

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE

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HORROR/MAGICAL REALISM

DRAFT 1

1-INT: BEDROOM, DAY

CLOSE UP of stars on an Army uniform being removed. PAN OUT to show the removal of medals on the right and a badge saying VIKRAM RAO on the left. FX: REVERSE and show LT COLONEL VIKRAM RAO, 35 and 6 feet tall, staring into the mirror as he buttons up a blue shirt with white stripes. He notices an outstanding button and redoes it, his hand slightly shaking this time.

Military turn to the left and VIKRAM opens the door into the drawing-room to see ANITA and DRISHTI look up at him and smile.

CUT TO:

2-EXT FAIRGROUND LATER IN THE DAY

Quick MONTAGE with CLOSE UP of the red and orange colours of the fairground tents, people on a Ferris Wheel, a boy hitting a Whack-A-Mole and a fire eater blowing fire.

DRISHTI

Papa? Can I have some cotton candy?

VIKRAM looks down to see DRISHTI tugging at his pants. He puts his fisted hand in hers and flips it, transferring the notes to her.

VIKRAM

Sure, Dee. As long as you share some with me, okay?

DRISHTI

Okay!

As DRISHTI runs off, VIKRAM watches her go fondly go as he realizes one of his sleeve buttons have come undone. ANITA notices and slides it in, her fingers gentle on his wrist.

ANITA

We didn't have to go today you know.

VIKRAM

You told me in September how much Drishti was looking forward to this fair.

ANITA

But you came back so early. Dee and I would have been fine staying in. Also

you know that she has been telling all her friends about her Papa, the superhero and his adventures, probably would appreciate stories she doesn't have to make up.

ANITA chuckles at her remark but VIKRAM doesn't smile back. Once she finishes, he let's go of her hand and walks towards the cotton candy stand where DRISHTI is watching wide-eyed at the candy maker utensil.

CART OWNER  
Here betiya. (Daughter)

He raises the stick to show a blood-red cotton candy.

VIKRAM  
What is this colour?

OWNER  
Rambo Fair's special cotton candy. The darker the better!

VIKRAM flinches as he takes it and shoves some notes at the owner. Unwitting as to what just happened, ANITA and DRISHTI share the cotton candy as they walk towards the fairground games. Excitable and curious, DRISHTI reaches for the darts, ping-pong balls and even tries to pick up the mallet from various games.

ANITA  
Dee! Decide which game you want to play first okay?

DRISHTI pouts but brightens and runs towards the far end of the left row of tents. As VIKRAM nears the tent, he freezes.

SLOW-MO of DRISHTI points a BB gun at the wall of the tent. The noises of the fair are replaced by gunfire and screams.

VIKRAM drops the cotton candy. SLOW-MO CLOSE UP on the cotton candy that rolls towards DRISHTI's feet, leaving blood-red sugary bits in its wake. DRISHTI turns towards him but the voice that comes is not hers.

DRISHTI  
Sir, left or right?

CLOSE UP on DRISHTI's frock as blood starts soaking the dress, making it darker.

DRISHTI (OFFSCREEN)

Papa put me down!

The vision fades away as VIKRAM registers the voice. He is gasping and holding DRISHTI's head in his hands too tightly.

ANITA

Vikram are you okay?

He puts her down quickly and steps away from ANITA's look of concern. VIKRAM turns and runs away.

ANITA

Vikram!

VIKRAM runs fast and as far away as possible, bumping blindly into people. He stops out of breath in a little wooded area.

INT: WOODED AREA

Once the visions fade away and he stops hyperventilating. He takes stock of his surroundings. Quiet. VIKRAM basks in the silence of the surroundings until he realises what he has done- and in front of his family. He looks around for a way out and finds no discernible path; until his eyes fall upon a lone tent in the far corner on the left. The tent is dilapidated, brown with none of the painted brightness of the other fairground tents. Movement rustles the side of the tent from inside.

VIKRAM

Hello? Can you help me?

No response. VIKRAM opens the flap and goes in. PAN UP to a wooden sign with crudely painted letters "THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE- FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY".

INT: THE TENT

The tent is barely more spruced up inside. With just a single wooden door, it seems mostly devoid of any decorations, except for the door. The door is painted as black as dry land- with the cracks visible. In the center, a small green shrub with white edges struggles.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Once there was a little boy...who  
loved his father so...

VIKRAM startles at the melodious voice emanating from the other side of the door. DUTCH TILT as VIKRAM recognises the

song being sung. He claps hands on his ears but the song is now deafening. Backing away, he finds that the entrance to the tent is now gone, replaced by a wall.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Oh, brave soldier boy...why don't you  
come home?

VIKRAM

No...Stop...Please.

