. From this angle, you'd never know how many lives are trapped behind it.

RASHMI (IN MALAYALAM)
Are you sure that's it?

STREET KID (IN MALAYALAM)
*All the kids know to stay away or
 you never come out again.*

Rashmi reaches into her purse, produces a wad of cash. The Street Kid snatches the whole thing, opens the car door and flees... getting as far away from the factory as he can.

Rashmi pulls out her cell phone and stares at it for a long moment. Shaking, she speed-dials someone.

RASHMI
 (mustering her courage)
 ...Arun, it-it's me.

Silence. Heavy and oppressive.

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
 I was worried sick, you know. I had
 the entire police station out
 looking for you.

RASHMI
 I-I came to see my sister.

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
 You know you can't be seen there.
 That isn't where you belong
 anymore.

RASHMI
 I'm not your pet, Arun. I need to
 breathe, okay?

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
 This embarrasses me, Rashmi. You
 understand that, right? If anyone
 knew I married a Shudra...

RASHMI
 I know.
 (beat)
 Arun, something's happened.

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
Ugh. You're more trouble than
you're worth--

RASHMI
--my sister sold her daughter to a
factory. She's just a little girl.
Please help me buy her back.

More silence.

RASHMI
It's the last thing I'll ever ask
of you.

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
If I do this, you'll come back?
You'll behave?

Rashmi shudders, between a rock and a hard place. A tear
trickles down her cheek.

RASHMI
Yes. I'll behave. I promise.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - NIGHT

The gate bell is JANGLING loudly. The Manager, drowsy with
sleep, stumbles down from the Big House toward the sound.

GHULAM
She won't go away, sir.

The Manager peers through the little gate window - sees
Rashmi. She stops ringing the bell.

THE MANAGER
What do you want?

RASHMI
To make a deal with you.

She thrusts her phone through the little window. The Manager
takes it, pleased by her desperation.

THE MANAGER (INTO PHONE)
Is this Mr. Bleeding Heart?

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
I apologize for my wife's behavior.
She never could learn her place.

The Manager turns away from Rashmi, surprised by her husband's words.

THE MANAGER (INTO PHONE)
Right now she's a problem, sir.
She's waking up the whole
neighborhood.

MAN'S VOICE (INTO PHONE)
Again, my apologies.
(beat)
If you could handle it for both of
us, you could keep the car. Her
jewelry's worth something too.
(beat)
Do we have a deal?

The Manager weighs his options.

MAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
Say it so she can hear.

THE MANAGER (INTO PHONE)
We have a deal.
(to Ghulam)
Open the gate.

The gate SLIDES open. Rashmi's smiling, relieved face appears...

...Ghulam pulls the baton far back behind her. She's oblivious to her fate as he swings and we:

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

The crate lid CRACKS open. Aditi looks up at The Manager.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
(mumbling)
I'll be good. I promise.

The softest smile appears on The Manager's cold face.

GHULAM (O.S.)
She shit herself. Get her out of
there. Get her some water. Wash
her.

Aditi's eyes open just enough to see Esha and the older girl who made her sit apart lean down on either side and lift Aditi from the crate.

They carry her as quickly as they can into the bathroom. O.S., we hear a SPLASH of water as Aditi cries out.

LATER

The other girls - including Kanti - are back at their machines, sewing women's skinny jeans together.

Kanti holds up a size 16 jeans.

KANTI

Can you imagine how rich you have to be to fit into these clothes?

OLDER GIRL #1

Mmm. I miss Kheer. My grandmother made it with golden raisins.

KANTI

That's why you have a fat ass.

The pretty girls giggle.

OLDER GIRL #1

What's an... *ass*?

PRETTY OLDER GIRL #1

Your backside, stupid.

OLDER GIRL #1

(offended)

Where did you learn a word like that?

KANTI

In the magazines the men enjoy themselves with in the big house.

OLDER GIRL #1

I meant...how'd you learn the word when you can't read?

Kanti CHUCKS a spool of thread at her as the others laugh.

ESHA (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)

That's it. Take your time. Don't rush.

The others look to see Aditi very gingerly walking out of the bathroom with Esha. Her feet are wrapped in layers upon layers of sari scraps, of all different colors.

KANTI

There's the little rat.

ESHA

That's enough, Kanti.

KANTI

You're right. It's exactly enough.

They approach Esha's work station... and as Esha turns away to get things ready, we see the scraps of fabric on Aditi's feet are floating under her feet... Aditi is still floating, though no one seems to notice.

Esha hands Aditi a scrap of fabric the same color as her aunt's mango sari, with an even more intricate stencil tied to it. She hands Aditi gold thread.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

(re: the skinny jeans)

What about these things?

ESHA

Blue jeans.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Bloo-jins. How many bloo-jins must I make?

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)

You are still learning. Finish that first.

Aditi nods and turns to walk away...when she notices that several of the older girls have already parked their 5-year-olds at the extra machines.

Aditi notices that everyone else's basket is only half as full as Esha's -- Esha is doing the work for both of them.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Esha, I'm sorry I told! I want to be a good girl. Please let me make the bloo-jins!

Esha is gentle with her.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)

Soon. I promise. Finish what I've given you, okay?

Aditi sways, nervous... but eventually nods and moves away from the group.

INT. FACTORY BATHROOM - DAY

A hole in the floor, and a faucet with a bucket in a concrete base with a drain. Nothing fancy...

...except that for aeration, there is a barred "window" in the bottom corner. Almost like a cage in a zoo.

A fat mango DROPS from the tree and hits the driveway only a few feet away. Aditi licks her lips, staring plaintively at the food she could never reach...

Aditi slliiides onto her butt by the barred section and reluctantly embroiders the scrap of fabric with the gold thread. But...every so often... she looks back at that mango.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dru sits on the couch playing a video game on the television, while Bala sits on a chair by the window, book in his hand.

THE MANAGER (O.S.)

What's this, Drupada?

Bala sits up, brings the book up in front of him in an unnatural way to make it look like he's reading, but he peeks up as his father enters the room.

Dru doesn't change his behavior at all.

DRU

I've told you a hundred times to call me Dru.

THE MANAGER

Dru. Ah. My apologies. I thought I was talking to my son with the bright future. Drupada who's going to become head of his own textile empire one day, not this nothing Dru who sits around playing video games all day.

Dru... just keeps playing.

THE MANAGER

My own flesh and blood. My heir.
(beat)
Even your faggot brother has the good sense to better himself.

Bala doesn't know what the word means, but he can tell it's not good.

The Manager suddenly LASHES OUT and kicks Dru off the couch onto the floor. Dru's face hits the wood floor with a *THWACK!*

Turned away from his father, Dru's chin quivers. Tears threaten to spill... but instead, he buries the anger. We see it well to the surface, and see him tamp it down again.

Bala doesn't move - the same way the factory girls stay still in Ghulam's presence. When The Manager turns to him, Bala buries his face in his book.

THE MANAGER

(to Dru)

Get up! Get the fuck out of this room. Where are your textbooks?

Dru SCRAMBLES out of the room as The Manager leaves another dusty footprint across the seat of Dru's pants.

In the silence after, The Manager fumes. He looks at Bala.

THE MANAGER

Education is everything. Without it, we remain forever stuck in the mud, Bala.

BALA

(eyes still on the book)

Yes, Acha.

He eyes Bala with equal disdain, then leaves:

THE MANAGER

How did I make two disappointments?

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Bala sees Aditi framed in the barred "window."

INT. FACTORY BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CRUNCHING footsteps. Aditi peers up, just as Bala appears with the book in his hand--

--Aditi eyes him nervously. She goes to get up, but it's difficult to maneuver with her hurt feet--

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)

Wait! Stay.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

I want to go home.

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
*Acha says a debt is a debt, you owe
 what you owe.*

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
How much do I owe?

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
I can find out for you.

Bala looks back at the Big House - they're too exposed. His father could look out the window and catch him there at any time. He turns back and sees Aditi eying the mango on the ground behind him.

Bala retrieves the mango and holds it up.

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
*Meet me around the side of the
 building.*

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
How can I do that?

He has already disappeared around the side of the factory.

EXT. SIDE WALL OF FACTORY - ESTABLISHING

It's very narrow here. Barely wide enough for Bala to walk between the factory wall and the exterior wall.

He comes to a BROKEN PIPE that looks into the factory.

THROUGH THE PIPE

We can see the girls working at their machines. Then, Aditi comes into view. She eyes him - us - through the pipe.

Bala excitedly feeds the mango through the pipe and she grabs it and bites into it. Then, he opens his book.

INTERCUT

BALA (IN STILTED ENGLISH)
 (reading aloud)
 No one knew them. No one knew where
 they had come from--

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
--what are you doing?

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
*Acha says English is a ticket to
 the future and I must practice. He
 says you are a...*
 (English)
 Captive audience...

Neither of them knows what that means.

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
*When I read to my brother he hits
 me.*

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
On your feet?

He shakes his head, then sweeps the hair away from his hairline to REVEAL a relatively recent and brutal SCAR.

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
 (re: the book)
It's a story.

Aditi stitches the intricate stencil as Bala keeps reading.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE - LATER

Bala enters the dining room to find his father and brother sitting at opposite ends of the table, eating in silence. Bala takes his place beside Dru.

THE MANAGER
 Why are you late, Bala?

BALA
 I was reading English.

THE MANAGER
 English, eh? Read a little for me.

Bala obediently takes out the book.

BALA
 (reading aloud)
 One warm night four children stood
 in front of a bakery. No one knew
 them. No one knew where they had
 come from--

THE MANAGER
 --Excellent! Very good, Bala.

DRU
It's just a kid's book.

THE MANAGER
Better than you could do at his
age.

Dru glares at Bala.

THE MANAGER
Very good, Bala. Keep going. There
may be hope for you yet.

DRU
For a faggot?

THE MANAGER
Surrounded by women all day? At
least he isn't distracted. Not like
you messing around with that
Kapadia girl when you think I can't
see you. I see everything.

DRU
She's just my friend.

THE MANAGER
Good. You're already promised to
the Chavali beauty anyway. Half the
factory work and all the rupees I
collect from the neighbors goes
into that friendship. It's an
important debt, Drupada.

