

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench.co.uk

Baby Taj

Tanya Shaffer

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM
SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK

Copyright © 2010 by Tanya Shaffer
All Rights Reserved

BABY TAJ is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-69842-2

www.SamuelFrench.com

www.SamuelFrench-London.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Info@SamuelFrench.com

1-866-598-8449

UNITED KINGDOM AND EUROPE

Plays@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk

020-7255-4302

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French, depending upon country of performance. Please be aware that *BABY TAJ* may not be licensed by Samuel French in your territory. Professional and amateur producers should contact the nearest Samuel French office or licensing partner to verify availability.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *BABY TAJ* is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play(s) does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to Samuel French before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title(s) is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Professional/Stock licensing fees are quoted upon application to Samuel French.

No one shall make any changes in this title(s) for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title(s), or part of this title(s), to any social media websites.

For all enquiries regarding motion picture, television, and other media rights, please contact Samuel French.

MUSIC USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all music clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Samuel French, against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of music by licensees. Please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

BABY TAJ was first produced by TheatreWorks at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts in Mountain View, California, September 28 to October 23, 2005. The performance was directed by Matt August, with sets by Joe Ragey, costumes by Fumiko Bielefeldt, lighting by Pamela Gray, and choreography by Sheetal Gandhi. The cast was as follows:

RACHEL	Lesley Fera
ANJALI	Sunita Param
CHANDRA	Qurrat Ann Kadwani
SUNITA	Kavita Matani
ARUSTU	Indrajit Sarkar
OSHO	Oomung Varma
ABHI	Sam Younis
MRS. SHARMA	Rashmi Rustagi
DANCER	Rachel Rajput
NATHAN/SAM/MIKE	Noel Wood
ENSEMBLE	Anil Margshayam, Janak Ramachandran, Rishi Shukla

CHARACTERS

RACHEL – A 37 year-old Jewish-American woman. Free-spirited travel addict. Single.

ANJALI – Her best friend, an Indian lesbian in her thirties who has lived in the U.S. for at least nine years. Single.

CHANDRA – Arustu's wife. Intelligent and quick-tempered. 30-ish.

SUNITA – A girl in her late teens, servant of the Sharmas.

ARUSTU – Mrs. Sharma's son. An astrologer. 30s. A prankster.

OSHO – Chandra and Arustu's six-year-old son.

MRS. SHARMA – Anjali's grandmother. A stern matriarch from Agra, India. 70's.

ABHI – Arustu's cousin. Teacher of Hindi, student of history, poet. Intellectual. 30s.

NATHAN – A friend of Rachel's. 20s or 30s.

MIKE – A friend of Rachel's. Medical intern. 20s or 30s.

TERI – Mike's wife. Medical intern also. 20s or 30s.

SAM – An ex-boyfriend of Rachel's. Mid-30s.

MOTHER – Abhi's Mother, 50s or 60s

COURTIER, LADY, PRINCE, ARJUMAND, GIRL, MAN, various historical characters who appear only in movement sequences.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Since *Baby Taj* takes place in multiple locations, I suggest a simple, stylized set of moveable pieces. The back wall may be a cyclorama, so that colors and shapes can be projected onto it as Abhi and Rachel visit the various monuments. The scene shifts should be fluid, with cross-fades rather than blackouts as often as possible.

Multiple-casting can permit as few as seven actors, if desired. (This would involve doubling Anjali/Sunita and Chandra/Mrs. Sharma.) A cast of nine or more actors is preferable.

A NOTE ON PUNCTUATION

Three dots (...) are intended to signal a trailing off inflection.

An em dash (–) is intended to signal an interruption.

*To my three boys: David, Tavi (“Daby”), and Elon;
and to Elena and Johnny, with love.*

(PROLOGUE: As the house lights fade, gentle music is heard. A woman is seen in silhouette, rocking a baby. Stars are visible above her, as if we are peering down at this little scene from out in space. The following language is heard in voiceover.)

RACHEL. *(voiceover)* I've dreamed you for so long, I can hardly believe you're with me now. Yet here you are: a tiny human voyager, sleeping off the shock of migration. I want to gather up joy and lay it at your feet, to banish grief to an island so remote that it can never find you. Instead I give you this world in all its startling detail. One day you'll ask me how you got here. When you do, I'll tell you this story.

ACT I

Scene One

(Rachel's bedroom. RACHEL is lying on her bed, facing upstage with her head toward the audience. ANJALI is about to inseminate her with a plastic syringe. ANJALI is five months pregnant.)

RACHEL. Wait!

ANJALI. What?

RACHEL. Wait!

ANJALI. Why?

RACHEL. Just...

ANJALI. Do you need to use the bathroom?

RACHEL. No –

ANJALI. Are you cold? I'll turn on the space heater.

RACHEL. No –

ANJALI. Then what? What is it? Rachel, this isn't the time for guessing games. These little nippers only last half an hour once they're thawed.

RACHEL. Nothing.

ANJALI. Good. Now on your back and don't give me any more lip.

RACHEL. It's just –

ANJALI. I said on your back, straight girl. Never cross a lesbian holding a turkey baster. I've got sperm, and I'm not afraid to use it.

RACHEL. (*RACHEL lies down, then pops back up.*) Can't we refreeze it?

ANJALI. You know we can't refreeze it. Half of them will die. (*Pause. Soothingly*) What's the matter, Rache? Are you afraid? I promise it won't hurt. What's that you keep telling people: "quicker than sex, and a lot less messy?" When you injected me I didn't even feel it, remember? I told you to hurry up and you were already done.

RACHEL. It's not that.

ANJALI. Then what?

RACHEL. It's just...

ANJALI. What?

RACHEL. (*breath*) I have to postpone it.

ANJALI. What?

RACHEL. (*pulling down dress, sitting up, turning*) Just for, like, a month. I got this amazing assignment. I just found out two hours ago. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

ANJALI. Not again.

RACHEL. To go to India, Anj, and you know how I've been wanting to –

ANJALI. Not now. Not after –

RACHEL. It's for this totally hip new travel site. I'd get to do my favorite kind of writing, all attitudey and blogggy and –

ANJALI. You promised, Rachel. You promised you wouldn't let me do this alone!

RACHEL. I won't! It'll just be –

ANJALI. We made a *pact*.

RACHEL. I know we did! And I'm gonna keep it!

