

THE TAJ

"The Interview"

S1:E1 - Pilot

"The Birthday Cake"

S1:E2 - Second Episode

Written by:

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THE TAJ

S1:E1 - "The Interview"

S1:E2 - "The Birthday Cake"

CAST

RAVI PATEL.....	TBD
SAMMI (SAMIRA) SHARMA.....	TBD
ARJUNA PATEL.....	TBD
LAKSHMI PATEL.....	TBD
MIGUEL.....	TBD

THE TAJ

S1:E1 - "The Interview"

SETS

Teaser, Scene A - The Taj - Front Entrance

Act One, Scene B - The Taj - Dining Area

Act Two, Scene C - The Taj - Dining Area

Act Two, Scene D - The Taj - Kitchen

Act Two, Scene E - The Taj - Office

Act Two, Scene F - The Taj - Dining Area

Tag, Scene G - The Taj - Front Entrance

THE INTERVIEW S1: E1

THE TAJ

FADE IN:

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - DAY

TWO YOUNG MALE INDIAN KITCHEN STAFF, SMARTLY DRESSED IN WHITE UNIFORMS, ARE REMOVING DISHES FROM THE LONG ELEGANTLY-DISPLAYED BUFFET TABLE THAT IS POSITIONED AGAINST ONE OF THE INDIAN RESTAURANT'S SIDE WALLS. THEY CARRY PLATTERS THROUGH A REAR DOOR INTO THE KITCHEN.

THE WALLS OF THE UPSCALE RESTAURANT INCLUDE PHOTOS OF INDIAN LANDMARKS, INCLUDING A LARGE MURAL OF THE TAJ MAHAL. AN INDIAN FLAG IS DRAPED ON THE WALL.

A SLOW MOVEMENT SITAR RAGA IS BARELY AUDIBLE. TWO STICKS OF INCENSE ARE WAFTING SMOKE INTO THE AIR AT THE RECEPTION DESK NEAR THE ENTRYWAY.

GRAY-HAIRED LAKSHMI PATEL (55), WHO IS ELEGANTLY-DRESSED IN AN EXPENSIVE-LOOKING SARI, AND WHO WEARS A BRILLIANTLY-COLORED RED GEMSTONE IN THE CENTER OF HER LOWER FOREHEAD, INSPECTS THE WORK. SHE SEES THEIR LAST TWO LUNCH CUSTOMERS (40) LEAVING AND MEETS THEM NEAR THE EXIT DOOR.

LAKSHMI

Thank you so much. Nice to see you
both again.

LUNCH CUSTOMER #1

It was so good.

LUNCH CUSTOMER #2

The red tomato chutney. That's new.

LAKSHMI

Yes. Did you like it?

LUNCH CUSTOMER #2

Loved it.

LAKSHMI

Wonderful. See you next time.
(pressing her palms together)

Namaste.

AFTER THE PATRONS LEAVE, LAKSHMI SEES HER SON, RAVI (30), SEATED AT ONE OF THE REAR TABLES AND APPROACHES HIM. RAVI IS ABSORBED IN HIS MOBILE PHONE SCREEN.

LAKSHMI (CONT'D)

Didn't we have an interview scheduled?

With your friend?

HE CHECKS HIS WATCH.

RAVI

Yes. Ten minutes.

HIS PHONE BUZZES. HE CHECKS A TEXT.

RAVI (CONT'D)

That's her.

HE GETS UP AND HEADS FOR THE FRONT DOOR.

LAKSHMI

Her? I thought. You said his name was

Sammi? Her name?

ACT I

EXT. THE TAJ - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

SAMMI SHARMA (26) IS STANDING ON THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF THE RESTAURANT HOLDING HER PHONE. SIGNAGE ABOVE THE DOOR READS "THE TAJ", "NORTH INDIAN CUISINE". THE STREETFRONT FACADE RESEMBLES ARCHITECTURE AND INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE TAJ MAHAL.

SAMMI IS SMARTLY DRESSED AND HAS A SHOULDER BAG. RAVI EXITS AND THEY SHARE A FRIENDLY SMILE. AS THEY SPEAK TOGETHER, ANONYMOUS PEOPLE DO PASSES BACK AND FORTH ON THE SIDEWALK, SOME WITH FANCY-LOOKING SHOPPING BAGS.

RAVI LEANS IN FOR A HUG. SAMMI LEANS AWAY FROM HIM AND BLOCKS HIM WITH THE PALM OF HER HAND.

SAMMI

What are you doing? You're making out with me right here at two in the afternoon on Michigan Avenue? Seriously?

RAVI

Just a hug. I haven't seen you for over a week.

SAMMI

Brilliant, Ravi. I'm here to interview for a job. Suppose your parents walked out here, or what's her name suddenly appeared?

RAVI

Darshana.

SAMMI

Darshana, whatever.

RAVI

She's in New York.

SAMMI

I don't know. I think this is a mistake.

RAVI

No, it's not a mistake.

SAMMI

Are you going to be groping me? I mean, if I get this?

RAVI

I don't grope. It's just, I feel affection for you. Sammi, this is the perfect situation. We can see each other practically every day.

SAMMI

I don't know. It feels weird.

RAVI

It's not weird. He's going to pay the manager a good salary.

SAMMI

That does sounds better. I don't want to have to move. I love my place. Just no groping.

RAVI PLACES HIS HAND OVER HIS HEART.

RAVI

Promise. You're a bit early but that's good. Let's go in. My father, Arjuna. He can be difficult.

SAMMI

Define difficult.

RAVI

Well, you know, he's old world, traditional.

SAMMI

He's a chauvinist.

RAVI

Well I wouldn't put it in those terms,
exactly. Just, traditional.

SAMMI

I can be difficult too.

RAVI

Sammi.

SAMMI

Don't worry. Let's go.

RAVI HOLDS THE DOOR FOR HER AND THEY ENTER.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA

RAVI LEADS SAMMI THROUGH THE RESTAURANT TO THE BACK TABLE
WHERE LAKSHMI IS SEATED. SAMMI LAGS BEHIND, CHECKING OUT THE
RESTAURANT LAYOUT.

RAVI

Mummy, this is Sammi. She's here for
the interview. This is my mum,
Lakshmi.

LAKSHMI

Oh, well, so you're here to interview
for the manager's position?

SAMMI

Yes.

LAKSHMI

(nervously)

Yes, well, I see. Sit down, please.

Sammi?

RAVI REMAINS STANDING.

SAMMI
(nods)

I brought a resume.

LAKSHMI

Good. You can show it to my husband.

Arjuna. Ravi's father. So, how do you
know Ravi?

RAVI

We met...

SAMMI
(interrupting)

We met through mutual friends.

RAVI

At a trade show.

SAMMI

Business expo, at McCormick Place.

LAKSHMI

I see. Ravi, get your father.

RAVI HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN.

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

IN A TYPICAL COMMERCIAL RESTAURANT KITCHEN, WITH STAINLESS
STEEL EVERYTHING, ARJUNA (55) IS DOWN ON HIS KNEES, RUMMAGING
THROUGH THE REFRIGERATOR, PULLING ITEMS OUT. HIS LEAD COOK,
MIGUEL (35) IS LOOKING ON.

A LARGE POSTER OF THE ELEPHANT GOD, GANESH, IS PLASTERED ON
THE KITCHEN WALL NEAR THE DOOR LEADING INTO THE DINING AREA.
TWO YOUNG INDIAN KITCHEN WORKERS SHUFFLE AROUND IN THE
BACKGROUND.

ARJUNA

I know it's in here. You've got something in here. I can see the little green specks.

MIGUEL

It's just Parsley. Very benign.

RAVI WALKS IN AND OBSERVES THE TWO MEN.

ARJUNA

You're telling me...no...aha! Here it is. The evidence.

