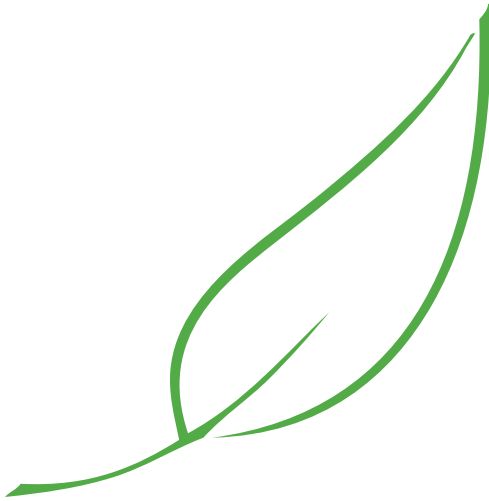


Gifted

By Carrie Printz



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GIFTED

By Carrie Printz

SYNOPSIS: Fifteen-year-old Aseem Ganeshe is your typical American kid, brilliant, biracial and dying to be a reality TV star. During Aseem's interview for the reality TV show, Stump The Brainiacs, he realizes the road to stardom isn't going to be as easy. There are just a few things standing in his way: his self-righteous older sister, his interfering East Indian grandmother, and his widowed mother. Mix in Internet dating, boarding school, and culture clashes, and the Ganeshes problems are multiplying. Different cultures and generations mixed with issues of loss and family, come together in this funny, poignant tale.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 male, 3 female)

ASEEM GANESHE (m.)..... 15; A high school junior. A brainiac. His father is Indian, his mother is white. Everything about him screams “nerd.” Still, a certain charm shines through. *(314 lines)*

ANJALI GANESHE (f.)..... 22; ASEEM's sister. A medical school student. *(308 lines)*

BARBARA GANESHE (f.)..... 50; their mother. A psychologist. *(164 lines)*

DEEPA GANESHE (f.)..... [Daa-dee-maa], 75; ASEEM and ANJALI's Indian grandmother from London. *(187 lines)*

JAKE SCOTT (m.) late 20s/early 30s. A television producer. *(198 lines)*

ASHOK RANJAN (m.) late 20s/early 30s. A doctor. *(31 lines)*

DAYA GANESHE (m.)..... 40s; BARBARA's late husband. *(50 lines)*

DURATION: 115 minutes

SETTING

Chicago. The Ganeshe family's home: A living/dining room and an adjoining kitchen. A television sits in the living room. A small section of backyard is visible at the side of the house. This is a middle-class home. It's comfortable but not excessively decorated. Rooms can be suggested by a minimal amount of basic furniture—i.e., a couch, some chairs and coffee table in the living room; a dining room table. The majority of the kitchen is offstage, but visible is a kitchen counter for the cooking scene.

TIME

Present. However, some scenes are memories from the past set in different locations. You may want to consider different lighting or other ways of delineating these scenes from those that take place in the present.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: A Tuesday

SCENE 2: Wednesday morning

SCENE 3: Later Wednesday

SCENE 4: Midnight, Wednesday

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: Thursday afternoon

SCENE 2: Thursday evening

SCENE 3: Friday morning

SCENE 4: Two months later

PROPS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ iPod | ☐ Notebook |
| ☐ Earbud Headphones | ☐ Mixing Bowl |
| ☐ Photo of ASEEM's Family | ☐ Mixing Spoon |
| ☐ Duster | ☐ Letter |
| ☐ Jake's Business Cards | ☐ Picture of ASHOK |
| ☐ Suitcase | ☐ Baseball |
| ☐ 2 Soda Pop Cans (1 unopened) | ☐ Plate of Hors D'oeuvres |
| ☐ Bag of Groceries | ☐ Flowers |
| ☐ 2 Tea Cups | ☐ Food on Serving Platters |
| ☐ Television Remote | ☐ Salt Shaker |
| ☐ Television | ☐ Pager |
| ☐ 2 Menus | ☐ Photo Album |
| ☐ Coffee Cup | ☐ Application Papers |
| ☐ News Paper | ☐ 6 Dining Room Place Settings (Dishes, Silverware, Glasses. |
| ☐ 2 Backpacks | |
| ☐ 2 Cell Phones | |

PRODUCTION HISTORY

"Gifted" premiered at The Edge Theatre Company in Lakewood, Colorado, on December 6, 2013, after winning the theater's 2012 new play festival.

The original cast was:

ASEEM Yasser Elmkanter
 ANJALI..... Carolyn Demanelis
 BARBARA Devra Keyes
 JAKE Ethan Yazzie-Mintz
 DEEPA Rekha Ohal
 DAYA Raj Agarwal
 ASHOK Arash Zadeh

DIRECTOR..... Sarah Roshan

*This perusal script is for reading purposes only.
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ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *We hear some popular Indian music—a combination of East meets Hip Hop. Several bars are played before ASEEM, 15, enters and addresses audience. Indian music could be played at various times throughout the play, perhaps during some scene changes or intermission.*

ASEEM: I used to flunk tests on purpose. See, I didn't want people knowing I was *(He gestures with quotes.)* "gifted." *(He looks into the audience.)* Would you? Here's the thing about being a teen-ager: It's cool to be different, but only in the narrowly defined confines of the accepted teen-age hierarchy. I'm not sure why, but no one has ever let me in on those rules of acceptability. And even if they did, I'm not sure I'd know how to live within them.

First off, people can't really place me. Here's the thing: You know how you're supposed to check off your race on applications and medical forms and stuff? Well, I'm never really sure what to put. See, my Dad was Indian and my Mom's a WASP from Toledo. I'm just enough of a blend that I confuse people. Some of the guys at school—they call me "the terrorist." I'm not kidding. Hilarious, right? Sometimes I'll speak in a made-up language and try to look all shifty and everything just to keep them guessing. *(A pause.)* Never underestimate the stupidity of a bunch of high school losers.

Then there's the whole smart thing. Eventually, my teachers found out the real reason why I was flunking tests. Then I got tested a bunch more. Then I ended up skipping the sixth grade. Now, I'm a whole lot younger than everybody else. *(Sarcastic.)* That makes me really popular.

And I'm good at sports. I can run. Really fast. And I can pitch. I've got a great curve ball. That pisses people off. Nerds aren't supposed to be athletic. And you probably know by now, most kids don't like people they can't put into a box. Abstract thinking is not their strong suit.

ASEEM: *(Continued.)* I'm not complaining or anything. I'm just telling you how it is.

ASEEM picks up a photograph from a coffee table and shows it to the audience. The photo is that of a happy family—two parents and two kids. Aseem's family, only a few years younger.

Exhibit A. My family. Circa 2010. Not a care in the world, right? That was before Dad died three years ago. Heart attack. Dropped dead at the office over a pile of paperwork...Kind of sucks. You know?...To lose your Dad when you're 12... Now it's just me, my Mom and my big sister. I'm the man of the family supposedly. Whatever that means.

ANJALI, 22, enters and begins dusting.