ANJALI. Because I would not have started yet. I would have waited. At least until I finished school, till I had a steady job.

RACHEL. I know –

ANJALI. But you said we'd help each other out. "Carpe diem," you said, "No time like the present."

RACHEL. I just need *one* month, Anj –

ANJALI. A *month*?

RACHEL. Four weeks! And then I'll come back and –

ANJALI. You won't.

RACHEL. What?

ANJALI. You *won't* come back. You'll stay. Like you did in Haiti. Like you did in Senegal. I'll get an e-mail saying that you're extending your trip because National Geographic just *had* to have a piece on the tsunami fallout* or the conflict with Pakistan, or –

RACHEL. That's not fair.

ANJALI. It's not?

RACHEL. This is different. You know it is.

ANJALI. You bet it is – I'm five months pregnant!

RACHEL. Come on. I'm not deserting you. I *want* a baby. You know that. I spent a thousand dollars on sperm, for God's sake!

ANJALI. (*waving vial*) And it's going to waste!

RACHEL. Just that one vial. I'll come back and use the others – I swear I will... (*Pause. Softening, slowing down.*) Come on. I'm not going to bail on you. Not on something as important as this. You're my best friend! We've been roommates for, what, nine years? You

*Feel free to update with contemporary reference

know me better than my own mother! Of course that's not saying much...Anyway. Don't worry. This is just a *short trip*. I'll be back in plenty of time to take birth classes with you, and to shop for car seats, and...It's better to space them out a bit anyway, don't you think? How much could I help you when your baby's little if I'm about to pop one out myself?

ANJALI. What if you meet some guy? Then it'll be another six months before you dump *him*, by which time my child will be almost –

RACHEL. *Please.* I'm done with that. I told you. I have dated enough loser jerks for the next three thousand lifetimes. From now on, you can call me Celibate Sue; Celly for short.

(ANJALI gives her a grim look.)

This'll be a quick job. In and out. I'll be back before you know it. *(pause)* Come on, Anjali. *(Pause. Trying to get her to meet her eyes.)* Anjali?

ANJALI. I'm scared.

RACHEL. I'll be home in plenty of time for the birth.

ANJALI. I'm scared anyway.

RACHEL. I know.

ANJALI. *(Pause. They look at each other. Sighs.)* Where in India will you go?

RACHEL. *(carefully)* That's...another thing I'd like discuss with you.

ANJALI. *(looks at her for a moment, then catches on)* Oh, no. No!

Scene Two

(One week later. The Sharmas' living room in Agra, India. RACHEL has just arrived. CHANDRA carries a baby.)

CHANDRA. Welcome to Agra. I am Mrs. Sharma.

RACHEL. Mrs. Sharma! It's a pleasure to – wait, *you're* Mrs. Sharma?

CHANDRA. Oh no, I see what you are thinking. I am not Mrs. Vasudhara Sharma! I am Chandra, her daughter-in-law.

RACHEL. Oh, okay. I thought you looked kind of young to be Anjali's grandmother!

CHANDRA. *(laughing)* Sit down, please. Just set your things down anywhere. You must be so tired.

RACHEL. Strangely enough, I feel fine. Somewhere over Thailand I hit my second wind. *(going gaga over the baby)* Who's this little cherub?

CHANDRA. This is Sachi.

RACHEL. How old is she?

CHANDRA. Four months.

RACHEL. Oh, what an angel. Look at those eyelashes!

CHANDRA. Yes, everyone remarks on that. Let us hope her mind will be equally remarkable. *(Pause. Eagerly)* My mother-in-law tells me you will stay with us for an entire month.

RACHEL. If it's no trouble.

CHANDRA. Oh no, of course not! We are delighted to have you. When Anjali first went to school in America, she used to visit us every year. But since her mother died, she's stopped coming. Now we have not seen her in more than six years. Her friends are our only link, and most of them stay only a day or two. We are just coming to know them and then *phhht!* they are gone. *(Pause)* But you must be hungry. Let me serve you some lunch.

RACHEL. I'm fine, thanks.

CHANDRA. It is no trouble.

RACHEL. I –

CHANDRA. (*Overlapping. Shouts.*) Sunita! Khana! (to RACHEL)

How will you occupy yourself? There is not much to do in Agra once you have viewed the monuments.

RACHEL. Oh, don't worry about that. I'll talk to people. Gather stories.

CHANDRA. You enjoy history?

RACHEL. I'd better. It's paying for my trip.

CHANDRA. (*not understanding*) It's...

RACHEL. I'm writing a series of articles for an internet site.

CHANDRA. You are a journalist?

RACHEL. (*nods*) Travel writer.

CHANDRA. You have come to the right household. My husband's cousin is very knowledgeable about the history of Agra.

RACHEL. Anjali mentioned him. He's the shy one, right?

CHANDRA. About most things, he says very little. But once you get him started on history, you can never shut him up!

(*RACHEL takes off her jacket or overshirt and crosses to her backpack. She takes out a bandana and pats her face.*)

You are hot? Do you want to bathe? Sunita can prepare a bath for you.

RACHEL. Not right now, thank you.

CHANDRA. Water is refreshing.

RACHEL. Thanks, I'm –

CHANDRA. Yes? (*prepares to call SUNITA*)

RACHEL. No. Later. Thanks.

CHANDRA. (*slightly put out*) Hm. Please, sit down. (*pause*) So how is our Anjali?

RACHEL. (*evasive*) She's fine. Working on her dissertation.

CHANDRA. That girl! She has been a student for nine years. She will be an old woman by the time she finishes!

Who will want to marry her then?

(While RACHEL searches for a response, SUNITA enters and places the lunch on the table.)

RACHEL. *(to SUNITA)* Thank you.

(SUNITA giggles with embarrassment and quickly exits, hiding her face. RACHEL watches her, slightly perplexed.)

CHANDRA. Will you take chai?

RACHEL. No thanks, water's fine.

CHANDRA. Please.

RACHEL. *(shrugs)* Okay.

CHANDRA. *(shouts toward kitchen)* Sunita! Chai! *(to RACHEL)*
My husband's cousin will accompany you to see the monuments.

RACHEL. Oh that's okay, I enjoy going solo.

CHANDRA. You cannot go alone! There are bad men about who prey on tourists.