ARJUNA REACHES WAY IN THE BACK AND PULLS OUT A CLUMP OF GREEN LEAFY HERBS. HE STANDS AND SMELLS AND THEN BITES OFF SEVERAL LEAVES AND CHEWS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Coriander.

MIGUEL

Cilantro.

ARJUNA

It's tomato chutney, not salsa. Too much chili. And too chunky. Onion chunks and tomato chunks. Smooth. Chutney is smooth. Roasted tomatoes, garlic, chilies, tamarind, cumin seed, salt, vinegar, lemon, brown sugar...brown sugar optional. How can you mingle brown sugar with chunky onion?

MIGUEL

I was experimenting.

RAVI AND MIGUEL SHARE SYMPATHETIC LOOKS. RAVI SPOONS SOME CHUTNEY ONTO A PIECE OF CHAPATI AND SAMPLES.

ARJUNA

This isn't Pancho Villa's taco stand!

This is The Taj!

RAVI

Your interview appointment is here,
for the manager's position.

ARJUNA

Oh.

HE HEADS OUT TOWARD THE DINING AREA. RAVI APPEARS TO LIKE THE CHUTNEY.

RAVI

(to Miguel)

Warm up some chapatis and bring this
out.

RAVI FOLLOWS HIS FATHER OUT OF THE KITCHEN.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

ARJUNA WALKS TO THE TABLE WHERE LAKSHMI AND SAMMI ARE SITTING, FOLLOWED BY RAVI WHO IS STILL CHEWING CHAPATI. THE MUSIC HAS BEEN TURNED OFF.

ARJUNA

(to Sammi)

Hello.

(to Lakshmi)

He said my appointment is here. Sammi
somebody.

LAKSHMI

This is Sammi. She's here to interview
for the manager's position.

ARJUNA

She's a she.

SAMMI'S EYEBROWS GO UP.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

This is for restaurant manager. I'm
opening another location in Skokie and
I need someone to manage here. He said
Sammi. That's your name?

SAMMI SMILES AND NODS. ARJUNA AND RAVI SIT.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

I was thinking Sammy Sosa. You know,
my first location on Clark, he was a
regular. Chicken masala. Double order.
He was a big eater. The corked bat.
You know what happened, right?

SAMMI LOOKS CLUELESS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

The Tampa batboy. Smuggled it in.
Claimed he was paid off by the St.
Louis batboy. Wait, Cubs or Sox?

SAMMI STILL LOOKS CLUELESS. SHE LOOKS TO RAVI WHO MOUTHS,
'CUBS'.

SAMMI

Oh, Cubs for sure.

ARJUNA LOOKS RELIEVED.

ARJUNA

Baseball was derived from cricket.
George Washington played cricket. I
played cricket back in Delhi. Mid-
wicket and top batsman. We won a
trophy, my school team.

LAKSHMI

He was really something.

RAVI

I don't think baseball started off
with George Washington and cricket.

ARJUNA
(to Lakshmi)

See. Young people. Don't even know
their own history.

LAKSHMI

Shocking.

ARJUNA

They don't even teach history in
schools anymore. Who knows what they
teach? So how do you expect to manage
men? Everyone, we're all men here.

LAKSHMI CLEARS HER THROAT SUBTLY.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Lakshmi is our host.

MIGUEL EMERGES FROM THE KITCHEN WITH A PLATE OF WARM CHAPATIS
AND A BIG BOWL OF TOMATO CHUTNEY WITH SPOONS. ONE OF HIS
KITCHEN STAFF PASSES AROUND PLATES. RAVI AND LAKSHMI REACH
FOR CHAPATIS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)
(to Miguel)

How would you feel working for a
woman? You couldn't work for a woman.

MIGUEL SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND APPEARS LIKE HE'S ABOUT TO
ANSWER 'NO BIG DEAL'.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

See, I told you.

LAKSHMI

Lots of women are working in jobs now,
management jobs. Here in America.

LAKSHMI AND RAVI SAMPLE THE CHUTNEY ON A PIECE OF CHAPATI.

ARJUNA

Whatever happened to managing a family
and raising children? That's a job.

LAKSHMI
(to Miguel)

Oh, I like the chutney. Is this new?

MIGUEL

Special recipe.

ARJUNA TURNS AND GIVES MIGUEL A SCOWL. HE RETURNS TO THE
KITCHEN.

ARJUNA

Are you married?

SAMMI

The 2010 Equality Act restricts
employers from discriminating on the
basis of marital status.

ARJUNA

The Equality Act? That's a U.S. law?

SAMMI NODS. RAVI IS VISIBLY NERVOUS

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Well, this isn't America, in here.

When you walk into The Taj, you're in

India.

LAKSHMI AND RAVI BOTH LOOK NERVOUS. THEY NIBBLE ON THE CHUTNEY AND CHAPATIS. LAKSHMI HANDS ARJUNA SAMMI'S RESUME. HE READS THE HEADLINE.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Sammi. They think all you need is a man's name these days, and suddenly...

SAMMI

It's short for Samira.

ARJUNA

Oh, so what's wrong with Samira?

Samira is feminine. Are you married?

SAMMI

No.

ARJUNA

You should be married. Starting a family. My son here, Ravi, he's married. Ten years. But no family. No grandchildren. I asked him to manage here. But no, he says he has a career. Security guard.

RAVI

Cybersecurity engineer.

ARJUNA

Security guard. And my other son, he won't come in, won't follow in his father's footsteps. He'd rather sell used cars.

RAVI

(to Sammi)

He's the sales manager at the Glencoe Mercedes dealership.

LAKSHMI

We get employee discounts.

ARJUNA

A son is supposed to follow in his father's profession. It's tradition. Thousands of years. We're Brahmin. My grandfather, he had a famous restaurant in New Delhi. All of the big people met there, Congress Party, before partition. Nehru. Maulana Azad and Subhas Chandra Bose. All of the important meetings were there. And then at Gandhi's funeral, everyone was there.

RAVI

At the restaurant?

ARJUNA

No, at the funeral. Were you born here, or in India.

SAMMI

India. Gujarat.

ARJUNA

So, you're trying to get your green card? Is that why you're here?

SAMMI

I came here when I was three. I'm an American citizen.

ARJUNA

What about your parents? Are they in India?

SAMMI

No, actually they live here, in the Chicago area.

ARJUNA

What does your father do?

SAMMI

He has management experience.

ARJUNA

Maybe he'd be interested in managing The Taj.

SAMMI PICKS UP HER PHONE AND DIALS HER FATHER.

SAMMI

Why don't you ask him?

SHE HANDS HIM HER PHONE.

ARJUNA

Good idea. What's his name?

SAMMI

Jai Ram.

ARJUNA WAITS FOR THE PHONE TO PICK UP ON THE OTHER END.

ARJUNA

Hello Mr. Sharma, no this isn't Samira. I'm using her phone. This is Arjuna Patel. I own The Taj, on Michigan Avenue. The only Indian restaurant on Michigan Avenue.

WAITS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Good you've heard of us. Samira tells me you have management experience.

WAITS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Oh, I see. Well, we're expanding to a new location in Skokie and I'm hiring a manager to manage my flagship location here. And Samira thought, I thought, since you have management experience...oh, Doctor Sharma. I see...

(MORE)

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

You're the head pathologist for the North Shore pediatric hospital...Yes, of course, I can understand why that would keep you very busy...Going in for surgery...Oh, well, I don't want to keep you. Yes, I'll give her your best, yes...Goodbye Doctor Sharma, goodbye.

RAVI

Not interested in a career change?

ARJUNA

No. So why aren't you in health care?

SAMMI

Because I'm not my father.

ARJUNA

Yes, but...let me look at this.

