

EAT WHAT YOU KILL

Written by

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FADE IN

INT. CAR - DAY

Middle-aged disheveled doctor, SONI SHAH (40s), in scrubs and a winter coat scrutinizes a crumpled sheet of paper which displays a list of *PHARMACY STORES* and their addresses. Many have checkmarks beside their names.

SONI
(to camera)
My better half believes that only
good things happen to good
people...

She checks off the pharmacy *City Drug*, exits car into a rough neighborhood, and fades in front of the *City Drug* pharmacy.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Scattered pills lay across a prescription pad on a nightstand. Various pill bottles and a spilled bottle of wine are difficult to overlook. Wine drips onto a fallen framed photo of Soni's husband and daughter.

Soni in scrubs, lies on her un-made, king bed staring at the ceiling. The elegant, antique ceiling fan spins.

She rolls to her side and bumps her cell phone to the ground.

SONI
(to camera)
Fuck the universe.

The phone vibrates from her best friend's call and the display reads *missed call AMEERA GAAR 9:30PM*.

She pours a handful of pills from various bottles into her mouth, gulps liquor from an open bottle while dropping pills along the way. Then she repeats, and lays back down as her eyes dart behind closed lids.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SONI'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE BEGINS, AUDIO ONLY ON BLACK SCREEN)

Dark, smelly patient room.

SONI
Hello? Is anyone there?

POUNDING. VENTILATOR ALARMS BEEPING. Male PATIENT calls to her.

PATIENT
(hypnotizing deep voice)
Help. Help me. Help. Help me
please. Help. Help me. Help. Help
me please.

SONI
I'm coming. I got you. The
ventilator tube is out! Help me
remove the blanket from your face.

GASP. STRUGGLE.

SONI (CONT'D)
No. No!

SLASH from a knife. Soni SCREAMS.

AUDIO ONLY ENDS.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Seated medical graduating CLASS of 2003 dressed in caps and gowns and an AUDIENCE sit in anticipation of the future. A SPEAKER at a podium with ALUMNI seated in a row.

A youthful Soni (mid-20s) in cap and gown readies to meet the world, listening with earnestness to a passionate commencement speech. She grins at her smart, confident, beautiful, empathetic (but will tell you how it is) best friend, AMEERA GAAR (late-20S), sitting near her.

Ameera winks at her.

Soni smiles at Ameera and winks back.

AMEERA GAAR
(whispers)
Don't forget intakes are no longer
than five minutes, yes/no answers
only. If the patient thinks about
steering away --

Ameera chuckles and puts up the "talk to the hand" gesture.

Soni jolts at the sound of her name, Dr. Soni Shah. She straightens her slouched shoulders, shakes multiple hands, and accepts the diploma, smiling non-stop till her seat.

She looks out at her aging, stern mother, UMA SHAH (60s), teary eyed, proud, short, bald father, DR. RAGHU SHAH (60s), self-assured big sister PRITHI SHAH by a few years, and fiancée, MANU SHAH (late 20s), medical researcher and professor who cannot help but notice how others judge him.

She locks eyes with her father.

He has a wistful look and gives her a thumbs up.

Soni twirls a bit of her hair and sniffs it as her smile fades away. Ameera glances at Soni with a smile.

AMEERA GAAR (CONT'D)
Chica, you stink!

Her hair drops.

AMEERA GAAR (CONT'D)
We should be paid for our
permanent, formaldehyde-ridden B.O!

Ameera laughs at her own joke.

Soni sniffs her hair and smiles.

SONI
I flicked cadaver guts from my
Netter's book into your carpet.

AMEERA GAAR
That's messed up!

Ameera waves at her family in the audience, losing track of what Soni says. Soni looks at her hands with some misgivings.

SONI
(to Ameera)
Why didn't I find out her name?
Even Cabbage Patch Dolls come with
some info...

Nobody listens. Soni returns to sniffing her hair.

INT. MEDICAL SCHOOL BANQUET HALL - DAY

Lots of PEOPLE, including family and friends, gather around small round tables making toasts and congratulating the GRADUATES with gifts and flowers.

Soni searches amongst the crowd.

Her hand is grabbed. Her fiancé, tall, dark and handsome British Indian guy Manu Shah, pulls her toward her family and friends who have gathered.

MANU
(British accent)
We've been looking for you, Dr.
Shah!

Soni smiles at him and approaches the group. Ameera jostles her way to the front of the group.

AMEERA
Me first! Congrats BFF.

Ameera presents Soni with a gift. Soni opens the box and takes out a T-shirt. They bust up laughing.

SONI
(reads T-shirt)
Don't ask me, ask your primary!
Class of 2003

Soni high-fives Ameera.

SONI (CONT'D)
No more being dumped on. Neurology,
here I come!

MANU
(to Soni)
There is something for you too, my
love, my fiancé.

She anticipates with a big smile.

MANU (CONT'D)
With residency starting in a few
weeks, here's a little something
for your white coat.

He digs out a small box from his pocket.

She opens to find a colorful hot air balloon lapel pin shaped like a brain. Soni tears up and hugs him.

AMEERA
(to Manu)
It's perfect!

Raghu inches his way to Soni.

RAGHU
 (thick Indian accent)
 Papa's turn?

Raghu hugs a teary-eyed Soni and holds her hands in his.

RAGHU (CONT'D)
 (to Soni)
 I wasn't worried years ago when my
 medical practice shut down..skin
 color too dark..moved to New York.
 You know why... You will do what I
 could not --

Hurt in his eyes, he smiles at her with fulfillment. Soni smothers him with another hug.

EXT. URBAN HOSPITAL NYC - DAY

PAGER DISPLAY: RESIDENT DOCTOR COUNTY HOSPITAL 2003

Poor people loiter around an old urban county hospital courtyard. Some hold conversations with themselves. Smoke clouds float. Many appear homeless. No healthy plants are seen. Litter peppers the ground. Stone sculpture fountain is with an *Out of Order* sign.

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL NYC RESIDENT WORKROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside this building, through the winding, long, dark corridors and puke, yellow walls that haven't been painted since the 1970s, a door opens to the resident workroom.

A tall, blonde resident doctor, handsome when cleaned up, strolls in with his white coat and wad of chew under his lip. He enters the small resident workroom, chart in hand. This is TILL SUTTON (late 20s), Southern charmer from Louisiana.

TILL
 (to Soni)
 Residency is like a brutal chili
 pepper eating contest that's sort
 of addictive. Pushed to the edge
 with an adrenaline rush, and if you
 break... well. But if you win, you
 move to the next round.

Soni ignores him, types at the computer, reaches for a pen without thinking and nearly knocks over his spit cup.

She grabs the stained open cup, peers in, sniffs and frowns. She leans towards the garbage can to toss it when Till alarms.

TILL SUTTON

You tellin' that you neva' seen a spit cup befo'? Betta' get used to it, as you and me are partnered up on the resident schedule.

He puts his arm around her with a big grin. Soni squeezes out a smile and places the cup back.

Dark saliva builds up in the corners of his mouth and lower lip bulges. He rambles on with chew almost popping out of his mouth.

TILL SUTTON (CONT'D)

I got ya back, roomy. Relax. Just be you.

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL CALL ROOM - NIGHT

Not showered in days with blue scrubs looking brown, Soni's lip starts to quiver and her eyes well up. Voices in her head play, from a female Russian PHLEBOTOMIST, FEMALE NURSE with strong New York accent, and young male RESIDENT.

PHLEBOTOMIST (V.O.)

(Russian accent)

Blood? Go get yourself.
Resident doctors do blood, lines, orders, paperwork, transporting patients. If I say the patient was unavailable, he was unavailable!

FEMALE NURSE (V.O.)

She doesn't know IVs. Some doctor!

RESIDENT (V.O.)

Locked in stairwell after hours!
Pounded on the door until an aide finally let her out!

Soni yells with outstretched arms at the sight of her hole in the wall call room, a 1970s dirty bathroom with open plumbing and a small mattress on the ground.

She blinks several times at the gaping crater in the ceiling with what looks like black mold.

Till pokes his head in.

TILL

I thought that was -

He swaggers in.

TILL (CONT'D)
Ya look like shit, kind of like
this room. I know just what you
need.

Till's eyes twinkle with excitement. Their hands tug.

SONI
Where we going? I'm tired.

TILL
Come on, live a little!

EXT. ROOFTOP OF URBAN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Till holds open rooftop metal door for Soni. She steps out,
breathless from the stairs.

SONI
What the hell! How did you get
access? The director said --

TILL
Has anyone ever told you have too
much moral compass?

SONI
Well uh...

Till leads her to the edge of the rooftop.

TILL
Look at that!

Breathtaking view of NYC lights, moonlight on the river, and
skyscrapers.

SONI
Whoa!

TILL
I've dreamed of this, ever since I
was a little kid in Louisiana.

SONI
New York?

TILL
To be a city slicker, like in the
movies...wealthy, fancy car, suit,
pent-house, fluffy white dog -

SONI

Your chew is kind of growing on me.
I wouldn't want you to change.

He chuckles.

TILL

All my life, I've been made fun of -
my drawl or me ordering food at a
restaurant like gumbo, fried
chicken, chitlins and greens -

SONI

They have that?

TILL

I didn't grow up with much, Soni.
My home is in a run down trailer
park neighborhood. Don't tell
anybody.

SONI

Your parents were probably thrilled
to hear that you were going to med
school.

TILL

Thrilled? Our church had a hoedown
for me to celebrate! Preacher "Do
Si Do'd" with my Ma!

SONI

See, you don't have to change.

TILL

No Soni. I want more... I want to
fit in - family to be respected.

He gestures to a lit apartment in a high-rise building.

TILL (CONT'D)

To be one of them... What about
you? Back there?

SONI

You saw that?

Soni makes face and bites nail.

SONI (CONT'D)

I'm ready for the next round. If
you can't take the heat, stay out
of the kitchen!

Till throws his arm around her.

SONI (CONT'D)
Come here, lil sis.

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL PATIENT ROOM - EARLY NEXT MORNING

Soni's body shakes from side to side with her eyes closed in bed. She tugs the covers with her hand, but meets resistance.

NURSE TARA (O.S.)
Room is for patients! I will call security if I find you here. I have to clean all over again!

She shivers, strains her heavy eyes and opens up them on the nurse's name badge.

SONI
Please, nurse... Tara, is it? Let me sleep. What time is it?

NURSE TARA (O.S.)
5:30 in the morning!

SONI
I'm allergic to my call room!

Soni fake sneezes a few times, blinks hard to make her eyes water, and looks up for sympathy. She pulls the sheets up to cover her.

The sheet rips out from her grasp.

Disillusioned Soni grabs her white coat laying on the bed and rushes out of the room.

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Soni stumbles, quickens her pace and then stops at the phlebotomy cart. Soni puts her hands up in the prayer position and begs.

PHLEBOTOMIST (O.S.)
OK, watch. One time! I could get in trouble. Need to talk to the nurse first.

Soni lets out a breath and smiles with relief.

She looks around and hums. A few empty blood tubes, tourniquet, needles, and alcohol swabs fade into her white coat pocket.

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL STAIRWELL - LATER THAT MORNING

Bulging white coat pocket hustles up a stairwell with tubes clanging and tourniquet hanging. Soni topples over Till Sutton, co-resident.

TILL SUTTON

Hiya, Soni! Ya betta' slow down, girl!

SONI

Gotta get blood - (trails off)
should have been done days ago!

INT. HOSPITAL PRISON WARD - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

Armed, strong, male police GUARDS open a double security bar gate for her. GUARD with a rough voice escorts her.

GUARD

Back again, doc?

SONI

You expect care to be any different?

Guard nods and shrugs to himself. PRISONERS in orange shout and whistle behind bars in cells.

She stops in front of a cell and stares at a former GANG MEMBER (30s), paralyzed from the waist down, tattoos, missing teeth, chained to a bed with an ankle bracelet.

Guard unlocks the cell.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to the Guard)

Same piss-filled laundered sheets!
They are people too.

Guard mocks her and rolls his eyes.

She steps in, whips out equipment from her pocket, puts on latex gloves.

SONI (CONT'D)

Your veins are impossible!

She grabs a larger needle, and unwraps it from the packaging..

She holds the needle in one hand, pulls his pants lower, and feels for a pulse in his groin with the other.

GANG MEMBER

I don't know if you're my type.

SONI

I have to go for the groin.

GANG MEMBER

You've done before, right?

She fumbles with the needle and considers her terrified patient.

TILL (V.O.)

Good way of gettin' blood, Soni, is an easy peasy fem' stick. Palpate the femoral pulse, but whateva' ya do, don't hit nerve and stab!

She takes a big breath and closes her eyes while the sweat on her forehead drips. She clenches the needle and stabs. He hollers.

The tube fills up with blood.

She smiles with pride.

SONI

(to self)

Call me Chili Queen! Thank you, Till!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY FOUR YEARS LATER
(2007)

Soni types at computer and checks time and date in right lower screen corner: 11:30 AM 6/1/2007. CLICK of TV remote turns it on.

She glances at the TV, the Oprah show. SHIRLY, Middle-aged, obese female patient watches the show and cannot be interrupted.

SONI

Shirly?

SHIRLY

My show's on.

SONI
It's time to exam--

Shirly turns up volume.

SONI (CONT'D)
(hollers)
5 more minutes!

Soni takes remote. Volume decreases.

SONI (CONT'D)
(to Shirly)
My friend Till was on Oprah last
week.

Soni gestures to TV.

SONI (CONT'D)
A John Doe was admitted. He matched
him up to a wanted criminal on
America's Most Wanted!

SHIRLY
Really?

Soni smiles with pride.

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL RESIDENT WORKROOM - DAY

Soni slumps in a chair at a computer.

A gun show magazine is at Till's empty work station. She reaches over to grab it and begins thumbing through the pages when she stops on an ad to read closer.

SONI
Shooting range?

Shakes her head and tosses the magazine back over to his messy workspace, just missing the spit cup. She glares at the cup.

SONI (CONT'D)
(to self)
Get used to that thing?

She sighs and looks at the door, expecting it to open any second with Till. A young MALE NURSE pops his head in.

