

Untitled

A play by Nikhil Mahapatra

Time:

Present or a little before it

Place:

Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York

Characters:

Akash – 17, South Asian man

Han – 17, Chinese man

Haresh – 44, South Asian man

Anne – 52, chinese woman

Eng – 50, chinese man

Jones – mid twenties, afro-Caribbean man

Marco – Late sixties, black man

Samuel – mid thirties, white man

Sonia – 17, latino woman

Emma – mid twenties, Caucasian female

Sadie – mid twenties, Caucasian female

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Act II – Scene 1

*Haresh's restaurant.
It's maybe three or four a.m.
The street has reached an eerie quiet it rarely does, barring the occasional car.
The moons light thrusts the world into a cold blue.
The restaurant is a mess. There is broken glass scattered everywhere.
Tablecloths have been ripped apart and spray-painted on.
The smell of paint fumes linger.
Grains and spices have spilled out from the ransacked kitchen.
And have settled in the air, lit up by the moons light.
HARESH sits, trying to clean a small stubborn spot on a table.
A single bulb in a broken glass lamp splays jagged shadows across the room.
ANNE enters gingerly. She's dressed in an old yet beautiful embroidered pink robe.*

ANNE

Haresh...
Haresh.

HARESH

Haresh is shaken out of his reverie.

Oh? Anne?

ANNE

I came to see how you were doing? Have the police already...?

HARESH

They got what they needed.

ANNE

Are you staying here tonight?

Silence.

I think...you should come stay with us. We don't have much space but...just for tonight.

Haresh.

HARESH

I can't, Anne.

ANNE

It's not for long.

HARESH

No, I have to wait. For Akash.

ANNE

Is he not home yet?

HARESH

Haresh shakes his head.

He won't pick up his phone.
Does Han know-?

ANNE

Are they together?

HARESH

Maybe.

ANNE

I'll give him a call.

HARESH

Thank you.

ANNE

I told him to be back early-
He should be studying! But it's hard enough on a normal day.

HARESH

It's Halloween. They're young. They like to have fun. I think that's okay.

ANNE

You can wait for them at our place.

HARESH

I'd like...I'd like to be here. He would come here first.

ANNE

I understand. Can I bring you some food, at least?

HARESH

It's fine.

ANNE

Okay. I'll...go call Han, then.

She moves to exit.

HARESH

Anne.

Hm? ANNE

Thank you. HARESH

I'll get Eng to bring some food over. And I won't take no for an answer! ANNE

*She leaves.
Haresh gives a small smile.
He gets up and walks over to the picture of Krishna on the wall
It's been sprayed with graffiti.
He tries to clean it off, to no avail.
He continues to scrub, and the picture tears.
He jumps back and freezes in horror.
He takes the picture down, and hunts around for tape to fix it,
He heads into the kitchen
Pots and pans clatter
And he sneezes from all the powdered spices in the air
He cannot find anything in the chaos.
ENG enters carrying takeout container.*

Haresh? ENG
Hello?

Hold on! HARESH

Oh. Eng. *More banging.
Haresh leaves the kitchen.*

I brought some food. ENG

Anne said she would send you. HARESH

Yes, she did send me. ENG

That was fast. HARESH

ENG

We're very good at making food quickly.
Here.

HARESH

Thank you.

*He takes the food and puts it on the table.
Silence.*

ENG

Anne got in touch with Han.

HARESH

Is-?

ENG

They weren't together.

HARESH

Oh.

ENG

Sorry.

HARESH

He's normally not this late.

ENG

Neither is mine.

HARESH

I should go out and look.

ENG

Wait, wait, wait-
Han said he would find him.

HARESH

I should help-
If something is-

ENG

I'm sure his phone is out of battery or something.

HARESH

It's late. It's dangerous outside.

ENG

Haresh.

HARESH

I should have left immediately.
I have to go.

ENG

You don't know where to go!

HARESH

Let me call Han, he'll know-

ENG

Haresh! Let Han find him. He'll be faster than you will.

HARESH

I-

ENG

I understand. But you have to wait.

HARESH

Okay. Okay. I'll do more waiting. Waiting, waiting, waiting.

Pause.

Why is it that when something important happens, when everything is on fire, why is the best course of action always to wait? Why? Nothing happens when we wait! And we're all waiting for something to happen!

ENG

Did you want a real answer?

HARESH

No!

Pause.

It was rhetorical.

Pause.

ENG

You and me, we're...not SO different. I often think when Han was born, I froze up. I held his little body in my arms and met his eyes, and when I slept that night, my soul left my body and...has yet to return. I look for it some nights. I light my lamp and walk down the stairs. I turn the wok, and fry star anise. I watch them float in hot oil, and think about the shape of the world. What a name, star anise. Smells like licorice and cough medicine. I turn and think of my son, and how many times I have fed him cough medicine. I find my way to his bedside, and there, like a hungry ghost, I see my soul. You and me...we are not so different. I feel the icy wick behind my ear, and I

know you do too. We can't move, frozen in place. Our souls are elsewhere, with other people. It is the strangest, sickest, most lovely thing, I think. We can't move, but we can wait. And so we do. The typhoons come up. The monsoons. The floods. Dragons yawn and elephants stomp, and mountains come crashing down like the waves in places far away from here. And we wait. And we wait. And we wait.

