

# The Perfect Matrimonial Alliance

By Rashma N. Kalsie

## **WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama editor JANET COLSON writes:***

*Live from Bollywood, it's The Perfect Matrimonial Alliance, a stageplay that's the perfect mash-up of Bollywood and real life. Indian-Australian playwright Rashma N. Kalsie's script takes us on a trip to the suburbs of North Delhi in the 90's, with a traditional family trying to broker an arranged marriage for their headstrong (and whip-smart) daughter, Simran, who has a more modern take on the ideal partnership.*

*The story begins with an advertisement for a popular movie coming up on TV as an invocation of the magic of a Bollywood romance:*

TV VOICE OVER

*Come fall in love..watch the TV premiere of Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayengey only on Zee. (Shahrukh Khan's Voice)*

CHUTKI           *Come fall in LOVE...(mesmerized)*

*Don't worry about not keeping up with the cultural references. Yes, this is another world, but it's also a parallel universe where the characters fly off the page and the dialogue is so natural, you always know who's saying what whether you know bupkes about Bollywood or you're already a fan.*

*The Perfect Matrimonial Alliance has a cinematic appeal as well as a theatrical realism that resonates from past to present. There's a lot of good stuff about standing up for oneself and forging a new identity in an oppressive system. I especially love Simran's outspoken and pragmatic feminism, which drives her to speak the unspeakable even at the expense of the perfect Bollywood ending.*

*Here's Simran on why she hasn't yet made her perfect match:*

Simran: We interviewed quite a few men, but they turned out to be idiots.

**Senior Editor Charles writes:** *This is 2<sup>nd</sup> language writing so expect a touch of 'outsider-ism'. For us, this is part of the reading experience and in the interest of authenticity of 'voice' we don't edit or correct it. Nouns that include the letter 'u' as in — neighbour, favour, colour—are using the British spelling common in India (and also in Canada) and are correctly spelled. (Spacing and format are the playwright's own.) CP*

## **The Perfect Matrimonial Alliance**

**By Rashma N. Kalsie**

### **ACT I**

#### **Scene 1**

##### **INT-LIVING ROOM-DAY**

**1996 Summer.** *Living room of a two-bedroom apartment in a middle-class suburb in North Delhi. The television set is placed on the top shelf of a mobile cabinet. There is a brass flower vase next to the television set. Cheap, colorful and artificial flowers in the vase draw attention to the vase. The sofas are covered with the bed sheets.*

*The bed rooms open into the living room. The living room is more like a foyer with doors opening into it. A calendar of Goddess Durga and Laxmi hangs on one door. This is Baldev and Kumud's room. The second door has the poster of the hit Bollywood film, 'Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge'. (DDLJ) This is Simran and Chutki's room.*

*CHUTKI (24) is a next-door girl with a dreamy look. She is sitting on the sofa, chopping onions in a steel plate. The plate is placed in her lap, the chopped onions are strewn on her dress. She is watching a movie trailer on the TV and singing along. The title song of the film, Dilwale*

*Dulhaniya Le Jayenge, is being telecast on the TV. When the song ends Chutki lets out a SIGH of yearning.*

TV VOICE OVER

Come fall in love..watch the TV premiere of Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayengey only on Zee. (Shahurukh Khan's Voice)

CHUTKI

Come fall in LOVE...(mesmerized)

*BALDEV CHAUDHARY (60) swings open the door that has Goddess' calendar. He comes out of the bedroom folding the newspaper. He has an expression of discontent bordering on frustration.*

BALDEV

Arrey..you are again watching a film? Your brain will rust with Bollywood shit. Chalo, give the remote and go to your room.

CHUTKI

I didn't watch the TV one whole week because they were showing DDLJ today.

BALDEV

DDL--Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayengey? How can you watch the same film over and over. It's not a Hitchcock thriller!

CHUTKI

I have seen it only once. But how can you rubbish a film without seeing it?

BALDEV

You don't need to eat rotten potatoes to know they are rotten!

CHUTKI

That's a poor analogy.

BALDEV

Clearly shows you don't work in the kitchen. Rotten potatoes stink..you can smell them from a distance.

CHUTKI

How come there were no rotten potatoes in your time?

BALDEV

Integrity..that is the difference between my generation and.. oye hoye! you're chopping onions on the sofa? Get off..I just spent 7000 rupees to change the...Off!

CHUTKI

There's a bedcover between me and the upholstery.

*Chutki gets up reluctantly. KUMUD CHAUDHARY (54) enters from the kitchen. Baldev puts the newspaper on the table.*

KUMUD

Chutki! I need the onions NOW!

BALDEV

You haven't done the gravy yet? I don't have a helicopter to fly you--

CHUTKI

Ma, you get dressed. I'll do the gravy in 2 minutes.

KUMUD

There are three hours for the meeting.. my *sari* will crumple.

BALDEV

We can't get late because of your *sari*. Do you know how many girls are lined up to meet a perfect boy like this one?

CHUTKI

That's exactly why *ma* should look crisp and smart. A perfect mother-in-law for a perfect Non-Resident Indian.

BALDEV

*Haan*..but he needs a perfect wife before the perfect mother-in-law?

KUMUD

Our Simran is no less. She speaks fluent English--

BALDEV

*Haan*..but English is no qualifying criterion for a marriage.

CHUTKI

But these people advertised they are looking for an English-speaking girl. They will give her some marks..

BALDEV

0.5 bonus points for English, that's all. Didn't you see the boy's photo..he looks like a film star.

CHUTKI

How would you know what a film star looks like, you haven't watched a film in 10 years.

*Kumud indicates Chutki to stop the argument.*

BALDEV

There aren't any boys lined up for you or for your sister.

KUMUD

They don't need a queue..just one..

CHUTKI

I am going to make sure there is a queue outside the door.

*Door bell rings*

BALDEV

There's only one person outside the door, that good-for-nothing neighbour, Sheena.

KUMUD

Shhush!

*Chutki goes out to answer the door bell.*

BALDEV

You'd better ask her to leave right away. I don't want any distractions on such an important day. Chutki...where's the remote?

*Chutki and Sheena heard off*

SHEENA

I can't wait--God..  
Shahrukh's so cute.

CHUTKI

Did you watch 'On  
the Sets of DDLJ'? He  
is so down-to-earth,  
*yaar.*

BALDEV

I want the remote.

*SHEENA (27) enters. She is attractive and slightly plump. She comes in beaming and happy.*

CHUTKI

Sorry papa, but we are watching a show.

BALDEV

Who's we?

KUMUD

You crack such poor jokes..why it's Sheena and Chutki.

*(Signaling him to stop)*

BALDEV

I want to watch Indo-Sri Lanka match, how's that a joke. And Sheena, sorry to disappoint you child, we are going out.

KUMUD

He's joking.. Chutki will be home.

SHEENA

I know.

*Beat..Baldev gives Chutki an intense stare.*

BALDEV

You know? Why of course..the whole neighbourhood knows more about this family more than I do. But what happened to your television, child?

SHEENA

Oh the TV....? Umn..it's working..woh, Titu is watching.. umnn..the match - yes, the Indo-Sri Lanka match.

BALDEV

Ah..so you finally paid the cable operator? Four months rent was it?

*Chutki stares back at Baldev*

CHUTKI

How can you believe that lying, cheating cable-operator?

BALDEV

Tut..not me, I don't believe anything that people say.

*Baldev smiles at Sheena, she looks away.*

KUMUD

You chat with Sheena, I'll do the onions.

*Kumud takes the onions to the kitchen.*

CHUTKI

I'll do it ma..

BALDEV

Give me the remote before you go to the kitchen.

CHUTKI

Seriously papa, you want us to miss Shahrukh's candid interview for a test match?

SHEENA

Let it be yaar..anyway he is going out in one hour..