MALE NURSE
Dr. Shah, you cover Dr. Sutton's
clinic again today.

SONI
 (to Male Nurse)
 You gotta be kidding me! Where is
 that guy?

Male nurse shrugs with chart in hand.

MALE NURSE
 Hasn't shown up for two days.

SONI
 Skips his last week. Tries to be
 from the city..drives me nuts.

She bites lip and shakes head.

SONI (CONT'D)
 I bet partying it up - laughing his
 head off. Chart?

INT. URBAN HOSPITAL PATIENT ROOM - SAME DAY

Soni CLICKS TV remote. TV turns off. She approaches Shirly's
 bedside. Shirly crosses her arms and gives a "not you again"
 look.

SONI
 (to Shirly)
 Today's my last day of residency.

SHIRLY
 That's great doc, but it's time for
 my show!

Soni smiles with pride and then looks away, smile fading.

SONI
 Till got me through...(a beat) I
 just got this.

Soni whips out a postcard from her pocket, displaying an
 image of the French Quarter and passes it to Shirly.

SONI (CONT'D)
 French Quarter in New Orleans.

Shirly quickly flips it over and reads...

SHIRLY
 Drink milk only if you need to bow
 out. You got this! Till

Shirly scrunches eyebrows confused.

SONI
 Inside joke.

EXT. BACKYARD PLAYSET - DUSK - ONE YEAR LATER

Soni, with a few more gray hairs, plays in a sandbox with her infant daughter, ADITI (nine months old), on a sunny day. Soni makes silly faces at her baby while she pours water from a bucket onto the sand. SPLASH.

CLICK, CLICK. Manu takes pictures of them.

SONI (CONT'D)
 Baby girl plays - No rules, pure freedom! But someone's got to make dinner. Stay out with papa.

Soni gets up. Aditi whimpers. Soni swoops her up and kisses her.

SONI (CONT'D)
 My Aditi..I'll never leave you.

Manu, with a camera hanging around his neck, takes Aditi into his arms.

MANU
 Let us make you dinner. You have to ready for your job tomorrow, Dr. Soni Shah, Assistant Professor of Neurology and Sleep Medicine.

Soni half-smiles, turns away, and picks at her dirty hands. Manu smiles and bounces Aditi in arms.

MANU (CONT'D)
 What you want? Chicken, pasta, fish? Hello? Earth to Soni?

FLASHBACK INT. DOCTOR'S PRIVATE PRACTICE OFFICE - DAY

1990s - Soni's memory

Door bells JINGLE. Soni, a kid, giggles to herself and walks passed a full waiting room of PATIENTS (various ages). She exaggerates her hunched posture from the weight of her heavy backpack and makes her way to her father in the back. The patients have a similar appearance of shared relations, seen in Southern Illinois.

INT. DR RAGHU SHAH'S PRIVATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Raghu Shah and Uma Shah huddle over the desk and talk about a letter received by the state. Soni stands and listens at doorway, not noticed by parents. Her smile diminishes.

RAGHU SHAH

Crazy racist people..they make up to run me out. I am 1 of 2 family practice doctors. Who will take care of this town?

UMA SHAH

(mild Indian accent)

Unbelievable. An undercover agent as a patient?

Backpack drops with THUD.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Manu taps Soni's shoulder.

SONI

..but what if like papa, I don't fit in? He wanted to help - to be accepted --

MANU

You can tackle anything that comes your way..sleep fellowship, baby.

Manu reaches his arm and turns her towards him.

MANU (CONT'D)

I might seem perfect --

He chuckles at the thought.

MANU (CONT'D)

There was a time in grad school, I felt inadequate... a minor mistake lost the grant that we worked years to get.

He clenches jaw.

MANU (CONT'D)

And that's when I decided that nothing is worthwhile, unless it is perfect.

A smirk flashes on his face.

MANU (CONT'D)

You, my love, are already there -
perfect. Just be you.

Soni chuckles.

SONI

You know who you sound like?

He kisses her on cheek and heads toward house. Soni turns and contemplates upon the sunset. Her phone vibrates with text from Ameera.

AMEERA GAAR

Thinking of you. Good luck!

INT. SLEEP CLINIC - DAY

PAGER DISPLAY: ATTENDING ACADEMIC SLEEP CLINIC 2008

A handful of young MEDICAL STUDENTS (early 20s), including a NERDY MED STUDENT, mill about in a spacious, window-rich physician work room with computers. They stand at attention around a RESIDENT (mid 20s) in a semicircle.

Insecure, unlikeable though he tries, DR. MOUSTAFA BASHIR (50s), with his characteristic slow, deep, monotonous voice, sits in front of the group, fidgets in his chair and sighs. His diagnosis of narcolepsy offsets his inadequacies as a person and as a doctor.

NERDY MEDICAL STUDENT

Excuse me, Dr. Bashir. Y-You mentioned narcolepsy - could you tell us more?

Dr. Bashir glares at the medical student who dared to put him on the spot to teach him something, as medical knowledge details do not come easy to him. He pulls out a nail clipper from his pocket. CLIP. CLIP. Nail clippings fly.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

You don't know what narcolepsy is?
You sleep too much. Okay?

Nerdy Medical Student looks down, embarrassed. Soni overhears and clears her throat. She unclenches fist and musters up the courage to speak to the group.

SONI

Actually, narcolepsy is a chronic disorder with five symptoms.

Soni counts on her fingers as she rattles off each symptom.

SONI (CONT'D)

Cataplexy, a brief loss of muscle tone. Hallucinations falling asleep or upon waking. Excessive daytime sleepiness, as Dr. Bashir mentioned. Sleep paralysis. Disrupted nighttime sleep. All five symptoms do not need to be present. Does that help?

Nerdy Medical Student's face lights up as do all the other medical students, impressed.

Soni smiles.

Dr. Bashir narrows eyes at his competitor to take down.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

(to group)

This is Dr. Soni Shah, junior faculty in the sleep clinic.

Soni half smiles, waves, and quickly returns back to typing on the computer.

Intimidated trainees breathe a sigh of relief and smile.

DR. MARCEL MICKELSON (60s), politically savvy, world-renowned sleep medicine expert, is a lanky man with a commanding voice, boisterous presence, and an eye for squashing the competition.

His peculiar matching hair style - ironed out, shoulder length gray hair, while Dr. Bashir's is black - woos his lone companion.

Dr. Mickelson enters the room with a hearty laugh and greets Dr. Bashir.

MARCEL MICKELSON

Moustafa! You look ruffled! Is Dr. Shah giving you a run for your money?

He hugs Dr. Bashir a bit too long. It raises some eyebrows. Dr. Bashir eats up his attention, while others see right through it.

Dr. Bashir blushes and smiles.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

She kind of is, in a good way. It's great she's here.

Dr Bashir pats Soni's shoulder. Soni smiles.

MARCEL MICKELSON

(to Dr. Bashir)

Agreed. Dr Shah will find success, like you - only sleep forensics expert in the world! You've done well - discovered a whole new field on your own.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

Yes, I know. I've been asked by lawyers to help them with their cases.

Dr. Mickelson pivots toward the group.

MARCEL MICKELSON

(to trainees and Soni)

Moustafa - I mean, Dr. Bashir - deserves your respect! He is the star medico-legal witness in which he defends a man accused of sexually molesting his 10 year-old stepdaughter, repeatedly.

Dr. Bashir stands with his nose in the air, alongside Dr. Mickelson, who rubs his shoulder.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)

(to trainees and Soni)

Moustafa testified one could not exclude a parasomnia defense, such as sexsomnia. The defendant's level of consciousness could not be verified!

Dr. Mickelson throws his arm around Dr. Bashir and squeezes.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)

(to Dr. Bashir)

Brilliant! How many men have been accused of sexual assault when, in fact, they are victims of a sleep condition?

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)

(to trainees and Soni)

You all should be honored to be in the presence of greatness!

His laugh fills the air. He gestures to Dr. Bashir.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)
 People got him wrong..about to
 kicked out of medical school for
 failing. The dean was on him. His
 father, very influential, didn't
 want anything to do with him --

Dr. Bashir, uncomfortable, shifts weight from side to side.
 He reaches into his pocket, brings out a pill bottle and pops
 a pill from it.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)
 (to Dr Bashir)
 Remember, Moustafa? Lonely times,
 for both of us. My divorce was
 right, though.

Dr. Mickelson's hand slides down to Dr. Bashir's small of his
 back and rubs in discrete, intimate way. Dr Bashir forces a
 smile, like a prostitute appeasing his drug-dealing pimp.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)
 (to trainees and Soni)
 I diagnosed him with narcolepsy and
 saved him. And look at him now,
 shining bright.

Soni kicks in an obligatory smile and makes way to the door.

SONI
 (to self)
 A voodoo field nobody can prove or
 disprove. Brilliant.

MARCEL MICKELSON
 (to trainees)
 Rewards come to those who are
 loyal.

Dr. Mickelson's hand then tucks a strand of black hair behind
 Dr. Bashir's ear.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)
 Isn't that right, Moustafa?

Dr. Mickelson laughs at Moustafa's slight nod and strides
 passed Soni to leave. Soni moves aside to let him by.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
 Soni, pick up your pace. You need
 cover me. I'm going to be awhile...
teaching.

Dr. Bashir snorts to himself. Residents tremble like bugs yet to be squashed.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)

(to trainees)

Have you seen my energy drink collection? I collected them myself.

He points. A ridiculous number of various energy drinks rests on shelf.

Raised eyebrows and slight smiles appear on trainees' faces.

Soni side glances at him over her shoulder and rolls eyes.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Soni bumps into her prior mentor, DR. FLIN LAZARUS (late 50s), neurology and sleep department head with an oversized suit, short stature, thinning hair and mild demeanor. He is the guy who bullies love - weak and timid, though smart and competent.

SONI

Dr. Lazarus! I almost ran over a friendly face! What are you doing here in the clinic?

FLIN LAZARUS

I'm here to congratulate Moustafa, of course.

SONI

Of course.

FLIN LAZARUS

Have you found your sea legs yet?

SONI

I'm getting there.

FLIN LAZARUS

I made the right choice when I hired you. Let me know if I can do anything to help.

Dr. Lazarus hurries along.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC LOBBY AREA - SAME DAY

Several angry PATIENTS push and shove in line. An overwhelmed petite SECRETARY (30s) scrambles at front desk. A strong male RESISTIVE PATIENT's fist pounds, very close to Secretary's face.

Her eyes land on the fist, while she attends to the phone.

SECRETARY

Hold please.

All lines blink.

In haste, she presses the wrong button. DIAL TONE. She sets down the receiver and gestures to the patients that she'll be right back and rushes out with tears.

Concerned, Soni returns with her.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

Patients are calling at odd hours
of the night - requesting refills.

SONI

How can I help?

Secretary points to Resistive Patient.

SECRETARY

I called security. His refill is
not due yet.

Soni approaches Resistive Patient.

SONI

Sir, I'm Dr. Shah. We can schedule
a follow-up to address the refill --

RESISTIVE PATIENT

Hell no, I'm not leaving! I want it
now!

Resistive Patient shoves Soni and lurches towards her. Dr. Mickelson steps in between, protecting Soni.

Buff SECURITY OFFICER handcuffs the Resistive Patient and drags him away.

SONI

(to Dr. Mickelson)

What's going on? Such large doses
of stimulants. I've actually
noticed more --

MARCEL MICKELSON
Don't worry. We have our tracking
system - (hushed) code name,
"amuse" files.

He side smiles.

SONI
Is it time for those patient files
to be electronic? More accessible -
the fellows and I can take a look
and help.

Dr. Mickelson points to the plaques and award certificates on
the wall.

MARCEL MICKELSON
Our center is internationally
recognized. Moustafa and I are just
fine taking care of the files.

His laugh booms.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)
Maintained for years - decades.
Our system has been double-checked
and triple-checked!

SONI
That's a relief.

MARCEL MICKELSON
Please go back to work and stop by
nurse Cindy's office.

SONI
What for?

MARCEL MICKELSON
Script refills need signing.

SONI
I would need to see the
corresponding amuse file, at least
for the controlled substances. I-It
would be helpful as I don't know
the patients.

Dr. Mickelson's awkward tight smile fades.

INT. CINDY'S OFFICE - LATER

A post-it note sticks on top of a stack of patient charts. Post-it note displays *Scripts and amuse files. Dr. Shah to sign by the end of the day.*

She grabs a pen from her white coat. The first thick chart flops open. Soni inspects it, flips a couple pages, takes a moment to read, and gasps.

She closes the chart. Sets it and the script aside in a different pile that she does not plan to sign.

She pulls up a chair, sits, and continues to review charts.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SLEEP CLINIC WORK ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

The last chart slips off of the tall pile of charts in her "do not sign" pile. She looks at the short pile of charts and then over at the tall pile. She stares at the scripts yet to be signed and rubs her nervous stomach.

SONI
(to self)
I could lose my license.

Soni wipes a tear from her eye, and combines all the scripts into one stack.

She drums fingers, then signs the first script and looks faraway.

SONI (CONT'D)
(to self)
What would Till do?

She shakes head. Scripts are signed at a rapid pace and dwindle away.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Soni ambles by Cindy's office, coffee in hand. Her ears perk up at Drs Mickelson and Bashir's laughter coming from within..

She peeks in through the door crack and steps back in hurry.

MARCEL MICKELSON (O.S.)
Cindy, I'm done with these scripts.
Record time. Hand me another pile.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (O.S)

Me too.

MARCEL MICKELSON (O.S.)

(to Moustafa Bashir)

Let's grab breakfast after.

She edges again to the door and surveys. Her eyes burn from tears.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC WORK ROOM - SAME DAY

Soni's enthusiasm during her lecture to the medical students, residents, and sleep medicine fellow AVA MARTINEZ (late 20s) is felt in every corner of the room - to make up for her wrongs. Intelligent, empathetic, respectful, day dreamer, Ava wants to learn and make connections.

SONI

A false diagnosis of narcolepsy or hypersomnia can be formed if a patient goes into a sleep study already sleep deprived. People with narcolepsy and hypersomnia benefit from a stable dose of a stimulant as treatment. If you see the red flag...

