

2013

Indians and onions : an exploration of the creation of "Curry Bowl" a one-person play

Rani Jessica Jain

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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INDIANS AND ONIONS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE CREATION OF
'CURRY BOWL' A ONE-PERSON PLAY

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and
Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

In
The Department of Theatre

By
Rani Jain
B.F.A. University of Calgary, Canada, 2009
May 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my Mother, and Father: You are my inspiration and my heart. Thank you for all of your support and guidance. All the best things in my life are because of you.

To Sean Jain: Thank you for giving me perspective and teaching me about hard work and dedication. When I practice my award speeches, I always practice thanking you first.

To The Bangalore/New Orleans Jains: Thank you for the laughs, love and endless good food.

To The San Francisco Jains: Thank you for reminding me about the importance of duty and for sharing your stories with me. Aditya and Leela are so lucky.

To Sakshi Jain: Thank you for being my editor and sounding board. Writing runs in the family. You should try it.

To the Gupta Family: Thank you for supporting me across the oceans.

To A.S. Gupta and Shakuntala Gupta: If the tree can be happy, than so can I. Thank you

To all the Jain's and Gupta's in-between: Thank you.

To my teachers: Thank you. Joanna Battles, for helping me find my voice in the classroom and out.

To Jason Bayle: Sometimes endless support, encouragement, and motivation are all a wayward artist needs to find their way. I hope to be with you when the King of Broadway calls.

To my other nine MFA classmates: Each of you has taught me how to be a better artist and a better person. You have taught me lessons in patience, kindness, forgiveness, generosity, and creativity. Thank you accepting me for all my 'feelings' and for sharing the last three years with me.

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ABSTRACT

The object of our thesis project was to devise and perform a one-person show. The experiment was to see if we could create original, thought provoking and engaging material and then perform this material in a confident and exciting way. The initial execution involved conceiving an idea that we felt compelled enough to talk about for 30-40 minutes. For many of my classmates, this was perhaps the hardest part. I, however, knew from the beginning I had a desire to explore the challenges and complications faced by children of immigrants. My desire was to share stories about my own experience with a clash of cultures. Given the intimate nature of the source material, my own life, my major struggle was finding a form in which to tell my stories. This led me to exploring several different structural devices. My original idea had been to do a cooking show using the curry ingredients as the impetus to tell each story. However, the cooking show format felt too clean and polished. I knew my own struggles and experience to be much more messy and undone than an orderly 'food network' style show. This then led to the idea that I, myself, was cooking a curry dinner for my family as an opportunity for them to meet the very 'un-Indian' fiancée. This created the east-meets-west tension I had so hoped for in my original musings about my show. Once the basic foundational idea was formed I was able to create a structure based on my father's beloved curry recipe. Each ingredient had two monologues paired with it. One monologue was directly delivered to the audience as I spoke to my fiancée and warned her about the impending chaos of meeting the Jain clan. The other partner monologue was an out of time moment where I relived moments of 'east-meet-west' clashes, either as myself, or other members of my family. Using an array of dialect work, physical choices, sound cues, and on-screen projections, I was able to transition easily between the characters I created including my cousin-in-law, my aunt, my mother, my brother, my grandfathers and two younger versions of myself. The audience seemed very receptive to the material and I have been encouraged to expand and redefine **Curry Bowl** for future productions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 2012 my MFA classmates and I began the process of completing our final thesis projects. Our assignment was to create a twenty to forty minute solo performance piece. Past MFA classes were given the option to either create their own work, or to write a thesis paper based on a role they had previously worked on during their time at LSU. The experiment of our assignment was to see if we could create original, thought provoking, engaging material, and then perform this material in a confident way.

My initial reaction to this assignment was one of great hesitation and discomfort. In other MFA programs it is common to replace a written thesis with a large cattle call style audition or showcase in one of the three major commercial markets: New York, Chicago or Los Angeles. This is often done as a way of launching each MFA candidate's career, by presenting their work in front of a group of directors, agents, and managers who might help them find work.

However, my initial hesitation soon dissipated, as I began to realize that developing an ability to write might indeed help my career as an actor. I have long been a fan of actresses like Tina Fey, Mindy Kahling and Amy Poehler. The most distinguishing element of their long and successful performance careers is that all of them have an ability to create vehicles for themselves to act in. So, with the inspiration of these comedic geniuses, and an arsenal of personal stories to tell, I set off on my journey to write and perform in **Curry Bowl**.

The process of creating, and then producing my show began in late Spring 2012 and ended with two performances in the final showcase January 15-18, 2013. The initial execution involved conceiving an idea that I felt compelled enough to write about. For many of my classmates this was perhaps the hardest part. I however knew from the beginning I had a desire to explore the challenges and complications faced by children of immigrants. My desire was to share stories about my own experience with clashing cultures.

Given that the source material was my own life, I felt overwhelmed in the beginning by which anecdotes to use. This led me to exploring several different structural devices in which to tell the whole story. Originally, the idea had been to do a cooking show using the ingredients of my cooking dish as the impetuses to tell each story. However the nature of the cooking show felt too clean and polished. I knew my own struggles and experiences to be much more messy and undone than a clean 'food network' style show. This then led to the idea that I, could cook a curry dinner for my family as an opportunity for them to meet the very 'un-Indian' fiancée. This created the East-meets-West tension I had so hoped for in my original musings about my show.

Once the basic foundation was formed I was able to create a structure based on my father's beloved curry recipe. Each ingredient had two monologues paired it, one where I spoke directly to the audience as my 'fiancée', and warned him about the impending chaos of meeting the Jain clan and another partner monologue where I relived moments of 'East-meet-West' clashes either as myself or as other members of my family. Using an array of dialect work, physical choices, sound cues and on-screen projections, I was able to transition easily between the ten different characters including my cousin-in-law, my aunt, my mother, my brother, my grandfathers and two younger versions of myself. The audience seemed very receptive to the material and I have been encouraged to expand and refine **Curry Bowl** for future productions.

Throughout the process I had three major obstacles: discovering my writer's voice, balancing my personal connection to the text with artistic objectivity, and finally the act of carrying a performance all by myself. The creation of this piece exercised a set of skills that I had never used before. This paper is my opportunity to reflect on those struggles. I hope to use this reflection to spur on other writing endeavors in my artistic career, and to aid in the process of refining **Curry Bowl**, so it may have a life after Louisiana State University.

CHAPTER 2: INSPIRATION AND SOURCE MATERIAL

“I am going to use the word Curry in the place of Love, this might seem strange to you but I have my reasons. One being that I am pretty sure if I say the words self love too much you might get the wrong idea about this show. But if I say Curry you will know that this show is about the things that make a perfect curry... my perfect curry. You cannot make good curry without love. Anyone who has made curry from a jar knows that. It is just not the same as the stuff that is made by a loving father, who will wear his ‘King of the Kitchen’ apron and say ‘va va va’ upon every taste. If you look up 'va va va' in the dictionary you will not find a definition. Because ‘va va va’ is like the main ingredient in really great curry. It is indescribable, perfect and imperfect all at the same time.”

The above excerpt was the beginnings of a monologue that never made it into my show. My original impulse to create this show came from a project I did during my undergraduate course work where I created a fifteen-minute version of this story. The product of what I wrote in my third year of undergrad, and the version that made its debut on the Swine Palace stage, couldn't have been more different, but the concept and ideas were the same. In both, my intention was to tackle the question: “Where do I fit?” In undergrad my instinct had been to connect the stories about my family by using a clinical, reflective character that transitioned me from piece to piece. But that idea was scrapped early on because of the way it distanced me from my text. However, I felt like this monologue perfectly summed up what my initial hope was for the play. I had a desire to show how each member of my family was like the ingredients that made me a perfect curry; a perfect blend of old and new, traditional and modern, and of course, Canadian and Indian.

Growing up in a small town in Canada, I often felt that I was straddling two different worlds. At home, I was being taught the basics of Indian culture, a sense of tradition, duty, and respect for my heritage. This somewhat strict and specific upbringing often clashed with the world I faced when I went to school everyday. This play was meant to be my awkward, painful, but ultimately, entertaining and funny, coming of age story.

Converting this journey to the medium of a solo show seemed daunting at first. The solo performance style has, in my experience, a tendency to be egotistical and self-indulgent. Although I knew this piece would be therapeutic in the writing of it, the most important thing to me was the sharing of it. Could I tell my story in a way that was active enough to engage an audience without falling into the aforementioned traps of solo creation?

