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Carrying the Calf**

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CARRYING THE CALF

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Shirley Barrie



Carrying the Calf

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Characters

INDIRA: 16, of South Asian extraction, has lived in Canada from the age of 5.

SHARON: 16, born in Canada of West Indian parents.

ANN: Pushing 40, white, divorced mother of 4.

FIROZA: Mid-late 20's, originally Ugandan of South Asian extraction, university educated.

Setting

The play takes place in an empty room in a local community centre. There are gym mats and a couple of benches. The four scenes span the eight weeks of a self-defence class for women.

Synopsis

Indira (16) has dragged her reluctant West Indian friend, Sharon, along to a self-defence for women class at the local community centre. Sharon would rather be spending the time with her boyfriend, Calvin. The only other student is Ann, a white single mother of 4. They are all facing a different kind of violence in their lives, but divided by age, race and expectations, they prove a handful for Firoza, the South Asian instructor. It is only when she tells them the ancient story of Fetneh who carried a calf up 60 steps every day for 6 years, that the connections begin to be made and strength of spirit is seen to be as essential as strength of body. The four scenes of the play are linked by katas: the strictly choreographed, powerful sequences of movements that are a central part of karate.

Introduction

In staging *Carrying the Calf* it is important to find a physicalization for each of the characters which shows the evolution of their physical confidence and their skills. This should be a part of the performance throughout and not just in the moments where physical action is scripted. While there is a measure of “acting” involved in making some of the physical moves in the play read effectively, it proved invaluable to have a good self-defence teacher/trainer as a part of the production team. Concern for safety and adequate warm-ups are important when undertaking this kind of work, particularly when performers are coming into contact with one another. Having actors of different heights playing Indira and Sharon in the remount of the production showed us that breaks from holds and throws must be adapted to the size and the physical agility of the actors.

The scripted physical moves in the play are of two types: generally taught self-defence tactics (such as locating the vulnerable spots on an attacker, and breaking from holds) and the “kata.” A kata is an integral part of karate training. It is a carefully orchestrated series of moves against imaginary attackers, moves which look very much like a choreographed dance. We chose a beginner's kata that visually revealed the grace, control, strength and confidence that the women develop over the weeks of the course.

The story of Fetneh, Bahram-Gur and the Calf which Firoza tells in the play is an ancient Persian tale which I first discovered in a book published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, called *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales of the Khamseh of Nizami* by Peter J. Chelkowski.

Carrying the Calf is a play about women who are having problems with some of the men in their lives, and who each take an initial step towards standing up for themselves - a step that is right for them. There is now a general public recognition that violence against women is a major problem in our society, but the steps towards changing our behaviour sometimes seem painful and slow. We should not conclude from this that the situation is hopeless, however. Rather, having acknowledged the problem, we must understand that there is still much for both men and women to learn about relating to each other. If we want to bridge the gap, we must find a way to do it. Fetneh, after all, didn't work for six years in order to reject Bahram-Gur but to have a positive relationship with him.

Production History

The play was first produced by Straight Stitching Productions in association with Prologue to the Performing Arts. The first performance was sponsored by the Bickford Centre on February 4, 1992 at the Central High School of Commerce in Toronto. A four-week tour followed.

Indira: Catherine Bruhier

Sharon: Michelle Moffatt

Ann: Mary Durkan

Firoza: Helen-Claire Tingling

Director: Lib Spry

Set and Costumes: Chris Bryden

Stage Manager: Nancy Katsof

Music: Groupo Gekko (formerly Urban Pygmies)

Self-defence by Julie Busch of the Toronto Academy of Karate and Denise Fujiwara, choreographic consultant. Teacher's Guide by Sue Daniel. Graphics by Rudolf Stussi. The production was remounted and toured in October 1992 with the following changes:

Indira: Sharon M. Lewis

Sharon: Melanie Nicholls-King

Stage Manager: Debbie Read

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Scene I

INDIRA: (*From off*) 201. This is it.

SHARON: (*From off*) I can't go in like this.

INDIRA: (*Off*) We're late. Come on. (*She enters. She wears a dark skirt and white blouse – almost like a school uniform. She carries a school bag. She's a bit breathless.*) Nobody's here!

SHARON: (*Enters*) Good. (*She's stylishly dressed including dress shoes — but she only wears one shoe. The other is in her hand. She limps to the bench and sits down, rubbing her ankle.*)

INDIRA: Are you all right?

SHARON: I twisted my ankle on those stupid stairs and broke the heel on my best shoes. I'm terrific.

INDIRA: Sorry.

SHARON: And I'm all sweaty from running through the park. Yuk. If you'd a been on time we could've walked around.

INDIRA: I couldn't help it, could I. My brother was going out and my dad said he had to walk me to the library.

SHARON: The library! Is that where you told them you were going? What if they find out?

INDIRA: They won't.

SHARON: (*She puts on the shoe and takes a step. The heel collapses.*) Chuh! I can't wear this!

INDIRA: They were kinda dumb shoes to wear here anyway.

SHARON: My running shoes are in my bag. Anyway you're a great one to talk. (*She gestures to the skirt.*) I mean wearing that here, now that's dumb.

INDIRA: I'm gonna change. Anyways, my Mum and Dad don't ask so many questions if I dress like this. You're lucky your parents don't tell you what to wear.

SHARON: They tell me. I just don't pay no attention. It's okay though. You expect that kinda thing from parents. But when teachers... D'you know what that witch Turnovski had the nerve to tell me last week? That I...

INDIRA: That you wouldn't have come down with a cold if you dressed properly.

SHARON: Yeah, well I can't wait to get out of that dump. I'm gonna get a job downtown in one of those fashion places. You get a discount on the clothes, you know. Hey, we could look for a job together.