Soni loses her train of thought and stares at the computer. Student clears her throat and Soni shakes head.

SONI (CONT'D)

Where was I?

Ava stirs.

AVA

The red flag.

SONI

If you see the red flag of an escalating stimulant dose, repeat the sleep study after an adequate amount of sleep to determine if they had a false diagnosis. If no narcolepsy is seen, gradually wean off the stimulant.

AVA

What if the patient refuses?

SONI

Educate the patient on dependence and addiction associated with the stimulant. That goes for opioids as well, which can be used for refractory restless legs syndrome.

AVA

But --

SONI

We doctors protect the patient. That's about it for today. Ava, see you in clinic later?

INT. SLEEP CLINIC WORK ROOM - SAME DAY

Soni and Ava take a seat laughing at something silly, like sisters.

SONI

(to Ava)

You forgot to mention this in your presentation!

AVA

My mind was somewhere else. A-And I didn't want to be rude.

SONI

Too nice. You could have warned me at least! (a beat) I should introduce you to my best friend Ameera. She can teach us both on how not to be too nice!

Their laughter is not welcomed by Dr. Bashir. He charges, slams down a patient schedule list, and gestures for them to see patients.

Soni taps Ava on arm, avoids direct eye contact with Dr. Bashir, and pops up from seat along with Ava.

AVA

(to Soni)

I don't get why he has to be like that...he's vying with you.

SONI

Don't know.

AVA

Maybe, it's been awhile since he's gotten some..you know.

SONI

Too much information Ava. What happened to not being rude?

CUT TO:

INT. SLEEP CLINIC HALLWAY - LATER

The middle finger pops in Soni's face. A male dissatisfied PATIENT storms out. Soni hangs head outside of the patient's room with chart in hand and sighs.

SONI

Mr. Lee wait!

Ava pats Soni on the back.

AVA

Talk about rude! You did the right thing.

Soni's head hangs as they walk into the work room.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC WORK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Soni and Ava huddle around a computer.

SONI

Ava, this patient is on an incredible amount of stimulant. Look at these study results.

Soni smuggles out a paper copy of the patient's amuse file from her white coat pocket and hands it to Ava for review. Soni points to the study results.

SONI (CONT'D)

More and more stimulant over time to combat his sleepiness...

Ava nods and raises eyebrows in disbelief. Soni studies the paper copy.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to Ava)

Retest this patient. Inform him about the stimulant taper.

AVA

But, Dr. Shah, that copy of his original sleep study - I reviewed everything on this patient, but I didn't see --

SONI

I --

Soni signals, with a shake of her head, "not now." Her beeper sounds. It is silenced.

AVA

More work?

SONI

Hmm? No, Dr. Lazarus wants to meet tomorrow.

INT. FLIN LAZARUS'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Dr. Lazarus sits at his plush desk admiring the plaques and certificates on the wall, including one that states *Sleep Clinic of Excellence Award*.

Soni sits across from him and smiles.

FLIN LAZARUS

Dr. Mickelson called me.

Her hands wring.

SONI

I...

Dr. Lazarus waves her off to keep quiet.

FLIN LAZARUS

These complaints are surprising - not like you.

SONI

I respect you, sir..long time mentor... You taught me neurology when I was a student, gave me my first reflex hammer.

He smiles at her.

FLIN LAZARUS

Aaah, yes. I was young and naïve - Chief of the department, in name only.

Soni furrows her eyebrows, a bit confused. Dr. Lazarus looks off in the distance for a moment.

SONI
I'm a team player.

FLIN LAZARUS
Soni, it's easy to fix.

SONI
Hmm... I wish it was that simple.

Soni rubs her temples to release tension.

FLIN LAZARUS
Sign the refill scripts for the stimulants and opioids. And no more repeating sleep studies to double check diagnoses.

He turns his attention to his computer and puts on his glasses.

SONI
What did you mean about being Chief in name only?

FLIN LAZARUS
Invisible. Got no respect despite the title. You know what I mean?

Soni nods yes and then no.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)
Let me show you.

The leadership plaque on the wall catches the light. He stands and gazes at it with pride.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)
The department's sleep clinic was hemorrhaging money - if you can you believe that?

His thoughts float away with him.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)
A complete disaster. The other clinics in the department were threatening to close up. Budgets slashed to make up for the losses... They hated me.

(MORE)

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)
 Talked behind my back...
 incompetent, weak.

Dr. Lazarus' gaze lands on her.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)
 I hired Dr. Mickelson, game
 changer, world sleep expert. The
 sleep clinic's success changed my
 life forever.

He points at the plaque.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)
 I have hope, Soni, that you too
 will do great things and continue
 to bring success - to us.

SONI
 I'm happy for you. (a beat) Dr.
 Mickelson said that I have
 potential.

FLIN LAZARUS
 Potential for what?

SONI
 To be the next world's sleep
 expert... What would my father say
 about that?

FLIN LAZARUS
 Yes, Soni! That's what I'm talking
 about!

SONI
 You're probably right. What's in it
 for me? A malpractice suit from a
 disgruntled --

FLIN LAZARUS
 Junky.

SONI
 Patient.

Soni rubs the discomfort from her belly.

SONI (CONT'D)
 But I can't, the scripts. I-I doubt
 their diagnoses are correct.

He sits down too quick. The chair almost slides out from
 under him. He grits his teeth and readjusts chair.

FLIN LAZARUS

Of course the diagnoses are correct! These patients have been with the clinic for years - even longer than I've been Chief.

Sensing unwanted hesitation, he turns to her and lowers his glasses to the tip of his nose, leans in, and peers over them.

Silence. Soni swallows wishing to be invisible.

Dr. Lazarus sets down his glasses, leans back in his chair, and smiles at her.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)

Soni, you are a team player. Support the sleep clinic, as I have for you over the years. There will be no stopping us.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC WORKROOM - LATER THAT DAY

A conversation between Ava and a young MALE FELLOW floats to her ear. She pauses her computer typing to listen.

MALE FELLOW (O.S.)

(to Ava)

JB had to leave the state to start up his sleep practice. His family is local.

AVA MARTINEZ (O.S.)

(to Male Fellow)

Yeah, job was all set up, but Dr. Mickelson made a call. I felt so bad for him.

MALE FELLOW (O.S.)

(to Ava)

JB was a good fellow...

AVA MARTINEZ (O.S.)

(to Male Fellow)

Doesn't matter. Nobody can set up shop around the corner.

MALE FELLOW (O.S.)

(to Ava)

Or more like in this state!

A shaky hand grasps coffee.

AVA (O.S)
(to Soni)
Dr. Shah! You're back! How did the
meeting go?

The coffee splashes on Soni's white coat. The fellows
scramble to help her, but she waves them off.

INT. CINDY'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Coffee stains on Soni's white coat are rubbed without
success. A stack of scripts on the table waits to be signed.

Soni places her hand on the tall stack and thinks. She then
writes on post-it note the following, *Cindy please repeat
studies on these charts and have patients follow up with me.*

Soni smiles to herself knowing that she made the right
decision. She picks up a chart and makes for the door.

Dr Mickelson's eye catches her off guard. She musters up a
smile.

Dr. Mickelson strolls in.

MARCEL MICKELSON
Have you seen Cindy?

SONI
Room 3.

He glances at the stack of files and scripts.

MARCEL
Sorry to interrupt. Were you
signing the refills?

He picks up the post-it note and looks up with intensity.

Soni takes few steps back.

MARCEL MICKELSON
Flin told me, Soni, that you were
ready to be part of our team.

Dr. Mickelson steps closer.

SONI
Research data from the state report
an increase in addiction and
overdose rates --

MARCEL MICKELSON

How is this any different from signing refills for, let's say, Neurontin or Elavil?

SONI

Neurontin is not a controlled sub--

MARCEL MICKELSON

Do you check every patient for neuropathy or nerve pain before signing the refill? Whip out the EMG machine?

SONI

No, but --

MARCEL MICKELSON

These patients need their drug, without it they suffer. I don't understand. Are you wanting to hurt these patients, Soni?

SONI

No --

MARCEL MICKELSON

Because if that's the case, you can pack up and leave. I will not have anyone on my team deny my patients care.

Soni's eyes start to redden. Her voice breaks.

SONI

No, no... it's not that. I-I want to be part of this team. I spoke with Flin - err, Dr. Lazarus.

Soni rises to her feet.

SONI (CONT'D)

I'll sign the scripts today. All of them.

Dr. Mickelson draws back, smiles, and reaches into pocket.

MARCEL MICKELSON

My favorite pen. It's yours.

Pen reflects the light from low-lying sun, peaking through the window. Lost for words, Soni grips the pen.

He strolls out but stops right outside the opened door to speak with CINDY, the clinic's middle-aged, loyal, veteran, sleep medicine nurse.

Her voice amplifies as she nears him.

CINDY (O.S.)
 (to Dr. Mickelson)
 Meeting later this afternoon with
 the drug rep and Dr. Lazarus.

MARCEL MICKELSON
 (to Cindy)
 Got it. Soni's just finishing up in
 there.

Cindy enunciates, so that Soni can hear what she says next.

CINDY (O.S.)
 (to Dr. Mickelson)
 Kristi, the drug rep, plans on
 bringing gifts to celebrate your
 sleep clinic -- the busiest in the
 region!

Dr. Mickelson turns toward Soni, not noticing that Dr. Bashir has arrived at the doorway.

MARCEL MICKELSON
 (to Cindy and Soni)
 Dr. Lazarus loves our meetings with
 Kristi - he kind of has a thing for
 her, or maybe it's the checks - I
 mean, gifts.

He laughs with heartiness.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)
 (to Cindy and Soni)
 We made something out of nothing.
 Couldn't do it without you, both.
 With my help, Soni, you might bump
 Moustafa in line to become the
 world's top sleep expert!

Moustafa glares at Soni as that thought cuts right through him.

INT. PARKING GARAGE OF HOSPITAL - DUSK

Soni treks to car.

Dr Bashir appears out of nowhere.

She looks around but sees nobody but him. Keys JINGLE as she picks up pace to the car avoiding eye contact.

BEEP BEEP sounds from car being unlocked.

Door does not open to her pull. Dr Bashir's hand sees to that. He turns and puts his body weight against door.

SONI
(to Dr Bashir)
What do you want?

Dr Bashir leans into her face.

MOSTAFA BASHIR
(to Soni)
I came to say hello.

Soni swallows.

SONI
Hello. I need to get go--

She wrenches on door handle without success.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
Don't think that we haven't
noticed. The patients talk, Soni.

SONI
I don't know what you mean.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
You tell them that they don't need
their stimulant!

SONI
I double check only those with
escalating doses. I'm doing the
right thing.

A pill pops into his mouth. He leans back and eyes roll for a moment, as he feels his high.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
As your colleague and someone who
would like to be your friend, I'm
warning you.

SONI
About what?

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
If you continue, your reputation
will be destroyed.

INT. SONI'S HOME - LATER

Hands on Soni's shoulders, Manu approaches Soni from behind.

MANU
What's the matter?

He holds her hand and leads her to sit on the cozy couch in their casual, historic home's living room, which is peppered with family photos and artwork on the walls. He rubs her back with a concerned look.

She rocks herself back and forth staring ahead, mind in a fog.

He hands her a glass of water that was sitting on the coffee table in front of them. Water spills as her hands tremble.

MANU (CONT'D)
Hey...

Manu steadies the glass for her.

MANU (CONT'D)
I'm trying to help. Help me
understand, Soni.

He brings the glass to her lips for her to sip and then sets it down. He leans in close and rubs her back.

MANU (CONT'D)
You've been on edge lately. You
will be OK. Nothing bad happens to
good people, remember?

SONI
Am I... good?

He furrows his brows for a moment and then smiles.

MANU
No... Perfect.

He hugs her.

She pulls back, sees his eyes filled with admiration, and then melts in his arms.

INT. SONI'S OFFICE - FEW DAYS LATER

Nervous Ava inches her way to Soni, who sits at desk smiling.

AVA MARTINEZ

I love working with you. You are a terrific doctor. Not only my mentor but a friend.

SONI

Ditto - you're not such a bad doc yourself. What's going on Ava?

AVA MARTINEZ

I could get in trouble - Dr. Mickelson - b-but I thought you should know.

SONI

You are safe with me, Ava. Sit, please. Know what?

Ave hesitates, looks back, and sits.

AVA MARTINEZ

Your patient got this in the mail. All of your patients are receiving this notice.

A crumpled letter tumbles out of Ava's white coat pocket.

SONI

Got it.

Soni picks it off floor and flattens it with hands.

SONI (CONT'D)

I'm sure it is nothing to wo--

AVA MARTINEZ

The letter is from Drs. Mickelson and Bashir.

Her eyes enlarge as she reads and then rereads it in silence.

AVA MARTINEZ (CONT'D)

It states to disregard your treatment plans of retesting and stimulant tapers. Something about your faulty judgement... Dr. Shah?

SONI

Huh? OK, OK. Thank you for letting me know.

Soni's licks dry lips in apprehensive way.

AVA MARTINEZ

I'm sorry. Are you OK?.. I-I think you should ignore it. It's dumb.

Soni falls into chair as if she is weighed down.

SONI

Ignore it? No.

AVA MARTINEZ

Things will get worse. You may not realize it, but I need you here. We all do.

SONI

Not going anywhere. Thank you Ava.

Soni waves her to go with a smile.

Door finally closes, releasing an audible sob that Soni was suppressing. The letter crushes in her hand.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC WORK ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The flattened letter slams down on the counter next to Drs. Mickelson and Bashir, who are sitting together.

They innocently smirk.

SONI

Not right. I will report this to Dr. Lazarus.

MARCEL MICKELSON

Can't we all get along? We had to clear the matter up to move forward.

He laughs in a relaxed manner and stands.

MARCEL MICKELSON (CONT'D)

This is a lucrative practice. I would hate for you to be left behind, Soni.

SONI

Left behind? What are--

MARCEL MICKELSON

If you leave..or be noble and report. Your career.

Dr. Bashir looks away with a slight worry in his eye.

