

GATHER THE ASHES

by

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ROARING FLAMES consume the screen. HISSES. POPS.

PULL BACK SLOWLY until a shape begins to form behind the orange and red. Barely noticeable. Something stares at us.

*Is that an eye? Then, a --*

Nose. The bone beneath the skin. PULL even more for

Teeth. Grim and wide as the cheek melts away. *Hissss.*

Though faint, the face stares at us for an uncomfortable moment behind the inferno. Impossible to ignore now. *Hissssss.*

One more EAR-SHATTERING POP as we --

SMASH CUT TO:

Darkness. Silent.

GLIDE THROUGH SHARP BLADES OF GRASS IN A DENSE FIELD to land in the backyard of an

OLD FARMHOUSE.

A lone flickering light emits from the attic window.

THE FAINT RINGING OF A BELL. FRANTIC WHISPERS ECHO LOUDER AND LOUDER.

INT. DARK AND GRAY ATTIC - NIGHT

CHYRON: VARANASI, INDIA. 1973.

CLOSE IN ON an OLD WOMAN shrouded in red silk, sitting on cold wood in front of a HANDMADE PRAYER ALTAR, upon which sits various STATUETTES OF HINDU DEITIES. Her wrinkled hand rings a SMALL BELL in circles before setting it down next to several LIT CANDLES.

She folds her trembling hands in prayer. WHISPERS a prayer to herself when --

TAPTAP. Her eyes open. She turns her focus to the single attic window. Continues whispering but JOLTS when--

TAPTAPTAP. LOUDER.

Her knees crack as she stands. Walks over to the window to find nobody outside. Just night and fog hovering over her front porch. But the front door is open. Suddenly --

CLICK. CREEAAAAK. The attic door creeps open on its own.

INT. LONG, DARK HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She pushes open the door to an empty hall. Wood groans under her feet as she approaches the STAIRWELL. LIGHT from the first floor glows upon her face.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The woman - AMMA (60s, South Asian, old and strong) - descends from the stairs.

MANSI (40 going on 65) sits on the couch in soot-covered shorts and T-shirt, nervously tapping his feet and hugging himself. He stares at a PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN above the fireplace, the frame adorned with a GARLAND.

Amma says nothing as she feels his energy. Lost in the photo, Mansi looks as if he might have a nervous breakdown.

Amma walks behind him. Shuts the front door. She speaks to Mansi in HINDI, indicated in *italics*.

AMMA

*I thought it was those children again. Did everything go smoothly?*

Mansi's gaze remains transfixed on the dying fire. A solemn air fills the room. He confirms with a nod.

AMMA (CONT'D)

*I am sorry you had to do it alone. I hope you understand. She was my daughter but --*

MANSI

*Please. A mother shouldn't have to do such things.*

AMMA

*Still...*

MANSI

*(voice cracking)*  
*No. I'm the one who is sorry.*

AMMA

*I won't hear that.*

Amma places a palm on his shoulder, but he shrugs it away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANSI

(through tears)  
*Why? It's my fault your daughter's gone.*

AMMA

*She wasn't well, son.*

MANSI

*It's what they'll say. And they're right. This Dalit has brought tragedy and darkness into your home.*

AMMA

(stern)  
*This isn't about caste. God protects us all, including this home.*

Mansi remains quiet. Knowing it's pointless, Amma heads for the stairs. She turns her head when --

MANSI

*He couldn't protect her. I couldn't protect her. Please.*  
 (pleading)  
*Give me your hate.*

On her way up the stairs --

AMMA

*We've both lost too much. No more of that. You rest your eyes.*

Her footsteps FADE. Now, Mansi's alone.

Mansi unfolds his hands to reveal a GOLD URN in his lap. He stares at it for a beat when --

TAPTAPTAP. Mansi jerks his head up.

VOICE (O.S.)

*You haven't let the ashes go.*

His lips quiver at the sound of a voice coming from across the house. He turns his head slowly, dreading what he might see. A direct view from the couch

THROUGH THE KITCHEN

Mansi's eyes find a STRANGER glaring at him through the GLASS SLIDING DOOR.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Bony fingers tap against the glass. A sinister glimmer in the man's eyes, staring through sharp black hair and into Mansi's soul. He speaks with an eerie calm.

STRANGER

*She belongs to God now.*

(re: urn)

*You mustn't steal from God.*

MANSI

Please...no.

STRANGER

*It is because of you. That's the truth, isn't it?*

(beat)

*If you didn't do what you did. If you stayed away, all would be well.*

Sharp teeth reveal themselves as the Stranger forms a taunting smile. He speaks slowly so every word sinks in.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

*Your wife would be here, instead of her remains. Your house would still be a home. And I would not be here. But now --*

MANSI

*Please. Leave us.*

STRANGER

(smiling)

*Never. He's almost here.*

From the darkness of the SUGARCANE PLANTATION in the backyard emerge TWO CHILDREN. Torn clothes covered in ASH. They stand on either side of the Stranger.

One carries a torch.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

(sing-song)

*Steal from God...and invite the devil.*

The child IGNITES one end of the torch. Approaches the STRANGER'S SLEEVE with the fire.

MANSI

NO!

Then LIGHTS THE STRANGER ON FIRE.

Startled, Mansi panics and jumps up from the couch when

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BANG! THE URN FALLS on the floor, SPILLING HIS WIFE'S ASHES EVERYWHERE.

Mansi drops to the floor and CRIES IN AGONY.

AMMA (O.S.)

Mansi?! *What's wrong?*

Amma rushes down the stairs again to find Mansi on his hands and knees. Manic, he gathers the ashes with his palms, desperately scooping them back into the urn.

AMMA (CONT'D)

*What is this?*

(re: ashes)

*Mansi, what have you done?!*

MANSI

Nonononono! *Get back!*

Mansi looks toward the door. The REFLECTION of wild flames in his black eyes.

CLOSE ON

The Stranger pressed up against the glass. Staring. Engulfed in the seething fire. But he registers no pain. A demonic smile with unflinching eyes.

Amma follows Mansi's gaze as he stares at the door.

AMMA'S POV

But she sees NOBODY on the other side of the glass.

MANSI'S POV

The burning face of the Stranger. The fire roars, and Mansi's shrill screams ECHO as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - LATE AFTERNOON

THUNDER rolls across a foggy sky.

CHYRON: LONDON, EAST END. 1989.

SIDDHARTH (Sid for short, 13, South Asian) stares at the electronic school board in an empty parking lot, anticipating someone.

4:45pm.

Nobody's coming. Rain begins to fall.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Quiet. Sid drags his feet on a paved walkway, surrounded by tombstones and mausoleums. Head down, he stares at the ground beneath him as he HEARS FOOTSTEPS not too far behind him.

Sid stops. Whips around. NOBODY'S there. Cold breath escapes his lungs.

As he continues, WE SEE a few FADED SILHOUETTES in the b.g. atop the hill, following him.

Sid stops once again, but the silhouettes don't hide this time. They laugh and cackle. One tosses a STONE in the air. Another grips a SPRAY CAN bottle. Typical BULLIES. This is familiar. Routine.

Sid sprints away as fast as he can.

And that's when the bullies charge after him O.S. as we --

CUT TO:

EXT./ INT. HIGH SCHOOL - SUNSET

A HOODED JACKET pushes through the rain to the same brick building. Pulls open the front door to head inside.

DEV (18, South Asian, British accent) pulls off his hood to find the halls empty. He's late.

DEV  
(to self)  
Shit.

EXT./ INT. FOSTER HOME - LATER

Dev opens the cheap gate and crosses a messy lawn.

FOSTER MOM smokes a cigarette on the porch in front of windows marked with SPRAY PAINTED X's.

Dev walks up the porch steps. He tries to ignore her, but feels her disgusted gaze on him. She's pissed.

DEV  
What?

FOSTER MOM  
Look at my windows. You gonna do something about him?  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FOSTER MOM (CONT'D)

My house shouldn't pay the price  
for him having no friends. In  
fact, you should.

DEV

He's thirteen.

FOSTER MOM

Should have some guts by now.

DEV

You didn't do anything?

She grabs her cleaning bucket. Walks to the front door  
and kicks it open.

FOSTER MOM

It's not my fault your brother's a  
lost cause.

Dev rolls his eyes as he follows her

INSIDE

They both find Sid sitting on the front steps. Quiet.  
BRUISE on his face. He probably heard everything.

FOSTER MOM (CONT'D)

Here he is.  
(with disgust)  
Hiding.

As she walks away, she yells --

FOSTER MOM (CONT'D)

(to Dev)  
And you don't live here anymore.  
Stop cluttering my house with your  
mail.

Dev takes a deep breath and faces Sid with apologetic  
eyes. Sid avoids eye contact, pissed beyond belief.

DEV

I'm so sorry. You okay?

SID

(quiet)  
You did it again.

DEV

The next shift was late. Why  
didn't you stay there like I told  
you to?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SID

Oh, sure. And get my ass kicked every time you don't show up? If it's too hard, I get it. Just do me a favor and stop pretending to be dependable.

DEV

Hey. I'm juggling a lot here.

SID

It's fine. I can run. I don't need you.

DEV

(re: Sid's face)

Let me see.

Dev examines Sid's bruises, but Sid inches away.

SID

You're not around anymore, and I'm the one stuck here.

DEV

Listen, I'm trying to get you out.

SID

How much longer?

DEV

It takes time. They're not just going to let an eighteen year old kid become your legal guardian overnight. Be grateful that I am working, so I can get us a place and prove I can take care of you.

SID

You can, right?

DEV

What's that supposed to mean?

SID

You'll go to school. Work. And I'll still be alone while you're juggling.

(beat)

I hate this place.

Dev sits down on the first step. Reads Sid's instincts.

DEV

We have to see this through. You can't run anymore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SID

Why not?

(re: foster parents)

All they care about is the money,  
and no kid stays longer than a  
couple months. It's --

DEV

Please. I need you to stay put. Do  
your part. Before you know it,  
it'll just be us and a place of  
our own.

(beat)

Come on. Let's grab some food.

Dev puts his arm around Sid, and pulls him closer.

SID

I'm not hungry.

Sid pulls Dev's arm off, and heads upstairs, leaving a  
frustrated Dev.

On his way out, Dev picks up a pile of envelopes by the  
front door. Sifting through them, one in particular  
stands out from BRING THEM HOME, their foster care  
agency.

INT. BRING THEM HOME FOSTER CARE - NEXT MORNING

Dev sits across MR. SINHA (50's, Indian, glasses), who  
only smiles if he likes you.

MR. SINHA

(in Hindi)

*Your Hindi is getting better,  
despite not having time to come to  
our sessions.*

DEV

*Shukriya (thank you).*

Pleased, Mr. Sinha smiles and continues the conversation  
in ENGLISH while sifting through paperwork.

MR. SINHA

You should check your mail. We've  
sent several letters.

DEV

Sorry. I moved. Still have to  
update the address.

MR. SINHA

You moved?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV

(nodding)

Into a studio. Hope to find something bigger soon for my brother and me.

MR. SINHA

You're eighteen now. Working?

DEV

Pharmacy. Just the register. College starts in a couple months.

MR. SINHA

Good.

Mr. Sinha puts the papers aside. Folds his hands on the table and locks eyes with Dev.

MR. SINHA (CONT'D)

Well, I called because we received an interesting letter from an executor abroad. He has information regarding your family.

DEV

My family?

MR. SINHA

It seems you have a relative in India. They've been trying to reach any remaining blood relation, and they finally tracked us down.

(beat)

It's your grandmother.

As if a bolt of lightning struck his chest, Dev sits at a loss for words. Mr. Sinha hands over a letter, written in HINDI.

DEV

Grandmother?

He stares at the letter, completely dumbfounded.

DEV (CONT'D)

What does it say?

SID (PRE-LAP)

This is unreal.

EXT. FOSTER HOME - LATER

Dev paces back and forth on the front lawn. Completely dumbfounded, Sid hovers over the letter.

SID  
We have a grandma. What else does it say? Anything about our parents?

Dev shakes his head. No luck.

DEV  
Nothing. Just that she's pretty sick and settling her affairs.

SID  
What's that mean?

DEV  
Apparently, we have a house under our name.

SID  
A house?

DEV  
Just have to be there in person to accept. Sign some papers, I guess. It's on a farm.

SID  
She's really sick, then. So we have to leave, like, now.

Excited, Sid expects urgency from Dev, but senses hesitance instead as Dev breathes a heavy sigh.

SID (CONT'D)  
What?

DEV  
It's an expensive trip. We can barely afford two tickets.

SID  
But we can, right?  
(approaching Dev)  
I mean...we have to go. If that place is ours, can't we just stay there for a while?

Dev shoots him a look. *Calm down.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV

Our life is here, and owning property could go a long way for us. I wonder how much it's worth.

SID

Whoa whoa. We're not even there yet and you're thinking of selling our house?

Frustrated that Sid doesn't see the big picture, Dev lays it out for him.

DEV

If it can get you out of here? Yeah.

SID

We know we have family out there. Doesn't that help us?

DEV

I need to prove I can take care of you and I can't do that with no money. I don't even want to take you out of school.

SID

You kidding? I'm not gonna stay here alone while you go.

DEV

How would it make me look as someone who has your best interests in mind? I'm thinking long-term. You're my responsibility.

SID

Why are you cutting me out of this, then?

(mocking Dev)

It's in my best interest to get the hell outta here.

Sid shoots his brother a challenging look.

SID (CONT'D)

You know we both have to go.

Dev looks at a confident Sid, knowing just how badly his little brother wants to get out of here. He also knows Sid has a point.

SID (CONT'D)

So...?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Dev nods. Of course, they're both going.

SID (CONT'D)  
 (smiling)  
 We're gonna go. Holy shit. We're  
 gonna see our family.

Cautious, Dev lets Sid have his moment of excitement.

DEV  
 Yeah. And find out why they left  
 us.

Dev's tone strikes a chord with Sid.

EXT. VILLAGE - SUNRISE

CLOSE ON

A wrinkled forehead.

Dressed in loose orange silk garb, a sun-kissed PRIEST (70s, South Asian, many wrinkles, many stories) walks toward us with a vigilant stare.

PULL BACK to reveal his arms are locked around a LONG BAMBOO ROD balanced on his back and shoulders. This is a *kanvar*. On both ends of that rod hang two CLAY POTS. He treads barefoot through the village streets. Most of his hair is tied in a bun while the rest drapes down to his bony knees. He marches for --

*Kanvar Yatra*, a pilgrimage for devotees of Lord Shiva, who trek to retrieve holy water from the holy river. Upon collecting the water, they travel miles through the village to a Shiva *mandir*, or temple, to offer the water during prayer.

CHYRON: VARANASI. PRESENT DAY.

BEHIND him walks a large crowd. Hundreds of VILLAGERS in orange garb flood the area, balancing vibrant TENTS on their own bamboo contraptions, decorated with FLAGS AND FLOWERS. Red. Orange. Pink. They all approach the

GANGES RIVERBANKS

The sun rises over the river and the crowd approaches, balancing their *kanvars* on their shoulders and backs.

Among the crowd of devotees, the exhausted priest raises his gaze, lost in devotion as he balances the *kanvar* on his back. Mutters a PRAYER under his breath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He takes careful steps into the water until the level reaches his knees. Then, waist.

Chest...

Then, the water level hits his shoulders as it POURS INTO THE POTS. He secures his footing as the weight of the pots bears down on him.

But after a moment, he inhales deeply and glides forward, submerging himself in the river.

EXT./ INT. SHIVA TEMPLE - SUNSET

Exhausted villagers approach the temple. Though painful, many smile as they help each other finish their final steps.

Calloused feet hit marble steps. Two clay pots, FILLED WITH HOLY WATER, hit the floor.

The priest lifts the pot and dispenses the holy water upon

A SHIVA LINGAM, a stone shrine to Lord Shiva.

Only after emptying the pots and cleansing the stone does he finally fall to his knees.

Touches his sweat-soaked brow to the marble and folds his hands in prayer as the sun goes down. Relieved, he rests his back against a pillar.

Shuts his eyes before the PIERCING SOUND OF AN AIRPLANE ABOVE disturbs his rest.

His tired eyes wince as he directs them up at the bright sky.

Off the airplane above, we --

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRPORT - ESTABLISHING

Tires screech on the tarmac as a 747 Air India flight hits a rough landing in the blazing heat.

INT. AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Dev and Sid hop off the escalator and descend into the maddening crowd. Dev grips his baggage, bumping into at least ten people every ten seconds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SID

This is insane.

Rickshaw and taxi drivers scream at potential customers pooling out of the terminal. Dev pushes desperately toward the exit.

DEV

Let's just head out those sliding doors. We'll grab a taxi from there.

Shoulder to shoulder. The crowd moves like a turbulent ocean, drowning the two. Dev snakes awkwardly through the chaos. Turns around to find Sid a few feet behind.

DEV (CONT'D)

Stay behind me.

SID

Slow down!

