

ACT I

SCENE 1

The stage should feel like two divided sections. SR is an apartment in New York. SL is a house in Punjab. However it is decorated, everything on the stage is white. It should have an unrealistic, sterile quality.

The Ronald Reagan interview with the Soviet Union press is projected on the set. The year is 1988.

The projection fades out as lights come up on LIZ, SR. She is 25 years old, currently. She is heavy and very pretty. A bit of an edge, which she rarely lets out. She is timid and apologetic. She goes to the answering machine and hits the button.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hello. Today is November 1st, 1988. You have six messages.

The answering machine "Beeps".

MOTHER

Liz, I'm so sorry. I never thought he was a good person.

FATHER

(Screaming, in the background.) He was a jerk! He didn't even like Jerry Lewis! Remember that fight we had?

MOTHER

Not everyone likes Jerry Lewis, Ray!

FATHER

If you had muscular dystrophy *right now*, you'd appreciate him, I'd bet. You'd *love* him!

MOTHER

Doing the special is not a reason to like Jerry Lewis!

FATHER

Yes, it is! Of course it is! Of course! He's a great man! If you *don't* like him, well, *you're* the one with the problem!

MOTHER

Ray, I am ON THE PHONE! Call me back, Liz.

This is your Mother, by the way.

FATHER

And your Father!

The answering machine "Beeps".

TODD

Hi, Liz

It's Todd. Listen, I'm not going to say that what I did was right. No, I did something terrible. I know that. I just think I'm ready to admit that, yes, I'm a workaholic. And a possible sexaholic. And yes, I met her (no, I'm not going to say her name) at work. And yes, it was a "*work emergency*." And work is a place that makes me feel powerful. And yes, that's my fault. Feeling powerful is my fault. I know you need closure. Anyway, call me back and just...let me know that -

The answering machine "Beeps".

MEREDITH

Liz, it's Mary. What the hell was a work emergency? He's a swim instructor for children. Listen, I called because I don't want you to forget that you're babysitting Rachel on Friday night. And, if you could, give her a little "scared straight" routine about men and how they're all awful. She says she already has a boyfriend. I mean, she's ten. It's some pen pal she has in Switzerland. She says his name is Matthew, which, I'm sure is *not* his real name and he's from a town called Thun. And she wants to meet him. I'm sure he's really, like, forty years old and an inmate at Rikers.

The answering machine "Beeps".

MEREDITH

But if this "Matthew" *is* the same age, we think, Mike and I, we just want her to meet a boy from *here*. Doesn't even have to be New York. It could be anywhere. Just...why Switzerland, right? That not I'm elitist about Americans. I mean, I'm as patriotic as the next gal.

I don't know why I said that. It sounds weird, right? Like I'm totally channeling Reagan, right?

It's just kind of...why -

The answering machine "Beeps".

MEREDITH

I think I got cut off again. Anyway...sorry about Todd. He was a piece of shit. If you want the number to that therapist I told you about...for any reason...you know, I think he might be single, too. Not that that's the reason that you should go to therapy. Not that I would *know* the reason that you should go to therapy. Or *say* it.

Anyway, the number is 212-4 -

The answering machine "Beeps".

ANSWERING MACHINE

End of tape. Mailbox full. Please delete these messages or replace the cassette.

Blackout.

SCENE 2

Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India's Independence Day Speech is projected on the set. The year is 1989.

Lights come up on BALWANT, a handsome and weatherworn Indian man, currently 39 years old. He is on the phone with his cousin, SATINDAR, a young Indian man, about 25. SATINDAR and BALWANT should speak in both Hindi and English, with subtitles being displayed on various objects on the stage.

SATINDAR

Balwant, you are wasting your time. Punjab is changing. All of India is changing! And you should change with it! It is getting more expensive every day. America is the land of opportunity, and nowhere is that clearer than in New York! People are just itching to *give* you money, *yaar*! Strike while the iron is hot!

