

RIDER.

A Short Film, Written by

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ON BLACK we hear children's voices speaking in Punjabi, singing energetically. Their voices crackled by the phone's speakers. A mum's voice punctuates. The kids giggle and we cross the language barrier--

FADE IN:

KIDS

Happy Birthday dear daddy. Happy Birthday to you.

Our rider, Indra (late-20s), perches on the backrest of a bench overlooking the Thames. He's on FaceTime.

His heart, overwhelmed by their warmth and their absence, reduces him to silence. His thin lips rise to the one side of his face.

MAALA

Daddy, watch this! Look at my handstand--

AMAR

No, look. Look at me. I'm a soldier.

His son waves a toy soldier in frame. He laughs. Proud.

INDRA

Maala. Amar. Look at this.

He spins the camera to show the scene. The London Eye. The Houses of Parliament. The pair gleam in awe.

MAALA

London!

AMAR

London!

His wife interrupts--

SAARUSHA

You two. Come on. We're nearly home. Say goodbye to daddy.

He switches the camera back.

MAALA

Bye bye daddy.

AMAR

Bye Dad.

INDRA

Amar.

(senses he's going)

Amar! Look after your mother and your sister. You're our big, brave soldier now. Just like your action toys.

SAARUSHA

He's fine. We're fine.

INDRA

I know.

SAARUSHA

Happy Birthday.

It's the first time since they were 16 that they've been apart on his birthday. This would not be the last, they knew. A new normal.

SAARUSHA (CONT'D)

Speak soon.

She kisses her fingers and waves. Indra does the same.

The call ends.

He takes a moment, draws a strawberry lace from his inner jacket pocket, and rips a chunk off with his teeth.

And like that, he's transported back down. He steps off the bench, draws his bike, and loads his foot on the pedal. One last glance at the view.

He rides off.

2 **EXT. CHALK FARM -- EVENING**

2

Indra corners a street, the houses are pristine and expensive. Now in the area he wants to work, he cruises gently, awaiting a job.

Ping. SUPER: Order from Sarah ready to collect at Siennas. £1.37-£1.96.

He accepts.

3 **EXT. SIENNAS -- EVENING**

3

Indra flashes his code at the waiter.

NINA

You good?

We're at the dinner table now. Finishing off the food Nina prepared.

INDRA

Totally, yeah. You?

NINA

Completely.

INDRA

Sure.

A short, warm grin rises on Nina's face.

NINA

You were away there for a second.

Indra smirks and shakes his head. She glances at his hands.

NINA (CONT'D)

Are you wearing them gloves?

INDRA

When I remember. Yeah. I am.

Beat.

INDRA (CONT'D)

This is nice.

NINA

(grins)

Just this?

INDRA

No, that's not what I meant-- Uh--

NINA

Uh--

INDRA

You are--

NINA

Uh-- Uh--

INDRA

It's good.

NINA

Sure. Ok. Yeah. Whatever. We do
this most nights-- of course it is.

(pause)

I'm just fucking with you.

Beat.

Nina draws a present from the stall beside her and drops it
in front of Indra. It punctuates the verbal jabs.

NINA (CONT'D)

Hey.

INDRA

Hi.

Indra rips the corner. She looks on expectingly. It's
strawberry laces.

NINA

Happy Birthday.

His look changes, turns to something new. A glint in his
eye conveys a fragile happiness. Nina stares him down.

NINA (CONT'D)

Is there something in my teeth?

9 **INT. FLAT B, BEDROOM -- LATER**

9

The room is bare. The walls are white. The mattress sits
loosely on the bed frame.

Indra and Nina kiss. He's topless. She works her way down his
neck, toward his shoulders. They're bruised from the straps.
Red-raw from sustained load.

She pauses. The moment lingers awkwardly.

He rolls her around onto her back, he grins, she laughs. They
make out.

10 **BEDROOM -- LATER**

10

Nina straddles Indra's back, massaging him. They enjoy each
other's silence.

NINA

Does that feel better?

INDRA

(winces)

It does. Yeah. Thank you (for this).

She lowers herself and gently kisses his back. She wraps her arms around his torso, shielding him like a shell. Noticing he's tense, she says--

NINA

You're worried.

He twists his neck to look at her and confirm the depth of the question. She's serious.

He looks back down and takes a moment.

INDRA

I worry about the way, the sad I'd be, being alone. Here. It's more than the fear I had back home, in Mandala. I can't stop thinking about it here.

Beat. Nina lays her cheek against his back.

NINA

For me. It's being back at home, stuck, without this city. *That* worries me.

INDRA

You like being here?

NINA

Don't you?

INDRA

No. I do. I guess it's just not feeling like home yet. After a year.

Nina reads into this. An inadvertent declaration their relationship falls short. It pulls her being down, sinks her heart, and temporarily paralyses her.

A lump growing in her throat--

NINA

It's hard-- I know-- But we have something here.

Her head dips--

11G **EXT. WEST HAMPSTEAD TUBE CROSSING -- NIGHT** 11G

Looking down an empty railway footbridge, a helmet crowns the horizon. It bobbles up, revealing Indra with his bike. His heavy bike. His cumbersome backpack. He hauls them up the stairs. The night continues.

