

DEPARTMENT HANDOUT: DIRECTOR & EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

THE BIRTHDAY LIE

2 Male + 1 Female (M + M + F) | Genre: Slice of Life/Family | Runtime: 6 - 9 Mins

OFFICIAL STORY LOGLINE: A father, an uncle, and a sharp 12-year-old girl try to stage a cheerful birthday surprise in a small living room, but the child sees through the performance and forces the adults to admit the grief they have been hiding. What begins as fake celebration turns into a quiet, honest family reckoning.
DIRECTOR'S DRAMATIC VISION & TONAL CONCEPT: - Keep the tone intimate, restrained, and emotionally truthful, with humor used as a defense mechanism rather than broad comedy. - Visual language should emphasize the awkwardness of the setup: uneven fairy lights, half-inflated balloons, and a cake box that feels too small for the emotional weight in the room. - Pace the scene like a slow pressure cooker: light banter at first, then a sharp emotional turn, then a soft release into honesty. - Let silence do the heavy lifting after Sanjana's key lines; the room should feel like it is listening. - The ending should not feel melodramatic; it should feel earned, human, and slightly imperfect, like a family choosing truth over performance.
CAST AT A GLANCE & CHARACTER ARCS: • character: Vivek age: 38 look: Office shirt with sleeves rolled up, slightly tired face, trying to look cheerful while managing the birthday setup. dramatic_arc: Starts as the one forcing order and 'classy' normalcy, then cracks under Sanjana's honesty and finally admits he misses Maa. • character: Anil age: 36 look: Casual T-shirt, energetic body language, balloon in hand, gift bag nearby, playful but emotionally avoidant. dramatic_arc: Begins as the comic disruptor making jokes and suggestions, then goes quiet when confronted, and finally speaks the truth about missing Maa. • character: Sanjana age: 12 look: School uniform, sharp-eyed, seated on the sofa with a handmade birthday card, observant and emotionally precise. dramatic_arc: Starts silent and watchful, then exposes the adults' fake celebration, and ends with relief once the truth is spoken.
FESTIVAL & AUDIENCE TARGET: Ideal for Short Film Festivals, Indie Showcases, and YouTube Creator Channels. Focus on tight performances, sound design, and authentic Hinglish dialogue delivery.

DEPARTMENT HANDOUT: ART, WARDROBE & PROP MASTER

1. SET DESIGN & SPATIAL DEPTH PLAN:

A small living room at night with a lived-in, slightly underprepared birthday setup. The wall should have fairy lights strung unevenly, with visible slack and crooked spacing to suggest rushed decoration. The table must hold a birthday cake box as a central practical object, with the gift bag placed on a nearby chair. Half-inflated balloons should sit in a corner or near the floor, visually underwhelming and slightly sad. The sofa should be simple and domestic, positioned so Sanjana can sit and observe the room without moving much. Textures should feel real and modest: matte wall paint, soft fabric upholstery, slightly crinkled cake box cardboard, and cheap plastic balloon sheen. The room should have spatial layers: foreground with the table and cake box, midground with Vivek and Anil moving around it, and background with Sanjana on the sofa and the fairy lights on the wall. The set must support the emotional reveal by making the room feel small enough that nobody can hide.

2. COSTUME & WARDROBE CONTINUITY:

• **character:** Vivek | **costume:** Office shirt with sleeves rolled up, suggesting he came from work and is trying to manage the evening with forced composure. | **continuity_notes:** Shirt should remain slightly rumpled through the scene; rolled sleeves should stay consistent to reflect ongoing effort and stress.

• **character:** Anil | **costume:** Casual T-shirt, practical and relaxed, suitable for balloon handling and informal family banter. | **continuity_notes:** T-shirt may show slight tension from movement and balloon handling; keep it simple and unchanged across the scene.

• **character:** Sanjana | **costume:** School uniform, neat and age-appropriate, contrasting with the adults' casual birthday-prep chaos. | **continuity_notes:** Uniform should remain tidy but not overly styled; the birthday card should stay in her hands until she places it on the table at the end.

3. HERO PROPS MASTER CHECKLIST (PRACTICAL ON-SET ASSETS):

• **prop:** Birthday cake box | **visual_details:** Plain box on the table, central to the scene, unopened until the end when Anil opens it.

• **prop:** Half-inflated balloons | **visual_details:** Several balloons in a corner or near the floor, visibly underfilled and slightly deflated in spirit.

• **prop:** Gift bag | **visual_details:** Placed on a chair, present but not emphasized, indicating a planned surprise.

• **prop:** Birthday card | **visual_details:** Handmade card held by Sanjana; front shows three stick figures, a cake, and a small heart, with the text 'Happy Birthday, Papa.'

• **prop:** Fairy lights | **visual_details:** Unevenly strung across the wall, slightly crooked and soft-glowing, used as a visual metaphor for the imperfect family setup.