My first step in combating my fear was to reach out to my family and ask for their experiences with the ‘clash of cultures’. I made the decision early on to include my mother, father, brother and all of my father’s siblings and their children. This choice was primarily made because they all live in North America and have had to navigate two cultures for many years if not all their lives. Currently, most of my mother’s family still live in India, so I decided that in this version of the show that was not a perspective I wanted to explore. Although, their perspective on family members who now live abroad, may be something I explore in future version of the play. The following is the initial e-mail I sent out to twenty members of my family:

From: Jessica Jain <rjjain14@gmail.com>

Sent: Wed, May 23, 2012 at 6:25 PM

To: Sheena Jain sheena.jain@gmail.com
chaitan jain <chaitan.jain@gmail.com>,
s jain <sakshijain.canadian@gmail.com>,
Amita Mehrotra <amita.mehrotra@gmail.com>, Anik Jain
<apjain@gmail.com>,
Ruchi Jain <ruchi715@gmail.com>,
sean.jain@gmail.com,
Anoop Jain <anoopjain2007@u.northwestern.edu>,
Shawn Jain <shawn.jain@gmail.com>,
naveen@sparkart.com,
Erin Jain <erinjain@corp.sparkart.com>,
Neha Jain <nehajain988@hotmail.com>,
Maneesh Jain <mashuva@gmail.com>,
jaindoc@yahoo.com,
Sanjiv Jain <s.ratan.jain@gmail.com>,
Pratima Jain <pratima_J2000@yahoo.com>,
Alka Jain <aj001.alka@gmail.com>,
Sid Jain <sidpritti@yahoo.com>,
Rita Jain <alokrita@sbcglobal.net>,
djainusa@gmail.com

Re: Family Help

Hi Family,

Hope you are all doing amazing! As you may or may not know I am about to enter my final year in my masters program. Part of my masters will be to finish my program by completing my Thesis project. In our program the requirement for our thesis is to write, and perform a one-person play that will be about 30-40 minutes long. We will also have to write a paper, which will be shelved away in the great big LSU library never to be read again. BUT, that is the easy part. The hard part is trying to write my own show, and that is where I need your help. The thing that most playwrights I have talked to suggest when embarking on this seemingly insane task, is to write about what you know. And I have decided that what I know better than anything else is my family and myself.

I have decided to write a play about the struggles and hilarity of growing up first generation. That is an interesting dynamic we young Jain's face, because we are just Indian to be different from our North American friends AND YET, American enough to be different from our parents and older members of our family. My hope is to theatricalize all of the funny and

important Indian/American moments in my life that have some how shaped my sense of identity.

SO, long story short, I was hoping I could ask you guys for your thoughts about what it has been like growing up, or, raising children in two different worlds. I would also like to encourage you to share funny family stories from reunions and family gathering where these ideas present themselves.

Although, I cannot guarantee this material will make it into the show and there is a good chance, I will use your ideas and musings to help me shape and develop the piece. If you are at all concerned about privacy, keep in mind that I am writing a play so everything I use will be theatricalized or fictionalized in some way. My desire is not to air out our dirty laundry in public but to tell a story about a really interesting family. In most cases if you have something particularly interesting to share I will be re-writing it and rewording it in a manner that makes it more about the 'character' of the Jain family and less about the real Jain family.

I totally understand if you don't want to contribute but you are all very funny and interesting people so I thought I would ask anyway.

I have tried to send this to some of the parents but I do not have everyone's email address so, children; if you could pass this email along I would really appreciate it. I would also be happy to talk to you over the phone about this if you need more clarification, or guidance, as to what I am looking for. Honestly anything you want to share is great. I will take stories, pictures, even a haikus. Just keep in mind that by sharing with me you are giving me permission to use it in my piece. I will be sure to send you all a copy of the script when it is finished and ready to perform and of course you are all invited to my final performance January 15 and 17th 2013. I have also attached a copy of my first essay regarding my piece that I did for one of my classes. It may give you more guidance into the type of material I am looking for.

Thank you in advance for all of your love and support! Also just FYI I found out my movie Pitch Perfect will be released in movie theatres nation wide Oct 5th 2012!

Thanks again!!

~Jess~

P.S. To Erin - Erin since you have married into our wonderful Jain family and all our 'Jainness' is new to you, your input would be priceless to me.

To say that the response from my family was overwhelming would be an understatement. I was sent so many stories and so much feedback that I could have written several different shows. Given the large quantity of emails, I chose only to include responses in this paper that eventually ended up inspiring moments in my show. The following was an email from my cousin-in-law Erin. She is the first non-Indian person to marry into the Jain family; so, I was particularly interested on her perspective on the dynamics of the family. As soon as she sent me her email response I knew I had to find a way to use her voice in my play.

From: Erin Jain <erinjain@corp.sparkart.com>

To: Jessica Jain rjjain14@gmail.com

Date: Mon, Jun 11, 2012 at 1:30 AM

Re: Family Help

Hi Jess,

I'm so sorry it's taken me a while to get back to you. This was fun to reflect on, so thank you for that :) I hope my ideas are useful for your play. I have no doubt that you'll do a fabulous job with it! :)

1) Things about the Indian culture that make me laugh

- I LOVE Indian clothes. I seriously feel like I'm wearing pajamas - they are so comfortable and of course, always come in stunning colors and designs. When I first wore a sari, I had to laugh because the 'skirt' looked like one big bed sheet to me. I couldn't imagine how this possibly got wrapped around into something quite elegant.

- I remember once how Sakshi imitated her dad in the perfect Indian accent (no shock there :)). But, it was hilarious.

- Looking at our Jain family, the adults are quite 'loud' and 'theatrical' while the 'kids' are much more subdued. I remember one of Paul's brothers was visiting from India. He was meeting Adi for the first time. Here Adi was maybe 5 months old, and we walk in, and he starts whistling. It was loud even for me. Of course, Adi started wailing, but he couldn't understand why he was crying. He just kept whistling. It's a mixed bag, though. Thinking about our aunts and uncles, some are definitely more animated than others.

- I'm not sure if this fits here, but Paul had a HUGE fascination with oriental rugs. He'd ask us if we wanted to shop for rugs practically every weekend. And, he was so set on finding the best deal on the rugs. :)

2) Things about the Indian culture that baffle/perplex me

- It is perplexing but at the same time admirable as to how 'served' Naveen and Shawn have been growing up. (please keep this private/anonymous) :) For example, for all the times I've had dinner at Alka's, Naveen was never asked to help clean up or wash dishes. He went to college not knowing how to do laundry or iron. When I tell him that I am going to teach Aditya all those things, he looks at me like I'm crazy. I don't know if it's different in other Indian families, or if it's different for girls vs. boys...

- Long Indian weddings baffle me. I once sat through a 3-hour Indian wedding. The guests were sitting in their chairs just chatting amongst themselves. You couldn't even hear what was going on during the ceremony. :)

- Heavy Indian jewelry baffles me. There was an aunty from India who gave me the most gorgeous gold set of earrings for our wedding. She insisted I try them on, but the prongs were so thick, they made my earlobes bleed. I couldn't get them in, but she kept insisting. Ouch! :)

- Calling our elder's aunty and uncle still baffles me a bit. It's a nice, loving thing, but it still makes me uncomfortable at times. After hearing me call one of Alka's friend's aunties, my friend thought that she must have been Alka's sister-in-law :)

- Arranged marriages definitely baffle me. I still can't imagine that situation...

3) Indian FOOD!

- I remember the first few times I had dinner at Naveen's house. There was so much food. It wasn't even always Indian food that Alka had made, but the dinner was like a feast each time with dessert and a large fruit plate to follow. Each time, I was stuffed to the brim, but the offer to have seconds and thirds kept coming and coming. I soon learned how important it is to Indian parents that their children feel well fed and full. When friends came to visit, they brought food. For small and large events alike, there was never a shortage of food. No

complaints from me, however, because it has all been amazing. I love Indian food - it's become my favorite cuisine :)

4) Misc

- I am so impressed by our Jain family. There is SO much love in this family. The closeness of the family is admirable, and I'm even more impressed by the strong bond the cousins have (you don't see that in the American culture). I'm not sure if that's an element you can use in your play, but I just wanted to mention it. And, the cousins are super 'hip' and 'cool', and everyone seems to have some amazing talent!

If I think of anything else, I'll let you know :)

Best of luck to you, Jess! If you need anymore help, please let me know!