BALWANT

I know nothing about America, Satindar.

SATINDAR

Empire State Building. Madonna. The Yankees. That's all you need to know.

BALWANT

I know *here*. I know *Punjab*. I know our *family*. Who you don't even see anymore!

SATINDAR

I send money home! My mother lives very well. You see her. Does she look unhappy? No. She wears the best clothes. I pay for it! She has jewelry. I pay for it! She eats well. She has a phone, which I call her on, every day. She is spoiled by me. And *you*! You have a *son*! When he asks you for something, what will you tell him? "We are too poor, but we have each other." "We have Rani's cooking!" "We have this bedroom that we all share!"

BALWANT

I have *two* sons, Satindar. I was blessed with twins.

SATINDAR

Abey yaar! You were *curse*d with twins, Balwant! Children are expensive! Having a life worth-while is expensive! I'm trying to help you. [*Do not make a hole in the plate you eat from!*]

BALWANT

I don't even speak English.

SATINDAR

You can learn. It's simple.

BALWANT

Is it?

SATINDAR

Yes!

BALWANT

Really?

SATINDAR

No.

BALWANT

And what will I do, once I'm there? Hmm? I have a life *here!* I work *here!*

SATINDAR

You're a farmer, man! You're just like every other person in Punjab...poor and getting poorer. You're not an executive. You're not rich. You're not Gordon Gekko! You're Balwant Singh!

BALWANT

I have no idea who Gordon Gekko is.

SATINDAR

He is very rich, very cool and has great hair.

BALWANT

You want me to come to America because of some sort of lizard with great hair?

SATINDAR

No. It's...nevermind. I want you to come here because it is a great opportunity for you. And your family. That's why. It's like the song, "If you can make it there, you'll make it anywhere, it's up to you! New York! New York!"

BALWANT

Yes. *If!* If you can make it there. Not, *I guarantee* you'll make it there. And when he says, "you'll make it *anywhere,*" I don't think he means Punjab.

SATINDAR

There are no guarantees. Of course it's part gamble. But I could get you a job at the car wash I work at. And you could work your way up. Or, get another job. Or not. Maybe you'll end up being the househusband to a very lonely, grateful, big-breasted American woman.

BALWANT

Why is she big-breasted?

SATINDAR

They all are here. They love big breasts. Everything's bigger here. Big cars, big salaries, big breasts.

BALWANT

Big waste of time, Satindar.

SATINDAR

Today, I just wash cars. Tomorrow, I could be *driving* a car. Four years from now, I'll have enough money saved to go to college. College in America! Then, a job in an office! That's how it works here, *yaar*! Anything is possible!

BALWANT

This is easy for you. You are younger than me. You had no wife. You had no children. You had only your mother and sister. You had less to lose.

SATINDAR

But look how much I've gained! And there's more coming. And it could be coming to you, too! But it's not *there*. It's *here*.

BALWANT

I wouldn't even know how to start.

SATINDAR

You could do what I did.

BALWANT

(Quickly) No.

SATINDAR

Get married.

BALWANT

I *am* married.

SATINDAR

So am I.

BALWANT

But yours is a fake marriage.

SATINDAR

Don't be a prude, Balwant.

BALWANT

I'm not being a prude. I'm being a realist. And in this reality, it's a fake marriage.

SATINDAR

Okay. Well then, don't be an *asshole*. That's how it's done. You meet someone...a pen pal. The world is full of lonely people. There's an agent I can connect you with. You write to this person. Something simple at first. Something he can send out to his company. And he'll connect you with someone specific. Someone here. Someone in New York. Some woman. Just write something. Something simple. "Hello. I am Balwant, a rich, sexy Indian man and would love to show you all of the pleasures of the body."

BALWANT

I am not saying that.

SATINDAR

Fine! Then, stay single!

The phone hangs up. BALWANT begins to write a letter.

BALWANT

Namaste. My name is Balwant.