HARESH

Silence.

Would you like something?

ENG

No, no, no-

Pause.

You have a tea?

HARESH

Yes, let me just put some on.

HARESH exits to the kitchen.

The sound of a kettle being put on.

ENG walks around the restaurant

He comes upon the tiny spot on the table that HARESH was trying to clean,

And begins to rub it clean himself.

First with a finger, then with a little spit, then with a little bit of tablecloth.

HARESH returns.

It will take one-two minute.

Ah, you don't have to clean-

ENG

It's all right-

HARESH

No,no,no it's okay. It's okay. I'll do it later.

ENG

You should eat.

HARESH

I-

ENG

There is no beef in it.

HARESH

What is it?

ENG

Cheong fun. Flat rice noodles. Try.

HARESH

Hareh opens the container and pokes at it warily.

It's very...

ENG

Like a fish, eh? Slippery.

HARESH

It looks like eels. White eels! Wormy white eels!

ENG

My mother used to tell me they were maggots! And then forced me to eat them! Han never fell for that one.

HARESH takes a bite.

How is it?

HARESH

Soft. So soft.

ENG

I think it is like eating silk.

HARESH

Silk would taste like this!
Mmpmh!

HARESH eats more heartily.

ENG

Anne will be happy you liked it.

The kitchen pot whistles.

HARESH hastily slurps up a noodle and motions for ENG to sit.

He heads to the kitchen.

Shuffling and banging sounds.

He comes out with two tall glasses

Filled to the near brim with hot, milky tea.

HARESH

Masala chai.

ENG

Oh!

Eng takes a cautionary sip.

It's spicy...but not really spicy.

HARESH

Good for colds and cough. Better than medicine, I think.

Pause.

You want to ask something.

ENG

No, no, no, no-
Maybe.

HARESH

Out with it.

ENG

Do you think they'll catch them?

HARESH

Who can say?

ENG

You don't know who-?

HARESH

I mean-
Who could know, really?

ENG nods.

ENG

If they can't...

HARESH

Things will work out.

ENG

...You have insurance?

HARESH

Pause.

We have someone watching over us.

ENG

Eng jumps, startled.

Eh? Who?

HARESH

A little sheepishly

Uh. God. God is always there.

ENG

Ah. That's nice. Back in the old country, it was always the communist party watching over us. And I don't mean in the good way.

They laugh

We'll help you clean up later.

HARESH

Ah, no need-

ENG

It's not-

HARESH

You've done enough. Don't worry about it.

Silence. They drink.

The doors open.

AKASH and HAN arrive.

AKASH freezes.

Han places a hand on a shoulder, but retracts it immediately.

AKASH

Appa...

What...

HARESH

Akash!

HARESH goes to AKASH

AKASH

What happened?

HARESH

Your phone!

AKASH

Huh?

HARESH

Your phone! I tried calling!

AKASH

It ran out of battery.

HARESH

You're not hurt?

No, why would I be-
The restaurant.

AKASH

It's nothing.

HARESH

Nothing. Dad-

AKASH

It's something that can be discussed in the morning.
Akash, you and your father can stay at ours tonight.

ENG

Ours?

HAN

Yes. When you're ready, we'll be expecting you. Please, make yourselves at home.
Come, Han.

ENG

Uh, sure.
I'll see you soon, Akash.

HAN

Right.

AKASH doesn't say anything.

HAN and ENG exit.

The restaurant...

AKASH

HARESH embraces his son

You're safe. You're safe!

HARESH

...You're safe too?

AKASH

Yes. I'm safe.

HARESH

Thank god.
The restaurant...

AKASH

HARESH

Don't worry about it.

AKASH

How can I-?

HARESH

It's my job to be worried about it.

AKASH

How can I not-?

HARESH

Go get your things. We should go over now.

AKASH

Right now?

HARESH

It's late, we should get some rest-

AKASH

But what are we going to do?

HARESH

I am going to figure it out.

AKASH

Figure it out? What does that mean? Are we going to fix it? Sell it? Start over? How much money do we even have?

HARESH

It's not a problem-

AKASH

It is exactly a-

HARESH

Akash!

It's not a problem. We can talk about it in the morning. Go get your things. We're staying at Eng's.

AKASH

I don't want to leave.

HARESH

We can't-

It's not safe.

AKASH

Upstairs-? Is it?

HARESH

It's fine. They didn't go up.

AKASH

There's a lock, we can just-

HARESH

Safety is more than a lock. Let's go. We'll come back in the morning.

AKASH

I'm....I...feel...

HARESH

I know. But don't be afraid. I won't let anything happen. It's why I'm here, right?
Let's go. We'll come back tomorrow. It'll still be here.

AKASH

You promise?

HARESH

Of course. It's-
It's not going anywhere. That much, I know.
We can talk about it in the morning. Now go, get your stuff. I don't want to keep
them waiting all night.

AKASH

Okay. Okay.

AKASH heads upstairs.

HARESH

I won't make you wait for anything.

BLACKOUT.