BALDEV

Ah..so you have an hourly update.

SHEENA

*Nahin..woh..(to Baldev) Accha..I'll come back at six.  
(to Chutki)*

*Chutki takes out the remote from her pyjama pocket and hands it to Baldev. He takes it as a matter of right.*

*Sheena scuttles out, Chutki follows her to see her off.*

*Baldev turns the channel to the match. We hear the commentary in the background.*

BALDEV

Why is Azhar batting, have we--? Oh oh oh...

*Commentary is heard. Baldev watches.*

BALDEV

Drop it, drop it, drop it, drop it... Dhut! Bloody Ranatunga, never misses a catch. Kumud! Lunch?

KUMUD (OFF)

Ready...

BALDEV

And Simran?

KUMUD (OFF)

Ready..

BALDEV

Where is she?

*Kumud enters with salad platter, offers to Baldev. He picks a carrot. She continues standing with the platter as he picks more carrots and eats.*

BALDEV

Is she serious this time? Or do you want me to bring Prince Charles to India?

KUMUD

Shush..she is working.

BALDEV

A school teacher working on a Sunday?

KUMUD

It's the new principal; he is driving the teachers up the wall.

BALDEV

Not the principal, it's your daughter driving us up the Himalayas.

KUMUD

Shush! She brought the work home so that we can meet the boy.

BALDEV

O ho..I should thank you two for giving me time!(sarcasm)

KUMUD

Arrey woh..

*Kumud starts to reply. Excitable noises on TV..Baldev munches the carrot.*

BALDEV

Wait wait wait..Clean Bold! Muralidharan..rascal! And you--by God, what timing! You speak and India loses a wicket!

KUMUD

Tut. you enjoy the salad, I'll check on Simran.

BALDEV

What enjoy? If they play like this, the five-day match will end in one day.

*Baldev takes the plate and watches intently. Kumud exits. She opens the door that has the movie poster. Baldev continues watching.*

## Scene 2

**INT. - LIVING ROOM - DAY (AFTER 20 minutes)**

*Chutki enters from the kitchen. She places the bowl of curry on the table. Baldev is watching the match.*

CHUTKI

Do you want rice or should I make chappatis?

BALDEV

You can't be negotiating menu at this hour. Just serve what you have!

CHUTKI

Ma..Simran..lunch.

*Chutki exits to the kitchen. SIMRAN (31) comes out of the room that has DDLJ poster. She is a plain Jane. Her hair is tied back in a neat braid. She has a no-nonsense look. She takes in the TV and her father in a quick glance. Baldev looks at her askance. She starts to cross to the kitchen.*

BALDEV

Kumud! Can you and Simran get dressed?

*Simran stops mid-way. She turns to face Baldev. Kumud comes out of the room. She is in a blouse and petticoat. A towel is thrown on her shoulders to cover her blouse.*

SIMRAN

I am ready for the meeting.

BALDEV

Are you wearing this  
dress--

SIMRAN

What's wrong with it?

BALDEV

On the day we are  
meeting a boy from  
Australia--

SIMRAN

I bought it last  
month.

BALDEV

An engineer with a  
foreign degree-

SIMRAN

From Rajouri market.  
The shop has the  
latest trend.

BALDEV

Who earns  
seventy-thousand  
dollars--

SIMRAN

And this is not cheap.

BALDEV

Whose family lives in  
South Delhi--

SIMRAN

This is the best dress  
I have.

BALDEV

Even a clerk would refuse you if he sees you in this  
dress!

KUMUD

What's wrong with the dress? (mustering courage)

BALDEV

Is that what you are teaching your daughter, to rebel  
against me? (To Kumud)

*Baldev hurls the salad plate into the air. It  
smashes. Kumud lets out a squeal. Simran remains  
unfazed. Chutki comes out of the kitchen. BEAT*

SIMRAN

Don't blame ma, I chose the dress.

BALDEV

You think I can't see through your tricks? (To Simran)

KUMUD

What tricks..she likes this dress, that's all.

BALDEV

It's not what she likes, but what will make her likeable.

KUMUD

She prefers pastel colors...

BALDEV

She's not a beauty queen that she can wear any colour she likes.

CHUTKI

Beauty Queens are not competing for grooms.

BALDEV

There you go..we were missing your voice.

CHUTKI

I was only trying to reason out.

BALDEV

Can you please reason out with the boys want to marry a Aishwarya Rai look alike. Think I'm lying--here-- look at this advertisement..today's paper..see, I have marked it for you..

*He picks up the newspaper...shows the advertisement..Reads.*

BALDEV (CONTD)

"Looking for a model-like beautiful, tall, slim girl. Cut off height 5 ft 5inch."..See! You think I am mad to fuss over your dresses.

CHUTKI

Ha..these grooms will have to go to a beauty pageant to find a model like bride.

*Chutki exits to the kitchen.*

KUMUD

Why don't you wear a sari? (To Simran)

BALDEV

What's wrong with you? She looks old in a sari. Better wear a bright colored salwar kameez.

*Chutki enters with a broom. She sweeps the remains of the plate and salad. Exits.*

SIMRAN

I don't have a *bright dress*.

BALDEV

Of course she has a bright dress. We bought it last year...when we met the boy from Canada.

KUMUD

Tut..but that is silk.

BALDEV

That is exactly what we need--silk, to make a fucking impression.

KUMUD

But it's too hot to wear silk.

*Chutki enters. She picks up the bowl that she had put on the table.*

BALDEV

Seriously? You think you are in a position to think about comfort?--Where are you taking the lunch?

CHUTKI

Keeping it safely in the kitchen.

BALDEV

Bring it back..we are late.

SIMRAN

I don't see how a change of dress can change my destiny?

KUMUD

Shush...

BALDEV

Look at her, unwilling to budge. Do you know how many matrimonial ads I responded to last month...47! BEAT Do you know how many people responded?

KUMUD

Tut--I know--

BALDEV

Three--exactly THREE, of which one is unemployed, the other has polio in one leg, and the third is waiting for his divorce papers.

KUMUD

I know, but--

BALDEV

No you don't know,  
because if you did,  
you would do anything  
to make this proposal  
work.

*Kumud starts to reply--stops. BEAT*

BALDEV (CONTD)

We have reached a dead END--

SIMRAN

So let's put an end to this weekly PARADE?

BALDEV

The what?

KUMUD

Shush..go to your room.

BALDEV

No no no no..stay here, let's talk! So I force you to  
parade in front of strangers! Right?

KUMUD

No no no no..she did not mean it like that.

*Simran looks away.*

BALDEV

She meant it like that!

KUMUD

She meant it generally...

BALDEV

I know your game. You want them to humiliate me. Why? I  
have fed you, clothed you, given you a house, this  
fucking house--for what? So you train your guns at me?

*He looks for something to throw. He charges  
towards the brass flower vase. Chutki appears from  
the kitchen. She grabs the vase before him.*

CHUTKI

I've a bright, blue salwar kameez.

BALDEV

Put that vase back.

CHUTKI

You don't need the vase, you need the dress.

KUMUD

It's okay. Let him  
break the vase, the  
TV, the whole house.

CHUTKI

It's bright, it's just  
right for summers and  
it's loose, so Simran  
will fit into it.  
Just what you need  
for today's meeting.

BALDEV

We are not meeting anyone. It is the end of the PARADE.  
Didn't you hear your sister? From now on, she will sit  
at home and wait for a miracle. Just like Pummy!

KUMUD

Don't! Don't drag Pummy into this..leave her alone,  
please!

*BEAT. Kumud's towel falls to the ground. She looks  
beaten as she sobs silently. Door Bell.*

*Chutki takes the door.*

*Simran takes in the moment. She looks at her  
mother in pain. But Kumud has withdrawn into  
herself. Kumud picks her towel - Exits to the  
room. Simran exits to the kitchen. Chutki is heard  
off stage as the above sequence plays out.*

SHEENA

Someone shrieked! You okay? (OFF)

CHUTKI

Oh yes yes yes..that was mom.

