

UNDER THE TALKING TREE

by

,

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT - EXPRESSWAY - DAY (IMAGINATION)

SARA (9), wearing a rosy-pink frock, her hair in pigtails, stands on one side of the road. She waves.

ISHAN (40s), slim figure, long, wavy, raven hair with a few streaks of gray, stands on the opposite side, in blue jeans and a brown jacket. Only visible from behind, he waves back at Sara.

Ishan shifts his position and brushes his hand over his heart, again and again.

SARA  
(quavery)  
Daddy! I'm coming!

ISHAN  
Sara! Darling, stop there! I'm coming!

Fearful, Sara tries to cross the busy road but vehicles moving at breakneck speed force her to step back. BRAKES GRIND, HORNS BLAST and TIRES SCREECH.

Frightened, Ishan tries to cross the road but fails. VEHICLES speed past him with VROOMS. He looks frustrated.

Out of nowhere a small CYCLONE strikes the road, HOWLING in the middle of it, swirling dry leaves and sand.

Then, the pitch-black road falls QUIET.

Ishan and Sara run towards each other, emotionally charged.

ISHAN  
Stop there! I'm coming.

They both stop when they get close to one another, puffing.

As they hug each other, the figure of Sara MELTS AWAY and turns into a cloud of thick, gray smoke.

A dead fast CAR BRAKES hard before Ishan. TIRES SCREECH in protest as the car skids to a halt.

A sharp, deafening THUNDER crashes overhead.

END IMAGINATION

INT. FOOD HEAVEN RESTAURANT - EVENING

The THUNDER FADES into a long HISS and then GURGLE of a COFFEE MACHINE. Ishan sits in a waiting chair, wearing same blue jeans and brown jacket, only visible from behind.

WAITER (O.S.)  
Sir, your food package is ready.

The voice jolts Ishan back into the present.

SUPER: "DEHRADUN, INDIA"

A WAITER (20s) hands a package to Ishan who takes it and gets up, silent, still visible from behind.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Ishan exits to street, face still unseen. A RAGGED GIRL (9) approaches.

She offers Ishan a rosy-pink balloon tied to a thin stick, for purchase.

She has dirty skin, tangled and untidy hair, big white eyes on dark face. She is barefoot. Shivers with cold.

Ishan takes the balloon. The Ragged Girl smiles like an angel.

ISHAN (V.O.)  
Dreamy eyes! Oblivious to everything around. No fear of the future.

Ishan gives her a 500 rupees note. Then he gives the balloon back to her and heads to the parking lot.

EXT. MOTORBIKE (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan's black sports motorbike pulls out from the parking lot onto the road.

Gradually, the chaotic city traffic swallows the motorbike.

EXT. MAYUR CLINIC - EVENING

A small building with a glowing signboard at the top: "MAYUR CLINIC."

On the door, a tilted down nameplate: "Dr. MAYUR, PSYCHIATRIST AND ONEIROLOGIST."

INT. MAYUR CLINIC - DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM - EVENING

Ishan sits on a chair at a table before DR. MAYUR (50s), balding, with glasses.

We finally see Ishan's face: Dark and deep, brooding eyes. A salt-and-pepper stubble. He seems wretched.

The TICKING WALL CLOCK in the hushed room spreads discomfort. Ishan sighs deeply.

ISHAN  
(taut)  
I want my dreams back!

Dr. Mayur's forehead creases.

DR. MAYUR  
Mr. Ishan, what type of dreams are you talking about?

ISHAN  
I used to have lucid dreams while sleeping. But gradually I lost them all.

DR. MAYUR  
That's great! Most people come here to get rid of their dreams.

ISHAN  
That may be. But I'm a writer. My dreams fuel my imagination or sometimes guide my intuition.

DR. MAYUR  
Okay, so you write!  
(completes paperwork)  
For a living?

Ishan seems uncomfortable at the question.

ISHAN  
I work with the money for money. In a bank, actually.

Dr. Mayur smiles faintly.

DR. MAYUR  
Could you tell me, when did you feel that you've lost all your dreams?

ISHAN  
Ah... dunno exactly. But... I feel I developed this condition when I was in litigation for my divorce.

DR. MAYUR  
Strange! Naturally, our minds crave dreams, mostly when we are stressed. If you don't dream at night, you may have daydreams or imaginations.

ISHAN  
I have them sometimes.

DR. MAYUR

I don't think you've lost all your dreams that happen in your sleep. Dark circles under your eyes...! Maybe you're not sleeping enough. Or you're just unable to remember your dreams.

ISHAN

I tried hard for both but couldn't succeed.

DR. MAYUR

Well, your temptation is natural. Lucid dreams can be a fun trip as you become aware that you're dreaming. And sometimes you may be even able to control the action, like a film-director.

ISHAN

Yeah!

DR. MAYUR

But they can't always be sweet dreams. They can be recurring nightmares or maybe a haunting image or experience tied with your past.

ISHAN

I'm willing to take that risk.

DR. MAYUR

Well, there are some medications that can induce lucid dreams. But they're mainly used for some mental disorders. I can't prescribe 'em.

Ishan stares at Dr. Mayur, dejected.

Dr Mayur takes out a paper box from a rack.

DR. MAYUR

A company is undertaking phase one clinical trials for an insomnia medication. The company claims that it can induce lucid dreams.

Dr Mayur opens the box and shows him some strips.

DR. MAYUR

I've tried this out on some volunteers and found effective. I can prescribe you this in phase two trial. After a few months.

ISHAN

Can't wait. I'm willing to volunteer.

DR. MAYUR

I feel you don't need this. These are new sleeping pills. Possible risks and side effects are unknown. And prescription would be for one month only.

ISHAN

It's all right. I'm ready for that.

Dr. Mayur gets up and searches something from different racks. Then he gives Ishan a pen and a paper to sign it.

He SCRIBBLES something on a paper and hands it to Ishan.

DR. MAYUR

Just one pill at bedtime.

He removes his glasses and places them on the table.

DR. MAYUR

Why don't you try to embrace real life and live in the present?

Ishan sighs and looks straight into Dr. Mayur's eyes.

ISHAN

When you feel that nothing is gonna change by accepting the reality of life and living in the present, then you have got to fly through the wings of your imagination.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nimble fingers type on a laptop keyboard in the haze of cigarette smoke. The TAP of fingers in the utter silence.

A CHIRP of a sparrow indicates a phone message.

A hand lifts a cell phone from the bed. An instant message pops up: "WOODLAND SHOES: Wishing you a very happy birthday."

The hand carelessly throws the phone aside and grabs a pen, and starts writing in a diary.

ISHAN (V.O.)

I'm forty-six today. It's like I'm going down after reaching the top of a high hill. The time is flying.

The hand stops writing to flip over an hourglass on the study table.

ISHAN (V.O.)  
Definitely, I'm not gonna take the  
same way down and I'm even ready to  
take the road less traveled... But  
I'm not sure where the path is...

INT. IDB OFFICE - CENTRAL HALL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A large navy-blue board on the wall with a stylish white logo: "IDB." Below the logo, in a large font: "INDIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, A GOVT. OF INDIA UNDERTAKING."

SUPER: "DEHRADUN, TWO YEARS EARLIER"

A chaotic noise of the constant CHATTER of a crowd of 40-50 CUSTOMERS and PHONES RINGING. In between, the HEAVY SOUND of a BILL COUNTING MACHINE and THUMP of STAMPS.

A SURLY CUSTOMER (40s) stares furiously at Ishan, who seems busy writing at his desk. A few clerks work in their compact cubicles beside the desk.

The Surly Customer slams his fist on the desk.

SURLY CUSTOMER  
Hey! Instead of returning my check,  
what have you been scribbling for  
the past five minutes? Are you crazy?  
Who employed you in this bank? Idiot!

Ishan looks taken aback. He gets up in anger.

ISHAN  
Hold it! How dare you? Who are  
you calling an idiot?

The Surly Customer violently pushes Ishan back behind the desk. He points his index finger at Ishan and screams:

SURLY CUSTOMER  
I'll teach you a lesson! You  
motherfucker!

All eyes shift to them. Some people try to settle the clash.

INT. IDB OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan sits at a large table: Hair tousled. Eyes bloodshot and puzzled.

In the front, plump manager DINESH (40s), with a wart on a cheek, hair thinning at the top, piercing eyes, collapses in his fancy chair.

A brass nameplate on the table: "DINESH, BRANCH MANAGER."

Dinesh TAPS repeatedly his platinum bracelet on the glass sheet over the tabletop. Shoots Ishan a venomous look.

Suddenly, he stops. His face stiffens. He grabs a PAPER from the stack on the table and THROWS it towards Ishan, furious.

DINESH

This is the fourth customer complaint against you in the past two months. Mr Ishan, stop daydreaming and wake up to the customers' needs.

ISHAN

But, sir, that customer was abusing me...

DINESH

Oh, c'mon! You're working in a bank. Forget about self-respect!

CENTRAL HALL

The office boy RAJU (30s), with drink-reddened eyes on bony face, approaches the manager's glass office with sly gestures.

He tries to peek inside through the blinds, chewing tobacco.

MANAGER'S OFFICE

Dinesh lifts a glass of water from the table.

DINESH

Along with my transformation from fifty K.G. to a hundred K.G. in the past twenty years in this fuckin' bank chair, I've also witnessed the transformation of the Indian public sector bank customers.

He takes a large sip and pours the leftover over a bonsai at the corner of the table.

DINESH

Twenty years ago, they were hesitant and inquisitive. Then they became friendly. Then they became demanding and now... now they've become fucking rude and abusive... But, we'll have to bear with it. We take salary for that.

Dinesh gets puffed by the long lecture. Stares at Ishan.



Ishan looks down, silent, with no fear in his eyes.

DINESH  
Y'know, the bank management is now  
very hard on customer complaints. I  
think you'd not like your fifth  
transfer in a span of three years.

Ishan still seems heedless. Dinesh looks restless with Ishan's enigmatic silence.

DINESH  
C'mon, Ishan, look at you! All  
officers of your batch have climbed  
up to the senior grades. And you're  
still lying at the damn same place.  
Mind you, you're really sluggish.

Ishan clutches his hands to his stomach. He stares at a coffee stain on the table.

DINESH  
I know, you've gone through a midlife  
crisis. But everyone has some sorta  
family problem. Actually, promotions  
aren't easy for the people like you.

He stares at Ishan's long hair, unshaven face and casuals.

DINESH  
You're officer, but your rebellious  
attitude clearly defies office  
etiquette.

Dinesh rubs his nose with a sarcastic smile.

DINESH  
I've heard that you're trying very  
hard with your stories.

He gives Ishan a contemptuous look.

DINESH  
I can't stop laughing that even at  
this age you're dreaming of being a  
writer, with no writing success to  
date.

ISHAN'S POV

Coffee stain changes its shape from OVAL to ROUND to STAR to OCTOPUS as Dinesh keeps speaking.

DINESH (O.S.)  
(raised voice)  
C'mon, Ishan! Where are you?

BACK TO ISHAN

He startles.

The plastic recliner squeaks as Dinesh shifts his weight towards its back.

DINESH  
(scornful)  
Your time of doing something new has passed. Stick to the bank job! At least show your commitment here if you couldn't show that to your family!

Dinesh brushes his palms together with a mocking smile as he notices that Ishan finally looks affected by his words. He opens a packet of biscuits and munches on one.

DINESH  
In fact, you can still write. But I can guarantee, even after years, your writing would be read only by yourself... These crispy biscuits look like dog's biscuits but are really tasty. You should try this.

Ishan's face looks flushed. He swallows hard.

Dinesh goes on. Then Ishan's mind shuts off from the torrent of insults and absolute SILENCE surrounds him.

Up from this silence emerges a faint DRUMMING.

This sound get louder as our vision CRAWLS into --

ISHAN'S EYES

Flash with repressed anger. We TRAVEL deep into one eye across time and space.

INT. SUPERMARKET - EVENING (BACK TO PRESENT)

CLOSE ON ISHAN'S EYES

A female voice RINGS through.

CASHIER GIRL (O.S.)  
Nine fifty... Sir, nine fifty.

Ishan comes around by the voice. He blinks and finds himself standing at the checkout counter, a CASHIER GIRL (20s) staring at him and a queue of customers waiting behind him.

CASHIER GIRL  
Sir, your bill is nine fifty. Would  
you like to add anything else?

Ishan hands her his credit card for payment.

ISHAN  
No! That's all.

MONTAGE - AROUND DEHRADUN

-- Ishan's motorbike creeps through heavy traffic.

-- Ishan buys fruits and milk from roadside vendors. Annoying beggars touch him over and over to get his attention.

-- Trapped in a major traffic jam, Ishan looks helpless.

-- Ishan's motorbike enters the parking lot of an apartment with a large board on the gate: "MARIGOLD APARTMENT."

END MONTAGE

EXT. MARIGOLD APARTMENT - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan stands before the ELEVATOR with filled shopping plastic bags. It opens with a DING. He walks in. The doors close.

INT. MARIGOLD APARTMENT - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan walks slowly, almost limping, weighed down with plastic bags. The ECHO of his footsteps is soft and muzzy.

Ishan stops before flat: "#222." He inserts the key into the lock. Door swings inwards with a CREAK. He enters.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Dingy and messy, all covered with dust. Spider webs in various corners. Dirty dishes in the kitchen sink.

BEDROOM

Ishan enters and gazes at the various objects, silent.

A study table with an hourglass on it. An empty bookcase. A dressing table with a full-length mirror.

Some pictures of famous Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Salman Rushdie and motivational quotes on the wall. One says "IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE."

Half of the double bed is covered with scattered books, a few opened. Ishan dusts off a book on the edge.

Ishan keeps his bag on the chair, grabs a ratty, old T-shirt and Pjs, and changes into them.

#### BATHROOM

Ishan washes his face in the sink which has specks of dirt. He watches a big spider moving near the bathroom mirror.

#### LIVING ROOM

Ishan opens his laptop and starts writing as he sips his coffee. Suddenly, he stops, grabs his cell phone, and scrolls through his contacts. He taps on "LAVA PUBLISHERS."

INT. LAVA PUBLISHERS OFFICE (NEW DELHI) - SAME

The desk phone RINGS.

Publisher's secretary RAJ (40s), a chunky man, picks it up.

RAJ

Hello!

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

ISHAN

Sir, this is Ishan. Four months back, I sent you my manuscript of a book of eight short stories, "The Last Voyage."

RAJ

Mr. Ishan, it's true that we accept manuscripts from promising new writers without an agent's representation, but our publisher Mr. Anil has been super busy for the past four months. Phone us in a month.

END INTERCUT

Ishan looks disappointed. He switches on his TV.

A SPIRITUAL GURU (60s) in a weird dress appears on the screen.

SPIRITUAL GURU (V.O.)

The Hindu scriptures describe "Kalpavriksha", a wishing tree, found in Himalayas, then heaven. It could fulfill your any wish. It is believed that its roots extended all the way

(MORE)

SPIRITUAL GURU (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
to the underworld. So it's possible  
that some day you may encounter a  
wishing tree.

The Spiritual Guru sips a drink from a rounded glass of brass.

SPIRITUAL GURU (V.O.)  
But the question is what would you  
ask for, if it happens with you?  
Most certainly, ordinary worldly  
things. Because your wishes are  
originated from the world that  
surrounds you, physically and  
mentally. Can you dare to wish beyond  
that?

Ishan looks engrossed in that TV show.

Ishan takes out a pill from a strip, swallows it with water.

INT. FAMILY COURT - COURTROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan's ex-wife SHREYA (30s) and LITTLE SARA (5), wearing a  
rosy-pink frock, stand in the front row before JUDGE-1 (50s).  
Ishan stands beside them.

JUDGE-1  
The court passes judgment and grants  
decree of divorce with mutual consent  
to petitioners Ishan Shivansh and  
Shreya Verma.

Ishan and Shreya with Sara exit the courtroom.

COMMON AREA

Shreya walks away with Sara. Ishan grabs Sara's tiny hand.

SHREYA  
You can't touch her!  
(intervenes physically)  
I'm doing Sara a favor by keeping  
her away from you. I'll never let  
you get the joy of being with her  
again!

Ishan pulls Sara's hand towards himself. Shreya resists. A  
tug of war happens. Shreya gets furious. She draws a pistol  
from her purse, aims at Ishan and fires.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan jerks awake and sits up on his bed, breathing heavily.

BATHROOM

Ishan dips his head in a large cold water bucket, to keep himself awake.

Ishan opens his eyes inside of the bucket, his head fully submerged.

He brings his head out and puffs badly.

BEDROOM

Ishan sits cross-legged on his bed and opens his laptop. He thinks for a few moments then starts writing.

The CLICK-CLICK of typing echoes in the silence of night.

With a MUSICAL CHIME the red WALL CLOCK strikes: "5:00 a.m." Ishan continues.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

A green ALARM CLOCK on the bed BEEPS. Ishan sleeps under a blanket. He throws his hand out and hits the snooze button.

After some time the alarm BEEPS again. Ishan slips out of the blanket, unwilling. He reads the time on his cell phone with half-opened eyes: "8:50 a.m."

