MURDER ON THE ARABIAN SEA
By Apoorva Kale

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ACT II
Scene 1

Two hours later. The inside of the barge.

One door leads to the deck of the barge.  
Another door at stage right leads to the exit.

The party is obviously over. Here and there,  
dirty dishes lie on the tables, glasses and napkins are strewn on the floor. It’s as if a Thanksgiving’s Day parade passed through this little boat.

A huge sign saying “Bye bye, Mr. Bahl!” hangs loosely on the back wall.

MR. KARPATI sits at the table, two empty glasses in front of him. DR. GIRI joins him carrying a half empty bottle of whiskey.

He pours himself a glass and then MR. KARPATI a glass, then raises his glass to toast.

MR. KARPATI stops him. He searches the mess around them, finds a clean plastic cup and places it on the table. DR. GIRD pours whiskey into this third glass. MR. KARPATI places a chair at the same spot, then drops a couple of cubes of ice in the third glass.

They raise a toast, and sip their whiskey.

APOO exits through the door that leads to the deck.
DR. GIRI goes back to drinking his whiskey as if nothing happened. MR. KARPATI meanwhile, does not have a sip.

DR. GIRI
Bottoms up, Mr. Karpati. Life is short.

MR. KARPATI
Let Apoo come back.

DR. GIRI
I do believe he’s rather ill disposed to come out right now. Why don’t get started? Celebrate for a change.

MR. KARPATI
What’s there to celebrate? They’re selling the boat. We should be in mourning.

DR. GIRI
They’re selling the boat?

MR. KARPATI
Mrs. Bahl didn’t want to keep the boat where her husband died.

DR. GIRI
How soon are they selling it?

MR. KARPATI
Tomorrow.

DR. GIRI
You’d think Apoo’s shenanigans wouldn’t have taken their toll on her. And now this.

MR. KARPATI
She had to make the decision quick. How else was she going to pay for Apoo’s education?

DR. GIRI
So this is our last drink on the old girl?

MR. KARPATI
Right. So I don’t see any reason to celebrate.

DR. GIRI
In memoriam, then. Adieu, Mona Lisa! *(he takes a swig.)*

MR. KARPATI
Let’s wait for Apoo.

DR. GIRI
Apoo’s got a flight to catch in two hours. He’s busy winding up. We should carry on drinking.

MR. KARPATI
Forget it. You just need an excuse to booze.

DR. GIRI
Don’t be a worry wart, Mr. Karpati. What’s wrong this time?

MR. KARPATI
Nothing. Just something that girl said.

DR. GIRI
Who? Ashumi? Here we go. She’s depressed. You’re depressed. Apoo’s sad that he’s leaving. The whole country’s depressed. Look, Mr. Karpati, when I came back from London, I was depressed I didn’t want to live. But it was Mrs. Bahl who called me here, right on this boat, and she made me some lovely crab curry and she said- “There’s no need to be depressed. Every day is a battle.” Every day is a battle. And that’s what I’ve been fighting. It’s a rather big boulder we’re pushing up the mountain, Mr. Karpati, but the thing that makes happy is that we’re all carrying a boulder.

MR. KARPATI
How I wish she’d cook us that crab curry one last time.

DR. GIRI
The last couple of hours really set the cat amongst the pigeons, didn’t they?

MR. KARPATI
You know doctor, sometimes I don’t understand a word you say.
Well, obviously you can’t take Cambridge out of a man. What I meant was; she’s a tad nervous when she left with the police, wasn’t she?

MR. KARPATI
A tad? Baby had to escort her. Apoo cut her nose in public.

DR. GIRI
Her nose?

MR. KARPATI
Her dignity, I meant. You can’t take Bombay out of a man either, evidently. They decided not to charge Mr. Badshah with anything, so not to worry.

_APOO enters._

MR. KARPATI
All set, young man?

APOO
All set.

MR. KARPATI
Bags and all? Passport?

APOO
Passport’s here. _be points to the table_ The bags are at home. I’ll pick them up on the way out.

APOO
What’s all this?

MR. KARPATI
It’s the last drink on the Mona Lisa. Wanna join?

APOO
It’ll help me crash on the flight. Why not?

DR. GIRI
Last drink on the Mona Lisa.

