

SALSA

by

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EXT. A RESIDENTIAL COLONY - EVENING

A posh neighbourhood with vehicles parked around, dogs barking at random strangers. A girl of 29 (Ritika), with a plain red shirt, blue cargo jeans, and a black sling bag, parks her scooter in front of a house that reads *number 144, Advocate Mridul Godse*. She picks up a random polybag from the street and discards it into a dustbin. She opens the mini door through a large steel swing gate, and walks towards the end of the house to the right door, leading to the basement, where emanate yellow lights.

INT. DANCE CLASS

Doors open, revealing Ritika with flailing shoulder length hair. She keeps her helmet and bag on the floor, wiping her sweaty hands on her jeans and walks towards the crowd of around ten people, learning salsa basics, 1,2,3.....5,6,7.....

RITIKA

Hey.

KAVITA (while dancing left and right)

Hey! You are here! We just started. Please partner up with him.

Kavita stretches the hand of a gentleman and glides him towards Ritika.

Ritika's face is stunted. She stares at him. Keeps staring. Voices echoing around her.

Snap

The boy in the black shirt snaps his fingers at her. Everyone is looking at Ritika.

ROHAN

Hello?

RITIKA (Whispers)

Sorry.

Everyone resumes the dance. Ritika only focusses on the tapping feet. CLOSE ON the tapping feet while the sound of one two three, five six seven, echoes in Ritika's head, fading the background into black.

Rohan's smile (while dancing) flashes amidst the black of the room.

Lights on.

KAVITA

Alright guys, that's it for today. Let's catch up tomorrow, practise at home. Also, if you want to, you can join Megha and others for coffee and snacks, we are just heading to Tribhuj.

Ritika rushes to grab her purse and helmet. Rohan comes running behind her.

ROHAN

Hey, sorry I didn't get a chance to properly introduce myself. I am Rohan.

Rohan puts his hand forward for a handshake.

RITIKA

No, you introduced yourself. I am Ritika.

She dashes towards the door.

ROHAN

Umm, do you maybe want to grab a bite? Everyone's going.

RITIKA

Oh, err, sorry, I am running late for an appointment. Maybe some other time.

ROHAN

Tomorrow?

RITIKA

Sure... See you.

Ritika walks out of the building and takes a deep sigh before putting her helmet on and starting her Vespa.

INT. RITIKA'S FLAT

Coffee is brewing. She pours herself a cup and walks towards the dining room. She sits at the table, picks up the newspaper, pretends to read for a couple seconds, then staring at the wall, thinks...

EXT. A BUSY ROAD

Ritika kicks her scooter, checks her watch, and is now running towards the Autorickshaw stand. Online Cabs have been cancelling on her again and again, and she has no time to get her scooter repaired. She is wearing a short white kurti, jeans, and a long scarf around her neck.

RITIKA (murmurs looking at her phone)

Another Cancellation? Fuck these cab companies. Aisa article likhungi ki raaton raat band ho jayengi sab ke sab!

She crosses the road and enters a rather secluded street to move in the direction of another busy road. Halfway through the street, she hears a man scream, she takes a right, as the groaning and screaming noises become louder, then, peeping through a wall, she sees two men in an alleyway. One young boy, suited up, in his 20s, ROHAN, the other, a man in his early 40s, with a gamcha around his neck. Her immediate reaction is to turn her phone silent, and click a picture.

The man in the gamcha is bleeding from his shoulders, joining his hands together in a pleading.

MAN

Maaf kar do bhai, bohot badi galti ho gayi, mujhe jaane do.

ROHAN

Aur gidgida, bheekh maang! MAAANG!

The man coughs and falls down on his feet. Rohan stabs him one last time in his stomach, putting a hand on his mouth, muffling his shrieks. Ritika watches dumbstruck, when she tries to retract, she accidentally steps on a polythene bag, Rohan turns towards her, but before he could see her, she disappears. She makes way for the traffic on the road, without turning her head even once, steps of Rohan closing in on her. Luckily, a bus is already waiting to leave. She boards it on the run, right when it starts moving, and breathes a sigh of relief. She tries to get a glimpse of the man who was following her through a window, but isn't able to spot him anywhere.