HE BEGINS TO SCAN OVER HER RESUME.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

What makes you think you can manage a business?

SHE POINTS TO A SPOT ON HER RESUME.

SAMMI

Here.

ARJUNA

What's this? Kellogg School of Management?

SAMMI NODS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

So why aren't you working for them?

What is this, like, 'Cornflake U'?

Where is this, in Battle Creek? Is
this like McDonald's 'Hamburger U'?
(to Ravi)

You know, I always thought, if I ever
franchise the Taj, I could start a
'Curry U', or maybe a 'Samosa U', or
'Dal U'. Bring in the new franchisees.

RAVI

Kellogg School of Management is at
Northwestern papa. In Evanston.

ARJUNA

Oh, right here. Why do they call it
'Cornflake U'?

RAVI

They don't. You call it 'Cornflake U'.

SAMMI

It's Northwestern's business school.
(points to resume)

I have a master's degree. MBA.

ARJUNA

Oh, MBA. That's good. That's good. So,
why are you here? Why are you looking
for a job? I don't see much employment
here.

SAMMI

(points)

Those are mostly summer jobs.

ARJUNA

No restaurant experience.

SAMMI

Yes, right here. I worked as a server,
here and here.

ARJUNA

(reading)

Lou's Deep Dish. What's that?

SAMMI

Deep dish pizza. On Howard.

ARJUNA

Pizza. That isn't food.

RAVI

A lot of people in this city would
disagree.

SAMMI

(pointing)

I interned with Windy City Agency
while I was getting my master's.

ARJUNA

What do they do?

SAMMI

It's a marketing and advertising
agency. After I graduated in 2020, I
started my own marketing company.
Mostly digital and SEO.

ARJUNA

SEO?

RAVI

Search engine optimization.

SAMMI

I signed up some clients but then the lockdowns hit and everything dried up.

ARJUNA

It was tough here too. We delivered. Actually it was good. Now we have a delivery business. Hmmm. Well, I don't know. Managing men, the servers, Miguel, the kitchen staff, delivery drivers. And no restaurant experience. I don't know. I'll let you know.

SAMMI GIVES RAVI A DOWNTRODDEN LOOK. SHE BEGINS TO GATHER HER THINGS. LAKSHMI STANDS AND MOVES BEHIND SAMMI AND GETS ARJUNA'S ATTENTION. SHE NODS AFFIRMATIVELY. ARJUNA GETS THE HINT.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

But I guess we could start you out on a trial basis. See how it goes. You need to be trained. We can start today. The restaurant business, not an easy business. Purchasing, forecasting and spoilage... payroll and customer relations, advertising. We do a lunch buffet, then close 'til five. Seven days a week.

SAMMI BEAMS AT RAVI AND HE BEAMS BACK.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)
(slaps the table)

Trial basis.

LAKSHMI SMILES AND NODS HER APPROVAL.

ACT II

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - DAY

RAVI IS SITTING AT A FRONT TABLE, TYPING A MESSAGE ON HIS PHONE. LAKSHMI APPROACHES.

LAKSHMI

Now where is Darshana? Why isn't she here now, with you?

RAVI

The same reason she wasn't with me yesterday and the day before.

LAKSHMI

It's shameful. You have lost the love of your wife.

RAVI

I never had the love of my so-called wife.

LAKSHMI

You should have three children by now. Your brother Steve has two.

RAVI

Steve and Maya are in love. It helps.

LAKSHMI

So, where is she?

RAVI

In New York, I guess. With her cousin?

LAKSHMI

You guess. You guess? What kind of husband are you? Darshana is from one of the best families in Delhi. They own two factories. This was a dream marriage for you and for all of us.

RAVI

Nightmare is more like it. See, that's just it. I married a family, not a woman. Someone I had met only once. You know, she was in love with him, her boyfriend. And now, instead of blaming her family, she blames me.

LAKSHMI

But that's the husband's job, responsibility. To woo her, take the lead, be the man. Inspire her to love you. It's disgraceful, the two of you, living without each other. And no children.

FRUSTRATED, RAVI GETS UP AND WALKS OFF.

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

MIGUEL'S TWO KITCHEN WORKERS ARE BUSY PREPARING FOR DINNER, CHOPPING VEGETABLES AND PREPARING DISHES ON THE BURNERS.

THERE IS A GROUP OF CARDBOARD PRODUCE BOXES STACKED IN THE KITCHEN NEAR THE COOLER, AWAY FROM THE KITCHEN WORKERS.

MIGUEL IS STANDING TRANCELIKE IN FRONT OF THE GANESH POSTER.

RAVI ENTERS IN FROM THE DINING ROOM AND SPOTS MIGUEL. HE STANDS BESIDE HIM AND THEY BOTH REGARD GANESH.

MIGUEL

Who is he?

RAVI

Ganesh. One of my father's favorites.

MIGUEL

But I mean, who is he, what is he?

RAVI

An Indian god.

MIGUEL

A god. He's an elephant. With arms, four arms. He appears very noble.

RAVI

As a young boy, Ganesh was guarding his mother's house. Parvati. She was a goddess. When Shiva tried to enter the house, Ganesh blocked his entrance. So Shiva killed Ganesh. Then Lord Brahma came along and he took the head of a nearby elephant and attached it to Ganesh's body.

MIGUEL

So he was very brave.

RAVI

And wise. Ganesh is known as the god of wisdom. It's just mythology. Some people still believe in these things.

MIGUEL

He does look wise.

JUST THEN, RAVI HEARS SAMMI'S VOICE AS SHE SCREAMS OUT IN PAIN. HE TURNS AND SEES SAMMI DROP A PRODUCE BOX ONTO THE FLOOR NEAR THE STACK OF BOXES. SAMMI HOLDS HER LOWER BACK AND MOANS IN PAIN. RAVI HUSTLES OVER.

RAVI

What happened? Are you okay?

SAMMI

My back. I think I pinched something.

RAVI

What is this?

SAMMI

A delivery. I'm helping Arjuna unload an order.

RAVI

Here, sit down.

SAMMI SITS DOWN ON SOME BOXES, WINCES AND CONTINUES TO HOLD HER LOWER BACK.

SAMMI

It hurts.

RAVI

I'll rub your back later.

SAMMI

No.

SHE WINCES AGAIN.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Actually, yes. Why am I unloading
trucks?

ARJUNA COMES IN FROM OUTSIDE CARRYING ANOTHER PRODUCE BOX. HE
SETS IT DOWN NEAR SAMMI AND RAVI.

ARJUNA

Okay, last one. Now, these go into the
cooler.

SAMMI

I hurt my back.

ARJUNA

Oh.

RAVI
(to Arjuna)

I'll help.

RAVI PICKS UP TWO PRODUCE BOXES AND CARRIES THEM INTO THE
NEARBY COOLER.

SAMMI

Is this what you want me to do? Is
this the manager's job, loading and
unloading trucks?

ARJUNA

See? I was afraid of this. You know
what a restaurant manager does?

SAMMI

What?

ARJUNA

In the army, what does the general do?

SAMMI

Start wars?

ARJUNA

The general does everything. He knows everything. That's why he's the general. A restaurant manager knows everything, does everything.

SAMMI

Why can't one of the guys help you with this?

ARJUNA

Okay, I'll have them help. You go ahead and prepare tonight's chicken tambura. Go on.

SAMMI

But, I don't...

ARJUNA

See, that's my point. Eventually, you will know how to prepare chicken tambura, and everything else we serve here. You'll know everything. The manager is the floater. If the cook doesn't show up, the manager cooks. If the host is sick, the manager becomes the host. You have to know everything because you have to train your staff on everything.

SAMMI

The manager shouldn't have to do
labor.

ARJUNA

What do you think this is? The queen's
chamber? You want me to install a dais
and a throne so you can anoint
everyone with your diamond scepter
while they place tribute at your feet?