(He gestures toward Anjali.) Exhibit B. My sister. Anjali. Yeah, I know...All my friends think she's hot...I don't see it, personally. And all my Mom's friends can't shut up about her...*(In a woman's high voice.)* "Oh Barbara, Anjali's so beautiful... Anjali's so smart...Anjali's so sweet..."*(Back to his normal voice.)* Actually, she's a royal pain in the ass...

BARBARA, 50, enters with a notepad and pen. She is writing.

ASEEM: *(Continued.)* Exhibit C. Mom. She's, well... She looks tired, don't you think? She never used to look that way...I'm sorry. I'm going off on a tangent. I do that a lot...See, even *(He gestures with quotation marks again.)* "gifted" kids aren't perfect...Anyway, I guess I'll just get out of your way here and let the story unfold. It's not really about me. Well, in a way it is...In a way I'm the whole reason for the story...Oops, there I go again...Okay, I'm just going to shut up now. Oh, by the way, my name's Aseem. My Mom picked it out of a baby book. It means "Limitless" in Hindi. My Dad always hated it. He wanted to call me Richard. That's my middle name. Aseem Richard Ganeshe. I may be the only person in the world with that name. I always hated it, too. But lately, for some reason, it's growing on me. *(ASEEM exits.)*

BARBARA: Let's see. I think I have everything. ..Channa Dal Lentils...Sooji-Farina...Raita Mix...Darjeeling Double Malt Tea...

ANJALI: Mom, what makes you so sure Daa-dee-maa wants Indian food? Maybe she'll step off the plane and have an enormous craving for a Big Mac.

BARBARA: Anjali! You know she wouldn't dream of eating beef!

ANJALI: Why are you trying so hard?

BARBARA: Look at you! Fluttering around dusting. Trying to make our house look pristine!

ANJALI: Remember the last time she was here? She said we lived like slobs!

BARBARA: She had a point.

ANJALI: It was right after Daddy died. I don't think a clean house was the first thing on our minds.

BARBARA: Cleanliness is very important to your grandmother.

ANJALI: A lot of things are very important to her. *(A pause.)* Are you planning to make all her favorite dishes?

BARBARA: I'm certainly going to try.

ANJALI: That's a gamble.

BARBARA: Everything's a gamble with Deepa.

ANJALI: What time are you picking her up?

BARBARA: *(Hesitates.)* I'm not.

ANJALI: What?

BARBARA: She's taking a cab.

ANJALI: *(Surprised.)* You're kidding!

BARBARA: Why not?

ANJALI: This little old woman is coming all the way from London, and you're making her take a cab?

BARBARA: Deepa would not like being called a little old woman. You know she's tough as nails.

ANJALI: Still, I could have picked her up. *(A pause.)* This is your passive-aggressive way of getting back at her, isn't it?

BARBARA: For what?

ANJALI: For everything...For being Deepa.

BARBARA: I don't think so...

ANJALI: Uh-huh.

BARBARA: Don't you have some more cleaning to do? Scrubbing the bathtubs perhaps?

ANJALI: Already done.

ASEEM saunters into the room. He's listening to music on his iPod and singing along off-key.

(To ASEEM.) Where are you going?

ASEEM, oblivious, doesn't hear ANJALI. She pulls his ear buds out and yells this time.

ANJALI: Where are you going?

ASEEM: *(He stares at her and grins.)* Out.

ANJALI: *(To BARBARA.)* Why do I have to do all the work around here and he does squat?

ASEEM: *(To ANJALI.)* It's really quite simple. I'm the favored one.

ANJALI: *(To ASEEM.)* No...She just feels sorry for you.

ASEEM: Really? For me? I'm not the one still living at home, mooching off Mom.

BARBARA: Please! I'm not in the mood for this today.

ANJALI: Mom, he hasn't even lifted a finger...

ASEEM: *(To ANJALI.)* When are you going to move out of here, anyway?

ANJALI: Maybe I should. Then you'd have to do a little more work around here.

ASEEM: Be my guest.

BARBARA: Enough! Aseem, help your sister. I just realized I forgot some Parantha bread...your father used to love it. Remember? I'll just run out to the store and get some. If Deepa gets here first...tell her I'll be right back.

ANJALI: But Mom...

BARBARA: I'll be back in a jiffy...Promise.

BARBARA exits. ASEEM and ANJALI look at each other.

ANJALI: Are you going to help or not?

ASEEM shrugs.

ANJALI: You can wipe down the table in the kitchen. I noticed *somebody* was eating Oreos in there and didn't bother to throw out the crumbs.

ASEEM: God, I wish I was perfect like you.

ANJALI: *(She smiles.)* Keep trying. Maybe someday you will be.

A pause as ASEEM watches ANJALI dust.

ASEEM: Why do you think Daa-dee-maa's really coming here?

ANJALI: To see us, of course.

ASEEM: Nah...it's got to be more than that. She's not flying across the Atlantic just to drop in and say "hi." It's not her standard modus operandi.

ANJALI: Now you sound like Mom.

ASEEM: Yeah...I'm thinking it has something to do with you. It's like she's afraid Mom's going to mess up your life if she doesn't come save you. *(In a mock Indian accent.)* Oh my precious, Anjali, come live with me in London. The Indian men will be lining up at your feet!

ANJALI: You never have liked her—just because she doesn't spoil you like Nana and Papa do.

ASEEM: I just can't relate to her. She's a little bit crazy, don't you think?

ANJALI: Maybe she's just too Indian for you.

ASEEM: Are you calling me a racist?

ANJALI: Maybe...

ASEEM: How can I be racist against my own flesh and blood?

ANJALI: Just go clean, genius.

ASEEM: Fine.

ASEEM turns on his iPod and begins singing. He exits. ANJALI shakes her head and returns to her dusting. After a moment, the doorbell rings.

ANJALI: *(Calls toward the door.)* Daa-dee-maa? Just a minute!

ANJALI goes to the door and opens it to JAKE.

ANJALI: *(Surprised.)* Yes?

JAKE: Hello. I'm Jake Scott. You must be Mrs. Ganeshe.

ANJALI: No. That would be my Mom.

JAKE: I'm sorry! Of course. You look much too young to be Aseem's mother.

ANJALI: What is this about?

JAKE: I'm the associate producer. From "Stump the Braniacs?"

ANJALI: Stump the what?

JAKE: The Braniacs. *(ANJALI stares blankly.)* Didn't Aseem tell you?

ANJALI: No.

ASEEM enters, sees JAKE at the doorway.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* Holy crap. Complications.

JAKE takes a card out of his wallet and hands it to ANJALI.

ANJALI: *(Reads card aloud.)* Jacob A. Scott. Shrinking Violet Productions. *(To Jake.)* What is this about?

JAKE: I'm from L.A. I called and spoke to Aseem last week...even talked to his father. We set the whole thing up. I thought he would've told the rest of the family by now.

ANJALI: *(Shocked.)* His father?

JAKE: Uh-huh.

ASEEM buries his head in his hands, then looks up.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* Double crap.

ANJALI: Unbelievable.

JAKE: Excuse me?

ANJALI: Mr...

JAKE: Scott.

ANJALI: Mr. Scott...Our father died three years ago.

JAKE: But I talked to him...He said how proud he was of his son.

