

STAIN RESISTANT

Written by

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EXT. SILICON VALLEY HIGHWAY - DAY

A car drives past a scenic highway with a satellite dish on one side and a grazing pasture on the other.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. DELHI - DAY

Street vendors selling pottery, fruits and vegetables are lined up along a busy road.

SFX: Traffic sounds

INDIAN GIRL 1 (V.O.)

How can you even eat that spicy stuff? You must REALLY like it.

INDIAN GIRL 2 (V.O.)

Not really. I just like to see how much spice I can handle before my eyes start watering.

INDIAN GIRL 1 (V.O.)

Why? To test your endurance of pain? *Arey baba*, I'm sure life will throw up many opportunities later.

INDIAN GIRL 2 (V.O.)

No way! My life is set. I'm going to have a storybook life - the kind Liz Bennett had after she grew to like Darcy.

INDIAN GIRL 1 (V.O.)

Hain? So you'll go with someone even after not liking them at first? I couldn't do that. No second chances with me.

INDIAN GIRL 2 (V.O.)

Even for me?

INDIAN GIRL 1 (V.O.)

Nahin yaar! I'll always have room for you. In my life, my heart and all my secrets.

They giggle.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CAR - DAY

SUNNY, an Indian American woman (40s), gracefully dressed in a silk tunic and an embroidered scarf, drives an SUV through a highway in Silicon Valley. She has the self-assurance of an immigrant who has experienced the world and drives with a detached air. A brown accordion folder rests on the passenger seat.

SFX: Phone rings.

The car dashboard reads "Unknown Caller." She hesitates before pressing a button on her steering wheel.

TELEPHONE OPERATOR (V.O.)
This is the operator from the SFPD
Tenderloin District. You have a
collect call from...

MALE (V.O.)
Pick up, (in Punjabi) *fucking
bitch!*

TELEPHONE OPERATOR (V.O.)
...would you like to accept?

SUNNY
(Sharply)
No.

She disconnects. Her lips quiver as she stares at the road ahead.

The highway sign shows the way to San Francisco. Sunny approaches the sign amidst a cacophony of voices in her head.

MALE (V.O.)
Can you bring the papers... *fucking
bitch* (in Punjabi)... You are
nothing... you do nothing...
fucking bitch (in Punjabi)

She swerves suddenly and takes a road away from San Francisco.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Sunny is seated at a table in a quiet restaurant. She places her phone on the table just as it lights up.

INSERT: Text message "Almost there."

Sunny clasps her hands and smiles uncertainly.

EXT. SFO DROP OFF AREA - DAY

SUPER: Ten years ago

TARA (30s), an Indian American woman, emerges from the passenger seat of a sedan, in trendy sweats, sneakers and large sunglasses. Her athletic build shows through her outfit and her long black hair hide most of her face.

She walks to the boot and reaches for her bag.

A casually-dressed Sunny (30s) joins her. Sunny sports a friendly smile and the signature curves of a mother with little time for herself. Sunny removes her glasses and places them with care on her head.

SUNNY

Thanks for coming, Tara. I've missed you so much.

Tara continues to keep her glasses on.

TARA

I missed you too, Sunny.

SUNNY

So proud of your exciting life in New York.

Tara remains silent.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

What is it? I know there's something on your mind.

Tara studies Sunny for what seems like a long time. A car honks behind them. Sunny looks over and gestures to the other driver to hold on.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Say it!

TARA

Just that, you have a great life too, beautiful kids, lovely home...

SUNNY

But?

Tara takes off her glasses and holds them in her hand. Her eyes are red and slightly swollen.

TARA

I don't see YOU in it. I get that you are putting your life on hold just... don't, lose yourself in all this.

SUNNY

All this? You mean, a home, a family?

TARA

Don't get me wrong--

SUNNY

No, you don't get me wrong. I could say the same for you. Don't get lost in all that, that you forget to build a home.

TARA

A home is not everything, I have what I want.

SUNNY

And you think I don't?

TARA

How can you possibly want to be... a glorified maid? He gets to be a CEO, and you?

Sunny is livid and the car behind them honks again. Sunny puts her glasses back on.

SUNNY

Bye Tara.

Sunny closes the boot and doesn't even look at Tara before getting in the car and driving away.

Tara's eyes tear up and she puts her glasses back on.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

TARA (40s), dressed impeccably in a crisp blue suit and a satin scarf, walks in. She exudes the composure of a C-suite executive and has the build of a woman who runs marathons. She spots Sunny and smiles uncomfortably.

Sunny rises from the table and gives her a hug.

SUNNY

Lovely scarf.

TARA
Yours as well.

They sit down. Sunny gestures to the WAITER and places their order.

Tara's phone buzzes and she takes a peek. She is visibly shaken when she looks up.

Sunny looks at her with concern but Tara averts her eyes and runs to the restroom.

Sunny gets a call on her phone from "Unknown Caller" and she aggressively turns her phone off.

INT. WOMEN'S RESTROOM - DAY

Sunny walks in and looks at the stalls. Only one door is shut.

