

# THE BETROTHED

By Dipika Guha

## **CHARACTERS**

**SIMON** thirty eight, an American man, a virgin, existentially anxious, his favourite movie is „When Harry Met Sally“

**ANNA CECILIA RASHEEDA SILOSA HANGI MARIA** as old as possible for a woman on stage, arises from a dark, mythical East European country, has never seen a movie but has lived the life of several

**RASHEEDA** mid thirties (although insists she is in her early twenties), daughter to **ANNA CECILIA** stunning, a model (played by the same actor as **ANNA CECILIA**), does not like movies

**SOLOMON** late fifties, handsome, dirt underneath his fingernails, speaks with an accent of a man from a mythical East European country who has spent his life watching American movies like „Die Hard“ and „The Godfather“

**THE SON** early teens, **SIMON**’s son (played by the same actor who plays **SOLOMON**) probably wants to be in the movies someday

**GONAN** late fifties, **SOLOMON**’s best friend and worst enemy, a fan of silent comedies

**THE PRIEST** late forties, the local priest, has recently got into watching American teen shows like 90210 and The Hills (played by the same actor as **GONAN**)

PLACE A mythical East European country "in transition".

Where the sun and moon are always a perfect circle. Where the night is perfectly black. Where the mornings are bright hot. (And the afternoons are even hotter...sleep is necessary or else one might be prone to error when delivering a calf)

Where, despite the heat, the soil smells freshly rained on. Where the earth is perfectly round. And you can feel its roundness. Where one's main occupation is the thought one thinks in the afternoon, just before that sleep.

#### LOCATIONS

ANNA CECILIA RASHEEDA's home: a two room hut. Only one room is visible (the room for the cows is offstage)

THE CEMETARY: one solitary headstone THE AFTERLIFE: one solitary bench

TIME The present ACTION OF TIME One week

## THE JOURNEY

### SUNDAY

*A lone airplane seat floats. Seated, an anxious looking man in his mid thirties dressed in a suit.*

*He plugs his earphones in. Loud music. He quickly turns it down and shifts uncomfortably. He slips an airline eye patch over his eyes and opens the airplane blanket. It is tiny and only goes up to his knees. He tries to cover himself up but in the effort only exposes another part of his body.*

*The man rips the eye patch off and stares at the (absent) woman sitting next to him.*

### SIMON

Back to the old cow country. Back to the old homeland... Don't you just hate it when people you don't know talk to you on the plane? yakking about their lives..taking up your personal space..I can't stand it. I mean, I love to travel. I just. Hate... leaving home because I really, I love America. But these days what with these airfares...fly anywhere you want for, like a dollar, right? And everybody has, like, a dollar...

This is my first time. Flying, I mean, flying, it's my first..I've been to first base, I mean, domestic, I mean domestic bases uh airport bases airports.. but this is my first time over the uh..body of of...water. I've been watching "Sex and the City". Those girls! They just fly all over the place don't they? I can see why you..women like it. It's, like really, really.. the women are really, I mean, women are really...anyway..my Mom always said women would take over the world and look at you now, not you-I mean not you personally but..but you know I can't help feeling that the guys on these shows are uh a little... because how many men are..are..like that, identify..and don't get me wrong I love that show but I don't feel that I really... My mom always really...you know she really... worries..about me finding..finding someone so I'm..I'm....

So! Listen to me yakking on. You gonna be gone long? You seeing the river and the the hills and the geysers? Oh you totally should. I bought this great guide books. It's got everything..absolutely everything we need you know, cause

us..boy they see us coming we gotta stick together in these places so if you need anything, feel free to..here..take my card...cause you never know what"s foreign is foreign..strange is strange...of course, no one really wants to leave home...but what"s a guy to do when for the first time in his life he"s...cause I"m I"m...  
Awww You look so sweet. Are you asleep? That"s okay...you sleep...  
The old cow country. My first time..my first...

