

Shantaram

Gregory David Roberts

Regards,

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Shantaram

Gregory David Roberts

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Shantaram

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Book Jacket Information:

Shantaram is a novel based on the life of the author, Gregory David Roberts. In 1978 Roberts committed a series of armed robberies, while addicted to heroin, and was sentenced to nineteen years' imprisonment. In July 1980 he escaped over the front wall of the prison, in broad daylight, thereby becoming one of Australia's most wanted men for what turned out to be the next ten years.

His journey took him to England, India, Africa and Europe, but his home for most of those years was Bombay, where he established a free medical clinic for slum dwellers, and worked as a counterfeiter, smuggler, gunrunner, and street soldier for one of the most charismatic branches of the Bombay mafia.

Shantaram deals with all this, and more. It is an epic, mesmerizing tale of crowded slums and five-star hotels, romantic love and prison torture, mafia gangs and Bollywood films, and spiritual gurus and brutal battlefields. It leaves a seamless web of unforgettable characters, amazing adventures, and superb evocations of Indian life.

This remarkable book can be read as a vast, extended thriller, as well as a superbly written meditation on the nature of good and evil. It is a compelling tale of a hunted man who had lost everything (his home, his family, and his soul) and came to find his humanity while living at the wildest edge of experience. Nothing like this has been written before, and nobody but Greg Roberts could have written it not.

3 3 3

Gregory David Roberts was born in Melbourne, and has lived in India, New Zealand, Germany, and Switzerland. He speaks four languages and has traveled widely in Asia, Africa and Europe. He is now a full-time writer and lives in Melbourne.

3 3 3

Praise for Shantaram

Shantaram is a big and big-hearted book, ... It's got everything you could ever want in a novel (memorable characters, tortured romances, wild omens, adventures in exotic locales, stories of heroism and courage, love and betrayal, sin and redemption ...

This vast tapestry of tales is sewn together with the skill of a master storyteller ... Roberts has one hell of an imaginative gift ...

What, in the end, strikes you most about this splendid and ultimately life-affirming novel is that it is also the kind of aesthetically pleasing novel that you can read without blushing (a masterpiece).

(Brampton Woodhead, The New York Times)

It is a tale, by turns gripping, hilarious, moving and instructive. It evokes the raw tangle of modern India superbly.

(Frank Bell, The Australian)

Shantaram is not so much a mirror as a mirror ball, spinning with relentless drive, dazzling but ungraspable. And, again, audacious. Gloriously audacious.

(Victoria Robinson, The Sydney Morning Herald)

3 3 3
For my mother
3 3 3

May all those you love find the truth in you and be true to your love.

(((((((((((

Shantaram

Part One

Chapter One

It took me a long time and most of the world to learn that I, no! about love and fate and the hoi es ! e ma, e, but the heart of it came to me in an instant, ! hile I ! as hained to a ! all and being tortured. I reali1ed, someho! , through the s reaming in my mind, that even in that sha , led, bloody hel#lessness, I ! as still free: free to hate the men ! ho ! ere torturing me, or to forgive them. It doesn't sound li, e mu h, I , no! . Out in the flin h and bite of the hain, ! hen it's all you've got, that freedom is a universe of #ossibility.)nd the hoi e you ma, e, bet! een hating and forgiving, an be ome the story of your life.

In my ase, it's a long story, and a ro! ded one. I ! as a revolutionary ! ho lost his ideals in heroin, a #hiloso#her ! ho lost his integrity in rime, and a #oet ! ho lost his soul in a ma' imum(se urity #rison. 7hen I es a#ed from that #rison, over the front ! all, bet! een t! o gun(to! ers, I be ame my ountry"s most ! anted man. ;u , ran ! ith me and fle! ! ith me a ross the ! orld to India, ! here I +oined the Oombay mafia. I ! or, ed as a gunrunner, a smuggler, and a ounterfeiter. I ! as hained on three ontinents, beaten, stabbed, and starved. I ! ent to ! ar. I ran into the enemy guns.)nd I survived, ! hile other men around me died. 2hey ! ere better men than I am, most of them: better men ! hose lives ! ere run hed u# in mista, es, and thro! n a! ay by the ! rong se ond of someone else"s hate, or love, or indifferen e.)nd I buried them, too many of those men, and grieved their stories and their lives into my o! n.

Out my story doesn't begin ! ith them, or ! ith the mafia: it goes ba , to that first day in Oombay. 9ate #ut me in the game there. ;u , dealt the ards that led me to <arla Saaranen.)nd I started to #lay it out, that hand, from the first moment I loo, ed into

her green eyes. So it begins, this story, like everything else (with a woman, and a city, and a little bit of luck).

The first thing I noticed about Bombay, on that first day, was the smell of the different air. I could smell it before I saw or heard anything of India, even as I walked along the umbilical corridor that connected the lane to the airport. I was excited and delighted by it, in that first Bombay minute, separated from prison and next to the outside world, but I didn't and couldn't recognize it. I know that it's the sweet, sweet eating smell of home, which is the opposite of hate and it's the sour, stifled smell of greed, which is the opposite of love. It's the smell of gods, demons, empires, and civilizations in resurrection and decay. It's the blue sea (smell of the sea, no matter where you are in the Island City, and the blood (metal smell of machines. It smells of the stir and sleep and taste of sixty million animals, more than half of them humans and rats. It smells of heartbreak, and the struggle to live, and of the crucial failures and loves that produce our courage. It smells of ten thousand restaurants, five thousand temples, shrines, churches, and mosques, and of a hundred bazaars devoted exclusively to perfumes, scents, incense, and freshly cut flowers. A friend called it the best good smell in the world, and she was right, of course, in that way she had of being right about things. Out whenever I return to Bombay, no, it's my first sense of the city (that smell, above all things (that welcomes me and tells me I've come home.

The next thing I noticed was the heat. I stood in airport queues, not five minutes from the conditioned air of the lane, and my clothes clung to sudden sweat. My heart thumped under the command of the new climate. A hot breath was an angry little victory. I came to know that it never stops, the angle sweat, because the heat that makes it, night and day, is a wet heat. The choking humidity makes amphibians of us all, in Bombay, breathing water in air. You learn to live with it, and you learn to like it, or you leave.

Then there were the Bengalis, the Gujaratis, and the Punjabis (the

from Rajasthan, Bengal, and Tamil - and from Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi, and
Konkani, Parsi, Oriya, and Untouchable - Hindu, Muslim,
Christian, Buddhist, Parsee, Jain, Jainist - fair skin and dark,
green eyes and golden brocade and black, every different face and
form of that extravagant variety, that incomparable beauty,
India.

Of the Bombay millions, and then one more. The two best friends
of the smuggler are the mule and the camel. Mules carry
contraband across a border control for a smuggler. Camels are
unsuspecting tourists! How do they help?
The smuggler to get across the border. To camouflage themselves,
often using false passports and identification papers, smugglers
insinuate themselves into the company of fellow travelers
(camels, how will they carry them safely and unobtrusively through
airport or border controls without realizing it.

I didn't know all that then. I learned the smuggling arts much
later, years later. On that first trip to India I was just
ignorant, going on instinct, and the only commodity I was smuggling was
myself, my fragile and hunted freedom. I was using a false
Swedish passport, with my photograph substituted in it for the
original. I'd done the trick for myself, and it wasn't a perfect job.
I was sure it would pass a routine examination, but I knew that
if suspicions were aroused, and someone checked with the
Swedish Consulate, it would be exposed as a forgery fairly
easily. On the journey to India from the United States, I'd roamed the
planet in search of the right group of Swedes. I found a
small party of students who were making their second trip to the
subcontinent. Arguing them to share their experience and
travellers' tips with me, I fostered a slender acquaintance with
them that brought us to the airport controls together. The
various Indian officials assumed that I was traveling with that
relaxed and guileless group, and gave me no more than a cursory
check.

I pushed through alone to the slant and sting of sunlight outside
the airport, into a bright light with the exhilaration of escape: another

I all sailed, another border crossed, another day and night to run and hide. I'd escaped from prison almost two years before, but the fact of the fugitive life is that you have to, every day and every night. I could not be completely free, never completely free, there was always a sense of fear and dread. I stood there on the main street, beneath the bare, blue sky of Bombay, and my heart was as lean and hungry for promises as a monsoon morning in the gardens of Malabar.

A hand called from behind me.

A hand grabbed at my arm. I stopped. I tensed every fighting muscle, and bit down on the fear. Don't run. Don't panic. I turned.

A small man stood before me, dressed in a grimy brown uniform, and carrying my guitar. More than small, he was a tiny man, a dwarf, with a large head, and the startled innocence of Down syndrome in his features. He thrust the guitar at me.

"Your music, sir. You are losing your music, isn't it?"

It was my guitar. I realized at once that I must've forgotten it near the baggage carousel. I couldn't guess how the little man had, somehow, found it. When I smiled my relief and surprise, the man grinned back at me with that serene certainty of the fearless and single-minded. He passed the guitar to me, and I noticed that his hands were as thin as the feet of a wading bird. I hummed a few notes from my repertoire and offered them to him, but he bowed away, hardly on his thin legs.

"Not money. We are here to help it, sir. Welcome in India," he said, and trotted away into the forest of bodies on the path.

I bought a ticket to the city with the "Veterans' Home Service," manned by ex-servicemen from the Indian army. I attached as my baggage, a suitcase and travel bag were lifted to the top of a bus, and dumped onto a pile of luggage with a force and nonchalant violence, and decided to place the guitar in my hands. I took a place on the bench seat at the back of the bus, and I was joined there by a lot of long-haired travellers. The bus filled quickly with a mix of Indians and foreigners, most of them young, and traveling as intensively as possible.

When the bus was close to full, the driver turned in his seat, smiled at us menacingly, spat a jet of vivid red betel juice through the open doorway, and announced our imminent departure.

Hi, hain, hallo

The engine roared, gears meshed with a groan, and then it sped off at alarming speed through roads of motorbikes and pedestrians who limped, sang, or sidestepped out of the way with only millimeters to spare. Our conductor, a young man in a blue uniform, said: "The road is very narrow, and the traffic is very heavy. Please be careful."

together, attached one to another, and with narrow lanes indicating
between them. Nothing in the enormous square of it rose much
above the height of a man.

It seemed impossible that a modern airport, full of prosperous
and useful travellers, was only a few kilometers away from those
rushed and hindered dreams. My first impression was that some
catastrophe had taken place, and that the slums were refugee
camps for the shambling survivors. I learned, months later, that
they were survivors, of course, those slum dwellers: the
catastrophes that had driven them to the slums from their
villages were poverty, famine, and bloodshed. And five thousand
new survivors arrived in the city every year, after a year,
year after year.

As the kilometers passed, as the hundreds of people in those
slums became thousands, and tens of thousands, my spirit quickened.
I felt defiled by my own health and the money in my pocket, etc. If
you feel it at all, it's a laboring guilt, that first
confrontation with the neglected of the earth. I'd robbed banks,
and dealt drugs, and I'd been beaten by prison warders until my
bones broke. I'd been stabbed, and I'd stabbed men in return. I'd
escaped from a hard prison full of hard men, the hard way (over
the front wall. Still, that first encounter with the ragged
misery of the slum, heart-breaking, all the way to the horizon, cut
into my eyes. For a time, I ran onto the pavements.

When the smoulders of shame and guilt flamed into anger, became
fist-tightening rage at the unfairness of it: That kind of a
government, I thought, ___! That kind of a system allows suffering
like this!

Out the slums went on, kilometre after kilometre, relieved only
by the awful contrast of the thriving businesses and rumbling,
moss-covered apartment buildings of the comparatively affluent.
The slums went on, and their sheer ubiquity bore down on my
foreigner's anxieties.) kind of wonder possessed me. I began to
look, beyond the immensity of the slum so anxieties, and to see the

They lived within them. I stood to brush for and the black, satin sheen of her hair. I bathed her children with water from a copper dish. I saw three goats with red ribbons tied to the collars at their throats. I saw a man shaved himself at 8

and a round mirror. I saw children playing everywhere. I saw a man carried water in buckets. I saw a man made repairs to one of the huts. I saw everywhere that I looked, the people smiled and laughed.

The bus stopped in a stutter of traffic, and a man emerged from one of the huts near my window. He was a foreigner, as I felt, as any of the newcomers on the bus, and dressed only in a white sheet of hibiscus cloth. He stretched, yawned, and scratched himself absently at his naked belly. There he was a definitive, bovine quality in his face and posture. I found myself envying that contentment, and the smiles of greeting he drew from a group of people who called him to the road.

The bus started into motion once more, and I lost sight of the man. Out that image of him changed everything in my attitude to the slums. Seeing him there, a man as alien to the place as I was, let me fixate myself in that world. That had seemed unimaginably strange and remote from my experience suddenly became possible, and comprehensible, and, finally, fascinating.

I looked at the people, then, and I saw how busy they were (how much industry and energy described their lives. Occasional sudden glimpses inside the huts revealed the astonishing cleanliness of that poverty: the spotless floors, and glistening metal pots in neat, tapering towers. And then, last, what should've been first, I saw how beautiful they were: the women dressed in crimson, blue, and gold; the women walking barefoot through the tangled shabbiness of the slum with patient, ethereal grace; the white-toothed, almond-eyed handsomeness of the men; and the affectionate camaraderie of the fine-limbed children, older ones playing with younger ones, many of them supporting baby brothers

and sisters on their slender hips.)nd half an hour after the bus ride began, I smiled for the first time.

5It ain't pretty,5 the young man beside me said, looking at the scene beyond the window. *e ! as Canadian, the male leaf hat on his waist, set of dreads: tall and heavy (set, ! ith blue eyes, and shoulder-length brown hair. *is companion looked like a shorter, more compact version of himself6 they even wore identical stone-washed jeans, sandals, and soft, white t-shirts, etc.

5Come again5

5This your first time5 he asked in reply. I nodded. 5I thought so. Don't

worry. From here on, it gets a little better. Not so many slums and all. Out it ain't good anywhere in Bombay. This here is the yummiest city in India, y'know, my friend.

5You got that right,5 the shorter man agreed.

5Out from here on in, you got a couple nice temples and some big British buildings that are okay ((stone lions and brass street lights and like that. Out this ain't India. The real India is up near the Himalayas, at Varanasi, or at the holy city of Varanasi, or down the coast, at Kerala. You gotta get outta the city to find the real India.

5Where are you guys headed5

5We're going to stay at an ashram,5 his friend announced. 5It's run by the Rameshwaris, at Poona. It's the best ashram in the country.

2! o pairs of blue eyes stared at me with the vague, almost accusatory assurance of those who've convinced themselves that they've found the one true path.

5Dou he , in" inE5

5SorryE5

5Dou he , in" into a room, or you #assin" on through Oombay todayE5

5I don't , no! ,5 I re#lied, turning to loo, through the ! indo!
on e more. It ! as true: I didn't , no! ! hether I ! anted to stay in
Oombay for a ! hile or ontinue on to ... some! here else. I didn't
, no! , and it didn't matter to me. \$ust at that moment, I ! as ! hat
<arla on e alled the most dangerous and fas inating animal in
the ! orld: a brave, hard man, ! ithout a #lan. 5I haven't really
got any #lans. Out I thin, I'll stay in Oombay for a ! hile.5

57ell, ! e're stayin" overnight, and at hin" the train tomorro! .
If you ! ant, ! e an share a room. It's a lot hea#er ! ith three.5

I met the stare in his guileless, blue eyes. 4aybe it ! ould be
better to share a room at first, I thought. 2heir genuine
do uments and their easy smiles ! ould smother my false #ass#ort.
4aybe it ! ould be safer.

5)nd it's a lot safer,5 he added.

5Deah, right,5 his friend agreed.

5SaferE5 I as, ed, assuming a non halan e I didn't feel.

2he bus ! as moving more slo! ly, along narro! hannels of three(
and four(storey buildings. 2raffi hurned through the streets
! ith ! ondrous and mysterious effi ien y((a ballisti dan e of
buses, tru , s, bi y les, ars, o' (arts, s ooters, and #eo#le.
2he o#en ! indo! s of our battered 1%
bus gave us the aromas of s#i es, #erfumes, diesel smo, e, and the
manure of o' en, in a steamy but not un#leasant mi' , and voi es
rose u# every! here above ri##les of unfamiliar musi . /very
orner arried giganti #osters, advertising Indian films. 2he

sunatural colours of the posters streamed behind the tanned face of the tall Canadian.

"Oh, sure, it's a lot safer. This is Gotham City, man. The street prices here have more to say to take your money than hell's casino."

"It's a city thing, man, the short one explained. "All cities are the same. It's not just here. It's the same in London, or Rio, or Paris. They're all dirty and they're all crazy. "City thing, you know! That I'm saying. Don't get to the rest of India, and you'll love it. This is a great country, but the cities are truly fucked, I gotta say."

"And the goddamn hotels are in on it," the tall one added. "Don't get ripped off just sitting in your hotel room and smoking a little weed. They do deals with the cops to bust you and take all your money. Safest thing is to stick together and travel in groups, take my word."

"And get outta the cities as fast as you can," the short one said. "Only shit you see that"

The bus had turned into the curve of a wide boulevard that was edged by huge stones, tumble(rolled into the turquoise sea.) small colony of black, ragged slum huts lined up on those roads like the wreckage of some disaster, and primitive shit. The huts were burning.

"God damn the hell, that out that guy's hood, in," man the tall Canadian shouted, pointing to a man who ran towards the sea with his clothes and hair on fire. The man slipped, and smashed heavily between the large stones. A woman and a child reached him and smothered the flames with their hands and their own clothes. Another people were trying to contain the fires in their huts, or simply stood, and waited, as their flimsy homes blazed. "Don't you see that? That guy's gone, I tell ya."

5Damn right5 the short one gas#ed.

2he bus driver slo! ed ! ith other traffi to loo, at the fire, but then revved the engine and drove on. - one of the ars on the busy road sto##ed. I turned to loo, through the rear ! indo! of the bus until the harred hum#s of the huts be ame minute s#e , s, and the bro! n smo, e of the fires ! as +ust a ! his#er of ruin.

)t the end of the long, seaside boulevard, ! e made a left turn into a ! ide street of modern buildings. 2here ! ere grand hotels, ! ith liveried 11 doormen standing beneath oloured a! nings. - ear them ! ere e' lusive restaurants, garlanded ! ith ourtyard gardens. Sunlight flashed on the #olished glass and brass fa ades of airline offi es and other businesses. Street stalls sheltered from the morning sunlight beneath broad umbrellas. 2he Indian men ! al, ing there ! ere dressed in hard shoes and ! estern business suits, and the ! omen ! ore e' #ensive sil, . 2hey loo, ed #ur#oseful and sober, their e' #ressions grave as they bustled to and from the large offi e buildings.

2he ontrast bet! een the familiar and the e' e#tional ! as every! here around me.) bullo , art ! as dra! n u# beside a modern

s#orts ar at a traffi signal.) man s=uatted to relieve himself behind the dis reet shelter of a satellite dish.)n ele tri for, lift tru , ! as being used to unload goods from an an ient ! ooden art ! ith ! ooden ! heels. 2he im#ression ! as of a #loding, indefatigable, and distant #ast that had rashed inta t, through barriers of time, into its o! n future. I li, ed it.

57e're almost there,5 my om#anion de lared. 58ity entre"s +ust a fe! blo , s. It"s not really ! hat you"d all the do! nto! n area. It"s +ust the tourist beat ! here most of the hea# hotels are. 2he last sto#. It"s alled 8olaba.5

The two young men too, their purses and travellers' bags were tucked under their arms, and they pushed them down the fronts of their trousers. The shorter man even removed his hat, and it, too, joined the purses, purses, and other valuables in the mass of things under his arms. He caught my eye, and smiled.

He grinned. "Can't be too careful!"

I stood and bumped my way to the front. When the bus stopped I was the first to take the seats, but a crowd of people on the footpath prevented me from moving down to the street. They were touts (street operatives for the various hoteliers, drug dealers, and other businessmen of the city) and they shouted at us in broken English with offers of cheap hotel rooms and bargains to be had. First among them in the doorway was a small man with a large, almost perfectly round head. He was dressed in a denim shirt and blue cotton trousers. He shouted for silence from his companions, and then turned to me with the kindest and most radiant smile I'd ever seen.

"Good mornings, great sirs!" he greeted us. "Welcome in Bombay! You are wanting it cheap and excellent hotels, isn't it?"

He stared straight into my eyes, that enormous smile notwithstanding. There was something in the depth of his smile (a kind of mischievous overbearing, more honest and more invited than mere haughtiness) that pierced me to the heart. It was the sort of a second, the eye contact between us. It was just long enough for me to decide to trust him (the little man with the big smile. I didn't, no, not then, but it was one of the best decisions of my life.

A number of the passengers, filing off the bus, began beating and slapping at the swarm of touts. The two young Canadians made their way through the crowd unmolested, smiling broadly and equally at the bustling touts and the agitated tourists. Watching them dodge and leave through the crowd, I noticed for the first time how fit and healthy and handsome they were. I decided there

and then to accept their offer to share the cost of a room. In their company, the crime of my escape from prison, the crime of my existence in the world, is as invisible and inconvertible.

The little guide grabbed my sleeve to lead me away from the frantic group, and toward the back of the bus. The conductor climbed to the roof with simian agility, and flung my bag, my travel bag into my arms. Other bags began tumbling to the pavement in an ominous rattle of rashes. As the passengers ran to stop the hard rain of their valuables, the guide led me away again, to a quiet spot a few metres from the bus.

Your name is Ghabra, is it, he stated, in his usually accented English. What is your good name?

Your good name is Ghabra, I lied, using the name from my false passport.

I am Bombay guide. Every excellent first number Bombay guide, I am. Well Bombay, no, it's very well. Don't want to see everything. I, no, really here is it you will find the most of everything. I can show you even more than everything.

The two young travellers joined us, pursued by a persistent band of ragged touts and guides. Ghabra shouted at his unruly colleagues, and they retreated a few metres, staring hungrily at our collection of bags and trunks.

What I want to see right now, I said, is a clean, cheap hotel room.

Certainly, sir, Ghabra beamed. I can take you to a cheap hotel, and I can

a very cheap hotel, and a too much cheap hotel, and even such a cheap hotel that nobody in a right mind is ever staying there

also.5

5@, ay, lead on, >raba, er. ; et"s ta, e a loo, .5

5*ey, ! ait a minute,5 the taller of the t! o young men
inter+e ted. 5)re you gonna #ay this guyE I mean, I , no! the ! ay
to the hotels. -o offen e to you, buddy((I"m sure you"re a good
guide and all((but ! e don"t need you.5

I loo, ed at >raba, er. *is large, dar, bro! n eyes ! ere studying my
fa e ! ith o#en amusement. I"ve never , no! n a man ! ho had less
hostility in him than >raba, er <harre: he ! as in a#able of
raising his voi e or his hand in anger, and I sensed something of
that even then, in the first minutes ! ith him.

5Do I need you, >raba, erE5 I as, ed him, my e' #ression mo , (
serious.

5@h, yesB5 he ried in re#ly. 5Dou are so very needing me, I am
almost rying ! ith your situationB @nly God , no! s ! hat terrible
things are ha##ening to you ! ithout my good self to guide your
body in OombayB5

5I"ll #ay him,5 I told my om#anions. 2hey shrugged, and lifted
their #a , s. 5@, ay. ; et"s go, >raba, er.5

I began to lift my #a , , but >raba, er grabbed at it s! iftly.

5I am arrying it your luggages,5 he insisted #olitely.

5-o, that"s o, ay. I"m fine.5

2he huge smile faded to a #leading fro! n.

5>lease, sir. It is my +ob. It is my duty. I am strong in my
ba , s. -o #roblem. Dou ! ill see.5

) If my instincts revolted at the idea.

5- o, really ...5

5> lease, 4r. ; indsay, this is my honour. See the #eo#le.5

> raba, er gestured ! ith his u#turned #alm to those touts and guides ! ho'd managed to se ure customers from among the tourists. /a h one of them sei1ed a bag, suit ase, or ba , #a , and trudged off, leading his #arty into the fla, (traffi ! ith bris, determination.

5Deah, ! ell, all right ...5 I muttered, deferring to his judgment. It ! as ust the first of ountless a#itulations that ! ould, in time, ome to define our relationshi#. 2he smile stret hed his round fa e on e more, and he gra##led ! ith the ba , #a , , ! or, ing the stra#s onto his shoulders ! ith my hel#. 2he #a , ! as heavy, for ing him to thrust his ne , out, lean over, and laun h himself for! ard into a trundling gait. 4y

1H

longer ste#s brought me u# level ! ith him, and I loo, ed into his straining fa e. I felt li, e the ! hite b! ana, redu ing him to my beast of burden, and I hated it.

Out he laughed, that small Indian man. *e hattered about Oombay and the sights to be seen, #ointing out landmar, s as ! e ! al, ed. *e s#o, e ! ith deferential amiability to the t! o 8anadians. *e smiled, and alled out greetings to a =uaintan es as he #assed them.)nd he ! as strong, mu h stronger than he loo, ed: he never #aused or faltered in his ste# throughout the fifteen(minute +ourney to the hotel.

9our stee# flights in a dar, and mossy ! ell of stairs, at the rear of a large, sea(front building, brought us to the foyer of the India Guest *ouse. /very floor on the ! ay u# had arried a different shield((() #sara *otel, Star of)sia Guest *ouse, Seashore *otel((indi ating that the one building ! as a tually four se#arate hotels, ea h one of them o u#ying a single floor,

and having its own staff, services, and style.

The two young travellers, Gaba, and I tumbled into the small foyer with our bags and a tall, muscular Indian, wearing a dark blue shirt and a black tie, sat behind a steel desk, beside the hallway that led to the guest rooms.

"Welcome," he said, a small, friendly smile dimpling his cheeks.
"Welcome, young gentlemen."

"That a dummy," my tall companion muttered, looking around him at the flaking paint and laminated wooden partitions.

"This is Mr. Ghand, Gaba, and interested in you. Best manager of the best hotel in Solaba."

"Shut up," Gaba, and Mr. Ghand groaned.

Gaba, and smiled the leader.

"See, that a great manager is this Mr. Ghand? He's hissed, grinning at me. He then turned his smile to the great manager. I am bringing three excellent tourists for you, Mr. Ghand. My very best customers for the very best hotel, isn't it?"

"I told you to shut up," Mr. Ghand snarled.

"*o! muh the short Canadian as, ed.

"Please," Mr. Ghand muttered, still glaring at Gaba, and.

"Three people, one room, one night, how much?"

"One hundred twenty rupees."

"That's the shorter one? Loaded. Where you, kidding me? 1?"

What's too much, his friend added. "Mon, I'm here outta here."

"No problem," Jond snatched. "You can go to some place else."

They began to gather their bags, but Jond stopped them with an anguished cry.

"Oh - oh This is the very most beautiful of hotels. Please, just see it the room please, for instance, just see it the lovely room. Just see it the lovely room."

There I as a momentary pause. The two young men hesitated in the doorway. Jond studied his hotel register, suddenly fascinated by the handwritten entries. Jond put his hand to my sleeve. I felt some sympathy for the street guide, and I admired Jond's style. "I'm not going to lead you, or persuade you to take the room. If you want it, take it on his terms. When he looked up from the register, he met my eyes with a frank and honest stare, one confident man to another. I began to like him.

"I'd like to see it, the lovely room," I said.

"Des Jond laughed.

"Oh, yes, here I go," the Canadians sighed, smiling.

"End of the passage," Jond smiled in return, reaching behind him to take the room key from a rack of hooks. "I tossed the key and its heavy brass nameplate across the desk to me. The next room on the right, my friend."

It was a large room, with three single beds covered by sheets, one window to the sea and side, and a row of windows that looked down on a busy street. A half of the walls were painted in a different shade of headache (green). The ceiling was laid with rafters, several rolls of paint dangled from the corners. The

ement floor slo#ed do! n! ards, ! ith mysterious lum#s and irregular undulations, to! ard the street ! indo! s. 2hree small #ly! ood side(tables and a battered ! ooden dressing table ! ith a ra ,ed mirror ! ere the only other #ie es of furniture. >revious o u#ants had left eviden e of their tenure: aandle melted into the ne , of a Oailey"s Irish 8ream bottle6 a alendar #rint of a -ea#olitan street s ene ta#ed to one ! all6 and t! o forlorn, shrivelled balloons hanging from the eiling fan. It ! as the ,ind of room that moved #eo#le to ! rite their names and other messages on the ! alls, +ust as men do in #rison ells.

5I"ll ta, e it,5 I de ided. 1C

5DesB5 >raba, er ried, s urrying a! ay at on e to! ard the foyer.

4y om#anions from the bus loo,ed at one another and laughed.

5I an"t be bothered arguin" ! ith this dude. *e"s ra1y.5

5I hear ya,5 the shorter one hu ,led. *e bent lo! and sniffed at the sheets before sitting do! n gingerly on one of the beds.

>raba, er returned ! ith)nand, ! ho arried the heavy hotel register. 7e entered our details into the boo, , one at a time, ! hile)nand he ,ed our #ass#orts. I #aid for a ! ee, in advan e.)nand gave the others their #ass#orts, but lingered ! ith mine, ta##ing it against his hee, thoughtfully.

5-e! . ealandE5 he murmured.

5SoE5 I fro! ned, ! ondering if he"d seen or sensed something. I ! as)ustralia"s most ! anted man, es a#ed from a +ail term of t! enty years for armed robberies, and a hot ne! name on the Inter#ol fugitive list. 7hat does he ! antE 7hat does he , no! E

5*mmm. @, ay, -e! . ealand, -e! . ealand, you must be ! anting something for smo, e, some lot of beer, some bottles ! his, y, hange money, business girls, good #arties. Dou ! ant to buy

something, you tell me, naE5

*e sna##ed the #ass#ort ba , into my hand and left the room, glaring malevolently at >raba, er. The guide rined a! ay from him in the door! ay, o! ering and smiling ha##ily at the same time.

5) great man.) great manager,5 >raba, er gushed, ! hen)nand ! as gone.

5Dou get a lot of -e! . ealanders here, >raba, erE5

5- ot so many, 4r. ;indsay. @h, but very fine fello! s they are. ; aughing, smo, ing, drin, ing, having se' es ! ith ! omen, all in the night, and then more laughing, smo, ing, and drin, ing.5

5A(huh. I don't su##ose you'd ha##en to , no! ! here I ould get some hashish, >raba, erE5

5- oooo #roblemB I an get it one tola, one , ilo, ten , ilos, even I , no! ! here it is a full ! arehouse ...5

5I don't need a ! arehouse full of hash. I +ust ! ant enough for a smo, e.5

5\$ust it ha##ens I have it one tola, ten grams, the best) fghan harras, in my #o , et. Dou ! ant to buyE5

5*o! mu hE5

52! o hundred ru#ees,5 he suggested, ho#efully. 17

I guessed that it ! as less than half that #ri e. Out t! o hundred ru#ees((about t! elve dollars)meri an, in those years((! as one(tenth of the #ri e in)ustralia. I tossed a #a , et of toba o and igarette #a#ers to him. 5@, ay. Roll u# a +oint and ! e'll try it out. If I li, e it, I'll buy it.5

4y t! o roommates ! ere stret hed out on their #arallel beds. 2hey loo, ed at one another and e' hanged similar e' #ressions, raising their foreheads in sedimentary ! rin, les and #ursing their li#s as >raba, er #ulled the #ie e of hashish from his #o , et. 2hey stared ! ith fas ination and dread ! hile the little guide , nelt to ma, e the +oint on the dusty surfa e of the dressing table.

5)re you sure this is a good idea, manE5

5Deah, they ould be settin" us u# for a drug bust or somethin"B5

5I thin, I feel o, ay about >raba, er. I don't thin, ! e"ll get busted,5 I re#lied, unrolling my travel blan, et and s#reading it out on the bed beneath the long ! indo! s. 2here ! as a ledge on the ! indo! sill, and I began to #la e my , ee#sa, es, trin, ets, and lu , y harms there((a bla , stone given to me by a hild in -e! . ealand, a #etrified snail shell one friend had found, and a

bra elet of ha! , "s la! s made by another. I ! as on the run. I had no home and no ountry. 4y bags ! ere filled ! ith things that friends had given me: a huge first(aid , it that they"d #ooled their money to buy for me, dra! ings, #oems, shells, feathers. /ven the lothes I ! ore and the boots on my feet ! ere gifts that friends had given me. /very ob+e t ! as signifi ant6 in my hunted e' ile, the ! indo! sill had be ome my home, and the talismans ! ere my nation.