Dev shoves a person out of Sid's way, making way for him. Grabs Sid's collar with a forceful grip and shoves him

OUTSIDE THE TERMINAL

DEV

This isn't London. Stay close.

SID

I'm fine.

A DRIVER approaches them.

DRIVER

*Where to?*

Dev rummages through his back to find the papers but no luck. Attempts to remember --

DEV

Resham Chowk...ummm..Gowdali.  
Umm..Gowd--

The driver abruptly pulls their baggage from their hands.

DRIVER

(moving them along)  
Gowdali village. I know. Find it later.

EXT. VARANASI STREETS - SUNSET - ESTABLISHING

FOLLOW OVERHEAD

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Orange skies slowly turn red. Soaring over an ancient part of India, a TAXI weaves in and out of the congested labyrinth of streets, bordered by small homes made of brick and stone.

Traffic moves in every direction as cows and buffaloes roam freely into the streets. Bicycle rickshaws push down the narrow *galis* (*alleys*) in which vendors sell food and clothes.

Intricately carved TEMPLES stand tall. Every few yards another shrine stands along the edge of the GANGES RIVER (aka GANGA).

KEEP FOLLOWING as we witness crowds swarming the *ghats*, stone steps leading to a wharf along the banks of the Ganges River.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Dev and Sid fan themselves in the heat, glistening with sweat. The driver veers into alleyways, deftly dodging civilians in the streets.

DRIVER  
(in Hindi)  
*From London?*

DEV  
*Ji. (Yes.)*

DRIVER  
*Nice place, uh?*

DEV  
(broken Hindi)  
*Have you ever been?*

Sid chuckles at Dev's attempt to speak proper Hindi, at which Dev shoots him an annoyed look.

DRIVER  
(nods 'no')  
*Seen pictures. The clock tower.  
The river. Why would I go see the  
Thames when I have our Ganges  
right here? God himself graces  
these waters.*

As they careen through the tiny streets, villagers crowd the stone embankments to reach the river.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
*If you look over there,  
Dashashwamedh Ghat is always busy.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sid locks his gaze on swarms of villagers bathing in the river.

SID  
They're showering.

DRIVER  
*They're praying. People come from all over the world to feel God's presence. All the holy stories your parents read to you, in fact - the Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata - stem from this land in one way or another. Can you believe it? Take Lord Shiva's legend. Right over there is where he sacrificed the ten horses.*

The Driver's prideful eyes meet Dev's confused gaze in the rearview mirror.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
*Surely, you've read the Gita? The Ramayana?*

Dev shakes his head in embarrassment of his lack of knowledge.

DEV  
*How much farther?*

DRIVER  
*Almost there. A little deeper into town.*

FROM ABOVE

The taxi exits the busy streets and crunches gravel as the vehicle turns to a secluded dirt road, on either side of which rests TOWERING CROPS.

Dev pulls out his papers.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
*Now give me the address. Must be here.*

The Driver takes the address and SLAMS the brakes immediately, thrusting the boys against the center divider.

SID  
What the...?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DRIVER  
(in English)  
I stop here.

Whatever friendly demeanor existed in the driver is now gone. With haste, the driver exits the cab.

SID  
Weird.

Dev gets out and approaches the driver, who pops the trunk and removes their bags.

The driver holds out his palm.

DRIVER  
Ten rupees.

DEV  
*Where's the house? There's no -- .*

DRIVER  
(cutting Dev off)  
*I said I stop here.*

Diverting from the awkward situation, the driver points ahead.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
(no eye contact)  
*Five minutes that way, on your left.*  
(stern)  
*Ten rupees.*

Dev retrieves a few coins from his pocket and hands them to him.

Without saying another word, the driver quickly climbs back in his taxi and drives off, kicking dust in their faces.

Sid stares out at the farmland, the sun almost completely set beyond the horizon. He slaps his neck, killing a bug.

SID  
This is where we were born?

Dev spots an OLD HOUSE in the distance.

DEV  
Grab your bag.

They both start wheeling the bags down the dirt path. Nothing but looming crops and farmland on either side of them.

EXT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

A haunting presence. A two-story farmhouse made of matchsticks, standing still by some spell. Straight out of a Ray Bradbury tale.

Sid frowns, pretty underwhelmed by the structure.

DEV  
 Feel like I've dreamt of this  
 place.

Nervous, Dev climbs the creaky porch steps. A LANTERN hangs from one of the porch beams.

Dev takes a deep breath and --

KNOCK KNOCK.

The boys wait. And wait. Dev presses his forehead against the windows. No luck.

SID  
 Should we go in?

Dev tries the door, and it creaks open. He pushes it open when --

PARVATI (O.S.)  
*HEY! Kaun? (Who's that?)*

Startled, the boys whip around to find PARVATI (mid 50s, bone thin, stronger than you). Standing defensively, she wipes her hands on her *dupatta*, wrapped around her waist.

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
*Are you touching my door? Step away.*

Dev steps down from the porch.

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
 Who are you?

DEV  
 Ummm...Devi?

PARVATI  
*She's sleeping.*

DEV  
*We're family.*

PARVATI  
*She has no family around here.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Parvati marches with authority toward the boys. Looks at them with suspicion. Like a bodyguard.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(nodding)

*I care for her, and this place.  
Parvati's my name.*

DEV

*I'm Dev. We're her grandchildren.  
From London.*

A bit of concern washes over Parvati.

PARVATI

*Grandchildren...? It can't be.*

DEV

*We would've called but there was  
no number. Just an address. It's  
all we could make out of this.*

Dev hands Parvati the letter he received from Mr. Sinha.

As if she's had a revelation, Parvati connects dots we don't see yet. Her defenses melt away as she places her sweaty palm on Dev's cheek.

PARVATI

*I've heard her say your name in  
her sleep.*

Dev smiles, reassured.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(re: Sid)

*And this one?*

DEV

*Siddharth. My little brother.*

Sid smiles, and notices Parvati's smile fade at the sight of him. It's discomfoting.

PARVATI

*Forgive me. Come in.*

Parvati gets out her ring of keys. Her hands are shaking.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Quite the occasion, isn't it?*

Parvati unlocks the door. Shoves it open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*She isn't awake but let's get you inside. It's getting dark.*

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The three step into THE SAME LIVING ROOM from the beginning of the film, only now a thick layer of dust has settled. Amma's armchair sits by the fireplace. That dusty old couch. Worn table.

The boys drop their bags by the door.

PARVATI

*The same as you remember?*

DEV

*Don't remember anything, actually.*

PARVATI

(my mistake)

*I see.*

(in English, smiling)

*Wait here.*

Parvati walks down the hallway to a bedroom door cloaked with faded paint.

SID

(quietly to Dev)

*Why'd she look at me that way?*

DEV

*Sshh.*

KNOCK KNOCK. Her ear up against the door, she listens for a voice.

PARVATI

*Amma?*

She creaks open the door just enough for Sid to notice a patch of STARK WHITE HAIR. Parvati takes one step inside before exiting momentarily. She shuts the door. Faces the boys.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Last night, she was very weak. Let's let her sleep for now. Come sit. Let me bring you some food.*

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The fireplace pops and crackles in the room as Dev and Sid sit on the couches, eating some rotis and curry with their hands.

PARVATI

*It is nice to share a meal after so long. It can get terribly lonely.*

DEV

*Won't Devi -- I mean Amma -- eat with us?*

A bit of sadness washes over Parvati at the thought.

PARVATI

*A lovely thought, but she hasn't left the room in years. She isn't able to walk. Can't do much of anything, really.*

DEV

What is her condition?

PARVATI

*A little bit of everything, I'm afraid. She was upstairs, praying, when she collapsed. If her bones don't fail her, her memory does.*

Parvati's eyes drift for a moment, lost in a horrific memory, before --

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*You grew up in London? Who looks after you?*

Parvati registers the awkward glance between the boys.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*God is good. Look at you now. You're home. You will stay here?*

DEV

*That was the plan. Does your family stay here, too?*

This question clearly strikes a sad note with Parvati.

PARVATI

*(solemnly)*  
*My husband passed back in Sri Lanka, where we lived. Sadly, no children.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I was looking for work, when fate  
brought me here to take care of  
your grandmother.*

*(smiling)*

*You could say God brought us  
together. A second lifeline.*

Sid places his empty plate on the table.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*It's getting late. Let me show you  
the house.*

Parvati leads the boys down the

FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY

Parvati points to that same door with the worn paint.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Amma's bedroom.*

Parvati creaks open the door opposite Amma's bedroom.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Washroom.*

But Sid's attention stays on Amma's bedroom door. Barely ajar.

A breathing machine HISSES eerily. He peeks inside to notice a WRINKLED HAND draped over the edge of a HOSPITAL BED. He shifts to catch a quick glimpse of white hair and loose skin before

Parvati pushes open the swinging door at the opposite end of the hallway, leading us to the

KITCHEN

Rustic. A round kitchen table sits in the middle of a spacious farmhouse kitchen.

At the far end, that very same GLASS SLIDING DOOR reveals the

BACKYARD.

A large, grassy lawn upon which rests an OLD SHED.

Dev goes to the door. Places his palm on the glass. Stares at those TALL GREEN STALKS bordering the perimeter of the lawn not too far away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Ganna.*  
 (in English)  
 Sugarcane.

The boys stare at a few INDIAN FARMERS chopping down the thick grass with machetes. One wipes his brow. Stops. Stares at Dev with round, hollow eyes.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Your parents worked in these fields all their lives. Day and night. Chopping away.*

DEV

They were farmers? This house is big.

PARVATI

*It's been passed down from a friend.*

DEV

Must've been a good friend.

Parvati's smile recedes a bit at this statement.

PARVATI

He passed long ago.

SID

What's that?

Sid points to a large wooden BOX outside, resting a few feet away. A LIGHT hangs just above its door.

PARVATI

*What's the word? Ah. Outhouse. If the toilet doesn't work inside, then we go outside.*

(off Sid's look)

*Don't worry. I keep the light on at night, so the workers don't use it.*

Sid throws Dev a false expression of relief, while Parvati walks toward a SMALL DOOR IN THE WALL in the corner of the kitchen. Taps on it.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I am downstairs if you ever need anything.*

She hops onto the creaky back stairwell, leading to the

INT. SECOND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

THAT LONG HALLWAY with an intricate RED RUG runs along wooden floorboards that might give at any moment.

Parvati leads them into a

PLAINLY DECORATED BEDROOM.

White. Bed with a cheap frame. Dresser.

PARVATI

*You can sleep here. This used to be your parents' room.*

Lost in this surreal moment, Dev and Sid walk into the room and survey. Dev opens an empty drawer.

DEV

*There's nothing in here.*

PARVATI

*I think she had it cleaned even before I moved in. They passed when they were so young.*

SID

You knew them?

PARVATI

(nodding)

*I only heard stories when she had the courage to speak of them.*

DEV

What happened to them?

Parvati pauses. A look of pity overcomes her.

PARVATI

*They were sick. A farmer's life isn't easy.*

SID

What were their names?

PARVATI

Names?

DEV

(embarrassed)

We really don't know anything.

With an empathetic smile --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARVATI

*One moment.*

Parvati pulls open the CLOSET. Reveals TWO PICTURE FRAMES DECORATED WITH GARLANDS. One of Mansi. The other is the SAME BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO of Padma.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(in English)

Mansi was your father. And Padma your mother.

Dev holds the photos in his grip. Both brothers stare at their parents for the first time. An overwhelming moment.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*It made her sad to see their faces, so I put them in here.*

(to Dev)

*You have his eyes.*

Sid stays on the photos, searching within them for some lost connection.

DOWN THE HALLWAY

Parvati flips a switch but the HALLWAY BULB remains off.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I'm sure you can tell the house is very old. I can clean, but wires confuse me. Half the time I live in the dark.*

Parvati notices Sid approaching a small, oddly shaped door at the end of the hall. BRIGHT ORANGE. STARK.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Your grandmother prayed in there everyday.*

INT. PRAYER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Moonlight shoots through that same window in the far corner of the pointed room. Parvati coughs, waving off a cloud of dust as the boys study the room.

Dev examines a few boxes resting against the wall. A TAPE RECORDER. A MANNEQUIN. In the room's center lies that same handmade, WOODEN ALTAR, still adorned with Hindu statuettes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARVATI

(recalling)

*I would wait for her morning bells  
to ring after her prayer. Only  
then would I start my work.*

Sid walks over to a dusty old HARMONIUM, a small keyboard in a wooden frame with a manual fan attached to its back. It sounds like an accordion breathing its last breath. Just awful...

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Harmonium. She played it well.*

DING DING. A FAINT RINGING from below.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Time for her medicine. Why don't  
you two wash up?*

DEV

*Can we come with you?*

PARVATI

*I think tomorrow would be best.*

DEV

(insisting)

*Please.*

Looking into his eyes, she reluctantly approves.

INT. AMMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Parvati pushes open a wincing door to a room corrupted with stale air. The chilling SOUNDS of hospital machines. The smell of medical supplies. A MIRROR. A SMALL CLOSET. The bed swallows most of the room.

Parvati leads the way. Gently caresses a head of white hair.

PARVATI

*Amma (mother)? Look who's here?*

She grabs a blood pressure monitor and begins wrapping it around Amma's arm.

FOLLOW BEHIND DEV

He walks around the machines to the foot of the bed. Faces his grandmother for the first time.

Bedridden and weak, Amma lays still. Almost lifeless.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sid noticeably keeps his distance, eyes glued to the machines. It's a jarring sight for a kid.

DEV  
Can she hear me?

PARVATI  
*I like to think so.*

Parvati opens a few drawers in the nightstand.

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
*I forgot the thermometer. Be right back.*

On her way out, Parvati catches Sid's discomfort.

Dev leans into the bed, reaches for Amma's hand. Holds it. Amma's eyes struggle to open ever so slightly.

DEV  
*Hi, Amma. It's Dev.*  
(lowering voice)  
*Mansi's son.*

GROANS emit from Amma's throat.

SID  
She saying something?

DEV  
I think she's trying.

Dev leans into the groaning, which becomes something between a whimper and a whistle. Her eyes turn glossy. Her lips tremble.

By some miracle, Amma musters the strength to raise her head a bit. Dev places his palm under it to help.

DEV (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Careful.

Dev leans in as she struggles. She mutters something in Dev's ear, JUST ABOVE A WHISPER.

AMMA  
*Wha-- Why d--did you come?*

DEV  
(smiling)  
*To meet you.*

Amma winces in pain as she struggles to speak.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Dev caresses her hand. Speaks in a low voice.

DEV (CONT'D)  
*It took a while but you found us.  
 We're together now.*

Again --

AMMA  
 (trying to speak)  
 GO.

She stops. Dev's smile fades when a TEAR trickles down Amma's cheek.

DEV  
 (to Amma)  
 Sssshh. Everything's fine.

Dev grabs a tissue to wipe her cheek dry. But --

Amma's eyes slowly roll up and STOP AT THE CEILING.  
 HORROR IN HER STARE.

AMMA  
 (whispers)  
 Noooooooo.

Concerned, Dev looks up. SEES NOTHING.

DEV  
 I'm here. Everything's fine.

Her eyes meet Dev. Her grip tightens around Dev's wrist. Her face is pale. Alarmed, Dev tries to calm her down but SHE SCREAMS --

AMMA  
**LEAVE! LEAVE HERE NOW!!**

As if resuscitated by fear, her body shakes violently.

Scared stiff, Sid backpedals as Parvati barges into the room and tries to calm her down.

PARVATI  
*What's going on?*

Dev releases Amma's grip and throws himself back as she collapses back on her pillow.

DEV  
 (stuttering)  
 I -- I'm sorry. She was --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Parvati quickly swipes a syringe. Fills it with medication.

PARVATI

*Go on upstairs. Give her some space.*

*(to Amma)*

*Ssshhh shhhh.*

Speechless, Dev catches his breath. Keeps his composure in front of Sid.

PULL OUT OF THE ROOM AS WE RISE TO THE SECOND FLOOR.

DIRECTLY ABOVE AMMA'S BEDROOM to --

INT. DEV AND SID'S ROOM - NIGHT

It's quiet. Awkward.

Sid throws his shirts in a dresser, on which the photo of their parents rest. Clearly, the exchange with Amma is on his mind. The disappointment is palpable.

DEV

Place needs some fixing up, huh?

Sid doesn't respond.

DEV (CONT'D)

You okay?

Sid shrugs.

DEV (CONT'D)

Remember. She's sick. It's been a long time for her, too.

SID

Maybe tomorrow'll be different. She'll be more awake and stuff.

Dev shoots him a false smile.

DEV

*(not likely)*

Yeah. Maybe.

*(then)*

Go on and wash up.

SID

*(avoiding it)*

Ummm...I already did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV

You sure?

Dev senses Sid's hesitance to go downstairs, and grabs his own towel.

DEV (CONT'D)

Come on. I'll go downstairs with you.

