

Sher Singh

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EXT. THE JUNGLE OF KUMAON - EVENING

Birds eye view of the dense Himalayan jungle of Kumaon. We swoop down, now almost kissing the roof of the trees, now almost in danger of hitting the tops.

EXT. FLOOR OF THE JUNGLE

A fox skirts expertly around the undergrowth on the floor of the forest. It is on the prowl: stopping, looking around, listening and then moving again. The sun in the west is winking for the last times for the day. And then we are in a clearing.

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING

The fox gets ahead of us. We trail him from behind. It stops abruptly. Perks its ears and approaches a ditch.

EXT. DITCH

The fox is at the edge of a ditch. Peering down in a state of excitement. It comes down now, purposefully and cautiously, in his usual cowardly manner. Sound of a passing vehicle. We spy a UP state corporation bus passing on the road from between the trees.

EXT. DITCH

The fox is at the bottom of the ditch. Now we see a bundle wrapped in a striped cloth: Yellow with black stripes, and hear a faint cry of a child in the bundle. The fox makes a round of it and is upon it at last. Sniffs, looks around for competition: None. The child, barely months old is crying, almost in sadness. The fox bares his fangs, gleeful (Was that a smirk?), positions itself for a jaw hold. Not good. Tries again from another angle. The fox is unable to pick it so it drags the bundle a few feet. The child cries louder but is still not much decibels.

SWOOSH!

A large rock flies past the fox, startling and freezing him for a moment. He animates again to pick up the bundle in a hurry. Another rock lands at his feet. The panicked fox drops its meal and runs up the ditch in a frenzy.

EXT. DITCH

At the edge of the ditch, JAGGU, A boy of about 15 looks down, his hand poised for yet another throw, but he drops the idea and yells. A bag rests at his feet.

JAGGU

Bapu! Come over here fast. I have found something.

His ruffian like FATHER comes out into the clearing. A large hatch bag on his back.

FATHER

Now! What is it this time?

JAGGU

Look there! A fox was at it. Seems like a tiger cub.

The smallness, the striped cloth, its tail like formation on one side and the animation of the bundle surely gives an impression of a Tiger Cub. Father's eyes light up with greed.

At the opposite edge, the fox watches the father-son duo climb down the ditch, hurriedly. Its face is almost humanlike in disappointment. It shakes its head in resignation.

The father bends. Turns the cloth over to see the child on his chest. Gets straight. Light goes out off his eyes.

FATHER

What the hell..

Turns the child over with his foot like he would a rabid dog. The child has stopped crying and is breathing rapidly, eyes open. The father moves to rap the son on the ear. The son deftly moves, the father misses.

FATHER

So much for your discovery! Now what I am going to do with it? God save me from you!

JAGGU

How was I to know? It seemed like a Sher (Tiger).

FATHER

The world is coming to an end. That is why such things are happening, I am telling you. Armageddon is coming.Now! You found it. You pick it up!

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING - DUSK

The sun has set. The silhouettes of the duo goes away. We hear only the murmurs of their chatter. The father continues to berate his son.

EXT. DITCH

Fox, still standing, its silhouette keeps on looking in the direction for a while, lest there be another opportunity and then drops its head and goes away.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE BLUE EXPANSE OF THE SKY FROM 5000 FEET UP - DAWN

The view moves south with uniform speed. OS: Bird sound of a flamingo. Three quarter of the flamingo beak appears from the left. Two quarters of it recedes as the bird drops speed on its upward wing stroke. The beak and part of the head arrives on the downward thrust. Loses some screen presence again but the bird is gaining ground. Soon it is past.

Another Flamingo arrives and we pull back to see a flock of flamingoes flying in their natural elegance and making a great show of pinkish white.

Only the pink is flecked by a smudge of pure white: It is a PELICAN, trailing them.

EXT. BLUE SKY - CONTINUOUS

The pelican gains speed to get abreast of a FLAMINGO in mid flock.

PELICAN

How much long for Mumbai now?

FLAMINGO

Just a little more and we'll be in Bombay. .oops Mumbai. It is the greatest city of the world if you ask me.

PELICAN

I am asking you.

FLAMINGO

He! He! He! Haven't you been here before?

PELICAN
 Never! Our flock comes to
 Bharatpur. I am only here to see
 the mother of Sher Singh.

We move back to look at the triangular formation of the birds
 designed to generate the least amount of the drag.

PELICAN
 Say? Ever heard of the story of
 Sher Singh?

FLAMINGO
 Tell me who hasn't? I have been
 hearing it since 20 seasons. His
 mother lives in Mumbai.

The flamingo flaps his wings to fill some more air under
 them. Gets ahead of the Pelican. Making Pelican to do the
 same. But it is an exertion for him.

PELICAN
 Say! Can you take me to the mother
 of Sher Singh?

FLAMINGO
 Umm! Well I don't know...

PELICAN
 Please. Please! Please! Please!
 Help me so that I may be able to
 get back to my flock soon. Be a
 Bird!

FLAMINGO
 Umm OK! But you must do what you
 are told. You must be careful not
 to irritate her. She is a cranky
 type if you know what I mean.

PELICAN
 Oh! I'll do just as you say. You
 don't worry about that. Leave it to
 me.

EXT. BLUE SKY

Long shot of the birds in flight. The sun is about to appear
 on the horizon.

EXT. BLUE SKY

Pelican and Flamingo.

We look down on the panoramic view of the city sprawled far down on the ground.

PELICAN

Oh my! I have never seen so many human nests at one place.

Flamingo is proud.

FLAMINGO

This is Mumbai. Mumbai!! This is where we come every winter. Come now!

PELICAN

Where?

FLAMINGO

To the mother of Sher Singh. Don't you want to see her?

PELICAN

Oh yeah! That is why I have...

The Flamingo swoops down.

FLAMINGO

Come fast. Don't lose sight of my tail.

PELICAN

..come. Wait for meeeeeeee!

We follow the Flamingo's tail. Towards the city. The rest of the flock continues onward.

EXT. VARSOVA ROAD - LATER

We are looking at it from some height. The place is beginning to stir. People are waiting for a local bus at a stop. People are returning from their morning strolls. CAFE COFFEE DAY is not yet open. a BEST bus stops at a stop, spits some and gorges some and is on its way again. The MAID from the bus crosses the road and enters through the gate of an Apartment. We look up, just in time to see the Flamingo and the Pelican flying in and settling on a window ledge a short distance away which is clearly not wide enough for two large birds.

FLAMINGO

Off! Ho!

The pelican misses his leg and has to flap his wing to stay.

FLAMINGO

Don't make noise!

Pelican regain his footing.

FLAMINGO

Off! You fool! Now watch out for a broomstick flying in your direction.

PELICAN

My bad! My bad!

The Pelican turns towards the window, taking every precaution. Looks in. Sees his own reflection and is distracted by his own dashing visage. Flamingo rolls his eyes.

INT. APARTMENT LIFT - CONTINUOUS

The maid climbs up. The lift stops. She opens it gets out and walks the corridor, away from us.

EXT. THE WINDOW LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

The pelican and the flamingo peer inside. Cupping their eyes with their wings to offset reflection.

INT. THE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is in a state of disrepair, though clean. The TV is on. THE END flashes on the TV screen for a moment and credits start to roll. In front of it, a figure is resting motionless on a reclining chair. The birds can only see her face in profile, her face almost obscured by her hair.

FLAMINGO (O.S.)

That is all she does. Watch TV all day long.

EXT. DOOR - CONTINUOUS

The maids opens the door with a key and pushes the doorbell.

EXT. WINDOW LEDGE - SAME TIME

The sound startles the birds. The pelican looses his footing again. Bangs his beak against the window glass.

FLAMINGO

Now she will be really mad.

The pelican comes back somehow.

PELICAN

It is you who is making me nervous.
She is sleeping like a swan.

FLAMINGO

Well I don't know. Something is wrong. HUSH.

PELICAN

HUSHHH!

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The maid is already in and approaching The ROOM.

MAID

Memsaab! Bai!..Memsaab?

Is at the door to the room. Knocks it.

MAID

Memsaab?

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door opens. Maid enters. The duo follows her every move.

MAID

Memsaab! Me Hemlata. Memsaab? Wake up.

PELICAN (O.S.)

What is going on?

FLAMINGO

You can see as much as I!!

The maid picks up the litter around the chair, papers etc. And shakes the reclining women.

MAID

Memsaab?

The head of the woman swings to the window. Her eyes staring straight at the two birds. Mouth open. The maid freezes and then takes a step back. Hand to her mouth. Eyes wide. Turns and rushes out of the door.

PELICAN

She surely looks angry now.

EXT. WINDOW LEDGE - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

The almost clear reflection from the window glass gives the impression of them being four birds instead of two.

FLAMINGO

Oh GARUDA! She is dead! You stupid crow.

PELICAN

Who are you calling a crow? Heh! Don't you bad mouth me again, understand?

FLAMINGO

Oh my god! Sher Singh's mother is dead. Now Sher Singh will come to KNOW!

PELICAN

What are you going on about? I can not understand one bit.

FLAMINGO

You can't, unless you knew the whole story. It is very bad. Sher Singh will come to know and he will be very sad.

PELICAN

His mother is dead. He is bound to be sad.

FLAMINGO

It is not that sadness YOU... but the other kind. Much worse!

PELICAN

Are you challenged in the head or something?

FLAMINGO

You don't seem to know the story of Sher Singh. Or you will be as worried as I am.

Or you would be, if your lot is as soft hearted as us flamingoes.

PELICAN

Yeah! Yeah! I have heard a few things about flamingoes. All good, all good of course... Now would you... tell me... about Sher Singh ?

Flamingo settles himself. The Pelican gears himself into a listening mode.

FLAMINGO

It is a long story.

PELICAN

Tell me tell me.

FLAMINGO

Some other time. Here I go.

The Flamingo winks at the Pelican and flies away. The pelican jumps after it.

EXT. ELECTRONIC STORE - DISPLAY WINDOW - DAY

People are walking by the display window. A row of TVs playing the news from a channel. A few stop to look at the screens or at their reflections. The people that pass by or linger truly represent the people of Mumbai. Mumbai-ites of all hues.

NEWS READER 1

In another news, the actress of old Meera Kumari, Known for her role in the movie Albeli, has died alone in her apartment. She was discovered by her housemaid. She was a reclusive and lived her last years in comparative poverty and loneliness. She was suffering from long and protracted illness. She was only 43.

NEWS READER 2

And now that she is dead, a horde of relatives are coming forward to claim the remains of her property. Tune in to our special program at 8 on the sad ends of not so successful film stars.

INT. TV STUDIO OFFICE - LATER

On the wall, a large flat screen runs the news feed from a channel. A young editor appears. Her BOSS sitting behind the table, looks up.

BOSS
Yes Geeta?

GEETA
Aaj Tak guys are running a story on that loony actress. Meera Kumari. Terminal 16.

The Boss uses the remote in front of him to change the channel on his Plasma.

AAJ TAK: A man is answering a question, His wife nodding behind him emphatically. And sobbing.

INTERVIEWEE
...As I said, we are the closet relatives of Behanji. And we are being cheated here. We are family and it is we who should be released the body..

INTERVIEWEE'S WIFE
They are not even letting us see Behanjee's..

The Boss mutes the sound. Unmindful the lady continues her histrionics.

BOSS
Who died?

GEETA
I told you! A small time actress. Did a few movies a decade ago.

BOSS
Then let them have their story. We have better things to do. People die every day. We are not an obituary column. Are we?

EXT. ELECTRONIC STORE - NIGHT

The passersbys have thinned. The news continues unabated. But at this moment we see the last one and a half of the Advertisements. The store keepers can be seen preparing to shut shop. NEWS:

NEWS READER 3

Congress party has accused the BJP for corruption in Madhya Pradesh while BJP has accused the Congress for corruption in Maharashtra.

The news caster changes.

NEWS READER 4

Famed Thespian and Director Rajiv Kumar, supposed to be the god father of Meera Kumari, has come forward to take the responsibility for the last rites for the loner actress, Meera Kumari, who died, uncared for, today morning at her apartment...

The splashed photograph again. Along with that of Rajiv Kumar.

NEWS READER 4

Let us go to our correspondent who has an exclusive live interview with Rajiv Kumar in just a moment...

INT. STAR STUDY - NIGHT

RAJIV KUMAR is a stern film star of old. In his 70s. He looks very rigid, hard to please kind of a bloke. Looks highly opinionated. His study is crowded with the mantle pieces of movies related awards of all kinds. Jubilee mementos, photographs with well known personalities of every hue from his era. He is sitting on his SINGHASAN. The AAJ TAK crew of a reporter and a camera man along with a lone man from 99 FM are finished setting up but look hurried under the gaze of the film star. The FM guy NAVNEET is already on the sofa in front of the star. Rajiv's secretary hovers behind him.

SHAHID

Ramu, all ok? OK. FM! You are after me.

He trains his mike and the camera man takes position. Clears his throat.

SHAHID

We are here with Rajiv Kumar Ji, the national award winning Director and a hit star ..who needs no introduction.

Rajeev Ji, First of all,
condolences for the demise and a
sad end to an actress who
entertained her fans in her time.

NOD.

SHAHID

Rajiv Ji, how well did you know
Meera Ji.

RAJIV KUMAR

It is no a question of how well I
knew her. Or Who else knew her. She
was one of us. It does not behove
the industry to ignore her in her
death also...yes I knew her.. She
was a cute innocent child, much
better actress than most actresses
more successful than her. I even
did a film with her.

NAVNEET

So you have taken the
responsibility of her last rites.

Invites a sharp look from Shahid.

SHAHID

How are going to cope with the
greedy relatives who are lining up
to claim.

RAJIV KUMAR

I would advise such vultures to
keep well away from me. Not one of
them came forward when she was
alive and in need.

NAVNEET

He flat alone is worth a fortune.

RAJIV KUMAR

Whatever. That is all she has. I
would rather throw it into the sea
than to let some greedy relative
get his hands on it.

SHAHID

But sir, the relatives are saying
that your sudden affection for the
deceased stems from the very fact
that she has this property. That
her will to you is a forgery.

Rajiv Kumar does not, for a moment believe what he has heard. His face darkens, resembling the TANDAV he once portrayed in the role of SHIVA. He almost looks in danger of attacking the reporters. Who are bracing themselves. But he calms himself, takes his time. His baritone rises.

RAJIV KUMAR

You know why the world of today
look so immoral to you? Because all
you can see is a reflection of what
you yourself are..

Stops as a uniformed Sentry enters his study. Walks apologetically to the secretary, murmurs in his ears. The secretary reacts and turns to Rajiv Kumar. Murmurs in his ear. Who listens with his visage hardening even more.

RAJIV KUMAR

He is waiting outside?

Nod.

RAJIV KUMAR

Bring him here... talk of the
greedy relatives.. Here is one here
already. I will deal with you
later.. just see what I do to him
now.