SAMMI

No, no, no. I didn't mean it like
that.

RAVI RETURNS AND PICKS UP ANOTHER BOX.

RAVI

I'll get these.

ARJUNA

(to Sammi)

Okay, come on. We'll go through the
office together.

ARJUNA HEADS INTO THE OFFICE AND SAMMI FOLLOWS, STILL HOLDING
HER LOWER BACK.

INT. THE TAJ - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

THE OFFICE IS CLUTTERED AND APPEARS A BIT DISORGANIZED. IT IS
A REASONABLE SIZE, BUT THE CLUTTER MAKES IT LOOK SMALLER.

THERE ARE NUMEROUS HISTORIC-LOOKING FRAMED BLACK AND WHITE
PHOTOS ON THE WALL AND TWO SMALL POSTERS OF INDIAN GODS.

THERE IS ONE PROMINENT DESK WITH AN EXECUTIVE CHAIR. THERE
ARE ALSO TWO SMALLER OFFICE-STYLE CHAIRS.

ARJUNA PULLS ONE OF THE OFFICE CHAIRS OVER NEAR THE DESK FOR
SAMMI AND THEN SITS BEHIND THE DESK.

SAMMI SITS AND BEGINS FIDDLING WITH ALL THE STUFF SITTING ON TOP OF THE DESK INCLUDING FOUR OLD SCHOOL ROLODEXES AND AN APPOINTMENT BOOK.

SAMMI

So, where do I work?

ARJUNA

In here.

SAMMI

I know but there's no work space for me.

ARJUNA

You can use the chair. When I'm not here, you can use the desk.

SAMMI

When are you here?

ARJUNA

Every day.

SAMMI

I need my own workspace. I can't work just sitting here on a chair.

ARJUNA

Okay.

HE FINDS AN OLD CARD TABLE BEHIND SOME CLUTTER, PULLS IT OUT, EXTENDS THE LEGS AND PLACES IT NEXT TO SAMMI.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

There. There's your desk.

SAMMI

A card table? Seriously? There's plenty of room in here for a second desk, if we just organize all this clutter.

ARJUNA

What clutter? Everything in here is perfectly organized. I know exactly where everything is.

SAMMI

Could have fooled me. I'll make some space for another desk.
(inspecting rolodexes)

What are these?

ARJUNA

What do you mean? You've never seen a rolodex before?

SAMMI

Uh, well, no I haven't, actually. What is it?

SHE CHECKS OUT SOME OF THE CARDS.

ARJUNA

Those are all our contacts, suppliers, customers, friends, association members, you know...

SAMMI

Why isn't all of this in a database?
This is the twenty-first century, last
time I checked.

ARJUNA

There are almost a thousand contacts
there. Who's going to type all of that
into a computer?

SAMMI

Why do you have four of them?

ARJUNA

Well, this one has the contacts from
the old location on Clark. And this
one is suppliers and competitors using
the name of the company or what they
sell. And this one is people, mostly
by their last name, but some by their
first name. And this one is phone
numbers outside of the Chicago area
codes.

SAMMI

Yeah, you've got it all organized. And
what's this?

SHE PICKS UP THE APPOINTMENT BOOK.

ARJUNA

Appointments. Time organizer.
Manager's time is very valuable, got
to keep the schedule straight,
meetings, appointments, calls, to-do
list...

SAMMI

I just stepped into nineteen eighty-
five.

ARJUNA

Eighty-five. That's when I opened on
Clark Street.

SAMMI

Right.

ARJUNA

Okay, I want to go over the books,
show you how everything is set up.

ARJUNA STANDS AND LIFTS TWO GIANT HEAVY LEDGER BOOKS OFF OF
THE TOP OF A METAL FILE CABINET AND PLOPS THEM DOWN ONTO THE
MIDDLE OF THE DESK.

SAMMI

Oh no, no, please. This is how you do
your accounting? In these old paper
ledgers? Oh no. Now I'm in the
twilight zone. You can't be serious.

ARJUNA

These are the same ledgers my
grandfather used in New Delhi. They
worked for him and they work for me.

SAMMI

Why don't you use Excel?

ARJUNA

What's Excel?

SAMMI

Who does your taxes?

ARJUNA

An old friend.

SAMMI

And you just hand him these.

ARJUNA SMILES LIKE A CHESHIRE CAT.

RAVI WALKS TO THE OFFICE DOOR AND STANDS IN THE DOORWAY.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Careful. This is the Wayback Machine.
It may not be safe for you in here.

RAVI

My father has his own system.

SAMMI

Can you help me move another desk in
here?

RAVI

Sure.

SAMMI

I need a twenty-first century
workspace.

ARJUNA

You see? Young people, always want to
change everything. When things work,
why change? Tradition.

RAVI

Sammi will help you modernize
everything.

SAMMI

Marketing, social media.

RAVI

You're only about fifty percent
capacity.

ARJUNA

Sixty-five before Covid.

SAMMI

We'll get it up over seventy.
(to Ravi)

Can you help me move some of this back
to the store room?

ARJUNA GETS UP ABRUPTLY AND WALKS OUT OF THE OFFICE. RAVI AND
SAMMI LOOK AT EACH OTHER, WONDERING WHY HE LEFT.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

LAKSHMI IS SETTING ALL OF THE TABLES FOR DINNER. A SLOW SITAR
RAGA IS QUIETLY PLAYING. ARJUNA WALKS UP, AGITATED.

ARJUNA

She's taking over in there.
Rearranging and...I won't know where
anything is. I need somebody older, a
man.

LAKSHMI

Arjuna, you need to upgrade,
modernize. She knows how to do all
that.

ARJUNA

But I don't feel like I can, you know,
tell her what to do. A man, I can just
say, do this and do that. No
questions. She questions everything.
And Ravi's no help. It's going to be
two against one.

LAKSHMI

Nobody's against anybody. Change is
sometimes awkward, painful. And pretty
soon, you're going to be spending a
lot of time in Skokie, getting
everything going. She needs to run
this her own way.

ARJUNA

Why her? I mean, you think she's, it's
a good idea, her?

LAKSHMI

Yes. I think there can be an advantage with a woman, especially in a situation like this. She'll work hard and commit herself to this to prove herself.

ARJUNA

You think so?

LAKSHMI SMILES AND NODS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

But, she's going to make a mess in there.

SAMMI WALKS OUT OF THE KITCHEN INTO THE DINING ROOM HOLDING SOME OLD DOCUMENTS. RAVI FOLLOWS BEHIND CARRYING A DOG-EARED CARDBOARD FILE STORAGE BOX.

SAMMI

You've got records here going back to 1990. You only need to keep financial records for seven years. It's just taking up space. It's a fire hazard.

ARJUNA
(exasperated)

Oh!

HE THROWS HIS HANDS UP IN THE AIR AND MARCHES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.

SAMMI

What...did I say something?

EXT. THE TAJ - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

RAVI AND SAMMI ARE STANDING, TALKING. THE 'OPEN' SIGN IS IN THE WINDOW.

RAVI

So, tomorrow's your first full day.

SAMMI

Do you think your father's going to be okay, I mean, with me managing?

RAVI

He'll be fine. The shock will wear off.

SAMMI

At first, I thought he was going to say no and then, all of a sudden he said yes.

RAVI

That was my mother.

SAMMI

Oh. So, I get it. He's the marionette.

RAVI

She's the family puppeteer. Keep that under your hat. This is perfect, I mean, it will give them both a chance to get to know you and then eventually...

SAMMI

This is just so bizarre. Almost half of American marriages end in divorce. It's the norm, practically.

RAVI

They're traditional.

SAMMI

They're Medieval.

RAVI

Arranged marriages, it's two families getting the divorce, not just two people. It's traumatic.