ASEEM approaches, offers his hand to JAKE.

ASEEM: Mr. Scott! Hello! I'm Aseem. It's great to finally meet you.

ANJALI: What's going on here?

ASEEM: What do you mean?

ANJALI: He said he spoke to Dad. What did you do? Channel his spirit?

ASEEM: *(Laughs.)* Okay. Confession time. See, I wasn't sure Mom would say "yes" to the whole idea. And I knew you wouldn't. And Mr. Scott had to talk to an adult... So, I just kind of asked Howie, uh, to pretend to be Dad.

ANJALI stares at ASEEM.

ANJALI: Howie? Howie Sung?

JAKE: Who's Howie Sung?

ASEEM: He's my best friend.

JAKE: Hmm.

ANJALI: Unbelievable.

JAKE: Do you mind if I come in for a moment?

ANJALI: I don't know... We have some company coming.

ASEEM: C'mon, Anj. He came all the way from L.A.

ANJALI thinks for a moment, then reluctantly lets JAKE inside. ALL stand there for a moment. An awkward pause.

ASEEM: *(To JAKE.)* I guess I pretty much blew it, huh? You don't want me on the show now, do you?

JAKE: *(JAKE thinks. He looks at ANJALI, then ASEEM.)* Well, what you did was highly unorthodox...

ANJALI nods.

JAKE: Not to mention dishonest...

ANJALI nods again. JAKE considers ASEEM, who looks dejected, then finally makes up his mind.

JAKE: But I suppose it does show creative thinking in a tight spot...I like it. Besides, I did come all this way. I guess I'd still like to interview you, Aseem. But we'll still need permission. From an actual *living* guardian.

ASEEM is elated. He motions for JAKE to sit down, and ANJALI reluctantly joins them.

ANJALI: This show...What is it exactly? I've never heard of it.

JAKE: That's because we're brand new...It's a game-slash-reality show. We pit average kids against really smart kids in all kinds of competitions—from athletic to academic. They live in a house together for a month...And we also film them beforehand at school and at home with their friends and families...We envision it as a fascinating look into the psyche of America's youth.

ANJALI: No...No way! What are you trying to do? Make my brother look like a freak?

JAKE: On the contrary...

ASEEM: (*To ANJALI.*) Since when were you so concerned about my welfare?

ANJALI: (*To ASEEM.*) Can't you see what they're doing? Even the name is insulting...

JAKE: Now wait just a minute...

ANJALI: (*To JAKE.*) How can you live with yourself?

JAKE: Excuse me?

ANJALI: How can you produce such trash? It's not even reality—just some twisted Hollywood version of it.

ASEEM: Anjali! Mr. Scott, I'm really sorry. When my sister opens her mouth, you're never quite sure what's going to come out.

JAKE: It's okay, kid. We get attacked all the time...Look, Miss Ganeshe...We're a business. Plain and simple. We look at what people are watching. We look at ratings. Then we come up with something a little bit different but just familiar enough not to tax viewers' brains too much.

ANJALI: But what about challenging the public? What about creating something valuable and long-lasting. What about real art?

JAKE: *(Pause, deadpans.)* That's not my job...You want art--go to a museum. You want entertainment. Turn on the television.

ANJALI: Entertainment *can* be art...

JAKE: I don't decide what to put on the air. I just facilitate it. Tell me something, what do you do for a living?

ANJALI: I'm in medical school.

JAKE: Oh great...someone who's actually going to saves lives. That analogy just went out the window...

ASEEM: Hello? *(To the audience.)* You ever get the feeling you don't exist? Why have I suddenly been left out of this conversation? *(Back to JAKE and ANJALI.)* Guys...can we talk about me and this show, please? I really want to do it. Do you think Mom will say "yes"?

ANJALI: She won't be thrilled when she hears you had Howie impersonate Dad.

ASEEM: She doesn't have to know...

ANJALI: I don't know...*(To JAKE.)* How'd you even find Aseem, anyway?

JAKE: He found us. We've been advertising the show for awhile now...Aseem wrote us a very compelling letter about why he should be featured.

ANJALI: Yes...I'm sure it was *very* compelling.

JAKE: We were duly impressed.

ANJALI: Uh-huh.

JAKE: Your brother is quite talented.

ANJALI: *(She looks at ASEEM.)* He sure is.

JAKE: We're not making fun of these kids. Brainiacs are misunderstood. They're normal people--just like everybody else.

ANJALI: Aseem? Normal?

JAKE: Sure.

ANJALI: But he's not. Give him a really hard math problem. Anything you can think of. Go ahead.

JAKE: Well, math was never my strong suit...

ANJALI: I'll do it, then. *(To ASEEM.)* Let's see...What's 395 times 1,666 divided by the square root of 2,401?

ASEEM thinks for a split second.

ASEEM: (*Laughs.*) C'mon, Anj. You can't think of anything harder? It's 13,430.

ANJALI: (*To JAKE.*) Is that normal?

JAKE: I wouldn't know if he's right or not...

ANJALI: Trust me. He is. They call him the Human Calculator.

JAKE: Okay, so he's disgustingly smart. But he's still like the rest of us. (*To ASEEM.*) You have the same passions and insecurities and the same desperate need to be loved...Don't you?

ASEEM: (*He shrugs.*) I guess.

ANJALI: You're exploiting children, Mr. Scott. You should be ashamed of yourself.

JAKE: I beg to differ.

ANJALI: It's one thing if idiot adults decide to make fools of themselves on these shows. It's quite another to put unsuspecting kids in the spotlight.

ANJALI and JAKE continue to "discuss" the situation, but their voices fade to the background.

ASEEM: (*To the audience.*) I don't really get the dance that's going on between these two...All I know is I have to get on that show. I mean, we're talking national television. I think my popularity score would go up 100 percent. Not that I really care about being popular. But I bet I could even get a cheerleader to go out with me, especially if there's a chance she could be on T.V. I know. You're thinking—man, is he shallow. But it's not about that. It's about taking a stand for the brainiacs of the world. It's about showing America who we really are. What's so bad about that? I mean, if I have to be known as "gifted," I may as well have some fun with it, right?

JAKE: Aseem, when do you expect your Mom?

ASEEM: She just went out for a quick errand. She should be back any minute.

JAKE: Great. I'll wait.

ANJALI glares at JAKE and resumes her cleaning.

ASEEM: Can I get you anything to drink?

JAKE: A glass of ice water would be nice. Thanks.

ASEEM starts to exit to the kitchen. JAKE looks nervously at ANJALI.

JAKE: I'll come with you.

JAKE and ASEEM exit. ANJALI cleans. After a moment, the doorbell rings. ANJALI goes to the door and opens it to DEEPA, who wears a traditional sari and carries a single suitcase. ANJALI kisses her.

ANJALI: Daa-dee-Maa! How are you?

DEEPA: As well as can be expected after traveling nearly 4,000 miles.

DEEPA enters the room. ANJALI carries her suitcase.

DEEPA: Let me look at you. Hmm...

ANJALI: What's wrong? Am I too pale? Too thin? Too fat?

DEEPA: No...no. I can't put my finger on it.

ANJALI: You look wonderful.