He hops out of the bed and rushes to the bathroom. In a hurry, he accidentally KICKS a STEEL TRASH CAN.

EXT. IDB OFFICE - LOBBY - MORNING

Ishan rushes towards the elevator.

Again in a hurry, he collides with the OFFICE ELEVATOR GUARD (30s), but he manages to get in.

INT. IDB OFFICE - CENTRAL HALL - MORNING

Ishan settles quickly in his chair. Already a long queue of CUSTOMERS awaits before Ishan's desk.

Adjacent to Ishan's seat, sit two other officers -- spiky-haired RAHUL (30) and curly-haired MAYA (27).

Ishan approves the cash checks and passes them on to the teller. In between he checks email and reads from a file. His computer screen displays frequent changes.

His phone RINGS. He looks at the Caller ID: "AMIT." He answers.

ISHAN  
Hi, Amit!

INT. AMIT'S OFFICE (NOIDA) - SAME

AMIT (40s), a chubby man with monkey-like ears, sits on his office chair and types something on his computer.

AMIT  
Hi, bro! Tell me, how many customers  
are staring at you like you stamped  
on their toes in a cramped place?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

ISHAN  
Rubbing salt into my wounds?

AMIT  
Okay, leave it. How's your writing  
going? Whatever! How's your sex life?  
Bro! You need an adventure.

Ishan looks askance at the long queue of customers shooting him sour looks.

ISHAN  
(whispers)  
Hold it! I'm not a software developer.

AMIT (V.O.)  
Okay, I'll call in the evening.

ISHAN  
Evening, I have a writing workshop.  
We'll talk tomorrow --

Suddenly Raju jumps in. He mumbles.

RAJU  
Ishan, sir!

Ishan answers without looking up at him.

ISHAN  
What?

Raju approaches Ishan like a wily fox. He speaks in honeyed tone with a dirty smile.

RAJU  
The boss is calling you!

Ishan grimaces and turns away in disgust due to bad breath.

RAJU

Sir, if you buy me cigarettes, I can give you some important informations about other staff members.

ISHAN

I don't need that. And, smoking is injurious to health.

(tries to close nostrils)

Brush your teeth sometimes!

Raju looks upset while Ishan heads to the --

MANAGER'S OFFICE

As Ishan enters, Dinesh stops turning the pages of a file. He gives Ishan a hard stare and gestures at the wall clock.

DINESH

You're two minutes late today...! I have a zero tolerance for the unpunctuality. You know, what the punishment is for the latecomers in a military camp?

Ishan says nothing.

DINESH

Look, you've to get sold three credit cards and two health insurance plan today.

ISHAN

But Rahul is the sales and marketing officer.

DINESH

He's going out for a meeting with a VIP customer.

DINESH

And look, you have to reply to the head office inspection report, today.

ISHAN

But sir, that's Maya's job. I'm already overburdened, and she looks busy in some lengthy phone chat.

DINESH

C'mon! She's busy with the customers. Stay late in the evening and finish the task.



ISHAN  
Today... I can't. I'll finish it  
tomorrow.

Dinesh glares at Ishan.

DINESH  
Oh, c'mon. Actually, you're not  
overburdened. You're sluggish! Today  
is the last day to submit. I want  
this today, anyway!

CENTRAL HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan works at his desk. Typical office sounds create a dreary  
and stifling ambience.

Raju, Rahul and Maya, gathered in a corner, snicker at Ishan.

In a few moments, a bunch of grouchy customers gathers before  
Ishan's desk. OFFICE PHONE TRILLS. Ishan hopelessly gazes at  
the customers and at a pile of files on his desk.

EXT. ROAD - EVENING

Ishan stands by the roadside as he talks on his phone.

ISHAN  
Am I talking with Literary Agent Mr  
Aakash?

AAKASH (V.O.)  
Yeah, speaking.

ISHAN  
Sir, I'm Ishan. I had sent a query  
regarding representation for my book  
of short stories, "The Last Voyage."  
I didn't get a reply.

AAKASH (V.O.)  
Ishan, I'm sorry. I can't represent  
you for this fantasy stories book.  
To be frank, I represent mainly non-  
fiction books and novels, as they  
are currently popular. You can contact  
me if you have some romantic comedy --

Aakash cuts the line. Ishan looks disappointed.

EXT. ABANDONED PUBLIC PARK - EVENING

The dim lights on the lamp posts. High-pitched SHRILL SOUNDS  
of the BEETLES.

Ishan sits, like a sculpture, on a bench in a poorly lit area under a small golden shower tree. He stares at the dark void.

In the background, in a Hindu crematorium, a funeral that is underway, is visible.

EXT. ROAD IN CITY OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Ishan, drenched in sweat, pulls along his motorbike on foot, with effort and difficulty. His physical appearance is similar but he looks younger.

AJEERA (20s), slim, with adorable childlike eyes and rusty-brown curly hair, drags behind, limping.

AJEERA

I guess we've walked four kilometers.  
I'm hungry again. Your motorbike is  
breaking down over and over. Why  
don't you auction it on eBay?

She pushes the motorbike from behind, to help Ishan.

ISHAN

Hold it, don't bother. We are close  
to a workshop.

AJEERA

Wait wait!

Ishan stops. Ajeera takes out a hanky and wipes his face.

AJEERA

Do you wanna live and die at the  
bank?

ISHAN

Don't know. But sometimes, I feel  
it's my social mask just to fit into  
society. Actually, I wanna be a  
writer. I write stories.

AJEERA

Wow! That's great. You can work from  
home and sleep in the daytime.

ISHAN

Hahaha... I still miss that daytime  
nap from the school days. And what  
about you?

AJEERA

I wanted to become a social story analyst...! Believe me, there's bitterness in life... I want to live life to the fullest and do whatever my heart says before I die.

ISHAN

Great! Actually... I don't send my stories out. I feel that nobody would understand them.

AJEERA

Today, write your obituary. How would you like to be remembered? Try to become that person. And face everything that comes in the way.

Ishan replies with a thoughtful silence.

EXT. MOTORBIKE WORKSHOP - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Ishan jolts out of his reverie as MECHANIC (20s) presses his motorbike's accelerator. He gets up from the waiting chair, approaches the mechanic and makes payment.

MECHANIC

Sir, your bike is ready. Sturdy, but this model has become old. I can help you to get a good resale value if you want to sale it.

Ishan touches his motorbike.

ISHAN

No, I can't.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ishan washes his face in the sink. Stares at his reflection in the mirror. Has a sudden coughing fit.

ISHAN'S POV

The mirror looks misted up. He wipes it with his hand but is unable to see his REFLECTION.

ISHAN

blinks, worried.

KITCHEN

Ishan opens a coffee jar -- empty. A mug slips out of his hand -- breaks.

## LIVING ROOM

Ishan types on his laptop as he sits on the sofa. His cell phone RINGS.

He eyes the caller ID: "Mom." Doesn't pick up.

Phone RINGS again. Ishan swipes his thumb over the screen. Old and frail MOM (70s), with old-mode glasses, appears on the screen. Her eyes seem stressed.

MOM (V.O.)

Why aren't you picking up the phone?

Ishan tries to smile but fails.

ISHAN

I was in the bathroom.

MOM (V.O.)

I know you well! God bless you!

ISHAN

How's your health?

MOM (V.O.)

I'm managing. Whenever I don't feel good, Ragini comes to help me. But you look weak and tired. Why don't you shave?

ISHAN

Oh, sometimes I don't have time.

MOM (V.O.)

But gray hair looks bad on the face. And do you wear the string of Rudraksha beads I gave you? Lord Shiva will help you, always... Are you listening?

ISHAN

Yeah! I'm wearing it.

MOM (V.O.)

I feel you're not eating and sleeping well.

ISHAN

I'm fine.

MOM (V.O.)

Restaurant food isn't always good. You should cook sometimes. I can teach you how to make carrot halwa.

Ishan eases his strained posture against the back of sofa.  
Gets up and cleans the sofa with a cloth. Sits back.

MOM (V.O.)

First peel off some fresh carrots.  
Then wash them properly, then grate  
them. Then...

ISHAN

Hold it, Mom! I'm not making carrot  
halwa right now.

MOM (V.O.)

Why're you yelling...? Accidents  
happen in life, but we can't sit at  
home for our whole life to avoid  
them. Life is very long. It can't be  
spent with memories. Arranged marriage  
or true love, find a girl for you.

ISHAN

I don't get any free time in this  
freaking job.

MOM (V.O.)

You're searching for happiness in  
the future when you'd be a successful  
writer. Live in the present!

ISHAN

(raised voice)

Where's the present? I don't see  
anything interesting or exciting in  
the present! I'm suffocating here!

MOM (V.O.)

Life isn't a colorful dream of an  
artist. We are just middle-class.  
And don't forget that we have lost  
all our savings in the settlement of  
divorce case.

ISHAN

I don't have any time and energy to  
think about myself... This life is  
empty of meaning!

MOM (V.O.)

You think and talk like that 'cause  
you don't have any first-hand  
experience of poverty. We've seen  
that. Leaking rooftop. Sleepless  
nights. It's ungratefulness if you're  
not happy with the things you have.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Ishan does the dishes. His phone RINGS. He wipes his hands on a towel and picks up the phone from the platform.

HARISH (V.O.)  
Hello, Ishan. This is Harish from Titan Literary Agency. I received your query letter for "The Last Voyage." Well, some of your stories are really amazing. And your writing style -- wow! I'm ready to represent you.

Ishan still looks in a state of disbelief.

ISHAN  
Are you really Mr. Harish?

HARISH (V.O.)  
Damn sure, I'm Harish.

Ishan smiles.

ISHAN  
Oh, thank you so much, Harish! I really need this.

HARISH (V.O.)  
But, you know, your stories are purely philosophical. They have potential only for a niche market. If you could spice up your stories, with some rude jokes or anything like that, their market appeal can increase.

ISHAN  
Sorry...! I can't change my stories for a class of readers who don't have any understanding of literature and philosophy.

HARISH (V.O.)  
Anyway, I'll try my best, but keep polishing your stories. Best of luck! Bye!

Ishan looks happy and a little excited.

INT. IDB OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - EVENING

Ishan sits before Dinesh who stops reading a letter.

DINESH  
These are two love letters for you --

Dinesh's phone RINGS. He answers. A faint FEMALE VOICE comes through the phone speaker, inaudible.

DINESH  
Yeah... 7'0 clock... Okay... I'll be  
on time.

Dinesh puts the phone on the table and stares at Ishan.

DINESH  
Confused? Just kidding.  
(hands two letters)  
One is a charge sheet for coming in  
late every other day and misbehaving  
with customers. The second one is a  
charge sheet for a bogus property  
visit where the loan went bad.

Ishan reads a letter and tries to recall.

ISHAN  
But you also visited this property  
with me.

Dinesh takes a sneaky glance at Ishan.

DINESH  
I may have. But papers don't say  
that. Well, you have to submit a  
reply in one month... Oh, you look  
stressed!  
(forwards a candy)  
Try this feel-good candy.

Ishan looks worried. Doesn't accept the candy.

INT. FAMILY COURT (JAIPUR) - COURTROOM - DAY

Ishan and Shreya with Sara sit in the first row on the  
opposite sides.

Ishan's lawyer ADVOCATE KAPIL (50s), wearing black coat with  
a name tag and a neck brace, stands before JUDGE-2 (50s) and  
next to SHREYA'S ADVOCATE (50s).

SHREYA'S ADVOCATE  
Sara's mother, Mrs Shreya, submits  
her complaint that Sara's father is  
a self-proclaimed writer who is  
mentally ill and lives in some  
imaginary world of success. All this  
has put him in a situation where he  
is most likely to lose his actual  
job at the bank. So, it would be in  
(MORE)

SHREYA'S ADVOCATE (CONT'D)  
Sara's best interest to keep her  
away from her father as his mental  
and financial instability can  
interfere with the child's normal  
development.

Ishan stares at the Shreya's Advocate, uneasy.

ADVOCATE KAPIL  
Objection, Your Honor!

JUDGE-2  
Overruled! The court puts on hold  
Mr. Ishan's petition for visitation  
rights, to see his daughter Sara.  
Court gives him at the most six  
months, from next month on, to submit  
some evidence to disprove these  
allegations and confirm his mental  
and financial stability. Until October  
31st.

Ishan looks nervous. Shreya gives him an evil grin.

COMMON AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Advocate Kapil hands Ishan a paper.

ISHAN  
This is absurd!

ADVOCATE KAPIL  
I can see that! But the biggest  
drawback of the Indian legal system  
is -- if a woman alleges a man as  
guilty, it's only a man's  
responsibility to prove, with  
evidence, that she is wrong... But  
no worries -- you can bring a  
certificate of satisfactory work and  
good conduct at workplace from your  
immediate boss in the bank.

Ishan looks worried.

ISHAN  
Okay. See you tomorrow!

Shreya, holding Sara's hand, bypasses them.

SARA  
Daddy!



Sara waves at Ishan, sad. Ishan waves back. Shreya does not look at Ishan. She tugs Sara way exit, pulling her hand.

Sara turns and looks back at Ishan with sad eyes as he clicks her picture on his cell phone.

INT. IDB OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Ishan sits opposite Dinesh.

DINESH  
Our bank has a policy to not issue any such certificate to the employee who is under investigation. You can confirm with our HR department.

INT. IDB OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - EVENING

Shreya and SHREYA'FATHER (60s) talk with Dinesh, inaudible.

Shreya's Father hands some gift packs to Dinesh. They shake hands and smile.

INT. ADVOCATE KAPIL'S OFFICE - EVENING

Shelves crammed with thick law books. A shiny table where Ishan sits opposite Advocate Kapil.

ADVOCATE KAPIL  
Revelation of confidential office matters in the court is really strange. Anyway, then you can wait. We have six months in hand.

ISHAN  
But it can last longer as disciplinary procedures are very slow. And I'm not sure it'd be in my favor. To be frank, I'm really in a situation where I can lose my job in the near future.

ADVOCATE KAPIL  
Then, it's going to be tough for you. You can't take up a new job until the investigation is complete. And there's no medical test that can diagnose a mental illness, so we can't fight on medical grounds.

Ishan thinks for a moment.

ISHAN  
If... I achieve some writing success in the next six months, then?

ADVOCATE KAPIL  
Well, it can work in court if you  
can do that. Otherwise...

ISHAN  
Otherwise?

ADVOCATE KAPIL  
Family courts are hopelessly biased  
in favor of mothers. You have seen  
your failed attempt to get your  
daughter's custody.

Ishan looks crestfallen. He counts some notes within his  
wallet and hands them to Advocate Kapil.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ishan types on his laptop at his dining table where a steel  
pan with food lies. His eyelids droop.

The wall clock strikes: "12:30 a.m." Ishan struggles to write.

LATER

Ishan jolts awake to the loud musical CHIME of the WALL CLOCK.  
He finds himself sleeping with his head resting on the  
keyboard. He squints at the wall lights.

He stares at the wall clock with sleepy eyes: "6:00 a.m."

Ishan gets up. Takes the lid off the pan and empties the  
food into a black garbage bag. Dumps it into a trash can.

INT. IDB OFFICE - CENTRAL HALL - EVENING

Ishan, with reddish eyes and frequent yawns, works on a  
computer at his desk. In the background, in manager's office,  
Dinesh gossips and laughs with Maya -- it looks like flirting.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ishan watches TV sitting on the sofa.

A bare-chested YOGI (50s) appears on the screen. He speaks  
with a confident tone.

YOGI (V.O.)  
Today, I'll teach you the art of  
meditation. To calm your mind and  
boost your energy levels. First  
practice it with AUM sound, just for  
a few seconds.

Ishan lays a mat on the floor. Sits in the lotus position.  
Closes his eyes softly.

AAOOUUMMM... from the TV fills the room.

LATER

Ishan cracks open his eyes to the sound of the musical chime of the wall clock. He finds himself sleeping on the floor, in a crumpled state. TV is still on.

INT. PHYSICIAN'S CONSULTING ROOM - EVENING

Ishan sits before a THIN PHYSICIAN (50), uneasy.

THIN PHYSICIAN

It happens at this age, due to hormonal changes. Good news is that we have medications for that.

The Thin Physician studies a report in his hand.

THIN PHYSICIAN

But, your endoscopy report shows the signs of beginning of gastric ulcers. We also have medications for that. But if you don't sleep properly at night and lower your stress levels, they aren't gonna work for you.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan stares at the hourglass on the table.

He takes off his T-shirt before the dressing-table mirror.

He studies keenly his wan image. Eyes with deep shadows under them. Gray hair. Feeble trunk.

He studies his thin, veined hands. Gradually runs his shaky hands over his face and then trunk.

His face clouds over with regret and a brooding melancholy.

EXT. CROSSROADS - EVENING

Ishan gives food to some HOMELESS PEOPLE and STRAY DOGS.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ishan takes out strawberry ice cream cone from the fridge.

QUICK FLASHBACK

Ishan and Sara approach an ice cream street vendor.

SARA

Strawberry! Strawberry!