5Oy all means, guys, if you don't feel safe, ta, e a ! al, or ! ait outside for a ! hile. I'll ome and get you, after I have a smo, e. It's +ust that I #romised some friends of mine that if I ever got to India, the first thing I'd do is smo, e some hash, and thin, of them. I mean to , ee# that #romise. Oesides, the manager seemed #retty ool about it to me. Is there any #roblem ! ith smo, ing a +oint here, >raba, erE5

5Smo, ing, drin, ing, dan ing, musi , se' y business, no #roblem

here,5 >raba, er assured us, grinning ha##ily and loo, ing u# momentarily from his tas, . 5/verything is allo! no #roblem here. /' e#t the fighting. 9ighting is not good manners at India Guest *ouse.5

5Dou seeE -o #roblem.5

5)nd dying,5 >raba, er added, ! ith a thoughtful ! ag of his round head. 54r.)nand is not li, ing it, if the #eo#le are dying here.5
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5Say ! hatE 7hat is he tal, ing about dyingE5

5Is he fu , in" seriousE 7ho the fu , is dyin" hereE _\$esusB5

5-o #roblem dying, baba,5 >raba, er soothed, offering the distraught 8anadians his neatly rolled +oint. 2he taller man too, it, and #uffed it alight. 5-ot many #eo#le are dying here in India Guest *ouse, and mostly only +un, ies, you , no! , ! ith the s, inny fa es. 9or you no #roblem, ! ith your so beautiful big fat bodies.5

*is smile ! as disarmingly harming as he brought the +oint to me. 7hen I returned it to him, he #uffed at it ! ith obvious #leasure, and #assed it to the 8anadians on e more.

5Is good harras, yesE5

5It's real good,5 the taller man said. *is smile ! as ! arm and generous((the big, o#en(hearted smile that the long years sin e then have taught me to asso iate ! ith 8anada and 8anadians.

5I'll ta, e it,5 I said. >raba, er #assed it to me, and I bro, e the ten(gram lum# into t! o #ie es, thro! ing one half to one of my roommates. 5*ere. Something for the train ride to >ona tomorrow! .5

2han, s, man,5 he ans! ered, sho! ing the #ie e to his friend.

5Say, you're all right. 8ra1y, but all right.5

I #ulled a bottle of ! his, y from my #a , and ra , ed the seal. It ! as another ritual, another #romise to a friend in -e! . ealand, a girl ! ho"d as, ed me to have a drin, and thin, of her if I managed to smuggle myself safely into India ! ith my false #ass#ort. 2he little rituals((the smo, e and the drin, of ! his, y((! ere im#ortant to me. I ! as sure that I"d lost those friends, +ust as I"d lost my family, and every friend I"d ever , no! n, ! hen I"d es a#ed from #rison. I ! as sure, someho! , that I ! ould never see them again. I ! as alone in the ! orld, ! ith no ho#e of return, and my ! hole life ! as held in memories, talismans, and #ledges of love.

I ! as about to ta, e a si# from the bottle, but an im#ulse made me offer it to >raba, er first.

2han, you too mu h, 4r. ;indsay,5 he gushed, his eyes ! ide ! ith delight. *e ti##ed his head ba , ! ard and #oured a measure of ! his, y into his mouth, ! ithout tou hing the bottle to his li#s.

5Is very best, first number, \$ohnnie 7al, er. @h, yes.5

5*ave some more, if you li, e.5

5\$ust a teeny #ie es, than, you so.5 *e dran, again, glugging the li=uo! n in throat(bulging gul#s. *e #aused, li , ing his li#s, then ti##ed the 19

bottle ba , a third time. 5Sorry, aaah, very sorry. Is so good this ! his, y, it is ma, ing a bad manners on me.5

5;isten, if you li, e it that mu h, you an , ee# the bottle. I've got another one. I bought them duty free on the #lane.5

5@h, than, you ...5 he ans! ered, but his smile rum#led into a stri , en e' #ression.

57hat's the matterE Don't you ! ant itE5

5Des, yes, 4r. ;indsay, very yes. Out if I , ne! this ! as my
! his, y and not yours, I ! ould not have been so generous ! ith my
good self in the drin, ing it u#.5

2he young 8anadians laughed.

5I tell you ! hat, >raba, er. I'll give you the full bottle, to
, ee#, and ! e'll all share the o#en one. *o! "s thatE)nd here"s
the t! o hundred ru#ees for the smo, e.5

5@, ay, suit yourselves. I'll be ba , in a ou#le of hours.5

>raba, er bo! ed and fa! ned, and #olitely too, his leave. I +oined him, but +ust as I ! as about to lose the door, the tall young man s#o, e.

5; isten ... ta, e it easy on the street, huhE I mean, you don't , no! ! hat it's li, e here. Dou an't trust no(one. 2his ain't the village. 2he Indians in the ity are ... ! ell, +ust be areful, is all. @, ayE5 F%

)t the re e#tion des, ,)nand #ut my #ass#ort, travel he=ues, and the bul, of my ash in his safe, giving me a detailed re ei#t, and I ste##ed do! n to the street ! ith the ! ords of the young 8anadian's ! arning ! heeling and turning in my mind li, e gulls above a s#a! ning tide.

>raba, er had ta, en us to the hotel along a ! ide, tree(lined, and relatively em#ty avenue that follo! ed a urve of the bay from the tall, stone ar h of the Gate! ay of India 4onument. 2he street at the front of the building ! as rammed ! ith #eo#le and vehi les, ho! ever, and the sound of voi es, ar horns, and ommer e ! as li, e a storm of rain on ! ood and metal roofs.

*undreds of #eo#le ! al, ed there, or stood in tal, ing grou#s. Sho#s, restaurants, and hotels filled the street side by side along its entire length. /very sho# or restaurant featured a smaller sub(sho# atta hed to the front of it. 2! o or three attendants, seated on folding stools, manned ea h of those small en roa hments on the foot#ath. 2here ! ere)fri ans,)rabs, /uro#eans, and Indians. ;anguages and musi hanged ! ith every ste#, and every restaurant s#illed a different s ent into the boiling air.

4en ! ith bullo , ! agons and hand arts ! ound their ! ay through heavy traffi to deliver ! atermelons and sa , s of ri e, soft

drinks and rags, of clothes, cigarettes and bottles of wine. Honey
! as every! here: it ! as a centre for the black, (market trade in
currenties, >raba, er told me, and this, bottles of bananas, notes ! ere
being counted and hanging hands only. 2here ! ere beggars and
+ugglers and a robbers, snappers, e harmers and musicians and
astrologers, #almists and #im#s and #ushers.)nd the street ! as
filthy. 2rash tumbled from the ! indo! s above ! ithout ! arning, and
garbage ! as hea#ed in #iles on the #avement or the road! ay, ! here
fat, fearless rats slithered to feast.

4ost #rominent on the street, to my eyes, ! ere the many ri##led
and diseased beggars. /very, kind of illness, disability, and
hardshi# #araded there, stood at the doorway of restaurants and
sho#s, or a##roa hed #eo#le on the street ! ith #rofessionally
#laintive ries. ;i, e the first sight of the slums from the
! indo! s of the bus, that glim#se of the suffering street brought
a hot shame to my healthy face. Out as >raba, er led me on through
the roistering road, he drew my attention to other images of
those beggars that softened the awful ari ature #resented by the
#erformance of their #iteousness. @ne grou# of beggars sat in a
doorway, #laying cards, some blind men and their friends enjoyed
a meal of fish F1
and ri e, and laughing children too, turns to ride ! ith a legless
man on his little trolley.

>raba, er ! as stealing sideways glances at my face as ! e ! al, ed.

5*o! are you liking our OombayE5

5I love it, 5 I answered, and it ! as true. 2o my eyes, the city
! as beautiful. It ! as ! ild and e' iting. Buildings that ! ere
Orish Romantic stood side to side ! ith modern, mirrored
business towers. 2he ha#ha1ard slough of neglected tenements
rumbled into lavish displays of market vegetables and sil, s. I
heard music from every shop and #assing taxi. 2he colours ! ere
vibrant. 2he fragrances ! ere di11yingly delicious.)nd there ! ere
more smiles in the eyes on those road streets than in any
other #la e I'd ever , no! n.

)bove all else, Oombay ! as free((e' hilaratingly free. I sa! that liberated, un onstrained s#irit ! herever I loo, ed, and I found myself res#onding to it ! ith the ! hole of my heart. /ven the flare of shame I"d felt ! hen I first sa! the slums and the street beggars dissolved in the understanding that they ! ere free, those men and ! omen. -o(one drove the beggars from the streets. -o(one banished the slum(d! ellers. >ainful as their lives ! ere, they ! ere free to live them in the same gardens and avenues as the ri h and #o! erful. 2hey ! ere free. 2he ity ! as free. I loved it.

Det I ! as a little unnerved by the density of #ur#oses, the arrival of needs and greeds, the sheer intensity of the #leading and the s heming on the street. I s#o, e none of the languages I

heard. I , ne! nothing of the ultures there, lothed in robes and saris and turbans. It ! as as if I"d found myself in a #erforman e of some e' travagant, om#le' drama, and I didn't have a s ri#. Out I smiled, and smiling ! as easy, no matter ho! strange and disorienting the street seemed to be. I ! as a fugitive. I ! as a ! anted man, a hunted man, ! ith a #ri e on my head.)nd I ! as still one ste# ahead of them. I ! as free. /very day, ! hen you're on the run, is the ! hole of your life. /very free minute is a short story ! ith a ha##y ending.

)nd I ! as glad of >raba, er's om#any. I noti ed that he ! as ! ell , no! n on the street, that he ! as greeted fre=uently and ! ith onsiderable ! armth by a ! ide range of #eo#le.

5Dou must be hungry, 4r. ; indsay,5 >raba, er observed. 5Dou are a ha##y fello! , don't mind I'm saying it, and ha##y al! ays has it the good a##etites.5 FF

57ell, I'm hungry enough, all right. 7here is this #la e ! e"re going to, any! ayE If I"d , no! n it ! ould ta, e this long to get to the restaurant, I ! ould've brought a ut lun h ! ith me.5

5\$ust a little bit not mu h too very far,5 he re#lied heerfully.

5@, ay ...5

5@h, yesß I ! ill ta, e you to the best restaurant, and ! ith the finest 4aharashtra foods. Dou ! ill en+oy, no #roblem.)ll the Oombay guides li, e me eat their foods there. 2his #la e is so good, they only have to #ay the #oli e half of usual ba, sheesh money. So good they are.5

5@, ay ...5

5@h, yesß Out first, let me get it Indian igarette for you, and for me also. *ere, ! e sto# no! .5

*e led me to a street stall that ! as no more than a folding ard table, ! ith a do1en brands of igarettes arranged in a ardboard bo' . @n the table there ! as a large brass tray, arrying several small silver dishes. 2he dishes ontained shredded o onut, s#i es, and an assortment of unidentifiable #astes.) bu , et beside the ard table ! as filled ! ith s#ear(sha#ed leaves, floating in ! ater. 2he igarette seller ! as drying the leaves, smearing them ! ith various #astes, filling them ! ith ground dates, o onut, betel, and s#i es, and rolling them into small #a , ages. 2he many ustomers ro! ded around his stall #ur hased the leaves as fast as his de' terous hands ould fill them.

>raba, er #ressed lose to the man, ! aiting for a han e to ma, e his order. 8raining my ne , to ! at h him through the thi , et of ustomers, I moved loser to! ard the edge of the foot#ath.)s I too, a ste# do! n onto the road, I heard an urgent shout.

5_; oo, _outß5

2! o hands gras#ed my arm at the elbo! and +er, ed me ba , , +ust as a huge, fast(moving, double(de , er bus s! e#t #ast. 2he bus

I could've killed me if those hands hadn't halted me in my stride, and I swung round to face my saviour. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. She was slender, with black hair, black shoulder-length hair, and pale skin. Although she wasn't tall, her square shoulders and straight-backed posture, with both feet planted firmly apart, gave her a quietly determined physical presence. She was wearing simple, black slacks, bound tightly at the ankles, black loafers (heeled shoes, a loose cotton shirt, and a large, long silver chain. She wore the silver chain with the double-breasted (mane of the liquid fabric) turtleneck FG and fluttering at her waist. All her clothes were in different shades of green.

She clung to everything a man should love and fear in her as there, right from the start, in the ironic smile that rimed and smiled the archery of her full lips. There was pride in that smile, and confidence in the set of her fine nose. Without understanding why, I knew beyond question that a lot of people would mistake her pride for arrogance, and confuse her confidence with inassivivity. I didn't make that mistake. My eyes were lost, smiling, floating free in the shimmering lagoon of her steady, even stare. Her eyes were large and sensually green. It was the green that trees are, in vivid dreams. It was the green that the sea would be, if the sea were perfect.

Her hand was still resting in the curve of my arm, near the elbow. The touch was exactly what the touch of a lover's hand should be: familiar, yet exciting as a whispered promise. I felt an almost irresistible urge to take her hand and place it flat against my chest, near my heart. Maybe I should've done it. I know, no, no! that she would've laughed, if I'd done it, and she would've liked me for it. Out strangers that were then, I stood for five long seconds and held the stare, while all the parallel worlds, all the parallel lives that might've been, and never would be, whirled around us. When she spoke,

52hat was loose. Dou're lucky.5

Des, I smiled. I am.

Her hand slowly left my arm. It was an easy, relaxed gesture, but I felt the detachment from her as sharply as if I'd been roughly pulled, even from a deep and happy dream. I leaned toward her, looking behind her to the left and then to the right.

What is it? she asked.

I'm looking for your things. You are my guardian angel, aren't you?

I'm afraid not, she replied, her cheeks dimpling with a lary smile. There's too much of the devil in me for that.

Just how much devil, I grinned, are you talking about here?

Some people were standing in a group, on the far side of the stall. One of them (a handsome, athletic man in his mid-twenties) stepped to the road and called to her. Some on, _yaar?

She turned and waved to him, then held out her hand to shake mine with a grip that was firm, but emotionally indeterminable. Her smile was faintly ambiguous. She might've liked me, or she might've just been happy to say goodbye.

Do you still haven't answered my question, I said, as her hand slipped from mine.

Oh! Much devil have I got in me? she answered me, the half-smile teasing her lips. That's a very personal question. Some to thin, of it, that might just be the most personal question anyone ever asked me. Out, hey, if you come to Jerusalem, some time, you could find out.

*er friends had moved to our side of the little stand, and she left me to join them. They were all Indians, all young, and dressed in the lean, fashionably Western clothes of the middle class. They laughed often and leaned against one another familiarly, but no one would relax. She seemed to breathe an aura that was attractive and inviolable at the same time. I moved closer, pretending to be intrigued by the cigarette seller's story, with his leaves and wastes. I listened as she spoke to them, but I couldn't understand the language. Her voice, in that language and in that conversation, was surprisingly deep and sonorous; the hairs on my arms tingled in response to the sound of it. And I suppose that, too, should've been a warning. The voice, Afghan mat hma, ers say, is more than half of love. Out I didn't, no! that then, and my heart rushed in, where even mat hma, ers might've feared to tread.

See, 4r. ; inds say, I bought it just to buy cigarettes for us,5 >raba, er said, rejoining me and offering one of the cigarettes with a flourish. This is India, country of the poor fellows. -o need for buying whole packets of cigarettes here. Just one cigarette, you can buy only. And no need for buying it any mat hes.5

*e leaned forward and too, under a length of smouldering hemlock rope that was hanging from a hook, on the telegraph pole, next to the cigarette stall. >raba, er blew the ash from the end of it, releasing a little orange ember of fire, which he used to puff his cigarette alight.

What is he making? What are they heating in those leaves?5

Is called ganja.) most very excellent taste and heating it is. /everyone in Bombay is heating and smoking, heating and more smoking, no problem, day and night also. &ery good for health it is, plenty of heating and full smoking. Don't want to try it? I will get it for you some.5

I nodded and let him make the order, not so much for the need of the man as for the ease it offered to stand there longer, and for?

look at her. She was so relaxed and at home, so much a part of the street and its insupportable lore. That I found beautiful, all around me, seemed to be mundane for her. I was reminded of the foreigner in the slum (the man I'd seen from the window of the bus). In her, she seemed calm and content in Bombay. She seemed to belong. I envied her the calm and assurance she drew from those around her.

Out more than that, my eyes were drawn to her perfect loveliness. I looked at her, a stranger, and every other breath strained to follow its way from my chest. I felt a tightening fist seized my heart. I voice in my blood said yes, yes, yes ... The ancient Sanskrit legends speak of a destined love, a communion between souls that are fated to meet and collide and enrage one another. The legends say that the loved one is instantly recognized because she's loved in every gesture, every expression of thought, every movement, every sound, and every mood that glows in her eyes. The legends say that I love her by her things (the things that only I can see) (and because I want her, kills every other desire of love.

The same legends also carry warnings that such fated love may, sometimes, be the possession and the obsession of one, and only one, of the two souls destined by destiny. Out of wisdom, in one sense, is the opposite of love. Love survives in us precisely because it isn't wise.

When you look at that girl, I observed, returning with the man and following the direction of my gaze. I doubt, she is beautiful, her name is Arla.

I doubt, no, her.

When, yes, Arla is everybody, no, she replied, in a stage whisper so loud that I feared she might hear. I doubt I want to meet

herE5

54eet herE5

5If you ! ant it, I ! ill s#ea, to her. Dou ! ant her to be your friendE5

57hatE5

5@h, yesB <arla is my friend, and she ! ill be your friend also, I

thin, so. 4aybe you ! ill ma, e a lot of money for your very good self, in business ! ith <arla. 4aybe you ! ill be ome su h good and losely friends that you ! ill have it a lot of se' es together, and ma, e a full enoyment of your bodies. I am sure you ! ill have a friendly #leasure.5

*e ! as a tually rubbing his hands together. 2he red +ui es of the #aan stained the teeth and li#s of his smile. I had to gras# at his arm to sto# FC him from a##roa hing her, there, in the grou# of her friends.

5-oB Sto#B 9or 8hrist's sa, e, , ee# your voi e do! n, >raba, er. If I ! ant to s#ea, to her, I'll do it myself.5

5@h, I am understand,5 he said, loo, ing abashed. 5It is ! hat foreigners are alling fore#lay, isn't itE5

5-oB 9ore#lay is ... never mind ! hat fore#lay isB5

5@h, goodB I never mind about the fore#lays, 4r. ; indsay. I am an Indian fello! , and ! e Indian fello! s, ! e don't ! orry about the fore#layings. 7e go straight to the bum#ing and +um#ing. @h yesB5

*e ! as holding an imaginary ! oman in his hands and thrusting his narro! hi#s at her, smiling that red(+ui ed smile all the ! hile.

Will you stop that? I snapped, looking up to see if Carla and her friends were at his side.

"Yes, Mr. ...," he said, slowing his rhythmic thrusts until they stopped altogether. "Out, I can still make a good offer of your friendship to the Miss Carla, if you like."

"- Oh I mean (no, thank you. I don't want to reproach her. I ... Oh God, that's the use. Just tell me ... the man who's tall, in good language is he speaking?"

"He is speaking in Hindi language, Mr. ...," said Dou. "Wait one minute, I will tell you what he is saying."

"He moved to the far side of the stall and joined her group quite unselfishly, leaning in to listen. - (One paid any attention to him. He nodded, laughed with the others, and returned after a few minutes.

"He is telling it one very funny story, about an inspector of Bombay Police, a very great powerful fellow in this area. That inspector did lose a very clever fellow in his jail, but the clever fellow, he did convince the inspector to let him out again, because he told the inspector he had some gold and jewels. - Not only that, but when he was free, the clever fellow sold the inspector some of the gold and some jewels. Out they were not really gold and not really jewels. They were the imitations, and very cheaply not the really things.) And the first mischief, the

clever fellow lived in the inspector's house for one week, before he sold the not really jewels.) And there is a big rumour that the clever fellow had secret business with that inspector's wife. - Oh! the inspector is really, and so much angry, that everybody is running when they see him."

"Oh! do you know her? Does she live here?"

5<no! ! ho, 4r. ; indsay((that ins#e tor"s ! ifeE5

5-o, of course notB I mean the girl((<arla.5

5Dou , no! ,5 he mused, fro! ning hard for the first time, 5there are a lots of girls in this Oombay. 7e are only five minutes from your hotel. In this five minutes, ! e have seen it hundreds of girls. In five minutes more, there is more hundreds of girls. /very five minutes, more hundreds of girls.)nd after a little of ! al, ing, ! e ! ill see hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds((5

5@h, hundreds of girls, greatB5 I interru#ted sar asti ally, my voi e mu h louder than I'd intended it to be. I glan ed around. Several #eo#le ! ere staring at me ! ith undisguised ontem#. I ontinued, in a hushed tone. 5I don't ! ant to , no! about hundreds of girls, >raba, er. I'm +ust ... urious ... about ... about that girl, o, ayE5

5@, ay, 4r. ; indsay, I ! ill be telling you everything. <arla((she is a famous businessman in Oombay. &ery long she is here. I thin, five years maybe. She has one small house, not far. /verybody , no! s the <arla.5

57here is she fromE5

5I thin, , German, or something li, e that.5

5Out she sounded)meri an.5

5Des, is sounding, but she is from German, or li, e to the German.)nd no! , any! ay, is almost very Indian. Dou ! ant to eat your foods no! E5

5Deah, +ust a minute.5

2he grou# of young friends alled out their goodbyes to others near the #aan stand, and ! al, ed off into the mill and s! irl of

the road. Carla joined them, smiling at her with her head held high in that seriously straight-backed, almost defiant posture. I watched her until she was swallowed by the tide of the roads, but she never looked back.

"Do you, no?" she called. "I asked you, as he joined me, and she started to smile more."

"Oh, yes! Wonderful and lovely place it is, one of the most wonderful, lovely places, the very, very fine and lovely place. In kind of foreigners you can find there, all making good business. Sex business, and drugs business, and money business, and black market business, and naughty industries, and smuggler business, and assorted business, and"

"Oh, yes, I get it."

"Do you want to go there?"

"Maybe later." She stopped smiling, and she stopped beside me. "Listen, what do your friends call you? I mean, what's your name for short, instead of 'Rabab'?"

"Oh, yes, short name I am having also. My short name is 'Rab'."

"'Rab' ... I like it."

"It's meaning the Son of God, or like to that. Is good name, yes?"

"Is good name, yes."

"Send your good name, Mr. Jones, it is really not so good, if you don't mind I'm telling your father. I don't like it this long and kind of a 'usual' name, for Indian people speaking."

5@h, you don'tE5

5Sorry to say it, no. I don't. -ot at all. -ot a bit. -ot even a teensy or a ! eensy((5

57ell,5 I smiled, 5I'm afraid there's not a lot I an do about it.5

5I'm thin, ing that a short name((; in((is mu h better,5 he suggested. 5If you're not having ob#e tions, I ! ill all you ; in.5

It ! as as good a name as any, and no more or less false than the do1en others I'd assumed sin e the es a#e. In fa t, in re ent months I'd found myself rea ting ! ith a =uir, y fatalism to the ne! names I ! as for ed to ado#t, in one #la e or another, and to the ne! names that others gave me. ; in. It ! as a diminutive I never ould've invented for myself. Out it sounded right, ! hi h is to say that I heard the voodoo e ho of something ordained, fated: a name that instantly belonged to me, as surely as the lost, se ret name ! ith ! hi h I ! as born, and under ! hi h I'd been senten ed to t! enty years in #rison.

I #eered do! n into >raba, er's round fa e and his large, dar, , mis hievous eyes, and I nodded, smiled, and a e#ted the name. I ouldn't , no! , then, that the little Oombay street guide had

given me a name thousands of #eo#le, from 8olaba to <andahar, from <inshasa to Oerlin, ! ould ome to , no! me by. 9ate needs a om#li es, and the stones in destiny"s ! alls are mortared ! ith small and heedless om#li ities su h as those. I loo, ba , , no! , and I , no! that the naming moment, ! hi h seemed so insignifi ant then, ! hi h seemed to demand no more than an arbitrary and su#erstitious yes or no, ! as in fa t a #ivotal moment in my life. 2he role I #layed under that name, and the hara ter I be ame((; inbaba((! as more real, and true to my nature, than anyone or anything that I ever ! as before it. F9

5Des, o, ay, ; in ! ill do.5

5&ery goodB I am too ha##y that you li, e it, this name.)nd li, e my name is meaning Son of ; ight in *indi language, your name, ; in, has it also a very fine and so lu , y meaning.5

5DeahE 7hat does ; in mean in *indiE5

5It's meaning _>enisB5 he e' #lained, ! ith a delight that he e' #e ted me to share.

5@h, great. 2hat's +ust ... great.5

5Des very great, very lu , y. It is not e' a tly meaning this, but it is sounding li, e ling, or lingam, and that is meaning #enis.5

58ome off it, man,5 I #rotested, beginning to ! al, on e more. 5*o! an I go around alling myself 4r. >enisE)re you , idding meE I an see it no! ((@h, hello, #leased to meet you, my name is >enis. -o ! ay. 9orget it. I thin, ! e"ll sti , to ; indsay.5

5-oB -oB ; in, really I'm telling you, this is a fine name, a very #o! er name, a very lu , y, a too lu , y nameB 2he #eo#le ! ill love this name, ! hen they hear it. 8ome, I ! ill sho! you. I ! ant to leave it this bottle of ! his, y you gave to me, leave it ! ith my friend, 4r. San+ay. *ere, +ust here in this sho#. \$ust you see ho! he li, es it your name.5

) fe! more #a es along the busy street brought us to a small sho# ! ith a hand(#ainted sign over the o#en door:

R)DI@ SI8<

/le tri Re#air /nter#rises

/le tri al Sales and Re#airs, San+ay Desh#ande >ro#rietor

San+ay Desh#ande ! as a heavy(set man in his fifties ! ith a halo of grey(! hite hair, and ! hite, bushy eyebro! s. *e sat behind a

solid ! ooden ounter, surrounded by bomb(blast radios, evis erated assette #layers, and bo' es of #arts. >raba, er greeted him, hattering in ra#id *indi, and #assed the bottle of ! his, y over the ounter. 4r. Desh#ande sla##ed a meaty hand on it, ! ithout loo, ing at it, and slid it out of sight on his side of the ounter. *e too, a sheaf of ru#ee notes from his shirt

#o , et, #eeled off a number, and #assed them a ross ! ith his #alm turned do! n! ard. >raba, er too, the money and sli##ed it into his #o , et ! ith a movement as s! ift and fluid as the tenta le(grab of a s=uid. *e finished tal, ing, at last, and be , oned me for! ard. G%

52his is my very good friend,5 he informed 4r. Desh#ande, #atting me on the arm. 5*e is from -e! . ealand.5

4r. Desh#ande grunted.

5*e is +ust today oming in Oombay. India Guest *ouse, he is staying.5

4r. Desh#ande grunted again. *e studied me ! ith a vaguely hostile uriosity.

5*is name is ; in. 4r. ; inbaba,5 >raba, er said.

57hat"s his nameE5 4r. Desh#ande as, ed.

5; in,5 >raba, er grinned. 5*is name is ; inbaba.5

4r. Desh#ande raised his im#ressive eyebro! s in a sur#rised smile.

5; inbabaE5

5@h, yesB5 >raba, er enthused. 5; in. ; in. &ery fine fello! , he is also.5

4r. Desh#ande e' tended his hand, and I shook it. He greeted one another, and then >raba, er began to tug at my sleeve, #ulling me towards the door! ay.

5; inbabaB5 4r. Desh#ande called out, as ! e ! ere about to ste# into the street. 57el ome in Oombay. Dou have any 7al, man or amera or any ghetto(blasting machine for selling, you ome to me, San+ay Desh#ande, at Radio Si . . I am giving best #ri es.5

I nodded, and ! e left the sho#. >raba, er dragged me a fe! #a es further along the street, and then sto##ed.

5Dou see, 4r. ; inE Dou see ho! he li, es it your nameE5

5I guess so,5 I muttered, be! ilderer as mu h by his enthusiasm as by the brief e' hange ! ith 4r. Desh#ande. 7hen I got to , no! him ! ell enough, ! hen I began to cherish his friendshi#, I discovered that >raba, er believed ! ith the ! hole of his heart that his smile made a difference, in #eo#le's hearts and in the ! orld. *e ! as right, of course, but it took me a long time to understand that truth, and to accept it.

57hat's the baba #art, at the end of the nameE ; in, I an

understand. Out ! hat's the ; inbaba bit all aboutE5

5Oaba is +ust a res#e ting name,5 >raba, er grinned. 5If ! e #ut baba u# on the ba , of your name, or on the name of anybody s#e ial, it is li, e meaning the res#e t ! e give it to a tea her, or a holy #ersons, or a very old, old, old((5

5I get it, I get it, but it doesn't make me any more comfortable ! ith it, >raba, I gotta tell ya. 2his ! hole #enis thing ... I don't , no! .5

5) Out you did see, 4r. San+ay Desh#andeb Dou did see ho! he li, ed
it G1

your nameB ; oo, , see ho! the #eo#le love this name. Dou see no! ,
you loo, , I ! ill tell it to everybodyB ; inbabaB ; inbabaB
; inbabaB5

*e ! as s#ea, ing in a shout, addressing strangers as they #assed
us on the street.

5) Il right, >rabu, all right. I ta, e your ! ord for it. 8alm
do! n.5 It ! as my turn to tug at his sleeve, and move him along
the street. 5I thought you ! anted to _drin, the ! his, yE5

5) h, yes,5 he sighed, 5! as ! anting it, and ! as already drin, ing
it in my mind also. Out no! , ; inbaba, ! ith this money from
selling your good #resent to 4r. San+ay, I an buy t! o bottles of
very bad and ni ely hea# Indian ! his, y, to en+oy, and #lenty of
money left for one ni e ne! shirt, red colour, one tola of good
harras, ti , ets for en+oying air ondition *indi #i ture, and
t! o days of foods. Out ! ait, ; inbaba, you are not eating it your
#aan. Dou must #ut it no! in the side of your mouth and he! it,
before it is getting stale and not good for taste.5

5@, ay, ho! do I do itE ; i, e thisE5

I #ut the leaf(! ra##ed #ar el, almost the si1e of a mat hbo' ,
into the side of my mouth bet! een the hee, and the teeth, as I'd
seen the others do. 7ithin se onds, a suffusion of aromati
s! eetnesses #ossed my mouth. 2he taste ! as shar# and lus ious
(honeyed and subtly #i=uant at the same time. 2he leaf ! ra##ing
began to dissolve, and the solid, run hy nibbles of shaved betel
nut, date, and o onut s! irded in the s! eet +ui es.

5) Dou must s#it it out some #aan no! ,5 >raba, er said, staring at
my grinding +a! s ! ith earnest on entration. 5) Dou ma, e li, e this,
seeE S#it him out li, e this.5

*e s#at out a s=uir of red +ui e that landed on the road, a

metre a! ay, and formed a #alm(sil)ed blot h. It ! as a #re ise,
e' #ert #ro edure. -ot a s#e , of the +ui e remained on his li#s.
7ith his enthusiasti en ouragement, I tried to imitate him, but
the mouthful of rimson li=uid bubbled out of my mouth, left a

trail of slobber on my chin and the front of my shirt, and landed
! ith an audible s#lat on my right boot.

5- o #roblem this shirt,5 >raba, er fro! ned, #ulling a hand, er hief
from his #o , et, and smearing the blood(red fluid dee#er into my
shirtfront ! ith vigorously ineffe tive rubbing. 5- o #roblem your
boots also. I ! ill ! i#e him +ust li, e this, seeE I must as, it
no! , do you li, e the s! immingE5 GF

5S! immingE5 I as, ed, s! allo! ing the little #aan mi' ture that ! as
still in my mouth.