*Slow half light. Roar of an aeroplane that sounds like its taking off and landing at the same time. The shadow of a plane passes behind him and then seeps through his body.*

*He watches the shadow leak into his skin and then releases it through the open palm of his hand.*

*Rousing balalaika wedding music....*

## **THE PROMISE**

Sunday evening

*SIMON stands outside the door of a single room house. A window upstage overlooks a large patch of green and a perfectly circular sun.*

*Inside, a table, two chairs and a fold up bed, a small stove, a transistor radio (where the music now comes from tinnily) and a small empty mouse cage in the corner of the room. A pile of ragged men"s shoes lie in one corner of the room. There is hay on the floor.*

*A hunched over figure in black sways gently. The hunched figure rises. She hobbles over to the doorway. She holds her age in every limb, in every pore of her body, every crease in her face, every strand of her hair.*

*It is as though time folded in on itself. They talk over the music.*

SIMON I"ve come for my wife!

CECILIA She"s dead.

*The music grinds to a halt.*

SIMON Is she inside?

CECILIA No. Because she's dead.

SIMON Where is everyone???

CECILIA They came. Then the sun came out so they went for a picnic. They left their shoes.

*She points to a pile of man's shoes in the corner of the room.*

SIMON But I flew all this way! I hate flying. They take your shoes away, they throw away your toothpaste. Strangers talk to you the whole time, it's terrible. I was going to be married today. Today! Why did this happen to me?

CECILIA I don't know. I don't know you.

SIMON My father

CECILIA And her father

SIMON Made a pact.

CECILIA Betrothed their most beloved

SIMON To their most beloved.

CECILIA Her father

SIMON And my father

CECILIA Lost a bet. Your father won for you Gonan's ugliest daughter. Lucky for you Gonan had no ugly daughters so you got the smallest. She was perfect, except for one little extra finger on her left foot.

SIMON Toe.

CECILIA Finger. But she's gone now.

SIMON Dead?

CECILIA Dead. She was like a daughter to me.

SIMON Rasheeda my wife!

CECILIA Rasheeda?

SIMON My wife!

CECILIA ....There appears to be a mix up.

SIMON She's not dead?

CECILIA Rasheeda's not dead. I thought you meant the one who didn't die...Ramida. Rasheeda's out back, with the cows. Yes..she's here after all....

SIMON Is this the ugly one?

CECILIA This IS the ugly one. Here I was thinking, I wonder why Gonan offloaded the nice looking one with the extra finger. Then I thought, the extra finger could be useful for scrubbing those bits behind the toilet.. so you see, I

was confused, but for no reason..because the ugly one who didn't die is right here. In the back. Waiting for you..

SIMON Scrubbing the cows.

CECILIA Or scrubbing herself. I can't tell. Their behinds are so alike. Let me fetch her.

SIMON Don't.

CECILIA You want to go back without wife?

SIMON She was promised.

CECILIA She is yours.

SIMON Don't get her.

CECILIA Ok I won't.

SIMON She'll think I'm a coward.

CECILIA At least you won't be a married coward. Once you give your word to a woman there's no turning back.. Especially if you were.

SIMON Betrothed

CECILIA It's sacred. Deadly. Run! Save yourself.

CECILIA Betrothed

*Simon turns around, ready to flee. The radio turns on and plays a somber tune.*

CECILIA Your father and her father played cards back in the days when men were men.

SIMON All I want is to lie under the covers and breathe. Breathe my father's breaths. Think of him. To know my place. That's all I want, to know my place. If this, if this is what it means to know my place, I'll I'll stay.  
Is this where we sleep?

*The old woman stares and then turns quickly.*

CECILIA Okay I'll get the cow. I mean, the girl.

*She exits out the back door. Simon waits. He sees a deck of cards on the table and pulls one from the pack. It is the Joker. He returns it hastily.*

*A small cough at the door. He turns.*

*The old woman walks in again. The music rises to a crescendo.*

CECILIA (dramatically) I am Rasheeda your wife. This is my house.

