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# HALF OF ME

Satinder Kaur Chohan

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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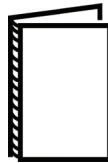


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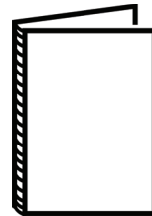
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Satinder Kaur Chohan is from Southall, West London and completed her BA in English Language and Literature at King's College London and her MA at Yale University in the US. A journalist and documentary researcher/assistant producer turned playwright, her plays include *Zameen* (Kali Theatre national tour 2008), *KabaddiKabaddiKabaddi* (Pursued By A Bear national tour 2012), *1984* (Vibrant Festival 2014 Finborough Theatre) and *Lotus Beauty*, a 2016 Sultan Padamsee Award for Playwriting Runner-Up. Satinder received OffWestEnd.com's 2013 Adopt A Playwright Award to develop *Made in India*. As Writer-in-Residence at the Centre for Family Research (University of Cambridge), she wrote *Half of Me*, first performed by Generation Arts in Summer 2016 (Lyric Hammersmith). *Half of Me* accompanies *Made in India* at select venues on tour.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Half of Me* was conceived as part of Tamasha Theatre Company's outreach project for *Made in India*, my play about three women brought together in an Indian fertility clinic through commercial surrogacy (also published by Samuel French). Despite focusing on the adults involved in surrogacy transactions in that play, I was curious about the babies born to parents who sought out surrogates in countries such as India, Nepal, Thailand or Cambodia. Would those parents one day tell their surrogate children about their birth/womb mothers from distant lands? If they did disclose birth origins, would those surrogate children search for their birth/womb mothers in later life? Or would those parents choose never to disclose their biological origins to their surrogate children?

Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) – donor insemination, egg donation, embryo donation, IVF and surrogacy – has become more widespread over the past two decades or so. A generation of 21st century ART babies are now coming of age. Their untold stories and experiences are only just emerging.

Since my main play *Made in India* focused on a story of female infertility about adults using ART, *Half of Me* became an offspring piece focusing on male infertility, about young people born from ART. The adult biological need to reproduce counterpointing the ART child's biological need to know one's origins. As a British Asian writer whose work is often set in India and around Asian culture, I was fascinated to explore identity and ancestry through a biological and scientific lens.

After receiving a Wellcome Trust Small Arts Award, *Half of Me* became an exciting and rewarding collaboration between the Centre for Family Research (CFR) at the University of Cambridge, youth theatre Generation Arts and Tamasha Theatre. With Professor Susan Golombok at the helm, CFR is a pioneering research centre examining parent-child relationships and the impact of "new family" forms such as those created by ART on young people. Inspired and informed by CFR's

research, *Half of Me* focuses on Areia, a child conceived by sperm donation, who embarks on a quest to find her biological/donor father at a critical time of self-discovery and self-identity – adolescence.

Problematic issues between parents and ART children might involve anonymity and disclosure, which play out globally, too. The play tries to capture the changing legal and political ART landscape. As the experiences of ART children are considered increasingly worldwide, donor anonymity laws are being rewritten to allow ART youngsters the option of tracing their biological parentage.

I spent three stimulating months as Writer-in-Residence at CFR, assimilating ideas and writing the play. I then workshopped the developing play with Generation Arts, who specialise in working with marginalised, at-risk or socially excluded young people and those from other non-traditional family backgrounds e.g. foster or adopted. After input from all parties towards the final script, *Half of Me* was first staged by Generation Arts (directed by Ali Godfrey) at the Lyric, Hammersmith in July 2016. This became the first of five separate young company productions linked to the *Made in India* tour, with others in Coventry, Colchester, Lancaster and Luton.

*Half of Me* brings together ancient and modern preoccupations with infertility and parentage. The play invokes Greece, the birthplace of Western civilisation, drawing on elements of Greek theatre born out of fertility cults and rites and Greek myths that explore parenthood (nature or nurture?). Greek myths anticipating unconventional conceptions and ARTs include the three-parent birth of Erichthonios; the surrogate birth of Helen of Troy; and Aphrodite, born from the white sea foam of Uranus's castrated genitals. Ancient Greece echoes in the modern scientific cyber world of ART, donor sibling registries and networks, sperm banks, fertility clinics and global new families (that sometimes reach double digits of half-siblings).

An ensemble piece ideal for a large young cast, the script encourages playfulness and flexibility in the staging. The play is light on props but big on imagined worlds – familial, scientific, cyber, ancient, modern. Minimal additional props, music and lighting can suggest these changing worlds, as the characters flow in and out of these spaces. Above all, like the science behind the story, new theatrical forms of *Half of Me* can be shaped by imaginative interpretations and (simple) technical innovations – whilst ensuring that our intrinsic need to find out who we are and where we come from continues an ancient and ageless theme.