SID

(clearly lying)  
I'm not scared. I already went.

But Dev knows the truth. Off Sid's annoyed look --

INT. DEV AND SID'S ROOM - MIDNIGHT

The boys are asleep. The wind HOWLS outside.

Tick. Tick. An awful repetitive note from the GRANDFATHER CLOCK echoes downstairs.

Sid tosses and turns until his eyes blink open. He sighs a breath of dread because, of course, nature calls.

Sid sits up. Stares at the bedroom door.

THE DOOR CREAKS OPEN JUST A SMIDGE.

A LEAKY FAUCET drips somewhere.

SID

(whispers)  
Dev? Dev!

But Dev is in dreamland, snoring away until --

DEV

(in his sleep)  
Hmmmphh?

SID

I need to pee.

DEV

(slurring his words)  
I'm sleeping.

SID

Come on.

DEV

(still slurring)  
Turn on the lights and go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Annoyed, Sid gets up and opens the bedroom door. Pokes his head out to face the long

SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

Tick. Tick. Creak. Creak. He makes his way to the

STAIRWELL

Sid cringes as every step GROANS and CREAKS during his descent into the

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sid braces himself as he passes the clock and faces the LONG HALLWAY.

He reaches the light switch and

FLICK.

But no light in the hallway.

Instead, Sid notices a sliver of YELLOW LIGHT emitting from inside the bathroom. Just a few feet away.

Deep breaths. Sid cautiously steps forward, his eyes stuck on Amma's bedroom door. The HISSING pumps anxiety into him.

Finally, Sid lunges at the bathroom door.

INT. BATHROOM - AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

CREEP SLOWLY BEHIND SID as he lifts the toilet seat and stares out the window in front of him. Locks eyes with a DEAD, TWISTY TREE, its branches bouncing over the stalks of sugarcane as the wind picks up.

LEAVES RUSTLING. Taptaptap. *Do we hear FOOTSTEPS outside?*

He unzips and goes about his business. Breaks his gaze and stares at his own reflection in the FULL-LENGTH MIRROR TO HIS RIGHT.

IN THE MIRROR

On the ground behind him, a SHADOW forms.

Thinking it's Dev --

SID  
I made it, no thanks to you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Silence. But when Sid looks away, WE SEE the shadow GROWS into what looks like an ARM.

But instead of fingers, a CLAW. Sid catches a quick glimpse when the --

LIGHT FLICKERS, causing him to panic.

Sid looks in the mirror again but the shadow is gone.

And the light flickers again, remaining OFF a bit too long for comfort.

SID (CONT'D)  
HEY STOP. Dev, that's not funny.

ON.

OFF.

ON...

OFF. And it stays off this time, flooding the bathroom with only an eerie circle of moonlight, AND THE SHADOW OF THAT DEAD TREE.

SID (CONT'D)  
That's it.

Sid zips up, flushes, and opens the door to

THE HALLWAY

To find NOBODY. Dead quiet, save for the wind eerily breathing through the trees.

SID (CONT'D)  
Dev?

CREEEAAAK.

Across the hall, Amma's bedroom door opens in that slow and creepy way.

Sid crosses the hall and stands

AT AMMA'S BEDROOM DOOR

Slightly ajar. Sid peeks inside. Focuses on the far corner, where a SWEATER HANGS ON A HOOK ON THE CLOSET DOOR.

He looks closer IN THE MIRROR'S REFLECTION. The gleam of the metal hanger shines like a pair of soul-stealing eyes, as if SOMEONE IS WEARING THE SWEATER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

For a split second, those GLIMMERING EYES shift up as if glaring at him. Sid freezes with paranoia when --

HONK! A QUICK FLASH OF LIGHT passes through the room as a truck drives by, revealing it is just, in fact, a sweater.

BUT THE LIGHT ALSO REVEALS AMMA'S HOSPITAL BED IS EMPTY.

And a HIGH-PITCHED VOICE calls out...

AMMA (O.S.)

Siddhaarth?

Sid jolts away from the door.

CREAK. CREAK. From the living room.

It's Amma's chair, which faces away from us and rocks back and forth toward an OPEN FRONT DOOR. Her white hair peeks above the back of her chair. Amma's voice calls again.

AMMA (CONT'D)

*Son? Is it you?*

SID

Ummm...

AMMA

*You're not playing with the other children?*

Sid stands quietly, wishing he could just go upstairs.

AMMA (CONT'D)

*That's good. You shouldn't. Come here. Let me lay my eyes on you.*

Against his better judgment, Sid tiptoes into the

LIVING ROOM

Flips a light switch when --

The chair stops rocking...

He slowly walks closer. He's inches away from the chair when water spills from the seat down to the floor, all over Amma's bare feet.

He stares at the BLACK VOID outside the door. An OMINOUS WIND BLOWS debris inside.

SID

Amma?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Sid reaches her front, and finds her unflinching eyes fixated on the door, filled with tears. Mouth agape. Lap wet with urine. Skin hangs off sunken cheeks. It's clear.

SHE'S DEAD.

Chest heaving with panic, Sid backs away from her corpse and SCREAMS AS WE --

EXT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - DAWN

POV FROM ABOVE

Townpeople scatter around the premises as men carry Amma's body out on a bier. Grief-stricken, Parvati watches from the porch. Hand over mouth, we follow her

INTO THE FARMHOUSE

Dev stands beside the couch as Parvati comes back inside, her head hanging.

PARVATI  
(through tears)  
*I'm so sorry.*

She looks up at Sid with a blank expression, who stands

ON THE SECOND FLOOR

Sid looks away, but locks his gaze at the other side of the dark hallway.

Catches a glimpse of the attic door. Wide open...

EXT. BACKYARD - THAT MORNING

A couple hours later.

Parvati scrubs Amma's prayer altar on the grass. The kitchen sliding door opens. She turns to find Sid, staring back at her with tired eyes.

PARVATI  
*Did you sleep at all?*

Sid nods. *Of course not.*

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
(nodding)  
*Me neither.*  
(re: altar)  
*The proper time comes for everything.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*We'll need this for the prayer tomorrow. The funeral will be tonight.*

SID

At night?

PARVATI

*Your grandmother's wishes. Will you bring this to the shed? I'll make some tea.*

Parvati wipes her brow and places her hand on Sid's shoulder as she goes inside.

EXT./INT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

Rusted hinges squeal as Sid pulls open the shed door. Straining, he lifts the altar onto a work table.

Behind him, beyond the open door, a BLURRED FIGURE --

FARMER (O.S.)

*Hello?*

Sid turns to find an old FARMER (60s) hiding behind the first row of sugarcane. Crevices for wrinkles. Tired eyes.

SID

Hi.

FARMER

*Has the funeral happened?*

SID

*Umm...not yet.*

FARMER

*Where's your aunt?*

SID

*She's inside. I'll get her.*

FARMER

*No. I'll wait.*

Sid notices the Farmer staring at the house, an uneasy energy pulsating within him. A MACHETE in his trembling grip.

SID

Are you okay?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FARMER

*This house...*

SID

*Did you know my grandma?*

FARMER

*I know everybody who lived here.*

Sid shuts and locks the shed. A strange silence.

FARMER (CONT'D)

*I told her to leave, but she  
didn't listen.**(then)**You shouldn't be here either.*

SID

*(why?)**We live here.*

The Farmer's voice quivers with a haunted tone.

FARMER

*Something else lives here, and it  
brings nothing but pain and death.*

SID

*I should go.*

The Farmer steps closer to Sid. Imposing.

FARMER

*It was a plague.*

We can practically hear Sid gulp as he slowly backpedals towards the house. The old man's eyes stay on the house.

FARMER (CONT'D)

*Brought upon by him.**(beat)**I hear him...screaming.**(inching closer)**Laughing...*

PARVATI (O.S.)

Siddharth!

Sid hastily whips around and rushes back to the house.

But then turns back around to find the Farmer has vanished behind the swaying sugarcane.

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Dev dries his wet hair. Reaches for his jacket when his watch drops

UNDER THE BED.

When he kneels on the hard wood, he finds STRANGE WRITING CARVED DEEP IN THE FLOORBOARDS UNDER THE BED. He runs his fingers along the letters, written in HINDI, trying to decipher them.

DEV

V--I--  
(then)  
Shit!

Chipped wood SLICES his finger. Blood drips from his finger onto the writing. He sucks the blood.

SID (O.C.)

What're you doing?

Dev quickly swipes his watch and gets back on his feet.

DEV

Nothing. Get up. It's time to go.

EXT. GHATS - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

It's cold by the river.

MILES OF GOLDEN CANDLES border the stone embankments, their reflections flickering in the Ganges River.

Prayer bells CHIME from temples atop those steps, more haunting than hopeful at this hour.

Clouds of smoke make their way through the night. Waves softly crash against the secluded, sandy shore.

PULL BACK to find

A BED OF WOODEN LOGS. Upon the logs rest several FLORAL GARLANDS. Red. Gold. White.

Amma's DEAD HAND dangles on the outside.

THIS IS A FUNERAL PYRE.

Sid stares, uncomfortable and quiet. Standing next to him, Dev and Parvati await instruction from ANAND (70s, the priest we saw earlier), who wears a white tunic, YELLOW SCARF covered in SANSKRIT, and a SATCHEL. VERMILLION on his forehead. Mysterious.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Anand picks up a TORCH and sprinkles CAMPHOR on the tip. Strikes a match and LIGHTS ONE END ON FIRE. He speaks IN ENGLISH.

ANAND

(to Dev)

By burning her body, we free her soul. As the elder, it is your duty to light the pyre.

DEV

(nervous)

I can't.

Anand focuses on Dev like a disappointed teacher, pushing the torch in Dev's face.

ANAND

*Dharma.*

(beat)

Duty. There is nothing more important at your age, at this stage in your life. Burn the body as I recite the last rites.

Careful, Dev grips the torch.

PARVATI

*Go ahead, son.*

Anand begins reciting from his BOOK OF HYMNS.

Dev walks to the edge of the pyre and IGNITES A BIT OF RED CLOTH hanging on the edge.

THE BED ERUPTS IN FLAMES. Dev flings the torch onto the pyre before stepping back.

Dev notices Parvati folding her hands in prayer. But he doesn't follow suit.

POV FROM ABOVE

Amma's CORPSE burns away, the fire exposing her bones.

CLOSE ON

SID. A SHARP WHISPER fills his ear and his eyes open. He stares at the glowing pyre, haunted by the sight. Feeling alone.

Anand's CHANTS ECHO in his ears. As he recites, the wind howls but the fire grows wilder. Angrier. A storm brews just before --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SOUND DROWNS OUT. The WHISPER fills Sid's ears again. He searches but there's nobody near him. The flames continue to fight against the violent wind WHEN --

FWOOP. THE FIRE STOPS, ITS LIFE SUCKED AWAY BY AN UNKNOWN FORCE IN THE PYRE. Amma's HALF BURNT hand hangs on the side, her body sandwiched between half-burnt logs. Helpless. The unholy image of a ritual interrupted.

Petrified, Sid looks to the other three for any comfort, but their EYES STAY SHUT. Then, something moves...

On the opposite side of the pyre, Sid spots a SHIRTLESS BOY hiding behind the fire, as if playing 'hide and seek.'

CLOSE ON

Crouched behind the pyre, the boy eerily stares at Sid. It's not a smile we trust.

Sid's eyes glaze over. As if entranced, he walks closer to the pyre. He walks around it. But the boy VANISHES, leaving Sid alone and staring at Amma when --

AMMA'S NECK SNAPS IN HIS DIRECTION. Her eyes shine with WHITE LIGHTS. Smoke and fire POP and WHEEZE around her.

HISSES. A THICK SMOKE escapes from Amma's body, and lingers ominously above her pyre. It TAKES SHAPE, hovering over the pyre as an entity.

TWO GLIMMERING EYES FROM WITHIN THE SMOKE GLARE AT SID FOR A CHILLING MOMENT, before dissipating.

WHOOSH! Suddenly, the FIRE RESURRECTS inches from his face. ANGRIER. VENGEFUL. A HINT OF GREEN IN THE ORANGE FLAMES. Sid shields his face and falls back.

DEV (O.S.)

SID! HEY!

Sid snaps out of it. Dev grabs Sid's arm and pulls him back.

DEV (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

(off Sid's confusion)

You okay?

SID

Huh? I saw...

DEV

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Sid points to the other side of the pyre. But the boy is no longer there. Amma's face no longer stares at him. *What the hell?*

SID

A kid.

PARVATI

*Perhaps it's too much for him. He can wait by the steps.*

DEV

She's right. Don't go too far.

Sid walks away, scratching his head. Once he's gone --

DEV (CONT'D)

(to Parvati)

*It's his first funeral.*

ON THE GHAT STEPS

Sid stands by the stone steps, watching the pyre burn from afar.

In the distance, Sid finds the BOY sitting on the edge of a wall. A BALL OF RED CLOTH, STUFFED WITH SOMETHING, SITS UNDER HIS FEET. Shirtless and COVERED IN ASH, he stares out at the pyres.

*No. He's staring at Amma's pyre.*

The boy suddenly fixes his yellow eyes on Sid. Sid turns away, but

BEHIND SID, we see he's still watching...

LATER

CLOSE ON

A BED OF ASH. THE REMAINS OF THEIR GRANDMOTHER.

Sid now stands next to Dev. With a demanding wave --

ANAND

(in Hindi)

*Collect the ashes.*

Dev steps forward to help but Anand pulls him back.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Not you. Just watch.

A skinny CHILD WORKER kneels into the sand and begins dutifully scooping the ashes into a SMALL GOLD URN.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

PARVATI

*Dalits. They burn the bodies. Like their fathers did. And like their own children will one day.*

Dev catches Anand watching carefully with a suspicious eye.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(explaining)

*Such is their fate. What society's written for them. Some are fortunate enough to leave, while others have no choice.*

CLOSE ON

The children scooping the ashes with their palms.

MOMENTS LATER

Anand leads the other three to the shore, holding the gold urn in his hands.

Soft cries become clearer as they near the river, the beach flooded by various UNLIT BEDS OF LOGS adjacent to one another. A WOMAN locks eyes with Dev as she mourns.

FWOOSH. As they walk, pyres ignite one-by-one.

Smoke billows into the sky.

EXT. GANGES RIVER - CONTINUOUS

A DIM YELLOW LANTERN slams down in the center of a SMALL BOAT.

Anand uses an oar to push the boat

INTO THE RIVER

Quiet. Still. Anand chants as the boat glides. Dev, Sid and Parvati sit quietly.

ANAND

*Ram naam satya hai. Ram naam satya hai. (Truth is in your name Lord Ram).*

Dev clutches the URN as the smoke CLOSES THEM OFF from shore.

He watches a nearby boat. A man attempts to lift a BODY WRAPPED IN ORANGE CLOTH. Finally, he PUSHES THE BODY into the river. Dev watches, horrified.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 Some can't afford the wood. They  
 lay the bodies to rest however  
 they can.

Once clear and seemingly all alone on the water, Anand stops rowing.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 (to Dev)  
 It's time.

Dev takes the urn and leans over the edge. He stares deep into the black water as the boat settles, almost expecting a body to float to the surface.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 Burn the body to release the soul.  
 Cast the ashes to release her from  
 the cycle of reincarnation.

As Anand chants the final prayer, Dev slowly pours Amma's ashes into the river.

Once empty, he gently places the urn into the river and the boys watch it float away, leaving them feeling more alone than ever.

Anand begins rowing back to shore.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 Get some rest. Tomorrow, we will  
 complete the ceremony with a  
 prayer.

As the boat approaches land --

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Sid sleeps a dead sleep until --

RING. RING. RING.

Something CHIMES in the distance.

VOICE (O.S.)  
 (faint)  
 Siddharth?

Sid blinks his eyes open to find Dev is still asleep.

Looks out the window to find it's DARK OUTSIDE. He slides out of bed.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sid opens the door to an empty hallway.

RING. RING.

A bell from the opposite end of the hall. Sid looks over the banister to the first floor, where the fire casts shadows on the walls.

Sid walks up to the prayer room door. Presses his ear against it.

*Is that whispering?*

He checks under his feet to find GRAY DUST. *Weird.*

INT. PRAYER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sid pushes open the door. Empty.

Hmmmm. He turns to walk away when --

BRAAAHHHHMMM. The SOUND OF A DEAD ORGAN sends shivers down Sid's spine. He whips around to find TWO GLOWING EYES at the far end of the room.

MRREEOOWWW.

Relief floods his veins as he spots a CAT, standing on the keys of that awful harmonium.

SID  
(quietly)  
Come on, kitty.

Sid marches to the cat. Reaches under her belly to lift but --

SCREECH! Growling, the cat scratches Sid's hand.

SID (CONT'D)  
HEY!

The cat scurries to the wall, springs up to the window.

SID (CONT'D)  
Hey NO!

Too late. She JUMPS OUT THE WINDOW.

Sid grabs a short STEP LADDER and climbs to the window.