EXT/INT STAR BUNGALOW - NIGHT

The secretary is at the gate. He peers out through the peephole in the gate to look at a short statured, dark complexioned man of about 50. The guard opens the side door, the diffident man enters, some invisible load bearing him down. No one answers to his folded hands.

SECRETARY

Come after me.

The man walks with a slight limp behind the secretary who skirts around the AAJ TAK OV Van and takes him inside the bungalow, passes the ornate high ceilinged drawing room and enters the study. Keeps the door open for the visitor.

SECRETARY

Come.

I/E. STAR STUDY - NIGHT

The occupants are all watching the door, the cameraman beams the light on the incomer, putting him off even more.

All watch him bathed in light and blinded. A hint of unexpectedness in Rajiv.

RAJIV KUMAR
Shut off the damn light!

SHAHID
But sir, we we will not be a a able
to r r record..

RAJIV KUMAR
SHHShut of the dam light, you
stammerhead.. It is my house, not
your damn studio. No light or there
is the door..

SHAHID
But sss siir

RAJIV KUMAR
Shut the damn light.

The camera man shuts it. Shahid sheepish. Seething inside.
The camera man gesture him to be calm.

Now PRASAD is gradually able to see but stands fixed.

RAJIV KUMAR
Wel come! Wel come!! We were
di scussing the likes of you only.
Come and grace us with your
presence!

Prasad comes forward and sits on a straight backed chair
placed by the secretary so that every one else can face him.

RAJIV KUMAR
Now if you'd be kind enough to tell
us your name?

PRASAD
Prasad.. Prasad! I am from Tanjour
in Tamilnad but I work at Jim
Corbett national park.

RAJIV KUMAR
Hoon! Pray tell us: how is it that
you are related to Meera?

Prasad becomes animated as if some energy is shot into him.

PRASAD

No No! I am not her relative.
She..I mean..A young man will be
arriving soon. He is her SON.

A new development for all.

RAJIV KUMAR

So you are not working solo. You
have a gang?

PRASAD

Gang?

RAJIV KUMAR

Yes! You are, beneath your sheep
exterior are a gang of swindlers.
You are after her property? Aren't
you? But you are not getting a rats
dropping from here.

PRASAD

No..It It is not like that
saar..he..She is his mother..And
the son does not care for the
property..

RAJIV KUMAR

Good! Very Good! Why don't you join
the film industry. It is in need of
good actors. You will do well. Here
you are bound to flop. Do you know
that there are tests that can prove
ones progeny. And I am, I have been
the closest person to her, before
she shut herself to the world. She
never had a son or a daughter, she
never married. She never had any
child even out of wedlock. I would
have known. And she never liked
children. SAVVY?

Prasad continues to nod his head pathetically, probably in
agreement.

PRASAD

But she has a son. And he is
arriving soon. I must explain it
all to you or It will be all over..

RAJIV KUMAR

It is all over already.

Prasad hold his hands together to Rajiv making him pause.

PRASAD

Before she was an actress, she used to dance in Nautankis (Road Shows).

RAJIV KUMAR

So?

PRASAD

I will tell you everything.. Please listen to this ..human being..like a human being..

Rajiv glares. Prasad's phone rings.

PRASAD

Where are you?

NAVNEET

Speakerphone! Speakerphone!!

Prasad fumbles, Navneet reaches, and does it himself.

INT. PHONE BOOTH, PALAM AIRPORT - SAME TIME

A Tamil woman in her late forties talks conspiratorially into the phone. She is LAVANYA, Prasad's wife.

LAVANYA

We are at the airport. He has brought the tickets.

INT. STAR STUDY - NIGHT

PRASAD

Couldn't you stall him? Old woman! You will ruin everything.

INT. PHONE BOOTH, PALAM AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

LAVANYA

Please do something. He will be there soon. Have you talked to those people? I am very scared.

INT. STAR STUDY - CONTINUOUS

PRASAD

It is all in Lord Murugan's hand now. He will do what pleases him.

INT. PHONE BOOTH, PALAM AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

LAVANYA

Please do something. Or He will never talk to me again. And I will die if that happens.

INT. STAR STUDY - CONTINUOUS

PRASAD

Have heart. You have done nothing wrong. Do not let him out of your sight. Phone me as soon as you land in Mumbai. And do me a favor. Don't blurt anything to him yourself OK. Promise me!

INT. PHONE BOOTH, PALAM AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

LAVANYA

He is coming.

She returns the receiver and gets out. A tall man stands just out of the booth. He is SHER SINGH of 17. His back only. Lavanya gulps and gapes.

SHER SINGH

The earliest flight I can get is at 4:30 in the morning.

Lavanya relaxes a little.

SHER SINGH

I will never forgive myself if I did not reach in time for my own mother's cremation.

LAVANYA

We did everything for your own good. We are not bad people.

SHER SINGH

What are you talking about?

LAVANYA
I don't know. I am scared.

INT. STAR STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Prasad returns the phone in his shirt pocket. And returns to his impatient audience.

PRASAD
She is my wife...I will tell you everything. As you know! Meera Kumari was in Nautankis before, so you can not be sure if she had a son or not?

RAJIV KUMAR
Show me her son and I will see that he and you all go to jail. You are not going to succeed. Make all the drama you like.

PRASAD
Please sir! I have not much time. Please hear me out and then do whatever you want to.

Rajiv calms down a little. Prasad raises his head to look far beyond..his eyes fill...

DISSOLVE TO:

WHITENESS

EXT. SHIMLA - DAY

The whiteness of snow. It is settled on everything. More clarity. We are in front of Hotel Chinar. A child is in the arms of a younger Prasad. Weeping uncontrollably.

PRASAD
Please do not cry my child. Every thing is going to be all right

Whiteness Again. And we return to the study.

INT. STAR STUDY

Prasad wipes his eyes. Unmoving, Rajiv looks at him without empathy. Prasad looks at him with misty eyes and the mist..

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DITCH - NOON

It is 10 years since we were here before. The face of Sher Singh, 10! He is in utility attire. His eyes are puffy. Same tiger striped cloth is in his hand. Sound of traffic. We pull back to see a familiar place: The DITCH.

He swipes his eyes and gets up, crosses the road and reaches the Government middle school on the other side.

EXT. SCHOOL GATE - AFTERNOON

He walks to the platform around a PEEPAL tree outside the gate and sits on it. Looks around. The mothers are gathered to collect their children. He watches them wistfully. A squirrel at the base of Peepal nibbles at a seed, stops and looks at him, locking her eyes and SMIRKS!

Taken aback, Sher Singh looks around. No one is interested in him. He smiles sadly and looks again at her. But she leaves what she is eating and climbs up the tree. Stops and waves to him. Makes him smile. No sadness for that ephemeral moment. He looks around to see if someone saw him and the squirrel to confirm what he just saw.

EXT. THE SCHOOL GROUND

The open air class. All students turn their heads in one synchronous movement, following..

EXT. THE SCHOOL

...the peon who walks the outside corridor, turns the bend, walks some more. Picks the iron rod and rings the final bell.

EXT. THE SCHOOL GROUND

The kids hurriedly put their books in the bags. Get up. Happy. It is their most favorite time in school. The GET OUT OF JAIL time. The teacher carries on with her last minute instructions but hardly any is paying attention.

EXT. SCHOOL GATE

The children come spewing out of the gate. A boy of ten RAHUL and a girl of 8, RANI come straight to Sher Singh. The boy throws his bag at him. Sher Singh picks it up.

RAHUL
I am hungry. What is for lunch today?

SHER SINGH
PATWARIN has made Kofta today.

RAHUL
Hurry up! Hurry up then. Koftaaaa!!
My favorite!!!

SHER SINGH
I saw a squirrel. I saw her smile.

RANI
Oh yeah! Where is it?

RAHUL
And I saw buffaloes shitting
cutlets .

SHER SINGH
It is gone now.

EXT. VILLAGE AND OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

Sher Singh answer feebly and picks up the two bags and trails after the boy. They cross the road again and on the side road now. Rahul enter a TRAIL by the road through a barbed wire fence.

RANI
Lets go by Pucca road.

RAHUL
This is shorter.

RANI
But mother said not to take this.
There is a tiger in the jungle.

SHER SINGH
The sign board on the square says
not to go into the jungle.

RAHUL

She says this just to scare you. I am not afraid. Come. . and you. . you can not even read.

SHER SINGH

I can read as well as write.

RAHUL

Yeah! I have seen it. You are worse than a kid of 1st standard. Come now you cowards.

They have to go after him.

RANI

I will tell mother.

RAHUL

And I will break your nose.

EXT. THE JUNGLE - DAY

Rahul leads the two other kids into the jungle which gets denser. He is not so sure of himself now.

RANI

There is a tigress in this jungle.

RAHUL

Stop chanting or you will have it.

As Rahul starts moving again, a baboon jumps right in front of him. He loses his footing. The baboon perches himself on a branch and makes threatening calls, feigns an attack. One more arrives. The kids have already shot from the track. Rani screams as she runs.

EXT. THE JUNGLE

The baboons titter at their prank and high five with their free hands.

EXT. THE JUNGLE

Trio walks fast. The jungle looks scarier to them now. A sharp rustle in the trees around them. Something is chasing them. The laggard Sher Singh's bags are bearing him down.

SHER SINGH

Do you hear?

RAHUL
What?

RANI
I hear it.

SHER SINGH
The tigress! There! Oh my god!

Another rustle in the foliage. The naturally camouflaged tigress gives us a glimpse. Rahul drops any pretences of bravery left and picks up speed again.

RAHUL
Run!

The kids run. Sher Singh is last. They reach a thinner patch of trees. Sher Singh drops one Bag. Stops to pick it up. Glimpses the tigress about 30 feet away. He takes to his heels again.

EXT. JUNGLE - AFTERNOON

Tigress appears through the bushes. Unhurried now. She rests her front legs on a large stone to look at the running Sher Singh.

CUB (O. S.)
What is it Maa?

The tigress looks down to her right side.

TIGRESS
Humans trespassing! Stop! Don't show yourself to them.

The cub double jumps on the rock. Gains the height. And looks in the same direction. The three month old White cub is breath taking. His bluish eyes curious.

TIGRESS
These are the most dangerous animals of the world.

CUB
Look harmless to me.

TIGRESS
Don't go by their looks. These creatures have almost wiped out our race from the face of the earth.

CUB
They can run on their hind legs.
WOW!

The cub titters a little inviting a faint smile on the mother as well.

EXT. THE JUNGLE - AFTERNOON

Sher Singh drops his bag again. Returns to pick it up and looks up to see the mother and son. The two kids lock their eyes. Each struck by the appearance of the other.

CUB
Human!

EXT. THE JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

SHER SINGH
Tiger cub!

The tigress roars.

TIGRESS
Get out of here! Don't ever come back. Get out. The jungle is ours.

Sher Singh turns to look to find the two watching him.

EXT. THE JUNGLE OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

Sher Singh has joined the two at the at a summit from where they can see their village at a short distance on an incline. The rising Himalayas lie in the backdrop.

SHER SINGH
I saw nothing.

RANI
There was a cub with the tigress.

RAHUL
These damn cats! Are really vile.

SHER SINGH
She was afraid herself that we might harm her cub.

RAHUL

I will tell father and he will come with the villagers to kill it.

SHER SINGH

There is no need to do that. She is only a mother and wants to protect her child.

Rahul stops and faces Sher Singh.

RAHUL

How do you know that?

Sher Singh has an idea what is coming.

SHER SINGH

Every mother is like that.

RAHUL

But how do you know? You don't have a mother. Your mother ditched you in the ditch. She did not even like you? Seen yourself in the mirror lately?

SHER SINGH

It is a lie. She did not do that.

RAHUL

Then where is she? Tell me?

RANI

She must have got separated. Like in the movie I saw once of Mi tabachan.

RANI

Yeah! I saw that movie too.

Rahul scoffs.

RAHUL

NO! She left him. She did not like him so she threw him in the ditch. That is what happened.

Sher Singh is completely deflated. About to cry. Rani helpless. Rahul triumphant.

RAHUL

I am only stating the truth! The whole village knows that.

EXT. THE JUNGLE OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

The Tigress watches the three from the distance. Rahul trudging off to disappearing down the summit Rani pulling Sher Singh who follows her dejectedly. The tigress turns back and disappears into the green.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAWN

The village of about 100 houses sleeps. The light of the day is still in a veil. Smoke is rising from an occasional chimney. The moon is visible yet in the sky.

I/E. RANDOM HOUSE

We close in on to what seem like a rooster pen. The pen door flies open. ROOSTER 1 comes striding out. Ramrod straight. Walks to the stairs. Climbs up jumping one stair at a time. Gets on the roof of a double story house. Walks purposefully to the chimney, half flies, half jumps over it. It surveys the whole expanse of the village. The veil has lifted slightly. It places its legs firmly and apart. Pulls his head back and lets it go.

ROOSTER 1

Get up get up O imbeciles.
It is already dayyyyyyyyyyy!

INT. PATWARI S HOUSE - DAWN

Patwari sleeps with his wife. Snoring.

In another room: The two kids sleep on different cots.

EXT. THE COURTYARD - DAWN

Sher Singh has finished cleaning the verandah with a broomstick. He opens the front door and stand under it. A man and a heavily dressed newly wed girl pass. The girl lags. The man stops and yells.

MAN

Hurry up! Najakat ki mari! We will miss the 5:15 bus.

WOMAN

Comi ng! Comi ng!

Sher Singh comes inside. Takes fodder from the hold. Goes to the buffalo shed. Places it in the KHURLI. The hungry beasts try to get at it.

SHER SINGH
Patience! Patience.

He mixes it with dry fodder.

SHER SINGH
Now enjoy!

He frees an older than a suckling calf who rushes to her mother and starts suckling.

He lets it do it only for a few moments and then drags it away.

SHER SINGH
Come now! If The Patwari knew I let you have it every morning. I will be the worse for it.

EXT. COURTYARD - MORNING

The day has dawned. Sun's rays filtering through the trees.

PATWARI, 35, gets out of his room which opens in the Verandah. Stretches himself. Looks at the verandah. Everything is spick and span. He drops his hands.

PATWARI
The bugger will pester me again.
Sheru! Sheru!

Sits on the chair in the verandah.

Sher Singh arrives.

PATWARI
Look! Boy! I am going out for a few days. Sit here..

Sher Singh sits on the ground at Patwari's feet.

PATWARI
I don't want any complaints from you. All right.

Sher Singh nods.

PATWARI
Now off you go. Get to work.

Sher Singh remains sitting, twaddling his thumbs. Looking intently at his master.

PATWARI

Go on..Don't ask me to enroll you in school. Who will do the household work then?

SHER SINGH

I will never ask you to enroll me into any school. Never. It is just that.. It is just that..I remember my mother a lot.