5@h, yes. S! imming. I ! ill ta, e you to 8ho! #atty bea h, so ni e
bea h it is, and there you an #ra tise he! ing and s#itting and
he! ing and more s#itting the #aan, but ! ithout so many of all
your lothes only, for a good saving on your laundry.5

5; isten, about that((going around the ity((you ! or, as a guide,
rightE5

5@h, yes. &ery best Oombay guide, and guiding all India also.5

5*o! mu h do you harge #er dayE5

*e glan ed at me, his hee, s a##led in the im#ish grin I ! as
learning to re ognise as the lever under(side of his broad and
gentle smile.

5I harge hundred ru#ees all day,5 he said.

5@, ay ...5

5) nd tourists buy it the lun h.5

5Sure.5

5) nd ta' i also, tourists #ay.5

5@f ourse.5

5) nd Oombay bus ti , ets, all they #ay.5

5Deah.5

5) nd hai, if ! e drin, it on a hot afternoon, for refreshing our good selves.5

5A(huh((5

5) nd se' y girls, if ! e go there, on a cool night, if ! e are feeling a big needy s! elling in our((5

5Deah, o, ay, o, ay. ; isten, I'll #ay you for the ! hole ! ee, . I ! ant you to sho! me Oombay, tea h me a bit about the ity. If it

! or, s out o, ay, there'll be a bonus for you at the end of the ! ee, . *o! does that soundE5

2he smile s#ar, ed his eyes, but his voi e ! as sur#risingly sombre as he re#lied.

52his is your good de ision, ; inbaba. Dour very good de ision.5

57ell,5 I laughed, 5! e'll see.) nd I ! ant you to tea h me some *indi ! ords, o, ayE5

5@h, yesß I an tea h everythingß *a means yes, and nahin means no, and #ani means ! ater, and , hanna means foods, and((5

5@, ay, o, ay, ! e don't have to learn it all at on e. Is this the restaurantE Good, I'm starved.5 GG

I ! as about to enter the dar, and un#re#ossessing restaurant ! hen he sto##ed me, his e' #ression suddenly grave. *e fro! ned, and s! allo! ed hard, as if he ! as unsure ho! to begin.

5Oefore ! e are eating this good foods,5 he said, at last, 5before ! e ... before ! e ma, e any business also, something there is, I must tell it to you.5

5_@(_ , ay ...5

*is manner ! as so de#e ted that I felt a t! inge of a##rehension.

57ell, no! I am telling ... that tola harras, the one I ! as selling to you in hotel ...5

5DesE5

57ell ... that ! as the business #ri e. 2he really #ri e((the friendshi# #ri e((is only fifty ru#ees for one tola) fghani harras.5 *e lifted his arms, and then let them sla# do! n at his thighs. 5I harged it fifty ru#ees too mu h.5

5I see,5 I ans! ered =uietly. 2he matter ! as so trivial, from my #oint of vie! , that I ! as tem#ted to laugh out loud. It ! as obviously im#ortant to him, ho! ever, and I sus#e ted that he ! asn't often moved to ma, e su h admissions. In fa t, as he told me mu h later, >raba, er had +ust then de ided to li, e me, and for him that meant he ! as bound to a s ru#ulous and literal honesty in everything he said or did. It ! as at on e his most endearing and most irritating =uality, that he al! ays told me the ! hole of the truth.

5So ... ! hat do you ! ant to do about itE5

54y suggestion,5 he said seriously, 5! e smo, e it that business

#ri e harras very fast, until finish that one, then I ! ill buy
ne! one for us.)fter from no! , it ! ill be everything friendshi#

#ri es, for you and for me also. 2his is a no #roblem #oli y,
isn't itE5

I laughed, and he laughed ! ith me. I thre! my arm around his
shoulder and led him into the steamy, ambrosial a tivity of the
busy restaurant.

5; in, I thin, I am your very good friend,5 >raba, er de ided,
grinning ha##ily. 57e are the lu , y fello! s, isn't itE5

54aybe it is,5 I re#lied. 54aybe it is.5

*ours later, I lay ba , in a omfortable dar, ness, under the
sound(strobe of a easelessly revolving eiling fan. I ! as tired,
but I ouldn't slee#. Oeneath my ! indo! s the street that had
! rithed and toiled in daylight ! as silent, subdued by a night(
sultriness, moist ! ith stars. GH

)stounding and #u1ling images from the ity tumbled and turned
in my mind li, e leaves on a ! ave of ! ind, and my blood so
thrilled ! ith ho#e and #ossibility that I ouldn't su##ress a
smile, lying there in the dar, . -o(one, in the ! orld I'd left
behind me, , ne! ! here I ! as. -o(one, in the ne! ! orld of Oombay,
, ne! ! ho I ! as. In that moment, in those shado! s, I ! as almost
safe.

I thought of >raba, er, and his #romise to return early in the
morning to begin my tours of the ity. 7ill he omeE I ! ordered.
@r ! ill I see him some! here later in the day, ! al, ing ! ith
another ne! ly arrived touristE I de ided, ! ith the faint,
im#ersonal allousness of the lonely, that if he ! ere as good as
his ! ord, and turned u# in the morning, I ! ould begin to li, e
him.

I thought of the ! oman, <arla, again and again, sur#rised that

her composed, unsmiling face intruded so often. If you go to
;eo#old"s, some time, maybe you'll find out. That ! as the last
thing she'd said to me. I didn't , no! if it ! as an invitation, a
challenge, or a ! arning. Whatever it ! as, I meant to take her u#
on it. I meant to go there, and look for her. Out not yet. -ot
until I'd learned a little more about the city she seemed to , no!
so ! ell. I'll give it a ! ee, , I thought.) ! ee, in the city ...

)nd beyond those reflections, as always, in fixed orbits around
the old s#here of my solitude, ! ere thoughts of my family and my
friends. /ndless. Anrea hable. /very night ! as t! isted around the
un=uen hable longing of ! hat my freedom had lost me, and all that
! as lost. /very night ! as #ier ed by the s#i, e of shame for ! hat
my freedom continued to ost them, the loved ones I ! as sure I
! ould never see again.

57e ould" a beat him do! n, you , no! ,5 the tall Canadian said from
his door, corner on the far side of the room, his sudden voice in
the ! hurring silence sounding like stones thro! n on a metal roof.
57e ould" a beat that manager do! n on the #rie of this room.

It's ostin" us si' bu , s for the day. 7e ould" a beat him do! n
to four. It's not a lotta money, but it's the ! ay they do things
here. Dou gotta beat these guys do! n, and barter for everything.
7e're leavin" tomorrow! for Delhi, but you're stayin" here. 7e
tal, ed about it before, ! hen you ! ere out, and ! e're , inda
! orried about you. Dou gotta beat "em do! n, man. If you don't
learn that, if you don't start thin, in" li, e that, they're gonna
fu , you over, these #eo#le. The Indians in the cities are real
mer enary, man. It's a great country, don't get me ! rong. That's
! hy ! e come ba , here. Out they're different G?
than us. They're ... hell, they +ust e' #e t it, that's all. Dou
gotta beat "em do! n.5

*e ! as right about the #rie of the room, of course. 7e ould've
saved a dollar or t! o #er day.)nd haggling is the e onomi al
thing to do. Most of the time, it's the shre! d and amiable ! ay to

ondu t your business in India.

Out he ! as ! rong, too. 2he manager,)nand, and I be ame good friends, in the years that follo! ed. 2he fa t that I trusted him on sight and didn't haggle, on that first day, that I didn't try to ma, e a bu , out of him, that I ! or, ed on an instin t that res#e ted him and ! as #re#ared to li, e him, endeared me to him. *e told me so, more than on e. *e , ne! , as ! e did, that si' of our dollars ! asn't an e' travagant #ri e for three foreign men to #ay. 2he o! ners of the hotel re eived four dollars #er day #er room. 2hat ! as their base line. 2he dollar or t! o above that minimum ! as all)nand and his staff of three room boys shared as their daily ! age. 2he little vi tories haggled from him by foreign tourists ost)nand his daily bread, and ost them the han e to , no! him as a friend.

2he sim#le and astonishing truth about India and Indian #eo#le is that ! hen you go there, and deal ! ith them, your heart al! ays guides you more ! isely than your head. 2here"s no! here else in the ! orld ! here that"s =uite so true.

I didn't , no! that then, as I losed my eyes in the dar, and breathing silen e on that first night in Oombay. I ! as running on instin t, and #ushing my lu , . I didn't , no! that I"d already given my heart to the ! oman, and the ity.)nd , no! ing none of it, I fell, before the smile faded from my li#s, into a dreamless, gentle slee#.

(((((((((((

GC

CHAPTER TWO

She walked into the old's at the usual time, and when she stopped at a table near me to talk, with friends, I tried once more to find the words for the foliage of her green eyes. I thought of leaves and ovals and the warm shallows of island seas. Out the living emerald in Arla's eyes, made luminous by the sunflowers

of gold light that surrounded the hills, was softer, far softer. I did eventually find that colour, the green in nature that was as a perfect match for the green in her lovely eyes, but it wasn't until long months after that night in the old's. And strangely, inevitably, I didn't tell her about it. I wish now with all my heart that I did. The vast reflects eternally between two mirrors ((the bright mirror of words and deeds, and the dark, one, full of things we didn't do or say. I wish now that from the beginning, even then in the first years that I knew her, even on that night, the words had come to tell her ... to tell her that I loved her.

And I did (I loved everything about her. I loved the *elvetian music of her Swiss-German /English, and the way she pushed her hair back, slowly with a thumb and forefinger when she was irritated by something. I loved the hard-edged cleverness of her conversation, and the easy, gentle way she touched the people she loved when she walked past them or sat beside them. I loved the way she held my eyes until the release moment when it stopped being uncomfortable, and then smiled, softening the assault, but never looked away.

She looked at the world in the eye and stared it down, and I loved that about her because I didn't love the world then. The world wanted to kill me or hate me. The world wanted to put me back in the same cage I'd escaped from, where the good guys, the guys in prison (guard uniforms who got paid to do the right thing, had chained me to a wall and, indeed, me until they broke my bones.) and maybe the world was right to want G7

that. Maybe it was no worse than I deserved. Out of repression, they say, breeds resistance in some men, and I was resisting the world with every minute of my life.

The world and I are not on speaking terms, Carla said to me once in those early months. The world was trying to win me back, she said, but it doesn't work. I guess I'm just not the forgiving type. And I saw that in her, too, right from the start. I knew from the first minute how much I loved her. I knew the determination in her that was almost brutal, and the courage that was almost cruel, and the lonely, angry longing to be loved. I knew all that, but I didn't say a word. I didn't tell her how much I loved her. I was numb, in those first years after the earthquake: shell-shocked by the disasters that had befallen in my life. My heart moved through deep and silent water. No one, and nothing, could really hurt me. No one, and nothing, could make me very happy. I was tough, but his is probably the saddest thing you can say about a man.

"You're becoming a regular here," she teased, ruffling my hair with one hand as she sat down at my table.

I loved it when she did that: it meant that she'd read me accurately, that she was sure I wouldn't take offense. I was thirty then (ugly, taller than average, with wide shoulders, a deep chest, and thick arms. People didn't often ruffle my hair.

"Deah. I guess I am."

"So, you went around on tour with Gabriela, er again? No! It was it today?"

"*e too, me to the island, /le#hanta, to see the waves."

"Beautiful #la e," she remarked quietly, looking at me, but dreaming of something else. "If you get the chance, you should visit the #anta and /llora waves, in the north of the state. I

s#ent the night there, on e, at)+anta, in one of the aves. 4y
boss too, me there.5

5Dour bossE5

5Des, my boss.5

5Is he /uro#ean, your boss, or IndianE5

5- either one, a tually.5

52ell me about him.5

57hyE5 she as, ed ! ith a dire t, fro! ning stare.

I ! as sim#ly ma, ing onversation, trying to , ee# her near me,
tal, ing to me, and the sudden ! ariness that bristled in the
single ! ord of her =uestion sur#rised me. G8

5It's no big deal,5 I re#lied, smiling. 5I'm +ust urious about
ho! #eo#le get ! or, here, ho! they ma, e a living, that's all.5

57ell, I met him five years ago, on a long(distan e flight,5 she
said, loo, ing do! n at her hands and seeming to rela' on e more.
57e both got on the #lane at . uri h. I ! as on my ! ay to
Singa#ore, but by the time ! e got to Oombay he"d onvin ed me to
get off the #lane and ! or, for him. 2he tri# to the aves ! as ...
something s#e ial. *e arranged it, someho! , ! ith the authorities,
and I ! ent u# there ! ith him, and s#ent the night in a big ave,
full of stone s ul#tures of the Ouddha, and a thousand hattering
bats. I ! as safe. *e had a bodyguard #osted outside. Out it ! as
in redible.) fantasti e' #erien e.)nd it really hel#ed me to
... to #ut things in fo us. Sometimes you brea, your heart in the
right ! ay, if you , no! ! hat I mean.5

I ! asn't sure ! hat she meant6 but ! hen she #aused, e' #e ting a
re#ly, I nodded as if I did understand.

5Do you learn something or you _feel something om#letely ne! , ! hen you brea, your heart that ! ay,5 she said. 5Something that only you an , no! or feel in that ! ay.)nd I , ne! , after that night, I ! ould never have that feeling any! here but India. I , ne! ((I an't e' #lain it, I +ust , ne! someho! ((that I ! as home, and ! arm, and safe.)nd, ! ell, I'm still here ...5

57hat , ind of business is he inE5

57hatE5

5Our boss((! hat does he doE5

5Im#orts,5 she said. 5)nd e' #orts.5

She la#sed into silen e, turning her head to s an the other tables.

5Do you miss your homeE5

54y homeE5

5Deah, I mean your other home. Don't you ever get homesi , for S! it1erlandE5

5In a ! ay, yes I do. I ome from Oasel((have you ever been thereE5

5- o, I've never been to /uro#e.5

57ell, you must go, and ! hen you go there you must visit Oasel. It's really a very /uro#ean ity, you , no! E It's divided by the river Rhine into Great Oasel and Small Oasel, and the t! o halves of the ity have really different styles and attitudes, so it's li, e living in t! o ities at the same time. 2hat used to suit me on e.)nd it's right on the meeting #la e of three ountries, so you an +ust ! al, a ross the border into Germany and 9ran e. Dou

an G9

have breakfast in France, you, no! , with coffee and baguettes, and lunch in Switzerland, and dinner in Germany, without leaving the city by more than a few kilometres. I miss Oaxaca, more than I miss Switzerland.

She stopped, catching her breath, and looked at me through soft, unadorned lashes.

Sorry, I'm giving you a geography lesson here.

—o, please go on. It's interesting.

Don't, she said slowly, I like you, ; in.

She stared that green fire into me. I felt myself reddening slightly, not from embarrassment, but from shame, that she'd said so easily the very words, I like you, that I couldn't let myself say to her.

Don't I ask, ed, trying to make the question sound more casual than it is. I caught her lips lose in a thin smile.

Des. You're a good listener. That's dangerous, because it's so

hard to resist. Being listened to (really listened to) is the second best thing in the world.

That's the first best thing.

Everybody knows that. The best thing in the world is nothing.

Oh, is it? I asked, laughing. That about sex?

—o.) Part from the biology, sex is all about nothing. That's why it's such a rush.

I laughed again.

5)nd ! hat about loveE) lot of #eo#le say that love is the best thing in the ! orld, not #o! er.5

52hey"re ! rong,5 she said ! ith terse finality. 5; ove is the o##osite of #o! er. 2hat"s ! hy ! e fear it so mu h.5

5<arla, dear one, the things you sayB5 Didier ; evy said, +oining us and ta, ing a seat beside <arla. 5I must ma, e the on lusion that you have ! i , ed intentions for our ; in.5

5Dou didn"t hear a ! ord ! e said,5 she hided.

5I don"t have to _hear you. I an see by the loo, on his fa e. Dou"ve been tal, ing your riddles to him, and turning his head around. Dou forget, <arla, that I , no! you too ! ell. *ere, ; in, ! e"ll ure you at on eB5

*e shouted to one of the red(+a , e

precious gem, to a pile of the finest Thai white heroin (might be bought or sold in the city.) And, as he sometimes boasted, there was very little he couldn't do for the right amount of money, provided there was no significant risk to his comfort and

personal safety.

Here talking of the different ideas people have about the best thing in the world, Charles said, "Out I don't have to ask, what you think."

"You could say that I think money is the best thing in the world," he suggested lightly, "and I'd both be right. A very sane and rational person one day realises that money is almost everything. The great principles and the noble virtues are all very well, in the long run of history, but from one day to the next, it's money that sees us going (and the lack of it that drives us under the great wheel.) And what about you, in England what did you say?"

"I didn't say anything yet, and no! that you're here, he won't get a chance."

"- oh! be fair, Charles. Tell us, in. I could like to, no!"

"Well, if you press me, I'd have to say freedom."

"The freedom to do what?" he asked, putting a little laugh in the last word.

"I don't know. Maybe just the freedom to say no. If you've got that much freedom, you really don't need any more."

The beer and coffee arrived. The waiter slammed the drinks onto the table with reckless discourtesy. The service in the shops, hotels, and restaurants of Bombay, in those days, moved from a politeness that was harming or failing to a rudeness that was

either abrupt or hostile. The H1

hurlishness of ; eo#old"s ! aiter's ! as legendary. It's my favourite #la e in the ! hole ! orld, <arla on e said, __to be treated li, e _dirt.

5) toastB5 Didier de lared, raising his glass to tou h mine. 52o the freedom ... to drin, B _SalutB5

*e dran, half the long glass, let out a loud, ! ide(mouthed sigh of #leasure, and then dran, the rest. *e ! as #ouring himself a se ond glass ! hen t! o others, a man and a ! oman, +oined our grou#, sitting bet! een <arla and me. The dar, , brooding, undernourished young man ! as 4odena, a dour and ta iturn S#aniard ! ho did bla , (mar, et business ! ith 9ren h, Italian, and)fri an tourists. *is om#anion, a slim and #retty German #rostitute named Alla, had for some time allo! ed him to all himself her lover.

5)h, 4odena, you are +ust in time to buy the ne' t round,5 Didier shouted, rea hing #ast <arla to sla# him on the shoulder. 5I ! ll have a ! his, y and soda, if you #lease.5

The shorter man flin hed under the blo! and s o! led unha##ily, but he alled the ! aiter to his side, and ordered drin, s. Alla ! as s#ea, ing ! ith <arla in a mi' ture of German and /nglish that, by a ident or intent, obs ured the most interesting #arts of her onversation.

5*o! ould I , no! it, _naE *o! ! as it #ossible for me to , no! that he ! as a S#innerE 2otal verru , t, I tell you.)t the start, he loo, ed totally straight to me. @r, maybe, do you thin, that ! as a signE 4aybe he ! as a little bit too straight loo, ing. _- a _+a, ten minutes in the room and er ! ollte auf der <lamotten , ommen. @n my best dressB I had to fight ! ith him to save my lothes, der S#rintfi , erB S#rit1en ! ollte er, all over my lothesB Gibt"s +a ni ht.)nd later, ! hen I ! ent to the bathroom

for a little sniff of roses, I came back, to see dass er seinen
Schuh tief in einer meiner Schuhe hat. Can you believe it?
In my shoes - it fits.

"It's fine," Carla said gently, "he really ones all ways, no!
How to find you, Alla."

"No, leider. That can I say? Really people love me."

"Don't listen to her, Alla my love," Didier consoled her.
"Reallyness is the basis of many a fine relationship. In fact,
reallyness is the basis of every fine relationship."

"Didier," Alla sighed, mouthing his name with a smile of
"wisdom," "I have told you to get busy, yet?"

"Oh," he laughed, "but I forgive you for the lapse. Meet us,
my dear
darling, such things are all implied, and understood."

"He! His, you arrived, in four small flasks, and the waiter raised
the tops off the soda bottles with a brass bottle opener that
hung from a chain at his belt. We let the tops bounce on the
table and fall to the floor, then slipped a grimy rag over the
wet surface of the table, for us to dry, and leave as the
moisture spilled in all directions.

"Two men approached our table from different parts of the
restaurant, one to see, to Didier and the other with a folder.
Alla used the moment to lean close to me. Under the table she
pressed something into my hand (it felt like a small roll of bank
notes) and her eyes pleaded with me not to draw attention to it.
) She talked to me, I slipped the notes into my pocket without
looking at them.

"So have you decided how long you're going to stay?" she asked.

"I don't really, no. I'm in no hurry."

5Don't you have someone waiting for you some! here, or someone you

should go toE5 she as, ed, smiling ! ith adroit but #assionless
o=uetry. Sedu tion ! as a habit ! ith her. She turned that same
smile on her customers, her friends, the ! aitters, even on Didier,
! hom she o#enly disli, ed((on everyone, in fa t, in luding her
lover, 4odena. In the months and years that follo! ed, I heard a
lot of #eo#le riti ise Alla, some of them ruelly, for her
flirtations. I didn't agree ! ith them. It seemed to me, as I got
to , no! her ! ell, that she flirted ! ith the ! orld be ause
flirting ! as the only real , indness she ever , ne! or shared: it
! as her ! ay of being ni e, and of ma, ing sure that #eo#le((men((
! ere ni e to her. She believed that there ! asn't enough ni eness
in the ! orld, and she said so, in e' a tly those ! ords, more than
on e. It ! asn't dee# feeling, and it ! asn't dee# thin, ing, but it
! as right, as far as it ! ent, and there ! as no real harm in it.
)nd ! hat the hell, she ! as a beautiful girl, and it ! as a very
good smile.

5- o,5 I lied. 52here"s no(one ! aiting, and no(one I should go
to.5

5)nd don't you have any, ! ie soll i h das sagen, any #rogramE)ny
#lanE5

5- ot really. I"m ! or, ing on a boo, .5

During the time sin e the es a#e, I"d learned that telling #eo#le
a small #art of the truth((that I ! as a ! riter((#rovided me ! ith
a useful and fle' ible over story. It ! as vague enough to e' #lain
e' tended stays or sudden de#artures, and the ! orld resear h ! as
om#rehensive enough to a ount for in=uiries about ertain
sub+e ts, su h as trans#ort and travel HG
and the availability of false do uments, that I ! as sometimes
for ed to ma, e. 4oreover, the over story guaranteed me a measure
of #riva y: the sim#le threat to tell #eo#le, at length, of my

! or, in #rogress usually dis ouraged all but the most
#ersistently urious.

)nd I ! as a ! riter. In)ustralia I'd ! ritten sin e my early
t! enties. I'd +ust begun to establish myself through my first
#ublished ! or, ! hen my marriage olla#sed, I lost the uestody of
my daughter, and I lost my life in drugs, rime, im#risonment,
and es a#e. Out even as a fugitive, ! riting ! as still a daily
ustom and #art of my instin tual routine. /ven there, in
;eo#old"s, my #o ,ets ! ere full of notes, s ribbled onto na#, ins,
re ei#ts, and s ra#s of #a#er. I never sto##ed ! riting. It ! as
! hat I did, no matter ! here I ! as or ho! my ir umstan es
hanged. @ne of the reasons I remember those early Oombay months
so ! ell is that, ! henever I ! as alone, I ! rote about those ne!
friends and the onversations ! e shared.)nd ! riting ! as one of
the things that saved me: the dis i#line and abstra tion of
#utting my life into ! ords, every day, hel#ed me to o#e ! ith
shame and its first ousin, des#air.

57ell, S heisse, I don't see ! hat"s to ! rite about in Oombay.

It's no good #la e, +a. 4y friend ; isa says this is the #la e
they ! ere thin, ing about, ! hen they invented the ! ord #its.)nd I
thin, it is a good #la e for alling a #its. Oetter you should go
some! here else to ! rite about, li, e Ra+asthan maybe. I did hear
that it's not a #its there, in Ra+asthan.5

5She"s right, ; in,5 <arla added. 5his is not India. 2here are
#eo#le here from every #art of India, but Oombay isn't India.
Oombay is an @! n(! orld, a ! orld in itself. 2he real India is out
there.5

5@ut thereE5

5@ut there, ! here the light sto#s.5

5I'm sure you're right,5 I ans! ered, smiling in a##re iation of

the phrase. Out I lie here, so far. I lie big cities, and this is the third (biggest city in the world.

“You’re beginning to sound like your tour guide,” Carla told. “I think, maybe, Garbajosa has been teaching you too.”

“I guess he has. *e”s been filling my head with facts and figures every day for the last week, (=quite amazing really, for a guy who left school when he was seven, and taught himself to read and write here on the streets.”

“What facts and figures?”

“Well, for instance, the official population of Bombay is eleven million, but Garbajosa says the guys who run the illegal numbers racket have a better idea of the real population, and they put it at anything from thirteen to fifteen million. And there are two hundred dialects and languages spoken in the city every day. Two hundred, for God’s sake! It’s like being in the centre of the world.”

“So if in response to that talk of languages, Alla spoke to Carla quietly and intently in German. “It’s a sign from Godena she stood, and gathered her purse and cigarettes. “The quiet Spaniard left the table without a word, and walked toward the open doorway that led to the street.”

“I have a job,” Alla announced, shouting insistently. “See you tomorrow, Carla. “About eleven o’clock, maybe I’ll have dinner together tomorrow night, if you’re here. I would like that. Bye.”

She walked out after Godena, followed by leers and admiring stares from many of the men in the bar. “Didier chose that moment to visit several acquaintances at another table. “Carla and I were alone.”

“She isn’t, you know.”

57 on't ! hatE5

5She ! on't have dinner ! ith you tomorro! night. It's +ust her ! ay.5

5I , no! ,5 I grinned.

5Dou li, e her, don't youE5

5Deah, I do. 7hat((does that stri, e you as funnyE5

5In a ! ay, yes. She li, es you, too.5

She #aused, and I thought she ! as about to e' #lain her remar , , but ! hen she s#o, e again it ! as to hange the sub+e t.

5She gave you some money.)meri an dollars. She told me about it, in German, so 4odena ! ouldn't understand. Dou're su##osed to give it to me, and she'll olle t it from my #la e at eleven tomorro! .5

5@, ay. Do you ! ant it no! E5

5- o, don't give it to me here. I have to go no! . I have an a##ointment. I'll be ba , in about an hour. 8an you ! ait till thenE @r ome ba , , and meet me thenE Dou an ! al, me home, if you li, e.5

5Sure, I'll be here.5

She stood to leave, and I stood also, dra! ing ba , her hair. She gave me a little smile, ! ith one eyebro! raised in irony or mo , ery or both.

5I ! asn't +o, ing before. Dou really should leave Oombay.5

I had her, I walked out to the street, and stepped into the balcony of a private taxi that had obviously been waiting for her. I saw the cream-colored car?

I stepped into the slow stream of night traffic, a man's hand emerged from the passenger window, his fingers clutching a string of green prayer beads, and warning a crowd of pedestrians with a wave.

Alone again, I sat down, set my hair against the wall, and let the activity of the old's and its glamorous patrons lose over me. The old's was the largest bar and restaurant in Solaba, and one of the largest in the city. The rectangular ground-floor room occupied a frontage equal to any four other restaurants, and was served by two metal doors that rolled up into wooden arches to give an evanescent view of the busy, Solaba's busiest and most colourful street. There was a smaller, more discreet, air-conditioned bar on the first floor, supported by sturdy columns that divided the ground floor into roughly equal sections, and around which many of the tables were grouped. Mirrors on those

pillars, and on much of the free wall space, provided the patrons with one of the bar's major attractions: the chance to inspect, admire, and oggle others in a mirror's reflection if not entirely anonymous fashion. For many, the duplication of their own images in two or more mirrors at the same time was not least among the pleasures of the pastime. The old's was a place for people to see, to be seen, and to see themselves in the act of being seen.

There were some thirty tables, all of them topped with earl-smooth Indian marble. Each table had four or more cedar chairs (sixty-minute chairs, as they used to call them, because they were just uncomfortable enough to discourage customers from staying for more than an hour.) A set of broad fans built into the high ceiling, stirring the white glass pendant lights to a slow, majestic sway. Mahogany trim lined the painted walls, surrounded the windows and doors, and framed the many mirrors. Rich fruits used in desserts and juices (apple, guava, custard apples, mosambi, grapes, watermelon, banana, santra, and, in the

season, four varieties of mango were displayed across the whole surface of one wall in gorgeous abundance. A vast, solid teak manager's counter resided, like the bridge of a sailing ship, over the busy deck of the restaurant. Behind that, along a narrow corridor, one corner of the frontage, it then, as occasionally visible beyond the flurry of waiters and the sizzling sounds of steam.

It faded but still sumptuous elegance struck, and held the eyes of all who passed through those corridors into the old's little world of light, colour, and richly panelled wood. Its chief splendour was as truly admired by none but its humblest workers, however, for it was only when the bar was closed, and the cleaners removed all the furniture each morning, that the beauty of the floor was exposed. Its intricate tilework, related to the pattern used in a north Indian style, with hexagons in black, cream, and brown radiating from a central sunburst. And thus a paving designed for drains, all but invisible to the tourists with their eyes on their own reflections in the dazzling mirrors, revealed its luxurious features only in secret to the naked feet of cleaners, the city's poorest and meekest working men.

For one cool, restless hour each morning after it opened, and the floors had been cleaned, the old's was an oasis of quiet in the struggling city. From then, until it closed at midnight, it was constantly crowded with visitors from a hundred countries, and the many locals, both foreign and Indian, who came there from every part of the city to conduct their business. The business ranged from traffic in drugs, currencies, passports, gold, and sex, to the intangible but no less lucrative trade in influence (the unofficial system of bribes and favours by which many appointments, promotions, and contracts were facilitated in India.

The old's was an unofficial free zone, scrupulously ignored by

the other! use efficient officers of the Solaba Police station, directly across the busy street. Det a peculiar dialect applied to the relationship between upstairs and downstairs, inside and outside the restaurant, and governed all of the business transacted there. Indian prostitutes, garlanded with roses of jasmine flowers and luxuriantly dressed in bejewelled saris, were prohibited downstairs, and only a nominated customers to the upstairs bar. European prostitutes were only permitted to sit downstairs, attracting the interest of men who sat at other tables, or simply strolled on the street outside. Deals for drugs and other contraband were only transacted at the tables, but the goods could only be exchanged outside the bar. It was common enough to see buyer and seller reach agreement on the street, outside to hand over money and goods, then go back inside to resume their pleasures at a table. Even the bureau rats and influential peddlers were bound by those unbroken rules: agreements reached in the dark booths of the upstairs bar could only be sealed, with handshakes and cash, on the pavement outside, so that no man could say he'd paid or received bribes within the walls of the old's.

While the fine lines that divided and connected the legal and illegal were

were not here more elegantly drawn, they weren't unique to the diverse society of the old's. The traders in the street stalls outside sold counterfeits of a costume, garden, and Bartier with a certain important element, the taxi drivers parked along the street angled their mirrors away from the unlawful or forbidden acts that too, played on the seats behind them, and a number of the who attended to their duties with diligence, at the station across the road, had paid hefty bribes for the privilege of that lucrative posting in the city centre.

Sitting at the old's, night after night, and listening to the conversations at the tables around me, I heard many foreigners and not a few Indians complain about the corruption that adhered to every aspect of public and commercial life in Bombay. My friends in the city had already shown me that those complaints were

often fair, and often true. Out there's no nation uncorrupted.
There's no system that's immune to the misuse of money.
>privileged and powerful elites grease the wheels of their
progress with bribes and campaign contributions in the noblest
assemblies. And the rich, all over the world, live longer and
healthier lives than the poor. There is a difference between the
dishonest bribe and the honest bribe, Didier; every one said to
me. The dishonest bribe is the same in every country, but the
honest bribe is India's alone. I smiled when he said that,
because I knew what he meant. India is as open. India is as honest.
And I liked that from the first day. My instinct wasn't to
criticize. My instinct, in the city, was learning to love, was
to observe, and become involved, and enjoy. I couldn't, no, then
that, in the months and years to come, my freedom and even my
life would depend on the Indian willingness to tilt the mirror.

57 That, alone, Didier gasped, returning to the table. 58 "est
trot? Don't you, no, my dear friend, it is faintly disgusting to
be alone here. And, I must tell you that being disgusting is a
privilege I reserve, exclusively, for myself. 8ome, I feel ill
drinking." 5

* He flopped into a chair beside me, calling his waiter to order
more drinks. I'd shown to him at my old's almost every night
for years, but I'd never been alone. It surprised me that he'd
decided to join me before Alla, Carla, or another of his friends
returned. In a small way, it was a kind of a setback, and I felt
grateful for it.