WINDOW POV

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The DEAD CAT lays still in its pool of blood. Lit by the porch lantern, Sid finds a BOY hidden behind the low fog. *Is that the boy from the funeral?*

The boy stares up at Sid for a very creepy moment before bending to cradle the animal, indifferent to the blood dripping down his arms. The boy holds his stare and waves at Sid, who retreats as fast as humanly possible.

INT. LIVING ROOM - THAT MORNING

Half asleep, Dev waddles down the stairs as he yawns.

PARVATI

You're up. Siddharth must be sleeping.

Dev confirms with a nod as Parvati waves over a young man in a wrinkled white buttoned shirt and jeans. This is ANWAR (late 30s, executor, obnoxious).

PARVATI (CONT'D)

This is Anwar. He's here to speak with you about Amma's belongings.

Anwar rises from his chair and walks over, tucking his shirt. He chews on BETEL LEAVES, stuffed with tobacco, which make it look like his gums are bleeding.

ANWAR

*How are you?*

Dev shakes his hand and nods politely. Red ooze from the leaves fills the gaps between Anwar's teeth.

ANWAR (CONT'D)

(in Hindi; realizing)  
*Stupid question.*

DEV

It's fine. Thank you.

PARVATI

I'll make some tea. You boys sit.

Parvati heads into the kitchen as Anwar stares at Dev. It's a little awkward. Anwar tilts his neck and examines the house.

ANWAR

Big place.

Anwar laughs awkwardly. Awkward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV

Should we sit?

ANWAR

Of course. The sooner we start,  
the sooner we'll finish.

They sit at the table and Anwar slices open an envelope.

ANWAR (CONT'D)

This shouldn't take long. Shall I  
begin by reading your  
grandmother's final will?

DEV

Sure.

ANWAR

(reading from paper)

*"I, Devi Ram, being of sound mind  
and body, do make, publish and  
declare this to be my Last Will  
and Testament. I direct all my  
just debts, secured and unsecured,  
be paid as soon as reasonable  
after my death." There are no  
debts, so we will move onto the  
property. "The remainder of my  
property, real and personal, I  
give, devise, and bequeath to my  
grandson, Dev Ram, son of Mansi  
and Padma Ram." As stated clearly,  
this means that this house will be  
left in your possession.*

DEV

Thank you. So the land is ours?

ANWAR

Just the house, actually.

DEV

Oh.

ANWAR

There is one more item kept on  
your behalf.

Anwar pulls out an envelope and hands it to Dev, who  
opens it. It's his BIRTH CERTIFICATE.

DEV

Wow.

Overwhelmed, Dev runs his fingers over the papers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANWAR

*Is everything alright?*

Dev nods, staring at the photo. Awestruck.

DEV

*I must be four or five years old here. It's a strange feeling...finally knowing where you came from. Feels real.*

*(re: certificate)*

*Do you have my brother's?*

ANWAR

*Brother?*

DEV

Ummm...Siddharth.

ANWAR

I don't have any record of a Siddharth here. Just you.

DEV

Is it possible to track his down?

ANWAR

I can try.

DEV

*(disappointed)*

We leave in just a few days. Was there anything else?

ANWAR

That would be it.

Anwar nods and slides over the paperwork and a pen.

ANWAR (CONT'D)

If you'll just sign in the designated areas, I'll be on my way.

Dev flips through the paperwork. Hesitates before picking up a pen. He signs steadily, noticing Anwar anxiously tapping his feet.

Anwar stares at the ceiling, folds more betel leaves and continues chewing. Smacking his lips.

DEV

*(eyes down; signing)*

What would you say is the value of this place?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ANWAR

Value?

DEV

If I were to sell it.

Anwar slows down his chewing.

DEV (CONT'D)

With no family here, we're not planning on staying. Do you think you can help me?

Anwar chuckles, leaning back in his chair.

ANWAR

Actually, it might be difficult.

As Dev continues signing, Anwar's eyes dart toward Parvati in the kitchen, as if checking to see if the coast is clear. His knee bounces faster.

DEV

I know it's a little rundown, but it is pretty big. I can fix it up. I just need the money for my brother and myself.

ANWAR

With all due respect, I don't think you'll have much luck. I couldn't give this away for free.

Anwar laughs to himself. It's a little eerie.

DEV

I don't understand.

Anwar leans in, his mouth almost on the table. Tongue in his cheek. Hesitates to say anything, but then --

ANWAR

Ummm, it's not about the structure of the house. There's a story.

Dev stops signing, interest piqued.

ANWAR (CONT'D)

Ages ago, there was a fire here. Burned the crops. Burned everything.

(then)

There was a man who burned with it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DEV  
God, that's awful.

Anwar taps his fingers on the table nervously, choosing his words carefully. Hesitant to say anything at all.

ANWAR  
They say he was a priest. An  
Aghori monk. Just horrible.

DEV  
A monk?

ANAND  
Yes, they're very devoted in their  
quest for enlightenment. Their  
practices are, shall we say, more  
different than other sects.

(beat)  
Anyway, they believe he was mid-  
ritual when he passed, and --

DEV  
What?

ANAND  
Forget it.

DEV  
Please.

ANWAR  
And...since his passing, some of  
the villagers say they have seen  
him.

DEV  
I'm sorry. Seen him?

ANWAR  
His spirit. Wandering.

DEV  
(practically rolling  
his eyes)  
Right.

Anwar smacks his lips. Chews louder.

ANWAR  
They see him in the fields. Still  
engulfed in the flames that  
swallowed him that night.

Dev lets out an uncomfortable chuckle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

DEV

Correct me if I'm wrong, but shouldn't a visit from a holy man mean something good?

ANWAR

Unless he wasn't holy.

DEV

So you're telling me this ghost story --

ANWAR

(chews louder)

-- not to frighten you. Just telling you why people stay away from here. And why you should expect very little from it.

Anwar pauses, hoping Dev will fill in the blanks.

DEV

(raises his eyebrows)

This is ridiculous. What was his name?

Anwar sucks his teeth, slightly annoyed and offended.

ANWAR

You're not religious, I take it?

DEV

I'm not superstitious.

ANWAR

Superstitious. Right. You've traveled a long way, son. The people over here? They take these things very seriously. This house hasn't been sold since. Just handed down, cared for from afar by the priesthood who looks after it.

After an awkward moment, Anwar rises and begins stuffing the papers into his briefcase. He takes in the house.

DEV

If you could just try to --

ANWAR

I told you. I can't help.

Dev slams his palm down on Anwar's papers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

DEV

Please. This is our only hope.  
We've lost everything. We don't  
need much money. Just enough.

He stares into Dev's eyes, feeling his desperation.

ANWAR

(appeasing Dev)

I will see.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Anand sits cross-legged on a small patch of cement right  
outside the kitchen door.

Sid watches carefully as Anand organizes his PRAYER ITEMS  
one by one on a crimson RED CLOTH. Statuettes of Hindu  
deities. Cup of milk. Dry rice. Bag of cotton balls.

Dev opens the door. Hands over a bottle of mustard oil.

ANAND

Thank you.

SID

Where'd you learn to speak  
English?

Sid crosses his legs. Anand rips a piece of cotton from  
the bag and hands it to him.

ANAND

I've traveled quite a bit doing  
this.

SID

You teach people how to pray?

ANAND

I teach ceremony. Most  
importantly, I try to give  
guidance to anyone in need, to  
anyone who may be lost.

Anand rips some cotton. Squeezes it between his palms.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Here.

Anand massages the cotton between his palms until its  
spaghetti thin.

Sid follows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND (CONT'D)

Hold out your right hand.

Anand grabs a SMALL CLAY DISH, and places it in the groove of Sid's palm.

Anand ties his string of cotton into a knot and places it in the center of the dish.

ANAND (CONT'D)

See? We're making candles.

He pours a little oil onto the cotton and pinches it.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*A candle wick. It should burn bright.*

Anand opens a container of RED POWDER.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Vermillion, for a *tika*.

(re: forehead)

The third eye.

Next to him, he opens a GLASS BOTTLE filled with water.

ANAND (CONT'D)

And holy water. From the Ganga, the holiest of rivers.

SID

Where we threw the ashes?

Anand sees Sid's childlike disgust at the thought.

ANAND

It purifies the soul.

Anand grabs some dry rice. With it, he sets the grains on the cloth in the shape of an OM sign.

SID

Do you know why we were sent away?

Anand stops, unprepared for this questioning.

ANAND

I assure you, it was for something better.

DEV

(challenging tone)

Better? About thirteen years of being alone. They'll never know what that felt like to us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Anand remains quiet for a moment, eyes stuck on his work.  
Then --

ANAND

Between 1879 and 1916, about  
60,000 laborers were shipped from  
India to countries like Fiji,  
Malaysia, and Trinidad, to work in  
fields like these. Their land was  
stolen. They had no choice but to  
leave in order to survive. It was  
indentured servitude.

Anand looks up from his preparation, meets eyes with Dev,  
challenging his anger.

ANAND (CONT'D)

They are no stranger to such  
matters.

(off Dev's silence)

Moving forward, and not looking  
back, was the only means of  
surviving.

An uncomfortable beat --

ANAND (CONT'D)

*In the shed, there's a cement  
cauldron. Bring it, please.*

BY THE SHED

Dev pulls open the partially broken door.

He grabs the silver handles of the CEMENT CAULDRON and  
grunts as he carries it outside. Shuts the door.

BEHIND DEV

A RUSTLING...

SOMEONE glides in between the stalks of sugarcane.  
CRUNCHING leaves and SNAPPING BRANCHES. Dev turns around.

The Someone pauses. Hides behind the first row so we  
can't see his face, but we know he's staring...

DEV

Hello?

Dev inches toward the person, standing eerily still. He's  
almost there when --

ANAND (O.S.)

*Dev!*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Dev turns around for a quick moment.

DEV

I found it!

When he faces the field again, Someone vanishes, just in time for Dev to miss him. Gone.

Dev carries the cauldron over to the setup and drops it in the center of Anand's arrangement.

ANAND

*Let's begin.*

Anand snaps a few pieces of KINDLING and arranges them carefully inside the cauldron.

He breaks a square piece of CAMPHOR. Holds it up in his palm.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*Light a match.*

Sid grabs the matchbox and strikes one. Anand holds closer the camphor in his palm.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Light it.

SID

You'll burn.

Anand shakes his head confidently. *No I won't.*

The camphor ignites instantly in Anand's palm. Anand holds it up, looking at Sid. With intent.

ANAND

We all have a spirit inside of us.

(in Hindi)

*All living things. Plants.*

*Animals. All encapsulated within a physical form. Muscle, bone, and skin become its vessel. What we're doing right now is releasing your grandmother's so it may move on.*

(re: fire)

*Think of the fire as a kind of channel, that will guide her toward moksha. Do you know what that means?*

The boys nod 'no.' Their eyes remain on the fire burning in Anand's hand, anticipating any sign of pain. But Anand is in control here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ANAND (CONT'D)

The soul's liberation from its physical form in this life and the next. It can take its rightful place in the Cosmos knowing its fulfilled its duties here on Earth.

SID

Didn't we already do that?

ANAND

This was her home. Her spirit is still here. We must guide her.

Anand drops the camphor into the center of the cauldron.

Dips a GREEN LEAF into the bottle of holy water, and sprinkles the water around him.

HISSES and POPS from the cauldron as the fire builds. SMOKE BILLOWS AGAINST THE GLASS WINDOW.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Listen carefully.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Anand eats a bowl of rice pudding while Parvati gathers the dishes.

PARVATI

*It is nice to see you after so many years.*

*(to the boys)*

*It's uncle here who brought me to live with your grandmother.*

DEV

*(nodding)*

*You knew her?*

ANAND

Our paths crossed.

DEV

*Do you look after this place, with the other priests?*

Anand immediately stops chewing.

DEV (CONT'D)

The executor was filling me in. I was wondering if you might help me find a buyer for it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND  
 (avoiding the  
 subject)  
 Your time is limited, and this is  
 a period of mourning.

Anand rises from his chair, preparing to leave.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 I wouldn't worry about such  
 things.

PARVATI  
*You're leaving already?*

ANAND  
*Many prayers to deliver.*

Anand drapes his shawl around his shoulders.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 (to Parvati)  
*Keep the light burning.*

Anand gives the boys a stern look.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
 (in English)  
 It's a miracle you're here. So be  
 here. Be present. And mind your  
 manners about your home.  
 (back to Parvati)  
*Stay inside. The monsoons will be  
 here soon.*

Anand walks out the door as Dev stares with suspicion.

SID (PRE-LAP)  
 She looked scared.

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The brothers lie in bed as the sun sets. Exhausted, Dev  
 shuts his eyes while Sid remains wide awake.

SID  
 I keep thinking...how did she get  
 to the door? She couldn't even  
 lift her head.

DEV  
 When you're that close to it, I'm  
 sure you're capable of anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SID  
It?

DEV  
Death.  
(then)  
Try to sleep a little.

SID  
How can you sleep? Aren't you sad?

DEV  
I didn't know her. I've only known  
you.

SID  
You think you'll sell it in time?

DEV  
I think so.

SID  
What about auntie? Where will she  
go?

DEV  
You want me to think about her or  
us?  
(beat)  
I have enough on my plate.

SID  
Things are strange here.

Dev looks over at Sid, who fiddles with his fingers.

DEV  
Try not to think about the  
funeral.

Sid avoids eye contact.

SID  
You ever see any kids hanging  
around the house?

DEV  
Kids? No. Why?

SID  
I think one of them followed us  
back from the funeral.

DEV  
What're you talking about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SID

I'm serious. I saw him. Outside.

Dev shuts his eyes again, desperately trying to shut Sid out.

DEV

There's kids everywhere around here.

SID

This guy came up to me.

DEV

What guy?

SID

Just some guy. Seemed a little crazy. Said a lot of people died here.

DEV

There was a fire.

SID

He said they were sick or something.

DEV

A farmer's lifestyle isn't the easiest, or the healthiest.

SID

No. He seemed scared. Like something's wrong with this place.

After a moment, Dev turns to Sid.

DEV

Listen, I know things are different here, but different can be good. Do yourself a favor and try to embrace it. Before you know it, we'll be out of here.

Dev shuts his eyes while Sid continues staring at the ceiling.

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dev and Sid are fast asleep in their small bed when something RATTLES not too far away. Then --

CREEAAK. The closet door pushes open on its own.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Still asleep, Sid rolls over on his side when --

CRREEEEAAAAAAAK. The door swings open completely now, until it SOFTLY HITS the wall.

TAP. TAP. The knob hits the wall behind the door REPEATEDLY, as if with intention. Finally --

BANG. Sid's heavy eyelids blink open. The tapping STOPS. Creeped out by the noise, he stares ahead at the DARK RECTANGULAR VOID in the closet.

He throws off the covers. Quietly gets out of bed. The floorboard GROANS almost as loud as his heart as he steps.

Sid reaches the closet. Grabs the knob to shut the door when MOONLIGHT shines on the photo of his father on the floor.

Curious, Sid grabs the photo. Brings it into the light. Stares at Mansi.

IN THE PICTURE FRAME

His own solemn expression, superimposed on his father's face. But then --

In the glass, he catches the REFLECTION OF A PALE CHILD HIDING BEHIND HIM IN THE OPEN DOORWAY.

CRASH! Sid drops the frame and leaps onto the bed.

SID

Dev!

Dev jolts awake.

DEV

What?! What's wrong?

SID

Someone was there!

They both turn to find Parvati at the door.

PARVATI

*Ohmygod. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.*

Parvati kneels and begins collecting the broken glass. Sid stays on the bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SID  
 (in utter panic)  
 I saw something! I saw him. He was  
 right there. At the door.

DEV  
 Jesus Christ, Sid. Take a breath.

SID  
 The kid. It was the kid! From the  
 funeral.

Parvati tries to understand.

PARVATI  
 (in Hindi; to Dev)  
*What's he saying?*

DEV  
 (to Parvati)  
 Nothing.  
 (to Sid)  
 Help her out, will you?

But Sid remains fixed in his position.

Dev carefully jumps out of bed and helps Parvati clean up  
 the glass.

SID  
 (to Dev)  
 You gotta believe me.

DEV  
 There's broken glass everywhere.

PARVATI  
*I'm sorry. I heard footsteps. Are  
 you alright?*

Sid nods, but we know better. Rattled, Sid's eyes remain  
 fixed on Mansi's photo.

EXT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Dev tries to find the perfect spot for a FOR SALE SIGN in  
 front of the farmhouse. He finds some soft ground and  
 hammers the sign into the driveway.

Parvati walks up behind him.

DEV  
 He dropped off a few signs.  
 (feeling bad)  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV (CONT'D)

*Do you have a place to go? If we sell?*

PARVATI

*(smiles)*

*I will be just fine.*

*(then)*

*You will, too.*

DEV

*You know what people say about what happened here?*

Based on her reaction, Dev assumes that's a yes.

