

Over the Edge

She is drowning. Her head struggles to break through from under the water. She struggles to breathe as she flaps her hands uselessly to try and swim to the top. From the shimmering water, she can see a hill. An indistinct solitary figure stands at the edge of the hill. The figure is staring down at the pool.

Jameela wakes up suddenly, sweating and shivering. She has two blankets around her in the sweltering heat of May. She struggles to catch her breath as she feels her pulse hammering away.

She swallows a sob as she flops down on her pillow. She stares up at the fan and marks each rotation as she tries to fall asleep again.

FADE IN

EXT PARK. AFTERNOON.

A dull afternoon with clouds gathering over the park. It's a small park with a children's playground a few metres away. The cacophony of traffic and humanity comes from the other side of the park. The park overlooks multiple shops, including some sari shops.

Dr Jameela Desai, walks down a solitary road with a lunch box. Dressed in her white coat. She is short but muscled. She walks with the familiar march of a soldier on duty, her back straight and looking ahead. Old habits die hard.

She sits on a bench and removes her sandwiches from the box and begins to nibble on them with no real enthusiasm.

All of a sudden, a woman flounces down next to her. She is tall, slim with green eyes and high cheekbones. Dressed in a purple shirt and jeans, she has an irritated expression on her face.

Shanaya

Biology tells us that we have evolved from monkeys. Apparently Anil's genetic ancestors were very stupid monkeys.

Jameela looks up slightly startled at the other person occupying the bench. She slightly raises an eyebrow at the random outburst.

Jameela  
Pardon?

Shanaya looks over at her, as if finally seeing someone else. She gives an appraising look to the other woman.

Shanaya  
How difficult is it to properly measure the border? This is primary school rubbish. Three inches more than what I asked for  
AND he tried to make me pay extra for it!

Jameela looks even more nonplussed.

Jameela  
Border?.. As in a for a sari?

Shanaya  
Yes. Why do I have to deal with such incompetent morons?

She gestures dramatically and sighs as in real pain. Jameela's mouth twitches as if trying not to laugh.

Jameela  
You could have someone else measure it before it comes to you.  
Middle man might be more.. Competent.

Shanaya's face brightened and looked at Jameela with a growing smile.

Shanaya  
That's it! I've got it.

She runs off without a word to Jameela. Jameela looks even more confused but with a slight smile on her face as she watches the tall, beautiful woman run off.

Her arms are finally working. She moves her arms and swims to the surface. She is so close to breaking through. The figure on the hill still stands close to the edge. Unwilling to go over. The figure looks down at the drowning girl.

FADE IN- EXT TWO WEEKS LATER. THE PARK.

Jameela sits on the same bench, with a tiffin of poha and a bottle of water. She takes a full spoon of poha in her mouth as the woman from the other day flounces down next to her again.

Shanaya

Well, atleast he listened and got that damn app. Hopefully he makes less dumb mistakes.

Jameela

App?

Shanaya

App for calculating cloth. Middle man like you suggested.

Jameela laughs.

Jameela

That..wasn't quite what I meant. But I'm glad it worked out.

They look at each other and share a laugh.

Shanaya

So...How long have you been retired from the Army?

Jameela stiffens with surprise. Shanaya half-smiles and points to Jameela's tiffin.

Shanaya

No one other than an Army woman would inscribe their name, age and rank on the tiffin... Dr Watwe.

Jameela

Very observant. How did you know I was retired? And it's Jameela please.

Shanaya

Jameela it is. You have been sitting here for two days. Clearly a daily routine. You are still dressed in a white coat so you work nearby. The Army clinic is on the opposite road. Mostly only retired army doctors work there in my experience.

Jameela stared at her open mouthed. She is absolutely bowled over. Shanaya blushed self-consciously.

Shanaya

I sell saris for a living. Being observant is a work hazard.

Jameela smiled but with a tinge of sadness to it.

Jameela

You must be very good at your job then. That was brilliant. Truly.

Shanaya blushed and tried to wave the compliment away with a half hearted wave.

Shanaya

I'm Shanaya by the way. I own a shop at Laxmi Road.

Jameela

I gathered. A young man came stomping down this road yesterday muttering about a "psycho witch" and her stupid shop. Somehow I didn't think he was talking about *Mrs Talpade's* sweet shop.

They both started giggling at that and burst into full laughter. As the laughter faded, Jameela looked over at Shanaya as she tried to stop chortling. Jameela stared at the slightly less mysterious woman as she felt a bond snap together within one laugh.

Jameela

Also, I didn't retire. I was honourably discharged. Or at least that's what I told the pension office.

Shanaya

Why?

Jameela

Because saying you were discharged because you had an affair with a superior officer would not go down well , I think.

Silence falls between the two compatriots. Meanwhile, the noise of the children playing starts to increase as the afternoon becomes evening.

Shanaya

Why did it end?

Jameela

Same reason all affairs end. There is one is willing to go over the edge and one is not. In this case, it was her.

Shanaya

Her?

Jameela

Well it certainly wasn't going to be a him.

Shanaya

Of course not.

They smiled at each other again. Unknown to either, they were both telling themselves not to touch the other's hands.

She moved her arms vigorously. Almost there. Finally! Her head broke through to the surface. Gasping, she gulped in essential oxygen as she peered up to the hill. The figure still stood at the edge. She seemed closer to the edge now though. She called out, urging her to jump, but she got no answer.

