



**STIMULI**

You are required to produce a short piece of drama on each stimulus in preparation for your written examination. Questions will be asked on **each** of the stimuli and will cover both practical and theoretical issues.

- 1 Letter from abroad
- 2 Going green
- 3 Festival banquet

**EXTRACT****Taken from *A Fine Balance***

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

The prize-winning novel *A Fine Balance*, by Rohinton Mistry, was published in 1995. It was adapted for the stage by Sudha Bhuchar and Kristine Landon-Smith, and first performed in 2006. For the purpose of the examination, you should focus **only** on the stage version printed here.

The play is set in an unspecified city in India in 1975, at the point where the Indian Government, led by Mrs Indira Gandhi (sometimes referred to as 'The Iron Widow'), has declared a State of Emergency. The city is in turmoil, and this is reflected in the radical slum-clearance policies.

The action centres on Dina Dalal, an attractive and spirited Parsi widow who is determined to avoid a second marriage. She takes in a student as a lodger as well as employing two Hindu tailors, who work for her in her small and ramshackle flat.

The play is in two acts, and the extract consists of the whole of Act One, with the exception of Scene 11, which has been omitted.

**Characters**

SHANKAR	a young beggar
DINA	a Parsi widow in her early forties
OM	a young low-caste tailor
ISHVAR	Om's uncle, a middle-aged low-caste tailor
MANECK	a seventeen-year-old student
WOMAN	in slum
RAJARAM	a hair-collector
MONKEYMAN	an itinerant performer
VISHRAM	tea-stall owner
MRS GUPTA	owner of a clothing export company
IBRAHIM	rent-collector
NUSSWAN	Dina's older brother
BEGGARMASTER	
'GOONDA'	a hired thug
TAILORS 1, 2 AND 3	
WORKERS ON THE BUILDING SITE	

**Additionally**

TIKKA	a dog
LEILA	a monkey

## ACT ONE

## PROLOGUE

*SHANKAR, a beggar, crawls on his gaddi (a makeshift beggar's cart) and talks directly to the audience.*

**SHANKAR:** *(calling)* Spare a paisa for a poor beggar. Look at me – Shankar, but everybody calls me Worm ... Before I got this gaddi I used to crawl around. No legs, can't walk ... Just one paisa ... 5  
*He doesn't get any money.*  
 Selfish git! Suited and booted, the world at your feet ... Don't you know a beggar's blessing is better than a eunuch's curse?  
*Seeing a pretty woman:* 10  
 Hey, lady, with your pretty face I bet your man keeps you in style. Who will caress my rough cheek and hold me in their warm embrace? ... Spare a paisa for the less fortunate!  
*To another man:*  
 A paisa, just one paisa ... for dry roti and daal ... Stomach is empty ... Give in your children's name ... The country is in Emergency ... Evil eye is everywhere ... Your charity will keep your innocents safe ... You look at me, you turn your face, you walk past. But from my pavement throne, I see everything. 15  
*DINA DALAL walks past SHANKAR. He calls out to her:* 20  
**SHANKAR:** Take pity on a poor beggar. Your home will flourish! Your children will blossom!  
*DINA chucks him a paisa in his tin. She is clearly lost.*  
**SHANKAR:** Madam, you look lost. This part of the city is not for ladies like you. I'm like A to Z, where you want to go? 25  
**DINA:** Tailors' alley.  
**SHANKAR:** You looking for tailors? I know just the people. Trust me ... Round the corner, to the right. Ask for Om and Ishvar Darzi. They trained. Good experience. 30  
*DINA goes.*  
**SHANKAR:** My friends Om and Ishvar, they will be pleased I gave their recommendation. They're new to this city. They don't know its ways. How about that? Me a poor beggar. I might have changed their fate. Between you and me, they had to leave their village, go AWOL ... keep a low profile ... you understand? This city is like a good mistress ... she'll keep your secrets. You can forget your past and look to the future ... 35  
*(He goes off with his cry for money)*  
 Spare a paisa, sir. 40

## SCENE ONE

*Streets of an urban metropolis in India.*  
*Tailors working somewhere in the underbelly of the city.*  
**OM** *(about the clothes they're sewing)* Who needs so many shirts?  
**TAILOR 1:** We are earning. What's it to you?  
**OM:** Only for three days. Then what? 45  
**ISHVAR:** God will provide.  
**TAILOR 3:** Hey, in this Emergency there is no god.  
**TAILOR 1:** Only the goddess.  
**ISHVAR:** Who?

TAILOR 3:	The Iron Widow, smiling from all the posters.	50
TAILOR 2:	Worship her and maybe she will bless you. <i>After a pause OM starts singing.</i>	
OM:	'What happened that my heart has broken.'	
TAILOR 1:	Who has broken your heart?	
TAILOR 2:	The girl at the water pipe every morning.	55
OM:	Why you jealous?	
ISHVAR:	Stop dreaming. I will find the girl for you.	
OM:	Find one for yourself first. DINA DALAL <i>comes looking for tailors.</i>	
DINA:	Namaste. Greetings. <i>They all greet her.</i>	60
	I'm Dina Dalal. I'm looking for two tailors to work exclusively for me. Permanent job. Anyone interested, eh?	
TAILOR 1:	Yes, yes ... ( <i>Showing his work.</i> ) Look.	
DINA:	No, no, finishing is not good.	65
TAILOR 2:	Look. Tip-top.	
DINA:	I want export quality.	
TAILOR 2:	Export quality? This is expert quality.	
DINA:	Detail has to be good. No crooked collars, uneven hems, mismatched sleeves.	70
TAILOR 2:	Yes. Yes.	
DINA:	Hours are eight to six. At my house.	
TAILOR 2:	Can't be done. Deliver work to us, then no problem.	
DINA:	Sewing has to be done under my strict supervision, otherwise I lose the contract.	75
ISHVAR:	We come to house. Me and my nephew. Ishvar and Om Prakash Darzi. Fully trained. We are apprentice for many years.	
DINA:	You have experience in ladies' clothes?	
ISHVAR:	Plenty. We can make any fashion you like. Puff sleeves ... bell bottoms.	80
DINA:	In this job sewing is from paper patterns. Same style, two-dozen, three-dozen.	
ISHVAR:	Repeat pattern is easy for us. You won't be disappointed.	
DINA:	Eight o'clock every day.	85
ISHVAR:	Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, anytime. We are there. Double-stitch, first-class. DINA <i>looks at his work.</i>	
DINA:	Mm, fine stitching. <i>She gives him a piece of paper with her address on it.</i>	90
	Here is my address. You come tomorrow morning. We'll give it a try.	
SCENE TWO		
	DINA's flat. ISHVAR and OM <i>come on, bringing their machines with them.</i>	
ISHVAR:	On hire purchase. In three years when payments are complete, they will belong to us.	95
DINA:	And the money I paid just now for your taxi?	
ISHVAR:	Please deduct from our wages.	
DINA:	Work is from eight to six, with one hour prompt for lunch.	
ISHVAR:	One meal at night is sufficient.	100
OM:	Speak for yourself. <i>The tailors set up and start to sew.</i>	

DINA: These thirty-six dresses are a test. Neatness, accuracy and consistency. I will supervise. My eyes might fail me in threading a needle, but don't think they will miss a crooked seam. Only if Mrs Gupta is satisfied will I get bigger orders. 105

OM: Who is this Mrs Gupta?

DINA: Never you mind.

ISHVAR: Mrs Dina, what is this Emergency we hear about?

DINA: Government problems. Games played by people in power. Doesn't affect ordinary people like us. 110

OM: That's what I said. My uncle likes to worry.

DINA: Oh, and if the rent collector, Ibrahim, sees you coming or going, tell him you are here to do the cooking and cleaning.