Patwari laughs a note.

PATWARI

It is you mother again! Haven't we had a talk about this many times before already?

SHER SINGH

You are the smartest person in the whole village. There is nothing beyond your knowledge. You can tell me where she is..

PATWARI

Arre! How can I know who is your mother in this whole wide world? The only way is if she came forward herself and claimed you as your son.

SHER SINGH

I think she is looking for me like I do but does not know where to find me.

Patwari laughs a note again.

PATWARI

Enough of it. Get the bike at the gate. NOW! GO! Go! Go !

SHER SINGH

But..

PATWARI

Hurry up now. Who is going to take the kids to school? Your mother? Go! And be grateful for what you have. Go or you will have a dose from me right now!

EXT. COURTYARD - SOME TIME LATER

Sher Singh is at the gate, laden with the two school bags, watching greedily the Patwari pruning her children. Rahul has the airs of a little king. Even Rani has a cause to be jealous of him. She opens her lunch box.

PATWARI N

Here is another hanky. Don't lose it this time. And don't let the others eat your Lunch. Rani! Fix your belt

RANI

What is this? I have only one cake. Rahul has two.

PATWARI N

He is a boy Beta. He is bigger.

RANI

No! I want two cakes like him.

PATWARI N

Do you always have to compete with your brother? I will give you two tomorrow.

RANI

That is what you always say.

PATWARI N

NOW, Don't make a scene MAHARANI JI, Go or you will be late for school. Chal o! Chal o!!

EXT. STREET - MORNING

The kids get out of the house, Sher Singh last. Patwari follows.

PATWARI N

Don't you take your time coming back, you hear me?

The kids trudge off but stop when they see another kid loitering in his school uniform unhurriedly and without his bag.

RAHUL

Lakhan? Aren't you going to school today?

LAKHAN
Haven' t you heard?

The Patwarin is out as well .

PATWARIN
What is going on. Why do you stop?

LAKHAN
It is a holiday at school .

RAHUL / RANI
HOLIDAAAY!

PATWARIN
Wait! What happened?

LAKHAN
The chief minister died today.

RAHUL
The chief minister died. Mother!
Chuteeeeeeee!

Glee on all three students. Another one who has just arrived at the scene gets the good news. They make a circle and start jumping around.

CHORUS
CHIEF MINISTER GAYA! EK CHUTTI DE
GAYA. (The good Chief Minister died
and gave us a holiday)

An old man walks past, displeased at the show of celebration.

OLD MAN
Abe! You haven't come to the
marriage of your respective
fathers? Somebody has died.

The kids keep quite till he turns the corner and are at it again. Patwarin laughs beneath her pallu. The kids begin to run off to play.

PATWARIN
Arre! Come back and change your
uniforms. .Of Ho! Sheru! Come back
inside, help me with the chores.

SHER SINGH
Can I play too?

PATWARI N
 Came in right this moment. Lat-
 Saheb wants to play!

EXT. IN/AROUND PATWARI HOUSE - AFTERNOON

RANI Looks for Sher Singh.

RANI
 Sheroooo?

Does not find him at the usual places.

RANI
 Mother! Where is Sheru?

PATWARI N
 How many times that I have to tell
 you? Keep your distance from the
 servant. Or do I have to tell your
 father to put some sense into you?

I/E. IN AROUND PATWARI HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Rani tiptoes into the store house and spies Sher Singh. She watches him weep and is affected by it and forgets not to lean too heavily on the window, which creaks loudly.

INT. STORE HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Sher Singh.

Gets up fast, wipes his eyes with his hands, pats the eyelids to rid of the puffiness and pretends to be looking for something in the store. No one enters in the mean time. He goes out. No one is around.

I/E. PATWARI HOUSE - LATER

The patwarin looks for Sher Singh around the house. Her neighbor sits in the verandah. A younger women of about 23.

PATWARI N
 O Sheru? Kahan mar gaya? Rani have
 you seen him?

Rani raises his head from her books in the verandah.

RANI

No! But don't heckle him please. He is very sad today.

Patwari n looks searchingly at her daughter. Sher Singh arrives. No sign of crying on his face.

PATWARI N

There you are. You have been loitering a lot lately. Go sit. Rani! Give him your comic book. No work for you today. Happy?

Sher Singh joins Rani, accepts the comic book and starts turning pages without reading.

RANI

Read it. It is very funny.

The pictures are really arresting in the pages. Chacha Choudhary and Sabu and their exploits.

RANI

Mother!

PATWARI N

Hoon?

RANI

From where do the kids come?

Patwari n is taken aback. The neighbor smirks in her pallu.

PATWARI N

Err.. they are gods gift to parents.

RANI

No you are not telling the truth. I know where they come from.

Eyes go wide.

PADOSAN

Hai Ram!

PATWARI N

CHAL CHAL! Concentrate on your study.

Sher Singh too looks interested.

RANI

I will tell you how they come. First one has to get married...

PATWARI N

Shut up! The kids of today are too much. Sheru, go now, bring a tola of Heeng from the shop of Raghav Bhaiya. Go on. . chalo chalo!

Sher Singh reluctantly leaves. Goes out of the door.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Sher Singh runs along the boundary wall of the house to the side. Stops nearest to where the two adults are sitting on the other side and listens.

RANI

Then after some time, the mothers stomach gets bloated like a balloon. Then she has to go to the hospital to get it treated. The doctors treat it and give a little child to the mother. That is how they come. Didn't you know?

Patwari n heaves a sigh of relief.

PADOSAN

Hai ram! E Rani, you are a smart girl. Who told you this?

PATWARI N

The kids are a gift of GOD to the mothers. I preyed and preyed and that is how I got Rahul.... and you too. SAMJHI.

RANI

But the stomach surely gets bloated. Sure does. I have seen it with my own eyes.

She looks around, ready to challenge anyone who thought otherwise.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Sher Singh has taken all in.

EXT. VILLAGE STREETS - DAY

JAGGU strides with his swagger in the street. He is now a young man of 25 and is dandier than the average villager. Sher Singh skirts him after spotting.

VILLAGER

Jaggu Bhai! How was your trip to Kathmandu?

JAGGU

Don't ask my man, don't ask. Casinos! Women! It is heaven. Heaven!

VILLAGER

When are you going to take me there?

JAGGU

When buffaloes start shitting cutlets.

EXT. STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Sher Singh is on his way.

I/E. POSTOFFICE - DAY

Single manned post office is crowded at the window. The soon to retire postmaster/postman sees Sher Singh standing in front of the window, behind the customers.

POSTMASTER

Arre! Sheru, long time no see. Come, come around inside. Come Come! Arre! this packet will need 12 rupee stamps. You want it or not?

CUSTOMER

All right! All right.

Postmaster issues the stamps. Gets up to open the door for Sher Singh.

POSTMASTER

Come..

Sher Singh enters. Postmaster goes back to his seat. Give back the change to customer.

CUSTOMER

How much time it will take to reach Delhi?

POSTMASTER

Only days. It is a registered letter. But don't worry. In government job application. If you register it even on the last date, they won't mind even if it reaches them a few days late.

CUSTOMER

But it will reach surely?

POSTMASTER

Positively. Don't drop it into the box, bring it to me before the last date. It is a registered letter. OK? OK! Now! Sher Singh, I have a BALUSHAHI for you. You like Balushahi? Hai na?

SHER SINGH

Is there any letter for me?

Postmaster stops unwrapping the sweet.

POSTMASTER

No son. I am afraid not.

SHER SINGH

But why? It is more than six months that I had sent my letter?

Postmaster rummages in the drawer on his table. Out of Sher Singh's sight.

A letter addressed simply: TO Sher Singh's MOTHER. Shuts it.

POSTMASTER

Maybe it did not reach the right person. Sometimes it takes years to get an answer.

SHER SINGH

Years is a very long time. Why don't you send a registered letter?

POSTMASTER

I will do that. Say tea along with a Balushahi? Or sweet lassi?

Sher Singh is an unhappy client.

SHER SINGH

I don't want any thing. Just do your job. Bring a letter from my mother. I paid for the tickets, or Didn't I?

POSTMASTER

I am doing all I can. But there are some things only god can do.

SHER SINGH

Everybody says that. But he does not do anything... You can prey as much you want but he will not do a thing. I have tried all of them Gods, paid them handsomely!

Postmaster stares at him from over the top of his lenses.

Jaggu arrives at the counter. Shutting Sher Singh up. Jaggu peers inside, handing the postmaster a slip. Brightens at the presence of Sher Singh.

JAGGU

Why? Sheru? What are you doing here. Any news on your mother?

No answer.

JAGGU

I saw her just the other day.

POSTMASTER

Stop it Jaggu. Don't you have any qualms?

JAGGU

I swear. I saw her. Honest to god.

Sher Singh has been played the same trick many time before, but he is still susceptible. Postmaster dials the number from the slip.

SHER SINGH

Tell me then?

JAGGU

Oh ho ho! Not so easy. What's in it for me? I was the one who saved you from foxes. And you don't even trust me? Every one says I am a bad man. I am not a bad man. Am I a bad man?

POSTMASTER
Hello! Yes one minute..

Hands Jaggu the phone.

JAGGU
Charan Bandana Lalaji
(Greetings)...Arre! Why do you
swear. The package will be with you
in a couple of days. It is just
that the cops have spies after me
all the time. I have to be care
ful.....No No No! No need not hire
anyone else....Is there anyone as
good as me?...oh come onwe
have a relationship here....two
days..I promise or a thief's
punishment is mine....Please!
Please Please!.....Thanks.

Hands the phone back. Throws a note. Winks at Sher Singh and
is gone.

SHER SINGH
Master Ji, Is it possible?...I was
just thinking..

POSTMASTER

SHER SINGH
That perhaps, that I am so
ugly..that my mother does not like
me..

POSTMASTER
What rubbish! There is no mother
in the whole wide world that does
not like her son. Perish the
thought. Get one thing straight!
Wherever she is. She loves you.
Who knows what trouble the poor
woman, your mother had to have
gotten separated from you...
I swear on my vocation. Now what
about that Balushahi?

Sher Singh turns his palm for the sweet. It is a worn workers
hand, slightly bigger than proportions. The post master takes
the other palm. The Same.

SHER SINGH
You want to see my future?

The sombre Post man shakes his hand, pats Sher Singh on the head. Hands him the bag of Balushahis. He does not need to see his palm to know his future.

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - MOMENTS LATER

JAGGU drives out of the village on his Bullet. Breaks abruptly. Removes his goggles. Looks in the rearview mirror and converses with himself. Playing both parts one after the other as we intercut to him and his image in the rearview mirror.

JAGGU

Arre, I almost forgot him. Jaggu beta, (Yeah? What is it?) You are slackening. (How?) Every problem has a solution. (What solution?). We have got Sheru. Think! Think! Think! (Oh yes! I was not thinking). Keep your head centered. .you hear me? You are going to land me in trouble one of these days (Whatever you say Sahab! you are a genius) That I am.

EXT. PATWARI'S HOUSE - EVENING

Jaggu's bike stops at the gate. He honks and honks. Patwari n gets out. And gets back inside on seeing Jaggu. Shuts the door.

PATWARI N

What do you want?

JAGGU

Where is Sheru?

PATWARI N

He will not see you. Go!

JAGGU

Why, Is he your indentured labourer. You want me to report you to the authorities?

PATWARI N

Go! Or Patwari Sahab will deal with you.

JAGGU (O. S.)

Sheru, I am the only one who knows in this whole wide world. Every one else tell lies to you. Talk to me today or I will never tell you any thing about what you want to know..you understand? Not after today. I know you are listening...

INT. COURTYARD

Sher Singh listens from the verandah, in view of his mistress, but pretends not to. Jaggu's bike roars and goes away. The mistress turns to him.

PATWARI N

He is a THUG. A liar and a smuggler. Don't you ever go near him. Or Patwari Saheb will throw you out. Understand?

INT. SERVANT QUARTER - NIGHT

Sher Singh is on his cot. Looking at the ceiling.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

The whole village is asleep is the moonlit night.

INT. SERVANT QUARTER / COURTYARD - NIGHT

Sher Singh gets up, looks out. His household is asleep as well. Soon he is in the courtyard. Tiptoeing. He heaves himself over the boundary wall.

EXT. STREET

In the street, his pace quickens..

VOICE

STOP! Who goes there!

Sher Singh turns in the direction. A large dog appears from a darkened corner.

DOG

Woof! Woof!

SHER SINGH
Shhh! It is me! Sher Singh.

The dog is already swinging his tail. Sher Singh starts again.

DOG
Woof!

Rani appears from the other side of the houses' boundary wall.

RANI
Are you running away?

SHER SINGH
No. Jaggu will tell me about my mother today.

RANI
You are forbidden to talk to him. I will tell father.

SHER SINGH
You go back inside.

RANI
I swear I am going to tell Dad.

SHER SINGH
The Patwari will beat me.

RANI
Then come back. Come back you...

Sher Singh has already disappeared leaving an angry damsel behind. She calls out loudly.

RANI
AHSAN FARAMOSH!

Dog waits for Rani to disappear. Calls out like a wolf head tilted up.

DOG
Jagte Rahooooo! (Keep Awake!)

EXT. RANDOM HOUSE - DAWN

Is already on the roof, surveys the village as usual. There is a cloud of mist floating today.

Rooster Jumps flies on the vantage point. Steadies himself. Pulls his head back. And lets go.

ROOSTER 1
Cough! Cough!! Cukroo..coo!

He clears his throat. Drinks water from a pot present there. Clears his throat. Pulls his throat and lets go.

ROOSTER 1
Jago! Jago!! Jago! Subah ho
gayeeeeee! (Ri se and Shi ne
Sl ackers!)

EXT. VILLAGE - DAWN

Sher Singh arrives at Jaggu's house. He jumps over the boundary wall. Skirts the bike and walks to the door is open. He pushes it in and Enters.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sher Singh arrives at the head of the bed and starts shaking the sleeping figure.

SHER SINGH
Jaggu! Jaggu! I am here.

Jaggu gets up, as if from a nightmare.

JAGGU
I have done nothing..I am
innocent..where am I? I am in my
house. Who are you? Sheru? What are
you doing here?

His wife also wakes up. Lets go a cry. Tries to cover herself up with a scream.

WIFE
What is going on?

JAGGU
You go back to sleep. You come with
me.

SHER SINGH
Jaggu! Do you really mean what you said?

WIFE
You are doing this thing again to this poor boy?

JAGGU
Shut your trap. Or you will have it.

Takes Sher Singh out of the room and into the verandah.

JAGGU
You doubting John, of course I really mean that.

SHER SINGH
You promise that you would tell me about my mother.

JAGGU
Of course.

SHER SINGH
Swear on your mother.

A pause.

JAGGU
I swear on my mother. Happy!

SHER SINGH
Tell me what you want me do?