She stands in front of the mirror and examines herself.

She wets a hand towel and holds it against her forehead when she hears Tara throw up.

SUNNY
Tara?

TARA
Yeah.

SUNNY
Can I help?

Tara opens the door to her stall and steps out, somewhat disheveled.

Sunny quickly wets another towel and hands it to her.

Tara rinses her mouth while Sunny watches her with concern. Tara looks at Sunny in the mirror.

TARA
Must be the flight.

SUNNY
Can I get you something?

TARA
No. I'm better. I was trying to keep it down but it just needed to come out.

SUNNY
Should I cancel our order?

TARA
No, no. I'm alright now.

Sunny looks at the floor indecisively, then heads for the door.

TARA (CONT'D)
Don't you want to use the loo?

SUNNY
No. (Points to Tara's scarf) You
better clean that before it stains.

Tara uses the damp towel to wipe her scarf. She takes a deep breath and addresses Sunny through the mirror.

TARA
Sunny?

Sunny pauses at the door.

TARA (CONT'D)
You okay?

SUNNY
Yeah.

TARA
You sure?

Sunny turns away to open the door and stands in the doorway.

SUNNY
Of course! It's all good.

Sunny leaves and Tara closes her eyes and shakes her head. She picks up her phone.

INSERT: Tara's phone with an India West headline - "Indian-American CEO caught in pedophilia sting operation."

INT. RESTAURANT TABLE - DAY

Sunny is sipping soup and clumsily spills some on her scarf. Tara sits across her.

TARA
Oh no, that's gonna stain!

SUNNY

That's the problem with Indian scarves. They don't make them stain resistant! But, we wouldn't be worth our Indian "Aunty" tag if we couldn't take care of it. Right?

Sunny eyes the club soda that Tara had ordered.

Tara smiles knowingly, pours some soda on her cloth napkin, leans forward and wipes Sunny's scarf.

Sunny grabs Tara's hand on her scarf and holds it close to her heart. They share a moment of genuine connection. As Tara pulls back, she smiles victoriously.

TARA

All clean. You can't even tell if a stain was ever there.

SUNNY

Hmm. (Beat) So, what brings you to SF after... how long has it been?

TARA

Almost ten years. I came to see you.

Sunny squints her eyes in doubt, and presses for the truth.

TARA (CONT'D)

It's the truth. I quit my job last week. (Sighs) And I'm here to file a lawsuit against someone who has wronged me.

Sunny eats her soup in silence. Tara studies her.

SUNNY

I'm with you, no matter what.

TARA

Still? Even after I didn't keep in touch all these years?

SUNNY

It happens. I know you are... were, a busy journalist. I also knew that you knew where to find me.

TARA

No hard feelings?

SUNNY

None whatsoever. (In Punjabi) *Throw dirt over it.*

Tara smiles feebly. Sunny peers deeply into Tara's eyes trying to get a read on her. Tara looks away.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

What is it? I know there's something on your mind.

Tara nods and looks at Sunny like a lost puppy. She holds Sunny's hand.

TARA

Ten years ago, when I visited your home...

Tara pauses searching for the right words.

SUNNY

Say it!

Tears well up in Tara's eyes as she begins to shake. Sunny is confused.

TARA

I thought if I just never mentioned it to anyone, it would go away. But it doesn't. It festers within you until you can't take it anymore and you want to scream at the top of your lungs that GODDAMNIT IT HAPPENED!

Tara begins to tremble with a mix of rage and helplessness. Sunny studies her closely and begins to tremble with her own realization.

SUNNY

(Whispering)
It was him.

TARA

You knew?

Sunny shakes her head.

SUNNY

It had to be. Is that why you--

TARA

I didn't know how to...

SUNNY

But you should have.

TARA

I didn't want to hurt you.

Sunny appears to be in a trance. A tear drops from Sunny's eyes. A tear drops from Tara's eyes.

SUNNY

I get it. I totally get it. But you didn't need to go through it alone. I would've believed you. I totally believe you.

TARA

How did you know?

SUNNY

Because he did it to me too.

TARA

You mean...

SUNNY

I mean, I've been there. All of it. (Takes a deep breath) Did he put his hand on your mouth, then his mouth on your mouth, suffocating you while you pleaded, cried, gasping for air, totally helpless?

INSERT: Images of Tara being suffocated, pleading, crying and gasping for air in a dark room flash by.

TARA

Yes, that was exactly how...

SUNNY

...that was exactly how he did it to me too.

INSERT: Images of YOUNG SUNNY (17), an Indian girl, being suffocated, pleading, crying and gasping for air in a dark room flash by.

Tara seems to have turned to stone with shock and rage.

TARA

When Sunny?

SUNNY

The night of the rock show, the night he drove me home.

TARA

Before you were married? But, why marry him then?

SUNNY

The choice wasn't mine to make.

INT. INDIAN KITCHEN - DAY

SUPER: New Delhi, 1995

YOUNG SUNNY (17), timidly stands in a corner dressed in a silk salwar kameez in bright colors. She works with a stone grinder to make cilantro chutney.