INDIRA: I'm staying at school.

SHARON: With what's happening to you? It's your funeral. I can't wear runners with this.

INDIRA: So it'll be dark when we finish. Nobody'll see you but me. And I won't tell.

SHARON: *(Pause)* Uhh, Calvin's meeting me.

INDIRA: You never told me that!

SHARON: I never got a chance, did I.

INDIRA: But you said you never go out with him on Tuesdays.

SHARON: I don't. Usually. But he called me after school and... You know.

INDIRA: No. *(She doesn't know.)*

SHARON: Give me a break, eh. I told him I couldn't till after.

INDIRA: But how am I gonna get home?

SHARON: I'll ask Calvin if he'd mind... driving around by your place.

INDIRA: Oh, great. It's bad enough I hang around with you. If my parents see me with you and Calvin, it'll be the end.

SHARON: So we'll drop you on the corner. *(She's been fiddling with the shoe again. The heel falls off.)* This'll never stay on. I'm gonna haveta go home.

INDIRA: You can't. You promised!

SHARON: Look why don't you just open your stupid big mouth and tell somebody about Jakey Barnes.

INDIRA: 'Cause if it got back to my dad he'd take me out of school. You don't know him, Shar.

SHARON: *(Pause)* It's not easy being your friend, you know. I mean, what am I gonna tell Calvin?

INDIRA: I thought you already talked to him.

SHARON: I said I'd promised to come here for a class with you. I didn't tell him what class.

INDIRA: Why not? Are you gonna lie?

SHARON: You're a great one to talk about lying! (*INDIRA is destroyed*) Hey, I never said it. Indie, forget I said it, all right. I don't want you going all guilty on me.

INDIRA: I don't want to lie. I didn't. Not exactly. But they wouldn't understand...

SHARON: Yeah, well it's the same with guys. You don't lie. You just have to... figure out a way to say it. Anyway, it's no big deal. It'll be over by then.

INDIRA: Sharon!!

SHARON: I only promised to come once.

ANN enters. She is out of breath. There is a sudden silence.

ANN: Hi. (*Pause*) Those stairs are killers. Am I late?

SHARON: For what?

ANN: The class.

SHARON: You got the wrong room.

ANN: This is 201 isn't it?

SHARON: God, you've stuck us in the wrong room, Indira. They'll have started already and we'll have to walk in in front of everybody.

INDIRA: I checked after school, Shar. It was this room.

ANN: Maybe we've signed up for the same class.

SHARON: Huh?

ANN: It is possible.

SHARON and INDIRA giggle.

SHARON: I don't think so.

ANN: This is supposed to be self defence for women.

SHARON: Chuh! You've really dumped us in it now, Indie. Let's go.

INDIRA: No.

ANN: What're you signed up for?

INDIRA: (*Embarrassed pause*) The... defence thing.

ANN: Well that's all right then.

SHARON: (*Muttering*) This is gonna be terrific!

ANN: (*To INDIRA*) Aren't very many of us, are there? I almost didn't come myself. Well... it's hard to get out with the kids'n all.

SHARON: I can't believe it. She's gotta be as old as my Mom.

INDIRA: Shhh.

SHARON: I mean... what's she here for?

ANN: D'you know if we're supposed to bring anything special for this class?

INDIRA: No. Sorry.

ANN: You've never come to anything like this before then?

SHARON: No way. Let's go, Indie.

INDIRA: No.

ANN: Is this all they give us to sit on? Oh well. (*She sits on the bench, moving INDIRA's bag and jacket to make room for her own things.*) It's quieter'n home. Kids fighting over the TV.

SHARON: God, she's taking over the whole place.

INDIRA: (*Pulling SHARON aside*) Why d'you have to be so rude?

SHARON: Why d'you have to be so polite? I mean, I wouldn't be stuck here with you if you didn't let people walk all over you, would I.

INDIRA: It's not the same thing.

SHARON: Isn't it? (*Pause*) And have you thought about the kind of person who's gonna be teaching this class then?

INDIRA: Yeah.

SHARON: What if it's a guy — huh? And if it's a woman, she's probably some big butch man-hater, muscles out to here. Yuk!! (*Silence*) Ah, c'mon, Indie. Let's go. I came, didn't I.

INDIRA: Yeah.

INDIRA goes to get her bag. SHARON sighs with relief. FIROZA enters. She's slim. Very pretty. East Indian. She has a computerized printout.

FIROZA: Hi everybody. Thanks so much for waiting. My name is Firoza, and I'm your instructor.

SHARON: Ohhhh no.

FIROZA: Is something wrong, Sharon? Or is it Ann?

ANN: I'm Ann.

INDIRA: She just got a bit tired of waiting. That's all.

FIROZA: I'm really sorry about that.

SHARON: You're going to teach us?

FIROZA: Well, that depends on you.

SHARON: On me! Hey — I didn't do nothing.

FIROZA: I didn't mean just you, Sharon. I meant all of you. *(Pause)* You see, usually they won't run a class with a registration of three...

SHARON: Oh. Too bad.

FIROZA: But — since this course is something the community centre says it really wants started, I've managed to persuade Phil to let us carry on. But he'll only agree if all three of you are really committed to the course and plan to keep coming.

SHARON: Chuh!

FIROZA: I know it's laying a lot on you, and...

INDIRA: I'll come.

SHARON: Indie! *(INDIRA glares at her. To FIROZA.)* But what if we're sick or something?

FIROZA: Well, I don't think Phil will pull the plug if you're in bed with the flu one week, but...

SHARON: But what if somebody can't do it.