RACHEL. Thank you, but I've actually done quite a bit of –

CHANDRA. *(overlapping)* But why do you come in May? The tourists come between October and February. The heat is terrible now. Foreigners cannot bear it.

RACHEL. *(Nods. Sighs.)* Yeah, well, my editor's a bit of a sadist.

CHANDRA. Sadist?

RACHEL. He likes watching people suffer.

CHANDRA. *(with interest)* Really?

RACHEL. Mm hm. Readers like it too. Heat stroke, rashes, dehydration – they eat that stuff up. *(SACHI gurgles. Eagerly)* Can I hold her?

(CHANDRA hands her the baby. To SACHI.)

Hi, sweetness. Hi, sugar plum pudding pie. Hi bunny bucket buggy boo. Hi pumpkin dumpling, munchkin bunchkin –

CHANDRA. I take it you are fond of babies.

RACHEL. Can't stand 'em.

CHANDRA. You have your own?

RACHEL. Not yet.

CHANDRA. You are married?

RACHEL. Uh-uh. Nope. Not married.

CHANDRA. How old?

RACHEL. Thirty-seven.

CHANDRA. So old!

(SUNITA enters.)

SUNITA. (*shyly*) Chai.

RACHEL. Thank you.

(SUNITA exits, giggling. RACHEL gestures after her.)

What's with her?

CHANDRA. You confuse her with your thanks.

RACHEL. (*shrugs*) She brought the chai...

CHANDRA. It is her job. (*Pause. Definitely.*) It is because of the sex, you know.

RACHEL. Excuse me?

CHANDRA. It is because of the sex that you American girls will not settle down.

RACHEL. I don't –

CHANDRA. Many of Anjali's friends have visited us. All girls older than twenty-five years. None of them married, not one! In this country, you marry one man, you are with him your whole life! He is the only one who will share your bed. He may be a kind man or a bad man, a smart man or a stupid man. No matter. He is your husband, and you will never be rid of him. In your country, you try one, throw him away, get a new one. If he is no good, you throw him away too and find another. It is like eating sweets. Once you have tasted one, you want more and more. Today ice cream, tomorrow halva, the next day kheer. You simply cannot stop.

RACHEL. That's a bit –

CHANDRA. Not true?

RACHEL. I'd like to think it's more complicated than that.

CHANDRA. Tell me, Rachel. Are you a virgin?

RACHEL. That's kind of a personal question.

CHANDRA. Please! You will not shock me. I tell you, I have met many American girls. One girl who was here, Trinity, we became good friends. She had just broken with her boyfriend. They were traveling together, and he left her for another girl. Right here, in my arms, she cried and cried. Oh, how she cried!

RACHEL. Maybe once we get to know each other better –

CHANDRA. Please! We are women! You can speak freely.

RACHEL. *(pause)* Okay. *(slowly)* I know this will sound strange, but in my country, if I were a virgin at my age, people would think there was something wrong with me.

CHANDRA. Really?

(SUNITA enters, takes CHANDRA's cup, exits.)

Do you have a boyfriend now?

RACHEL. No.

CHANDRA. But you have had one.

RACHEL. Well, yes.

CHANDRA. You have had more than one?

RACHEL. *(uncomfortable)* Sure.

CHANDRA. Two or three?

RACHEL. I... *(laughs nervously)*

CHANDRA. More even than that!

RACHEL. Well...

CHANDRA. Four, maybe.

RACHEL. *(lying)* Yes, about four.

ARUSTU. *(from offstage)* Hello, ladies!

(ARUSTU enters. Goes to SACHI.)

Hello my little Sachi tachi bachi.

CHANDRA. Here is my husband.

RACHEL. *(rises, relieved)* Pleased to meet you. I'm Rachel Freed.

(ARUSTU and RACHEL shake hands.)

ARUSTU. Arustu Sharma. The pleasure is mine.

RACHEL. Aru-stú?

ARUSTU. It is Hindi for Aristotle. Because I am a deep thinker. *(He strikes a thoughtful pose.)*

CHANDRA. Where is the boy?

ARUSTU. The boy? *(gasps)* I must have left him at the petrol station.

CHANDRA. Very humorous. *(to RACHEL)* My husband is the next Govinda.

RACHEL. Govind –

CHANDRA. Our famous comedian.

(OSHO runs in and throws himself on CHANDRA.)

OSHO. Mummy!

CHANDRA. *(to RACHEL)* My son, Osho. *(to OSHO)* Oh! You are dirty! Go wash your hands, naughty boy! Look what he has done to my kurta!

(OSHO exits.)

ARUSTU. You are from America?

RACHEL. Yes.

ARUSTU. *(scrutinizing her)* Born when?

RACHEL. Excuse me?

CHANDRA. My husband is a professional astrologer. He wants to know your birth date so he can analyze you.

ARUSTU. But you must be tired. Is my wife wearing you out with her questions?

CHANDRA. We were having a very nice conversation until you disturbed us.

ARUSTU. Chandra will ask questions all day and all night if you permit it. She is a very curious person.

CHANDRA. Ha! It is my husband who is curious. He will drag you away from me so that he may question you himself.

ARUSTU. *Cha*, Chandra! Let the girl rest a bit. It is terribly hot, but the room you will sleep in has a very good fan. Come, I will take you there. *(pause, conspiratorially)* Later, I will show you my computer.

Scene Three

(The next day. Arustu's study. ARUSTU is pouring water over RACHEL's head.)

RACHEL. Ah. Relief.

ARUSTU. It is the only way to stay alive in this heat.

RACHEL. You're a wise man.

ARUSTU. They tell me so. I trust you slept well?

RACHEL. Yes, thank you.

ARUSTU. So today you will visit the Taj Mahal?

RACHEL. No, I'll take today to get acclimated. I'll start the hardcore tourist stuff tomorrow.

ARUSTU. So you will visit the sights and write down what you see.

RACHEL. What I see, what I hear, what I think. It's kind of a journal-slash-tourist guide: part history, part armchair travel, part gossip. I can pretty much write what I want, as long as it's fun to read.

ARUSTU. And they pay you to do this?

RACHEL. That's right.

ARUSTU. Amazing. Well. On to business. *(rubs his hands together)* Do you have a question in mind?

RACHEL. You know, I'm not really into this astrology stuff.

ARUSTU. No matter. Your skepticism will not prejudice the stars.

RACHEL. What I mean is –

ARUSTU. There is no harm in asking, right? Unless of course you have no unresolved issues in your life?