Love and hugs,

Erin

The following is an email response from my cousin Shawn. This email and attached story best describe his struggle with identity within two cultures. It also describes one of his most painful and personal experiences. Shawn's courage and candor made it easy to decide to adapt his words into a section of my script. In fact, the monologue based on his story ended up being a very a prominent moment in the script.

From: Shawn Jain shawn.jain@gmail.com

To: Jessica Jain rjjain14@gmail.com

Date: Thu, May 24, 2012 at 6:59 PM

Re: Family Help

Jessica, I'm attaching a story I wrote/read in New York as part of a writing workshop I did this past winter. I give you permission to use it, but please anonymize all the names in it. And don't share the actual piece I sent you with anyone else in the family.

Good luck,

Shawn

“Richmond Bridge

The plan was hatched that while leaving my psychologist's office. I had only seen the therapist once, but it had felt so powerful to come out to someone; I wanted him to be proud of me the next time I saw him. I was going to tell my dear brother, Naveen, that I liked guys. Given Naveen's history of his own hardships growing

up, I predicted a positive response from my disclosure of who I am able to love.

We met at Trader Vic's. As we walked into the restaurant, my heart was pounding.

The plan was subconscious. I did not know how, I did not know exactly when, but I knew that when given the choice to drive or to ride I had to choose to be in control.

The gentle probing began only after the meal, as we drove back together towards the Richmond Bridge. "Why are you depressed?" would have been too harsh a question to ask me.

And despite his efforts to be gentle, I wouldn't open up. I wouldn't give him the privilege of hearing a long, tortured story. But as the oil refineries came into view, the hilly turn before the toll booth, the beep of the FasTrak, he went down the road of saying that he knew what it was like to not have a girlfriend.

Both hands on the wheel, I said, "I'm gay."

"Really?" He responded.

He put his hand on my shoulder, gently caressed my neck.

My prediction was right.

Four years passed. During that time, I had the courage to tell friends, both new and old, that I was gay. I had my first 'one that got away'. I met Ameet, my now-ex, who I introduced to many of my friends and missed dearly when I worked in India, but who I soon enough realized wasn't right for me. I met other guys too. Mostly on Craigslist or through Adam4Adam.

But I still hadn't told my parents.

And last year, I met someone, who inspired me to come out to them.

His story inspired me. He was younger, from India; his parents were traditional, and I knew that if he could do it, I could too.

I also knew the timing would be perfect. It was May. My sister-in-law was pregnant. The baby was going to come anytime between Thanksgiving and Christmas. But I didn't want to be like one of those people on TV who came out on Thanksgiving. But if not then, when? I knew I had to do it. Not just because I had to get it off my fucking chest, but also because it was practical.

This time it was breakfast. Fruit was eaten, meal was served, and my heart was again pounding. Just as my Mom finished, chewing her waffle more slowly than my Dad or I...

“Mom, Dad, there’s something I’ve been wanting to tell you for a really long time.

The way that most men like girls, I like guys.”

What happened next was kind of a blur. My father was stunned. “What?”

Then he proceeded to cry. Mom tried to rationalize with me. “These are just feelings and they can be overcome,” she said.

Dad said that I would never be happy. That stung a lot back then, and still stings a lot, because sometimes I wonder if it’s true.

Mom, on the other hand, felt betrayed that she and Dad were the last people in the world to know. Having lived in San Francisco in the 80s and 90s, when gay men were practically dying in the street, young healthy bodies becoming lifeless bags of bones, she worried that I would contract HIV.

I immediately went into public relations crisis communications, “tough questions” mode, using tools I learned in my career, saying things like, “I cannot confirm or deny that.”

In tending to them, I repressed the pain I felt.

After returning to New York, I dispatched two of my close friends to visit them to assuage their fears that I was a good person who yes, could someday be happy. My friend Sudev (Indian-American, straight, same age, from Fremont) thought that it was a good discussion and that my Mom especially would be able to accept me for who I am. My friend Nathaniel (white, also straight, same age, from Santa Cruz) was less optimistic about the conversation. He thought it ended up being kind of circular and that they still had a long way to go.

Honestly, it didn’t feel good to come out to them. In fact, it really, really hurt. I felt very vulnerable.

After several months, they stopped asking questions about it, and I accepted that as their acceptance. My nephew was born, and when I went home for Christmas and he was, not unexpectedly, the complete focus of attention, I breathed sighs of relief.

While I was home for Christmas, Mom and Dad were excited for their upcoming trip to India. Dad was planning to visit his village

in Haryana, and my cousin was going to get married in Chandigarh. I felt this strong urge to accompany them, even though I knew it would only be for a week. My Dad was excited by this, and I felt like I was doing what a dutiful son should do.

It was February 2011. I returned to the U.S. from India before Mom and Dad, and I knew that they were on their way home. I ignored a call that I should have answered. It was from a Las Vegas number. Who could that be? And then I listened to the tear-filled voicemail from my Mom, telling me that the Thai Airways flight they were on was landing in Japan because my Dad had had a massive heart attack. And it went blank. I felt numb.

That night my father died, I called and woke up my friend Sudev, who was living in Delhi now, and who I was with the last time I was with my Dad. He told me that it was really great that I had told my Dad “about everything” before he passed. I’m still not so sure, but in times like this, I have to just take his word for it.

My father never explicitly told me that he was OK with me being gay. That would have been too much to ask of him, especially since it was only May 2010 that I came out to him, and he passed away in February 2011. But there were indications that he was moving in the direction of acceptance. I remember him saying to me when I was back home in December that all he wanted was for me to be happy. He told me that he loved me and gave me a big hug.

Actually, ever since I went to college my Dad always, always used to ask me if I was happy. Every time we spoke on the phone, he asked me two things: do you need any money? And are you happy? My dada passed away before I was born, but from stories that I’ve heard, he would have never asked those questions of my Dad when he was younger. But my Dad was a caring and placid soul, perhaps learning those traits from his mother, who I also never met. For all the time I was in New York, when he would ask me that question on the phone, I would lie and say that yes, I am happy. But my Mom told me when I was back home preparing for the funeral that he thought I was pretending to be happy, but I really wasn’t happy. I was able to fool my Mom, but I wasn’t able to fool him.

At first, my father was very against me studying in India, which I did in 2006 while attending UC Berkeley as an undergrad. He asked completely seriously, “why do you want to suffer?” as if that’s what going to India would imply. But when he and Mom came there and visited, and he saw how happy I was, and how

much India had changed, and how I could communicate with his brothers in broken, but understandable Hindi, he understood why I valued going back there so much.

So I guess the story of the relationship between my Dad and I is one that was, though embroidered with love, still in the process of acceptance and understanding. I wish he was still here, not only so that we could have more time together, but also so that we could move further in that direction and he could see me further along on my journey. I wish he could see me truly happy, perhaps partnered, and doing what I love. I know that would have brought him tremendous joy.”

I couldn't have been more grateful to my family for all of their support and these two email conversations show just how deep they were willing to go in order to help me create a well rounded show. This initial research stage was very important to my overall process, because, it allowed me to discover important layers to my piece. I was given ideas that gave the piece, depth and perspective and made my show more accessible to the audience. Not everyone will want to hear the story about a whiney twenty something 'just trying to fit in'; but, they maybe interested in hearing about loss, duty, and joy.

CHAPTER 3: JOURNALING

Once my research was complete I began the important process of devising my work. The following is documentation of the beginning phases of my writing. I used a journal format to document my initial ideas, and research any anxieties and fears that presented themselves as I began to take on this enormous task. I also shared updated version of this script and journal folder with my advisors so they could share in the journey with me. This made it easier for us to dialogue about the somewhat arduous creation of my play.

I have chosen to include the entirety of the journal as opposed to just referencing it because it documents very clearly the two of my three major struggles; finding my form and respecting both my family and my artistic voice.

May 10th:

My thoughts about my solo show:

To be honest, I am not even sure where to begin. I feel like I know what I want to say but I don't know where to begin saying it. I feel distracted and scattered. I have this image in my mind of this beautiful show about my family and my life but I am so worried and scared that maybe it will be self indulgent and stupid. This is, after all, a very precious project to work on.

I am frustrated all of a sudden because I have so many ideas of what I want, but I just don't know where to begin.

When I go home next week I am going to start by reading all my old journals. But right now, it all feels a little beyond me. I am not a writer. I have never been a writer, and I am really frightened to begin.

