

# **Changing Tides**



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Fall 2022

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Syed Manzoorul Islam', written over a horizontal line.

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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### **Abstract**

The dissertation titled *Changing Tides* is a realist play that deals with the issues of abandonment, loneliness, dysfunctional families, bullying and hustle culture. These are a few pressing and timely issues in our society. However, most of them goes unnoticed and when we become mindful about the problems, we are left on our own. The irony of our age is that we have lost our emotional and mental connection with our loved ones as well as ourselves, despite being in the era of the connecting devices, social media platforms and globalization. The issues presented in the play, does not need some extreme utopian solution or magical touch to disappear from our lives. It is possible to get rid of the problems through communicating and spending time with our loved ones.

## Introduction

The play, *Changing Tides* deals with the issues of bullying, abandonment, loneliness, dysfunctional broken families, and the negative effect of hustle culture. In the midst of our fast paced life, we often tend to ignore these issues and carry on with our lives as they are. If left unchecked and unresolved, these issues are capable enough to grow and have detrimental effect on one's life and may ultimately destroy it.

*Changing Tides* belongs to the realist genre of drama. As per the play's genre, I have attempted to keep the situations, course of action, plot and, characters as close to the reality of our times as possible. Through realist dramas, one can represent the ills of our society, where the audiences can be fair spectator. The play has given me a medium, where I am able to express my perspectives about some pressing issues of our time.

Hustle culture is glorified on a global level even though it has been responsible for causing burn out, stress, depression and many other mental health issues. The believers of hustle culture “put everything in their work and value it above everything else” (Maudud) The character Mr.Hasan, Ahnaf's father is a representative of hustle culture in the play. Hanifa tells Rahima about how Mr.Hasan is always working and have no time for his son. The restraint between the father and son occurs because of this workaholic nature of Mr.Hasan. His work is also the reason for him being a dysfunctional father as he sets some unattainable standards for him at work. In the play, he mentions that he has been putting in more time to gain something. Although, what type of gain concerns him is not specified but the toxic hustle culture enables him to put more of his hours for it. In addition, Ahnaf getting bullied for his speech impediment and thinking that getting mocked for it is okay, shows how we, as a society, have normalized the culture of getting

bullied for being different than the others. According to a news article “A report in 2019 claimed that 23 percent of Bangladeshi school students are victims of bullying. Another study showed that the percentage of school students getting bullied was increased to 44.4 percent by June 2021” (CS). Moreover, the vicious cruelty against the minority is not limited to people with disabilities only. There are several instances where people from the majority population of Bangladesh violated the rights of minority population. I wanted to show through Ahnaf’s bullying incidents how the minorities in Bangladesh are getting oppressed, abused and displaced. Furthermore, the theme of abandonment is prevalent in our society. Rahima being abandoned by her husband and then by her son, is the story of many women living in Bangladesh. Just like Ahnaf, many children are either abandoned by their fathers or feel abandoned. The increasing numbers of dysfunctional families where the parents are not present to support their children emotionally also affect the mental health of those children.

Creating characters that people can relate with is one of the most important aspects while writing a realistic play. In the book *The Art of Dramatic writing*, Lajos Egri suggests that the characters of the play should be strong enough to stand on their own without the constant help of the playwright. To quote Egri, “It is not enough, in your study of a man, to know if: he is rude, polite, religious, atheistic, moral, degenerate. You must know why. We want to know why man is as he is, why his character is constantly changing, and why it must change whether he wishes it or no” (33). Therefore, as a playwright, I drew inspiration for my characters from people surrounding us and tried to create reasons as to why they are and how they are. The characters in this play are inspired by real life people around us. There are many Rahimas who dedicate their lives for the happiness of their loved ones and yet find themselves holding no value in their loved ones’ lives. However, they still keep pretending to not know that they are neglected just like

Rahima. There are many Ahnafs who get bullied at school by their peers and even by the teachers. There are far too many Ahnafs who keep on pining for the love and approval of their parents, however, they don't get it in any way. The world is full of Mr. Hasans who prioritize their work over family and who abandon them emotionally.

Shakespeare's plays are considered to be universal. Along with their themes, poetic language, interesting plotlines, clever historical references and his own representation of history, Shakespeare skillfully used his minor characters to make his plays more diverse and interesting. According to Collins, "Shakespeare, for instance, could apparently see that minor characters were valuable for creating a sense of verisimilitude to a particular scene or dramatic circumstance" (12). Inspired by Shakespeare's technique of using minor characters for furthering the purpose of his plays, I too, used the minor characters in *Changing Tides* to bring forth important information throughout the play. As for the character Hanifa, she makes the audience acquainted with the fact about how Mr. Hasan became a workaholic person after his wife's death. It gives the audience a reason as to why Mr. Hasan is like he is. Hanifa is also the one who tells Rahima about Mr. Hasan's imprisonment after Ahnaf stops talking to Rahima. Tarik chacha plays an important part in letting the audience know the backstory of Rahima. He is also the one to whom Rahima confesses that she has been pretending with herself that she wasn't abandoned by her son. In addition, the clerk from Ahnaf's school represents the mentality of people about the subject of bullying. When Rahima asks the clerk what the bullies were doing to Ahnaf, the clerk says in reply that they are just kids joking around. This is how many people of the society behave if they see someone in problem. They assume that everything is fine, that there is nothing to worry about those incidents. In a way, these types of people promote bullying and violence against others. However, the jailers in the play help Mr. Hasan realize how he has been a fool to

neglect his child in order for his work and now he is abandoned himself. Therefore, the minor characters hold a significant amount of value in the play. Without their roles and functions, the story's progress would have been dull and monotonous.

In terms of techniques and style of the play, they belong to the genre of realist prose drama. The dialogues are all in prose and in everyday language. These reflect the reality of the language use that define our daily communication and conversations. The story has a beginning, middle and an ending. The plot line is linear with rising action, conflict, climax, falling action and resolution. The main conflict in the play involves the complexities of a father and son, and a mother and son relationship. The climax is when Mr.Hasan is imprisoned for the sale of adulterated food. The falling action takes place when Mr.Hasan is in the prison and Rahima gets to know that her son is not coming back to her. Finally, the resolution happens when Ahnaf decides to go and see his father in the prison and Rahima acknowledges that she has been abandoned by her son as well but decides to not let this impact her life.

The title of the play, *Changing Tides*, suggests the very thing it means. At first Ahnaf feels abandoned by his father and then Mr.Hasan - after his realization of what he has lost – starts feeling abandoned by his son. It is a change in their relationship dynamic and it shows how the time has changed for both Mr.Hasan and Ahnaf. In addition, in the case of Rahima, her change in life is not quite like Mr.hasan. Her son still doesn't reach out to her and she is still hurt because of that. But the monumental shift that occurs in her life is that she cuts off the continuous thread of abandonment by herself. Rahima, previously left and abandoned by her uncle and aunt and then by her husband, keeps on pretending that her son has not abandoned her. Whereas in her mind she knows that her son isn't ever coming back. However, when her son tells her that he can't come or won't come to Bangladesh because his wife has told him not to, she confronts her

son. The event of confrontation becomes known to us by her and Tarik Chacha's conversation. And she decides that she is done with the pretension. She acknowledges that her son has abandoned her and decides to move forward despite that. By acknowledging the abandonment she actually feels freed to move on in her life. Therefore, time also brings a significant change of course in her life, and she feels more secure because of it.

The premise of the play is "The problems of our lives could be solved if we just talked." The issues presented in the play, even though pressing, are not something out of our daily lives. Therefore, there is no need for any utopian or magical problem solving skills to mitigate these issues. If we can only put our differences aside and have a conversation about what it is that is bothering us, the distances in our relationships can get reduced dramatically. We just have to be willing to try.