VIKRAM turns as the door creaks open, revealing a small stage with a woman crooning into a microphone. Tall, dark and dressed in the familiar black of the nightclub singer who entertained the night before they were to go into the trenches, she points to a person in the audience who as the door fully opens is revealed to be VIKRAM, his arms around long-dead friends as they sway drunkenly to the music.

THE BOYS/THE NIGHTINGALE

Oh brave soldier boy...Alone don't  
be...We are here for you truly...

He falls on his knees as the memories rush over. His eyes well up with tears and he struggles to push them back. He opens his fisted hands to see a horribly familiar badge. Specked with blood, it says SHREYANS KHATRI on it.

VIKRAM

No...I tried...I don't deserve...I  
don't want this...I don't want to  
REMEMBER! LEAVE ME ALONE!

As he yells that, he finds himself flung out of the tent into the grassy ground. He looks up to see the serene smiling face of a motherly woman in sparkling white.

THE ROSE

Can I help you, sir?

VIKRAM tries to reply but is hyperventilating too hard. When he finally raises himself up, the woman continues staring at him with her serene smile now brightening into practically beatific.

THE ROSE

Such a lovely frame for one so sad.

VIKRAM

Huh?

THE ROSE

I'm Rose. I'm the artist for the fair.

VIKRAM

I'm Vikram. Vikram Rao.

THE ROSE

Hello Vikram Rao. Join me for a cup of tea?

VIKRAM

I-I should really-

THE ROSE

I understand. But after such...a troubling time witherer, wouldn't you want to face your family with a better look?

VIKRAM hesitates but looks over her shoulder to see the fair below. ANITA and DRISHTI are standing around a fire eater as he ignites the other stick with his mouth. They clap enthusiastically, smiles blown wide. He can't go to them like this.

VIKRAM

Okay. Just a cup of tea right?

THE ROSE

Of course. We don't need to talk or any of that nonsense. But I do have one tiny request.

VIKRAM

What?

THE ROSE

Can I draw you?Just a little portrait. I'll throw it in for free. A smiling face for your family.

VIKRAM is a little unsure but is unwilling to face his family just now. He nods and follows THE ROSE into a second tent near the first one that wasn't there before. PAN UP AND OUT to show the upper half of the tent painted with a wide grin on his face...but his mouth is open as if screaming.

CUT TO:

INT CORRIDOR OF DRAWING ROOM, NIGHT

ANITA closes the door to DRISHTI's bedroom behind her. VIKRAM is standing outside near the table with framed photos around it with the drawing in his hand.

ANITA  
Such a nice smile

VIKRAM  
Yeah, the artist wanted a happy face.

ANITA  
Those aren't always the same thing.  
Where'd you like to put it? Hall or  
the bedroom?

VIKRAM  
Hall is fine.

ANITA frames the picture as VIKRAM fiddles with the radio.

ANITA  
Vikram about today- Drishti playing  
that game...

VIKRAM  
It's not a problem.

An uncomfortable silence ensues.

ANITA  
Your father had called earlier today.  
We could invite him to dinner. You  
always said his favorite phrase was  
only a soldier can talk to another  
soldier.

ANITA waits for VIKRAM's reaction. VIKRAM looks at her unsmilingly but squeezes her hand and nods shortly.

CUT TO

INT DINING ROOM, EVENING

FATHER  
So Rai saab went to the family's house  
to meet the boy. Everything seems to  
be going well, but then Rai starts  
talking about his visit to Punjab and  
the boy walked out! Pass the kofta

beta-

ANITA puts the kofta in his plate. PAN AROUND on VIKRAM who has a slight polite smile on his face and is pushing his food around.

FATHER

So he asked what happened, but all the parents would say he got upset if anyone talked about Punjab. Where the Army went wrong with this new generation I don't know...

The loud peal of the phone interrupts the scintillating conversation.

ANITA

I'll get it.

VIKRAM

So papa I wanted to ask-

ANITA

Vikram.

VIKRAM looks at ANITA who looks tearful.

ANITA

It's Sergeant Reddy's father. He's- he passed away this morning.

CUT TO:

INT: FUNERAL ROOM

VIKRAM stands at the back with ANITA hand in hand as NEIL REDDY'S mother cries and wails, in front of a dais with a framed picture of NEIL with a garland on it.

FUNERAL GOER 1

Found how-

FUNERAL GOER 2-

... Mr Reddy had to pay the coroner off to say it was an accident.

PUNDIT

It's time.

As the body is taken out of the room for the shamsham (final rites) ANITA looks up at VIKRAM to see him smiling widely. He



pushes her hand off and walks out of the room.

OFFICE, NEXT DAY

VIKRAM slides into his new chair at his office.

IDIOT COLLEAGUE

Oy. You're the Army guy, right?

VIKRAM turns to see an oily man in the next cubicle grinning stupidly at him. Ignores him. FOCUS ON IDIOT COLLEAGUE.