CONDUCTOR

Arre Madam, Har paanch minute mein toh bus aati hai! Ya humein ishara kar deti hum rok dete! Kahan ka ticket kaatu?

RITIKA

Second stop, jo bhi hai

INT. RITIKA'S DINING TABLE

She sips her coffee and picks up a notepad, with a half-written paper, and begins scribbling her thoughts down, when the doorbell rings. She walks towards the door.

INT/EXT. RITIKA'S FLAT

She peeps through the hole and opens the door with the latch intact. Her face strongly visible through the space.

DELIVERY BOY

Madam, OTP.

A man of around 30 years of age, with deciduous teeth, smiles at her. She nods and walks to the dining table to get the phone. His eyes graze at her shorts, revealing legs, and bust. He is also eyeing the living area through the space that he can assess.

RITIKA

567893. Bahar hi rakh jaana parcel bhaiya. Thank you.

She shuts the door.

INT. DANCE CLASS

Everyone is dancing with their socks on. Ritika, who is wearing a fitted crop top and Yoga pants, looks more confident and relaxed than the last time.

She approaches the centre of the dance hall. This time, she smiles at Rohan when she sees him. When they partner up, her body posture is relaxed, her hands more poised as she focuses. The sound of 1,2,3...5,6,7 runs through their heads as they sway together in Salsa. After the class, Ritika picks her purse up, and Rohan again comes dashing towards her.

ROHAN

Hey, how about that coffee now?

RITIKA

I am sorry, I have to leave early. I have some drafts I need to finish today.

ROHAN

Oh, so you are a writer?

RITIKA

Journalist, maybe next time?

Ritika hurriedly rushes out again, catching her breath as she whirs her scooter to life.

INT. RITIKA'S LIVING ROOM.

She is seated on the study table. Papers are scattered everywhere. Some notebooks lay on the floor, the tile acting as the bookmark.

She is again rummaging through her stuff, putting some pieces together, and trying to write on her laptop screen. She takes a sip from her coffee mug, hair bun tied, this time, it says

"Chapter 01

The first crime

He stabbed him five times, not to make sure he was dead, but to ensure he heard enough painful screams. He wanted to hear the pain he had perhaps felt, when the dying man had harmed somebody, he loved. What was that hurt? What had this man caused him, that the only punishment he could think of was his painful death? It was impossible for me to know at the very moment...

Phone rings.

RITIKA

Haan maa!

She quickly gets up and walks to the balcony with the phone. Her hands rest on the railing.

RITIKA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Kya kar rhi hai beta?

RITIKA

Bas kuch likh rhi thi

RITIKA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Khana kha liya?

RITIKA

Haan, bas banaungi ab.

A guy is staring at her from down the street, the same delivery guy who came the other day. She notices, gets uncomfortable, and walks inside, shutting the drapes.

RITIKA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Sabziyan le aayi?

'RITU?'

RITIKA

Haan, haan mummy

RITIKA'S MOTHER

Sabziyan le aayi?

RITIKA

Online mangwa li thi na

RITIKA'S MOTHER

Arre, kitne online orders hote hain tere! Beta wahan akele itne logon ko aane dena sahi nhi hai...zamana bohot kharab hai..

RITIKA

Hmm...

RITIKA'S MOTHER

Hafte bhar ka rashan ek sath le aaya kar

Bell rings again.

RITIKA

Chalo maa, koi aaya hai, main karti hoon baadme.

RITIKA'S MOTHER

Phirse koi online order hi lekar aaya hoga, kitni baar samjhaya hai is ladki ko...jab dekho tab parcel..sunti...

Ritika hangs up the phone and looks through the peephole.

She swallows a shock seeing Rohan standing just outside her door. She grabs a paper cutter from her desk pen holder and hides it in her pocket. She opens the door, with the chain still latched.

RITIKA

Hello?

ROHAN

Oh Hi! I am Rohan, from Salsa class yesterday?

RITIKA

Oh, Hi, umm, I wasn't expecting to see you here.

ROHAN

Yeah, I just came to give you back your ID, you dropped it in the class. I would have come yesterday, but I had some prior commitments, so...

RITIKA

How do you know where I live?

ROHAN

Err...

Rohan exhibits the card before her with all her details.