DEV (CONT'D)

And you still decided to live here?

PARVATI

I made a promise to your grandmother to take care of her house.

DEV

Even after she's gone?

PARVATI

Before I was brought here, I was alone. I was in such a dark place. But then I was given a family again. Reminded of that feeling.

*(then)*

You wouldn't break a promise to Siddharth, I'm sure.

Dev shoots her a rare smile, hammers the sign one more time and heads to the house.

Standing with her tea, Parvati stares out at the sky until she picks up an unwelcome SCENT. Something ROTTEN.

She follows it to the side of the house.

Parvati GASPS. Covers her mouth in horror and disgust as she backpedals.

CLOSE ON

The SKULL OF A COW, swarming with flies. ROTTEN MEAT AND BLOOD DRIP OFF ITS BONES. Hollow eyes stare at her. She looks around in horror, searching for a culprit. But nobody is in sight.

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Sid steps inside from the backyard. He walks

UPSTAIRS

Approaches his bedroom when he hears A COUPLE DEAD NOTES FROM THE HARMONIUM.

He freezes. *Not again.* He then follows the music to the attic.

Sid braces himself, only to find Parvati practicing the mini organ. He stares at her, seemingly lost in the music. Her eyes sad. Withdrawn...

She stops suddenly. Dead quiet. Without looking up --

PARVATI

(in Hindi)

*It's a terrible sound, isn't it? I finally decided to organize a bit up here, and started practicing.*

(off Sid's silence)

*There's not much to do here. I could teach you.*

Parvati plays a couple notes, manually pumping the fan with her left hand and playing the keys with her right.

Sid winces at the ghastly sound. Offers a polite smile.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(closes the machine)

*Maybe not.*

She gets on her feet and glides toward him. Stops at the door.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I should be going to bed, anyway.*

SID

*This early?*

PARVATI

*I have some prayers to do tonight, and I prefer not to be disturbed. Alright?*

Sid gets the feeling he shouldn't ask any more questions.

SID

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARVATI  
*Good night, son.*

INT. KITCHEN - THE NEXT SUNRISE

Before dawn.

The lights are off. The place is quiet.

Most of the house is dark as Parvati starts her early morning cleaning routine, sweeping the kitchen.

The front door is open, allowing a subtle beam of red light in the b.g as the sun takes its time rising.

Sweep. Sweep. Sweep. Parvati hums a tune, facing away from the front door.

As she sweeps, WE HEAR the slightest GIGGLE from the door.

Parvati stops. Turns around. Sees nothing...

Sweep. Sweep. This time, WE SEE a BLURRED SHADOW, about the size of a small child, sneak in through the front door and ---

BAM. BAM. BAM. WE HEAR ITS HEAVY FOOTSTEPS AS IT SPRINGS UP THE STAIRS.

Parvati turns around to just in time to miss it.

PARVATI  
Siddharth?

Parvati heads to the open door, finding MUDDY FOOTSTEPS leading up the stairs.

All quiet when --

DINGADINGADINGDING.

She smiles to herself. *Is Siddharth praying in the prayer room?*

Parvati grips the banister. Steps upstairs

TO THE SECOND FLOOR

Nothing. Until, again --

DINGADINGADINGADINGDING.

The prayer bell rings in that familiar, incessant pattern.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The bell stops.

Parvati tiptoes past the boys' bedroom door AND FREEZES at the sight of SID AND DEV. FAST ASLEEP IN THEIR BED.

And that's when she hears it once more.

DINGADINGADINGADINGADINGADINGADING.

Loud. Panicked.

With cautious steps, Parvati creaks over to the prayer room door. Pushes it open to find --

INT. PRAYER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Something - a SHAPE - shrouded in vibrant RED SILK sits in front of the prayer altar, body hidden. Only a BURNT HAND juts out, ringing that bell in front of a single LIT CANDLE AND A LARGE SILVER URN.

Parvati's eyes go wide with fright. Breathing heavier now, she still speaks just above a whisper.

PARVATI  
(voice cracking)  
A-A-A-Amma?

THE SHAPE  
(Hindi; a whisper)  
*You did not watch the light.*

The Shape stops ringing. SLAMS the bell down, angry at the interruption. A WIND ACCELERATES IN THE ROOM.

THE CANDLE BLOWS OUT.

Statuettes tip over. Lord Ram breaks.

And the Shape's head turns to face a paralyzed Parvati.

PARVATI  
Amma?

The Shape ceases to move. *No. It's not Amma.*

THE SHAPE  
(in a whisper)  
It's mine. I want it. It's mine. I want it. Mine. MINE.

An OMINOUS GROAN fills the room. Parvati steps back as the Shape rises. And continues rising...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Shape reaches an inhuman height, almost touching the ceiling. Looming over Parvati...

And from the darkness within the silk, TWO DEAD FEET suddenly appear.

PARVATI SHRIEKS as she falls onto the ground, stumbling back into the

SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

She crawls backward toward the stairwell, SCREAMING at the top of her lungs. She reaches for the boys' bedroom door. BUT IT SLAMS SHUT ON ITS OWN. They can't hear her.

Nobody can.

The Shape glides out of the prayer room, DARKNESS swallowing everything behind it.

Parvati clutches her OM necklace, desperately heading for the stairwell. Finally, she gets on her feet, still stepping back.

CLOSE ON PARVATI

Eyes shut tight. Clutching her necklace. She WHISPERS A MANTRA to herself as if her life depends on it. Then --

THE GROANING STOPS. The world eases into a calm.

Parvati's eyelids quiver before they open. But she finds herself face-to-face with the DARK VOID.

THUD! From that black space a KAPALA - a small white bowl - drops to the ground, DRIPPING WITH BLOOD. Parvati screams before an ANIMALISTIC GROWL fills the air and a

DEAD HAND SHOVES PARVATI DOWN THE STAIRWELL. Unholy grunts and screams of pain echo as Parvati's body tumbles and hits the floor.

CLOSE ON

Parvati at the bottom of the steps. Lying still, as sunshine pours into the house.

INT. PARVATI'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sid enters her room with food and a cup of chai. Anand takes it from him and sets it on her side table.

Sid pauses when he sees Parvati in her bed, pale as a ghost. Unresponsive. One ankle and arm wrapped in bandages.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND

(to Parvati)

*How wonderful. The boys made this for you.*

(whispers to Sid)

*Thank you. Let me talk to auntie for a moment.*

Sid exits her room to the

BASEMENT STEPS.

He shuts the door but PRESSES HIS EAR against the door to eavesdrop.

BACK IN PARVATI'S ROOM

ANAND (CONT'D)

*How are you feeling?*

Parvati's glossy eyes stare straight ahead in fear, unable to meet Anand. Her body quivers in fear.

PARVATI

*I saw something, father. Something terrible was in this house.*

ANAND

*Now now. You've had quite a fall.*

PARVATI

(raising her voice)

*I trust my eyes, father. I trust what I feel. And I have felt a presence in this house ever since Amma's death. Ever since the children arrived. I could feel it, and it's only grown stronger.*

(re: kids)

*They shouldn't be here, should they?*

ANAND

*I can see that I've burdened you with too much. I'm sorry.*

PARVATI

*Why did you bring me here, father?*

Rather than a simple inquiry, the question lands more as an accusation. Anand meets her eyes.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*There's something you're not telling me. You know what happened here.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANAND

*They're just stories...*

Parvati winces as she reaches under her bed to reveal the *kapala*. She hands it to Anand, who fears the very sight of it.

Anand examines it. A DRAWING IN CRIMSON RED on its bottom side. THE MARK OF A MASSIVE BEAST. With TEETH. HORNS. CLAWS.

PARVATI

*You know what this is.*

ON THE BASEMENT STEPS

Sid listens in horror --

DEV (O.S.)

(calling out)

SID!

Sid impulsively backs away and rushes upstairs, his mind fixated on the conversation behind those walls.

BACK IN PARVATI'S ROOM

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Anand nods.

PARVATI

*Say it.*

ANAND

*An asura (demon). Raktabija.*

PARVATI

*The buffalo demon. This is its mark. The mark of dark practice to call upon something evil. That's what happened all those years ago. It's true.*

ANAND

*It's only a couple days more --*

PARVATI

(cutting him off)

*It said a name.*

(beat)

Vaikum.

ANAND

*The man who called upon the demon.  
On these grounds.*

Parvati's silence speaks volumes of fear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PARVATI

*Please. Get them out of here.*

Anand nods, staring at the red mark.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Dev sifts through some college brochures as Sid emerges from the basement.

DEV

(re: brochures)

You know, if we sell this place, we can get a nice place on south campus. Big enough for the both of us. Close enough to main campus. There'll be things for you to do.

SID

(doesn't really care)

Yeah. That sounds great.

Dev catches Sid blinking his eyes open and shut, shaking himself awake. Clearly, none of that is on his mind.

DEV

You alright? Your eyes are red.

SID

Mmhmmm. Yeah.

KNOCK KNOCK. Anwar knocks at the front door.

DEV

Be right back.

EXT. AMMA'S FRONT PORCH - LATER

Anand finds Dev sitting on the front porch, slicing an apple with a knife and staring out onto the land.

Anand takes a seat beside him.

DEV

How is she?

ANAND

Stronger than both of us.

A hint of a smile from Anand, but Dev doesn't reciprocate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND (CONT'D)

(reassuring)

She will be fine. Are you alright?

DEV

I thought things would be easier once we got here.

ANAND

You've had your fair share of hardship.

Dev bows his head, staring at the ground in a defeated mood.

DEV

The executor came by. Said he couldn't find any birth certificate for my brother. Said he couldn't sell the house. I came here with nothing. Looks like I'm leaving with nothing.

(then, annoyed)

What am I missing?

Anand's eyes soften as he feels sorry for Dev.

ANAND

Did you know your mother was of higher caste than your father? A marriage like that is frowned upon here, especially in those days.

DEV

I didn't know that.

ANAND

It was bold. Their safety was even compromised. But they married anyway, even though their own community banished them. For love. They put love first, just like they put their children first. They wanted what was best for you. A life beyond this.

Anand looks into Dev's eyes, hoping the boy will understand. But Dev looks away.

ANAND (CONT'D)

I'm going to buy this house from you.

DEV

What? Why? You don't have to do that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANAND  
(insisting)  
I know I don't, but I want to.

Dev looks at Anand with disbelief.

DEV  
Why? It's not necess --.

ANAND  
(abruptly)  
I want it.

Dev stops, alarmed by Anand's persistent tone.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
(lowers his voice)  
Not just for me, but for the  
people. It can be a place for  
community. Worship.  
(looking at the  
house)  
Plus, I already have a certain  
attachment to it.

DEV  
But, Sid --

Anand places his hand on Dev's.

ANAND  
Don't take for granted what has  
been in front of you your entire  
life. You've done your duty. Go  
build a home.

DEV  
Why're you pushing this? Everybody  
keeps talking about promises made  
to my family. What about us?

We sense Anand's hesitance as he avoids eye contact with  
Dev. He straightens his posture as if unraveling a  
burden.

ANAND  
I'm sorry.

DEV  
For what?

After a deep breath --

ANAND  
There is a truth we've been  
shielding from you.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ANAND (CONT'D)

Years after you were born, your father found a young boy stranded by himself in the fields. They tried to find his parents, but were unsuccessful.

Dev laughs it off, but stops when he sees the despair on Anand's face.

DEV

What the hell are you saying?

ANAND

Siddharth isn't your brother by blood. I'm sorry. I promised your family I would keep the secret.

DEV

You're lying.

Anand rests his hand on Dev's shoulder.

ANAND

It's the truth, son.

Dev swipes Anand's hand away and stands up.

DEV

Don't call me son.

ANAND

The longer you stay, the chances of him finding out grow stronger.

DEV

(realizing)

His birth certificate. That's why we can't find it. You didn't say anything? How could you keep this from us? From him?

ANAND

It would risk losing his trust at a point in his life where he needs you the most. I promised your grandmother.

DEV

I don't believe this.

ANAND

You came here to build a future, yes? Not dwell on the past. That's what your parents wanted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DEV

Please. Leave.

Anand stands to leave. Steps off the porch.

DEV (CONT'D)

And don't come back.

ANAND

You will have the funds in a couple days. I'll help arrange your travel tomorrow. You won't see me after that.

INT. PARVATI'S ROOM - LATER

Dev and Parvati sit in silence before she reveals a bundle of cloth, filled with GOLD JEWELRY.

PARVATI

*I want you to take this. It's your grandmother's wedding jewelry.*

DEV

I can't.

PARVATI

Please. She'd want you to have it.

Parvati unfolds Dev's palms and rests the jewelry in them.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Dev enters the kitchen but stops when he sees Sid sifting through college brochures. He stares at him for a moment, suddenly feeling more distant from his brother than ever before.

SID

(re: jewelry)  
What's that?

DEV

Amma's wedding jewelry. Auntie gave it to us.

Sid stops. Hesitates to ask, but --

SID

She say anything to you about her accident?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV

Say anything?

SID

I heard her say something to  
uncle.

DEV

What do you mean?

SID

She said she saw something.  
Someone in the house. Remember  
what I told you? The kid...

DEV

Oh come on.

SID

What if it was them? It would  
explain what I saw.

DEV

This is getting annoying.

Dev goes to the fridge, but Sid cuts him off.

SID

No. I saw him. I'm telling you.

DEV

Even if you're right, they'd have  
to be pretty stupid to trespass  
again, wouldn't they?

SID

They pushed her down the stairs.

DEV

(back off)

Please!

(in Sid's face)

You can't possibly be scared of  
these kids. Wouldn't you be twice  
their size? They're not those same  
bullies back home who gave you  
that bruise.

Sid stops, a little offended. No response to give.

Dev takes a deep breath, controlling his patience.  
Composes himself. He opens the fridge and grabs a bottle  
of water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DEV (CONT'D)  
 (forget it)  
 You know what? We're leaving  
 tomorrow night, anyway.

SID  
 (shocked)  
 What?

DEV  
 I found a buyer.

SID  
 Who?

DEV  
 Uncle. So pack when you're ready.  
 (then)  
 Happy? I'm going to bed.

SID  
 Why didn't he offer earlier?

Dev considers that question for a moment, but walks away  
 toward the stairs.

DEV  
 (dismissive)  
 Does it matter? Warm a plate of  
 food and bring it down for auntie.  
 She hasn't eaten. I'm going to  
 bed.

INT. KITCHEN - THAT NIGHT

The fire crackles. Sid slowly falls asleep on the couch  
 reading a book for school. His eyes finally close when --

BA-DUM.

BA-DUM.

BA-DUM.

A noise from across the house wakes him. *Oh no. Is  
 someone inside?* He gets up and creeps over to the

KITCHEN

He finds the source. A wind PULLS AND PUSHES THE OUTHOUSE  
 DOOR. Sid stares at it. *Pleasestop. Pleasestop.*

It opens wide and --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A strong push SLAMS IT SHUT. CLOSED. Sid's face reads *Phew...*

From the refrigerator, he takes out a plate of leftovers. Concocts a bowl and warms it up. Throws a fork in it.

He pulls open the small door to the

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

FLICK. A yellow light swings on a thin chain. Sid stomps down the stairs to Parvati's bedroom door. He tries the knob. Locked.

He knocks lightly.

SID

Auntie?

Sid places the dish on the last step, when a subtle light catches his eye. Sid peeks

THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

Her bed is unkempt. Parvati limps toward the bed, wincing in pain, as she sits down. She catches her breath and

Stares at the FULL LENGTH MIRROR just a few feet ahead, through which SID CAN SEE HER WORN REFLECTION.

From under her bed, Parvati grips a medium-sized TORCH about the size of her forearm. Built of kindling and incense. Wrapped and sealed with brown paper.

Sid watches quietly as she reaches for a BOX OF MATCHES.

PFFFT. She strikes one. Lights the end of the torch.

Shutting her eyes in a meditative state, she takes a deep breath and waves the torch around in circles, surrounding the room in light smoke.

She's WHISPERS something to herself. It feels unsettling. Ritualistic.

Everything in Sid's bones tells him to leave, but he watches Parvati open her eyes and stare blankly at herself in the mirror, as if waiting for something.

Still reciting under her breath...

From under her pillow, she reveals a SANNI MASK. Carved from wood, it wears a grotesque expression. Crimson lips and tongue. Wide grin. Big, white eyes that stare into the soul.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A calm washes over her as she brings it to her face. Rises to her feet and begins CHANTING, and STOMPING IN RHYTHM.

This is a TOVIL DANCE. Tribal. Transformative.

Sid tries his best not to breathe, or panic. He squints, trying to see past the smoke.

IN THE MIRROR

A CREATURE rears its head, crouching behind Parvati. The size of a child and caked in WHITE POWDER. Wild eyes. Sharp teeth. Evil.

It's THE BOY FROM THE FUNERAL, or what we'll call an ASH DEMON. He licks his teeth with a BRIGHT RED TONGUE, reacting angrily to Parvati's dance.

