

CROSSOVER

Written by

Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar & Kali Bailey

INT. MALA FAMILY HOME - SUNSET

MALA (18), intelligent with an air of learned posture, sits at the table. KAVITHA (late 30s), edgy and watchful, serves Mala more rice.

MALA

Mom I don't want any more...

PLOP. She gets more rice.

KAVITHA

How will you keep that big brain going without food? You must make time for both eating and studying.

When Kavitha looks away, Mala checks her phone. On the screen is a live pro basketball game.

KAVITHA (CONT'D)

And tutoring keeps you busy enough.

Mala looks back up away from the game quickly.

MALA

Speaking of, Aunt Anitha is picking me up. I have a tutoring session tonight.

KAVITHA

Who are you tutoring now?

MALA

His name is Doug. He has a great free-throw average, the highest in the state. Sixty percent of our losses could have been W's if we had hit all of our free-throws. (beat) Not that I've been paying much attention really that's just what I hear around school.

Kavitha is very obviously displeased to hear this.

KAVITHA

Your time should be spent studying for your statistics class not on memorizing basketball stats. Those boys - lost potential. Lazy and unmotivated. All they care about is the NBA. A waste of your time. They are someone else's problem.

MALA

Mom, statistically it simply isn't true. I'm sure Doug is going to be a very respectful student.

Kavitha titters, skeptical.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

The front door opens and in bustles AUNT ANITHA (30s), Kavitha's younger sister. She's the definition of a "cool aunt," complete with kind eyes and a clever sense of humor.

KAVITHA

(Irritated)

Yes, by all means do come in.

Anitha clearly misses her sister's irritation.

AUNT ANITHA

Thanks! Mala, you ready to go?

MALA

Yep.

KAVITHA

It's not even 6:30 yet.

Mala and Anitha exchange glances.

MALA

Oh I like to get there early and uh, get a good table and catch up on reading you know.

Mala stands, grabs her backpack from the floor and kisses her mom's forehead.

KAVITHA

Take some to go.

As if from nowhere, Kavitha pulls out a to-go tuperware of food. Mala sighs, smiles, and takes the tuperware.

MALA

Thanks Mom.

KAVITHA

And one for you too Anitha.

She pulls out a second tuperware for Anitha.

AUNT ANITHA  
 Mmmm, best sambar on the east  
 coast. Thanks Kavitha.

Aunt Anitha leans down and kisses Kavitha on the cheek. She hurries to catch up with Mala.

MALA  
 (Whispering)  
 How are we doing?

AUNT ANITHA  
 (Whispering)  
 We're up ten points with four  
 minutes to go. But Branson fouled  
 out. We can finish the game in the  
 car on the way.

Kavitha watches them go, suspicious. They hustle to the car.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Mala sits at a desk alone. She puts down a book and looks at her watch - it's 9:00 PM. She packs up and leaves, frustrated.

EXT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

A worn car pulls up and a small black woman, NANA, late 60s, grandmotherly, is at the wheel. She is seated on cushions so she can see over the steering wheel. DOUG LAKE (19), a large athletic black teenager, gets out of the passenger side.

NANA  
 Thank you for helpin' me tonight.

DOUG  
 No problem Nana.

NANA  
 You study good.

DOUG  
 You drive careful.

NANA  
 You mind your business.

Doug gently closes the door and watches wistfully while she pulls away. He realizes the time, and runs for the library.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Doug hustles inside, clearly lost. He gapes for a second at the vaulted ceilings then walks over to PRASANTH (20s), a nerdy Indian American grad student monitoring the circulation desk.

PRASANTH  
Can I help you?

Doug scratches his bald head.

DOUG  
Yeah. I'm supposed to meet my tutor here.

He pulls out a piece of paper and looks at it.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Mela?

Prasanth shakes his head.

PRASANTH  
Ma-la. She was here a longtime back, reading a book. Hawking. A Brief History of Time. But she left.

DOUG  
Shit! Coach is going to kick my ass. What she look like?

PRASANTH  
Pissed.

EXT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Mala is headed down the walkway, frustration in every step. Doug sees her and jogs to catch up.

DOUG  
Hey, are you--Mela?

MALA  
Nope.

DOUG  
Oh sorry, right - Maaalaaa.

MALA  
I'm not a goat.

DOUG

Listen, I was helping my Nana and I didn't realize the time--

MALA

I am all done with inconsiderate athletes who are too lazy to respect other people's time.