* He drummed his fingers on the table until the hissy arrived,
drinking half his glass in a greedy gulp and then relaxed at last,
turning to me with his
a narrow-eyed smile.

5Dou are heavy in thoughts.5

I was thin, looking about ; he old's (looking around, and talking it all in.

5) terrible ! he sighed, shaking his head of thoughts.
I hate myself for enjoying it so much here.

Two men, wearing loose trousers gathered tightly at the ankles and dark green vests over their long-sleeved, thigh-length shirts, approached us, and drew Didier's attention. They nodded to him, showing a broad smile and a salute, and then joined a group of friends at a table not far from our own.

Dangerous men, Didier muttered, the smile still creasing his face as he stared at their backs. They were Afghans. Rafiq, the small one, he used to run the black market in Kabul.

Oh, so?

Yes, sorts. He was the boss. A very big fellow, previously. - Oh! he runs heroin through Pakistan. He makes a lot more money from the heroin sugar, but he is very bitter about this losing of the Kabul business. He is involved in that struggle (most of them his men).

It wasn't possible that they would've heard the remark, but just then the two Afghans turned in their seats and stared at us with dark, serious expressions, as if responding to his words. One of their companions at the table leaned close, and spoke to them. He pointed at Didier, then at me, and they shifted their gaze to look directly into my eyes.

Involved ... Didier repeated softly, smiling even more broadly until the two men turned their backs to us once more. I would refuse to do business with them, if only they did not do such

good business.

*e ! as s#ea, ing out of the orner of his mouth, li, e a #risoner
under the eyes of the ! arders. It stru , me as funny. In
)ustralian #risons, that ! his#ering te hni=ue is , no! n as _side(
_valving. 2he e' #ression s#o, e itself learly in my mind and,
together ! ith Didier"s mannerism, the ! ords #ut me ba , in a
#rison ell. I ould smell the hea# disinfe tant, hear the metal
hiss of the ,

nothing. In matters of food I am French, in matters of love I am Italian, and in matters of business I am Swiss. &ery Swiss. Strictly neutral. Out there will be more blood on these boots, of that I am sure.

She turned to me and blinked, as if severing the thread of daydream with his thin, lashes.

"I must be drunk," he said with a pleasurable surprise. "Let's have another drink."

"Do you go ahead. I'll sit on this one. How do these assortments

anything from one hundred to one thousand dollars, of course. Do you want to buy one?"

"- o ..."

"This is a Bombay gold dealer's no. It is a no that means maybe, and the more passionate the no, the more definite the maybe. When you want one, come to me. I will arrange it for you for a small commission, of course."

"Do you make a lot of ... commissions here?"

"4mm, it goes. I cannot explain," he grinned, his blue eyes gleaming through lenses of binoculars. "I make ends meet, as they say, and when they meet I get a payment from both of the ends. Just no, ?"

tonight, I made the arrangements for a sale of 4 anali hashish. Do you see those Italian tourists, over there, by the fruits, the fellow with the long, blonde hair, and the girl in red? They wanted to buy. Someone (you see him, out there on the street, the one with a dirty shirt and no shoes, waiting for his commission) he put them to me, and then I in my turn put them to

)+ay. *e ma, es hashish business, and he is an e' ellent riminal.
See no! , he sits ! i

Suddenly his mood changed. *e poured a splash from the bottle, looked at me with a smile, and raised his glass.

So, let's drink to Bombay, a fine place to be in no hurry and to civilised politics, I hope! I'll take a bribe, in the interests of the order, if not of the law. To _ba, sheesh!

I'll drink to that, I said, clattering my glass against his in the toast. So, tell me, Didier, what keeps you here in Bombay?

I am French, he replied, admiring the drink on his half (raised glass, I am gay, I am Jewish, and I am a criminal, more or less in that order. Bombay is the only city I have ever found that allows me to be all four of those things, at the same time.

We laughed, and drank, and he turned his gaze on the side room, his hungry eyes finally coming to rest on a group of Indian men who sat near one of the entrances. *e studied them for a while, sitting slowly at his drink.

Well, if you decide to stay, you have missed a good time for it. This is a time of changes. Great changes. Do you see those men, eating foods with such strong appetites? They are Sainis, I hear, for the Shiv Sena. *at the men, I think, is the harmful English political phrase. Your guide, has he told you of the Sena?

Oh, I don't think so.

Conscious of the fact, I would say. The Shiv Sena party is the face of the future in Bombay. Perhaps their mode and their politics is the future everywhere.

What kind of politics?

Local, regional, language (based, ethnic), us (against) them, he replied, sneering cynically as he tilted each character off on the fingers of his left hand. They were very polite, soft

hands. *is long fingernails ! ere bla , ! ith dirt under the edges.
2he #oliti s of fear. I hate #oliti s, and #oliti ans even
more. 2hey ma, e a religion of being greedy. It's unforgivable.)
man's relationshi# to his greed is a dee#ly #ersonal thing, don't
you thin, E 2he Shiv Sena ontrols the #oli e, be ause they are a
4aharashtrian #arty, and most of the lo! er ran, s of the #oli e
are 4aharashtrians. 2hey ontrol a lot of the slums, too, and
many of the unions, and some of the #ress. 2hey have everything,
in fa t, e' e#t the money. @h, they have the su##ort of the sugar
barons, and some of the mer hants, but the real money((the
industrial money and the bla , money((that is in the hands of the
>arsees and the *indus from other ities in India and, most hated

of all, the 4uslims.)nd here is the struggle, the guerre
e onomi=ue, the truth behind their tal, of ra e and language and
region. 2hey are hanging the ity, a little less and a little
more every day. /ven the name has been hanged, from Oombay to
4umbai. 2hey haven't managed to hange the ma#s, yet, but they
! ill do it.)nd they ! ill do almost anything, +oin ! ith almost
anyone, in their =uest. 2here ?F
are o##ortunities. 9ortunes. \$ust in the last fe! months some
Saini, s((oh, not the #ubli ones, not the highly #la ed ones((
made a deal ! ith Rafi= and his)fghans and the #oli e. In
e' hange for ertain ash and on essions, the #oli e losed do! n
all but a fe! of the o#ium dens in the ity. Do1ens of the finest
smo, ing #arlours, #la es that have served the ommunity for
generations, ! ere losed in a single ! ee, . 8losed foreverB
-ormally, I do not interest myself in the #igsty of #oliti s, or
in the slaughterhouse of big business, for that matter. 2he only
for e more ruthless and yni al than the business of big #oliti s
is the #oliti s of big business. Out this is big #oliti s and big
business together, in the destru tion of the o#ium smo, ing, and I
am in ensedB I as, you, ! hat is Oombay ! ithout its handu((its
o#ium((and its o#ium densE 7hat is the ! orld oming toE It's a
disgra eB5

I ! at hed the men he"d des ribed, as they on entrated ! ith

energetic single-mindedness on their meal. The table was headed with matters of rice, chicken, and vegetable dishes. – one of the five men spoke, nor did they so much as look at one another as they ate, bending only to their plates and scooping the food into their mouths rapidly.

That's a pretty good line, I commented, grinning widely. He spoke about the business of big politics, and the politics of big business. I like it.

Oh, my dear friend, I cannot claim it as my own. It was Carla who said it to me the first time, and I have used it ever since. I am guilty of many crimes (of most crimes, to say the truth (but I have never claimed a cleverness that was not my own.

Amirable, I laughed.

Well, he scoffed, a man has to draw the line somewhere. Civilization, after all, is defined by what is forbidden, more than what is permitted.

He paused, drumming the fingers of his right hand on the old marble table top. After a few moments, he glanced around at me.

That is one of mine, he said, apparently peeved that I hadn't drawn attention to the phrase. When I didn't react, he spoke again. About the civilization ... it was one of mine.

And damn clever, I responded quickly.

Nothing at all, he said modestly, then he caught my eye, and we both laughed out loud.

That was in it for Rafi, if you don't mind my saying. That stuff about losing all the opium dens. Why did he go along with it? G

5Go along ! ith itE5 Didier fro! ned, 57hy, it ! as his idea. 2here is more money to be made from garad((bro! n sugar heroin((than there is from o#ium.)nd no! everyone, all the #oor ! ho ! ere handu smo, ers, they have be ome garad smo, ers. Rafi= ontrols the garad, the bro! n sugar. -ot all of it, of ourse. -o one man ontrols all the thousands of , ilos of bro! n sugar that ome from)fghanistan, through >a, istan, into India. Out a lot of it is his, a lot of the Oombay bro! n heroin. 2his is big money, my friend, big money.5

57hy did the #oliti ians go along ! ith itE5

5)h, it is not only bro! n sugar and hashish that omes from)fghanistan into India,5 he onfided, lo! ering his voi e and s#ea,ing from the orner of his mouth on e more. 52here are guns, heavy ! ea#ons, e' #losives. 2he Si, hs are using these ! ea#ons no! , in >un+ab, and the 4uslim se#arartists in <ashmir. 2here are ! ea#ons, you see.)nd there is #o! er, the #o! er to s#ea, for many of the #oor 4uslims ! ho are the enemies of the Shiv Sena. If you ontrol one trade, the drugs, you an influen e the other, the guns.)nd the Sena >arty is des#erate to ontrol the flo! of guns into their state, their 4aharashtra. 4oney and #o! er. ;oo, there, at the table ne' t to Rafi= and his men. Dou see the three)fri ans, t! o men and a ! omanE5

5Des. I noti ed her before. She"s very beautiful.5

*er young fa e, ! ith its #rominent hee, bones, softly flared nose, and very full li#s, loo, ed as if it had been arved in vol ani stone by the rush of a river. *er hair ! as braided into a multitude of long, fine, beaded #laits. She laughed, sharing a +o, e ! ith her friends, and her teeth gleamed large and #erfe tly ! hite.

5OeautifulE I thin, not.)mong the)fri ans, the men are beautiful, in my o#inion, ! hereas the ! omen are merely very attra tive. 9or /uro#eans, the o##osite is true. <arla is

beautiful, and I never, never! a /uro#ean man ! ho is beautiful in that ! ay. Out that is another matter. I mean only to say that they are customers of Rafi=, -igerians, and that their business bet! een Oombay and ;agos is one of the on essions((a _s#in(_off is the term, I thin, ((of this deal ! ith the Saini, s. 2he Sena has a man at Oombay 8ustoms. So mu h money is moving from hand to hand. Rafi="s little s heme is a tangle of ountries,) fghanistan and India, >a, istan and -igeria, and of #o! ers((#oli e and ustoms and #oliti ians.)ll of it is a #art of the struggle for ontrol here in our ursed and beloved ?H

Oombay.)nd all of it, all this intrigue, gro! s from the losing do! n of my dear old o#ium dens.) tragedy.5

52his Rafi=,5 I muttered, #erha#s sounding more fli##ant than I'd intended, 5is =uite a guy.5

5*e is) fghan, and his ountry is at ! ar, my friend. 2hat gives him an edge, as the)meri ans say.)nd he ! or, s for the 7alidlalla mafia oun il((one of the most #o! erful. *is losest asso iate is 8huha, one of the most dangerous men in Oombay. Out the real #o! er here, in this #art of the ity, is the great don, lord) bdel <hader <han. *e is a #oet, a #hiloso#her, and a lord of rime. 2hey all him <haderbhai. <hader(_/lder(_Orother. 2here are others, ! ith more money and more guns than <haderbhai((he is a man of rigid #rin i#les, you see, and there are many lu rative things that he ! ill not do. Out those same #rin i#les give him((I am not sure ho! to say it in /nglish((the immoral high ground, #erha#s, and there is no(one, in this #art of Oombay, ! ho has more real #o! er than he does. 4any #eo#le believe that he is a saint, ! ith su#ernatural a#abilities. I , no! him, and I an tell you that <haderbhai is the most fas inating man I ever met. If you ! ill allo! me the small immodesty, this ma, es him a truly remar, able individual, for I have met a great many interesting men in my life.5

*e left the ! ords to s! irl for a moment in the eye onta t

bet! een us.

Some, you are not drinking I hate it! then #eo#le take so long to drink a single glass. It is like putting on a condom to masturbate.

—o really, I laughed. I, er, I'm waiting for Carla to come back. She's due any minute now!

Oh, Carla ... she said her name with a long, #urring roll. And must! What are your intentions! with our insubstantial Carla?

Some again?

Perhaps it is more useful to consider! What intentions she has for you, no?

He poured the last of the one-litre bottle into his glass and topped it up with the last of the soda. He'd been drinking steadily for more than an hour. His eyes were as veined and bloodshot as the back of a boxer's fist, but the gaze that stared from them was unflinching, and his hands were precise in their movements.

I saw her on the street, just hours after I landed in Bombay, I found myself saying. There! as something about her that ... I think, she's one of the reasons why I've stayed here this long. Her and Gaba, er. Like??

them (I liked them both on sight. I'm a #eo#le person, if you know what I mean. If the #eo#le in it were interesting, I'd refer a tin shed to the 2+ 4ahal (not that I've seen the 2+ 4ahal yet).

It leaves, Didier sniffed, dismissing the arithmetic! Consider! with the orders. Out did you say interesting? Carla is interesting?

*e laughed out loud again. It ! as a #e uliarly high(#it hed laugh, harsh and almost hysteri al. *e sla##ed me hard on the ba , , s#illing a little of his drin, .

5*aB Dou , no! , ;in, I a##rove of you, even if a ommendation from me is a very fragile endorsement.5

*e drained his glass, thum#ed it on the table, and ! i#ed his losely trimmed mousta he ! ith the ba , of his hand. 7hen he sa! my #u11led e' #ression, he leaned lose until our fa es ! ere only a fe! entimetres a#art.

5;et me e' #lain something to you. ;oo, around here. *o! many #eo#le do you ountE5

57ell, maybe, si' ty, eighty.5

5/ighty #eo#le. Gree, s, Germans, Italians, 9ren h,)meri ans. 2ourists from every! here. /ating, drin, ing, tal, ing, laughing.)nd from Oombay((Indians and Iranians and)fghans and)rabs and)fri ans. Out ho! many of these #eo#le have real #o! er, real destiny, real dynami=ue for their #la e, and their time, and the lives of thousands of #eo#leE I ! ill tell you((four. 9our #eo#le in this room ! ith #o! er, and the rest are li, e the rest of the #eo#le every! here: #o! erless, slee#ers in the dream, anonymes. 7hen <arla omes ba , , there ! ill be five #eo#le in this room ! ith #o! er. 2hat is <arla, the one you all interesting. I see by your e' #ression, my young friend, you do not understand ! hat I am saying. ;et me #ut it this ! ay: <arla is reasonably good at being a friend, but she is stu#endously good at being an enemy. 7hen you +udge the #o! er that is in a #erson, you must +udge their a#a ities as both friend and as enemy.)nd there is no(one in this ity that ma, es a ! orse or more dangerous enemy than <arla.5

*e stared into my eyes, loo, ing for something, moving from one eye to the other and ba , again.

5Dou , no! the , ind of #o! er I'm tal, ing about, don't youE Real #o! er. 2he #o! er to ma, e men shine li, e the stars, or rush them to dust. 2he #o! er of se rets. 2errible, terrible se rets. 2he #o! er to live ! ithout ?C

remorse or regret. Is there something in your life, ; in, that you regretE Is there anything you have done, that you regret itE5

5Des, I guess I((5

5@f course you doB)nd so do I, regret ... things I have done ... and not done. Out not <arla.)nd that is ! hy she is li, e the others, the fe! others in this room, ! ho have real #o! er. She has a heart li, e theirs, and you and I do not.)h, forgive me, I am almost drun, , and I see that my Italians are leaving.)+ay ! ill not ! ait for mu h longer. I must go, no! , and olle t my little ommission, before I an allo! myself to be om#letely drun, .5

*e sat ba , in his hair, and then #ushed himself to his feet by leaning heavily on the table ! ith both of his soft, ! hite hands. 7ithout another ! ord or loo, he left, and I ! at hed him ! al, to! ard the , it hen, threading his ! ay through the tables ! ith the rolling, s#ongy ste# of the #ra tised drin, er. *is s#orts oat ! as reased and ! rin, led at the ba , , ! here he'd been leaning against the hair, and the seat of his trousers hung in baggy folds. Oefore I , ne! him ! ell enough, before I realised ho! mu h it meant that he'd lived by rime and #assion for eight years in Oombay ! ithout ma, ing a single enemy and ! ithout borro! ing a single dollar, I tended to dismiss Didier as little more than an amusing but ho#eless drun, ard. It ! as an easy mista, e to ma, e, and one that he himself en ouraged.

2he first rule of bla , business every! here is: never let anyone , no! ! hat you're thin, ing. Didier's orollary to the rule ! as: all! ays , no! ! hat the other thin, s of you. 2he shabby lothes, the matted, urly hair, #ressed flat in #la es ! here it had rested on the #illo! the night before, even his fondness for al ohol, e' aggerated into ! hat seemed to be a debilitating addi tion((they

! ere all e' #ressions of an image he ultivated, and ! ere as arefully nuan ed as a #rofessional a tor"s. *e made #eo#le thin, that he ! as harmless and hel#less, be ause that ! as the #re ise o##osite of the truth.

I had little time to thin, about Didier and the #u11ling remar, s he"d made, ho! ever, be ause <arla soon returned, and ! e left the restaurant almost at on e. 7e too, the long ! ay to her small house, ! al, ing beside the sea ! all that runs from the Gate! ay of India to the Radio 8lub *otel. 2he long, ! ide street ! as em#ty. @n our right, behind a ro! of #lane trees, ! ere hotels and a#artment buildings.) fe! lights, here and ?7 there, sho! ed ! indo! gra#hs of the lives being lived in those rooms: a s ul#ture dis#layed on one ! all, a shelf of boo, s on another, a #oster of some Indian deity, framed in ! ood, surrounded by flo! ers and smo, y streamers of in ense and, +ust visible in the orner of a street(level ! indo! , t! o slender hands #ressed together in #rayer.

@n our left ! as a vast segment of the ! orld"s largest harbour, the dar, ! ater starred by the moorage lights of a hundred shi#s at an hor. Oeyond them, the hori1on =uivered ! ith fires flung from the to! ers of offshore refineries. 2here ! as no moon. It ! as nearly midnight, but the air ! as still as ! arm as it had been in the early afternoon. *igh tide on the)rabian Sea brought o asional s#rays over the ! aist(high stone ! all: mists that

s! ired, on the Simoom, all the ! ay from the oast of)fri a.

7e ! al, ed slo! ly. I loo, ed u# often at the s, y, so heavy ! ith stars that the bla , net of night ! as bulging, overflo! ing ! ith its glittering haul. Im#risonment meant years ! ithout a sunrise, a sunset, or a night s, y, lo , ed in a ell for si' teen hours ea h day, from early afternoon to late morning. Im#risonment meant that they too, a! ay the sun and the moon and the stars. >rison ! as n"t hell, but there ! as no heaven in it, either. In its o! n ! ay, that ! as +ust as bad.

5 Dou an ta, e this good (listener business a little too far, you
, no! .5

5 7 hatE @h, sorry. I ! as thin, ing.5 I a#ologised, and shoo, myself
into the moment. 5 *ey, before I forget, here"s that money Alla
gave me.5

She a e#ted the roll of notes from me and shoved it into her
handbag ! ithout loo, ing at it.

5 It"s strange, you , no! . Alla ! ent ! ith 4odena to brea, a! ay from
someone else ! ho ! as ontrolling her li, e a slave. - o! she"s
4odena"s slave, in a ! ay. Out she loves him, and that ma, es her
ashamed that she has to lie to him, to , ee# a little money for
herself.5

5 Some #eo#le need the master (slave thing.5

5 - ot +ust some #eo#le,5 she res#onded, ! ith sudden and
dis on erting bitterness. 5 7 hen you ! ere tal, ing to Didier about
freedom, ! hen he as, ed you the freedom to do ! hatE ((you said, the
freedom to say no. It"s funny, but I ! as thin, ing it"s more
im#ortant to have the freedom to say yes.5

5 S#ea, ing of Didier,5 I said lightly, trying to hange the
sub+e t and lift her s#irits, 5 I had a long tal, ! ith him
tonight, ! hile I ! as ! aiting for you.5 ?8

5 I thin, Didier ! ould"ve done most of the tal, ing,5 she guessed.

5 7 ell, yes, he did, but it ! as interesting. I en+oyed it. It"s
the first time ! e"ve ever tal, ed li, e that.5

5 7 hat did he tell youE5

5 2 ell meE5 2 he #hrase stru , me as #e uliar6 it arried the hint
that there ! ere things he shouldn"t tell. 5 *e ! as giving me some

ba , ground on some of the #eo#le at ; eo#old"s. 2he)fgans, and the Iranians, and the Shiv Saini, s((or ! hatever they"re alled((and the lo al mafia dons.5

She gave a ! ry little smile.

5l ! ouldn"t ta, e too mu h noti e of ! hat Didier says. *e an be very su#erfi ial, es#e ially ! hen he"s being serious. *e"s the , ind of guy ! ho gets right do! n to the s, in of things, if you , no! ! hat I mean. I told him on e he"s so shallo! that the best he an manage is a single entendre. 2he funny thing is, he li, ed it. I"ll say this for Didier, you an"t insult him.5

5l thought you t! o ! ere friends,5 I remar, ed, de iding not to re#eat ! hat Didier had said about her.

59riends ... ! ell, sometimes, I"m not really sure ! hat friendshi# is. 7e"ve , no! n ea h other for years. 7e used to live together on e((did he tell youE5

5-o, he didn"t.5

5Deah. 9or a year, ! hen I first ame to Oombay. 7e shared a ra1y, fra tured little a#artment in the 9ort area. 2he building ! as rumbling around us. /very morning ! e used to ! a, e ! ith #laster on our fa es from the #regnant eiling, and there ! ere al! ays ne! hun, s of stone and ! ood and other stuff in the hall! ay. 2he ! hole building olla#sed in the monsoon a ou#le of years ago, and a fe! #eo#le ! ere , illed. I ! al, that ! ay sometimes, and loo, u# at the hole in the s, y ! here my bedroom used to be. I su##ose you ould say that ! e"re lose, Didier and I. Out friendsE 9riendshi# is something that gets harder to understand, every damn year of my life. 9riendshi# is li, e a , ind of algebra test that nobody #asses. In my ! orst moods, I thin, the best you an say is that a friend is anyone you don"t des#ise.5

*er tone ! as serious, but I allo! ed myself a gentle laugh.

52hat"s a bit strong, I thin, .5

She loo, ed at me, fro! ning hard, but then she, too, laughed.

54aybe it is. I"m tired. I haven"t had enough slee# for the last fe! nights. I don"t mean to be hard on Didier. It"s +ust that he an be very ?9

annoying sometimes, you , no! E Did he say anything about meE5

5*e ... he said that he thin, s you"re beautiful.5

5*e said thatE5

5Des. *e ! as tal, ing about beauty in ! hite #eo#le and bla , #eo#le, and he said <arla is beautiful.5

She raised her eyebro! s, in mild and #leased sur#rise.

57ell, I"ll ta, e that as a signifi ant om#liment, even if he is an outrageous liar.5

5I li, e Didier.5

57hyE5 she as, ed =ui , ly.

5@h, I don"t , no! . It"s his #rofessionalism, I thin, . I li, e #eo#le ! ho are e' #ert at ! hat they do.)nd there"s a sadness in him that ... , ind of ma, es sense to me. *e reminds me of a fe! guys I , no! . 9riends.5

5)t least he ma, es no se ret of his de aden e,5 she de lared, and I ! as suddenly reminded of something Didier had told me about <arla, and the #o! er of se rets. 5>erha#s that"s ! hat ! e really

have in common, Didier and I (we both hate hypocrisy. *y#o risy is just another kind of cruelty.) and Didier's not cruel. *e's !ild, but he's not cruel. *e's been quiet, in the last while, but there were times when his passionate affairs were the scandal of the city, or at least of the foreigners who live here.) Jealous lover, a young 40-year-old boy, chased him down the causeway with a sword one night. They were both starved (=quite a shocking event in Bombay, and in the case of Didier, something of a spectacle, I can report. *e ran into the Colaba Police station, and they rescued him. They are very conservative about such things in India, but Didier has one rule (he never has any sex involvement with Indians (and I think they respect that.) lot of foreigners come here just for the sex with very young Indian boys. Didier despises them, and he restricts himself to affairs with foreigners. I wouldn't be surprised if that's why he told you so much of other people's business tonight. *e was trying to seduce you, perhaps, by impressing you with his knowledge of sex, business and sex. @h, hello! <at1eli! *ey, where did you come from?

7e'd come upon a cat that was squatting on the sea wall all to eat from a jar when someone had discarded there. The thin, grey animal hungrily devoured and swallowed, growling and hissing at the same time, but it allowed Carla to stroke its back, as it lowered its head to the food on the floor. It was a frightened and suspicious specimen with one ear held to

C%

the shade of a rosebud, and bare patches on its sides and back, where unhealed sores were exposed. I found it amazing that such a feral, emaciated creature should permit itself to be petted by a stranger, and that Carla would want to do such a thing. Even more astounding, it seemed to me then, was that the cat had such a keen appetite for vegetables and rice, cooked in a sauce of chili, very hot chillies.

@h, look at him, she cooed. Isn't he beautiful?

Well ...

5Don't you admire his courage, his determination to surviveE5

5I'm afraid I don't like cats very much. I don't mind dogs, but

cats ...5

5Out you must love cats! In a perfect world, all the people would be like cats are, at the top of the afternoon.5

I laughed.

5Did anyone ever tell you you've got a very peculiar way of putting thingsE5

5What do you meanE5 she asked, turning to me quietly.

When in the streetlight I could see that her face was flushed, almost angry. I didn't know then that the English language was a gentle obsession with her: that she studied and rote and worked hard to compose those clever fragments of her conversation.

5Just that you have a peculiar way of expressing yourself. Don't get me wrong, I like it. I like it very much. It's like ... well ... that, yesterday, for instance, when everyone was talking about truth. *Absolute truth. Ultimate truth.* And there is no truth, is anything trueE Everybody had something to say about it (Didier, Alla, Aurelio, even Odessa. When you said, the truth is a bully like all pretend to like. I was, no, edged out by it. Did you read that in a book, or hear it in a play, or a movieE5

5-oh. I made it up myself.5

5Well, that's what I mean. I don't think I could repeat anything that the others said, and be sure of getting it exactly right. Out that line of yours (I'll never forget it.5

5Do you agree ! ith itE5

57hat((that the truth is a bully ! e all #retend to li, eE5

5Des.5

5- o, I don't, not at all. Out I love the idea, and the ! ay you
#ut it.5

*er half(smile held my stare. 7e ! ere silent for a fe! moments,
and +ust as she began to loo, a! ay I s#o, e again to hold her
attention. C1

57hy do you li, e Oiarrit1E5

57hatE5

52he other day, the day before yesterday, you said that Oiarrit1
is one of your favourite #la es. I've never been there, so I
don't , no! , one ! ay or the other. Out I'd li, e to , no! ! hy you
li, e it so mu h.5

She smiled, ! rin, ling her nose in a =ui11i al e' #ression that
might've been s ornful or #leased.

5Dou remember thatE 2hen, I guess I better tell you. Oiarrit1 ...
ho! to e' #lain it ... I thin, it's the o ean. 2he)tlanti . I
love Oiarrit1 in the ! intertime, ! hen the tourists are gone, and
the sea is so frightening that it turns #eo#le to stone. Dou see
them standing on the deserted bea hes, and staring at the sea((
statues, s attered along the bea h bet! een the liffs, fro1en
stiff by the terror they feel ! hen they loo, at the o ean. It's
not li, e other o eans((not li, e the ! arm >a ifi or the Indian.
2he)tlanti there, in ! inter, is really unforgiving, and
ruthlessly ruel. Dou an feel it alling to you. Dou , no! it
! ants to drag you out and #ull you under. It's so beautiful, I

must burst into tears the first time I really looked at it.)nd I wanted to go to it. I wanted to let myself go out and under the big, angry waves. It's the scariest thing. Out the people in Oiarrit1, they're the most tolerant and easygoing people in /uro#e, I think, something frees them out. something is too over the top. It's kind of weird((in most holiday places, the people are angry and the sea is calm. In Oiarrit1, it's the other way around.5

5Do you think you'll go back, there one day((to stay, I mean5

5- o,5 she said =ui ,ly. 5If I ever leave here, for good, it'll mean going back, to the States. I grew up there, after my parents died.)nd I'd like to go back, some day. I think I love it there, most of all. 2here's something so confident and openhearted and ... and brave about)meria, and the)merian people. I don't feel)merian((at least, I don't think I do((but I'm comfortable with them, if you know what I mean, more than I am with any other people, anywhere.5

5Tell me about the others,5 I asked, wanting to hear talking.

5The others5 she asked, finishing suddenly.

5The relatives; old"s. Didier and the others. 2ell me about ; etitia, to start with. *o! do you know her5

She relaxed, and let her eyes roam the shadows on the far side of the street. Still thinking, still considering, she lifted her gaze to the night sky. CF
The blue light from a street lamp melted to liquid on her lips and in the shadows of her large eyes.

5; ettie lived in Goa for a while,5 she began, affectionately laying in her voice. 5She came to India for the usual mix of parties and spiritual highs. She found the parties, and she enjoyed them, I think, ; ettie loves a party. Out she never had much luck with the spiritual side of things. She went back, to London((to live in the

same year (but then she came back, to India for one last try at the soul thing. She's on a soul mission. She's tough, but

she's a very spiritual girl. I think, she's the most spiritual of all of us, really.

*o! does she live? I don't mean to pry (it's just that I was saying before, I must want to learn how people make a living here. *o! foreigners get by, I mean.

She's an expert with gems (gemstones and jewels. She works on a commission basis for some of the foreign buyers. It was Didier who got her the job. *e has contacts everywhere in Bombay.

Didier? I smiled, genuinely surprised. I thought that they hated each other (well, not hate each other. I thought they couldn't stand each other.

@h, they annoy one another, sure. Out there's a real friendship there. If anything bad happened to one of them, the other would be devastated.

*o! about 4 auri? I asked, trying to keep my tone even. The tall Italian was too handsome, too confident, and I envied him for that. I saw his deeper, noble lineage of Carlarla, and his friendship with her. What's his story?

His story? I don't know. That his story is, she replied, from the beginning again. *is parents died, leaving him a lot of money. *e spent it, and I think, he developed something of a talent for spending money.

@ther people's money? I asked. I might've seemed too eager for that to be true, because she answered me with a question.

Do you know the story of the sorcerer and the frog? Dou, no, the frog agrees to marry the sorcerer across the river, because

the scorpion promises not to sting him.

Deah. And then the scorpion stings the frog, half a day across the river. The drowning frog asks him why he did it, then they'll both drown, and the scorpion says that he's a scorpion, and it's his nature to sting.

Des, she sighed, nodding slowly until the frog left her brother.
That's auri1io. And if you know that, he's not a problem, because you must CG
don't offer to carry him across the river. Do you know what I mean?

I'd been in prison. I know what she meant. I nodded, and asked her about Alla and Odessa.

Like Alla, she answered quietly, turning that half-smile on me again. She's crazy and unreliable, but I have a feeling for her. She was a rich girl, in Germany, and she played with heroin until she got a habit. Her family cut her off, so she came to

India (she was with a bad guy, a German guy, a lunatic like her, who put her to work in a very tough place.) horrible place. She loved the guy. She did it for him. She would've done anything for him. Some women are like that. Some loves are like that. Most loves are like that, from what I can see. Our heart starts to feel like an overloaded lifeboat. You throw your ride out to sea, let it float, and your self (resist and your independence.) After a while you start throwing people out (your friends, everyone you used to know.) And it's still not enough. The lifeboat is still sinking, and you know it's going to take you down with it. I've seen that happen to a lot of girls here. I think that's why I'm sick of love.

I couldn't tell if she was talking about herself, or pointing the words at me. Either way, they were sharp, and I didn't want to hear them.