## **SEDUCTION OF THE TONGUE**

*An hour later. SIMON and CECILIA sit at the table together. They drink coffee.*

CECILIA How green the garden looks against the mountain gone dry from the happiness of summer. In winter he weeps and the garden does not look as green. The tree waits for me when I come home from my afternoon swim. It bends down to smell the nape of my neck. I dry in the heat of the afternoon sun.

SIMON That's..great.

CECILIA Your English is weak. Where did you learn it?

SIMON Pittsburgh.

CECILIA Don't worry. We'll return your language to you Simon Son of Simon.  
You're as skinny as a rake. Like your father.

SIMON My father?

CECILIA Your father was a rake who had all the girls: pretty girls, ugly girls, toothy girls, hairy girls, girls who existed, girls who didn't.

SIMON What IS this?

CECILIA Your father once stole a girl from his brother's dreams. In the dream his brother was sitting in a library reading a book when in walks in the most stop your heart beautiful woman. The library had tall ceilings and windows and enough books to build a house with. Perfect for fucking. So, this woman comes in and without any courtship they began to do their business. So they meet like this, every night and then one night, the woman stops coming. Just like that. No warning, no sign, nothing.

So that morning, your uncle comes down for breakfast looking like he dropped his heart down a well. And your father, he's there, drinking his coffee. He says „What's the matter brother-you look like you dropped your heart down a well“. Back comes the reply „You know brother, I have this dream every night this beautiful woman comes to me. We make love until I wake. I wake with her sound inside my skin. Last night, she didn't come“. So your father says „Does she have dark hair on her upper arms, big eyelashes and a squint? And your uncle replies „Yes, she is beautiful“.

And your father says, „She's with me now“.

That's the kind of man he was. Long arms to steal women Long everything.. So we heard.

SIMON This is like a movie. Where the couple don't meet until right at the very end. We're at the beginning, although it looks like the end for you..How old are you?

CECILIA Thirty two. I only look like this because of age. You look as old as you feel And I feel like this. Old. You should have come yesterday Simon son of Simon, I was really good looking then.

SIMON Then?

CECILIA I aged. It was sudden. Suddenly, the world turned round. I saw one half of it was green, the other half brown. Half of the world in darkness while the other half in light Only half of us have food to eat while the other half have nothing. I felt this sadness deep inside my life. I tapped a dark well of grief. I sat under the tree outside and cried tears that wet the earth. And then when I came back into the house and looked in the mirror I saw my face had aged. My hair had whitened. I became as you see me now. Forever changed. And then I remembered you were coming and I thought „Nevermind, these things happen”. Do you want more coffee?

*Cecilia reaches for Simon's mug and pours white sugar into it, mixing slowly.*

SIMON ..... Okay. So where I come from Cecilia, you have to ..to be able to look at your wife. To take her to office parties or Halloween parties. You have to be able to take her out. Side. Where I come from Rasheeda. What your wife looks like. It matters.

CECILIA The arch of her back, the strength in the soles of her feet, the dance her heat makes. It all matters.. I love myself Simon Son of Simon. How many women love themselves?

SIMON I want to meet a woman on a railway carriage. She's sitting alone. A book falls on her head. She looks up. She sees me. I smile. It's my book I don't want it to be heavy-just serious. I don't want to kill her..just a slight concussion so I can hold her. The book is heavy like her eyes.  
I've never met my wife Rasheeda. But you are not the one.

CECILIA I AM the one.

SIMON No, you're not.

CECILIA I am. What if I do this with my mouth?

SIMON No.

CECILIA This?

SIMON No.

CECILIA It'll get better. That's the way marriages work, they get better with time, when the passion fades.

SIMON What passion???

CECILIA How sweet it is not to have to work so hard for love?