SAMMI

Like Dorothy said, "Toto, we're not in India anymore".

RAVI

Like my father said, in there, it is India.

SAMMI

Well, thank you, especially the job.

SAMMI PLACES HER PALM ON RAVI'S CHEST.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Eight PM. Back rub. My place.

RAVI

Yes sir, boss lady.

SAMMI SMILES, WINKS AND WALKS OFF.

THE BIRTHDAY CAKE S1: E2

THE TAJ

S1:E2 - "The Birthday Cake"
(Second episode in the series)

THE TAJ

FADE IN:

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - DAY

LAKSHMI IS STANDING NEAR THE ENTRANCE AT THE RECEPTION STAND. LUNCH CUSTOMERS ARE ENTERING AND LEAVING. A MAN AND A WOMAN (40) IN BUSINESS ATTIRE ENTER.

LAKSHMI

Hello. Welcome. You've been here
before, I think?

WOMAN

I have.

MAN

First time for me.

LAKSHMI

You can sit anywhere. Help yourself to
the buffet. It's all you can eat. And
the server will get your drinks.

WOMAN

Thanks.

ARJUNA ENTERS WEARING HIS CUBS CAP. HE IS DISHEVELED AND APPARENTLY DISTRAUGHT. HE REMOVES HIS CAP AND WIPES HIS BROW.

LAKSHMI

Where have you been? I thought you
said an hour.

SHE CHECKS HER WATCH.

ARJUNA

In any normal city, an hour. But in
this upside down, dysfunctional...

LAKSHMI

What was the problem? The lines? Your
paperwork?

ARJUNA

Traffic. What is that?

LAKSHMI

What do you mean?

ARJUNA

Bollywood? We play classical here.
What's with the Bollywood?

LAKSHMI

Well, Sammi wanted to...

ARJUNA

(interrupts)

Oh, say no more.

LAKSHMI

So, what happened, with the traffic?

ARJUNA

Okay, so I take Ontario, like I always do, and it feeds into Ohio and then onto the Kennedy on ramp.

LAKSHMI

Right.

ARJUNA

But as soon as I get to the river, bang! Everything stops.

LAKSHMI

Oh no.

ARJUNA

And I'm trying to figure out what's going on. There's a cop car up there, taking up a whole lane on the bridge.

LAKSHMI

Maybe somebody jumped.

ARJUNA

Probably. It's a mess, semis, a big dump truck, and then an ambulance is trying to fight through from the other direction... so I'm crawling along. I finally make my way over the bridge. I see the on ramp. But the Kennedy overpass, it's stopped. It's a parking lot. I mean, not moving, at all.

(MORE)

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

So then I figure, okay, I'll jump on Milwaukee Avenue, cause it parallels Elston.

LAKSHMI

Good thinking.

ARJUNA

Right. So I make a quick jog up one block on Halsted and then left one block and I'm on Milwaukee. Why do they put the DMV out in the middle of nowhere? Why can't they put it downtown or on the West Side? It's halfway to Wisconsin out there.

LAKSHMI

It is a long way.

ARJUNA

So, I'm cruising up Milwaukee Avenue. And it's stoplights, but we're moving. And then when I get to Pulaski, I go right to jog up a few blocks to pick up Elston.

LAKSHMI

Right.

ARJUNA

But when I get to Elston, it's a no left turn there, I forgot, but up one block, you can jog left on Montrose.

(MORE)

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

That's how you do that. But at
Montrose, then it's no left turn!

LAKSHMI

Why?

ARJUNA

They're paving Montrose. It's a mess.
All that hot tar... it gets on the car
and everything.

LAKSHMI

What did you do?

ARJUNA

Well, okay, so I go up to Bryn Mawr to
cut over.

LAKSHMI

Why didn't you use Foster?

ARJUNA

Foster's always slow. I hate Foster.
It goes down to one lane in places. So
I figure, I'll outsmart the traffic
and go over on Bryn Mawr and then come
into Elston from above through the
forest preserve, and the DMV is right
there.

LAKSHMI

Did that work?

ARJUNA

Uh, no. Bryn Mawr dead-ends before you get to Elston. And you know where it dead-ends? In a cemetery!

LAKSHMI

Great place for a dead end. So, then what?

ARJUNA

Back to Foster. I hate Foster. And then I finally get to the DMV and I'm late for my appointment. I had to get in line. I'm starving.

LAKSHMI

I'll get you some coffee.

LAKSHMI HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN. ARJUNA GOES OVER TO THE BUFFET LINE WHERE HE FINDS RAVI LOADING UP A PLATE. THE OTHER CUSTOMERS ARE ALL SEATED. ARJUNA GRABS A PLATE AND CHECKS EVERYTHING OUT. HE POINTS.

ARJUNA

(to Ravi)

What's this?

RAVI

I think its a dhokla, cauliflower and chick peas.

ARJUNA

Where's the mutton? It's Wednesday. We have mutton rara on Wednesday. And no tandoori chicken. Did Jewel run out of chicken? What's this?

ARNUNA PICKS UP A THIN, DRY, CRISPY FLATBREAD AND CRUSHES IT, SPLINTERING IT INTO PIECES.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

No naan! What's going on here? What happened to my buffet? It's been hijacked!

ARNUNA HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN. RAVI FOLLOWS. AS HE APPROACHES THE DOOR, LAKSHMI EXITS THE KITCHEN WITH HIS COFFEE.

LAKSHMI

Your coffee.

ARJUNA STORMS PAST HER. LAKSHMI REGARDS RAVI CURIOUSLY.

LAKSHMI (CONT'D)

What?

RAVI

Changes.

LAKSHMI

Oh, the buffet. Oh dear.

LAKSHMI FOLLOWS THE TWO MEN INTO THE KITCHEN.

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN

ARJUNA, RAVI AND LAKSHMI HEAD TOWARD MIGUEL. MIGUEL HAS A RED DOT ON HIS FOREHEAD.

ARJUNA
(to Miguel)

What happened to the buffet? No mutton, no tandoori chicken. What's going on?

MIGUEL IS NERVOUS, TRYING NOT TO BLAME SAMMI BUT HE HAS NO CHOICE.

MIGUEL

Well, uh, she... had some recipes,
and...

ARJUNA

She!

HE HEADS FOR THE OFFICE, ADJACENT TO THE KITCHEN, AND EVERYONE NERVOUSLY FOLLOWS. INSIDE, SAMMI IS AT HER DESK SPEAKING ON THE LANDLINE PHONE.

HER DESK IS COMPARABLE IN SIZE TO ARJUNA'S DESK AND THE TWO DESKS ARE BUTTED UP AGAINST EACH OTHER SO THAT THE TWO OF THEM ARE FACING EACH OTHER WHEN SEATED.

ARJUNA STORMS IN AND RAVI FOLLOWS BEHIND. LAKSHMI STANDS IN THE DOORWAY AND MIGUEL HIDES BEHIND HER.

MIGUEL

(to Sammi)

Where's my restaurant?!

SAMMI

(into the phone)

I'll have to call you back.

SHE HANGS UP.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

(to Arjuna)

Your restaurant. I don't understand.

ARJUNA

My restaurant, The Taj, it's been
hijacked! Call the police!

SAMMI LOOKS TO RAVI FOR SUPPORT.

SAMMI

What?

ARJUNA

It's Wednesday. We serve mutton on Wednesday. And no tandoori chicken. We always serve tandoori chicken. Every day. That's our specialty.

SAMMI

Oh right. I decided to switch things up a little bit.

ARJUNA

Switch things up. What's with the Bollywood? There's no naan out there. No chapatis. Just these crackery, frisbee things.

RAVI

Papadum.

ARJUNA

Papa, whatever. There's no bread. What do you expect people to eat?

