

Pilot

For Radio

Arghya Lahiri
All Rights Reserved

Arghya Lahiri
G/8, Uttarayan CHS,
Mahakali Caves Rd.,
Andheri E
Mumbai 400093
Ph: +91 9870225990
E-mail:
lahiri.arghya@gmail.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

WOMAN	Shernaz Patel
MAN	Tavish Bhattacharya
WOMAN#2	Kyla D'Souza

Setting:

A hospital in Bombay. A Jungle Camp near Kanha National Park.

Time:

April 2020.

Engineered by Kaizad Gherdha

Music by Kaizad Gherdha

Directed by Nadir Khan

1. INT/EXT - HOSPITAL/FOREST LODGE - NIGHT

1.

(A mobile phone rings. Once. It's
picked up in a hurry.)

WOMAN
Hello-

MAN
My God, I've been-

WOMAN
Listen. I don't have much time.

MAN
How are-

WOMAN
Listen. They've locked us in.

MAN
Who-

WOMAN
Two doctors, four ward boys. They sealed us in with the
patients. There are no PPES. No one can get in.

MAN
How many floors?

WOMAN
Five.

(Silence.)

MAN
When are you getting out?

WOMAN
They took our phones. This one was in my bag.

MAN
Why would they take your phones?

WOMAN
You're not supposed to know about this.

MAN
They can't force you to do that.
(Silence.)

MAN (CONT'D)

You volunteered, didn't you?
(Silence.)

WOMAN

Even if you got to Raipur airport, there are no flights.

MAN

(moving about)

I'll get Biswas to give me special dispensation. Or an escort. It's twenty-two hours to Bombay. I'll be there in eighteen.

WOMAN

You're on the edge of a forest, six hours from the nearest city. Don't you fucking move.

MAN

And you'll stop me how?

WOMAN

If I walk out of here. *If*. And I see you. I'm walking straight past you. You show the tourists tigers. I'm gone.

MAN

You can't do that.

WOMAN

(Softer)

You have asthma. You've had it since you were four. This is a death sentence.

MAN

You went back to buy twelve fucking *tables*.

WOMAN

I have to go. Suchi thinks I'm in the loo.

MAN

Tell her-

WOMAN

You think I'm going to tell her I have a phone?
(She disconnects.)

(A mobile phone rings. Answered in a hurry.)

MAN

It's been two days.

WOMAN

Sorry. We're alternating. Thirty-six hours on. Supposed to be twelve off. Can't do more than four.

MAN

Why?

WOMAN

I can't sleep. We're down a ward boy. Three patients. Twelve now.

(Silence.)

WOMAN

Tell me.

MAN

Are you serious?

WOMAN

Please. Tell me. I don't- I have forty-five seconds.

MAN

There's... it's clear. Clear tonight. Clearer every night. Stars, like diamonds on velvet. Or... you remember those lobelia in Mount Kenya, that we'd kick in the morning and they'd shatter?

WOMAN

Yes.

MAN

Yes. Stars like that. Your bastard brain-fever bird is here. Wakes me up at four every morning.

WOMAN

Indian hawk-cuckoo.

(Beat.)

MAN

I made a cake. And I fed the yolk to the crows. You know.

WOMAN

All crows are your dad. I should-

MAN

Why did you volunteer?

(Beat.)

WOMAN

There's a young woman here. Neelam. She was due three days ago.

(She disconnects.)

3. INT/EXT - HOSPITAL/FOREST LODGE - DAY

3.

(A mobile phone rings. Answered in a hurry.)

MAN

Hey...

WOMAN

Down to nine.

(Silence.)

MAN

Neelam?

WOMAN

The kid has it. Three days old, fucking infected.

MAN

Are you sure?

WOMAN

Every day, they roll a cart across. With our food, and supplies. We roll it back. Disinfected. Empties. And swabs in a biohazard pouch.

(Beat.)

The kid has it.

MAN

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

We look at these people we know, across this corridor. Twelve feet, maybe? On the other side. Like the boat? Between the lands of-

MAN

-life and death, yes.