RACHEL. Oh, I wouldn't say that.

ARUSTU. Well then...

RACHEL. I'm just not sure...

ARUSTU. You don't even have to say it out loud. Simply focus on it very strongly in your mind.

RACHEL. This should be a...personal question?

ARUSTU. Anything you like! Anything at all. *(pause)* You have it?

RACHEL. I guess so. *(pause)* Wait, no. *(long pause as she tries to figure out the right wording for her question)* Okay, I've got it... Okay. Okay.

ARUSTU. And you were born on September 6, 1968* at two o'clock in the afternoon.

RACHEL. Right.

(ARUSTU enters the information into his computer. After a moment, he turns to RACHEL.)

ARUSTU. I'm getting a mixed signal. Do you have two different questions?

RACHEL. I did at first, but I made them into one.

ARUSTU. Ah, you see, that is the problem. The question was not completely clear. *(pause)* You'd better tell me what it was.

RACHEL. I thought I didn't have to!

ARUSTU. *(shrugs)* If the question had been clear...

RACHEL. But it's private.

ARUSTU. No problem. You will not offend me. One hears all sorts of things in this line of work.

RACHEL. I'm sure. It's just...

ARUSTU. Yes?

RACHEL. I really don't want to share this with the whole family.

ARUSTU. Please, you insult me! This goes without saying. Between the astrologer and the client is complete confidence!

RACHEL. Well. *(pause)* It concerns a friend of mine. A childhood friend, in America. Her name is... Lisa.

ARUSTU. *Acha.* And when was she born?

RACHEL. Born?

ARUSTU. Yes, her birthday. We were checking your stars, not hers. That may explain the confusion.

**Year should be changed so that she is 37 years old.

RACHEL. Oh, I see. Well, she was born the same day I was, actually. In fact, that's how we met. Our mothers met at the hospital. We've known each other all our lives.

ARUSTU. I see. And what about this...Lisa?

RACHEL. Well...She wants to have a baby. But she's, you know, single. Not married. So at first my question was, should Lisa go through with having her baby alone?

ARUSTU. (*startled*) Alone?

RACHEL. Well, not exactly alone, but with her best girlfriend.

ARUSTU. With her *girlfriend*?

RACHEL. She'd raise it with her girlfriend. She'd *conceive* it alone. Via artificial insemination.

ARUSTU. Artificial – ?!

RACHEL. Oh, forget it.

ARUSTU. (*making an effort to contain himself*) No, please, continue. I am sorry. This question is simply...unfamiliar to me.

RACHEL. Okay, so then I thought, no, that's not the whole question. What I really want to ask is: When – if ever – will Lisa meet a man that she wants to spend her life with? Because if she's going to meet him soon, she can wait to have her baby, but if she's not going to meet him until much later, or if he doesn't even exist, she should go ahead with her plan, because she's, you know, running out of time. Besides which she promised her friend...well. Anyway. So then I decided my question should be, "Will Lisa meet her life partner in the next year, or should she go ahead and have her baby now and hope to meet this guy somewhere down the road?"

ARUSTU. I see. Very complicated question. (*He consults the computer.*) Because you have asked a divided question, the stars have given a divided answer. *Either* she will meet her life partner in the next month, *or* she will have her baby alone and meet him several years later. Or both. Possibly both.

RACHEL. Both?

ARUSTU. Yes. It may be that she will meet the man this month, but it will be some time before she realizes it.

RACHEL. You mean she might meet the man and not even know it?

ARUSTU. (*pleased*) Exactly!

RACHEL. That sucks!

ARUSTU. Pardon?

RACHEL. Now I'm gonna go nuts thinking that the man of my...friend's...dreams is right under her nose and she doesn't even know it!

ARUSTU. (*Pause. Tentatively.*) It is difficult to meet men in America?

RACHEL. Meeting them is easy. Finding someone you want to commit to who wants to commit to you – that's the problem.

ARUSTU. We are fortunate not to have this problem. We are traditional people – our parents tell us whom we should marry and we obey them.

RACHEL. What if it doesn't work out?

ARUSTU. That is not an option. Divorce would humiliate our families. If my wife and I have a problem, my first thought is: "How can I resolve this?" I do not think, "Hmm, perhaps I will take another wife." I know I must continue living with this one, so my only choice is: do I live with her in conflict, or do I make peace in my home?

RACHEL. There's something to be said for that.

ARUSTU. (*delicately*) You yourself are single, are you not?

RACHEL. Me? Yes. As a matter of fact, I am.

ARUSTU. If you like, we can place an advertisement for you. Since fate has brought you to us, you might as well use the time wisely.

RACHEL. An advertisement?

ARUSTU. We can advertise for a sober, educated young man with a good job and a steady disposition. Even at your age, there will be many who will be eager for the chance to live in America. (*He looks at her mischievously.*)

RACHEL. You're joking. Aren't you?

ARUSTU. You had better find someone quickly. You seem to be beautiful now, but who knows how long that will last? We can place the advertisement and see what happens.

RACHEL. Don't you dare.

ARUSTU. (*playful*) Oh, but I will. It just might be the answer to your prayers.

Scene Four

(Four days later: ANJALI and RACHEL are on the phone. ANJALI is in her bedroom, RACHEL is in a bedroom at the Sharma's house.)

ANJALI. Hello?

RACHEL. It's Rachel.

ANJALI. Rachel! How are you? How is India?

RACHEL. It's great! I've been wanting to call you all week.
How are *you*?

ANJALI. Fine. *(pause)* Actually I'm still sick all the time, but they tell me that's a good thing.

RACHEL. Poor Anj.

ANJALI. At least the baby's healthy. That's all that matters, right?

RACHEL. Yeah, knock on wood. *(pause)* So when's the big ultrasound?

ANJALI. A week from Monday.

RACHEL. Are you gonna find out if it's a boy or girl?

ANJALI. I haven't decided yet.

RACHEL. Please find out.

ANJALI. Why?

RACHEL. I hate suspense.

ANJALI. I'll keep that in mind. *(pause)* Are you enjoying my family?

RACHEL. They're great.

ANJALI. And my grandmother? She doesn't frighten you?

RACHEL. Haven't met her yet. She's out of town till the end of the month.

ANJALI. Too bad. I was counting on her to whip you into shape.

