The Morning Ritual

by

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BLACK.

THE SOUNDS OF DAY BREAK - A ROOSTER COCK-A-DOODLE-DOOS, AFAR- THE MUEZZIN CALLS THE FAITHFUL TO PRAYER.

FADE IN:

EXT. TENEMENT, BOMBAY - DAY

A tenement colony (zopadpatti) awakening slowly. Thousands of small tin huts.

We are getting closer to one particular hut.

A LEGEND APPEARS: <u>THE MORNING RITUAL</u>

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Raju...Raju beta...uth beta! Raju!
(Raju, son. Wake up!
Raju!)

INT. HOVEL - DAY

A small, sparse Bombay tenement - an eight by ten room, made of mat, tin, cardboard and other sundry materials.

The early morning light streams through the cracks on the wall and falls on RAJU, 11, and in deep slumber. He is nudged.

RAJU'S MOTHER (O.S.)
Uth...school ke liye deeri ho rahi hai beta.
(Wake up son, you will be late for school.)

Raju slowly opens his eyes, squints and stretches his tiny frame.

Off-screen - Raju's mother moves over to the 'kitchen' area. We hear her light the stove and put a vessel on it.

RAJU'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
Ja, taiyyar ho kar nashta kar le.
(Go, get ready and then eat your breakfast.)

Raju stands and drags his feet to the door. On his way out, he picks up an empty rusty can that sits by the door, across the can - 'DALDA ASLI GHEE' (Dalda, real purified butter)

The rickety hovel door bangs shut behind Raju.

EXT. CARTER ROAD SEAFACE - DAY

Raju trudges down the promenade along the sea clutching his Dalda can. The tide is very low.

He casually scales the knee length wall that separates the rocks from the promenade.

Out of nowhere, a thick stick blocks his path.

Raju looks up at - SECURITY GUARD, 6 feet tall, a thick mustache that curves upwards, thick eyebrows and kol lined eyes. A tank of a man, a modern day demon.

SECURITY GUARD
Yahan kya kar raha hai!?
(What are you doing here?)

RAJU
Sandaas karne aaya.
(I came to shit.)

The Security Guard indicates a board that screams in big bold Hindi letters - “YAHAN SUNDAAS KARNA MANA HAI.” (”EXCRETEMENT STRICTLY PROHIBITED”)

SECURITY GUARD
Idhar ka naya ruling hai, sundaas karna mana hai. Chal bhag yahan se.
(It is the new rule, shitting here is prohibited. Run along.)

RAJU
Magar mein roz yahan sundaas karta hoon.
(But I shit here everyday.)

SECURITY GUARD
(re. The swnanky apartment buildings across the street.)
Sahib log ne do crore ka flat samundar ka hava khane ko liya hai, tera sundaas suunghne ko nahi!
(People have bought these 20 million rupee flats for fresh sea breeze, not the stench of your shit!)

Beat

The Security Guard booms-

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
Phir dikhai diya to police mein daal dega!
(If I see you again, I will hand you over to the police.)

INT./EXT. SULABH SHAUCHALAY - DAY

A busy Sulabh Shauchalay (public toilet), a BABU, old and jaded, sits behind a desk at the entrance. A mosquito squatter and a lock box lie on the desk.

He browses the Mayapuri magazine. Periodically, he tracks a buzzing mosquito without as much as looking up and squats it mercilessly with the squatter. He has been doing this for years.

People drop coins into the lock box as they walk in.

Enter Raju, clutching his Dalda can. He hesitates.

BABU
Kahan chale?
(Where are you going?)

Raju stops in his tracks.

RAJU
Sundaas karna hai.
(I want to shit.)

Raju peers inside the toilet hopefully.

BABU
(re. The lock box)
Aath aana.
(It will be 8 aanas.)

RAJU
Abhi nahi hai, baad mein doonga.
(I don't have now, I will pay you later.)

The Babu looks up from his magazine.

BABU
To phir sundaas bhi baad mein karna.
(Then shit later as well.)

EXT. MAIN ROAD - DAY

Raju runs down the street, swinging the Dalda can along. The morning traffic whizzes past.

He turns into a street.

EXT. RAILWAY CROSSING - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Raju reaches the railway crossing. A western railway local train goes by - the 1st Virar fast of the day.

Raju goes up to the crossing and looks down the tracks- By the wall along the tracks, people squatting as far as the eye can see, performing the morning ritual while watching trains go by. The women have open umbrellas placed in front to obstruct the view from the trains.

Raju pulls his shorts down, and squats to join the communal morning ritual.

Just as he is about to get comfortable, feet adorned in Kolhapuri chappals stand in front of him.

He looks up.