DOUG

Hey, hold up. You don't know shit about me.

For a moment Mala considers this.

MALA

I know you are failing most of your classes so are not going to be able to play for much longer this season. That means you lose your scholarship and one day, in the not so far future, you no longer be the NBA's bright and shining star because after you blow out your knee or elbow or back, you'll be a washed up has-been who might get some game time in Europe.

DOUG

Okay so I'm not a braniac like you. It's not my strength. That's why I you're here.

Mala walks away.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Look I didn't mean to be rude. Just lost track of time.

Mala swings back around.

MALA

My brain is no different than yours. It just works harder.

Doug is stunned, no one back talks to him like that. He recovers and runs after her.

DOUG

Listen. I'm really sorry alright. But if we don't do this, I won't get to play and then Coach--

MALA

You won't get to play this weekend?

Mala stops. Doug almost slams into her and reaches out to steady himself by grabbing her shoulders.

DOUG

Yeah, I won't get to play.

MALA

Can you get me tickets?

DOUG

Tickets? Would not have predicted you follow basketball.

MALA

Well you don't know shit about me do you?

DOUG

Do you know what I have to do to get tickets? This weekend is the semifinal. It's been sold out for months.

At that moment, a GORGEOUS GIRL in a close-fitting skirt walks by. Doug is immediately distracted.

Mala snorts in disgust and keeps walking. Doug is torn. He stops for a lingering smile and then rushes after Mala.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Ok fine, I'll get you tickets! One for this weekend?

MALA

Season tickets.

DOUG

Eh?

MALA

I said, I want season tickets.

Doug laughs.

DOUG

That's almost impossible.

MALA

Well, I guess you and the bench are going to get real comfortable.

DOUG  
 Okay, okay. Season tickets. Now,  
 can you sign this for me?

He pulls out a folder with the school seal on it and flips to the tutor sheet. Mala looks at it suspiciously.

MALA  
 Aren't we supposed to study before  
 I sign this?

DOUG  
 Listen, I promise I'll be a perfect  
 little student next time.

MALA  
 And you'll get my tickets?

DOUG  
 Yes.

Mala takes the pen and signs. He sighs and closes the folder.

MALA  
 Next week. Four o'clock. Don't be  
 late.

INT. LIBRARY - ONE WEEK LATER

Doug sits at a desk, talking on his cell phone. His voice is low and sexy.

Prasanth is working and keeps sneaking looks at Doug. He's reading an article online about Doug's twenty-six points and four rebounds from last weekend. A clock on the wall reads four p.m.

Mala enters, pleased to see Doug is on time. She sits and puts her backpack down and looks at Doug who slouches in the chair across from her, barely acknowledging her.

DOUG  
 Of course, I'd rather be chillin'  
 with you. I just got some other  
 stuff I gotta do. Besides you.

Annoyed, Mala makes movements to leave.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
 Baby, I got to call you later.

He hangs up.



DOUG (CONT'D)  
Woa, woa where you going?

MALA  
I have better things to do than  
listen to your booty calls.

Prasanth sees Mala looking in his direction, brightens up and makes his way over.

PRASANTH  
I was wondering if you're free  
after, you want to talk organic  
chemistry.

MALA  
I'm not on the pre-med track. I'm  
just taking the class because my  
mom wants me to.

PRASANTH  
Really? Well with how high your mid-  
term grades were you should really  
consider it.

MALA  
Thanks I-

DOUG  
Hey, hey. No booty calls during  
tutoring.

Mala stares at Doug, incredulous. He motions to the books on the table and for Prasanth to leave.

MALA  
I'll catch up with you later.

Prasanth nods and walks away, looking over his shoulder a few times. Mala glares at Doug. Doug shrugs, smug.

DOUG  
Okay, well. I'm here. On time.  
Where we starting?

Mala takes out a piece of paper and shows Doug. It is his monthly progress report from the athletic office.

MALA  
The English grade is the direst.

DOUG  
What I gotta do to get it up?

MALA  
Stop talking like that for one.

DOUG  
What?

MALA  
Use full words.

DOUG  
Listen, I don't know who you think  
you are but, you ain't about to  
tell me how to speak, you little--

MALA  
Research shows that if you practice  
informal writing and speaking  
standard English, your formal  
writing and speaking will improve,  
no matter what your community's  
natural dialect. Talk with your  
buddies however you want. But with  
me, let's work on standard English.  
But first things first. You have  
something for me?

