

"GESTATION TRUCE"

By

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FADE IN:

INT/NIGHT/HOSPITAL ROOM.

A room in a small-town hospital.

The door to the right.

A table piled high with discarded files. A chair.

Caking dirty brown stain on a bedside stand.

A metal cot-

Paint peeling off.

Dirty sheets.

A metal cradle -

A rolled up mattress in the cradle makes it look 'empty'.

And yet, junk has been thrown into it making it 'cluttered'

The Nurse is here to collect a blood sample.

Varkha sits on the bed. Her hand on her mouth.

The other arm trying to get out of Nurse's grip.

NURSE

If you resist, you will bleed.

(Nurse is trying to find a vein in the crook of her patient's arm.)

VARKHA

I have to Like it; do I?

(Nurse straightens her patient's arm and 'aims' the needle again.)

VARKHA

(less defiant now)

Am a little afraid of needles...

NURSE

Afraid of nee-e-dles, are you?

Too late...

(She jams the needle into her patient's arm. Varkha screams.)

VARKHA

(holding the wrist that's hurting her):

Sister...

NURSE

'Sister'? (laughs) Shut up and sleep now.

(Lights go off as Nurse is muttering to herself, looking for something under the bed.)

NURSE

...made me drop that ampoule...

(Lights come on to slowly reveal Varkha lying on the bed, knees drawn up. A head emerges at the foot end of the bed, Labouredly as if in child birth.

Nurse has shed her uniform and wears just a white slip. Nurse stands up and puts both her hands on Varkha's feet, so that Varkha is pinned to the bed.

Varkha raises her head from the pillow, rests it on the metal frame.

They look at each other... a long moment.)

VARKHA

Please spare me the request.

'Precious potential life' and all that.

NURSE

You recognize me!

You See me!

(Lights go off gradually as we hear nurse, in a child-like sing-song)

NURSE

Now you see me.

Now you don't?

Where is baby?

Mamma wants to know.

(Varkha looks under the bed, and as the lights go off totally, repeats)

VARKHA

Don't try that line on me.

'Precious potential life' and all that.

PROFESSOR

And you better not try the 'Harassed',  
'Exploited', story, you 'Practical'  
bitch.

(Lights come on to reveal only the professor's crazed face as he  
says this. Then, slowly, by the table he is seen in entirety.  
Dressed in stereotypical garb of an academic.

Varkha looks at him with desire.

She looks as if she is drunk.)

PROFESSOR

He was drunk too.

VARKHA

'He'?

PROFESSOR

Look a lot like Daddy, do I?

Is that why you want to kill me?

So you don't have to see his face  
everyday?

VARKHA

And your dirty body.

PROFESSOR

(the same sing -song tune that nurse used)

Mommy hates Daddy

So, Mommy kills baby.

Break baby's crown.

For Mommy fell down.

(Varkha stumbles off the bed.

She wraps a shawl around her shoulder.

She tiptoes to near where he is standing.

Then 'imagines' a closed door separating them and makes an act of 'knocking' on it.)

VARKHA

knock knock

A CHILD's voice (off -stage)

Who is it?

PROFESSOR

It was you with that stupid 'displaced'  
'hapless' act.

(Pretends to 'open' the 'door')

(Varkha pushes past him, even as he makes an exaggerated 'act' of standing in the 'doorway')

VARKHA

I don't have a room!

The organizers haven't made  
arrangements for the Research  
assistants!

(Professor 'closes' the 'door' and walks to her.

He puts his hand on her upper arm.)

PROFESSOR

This won't happen next year, you thought.

Next conference you would present your own paper.

After this, Father would make sure you went places.

(He takes off his coat)

You will be a full-fledged Associate Professor.

VARKHA

Under your guidance, Sir.

(Professor dusts his coat, hangs it on the back of a chair with a careful, almost overdone 'neatness')

PROFESSOR

(muttering)

Father is 50 years old.

(taking off his ring and keeping it on the table)

Married.

Father likes everything to be tidy.

VARKHA

I know, Sir.

(She folds the shawl into a tiny square.)

I know how to keep things

(She keeps the shawl on the seat of the same chair and pushes the chair under the table)

Discreet.

(Professor goes up to Varkha, stands behind her, puts his hands on her shoulders, and rubs his face against her head.)

PROFESSOR

(murmurs)

Discreet...

(He draws her closer to him, his hand now just below her chest. He turns her around.)