Ishan hands one strawberry ice cream cone to Sara.

BACK TO SCENE

Some melted ice cream drips on Ishan's foot. He comes to his senses and puts back ice cream in the fridge.

EXT. BIRD SANCTUARY - LAKESIDE - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Beautiful waterbirds cry and skim over the lake. Ishan and Sara enjoy watching birds with other birdwatchers while they lick their ice cream cones.

SARA

Daddy! I can't see anything.

ISHAN

Focus only on one bird at a time!

SARA

I can't.

ISHAN

Hold it, darling. Today I tell you a story from epic Mahabharata. It teaches a moral lesson about power of focus.

Sara comes closer. Ishan wipes ice cream from her nose.

ISHAN

Once upon a time Guru Drona decided to test his pupils' archery skills. So he stuck a toy bird in a tree as a target. When he asked them what they could see to aim for, they all gave different dull answers, and missed the target. Only Arjun said he could see nothing more than the eye of the bird. His arrow pierced the bird's eye perfectly.

SARA

But why do we have to pass such difficult tests?

ISHAN

Sometimes to prove yourself, in your own eyes, in the game of life.

SARA

But Daddy, you are not an archer. What's your test? Mummy often says, "Your daddy is a failed writer."

A GIANT *PTEROSAUR* flies overhead and attacks them to snatch Sara's ice cream. Sara hugs Ishan in panic.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan startles awake. Lies on his back on the bed. A CLASSICAL VIOLIN TUNE fills the air.

Ishan sits up and pulls the drawer of his bedside table. Removes a packet of cigarettes.

He gets up and slowly heads towards the balcony.

EXT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Ishan stands by the railing in the pale light of full moon. Lights the cigarette from a lighter, broody.

The violin sound wafts from the top floor of a tall building in the front.

An AGED MAN (60s) with a long, gray beard sits on a chair in a balcony and plays a heartbreaking tune on his violin.

The soulful music continues, and with every note, Ishan's cigarette smoke curls upwards into the air.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Ishan approaches his study table. Stares at the hourglass. Flips it over.

INT. IDB OFFICE - CENTRAL HALL - DAY

Ishan works at his desk. The dirty wall clock strikes: "2:00 p.m." Raju approaches.

RAJU

Your lunch box didn't come today.  
You'll have to go out for the lunch.

INT. EATERY - DAY

Ishan sits at a table and reads the menu. Motions to the waiter to take his order.

While waiting, Ishan dials a number on his cell phone.

INT. LAVA PUBLISHERS OFFICE (NEW DELHI) - SAME

Publisher ANIL (50s), bulky figure, wearing panama hat, plays a melodious tune on a harmonica on his chair.

His gold-capped canine glints as he removes the harmonica from his lips.

The desk phone RINGS. Anil picks it up.

ANIL

Hello!

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

ISHAN

Hello, sir. I am Ishan! I sent you my manuscript of short stories, "The Last Voyage." You told me to --

ANIL

Yeah, Mr Ishan. I read your stories. It's true that we give chances to newbie writers, but your book doesn't fit our slate.

ISHAN

Sir, would you please tell me the issue?

ANIL

Frankly speaking, you're a good writer but your philosophy-flavored fantasy stories appeal only to an elite class.

ISHAN

But sir, these stories are written in simple language. And philosophy is part of everybody's life.

ANIL

That sounds pretty cool in a public speech, but reality is different. I've been in this business for the past thirty years and run a mid-size publishing house. Fiction readers today want some kind of excitement. Crime thrillers, suspense, horror, corrupt politics, sex. If you can write those kind of raunchy stories, then you're most welcome.

INT. IDB OFFICE - CENTRAL HALL - LATER

Grim-faced Ishan lumbers back to his desk, listless. Peeks into the LUNCHROOM. Notices Dinesh, Rahul and Maya laugh out loud while they finish their lunch.

Ishan seems paranoid that they all are laughing at him. He sits at his desk, quiet.

His face turns grimmer as he hears more LAUGHTER.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ishan still looks grim. Sits on the sofa, quiet.

QUICK FLASH - LITTLE ISHAN'S SCHOOL CLASS ROOM

A TEACHER (40s) reads aloud LITTLE ISHAN's (7) story, barely audible, who stands by him. Little Ishan's classmates and Teacher laugh at him. He looks demeaned and humiliated.

BACK TO SCENE

A gale of LAUGHTER (V.O.) ECHOES in Ishan's mind.

EXT. AWARD SHOW - NIGHT

Anil sits and stares at the ANCHOR (30s) on the stage.

ANCHOR

And "The Publisher Of The Year" award  
goes to "Penguin Random House India."

A PUBLISHER (50s) waves his trophy on the stage. Returns to the audience. Approaches Anil and sits nearby.

PUBLISHER

Anil! What are you doing here? Oh,  
as a guest. Hard luck, for not a  
single nomination, this year too.  
The reality is, winners have class.

Anil says nothing but clenches his jaws, humiliated.

INT. LAVA PUBLISHERS OFFICE (NEW DELHI) - DAY

Anil plays a gloomy tune on his harmonica with a grim face. He stops and looks up at Raj who stands by him.

RAJ

Sir, lemme tell you that you're making  
big bucks from all your books, but  
the books you're publishing aren't  
the award-winning type.

Anil's face becomes hard.

ANIL

Touch anything but never touch my  
arrogance! Do you think I'm a fool  
coz I'm giving chances to newbie  
writers! That's a part of my profit  
business strategy.

RAJ

I'm sorry, sir. That guy Ishan sent his polished manuscript again. I think his type of book can win awards.

ANIL

You took words out of my mouth. One filmmaker is willing to buy one of his short stories for making a film. Now I would kill two birds with one stone. Call him for a meeting.

INT. LAVA PUBLISHERS OFFICE - EVENING

Anil plays a romantic tune on his harmonica, at his chair.

He stops with a wolfish grin as he stares at his RECEPTIONIST (20s) who sits on his lap wearing a red mini skirt.

As Ishan arrives, the Receptionist leaves. Ishan tries to put on a fake smile. He licks his lips, nervous.

ANIL

Come, Mr. Ishan! Have a seat...! I have a deal for you.

Ishan sits and waits with bated breath.

ANIL

Actually, we want to buy "The Last Voyage."

ISHAN

That's fine, sir! But I have an agent.

ANIL

I deal with the writers directly. Not through the agents. The deal is that we want to buy all print and film media rights for your book for an amount of *rupees one lakh*. But your name would remain as author.

ISHAN

*One Lakh*! But, that's a very small amount, sir. All authors get royalty on the book sale.

ANIL

So you're teaching me the rules...? Look, Mr. Ishan, touch anything but never touch my arrogance! You're new to this industry. We are the sharks of this ocean. We decide the rules.



ISHAN

But, I need money to support my writing.

ANIL

This is more than what you deserve. I can guarantee -- no big or mid-size publisher would look at the book by an unknown writer like you.

ISHAN

I feel, perhaps you don't have class to understand my writing.

ANIL

(angry)  
I said touch anything but never touch my arrogance!

He hurls the manuscript at Ishan's face.

ANIL

I don't need your stories! Bug off!

Ishan collects his manuscript and exits, silent but red-faced.

Anil anxiously plays a horrific tune on his harmonica. He plays faster and faster... Raj rushes to the office. Suddenly Anil flings his harmonica to the front wall.

His gold-capped canine sparkles in the light as he screams with a breathy voice in a fit of temper.

ANIL

Raj! Inform all the known publishing houses! And make sure this man doesn't get any deal, in any form!

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE LAVA PUBLISHERS OFFICE - EVENING

Ishan walks on the footpath as he exits. He passes by a group of YOUNG MEN at an open tea stall who LAUGH out loud as they crack some joke. The LAUGHTER discomforts Ishan.

EXT. SILENT SCENIC ROAD - MOTORBIKE (MOVING) - DAY

The ENGINE REVS. Ishan takes the road to the VALLEY, away from the city.

He stifles the engine's growl before a small tea shop where the silent road ends.

EXT. ROAD TEA SHOP - DAY

Ishan sits on a stool made out of a tree trunk. The TEA SELLER (50s) approaches with tea in a *kulhad* (earthen cup).

Ishan takes the *kulhad*. Sips as he turns his head towards a rocky and slightly sandy TRACK off to the side, curious.

ISHAN

Where does that track go?

TEA SELLER

Sir, you can come for fresh air, but up to here only.

(signals at track)

That's the way to the dangerous Valley of Dead Flowers. Nobody returns alive who dares to go there. I've heard that enchanted forest is full of trees with magical powers.

Ishan stares at the track, indecisive.

EXT. DESERTED STREET - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan walks on the footpath. He notices a weird TREE by the roadside with long branches like tentacles.

As he approaches the tree it traps him in one of the branches. The grip becomes tighter and one small branch grips his neck.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan sleeps on his back on his bed. His body is stiff but still. Only his fingers shiver. His eyelashes flutter, eyelids tremble, and eyes fling open.

He wakes up in a cold sweat, sits up on the bed, and sighs.

EXT. TITAN LITERARY AGENCY OFFICE (MUMBAI) - EVENING

A white board on a glass door which reads in large red font: "TITAN LITERARY AGENCY."

INT. TITAN LITERARY AGENCY OFFICE - EVENING

Ishan sits before agent, HARISH (40s), with a goatee.

HARISH

Ishan, I've talked with more than forty publishers. Initially a few were interested, but now... nobody is willing to even look at your manuscript... I feel it would be difficult for me to further manage your writing. I'm sorry!

Ishan looks disappointed.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ishan sits on the sofa, reads an email staring at his laptop.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN (EMAIL)

Digital text: "WRITE INDIA SHORT STORY CONTEST - WE SINCERELY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR STORY DIDN'T ADVANCE TO THE QUARTER FINAL."

BACK TO SCENE

Ishan sighs, frustrated. Closes his laptop.

INT. MMZ MALL - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan roams until he spots a bonsai shop. He gazes at the bonsai trees, fascinated, and murmurs.

ISHAN  
Amazing! Dinesh has only one but  
this is --

SALESGIRL (O.S.)  
-- Entire jungle... for your house.

A SALESGIRL (20s) catches him doing window-shopping. She approaches.

ISHAN  
It's really beautiful. But this jungle  
is only for those who either don't  
have time or don't have courage to  
see the real one.

The Salesgirl smiles.

SALESGIRL  
Sir, do you have either of them?

Ishan turns around, thoughtful. He leaves, with slow steps.  
The Salesgirl calls out to Ishan.

SALESGIRL  
I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to  
offend you. Please, buy at least  
one!

Ishan keeps walking. His cell phone RINGS.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ishan's sleep breaks by the RING of cell phone. He finds himself sleeping at the study table. He picks up the phone from the table, half awake.

MOM (V.O.)

I'm sure you're still sleeping. Get up, my son! Today I'll tell you how to use fennel seeds for indigestion.

ISHAN

Mom, I'll talk later --

He cuts the line and looks at the phone screen: "SUNDAY."

EXT. SILENT SCENIC ROAD - MOTORBIKE (MOVING) - MORNING

The ENGINE ROARS. Ishan rides to the VALLEY.

LATER

He STAMPS on the BRAKE PEDAL by the track near the tea shop.

Suddenly, he hears a MELODIOUS TUNE of a FLUTE echoing faintly in the mountains.

His motorbike pulls away onto the track like he is drawn by the melody.

Ishan rides slow on the pebbly track. Gradually, the flute music gets louder and clearer. After a bumpy ride, he reaches an area full of lush wild grass.

EXT. LUSH GREEN AREA BY HILLS - CONTINUOUS

Ishan gets off his motorbike where the track merges with a MOUNTAIN PASS.

A flock of sheep grazes on the ground.

A SHEPHERD BOY (15) sits on a boulder and plays the flute. He stops as he notices Ishan.

ISHAN

Your flute music is enchanting...!  
Do you know where this pass goes?

SHEPHERD BOY

Better if you don't ask. This pass goes to the Valley of Dead Flowers. Full of dangerous and spooky trees. Nobody returns alive from there. Cell phone signals get lost there.

Ishan locks his motorbike near the boulder. Grabs his small backpack and water bottle. Follows the pass.

SHEPHERD BOY  
Hey, are you crazy?

Ishan turns to him, and smiles.

ISHAN  
Yeah! I am.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - TRACKING ISHAN - LATER

Ishan follows the path through the trees and bushes.

Gradually, the sunlight dims as the forest gets denser. Some birds let out EERIE SHRIEKS AND HOOTS. Monkeys SCREECH.

Out of the blue a massive king cobra, wrapped around a tree branch, ATTACKS Ishan but he dives to escape.

After some distance Ishan watches TWO GREEN, CAT-LIKE EYES peeping through the bushes. His eyes bulge with fright. He holds his breath.

He startles as the animal RUSHES through the bushes. It gives him GOOSEBUMPS. His BREATH bursts in and out.

He slogs through the forest for some time. The sunlight brightens.

Ishan notices a saffron flag flying at the top of a SMALL TEMPLE in a sun-kissed area. He sighs with relief.

EXT. ANCIENT ROCKY TEMPLE - DAY

A Lord Shiva temple carved out of a single piece of rock.

A saffron-clad Hindu SADHU (60s), with long gray hair and beard, meditates in lotus position on a flat rock under a neem tree on the side of temple. His eyes are closed.

He opens his eyes at Ishan's FOOTSTEPS. Appears unruffled.

Ishan bows before him with folded hands. Sadhu smiles.

SADHU  
I was just waiting for you.

Ishan gapes.

ISHAN  
For me? But why, baba?

SADHU

A few meters away is the passage to the Valley of Dead Flowers. For fifteen years, I haven't seen a single person who would dare to enter this valley. People reach this place and return empty-handed.

ISHAN

Why?

SADHU

A lack of courage to trust the intuition and face the fear of the unknown.

Ishan approaches the opening of the dark passage, curious. It looks dangerous and creepy. He returns to Sadhu.

ISHAN

But fear of a dangerous valley is natural, baba. What has this to do with mental fears of life?

SADHU

This is just a test of life to make you feel that what we hear from others is not always true. Your life will change forever as you enter this valley.

ISHAN

Have you entered?

SADHU

Fifteen years ago. And I returned after one year, almost killed... but miraculously transformed. But I warn you, the cost for this choice can be your life.

ISHAN

Why do you feel that I'll not return from this place, like other people?

SADHU

From your eyes! When your thirst overpowers your fears, then nothing can stop you.

ISHAN

I don't understand.

SADHU

You'll understand soon, and experience later with the string of events in your life.

ISHAN

But if I'm lost in the valley, then?

SADHU

Do you think that a quest for a meaningful life would end without losing yourself?

EXT. VALLEY PASSAGE - DAY

Ishan passes through a dark, narrow passage, touching rock walls with his hands.

EXT. HILLTOP - CONTINUOUS

Ishan exits to a VALLEY VISTA. A cloud obscures his vision.

As the cloud dissipates, Ishan is stunned by the breathtaking natural beauty of the thickly wooded valley.

A vast dried-up river bed between hills and mountains. Some small, murky water pools lie scattered amid mudcracks.

EXT. VALLEY OF DEAD FLOWERS - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan struggles to descend the hill towards the valley floor.

EXT. VALLEY OF DEAD FLOWERS - FLOOR - LATER

Ishan stands on a rock to behold the natural beauty.

He watches a thirsty deer approaches a water pool. It steps back from the edge as it notices some crocodiles swimming.

The day is sunny. The deer waits for a few moments. But when thirst overpowers its fear then it dares to approach the shallow water, and quenches its thirst.

A crocodile jumps on the deer which escapes courageously.

Ishan's eyes sparkle. He gets down the rock.

Ishan walks through the valley, enjoying magnificent scenery.

Most of the trees are small and flowery with a thick bed of dead flowers under them.

Multicolor butterflies fly around, sucking nectar from the flowers of countless color-blends. A few land on Ishan.

Ishan's eyes fall on a GIGANTIC BANYAN TREE. He looks fascinated by its eye-catching beauty, size and elegance.

He approaches.

EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - CONTINUOUS

Sky-high tree. It's knotty roots cascade down from its expansive girth to embrace earth.

Ishan looks enchanted by the inviting mystique and majesty of the tree. He approaches with slow, fearful steps.

ISHAN  
(murmurs in awe)  
My God...! It's incredible!

He touches its enormous trunk, then hesitantly hugs it.

A cool breeze. Music of RUSTLING LEAVES. BIRDSONG accompany it. Small orange fruits rain down on Ishan.

Ishan closes his eyes with this divine experience. A serene silence appears on his face.

He drinks water from his bottle and lies on a large flat rock in the shade of the tree. He rests his head on his backpack. His heavy eyelids close.

LATER

Ishan snoozes.

TALKING TREE (O.S.)  
So, ultimately you came here.

A spooky, ethereal voice rousts Ishan, who staggers awake. He looks frozen, eyes wide, struggling to comprehend. He's about to run away.

TALKING TREE  
Don't be afraid! I'm an ancient tree  
that can talk with humans!