# **Changing Tides**

An Original Play By

Khadija Begum Atia

### Synopsis

The play takes the readers or audience through the journey of Ahnaf, an introverted teenage boy who suffers from speech impediment from a really young age. Rahima, a neighbor of Ahnaf, witnesses him getting bullied while delivering lunch for the teachers at his school. After meeting with Rahima and Tarik Chacha, Ahnaf slowly starts coming out of his shell. Rahima lives with Tarik Chacha, who lets Ahnaf know the history of Rahima and her son. Hanifa tells Rahima the truth about Mr.Hasan and Ahnaf's relationship. Rahima's son tells her that he is coming to meet with her after 11 years. Ahnaf is badly bullied on his viva exam by his teacher and peers. Mr.Hasan is in trouble for selling adulterated food and tries to run away leaving Ahnaf behind. In rage, Ahnaf tells the police to take Mr.Hasan away. In the prison, with all the time in the world, Mr.Hasan starts realizing that he has lost his son in the process of making more and more money. Rahima's son tells her that he can't come to her because his wife said so. Rahima is hurt but acknowledges her situation and decides to move forth in life. Rahima suggests Ahnaf if he wants to go meet his father in the prison then he should do it, instead of holding grudges on him. Ahnaf visits his father and Mr.Hasan asks for his forgiveness. Ahnaf thanks Rahima for bringing him to the police station. The play ends while giving the audience hope that Ahnaf and his father's relationship will improve in future.

## Character List

Ahnaf: A 14 year old boy. He is the protagonist of the play.

Rahima: 47 year old Rahima is a neighbor of Ahnaf.

Mr.Hasan: Ahnaf's father, a workaholic man. He is of age 42

Tarik Islam: Aged 74 Tarik is Rahima's uncle. Rahima lives in his house.

Hanifa: Ahnaf's housemaid.

Malik: A business associate of Mr.Hasan.

Rubel: Rahima's son, who live in Italy. He is 29 years old.

Sazzad, Saad, Taraf: Ahnaf's classmates. They are the bullies of Ahnaf.

Teacher

Police 1

Police 2

Jailer 1

Jailer 2

## Act I

### Scene I: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, in the morning.

*(Hanifa enters the stage yawning and sits on the sofa)*

Hanifa: I wish I could sleep for a little longer today. *(Yawns again)* Couldn't even finish the dream... damn!

*(She sighs and closes her eyes and starts humming the tune of the song 'Shada Shada Kala Kala'<sup>1</sup>. Mr.Hasan enters with a briefcase while talking with someone on his phone. Hanifa hops off the sofa, looks at the clock hanging on the wall and hurriedly exits the stage)*

Mr. Hasan: Yes... yes... I got Mr. Chowdhury's email. He has asked for a meeting tomorrow afternoon. I believe his eagerness to meet with us is a positive sign. Yeah... Yeah... Hey listen, could you please check the presentation made for Lucky Food and Beverage Ltd.? I had emailed him about the changes and I am sure Akash has worked on them. But it would be good if you could check before presenting it. Yes... I am just heading out now. Yes... I am heading to the meeting. Yeah ... Okay. Talk to you later.

*(Hanifa enters the stage holding a fruit bowl. She sheepishly comes towards Mr.Hasan and says)*

Hanifa: Bhaijaan, I didn't know you will be leaving so early today. I couldn't even make breakfast for you. *(She holds out an apple to him and Mr.Hasan gestures 'no')* Bhaijaan, won't you have it? Don't leave without eating anything. Besides, apple is good for health. A doctor once told me to have an apple every day. He said that an

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<sup>1</sup> 'Shada Shada Kala Kala' is a song from a Bangladeshi movie called Hawa.

apple a day will keep me away from him. I don't know why he said that... Maybe because it is the healthiest fruit... *(Hanifa offers the apple one more time. Mr.Hasan looks at her annoyingly)* No? No problem I will have it *(Hanifa chuckles awkwardly)*.

*(Mr.Hasan makes his way towards the other side of the stage and turns)*

Mr. Hasan: Send Ahnaf to school on time. Don't forget that.

Hanifa: No... No... I won't forget that. *(Mr.Hasan leaves)* Allah, you saved me this time. *(Proceeds to sit on the sofa again)* No... I can't sit now. I have to prepare Ahnaf baba's breakfast and lunch. I better get going.

*(Hanifa exits)*

**Scene II: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, in the morning.**

*(Ahnaf enters, glances towards the clock and sits down on the sofa. He pulls out his mobile phone and starts playing on it. Hanifa enters.)*

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba, you are up? What are you doing, baba? You have to get going... Go get ready for school or else you will be late. *(Ahnaf nervously looks at her at the mention of school. He becomes agitated and starts shaking his legs)* You know your father told me to send you to school on time. If you are late, he will scold me. Now go ...go! I will bring your breakfast to your room. *(She turns to go and then comes back)* Oh... and I could only make noodles for today. I know you don't like it that much but I woke up late and couldn't prepare anything else, baba.

Ahnaf: It's f...f...f...fine.

Hanifa: Okay, baba. You go and get ready now.

*(Hanifa leaves. Ahnaf stays on the stage. He glances at the clock multiple times and looks worried. He takes a deep breath and gets up reluctantly. He exits the stage.)*

**Scene III: In the corridor, outside of Ahnaf's classroom.**

*(Ahnaf is standing outside of his classroom and some other boys enter the stage while chattering with each other. Ahnaf notices them and becomes nervous)*

Taraf: Did you see yesterday's match? Oh it was breathtaking!!! I was on the edge of my seat the whole time.

Sazzad: Nah... I was busy playing the... *(He notices Ahnaf and breaks off)* Areh...! Ahnaf?!  
What are you doing, buddy?

Taraf: Hey Sazzad, let's not bother him now. Okay?

Sazzad: Hold on, Taraf... I am sure it's of no bother to him. Isn't it, Ahnaf? *(He puts his hands around Ahnaf's shoulder. Ahnaf flinches and tries to move away)* What happened, buddy? *(Mocking Afnan, he says)* Are you afraid that I am going to b...b...b...b...beat you??!

*(Sazzad and Saad laugh in unison)*

Saad: Ahha! I don't get why you are scared of us? We just want to be your  
f...f...f...friend! Hahaha!

Ahnaf: P...p...please l...l...leave me alone.

Saad: No. We won't. Now tell me something. How could you not answer a simple math question in the class? Are you that dumb? It was basically an easy multiplication equation. How could you not get that?

*(Rahima enters the stage with 2 lunch box in her hand. A clerk enters from the other end of the stage. Rahima hands the lunch boxes over to the clerk)*

Sazzad: Forget multiplication. Tell me what's 2 plus 2? What? You can't even answer this, Mr.Stutters?

Rahima: Apa, what's going on there?

Clerk: Oh nothing. They are just kids joking around.

Sazzad: Hey guys! See what I did there? I just thought of a new nickname for our dearest Ahnaf! Mr.Stutters! *(Ahnaf looks over at Rahima and the clerk nervously)* What are you looking at? Huh?! You think they are going to come over here and save you? Tell me how would you ask for their help? Will you scream "S...s...s...save me" or "Save m...m...m...me"? Why won't you answer Mr.Stutters?

*(Ahnaf tries to break away from Sazzad. Sazzad grips him and laughs. The clerk approaches them)*

Clerk: Hey! What is going on here? The class is about to start. Go to your class now. Go.

*(The clerk exits. Sazzad and Saad exit the stage while laughing. Taraf looks apologetically towards Ahnaf and leaves.)*

*(Ahnaf looks at Rahima and Rahima gives him a smile. Ahnaf leaves. And then Rahima exits the stage)*

*(Scene Ends)*

**Scene IV: Outside the building of Ahnaf and Rahima's home, in the afternoon.**

*(Ahnaf enters the stage and goes near the entrance gate of the building. Rahima enters carrying multiple bags, one of them falls from her hand and she struggles to pick it up. Ahnaf notices this and goes forward to help her)*

Rahima: Ohho! *(Gesturing towards the fallen bag)* Couldn't you hold on for just a little bit longer? *(Ahnaf picks up the bag and hands it to her)* Oh! How kind! Thank you, baba. Areh! You are the boy from the school. Aren't you? *(Ahnaf nods)* What are you doing here? Do you live in this building? *(Ahnaf nods again)* I live here too with my Chacha<sup>2</sup>, Tarik Islam. Which floor do you live on?