RITIKA

Right. But you didn't have to come all the way here. I could have picked it up next weekend.

ROHAN

I just thought you might need it. It is an important card. And I think, I have earned the right to answer your questions from inside your house if you don't mind? I brought you your stuff but it feels like I am a random salesman.

Ritika steps away, shows him the way inside, and shuts the door behind her, leaving it unlatched.

INT. Ritika's living room

Rohan seats himself on the sofa and rubs his hands together. Ritika, for a couple of minutes keeps noticing his child-like features, infectious smile, and the effect his words have on her.

ROHAN

So, I obviously don't have to tell you how badly I want to ask you out, and even though you conveniently keep turning me down, I am going to ask one last time.

RITIKA

Look, Rohan, I...

ROHAN

No, no, let me finish. From the moment I saw you enter that class in your flailing dark brown hair, and that red T shirt, red is the perfect colour for you by the way, man, I cannot stop thinking about you. I came here hoping I could maybe

extract a date out of you, and perhaps we could get to know each other better?

RITIKA

Umm...

ROHAN

You don't have to answer right away.

Rohan gets up to the standing Ritika, and holds her hand, which makes Ritika shudder. He says softly.

ROHAN

I will simply leave you my number. If you don't want to see me again, you won't, I promise. I am not such a bad guy. Go on one date with me and you will see. In fact, I am quite charming. I look fine, eat fine, am rich, good mannered, and I like you so much that I don't even care about making a fool of myself.

RITIKA

Okay.

ROHAN

Okay for leaving my number, or okay for a date?

RITIKA

Both?

ROHAN

If you weren't here, I would be embarrassing myself with some killer dance moves.

They smile at each other, the camera moves outwards from them both, to the closed door, to the building, to Gurgaon City, and then it closes in on a café.

INT. RESTAURANT

Rohan and Ritika sit on a table of a chic vibed restaurant. A couple is feeding each other on the table next to them. A few children are passing through the window, where they are seated. Some youngsters are stuck to their phones.

ROHAN

I have been here a few times, and the food has always been delicious.

RITIKA

Oh yeah? I am starving.

ROHAN

Accha! And here I thought, tum baki ladkiyon ki tarah, date par aane se pehle ek heavy lunch karke aaogi. Taki tumhare appetite par main tumhe judge na kar saku.

RITIKA

Mister, judge karne ka aaj ka kaam mera hai, and who are these girls you have been on dates with? Khane mein kaisi sharam.

ROHAN

Exactly!

He smiles at her with such confidence, as if admiration and possession were exactly the same thing. Ritika blushes. The waiter approaches them.

WAITER

Order sir?

ROHAN

You have got to try their cheesy fries yrr, let me get the first order please, then you can choose from the menu.

RITIKA

Sure.

ROHAN

Bhai, get me one cheesy fries, one hazelnut cold coffee, one honey chilli potato, and the chilli garlic noodles, extra spicy.

WAITER

Ok sir, aur kuch?

RITIKA

Water, please. Cold.

WAITER

Sure, ma'am.

Rohan smiles at her as the waiter leaves.

ROHAN

So, tell me a little about yourself, RITIKA.

RITIKA

I am a crime journalist.

ROHAN

That's so cool. What company do you work with?

RITIKA

All of them. I mean...I am a freelance journalist, and a wanna be thriller writer. I want to ultimately settle down and write novels that make me a lot of money.

ROHAN

I am listening.

RITIKA (chuckles)

I am 29 years old. Single. My family lives in Panipat, and I here. I have a small brother who is not in the country.

ROHAN

You just shared too many personal details with a random stranger.

RITIKA

Not something you couldn't have learned from anywhere else. You could launch a spy on me today and learn a lot more than what I told you within the next 12-24 hours.

ROHAN

A crime Journalist, indeed. So, my turn?

RITIKA

Sure. Tell me Mr. Stranger, where are you from and what are you doing in this city.

ROHAN

So, you guessed it right. I am actually from Delhi. I sell T-shirts to businesses.

RITIKA

Oh, so you are a big shot textile manufacturing Diva. You must be really rich.

ROHAN

Not REALLY RICH, but I do okay. How did you figure it out with that one statement?