SAMMI

Papadum is light, with seeds, it isn't heavy like breads. Less calories.

ARJUNA

What the hell's wrong with calories?!

LAKSHMI

Arjuna.

ARJUNA

There's just a bunch of vegetables out there. What are people supposed to eat?

SAMMI

Vegetables?

ARJUNA

Vegetables! These guys from the board of trade, you know what they trade all day?

SAMMI SHAKES HER HEAD WITH A CLUELESS LOOK.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Cattle, hogs, pork bellies. You're going to turn all of these people into vegetarians?

SAMMI

Well, vegetarian diet is actually very healthy.

ARJUNA

You know what they eat for breakfast?

SAMMI IS CLUELESS.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Vegans!

SAMMI

I just thought that introducing some Gujarati dishes would be nice for a change. Gujarati food is much healthier.

ARJUNA

Healthier? Who says? This isn't a health spa. It's a restaurant. When was the last time you were outside, in front of the restaurant?

SHE CHECKS HER WATCH.

SAMMI

I don't know, two hours ago?

ARJUNA

And what does it say out there?

SAMMI

The Taj?

ARJUNA

What else?

SAMMI IS CLUELESS.

RAVI

North Indian cuisine.

ARJUNA

North Indian cuisine.

SAMMI

Well, Gujarat is north.

ARJUNA

Gujarati food is Gujarati food. It isn't North Indian.

SAMMI

Well, it isn't Tamil. It's more north than south.

ARJUNA

You're missing the point. It's completely different.

SAMMI

Yes, and better. That's why I put some Gujarati dishes out on the buffet.

ARJUNA

Better! According to whom?

SAMMI IS STUCK.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

The Taj is a North Indian restaurant, not a Gujarati restaurant. If you go outside on the sidewalk and stop people out there. How many of them know where North India is?

SAMMI

Most of them, I guess.

ARJUNA

All of them. You know how many of them know where Gujarat is?

SAMMI IS STUCK AGAIN.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

None of them. They don't even know what you're talking about. What's a Gujarat? They'll say 'gesundheit'. They'll think you sneezed. What's the most famous landmark in Gujarat?

SAMMI

I don't know, maybe the Rani Ka Vav stepwell.

ARJUNA

A stepwell. A fancy hole in the ground. What percentage of people in Chicago have heard of the Rani Ka Vav?

SAMMI

I don't know...

ARJUNA

Zero. What percentage of people in this city know what the Taj Mahal is?

SAMMI IS STARTING TO SWEAT.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

One hundred percent. Do you want to attract the attention of one hundred percent of the people in this city or zero percent? I thought you were a marketing genius.

SAMMI

I'm not trying to change everything. I just wanted to introduce some new dishes. Some healthy, vegetarian dishes.

ARJUNA

We have healthy vegetarian dishes and we also serve meat dishes. This isn't Ahmedabad or Surat.

SAMMI

I'm sorry.

ARJUNA

And Bollywood? We play classical music here. Ragas. Slow and medium movements. Mostly slow. This isn't a movie theater.

SAMMI

Well, there's some research, I just read this, about music tempos and restaurant turnover. And faster tempos speed up how fast people eat, how long they stay, so faster tempos increase your turnover.

ARJUNA

I'm not trying to get people out of here. I'm trying to get them in here!

LAKSHMI

Arjuna, maybe we should add some Gujarati dishes, especially for the buffet. We won't have to change the menu and vegetarian food is becoming more popular all the time.

RAVI

Yeah, and besides, Americans don't know the difference.

ARJUNA

I know the difference. And the Indians who eat here know the difference.

RAVI

Not the young ones.

ARJUNA

Alright, fine. But we have to serve meat. This is Chicago!

LAKSHMI CHECKS HER WATCH.

LAKSHMI

(to Arjuna)

Why don't you grab some lunch before they break down the buffet.

ARJUNA

Right.

HE LEAVES THE OFFICE AND MIGUEL SCAMPERS OUT OF HIS WAY.

LAKSHMI

I'll get you some fresh coffee.

SAMMI

(to Ravi)

I didn't think it was such a big deal.

RAVI

Everything is a big deal. The Taj,
it's like his child. He wants to
standardize everything. He's got this
big franchising dream.

LAKSHMI STEPS IN.

LAKSHMI

(to Sammi)

You know about tonight, right?

SAMMI

Arjuna's birthday.

LAKSHMI

And we've invited friends. About a
dozen. Nine PM. After it starts to
thin out. We'll set up a big table at
the back. Miguel's working on
everything.

SHE CHECKS HER WATCH.

LAKSHMI (CONT'D)

Oh, two PM. I need to be out there.

LAKSHMI LEAVES THE OFFICE, WALKS THROUGH THE KITCHEN TOWARD
THE DOORS INTO THE DINING AREA. AS SHE REACHES THE DOORS, TWO
KITCHEN WORKERS ARE CARRYING SERVING PLATTERS BACK INTO THE
KITCHEN FROM THE BUFFET.

SAMMI

(to Ravi)

How old? Arjuna?

RAVI

Fifty six.

SAMMI

Fifty six. I better check with Miguel.

SAMMI GETS UP AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. RAVI FOLLOWS. SAMMI FINDS MIGUEL STANDING IN FRONT OF THE BIG POSTER OF THE ELEPHANT GOD, GANESH. MIGUEL IS MOTIONLESS, STARING, AS IF HE'S IN SOME KIND OF TRANCE.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Miguel.

SHE WAITS FOR HIM TO RESPOND.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Miguel?

MIGUEL DOESN'T RESPOND. SAMMI WAVES HER HAND IN FRONT OF HIS FACE. RAVI LOOKS ON WITH KEEN INTEREST.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

Miguel, you okay? Hello.

MIGUEL RESPONDS, SPEAKING SLOWLY.

MIGUEL

Yes, yes, I'm fine. It's just, it's strange. I have a kind of strange feeling. I had this dream last night.

RAVI

About Ganesh?

MIGUEL

Yes, and he embraced me.

RAVI

Embraced you?

MIGUEL

Yes with his trunk, or actually two trunks. He had two trunks and they were like arms and he embraced me.

SAMMI

Wow.

RAVI

Yeah.

MIGUEL

And then when I woke up this morning, it felt like, I felt like he was still embracing me. Like he was right behind me... or actually, inside of me.

SAMMI

That is strange.

RAVI

Inside of you. What do you mean?

MIGUEL

Well, so like right now, if I just look at the blank white wall, it's like Ganesh is looking, and I'm looking too. I can kind of see a faint outline of him in my vision as I look.

SAMMI

Oh my god.

MIGUEL

What's happening?

RAVI

I have no idea.

MIGUEL

I think, actually, I think I'm an elephant. Or I'm Ganesh. Plus I'm myself. I don't feel like just a person any more. I think like an elephant. I feel like an elephant.

RAVI

(to Sammi)

We need to speak with my mother about this.

SAMMI

(to Miguel)

Can you continue to work? We have to get ready for dinner and we have Arjuna's birthday party tonight.

MIGUEL

Oh yes, that won't be a problem.

MIGUEL TURNS AND THEN MOVES HIS ARM LIKE HE'S MOVING SOMETHING OUT OF HIS WAY.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

As long as my trunk doesn't get in the way. I should be fine.

RAVI AND SAMMI GIVE EACH OTHER A LOOK LIKE, WHAT THE?... THEY EXIT OUT OF THE KITCHEN AND INTO THE DINING ROOM.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - DAY - CONTINUOUS

RAVI AND SAMMI ENTER THE DINING ROOM AND SEE LAKSHMI UP NEAR THE FRONT DOOR. ARJUNA IS SITTING AT THE BACK TABLE SIPPING COFFEE AND READING THE PAPER. THE LUNCH CUSTOMERS HAVE ALL LEFT. THEY HUSTLE UP TO LAKSHMI.