Her mother, MRS. SHARMA (Late 40s) walks in wearing a bright silk sari and vermillion in her hair.

Sunny looks up pleadingly, with tears in her eyes. Her stole slides off her shoulder.

MRS. SHARMA

What is taking so long? And watch your *chunni* or it'll get stained.

YOUNG SUNNY

(Whispers)

Mummy, please... I don't want to do this.

Sunny fixes her stole as Mrs. Sharma grabs the grinder from her hand and works on the chutney at a furious pace.

MRS. SHARMA

I don't want any drama from you today.

YOUNG SUNNY

But Ma, after what he did to me, how can you...

Sunny's mother puts the grinder down and snaps open a safety pin attached to her bangles. She holds it in her mouth and indicates to Sunny to turn around. Sunny does as she is told.

MRS. SHARMA

(In Hindi)

Shhh... keep quiet, someone may hear us.

Mrs. Sharma fixes Sunny's stole and fastens it to her *Kurta* on the shoulder with the safety pin. Sunny gets pricked and grimaces.

MRS. SHARMA (CONT'D)

Now listen to me. You went with him to his house, willingly, late at night! No one is going to believe you. Everyone will question your character.

A tiny drop of blood forms on Sunny's shoulder. Sunny wipes it briskly and covers it with the stole.

YOUNG SUNNY

I don't care about others. Do you believe me, Ma?

MRS. SHARMA

My child, it makes no difference what I believe or don't believe. It's a man's world, the sooner you accept it, the happier you'll be.

YOUNG SUNNY

Happy? With the guy who raped me?

Sunny's mother slaps her hard across her face and goes back to grinding the chutney.

MRS. SHARMA

Never use that word again. (Lowers her voice) If it really was THAT, you would never hear from him again and you would be ruined. Then be a spinster forever wondering what happened to your life. At least he has the decency to ask for your hand in marriage. Such a respectable family, and such a respectable proposal. (In Hindi) *Things happen in the throes of youth...* but he is still dignified enough to want to marry you.

YOUNG SUNNY

Dignified?

MRS. SHARMA

Enough already. First you don't listen to me, then you come to me crying! I told you to stay away from boys, from that stupid rock show, from staying out late, from wearing those tight jeans. Did I or did I not? Now what do you want me to do?

YOUNG SUNNY

But Ma, please try to understand. I
don't want to get married.
Certainly not to him!

Mrs. Sharma extends her hand and Sunny passes her a bowl.
Mrs. Sharma scrapes the chutney off the grinder and tenderly
puts it in the bowl.

MRS. SHARMA

I am DONE with you. Engineers don't
grow on trees. And then he is going
to America for higher studies...
and wants to take you with him.
What more can you want?

YOUNG SUNNY

(Mumbles)
Not that.

Sunny's mother arranges a tray with four tea cups and forces
it into her daughter's hands.

MRS. SHARMA

Stop embarrassing us and come out
right now. Or else, you can leave
this house forever. I will not let
you bring shame to our family name.

She glares at Sunny, who lowers her head and walks out with
the tea tray in her hands. She follows with another tray with
the chutney and some other snacks.

INT. RESTAURANT TABLE - DAY

Sunny and Tara stare at the flickering flame of a votive
candle on their table. A plate of dessert sits next to it.

TARA

But, why did HE marry you? He
must've loved you, right?

SUNNY

It was never about love. It was
about control. What better
punishment for the girl who
resisted, than to control her
forever?

They sit in silence, diminished and depleted.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

You know he is in jail, don't you?

TARA

Yeah, I saw the news alert about the sting operation. I'm so sorry Sunny...

SUNNY

(Sharply)

Don't be! As it is women apologize too much. Not this time. Not back then. IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

A determined Sunny picks up a spoon and digs into the dessert. Tara pulls up a picture of them as school girls on her phone.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

I wish we could go back to being those silly school girls. Naive and untouched.

TARA

And miss out on being a grown up? No way! (In a mix of Punjabi and English) *Throw dirt* on our past.

Tara puts her phone away, just as Sunny takes a deep breath and reaches into her purse.

TARA (CONT'D)

No, no, no. The lunch is on me. I have a lot of making up to do.

Sunny pulls out a bottle of prescription pills and places it on the table, just as Tara pulls out her credit card.

Tara is startled and reaches forward to hold Sunny's hands in hers. They look at one another and a new resolve takes over both faces.

The waiter approaches.

WAITER

Everything alright?

Tara looks at Sunny and smiles. Sunny nods.

TARA

It will be.

Sunny tidies her scarf and sits up smiling. She picks up the bottle.

SUNNY

Could you throw this for me,
please?

Waiter nods and takes the bottle from her.

Sunny's smile widens with a naughty glint.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

And could you bring HER the cheque,
please.

Tara laughs and possessively grabs the dessert plate.

Sunny tries to scoop the last bite but Tara gets to it first.

FADE OUT.