

Steal in The Attic

A play in 3 acts

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Setting

The play alternates between the late 1980s in Queens, NYC, in the vibrant neighborhood of Richmond Hill, known for its bustling West Indian community, and the present day, in quieter, more reflective settings that mirror the characters' current lives.

Characters

- **Kartick** – A Guyanese immigrant who was 29 years old when he moved to Queens, NYC, in 1987. Bright, hopeful, and carrying the vibrant spirit of his homeland.
- **Luna** – An American woman, artistic, open-minded, and curious about the world around her.
- **Alyssa** – Kartick and Luna's daughter, who grows from a child into a young adult throughout the play. She embodies the emotional bridge between her parents.
- **Sherry** – Kartick's wife in his later life, a background character who influences Kartick's family dynamics but remains somewhat peripheral.
- **Kelly** – Luna's sister. Her role, though minor, is crucial.

Act 1**Scene 1: Kartick's Attic, Present Day**

(Curtains drawn. Dim lights should convey false intimacy. Portray is an attic. There are several faulty windows, frosted in dust. A twin-size bed stands center stage. Two full bookshelves sit upon a large Indian-inspired rug. There are several plants lined up against the wall, fully decayed. An early 90s-inspired TV sits upon a table, more for decor than function. On both sides of the bed are end tables; on them are several photos. The frames show signs of abuse, all wearing cracks with the same muted colors, bearing the relentless march of time and the scars of history. Kartick enters stage right. At 66 years old, his broad appearance is striking, even handsome. He stands numb, gulping the stale air as memories cut through, drowning him with their pain. Pain he still wore, along with regret dripping in his sweat. The attic feels like a sauna as he limps over; he hesitates for a moment before reaching out and picking up a single photograph. The photo is old, its edges frayed, capturing a moment long gone. In it, a younger Kartick stands next to a woman, her face radiant with happiness, while he appears distant. In this captured instant, the background is blurred, highlighting her figure and the subtle swell of her abdomen, indicating her pregnancy.)

(His gaze shifts back to the woman, her smile frozen in time. He closes his eyes briefly, tears escaping down his cheek.)

KARTICK

(whispering as if speaking directly to the woman in the photo)
I'm sorry.

(He places the photo gently on the table, his hands lingering on it as if trying to hold on to the moment a little longer.)

(Curtains close smoothly, hinting at a transition to a flashback in Scene II.)

Scene 2: Richmond Hill, 1987

(The stage explodes with the colors and sounds of a Caribbean festival. People dance in vibrant clothes, street vendors sell exotic foods, and the air is alive with music. A young Kartick walks through the crowd, absorbing every sight and sound with a broad smile. Luna, camera in hand, notices him.)

Luna: Hey, I haven't seen you here before. First festival?

Kartick: Yes, I just arrived from Guyana. It's beautiful, like a piece of home.

Luna (smiling): I'm Luna. And yeah, Queens is good at making everyone feel a bit at home.

(The atmosphere of the festival is electric. Luna notices Kartick looking at a food vendor, where a large pot simmers.)

Kartick (timidly): Want to try some pholourie? They're fried dough balls. My mother makes these back home in Guyana. She sells them in her small shop by the market. You wouldn't believe the lines on a Saturday morning.

(They watch as the vendor scoops a handful of dough and drops it into hot oil, where it sizzles and turns golden brown.)

(Luna takes a bite of the pholourie, her face lighting up with delight at the flavors.)

Luna: Wow, these are incredible! I can see why there'd be lines for these. They're unlike anything I've tried before. The sauce is fantastic, too!

Kartick (pleased): I'm glad you like them. It feels good to share a piece of home, especially here, where everything is new.

(They continue to chat and eat, walking through the festival grounds. Luna points out various stalls and introduces Kartick to local treats, each sharing stories of their favorite childhood foods. As they walk, steel drums grow louder, pulling them towards a group of people dancing. The rhythm is infectious, and Kartick looks at Luna with a hesitant but hopeful expression.)

Kartick: Do you dance? Because it looks like a lot of fun.