RAVI
(to Lakshmi)

Miguel has had some kind of
experience.

LAKSHMI
Experience. That's nice.

SAMMI
No, it's weird, or...

RAVI
He's imagining, or hallucinating,
or...

LAKSHMI
Hallucinating? Oh dear. What sort of
hallucination? Is he on drugs?

RAVI
No it's...

SAMMI
He thinks he's Ganesh.

LAKSHMI
Oh my word! That's absurd. He's not
even Hindu. He's catholic or
something.

SAMMI
No, I think this might be like he's
identifying as an elephant, or he's
identifying as Ganesh, you know, like
some people identify as another
gender.

LAKSHMI

Like trans, you mean like that?

SAMMI

Exactly.

RAVI

There was a kid on CNN who identified as a cat. And he was like, meowing in school all day. He even brought cat food to school in his lunchbox.

LAKSHMI

Well no one can actually be a cat or an elephant. He's probably just going through a phase.

SAMMI

An elephant phase?

LAKSHMI

Yes. Children do and think all kinds of outrageous things.

RAVI

But Miguel's not a child. Something's really going on with him.

LAKSHMI

He's probably just having fun with you. He's pulling your leg.

SAMMI

(to Ravi)

Do elephants have any kind of special pronouns?

SUDDENLY, A DEAFENING ROAR OF A BULL ELEPHANT COMING FROM THE KITCHEN SHAKES THE ENTIRE RESTAURANT. ARJUNA DROPS HIS COFFEE CUP. LAKSHMI, SAMMI AND RAVI TURN AND STARE TOWARD THE KITCHEN DOORS, WIDE-EYED.

ARJUNA

What the hell was that?

ARJUNA GETS UP AND MARCHES INTO THE KITCHEN. THE OTHER THREE FOLLOW.

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

ONE OF THE COOKS HAS SPILLED A POT OF SOUP ONTO THE FLOOR.

ARJUNA

What happened?

MIGUEL

He bumped into my trunk. And the dal spilled.

ARJUNA

Your trunk. What trunk? What are you talking about?

RAVI

Miguel is an elephant, or he's Ganesh.

ARJUNA

Have all you people lost your senses? How can he be something that doesn't exist. And what was that loud roar? It sounded like an elephant. Do you have a recording of an elephant in here somewhere?

MIGUEL

No, that was me. I didn't mean to yell. It's just, now we have to make the dal all over again.

SAMMI

He thinks he's Ganesh.

RAVI

Or he's channeling Ganesh.

ARJUNA

(to Miguel)

Miguel, I think you need the rest of the day off.

MIGUEL

No really, I'm fine.

ARJUNA

Come with me. Let's talk about this up front.

ARJUNA HEADS FOR THE DINING ROOM DOORS AND MIGUEL FOLLOWS. WHEN MIGUEL TRIES TO PASS THROUGH THE DOORWAY, HE HESITATES AND PULLS HIS HANDS AGAINST HIS HEAD.

MIGUEL

(to Ravi and Sammi)

I have to squeeze my ears through.

RAVI, SAMMI AND LAKSHMI FOLLOW BEHIND.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

ARJUNA HEADS FOR HIS FAVORITE TABLE. LAKSHMI WIPES UP THE SPILLED COFFEE.

ARJUNA

(to Miguel)

Here sit down.

MIGUEL SITS AND THE REST STAND TO OBSERVE AND LISTEN.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)

Now what's all this, elephant
business?

SAMMI

He identifies as an elephant.

ARJUNA

What do you mean he identifies as an
elephant? That's preposterous.

RAVI

It's not, actually. Sometimes people
identify with things other than
themselves.

ARJUNA SHAKES HIS HEAD IN DISBELIEF.

ARJUNA
(to Miguel)

I'll make an appointment for you with
Doctor Singh. He's a psychiatrist.
He'll help you sort this out.

MIGUEL

No, really, I'm fine. I just need to
be more careful in there, with my
trunk.

ARJUNA IS BEWILDERED.

ARJUNA

Your trunk. Okay, just go back to work
and we'll talk about this later.

MIGUEL NODS, SMILES AND HEADS TOWARD THE KITCHEN DOORS. AS HE GOES THROUGH, HE PLACES HIS HANDS AGAINST HIS HEAD AGAIN.

RAVI
(to Arjuna)

He has to be careful with his ears
when he goes through doorways.

ARJUNA
Did something happen that I don't know
about? Is there LSD in the water
supply or something? I know. This is
all a prank, right? Where's the
camera?

SAMMI
Miguel has had an enlightenment, an
epiphany of self-realization.

ARJUNA
I need to get out of here.

ARJUNA GETS UP AND STRETCHES.

ARJUNA (CONT'D)
I'm going to walk to Navy Pier. Get
some fresh air. Clear my head.
Identify with some pigeons.

LAKSHMI
Good idea. It'll give you some
exercise.

ARJUNA HEADS FOR THE FRONT DOOR AND EXITS THE RESTAURANT.

LAKSHMI (CONT'D)

Good. That'll give us some time to get everything ready for tonight.

LATER:

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN - NIGHT

SAMMI IS SEATED AT HER DESK IN THE OFFICE ADJACENT TO THE KITCHEN. RAVI ENTERS.

SAMMI

Is it busy out there?

RAVI

Average for this time of night. Party of six just left.

SAMMI

Has everyone arrived for Arjuna's birthday celebration?

RAVI

Yeah, they've started to serve.

SAMMI

What about the cake? Is it ready?

RAVI

Miguel's working on it.

SAMMI

Let's see.

SHE HEADS OUT OF THE OFFICE TOWARD MIGUEL WHO IS ICING THE LARGE CAKE WITH A BIG ICING SPATULA. RAVI FOLLOWS.

SAMMI (CONT'D)
(to Miguel)

You baked that here?

MIGUEL

(nods)

Barely fit in our oven.

SAMMI REACHES INTO THE LARGE MIXING BOWL WITH HER FOREFINGER TO SAMPLE THE ICING.

SAMMI

Mmm, yummy.

AS SHE TASTES IT, SHE COUGHS AND HER EYES GO WIDE. SHE MAKES A FACE.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

What is that? What's that taste?

MIGUEL

What does it taste like?

SAMMI

You don't know?

MIGUEL

(shakes head)

Lakshmi gave me a bag of flavoring powder and I just mixed it in.

RAVI

Let me see.

HE SCOOPS SOME ICING OUT OF THE BOWL WITH HIS FINGER, TASTES IT AND MAKES A FACE.

RAVI (CONT'D)

Yuk. That's curry. Curry icing?

SAMMI SCOOPS OUT SOME MORE ICING AND TASTES.

SAMMI

Hot curry. It's horrible. Who ever heard of curry icing?

RAVI

This has to be a mistake. We always use ginger icing. I bet Lakshmi got the herb bottles mixed up.

SAMMI

(to Ravi)

We should switch to ginger, you think?

RAVI

Definitely.

SAMMI

(to Miguel)

Okay, you start a new batch of icing but with ginger and I'll scrape this off.

MIGUEL

Okay.

SAMMI STARTS SCRAPING OFF THE ICING WITH THE SPATULA.

SAMMI

(to Ravi)

Go see what's going on out there.

SHE CHECKS HER WATCH.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

It's almost nine thirty.

RAVI HEADS OUT OF THE KITCHEN. MIGUEL GETS BUSY MAKING THE NEW BATCH OF ICING WHILE SAMMI CAREFULLY SCRAPES THE CURRY ICING OFF OF THE CAKE.

A MOMENT LATER, RAVI RETURNS.

RAVI

They're halfway through the meal already.

SAMMI

Where's Lakshmi?