(beat)
You want to mess about, pick one of
the factory girls and fuck her in
the stables. No one will hear you
there.

DRU
I wouldn't touch one of those
creatures if you paid me... well,
maybe if you paid me.

The Manager laughs, noticing a bit of himself in his son.

THE MANAGER
Better a problem we can solve than
one we cannot.

BALA
How much do the factory girls owe,
Acha? How long will it take them to
pay it off?

THE MANAGER

What kind of question is that?

BALA

...How much--

THE MANAGER

(snaps)

--who cares? More than they can ever pay back. Don't talk money. They can't understand it.

BALA

But when can they go home?

DRU

Never, you idiot.

Bala looks at his father, who doesn't look him in the eye -- all the confirmation he needs.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

The girls sleep on their mats in the corner. The gentle WHIRRR of a sewing machine fills the air.

Aditi wakes and sees Esha, still at her machine.

ESHA'S SEWING MACHINE

Esha has cleverly detached a string of naked light bulbs and laid it across her sewing table, lighting her fingers in the dark without shining the light on her sleeping friends. Her brow is sweaty, but her focus is absolute.

Aditi watches, feeling guilty.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Esha? Please teach me. I can do it.

Esha eyes Aditi's bandaged feet, pained.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)

You really think so?

Aditi nods and shows her embroidered scrap of fabric -- it's actually not half bad. In fact, we can see the start of a skill buried in there, past the mis-stitches and puckering.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

I need to pay off my debt. I want to go home.

Esha gently caresses Aditi's cheek, like Aditi's mother once did. Esha picks up a nearby sewing machine and puts it beside her own, pats the stool beside her.

Esha turns away to grab denim from her basket.

ON THE STOOL

Aditi tries to climb up, but when she presses her bandaged foot onto the bar--she YANKS away with a painful HISS...

...and that's when she notices her feet aren't touching the ground. She bends over to look down at her feet -- and sees an inch or two of air between her and the floor.

Aditi turns her back to the stool...

...and lifts herself up. Her feet rise just high enough for her to slide on the seat as:

 ESHA CONT'D) (IN MALAYALAM)
 (while turned away)
 Can you get up?

Esha turns to see Aditi already on the stool. Surprised, she gently pulls Aditi's stool closer.

 ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)
 (pointing out on the
 machine)
 What is this?

 ADITI
 (thread)
 Tread.

Esha makes a thhh thhh sound with her mouth to remind her.

 ADITI
 Thhhhread.

 ESHA (MIXED)
 This is the bobbin.

 ADITI
 Bobbin.

 ESHA (MIXED)
 *This is the push pedal. You use
 your foot to power the machine.
 Right now you're too small to reach
 it on the floor, so you will need
 to use your elbow, ya?*

Aditi tries to both hold the denim on the sewing machine under the needle, and push rhythmically on the pedal. It'd be difficult for anyone.

Esha starts working again... and Aditi follows.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

Esha places her large stack of blue jeans into the shipping crate... and Aditi puts in her own two pair as well...

...as the other girls begin to wake up for the day.

GHULAM

All right. All right. Everybody up.

He taps his baton on the cell bars--*CLING! CLING! CLING!*

The Manager enters.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)

Stand up straight, all of you.

He walks the length of the factory, reviewing each girl the way you might a prize piece of livestock.

Years of abuse have taken their toll on some of the older girls. The Manager motions for these to step forward.

In all, he picks out five girls.

THE MANAGER

Follow me.

(their fearful hesitation)

Now!

One girl clings to a friend so hard he has to rip them away from each other and pulls the girl out of sight by the hair. The other four follow.

Aditi stays out of the way, but at just the right spot so she can watch through the sliding door before it closes as...

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

The Manager pulls the girl toward an OLDER WOMAN, late 50s. Ghulam shoves the girls into the back of a Lincoln Continental idling just outside the gate.

THE MANAGER

There they are.

(beat)

Do we have a problem?

The Older Woman hands him a stack of cash and gets in the car with the girls... but before she leaves she spots Aditi just as the sliding door closes for good.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

The TORN AWAY GIRL who was left behind when her friend was taken sobs quietly at her sewing table. Esha whispers something in her ear, but she's still devastated.

The two male workers go around to everyone's empty baskets beside their machines...and fill them with more denim.

GHULAM

Manager says they must be dyed first, then sewn. 200 pairs.

TORN AWAY GIRL

Ghulam, when is Rahel coming back?

GHULAM

Who cares?

Ghulam and the two male workers place boxes of industrial dye and tubs on the floor. Then they tie long, sturdy strings across the room under the skylight.

GHULAM

This is a rush order. No food until it's done.

The girls quietly deflate... but accept it.

INT. SLEEPING CORNER - LATER

Tiny bare hands DIP denim into tubs full of jewel tones -

Red...

...yellow...

...green...

...blue...

...purple...

Once the denim is fully saturated, the girls twist out the excess and hand it off to another to hang under the skylight to dry.

COUGHING is common. The girls try not to lean over the tubs, but sometimes it's unavoidable and they yank back with a grimace - it's potent stuff.

After staying up all night, Esha is flagging beside Aditi.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Esha, wake up. Esha...

Aditi gets up and walks to the bathroom, pours cool water from the faucet on a piece of fabric.

BALA (O.S. IN MALAYALAM)
Aditi!

Aditi walks over to the barred "window."

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Did you find out how much I owe?

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
You wouldn't understand.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Did those other girls pay their debts?

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
...yes.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Then, tell me.

Bala shifts, trying to think:

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
You owe seven years, all right?
(beat)
Will you let me read to you?

She looks back at the work still to be done - only 40 of the 200 pieces of denim are dyed.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
When the work is done. I have to work hard for my family.

Bala nods, sad, and watches her leave.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Kanti's feet are still bandaged. She has to crawl on her hands and knees to get around. She eyes Aditi as she enters, feet bandaged, but having no trouble whatsoever walking.

KANTI

They must not have hit her very hard.

Through the door, she sees Bala looking after Aditi.

KANTI (IN MALAYALAM)

*Look at that boy pining after her.
If she had a brain at all, she'd
help us. She'd help herself.*

Aditi kneels beside Esha and presses the cold fabric to her forehead, waking her. She can't unhear what Kanti said.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD

Bala is halfway back to the house when he hears:

ADITI (O.S.)

Bala!

Bala rushes back, book in hand.

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)

Finished already?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

*No, but we will finish faster with
food.*

Bala nods, considering.

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)

Yes! I do better with food too.

(beat)

But Acha wouldn't like it.

Aditi looks away, disappointed. Bala thinks quickly--

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)

*--I can give you mangos every time
I read to you through the pipe.*

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Enough for all of us?

He frowns... she starts to move away--

BALA (IN MALAYALAM)
--*Yes all!*

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Aditi motions for the other girls to follow.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Hurry! Food!

The other girls watch as she rushes to the broken pipe and holds out her skirt...

...as mango after mango after mango pops through the pipe. The girls, minus injured Kanti and Nitika, rush forward to collect the mangos until Aditi has only three left.

She gives one to Kanti, who grudgingly accepts, almost proud.

Aditi goes over to Nitika, who's awake and crying, still on her stomach in the corner. Nitika stares at Aditi for a hard moment and turns her head away. Aditi gently puts a mango within reach in front of Nitika's face...

...and after Aditi is gone, Nitika gently wraps her hand around the mango and pulls it close.

INT. BALA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dru snores in the other bed. Bala slips out of the room.

EXT. SIDE WALL OF FACTORY - NIGHT

Bala approaches the pipe...

...he's relieved when he sees Aditi staring back out at him.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

Aditi has pulled a stool up to the broken pipe so she can sit and stitch another intricate stencil while he reads.

It's a new book.

BALA (IN STILTED ENGLISH)
There wasn't money for wool or
sugar or holiday cheer... so we
made our own...

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

The denim is gone. Bolts and bolts and bolts of colorful dyed SILK are tossed onto the lines to dry in the sun.

Who knows how long Aditi has been here...

The girls all sit in general quiet, sewing saris. When Esha finishes the hem of one, she hands it to Aditi, who begins to embroider the edges. She's good.

Ghulam enters and the energy changes. He slinks past sewing machines, observing the work...

...until his hand grazes the back of one of the pretty older girls' necks. He touches one girl's hair here, pats another on the head...

...and stops behind Aditi. The other girls watch as he places a hand on her shoulder, then runs his hand down to her hand, takes hold of it and pulls her from the stool.

Esha LEAPS to her feet and shoves him away.

ESHA

No. No! She's too young.

GHULAM

That's how I like them.

(he ogles Esha)

You're just jealous I don't come for you anymore.

Ghulam yanks Aditi forward--

--Esha shoves Aditi behind her.

Ghulam PULLS his baton back, ready to STRIKE. Esha stares him down, far too old for her age.

ESHA

No. It's me you want.

Esha - this tiny 10-year-old - gently takes hold of Ghulam's hand... and leads him beyond the cell bars.

Kanti watches as Aditi simply... goes back to the sewing machine and keeps embroidering, oblivious to what Esha has just done for her. Nitika sits at the sewing machine beside Kanti, also watching.

INT. BALA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Drupada sleeps, his eye blackened by a terrible bruise. Bala peeks out into the hall, sees his father is snoring in another room.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - NIGHT

Bala, book in hand, goes to the mango tree's roots and extracts a hidden basket full of mangos.

EXT. SIDE WALL OF FACTORY - MOMENTS LATER

Bala arrives at the broken pipe, and sees a line of girls waiting for the mangos he has brought.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

The girls pass the mangos down the line until everyone has one, then they leave Aditi and Bala alone. Now, however, instead of facing each other, Bala leans up against the wall so Aditi can read the book too.

INTERCUT

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

What is that word?

We see it's a comic book - an issue of Superman.

BALA

(he points to each)

Plane. Bird... plane... Superman...

(beat in Malayalam)

They're all things that can fly.

ADITI

Fly.

Bala gestures with his hand, "flying" through the air.

END INTERCUT

As Bala begins to read the comic aloud to her, Aditi drifts:

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

The mango has sprouted. The tiniest shoot of green peeks through the dirt.