Luna (laughing): I'm no expert, but I never miss a chance to dance.

(They set their food aside and join the dancers. The music is lively, filled with the metallic ring of steel drums and the syncopated beat of soca. Although initially cautious, Luna is graceful, and Kartick soon finds the rhythm. They laugh as they attempt to keep up with the other dancers, the moment's joy drawing them closer. As the song

ends, they step aside, catching their breath and laughing at their own daring.)

Kartick: That was fantastic! Thanks for dancing with me. I haven't felt this free in a long time.

Luna: You're a pretty good dancer, Kartick.

Kartick (smiling broadly): You're too kind. We should do this again.

(Luna nods, still smiling from the dance.)

Luna: Definitely. Here, let me give you my number. Maybe you can show me more of your world, and I can introduce you to more of New York City.

(Kartick nods eagerly, and they exchange phone numbers.)

Kartick: I'd like that. There's a lot I want to explore, and having a local guide seems like the perfect way to do it.

Luna: And I'm always up for learning about new cultures. It's a deal then.

(They smile at each other, a sense of camaraderie and anticipation for future adventures settles between them. The festival continues around them, a blur of sounds and colors, but for a moment, it all fades into the background as they focus on the new connection they've just made. The lights dim slightly to signify the end of the scene, leaving the audience with the sense of a budding relationship set against the backdrop of cultural celebration and personal discovery.)

Scene III: Kartick's home, A year Later

(The stage is set with a small dining table, two chairs, and subdued lighting, suggesting the intimacy and seriousness of the moment. Luna and Kartick sit across from each other, their dinner mostly untouched. Luna's expression is uneasy as she gathers her courage to speak.)

Luna: Kartick, I need to tell you something... I'm pregnant.

(Kartick's face registers a tumult of emotions—surprise, fear, and a fleeting moment of joy, which quickly dissolves into apprehension.)

Kartick: A baby... Luna, this... this is unexpected.

Luna: I know it's not easy, but maybe it's a new beginning for us?

(Kartick looks away, his hands clasped tightly together, as if holding himself together. His voice is heavy with unspoken worries.)

Kartick: Or an end... Luna, I'm not just here to start anew. There's so much you don't know. Back home, my family barely makes ends meet. My mother sells in the market, and my father is a freelance welder, but work is scarce. I came here to find a good job, to send money back, to pull them out of the slums.

(Luna reaches across the table, trying to offer comfort, but Kartick pulls back, his expression tormented.)

Kartick: And there's more. In my culture, having a child out of wedlock... My parents would see it as a disgrace. They'd expect me to marry you. But Luna, I can't afford a wedding, not with all the financial responsibilities I already carry.

(Luna's face falls, her eyes filling with tears)

Luna: Kartick, I love you, can't we find a way through this? Your family, they haven't met me, they might understand..

Kartick (shaking his head): It's not just about meeting you. It's about honor, about expectations that were set long before I left Guyana. I need to support them, Luna. And now, how can I support a child, you, and them?

(Kartick stands, pacing a little as he speaks, his voice a mix of despair and frustration.)

Kartick: I love you, Luna. I do. And that's why I can't drag you into this chaos. I wanted to give you more than this.

(Luna stands too, reaching for him, her voice desperate but gentle.)

Luna: Kartick, we'll face this together. Isn't that what love is?

(Kartick looks at her, love and pain etched across his face. He wants to believe her, to take that leap, but the chains of his responsibilities and cultural expectations hold him back.)

Kartick: I need to think, Luna. I need... space to figure out how we can possibly make this work.

(The scene closes with Kartick stepping away, leaving Luna alone at the table, her face a portrait of sorrow and resolve. The lights dim slowly.)

ACT 2

Scene I: 1997

(The stage is split into two settings: Kartick's modest living room in Queens on one side and Luna's sunny living room in Orlando on the other. Each setting is alive with the sounds of family life, but the two halves are distinctly separate. Kartick is currently married to Sherry and Luna is married to David. Kartick, now visibly older and with streaks of gray in his hair, sits surrounded by his three children, two boys and a girl, playing a board game. The laughter is light, but his eyes occasionally drift to an old photograph on the wall—a picture of Alyssa—whose features strikingly echo Luna's.)

