

SCENE 1

SIA KHATRI's bedroom: which contains a bed, a chair, a table with a record player, a packed trunk below a window. There is one door.

SIAXHATRI (12) spins around with a beautiful doll (Romilla), humming a tune.

SIA

Father says Goa is beautiful! Would you like to be a mermaid, Romilla? We can lay by the ocean and fan our tales, make necklaces and bangles from shells, and...

Noises from outside the house: breaking glass and screams. Sia turns as though to go to the window.

Her father, CHANDRA, hurriedly enters. Worried, he sweeps her up and carries her away from the window.

CHANDRA

Sia, no! Stay away from the window.

SIA

I was just going...

CHANDRA

Leave the curtain. Come my Rani Bitiya, it is time to put Romilla to bed.

He puts a record on to drown out the noise. Sia climbs in bed, Chandra pulls up a chair beside her.

SIA

I was telling her about Goa, and how we will be mermaids by the sea!

CHANDRA

Mermaids? Like Suvannamaccha?

SIA

Suvannamacha?

CHANDRA

Yes, do you remember the story? Suvannamaccha the golden tailed mermaid from the Rumayana. She was a mermaid princess.

SIA

A princess?

CHANDRA

Yes, my Rani Bititya, a little princess, just like you. But she was a naughty princess.

SIA

Can princesses be naughty?

CHANDRA

Well, Sia she wasn't trying to be naughty. Someone can seem naughty because they have a different perspective, or they need something different from what someone else needs. You see, Suvannamacha lived in the sea...

SIA

Of course she did! She was a mermaid!

CHANDRA

Yes, of course. Well do you remember that Sita was kidnapped? And that Rama was trying to rescue her?

(Sia nods fervently.)

Well, Rama's asked Hanuman's help to find her, and he found her kidnapped on the island of Lanka. Rama was so grateful to know where she was, but he could not cross the sea, so he asked Hanuman to build a bridge, so that he could rescue his beloved Sita.

SIA

Did the mermaid help him?

CHANDRA

Well, Sia, how do you think you would feel if someone was dropping giant boulders in your home?

SIA

Oh I see, she must have been scared!

As Chandra tells the story, actors in masks  
mime/dance the story, under blue/green light  
on stage right.

CHANDRA

Yes, she didn't like it. Hanuman had a team of forest dwelling Vanaras throwing rocks to build the foundation of the bridge deep in the sea, and that was her home! Everyday they would throw hundreds of rocks into the water, and Suvannamacha and her friends would take them all away.

SIA

How did they build the bridge? Rama had to rescue Sita!

CHANDRA

Well, at first Hanuman tried to fight the mermaids, but he could not. He found Suvannamaccha so beautiful! So instead, he swam with her, and as they spent time together, they grew in understanding, and they fell in love.

SIA

How wonderful!

CHANDRA

The mermaid princess revealed that the demon who kidnapped Sita, was actually her father, Ravana! Ravana had told her to clear the rocks for the bridge, but he had not told Suvannamacha what he had done. When Hanuman told the mermaid princess about Rama and Sita, and he told her that her father had kidnapped Sita, she cried. And now that she understood, she would have all the mermaids return the rocks and help build the bridge.

Light down on the dancers.

SIA

(Yawning)

Do you think I'll see mermaids in Goa, father?

CHANDRA

Perhaps, darling. You will go to the same school that your mother attended many years ago. It will be cool, and sunny and full of all kinds of people.

SIA

Vishv Yaatree - world traveler school. It sounds wonderful! But I will miss you father. How long will you be gone?

CHANDRA

A few months darling. I will go and make a new home for us: I must find work and a home. The world is changing, Rani Bitiya. It will be save for you in the south, by the sea. I will come back as soon as I can.

SIA

I understand. Father, if I were on an island, would you build a bridge to come get me?

CHANDRA

Of course. If I could not build a bridge, I would become a fish. If I could not become a fish, I would drain the ocean and walk across the dry ground to find you. Wherever you are is where I belong. I promise I will come back, Rani Bitiya. Good night my love.

SIA

Goodnight father.

SIA TURNS INTO HER PILLOW TO SLEEP.  
CHANDRA TURNS OUT THE LIGHT AND  
EXITS SIA'S BEDROOM.

SCENE 5

Vishv Yaatree Skool.

The children walk in a line towards towards to dormitory to retire for the night. MISS URMILA drags BENITO at the back. He is hysterical.

BENITO

No!! Leave me ALONE!

MISS URMILLA

Benito, I don't know what has come over you! Don't you want to go with your friends?

BENITO

I don't have any friends!

MISS URMILLA

Of course you do! Benito!

BENITO

I don't have any friends, I want to go home! I want minha mae!

MISS URMILLA

Benito, you know...

Benito screams

BENITO

I want MINHA MAE!

SIA

What's wrong Miss Urmilla?

MISS URMILLA

Oh Sia, there's nothing we can do when he's like this.

SIA

What is Minha Mae?

MISS URMILLA

Sia, dear, he misses his mother. She's passed away. There's nothing we can do.

SIA

Can stay with him, Miss Urmilla.

MISS URMILLA

(Reluctant)

I do need to put the children to bed. Thank you, Sia. He'll wear himself out. Just sit with him for a bit, make sure he doesn't run off!

Miss Urmilla follows the children upstage to the dormitory.

Sia watches Benito. She gets down on the ground beside him.

SIA

You miss your mother?

Benito huffs, crossing his arms and turning away from her.

SIA

It's okay. You can be angry.

BENITO

I'M NOT ANGRY!

Sia stifles a laugh. He stomps.

SIA

I was angry when my mother died. I was so full of feelings. I felt like I was going to explode with feelings.

Benito wails.

SIA

(Wails with Benito.)

It's not fair!!!! Children need a mother!!!

Benito turns and holds Sia, squeezing desperately tightly. She takes deep breaths with him, looking up into the sky. He begins to calm down.

BENITO

Is your mother an angel?

SIA

She is a star.

BENITO

A star?

SIA

Yes, a star. She's looking over us now. Do you want to see her.

He nods. She turns him to where she has been looking up in the sky. Sia gets to his level and points.

BENITO

How can you tell which one.

SIA

My father taught me. I look for the brightest star, and then you see a little band beside it? She's there in the middle. With her father and mother.

BENITO

Even stars have parents. Do you think my mother is up there, too.

SIA

Of course. Look around. You'll feel it when you find her.

Benito searches the sky. He lights up, pointing.

BENITO

There! She's by the water! There Sia.

SIA

Now you know where to look for her. She'll always be there. Even when it's light, the stars are still there, we just can't always see them.

BENITO

I love you, Sia.

SIA

I feel like she's speaking to me Benito, she'd like me to watch over you. Would that be okay?

He hugs her.

SIA

When you need your mother, you can come to me. She'll send me hugs for you, and you can get one whenever you want.

SHE WIPES HIS TEARS, AND THEY WALK  
TO THE DORMITORY TOGETHER.