The voice originating from a large tree trunk cavity doesn't sound spooky now. It's more like a person, speaking with a deep voice and high bass.

Ishan stare at the tree, afraid. Walks away with his backpack.

After a few steps he stops, gently slaps his face then he returns to the tree.

He taps the tree trunk. He peeps into the cavity, scared.

Then he walks away.



After a few steps he returns again to the tree.

He stares at the tree with a gasp of disbelief.

ISHAN

What rubbish! How can a tree speak?

TALKING TREE

I can understand. How can you believe that? You're from a world where everybody is running mindlessly like a machine. People have forgotten to pause in life to look inside of them.

Ishan stands quiet with a sense of wonder.

TALKING TREE

Have you ever met a tree before?

Ishan looks thoughtful.

ISHAN

Yeah! A lot. But I haven't heard any of them speaking.

TALKING TREE

Have you ever met a tree while alone? Away from the crowd of people, the noise of the city, cell phones and the internet? And away from your preconceptions? Have you ever opened your heart before a tree and tried to talk to it?

Ishan keeps quiet, answerless.

TALKING TREE

If you haven't, then don't say that trees don't speak. Trees do speak... But I warn you to never tell anybody that you talked to a anthropomorphic tree!

Ishan looks amazed.

ISHAN

Are you a wishing tree that can fulfill my any wish?

TALKING TREE

That happens only in fables.

ISHAN

Then why am I wasting my time with you?

TALKING TREE

I'm not just a tree -- I'm an experience of your life, gained in the silence... your experience of meeting yourself. A stimulus to the magic inside.

ISHAN

Can you answer all my questions?

TALKING TREE

Questions change as your life fills with constantly elevating consciousness. So don't ask me any questions! I can't be a philosopher or guru... but I can be a friend.

Ishan stares at the tree, speechless and still baffled.

TALKING TREE

What're you thinking? Mythological sapient trees often tell stories to the visitors. Let's play differently. Now, tell me your stories... of your love, loss, pain, or ultimate calling. Maybe in several visits to this place.

Ishan seems now convinced. Sits back on the rock, still quiet.

TALKING TREE

Perhaps you don't want to face your inner conflicts... Okay, first tell me the story of your love so that I can understand what you have lost.

Ishan's eyes become dreamy as he begins weaving his story.

ISHAN

I purchased my sports motorbike only to impress her. But I couldn't forget my first meeting with her...

INT. BRANCH MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Ishan and Ajeera stand before BRANCH MANAGER.

BRANCH MANAGER

Ishan! She is Ajeera, a trainee officer.

SUPER: "NEW DELHI, TEN YEARS EARLIER"

Ajeera's purse slips out of her hand.

She bends down to pick it up. Ishan bends down to help her. They bump heads.

ISHAN  
Oh, sorry!

They try to get up together, maintaining eye contact. But they bump their heads on a table's edge.

WORKSPACE - LATER

Ishan studies a file while walking, absorbed. Ajeera walks, busy with a report. She accidentally pulls out Ishan's chair before he can sit on it. He falls down.

EXT. MOTORBIKE SHOWROOM - DAY

Ishan gets on his gleaming black machine while Ajeera stands by him. He strokes his hair and adjusts the string of Rudraksh beads.

ISHAN  
Take the back seat!

AJEERA  
Okay okay! It's too high and slippery!  
Don't brake too hard!

ISHAN  
(masculine grin)  
I'll try my best.

EXT. ROAD JUNCTION - LATER

Ishan brakes hard to avoid a SCOOTER RIDER (20s). Draws Ajeera closer against his back. Inhales the scent of her silky hair brushing against him.

ISHAN  
(to scooter rider)  
Thank you, so much, bro!

Ishan grins, amused. Ajeera slaps his back.

EXT. AJEERA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The DOORBELL RINGS as Ishan pushes the button.

Nobody answers. Ishan pushes the button again, and waits.

No response. Ishan peeps through a half-open ground floor APARTMENT window. He watches --

INT. AJEERA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - SAME

JASLEEN (20s), a high-fashion animal with ragged jeans, shaven head and a scorpion tattoo on her arm, lies carelessly on Ajeera's bed. She wears headphones, and listens to some music.

Ajeera exits the bathroom, a red towel wrapped around.

JASLEEN  
Where's Ishan? You said he's coming.

AJEERA  
Yeah yeah! He can be busy with stray dogs and homeless people.

Jasleen puffs on a cigarette.

JASLEEN  
Strange man! Do you love him?

AJEERA  
(blushing)  
No no, Jasleen! He's just a friend.  
Believe me.

JASLEEN  
Friend! Then why're you blushing?  
Well, he isn't a dashing guy, but  
he's not that bad.

Ajeera applies mascara at a dressing table.

AJEERA  
Ishan is taking me out for dinner.

Jasleen rubs the cigarette butt on Ajeera's laptop.

JASLEEN  
Did he kiss you?

Ajeera tries to hide her shy smile with both her hands.

AJEERA  
What the hell are you saying?

JASLEEN  
Hold your towel! I know men very well. They're fucking vicious dogs. They're desperate for those type of things.  
(winks)  
You give 'em everything they want and they'll bow before you.

AJEERA  
No no! He's not that type.

EXT. AJEERA'S APARTMENT - SAME

Ishan smiles, listening to their chat through the window.

INT. RESTAURENT - NIGHT

Ishan and Ajeera sit opposite at a table. A romantic MUSIC plays at low volume.

The waiter brings the ordered food. Ajeera quickly draws the dishes closer.

AJEERA  
Sorry sorry, I'm hungry.

She gobbles the piping-hot food without looking at Ishan. Her tongue burns. She pants.

Ishan gives her water. She takes a quick gulp. Then Ishan offers her ice cream cup. She gulps it down.

Ishan smiles at her childlike behavior.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan reads a book sitting on his bed. His phone RINGS. He answers.

ISHAN  
Hi, Ajeera.

SPLIT SCREEN - INT. AJEERA'S BEDROOM/ISHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ajeera flops down on her bed, cuddling a pillow to her chest. She talks with Ishan on her phone. She smiles and laughs.

Ishan lies on his side on his bed, talking on the phone with a smile. He chortles, and takes window's curtain fabric in his mouth in excitement.

END SPLIT SCREEN

INT. GIFT SHOP - EVENING

Ishan looks at the various gift items. Whenever something looks appealing, he first looks at the price tag. Then his eyes settle on a maroon handbag.

ISHAN  
(murmurs to himself)  
Lovely for Ajeera's birthday!

He takes the bag. Then his gaze shifts to an hourglass.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan writes a letter at his study table.

ISHAN (V.O.)

Dear Ajeera! I'm writing this letter  
as I feel I would never be able to  
tell you how much I love you. Because  
whenever I gaze into your beautiful,  
hypnotic eyes I forget everything...

EXT. NEW DELHI - CONNAUGHT PLACE - BUSY ROAD - DAY

Ishan and Ajeera help an AGED WOMAN (70s) cross the road and reach her car while she struggles.

AGED WOMAN

Thanks for your kind help. You are a  
sweet couple!

AJEERA

No, Auntie. We are just friends.

Ishan seems devastated and looks away, touching his love letter in his shirt's pocket, while Ajeera exchanges a smiling glance with the aged woman as she leaves.

INT. HOSPITAL (UDAIPUR) - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

A female NURSE (20s) injects some medicine in the arm of Ishan's DAD (70s) who lies unconscious on the bed. A DOCTOR (50s) checks various reports.

DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Ishan and his elder sister RAGINI (40s) sit before the Doctor, worried.

DOCTOR

Your father's prostate cancer is in  
the last stage. There's no sign of  
improvement. My advice is, take him  
home, care for him and try to make  
him happy.

CORRIDOR

Ishan and Ragini sit on a bench.

RAGINI

Dad is a man of few words. But for  
the past few days he's talking a lot  
(MORE)

RAGINI (CONT'D)  
more. Perhaps he knows he doesn't  
have much time. Yesterday he was  
discussing the color of your wedding  
suit.

ISHAN  
You are doin' a lot for Mom and Dad  
in spite of your own family  
responsibilities. But, you know, I  
can't think of marriage at this time.

RAGINI  
I know. But maybe you can do this to  
bring a smile to Dad's face...?  
Well, let me see the dad.

Ragini walks to the patients's room. Ishan gets up and looks  
outside a window. Faint sound of an OPERA from a nearby house.

Ishan paces up and down with the music, pensive.

MOMENTS LATER

Ragini comes back.

RAGINI  
Ishan! Should I arrange a meeting  
with Shreya and her parents, at  
Jaipur? She's tall, fair and pretty.

ISHAN  
(deadpan)  
Tall, fair and pretty...

EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Ishan sits on the rock, lost in the smoky memories.

ISHAN  
She was just tall, fair and pretty.  
Nothing else... After two meetings  
of total sixty minutes and five phone  
chats of total ninety minutes, I  
guessed Shreya was okay for me...  
She fucked up my life.  
(throws stone in air)  
Ajeera was transferred to a different  
place. I never saw her again...

TALKING TREE  
So, you want to say that your failed  
love story and failed marriage ruined  
your life?

Ishan stares at the tree, upset, as he expects some sympathy.

TALKING TREE

No deer in this jungle can blame swamp, wild grass or dense vegetation for not running fast. He knows, the cost can be his life for this.

ISHAN

I'm not blaming anyone or anything.

TALKING TREE

You can. Humans have time and liberty for that. But the cost is -- being a mediocre, entire life. Are you ready to pay that?

ISHAN

But sometimes I feel that if I had married Ajeera, my life would have been so different.

TALKING TREE

But why everybody wants somebody or something from a relationship of love? Is this truly love, or humans have changed the definition of love over the time?

ISHAN

But, is it a crime to wish anything good in life?

TALKING TREE

Wishes deep from your heart, that you repeat under your breath, will appear some day in your life as reality.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan stares at his cell phone lying on his bed.

PHONE SCREEN

Ad of card game rummy.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan and Amit play cards at a table. Amit throws a card. Ishan stares at the --

CARD

Has a picture of CIRCULAR MAZE. We TRAVEL deep inside of it.



END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The picture of the maze turns into a SPINNING CEILING FAN.

Ishan's eyelids flutter before he wakes up. He lies on his bed, looking blankly at the ceiling fan.

He deliberately sits up, musing.

EXT. NEWSPAPER VENDOR'S STALL - DAY

Ishan buys a newspaper. His eyes fall on a --

SMALL FRONT PAGE AD

Depicts a picture of a MAZE with text beneath:

"WRITING-MAZE: A UNIQUE MENTORING PROGRAM IN DEHRADUN BY  
RENOWNED WRITER AND NATIONAL AWARD WINNER - PROFESSOR RAMAN.  
CONTACT TIME: 4-7 PM ON SUNDAY."

Ishan gazes at the ad.

EXT. PROFESSOR RAMAN'S RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON

Ishan stands before a large iron gate where a GATEKEEPER  
(40s), with a droopy mustache and a dark green uniform, sits  
on a chair, dozing off.

ISHAN

Excuse me!

Gatekeeper startles. Blinks.

GATEKEEPER

Uh! Yeah!

ISHAN

Sir, I want to see Professor Raman.

GATEKEEPER

Well...

(yawns)

Go inside through the narrow entryway  
at the side of this gate. Your path  
will diverge in two paths separated  
by a wall. If you're a writer, then  
go left, otherwise go right.

Ishan looks amazed. He enters and takes the LEFT PATH.

EXT. PROFESSOR RAMAN'S RESIDENCE - MAZE - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan walks the narrow path surrounded by high, blank white walls.

After some walking the path diverges into TWO PATHS. Ishan takes the LEFT ONE.

Then he takes three left turns.

Ishan keeps walking. The path again diverges into TWO PATHS. Again he takes the LEFT ONE.

The same pattern repeats again. Ishan looks anxious now. He looks around and wipes his face with his handkerchief.

Ishan keeps walking until he reaches --

EXT. PROFESSOR RAMAN'S RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Ishan looks flabbergasted to find himself standing before the Gatekeeper again. The Gatekeeper giggles.

GATEKEEPER

Do you want to try again or go back home?

Ishan doesn't reply. Heads back to the maze.

EXT. PROFESSOR RAMAN'S RESIDENCE - POOLSIDE - LATER

Ishan exits the maze successfully, and finds himself next to a pool in front of an impressive mansion.

Ishan sees that PROFESSOR RAMAN (70s), with long, shiny gray hair and beard, wearing thick round glasses, lazes in a wicker chair under a fiberglass sunshade. He smokes an exotic pipe.

A small tea-table lies in front of Raman with a glass of water, a small cake and a big knife on a steel tray.

Ishan approaches him.

ISHAN

Hello, sir! I'm Ishan. I work in a bank and --

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I'm a writer. I already know that. Don't waste my time. Just go away!

ISHAN

Go away? But I came here --

Raman gets up, angry.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I said go away! I'm extremely jaded of all the wannabe star writers, like you. Now I realize my mistake. I made "Writing Maze" FREE for the writers. People don't value the free things.

ISHAN

But I --

PROFESSOR RAMAN

(shouts)

I said go away! Are you deaf?

Ishan gets irritated.

ISHAN

(shouts out)

Hold it! Then why're you giving an ad in the news paper? Only to insult struggling writers?

Raman thinks for a moment and nods.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Hmmm...! I smell some kind of anger inside of you, against invisible slavery of middle-class people, living with injured self-respect, who wanna do something big with their lives.

Professor Raman stares at Ishan for a moment.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I was just like you when I was your age, struggling hard to be a writer... Y'know anger is like a stone, acting as a roadblock. It can make you fall if you don't know how to convert it into a stepping stone.

Raman sits back on his chair. Doesn't offer Ishan a seat. Ishan looks adamant. Sits on nearby chair.

Raman clears the rasp from his voice.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

You've tasted the maze and understood how a writer's path is. Now, tell me about your writing goal and hurdles.

Ishan takes a deep breath, and begins speaking.

LATER

Raman nods at Ishan.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

So you're writing a novel on the life of a storyteller that you want to get published in the next six months. Without compromising your artistic voice. It means you want to just write but not to sell your novel.

He takes a deep puff on his pipe.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I can't understand whether you're going to write this story for yourself or for your daughter?

ISHAN

Maybe, for myself. But my daughter is the heart of the story.

Raman drops the pipe into the glass of water.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

But after listening to your dispirited story I can bet you can't complete a winning story in under six months.

He pulls out a small, yellow towel from a bag.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Why story of only a storyteller?

ISHAN

There are millions of people, especially office-goers, who strive for a life of freedom to create something. I want to write this story to inspire them.

Raman wipes his face with the towel.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Then, write your own story.

Ishan gasps.

ISHAN

Well... I can't.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Are you afraid of your own story? Dull, boring and gray.

Ishan looks uneasy, unable to maintain eye contact.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Actually, you're a demoralized and discouraged writer who doesn't have the courage to face rejection or failure. You are writing this story only to inspire yourself.

Ishan looks upset. Gets up from his seat. Paces around. Stops.

ISHAN

That's not true.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Yeah! It's a lie that you're living. If you can't change your own story, how can you change other's?

ISHAN

But I came here with hopes of getting a mentor for my new project.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Sorry! I don't offer hollow motivation or writing advice... I offer only unique challenges.

Raman gets up and approaches a T.T.(table-tennis) table nearby. He grabs a bat and ball.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Have you ever played T.T.

ISHAN

I was the university champion. I can beat you within seconds, but I don't want to embarrass you at this age.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

In your dreams. You can't stand against me for even thirty seconds.

Ishan gets up rolling up his sleeve. Grabs the bat. Takes the position.

MONTAGE - AROUND T.T. TABLE

-- Ishan misses a powerful backhand drive by Raman.

-- Ishan misses a quick forehand drive by Raman.

-- Ishan can't stop an aggressive smash by Raman.

-- Ishan struggles to stop the fast strokes by Raman at different angles around the table.

END MONTAGE

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Nice try. Perhaps you have forgotten your strengths.

Ishan puts back the bat on the T.T.table.

ISHAN

I'll come better prepared next time.

Raman approaches the tea-table. Grabs the sharp knife and rubs it on his palm.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I challenge you to write your own life story in less than six months. Not a boring autobiography. But a fiction story. And I'm eager to see what new colors you can bring to your dull, gray story.

ISHAN

But what if I win this race against time?

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I'm not interested in your past work. But if any of your already written short stories wins some reputed contest in the next six months, or even comes close, I'll immediately read your novel.

ISHAN

Anybody can do that.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

If your story and writing is unique, I'll recommend it to one of my publisher friends. If he agrees, you'll get published, before six months.

The knife glitters in Raman's hand. Raman cuts a slice of cake. Forwards it to Ishan.

Ishan spreads his hand but Raman drops the cake on the floor before he can grab it.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

It's a life-changing opportunity for you, but not a piece of cake. You'll be into a maze of unscripted life. Either you'll rediscover yourself or lose everything.

He gestures at a white board on a free standing wall nearby.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Still, if you want to go ahead with it -- write your name and the end date, six months from today.

Ishan approaches the board CRAMMED WITH NAMES AND DATES.

