

FADE IN:

EXT. PONDICHERRY, INDIA. NIGHT

With an expansive view toward the night's horizon and the southeastern Indian countryside far below, a YOUNG WOMAN, early 30's, can be seen from miles above, leaving a little slum village on a winding dirt road.

Some strange determination moves her forward in the dead of night.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)

I can't remember when we first
found you.

As our view moves closer in. She is covered in garments weathered from the years. A thick shawl lays over her head, wrapping around her shoulders.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)

It was so very long ago. Longer
than I can now remember.

Suddenly, a Himalayan field mouse scurries out from her shawl, sits on her shoulders and looks ahead with anticipation.

The woman looks to the mouse momentarily and smiles. The mouse looks back, revealing its bright yellow eyes glowing in the night.

EXT. HILL COUNTRY. NIGHT

A train travels atop a hill country ridge. Moonlight pours through the windows, illuminating the solitary person inside; the same woman.

The field mouse runs across a little ledge outside the elderly woman's window.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)

We have found you a thousand
times...

She's holding a white diphylla in her hand. She twirls it slowly. The petals pulse with light.

A touch of her profile can now be seen. The glow of the flower subtly illuminates her kind eyes and the beautiful terrain of her face.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
...and we will find you a thousand
more.

EXT. OCEAN CLIFFS. NIGHT

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
Every night.

She walks past the remnants of a broken and abandoned ship at the base of a jetting cliffside. The mouse walks ahead.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
Along the cliffside...

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT

We follow behind her as she walks through a forest. The mouse is still ahead.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
...through the forest...

Through the tree line, heavily saturated and flashing speckles of colorful city lights can be seen. Celebratory music and people partaking in some sort of overly-indulgent merriment can be faintly heard.

The woman seems resolute on keeping her gaze ahead but something powerful seems to lure her to give the spectacle a subtle glance for just one moment.

As she does, the mouse ahead shifts in shape, almost as a quick flash, to some very towering, ominous and bitch black version of itself.

The woman forces her gaze forward again and begins to walk with even more determination than before. As she does, the mouse flashes back to it's original shape.

EXT. LAKE. NIGHT

In a small wooden boat, she rows across a lake shrouded by fog. The mouse sits on the very tip of the boat, looking forward.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
...across the lake...

Through the fog, a scattered, flickering of faint white light can be seen.

EXT. RED HILLS. NIGHT

She makes her way unsteadily, but resolutely, up the rocky Red Hills of Chennai. The mouse is a ways ahead, but looks back, making sure the elderly woman is keeping up.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
...and up the Red Hills.

In the distance, a sea of white diphylleia resting on the hillside pulses in rhythm with the flower in the womans hand.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
So that we could bring you...

Her eyes widen as she begins to make out a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, 50's, in a flowing red dress collecting the flowers in the distance.

YOUNG WOMAN (VO)
...back home.

As she comes to a halt, the fog begins to clear in an almost magical fashion. She calls out to the woman in the distance.

YOUNG WOMAN
Mother!

The middle-aged woman turns towards the young woman. From the distance, with squinting eyes, the middle-aged woman tries to make out the young woman. The last of the fog between them dissipates.

As is does, the middle-aged woman is struck with awe. She GASPS and drops the flowers in her hand to the ground.

MIDDLE AGED WOMAN

Anushka?

SUPERIMPOSE: The Skeleton Flower

END TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING. DAY

Outside a run-down government building, a slum girl, as cute as a button and as tough as nails, ANUSHKA (9), waits in a line amongst a group of lower-caste families.

A sign at the front simply reads, "CHARITY FOR THE POOR."

The chaotic din of the crowd's chatter, crying babies, and noisy city traffic seems to wear on Anushka. She reaches up to adjust the volume on a weathered hearing aid above her right ear.

Just a little lower until the city's volume is just right.

Anushka looks across the busy street, inspecting several expensive clothing stores boasting the latest in Hindi fashion.

Her eyes scan the colorful window displays until she lands on a boutique textile store.

Inside, two parents gush with pride as their unamused SON (11) receives the final touches of his fitting in an elegant purple badhadi and bejeweled white kurta.

Anushka is enamored at the sight.

The boy and Anushka's eyes meet. Anushka gives him a little smile. The boy scowls and sticks his tongue out at her. A flash of sadness passes over Anushka's face, quickly replaced by an even fiercer scowl and even more protruding tongue. The boy attempts to match her fervor, but to no avail.

A voice calls out to the crowd.

GOV WORKER (OC)
You know the rules!...

The crowd around Anushka begins to jostle with anticipation. A hand reaches down, grabbing her by the hand.

GOV WORKER
No pushing, no fighting, no stealing. And remember, if you don't get anything today, tomorrow is a new day.

ABHI (OC)
Anushka.

Anushka looks up to see her father ABHI (43).

ABHI
Keep close.

Anushka nods in agreement.

A bell RINGS.

As the crowd rushes forward, Abhi leads Anushka through the chaos of hungry families desperate to get their keep. After several attempts to get their hands on something, Abhi and Anushka are left empty-handed.

The crowd quickly dissipates.

Abhi walks up to one of the government worker's who's making his way back into the building.

ABHI
Excuse me.

The government worker closes the door on Abhi and Anushka.

ABHI
Sir?

ANUSHKA

It's okay, Papa. I wasn't that hungry anyways.

Abhi gives her a halfhearted smile as he gestures for them to head home.

Suddenly, Anushka spots something.

ANUSHKA

Papa... look!

Anushka forcefully detaches her hand from Abhi and runs to retrieve whatever she saw.