RITIKA

For starters, I met you in a Salsa class. It's usually hot-shot rich kids over there who have too much money and time to spend. You said you manufacture T-shirts for businesses, and if you are rich, it means you have been in business for many years, which means you would have expanded, so it obviously did not remain just about the T-shirts, you would have expanded to kurtis, pants, stoles, and what not.

ROHAN

Impressive. So, other than putting criminals behind bars, charming people with your analytical brain, and dancing, what else do you do?

RITIKA

I don't put people behind the bars. I just bring them into public attention so that someone else does the job.

ROHAN

Have you ever written wrong about somebody? Someone who was proven innocent even though you were certain he was guilty?

RITIKA

There was someone who was proven innocent, but I was not wrong. He most certainly was guilty.

ROHAN

How can you be sure?

RITIKA

I had the evidence.

ROHAN

Couldn't the evidence be wrong?

RITIKA

Maybe, but he did commit a crime according to the constitution. Even though some circumstantial evidence led to a bail out, he still deserved some punishment.

ROHAN

Don't you think you are being too harsh? I mean, what did he do? Steal something?

RITIKA

Murder.

ROHAN

Okay, maybe he was trying to defend or protect someone.

RITIKA

How does it matter if he killed a man?

ROHAN

Woah, I thought you had more colours to you than black and white.

RITIKA

Look, I do understand that sometimes people do things that are unforgivable, and it may seem like the only way to punish them when the law won't, is to take the order in your own hands and kill them or make them suffer. But then, what kind of a society do we become if we encourage this behaviour? People taking revenge on people and it is allowed? ANARCHY.

Rohan zones out.

INT. A Wrecked House FLASHBACK

A six-year-old kid (Rohan) is hiding behind the bed, a raggedy drunken man is walking closer to a woman with hands adjoined. She is begging him for something. Whizz...the belt whips again at her. The man is laughing. He grabs the woman by her head.

MAN

Kya bola tha tujhe? Is mahine ke paise 5 tareekh tak mil jane chahiye!

WOMAN (Sobbing)

Sahab bas ek din late ho gaya. Mujhe naukri se mila nahi tha. Bas ek hi din ki toh baat hai...jaane do is baar

MAN

Ek din jo late hua, uski keemat kaun dega?

WOMAN

Sahab aap 100 rupaye aur le lena

MAN

Paise dikhakar itra rahi hai? Haan? Chal bistar pe chal

WOMAN

Sahab aisa mat karo, is baar chhod do main haath jodti hoon

The man grabs the shrieking woman by her saree, drags her to the bed, and slaps her before unzipping himself insultingly, still laughing, and pushes himself inside, the woman screaming. The young boy is shocked, crying in the corner of the bed, hurting himself by dragging his palm into the wooden corners

WOMAN (V.O.)

Beta, chahe kuch bhi ho jaye, bistar ke peeche se mat hatna.

Chahe kuch bhi ho jaye, na tu bahar ayega, na hi koi aawaz Karega, teri maa kitna bhi chilli le, tu chup rahega, bol, waada? Meri kasam?

Tears roll down the young Rohan's eyes while staring wildly into the scene.

EXT. STREET FLASHBACK

YOUNG ROHAN

Kyu be, ek din late ho jata hai payment ko, toh tu logon ka rape karne se pehle nhi sochta, ab mera payment ek mahine tak nhi diya, toh mujhe toh tujhe maar dena chahiye, nai?

POOR MAN

Beta yeh kya bol rhe ho? Main bas paise lene hi jaa raha tha, main aaj hi tumhare sab paise de dunga

YOUNG ROHAN

Accha? Paise ka raub dikhakar itra raha hai?

The eyes of the man widen, like he remembered something from his past.

MAN (Chuckling)

Beta, jawaani mein kayi galtiyen ho jaati hain...tumse bhi hui hongii. Ab purani baatein kya lekar baithna, jaane do, aur aage badho.

YOUNG ROHAN

Teri maa ka rape karu, tujhe dikhaau, phir yahi tujhe bolu toh?

MAN (controlling his anger)

Jaane de ab, mere paas kuch nai hai

YOUNG ROHAN

Brinda ne bhi aisa hi kuch bola tha tujhe. Tune jaane diya tha?

Man is dumbstruck. When Rohan stabs him on his arm, he screams out loud.