Ishan grabs a red marker from a stand on the wall. Writes in one blank corner of the board: "ISHAN - OCT 31."

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I was also uncompromising, like you. But after repeated failures I compromised somewhere and started writing something I didn't believe in. And I kept doing that, just for the money.

Raman's eyes look sad.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

Sometimes I regret that. But I didn't have anyone who could help me out.

Raman approaches Ishan and gazes into his eyes.

PROFESSOR RAMAN

I have been waiting years for a writer who could be more stubborn than me... I'll wait for you.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan dozes off. Drunk with fatigue, he's about to hit his head as he slumps forward.

He cracks open his eyes with a hypnic jerk. Realizes he is slumped on the chair by his study table.

He types on his laptop:

ISHAN (V.O.)

Dhruv was burning midnight oil to complete his novel. He wanted to see professor again as soon as possible.  
(MORE)

ISHAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But he was still unsure how the banyan  
tree he encountered in the jungle  
would sort out his life's problems  
as it was not a wishing tree.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ishan irons his shirt. His phone RINGS. He picks it up.

INT. AMIT'S HOUSE (NOIDA) - BEDROOM - SAME

Amit sits on his bed and opens a Coke. His phone is clamped  
between his tilted head and his shoulder.

AMIT  
Hey, bro! I'm comin' to your city.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

ISHAN  
Hold it! You must be kidding.

AMIT  
No! I'm coming next Sunday. Whatever,  
I'm not gonna disturb you. I'll stay  
at Jay's place.

ISHAN  
Sunday I'm busy. I've to finish a  
novel for a challenge in less than  
six months.

Amit sips his Coke.

AMIT  
We'll make your mood better, and  
you'll write faster. Whatever! Look  
at Jay. He's also working in your  
bank and in your city. He's so cool.

ISHAN  
Hold it! I can't be like him!

AMIT  
Okay! Just calm down. Whatever, I'm  
coming next Sunday.

ISHAN  
But --?

Amit disconnects the call. Ishan smells something. He rushes  
to the ironing-table as his shirt burns under the hot iron.



EXT. LAKESIDE - CRAZY POINT RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Open air. ROCK MUSIC BLASTS from a LOUDSPEAKER.

The cook tosses up a fiery dish in the air. The CLINK OF GLASSES and high pitched FEMININE LAUGHTER.

Ishan chats with hawk-nosed JAY (40s), sitting at a round table. Some boats row in the background on a LAKE.

Amit, wearing a weird "STRAY BULL" T-shirt, walks towards them, rocking to the music, with a box of fries in his hand.

As Amit walks, he leers at some female tourists in revealing dresses, gyrating their hips to the music. One of them gives him the middle finger.

Amit stumbles. He reaches the table and sinks into a chair.

A WAITER (20s) approaches the table with a wooden smile. Amit gives him an awkward stare.

AMIT

No sexy waitress? Whatever! Bring three large beers with masala peanuts and *paneer tikka*.

Amit glances at Ishan, carelessly munching on fries.

AMIT

Tell now, bro! Whatz the problem?

ISHAN

I was a night owl, thinking of writing success with a day job, but now --

AMIT

-- Now you've been bitten by a fucking writing bug or whatever.

(giggles)

Bro! You need an adventure. Trekking, hiking, mountaineering and hooking up with a sexy woman after a booze party with me.

Fuming, Ishan snatches the box of fries from Amit's hand and tosses it into a nearby trash can.

Amit frowns. Ishan ignores him and stares at the loudspeaker.

ISHAN

Why is this fucking music so loud?

The Waiter plonks three king-size frothy beer mugs with other dishes. Amit quickly lifts the mug to his lips.

JAY  
 Ishan, it's not a big deal! There are so many people who write while they have day job.

Ishan munches on masala peanuts.

ISHAN  
 Hold it! Why are these fucking peanuts so salty...?

Both Amit and Jay stare at Ishan, baffled.

ISHAN  
 Jay, so many people don't get charge sheets when they try to churn out some quality pages in the evening.

JAY  
 I was chargesheeted twice. Nothing happened, but the fucking inquiry lasted for more than a year.

ISHAN  
 All cases are not same. It's serious.

He takes a large swig of his beer, grim. Amit enjoys *paneer tikka*.

AMIT  
 You overthink too much. I'm sure, an adventure will --

ISHAN  
 Enough of your fucking adventure! I don't have time!

JAY  
 Actually your problem is your life is monotonous. You'd start loving your job after your marriage, like me. To stay away from your wife's tantrum.

AMIT  
 This man is a workaholic. So he's talking nonsense. I try to get home early. And then I drain a large glass of whisky to release all the fucking tensions.

ISHAN  
 Now I feel that both alcoholics and workaholics have strange standards for happiness.

JAY

But what can we do...? Well, I'm not discouraging you. But this isn't the age for searching for a new writing career. You can write just as your hobby. Try to save your bank job! It's a big deal. Don't try to become a hero!

Jay sips his beer with a grim face.

JAY

Even I sacrificed my dream of being a musician, to please my family. But I feel now, this life is far better.

ISHAN

And what's better?

JAY

I joined the bank with you, took promotions. And see the difference now. I own a mansion, an expensive car. I enjoy stay at luxury hotels. My children study in big schools. I can afford treatment in five star hospitals. And you...? I wish you could think like me.

ISHAN

But are you happy now?

JAY

Very happy. But I ask you the same question?

Ishan looks deep in some thought.

INT. ROSE CAFE (DEHRADUN) - EVENING

A board on the wall behind the reception desk says: "ROSE CAFE - A DEN OF CREATIVE PEOPLE."

A relaxing ambiance. Soothing INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC plays. A few people sit around, conversing softly.

Ishan sits at a table and sips his coffee. The hard copy of his manuscript lies on the table.

Ishan inhales deeply. He turns back, sees and calls out --

ISHAN

Ajeera!

Ajeera sits at a table behind him. Looks at him, smiles and shifts to his table.

AJEERA

Hi, Ishan...! How did you know that I'm here while you couldn't see me?

ISHAN

Your fragrance. It hasn't changed even after so many years... But you have changed.

Ajeera looks a little sober now. Her childlike eyes now have a stability and depth. And her slim figure is now curvaceous.

AJEERA

Everything changes with the time. You've also changed. Where's your wife?

ISHAN

Went away with her temper and my daughter... And you?

AJEERA

Five years ago, my husband died in a car crash!

ISHAN

Oh, I'm sorry!

AJEERA

Don't be! He was cheating me.

There's a peculiar silence for a few moments.

ISHAN

By the way, what're you doing here in Dehradun?

AJEERA

I work here in a magazine, "Women's Era". As a story analyst.

ISHAN

Great! I'm also working on my novel.

AJEERA

(re: manuscript)  
Is this your manuscript?

She takes the manuscript and turns pages.

AJEERA  
It seems interesting... Can I take  
this with me?

ISHAN  
It's incomplete. Maybe, take it later.

AJEERA  
I like incomplete stories... See ya  
next Sunday.

Ajeera gets up and walks away with the manuscript.

Ishan sits quiet, in a state of disbelief.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan writes on his laptop.

ISHAN (V.O.)  
Dhruv still couldn't believe that  
his long time sweetheart Roohi came  
back. Perhaps his inspiration.

INT. ROSE CAFE - EVENING

Ajeera sits opposite Ishan, with a grin.

AJEERA  
Wow! It's mind blowing! Believe me!  
Do you have any finished manuscripts?

ISHAN  
I have one. But no publisher is ready  
to publish that book.

AJEERA  
Try International publishers with  
your new project. With a new approach.

ISHAN  
Please! It's no fun.

AJEERA  
Believe me! Maybe something bigger  
is waiting for you.

Ishan sips his coffee.

ISHAN  
(sideways glance)  
You said everything changes with  
time. But some feelings never change.

Ajeera tries to make eye contact with Ishan who avoids it.

AJEERA  
And what're those feelings?

ISHAN  
(nervous; sips coffee)  
Mmmm...

AJEERA  
(romantic gaze)  
Tell me!

Ishan keep sipping his coffee. Ajeera snatches his cup, chugs his coffee and plonks the empty cup on the table.

ISHAN  
Mmmmm...

Ishan immediately takes the copy of script, opens it and pretends to read it, turning pages.

Ajeera snatches the script and raises questioning eyebrows in a romantic way.

ISHAN  
(nervous)  
Mmmmm...! I need to go to the  
restroom.

Ishan rushes to the restroom.

RESTROOM

Ishan stands before sink and sighs with relief. He washes his face in the sink.

Ishan is shocked as he sees naughty Ajeera's reflection in the mirror who stands behind him in the empty restroom.

He quickly rushes into one of the bathrooms, nervous.

EXT. SILENT ROAD - NIGHT

Ishan ambles along with Ajeera, quite and a little embarrassed. Ajeera giggles at him. Ishan smiles.

ISHAN  
Shame on you! You entered the men's  
room.

AJEERA  
Shame on you! You ran like a rat.

They share a stoned laugh.

AJEERA  
You are still very shy...! But really  
sweet.

Ishan smiles at her.

EXT. BOOK-WORLD BOOK SHOP - DAY

Ishan is just about to enter through the main door when --

VIRAM (40s), with a handlebar mustache, wearing a white kurta  
and pyjama with his red turban, rushes out the door.

He bumps his arm against Ishan. Some books in his hand scatter  
on the ground. He squats to collect them. Ishan helps him.

ISHAN  
Oh, I'm sorry!

VIRAM  
All right. It's all my fault.

Viram collects his books and gets up.

ISHAN  
Story books...! Are you a teacher?

VIRAM  
A storyteller.

ISHAN  
Do you write?

VIRAM  
I narrate stories to the villagers.  
Actually all of my stories have gone  
stale. So, I'll have to read some  
fresh ones.

ISHAN  
Almost all villagers have smartphones  
today. Do they still have any interest  
in stories told orally?

VIRAM  
Of course. Because I drag them into  
my world in my own way.

ISHAN  
Interesting! I'm Ishan. I'm writing  
a novel. I'm eager to see what can I  
find in your stories.

VIRAM

Then come to my village -- Rampur.  
Thirty kilometers from here. Take my  
number. Ask for Viram.

EXT. RAMPUR VILLAGE - GROUND - NIGHT

The villagers and Ishan sit silently on the sand in a large  
circle around a ROARING BONFIRE.

Viram stands by the bonfire, in the get-up of Rajput king  
Maharana Pratap, with a sword in his hand. VIRAM'S FRIEND  
stands by him dressed as commander Hakim Khan. His pet horse  
lies nearby like it is injured badly.

VIRAM

... Now I take you to the battlefield  
of Haldighati where the sand became  
red with the blood of dying soldiers.  
Legendary fighter King Maharana Pratap  
leans over his beloved horse, Chetak,  
who is injured badly in the battle  
against Mughal emperor, Akbar.

VIRAM'S FRIEND

Maharana! You are living in the jungle  
with your family and suffering  
hardships. You sacrificed lives of  
many of your dear soldiers. And now  
your beloved horse Chetak is taking  
it's last breath. For what all this?  
Only for the so called freedom?

VIRAM

Hakim Khan! This is not the matter  
of mere physical freedom. This is  
about freedom of thinking and  
expression. And ultimately freedom  
of my consciousness. And not just  
mine but of thousands of people who  
regard me as their king.

The people listen with rapt attention. Ishan looks captivated.

VIRAM

This freedom is our birthright. Nobody  
can take this away from us. And to  
protect this I can sacrifice anything.

The horse acts like it died. Viram hugs it and cries.

Then Viram gets up and roars waving his sword into the air.



VIRAM  
Neither I will submit nor I will run  
away. I will continue this battle  
till my last breath...

The crowd cheers and claps. The people throw notes and coins  
on a white cloth spread by the bonfire.

LATER

Ishan and Viram sit on a sand dune side by side, facing the  
dying bonfire.

ISHAN  
Who says your stories are stale?  
They are fresh all the time.

VIRAM  
I don't know but I do all this just  
for the money, which isn't much.  
But I enjoy all this.

Ishan gets up and hands Viram some notes.

ISHAN  
Okay! I leave now.

VIRAM  
Is this for my story?

ISHAN  
Your story is priceless for me.  
This is for buying more books. Keep  
telling stories... Okay, Bye!

Ishan walks towards his motorbike. Suddenly he turns around.

ISHAN  
And by the way, your horse is a better  
actor than you.

VIRAM  
Hahaha... Visit again!

Ishan smiles and waves at Viram and his friend standing by  
Viram's horse. They smile and wave back. The Horse shakes  
it's head and NEIGHS.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

Ishan and Ajeera sit on a bench under a tree. Ajeera reads  
from a paper.

AJEERA

"Dhruv decided he would not become a part of the system, that conditions people to be slave. Slave of social, political and religious ideologies. He will have the courage to be himself."

Ajeera keeps the paper down.

AJEERA

I know what are you thinking.

ISHAN

How?

AJEERA

I can truly relate with your story...

INT. AJEERA'S HOUSE AFTER MARRIAGE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Ajeera, in office wear, hurries in placing some pots of cooked food on dining table. AJEERA'S HUSBAND (30s) and MOTHER IN LAW (60s) stare at her while having breakfast.

AJEERA'S HUSBAND

You can't manage all these things together. Why're you so stubborn to work in a magazine when my business is running so good.

AJEERA

Coz I'm itching to do this. And this is my identification. I don't want to be just a housewife.

MOTHER IN LAW

We are not a conservative family. Still I chose to be a homemaker to support your father-in-law.

AJEERA

Home is made from the people who live happily there, not from a building. And you ARE conservative. My cab driver is waiting...

Ajeera leaves.

INT. AJEERA'S MAGAZINE OFFICE - EDITORS'S OFFICE - DAY

Ajeera enters to confront EDITOR (60s), obese, with glasses.

AJEERA

Why is my article removed without discussing with me?

EDITOR

I don't need your permission. We run a large publishing house. We can't overlook effects of publishing an article on our business.

AJEERA

But at least I should have been informed.

EDITOR

You were asked to write about social reasons and mindset of people. An article that tells why literature and writing is still not considered a preferred career option. It was not about writers' exploitation by the publishers and their publishing related struggles.

AJEERA

But truth must come out.

EDITOR

You can write all this! But not here.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Ishan and Ajeera sit on the bench.

AJEERA

I was fired. I couldn't get a job of my choice for a long time. I always wanted to help struggling writers. When I read your story, I felt it was something I was trying to write, as an article.

ISHAN

Most publishers and agents say all I'm writing is just crap. But I can't write just for the market. I write whatever I feel.

AJEERA

Immortality of a great story is only because of a writer's burning desire to tell the story deep inside his heart... Believe me!

ISHAN

But I'm not sure whether my new project is going in the right direction or not.

AJEERA

I feel you're still not confident of your own story's success. You're the writer as well as protagonist. And this element gives your story a unique depth and power. Believe me!

ISHAN

I feel now... Professor Raman was right.

INT. IDB REGIONAL OFFICE - MANAGER'S MEETING ROOM - DAY

A message flashes on a computer screen on the wall: "BRANCH MANAGER'S PERFORMANCE REVIEW."

Branch Managers, including Dinesh, sit around an oval shaped table. REGIONAL MANAGER (50s), obese and balding, sits with some papers and a nameplate: "REGIONAL MANAGER."

REGIONAL MANAGER

(looks into a sheet)

Dinesh! Do you sleep in the office time? For the past two years your branch's rank has been falling consistently. And now you're at the bottom.

DINESH

Sir! The main problem is my officer, Ishan. He is on unauthorized leave. He doesn't have skin in the game.

REGIONAL MANAGER

Don't try to put blame of your mismanagement on others.

DINESH

Ishan didn't submit a reply to his charge sheet. I had asked permission to lodge a police complaint against him?

REGIONAL MANAGER

Don't think that you're too clever. You already know that head office didn't permit us for that. Bank will take appropriate action against him.

DINESH

I want Ishan to be transferred.

REGIONAL MANAGER

This bank is not your chess board. You got hometown posting only because of your good track record. But your current performance shows you're just doing nothing. I give you six month. Or get ready for transfer to a notorious branch.

Dinesh looks upset by the insult and warning.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Ishan prepares coffee on the gas stove. Suddenly he listens to the sound of a nightingale. He rushes to the balcony.

BALCONY

As Ishan approaches the nightingale flies from the railings. Ishan stands by the railings, lost in the sweet memories...

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Ishan and Sara sit side by side on the sofa.

SARA

Daddy! Give me one of your book you are writing. I want to show that to my classmates. I have told them my dad is a writer.

ISHAN

Definitely, I'll give you one. But after some time. Today, you're going to tell me a story.

Sara thinks something.

SARA

Aaa... Okay... There was a man who had a nightingale who used to sing beautiful songs. One day she performed before a king. The king bought the nightingale from the man and caged it. Now she would sing only sad songs.

ISHAN

Nice story. But what's the moral.

Sara smiles and thinks for a moment.

SARA

Don't sing a beautiful song before a devil.

ISHAN

Hahaha... it's really funny. But I didn't listen to the song of nightingale.