RACHEL. I'm not sure I appreciate that. Which reminds me, guess what Arustu did.

ANJALI. What?

RACHEL. He put an ad in the paper for a husband for me!

ANJALI. No.

RACHEL. Yes! Now some guy is coming on Saturday to meet me.

ANJALI. Oh my God. He'll probably be expecting a traditional Indian girl.

RACHEL. I know! It's so embarrassing.

ANJALI. Well, try to be on your best behaviour. Who knows? You might get lucky.

RACHEL. Yeah right. And you'd kill me!

ANJALI. You got that right. *(pause)* So have they asked about me?

RACHEL. Of course.

ANJALI. And?

RACHEL. I told them you were busy with your dissertation.

ANJALI. Nothing else?

RACHEL. Nope.

ANJALI. You sure? No accidental slips?

RACHEL. Accidental slips? Like what? "By the way, your cousin the pregnant lesbian –" *Oops! (covers her mouth)*

ANJALI. Shhh... Rachel! Keep your voice down!

RACHEL. My voice *is* down. Anyway, they've got the TV on in there. Now stop worrying. At least about this. Worry about more important things. *(stagey whisper)* And call me as soon as you know if it's got a willy or not.

Scene Five

(Two days later. The Sharmas' living room. ARUSTU is reading a magazine. CHANDRA is holding SACHI. OSHO is pushing a toy car back and forth across the floor, making engine sounds. RACHEL paces nervously.)

CHANDRA. Stop that noise, naughty boy.

(OSHO is silent for a moment, then starts again.)

CHANDRA. Ay! Go to the other room.

OSHO. No, Mummy, no, Mummy.

CHANDRA. Then hush.

(A loud noise comes from the kitchen, followed by a little scream. RACHEL jumps, screams as well.)

CHANDRA. *(explaining)* Sunita is making chai.

RACHEL. Oh, for God's sake. I can't do this!

ARUSTU. You have only to meet him. He is a kind man – I spoke to him on the telephone. *(A knock is heard. Smiling.)* I will answer that.

RACHEL. Oh God.

ARUSTU. Come in! Your good name?

ABHI. Abhi.

ARUSTU. Come in, Abhiji. It is our pleasure. And here is the blushing bride.

RACHEL. *(in extreme embarrassment)* Hi. I'm Rachel Freed.

ABHI. Namaste.

RACHEL. Namaste.

ARUSTU. Turn around, please, Abhiji.

ABHI. Hm?

ARUSTU. Turn around. Let us look at you.

(ABHI turns around. RACHEL looks away, extremely embarrassed.)

Now why don't you show Miss Freed your arm muscle?

RACHEL. Oh, that won't be necessary.

ARUSTU. No, I insist. This is how it is done here, no problem. Go ahead, Abhiji.

(ABHI pulls up his sleeve and makes a muscle.)

Is it okay?

RACHEL. Very nice.

ARUSTU. And perhaps you would like to inspect his teeth?

RACHEL. What?

ARUSTU. His teeth! To see if he has good genetic material.

RACHEL. Look, you guys, this is...

ARUSTU. Show her your teeth, Abhiji.

(ABHI gives ARUSTU a dirty look, then pulls back his lips with his fingers, exposing his teeth.)

ARUSTU. Well?

RACHEL. *(mortified)* They look fine.

(At this point OSHO can contain himself no longer and starts giggling. Soon everyone in the room except RACHEL is howling with laughter. ARUSTU and OSHO imitate ABHI showing off his teeth.)

ARUSTU. Did you hear her? They look fine! They do not look fine, Abhiji! You should brush them more often!

RACHEL. What the...?

ARUSTU. And that muscle is pathetic! *(pointing at OSHO)* His muscle is bigger than that!

(OSHO makes a muscle.)

CHANDRA. *(crossing to RACHEL.)* Arustu, you are unkind. Look at the poor girl!

RACHEL. *(finally understanding that she's been had)* Arustu, I'm gonna kill you!

(She chases him around the room. He grabs OSHO and uses him as a shield.)

ARUSTU. You will not harm an innocent child!

RACHEL. No, but I will harm his guilty father! *(She pinches him.)*

ARUSTU. Ow! (*runs to the other side of the couch*) But there is no harm done, eh? And I have found you a very knowledgeable guide, an excellent friend and a cousin of mine, to escort you to see the Taj Mahal.

RACHEL. Cousin! You mean this is –

ARUSTU. My cousin, Abhinav Sharma!

(*ABHI smiles sheepishly.*)

RACHEL. (*to ARUSTU*) So you didn't even place the ad?

ARUSTU. No!

RACHEL. What was that you showed me in the paper yesterday – "Suitable groom wanted for intelligent woman living in America?"

ARUSTU. Some family is seeking a husband for their overseas daughter. Now go and enjoy the Taj.

CHANDRA. And here is something to help you stay cool.

(*She and ARUSTU pick up glasses of water and pour them simultaneously over RACHEL's and ABHI's heads. Lights out.*)

Scene Six

(The Taj Mahal. RACHEL and ABHI stand gazing at the monument.)

RACHEL. There it is. “The Greatest Monument to Love Ever Created.”

ABHI. *(nods uncomfortably)* Yes.

RACHEL. *(pause)* I can’t believe Arustu pulled that stunt.

ABHI. *(awkward)* Yes. He is quite –

RACHEL. And you, too!

ABHI. I am sorry. Arustu – that is – it is not my usual –

RACHEL. It’s okay, forget it. *(pause, looking again at the Taj)*
It’s so...graceful.

ABHI. *(pleased)* Yes, that is precisely it. It is grateful. I mean, graceful. *(He is immediately shy again. Long awkward pause.)* Shall we approach?

(They begin walking toward the Taj.)

RACHEL. So... I hear you’re quite the history buff.

ABHI. Sorry?

RACHEL. That you know a lot about history.

ABHI. *(Shakes his head. Modestly.)* It is only a hobby.

RACHEL. That’s not what I hear.

ABHI. My cousins are too kind.

RACHEL. *(pulls out a small pad)* Would you mind if I ask you a few questions about this place, for the piece that I’m writing?

ABHI. About Agra?

RACHEL. About the Taj.

ABHI. *(flattered)* I’m certainly no expert...

RACHEL. I’ll be the judge of that.

(Pause. She refers to her notes and takes more during the following questions, which should follow one another rapidly.)