Aditi walks to the middle of the room, under the skylight. In the real world, it's night, but here the sky shines vivid INDIGO above her.

Aditi raises her hands like Superman... and her hair blows back as she rises slowly into the air. Aditi suddenly JERKS as she realizes it's really working.

She's flying!

She doesn't have the hang of it... she's like a duckling leaping out of the nest. Staying upright is difficult...

...but up here, near the skylight, the most beautiful sounds drift to her...

...running water...

...a bird...

...rustling leaves...

...and WHIMPERING.

FACTORY FLOOR

Esha stumbles onto the factory floor and collapses to her knees, below Aditi.

Esha WEEPS, holding her head in her hands, inconsolable and so small on the bare floor alone. Her lip is cut, there are bruises on her arms.

ESHA

Amma! Amma...

ADITI

...Esha?

Esha looks up and sees Aditi flying, and realizes they're together in a totally empty factory - no saris hanging, no sewing machines, no trunks, no other girls.

Then, she sees the Indigo sky - she's mesmerized by it, pain forgotten. She struggles to stand, but she collapses on her face in the dirt--

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

--Aditi rips her attention away from Bala and the broken pipe and sees Esha face down on the floor.

The other girls rush to her and Aditi's up like a shot, leaving Bala behind.

Kanti and the other Older Girls lift Esha up just as Aditi arrives. They're already carrying Esha to a far corner. They place her over a GRATE IN THE FLOOR.

Aditi rushes up--and the air coming up through the grate blows her hair back. Aditi yanks away cradling herself.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

It's cold!

Though it's very subtle, we see that the air is blowing up Esha's clothing from below, soothing her injuries.

KANTI (IN MALAYALAM)

(to Aditi)

Go hug her.

Aditi doesn't understand... not yet... but she approaches Esha anyway, and hugs her from the side. Esha wraps her arm around Aditi gently.

ESHA (IN MALAYALAM)

Aditi, where were we?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

A secret place.

(beat)

We can share it until we go home.

As Esha continues to cry we:

BEGIN A SERIES
OF SHORT SCENES

FACTORY FLOOR

A beautiful bolt of white silk lays across each girl's work station. Esha and Aditi countdown together:

ESHA

Three...two...one!

ADITI

Tree...two...one!

They smile and begin to embroider their own silk fabric, racing each other.

BROKEN PIPE

Aditi listens to Bala read.

ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

Aditi appears in the center of the empty room, she gestures to the empty air beside her...

...where Esha suddenly appears. Aditi lifts off the ground and pulls Esha up into the air.

FACTORY FLOOR

A male worker tries to take Nitika from the room...

...Kanti runs her finger over the Male Worker's shoulder until he forgets Nitika and takes Kanti instead.

BROKEN PIPE

Aditi is waiting when Bala appears with an eye swollen shut from a brutal black eye. He feeds mangoes through the pipe but can't look at her.

Aditi gently reaches through the pipe and cups Bala's face...

...her touch - has he ever been touched with kindness before?

He passes the comic book he brought through the broken pipe. It's an issue of Supergirl. Aditi opens it.

ADITI (IN STILTED ENGLISH)

(nervously)

The silver... water was a... still mirror before her. When she looked at her reflek-shun, she could see the sool--

BALA

--soul...

ADITI (IN STILTED ENGLISH)

...soul she carried inside...

She pauses and looks at him - he's pitiful. She touches his shoulder to draw his attention again.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Bala...close your eyes.

BALA'S INTERNAL WORLD

Bala opens his eyes... and finds himself with Aditi in the empty factory.

BALA

Aditi!

ADITI

He can't find us here. You're safe.

(beat)

Let me show you.

She lifts off the ground... and pulls him up with her.

FACTORY FLOOR

Kanti reenters, showing no physical signs of abuse... but her hands shake as she walks toward her machine. The other girls are all nearly done with their baskets, but hers is still full.

Kanti takes a skirt and walks, defeated, to the corner with the grate. She sits down on it and continues to sew...

...until Aditi gathers her own pile of finished skirts into her arms and places them on Kanti's table and takes fabric from Kanti's basket...

...Esha takes some...

...so does Nitika...

...Aditi starts on a new skirt as Kanti watches, so grateful.

ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

Aditi and Esha are playing tag in the air, when Kanti swims by and tags them both on the shoulder with the first smile we've seen from her.

The mango tree sapling is now taller than Aditi, its leaves fanning out under the skylight.

FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

The Manager catches the girls adding finished skirts to each other's baskets, sharing the work.

The Manager YELLS at them, but they seem unconcerned, almost defiant...

...The Manager snaps his fingers and Ghulam and the Male Workers appear and clear off the central table.

They lift Aditi onto the table. Out of frame, they hit her feet again.

ADITI'S POV

The real world and her internal world blend with each strike. Beautiful colors swirl in the sky visible through the skylight.

AFTER

The Manager watches, suspicious. Aditi doesn't even cry. Frustrated and fuming, The Manager leaves...

...as we see that Aditi's still floating.

FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

Aditi leans down over Nitika, whose back is bandaged again. She whispers into Nitika's ear:

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
*Come with me. I can take you to a
secret place.*

Nitika turns away from her.

THE BIG HOUSE

Bala tries to slip out of the house at night, book in hand.

THE MANAGER (O.S.)
Where are you going, Bala?

Bala turns, sees The Manager in the shadows, watching him.

BALA
Just wanted some air.

THE MANAGER
Go to bed.

BALA'S BEDROOM

Bala sits up in bed, his eyes glazed over.

BALA'S INTERNAL WORLD

Bala is in the empty factory.

BALA

Aditi?

FACTORY FLOOR

Aditi WAKES with a start. She looks over at the broken pipe, but Bala's not there. She transitions...

ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

...to the empty factory and finds Bala waiting there for her.

THE SHORT SCENES
END WITH A

TIME LAPSE INTERCUT

+ FACTORY FLOOR - Aditi ages from 5 to 7 to 9 to 12 at her sewing machine. Piece after piece of clothing - Indian, American, European - speed by under her needle.

+ **ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD** - More and more of the girls appear in the empty factory beside Aditi...

+ FACTORY FLOOR - ...but Nitika never makes the transition. Every time Aditi stares up at the skylight (as more and more girls stare up at it), Nitika watches enviously. She tries looking up like everyone else, but she only ever sees the hazy sky.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

When the TIME LAPSE ends, **12-YEAR-OLD Aditi**, far too mature for her age, sits at her sewing machine, hand-embroidering a butterfly onto the hem of a red wedding sari.

ESHA

That's beautiful, Aditi.

Aditi holds it up. GASPS from the other girls -- it's the most beautiful sari they've ever seen.

Ghulam SLAMS his baton on the bars, as The Manager enters, followed by NEW GIRLS, all between 7-12 years old, many clearly street children.

Esha, Kanti and the other Older Girls (ALL NOW 17) wearily watch the new crop take in their surroundings.

OLDER GIRL #2

Esha...More girls.

ESHA

There are always more girls...

THE MANAGER

Let's go. Hurry up. Teach them quickly if you don't want to work all night.

The girls bring their embroidered saris to the shipping crate. Each tucks theirs inside, and avoids looking at The Manager, who examines each piece quickly before it's loaded.

Per tradition, each Older Girl gently places a hand on a new girl's shoulder and guides her to a machine.

Aditi folds her beautiful red sari and goes to put it into a compartment in the shipping crate--

THE MANAGER

--Wait. Hold that up.

Aditi gently expands the sari REVEALING more than just a butterfly. It's a sky of birds, bees, butterflies, a sun, a moon -- the universe itself.

The Manager is mesmerized.

THE MANAGER

You did all this?

ADITI

Yes, sir.

She folds it again and goes to tuck it into the final compartment in the shipping crate, but he stops her again. Takes the sari from her, folds it over his arm.

THE MANAGER

Start again. We can't send that.

Aditi frowns, but starts to take it back with her.

THE MANAGER

No. Give it here.

ADITI

Please don't throw it away--

THE MANAGER

--It's none of your business what I do with it.

ADITI

--Please sir, let me keep it. Add it to my debt. I'll stay an extra month for it.

The Manager stares at her sincere face and laughs.

THE MANAGER

What are you talking about?

ADITI

Seven years, sir. They're almost over. Bala--

THE MANAGER

(snaps)

--Bala what?

ADITI

He told me what I owed. Seven years. It's been seven years.

THE MANAGER

Yes, well. Bala spoke out of turn.

He walks out with the beautiful red sari as the male workers carry the crate out.

ADITI

What does that mean? Sir! What does that mean?

He disappears down the side corridor.

Kanti and Esha exchange a nervous glance. They delicately approach Aditi.

ESHA

Come away, Aditi.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - BROKEN PIPE - EVENING

Aditi bites her nails, sitting by the broken pipe, obviously waiting for Bala...

...but when he arrives, he's nothing like we were expecting. The scrawny boy has been replaced by a handsome 15 year old with the delicate nature of a scholar.

As is the routine, he comes bearing a huge basket of mangos (even bigger than it was before).

BALA

Here. I've brought seema atha too. They're supposed to be for my brother's wedding, but I took a couple. Be careful of the black seeds. Tell them not to crack their teeth.

The seema atha - custard apples/cherimoya - are passed back behind her without another thought. So are the mangos.

BALA

...keep one for yourself, Aditi--

ADITI

--I'll try one when I'm home.

Bala's smile falters.

ADITI

I am going home, right Bala?

BALA

Aditi...

...he can't look her in the eye...

...and it breaks her heart.

ADITI

They'll call me stupid.

BALA

Who?

Her eyes dart back toward the factory floor where the other girls are sharing and playing with the fruit.

ADITI

I have to go, Bala.

BALA

Aditi, please.

ADITI

Goodbye--

--he grabs her shoulder, not hard, but he knows it's the wrong thing to do. He lets go. She doesn't look at him.

BALA

I-I didn't know what to tell you. I thought it would be worse to know the truth. Aditi, please believe me.

ADITI

You lied to me.

BALA

I've never hurt you. O-Or anyone else.

ADITI

That is not the same as doing the right thing.