Sara curls her lips and whistles like a nightingale.

ISHAN

That's my little nightingale.

He hugs Sara.

EXT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Ishan watches some birds flying in the sky. Suddenly he remembers something and runs to the kitchen.

KITCHEN

The coffee burns on the pan as all the water dried up. Ishan turns off the stove and shakes his head.

INT. IDB OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Rahul sits opposite Dinesh who looks distressed. Suddenly Dinesh's phone RINGS.

DINESH

Yeah... 7'0 clock... Okay... Don't worry. I'll reach on time.

Dinesh puts phone on the table, it RINGS again.

DINESH

Good afternoon, sir... Yeah... Yeah... Okay, sir, it will be done.

As Dinesh puts phone on the table, it RINGS once again.

DINESH

Why're you calling me again and again... I remember that... I'll bring that...

Dinesh cuts the line and puts the phone on table with a THUD.

DINESH

Woman! At one end my wife and on the other end this Regional Manager. Both are headaches. And bastard Ishan is only adding to my problems.

Raju enters with a tray of tea cups and saucers.

He plonks the tray on the table.

Dinesh gets angry. He glares at Raju.

DINESH

Out!

Raju rushes out the door.

RAHUL

Ishan is off duty for the past fifteen days. Why don't you try his transfer?

DINESH

Now I'm on the verge of transfer. And my wife has warned me if I'm transferred, she wouldn't shift with me. She says -- she can't allow anybody to disturb her weight-loss program. Huh!

Dinesh rubs his forehead, uneasy. Takes out a tablet from a blister pack and swallows it with water.

DINESH

I hate rebels like Ishan. They are like parasites on the system. And this parasite has made my life hell. I won "Best Manager Award" continuously for five years, but he spoiled everything in the past two years.

His mouth twists with hate.

DINESH

Unfortunately, I don't have the powers to fire Ishan. Otherwise I would have thrown him out a long ago. But I'll make it happen now... in my own way.

He stares at a framed picture of MONALISA'S PAINTING on the wall. Looks upset by her SMILE. Gets up and approaches it.

DINESH

I'm nursing my hatred like an old wound!

Hysterical, Dinesh SMASHES the PAINTING from his bracelet with a side punch.

EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - DAY

Ishan talks to the tree, sitting on the rock.

ISHAN  
My married life was a nightmare!

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Shreya checks through Ishan's jeans pockets and his wallet. She gets a paper from the wallet. She reads it and her facial expression changes from shock to anger.

Meanwhile Ishan enters the room. Shreya shows her his wallet and the letter.

SHREYA  
Who's this Ajeera? Is she the bitch  
in whose dreams you're drowned day  
and night?

ISHAN  
It's nothing. This is old. It was  
already over. There was nothing to  
tell you.

SHREYA  
You can't fool me anymore. Now I  
understand why you pretend to be  
busy all the time in your writing  
and avoid all the parties from my  
family, friends and relatives.

ISHAN  
I'm not a party animal like you. I  
want time and space for my writing.  
It's my life.

Shreya looks about to cry.

SHREYA  
I wanted a man who would love and  
pamper me all the time. You betrayed  
me. You can never be mine. I'm leaving  
this house.

She opens cupboard and starts packing.

LATER

Shreya leaves with Sara and a big trolley bag, furious.

Ishan stares at her, quiet and shocked.



SHREYA

You shattered all my dreams. I will take everything away from your life that gives you happiness. Your writing, Sara, your dream of being a famous writer. Everything.

INT. FAMILY COURT (JAIPUR) - COURTROOM - DAY

Crowded. Ishan stands in the dock before JUDGE-1 who writes in a paper and dictates.

JUDGE-1

The court orders a judicial custody of thirty days for accused Ishan Shivansh on charges of harassment for large dowry and domestic violence, until further investigation.

INT. JAIPUR CENTRAL JAIL - JAILER'S OFFICE - DAY

JAILER (50s), in khakis, sits with Advocate Kapil. Ishan, in black-and-white striped prison uniform, emerges from the dark, broken-down.

Jailer gestures Ishan to have a seat. Ishan sits on a chair.

JAILER

Court has granted you the bail.

Ishan, in a state of shock, says nothing.

The Jailer signs a letter and hands it to Ishan.

JAILER

I know you're in a trap of an abusive marriage. Still, I advise you to make a divorce settlement for the compensation whatever your wife wants, to avoid further mental torture.

Ishan still keeps quiet.

EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Ishan sits on the rock with a grim face.

ISHAN

I'm the unfortunate father who couldn't live my childhood again with my daughter... I still have that image of her in my mind from the courtroom.

Ishan sighs with closed eyes.

ISHAN

I feel that whatever the situations might be, I did injustice to my daughter. I didn't fulfill the duties of a father.

Ishan's voice becomes weaker.

ISHAN

My old and ailing mother lives alone in my hometown. I didn't serve her right... It breaks my heart that I failed as a father and as a son.

Ishan's eyes brim with tears. A dismal silence follows.

TALKING TREE

If you're sitting alive at this place, it's a blessing. In the next moment you can be hunted down by a leopard or a tiger.

A TIGER ROARS in the distance. Ishan gets up, turns around and then looks around.

TALKING TREE

Now you look more afraid than sad. Nothing is permanent. Neither life nor any feeling or emotion. This realization is very deep in this jungle. But people living in concrete jungles ignore this truth.

ISHAN

But what about my guilty conscience?

TALKING TREE

Who's filled with a guilt sense? A father, son, brother or a husband? Who are you actually? This jungle will teach you how to read your solitude and develop the art of choiceless observation like a good writer. And gradually you'll feel that you are not just a person, a feeling, thought or emotion. You are something else.

Ishan sits calm and quiet but his eyes shine.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan sits on his bed as he types on his laptop. His phone RINGS. The caller ID: "Mom." Ishan connects phone to laptop and answers. MOM'S FACE appears on the laptop screen.

MOM (V.O.)  
What're you doing?

ISHAN  
Nothing! Just trying to write. My  
stomach is upset from dysentery.

MOM (V.O.)  
Use curd for that! Today I'll tell  
you how to make curd from milk...  
Are you listening?

ISHAN  
I know that, but I bought curd from  
the market.

MOM (V.O.)  
That's useless. Make curd at home.

ISHAN  
Hold it! You're wasting my time!  
Lemme write!

MOM (V.O.)  
Why're you yelling at me...? You're  
writing today 'cause I taught you  
grammar. I taught you tenses. The  
past, present and future tense...  
Are you listening?

They share a moment of strange silence. Suddenly, both of  
them burst out laughing. They keep laughing for some time.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Crash of waves and fizz of foam as it sweeps ashore. Beach  
umbrellas flap in the wind. Seagulls cry. Powerboats thunder.

Black smoke rises from a barbecue at a --

EXT. BEACH RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Ishan and Ajeera sit at a table, enjoying blue drinks. Ajeera  
brings out a cigarette packet and offers one to Ishan.

ISHAN  
(shakes head)  
I smoke occasionally, when I think  
too much about something. But when  
did you start smoking?

AJEERA  
When my married life started to burn,  
I thought there must be some smoke.

She clamps a cigarette between her lips. Ishan flicks her lighter and lights her cigarette.

ISHAN

I'm a skeptical -- why would anyone like to read my life-story? I'm not some celebrity writer.

AJEERA

If at some point in your story ordinary people would feel that it's their story, they'd see a hero squirming to come out of them.

Ishan listens quietly, gazing at her eyes, spellbound.

AJEERA

This Sunday you're going out with me for a movie.

ISHAN

I don't feel like going. I feel I should spend more time on writing.

AJEERA

The best ideas come to writers when they are not working... And if you want company of a beautiful girl then you should make her feel special.

Ishan looks a little nervous.

AJEERA

Look, I know you can't do that... But if you don't see the colors of life, how you're going to write about them? Let's go for parasailing with a dip.

ISHAN

I like that. But I'm afraid of water.

Ajeera gets up and pulls his hand towards operators.

AJEERA

Honestly, I'm also afraid of water...

EXT. BEACH - PARASAILING RIG - MOMENTS LATER

A boat pulls up Ishan and Ajeera, wearing a special parachute, into the air by a rope.

AJEERA

Whooo! Sometimes I do this to feel a little thrill of fear...

Ishan and Ajeera dip suddenly into the water and rise again with the parachute.

ISHAN  
You're really crazy!

AJEERA  
It makes me feel that I'm alive. And  
just living life is a sheer bliss.  
An opportunity. Don't let it go!

Ishan and Ajeera dip into the water again, and rise high...

MONTAGE - AROUND INDIA

-- Ishan and Ajeera enjoy RIVER RAFTING.

-- Ishan and Ajeera ride in a FERRIS WHEEL.

-- Ishan and Ajeera enjoy a camel ride in DESERT. The camel speeds up.

-- Ishan and Ajeera watch a movie in a THEATER.

END MONTAGE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ishan types on his laptop sitting at the dining table.

ISHAN (V.O.)  
Dhruv was like a closed book. Roohi  
gradually opened that book so that  
the world could read it.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan and Ajeera lie on the bed side by side. Ajeera smokes, relaxed. Ishan gives her a romantic gaze. Moves closer and tries to kiss her on the lips. She stays away, blushing.

AJEERA  
I'm not easy to get! It looks like  
you're in a hurry!

ISHAN  
Yeah! I am! Maybe because of a bitter  
past experience.

He sits up. Ajeera sits beside and holds his hand.

AJEERA  
Your hands are strange. Sometimes  
they feel hard, like the hands of a  
(MORE)

AJEERA (CONT'D)  
farmer, and sometimes they feel soft,  
like the hands of a child.

ISHAN  
I was actually a child, just seven,  
when I read the stories of the  
journeys of Sindbad in a book my  
father gave me. He was a teacher.  
One day he took me to his school  
library.

MEMORY FLASH - ISHAN

LITTLE ISHAN (7) stares enchanted at all of the bookcases  
crammed with books.

BACK TO SCENE

Ishan smiles as he reminisces.

ISHAN  
I can still feel the smell of those  
books...! It was the most precious  
gift from a father -- the world of  
books. It changed me completely from  
inside. I want to gift that world to  
my daughter...

Ishan looks emotional. Ajeera hugs him.

EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - DAY

Ishan sits on the rock with a dreamy look in his eyes.

ISHAN  
I can't tell why I want to be writer.  
It's like a dying-wish for me... But  
every failure or rejection reminds  
me of the mockery that I faced when  
I was just seven.  
(anxious)  
Everyone laughed at me and my story.  
The writer within that child died  
that day.

He looks down.

ISHAN  
As I grew up, I gathered again my  
courage to write stories. But only  
for myself. Ajeera taught me to face  
my fears. But... I can't tell anybody  
that somewhere... I'm still afraid.

TALKING TREE

Why're you so afraid of your fears?

Ishan looks at the tree.

TALKING TREE

Every animal in this jungle has to live with its fears. But it relies on its instinct for survival. Its natural powers. Look inside of you. Your vivid imagination and lucid dreams are your power. A creative energy, if harnessed, can do wonders. But only if you are fully aware. Otherwise it can destroy you.

ISHAN

But who wants dreams and imagination? Corporate leaders talk about seventy hours work week in the name of economic growth.

TALKING TREE

Not everybody can understand an artist's world. The world of a true artist is always a mystery.

Ishan gazes at the tree with bright eyes.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dim light. Ajeera stands in a corner, changing.

Ishan sits on his bed reading a book. His eyes fall on Ajeera's bare back, tattooed with a GREEN FISH.

Ishan gets up from the bed and approaches Ajeera.

Ishan caresses the back of Ajeera's neck. She turns back around. Ishan holds her hand between both of his hands and gazes into her eyes.

Ishan and Ajeera move closer, and breathe rapidly.

ISHAN

Thank you... Your love really brought me back to life.

Both sit on the bed maintaining passionate eye contact.

ISHAN

I feel that... that I like you.

AJEERA

Like?

ISHAN  
Okay, I love you...

AJEERA  
Thank you, for giving me a chance to  
live this beautiful life with you.

ISHAN  
Now, I've decided. I'll do what my  
heart tells me to do.

AJEERA  
And for that you'll have to kiss me  
forgetting everything... everything!  
Believe me!

Ajeera holds Ishan's hand. He cups her face in his hands and  
kisses her plump, pink lips. He kisses her madly.

Suddenly it appears like Ishan is fainting.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ishan wakes up on his bed. Ajeera is gone. Ishan grabs his  
PHONE and dials a number.

VOICE MESSAGE (V.O.)  
This number is not in service.

Ishan tries the same number several times -- same message.  
He looks anxious.

EXT. MARIGOLD APARTMENT - EVENING

Ishan, standing by the roadside, watches a LITTLE GIRL (8)  
step out from a fancy BMW car with her FATHER (40s). They  
buy strawberry ice cream cones from a STREET VENDOR.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan sleeps in his bed. SARA APPEARS, standing near a wall.

SARA  
Daddy. Get up...! I don't enjoy any  
ice cream without you. When are you  
coming? Why are you not living with  
me?

Ishan gets up from the bed, and approaches Sara. With moist  
eyes, affectionate Ishan tries to touch her forehead.

At his fingers touch her IMAGE FADES AWAY like a reflection  
on a water surface.

END DREAM SEQUENCE



INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ishan's eyes flick open. He finds himself before the water bucket, touching the water surface, which keeps moving. He pauses for a few seconds.

Then he submerges his head into the cold water.

He opens his eyes inside of the bucket. A few drops of blood from his mouth diffuse into the water.

He brings his head out, puffed.

BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan paces around, restless. After a few moments, he stops and grabs his phone from the bed. Dials a number.

VOICE MESSAGE (V.O.)  
This number is not in service.

Concern grows on Ishan's face.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Ishan gazes at his dull reflection in the mirror. Coughs hard, croaky. Throws up some blood into the sink.

MONTAGE - AROUND DEHRADUN

-- Ishan enters the ROSE CAFE. He looks around, but doesn't find Ajeera. He exits, disappointed.

-- Ishan walks through the PUBLIC PARK. Reaches the same bench where he used to sit with Ajeera but finds nobody.

-- Ishan spots Ajeera in a crowd on the ROAD. When he approaches her, he finds she is Ajeera lookalike.

END MONTAGE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan dials a number on his cell phone.

VOICE MESSAGE (V.O.)  
This number is not in service.

He dials anxiously the same number over and over again and keeps getting the same message.

Ishan dials another number, anxious and worried.

ISHAN

Jay, my friend Ajeera has been missing for the past seven days. I'm unable to contact her. I want your help.

JAY (V.O.)

Don't worry! One of Amit's friends works for the IT department of Delhi Police. We'll ask for his help.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ishan, Jay and Amit sit together on the sofa set.

AMIT

I've given Ajeera's number to my friend Vishal. He said he'll receive all the information about the number in a few hours.

JAY

I think we should seek help from local police also. Do you have any photographs or videos with her?

Ishan nods and searches in his phone, but he looks anxious.

ISHAN

Ah... All photos and videos are missing! How's this possible...?

INT. ROSE CAFE - AFTERNOON

Ishan, Amit and Jay reach the reception counter and talk to the CAFE OWNER (50s).

ISHAN

Sir, we are looking for a missing girl. I was here with her on May first, in the evening.

(gestures at table)

At that table. Can we have a look at the CCTV footage?

CAFE OWNER

Sorry, sir. We can't disclose private information regarding our customers.

AMIT

Actually, we need some footage to lodge a police complaint. Please!

CAFE OWNER

Okay... let's see.

He logs into a system. They stare at a --

CCTV SCREEN

Only Ishan appears, sipping his coffee. No Ajeera.

They watch the recordings multiple times. Ishan shakes his head, incredulous.

EXT. ROSE CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan looks puzzled.

ISHAN

How's this possible? She was with me  
for the past two months. I can feel  
her fragrance in this air even today.

Amit and Jay stare at him, perplexed.

ISHAN

You know, for the past three months,  
I've been having strange experiences.  
Apart from meeting my old friend  
Ajeera, I met a talking tree in the  
Valley of Dead Flowers.

Amit and Jay look shaken and bemused.

ISHAN

Dr. Mayur gave me some medication.  
After that I went through some amazing  
experiences. My life is changing for  
the better.

Amit's phone RINGS. He puts it on the loudspeaker.

VISHAL (V.O.)

Amit, I've got the information. This  
number was being used by a lady five  
years ago. We've got her address, in  
Mussoorie.

AMIT

What's the name of the lady?

VISHAL (V.O.)

Ajeera!

Ishan looks bewildered.

EXT. MUSSOORIE - AJEERA'S HOUSE - EVENING

A small and old bungalow with a dim light on the porch. A CHURCH BELL RINGS out in the distance, piercing the eerie silence. A mournful HOWL of a DOG in the distant dark follows.

Ishan pushes the doorbell button. Amit and Jay stand by him.

An OLD LADY (70s) in a white gown opens the door. She watches them with a questioning face.

ISHAN  
We wanna see Ajeera.

OLD LADY  
Who're you?

ISHAN  
I'm her friend.

OLD LADY  
You are late...! She died five years ago!