I started today by going to the library. I was filled with drive and motivation but then it smelt like BO... so I left. I think that I really went because I was hoping to run into a boy I have been talking to. In India, boys would not be a distraction, At least I think they wouldn't. I would just get married. I would say to my mother... mom I am ready to get married... and bingo bango 14 days later I would be married or something like that. So I worked in the Library for less than an hour, and I left, and now I am sitting at a coffee shop, and I am writing this but I am also watching the door... because I really want an excuse not to do this. And a boy seems like the perfect one.

The funny thing about this is I am essentially stalling from WRITING a play about my feelings by journaling about my feelings... how odd.

May 12th:

I just left my paper and stuff alone for a day and I am back at the coffee shop to try to do a little more writing. I have cleared my head of all things boy related and I am ready to focus. I had an idea yesterday as I was reading my rather battered version of *Pride and Prejudice*: What if I used sections of novels as a way to transition from monologue to monologue. I don't know exactly which book excerpts or whether I would read them or have them, projected on a screen or something.

Not sure if any of this is going to work but I do think it is all a part of the process to have these ideas, and not let them slide away. I think that, that is what writing is... deciding whether ideas live or die. As of right, now I just want everything to die. Classy right?

May 23rd:

I have had an epiphany over the last few days about my thesis. I think that maybe the convention of the story telling is a cooking show. I don't know if that has any merit but I do think there is something interesting about it. In my mind, the ingredients would be something like: History, Family Reunions, Dating, and growing up or bad news. The idea is great! Now I have to sit down and write. Which is not something I am really in the mood to do. It is 3:30 in the afternoon, and every time I think about writing, I get really REALLY tired, which is ridiculous. I have no idea why that is. I just want to nap whenever I think about working on this show.

June 2nd:

I will start the show by asking the audience to take their shoes off... this makes perfect sense to me. Also, I will be cooking real curry on stage. And the REAL ingredients will stimulate the story telling. Fuck the bullshit about "fake ingredients" that's too silly. That is all.

June 14th:

Oh man, I have been doing so much work on my thesis! I am joking and not joking all at the same time. I feel like I have spent HOURS just talking to my family and organizing all these emails they have sent me and I am getting great ideas for my show... but usually when I AM AS FAR AWAY FROM MY COMPUTER AS POSSIBLE. I can see the opening of my show and I want my stage to look like a kitchen, with a screen behind me projecting pictures.

Reading all these notes from my family makes me want to weep. Why am I airing all my dirty laundry in public? This feels like this maybe a bad idea. Not sure yet.

June 18th:

Had my meeting with George today. Have some really great ideas to work through. It's cool because I feel like we are really on the same page. He's given me the assignment of writing 6-8 monologues inspired by my research. He also suggested using the idea of the shoes around the main cooking area in the shape of a wheel, which, I realized, could be really subtle reference to the India flag... BRAVO GEORGE!!! I also think we may have found the central conflict. I am prepping dinner, a dinner party, and my 'fiancée' is going to meet the family for the first time. I think this is a very sweet idea. But, it really scares me. I think its scares me because I know how important that meeting will be in my real life, that the idea of staging it is terrifying.... I don't know. When I confessed this to George, he reminded me that if it scares me it's probably the right idea.

July 6th:

Okie dokie just sent my first monologue to my teachers and to Jason. Jason is my little thesis-writing buddy. I think it may not suck! It was harder to write than I thought. I chose to start with writing about my cousin Shawn coming out because he had already given me so much of the material. I cannot shake the feeling that maybe this is not what he was trying to communicate in the story but the word that struck me from his original story is: DUTIFUL.... As India kid we are ALWAYS torn between a sense of duty to the world we know and the world

we come from. I feel that ALL the time when my family grills me about marriage or about my career. I don't think my sweet darling grandmother will ever really understand that my career will always be as important (if not more important) to me than marriage or family. I don't think she will ever understand that sometime I will have to take my clothes off and kiss boys and do things that she considers totally disgusting as part of my job. But that's just my reality.

BUT, my reality seems like small potatoes when I think about Shawn's reality. I cannot imagine spending your whole life knowing that the person you are is radically different from the person you are expected to be.

Duty Duty Duty. We Indian kids are nothing if not totally dutiful.

Aug 29th:

As usual I will probably use any excuse possible to avoid actually working on this thing. I am currently also doing some writing for the MFA movie, and I keep finding excuses not to write that either. I just have to get into this zone before I can write. It requires so much prep. I had a mini meltdown in class when I felt like I just wanted to scrap the whole idea. But I guess that just means I need to keep going. The whole thing feels scary and embarrassing. Over the last 3 years here I have really truly seen what I consider to be VERY VERY VERY good playwriting and VERY BAD playwriting. I just want my play to speak a universal language. I want people to hear themselves in my stories. I want it to be engaging and exciting. But I am telling stories about MY FAMILY... how is that exciting? And yet... whenever I am on a date or trying to make someone laugh that is the first place I go... to the hilarious family fun time bank of hilariousness. So why is this different?

We have partnered off into little writing groups and the hope is that we will be able to keep each other in check and on task. The date of our performances have been pushed back to January. That is great in one way but terrible in another because what about our academic paper? How do we fit that in if we are pushing the show back?

I guess I am more grateful for hurrication than I know. BUT again I only have 3 hours until my battery dies.

One of my friends just told me to get really drunk and then start writing. I kind of think that's maybe a brilliant idea. If I am wasted then maybe the only things that will come out on the page will be brilliance. I believe it was Earnest Hemingway that said, "Write drunk, edit sober". Then I could potentially be hitting two hurrication birds with one stone... the number one rule of Hurrication: be drunk. But I was trying to avoid that so I could be productive. But I can be drunk and be productive at the same time.

Also in the spirit of positive affirmation: I AM ALREADY DONE WITH MY THESIS. I AM PROUD OF IT. I AM ALREADY DONE WITH MY THESIS.

Sept 1st:

I was a little worried about making the transitions between the ingredients into the monologues, but I think I have come up with my first one! Hooray.

Other good news: I have discovered that the best way for me to write is to improvise on my feet first. Or even to just improvise while I am doing something else. But sitting in front of my computer and telling myself to "Just WRITE" doesn't always turn out the best product. So, great new discovery!

Sept 18th:

Trying a new angle: Growing up is hard to do. Read and re-read some books about growing up, including, the newest coming of age saga: **Perks of Being a Wildflower**. It's funny because obviously growing up now is a lot harder than growing up then... as in MY then. I also re-read **Catcher and the Rye** and **The Namesake**... but obviously kids today have life a lot harder... they are all dropping ecstasy and spending months in rehab. I feel like we were near that... but not as publically. We probably did as many drugs as they do... but some how I think we were stronger. It was rare someone actually went off to rehab for months at a time. Mind you I say all of this as if these are things I have done. I have seen my friends do a lot of drugs and drink a lot of booze and get into a lot of trouble. I have read many books about young people doing all these things, but have never done them myself.

I think that more than anything else my show is about growing up. Even though the scenarios of my life were different, and I am what my brother calls a "good kid", that doesn't mean that my actual feelings about growing up are any different. It just means that I am going to feel like I am growing up at 25 instead of 15... just 10 years off. Not bad. I know some Indian women that never truly become women. They become wives, mothers, maybe even great career people, but I am not sure they really ever become women. That's how I feel about my sweet cousins in India. They will be fabulous wives and they will have lovely homes and their families will all be very proud of them... but I wonder if THEY will be proud of themselves?

CHAPTER 5: FINDING MY WRITERS VOICE

As my journaling indicates the process was far from easy and after I discovered my form it was then time to discover my writers voice. I had dealt with the task of collecting material, and had a firm idea about form in which to present that material but, the real challenge of writing a solo show, came in the act of marrying the two. Or, tailoring the content to suit the form. I mentioned several times in my journaling how I struggled with the act of sitting at my computer and putting my ideas on paper. In the beginning, I tried to write my play as I would write any academic paper. I would sit at my computer and simply write. However, I found the product of this was stiff, and often very awkward. So, this method was quickly abandoned. My next solution was to try writing only when the ‘inspiration’ hit me. I feel like little explanation is needed to truly describe the flaws in this plan. I grew increasingly frustrated and ended up abandoning my piece for almost a month before my writing style finally came to me. During my undergrad, I wrote the first incarnation of **Curry Bowl** for a class called ‘Performance Creation’. The teacher of this class was also my long time improv coach, and she treated the act of creating material like she treated improvisation. She would continually remind us that the best way to create was to try. We would spend hours locked in our classroom walking about the room talking to ourselves. Improving, riffing and generating creative content away from our computer screens. This method of spontaneous creation eventually became my key to resurrecting **Curry Bowl**.