DEEPA: Pilates. Three times a week. My stomach's flat as a board.
Feel it.

DEEPA places ANJALI'S hand on her stomach. ANJALI nods. DEEPA surveys the room.

DEEPA: Same décor, I see. *(A pause.)* And your mother? Where is she?

ANJALI: At the store.

DEEPA: Yes. She's a very busy lady, your mother.

ANJALI: Yes.

DEEPA: And you? How are your studies?

ANJALI: *(Hesitates.)* They're fine.

DEEPA: I remember your Daa-daa-jee in med school. All that grueling studying and back and forth constantly to the hospital. He looked like he was sleep walking half the time.

ANJALI: That sounds about right.

DEEPA: But it's an honorable career. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

ANJALI: I know that.

ASEEM and JAKE re-enter, carrying sodas.

ANJALI: Those were for dinner...

ASEEM pops his can open in ANJALI'S face.

ASEEM: So?

DEEPA: Aseem, come say hello to your Daa-dee-maa.

ASEEM and DEEPA hug. She smooths his hair.

DEEPA: You've grown.

ASEEM: Yeah, teen-agers tend to do that.

DEEPA: Still the same smart mouth.

ASEEM: How was your flight?

DEEPA: It could have been worse. I could have been a stowaway aboard a merchant ship...*(She notices JAKE.)* Hello...

JAKE: Hello, ma'am. Jake Scott. It's a pleasure. *(He shakes DEEPA's hand earnestly.)*

DEEPA: *(She looks him over.)* Yes. It is.

ASEEM: Jake's a T.V. producer. I might be on television. On this really cool game-slash-reality show called "Stump the Braniacs."

DEEPA: What is a brainiac?

ASEEM: A really smart person, Daa-dee-maa. Like me.

DEEPA: Be careful what you assume about yourself, Aseem. It could get you into trouble.

ANJALI: *(To DEEPA.)* None of us knew the first thing about this...Aseem contacted the show on his own...He had this friend of his, Howie Sung...

ASEEM: *(Interrupts.)* Anj, you don't want to bore Daa-dee-Maa with the details. *(To DEEPA.)* I'm sure you're very tired...and hungry, right?

DEEPA: I am a bit tired...

BARBARA enters with a bag of groceries. She's a bit of a mess.

BARBARA: Hello. I'm sorry...Traffic. Deepa!

DEEPA and BARBARA embrace awkwardly.

BARBARA: How was your trip?

DEEPA: Wonderful! I slept like a baby almost the entire time.

BARBARA: I'm so sorry we couldn't meet you at the airport.

DEEPA: No problem. I know how busy you are, my dear. The cab driver was most pleasant. He was from Delhi. He lived just a few blocks away from my cousin Baldev.

BARBARA: What a coincidence! How nice for you...

BARBARA suddenly notices JAKE.

BARBARA: I'm sorry...And you are?

JAKE: Jake Scott, ma'am. How do you do?

JAKE offers his hand. Barbara shakes it, confused.

BARBARA: Hello. Should I know you?

JAKE: No ma'am. I'm a television producer. Your son contacted our show and...

ASEEM: Mom! You've just got to let me do it...Please!

BARBARA: Do what?

ASEEM: "Stump the Brainiacs." It's going to be awesome! They pit you against ordinary kids in all these competitions.

BARBARA: I don't understand...

ANJALI: Mom, Aseem went behind your back. He contacted the show's producers and then got Howie Sung to...

ASEEM: (To BARBARA.) Mom, I can explain...

BARBARA: (Confused.) Explain what?

JAKE: Mrs. Ganeshe...I'm a producer for "Stump the Braniacs."

ASEEM: It's a game-slash-reality show.

JAKE: We feature...

ANJALI: You mean exploit...

BARBARA: Could everybody please be quiet? I have a raging headache. Mr. Scott, could you please explain what's going on?.

JAKE: Certainly, ma'am. Aseem here contacted us about appearing on our show—"Stump the Brainiacs." It's a novel concept. We call it reality T.V. with a twist.

ANJALI: (*Sarcastic.*) Please...

BARBARA: (*Stern.*) Anjali...

JAKE: We give these kids a chance to tell the world about their lives, their families. A chance to express who they really are.

ANJALI: Between commercials...

JAKE: Well, of course. We have to turn a profit like anyone else. Anyway, the show pits really smart kids...

BARBARA: The brainiacs?

JAKE: Right. Against average kids.

BARBARA: Dumb ones?

JAKE: No. Average. Just your typical Joe Blow. Like me.

BARBARA: I see.

JAKE: And they all live together in a house.

BARBARA: Haven't I seen this before?

ANJALI: (*Sarcastic.*) It's with a *twist*, Mom.

ASEEM: I'll be a celebrity...maybe even get my picture in the paper!

DEEPA: What is so wonderful about that?

ASEEM: Please, Mom. Please say "yes"!

BARBARA looks helplessly at everyone.

BARBARA: I'll need to know more. Where is this show filmed? What is the time commitment? Will he have to miss school?

ANJALI: It's awful, Mom. They want to film him at home—with his family! What a nightmare!

BARBARA: We're a nightmare?

DEEPA: What a wonderful idea! Some eligible Indian man just might see Anjali on television and give her a call...

ANJALI: Please! I don't need to go on television to find a date!

ASEEM: The guys aren't exactly lining up at the door...

ANJALI: Would somebody please just rip out his vocal cords?

ASEEM: *(Laughs.)* Nice one!

BARBARA: Aseem, you know your sister is too busy to date...

DEEPA: Too busy to date? Ridiculous! Anjali, there's such a thing as a biological clock...

ANJALI: I'm 22!

ASEEM: Aren't we getting off the subject here?

JAKE takes out his card and hands it to BARBARA.

JAKE: I can see this is not a good time. Talk it over. Give me a call. I'll be here through Thursday. I've got a few more kids to interview.

ASEEM: *(To audience, worried.)* Competition? Great! *(To JAKE.)* Really? Who else are you talking to?

JAKE: Chicago's a big town. There's a kid from the U. of Chicago Lab School who looks pretty promising. He got a perfect score on his PSATs.

ASEEM: Big deal. So did I. Who else you got?

JAKE: Let's see...There's a girl from Evanston who invented a shark-sensing device for scuba divers.

ASEEM: Sounds easy enough...

JAKE: Aseem, face facts. There are other brainiacs out there. We have to give them a shot, too.

ASEEM: Yeah, but are they all this photogenic? *(He flashes a big grin.)*

JAKE: *(Ignores ASEEM.)* It was nice meeting you all. Mrs. Ganeshe—a pleasure. Give me a call when you've made up your mind.

JAKE exits.

ASEEM: *(To ANJALI.)* Thanks a lot...you probably ruined my chances. He'll probably pick Mr. Elite Private School or Miss Albert Einstein before he goes with the kid from the dysfunctional family here...

BARBARA: We are not dysfunctional!

DEEPA: I hear dysfunctional is "in."

BARBARA: I just need time to consider everything. You sprung this on me out of the blue.

ASEEM: What's to consider? It's a great opportunity. Plain and simple.