VARKHA

Okay, it was me who went to his room.

But-but-

(almost gaily- as if freeing herself from all responsibility)

He should have been more responsible...

PROFESSOR

You didn't want him to be careful.

Your body was fed up of being disciplined and barren.

Your body wanted a baby.

Mommy wanted me.

(Professor pushes her hair back from her face)

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Mommy wanted me.

(Professor pushes her hair back from her face).

PROFESSOR

Discreet?

(His hand suddenly moves lower.

Varkha turns her face to look at him.)

PROFESSOR

Is that why we've come all the way to  
this town?

Baby will be Discreetly curretted out.

Mamma's filthy little secret.

(She tries to struggle out of his arms.)

PROFESSOR

Filthy little baby will be burnt..

Do they have an incinerator here?

Or will that nurse just go and bury me  
in the backyard?

VARKHA

(calls out)

Nurse. Nurse.

(Total dark.

Then, slowly, very little light reveals the nurse holding Varkha just as the professor had been holding her.

Nurse walks Varkha to the bed. We barely see Nurse helping Varkha on to the bed as the screen darkens again.)

VARKHA

I cannot see anything.

(Light to show Nurse has shed the uniform. She is wearing the white slip.

She is standing at the foot of the bed, her hands on Varkha's knees.)

NURSE

But baby can see Mother.

I see what you did.

I see what you plan to do.

(Nurse separates Varkha's knees harshly.

Varkha raises her head and shoulder up-

Aggressively

But also similar to a woman 'pushing' during a labour contraction.)

VARKHA

Imagining strength are we, Foetus?

Don't forget, you are just a piece of  
flesh.

NURSE

Your flesh.

(sarcastically)

M-o-t-h-e-r.

(Varkha reaches out to touch Nurse, quickly withdraws her  
hand.)

VARKHA

My flesh, my body. I have the right.

NURSE

Rights? Of course- I am pro-choice too-

But this is not about what is right.

This is between you and me.

The hatred you feel for me now.

I want to hate you back.

I want to live to make your life  
miserable.

VARKHA

I made you, so I am allowed to 'unmake'  
you.

NURSE

(in a genuinely loving tone)

I am a Part of you, Varkha.

(Varkha sits up.)

VARKHA

How do you know my name?

I registered here as Mrs. Joshi...

(screams)

How do you know my name?

(Nurse walks up to put her hand on Varkha's head.)

NURSE

I know all your names.

Even the ones nobody else knows;

the names you give yourself.

(Varkha pushes the hand away, sits up, her legs stretched in front of her.)

NURSE

I am a part of you...

VARKHA

An unwanted part.

Your death is scheduled for 11 AM.

NURSE

Do you think that only you have the  
power to decide, to destroy?

Don't forget where this little 'piece  
of flesh is'.

(Nurse puts her hand back on Varkha's head, this time, with  
force.)

NURSE

A little thing Inside you can also  
destroy you, woman!

(Varkha reaches for the bell-switch.)

(Nurse grabs her hand.)

NURSE

(grins)

Plans could go wrong in this scheduled  
'Termination' of me.

(Nurse makes scratching motions across the veins of  
Varkha's wrist.)

You could bleed to death, maybe?

(Nurse puts her one knee on the bed, and both her hands  
on Varkha's stomach.)

NURSE

(pressing Varkha's lower abdomen.)

Or do you value your fertility more  
than your life, 'Mamma'?

Maybe you won't bleed to death 'Ma'.

Maybe to save your life there will be a  
timely hysterectomy...

VARKHA (Pleads)

We - could- make - a deal.

Not because of the love we are supposed  
to have for each other...

NURSE

... but because of this other trait we  
share-

The determination to survive-  
at all costs.

VARKHA

I didn't set out to kill you, you know;  
just wanted to live.

NURSE (imploringly)

so do I.

VARKHA (holding the Nurse's hand):

I can explain.

NURSE

There will be time for explanations.

Accusations and explanations.

But Now.

(Nurse puts her head on Varkhas's lap.

Varkha begins to gently caress Nurse's head.)

VARKHA (threateningly)

Yes Baby, I too can fight-that's what  
you want isn't it?

A lifetime of the mother-daughter  
conflict ahead of us.

NURSE

but now..

(counts on her fingers)

For 20 weeks, ...

VARKHA

(holding Nurse's head close to her chest)

...no fighting, my child.

FADE OUT:

THE END