Ahnaf: S...s...s...sixth floor. *(Looks embarrassed)*

Rahima: Really? We live on the fifth floor. Just below you. How weird! We live in the same building and never even saw each other before today. Well... to be honest it is not that weird. People don't even get to meet their family members in today's world so not knowing their neighbors is pretty normal nowadays.

*(Ahnaf only smiles)*

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<sup>2</sup> Chacha is a Bengali word for uncle.

Rahima: You really don't like talking, I see... Uhhmm... Are you okay, baba? I saw you with those boys over at school. You weren't at ease with them like friends usually are. Were they disturbing you? (*Ahanf shakes his head gesturing 'no'*) hmm... okay... Would you please help me bring these bags back to my place? I don't want any of them to fall apart while going up. I hope it won't be a bother to you.

Ahnaf: No. It's f...f...fine.

Rahima: Oh wonderful...! Thanks for the help. Oh and you can meet my Chacha as well. Let's go then.

(*Rahima and Ahnaf exit the stage*)

**Scene V: Interior of Rahima's house. In the afternoon, in the drawing room.**

(*The doorbell rings and. Tarik opens the door. Ahnaf and Rahima enter*)

Rahima: Come on in. Chacha, this is Ahnaf. He lives just above us on the sixth floor.

Tarik: Hello, young man. It's nice to meet you.

Rahima: Ahnaf, please sit down. I will just come. Oh and give me those bags. Thanks for the help. (*Rahima exits the stage. Tarik sits on the sofa*)

Tarik: Come, Ahnaf. Have a seat. (*Ahnaf sits down*) Which class do you study in?

Ahnaf: 8th s...s...standard.

Tarik: Oh! That is a tough one. I barely passed the math exams in that class. (*Ahnaf smiles*) Your school uniform... Are you studying in Pragati School and College?

Ahnaf: Yes.

Tarik: Oh... Rahima delivers lunch boxes to some of the teachers in your school. Ever saw her there?

Ahnaf: I s...s...saw her today.

*(Rahima enters)*

Tarik: Oh so you guys came from the school together?

Rahima: No... No... We met right outside the building. That's when I got to know that he lives here. *(Hands Ahnaf a glass of lemonade)*

Tarik: Well it's a good thing that you brought him here. Now, I can have a partner to play chess with. *(Looks towards Ahnaf suggestively)* Rahima never wants to play with me.

Rahima: That's because the game is awfully boring. And the rules confuse me.

Tarik: Ahnaf, do you know how to play chess? *(Ahnaf shakes his head indicating 'no')* Do you want to play chess? *(Ahnaf shrugs)*

Tarik: Great! Rahima, can you please bring the chess board from my room?

Rahima: Chacha, the boy just came from school. His parents will worry if he is not home soon.

Ahnaf: No... It won't be a p...p...problem.

Rahima: Are you sure? *(Ahnaf nods)*

Tarik: Well... That settles it then. We will play chess now.

*(End of scene)*

**Scene VI: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, in the evening.**

*(Ahnaf is lying on the sofa with his mobile phone in his hand. He has headphones on. The bell rings. Ahnaf keeps lying down on the sofa for not hearing the bell. Hanifa enters. Hanifa goes towards the door and Mr.Hasan enters with his briefcase. Ahnaf sits up straight at the sofa and takes his headphones off in a hurried manner)*

Hanifa: Bhaijaan, give me the bag. I will keep it in the room.

Mr.Hasan: That's ok. Now make a cup of tea.

*(Hanifa exits. Ahnaf stays seated rigidly on the sofa and stares at his phone. Mr.Hasan exits. Mr.Hasan enters the stage with his laptop. He sits on the sofa and opens his laptop. Hanifa comes back with the tea)*

Hanifa: *(Keeps the cup in front of Mr.Hasan)* Should I add some sugar?

Mr.Hasan: *(Takes a sip and shakes his head. Mr.Hasan looks at Ahnaf)* Ahnaf, are you done with your homework? *(Ahnaf shakes his head)* Then go to your room and finish it.

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba, should I bring your books? You can do the homework here.

Mr.Hasan: No. *(Tapping on his laptop, Mr.Hasan says)* Malik is on his way here. Ahnaf, go to your room.

*(Ahnaf exits)*

*(End of scene)*

**Scene VII: Interior of Rahima's house.**

*(Tarik is sitting in the drawing room reading a newspaper. The doorbell rings thrice. Tarik keeps the newspaper down and walks towards the door)*

Tarik:       Wait...! Wait...! You don't have to ring the bell so many times. I am an old man.  
                  Have some patience.

*(Tarik opens the door and Ahnaf enters)*

Tarik:       Ahnaf...! I have told you not to ring the bell so many times. *(Gesturing to Ahnaf to get inside he says)* What would I do if the bell stops working?

Ahnaf:       Ins...in...install a new one?

Tarik:       Sly remarks won't help you get out of paying for the bell, if broken.

*(Ahnaf smiles. Rahima enters)*

Rahima:     Areh Ahnaf... Here for the afternoon chess match, I suppose?

Tarik:       No. Not today. Your old man needs to rest a little.

Ahnaf:       *(Looks towards Tarik)* You okay, Dadu<sup>3</sup>?

Tarik:       No reason to worry, I am perfectly fine. I am just a little tired. That's all. Ok, see you later. Oh... And Ahnaf, don't let Rahima wake me up from my nap to have some stupid medicines.

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<sup>3</sup> Dadu is a word to refer to older people as grandfather

Rahima: Those stupid medicines are doctor prescribed and they play a big role in maintaining your health.

Tarik: *(Going towards the end of the stage says)* Ahnaf, don't let her wake me up...

*(Tarik exits. Rahima and Ahnaf sits on the sofa)*

Rahima: Whenever it comes to medicines, he acts like a child. *(Ahnaf grins)* Anyways, how was school today?

Ahnaf: Good.

Rahima: Come on, now, what have we discussed about one word answers?

Ahnaf: What?

Rahima: That I don't like them. Now elaborate please?

Ahnaf: Good as in, a teacher didn't come to s..school today. So a s...s... *(Pauses and takes a deep breath)* A substitute teacher took his class.

Rahima: Which is good, why?

Ahnaf: B...because he didn't ask me hard questions about the United N...n...nations and laugh at my s..s..stutter.

Rahima: *(Looks shocked)* Your teacher laughs at you when you stammer?

Ahnaf: Yeah. And the students too. Not eve...everyone is weird like you and D...Dadu.

Rahima: How are we weird?

Ahnaf: People have been mocking me m...m...my whole life for this. But you and dadu never, for once, laughed at me. So, I figured you guys are the exceptions.

Rahima: Stammering isn't funny. Why would we laugh at it? (*Ahnaf shrugs*) You say the strangest things sometimes.

Ahnaf: (*Ahnaf looks thoughtful and then says*) It is not strange really. Laughing has always been the primary reaction to m...m...my stammering. S...s...so it is normal to me.

Rahima: What about your father? Has he ever laughed or berated you for this?

Ahnaf: My father barely talks to me. His b...b...business deals are more amusing to him more than my s...speech impediment. And as you know, my mother died when I was four years old. I was too young to r...remember whether she used to laugh at me or not.

Rahima: I am sure she didn't.

Ahnaf: I believe you. Mothers are wired like that.

Rahima: Like what?

Ahnaf: Like... Incapable of seeing any f...f...flaw in their children.

Rahima: Ahnaf, you do not have any flaw. (*Ahnaf shrugs again*) Ummm... may I ask you something (*Ahnaf picks up the crystal paperweight from the table and starts playing with it*)

Ahnaf: Sure.

Rahima: Why don't you talk to your father? Why are you so angry with him?

Ahnaf: I am not angry with him, Aunty. And it's not like we d...don't talk. He asks me questions about m...matters that he is concerned with and I answer to those questions.

Rahima: What type of questions?

Ahnaf: Questions about studies... Whether I am s...studying properly or not. Whether I am practicing math on a regular b...basis or not. Whether I will get straights A's in the Junior S....s...school Certificate exam or not.

Rahima: Does he only speak to you about academic things and nothing else?