JAGGU
Not a word about this to anyone. Or I swear I will kill you and never tell who your mother is. What will you say to Patwari if he asks?

SHER SINGH
Are you going to tell me about my mother?

JAGGU
Haven't I told to already? Do you want it in writing?

SHER SINGH
Then I won't tell him anything. Anyways, he's gone away for a few days.

JAGGU

Super! Listen carefully! I will take you to Nepalganj. But you will have to return by yourself along with what I give you there. Bring it to me here and I'll tell you who your mother is. Deal?

SHER SINGH

Deal!

JAGGU

Great! You have made the right decision. Now have you eaten? Woman! get up now. Fix something for Master Sheru here, I will be back soon.

Wife comes out.

WIFE

Wait!

Jaggu is gone.

EXT. JAGGU COURTYARD - DAWN

The wife picks up the pot from the earthen fire and pours tea for the boy, in a large steel glass. She places it in front of him. Goes inside and bring last night's rotis freshly smeared with ghee. Places it in front of him.

SHER SINGH

Can I keep them for later?

WIFE

As you wish. . . . What?

Sher Singh is looking intently at her.

SHER SINGH

How many children have you?

Wife reddens and smiles.

WIFE

None yet. I am only married for three months and three..four days now.

SHER SINGH

Yeah! Nine months. I know but You must be careful to see what kind of son is given you.

WIFE

If you say so. But why?

SHER SINGH

So that when you don't like him. Then you will not have to throw him away. It will make him very sad thinking that his mother does not like him. So you must decide what kind of son you want before hand. And don't let the god to gift as he pleases. It doesn't much benefit one to trust in god anyway.

WIFE

I will ask god to give me a son like you.

SHER SINGH

No! No! Don't ever make that mistake. You are not going to like me. My own mother does not like me. You must be new here. Don't you know? She threw me in a ditch!

Sher Singh states, matter of factly, having finished his logic and expecting her to understand it now. The woman is speechless.

I/E. STREET SHOP, NEPAL GANJ - DAY

The bazar of this moffusil Nepalese town is crowded and dusty. A very fat PANSARI, grocer, looks at Sher Singh and then at Jaggu.

PANSARI

Jaggu! Are you crazy or something? How will he be able to do it?

JAGGU

Don't go by the looks. He is one tough customer. Say Sheru? Are you ready to do this?

SHER SINGH

I can do it. I can do anything for my. .

JAGGU
SEE THAT!

Jaggu takes the fat man aside.

JAGGU
Tell you what, when I was a kid, I made more successful runs than my father. I tell you, kids are better couriers. NO one suspects them, cost a penny.

PANSARI
You sure he will be able to walk ten miles alone?

JAGGU
Of course. We came by the same route.

PANSARI
Suits me. What do I care. It is you who will have to face Lala if anything went south.

EXT. MOUNTAINOUS ROAD - DAY

A car stops on a side road, just on the edge of the jungle. Sher Singh gets out of the back seat. Puts on a heavily laden pack on his back, nearly wears himself down. Jaggu slides the window. Stretches his hand which Sher Singh takes and lets it be handled like the arm of a hand pump. Jaggu starts his drill.

JAGGU
Now show me what you are. WHO are you?

SHER SINGH
I am Sher Singh.

JAGGU
I asked who are you?

SHER SINGH
I AM Sher Singh!

JAGGU
What are you afraid of?

SHER SINGH
I am afraid of nothing.

JAGGU
What are you going to do?

SHER SINGH
I am going to find my mother.

JAGGU
Abe Donkey! What are you going to do now?

SHER SINGH
I am going to meet you in the village with the MAAL and you will tell me about my mother!

JAGGU
That's right. Now GO! And remember! Nepalese dicks can't chase you into India and Indians won't chase you into Nepal. Just telling. Not that it will happen.

Sher Singh adjusts his load again and starts climbing down the slope. The 35ish driver has watched the exchange curiously.

JAGGU
My dad used to do the same exercise when I was..a little older than him.

DRI VER
You were much older than him. You sure he will be up to it?

JAGGU
He'd better be. Now drop me off at the SURTI border post. I will be in the village much before him.

EXT. INCLINE TO THE NEPAL JUNGLE - DAY

Sher Singh disappears into the dense undergrowth down below.

EXT. NEPAL JUNGLE - DAY

Sher Si nwalks fast in the jungle. Comes across a jackal who runs away. Sher si gh assures himself.

SHER SINGH
Who am I? I am Sher Singh.

He is now climbing.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEPAL JUNGLE - DAY

Has climbed the small hilltop and disappears on the other side. The sky, is darker now. The clouds road and then there is lightening.

EXT. ROAD TO SURTI - DAY

It is cloudy, The car stops behind a row of vehicles on the road. Both occupants get out. Row upon rows of small vehicles lined in front. Sher looks at the sky and is worried.

JAGGU
What the hell? It happens with me every time.

He stops a rubbernecker.

JAGGU
What is it brother?

RUBBERNECKER
Flash Flood in the River. Now we are stuck for at least a day.

DRIVER
Jaggu Beta! Now, how is that little kid is going to cross the river. The only way across is the hanging bridge. A border guard is sure to be there.

JAGGU
God Damn Almighty! Sheran Waliye!
Ab Tera hi Aasra! (Tiger Riding Goddess, help!) Please keep my stuff safe.

EXT. NEPAL JUNGLE - DAY

It is increasingly cloudy. Sher Singh looks at the raging river in front of him. He starts walking in the opposite direction of the flow. Walks only a little way and stops in his tracks. A bear cub is loitering on his right.

He looks around, no mother, and starts running. The cub spots him and himself runs, in the opposite direction as it starts to rain lightly.

EXT. HANGING BRIDGE - EVENING

Rain has stopped. River is still raging albeit with less intensity. A large flock of sheep is being herded to the other side. No sign of the guards. He loads his load and climbs down from the perch. Falls in behind the flock, which may take long in crossing as the bridge is no wider than six feet. A sheep dog growls at him. He keeps distance. Walking behind them.

The last of the sheep and the dog and the herder are on the bridge. Sher Singh follows them. The rope bridge is swaying dangerously, some of the floor boards are missing. When the kid is in the middle of the bridge, he looks up and there is that policeman again. Waiting. Sher Singh about turns.

POLICEMAN
Stop! You kid!

Sher Singh is already on the terra firma. The dog turns and growls but on herders whistle command, stays.

The herder flashes his betel strained teeth. The Police man has to struggle through the sheep.

EXT. NEPAL BORDER - EVENING

Sher Singh runs. Slips. Gets up and goes away.

EXT. HANGING BRIDGE

The last of the sheep clears the bridge. The police man glares at the herder and runs to the other side.

EXT. NEPAL BORDER

The policeman follows the foot marks Sher Singh made on damp ground. The Foot marks go up a slope. He groans at the work ahead.

POLICEMAN
Bacchu! You can run but you can not
hide. You are going straight to
jail. Surrender yourself and I
might let you go...

EXT. NEPAL BORDER

Sher Singh is hidden, just out of sight, on the hill top. Behind him is a straight drop. To the right and left: dense thorny bushes. Impenetrable.

EXT. NEPAL BORDER

The policeman tries again.

POLICEMAN

Listen Kid. I am in a good mood today so take this opportunity. Give me the load you are carrying. Throw it to me and by Goddess Bhawani, I will not touch you.

He starts climbing as well, stealthily.

POLICEMAN

I will only wait for five minutes. After that the deal is off.

EXT. NEPAL BORDER

Hill lock.

The policeman is at the summit at last. Stands up. Sher Singh runs through him, toppling him and himself over. Sher Singh recovers but the policeman can not. He tumbles down to where he came from. Sher Singh picks the bag up and climbs down away from him.

EXT. NEPAL BORDER

At the base, the smarting policeman gets up.

POLICEMAN

You have invited it on yourself. Messed with the wrong guy.

And runs after Sher Singh. Making ground easily. Sher Singh changes direction to the left and traps himself once again. Now the policeman is behind him and the SURTI river, in front. Policeman arrives promptly. Advancing.

POLICEMAN
 HARAMZADE! KUTTE!! Just see what I
 do to you now. Go! Jump and drown
 yourself. Only that can save you.

Sher Singh backs down, to the edge of the river. The police man lunges forward and Sher Singh jumps in to the river which takes him into its flow instantly.

POLICEMAN
 I'll be doggoned!

The kid appears above the water, fifty feet down. hangs on to his bag stuck between the two rocks, dearly. He manages to pull himself on to the rock. Pulls the bag, slips, but recovers. Jumps on another rock and the rest is easy. He is almost on the other side.

POLICEMAN
 Damn! YOU Stay there if you are any
 smarter!!

Policeman looks to jump in the water. Deems it too dangerous and runs to the bridge.

EXT. INDIA BORDER - EVENING

Sher Singh picks himself and the bag up and is away again. Side of his forehead bloody. His manner which has been frozen in terror in the preceding minutes, breaks into triumph. We stay there to find a piece of paper he has dropped. It is the school I-card of Rani.

EXT. COURTYARD, JAGGU - NIGHT

The door opens. There is Sher Singh, standing under it, dripping wet. Bag in hand. Anxious Jaggu rushes to the bag, closes the door, opens the bag to take out the bricks like stuff wrapped in polybags.

JAGGU
 Well Done! My boy. Well done. I
 knew it. You can do it. Sheru! you
 and I are going to conquer the
 world.

SHER SINGH
 Tell me about my mother now.

JAGGU

Take a breather man. You look tired. She is preparing chicken. MMMMah! You just wait.

SHER SINGH

I do not eat meat. Paap lagta hai. (It's a sin.)

JAGGU

You have made me happy. Here.. Don't refuse.. you have to take this.. It is two biggest Mahatama Ghandis. 1000 rupees and here.. imported chocolate.

Hands him the money and a packet of chocolate.

SHER SINGH

Tell me about my mother now please! Like you promised.

JAGGU

ACHCHA! Say I won't! What can you do?

SHER SINGH

I will go straight to Masterji at the DAKKHANA and tell him everything and the police will be here in no time.

The chameleon in Jaggu turns his colors to a demonic hue.

JAGGU

Wait here..

INT. BEDROOM - JAGGU - CONTINUOUS

His wife is preparing the Masala for the chicken. Jaggu goes to the trunk and takes out a sturdy cotton thread. His wife gets up.

WIFE

What are you going to do with it?

JAGGU

That little snake is threatening to go to the police.

WIFE

Don't you think of harming this poor boy. You will see my dead face if you do.

JAGGU

You stay where you belong. Don't cross me.

Goes out. Wife follows.

WIFE

I will wake the whole village if crossed the door with the boy.

Stops Jaggu in his tracks.

JAGGU

You wouldn't dare.

But his wife's look says the opposite.

JAGGU

You want to see me in jail?

The wife does not relent. Matching eyeball to eyeball with her sly husband who gives up eventually.

JAGGU

So, you two will finally pry out the best kept secret from me!

The wife starts weeping.

JAGGU

Stop that. I am sorry. Arri! Your first arrow was right at the mark. No need to take out the Brahmastra (Brahma's weapon). I will tell him of his mother.

Jaggu goes in again. The wife continues crying looking at the boy and the apologetic Sher Singh does not look her in the eye while standing his ground. Jaggu comes out and takes Sher Singh aside. Hands him an envelope.

JAGGU

I never thought I would have to break the promise I made to my dead father. Here is the photograph of your mother. Not so fast. First you promise me that you will never tell anyone else about her ... or she will get into big trouble.

SHER SINGH
I won't tell anyone.

JAGGU
Pucca!

SHER SINGH
Pucca!

Jaggu hand him the envelope with some ceremony. Trembling little hands receive it. Picks the money and the chocolate box and hands it as well, keeping one Gandhi back.

JAGGU
Now go.

Sher Singh, tearful, holding the envelope with utmost care walks off. Out of the house.

WIFE
What did you give him.

JAGGU
What he wanted. The picture of his mother.

WIFE
Is that really his mother?

JAGGU
Trust me, Pagli. His mother was a Nautanki wali. If father was alive he would have vouched. We both saw her when we found him.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

Sher Singh stops under a street light, drops the chocolates. Open the envelope. Hands trembling. Takes slowly out the photograph. First the torso, then neck, then the lips, nose, eyes : His mother. In the pose of a seductive dancer. He embraces her. Silent tears flowing.

EXT. DREAM SEQUENCE - DAY

The little dancing birds in pair are chirping and dancing rhythmically from branch to branch.

Sher Singh looks at them, with a 1000 watt smile for the first that we have seen and probably for the first time in his life.

His mother is playing hide and seek with him. He finds her hiding, wearing the same clothes as in the picture but looking motherly, startling her and runs away as she chases him. Not able to catch him.

Birds singing.

EXT. COURTYARD, PATWARI - MORNING

The patwari gets out. The courtyard is clean. Sounds of Sher Singh from the Buffalo Shed.

PATWARI
Sher Singh!

Sher Singh comes bounding out.

SHER SINGH
Yes Maam!

PATWARI
Where were you last night and the whole day yesterday?

SHER SINGH
No where!

PATWARI
What are you smiling at?

SHER SINGH
Today I am very happy.

PATWARI
Don't be too happy. Patwari Saheb will be coming in the afternoon.

Rani looks at him with hands perched on the waist. He beacons her. Her mood remains foul.

INT. STORE HOUSE - DAY

Sher Singh pushes the door. Rani enters after him.

RANI
I did not tell mother that I saw you going the other day.

SHER SINGH
 You will not believe what has
 happened to me. Promise not to tell
 anyone.

RANI
 Cross my heart and hope to die.

Sher Singh takes out the photograph and shows it to her
 ceremoniously.

RANI
 Who is she?

SHER SINGH
 She is my MOTHER.

Rani burst out laughing.

Sher Singh returns the photograph to the envelope. Hard
 faced.

RANI
 Let me see it again (giggle)

SHER SINGH
 Go away and never talk to me again.

RANI
 Give it to me.

Sher Singh pushes her, she falls to the ground. She gets up.
 Fire and tears in her eyes. Wags her finger at him as she
 storms out.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Patwari parks the Bike on the street. Patwari opens before
 he knocks.

PATWARI N
 AA GAYE!

He touches her at the waist. She jumps, looking around,
 reddening. Rahul and Rani come bounding to him. Embracing
 him.

PATWARI
 OK! OK! I have been gone only for
 two days. OK! OK!

EXT. COURTYARD, PATWARI - LATER

Patwari sips tea.

PATWARI

Why is my gudiya looking angry?
Didn't you like what I brought you?

RANI

Father! Sheru beat me up.

Patwari brings something fried and sets it up on the round stool in front.

PATWARI

There is something the wrong with Sheru. He was missing a whole day and night. And doesn't tell.

Rahul raises his head from his charade of studying.

RANI

I told him that father will be angry and he says he don't care.

RAHUL

I saw him embracing Rani like this.

Embraces himself.

