MERRY CHRISTMAS

A fragile comedy

RAMAMAN JAISWAL

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For My Deceased Father and My Loving Mother.

About The Author

Ramaman Jaiswal is a well-known theatre artist from Kolkata who has been actively involved in Hindi theatre for more than a decade as an actor, director, and writer. In 2017, he founded his own theatre group, 'Black Curtain Theatre', where he directed more than a dozen impactful plays that blended traditional and modern theatrical styles; he also wrote numerous plays of varying scales. The author's works have always uniquely portrayed the world through a blend of realism, absurdity, and imagination, creating stories that leave a lasting impact on audiences.

CHARACTERS

SIMRAN

SEJAL

REETIK

HARSH

The stage lights up dimly with an English song, 'Can't Help Falling in Love,' playing in the background. A woman in a black dress with a white bib apron over it is standing in front of the dining table, placed at the center stage— with two chairs placed on the opposite side and two in the corners. She unwraps a gift box and takes out a cell phone. She then, sad, starts dancing like a ballerina all over the stage. At last, she comes and sits smoothly on the left corner chair—places her hands on the dining table—then places her palms over her forehead and freezes. Lights and music slowly fade off. After some time, the stage illuminates again. A curated house sparkling with Christmas decorations. The woman, tense, is sitting on the same chair, with her phone in her hands, scrolling the reels endlessly. The doorbell rings. The woman, keeping her phone inside her apron's front pocket, rushes to the main door—placed upon a five-stair platform on the left downstage. She climbs and opens the door. A simple man enters with a royal blue shirt and black pants.

Reetik: *(Merrily)* MERRY CHRISTMAS…!

Simran: Uhh...

She goes and stands near the dining table, looking away from Reetik.

Reetik: *(Confusedly)* Hey...? What did I do now?!

He steps closer to Simran and taps on her shoulder.

"What…?"

Simran turns away further.

"Go on, say it…!"

Simran turns towards Reetik, hesitantly. "Actually... Umm... I mean... Yesterday... when I was heading back home with your Christmas gift... I was wondering what lie to tell Harsh about who gave me such an expensive diamond-plated phone... I couldn't figure it out... but then... I spotted a mobile store—and I got an

idea! I went inside the shop and spoke to the owner and said that... when my husband comes tomorrow, please give this gift to him and tell him that he won it in a lucky draw this Christmas. You see, my husband has been feeling a bit unlucky lately. "

Reetik: Very nice... Very good, good plan! So why are you worried, dear? *(bulging his eyes)* ...Did Harsh find out about us?

Simran: No, stupid...!

Reetik: So...?

After a pause, he bugged out again.

"...Did the shop owner refuse to hand over the phone?!"

Simran: No... he did hand over the phone, but...

Reetik: *(Irritably)* Then why are you worried, my dear...?

Simran: Actually...

She takes out another phone from her apron pocket and hands it to Reetik, anguishfully.

"He sent a Chinese phone instead of your diamond-plated phone!"

Reetik's cell phone rang out loudly. He took out his phone from his pants pocket, cut the incoming call, put the vibration mode on, and placed it back inside his pocket. He continued, devastated.

Reetik: Oh my god! Oh my god! What have you done, dear? ...That wasn't a normal phone... The back of the phone was encrusted with the rarest and purest 'Brono-doped' tiny diamonds! It was a 5-lakh-rupee phone...! *(He groans)* You've done something incredibly foolish!

Simran: Excuse me...? You praised me a moment ago.

Reetik: Yes... But you turned the whole thing into a silly mess with that 'Chinese twist' at the climax! I thought you were asking me to come over early to celebrate Christmas. If I'd known I was

walking into a situation where 'Madam' was playing the role of a 'Sad Santa', I wouldn't have come at all!

Simran: Reetik... That's enough of you!

Reetik: What was the need for all this? Why didn't you just bring it directly? You could have lied about a friend!

Simran: Oh, really...? What kind of friend would gift me a 5-lakh rupee phone with the rarest and purest 'boo-doo!' diamond on the back...

Reetik: It's Boron-doped...

Simran: WHATEVER...! But Harsh would have been 100% suspicious! That is why I thought this idea was the best.

Reetik gasps. "So now? What do we do? Do you have the owner's number?"

Simran: No... I was so stressed that I forgot to get the number.

Reetik: Wow... So now, what do we do?

Simran: Well... I was thinking that we should both go to his shop and talk nicely. Maybe he'd give it to us. He seemed like a decent man.

Reetik: Oh, really...?! And what if your 'decent man' doesn't give it? Then what?

Simran: Then we will fight! I will carry all my kitchenware.

Reetik: ***(Sarcastically)*** Wow... Kitchenware! ***(Holding his forehead)*** Can I get some coffee? I've got a bad headache, certainly.

Simran: Yeah, I'll make some!