I understand it took more than twenty years to build it?

ABHI. That's right. Twenty-two years.

RACHEL. And this was in the seventeenth century...

ABHI. Construction began in 1630 and was completed in 1652.

RACHEL. And the Taj Mahal is actually a tomb?

ABHI. Correct. Emperor Shah Jahan commissioned it as both a mausoleum for his wife and an enduring tribute to the splendor of their love. Upon his death, he was buried alongside her in the vault beneath the main chamber.

RACHEL. How many people?

ABHI. Sorry?

RACHEL. I understand there was a huge body of labor –

ABHI. Oh. Yes. More than 20,000 workers.

RACHEL. (*shaking her head*) Incredible.

ABHI. (*Warming to the subject. Lecturing.*) A thousand elephants carried the materials from all over Asia. When it was finished, the emperor Shah Jahan cut off the right hand of the master builder so that it could never be repeated.

RACHEL. That puts a bit of a damper on the monument to love.

ABHI. Pardon?

RACHEL. Chopping off the guy's hand. Not very romantic.

ABHI. Well, it –

RACHEL. (*making a note as she talks*) What's so romantic about building a monument when the money comes from other people's taxes and you don't have to carry a single stone? Now if the king had cut off his *own* hand, that would be another story.

ABHI. (*stiffly*) Emperor.

RACHEL. Hmmm?

ABHI. Shah Jahan was an emperor. Not a king.

RACHEL. Same difference, no?

ABHI. An emperor rules over an entire empire. A king generally governs only a single nation.

RACHEL. I stand corrected.

ABHI. (*annoyed*) Shah Jahan may have been a tyrant – they all were in those days – but there is no doubt that he genuinely adored his wife. (*pause*) His second wife, that is.

RACHEL. *Second wife?*

ABHI. (*sheepish*) Even the royalty could not always do as they chose.

(*RACHEL is about to ask him another question, but he gestures that they should go in.*)

Come. We must remove our shoes to enter.

(*They remove their shoes and enter the building. A sign reads “It is an offense to make the monument dirty.” A couple of other people enter in the shadows and mill around, looking at the walls.*)

RACHEL. (*examining the marble*) It’s so intricate.

ABHI. (*professorial*) Shah Jahan planned to build a second one, out of black marble, on the other side of the river, but he died before the foundation was complete.

RACHEL. It’s like he cherished his suffering.

ABHI. Precisely. He immortalized it. The Taj Mahal is “a solitary teardrop hanging on the cheek of time.”

RACHEL. (*raising her eyebrows*) So you’re a poet.

ABHI. Not me. Rabindranath Tagore.

RACHEL. Ah. (*makes a note*) You don’t write poetry?

ABHI. No.

RACHEL. Never?

ABHI. (*conceding*) Occasionally. But only my God can bear to hear it. And that is because he tunes his ears to the intention rather than the result.

RACHEL. Oh, I’m sure that’s not –

ABHI. Come. (*quickly changing the subject*) Each of these flowers contains more than fifty separate pieces of stone.

RACHEL. (*Smiles. Makes a note.*) Do they sell any diagrams that list the different gems?

ABHI. Not that I know of. *(pause)* But I can identify them for you, if you'd like.

RACHEL. You can? *(ABHI nods.)* Please.

ABHI. *(Pointing. Moving slowly from place to place. Lighting shifts and becomes magical. Music or drone fades in. These effects, together with the lyrical names of the stones, cast a hypnotic spell.)*

Carnelian. Turquoise. Lapis Lazuli. Coral. Onyx. Cat's eye. Garnet. Jasper. Ruby. Jade. Goldstone. Agate. Slate. Diamond. Malachite. Sapphire. Topaz. Amethyst. Emerald. Conch shell. Sandstone. Bloodstone. Mother of Pearl.

RACHEL. *(pause)* It's spooky.

ABHI. What?

RACHEL. The echo in here. It's as if a ghost were repeating your words.

ABHI. Yes. That is one of the things I like about this place. It feels as if they are all still in here – Shah Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, the courtiers, even the builders – lurking in the shadows, waiting to tell their stories to anyone who will listen.

RACHEL. Mmmm. *(smiles)* So you said the woman Shah Jahan built this for was not his first wife?

ABHI. That is correct. *(Pause. Explaining)* A prince's marriage was a political arrangement. And he was so young when he first saw her.

RACHEL. Saw who?

ABHI. Arjumand Banu Begam was her name. Later she was known as Mumtaz Mahal, "the Chosen of the Palace."

(Pause. RACHEL takes out her pad and begins to make some notes.)

Shah Jahan – who was still Prince Khurram at the time – was only sixteen years old when he spotted her hawk-ing glass beads at the Royal Meena Bazaar.

(Lights shift and a woman steps out of the shadows, dressed in period costume. Music comes up slowly, either

classical Indian music or some kind of Bollywood East/West mix. The movement and acting in this section should be stylized and theatrical.)

RACHEL. Wait a minute.

(ARJUMAND stops and looks at RACHEL)

The empress-to-be was a salesgirl?

(ARJUMAND tosses her head scornfully.)

ABHI. Not quite.

(ARJUMAND smiles and continues her cross.)

On an ordinary day, Arjumand Banu Begam was a high-born girl, the daughter of a prime minister. But on an ordinary day the prince would not have been permitted to enter the bazaar at all. It was at the Royal Meena Bazaar that the ladies of the court purchased the oils, waxes and dyes that were the hidden complements to their beauty. Men were strictly forbidden to enter. But a couple of times a year, they had what they called “upside-down days,” in which the shop girls stayed home, the ladies became the merchants, and the male courtiers became the customers. On such days all decorum was abandoned, and the ladies and courtiers haggled as if it were an ordinary marketplace. The courtiers even attempted to impress the maidens by haggling with them in rhyming poetry.

RACHEL. Such as?

ABHI. Pardon?

RACHEL. The poetry. What was it like?

ABHI. Oh, I don’t know exactly. “Oh lady fair, your face is rare,” something like that.

RACHEL. Go on.

ABHI. Excuse me?

RACHEL. What else would they say?

ABHI. I don’t know...They’d try to flatter the women and get a good price for themselves at the same time. Perhaps something like...

(A second LADY steps out of the shadows. ABHI takes on the role of the courtier, stepping into the scene and addressing her. He should be substantially transformed while playing the role.)

