

THE THIRD SEATBELT

A Slice of Life/Family 3-Character Screenplay in Hinglish

Genre: Slice of Life/Family	Format: 3-Character Short Film (Trio Cast)	Runtime: 6 - 9 Minutes
Cast: FORMAT: 3-Character Short Film (Trio Cast) Character 1: Raghav (36)	Language: Hinglish	Credit: Story Dil Se Team

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Raat ke monsoon mein ek parked car, windshield par baarish ki zor-zor se thapthapahat, dashboard ki halka peeli roshni, aur traffic lights ka geela sa reflection—bas yahi ek chhota sa duniya ka kona tha jahan Raghav, Neha aur Mini phans gaye the. Raghav, polo shirt mein thoda rumped, car keys ko baar-baar haath mein ghumate hue bole ja raha tha, “Bas do minute mein nikal jayenge.” Neha sunglasses utare bina, seatbelt tight kiye, dry tone mein jawab deti, “Do minute tumhari definition mein hamesha 20 minute hote hain.” Mini back seat mein school uniform mein baithi, earbuds neck par latke hue, bahar dekhte hue aise pretend kar rahi thi jaise uska koi lena-dena hi nahi, par uski aankhon mein sab kuch record ho raha tha.

Aaj family function tha—mama ke yahan, jahan sabko ek perfect family pose chahiye tha. Par car ke andar ka silence kuch aur hi kahani bol raha tha. Raghav ne mood light karne ke liye joke maara, “Arre, aaj toh rain bhi attendance le rahi hai.” Neha ne bina dekhe bola, “Aur tum bhi.” Mini ke lips ke corner pe ek chhoti si smile aayi, phir gayab. Raghav ne phone uthaya, route check kiya, phir Neha se pucha, “Umbrella bag mein hai na?” Neha ne tissue box ki taraf ishara kiya, “Tumhare baad sab kuch bag mein hi hota hai. Umbrella, patience, responsibility—sab.”

Mini pehli baar bol padi, “Mummy, papa, aap log directly ek dusre se baat kar sakte ho na? Main middleman nahi hoon.” Dono ek second ke liye chup. Raghav hasne ki koshish karta hai, “Arey beta, hum toh bas—” Neha cut karti hai, “Bas kya? Bas normal ho gaye hain.” Car ke andar hawa aur tight ho gayi. Rain windshield pe aur zor se padne lagi, jaise koi aur bhi sun raha ho. Mini ne apni seatbelt ko dekhte hue kaha, “Normal log ek dusre ko dekh ke baat karte hain. Aap dono phone, mujhe, ya weather report ko address karte ho. Ek dusre ko nahi.”

Raghav ka chehra thoda toot-ta hai. Woh gentle banne ki koshish karta hai. “Neha, main bas aaj fight nahi chahta tha.” Neha finally sunglasses hata deti hai. Uski aankhon mein thakaan bhi hai aur gussa bhi, par zyada kuch aur—woh emotional precision jo sirf wahi aurat jaan sakti hai jo kabse sab sambhal rahi ho. “Fight tum nahi chahte ya sach nahi chahte?” Raghav ka jaw set ho jata hai. “Sach? Sach yeh hai ki tum mujhe har baat mein judge karti ho.” Neha instantly, “Aur tum har silence ko ‘theek hai’ samajh lete ho.”

Mini ne tissue box se ek tissue nikala, fold kiya, phir fold kiya. “Toh bol do na. Main sun rahi hoon.” Raghav aur Neha dono uski taraf dekhte hain. Woh teenon ke beech ka space ekdum charged ho jata hai. Raghav bolta hai, “Main bas

chahta tha ki aaj function pe hum normal family lagen.” Neha ka jawab aata hai, “Normal family hoti kaunsi hai, Raghav? Jahan koi kisi se baat hi na kare aur bas smile karte rahe?” Mini dheere se, almost whisper mein, “Exactly.”

Phir ek chhota sa beat. Raghav notice karta hai Mini ke haath mein do car keys hain—ek uski, ek aur spare jaisi. Woh confuse hota hai. “Mini, yeh extra keys kahan se aayi?” Mini pehli baar seedha un dono ko dekhti hai. “Mere paas rakhi thi.” Neha: “Kyun?” Mini ka answer simple, par seedha dil mein lagta hai: “Kyunki agar aap log alag-alag ghar se nikal jaate, toh function se pehle milte hi nahi. Aur agar yeh ride cancel ho jaati, toh aap log phir se message pe hi baat karte. Ya matlab, baat bhi nahi karte.”

Raghav aur Neha ka chehra badal jaata hai. Mini ki awaaz ab bhi controlled hai, par uske andar ka darr saamne aa raha hai. “Mujhe pata hai aap log fight kar rahe ho. Mujhe yeh bhi pata hai ki last time jab maine aapko dinner table pe chup dekha tha, tab se kuch theek nahi hai. Toh main ne socha... ek car mein phans jaoge, toh shayad bol hi doge.”

Bahar ek gaadi horn deti hai. Rain aur tez ho jaati hai. Raghav ki aankhon mein guilty softness aa jaati hai. Neha ka face ek pal ke liye crack karta hai. Woh Mini ke paas thoda jhuk kar bolti hai, “Tumhe yeh sab karne ki zarurat nahi thi.” Mini, eyes wet but stubborn, bolti hai, “Mujhe karna pada. Kyunki aap dono ek hi car mein bhi alag-alag duniya mein ho. Aur main beech mein seatbelt ki tarah hoon—tight, useful, aur invisible.”

Silence. Phir Raghav dheere se car keys table-dash pe rakh deta hai. Woh Neha ko dekhta hai, pehli baar seedha. “Meri galti hai. Main baat avoid karta raha.” Neha saans leti hai, phir itna hi kehti hai, “Aur main thak gayi thi, isliye chup rahi.” Mini un dono ko dekhti hai. Raghav umbrella uthata hai. Neha tissue box band karti hai. Car ka cabin ab bhi foggy hai, par us fog ke andar ek line clear ho jaati hai—family perfect nahi hoti, bas baat karne se zinda rehti hai.

Finally, Mini apni seatbelt kholti hai, aur ek tiny smile ke saath bolti hai, “Good. Ab function pe jaake fake smile kar lena. Ghar aake asli wali kar lena.” Raghav aur Neha dono pehli baar ek saath hansi se phoot padte hain. Rain ab bhi gir rahi hai, traffic lights ab bhi shimmer kar rahi hain, par car ke andar kuch shift ho chuka hai. The third seatbelt was never on the child’s body. It was the invisible thing she had been holding together—until she finally forced her parents to buckle up to the truth.