SHEENA

Oh my God! (OFF)

CHUTKI

Oh no no no..it's the match--India lost a wicket.(OFF)

SHEENA

The match?(not convinced).(OFF)

*Baldev turns on the TV. India has lost a wicket.*

SCENE 3

**INT-CAFE, AT SHOPPER'S STOP MALL- DAY**

*RAJ MALHOTRA (32) is a handsome and charming. His sunglasses, gelled hair, crisp white shirt and his countenance tell us he is successful. He wears a smug smile.*

*MONICA MALHOTRA (26), Raj's sister, is slim and glamorous. She is a head-turner. Their mother, USHA MALHOTRA (55) is a wanna-be. She wears a gaudy saree, dark lipstick and sandals.*

*SURENDER MALHOTRA (62), Raj's father, is a bulky man with an air of self-importance. He is sorting papers while his wife is slurping her coffee.*

SURENDER

Six to go.

USHA

Six girls or six wickets?

SURENDER

By God, if you had paid attention to what I was saying.

USHA

You confuse everyone, one minute you talk cricket, the next you are talking about proposals.

SURENDER

Money can buy everything except--

USHA

See, now you jumped to money.

MONICA

Love

SURENDER

Intelligence.

RAJ

Dad..don't be bad.

SURENDER

Son..please don't make the same mistake as me.

USHA

For once, you admit you make mistakes.

*Raj gives his mother the look of 'please don't speak'*

SURENDER

Marry a girl who has some brains.

RAJ

Mom...please..focus on your coffee. We have meetings lined up.

*Usha goes back to her coffee.*

MONICA

I'll freshen up.

SURENDER

Don't take forever, we are already late for the next meeting.

*Monica pulls out a makeup kit.*

RAJ

Why did we squeeze so many meetings in a day?

SURENDER

We could have managed time better if your mother and sister had not darted off to the shops and now they want to freshen up every few minutes.

USHA

Wait, I want to check my makeup.

SURENDER

Please control your mother, every time she goes into the ladies room she comes out looking worse.

MONICA

Dad..don't be bad.

*Usha stomps out. Monica follows her chuckling.*

RAJ

Can we call up the people we are to meet next?

SURENDER

We can pass this girl, she's average.

*Surender pulls out Simran's biodata from a heap of papers.*

RAJ

Do we have her photo?

SURENDER

I can't carry photos around, therefore I wrote my comments on the biodata.

RAJ

What does she do?

SURENDER

School Teacher.

RAJ

I like that, plenty of jobs for the teachers. Does she teach Maths?

SURENDER

English.

RAJ

That's terrific, she can pass the English exam easily. What's her name?

SURENDER

Wait...

*Surender reads.*

SURENDER (CONTD)

Simran Chaudhary.

RAJ

Simran! We can't skip this one dad.

SURENDER

But she is average - nothing wrong, but nothing right.

*Monica returns.*

SURENDER

Where's Usha?

MONICA

She's touching up her lipstick.

SURENDER

Why did you gift her makeup kit? She wears all of it at the same time.

RAJ

Let her have fun with it. So how tall is Simran Chaudhary?

MONICA

Are we meeting a Simran? Wow!

SURENDER

Don't be excited, she doesn't look like anything like a Bollywood actor.

RAJ

Height?

SURENDER

Most people add an inch or two to the actual height,  
afterall you can't measure.

*Surender scans the biodata*

SURENDER (CONTD)

5 feet 2 inch.

MONICA

More like five one.

RAJ

Weight?

SURENDER

Says medium built.

MONICA

More like slightly overweight.

SURENDER

They click photo at an angle, you can never tell.

RAJ

Means she is not fat or you would have noted it down.

SURENDER

Definitely not fat.

RAJ

Fair?

SURENDER

At least the biodata says she is fair.

MONICA

Prem Studio photographers do the touch up anyway.

RAJ

Didn't we specify 'No photos from Prem Studio'.

MONICA

Every girl goes to Prem for a matrimonial photo shoot.  
They wait weeks for an appointment because those guys  
can make you look three sizes small.

SURENDER

And the soft lens makes you look five years younger.

RAJ

Ah good one..how old is she?

SURENDER

31! By the Goddess, how did I shortlist her?

RAJ

Wait wait wait wait..let's go over her particulars without discounting facts--5ft 2inches, medium built or say not fat, fair, teacher, knows English, and definitely has brains. Guys, let's meet Simran.

SURENDER

Oho..but we have to meet the currency agent on the way?

RAJ

Just call them and delay the meeting by half an hour. Use my mobile.

SURENDER

Tut..mobile call is 16 rupees a minute. I'll use the phone booth. Can you believe they still charge one rupee per call.

RAJ

But dad, this is quicker. They might leave if we don't turn up on time.

SURENDER

This is India son. The girls' parents play on back foot. They'll wait.

RAJ

I don't like to make people wait.

MONICA

Don't stress, no one expects people to be on time. Who knows they might be running late themselves?

*Surender exits. Raj reads Simran's biodata.*

#### **SCENE 4**

***INT-BED ROOM-DAY (AFTER 30 Minutes)***

*There's a small bed and a stool by the mirror/dressing table. Shahrukh Khan's poster is on the wall. Simran has changed into a blue dress. Chutki is rummaging through a box of bangles.*

CHUTKI

Try this..

SIMRAN

It won't fit..

CHUTKI

This one has a clasp.

SIMRAN

It's pointless.

CHUTKI

How do you know you won't like him?

SIMRAN

The question is whether he will like me?

*Chutki slips the bangle in Simran's hand.*

CHUTKI

It's destined. Didn't you see his name?

SIMRAN

Seriously, the name?

*Chutki stands by Shahrukh's poster. Stretches her arms like him.*

CHUTKI

Raj, Simran on screen - two strangers meet on Eurorail and ta..da..! Cut to - Raj and Simran in Delhi- two strangers meet in a hotel and ta..da...

SIMRAN

Aren't you too old to believe in Santa Claus and Cupid.

CHUTKI

Films imitate life.

SIMRAN

There's a fine line between the real and the fantasy.

CHUTKI

What if he says yes.

SIMRAN

What if he doesn't?

CHUTKI

Someone better will come along, because God creates a special someone for everyone.

SIMRAN

How come he forgot to create a special someone for Pummy aunty?

CHUTKI

She got unlucky in love..and that was way back in 1980.

SIMRAN

Unlucky is an understatement and 1980 was 16 years back.

CHUTKI

What do you want me to say, ruined in love?

SIMRAN

Wedding called off a few hours before the ceremony - is that merely unlucky!

CHUTKI

Okay worse than unlucky!

SIMRAN

No no no, let me help you visualize the scene..the bride waiting in a red bridal sari--the family waiting to receive the *baraat*-- the marquee all lit up-- the waiters serving mocktails and snacks -- the *pandit* (priest) seated in the *mandap* (ceremony place)--and the groom goes BOOM!

CHUTKI

Heartbreaks are part of the deal.

SIMRAN

You don't anticipate a heart break when you fall in love.

CHUTKI

Did you have one?

SIMRAN

What?

CHUTKI

A heartbreak?

SIMRAN

I am not telling you even if I did.

CHUTKI

All the more reason to go for an arranged marriage. No heartbreaks.

SIMRAN

Oh please! You haven't had to meet random people at random places, how would you know?

CHUTKI

The adventure of meeting a stranger--

SIMRAN

--With his mother, father, sister, father's sister  
and--

CHUTKI

Isn't that kinky-- locking eyes with a stranger with so  
many people around.

