

Your main commentary should be focused on exclamation and interrogation. Other topics may also be addressed.

'I'm looking for an actor just like you.' My head rang with cheering bells. We sat down with our coffee. Shadwell put his elbow out half-way across the table in a puddle of tea, resting his cheek on the palm of his hand, and stared at me.

5 'Really?' I said enthusiastically. 'An actor like me in what way?'
 'An actor who'll fit the part.'
 'What part?' I asked.
 He looked at me impatiently. 'The part in the book.'
 I could be very direct at times. 'What book?'
 'The book I asked you to read, Karim.'

10 'But you didn't.'
 'I told Eva to tell you.'
 'But Eva didn't tell me anything. I would have remembered.'
 'Oh Christ. Oh God, I'm going mad. Karim, what the hell is that woman playing at?'
 And he held his head in his hands.

15 'Don't ask me,' I said. 'At least tell me what the book is. Maybe I can buy it today.'
 'Stop being so rational,' he said. 'It's *The Jungle Book*. Kipling. You know it, of course.'
 'Yeah, I've seen the film.'
 'I'm sure.'

20 He could be a snooty bastard, old Shadwell, that was for sure. But I was going to keep myself under control whatever he said. Then his attitude changed completely. Instead of talking about the job he said some words to me in Punjabi or Urdu. To tell the truth, when he spoke it sounded like he was gargling.
 'Well?' he said. He rattled off some more words. 'You don't understand?'

25 'No, not really.'
 'What could I say? I couldn't win. I knew he'd hate me for it.'
 'Your own language!'
 'Yeah, well, I get a bit. The dirty words. I know when I'm being called a camel's rectum.'

30 'Of course. But your father speaks, doesn't he? He must do.'
 Of course he speaks, I felt like saying. He speaks out of his mouth, unlike you, you fucking cunt bastard shithead.
 'Yes, but not to me,' I said. 'It would be stupid. We wouldn't know what he was on about. Things are difficult enough as it is.'

35 Shadwell persisted. There seemed to be no way he was ever going to get off this subject.
 'You've never been there, I suppose.'
 'Where?'

40 'Why was he being so bloody aggressive about it?'
 'You know where. Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Trivandrum, Goa, the Punjab. You've never had that dust in your nostrils.'
 'Never in my nostrils, no.'

'You must go,' he said, as if nobody had ever been there but him.
 'I will, OK?'

45 'Yes, take a rucksack and see India, if it's the last thing you do in your life.'
 'Right, Mr Shadwell.'
 He lived in his own mind, he really did. He shook his head and did a series of short barks in his throat. This was him laughing, I was certain. 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!' he went. He said, 'What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given
 50 birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there'd be. Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington.'
 'Oh God, what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth
 55 century. Yes?'

'Mr Shadwell - ' I started.
 'Eva can be a very difficult woman, you know.'
 'Yeah?'

I breathed more easily now he'd changed the subject.
 60 'The best women always are,' he went on. 'But she didn't give you the book. She's trying to protect you from your destiny, which is to be half-caste in England. That must be complicated for you to accept - belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere. Racism. Do you find it difficult? Please tell me.'
 He looked at me.

65 'I don't know,' I said defensively. 'Let's talk about acting.'
 'Don't you know?' he persisted. 'Don't you really?'

I couldn't answer his questions. I could barely speak at all; the muscles in my face seemed to have gone rigid. I was shaking with embarrassment that he could talk to me in this way at all, as if he knew me, as if he had the right to question me.

70 Fortunately he didn't wait for any reply. He said, 'When I saw more of Eva than I do now, she was often unstable; Highly strung, we call it. Yes? She's been around, Eva, and she's seen a lot. One morning we woke up in Tangier, and she was suffocating. All her hair had dropped out in the night and she was choking on it.'
 I just looked at him.

75 'Incredible, eh?' 'Incredible. It must have been psychological.' And I almost added that my hair would probably fall out if I had to spend too much time with him.