Parvati dances wilder, her arms jutting out as the demon's gaze switches from her...

TO SID, who sprints up the stairs and rushes to --

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sid rushes upstairs into the room. Shuts the door, his back against it. His eyes wide in terror. His breath short.

Dev packs his suitcase but stops when he notices Sid's face awash with fright.

DEV

What?

SID

(whispering)

We have to leave.

DEV

We are leaving.

SID

No. Right now.

DEV

It's one more night.

SID

I saw something downstairs. In her room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEV

In auntie's room? What were you doing in there?

SID

She was wearing a weird mask, and doing some sort of dance, or a ritual. Something's not right here. Believe me.

DEV

Stop it.

SID

I'm telling you. I saw something in the mirror.

(panicking)

A...I don't know what it was. It looked...it had red eyes. Covered in mud or something.

(looking to Dev)

We have to go.

Dev puts his hands on Sid's shoulder to calm him down.

DEV

Take a deep breath. Stop.

Sid shrugs Dev's hands away. Shoves him.

SID

I'm not making this shit up! Why can't you just listen to me?! This place is cursed.

DEV

(interrupting)

That's enough. This place is not cursed. You need to rest.

SID

I know what I saw.

DEV

(stern)

Listen to me. We have one more night and we're not leaving until the sale is done. That's what we came for.

SID

You're not listening to me.

DEV

I really don't have time for your delusions right now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SID

That's your problem. You never have the time. I need you.

DEV

I am here. Am I not doing this for your future?

SID

I need you right now. You don't seem to get it.

Fed up, Dev walks up to Sid. Puts a finger to Sid's chest.

DEV

(raising his voice)

I'm trying to make this work so we don't leave here empty-handed! Get one thing straight. I am the only one who does care about us. About you.

SID

Sure as hell don't show it.

Suddenly, Dev throws his bag on the floor in a fit of anger.

Sid stands his ground, overcome with fear and unable to look Dev in the eyes. Desperate.

SID (CONT'D)

Our grandma is dead. Our whole family is dead...and all you can think about is selling the place. You wanted to be alone, and here we are.

DEV

I'm the one who brought you here!

SID

You didn't want to.

DEV

Maybe I shouldn't have! If I didn't, we probably wouldn't even be in this mess. All you've done is be ungrateful, you little -

Dev catches himself and stops as Sid backs away from Dev's anger. Sid's chest heaves with anger and pain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SID

Little what? You'll never be there. You might as well drop dead, too.

Stunned by Sid's words, Dev lets the room stay quiet, waiting for an apology. But there isn't one.

DEV

Grow up.

SID

Fuck you. When we get back, you can live your life. I'll figure mine out.

Dev takes the punch in the gut as Sid storms out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sid rushes down the stairs but STOPS AT THE BOTTOM STEP when he finds Parvati sitting on the couch where Mansi once sat.

Hearing their fight, Parvati looks at Sid with an apologetic expression.

PARVATI

*Sit.*

Sid sits on the edge of one of the chairs.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Your mind is racing. I know the feeling. I was a child when I saw such things, too. The sights and sounds of a new place, a new idea or belief, can be overwhelming. But they are only scary if you don't know the meaning.*

Parvati pulls out the mask. Sid jumps to his feet and steps back.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*Don't be afraid. This is a Sanni mask. It wards off bad energies.*

Sid takes a couple steps forward, giving Parvati the signal to continue her explanation. Mask in her hand, she continues --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*And what you saw was a tovil dance. Back in Sri Lanka, we would perform such dances for a number of reasons. When people were...sick. When they felt omens surrounded them. We would wear these masks and dance to scare them away.*

*(locks eyes with Sid)*

*To help. It's an old practice.*

SID

*Why were you doing it?*

PARVATI

*Tragedy, like the one you're living through right now, invites sorrow. My hope was to chase the darkness away. Here.*

Parvati holds out the mask. Sid walks closer. Takes it from her.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I know it looks scary. It's supposed to. The point is to mock fear, by meeting it with strength. We acknowledge it, and face it. There comes a day when we all have to face our fears. You stand strong. You stand tall.*

Sid finds a sort of relief in her maternal explanation, as does Dev, who secretly listens from the second floor.

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dev sits alone on the edge of the bed, staring at his packed suitcase. Amma's jewelry sits on the bed. Overwhelmed, his head hangs with the weight of the world and falls into his palms as he cries.

He then looks to the closet - the dark space - with anger and resentment.

Wipes his tears and stomps over to the closet. He takes one look at Mansi and Padma's photos and SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sid pours himself a tall glass of water. While he gulps it down, what he DOESN'T see is the OUTHOUSE LIGHT FLICKERING OUTSIDE.

CRREEAK. The BASEMENT DOOR slides open in an unnatural way.

Sid whips around and wipes his mouth. Steels himself and slowly walks over to shut the door when --

SCREECH! The GRAY CAT emerges from the steps as Sid's heart jumps into his throat.

MEOW. Sid stares at the cat who stares out the door.

Meanwhile --

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Dev sits wide awake in the bed when he hears MUFFLED CRIES coming from the other side of the wall. *Sid?*

He presses his ear against the wall. It's coming from the prayer room...

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dev steps outside. Stares at the dark corner of the hall.

DEV

Sid. Come on. Come back inside.

Nothing. He inches closer to reach the door. The SOUND OF A GUTTURAL NOISE GROWS.

INT. PRAYER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dev opens the door. Dark. Empty.

He follows the WHIMPERING SOUNDS to the TAPE RECORDER.

When he reaches it...CLICK. The SOUND STOPS ON ITS OWN. Dev picks up the machine. Opens it to find NO TAPE INSIDE.

BEHIND DEV

A SHADOW LOOMS over Dev, casting him in darkness as he searches for tape.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dev senses movement and turns to find the MANNEQUIN...teetering over. He ducks out of the way as it crashes, BREAKING IN TWO.

Dev grabs the broken base when --

DEV

Fuu---!

THE METAL SLICES HIS FINGER.

He shoves the mannequin out of the way. It SLAMS against the wall behind the altar, causing AN OLD WOOD PANEL to fall out of place, exposing a DARK SPACE IN THE WALL. Dev inches closer to

THE DARK SPACE

Dev reaches inside to retrieve a SMALL WOODEN BOX.

He kneels on the floor. Examines the keyhole. LOCKED.  
*Where's the key?*

Dev runs his fingers along the prayer altar, around the deities. Sees nothing. But then...

He lifts the decorative doily and finds a SMALL BRASS KEY sitting there. He grabs it and

CLICK. The box opens...

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Sid breaks a piece of bread and drops it on the floor near the cat.

BEHIND SID

On the other side of the glass door, WE SEE the outhouse light SWITCH ON BY ITSELF.

MEOW.

BZZZT. THE LIGHT BUZZES OFF. It's darker now...

Sid turns his neck at the sudden darkness. He finds himself staring at TWO GLIMMERING LIGHTS shining from within the sugarcane. The lights seem to inch CLOSER. Until --

BZZT! THE LIGHT POPS BACK ON and Sid jumps back.

REVEAL a DARK SILHOUETTE now standing in the light, its TWO GLIMMERING EYES hiding in the shadows just a few feet from the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sid should walk away. But he doesn't.

Those glimmering lights step closer. THE LOST BOY from the *ghats* steps into the light. Arms behind his back.

LOST BOY  
(in Hindi)  
*Is Baba home?*

Sid stands still. Noticing the door is UNLOCKED, he quickly slams the wooden rod between the door and the wall. LOCKED.

LOST BOY (CONT'D)  
*He told us to wait. He said you  
would be here. I can feel him.*

Lost Boy lifts his dirty white shirt to reveal a SCAR ON HIS STOMACH. He lifts his gaze from his wound, awaiting a response from Sid.

LOST BOY (CONT'D)  
*You can, too.*

This scares the shit out of Sid, because he lifts his shirt to REVEAL THE SAME SCAR.

LOST BOY (CONT'D)  
*They can, too.*

The Lost Boy looks to the sugarcane, the rods of which begin to sway as something, SOMEONE, nears...

BACK IN THE PRAYER ROOM

Dev opens the box and finds a folded piece of brown paper. It's an OLD LETTER, WRITTEN IN HINDI. Burnt around the edges.

On the back, THE SAME MACABRE SKETCH OF THAT CREATURE. HORNS. CLAWS. GLIMMERING WHITE EYES. BLACK SKIN. FLAMES SURROUNDING HIS BODY.

The same mark Parvati discovered.

Under the letter, Dev finds a wad of parchment, crumpled into a ball. He unfolds it to find every inch of the page SMOTHERED with black chalk, written in Hindi:

VAIKUM VAIKUM VAIKUM VAIKUM VAIKUM VAIKUM VAIKUM

Dev attempts to read the letter, but only translates a few words. SUBTITLES reveal:

*"Anandji, I fear for Mansi. He's sick. Please save him.  
Save the children. They will kill him."*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Anand?

Dev finds a CASSETTE TAPE. He cautiously slides it into the player. Hits PLAY.

A MENACING voice snarls in Hindi --

TAPE RECORDER  
(growling)  
*Mine. It's mine. HE'S MINE!*

Then, a separate, high-pitched WHIMPERING --

TAPE RECORDER (CONT'D)  
*Help me...Kill me...please....*

And, finally, a BLOOD CURDLING SCREAM, both impossibly high and guttural, emits from the tape recorder. Dev PUNCHES STOP.

Then, a SILVER SHINE from WITHIN THE WALL catches his eye...

BACK IN THE KITCHEN

Behind Lost Boy, MORE children emerge from the sugarcane plantation. Two. Three. Ten.

By now, we know they're not children. They're monsters.

Charcoal skin peeks beneath a coat of WHITE ASH that cakes their bodies. BONES jut out of their skin.

They look...DEAD. One of them holds an URN in his hands and approaches the door.

LOST BOY  
(threatening)  
*He wants you.*

The boy presses himself AGAINST THE GLASS, MUCH LIKE THE STRANGER IN THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM.

He opens the urn. Dips his hand inside and smothers his face in ASH. Then smiles the most creepy smile you've ever seen.

And in A DEEP, DEMONIC VOICE --

LOST BOY (CONT'D)  
*He will come.*

SID  
(yells out)  
Dev? DEV!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LOST BOY

*He will get you.*

And THAT'S WHEN THE WOODEN ROD SNAPS. The DOOR VIOLENTLY SLIDES OPEN ON ITS OWN WITH VIOLENT FORCE. Sid shields his face as a STORM blows through the kitchen.

A DEAD HAND grips Sid's ankle and yanks Sid to the ground.

IN THE ATTIC

REVEAL Dev pulling an URN out of the space. Horrified, he twists open the lid when a SHRIEK FROM OUTSIDE HITS HIM.

SID (O.S.)

(bloody murder)

DEV! HELP!

Startled, Dev drops the urn on the ground, spilling ASHES ALL OVER HIMSELF AND THE FLOOR.

IN THE KITCHEN

Sid claws desperately at the floor as he's dragged outside

ACROSS THE YARD

SID (CONT'D)

HEEEEEELP!!

OVERHEAD

Sid's body flailing desperately as its dragged toward the acres of green sugarcane.

IN THE KITCHEN

Dev careens into the kitchen in a panic. Stares wide-eyed in horror as he sees Sid's body being dragged away by SOMETHING INVISIBLE.

DEV

SID!

Dev sprints outside after Sid.

FOLLOW CLOSELY

Sid screams as he's pulled away from us, swallowed behind the imposing

INT. SUGARCANE PLANTATION - CONTINUOUS

Dev shoves himself inside the plantation. Searches in all directions for Sid. But he's too late.

Wet. Dark. Quiet. Surrounded by looming crops that allow a view of only the night sky.

DEV

SID!

CRUNCH. CRACK. Dev muscles his way through the sugarcane, bruising his shoulders in the process.

DEV (CONT'D)

Sid! Say something!

The ground sucks Dev's shoes into the ground, slowing him down until he COLLAPSES INTO THE MUD. He grips one of the stalks and pulls himself up, now covered in mud. Catches his breath.

DEV (CONT'D)

Sid!

(to himself)

WHERE ARE YOU?

Dev can only hear the crows circling above the fields.

He yanks his foot out of the mud, and continues.

VOICE (O.S.)

HELP!

He whips around.

DEV

SID! I'm coming!

But Dev stops as THE SOUND OF CACKLING surrounds him. He looks around to find SHADOWS DARTING behind the sugarcane.

Dev stops to find A SHADOW standing just a few yards away. Illuminated by the moonlight, A MAN grinning an unholy grin. His long hair drips down to his knees. THICK ROPES OF PRAYER BEADS cover every inch of his neck.

His chest and face plastered with STARK WHITE ASH.

Scared stiff, Dev shudders as he breathes. Dev BLINKS.

AND THE FIGURE IS GONE.

The LAUGHTER AND WHISPERS GET LOUDER NOW. Taunting him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELSEWHERE IN THE PLANTATION

Sid opens his eyes and finds himself in a secluded area in which the sugarcane has been flattened. The barren land is in the shape of a circle.

IT'S A CROP CIRCLE. Sid smells the air. Touches the soil and smells it. BURNT GROUND.

And there's a SMALL HOLE in the center.

SID

DEV?!

Nothing.

The SNAPPING and CRUNCHING around him causes Sid to inch closer to the hole. He looks inside. Tries to scream but it's caught in his throat.

BACK WITH DEV

Dev weaves in between the stalks, running as fast as he can until his shoulder SLAMS into one of the stalks, and he crashes onto the ground.

A SCREAM IN THE DISTANCE.

DEV

Sid!

Panting, Dev rubs his eyes with his mud-covered palms but only OBSCURES HIS VISION. Frantic and unable to open his eyes, he keeps trying to wipe the mud from his face.

Something RUSTLES in the distance.

NOT SID (O.S.)

(distant)

DEV!

Spoiler alert: It's NOT SID.

DEV

I can hear you!

DEV'S MUDDY POV

In the near distance, he sees a tall and lanky figure walking in the opposite direction.

DEV (CONT'D)

(weak)

I can see you. Stay there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Dev lifts himself up. Limpes ahead despite his injury, clutching the sugarcane as he stumbles.

DEV (CONT'D)

Stop. I'm right here.

Suddenly, NOT SID disappears. Dev stops, only to see AN ORANGE FLICKER NOT TOO FAR AWAY.

Dev rushes through the field now, following the light. Pushing through until he reaches

TEH CROP CIRCLE

A ROARING FIRE at its center. On the other side of it, a CHILD sits, its nose buried in a cup - specifically that KAPALA - in his hand.

Dev stops as child shifts its gaze from the cup, tracking his movement. The child lowers the cup to reveal BLOOD DRIPPING FROM ITS MOUTH. He growls and retreats into the field with an inhuman speed.

Dev spots a limp arm, hanging from THE HOLE INSIDE. He rushes over to find Sid, laying UNCONSCIOUS.

Dev drags him out and panics when we

REVEAL A PILE OF BONES. Human bones.

Dev's other hand finds the *kapala*, and realizes it's not a cup. He turns it over to discover it's a CHILD'S SKULL.

DEV (CONT'D)

No.

Dev swiftly grabs Sid by the arm. Cradles him and looks up to find a way out amidst the sugarcane stalks.

Dev retreats back

INTO THE SUGARCANE

Dev blindly pushes through the stalks to FINALLY COLLAPSE onto the

BACKYARD OF AMMA'S FARMHOUSE

Panting, Dev hovers over Sid's limp body.

DEV (CONT'D)

Help! HELP!

Dev breathes into Sid's lungs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DEV (CONT'D)

Please.

Pounds on Sid's chest.

DEV (CONT'D)

HELP! HELP! SOMEBODY!

His screams reach the sky as we --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dev rushes over to the couch, where Sid cries in pain. He clutches his wrist, sliced with THREE GASHES.

Dev focuses on wrapping Sid's wrists. Gives him a wet cloth.

DEV

Keep this on your forehead.

Sid holds it against his forehead, breathing heavily.

SID

Say it. I know you saw something.  
TELL ME.

Dev's eyes land on Parvati, who avoids eye contact.

SID (CONT'D)

(manic)

Those kids, that man...

(in tears)

They want to hurt us. We have to go. I want to leave now.

Dev meets Sid's teary eyes, which look at him with a desperate plea.

Dev puts his arm around Sid, trying to calm him.

DEV

Heyheyhey. Look at me. I'm sorry. I believe you. I'm just going to go pack your things. Then, we're getting out of here.

INT. DEV AND SID'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dev frantically zips from one side of the room to the other, packing Sid's belongings. He shuts and locks a suitcase.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Trying to compose himself, he takes a seat on the bed. Overwhelmed. Buries his head in his palms. He gives in to a true state of fear.

FOOTSTEPS CLOSE IN as Parvati approaches the door.

PARVATI (O.S.)

Where are you going?

DEV

(packing)

Away from here. To a hospital.

PARVATI

You won't find a way out of here at this time of night.