Simran goes inside the right wing. Reetik gasps; he sits on the left corner chair and reflects on the trouble that has befallen him. His phone vibrates; he takes it out and cuts the incoming call angrily.

Reetik: Oh, come on, man. All the trouble was destined to strike on the very same day.

He throws the phone on the table. Simran comes and stands near the wing.

Simran: Did you say something?

Reetik gets up from the chair. " Ah... I mean... I was asking... when will Harsh be back?

Simran: Harsh has a meeting... He'd be late... What did you say to Sejal?

Reetik: The plan was to pick her up from her office at 5:30, and then go for ice cream. Since today is *'Madam Witch's Cheat Day...'* Where she eats for her inner demon! And then came here for the Christmas party with both of you. But you called up... so I told her that I had some urgent work to complete.

After a moment of silence.

Simran: *(Guilty)* So, what did Sejal say?

Reetik: *(Dramatically)* ' Oh, really...! HA-HA-HA! By the way... some work came up for me too... I was actually going to say no myself—Bye! '

Both giggle.

Simran: *(Going offstage)* Why do you treat the poor girl like that...?!

Reetik: POOR GIRL...?! *(to audience)* If anyone wants to see a TV-serial-style 'Vamp Wife....!' then they should come to my house! Honestly, I never imagined such wives ever existed in real life! And that... let alone I'd end up one with! ***He trills.***

Simran enters with a cup of coffee in her hand.

Simran: Ugh... That's terrible... Don't speak like that...

She gives the coffee to Reetik—Reetik sits on the right corner chair; Simran sits beside Reetik—holding his hand.

"Anyway... listen... look, I'm sorry. "

Reetik: *(After a sip)* Oh, let it be... For you, I'd happily take a loss of fifty—not just five!

Simran: No, no, I mean... because of me, your ice-cream plan with Sejal got cancelled, so...

Reetik: So...? Aren't you sorry about my gift getting stolen?!

Simran: Oh!

She grabs her head with both her hands. Reetik gasps in disappointment.

...I completely forgot about that! Look, let's just go once...

Reetik: Hey, take it easy...

Simran: Please...

Reetik: Look...! That phone doesn't matter... what matters is ensuring Harsh and Sejal do not find out about our relationship! And if that happens... then things will get even more complicated for all four of us. And things are already messy enough as it is...

Simran attempts to speak. Reetik overlaps.

Reetik: Listen to me...! See, I'm doing something terrible to Harsh... having an affair with my best friend's wife! But I can't help falling for you...! And now I don't want to lose you! And I'll do whatever it takes—lie, deceive, lose, anything to keep you in my life! So let it go... forget about the phone! *(Twirling the phone)* Besides... this 'Chinese phone' isn't bad either, is it?" *He chuckles.*

Simran smiles, upset.

Reetik: *(Concernedly)* What's wrong now?

Simran: This is all happening because of me... Everything is getting tangled up because of me!

(Pause) ...I used to be so ambitious and smart. But look... what this affair thing has turned me into. I feel so guilty and scared every

time, with the same thought that I am doing terrible things to Harsh and Sejal. I started all of this, and now I have no idea how to get out of it!

Reetik: 'We' started all this.

Simran: *(Delightfully)* See... You always give me positive vibes... that is the only thing I like so much about you! (*Getting sad)* ...And something that Harsh had stopped doing. *(Pause)* ...The very thought of what I'll do alone once you leave for London scares me. *(Pause)* ...Is it necessary for you to go to London?

Reetik: *(Irked)* We have discussed this before, Simran. If we want to live together, then yes! Look, A time will come when our relationship has to be revealed to everyone. And at that moment... I wouldn't be able to look into my best friend's eyes! ...or anyone. And that is why I am thinking of getting settled in London with you. And I need to leave to make all the arrangements... so that we could live there happily—far away from all this mental mess!

Simran: Yes... You are right; we have undone ourselves, and now we must avert our eyes.

She looks down, upset.

Reetik: *(After taking a sip)* Why don't you go back to your work in my absence?

Simran: No... I wouldn't be able to work with all this 'relationship stress!'

Reetik irritably put the cup on the table and got up from his chair.

Reetik: You know what? This is your problem! Do you think I don't feel guilty? But that doesn't mean we should give up on our work... or stop being happy! I mean, look at the world out there... half of the population is playing this 'Affair-Game' only! Everyone is finding their true love in someone else's spouse...! And yet, they all seem happy! I mean... *'Cheating is now becoming a global trend, man!'* ...You know, there was a time when I used to mock

others for this sort of thing. But I never imagined that I'd get caught up in the same game one day! And that... with my best friend's wife! No, you just think over it—we've known each other for eight long years... yet we never felt love for each other... until we got married and then realized that we both had chosen the wrong person? In your love for Harsh, you overlooked his flaws—flaws that began to grate on you after marriage. And as for me... well... sometimes I feel like I shouldn't have gone for an arranged marriage at all. I overlooked the entire character of Sejal! ....But then again, I wonder... what I would have achieved with a love marriage either... after all, you two had a ten-year relationship.