BALA

This is the real world, Aditi. This is just how things are.

ADITI

Stop repeating what your father tells you.

Still not looking at him, she stands up and walks away, back into the factory.

He watches her go, devastated... but what more could he say?

EXT. SLUM - KERALA STATE, INDIA

Rashmi's rolls royce pulls up to the edge of a tight section of shacks. The Manager, Ghulam and Bala get out. Bala lags behind, dragging his feet.

THE MANAGER

Bala, the bags, please.

Ghulam opens the trunk REVEALING bags upon bags of fresh produce and rice. He loads bags of rice into Bala's arms, grabs bags of produce, and motions for Bala to follow.

The Manager approaches an ANCIENT WOMAN with two young grandsons and says something to her in Malayalam. She reaches up and gently touches The Manager's face, then hands him a small coin purse.

As The Manager moves on to the next home, Ghulam gives her grandsons food.

Bala's confusion in the situation is palpable. He watches his father collect small bits of money in exchange for food.

People don't seem to resist at all - they almost seem to bow to him as they pay him. This is a tried-and-true system.

The Manager approaches a house with a newborn.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
*What a blessing! So quiet. Ghulam,
 make sure they get a gift of rice.*

Ghulam gives them two bags of rice. Bala watches, genuinely flabbergasted. Maybe Aditi really just doesn't understand.

OUT OF EARSHOT

The Manager approaches a DRUNK MAN and his fluttery wife.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
Dashamamsha...

The fluttery wife, who has a black eye, moves around her useless swaying husband and shyly hands The Manager a couple coins. He eyes the paltry amount ominously.

DRUNK MAN (IN MALAYALAM)
*We had unexpected expenses. We'll
 have more for you next time.*

Clearly an old excuse. He's not even trying to be convincing. The Manager nods and motions for him to move closer.

THE MANAGER (IN MALAYALAM)
*Tell me. When I cut out your
 tongue, will that stop you from
 drinking?*

The Drunk Man stops swaying. The fluttery wife nervously removes her *nath*, her tiny gold nose ring - clearly the only thing of value she has - and places it in The Manager's palm. The Manager moves away, totally casual.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

The girls sew at their machines, glancing curiously, as

IN THE CORNER

Aditi still lays on her mat. Tears stream out of her eyes.

Esha and Kanti both have piles of fabrics that are twice as high as the others... and Nitika's machine is empty.

KANTI
 (to others)
 First Nitika disappears, then Aditi
 abandons us.

ESHA
 She'll come around. Or they'll make
 her come around.

Esha glances worriedly at Aditi.

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

Aditi BANGS desperately on an invisible barrier across the skylight. She presses up on it, STRAINS...but there is something keeping her in.

Aditi SLAMS her fists on it harder and HARDER and HARDER until it seems like her fists will break!

Her breath is ragged... and shallower. The shallower and more panicked her breathing becomes, the lower she sinks...

...lower...

...and lower...

...and lower...

She claws up, trying to reach the skylight...but it's no use.

She sinks to her knees at the roots of the ENORMOUS MANGO TREE that has grown from the seed she once planted. Her tears fall on the roots, and are immediately absorbed.

GHULAM (V.O.)
 SHUT UP! GET BACK! BACK INTO THE
 BATHROOM! NOW!

KANTI (V.O.)
 She's bleeding!

GHULAM (V.O.)
 BATHROOM NOW!

The sound of Ghulam's baton SLAM-SLAM-SLAMMING against the cell bars RATTLES Aditi's internal world. As painful shock waves rip across the floor toward her, we

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

--Aditi LEAPS to her feet off her mat as the girls crowd back into the bathroom. She has only a moment to register--

--Ghulam YANKS a bloody, dirty girl onto the factory floor. The person is unrecognizable and fights VICIOUSLY. It takes Ghulam AND the two male workers to get her inside.

Ghulam drags the girl to a trunk, and WRANGLES her inside. She SCREAMS bloody murder until the lid of the trunk SLAMS down on top of her. Ghulam locks it quickly and scampers back, catching his breath.

GHULAM

She's more trouble than she's worth! So are all of you!

He SLAMS his baton against the cell bars to make his point.

GHULAM

NO ONE goes near her or you go in too! Get back to work!

He and the two male workers rush out.

The girls emerge from the bathroom, staring at the trunk. They want to open it...

...but one by one they return to work instead, until only Aditi is left staring at it.

ESHA (O.S.)

Aditi! It'll only get her in more trouble. Come.

Aditi listens to Esha and returns to her station.

ADITI

Who is it?

KANTI

Hush! Nitika.

Aditi clearly didn't even realize -- she looks back at the trunk. There's an itch there that will need to be scratched.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE - EVENING

Several Indian men pal around with DRU, now 20, not as handsome as his younger brother, but has all the confidence of a first child. He also looks an awful lot like his father. He wears bachelor party paraphernalia.

INDIAN MAN #1
I can't believe you're getting
married tomorrow. To a Chavali too!

INDIAN MAN #2
Tell us the truth. You still seeing
Parvati Kapadia on the side?

A ripple of sadness crosses Dru's face. He covers by locking
Indian Man #2 in a headlock and giving him a noogie.

DRU
Why? You couldn't get her anyway.

The others OOOH.

Bala stands by the window he once sat beside, staring at the
factory. He taps a novel against his leg.

INDIAN MAN #1
What's wrong with your brother?

Dru eyes him with a sneer.

DRU
He's always been wrong. Let's go.

The men funnel out of the house and in the absence of joy,
the room fills with a silent tightness.

Bala TRANSITIONS:

INT. BALA'S INTERNAL WORLD

The factory isn't empty when he arrives. The girls play in
the air, tossing "balls" of bright silk back and forth.

Their fun dies as they whisper:

GIRLS
It's the Manager's son!

Aditi sits solemnly in the corner... and stands when Bala
emerges from the shadows.

ADITI
Get out of here!

BALA
Aditi, please. I-I'd rather be in
here with you--

--a BRICK WALL cascades down between them, almost on top of him. Banishing him from the factory--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE BIG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

--Bala's eyes SNAP open, mid-flinch, as if the bricks could have really hurt him, unaware that The Manager is watching him from behind. He joins Bala at the window, but Bala's quick to look away from the factory.

THE MANAGER
What's the matter?

Bala quickly wipes away a tear.

BALA
Nothing, I'm fine. Just studying.

THE MANAGER
You should celebrate with Drupada--

BALA
(sharp and angry)
--Why would I do that?

The Manager is silent. His eyes light up for a moment.

THE MANAGER
This marriage will unlock the
future for us. We will be
legitimate in a way we've never
been before.

Bala doesn't want to ask...but he can't resist:

BALA
...what do you mean, Acha?

THE MANAGER
Don't be stupid! You know I was
born in the gutter.

BALA
I'm sorry, Acha.

THE MANAGER
I carry around my poverty like a
tattoo across my face. You and your
brother were afforded the luxury of
what I could provide - a top
education, connections...
(MORE)

but we are too new...
 (as if it sickens him)
 ...still too common. Marrying a
 Chavali opens many doors. Once his
 son is born, he will lift this
 family into the air and we'll never
 set foot on the ground again,
 understand?

BALA

Yes, Acha.

The Manager grunts. He sees his son eye the factory:

THE MANAGER

Speak your mind, son.

Bala winces, not trusting the offer at all.

BALA

(everything)
 It's not... nice, is it?

THE MANAGER

It's the price of success, Bala!
 (beat, gentler)
 Son... They don't understand
 freedom and they don't really want
 it. Trust me.

The Manager pats Bala on the shoulder (Bala winces), and then
 leaves the room...

...Bala shifts anxiously.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - DAY

Dru is on top of a WHITE CAMEL, dressed in the traditional
 white wedding suit, sword on his hip, his male friends,
 father and brother surrounding him, helping him get into a
 comfortable position. His entourage carry the accoutrements
 of the wedding party. It's all color and noise and excitement
 as the wedding party opens the factory gate and travels out
 into the city...

...the factory stands completely silent.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The girls sit at their sewing machines quietly sewing as the
 men stand guard to keep the girls quiet.

INT. BALLROOM DRESSING ROOM - DAY

An opulent golden room with a BRIDE at center. She's wearing a traditional red sari. Her mother steps up to lay part of the sari over her head...

...it's the sari Aditi made. The butterfly, the birds, the sun, the moon - the universe! - shines across it.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

The sari Aditi sews is a vibrant EMERALD GREEN. She CRACKS her back, as no 12 year old should...

...and the sewing machine EATS her sari. Aditi quickly pulls the sari free, but the edge is puckered. She pats it down, uses her nails to pull the thread, but it's not perfect...

ESHA (O.S.)

Don't worry. We have some leftover material. You can start again.

Tears form in Aditi's eyes anyway...

...it's not just about the sari anymore.

ADITI

(murmuring)

I was so stupid. I am so stupid.

ESHA

(eying the male workers)

Aditi. Be quiet!

ADITI

Why did they let me go?

ESHA

Who?

ADITI

He took me from my house, put me in a truck. Only me. Not my sisters. My parents aren't waiting for me to come home.

ESHA

Don't think of those things--

--Aditi SLAMS her fists on her table, startling everyone.

She takes the emerald sari in her hands and tries to RIP it in half with her hands.

ADITI
 (sarcastic and angry)
 It's such a pretty stupid thing! We
 have to take care with it!

GHULAM (O.S.)
 What are you doing?!

It won't tear, and doesn't--

--as the male workers pull the sari out of her hands and haul her back toward the trunks.

ADITI
 Let me go! I don't belong here!
 Please! No! I'll do anything--

--the trunk top opens and they shove her inside. She SCREAMS, and this time we do hear it. She fights - the box looks like a bucking bronco on the floor. The hinges on the trunk have to give, don't they? It's impossible that they wouldn't.

The other girls watch, mesmerized by the movement of the box.

INSIDE THE TRUNK

Aditi gives into despair. She weeps and tears at the box, her breath getting shallower and shallower as claustrophobia sets in... as her tears begin to choke her.

OUTSIDE THE TRUNK

The noises are terrible - it sounds like Aditi is dying.

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

The crying echoes through the factory.