RANI

No he did not.

RAHUL

He did too.

RANI

NO HE DID NOT.

Patwari drops his cup. Looks and picks up a cane. Frightening Rani.

RANI

He did not beat me up. He only pushed me. Rahul is lying. He forges your signatures on the report card.

RAHUL

Liar! I do not.

RANI

Yes you do.

Patwari rushes towards Sher Singh's quarter.

RANI
Don't beat him dad.

EXT. SERVANT QUARTER - MOMENTS LATER

Sher Singh is on his bed, looking at the picture.

The door bursts in. Patwari has to bend to get in. Sher is vertical in a flash. Patwari reaches and SMACKS the stick with Sher Singh's side who bends over. One hand behind the back.

PATWARI
Didn't I tell you? NO COMPLAINTS?

Raises the stick again.

SHER SINGH
No Sir! I did nothing.

Patwari lets go one at the ankles.

PATWARI
A lesson needs teaching.

Making Sher Singh hop on one leg. Patwari can see something under the pillow. Comes forward and picks it up. A 500 Rupees note. Picks it up.

PATWARI
A thief as well. Are you?

SHER SINGH
No Sir! Jaggu gave it to me. You can ask him.

PATWARI
I don't want your kind of filth in my house. You have overstayed your welcome. AHSAN FARAMOSH! I said never talk to Jaggu. What is this?

Slaps him back handed. Rummages in the made travelling bag.

PATWARI
Going somewhere? What else you have stolen. RADHA! Look in the trunk to see if anything is missing! What have you there?

His attention is on Sher Singh's hidden hand. Sher Singh backs away. Patwari turns him and pries out the picture from his hand. Looks at the picture. Another slap.

PATWARI

What is this? I said what is this?

SHER SINGH

Give it back. It is my mother.

PATWARI

This? Your mother! This woman dances naked for 10 rupees a person. She is a harlot.

SHER SINGH

Don't you... say anything about my mother!!

Patwari is taken aback.

PATWARI

Such insubordination. I don't tolerate this in my own children.

EXT. COURTYARD, PATWARI - CONTINUOUS

Rani hears a smack.

INT. SERVANT QUARTER - CONTINUOUS

Patwari pushes Sher Singh away.

PATWARI

She is a harlot and is anyone's for the asking for twenty rupees a go.

Holds the picture, poised to tear it.

PATWARI

What are you going to do about it.

Sher Singh moves with amazing speed. Picks up the stick resting on Patwari's leg and smacks Patwari on the knuckles making him cry out and drop the photograph. Another blow comes to the head. Patwari staggers. Sher Singh picks up the bag. Patwari tries to catch him while writhing, loses his footing, staggers back, smacks his head on the door post and is still staggering back, out of the door and falls ten feet below.

PATWARI
Hai! Maar Di a Re!

Sher Singh gets out.

PATWARI (O.S.)
My leg! Don't let him get away.

Sher Singh jumps down the stairs, bounds over the boundary wall. Patwarin coming to the rescue of her husband.

PATWARIN
Arre! Someone catch him. The little rascal!

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Sher Singh runs scared into a passerby, entangles himself. Passerby tries to catch him but Sher Singh is already away and running. Runs through the streets and out of the village and is at the summit. Sees a crowd of people on the road. He dives into the jungle and disappears.

EXT. THE TIGRESS JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

We see the backs of two pairs of cat ears. One striped one smaller one white. Twisting to the sound of Sher Singh rushing through the bushes.

CUB
What is it? Mother?

TIGRESS
Danger. Stay where you are.

As she gets up and starts in the direction in attack mode.

The cub is apprehensive. He gets up and toddles/rushes to the hiding place under an over hanging rock, following the protocol.

The tigress moves fluidly and is into the bushes.

The birds start speaking their warning signals.

She comes out on the other side.

EXT. TIGRESS JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

Sher Singh is more afraid of the present danger now and is undecided where to go now. A sudden rustling alerts him to the tigress coming at him, only fifty feet away.

Sher Singh unknowingly rushes in the direction of the cub. The tigress bounds after him.

20 feet now. . . . 15. . . .

10. . . the tigress jumps. Sher Singh looks behind just in time. Screams and ducks. The tigress overshoots the mark. Put on the breaks. Sher Singh rushes to a tree, dropping the envelope and bounds up the tree before the tigress had a chance of jumping him again. She tries to climb the tree but is not that expert at it. And Sher Singh is now perched as high as possible.

EXT. THE TIGRESS JUNGLE

The cub can see the human on top of the tree from his den under the overhanging rock. Gets out.

TIGRESS
Stay there!

The cub stops and then starts again. The tigress goes to meet him.

TIGRESS
I said stay!

CUB
Human can climb the trees! Better than you.

TIGRESS
I missed him by the whisker. Darn! Now we will have to move again. Where one human comes, the whole horde follows. They produce cubs like rabbits. Or we can finish him off. He will have to come down sooner or later and then we will see.

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - MOMENTS LATER

Sher Singh is perched on the tree looking down on the prowling tigress below him. And the cub plays look-see with him. Looking when Sher is not looking. Sher Singh plays the same. Making the cub playful and giggly.

TIGRESS
Stop it. He is the enemy.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - NIGHT

The night critters are singing. Sher Singh peers and see no movement in the dark. The white ness of envelope. The lights in a far off human habitation are twinkling and seamlessly intermingling with stars in the sky. He gets lower. No movement. Lower still.

A rustle. Running paws, a growl coming near and he climbs back up again.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - DAWN

The rooster is crowing far away: Sher Singh wakes up. Wedged between the two branches and had tied himself up for fear of falling off. He licks his lips. Reaches for a branch of the adjacent tree and plucks its fruit. Nibbles, spits it back. The tigress is looking at him intently. Cub is asleep.

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - DAY

The sun is bearing down. Sher Singh is dozing. Tigress is half dozing in the shade. The cub is catching flies.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TIGRESS DEN - LATER

Sher Singh, eyes closed. The tigress attempts to climb the tree again. Successful only in waking Sher Singh up.

SHER SINGH
Please let me go. What quarrel do
you have with me?

The cub is at the mothers side.

CUB
What is he saying?

TIGRESS
Who knows. I can not understand humans. Son! I have to go in search of food now.

CUB
What about me? The dangerous human will eat me.

TIGRESS
I don't think so. Just stay in the den. I will sneak out. He will not know that I am not here. If at all he comes close, just bare you teeth and growl. These human and cowards at heart. On the other hand, lets not take any chances. Come. We will go elsewhere.

Sher Singh sees their silhouettes going away. Sher Singh quickly gets down and picks up the envelope and exits.

EXT. VILLAGE - LATER

Sher Singh slinks into a street.

INT. POSTMASTER HOUSE - LATER

The post master watches TV. Hears a voice. Comes to the window. It is Sher Singh. Looks behind him.

POSTMASTER
What are you doing here?

SHER SINGH
It was not my fault.

POSTMASTER
Never mind whose fault it was. But things are too hot for you here. Patwari will lynch you if he saw you. And if you survive him, the police is looking for you as well.

SHER SINGH
Can you let me hide at your place till morning?

POSTMASTER

I don't think so. My wife will scream to high hell. Take this, I have this much only with me. Run away until things cool down. Don't let any one see you. They are looking for you everywhere.

O.S.

Who are you talking to?

The old woman is behind him. Looks over his shoulder. Sher Singh is no longer there.

POSTMASTER

No one.

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Sher Singh trudges along slowly to where he came down from. He looks tired.

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - NIGHT

It's a moonlit night. He sits on the ground. Even climbing up again seem like a Mount Everest. Look to the side and freezes. The face of the cub is barely a feet away from him. The cub is frozen himself. The only way for the cub to run is through Sher Singh.

Sher Singh heaves a sigh of relief.

The cub heaves a sigh of relief.

CUB

You aren't going to eat me. Are you?

Sher Singh takes out the chocolate from the bag. Unwraps and offers to the suspicious cub. Who sniffs. Licks. Takes it and begins eating.

Sher Singh smiles. And dozes off. The cub finishes his chocolate. Licking his face thoroughly. Comes forward and inspects the sleeping human. Back tracks in a hurry at one slight movement in the human. Forward again and licks its fingers for the remains of the sweet stuff.

EXT. TIGRESS JUNGLE - DAWN

The tigress stops. Sniffs and walks fast into the clearing around the den. The human is sleeping. Walks to the den. No cub. Rushes to the human. Ominous. Bares his fangs. The cub jumps over the human and is between them.

TIGRESS
Get out of the way.

Even the cub is frightened.

Sher Singh continues sleeping.

CUB
You are wrong. I like him. He does not act like a human.

TIGRESS
I know them better son.

She closes in.

Sher Singh turns, as if offering his neck for an easy kill. The tigress continues watching. And then gets away from him and sits.

TIGRESS
This is the first and last time I ever spare a human. I don't know what has come over me. But I know I am going to regret this.

The cub lets out a breath.

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - MORNING

Sher Singh wakes up. Finds where he is.

The tigress sits only a few feet away from him. He is on his feet in a flash and runs.

No change in the tigress.

He stops. The tigress watches him calmly. Cub is asleep.

Sher Singh picks his bag. Walks away with his face towards the cat. A safe distance.

SHER SINGH
This is my mother. I know what she looks like at last. Now I am going to find her.

Turns and goes away.

The tigress drops her chin on her paws again and looks at her sleeping cub. Wonder what she is thinking.

EXT. THE FLAMINGO GROUNDS IN MUMBAI - DAY

FLAMINGO

...that is what little Sher Singh
told the tigress as he took her
leave.

The Flamingo stops. The pelican get out of the trance. The other flamingos are dotting the marshes. Away from them.

PELICAN

Go on! Don't Stop.

FLAMINGO

Wait a little..Mister. Give me a
breather. Get me a sweet little
fish. Refreshment time. Go on. I am
waiting right here. And then we
will start again.

Pelican groans.

EXT. THE JUNGLE - LATER

We again fly over the tree tops as we try to follow Sher Singh. He stops at the higher ground from where he can see the valley and the roads and the tiny vehicles plying.

A gun barrel that comes and sticks his neck shudders him.

MOOCH (O. S.)

Turn around.

The man with a huge MOOCH stares down at him.

MOOCH

What are you doing here?

SHER SINGH

I am going home.

MOOCH

You should not be loitering here.
There is a tigress here.

SHER SINGH

I know. I saw her.

MOOCH whistles and two more men arrive from two directions.

MOOCH

Tell me there was a white tiger cub
with it?

Sher Singh looks at the guns all of them have and the jingle of metal implements in the bag one of them carries and their overall suspect looks.

SHER SINGH

NO! I never saw a cub.

2ND MAN

Where did you see the tigress?

SHER SINGH

I don't know. I saw her 2 weeks
ago.

3RD MAN

Whose son are you?

SHER SINGH

....My mothers.

MOOCH

Looks slow in the head. Move along.
I don't want to see you here.

Sher Singh moves along.

The three watch him climb down the slope.

3RD MAN

You sure your intel is right? I say we come back later.

MOOCH

Later? After the news reaches the Forest officer? What is wrong with you? The deal is for 10 lakh for the white tiger cub. You don't like Laxmi? My information is rock solid. Lets go get her.

EXT. THE JUNGLE OUTSKIRTS - SAME TIME

Sher Singh has overheard the exchange. He is worried.

EXT. THE JUNGLE - DAY

We again skim the tree tops looking through to the ground and follow Sher Singh as he runs back into the jungle.

EXT. THE JUNGLE - DAY

He is retracing his steps. Passes the very same landmarks one after the other.

The roar of the tigress reverberates through.

He stops.

EXT. JUNGLE - SAME TIME

The trio stops and changes direction. The tigress roars are distressing.

We intercut between the trio and Sher Singh rushing to the same spot.

The trio is there before Sher Singh.

Sher Singh approaches from behind a tree.

The tigress in her hind leg in a cruel foot clamp, has almost torn the meat off it in an effort to pull herself free.

She tries to get at the four people, who laugh standing at a safe distance.

The tigress sniffs and looks straight at Sher Singh through the bushes.

She flays at him.

The hate and accusation in her eyes can almost be read.

MOOCH

Aim properly. Only at the underbelly. Or the price will go down on her skin.

GUNSHOT!

All goes quite.

MOOCH

Now fan out with the tape recorders. The cub can not be far. Didn't I tell you. DIHADI TO BAN GAYI AB LOTTERY NIKALO.

EXT. JUNGLE - MOMENTS LATER

The call of the tigress.

Close on the tape recorder.

The call of the tigress.

EXT. TIGRESS DEN - CONTINUOUS

The cub hears the call. Come bounding out. Happy. And Answers.

THE JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

The Poachers and Sher Singh. A Race between them begins.

EXT. THE DEN CLEARING

One poacher emerges. Pushes the button. Tigress calls.

EXT. NEAR THE DEN - CONTINUOUS

The cub opens his mouth. A small hand grabs it and picks the animal up.

EXT. THE TIGRESS DEN - MOMENTS LATER

Mooch, 1st and 4th assemble in the clearing. The Mooch towers over the empty den and surveys the marks on the ground.

MOOCH

Sherni and the cub...and size six sneakers. Some one has been here before us. Someone little..A BOY?

4TH

Boy?

MOOCH

A boy with a bag. Who saw the tigress only a week before..

1ST

But why would he..

MOOCH

Find the boy. He cant be far. I'll darned if I get beaten by a shaggy boy!

EXT. THE JUNGLE - LATER

Sher Singh runs with the struggling cub. The cub scartches Sher Singh and in a pique, Sher Singh hold him in front of him and glares at him. The cub keeps crying. Sher Singh melts.

SHER SINGH

You mother...your mother has gone away. Stop it! She has left you. She does not like you.

The cub frees from his grasp. Sher Singh catches him and ties him to a branch with a nylon rope pilfered from the his bag.

SHER SINGH

You wait here. You are in danger.
Don't make things difficult for me
or I will leave you here.
Understand?

The frantic cub is circling, pulling at the rope. Sher Singh goes away. We move along with him.

EXT. THE JUNGLE - MOMENTS LATER

A large black rope sways under a branch. The cub stops his struggles.

We move up.

The black rope is the tale of an serious old BABOON. Four more junior baboons jump on the same tree from different directions and settle on the lower branches. One showing his teeth to the cub. One is bold enough to get down get near the cub but jumps away as soon as the cub advances cawing a roar. The three others laugh.

BABOON 3

He is only a cub.

OLD BABOON

Remove his gag. We are removing
your gag. Be still.

The baboon, keeping his distance, stretches his arms, pulls away the sock. The cub shakes his head. Stretches his jaw. The baboon sniff at the sock. Likes the aroma.

OLD BABOON

Why you with the human, Where is
your mother?

CUB

I don't know.

OLD BABOON

What does the human say?

CUB

How do I know. I asked him but he
does not know how to speak.