(The lights dim on Kartick's side and brighten on Luna's setting in Orlando. Luna is helping her two boys with homework. Her movements are automatic, but her mind seems elsewhere. She pauses, as Alyssa approaches her.)

(Both scenes freeze, and the stage is quiet, the emotional distance lingers despite the physical closeness of Alyssa that links them.)

Scene II: Kartick's Home, Richmond Hill, 2007

(The scene opens in a modern living room. The decor is sparse, with muted colors and minimalistic furniture. Kartick, now 49 years old, sits on a sleek sofa, his expression tense. Alyssa, now a young adult, is standing near the doorway, her suitcase beside her, frustration visible on her face. The atmosphere is charged with tension.)

ALYSSA

(voice raised, on the edge of shouting)

It's just dinner with friends, Dad! I don't see why that's such a problem!

KARTICK

(firm, trying to maintain control)

It's 11 p.m., Alyssa. It's not just dinner; it's irresponsible. You're under my roof, and you'll follow my rules.

ALYSSA

(sarcastically)

Oh, your roof? The one I see maybe twice a year? I'm not a child!

KARTICK

(voice rising)

That doesn't mean you can come and go at any hour you please!

(Their voices escalate, echoing in the sparse room. In the background, Sherry enters quietly, observing the confrontation but choosing not to intervene.)

ALYSSA

(tears starting to form, voice breaking)

You know what? I don't even know why I bother coming here. You and Sherry make me feel like an outsider.

(She grabs her suitcase, moving swiftly towards the door. Kartick makes a move as if to stop her, then hesitates, his hand frozen mid-air.)

KARTICK

(voice softer, but still tense)

Alyssa, please. Let's talk about this in the morning.

ALYSSA

(turning back, her face streaked with tears)

No, Dad. Talking never changes anything with you. You don't listen.

(She exits, slamming the door behind her. The sound reverberates, leaving Kartick standing helplessly. Sherry approaches him, her expression a mix of concern and disapproval.)

SHERRY

(tentatively)

Kartick, maybe you should—

KARTICK

(cutting her off, distressed)

Not now, Sherry.

(The room falls silent except for the ticking of a clock. Kartick sinks back onto the sofa, his head in his hands. The stage lights dim to a focused spot on him, highlighting his solitude. After a moment, his phone rings. He hesitates, then answers. Luna's voice is heard, furious and loud.)

LUNA (V.O.)

Kartick! What the hell did you say to Alyssa? She's on a plane back to Florida, and she's distraught!

KARTICK

(struggling to keep his composure)

Luna, she wanted to go out late. I couldn't just—

LUNA (V.O.)

(interrupting, furious)

She's nearly an adult, Kartick! If you spent more time building trust instead of imposing rules, maybe she wouldn't run the first chance she gets!

KARTICK

(defensive)

I'm trying to be a good father, Luna. I-

LUNA (V.O.)

(cutting him off)

No, Kartick. Being a father isn't just about setting rules. It's about being there, listening, understanding! Which you've never been good at, not with her, not with us!

(The line goes dead. Kartick sits, stunned, the phone slipping from his grasp to the floor. The stage darkens slowly, leaving him enveloped in shadow, the weight of his choices and the distance between him and his daughter clear.)

(Curtains close)

ACT 3

Scene 1: Richmondhill, 2017

(The curtains open to a quiet, somber stage. The setting is stark, minimalistic. The stage is split: on one side, Kartick's familiar living room; on the other, a busy street in Orlando, bustling with life yet carrying a sense of foreboding. Kartick, now 59, appears older, his movements slower. He's sitting on the sofa, lost in thought.)

(Lights dim slightly and a phone rings, piercing the silence. Kartick, startled, picks up the phone. His face changes from confusion to shock as he listens.)

KARTICK

(holding the phone, voice trembling)

Kelly? What...? How...?

(The voice of Kelly, Luna's sister, comes through, her tone heavy with grief.)