I would give my self a character, and wander around my apartment in circles, talking to, or about, them. If I were generating their monologues with only the outlines of a story in mind, I would spend hours talking like them while I did menial tasks around the house. And eventually when their voice became a part of my own, I was ready to sit in front of my computer.

With other characters, like my cousin Shawn, whose story I shared above, I had the unique challenge of adapting already created material. The story on paper is truly beautiful, but to simply read the story out loud to an audience, would take away from the experience of live theatre. The story as is did not translate well into a monologue. I found that every time I tried to adapt the story verbatim I was left with a monologue that was introspective, and more about me, (the actor), then me telling the story to sharing it with the audience. This act of adaptation was very upsetting. I was so honored that Shawn had chosen to share with me that I felt overwhelmed by guilt and anxiety at the thought of abandoning his text for the purpose of my show. But, this is where I had to decide to be Jessica Jain, the playwright, and not Jessica Jain, second youngest cousin. I had to try to be objective, and realize that there is a separation between ‘Jessica’ and myself, and that is what makes the show art, and not therapy. After much thought and consideration, I finally adapted the story into a eulogy. This format made it easier for me to use Shawn’s words with out indulging in them.

CHAPTER 6: THE FINAL SCRIPT

The following is the current iteration of my ‘Curry Bowl’ script. As the show went into rehearsal, many awkward moments that had caused me trouble before, began to clarify. The act of performing it made moments clearer and the dialogue more honest, easy and accessible. Although I don’t think this is the final iteration of the script, I do sense this will be a very important basis for the future of my show.

Curry Bowl

As lights come to half the following quote from the “Life Of Pi” Is on the projection screen.

Slide: “They speak a funny English in India. They use words like bamboozle”

~Yann Martel “Life of Pi”~

(Lights fade. In the black out the following is heard as if coming from a voicemail)

Jessica Voicemail Message:

Hey, you have reached Jessica. I am sorry, I am not able to take your call right now, but, if you can leave me your name and number I’ll get back to you as soon as possible.

(The sound of a voicemail beep)

Sanjiv Voicemail:

HEY Jess how's is it going? As I enjoy slow and good cooking, I am doing the same while recording this ... please be aware, I cook to taste, so it is difficult to say half table spoon of this or a table spoon of this, etc etc. however, I will try my best ...

(Lights up on an empty stage. Jessica walks in looking frazzled and overwhelmed, but smiles brightly when she sees the audience. She is carrying a bag of groceries. Groceries tumble from her arms and she laughs.)

Jessica:

Oh Hi. I am so sorry. I am running so late. No... no kissing... cooking...I just need to start cooking.

(She drops the bag of groceries off on the counter mid stage. She looks at the audience again and smiles.)

You look super cute by the way. Very “meet the parents” appropriate.

(Turns back to her task....She then does a double take.)

Are you wearing your shoes in the house? Seriously? We’ve talked about this SO MANY TIMES. You know it’s my obsessive Asian thing.

(Make a motion for him to remove his shoes and sighs. Then moves behind the counter.)

Urgh. I’m a bitch. I am just anxious. I’m worried about the curry. And I am worried about you. *(Mark obviously reacts poorly)*. Not you. You’re perfect. And they are perfect. The two of you are just perfectly different.

You're either going to mix perfectly or this will end up like every other curry I have ever made from scratch... a horrible, horrible disaster, that ends in painful, diarrhea.

(Shaking off the image and steadying herself. She moves behind the counter and begins un-bagging groceries and grabbing things from the fridge.)

Just don't know if this was the best way to do this. If we had just snuck you into some kind of family function, then you'd say hello, they'd ask you a few questions, and then, we could leave. But this way is like, warfare. It's like we're sneaking into Kandahar hoping to have a peaceful picnic. Why are you laughing at me? How is this not as anxiety causing for you? I am trying to feel my feelings over here and you are just teasing me. This is my quintessential existential growing up moment, and you are lucky enough to be a part of it. If I wrote a book about this shit it could be huge. They would probably make a movie and that girl from 'Slumdog Millionaire' would play me because every one says I look like her. But I don't, I don't look anything like her. Everyone is just a little racist. That would be the title: "Everyone's a little racist". Growing up as the little Canadian Indian girl is hard.

Fine. Fine. My neurosis are funny. But you'll see. You're about to enter a whole new world. I wonder if you'll even make it through the FIRST game of scrabble.

(Pause)

That's right. We're scrabble people. Well I'm not. But they are. Momma Jain is scrabble champ, and Papa Jain cheats... we are always on the same team.

(Moves to the counter to begin cutting up vegetables)

I'll bet you 300 dollars and dish duty that my Dad will rope you into helping him in the garden. He's a fanatic about that thing. Him and the dog, just planting and tending to their garden. *(Holding up a tomato)*. This is actually a Sanjiv Jain tomato... please practice telling him "it's the best tomato I have ever eaten."

(Light shift. Voicemail is heard and Jessica steps into a pair of pretty black flats)

Ellen Voicemail: Hey Jess. It's Ellen. Nikhil's Fiancée... but I guess you knew that already. Anyway, I was just calling because, I am trying to figure out what to wear to this Diwali celebration, and I don't even know where to begin. Could you just call me when you get a chance? Sorry to be such a bother!

(Lights up)

Ellen:

(Ellen is fussing with a long sheet of ornate fabric.)

Oh Jess, I don't know how you do this. It looks like a giant bed sheet to me. I don't know how you could possibly wrap it into something so elegant. So elegant, but, feels like I'm wearing a snuggie. Have you noticed how India clothes feel like pajamas?

Oh you haven't. *(Mumbled disappointment)*.

Okay so explain to me again what I call everyone.

Nikhil's father's brothers is his Tauji and his wife is his Taiji. *(Makes a TH sound to imitate the person she is speaking too)* Taiji. Got it.

His mother sister is Masi her husband Mause.

Father's sister is his Bua and his husband is Poo, poofa, pooa.. ji... Lets come back to that one. That's a tricky one.

Wait who are Uncle and Aunty? I thought I got to call someone Uncle and someone else Aunty...

Look I don't mean to get upset. I know you are trying to help. But I am getting married today. And there are so many customs. So many traditions and I am just trying to keep it together. **SO IF YOU DON'T MIND PLEASE TELL ME...WHO IS UNCLE AND WHO IS AUNTY?** I was told that I would get to call **SOMEONE UNCLE AND AUNTY.**

Oh... ohh...they are not related... Ravi Uncle and Punam Aunty. Wait they are not related? Then why do they come over so much? Don't you think they come over a lot?

Oh, okay good. It's not just me. Is there anything else? Or anyone else?

Dadiji! *(Putting her hand up to indicate she know this one)* Nikhil's paternal Grandma. *(She speaks her name with great joy)* Dadiji. *(Thoughtfully)* She is wonderful. Did you see the jewelry she got me? She always makes me feel like I am one of you girls. But sometimes she calls me Eela. Well most of the time she calls me Eela... Do you think she realizes that I am white? Right?

(Lights Shift Projection Comes Up)

Slide: In the Indian culture the adults of each family are given names of respect to indicate their relationship to each child's parents. There are four different titles for uncle, four aunts, two for grandma and two for grandpa.

(Lights Shift. Jessica is back at the counter.)

Jessica:

Oh, did you put the lights up? I really want my dad to see them. He'll be so proud; I am officially embracing my status as a social outcast and environmental destroyer.

I was always mortified when my dad would put our Christmas lights up in October. Mostly because cute Kevin the neighbor boy would always tease me for being weird.

I just want to be normal... I wanted to have blonde hair, blue eyes and go to church like everybody else.

(Rolls her eyes)

But now I love it. And I love that we get to spend Diwali together. We never get to spend Diwali together.

When I was in college it was the worst, because, it always happened to e in the middle of the week. So we'd all grab our iphones and facetime. I think that's something Indians and American's can agree on. "Apple saves the holiday."

(Lights shift and voicemail plays)

Miss Rhonda Voicemail: Jessica, sweetheart. It's Ms Rhonda from next door. Sugar, you have left your lights on for almost a week now and I see you have your Christmas lights up... and I just want to check in and see

what's going on. I don't know if you are afraid of the dark or we have some kind of Christmas light strangler in the neighborhood.... So just give me a call sweetheart and let me know which.

(Lights shift and Jessica is wearing a pair of obnoxious fluffy slippers)

Young Jessica:

Daddy, please don't do this. I am begging you. You have no idea what you are doing.