The wizened old baboon shakes his head gravely. He signals one of his baboons who gets down and begins untying the rope.

OLD BABOON
I should give you a piece of
advise. Don't have any thing to do
with humans. Hurry up! The human
will be here any moment.

The baboon begins fumbling with the knot.

OLD BABOON
The human is not trustworthy. And I
should know. They are our distant
relatives.

Sher Singh appears.

BABOON 3
He is coming. He is coming.

The baboon at the knot, starts biting at the rope, pulling at
it. Sher Singh comes a running. A stick in hand.

SHER SINGH
Ho! Ho! Shoo!

The baboons bare their teeth but keep distance. The baboon at
the rope having abandoned his task.

Sher Singh unties the cub. And pulls him away from the
baboons.

OLD BABOON
Remember what I told you. .

SHER SINGH
I am going to take you to Jim
Corbett. You will be safe there.

OLD BABOON
Remember what I told you. Humans!
Never trust them.

Sher Singh drags him away.

OLD BABOON
They have already killed the poor
bastards mother.

Baboon 3 calls out. .

BABOON 3
Little Tiger. They have already. .

OLD BABOON
Stop! Don't tell him.

EXT. THE BUS STAND - TOWN

Sher Singh walks through the crowd. The pall of sadness is replaced by a mixture of hope, fear and -at sea- like bewilderment.

The conductors are calling out for passengers.

Pi thoragarh! Pi thoragarh! Superfast. No stappages.

Dam colony! Dam Colony!

Whistles.

The Cub peeps from the peephole through the bag. So many humans! He slides deep into the bag.

Hardwar! Hardwar!

Tanakpur!

Whistle!

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - DAY

A bus moves through the hills.

INT. THE BUS - CONTINUOUS

Conductor moves down the aisle.

CONDUCTOR
Ticket! Ticket!!

Sher Singh sits at the window on a three seater, a self conscious 30 something woman sits beside him. In full makeup, She is enjoying the eyeballs. The conductor checks the tickets.

CONDUCTOR
The boy with you?

She shakes her head distastefully.

CONDUCTOR
Kid! Who are you with?

SHER SINGH
I am with myself. A ticket for Jim
Corbett national park.

The conductor gives him the ticket. Eying him.

EXT. THE BUS STAND - SAME TIME

The Mooch with another man is scouring the bus stand.

Looking for the boy.

The 3rd man meets him.

3RD MAN

He is going to Jim Corbett.
National Park. I have got the bus
number.

Mooch and the others rush out...

EXT. THE BUS STAND - CONTINUOUS

...and pile into a Jeep.

INT. THE BUS - DAY

Sher Singh sleeps. The cub looks at the humans legs from the bag at Sher Singh s feet.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The jeep moves fast.

INT. BUS - DAY

Sher Singh is asleep. The third passenger besides the painted woman is new. He tries to snuggle close to the woman and is give a warning stare.

The bag twists and the Cub peers out and sniffs the leg of the woman.

She looks sharply at the lecher. Who smiles leeringly.

The Cub is now all out and grazes the leg once more.

The woman turns to the lecher.

WOMAN

I dare you to do it again.

The lecher slides away.

But the cub does it again.

The woman gets up and smacks the lecher left and right and sits down self righteously.

LECHER

What did I did I do? I did nothing.

The commotion makes the cub try to dive into the bag and feels the woman again, more strongly. The woman bends, throws her hand blind under the seats and picks up the cub. As soon as the cub is on display, he caws and tries to look as threatening as he can. The woman screams.

The cub jumps on the seat besides the screaming woman. Sher Singh tries to catch it. The cub jumps. .over the heads of the passengers in front

A PASSANGHER

What is this?

B PASSANGER

A white tiger cub. Catch him.

SHER SINGH

No! It is mine!

He jumps over the passengers as well. Jumps to catch him by the tail. A large man catches Sher Singh by the neck. The driver breaks suddenly. Throwing everyone forward. Sher and Sher are thrown against the door. He opens the door, catches the cub by the waist and jumps. Before another passenger got down he is into the fields.

The Jeep slides behind the Bus. Mooch and others get down. One of them shoots in Sher Singh's direction.

EXT. THE FIELDS - DAY

Sher Singh doubles back and hides. The poachers keep onwards. Sher Singh waits a bit and then rushes back to the highway. Slips and falls. The cub is thrown out of his grasp. The cub seizes the opportunity to try to run away.

SHER SINGH

Wait!

CUB

Maaa! Where are you?

Looks: Sees the KANCHANJANGA peak and takes to it.

SHER SINGH
Stop! I say stop.

The cub is on the highway already.

A car whizzes past him. Seeing that the human is upon, the cub jumps headlong, nearly hit by another oncoming car. The fright he gets makes him freeze in the middle of the other half of the highway. A trawler hurtles down, straight for the cub. Sher Singh lets one vehicle through and rushes after the cub. The cub in his panic runs straight for the oncoming trawler.

The trawler honks loudly.

The trawler breaks. The tires lock but do not stop its forward movement. Sher Singh grabs the cub but the trawler is already upon him.

I/E. TRUCK CABIN

The driver sees the kid go down under as the trawler stops at last accompanied by the sound of a THUD.

The frantic SIKH driver gets down.

SIKH
O Mereya Nanaka! What have you made
me do!

Peers under the chassis.

Sher Singh and the cub lie together in the foetal position of twins. Surprise and then wide grin replace on the face of the BIG Sikh.

SIKH
Kamaal Ho gya! A miracle! Ha! Ha!
Come out come out. Don't be afraid.
Take my hand. Are you all right?

The cub is even more scared. But this time Sher Singh has him.

SIKH
Where the hell were you going?

SHER SINGH
I am going to Jim Corbett park.

Sher Singh stumbles.

SIKH
Alone? You sure your are OK?

Nod. The Sikh looks at the piling traffic behind him.

SIKH
Get in. Get in then.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

The trawler starts. And the small traffic jam clears.

EXT. TRUCK CABIN

The Sikh jumps at the Cub as Sher Singh tries to settle him between them.

SIKH
Keep the cat away?

SHER SINGH
It is a Sher. Not a cat. Can't you see?

SIKH
.....Really! A white tiger!! I'll be...

SHER SINGH
Yeah! Only one in ten thousand tiger cub is white. He is unique.

Tries to pat the cub. The cub growls.

SIKH
You sure it is a He?

SHER SINGH
Yeah! See!

The raised cub tries to snap at Sher Singh.

HE bites too. Have tiger, will bite eh heh heh! Tell me you haven't stolen it from its mother!

SHER SINGH
His mother is..

Starts to say more but then whispers it into Sikh's ear.

SHER SINGH
And where is your mother?

SHER SINGH
I am looking for her.

He brings out the picture. And hands it to the driver. But does not let go of it himself.

SHER SINGH
Have you seen her asking about me?

The Driver looks and recognizes her instantly. He has another different picture of her pasted behind his seat.

SIKH
She is your mother?

Sikh throws the stuff on the dashboard down the seat across Sher Singh.

SIKH
Oh Ho! Pick it up please.

Sher Singh bends down and screams. The Sikh spots a blue bruise on the boy's pelvis, forget to remove the picture behind him and parks the truck by the side.

SIKH
Show me the injury. I said show it to me!

Apart from the bruise, some broken bone is pushing against the skin.

SIKH
Oh my god!

Sher Singh is teary now.

SIKH
It must be hurting like hell. Isn't it?

SHER SINGH
Feels like I am going to die. I do not want to die before seeing my mother now.

SIKH
Then why didn't you tell me? YOU IMBECILE!

Tears are flowing freely now.

SHER SINGH
I was afraid that you might not
like that and leave me on the road.

INT. STAR STUDY - NIGHT

Prasad drinks the proffered water. No change on Rajiv's
expression. Prasad looks at his watch.

PRASAD
The little child had to endure more
than his share. I sometimes wonder
if there really is someone looking
over us. Guiding us. Someone sure
was looking over that boy.

Rajiv's suspicions have doubled.

RAJIV KUMAR
You are one piece of work. Keep
weaving your web but don't think I
can be trapped.

EXT. JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK - EVENING

A crowd of domestic and foreign tourists assemble at the
gate. The Sikh carries an unconscious Sher Singh on his
shoulder and the cub in the crook, causing a flutter

SIKH
This is the kid. He saved this
little tiger cub from the clutch of
poachers.

Prasad approaches.

PRASAD
You talked to me.

SIKH
You got the doctors? The kid is
serious.

The Sikh unloads the kid and Prasad helps him to carry him
into the dispensary. The cub is scooped by someone else.

PRASAD (V.O.)
That was the first time I saw him.
I know you are not going to believe
me. Even I did not realize it at
the time. I felt a sort of
closeness I had never known before.

INT. STAR STUDY - NIGHT

Prasad takes out the pictures of Sher Singh, Cub, The Sikh, himself, the foreign tourists, domestic tourists and the staff and gives it to Rajiv Kumar. Who looks at them feigning disinterest.

RAJIV KUMAR

Hoon!

The FM guy is muttering into his collar piece.

INT. STAR STUDY - CONTINUOUS

PRASAD

All the tourists and the staff treated him that day like he had returned victorious from a war.

Smiles a little. Without any response from the star.

PRASAD

I took him to my place later. And my wife felt the same way about him. No. Even more...

FLASH:

Sher Singh is asleep on a bed. Prasad's wife gazes at him intently. He holds her hand tightly.

EXT. THE STAFF QUARTERS - JIM CORBETT - DAWN

The Rooster 2 walks up the stairs of the building. Stops midstairs to look at the man sized mirror with the caption:

How I am looking today!

Admires himself. And walks up.

Is at the roof.

At the vantage point.

Pulls his head back and lets go.

ROOSTER 2

Cukroooo cucrooo cooooooooooooo!

EXT. ANIMAL HOLDING PEN - MORNING

Prasad carries Sher Singh around the pen, in a wheel chair.
The cub lies alone in the pen.

SHER SINGH

What is to become of him now?

PRASAD

He is very small. We will try that a lactating mother might accept her as her own. He might see her as his own mother.

SHER SINGH

Won't he know the difference?

PRASAD

He might but then he might not. What is more important is that the mother accepts him. Now lets go home. My wife has prepared Idli sambar for you. You like Idli sambar?

SHER SINGH

No!

PRASAD

You should have told me. What do you like?

SHER SINGH

I like the Maalpua Patwarin makes for Rahul and Rani.

PRASAD

Maalpua it is. Let go.

SHER SINGH

When will I be able to walk?

PRASAD

Soon! Soon!

SHER SINGH

Do you think Sardar Ji can find my mother?

PRASAD

Of course! He travels all over India. Only he can find her. But you can stay with us as long as you want.

Sher Singh is not too thrilled of this eventuality.

INT. PRASAD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Prasad sits on the bed and Lavanya lies face away from him. She has been crying.

LAVANYA

What mother will abandon the child like this. She must be a WITCH.

PRASAD

SHHHH. .he might be awake.

LAVANYA

The Lord is very unjust. He grants children to those who abandon them and overlook those who want them.

PRASAD

Now Stop it.

I/E. THE HOLDING PEN - DAY

There is a partition between the cub and the other area where a tigress and her cub are being unloaded. But the viewer does not know that. Yet. Prasad, an uppity Sher Singh, still on a wheelchair and other staff outside the pen.

PRASAD

Don't make any noise. She is a wild one.

The other cubs start roaming around the pen. The tigress surveys the surrounding.

The white cub caws.

The tigress rushes to him. Hisses!

CUB

Maaa! Are you my maa?

The tigress Growls angrily and attacks the cub, but is prevented by the mesh separating them.

The cub cowers and goes into hiding.

EXT. THE HOLDING PEN

Sher Singh is sober.

PRASAD

The tigress does not like him.

SHER SINGH

I will keep him. I will ask my mother to let me keep him.

PRASAD

Of course you would. But that will not be in the interest of the cub. Only a tigress can teach him the ways of the tigers.

SHER SINGH

But why doesn't she like him. He is so beautiful?

PRASAD

Don't worry. All is not lost yet. We have ways.

INT. SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sher Singh is asleep. Lavanya gazes at him. Prasad urges her to come away.

LAVANYA

What if we keep him?

PRASAD

He wants to be with his mother. Don't get too attached. What's gotten into you?

LAVANYA

But he fills me so in love. He is the one I have always seen in my dreams. I swear. Can't he stay? I promise, I will love him like a mother.

PRASAD

SHHH! Crazy woman! You always said you did not want to adopt. Many times.

LAVANYA

I don't want to adopt.

PRASAD

Then what is this?

Lavanya, unable to explain, weeps. Prasad sits up and places his hand over her head, wipes the tears.

LAVANYA

I know I am related to him from a previous birth. I know he is my child.

He keeps on soothing her. The pupils of Sher Singh move beneath the closed lids.

PRASAD (V.O.)

I knew at that moment that I had to send him away as soon as possible. Lavanya was getting too attached to him. And then the news came...

INT. OFFICE - JIM CORBETT - DAY

Prasad takes the phone from his colleague who is holding it for him.

INTERCUTS WITH SIKH IN ON A ROADSIDE PHONE BOOTH.

SIKH

I have found her. The boy's...uh mother. She is in Shimla. She is an actress. She is shooting there and guess what? She comes from the same area as Our boy. She used to be a Nautakiwaki (dancer). So may be the kid is right about her after all, unlikely or not.

INT. PRASAD BEDROOM

Lavanya wakes up. A premonition strikes her. She looks everywhere in her house. There is no sign of her husband and her boy. Frantically, she runs to the adjacent house. She knock on her neighbors.

LAVANYA

Have you seen Sher Singh, the boy who was with us?

NEIGHBOR

Prasad Ji has taken him to Shimla to see his mother. Didn't you know?

Lavanya is devastated.

EXT. SHIMLA - DAY

The first snow fall of the season. The tourists are making merry. The Soft snow is falling and covering everything in white.

INT. HOTEL CHINAR - SHIMLA - DAY

The bell boy drops the bags in the room and take his modest tip with a pinch of salt.

BELL BOY
Call 21 if you need anything.

And exits.

PRASAD
I must call my wife. She must be wondering where we went. You want to talk to her?

SHER SINGH
No! I don't like her. It is she who is a witch.

PRASAD
...then I am going to go see your mother and tell her about you.

SHER SINGH
What if I she does not like me?

The boy is worried sick now that the moment he has dreamt of all his life draws near.

PRASAD
Just stay here. OK?

SHER SINGH
But don't tell her that the police are after me and that I broke Patwari's leg.

EXT. SHIMLA - LATER

The snow is falling yet. The whole city is now draped in white.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SAME TIME

The view from window is breath taking. A group of tourists on the road just below the window. Shower each other with the snow. Laughing merrily. One of them slips. More laughter. Tries to get up, slips again. Roars of delight.

We turn to look inside. There is no one in sight. We move slowly to look under the bed.