OM: You want us to lie? 115

ISHVAR: Yes, yes, Mrs Dina. Whatever you say.  
MANECK *comes running in, wet from his bath.*

MANECK: Dina Auntie, there are worms crawling out of the plughole!

DINA: Just throw some water on them. They will go away.  
*The tailors clock MANECK.* 120

DINA: Maneck is my boarder. He needs peace and quiet to study.

ISHVAR: Yes. Yes.

DINA: Or should I be calling you Mac?

MANECK: I hate that name.

OM: What are you studying? 125

MANECK: Air conditioning.

ISHVAR: What?

OM: That machine that makes the air cold.

ISHVAR: And how is your college?

MANECK: Hopeless. But I have to finish it somehow to please my father. Then home I go on the first train. 130

ISHVAR: Soon as we collect some money. We're also going back to find a wife for my nephew.

OM: How many times do I have to say, I'm not getting married?

ISHVAR: Look at that sour-lime face. 135

DINA: Well, the more you sew, the more you earn.  
*Tailors start sewing again.*

DINA: (to MANECK) Now, have you finished your bath, or the worms have frightened you off?

MANECK: They're disgusting. So many of them. 140

DINA: Since it's your first day, I'll treat them with phenol but it's very expensive. From tomorrow you'll have to make friends with the worms.

MANECK: Thank you, Auntie.

DINA: Wouldn't want your mum to think I'm not looking after you. 145

MANECK: No, no ...

DINA: She's given me strict instructions. Fried eggs floating in butter for your breakfast ...

MANECK: Anything is better than the college canteen.

DINA: I hope you'll be comfortable here. 150

MANECK: Of course. You've given me your room ...

DINA: Just as I'd learned to be alone, I have company.  
MANECK *exits.*  
DINA *stands gazing out of the window. The tailors exit.*

## SCENE THREE

	<i>Slum site, temporary home of OM and ISHVAR.</i>	155
	<i>RAJARAM enters with his plate of food and starts eating. A WOMAN is there, sifting through her basket of fruit.</i>	
RAJARAM:	Got something sweet? Banana?	
WOMAN:	Bananas I'm saving for Monkeyman. I've got a mango. Too bruised for people with money.	160
	<i>She cleans it with her spit and gives it to RAJARAM.</i>	
RAJARAM:	Clean it with water.	
WOMAN:	Where is there water round here?	
	<i>OM and ISHVAR arrive and greet RAJARAM.</i>	
RAJARAM:	Come sit with me, share my meal.	165
ISHVAR:	No, such a long journey from Mrs Dina's, so we ate at the station.	
RAJARAM:	No, you're new here. It's my duty to look after you.	
	<i>He goes off to get the food.</i>	
ISHVAR:	So what colour plates and glasses shall we buy?	170
OM:	Doesn't matter.	
ISHVAR:	Towel? The one with yellow flowers?	
OM:	Doesn't matter.	
ISHVAR:	It'll give a homely feel to this place.	
OM:	It's a slum.	175
	<i>WOMAN gives the tailor a piece of fruit.</i>	
WOMAN:	Eat. Good for your health.	
	<i>RAJARAM comes back with food for them. ISHVAR puts some of his food onto OM's plate.</i>	
ISHVAR:	In this city, Rajaram, you are looking after strangers. You don't find that in a city.	180
RAJARAM:	The city grabs you, sinks its claws into you and refuses to let you go.	
OM:	Not us, we are here to make some money and hurry back.	
RAJARAM:	That's what we all say.	185
OM:	We have some unfinished business in the village.	
RAJARAM:	Why? What have you done?	
ISHVAR:	It is not us who have done. We have been done upon.	
RAJARAM:	So how's it going?	
ISHVAR:	Mrs Dina makes us work hard. There is a long order for dresses.	190
RAJARAM:	Good if order is long.	
OM:	Morning to night we are doing skilled work and still she wants us to pretend we're her bloody servants who sweep and mop.	
ISHVAR:	It's just a story to prevent trouble with the landlord.	195
OM:	Trouble for whom? For her? Why should I care? If we are dead tomorrow, she'll get two new tailors and we couldn't even afford the ghee and wood for our funeral pyre.	
ISHVAR:	You are forever speaking without thinking. If she gets kicked out of the flat, we have no place to work. Have you thought? This is our first decent job since we came to the city.	200
OM:	And I should rejoice for that? Secret destinations where she delivers the dresses. We should work direct for this Mrs Gupta. Cut out Mrs Dina. She is making money from our sweat without a single stitch from her fingers.	205
RAJARAM:	How's her hair?	
ISHVAR:	Her hair?	
RAJARAM:	Hair. Is it long or short?	

OM:	<i>(indicating with his hand)</i> Long down to here, but she keeps it tight like her fist ... and black. Not one grey hair on her head.	210
WOMAN:	Be careful talking to him or you'll be bald.	
ISHVAR:	You are a hair-doctor, I think.	
RAJARAM:	Barber. But I gave it up. Got fed up with complaining customers. Too short, too long, puff not big enough, sideburns not wide enough. Every ugly fellow wants to look like a film actor ... Now I'm a hair-collector.	215
ISHVAR:	What do you have to do as a hair-collector?	
RAJARAM:	Collect hair.	
OM:	And is there money in that?	220
RAJARAM:	Very big business. There is great demand for hair in foreign countries.	
ISHVAR:	What do they do with it?	
RAJARAM:	Mostly they wear it. Foreign women enjoy wearing other people's hair. Men also, especially if they are bald. In foreign countries they fear baldness.	225
OM:	And how do you collect the hair? Steal it from people's heads?	
RAJARAM:	I go to pavement barbers. They let me take it in exchange for a packet of blades, or soap, or a comb. In haircutting salons they give it free if I sweep the floor. I'll show you my stock. <i>He shows them his sacks in the lamp light.</i>	230
	See, short hair. Not more than two, three inches long. Sold by the kilo to the export agent. But look inside this bag. From a ladies' barber. Beautiful ... no? This is the valuable stuff.	
OM:	<i>(feeling the hair in the sack)</i> Feels good. Soft and smooth.	235
RAJARAM:	You know, when I find hair like this I always want to meet the woman. I lie awake wondering about her. What does she look like? Why was it cut? For fashion? For punishment? Or did her husband die?	
OM:	This must have been a rich woman's hair.	240
RAJARAM:	And why do you think so?	
OM:	Because of the fragrance. A poor woman would use raw coconut oil.	
RAJARAM:	Perfectly correct. You have the makings of a hair-collector. Let me know if you get tired of tailoring.	245
OM:	But would I be able to stroke the hair while it's still attached to the woman? All the hair? From top to bottom, and between the legs?	
RAJARAM:	He's a clever rascal, isn't he?	
	<i>MONKEYMAN arrives with a monkey and dog. OM and ISHVAR react to the dog. WOMAN calls over Leila, the monkey.</i>	250
WOMAN:	Hey, Leila. Come here. Look what I got for you. First, greet your auntie. <i>Leila makes salaam and holds out her hand.</i>	255
MONKEYMAN:	Look at her. Holding her hand out for money.	
WOMAN:	Here. Take, I kept banana for her.	
MONKEYMAN:	Come here. <i>He takes food out of the monkey's mouth.</i>	
	What you got in mouth? Left your brother to scavenge in the rubbish. You should have seen her today. Playing the shy bride, eh, Leila?	260
WOMAN:	One day we find groom for you. <i>The dog, Tikka, sniffs around her. She shoos him away.</i>	
MONKEYMAN:	Hey, Tikka ... tomorrow your papa is invited by the Prime	265