Simran: *(Annoyedly)* See... I don't like these things about you!

Reetik comes near Simran and places his hands over her shoulder.

Reetik: Ok…ok! I'm sorry. Why don't you talk to Harsh about a divorce? "

Simran: NO.

Reetik: But why?

Simran: JUST NO...!

Reetik jerks. "Oh, come on....! At least tell me the reason?"

Simran: Because I know Harsh won't give me a divorce! And if I were to bring it up... he'd start trying to resolve all the misunderstandings between us... and that would make me feel even more guilty... and I could spill out our truth!

Reetik: So, what do you want me to do?

Simran: I don't know... You tell me?!

Reetik groans. He looks at the speaker kept on a long cabinet at the back center of the stage. Playfully.

Reetik: Shall I...? HEY SIRI...! PLAY 'PUT YOUR HEAD ON MY SHOULDER!'

Song plays. Reetik grabs Simran's hand and makes her dance. After some time, the doorbell rings. Both panic.

Simran: Oh my god... Harsh is here, Harsh is here... You go and hide under the dining table... and as soon as Harsh goes into the bathroom, you slip out...

Reetik: Shh...! Siri, stop. Go and open the door. Open it... or else Harsh will definitely get suspicious. Go.

Simran agitatedly walks towards the door. Reetik sits on a chair and grabs his coffee mug. Simran opens the door. A handsome man enters in a grey shirt and deep green pants.

Simran: *(Overacting)* Oh, Harsh! You're back so early, baby... You were supposed to come at 7, right?

Harsh: What has happened to you, Simran? It's already 7:30!

Simran: Oh... Is it 7:30 already? Time flies when I'm waiting for you...! Anyway, look who's here!

Reetik: The surprise is here!

Both enter and come near the dining table.

Harsh: You're here?

Reetik: Yes, I'm here.

Simran exclaimed, posing in a 'V'. " YES... WE ALL ARE HERE! "

Reetik's cell phone buzzes; Harsh and Reetik look incredulously towards Simran. After a moment, Reetik grabbed his phone from the table, cut the incoming call again, and placed it inside his pocket. Harsh held his forehead, embarrassed.

Harsh: Simran...? Can I get some coffee? I've got a bad headache, certainly."

Simran: Sure!

Simran exits to the right wing. Harsh and Reetik hugged each other. In unison.

"MERRY CHRISTMAS, MAN....! "

Harsh: You're here so early?

Reetik: Yeah, man... There wasn't much work at the office today. So, I left early. I thought I'd come over and we could have some fun. But when I got here, I found out you had work and would be late... so I was just waiting for you.

Harsh: No problem, man. But how did your boss suddenly show mercy to you today?

Reetik: Boss didn't show up today... so I got the chance to flee!

Harsh: And why didn't your boss show up today? Christmas leave?

Reetik: Yeah, he has to practice playing 'Santa' today.

Harsh: For whom? That money-greedy man doesn't have any kids.

Reetik: Well... IT'S C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L.

After a pause, they both laugh out in unison.

"BITCH-LOVER...!"

Harsh: Oh, man! You sit down; I'll go freshen up and come back.

Reetik: Yeah, Okay.

Harsh exits to the left wing, checking his phone. Reetik gasps in relief and takes a large sip of coffee. After a while, Simran quietly comes to Reetik.

Simran: Hey... all's well?

Reetik: ***(cautiously)*** Yeah, yeah... don't worry.

Simran gasps. "Ufff... I really thought we were going to get caught today. I was feeling so scared!"

Reetik: Shhh... just be quiet. Otherwise, this restlessness of yours will definitely get us both caught.

Simran: He didn't ask you why you didn't come with Sejal?

Reetik: No. I told him that my boss didn't come... so I left early from the office and came over here... everything is fine... so don't worry...

Harsh enters, busy typing something on his phone. Simran panics and grabs Reetik's coffee mug from his hand and turns towards Harsh.

Simran: Harsh, your coffee!

Harsh, leery, keeps his phone inside his pants pocket and grabs the cup. " Aah...! This has gone cold! "

Simran: ***(taking back the mug from Harsh's hand)*** Oh, you took too long... so it's gotten quite cold. I'll make another one.

Simran walks towards the right stage. The doorbell rings. Simran stands near the wing.

Harsh: This must be Sejal... I'll open!

Harsh goes and opens the door.

Harsh: Hey, Sejal...! MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Sejal enters in a white dress with her cell phone raised up in the air.

Sejal: MERRY CHRISTMAS, Harsh...! Say hello to my fans!

Harsh: ***(energetically)*** HELLO GUYZZZ.... MERRY CHRISTMAS!

They sniggering come and stand on the downstage centre. Sejal moves her phone towards Reetik.

Sejal: Hey guys... This is my hubby!

Reetik: ***(waving his hand, dully)*** Merry Christmas, guys.

