

AFTER THE APPLAUSE

A Slice of Life/Romance 2-Character Screenplay in Hinglish

Genre: Slice of Life/Romance	Format: 2-Character Short Film (Duo Cast)	Runtime: 5 - 8 Minutes
Cast: FORMAT: 2-Character Short Film (Duo Cast) Character 1: Nandita (31)	Language: Hinglish	Credit: Story Dil Se Team

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Show khatam ho chuka hai, lekin auditorium abhi bhi usi tarah saans le raha hai jaise applause ki goonj deewaron mein atki hui ho. Dim work lights ke neeche red velvet seats aadhi andheri, aadhi yaadon se bhari lag rahi hain. Stage par ek spotlight ab bhi faint sa jal raha hai, jaise kisi ne exit karne se pehle usse bhool kar chhod diya ho. Nandita, rehearsal clothes mein, smudged eyeliner aur script ko seene se lagaye, third row ke paas khadi hai. Uske chehre par thakaan hai, lekin us thakaan ke andar ek ajeeb si chamak bhi hai—jaise performance ke baad ka woh moment jab actor khud ko phir se insaan banata hai.

Jhanvi black T-shirt aur cargo pants mein stage ke right wing se nikalti hai, headset ek kaan par latka hua, haath mein spotlight remote. Uska kaam khatam ho chuka hai, lekin woh hamesha ki tarah last mein ruk gayi hai. Dono ke beech pehle toh wahi professional distance hai jo theatre mein sabse zyada bolta hai: cues, timings, missed fade, aur ek do technical complaints. Nandita kehti hai ki last scene mein light thoda late thi. Jhanvi bina defensive hue bolti hai ki actor ne entrance thoda jaldi le liya tha. Dono ko pata hai ki yeh sach bhi hai aur bahana bhi.

Conversation dheere-dheere personal ho jaati hai, jaise koi soft music jo pehle background mein hota hai aur phir achanak dil ke andar sunai dene lagta hai. Nandita seat par baith jaati hai, script khol kar uske pages palatne lagti hai. Jhanvi stage mark tape ko apne jooton se halka sa thokti hai, phir water bottle se ek sip leti hai. Nandita mazaak mein bolti hai ki theatre mein sabko lagta hai actress logon ki life glamorous hoti hai, jabki asal mein hum log makeup, insecurity aur unpaid overtime ka combo hote hain. Jhanvi hasti hai, phir quietly kehti hai ki technicians ke baare mein bhi log bas itna hi jaante hain ki "lights on kar dete hain." Uske tone mein complaint kam, exhaustion zyada hoti hai.

Dheere-dheere dono confess karne lagti hain ki stage ke bahar sabse zyada akela kaun feel karta hai. Nandita bolti hai ki jab applause aata hai na, tab bhi kabhi-kabhi lagta hai log usse nahi, uske character ko dekh rahe the. Jhanvi jawab deti hai ki lights ke peeche khade rehkar kisi ko itna clearly dekhna easy hai, lekin khud ko dekhna sabse mushkil. Woh admit karti hai ki woh har show ke baad auditorium mein thodi der ruk jaati hai, kyunki yahan kam se kam cheezein jhooth nahi bolti—seat khali hoti hain toh khali hoti hain, roshni jalti hai toh sach mein jalti hai.

Nandita usse dekhti hai, aur pehli baar uski awaz mein teasing ke saath softness aa jaati hai. Woh poochti hai ki kya Jhanvi hamesha itni serious rehti hai, ya sirf uske saamne. Jhanvi palat kar bolti hai, "Tum hamesha itni dramatic rehti ho, ya sirf stage pe?" Dono has padti hain, aur us hasi mein woh tension toot jaati hai jo kab se unke beech quietly maujood thi. Phir Nandita script ke beech se ek folded note nikaalti hai. Uske chehre par surprise aur recognition ek saath aate hain. Har night koi na koi chhota sa note—"Second pause perfect tha," "Today's light made your silence beautiful," "Don't rush the last line"—woh uske script mein milta raha tha. Nandita sochti thi koi anonymous admirer hai, shayad stage manager ka prank, shayad ek secret fan.

Jhanvi pehli baar thodi nervous dikhti hai. Woh confess karti hai ki notes woh likhti thi. Har show ke baad. Chhupkar. Kyunki bolne ka himmat nahi thi. Nandita ko dekhkar lagta tha jaise woh stage par sab kuch de sakti hai, lekin stage ke baad shayad koi usse poochta hi nahi ki woh theek hai ya nahi. Woh notes sirf cues nahi the; woh ek tarah se "main tumhe dekh rahi hoon" ka tareeka the. Nandita chup ho jaati hai. Uski aankhon mein surprise ke saath ek narm si nami aati hai. Woh bolti hai ki usne har note sambhal ke rakha. Kyunki kisi ne usse pehli baar role ke bahar notice kiya tha.

Twist ka final beat intimate aur hopeful hai: Nandita script ka last page khol kar dikhaati hai, jahan ek note card ab tak tape se chipka hua tha. Uspar Jhanvi ka naam likha hai—pehli baar full name mein, clean handwriting mein. Nandita kehti hai ki aaj usne bhi ek note likha tha, lekin is baar script mein nahi, seedha uske liye. Woh note card Jhanvi ko deti hai. Us par likha hota hai: "Kal rehearsal ke baad coffee? Sirf cues nahi, tumse baat karni hai. —Nandita."

Jhanvi ka smile pehle chhota hota hai, phir roshni ki tarah phail jaata hai. Spotlight remote uske haath mein hai, aur woh bina soche us faint spotlight ko thoda aur warm kar deti hai. Auditorium mein ab applause nahi, bas do logon ki saans aur ek naya, halka sa future hai. Nandita stage mark tape par ek step aage badhti hai. Jhanvi bhi. Dono ke beech ab distance kam hai, lekin silence pehle se zyada comfortable. Jaise theatre ne finally un dono ke liye ek aisi jagah bana di ho jahan role ke bahar bhi koi unhein dekh raha ho. Aur is baar, woh dekhna kisi ending jaisa nahi, ek shuruat jaisa lagta hai.