	Minister ... Big Congress Party rally. Buses coming to take me. She want to hear things from my lips.	
RAJARAM:	You and thousands of other idiots.	
WOMAN:	Tell her to come and see what prosperity we are living in. You also going to this rally?	270
RAJARAM:	I'm not giving up a day of hair-collecting to listen to bogus talk and be Mother India's adoring public. You?	
WOMAN:	They're paying five rupees and free snack and tea.	
OM:	Let's go.	
ISHVAR:	We have a job. Let the unemployed take tea with the Prime Minister.	275
MONKEYMAN:	So, Tikka, I am trusting you with your sister.	
WOMAN:	Take her with you.	
MONKEYMAN:	It's meeting, not circus. They don't want monkey, even though I tell them Leila is like my obedient child. Anyway, she cause trouble ... Come now. So ja ... come ... ( <i>To the monkey.</i> ) Leave banana for breakfast.	280
SCENE FOUR		
	<i>VISHRAM's restaurant – a roadside stall in the city. VISHRAM comes on selling his wares. OM comes on. He notices the poster of Indira Gandhi.</i>	285
OM:	You too have become a devotee of the goddess?	
VISHRAM:	Compulsory prayers. Her presence is protection.	
OM:	What do you mean?	
VISHRAM:	I put up her picture and advertise her twenty-point programme and my windows don't get smashed by government vandals.	290
OM:	Twenty points?	
VISHRAM:	She wants to tackle poverty, housing, family planning. People are still multiplying.	
OM:	So, forget it.	
VISHRAM:	( <i>noticing OM's bandaged hand</i> ) What happened to you? Been in a fight?	295
OM:	It's long story.	
VISHRAM:	So many modern <i>Mahabharatas</i> are spun out over a cup of my chai.	
OM:	( <i>seeing ISHVAR and MANECK</i> ) Put more sugar in, and two more strong chai.	300
	<i>OM offers MANECK a beedi (a cheap roll-up cigarette), as he is smoking himself.</i>	
MANECK:	No thanks. I don't smoke.	
ISHVAR:	So, detective sahib? Found out where Mrs Dina goes? Name of Mrs Gupta's company? Address?	305
OM:	Have you tried following a taxi on a cycle?	
ISHVAR:	Was it my crazy idea? So you shed your own blood for nothing?	
OM:	No need for such heavy dialogue.	310
MANECK:	What did you do?	
OM:	Stabbed myself with scissors so Mrs Dina would let me see a doctor. How else could I get out of the house to follow her to Mrs Gupta's? She locks us in.	
MANECK:	What?	315
ISHVAR:	So what happened?	
OM:	I had the taxi well in my sight, but then I had to keep changing lanes to keep up, and on the main road the taxi disappeared.	

	There were so many of the same – same yellow and black Fiats with their meters sticking out ... I didn't know which one to follow. I thought I had the right one just as I squeezed between two cars and was knocked off my bike.	320
ISHVAR:	My God! Your anger will always lead to haste!	
OM:	( <i>flashing fifty rupees</i> ) Well, my haste got me fifty rupees! (To MANECK.) We can go to movie. <i>Revolver Rani</i> .	325
ISHVAR:	Where from?	
OM:	Compensation from driver, but I got up too fast. I should have screamed and shouted that I was dying and done him for two hundred.	
ISHVAR:	Only to you could such things happen. And if your finger goes septic and your tailoring is kaput? How long will your fifty rupees last?	330
OM:	It's not that bad.	
MANECK:	Why do you need to know where Mrs Gupta lives?	
OM:	So we can talk directly to her instead of being fleeced.	335
MANECK:	I'm sure Dina Auntie wouldn't do that.	
ISHVAR:	You have better things to do than get involved in Om's sorry story. Like make your father proud with your studies.	
MANECK:	Even if I was A-grade student, it wouldn't make my father proud.	
OM:	Don't talk rubbish.	340
MANECK:	It's true. 'The slow coach always gets left behind' he's always saying. But he's the one who's the slow coach. He won't even change a packet of biscuits in his shop ...	
ISHVAR:	You have a shop?	
MANECK:	I hope to run it one day ...	345
OM:	Look, your father sent you here to study because he cares about your future.	
MANECK:	You're an expert on fathers or what?	
OM:	Yes.	
MANECK:	What makes you?	350
OM:	Because my father is dead. That quickly makes you an expert. So stop talking rubbish about your father.	
MANECK:	Yes, yes. My father is a saint.	
OM:	I'm never going to be a father.	
MANECK:	Me neither.	355
OM:	Maybe we should have the snip. Government is offering radio.	
ISHVAR:	Don't even joke about such things. You will marry when I tell you. No arguments.	
OM:	Everyone has a radio.	
ISHVAR:	Everyone jumps in the well? You will also? Learning big city ways.	360
OM:	You get the operation if you don't want me to.	
ISHVAR:	Shameless! My manhood for a stupid radio?	
OM:	Who are you saving your manhood for?	
ISHVAR:	( <i>meaning he has sacrificed himself for OM</i> ) Who have I sacrificed myself for?	365
	<i>Silence as this hits home to OM.</i>	
ISHVAR:	You want transistor? Get back to work and save.	
	<i>They get up to go.</i>	
OM:	Put it on the tab.	370
	<i>As they leave, they see WOMAN washing and drying half her sari.</i>	
OM:	You see that woman? She's always at the pump. She has only one sari.	

## SCENE FIVE

	DINA's flat. <i>The tailors and MANECK come back from the restaurant and go to DINA's flat.</i>	375
DINA:	(to OM) So how far was your doctor? The southernmost tip of Sri Lanka?	
OM:	Yes. I was carried through the sky by Lord Hanuman.	380
DINA:	This fellow is getting very sharp. <i>They get back to their sewing.</i>	
DINA:	(to MANECK) Were you smoking with these two?	
MANECK:	No, Auntie.	
DINA:	Under my roof, I stand in your parents' place.	385
MANECK:	They were smoking and I was sitting next to them.	
DINA:	(to the tailors) You shouldn't smoke. Cancer will eat your lungs.	
OM:	This expensive city will eat us alive before that.	
DINA:	Work hard and you'll earn plenty of money.	390
OM:	(under his breath) Not the way you pay us.	
DINA:	Did you say something?	
OM:	Do you have to go far to get the work?	
DINA:	Not far.	
OM:	And what is the name of the company you go to?	395
DINA:	Why you bother with the name? All I'm concerned is that the work gets done.	
ISHVAR:	And that is what interests us also. <i>They start sewing.</i>	
DINA:	(to OM) The seams from yesterday weren't straight.	400
ISHVAR:	I will separate them and do them again.	
DINA:	He makes mistakes. He should correct them.	
OM:	You can hardly see in this dim light.	
DINA:	If I exceed the monthly quota, my meter will be disconnected. Then we'll be in total darkness.	405
ISHVAR:	Shall we move the sewing machines to the front room?	
DINA:	And parade yourself to the whole street? The landlord will accuse me of running a factory from my flat.	
OM:	So you lock us in when you go out so no one can see us.	
DINA:	I have no choice.	410
OM:	You think we're thieves.	
ISHVAR:	She's not saying that ...	
OM:	We're going to take your possessions and run away.	
DINA:	The landlord could barge in and throw you out on the street. But he wouldn't dare to break the padlock. It's against the law. <i>They sew some more.</i>	415
OM:	Very difficult pattern. We'll have to charge more this time for sure.	
DINA:	For the commission I get on the order, I pay you a fair rate. So stop your backchat and get to work. And take your fingers out of your hair before you get oil on the cloth. Scratch, scratch, scratch the whole day. <i>DINA moves off and ISHVAR approaches her.</i>	420
ISHVAR:	Om is not a bad boy. If sometimes he's disobedient or bad-tempered, it's only because he's frustrated and unhappy. He has had a very unfortunate life.	425
DINA:	You think mine has been easy? But we must make the best of what we have.	