She crawls under a nearby table to grab a large red onion. She brings it back to her father, holding it up to him, puffed up with pride.

ABHI

My little hero.

Abhi pulls her toward him and hugs her tightly. He puts the onion carefully in his leather satchel.

EXT. BAZAAR. DAY

Anushka skips alongside her father as they make their way through a bustling pop-up bazaar. Abhi's focus remains straight ahead while Anushka's attention is constantly drawn to the wonderful sights, sounds and smells all around her.

Colorful spices! Eccentric cashmere rugs! Hand crafted wooden toys!ext.

Eventually, Abi and Anushka come to a small jewelry shop. Before stepping inside, Abhi pulls a small wooden box out of his satchel.

Just then, Anushka sees a chubby dog with a red bow on her head sleeping right outside the door.

ANUSHKA
 Awww.... doggy!
 (To Abhi)
 Can I stay with her?

Abhi isn't perfectly keen on the idea.

ANUSHKA
 Please?!

ABHI
 No wandering off.

ANUSHKA
 No wandering off.

ABHI
 Promise?

ANUSHKA
 Promise.

Abhi walks inside the store. Anushka plops on the ground next to the dog.

ANUSHKA
 My name's Anushka. You can call me
 Anu though, if it's easier.

The dog pants and stares off into nothingness. Anushka carries on with a one-sided, mile-a-minute ramble.

ANUSHKA
 I like your bow.

The dog, still staring off.

ANUSHKA
 Papa told me that before my mom
 died, she used to put a silk bow in
 my hair every day when I was a
 little baby. I was a cute baby. One
 day when we were riding the train,
 I reached up and pulled the bow off
 my head and threw it out the
 window.

(looking off
 melodramatically)

Never saw it again.

INT. JEWELER. DAY

Abhi waits for the JEWELER to finish with a customer. As soon as he does, Abhi makes his way to the counter.

JEWELER

(Sarcastically)

Ahhh... I see... so, you only come to visit me when the landlord calls. Some kind of friend you are Abishek?

ABHI

Friend? Hah! You're the most expensive friend I've ever had.

JEWELER

I might be expensive, but at least I'm loyal.

Abhi sets a wooden box on the counter in front of the jeweler.

JEWELER

So... what do you have for me today?

The jeweler opens the wooden box.

EXT. BAZAAR. DAY

ANUSHKA

(to the dog)

Can I call you Lata? You look like a Lata. We have this other dog in our neighborhood, you might be friends but I think he can be a little grumpy! Just the other day I....

The dog spots something in the distance and gets up.

ANUSHKA

Lata?

The dog starts to waddle away.

ANUSHKA

(Demanding)

Lata!

Anushka follows the dog on all fours.

She's right on the dog's tail but is suddenly distracted by the sound of laughing coming from behind a nearby cart where a man is selling spices.

Anushka crawls up to the cart and peeks over to investigate.

Just beyond, two very eccentric women who are in front of a mirror, gossiping idly and sampling some vibrant red blush.

Anushka turns up her hearing aid a hair to get a better listen. The surrounding noise still overpowers them.

Indistinguishable chatter and laughter can be heard.

Anushka is fascinated by their fancy appearance and even more so by their melodramatic behavior.

INT. JEWELER. DAY

Abhi watches as the jeweler inspects an ornate silver necklace covered in a variety of small Himalayan stones.

Many stones are missing.

ABHI

The blue ones?

JEWELER

Abhi... I told you before... too common. I could give you something but, trust me, it wouldn't be worth it to you.

ABHI

What could you give?

JEWELER

200 rupee.

ABHI

Each?

The jeweler gives Abhi a skeptical look.

ABHI

For both? Please sir. That's less than you offered last month.

JEWELER

Let's see what else we have...

The jeweler runs his fingers across the necklace, stopping at a pair of yellow stones near the center. The jeweler looks to Abhi with a look of inquiry.

Abhi takes a long moment to consider.

ABHI

Those are for Anushka. I promised.

EXT. BAZAAR. DAY

Anushka, in an attempt to make-shift her own variation of blush, sneaks her fingers in a pile of red curry powder resting on the cart and smears it on her cheeks, emulating the same motion as the women applying their makeup.

As the women continue to chatter loudly and expressively, Anushka copies them in an almost mocking fashion.

One of the women throws her head back in laughter. Anushka follows suit and accidentally falls back, CRASHING into a display of various spices and knocking everything to the ground.

Anushka looks over to the VENDOR of the spice cart and luckily, he is fast asleep.

Just then, Anushka hears her father coming out of the jewelry store.

JEWELER

Pleasure as always!
 (As the door is closing)
 See you next month?

Anushka clammers back to her original spot.

ABHI

(To himself after the door is
 closed)
 Let's hope not.

Anushka scrambles to get back to the entrance of the jewelry shop.

Abhi puts a small amount of rupee bills and the wooden box into his satchel. Anushka realizes she still has curry powder on her face and quickly wipes it off.

Abhi turns to Anushka, who looks up at him like the picture of innocence.

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER. DAY

Abhi and Anushka walk down a street of the wealthy district. Parisian influenced architecture is all around. This area is clearly for the upper-caste of society.

Anushka and Abhi stick out like a sore thumb.

From a nearby alleyway, a faint but captivating voice can be heard.

GYPSY WOMAN

..with enough energy and stamina to
 power a small village...

Anushka and Abhi look down a little dead end alley where they see a GYPSY WOMAN (64) surrounded by upper-caste children and their parents.

GYPSY WOMAN

... these magical creatures are
 sure to bring excitement to the
 most dreary of days!

Anushka's curiosity is piqued. Abhi gives her a permissive nod to take a look.