*Satinder Kaur Chohan*  
2017

*Half of Me* received its world premiere at the Lyric Hammersmith, on 28 July 2016, performed by the Future Stage Company at Generation Arts with the following cast:

### **CAST**

Leah Brown-Edwards  
Johnny Collins  
Damien Czadowksi  
Helder Fernandes  
Chloe Florence  
Hakeem Jacobs  
Katerina Konstantinidou  
Erica Kouassi  
Adebola Olayinka  
Maria Pavlenko  
Leandro Pestana  
Nathan Wallace-Auguste

**Director** Ali Godfrey  
**Assistant Director** Hayley Konadu  
**Company Manager** Ace Ruele Aristotles  
**Movement Director** Ira Mandela Siobhan  
**Designer** Rachel Dingle  
**Production Stage Manager** Adam Burns  
**Deputy Stage Manager** Nicole Scott

Generation Arts provides free, high quality acting and theatre-making training for disadvantaged young people, and aspiring actors aged 19–25.

[www.generationarts.org.uk](http://www.generationarts.org.uk)





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Producing Assistant – Anuja Batra

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The Centre for Family Research is a multi-disciplinary research centre at the University of Cambridge. The Centre has undertaken pioneering and influential research since the 1960s and has an international reputation for its investigations of families and children. Its interests cover child development, parenting and family relationships in new and traditional family forms and its research has focused on topics from pregnancy through to later life.

[www.cfr.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cfr.cam.ac.uk)



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## **CHARACTERS**

**(SCIENTIFIC) TITANS** – the Chorus

**MUM (GIA)** – Areia’s mum

**DAD (OURI)** – Areia’s dad

**AREIA** – 17-year-old teenage girl

**DR. CYBELE** – Owner of Elixir of Life clinic

**SPERM**

**EGGS**

**DR. EPIONE** – Hospital doctor

**HEPHY** – Areia’s best friend

**STUDENT 1**

**STUDENT 2**

**STUDENT 3**

**ERICA** – Areia’s half-sibling 1

**DION** – Areia’s half-sibling 2

**HELENA** – Areia’s half-sibling 3

**LAWMAKER 1**

**LAWMAKER 2**

**LAWMAKER 3**

**FOUR PARENTS** – Helena’s parents

*For the TITANS, each new line denotes a new speaker.*



**(SCIENTIFIC) TITANS** Under the long shadow of Mount  
Olympus

At the foot of the Acropolis

Stands Elixir of Life

A different sort of bank

From other Greek ones close to collapse

Because in this expanding bank

A strong liquid currency thrives

Demand is outstripping supply

And one mystery man

Is happy to comply.

He puts down a healthy deposit

With the assurance

His secret will never be told.

Crossing mainland Europe and the Channel

All the way to the UK

Mum draws up a preference list.

**MUM** Race

Ethnicity.

**DAD** Greek, like me.

**MUM** Eye colour

Hair colour

Height

Weight

Education/occupation

Blood type

Psychological profile.

**DAD** Anonymity – yes.

**TITANS** And sends the list back to the bank

Making the sign of the cross.

Soon, the bank finds a perfect fit.

**DR. CYBELE** Result!

We'll have to extract your eggs.

**TITANS** As lightning bolts around the Elixir of Life lab

We Scientific Titans

Don our long white robes

Wield syringes

Like magic wands

Smooth petri dishes

Like bronze disks

To hurl into the future

Because fate and destiny

Lie in our godly hands.

We cast a microscopic eye

Over Mum's eggs and the donor's sperm

To ensure both are fit enough

For a Greek fertility dance.

*Dionysian music plays as the **EGGS** and **SPERM**  
limber up on separate sides.*

**DR. CYBELE** *steps forward and closely inspects both lines.*

**SPERM/EGGS** Choose me! Choose me!

**TITANS** Then Dr. Cybele selects the healthiest egg –

**SPERM** (*to the chosen EGG*) Looking so fine!

**TITANS** – and selects the healthiest sperm –

**EGGS** (*to the chosen SPERM*) Looking so fine!

**TITANS** For a more choreographed dance

In an IVF petri dish.

The lucky two dance together

Get to know each other better

Bloom like a flower.

As two become one

The embryo hatches and hooks

To Mum's glowing tum.

**MUM** I'm pregnant!

**DAD** *hugs and kisses* **MUM**.

**TITANS** Nine months later

A miracle life is born to the world.

\*\*\*\*\*

**MUM** *holds up their baby bundle of joy for DAD.*

**MUM** Dad, say Yeia Sou to your daughter Areia.

**DAD** A name of Goddess Aphrodite.

**DAD** *takes the baby in his arms and kisses her gently.*

(*To MUM*) She's so beautiful

Looks just like you.