Ahnaf: Nah... He also sometimes asks me if I have eaten or not. You know how I cultivated my "one word answer" habit that you hate? I find m...m...myself often nervous around him. And whenever I am n...nervous, I tend to stammer more. So, I just stick to one word answers whenever I am talking with him.

Rahima: Why do you find yourself nervous around him?

Ahnaf: What are you? A jailer? Why do I f...f...feel like being investigated?

Rahima: Don't deflect the question. Tell me why do you feel nervous?

Ahnaf: I don't know... I just do. Sometimes, I f...f...feel like that he doesn't like me. I know that I disappoint him. I am neither that good in my s...studies nor s...s...sport. He expects so many things from me. And I can't even talk p...p...properly.

*(Rahima comes closer towards Ahnaf and puts her hand on his shoulder)*

Rahima: I know stammering can be frustrating but by no means it's a fault of yours. And I am sure that your father loves you a lot... Why don't you try to talk to him about the things that bother you?

Ahnaf: I can't. There is this invisible barrier b...between us. And it's f...f...fine I guess. I just hope that someday, he will be proud of m...me. *(Rahima nods understandably. After pausing for a while, Ahnaf says to her excitedly)* Hey, you want to see the new character I just unlocked in my online game?

Rahima: Sure.

Ahnaf: *(Keeps the paperweight back on the table. Brings out his phone from his pocket and shows to Rahima)* See! Isn't he dope? He has better speed, s...stamina and his warrior costume is sooooo much better and more protective than the previous character. *(Rahima looks confused)* Areh...! My s...survival rate got b...better with this character. I have also unlocked new and more effective potions that will help me in healing my character faster...

*(Rahima listens to him intently. Ahnaf keeps talking about the game and the scene ends)*

### **Scene VIII: In the drawing room of Rahima's house, in the afternoon.**

*(Tarik and Ahnaf are playing chess)*

Tarik: Ahnaf, go bring me a glass of water.

Ahnaf: I am not falling f...f...for the same trick again.

Tarik: What trick?

Ahnaf: The one where you s...send me to get a glass of water and in my absence, change the p...position of your b...b...bishop and queen on the b...board.

Tarik: How dare you make such an accusation? I am nothing if not an honest chess player!  
*(Grinning Ahnaf bends down, picks up a bottle of water)* Oh...! You already had water here? *(Looks disappointed)*

Ahnaf: *(Nods)* Here. *(Hands the bottle to Tarik)*

Tarik: Not thirsty anymore. Don't waste time, play your move.

Ahnaf: *(Eyeing the board he says)* I am th...thinking. Anyways, where is Aunty?

*(They keep on playing chess)*

Tarik: She went to buy my medicines. God, she is persistent.

Ahnaf: What do you mean?

Tarik: I threw out the last batch of medicines.

Ahnaf: What f...for, Dadu? You know you need them.

Tarik: Don't you repeat Rahima's argument! I don't need them. The doctor lied to Rahima and made her believe that I need them. She is too trusting. She cares and worries way too much to see through the lies. Just like she cares and loves her son way too much to see through his lies.

Ahanf: *(Stops playing chess and looks at Tarik)* What do you mean?

Tarik: It's been more than 11 years since Rahima sent him to Italy for studying. He hasn't come back till now. He has his own life there, he got married and has a good job. Whenever Rahima asks him to come back to the country, he makes excuses of work or money problems and just ignores the matter altogether.

Ahnaf: I feel bad for her. She always talks so f...f...fondly of her son.

Tarik: I know. And I don't think he will ever come back. But I don't have the heart to tell her that. Poor girl has been through a lot in her life. *(Ahnaf gives a suggestive look for Tarik to carry on)* Her parents died leaving her to her uncle and aunt. They married her off when she was 16.

Ahnaf: *(In shock)* Sixteen?

Tarik: Yes. And she had Rubel, her son, when she was 18. Her husband was abusive. However, she didn't have to endure it for long. Soon after Ahnaf's birth, her husband's abusive behaviors became more and more frequent. And one day, he accused her of seeing someone. He said that Rubel was not his son rather the result of Rahima's relations with another man. With this, he threw her out of his house with one year old Rubel.

Ahnaf: And then?

Tarik: I don't know all the details but I do know that she couldn't go back to her uncle's house as well. She raised Rubel all alone by giving tuitions to kids. When Rubel got

older, he started to show interest towards going abroad for higher education and better life... Rahima agreed. However, the biggest obstacle regarding this was money. And that's where I came into the picture.

I am a distant relative of Rahima and I met her again 11 years ago. After I got to know her situation, I offered her the money she needed. You see... I have no children of my own and a few years had passed by since my wife's death, so having no one spend my money on, I decided to help her. But Rahima wouldn't take my money. So I had to tell her that I would only be loaning her the money. She still hesitated a lot at first, but came around after making a promise of paying me back. Well... then Rubel went away to fulfill his dreams. And Rahima, once again, got left behind.

Ahnaf: How come you guys stay here t...together?

Tarik: Oh that's because I told her to stay with me and take care of me till her son took her with him. So since then, she has been here with me. She started the lunch box delivery business in order to pay me back even though, I have told her multiple times that I do not need that money.

Ahnaf: Hmm...

Tarik: Listen, don't mention any of these to Rahima. She doesn't like to talk about it.

Ahnaf: I won't.

Tarik: You know, I pray every day that someday Rahima will receive a call from her son saying that he is coming to Bangladesh to take her with him. But I have seen life enough to know that this is nothing but a delusional hope. *(The doorbell rings)* It's probably Rahima.

*(Ahnaf goes towards the door and opens it. Rahima enters)*

Rahima: Hello... Back from school already? Does your father know that you are here, baba?  
*(Ahnaf shrugs)* Ahnaf, I have told you million times to let your father know your whereabouts. *(Pointing towards the chess board)* So who is winning?

Ahnaf: Me. B...because I didn't let Dadu cheat t...today.

Tarik: You cheat. Rahima, I don't like this boy at all. Ask him to leave.

Rahima: You can't get rid of him. He is your chess partner for life.

*(Tarik keeps saying that he doesn't cheat. Ahnaf and Rahima laugh)*

*(Scene ends)*

**Act II****Scene I: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, in the evening.**

*(Mr.Hasan and Malik are sitting in the drawing room)*

Mr.Hasan: You said you would come at 6 pm sharp. Why are you late?

Malik: I was on a long phone call with Mr.Chowdhury. The news reached him and now he is thinking to scratch his company's deal with us.

Mr.Hasan: But how is it our fault? How were we supposed to know that something like this would happen? We are a reputable organization and we have worked with many respected food companies till now. Just this one set back and we lose all our credibility? We start losing clients?

Malik: We all were quite happy with bagging an international client. And you assured us that everything about them seemed legit. You didn't mention about any toxins!

Mr.Hasan: *(Looks worried)* I, myself, didn't know about any toxins. It seemed fishy how they were interested in dividing the profit into a 60-40%. But I completely ignored that thinking they were interested in expanding their business throughout Bangladesh.

Malik: You should have been more careful. Although they had great review, the company only started a few years ago. Who is to say that they didn't buy those reviews?

Mr.Hasan: No... You are right. I should have been more careful. But, Malik... you encouraged me to go forward with the deal more than anyone else. I thought it was because you

were sure of their legitimacy. Besides you brought in this deal.

Malik: *(Malik looks flustered)* Listen, I only trusted your instinct and nothing else...  
Usually you are right about business deals. Who knew this would backfire...

Mr.Hasan: I don't know what had gotten into me.

Malik: You know, my phone hasn't stopped ringing for the last 4 days. More than 40 people became ill after eating their canned food items. I am just praying that we won't hear any news of someone's death.

Mr.Hasan: Shhhh....! Don't speak so loudly. My son might hear you.

Malik: Anyways, I have spoken to my lawyer about this. He has assured me that he will build a strong case for us, if we need to defend ourselves.

Mr.Hasan: Thank you so much for taking care of this.

Malik: We are partners. Of course, I am going to look after you. I won't leave you high and dry. Don't worry, I am sure we will be able to get through this soon. *(Mr.Hasan nods. Malik stands up)* Okay... So, I will get going then. I have lots to do. You take care of yourself. And call me if you need anything.