ISHVAR:	May I take some water from the kitchen?	
DINA:	Use the plain glasses. The frosted ones are for Maneck and me.	430
	<i>ISHVAR goes to the kitchen. OM indicates for MANECK to come over.</i>	
OM:	Not having a husband makes her sour. She needs someone to service her.	435
MANECK:	Don't talk about Dina Auntie like that.	
OM:	But it's true. If she had a man ...	
MANECK:	Mummy says the way she loved her husband, she could never look at another man.	
OM:	Doesn't stop us looking at her.	440
MANECK:	Stop it.	
OM:	Ever done it?	
MANECK:	Almost. On a railway train.	
OM:	You're a champion fakeologist, for sure. On a train!	
MANECK:	No, really. A few months ago, when I left home to come to college. There was a woman in the upper booth, opposite mine. Very beautiful.	445
OM:	More beautiful than Mrs Dina?	
MANECK:	No. But the minute I got on the train, she kept staring at me, smiling when no one was watching. It's so sad. I'll never meet that woman again.	450
	<i>During this ISHVAR has returned and started working again. The siren sounds indicating that it's six o'clock.</i>	
OM:	It's six o'clock.	
	<i>They pack up to go.</i>	455
DINA:	Tomorrow order has to be finished. So don't be late like today.	
ISHVAR:	There was an accident. Train was delayed.	
DINA:	Under the Emergency, government says railways run on time. Strange that your train keeps coming late.	
ISHVAR:	You can't trust the government.	460
	<i>They go.</i>	
MANECK:	Why do you fight with them, Auntie?	
DINA:	You dare to ask me? Do you know the whole story?	
MANECK:	I'm sorry, Auntie. I meant ...	
DINA:	Mistakes and shoddy work. But thank God for Ishvar. One angel and one devil. Trouble is when Angel keeps company with the Devil, neither can be trusted.	465
MANECK:	Do you really lock them in?	
DINA:	The landlord's threat is real – you remember it too. Always pretend you're my nephew.	470
	<i>MANECK doesn't say anything.</i>	
DINA:	I'm telling you. If I don't lock them in, they could go outside and blab to the world that they're working here. Then what would happen? As it is I can barely manage. My tiny commission sticks in their throat.	475
MANECK:	Shall I tell Mummy to send more money?	
DINA:	Absolutely not.	
MANECK:	For my rent and food?	
DINA:	I'm charging a fair price and she's paying it. If I wanted charity I could have played the poor widow and languished at my brother's.	480

## SCENE SIX

*Clearing of the slums.*

*The tailors are back in the slums.*

- OM: I'm starving.
- ISHVAR: Do you have worms? Now if you were married, your wife would have food cooked and waiting for you. 485
- OM: Why don't you get married? I've selected a wife for you.
- ISHVAR: Who?
- OM: Mrs Dina. I know you like her, you're always taking her side. You should give her a poke. 490
- ISHVAR: Shameless boy!  
*The rumbling sounds of a bulldozer coming closer. Announcements on the loudspeaker.*
- ANNOUNCEMENT: Keep back! These slums are illegal. Beautification police! We have orders to destroy the huts! Get back! 495
- OM: What is going on?  
*RAJARAM comes running on as the slums are cleared.*
- RAJARAM: Run! Run! They are clearing people also.
- ANNOUNCEMENT: Collect your belongings and move on or you will be moved!  
*The slums are completely demolished. Slum-dwellers grab what belongings they can, and flee. The bulldozers come in and flatten the place. The dust settles.*
- Time passes. MONKEYMAN comes on and starts to make a shrine. He puts on top a garlanded picture of Leila the monkey and Tikka the dog. He speaks to Tikka, cajoling him to come over.*
- MONKEYMAN: Come here, Tikka, come here ... In one day how our fortunes changed! While I showered rose petals on Mother India at rally, she had our homes flattened by bulldozer ... all crooks and liars. While I ate free bhajia, you were so hungry you had to bite into your own sister. She is also gone ... beloved to God ... only two of us left ... Never mind I forgive you ... You played like children, I thought she was safe but Dog is dumb animal, I should have known ... all my fault for leaving you alone ... Come ... eat sweets. Offering to the gods ... 510
- Look what I got ... lovely picture of you with your monkey sister on your back when she still alive, before you became a villain. All family was together ... Kodak moment taken by that American tourist. He enjoyed our act, didn't he? Sister, you and Papa. Come fold your hands and pray for sister's soul ... 515
- mourn with me, then we have special treat. I got five rupees from rally. 520
- TIKKA comes over and MONKEYMAN prepares to slit the dog's throat as a sacrifice.*
- Now your sinner's soul will be free, like your innocent sister's. 525
- Blackout.*

## SCENE SEVEN

*'Au Revoir' Exports company.*

*MRS GUPTA comes on with a bouffant hairdo. She greets DINA.*

- MRS GUPTA: Hello, Mrs Dalal. I've just been at the hair salon. What do you think? 530
- DINA: Beautiful.
- MRS GUPTA: It's a bouffant.

DINA:	It sets off your cheekbones.	
MRS GUPTA:	Stop, you are making me blush. Empty-handed? Where is my order?	535
DINA:	My tailors haven't come for a few days.	
MRS GUPTA:	That's very inconvenient. Where are they?	
DINA:	<i>(lying)</i> They had a bereavement in the family.	
MRS GUPTA:	Drinking and dancing in their village, no doubt. Too many production days are lost with such excuses. When will they be back?	540
DINA:	Soon I hope.	
MRS GUPTA:	We are third-world in development but first-class in absenteeism and strikes. The Emergency is good medicine for the nation. I'm with Mrs Gandhi on this.	545
DINA:	Surely she only declared Emergency because the court found her guilty of cheating in the election.	
MRS GUPTA:	No, no, no! That is all rubbish, it will be appealed. Now all these troublemakers who accused her falsely have been put in jail.	550
DINA:	Seems like anyone can be in jail these days for no rhyme or reason.	
MRS GUPTA:	What nonsense, Mrs Dalal!	
DINA:	They are overflowing the jails with MISA suspects and holding them without trial.	555
MRS GUPTA:	What do you know about Maintenance of Internal Security when you don't even know where your tailors are?	
DINA:	Maneck tells me of daily arrests on his campus. Anyone who speaks out against the Emergency is a target.	560
MRS GUPTA:	So your adolescent boarder from the mountains is informing your politics? What does he know about the real threats to this country? Laziness and indiscipline! Indiscipline is the mother of chaos. The need of the hour is discipline and that is the Prime Minister's message on the posters, which I have hung prominently for all my workers to see.	565
DINA:	Yes, Mrs Gupta.	
MRS GUPTA:	Now, about my order.	
DINA:	I am sure the tailors will be back soon.	
MRS GUPTA:	No more delays, Mrs Dalal. Remember, strict rules and firm supervision leads to success. Tailors are very strange people. They work with tiny needles but strut about as if they are carrying big swords. You must keep control.	570
DINA:	Yes.	
MRS GUPTA:	You are the boss. I don't give my workers rest. Rest causes thinking and thinking causes excuses. I don't allow it. You must have workers, not shirkers. This is why I'm a big businesswoman and Mr Gupta can sit at home in his slippers. My exporters rely on me. 'Mrs Gupta,' they say, 'you are simply marvellous. Always on time.' Highly prestigious labels from America and Europe are asking for my creations. In just one year I have doubled my turnover at 'Au Revoir' Exports. Make sure your tailors are back – if your order is not in by next Friday, I will have to bid <i>you</i> 'au revoir'.	580
DINA:	Yes, Friday, then.	585