Sejal: ***(Laughs out)*** HAHAHA..... EEE....! My fans are saying that your husband looks so grumpy! ***(giggles)*** ...He isn't a grumpy guyzzz.... He is an absolute grouch!

Sejal laughs out again. Reetik makes his eyes big over Sejal. Harsh looks here and there, biting his lip. Simran interrupts cheerfully.

Simran: Merry Christmas... Sejal!

Sejal moves her phone towards Simran, and Jerk ends her video call.

Sejal: MERryyyy... OMG! No makeup! No hairstyle! And look at your dressing sense, baby...! You are looking more like a maid than Harsh's wife.

Reetik: Hold on, Sejal!

Harsh: Oh, relax, man. Look, Sejal! Simran was preparing dinner for all of us, so...

Sejal: *(Panicked)* WHAT...! HANDMADE FOODS...! Eww...! I think you people don't follow the world updates. It is proven that a person's mindset gets infused into the food they prepare... And if we eat food prepared by other humans... we might also fall ill! And that is why... these days, food prepared by yourself or machines is considered the purest and most hygienic! *(Pointing towards Simran)* And look at her state...! Even a beggar would hesitate to accept anything from her hands.

Reetik: Enough, Sejal!

Harsh: Oh, don't worry, man. You see, Sejal... Simran stays at home all day now... that's why she has completely lost her sense of grooming. She has become so simple and unkempt that... sometimes... even I get confused about whether this is my wife or a maid. (*Last words, more to himself.)*

Sejal: Aww... so sad! But don't worry, Harsh...! My business is to make people look beautiful.

She, putting her phone inside her handbag, goes behind Simran. She then raises Simran's hands straight in the air—then stretches her shoulders—squeezes her chest—and twists

her waist. She then unties her hair and spreads it like cotton candy—Lastly, she unties her dirty apron and wipes her face.

Sejal: TADA…!

After a moment of silence, Reetik mutters to Harsh. "I told you, didn't I? That my wife turns women into witches."

Harsh: Yeah, man. Simran? You go inside... get ready... and bring champagne out! In the meantime, we'll sit here and chat.

Simran exits sadly. All three sit around the dining table. The men take the corner chairs. Sejal sits on the right front chair, beside Reetik (checking his phone). Sejal puts her handbag down on the stage.

Sejal: And Harsh, how's your 'UW' business going?

Harsh: Well... fantastic! My team has come up with a brilliant idea—'Drawstrings in Underwear!'

Sejal: O-M-G! DRAWSTRINGS IN UW! This is a 'FAB' idea, Harsh! Just watch... This trend of yours will take the world by storm! TOUCHWOOD!

Harsh: Thank you, Sejal! And what about you... How's your fashion company going?

Sejal: O' JUST FAB...! I got three *'Rich-e-events'* for this new year!

Harsh: Wow... Congratulations!

Sejal: Thank you, Harsh...!

Harsh: And Reetik? You tell me, man? How did you like my new trend?

Reetik: *(Keeping his phone back inside his pocket)* Well... It's good, man. I mean... bringing back past trends is always a great idea—that approach has always worked in this mutable world!

Harsh: Exactly! I think the two of us should start a business too?

Reetik: No, man... I'm happy in this job!

Harsh: Look, man... I would suggest that you should have a backup plan! Because very soon, robots and AI alone will be performing all these secondary tasks! Many companies have already adopted this... and soon it will become a global trend!

Sejal: Yes...! Harsh is absolutely right! And, moreover, today's world is a world of trends... innovation... Imagination! Like your idea, Harsh... drawstrings in UW! ...And like mine, ' *The Mummified Dress!*' Which prevents women from getting molested. I got this fantastic fashion idea from *'Draupadi's Chir Haran scene from the epic 'Mahabharata!'* Wrap a woman in such long cloth... that the molesters get tired of unwrapping her! Isn't it brilliant, guys? Also, I have got the *'Madam Trendz of the Year Award!'* for this innovative idea. ***(giggles)*** ...And also, this job traditional have now become a thing of the past and cheap in the society!

Reetik: Maybe you both are right... But what I think is that there's still time for the AI invasion! And moreover, why should I bother my mind engaging with new things now, when I already find peace and tranquility within this job!

Harsh: You got the last point, man!

Reetik: Thank you, man! And I really don't notice much of a difference between the businesses and the job...

Harsh interrupts. "No, man, you're wrong here! I mean... I personally believe that there is a huge difference between the two... and that is the 'Self-freedom...'

Sejal pops in. "I agree with Harsh! You see... in business, you are like a free-roaming bull! Whereas in a job... you become like an ox yoked to an oil press!"

Reetik: Whatever it is...! But the job is strong in terms of security.

Harsh: You again got the point, man!

Sejal: ***(Taunting)*** Yeah... the only thing that matters is covering one's own splurge and security—to hell with everyone else! That's why you keep licking the feet of this job!