Mr.Hasan: You take care too. Let's talk over phone about what more we can do to deal with this problem.

Malik: Okay. See you later then. *(Malik exits)*

*(Scene ends)*

**Scene II: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, in the afternoon.**

*(The doorbell rings. Hanifa approaches the door.)*

Hanifa: Salam-Alaikum, Who do you want? *(Pauses)* Ahnaf baba? Are you Rahima apa?  
Please please, come inside. *(Rahima enters holding a box in her hand. Hanifa asks her to take a seat)* Please take a seat. I will just call Ahnaf baba.

*(Rahima sits down on the sofa. Ahnaf enters after Hanifa's exit)*

Ahnaf: Areh...! Rahima aunty you are here?

Rahima: Yes. I came to give you this cake that I made. *(Hanifa enters the stage and puts a glass of water in front of Rahima)* Oh thank you so much, Hanifa.

Hanifa: *(Acts shocked)* Haaa!! Apa... How did you know my name?

Rahima: Hahaha... I know everything... I am just kidding. I got to know your name from Ahnaf. He talks about you really fondly.

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba talks about me? What does he say?

Rahima: That you are an interesting and fun loving person. *(Hanifa smiles at Ahnaf)*

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba is such a nice person to say these things about me.

Ahnaf: *(Smiles at Hanifa)* Aunty why'd you b...b...bring a cake?

Rahima: No special reason. You like chocolate cakes, and this is one.

Ahnaf: Thank you for the cake. And I am glad th...that you are here. My exams are going to start s...soon and I am yet to f...finish the syllabus. So I was p...p...panicking.

Rahima: Don't worry, baba. I know you will ace your tests.

Ahnaf: Well, I won't ace them. B...b...but I am hoping to pass with decent m... marks.

Rahima: I said what I said!

Ahnaf: Okay... Oh Aunty... I want to show you s...something. Wait here!

*(Ahnaf leaves)*

Hanifa: Rahima apa, I am feeling really happy that you are here.

Rahima: Why do you say that...? And why are you standing there? Come, sit over here.

Hanifa: No... No... I am fine. Ahnaf baba stays really quiet at home. He either sits on his computer or uses his phone. He only answers in yes or no and nothing else. You know, I am the only one in this house who talks. Ahnaf baba and Hasan bhaijaan don't talk that much. Not to me... Not to themselves. The silence in this house is unbearable. So, hearing you guys talk is making me feel sane. Hhehehe.

Rahima: Ahnaf and his father don't talk to each other?

Hanifa: Not really. They don't even see each other often. Hasan bhaijaan is always working, always busy. He goes to office really early in the morning and gets back home late at night. So when he gets home from work, he doesn't want to be disturbed. And Ahnaf baba always sits in his room alone whenever he is at home.

Rahima: Have they always been like this?

Hanifa: No. Hasan bhaijaan used to be full of life. He used to play with little Ahnaf baba, talk for hours and hours with Dola apa. But everything changed after the death of Dola apa. Her death broke Hasan bhaijaan. In order to survive, he focused more and more on work. Eventually his work became the only thing that mattered to him. Poor Ahnaf baba lost his mother at such a young age. And even though alive, his father is not there for him... Ah-hah... What am I doing? I haven't even served you tea.

*(Hanifa stands up hastily)*

Rahima: Please don't. I don't want to have tea right now.

Hanifa: What are you saying, Apa! You came here for the first time and won't even have tea? No... No... This can't be...

*(Ahnaf enters)*

Rahima: Ahha! Hanifa, come sit here. I don't want tea now. *(Ahnaf comes and sits beside her)*  
I will have tea next time. Okay?

Hanifa: Okay, Apa.

Ahnaf: Aunty... *(He holds his phone in front of Rahima)* See... Do you like this picture?

Rahima: Is it one your game characters? It looks beautiful. Is it a cooking game because the character is wearing a chef's costume?

Ahnaf: No... It's not a game. I made a profile picture for your Facebook business page.

Rahima: What business?

Ahnaf: Your online food business. Aunty, online businesses are th...thriving now. You already do lunch d...deliveries. If you have an online presence your b...b...business will grow even more.

Rahima: No...No... I can't do that.

Ahnaf: You can. There are so many people who have made b...business out of home-made food. I have had your food and it's delicious. And I know for sure, that it will sell.

Rahima: But, baba...

Ahnaf: No b...buts or ifs. I said what I said. We will sketch the plan out in details after m...my exams. Okay?

Rahima: Okay. *(Stands up)* I should really get going now. Tarik chacha is alone at home.

Ahnaf: *(Stands up with Rahima)* Oh... Aunty, tell Dadu that I can't come for a few days.

Rahima: Okay. All the best for your exams! Hanifa, take care.

*(Rahima leaves)*

*(End of scene)*

**Scene III: In the drawing room of Rahima's house, in the morning.**

*(Tarik is sitting in the drawing room and reading newspaper. Rahima enters the stage)*

Rahima: Chacha...

Tarik: Hmm...?

Rahima: I can't reach Ahnaf on his phone. I have tried so many times... I feel worried now.

Tarik: Rahima... Didn't he tell you that he will be busy with his exams, dear? So, it is quite possible that he has turned his phone off for avoiding any type of distraction.

Rahima: Maybe... But it has been so many days since his exams started. It should have been finished by now. Shouldn't it? *(Tarik shrugs)* You know what? I will go and check up on him. There is still time for his school to start. Maybe he hasn't left yet. I will just come, Chacha.

*(Rahima starts walking towards the door. Her phone rings)*

Tarik: Rahima... Your phone is ringing.

Rahima: Maybe it's Ahnaf! *(Receives the call)* Hello... Rubel? Whose number is it? How are you, Abbu? You finally remembered your mother. Yes... Tell me what is it? What...! You are coming to Bangladesh? When...? What!!! In two days? Rubel, why didn't you tell before? Will your wife come with you? You have to keep the phone now?! Okay... At least tell me when your flight will land... 8.00 Pm? Alright, Abbu. I can't wait to see you. Okay, Abbu. Alright. Bye.

Tarik: Rubel is coming?

Rahima: Yes, Chacha! Oh... I can't believe it. He is still the same as he was in childhood. He tells me nothing! See Chacha, he is coming to Bangladesh in two days and he tells me the news today. Oh I am so happy, Chacha. How long it has been? 11 years! My

son is coming to me after 11 years. Oh goodness! There is so much to do. I will cook all his favorite meals, I have to prepare the room for him. Oh and I have to go to the airport to receive him too! *(Tarik smiles while looking at Rahima. Rahima leaves the stage saying)* So much to do...! Goodness I have so much to do.

*(Scene ends)*

#### **Scene IV: Interior of a classroom in Ahnaf's school.**

*(Ahnaf is sitting on a bench. Sazzad, Saad and Taraf are also sitting on benches. The teacher talks while marking his notes)*

Teacher: Okay... So everyone is done with their viva except for one student. Ahnaf, Come here. Ahnaf. *(Ahnaf goes to the teacher)* Sit down on the chair. Do you know why I didn't take your viva till now? *(Pauses)* It's because if I had called you here before the other students then they would not have been able to sit for their viva today. You would have taken up the entire time with your b...b...bs, f...f...fs and d...d...ds! *(The teacher bursts out laughing. The students join him)* Laugh, Ahnaf! It's funny... Anyways, let's start the viva now. Tell me, what is a constitution?

Ahnaf: A constitution is a s..., is a s...set of fundamental p...p...principles by which a s...s...state is governed.

Teacher: Ahnaf, try to give the answers a little bit faster. I haven't gotten all day. Okay. So the next question is ... When was Nepal declared a democratic country?

Ahnaf: On M...m...m...may 28<sup>th</sup>, two th...th...th..thousand eight, Nepal was declared as a d...d...democratic country.

Teacher: Name five countries that have written constitutions.

Ahnaf: India, F...f...f... *(The teacher expresses annoyance. Ahnaf stops talking)*

Teacher: Ahnaf, it's really late. Another exam will take place in this room. So can you hurry up please?

*(The other boys snicker)*

Ahnaf: I can.