DR. GIRI _replenishes his glasses._
DR. GIRI
Here’s to a safe flight. Bon voyage!

MR. KARPATI
Bon voyage!

MR. KARPATI and DR. GIRI drink their whiskey.

APOO
The flight can crash land for all I care.

DR. GIRI
That’s rather dour, Apoo.

MR. KARPATI
Don’t talk like that, Apoo. Don’t talk like that. It’s very inauspicious.

APOO
What I mean is: whether the plane crashes or the plane lands, I know what’s laid out for me. There’s no surprises, no twists in the plot from here on. Just a long thin note, like the hum of that air-conditioner. But nothing to worry about; I’m quite happy about it. I’ll settle for a not-so-spectacular life. An uncharmed life. The only good thing about dying on that plane tonight will be that at least that’ll be a surprise.

Pause.

MR. KARPATI
It’s ok, my boy. The cops gave you the third degree or what?

APOO
…

MR. KARPATI
What happened? Don’t want to talk it or what?

DR. GIRI
Well, the inspector obviously didn’t buy it, otherwise Mr. Badshah wouldn’t be walking around the boat scot-free right now.

MR. KARPATI
You don’t have to feel shy. It’s us only.

APOO
Inspector Gore said that if he wasn’t friend of the family’s, I would have spent the night in the lock-up for defaming Mr. Badshah.

DR. GIRI
Since when was Inspector Gore a friend of the family’s?

APOO
About 50,000 rupees ago.

MR. KARPATI
Be quiet, he’s still eating the free chicken biryani outside.

APOO
He probably had pity on me because I’m leaving.

MOM enters with BABY.

BABY
I just need to search for something.

MOM
Let me say goodbye at least.

BABY
But it’s too cold outside.

MOM
Cold? What’re you talking about? I’m sweating.

BABY
Not the weather. The people.

MOM
*(calling offstage)*
No, inspector, there’s no more food here.

BABY

How do you say ‘Kindly fuck off’ in Hindi?

MOM

Bloody rascal won’t leave only.

BABY

We bribed him.

MOM

We fed him.

BABY

What’s left?

MOM

God knows. What a horrid way to say goodbye to the boat. All those people have spent so many nice nice evenings here. So many parties we had. So much booze you all drank. And now this rascal’s going to piss on our parade.

MR. KARPATI

Maybe he wants to come inside.

APOO

Sorry, mom.

MOM

I’m not angry I’m not angry. Just get him out of here.

*The door opens. INSPECTOR GORE enters.*

INSPECTOR GORE

Hello hello! Me myself Inspector Gore.

MR. KARPATI

Me myself Mr. Karpati.

*They shake hands with one another.*
DR. GIRI
And we ourselves very pleased to see you.

INSPECTOR GORE
Mention not. No tension. Stand up when you do hand shake.

MR. KARPATI
Ha ha.

INSPECTOR GORE
No I mean it. Stand up. I’m a police officer.

MR. KARPATI looks at DR. GIRI wondering if INSPECTOR GORE is serious.

Or I’ll arrest you.

They both stand up.

INSPECTOR GORE
Ha ha! Can’t tell when I’m joking? Sit sit.

MR. KARPATI and DR. GIRI hesitate.

Sit I said.

MR. KARPATI and DR. GIRI sit down.

No food in here or what, madam?

MOM
Promise, inspector.

INSPECTOR GORE looks around the boat.

INSPECTOR GORE
Wah wah! Wah wah! What a beauty, Mrs. Bahl. Picture of true beauty, this boat. How expensive? What your husband did for a living?
MOM
Excuse me?

INSPECTOR GORE
For you to afford this, I mean. What was your husband doing?

APOO
Inspector Gore, we’re actually getting ready to leave ourselves, and since I already told you everything I know, can you please…

INSPECTOR GORE
Told me everything you know? Gentle Man, what you told me exactly? Tell everyone. Tell tell.

APOO
I told you what I knew.

INSPECTOR GORE
Young man, since you’re not going to tell people, I shall tell them. What this boy knew, I’ll tell you. Two hours ago, I get a phone call saying, ‘Someone killed my father’. And when I came and asked this young man who killed his father, what he said, you know? ‘I don’t know’ he said. He holds his head in his hands and says ‘I don’t know’.