SIMRAN

All the eyes on you, checking you out, judging you,  
rejecting you.

CHUTKI

But they let you talk in private, don't they?

SIMRAN

The boy and the girl can talk only if other things  
match

"Child come stand next to her--haan the heights match  
alright. Is your daughter wearing heels?"

*Simran enacts the above sequence with Chutki  
playing the girl under scrutiny*

CHUTKI

You can't have sex with all of them, so they have to  
use their imagination.

SIMRAN

Or maybe they should have a swimming costume round.

CHUTKI

Boy and girl date by the pool..

SIMRAN

They want a whole package.

CHUTKI

There you are - the school teacher package - the most  
favoured profession. Early to rise, early to return  
home, summer holidays, steady income, and extra income  
from tuition.

SIMRAN

Exactly, that's all there is to a human being.

CHUTKI

Your biggest armour, read your poetry out to them if  
you don't like the guy. He'll run away along with his--

SIMRAN

Mommy, daddy, aunty, aunty's husband, sister, sister's mother-in-law----

*Sheena comes into the room. She has ear rings in her hand*

SHEENA

Did you want these?

CHUTKI

Oh God..(still laughing at the joke).. no..not these. Arrey the blue ones-- tut..the ones with a tear drop pearl at the bottom.

SHEENA

The danglers with stone work?

SIMRAN

Don't trouble her. I have a collection of ear rings.

CHUTKI

Na...yours won't work and her ear rings are exquisite.

SHEENA

What does he do?

CHUTKI

A software guy. But guess his name?

SHEENA

What's in a name?

CHUTKI

Raj and Simran. Ta-da..synchronicity.

*Sheena sings the title song. Chutki joins.*

SIMRAN

You are more excited about marriage than I am. Why don't we place your ad in the matrimonial column?

CHUTKI

Na...no marriage until I have experienced the depth of love.

SIMRAN

Why different parameters for the rest of us?

CHUTKI

You had your chance when you were 24.

SHEENA

Some people fall in love after marriage.

SIMRAN

Unhuh--people fall out of love after marriage.

SHEENA

Depends on how much you love.

SIMRAN

Of course, of course..you and Titu are eternal love birds.

SHEENA

Tut..I'll bring the blue earrings.

*Sheena exits*

CHUTKI

Don't be mean.. she's lending you her best earrings.

SIMRAN

Kindness cannot compensate brains.

CHUTKI

You witch!

SIMRAN

Fair is foul and foul is fair...

CHUTKI

There's a world beyond Shakespeare.

SIMRAN

Nay...not that.(To Chutki)

*Sheena stands at the door with the ear rings. She is panting from running around.*

SHEENA

Not even these?

CHUTKI

She was being poetic.

*Chutki leaps at the earrings. Wears one.*

CHUTKI

How do I look?

SIMRAN

Where's your tiara, dear Ms World of our suburb?

SHEENA

Tha's a splendid idea, we should organize a beauty contest for Vikaspuri. I'll go on a diet immediately.

CHUTKI

Simran was being sarcastic.

SHEENA

Sarcasm is not good for girls, makes us look old.

SIMRAN

In which case I am already 60.

CHUTKI

These earrings can take away those years off your face.

*Simran wears the ear rings, sees herself in the mirror.*

SIMRAN

Nah..too cheesy for my style.

*Kumud comes in. She is looking graceful in a sari. She has a tinge of sadness - she has not recovered from the fight.*

KUMUD

Simran?

SIMRAN

Let's go.

*Simran takes off the ear rings and leaves them on the table.*

KUMUD

Sheena, child, I don't mind you being here, but your husband will get restless and come looking for you and Simran's father doesn't like men coming home in our absence.

SHEENA

Yeah yeah...I am going home for now, but..can I come down to watch the movie at 6?

KUMUD

Haan..but come alone.

SHEENA

Thank you aunty.

*Sheena scuttles out. Simran has picked a bag.*

CHUTKI

Don't you think you should have been discreet! (to Kumud)

SIMRAN

Clearly your friend is incapable of picking up hints.

*Kumud pats Chutki's cheek, Simran chuckles. They exit. Chutki wears the ear rings. Admires herself in the mirror. Wears a tiara. Kisses Shahrukh Khan in the poster. Music of DDLJ*

### Scene 5

#### ***INT. -HOTEL LOBBY -DAY***

*Two sofas in the hotel lobby. Simran is sitting across her parents. Western classical music is playing in the background. They are ill-at-ease. Shuffling in their seats.*

SIMRAN

We should have waited outside the hotel.

KUMUD

But it's so hot outside.

SIMRAN

We should not have come in early.

BALDEV

Twenty minutes before the meeting time is not early.

KUMUD

We should have met them at Coffee Home. Cheap and best.

BALDEV

You think I didn't suggest Coffee Home. The boy's father was firm about meeting in a hotel.

KUMUD

But we can't afford this place.

BALDEV

Exactly, that is why he suggested we meet in the lobby.

KUMUD

What if the hotel staff objects? If everyone starts meeting in the hotel lobbies, they will run into losses.

SIMRAN

Just pretend you intend to go to their cafe after meeting in the lobby.

BALDEV

Be at ease, no one will notice.

KUMUD

Isn't it time?

BALDEV

Five minutes past.

SIMRAN

They are entitled to ten minutes grace time.

KUMUD

Not that I expect them to be on time.

BALDEV

They can afford to be late, they are in a strong position.

SIMRAN

Their strength is relative.

BALDEV

Our weakness is absolute.

KUMUD

We are all equally helpless before destiny.

BALDEV

We were not so helpless once. We had options when she was young, even three years back there were good proposals. But she rejected them all and now--

SIMRAN

One good thing about meeting people in hotel lobbies is that you can use the toilets.

KUMUD

Coffee Home toilets are disgusting.

*Simran exits to the toilet.*

BALDEV

How convenient to run away from reality.

KUMUD

No point meeting people from South Delhi.

BALDEV

We can only meet people who want to meet us.

KUMUD

They have a lifestyle..we are no match.

BALDEV

Perhaps they are looking for a girl who can speak good English..remember what Chutki said this morning.

KUMUD

Chutki is a kid.

BALDEV

She is smarter than Simran.

KUMUD

If only we could contact the boy's parents..do they have a walkie talkie?

BALDEV

You mean the mobile phone? Wait...let me check his biodata.

*Baldev takes out a paper from his pocket.*

BALDEV (CONTD)

It's an overseas number.

KUMUD

Tut..what are our options?

BALDEV

Just one--wait for them.

*Simran enters*

KUMUD

Can I do my knitting here?

SIMRAN

You could knit a sweater for the Austalian boy--

BALDEV

They must be on the way..they know we are waiting.

*A hotel staff enters*

HOTEL STAFF

Mr Baldev Chaudhary?

BALDEV

Yes--?

HOTEL STAFF

Mr Malhotra called the reception, he is running late.  
Would you like to order some tea--coffee?

BALDEV

Ummn..how much..

SIMRAN

We'll have it later..Thanks.

*Staff exits. Baldev is relieved.*

BALDEV

They can afford to be late--

KUMUD

What's our option?

SIMRAN

Just one.

*Kumud starts knitting. Simran picks up a magazine from the coffee table. Flips pages. Baldev shifts in the sofa. Changes position--stares into the abyss. They wait. Western Classical music is playing. BEAT*

## Scene 6

### ***INT-LIVING ROOM-DAY***

CHUTKI

I saw him in the balcony..

SHEENA

What's his name?

CHUTKI

With his morning coffee.

SHEENA

House number?

*Chutki peeps out the window*

CHUTKI

He came out for a bit.

*Sheena peeps out.*

SHEENA

On the other side of the road?

CHUTKI

He looks like Shahrukh.

SHEENA

Every guy looks like Shahrukh.