INT. SONI'S HOME - NIGHT

Manu closes the window blinds and plops down next to Soni on couch. Soni studies the letter in hand.

MANU

Aditi is asleep. Why don't you show the letter to Dr. Lazarus? It's a misunderstanding.

SONI

I have a bigger problem. I got this in the mail today.

Soni hands him the letter.

SONI (CONT'D)

It's a letter from a patient, threatening to sue me for incompetent care.

MANU

You really need to speak with Dr. Lazarus! Keep your head down. Follow their rules. They will see your good heart.

SONI

Follow their rules?

MANU

Nothing less than perfect.

He touches her shoulder, pauses, and stands up to leave.

MANU (CONT'D)

Dinner dishes - unless you would like to take over? I need time to work on my grant.

Soni looks up from the letter, her mind churning.

SONI

I'll apply to our competing hospital but need references.

He shakes head and steps out.

Soni throws letter aside. Her phone buzzes with text. She glances at it quizzically.

AMEERA TEXT

I'm so sorry. I heard the news.

Soni types text.

SONI TEXT

?

She flips on TV news channel and watches on screen...

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF GROCERY STORE - DAY

Shaky news clip appears on TV screen - gunshots POP POP POP POP, SCREAMS from random WITNESSES running away, hiding, and then Till on ground dead, bloody from multiple gunshot wounds with groceries splayed over him and torn paper bag.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Male, gripping BROADCASTER (40s) reports at anchor desk.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Dr. Till Sutton was dead at the scene while visiting his hometown Mound, Louisiana. The murder suspect, Fred Lee, was apprehended. Our special investigators found that the suspect was high on methamphetamines which were supplied by a local sleep clinic here in New York City. We believe the murder was a targeted attack in retaliation for Dr. Till Sutton's heroic deed of turning in a wanted criminal years ago. Our prayers go out to his family.

Hand over her mouth. She gasps from hyperventilating.

SONI

(to self)

No!

Tears drip from her face. Manu rushes in wide-eyed.

INT. FLIN LAZARUS'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Soni refuses with polite smile. He approaches her with kind eyes.

FLIN LAZARUS

Soni, we are short-staffed. I won't accept your resignation letter. The patients need you.

He passes the letter from his desk back to her.

SONI

This is hard for me. I-I can't continue to work in the sleep clinic.

FLIN LAZARUS

Nonsense!

SONI

I've worked here for over a year. It's time.

Papers shuffle on his desk. He thinks.

FLIN LAZARUS

Soni, you are forgetting the bigger picture.

SONI

I would like to explain. Th-the work environment is... toxic.

Genuine concern floods him.

FLIN LAZARUS

Sit, please. You are upset, and when we're upset we say things that we don't mean.

Soni hesitates but sits in chair.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)

I tell you what - I'll put in a good word for you with the sleep folks.

He swivels in his chair with excitement.

FLIN LAZARUS (CONT'D)

You'll still be on track!

SONI

On track?

FLIN LAZARUS

To be a legend in sleep medicine. You got this!

Soni cannot seem to find enough breath as she exhales.

SONI

I do love the science of sleep
medicine... but I can't.

He shakes his head.

FLIN LAZARUS

Think, Soni! Dr. Mickelson is not
one to let things slide. Three more
months won't be easy.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC - DAY - THREE MONTHS LATER

A box of desk supplies and framed certificates lifts up.

SONI

No, Ava. I got this.

AVA MARTINEZ

What will you do?

Soni flashes a bittersweet smile.

SONI

A vacation? Dr Mickelson did
sabotage my only job prospect.

Ava strokes her on the back and walks beside her. Other
Medical Students smile at her, as if to say take me with you.

With the door in sight, Dr. Bashir blocks her path.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

You've grown on me Soni. If you
ever need a reference --

He saunters. Soni glances back before she turns to leave. The
corners of her mouth turn upward at Dr. Mickelson.

Dr. Mickelson looks at her with contempt and then notices
Ava.

MARCEL MICKELSON

Ava, please see Cindy. You'll need
to sign some scripts.

Soni squeezes Ava's hand, shaking head no.

SONI
 (whispers to Ava)
 Don't sign.

AVA MARTINEZ
 (to Soni)
 Still got 6 more months to go. I
 can't afford to burn bridges - huge
 loans to pay off. I'll call you
 later.

Soni's lip quivers.

INT. SONI'S HOME - A FEW MONTHS LATER (2009)

PAGER DISPLAY: ASSOCIATE PHYSICIAN PRIVATE PRACTICE 2009

Soni leans closer to cell phone speaker to listen and
 concentrates on the contract on laptop screen.

DR. JUSTIN BIASOTTO (late 40s), slick long-term care facility
 director, president of a small private practice neurology
 group, and a savvy businessman.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (V.O)
 Dr. Shah, love to have you join. It
 only takes two years of exceeding
 expectations and buy-in to become a
 partner. Compensation formula is
 easy - eat what you kill, after
 expenses.

SONI
 (to cell speakerphone)
 Sounds great! And what about sleep -
 -

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
 I... err... Dr. Mickelson... You
 will mainly work at a long-term
 care facility for brain injury
 patients, with some clinic. Is that
 OK?

SONI
 No sleep clinic? Just neurology?
 Um... OK.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
 Night calls are split with us
 partners. We cover four hospitals.
 Busy, but we all share the load.

SONI

OK. I'm so happy to have this opportunity. I won't let you down. See you on Monday!

Call ends. Fist pumps as Soni smiles, and sighs.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE - DAY

Handshakes greet excited Soni from professional PARTNERS, mainly male except for one Asian female (ranging from 40 to 60s). Partners welcome Soni and disperse back to their offices.

Soni adjusts a few personal family photos on her office desk. Her packed schedule pops up on the computer screen, seizing her attention.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE DR. BIASOTTO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Brushing off his expensive suit, Dr. Biasotto smiles and signals for Soni to come in.

SONI

Excuse me, Dr. Biasotto. I noticed visit time slots are quite short. I won't have time to care for the patients properly.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

No worries. Everyone has a full, double-booked schedule. You'll learn to be efficient.

He types on the computer. She nods in silence, not sure.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE - DAY

Random adult MIXED-AGE PATIENTS and their families fill up the waiting room, yelling complaints.

MIXED-AGE PATIENTS

--What's taking Dr. Shah so long?!
 --I've been waiting for 2 hours.
 --My appointment is now. What's going on? This sucks.

A patient approaches the young RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry for the long waits. Dr.
Shah is new. Please be patient.

Flustered Soni moves from room.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE DR. BIASOTTO'S OFFICE - ONE WEEK LATER

Dr. Biasotto considers Soni and glances at his watch.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Soni, two to three hour wait times
are not helping.

He hustles to his chair at his desk and moves computer mouse.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)

You have to pick up your pace, even
if it means cutting corners.

Computer monitor reflects in his eyes. Soni shakes her head.

SONI

Can we lighten up the schedule?

He types on computer and shakes head.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Overhead, bills to pay. Everyone
has to carry their own weight in
this practice.

SONI

I do want to be in this practice.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

OK, then. To help the most people,
you need to find a way.

SONI

How?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Figure out the system.

SONI

The system?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
 Patient satisfaction scores figure
 into your bonus, and yours aren't
 looking so hot.

Phone receiver moves to his ear.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE PATIENT ROOM ONE - SAME DAY

Computer keys CLICK for a few moments. Soni fills up her
 lungs and readies herself.

A slow, geriatric patient named GERALD (70s) inches down off
 the patient table after a couple attempts.

SONI
 (loudly to Gerald)
 Gerald, no harm in having more
 information! This EMG procedure is
 a test for your muscles and nerves
 in your hand.

GERALD
 OK, whatever you think, doc!

Soni's conscience starts a battle in her head. She stirs to
 move on to the next patient but forestalls.

SONI
 (to Gerald)
 You don't really need the
 procedure. A hand splint will do,
 but --

GERALD
 What? Can't hear ya!

A slight smile creeps up on her face.

The door closes behind her.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE PATIENT ROOM TWO - CONTINUOUS

Overweight patient, CHARLIE (50s) greets Soni, but stops
 short. Soni looks past him.

She types fast. He bends his torso to try to look at the
 computer screen.

SONI
 Hello, you! What is your concern
 today?

CHARLIE
It's Charlie. Back pain.

Soni remembers Ameera.

SONI
(to self)
5 minutes

She fires off question after question. He attempts to answer, but is interrupted before finishing his response.

SONI (CONT'D)
How long?

CHARLIE
I don't --

SONI
Years.

CHARLIE
Yes that seems...

SONI
Where at? Lower back?

CHARLIE
Yes, but --

SONI
Pain down your legs? Bowel/bladder
problems? Numbness/tingling? Can't
walk?

His nods try to keep up with the questions but go in different directions.

Soni hoists him up to stand, spins him around and nudges him to walk.

Grimace erupts as he shuffles. He grabs his back.

Soni shakes her head and comes to her senses.

SONI (CONT'D)
Oh my gosh, I'm sorry. Are you OK?

She helps him back to the chair and then checks her watch.

SONI (CONT'D)
You'll be alright. Need to lose
weight and exercise. Follow up with
your primary.

CHARLIE

I have disability paperwork.

SONI

It's not our clinic policy to fill that out. Please ask your primary.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE - CONTINUOUS

Soni exits a patient's room. Dr. Biasotto's whitecoat blurs past her and then comes back.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Dr. Shah, looks like you've figured out your way!

She proves her abilities with the following...

SONI

Jump through annoying clicks in the EMR, document, bill... Thank goodness for primary docs. (a beat) I can't stand disability paperwork!

Dr. Biasotto laughs.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Me either! You're looking great with quality measures.

SONI

Thank you. Not that hard to check off boxes and document stuff that doesn't matter to patient care.

She laughs, surprising herself.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

And Voilà! In comes government money.

With a smug smile, he dances and struts away.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)

I built this practice with my own sweat and tears. (trails off) Deserve every penny.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE - LATER

Dark circles under her eyes, Soni drags herself out of the last patient's room for the day.

Dr. Biasotto has on his jacket, done for the day, and says in passing to her:

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Dr. Shah, still here? I've changed my mind. You'll get to read sleep studies in a few weeks!

SONI

Sleep?

He grins heading out. Then he walks backwards a few steps.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Don't forget you start at the long-term care facility tomorrow. Talk later!

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Typical bar lounge scene. Chatter hums in background. Soni, Ava, and Ameera, dressed up in classy attire lean on a small round table with drinks.

AMEERA GAAR

(to Ava)

Thank you Ava! Work gets in the way from going out, nowadays.

SONI

Thank goodness Manu's watching Aditi. He was right. I needed a night out with my girls!

Soni sips drink.

SONI (CONT'D)

Women in my field are hard to come by..

Soni smiles at Ava.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to Ameera Gaar)

Ava keeps me sane, especially with my last job.

AVA MARTINEZ

Your drug popping asshole misses you, Soni! You should come back!

Ava tosses her brown hair and laughs.

AMEERA GAAR
Drug popping asshole? Now that's
what I'm talking about! Do tell!

SONI
Oh God, he gives me the chills...

AMEERA GAAR
Was he hot?

SONI
(to Ameera)
Negative.

Soni nonchalantly musters up...

AVA MARTINEZ
Do they still make you sign--?

AVA MARTINEZ (CONT'D)
Do I have a choice?

Soni, guilt-ridden, draws out a sip from her drink. Ameera changes the subject.

AMEERA GAAR
Soni, how's working at the long-
term care facility?

SONI
I start tomorrow - a slower change
of pace, I think.

AMEERA GAAR
Clinic has you busy?

SONI
Swamped, no time --

AMEERA GAAR
Remember what I taught you in med
school? Conserve energy - pick your
battles.

Ameera snaps her fingers and makes a "talk to the hand" face with her hand raised.

SONI
Oh brother!

AVA MARTINEZ
Forget work! I think it's time to
dance, ladies!

Ava leads gleeful Soni to the dance floor. Ameera swaggers her own dance moves in comedic manner behind them.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY - NEXT DAY

Common space of an old 1970s building, with florescent lights and dark carpeted floors, does not hold up determined Soni.

Non-verbal adult DISABLED PATIENTS are lined up in a row in wheelchairs, some involuntarily moving, others spacing out.

Soni regards them as she strides past towards the dining area, where more of them are seen in wheelchairs and halos, helmets or with surgical bandages on their heads.

They sit at tables. Most stare into space while others drool with open mouths filled with half-eaten mush.

Random YELLS from afar. A single AIDE attends to them.

An empty nurses' station passes as Soni continues on through a hallway, pausing to be buzzed through several secure doors.

She greets a male BRAIN INJURED PATIENT with a sunken head from a prior surgery. He sits in a wheelchair in another common area and stares ahead.

SONI

Hello, Jose! Can you hear me?

No response. Soni waves her hand in front of his face and checks his eyes with a light and then moves his spastic limbs around. She frowns.

With slouched posture, she rubs eyes and heads to the nurses station. She sinks into chair and strains her eyes at the computer screen.

Pager BEEPS. She checks her pager, sets it down, and grabs a granola bar from her medicine bag. The wrapper opens and a savory bite is about to be had when...

Pager BEEPS again non-stop. She gives the pager an evil eye and throws it in her bag. The sound stops.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to self)

How many more consults? Shit, what time is it?

Cell phone comes close to her eyes. She squints reading the time. Her cheeks are then pushed up by her hands, irritated that she has yet another thing to do. She texts on her cell.

SONI TEXT

Have to work late. Another time.
Happy Anniversary. Love you.

She eyeballs her cell phone for a reply message inhaling the granola bar. Cell phone fades with no response.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY PATIENT ROOM - LATER

A waft of foul odor hits Soni's face.

DISHEVELED MAN in a mesh cage has a vacant look, moans and grunts.

Her hand runs along the seam for the zipper to open the cage. She finds it and is about to unzip...

He charges at her with enormous eyes. She drops the zipper and steps back.

SONI

I-I'm a neurologist, a brain
doctor, here to help you. Can you
tell me your name? Are you in pain?

For a second, she thinks he sees her. He moans. Soni attempts to engage him by miming out actions to examine him.