Teacher: Then do. Don't waste my time. Name five countries that have written constitution. Fast.

Ahnaf: India, B...Brazil, Ammerica, Denm...m...mark, F...f...f...

Teacher: *(Holds his hand up gesturing Ahnaf to stop talking)* If you can't say the name of that country, then tell me the name of another country that doesn't start with an "F". Be a little smart. Okay?

Ahnaf: I... I can't rem...m...mber any other country n...now.

Teacher: Well, then *(Collecting his things, the teacher stands up)* I guess we are done here. *(The teacher looks at Sazzad, Saad and Taraf)* No matter what you do... don't be like him. *(The other boys laugh. The teacher goes towards the exit while saying)* Poor guy! Who knows what future has in for him...

*(The teacher exits. Sazzad, Saad, Taraf gets up)*

Sazzad: Hey, Stutters! Your viva was such a disaster that I feel s...s...s...sorry for you.

*(The boys leave while laughing. Ahnaf stays seated on the chair alone)*

*(End of scene)*

**Scene V: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, afternoon.**

*(Mr.Hasan is sitting in the drawing room with his laptop opened on the table. His phone rings)*

Mr.Hasan: Hello... Yes Nakib. What do you mean I missed the board of directors meeting?

Malik told me the meeting had been canceled. Okay tell me what happened at the meeting? ... There has been a motion to remove me from the post of CEO?

*(Mr.Hasan stands up and starts pacing around)* What are you saying, Nakib? ...

Malik suggested my removal? The other day he was here telling me he has got my back! That scoundrel! The police came? What were they saying? What do you mean I should lay low? I have been betrayed by that company too! Nakib, everyone must know that! We should case a file against them. What do you mean, I should escape?

*(Hanifa enters)*

Hanifa: Hasan bhaijaan... Is everything alright?

Mr.Hasan: Listen, Nakib. I have to go now. I will talk to you later. *(Hangs up the phone)* Where is Ahnaf?

Hanifa: He isn't home yet. He is probably still at school.

Mr.Hasan: Okay. I have to go somewhere. I will be back soon.

*(Hasan exits. Scene ends)*

**Scene VI: In the drawing room of Rahima's house, afternoon.**

*(The doorbell rings and Tarik goes to open the door)*

Tarik: Ahnaf! It's been so many days! Come in. Come in. Was there any exam today?

Ahnaf: Yeah.

Tarik: *(Sits on the sofa)* How did it go?

Ahnaf: F...f...fine. Dadu, where is Aunty?

Tarik: Oh wait! Rahima... Rahima... Come here. See who has come! She called you so many times but couldn't reach you so she got worried, you know. Rahima...!

*(Rahima enters but acts rushed)* See, I told you he is fine.

Rahima: Areh... Ahnaf... Did you come from school directly?

Ahnaf: Hmm...

Rahima: *(Rahima hands Tarik some medicines)* Chacha, here are your medicines for the evening. Please do have them. *(She exits and comes back with a water bottle)* Oh Ahnaf, you had exams today? How was it?

Ahnaf: Not...

Rahima: Here is the water bottle, Chacha. Please take your medicines on time. *(She picks up the plates from the table and exits. She enters again)* Ahnaf baba, how was your exam?

Ahnaf: Not that good.

Rahima: Why? What happened?

Ahnaf: B...because I couldn't...

Rahima: Chacha, did you see the keys of the cupboard? I can't find them anywhere. My bag is in there.

Tarik: Check in the kitchen. You might have kept it there.

*(Rahima leaves and comes back with a key)*

Rahima: Yes. Found it. Ahnaf, you were saying about your exam. What happened?

Ahnaf: It was b...bad and the teacher really...

Rahima: One second Ahnaf...

*(Rahima leaves again. And enters with a phone and bag in her hand)*

Rahima: Chacha, keep your phone with you. We might be late because of the famous Dhaka traffic. So, I will call to check up on you. Okay? Oh and Ahnaf, what were you saying about the teacher?

Ahnaf: Nothing... Are you g...g...going s...somewhere?

Rahima: Oh yes. I couldn't tell you. My son is coming today. I have to leave right now for the airport. Or else I will be late.

Ahnaf: Oh...

Rahima: Alright... I am heading out, Chacha. Bye, Ahnaf.

*(Rahima Exits)*

Tarik: Crazy girl! She has been acting like ever since she got to know about Rubel coming to Bangladesh. She is running frantically doing this and that. Let her son come and you will see that she has time for no one except for him...

Ahnaf: *(Ahnaf says sadly)* F...f...fair enough. After all, it's her s...son

Tarik: Hahaha... You are right. Hey, why are you still standing? Come let's play a match of chess.

Ahnaf: Not today. I should go.

*(Ahnaf exits. Scene ends)*

**Scene VII: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, evening.**

*(The bell rings rapidly. Ahnaf opens the door. Mr.Hasan enters looking frantic. He runs past Ahnaf and exits from the stage. The laptop is set on the table)*

Ahnaf: Abbu? Abbu! What happ... happened? *(Mr.Hasan enters and comes to pick up the laptop)* Will you p...please answer?

Mr.Hasan: Ahnaf, don't bother me right now.

Ahnaf: I am b...bo...bothering you? I am asking what has happ...happened? Why are you in s...s...such a rush?

Mr.Hasan: Nothing has happened. Go to your room!

Ahnaf: No... I won't! (*Hanifa enters*)

Hanifa: Hasan bhaijaan... Ahnaf baba... What happened? Why are you shouting?

Ahnaf: I won't go to m...m...my room until you t...t...tell me what's wrong...

Mr.Hasan: Ahnaf, please! I don't have time for this.

Ahnaf: (*Laughs mockingly*) When do you ever have t...t...time for me? I am n..n..not your work! Why will you have t...t...time for me? (*Mr.Hasan exits again and enters with a travel bag in his hand*) Where are you g..g..going?

Mr.Hasan: I need to go and sort a few things out. I will be back soon... after a few days. Let's talk then.

Ahnaf: B...b...but I want to t..talk now!

Mr.Hasan: Talk about what? Talk about what, Ahnaf? Can't you see that I am busy! I need to go!

Ahnaf: Can't you s...see that I need you?! Do you have any id...idea about what I am g...going through? Do you know what happ...happened with m...m..me today?

Mr.Hasan: Ahnaf! Please. We will talk later about whatever dumb problem you are going through. I have a really big problem that I need to solve.

Ahnaf: You... You... You... It's always all ab...about you! You didn't even ask m...me anything! You just assumed that I have s...s...some dumb p...p...problem that is beneath you! And now... You are off to m...ma..make some b..business deal.

*(The doorbell rings. Hanifa goes to open the door. Two police man enters)*

Police 1: Mr.Hasan... We have an arrest warrant against you.

Mr.Hasan: But... I have not done anything.

Police 1: You are under arrest for negligent sale of consumer goods.

Ahnaf: What...?

Police 2: Mr.Hasan imported and sold food and beverage products from a company. The adulterated food of the company has caused some serious health issues in the people. This is an offence punishable by law.

Mr.Hasan: Officer, please! I can explain.

Ahnaf: So... You were r...rr..running away?!

Mr.Hasan: No. I wasn't.

Ahnaf: Yes. You were... You were r...rrrunning away leaving m...me alone!

Mr.Hasan: You are not trying to understand my situation!

Ahnaf: I don't n..need to! B...because you are a ss...selfish man who puts himself ab...bove all! Above his own s...s...son! That has al...ways been your ss...situation!

*(Mr.Hasan goes towards Ahnaf and tries to touch his shoulder. Ahnaf slaps*

*Mr.Hasan's hand away)* Don't you dare! *(Looks towards the officer)* Sir! Please take thiss m...man away! *(Ahnaf exits)*

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba, what are you saying! *(The police pulls Mr.Hasan away with them)*

Please leave, Hasan bhaaijaan! Ahnaf baba...! Hasan bhaijaan...!

*(The police and Mr.Hasan exit)*

*(End of Scene)*

**Act III****Scene I: In the drawing room of Rahima's house, at night**

*(Tarik is sitting in the drawing room. Rahima enters)*

Tarik:     Areh... Rahima, you are back! *(Tarik goes towards the main door)* Rahima, where is Rubel?

