

LOTUS
Episode 1: The Concert
by

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EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

It is HOLI, the festival of colors. Powdered colors- BLUE, GREEN, RED, YELLOW- are thrown into the air.

RANI (V.O)
My memories are like colors thrown
around on Holi.

A girl, RANI(11), laughs. Every part of her is covered in the colors.

RANI (V.O)
The colors mix together until they
turn into a duller version of what
once was.

Rani raises her HANDS and screams as more colors are thrown at her. She wipes her face, only for the colors to smear.

RANI (V.O)
And I can't rub them off. No matter
how hard I try.

Rani grabs her own colors from someone passing by. She throws them, a huge grin on her face.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

An ALARM blares. 8:30 AM. RAJ (24) reaches over. Turns the alarm off.

With bedhead and sleepy eyes, he looks up from his blankets and sees the time. He jumps up.

RAJ
NO. Nononononononono...

He rushes to the bathroom. Comes out with toothbrush in mouth. He pulls on PANTS and a SHIRT that is wrinkled beyond repair.

The CELL PHONE rings. He picks it up.

RAJ
I'm almost there. On my way, I-

He spits the toothpaste into the kitchen sink. A VOICE screams through the phone. Raj puts the phone back to his ear as he looks around his messy apartment.

RAJ (TO PHONE)
Yes, sure, I'll pick it up. Can you
text it to me? No? Sure. Got it. I
have a great memory, you know. I-
Hello?

The call ended. He throws a LAPTOP into his BACKPACK and runs out the DOOR.

A beat later, Raj OPENS the door again and runs back in to grab KEYS. He runs out. The door SLAMS shut.

INT. ROCKY MTN TEA - MORNING

The cafe is busy. Raj is at the front, waiting for his order. He checks his watch. Taps on the counter. He stops an EMPLOYEE passing by.

RAJ

Excuse me. How much longer-

EMPLOYEE

Sorry, sir. We're understaffed. A few more minutes-

RAJ

Please. Is there anything you can do? It's my first week at work and my boss is on my back about the coffee orders. And if I'm late to this meeting, I could lose the chance to write a story and-

The Employee walks away from him.

RAJ

Please! I'll tip extra!

Hearing the word "tip", RANI (24) looks up from the DRINK MACHINE. She goes to the COUNTER and steps in front of Raj. He opens his mouth to speak, but she cuts him off.

RANI

What's your order number?

RAJ

25. Please. If you can-

She looks around the cafe to make sure she's not heard by the employees. She leans in.

RANI

How much of a tip are you giving?

Raj stares at her.

RAJ

Is this legal?

Rani sighs and backs away.

RANI

That will be a 20 minute wait.

RAJ

Wait! Fine!

Rani steps back to the counter. Raj digs out 10 DOLLARS from his pocket.

RANI
Your order will be out soon.
(quieter)
Add 5 and yours will be next.

RAJ
Deal.

Rani nods. She steps back to the machines. JOSIE (32) slides up next to her.

JOSIE
I saw that, Rani.

RANI
Help me with the order.

JOSIE
How much do I get of that tip?

RANI
20%.

JOSIE
50%.

RANI
Were you the one talking to our customer, Josie?

Josie looks back at Raj. He bites his fingernail.

JOSIE
I'll report you to the manager.

RANI
Fine. 50.

JOSIE
Latte coming right up.

Josie moves farther away as she works. She speaks louder to be heard over the NOISE of the machines.

JOSIE
I heard you have tickets to The Lotus tonight.

Raj looks up. The Lotus?

RANI
One. I have one ticket.

JOSIE
Wanna a friend to join you?

RANI
Friend? Who are you talking about?

JOSIE
You hurt me, Rani.

RANI
(a small smile)
You'll get over it.

INT. ROCKY MTN TEA - MOMENTS LATER

Finally, finally! They place the DRINKS on the counter.

RAJ
Thank God. Thank you.

Rani holds out her HAND. Raj stares at it. He realizes what she means. He hands over the 10 DOLLARS and digs around in his pocket for more.

RAJ
I'm sorry. This is all I have.

RANI
Seriously? You don't have a card?

RAJ
(walking away)
I'll bring it later! I promise!

He runs out the door. Rani CRUMPLES the note in her hand. She notices that he left his KEYS on the counter. She picks them up and POCKETS them. Now he has to come back.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Raj rushes into the office, drinks in hand. The office is an open desk space with employees moving around. His boss VICKY (early 30s) gestures at him impatiently.

RAJ
I'm so sorry. I bought-

VICKY
Save it. The meeting started.
Walking in late on your first week
is not a good look.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY

They round a bend. Vicky puts his hand up. Raj stops, almost spilling the drinks.

RAJ
I think I hate coffee now.

VICKY
Raj, are you wearing crocs?

Raj looks down. Neon orange crocs. And socks. Ones with weird eyes printed all over. They stare up at him.

RAJ

I can explain. The socks are from a halloween sale.

VICKY

Fix your hair.

With his hands full, Raj can only shake his head to try (and fail) to tame his hair. He follows Vicky.

INT. MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Vicky, followed by Raj, walk into a room of eight people. They all LOOK UP.

MICHELLE

Glad you could join us.

MICHELLE (late 40s) stands at the HEAD of the table.

Raj places the coffee on the table. He sits down across from Vicky. Raj grabs one of the cups and wraps his hands around it to calm his nerves. Michelle continues.