They all look horror-struck.

ISHAN  
(shaky voice)  
Died...! But I last saw her seven days ago!

OLD LADY  
Have you lost your mind? I'm her mother. She was killed in a car accident five years ago, with her husband.

They all stare at her, shocked. Suddenly she cries.

OLD LADY  
My child...!

Ishan grieves, puzzled.

INT. MAYUR CLINIC - DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM - EVENING

Jay and Amit, with quizzing looks, sit before Dr. Mayur.

HALLWAY

Ishan tiptoes towards the consulting room's door, to eavesdrop.

DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM

Dr. Mayur looks serious.

DR.MAYUR

I've talked with Ishan in private.  
Now I want to tell you something, as  
you appear to be his good friends.  
I'm sorry to say, but Ishan's mental  
state isn't normal...

Jay and Amit lean forward on their seats, worried.

DR.MAYUR

Actually Ishan is able to have lucid  
dreams. Lucid dreams are strange.  
Sometimes they break naturally. But  
sometimes they don't. You get to  
know that you're inside a dream, but  
you can't come out of it. It's like  
a dream paralysis.

AMIT

But sir, what does this have to do  
with an abnormal mental state?

DR. MAYUR

When dream paralysis diffuses from  
your sleep into your life, it converts  
into a mental illness called DRC or  
Dream Reality Confusion. Ishan is  
suffering from DRC.

HALLWAY

Ishan moves closer to the door.

DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM

Amit and Jay raise questioning eyebrows.

DR.MAYUR

DRC is an inability to determine  
whether an event or experience  
occurred during the waking state or  
whether it was part of a dream.

JAY

What causes it?

DR.MAYUR

Can't say with any certainty.  
(MORE)

DR.MAYUR (CONT'D)

Unstable sleep and wake cycles,  
fantasy proneness, emotional  
disturbances, instability in  
relationships. These may be some of  
the main reasons. But something else  
might be here...

AMIT

And what's that?

DR.MAYUR

Ishan was very keen to try a  
medication to induce lucid dreams.  
He volunteered and I prescribed him  
a new sleeping medication for one  
month only. However, he's been taking  
it continuously for the past three  
months. He stole extra medication  
from my store when I was busy.

Dr Mayur places his glasses on the table.

DR.MAYUR

He's using lucid dreams as a form of  
escapism that forced him to be out  
of touch with reality. So, some of  
the experiences he perceived as  
reality might be his dreams. Now  
he's made up his own world in which  
he's living. This world is... the  
matrix of his dreams and realities.

Amit and Jay look worried by the revelation.

HALLWAY

Ishan looks puzzled and worried.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ishan, Amit and Jay have tea at the dining table.

JAY

Okay, Ishan. We're leaving. Take the  
new medicine the doctor has prescribed  
now, and get some proper rest.

AMIT

And move back to Udaipur as soon as  
possible.

Amit and Jay hug Ishan, emotional.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Ishan reads an email.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN

"RE: NOTICE FOR TERMINATION FROM THE BANK JOB."

BACK TO SCENE

Ishan stares blankly at the laptop screen, dubious.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan sleeps on his bed. His sleep breaks by a NERVOUS LAUGHTER.

He moves slowly towards the dressing table mirror. Sees his REFLECTION, laughing.

ISHAN (MIRROR IMAGE)  
So what? You think my world is fake?  
You're a fool! I'm an artist. My  
world is real. You are living in a  
world of illusions. Fat bank balances,  
big houses, cars, assets. They all  
are illusions... You'll understand  
it when death will grip your neck.

Ishan gapes at the mirror, puzzled from the delusion.

EXT. ABANDONED PUBLIC PARK - EVENING

Ishan sits on the same wooden bench under the golden shower tree. His backbone is slumped in despair.

The wind gets stronger and NOISIER. LIGHTNING STRIKES. RAIN DRIZZLES. Ishan sits still.

CLOSE ON ISHAN'S FACE

Ishan looks disheartened. The water drips down his face.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON ISHAN'S FACE

The water drips down his face.

Ishan stands under the shower, naked, slouching against the shower wall. His face crimps to contain his grief and despair.

BEDROOM

He gazes at Sara's pic as he lies on his bed

EXT. DESERT - EXPRESSWAY - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Sara, wearing a rosy-pink frock, stands on one side of the road. She waves.

Ishan stands on the opposite side of the road.

SARA  
Daddy! I'm coming

ISHAN  
Darling! Stop there, I'm coming.

Sara, fearful, tries to cross the busy road full of deadly fast vehicles. BRAKES GRIND, HORNS BLAST and TIRES SCREECH.

Both of them run towards each other, spreading their arms. They come closer together, puffing and panting --

Until a fast car KNOCKS Sara into the air. Her body slams over the roof of the car, in SLOW MOTION.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan springs awake and sits upright on his bed, drenched in sweat, and breathing heavily.

He bursts into tears. He cries out.

EXT. VALLEY OF DEAD FLOWERS - DAY

Ishan flounders through a slightly muddy area on his way to the talking tree.

As he reaches to the dry earth, he looks amazed by the scene around the talking tree.

A LARGE CROWD gathers around the tree. A giant LOGGING HARVESTER ROARS by its side.

Unclear about the situation, Ishan asks an ONLOOKER (30s) standing at a distance from the tree.

ISHAN  
What's going on?

ONLOOKER  
The government is cutting trees for an ambitious railroad project. This giant tree stands in the way. So...

Ishan rushes madly into the crowd, pushing through until reaching --



EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - CONTINUOUS

He approaches the LOGGING HARVESTER OPERATOR (30s).

ISHAN  
(screams)  
Hey! What the hell are you doing?  
It's a magical tree! Don't cut it  
down!

A FEW PEOPLE grab Ishan by his arms, drag him away and throw him on the ground.

The harvester starts CUTTING the huge tree trunk.

Ishan gets up and sprints towards the harvester, crying out. He is manhandled by some SECURITY GUARDS. He resists. A punch on the face leaves him reeling, spitting blood.

He kneels down on the ground and screams at the top of his voice, looking up at the sky.

He tries to get into the way of the harvester. Security guards knock him down and beat him hard until he is motionless.

They brutally drag him on the ground and throw him away from the tree. The HARVESTER'S HEAVY BUZZING goes on.

Ishan lies injured, on his front, like a dead dog.

The ground QUAKES as the gigantic TREE TOPPLES.

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan lies on his front on his bed. His cell phone RINGS. He doesn't pick up.

The phone keeps RINGING. Ishan finally looks at the Caller ID: "Ragini." He picks up.

RAGINI (V.O.)  
(apprehensive voice)  
Ishan, where have you been? Mom!  
She isn't well! She's having  
difficulty breathing!

ISHAN  
Call the doctor! I'm coming.

EXT. UDAIPUR AIRPORT - RUNWAY - MORNING

An airplane lands with a BANG.

EXT. UDAIPUR - ISHAN'S HOUSE (PARENTAL) - MORNING

Ishan sees a crowd gathered outside his small bungalow.

Limping, Ishan enters the main gate with a small backpack on his shoulder. His lips and chin are bloodstained.

Speechless and filled with a sense of impending doom, he reaches the main door.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

As Ishan walks in, his heart sinks. The dead body of his mom lies on the floor, wrapped in a white shroud.

Ishan is in a state of utter disbelief, shocked. With a limp posture, he blinks his eyes.

ISHAN'S POV

The whole world moves around him IN SLOW MOTION, like a nightmarish dream world. Mom's dead body. MOURNERS. His sister Ragini, blubbering. Everything.

BACK TO SCENE

Ishan looks baffled. Stares at the dead body and approaches.

He doesn't cry, as if he was stoned. He touches mom's forehead and then hugs her tight, crazily. A few mourners try to pull him away.

EXT. CREMATORIUM - DAY

Mom's dead body burns fiercely on the funeral pile of timbers.

Behind the hazy curtain of smoke, Ishan stands with hard, glazed, unblinking eyes.

ISHAN'S EYES

The fire reflects. We TRAVEL deep into one eye across time and space.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE (UDAIPUR) - BEDROOM - DAY

ISHAN'S EYES

Light of a wall lamp reflects.

Ishan has long hair and a thick beard. Looks thin and weak.

He lies on his bed. Some books are scattered around him.

EXT. BROAD STREET BY ISHAN'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

LITTLE ISHAN (7) learns to ride a small red bike. YOUNGER MOM (35) tries to support him from behind.

Ishan carries on himself, riding hesitantly for the first time solo.

Both of them squeal with sheer delight.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Ishan searches for Younger Mom around the house.

LITTLE ISHAN  
Mom! Where're you?

BEDROOM

Disappointed, he sits on the bed and cries.

Younger Mom appears from inside a cupboard, to surprise him.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Ishan gets up from his bed and opens the cupboard to search his mom.

Pages of an open BOOK near the open window FLUTTER from a gust of wind, bringing Ishan back to present. He closes the book with a pang of nostalgia.

Misty-eyed, he touches his childhood photograph with Mom on the wall. Spots his small red bike in one corner of the room.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - PORCH - MORNING

Ishan opens the front door and grabs some plastic shopping bags with milk and bread hanging on the door handle. He shuts the door behind him.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Ishan removes all of the books and laptop from the bed -- puts them in the cupboard. He dims the light.

The room looks shadowy. Ishan is slumped in the chair. His eyes are red and puffy.

ISHAN'S POV

Tunnel vision.

ISHAN

totters in the room. Blacks out from weakness.

LATER

Ishan regains consciousness. Finds himself lying on the floor, with a shooting pain in his neck and back of the head.

He manages to get up and totter back to the bed.

He wipes his nose. He looks around the room blinking his eyes. He rubs his fist on his chest.

He touches his string of Rudraksh beads on his neck and closes his eyes to pray.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

Ragini, Amit and Jay stand by the main door. DOORBELL RINGS as Ragini pushes the button.

SUPER: "ONE MONTH LATER"

Ishan opens the door. They enter.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

They all hug him and put consoling arms around his shoulders.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ragini arranges Ishan's rumpled clothes lying around everywhere. All sit in the chairs around a small tea-table. Ragini pours tea in the mugs from a Thermos.

JAY

We can seek legal help and use trauma and mental illness as defense if you wanna join back in the bank...

Ishan shakes his head.

RAGINI

If you think that now you can do only writing for a living, then you'll have to find some real success.

AMIT

Three months ago you told me that you have to complete a novel for a challenge. Why don't you work on that?

RAGINI

For the past month, you haven't even left this house. How long will this go on?

She gets up and opens the curtains.

RAGINI

Ishan, every story has its destiny.  
(MORE)

RAGINI (CONT'D)

I feel that our life is not just ours. Our relationships make it complete. And when we lose somebody, we can't forget the people we have now. She was my mother too.

AMIT

Ragini didi lives in this city and she's trying her best to support you. Bro, it's time to move on.

Amit pats Ishan's back. Ishan looks glassy-eyed.

INT. AWARD SHOW - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

An ANCHOR (30s) announces on the stage.

ANCHOR

And the best author award goes to Mr. Ishan.

Ishan raises a hand with a trophy. The CLAP and CHEERS.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ishan wakes up. He blinks and looks around. His face turns grim as he comes back to reality.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan sits on his bed and opens his laptop. Tries to write but can't. Rubs his temples and pulls his hair.

LATER

Ishan sleeps on his bed. He hears a strange sound, like somebody MOANING.

He slowly gets up and walks to the dressing table. Looks at his reflection in the mirror, shocked.

ISHAN (MIRROR IMAGE)

(pent-up frustration)

You're not a writer. You are an empty man obsessed with your dreams. You are stuck into a maze of dreams and realities. There is no way out.

Ishan gazes at the mirror, baffled.

LATER

Ishan tosses and turns in the bed, unable to sleep due to distracting WALL CLOCK TICKING.

He tries to plug his ears from his palms and then with pillows.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan sleeps on his bed.

MOM (O.S.)

Ishan, get up my son! Why're you still sleeping?

Ishan wakes up to find MOM, WEARING A LUMINOUS WHITE SARI, staring at him.

MOM

My son! My death is not the biggest loss of your life. Your biggest loss would be if your individuality died, while you are still living -- the individuality that makes you a writer with a unique voice.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ishan's closed eyes flutter and open to a NIGHTINGALE SONG. He rubs his moist eyes and gets up.

He opens the cupboard and takes out some strips of pills. He looks at them for a moment and throws them out the window.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - MORNING

Ishan ascends the marble staircase.

He reaches the top, and opens a door to the rooftop.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Ishan looks around, squinting in the bright sunlight.

A large flock of birds flies overhead. They repeatedly turn back and fly over him. He gazes at them, hypnotized.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - LATER

Ishan walks downstairs. Grabs a dusty aqua-blue bike kept in a corner.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan washes his bike using a hose.

EXT. BROAD STREET BY ISHAN'S HOUSE - LATER

Ishan, in a gray track suit, hits the road on his bike.

EXT. BIKE (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Ishan pedals down the road towards the CITY OUTSKIRTS. The bike SQUEAKS, CREAKS and RATTLES.

EXT. HILLY AREA - CONTINUOUS

Ishan pedals along a dead-silent road bypassing a high hill.

He brakes and stares at a CREMATORIUM by the road, panting.

He catches his breath and wheels around. Stops his bike near a water hand-pump. Tries the pump -- out of order.

He notices a WHITE FLAG flying a few meters away. Approaches.

He finds himself in front of a temple gate. Enters.

EXT. LORD SHIVA TEMPLE - COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Covers a wide, raw area, having some shade trees.

Ishan walks towards the porch area.

EXT. LORD SHIVA TEMPLE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Ishan's eyes fall on a SAINT (40s), with a lean body, shaved head and face, and swathed in a white robe. He reads a book, sitting on a cotton mat. DISCIPLE-1 sits next to him.

ISHAN

Can I have some water, please?

Saint signals Ishan to sit on the mat who sits opposite him.

Disciple-1 brings a glass and a water jug. Hands them to Ishan. Ishan glugs down three glasses.

SAINT

You look very thirsty. Did you come here in search of water, or --

ISHAN

-- A meaningful life, maybe. I'm a writer who is lost in his own story.

SAINT  
I know you have lost someone loved.

ISHAN  
How do you know that?

SAINT  
Because I teach people the art of dying. People come here to learn this art, and sometimes to die peacefully in our "House to Rest In Peace." But it happens very late, when they are about to die. Mostly the critically ill.

His eyes are deep and his voice has an aura of confidence.

ISHAN  
I've seen people learning the art of living. Does dying need some art?

SAINT  
Of course.

DISCIPLE-2 (30s) with a shaved head and wearing a white robe comes running, anxious.

DISCIPLE-2  
Gurudev, Prem's condition is worsening. He's calling for you.

Saint gets up and scampers towards the ashram. Ishan and the disciples follows him closely.

INT. HOUSE TO REST IN PEACE - MOMENTS LATER

A large empty hall with blank white walls. A huge bronze idol of Lord Shiva rests near a wall, before which skeletal PREM (50s) lies on a mat under a white sheet.

Prem's family members surround him. Some disciples and Ishan sit nearby on a white carpet, silent. Saint sits on his knees near Prem's head, calm and quiet.

Prem's shallow, unsteady and noisy breath carries into the hall's pin-drop silence.

PREM  
(weak voice)  
Gurudev! Time for the final curtain...  
I'm dying...

SAINT  
Who told you that you're dying?



There is a mysterious moment of silence.

SAINT

You can't die... Only your body is dying. This is merely a vessel, inside which there's something that never dies. You're that light. So let go of all of your fears about death.

PREM

(teary eyes, weaker voice)  
I'm not afraid of death. But I regret not listening to my heart while I was living. I did a job I never wanted to do, just for the money. I wasted my entire life earning money and collecting things for the sake of comfort for this body of mine.

Ishan stares at Prem's face, regretful. Prem's voice sinks into a whisper with a wheezy sound.

PREM

Now, nothing is coming with me to where I am going...

SAINT

It's not the time for regrets. It's the time to...

He sees that Prem's eyes are still. Prem is no more.

Saint places his palm over Prem's eyes to close them. Folds his hand before Prem, calm and impassive. Gets up.

EXT. HOUSE TO REST IN PEACE - CONTINUOUS

A wooden board at the top of a large door says: "HOUSE TO REST IN PEACE." Saint comes out, followed by Ishan.

Saint walks with slow steps towards the temple. Ishan accompanies him.

Saint stops after a few steps.

SAINT

Death is the ultimate truth! It can strike at anytime. I feel now you've understood well how one should die, and for that how one should live.

He turns towards Ishan.

SAINT

The deaths of our loved ones are not just events that bring very personal pain and suffering to us. If we pause, and observe closely, they can be events of soulful awakening.

Ishan listens with an unblinking gaze at Saint's face.

SAINT

Now you have to decide how you want to die. As a weak writer who just couldn't stand up again when life ruthlessly threw a knockout punch on his face?...

He approaches and gazes into Ishan's eyes who looks bewitched.