BARBARA: I have to think about it. That's all. Without your father around...

ASEEM: I know. I know. All the big decisions rest on your shoulders.

ANJALI: *(To ASEEM.)* Lose the attitude, genius.

DEEPA: *(To BARBARA.)* Sit down. Relax. You look tired. Can I get you something to drink?

BARBARA: I should be the one waiting on you... Let me fix you some tea. And I have some Mango cookies from this wonderful Indian bakery downtown...

She starts to head into the kitchen. DEEPA stops her.

DEEPA: Don't worry about me. I'm fine. Aseem, go get your mother something to drink. Anjali, bring those groceries into the kitchen for her.

ASEEM and ANJALI reluctantly exit. DEEPA urges BARBARA to sit on the couch. BARBARA complies.

DEEPA: Barbara, dear, I can see you're still grieving deeply for Daya, but you musn't let them run rampant over you.

BARBARA: I don't.

DEEPA: They're strong willed. Especially Aseem. His father would have reined him in.

BARBARA: *(A pause.)* His father was a push over.

DEEPA: I worry about you.

BARBARA: We're fine.

DEEPA: I'm not so sure.

BARBARA: Aseem's doing great in school. Anjali is too. He's a little willful now and then—that's to be expected.

DEEPA: He's got a mouth on him. He's disrespectful. In my family, that would not have been tolerated. There have been studies--gifted children need structure, or else they'll develop behavior problems.

BARBARA: What are you implying?

DEEPA: Nothing, dear. *(A pause.)* Have you ever considered that Aseem's sarcasm is a way of acting out his frustrations?

BARBARA: With all due respect, I'm the psychologist here, Deepa. (A pause.) His frustrations over what?

DEEPA: You can't tell me he doesn't get teased.

BARBARA: A lot of the kids at school respect his intelligence.

DEEPA: I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the fact of his mixed parentage.

BARBARA: (*Laughs.*) This is the 21st century, Deepa. I hardly think people care about such things these days.

DEEPA: You think prejudice went out of fashion with the new millennium?

BARBARA: Of course not. But most kids these days couldn't care less about things like that. He's hardly unique.

DEEPA: You are naïve, then.

BARBARA: And you are... (*A pause as she swallows what she really wants to say.*) incorrect.

DEEPA: That is rarely the case, my dear... While we're on the subject of your children, what about Anjali? She's clearly miserable.

BARBARA: Miserable?

DEEPA: All you have to do is look at her.

BARBARA: What does she have to be miserable about?

DEEPA: Plenty. If you could read her soul, you would know.

BARBARA: You're in the business of reading souls now?

DEEPA: I'm good at seeing beneath the surface. Some would even say I'm a mind reader.

BARBARA: (*Skeptical.*) They would?

DEEPA: Barbara, I'm concerned that Anjali doesn't date.

BARBARA: Please...you're not going to feed me that tired old line that a woman can't be happy without a man. Right now, she barely has time to brush her teeth.

DEEPA: My husband had time for a young bride and a baby.

BARBARA: Medical school is even more demanding now than it used to be. And Anjali's already a workaholic.

DEEPA: Excuses.

BARBARA: What do you expect me to do? I can't force her to date.

DEEPA: That's why I've taken the liberty of...

ANJALI and ASEEM enter. They hand BARBARA and DEEPA some tea.

DEEPA: Good, good. It's better that they hear this, too.

ANJALI/ ASEEM: *(Overlapping.)* Hear what?

DEEPA: I had wanted to tell you over dinner, but I may as well tell you now. I have solved all your problems!

ASEEM and ANJALI look at each other.

ASEEM: Uh-oh.

DEEPA: I've taken the liberty of arranging some things...*(To ANJALI.)* For you, I have found a man who may well be your future husband. *(To ASEEM.)* And for you, I've found a school that will lay the groundwork for all your future successes. No need to thank me, of course.

ANJALI, ASEEM, and BARBARA: *(Stunned, overlapping.)* You what?

BARBARA: Deepa, with all due respect, I'm not sure it is really your place...

DEEPA: Now, Barbara, don't feel threatened...

BARBARA: *(Defensive.)* I'm not, but...

DEEPA: In our tradition, the elders must guide the younger generation in making the right decisions about life.

BARBARA: As is our tradition...

ASEEM: Hey, don't we get a say about all this?

DEEPA: No.

BARBARA: Deepa, that's not really how I operate.

DEEPA: Perhaps you should. Anjali, this is not uncommon. You know arranged marriages are an Indian tradition.

ANJALI: *(Infuriated.)* Marriage?

BARBARA: I don't think she means...

DEEPA: No one said anything about marriage...

ANJALI: You just did!

DEEPA: I was merely pointing out that arranged marriages are part of your heritage so you would understand why I feel compelled to become involved. I have simply arranged a meeting for you and this young man so you can see if you like each other. There is no pressure. If you don't like him, fine. But I think you'll be quite impressed. I certainly was.

ANJALI: Where did you meet this person?

DEEPA: I haven't exactly met him yet.

ANJALI: Meaning what?

DEEPA: Have you heard of Shaadi.com?

ANJALI: Oh, no!

DEEPA: It's perfectly respectable—and successful too. Over 3.2 million matches and counting.

ANJALI: (*Furious.*) How could you...what made you think it was okay to do this without even asking me?

DEEPA: I thought I was helping you.

ANJALI: In what possible way?

ASEEM can't hide his amusement any longer. He begins to laugh.

ANJALI: You *would* think this is hilarious.

BARBARA: Aseem, really.

ASEEM: (*Tries to contain himself.*) I'm sorry. So, who is this guy anyway?

DEEPA: His name is Ashok Ranjan. A very successful doctor from right here in Chicago. (To ANJALI.) You see, you already have much in common. And wait until you see his picture...To die for.

ASEEM: (*Teasingly.*) Wow...he sounds like a dream.

ANJALI: I can't...I won't. I'm not going through with this. I'm sorry, Daa-dee-maa, you'll have to cancel it.

DEEPA: But that is not possible. It's all set up. He's coming here for dinner on Thursday.

BARBARA: But that's in two days! I wasn't really planning on hosting a dinner party...

DEEPA: Don't worry, Barbara, I'll show you how to prepare the meal. And Anjali, I'll help you get you ready. (*She fusses with ANJALI's hair.*) I will transform you into a rajkumari!

ANJALI: A what?

DEEPA: An Indian princess.

ANJALI: I don't want to be a princess!

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* I almost feel sorry for her...

DEEPA: *(To ASEEM.)* Now, I haven't forgotten about you...I have found you a wonderful school in London.

ASEEM: Huh?

BARBARA: Why would he want to go to school in London?

DEEPA: It's the Brimley School--one of the best schools in the U.K. All the children of London's Indian elite attend. Not only would you be extremely well educated, but you would rub elbows with Britain's most powerful families. As far as college is concerned, you could write your own ticket.

ASEEM: If it's so exclusive, how did you get me in?

DEEPA: Connections, Aseem. It's always about connections. Your Daa-Daa-Jee removed the headmaster's appendix years ago. He's eternally grateful.