## SCENE EIGHT

*The building site to which OM and ISHVAR have been cleared. Workers are breaking stones and making gravel. ISHVAR half-fills a woman's basket.*

WOMAN 1:	Fill it to the top.	
ISHVAR:	I have never done this work before.	590
WOMAN 1:	Filling is easy. ( <i>Getting up.</i> ) For carrying, you need balance.	
ISHVAR:	The heat is making me feel faint.	
WOMAN 2:	No sympathy here, kid!	
WOMAN 1:	Water is coming.	
	<i>OM wets his hair with his spit and puts comb through it.</i>	595
WOMAN 2:	Oi! Get back to work or overseer will have something to say.	
OM:	We're tailors, not stone-breakers.	
WOMAN 2:	And I'm the Queen of Jhansi.	
ISHVAR:	There is a mistake. We shouldn't be here.	
MAN 1:	Couldn't agree more, nimble fingers!	600
MAN 2:	Homeless amateurs they round up!	
ISHVAR:	We are not homeless, they destroyed our homes!	
	<i>SHANKAR comes with water and gives it to the thirsty workers.</i>	
MAN 1	( <i>about SHANKAR</i> ) And this beggar? What kind of labourer is he going to make?	605
WOMAN 1:	Be quiet! At least he quenches your thirst. <i>She drinks and exits during the following lines.</i>	
SHANKAR:	So! Without beggars how will people wash away their sins?	
MAN 2:	Listen to him! Holier than thou!	610
WOMAN 2:	Son of a pig! Give me some water. <i>SHANKAR goes up to the tailors and talks to them.</i>	
SHANKAR:	They don't like us here.	
ISHVAR:	Because they think we are after their livelihood.	
SHANKAR:	Little do they know my livelihood would put their meagre wages to shame. I command the city's top begging spots. Office crowd, lunch crowd, shopping crowd ... such takings!	615
ISHVAR:	What bad kismet that we got cleared away. At least we are together.	
SHANKAR:	Yes. I wish my Beggarmaster would come and find me.	620
OM:	You think he's looking?	
ISHVAR:	We need to get out of here. <i>The siren sounds. SHANKAR exits and everyone lies down to rest.</i>	

## SCENE NINE

*Split focus on stage:  
Workers asleep on the building site.*

*DINA's flat.*

*DINA comes on with stacks of cloth for an order. The doorbell rings.*

DINA	( <i>to MANECK, who is off</i> ) It's Ibrahim, Maneck – stay hidden. There is a familiarity to this drill. DINA gets an envelope out of one of the machine drawers and goes to let IBRAHIM in. He greets her as she hands him an envelope.	630
IBRAHIM:	Hello, sister!	
DINA:	Please count it.	635
IBRAHIM:	No need, sister. Twenty-year tenant like you. If I can't trust you, who can I trust?	

- He fumbles with his folder and elastic band.*  
Please, sister, can I sit for a minute to find your receipt, or everything will fall to the ground? Old hands are clumsy hands. Lucky legs are still working. 640  
*He sits and surveys the room. He clocks the sewing machines.*
- IBRAHIM: You have two machines in this room?  
DINA: There's no law against two machines, is there?  
IBRAHIM: Not at all, just asking. Although with this crazy Emergency, you can never tell what law there is. The government surprises us daily. 645
- DINA: One has a light needle, the other heavy. Presser-feet and tensions are also different.
- IBRAHIM: They look exactly the same to me, but what do I know about sewing? ... So where does the young man live? 650
- DINA: What?  
IBRAHIM: The young man, sister. Your paying guest.  
DINA: How dare you suggest I keep young men in my flat?  
IBRAHIM: Please. That's not what I ... 655  
DINA: Haven't you got enough adulterers to blackmail? You want to sully a defenceless widow's reputation?  
IBRAHIM: Forgive me, sister. Must be a silly rumour.  
DINA: If there's nothing else, I will see you next month.  
IBRAHIM: With your permission, sister. Your humble servant. 660  
*He leaves and MANECK comes back in.*
- MANECK: Sorry, Auntie. You shouldn't have to listen to that.  
DINA: Can't be helped.  
MANECK: At least rent is paid up and water and electricity too.  
DINA: We can't eat electricity. No sign of those buggers! How will I deliver my order? If they don't turn up, I'll have to go cap in hand to my brother. 665
- MANECK: Auntie, Vishram at the tea stall told me Om and Ishvar's homes were destroyed and they were dragged into the police truck. Who knows where they are now. In jail? 670
- DINA: And how long is their sentence? One week? Two? If those rascals were moonlighting somewhere else this would be the way to do it, starting a rumour.
- MANECK: It's not just them, Auntie. Everyone from the streets and slums, all the beggars and pavement-dwellers, were taken away by the police. 675
- DINA: Surely there's no law for doing that.  
MANECK: It's a new policy. City Beautification Plan or something, under the Emergency.
- DINA: I am sick and tired of that stupid word. 680  
MANECK: We could check with the police.  
DINA: You think they will unlock the jail on my say-so?  
MANECK: At least we would know where they are.  
DINA: At this moment, I'm more worried about these dresses.  
MANECK: I knew it. You're so selfish, you don't think about anyone but yourself. 685
- DINA: How dare you talk to me like that?  
MANECK: Om and Ishvar could be dead for all you care.  
*He goes off and slams the door.*
- DINA: If you damage my door, I'll send you back express delivery to your parents. 690  
*MANECK comes back out.*
- MANECK: When do you have to deliver them?

DINA:	Day after tomorrow. By twelve o'clock.	
MANECK:	That's two whole days. Lots of time.	695
DINA:	For two expert tailors. Not for me alone.	
MANECK:	I'll help you.	
DINA:	But there are sixty dresses. Six-zero. Hems and buttons all to be done by hand.	
MANECK:	How will they know if we do it by machine?	700
DINA:	The difference is like night and day.	
MANECK:	We have forty-eight hours till delivery time.	
DINA:	If we don't eat or sleep or go to the bathroom.	
MANECK:	We can at least try. Deliver what we finish and make an excuse that the tailors fell sick or something.	705
DINA:	You're a good boy, you know. Your parents are very fortunate.	
MANECK:	That must be why they sent me away.	
DINA:	They want you to have a better life than theirs.	
MANECK:	My life was perfect before my father sent me to boarding school and now here.	710
DINA:	You not happy here?	
MANECK:	No ... no ... Dina Auntie, I didn't mean ... Come on, Auntie ... let's give it a go!	
DINA:	What about college?	
MANECK:	No lectures today.	715
DINA:	Come, I'll teach you buttons. Easier than hems.	
MANECK:	Anything. I learn quickly. <i>He threads a needle and puts it in his mouth.</i>	
DINA:	Take it out at once before you swallow it.	
MANECK:	You never shout at Om for doing that.	720
DINA:	That's different. He's trained. He grew up with tailors.	
MANECK:	No, he didn't. His family used to be cobblers.	
DINA:	And you know so much about them?	
MANECK:	Om told me.	
DINA:	You should keep your distance.	725
MANECK:	You want me to treat them like they got treated in their village? They were ... leather workers. Untouchable. Spat on by the landowners ...	
DINA:	These Hindus and their outdated caste system.	
MANECK:	Om told me in confidence. They were scared of being treated badly if anyone knew.	730
DINA:	You can tell me. I don't believe in these customs.	
MANECK:	Auntie, you have no idea.	
DINA:	And you do?	
MANECK:	You know Om's father and Ishvar were caned as children for daring to touch the chalks and slates in the village school. So their father then decided he didn't want his sons to be slaves to the upper castes. He sent them to become apprentices with his Muslim tailor friend in the city – Ashraf. When Om's dad came back to the village, he was successful and the high castes didn't like it. When he went to cast his vote in the village election, the landowner Thakur Dharamsi took his revenge on the whole family.	735
DINA:	What did he do?	
MANECK:	They hung Om's dad from a banyan tree and the rest of the family were torched.	740
DINA:	Oh my God!	
MANECK:	Om and Ishvar only survived because they were with Ashraf in the city.	745