5)nd ho! about <avitaE 7here does she fit inE5

5<avita"s great! She"s a freelan er((you , no! that((a freelan e
! riter. She ! ants to be a +ournalist, and I thin, she"ll get
there. I ho#e she gets there. She"s bright and honest and gutsy.
She"s beautiful, too. Don"t you thin, she"s a gorgeous girlE5

5Sure,5 I agreed, re alling the honey(oloured eyes, the full and
sha#ely li#s, and the long, e' #ressive fingers. 5She"s a #retty
girl. Out they"re all good(loo, ing #eo#le, I thin, . /ven Didier,
in his rum#led(u# ! ay, has got a tou h of the ;ord Oyron about
him. ;ettie"s a lovely girl. *er eyes are al! ays laughing((
they"re a real _i e(blue, her eyes, aren"t theyE Alla loo, s li, e
a doll, ! ith those big eyes and big li#s on su h a round fa e.
Out it"s a #retty doll"s fa e. 4auri1io"s handsome, li, e a
maga1ine model, and 4odena"s handsome in a different ! ay, li, e a
bullfighter or something.)nd you"re ... you"re the most
beautiful ! oman I"ve ever seen ! ith my o! n eyes.5

2here, I"d said it.)nd even in the sho , of s#ea, ing the thought
out loud, I ! ondered if she"d understood, if she"d #ier ed my
! ords about their beauty, and hers, to find the misery that
ins#ired them: the misery CH
that an ugly man feels in every ons ious minute of love.

She laughed((a good, dee#, ! ide(mouthed laugh((and sei1ed my arm
im#ulsively, #ulling me along the foot#ath. \$ust then, as if
dra! n from the shado! s by her laughter, there ! as a lattering
rattle of noise as a beggar, riding on a small ! ooden #latform
! ith metal ball(bearing ! heels, rolled off the foot#ath on the
o##osite side of the street. *e #ushed himself for! ard ! ith his
hands until he rea hed the entre of the deserted road, ! heeling
to a sto# ! ith a dramati #irouette. *is #iteously thin mantis(
legs ! ere folded and tu , ed beneath him on the #latform, ! hi h
! as a #ie e of ! ood no bigger than a folded ne! s#a#er. *e ! ore a
boy"s s hool uniform of , ha, i shorts and a #o! der(blue shirt.
)lthough he ! as a man in his t! enties, the lothes ! ere too big

for him.

Charles called out, greeting him by name, and he stopped opposite him. They stood for some time in silence. I stared across the ten metres that separated us, fascinated by the man's hands. They were huge hands, as wide across the back, from thumb to thumb, as his face. In the streetlight I could see that they were thickly padded on the fingers and palms like the pads of a bear.

Good night he called out in English, after a minute. He lifted one hand, first to his forehead and then to his heart, in a delicate gesture of consummate gallantry. With another slight, graceful flourish, he rolled himself forward along the road, gaining speed as he rolled down the gentle slope to the Gateway monument.

He waited for him out of sight, and then Charles pulled at my arm, leading me along the path on the other side. I allowed myself to be led. I allowed myself to be drawn by the soft leading of the waves, and the roulade of her voice by the blue sky, and the darkness, the night of her hair by the sea (the smell of the sleeping street, and the perfume sublime on her arms, in. I allowed myself to be drawn into her life, and the life of the city. I called her home. I said good night. And I was singing quietly to myself as I went back, along the silent brood of streets to my hotel.

((((((((((((

CHAPTER THREE

57hat you're saying is that ! e're finally going to get do! n to the real deal.5

5Real ! ill be full, baba,5 >raba, er assured me, 5and deal ! ill be #lenty also. -o! you ! ill see it the really ity. Asually, I am never ta, ing the tourists to these #la es. 2hey are not li, ing it, and I am not li, ing their not li, ing. @r maybe sometimes they are li, ing it too mu h, in these #la es, and I am li, ing that even less, isn't itE Dou must have it a good heads, to li, e these things, and you must be having a good hearts, to not li, e them too mu h. ;i, e you, ;inbaba. Dou are my good friend. I , ne! it very ! ell, on that first day, ! hen ! e ! ere drin, ing the ! his, y, in your room. -o! my Oombay, ! ith your good heads and your good hearts, you ! ill see it all.5

7e ! ere riding in a ta' i along 4ahatma Gandhi Road #ast 9lora 9ountain and to! ards &i toria Station. It ! as an hour before noon, and the s! ash of traffi that ourceed through that stone anyon ! as s! ollen by large numbers of runners #ushing tiffin arts. 2he runners olle ted lun hes from homes and a#artments, and #la ed them in tin yinders alled +al#aans, or tiffins. 2hey #ushed huge trays of the tiffins on long ! ooden arts, si'

men and more to a art. 2hrough the heavy metal(traffi of buses, tru , s, s ooters, and ars, they made deliveries at offi es and businesses all over the ity. -one but the men and ! omen ! ho o#erated the servi e , ne! e' a tly ho! it ! as done: ho! barely literate men evolved the bafflingly om#le' system of symbols, colours, and , ey numbers to mar, and identify the yinders6 ho! , day after day, hundreds of thousands of those identi al ontainers s! e#t through the ity on their ! ooden a' les, oiled ! ith s! eat, and rea hed the right man or ! oman, among millions, every time6 and ho! all that ! as a hieved at a ost measured in

ents rather than dollars. 4agi , the tri , that onne ts the CC
ordinary to the im#ossible, ! as the invisible river that ran
through every street and beating heart in Oombay in those years,
and nothing, from the #ostal servi e to the #leading of beggars,
! or, ed ! ithout a measure of it.

57hat number that bus, ; inbabaE I ui , ly, tell it.5

5\$ust a se ond.5 I hesitated, #eering out of the half(o#en ! indo!
of the ta' i and trying to read the urli ue numbers on the front
of a red, double(de , er bus that had sto##ed o##osite us
momentarily. 5It"s, ah, it"s a one(1ero(four, isn"t itE5

5&ery very fineB Dou have learn your *indi numbers so ni ely. -o!
no #roblem for you, reading numbers for bus, and train, and menu
ard, and drugs #ur hase, and other good things. -o! tell me,
! hat is alu #ala, E5

5)lu #ala, is #otato and s#ina h.5

5Good.)nd ni e eating also, you have not mention. I love to eat
it, alu #ala, . 7hat is _#hul _gobhi and bhindiE5

52hat"s ... oh yeah, auliflo! er and ... and o, ra.5

58orre t.)nd also good eating, again you are not mention. 7hat
is baingan masalaE5

52hat"s, ah, s#i ed egg#lant.5

5)gain rightB 7hat is it, you"re not en+oying eating bainganE5

5Des, yes, all rightB Oaingan is good eating, tooB5

5I don"t li, e it baingan so mu h,5 he sneered, ! rin, ling u# his
short nose. 52ell me, ! hat am I alling hehra, munh, and dilleE5

5@, ay ... don"t tell me ... fa e, mouth, and heart. Is that

rightE5

Every right, no problem. I have been ! at hing it, ho! ni ely you
eat u# your foods ! ith the hand, li, e a good Indian style.)nd
ho! you learn to as, for the things((ho! mu h this, ho! mu h
that, give me t! o u#s of tea, I ! ant more hashish((s#ea, ing only

*indi to the #eo#le. I have seen this all. Dou are my best
student, ; inbaba.)nd I am your best tea her also, isn't itE5

It is, >rabu,5 I laughed. 5*eyB 7at h outB5

My shout alerted the ta' i driver, ! ho s! erved +ust in time to
avoid an o' (art that ! as attem#ting to ma, e a turn in front of
us. 2he ta' i driver((a burly, dar, (s, inned man ! ith a bristling

59or 8hrist"s sa, e, tell him to sto#B5 I shouted as the ab
a elerated into a s=uall of traffi , lur hing in the s! erve left
and right. 5*e"s going to , ill usB5

50and , aroB5 >raba, er shouted. Sto#B

*e added a #ithy urse, for good measure, but the driver only
be ame more enraged. 7ith the ar hurtling along at to# s#eed, he
turned his head to snarl at us. *is mouth ! as ! ide o#en, and his
teeth ! ere bared. *is eyes ! ere huge, their bla , ness strea, ed
! ith rage.

5) rreyB5 >raba, er shri, ed, #ointing #ast the driver.

It ! as too late. 2he man turned =ui , ly. *is arms stiffened at
the ! heel, and he hit the bra, es hard. 2here ! as a s, ating,
sliding se ond ... t! o se onds ... three se onds. I heard a
guttural gas# of air from dee# in his throat. It ! as a su , ing
sound, li, e the lifting of a flat stone from the moist lay on
the edge of a riverbed. 2hen there ! as the ! hum# and rash as ! e
slammed into a ar that had sto##ed in front of us to ma, e a
turn. 7e ! ere thro! n for! ard into the ba , of his seat, and heard
t! o thum#ing e' #losions as t! o other ars ramm, ed into us.

Shattered glass and hrome fragments rattled on the road li, e
thin metalli a##ause in the sudden silen e that follo! ed the
im#a ts. 4y head had hit the door in the tumble s#ill of the
a ident. I felt blood flo! ing from a ut above my eye, but I ! as
other! ise unhurt.)s I ! riggled myself u# from the floor, and
onto the ba , seat on e more, I felt >raba, er"s hands on me. C8

5- othing bro, en you are, ; inE Dou are o, ayE5

5I"m o, ay, I"m o, ay.5

5Dou are sureE /everything not bro, enE5

Jesus, >rabu, I don't care how good this guy's sitting is, I said, laughing nervously, and ragged with relief, he doesn't get a tip.)re you all right?

He must get out, ; in he answered, his voice rising to a hysterical pitch. "Get out of here - o!"

The door on his side slammed shut, and he began to push at it with his shoulder. He couldn't budge it. He reached across me to try the door on my side, but sat on it that another car slammed against it, pinning it shut. Our eyes met, and there was such fear in him, such terror in the white-rimmed bulge of his eyes, that I felt the coldness of it deep in my chest. He turned at once, and thrust himself again at the door on his side.

My mind was muddled after, and one idea flashed from it, clear and elusive: "Is that what he's afraid of?" I asked myself the question I couldn't stop thinking it. I looked at the terror that flared at >rabu's gasping mouth, and I was sure the taxi was going to catch fire. I, nevertheless, were trapped there. The rear windows, in all the Bombay taxis I'd seen, didn't open beyond a few centimetres. The doors were slammed, and the windows couldn't open, and the taxi was going to explode in fire, and we were trapped. I turned live ... Is that why he's so scared?

I looked to the driver. He was slumped, almost, but not the steering wheel and the door. His body was still, but I heard him moaning. Beneath the thin shirt, the bare ridge of his spine rose and fell with each slow and shallow breath.

Rabhu stared at the windows of the cab, and I heard elevated voices. >rabu, looking out at them, turning this way and that, his face framed in an expression of terrible anguish. Suddenly, he lumbered over the seat into the front of the car and rested the passenger door open. Turning swiftly and grabbing at my arms with surprising strength, he tried to drag me by main force over the seat that divided us.

his ! ay, ; inB Get out, no! B *urryB *urryB5

I limbed u# and over the seat. >raba, er got out of the ar,

#ushing his ! ay into a ro! d of onloo, ers. I rea hed out to the driver, trying to #rise him from the obstru ting rim of the steering ! heel, but >raba, er"s hands C9

! ere on me again, brutally rough. 2he fingernails of one hand tore into the s, in of my ba , , and the other ! ren hed at the collar of my shirt.

5Don"t tou h him, ; inB5 he almost s reamed. 5Don"t tou h himB ; eave him and get out. Get out no! B5

*e dragged me from the ar and through the hedge of bodies #ressing in on the a ident. @n a foot#ath nearby, ! e sat beneath a fringe of ha! thorn leaves that overhung a fen e of ! rought(iron s#ears, and ins#e ted one another for in+uries. 2he ut on my forehead, above my right eye, ! asn"t as serious as I"d thought. 2he bleeding had already sto##ed, and it began to ! ee# a lear, #lasmi fluid. I ! as sore in a fe! #la es, but it ! as no ause for on ern. >raba, er radled his arm((the same arm that had #ulled me from the ar ! ith su h irresistible #o! er((and it ! as obvious that he ! as in #ain.) large s! elling had already formed near the elbo! . I , ne! it ! ould leave a nasty bruise, but nothing seemed to be bro, en.

5; oo, s li, e you ! ere ! rong, >rabu,5 I hided, smiling as I lit a igarette for him.

57rong, babaE5

5Getting us out of the ar in su h a #ani and all. Dou really had me going. I thought the damn thing ! as going to at h fire, but it loo, s o, ay.5

5@h,5 he re#lied softly, staring straight ahead. 5Dou thin, I ! as frightening for fireE -ot fire in the ar, ; in, but fire in the #eo#le. ; oo, , no! . See the #ubli , ho! they are.5

7e stood, stret hing the a he from shoulders and ! hi#(lashed ne ,s, and loo,ed to! ard the ! re , age some ten metres a! ay.)bout thirty #eo#le had gathered around the four rashed vehi les.)fe! of them ! ere hel#ing drivers and #assengers from the damaged ars. 2he rest huddled together in grou#s, gesturing ! ildly and shouting. 4ore #eo#le streamed to! ard the site from every dire tion. Drivers of other ars that had been blo ,ed from travelling further, left their vehi les and +oined the ro! d. 2he thirty #eo#le be ame fifty, eighty, then a hundred as ! e ! at hed.

@ne man ! as the entre of attention. It ! as his ar that had been trying to turn right, his ar ! e"d smashed into ! ith the bra, es on full lo ,. *e stood beside the ta' i, bello! ing ! ith rage. *e ! as a round(shouldered man, in his middle forties, ! earing a grey, otton safari suit that had 7% been tailored to a ommodate the e' travagant boast of his large #aun h. *is thinning hair ! as a! ry. 2he breast #o ,et of his suit had been torn, there ! as a ri# in his trousers, and he"d lost one

sandal. 2hat dishevelment ombined ! ith his theatri al gestures and #ersistent shouting to #resent a s#e ta le that seemed to be more enthralling, for the ro! d of onloo,ers, than the ! re , age of the ars. *is hand had been ut from the #alm to the ! rist.)s the staring ro! d gre! more silent, subdued by the drama, he smeared blood from the ! ound on his fa e and beat the redness into the grey of his suit, shouting all the ! hile.

\$ust then, some men arried a ! oman into the little lear s#a e around the man, and #la ed her on a #ie e of loth that ! as stret hed out on the ground for her. 2hey shouted instru tions to the ro! d, and in moments a ! ooden art a##eared, #ushed by bare(hested men ! earing only singlets and short lungis. 2he ! oman ! as lifted onto the art, her red sari gathered u# in folds and

! ra##ed about her legs. She may have been the man's ! ife((I
ouldn't be sure((but his rage suddenly gre! hysteri al. *e
seiled her roughly by the shoulders and shoo, her. *e #ulled at
her hair. *e a##ealed to the ro! d ! ith enormous, histrioni
gestures, flinging his arms ! ide and then stri, ing his o! n blood(
strea, ed fa e. 2hey ! ere the gestures of #antomime, the
e' aggerated simulations of silent films, and I ouldn't hel#
thin, ing they ! ere absurd and funny. Out the in+uries #eo#le had
sustained ! ere real, as ! ere the rumbling threats that surged
through the ever(in reasing ro! d.

)s the semi(ons ious ! oman ! as trundled a! ay on the humble art,
the man hurled himself at the door of the ta' i, ! ren hing it
o#en. 2he ro! d rea ted as one. 2hey dragged the da1ed and
in+ured ta' i driver from his ab in an instant and flung him on
the bonnet of the ar. *e raised his arms in feeble #leading, but
a do1en, t! enty, fifty hands #un hed and tore at him. Olo! s
drummed on his fa e, hest, stoma h, and groin. 9ingernails
s rat hed and ri##ed, tearing his mouth o#en on one side almost
to the ear, and shredding his shirt to rags.

It ha##ened in se onds. I told myself, as I ! at hed the beating,
that it ! as all too fast, that I ! as da1ed, and there ! as no time
to rea t. 7hat ! e all o! ardi e is often +ust another name for
being ta, en by sur#rise, and ourage is seldom any better than
sim#ly being ! ell #re#ared.)nd I might've done more, I might've
done something, anything, if it had ha##ened in)ustralia. It's
not your ountry, I told myself, as I ! at hed the 71
beating. It's not your ulture ...

Out there ! as another thought, dar, and se ret then, and all too
lear to me no! : the man ! as an idiot, an insulting and
belligerent idiot, ! hose re , less stu#idity had ris, ed >raba, er's
life and mine.) s#linter of s#ite had #ier ed my heart ! hen the
ro! d turned on him, and at least some small #arti le of their
revenge((a blo! or a shout or a shove((! as my o! n. *el#less,
raven, ashamed, I did nothing.

57 e've got to do something ...5 I said lamely.

5/nough #eo#le are doing, baba,5 >raba, er re#lied.

5-o, I mean, ! e've got to ... an't ! e hel# him, someho! E5

59or this fello! is no hel#ing,5 he sighed. 5-o! you see it, ;in.

) idents is very bad business in Oombay. Oetter you get out of that ar, or ta' i, or ! hat is it you are in, very, very =ui , ly.

2he #ubli are not having #atien e for su h business. See no! , it is too late for that fello! .5

2he beating ! as s! ift, but savage. Olood streamed from many uts on the man's fa e and na, ed torso.)t a signal, #er eived, someho! , through the ho! l and shrie, of the ro! d, the man ! as lifted u# and arried off at head height. *is legs ! ere #ressed together and stret hed out, held rigid by a do1en hands. *is arms ! ere s#layed out at right angles to his body and held fast. *is head lolled and fell ba , , the soft, ! et fla# of s, in hanging from hee, to +a! . *is eyes ! ere o#en, ons ious, staring ba , ! ard and u#side do! n: bla , eyes, s udded ! ith fear and imbe ile ho#e. 2raffi on the far side of the road #arted to let the #eo#le #ass, and the man slo! ly disa##eared, ru ified on the hands and shoulders of the ro! d.

58ome on, ;in. ;et's go. Dou are o, ayE5

5I'm all right,5 I mumbled, for ing myself to shuffle into ste# beside him. 4y self(assuran e had melted through mus le and bone to settle in my , nees. /a h ste# ! as leaden and ! illed. It ! asn't the violen e that had sha, en me. I'd seen ! orse, and ! ith far less #rovo ation, in #rison. It ! as, instead, the too(sudden olla#se of my stilted om#la en ies. 2he ! ee, s of the ity I'd thought I ! as beginning to , no! ((the Oombay of tem#les, ba1aars, restaurants, and ne! friends((had indered in the fires of that #ubli rage.

57hat ... ! hat are they going to do ! ith himE5

52hey ! ill ta,e him to #oli e, I thin, so. Oehind 8ra! ford 4ar, et
is one #oli e station, for this area. 4aybe he ! ill have the lu ,
(maybe 7F
alive, he ! ill rea h there. 4aybe not. *e has a very =ui , ly
<arma, this fello! .5

5Dou've seen this beforeE5

5@h, many times, ; inbaba. Sometimes, I drive it my ousin
Shantu's ta' i. I have seen so many angry #ubli s. 2hat is ! hy I
! as getting so afraid for you, and for my good self also.5

57hy does it ha##en li, e thatE 7hy did they get so ra1y about
itE5

52hat is nobody , no! s, ; in,5 >raba, er shrugged, =ui , ening his
#a e a little.

57ait a minute,5 I #aused, slo! ing him ! ith a hand to his
shoulder. 57here are ! e goingE5

5Still going for the tour, isn't itE5

5I thought ... maybe ... you ! ant to all it off, for today.5

58alling off ! hyE 7e have it a real and full deal to see,
; inbaba. So, let"s go, naE5

5Out ! hat about your armE Don't you ! ant to get it seen toE5

5-o #roblem this arms, ; in. 9or last of the touring, ! e ! ill have
some ! his, y drin, s in a terrible #la e I , no! . 2hat ! ill be a
good medi ine. So ome on, let"s go no! , baba.5

Well, okay, if you say so. Out! Here going the other way,
weren't they?

Still going the other way, baba, >raba, he replied with some
urgency. Out first going this way only because there is a
telephone, at the station. I must call my cousin, or, going to
Sunshine restaurant, as the dishes! A young boy. *He is wanting a
taxi (driving job, for his brother, Suresh, and I must give it the
number and boss (name of the driver, no longer with the phone.
That fellow's boss will be needing a new driver no longer, and he must
hurry for such a good chance, isn't it?

>raba, he made that call. Seconds later, he continued his tour of
the dark side of the city without a heartbeat of hesitation, in
another taxi, as if nothing had happened. - or did he ever raise
the matter with me again. When I occasionally spoke of it, he
responded with a shrug, or some bland comment about our good luck,
in avoiding serious injury. For him, the incident was like a
brief in a night club, or a clash of rival supporters at a
football match (commonplace and unremarkable, unless you happen
to be in the centre of it.

Out for me that sudden, savage, bewildering riot, the sight of
that taxi (7G
driver floating away on a rickling wave of hands, shoulders, and
heads as a turning point.) None understanding emerged from it. I
suddenly realised that if I wanted to stay there, in Bombay, the
city I'd already fallen in love with, I had to change. I had to
get involved. The city wouldn't let me be a spectator, aloof and
apart. If I wanted to stay, I had to expect that she would drag
me into the river of her nature, and her rage. Sooner or later,
I, nevertheless, I would have to step off the pavement and into the bloody
road, and put my body on the line.

And with the seed of that resolve, born in that convulsion and
moment, >raba, he's dark, circuit of the city began. When he
resumed our tour, he took me to a slave market not far from
Dongri, an inner suburb famous for its mosques, ba1aars, and

restaurants specialising in 4ughlai dishes. The main road became
streets and the streets became lanes and, when those crowded too
narrow for the traffic to negotiate, they left the vehicles jammed
together in the sinuous business of the roads. The further they
travelled into the 8atiline lanes, the more they lost of the day,
the year, the very age in which they lived. Their automobiles and then
their scooters disappeared, the air became clearer, sharper, without the
stains of smokes and perfumes undulled by the diesel and petrol
fumes prevalent elsewhere. Traffic noise faded, eased, and was
replaced by street sound (a class of children reciting verses
from the Koran in a little courtyard, the clink and scrape of
stone on stone, as they mended ground smokes in doorways and the
whining optimism of cries from their neighbours, mattress
fluffers, stove repairers, and other householders. They were these
sounds, everywhere, layered with voice and hand.

At one turn in the little alleyways they passed a long metal railing,
where bicycles were parked. From then on, even those simple
mahines vanished. Goods were transported by bearers with
enormous bundles on their heads. One burden usually carried by
all, the thudding pressure of the Bombay sun, was lifted from us:
the lanes were dark, cool, shadowless. Although only three and at
most four storeys tall, the buildings leaned in upon the winding
pathways, and the sky was reduced to a thin brushstroke of pale
blue.

The buildings themselves were ancient and dilapidated. Stone
facades, which had once been splendid and impressive, were
rumbling, grimed, and battered with hazardous necessity. *ere and
there, small balconies jutted out to meet one another overhead,
so close that neighbours could hear
each other's voices and pass things with an outstretched hand. Glimpses
inside the houses showed unadorned walls and sagging staircases.
Many ground-floor windows were held open to reveal makeshift
shops for the sale of sweets, cigarettes, groceries, vegetables,
and utensils. It was clear that the plumbing was rudimentary,

! here it ! as onne ted at all. 7e #assed several #la es ! here ! omen gathered ! ith metal or lay #ots to olle t ! ater from a single, outside ta#.)nd s, eined over all the buildings li, e metal ob! ebs ! ere om#li ated tra eries of ele tri al onduits and ! ires, as if even that symbol and sour e of the modern age and its #o! er ! as no more than a fragile, tem#orary net that might be s! e#t a! ay by a rough gesture.

\$ust as the ontra ted lanes seemed, ! ith every t! ist and turn, to belong to another age, so too did the a##earan e of the #eo#le hange as ! e moved dee#er into the ma1e. I sa! less and less of the ! estern(style otton shirts and trousers, so ommon every! here else in the ity, until finally those fashions disa##eared from all but the youngest hildren. Instead, the men ! ore traditional garments of olourful diversity. 2here ! ere long sil, shirts that des ended to the ,nee and ! ere fastened ! ith #earl buttons, from ne , to ! aist6 , aftan robes in #lain olours or stri#es6 hooded loa, s that resembled the garb of mon, s6 and

an endless variety of s, ull a#s, in ! hite or beaded olours, and turbans in yello! , red, and ele tri blue. 2he ! omen ! ere more ons#i uously be+e! elled, des#ite the indigen e of the =uarter, and ! hat those +e! els la , ed in money"s ! orth ! as found in the e' travagan e of their design. -o less #rominent ! ere aste mar, tattoos on some foreheads, hee, s, hands, and ! rists.)nd every bare feminine foot ! as gra ed by an, lets of silver bells and oiled brass toe(rings).

It ! as as if all of those hundreds of #eo#le ! ere ostumed for home, for themselves, not for the #ubli #romenades. It ! as as if they ! ere safe, there, to lothe themselves in tradition and dis#lay.)nd the streets ! ere lean. 2he buildings ! ere ra , ed and smeared, the onstri ted #assage! ays ! ere ro! ded ! ith goats, hi , ens, dogs, and #eo#le, and ea h thin fa e sho! ed the shade and hollo! s of #enury, but the streets and the #eo#le ! ere stainlessly, s ru#ulously lean.

We turned then into more anient alleyways, so narrow that two persons passed one another only with difficulty. People stepped into doorway, waiting for us to pass, as if they were about to move on. The passages had been

covered with false ceilings and stretched awnings, and in the darkness it was not possible to see more than a few metres in front or behind. I kept my eyes on the guide, fearful that I would not find my way out alone. The little guide turned often, drawing my attention to a loose stone in the path ahead, or a step, or some obstruction overhead. On entering on those streets, I lost my orientation. My mental map of the city turned, blurred, faded, and I could not guess at the direction of the sea, or the major landmarks, the Gopuram, the station, the market, etc. I had passed on our way to the quarter. I felt myself to be so deep in the flow and reflux of those narrow lanes, so smothered by the intimacy of open doors and perfumed bodies, that it seemed I was walking inside the buildings, inside the very homes, rather than between them.

We came upon a stall where a man in a stained cotton vest stirred battered foods frying in a dish of bubbling oil. The blue flames of his kerosene stove, eerie and laustral, provided the only light. A motion haunted his face. It was anguish, some kind of anguish, and the dull, stoic anger that hangs in the eyes of the repetitive, ill-served. The guide moved past him and into the darkness beyond. As I approached the man he turned to face me, and his eyes met mine. For a moment, the full force of his blue-lit anger was directed at me.

Long years after that day, the Afghan guerrillas I came to know as friends, on a mountain near the siege of Kandahar, talked for hours about Indian films and their favourite Bollywood movie stars. Indian actors are the greatest in the world, one of them said once, because Indian people know how to shout with their eyes. That man, street-fried foods too, stared at me, with shouting eyes, and stopped me as surely as if he had pushed a hand

into my chest. I couldn't move. In my open eyes, there were words
((I'm sorry, I'm sorry that you have to do this! or, I'm sorry
that your world, your life, is so hot and dark, and unremembered,
I'm sorry that I'm intruding ...

Still staring at me, he grasped the handles of his dish. For one,
thudding heartbeats, I was gripped by the ridiculous,
terrifying thought that he was going through the boiling oil in
my face. Near her, ed at my feet and I moved, easing my way past
him with my hands flat against the damp surface of the stone
wall. Two steps beyond him, my foot struck a rail, in the path
and I stumbled, and fell, dragging another man down with me. *e
was an elderly man, thin and frail. I could feel the impact,
basement of his bones through his coarse tunic. We fell heavily,
landing near the

the open entrance to a house, and the old man struck his head. I
slammed to my feet, slipping and sliding on a pile of shifting
stones. I tried to help the man to stand, but there was an
elderly woman who squatted on her haunches there, in the open
doorway, and she slapped at my hands, warning me away. I
apologised in English, struggling to find the words for I'm sorry
in Hindi (What are they? >raba, she taught me the words ... 4u+ha, o
afsoos hain ... that's it (I said it three, four times. In that
dark, quiet corridor between the buildings, the words echoed like
a drum, and's prayer in an empty hallway.

The old man moaned quietly, slouching in the doorway. The woman
hit his face with a corner of her headscarf, and held the cloth
out for me to see the bright stain of blood. She said nothing,
but her grin, faded face as he raised it with a frown of contempt. With
that simple gesture, holding out the bloodstained cloth, she
seemed to be saying; oo, you stupid oaf, you great clumsy
barbarian, look! What you've done here ...

I felt choked by the heat, smothered by the darkness and the
strangeness of the place. The walls seemed to press upon my
hands, as if only my arms prevented them from closing in on me
altogether. I backed away from the elderly couple, stumbling at

first, and then lunging headlong into the shadow (land of the tunnel street.) hand reached out to grab at my shoulder. It was as gentle touch, but I almost shouted out loud.

"This! ay, baba," >raba, er said, laughing quietly. "Here are you taking yourself? This! ay only.) long this passage now, and you must be careful of your feet to the outside because too much dirty it is, in the middle of the passages, o, ay!"

"I was standing in the entrance to a narrow passage formed between the blank walls of the buildings. feeble light gleamed in the teeth and eyes of his smile, but beyond him was only blackness. I turned his back to me, spreading his feet out until they touched the walls, braced himself with his hands, and then shuffled off, sliding his feet along the walls in small, dragging steps. I expected him to follow. I hesitated, but when the arrival of a bright star of

his shuffling form melted in the darkness and vanished, I too put my feet out against the walls and shambled after him.

I could hear >raba, er ahead of me, but it was so dark that I couldn't see him. One foot strayed from the edge of the wall, and my boot slipped into a muddy slime that rested in the centre of the path.) foul smell rose up from that vicious ooze, and I pressed my feet hard against the

walls, sliding them along in short steps. Something squat and heavy slithered past me, rasping its thin body against my boot. Seconds later, another and then a third creature added past me in the darkness, rolling heavy flesh over the toes of my boots.

">raba! bello! ed, not, no! ing ho! far ahead of me he was. Here are things in here with us!"

"Things, baba!"

"On the ground! Something's crawling on my feet! Something heavy!"

Only rats are crawling here, ; in. There are no things.

Rats are you kidding? These things are as big as bull terriers. Jesus, this is some tour, my friend!

One problem big rats, ; in, > raba, er ans! ered quietly from the dark, mess in front of me. Big rats are friendly fellows, not making mischief for the #eo#le. If you don't attack them. Only one thing is making them bite and scratch and such things.

What's that, for God's sake?

Shouting, baba, he replied softly. They don't like the loud voices.

Oh, great! -o! you tell me, I roared. Is it much further? This is starting to give me the creeps and

*e'd stopped, and I bumped into him, pressing him against the panelled surface of a wooden door.

We are here, he whispered, reaching out to, no, ! ith a 'om#le' series of taps and pauses. There ! as a scrape and a lunge, as a heavy bolt slid free, and then the door swung open, dazing us ! ith sudden bright light. > raba, er grasped my sleeve and dragged me ! ith him. I ui , ly, ; in. -o big rats allowed inside!

We stepped inside a small chamber, hemmed in by blankets and lit from high above by a rasil, a tangle of s, y. I could hear voices from deeper ! ithin the ul(de(sa .) huge man slammed the gate shut. *e put his back to it and faced us ! ith a snarl, teeth bared. > raba, er began to talk, at once, #lating him ! ith soft words and fascinating gestures. The man shook his head repeatedly,

intermittently regularly to say _no, no, no.

*e to! ered over me. I ! as standing so lose to him that I ould feel the breath from his ! ide nostrils, the sound of it li, e ! ind ! histling through aves on a ro , y shore. *is hair ! as very short, e' #osing ears as large and nubbed as a bo' er's #ra ti e mitts. *is s=uare fa e seemed to be animated by more strong muscle tissue than the average man has in

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his ba , . *is hest, as ! ide as I ! as from shoulder to shoulder, rose and fell ! ith ea h breath, and rested u#on an immense belly. 2he fine dagger(line of his moustache a entuated his s o! I, and he loo, ed at me ! ith su h undiluted loathing that a little #rayer unfurled itself in my mind. >lease God, don't ma, e me fight this man.

*e raised the #arms of his hands to sto# >raba, er's ! heedling a+olery. 2hey ! ere huge hands, gnarled and alloused enough to s ra#e the barnacles off the side of a dry(do , ed oil tan, er.