Reetik: Well... it is better than receiving legal notices at your house! *(To Harsh)* Didn't the 'Madam-trendz' tell you... A case has been registered against her for stealing dress designs.

Sejal: *(Glaring at Reetik)* ...It is due to some misunderstandings only. Nothing big to share. *(Leaning towards Reetik)* The thing is, dear hubby... That in big business, one has to face such difficulties. And, moreover, highlighting the failures of others befits only the person who has stood by them during those very failures.

Reetik: First, watch your attitude.

Sejal: BLESS ME.

Simran, in a yellow dress, enters with Champagne and glasses. Harsh cried out.

Harsh: HERE COMES THE CHAMPAGNE...!

Simran comes and sits beside Sejal. Harsh starts opening the bottle.

Reetik: 'Gout de Diamants'! Wow, man! Where did you get this from?!

Harsh: Well... my friend is in the shipment business. You see... he likes wearing my brand's underwear... he says he feels cold and free! He admires me! So he always gifts me with all these rare and expensive items.

Reetik: Wow, man! This simply has to be posted on my social account!

He takes out his phone and starts snapping selfies with the bottle. Harsh photobomb.

Sejal: Harsh? Don't say underwear... it sounds so cheap and illiterate! Say 'U-W'! Good and classy.

Simran: I think Sejal is right! I also don't like saying, I'm going to the washroom in front of others! So from today onwards, I'll say... "I'm going to the 'W-R!'

Sejal: *(Impressively)* I think this is the 'FAB' idea... Simran! Well done, sweetheart! *(She stands up, clearing her throat)* Umm... hmm... From today onwards... we will refer to every unsavory act using a short form, so that we do not have to face embarrassment in front of others!

Reetik: *(keeping his phone back inside his pocket)* Well... in that case... then you also shouldn't go anywhere else either... and should just send your clothes! Because... you are also unsavory enough to be present in front of others!

Simran and Harsh gave a horrified look to each other. Sejal slowly sat down, sneering at Reetik. Reetik ignored Sejal and took a sip of the Champagne.

Reetik: Ummm... really, man! It literally tastes like Diamond! I am blessed to have one. Thank you, man!

Harsh: Love you, man.

Reetik: I wish I had a friend too... who would gift me such precious drinks!

Sejal: Aww...! Poor guy! The thing is, dear hubby... you have to build strong connections to get a taste of these Ultra-luxurious things! However, those who kiss their boss's ass... can only enjoy these things at the mercy of others.

Reetik's phone buzzes. Silence. The buzz sound cuts out. Simran pops in.

Simran: Ah... you know, Sejal! I have made delicious meals especially for you two!

Sejal: REALLY...! Aww... How sweet of you, Sweetheart! What did you make?

Simran: I have made mashed potatoes with salty gravy... fried chicken with cranberry sauce... and green bean casserole!

Sejal: Aww... How sweet of you, dear! But, sweetheart... I'm allergic to potatoes, cranberries, and beans. Sorry.

Simran: Oh... I didn't know that! What other things are you allergic to?

Sejal: Well... Umm... milk, eggs, peanuts, nuts, turmeric, mold, sesame, asafoetida, black pepper, pollen, dust mites, latex, shellfish, wheat, soy... vegetables, and fruits.

Simran: Oh my god! Allergies to so many things! How do you manage to survive?

Reetik: *(In a low voice)* The witch needs only to drink blood to survive.

Sejal: I'm a witch—that's the only reason I'm dealing with a ghoul like you!

Reetik: I am a ghoul—that is precisely why I am safe until now. I learned this art only from you.

Sejal: Oh, really...! That's the only thing you learned from me—nothing else?

Reetik: No. There is nothing else worth learning from you.

Sejal: OH, REALLY!

Simran pops in again, keenly.

Simran: Oh, don't worry, Sejal! You can try my homemade dessert... I have made 'Vanilla Custard' for you!

Sejal: Oh, poor girl. But I am allergic to custard too.

Simran: Oh...

Sejal: But don't get upset, sweetheart! I can have *'CHICKENzzz...!'* Animal protein is the only thing the Almighty has left for me!

Simran: But for dessert?

Harsh: Oh, don't worry! We will go for an ice cream party right after dinner!

Sejal: Yes... That's a 'FAB' plan! Let's go and have ice cream after dinner! *(taunts Reetik)* Besides... who else has the time to keep their promises and fulfil others' plans?

Harsh: You guys had any plan for today?

Sejal: Yes... my sweet hubby was to pick me up at 5:30 and go for an ice cream treat today! But, as usual... he got work! So he cancelled at the peak time.

Harsh: Really...? But he said that he was free all day today...

He stops, sensing he shouldn't have said that. Sejal stands up angrily and fires herself at Reetik.

Sejal: Oh, there you go...! So you lied to me and want me to change my attitude! Where were you? Tell me now...?! "

Harsh: *(Interrupts, standing)* Ah... Sejal! You are mistaken about Reetik! He was here... waiting for me... I called him...