SONI (CONT'D)

Can I examine you? Close your eyes
like this. Make a fist like this.
Lift arms up like this.

He does nothing.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY - CONTINUOUS

SCRUFFY PATIENTS walk like doped up zombies in a common area. Soni stops busy YOUNG NURSE (early 20s) who tries to pass by in a hurry. Soni points to the room.

SONI

Excuse me, nurse. This patient -
he's in a cage like... like an
animal! Why? How long has he been
that way?

YOUNG NURSE

Don't worry, doc. He's been in a
restraint cage for at least a
month, off and on.

SONI

One month?!

YOUNG NURSE

It's protocol for our behavioral unit. It's for his own safety.

SONI

Does his family know?

YOUNG NURSE

I'm sure somebody told them. He's fine.

Soni nods, seeking to reassure herself without success.

Soni trudges on and visits with another male GRUNGY PATIENT (60s) sitting nearby in a chair. She bends over to his level.

Within a flash, her stethoscope strangles her around the neck. The Grungy Patient yanks it tight and stands, before she has a chance to say hello.

GRUNGY PATIENT

Son of a bitch!

An armed guard arrives and struggles with the patient who drops the stethoscope.

Soni falls back and rubs her neck.

Young Nurse stabs the patient's arm with a needle.

Patient calms after a moment and is lowered to a chair.

YOUNG NURSE

You OK, doc?

Soni nods in shock.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY DINING COMMON AREA - LATER

Disabled STROKE PATIENTS, many of which are non-engaged, elderly with varying levels of paralysis, sit around a table with food trays in front of them. A young AIDE shoves food into some of their mouths. Others snore with hanging mouths.

Soni searches for her patient. A female NURSING ASSISTANT (20s) raises her hand up and motions for Soni to come over to the patient, JUDY, a frail, elderly lady with facial droop and a paralyzed arm.

SONI
Hello, Judy.

JUDY
Get the hell away from me, you
bitch.

Judy trails off mumbling.

SONI
OK then. I'll observe for now.

Soni shakes her head to herself.

Nursing Assistant brushes Soni's arm while feeding Judy.

NURSING ASSISTANT
(to Soni)
I heard what happened. Sounds like
you've had a rough day.

Food splats on Nursing Assistant's face. Judy swats the spoon
away. She wipes it away with a napkin.

NURSING ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
She will be nicer after her shock
therapy treatment. Won't we, Judy?

SONI
ECT? She had a stroke. Give me a
few minutes, please.

Nursing Assistant sighs and makes phone call at nurses'
station.

SONI (CONT'D)
OK, Judy. I'm going to check a few
things.

Patient locks eyes with Soni and mumbles as Soni does a brief
neurology exam, flashing a light in her eyes, moving her
limbs, checking knee reflexes.

Nursing Assistant returns.

SONI (CONT'D)
Judy does not need ECT. Cancel the
order.

NURSING ASSISTANT
No can do. I was on the phone. Our
director, Dr. Biasotto, wants her
to be on the schedule.

SONI

What?! Did you tell him --

NURSING ASSISTANT

He knows you're here. He said to
leave her on the schedule,
regardless.

Soni's pager beeps. It clicks off. Soni throws hands up, not
having time to search for words and grabs phone to return the
page.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY PATIENT ROOM - LATER

PATIENT SAM (50s) lays in bed, hooked to a ventilator, skull
half-sunken from prior brain surgery. He opens his roving
eyes and blinks, unaware of his environment.

Sam's elderly father, ROGER, dotes on him at his bedside.

SONI

Hello, Sam. It's me, Dr. Shah.
Excuse me, Roger.

Rogers steps aside. Soni draws close to the bedside and
shines a light in Sam's eyes.

SONI (CONT'D)

Sam, can you open your eyes if you
can hear me?

Soni flicks her fingers in his face to test his visual threat
response. He does not blink.

She ranges his head side to side, examining his eye
movements. She slides her hands into his hands.

SONI (CONT'D)

Can you squeeze my hands?

No response from Sam.

She gives him a sternal rub and he responds with an extension
posture of the arms.

SONI (CONT'D)

A long time since the car accident,
Roger. How are you holding up?

ROGER

Nine months. OK, I guess. So what
do you think, Dr. Shah?

SONI

About?

ROGER

When will he wake up?

SONI

Wake up? The longer he stays like this, the less chance he has for that. The other doctors have talked to you about his prognosis before, right?

ROGER

No. Nobody has said anything since we got here.

SONI

When did he arrive again?

ROGER

We've been here well over seven months.

Roger searches her eyes, while his eyes start to water.

SONI

Roger...

Soni clears her throat and fixes Sam's blanket to cover him better. She looks at Sam with compassion and then at Roger.

SONI (CONT'D)

It's my job to be transparent.

ROGER

Yes, please tell me.

SONI

I do not believe Sam will wake up to have a meaningful neurologic recovery. You do have palliative care options. I can --

Roger sobs and put hand up for her to stop. She attempts to touch his shoulder but he shoves her down. His chair hurls at her, just missing. A tray knocks over furthering the commotion.

ROGER

Get out!

A young, petite NURSING AIDE shows up at the door, alarmed. Soni scrambles to her feet. She captures one last look at Sam, nods and fades into the background.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DR. BIASOTTO'S OFFICE - A FEW WEEKS LATER

Dr. Biasotto sits at his grand desk. His hair is perfect, and his suit matches the upscale office.

Soni shifts in her seat, unsure of why she is there. He reclines back in his, at ease.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

You have been working here for the past several weeks, and perhaps you still have yet to learn the ropes.

He unfolds a letter from his desk and glances at it.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)

I have received a formal letter of complaint from one of your patients.

SONI

What? From whom?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Sam Peterson.

SONI

Sam? But he's --

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

His father Roger wrote the letter.

He hands her the letter to read.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)

His son has a poor prognosis with no chance for recovery?

SONI

Yes. And?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

And, I don't want you to take people's hope away.

SONI

I don't understand.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
If these families continue care
against all odds, it is their
prerogative, and besides...

He folds up the letter and places it on the desk next to a
blade letter opener, which then flips in his hands.

SONI
You don't want me to discuss a
patient's prognosis?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
You are forgetting how much good we
do here, Soni.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
If it weren't for our facility,
where would the vegetables, the
demented, the mentally deranged,
the crippled go? Home? - People
don't want to be burdened.

The letter opener is tossed on the desk. He extends his hand
out for Soni to shake.

Dr. Biasotto laughs as he sees her tense reaction.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
Relax, Soni. This is a win-win
situation.

SONI
But that's not --

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
I'm running a business. The longer
a patient stays, the more
disabled... Don't forget where your
salary comes from.

Soni half-smiles and wonders whether to shake the hand.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
Let's give the people the peace of
mind that they want but cannot say
in words.

He reclaims his hand and reaches into his desk drawer. A
photo of his mother has a stark resemblance to him. He gazes
at it.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
 I lived with my demented mama for years. Alzheimer's. She insisted that she didn't want to be in an old person's home.

Though not a complete brute as he took care of his mother, he wished for her to die on more days than not.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
 My wife left, took half, and my dog.

Photo is flinged back into his desk drawer. He looks distant, fuming over his ex-wife.

SONI
 I'm sorry to hear that. I-I do want to help people.

He shakes his head, processing what she just said. He again puts his hand out to shake.

Her outstretched hand feels the heat off of his, so close, but then he turns as the phone rings. He grabs the phone receiver and listens with a playful smile.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
 Yes, yes of course we have bed availability. Have I ever said no to you?

INT. SONI'S CAR - DAY

Soni drives, eager to get home. She talks on speaker phone.

SONI
 I did the right thing, Ameera, even if Roger didn't want to hear it.

AMEERA GAAR
 Tough call, for sure.

SONI
 I don't know...Dr. Biasotto --

AMEERA GAAR
 First instinct is usually the right one.

SONI
 Yeah...

AMEERA GAAR

Where was that advice when I dated
that jerk!

Ameera laughs at herself.

AMEERA GAAR (CONT'D)

Speaking of which, gotta run.

Call ends. Soni smiles and shakes head.

INT. SONI'S HOME - DAY

Manu and Aditi play with toys on the carpeted floor in their family room. Soni kisses Aditi and then Manu on the cheek. She plops down beside them. Manu smiles a toothy smile.

MANU

(to Aditi)

Looks like Mama wants to play.

SONI

Got to come home early today.

MANU

No complaints here.

Aditi jumps up and wraps her Mama with her little hands. Soni's weary hands lift toy and attempts to play but stops.

SONI

(to Aditi)

I can't. Papa is better at this
than me.

ADITI

(to Soni)

No! You!

SONI

(to Aditi)

Maybe tomorrow.

Aditi clutches the toy and stomps off.

MANU

She misses you..I-I was thinking we
can go out for dinner. It's been
awhile since we've spent some time
together. I can get a babysitter.

Soni sighs. Her mind wanders.

SONI
Night call tonight.

Manu clenches jaw with disappointment.

MANU
Right... I'll warm up leftovers.
Eat something before you go.

INT. SONI'S CAR - NIGHT

Heavy snow falls. Soni drives. Pager BEEPS. She clicks her pager off and the car swerves. Another car HONKS. She bangs her hands on the steering wheel.

SONI
(to self)
No, no, no! Fuck!

Her exit passes. She takes the next exit and parks her car on the side of the road.

She nods off. Her pager BEEPS again and startles her. She taps her face and talks to herself to keep awake.

SONI (CONT'D)
(slurs to self)
A sleep deprived doctor has the
same judgement as a drunk driver.

She rests her head back, forces open her bleary eyes, puts her blinker on, and starts to drive. Her small blue car swerves into the next lane and blurs in the distance.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY - FEW WEEKS LATER

A troubled middle-aged WIFE steps in front of Soni in the hallway. Soni looks haggard, post-call.

WIFE
Excuse me. You've been caring for
my husband for several weeks. I-I
always miss you.

Soni flashes an uncomfortable nod and smile.

WIFE (CONT'D)
When he wakes up - I mean, will he
wake up and be normal again?

A pat on the shoulder. A flow of words rehearse in Soni's head, but she holds back and stops. She doesn't know which way to proceed.

WIFE (CONT'D)

Doctor?

Pager doesn't sound, but Soni examines it anyway.

SONI

I have to run.

WIFE

But --

SONI

He will be fine. Needs more time.

Soni ducks into a patient room.

INT. LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY PATIENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A ventilator WHIRS. Soni peeks her head into the patient Sam's room and lets go breath. Roger is not there. She slips in and surveys Sam.

SONI

Sam, this is it. I can't take care of you anymore. I'm so sorry.

Soni pivots to exit, but a bedside tray is bumped. A pen rolls off and plunges to the floor.

SONI (CONT'D)

It's just a pen.

Her fingers stretch to reach it. Pen rolls away behind bed.

The ventilator cord grazes her fingers. Her eyes follow it to the plug and wall outlet. She ponders.

Her hand as if having a mind of its own crawls along the cord toward the plug. The grip tightened.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to Sam)

You don't have to be this way.

She breathes several times.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to self)

Pick my battles.

The cord is pulled.

Ventilator machine alarms BEEP.

Soni rises to her feet. Eyes steady on Sam. Young Nurse darts in minutes later.

YOUNG NURSE
Doc, doc, what's
happening?

SONI
I was passing by the room when I
heard the alarms.

Young Nurse scurries around the bed, checks the lines, breathing tube, vent settings, and finally her jaw drops...

The unplugged cord is plugged back into the wall.

YOUNG NURSE
How can this be?

Young Nurse raises her brows at Soni.

YOUNG NURSE (CONT'D)
Doc?

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE OFFICE - DAY

Partners, some at computers while other stand around, including Asian female and Dr. Biasotto engage in conversation about a new hire.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
(to partners)
Doc? Slipped my mind.

Soni walks in the work room and overhears.

SONI
(to Dr. Biasotto)
Did I hear 'sleep'?

Soni smiles.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
(to Soni)
Our sleep clinic, which is owned by
the hospital, has hired Dr. B-
something.

(MORE)

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
 A world expert in sleep forensics!
 It sounds like he should be on a
 CSI show!

SONI
 (to Dr. Biasotto)
 Dr. B-Bashir?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
 (to Soni)
 You know him?

Soni nods.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)
 That's good, as you might have to
 work with him.

Hand over mouth, Soni turns from the group. Nausea hits. She gags.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE OFFICE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Shaky fingers type on cell phone, until a loud CRASH sounds. Soni is motionless.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (O.S.)
 Sorry for the noise. A bookshelf
 fell down!

Soni takes a deep breath to refocus and finishes text.

SONI TEXT
 Ava, heard news about Dr. B. What's
 going on? Soni

Soni paces. Phone chimes.

AVA MARTINEZ TEXT
 A lot! Anonymous whistleblower
 complained to state board. Let us
 catch up over drinks.

SONI
 (to self)
 Whistleblower.

Sounds of Till's death, gunshots POP POP POP POP and SCREAMS replay in her mind.

Phone drops to floor and chimes with incoming texts.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Soni tosses back a shot at the bar. Ava shoots her a surprised look and sips cocktail. They rest on stools.

AVA MARTINEZ
Damn girl! It's happy hour, but
take it easy.

SONI
Tell me everything.

AVA MARTINEZ
About?

SONI
The sleep clinic!

AVA MARTINEZ
It's on probation. Scripts are
closely monitored. No more amuse
files!

SONI
Really?

AVA MARTINEZ
Best part is that Dr. Mickelson has
to work at a drug rehab facility!

Ava grins at Soni to say that she approves of her actions.

SONI
And what about the whistleblower?

AVA MARTINEZ
What do you mean?

Ava's eyes check out a GOOD LOOKING MAN (30s) at the bar.
Soni clears throat to gain her attention.

SONI
Do they know who the whistleblower
is?

AVA MARTINEZ
Nope, but they are pissed!

Soni releases her held breath.

SONI
W-What do you think they'll do to
the person?

AVA MARTINEZ
Murder her when she's not looking,
better get protection..just
kidding.