5*e says ! e are not allo! ed inside,5 >raba, er e' #lained.

57ell,5 I re#lied, rea hing #ast the man and attem#ting ! ith unford enthusiasm to o#en the door, 5you an't say ! e didn't try.5

5-o, no, ; inB5 >raba, er sto##ed me. 57e must argue ! ith him about this matter.5

2he big man folded his arms, stret hing the seams of his , ha, i shirt ! ith little ri##les of sound.

5I don't thin, that's su h a good idea,5 I mumbled, under a tight smile.

58ertainly it isB5 >raba, er insisted. 52ourists are not allo! ed here, or to any of the other #eo#le(mar, ets, but I have told him that you are not one of these tourist fello! s. I have told him that you have learned the 4arathi language. *e does not believe me. 2hat is our #roblem only. *e doesn't believe any foreigner

! ill s#ea, 4arathi. Dou must for that reason s#ea, it a little
4arathi for him. Dou ! ill see. *e ! ill allo! us inside.5

5l only , no! about t! enty ! ords of 4arathi, >rabu.5

5-o #roblem t! enty ! ords, baba. \$ust ma, e a begin. Dou ! ill see.
2ell him your name.5

54y nameE5

5Des, li, e I taught it to you. -ot in *indi, but in 4arathi.
@, ay, +ust begin ...5

5)h, ah, ma1a nao ; in ahey,5 I muttered, un ertainly. 4y name is

; in.

50aa#reeB5 the big man gas#ed, his eyes ! ide ! ith genuine
sur#rise. Good ; ordB

/n ouraged, I tried a fe! more of the #hrases >raba, er had taught
me during the last fe! ! ee, s.

54a1a Desh - e! . ealand ahey.)ta me 8olabala rahella ahey.5 4y
ountry is -e! . ealand. I am living in 8olaba no! .

5_<ai _garam _mad" hudB5 he roared, smiling for the first time.

2he #hrase literally means, 7hat a hot motherfu , erB It"s so
fre=uently and inventively 79

a##lied in onversation, ho! ever, that it an be loosely
translated as Son of a gunB

2he giant gras#ed my shoulder, s=uee1ing it ! ith amiable
severity.

I ran through the range of my 4arathi #hrases, beginning ! ith the
first ! ords I"d as, ed >raba, er to tea h me((I love your ountry

very much (and on luding ! ith a re=uest I ! as often for ed to
ma, e in restaurants, but ! hi h must've seemed s#e ta ularly
ina##ro#riate in the little al ove: >lease turn off the fan,
! hile I am eating my sou# ...

5/nough no! , baba,5 >raba, er gurgled through his ! ide grin. 7hen
I fell silent, the big man s#o, e s! iftly and e' uberantly.
>raba, er translated for him, nodding and gesturing e' #ressively
! ith his hands. 5*e says he is Oombay #oli eman, and his name is
&inod.5

5*e"s a o#E5

5@h yes, ; in.) #oli e(o#, he is.5

5Do the o#s run this #la eE5

5@h, no. 2his is #art(time ! or, only. *e says he is so very, very
ha##y to meet you ...

5*e says you are the first gora he ever met ! ho an s#ea, 4arathi
...

5*e says some foreigners s#ea, *indi, but nobody foreigner an
s#ea, 4arathi ...

5*e says 4arathi is his language. *is native #la e is >une ...

5*e says they s#ea, it a very #ure 4arathi in >une, and you must
go there to hear it ...

5*e says he is too ha##yß Dou are li, e a son to him ...

5*e says you must ome to his house, and eat foods and meet his
family ...

5*e says that ! ill be one hundred ru#ees.5

57 hat ! as thatE5

50a, sheesh, ; in. 2o go inside. @ne hundred ru#ees, it is. >ay him no! .5

5@h, sure.5 I fumbled a fe! notes from my #o , et, #eeled off one hundred ru#ees, and handed it over. 2here"s a s#e ial sleight of hand that"s #e uliar to #oli emen: the on+uring tri , that #alms and on eals ban, notes ! ith a s, ill that e' #erien ed shell(game s! indlers envy. 2he big man olle ted the money ! ith a t! o(handed handsha, e, smeared a #alm a ross his hest as if brushing a! ay rumb after eating a sand! i h, and then s rat hed at his nose ! ith #ra tised inno en e. 2he money had vanished. *e #ointed along the narro! orridor. 7e ! ere free to enter. 8%

2! o shar# turns and a do1en #a es beyond the gate and its shaft of bright light, ! e ame u#on a , ind of ourtyard. Several men sat on rough ! ooden ben hes, or stood in tal, ing grou#s of t! o or three. Some ! ere)rabs, dressed in loose, otton robes and , affiyehs.)n Indian boy moved among them, serving bla , tea in long glasses. Some of the men loo, ed at >raba, er and me ! ith fro! ning uriosity. 7hen >raba, er smiled ! idely and ! aved a greeting they turned a! ay, on entrating their attention on e more on their onversation. @ asionally, one or another of them loo, ed u# to ins#e t a grou# of hildren ! ho sat together on a long ! ooden ben h beneath a ragged anvas a! ning.

It ! as dar, er there, after the bright light of the entran e hamber.) #at h! or, of anvas s ra#s #rovided an uneven over that s reened out most of the s, y. Olan, bro! n and magenta ! alls rose u# all around us. 2he fe! ! indo! s I ould see, through tears in the anvas overings, ! ere boarded over. -ot a real ourtyard, the roughly s=uare s#a e seemed un#lanned, a , ind of mista, e, an almost forgotten ar hite tural a ident formed by building and rebuilding on the ruins of other stru tures ! ithin the ongested blo , . 2he ground ! as #aved ! ith ha#ha1ard olle tions of tiles that had on e been the floors of , it hens and bathrooms. 2! o

na, ed bulbs, strange fruit on the ! ithered vines of bare ! ires,
#rovided the #oor light.

7e moved to a =uiet orner, a e#ted tea ! hen it ! as offered, and
si##ed it in silen e for a ! hile. 2hen, s#ea, ing =uietly and
slo! ly, >raba, er told me about the #la e he alled the #eo#le(
mar, et. 2he hildren sitting beneath the tattered ano#y ! ere
slaves. 2hey"d ome from the y lone in 7est Oengal, the drought
in @rissa, the holera e#idemi in *aryana, the se ssessionist
fighting in >un+ab. Sour ed in alamity, re ruited and #ur hased
by s outs, the hildren had +ourneyed to Oombay by train, often
alone, through all the many hundreds of , ilometres.

2he men gathered in the ourtyard ! ere #ur hasers or agents.
)lthough they seemed to e' #ress no great interest, tal, ing
amongst themselves and for the most #art ignoring the hildren on
the ! ooden ben h, >raba, er assured me that a restrained haggling
! as ta, ing #la e, and that bargains ! ere being stru , , even as ! e
! at hed.

2he hildren ! ere thin, vulnerable, and small. 2! o of them sat
! ith their four hands bun hed together in a beehive(ball. @ne
hild embra ed another ! ithin the huddle of a #rote tive arm.)ll
of them stared out at 81
the ! ell(fed, ! ell(lothed #ur hasers and agents, follo! ing every
hange of e' #ression or em#hati gesture of their be+e! elled
hands.)nd the eyes of those hildren ! ere li, e the bla , gleam
at the bottom of a s! eet! ater ! ell.

7hat does it ta, e to harden a man"s heartE *o! ould I see that
#la e, loo, at those hildren, and not #ut a sto# to itE 7hy
didn't I onta t the authoritiesE 7hy didn't I get a gun, and #ut
a sto# to it myselfE 2he ans! er to that, li, e the ans! ers to all
the big =uestions, ame in many #arts. I ! as a ! anted man, a
hunted riminal, living on the run. 8onta ting #oli e or
government authorities ! asn't an o#tion for me. I ! as a stranger
in that strange land: it ! asn't my ountry, and it ! asn't my

ulture. I had to , no! more. I had to , no! the language that ! as s#o, en, at the very least, before I ould #resume to interfere.)nd I'd learned, the hard ! ay, that sometimes, even ! ith the #urest intentions, ! e ma, e things ! orse ! hen ! e do our best to ma, e things better. If I ame ba , ! ith a gun and sto##ed the slave mar, et there, in that roo, ed on rete ma1e, it ! ould start u# again some! here else. Stranger that I ! as, I , ne! that mu h.)nd maybe the ne! slave mar, et, in a different #la e, ! ould be ! orse. I ! as hel#less to sto# it, and I , ne! it.

7hat I didn't , no! then, and ! hat troubled me for a long time after that Day of the Slaves, ! as ho! I ould be there, and loo, at the hildren, and not be rushed by it. I realised, mu h later, that a #art of the ans! er lay in the)ustralian #rison, and the men I'd met there. Some of those men, too many of them, ! ere serving their fourth or fifth #rison senten es. 4any of them had begun their im#risonment in reform s hools((Ooys" *omes, they ! ere alled, and Douth 2raining 8entres((! hen they ! ere no older than those Indian slave hildren. Some of them had been beaten, starved, and lo , ed in solitary onfinement. Some of them, too many of them, had been se' ually abused.)s, any man ! ith a long(enough e' #erien e of #risons, and he'll tell you that all it ta, es to harden a man"s heart is a system of +usti e.

)nd strange and shameful as it is to admit it, I ! as glad that something, someone, some e' #erien e had flinted my heart. 2hat hard stone ! ithin my hest ! as all that #rote ted me from those first sounds and images of >raba, er"s dar, tour of the ity.

*ands la##ed in brittle e hoes, and a little girl stood u# from

the ben h to sing and dan e. It ! as a love song from a #o#ular *indi movie. I 8F

heard it many times, hundreds of times, during the follo! ing years, and it al! ays reminded me of that hild, ten years old, and her sur#risingly strong, high, thin voi e. She s! ayed her hi#s, #ushing u# her non(e' istent breasts in a hild"s imitation

of a tem#tress burles=ue, and ne! interest =uir, ed the heads of the #ur hasers and agents.

>raba, er #laid the &irgil. *is soft voi e ! as easeless, e' #laining all that ! e sa! , and all that he , ne! . *e told me that the hildren ! ould've died, if they hadn't found their ! ay to the #eo#le(mar, et. >rofessional re ruiters, , no! n as talent s outs, roamed from one atastro#he to another, from drought to earth=ua, e to flood. Starving #arents, ! ho"d already ! at hed one or more of their hildren si , en, and die, blessed the s outs, , neeling to tou h their feet. 2hey begged them to buy a son or a daughter, so that at least that one hild ! ould live.

2he boys on sale there ! ere destined to ! or, as amel +o , eys in Saudi)rabia, <u! ait, and other Gulf States. Some ! ould be maimed in the amel ra es that #rovided afternoon entertainment for the ri h shei, s, >raba, er said. Some ! ould die. 2he survivors, gro! n too tall to ride in the ra es, ! ere often abandoned to fend for themselves. 2he girls ! ould ! or, in households throughout the 4iddle /ast. Some of them ! ould be used for se' .

Out they ! ere alive, >raba, er said, those boys and girls. 2hey ! ere the lu , y ones. 9or every hild ! ho #assed through the #eo#le(mar, et there ! ere a hundred others, or more, ! ho"d starved in unutterable agonies, and ! ere dead.

2he starving, the dead, the slaves.)nd through it all, the #urr and rustle of >raba, er's voi e. 2here's a truth that's dee#er than e' #erien e. It's beyond ! hat ! e see, or even ! hat ! e feel. It's an order of truth that se#arates the #rofound from the merely lever, and the reality from the #er e#tion. 7e're hel#less, usually, in the fa e of it6 and the ost of , no! ing it, li, e the ost of , no! ing love, is sometimes greater than any heart ! ould ! illingly #ay. It doesn't al! ays hel# us to love the ! orld, but it does #revent us from hating the ! orld.)nd the only ! ay to , no! that truth is to share it, from heart to heart, +ust as >raba, er told it to me, +ust as I'm telling it to you no! .

CHAPTER FOUR

5Do you , no! the Oorsalino hat testE5

52he ! hatE5

52he Oorsalino hat test. It is the test that reveals ! hether a

hat is a genuine Oorsalino, or an inferior imitator. Dou , no!
about the Oorsalino, nonE5

5- o, I an't say I do.5

5)aaaah,5 Didier smiled. 2he smile ! as om#osed of one #art
sur#rise, one #art mis hief, and one #art ontem#t. Someho! ,
those elements ombined in an effe t that ! as disarmingly
harming. *e leaned slightly for! ard and in lined his head to one
side, his bla , urly hair sha,ing as if to em#hasise the #oints
in his e' #lanation. 52he Oorsalino is a garment of the first and
finest =uality. It is believed by many, and myself in luded, to
be the most outstanding gentleman"s head overing ever made.5

*is hands sha#ed an imaginary hat on his head.

5It is ! ide(brimmed, in bla , or ! hite, and made from the furs of
the la#in.5

5So, it"s +ust a hat,5 I added, in ! hat I thought to be an
agreeable tone. 57e"re tal,ing about a rabbit(fur hat.5

Didier ! as outraged.

5\$ust a hatE @h, no, my friendB 2he Oorsalino is more than +ust a
hat. 2he Oorsalino is a ! or, of artB It is brushed ten thousand
times, by hand, before it is sold. It ! as the style e' #ression of
first hoi e by dis erning 9ren h and Italian gangsters in 4ilan

and 4arseilles for many de ades. 2he very name of Oorsalino be ame a synonyme for gangsters. 2he ! ild young men of the under! orld of 4ilano and 4arseilles ! ere alled Oorsalinos. 2hose ! ere the days ! hen gangsters had some style. 2hey understood that if you ! ere to live as an outla! and steal and shoot #eo#le for a living, you had a res#onsibility to dress ! ith some elegan e. Isn"t it soE5 8H

5It"s the least they ould do,5 I agreed, smiling.

5Out of ourseß -o! , sadly, there is all attitude and no style. It is the mar, of the age in ! hi h ! e live that the style be omes the attitude, instead of the attitude be oming the style.5

*e #aused, #ermitting me a moment to a , no! ledge the turn of #hrase.

5)nd so,5 he ontinued, 5the test of a real Oorsalino hat is to roll it into a ylinder, roll it u# into a very tight tube, and #ass it through a ! edding ring. If it emerges from this test ! ithout #ermanent reases, and if it s#rings ba , to its original sha#e, and if it is not damaged in the e' #erien e, it is a genuine Oorsalino.5

5)nd you"re saying ...5

5\$ust soß5 Didier shouted, slamming a fist do! n on the table.

7e ! ere sitting in ; eo#old"s, near the s=uare ar h of the 8ause! ay doors, at eight o" lo , . Some foreigners at the ne' t table turned their heads at the noisy outburst, but the staff and the regulars ignored the 9ren hman. Didier had been eating and drin,ing and e' #ostulating at ; eo#old"s for nine years. 2hey all , ne! there ! as a line you ould ross ! ith him, a limit to his toleran e, and he ! as a dangerous man if you rossed it. 2hey also , ne! that the line ! asn"t dra! n in the soft sand of his o! n

life or beliefs or feelings. Didier's line ! as dra! n through the hearts of the #eo#le he loved. If you hurt them, in any ! ay, you roused him to a old and deadly rage. Out nothing anyone said or did to him, short of a tual bodily harm, ever really offended or angered him.

58omme J ab 2hat is my #ointB Dour little friend, >raba, er, has #ut you through the hat test. *e rolled you into a tube, and dragged you through the ! edding ring, to see if you are a real Oorsalino or not. 2hat ! as his #ur#ose in ta, ing you on the tour of the bad sights and sounds of the ity. It ! as a Oorsalino test.5

I si##ed my offee in silen e, , no! ing that he ! as right((>raba, er's dar, tour had been a , ind of test((but not ! illing to give Didier the tro#hy of on eding the #oint.

2he evening ro! d of tourists from Germany, S! it1erland, 9ran e, /ngland, -or! ay,)meri a, \$a#an, and a do1en other ountries thinned out, giving ! ay to the night ro! d of Indians and e' #atriates ! ho alled Oombay home. 2he lo als re laimed #la es li, e ; eo#old"s, the 4o ambo, 8afe 4ondegar, and the ; ight of)sia every night, ! hen the tourists 8? sought the safety of their hotels.

5If it ! as a test,5 I did at last on ede, 5he must've given me a #ass. *e invited me to go ! ith him to visit his family, in his village in the north of the state.5

Didier raised his eyebrow! s in theatri al sur#rise.

59or ho! longE5

5I don't , no! .) ou#le of months, I thin, . 4aybe more.5

5)h, then it is so,5 he on luded. 5Dour little friend is beginning to love you.5

I think, that's putting it a bit strong, I objected, frowning.

— No, no, you do not understand. You must be careful, here, with the real affection of those you meet. This is not like any other place. This is India. Everyone who comes here falls in love (most of us fall in love many times over.) And the Indians, they love

most of all. Our little friend may be beginning to love you. There is nothing strange in this. I say it from a long experience of this country, and especially of this city. It happens often, and easily, for the Indians. That is how they manage to live together, a billion of them, in reasonable ease. They are not perfect, of course. They, no! how! to fight and lie and cheat each other, and all the things that all of us do. Out more than any other people in the world, the Indians, no! how! to love one another.

She paused to light a cigarette, and then lit it like a little flagpole until the waiter noticed him and nodded to his request for another glass of vodka.

India is about sixty times the size of France, he went on, as the glass of alcohol and a bottle of hurried snacks arrived at our table. Out it has almost twenty times the population. Twenty times! Believe me, if there were a billion Frenchmen living in such a crowded space, there would be rivers of blood. Rivers of blood! And, as everyone knows, the French are the most civilized people in Europe. Indeed, in the whole world. — No, no, without love, India would be impossible.

Stettin joined us at our table, sitting to my left.

What are you on about now, Didier, you bastard! She asked, domineeringly, her South Indian accent giving the first syllable of the last word an explosive ring.

She was just telling me that the French are the most civilized

#eo#le in the ! orld.5 8C

5) s all the ! orld , no! s,5 he added.

57hen you #rodu e a Sha, es#eare, out of your villes and vineyards, mate, I might +ust agree ! ith you,5 ; ettie murmured through a smile that seemed to be ! arm and ondes ending in e=ual #arts.

54y dear, #lease do not thin, that I disres#e t your Sha, es#eare,5 Didier ounterred, laughing ha##ily. 5I love the /nglish language, be ause so mu h of it is 9ren h.5

52ou he,5 I grinned, 5as ! e say in /nglish.5

Alla and 4odena arrived at that moment, and sat do! n. Alla ! as dressed for ! or, in a small, tight, bla , , halter(ne , dress, fishnet sto , ings, and stiletto(heel shoes. She ! ore eye(da11ling fa, e diamonds at her throat and ears. 2he ontrast bet! een her lothing and ; ettie"s ! as star, . ; ettie ! ore a fine, bone(oloured bro ade +a , et over loose, dar, (bro! n satin ulottes, and boots. Det the fa es of the t! o ! omen #rodu ed the strongest and most une' #e ted ontrast. ; ettie"s ga1e ! as sedu tive, dire t, self(assured, and s#ar, ling ! ith ironies and se rets,

! hile Alla"s ! ide blue eyes, for all the ma, e(u# and lothing of her #rofessional se' uality, sho! ed nothing but inno en e((honest, va uous inno en e.

5Dou are forbidden to s#ea, to me, Didier,5 Alla said at on e, #outing in onsolably. 5I have had a very disagreeable time ! ith 9ederi o((three hours((and it is all your fault.5

5OahB5 Didier s#at out. 59ederi oB5

5@h,5 ; ettie +oined in, ma, ing three long sounds out of one. 5Something"s ha##ened to the beautiful young 9ederi o, has itE

8ome on, Alla me darlin", let"s have all the gossi#.

5_- a _+a, 9ederi o has got a religion, and he is driving me ra1y about it, and it is all Didier"s fault.

5DesB5 Didier added, learly disgusted. 59ederi o has found religion. It is a tragedy. *e no longer drin, s or smo, es or ta, es drugs.)nd of course he ! ill not have se' ! ith anyone((not even ! ith himselfB It is an a##alling ! aste of talent. 2he man ! as a genius of the orru#tions, my finest student, my master! or, . It is maddening. *e is no! a good man, in the very ! orst sense of the ! ord.

57ell, you ! in a fe! , you lose a fe! ,5 ;ettie sighed ! ith mo , sym#athy. 5Dou mustn"t let it get you do! n, Didier. 2here"ll be other fish for you to fry and gobble u#.

5Dour sym#athy should be for me,5 Alla hided. 59ederi o ame from 87

Didier in su h a bad mood yesterday, he ! as at my door today in tears. S heisseB 7ir, li hB 9or three hours he ried and he raved at me about being born again. In the end I felt so sorry for him. It ! as only ! ith a great suffering that I let 4odena thro! him and his bible boo, s onto the street. It"s all your fault, Didier, and I ! ill ta, e the longest time to forgive you for it.

59anati s,5 Didier mused, ignoring the rebu, e, 5al! ays seem to have the same s rubbed and staring loo, about them. 2hey have the loo, of #eo#le ! ho do not masturbate, but ! ho thin, about it almost all the time.

5I really do love you, you , no! , Didier,5 ;ettie stuttered, through her bubbling laughter. 5/ven if you are a des#i able toad of a man.

5-o, you love him be ause he is a des#i able toe of a man,5 Alla de lared.

What's to do, love, not to do, ; ettie corre ted patiently, still laughing. *e's a toad of a man, not a toe of a man.) desirable toe ! ouldn't make any sense at all, no! ! ould it? e ! ouldn't love him or hate him just for being a toe of a man, ! ould ! e,

darling((even if ! e , ne! ! hat it meant?

I'm not so good ! ith the /nglish +o, es, you , no! that, ; ettie, Alla #ersisted. Out I thin, he _is a big, ugly, hairy toe of a man.

I assure you, Didier #rotested, that my toes((and my feet, for that matter((are e' e#tionally beautiful.

Carla, Aurilio, and an Indian man in his early thirties ! al, ed in from the busy night street. Aurilio and Odena +oined a second table to ours, and then the eight of us ordered drinks and food.

; in, ; ettie, this is my friend, &i, ram >atel, Carla announced, ! hen there ! as a moment of relative =uiet. *e came back , a couple of ! ee, s ago, after a long holiday in Denmark, , and I thin, you're the only t! o ! ho haven't met him.

; ettie and I introduced ourselves to the ne! omer, but my real attention ! as on Aurilio and Carla. *e sat beside her, o##osite me, and rested his hand on the ba , of her hair. *e leaned in close to her, and their heads almost touched ! hen they s#o, e.

There's a dar, feeling((less than hatred, but more than loathing ((that ugly men feel for handsome men. It's unreasonable and un+ustified, of course, but it's all! ays there, hiding in the long shadow! thro! n by envy. It ree#s out, into the light of your eyes, ! hen you're falling in love 88

! ith a beautiful ! oman. I loo, ed at Aurilio, and a little of that dar, feeling began in my heart. *is straight, ! hite teeth, smooth om#le' ion, and thi , , dar, hair turned me against him

more softly and surely than flames in his hearth might be done.

And Clara was beautiful: her hair, in a French roll, was shining like water running over black, river stones, and her green eyes were radiant with humor and pleasure. She wore a long-sleeved Indian salwar that reached to below her knees, where it met loose trousers in the same olive silk fabric.

I had a great time, year, the next summer, and as saying when my thoughts returned to the moment. Denmark is very hot, very cool. The people are very sophisticated. They're so funny, uncontrolled, I couldn't believe it. I went to a sauna in Copenhagen. It was a funny huge place, year, with a mixed set of people (with men and women, together, walking around starknude). Absolutely, totally naked. And nobody reacted at all. -ot even a flickering eye, year. Indian guys couldn't handle that. They'd be boiling, I tell you.

Were you boiling, and dear; ettie as, ed, softly.

Were you funny, kidding? I was the only guy in the place wearing a towel, and the only guy with a hard-on.

I don't understand, Alla said, when she stopped laughing. It was a flat statement (neither a complaint, nor a plea for further explanation).

*ey, I went there every day for three weeks, year, and continued. I thought that if I just spent enough time there, I'd get used to it, like all the super-cool Danes.

Get used to that? Alla asked.

and I frowned at her, bewildered, and then turned to ettie.

It was no good. It was useless. After three weeks, I still had to wear the towel. -o matter how often I went there, when I said

those bony bits going up and down, and side to side, I stiffened up. That's what I say! I'm too Indian for a lady like that.

It is the same for Indian women, I observed. When they are making love, it is not possible to be naked.

Well, that's not always true, I remember to mention, and anyway, it's the guys who are the problem here. Indian women are ready to change. Young Indian girls from middle-class families are used to change, yaar. They're educated, and they're ready for short hair, short dresses, and short love affairs. They're ready for it, but the guys are holding them back. The average Indian guy has a sexual maturity of about fourteen.

Well, tell me about it, I said.

Avita Singh had addressed our table moments before, and stood behind me while he made his observations about Indian women. With short, styled hair, and a pair of jeans and a white t-shirt bearing the emblem of the University, she was the living woman, the physical representation of what I had been saying. She was the real thing.

You're such a huddler, I said, taking a lady opposite him and on my right side. Don't say all this, but you're just as bad as all the rest. So, what do you treat your own sister, yaar, if she dares to wear jeans and a tight t-shirt?

Hey, I bought her that tight t-shirt, in London, last year, I protested.

But you still gave her bursts of grief when she wore it to the annual yatra, I said.

Well, how could I do that when she would want to wear it outside the apartment? He countered lamely, provoking laughter and

derision from the whole group. - one laughed harder than I, Ram himself.

I, Ram - as of average height and build, but average stature - just there, with those dark hair, thick, curly, black, hair framed a handsome, intelligent face. The bright and animated light brown eyes stared out confidently above a long, high nose and a sharp, immaculately trimmed mustache. He wore a dark suit, a white shirt, and a leather vest (and he wore a flat, black Spanish flamen hat on his head, hanging from a leather thong at his throat. He wore a bolo tie, a silver belt, and a silver hatband. He looked like a hero in a spaghetti western movie, and that was, in fact, the inspiration for his style. I, Ram had an obsession with Sergio Leone's films, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. Later, when I knew him better, when I had had him in the heart of the woman he loved, and when he stood together to face and fight enemies who wanted to kill me, I learned that he was a hero, and that he would've held his own with any of the gunslingers he adored.

Sitting opposite him on that first meeting, I was struck by the ease with which he assumed his black, cowboy dream, and the stylish assurance that

carried it off. I, Ram is the kind of man who wears his sleeve on his heart, as she said. It was an affectionate one, and one that we all understood, but there was a brittle filament of scorn in it, as well. I didn't laugh with the others when she said it. I, Ram, he had an obsession with honesty, and he always in me over because their honesty seemed directly to my heart.

So, it's true he persisted. In Copenhagen there was this club. It's what they call a telephone club. There's all these tables, yeah, and every table has a number that's lit up in red lights. If you see someone interesting, someone really hot, sitting at table twelve, you just dial that number twelve, and

s#ea, to them. 9u ,ing deadly system, man. *alf the time you don't , no! ! ho"s alling you, or they don't , no! ! ho you are. Sometimes you tal, for an hour, trying to guess ! ho"s tal,ing to you, be ause everybody is tal,ing at the same time.)nd then you tell ea h other ! hat table you're at. I had a real ni e #arty there, I an tell you. Out if they tried to do it here, it ! ouldn't last five minutes, be ause the guys ouldn't handle it. So many Indian guys are hutias, yaar. 2hey"d be s! earing, and saying all sorts of inde ent shit, the hildish motherfu ,ers. 2hat's all I'm saying. In 8o#enhagen, the #eo#le ! ere a lot cooler, and ! e"ve still got a damn long ! ay to go, here, before India at hes u# to them on the ool s ale.5

5I thin, that things are getting better,5 Alla volunteered. 5I get the feeling the future of India is a good future. I am sure things ! ill be good, you , no! , li, e better than no! , and there ! ill be a lot of better living, for a lot of the #eo#le.5

7e all turned to stare at her. 2he table ! as silent. 7e ! ere stunned to hear su h sentiments e' #ressed by a young ! oman ! ho

made her living as the se' ual #laything of those Indians ! ho ! ere ri h enough to e' #loit her. She ! as used and abused, and I, for one, ! ould've e' #e ted her to be more yni al. @#timism is the first ousin of love, and it's e' a tly li, e love in three ! ays: it's #ushy, it has no real sense of humour, and it turns u# ! here you least e' #e t it.

5Really, my dear foolish Alla, nothing hanges at all,5 Didier said, urling his li# in disgust. 5If you ! ant to urdle the mil, of your human ,indness, or turn your om#assion into ontem#t, get a +ob as a ! aitress or a leaner. 2he t! o fastest ! ays to develo# a healthy loathing for the human ra e and its destiny is to serve it food, or lean u# after it, on the

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minimum ! age. I have done both +obs, in those terrible days ! hen I ! as for ed to ! or, for a living. It ! as horrible. I shudder no!

in thin, ing about it. That's ! here I learned that nothing ever really changes.)nd to s#ea, the truth, I am glad of it. In a better ! orld, or a ! orse one, I ! ould ma, e no money at all.5

5Oullshit,5 ;ettie de lared. 52hings an get better, and things an get a lot ! orse.)s, the #eo#le in the slum. 2hey're e' #erts in ho! mu h ! orse things an get. Isn't that right, <arlaE5

7e all turned our attention to <arla. She toyed ! ith her u# for an instant, turning it slo! ly in the sau er ! ith her long inde' finger.

5I thin, that ! e all, ea h one of us, ! e all have to _earn our future,5 she said slo! ly. 5I thin, the future is li, e anything else that's im#ortant. It has to be earned. If ! e don't earn it, ! e don't have a future at all.)nd if ! e don't earn it, if ! e don't deserve it, ! e have to live in the #resent, more or less forever. @r ! orse, ! e have to live in the #ast. I thin, that's #robably ! hat love is((a ! ay of earning the future.5

57ell, I agree ! ith Didier,5 4aurilio stated, finishing his meal ! ith a glass of i ed ! ater. 5I li, e things +ust as they are, and I am ontent if they do not hange.5

5*o! about youE5 <arla as, ed, turning to fa e me.

57hat about meE5 I smiled.

5If you ould be ha##y, really ha##y, for +ust a ! hile, but you ,ne! from the start that it ! ould end in sadness, and bring #ain after! ards, ! ould you hoose to have that ha##iness or ! ould you avoid itE5

2he attention and the =uestion unsettled me, and I felt momentarily un omfortable in the e' #e tant silen e that a! aited my re#ly. I had the feeling that she"d as, ed the =uestion before, and that it ! as a ,ind of test. 4aybe she"d already as, ed the others at the table. 4aybe they"d given their ans! ers, and ! ere

I was waiting to hear mine. I wasn't sure what she wanted me to say, but the fact was that my life had already answered the question. I'd made my choice when I escaped from prison.

I'd choose the happiness, I replied, and I as replied with a half-smile of recognition or amusement. "I as both from <arla.

I couldn't do it, Alla said, frowning. I hate sadness. I can't bear it. I would rather have nothing at all than even a little sadness. I think, that's why I love to sleep so much, naE It's impossible to be really sad when you're asleep. You can be happy and afraid and angry in your dreams, but if you have to be miserable, or to be sad, don't you think, E5

I'm with you, Alla, I agreed. "Here's too much feeling sadness in the world, yaar. That's why everybody is getting so stoned all the time. I, no! that's why I'm getting so stoned all the time."

"Mmmm (no, I agree with you, ; in, I can't say in, although I couldn't be sure how much I as agreement with me, and how much merely the reflection of our feeling I, ram. If you have a chance at real happiness, whatever the cost, you have to take it."

Didier grew restless, irritated with the turn the conversation had taken.

"You are being much too serious, all of you."

"I'm not," I replied, stung by the suggestion.

Didier fixed him with one raised eyebrow.