ASEEM: An appendix got me in? Imagine what we would have got for a heart transplant!

DEEPA: It doesn't hurt that you're brilliant, either.

ASEEM: No! I won't go! London is cold and rainy and depressing. And everybody talks funny.

ANJALI begins to laugh.

BARBARA: Deepa, please. You can't just take him out of his school. He's going to be a senior next year. He's doing quite well.

DEEPA: But that school is nothing special. He deserves so much more. If it's money you're worried about, don't. I will pay for it.

ASEEM: But I'm happy where I am. I have friends. I'm challenged. I might get on this reality show...

DEEPA: Pssh! Aseem, your father would have wanted this for you...

ASEEM: How do you know that?

BARBARA: Didn't she tell you? She reads souls.

Lights fade. ALL exit but ASEEM.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* It's times like this that I really miss my Dad. He would have said something wise and insightful to convince Daa-dee-maa to butt out. He was like that...always knowing the right thing to say...always able to calm people down. I wish you could have known him. Mom used to call him the goofy intellectual—brilliant but a clown at the same time. And I don't ever remember him being sad or bored. Not really. He greeted every day of his life like he was about to unwrap the best birthday present in the entire world. *(A pause.)* I remember we had this really amazing day once. It was completely perfect from beginning to end...How many perfect days can you say you've had in your life? A handful? Dozens? If you've had more than that, you're lucky.

ASEEM sits on the couch and turns on the television, begins surfing with the remote. DAYA GANESHE, 40s, enters, takes the remote and turns off the television. He is bursting with excitement.

DAYA: Today's the day!

ASEEM: *(Groggily.)* Huh?

DAYA: *(Excitedly.)* Today. We're seeing Chicago!

ASEEM: Dad—what are you talking about? We live here. We see it every day.

DAYA: We're seeing it like never before. Get up! Get dressed! We've got a lot of ground to cover.

ASEEM: Dad, it's 6:30 a.m.

DAYA: Exactly. We're running late.

ASEEM yawns and stands reluctantly.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* We started out at Walker Brothers Pancake House in Wilmette.

DAYA: *(To the audience.)* The Ritz Hotel of pancake houses. Their apple pancake topped with vanilla ice cream—it's to die for.

ASEEM: Dad, do you mind?

DAYA: What? I'm not allowed to talk to them?

ASEEM: No, you're not...

DAYA: *(Pretends to be miffed.)* Fine. Carry on.

ASEEM and DAYA sit and look at menus.

DAYA: The pancake is an amazing thing.

ASEEM: *(Bored.)* I guess.

DAYA: Did you know the first pancakes were invented in ancient Rome?

ASEEM: *(Feigns interest.)* No kidding?

DAYA: It's true. Then everyone had to get in on the action. Matter of fact, I can't think of a country that doesn't have its own version. India's are called Dosas. They can be sweet or salty depending on your mood.

ASEEM: You don't say...

DAYA: Frankly, I prefer the American pancake. The way we douse them with maple syrup—like they're drowning in it. There's something downright decadent about it. But, then, that's America, isn't it?

ASEEM: *(He shrugs, sleepily.)* I guess so.

DAYA: So, what do you say, son? Should we be decadent this morning?

ASEEM: Sure. Why not?

DAYA pats ASEEM on the back.

DAYA: That's my boy!

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* Next, we headed downtown to the Sears Tower. Only now it's the Willis Tower. I don't get it. It's like changing the name of the Empire State Building. Why would you go and do that? Believe it or not, I had never been to the Sears—I mean—Willis Tower. And Dad, well, he was this huge architecture buff...He always used to say...

DAYA: *(To ASEEM.)* I hope you'll get to see the Taj Mahal someday, son. Its beauty will make you cry.

ASEEM: *(To DAYA.)* Yeah, whatever, Dad...*(To the audience.)* He pointed out all these really amazing buildings.

DAYA and ASEEM gaze around in awe at the Chicago skyline.

DAYA: *(To ASEEM.)* Isn't this incredible? Look at the view! We're at 1,353 feet! *(They stare off in the distance.)*

ASEEM: I've never seen anything like it.

They continue to look around.

DAYA: Look! There's the Board of Trade!

ASEEM: Where?

DAYA: Right there! It's a wonderful example of Art Deco style. The statue that caps it is the goddess Ceres. She represents the exchange's beginnings as a commodities market.

ASEEM: No kidding?

DAYA: On a good day, you can see clear across Lake Michigan...all the way to Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin...You know, this used to be the tallest building in the world until the Petronas twin towers were erected in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1997. But actually, there was some debate as to which of the two was really the tallest because the height of the antennas on the Petronas towers is included in the total height, while the height of the antennas is *not* included in calculating the height of the Sears tower.

ASEEM: *(Looking around, a little bored.)* Ya don't say...

DAYA: Malaysia seems to be cheating a bit, if you ask me.

ASEEM: But no one did, Dad.

DAYA: Their loss. Of course, all that antenna silliness became irrelevant when the Taipei 101 tower was built in 2004. It topped out at 1676 feet, leaving them both in its dust.

ASEEM: *(Impressed.)* How do you carry all this information around in your brain?

DAYA: I don't. *(He points to an unseen display.)* I just read it over there.

ASEEM: Oh.

DAYA: You're the only genius in the family, son. I'm just the know-it-all. *(Checks his watch.)* Come on, we're late. We should get going.

DAYA rushes ASEEM along.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* Next stop—Wrigley Field to watch the Cubbies. I don't know how Dad snagged them, but he got seats right behind the dugout.

ASEEM AND DAYA sit. They mime the following food items.

DAYA: Chili dogs?

ASEEM: Check.

DAYA: Popcorn?

ASEEM: Check.

DAYA: Cokes?

ASEEM: Check.

DAYA: Ice cream sandwiches?

ASEEM: Check.

DAYA: Tums?

ASEEM: Check.

They watch the game. A bad call is made. They react.

DAYA: Ah, c'mon! That was a lousy call! He was safe!

DAYA/ASEEM: Boo!

ASEEM: The dude is blind, man! Totally blind!

DAYA: Have some popcorn.

ASEEM: Thanks.

They watch the game.

DAYA: Have you ever thought of baseball as a symphony?

ASEEM: Huh?

DAYA: Have you ever heard such an amazing array of sounds?

DAYA stands and proceeds to act and sound out each of the following in quick succession. ASEEM slips down in his seat, embarrassed: The whoosh of the pitch... the crack of the ball on the bat...The cheers of the crowd...The boos of the crowd...The announcer's voice announcing "It's a line drive"...The organ music playing "charge"...The national anthem...Standing at the seventh inning stretch...Finally, ASEEM can't take it anymore.

ASEEM: Dad! People are staring!

DAYA: (*Oblivious.*) They should write a symphony for it, don't you think? Or at least a concerto.

ASEEM: (*Embarrassed, looks around nervously.*) Can you please just sit down?

DAYA: What's the matter? You're having fun, aren't you?

ASEEM: Of course...it's just. (*ASEEM notices DAYA looking hurt.*) Never mind. Can you pass the popcorn, please?

DAYA: Sure. (*He stifles a burp.*) I'll take some of those Tums, too.