The mango tree's roots begin to GROW, making their way across the floor to the trunk...

...the roots RIP the trunk apart. They wrap around Aditi and carry her toward the tree.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
 (to the tree)
Please kill me.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR

The box has stilled, but everyone still watches as:

ADITI (MUFFLED IN MALAYALAM)

No more.

GHULAM

Back to work, the rest of you. The
Manager will hear about this.

All of the girls, except for Esha and Kanti, go back to their machines. Ghulam raises his baton threateningly, and only then do Esha and Kanti return to work.

INT. TRUNK - NIGHT

Aditi is still breathing very shallowly, awake and staring at the wood only inches above her head.

NITIKA (O.S.)

Where do you go?

Aditi turns her head and peers

THROUGH THE WOODEN SLATES

She can just see Nitika's eyes peering back at her from the next trunk over.

NITIKA (O.S.)

Where do you go when you drift
away?

ADITI

Nowhere... A secret place where I
hid myself away...

(beat)

I should have hidden more.

NITIKA (O.S.)

I should have run faster.

Even separated, Nitika can sense it as Aditi closes her eyes... and begins to transition to her internal world--

NITIKA (O.S.)

--You can't hide in there forever.

Aditi's eyes shoot open in the dark.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

The Manager sits in the living room having tea with the Older Woman who once took the 5 girls away. She's wrapped in a beautiful sari. We'll soon learn she's a MADAM who aged very gracefully, her energy holds weight in any room she enters.

THE MANAGER

I've always been good to you, haven't I? Every year, I pick out my best merchandise and sell it to you at a fair price. Why do you need to see them this year?

MADAM

With all respect, we both know you've sent me your discards.

The Manager admires her polite firmness.

THE MANAGER

We have a few virgins, if that's what you're after.

MADAM

Virginity is irrelevant.

He pauses stirring his tea, surprised.

THE MANAGER

Really? Have we fallen so low?

MADAM

Forgive my bluntness, but you're a man -- virginity is a fruit your kind enjoys picking and, if you'll excuse me, *bruising*. You take pride in the ruining of it... Then what?

THE MANAGER

We have some whores too.

MADAM

A woman cannot be a whore if she is forced.

THE MANAGER

Agree to disagree, I suppose.

She nods generously.

MADAM

It's the energy that matters. A girl with spirit is worth ten whores.

The Manager laughs amiably.

THE MANAGER

For that price, you can buy all my spirited girls.

We pull out into the hall to REVEAL Bala has heard it all.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - DAY

Bala, book in hand, "casually" walks past the factory's barred "window" and drops the book...

...giving him a reason to peek in -- the girls are sewing again, but Aditi is nowhere to be seen.

Kanti comes in to use the bathroom. She pauses when she sees him, then defiantly squats over the "toilet" anyway.

Bala bashfully turns away.

BALA

Why don't you have any shame?

KANTI

Why don't you?

BALA

I just want to talk to her. I even brought her favorite comic book.

It's an issue of Supergirl.

KANTI

Bring food.

BALA

(bitter)

Is that what she wants?

KANTI

No, it's what I want. I'll tell her you want to see her. No promises.

Kanti finishes and walks back into the main room. Frustrated, and eying the Big House nervously, Bala marches over to the mango tree, retrieves the basket and starts going through the mangos on the ground.

He picks up one - it's bruised and he gently tosses it aside. He picks up another - it's good and he puts it in the basket.

LATER

The basket is so full, he can't lift it. He has to kick it with his foot. Once at the barred "window:"

BALA

Kanti! I brought your blood mangos.

Kanti motions for the other girls to follow. They pour into the small bathroom.

Bala looks at them all through the bars, hungrily looking at the fruit. The younger girls are plumper... barely. The older girls are scrawny, dark circles and lifeless hair signalling malnutrition.

He swallows his sudden guilt like a lump in his throat.

BALA

Here, take them. Hurry.

The girls rush forward and take two each until Kanti reaches out to take the last two mangos. He grabs her arms.

BALA

Where is she?

KANTI

Ask your father.

She pulls back and takes the mangos with her.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE

Bala SLAMS the door on his way in, startling the Madam.

BALA

Where is she, Acha?

MADAM

Where is who?

THE MANAGER

(to the Madam)

You'll have to excuse my son. I coddled him and it made him weak.

The Madam politely pretends not to listen as The Manager gets up to address Bala in semi-privacy.

THE MANAGER

Who is it you're talking about?

BALA

Where is Aditi--

THE MANAGER

--They don't have names.

The Manager forcefully grabs his chin.

THE MANAGER

Your pet will be let out tomorrow
so Mrs. Cama can examine her.

BALA

(realizing)

Is she in one of those--

THE MANAGER

--We will discuss this when our
company leaves.

Bala rushes out, his father calling after him.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

The girls turn as LOUD TALKING like BARKING suddenly picks up
beyond the cell bars. Bala BURSTS past Ghulam.

It's obvious that if Bala were one of the girls, Ghulam would
have already used the baton on him, but he couldn't use it on
the boss's son... could he?

BALA

Don't touch me!

(beat)

Aditi? Where are you?

Bala walks up to the far trunk, lifts the lid - it's empty.
Bala goes to the second - the lid won't lift.

BALA

Aditi?

He peers through the wooden slates - a pair of eyes peer back
up at him - it's Nitika. He gets off the trunk...

...he leans over the last trunk...

THROUGH THE WOODEN SLATES

Aditi's eyes peer up at him - unmistakably hers.

BALA

Aditi. Hold on. I'll get you out.

(to Ghulam)

Key. Now!

GHULAM

I must ask your father, sir.

He sees the key on Ghulam's waist - grabs it - and shoves Ghulam back surprisingly hard when Ghulam resists.

Bala turns back to Aditi's trunk and unlocks it. He lifts the lid, revealing Aditi's emaciated frame - who knows how long she's been in here. Her lips are dry and cracked. Her fingers are bloody from where she tried to claw through the box.

Bala stares at her for a long moment. She SUCKS IN THE FRESH AIR and stares up at him like a cornered animal.

Bala kneels down, reaches his hand under her to lift her up--
--but PAUSES suddenly.

UNDER ADITI

His hand hits nothing but air. He explores the bottom of the trunk curiously -- her body never touches the trunk bottom -- she's floating in the real world.

THE MANAGER (O.S.)

(to Ghulam)

How'd he get your key from you?

Idiot.

Bala gently lifts Aditi to sit up. He eyes his father.

THE MANAGER

You let her out. Good for you. Go on. Open the other one while you're at it.

Bala does as he's told, and opens Nitika's trunk REVEALING that she's just as dirty as the night she was put in here.

The Madam pulls back from the smell.

MADAM (O.S.)

This is how you treat your merchandise?

THE MANAGER

Please. This is absolutely out of the ordinary. My apologies.

The Madam looks over all of the girls staring back at her across the factory floor - it's not out of the ordinary, they all look worn down.

THE MANAGER

You! You! Clean them up, now.

Kanti and Esha rush forward to help Aditi and Nitika walk to the bathroom. Bala follows behind.

MADAM

I'll look over the others while I wait. Stand, please.

The girls nervously get to their feet.

INT. FACTORY BATHROOM

The girls rush for the faucet, as Bala pauses to look at the barred "window" from this side. This is a cage.

Esha opens the faucet--

--Aditi and Nitika DIVE for the water, both drinking greedily, desperately, as if they've never had water before.

ESHA

Hurry, Kanti. The soap.

Kanti indelicately pours water over Nitika and begins to scrub. Nitika pulls away.

NITIKA

It hurts!

Kanti lifts Nitika's shirt and sees bed sores on Nitika's back. Kanti returns to the job, scrubbing more gently.

Bala glances back out into the factory floor and:

BALA

(whispering)

Please behave, but don't trust this woman.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The Madam examines the plainer older girls.

MADAM
Open your mouths.

The girls opens their mouths.

MADAM
Smile.

They smile... But the smiles are tainted by years of woe.

MADAM (IN MALAYALAM)
(whispers)
*Smile like you've been given the
blessings of Lakshmi.*

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

The Older Girls are alone in the factory -- and the factory doors are open. No one is there to stop them from leaving.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The Older Girls' eyes are glazed over - they're still in the internal world -- and their smiles are genuine, intriguing and seductive. The Madam smiles coyly.

THE MANAGER (O.S.)
The pretty ones are over here.

The Madam turns to examine the Pretty Older Girls.

MADAM
Smile.
(they do)
...What lovely wives you would
make.

The Manager frowns as the Madam turns away from his pretty stock. He looks around quickly:

THE MANAGER
Where is Kanti? Kanti present
yourself.

Kanti, Esha, Aditi and Nitika emerge from the bathroom, clean and quiet. Even wet, they all exude something that the others don't. A defiance that whispers to us through the camera.

MADAM
Smile for me, girls.

Esha, Kanti, and Aditi do as they're told, smiling gently, nervously, studying this woman for cues.

MADAM
 (to Nitika)
 Smile for me, child.

Nitika does a purposefully ugly smile, more baring her teeth.

THE MANAGER
 Nitika! Behave!

The Madam smiles again.

MADAM
 It's quite all right. I'm finished.
 I'll take them...
 (she motions to the Older
 Girls who she first
 examined - not the
 overtly pretty ones)
 And her...
 (she gently touches Kanti
 on the shoulder)
 And her...
 (she runs her hand over
 Aditi's head)
 And this hellfire...

She caresses Nitika's face gently. The girls the Madam chose come together. The Madam admires her choices, and smiles.

THE MANAGER
 But--

MADAM
 --is there a problem?

THE MANAGER
 ...That's more than normal.

She tosses a stack of cash at The Manager. He catches it.

She lifts Nitika's shirt gently away from her back -- sees old lash marks and fresh bed sores.

MADAM
 I'll offer half for this one. My
 customers want to tenderize their
 fares themselves. They don't need
 you doing it for them.

THE MANAGER
 Of course, madam.

BALA
Madam, please. Not this one.

Bala steps up behind Aditi.

MADAM
It's all right, *maghan*.

BALA
But--

THE MANAGER
--Bala.

ADITI
Will we leave this place?
(she nods)
Then I want to go.