Sher Singh is there. Biting his nails.

Click!

The door opens.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Sher Singh watches: The trousers of Prasad and the Sari of his mother enter.

PRASAD (O.S.)

He must have gone out or something.
He will be here soon. You please wait.

MEERA KUMARI (O.S.)

I can not wait a moment more. I have been waiting too long for my son.

PRASAD

You please stay here while I go look for him.

The trousers recede from the door.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Under the bed, Sher Singh noiselessly retreats further.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

The Sari turns and faces the bed. And slowly approaches. At the edge of the bed. The knees bend a little and Meera Kumari's face appears, smiling at us. She extend her hand. Sher singh trembling hand hesitates but finally meets her.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sher Singh is out from under the bed. Straightens. His mother gazes lovingly at him.

MEERA KUMARI
Look at me son.

No dice. Eyes are filled with tears again now.

MEERA KUMARI
Are you angry with me?

Shake of the head.

MEERA KUMARI
Then why don't you look at me. Look at me please!

Sher Singh, with an effort looks at her. And jumps at her for an embrace.

I/E. HOTEL CHINAR - SAME TIME

The room is empty.

The lobby is empty.

The road down the window has only one passerby, a porter with a heavy load.

The reception area is uneventful.

The marquee is empty.

Under the bed.

Sher Singh is sleeping. And laughing in his dream.

INT. HOTEL WILD FLOWER HALL - ROOM - DAY

Prasad sits uncomfortably on the plush sofa in the well appointed sitting area of the suite.

Meera Kumari breezes in.

MEERA KUMARI
Sit Sit.. Please.. So where is the young boy who wanted to see me.

He saved a tiger cub from poachers?
Isn't it?

Prasad nods as she picks up newspaper cutting.

PRASAD
I will bring him. He really is a
very loving boy.

MEERA KUMARI
Isn't snow beautiful? Well the
shooting is cancelled for today.
You can bring him any time of the
day.

PRASAD
Can I ask you something if you
don't mind?

MEERA KUMARI
Ask away.

PRASAD
Are you.. Were you a err.. dancer in
a Nautanki troupe before?

The smile fades.

MEERA KUMARI
Yes I was. It is an Art form. A
folk art. Do you have any problem
with that?

PRASAD
No! No! Yes yes! You see? This boy
thinks.. he has been told that..

MEERA KUMARI
Nautanki dancers are bad girls?

PRASAD
That you are his mother. I don't
know the truth but he believes
that.. for real.

MEERA KUMARI
What did you say?

PRASAD
He thinks that you are his mother.
He is a very cute child. I don't
know. In your day at the
nautanki.. perhaps!

Meera Kumari composes her self. Gets up, makes herself a drink, gulps it down. Prasad watching in apprehension. Turns to him.

MEERA KUMARI

Who sent you?

PRASAD

Who? Me? No I came on my own.

MEERA KUMARI

Do you people have something against Nautanki walis. You think we have no character.

PRASAD

No No you misunderstand.

MEERA KUMARI

Do you realize how much this can harm me. They will make a scandal out of it. Already they are a hundred scandals about me. A linkup with everyone. And who is going to believe? A Nautanki wali or a boy?

PRASAD

But madam!

MEERA KUMARI

Ok! Ok! You have got me. How much do you want?

PRASAD

I don't want anything. This boy really thinks that you are his mother.

MEERA KUMARI

And I say I am not.

PRASAD

But he truly completely thinks that. Only you can convince him otherwise.

MEERA KUMARI

This is only my second lead role. Such kind of bad publicity will ruin me. I don't want a son. I have struggled for five long years to get here. AND I AM NOT ABOUT TO GIVE IT ALL UP FOR ANYONE. You understand?

PRASAD
I will bring the boy right now.

MEERA KUMARI
No you wont. I am nobody's mother.

PRASAD
Then please tell that to him on his face.

Prasad gets up and exits in some state of turmoil.

Meera Devi is dials on the state of the art Nokia of 2002.

EXT. SHIMLA - EVENING

PRASAD (V.O.)
I couldn't bring myself to take the devastating news to the unfortunate boy. Perhaps she really was not his mother. I would have given anything not to be in that situation.

The snow fall has abated. The Ridge is full of revellers.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

The bed underside is empty.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - EVENING

Prasad enters the hotel. And stops. Sher Singh looks at him. Prasad's body language is not assuring in the least.

Sher Singh starts waving and accusing finger at him.

SHER SINGH
I knew it. You and your wife. You don't want me to see my mother.

The activity in the lobby stops.

SHER SINGH
I will go and see my mother by myself. I don't need you.

He runs and before anyone knew what is happening he is out of the door.

PRASAD

Please! Help me..go after him. Take him to the wild flower hall hotel. I have a bad leg.

The bell boy looks in the direction of the floor manager, gets a nod and goes after the boy.

EXT. SHIMLA - EVENING

Sher Singh moves fast and is not even properly clothed for the weather.

Bell boy comes up behind him.

BELL BOY

Stop. Go slow. You will slip. I will take you where you want to go.

Sher Singh lets him run abreast.

BELL BOY

What is with you guys. Your father and mother fighting? Don't worry It happens with everyone.

SHER SINGH

He is not my father.

BELL BOY

Oh! Then what the story? Did you run away from home? But don't worry! Mothers love you more when you do that. I did it once too. And Boy! The feasts Amma prepared for me for days on end. But don't you do that again. It makes them worry!

The bell boy stops at a road side DEHRA (temple) pays a hasty respect and continues.

At the gates of the Hotel. Sher singh stops.

BELL BOY

Come now! What is with you. Before you were hard to stop, now harder to budge. Ok! Stay here. I will go in and tell you mother. Wait here! You father will be here soon.

SHER SINGH

He is not my father.

BELL BOY
 OK! OK! I know now. Wait here!
 Wait! How will I know who your
 mother is.

Sher Singh hand him the picture. Bell Boy takes a look,
 doesn't react like usual.

BELL BOY
 Don't go any where. Your father
 will be here soon.

Runs into the hotel.

Sher singh retreats back to the road and is at the Dehra.
 Folds his hands and entreats silently to the Deity. GODDESS
 KALI, tongue out, does not look at all pleased.

INT. RECEPTION - NIGHT

The bell boy is a known person. The receptionist has the
 picture in his hand.

RECEPTIONIST
 She is checking out.

BELL BOY
 Who is she?

RECEPTIONIST
 Don't you know? Why are you
 carrying her picture then. She is
 the Heroine. She is shooting with
 Govinda. There She is....

Meera Kumari steps out of the lift. Glasses and all. Followed
 by her small entourage.

The Bell boy watches, open mouthed, the picture and then her.

EXT. DEHRA - EVENING

Sher Singh meditates.

BELL BOY
 There you are. Umm you sure she is
 your mother?

Sher Singh nods fiercely.

BELL BOY

She is checking out...going away
from here...like right now!

EXT. HOTEL WILD FLOWER HALL - MARQUEE - EVENING

Sher Singh Arrives at the marquee at a run. Three cars are waiting, one behind the other and start moving as he approaches.

The first car has known film artists. But of no interest to Sher Singh. The second is a SUV.

Sher Singh jumps on the footrest to look in.

PASSENGER 1

Boy! What are you doing.

Sher Singh gets down.

The last one is a luxury car with black tinted windows. Sher Singh is unable to look in. He beats on the window glass.

The door man gets interested.

DOORMAN

Hey!

The window glass slides down, Film Star Govinda peers out.

GOVINDA

What is it beta?

Sher Singh looks beyond him. It is dark. The car stops. The driver gets out and the dome light lights up. There She is! Sher Singh's mother. He starts waving the striped cloth.

SHER SINGH

Mother! Mother! It is me! Sher
Singh. Your son!

The embarrassed actress reaches over Govinda and raises the glass.

The door man gets hold of Sher Singh. The driver of the Car gets back in.

SHER SINGH

Please don't leave me! You are my
mother! I am Sher Singh. Remember
the ditch! THE DITCH!

The bell boy arrives.

DOORMAN

Is he with you? Take him away or he will get it.

SHER SINGH

Please don't leave me. I am your son.

The car has already started moving. And moves out of the gate, turns and vanishes.

The doorman releases Sher Singh and he bounds after the car. The Bell boy follows him.

EXT. HOTEL WILD FLOWER HALL - GATE

No sign of Sher Singh. The bell boys watches Prasad approach with his limp.

BELL BOY

What is going on. The woman is not a mother. She is an actress.

PRASAD

Where is Sher Singh? Did She see her? What did she say to him?

BELL BOY

She is gone. And So is your son.

Prasad gets him by the collar.

PRASAD

Why did you let him go? You speed talking, good for nothing hillybilly!

Leaves him.

PRASAD

I am sorry! I very troubled right now.

BELL BOY

Don't worry. Its on me. You can say a few more things if it calms you down. I don't mind. I don't know where the Boy is. But Meera Kumari has only shifted hotels. She will be there till the morning and be gone. To Bombay.

EXT. SHIMLA - STREET - LATER

Prasad knocks at the gate of a Villa. Someone watches him from the curtain. The door opens. An two big men get out to walk towards him. Prasad gulps down his spit. They get out of the gate. One of them grabs Prasad by the collar and drags him away to a side.

GOON 1
Stop bothering Madam.

PRASAD
Please listen to me. It is about a boy. The boy will be crushed.

GOON 2
Crushed or not. You are not to come near this place again.

Pushes Prasad away.

GOON 1
Get the hell out of here.

PRASAD
PLEASE let me talk to the Madam.

GOON 1
Are you deaf or something? Don't make things difficult for yourself.

Prasad approaches them again.

GOON 2
Teri to!

He pushes him, Prasad staggers and falls spreadeagled. Gets up (Not easy, with a bad leg) on the slippery snow and we see him walking away.

PRASAD (V.O.)
All I wanted to do was see the boy happy for once.

I/E. HOTEL CHINAR - SHIMLA - NIGHT

Snow is falling again. Prasad enters the lobby. The same bell boy is waiting. But do not have to ask anything.

PRASAD
Where is Sher Singh?

BELL BOY
He hasn't returned.

EXT. SHIMLA - NIGHT

The night time festivities at the peak of the tourists season.

PRASAD (V.O.)
The whole staff of the hotel, later even the police and me scoured the whole of Shimla but the boy had vanished.

EXT. THE RIDGE - NIGHT

The clock tower shows 2 AM. Snow is falling. The area is devoid of any living soul until Prasad comes into the picture to bang at the door of the police box. The policeman who opens the window looks to have gotten tired of Prasad.

PRASAD
Did you see him?

BEAT POLICEMAN
You should not have lost him in the first place.

EXT. SHIMLA-RIDGE - NIGHT

Not a soul stirs at the maiden. The snow has stopped again. Except Prasad limping ahead and the Bell Boy trudging behind him. They pass the McDonalds Joker sitting on his bench. Half covered in snow.

BELL BOY
We have searched all over.

PRASAD
I have to find him.

BELL BOY
But he is not anywhere. Someone must have taken him in. We will find him in the morning.

PRASAD
He will not go to any one. He only wants his mother.

The Bell Boy can feel Prasad's agony.

BELL BOY

Lets us go back. You are not looking good yourself. I will search for him.

The bell boy makes the mistake of touching Prasad on the shoulder. And Prasad spills over. He weeps. Limp along to a snow covered bench. Sits and weeps. Talking alternatively in Tamil and Hindi.

PRASAD

That poor boy is going to die!

BELL BOY

No man! Think good thoughts.

PRASAD

That boy is going to die.

The beat policeman arrives winding up to send what he thinks are stragglers, away.

BEAT POLICEMAN

Haven't found your son? I saw a boy a couple of hours ago. But he ran away.

PRASAD

Where did you find him?

BEAT POLICEMAN

Right here! On the ridge.

Prasad gets up.

BELL BOY

Then he must be here. If he went down from the ridge. One of us must have seen him.

BEAT POLICEMAN

But he is not here now. I would have seen him.

Prasad is limp running in the open ridge ground. Bell boy passes the Joker again. Stops. A small mound of snow settles under the Joker's stretched hand. He removes some snow from it. A cloth. Prasad turns and looks at the Bell boy roving the snow frantically. He is there just as soon and wants to do it himself. Sher Singh, unconscious, frozen with his legs to his chest, reveals himself.

The snow on the Joker falls down and his smile becomes once again. Prasad holds Sher Singh while the beat Policeman is tries to find a pulse.

BEAT POLICEMAN

He is alive. I will carry him.

PRASAD

NO! I will take him. Just tell me where.

He Picks him up and runs after the policeman. Limp and all.

We stay there and hear his laugh and cry, all at the same time.

I/E. SHIMLA - DAWN

The snow clad city.

An alarm clock is ringing.

In a chicken coop. The Rooster 3 is sleeping. Sound of wood striking wood. The rooster open his eyes in alarm. Looks at the clock. Its is 6 0 clock. He gets up in a hurry. And runs like hell. Jumps from one roof to another to a chimney. Many are already awake.

Plants his legs. Pulls his head back and lets go.

ROOSTER 3

Jago! Jago! Jago! Thandi Bahoot
Hiiiiiiiiiiii! (It is frigging cold
outside)

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Sher Singh wakes up. Looks around. Prasad is sleeping on a chair besides him. He gets down without disturbing him. Puts on his clothes. Not the ones Prasad brought. Slips out of the door.

Prasad opens his eyes. The door just shuts it self with a click. No Sher Singh.

Is on his feet in a flash. Runs out, barefoot. Bound down the stairs into the lobby. Is out of the door.

PRASAD

Stop!

Sher Singh stops and turns. Defiant.

Prasad makes an effort to act. Despite Rajiv Kumar's assertion. He is not a good actor at all. Waves the papers and photograph at the boy. Reaches him. Sher Singh takes the picture. It is a photograph of Meera Kumari along with Prasad and Chhapi Ram and Goon 1.

PRASAD

What was the point of going to your mother in front of every one. You would have ruined her career! Ah!
(His bad leg)

PRASAD

Here! She has sent a letter for you. She wants to see you. But you must promise me that you will do just as I say. Read it?

Sher Singh's defiance is replaced by hope. Resurfacing again. He looks hard at the letter. Is it his ticket?

SHER SINGH

I can not read.

PRASAD

Let me... It says.. that .. I will read just as she wrote... Hmm. Dear Son. I love you. More than anything. I am really really sorry that I did not acknowledge you yesterday. It is not you, but me. It is my bad fortunes that keeps my son away from me. But I am proud of you. How brave you are.

SHER SINGH

You have written it yourself.

PRASAD

Why would I do that? Go to the room and I bring your mother there. yes! Go on.

Sher Singh stares at him. Afraid not to make a mistake.

PRASAD

She is right here in this hotel.

SHER SINGH

You are lying!

PRASAD
I am not lying. Hey!

SHER SINGH
You are not lying?