CHUTKI

But this guy has dimples..deep dimples. Exactly like--

*Chutki goes to the poster on the door.*

SHEENA

But who is he? What does he do?

CHUTKI

I don't know.

SHEENA

How can you love him without knowing his name?

CHUTKI

Happens..

SHEENA

How long have you been in love?

CHUTKI

Since Tuesday.

SHEENA

Five days!

CHUTKI

Feels like eternity.

SHEENA

Five whole days and you didn't tell me.

CHUTKI

I wanted to be alone with the feeling.

SHEENA

Let's go to the lane he lives in.

CHUTKI

I went this morning.

SHEENA

Did you wave at him?

CHUTKI

He wasn't there.

SHEENA

Tut..

CHUTKI

Can you do me a favour--please! Get me his name and number?

SHEENA

I don't even know him.

CHUTKI

Or ask your husband?

SHEENA

Titu is not the social sorts.

CHUTKI

All he has to do is befriend the security guard of their colony.

SHEENA

Even I can ask the guard--but wait-- my maid works in that colony. I can ask her to connect with the maid who works in Shahrukh's house.

CHUTKI

Yes..let's call him Shahrukh until we know his real name.

SHEENA

What if Shahrukh has a steady girl friend?

CHUTKI

I'll win him over.

SHEENA

What if he's a Casanova?

CHUTKI

True love can change people.

SHEENA

What if he doesn't find you attractive?

CHUTKI

Impossible.

SHEENA

You are not Aishwarya Rai.

CHUTKI

Are you even my friend?

SHEENA

Don't raise your hopes lest you suffer.

CHUTKI

But I want him..that's it!

SHEENA

Go slow.

CHUTKI

I have to chase my love with urgency. It's critical!

SHEENA

Why..you're only 24!

CHUTKI

I don't want to end up like Pummy aunty.

SHEENA

So it is true?

CHUTKI

What?

SHEENA

Her husband ran away with her best friend.

CHUTKI

All I know is he didn't make it to the wedding.

SHEENA

And she died of heart ache?

CHUTKI

That's a mystery no one talks about.

SHEENA

Was it arranged or love?

CHUTKI

They went to the same college. That's the reason papa sent us to girls' school.

SHEENA

Tut.. but what about Simran?

CHUTKI

She's looking for someone special.

SHEENA

Don't mind, but isn't she too plain to be choosy.

CHUTKI

She knows what she wants.

SHEENA

Maybe she likes someone?

CHUTKI

I would have sniffed him out.

SHEENA

Why she is already 31..who will marry her?

CHUTKI

Raj will find Simran!

SHEENA

You are impossible.

CHUTKI

Movie time..

*Chutki turns on the TV...DDLJ song.*

### **Scene 7**

#### ***INT-HOTEL LOBBY-DAY***

*Raj's sister, father and mother are squeezed on a sofa. Usha's makeup is loud and comical. Simran and her parents are sitting on the sofa placed directly across. Raj is standing behind his parents' sofa. He keeps changing position.*

SURENDER

You know how these currency agents are..always late. We couldn't have avoided the meeting-

RAJ

I am so sorry you had to wait..just a bad day. Should we go to the cafe?

SURENDER

I don't want to saddle Mr Chaudhary with a fat bill.

RAJ

I'll pick the bill--

SURENDER

Tut...I know you are modern, but Mr Chaudhary will not let us pay..right sir?

USHA

Traditions bind us, only the girls' parents can pay.  
What do you say sister? (To Kumud)

KUMUD

Yes..yes. Such is the tradition.

SURENDER

So it's settled we'll stay here and talk.

BALDEV

Not a problem, the sofas are quite comfortable. In fact,  
we have been sitting on them for an hour.

*Monica crosses her legs. Her skirt is too short  
for everyone's comfort. Kumud is horrified.*

*Surender realizing the awkwardness of Monica's  
action.*

SURENDER

Monica, child, why don't you let your brother sit for a  
while.

RAJ

I don't want to sit..but mom, why don't you exchange  
seats with Monica?

*Usha shuffles in her seat, pushing others to the  
end.*

USHA

I am comfortable.

*Surender looks at her for a second and Usha  
doesn't respond. BEAT*

SURENDER

You are far too comfortable for others comfort,  
darling.

KUMUD

Raj, child.. please sit here, Simran is used to  
standing long hours.

SIMRAN

Exactly..don't kill yourself over chivalry.

RAJ

No no..

SURENDER

Tut *nahin*...you keep sitting. My wife missed the joke. But really.. Monica is an independent girl. Tell them about your work, Monica.

MONICA

Dad please..we are here to talk about Raj.

*Baldev is restless by now. He wants to say something, only if someone would let him speak. Simran is half-amused, half-annoyed. Raj squeezes his sister's shoulders.*

RAJ

How can we not introduce you, you're the rockstar of our family.

SURENDER

Tut..now that the cat is out of the bag--just two minutes of your time, sir?

BALDEV

Yes yes..

SURENDER

So this young girl here is a fashion designer. She has a boutique in Green Park .. 20 people work under her. Can you guess her age?

KUMUD

Twenty..eight..or--

SURENDER

By God no! She is only 26!

BALDEV

Very nice. Simran is also the head of the--

SURENDER

English teacher, I know--it's in the biodata. You'll be amazed sir, how I remember all the biodatas. Do you know how many responses we got to Raj's ad.

RAJ

Dad...

BALDEV

I can imagine..

SURENDER

Beyond imagination--500! And I had to sort out all the biodatas. Your daughter is lucky to be in the shortlist.

USHA

He did not consult me. So which standard do you teach--what was her name again?

SURENDER

Simran--her name is Simran. She teaches grade 10th students. Right sir?

BALDEV

You have an astonishing memory.

SURENDER

*Desi ghee...* my mother used to make *ghee* at home. Mind you, *ghee* made from cow's milk.

USHA

That is why his cholesterol is high.

SURENDER

Usha darling..it's not that high.

MONICA

Borderline.

*Monica crosses her legs again. Baldev looks away. Simran coughs.*

RAJ

Monica, why don't you check out the shopping arcade in the hotel? Remember we saw a shop when we were coming in.

USHA

She has spent all the money at Shopper's Stop.

RAJ

Monica?

MONICA

I need cash.

*Monica gets the hint. Monica and Raj move away from the sofas.*

MONICA

Why are we wasting time on her?

RAJ

Tut..we can't just walk away.

MONICA

Dad was right--average STUFF.

RAJ

Shh..Can you please buy a longer skirt while we finish here.

MONICA

Seriously?

RAJ

Please..it's getting awkward. And don't be gone long. Mom..do you want to accompany Monica?

*Usha does not move. Raj takes out his wallet and pulls out currency notes.*

USHA

Nahin baba..I am tired. So much running around.

SURENDER

You know how it is..so many girls to meet and only 15 days to finalize things. (To Baldev)

KUMUD

You send your daughter alone--is it even safe?

SURENDER

She is trained in karate. And your daughter?

BALDEV

She has been so busy with academics that-

USHA

Don't mind, but Monica is so beautiful, we had to train her in self-defence at a young age.

SURENDER

If I am not mistaken, you have two daughters.

KUMUD

The younger one has learnt kathak. She loves dance.

SURENDER

Monica is also big time into dance. (To Kumud) Why did you send her shopping--she will delay us for the next meeting. (To Raj)

*Raj has just returned. He continues standing*

RAJ

She can't be gone long, I gave her just enough money.

USHA

Do you know how to cook Simran? Academics is of little use in the kitchen.

*Surender nudges her to stop*

USHA

No harm in asking..what do you say sister?

KUMUD

My daughters are excellent cooks.

USHA

Can you cook momos?

*Simran looks straight at Usha*

SIMRAN

No..