MICHELLE

Kasha, what do you have for me?

KASHA (late 20s), straightens her bright red glasses.

KASHA

March is next month. I was thinking a piece on predicting spring trends before the season starts.

MICHELLE

We've done this every season. I hire you to think outside the box. What are you in charge of again?

KASHA

(clears throat)
Fashion.

MICHELLE

Get started on the piece. But I want something more from you next time. Vicky, you're up.

Vicky leans forward.

VICKY

For arts and culture, one of the museums is launching an exhibition by Kennet Glintoka. We can do a spotlight piece.

Michelle taps her finger on her laptop and sits down.

VICKY

We can include other artists-

MICHELLE

(waves her hand)

It's not the number of artists that matters but the quality of content. We're the 720 Gazette. Not some local newspaper.

VICKY

Yes, I agree. You're correct.

MICHELLE

I don't need you to agree with me. I want new stories. You have any?

Vicky shuts up.

MICHELLE

Anyone?

Raj stares at the cup of coffee. This is his moment. His time to stand out. If he could just think of an idea.

RAJ

The Lotus.

The room TURNS to look at him. Raj freezes. Vicky NARROWS his eyes.

MICHELLE

Yes?

RAJ

There's a concert. Someone at the cafe was talking about it. While I got your coffee. At the...cafe.

His hands are sweaty. He tries to ignore Vicky who is screaming at him- telepathically- to SHUT. UP.

VICKY

(laughs nervously)

Yes, the coffee. It's quite good coffee, isn't it....

Raj stands. Vicky drops his forehead into his hand.

RAJ

The Lotus. It's a rock band. Made entirely of South Asian artists and is the first of its kind to make it to the Billboard Top 100. We can do a story on the artists and, um...

Raj looks down nervously. He clears his throat.

RAJ

And the fans. My sister is a fan. There's a huge subculture around the band. So a story on the music and impact of the band.

He looks up. The employees are shocked. The new guy speaks.

MICHELLE

What's your name?

RAJ

Raj. I started here a week ago.

MICHELLE

And why did we hire you?

VICKY

He submitted the essay on the impact of masculinity on mental health and university life.

Michelle studies him. Raj sits down and GRABS his coffee as if holding on for dear life.

MICHELLE

Raj. I expect a better sense of dress and appearance at work.

Raj looks down at his SOCKS. They mock him. Vicky shoots him an I-told-you-so look. Kasha hides a smile behind her hand.

MICHELLE

(cont.)

It's an idea.

That's a surprise.

MICHELLE

(cont.)

I'm a stickler for first impressions, Raj. You didn't make a great one. But I expect this piece to be good. The article is yours. Start writing.

Michelle STANDS.

MICHELLE

(cont.)

Next meeting, I expect more. There are many people waiting to take your jobs. Remember that.

Michelle and her SECRETARY leave the room. Kasha gives Michelle the side-eye as the door closes.

KASHA
 (fake upbeat)
 Michelle! I have an idea! An expose
 about your toxic workplace!

Raj STANDS UP.

VICKY
 Sit down.

Raj SITS DOWN.

The employees leave the conference room. On her way out,
 Kasha says to Raj:

KASHA
 You're lucky. Interns usually don't
 get the chance to speak.

RAJ
 Oh, I'm not an intern-

KASHA
 I'm rooting for you, Ricky.

RAJ
 My name's not-

Kasha leaves the room. Raj fidgets with his coffee cup. When
 did all the coffee disappear? Fascinating.

VICKY
 Raj, I'm talking to you.

RAJ
 Huh?

Vicky sighs.

VICKY
 I need you to listen carefully.

Raj nods.

VICKY
 I started here 15 years ago. When
 you were in your diapers and
 Michelle was just another employee.

RAJ
 I'm not-

VICKY
 I've been through the highs and
 lows of this magazine. Through
 economic crashes and a pandemic.
 I've cycled through so many bright
 new people, and I can't remember
 (MORE)

VICKY (cont'd)
any of their faces because they
were either fired or not so bright
by the end of the month.

Raj stares at his hands. What did he get himself into?

VICKY
(cont.)
Don't think for a second that you
got this job because you deserve
it. There are plenty of people who
might deserve it more than you,
judging from your performance thus
far. Every second you're here, you
must fight for your place. And
frankly, I don't think you have
what it takes.

Vicky stands up.

VICKY
(cont.)
I expect to see a draft of your
story by the end of the week.

A week?!

RAJ
I- Yes.

VICKY
I assume you're going to the
concert. And I suggest you find a
way to get a ticket. I heard the
show is sold out.

RAJ
Yes, of course.

Vicky walks out of the room. Raj waits for the sound of his
FOOTSTEPS to fade. He drops his head into his hands.

RAJ
You're so dumb. You're so dumb.
What's another word for dumb?
Stupid. You're a writer. All you
can think of is stupid?

He pulls out his PHONE and presses a number. He puts the
phone to his ear. Someone picks up.

RAJ
(defeated)
Akka, I need to ask you a favor.
Any chance you have a ticket to The
Lotus tonight?

INT. ROCKY MTN TEA - AFTERNOON

Rani CLOSES up the cafe. Josie empties a dustpan into the trash. Rani walks to Josie and hands her a 5 DOLLAR BILL.

RANI

You're cut.

JOSIE

This is the 50%?