FIROZA: Oh, I'm sure you won't have any problems, Sharon.

ANN: *(She's not going to be put down by SHARON.)* I'll come.

SHARON: Gawd!! Look. You gotta understand. It wasn't my idea, coming here. She talked me into it.

FIROZA: Oh.

SHARON: It was a favour like...

FIROZA: I see... Well you don't have to decide right now. You don't even know what you're getting into. Right? Tell you what. Why don't we go ahead with this class and then we can talk at the end when you've got a better idea of what it's all about.

INDIRA: All right.

ANN nods. SHARON shrugs.

FIROZA: I'll show you something we'll be learning.

She demonstrates a beautiful and powerful kata – a choreographed series of movements used in karate. SHARON is impressed in spite of herself. ANN is skeptical about what she's let herself in for. INDIRA is enthralled.

Scene 2

It's halfway through the third class. FIROZA is working with ANN.

FIROZA: Let's go back to the Cross Arm Grab.

ANN: Oh gawd.

FIROZA: Do you remember?

ANN: I... think so.

FIROZA: Ready? (FIROZA grabs her.)

ANN: (Fluffs it.) Sorry.

FIROZA: That's okay. I'll go over it again. (She waits.)

ANN: Oh. I'm the aggressor now. Right. (She grabs FIROZA. FIROZA cleanly breaks the hold perhaps describing in words the sequence of moves, which leaves ANN on her knees.) Got it... I think.

FIROZA: So... (She grabs ANN. ANN breaks the hold, not smoothly but effectively and with relish.) Good.

INDIRA enters. She's wearing more appropriate clothes – closer in style to FIROZA's than SHARON's.

FIROZA: (Breaking off with ANN) Well?

INDIRA: No answer.

ANN: (*Breathing heavily*) Is it time for a break yet?

FIROZA: Why not.

ANN: Thank god. (*She collapses on the bench.*)

FIROZA: She seemed to be catching on to things so quickly last week. I thought...

INDIRA: She said she was coming.

FIROZA: Did I say something to upset her?

INDIRA: Noooo.

ANN: Something probably just came up.

INDIRA: Or someone.

FIROZA: With my luck Phil will pick tonight to do a spot check.

INDIRA: He wouldn't, would he? (*FIROZA shrugs*)

ANN: No. Don't worry so much, Indira. I don't suppose Firoza pays the rent by doing stuff like this, eh?

FIROZA: No.

INDIRA: What do you do?

FIROZA: (*Laughs*) Ah well...

INDIRA: I'm sorry. It's none of my...

FIROZA: No, Indira. It's okay. I used to be a government researcher.

ANN: Hooo. That sounds like a pretty good job. D'ya get laid off?

FIROZA: I hated it. I quit.

ANN: Must be nice.

FIROZA: I wanted to be a writer.

INDIRA: Wow!

FIROZA: Well, not exactly a writer. I wanted to edit a book.

INDIRA: What about?

FIROZA: It's a collection of stories that women tell. Women who've come here from all over the world.

ANN: Who's gonna pay you for doing that?

FIROZA: That's exactly what my mother said. "After all I went through to send you to university, Firoza. I should have let your uncles marry you off like they wanted to." Well, you know what families can be like, eh, Indira.

ANN: Yeah well she's got a point, don't you think. I mean — who's going to read something like that.

FIROZA: I'd hoped — people like Indira and you.

ANN: You're wasting your time on me. No offence, but when I finally get everything cleaned up in the evening, all I wanna do is sit down, maybe have a bit of a laugh at something on the TV and crawl into bed.

INDIRA: I'd read it. I'd really like to.

FIROZA: Thanks, but you're not going to have the chance. I just got a rejection letter from the publisher this morning. He agrees with Ann.

INDIRA: Oh.

FIROZA: So it really hasn't been my day.

INDIRA: I'm sorry.

FIROZA: It's not your fault.

INDIRA: I'm gonna kill her. She said she was coming.

FIROZA: I guess this class is really important to you, Indira.

INDIRA: Yeah.

FIROZA: Why?

INDIRA: Oh well... I don't know... you hear a lot these days about how dangerous it can be for women, don't you. I just thought, you know, it's better to be prepared... And I'm really getting a lot out of it.

FIROZA: You're lucky, you know.

INDIRA: How?

FIROZA: Being able to do something like this while you're still young and at home. You must have a very supportive family.

INDIRA: Oh... yeah, they're great.

FIROZA: What about you, Ann?

ANN: What?

FIROZA: What made you come?

ANN: Me? *(Pause)* Uh... masochism. *(FIROZA laughs)* Isn't that the right word?

FIROZA: Yes. I guess so.

SHARON enters.

SHARON: Hi everybody.

INDIRA: Where have you been?!

SHARON: *(To everybody)* Something came up.

INDIRA: I bet.

FIROZA: Don't worry about it. We're just glad you're here now.

INDIRA: What were you doing?

ANN: See. All that worry for nothing.

ANN and FIROZA begin laying out the mats.

SHARON: I couldn't get away.

INDIRA: From what?

SHARON: Calvin wanted me to meet his cousin, Roy.

INDIRA: Why now?

SHARON: 'Cause he was driving back to Sarnia tonight, wasn't he.

INDIRA: Firoza was really worried. The whole class could've been cancelled. You let her down, not turning up.

SHARON: Is that why you're coming now, Indie?

INDIRA: What d'ya mean?

SHARON: *(Sarcastic)* You don't want Firoza to lose her precious class. Well — I don't care that for Firoza. *(Snapping her fingers)*

INDIRA: Sharon!

SHARON: It's you I was coming for.

INDIRA: Just 'cause I like Firoza doesn't mean I don't care about the class.