Doug unzips his bag and slides her an envelope with school  
branding all over it. She grins and opens it.

He watches her, slightly puzzled, slightly happy, to see her  
clutching the tickets to her like a prize.

MALA (CONT'D)  
One season ticket.

DOUG  
You're in the family row. Sitting  
next to my Nana.

MALA  
Not your parents?

DOUG  
My Nana raised me.

Beat as Mala soaks this in.

MALA  
It will be my honor to sit with  
her. If we get to watch you play  
that is. Let's get to it.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Hours have passed. All of Doug's books are open. Various snacks lay scattered about.

Prasanth leaves, regretful. Doug puts his pencil down, exhausted. He massages his hand.

DOUG

Done.

Mala picks it up, scans it. Nods. Starts making notes.

DOUG (CONT'D)

I need a break.

MALA

You need to finish this before tomorrow.

DOUG

Either we break or I break down.

Mala reacts: she sees he is not exaggerating.

MALA

Fine. Ten minutes. Max. What did you have in mind?

Doug grins.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Mala walks onto the court in awe. For a huge basketball fan, this is like Christmas morning.

MALA

I didn't know anyone could just walk in here.

SWISH! Doug hits a free-throw easily.

DOUG

You can't. They make an exception for me. I do my best training late at night. Heads up!

He tosses her the ball. Mala catches it awkwardly to her chest, then steps up to the free-throw line, moves around several times, looking for the best angle. Doug tries his best to hide a smirk. She finally decides on an unorthodox position, aims, and SINKS one. Doug stares at her in shock.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Damn girl. How do you know how to do that?

MALA

It's easy enough if you calculate the distance to the basket, estimate the angle from the most advantageous point, then apply the exact amount of joules or amount of energy, under the exact point on the sphere. Which is exactly what you do each time you shoot.

Mala SINKS another shot.

MALA (CONT'D)

But you'll get to that in physics.

Doug reacts: impressive.

DOUG

You're giving me a very strong robot kind of vibe. You sure you're human?

MALA

Yes, there are millions in my model, all raised by Indian parents.

Doug chuckles.

DOUG

So, what are you going to do when you grow up? Like save the world or something?

MALA

I wanted to go into space once. But then seeing the challenger explode and everything - you could die.

DOUG

Everyone dies. Usually, way before they should.

Mala looks at him, softening slightly.

MALA

Fair point. But it turns out I can develop any skill thanks to my relentless determination and unwavering commitment to my studies so I'd rather not die in space.

DOUG

Okay, smarty pants, don't rub it in. You're from a superior race I get it. I'm only good with the ball.

MALA

Just because I'm smart doesn't mean I'm superior. You're excellent with a ball. Most people never achieve excellence at anything.

DOUG

I'm excellent with other things too.

He grins, moving closer to her.

DOUG (CONT'D)

But we'll get to that in anatomy.

He winks at her but then pulls away, teasing.

MALA

I'm not going to be another one of your conquests.

DOUG

Hey we all have needs right?

MALA

You need to stay on the team. I need to make money. Those are our needs. You lose me, you lose it all.

DOUG

Alright boss lady. Can't blame a dude for trying.

He turns and hits a three pointer then chases the ball down. She recovers, not wanting Doug to catch this insecurity.

She motions for him to pass her the ball. She walks to the three point line, aims and misses. Doug grabs the rebound.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
You got your feet planted wrong.  
Here look.

He moves closer, legitimately helping her stance.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Widen up your stance a bit. Yeah  
that's good. Grab the ball here...

Doug moves her hands to the correct position on the ball.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
And here.

Mala catches her breath in spite of herself. Doug smiles,  
genuine.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Now.

He guides her hands and... SWISH!

MALA  
Ha! Yes! Me against the world.

She turns to him, grinning. A rare playfulness in her eyes.

DOUG  
Hell, maybe it's we against the  
world.

MALA  
Yes. Maybe. We against the world.

They share a sweet moment of connection. Doug takes the ball  
and tries to SHOOT but Mala swipes it from him, checks her  
watch.

MALA (CONT'D)  
Ten minutes is up.

She runs up court. He shakes his head and follows her.

DOUG  
Oh now that's definitely traveling!  
Penalty!

Mala laughs as they run off the court.

FADE TO:

TITLE CARD OVER BLACK:

**ME AGAINST THE WORLD**