12 **EXT. WEST HAMPSTEAD HIGH STREET -- NIGHT** 12

Perched on his bike frame, Indra takes a break. He looks at a video of his family on his phone, rolling his finger over their faces but not hitting play.

Ping.

Nina texts: "Cant sleep. You up?"

13 **EXT. ALEXANDRA ROAD ESTATE -- NIGHT** 13

Indra sits at the bottom of some wide concrete steps, taking a moment.

NINA (O.S.)

What's up?

He looks around and up to her. She towers over.

INDRA

Taking a rest... I'm thinking about home.

NINA

I do that, too. You know. Think about home.

Beat. She crouches next to him.

INDRA

When I'm here, I want to be there. But when I was there, I couldn't wait to leave.

NINA

They miss you?

He nods.

NINA (CONT'D)

You miss them?

INDRA

I do.

Nina feels the weight of this admission. She lets it sit. The moment hangs.

She peels off him and rises.

She wraps her hands around his arm and tugs him upward. He stays put.

She tugs once more to no avail, and looks around - hopeless.

On the floor next to him, she sights his rucksack.

NINA

Look.

She smirks and loads the rucksack onto her back. As she does, her back buckles under the load. She struggles to stand straight.

She stumbles backward.

Indra rushes to his feet and grabs her forearms. She releases a sweet, relieved laugh.

NINA (CONT'D)

See. I got it.

INDRA

(smiles)

You don't got it.

NINA

I don't.

She doesn't.

Indra steps up and helps her out, unclipping the chest latch. Tension lingers between them - his touch feels exciting. It rises--

Ping. Indra's phone. SUPER: You have a collection for Simon at Southern Fried Palace.

INDRA

(That's me.)

Nina moves to hug him and goes for a kiss on the way in. Indra sticks to the hug.

He withdraws, loads up his phone on his bike, and sets off.

Nina bursts into tears. It's over.

18C **EXT. KILBURN/SOUTH HAMPSTEAD -- POS. A -- NIGHT** 18C

He takes a turn. They follow.

18D **EXT. KILBURN/SOUTH HAMPSTEAD -- ON BOARD -- NIGHT** 18D

His peddling increases, cautiously. His speed mounting.

The sound crystallises. A moped. A hellish, high-pitched whine. They gain.

18E **EXT. KILBURN/SOUTH HAMPSTEAD -- POS. B -- NIGHT** 18E

He takes a left--

They follow--

18F **EXT. KILBURN/SOUTH HAMPSTEAD -- POS. C -- NIGHT** 18F

He stands up-- They accelerate--

A sharp right.

18G **EXT. KILBURN/SOUTH HAMPSTEAD -- POS. D -- NIGHT** 18G

A glance over his shoulder--

The lights glow, blinding--

Until the sound hones in. As do the mopeds.

18H **EXT. KILBURN/SOUTH HAMPSTEAD -- POS. E -- NIGHT** 18H

Indra turns off to try pull off a fast one-eighty. Like a missile, they block him. The passenger leaps off--

Whack! Indra flies off his bike, crashing onto the tarmac.

Two guys in black outfits jump him. One hits him with a hammer. A blunt, meaty sound. **Thud. Thud.**

Indra coils up.

The other lifts his e-bike, mounts it, and leaves.

The attacker gives him one last kick. **Whack!** Before getting back on the same moped and fleeing.

Indra rolls on the ground, comforting himself. Sobbing.

25A **EXT. PARK -- NIGHT**

25A

Under a lamppost on a path, Indra imagines himself and Saarusha marooned together.

She looks at him, reading the change on him. The external markings, the bruises and the weight loss. Beyond that, details only a wife could tell. A change in posture, his aura and his confidence. It hurts her to see him this way. Pity and disappointment build.

He feels her pain. That she sees through him, knowing he has strayed from his focus. His loyalty to their plan has waned.

25B **EXT. HAMPSTEAD HEATH -- DAWN**

25B

He taps the top corner of the chat and selects 'block'. 'Are you sure?'

The moment hangs. He contemplates--

'Yes.'

Indra marches off. Children's voice seep in--

26 **EXT. HAMPSTEAD HEATH -- DAWN**

26

Indra sits hunched over his phone. The video playing back. The city in the background. Finally: openness. Space to think.

SAARUSHA (V.O.)

Don't forget us when you're there.
When you make it. We'll be here,
waiting for you. I'll be raising
our two angels.

AMAR (V.O.)

Mom stop!

SAARUSHA (V.O.)

I know it's going to be a tough
journey. You can, always, if you
need to, come back. We'll be here.
We love you. I love you. See you
soon.

AMAR

Love you, Dad.

MAALA

I love you, Daddy.

ALL (V.O.)

Byeeeeee.

The video rips at him. It breaks him apart.

And then it stops. Silence. Indra dips lower.

In time, he brushes it off, collects himself, and leaves.

The sun rising over London.

27

EXT. HAMPSTEAD HEATH -- MORNING

27

Indra approaches a rentable e-bike. He scans the code and sets himself to go, pulling his pack tight, loading his phone on the dock.

He rolls his hands over, inspecting the bruises and cuts from the fall. They sting.

He stares at them intensely. The shot, zooming, suffocating. We exchange cuts between his stare and his palms until--

Ping.

THE END.