DINA:	Such horrible suffering! I had no idea ... Day after day they sat quietly working without saying a word and to you they tell their life story.	750
MANECK:	Maybe they were afraid of you?	
DINA:	Afraid of me? What nonsense. If anything I was afraid of them. That they would find Mrs Gupta's company and cut me out or get better jobs. Sometimes I was afraid even to point out their mistakes. I would correct them at night after they left. God only knows where they are.	755
SCENE TEN		
	<i>Split stage:</i> <i>The building site, where people are still resting. OM and ISHVAR are restless.</i> <i>DINA in her flat, sewing.</i>	760
ISHVAR:	Dresses will be late again. What will Mrs Dina do?	
OM:	Find new tailors and forget about us. What else? We should never have come to the city. We could've stayed being Ashraf's apprentices.	765
ISHVAR:	Ashraf couldn't afford to keep us any more. Ready-made clothes ruined his business. As it is, I'll always be grateful we were safe with him or we would have perished with the rest of our family in the village.	770
OM:	I wish I had died with them.	
ISHVAR:	Don't ever say that.	
OM:	Why not? Why were we spared, Uncle? Why?	
ISHVAR:	To make a better future.	
OM:	What future? God is having a joke. Letting us train as tailors only to toil to death in this hell of heartless devils.	775
ISHVAR:	It's not God. It is this Emergency. You must have hope.	
OM:	Like my father had when he trained with Ashraf and came back to the village?	
ISHVAR:	It was his pride, not his hope, that came before a fall. You can't walk tall in front of the upper castes.	780
OM:	So you lower your eyes to the ground and live a long life?	
ISHVAR:	What do you know? Born yesterday. What do you know about the endurance of your people? The timeless chain of caste that shackled us to work with carcasses and filth while being treated worse than animals. It was my father who dared to break the chain by sending me and my brother to train as tailors. Yes, he lowered his eyes and waited for the seed of hope he sowed to grow. But your father was impatient, wanting change overnight and I see that streak in you.	785
OM:	He went to cast his vote, which is every man's right.	790
ISHVAR:	For us rights and wrongs are determined by the likes of Thakur Dharamsi. Be grateful our caste is invisible in the city. We will get out of here, work hard, get you married. You must continue our bloodline and who knows what your children will become?	795
	<i>SHANKAR rolls in on his platform with food, balancing the dinner slowly and carefully. He offers it to the tailors.</i>	
SHANKAR:	Eat, it will give you strength. Chew properly. No rushing. <i>The tailors start eating. Again ISHVAR puts some of his food on OM's plate without him noticing.</i>	800
SHANKAR:	More chappatis? I made friends with someone in the kitchen.	

ISHVAR:	I can get as many as I like.	
	No, enough.	
	SHANKAR <i>starts to leave the site.</i>	805
OM:	Any news from your Beggarmaster?	
SHANKAR:	He will think I have run away when he comes to my pavement spot tomorrow for my money.	
ISHVAR:	If he asks around, someone will tell him the police took you.	
SHANKAR:	That's what I still can't understand. Why did the police take me? Beggarmaster pays them every week. All his beggars are allowed to work without harassment.	810
ISHVAR:	These are different police. Beautification police.	
OM:	Ugly bastards!	
ISHVAR:	Maybe they don't know your Beggarmaster.	815
SHANKAR:	Ha! Everybody knows Beggarmaster.	
OM:	With his briefcase handcuffed to his hand, he looks like underworld gangster.	
SHANKAR:	Gangster only to his enemies, to his own type he is like God. He looks after my everything. When I was little, he carried me around and used to rent me out each day. I was in great demand. I earned him the highest profits. A child, a suckling cripple, earns a lot of money from the public. Wish I could still be carried around in women's arms, their sweet nipples in my mouth. Better than bumping along all day on this platform, banging my balls and wearing out my buttocks.	820
		825
ISHVAR:	Your life is hard.	
SHANKAR:	But the rewards were sweet. If I was good, Beggarmaster took me to a prostitute. Especially on my birthday. Now I feel all alone. I want to go home!	830
ISHVAR:	Have faith.	
	SHANKAR <i>leaves.</i>	
OM:	If you hear from your Beggarmaster, put in a word for us as well ... get us out of here.	835

## [SCENE ELEVEN OMITTED]

## SCENE TWELVE

	NUSSWAN's office.	
	NUSSWAN <i>presses his bell for DINA to come in. DINA and MANECK enter.</i>	
DINA:	You're turning European? Usually you make me wait at least fifteen minutes.	840
NUSSWAN:	Well, I am free. Usually I'm busy.	
DINA:	How are Ruby and the boys?	
NUSSWAN:	They are well. Not that Xerxes and Zarir are boys any more. Older than this young man, I should imagine. You've missed their childhood.	845
DINA:	Where are my manners? This is Maneck. Maneck, this is my brother Nusswan.	
NUSSWAN:	Pleased to meet you.	
MANECK:	Lovely to meet you.	
DINA:	Maneck has heard a lot about you from me, and I wanted the two of you to meet. He came to live with me a few months ago.	850
NUSSWAN:	Live with you?	
DINA:	What else would a paying guest do?	

NUSSWAN:	Yes, yes, of course. But your flat is the size of a matchbox. And what with tailors and sewing machines, where has she put you?	855
MANECK:	Em ...	
DINA:	He's in my room and I sleep with the sewing machines.	
NUSSWAN:	Dina, Dina! I ask you, is this independence? ( <i>To MANECK.</i> ) She had a home. With us.	860
DINA:	I couldn't live off your charity for ever.	
NUSSWAN:	What charity? It was quid pro quo. You could have carried on making yourself useful to Ruby.	
DINA:	Like a servant. You let go of the servant.	865
NUSSWAN:	So, Maneck, where do you work?	
DINA:	Work? He's just seventeen. He goes to college.	
NUSSWAN:	And what are you studying?	
MANECK:	Refrigeration and air-conditioning.	
NUSSWAN:	Very wise choice. The future lies with technology and modernisation. Magnificent changes are taking place in this country. And the credit goes to our Prime Minister. Thanks to our visionary leader and her beautification programme, this city will be restored to its former glory.	870
DINA:	Well, in this beautification I have lost my tailors.	875
NUSSWAN:	What a pity.	
DINA:	They were an eyesore, so were carted off by the police somewhere.	
NUSSWAN:	Well poverty has to be tackled head on. Mrs Gandhi's twenty-point programme has pragmatic policies, not irrelevant theories. A good friend of mine was saying only last week – and he's the director of a multinational, mind, not some two paisa home-grown business, Maneck – he was saying that at least two hundred million people are surplus to requirement, they should be eliminated.	880
MANECK:	Eliminated?	885
NUSSWAN:	Yes. You know – got rid of ...	
MANECK:	But how would they be eliminated?	
NUSSWAN:	That's easy. Feed them a free meal of arsenic or cyanide. Lorries could go around to the temples and places where they gather to beg. Counting them as unemployment statistics year after year just makes the numbers look bad. And what are their lives? Sitting in the gutter. Looking like corpses. Death would be a mercy. So what can I do for you, little sister?	890
DINA:	Until I find new tailors, I can't accept any more orders.	895
NUSSWAN:	( <i>to MANECK</i> ) Could you excuse us? My secretary will get you tea.	
MANECK:	Yes, of course. <i>He exits.</i>	900
NUSSWAN:	What are you doing? Cavorting around with students less than half your age? You think you're in Hollywood? Rubbing my nose in it.	
DINA:	How am I rubbing your nose?	
NUSSWAN:	With your defiance and dis–	905
DINA:	Disobedience?! I'm not a kid.	
NUSSWAN:	As if you listened to me, then. Scoffing at my authority with your accusing eyes.	
DINA:	Who made me Sellotape my pigtails back on my head as punishment for getting a bob?	910