INT Café

RITIKA

Hello? Rohan?

She is snapping her fingers at him.

ROHAN (snapping out of his thoughts)

So, you wouldn't let a murderer go then, even when you know he won't commit another murder.

The waiter puts down the fries, cold coffee, and noodles on the table.

RITIKA

Of course, he has to be punished for the first one, right?

ROHAN

I thought it was about making the world a safer place for others to live in. If the thief won't steal again, he can return the things he stole and get back to his normal life, right?

RITIKA

But he will always have a proclivity to steal.

ROHAN (Offering the fries)

We all have that. We can all steal and all murder. We just need the right motivation and the right circumstance. But we aren't putting all of us in jail.

RITIKA (Munching on the fries)

It is different. When you first commit a murder, it is so different. You have never picked up a gun, never stabbed someone in the chest. But once you do, it becomes easier to do it again. Cause you did it once and you survive. Mmm..these are delicious.

ROHAN

What if she murdered protecting herself, like a creepy old man trying to rape her and she kills him by hitting him in the head. And you are welcome. Try the noodles too.

RITIKA

She might be proven innocent in the court, but I still will have to report it.

ROHAN

So, you will write about everything? Not hold back if it helps the woman?

RITIKA

Hey, all my investigations help people in some way or the other. This incident teaches women to voice their opinion, and they can protect themselves, and the law might favour them. And it is my sole responsibility to report a crime.

ROHAN

Even if it involves disclosing a past secret?

Ritika halted a while. Whether it was the change in Rohan's tone, or whether she remembered something, no one could tell.

RITIKA

Of course. And I must say, this is the best first date I have ever been too.

ROHAN

I know, I am a great conversationalist.

RITIKA

I meant, the food. It is great. Thanks for bringing me here. They stare at each other, smile, they can feel their hearts racing, their breaths getting shallow.

RITIKA (V.O.)

I tried really hard to resist him, but the smell of a fresh story kept pulling me in. He had killed a man, and yet

sustained the innocence. He was not my crime report. He was my great blockbuster novel. For the first time, I did not want to uncover the crime, but the person behind that crime. I did not want to be a journalist, I just wanted to know him better.

Like a mystery in the bottom of the pit, he hung in my mind. He challenged everything I am and everything I thought I could be. I just wish I am not running after a shadow this time. I wish he really is the man I need him to be.

INT. RITIKA'S HOUSE. THEY ARE BOTH MAKING OUT ON THE SOFA.

INT. They are laughing in each others' arms on the bed.

INT. They are both dancing in the Salsa class, comfortably, laughing, flirting.

EXT. They are both riding in Rohan's car, a gun in the back zip of the driver's seat, hidden from her.

INT. Rohan reads through Ritika's papers on the study table, where he is shocked to read through some of the words. Ritika snatches the papers away from him and hugs him, his expression goes from warm to cold.

INT. Ritika's bedroom. Night. The room is basking in warm light. A small table lamp beside a plush bed, a book in Ritika's hand. The curtains are closed, except for a small area of the window, through which the moonlight finds it's way inside. Cupboard has motivation quotes posters on them.

Ritika steals glances towards the phone kept on the bedside table while reading. The moment she hears a notification ring, she keeps the book aside and picks the phone up.

ROHAN (Text Message)

Hey beautiful! Asleep?

Ritika waits for some moment before responding.

RITIKA (Text Message)

Reading.

ROHAN (Text Message)

Oh, then I should get over there to keep you company.

RITIKA (Text Message)

Of course not. You won't let me read.

ROHAN (Text Message)

This is the one thing I love about you.

RITIKA (Text Message)

Just the one?

ROHAN (Text Message)

No way, one of the many little things. In fact, I can say for certain, I love every little part of you.

Ritika blushes, but looks at the message through shocking eyes.

RITIKA (Text Message)

Is that a confession?

ROHAN (Text Message)

Yes. Do you feel the same way about me?

RITIKA (Text Message)

We have known each other only for a couple weeks. Besides, Text confessions don't count. Say it face to face, then we will see.

She bites her nails and smiles playfully.

ROHAN (Text Message)

I so wish I was in Gurgaon at the moment. I would climb through your window, grab your waist, pull you close, kiss you like I have never kissed you before, and then confess the magic swirling inside of me.