(*To AREIA*) Yeia Sou, my darling daughter.

You're the gift of love

Your mum and I have longed for

Our whole lives.

**TITANS** But Dad can't ignore

Areia's piercing eyes

One azure blue

The other emerald green

Nor her dark curls

Like wavy wisps cresting the Mediterranean Sea

That Areia didn't get from him or his wife.

Dad hugs Areia close but turns his head

As a single tear sears

The baby's rosy red cheek.

**DAD** She must never know

I'm not her real dad.

**MUM** Ouri, she has no other dad but you.

**DAD** I didn't make her.

**MUM** You've been with me every step.

**DAD** Promise you'll never breathe a word to her.

**MUM** Shouldn't we tell her

When she's old enough to understand?

**DAD** We had to fight my illness

Our family

Our faith

I don't want to fight my daughter too.

She'll be so wrapped up in our love

She never needs to know.

**MUM** Ok Ouri, I promise.

**TITANS** As the perfect family huddles together

Dad clutches his daughter's tiny hand

But under her cotton shawl

Areia's other tiny hand clutches her tiny heart.

\*\*\*\*\*

**TITANS** Areia grows up asking questions.

**AREIA** Where did I get my weird eyes?

My wavy hair?

My scholarly air?

**TITANS** Dad's body contorts

Suddenly he's fascinated by

"Boukros", Mum's fave Greek soap opera

While Mum runs out

To rustle up her trademark moussaka.

Areia feels sharp pangs in her chest.

**AREIA** What have I done wrong?

Something isn't right

Especially when Mum and Dad say—

**MUM/DAD** No, everything is fine!

**TITANS** Areia slowly retreats

Into a deep void

Welling up inside.

**AREIA** Different, lost, alone

The problem is me

No wonder they don't want to know me at times

I only want to make them happy

But I'm stuck inside this person

Who doesn't make sense –

And I don't know why.

**TITANS** As teenage Areia becomes more detached

Mum and Dad feel too far adrift

And gift her anything she wants.

**MUM** A smartwatch?

**DAD** A hoverboard?

**MUM** A car?

**DAD** A drone?

**TITANS** Nothing is too ridiculous or pricey.

**AREIA** My grades have been slipping, are you sure?

**MUM** Anything for our precious daughter.

**TITANS** Then on her 17th birthday.

**MUM** Surprise!

**DAD** We're taking you to the Museum of Greek Antiquities!

*AREIA hugs her DAD, holds him tight.*

**TITANS** While other teenagers

Are hooked on Playstations and FIFA

Hang out at the cinema or Westfields

Areia is turning into a right old history buff.

She doesn't get it from Mum or Dad

Who have little time for scholarly things.

**AREIA** You'll both really hang out with me there?

**DAD** We can all learn more

About our Greek ancestry.

**TITANS** The museum overflows

With ancient Greek objects and statues

Thousands of years old.

**AREIA** I love the godly designs

Of heroes and heroines  
 Tragic and comedic scenes  
 In earthy terracotta  
 Shiny bronze  
 Smooth marble  
 Even those missing heads and limbs...

*DAD puts his arm around MUM's shoulder.*

**DAD** (to MUM) See how happy our daughter is.

**TITANS** Suddenly Areia stops

In front of a tall marble statue  
 Of a young man in his twenties  
 A sculpture of human perfection.  
 There's something in the dark waves of his hair  
 His piercing azure blue emerald green eyes  
 Something in his lips  
 That speak of another time and place  
 In the beginning of her life.

**DAD** Areia, are you alright there?

**MUM** Darling?

**TITANS** Areia feels a sharp pain

Abnormal rhythms in her heart  
 Loses her balance  
 Dad breaks her fall  
 Areia is turning blue.

**MUM** (to DAD) Call for help!

**TITANS** In the ambulance

Mum clutches one of Areia's hands tight  
Dad clutches the other close to her heart.

**AREIA** I've been feeling it

As long as I can remember

Like there's a deep hole inside

Where the cold wind blows

Dark shadows push their way through.

\*\*\*\*\*

**DR. EPIONE** Your daughter has a hole in her heart  
An undetected congenital defect  
Like a ticking time bomb in her chest.

**MUM** Will she be ok?

**DR. EPIONE** A genetic defect, Mum from you?

**MUM** Not me.

**DR. EPIONE** From you Dad?

**DAD** Yes, it's from my side of the family.

**MUM** Ouri, don't lie.

**DAD** Gia –

**MUM** Your daughter's life is more important.

**MUM and DAD** *look over at anaesthetised AREIA.*

**DAD** We used a sperm donor to conceive her.

**DR. EPIONE** Ah, I see.

**MUM** Do we need to get in touch with him?

**DAD** What good would that do?

**DR. EPIONE** Areia's complete medical records

Could reveal how we proceed.