You have to stop you have to. Look around you can't you see how you'd be hurting Sean and I and Mom even... If you do this... Please Dad don't I am begging you.

You don't care do you? You're going to do this without any idea how badly this can, and will hurt us. Daddy PLEASE! My whole life is about to fall apart around me and you just don't seem to care. Papa. STOP! NO ONE PUTS THEIR CHRISTMAS LIGHTS UP IN OCTOBER! I don't care if its Diwali or even if we're going to get the best karma in the whole world. If you hang-up even one Christmas light that's it... I have officially solidified my status as a social outcast. Becky's family is Jewish and they celebrate their Hanukah and nobody knows... why can't we be like them? At least they keep their menorah to themselves! All I want is one Halloween where we don't have our Christmas lights up!

(Lights Shift and Projection comes up)

Slide: Diwali; The Festival of Lights. Celebrated between Mid October and Early November in honor of the Indian god Rama.

(Lights Shift)

Jessica:

(Jessica is fumbling desperately trying to find something. Crawls under the counter and comes up rather frantically holding a little jar filled with yellow powder)

What's next?? Oh God!... That's why we have a recipe book. Turmeric! If there were an India Popeye he would eat this instead of Spinach. It's basically like an Indian wonder drug. Your foot broken? Have some Haldi. That's what we call it. Your stomach hurts? Have some Haldi! You are about to get married and you want to cleanse away all of your sins? Just add water and rub it all over you body and BOOM all of you past indiscretions are gone. When I was 12 we went to my cousin's wedding in India and there was an ENTIRE ceremony where he sat in his underwear and EVERY member of his family just wiped this goopy yellow paste all over him. We where all "cleansing" him. I was so embarrassed for him. He just sat there like a trooper without a care in the world.

Haldi: Indian folks swear by it. I am pretty sure it does nothing.

(Light Shift. Voicemail is heard)

Voicemail Chachi: Jessica, it's Chachi. How come you haven't called? We're worried about you girl! Have you eaten dinner? Call me back.

(Jessica Steps into decorative Indian sandals)

Priti Chachi:

Jessica... Oh Jessica come out here and show me how it fits.

(She waits impatiently... tapping her foot)

(She sees Jessica and sighs)

Auray... Gurl... what happened? I thought your mother had this made for you while she was in India.. How come it doesn't fit? Where have the boobies gone? *Sutheanas (Said with great dramatic flair)*. This is terrible where will we find a tailor to fix this now? Don't give me that look. You know why this happens? Because you don't eat properly. You are always doing some new dieting sheiting. "I'm not eating bread". "I'm only drinking juice", "I'm vegan shevgan". Very bad. I don't understand you girls. It is very important for a girl to stay slim but you do it in such funny ways. Eat properly. That's it. You eat almonds for your brains, haldi for your muscles. *(In disgust) Tum Log To Kuch Nahin Kahti (Translation. You people don't eat anything)*. Where are we going to find a tailor now to fix this?

(Lights Shift)

Slide: Haldi or Tumeric is a spice used in Indian cooking, cosmetics and religious and wedding ceremonies. Scientist are in the preliminary stages of researching its effect on cancer, arthritis and other clinical disorders... But I am pretty sure it does nothing.

(Lights Up)

Jessica:

(Cutting cloves of garlic and making strange choking noises).

The pungency of this stuff makes me want to vom. How can something so small be so delicious and smell so overwhelming? Maybe I should just skip it. My curry doesn't really need garlic right? No, no I have to use it. If I don't I am sure somehow it will magically turn out inedible.

(Beginning to press the garlic in the garlic press)

I think my friend Jenny once told me it was an aphrodisiac. I don't get that. One sniff of garlic on you I'll be ready to call it a night. Thanks but no thanks. Sorry but not sorry.

But then again Indians use it in everything and they did write the Kama sutra.

You know what it is? It's sexy on the down low. *(As if she has made the greatest revelation in the world)* That is it. That is TOTALLY it. Garlic like Indians in sexy on the down low.

Okay so we don't kiss in our movies, but you know whats standing between you and that little lady in the sari? Nothing but a few yards of fabric. Sexy on the down low.

Urgh... no... that's not it. That was my worst joke yet. I'm full of them.

I may never master the sex joke. We just don't do the 'sex talk' well. My mom tried to have a sex talk with me ... in the food court at the mall at 19. The words "chastity belt" where defiantly used. Sexy on the down low....

(Lights Shift. Voice Mail plays)

Katie Voicemail: Jess, it's Katie. I just wanted to see if you had told your Mom about you and the boy yet? Its so weird to me that she doesn't know that you guys are bumping uglies. I thought Moms just knew this stuff. Anyway, just call me back.

(Lights shift. Jessica is painting her nails and wearing the little tiny toes separators.)

Jessica:

Katie, can I ask you a question?

Do you ever think we are doing it wrong?

Growing up... Do you every think we are growing up wrong?

I know it sounds crazy but.... You know last week when we where at Monica's party and everyone got really drunk and you and I just left early... do you think we should have stayed?

You love Jesus and thats why you don't go crazy at these parties but what's my excuse? (Realization) My parents. MY PARENTS don't let me do anything and rather than fighting them I just agree. I don't smoke I don't drink I DON'T date. Because my parents don't want me to. Because it's the right thing to do. But if I did those things would they know? Would they even find out?

Yeah, I know Jesus knows everything... but I'm not really worried about Jesus. I am worried about my parents.

When I watch teen movies and read books about growing up all the best characters always do exactly the things that their parents don't want them too. And they always end up learning some great life lesson.

I am obedient, I am smart, I get good grades, and I always call to tell my parents when I am going to be late and even when I can get drunk off my ass I NEVER DO. But why not? I feel like I have never made a real mistake in my whole life. I feel like I have spent all of the years I was supposed to spend having fun... being good. But what if, when I grow up, I can't make those mistakes anymore? Will it really matter what my parents knew?

(Light shift)

Slide: "Teleological speaking, ABCD's are unable to answer the question 'Where are you from?' In other words, him. Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that is stands for 'American-born confused deshi'"

~Jhumpa Lahiri "The Namesake"~

(Lights Up)

Jessica:

(Pulling out three empty bottles of wine from under the counter. Looking at the audience sheepishly.)

I think we have a big problem.... Oh Oh... No... we're not panicking right? Call my brother. He'll have a bottle or two to bring over... He'll have a bottle or two lying around... I know he'll have a bottle or two lying around. I'm glad he'll be here. I spend 50% of my life worried that everyone outside my family will think we are too close. We are too close. It's basically engrained in my DNA. We can't help it!!! Indian people are freaky close.... Weeeeelll.... Freaky close by America standards.

I think it's strange that you don't know any of your cousins. I know all of mine, plus my cousins, cousins. My mother and I once had a 2-hour argument about the fact that I didn't want to invite HER cousins to my wedding. I wasn't even planning on having a wedding at that time. But God forbid she insults her cousins by not inviting them to my wedding.

Oh by the way... her cousins are coming to the wedding.

(Lights Shift. Voicemail plays)

Mom Voicemail One: Jess, I think there is something going on with you brother. I think he's dating someone. Could you talk to him?

(Lights Up)

Sean:

Jess... Jess... are you going to come out of the bathroom or are you going to hide in there forever? Look... I know you are mad, but what do you expect? Mom and Dad are always going to be Mom and Dad. Jess!!

You can either sit in there and cry about it or you can try to realize it's a good thing. They made you come home early from the party. Big deal. I swear it is not the end of the world.

JESS!!!! COME OUT! I get it... when I was your age I used to wish our parents where more easy going too.

(Pauses)

Look do you remember my friend Tyler? Tyler from Strath? I spent my entire senior year hating Mom and Dad because Tyler's mom was looking after his pot plant and buying him a car while they where harassing me about collage and making me study.

TYLER'S MOM WAS LOOKING AFTER HIS MARIJUANNA PLANT and I was being forced to take the bus to school and get a math tutor. But guess what? Sometimes having parents like Tyler's sucks too. Because Tyler's Mom may have helped us be a band of degenerates in high school, but when it really mattered she wasn't there.

Last year when Tyler flunked out of college his Mom lost her shit. She kicked him out and refused to talk to him for six months. Do you think Mom would ever do that? Do you think Dad would every LET her do that? No. The fact of the matter is Jess, Mom and Dad can be nosy, overbearing and a big pain in the ass, but they'd never abandon us, they'd never throw us into the deep end of the pool and expect us to just figure things out. And this may sound stupid... and you know what, I think its kinda great thing that Mom will be offering to cook and clean for us far past when it's appropriate.