MADAM
And so you shall.

THE MANAGER
Back! The rest of you back!

The other girls scurry back into the bathroom.

The Manager goes to the big sliding door Aditi once walked through freely and begins to unlock the massive padlock.

Bala pulls Aditi aside. She still doesn't look at him.

BALA
Please. You don't know what she is.
Men come to her to... use girls.

ADITI
No different than here.

BALA
They'll break you, Aditi.

Aditi gently disentangles herself from his grasp and joins the girls by the Madam...

...but there's a glint in her eye...

...her hand gently takes hold of Nitika's. Nitika looks over at Aditi, and sees the glint.

ADITI
No more.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD

The sliding door ROLLS open. Sunlight spills across the hard floor. The girls squint. Aditi eyes the gravel on the driveway, the trees.

A breeze rushes past her -- it's freedom and it hits her like a freight train.

THE MANAGER (O.S.)
 (re: the cash)
 Wait a second. You have too many girls. This only covers five.

The Madam eyes him with very subtle disdain.

MADAM
 My driver has the rest.

THE MANAGER
 ...Open the gate.

Ghulam rushes forward and pulls open the main gate leading into the factory.

The moment the gate opens an entire world crosses Aditi's face -- the market, the color, the people! An entire city so close and so far for seven years.

Gently, Aditi steps forward...

...and tugs Nitika along.

They slip around the male workers' backs as the Manager and Madam are preoccupied with waiting for her driver to emerge from the Lincoln Continental.

MADAM (O.S.)
 Bring my purse!

The Driver ducks back into the car.

THE MANAGER
 Can he hurry up?

Aditi glances back only once - and sees the other girls, still in the factory, still trapped. She catches Esha's eye -- her mentor, her friend.

NITIKA (O.S.)
 We have to run. I'll tell you when.

Overcome with sudden guilt, Aditi hesitates...

...Esha gently gestures for her to go, to be free. Forgiving her in a single glance.

Turning away is a physical effort for Aditi, but when she does, she sees it's a clear shot to the small opening in the gate leading to the market. To freedom.

ADITI

Now!

The girls TAKE OFF LIKE A SHOT, their short legs sprint beneath them, kicking up pebbles under Nitika's feet.

THE MANAGER

Stop them!

Ghulam grabs Nitika's leg--

--she CLATTERS to the ground like a newborn horse.

NITIKA

Go Aditi!

But, Aditi SLAMS her foot down on Ghulam's nose--

--he releases Nitika as both girls BURST for the gate--

--It SLIDES shut just as they reach it.

As the male workers close in, Aditi spots a rickety gutter pipe leading to the factory roof.

ADITI

This way!

Aditi begins to climb! Nitika's right behind her--

--Nitika SCRATCHES the male worker who grabs her, giving her just enough time to climb too high for them to reach.

THE MANAGER

What are you idiots waiting for?

He SNAPS his fingers. The three men BOLT around the building.

BALA

Hurry Aditi!

The Manager SLAPS the back of his son's head.

EXT. FACTORY ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Aditi turns and helps Nitika up the last couple of feet.

NITIKA
Help me find a way out!

Aditi rushes toward the far edge...

...but she passes the skylight looking down into the factory. The girls are just below, looking up at her with fear and awe. So many she's leaving behind.

INT. FACTORY ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Nitika rushes to Aditi, who is frozen where she stands by the skylight.

NITIKA
Aditi? We'll have to jump. Wake up!

ADITI
We're leaving them.

Aditi stares down through the skylight...

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

One by one, the girls on the floor swim up through the air toward the skylight...

...and like Aditi once did, they hit that invisible barrier.

GIRLS
Go Aditi! Go! Run! Get out of here!

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The girls are still gathered together on the floor, staring up at Aditi. The Manager moves among them, genuinely freaked out by the overwhelming strength and peace he sees on their upturned faces.

GIRLS
Go Aditi! Go! Run! Get out of here!

THE MANAGER
Shut up! Back in the bathroom. Now!

He SLAPS one... but she just returns to staring up.

EXT. FACTORY - INDUSTRIAL CITY DESERT

A male worker rushes into the street just outside the factory, baton at the ready. He looks up just as Nitika peers down at him. She rushes out of view.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

The other male worker, Ghulam and Bala rush into the courtyard as Nitika looks down at them.

Ghulam begins to climb a rickety ladder leading to the top.

EXT. FACTORY ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Nitika runs back to Aditi.

NITIKA

Come on, Aditi. We have to jump!...
We can come back for them!

Below, The Manager catches Aditi's eye. She watches as...

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

...The Manager picks up a sewing machine...

...checks that Aditi is watching...

...and SLAMS it against one of the Older Girls. She collapses. The other girls scatter...

...but he grabs Esha's arm before she can get away.

ADITI

Let her go!

THE MANAGER

Come down! Enough of this!

EXT. FACTORY ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Nitika tugs on Aditi again...

...it's the toughest choice Aditi has ever made.

ADITI

I can't leave her.

NITIKA
He'll kill her anyway!

ADITI
Go! Tell someone. Please!

Nitika lets her go...

...and just as Ghulam reaches the top of the ladder--

--Nitika LAUNCHES herself off the roof--

--and disappears with a CRASH, into the market just across the road. VENDOR SCREAMS flutter up to Aditi...

...from here she can see Nitika's leg. It isn't moving.

ADITI
NITIKA!

Ghulam grabs Aditi and pulls her away before anyone in the market looks this way.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD

Aditi climbs down the ladder, with the two male workers and Bala waiting at the bottom and Ghulam following her down. There's nowhere to run anymore.

ON THE GROUND

Bala reaches for Aditi... Aditi turns away.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Aditi is marched back onto the floor...

...just in time for The Manager to meet her eye...

...pull back the sewing machine in his hand...

...and SLAM it across Esha's face. Esha collapses to the floor, unconscious and heavily bleeding from her neck...

...the Madam staggers several feet back in the courtyard, even The Manager is surprised by what he's done.

THE MANAGER
I tell you what to do to protect
you! You see what happens when you
don't listen?
(MORE)

(beat, the other girls the
Madam picked)
You. Come.

As Aditi rushes to Esha and tries to stymie the blood with her own sari, Kanti and the others are led out by Ghulam and the two male workers.

EXT. FACTORY - INDUSTRIAL CITY DESERT

The Madam's Driver opens the back door of her Lincoln continental, unaware of what's happened.

Shaking, the Madam frantically motions for the girls to get in the car ahead of her...

...and she winces as The Manager comes up behind her, his shirt blood-stained. Like the girls do around Ghulam, she's frozen for a long moment waiting to see what he'll do...

...until he shakes her hand limply.

THE MANAGER

Thank you for your business.

He stalks back inside... and the gate rolls shut again.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

The other girls are asleep. Aditi is laying beside Esha in the center of the floor. Painfully, Esha's eyes open, and find Aditi staring back at her.

ESHA

(croaking)

It's beautiful... Aditi...

ADITI

What is?

Esha's eyes are glazed over. Aditi TRANSITIONS TO:

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

Aditi is alone on the floor...

...she looks up to see Esha HOVERING above her.

ADITI

Wait for me!

Aditi rises into the air... and Esha receives her with a hug.

ESHA

It's so beautiful tonight. Look!

They admire the sky through the skylight. It is an almost aurora-borealis **WHITE** and fluid, soft and welcoming.

Pain grips Esha suddenly, SHAKING THE EMPTY FACTORY. The mango tree VIBRATES beside them, the floor ripples with pain.

ESHA

No more.

ADITI

It'll pass, Esha, I swear.

Esha slips out of Aditi's grasp, floating...

...upward...

...and upward...

...and upward...

ADITI

Wait! You'll--

--Esha WINCES again, again RATTLING the foundations of the factory around them...

...as she rises up through the skylight and FADES AWAY.

ADITI

Esha! Esha! Wait for me!

Aditi tries to follow...

...but again she hits that invisible barrier.

ADITI

ESHA! Don't leave me here! ESHA!

A gentle CRACKING noise from below draws her attention...

...Aditi watches as the mango tree's roots move freely toward Esha's lifeless body on the floor. The roots wrap around Esha's body until she's swaddled in them.

ADITI

Let her go!

Aditi flies down...but when she rips open the cocoon of roots, Esha's gone.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

Aditi is still cradling Esha's body, weeping under the skylight.

One girl goes to the cell bars and lightly taps on them until one of the male workers arrives. She motions to Aditi, inconsolable on the floor.

The Male Worker stumbles in and tries to lift Esha's body into his arms...

...but Aditi scrambles to keep Esha to herself.

ADITI

No! No.

MALE WORKER

If I have to get the Manager, he'll put you in the box.

Still, she won't give Esha up. The Male Worker leaves.

OLDER GIRL #2

Aditi. She has to go.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

She deserves a proper pyre.

Older Girl #2 recoils a little.

ADITI

Help me lift her.

Together, the girls come together and carry Esha to a wooden trunk and tuck her inside. Aditi grabs a sari drying on a nearby line and wraps Esha in it.

Finally, she takes the string of naked bulbs that are still draped over Esha's sewing table.

She dashes one of the bulbs against the edge of the table, exposing the bright red filament... and presses it to the edge of Esha's sari.

The sari - the box - Esha - go up in flames instantly.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - NIGHT

The Manager and Bala emerge from their house, following the Male Worker...

...they pause as they see a BRIGHT ORANGE GLOW rising up through the skylight.

GHULAM
Fire! Fire, sir!

THE MANAGER
The hose! Bala, grab a bucket!

INT. FACTORY FLOOR

As the men rush in with buckets of water...

...The Manager and Bala see all of the girls standing back, watching the fire like they're not really there. The fire reflects in their unblinking eyes, playing off the gentle smiles on their faces.

Aditi stands at the front, eyes glazed over as we--

MATCH CUT:

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

--Aditi's face comes alive as she and the girls swim through the air, embers dancing between them, all around them.

There's something magical about it. The fire feeding the embers, the girls together in the air, in the darkness. It's almost like a renaissance painting come to life.