IDIOT COLLEAGUE

So lucky you are. You get to travel the country, kill all those bloody Pakistanis, plus the girls must go mad...

Suddenly a loud sharp noise rings out. Everyone startles. Three people rush to the window including IDIOT COLLEAGUE.

IDIOT COLLEAGUE

Tyre burst. Rubbish.

IDIOT COLLEAGUE turns and sees VIKRAM in the fetal position under the chair.

IDIOT COLLEAGUE

Scared of a tyre burst huh?

VIKRAM raises his head. He now has an almost demented, stretched grin on his face.

CUT TO:

INT LIVING ROOM

ANITA

Five cracked ribs, a black eye, and God knows what else. I don't know how we're going to afford that lawyer-

VIKRAM sits upright on the sofa upright and staring at nothing as ANITA paces.

ANITA

Vikram! Are you listening?

VIKRAM

It was nothing. Things just got out of hand.

ANITA

Nothing.Right.You almost beat a man to death, you were hiding under the table, you walk out of a funeral, you wake up screaming from nightmares every night, you don't eat anymore but it was nothing. I don't know what-

Silence ensues as ANITA walks towards the table with the framed photographs.

ANITA

We are a quiet family.

ANITA picks up a family photograph from the middle row. A five-year-old Drishti and ANITA in the centre with VIKRAM in his Army uniform surrounded by stern-looking relatives.

ANITA

That's what you told me.We are a quiet family. We don't pull our hair and bash our chests with our grief or shout it from the rooftops that we are happy.After years of a family that used words like weapons, you seemed-perfect.But now the quiet isn't a shield-for you. It's a tent- a deep dark tunnel to hide in until you forget yourself.So please Vikram. Before you get lost in it...Please talk to me.

FX: REVERSE to VIKRAM's POV. ANITA waits behind him, hoping and pleading he'll turn around, make that move. VIKRAM turns around and ANITA slumps in defeat, her eyes tearing up.

ANITA

Okay-All right. I think Drishti and me should go tomorrow... visit my parents for a while.

ANITA walks away, her sobs audible. As ANITA walks away, the mirror behind her is unobstructed and we see VIKRAM's face in it- with that same demented grin. VIKRAM walks slowly towards the mirror, pushing his cheeks down with his fingers but the smile is now affixed. His eyes catch the framed picture of his portrait. He picks it up with a dawning realisation.

VIKRAM

ANITA! ANITA!

VIKRAM bursts through their bedroom door. ANITA is packing her bag, crying.

ANITA

Vikram don't-

VIKRAM

No- No I know what happened. It's the lady from the fair. She cursed me or something- I can make her fix it.

VIKRAM feverishly runs out and grabs a sleepy DRISHTI from her bedroom and takes ANITA's hand and rushes towards the car outside.

INT: THE CAR, NIGHT

DRISHTI

Papa, where are we going?

ANITA

Vikram, this is crazy. The fair will be closed. And what lady are talking about-

VIKRAM

I met this woman in this tent. She did some magic on me, or she drew a picture and put some magic on it and that's why I can't stop smiling I don't know how but-here it is!

CAR turns to the left into an empty field.

VIKRAM

No...It should be here. She should be here.

VIKRAM runs out of the car and looks around frantically.

VIKRAM

ROSE! ROSE!

ANITA

Vikram! Get back here or so help me-

VIKRAM

Anita, she's real. I promise. I'll-I'll find her.

VIKRAM reverses and speeds out onto the empty road.

ANITA

Vikram slow down! This is madness,  
stop this!

VIKRAM

She ruined our life, Anita. I'm not- I  
need to find her. She can stop this.

ANITA

She didn't do anything! It's all you.  
You need help Vikram-

ANITA's voice fades out as VIKRAM sees multicolored  
fluorescent lights light up in the distance in the shape of a  
tent. A familiar singing voice croons, breaking the silence  
of the night and road.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Oh brave soldier boy...who loved his  
family so...

VIKRAM

That was...It was supposed to be  
different...

VIKRAM speeds up the car towards the lights of the tent.

ANITA

Vikram look out!

A large truck comes from nowhere on the narrow road. Vikram  
swerves but there's nowhere to turn. The music fritzes out  
and the tent lights are replaced by the truck's. ANITA and  
DRISHTI's scream. Scene goes black.

EXT WOODSIDE ROAD MIDNIGHT

FOCUS on the AMBULANCE and the paramedic inside. PARAMEDIC is  
speaking into the walkie-talkie.

PARAMEDIC 1

...No brain injuries detected but  
unconscious... Heartbeats detected.

The PARAMEDIC puts down the walkie-talkie as the other  
paramedic comes into the light, dragging the three gurneys to  
be loaded into the ambulance. As VIKRAM's gurney comes into  
the light, CLOSE UP to his face. His cheeks are wet with  
tears and the grin has faded completely.

THE END