SURENDER

Nevermind..Usha likes to ask this question to every girl she meets. Not that we eat momos. So Mr. Chaudhary, do you have any questions for Raj?

BALDEV

Not really..you told everything..just wondering if Raj is planning to settle down in Australia?

SURENDER

He is already settled there. So much so, he drinks Bisleri water in India.

RAJ

Sir..I am an Australian citizen now.

BALDEV

So..you would want your wife to work?

RAJ

Absolutely..not for money, but for her own sanity.

BALDEV

Simran is an independent girl. She can adjust anywhere. Why don't you two talk in private?

SURENDER

Why bother, they can talk here. What do you say sonny?

RAJ

Yeah..now that I have a place to sit.

*Raj sits down on the sofa.*

SURENDER

Just inquisitive as to why you delayed your daughter's marriage? 31 is old even by international standard.

BALDEV

Just didn't materialize....you know how it is--things have to click--

KUMUD

--You can't change destinies.

SIMRAN

We were looking for a perfect matrimonial alliance.

SURENDER

A perfect alliance for you, is it? (contempt)

SIMRAN

We interviewed quite a few men, but they turned out to be idiots.

RAJ

You seem to have a high bench mark. (not believing)

SIMRAN

My IQ is 101, I can't marry any Tom, Dick, Harry.

USHA

What is Monica's IQ?

SURENDER

Shh! (To Usha) What do you want to do with this IQ? Apply to Indian Institute of Technology? (To Simran)

SIMRAN

Why would I want to go to an engineering college? English is my subject.

RAJ

Well..good for you to have a high IQ.

SIMRAN

An average Indian has an IQ score of 80 something. But I can't request candidates to take an IQ test?

BALDEV

She has a sense of humor. (Trying to stop Simran)

SIMRAN

That's another trait that I am looking for - a sense of humor. Hard to find.

BALDEV

The kids need their space, maybe they could go to the cafe?

USHA

Raj talks to a girl only if she clears the first round.

BALDEV

I think you should talk to her before making up your mind.

RAJ

Mom please! Yeah..so talk? I am still thinking what to ask?

SIMRAN

Don't you have a list of questions?

RAJ

No..I...just go with the flow.

BALDEV

How can you marry or not marry a person without talking? (Beseeching)

*Simran looks away. Kumud is scared. Surrender continues talking non-chalantly.*

SURENDER

You won't believe this Mr Chaudhary, but I didn't see my wife until the wedding night.

KUMUD

Times have changed..

USHA

I like the change, they didn't make good makeup in our times. Simran doesn't wear any makeup?

KUMUD

She..just like that--Simran?

SIMRAN

I don't have the time to remove makeup.

USHA

Raj brought me a makeup removing kit from Australia! These foreigners are ahead of us in everything.

RAJ

Mom! (firm)

SURENDER

So Mr Chaudhary, nice meeting you, I will call you up and--you know, it's up to Raj really. So many girls to choose from.

BALDEV

But Raj didn't even talk to Simran? How can he discard--they should talk for at least five minutes. (pleading). You'll be surprised how well versed Simran is in politics, international relations and literature. She speaks impeccable English. In fact I learnt this word from her - impeccable. Her vocabulary is--

*Kumud is tearful. Simran is angry. Surender rolls up his eyes.*

RAJ

Rest assured sir, I am a keen observer. I don't like to engage with people directly--this distance gives me a perspective.

*Simran stands up*

SIMRAN

Excuse my imprudence Mr Raj Malhotra, but I have a different style of engaging with people. I like to probe deep. Since I have made the effort of coming to this hotel which is 27 kilometers from where I live, and spent 300 rupess on the cab, and then waited an hour for you guys to arrive, I think I deserve a better return on investment.

SURENDER

Like what investment? (suspicious)

*Baldev is too overwhelmed, he sneaks a moment to wipe his tears. Kumud looks askance at Baldev.*

SIMRAN

Investment of my time and my father's hard-earned money. As a pensioner he has limited means.

*Raj is trying to gauge the situation. Usha is baffled. Surender's patronizing contempt is changing to anger and suspicion.*

RAJ

I am sorry..but what is it you want?

SIMRAN

Five minutes of your time.

*BEAT. A feeling of shock has overcome the group. Monica walks in with a shopping bag.*

MONICA

Hey--are we ready to leave?(Sing-song)

SIMRAN

Not yet. You can take my seat..(noticing Monica's reluctance). I insist you take my seat and sit across your father, while I talk to your brother. And be careful how you cross your legs.

*Monica sits in Simran's place.*

SIMRAN (CONTD)

Mr Raj, are you waiting for an invitation?

*Raj stands up reluctantly.*

SURENDER

Where are you going?

SIMRAN

To those soafs in the corner. Not too far from where you are.

*Raj realizes he is cornered. He walks swiftly to the indicated sofas. Baldev starts to say something - stops.*

SIMRAN (CONTD)

Please continue talking...we'll be back soon. (To Surender)

### Scene 8

#### **INT-LIVING ROOM-DAY**

*Chutki and Sheena are watching DDLJ.*

SHEENA

Look at his smile..

CHUTKI

The dimples..

SHEENA

And his dance moves.

CHUTKI

Do you think he'll like me?

SHEENA

What do you mean?

CHUTKI

The guy who lives on the other side of the road -- how can you forget?

SHEENA

I don't know. Guys are strange..they can like a girl for silly reasons.

CHUTKI

Like what?

SHEENA

Like her dad's car.

CHUTKI

Why did Titu like you?

SHEENA

My dad didn't have a car..but I had my eyes, looks--and an hourglass figure in those days.

CHUTKI

Why you must have been quite a head turner.

SHEENA

I was spoilt for choices. But Titu chased me for two months before I said yes to the first date.

CHUTKI

You didn't like him?

SHEENA

Guys don't like girls who are easy.

*A muffled voice of a man. Chutki increases TV volume.*

SHEENA

Did someone call my name?

CHUTKI

I didn't hear a thing. But why does he keep calling you again and again.

SHEENA

He loves me like insane and--

CHUTKI

And what?

SHEENA

I won't tell you--it's too naughty for a young unmarried girl. Your parents will kill me.

CHUTKI

Why doesn't he work?

SHEENA

He is thinking of starting a business.

CHUTKI

Hasn't he been thinking a long time.

SHEENA

He doesn't want to risk his money. I am looking for a job myself..can you ask Simran to ask in her school?

CHUTKI

But you don't have a degree.

SHEENA

She would know of schools that are not so particular about a degree. Perhaps nursery classes?

CHUTKI

Nursery kids are tough. Are you sure?

SHEENA

I want to work..go out every day and do something.

CHUTKI

Do a computer course..it's the next big thing.

SHEENA

Can you teach me computers?

CHUTKI

Silly, I need a computer before I can teach you. But there's a training center in the market.

SHEENA

They'll ask for a fee..and--

CHUTKI

Hey that's Titu--why's he forever yelling!

*A man's voice -- Sheena!*

SHEENA

I told you I heard someone.

*Sheena hurries out. Chutki goes to the window. Looks out. DDLJ song in the background.*

Scene 9

***INT-HOTEL LOBBY-DAY***

*Raj and Simran stand by the sofa. Their parents are looking at them. Baldev is trying to hear what's going on.*

SIMRAN

You could sit if you like.

RAJ

No, I am good.

SIMRAN

In a rush, are we?

RAJ

I have meetings lined up, if you don't mind. (sarcasm)

SIMRAN

Ah the mating bazaar! The girls can wait for their Australian prince.

RAJ

Are you mocking me or the girls like yourself?

SIMRAN

What do you think?

RAJ

Somebody said spinsters are bitter, vitriolic women-- now I can appreciate the saying.

SIMRAN

How come you are an eligible bachelor at 32 and I a frustrated spinster at 31?