SHARON: Yeah? Well, I'll tell you Indie. I'm not gonna lose Calvin over this class. Not even for you. Got it.

She is trying to get off a new pair of strapped shoes and put on her running shoes. INDIRA goes off on her own and practices the kata. ANN gets up from placing a mat.

ANN: Ohhh. I seem to be full of muscles I never knew I had.

FIROZA: It'll get better.

ANN: Yeah. Sure. Last week I only ached for two days. First week it was seven. I was crippled.

FIROZA: (*Jokingly*) You haven't been getting enough exercise, Ann.

ANN: I'm a cleaner for God's sake.

FIROZA: Well, we are using different muscles here.

ANN: You don't have to tell me. I can feel every one of them.

SHARON: Doesn't bother me.

ANN: Yeah, well you're...

SHARON: Black!

ANN: I wasn't going to say that!

SHARON: Sure.

ANN: I was going to say young. Probably take gym or whatever they call it now.

SHARON: Not for long. Thank God.

FIROZA: My goodness, Sharon, you make it sound like you're leaving.

SHARON: Yeah. So.

FIROZA: Oh. Well... (*Pause*) Have you got a job?

SHARON: Haven't found the right thing yet.

FIROZA: Maybe you'd have more choice if you stayed on.

SHARON: What planet's she living on?

ANN: I don't think she wants to stay on.

SHARON: Wouldn't make any difference if I did.

FIROZA: But if she had a graduation diploma...

SHARON: When's the last time you talked to a guidance officer?

INDIRA: Do we have to talk about this?

SHARON: I didn't start it. Last month I went to see the Guidance.

About what courses to take next semester. I told Mrs. Gorman what I wanted and she spent half an hour trying to talk me out of it. Very subtle, like, you know. But I'm not stupid. I knew what she was doing. Going on about how good it was to be ambitious, but needing to be realistic and how important it was to have something to fall back on, if things didn't work out.

FIROZA: If you understood what she was doing, why'd you pay any attention to her?

SHARON: I ain't finished yet. Richard Bates goes in right after me, see.

Now, I'm no brain, but he's a real dweeb. Stu... pid. And there was old Gorman, just slobbering with the effort to get him to take the same courses she'd been talking me out of because she couldn't bear to have him sell himself short on his potential.

INDIRA: How d'you know she said that?

SHARON: There wasn't nobody else around so I listened outside the door.

FIROZA: The important thing is why Mrs. Gorman did it.

SHARON: S'obvious. Richard's white, isn't he.

ANN: He's also a guy.

FIROZA: Sharon, we can't let other people's prejudices stop us from doing what we want. Indira's staying on at school. She'd be there to support you.

SHARON: Is that what she told you?

INDIRA: (*Tries to shut SHARON up.*) Isn't it time to get back to work?

FIROZA: Yes. (*Pause*) Well – Sharon's story has shown us pretty clearly that society still has lots of ways of making us think that we're inadequate. It doesn't mean we are. That's one of the things we're learning here.

SHARON: All we're learning is how to do rolls and falls an' hit the air an' stuff. That's nothing.

ANN: It is if you're not used to it.

FIROZA: Let's move on then. *(She grabs SHARON's wrist.)*

SHARON: Heyyyy!!! *(She's really panicked. She can't break away.)*

FIROZA: *(Lets her go.)* I'm sorry, Sharon. I didn't mean to frighten you. But that's how suddenly it could happen. Let's say... I'm an aggressor. *(She moves to INDIRA)* And I grab hold of you. *(She grabs INDIRA's wrist.)* What do you feel?

INDIRA: Scared?

FIROZA: What do you want to do about it?

INDIRA: I don't know.

FIROZA: Do you want to break away?

INDIRA: I suppose so.

FIROZA: Well, you must decide. If you're uncertain you give your opponent the advantage.

SHARON: Well, he's got the advantage, hasn't he. I mean, he wouldn't have grabbed her in the first place if he wasn't stronger than her, would he.

FIROZA: I guess we'd better review the old oriental recipe for victory in battle. First — Ann?

ANN: Oh, gawd. Um — uhh — eyes.

FIROZA: That's right. Be aware of your opponent. Two —

INDIRA: Legs.

FIROZA: For balance. Maybe even just to run away.

ANN: Guts.

FIROZA: Yes. Strength of will. You want to defend yourself. And what comes right at the bottom of the list, Sharon.

SHARON: *(Pause)* Strength.

FIROZA: Right.

SHARON: Why're you picking on me? This whole thing is just dumb. I don't need to learn all this stupid stuff.

FIROZA: Why not?

SHARON: 'Cause I can stick up for myself. Me 'n my friends. It's like I keep telling Indie, us West Indians, we stick up for each other. Your trouble is you don't help each other out. You're scared.

FIROZA: You know, you're partly right, Sharon. But only partly. South Asians have been taught that it's shameful to fight in public. That's not quite the same thing as being scared.

ANN: Could look the same.

SHARON: So what're you doing this for?

FIROZA: Because girls and women from whatever culture, are scared. And we limit ourselves because of that fear. I think it's important to know how to avoid dangerous situations and get out of them if they arise. Even you, Sharon — you can't go everywhere with a gang of friends, can you.

SHARON: Yeah — well I've got someone lookin' out for me.

FIROZA: A special guardian angel?

INDIRA: That's one way of describing Calvin.

FIROZA: A boyfriend!

SHARON: Yeah. And nobody gives me no trouble when he's around.

FIROZA: And when he's not?

SHARON: What're you getting at?

FIROZA: You sound a bit like my old uncle...

SHARON: Wha...!