NUSSWAN:	You know what community is saying about you?	
DINA:	You can revel in their sympathy. 'Poor Nusswan, can't tame his unruly sister.'	
NUSSWAN:	How much is that boarder paying you?	
DINA:	Maneck. You want to know all my credits and debits before you agree to help me?	915
NUSSWAN:	Have I ever refused you? Even when you married that unambitious medicine-mixing fool.	
DINA:	Whatever happened to not speaking ill of the dead?	
NUSSWAN:	What was wrong with Poros? Or Solly?	920
DINA:	If you discount the pot belly. Nothing.	
NUSSWAN:	Pot belly, he's got only now. Sign of prosperity. And your Rustom. Unfortunate in looks, unfortunate in money and unfortunate in life span. What you saw in him? Poetry and recitals! Since when did Bach pay the bills? Fiancés buy diamonds as an engagement present – a brooch. When he came in with that pagoda-green umbrella –	925
DINA:	He didn't want me to get wet ...	
NUSSWAN:	– still I supported your decision. What a lavish wedding I gave you. Forty-eight guests, caterers and bottles of Johnnie Walker.	930
DINA:	Which you and your friends consumed.	
NUSSWAN:	Talking of friends, Jehangir would have had you, even after being widowed.	
DINA:	If I wanted to marry again, I am sure I could promenade on the parade even now with a sign around my neck and someone would take pity on me.	935
NUSSWAN:	You were beautiful, Dina. Still not bad, considering your age. You could have lived like a queen!	
DINA:	I could have died and let the vultures eat me alive!	940
NUSSWAN:	Such blasphemy! What would our father in heaven say? <i>He fills out a cash voucher.</i>	
	Give this to the cashier.	
DINA:	I always pay you back.	
NUSSWAN:	And remember. My door is always open.	945

## SCENE THIRTEEN

	OM, SHANKAR <i>and</i> ISHVAR <i>are in a truck with BEGGARMASTER, heading back to the city at night.</i>	
OM:	Look. People are sleeping peacefully. No police to bother them. Maybe the Emergency has been cancelled.	
BEGGARMASTER:	No, it has become a game, like all the other laws. Easy to play, once you know the rules. Since you are Worm's friends, I am willing to help you.	950
ISHVAR:	We are very grateful to you for securing our release from the irrigation project.	
BEGGARMASTER:	Gratitude is good. Do you have any experience?	955
ISHVAR:	Oh yes, many years' experience.	
BEGGARMASTER:	It doesn't look to me that you could be successful.	
OM:	We are fully trained. We can even take measurements straight from the customer's body.	
BEGGARMASTER:	Measurements from the body?	960
OM:	Of course. We are skilled tailors, not hacks.	
BEGGARMASTER:	I thought you wanted to work for me as beggars. I have no need for tailors. I'll take you back to the site.	

ISHVAR:	No, please, Beggarmaster, there must be some other way to show our gratitude.	965
BEGGARMASTER:	Usually when I look after a beggar, I charge one hundred rupees a week – begging space, food, clothes, protection all inclusive.	
ISHVAR:	Yes, Shankar ... Worm told us about it.	
SHANKAR:	You are a very kind Beggarmaster. I knew you will find me.	970
BEGGARMASTER:	I can't afford to lose you.	
ISHVAR:	What luck for all of us that you came to the rescue.	
BEGGARMASTER:	Luck has little to do with it. I am the most famous Beggarmaster in the city.	
ISHVAR:	We know.	975
BEGGARMASTER:	Anyway, your case is different, you don't need looking after in the same way. Just pay me fifty a week per person, for one year.	
OM:	That's almost two thousand five hundred each.	
BEGGARMASTER:	It's minimum for what I'm offering.	980
ISHVAR:	Three days' worth of sewing each week. We won't be able to afford it. We'll give you twenty-five.	
BEGGARMASTER:	I'm not selling onions and potatoes in the bazaar. My business is looking after human lives. Don't try to bargain with me.	
ISHVAR:	We'll take it.	985
BEGGARMASTER:	What's your credentials? How will I know you can pay?	
SHANKAR:	They have good jobs with a Parsi lady.	
BEGGARMASTER:	I will have to verify it for myself when I drop you off.	
ISHVAR:	No, no ... We can't disturb Mrs Dina in the middle of the night.	
OM:	She is bad-tempered. We will surely lose our jobs.	990
BEGGARMASTER:	Then there's always Plan B. Begging for me. Although we'll have to arrange some injuries.	
	<i>OM and ISHVAR are horrified.</i>	
ISHVAR:	Don't worry, we will introduce you to Mrs Dina.	
BEGGARMASTER:	I'll come personally every Thursday to collect my weekly payment.	995
ISHVAR:	All right.	
BEGGARMASTER:	Sometimes one of my clients will vanish without paying, after enjoying my hospitality. But I always manage to find them. Please remember that.	1000

## SCENE FOURTEEN

	<i>DINA lays out the table for four with MANECK helping her. A record of Bob Dylan singing can be heard from the upstairs flat.</i>	
DINA:	Those hippies upstairs and their love affair with Bob Dylan.	
MANECK:	It's kind of you to ask Om and Ishvar to eat with us.	1005
DINA:	It's practical. If they are under my roof they won't disappear into the wilderness. I have to rebuild my credibility with Mrs Gupta.	
MANECK:	You've used your best plates.	
DINA:	No point keeping fine china for fancy occasions that never arise.	1010
	<i>Pause.</i>	
	The last time all the sides of this table were occupied was my third wedding anniversary – the night Rustom was killed. He just popped out on his bicycle to get vanilla ice cream for Nusswan's boys. It was raining ... I made tea ... He should	1015

