

[Dialogue takes place slowly with plenty of space between lines.]

INT. DAY - HOSPITAL

In an uninviting hospital, SALIM (89) lies in a cheap bed scribbling on a newspaper crossword with failing vision. On the tray table in front of him is a small wine glass half-full. He has dark skin, an aristocratic face and a full head of white hair. He looks frail but his defiant brow is locked in concentration.

Through a nearby window, we hear the noon traffic rushing like wind far off outside. Every now and then a noisy ambulance cuts through.

Two NURSES wheel IAN (89) in the same kind of bed into a space next to Salim.

They pull the partition curtain across, dividing the two men and leave.

Ian looks like any moment could be his last. He has a drip attached to his forearm and his breathing is laboured. He is bald and there is a natural good-natured scruffiness about him. He blinks around at his surroundings, slowly but inquisitively.

Side by side the men look as though from two different worlds.

IAN
(calling out quietly)
Hello...?

Salim doesn't hear. He sips his wine, absorbed in the crossword.

IAN (CONTD)
(straining, louder)
Excuse me...?

SALIM
(eyes on paper)
Yes?

IAN
Do you have...the time?

SALIM
No. Sorry.

Silence.

(CONTINUED)

IAN
I was born...in this place...

SALIM
(still not looking up)
So was I.

IAN
April 3rd...1924...

Salim looks up from his paper.

SALIM
That's my birthday.

IAN
What did you...make of it all?

SALIM
I haven't decided.

IAN
(weak laugh)
Chop chop.

Salim tries to resume his crossword.

IAN (CONTD)
I have a flight booked for next
month. Joining my wife in
Jerusalem.

Salim blinks confusedly - no one in this ward is going
anywhere. At least not on a plane.

SALIM
(deadpan)
Flying first class?

Ian laughs.

IAN
Cargo actually.

Silence.

IAN (CONTD)
Live nearby?

SALIM
Across the park.

IAN
So did we...those houses...didn't
cost...what they do now.

SALIM
No.

IAN
That Italian...on the High
Street...

SALIM
Dino's. Most Sunday's for pizza.

IAN
I went Saturdays.

SALIM
I'd walk through the park on
Saturday.

IAN (CONTD)
With your children?

Beat.

SALIM
I married once. No children.

IAN
Sorry.

SALIM
No need to be sorry.

IAN
Pat and I were married 60
years...she passed 3 years ago.

SALIM
I'm sorry...How did you two meet?

IAN
I was a dentist...she was my first
root canal...very painful procedure
back then...the 4-letter words that
came out of her mouth...what a
vocabulary...Asked her if I could
make up for it...by taking her out
to dinner...once she was able to
eat again...

Silence

IAN (CONTD)

May I ask...what happened to your wife?

SALIM

We divorced. Apparently I was too focused on my work. Mind you, she knew what I was like when we met.

IAN

What did you do?

SALIM

Physics professor. Cambridge. I spent 30 years looking for the 'graviton'.

IAN

Did you find it?

SALIM

No.

IAN

Ah well...

Silence.

SALIM

Perhaps I could have been a little more attentive.

IAN

Pretty girl...?

SALIM

Ravishing.

IAN

How did you meet?

SALIM

Our parents introduced us. She came from a very traditional family. We weren't allowed to be alone together until the wedding night.

IAN

What was it like...your first night?

Salim makes a face at the intimate question. But answers anyway. He is tacit at first, however as the memories start flooding back he becomes more and more generous.

(CONTINUED)

SALIM

Our first night... Well, we were so tired after the wedding party. We hadn't eaten anything, and we'd been drinking champagne all day... Soon as everyone left we just collapsed on the bed. Before we fell asleep we promised we'd make up for it on our honeymoon.

IAN

Where did...you go?

SALIM

(transported)

India. It was very beautiful... I remember the first night she wore this silk gown - perfectly see-through - can you imagine? I was shocked that she owned such a thing. After we made love we went to the beach and swam in the full moonlight. I'd never seen such stars. The water was warm as a bath. Suddenly Elaine screams and points at the shore - my heart nearly stopped - I turn around to see two people running off with all our clothes.

Ian laughs.

He continues, his voice quavering.

SALIM (CONTD)

Elaine refused to leave the water naked...so I ran out and tried to chase them down, naked as the day I was born. I crashed straight into a policeman. He thought I was a pervert.

Pause.

SALIM (CONTD)

We haven't spoken for years. I don't know if she's alive or dead.

Silence.

Straining with enormous effort, Ian reaches his hand across the space between the beds and pushes his hand through the partition curtain. He leaves his arm out for Salim to clasp.

(CONTINUED)