RANI

The jerk said he'd pay 15 and then ran off after paying 10. He hasn't come back either.

JOSIE

I don't think he'll ever be back.

RANI

You saw how busy we were. And his order was huge. We did him a favor.

JOSIE

(snickers)

Whatever helps you sleep at night. You realize we could be fired?

RANI

Being fired isn't the worst thing.

JOSIE

It is if it means I'd be separated from you.

RANI

Shut up.

JOSIE

One day you'll accept my kindness. My generosity.

RANI

I'm leaving.

JOSIE

Wait for me. I'll finish sweeping and head out with you.

RANI

Can't. I'm busy.

JOSIE

Doing what? You realize the whole staff has rumors about you. They say you probably murdered someone.

RANI

Do I look scary to you?

JOSIE
No. A little. Yes.
(cont.)
Headed to the store?

Rani moves to the door.

RANI
Mm-hmm.

Josie holds the MONEY in her hand back out to Rani.

JOSIE
Here. Take the 5 and pick up some
cheap paints for me, will you? My
kid has a science project and needs
some for his little styrofoam
planets.

Rani takes the money and heads out the door.

JOSIE
See you tomorrow!

INT. ART SHOP - AFTERNOON

Rani places her BASKET of ART SUPPLIES on the counter. The
CASHIER smiles at her.

CASHIER
It's been a while. New project?

RANI
Yep.

CASHIER
Busy, I see.

RANI
Trying to be.

CASHIER
(finishing the order)
Anything else I can help you with?

RANI
Do you know of what paints can be
used for a school science project?
With styrofoam planets?

CASHIER
Sure, I'll be right back.

The cashier walks behind some aisles in the store. Behind
the counter Rani sees a FLYER. It advertises an event for
the upcoming festival of HOLI.

The cashier returns with some PAINTS.

CASHIER

So we have two types.

(points to the right)

These are what kids usually get.

But these...

(points to left)

Are, in my humble opinion, much better. They last longer and look better. The only downside is they're pricier.

RANI

I'll go with the better ones.

CASHIER

Great choice. And we'll of course give you our favorite customer discount. This will be your total.

Rani pays with her card. She points at the HOLI FLYER.

RANI

Where's that happening?

CASHIER

The Holi event? They're closing down the entire street for it. You should come!

RANI

Not really my thing.

CASHIER

Ah, come on. There's chaos, color, fun. Sounds right up your alley. Think about it.

Rani smiles and nods. As she leaves the counter, her smile DISAPPEARS. She checks the TIME on her phone. 4:12 PM. 3 hours until the concert.

EXT. OUTSIDE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Raj's phone reads 4:12 PM. He RINGS the doorbell. He's in a suburban neighborhood.

The door opens. Raj smiles sheepishly as his older sister MO (30) walks out. She's dressed in a SARI. Her fingers are busy SCREWING IN HER EARRINGS as she holds her FOOT against the door to keep it open.

MO

You owe me big-time, Raj.

RAJ

I know. I'll pay you back. Whatever you want, Akka.

MO

Get in here.

Raj enters the house. A SHOUT greets him. Raj grins as a little girl, LAVANYA (4), runs up to greet him.

LAVANYA

Pedadaddy!

Raj picks her up and throws her into the air.

RAJ

And who is this big girl?

Lavanya laughs and giggles as Raj TICKLES her. PRITI(28) enters, dressed in a CHURIDAR and with a PLATE OF FOOD in her hands.

PRITI

Put her down. Lavanya, we're not leaving until you finish annam.

Raj puts Lavanya down and TAKES OFF HIS SHOES. Mo movies past him and into the house.

RAJ

How are you, Akka?

PRITI

I'm good, kanna. How's work?

RAJ

Don't ask.

Priti FEEDS Lavanya with her hands as Lavanya plays with TOYS on the ground.

PRITI

I should thank you. Mo's coming with us to the function now that she can't go to the concert. At least I won't be alone with this little rascal.

RAJ

I feel bad. I really wouldn't ask unless it was absolutely necessary.

Priti gives the last of the food to Lavanya and STANDS. Raj follows her inside, picking up Lavanya who is too immersed in her toys to give much notice.

PRITI

Don't feel bad. Mo already has tickets to their concert next month in LA.

MO (O.F.)

Hey!

Mo comes out of a room. She takes a TICKET from her purse.

MO

Every concert matters. Through every concert you come out as a different person.

She hands Raj the ticket. Raj reaches out to take it, but Mo snatches it away again.

MO

The deal is that next time I call you, you appear before me. It could be for any reason. At any time. I call you. You're there.

RAJ

My life, my soul, are yours.

MO

Good.

She hands the ticket over. Raj takes it and stuffs it into his backpack.

RAJ

Also, Akka. Do you have time for an interview? Part of my story is to talk to fans of The Lotus.

MO

Sure. I'd love to. But another day.

Mo turns to Priti.

MO

How do I look?

PRITI

Stunning as always.

Mo leans over and kisses Priti.

PRITI

Are we ready to go?

MO

Raj, you need a ride? I can't take you to the concert, but I can take you into the city.

Raj leans down to talks to Lavanya.

RAJ

Guess who got a ticket? That's right! You're pedaddy! And now he won't be fired right away! High-five.