	have been ten minutes. I put a tea-cosy over the pot. Still it went cold. He never came back. It was a hit-and-run.	
MANECK:	Mummy told me. What a tragic accident.	
DINA:	The policeman said a stray dog lapped up the thick pink puddle of ice cream that fell from his hands. They didn't have vanilla, he must've got strawberry not to disappoint the children. Sometimes, from the verandah, I still imagine him peddling in the distance.	1020
	<i>She calls the tailors to the table.</i>	1025
	Food is on the table.	
	<i>She goes back in.</i>	
ISHVAR:	She's calling us to the table.	
OM:	So we should go.	
	ISHVAR and OM tentatively take their places at the table. They look nervously at the cutlery and proceed to eat with their hands. DINA and MANECK realise they are not comfortable with cutlery; they put their own cutlery down and also eat with their hands. ISHVAR can't contain himself. He breaks down.	1030
ISHVAR:	Oh, Mrs Dina, I don't know how to thank you. Such kindness! We are so afraid of the outside ... this Emergency, the police. We didn't know where we were. I thought we would die on that irrigation project. I don't know how to thank you.	1035
DINA:	That's enough, please. There is no need for all this.	
ISHVAR:	I just don't know how to thank you.	1040
DINA:	There have been enough thanks for one day. Now eat.	
	<i>They eat.</i>	
	I don't like you getting in the clutches of this Beggarmaster fellow. He sounds fearsome.	
ISHVAR:	Better the devil you know, Mrs Dina.	1045
	<i>They eat. OM scratches his head.</i>	
DINA:	We will have to put some kerosene on that hair.	
OM:	Does it poison the lice?	
MANECK:	I'll tell you.	
OM:	You are a champion fakeologist.	1050
MANECK:	Listen. First every louse soaks itself in kerosene. In the middle of the night when you are asleep, Dina Auntie gives each one a tiny matchstick. At the count of three they commit suicide in bursts of tiny flames without hurting you. There'll be a beautiful halo around your head when it happens.	1055
DINA:	That's not funny, Mac.	
OM:	Mac?	
MANECK:	My nickname. I hate it.	
ISHVAR:	Thank you, Mrs Dina, for letting us sleep on the verandah last night.	1060
DINA:	Where else would you have gone?	
ISHVAR:	Can we leave our trunk here?	
DINA:	Where will you sleep tonight?	
ISHVAR:	I don't know. Maybe we'll find some doorway of a shop. Even for that you have to grease someone's palm.	1065
DINA:	You can stay here.	
ISHVAR:	Thank you. And we will pay.	
DINA:	Absolutely no rent. Ibrahim will have me for subletting. Just keeping you out of those crooked police hands.	
MANECK:	(aside) I'm very proud of you, Dina Auntie.	1070
	<i>There is a knock at the door. MANECK goes and ushers RAJARAM in.</i>	

DINA:	This fellow came before also. Says he's your friend.	
ISHVAR:	Rajaram!	
DINA:	So you know him?	1075
ISHVAR:	He showed us great kindness when we first came to the city.	
DINA:	Please talk to him on the verandah. <i>As the tailors talk to RAJARAM, DINA takes up sewing.</i>	
ISHVAR:	Where did you disappear to?	
RAJARAM:	When the bulldozers came, I thought you two were kaput. Where have you been?	1080
OM:	VIP guests of Mrs Gandhi's.	
RAJARAM:	In the lock-up?	
ISHVAR:	We were rounded up and forced to work as labourers on irrigation project.	1085
RAJARAM:	(to OM) You lost weight.	
OM:	Special government diet.	
RAJARAM:	Still got your sense of humour.	
ISHVAR:	What can I say? Our fate has dragged us every which way and now we are back at Mrs Dina's.	1090
RAJARAM:	Lucky you! You're onto a good thing here, I see. You were right about her hair.	
ISHVAR:	Look, you can't stay long.	
RAJARAM:	I have a problem, only a small obstacle but with my profession I need storage space.	1095
ISHVAR:	For what?	
RAJARAM:	Currently I'm specialising in plaits, but sleeping on the streets I have nowhere to store what I collect. Will you keep it safe for me? Your good friend?	
OM:	We have our trunk. <i>RAJARAM hands over a bag. OM takes out two exuberant plaits and starts fingering them.</i>	1100
RAJARAM:	Don't touch them!	
OM:	Sorry.	
RAJARAM:	No no! It's just the hair-agents are fussy about clean hair.	1105
OM:	I wash my hands with Lifebuoy. How did you get these two? So cleanly cropped.	
RAJARAM:	They wanted pageboy-style.	
ISHVAR:	You cutting hair again?	
RAJARAM:	Mostly pavement-barbering. Just to keep me going. So you'll keep this safe?	1110
ISHVAR:	As safe as anything is these days.	
RAJARAM:	Thank you, and if I want to add more I can always come here?	
ISHVAR:	No, no, you'll scare Mrs Dina. As it is, she thinks we're mixing with crooks and crackpots. You just give it in a bag to Worm.	1115
OM:	That beggar with the gaddi. His patch is near that Vishram tea stall. He can be the go-between.	
RAJARAM:	That beggar is your friend? Strange friends you make.	
ISHVAR:	Yes. Very strange.	1120
RAJARAM:	I won't forget this. <i>He exits. The tailors go back to where DINA is sewing her quilt.</i>	
ISHVAR:	Sorry, Mrs Dina.	
DINA:	You receive your visitors on the verandah. Strictly outside work hours.	1125
ISHVAR:	No no, Mrs Dina, he won't disturb you again. He will meet us at the tea stall.	

DINA: I was thinking, Make your tea here. Saves time.  
 OM: (*about the quilt*) What's this? 1130  
 DINA: Maneck and I started a quilt. To pass the time when you were away.

ISHVAR: It's good to use up the remnants and leftovers.  
 OM: But it's never cold in this city.  
 ISHVAR: I remember that poplin, from our first job. 1135  
 DINA: How fast you finished those dresses. I thought I had found two geniuses.

MANECK: And these blue and white flowers. You made these skirts the day I had my exams.  
 OM: And this. Our home was destroyed by the government, the day we started on this cloth. 1140  
*Another knock at the door.*

DINA: Who's there?  
 IBRAHIM: Sorry to bother you, sister. But the office has sent me.  
 DINA: Couldn't it wait till morning? 1145  
 IBRAHIM: They said it was urgent, sister. I do as I'm told.  
 IBRAHIM *enters with a GOONDA.*

DINA: You can't just barge in.  
 IBRAHIM: When you are using for commercial purposes, not domestic, the landlord has right of entry. 1150

DINA: So why doesn't he come himself instead of sending his spy and stooge? I pay my rent, I'm entitled to privacy.  
 IBRAHIM: It's not about rent. Office has sent me to deliver final notice – orally. Listen carefully. You must vacate in forty-eight hours. For violating terms and conditions. 1155

DINA: I'm calling the police right now if you don't take your goonda and leave. If landlord has a problem, tell him I'll see him in court.

IBRAHIM: (*getting his folder out*) It's all here ... Dates, times, comings, goings, taxis, dresses – and these sewing machines are proof. 1160

DINA: Proof of what?  
 IBRAHIM: The problem is you cannot hire tailors and run business. And a paying guest. Insanity, sister.

DINA: Well, this is my husband and these two boys are our sons. Go tell your landlord. 1165

IBRAHIM: Marriage licence? Birth certificates? Can I see, please?  
 DINA: The back of my slipper across your mouth is what you'll see.  
 IBRAHIM: Don't provoke desperate measures, sister.  
 DINA: You always get my money.  
*The GOONDA starts destroying her flat.* 1170

OM: Cowardly git. If you're such a man, do your own dirty work.  
 DINA: Ishvar, run to the corner. Fetch the police.  
*The GOONDA stops him.*

IBRAHIM: Please – no violence.  
 DINA: If you don't leave, I'm going to start screaming for help. 1175  
 GOONDA: If you scream, we'll have to stop you.  
 DINA: Stop him, please! Do something.  
*The GOONDA spits on the cloth, spraying it with paan juice.*  
*MANECK tries to attack him.*

MANECK: You bastard. 1180  
*GOONDA stops him.*

GOONDA: Okay. You've had your fun, kid.  
*He brandishes a knife. DINA screams.*





---

*Copyright Acknowledgements:*

EXTRACT © Sudha Bhuchar/Kristine Landon-Smith; *A Fine Balance*; Methuen Drama, an imprint of A&C Black Publishers; 2007.

Permission to reproduce items where third-party owned material protected by copyright is included has been sought and cleared where possible. Every reasonable effort has been made by the publisher (UCLES) to trace copyright holders, but if any items requiring clearance have unwittingly been included, the publisher will be pleased to make amends at the earliest possible opportunity.

University of Cambridge International Examinations is part of the Cambridge Assessment Group. Cambridge Assessment is the brand name of University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), which is itself a department of the University of Cambridge.