

# THE ANSWERING MACHINE

**A Mystery/Crime 1-Character Solo Monologue in Hinglish**

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| <b>Genre:</b> Mystery/Crime                                                                                                         | <b>Format:</b> 1-Character Solo Monologue (Single Actor) | <b>Runtime:</b> 4 - 6 Minutes    |
| <b>Cast:</b> FORMAT: 1-Character Solo Monologue (Single Actor)   Character: Private Investigator with a Broken Past (Female, 40-47) | <b>Language:</b> Hinglish                                | <b>Credit:</b> Story Dil Se Team |

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Raat ka office, jaise kisi purane case ki band file. Half-closed blinds se streetlight ki patli patli stripes floor par gir rahi hain. Desk lamp ka peela sa circle table ko pakad ke baitha hai, aur uske bilkul paas ek purana answering machine blink kar raha hai—laal light, ziddi, jaise koi ghanti jo bajna bhool gayi ho. Main wapas aati hoon toh sab kuch wahi hai, bas hawa mein ek ajeeb si badbu hai: purani paper files, stale coffee, aur aadhi khatam zindagi ki.

Main leather jacket utarti nahin. Uterna matlab settle hona hota hai, aur main kab ka settle hona chhod chuki hoon. Mere desk par case files neat stack mein rakhi hain, jaise discipline se dard ko control kiya ja sakta ho. Magnifying glass, cassette tapes, ek pen jo kabhi kaam karta hai kabhi nahi. Aur answering machine. Yeh machine mujhe dekh kar blink kar rahi hai, jaise keh rahi ho: aaj tum bhaag nahi sakti.

Main play dabati hoon.

Pehli message mein ek aurat ki awaaz aati hai—thodi hansii mein, thoda darr mein. Woh kehti hai, “Miss Verma? Mujhe pata hai aap case lena pasand nahi karti. Par aapko lena padega. Kyunki jo hua, uska saboot mere paas hai.” Main freeze ho jaati hoon. Woh awaaz... kahin suni hui. Bohot pehle. Kisi aise raat ki yaad jahan main apni saans bhi trust nahi karti thi.

Doosri message: “Aapne us investigation ko adhoora chhoda tha. Main wahin thi.”

Mere haath kaanpne lagte hain, par main tape ko rewind karke dobara sunti hoon. “Wahin thi.” Yeh do shabd mere andar ek darwaza khol dete hain. Woh case, jo mera naam kha gaya tha. Woh murder, jahan ek witness tha. Ek witness jo court tak nahi pahunchi. Ek witness jise main protect karne ka vaada karke gayab ho gayi thi.

Main chair par baithti hoon, peeth seedhi, jaise kisi interrogation room mein hoon. Sirf is baar interrogator main khud hoon. Main cassette tape nikaalti hoon, uspar purana label: “W-9”. Mere haath se thodi si dhool girti hai. Yeh wahi numbering hai jo main tab use karti thi jab mujhe lagta tha ki sab control mein hai. Funny. Control. Sabse bada jhooth.

Teesri message mein awaaz aur saaf ho jaati hai. “Aapne mujhe bachaya nahi tha. Aapne mujhe chhod diya tha.”

Mere gale mein kuch atak jaata hai. Main bolti hoon, “Main... main wapas aayi thi.” Par room mujhe jawab nahi deta. Sirf machine ka blink. Sirf lamp ka buzz. Sirf mere saans ki awaaz.

Main us raat ko yaad karne lagti hoon—rain-slick road, ek warehouse, ek naam jo main kabhi loudly nahi bolti. Main kisi ko pakadne gayi thi, aur kisi ne mujhe tod diya tha. Not physically. Worse. Itna ki main apni face, apni file, apna reason—sab lose kar baithi. Maine case drop nahi kiya tha. Maine khud ko drop kiya tha.

Answering machine ki next message mein woh aurat whisper karti hai, “Aapko lagta hai aap bhool gayi. Par main nahi bhooli. Main aapki office ki smell bhi yaad kar sakti hoon. Desk lamp. Half-closed blinds. Aur woh ek drawer, jisme aapne asli file chhupa rakhi thi.”

Main ekdum seedhi ho jaati hoon.

Mera right hand dheere se desk ke neeche wale drawer tak jaata hai. Main usse kholti hoon. Andar ek purani envelope. Ungliyon se seal khulti hai. Andar photographs, ek torn receipt, aur ek chhota sa note: “If you play this back, it means they found you.”

Mere chehre par pehli baar darr aur guilt ek saath aate hain. Main hasti hoon, par woh hansii khush nahi, thaki hui hai. “Toh tum mujhe dhoondh hi liya,” main room se kehti hoon, jaise koi saamne baitha ho.

Phir last message. Awaaz ab almost whisper hai, par har lafz knife ki tarah sharp. “Aapko lagta hai main witness hoon. Main thi. Ab nahi. Ab main woh hoon jisne aapko yaad rakha. Aur jo aapne dekha tha, woh murder nahi tha. Cover-up tha. Aur aap us raat ke baad gayab nahi hui thi, Miss Verma... aapko chupaya gaya tha.”

Main tape rok deti hoon.

Room mein silence girta hai, heavy aur alive. Main magnifying glass uthati hoon aur photos ko dekhti hoon. Ek blurred reflection. Ek familiar sign. Ek police badge ka corner. Sab kuch us ek night ki taraf point kar raha hai jisse main bach ke nikal aayi thi—ya shayad nikali gayi thi.

Main seedha camera ki taraf nahi, answering machine ki taraf dekhti hoon. “Agar tum sach mein wohi ho,” main dheere se bolti hoon, “toh mujhe ek aur message bhejo. Is baar naam ke saath.”

Answering machine blink karti rehti hai.

Aur main pehli baar, bohot saalon baad, case ko dekh kar nahi—apne aap ko dekh kar darr jaati hoon.