ABHI. *(cont.)* How much do you ask for this bangle here?

LADY. Twenty rupees – it's not so dear.

ABHI. Twenty rupees! Don't be unkind!

'Tis true your beauty makes men blind,
But velvet skin and sparkling eyes
And shining hair cannot disguise,
This trifle's not as fine as you –
I'll pay five rupees...but give me two.

LADY. *(indignant)* Five rupees! Ha!

This bangle's wrought of gold and jewels,
Beyond the ken of silly fools,
It's lovely as the road is long.
You'll pay ten rupees – and a song!

ABHI. To sing for you, my voice would quake
my hands would shake, your ears would ache
I'll give eight rupees and a kiss
To transport you to endless bliss.

(He goes to kiss the LADY on the lips. She playfully turns her head at the last minute so that he kisses her cheek.)

RACHEL. Bravo! *(excited)* Was it really like that?

ABHI. *(revved up)* Of course! *(pause)* Except that they were speaking in Persian.

(RACHEL is about to ask another question, but he stops her. He is finding his form.)

Now shhh. No more questions. It is bad luck to interrupt the storyteller.

It was on an upside-down day in 1607 that Prince Khurram walked into the bazaar and saw a young girl selling pieces of glass cut to look like precious gems.

(A YOUNG MAN emerges, dressed as Prince Khurram.

ABHI shadows him throughout this narration.)

ABHI. (*cont.*) There was no one at her stand, because the girl's beauty was so flawless, so radiant, that the young men were too intimidated to approach. The prince strode up to her booth and asked the price of the largest gem, an enormous piece of glass the size of a pomegranate, which glittered in the sun like a diamond.

(*to ARJUMAND*) How much for this one?

She gave him a saucy look and told him the jewel was so expensive...

ARJUMAND. (*overlapping*) This jewel is so expensive that even the emperor himself cannot afford it.

ABHI. When he insisted she tell him the price, she said the cost was...

ARJUMAND. Ten thousand rupees.

ABHI. He looked at her for a full minute, until even in the role of a cheeky shop girl, she was compelled to drop her eyes. He then removed his purse, took out ten thousand rupees, handed them to her, and departed without a word.

(*The following narration is played out in a kind of stylized gesture/dance.*)

The next afternoon, the prince did something very unusual. He asked his father's permission to marry the young woman he had met at the Royal Meena Bazaar. His father smiled a mysterious smile, remembering the moment he first set eyes on Nur Jahan, his own beloved queen. The emperor granted his son's wish, but not right away. First the prince was married off to a Persian princess to forge an alliance. Five years later he was permitted to marry his true love.

RACHEL. Not such a great deal for the Persian princess.

(*Lights out on historical characters.*)

ABHI. (*shrugs*) Who knows? (*smiling*) She may have been relieved to get away from him. The prince was fond of attending executions in the torture chambers below the palace. Death by strangulation was his favorite spectator sport.

(Strangulation sounds are heard. The assembled crowd gives a cheer.)

RACHEL. Now *that's* romantic.

ABHI. In any case, the prince adored his new bride. From their wedding day onward, the two were never apart. When Mumtaz Mahal died while giving birth to their fourteenth child, Shah Jahan was devastated. He locked himself in his rooms, and for eight days he took no food or drink. When he came out, his black hair had turned completely white. Some even say he had shrunk from a tall man to a short one. He ordered his whole kingdom into mourning, and for two years no games or music or bright colors were permitted in public places. He himself wore nothing but white robes for ten full years in honor of the queen's death.

(Pause. Lights out on characters.)

Whatever else you might say about the man, you cannot accuse him of inconstancy in love.

RACHEL. *(impressed and becoming more curious about him)*
You're not by any chance a professional guide?

ABHI. *(embarrassed)* No, just a student of history. And a teacher.

RACHEL. What do you teach?

ABHI. I teach Hindi. To foreigners. And sometimes to cabinet ministers from South India. *(pause)* Shall we descend to the vault?

Scene Seven

(That evening. The Sharmas' living room. RACHEL sits on the couch, holding SACHI. ARUSTU is reading the newspaper. CHANDRA is quizzing OSHO on English spelling words. OSHO writes them in his book as he speaks the letters.)

CHANDRA. Drill.

OSHO. D-R-I-L-L.

CHANDRA. Bore.

OSHO. B-O-R-E.

ARUSTU. So...How did you enjoy our cousin Abhiji?

RACHEL. He's an interesting guy. Quite a fount of information, once you get him going.

CHANDRA. Spigot.

OSHO. S-P-I-G-O-T.

ARUSTU. Shall I check your charts for compatibility?

RACHEL. What? Oh. No, thanks.

ARUSTU. Abhi's chart predicts many offspring. All the men in our family are very fertile.

CHANDRA. Finger.

(OSHO continues writing the words without speaking them aloud.)

RACHEL. Thanks, but no thanks. *(pause)* I do envy you, though.

ARUSTU. Me?

RACHEL. Having all this family around. My life seems so isolated by comparison.

CHANDRA. Zoo.

ARUSTU. *(with a small sigh)* We are never lonely here.

RACHEL. Isn't that a good thing?

CHANDRA. Axe. *(Her pronunciation is somewhere between "axe," "ex," and "eggs.")*

OSHO. Kya?

ARUSTU. (*shrugs*) There is no changing it, so what is the point of asking oneself that question?

CHANDRA. Axe!

(*OSHO writes. CHANDRA picks up his paper to see what he has written.*)

ARUSTU. But I will tell you one thing. (*leaning in*) You can have no secrets in this house.

CHANDRA. (*to OSHO*) How do you spell axe?

OSHO. (*fearfully*) E-G-G-S.

ARUSTU. E-G-G-S is the correct spelling of “eggs.” (*to RACHEL*) Would you pronounce axe “eggs?” (*to OSHO*) Axe.

OSHO. (*catching on*) A-X-E!

ARUSTU. Acha! (*to RACHEL*) If his mother had correct pronunciation...

CHANDRA. (*shooting ARUSTU a dirty look*) Finger!

OSHO. F-I-N-G-E-R.

CHANDRA. (*to RACHEL*) Is he spelling this word correctly?

RACHEL. Yes.

CHANDRA. And look at what is written here. (*holds out workbook*) F-A-I-G-E-R. You see! He knows it, but he does it wrong! This proves he is not serious about his studies. (*to OSHO*) Button.