Raju's POV. Towering over him is MUNNA BHAI, unshaven, in a shiny unbuttoned shirt, hair parted in the middle. He chews on betel nut. Every inch - the local thug.

MUNNA BHAI
Uth, chal...uth.
(Stand, pronto.)

Raju meekly pulls up his shorts and stands.

MUNNA BHAI (CONT'D)
Sundaas tax bhara kya? Yeh sab log bhare. Nikaal chal, do rupiya!
(Have you paid the shit tax? All these people have. Out with two rupees, now!)

RAJU
Do rupiya! Shulabh shauchalaya mein khali aath aana hai!
(Two rupees! Its only fifty paisa in the public toilet!)

Beat

Munna Bhai stares back, impassive. Its been a long time since anyone questioned him. He smirks-

MUNNA BHAI
Sundaas free hai. Do rupiya khuli hava ka hai.
(Its free to shit. The two rupees is for the fresh air.)

EXT. STREET - DAY

Raju walks down the street dejected.

Suddenly, he spots something and runs across the street.

EXT. REGENT HOTEL - DAY

A school bus that says 'RAJPUT BOY'S SCHOOL' is parked at the hotel entrance.

At the whistle of the PT (Physical Training) TEACHER, excited ten-year-olds with gym bags in hand alight from the bus.

Raju watches from the side as the boys jump out of the bus and run into the hotel lobby one by one.

On impulse - in the brief seconds between one boy running into the hotel and the other alighting the bus, Raju jumps into the line and runs into the hotel with them.

INT. REGENT HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mirror like granite on the floor, huge chandeliers dangling from the ceiling like inverted diamond trees. Waiters carrying trays laden with breakfast and coffee hurry along, corporate types and foreign tourists float around.

Raju watches this amazing world, wide eyed. He is lost in the crowd of excited rich kids, two shades fairer and much healthier than him. No one notices him.

He is awestruck, he clutches the Dalda tin tightly. It is the only thing that feels real to him in this dreamlike world.

INT. CHANGING ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

A 5-star hotel changing room.

There is an animated chatter in the air. The private school boys are in their swimming trunks.

Raju has followed their cue, he is in his underwear. Here, the difference between them and him is even more pronounced. He watches their healthy bodies not with envy but awe. He is aware of his own malnourished body for the first time.

The PT teacher's WHISTLE BLOWS and the children file out of the room shrieking with excitement.

Raju follows them. Whatever it is, he wants to be part of it.

EXT. POOL - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The boys jump into the pool, they keep BELLY FLOPPING and CANNON BALLING off the diving board under the watchful and stern eye of the PT Teacher.

MOTU, a chubby boy goes underwater.

UNDERWATER - SILENCE. Motu's POV. The dangling legs and lower bodies of his classmates, Raju's skinny, dark body sticks out. Motu goes towards it, cutting through the water with fluid motions.

In the shallow end, Raju stands shivering. He is cold but watching these excited rich kids jumping in and out of water with such gusto is a magnificent sight, he is capturing every moment in his memory.

Joy is infectious, for the first time since we met him, Raju smiles.

UNDERWATER - Motu rises slowly-

Breaking the SURFACE to stand right next to Raju. The unexpected intrusion breaks Raju's trance. Their eyes meet.

Motu points an accusing finger at Raju.

MOTU
MISS...MISS...HE IS <u>SHITTING</u>!
SHITTING IN THE POOL!!

The SHALLOW END empties first. ANXIOUS BOYS wading as fast as they can to get out of the pool. Before long, the BOYS at the DEEP END are climbing out too. It is a mass exodus.

Raju is alone in the center of the pool, shivering and hugging himself. Sullen boys stand on the pool side all around him with accusing eyes. The game is up.

INT. REGENT HOTEL LOBBY - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The PT Teacher pulls Raju across the lobby by his ear. She is a woman with a mission. Raju trots to keep up with her.

The corporate types pause from their stocks, bonds and other chatter and look on in STUNNED SILENCE as the scrawny wet boy in nothing but a soiled underwear is dragged across the glittering hotel lobby.

As soon as the show has passed, the silence is replaced by instant chatter, they get back to their world.

EXT. REGENT HOTEL - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The PT Teacher pushes Raju out of the hotel door into the street.

PT TEACHER
Get out you little rascal!

She turns and leaves in a huff.

Raju collects himself from the pavement and stands, still shivering. Someone flings his clothes and the beloved Dalda tin at his feet.

INT. HOVEL - DAY

Raju opens the rickety door of the hovel and enters. His hair is still wet.

He slowly places the Dalda tin to the side of the door.

RAJU'S MOTHER (O.S.)
Tu aa gaya beta? Nashta taiyyar hai.
(You are back son?
Breakfast is ready.)

FADE TO BLACK.