KELLY (V.O.)

Kartick, it's Luna... there was an accident. She... she didn't make it.

(Kartick's knees buckle slightly; he sits down heavily, the phone slipping slightly from his grasp as he absorbs the shock.)

KARTICK

(whispering, to himself)

Luna...

KELLY (V.O.)

(steadying her voice)

The funeral is in two days. We... we thought you should know.

(Kartick nods, though she can't see him.)

KARTICK

I'll be there. Thank you for telling me, Kelly.

(He hangs up, stands up slowly, and starts to pack a small bag with a robotic precision, each movement heavy with unspoken sorrow.)

[Transition to Orlando, Florida]

Scene II: The Funeral Home

(The stage is dimly lit, with the setting of a funeral home. Mourners move quietly across the stage, offering a backdrop of whispered condolences and soft sobs. Kartick enters, visibly shaken, looking around in a daze. He spots Alyssa, who is standing aloof, her expression a mix of anger and grief. He approaches her tentatively.)

KARTICK

(softly)

Alyssa...

ALYSSA

(coldly, not looking at him)

You're late. The viewing ended an hour ago.

KARTICK

(confused and hurt)

But I was told it starts now...

ALYSSA

(voice sharp, eyes flashing)

Well, you were told wrong.

(She turns away, leaving Kartick standing there, the weight of her words hitting him harder than the grief. He watches her walk away, his hand reaching out, then falling to his side.)

[Transition to a simple, dimly lit area symbolizing a graveside.]

Scene III: The Graveside

(Kartick stands alone at the edge of the stage, looking towards a representation of Luna's grave. The lighting focuses on him, the rest of the stage fading into darkness.)

KARTICK

(speaking softly, as if to Luna)

I missed you for years, and now... I missed saying goodbye too. I'm sorry, Luna. For everything.

(The lights dim further, suggesting the passing of the service. Kartick remains motionless, lost in his regrets and memories.)

ACT 3

Scene I: Kartick's Attic, Present Day

(The setting returns to the attic from Act 1 Scene 1.)

KARTICK

(softly, a tear rolling down his cheek)

I've kept running from the past, from everyone... Even from myself.
But it's time. It's time to heal.

(He sets the photograph back down, straightens up, and takes a deep breath. The lighting softens, casting a gentle glow around him, suggesting a moment of clarity and peace.)

KARTICK

(to the audience, a resolve in his voice)

Life... it's fleeting. And love, it's complicated. But forgiveness...
forgiveness is possible. It's never too late to seek it, to give it.
For Luna, for Alyssa, and for myself.

(The lights begin to dim slowly, leaving Kartick in a growing shadow,
a symbolic gesture to his journey towards reconciliation with his
past and his hopes for the future. Suddenly, a soft sound is heard
offstage—the opening of the attic door. Alyssa, older and more
composed, steps into the light. She moves towards Kartick, her
expression one of concern and newfound understanding.)

ALYSSA

(gently, reaching out to him)

Dad? Are you okay?

KARTICK

(turning to her, a small, sad smile on his face)

I'm trying.

(Alyssa sits beside him, close but respectful of his space. She
notices the photograph he was looking at and picks it up. They both
look at it together, sharing a silent moment as they gaze at the
image of a younger Kartick and Luna, full of hope.)

ALYSSA

(softly)

She looks so happy here.

KARTICK

(nods, voice cracking with emotion)

She was... She was incredible.

(They share a look, years of barriers slowly crumbling in that small, shared silence. Alyssa places her hand over his, a gesture of reconciliation and love.)

KARTICK

(whispering, as if speaking to both Luna and Alyssa)

I'm sorry... so deeply sorry.

(The lights dim to a soft glow encapsulating just the two of them, symbolizing the beginning of healing and understanding. The echo of Kartick's whispered apology lingers in the air, heavy with significance.)

(The stage darkens completely, his words blending into the silence as the curtains close gently, marking not just the end of the play, but also a hopeful start to a new chapter in the lives of Kartick and Alyssa and growing old)

[End of Play]