Ritika gulps, her smile not fading from her face, her eyes shining, hands go in the air for a happy punch. Before she could respond, another text flashed on her screen.

ROHAN (Text Message)

I was going to drive back to Gurgaon from Panipat in the morning, but it seems like I will have to start right away. Wait for me, and my kisses XOXO

RITIKA (Text Message)

Hey! No! Don't drive in the night. The roads are a mess. I think the longer we wait, the more exciting the meet will be. Just drive back in the morning. I will be right here. Waiting for you.

ROHAN (Text Message)

Alright then. Let me finish this meeting with the client and get some sleep. Tomorrow, I will show you what a confession truly means.

RITIKA (Text Message)

Good night. See you.

ROHAN (Text Message)

Good night. Long night. See you soon, love *heart emoji*

Ritika puts the phone aside, stretches her arms, shuts the night light and falls asleep, with a smile on her face.

The next morning, a doorbell wakes her up.

Drowsily, she walks from across her room to the living room when the doorbell does not stop ringing.

She is dressed in shabby clothes when she opens the door. A delivery boy stands outside.

DELIVERY BOY

Madam Return.

Ritika hastily looks for the parcel, the boy eyeing her visible waist as her shorts go down. It is a large box, so she has to open the entire door. She hands him over the package.

DELIVERY BOY

Madam OTP.

But before she moves away from the door, or says something he grabs her hand and pushes the entire door open. RITIKA shrieks in a haze, but is silenced by his hands, he pushes the door close with his foot. He takes her to the couch, and forces her on it, him enveloping her entirely.

She tries to resist, but is helpless.

INT. CLOSE UP. Ritika's point of view. The man is laughing right in front of her. The entire world has slowed down. She has no where to go, her breathing is shallow, and she is almost bracing herself for either giving up, or another shriek. The man is pressing her breasts like he owns them, and then suddenly, a gunshot is heard.

The man stops and his weight falls on her. She pushes him aside.

INT. RITIKA'S LIVING ROOM

RITIKA

Rohan! What the hell!

Rohan is standing with an idiotic smile and a large gun in his hand.

ROHAN

Are you okay?

RITIKA

No! What? Is he dead?

Rohan pulls her hand up, and notices some scratches, he takes off his jacket and covers her up.

ROHAN

I wish he is.

Ritika is unable to control a sob, and hides her face in his arms for a few seconds, when she suddenly realises something, and puts her face in front of him.

RITIKA

Wait a minute! How did you get in?

ROHAN

I tried calling you several times, but when you did not pick up the call, I climbed by your window. I did not find you in your room, so I came in here.

RITIKA

Aww. You actually climbed the window for me? But...hold on, how do you have a gun?

ROHAN

I carry it for self defence.

RITIKA

Just like how you carried that knife that morning?

ROHAN

What are you talking about?

RITIKA

That day when you killed an old man.

ROHAN

How do you know about it?

RITIKA

I saw you, Rohan!

He pushes her away, while she sits down on the dining chair, sobbing again. He thinks for a while, then turn towards her and gets down on his knees, looking straight into her eyes.

ROHAN

He raped and exploited my mother when I was six. Not once, not twice, but as many times as he could. If I had to kill him again, I would.

Ritika looks at him blankly for a few seconds, his hands inching closer to the gun. She quickly hugs him and buries her head on his chest, and they both stay like that for some seconds.

RITIKA

Let's first figure out, how to get rid of that body.

ROHAN

But, he might still be alive.

RITIKA

Not for long.

Rohan looks at her shockingly.

CLOSE UP on the blood dripping from the delivery boy's body.

Ext. The Alley. Rohan is chasing behind Ritika. For one second, she looks at him, and drops her phone while running. Rohan picks it up, and watches her climb the bus. He has a sly smile on his face.

INT. Ritika's living room.

Ritika is moving closer to the body, with disgust on her face.

ROHAN

Ritika, are you sure you want to do this?

RITIKA

Yes. Or he will blab about us to the police.

ROHAN

Where are your crime morals now?

Ritika halts, turns around, looks at him with shock. He is holding a gun against her.

Black out.

A gun shot is heard.