WOMAN

Who's the pilot, though? Steel box rumbling down linoleum, scraping against the wall?

(She disconnects.)

4. INT/EXT - HOSPITAL/FOREST LODGE - NIGHT

4.

(A phone rings.)

WOMAN

His chest sounds like wet mud. The kid.

(She sighs.)

What I'd do to hear him yell, once.

MAN

He'll get better.

WOMAN

His mother is on another floor. She's coughing. Both ward boys are coughing.

(Beat.)

Suchi's coughing.

MAN

They have to get you out of there.

(She begins to cry.)

MAN

They race marbles. It's a... *thing*. And now that there are no sports, it's a real thing. I've been watching.

WOMAN

That's the stupidest thing I've heard.

MAN

No, listen. They have names, and after a while- it's bizarre, you feel like you know them.

WOMAN

Who's your guy? Or gal?

MAN

He's the two-time defending champion, actually. Marble 109.

WOMAN

Marble 109. Fuck. At least that's a change from your policy of picking the underdog.

(Beat.)

MAN

You remember Shillong?

WOMAN

This doesn't help.

MAN

No. Listen. After we'd found the hotel-

WOMAN

The Blueberry Hotel.

MAN

I don't know when. I woke. The fever had broken, finally. You'd fallen asleep, finally. Three heaters on the bed. Radiator turned the whole room orange. The fan, off, like a sentry at her post. Like you. I- I've picked winners since 2004.

WOMAN

You're sweet.
An idiot, but sweet.

MAN

If you were stupid enough to volunteer to stay, the kid has to get better.

(She disconnects.)

5. INT/EXT - HOSPITAL/FOREST LODGE - NIGHT

5.

(She coughs.)

WOMAN

Well, I suppose we should talk about it.

MAN

I think about you all the time. Night and day. Must be love.

WOMAN

(ignoring him)

Do you have a pen and a paper?

MAN

Are you going to dictate your will?

WOMAN

We've done that- Suchi, Ganesh and me. We witnessed each other.

(Silence.)

WOMAN

G-6, Uttarayan, Mahakali Caves Rd.

MAN

What am I looking for?

WOMAN

A boy. His mother's name is Neelam. He gets my binoculars.

6. INT/EXT - HOSPITAL/FOREST LODGE - NIGHT

6.

WOMAN

(She whistles. It's eerie.)

You remember the Malabar Whistling Thrush? In Coorg?

MAN

Kunoor.

WOMAN

It sounds like that in my head. Just this *whine*, like a test signal.

MAN

Listen. Months, years, from now, when I get home, it won't smell of you. I will cry. And I will fall asleep sitting in your chair. One night, I will dream your hand, cool on my forehead, like Shillong. Your gang of sparrows will wake me—arguing, eating, fucking. I will make your awful filter coffee. And I will start to look for your binoculars.

(Silence.)

WOMAN

Suchi is fading. So am I. The kid rumbles.

(She coughs.)

Before I lie down, I will stand by her bed for fifteen minutes. And if her breathing isn't better, I'm switching it to the kid. You hear me?

MAN

Yes.

WOMAN

I do this of my free will.

MAN

Yes.

WOMAN

I wish we'd had more time.

(She disconnects.)

7. INT/EXT - HOSPITAL/FOREST LODGE - DAY

7.

(A phone rings. It's answered in a hurry.)

MAN
Hello?

WOMAN#2
Mr. Mishra?

MAN
Yes.

WOMAN#2
I'm sorry, but-

MAN
Yes. I know.

(Silence.)

WOMAN#2
We are all very-

MAN
Ssshhh.

WOMAN#2
Sorry?

MAN
Quiet.

(Silence. Very distant, a child crying.)

MAN
Is that a baby? Please. This is important.

WOMAN#2
Yes.

MAN
Do you know the name?

WOMAN#2
(moving, looking)
I, uh, don't. There's no name. Someone has just written 'Baby 109' on it- him, a bunch of times. 'Baby 109'.

Baby 109. Okay.
Thank you.

MAN

(Beat.)

THE END