SAINT

... Or as a courageous writer who can teach his children the lesson of having courage to follow their hearts -- who can tell them, "pause in life, look inside of you, and identify your real powers that can give you your true place and a meaningful life in this world. Before you face the final curtain."

He puts his hand over Ishan's shoulder.

SAINT

This is the best gift you can give to your children or anyone else as a writer, in this fast running world.

Speechless and with a soft light in his eyes, Ishan heads towards the main gate.

SAINT

Where're you going?

Ishan turns back with a faint smile.

ISHAN

To change my story.

EXT. BIKE (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Ishan rides on the road. His eyes flash with a new spark of wisdom of life. He pedals harder and speeds away.

Rain falls -- cats and dogs. Ishan doesn't stop.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan gazes at SARA'S PIC in his phone lying on his bed.

Ishan looks at the date on cell phone screen: "SEP 5."

He gets up and approaches a wall calendar. Crosses a date with a marker on it: "OCT 31."

He flicks his lighter and lights a cigarette.

DR. MAYUR (V.O.)  
Now he's made up his own world...  
The world of the matrix of his dreams  
and realities.

A shadow of self-doubt darkens Ishan's face.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE (UDAIPUR) - KITCHEN - EVENING

Ishan stirs noodles in a pan on the gas stove.

BEDROOM

Ishan eats noodles with a fork, sitting on his bed.

He grabs his phone and dials a number.

GATEKEEPER (V.O.)  
Hello!

ISHAN  
Is this Professor Raman's residence?

GATEKEEPER (V.O.)  
Yes! Tell me, what can I do --?

Ishan disconnects the phone.

He dials again a number.

VIRAM (V.O.)  
Hello sir, when are you coming back  
to Rampur?

Ishan cuts the line.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan gazes at SARA'S PIC in his cell phone.

SARA (V.O.)  
But why do we have to pass such  
difficult tests?

Ishan gets up and arranges a large study table, chair, wooden bookcase, table lamp and a printer against a wall.

He brings out all the books on the writing craft from the cupboard and arranges them in the bookcase.

LATER

Ishan sits at the table and opens his laptop. Punches the keys. His fingers dance across the keyboard.

MONTAGE - ISHAN'S BEDROOM

-- Ishan reads some books and makes notes.

-- Ishan types on the laptop, and sips his coffee.

-- Ishan lies on his back on the floor and types with his laptop on his chest and a thick pillow below his head.

END MONTAGE

Ishan paces the bedroom up and down, restless.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - MORNING

Ishan waters the plants with a can, deep in thought.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Restless, Ishan paces like a caged animal. He hears a STRANGE LAUGH. Approaches the mirror. Sees his perturbed REFLECTION.

ISHAN (MIRROR IMAGE)  
Your story is not yours. It's the  
story of your dreams... Your dreams  
are finished. Now, you are finished.

Mirror image laughs. Ishan stares at his reflection, baffled.

All of a sudden his phone RINGS. He grabs it from the bed and stares at the Caller ID: "Ajeera."

A strong wind RATTLES the closed WINDOW, creating a terrifying noise.

A mixed fear and surprise flashes on Ishan's face. With some reluctance, he picks up the phone.

AJEERA (V.O.)  
You can't complete it without me.

ISHAN  
Ajeera! Where you've been? Everyone  
thinks you're just my dream girl.  
They think I'm mad.

AJEERA (V.O.)  
They're right... Without a bit of  
madness, creating a unique piece of  
art is impossible.

ISHAN  
Oh, Ajeera, only you can understand  
me. Come soon! I feel lonely.

AJEERA (V.O.)  
I haven't gone anywhere. I'm always  
with you.

Ishan looks baffled.

AJEERA (V.O.)  
I'm your desire for self expression!  
Your creative muse!

ISHAN  
But who'll take my story to its  
destiny?

AJEERA (V.O.)  
Your desire will. Whether you win or  
lose, it doesn't matter. But your  
desire to tell your story to the  
world must win!

A BLUE LIGHT FLASHES through the windowpane. Ishan rushes  
towards the foyer.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Ishan quickly pulls the string of the curtain on the large  
glass wall facing the garden, revealing --

Ajeera, who stands on the other side of the glass, wearing a  
LUMINOUS, BLUE GOWN.

Ishan approaches the glass wall and places both his palms on  
it, staring at Ajeera, who joins her palms with him.

Ishan places his lips on the glass. Ajeera kisses his lips  
through the glass. A SPARKLING BLUE LIGHT enters Ishan's  
body. Dazzled, he shuts his eyes.

Reopens them after a moment -- finds nothing. Ishan smirks.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan sits at his study table, typing on his laptop. The  
TAPS of his fingers echo in the silence.

ISHAN (V.O.)  
... And Dhruv wondered, "Was that  
really a wishing tree?"

LATER

Ishan flips over the hourglass on his study table.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - MORNING

Ishan waters the flower plants with a can, cool and calm.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

SUPER: "A FEW DAYS LATER"

Ishan sits on his bed, and gazes at the laptop screen.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN (EMAIL)

"WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SHORT STORY DID NOT MAKE  
IT TO THE LIST OF THREE WINNERS OUT OF THE TEN FINALISTS."

BACK TO SCENE

Ishan stares at his cell phone screen: "SEP 25."

EXT. PROFESSOR RAMAN'S RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON

Ishan looks amazed to find nothing but an empty ground. No  
maze. No mansion.

Ishan spots the Gatekeeper. Approaches.

ISHAN  
Hello, sir! I want to see professor.

GATEKEEPER  
You can't!

ISHAN  
But why?

GATEKEEPER  
Because, Professor Raman is no more...  
He passed away fifteen days ago from  
cardiac arrest... His son sold his  
property to a hotel builder. Professor  
Raman was a great teacher. Your life  
could have changed forever if you  
had come a few days ago.

Ishan turns around slowly, sorrowful. Leaves with slow steps.

EXT. ROADSIDE FOOTPATH - MOMENTS LATER

He sits there and grieves.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE (UDAIPUR) - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan lies on his bed, downhearted.

He grabs his phone and dials a number.

INT. RAINBOW PRESS OFFICE - DAY

Ishan, Amit and Jay enter. VIVEK (40s), owlsh due to large round glasses, welcomes them at his table, with a plastic smile.

Amit stares at I.D. card at Vivek's shirt pocket, trying hard to read name.

VIVEK

Vivek. I'm Vivek, the manager.  
(shakes hand)  
Please have a seat!

They all sit in chairs opposite Vivek.

VIVEK

Sir, Rainbow Press is the fastest self publisher in India. You'll have your book in your hands in just seven days.

Ishan gives Vivek an incredulous look.

VIVEK

Editing, proofreading, cover design, I.S.B.N., promotion and marketing through our website and social media, online and offline distribution. Everything for just rupees *three lakhs*, for hundred print copies.

AMIT

Just hundred copies?

VIVEK

We print on demand, sir. Later, you can choose an ebook option also. You'll get hundred percent royalty.

AMIT

I feel hundred is your lucky number.

Ishan muses a bit. Vivek stares at him.

ISHAN  
 Okay, done.  
 (forwards manuscript)  
 This is my manuscript.

MONTAGE - AROUND RAINBOW PRESS

-- Ishan sits next to COPY EDITOR (30s) before a computer, busy with the editing.

-- Ishan sits next to COVER DESIGNER (30s) on a computer who suggests him various book covers.

-- A book's printing is in process.

END MONTAGE

INT. RAINBOW PRESS OFFICE - DAY

Ishan, Amit and Jay sit before Vivek who places a crisp, gleaming book on the table before Ishan.

VIVEK  
 Sir, this is your book.

Ishan gently touches the --

BOOK COVER

Picture of a banyan tree and titled: "UNDER THE TALKING TREE."  
 Author: "ISHAN SHIVANSH."

Ishan looks happy.

ISHAN  
 Thank you! Thank you so much!

AMIT  
 (checks book cover)  
 Isn't this very thin? And tree is small in size.

Vivek gives Amit a weird look. Ishan and Jay get up.

JAY  
 It's a big deal now. Ishan, I'm jealous of you! I wish I could think like you.

Jay hugs Ishan, emotional.

AMIT  
 Vivek, your glasses are really nice!

Vivek looks bewildered while they all leave.



INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - MORNING

Jay sleeps on a sofa. Amit sleeps on the floor, snoring.

Ishan enters with a tea tray and puts it on a tea table.

ISHAN

Get up, lazybones! Tea is ready.

Amit and Jay get up, yawning. Amit chugs his tea.

AMIT

Now you should create a You Tube channel and promote your book.

ISHAN

I'm not aware of all these things.

Amit snatches Ishan's phone from his hand. Spends some time with the phone. Then he smiles.

AMIT

Your channel's name is "Story Lovers".  
Let's go to shoot our first video.

Ishan rubs his face with his palms and strokes his hair.  
Amit shoots video in Ishan's phone.

ISHAN

Hi, friends! I'm Ishan. Author of book "Under The Talking Tree." This is story of a struggling storyteller whose life changes forever when he encounters a magical talking tree in the jungle. I appeal all of you to read and enjoy this book.

JAY

I feel you're not good at selling.

AMIT

Ah... Dude, who are the target readers? Middle class, office-goers or lazy Gen-z youngsters? Try to pull them...! Let's shoot again!

Amit shoots video. Ishan starts again...

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

Ishan waters the plant with a can, absorbed in thought.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ishan lies on his bed.

SUPER: "FIFTEEN DAYS LATER"

Ishan stares at his --

PHONE SCREEN

Author's dashboard. Clicks at "SALES REPORT."

Ishan stares at the phone, grim.

PHONE SCREEN

You Tube channel page: "STORY LOVERS." Clicks: "COMMENTS."

Cruelbarber@xxx -- "Have a hair cut."

Husky@12 -- "Your voice sucks."

Lazyboy@369 -- "Chill. Don't try too hard. It's timewaste."

Ishan dials a number, anxious.

ISHAN

Amit, I feel this plan has failed.  
Only seven copies are sold and only  
thirty-five views on "Story Lovers."  
I read the comments on my channel.  
They're nasty.

AMIT (V.O.)

Dude. You Tube rule number one: never  
read the fucking comments. They're  
mostly by idiots. Don't lose heart.

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Ishan sleeps deeply on his bed.

SUPER: "TEN DAYS LATER"

His phone RINGS. He startles awake and answers.

AMIT (V.O.)

Hey, bro! Have you seen views on  
"Story Lovers."

Ishan opens his channel. He looks shocked.

PHONE SCREEN

You Tube channel page: "STORY LOVERS." Views: "1.2 million."

ISHAN

Hold it! Is this a dream?

AMIT (V.O.)

This is reality, bro. Switch on the T.V. and see the news on N.D.T.V.

ISHAN

Okay, I call you back.

Ishan switches on the TV. The screen shows a TV reporter.

TV REPORTER (V.O.)

This is Megha from N.D.T.V. We are covering news of Jaipur International Literature Festival. Recently, a youtuber, "WORDSMITH" interviewed celebrity author Mr. Avinash at the festival. His video is now viral.

The report cuts to video of A MAN holding a mike before AVINASH (50s).

AVINASH (V.O.)

I recently purchased a book from a railway book stall during my travel. This book is "Under the Talking Tree." By a new author -- Ishan. This book is really wonderful and inspirational. I advise all the creative people to read this book -- people who are trying to make a name in any field.

Ishan reopens his phone, excited. His phone RINGS. He answers.

VIVEK (V.O.)

Mr. Ishan, all your copies are sold. Do you want to order more?

ISHAN

Yeah! Like, ten thousand print and ten thousand eBooks.

VIVEK (V.O.)

Are you sure sir? You'll need huge funds for that.

ISHAN

Yeah, I'm sure. You can adjust my future royalty.

VIVEK (V.O.)

That's not possible. We pay month's royalty after forty days. But we need advance funds for printing. And this market is unpredictable. I'm sending you the invoice. We'll start printing after you make payment.

Ishan cuts the line, pondering over something.

INT. USED MOTORBIKE MARKET - DAY

Ishan signs a few papers. Hands over his motorbike papers and key to the MARKET OWNER (50s), who counts a thick stack of currency notes and hands them to Ishan.

MARKET OWNER  
Twenty-five thousand. This is the  
best resale value you can get.

Ishan touches the motorbike gently, emotional, and leaves.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

The birds CHIRP. Ishan feeds them. Ishan's phone RINGS. He answers.

ISHAN  
Hello?

VED (V.O.)  
Hello, Ishan, this is Ved from Harper  
Collins India. I read your book. I'm  
quite impressed by your writing  
skills, unique story and artistic  
voice. The rising demand for your  
book attracted our attention.

ISHAN  
Thank you, sir.

VED (V.O.)  
On behalf of Harper Collins, I'm  
pleased to extend you an offer of  
publishing "Under The Talking Tree"  
through the traditional route. I'll  
send you the list of agents attached  
with us. If you're interested, you  
can meet me anytime at our New Delhi  
office.

ISHAN  
Why not, sir. I'll meet you tomorrow.  
Thank you, so much!

Ishan looks happy and excited.

INT. LAVA PUBLISHERS OFFICE (NEW DELHI) - DAY

Anil dials a number as he sits at his desk.

ANIL

Is this Ved from Harpar Collins?  
Sir, I'm Anil from Lava Publishers.  
I want to have a word with you about  
your upcoming book from author Ishan.

INT. FAMILY COURT (JAIPUR) - COURTROOM - DAY

Ishan sits in the first row at one side. Shreya with Sara  
sits in the same row on other side. Their counsel stand before  
Judge-2, arguing.

SHREYA'S ADVOCATE

... But, My Lord, Ishan's success  
may be the result of his past work  
when he was mentally fit.

JUDGE-2

Respondent's counsel...

ADVOCATE KAPIL

My Lord, my client recently received  
a book publishing offer from "Harpar  
Collins." It confirms his sanity and  
his creative intelligence. He is  
financially stable and has a strong  
emotional bond with his daughter.

He forwards some papers to Judge-2.

ADVOCATE KAPIL

My Lord, this is a case of parental  
alienation -- a strategy whereby the  
mother is intentionally displaying  
to the child unjustified negativity  
aimed at the father to damage his  
daughter's relationship with him.  
It's an emotional child abuse as a  
child shouldn't be deprived of her  
basic right to get love and affection  
of both the parents.

Advocate Kapil adjusts his neck brace.

ADVOCATE KAPIL

Allegations of mental illness are  
completely baseless against my client.  
He's a writer. If he's mentally ill  
then every artist absorbed in his  
art is mentally ill for the so-called  
normal people of society who hate  
art and artists. That's all, Your  
Honor.

The Judge writes something on a paper and dictates.

JUDGE-2

The court grants Mr. Ishan supervised visitation rights to see his daughter Sara.

Shreya clenches her fists in anger and frustration. Judge -2 faces audience.

JUDGE-2

An artist always struggles somewhere to find a balance between his creativity and worldly wisdom. And this struggle is the beauty of an artist's life.

Ishan remains quiet, with a winning smile across his face.

EXT. CHILDREN'S PLAY PARK - DAY

Ishan and Sara stand on opposite sides, far away. They wave at each other.

They walk at each other, then trot, and finally run spreading their arms and tears in their eyes.

They meet in the middle of park, puffing and panting.

They hug tightly.

Ishan gifts Sara his book. She looks happy to see the book. They smile at each other and hug again.

EXT. BIKE (MOVING) - MORNING (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Ishan rides towards the CITY OUTSKIRTS. Brakes.

Ishan sees a huge banyan tree at the roadside, of the same size as the talking tree. Shakes his head and simpers.

After riding further, Ishan sees another massive banyan tree. Keeps pedaling --

He sees yet another huge banyan tree.

He stops his bike, and approaches --

EXT. UNDER THE TALKING TREE - CONTINUOUS

Ishan stares at the tree, baffled.

TALKING TREE

Don't be amazed. I'm your friend.  
The talking tree.

ISHAN  
But... but they cut down you?

TALKING TREE  
I told you, I'm not just a tree.  
I'm an experience of your life, that  
will live with you till your last  
breath -- experience of meeting  
yourself... that rekindles the spirit  
of a dying writer.

Ishan looks overwhelmed with emotions. With teary eyes, he  
falls on his knees to the ground. Closes his eyes, fulfilled.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ishan awakens to the SWEET SONG of a NIGHTINGALE. He gets up  
with moist eyes, and removes the window curtain. He smiles  
at the nightingale sitting outside.

EXT. ISHAN'S HOUSE - ROOFTOP - MORNING

A NOISY CHORUS of singing BIRDS. Ishan holds some printed  
pages of his script in his hand.

He gazes at the RISING SUN, scattering a reddish-orange  
sublime light in the sky. A flock of birds appear on the  
horizon.

With a seraphic smile, Ishan tosses the pages into the air.

Ecstatic, he spreads his arms like the wings of a bird.

The pages float down slowly, like weightless feathers, IN  
SLOW MOTION.

ISHAN (V.O.)  
Your life doesn't change when you  
reach the destination of your ultimate  
calling. It changes even before that,  
when you set out on the adventurous  
journey to that destination, by  
meeting yourself.

FADE OUT

THE END