Lavanya gives Raj a HIGH-FIVE.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

LOUD MUSIC plays from a speaker. It's the DESI-ROCK sound of The Lotus. ART adorns the walls. BOOKCASES fill with NOVELS, ART BOOKS, PAINT SUPPLIES, PHOTO FRAMES. By the window is an EASEL. On that easel is a CANVAS. EMPTY. BLANK. WHITE.

Rani STARES at the canvas.

No ideas.

She picks up a PAINTBRUSH. Dips it in PAINT. Moves it towards the canvas.

She moves it back. The empty canvas mocks her. She sighs and turns away.

Still no ideas.

So she DANCES.

She turns up the speaker, begins to GET READY FOR THE CONCERT. Wears STYLISH CLOTHES and MAKEUP that blend WESTERN AND INDIAN styles. She continues to dance, staying as far away from the canvas as possible.

A KNOCK on the door interrupts her. Gasping for breath, she turns down the music. The KNOCK again.

She opens the door. Her neighbor, MR. LANDBURY(57).

MR. LANDBURY

Rani, good to see you. How was your day?

RANI

Good, thank you.

MR. LANDBURY

Great. The sound is a bit loud and I was hoping you could turn it down. I may seem old, but my hearing's still in perfect condition.

RANI

Sure.

MR. LANDBURY

Great, thank you. I also thought I'd use this opportunity to ask if you've made any progress regarding the mural.

Right. This was a customer. Rani puts on the biggest smile she can muster. She looks back into her apartment. The EMPTY CANVAS laughs at her. She closes the door.

RANI

The project. Of course.

MR. LANDBURY

I'd love to hear them. The others teachers are really excited and were hoping for updates. Is the commission so far?

RANI

Yes, the money's great. Thank you. And I'd love to sit down with you. But now-

MR. LANDBURY

You know, I had some ideas myself and thought I'd share them with you.

RANI

Oh, well that's great. But...and you're taking out your phone.

Mr. Landbury takes out his phone and pulls up some PHOTOS of art murals done around the city.

MR. LANDBURY

Since the project is an art mural for the school, I've been looking at examples of other murals done throughout the city. There's this one I like. And this one. But this one's my favorite.

He holds up his phone to her. Rani nods unwillingly.

MR. LANDBURY

(cont.)

You see all the faces looking regal. I thought it would be great if we could have faces of different children who go to Wooley Elementary. All different kind of faces. How great would that be?

RANI

Yes. Faces. I can paint faces.

MR. LANDBURY

Of course, I don't want to get in the way of your ideas.

RANI

No, I-I was thinking the same thing. Glad to see we're on the same page.

MR. LANDBURY

That's wonderful. I'll let the other teachers know. I really would love for you to come to the school. The kids are excited for the mural as well. If you feel comfortable, you can even teach them some skills for their own project that's going up on the opposite side of the building.

RANI

Yes. I'll think about it.

MR. LANDBURY

How does next week sound?

RANI

I might be busy next week. I'll let you know.

MR. LANDBURY

Well, alright then. If you have any sketches that you can show me that would be great as well.

RANI

Yes, definitely. I'll get them to you soon.

MR. LANDBURY

I look forward to it, Ms. Jalsi. I've heard such good things about your work. I think the kids would love it as well.

RANI

Yes. Send them my wishes.

Mr. Landbury walks away and into his own apartment. Before going in, he WAVES. When he disappears, she sighs and turns to open her door.

It doesn't open.

It's locked.

She SHAKES the doorknob. KICKS the door. BENDS OVER in pain.

Defeated, she walks to Mr. Landbury's door and knocks. Mr. Landbury appears with a smile.

MR. LANDBURY

Yes, dear?

RANI

I'm sorry, Mr. Landbury. Can I use your phone?

INT./EXT. CAR - EVENING

TRAFFIC. Mo HONKS. The car inches forward. Stops. Mo runs a hand down her face. Priti puts her hand on Mo's arm. Lavanya is strapped into the booster seat next to Raj, who plays with her as she laughs.

MO

I don't think we'll get anywhere.

Raj checks the time. 6:18 PM.

RAJ

How far are we?

MO

Pretty far.

PRITI

My phone says the traffic should let up soon.

MO

I swear, Raj, if you miss this concert I don't think I'll ever forgive you.

RAJ

I'll get out here.

MO

What?

Raj grabs his things and plants a kiss on Lavanya's head.

RAJ

I'll get out and grab a taxi wherever the traffic lets up.

PRITI

Are you sure?

MO

Good. Go. If you see Deepum, tell him I said hi.

RAJ

Who's that?

MO

Get out before I destroy you.

PRITI

He's the lead guitarist.

MO

I cannot believe I'm letting him go uneducated.

RAJ
I'll call you later.

PRITI
Take photos! And videos! She'll
want to see both!

Raj hops out of the car and runs to the sidewalk.

MO
Go, my brother. Go, meet The Lotus.

PRITI
We can play their music while we
wait.

MO
I can't listen. It hurts too much.

PRITI
Fine. We'll play my music. Ready,
Lavanya? Can you say 'ready'?

LAVANYA
Reaaaddy Mommmmyyyy!

EXT. SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Rani RUNS out of her building. Her bag is slung over her
shoulder. Outside, traffic. HONKS fill the air.

Great.

She runs down the sidewalk and sees the traffic lessen up
ahead. She WAVES her hand. The taxis pass by.

RANI
Come on, come on.

Finally, a TAXI rolls up to her. She gets inside.