RAVI

She's busy with customers and party
guests.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

ARJUNA IS AT THE HEAD OF THE LONG BANQUET TABLE HOLDING COURT AND ENJOYING THE MEAL WITH HIS GUESTS, WHO ARE A MIX OF RACES. LAKSHMI PLAYS HOSTESS AS SERVERS POUR WATER AND REMOVE PLATES.

ONE OF ARJUNA'S MALE FRIENDS, WITH AN ENGLISH ACCENT, RISES AND CLINKS HIS GLASS.

MALE FRIEND

I'd like to propose a toast to my
longtime friend, Arjuna Patel, a most
gracious host, consummate
entrepreneur, and a genuine, jolly
good fellow.

THE MEN RISE AND EVERYONE SAYS, HEAR, HEAR, AND THEY DRINK A TOAST. THE MEN SIT AND EVERYONE CHATS QUIETLY, AS SERVERS REMOVE MORE PLATES.

LAKSHMI GETS EVERYONE'S ATTENTION.

LAKSHMI

I hope you liked everything. We're
experimenting with some new dishes.
They're Gujarati. Our new manager is
from Gujarat.

EVERYONE SMILES AND NODS GRACIOUSLY.

LATER:

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN - NIGHT

SAMMI AND RAVI ARE STANDING WITH MIGUEL NEXT TO THE CAKE.
KITCHEN STAFF GO IN AND OUT WITH PLATES AND BOWLS.

SAMMI

How come you weren't out there?

RAVI

We're going to have a celebration
tomorrow at home. My brother and his
family are coming.

LAKSHMI ENTERS THE KITCHEN AND SPOTS THE CAKE.

LAKSHMI

Oh good, we're ready for dessert. We
decided against candles. Too many.

SHE TAKES HER FOREFINGER AND SWIPES THE ICING FOR A TASTE.
SHE GRIMACES.

LAKSHMI (CONT'D)

This isn't curry! This is ginger. What
happened to the curry?

RAVI

You wanted curry icing?

LAKSHMI

Yes!

SAMMI

How can you... why curry?

LAKSHMI

Arjuna said he wanted to have curry
icing this time. I gave Miguel the
powder.

MIGUEL HUMBLY TAKES THE BLAME WITH HIS REACTION BUT RAVI CUTS IN.

RAVI

We switched. It was originally curry
but I thought there was some mistake.
We re-iced it with ginger.

LAKSHMI

Well you have to change back. And
quickly! They're almost finished out
there!

MIGUEL

I'll mix up some more.

MIGUEL SCRAMBLES TO GRAB THE INGREDIENTS.

SAMMI

I'll spatula this off.

SAMMI GETS TO WORK, SCRAPING THE ICING OFF.

RAVI

Where's the curry?

LAKSHMI

Oh, oh dear. Let's see. I think
there's some in the office. Let me
look.

RAVI GOES TO THE DOOR TO PEER OUT TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON.

RAVI

We need to hurry. They're just sitting
around, talking.

LAKSHMI EXITS THE OFFICE WITH A BAG OF POWDER.

LAKSHMI

Miguel, here.

MIGUEL IS JUGGLING CONTAINERS. HE TURNS AND SUDDENLY A METAL TRAY FLIES OFF OF THE COUNTER AND ONTO THE FLOOR.

MIGUEL

Oh sorry, my trunk.

ONE OF THE KITCHEN STAFF QUICKLY CLEANS UP. LAKSHMI GIVES MIGUEL AN INCREDULOUS LOOK AND WRINGS HER HANDS NERVOUSLY.

MIGUEL TAKES THE POWDER AND STARTS MEASURING INGREDIENTS INTO THE MIXING BOWL.

LAKSHMI

I'll get coffee going. That will slow things down.

SHE EXITS THE KITCHEN INTO THE DINING AREA.

MIGUEL TURNS ON THE MIXER AND IT BEGINS TO TURN AND HUM.

SAMMI

(to Ravi)

What's with the curry icing?

RAVI

My father has some strange tastes.

Sometimes he tries things just to get attention, I think.

SAMMI

It tastes... horrible.

RAVI ROLLS HIS EYES AND SHAKES HIS HEAD.

SAMMI (CONT'D)

(to Miguel)

How's that coming?

MIGUEL

Almost.

LAKSHMI RUSHES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.

LAKSHMI

They're about to sing...

AS SHE SAYS SING, THEY HEAR THE GUESTS BEGIN TO SING HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ARJUNA.

SAMMI

Oh no, hurry.

MIGUEL PULLS THE BOWL OFF OF THE MIXER AND RAVI AND SAMMI BEGIN NERVOUSLY SCOOPING OUT ICING AND LATHERING IT ONTO THE CAKE. THEY FINISH JUST AS THE SINGING FINISHES AND THE GUESTS APPLAUD.

LAKSHMI

Miguel, you carry it out.

MIGUEL GRABS THE CAKE AND WALKS TOWARD THE DOOR, WITH SAMMI AND RAVI BEHIND HIM. HE STOPS AT THE DOOR.

MIGUEL

(to Ravi)

Get my ears.

RAVI PRESSES HIS HANDS AGAINST THE SIDES OF MIGUEL'S HEAD AND THEY ALL EXIT OUT OF THE KITCHEN.

INT. THE TAJ - DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

MIGUEL CARRIES THE CAKE OVER AND PLACES IT IN FRONT OF ARJUNA. LAKSHMI STEPS IN WITH A BIG CAKE KNIFE. A SERVER STANDS AT THE READY TO TAKE PIECES FROM HER AND PLACE THEM IN FRONT OF GUESTS.

THE GUESTS CHIT CHAT AS THE CAKE IS SERVED TO EVERYONE.

SAMMI AND RAVI STAND OFF TO THE SIDE TO WATCH THE REACTION OF THE GUESTS TO THE ICING. LAKSHMI IS THE FIRST TO TEST.

LAKSHMI

Oh, Miguel, this is so good.

THE REST OF THE GUESTS BITE INTO THEIR PIECES WITH A VARIETY OF STRANGE REACTIONS. A COUPLE OF GUESTS DISCREETLY SCRAPE THE ICING OFF TO THE SIDE.

ARJUNA

Delicious.

GUEST #1
(clears his throat)

The icing, it's different.

ARJUNA

Curry. Ginger cake and curry icing. My
invention.

GUEST #2
(with broken voice)

Spicy. Very unusual.

THE GUESTS POLITELY CONGRATULATE ARJUNA ON THE UNIQUE CHOICE OF FLAVORS, AS THEY HIDE PIECES IN THEIR GLASSES AND SCRAPE ICING OFF TO THE SIDE.

SAMMI ELBOWS RAVI GENTLY IN HIS SIDE AND MOTIONS FOR HIM TO FOLLOW. THEY RETURN BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.

INT. THE TAJ - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

THEY SNICKER AS THEY HEAD INTO THE OFFICE. SAMMI SITS AT HER DESK. RAVI SITS IN ARJUNA'S DESK AND PUTS HIS FEET UP.

SAMMI

Your father. He does some strange
things.

RAVI

He's a free thinker.

SAMMI

A free-thinking traditionalist. What
do you think is going on with Miguel?

RAVI

I don't know. Maybe tequila poisoning?

THEY LAUGH.

SAMMI

Like your mother said, it's probably
just a phase. His elephant phase.

RAVI

I hope he doesn't turn into Shiva. He
might burn the place down.

SAMMI

I think it's all about Ganesh.

RAVI

I think we should make out.

SAMMI

Ravi! Someone might come back here.

RAVI GETS UP AND GOES FOR THE LIGHT SWITCH.

RAVI

Exactly. The thrill of getting caught.

THE OFFICE GOES DARK.

SAMMI

Ravi!
(amorously)

Ravi...