SONI
Not funny. I lost a good friend -

Ava is distracted by the GOOD LOOKING MAN and tosses hair.

AVA MARTINEZ
Dr. Mickelson was bitching about
Dr. Lazarus the other day.

SONI
Dr. Lazarus?

AVA MARTINEZ
He was trying to convince Dr.
Mickelson to forget about it.

Ava's focus lands on the Good Looking Man who smiles at her.

SONI
Forget about what?

AVA MARTINEZ
Tracking down the whistleblower.

Ava's eyes twinkle with pride at her role model.

Soni blinks at her, wondering if she should tell her.

SONI
Do you have to go soon?

AVA MARTINEZ
Trying to get rid of me, are we?

SONI
No, no. That's ridiculous.

INT. GUN SHOP - NIGHT

Her finger points at an opened gun show magazine. TOM, a
bearded man (50s) behind counter squints eyes, inspecting.

SONI
Do you have it?

BEARDED MAN
(Southern accent)
Of course ma'am.
(MORE)

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)
Lots of women buy that one - great
for personal protection. Gotta go
to the back.

Soni licks dry lips. Throat feels tight though she swallows.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)
Here's the shooting range info.

The flier edges toward her.

INT. SONI'S HOME - LATER

Soni sleeps on the couch. Manu kisses her on the forehead and searches around the room without making a sound.

Her purse on the coffee table is unlatched. Soni's eyes pop open.

SONI
What are you doing?!

He startles.

MANU
Sorry, just looking for my keys.

Soni snatches the purse and digs through it. He makes a face.

SONI
Not here. Leave my purse alone... I-
I have to get some rest.

MANU
Jeez, I won't mess with a woman's
purse again.

INT. HOSPITAL SLEEP LAB - NEXT DAY

Soni's eyes adjust to darkened sleep lab and probe the work room, filled with a few computers, and the hallway. Purse is set down. Not a soul is seen. Her computer flashes on to the sound of a deep breath.

Soni clicks a mouse on the computer.

SONI
(to self)
Few sleep studies..then kiss Aditi
goodnight.

The sound of typing fills the air.

A familiar low, hypnotizing voice resonates in her ear from behind.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
I'm the director now.

Her hands tremble on the keyboard.

He laughs while she looks through her computer screen.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
Soni, you don't have to be afraid.
I am your mentor - remember?

She spins around and with a look to shoot him down...

SONI
You are not my mentor.

She makes a beeline for the exit.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
You've lost your way. Or have you?
I've heard good things about you
from Justin.

Soni halts.

SONI
What?

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
Justin - Dr Biasotto and I go way
back, went to med school together.

He chuckles.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
We were the dumb ones in the class -
-

She turns quickly to look him in the eye.

SONI
I believe that.

His lips tighten at the insult.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
Always underestimated. Thank you,
Soni, for reconnecting us. We're
business partners.

He picks up a file near her computer and opens it briefly to inspect the patient name and then closes it.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
How do you think you got this job?
Weren't you curious that there was
no investigation?

Her nose wrinkles. She initiates her leave.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
I can report you, an eye for an
eye.

Her feet cease in place.

SONI
Report what?

His steps sharpen. Soni turns.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
Which part?

SONI
You've got it wrong. I di--

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
So smart. Everyone loved you - the
students, residents, the fellows.
Even Marcel was starting to favor
you.

SONI
He didn't like me.

Dr. Bashir snickers. A pill bottle emerges from his pocket.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
You knew... yet created new
addicts.

Lips move, but no sound generates from Soni.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
Lied to patients about prognosis.

He scrutinizes the bottle.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
Attempted to murder Sam Peterson.

SONI
No, no, no.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
You are not better than me!

The bottle pops open and shakes into his hand.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)
We are more alike..don't you think?

SONI
I can help you.

He smirks.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
Really?

SONI
I saw your amuse file.

A pills rolls within his pincer grasp.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
My amuse file? Can't be. It was
lost a long time ago.

SONI
You-you trusted him... It's not
your fault...he manipulated --

She struggles to finish her thought. He inches his face
intimately closer to hers.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
You, help me?

Their eyes meet.

SONI
Yes.

Tears well up in his eyes.

SONI (CONT'D)
To wean off --

He licks lips.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
I'm not a loser.

SONI
No.

Silence for a beat or two. Tears drip from her face. He leans in to kiss her.

The kiss is staved off. Her closed eyes turn just in time. The rejection surges in him.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

I have narcolepsy!

The pill bottle knocks out of his hand and flies in the air.

A pill enters the smile of his mouth. He ensnares the bottle.

Soni screams and shoves him, clearing the path out. His last words echo in her mind.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (CONT'D)

Does Manu know?

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The glove compartment unlocks. A gun lays ready to be picked up. Soni's unsteady hand caresses it and then clenches. Up close, the gun glints. She assesses it.

Dr Bashir's silhouette behind the door enlarges.

Car door opens. Keys drop in between seat.

SONI

(to self)

Shit!

Car door SLAMS. Seat moves back and forth. Lost keys are found in time. Glove compartment door latches closed upon the gun.

EXT. SONI'S HOME - NIGHT

Car SCREECHES to a halt in front of the house. Soni wobbles out of her car. Knees buckle.

Manu races to her aid.

MANU

What's the matter?

INT. SONI'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Manu guides impassive Soni to the couch, where he rests her.

MANU

Sit. I'll get you some water.

A glass of water returns from kitchen.

MANU (CONT'D)

Aditi is in bed. Can you please tell me what is going on?

SONI

Dr. Bashir is back. He is the new sleep director. I-I ran into him at the sleep lab.

MANU

Why all the tears?

He leans in close to her on couch.

MANU (CONT'D)

Did he hurt you?

Soni weeps. Water sloshes in her glass as it lands on coffee table.

MANU (CONT'D)

Give me your keys.

SONI

What? No! Why?

MANU

I want to straighten that guy out!

He jolts up. Jaw clenches.

SONI

No, please, Manu. Let me handle it.

Her hand clasps onto his. Manu hesitates. A kiss warms her hand. He leans in her space and brings the water to her lips.

MANU

I'm worried.

SONI

He only spoke to me, and I left.

MANU

Please talk to me, Soni.

Dead hush. He can't tolerate it any longer.

MANU (CONT'D)

I do my best for you. I work, cook,
clean, take care of Aditi - so you
can work and not feel overwhelmed.
Do I not deserve your best?

He gathers his frustration and veers away.

MANU (CONT'D)

Go see a psychiatrist. I think you
are becoming... paranoid.

Soni stands and swings round.

SONI

Paranoid?

Kleenex tissue absorbs her tears.

SONI (CONT'D)

I'll have to explain it on every
fucking job and license
application! Nobody will hire me.

Her pace marshals away from him. She sighs and massages her
tentative hands.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to self)

Maybe I do need to prescribe myself
something.

INT. SONI'S BEDROOM - LATER

The door to her back, Soni sways. A full wine glass, one of
many, intoxicates her. Wind HOWLS at the window.

She alerts in a hypervigilant way. Glassy eyes agitate to spy
out the window. Little sounds amplify and cause a jump.

She hears SHUFFLE, SHUFFLE. A door CREAKS.

She tenses her shoulders and loses control. Wine glass dives
to a shatter.

Cloudy vision focuses on a small blanket on the floor. The
fog lifts enough to make out Aditi in her pajamas next to it.

ADITI

Mama, I heard something.

Aditi whimpers.

SONI
(slurs)
Don't move. Broken glass.

Soni teeters over broken glass.

SONI (CONT'D)
(slurs to self)
Shit. Shit. Shit

The blanket glides to Aditi's little hand. Soni thumbs Aditi's tears.

ADITI
Mama, you said a bad word. Papa
says --

Aditi snuffles and wipes her nose with her hand. Soni bends down to Aditi's level.

SONI
(slurs)
What does papa say, Aditi?

ADITI
Papa says that good people don't
say bad words.

Soni rolls eyes.

SONI
(slurs)
Aditi, sometimes good people make
mistakes. Like your friend Rosie -
remember when she bit you on the
arm? You two are still friends,
right?

Aditi chimes in.

ADITI
Or like when she took my doll.

Soni's eyes fill with tears as she takes a good look at her daughter.

SONI
(slurs)
Just like that. Oh my Aditi. I'm so
sorry - for everything. There's
nothing to be scared about.

She closes in with a hug.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs)

Come, let's go to sleep. I think you could use a bedtime story.

ADITI

But papa always tells me the story. He tucks me in - not you.

SONI

Mama's here, here for you..always.

Soni's lips purse, fighting off a cry.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SONI'S HOME - SEVERAL NIGHTS LATER

Soni nurses a full glass of wine, taking note of Manu's presence. Laptop hovers her lap. Manu peruses over her shoulder and then attends to the kitchen.

MANU (O.S.)

Second job in two years. If you wait you could be partner. A black mark on your CV won't look good.

His leave allows for her wine to empty in one swoop. She blots her mouth.

SONI

(to Manu)

It's better, if I stay out of Dr. Bashir's way.

The words on the screen center before her.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to self)

Modern day mental asylum.

MANU (O.S.)

What did you say?

SONI

(to Manu)

Night call is brutal. One page for a consult, finish it, drive to the next hospital and back again. And clinic the next day, regardless if I've been up all night!

Manu reenters room to face the empty wine glass on the coffee table.

MANU

Why do all the other partners put
up with it?

Soni springs in her seat and glowers at him.

SONI

Something is wrong with me? I'm the
odd one out? Maybe it is me. I'm
the crazy one!

She jerks up. Another bottle of wine clanks from the liquor cabinet.

MANU

(to Soni)
Shouldn't you slow down with that?

Soni storms out with bottle.

INT. JUSTIN BIASOTTO'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Soni trips into door. Door swings open.

The smell of her intoxication consumes the nostrils of
astonished, yet concerned, Dr. Biasotto.

She yields him the letter to which his glance.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Please, take a seat.

The letter folds.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO (CONT'D)

Why don't you hang on to it and
think about it. You don't look
quite yourself.

SONI

(slurs)
No, I need to leave. M-My family
needs me.

She hunches and descends onto his desk. Piled up Medicare
audit letters shuffle in her face. Her fingers are all over
the papers.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs)

Another Medicare audit? Did we finally get caught ripping them off?

JUSTIN BIASOTTO

Noooo. This? No big deal. We get these every few months. Just a formality, really.

She raises eyebrows and pivots to leave.

Her shoulder bangs, missing the mark of the door on her way out.

SONI

I know. The contract. Work another three months.

Dr. Biasotto wafts at his nose as she catches herself.

INT. PRIVATE PRACTICE OFFICE - DAY

Soni, with glassy eyes, hunts and pecks on computer keyboard.

Radio music carries in the background.

A couple of Partners pause their work at nearby computers to observe Soni's strange behavior.

Soni cannot avoid their judgement.

Her eyes wander from computer screen to radio. Radio amplifies in Soni's head.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And next up, the latest song titled...

MOUSTAFA BASHIR (O.S.)

(through radio)

I'll be watching you.

Soni blocks the sound with hands over ears.

She then leans in closer to converse with the radio. Her hands move toward it.

SONI

(to radio)

Wh-what did you say? What did you say?!

The radio is grabbed. The cord yanks out. It is thrown against the wall.

Shaken Soni searches room with her eyes, darting here and there. Partners are stupefied with mouths open.

SONI (CONT'D)
 (to partners)
 Did you guys hear that?

Partners shake their heads no.

SONI (CONT'D)
 I was kidding.

Soni's chair reclines. From her pocket, a pill bottle transpires.

She shoots a look over at the partners, who have resumed typing at their computers. Her head hangs low so no one can see. A pill touches her tongue.

She savors the feeling. Head lifts. Eyes roll back. Eyes close to darkness. A deep breath is released. An ongoing conversation between partners floats to her.

MALE PARTNER (O.S.)
 He's arrogant and incompetent.
 Doesn't make sense. I thought he
 was some world expert?

Soni's eyes pop. Paradoxical laughter from her fills the air. Chair slips from under her. She thumps to the floor.

The partners shrug to each other with bewilderment.

Rolling and laughing interchanges with sobbing.

MALE PARTNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Oh my God! Call 911!

INT. SONI'S HOME - NIGHT - THREE MONTHS LATER

Laptop is about to be opened on couch. A full wine glass next to wine bottle are on the coffee table in front of Soni.

The floor CREAKS. Soni's hands suspend with laptop half opened. CREAK again. She stiffens with heartbeat in her ear.

SONI
 Who's there? Who's there!? Stay the
 fuck away! Leave me al--

His hands seize her shoulders from behind.

MANU

Whoa, whoa. It's just me, Soni.
What's gotten into you?

Her disbelief processes by degrees to a deep exhale, where it escapes. She shoves his hand off her shoulder.

SONI

Nothing is wrong with me.

Wine glass to lips, she imbibes a hearty quaff.

Manu steps back to avoid making the situation worse.

MANU

Again with the wine? It's been
three months since your break--
good people don't --

SONI

Don't what?

She gives him an "I dare you" look. Manu sighs.

MANU

Never mind.

Unsure of what to do, he seeks refuge in the kitchen.

An envelope in Soni's hand open. She reads the letter inside and sighs with relief.

SONI

(to Manu)

"Dear" - I can't believe this. A
neurology job! They want me to
start ASAP.

MANU

Are you sure --?

SONI

I'm gonna stick it out, no matter
what.

Manu, not convinced says...

MANU (O.S.)

Great news, my love..are you up for
going out - dinner to celebrate?

She sips and looks off in the distance with an unsettled look.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Casual, cute dining room filled with couples. Manu and Soni eat over candlelight with no alcohol beverages.

MANU

A beach vacation! Aditi loves to swim..How does that sound?

SONI

She is pretty cute with her floaties.

MANU

Perfect. Takes after her mama... Remember Aruba?

Soni smiles and nods.

SONI

That was a long time ago...

MANU

It doesn't have to be, Soni.

He reaches for her hand.

SONI

Don't think the timing is right..new job.

Manu frowns and looks away.

MANU

Right.

Ameera spots Soni as she leaves.

I

AMEERA GAAR

Soni!