INT.TAXI

TAXI DRIVER
Hey there! Where to?

RANI
Red Rock Symposium.

Rani shuts the door. It OPENS again. She jumps and stares at
the person now on the other side.

INT./EXT. CAR

Raj keeps his hand on the door.

RAJ
(gasping for breath)
Taxi.

RANI

Taken.

RAJ

Where are you going?

RANI

This is my ride.

RAJ

Please. I'm desperate. I'm headed to the Red Rock Symposium.

TAXI DRIVER

That's where the lady's headed, too.

Rani frowns at the driver.

TAXI DRIVER

Sorry. With the traffic, it's been a rough day. There was a pile up on the highway, too.

RAJ

(to the taxi driver)

I'll pay you double your usual rate. I just really need to get in the car.

At that, Rani recognizes him. She scoffs.

RANI

I wouldn't trust him.

RAJ

What are you-oh. Oh! Perfect. It's you! From the cafe. I can pay you when we get there or something. See, it's fate!

TAXI DRIVER

Listen, is the guy coming or not?

Rani stalls.

RAJ

We'll miss the concert.

RANI

Fine.

She scoots over. Raj jumps into the car.

The taxi SPEEDS AWAY.

INT./EXT. CAR- MOMENTS LATER

The taxi is at a STANDSTILL. Traffic. Again. The driver HONKS. In the backseat, Rani massages her forehead. Raj taps his head against the window repeatedly.

RANI

Any idea how much time this will take?

TAXI DRIVER

Can't say. There might be another accident.

Rani leans back in her seat. Raj sighs and looks at Rani.

RAJ

You know, I wouldn't be going to the concert if it weren't for you.

RANI

What do you mean?

RAJ

I heard you and your coworker talking about The Lotus. That was the only thing that popped into my head when I was at my meeting.

Rani doesn't say anything. Raj looks out the window.

RAJ

It's snowing.

Sure enough, it's SNOWING lightly. As they watch, the snow becomes HEAVIER.

RANI

Even better. We'll never make it.

Raj leans forward and speaks to the driver.

RAJ

Is there a different road we can take?

TAXI DRIVER

I don't think so.

RAJ

Something? Anything?

TAXI DRIVER

There's one route that takes a dirt path around the city. Usually there aren't many cars. It takes a while though. But it can be sketchy.

RAJ

Let's do that.

RANI

You want to take the deserted dirt path?

RAJ

Do you wanna make the concert?

The driver waits for her. Raj looks at her expectantly.

RANI

Fine. Let's do the dumb thing.

Raj grins at her.

The driver weaves through the lanes and exits into a side alley. Eventually, the road turns into a dirt path. The car JOSTLES from side to side.

RANI

I'm going to be sick.

RAJ

So The Lotus has 4 members?

Raj READS about the members on his phone and takes notes.

TAXI DRIVER

The Lotus? My son loves this band.

RAJ

Great, so you can help me! What do you know about them?

TAXI DRIVER

Star, Ali, Deepum, and the last one...I'm not sure.

Rani bites her lip.

TAXI DRIVER

I think it starts with a Z.

RANI

It's Zindi. Lead singer. You don't even know them. How come you wanna see them so badly?

RAJ

For work. I'm writing a piece on them and their impact on their fans. Honestly, I'd love your help.

RANI

Is it really that big a deal if you don't make it to their show?

RAJ

Yes. My entire career rides on this article. I'm not missing anything.

RANI

Nothing's that important at the end of the day.

RAJ

Well, I didn't ask you.

RANI

Wow, okay. Who asked for help?

RAJ

Right. Sorry, I-

RANI

Save it. Anyway, at this rate, you'll miss half the show.

TAXI DRIVER

7:45 is our ETA.

Raj watches Rani as she pulls HEADPHONES out of her bag.

RAJ

How did you first hear of the band?

RANI

No. I don't want to be a part of your article.

Rani puts on her headphones. Raj gets the message. He turns back to his phone and keeps reading.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The road turns into a smoother path. STREETLIGHTS dot the road. Raj DOZES off. Rani glances at him. She SEES his phone SLIPPING OUT OF HIS HAND. She reaches over and CATCHES it.

On his phone, she sees an ARTICLE about The Lotus performing to raise money for domestic violence survivors. She TURNS OFF the phone and moves to place it on the seat, but it LIGHTS UP again. Rani sees a goofy PHOTO of Raj and his family - his sister and his parents.

She STARES at the photo before placing the phone face down next to Raj.

Suddenly, a BOOM. The car LURCHES FORWARD. Raj wakes up screaming. The taxi slows to a STOP at the curb.

RAJ

What? What happened?

TAXI DRIVER

One of the tires blew out.

Raj check the time and groans.

TAXI DRIVER

My deepest apologies. I have a spare in the back.

RANI

Do you need help?

TAXI DRIVER

No, no. I'll have to ask you to leave the car for a little bit, but I'll let you know when.

The driver gets out of the car. He mutters something under his breath as he passes by.

RAJ

I'm so tired.

RANI

I don't think we'll get to the concert.

RAJ

It doesn't take long to fix a tire, right?

RANI

In this snow? He didn't even have a coat or gloves.

RAJ

It wasn't supposed to snow today.

Rani realizes something and digs around in her bag.

RAJ

I can't just sit here.