(Light shift)

Slide: "Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt by her side, the baby's birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived."

~Jhumpa Lahiri "The Namesake"~

(Lights Up)

(Jessica moves back behind the counter)

Jessica:

Woah, woah, woah, there is no point in both of us freaking out. We've got the wine, the curry is marinating... Why don't you go watch the football game? I know enough and I know there is a game on right now. And you can talk to me all about it and I will try to care.

(Improv football stuff) Because I do try. But its hard because my loyalties are set. It's all about the hockey. Just thinking about hockey makes me happy. Hockey is part of the definition of the Jain's and its part of the definition of Canada.

You don't understand why hockey? Well I don't understand how you have a different sport for every season. Football, then basketball, then baseball and you love cricket too. SO where is the loyalty how can you truly know about the defining nature of loving one sport above all else and spreading that love and passing that love on...aren't you kind of a sports whore?

(Reacting to something he has said)

Wait, wait, what are you insinuating? Did you just insinuate that YOU are some how more Indian than me because you like CRICKET and I don't? Umm Ummm... NO. I am CanIndian baby. Canada plus India equals CanIndian. I get to choose my sport. And I know about Cricket.

(Badly imitating the cricket set up and very clearly talking nonsense.)

I know about the bat with the flat and the two things and you hit the ball and then you kinda go between the thing and the other thing. I know.

Do not ever assume you know more about being more Indian than me. Because you may know (*motions to her head*), but I KNOW (*motions to her heart*).

(*Lights shift. Voicemail plays*)

Sean Voicemail One: Jess. Mom wants to know if you are dating someone. You should probably call her so she stops asking me.

(*Lights Up. Jessica slips on a pair of Birkenstocks*)

Richard:

Shhhh... Quiet. This is the best part. This is the part where the Amir Khan tells the British officers that he will play him in a game of cricket for the control of his village. My professor in the Asian histories class said this was a very clear representation of the Indo- British struggles during the time of the occupation. (*Looks at Jessica*) Look Babe have you traced your lineage back to that time period? Why not? Don't you think you should know this stuff? These are your people. My ethic theologues professor was saying that first generation children often loose touch with their culture, quicker in an attempt to assimilate to the masses. (*Tenderly*) Honey, but what you don't realize is, that is just a faster way of dying. They are just assimilating to a culture where worth as a human being is rated on a scale where the highest possible grade is a FOUR! What you're saying by not acknowledging YOUR story that there is no room for cultural value... (Picking up her sweater and examining it critically) Unless like your sweater it's mass-produced in China. I just worry, that maybe you don't truly know who you are? Have you ever thought about piercing your nose? That would be such a positive affirmation of you embracing your culture.

(*Lights shift*)

Slide: "Their cousins and aunts and uncles asked them about life in America, about what they eat for breakfast, about their friends at school. They look at pictures of their house on Pemberton Road.

"Carpets in the bathroom", they say, "imagine that."

~Jhumpa Lahiri 'The Namesake'~

(*Lights up*)

Jessica:

Do you mind putting the mats out on the counter? We won't need forks and knives just spoons. We're going to do this authentic 'rip and dip' style.

I told you my uncle who lives in Bangalore is coming too right? I know it's hard to keep track of them all but when you meet them you'll know them. He's my Dad's youngest brother. The funny one.

He and I went to the same college. He'll remind me of that at LEAST once during dinner. And he'll probably tell this terrible story about how he used go to "Toga Parties". I am not sure he will ever truly understand the implication of going to a "Toga Party".

It's kind of sweet though. I think when Indians and North Americans meet there is just some kind of a chemical reaction. (*Smell the curry*) Kinda like this curry.

Mom Voicemail Two: Hey Jess, it's Mom. Haven't heard from you. Just wondering what you are up to. Call me back. Love you. Bye.

(*Lights Up Jessica puts on house slippers*)

Pratima:

(Pratima is sitting on a chair gently massaging her hands. She starts when someone enters the room)

Sanjiv?

(She see the person who has entered the room and begins to cry)

I.. I went for a walk. I just... Sanjiv it's so cold outside. My hands. *(She begins to cry harder. She weeps for a moment before collecting herself).*

I miss home Sanjiv. I know you told me not to go out for a walk today. I know you did. But, what am I supposed to do here in the house all day? What am I suppose to do in the little tiny town where everyone wants to call me Pat? I walked past Lynda's house again today and again today like everyday she calls out to me: "Oh Pat, Pat how are you?". My name is not PAT. It's PRATIMA. I have taken the time to learn your name. Please take the time to learn mine. I thought coming to Canada would be so different. I thought I would be amazed by some marvelous big city but instead I am stuck in a little town where women think nothing about wearing rollers to the grocery store and want to change my name. *(She chuckles sadly)* And don't get me started about country music. Everywhere I go its this honky tonky nonsense. Please, sir, stop crying about your truck and just get over it. Okay?

(Lights up)

Slide: "The result was that the animals, like us, got their working papers. They where future Yankee's and we future Canucks"

~Yann Martel "Life Of Pi"~

(Lights Up)

Jessica:

OH DAMMIT! Shit Shit Shit Shit Shit. I cut myself. Don't. Stop. Don't move a muscle. I don't move! *(Sucking on her finger)* I don't want you anywhere near my blood onions.

(Moving from behind the counter to sitting on top of it)

I hate onions. I mean it. I hate them. But you can't have curry without them you can't have any Indian dish worth having without them. Do you know where normal people... well not normal people... non-Indian people have salad with dinner; we have a plate of cucumber carrots and onions... RAW ONIONS. Everyone in my family can just eat them up no problem. They go gaga for THEM! But they sit on the plate taunting me. They look at me with their judgmental onion eyes and say:

"Come on Jessica! ARE YOU INDIAN ENOUGH?"

And I never am. Its feels like my duty to love these stupid smell things but I just can't do it.

(Light shift as voicemail plays)

Mom Voicemail Three: Hey Jess it's Mom. Sorry to tell you this in a message but I wanted you to hear it from me. Phoofagi passed away last night. Can you call Bua and the boys when you get a chance? I know they are really upset. Love you. Call me too. Bye.

(Lights Up. Jessica puts on a pair of stylish men's shoes and stand behind down right clutching a piece of paper)

Cousin:

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for being here today. I would like to take a moment to thank all the members of my family who have come from different parts of the world. The Canadians Jain's, Sean and Jessica, The Charlotte Jain's, The Washington Jain's, Chaitan who has joined us all the way from Switzerland and of course all of my family who has traveled all the way from India including Chacha and Chachi who flew in this morning from Bangalore.

I wish that we could all be together under happier circumstances, because, I am sure my Dad would have liked to have everyone all together.

My Dad was a really generous and hard working man and if I had to describe our relationship I would say it was dutiful. He taught me a lot about the importance of family and the importance of duty to your family. Duty to act a certain way. Duty to speak a certain way. Duty to answer the phone whenever they call.

(He laughs then runs his hand through his hair)

(He takes a deep breath)

A lot of you know that my relationship with Dad had been strained over the last year and that makes this loss so much harder.

That night my father died, I called and woke up my brother, and cried. He tried to console me and told me that it was really great that I had told Dad “about everything” before he passed. I’m still not so sure, but at a time like this, that’s what I have to believe.

Dad never explicitly told me that he was OK with me being gay. I think that would have been too much to ask. But, I felt like he was moving in the direction of acceptance.

I remember him saying to me a few weeks after my ‘confession’ that all he wanted was for me to be happy. Then he told me that he loved me and gave me a big hug.

I wish he were still here, not only so that we could have more time together, but also so he could get to that place of acceptance, and see me truly happy, in love, and doing what I love. I know that would have brought him tremendous joy.

Duty seems like a heavy word. It is bigger than me. I wish I could say that my duty to myself and my duty to my family were the same thing. And sometimes that overwhelms me so much but then I realize the reason our parents teach us about duty is because that is their way of protecting us. Their way of shielding us from all of the evil and terrible things in the world. My Dad only wanted me to be happy because I think that was his duty.

(Takes a deep breath)

Anyway. I am just glad you could all be here today. Because my dad was a wonderful dutiful man and I am so proud to be his son.