FADE IN : EXT THE PARK. EVENING. DARK CLOUDS are gathering. It looks like a stormy evening.

Jameela sits on her usual bench. Her tiffin holds the remnants of dal roti and rice. The tiffin had pretty much been wiped clean. Jameela looks to and fro from the viewpoint.

Suddenly she sees a figure bounding towards her. Shanaya , dressed in a blue shirt and jeans comes and sits on the bench. Jameela smiles at her warmly, her heart is pounding away. Shanaya smiles back but seems to stiffen up.

Shanaya

I was married. For 10 years. It wasn't.. Good.

Jameela

Okay.

Shanaya

My former husband and I hated each other. We didn't like or tolerate each other even, as is for most of arranged Indian marriages. Plus he was a "traditional",read sexist dick.

Shanaya

That wasn't the issue. I had learnt how to tune out idiots from an early age. I had a friend. Reena. More than a friend, I mean.. We were together for two years.

Jameela (gently)

I understand.

Shanaya

She was interesting. Highly intelligent and very charismatic. We had fun together. But then one day I came home from seeing her and I found my parents in the living room with Victor. They told me they knew about Irene and me.

Shanaya (continued)

I thought it was my fault. I thought I wasn't careful enough. I sneaked out and I went to her with some vague plan of elopement. and saw her taking a cheque from my parents. And then she said "Shame, your daughter was more fun than the usual girls I have to work with."

Jameela

Oh.

Shanaya

Yes. Oh. I went back home and married Victor. Ten *miserable* years later, he died and left us both in a better place than before. I opened my shop six months after. After that, I realised that emotions...*sentiment* gets you nowhere. It warps the mind and leaves you defenseless. I tried to take that leap of faith one time and it almost ruined me. *I won't make that mistake again.*

Shanaya stopped, breathing heavily as she tried not to look at Jameela. Jameela schooled in her expression as she heard her heart shatter in pieces.

Jameela

Yeah. You're right. Of course you are.

CUT TO INT Jameela'S HOME. EVENING. A storm is brewing outside. Jameela is watching TV, flipping through channels uninterestedly. A plate of food is left uneaten on the side table. The doorbell rings.

Jameela

Coming. Coming.

Jameela opens the door. It's Shanaya.

Jameela

Oh hey. I hope you didn't have a problem finding the place.

Shanaya



No,not really. Why did you call me? Why were you not at the bench today?

Jameela  
I was..busy.

Awkward silence ensues.

Shanaya  
Can I come in?

Jameela nods and lets Shanaya in. They sit down in the dining room. Shanaya looks around.

Shanaya  
This is not your place.

Jameela  
No it's my grandfather's. He left it to me in his will, despite my parents' extreme protests.

Shanaya  
I thought so. It doesn't...look like you.

Jameela  
Didn't think there was a point decorating. Listen, um..I got a job offer in Delhi.

Shanaya  
Oh. I see. I assume you've accepted?

Jameela  
It's good pay. In a hospital where I get to treat real patients instead of old hypochondriac geezers.

Shanaya (laughs a little)  
Of course. It sounds.. Perfect for you.  
When do you leave?

Jameela  
Two weeks. Just need to pack up everything. Not like I had much.

The silence, once comfortable now is oppressive.

Jameela

Unless... there is something that I did...have? Something that might  
need me to stay?

A pregnant pause as Jameela held her breath.

Shanaya

What could there be?

Jameela and Shanaya sit in silence, their fear leaving their  
feelings unsaid.

FADE TO THE NEXT NIGHT. INT Jameela'S APARTMENT. BARE WITH A FEW  
BAGS AROUND. Jameela SITS WITH A GLASS OF WHISKEY. THE SOUND OF  
HEAVY RAIN BATTERS THE DOORS AND WINDOWS.

THE DOORBELL RINGS. ONCE, TWICE AND THEN THRICE.

Jameela

Coming, coming

The door opens to show a rain-soaked Shanaya oscillating on the  
doorway.

Jameela

Shanaya? What happened?

Shanaya

I'm an idiot.

Jameela

Okay... that's a first.

Shanaya

Can I come in?

Jameela still looks a little surprised. But she lets her in.  
They sit in the Dining Room.

Shanaya

That day. At the bench, when I said about those things..

Jameela (tersely)

I agreed with you. Sentiment, love, all that *rubbish*.

Shanaya (continuing)

I hadn't considered the..latest factors. Dangerous oversight  
really.

Jameela

What factors?

Shanaya

That, those afternoons on the bench with a former army doctor  
were the greatest afternoons of my life.

Jameela looks up at Shanaya with shock and a little dawning  
hope.

Shanaya

I meant what I said before. About love. But then I met you. You  
impossible woman who laughed at my jokes. Who said brilliant  
when others would have abused me. Brave and kind. You understood  
what it was like to take that leap over the edge and fall to the  
ground. My conductor of light.

Jameela's eyes filled with tears and fell on her face. A  
blinding smile grew on her face. She reached out to Shanaya's  
trembling hand and held it to her heart. Their foreheads touched  
as they both cried.

Jameela

You brilliant madwoman. My genius who led me out of the  
darkness. God, I love you, you git.

Shanaya and Jameela laughed through their tears. Their lips met  
in a tender kiss as the rain raged out below.

The figure atop the hill took a running start and cannonballed over the edge to the pool below. Jameela stared in awe as Shanaya made a whooping sound as she came down to the pool below the hill.

THE END