Soni pops up from chair and hugs Ameera.

SONI

Ameera! What are you doing here?

AMEERA GAAR

Sorry to say, I'm on a really bad date. He's getting the car.

SONI
 Why don't you join us..over some
 wine?

Manu's mouth parts.

MANU
 (to Soni)
 A drink? I thought you were going
 to sl--

Soni speaks through her teeth.

SONI
 (to Manu)
 Order a bottle..for Ameera.

MANU
 How about some club soda, instead?

Ameera senses the tension and wavers.

AMEERA GAAR
 (to Soni)
 Another girls night, sometime soon?
 I wouldn't want Manu in on our girl
 secrets.

Ameera winks at Manu.

Soni smiles at Ameera and shoots Manu a look of annoyance.

INT. SONI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - THREE YEARS LATER (2012)

PAGER DISPLAY: PROVIDER NOT-FOR-PROFIT HOSPITAL 2012

Soni collapses on her unmade bed in complete exhaustion. Her
 pager BEEPS.

INT. SONI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Manu and four year-old child Aditi take off winter coats and
 boots at the door. Manu hangs coats up on coat rack.

ADITI
 Where's mama?

MANU
 Probably in her bedroom. Go check.

Aditi hops on one foot to the stairs. One foot hits the first
 two steps, but then both feet scurry up the stairs.

INT. SONI'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aditi jiggles Soni's arm. Her pager BEEPS.

ADITI
Mama, your pager! Wake up.

Soni rolls over, waking from sleep with heavy eyelids.

ADITI (CONT'D)
Always working, mama.

SONI
Aditi, I'm here. I'm here.

Manu trails in, shuts the pager and discards it at Soni. He walks into the closet and changes clothes.

SONI (CONT'D)
(to Manu)
36 hours straight. Don't tell me
it's another stroke code.

Soni squints at pager. Aditi climbs in bed.

SONI (CONT'D)
(to Aditi)
I have to go, sweetie. It's an
emergency. See the patient through
the computer.

Soni rises out of bed and helps Aditi out too. Aditi's legs twist.

ADITI
Mama, I need to potty.

SONI
Go ask papa.

Aditi looks down at a puddle.

ADITI
Mama, I peed. Accident.

A look darts past her crying daughter and pierces its target, Manu. Soni points to his face as he stands in the doorway.

SONI
You need to help!

INT. SONI'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Soni stomps into her simple, small home office and swivels her chair around in anger. The chair then bangs against her hand and stops.

She sighs, trying to compose herself in the chair.

The tangled headset cord is tugged. She adjusts headset, clicks the mouse and the computer monitor lights her face.

SONI

Hello. I'm Dr. Soni Shah, stroke neurologist. Where's the ER provider? Time is brain, people.

INT. SONI'S BEDROOM - LATER

Soni drags her feet on the way back to her bedroom with partially opened eyes, and caves in bed, face down.

Manu wipes up the floor with a rag and cleaner, irritated.

MANU

What happened to one week on and one week off? This is ridiculous. We can't keep this up.

SONI

That's in my contract, but I never get those hours.

Soni, in bed, props herself toward Manu.

SONI (CONT'D)

For the past three years, admin has been trying to recruit more doctors.

MANU

Have you seen anyone come by for an interview? Or any CVs?

SONI

No.

Soni scoots her sprawled self toward the pillow and lays her head down, closing her eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A large polished table is bordered with Soni and the other neurologists in her group, all in white coats, including Korean male (40s) who never complains, a big-boned EX-MARINE male (40s), and DIPLOMATIC FEMALE (40s). OFFICE MANAGER (30s), an innocent dunce, fidgets in his seat.

Beeper sounds and is clicked off. Manic, ruthless VP of Medical Affairs, DR. AMELIA PADLEY (50s), shoots straight into the room and joins the group at the table. She hates feeling vulnerable and uses tough-love to her advantage.

Raised eyebrows and shrugs pass over the doctors. They do not know why she is present, as she never comes to their meetings.

AMELIA PADLEY

Couple announcements. We need you to continue to fly patients from our rural telemedicine sites to our stroke center, despite the distance

--

SONI

It takes too long for the patient to get here.

AMELIA PADLEY

It will help our patient census and get the word out about our stroke program.

SONI

What about the closer stroke centers? The longer it takes for a patient to get acute therapy, the worse the outcome and disability. Shouldn't we try coordin--

AMELIA PADLEY

Our care is worth it.

Soni gestures to the other partners to pipe up too, as she knows that they agree with her.

Nobody says a word. Office manager yawns.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)

Moving on to our next item. The administration wants you to cover two additional urban hospitals.

(MORE)

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)

They not only will get top quality doctors - you - but will save money too, from not having to hire private contractors.

The partners look at each other, skeptical.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)

(to the group)

You start covering night call for these hospitals, effective immediately, in addition to your current work.

Dr. Padley bounces up, gesturing in an over the top manner.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)

'Yes we can!' It is a true honor that your practice style has been chosen to be the model for our other hospitals.

Impatient Dr. Padley, with a toothy smile, shifts position while standing, almost swaying, waiting for others to agree.

Soni rubs her head in frustration.

SONI

(to Dr. Padley)

I'm not sure about this. Can we see our current volume data?

AMELIA PADLEY

(to Soni)

That's not the point, Soni! I don't appreciate naysayers. You all have room to work harder.

Soni seeks eye contact with the other physicians for support but gets none, except for the EX-MARINE who shrugs.

INT. HOSPITAL PATIENT ROOM - LATER

Male COMATOSE PATIENT (60s) has his eyes closed, laying in bed, tubes, wires and pumps coming out of every orifice.

A ventilator WHOOSHES inside this large, new patient room. At the bedside, Soni goes through the motions of a coma exam in a quick automatic manner, starting with a sternal rub.

SONI

Hello! Can you hear me? I'm Dr. Shah.

Gloved fingers pry his eyes open. A light shines into them. She then ranges his head side to side while holding his eyes open. A Kleenex tissue from the side table twists its tip and touches each cornea. Her fingers pinch each leg.

She whips out a reflex hammer from her pocket and lifts the patient's leg, stroking the bottom of his foot with its handle before setting it down.

She stares off in the distance as her mind leaves the room. She lifts the other leg to check his reflex.

THUD.

She comes to realize that she dropped the patient's leg like it was a trash bag. It hangs off the bed.

SONI (CONT'D)

What the --? Oh God, what have I done?

Soni panics with gaped eyes for a moment, before sprinting out.

INT. SONI'S HOME - NIGHT

Wine washes down a couple pills in Soni's throat. Her eyes reddened from tears. She sets down a pill bottle next to her purse on the coffee table.

SONI

(to Manu)

Your grad student called again.

Manu brings her a glass of water from the kitchen and switches it with her wine glass. Uncomfortable, he changes topic.

MANU

You need to tell me what is going on with you?

He faces her on the couch.

SONI

Is she pretty?

MANU

Pretty? Y-You were getting better after switching up the meds, but now this?.. Always working and drinking. I don't know who you are!

He trudges to the door.

MANU (CONT'D)
I'm going out.

SONI
Where are you going? To her?

Door SLAMS. Soni holds her head. She fumbles for her cell phone from her purse and calls up Ameera.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
Hey! What do you think about me as a blonde? I was looking at these wigs --

SONI
Ameera..

Soni sniffles.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
What's up?

SONI
That girls' night sounds good, right about now.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
Of course, but you sound upset.

SONI
Meet me at the bar. Talk then.

Soni ends call.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Ameera and Soni are in a booth, mid-conversation, cocktails in hand. Ameera's eyes are filled with concern.

SONI
I can't talk to Manu. He's... I-I-I don't know what to do.

AMEERA GAAR
OK, breathe. What's going on?

Soni takes a deep breath, as if coming up from underwater.

SONI

I was seeing a patient today in the ICU, I dropped his leg and - thank God he was alone.

AMEERA

Sweetie, you lost me.

SONI

I was doing a coma exam, but I wasn't.

AMEERA GAAR

Uh-huh.

SONI

Going through the motions --

AMEERA GAAR

I do that often but not in the hospital..kidding.

Ameera touches Soni's arm with a smile.

SONI

I zoned out - dropped the patient's leg, like it was a bag of-of-of trash.

The tissue that the drink came on wipes her tears.

SONI (CONT'D)

I realized when I came to. I'm freaking out!

AMEERA GAAR

Sounds like depersonalization. One step towards burnout. You need a break, girl.

SONI

Burnout?

She rants.

SONI (CONT'D)

No time to pee! Patients demand to be seen right away. No clue as to how much paperwork I wade through before seeing them, and the paperwork that I swim through after. I work through lunch --

AMEERA GAAR
 OK, OK. Have you told Manu about
 what's going on?

Soni takes time to drink.

SONI
 He wouldn't understand. Anything
 less than perfect..deserves better.

AMEERA GAAR
 Yes, his boxers often get in a
 bunch, but he loves you.

Soni shakes her head no to herself and begins to cry, hands
 over face.

AMEERA
 Have you spoken to your boss about
 this? Soni? Let's talk about this,
 please.

Her hands lower.

SONI
 Hell no. I'm already seen as the
 weakest link.

AMEERA
 Soni! Good God, you need to stand
 up for yourself. Who care's what
 the fuck they think?!

Soni palpates the bulge of the pill bottle in her pocket.

AMEERA (CONT'D)
 OK, OK, listen. Screw the
 paperwork! During lunch, go to the
 doctor's lounge and eat, socialize
 for 30 minutes. Promise me you'll
 go.

SONI
 You always know what to do..so put
 together, unlike me.

Soni gulps her drink.

AMEERA GAAR
 My confidence doesn't come easy...
 Ever since the sexual assault, I
 have to prove myself - I'm more
 than just a pretty face.

SONI
I'm sorry..I forgot.

Ameera downs her drink.

AMEERA GAAR
I usually keep my guard up. Maybe,
that's why I haven't found any luck
dating!

She laughs.

SONI
You'll find someone... I'm grateful
to have had you --

AMEERA
You still have me, always. I love
you, chica.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A security camera catches Soni's eye. LAUGHTER from nurses
amplify as they leer over at her from their state-of-the-art
nurses' station. Soni notices their augmented stares.

She covers her ears, trying to shut out the laughter. Her
eyes close and body rocks back and forth.

Her eyes then burst open in panic. She pats the underside of
the countertop for listening devices, at first bent over from
her chair, and then searching down on hands and knees.

She at last pulls herself up to chair, and takes a deep
breath to steady herself.

She manipulates her white coat pocket and out comes a pill
bottle. One last pill teases her.

Soni then calls Ameera on her cell phone.

AMEERA (V.O.)
Hey, what's up?

SONI
I called to hear your voice -
hoping for a confidence boost.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
Did you eat lunch yet?

SONI
I couldn't find the time.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
I'm on my way.

SONI
What?!

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - DAY

Ameera and Soni converse over half-eaten trays of food.
Tables with various seated VISITORS eat.

SONI
Our VP of medical affairs asked to
see me tomorrow. First one-on-one
meeting.

AMEERA GAAR
I see. You nervous?

SONI
Yeah.

AMEERA GAAR
You should tell her to "suck it!"

SONI
Seriously?

AMEERA GAAR
I can come with you to the meeting.

SONI
You? What for?

AMEERA GAAR
So I can tell her to "suck it!"

Soni chuckles.

AMEERA GAAR (CONT'D)
I found this toy dick gift..large
but not too large..perfect!

SONI
No, no no. I love the sentiment,
though. If I could only be more
like you.

AMEERA GAAR
It's in you! I can feel it. Are you
going to ask her?

SONI
That's the plan.

AMEERA GAAR
She'll agree. It's a fair deal.

SONI
Hmmm - thank you, Ameera, for lunch. You are crazy to come all this way, but I needed that.

INT. AMELIA PADLEY'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Soni straightens up her white coat, knocks, and enters the office of the VP of Medical Affairs.

Soni smiles and holds out her hand out to shake.

SONI
(to Dr. Padley)
Hello, I'm Dr. Shah. You had asked to see me?

Dr. Padley means business and snubs the handshake. She makes a dramatic beeline to a small table, strikes down a pile of papers, and sits. She flails her arms signaling for Soni to sit in the chair beside her with no eye contact.

Soni shifts positions in her seat, readjusting the reflex hammer in her white coat pocket. A beautiful view appears before her eyes from the window. She gazes at the view, unsure of which side of the window she is in.

Dr. Padley throws on black framed reading glasses. Stacks of highlighted papers FLIP with some floating to the ground. She ceases upon Soni's highlighted email to the group.

Soni's attention snaps to the email with her puzzled eyes.

Reading glasses pummel on the table. Dr. Padley's pressured speech finds a way through her teeth.

AMELIA PADLEY
I have tracked you. You don't sound like you want to be here.

Papers shuffle.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
Who do you think you are?
Communicating grievances via email?
Talk about such things at your provider meeting, not in an email.

Dr Padley snatches the glasses. Flipping of papers continue with some flying through the air. The appearance of Soni's contract, with almost every sentence highlighted in different colors, is a strange find.

At the sight of that, Soni pinches herself thinking she must be on the outside of that window.

Dr. Padley recites from the contract without taking a breath. Hand gestures have trouble keeping up.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
During the term of this Agreement,
Physician agrees to devote
Physician's time and best efforts
to the practice of medicine on
behalf of Employer and the affairs
of Employer and to perform such
services and duties as may from
time to time be assigned to
Physician by Employer --

Dr. Padley scowls at Soni.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
If you leave, you need to give six
months notice.

Glasses slide with force on the table.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
You choose to be here. There are
providers knocking at the door to
take your position.

Soni looks down and away from the papers.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
No raise. Nor will we hire help
because you think its convenient.
There are expenses, a budget.
Speak!

Soni clears her throat.

SONI
Thank you. I-I-I have worked here
for years. I have gone above and
beyond - a good partner, help cover
others who need time off. But, I'm
burning out. Too many shifts, given
the ongoing staffing shortage --

AMELIA PADLEY

We are actively recruiting but haven't found anyone yet.

SONI

This month, I am scheduled to work 25 twelve hour shifts in one month.