Dev springs up from the bed. Furious.

DEV

THEN HELP ME! My brother is scared to death. I saw someone trying to hurt him. Those kids, or whatever they are, want to hurt him.

ANAND (O.C.)

Not someone. Some thing.

Dev turns to see Anand at the door.

ANAND (CONT'D)

It's too late.

Judging Anand's tone, Dev approaches him.

Anand looks to Parvati with a suspicious glance. Dev reaches into his pocket and reveals the LETTER.

DEV

You know what this is. Tell me. And don't lie.

Anand takes the letter. Studies it. And we know by his terrified expression that he recognizes it.

ANAND

Where did you find this?

PARVATI

*What is that, father?*

DEV

It's a letter. From Amma.  
(to Anand)  
To you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DEV (CONT'D)

You've been lying to us this whole time. My father wasn't sick, was he?

Anand keeps his eyes on that letter.

DEV (CONT'D)

What are you hiding?

ANAND

I know what you must think, but it's not that simple.

DEV

Tell me the truth. What did he do? Was it the fire? Did they blame him?

Dev reveals the URN and hands it to Parvati, who stares at it in disbelief. Then, at Anand.

ANAND

She didn't want you to know.

DEV

We have the right.

ANAND

It was for your own good.

DEV

Look at the good it's done! I'm taking him to the hospital.

ANAND

You can't leave.

DEV

You can't stop me!

Dev pulls open the door when Anand slams it shut, standing in his way.

ANAND

Listen to me. Your father was a good man and, for that, he suffered.

PARVATI

(don't tell him)  
*Father. Please.*

Anand walks over to Parvati, who examines the urn.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*These aren't your father's ashes.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DEV

What?

ANAND

They're the remains of a very dangerous man. An evil man. Your father was accused of killing him.

Anand flips it over to find the same MARK OF RAKTABIJA, the buffalo demon, on the bottom of it.

ANAND (CONT'D)

(to Parvati)

*He has to know.*

DEV

Know what?

ANAND

(to Dev)

People thought he set the fire, but it was somebody else. It was the very thing that came after Siddharth tonight.

DEV

What are you talking about?

Feeling his knees getting weaker, Anand takes a seat on the bed.

ANAND

There's a spirit that plagues this house.

DEV

Please. I've heard this.

ANAND

(yelling)

Then, it would do you well to listen this time!

(off Dev's silence)

THIS land has a history, like everything else. And, like you, this spirit will not forget its own.

The ferocity in Anand's voice startles Dev. Anand takes the scribbled letter in Dev's hand. Unfolds it. Parvati starts breathing in a panicked rhythm, recognizing the name and the drawing.

VAIKUM VAIKUM VAIKUM.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ANAND (CONT'D)

A man used this land. His name was Vaikum.

DEV

The priest?

ANAND

He was no priest. He posed as one, manipulating people, mostly those who were desperate and poor. With a promise of wealth and good favor in the afterlife, they did what he told them to do. Word spread across the village when they started going missing.

DEV

Who?

ANAND

The children. He was offering them.

DEV

Offering?

ANAND

Sacrificing them on this land.

A cold beat.

Dev wouldn't believe these words if it wasn't for the fear in Anand's trembling voice.

DEV

(horrified)  
He killed children?

ANAND

He told the parents it was necessary practice.

(beat)

He posed as an agent of the holy cause. He wasn't. But it was too late. His plague was spreading.

Anand turns the urn to show Dev the red drawing.

ANAND (CONT'D)

He prayed allegiance to the demon, *Raktabija*. It's believed that with every drop of its blood, a new demon is born.

Off Dev's horrified expression -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ANAND (CONT'D)

When it was found what he was  
doing --

DEV

My father killed him?

ANAND

Vaikum killed himself. Burned  
himself. Ran through the  
plantation, screaming like a  
madman.

(beat)

We thought he was gone, but I  
believe it was a ritual. He hid  
his remains here to preserve his  
spirit and remain a curse on this  
place.

DEV

You can't expect me to believe  
this.

Anand jumps up furiously. Points to the field.

ANAND

You've seen him tonight.

(beat)

His followers would come here.

DEV

How do you know all this?

ANAND

Your father found a man  
sacrificing his own child in this  
plantation. He interfered. He had  
no choice but to do the right  
thing.

(then)

That child was Siddharth. That is  
why you were sent away.

DEV

(shaking his head)

I didn't ask for this.

Struck with this revelation, Parvati stares daggers into  
Anand's eyes.

Dev shakes his head in denial.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

ANAND

(to Dev)

Your father knew it wasn't safe for either of you, so your grandmother arranged to send you overseas. For protection. You didn't ask for this, but your responsibilities are of significant importance.

DEV

So they shipped us off and just forgot about us?

ANAND

Your father was sick. Possessed.  
(off Dev's look)  
The demon was consuming him.

Ashamed, Anand tears his gaze away from Dev.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Your grandmother called for my help. I tried to perform an exorcism. But I failed.

Dev looks to Parvati, who holds back tears. Reluctantly, she nods to him, confirming the truth even though she wants to deny it.

DEV

You endangered my family, and now you're endangering us.  
(to Parvati)  
We're leaving.

Anand stands in Dev's way.

ANAND

You can't.

DEV

(fighting back)  
Like hell I can't. I'M THE ONLY ONE HE HAS.

ANAND

Then PROTECT HIM!

DEV

I don't believe a word of any of this!

ANAND

I'm afraid you don't have any choice!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

ANAND (CONT'D)

I see the same marks on Siddharth that were on your father. It will not let him go unless we do something.

Anand place his hand on Dev's back.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Please. I couldn't save your father. Let me help you.

Dev wants to storm out of there, but he believes Anand.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - DEAD OF NIGHT

CLOSE ON

Small clay dishes FLICKER with lit candle wicks in every room. On the steps. On the kitchen counter.

ANAND (O.C.)

We sanctify the grounds. If we cleanse this house, it will sever any bond he has to this land. Then, we dispose of the ashes.

Anand, Dev, Sid and Parvati sit on the floor in the living room around the cement cauldron.

The same prayer items lay in front of them.

Anand lights a few INCENSE and hands them to Sid.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Take these. Make sure the scent fills every room.

DEV

How do we know this will work?

ANAND

The fire. It opens a line of communication, between us and them. If this goes according to plan, we'll reach the spirit.

DEV

What if it doesn't listen?

Anand snaps a few small twigs and places them into the cauldron. Strikes a match, lights a piece of camphor. Tosses it into the cauldron.

Sid returns from the second floor and hands the incense to Anand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a deep breath --

ANAND

Take a seat. Let us begin.

Anand brings forward a big bowl of *havan samagri*, a mixture of herbal roots and crushed leaves.

ANAND (CONT'D)

As I recite the mantra, you will add this mixture to the fire.

Anand rests the SILVER URN on the ground next to him. Then, grips his book of mantras.

ANAND (CONT'D)

Now try and concentrate. No matter what happens.

Anand takes a deep breath. Begins praying in HINDI as he starts the fire ritual.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*O Lord Almighty. Om Brahma,  
Varuna, Indra, Rudra, Marutaa.  
Hear us. Watch over us. Oh Brahma,  
creator of the universe. Protect  
us from those who cast evil  
shadows upon us.*

As Anand recites verse by verse, he directs the boys with his finger when to add the mixture to the fire.

THUNDER ROLLS again.

The lights flicker ever so slightly.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*Om Vishnu, preserver of the  
universe. Watch over us with a  
protective light. May Lord Shiva,  
the destroyer and punisher of evil  
deeds, banish any evil that dares  
trespass upon these grounds.  
(to everyone)  
Shut your eyes now.*

Anand recites faster, making Dev and Sid more nervous. They shut their eyes in concentration.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*May Agni, Goddess of Fire, be in  
our favor. Heavenly Mother, take  
pity on us, your children. Free us  
from our sins.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANAND (CONT'D)

*By the might of Your love, pour  
unto our souls the radiance of  
your holiness. We pray to you.*

SNAP. POP. The fire rises higher as the prayer proceeds.

WHOOSH! Suddenly, an UNSEEN ENERGY causes the fire to shoot to the ceiling.

An ominous gust of wind invades the room before everything goes still. Silent.

Sid opens his eyes with caution. Anand stops and examines the room.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*Is there a presence in the room?*

SID'S POV

Scared, he watches as the kitchen lights flicker before --

CLICK. They shut off. Darkness SPREADS across the kitchen.

Then, the second floor.

No light glows save for the fire in the cauldron and the candles. Until --

FWOOP. FWOOP. NOW THE CANDLES ON THE STEPS EXTINGUISH ON THEIR OWN. One by one they blow out, leaving behind subtle streaks of smoke.

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

*I reach out to you with peace.  
Reveal yourself.*

Sid suddenly hears in his ear that same INTRUDING WHISPER from the *ghats*. With a direct view of the GLASS DOOR in the kitchen, Sid stares outside.

The outhouse light switches on. And a man appears.

IT'S THE STRANGER. Same devious smile. Same glimmering eyes with whom Sid has become familiar.

TAPTAPTAP.

Sid jerks his neck over to the window by the door. THE LOST BOY from the night of the funeral rests his forehead calmly against the glass.

Sid stares at The Stranger. His eyes become heavy. His brow relaxes. Then, Sid rises to his feet, as if IN A TRANCE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DEV

Sid?

Anand opens his eyes.

PARVATI

(panicked)  
*Somebody's here.*

But Parvati can't see anybody outside.

Anand stands up, still chanting. Motions for Dev to remain seated.

Dev and Parvati look to the door but we realize ONLY ANAND AND SID CAN SEE THE STRANGER.

ANAND

*There is something else guiding you. Something darker. I ask you, why follow the devil?*

Anand carefully follows Sid

INTO THE KITCHEN

Anand sees The Stranger luring Sid to the glass.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*Stop this now. Tell us who you are.*

THE STRANGER

*I burn fire for the devil who resides here.*

Anand stands between The Stranger and Sid.

ANAND

*You've taken enough.*

As if the Stranger were reciting his own evil mantra --

THE STRANGER

(sing-song)  
*Steal from God. And invite the devil. Steal from God. Invite the devil, I will. Invite the devil I will.*

TAPTAPTAP.

Dev's attention moves towards the

TAPTAPTAPTAP. BANG BANG BANG.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DEV  
What's happening?!

WE SEE THE DEMONIC CHILDREN SNEER, GROWL, AND SCREAM.

IN THE KITCHEN

The Stranger reveals an URN in his hand. TAPS the lid with his sharp fingernails and

Pours the ashes onto the cement pavement, smiling pure evil as CHILDREN APPEAR from the plantation behind him.

Hand on Sid's chest, Anand stands between Sid and the door now. He turns to face the Stranger.

THE STRANGER  
(demonic)  
*You stole from me.*

As if this sounded familiar, Anand steels himself.

ANAND  
(chanting valiantly)  
*Lord Shiva, protect us as we fear  
not the devil. We fear no evil for  
you are with us. Let the souls  
which roam here rest in peace.*

The Stranger HOWLS in pain at the door, SHRIEKING at a demonic pitch. His maw opens wide, revealing bleeding gums and razor sharp teeth.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
*Back, demon!*

Lost Boy in the kitchen BANGS on the glass door in protest. Another CLAWS and SCRATCHES at the front door.

A BARRAGE OF SCREECHING AND BANGING against the house.

Dev frantically adds to the fire. LARGER DOSES WITH HASTE.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
*Extinguish all evil from this  
place, Lord. You are Almighty. You  
have sheltered these children  
under your protection. Do not fail  
them now, Lord!*

THE FIRE HISSES AND WHISTLES.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
(louder now)  
*DO NOT FAIL THEM.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

THE STRANGER

*He already has.*

IN THE KITCHEN

Anand opens a bottle and pours HOLY WATER AROUND THE DOOR.

ANAND

*You will not cross this line,  
devil.*

The Stranger howls again as the SLIDING DOOR RIPS OPEN!

A TYPHOON fills the room, pulling Sid toward the Stranger, but Anand blocks the path.

Anand tilts his neck to the sky, praying with all his might, feet planted strongly amidst the storm when --

Sid's NECK shoots back in pain as he lets out a SCREAM. MORE BURN MARKS APPEAR ON HIS WRIST.

DEV

SID!!!

Fighting the storm inside, Dev gets on his feet but --

ANAND

(to Dev)  
Don't stop!

The walls quake.

Tick. Chime. TICK. CHIME. The grandfather clock crashes to the ground.

Sid's scream turns into a HORRIFIC, DEMONIC GROAN as the pain becomes unbearable. As Sid's eyes turn RED, his veins pulse from under his skin. He STARTS TO CHOKE.

A deep, hellish voice emits from Sid --

SID

IT...HURTS!!

THE STRANGER

(smiling)  
*The devil is here. You're too  
late.*

Sid's nose begins to bleed as the fire becomes violent.

Anand drenches his palm with holy water before GRIPPING SID'S HAND. Sid screams in pain as his arm SIZZLES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

ANAND

*Extinguish all evil, Lord! I beg  
you. VANQUISH THIS DEMON!*

(screams at Dev)

The ashes! Pour them in the  
cauldron! NOW!

With panicked fingers, Dev unclasps the urn.

ANAND (CONT'D)

NOW!

Dev disposes the ASHES INTO THE CAULDRON and is thrown  
onto his back as the FIRE RAGES TO THE CEILING. He  
watches as the

Whistling flames turn GREEN.

BLUE.

RED.

A hint of a smirk on the Stranger's face as he stares at  
the fire inside...

Glasses SHATTER as the storm grows stronger inside the  
house.

Lights FLICKER. Then POP.

Anand holds on for dear life.

ANAND (CONT'D)

You are no match for the creator,  
the preserver, and the destroyer  
of all that is holy.

Anand throws the entire bottle of holy water at The  
Stranger. The glass SHATTERS, dousing the demon, who  
SHRIEKS IN PAIN.

Anand and Sid are thrown back as --

Instantly, the fire drops, sucking itself back into the  
cauldron.

And the candles REIGNITE.

Dev opens his eyes to find calm. Silence. Peace.

Anand sits. Limp.

DEV

Uncle?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

Dev and Parvati crawl over to an unconscious Sid and limp Anand.

A GROANING emits from Anand's throat. *What's that sound...*

Dev places a hand on his shoulder when --

Anand jolts awake, gasping as if he had died and come back to life.

DEV (CONT'D)

Are you alright? Is he gone?

Anand returns to his senses. Confirms with a nod.

Parvati's analyzes the room, looking for any lingering presence.

INT. DEV AND SID'S ROOM - LATER

Smoke from Parvati's torch fills the room. Donning her Sanni mask, she concludes a Tovil ceremony.

Upon finishing, Parvati removes her mask.

Anand and Dev pour the remains of the fire into a separate urn.

PARVATI

*The remains have been purified.  
His soul is untethered.*

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Anand sits on a cot, wincing in pain as he wraps his shawl into a makeshift sling for his arm.

Dev helps Anand, bringing the sling around his neck.

The fire is ablaze. Sid sleeps in a blanket on the couch.

DEV

Are you sure you won't sleep in a bed?

ANAND

Oh, I'm just fine.

DEV

Thank you. For everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND

Not done yet. The sun will be up  
in just a couple hours. I'll leave  
just as it rises.

(re: ashes)

Put this all to rest. And you both  
will have earned a new beginning.

Dev looks at Sid, finally sleeping.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LATER

Anand's watch reads 3:00 AM.

We hear a GROAN as Anand limps into the room, glass of  
water in hand.

Sleep didn't come easy tonight.

Anand drops onto the cot. Deep in thought, he stares at  
the fire for a beat, gulping down his water.

He reaches into his shirt and pulls out his GOLD NECKLACE  
of an OM SYMBOL. He looks at it with love and devotion  
before giving it a kiss.

Fighting the aches and pains his body endured, Anand lays  
on his back.

FROM ABOVE

Staring at Anand as he opens his eyes IN HORROR

REVERSE ANGLE

On the ceiling to find

PURE EVIL GLARING AT HIM WITH RED PUPILS through long,  
dark hair that strings down to the floor. Its CHARCOAL  
LIMBS CLING TO THE CEILING, LIKE AN ARACHNID ready to  
attack.

This time, it's not one of the children.

This time, a 7-foot DEMON stares at him with furious dark  
eyes.

They were too late. It's RAKTABIJA, the buffalo demon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Before Anand can scream, the demon releases its claws and falls onto Anand, smothering him in ash and seeping into his mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - BEFORE DAWN

CAMERA PANS up the couch, tracking up Sid's sleeping body. After what seems like an eternity, the boy rests peacefully. Until --

A CLAW SNAPS INTO FRAME. Covers his mouth. Snatches him off the couch.

EXT. SUGARCANE PLANTATION - BEFORE SUNRISE

Before sunrise.

Sid's eyes slowly fade open only to find himself in the CROP CIRCLE.

A BRIGHT RED FIRE darts wildly against the dark blue sky.