OSHO. B-U-T-T-N-E.

CHANDRA. (*menacing*) N-E?

OSHO. (*panicked*) B-U-T-T-E-N!

CHANDRA. But-ten?

OSHO. I-N?

CHANDRA. I-N?

OSHO. (*whimpering*) E-N?

CHANDRA. O-N! B-U-T-T-O-N!

OSHO. But-tone?

CHANDRA. Hey Bhagwan! Not but-tone, button. (*to ARUSTU*) Will it disturb you now if I beat him?

ARUSTU. Yes, it will disturb me very much.

CHANDRA. He has made seven mistakes.

ARUSTU. So what?

CHANDRA. He is habituated to be beaten.

ARUSTU. But I am not habituated to watch it.

CHANDRA. Then you go in the other room. I will beat him.

ARUSTU. He will become repulsive to his studies. *(He exits.)*

CHANDRA. *Eh! (Making a "good riddance" gesture. To RACHEL)*

At his age, I was an excellent student. First in the class. Look at this, from his school. Here he has made the same mistakes twice. This shows that he is not serious. And look here – he has missed one, and not completed two of the questions. And here. It says capitalize every word. He has capitalized all except one. *Why?* Do you think this is his best work?

RACHEL. I don't know. I suppose he could do better.

CHANDRA. He *can* do better! *(notices that RACHEL is staring at her)* Why do you look at me like that? He does not mind if I beat him. It is good for him. He loves me, don't you Osho?

OSHO. Yes.

ARUSTU. *(from offstage)* He answers out of fear.

CHANDRA. He does not. Do you, Osho?

OSHO. No.

CHANDRA. Now come here and give your mother a kiss.

(OSHO hugs and kisses her. CHANDRA nods toward RACHEL.)

OSHO. *(dutifully, to RACHEL)* I love my mummy.

CHANDRA. You see? Now go and continue working, naughty boy. You have escaped a beating this time.

(OSHO exits.)

You see how Arustu insults me? But he never involves himself with the boy's studies, oh no! The boy could spend all day roaming the streets like a hooligan and he would not even notice.

ARUSTU. (*from offstage*) Falsely accused! I am falsely accused!

(SACHI starts to cry and CHANDRA takes her from RACHEL.)

CHANDRA. Sunita!

(SUNITA enters, takes SACHI from CHANDRA and exits.)

RACHEL. (*looking after SUNITA*) She looks so young.

CHANDRA. Who?

RACHEL. Sunita.

CHANDRA. She is seventeen.

RACHEL. Does she go to school?

CHANDRA. No. Her parents are very poor. She is lucky to have such a comfortable job. Her parents could just as easily have cut off her fingers and sent her out on the streets to beg.

RACHEL. What?

CHANDRA. You have seen the beggar children, haven't you? With the missing fingers?

RACHEL. I thought it was leprosy.

CHANDRA. Sometimes. Sometimes not.

RACHEL. Parents cut off their own...

CHANDRA. If they are desperate enough. The streets are competitive. People have more sympathy for beggars who are missing some body parts. But even among those who are better off, many families still do not believe in educating girls.

RACHEL. I take it your parents were more liberal.

CHANDRA. I was lucky to be born into an enlightened class. (*with some pride*) I completed my PhD in Chemistry the year before Osho was born.

RACHEL. Really!

CHANDRA. I was nominated for a faculty appointment.

RACHEL. But you didn't –

CHANDRA. I had to withdraw my name. Mrs. Sharma will not permit me to work.

RACHEL. I thought she was a school principal.

CHANDRA. (*nodding*) She has one thousand pupils in her charge. She raised five children, born over a twenty-year span, working all the while. Even now, she travels the country, giving lectures. She sits on so many boards and committees.

RACHEL. So why...?

CHANDRA. It is different, I suppose, what you do for yourself and what you want for your son. Perhaps she feels she was not a good wife to her own husband. He is a politician, also traveling all the time. The two of them hardly meet. (*pause*) I don't mean to speak badly of her. I admire her very much. (*lowering her voice*) It is only that when she is here, we cannot relax. She demands old-fashioned respect. Even Arustu is afraid of her. When she is home, I must keep my head covered at all times. And she does not permit me to see friends.

RACHEL. Why?

CHANDRA. What does a woman need friends for if she is married? That is how the thinking goes. Our husbands and children should be our whole lives. Even my family I should see only once or twice a year.

(*SUNITA enters with SACHI, hands her to CHANDRA, exits.*)

Everything is changing, though. My path is settled, but it will be different for her. (*indicating SACHI*) I want her to go to Oxford. Or maybe Cambridge.

RACHEL. But you won't beat her, will you?

CHANDRA. No... She is too small. (*pause*) But if she is lazy in her studies, I will beat her. How can she have a better life if she will not study? (*Looking at SACHI. Tenderly, in baby talk*) If I have to beat you, I will do so, never fear.

Scene Eight

(Three days later. ANJALI and RACHEL, on the phone. As before, ANJALI is in her bedroom, and RACHEL is in a bedroom at the Sharma's house.)

ANJALI. *(excited)* It's a girl.

RACHEL. *(screams)* Oh my God!

ARUSTU. *(from offstage)* Rachel? Are you alright?

RACHEL. *(to ARUSTU)* Fine! *(softer, to ANJALI)* I'm so excited!

ANJALI. Me too! She seems so much more *real* now. I had to pull over and cry on the way home from the hospital. I just kept thinking, "I'm having a little girl." *(Her eyes fill.)*

RACHEL. Oh sweetie.

ANJALI. And then suddenly I was terrified. I thought, how can I protect her?

RACHEL. From what?

ANJALI. You know...All the crap. All those societal voices that tell her she has to look a certain way and act a certain way and *be* a certain way. Everything that made me feel so inadequate growing up.

RACHEL. Ah, but she'll have something you didn't.

ANJALI. What?

RACHEL. She'll have you as a role model.

ANJALI. Oh, come on, me? What kind of role model am I? I'm a coward. I'm not even out to my own family.

RACHEL. You are a courageous warrior goddess, is what you are.

ANJALI. Please.

RACHEL. You tell the truth, and you follow through. You say you'll do something, and there it is: done. These are extremely rare qualities.

ANJALI. Well thank you.

RACHEL. Plus, she's growing up in San Francisco.

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.