**DAD** He's anonymous.

**DR. EPIONE** The situation is serious –

**MUM** How serious?

**DR. EPIONE** If the hole grows bigger

Areia will need surgery

But if she can get rest with no stress

We don't need to make any rash moves yet.

**DAD** Thank God.

**MUM** Ouri, if she needs him, I won't let this go.

**DR. EPIONE** *leaves MUM and DAD alone by AREIA's side.*

**DAD** Why didn't the clinic tell us about his defect?

**MUM** They probably didn't know.

**DAD** Shouldn't someone have known?

**MUM** I think we should tell her.

**DAD** You made a promise.

**MUM** This isn't about you.

**DAD** She doesn't need to know.

**MUM** She has every right to know

The man who helped make her

Gave her a hole in her heart.

**DAD** I can't bear for my darling Areia

To know I'm not her dad.

**AREIA** (*groggy, sitting up*) What?

You're...not...my -?

**TITANS** Lost in fear

Mum and Dad were both unaware

The anaesthetic had worn off

Areia's fragile heart is trembling

Her insides shaking

In an instant, her whole world has changed.

**AREIA** What did you say?

**MUM** Darling, lie back.

**AREIA** What did you say?

**MUM** Rest, you've got to get up early for more tests.

**AREIA** Please, stop lying to me.

**DAD** Areia, I'm so sorry.

After my long illness

My body dried up.

Broke.

We had to use a donor for IVF in Greece.

**AREIA** IV-what?

**MUM** In-vitro fertilisation.

One of my eggs was fertilised in a lab

By a generous donor's sperm.

**AREIA** I was made from a stranger's sperm?

**DAD** An act of love.

**AREIA** A freak of science?

**MUM** A miracle baby.

**AREIA** Hanging questions

Awkward silences

Abrupt departures

Sideway glances, freezing me out.

I don't look like you at all Dad.

I never did.

I never will.

**TITANS** Dad chokes up hearing these words

Areia is driving a spear through his heart.

**MUM** Your dad is still your dad

Nothing and no-one can ever change that.

**AREIA** If you're not my real dad

Who is?

\*\*\*\*\*

**TITANS** Every morning before taking her heart medication  
 Areia locks her bedroom door  
 Stares in the mirror  
 Loses herself in her azure blue emerald green eyes  
 Trying to find her biological dad in her body and face.  
 She catches glimpses  
 Never finds him.  
 On the street, she scans every passing male face  
 Surfs websites with pics of ancient and modern Greeks  
 Never finds him.  
 She confides in her best friend Hephy.

**AREIA** I can't stop thinking about him.

**HEPHY** Forget about him.

**AREIA** How can I when he's part of me?

**HEPHY** Wanna go to the cinema Friday night?

**AREIA** I'll be at the museum.

**HEPHY** Saturday night?

**AREIA** You think he thinks about me?

**HEPHY** In the twenty-second century then?

**AREIA** That he even knows I exist?

**TITANS** Once Hephy realises he isn't the one  
 To fix Areia's broken heart

He gathers his friends in the college canteen.

**HEPHY** Hey people, listen up!

**TITANS** Students taunt and tease Areia

Every time they see her.

**STUDENT 1** Your fake dad dried up—

**STUDENT 2** Like a Greek raisin in the sun—

**STUDENT 3** So your mum went to a dodgy bank—

**STUDENT 1** Paid some weirdo to do a big wank—

**STUDENT 2** He shot down a fat deposit for her—

**ALL STUDENTS** Now you've got sperm for a Dad!

Sperm for a dad!

Areia's got wriggly sperm for a dad!

**TITANS** Pains jab in Areia's heart

The hole is growing bigger.

\*\*\*\*\*

**AREIA** Do you know how hard it is  
 To look in the mirror each day  
 See a stranger in your face?  
 If you'd been honest when I was younger  
 It might not have mattered so much.

**DAD** It shouldn't matter now or then –

**AREIA** Genetics mattered to Mum and you  
 But shouldn't matter to me?

**DAD** Family is more than genetics and blood.

**AREIA** Then this family isn't enough for me.  
 I want to know who I am  
 I want to know who he is  
 Because whoever that man is  
 He's half my DNA  
 Half my body  
 Half my blood.  
 Half of me.

**DAD** He's anonymous  
 Those were the terms and conditions.

**AREIA** For Mum, you and him.  
 You all signed me up  
 To this emptiness inside  
 Now I need to find the missing part of me  
 Before I run out of time.

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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