A RED TENT sits aglow with a light inside.

The familiar HOLE at the far end.

Sid's eyes dart in a panic, but he can't move. Paralyzed.

The dirt crunches and snaps as Anand emerges from the sugarcane in his white garb, dragging the CAULDRON behind him.

His hand is a CLAW with long, black digits. His eyes glimmer, and he growls with every breath escaping his lungs.

This is Anand's body, but this clearly isn't Anand. He's POSSESSED.

Smiling --

ANAND (POSSESSED)

(in Hindi)

*You shouldn't fall into such deep sleep.*

SID

Please. Let me go.

ANAND (POSSESSED)

*Why be afraid? You are home.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Anand gets on ALL FOUR LIMBS like a some BEAST, kicking loose twigs and dirt closer to the fire.

He sits by the fire. Stares at Sid. Quiet. Unflinching.

Suddenly, THE CHILDREN appear from the sugarcane, surrounding the two of them and standing against the looming cane.

THE SAME WOUND on all their stomachs. Their eyes GLIMMER.

FROM THE HOLE, one brings Anand a RED BUNDLE. From inside, Anand reveals A HUMAN BONE. He brings it to his nose, and effortlessly SNAPS IT IN TWO before tossing the BONE INTO THE FIRE.

Then, he reveals another...

ANAND (CONT'D)

*There was a man, a long time ago,  
who made a living among the dead.  
A very poor man. He burned bodies  
night after night at the ghats.*

Anand picks up a *kapala*, containing a FINE POWDER. With his fingers, he occasionally adds a few pinches to the fire as he speaks.

ANAND (CONT'D)

*One day, he asked God for more  
than staring at the dead night  
after night. Anything that would  
provide an escape. But God never  
answered --*

A moment later, a MAN exits the tent -

Covered in blood, the man carries a SMALL CHILD in his arms. In his hand he clutches a KARAMBIT, a curved blade.

Sid's chest heaves in and out like the fan on that harmonium. Petrified. He wants to run but he can't.

The children gather around the man carrying the bloodied body. They eagerly take turns placing their palms on the boy's bloodied corpse and SMOTHER THEIR CHESTS WITH HIS BLOOD.

The children pass around an URN. Reaching inside, they plaster their bodies with handfuls of ASH, covering the red with POWDER WHITE.

The man licks his fingers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANAND (CONT'D)  
*-- so I did. And offered him  
 enlightenment at a price.*

Anand turns to face Sid, who trembles at the sight of Anand's CHANGED PHYSICAL APPEARANCE. He reveals NOW SHARP TEETH, and VEINS PROTRUDING FROM HIS NOW PALE WHITE FOREHEAD. He's turning into something...

A monster.

And with a deeper, darker voice --

ANAND (CONT'D)  
*I ask you. What was that price?*

THUNDER ROLLS. Anand shuts his eyes as he tilts his neck to face the gray sky.

ANAND (CONT'D)  
*Ah. The monsoons are here.*

Tears stream down Sid's face as we --

CUT TO:

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - AT THE SAME TIME

A ray of sunlight hits Dev, waking him up. He looks around at an empty house.

DEV  
 Sid?

Dev gets to his feet.

DEV (CONT'D)  
 Uncle?

No sign of anybody as Dev searches all corners of the house. He looks

OUT THE WINDOW to find

A STREAK OF SMOKE RISING FROM THE FIELD.

As Dev returns to the living room, he stares at the ceiling in horror at CLAW MARKS. And the MARK OF RAKTABIJA IN BLOOD.

DEV (CONT'D)  
 (in horror)  
 No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dev runs for the door when he notices Anand's bottle of HOLY WATER. He grabs it before sprinting out the door.

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Parvati opens the basement door to find the back door wide open.

BANG. THE SHED DOOR SLAMS in the distance. Parvati walks over.

INSIDE THE SHED

Finds the floor CHOPPED. BROKEN OPEN WITH AN AXE, leaving a hole that leads UNDERGROUND.

PARVATI

Dev? Son?

VOICE (O.S.)

HELP!

Parvati panics and instinctively grips a flashlight from a nearby table.

INT. CRAWLSPACE - CONTINUOUS

Parvati slides down into the space. Waves her white light ahead to reveal an UNDERGROUND PASSAGE under the house. Shaped by sturdy walls of mud, it seems this place has existed for years.

A CHILD'S LAUGHTER ECHOES deep within the darkness.

She whips the flashlight only to barely miss A CREATURE ducking around the corner.

Parvati freezes. She takes a couple steps before --

CLINK. Broken pieces of ceramic beneath her feet. She stops. Follows the trail.

Turns a corner. Deeper and deeper, until she finds

COUNTLESS URNS, lined up against each other settled in the mud. Parvati bends down and removes one of the lids. Kicks it over as a PILE OF ASH spills out.

She kicks another. And another. MORE ASHES. UNRESTED SOULS.

Then, she finds the SILVER URN. With the demonic mark of RAKTABIJA. Her eyes go wide with terror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Parvati manically shines the flashlight on each of the urns.

She cries out when she finds the mark of Raktabija on every urn. EVERY. SINGLE. ONE. *Fuck...*

She backpedals. Almost loses her footing when --

CRUNCH.

Parvati looks down to find BONES jutting out of the ground.

A HAND. LEG. SKULL. A TRUE LOVECRAFTIAN TOMB.

DEAD CHILD (O.S.)

*Stay. Please.*

Parvati's shines her flashlight ahead to find a DEAD CHILD staring at her.

PARVATI

No --

Parvati sprints in the opposite direction towards the opening in the floor, desperate to escape.

But a DEAD HAND grabs her ankle, digs into her skin, before yanking Parvati off her feet and knocking her flashlights a few feet away.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

NOOOOOOO!

Parvati digs her fingers into the ground as the CLAW digs deeper into her leg, pulling her deeper into the crawlspace.

Parvati desperately reaches for her flashlight, but it's out of reach...

EXT. SUGARCANE PLANTATION - SAME TIME

Anand stares blankly into the flames of the fire.

His white garb now stained in blood, he kneels next to Sid.

Sid shuts his eyes as Anand presses his nose against Sid's face and takes a deep breath, smelling his victim.

SID

(trembling)

Uncle...please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Anand stares at Sid. His pupils RED. No sign of Anand at all.

Anand grabs him by the hair and drags him to the fire.

ANAND (POSSESSED)  
HE'S MINE. My blood. My blood.

Anand grabs Sid's arm in one hand. Grips the karambit in the other. Ready to slice it open when --

DEV  
NO!

Dev pushes out through the sugarcane into the crop circle. He lunges at Anand, knocking Sid to the floor.

Sid unclenches and clenches his fist, realizing HE CAN MOVE.

Dev GRABS ONE OF THE FIRELOGS FROM THE BONFIRE, waving it to evade the children.

DEV (CONT'D)  
Sid. Run.  
(beat)  
NOW!

Anand growls at Dev, who waves the torch in his face.

DEV (CONT'D)  
(desperate)  
Uncle. Please. Don't do --.

But Dev stops. Chokes in pain. Looks down to find

Anand's CLAW PIERCED INTO HIS STOMACH.

Dev's body drops as Anand walks away.

Gripping his stomach, Dev desperately drags his body to the torch. He musters enough strength to clutch it and IGNITE THE SUGARCANE PLANTATION in a BLAZE OF ORANGE.

The fire spreads immediately.

THE CHILDREN - the ASH DEMONS - HISS. One snaps at Dev and he LIGHTS IT ON FIRE.

The PLANTATION BURNS AROUND THEM, trapping them inside the crop circle. Dev crawls towards Anand, torch still in hand.

But Anand looks back at Dev just before stepping into the fiery plantation, unfazed.

EXT. / INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Sid escapes through the sugar plantation onto Amma's backyard. Running at full speed, he screams --

SID  
Auntie? Auntie?!

Sid rushes through the open backdoor and  
INTO THE KITCHEN

SID (CONT'D)  
Auntie?

Sid scours the room. Yells for her. But nothing.

INT. PARVATI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sid breaks into her room but finds it empty before rushing back up the stairs to the

KITCHEN

*What's that smell?*

Sid turns to the backyard to find  
THE PLANTATION CONSUMED BY INFERNO.

SID  
Dev!!!

He runs into the backyard when --

Out from the flames, Anand emerges.

His skin burns, exposing the blood and tissue underneath, but he persists with inhuman strength to the house.

Fire latches onto his white scarf, trailing behind him as he leads a

PATH OF FIRE FROM THE PLANTATION TO THE FARMHOUSE.

THUNDER ROLLS AGAIN. A HARD RAIN BEGINS TO FALL.

INT. CRAWLSPACE - SAME TIME

Underground, Parvati limps away from the demon, turning one corner after the other to escape when she finally finds LIGHT ABOVE HER HEAD, seeping through wooden panels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She places her palms on the roof. Pushes with all her might until --

INT. PARVATI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wood CREAKS, SPLINTERS and finally SNAPS AS PARVATI'S HAND BURSTS THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDS.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sid runs for the front door.

But Anand, crawling like a beast, cuts Sid's path and grabs him by the throat.

With his claw, Anand slices Sid's arm. Blood drips to the floor as the FIRE EATS AWAY AT THE KITCHEN.

SID

Ahhhh!

PARVATI (O.S.)

*Father!*

SSZZTTT! Anand releases his grip, and Sid hits the ground.

Anand turns his gaze to face Parvati.

REVEAL PARVATI, WEARING THE SANNI MASK.

Anand INSTANTLY SCREECHES AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS and backs away. AFRAID OF THE MASK.

With a flick of her wrist, Parvati hits Anand with a dose of HOLY WATER, causing his skin to SIZZLE FROM THE BURN.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(in Hindi)

*Father. Hear me!*

Anand avoids Parvati, stumbling in every direction in order to keep a safe distance.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I know who you are, demon. The very plague who has cursed this place for centuries.*

Despite her fear, she continues towards Anand.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I am here to tell you your plague has come to an end.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She casts more holy water onto him, causing Anand to SNARL despite the pain. He clutches his arms, bending his scalp, revealing TWO BUMPS on the back of his head. THE STUMPS OF HORNS...

Anand finally grabs her by the throat. Draws his claws...

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I say your name without fear.  
Raktabija.*

Anand opens his mouth and UNLEASHES A HELLISH SHRIEK THAT QUAKES THE HOUSE.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

(then)  
*Demon from Hell. You are no match  
for this vessel you inhabit, for  
he is God's soldier.*

Fastened in his grip, Anand lifts Parvati off her feet.

Choking, Parvati unscrews the holy water. Pours it on her palms.

Then SLAMS BOTH HER PALMS ONTO THE SIDE of his head. His SCALP BURNS WITH HER TOUCH. Anand screams that DEMONIC SCREAM.

Parvati holds his face with both hands. Forehead to forehead, she STARES DEAD INTO HIS EYES, CHALLENGING THE DEVIL.

FACE TO FACE. Good versus evil.

Anand HOWLS YET AGAIN, trying unsuccessfully to evade his eyes.

Spellbound with power, Parvati maintains her hold on Anand and preaches with a vigilance that rivals that of Father Karras in The Exorcist.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

*I know who you are. I know your  
true form. But I also know your  
fate. Your fear. Of the mother,  
our goddess, who ripped your flesh  
and drank your blood so it should  
spill no more.*

(then)  
*Look at me, demon. I carry with me  
the power of the Holy Mother.*

Anand screams the scream of a thousand fallen angels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Looking closely, she notices TEARS trickling down his cheeks.

*It's him. He's still in there.*

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
 (calling to him)  
*I know you're in there, Father.  
 Fight it.*

His skin contorts and bulges as if something were trying to escape. Anand's eyes turn from white to BLACK AND RED.

His teeth sharper. His skin more pale. Then --

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
*Look at me, demon. Your  
 resurrection is short-lived. With  
 the power of the holy mother, I  
 banish you from this realm onto  
 her lap on which you will be  
 devoured. In this life and the  
 next. And for eternity, by the  
 power of God.*

Fire SPREADS QUICKLY THROUGH THE LIVING ROOM.

Anand SCREAMS as his forehead pulsates. His FLESH RIPS as the TRUE FORM OF THE BUFFALO DEMON PIERCES THROUGH HIS SKIN, Raktabija slowly revealing itself.

PARVATI (CONT'D)  
 (to herself)  
 No.

Anand's teeth snap at Parvati as the demon tries to remain within its host.

After a moment, Anand's TRUE VOICE merges with the DARK VOICE OF THE DEMON, fighting through his own EXORCISM.

ANAND  
 (as Anand)  
*Leave...me...*  
 (screaming)  
 AHHHH!

Anand becomes pale. Blue veins PULSATE IN HIS FACE AS THE DEMON CONTINUES TO INVADE HIS SOUL.

At a loss --

PARVATI  
*It's killing him.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DEV

Sid!

Parvati turns her gaze to find Dev inside the house, watching as Parvati hovers over Anand.

PARVATI

*Get yourselves out of here! NOW!*

THE FRONT DOOR THRUSTS OPEN as the demon's power continues to quake the house.

Fire consumes the windows near Sid. Clutching his stomach, Dev shoves Sid out of the way just as they POP AND SHATTER.

The fire swallows the table.

PARVATI (CONT'D)

Go!

Sid watches as Anand yelps in pain in Parvati's lap.

DEV

Let's go!

Dev grabs Sid by the collar. Assesses the fiery doorway.

DEV (CONT'D)

One, two, three. Come on!

They push through the doorway and stumble down the steps

INTO THE FRONT YARD

Sid coughs the smoke out of his lungs.

DEV (CONT'D)

I have to go back in. Stay here.

SID

No. You can't.

DEV

Stay here. I'll be back. Promise.

Dev climbs up the porch steps...

INSIDE THE HOUSE

Parvati PICKS UP THE URN. Shoves it against the walls of the house. It bursts open. THE ASHES SCATTER AND BURN.

She EMPTIES THE ENTIRE BOTTLE OF HOLY WATER onto the remains when --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Anand's chest arches upward, screaming in PAIN as the ashes burn.

On her knees, Parvati's eyes well with tears.

PARVATI  
(helpless)  
*What do I do?*

Anand grabs Parvati by the throat. He might kill her this instance, but something stops him.

ANAND  
(as himself)  
*Get out. It's the only way.*

A glimpse of the real Anand. HE rips off his OM NECKLACE and gives it to Parvati.

Dev pushes inside the house.

PARVATI  
No.

ANAND  
*It's my duty. Let me.*

Finally, he releases his grip on her, shoving her into Dev, who immediately pulls her

OUTSIDE INTO THE MONSOON RAIN.

DEV  
I can get him.

Dev runs back to the front door yet again but Anand SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT, trapping himself inside.

DEV (CONT'D)  
NO!

INT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the inferno, all goes quiet. Through his labored breathing, we hear the demon's snarl.

Exhausted. Bleeding. A calm washes over him as he stands, and begins reciting his mantra through pain.

ANAND  
*M-m-may our Lord, our Mother, our Goddess, have mercy on our souls. May they banish all evil. May they banish the devil himself.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANAND (CONT'D)

*Leave this place, beast, and never  
return. Your plague upon these  
grounds has come to an end.*

As Anand chants, his knees buckle in pain, but he maintains balance. Once again --

ANAND (CONT'D)

*Hear me, devil! I declare your  
plague has reached its end, by the  
power of God!*

BEHIND THE FLAMES

Dev and Anand's eyes meet.

DEV

Let me in!

But Anand's eyes say it all. *This is it.*

His sacrifice is clear, standing between the demon and the children.

DEV (CONT'D)

NO!

But Anand backs into the fire. His garb catches fire. He shuts his eyes as the fire engulfs him.

A plume of inferno THROWS DEV OFF THE PORCH.

On his back, Dev searches for any sign of Anand but THE ROOF COLLAPSES.

SID

Get back!

Sid and Parvati pull Dev back on his feet.

CRASH! The house crumbles. First, the roof into the attic.

The attic into the living room.

The walls onto the floor.

INT. CRAWLSPACE - SAME TIME

THE FIRE CONSUMES the crawlspace. COUNTLESS URNS SHATTER AS THE REMAINS OF COUNTLESS SOULS burn.

FADE TO:

EXT. AMMA'S FARMHOUSE - LATER

Under the shade of a banyan tree, the three watch their home turn to ash.

Dev looks down to find Sid, staring at him. Dev reciprocates. A silent truth between them.

A look that says, *What now?*

Parvati unfolds her palm to reveal the OM necklace, given to her by Anand. She looks at it, and unfurls it into Sid's palm. Covers it.

SID

Now what?

She locks eyes with Dev.

PARVATI

*We keep our promises.*

She wraps her arms around Sid. Kisses his forehead. Then embraces Dev. Protective. A mother fulfilled.

The three - a new family - watch as the house glimmers one last time before it's buried under a hard monsoon rain, making room for new ground. A new beginning.

FADE TO BLACK.