Sejal: OH, REALLY...!

Simran panics. "Yes, Sejal... You are getting it all wrong... Let me serve you some more champagne! *She jerks to her feet and makes her drink fall over Sejal's dress. Everyone jolts.*

Sejal: OMG! OMG! My thirty-thousand-rupee dress...! My thirty-thousand-rupee dress..!

Simran: Oh, I'm so sorry! I didn't notice...

Sejal: *(Angrily)* O' DIDN'T NOTICE...?! Harsh is right... You are totally scatterbrained!

Reetik: Enough, Sejal!

Sejal: O' YOU JUST SHUT UP!

Harsh Snaps out. "ENOUGH OF YOU GUYS! ...Please don't spoil the festival! ...Simran? You take Sejal to the washroom and help clean her dress ".

Simran and Sejal exit to the left wing.

Reetik gasps. "Ufff...!"

Harsh: Come, let's have a cigarette.

They walk up to the platform, open the main door, and light up cigarettes.

Harsh: *(After a puff)* What?

Reetik: *(Timidly)* What?

Harsh: What...?!

Reetik: Are you playing some sort of riddle game with me?

Harsh: Huh... Is there a problem between you and Sejal?

Reetik: Oh, that. I mean... the problem is... Sejal is very complicated, man!

Harsh: Are you having an affair?

Reetik: *(Quickly)* No...! I mean... Look... I'm applying for a job abroad... and if it happens... Life will be heaven, man, wouldn't it? But Sejal did not want me to go! And I don't know why. Even though I told her to stay here and expand her fashion company. We will keep coming and going... but despite this, she started giving me this taunting treatment every time! ...I feel she is jealous of my success!

Harsh: I didn't mean this. I was asking that... Why did you lie to Sejal today?

Reetik: Honestly, man... I don't know why... but I just didn't want to go with her. And that's why I came over here... I thought you'd be home... but when I arrived, Simran mentioned you'd be late. I didn't feel right calling you in the middle of your work, so I just waited for you.

Harsh: Look, man! As a brother, I would suggest you quickly clear up whatever misunderstanding exists between you and Sejal. Or else the situation could get even worse. See, you talk to Sejal once and find out what she wants... sometimes things don't work in a

relationship when it's only what you want! Think over it... I don't want you to suffer, man.

Reetik's phone buzzes; he takes it out of his pocket and irritably cuts the call.

Reetik: ***(Blurted)*** Oh, come on, man... I am not in town!

Harsh: What was that...?

Reetik: I don't know...! I mean... Actually, I borrowed some money from one of my friends to buy something. And it was supposed to be repaid after three months. But he suddenly needs the money and is asking for it back! And I don't have the money right now! So I'm just repeatedly disconnecting his calls... so that he might think I've gone out of town? ...I guess.

Harsh: No, man. If you keep disconnecting his calls... he'll think you're ignoring him.

Reetik: So... what should I do?

Harsh: Well... I think you should put your phone on flight mode. So when he calls you, he will think your phone's signal has shut down... because you are out of town! Besides, it's a festival day—you aren't expecting any important call, are you?

Reetik: Yes, man! That's a brilliant idea! Why didn't I think of it before?

Reetik put his phone in flight mode and put it back in his pocket.

Reetik: Thank you, man!

Harsh: Do not mention! By the way, I am sorry, man... for my tongue slipping in front of Sejal.

Reetik: Well... shits happens, man. In fact, in this regard... I consider myself a bit lucky to have a wife who only insults me, rather than pushing me off a cliff.

Both look up. In Unison.

"REST IN PEACE, BROTHER!".

Both chuckle and take a puff. After a moment of silence.

Reetik: Harsh? Don't mind, but... is everything okay between you and Simran? I mean, I just felt...

Harsh: I know what you are pointing out, man. Look, I am sorry for saying that maid thing to Simran! But I feel like there is some problem with her... ***(pause)*** I mean, she... she used to be perfect... It is just that lately... she has started acting a bit more like a fool! Didn't you see what she just did with Sejal? She wasn't like this before... but for some reason, lately she has been acting strangely—almost like a kid! I miss that smart and fearless Simran of mine. That's it. ***(After a puff)*** ...Leave all this aside, and tell me, what gift are you giving to Sejal today?

Reetik: Well... I don't know? It's a surprise for me too!

Harsh: What do you mean?

Reetik: Now Madam doesn't like anything of mine... that's why I was wondering what gift to give her. And just then, I found an app named ' SANTA FOR MOROS'—for those unhappy couples who don't get along with each other. Here you can describe the strained relationship you share with your wife... make a payment of twenty-five thousand... and then, understanding your mindset, they will send a gift for your wife according to their own judgment. So, I don't really know what the gift is. I just brought it straight here.

Harsh: God save you today, man!