He "crumples up the letter" and starts a new one.

Namaste. My name is Balwant, I am a farmer from Punjab and I am interested in meeting someone new. As my mother used to say, "if you're not *making* friends, you're *losing* them."

However, she's dead, now, so, she knows loss better than anyone.

He "crumples up the letter" and starts a new one.

Namaste. My name is Balwant and I am from Punjab. I have two sons, twins, who are too young to be called *ungrateful*, but I know it is coming. I have a wife, who is such a stereotype, she might as well be a cartoon. The apartment we live in is so small, we roll out beds to sleep every night and roll them back up in the morning. I have not gotten a good night's sleep since 1985. When I *do* sleep, I dream of the life that I *already* have. I am just now realizing...I only have nightmares.

He “crumples up the letter” and starts a new one.

Namaste. I am Balwant and I am *stuck*. I am stuck in my life. I am stuck in my job. I am stuck in my status. I would love more space, room to stretch, the freedom to become *something*.

He “crumples up the letter” and starts a new one.

Namaste. I am Balwant. I am thirty-nine years old. I hope that you write me back.

The lights fade on stage.

SCENE 3

A projection of a children's program takes over the stage. A man in a colorful captain's uniform speaks to the camera as a fanfare plays.

CAPTAIN ABE

Wow! What a day we had, kids! (*Audience screams*) Before we say *goodbye*, though, let's say *hello* to our pen pals across the globe! Today's letter comes all the way from China! Fei writes, 'Hello, Captain Abe! How are you? How is America? I live in a small town called Hemu. It is in China. My cousin lives in San Francisco. I love you and have a good day!' Well, Fei, it is always great to hear from people all over the world! We're pretty far from your cousin in San Francisco, but I'm sure he's watching right now and is happy to see you doing well! Remember kids, if you want to get your *own* pen pal, just write to PenPal, Inc. 2448 Jefferson Blvd, Washington, D.C. 20019 and they'll set you up with a brand-new best friend! Well, that's all the time we have today kids! (*Audience moans*) Awww, don't be sad! Remember, when it rains it just makes it easier to –

The program blacks out with a snap. Lights come up on SR. LIZ is writing a letter.

LIZ

Hello. My name is Liz.

She "crumples up the letter" and starts a new one.

Hello. I'm Liz and I'm interested in meeting new people, since my boyfriend, Todd, left me. Being single is...I don't know...I guess lonely...and lonely is really just scary.

She "crumples up the letter" and starts a new one.

Hello. I'm Liz and I'm jealous of my ten year old niece because she has a pen pal that she says is her boyfriend and I'm just a stupid customer service rep in New York and it's a city of seven and a half million people and if half of them are men, that's still about three and a half million men and even if half of them are already married, well, that makes about two million single men and even if a quarter of them are homeless, well, that still makes about one and a half million eligible men and I'm not even *opposed* to dating homeless men at this point and I'm still single!

She "crumples up the letter" and starts a new one.

Hello. I'm Liz and I'm interested in meeting a pen pal. I found this company from when I was watching a children's show when I was babysitting my niece. So, this might be for children only. I am *not* interested in meeting children. I'm not creepy or anything. I have never done this before, or anything. I've never put myself out there like this. Do you have an adult's program where other interested adults can meet? Again, I'm not interested in meeting children. I'm looking to meet others who are as lonely as me. Again, no children please.

She "crumples up the letter" and starts a new one.

Hello. I'm Liz. I'm interested in meeting a pen pal. I am twenty-five years old. Thank you for reading. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

A formal response letter is projected on the stage.

MARK

(*V.O.*) Hello. Thank you for contacting PenPal, Inc. We have reviewed your letter and are sending it out into the world! We hope you enjoy connecting with people across the globe! Remember, always believe that long distance relationships can get much shorter through friendship! Mark Sutton, PenPal, Inc. Agent.

The lights fade on stage.