

LAMBI JUDAAI

A LONG SEPARATION

Written by Shaida Chaudhury

INT. AKRAMS HOME - BRADFORD

The sound of the eject button is heard on a cassette player. A cassette is placed inside and then closed.

AKRAM Hello (CLICK). Hello (CLICK). Is it recording?
 Wait. (CLICK).
 Yes it is recording.
 Assalamualaikum my beloved Ayesha Younis.
 It is me, Akram Younis.
 It is 3rd June 1968. It is half past two in the
 afternoon here.
 It has been 193 days since I arrived here. (PAUSE)
 193 days since I have seen my love. I have
 missed...

Sound of men talking are heard in the background. Dishes clattering.

 Sorry, it is noisy here today. Those of us that
 worked the night shift, are awake now.
 The others are working the day shift, they shall
 return this evening to sleep. We take it in turns
 to sleep in the beds. It is all quite different
 here.
 The Drummond textile factory is a great place to
 work. Working nights has been difficult to get used
 to. And the greasy smell of the wool and oil mist,
 it is very strong. But I am working hard. I will
 soon have enough money saved to come back to
 Pakistan. To collect you my love. Soon.

The music from an ice cream van is heard.

(EXCITED) Can you hear that?

These vans drive to your street and you can buy an ice cream. The driver puts a cone under a machine. And this swirly ice cream falls perfectly on this cone. It is very different to the ice cream in Pakistan.

When you are here, we will have this ice cream together. I must take my leave my love as it is prayer time. I will find out who will be leaving for Pakistan and I will ask them to take this cassette for you. May Allah keep you safe until we meet again.

Khuda hafiz.

INT. AKRAMS HOME - BRADFORD

The sound of the eject button is heard on a cassette player. A cassette is placed inside and then closed. Akram presses the record button on the cassette player.

AKRAM

Assalamualaikum my love.

It is 7th September 1968. It is just after eight in the morning here. I have just finished work.

Please forgive me, it has been some time since I spoke with you.

Mr Bashir gave me your cassette once he returned to England. It brought me so much joy to hear your voice, to hear Abu Jaan (father) and Ami Jaan's (mother) voice. It gave me so much comfort to hear you are all in good health. Ami Jaan said that the buffalo is not well. I will try and send some money so that the buffalo can be treated. It soothed my heart to hear Abu Jaan singing his poetry. There was a time when I could not sleep as a child until

Abu Jaan sang to me. There have been nights where I lay awake trying to imagine his voice singing to me.
(SADNESS)

Your cassette came to me just at the right time, hearing your voice telling me all the news of what has been happening in our village, brought comfort to my sorrowed heart. I played your cassette over and over. It was as if you were here next to me.
(TEARFUL)

Work has been keeping me very busy. Working the night shift has made me very tired, I have been sleeping for longer during the days. Then after my evening meal with the others, we head back to work. I am happy though, as I have been saving and once I have everything in place ready for you to be here with me.

(EXCITED) Last week I went to the Belle Vue Studios here in Bradford. Many had told me of it. It was an extraordinary place. I wanted to have my photo taken to send to you my love. I was very excited I even bought a new suit.

I waited along with many others in the studio. Everyone was dressed very smartly my love. Men in suits, the women in colourful shalwar kameez. I imagined what you may have worn had you been with me. (PAUSE)

It had been a long wait. But it was my turn soon enough.

The photographer called me over. There were several chairs placed in front of the black curtain. There had been a family before me. (SADNESS)

I sat on a chair as instructed. He straightened the black curtain draped behind me. There was a table to the side of me, which had a fluted vase of flowers placed on the middle of it.

He then disappeared under the black cloth over his camera. He was like a magician. I wish you had been with me. But I promise you it shall be the first place we shall visit when you are here. May Allah keep you safe until we meet again. Khuda hafiz.

INT. AKRAMS HOME - BRADFORD

The sound of the eject button is heard on a cassette player. A cassette is placed inside and then closed. Akram presses the record button on the cassette player.

AKRAM Assalamualaikum my love. It is 23rd January 1969 here. Mr Khan came from Pakistan a few days ago. He came back with his wife and daughter. (SADNESS) Mr Khan gave me a cassette from you all. Father does not sound very well. He was struggling to sing. I am very worried for him. He was asking for me to return back to Pakistan to see him one last time. (TEARFUL). I promise I will return as soon as I have enough money saved up. Please look after him for me until I am able to return. I had missed the sound of your tranquil voice. It gave me peace.

Sound of Church bells are heard.