AMELIA PADLEY

Folks don't get your salary for doing nothing.

SONI

No, it's not about money. It's staffing, and you said that people are knocking on the d--

AMELIA PADLEY

It's more complicated than that.

SONI

I'm concerned about your expansion plan. Th-the decision was made without talking to any of us.

AMELIA PADLEY

I do not need to ask your permission. I am the VP of medical affairs!

Soni focuses out the window, slowing down her breathing.

SONI

I am chronically sleep deprived and worry about patient safety and my own safety.

Dr. Padley makes a face and laughs.

AMELIA PADLEY

Sorry to break the news, Soni, but all physicians are 'chronically sleep deprived.' If patient safety is an issue, I would hear about that from the others.

Soni unglues her eyes from the window and turns with determination toward Dr. Padley.

SONI

I need to advocate for myself and ask to go part-time.

AMELIA PADLEY

You are simply an employee of the hospital. You are in no position to negotiate.

SONI

Maybe we should keep this conversation go--

AMELIA PADLEY

Absolutely not. I don't have time to meet with you again. Too busy.

Soni's eyes start to water.

SONI

I-I need to make a change. I always feel like I'm on during my days off. I need to be part-time. Please!

Dr. Padley ignores Soni. Her coffee mug refills.

AMELIA PADLEY

(to Soni)

I went part-time after my baby was born premature, years ago..tough time. It was beyond control, dealing with a lot of stuff - baby with special needs.

Soni's eyes perk up with hope.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)

She's an adult now - still lives with me.

Dr. Padley glances through invisible Soni.

SONI

I am willing to wait a period of time, so that you can get your staffing in order.

AMELIA PADLEY

This is not the same. I had to work, juggle the baby, and earn respect to get this position. If I was able to survive and come out ahead, you can do it, too.

Dr. Padley shakes head to get back to her point.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)

(to Soni)

Working at a hospital is much better than private practice. My family practice partner didn't want to do evening clinic anymore - no staff to help field calls. I told her to suck it up.

Soni locks in on Dr. Padley's eyes.

SONI

(to Dr. Padley)

But that doesn't make it right.

Awkward silence. Dr. Padley shuffles papers and leaps up, having heard enough.

AMELIA PADLEY

(to Soni)

I'll have to talk to many, many people to see if a part-time option is even viable. Let's meet up again in six months.

Soni rises as Dr. Padley turns away.

SONI

Even if I wait until your staffing shortage is resolved, you are telling me 'maybe'?

Dr. Padley hurries, stops, and whirls around. A hand juts out to shake with Soni.

Uncertain of what is happening, Soni shakes her hand.

AMELIA PADLEY

I do respect what you do.

Soni is puzzled by that comment.

SONI

But six months is too --

Phone rings. Dr. Padley jumps into desk chair and clicks on speaker phone. Middle-aged female SECRETARY with nasal voice answers.

SECRETARY (V.O.)

Dr. Biasotto is on the line.

Soni's mouth opens and her breathing quickens. Dr. Padley flicks her hair and smiles.

AMELIA PADLEY
Put him through. Justin! Make way
for another batch. Disability
scores are higher than last.

JUSTIN BIASOTTO
I can always count on you for
putting a smile on my face!

AMELIA PADLEY
Talk later tonight!

Dr. Padley giggles and hangs up the phone.

Soni steps back.

Irrked that Soni is still there, Dr. Padley waves for her to leave. A flashing button is pushed to answer another call on speaker phone. It's a middle-aged male INSURANCE ADVOCATE, who works at her hospital.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
What now?

INSURANCE ADVOCATE (V.O.)
Dr. Padley, we have a problem. It's
about the claims - we are being
denied.

AMELIA PADLEY
It's not like we have more than
one. Which claims?

INSURANCE ADVOCATE (V.O.)
The claims regarding transportation
coverage for stroke patients flown
from surrounding telemed sites to
our hospital. There are closer
options.

Seething Dr. Padley jolts up. A stack of journals wipe off her desk, crashing to the ground.

AMELIA PADLEY
We need to keep revenue all in the
family.

INSURANCE ADVOCATE (V.O.)
Y-Yes, ma'am. But time is brain --

Dr. Padley presses the phone receiver to her ear.

AMELIA PADLEY
 If insurance companies won't pay
 for the helicopter, contact
 collections!

Dr. Padley bangs the phone down and reclines back in her chair. She sorts a pile of mail on her desk.

A brochure crumples into a paper ball and is hurled into the wastebasket some distance away from her desk.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
 (to self)
 Drug rep brochures - disposable.

Dr. Padley glances at Soni, vexed at her persistent presence.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
 (to Soni)
 Employees...

Dr Padley takes aim. Her half eaten sandwich laying on the desk lands in the wastebasket.

AMELIA PADLEY (CONT'D)
 (to Soni)
 Reportable. I mean, disposable.

Soni's eyes well with tears.

INT. SONI'S HOME - NIGHT

Manu focuses on his computer screen, analyzing graphs. Soni approaches.

SONI
 Your grad student called again. Why
 does she call after hours, Manu?
 Hangs up whenever I answer the
 phone?

Soni's voice breaks with emotion.

SONI (CONT'D)
 It's the same number on the caller
 ID.

Manu rolls neck and breathes. Something feels off with him.

MANU
 I am not having an affair. I don't
 know why she calls. Please don't
 be..paranoid.

He hesitates and then advances toward her.

MANU (CONT'D)
 You've been drinking again. I smell
 it. You know this is not good...

His brain tells him not to reward her imperfections with an embrace, but his heart says otherwise. A tear falls on his cheek as he gazes into her tearful eyes. He says the following more for himself than for her...

MANU (CONT'D)
 But...nobody is perfect.

The tears wipe from her face. He holds her tight.

MANU (CONT'D)
 I love you, Soni. The good and the
 bad.

A small kiss plants on her lips.

MANU (CONT'D)
 I'm up against this grant deadline.
 I know you want to quit. Take a
 couple of weeks. Sleep on it.

His reassurance does take not alleviate her distraction.

INT. HOSPITAL - SIX MONTHS LATER

A filthy whitecoat stuffs into a cardboard box on the floor, which holds desk supplies and framed certificates. Soni slumps in a chair at nurses station, exhausted. The chime of her cell phone catches her attention.

MANU TEXT
 Btw Aditi will be at Rosie's
 tonight first sleepover! I'll drop
 her off.

She sets her phone down on the counter, sighs and smiles, thinking of Aditi. Her phone chimes again.

MANU TEXT (CONT'D)
 Have to work late tonight in lab to
 help grad student. Pushing up on
 deadline. I love you.

The text reads over and over in her head. Her jaw clenches. She nods at the phone trying to contain her anger. The phone then propels to the box but misses its target.

Her phone goes down.

Soni closes her eyes, rubbing her temples. OFFICE MANAGER trips over a cell phone on the floor, kicking it further away.

A crack separates Soni and Manu on the phone's home screen photo.

The phone waves in the air. He spins around searching, though Soni is sitting right in front of him. At last, he notes her position and approaches.

SONI
(to Office Manager)
Goodbye bean counter and good luck
sucking up somebody's else revenue.

Leroy, not quite getting the joke, tosses the phone in her box, eager to please.

OFFICE MANAGER
Phone! Good lu --

Soni looks past his ineptitude and pushes on.

Her middle finger says farewell to a security camera, in passing.

INT. CAR - DAY

Soni drives with tears running down face. Ameera calls on speakerphone. Soni answers.

SONI
(to Ameera)
They are masters at it. Say "yes
you can". "Don't be a naysayer".
"Use your good will otherwise
you'll sacrifice patient care". You
should be so honored to bust your
ass off!

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
Last day went well.

Her hands slam on the steering wheel.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)
I hear you, sweetie. The good news
is that you don't have to listen to
that shit anymore.

SONI

Yep.

AMEERA GAAR

Why don't we go out tonight? Call Ava, for a real girls night? I need a man or actually just a good fuck will do..

Ameera chuckles.

AMEERA GAAR (CONT'D)

Preferably from a good looking and not overweight guy..I can settle for a little chunky..desperate times calls for - anyway, I could really use a wingman... err, wing woman?

SONI

I don't know...

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)

C'mon. I need my chica with me.

SONI

I have to go.

AMEERA GAAR (V.O.)

I'll call you.

Call ends.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Worn-out Soni holds a framed certificate. A burning fireplace flickers in front of her.

SONI

(slurs to self)

All those years of busting my ass.
Wasted.

The glassed-in certificate fractures against the wall.

Soni staggers over to a liquor bottle, gulps it down, and stumbles to the ground. A rumpled white coat half hangs out of the cardboard box with a lapel pin visible.

She sets down the bottle next to the box.

The balloon lapel pin rips from the coat. She wipes away a tear and casts it into the fire.

Rocking herself back and forth, she contemplates as the pin burns.

SONI (CONT'D)
 (slurs to self)
 Papa... all those patients...
 disabled... I kept the money all in
 the family. Some family.

She then fumbles for her laptop from the box. Her fingers open it on the floor and activate the track pad. She clicks onto a patient letter.

SONI (V.O.)
 Dear, Dr. Shah, thank you for
 caring for my mother when she had
 her stroke. I know you tried your
 best. She is at a long-term care
 facility with severe disability. I
 pray that she comes home soon.
 Sincerely, Mary Shelton.

She beholds the screen swaying from side to side.

SONI
 (slurs to self)
 My best...

Her screensaver pops up - a photo of her and Manu cuddling.

SONI (CONT'D)
 (slurs to self)
 If Manu knew the real me --

The laptop closes with an impact.

SONI (CONT'D)
 (slurs to self)
 Just be you. But who am I?

The liquor bottle settles in her grip once again. Her cell phone buzzes on an end table with a call from an unknown caller, a pushy female REPORTER (30). Soni answers it.

SONI (CONT'D)
 (slurs)
 Hello?

REPORTER (V.O.)
 Dr. Shah?

SONI
 Mm-hmm.

REPORTER (V.O.)

I'm calling from the New York Times. Your husband, veteran university researcher Dr. Manu Shah was ousted for an inappropriate relationship with a graduate student. Do you have any comment?

She clicks it off with blank look. Then she stumbles into the camera, hallucinating.

SONI

(slurs to camera)
Didn't see you there..y-you heard that?

A voice plays in her mind. She snickers.

A scalpel glistens, next to the white coat on the ground. Soni casts a skeptical eye and flips it in her hands. It then gesticulates with her words.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs to camera)
The US healthcare system is like the boil I saw when I was a kid, shadowing Papa in his office. Nasty, painful boil hidden deep in the skin folds of a morbidly obese man's groin.

The scalpel quivers. Its cold metal meets the warmth of her inner wrist.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs to camera)
Only way to heal it was to lance it open.

Blood oozes from small cut.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs to camera)
Exposing every last pustule...

The scalpel plonks on the floor. Soni's panic stricken eyes long for her friend, who she can no longer see.

SONI (CONT'D)

(to the room)
Hey, hey, where'd you go?

Instead, an outline of Dr. Bashir sitting in a darkened corner materializes.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR

(to Soni)

Dr. Biasotto and I go way back.

Dr. Bashir cackles, increasing in intensity. Soni shields her ears but cannot drown it out. The laughing stops at last.

Her eyes gravitate upon the laptop. She opens it. The keys are pecked at.

SONI

(slurs to self)

I should have been the whistleblower, for Ava. And for Till..I'm so sorry. I lost in the final round... To think, I could just forget with some flowers.

Computer displays "New York State Board." Her typing picks up, faster.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs to self)

It was never about fitting in, rather...

Her hands thwack on the laptop. A tear spots on the keyboard.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs to computer)

Belonging - I'm on your team now, Mary.

Typing resumes. The print button is clicked. She rechecks it with her eyes, unnerved.

SONI (CONT'D)

(slurs to self)

It's done. I stood up for myself, Ameera.

She smiles with relief and hobbles over to bed, when she hears someone rustle in the shadows.

SONI (CONT'D)

No. No, not again. Fuck you!

She drags herself away. Hands protect her ears. Bathroom door opens. She hangs back.

Instead of her home bathroom, she peers into a cramped hospital patient room bathroom with fluorescent lighting.

INT. HOSPITAL PATIENT ROOM BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Soni then hurtles in, locking the door behind her. Her face reflects back from the mirror. On closer inspection, she pats down her face to make sure it is intact. Oblivious, she wears a white coat now.

A mirrored medicine cabinet CREAKS part way open on its own.

The cabinet door draws open further. Several pill bottles tumble out.

She throws empty ones aside, one by one, until she finds pills. Pills from random bottles collect into her hand. A few drop along the way.

The cabinet closes. Her face blinks in the mirror - unkept, thin, hollowed with dark circles under bloodshot eyes.

SONI
(to self in mirror)
You did this to me!

Her hand slides in the white coat pocket and finds a liquor bottle. She wonders how it got there and licks her lips.

An unsteady hand plucks a cup from the urine specimen cup dispenser next to the medicine cabinet.

Fluorescent light flickers above. The cup fills with liquor.

She raises the cup up in a toast to the mirror. Pills conceal in the other hand.

SONI (CONT'D)
A toast to medicine! Eat what you
kill!

Her drink splashes at the mirror. Pills throw back into her mouth. She consumes the liquor from the bottle, while looking at the mirror.

Without warning, the drink then spews from her mouth. She blinks multiple times and tilts into the mirror. She withdraws in an instant.

A reflection of Dr. Bashir over her shoulder flashes with him popping pills into his mouth, smiling. He then FLICKS the light switch off.

The scene blacks out and then the following dialogue is audio only.

MOUSTAFA BASHIR
Help. Help me. Help...

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. SONI'S HOME - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE ENDS)

Disheveled pale Soni in scrubs lays, eyes closed, in bed.
Mild GURGLING or DEATH RATTLE is heard.

The cell phone next to the dropped pills vibrates, after
which it displays *missed call Ameera Gaar 10:15pm*.

Soni's chest rises and falls with shallow movements. It then
terminates, along with the gurgling. Beside her nightstand is
a sealed envelope which reads *New York State Medical Board*.
Silence befalls the room.

FADE OUT