FIROZA: ...when he found out I was taking self-defence. I "should not be doing such a thing," he said. I should be content not to go out, especially at night, unless I had a man to protect me. "What about coming home after working late?" I asked. "You should get married," he said.

SHARON: Yeah, well it's different for me.

FIROZA: What would you do if Calvin wasn't around?

SHARON: Look — that's not going to happen. I'm not gonna let it.

FIROZA: He could, by chance, get run over by a bus.

SHARON: That's really sick!

FIROZA: All I'm saying is people change. Circumstances change.

SHARON: You're just saying that 'cause you can't get anybody.

FIROZA: I don't want a man to have to look after me.

SHARON: Well, you're weird!

INDIRA: She didn't really mean that. You didn't, did you, Sharon.

ANN: I wanted somebody to look after me. Well, why not? I was working in a factory when I was 15. I nearly died of the boredom and my ears hummed all the time from the noise. Seemed to me it'd be heaven to get married, stay at home, have somebody look after me.

SHARON: See!

ANN: Trouble was it didn't last. I was home with the kids. He never was. Then he started getting laid off every job he got. Drank too much. I was cleaning out toilets to make ends meet.

SHARON: Yuk!

ANN: Smell, noise. What the hell. Life was shit whichever way you looked at it.

FIROZA: So doesn't it make sense to be able to look after yourself as well as you can.

SHARON: You don't give up, do ya? Hey — I'm not the brightest person in the world, but even I can figure out that some stupid piece of paper isn't gonna get me a job.

FIROZA: That isn't true. There are jobs.

SHARON: Yeah — well you won't catch me cleaning out somebody else's toilets. I'd rather get married and take my chances.

ANN: This Calvin got a good job then?

SHARON: He's self-employed. He makes good money. And he's generous. He bought me those shoes.

ANN: I bet he's sexy too.

SHARON: Yeah.

INDIRA: Yeah. He is. And cool. (*INDIRA begins to 'play out' Calvin. She does it very well. The walk. The gestures. The monopolization of space. The intention of playacting at the beginning is to release the tension but it turns into something more serious. Even FIROZA gets out of*

her way. But then, both she and ANN take it as a joke at first) Hey, man. (*Imaginary handshakes*) Gettin' trough? (*Pronounced true*) Magic. That little business, man. Soon come. No worries, man. Soon come. Trust me, bro'. Yeah. (*She moves around the area. Full of masculinity, enjoying the power she is finding. SHARON giggles. INDIRA goes to her*) Looking good, woman. Yes, man. That's one good looking babe fer me to go out walking with. Get rid of your friend now.

SHARON laughs.

INDIRA: Three's too many for what I got in mind. Hey, Indira, your books're waiting for you, girl. They're about the only hard thing you'll come in contact with. (*She laughs*) Hey – ey – loosen up, woman. Too much up here ain't good fer you. Chuh! Can't take a joke, that girl. So — (*She puts her arm round SHARON's shoulder and in a very sexy fashion runs her hand cross her shoulder and down her arm. She stops at her wrist, grabs it viciously and twists it up her back.*) – what d'ya say?

SHARON: Please, Calvin, don't do that. You're hurting me. Please.

INDIRA: (*Lets her go*) Thass nice. Hey, let's see a big smile, now. (*Strokes her cheek*) I'm walkin' out with my woman.

FIROZA: Indira. That's enough. Are you alright, Sharon?

SHARON: Yeah, yeah. She was just fooling around.

INDIRA is surprised and horrified at what she has done.

FIROZA: Was she?

SHARON: Calvin said you'd be trying to turn me against him.

FIROZA: I'm not.

SHARON: Well, you're not going to. You don't even know him. You don't know nothing.

FIROZA: So explain it to me.

SHARON: I can't. Why should I! Look — it's just the way things are.

FIROZA: It's not the way they have to be.

SHARON: Chuh! I knew I shoulda stayed at McDonalds with Calvin and Roy. At least we were having a few laughs. (*She gets her coat and starts out.*)

ANN: Sharon.

SHARON: What?

ANN: Harry — that's my ex-husband, you know. Well he comes round to the house a few weeks ago. He was drunk as a skunk. Pushed his way in saying it was his place. He smashed Mikey's model. That kid spent hours building that plane and Harry... I just stood there. I was terrified. My older boy finally shoved the jerk out the door. But I can't depend on him all my life, can I. In a couple of years he'll be gone and there's the little ones to think about...

Silence. SHARON puts her coat down.

ANN: So maybe we can get back to work.

FIROZA: Right. Partners. *(She goes towards SHARON but SHARON turns to INDIRA.)*

ANN: Looks like you're stuck with me.

FIROZA: Let's review what we did last week. Front chokehold.

SHARON does a sudden grab and throw down of INDIRA who lands heavily. She's paying INDIRA back. Not daring to directly reprove SHARON, FIROZA pointedly repeats the correct instruction.

FIROZA: Front choke hold. *(Pause)* Remember all the open spots you've got to choose from. *(To ANN)* Grab me. *(She demonstrates)* Hair, ear, floating ribs, solar plexus, groin, knee, instep, break away.

SHARON and INDIRA practice while FIROZA works with ANN. SHARON is very good at it and there is a growing enjoyment between the two girls.

FIROZA: *(To ANN)* Ready?

ANN: Yeah.

FIROZA: *(Grabs her)* Remember you've got seven places to choose from. *(ANN begins)* Good. *(ANN Pauses)* Solar plexus?

ANN: Where's that again? *(She points.)*

FIROZA: Yes.

ANN: *(Carries on)* And the top of the foot.

FIROZA: Good. Now push the attacker away. (*ANN does*) That's really coming, Ann. (*Turns to see SHARON doing a very strong and aggressive sequence ending with a break away.*) That's really... coming. Let's finish now.