Rahima:   *(Rahima throws her purse on the table and sits on the sofa)* Italy.

Tarik:     What? What do you mean Italy? You went to take him to the airport.

Rahima:   Yes. But he never arrived, Chacha. He never left Italy. *(Rahima leans forward and covers her face with her hand)* He called me 2 hours ago to say that he couldn't come. His wife had a change of heart so he cancelled the plan altogether. *(Rahima lets out a sad chuckle)*

Tarik:     *(Comes towards Rahima. And puts his hand on her head)* Maybe something came up.

Rahima:   No, Chacha. Nothing came up. He just doesn't have that type of time to waste on me. When I asked how he could do this to me... You know what my son said to me, Chacha? He said that he couldn't leave his wife alone just to meet me. My son... Who I shielded from all the evil of the world, for whom, I happily gave my whole life away... That son tells me that he couldn't leave his wife alone for a few days just to meet me. Like I am not his mother, rather some unknown person who has no value to him whatsoever. I did everything for him. I fulfilled every one of his wishes.

I never let him feel the absence of a father. Never let him feel any discomfort. I never remarried, Chacha, because I didn't want him to have a stepfather. I never let him face any hardships. That son tells me that he couldn't come to for a few days.

*(Rahima starts crying)*

Tarik: Don't cry! Wait...Let me call him. I will set him straight.

Rahima: No. You won't call him. I don't matter to him, Chacha. So, you calling him will have no effect on him.

Tarik: You are important to him, Rahima.

Rahima: No, Chacha. For the first time in so many years I am seeing things clearly. He never intended to come back. Every time I asked, he would say something like he doesn't have enough money or he is busy with studies or he is sick or his boss isn't allowing him to come. These were all excuses and I kept on believing... No... I kept on pretending with myself. I knew somewhere in my heart that I had lost my son. But, how could I accept it, Chacha? He is my son, my flesh, my everything... I didn't want to think about the cruel truth so I kept pretending. But today I was forced to face the reality. It's painful but it's the truth. My son has abandoned me. My own son doesn't care about me, Chacha... *(Rahima cries)*

Tarik: I am sorry, dear...

*(Rahima keeps crying. Tarik tries to console her)*

*(End of scene)*

**Scene II: Interior of Jail. At the night.**

*(Mr.Hasan is sitting inside of a jail cell. In front of the cell, a jailer is sitting on a stool. Another jailer comes to give food to Mr.Hasan)*

Jailer 1: Hasan Shaheb... See I brought you food. It might taste bad but it's not adulterated like the food that you sold

*(Jailer 1 and Jailer 2 laugh in unison)*

Mr.Hasan: Did anyone come for me?

Jailer 1: Come for what? To bail you out? You can't get bail. Government has issued very strict policies on food adulteration. You will have to serve at least 3 years, Hasan Shaheb.

Mr.Hasan: *(Mr.Hasan says in a devastated voice)* Really? Nobody came to see me? Not even my son?

Jailer 1: Why are you so shocked? How can you even expect him to come here for you? From what I have heard, your own son told the police to take you away. What kind of a father are you that your own son wanted to get rid of you? I don't think he would come to see you let alone others. *(Jailer 1 opens the cell's gate and slides the plate of food inside the cell)* Here, have this. *(Looks towards Jailer 2)* Bhai, I will go home now. See you tomorrow. *(Jailer 2 nods his head. Jailer 1 looks towards Mr.Hasan)*  
Hasan shaheb, see you tomorrow.

*(Jailer 1 exits)*

Jailer 2: Hasan shaheb... Is it true that your son told the police to take you away? (*Mr.Hasan stays quiet*) What did you do to make him say that?

Mr.Hasan: I don't know...

Jailer 2: You must have done something terrible. A father is supposed to be the support and strength of a child. Why would a child feel like this for his father? I can't even imagine my son or daughter saying something like this about me. Allah, forgive me... I won't be able to bear something like that.

(*Jailer 2 keeps talking and Mr.Hasan seems to be out of it*)

Hasan shaheb... Hasan shaheb... (*Jailer 2 hits the cell bar with his baton*) Hasan shaheb! Where did you get lost?

Mr.Hasan: Nothing. I am just thinking about what you said...

Jailer 2: Hmm... (*Checks the time on his watch*) It's really late. You should have your food. (*Mr.Hasan doesn't say anything and seems lost in thoughts again*) Hasan Shaheb... Have your food while you are doing the thinking. The food was cooked very early in the morning. If it goes bad, you won't be able to eat it.

(*Jailer 2 get up and stretches his hands with a loud yawn*) I better go now.

Mr.Hasan... I am going now. Leave the plate closer to the cell's exit gate after you are finished. The kitchen boys will collect it in the morning. Okay? (*Mr.Hasan nods*) See you tomorrow.

(*Jailer 2 exits. Mr.Hasan looks deep in thought. The scene ends*)

**Scence III: Interior of Jail, in the afternoon.**

*(Mr.Hasan is sitting on the ground inside the jail cell. Jailer 2 enters)*

Jailer 2: Hasan shaheb... I heard one of your colleagues came to the police station this morning.

Mr.Hasan: Who?

Jailer 2: What was the name? *(Scratching his head)*

Mr.Hasan: Malik?

Jailer 2: Yes... Yes... Malik. He was here with a lawyer.

Mr.Hasan: *(Mr.Hasan gets up and walks closer towards the bars)* He came with a lawyer?  
What for?

Jailer 2: He was trying to find a way... should I say... to save your company, and not you.  
Meaning... He was saying that the company should not have to pay for the casualties as the company wasn't completely on board with the idea of importing and selling those adulterated food items.

Mr.Hasan: But he is lying.

Jailer 2: He said that you exercised your power as the CEO and forced the others to agree on the deal.

Mr.Hasan: What!! That lying son of a bitch!

Jailer 2: I don't know, Hasan shaheb... If he can prove what he is saying then you will be locked down here for a long time.

*(Jailer 1 enters)*

Jailer 1: Bhai... Here you are! Sir is looking for you. Come quickly!

*(Jailer 1 and Jailer 2 exit. Mr.Hasan talks to himself)*

Mr.Hasan: How foolish could I have been! Oh... how foolish could I have been!

**Scene IV: The drawing room of Ahnaf's house, at night.**

*(Ahnaf is sitting in the drawing room. Hanifa enters with a phone)*

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba... Ahnaf baba... Your phone has been ringing for a while now. Check, who is calling you...

*(Ahnaf takes the phone from Hanifa. looks at it for few seconds and the keeps the phone on the table.)*

Hanifa: Who is it?

Ahnaf: R...rr...Rahima aunty.

Hanifa: Talk to her, Ahnaf baba. Tell her that the police have taken your father away. She will be able to help.

Ahnaf: N...n...no

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba, Hasan bhaijaan is your father. No matter what happens it won't change.  
Don't be so angry with him, baba. *(Ahnaf stays quiet)* Ahnaf baba... Say something!

Ahnaf: I n...ne...need to s...study.

*(Ahnaf gets up and takes his phone. He exits the stage)*

*(Scene ends)*

**Scene V: Interior, Mr.Hasan's jail cell, in the morning.**

*(Jailer 2 enters. Mr.Hasan is sitting on the ground)*

Jailer 2: Hasan shaheb...oh Hasan shaheb. You seem to be out of it again. What are you thinking about now?

Mr.Hasan: I am thinking about the dream that I had today.

Jailer 2: What dream?

Mr.Hasan: I saw that me and my son... We were at Shishupark. We were having a blast there.  
Ahnaf and I were going on rides and screaming and shouting at the top of our lungs.  
I got him a cotton candy which made him so happy because he is such a sweet tooth.  
It was in the color blue. He shared the cotton candy with me. I got him balloons and  
he made fun of me saying "Abbu, I am not a kid anymore" but I knew that it made  
him happy. We took photos in front of the horse ride, and the haunted train. Ahnaf  
looked so happy...

It was a beautiful yet painful dream.

Jailer 2: Hurr... What are you saying? How can it be painful?