ASEEM: Here you go.

They watch the game. Their excitement grows. They stand. A homerun is made. Then another. They cheer and high five each other, jumping up and down.

ASEEM / DAYA: Yes! Yes!

DAYA: Wouldn't it be amazing if they pulled it off?

ASEEM: Sure would...

DAYA: Watch. Just watch. I bet they will!

ASEEM looks at DAYA enjoying the game. After a moment, ASEEM addresses the audience.

ASEEM: (*To the audience.*) The Cubs got their butts whipped by the Dodgers that day, but it didn't matter. We were in Wrigley Field yelling our heads off and stuffing our faces. (*A pause, he remembers wistfully.*) Like I said—a perfect day. We finally ended up at Navy Pier—riding the Wave Swinger, playing with remote-controlled boats and watching the fireworks.

ASEEM and DAYA watch the fireworks.

ASEEM: I remember looking back and forth between those bursts of light exploding in the sky and Dad getting all excited like a little kid.

DAYA laughs heartily.

ASEEM: What's so funny?

DAYA: I'm reminded of that old Buddhist saying.

ASEEM: What's that, Dad?

DAYA: "When you realize how perfect everything is, you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky."

ASEEM watches the FIREWORKS, realizing this is a perfect moment with his father and knowing it can't last.

ASEEM: *(In quiet awe.)* Yeah...I think I know what you mean.

END SCENE

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *The present. The next morning. BARBARA enters the living room in her robe and pajamas, holding a cup of coffee. She is exhausted. She picks up the newspaper from the coffee table and begins reading. After a moment, ASEEM enters.*

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* After years of practice at being a kid, I've been able to perfect a few important techniques. One of them is this: When you want to get your parents to say "yes" to something, it's important to strike when their resistance is at its lowest point. That means when they're sick, tired or distracted. Preferably all three...

ASEEM approaches BARBARA.

ASEEM: Hi, Mom.

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BARBARA glances up from her paper.

BARBARA: Hello.

ASEEM: You don't look too good. Can I get you anything?

BARBARA: I didn't sleep well last night. I never do when Deepa is here.

ASEEM: That's too bad. *(A pause.)* So, I was wondering...have you done any more thinking? About the T.V. show and all?

BARBARA: The T.V. show?

ASEEM: You know—"Stump the Brainiacs."

BARBARA: Oh that...I don't know.

ASEEM puts his hands together, begging.

ASEEM: Please, Mom...Please say "yes." It would be so awesome! We're talking national television. How many chances does a person get at that in their life? If they're not an actor or a newscaster or something?

BARBARA: I'm just not sure it's a good idea.

ASEEM: Why not? Give me one good reason why it's a bad idea...*(ASEEM jumps in before BARBARA can answer.)* See--you can't! That means it's a good idea! Dad would've said yes. I know he would have.

BARBARA: I'm not so sure about that...

ASEEM: Mom—Dad would've been all over it! Remember how much he used to love watching "Jeopardy"? It's the same kind of thing—with a slightly different twist. You know, to make it more contemporary.

BARBARA: I don't know. Let me have a little more coffee and wake up first. I need to give it some more thought.

ASEEM: What else do you need to think about? Please, Mom. At least let me do the interview. *(He looks up at her pleadingly.)*

BARBARA: Your sister seems to think it's a bad idea.

ASEEM: *(Indignant.)* What does she know about any of this?

BARBARA: I value her opinion.

ASEEM: What about my opinion? We're talking about my life here....not hers. She's just jealous!

BARBARA: I don't think so.

ASEEM: Anjali is a cynic. You know that. I'm telling you—this would be good for me. Really. Don't you think I deserve this? After how hard I've worked? And after everything I've been through? Please...

BARBARA: *(Sighs.)* Aseem...you exhaust me.

ASEEM winks at the audience and again looks pleadingly at BARBARA.

BARBARA: *(She sighs.)* You can do the interview—and then, if they pick you for the show, we'll see. *(ASEEM leaps up and hugs BARBARA.)*

ASEEM: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! You won't regret this...You'll see. It's going to be so cool! We're gonna be celebrities!

BARBARA: God help us.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* Some would call that manipulative. I call it persistence.

ANJALI enters, a backpack slung over her shoulder, looking exhausted. ASEEM grins.

ANJALI: Why are you so smug?

ASEEM: Mom said I could do the show!

ANJALI: *(To BARBARA.)* You did?

BARBARA: I told him he could do the interview. Then, we'll see...

ANJALI: It's a bad idea.

ASEEM: Why?

ANJALI: It's just the principle of the thing.

ASEEM: You and your principles...

ANJALI: And the whole thing is so demeaning. Come on...You're not going to be the least bit embarrassed?

ASEEM: About what? Lighten up, Anj. It's just a T.V. show.

BARBARA: Kids, please. Not now. Not when I have this dinner to plan...

ANJALI: Mom, I need you to cancel it. Please!

BARBARA: You know I can't do that! Deepa would give me the silent treatment the rest of her visit.

ASEEM: That doesn't sound so bad.

BARBARA: It is. Trust me. She has looks that could make a Marine surrender.

ANJALI: Make up an excuse. Tell her I got called into the hospital at the last minute...I am not going through with this ridiculous set-up.

BARBARA: Anjali, what could be so bad? Have you ever considered that you might actually like this man?

ANJALI: That's not the point.

BARBARA: What exactly is the point?

ANJALI: I don't like Daa-dee-maa or anyone else meddling in my affairs.

ASEEM: Or lack thereof.

ANJALI: (*To ASEEM.*) If you make one more snotty comment, I swear I'll...

ASEEM: (*Grins.*) What?

BARBARA: Have you ever considered that Deepa is simply trying to help? And why not accept it? You haven't exactly been putting yourself out there trying to meet people.

ANJALI: I'm in med school!

BARBARA: But you're not dead! You never make time for fun.

ANJALI: I'm too busy to have fun. After I get through school, I promise—I'll have some fun.

BARBARA: Do you think it's going to be any easier with your internship? You've got to blow off steam. You're young...You're pretty...Enjoy it. Trust me--It fades soon enough.

ANJALI: (*She sighs dramatically.*) Fine. But just tonight. If she tries to set me up again—forget it.

BARBARA: Thank you. Who knows? You might be pleasantly surprised.

ASEEM: (*Fake English accent.*) Not bloody likely.

ANJALI tries to slug ASEEM, but he slips away. BARBARA and ANJALI exit.

ASEEM: *(To the audience.)* I can't remember when I first started hating my sister. We used to get along pretty well. We were sort of a team, actually.

Three years earlier. Night. ASEEM is lying down on the lawn outside their house, looking up at the sky. He wipes his eyes. After a moment, ANJALI enters.

ANJALI: Hi.

ASEEM: Hi.

ANJALI: What are you doing?

ASEEM: Stargazing. Dad and I used to do it a lot. Remember?

ANJALI: Can I join you?

ASEEM: What about everyone in there?

ANJALI: I don't think they'll notice. There's so many people and so much food.

ASEEM: That's Deepa for you. When in doubt, cook.

ANJALI lies down next to ASEEM and they look up at the sky.