Aditi grabs the hands of the first girl The Manager hit with the sewing machine. They spin around each other--

--they spin--

--and spin--

--and spin--

--as Aditi DISAPPEARS in front of her.

GIRL
Aditi?

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

Bala douses the fire. The Manager JERKS Aditi back to reality.

THE MANAGER

Where do you go? Huh?! Where are you?

ADITI

Where you can never reach me.

He **SHOVES** her down, as the other girls wake to catch her.

THE MANAGER

I own you! I own all of you! Your families never wanted you--I wanted you! I gave you purpose. I made you useful. Without me you're nothing! Don't you forget it.

He grabs Aditi roughly, pulls her to her sewing station and shoves her down into her seat.

THE MANAGER

Do your fucking job or I'll kill every last one of them.

ADITI

Why not just kill me?

THE MANAGER

Why would I do that?

He turns away, sees Bala's growing hatred. He **SLAPS** his son, splitting his lip.

THE MANAGER

She learned this from you! This is your fault! Careful I don't throw you in here too.

(to male workers)

Get this shit out of here before it damages the building.

He stalks out.

BALA

Please let me back in, Aditi.

ADITI

Let. Us. Out!

She turns away. All the girls turn their backs on him.

EXT. BALA'S ROOM - DAY

Bala stews, impotent. What can he do? He turns on his laptop and goes to a search engine...

...but what exactly can he search for?

THE MANAGER (O.S.)

Bala?

The Manager moves about grabbing random things and shoving them into a bag he's carrying.

THE MANAGER

Get your things.

BALA

What?

THE MANAGER

Pack. Now. I'm sending you away.

BALA

I'm not going anywhere--

--The Manager raises his hand to slap his son--

--Bala winces!--

--The Manager turns away and keeps packing, venomous.

THE MANAGER

This all balances on the edge of a razor. Any misstep could bleed us.

BALA

They're suffering.

THE MANAGER

I told you. That's just the price of success. One day when you open your own factory, you'll understand.

As the Manager leaves the room:

BALA FADES FROM
THE CHAIR.

EXT./INT. MONTAGE

A TIME LAPSE BEGINS AS:

+ FACTORY FLOOR

- The basket beside Aditi's sewing station fills with silk... with cotton... with denim...

- The area with the burned trunks cleans itself - the burned trunks disappear, the soot is scrubbed away. New trunks are put in, this time made of metal.

- Ghulam comes in for a girl, reaches for a young one who struggles fiercely trying to stay in her seat. As Ghulam raises his baton to strike her...

...Aditi places a hand on his arm, and guides him away taking the young girl's place like Esha had once done for her.

ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

NO SOUND. The floor SPIKES rhythmically below Aditi as she floats, staring up at the PERIWINKLE sky through the skylight...

...bruises begin to appear across her body -- trouble from another world that can barely touch her here.

FACTORY FLOOR

The girls jolt to their feet as Ghulam tosses Aditi back in and she collapses to the floor. They rush to pick her up and discover her sari is torn. They carry her to her seat at the sewing station. She motions for the green sari laying nearby - we see she's been embroidering it and it's as beautiful as the red sari she once made.

As Aditi wraps it around herself, we pull up the green sari from hem to waist to shoulder and finally to her face--

--17-YEAR-OLD ADITI stares back at us as the

TIME LAPSE ENDS

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

Aditi glances in both directions - the guards are distracted - she quickly folds back the waist of the jeans she's sewing --

-- she finishes sewing the words "HELP US" into the seam of the jeans. Then, she quickly folds the pants, walks over and feeds it into one of the compartments in the shipping crate.

She returns to her seat, where an ILLITERATE GIRL is waiting.

ILLITERATE GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

This doesn't look like yours.

She furtively shows Aditi the seam of the jeans she's sewing. It reads HALP US.

Aditi smiles at her and quickly snips a line in the seam turning HALP into HELP.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

It looks great.

ILLITERATE GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

Thank you!

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - DAY

The Manager, who looks much older than when we last saw him, is talking with the two male workers.

THE MANAGER

Remember. Young. The younger the better -- to a point. Four or five years old is best. They grow into it. Hurry up. We've got a big order coming up.

The two male workers rush for the same truck that once carried Aditi into the factory -- it's older and WARBLERS grossly as they turn it on.

One of the male workers opens the gate REVEALING:

Rashmi's rolls royce. The Male Worker rushes forward and TAPS on the hood of the car to get them out of the way--

--the driver presses on the GAS and speeds inside like a bat outta hell, narrowly missing the male worker. The car SQUEALS to a stop, sending plumes of dust into the air.

The driver jumps out -- it's DRU, now 25, and he's pissed.

THE MANAGER

Drupada?

Dru paces frantically as he talks to someone on the phone:

DRU (INTO PHONE)
 I don't care what the doctor said!
 There's nothing wrong with me! I'm
 a fucking stud.
 (beat)
 Then get a second opinion!

He cancels the call:

DRU
 Fucking bitch...

THE MANAGER
 Drupada. What's going on?

Dru finally stops moving long enough for us to see the look
 in his eyes - anguish and a lot of anger.

DRU
 My wife -- that Chavali cunt -- she
 convinced the doctor I'm sterile!

THE MANAGER
 Sterile?

The Manager looks struck, as if he's been shot. It's not even
 clear if he hears what Dru says next or not:

DRU
 Acha, it's not true. She put him up
 to it, I know it. I-I'll get a
 second opinion--

--The Manager holds up a hand silencing his son instantly.

THE MANAGER
 You come here and steal my future
 from me? Get out of my fucking
 house.

DRU
 It's her--

THE MANAGER
 --Five years without a child? Five
 years, Drupada. You fucking
 disappointment.

He staggers inside, like the old man he has become.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE - EVENING

Dru eats in silence at the dining table. The Manager stews, his plate untouched, his mind racing, his fingers steepled anxiously in front of him.

THE MANAGER

Here's what we'll do. I'll call Bala back. He'll marry. Have a family. Give my future back to me--

DRU

--who's gonna marry a faggot?

The Manager stares daggers at his oldest, silencing him.

THE MANAGER

At least a faggot can father children.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

The girls are asleep... all save Aditi, who is laying beside one of the metal trunks WHISPERING to the GIRL inside it.

TRUNK GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

Is the secret place always there?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

Yes.

TRUNK GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

How did you find it?

Aditi frowns, lost for a moment in thoughts from long ago.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

It isn't important now. What's important is that you find it. Close your eyes. Are they closed?

TRUNK GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

Yes.

Aditi closes her own--

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

--and opens them. She's laying in the empty factory next to the TRUNK GIRL, who's now free. She's a new girl to the factory.

The Trunk Girl stands up and STRETCHES, peering about at the mango tree, the golden sky visible through the skylight. Tears stream from her eyes.

TRUNK GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)
Can I stay here?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
*...No... But you can come back
whenever you want.*

TRUNK GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)
I want to go home.

Aditi smiles delicately... until she remembers:

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Try this!

Aditi rises effortlessly into the air. The Trunk Girl marvels at her for a long moment...

...and then tries it herself. She's awkward, can barely get a few inches off the ground -- and she's at risk of doing an unintentional flip -- BUT it's still the most amazing thing she's ever done.

For a long moment, they linger in their joy...

...until a sound filters in all around them -- WHIMPERING. The floor RIPPLES with the sniffing.

TRUNK GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)
What is that?

They look down in time to see a 5-YEAR-OLD GIRL stumble onto the factory floor. She's in the internal world already, her cheeks ruddy with tears.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Aditi sits up and catches the little girl's eye...

...Ghulam is holding onto the little girl's wrist.

Six other little girls stumble onto the factory floor.

THE MANAGER
Get up! Get up.

The girls in the corner rouse from their sleep.

THE MANAGER

New workers to lighten your load -
You're welcome.

(beat)

We have a big order to fill,
starting tomorrow, so I suggest you
teach them all they need to know.

As Esha and Kanti did when Aditi first arrived, Aditi and the other Older Girls walk forward and each select a 5-year-old to take under their wing.

Aditi picks up the little girl, firmly taking her out of Ghulam's grasp. Ghulam smirks - it's only a matter of time.

INT. FACTORY BATHROOM - DAWN

Aditi sits with the little girl on her lap, cloth in hand, washing her face.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

What is your name?

LITTLE GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

My Amma will come for me.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

I know, baby. What is your name?

LITTLE GIRL (IN MALAYALAM)

...Padmini.

Padmini lays her head against Aditi's shoulder. Aditi holds her tightly, comforting her...

...but Aditi looks like she needs the comfort, as her eyes go hollow, as she essentially rocks herself from long ago.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

While the other girls sleep, Aditi stays up and shows Padmini the parts of her sewing machine.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

What is this?

PADMINI

Bobbin.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)

And this?

PADMINI
Poosh ped-all.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
*You're too small to reach now with
your feet, so you'll have to use
your hand, ya?*

Just like Aditi did so long ago, Padmini tries to use the push pedal while also moving the fabric through the machine.

The parallel is not lost on Aditi, who trembles with discomfort.

PADMINI (IN MALAYALAM)
Did I do wrong?

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
*No. You're so good at this already.
Look. Look how good you are.*

LATER

Aditi lays down on her mat--

--Padmini curls up in her arms. Aditi doesn't quite know what to do... except let the little girl sleep.

EVEN LATER

Aditi JERKS awake... and notices her arms are empty.

ADITI
Padmini?

She turns--

--and sees Ghulam carrying Padmini toward the cell bars.

In a flash, Aditi's on her feet. Unsure of what to do, she grabs the only thing she can -- the sewing machine.

She SLAMS it over Ghulam's head--

--he and Padmini tumble to the floor.

GHULAM
You stupid bitch!

He gets to his feet, wobbly from the hit.

ADITI (IN MALAYALAM)
Padmini! Behind me!

Shaking, but fierce, Aditi wields the sewing machine as a weapon - SWIPING at him - keeping him at bay--

--until the male workers' arms wrap around her from behind, capturing her. They shove the sewing machine out of her hands. She fights! But they're too much for her.

Ghulam holds open the top of one of the metal trunks as the male workers shove her inside.

INSIDE THE TRUNK

The last thing Aditi sees... is Ghulam taking Padmini's hand.