She goes into a formal bow. SHARON barely bobs her head and is out of there, INDIRA following.

FIROZA: See you next week? (*No reply. ANN begins to gather up her things*) You're doing really well, Ann.

ANN: Yeah. I didn't know I had it in me.

FIROZA: I... want to say thanks. For helping me out earlier. You know... with Sharon.

ANN: Oh. That's okay.

FIROZA: She's so... difficult.

ANN: Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't wanta be her mum, but I kinda like her spunk.

FIROZA: You think I was too heavy.

ANN: You're the teacher.

FIROZA: That doesn't mean I'm always right.

ANN: So you were too heavy.

FIROZA: (*Pause*) D'you think they won't come back?

ANN: Hard to say.

FIROZA: I'm just not getting through to them.

ANN: I think what you mean is, you're not getting them to agree with you.

FIROZA: No! (*Pause*) I just want them to understand...

ANN: Yeah, well... maybe it's you that don't understand.

FIROZA: What?

ANN: Ah, forget it.

FIROZA: No. You want the class to continue, so help me out here. Please.

ANN: You're just different from us. Even from Indira. You got answers to questions we ain't even asked yet. But I don't think you got a

clue about how things are. Look, you come down here once a week with all these “facts” and “ideas.” “Most women have to work.” “Be strong.” Well, you might be right. But you can’t ignore love... and sex. You know the kind of stuff kids read. “How can Amanda get Kevin to notice her.”

FIROZA: But they can’t take that kind of thing seriously.

ANN: Why not? D’you expect something like “How can Amanda get top marks in her finals?” to turn them on?

FIROZA: Come on, Ann. You told Sharon the story about Harry coming back to your house. You know all this romantic stuff’s a myth.

ANN: Some people think God’s a myth. But plenty of them still believe in him anyway — especially when the chips are down. Haven’t you ever been in love?

FIROZA: Well, yes, I suppose so, but...

ANN: No. I don’t think you have. Well, it’s wonderful! I may be getting fat and pushing forty and divorced, but I haven’t forgotten how fantastic it felt. Somebody loves you in spite of the fact that you don’t look like Shania Twain. You’re the centre of his life. You count. And you relax because someone else is in charge now. (Pause) But then you wake up one morning and you realize that he might be the centre of your life, but he’s not there when you need him, and feeding your kids is more or less up to you, and...

FIROZA: So the old myth’s a fake.

ANN: It sucks you in.

FIROZA: You got out.

ANN: Yeah. But I’m not proud of it, Firoza. I’m not looking forward to spending the rest of my life on my own. But I haven’t figured out what having a good relationship with a man really means. I don’t think they know either.

FIROZA: How could they. They’re too young.

ANN: Men I mean. The old myth whammies them too, don’t it. They’re supposed to be always in control. Never show they’re weak. Well, that’s impossible. Maybe that’s why Harry drinks. I don’t know. Gawd! I gotta go. I left the two youngest on their own. They’re probably tearing the place apart.

She leaves. FIROZA is left on her own.

Scene 3

INDIRA enters obviously upset. She puts down her school bag. The skirt and blouse she's just changed out of are stuffed any old how in the top of the bag. She begins to practice the kata with aggression, but she can't get it right and keeps breaking off in frustration. SHARON enters. Watches INDIRA.

SHARON: No, Indie. Look. *(She demonstrates. She can do it really well.)*

INDIRA: I did that.

SHARON: And forward.

INDIRA: Oh.

SHARON: And then... *(She finishes)* Do it again. *(INDIRA starts. SHARON begins to warm up.)* I saw your dad today.

INDIRA: Where?

SHARON: In the store, stupid. Where d'you think? My Mum made me go down for some vacuum cleaner bags. Right before video hits... Usually your old man doesn't say more'n two words to me. But today, when I'm trying to get back for the number two song, he starts giving me the third degree. *(INDIRA stops the kata.)* Wants to know how we're getting on with the big project.

INDIRA: He suspects something. I'm dead. What'd you say?

SHARON: What could I say? I couldn't even remember what you said we were supposed to be doing!

INDIRA: "The benefits of physical exercise on the learning process."

SHARON: Oh.

INDIRA: What'd you tell him, Shar... ?

SHARON: Nothing too — specific. It was a lot of hard work. You know. Stuff like that. Don't worry. I think he bought it.

INDIRA: *(Relief)* You do that real well.

SHARON: What?

INDIRA: Talking a lot to cover up the fact you don't know nothing.

SHARON: *(Goes after INDIRA — semi-playfully hitting/tickling her.)* Very funny, Miss Know-it-all Do-nothing.

INDIRA: I was just teasing.

SHARON: I waited for you for two buses after school. Where were you? *(No reply)* Indie?

INDIRA: I was... in the washroom.

SHARON: *(Pause)* Jakey Barnes.

INDIRA: Why is he picking on me?

SHARON: Don't be so dumb, Indie. You're smart, and you wouldn't go out with him and you're brown. You should just tell him to screw off.

INDIRA: I can't, Sharon. Every time I see him I get so scared.

SHARON: All these weeks you been dragging me out here... haven't you learned anything?

INDIRA: Yeah. But...

SHARON: Did you think if you came out to this class for a couple of months, all your problems would just — go away? Poof!!

INDIRA: I guess I wish they would. Yeah.

SHARON: Daydreams! Bullies are real, Indie.

INDIRA: I know that.

SHARON: You're gonna have to tell somebody.

INDIRA: No! Look — I told you already, Shar, it'd get back to my dad. I know it would. And he'd take me right out of school. He'd send me back to India.