RAJ

Didn't you see your father's desperation?

SIMRAN

He is a victim of the system that shames women who cannot find a mating partner by a certain age. There's a clock ticking for women, whereas men can live in timelessness.

RAJ

It's the physiology and anatomy of reproduction.

SIMRAN

It's the mindset that wants younger brides so that they can produce more babies and work in the kitchen.

RAJ

So you wanted to lecture me on patriarchy?

SIMRAN

Oh no no no..I wanted to admonish you for being an arrogant bastard.

RAJ

Excuse me!

SIMRAN

Not entirely your fault, though.

RAJ

Are you blaming my family?

SIMRAN

No..the extended family and beyond the family.

RAJ

My family respects women, don't you see how we dote on Monica?

SIMRAN

Of course I see everything----how your dad showers respect on your mother, and Monica --why she's such a sweet..spoilt.. brat.

RAJ

You think you can fling abuses on my family!

SIMRAN

She could learn some manners--the average STUFF!

*Beat. Raj avoids Simran's piercing gaze.*

RAJ

Oh.fuck..no..I mean.. I'm sorry..it wasn't meant like that. It's just an expression..

SIMRAN

Yes...yes..we understand. Afterall, it's a bazaar of mating partners and gentlemen like you are forced to make a relative comparison of secondary sexual characteristics--not your fault.

RAJ

Yes..but excuse me, what is secondary sexual character--characteristics?

SIMRAN

Just a term in anthropology, that describes the physical traits that give humans and animals advantage

(MORE)

SIMRAN (cont'd)  
over their rivals in finding a mating partner. The primitive stuff.

RAJ  
Listen..mate..I didn't think like that or think at all. I simply want to marry an Indian girl, how do I do that sitting in Australia? So I took this route.

SIMRAN  
Aren't you too modern for this age-old traditional system?

RAJ  
Why corner me? The newspapers are full of matrimonial ads. If it works for modern Indians, then it works for me.

SIMRAN  
People like you have distorted the system. We are no longer equal partners in this bazaar.

RAJ  
But I didn't cause this inequality?

SIMRAN  
But you took advantage of it.

RAJ  
Maybe---but you are here of your own volition. You don't have to enter this bazaar at all. So can we go back now?

CUT TO

*Baldev has been looking at them from a distance.  
Others snatch a glimpse when they can.*

SURENDER  
What's taking them so long?

BALDEV  
They seem to be enjoying the conversation?

USHA  
What are they talking about?

MONICA  
The bees and the birds.

KUMUD  
Let's continue with our conversation..so what were you saying Mr Malhotra?

*Surender is peeved, but he resumes talking.*

CUT TO

SIMRAN

In a bit--in a bit, we'll both go back to our respective parents.

RAJ

Mate..I am done talking.

SIMRAN

But I am not finished yet.

RAJ

What's left to talk?

SIMRAN

I want you to apologize to my family.

RAJ

For what?

SIMRAN

For being arrogant and rude.

RAJ

It's not my fault if I don't find you attractive. You should bleach your face, wear make up to hide the dark circles and wear a strong perfume. I am repulsed by your looks and odor.

SIMRAN

Wow! The mask falls!

RAJ

My dad said let's skip this girl, she is too old and plain. But I said, hey..her name is Simran, let's check her out. How wrong I was!

SIMRAN

My sister said, his name is Raj and he is an NRI, he will be modern and polished. How wrong she was!

*CORY CORBETT(28) enters. He is dressed in casuals and sunglasses.*

RAJ

How distasteful this has been?

SIMRAN

Living in Australia has not made you modern or even half-decent.

CORY

Hey..Raj!

RAJ

Cory! (Puts on a fake smile and switches accent)

CORY

I didn't know you were in Delhi?

RAJ

It's my hometown. But what are you doing here mate?

*Raj puts his arm around Cory, moves away from Simran. Simran watches them closely.*

CORY

Work..we are outsourcing a process.. .and--oh I am sorry, I interrupted you guys. (indicating Simran)

RAJ

Oh no no worries..I don't know her.

CORY

You don't what?

RAJ

Some random lady.

CORY

Weren't you guys talking when I walked in?

RAJ

Who me? No..no..

CORY

Wait wait wait..I came out the lift, walked to the foyer--and then I saw you--and I said, hey that's Raj--Raj talking to a woman--and--but of course you were talking to her.

RAJ

Oh that--I wasn't talking--as in talking..she was looking for the cafe, you know..directions and stuff.

CORY

Ah..so I didn't get it wrong.

RAJ

Yeah..yeah..my mistake, I had a brief interaction with her, but I am here to meet my uncle. He should be coming in any moment.

CORY

Cool..see you around.

SIMRAN

Hi..

CORY

Hey.

SIMRAN

Simran.

RAJ

Excuse me ma'am, the cafe's that side.

SIMRAN

I am talking to that gentleman.

CORY

Do I know you?

SIMRAN

No..

CORY

Ummn--the cafe's straight down..on to your left.

SIMRAN

Thanks..but I am not looking for a cafe.

CORY

Sure..(looks at Raj)

RAJ

Ma'am I'll talk to you once I am done saying goodbye to my friend. .

*Pulling Cory aside*

RAJ

Let's get out of here quick...she looks like a mental case.

CORY

Let's call the hotel staff to help her.

RAJ

Let's help ourselves first.

SIMRAN

Your parents are getting restless.

CORY

Parents? Oh..oh.. you and your family are here to meet your uncle--

SIMRAN

No no no..he and his family are here to meet my family.

CORY

Sure--(looks at Raj)

*Raj signals Cory to flee*

SIMRAN

We are on a matrimonial date.

CORY

A matrimonial date? Exciting.

SIMRAN

With our families, of course.

CORY

A matrimonial date under parental supervision.

SIMRAN

No no no..let me educate you. Mind you, not every tourist gets to see this first hand. You got lucky.

*Cory pulls out a camera from his pocket.*

CORY

Sure..

SIMRAN

This is a scene straight out of an arranged marriage film.

RAJ

Don't listen to her, she's mad.

CORY

Sure..(To Raj)

SIMRAN

In an arranged marriage, like any other marriage, people go looking for mating partners. They meet probable partners in cafes, hotel lobbies, people's living rooms, or even by the roadside.

CORY

Sure..roadside is cool.(To Simran)

RAJ

Are you nuts? Lecturing people in a public place. (To Simran)

SIMRAN

In the good old days the partners were introduced by common relatives, but these days people advertize in newspapers.

CORY

Sounds like an adventure. (To Simran)

RAJ

Oh no no...she's just making up things for effect. (To Cory)

CORY

Sure.. (To Raj)

SIMRAN

So when you walked in, Raj was checking me out—in fact he was done checking me out.

RAJ

She is a vindictive woman...she has been hurling abuses at me and my family because I rejected her.

CORY

Sure.. (To Raj)

SIMRAN

And I had rejected him even before he arrived, because he was one hour late.

CORY

An hour!

RAJ

Are you even in a position to reject a proposal?  
(sneer)

SIMRAN

You see he had meetings lined up..meeting one girl after another..checking them out and striking a conversation if he approves of their secondary sexual characteristics..it's a tough job. (To Cory)

*Monica and Surender come from behind. They pull Raj away. Simran continues talking to Cory.*

SURENDER

C'mon, we are late for the next meeting.

MONICA

Who's he?

SURENDER

Your friend? Oho..why didn't you introduce him? (To Raj)

Hello there..(To Cory)

SIMRAN

Meet Raj's family!

*Surender and Monica surround Cory. Raj remains aloof and overwhelmed.*

*Surender shakes Cory's hand vigorously. In her zeal to go close to Cory, Monica pushes Simran behind.*

SURENDER

Hello young man. I am Raj's dad. Monica, my daughter.