ANJALI: Why do people always assume everyone is hungry after a funeral? I have absolutely no appetite.

ASEEM: Me either. *(A pause.)* Was it your idea to display some of his architectural models?

ANJALI: Yep. He loved them so. He used to spend hours showing me how to make them.

ASEEM: You always had the patience for that. Not me.

ANJALI: Those were our best times together.

After a minute, ANJALI points upward.

ANJALI: Is that the big dipper?

ASEEM: Nope. It's over there.

ANJALI: Oh...*(She gazes around.)* It's nice out here...Peaceful. You can think.

ASEEM: Yep.

ANJALI: Remember we used to come out here and camp in our sleeping bags? Dad would try to scare us in the middle of the night?

ASEEM: (*Laughs.*) Yeah, I'd always scream and freak out just to make him feel better.

ANJALI: Then Mom would come out in her robe and yell at him to leave us alone! The neighbors must have loved us.

They laugh and stare at the sky.

ASEEM: Dad used to say we had a twin earth out there somewhere. Possibly hundreds of them. Parallel universes.

ANJALI: Einstein? Worm holes? The space-time continuum?

ASEEM: Uh-huh.

ANJALI: So somewhere there's another you and me lying here looking at the stars?

ASEEM: And me as an old man. And you at your daughter's high school graduation.

ANJALI: (*Happy.*) A daughter?

ASEEM: Why not?

ANJALI: And me spitting up on Dad's shirt. And you chipping your tooth on that step over there when you were about two. And...(*Laughs.*) Oh no.

ASEEM: What?

ANJALI: Hundreds of Deepas!

ASEEM: (*Shivers.*) There's a scary thought.

Both laugh. Then, quiet again, they stare at the sky.

ANJALI: You okay?

ASEEM: Guess so. You?

ANJALI: Not really.

ASEEM: Me either. (*A pause.*)

ANJALI: There were a lot of people, huh?

ASEEM: Yep.

ANJALI: I didn't know half of them.

ASEEM: Me either.

ANJALI: His boss said some nice things.

ASEEM: Who was that lady with the giant green feathered hat? She kept blowing her nose the whole time. She sounded like a trumpet.

ANJALI: No idea.

ASEEM: Mom held it together pretty well. 'Till the end, at least.

ANJALI: Daa-dee-maa was a wreck. I thought she'd be the strong one.

ASEEM: Me too.

ANJALI: Who was that guy with the heavy-duty body odor?

ASEEM: Oh man, you could smell him from a mile away! He was the super from Mom and Dad's first apartment on Ridge Avenue. He kept slapping me on the back and telling me how I'm a miniature version of Dad. How I have to be strong for the family now.

ANJALI: *(Laughs.)* Really?

ASEEM: Yep. I wanted to tell him to shut the hell up and go take a shower, but I didn't quite have it in me today.

ANJALI: He sure had a lot of friends. Didn't he?

ASEEM: Yep. Everybody loved him. *(A pause.)* Anj...

ANJALI: Yeah?

ASEEM: Do you think we'll ever be happy again?

ANJALI: *(She thinks.)* I don't know. *(A pause.)* Maybe. *(A pause.)* But it'll be a different kind of happy.

ASEEM: Yeah...Think we should go back in?

ANJALI: No. Not yet. I just want to lie here some more.

ASEEM: Me too.

They gaze up at the sky.

END SCENE

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE: *Present. Later that day. ASEEM sits on the couch, texting on his cell phone. DEEPA enters, sits down next to him.*

DEEPA: What are you doing?

ASEEM: Huh? Oh. This is called a (*Slowly.*) cell phone.

DEEPA: Don't be smart.

ASEEM: I'm texting my friend Howie.

DEEPA: Texting?

ASEEM: Yeah, you know...here. (*He shows her the phone.*)

DEEPA: So, you type a message to him and he types back?

ASEEM: Right.

DEEPA: Why don't you just call him?

ASEEM: It's not the same.

DEEPA: Why not?

ASEEM: (*Sighs.*) It just isn't. (*He texts some more.*) Daa-dee-maa, did you know that India is one of the leaders in cell phone technology?

DEEPA: Did you know that India has some of the most exquisitely designed buildings in the world?

ASEEM: (*Dryly.*) Right. The Taj Mahal. Its beauty will make you cry.

DEEPA: Don't be smart.

A pause. A cell phone beeps. DEEPA takes it out of her pocket, looks at the screen and begins texting. ASEEM does a double take.

ASEEM: Huh?

DEEPA: You think your Daa-dee-maa is a complete technophobe?

ASEEM: No, but...

DEEPA: You may be smart, Aseem. But there is much you do not see.

ASEEM and DEEPA both sit, texting on their cell phones.

DEEPA: Your Uncle Baldev says "hello."

ASEEM: Tell him "hello."

DEEPA: He wants to know if you've made up your mind about the Brimley School.

ASEEM: You've got him in on this too? You're relentless!

ASEEM texts a message on his phone. He waits for an answer.

DEEPA: He says it would be very wise of you to go.

ASEEM's phone beeps.

ASEEM: Howie thinks it's a really stupid idea.

DEEPA: Your Uncle says you would make the entire family very proud.

ASEEM: Howie says it would be extremely disruptive for my education to transfer to a different academic system in the middle of my high school career, especially since I've already started getting catalogs from Princeton and Yale. Not to mention, I'd miss the chance to be on "Stump the Brainiacs."

DEEPA: He didn't text all that!

ASEEM: No. That last little bit was me.

DEEPA: Do you know how many boys would give anything to go to that school?

ASEEM: Not me.

DEEPA: The Indian ambassador's son goes there.

ASEEM: Good for the Indian ambassador's son.

DEEPA: Why do you fight so hard against me?

ASEEM: Because you push so hard.

DEEPA: I push because I love.

ASEEM: How about loving a little less?

DEEPA: You would meet others like you who are successful...who are proud of their Indian heritage.

ASEEM: Rich Indian kids, you mean?

DEEPA: Why do you deny who you are?

ASEEM: I don't deny it. Look, I'm white too, you know.

DEEPA: Oh, yes. I know.

ASEEM: What do you want from me?

DEEPA: I want you to know where you came from...or at least 50 percent of you.

ASEEM: Then send me to India—not some snooty London boys school.

DEEPA: *(She studies ASEEM.)* You are so like him.

ASEEM: Dad?

DEEPA nods.

ASEEM: How?

DEEPA: The stubbornness...The brilliance... He has passed much onto you.

ASEEM's phone beeps again. He has another text message. He reads it. He replies.

DEEPA: Won't you at least visit the school? I will pay for your trip.

ASEEM: It's not that I'm not grateful...It's just that...I'll have to think about it. Okay? I've got a lot going on right now.

DEEPA: This game show?

ASEEM: Game-slash-reality show.

DEEPA: I only want your happiness.

ASEEM: *(He looks at her skeptically.)* You do?

DEEPA: Yes. Tell me something, what do you think this so-called game-slash-reality show will help you accomplish?

ASEEM stares at DEEPA.

ASEEM: I have no idea. I just think it'd be cool.

END SCENE



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