SHARON: Come on.

INDIRA: He's already talking about it.

SHARON: Why?

INDIRA: Because *(Mimicking her father)* "there are no moral standards in this country." There's no sex or drugs in India.

SHARON: Yeah?

INDIRA: That's what he thinks. I've lived here since I was five years old Sharon. This is where I want to be.

SHARON: Well he can't make you go.

INDIRA: Oh no? And even if he didn't he wouldn't let me stay at school. I'd be working in the store. I've got to sort it out on my own.

SHARON: So what'd you tell him about the rip in your jacket the other day?

INDIRA: I said I caught it on my locker.

SHARON: Yeah, well just remember, I won't be around to get you out of trouble next year.

INDIRA: You got the job!

SHARON: No.

INDIRA: Maybe you will end up back at school.

SHARON: I'm not that desperate. But my parents're getting really mean. If I'm not at school they're gonna make me pay a fortune in rent.

INDIRA: So why don't you stay in school...

SHARON: Thank you, Firoza.

INDIRA: This doesn't have anything to do with her. For years all you've talked about is going to college and being a fashion designer. And now it's like you're giving it all up 'cause some stupid counsellor gets up your nose.

SHARON: Just bug off, alright. *(Pause)* God, I'm glad this stupid course is nearly finished.

INDIRA: I thought you were enjoying it.

SHARON: Huh!

INDIRA: You're the best one of all of us.

SHARON: Yeah. I know. But it makes me feel funny.

INDIRA: What d'you mean?

SHARON: I don't know. Just funny. I don't like it.

INDIRA: You mean Calvin doesn't like it. *(SHARON looks at her.)* Are you gonna wait while I change tonight?

SHARON: You were taking too long.

INDIRA: Firoza was loaning me the calendar for her university. And I wasn't that long!

SHARON: Calvin was getting restless. You know what he's like. It's weird, eh. All this time we've been going out he was always busy on Tuesdays. All of a sudden he's free — every damn Tuesday he's waiting for me, and I'm all hot and smelling like the school changing room. Chuh! *(She looks in her bag.)* I knew it! I forgot my deodorant. Have you got any, Indie?

INDIRA: I'm not meeting anybody after, am I. Anyways I use the smell to keep people away when I have to walk home on my own. *(She goes after SHARON, arm up. They play out a smell/repel routine.)* I scare off attackers.

SHARON: Nooo. Help! It's an offensive weapon.

INDIRA: But legal. Ha, ha. *(She surprises SHARON with a hold and flip.)*

SHARON: *(Leaps up. On the attack. Then she softens.)* That was pretty good, Indie. *(They laugh)* You'll do.

INDIRA: No I won't...

SHARON: Indira!

INDIRA: I'm not scared of you. I just can't imagine getting close enough to somebody I'm scared of to do that.

SHARON: Hey — those goons at school weren't six feet away when your jacket got "caught on your locker," were they?

INDIRA: No. But...

FIROZA: *(Enters)* Hi, girls.

SHARON/INDIRA: Hi.

FIROZA: How's things?

INDIRA: Great! *(SHARON looks at her. Sucks her teeth. Turns away. INDIRA helps FIROZA get rid of the mats.)*

ANN: *(Enters. She's very down.)* Sorry I'm late.

FIROZA: Is something the matter?

ANN: No. I just come from a meeting with my social worker. That's always depressing.

FIROZA: Well then... If we're all ready, we'll do some warm ups.

They're going to begin with a stretching exercise in pairs. INDIRA moves to SHARON, but SHARON turns to FIROZA. A first. ANN moves to work with INDIRA, and they begin the exercise.

SHARON: *(Doesn't take FIROZA's outstretched hands)* Does this stuff really work? I mean it's one thing playing around in here. But out there — is it gonna work? *(INDIRA is worried. What is SHARON up to?)*

FIROZA: If we want it to. *(Offers her hands again. SHARON snorts.)* Let's be honest, Sharon. Learning the right moves isn't some magic formula that's going to somehow make everything all right out there. *(SHARON looks knowingly at INDIRA.)* I know someone who has a black belt in judo, but wilts in any kind of aggressive situation. And there are people who've stood up to intimidation without having a self-defence class in their lives.

ANN: Are you telling us — after all this pain — that we don't need this!?

FIROZA: No. But what we need as well as the ability, is confidence. We have to believe that what we want matters. *(She's not getting through.)* I remember trying to tell my mother I wanted to quit my job and be a writer. Well, my mother is barely five feet tall and she's never raised a hand to anyone in her life. I'd been taking self-defence for a year and for six months I was too scared to open my mouth.

SHARON: Yeah, but being scared of telling somebody something... That's a lot different than somebody trying to — well — beat up on you or something.

FIROZA: Yes. But in both cases you have to deal with your fear. And fear isn't a bad thing.

INDIRA: It isn't?

FIROZA: Hey — if we were never scared, we'd probably all be dead before we were five. Fear warns us of danger. It releases adrenalin which gives us extra energy. Now, we can use that energy to do something about the situation, or we can let it all seep away by shaking in our boots. It's our choice.

ANN: Choice!

FIROZA: Yes.

ANN: That's rich, that is. How many of us ever get a choice?

FIROZA: We all have choices.

ANN: Yeah, but you can stand your ground and still get hurt.

FIROZA: Yes. But you've got a chance...

ANN: Only in your dreams. In the real world most choices are between bad and bad.

FIROZA: So give me an example.

ANN: Okay. I've just been talking to my social worker, okay? About quitting work and going on Mother's Allowance. I'd actually be better off.

SHARON: Sounds good to me.

ANN: I don't wanta quit. I don't want those bastards prying into my life.