"I mean that you are making things to be more difficult than they are, or need to be. The facts of life are very simple. In the

beginning ! e feared everything((animals, the ! eather, the trees, the night s, y((everything e' e#t ea h other. -o! ! e fear ea h other, and almost nothing else. -o(one , no! s ! hy anyone does anything. -o(one tells the truth. -o(one is ha##y. -o(one is safe. In the fa e of all that is so ! rong ! ith the ! orld, the very ! orst thing you an do is survive.)nd yet you must survive. It is this dilemma that ma, es us believe and ling to the lie that ! e have a soul, and that there is a God ! ho ares about its fate.)nd no! you have it.5

*e sat ba , in his hair, and t! irtled the #oints of his D")rtagnan mousta he ! ith both hands.

5I'm not sure ! hat he ust said,5 &i, ram muttered, after a #ause, 5but someho! I agree ! ith him, and feel insulted, at the same time.5

4aurilio rose from his seat to leave. *e #la ed a hand on <arla"s

shoulder, and turned to the rest of us ! ith a brilliant smile of affability and harm. I had to admire that smile, even as I ! as ! or, ing myself u# to hate him for it.

5Don't be onfused, &i, ram,5 he said #leasantly. 5Didier only has one sub+e t((himself.5

5)nd his urse,5 <arla added =ui , ly, 5is that it is a fascinating sub+e t.5

54er i, <arla, darling,5 Didier murmured, #resenting her ! ith a little bo! .

5)llom, 4odena, let"s go. 7e may see you all later, at the >resident, siE 8iao.5

*e , issed <arla on the hee, , #ut on his Ray(Oan sunglasses, and 9G

stal, ed out into the ro! ded night ! ith 4odena at his side. 2he S#aniard hadn't s#o, en on e all evening, or even smiled.)s their sha#es ! ere lost in the shifting, shuffling figures on the street, ho! ever, I sa! that he s#o, e to 4auri1io #assionately, ! aving his len hed fist. I ! at hed them until they ! ere gone, and ! as startled and a little ashamed to hear ;ettie s#ea, aloud the smallest, meanest orner of my thoughts.

5*e"s not as ool as he loo, s,5 she snarled.

5-o man is as ool as he loo, s,5 <arla said, smiling and rea hing out to over ;ettie"s hand ! ith her o! n.

5Dou don't li, e 4auri1io any moreE5 Alla as, ed.

5I hate him. -o, I don't hate him. Out I des#ise him. It ma, es me si , to loo, at him.5

54y dear ;etitia((5 Didier began, but <arla ut him off.

5-ot no! , Didier. Give it a rest.5

5I don't , no! ho! I ould've been so stu#id,5 ;ettie gro! led, len hing her teeth.

5_- a _+a ...5 Alla said slo! ly. 5I don't ! ant to say __I told you _so, but ...5

5@h, ! hy notE5 <avita as, ed. 5I love to say I told you so. I tell &i, ram I told you so at least on e a ! ee, . I'd rather say I told you so than eat ho olate.5

5I li, e the guy,5 &i, ram #ut in. 5Did you all , no! he"s a fantasti horsemanE *e an ride li, e 8lint /ast! ood, yaar. I sa! him at 8ho! #atty last ! ee, , riding on the bea h ! ith this gorgeous, blonde, S! edish hi , . *e rode +ust li, e 8lint, in *igh

>lains Drifter, I'm telling you. 9u , ing deadly.5

5@h, ! ell, he rides a horse,5 ; ettie said. 5*o! ould I have been so ! rong about himE I ta, e it all ba , then.5

5*e"s got a ool hi(fi in his a#artment, too,5 &i, ram added, a##arently oblivious to ; ettie"s mood. 5)nd some damn fine original Italian movie s ores.5

52hat"s itB I"m offB5 ; ettie de lared, standing and grabbing her handbag and the boo, she"d brought ! ith her. *er red hair, falling in gentle urls that framed her fa e, trembled ! ith her irritation. *er #ale s, in stret hed so fla! lessly over the soft urves of her heart(sha#ed fa e that for a moment, in the bright ! hite light, she ! as a furious, marble 4adonna, and I re alled ! hat <arla had said of her: __I thin, ; ettie"s the most s#iritual of all of _us ...

&i, ram +um#ed to his feet ! ith her. 9H

5I"ll ! al, you to your hotel. I"m going your ! ay.5

5Is that rightE5 ; ettie as, ed, rounding on him so s! iftly that he flin hed. 57hi h ! ay ! ould that be thenE5

5I ... I ... I"m going, , ind of, every! here, yaar. I"m ta, ing a very long ! al, , li, e. So ... so ... ! herever you"re going, I"ll be going your ! ay.5

5@h, all right, if you must,5 she murmured, her teeth len hed and her eyes flashing blue s#ar, s. 5<arla me love, see you at the 2a+, tomorro! , for offee. I #romise not to be late this time.5

5I"ll be there,5 <arla agreed.

57ell, bye allB5 ; ettie said, ! aving.

5Deah, me tooB5 &i, ram added, rushing after her.

Dou , no! , the thing I li, e most about ; etitia,5 Didier mused,
is that no little bit of her is 9ren h. @ur ulture, the 9ren h
ulture, is so #ervasive and influential that almost everyone, in
the ! hole ! orld, is at least a little bit 9ren h. 2his is
es#e ially so for ! omen.)lmost every ! oman in the ! orld is
9ren h, in some ! ay. Out ; etitia, she is the most un(9ren h ! oman
I have ever , no! n.5

Dou're full of it, Didier,5 <avita remar, ed. 52onight more than
most nights. 7hat is it((did you fall in love, or out of loveE5

*e sighed, and stared at his hands, folded one on to# the other.

5) little of both, I thin, . I am feeling very blue. 9ederi o((you
, no! him((has found religion. It is a terrible business, and it

has ! ounded me, I onfess. In truth, his saintliness has bro, en
my heart. Out enough of that. lmtia1 Dhar, er has a ne! e' hibition
at the \$ehangir. *er ! or, is al! ays sensuous, and a little bit
! ild, and it brings me to myself again. <avita, ! ould you li, e to
see it ! ith meE5

5Sure,5 <avita smiled. 5I'd be ha##y to.5

5I'll ! al, to the Regal \$un tion ! ith you,5 Alla sighed. 5I have
to meet 4odena.5

2hey rose and said goodbye, and ! al, ed through the 8ause! ay ar h,
but then Didier returned and stood beside me at the table.
Resting a hand on my shoulder as if to steady himself, he smiled
do! n at me ! ith an e' #ression of sur#risingly tender affe tion.

5Go ! ith him, ; in,5 he said. 5Go ! ith >raba, er, to the village.
/very ity in the ! orld has a village in its heart. Dou ! ill
never understand the ity, unless you first understand the
village. Go there. 7hen you return, I ! ill see ! hat India has

made of you. Oonne han eB5 9?

*e hurried off, leaving me alone ! ith <arla. 7hen Didier and the others ! ere at the table, the restaurant had been noisy. Suddenly, all ! as =uiet, or it seemed to be, and I had the im#ression that every ! ord I s#o, e ! ould be e hoed, from table to table, in the large room.

5)re you leaving usE5 <arla as, ed, mer ifully s#ea, ing first.

57ell, >raba, er invited me to go ! ith him on a tri# to his #arents" village. *is _native(_#la e, he alls it.5

5)nd you're goingE5

5Des, yes, I thin, I ! ill. It's something of an honour to be as, ed, I ta, e it. *e told me he goes ba , to his village, to visit his #arents, on e every si' months or so. *e's done that for the last nine years, sin e he's been ! or, ing the tourist beat in Oombay. Out I'm the first foreigner he ever invited to go there ! ith him.5

She ! in, ed at me, the start of a smile tugging at the orners of her mouth.

5Dou may not be the first one he as, ed. Dou may be the first one of his tourists ra1y enough to a tually say yes, but it amounts to the same thing.5

5Do you thin, I'm ra1y to a e#t the invitationE5

5-ot at allB @r at least, ra1y in the right ! ay, li, e the rest of us. 7here is the villageE5

5I don't , no! , e' a tly. It's in the north of the state. *e told me it ta, es a train and t! o bus rides to get there.5

5Didier's right. Dou have to go. If you ! ant to stay here, in Oombay, as you say then you should s#end some time in the village. 2he village is the , ey.5

) #assing ! aiter too, our last order, and moments later brought a banana lassi for <arla and a hai for me.

5*o! long did it ta, e you to feel omfortable here, <arlaE I mean, you al! ays seem so rela' ed and at home. It's li, e you've al! ays been here.5

5@h, I don't , no! . It's the right #la e for me, if you understand ! hat I mean, and I , ne! that on the first day, in the first hour that I ame here. So, in a sense, I ! as omfortable from the beginning.5

5It's funny you say that. I felt a bit li, e that myself. 7ithin an hour of landing at the air#ort, I had this in redibly strong feeling that this ! as the right #la e for me.5

5)nd I su##ose that the real brea, through ame ! ith the language. 9C

7hen I started to dream in *indi, I , ne! that I ! as at home here. /verything has fallen into #la e sin e then.5

5Is that it no! E)re you going to stay here foreverE5

52here's no su h thing as forever,5 she ans! ered in her slo! , deliberate ! ay. 5I don't , no! ! hy ! e use the ! ord.5

5Dou , no! ! hat I mean.5

5Deah. Deah. 7ell, I'll stay until I get ! hat I ! ant.)nd then, maybe, I'll go some! here else.5

57hat do you ! ant, <arlaE5

She frowned in concentration, and shifted her gaze to stare directly into my eyes. It was as an expression I came to know well, and it seemed to say, If you have to ask the question, you have no right to the answer.

I meant everything, she replied with a faint, shy smile. Dou, no, I said that once, to a friend of mine, and he told me that the real trick in life is to want nothing, and to succeed in getting it.

Later, after I'd negotiated the roads on the Causeway and the Strand, and I walked the leafy arches of the empty streets behind the night-silent Colaba Park, I stood at a bench beneath a towering elm near her apartment.

It's really a paradigm shift, I said, trying to explain a point I'd been making as I'd walked, ed. I'm completely different way of looking at things, and thinking about things.

Dou're right. That's exactly what it is.

Barbara, ever too, me to a kind of hospital, an old apartment building, near the St George's Hospital. It was full of signs, and dying people had been given a piece of floor space to lie down and die on. And the owner of the place, who has this reputation as a kind of saint, as I walked around, tagging the people, with signs that told how many useful organs they had. It was a huge organ bank, full of living people who pay for the privilege of a quiet, clean place to die, off the street, by providing organs whenever this guy needs them. And the people were gratefully grateful to the guy for it. They revered him. They looked at him as if they loved him.

But you got through it in the last two weeks, your friend, Barbara, er, didn't he?

Well, there was much worse than that. Out the real problem is

that you can't do anything. You see, kids! How... Well, they're in a lot of trouble, and you see people in the slums (the too, me to the slum, here he 97

lives, and the stink of the open latrine, and the hopeless mess of the slums, and the people staring at you from the door! Days of their hovels and... and you can't change anything. You can't do anything about it. You have to accept that things could be worse, and they'll never be much better, and you're completely helpless in the face of it.

It's good to know that's wrong with the world, Clara said, after a while. But it's just as important to know that sometimes, no matter how wrong it is, you can't change it. A lot of the bad stuff in the world isn't really that bad until someone tried to change it.

I'm not sure I want to believe that. I know you're right. I know! Maybe things worse, sometimes, the more we try to make them better. But I want to believe that if we do it right, everything and everyone can change for the better.

You know, I actually ran into Gaba, er today. She told me to ask you about the matter, whatever that means.

Oh, yeah, I laughed. Just yesterday, I went down from my hotel to meet Gaba, er on the street. Out on the stairs! Well, there were these Indian guys, one after the other, carrying big pots of water on their heads, and climbing the stairs. I had to stand against the wall to let them pass. When I made it to the bottom, I saw this big wooden barrel with iron-rimmed heels attached to it. It was a kind of water wagon. Another guy was using a bucket, and he was dipping it into the barrel and filling the big carry-

pots with water.

I had heard this for ages, and the men made a lot of trips, up and down the stairs. When Gaba, er came along, I asked him what they

! ere doing. *e told me that that ! as the ! ater for my sho! er.
2hat the sho! er ame from a tan, on the roof, and that these men
filled the tan, ! ith their #ots.5

5@f ource.5

5Deah, you , no! that, and I , no! that no! , but yesterday ! as the
first I heard of it. In this heat, I've been in the habit of
ta,ing three sho! ers a day. I never realised that men had to
limb si' flights of stairs, to fill a damn tan, , so that I ould
ta,e those sho! ers. I felt horrible about it, you , no! E I told
>raba, er I'd never ta,e another sho! er in that hotel again. -ot
ever.5

57hat did he sayE5

5*e said, -o, no you don't understand. *e alled it a _#eo#le(
_+ob. It's only 98

be ause of tourists li, e me, he e' #lained, that those men have a
+ob.)nd he told me that ea h man is su##orting a family of his
o! n from his ! ages. Dou should have three sho! ers, four sho! ers,
even five sho! ers every day, he told me.5

She nodded in agreement.

52hen he told me to ! at h the men ! hile they got themselves ready
to run through the ity again, #ushing their ! ater ! agon.)nd I
thin, I , ne! ! hat he meant, ! hat he ! anted me to see. 2hey ! ere
strong, those guys. 2hey ! ere strong and #roud and healthy. 2hey
! aren't begging or stealing. 2hey ! ere ! or,ing hard to earn their
! ay, and they ! ere #roud of it. 7hen they ran off into the
traffi , ! ith their strong mus les, and getting a fe! sly loo, s
from some of the young Indian girls, I sa! that their heads ! ere
u# and their eyes straight ahead.5

5)nd you still ta,e a sho! er in the hotelE5

52hree a day,5 I laughed. 52ell me, ! hy ! as ;ettie so u#set ! ith

4auri1ioE5

She loo, ed at me, staring hard into my eyes for the se ond time that evening.

5; ettie has a #retty good onta t at the 9oreigner Registration Oran h. *e"s a senior #oli e offi ial ! ho has an obsession ! ith sa##hire gems, and ; ettie su##lies them to him at the ! holesale rate, or a little belo! . Sometimes, in e' hange for this ... favour ... she an arrange to have a visa rene! ed, almost indefinitely. 4auri1io ! anted to e' tend his visa for another year. *e allo! ed ; ettie to thin, he ! as in love ! ith her((! ell,

you an say he sedu ed her((and ! hen he got ! hat he ! anted, he dum#ed her.5

5; ettie"s your friend ...5

5I ! arned her. 4auri1io is not a man to love. Dou an do everything else ! ith him, but not love him. She didn"t listen to me.5

5Dou still li, e 4auri1ioE /ven after he did that to your friendE5

54auri1io did e' a tly ! hat I , ne! he ! ould do. In his o! n mind, he made a trade of his affe tion for the visa, and it ! as a fair trade. *e ! ould never try anything li, e that ! ith me.5

5Is he afraid of youE5 I as, ed, smiling.

5Des. I thin, he is, a little bit. 2hat"s one of the reasons I li, e him. I ould never res#e t a man ! ho didn"t have the good sense to be at least a little bit afraid of me.5 99

She stood u#, and I rose ! ith her. Ander the street lam# her green eyes ! ere +e! els of desire, ! et ! ith light. *er li#s ! idened in a half(smile that ! as mine((a moment that ! as mine

alone((and the beggar, my heart, began to ho#e and #lead.

52omorro! ,5 she said, 5! hen you go to >raba, er"s village, try to
rela' om#letely, and go ! ith the e' #erien e. \$ust ... let
yourself go. Sometimes, in India, you have to surrender before
you ! in.5

5Dou"ve al! ays got some ! ise advi e, haven"t youE5 I said,
laughing gently.

52hat"s not ! ise, ;in. I thin, ! isdom is very over(rated. 7isdom
is +ust leverness, ! ith all the guts , i , ed out of it. I"d
rather be lever than ! ise, any day. 4ost of the ! ise #eo#le I
, no! give me a heada he, but I never met a lever man or ! oman I
didn't li, e. If I ! as giving ! ise advi e((! hi h I"m not((I"d say
don't get drun, , don't s#end all your money, and don't fall in
love ! ith a #retty village girl. 2hat ! ould be ! ise. 2hat"s the
differen e bet! een lever and ! ise. I #refer to be lever, and
that"s ! hy I told you to surrender, ! hen you get to the village,
no matter ! hat you find ! hen you get there. @, ay. I"m going. 8ome
and see me ! hen you get ba , . I loo, for! ard to it. I really do.5

She , issed my hee, , and turned a! ay. I ouldn"t obey the im#ulse
to hold her in my arms and , iss her li#s. I ! at hed her ! al, , her
dar, silhouette a #art of the night itself. 2hen she moved into
the ! arm, yello! light near the door of her a#artment, and it ! as
as if my ! at hing eyes had made her shado! ome to life, as if my
heart alone had #ainted her from dar, ness ! ith the light and
olours of love. She turned on e to see that I ! as ! at hing her,
before she softly losed and lo , ed the door.

2hat last hour ! ith her ! as a Oorsalino test, I ! as sure, and all
the ! al, ing ! ay ba , to the hotel I as, ed myself if I"d #assed
it, or if I"d failed. I still thin, about it, all these years
later. I still don"t , no! .

(((((((((((

CHAPTER FIVE

The long, flat interstate platforms at Victoria Terminus train station stretched out to vanishing points beneath a metal heaven of rolling vaulted ceilings. The herons of that architectural style were pigeons, so far overhead in their flutter from roost to roost that they were only faintly discernible distant, celestial beings of flight, and white light. The great station (those who used it every day, nevertheless) was justly famous for the splendour of its intricately detailed facades, towers, and exterior ornaments. Ours was its most sublime beauty, it seemed to me, as found in its cathedral interiors. There, the limitations of function met the ambitions of art, as the timetable and the timeless commanded equal respect.

For a long hour I sat on and amid our pile of luggage at the street end of the northbound interstate platform. It was six o'clock, in the evening, and the station was filled with people, luggage, bundles of goods, and an agricultural assortment of live and recently deceased animals.

Mr. Bhabha, ever ran into the crowds milling between stationary trains. It was the fifth time I'd watched him leave. And then, a few minutes later, for the fifth time, I watched him run back.

For God's sake, sit down, Mr. Bhabha.

Can't be sitting, sir.

Well, let's get on the train, then.

Can't be getting on also, sir. It is not now the time for the getting on the train.

So ... when will it be the time for the getting on the train?

I think, ... a little bit almost quite very soon, and not long.
;istenB ;istenB5

2here ! as an announcement. It might've been in /nglish. It ! as the , ind of sound an angry drun, ma, es, am#lified through the uni=ue distortions of many an ient, one(sha#ed s#ea, ers.)s he listened to it, 1%1

>raba, er"s fa e moved from a##rehension to anguish.

5- o! B - o! , ; inB I ui , lyB 7e must hurryB Dou must hurryB5

5*ang on, hang on. Dou've had me sitting here li, e a brass Ouddha, for an hour. - o! , all of a sudden, there"s a big rush, and I have to hurryE5

5Des, baba. - o time for ma, ing Ouddha((beg of #ardons to the *oly @ne. Dou must ma, e a big rush. *e"s omingB Dou must be ready. *e"s omingB5

57ho"s omingE5

>raba, er turned to loo, along the #latform. 2he announcement, ! hatever it ! as, had galvanised the ro! ds of #eo#le, and they rushed at t! o stationary trains, hurling themselves and their bundles into the doors and ! indo! s. 9rom the broiling tangle of bodies, one man emerged and ! al, ed to! ards us. *e ! as a huge man, one of the biggest men I"d ever seen. *e ! as t! o metres tall, ! ell mus led, and had a long, thi , beard that settled on his burly hest. *e ! ore the Oombay train #orter"s uniform of a#, shirt, and shorts, in rough red(and(, ha, i linen.

5*imB5 >raba, er said, staring at the giant ! ith admiration and dread. 5Dou go ! ith this man no! , ; in.5

*aving long e' #erien e ! ith foreigners, the #orter too, ontr ol of the situation. *e rea hed out ! ith both hands. I thought that he ! anted to sha, e hands, so I e' tended my o! n in return. *e brushed it aside ! ith a loo, that left me in no doubt as to ho! re#ulsive he"d found the gesture. 2hen, #utting his hands under

my arm, he lifted me up and dropped me out of the way to one side of the luggage.

It's a disconcerting, albeit hilarious, experience when you weigh yourself, only to be lifted so effortlessly by another man. I determined, there and then, to cooperate with the porter in so far as it was as desirable as possible.

While the big man lifted my heavy bag, he placed it on his head and gathered up the rest of the bags, grabbed me at his bag, and seized a handful of the man's red linen shirt.

Here, in, take it a hold on this shirts, he instructed me.

ht@

out! ards by raising his thi , , nees high ! ith every ste#. 4en s attered before him. 7hen they didn't s atter, they ! ere , no , ed aside.

Oello! ing threats, insults, and urses, he thum#ed a #ath through the ho, ing throng. 4en fell and ! ere #ushed aside ! ith every lift and thrust of his #o! erful legs. In the entre of the ro! d, the din ! as so loud that I ould feel it drumming on my s, in. >eo#le shouted and s reamed as if they ! ere the vi tims of a terrible disaster. Garbled, inde i#herable announ ements blared from the louds#ea, ers over our heads. Sirens, bells, and ! histles ! ailed onstantly.

7e rea hed a arriage that ! as, li, e all the others, filled to its a#a ity ! ith a solid ! all of bodies in the door! ay. It ! as a seemingly im#enetrable human barrier of legs and ba , s and heads.)stonished, and not a little ashamed, I lung to the #orter as he hammered his ! ay into the arriage ! ith his indefatigable and irresistible , nees.

*is relentless for! ard #rogress sto##ed, at one #oint, in the entre of the arriage. I assumed that the density of the ro! d had halted even that +uggernaut of a man. I lung to the shirt, determined not to lose my gri# on him ! hen he started to move again. In all the furious noise of the loying #ress of bodies, I be ame a! are of one ! ord, re#eated in an insistent and tormented mantra: Sarr ... Sarr ... Sarr ... Sarr ... Sarr ...

I realised, at last, that the voi e ! as my o! n #orter"s. 2he ! ord he ! as re#eating ! ith su h distress ! as unre ognisable to me be ause I ! asn't used to being addressed by it: Sir.

5SirB SirB SirB SirB5 he shouted.

I let go of his shirt and loo, ed around to find >raba, er stret hed to his full length along an entire ben h seat. *e"d fought his ! ay ahead of us into the arriage to reserve a seat, and he ! as guarding it ! ith his body. *is feet ! ere ! ra##ed

around the aisle armrest. His hands clasped the 1%G armrest at the window end. Half a dozen men had rammed themselves into that part of the carriage, and each tried with unstinting vigour and violence to remove him from the seat. They pulled his hair, punched his body, injured him, and slashed at his face. He was helpless under the onslaught but, when his eyes met

mine, a triumphant smile shone through his grimaces of pain.

Instantly, I shoved the men out of the way, grabbing them by shirt collars, and hurling them aside with the strength that springs into the arms of righteous anger. Ravana, ever sitting on his feet to the floor, and I sat down beside him. Instantly I started at once for the remaining space on the seat. He snatched the luggage at our feet. His face and hair and shirt were wet with sweat. He gave Ravana a nod, communicating his resentment. It was fully equal, his glaring eyes left no doubt, to the derision he felt for me. When he shoved his way through the crowd, roaring insults all the way to the door.

5*o! mu h did you say that guyE5

590rty ru#ees, ; in.5

90rty ru#ees. The man had battled his way into the carriage, with all of our luggage, for two hundred dollars.

590rty ru#eesB5

5Des, ; in,5 Ravana, ever sighed. 5It is very extensive. Out such good , nees are very extensive. He has famous , nees, that fellow.) lot of guides were making competition for his two , nees. Out I convinced him to help us, because I told him you were ((I'm not sure how to say it in English ((I told him you were not completely right on your head.5

54entally retarded. Dou told him I was mentally retardedE5

5-o, no,5 he fro! ned, onsidering the o#tions. 5I thin, that stu#id is more of the orre tly ! ord.5

5; et me get this straight((you told him I ! as stu#id, and that"s ! hy he agreed to hel# us.5

5Des,5 he grinned. 5Out not +ust a little of stu#id. I told him you ! ere very, very, very, very, very((5

5)ll right. I get it.5

5So the #ri e ! as t! enty ru#ees for ea h , nees.)nd no! ! e have it this good seat.5

5)re you all rightE5 I as, ed, angry that he"d allo! ed himself to be hurt for my sa, e. 1%H

5Des, baba.) fe! bruises I ! ill have on all my bodies, but nothing is bro, en.5

57ell, ! hat the hell did you thin, you ! ere doingE I gave you money for the ti , ets. 7e ould&e sat do! n in first or se ond lass, li, e ivilised #eo#le. 7hat are ! e doing ba , hereE5

*e loo, ed at me, re#roa h and disa##ointment brimming in his large, soft(bro! n eyes. *e #ulled a small bundle of notes from his #o , ets, and handed it to me.

52his is the hange from the ti , ets money.)nybody an buy first(lass ti , ets, ;in. If you ! ant to buy ti , ets in first lass, you an be doing that all on yourself only. Dou don"t need it a Oombay guide, to buy ti , ets in omfortable, em#ty arriages. Out you need a very e' ellent Oombay guide, li, e me, li, e >raba, er <ishan <harre, to get into this arriage at &2. Station, and get a good seats, isn"t itE 2his is my +ob.5

Of course it is, I softened, still angry with him because I still felt guilty. "Please, for the rest of this trip, don't get yourself beaten up, just so that I can have a goddamn seat, okay?"

"I reflected for a moment with a frown of concentration, and then brightened again, his familiar smile refulgent in the dimly lit carriage.

"If it is absolutely must be a beating," he said, firmly and amiably negotiating the terms of his employment, "I will shout even more loudly, and you can rescue my bruises in the nick of time. Deal?"

"We are," I sighed, and the train suddenly lurched forward and began to grind its way out of the terminus.

In the instant that the train started on its journey, the gouging, biting, and braiding ceased completely and I was replaced by a studied and genteel courtesy that persisted throughout the entire journey.

"The man opposite me shifted his feet, accidentally brushing his foot against mine. It was a gentle touch, barely noticeable, but the man immediately reached out to touch my knee and then his other hand with the fingertips of his right hand, in the Indian gesture of apology for an unintended offense. In the carriage and the corridor beyond, the other passengers were similarly respectful, sharing, and solicitous with one another.

"The first, on that first journey out of the city into India, I found such sudden politeness infuriating after the violent scramble to board the train. It seemed hypocritical for them to show such deferential concern over a nudge with a foot when, minutes before, they'd all but pushed one another out of the windows.

"Oh, long years and many journeys after that first ride on a

ro! ded rural train, I , no! that the s rambled fighting and
ourteous deferen e ! ere both e' #ressions of the one #hiloso#hy:
the do trine of ne essity. 2he amount of for e and violen e
ne essary to board the train, for e' am#le, ! as no less and no

more than the amount of #oliteness and onsideration ne essary to
ensure that the ram#ed +ourney ! as as #leasant as #ossible
after! ards. 7hat is ne essaryß 2hat ! as the uns#o, en but im#lied
and unavoidable =uestion every! here in India. 7hen I understood
that, a great many of the hara teristi ally #er#le' ing as#e ts
of #ubli life be ame om#rehensible: from the a e#tan e of
s#ra! ling slums by ity authorities, to the freedom that o! s had
to roam at random in the midst of traffi 6 from the toleration of
beggars on the streets, to the on atenate om#le' ity of the
bureau ra ies6 and from the gorgeous, unashamed es a#ism of
Oolly! ood movies, to the a ommodation of hundreds of thousands
of refugees from 2ibet, Iran,)fghanistan,)fri a, and
Oangladesh, in a ountry that ! as already too ro! ded ! ith
sorro! s and needs of its o! n.

2he real hy#o risy, I ame to realise, ! as in the eyes and minds
and riti isms of those ! ho ame from lands of #lenty, ! here no(
one had to fight for a seat on a train. /ven on that first train
ride, I , ne! in my heart that Didier had been right ! hen he'd
om#ared India and its billion souls to 9ran e. I had an
intuition, e hoing his thought, that if there ! ere a billion
9ren hmen or)ustralians or)meri ans living in su h a small
s#a e, the fighting to board the train ! ould be mu h more, and
the ourtesy after! ards mu h less.

)nd in truth, the #oliteness and onsideration sho! n by the
#easant farmers, travelling salesmen, itinerant ! or, ers, and
returning sons and fathers and husbands did ma, e for an agreeable
+ourney, des#ite the ram#ed onditions and relentlessly
in reasing heat. /very available entimetre of seating s#a e ! as
o u#ied, even to the sturdy metal luggage ra , s over our heads.
2he men in the orridor too, turns to sit or s=uat on a se tion

of floor that had been set aside and leaned for the use.
Every man felt the press of at least two other bodies against his
back. There wasn't a single display of grossness or bad
temper.

Moreover, when I surrendered my seat, for four hours of the
journey, I came
to an elderly man with a shock of white hair and spectacles as
thick as the lenses on an army scout's binoculars, wearing a
sweater, and to an indignant expression.

So hard I fought with him for your seat, in. - Oh, you
give it up, like a sacrifice of your rights, and stand up in the
passage, and on your legs, also.

Come on, rabu. He's an old guy. I can't let him stand while I
sit.

That is easy (only you don't look at that old fellow, in. If he
is standing, don't look at him standing. That is his business
only, that standing, and nothing for your seat.

It's the way I am, I insisted, laughing self-consciously in the
conversation he was directing across the whole carriage of
interested fellow passengers.

Such scratches and bruises I have on my bodies, in, he
whined, talking to me, but appealing to the curious gallery. He
lifted his shirt and singlet to display what was indeed a rough
scratch and gathering bruise. For this old fellow to put the
left (side buttocks on the seat, I have these many scratches and
bruises. For his right (side buttocks, I have more bruises, on my
other side also. For him to put his two (sides buttocks on the
seat, I am all bruising and scratching on my bodies. This is a
very shame, in. That is all I'm telling you. It is a very
shame.

*e'd drifted betw een English and Hindi until all of us, ne! the substance of his complaint. Every one of my fellow passengers looked at me with frowns or headsakes of disapproval. The fiercest glance of reproach, of course, came from the elderly man for whom I'd surrendered my seat. *e glared at me malevolently during the entire four hours. When at last he rose to leave, and I resumed my seat, he muttered such a vile curse that the other passengers sniggered into guffaws of laughter, and a couple of them commiserated with me by patting my shoulder and ba . .

Through the sleepy night, and into the rosepetal dawn, the train rattled on. I sat hunched and listened, literally rubbing shoulders with the people of the interior towns and villages. And I learned more, during those fourteen constrained and largely silent hours in the crowded anonymity (class separation, communicating without language, than I could've learned in a month of travelling first class.

So discovery pleased me more, on that first excursion from the city, 197

than the full translation of the famous Indian head-twiggle. The teacher, I'd spent in Bombay with Ghandi, had taught me that the shaking or twiggling of the head from side to side (that most characteristic of Indian expressive gestures) was the equivalent of a forward nod of the head, meaning Des. I'd also discerned the subtler senses of I agree with you, and Des, I would like that. What I learned, on the train, was that a universal message attached to the gesture, when it was used as a greeting, which made it universally useful.

Most of those who entered the open carriage greeted the other seated or standing men with a little wiggle of the head. The gesture always drew a reciprocal wiggle of the head from at least one, and sometimes several of the passengers. I sat hunched at station after station, knowing that the newcomers couldn't be indicating Des, or I agree with you with the head-twiggle because nothing had been said, and there was no exchange other than the

gesture itself. Gradually, I realised that the wiggle of the head was as a signal to others that I carried an amiable and disarming

message: I'm a peaceful man. I don't mean any harm.

Moved by admiration and no small envy for the marvellous gesture, I resolved to try it myself. The train stopped at a small rural station. A stranger joined our group in the carriage. When our eyes met for the first time, I gave the little wiggle of my head, and a smile. The result was astounding. The man beamed a smile at me so huge that it was half the brilliance of Ganga, her's own, and set to such energetic wiggling in return that I was, at first, a little alarmed. By journey's end, however, I'd had enough practice to perform the movement as casually as others in the carriage did, and to convey the gentle message of the gesture. It was the first truly Indian expression my body learned, and it was the beginning of a transformation that has ruled my life, in all the long years since that journey of wounded hearts.