He gets out of the car. Rani pulls out a PAIR OF GLOVES in triumph. She opens the door.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The road is EMPTY except for the occasional car. It's cold. The snow falls incessantly. The driver is clearly having a hard time handling the equipment.

RANI

I have gloves. Here.

Rani hands the driver the gloves. He takes them gratefully, hesitates, hands them back to her.

GIACCARDO

I think my arthritis is acting up. Either of you know how to change a tire?

Rani and Raj glance at each other.

EXT. NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

Rani and Raj CROUCH beside the tire as Giaccardo holds a FLASHLIGHT for them. They each have a GLOVE on one hand, the other hand BARE. They take turns tightening the bolts.

RAJ
I can't believe I'm spending my
night like this.

RANI
Tell me about it.

TAXI DRIVER
You both doing okay?

RANI
Yep!

RAJ
Doing great!

RAJ
(to RANI)
So, can you answer my
question now?

RANI
What question?

RAJ
How did you get to know The Lotus?

RANI
I told you, I don't want to be a
part of your piece.

RAJ
I'm just trying to make
conversation.

He hands the equipment to Rani and holds the tire.

RANI
I'll ask you first. How come you
care so much about this article?

Raj watches her as she tightens the bolt.

RAJ
I started a new job. My boss is
scary. Kind of like you.

RANI
Excuse me?

RAJ

(shrugs)

Every time I talk to you, you look at me like I'm your worst enemy.

RANI

(grunts)

You didn't pay me the tip you promised. And you got in my taxi. And when I tell you to mind your own business, you keep asking questions.

Raj opens his mouth to say something. Shuts it. He sighs.

RAJ

I'm sorry.

Rani straightens and passes the equipment to Raj.

RAJ

I've been really stressed lately. I shouldn't be a burden to others because of it.

RANI

Go on.

RAJ

It's just-I got my first official writing job after trying for a really long time. And my boss made it seem like he'd fire me if this assignment isn't good.

RANI

Was he serious?

RAJ

I don't know. But I'd rather not test it out. How about you? What do you do?

RANI

I work at a cafe.

RAJ

Ah, right. I guess I knew that.

RANI

It's not all I do. I use the job at the cafe to save up money for painting supplies.

RAJ

You're a painter.

RANI

I'm trying to be. But it doesn't pay enough to quit the cafe.

RAJ

That great of a job, huh?

RANI

Couldn't you tell from the morning?

RAJ

What, from the way you bribed me?

RANI

A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do.

RAJ

Do I still need to pay you that 5 dollars?

RANI

Keep in mind that I have a wrench in my hand and we're on a cold, deserted street.

RAJ

Our kind driver will save me.

They look. The driver isn't there. He's gone inside to warm up his hands. They didn't even notice.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Rani and Raj get into the car.

RAJ

All done, sir.

GIACCARDO

Thank you. Thank you so much. And I'm so sorry for the tire.

RAJ

It's not like you could control it.

GIACCARDO

If we try, we can still make it by 8:30 it looks like.

RANI

That's too late. Let's head back.

Raj looks at his phone. He looks defeated.

RAJ

I was hoping I could catch the members somehow. Backstage or something.

RANI

Do you have any idea how famous they are? Security is strict.

Raj groans.

RAJ

Okay. I'm good to go back.

As the car drives off, Raj turns to look at Rani. She narrows her eyes at him.

RANI

What's with that look?

RAJ

I know you said I can't interview you.

RANI

Good. Then don't ask.

RAJ

Do you know of anyone else I can interview?

RANI

Not really.

RAJ

What about your coworker?

RANI

Josie?

RAJ

You were talking about the concert with her.

RANI

She's less into them than I am, and I'm not even that big of a fan.

RAJ

Do you know of any places I can go to meet fans?

RANI

There's a fan club. They sometimes have meetings.

RAJ

Is there a meeting coming up?

RANI

I can give you their name. They post when they have meetings.

RAJ
Perfect. Thank you.

RANI
Here. Put your number in so I can
send you the details.

Rani hands her PHONE to Raj. He types in his number.

EXT. OUTSIDE RANI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The taxi stops in front of Rani's apartment. She gets out.
The window rolls down. Raj peeks his head out.

RAJ
So this is the queen's lair.

RANI
Good luck. With your article.

RAJ
Maybe I'll send it to you after I'm
done.

Rani shrugs and walks away. The taxi drives away while she
digs around in her purse for her keys.

EXT. RAJ'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Raj gets out of the taxi. He waves as the driver pulls away.

Raj opens the door and walks in. In the LOBBY, he sees a man
standing there in a suit. Raj FREEZES.

The man, PRABHU (63), grins at Raj.

PRABHU
Hello, beta.

RAJ
Dad?

Prabhu walks up to his son.

VIKRAM
Aren't you glad to see me?

RAJ
I-I don't understand-

VIKRAM
You look different. What's with
those socks?

Raj gapes at his father. His phone rings in his pocket. He
takes it out and looks at the screen. Three text messages
pop up. They're from Rani:

I have your keys. You left them at the cafe this morning. Forgot I had them.

Well, shit.

He looks back at his father, who waits for Rak to speak.

END OF EPISODE 1

SUMMARY OF EPISODES 2-5:

Episode 2: The Performance

Raj picks up the keys from Rani. Prabhu tags along and meets Rani. They look at her paintings, and we realize that Rani used to be very talented. Prabhu recognizes several of her works. However, Rani hasn't made a new piece in a year.