FIROZA: Well, if you've managed so far, Ann...

ANN: And as for work... I can be touched up or quit.

INDIRA: But that's a choice, isn't it?

ANN: Oh, for...

FIROZA: Are you saying you're being sexually harassed, Ann?

ANN: I don't know about that. All I know is that ever since we got this new supervisor — well, you never know where the slimy bastard's hands are gonna end up. (To SHARON) And if you laugh, so help me, I'll belt you.

SHARON: I ain't laughin'.

FIROZA: But you don't have to take that, Ann.

ANN: Yeah. I know. I can quit. Go on Mother's Allowance. Or get a job cleaning offices at night and leave the kids on their own to run wild.

FIROZA: You can report him.

ANN: Hah! If that's all you've got to offer...

FIROZA: There are laws...

SHARON: Chuh!

ANN: I don't know what world you live in. His word against mine? You gotta be joking.

FIROZA: But...

ANN: They got all kinds of ways to make your life miserable if you rock the boat. You got no idea how long it took me to get my hours increased. They could cut me back just like that.

She snaps her fingers. SILENCE. They wait for FIROZA.

FIROZA: All right. I accept it's hard. (*INDIRA is crushed. The miracle hasn't happened.*) But there must be something we can do.

ANN: So tell me something. (*Pause*) Can't. Can you.

FIROZA: I can tell you about a woman who found herself in a very difficult position, and found a way out of it. It's a very old story...

ANN: Oh great. A story!

FIROZA: ...about a woman called Fetneh, and the King of Persia, who's name was Bahram-Gur.

SHARON: Weird names!

INDIRA: Shh.

FIROZA: Bahram-Gur means wild ass. He was a crack shot with a bow and arrow and killed a lot of wild asses. Fetneh would play beautiful music on her harp while he hunted.

SHARON: Typical.

FIROZA: I suppose so. But she was a very good musician. One day, after a large kill, Fetneh didn't praise the king for his skill. Bahram-Gur got very angry. "Tell me then, Fetneh, how should I have killed the ass?" he said. Now Fetneh was fed up with praising him all the time for what he could do so easily. So she said, "You should have pinned its hoof to its ear." Bahram-Gur sighted a wild ass, and taking careful aim, just grazed its ear. And as the ass raised its hoof to rub the scratch, Bahram-Gur let fly with a second arrow and pinned its hoof to its ear!

ANN: I bet she felt pretty stupid.

FIROZA: Well, she still wouldn't praise him. "You do this through practice," she teased him. "In everything, my King, practice makes possible." Bahram-Gur was furious, and he ordered her to be put to death.

INDIRA: So she shouldn't have talked back.

FIROZA: Well, I don't know about that. What I do know is that she refused to accept that there was no way to save herself. First of all, she persuaded her guard to spare her life for one week.

ANN: That's just putting off the agony.

FIROZA: Not quite. She had a plan. You see, she knew that Bahram-Gur was angry because his pride had been hurt, but that he probably wouldn't stay angry for long. At the end of the week, the guard would go to Bahram-Gur and tell him that Fetneh was dead. If the King was pleased then the guard would return and kill her. But if he cried, the guard would let her live.

ANN: Risky.

FIROZA: The alternative was certain death. When the guard went to the King a week later and said that Fetneh was dead, the King...

INDIRA: The King cried!

FIROZA: Yes. He did.

INDIRA: So her life was saved. So if Fetneh could outwit a king, you gotta be able to get round your supervisor, Ann.

ANN: It's just a story.

SHARON: Strike to maim! *(She goes through an imaginary attack. A few hard jabs, a trip, ending up stomping on his fingers.)* Break the bastard's fingers!

ANN: And get charged with assault!

SHARON: Disguise yourself. And jump out at him when he's not expecting it.

FIROZA: That's definitely assault.

INDIRA: And anyway, he wouldn't know who'd done it. He'd probably just carry on... you know — at work.

SHARON: But only when he got out of hospital.

ANN: Hasn't solved my problem though.

INDIRA: We gotta think of something more... ingenious.

SHARON: Ohhhh. Aren't we using the words now.

INDIRA: Shut up, Shar. Look. He's gotta get the message, right. But in a way that he can't pin anything on you.

ANN: Yeah. (*She doesn't believe it.*)

SHARON: So what's he like?

ANN: Huh?

SHARON: We're supposed to know the enemy. Right?

ANN: Right. Well... (*She thinks. Gives up.*) He's a real slime ball.

SHARON: Yeah, we know that, Ann. C'mon. C'mon. The details.

ANN: Five foot ten. Fortyish.

SHARON: This isn't helping.

INDIRA: What's he like?

SHARON: What's he do?

ANN: All right. Picture it. Him. Monday. Back from his package holiday to Florida. He comes swaggering in like he's God's gift — know what I mean? And you should've seen him. Suntanned — and dressed — whoooo! Off-white pants, one of those wild Hawaiian shirts, open down to here.

INDIRA/SHARON: Yuk!

ANN: And snakeskin shoes!

SHARON: Ohhhh. This man is too much.

ANN: He's supposed to wear his uniform to work.

SHARON: And what're you doing?

ANN: I'm down on my hands 'n knees with a bucket, trying to clean the legs of a desk. You wouldn't believe what those kids get on the table legs.

INDIRA: Yuk!!

SHARON: So... Slime Ball sleazes his way over for a feel and you... (*Sudden inspiration*) throw the pail of water all over him. Haaaa!!

INDIRA: No. That's not good enough, Shar.

SHARON: Why not?

INDIRA: He's still gonna know you did it on purpose. Do it again. I'll be Ann. (*She gets down*)



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