Reetik: My fingers are crossed! Now your turn... You tell me, what gift are you giving Simran today?

Harsh: Well... Something Smart!

Reetik: Ok...

Sejal enters, muttering angrily, with a deep stain on her clothes.

Sejal: HEY SIRI...! PLAY 'JAILHOUSE ROCK!'

Reetik: What are you doing?

Sejal: I am angry... so I am going to dance.

The song starts. Sejal starts dancing.

Reetik: What nonsense is this?

Sejal: So...? What have we come here to do? Just sit, eat, and fight? O' Come on... It's a Christmas party! Let's dance!

Harsh: I think she has a point!

He throws the cigarette and joins Sejal, energizing Reetik to join. Lately, Simran dancing enters the stage. And they dance and dance and dance... The stage goes dark as the song ends.

After some time, the stage illuminates again. Harsh, Reetik, and Sejal are sitting around the dining table (Same position), Harsh and Reetik singing and playing drums with spoons, while Sejal is making merry videos. After some time, Simran enters dancing, holding a large tray full of dinner in her hands; she comes and poses beside Sejal, raising the dinner tray over Sejal's head.

Simran: TADA...!

Sejal: *(down her phone, cautiously)* WAIT...! Please be careful! Last time you spilled champagne on me. Who knows? Maybe this time you'll spill some salty gravy on me!

Simran: *(Cheerfully)* Don't worry, Sejal! 'Nothing ever goes wrong when you are in happiness!'

She sits and serves the chicken to Reetik and Sejal. After they take a bite.

Reetik: Umm... The chicken is too delicious!

Sejal: Indeed! Congratulations, sweetheart. I just hope you prepared it with a good state of mind.

Sejal giggles. Reetik gave her a disappointed look. Simran looks down.

Harsh: *(Holding his stomach)* AHH...!!

Everybody panics.

Simran: What happened, Harsh?

Harsh: Oh, man! The hungry rats in my stomach are boxing. AHHH...! Oh, there goes another punch... Serve me the chicken fast?

Everybody chuckles.

Simran: *(Serving to Harsh)* Don't worry, Harsh... I have mixed 'Rat-Kill' into the food! All your stomach rats are going to die!

Sejal stops eating. Reetik spits the chicken out of his mouth onto the plate.

Sejal: O-M-G! You mixed rat kill into the food?!

Simran: Yeah!

Sejal: But why?

Simran: Because it will kill our 'Stomach Rats...!' *(laughs)*

Sejal: Baby... it will kill all of us.

Simran: *(Frowning)* Oh... Is it? But they mentioned that it was safe for mankind. *(Pause)* ...Oh, no, no, no! I wasn't talking about that rat-killing poison! I was talking about the medicine 'R-A-K-T-K-I-L'! Harsh has intestinal worms... that's the medicine for it. And it's safe for us too... You never know who might have worms inside!

Simran giggles. Harsh embarrassingly bites the chicken.

Sejal: Then why were you calling the worms 'rats'?

Simran: Oh, I was joking!

Sejal: Oh. That means we're the fools for taking it seriously?

She looks at the men's disgusted faces.

"...I GUESS NOT! Because the majority didn't understand your joke... So, in that case... YOU'RE THE FOOL! ...And, moreover, I didn't know Harsh had worms inside him."

Harsh: *(Glaring at Simran*) And I didn't want anyone to know either that I had worms inside me.

Reetik: HELL TO THE MEDICAL COMPANY!

Harsh: What happened to you, man?

Reetik: That was my favorite piece of chicken.

Harsh: *(getting up from his chair)* I need some whisky now!

Reetik: I appreciate that, man. Wait! I am coming with you.

Harsh and Reetik exit to the right wing. Sejal sneers at Simran.

Simran: *(Jittery)* Is there anything you want, Sejal?

Sejal: Yes, sweetheart.

Simran: What?

Sejal: You don't look as foolish as you make yourself appear.

Simran: I didn't understand...

Sejal: Look, Simran, I'm a very difficult person. Moreover, we are neither relatives nor friends! And I know that you purposely spilled the champagne on my dress.

Simran: *(Nervously)* Purposely?

Sejal: Yes.

Simran: But why would I do that?

Sejal: Because you are jealous of me!

Simran: Me?

Sejal: Yes. And that's why I want you to pay for my dress.

Simran: Me...?!

Sejal: Yes! Oh... I forgot that you are now unemployed and dependent on Harsh. So... how would you pay me thirty thousand, dear? Ummm... Well, I have an idea...! You can beg Harsh for the money and give it to me—okay?

Simran: ***(Softly)*** You know, Sejal? Earnings from honest work never yield immediate results. If you want to succeed quickly, you have to resort to dishonesty. And your lifestyle clearly shows that you live off ill-gotten gains. So, either accept this situation as the consequence of your own bad karma... or simply buy yourself a dress! After all, you certainly don't lack money.

Sejal: How dare you talk to me like this?