Mr.Hasan: Because none of it ever happened in real life. And I don't know if it ever will... You know Bhai, I am not afraid about the years I have to serve here... I am afraid that with all those years, with all those passing time, my son will go farther away from me.

I don't blame him... I haven't exactly been the ideal father. I don't know about his favorite food, or color or dreams or fears... I don't know if he likes biriyani or not. I don't know what his favorite song is... I don't know if he supports Brazil or Argentina or any other football team. I don't know the name of his best friend... I don't even know if he has a best friend or not... I know nothing about him. I never asked.

I dedicated all my time to my work. I always thought that the more time I give to my work, the more I will be gaining. But sitting here, at my 6 by 8 feet confinement, I realized that I didn't achieve anything at all. I only lost. I lost the precious time with my son. And maybe I lost my son.

When I first got here, I kept thinking how I was betrayed by Malik and the people from my company... When in reality, I was the one who betrayed myself. I betrayed myself every time I said to me "I will talk later with Ahnaf". I betrayed myself every time I went to work thinking that "today after going back home, I will spend time with Ahnaf". And look what the betrayal cost me... It cost me my son, his love.

*(Looks at Jailer 2)* You remember what you said to me on my first night here?

*(Jailer 2 shakes his head side to side)* You had said that you wouldn't be able to bear if your son or daughter wanted to get rid of you. You know how I feel now... I feel

that death would have been much easier than living with knowing that my son doesn't want anything to do with me...

*(Jailer 2 looks remorseful. Mr.Hasan sobs)*

*(End of Scene)*

**Scene VI: In the drawing room of Ahnaf's house, in the morning.**

*(The doorbell rings and Hanifa comes to open the door)*

Hanifa: Salam Alaikum Apa. Come in.

Rahima: Walaikum Salam. How are you, Hanifa?

Hanifa: With the situation of the house, I am not well, Apa.

Rahima: Why? What happened?

Hanifa: Ahnaf baba didn't tell you? The police took Hasan bhaijaan. *(Hanifa starts sobbing)*  
He is arrested for selling adulterated food. He might be in jail for a long time, Apa.

Rahima: What?! When did this happen? Ahnaf didn't tell me anything. In fact, he didn't even receive my phone call during these past few days.

Hanifa: I told him to talk to you about this. He said he won't. Apa, Hasan bhaijaan must be in terrible situation over there. Ahnaf baba won't even go to meet him. Please, Apa, do something.

Rahima: Ok. I will see what I can do. Please call Ahnaf.

Hanifa: Alright. Please take a seat, Apa.

*(Hanifa exits. After a while, Ahnaf enters)*

Rahima: How are you, Ahnaf? *(Ahnaf doesn't speak. He stands with stiff face)* Hanifa told me everything. I am so sorry that you had to go through that. ... Did you talk to your father?

Ahnaf: N...no.

Rahima: Hmm... *(Rahima and Ahnaf stay quiet for a bit)* Ahnaf... Baba... Are you angry with me or something? You haven't received any of my calls. You didn't even let me know about your father. Is everything alright? Have I done something? *(Ahnaf stays quiet)* Ahnaf baba, please talk to me...

Ahnaf: You d...didn't. And I am n...no...not angry with you.

Rahima: Then what is it?

Ahnaf: N...nothing. How is your s...son?

Rahima: I wouldn't know that. *(Ahnaf gives a questioning look)* He didn't come.

Ahnaf: You okay?

Rahima: I finally am. There is this freedom since I decided that I won't wait for him anymore. It's his life he can live it as he pleases.

Ahnaf: What happ...happened?

Rahima: Long story. We can talk about it later.

Ahnaf: Hmm...

Rahima: Ahnaf, I know your father hasn't always been there for you. It's completely your decision whether you want to go and meet him or not. But I can say this that if there is even a small part of you that wants some sort of answer or wants to talk to him then you should do it. Or you will regret it for the rest of your life. To be honest my recent experience with my son has been painful, but I, now, know that I won't be anguishing myself over waiting for him. *(Ahnaf stays quiet. Rahima stands up)*  
Okay... then... I will be leaving now. But if you want to talk then do give me a call.

*(Rahima walks to the door. Ahnaf calls her)*

Ahnaf: Auntie... Would you t...t...take me to see him?

Rahima: Of course. Want to go now? *(Ahnaf Nods)* Let's go then.

*(Ahnaf and Rahima exit. Scene ends)*

## **Scene VII: Interior, Visitor's room of jail.**

*(The room has a round table with 3 seats. Jailer 2, Rahima and Ahnaf enter.)*

Jailer 2: You people wait here. I will bring Hasan shaheb.

Rahima: Ahnaf, you take a seat. I will be waiting outside. *(She turns to go away. Ahnaf turns with her)*

Ahnaf: Where are you g...going??

Rahima: I will be just outside. Don't worry. Your father will be here soon. I should go.

*(Rahima exits. Ahnaf sits on the chair. Jailer 2 enters with Mr.Hasan)*

Jailer 2: Hasan Shaheb, your son came. You sit here. You only have 10 minutes. That's all I could manage. Sorry. I will go stand there

*(Jailer 2 goes to the farthest right corner of the stage and stands there. Mr.Hasan pulls out a chair and sits.)*

Mr.Hasan: How have you been?

Ahnaf: F...f..fine. You?

Mr.Hasan: I have been better. Who did you come here with?

Ahnaf: R...Rahima aunty.

Mr.Hasan: The lady who lives on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor in our building? *(Ahnaf nods)* Hmm... Hanifa told me about her. How is Hanifa?

Ahnaf: Good b...but she keeps crying f..f..for you.

Mr.Hasan: *(Chuckles)* Crazy girl. Have you been eating well?

Ahnaf: *(Looks at Mr.Hasan for a moment with disbelief)* That's what you want t..t..to know?

Mr.Hasan: No. Not really. I want to know many things. But I don't know how to start?

Ahnaf: Well... What is it?

Mr.Hasan: I want to know what you meant by I didn't know what you are going through. What happened at that day?

Ahnaf: I had a t...terrible day at s...s...school. The teacher made f..f...fun of my s...stuttering. And I ...No. It was n...nothing.

Mr.Hasan: It was not nothing, son. I am sorry that you had to go through that.

Jailer 2: Hasan shaheb, 5 more minutes...

Mr.Hasan: *(Mr.Hasan nods)* Ahnaf, I know it's long overdue... But I am sorry. I am sorry for making you feel like you were alone. I am sorry that I prioritized my work over you. You, who is the most precious gift of my life. I am sorry that I wasn't there for you when you needed me. I am sorry for trying to run away. I am sorry for leaving you at home and rotting here in jail. I am sorry for everything. I don't know if I will ever be able to make up for all the hurt I have caused you over these years. I might be in Jail for 3 years or more... But I want you to know that I will always be there for you. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me... Because I don't want to live the rest of my life with my son's hatred.

Ahnaf: *(Ahnaf sniffles)* I d...don't hate you, Abbu. I just wanted your t...time.

Mr.Hasan: *(Holds Ahnaf's hands. And starts crying)* I am sorry, Abbu. I am so sorry.

Ahnaf: *(Brings his head closer to Mr.Hasan's)* D...don't cry. It..it's okay. Just get out of here quick.

*(Mr.Hasan keeps crying holding Ahnaf's hands. Jailer 2 comes to them)*

Jailer 2: I am so sorry, Hasan shaheb. But we have to go now.

*(Jailer 2 holds Mr.Hasan's hands and pull him up)*

Ahnaf: I will s...see you s..soon, Abbu.

Mr.Hasan: *(Mr.Hasan hugs Ahnaf)* I will be waiting...

*(Ahnaf smile at Mr.Hasan. Mr.Hasan smiles back. Mr.Hasan and Jailer 2 exit. Rahima enters.*

*Rahima keeps her hand on Ahnaf's head. Ahnaf looks at her)*

Ahnaf: Th...thank you for b...bringing me here.

Rahima: *(Smiles at Ahnaf)* Silly boy...! Let's go now, Hanifa must be waiting. *(Ahnaf nods)*

*(Rahima and Ahnaf exit the stage together)*

*(The End)*

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