PRASAD
I am not lying.

SHER SINGH
.....Did she say why she threw me
into the ditch?

PRASAD
She did not throw you into the
ditch. She Swore that she didn't.

Sher Singh continues looking down and looks at Prasad, eyes filled, who opens his arms and Sher Singh jumps in, not out of affection for Prasad but for the fact that he is overwhelmed now and would take anything to cry on. He cries uncontrollably.

PRASAD
Please do not cry my child. Every
thing is going to be all right.

I/E. HOTEL CHINAR - SHIMLA - LATER

Meera Kumari, Prasad, hotel manager, Chhapi Ram sit together.

MEERA KUMARI
You know! I am only doing this
once. Later I will not have
anything to do with you or the boy.
And don't think I am here because
you threatened to go to the media.

Prasad keeps nodding somberly.

MEERA KUMARI
What am I going to say to the boy?

INT. HOTEL ROOM

(The dream of Sher Singh will play out in real now. But will be seen from angles different than what was dreamt before. Prasad is making his dream come true.)

The view from window is breath taking. A group of tourists on the road just below the window.

Shower each other with the snow. Laughing merrily. One of them slips. More laughter. Tries to get up, slips again. Roars of delight.

We turn to look inside. There is no one in sight. We move slowly to look under the bed.

Sher Singh bites his nails.

Click!

The door opens. Making him jump.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Prasad and Meera Kumari enter the room.

PRASAD

He must have gone out or something.
He will be here soon. You please wait.

Meera Kumari gesture with her hand: Where is he?

Prasad points under the bed.

MEERA KUMARI

I can not wait a moment more. I have been waiting too long for my son.

PRASAD

You please stay here while I go look for him.

Prasad goes out of the door.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Sher Singh noiselessly retreats. Confused emotions.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Meera Kumari turns and faces the bed. And slowly approaches. At the edge of the bed. She bends a little and we are looking at Sher Singh looking at us. Her hand extends to Sher Singh who hesitates and finally finds it with his.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sher Singh is out from under the bed. Straightens. His mother gazing lovingly at him. Sher Singh not meeting her eyes.

MEERA KUMARI

Look at me son.

No dice. Eyes are filled with tears again now.

MEERA KUMARI

Are you angry with me?

Shake of the head.

MEERA KUMARI

Then why don't you look at me. Look at me please!

Sher Singh, with an effort looks at her. And jumps at her for an embrace. She catches him in her arms. Looking discomfited. Waves her hand to Prasad who is looking in from the window.

MEERA KUMARI

Such an beautiful son I have. Let me look at him.

Her earpiece gets loose. She extends Sher Singh in her arms and tries to act like a mother. Good thing that Sher Singh is not a critic.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Prasad is perched on the window ledge. Chhapi Ram holding him. An ear piece on Prasad and a mike. He takes the mike to his mouth.

PRASAD

I want you to promise me something son. Will you do something I ask you?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

SHER SINGH

Ask me anything. I will do it...

SHER SINGH
You are very beautiful!

MEERA KUMARI
Yeah! I know.

SHER SINGH
My mother! I can't wait to see the
look on Rani's face.

He giggles in his tears.

MEERA KUMARI
Before I say this..my son. Know
this..that I love you. There is
nothing more that I love than you.

Sher Singh embraces her again.

SHER SINGH
I am so happy today.

MEERA KUMARI
I am going to ask you something.
You can not see me ever again.

SHER SINGH
No! I will always be with you.

MEERA KUMARI
Try to understand my son. What
mother wants to be away from her
son? But I can't.

SHER SINGH
NO please!

MEERA KUMARI
But I will always be with you, in
my heart. I will write to..write
to? I am not going....OK OK OKI
will always write to you. If you
don't do that. Your mother will be
ruined. She will never be able to
show her face to any one again. She
will have no option but to die...

Meera Devi gets on her knees and starts weeping. Sher Singh quickly wraps his arms around her.

SHER SINGH
Please don't cry. Mother. I will never do anything that will make you sad. I will die but I will never do anything to make you cry.

The weeping stops abruptly. But Meera Kumari realizes her folly and saves the day by an encore.

MEERA KUMARI
Promise me. And you must not tell any one.

SHER SINGH
But you will write to me. Every day. Registered letter?

MEERA KUMARI
What? Yes! Yes!

SHER SINGH
And talk to me when ever I am sad.

MEERA KUMARI
Yes. Do you promise me?

SHER SINGH
I promise.

MEERA KUMARI
No! Swear on me.

SHER SINGH
What will happen if I don't agree?

MEERA KUMARI
There will be a huge scandal. No one will give me work. Every one will believe you. No one will listen to..

This time she is not acting.

SHER SINGH
I swear on you.

MEERA KUMARI
Oh my son! Thank you. You are the greatest son in the world.

Knock on the door.

Meera Kumari gets away a little too fast for a mother. Opens the door. Chhapi Ram gets in for Sher Singh's benefit.

CHHAPI RAM

Madam. You must hurry. Your plane
leaves in half an hour.

MEERA KUMARI

I must go now. Come here.

Sher Singh goes to her. Sher pecks him on his cheek. Sher
Singh kisses her on the Cheek. She remembers to hug him
again.

SHER SINGH

Rahul always did that to his
mother. I wanted to kiss my mother
too.

MEERA KUMARI

Good Bye son. NO NO don't come,
remember, no one must know.

SHER SINGH

Here! Something to remember me by.

Hands her a miniature toy cub.

MEERA KUMARI

Oh yes. What? No. . double. . OK. . here.

Takes out the necklace and gives it to him.

MEERA KUMARI

I will always love you.

SHER SINGH

When I am big. You will not have to
work.

MEERA KUMARI

OK. Whatever.

She smiles to offset this sudden break in character.

Sher Singh is reluctant to let her go yet. But to her credit
she exits gracefully like a mother would.

The door shuts on Sher Singh, who clutches the necklace.

INT. HOTEL CHINAR - SHIMLA - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

She is out of character now, fans her face with her palm.

MEERA KUMARI

Oh! God! Oh god! I nearly blurted it out. Too bad there are no cameras. How was I?

PRASAD

You were very good. You are a very good actress.

MEERA KUMARI

Thank you. Hope the public knows it as well. That will be more like it.

EXT. JIM CORBETT PARK - DAY

The cub looks at the Pictures held out by Sher Singh. He says proudly.

SHER SINGH

She is my mother. I got a letter from her today. But don't tell it to any one.

STAFF

Sher Singh. Get away from the cub. We are bringing the tigress.

Sher Singh goes and stands along side Prasad and Lavanya. Lavanya tries to keep him close to her but Sher Singh keeps his distance.

PRASAD

Today we are going to send the cub to this new Tigress that we have brought.

The partition is raised. The cub looks in the direction and Calls out.

CUB

Mother!

The tigress looks at him but keeps sitting. The cub nears her and is upon her. Calling her. Grazes himself against her. She turns her head, sniffs him. Sniffs again.

The official hold their breath.

The tigress starts licking him. The other two cubs intermingle. Playing with the white one. The white one jumps on the cubs gleefully.

The happy official embrace each other. Prasad shakes hand with Sher Singh. Lavanya ruffles her hair lovingly. Sher Singh lets her know that he does not like her gesture much by shaking his head and getting away. She gestures Prasad to convey that it is all right.

The cub comes straight for Sher Singh. Stops in front, looking up to him.

SHER SINGH
Go to your mother. Shoo! Shoo! GO!
There is your mother.

Sher Singh watches the cub and Prasad watches Sher Singh, with the same secret in their hearts.

INT. STAR STUDY - NIGHT

The audience remains silent for a few moments. Prasad acts as if he has confessed to something.

SHAHID
Who wrote those letters?

PRASAD
I did.

SECRETARY
And who talked to him.

PRASAD
Lavanya, my wife did. I asked the actress but she refused. So she learned to speak like a North Indian. But she was the happiest doing it, it was the only time Sher Singh talked to her like a son. She loves him like no mother has ever loved her son before. I implore you. Don't take his mother away from him.

Navneet keeps on clearing his throat.

NAVNEET
Rajiv Ji, something bad has happened!

RAJIV KUMAR
What is it now?

NAVNEET

My channel, the buggers, without telling me, have broadcast the whole thing live. Any one who was listening in, now knows the truth.

PRASAD

Oh my god! They should not have done that. Everything is ruined now. How are we ever to look him in the eye?

Looks in all directions. No help is forthcoming.

EXT. VARSOVA CREMATORIUM - DAWN

A shrouded dead body is being brought in. We see it from the top of the high rise adjacent to it. A car behind it. Behind it: the AAJ TAK VAN.

INT. AAJ TAK VAN - MORNING

SHAHID

Now I will have a story. That grey haired devil is trapped now. He is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't.

CAMERA MAN

Does what?

SHAHID

Accept Sher Singh as Meera's son. I will make him a villain. Be sure to record every thing. Video is more powerful than FM Sheff M! The whole of india watches us.

I/E. MUMBAI AIRPORT - MORNING

Lavanya, talking on her mobile is half running behind Sher Singh who is ahead of her. We don't see his face but still can recognize him as Sher Singh. They get in a taxi.

INT. TAXI

Sher Singh looks at his watch. 6:30

SHER SINGH

Bhai Saheb. Please take us to Varsova crematorium as soon as possible.

LAVANYA

Please hurry Bhai Saheb. His mother is being cremated today.

The driver breaks. Turns to look at them.

DRIVER

Are you that Sher Singh? The son of the Meera Kumari Ji? Don't you worry. You have come to the right Taxi. I will take you before time. You don't worry about that. I know all about you.

The eyes of the driver and Lavanya meet in the mirror.

EXT. VARSOVA CREMATORIUM - SAME TIME

We are still looking at it from the high rise. The pelican flies in and sits right besides us. The Flamingo settles by his side.

EXT. VARSOVA CREMATORIUM - MORNING

The Aaj tak crew, Navneet, Rajiv Kumar and his secretary and Prasad, Rajiv and Prasad away from the rest stand.

The purohit chants in the background. The white draped body is already on the pyre. Rajiv is still stubborn.

PRASAD

They are on the way. They will be here soon.

The others crane their neck to look at the high rises. The flamingos are flying in from every side and settling in. The camera man trains on them.

A few people get in.

More people.

The place is getting crowded.

Rajiv looks surprised. The secretary comes to him.

SECRETARY

They are all coming in for the mother of Sher Singh... that is what they are saying.

The road outside is crowded with the incoming vehicles. The Andheri -Varsova route bus has trouble getting through. It honks helplessly. The camera man records. Shahid is stumped.. taking it all in.

EXT. THE ANDHERI FLYOVER - MORNING

The flyover is chock a block with vehicles.

INT. TAXI AT FLYOVER - CONTINUOUS

DRIVER

Traffic Jam! Please stay inside. I will do something.

He gets out. To the policeman. Talks to him. The policeman looks towards the taxi comes towards it and looks in. Extends his hand to shake it with Sher Singh, removing his cap. And gets to work. Whistling.

It is Sher Singh.

Cars, motorcycles, Autos begin manoeuvring to make way for Sher Singh's taxi.

MAN IN THE JAM 1

Its Sher Singh.

MAN IN THE JAM 2

Sher Singh.

Taxi inches forward.

People peer.

The taxi gets its nose out. Only a bike blocking it. Someone big comes behind it and picks it out of the way, including the passenger. The Big man thumps his chest to Sher Singh: Keep Faith!

The Taxi is in the clear. The police man stops traffic on the intersection ahead. Another two gets on their bikes and pilot the lowly taxi. Sirens blaze, clearing the way for it as they go.

EXT. VARSOVA CREMATORIUM

Prasad has stopped worrying for now and started wondering already at the crowd of people inside the crematorium and outside of it. And at hundreds of Flamingos sitting on the highrise. Sound of Sirens. The crowds part for the taxi. White clad Sher Singh gets out. Behind him, Lavanya. Scores of hands pat Sher Singh as he moves forward. He starts crying as he folds his hands for those present.

ONLOOKER

Who died?

TWO

Must be someone rich and famous.

THREE

It the mother of Sher Singh.

EXT. VARSOVA CREMATORIUM

His hands are folded in supplication to Rajiv Kumar.

PRASAD

It is a miracle Sir. A miracle.

The Pandit comes to Rajiv Kumar.

PUROHIT

Who is going to give Mukhagni
(fire) to the deceased?

RAJIV KUMAR

Who else! But her son. There he is!
He will do his duty to his mother.

PUROHIT

Very Well!

We see Sher Singh as he follows the Purohit to the Pyre.

PRASAD

Thank you Sir! You are great.

RAJIV KUMAR

But why don't you tell him the
truth. I guarantee you that he will
respect you for it.

PRASAD

We can not do that sir. Much as we
would want him to love us.

But he will never love us like he does his mother. And I know now that his mother is dead. He does not need to live with us. He is freed from the promise he made to his mother. But We still can not kill his mother. His mother should live. Forever, in his heart.

Rajiv Kumar nods. All hardness gone from his face.

We pull back to the sky to see that the people are still pouring in.

EXT. HIGHRISE - FLAMINGO & PELICAN - CONTINUOUS

A tear drops from the eye of the pelican.

FLAMINGO

Hey! Pelican? You are crying.

PELICAN

No! No! It is something in my eye..
Pelicans don't cry.

EXT. VARSOVA CREMATORIUM ROAD

In the crowd outside, A TAPORI tries to jump to look and see what happens inside. A BIHARI and an old PARSI WOMAN along side him.

TAPORI

What is going on? Why is every body here?

BIHARI

All are here for the mother of Sher Singh.

TAPORI

What Sher Singh?

The Bi hari proceeds to tell him about it but the Parsi woman stops him.

PARSI WOMAN

No need to tell him son! The less people know about it, the better it is for Sher Singh.

We resume pulling back from the three to take the whole scene in and..are at last looking down on every one.

People and a few flamingos still trickle in as we keep on pulling back slowly.

CAMERAMAN (O. S.)
Shahid Bhai! I have taped every thing.

SHAHID (O. S.)
Remove the tape and destroy it, right now, in front of me.

CAMERAMAN (O. S.)
But Shahid Bhai, your job? You know what happens if you don't bring the story?

SHAHID (O. S.)
As if I care. Trash it right now!

CAMERAMAN (V. O.)
OK! Shahid Bhai!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JIM CORBETT PARK - EVENING

A whiter tiger and his cub. In a father son conversation:

A Cheetal stops to look in their direction and then bounds away.

TIGER
Son! This worth a lakh Cheetals:
mothers are the greatest boon
everyone has. Only thing is, we
realize it only when we don't have
them.

They are now walking away from us. The cub jogging to keep abreast.

TIGER
And this is worth that many as
well: A tiger is always a tiger.
But a human! He has the choice to
be as bad or as good as he wants to
be. It is all in him.

The father and son, walk away from us and into the sunset.