Simran: Look, Sejal, I'm a very simple person. Moreover, we are neither relatives nor friends! So, whatever face you show in the mirror, that is what you will see.

Harsh and Reetik enter with the whiskey bottle. They sit. Reetik starts opening the bottle. Harsh looks at Sejal's angry face.

Harsh: All's well between you two, right?

Simran: Yeah, yeah! All's well. It's just that we were cracking jokes... and it turned out my joke was better than Sejal's—which is why she got a little upset. Isn't it, Sejal?

Sejal, with a feigned smile on her face. "Yes, sweetheart. Harsh, Nothing to worry about!"

Reetik passed the half-filled whisky glass to Harsh. "Hey... put the joke stuff aside, and let's finish dinner first! There isn't much time left until 12:00."

Harsh: ***(After a sip)*** Yes... and we also have to go out and have ice cream...

Simran: ***(Quickly)*** But before that... I have a surprise for you guys!

Men in unison. "Surprise...!"

Harsh: What!?

Simran: I have made chocolate cake for you two! We will cut it exactly at 12 o'clock.

Men exclaim in unison. "BINGO...!"

Simran: And if Sejal is allergic to chocolate too... then she can only watch us eat!

*All three giggle. Sejal, with a plastic smile. "*No, thank you, dear".

Harsh: Hey, man... I have an Idea! Let's play a game and see who can eat dinner fastest!

Reetik: Great idea, man! No one can beat me in this game...!

Harsh: Oh, really? Well... that might be true, simply because you've never played against me before.

Reetik: Relax! We'll see.

Harsh: Hey, let's place a bet! I bet—ONE THOUSAND.

Reetik: Huh... Let's make this game even more interesting. I bet—TWO THOUSAND.

Sejal: Hello, please...! Back in my childhood, I won an award for eating the most 'Pani puri' in 2 minutes! I bet—THREE THOUSAND! Let's make this game even more interesting.

Simran: Guys... let's keep the game friendly, please... FIVE THOUSAND! Let's see who can beat me!

They all look at each other defiantly and then start wolfing down the dinner. The stage goes dark. After some time. All in unison.

10... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...!

" MERRY CHRISTMAS...!! "

The stage lit up again with the carol music playing in the background. Everyone is standing around the dining table with gifts in their hands and a cake in the center of the table.

They sing and dance, and cut the cake. After celebrating, they exchange gifts and open them.

Harsh gulps. "Oh!-My!-God! GTA 6 gameplay! Love you, Baby!"

Simran delivers a friendly smile.

Reetik: Look here, man! Sejal got me SmartGoggles. 2.0! *He wears them.* "How do I look?"

Harsh: Well... now I feel jealous!

Reetik: Thanks, Sejal.

Sejal: Enjoy yourself, dear.

Simran yells. "A KEY RING...! You got me a KEY RING?"

Sejal giggles softly.

Harsh: Baby...! This isn't an ordinary key ring... It's a smart key ring! It has a SIM card inside. If you lose your keys... it will ring out loudly when you call! You always forget your keys here and there, so I got you.

Simran: Wow, Harsh! This is a highly useful thing. Thank you!

Harsh: You're welcome, baby!

Sejal: *(raising a phone up in the air)* Look...! My dear hubby has got me a dummy phone!

She throws the phone on the table and gives a disappointed look to Reetik. Harsh giggles. Simran looks at them in confusion.

Reetik: *(Flustered)* Ahh... Umm... I mean... I can explain...

Sejal belly laughs. Everybody looks incredulously towards her.

Reetik: Have you gone mad or what?

Sejal: No, no... I am just laughing at your childish act, my dear hubby! Do you really think that by pulling these farce stunts you'd make me angry and ruin my Christmas? HOW KIDISH! But you

know what... even if you had handed me a new phone now... I wouldn't have accepted it. Because... today, I've received a truly unique gift! Oh, I forgot to share with you guys... ***She bends and picks up her handbag and takes out a diamond-encrusted phone.*** " TADA... A DIAMOND-PLATED PHONE! Isn't it beautiful, guys? I didn't get the time to switch it...

Reetik: ***(Surprisedly)*** Who gifted you this phone?

Sejal: A friend gave it to me.

Simran: Oh.

Harsh hides his smile. Simran and Reetik look at each other, broken.

Sejal: Come...! Let's take a 'Snap-happy!' with my new phone!

Sejal and Harsh, sniggering, rush to the left upstage and stand in front of the decorated Christmas tree placed diagonally near the cabinet. Afterward, Simran and Reetik walk dully towards them and stand beside their partners. Sejal holds the camera up. The couples hold each other in their arms.

Sejal: 1... 2... 3...!

Everyone beaming. *" ALL'S WELL.....! "*

The camera clicks. Scene freezes. The song 'Can't Help Falling in Love' starts playing in the background. Slowly, the stage goes dark while the song is still playing.

Here the story ends. But Life Goes On...