Raj and Prabhu return home. We learn of their strained relationship, and that Prabhu wants Raj to return to the family business. However, Raj refuses. It is also revealed that Prabhu does not speak to his daughter, Mo, as he does not approve of her relationship with Priti. Nor does he ask about her. Prabhu leaves after Raj promises to visit his parents, at least for his mother's sake. Raj agrees.

Rani visits her mother, Kirthi, who lives alone in the city. They dine at a restaurant, and Kirthi questions how Rani is able to afford to treat her so well. Rani tells her not to worry, as she got a new project and is finally painting again. Kirthi is excited by the news. We learn that Kirthi is taking classes to learn engineering again so she can go back to work. They return to Kirthi's place, where per traditon, a shrine is set up for Rani's father. We learn that Rani's father passed away last year. Rani doesn't appreciate that her mom still has this shrine.

Raj and Mo both attend the fan club for The Lotus. Here, Raj learns more about the members and how they have made a huge impact on South Asian representation in the Western music scene. One of the members, Deepum, is an open advocate against domestic violence and has done a few shows to raise money for survivors. As the club members talk about Deepum, some open up about their own experiences with domestic violence. Moreover, Deepum is holding a special live performance at a nearby venue. Raj is determined to go. Mo gets her own tickets. Raj is able to get two tickets of his own. He invites Rani to come. Surprised, she agrees.

Rani and Raj go to the live performance. There, Rani reveals that she's been a fan of The Lotus since they first formed five years ago. She remembers seeing them perform in little bars and coffee houses across the city. Here, we see a flashback to Rani at 19 years old, drawing in a notebook while the band performs on a small stage at a cafe.

Rani meets Mo and Priti. They bond quickly over their love of the band. Mo is interested in Rani's artwork and wonders if she'd be willing to make a work for Priti's office. Rani says that she'll think about it. She is nervous to accept it as she still hasn't painted in a while.

After the performance, Raj tries to speak with Deepum and drags Rani along with him. Briefly, Deepum answers some of Raj's questions. Rani gets a call from her mother and leaves the two for a moment. Raj finishes the conversation with Deepum and turns to talk to Rani. But Rani's gone. He calls her but she doesn't pick up. Mo tells him that Rani had an emergency and had to leave.

Episode 3: Coffee

Rani gets a call from her mom, Kirti, who was recently checked into the hospital. Rani rushes over. Luckily, Kirti is fine, but she called her daughter for a ride home. At the hospital, Rani convinces Kirti to get a full checkup done by the doctor. Kirti, who is usually adverse to doctors, finally relents. During the checkup, the doctors find that there is a hole in Kirti's ear, likely from an old fall or wound. Kirti must go into surgery or risk losing hearing in her ear. Rani knows the wound is from a previous incident of domestic violence. Rani demands that Kirti go into surgery soon to get things fixed. Kirti refuses. They go home, and Rani decides to stay with Kirti for the night.

Raj visits Rani's home. While Rani never arrives, Mr. Landbury sees Raj and invites him in. They bond over coffee. Mr. Landbury discusses his experience at the school and admits that it's been difficult to take care of his students, especially those with mental health concerns or issues at home. Raj gets an idea to do a piece on the mental health of students and how increased funding for music and the arts has the capability to help students, but not in lieu of proper mental health support and trauma-informed care. Raj also opens up a little about his own experiences growing up. While he didn't experience physical abuse, there was a lot of emotional and verbal abuse in his family. He explains that it's been hard to break out of it, and he still fears connecting to others sometimes. It's taken him a long time to get to where he is emotionally. However, he still feels like he is lacking in a lot of ways. Mr. Landbury comforts him. Finally, Raj gets a message from Rani saying that something came up. Raj leaves the apartment.

At night, Rani and Kirti talk. Rani explains that she wants Kirti to move forward from her past relationship with her husband. Kirti shoots back that Rani doesn't seem to be able to move forward either. Rani can't paint. She isolates herself. Kirti tells Rani that she wants her to be able to live her life. Rani convinces Kirti to get the surgery.

The next morning, a Monday, Rani goes to work at the cafe. Rani gives Josie the paints for Josie's child. Rani asks if

Josie wants to grab a cup of coffee together after their shift. Josie, surprised, agrees. Raj walks into the cafe and greets Rani. He looks dashing in a suit (he upgraded his work attire). He hands her the money he still owes her and asks where she went after the performance yesterday. She dodges his questions. He admits to her that he met up with Mr. Landbury while he waited for her. She is surprised, both about Mr. Landbury and about the fact that he was waiting for her in first place. Embarrassed, he covers it up by saying he was in the area. Rani asks if he's available that evening and asks if she can paint him for practice. He agrees.

Raj goes in to work and gives his boss a draft of the piece he's working on. He also pitches the next story. His boss isn't impressed. Raj is embarrassed and considers quitting instead of being fired first. Instead, he sits at his desk and writes all day. Clearly, there's a change in him. He cleans up his workspace and seems determined to make a good impression.

At the end of their day, Rani and Josie share a cup of coffee. Josie shares photos of her kid and talks about him with pride. Rani tells her that she must be a good mom, and reveals that she didn't really have good parents growing up. She opens up a little about her painting slump and explains that she is going to get over it today. No matter what. She spots Raj walking up to the cafe and smiles.

