



THE THIRD CUP

A Sci-Fi/High-Concept 3-Character Screenplay in Hinglish

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LOGLINE: A professor claims a cup of tea can be used to detect time anomalies, and his assistant is desperate to prove the experiment works before morning. The cafeteria manager keeps interrupting with practical questions, but she may understand the science better than both men. The twist: she has already lived the same night three times, and this is the first loop where she decides to change the outcome.

CAST / CHARACTERS: FORMAT: 3-Character Short Film (Trio Cast) | Character 1: Professor Iqbal (46)

LOCATION: A university cafeteria corner after closing, lit by one hanging tube light, with steam from a kettle and reflections on metal tables.

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FADE IN:

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFETERIA - NIGHT

After closing. One hanging tube light buzzes over a corner table. Steam rises from a KETTLE. Metal tables reflect the light in broken strips.

PROFESSOR IQBAL (46), thoughtful, slightly rumpled, chalk dust on his sleeves, writes equations on a small CHALKBOARD.

ROHAN (24), eager and nervous, laptop open, energy drink in hand, watches the screen like his life depends on it.

ASHA (39), cafeteria manager, plain apron, watchful stare, stands near the counter, pretending not to listen.

IQBAL

Rohan, focus. Tea is not just tea.

ROHAN

Sir, main focus hi kar raha hoon. Bas... aapki theory thodi wild hai.

IQBAL

Wild theories change the world.

ASHA

World baad mein. Pehle tea ka bill kaun dega?

Rohan awkwardly smiles. Iqbal ignores the jab.

IQBAL

If a time anomaly passes through this space, steam pattern will deviate.

ROHAN

Aur agar nahi hua?

IQBAL

Toh humne kuch seekha.

ASHA

Aur agar chai thandi ho gayi toh?

ROHAN

Ma'am, please... thoda serious ho jaiye.

ASHA

Main serious hi hoon. Isliye puch rahi hoon.

Iqbal places THREE TEA CUPS on the table.

IQBAL

Cup one: baseline. Cup two: control. Cup three...

(beat)

anomaly cup.

ROHAN

Finally.

Rohan starts recording on the laptop.

Asha watches the setup closely.

ASHA

Same cups hain?

IQBAL

Yes.

ASHA

Kettle ka water same?

IQBAL

Obviously.

ASHA

Obviously ka matlab science mein kab se proof ho gaya?

Iqbal pours tea carefully. Steam curls under the tube light.

Rohan leans in.

ROHAN

Sir, laptop readings stable hain.

Iqbal nods, satisfied.

Asha quietly rotates one cup by a few degrees.

IQBAL

Asha ji—

ASHA

Kya? Sirf angle badla hai.

Iqbal stares at the steam.

IQBAL

Wait...

The steam swirl shifts, matching a pattern on the chalkboard.

Rohan jolts forward.

ROHAN

Sir! Match kar raha hai!

IQBAL

No... no, that's not possible.

ASHA

Possible hai. Aap dekh rahe ho.

ROHAN

Ma'am, please cup mat hilaiye.

ASHA

Main cup nahi hila rahi. Main bas dekh rahi hoon.

A beat.

The second hand on Asha's watch seems to STICK for a moment.

Rohan doesn't notice.

IQBAL

Third cup. Mark it.

He picks up the THIRD CUP and makes a tiny chalk mark on the rim.

IQBAL (CONT'D)

If anomaly is present, steam collapse will reverse.

ROHAN

Recording on.

ASHA

Aur agar reverse na hua?

IQBAL

Then we repeat.

ASHA

Haan. Teen baar.

Iqbal looks up.

IQBAL

Kya?

Asha's expression changes—calm, certain.

ASHA

Kyuki main is night ko teen baar jee chuki hoon.

Silence.

Rohan laughs once, nervously.

ROHAN

Ma'am...

ASHA

Hansi aa rahi hai? Theek hai. Pehle do loops mein tumne panic kiya. Is baar mat karo.

IQBAL

This is absurd.

ASHA

Absurd hi toh ho raha hai, Professor.

She points to the table.

ASHA (CONT'D)

Pehle loop mein energy drink gir gaya tha. Dusre mein aapne chalkboard ulta rakha tha. Aur har baar aap bolte rahe: "Science ko patience chahiye."

Rohan's smile dies.

ROHAN

Sir...

ASHA

Main mazak nahi kar rahi.

Asha steps closer.

ASHA (CONT'D)

Is baar suno. Chalkboard ko table ke parallel rakho. Laptop camera off karo. Screen reflection steam ko distort kar rahi hai. Aur kettle do second pehle band karo.

ROHAN

Sir?

Iqbal studies her, shaken, then nods.

IQBAL

Do it.

Rohan obeys, confused.

Asha watches the kettle.

ASHA

Ab.

Rohan switches the kettle off.

The steam tightens into a CLEAN, IMPOSSIBLE SPIRAL.

On the laptop, readings SPIKE.

ROHAN

Oh my God...

The condensation inside the third cup moves in REVERSE.

IQBAL

This... this is real.

Asha finally exhales.

ASHA

Haan. Real hai.

Rohan looks at her, stunned.

ROHAN

Aapko kaise pata tha?

Asha slides the third cup toward herself.

ASHA

Kyuki main observer nahi thi. Main loop mein phans gayi thi.

Iqbal is speechless.

IQBAL

You've lived this night three times?

ASHA

Three times. Har baar tum dono same cheez prove karne mein lage rahe. Har baar result fail hua.

ROHAN

Toh aaj alag kya hai?

Asha looks at both men.

ASHA

Aaj main decide karungi ki discovery ka matlab kya hai.

She picks up the third cup.

IQBAL

Asha, wait—

ASHA

Professor, aapka science brilliant hai.

(to Rohan)

Aur tumhara hunger bhi. Par time ko control karne ka matlab usse jeetna nahi hota. Kabhi kabhi bas sahi choice karni padti hai.

She **URNS** the cup upside down.

Tea spills across the metal table.

The tube light **FLICKERS** hard.

For one split second, everything seems frozen.

The chalkboard **CREAKS**.

When the light stabilizes, a fresh line appears on the board in new chalk handwriting:

"ANOMALY IS NOT IN THE TEA. IT IS IN THE CHOICE."

Iqbal stares at it.

Rohan looks from the board to Asha.

ROHAN

Yeh aapne likha?

ASHA

Is baar.

IQBAL

Why didn't you tell us before?

ASHA

Kyuki pehle do baar tum log sunte hi nahi.

A beat.

Dawn light begins to seep through a side window.

The cafeteria feels calmer now.

IQBAL

So what happens now?

Asha glances at the three cups—one upright, one tilted, one overturned.

ASHA

Ab subah se pehle proof milega.

(beat)

Lekin credit ke liye nahi. Understanding ke liye.

Rohan slowly closes the laptop.

ROHAN

Sir... we actually did it.

Iqbal nods, humbled.

IQBAL

No.

(looks at Asha)

She did.

Asha gives a small, tired smile.

The kettle lets out one final soft hiss.

FADE OUT.

THE END.