4. PRACTICAL SFX & MAKEUP (MUA):

Keep makeup natural and minimal. Vivek should have a slightly tired, workday look with subtle under-eye fatigue and a controlled smile that can break easily. Anil should look casual and lightly stressed from balloon blowing, with possible slight flush or breathlessness after the balloon pops. Sanjana should be clean, school-ready, and emotionally contained. Add subtle sweat or sheen only if needed to reflect the effort of the room and the tension after the confrontation. No heavy SFX is required; the emotional distress should come from performance and lighting rather than prosthetics.

ACTOR MASTERCLASS & HINGLISH AUDITION SIDES

STORYDILSE PRODUCTION BIBLE

DEPARTMENT HANDOUT: ACTORS & CASTING DIRECTOR

STANISLAVSKI SUBTEXT & CHARACTER DRIVERS:

- **character:** Vivek | **super_objective:** To keep the birthday normal and controlled so the family does not have to face the pain beneath it. | **subtext:** If I manage the room, I can manage the feelings. If I keep smiling, nobody will ask what we are really avoiding.
- **character:** Anil | **super_objective:** To keep the mood light and deflect emotional heaviness with humor and activity. | **subtext:** If I joke enough, I won't have to sit inside the grief. If I keep moving, I won't have to feel it.
- **character:** Sanjana | **super_objective:** To force honesty from the adults and stop the yearly ritual of pretending. | **subtext:** I already know the truth; I just need you to say it out loud so I'm not carrying it alone.

CANONICAL HINGLISH AUDITION SIDES (CLIMACTIC SCENE):

VIVEK

Theek hai. Simple party. Classy. Overacting nahi.

ANIL

Overacting? Bhai, tu fairy lights ko dekh. Ye lights bhi overacting kar rahi hain.

ANIL

Phool raha hoon. Zindagi ki tarah.

SANJANA

Mujhe jhooth pasand nahi hai.

SANJANA

Aap log birthdays se nahi, Maa ki yaad se bach rahe ho.



DEPARTMENT HANDOUT: CINEMATOGRAPHY & SOUND DEPT

1. CINEMATOGRAPHY CONCEPT & LENS PALETTE:

Use intimate, observational framing with a preference for medium shots, close-ups, and controlled over-the-shoulder coverage that traps the characters in the small room. Lenses should feel natural and human, with a mild compression in close-ups to isolate emotional reactions without making the space feel artificial. Camera movement should be minimal and motivated: gentle pans, subtle push-ins during the reveal, and stillness during the silence. The visual philosophy is to let the room breathe as a pressure chamber, then tighten the frame as the truth emerges.

2. 3-TIER LIGHTING SCHEMATIC:

Tier 1: Warm practical birthday ambience at the start, driven by soft fairy lights and low room fill, with slightly uneven illumination to match the imperfect setup.

Tier 2: During the confrontation, reduce fill and let the fairy lights become more pronounced as a soft but emotionally sharp back/edge source, creating pockets of shadow and making the room feel more honest and exposed.

Tier 3: In the ending, restore a gentle, balanced warmth through the practicals and a soft key, so the room feels calmer and more human, while still retaining the modest, imperfect look of a real home.

3. SOUND DESIGN & FOLEY ATMOSPHERE:

Prioritize intimate room tone: faint electrical hum from the fairy lights, soft fabric movement on the sofa, balloon rubber squeaks, and the pop of a balloon as a key punctuation moment. The cake box should have subtle cardboard handling sounds. Dialogue must sit close and dry, with the silence after Sanjana's lines becoming a major sound event. Keep ambient sound minimal so the emotional shifts are clearly heard.

4. COLOR GRADING LUT & PALETTE:

Use a warm, slightly muted family-drama palette with amber practicals and soft neutral shadows. Fairy lights should read as gentle gold rather than bright festive color. Skin tones should remain natural, with a slight desaturation in the tense middle section to reflect emotional heaviness. The final moments can recover a touch of warmth and softness, but avoid glossy saturation; the look should stay grounded and domestic.



DEPARTMENT HANDOUT: PRODUCER & LINE MANAGEMENT

TIME	ACTIVITY / SCENE BLOCK	KEY DEPARTMENTS INVOLVED
08:00 - 09:30	Set dressing, prop placement, and fairy light rigging	Art, Grip, Electric
09:30 - 10:30	Camera blocking and rehearsal with actors	Director, Camera, Cast
10:30 - 12:00	Shoot opening banter and balloon business	Camera, Sound, Cast
12:00 - 13:30	Shoot confrontation and emotional reveal	Camera, Sound, Cast
13:30 - 14:30	Shoot ending beat, card placement, cake box opening, and room reset	Camera, Art, Cast

LOCATION HACK & BUDGET SAVING TIPS:
Use one real living room location and dress it minimally but carefully; the emotional weight comes from composition, not expensive set build. Practical fairy lights can do most of the lighting work if supplemented with a soft key and negative fill. Keep the balloon count low and use only a few hero balloons for continuity. The cake box can be a simple prop box with strong framing to make it feel important. Shoot the scene in coverage-efficient blocks: opening banter, reveal, and resolution. Use natural performances and avoid over-staging; the script’s power comes from silence and reaction, which are free to capture.

• **Mandatory Licensing:** Completely free for student/commercial production with on-screen credit: ‘Story & Screenplay by Story Dil Se (storydilse.in)’.