Episode 4: Paint

In Rani's apartment, Rani seats Raj by the window and sits down to paint. However, unable to paint, she tells him to change positions again. This happens a few times until he gets fed up and goes to make some food. Rani tells him to sit down, but instead he makes fun of her for her kitchen being so empty. Annoyed, she gestures for him to sit again and accidentally flicks some paint onto his face from her paintbrush. She laughs and tells him she has an idea. He goes along with it as she paints his face, and then tells him to sit by the window again. They talk while she paints. Sooner than expected, she's done with the painting but doesn't reveal it to him. She takes a photo of him with the paint all over his face and attaches it to her canvas.

After washing off the paint from his face, he comes back to see her painting over the work she just did to start over. He's shocked, but she says she needs to keep getting better and can't get too attached to the work. He asks what her plan is for the rest of the night. She says, of course, painting. He asks if she wants to go out to dinner. She refuses, and instead says that if he wants they can order takeout and eat inside so she can keep working. He agrees and takes out his laptop to write. Together, they work in silence. However, the end of the night leaves them both feeling more frustrated with their work than happy, as neither can get to a good place.

The next day, Rani knocks on Mr. Landbury's door and agrees to go to the school with him to meet the students. At the school she meets other students and briefly teaches some of the students in art class about some painting tips. She's also able to meet Josie's child and offers to teach him how to paint really cool planets if his mom agrees. Finally, she checks out the space where she must paint her mural. She takes a stroke of paint and puts it onto the wall. There. At least she got started.

Raj comes by the cafe that day to see Rani. Josie tells him that Rani took the day off. He goes into work without buying any coffee. This time at work, he gets a call from his mother telling him to come visit her. He relents and agrees to meet up with his parents that night.

At Josie's house, Rani and Josie paint with Josie's child. Rani bonds with both of them. When she goes home, she paints non-stop. She finds she's able to channel some of her childhood trauma into her painting. Eventually, she feels she needs some fresh air and goes on a walk.

Raj visits his parents. Here, we see some of his family dynamics play out. His mother, Lakshmi, is distant but nice. His father, Prabhu, acts jovial until he realizes that he will never convince Raj to go back into the family business. Raj, unable to take it anymore, takes his anger out on Prabhu. Prabhu gets angry and tells Lakshmi it's her fault that her son acts like this. He tells her to talk to Raj. However, Lakshmi sides with Raj. She tells her husband that he already distanced her from her daughter, Mo, and he's going to end up doing the same thing with her son. Angry, Prabhu tells Raj to get out of the house. Raj tries to convince Lakshmi to come with him, but she refuses.

Raj leaves and goes to Mo's house. There, Mo and Raj discuss what happened when Mo came out to their parents years ago, and how they cut ties with her. She explains that while things were worse after coming out, they weren't great before either. She had to hide every emotion, every wish of her own, in order to be a perfect daughter. She vows not to do the same for her own child, and to never treat Priti like her father treats their mother. As they talk, Raj explains that he doesn't know if he will ever be comfortable in a relationships. He's too scared of hurting someone, or of being hurt. However, Mo explains that love is healing as much as it hurts. The doorbell rings. It's their mother. She apologizes for distancing himself from Mo and promises to be there for her from now on.

Raj returns to his apartment. Before he walks in, he hears someone calling his name and turns to see Rani. She tells him she's been calling his name for a while, but he didn't hear her. He invites her up for a drink. While she claims she can't stay for long, they end up staying up and talking for most of the night.

Episode 5: Color

Rani wakes up at Raj's place. They spent the night talking and at some point fell asleep. She's shocked she let down her guard that much rushes out of the house before he wakes up. When he wakes, he's disappointed that she's gone.

Rani drop her mom, Kirti, off at the hospital. While they drive, Rani informs her that she's painting again and has been making an effort to connect with people. Kirti is glad, and promises her daughter that she will try to move forward as well. Rani gets Kirti into the surgery and returns to work at the cafe for a little bit. There, she is disappointed when Raj doesn't show up.

At work, Raj has writer's block. Rather than being scared, he goes to his boss for help. His boss explains that his work is too too formal. Like reading a report or an essay. In order to fit in with the magazine, he needs to add a personal story. When Raj sits down at his desk again, he continues to write.

At the end of the day, he visits Rani and catches her just as she's leaving the cafe to return to the hospital. He asks to come with her. At first she refuses, but finally relents. They go to the hospital. The surgery was a success. Kirti meets Raj and decides to stay with Rani for a few days while she recovers.

Over the next few days, Raj bonds with Rani and Kirti. Rani starts to paint the mural at school. Raj and Rani both go the fan club again. Rani also meets up with Mo and Priti and agrees to commission art for them. Raj finishes his article and achieves his boss's approval.

Raj also meets up with his father, who claims that he doesn't want to lose his son. However, Raj says that he won't accept the relationship until his father treats both his wife and daughter better. His father, too concerned with patriarchy and societal rules, refuses to accept his daughter. Raj walks away from his father and says when he's willing to change, he'll be waiting for him. His father looks on with sadness and regret.

In the last scene, it's revealed that The Lotus will make a special appearance at the Holi festival in the city. Rani and Raj go together. After the celebration, they walk hand in hand to the school where Rani's mural is completed. It's a beautiful painting of the faces of children among flowers of all shapes and sizes, a whirlwind of colors.