CORY

Hello.

SURENDER

What a mad day to run into you..we have meetings lined up.

CORY

I know..

MONICA

Raj must have told you.

SURENDER

But young man, tomorrow you are having dinner with us. I insist. I'll send my car and driver to bring you over.

CORY

Thanks but..

SURENDER

No no no--you are our guest.

MONICA

We'll be delighted to have you over.

SURENDER

Now you can't say no..

*Simran walks away to Baldev and Kumud who are where she had left them. Cory's eyes follow her.*

**Scene 10**

***INT-LIVING ROOM-EVENING***

*Chutki brings in two coffee mugs to Sheena. Sheena is watching the film.*

SHEENA

You missed the fight scene.

CHUTKI

I don't like fights.

SHEENA

Ummn good coffee. (Drinks)

CHUTKI

I made it strong for you.

SHEENA

Thanks. I am waiting for the last scene.

CHUTKI

Two fight sequences before the train comes into the frame

SHEENA

You should become a film director.

CHUTKI

*Sighs.* Should we go check out the guy after the movie?

SHEENA

No way..Titu is upset I have been out all afternoon.

CHUTKI

We'll dash across the road and be back before Titu realizes the film is over.

SHEENA

God..you're fixated.

CHUTKI

I don't want to lose him.

SHEENA

Ad Break! I hate the break before the climax. (Sigh)

*Chutki goes to the window. Peeps out. Turns back disappointed. Sheena lowers TV volume.*

CHUTKI

We are living under the shadow of a curse.

SHEENA

What?

CHUTKI

Pummy aunty cursed my father.

SHEENA

You don't believe that kind of stuff?

CHUTKI

I was a kid--I just know that Pummy aunty left a suicide note. She said she would have survived the heartbreak but for all the people jeering her.

SHEENA

Did your father--

CHUTKI

You know how senseless he can be--anything for a good laugh.

SHEENA

So the rumours are true..she killed herself.

CHUTKI

Ma is so scared.

SHEENA

What's the curse?

CHUTKI

That we'll both end up like Pummy aunty - heartbroken, jilted spinsters. And my father will be ridiculed like he--you know Karma.

SHEENA

I don't believe she would have cursed her own nieces. She loved you both.

CHUTKI

I see the fear in my mother's eyes.

SHEENA

What about Simran?

CHUTKI

She is fearless and resilient.

SHEENA

That's the only way to be - fearless and resilient.  
Aeee--up the volume.

CHUTKI

The train is here!

SHEENA

Raj gets on the train while Simran is at the platform.

CHUTKI

Helpless in her father's grip.

SHEENA

There the father lets Simran go--'go live your life  
Simran'.

CHUTKI

Live your life Simran...run run run!

SHEENA

Raj stretches his arm--Simran running with the  
train--her arm seeking Raj's.

*Door bell. Rings twice. Chutki takes the door,  
reluctantly. Sheena continues watching. DDLJ song  
starts playing.*

*A tall, bulky man storms in. Pushes Chutki aside.  
Chutki falls down. He is drunk and disheveled.  
Charges at Sheena, lifts her by her shirt. DDLJ  
song continues to play.*

TITU

I have been shouting like a fool, you deaf woman.  
Singing songs while I wait for ice cubes. Making me  
look like a fool in the neighbourhood - you cocksucking  
bitch!

*He slaps Sheena. Chutki shrieks.*

*Titu Exits. Sheena collects herself. She looks at  
Chutki. In that moment we know she had been lying  
about her happy married life. Sheena exits. Sound  
of the door shutting.*

*Song continues to play.*

*Chutki goes to the window--draws the curtain. The  
song continues to play.*

Scene 11

***INT-HOTEL LOBBY-NIGHT***

*Kumud and Baldev are waiting. Simran enters.*

KUMUD

Why did you go to the toilet without telling me? I have been holding for so long.

SIMRAN

It was urgent. Have they gone?

KUMUD

They left without a proper goodbye.

BALDEV

They were late for the next meeting. I think Mr Malhotra was upset with Raj for spending too much time with Simran.

KUMUD

What was he talking about?

SIMRAN

General stuff.

BALDEV

Did he mention marriage?

SIMRAN

Not even a hint.

KUMUD

But there's hope, no boy has talked to her for so long.

BALDEV

It's positive so far. The mother is okay, but the father and the sister were not interested in Simran.

KUMUD

But I have to use the toilet before we leave.

BALDEV

It's on the other end..let me show you, lest you lose your way.

*Kumud and Baldev exit talking about, 'Most positive'.*

*Cory enters.*

CORY

Ma'am..the cafe is straight down, on to your left.

SIMRAN

Oh no..I am sorry I dragged you in the mess.

CORY

It was most entertaining and educational. Now I want to know more about arranged marriages -- how about you continue the lecture in the cafe?

SIMRAN

I am with my family.

CORY

Tomorrow or the day after--?

SIMRAN

Tomorrow works.

CORY

Five PM in the café?

SIMRAN

Okay..

CUT TO

*Baldev and Kumud spot Cory and Simran. They are returning from the toilet.*

BALDEV

What is this white man talking to her about?

KUMUD

I think he is Raj's friend.

BALDEV

What's wrong--all the boys are suddenly falling in love with Simran.

KUMUD

The curse is broken.

*Cory and Simran continue talking. DDLJ song in the background.*

## **The Playwright Speaks..**

Nineties was India's golden decade. Indian economy had opened up and India had gone global, but the abundance had not percolated to the middle class. Westernization, capitalism and global exposure led to rapid commercialization. Everything became a commodity - food, beauty, love, sports and even marriage. Arranged marriage became a market, a bazaar to hunt for the partner of your dreams. Around the time Aishwarya Rai won Ms World title and suddenly Indian girls were expected to transform into beautiful nymphs. In 1995 Bollywood produced DDLJ or *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayengey*, a romantic comedy starring the super star, Shahrukh Khan. The film was about lovers standing up against parents but not breaking from the tradition. I wrote the play because I wanted to capture a society in flux and create characters that were trapped between personal aspirations, social expectations, cultural mores and Bollywood romance. The question was how will these young women find love and does love exist outside Bollywood? The play has Bollywood music and dance thrown in the mix of high-voltage drama. It is a realistic play and the characters are your next-door neighbors living out their vulnerable lives. But there is hope for them and for us as the characters redefine love and come to their own.

**Author's Bio: Rashma N. Kalsie** is a playwright, theater maker and author. Her works have been performed and published in Australia and India. Rashma's work includes the plays: *Padma Shri Prahasana* (India Habitat Center 2016, Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts 2018, Jawaharlal Nehru University 2019), *Melbourne Talam* developed at Melbourne Theater Company (MTC Education Season 2017), *The Lost Dog* (Walker Gallery & Arts Centre, Dandenong 2012 and 2014), and *Meri Script Hai Kahan* (Eventura Creations 2003); the novels *Ohh! Gods are Online* co-authored with Phl Cherry (Srishti Publishers & Distributors), *Melbourne Talam* (Currency Press 2017), and *The Buddha and the Bitch* co-authored with Phebe Beiser (Hay House); and over 100 scripts for TV shows. She has published articles and shorts in print and online magazines.

Awards: Green Room Nomination for 'New Writing for Australian Stage' in 2018 for *Melbourne Talam*, *Melbourne Talam* won 'Drama Victoria Award for Best VCE production 2017'

Grants: Council of City of Greater Dandenong Grants for *The Lost Dog* in 2012 and 2014, IGNCA grants for *Padma Shri Prahasana* (2018), Indic Academy grants for *Padma Shri Prahasana* (2018)

Rashma was CONNECT Ambassador for CONNECT Program by Melbourne Theater Company & Multicultural Arts Victoria from 2013 to 2015