(Lights Shift)

Slide “To lose your father is to lose the one whose guidance and help you seek, who supports you like the trunk support its branches”

~Yann Martel “Life of Pi”~

(*Lights up. Jessica moves back to the onions*)

Jessica:

Okay so lets try this again. Hopefully I won't mutilate myself again. I am sorry I really didn't mean for this to be so dramatic. It's not that I don't want you to meet them... I'm just not sure that I am ready for you to meet them. That doesn't make sense.

This all just feels so grown up. It feels like... maybe I am accepting that my family is changing and that now they aren't number one anymore... you are.

And I'm not upset about that.

I am just scared to not be their number one anymore. It's like when I was little I used to cry when I would think about my brother getting married because I think my biggest fear was that he was going to marry a heinous bitch and then he'd stop talking to me.

Stop don't laugh. It's not as silly as it sounds... Fine it's a little silly. But I'm just afraid of it all changing I am afraid of leaving them, or them leaving me. Because at the end of the day all of the good stuff and all of the bad stuff is all because of them. They are part of me and I am so desperately afraid to loose that. Because I know who I am with you and I know who I am with them, and I don't know if it all fits together... They might. I just don't know

BLACKOUT SCREEN

(*Lights Shift. Voicemail Plays*)

Sean Voicemail Two: Hey Jess. Its Sean. Look, I am not sure you have anything to do tonight, but, I have some bad news. Jess, Nana died last night. Mom doesn't know yet. Dads going to tell her when she gets home from work. Just call me back K?

(*Lights Up*)

Nana:

Why are you crying?

Does it help? Crying?

If it makes you feel better, it's okay, cry.

But if it doesn't make you feel happy then you mustuunn't do it.

You should only strive for happiness.

You see this tree here?

Do you think the tree is happy?

(*Tongue click*)

Then why aren't you happy?

The tree has lived for carroors of years.

You have to live only one carror.

The tree has seen so many changes. Seen so many friends so many families.

You only have one. Why are you unhappy then?

If the tree can be happy then you have to be happy too.

Change is such a small thing. Everyone does it. First you are new baby, and then you are fun baby, then you are teenager, then you are adult, and then you are mother/father, then you are old like me and when you are old like me you are ready to be a new baby again. Simple

So you must not cry. Its okay. Everything is okay.

(Lights shift)

Slide One: Two Men In Jump Suits

Slide Two: A Smiling man and Woman

(Lights back up on the full stage.)

Jessica:

Okay, so that is everything. Now we just wait. Let it all simmer up and, fingers crossed it won't be a disaster. Not that it really could be. I followed the recipe to a T. And you were there to help. I think maybe, just maybe this time will be Gastroenteritis free. *(Pats her stomach)*

I really love you... you know that right? And I love them. So I know this can't be a bad thing.

(Door bell rings. Jessica looks at the audience and says with a straight face.)

Jessica:

But, you do realize if they don't like you I am going to dump you right?

(She breaks into a broad smile as the lights go down)

(After a moment lights come back up and Jessica prepare to take her bow. Then the song 'Yeh Ladka Hai Allah' from the movie 'Khabhi Khushi Khabhi Ghum' begins to play. A large surprise Bollywood number ensues. Planted members of the audience jump up and run on stage. They put on the items of clothing that Jessica was wearing when she played the other characters. They begin a fun choreographed number. Jessica is at first reluctant to partake but then gives in and joins in the fun. They encourage the audience to join as well.

CHAPTER 7: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE PROCESS

The MFA thesis showcase was presented the week of January 15 – January 20th 2013. Each of my classmates were given two opportunities to perform the show. **Curry Bowl** was performed January 17th at 7:30 pm and January 19th at 7:30pm. I performed in tandem with my fellow MFA Nicholas Hamel. He performed his one-person show **Turkey Boys** directly before my performance of **Curry Bowl**.

The rehearsal process for **Curry Bowl** took place the week after Christmas holiday ended. I was given a week and a half to rehearse, tech, and mount my show. The expectation of our faculty was that we would return from Christmas break with our lines memorized, and a brief idea of how we wanted to execute our show. During rehearsal week I met with two of my professors, George Judy and Joanna Battles, twice. George served as my director, and Joanna served as vocal coach and dialect coach. At my faculty rehearsal George, Joanna and I worked through moments in the script that needed clearing up. In general, many of my notes consisted of slight adjustments to my text, as well as physical and vocal clarification of a few of my characters. We also worked on my emotional arc, while addressing my fiancée. In the initial rehearsal it was easy for me to get caught up in the chaotic nature of my writing, and end up delivering those monologue in a ‘one-note’ fashion. Because the faculty’s limited availability, I relayed heavily on the guidance of one of my classmates, Jason Bayle, for assistance during my outside rehearsal. Jason is not only a gifted performer, but he also has a great directorial eye. He continually encouraged me to remember that the most important part of executing my performance was remembering that I knew the material as well as anyone could, because I had lived it.

The final step of my rehearsal process was to try to solidify the ending of my play. I wanted to mimic the theatrical and colorful endings of many Bollywood movies, so I enlisted the help of an LSU undergraduate choreographer Rachel Vierck. Rachel and I corresponded several times during the month of December and I shared with her the music I was hoping to use. She then put together a one minute dance piece that was performed by seven LSU students, 6 of whom were undergraduate students and one PHD candidate. The dancers sat in the audience for my show, and as I was taking my final bow, jumped up, and joined me on stage for a rather silly, but very celebratory, final number.

The first evening of performance, my biggest concern was the ability to juggle my own anxiety and nerves. The process of mounting all eleven shows proved much more stressful and hectic than initially expected. Because there was so many shows to produce in one week, all eleven of my classmates and I where given the responsibility to assist each other with the technical elements of each show. This meant that for many of us we where running and managing, as many as nine shows, as well as worrying about the performance elements of our own pieces. The execution of the performance was truly an ensemble effort. In an ideal world, I would have preferred not to have to deal with these other stresses, but in an academic setting, this seemed like the only option.

On the second evening, my fear of failures was quieted by my success of my first performance. One of my greatest accomplishments in the writing of the piece, was setting up a situation where the audience was truly my scene partner. During this second performance, when I delivered the monologue to my fiancée, I was truly able to play off of the audiences reaction. As an actor, my hope is to always be as present and as engaged as possible, and with an animated and truly supportive crowd, it was very easy to achieve that goal. It was also a great honor to perform the piece for my mother and father who were in the audience that night. There is a very

particular kind of thrill I get from a great night of performance and Saturday, January 19 2013 was one of those nights.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The response following my show was very encouraging and positive. The most meaningful feedback came from the members of my family that made it to see the show. I was nervous to hear their reactions to my candid, and sometimes unflattering, discussion of them in such a public way, but they thoroughly enjoyed it. My long time mentor and singing teacher described the show as '[a] culmination of all [my] creativity, craft, courage, consciousness and confidence'. I have yet to have any formal feedback from my advising faculty about the show, but I believe their critique will come later in the semester as our course load lessens.

I hope to revisit **Curry Bowl** again in the future. Currently, I have sent the script off to a great friend of mine, Simon Mallet. Simon is the artistic director of the Canadian theatre company, Downstage Theatre. Downstage is located in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and specializes in developing and performing new works of theatre. I look forward to hearing his feedback on the piece, and eventually I do hope that **Curry Bowl** will find a home on the Downstage Theatre stage. I have also begun looking into various fringe festivals across the United States with the ultimate goal of being able to raise the funds to go to the New York or Chicago Fringe Festival.

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VITA

Jessica Jain was born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and raised all over the world including Yemen, Cyprus, but considers Calgary her home. She graduated from Bishop Carroll Senior High School in Calgary. Bishop Carroll was a progressive education high school that operated with a constructivist model of student-centered learning. She attended The University of Calgary, and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts In 2009. While attending the University of Calgary she received a prestigious 'One Yellow Rabbit' performance creation residency. During this residency, she worked with the 'One Yellow Rabbit' performing ensemble, which included famed performance creation artist Denise Clarke. She also worked the esteemed Canadian director Jeanette Lamermott Morey, on a production of *The Thebans*. Upon graduation Jessica moved to Texas where she starred in the Dallas Children's Theatre production of '**Junie B Jones and a Little Monkey Business**'. In the fall of 2010, she began the MFA program at Louisiana State University. While at LSU, she starred in several Swine Palace and LSU Theatre Productions, including **The Metal Children, August Osage County, Pride and Prejudice, A Freeman Of Color** and **All the Kings Men**. She also had a small role in the Universal Pictures motion picture **Pitch Perfect**. After graduating, she hopes to move to New York City and continue her career as an actress.