The winter here is brutal. I am wrapped up in my duvet, shivering from the blistering cold. Although I feel the cold inside my bones like I have never experienced before in my life. The falling snow

outside is beautiful. I played in the snow. I laid in it as long as I could bear it. (LAUGHS) Christmas here was so magical.

I cannot wait for you to experience this beauty with me. (EXCITED) There is so much I want to show you in this beautiful country. Our new home. There is so much to experience, so much to love. The people, the culture, the fish and chips. Bradford is a beautiful city.

My love, I await until the day we are together again. Soon my love soon. (PAUSE). I must sleep now my love. May Allah keep you safe. Khuda hafiz.

INT. AKRAMS HOME - BRADFORD

The sound of the eject button is heard on a cassette player. A cassette is placed inside and then closed. Akram presses the record button on the cassette player.

AKRAM

Assalamualaikum my love.

It is 27th April 1969. It is just after six in the evening. Thank you for sending me your cassette, I felt so elated to hear your voice, to hear Ami Jaan's voice. To hear Abu Jaan's singing. Abu Jaan sounded a little better. I am glad the medicine is working. I have been struggling of late. I miss you all so much...(PAUSE)

My friend Ali was to return to Pakistan to collect his wife. But he was attacked one night after his shift at the factory. I do not know why they attacked him. He was just walking home. They shouted awful words at him, about going back to his own country. He is still in the hospital. May Allah give him strength to heal and his family to

have sabar (patience) during this difficult time.
Ameen.

I have been working overtime as much as I can. I want to pay for Abu Jaan's treatment. I know Ami Jaan has said for me not to worry. I just need to save a little more and then I shall return. I ask you to be patient a little longer my love. I was happy you said that my photo gives you comfort until I return.

I must finish now. I want to visit Ali at the hospital before I go to work tonight. I do not want you to worry my love. I am safe here in Bradford. Everybody has been welcoming. It is safe. Khuda hafiz.

INT. AKRAMS HOME

The sound of the eject button is heard on a cassette player. A cassette is placed inside and then closed. Akram presses the record button on the cassette player.

AKRAM (CRYING) Inna Lilahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un
(We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return)
I received the news from Mr Bashir about Abu Jaan. He came to my work tonight during my shift. I had ear plugs in and the noise of the looms was so loud. From the corner of my eye, I saw Mr Bashir with my manager. Mr Bashir does not work at the factory. They were looking over at me but I carried on spinning. Then my friend Henry came over, his kind eyes ushered me away. He took over the spinning. I walked slowly over to my managers office. I was ushered to sit. I was not prepared...(CRIES)...I...(BEAT)

It is 14th August 1969. It is after 3am. I was told the Janaza (burial) had already taken place. The news took so long to arrive here... (TEARFUL).

A sound of a knock on the door is heard. Akram presses stop on the cassette player.

INT. AKRAMS HOME - BRADFORD

Akram presses record on the cassette player.

AKRAM Assalamualaikum. It is 20th November 1969. Forgive me my love as I did not finish recording this cassette.

Henry had come around to the house that dark night. He has shown a great kindness to me. He had insisted I stay with him and his family for a few days. I was very thankful. His wife Sharon was very kind like Henry. They welcomed me into their home as if I was family. It helped me a great deal. I have taken two weeks off from the factory. I am coming back my love. I am coming to collect you to bring you here. You will fall in love instantly, just like I did. We'll have ice cream from the ice-cream van and then we'll go to the studio. We will send our photos to Ami Jaan. She will see how happy we are here. I will ask my cousin to live with Ami Jaan. She cannot be left on her own. (PAUSE)

When I arrive I wish to pray over Abu Jaan's grave first. (PAUSE)

I am intending to give this cassette to Ali. He is due to leave tomorrow morning.

My love we will meet in two weeks. Until then may Allah keep you safe. Khuda hafiz.

INT. YEAR 2018 - AKRAM AND AYESHA'S HOME - BRADFORD

The sound of the eject button is heard on a cassette player. A cassette is placed inside and then closed.

AKRAM

It is 3rd June 2018.

I am recording this today as I can tell by your reaction that my memories are starting to fade. I feel no anger, this is what was written for me. But I know this cruel disease will soon take every last memory from me.

It has been an extraordinary 52 years together hasn't it my love. Allah blessed us with our beautiful children and grandchildren. But I am soon to become a stranger in your lives and I will not recognise you, our family anymore. But you will always have our cassettes. Remember me as I was. I am still him. All I ask is that you hold my hand when the end is near. I will know it is you my love. I will always know. I love you with all my heart Ayesha Younis.

May Allah keep you all safe. Khuda hafiz.