ADITI
 No!

The trunk lid SHUTS and locks.

GHULAM
 Go on, stupid bitch.
 (to Male Worker)
 Watch her freak out!

INSIDE THE TRUNK

Aditi's throat starts to tighten. At least the wooden trunks had slats that let the air in. Her breath stalls. She GULPS at the air! There isn't enough...

ADITI
 No! No more...No more! No...no...

...Aditi takes a DEEP BREATH...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

...and releases her breath in the empty factory.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR

Ghulam, the male workers, and the girls stare at the unmoving box. Where once it vibrated almost to the point of breaking, now it's calm and dead still.

MALE WORKER (IN MALAYALAM)
You think she's okay?

GHULAM (IN MALAYALAM)
Who fucking cares?

He KICKS the trunk.

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

The kick RIPPLES the floor under her, but Aditi remains perfectly still, hovering a few inches off the floor. She takes a deep breath...

...and releases it...

...and another...

She's in the internal world, but her eyes begin to glaze over like they do in the real world when she is in here...

...as if she's not here anymore either.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

The girls are back at their stations.

A Male Worker enters and nudges the trunk Aditi is in. Nothing. He checks that Ghulam isn't watching and opens it

REVEALING

Aditi, eyes glazed over, looking almost catatonic, staring up through the skylight.

MALE WORKER (IN MALAYALAM)
Hey... Hey!

He nudges her. She does not stir.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - LATER

Aditi lays on her mat in the corner. The girls eat dinner nearby... but keep looking at her every so often.

When they go to sleep, Padmini curls up beside her again.

PADMINI (IN MALAYALAM)
 (to another girl)
 ...where did she go?

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

Aditi looks comatose here too...

...until we transition to her POV. The mango tree's leaves hang overhead, stretching from one end of the factory to the other now, stunted and crowded under the factory ceiling that contains them...

...when the ceiling suddenly CRACKS. Debris would hit Aditi, if the boughs of the mango tree weren't there to protect her.

CRACKS...

...

...

...

...

...chase each other across the walls, as huge chunks begin to fall, THUNDEROUS to the ground...

...until we're back in the GREENEST FIELD we've ever seen.

Breath SURGES into Aditi, reawakening her. She sits up and looks around - there's probably no one for a thousand miles.

The only thing beyond the ruins of the factory is a BRICK WALL -- the brick wall she once brought down on Bala to keep him out.

She touches it and the bricks EXPLODE away

REVEALING

Bala (NOW 20) in a college dorm, far from here. Back turned to her.

On the desk beside his books sits his CELL PHONE - there are 25 missed calls from his father. It rings again... he picks it up to THROW IT--

--when he sees Aditi staring back at him, floating in the emerald sari.

BALA

Aditi, are you...

She simply stares. It's unnerving.

BALA
Please say something. Please...

ADITI
No more, Bala. It's time for you to
come back, understand? Help us.
Right now. Come back--

INT. FACTORY FLOOR

--Ghulam squats over Aditi, staring at her. He raises his
hand to slap her--

INT. ADITI'S INTERNAL WORLD

--Aditi winces, as if she's been struck.

BALA
Aditi?

INT. BALA'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aditi disappears. Bala blinks his glazed-over eyes and sees
where she once was is now just a wall.

His cell phone RINGS again... and this time, he answers.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Aditi JOLTS awake, taking a deep gulp of air...

...as the girls rush around Ghulam, gather around Aditi and
smother her in their love.

GIRLS
We were so worried!... We couldn't
find you... Are you okay?

ADITI
(calmest we've ever seen
her)
It's okay. I'm here.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - DAY

The Manager and Dru wait impatiently for the gate to roll
open. When it does, there is a taxi idling outside.

Bala gets out radiating an unsettling level of peace.

THE MANAGER

(fawning)

Bala. My son. It is so good to have you home at last. Come. There is much to discuss.

The Manager has never been this nice to him...

...but Bala simply takes it in stride.

As he's ushered toward the Big House, he turns his head slightly, as if he knows he'll see Aditi's face looking back at him from the barred "window" in the factory bathroom...

...and he's right.

INT. THE BIG HOUSE

Back at the dining table, in their old chairs, The Manager and his sons sit.

THE MANAGER

A lawyer! In America! It's a fine thing, son. A fine thing.

DRU

(murmuring)

That takes ten years in America.

BALA

I'm up for the challenge. You meet so many interesting people.

THE MANAGER

Yes? Any girls?

Dru SNORTS with derision.

THE MANAGER

Are you sick, Drupada? Feel free to excuse yourself.

Dru quiets down.

THE MANAGER

Bala, I know you're young... but maybe, you know, it might be time to marry...

BALA

...as a matter of fact, I did meet someone.

DRU

No way--

THE MANAGER

--Drupada!

DRU

Who is she? What's she like?... It is a she, no?

BALA

Her name is Radha.

THE MANAGER

Radha! Excellent name! She comes from a good family in America?

BALA

She was born in Delhi to a very good family... Vyavahare.

Dru CHOKES on his food. The Manager looks like he's won the lottery, his eyes gloss over with a view of the future almost as pure and happy as the girls in their internal world.

Bala pulls a picture of him and RADHA, a little older with a mysterious Mona Lisa smile.

THE MANAGER

A Vyavahare! My son, married to a Vyavahare.

He actually giggles.

BALA

...I was hoping to have the wedding here, Acha. Soon--

THE MANAGER

--Well, of course, soon! Yes!

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT

Aditi lays on her mat, holding Padmini, waiting.

BALA (O.S.)

Aditi!

BROKEN PIPE - INTERCUT

Aditi reaches through the pipe and cups his cheek like she did long ago.

BALA
Aditi. I'm so sor--

ADITI
--Thank you.

BALA
Here.

He holds up a tape recorder to the pipe.

ADITI
What is that?

BALA
You talk into it. Tell me your
story. I will take it to a charity
group that can help close the
factory down.

He presses the record button on the tape recorder.

BALA
Just talk. I'll hear you.

ADITI
My name is Aditi...

As we hear V.O., we see:

EXT./INT. MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

+ FREE THE SLAVES HEADQUARTERS

Bala plays the tape for a group of charity workers - it's an eclectic group of Indians, Americans and Europeans. Radha - the girl from his photo - is one of them...

ADITI (V.O.)
I had four sisters once. A fifth
was born... but I don't know what
happened to her. Perhaps my parents
sold her too.

+ MUNICIPAL COURT

Radha and Bala play the tape for a JUDGE. The Judge stamps a pile of paperwork.

BALA (V.O.)
Do you blame them for this?

+ POLICE STATION

Not local. More organized. The Police Officers - male and female - review the forms as they listen to the tape.

ADITI (V.O.)

I don't know. Maybe I did once.
After I realized the Manager
wouldn't let me leave, and... after
I watched the Manager kill my
friend.

+ FREE THE SLAVES VAN

It follows a police van as it pulls up quietly in front of the gate to the FACTORY.

ADITI (V.O.)

He tells us we're nothing...
because we're weak... but we're
still alive because we're strong.

+ GATE

Bala and Radha knock. Dru peers through the small window, sees them and orders the gate opened...

...as soon as the Gate opens the police FLOOD in.

+ BIG HOUSE

The Manager hears screaming from outside.

+ COURTYARD

Dru is already pinned. Male Worker #1 fights and a cop STRIKES him down with a baton. Male Worker #2 just surrenders.

Ghulam tries to flee and a cop chases him to the far fence. Ghulam tries to scale it--

--a cop LATCHES ON and SLAMS him into the ground.

+ COURTYARD

The Manager, looking even older, emerges from the house to face a line of policemen wielding guns. He puts up his hands and gets to his knees...

...just in time to see Bala and Radha lead the other Free the Slaves charity workers into the courtyard, carrying blankets, water and food.

Bala lingers, staring down his father just long enough to make the point -- his empire is gone.

ADITI (V.O.)

He tells us to be who he wants us to be. We refuse. We fight, knowing that one day the walls will crash down on top of him.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Aditi stands in front of the group of girls, as the SHOUTING from outside dies down.

The lock on the sliding door ERUPTS in sparks. A dull RUMBLE like a drum roll as the sliding door rolls open, spilling sunshine across the floor.

The girls watch it fall across their feet...

...and across Aditi's toes, which still hover two or three inches off the ground, even after all of these years.

INT./EXT. FACTORY ANTEROOM - DAWN

Aditi - and only Aditi - floats forward across the floor. We TRACK her scarred feet as they float, like a ghost, past the cell bars, past the side hall...

...until she pauses at the very threshold of the courtyard.

Very gently, Aditi STEPS OUT...

....AND DOWN onto solid ground.

EXT. FACTORY COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

She steps again... and again... until she's in full sunshine, her green sari SHIMMERING in the light.

Aditi LISTENS: Birds, wind, people, her deep free BREATH. It's all so much. Tears stream down her face.

As the charity workers watch, the girls emerge into the sun and gather around Aditi. Padmini comes up beside her. Aditi smiles at her.

What now? Where do they go? What can they be? Who are they?

Joy like we've never seen it blossoms on Aditi's face, so radiant it's contagious, it's everything we've ever needed, it's like we can breathe again, it's hope incarnate.

Aditi looks up into that normal blue sky... and her feet lift off the ground.

This time, everyone sees it - The Manager, the other girls, the charity workers, Bala. It's not in her head or some foreign place.

IN THE AIR

She hovers for a long moment, eyes set on something we cannot see. Then like a rocket, she BLASTS OFF into the air, one second there, the next GONE...

...and after a moment, each girl BLASTS OFF after her...

...first one...

...then two more...

...then the rest.

AND WE CUT TO:

AIR

OVER BLACK:

+ 40 million people are enslaved in the world today. More than at any other time in human history.

+ This number includes labor slaves, sexual slaves and those in forced marriages, among others.

+ They're used to harvest cocoa, cotton, sugar and seafood, to mine diamonds, iron, charcoal for car production, and gold, and forced to work as maids, janitors, loggers and prostitutes.

+ Nearly 5.5 million slaves worldwide are children.

+ Find out more at: freetheslaves.net, Antislavery.org and 50forfreedom.org