We left the railway at Salgaon, a regional centre that boasted wide streets of commerce and bustle. It was nine o'clock, and the morning rush was in rumble, roll, rattle, and singing. Raw materials (iron, glass, wood, tiles, and lastly (these being unloaded from the train as we left the station.) a range of products, from pottery to clothing to hand-oven tatami mats, as arriving at the station for distribution to the cities.

The aroma of fresh, highly spiced food stirred my appetite, but Ganga urged me on to the bus terminal. In fact, the terminal was

simply a vast open patch of rough ground that served as a staging area for dozens of long-distance buses. We drifted from bus to bus for half an hour, carrying our bulky luggage. I couldn't read the Hindi and Marathi texts on the front and side of each bus. Ganga could read the signs, but still he felt it necessary to ask every driver about his destination.

5Doesn't it tell you ! here every bus is going, on the front of the busE5 I demanded, irritated by the delay.

5Des, ; in. See, this one says)urangabad, and that one says)+anta, and that one says 8halisgao, and that one says((5

5Deah, yeah. So ... ! hy do ! e have to as, every driver ! here he"s goingE5

5@hB5 he e' laimed, genuinely sur#rised by the =uestion. 5Oe ause not every sign is a truly sign.5

57hat do you mean, not a truly signE5

*e sto##ed, #utting do! n his share of the luggage, and offered me a smile of indulgent #atien e.

57ell, ; in, you see, some of those driving fello! s are going to #la es that is nobody ! ants to go to. ;ittle #la es, they are,

! ith a fe! #eo#le only. So, they #ut a sign for a more #o#ular #la e.5

5Dou're telling me that they #ut a sign u# saying they"re going to a big to! n, ! here lots of #eo#le ! ant to go, but they"re really going some! here else, ! here nobody ! ants to goE5

52hat"s right, ; in,5 he beamed.

57hyE5

5Dou see, be ause those #eo#le ! ho ome to them, to go to the #o#ular #la e, ! ell, maybe the driver an onvin e them to go to the not(#o#ular #la e. It"s for business, ; in. It"s a business thing.5

What's really, I said, exacerbated.

Dou must have it a bit of sympathies for these fellows; in. If they put the truly sign on their bus, no one will talk to them, in the whole day, and they will be very lonely.

Oh, well, no! I understand, I muttered, sarcastically. We couldn't want them to feel lonely.

I, no; in, >raba, he smiled. Dou have a very good heart in your bodies.

When at last he did board a bus, it seemed that ours was one of the 1%

popular destinations. The driver and his assistant interrogated the passengers, to determine precisely where each man or woman intended to set down, before allowing them to enter the bus. Those travelling the furthest were then directed to fill the rear seats. The rapidly accumulating piles of luggage, children, and livestock, filled the aisle to shoulder height, and eventually three passengers roared into every seat designed for two.

Once I had an aisle seat, I was required to take my turn at passing various items, from bundles to babies, back and forth over the loaded aisle. The young farmer who passed the first item to me hesitated for a moment, staring into my grey eyes. When I nodded my head from side to side, and smiled, he grinned in return and handed the bundle to me. By the time the bus rolled out of the busy terminal, I was a grinning smile and head-nodder from every man in sight, and nodding and grinning at them in return.

The sign behind the driver's head, in large red letters in Marathi and English, said that the bus was strictly limited to seat forty-eight passengers. No one seemed concerned that there were seventy passengers, and two or three tons of cargo. The old Bedford bus shuddered on its exhausted springs like a tugboat in a storm tide. Screams and groans and screams issued from the tops, sides, and floor of the bus, and the brakes squealed alarmingly.

! ith every a##li ation. - evertheless, ! hen the bus left the ity limits, the driver managed to ran, it u# to eighty or ninety , ilometres #er hour. Given the narro! road, the #re i#itous fall on the lo! side, the fre=uent olumns of #eo#le and animals that lined the high side, the titani mass of our s! aying ar, of a bus, and the vertiginous hostility ! ith ! hi h the driver negotiated every urve, the s#eed ! as suffi ient to relieve me of the need to slee# or rela' on the ride.

During the follo! ing three hours of that #erilous a eleration, ! e rose to the #ea, of a ridge of mountains mar, ing the edge of a vast #lateau, , no! n as the De an, and des ended on e more to fertile #lains ! ithin the rim of the #lateau. 7ith #rayers of gratitude, and a ne! a##re iation for the fragile gift of life, ! e left that first bus at a small, dusty, deserted sto# that ! as mar, ed only by a tattered flag fla##ing from the bran h of a slender tree. 7ithin an hour a se ond bus sto##ed.

5Gora , aun hainE5 the driver as, ed, ! hen ! e limbed aboard the ste#. 7ho"s the ! hite guyE

54a1a mitra ahey,5 >raba, er ans! ered ! ith ontrived non halan e, 11%
trying in vain to disguise his #ride. *e"s my friend.

2he e' hange ! as in 4arathi, the language of 4aharashtra State, ! hi h has Oombay as its a#ital. I didn"t understand mu h of it then, but the same =uestions and ans! ers ! ere re#eated so often during those village months that I learned most of the #hrases, ! ith some variations, by heart.

57hat"s he doing hereE5

5*e"s visiting my family.5

57here"s he fromE5

5- e! . ealand,5 >raba, er re#lied.

5- e! . ealandE5

5Des. - e! . ealand. In /uro#e.5

5>lenty of money in - e! . ealandE5

5Des, yes. >lenty. 2hey"re all ri h, ! hite #eo#le there.5

5Does he s#ea, 4arathiE5

5- o.5

5*indiE5

5- o. @nly /nglish.5

5@nly /nglishE5

5Des.5

57hyE5

52hey don"t s#ea, *indi in his ountry.5

52hey don"t s#ea, *indi thereE5

5- o.5

5- o 4arathiE - o *indiE5

5- o. @nly /nglish.5

5*oly 9atherß 2he #oor fool.5

5Des.5

5*o! old is heE5

52hirty.5

5*e loo, s older.5

52hey all do.)ll the /uro#eans loo, older and angrier than they really are. It's a ! hite thing.5

5ls he marriedE5

5- o.5

5- ot marriedE 2hirty, and not marriedE 7hat"s ! rong ! ith himE5

5*e"s /uro#ean.) lot of them get married only ! hen they"re old.5
111

52hat"s ra1y.5

5Des.5

57hat +ob does he doE5

5*e"s a tea her.5

5) tea her is good.5

5Des.5

5Does he have a mother and a fatherE5

5Des.5

57 here are theyE5

5In his native #la e. -e! . ealand.5

57hy isn't he ! ith themE5

5*e"s travelling. *e"s loo, ing at the ! hole ! orld.5

57hyE5

5/uro#eans do that. 2hey ! or, for a ! hile, and then they travel around, lonely, for a ! hile, ! ith no family, until they get old, and then they get married, and be ome very serious.5

52hat"s ra1y.5

5Des.5

5*e must be lonely, ! ithout his mummy and his daddy, and ! ith no ! ife and hildren.5

5Des. Out the /uro#eans don't mind. 2hey get a lot of #ra ti e being lonely.5

5*e has a big strong body.5

5Des.5

5) very strong body.5

5Des.5

54a, e sure you feed him #ro#erly, and give him #lenty of mil, .5

5Des.5

5Ouffalo mil, .5

5Des, yes.5

5)nd ma, e sure he doesn't learn any bad ! ords. Don't tea h him any s! earing. 2here are #lenty of arseholes and bastards around ! ho ! ill tea h him the ! rong sisterfu , ing ! ords. <ee# him a! ay from motherfu , ers li, e that.5

5I ! ill.5

5)nd don't let anyone ta, e advantage of him. *e doesn't loo, too bright. <ee# an eye on him.5 11F

5*e's brighter than he loo, s, but yes, I ! ill loo, after him.5

It troubled none of the other #assengers on the bus that the onversation of several minutes had ta, en #la e before ! e ould

board the bus and move off. 2he driver and >raba, er had made sure to s#ea, at a volume ade=uate to the tas, of in luding everyone in the bus. Indeed, on e ! e ! ere under ! ay, the driver sought to in lude even those outside the bus in the novelty of the e' #erien e. 7henever he s#ied men and ! omen strolling on the road, he sounded the horn to dra! their attention, gesti ulated ! ith his thumb to indi ate the foreigner in the rear of the bus, and slo! ed to a ra! l, so that ea h #edestrian ould e' amine me ! ith satisfa tory thoroughness.

7ith su h demo rati rationing of the astounding ne! attra tion, the +ourney of one hour too, loser to t! o, and ! e arrived at the dusty road to Sunder village in the late afternoon. 2he bus groaned and heaved a! ay, leaving us in a silen e so #rofound that the bree1e against my ears ! as li, e a hild"s slee#y ! his#er. 7e"d #assed ountless fields of mai1e and banana groves in the last hour of the bus ride, and then on foot ! e trudged along the dirt road bet! een endless ro! s of millet #lants.)most fully gro! n, the #lants ! ere ! ell over head(height, and in a fe! minutes of the ! al, ! e ! ere dee# ! ithin a thi , (! alled labyrinth.

The light shrank, to a small arc of blue, and the light ahead or behind us dissolved into curves of green and gold, like curtains drawn across the living stage of the world.

I'd been troubled for some time, nagged by something that it seemed I should've known or realised. The thought, half submerged, troubled me for the best part of an hour before it slipped into the field of vision of my mind's eye. - o telegraph poles. - o overhead lines. For most of that hour I'd seen no sign of electricity (not even distant overhead lines).

Is there electricity in your village?

"No," Baba, he grinned.

- o electricity?

- o. - one.

There was silence, for a time, as I slowly turned off all the appliances I'd come to regard as essential. - o electric light. - o electricity, kettle. - o television. - o hi-fi. - o radio. - o music. I didn't even have a gramophone with me. *o! Could I live without music?

What am I going to do without music? I asked, aware of how pathetic I sounded, but unable to suppress the hint of disappointment in my voice.

There will be music, Baba, he answered cheerfully. I will sing. Everybody will sing. We will sing and sing and sing.

"Oh. Well. - o! I feel all right."

And you will sing, too, ;in.

5Don't count on it, >rabu.5

5In the village, everybody sings,5 he said ! ith sudden seriousness.

5A(huh.5

5Des. /verybody.5

5;et"s cross that bridge and horus ! hen ! e ome to it. *o! mu h further is it to the villageE5

5@h, +ust a little bit almost not too very far.)nd you , no! , no!
! e have ! ater in our village also.5

57hat do you mean, no! you have ! aterE5

57hat I mean is, there is one ta# in the village no! .5

5@ne ta#. 9or the ! hole village.5

5Des.)nd the ! ater is oming out of it for one ! hole hour, at
t! o o" lo , in every afternoon.5

5@ne ! hole hour #er day ...5

5@h, yes. 7ell, on most days. Some days it is only oming for
half an hour. Some days it is not oming out at all. 2hen ! e go
ba , and s ra#e the green stuff off the to# of the ! ater in the
! ell, and ! e are no #roblem for ! ater.)hB ;oo, B *ere is my
fatherB5

)head of us, on the rambling and ! eedy #ath, ! as an o' (art. 2he
o' , a huge urve(horned beast, the olour of afe latte, ! as
sha , led to a tall, bas, et(sha#ed art mounted on t! o ! ooden,
steel(rimmed ! heels. 2he ! heels ! ere narro! but high, rea hing to
my shoulder. Smo, ing a beedie igarette and sitting on the o' (bo!
yo, e, his legs dangling free, ! as >raba, er"s father.

<ishan 4ango <harre ! as a tiny man, shorter even than >raba, er, ! ith very lose(ro##ed grey hair, a short, grey moustache, and a #rominent #aun h on his other! ise slender frame. *e ! ore the ! hite a#, otton , urtah shirt, and dhoti of the farmer aste. 2he dhoti is te hni ally des ribed as a loin loth, but the term robs the garment of its serene and gra eful elegance. It an be gathered u# to be ome ! or, shorts for 11H labour in the fields, or loosened to be ome #antaloons(style trousers ! ith the an, les free. 2he dhoti itself is al! ays moving, and it follo! s the human ontour in every a t from running to sitting still. It a#tures every bree1e at noon, and , ee#s out the da! n hill. It's modest and #ra ti al, yet flattering and attra tive at the same time. Gandhi gave the dhoti #rominen e on

his tri#s to /uro#e, in the struggle for Indian inde#enden e from /ngland. 7ith all due res#e t to the 4ahatma, ho! ever, it's not until you live and ! or, ! ith India's farmers that you fully a##re iate the gentle and ennobling beauty of that sim#le ! ra# of fabri .

>raba, er dro##ed his bags and ran for! ard. *is father s#rang from his seat on the yo, e, and they embra ed shyly. 2he older man's smile ! as the only smile I've ever seen that rivalled >raba, er's o! n. It ! as a vast smile, using the ! hole of the fa e, as if he'd been fro1en in the middle of a belly laugh. 7hen >raba, er turned to fa e me, beside his father, sub+e ting me to a double dose of the giganti smile((the original, and its slightly grander geneti o#y((the effe t ! as so over! helming that I found myself grinning hel#lessly in return.

5; in, this is my father, <ishan 4ango <harre.)nd father, this is 4r. ; in. I am ha##y, too mu h ha##y, that you are meeting ea h other's good selves.5

7e shoo, hands, and stared into one another's eyes. >raba, er and his father had the same almost #erfe tly round fa e and the same

u#turned, button nose. *o! ever, ! here >raba, er"s fa e ! as
om#letely o#en, guileless, and unlined, his father"s fa e ! as
dee#ly ! rin, led6 and ! hen he ! asn"t smiling, there ! as a ! eary
shado! that losed over his eyes. It ! as as if he"d sealed shut
some doors in himself, and stood guard over them, ! ith his eyes
alone. 2here ! as #ride in his fa e, but he ! as sad, and tired,
and ! orried. It too, me a long time to realise that all farmers,
every! here, are +ust as tired, ! orried, #roud, and sad: that the
soil you turn and the seed you so! are all you really have, ! hen
you live and ! or, the /arth.)nd sometimes, mu h too often,
there"s nothing more than that((the silent, se ret, heartbrea, ing
+oy God #uts into things that bloom and gro! ((to hel# you fa e
the fear of hunger and the dread of evil.

54y father is a very su ess man,5 >raba, er beamed, #roudly, his
arm around the older man"s shoulders. I s#o, e very little
4arathi, and <ishan s#o, e no /nglish, so >raba, er re#eated
everything in both languages. *earing the #hrase in his o! n
language, <ishan lifted his shirt ! ith a 11?
gra eful, artless flourish, and #atted at his hairy #ot(belly.
*is eyes glittered as he s#o, e to me, ! aggling his head all the
! hile in ! hat seemed to be an unnervingly sedu tive leer.

57hat did he sayE5

5*e ! ants you to #at his tummies,5 >raba, er e' #lained, grinning.

<ishan grinned as ! idely.

5I don"t thin, so.5

5@h, yes, ; in. *e ! ants you to #at his tummies.5

5- o.5

5*e really ! ants you to give it a #at,5 he #ersisted.

52ell him I'm flattered, and I thin, it's a fine tummies. Out
tell him I thin, I'll #ass, >rabu.5

5\$ust give it a little #at, ; in.5

5- o,5 I said, more firmly.

<ishan's grin ! idened, and he raised his eyebrow! s several times,
in en ouragement. *e still held the shirt u# to his hest,
e' #osing the round, hairy #aun h.

5Go on, ; in.) fe! #ats only. It ! on't bite you, my father's
tummies.5

Sometimes you have to surrender, <arla said, before you ! in.)nd
she ! as right. Surrender is at the heart of the Indian
e' #erien e. I gave in. Glan ing around me, on the deserted tra , ,
I rea hed out and #atted the ! arm and fu11y belly.

\$ust then, of ouse, the tall green stal, s of millet beside us
on the #ath se#arated to reveal four dar, bro! n fa es. 2hey ! ere
young men. 2hey stared at us, their eyes ! ide ! ith the , ind of
ama1ement that's afraid, a##alled, and delighted at the same
time.

Slo! ly, and ! ith as mu h dignity as I ould muster, I ! ithdre! my
hand from <ishan's stoma h. *e loo, ed at me, and then at the
others, ! ith one eyebrow! raised and the orners of his mouth
dra! n do! n into the smug smile of a #oli e #rose utor, resting
his ase.

5I don't ! ant to intrude on your dad's moment here, >rabu, but
don't you thin, ! e should be getting alongE5

58halloB5 <ishan announ ed, ma, ing a guess at the meaning of my
! ords. _; et's _goB

)s ! e loaded our gear and limbed into the ba , of the art,

<ishan too, his seat on the yoke attached to the ox (bullock), raised a long bamboo stick, that had a nail driven into the end of it, and moved us off with a tremendous blow to the animal's haunches.

Responding to the violent blow, the ox gave a lurch forward, and then set off with ponderous, thudding slowness. Our steady but very sluggish progress caused me to wonder at the hoariness of that beast, above others, to perform the task. It seemed to me that the Indian ox, no more than as the bailie, was surely the slowest harness animal in the world. If I'd limbered down from the start, and walked at a moderate pace, I could've doubled its speed. In

fact, the people who'd stared at us through the millet plants were rushing ahead through the dense rows at the sides of the path to announce our arrival.

Very tentatively to fifty metres or so, nevertheless faces appeared between the staked stalks of maize, corn, and millet. The expression on those faces was always the same (frankly, stupefying, goggle-eyed amazement. If Ghabra and his father had acquired a wild bear, and trained it to speak, the people wouldn't have reacted with more gape-mouthed astonishment.

The people are too happy, Ghabra laughed. You are the first person from foreign to visit my village in ten years. The last foreign fellow coming here was from Belgium. That was ten years ago. All the people here are less than ten years old have never seen a foreigner with their own eyes. That last fellow, that one from Belgium, he was a good man. Out you are a very, very good man, my friend. The people will love you too much. You will be so happy here, you will be outside yourself. You will see.

The people who stared at me from the groves and bushes at the side of the road seemed more anguished and threatened than happy. In the hope of dissuading that trepidation, I began to raise

my Indian head(! igger. The rea tion ! as immediate. The #eo#le smiled, laughed, ! iggered their heads in return, and ran ahead, shouting to their neighbours about the entertaining s#e ta le that ! as #loding along the tra , to! ards them.

To ensure the unflagging #rogress of the o' , <ishan beat the animal fier ely and often. The sti , rose and fell ! ith a resounding sma , at regular intervals of minutes. The rhythm of those heavy blo! s ! as #un tuated by shar# +abs at the animal's flank, s ! ith the nail atta hed to the end of the sti , . /a h thrust #enetrated the thi , hide, and raised a little tuft of ream bro! n fur.

The o' didn't rea t to those assaults, other than to ontinue its lumbering, drag(footed advan e along the #ath. -evertheless, I suffered for the 117 beast. /a h blo! and +ab a umulated ! ithin my sym#athy until it ! as more than I ould bear.

5>rabu, do me a favour, #lease as, your father to sto# hitting the animal.5

5Sto# ... sto# hittingB5

5Deah.)s, him to sto# hitting the o' , #lease.5

5- o, it is not #ossible, ; in,5 he re#lied, laughing.

The sti , slammed into the broad ba , of the o' , and ! as follo! ed by t! o =ui , +abs of the nail.

5I mean it, >rabu. >lease as, him to sto#.5

5Out, ; in ...5

I flin hed, as the sti , ame do! n again, and my e' #ression #leaded ! ith him to intervene.

Reluctantly, >raba, er #assed on my re=uest to his father. <ishan listened intently, and then laughed hel#lessly in a fit of giggles.)fter a time, he #er eived his son's distress, ho! ever, and the laughter subsided, and finally died, in a flurry of =uestions. >raba, er did his best to ans! er them, but at last he turned his in reasingly forlorn e' #ression to me on e more.

54y father, ;in, he ! ants to , no! ! hy you ! ant him to sto# using the sti , .5

5I don't ! ant him to hurt the o' .5

2his time >raba, er laughed, and ! hen he ! as able to translate my ! ords for his father, they both laughed. 2hey tal, ed for a ! hile, still laughing, and then >raba, er addressed me again.

54y father is as, ing, is it true that in your ountry #eo#le are eating o! sE5

57ell, yes, it's true. Out ...5

5*o! many of the o! s do you eat thereE5

57e ... ! ell ... ! e e' #ort them from my ountry. 7e don't eat them all ourselves.5

5*o! manyE5

5@h, hundreds of thousands of them. 4aybe millions, if you ount the shee#. Out ! e use humane methods, and ! e don't believe in unne essarily hurting them.5

54y father is saying, he thin, s it is very hard to _eat one of these big animals, ! ithout hurting it.5 118

*e then sought to e' #lain my nature to his father by re ounting for him the story of ho! I'd given u# my seat, on the train

journey, to allow an elderly man to sit, hold I shared my fruit and other food with my fellow passengers, and hold I often gave to beggars on the streets of Bombay.

Chishan pulled the cart to a sudden stop, and resumed down from the wooden yoke. He fired a stream of commands at Ghaba, who finally turned to me to translate.

My father insists to, no! if I have it any presents with us, from Bombay, for him and the family. I told him I did. - oh! he insists

us to give it those presents to him here, and in this place, before I go any more along the road.

He insists us to go through our bags, here, on this train.

Des. He is afraid that when I get to Sunder village, you will have a good heart, and give it away all those presents to other people, and he will not get his presents. He insists it all his presents no!

So I did. Under the indigo banner of early evening, on the stretch of train, between fields of undulating maize and millet, I observed the colours of India, the yellows and reds and earthy blues of shirts and lungis and saris. When I reached them, with fragrant soaps and sewing needles, insecticide and safety pins, perfume and shampoo and massage oils, so that one full bag contained only those things I'd brought for Ghaba's family. With that bag safely tucked behind him on the rails of the cart harness, Chishan changed our pace on the last leg of our journey by striking the dumbly patient more often, and with a good deal more vigour, than he'd done before I tried to intercede on its behalf.

And then, at last, it was the voices of women and children, raised in laughter and cries of excitement, that welcomed us. The sounds reached us moments before I turned the last sharp curve

and entered the village of Sunder along a single, wide street of
silt, pressed, golden river sand. On either side were the
houses, distributed so that no house faced into another across
the street. The houses were round, made of baked mud, with
round windows and arched doors. The roofs were made with little
domes of thatched grasses.

Word had spread that the foreigner was arriving. The two hundred
souls of Sunder village had been joined by hundreds more from
neighbouring villages. Vishan drove us into the throng, stopping
outside his own home. He was grinning so widely that everyone
looked at him as moved to laugh in return.

We limbed down from the cart, and stood with our luggage at our
feet in the centre of six hundred stares and hisses. Breath
filled silence settled on the road, gathered so tightly that each
one pressed upon his neighbour. They were so close to me that I
could feel the breath upon my face. Six hundred pairs of eyes
fixed me with the intensity of their fascination. One woman,
Raba, was at my side, and although he smiled and enjoyed the
celebrity that the moment gave him, he too was amazed by the press
of attention and the surrounding clamour and excitement.

Suddenly you're ordering why I've called you all here, I
said, in just the serious tone of voice that I could've been funny
if there'd been a single person in the road who understood the

woman. One did, of course, and the silence thickened, as even
the faint murmurs died away.

What do you say to a huge crowd of strangers who are waiting for
you to say something, and who don't speak your language?

My bag was at my feet. In the top flap, set there as a
souvenir that a friend had given me. It was a leather satchel, in

blatant, and I hid, completely with bells on the ends of its three
both horns. The friend, an actor in England, had made the
theater's assistant as part of a costume. Just the air port, within minutes
to go before my flight to India, he'd given me the assistant as a good
luck charm, a remembrance of him, and I'd stuffed it into the top
of my bag, assistant.

There's a kind of luck, that's not much more than being in the
right place at the right time, a kind of inspiration that's not
much more than doing the right thing in the right way, and both
only really happen to you when you empty your heart of ambition,
ambition, and ambition when you give yourself, completely, to the
golden, fate-filled moment.

I too, the theater's assistant out of the bag, and put it on, pulling it
tight under my chin, and straightening the both horns with my
fingers. Everyone at the front of the road drew back with a
little rushing gasp of alarm. When I smiled, and I nodded my
head, ringing the bells.

"Hello, folks," I said. "It's show time."

The effect was electrifying. Everyone laughed. The entire group
of women, children, and men erupted as one, laughing and shouting
and crying.
One person reached out to touch me on the shoulder. The
children at the front reached for my hands. When everyone within
grasping distance attacked, stroked, and grabbed me. I caught
Chandrababu's eye. The look of joy and pride I found there was a
kind of prayer.

He permitted the gentle assault for some minutes, and then
asserted his authority over the new attraction by clearing the
road away. He succeeded, at last, in opening the way to his
father's house and, as he entered the doorway of Chandrababu's
home, the chattering, laughing road began to disperse.

"You must have a bath, Sir. After such a long travel you must be

smelling unhasy. Some this! ay. 4y sisters have already heated the! ater on the fire. 2he #ots are ready for your bath. 8ome.5

7e #assed through a lo! ar h, and he led me to an area beside the house that! as en losed on three sides by hanging tatami mats. 9lat river stones formed a sho! er base, and three large lay #ots of! arm! ater! ere arranged near them.) hannel had been dug and smoothed out, allo! ing! ater to run off behind the house.

>raba, er told me that a small brass +ug! as to be used to ti#! ater over my body, and gave me the soa# dish.

I'd been unla ing my boots! hile he s#o, e, and I ast them aside, thre! off my shirt, and #ulled off my +eans.

5; inB5 >raba, er s reamed in #ani , lea#ing, in a single bound, a ross the t! o metres that se#arated us. *e tried to over my body! ith his hands, but then loo, ed around in anguish to see that the to! el! as on my ba , #a , , a further t! o metres a! ay. *e +um#ed for the to! el, snat hed it u#, and +um#ed ba , , giving a little shout of #ani ((DaaahB((ea h time. *e! ra##ed the to! el around me, and loo, ed around in terror.

5*ave you gone ra1y, ; inE 7hat are you doingE5

5I'm trying to ... ta, e a sho! er ...5

5Out li, e thatE ; i, e thatE5

57hat's the matter! ith you, >rabuE Dou told me to ta, e a sho! er. Dou brought me here to have a sho! er. So, I'm trying to ta, e a sho! er, but you're +um#ing around li, e a rabbit. 7hat's your #roblemE5

5Dou! ere na, ed, ; inB -a, ed, ! ithout any lothes alsoB5

52hat's ho! I ta, e a sho! er,5 I said, e' as#erated by his

mysterious terror. *e ! as darting about, #eering through the tatami matting at various #la es. 52hat"s ho! everyone ta, es a sho! er, isn"t itE5 1F1

5-oB -oB -o, ; inB5 he orre ted, returning to fa e me.) des#erate e' #ression ontorted his normally ha##y features.

5Dou don"t ta, e your lothes offE5

5-o, ; inB 2his is India. -obody an ta, e his lothes off, not even to ! ash his bodies. 2his is India. -obody is ever na, ed in India.)nd es#e ially, nobody is na, ed ! ithout lothes.5

5So ... ho! do you ta, e a sho! erE5

57e ! ear it the under#ants, for having a bath in India.5

57ell, that"s fine,5 I said, dro##ing the to! el to reveal my bla , +o , ey shorts. 5I"m ! earing under#ants.5

5DaaahB5 >raba, er s reamed, diving for the to! el and overing me again.

52hose teeny #ie es, ; inE 2hose are not the under#ants. 2hose are the under(under#ants only. Dou must have it the over(under#ants.5

52he ... over(under#antsE5

5Des. 8ertainly. ; i, e these, my ones, that I am ! earing.5

*e unbuttoned his o! n trousers enough to sho! me that he ! ore a #air of green shorts under his lothes.

5In India, the men are ! earing this over(under#ants, under their lothes, at all times, and in all the situations. /ven if they are ! earing under(under#ants, still they are ! earing over(

underpants, over their unders. Dou seeE5

5- o.5

5 Well, just you wait here. I will get you some overpants for your bath. Out don't remove your toilet. Please promise If the people see you without the toilet, in such teeny pieces, they will be liable. Wait hereE5

*e darted off, and after a few minutes returned with a pair of red football shorts.

*ere, in, he sniffed. Dou are such a big fellow, I hope I can get a good fit. These are from Satish. *e is so fat, I think, they might fit you. I told him a story, and then he gave it this pair for you. I told him that on the journey you had loose motions, and you made such a mess in your overpants that I had to throw them away.5

Dou told him, I said, that I shit my pantsE5

@h, yes, in. I certainly couldn't tell him that you have no overpantsE5 1FF

Well, of course not.5

I mean, what would he be thinking about youE5

2han, you, rabu, I muttered, through clenched teeth. If my tone had been any drier I couldn't have needed a toilet.

2hat is my pleasure, in. I am your very good friend. So please, promise me that you will not be named in India. /specially not without your clothes.5

I promise.5

I am so glad you made this promise, in. Dou are my very good

friend, too, isn't it? – oh! I! ill take a bath also, like! e are
to brothers, and I! ill show you the Indian style.⁵

So, like both too, a shower, in the bathing area of his father's
house. Following him, and following his lead, I! let my body in a
first rinse! with! to! of! after from one of the large pots,

and! over, under the soap# beneath my shorts! without ever taking them
off. After the final rinse, and a =ui, dry off! with the towel,
he taught me how! to tie a lungi around the! wet shorts. The lungi
! as a sarong (like a rectangle of cotton,! worn from! waist to ankles.
*e gathered! to! long ends or! corners of the lungi at the front,
and then #passed them around my! waist, and rolled them under the
to# edge, in the small of my back, . Following the enir ling lungi, I
removed and discarded my! wet shorts and slid## on a dry #pair of
shorts underneath. Following that! the =ue, >raba,er assured me, I
could take a shower in the o#en, and not offend his neighbours.

After the shower, and a delicious meal of dhal, rice, and
homemade flatbreads, >raba,er and I! sat! as his #parents and
his! to! sisters opened their #resents. We drank tea then, and for
! to! hours! e answered =uestions about me, and my home and family.
I tried to answer truthfully (without the! ru! truth that in
my hunted! e'ile, I didn't think, I! could ever see my home or
family again.)t last, >raba,er announced that he! as too tired
to translate any more, and that I should be #ermitted to rest.

) bed made from the! wood of! coconut trees and! with a stretched
mattress, formed from a! web of! coconut (fibre rope,! as set up# for
me in the o#en, outside <ishan's house. It! as <ishan's! n bed.
>raba,er told me that it might take! to! days to have a new! one
made to his father's satisfaction. Until then <ishan! ould sleep#
beside his son on the floor of the house,! while I used his bed. I
tried to resist, but my #rotests dropped in! FG
the sea of their gentle, relentless insistence. So I lay down on
the #oor farmer's bed, and my first night in that first Indian
village ended, as it had begun,! with surrender.

>raba, er told me that his family and his neighbours ! ere
on erved that I ! ould be lonely, that I must be lonely, in a
strange #la e, ! ithout my o! n family. 2hey de ided to sit ! ith me
on that first night, mounting a vigil in the dar, until they ! ere
sure that I ! as #ea efully dee# in slee#.)fter all, the little
guide remar, ed, #eo#le in my ountry, in my village, ! ould do the
same for him, if he ! ent there and missed his family, ! ouldn't
theyE

2hey sat on the ground around my lo! bed, >raba, er and his
#arents and his neighbours, , ee#ing me om#any in the ! arm, dar, ,
innamon(s ented night, and forming a ring of #rote tion around
me. I thought that it ! ould be im#ossible to slee# ! ithin a
ir le of s#e tators, but in minutes I began to float and drift
on the murmuring tide of their voi es6 soft and rhythmi ! aves
that s! irtled beneath a fathomless night of bright, ! his#ering
stars.

)t one #oint, >raba, er"s father rea hed out from his #la e at my
left side to rest his hand on my shoulder. It ! as a sim#le
gesture of , indness and omfort, but its effe t on me ! as
#rofound.) moment before, I"d been drifting to! ard slee#.
Suddenly I ! as hard a! a, e. I #lunged into memories and thoughts

of my daughter, my #arents, my brother6 of the rimes I"d
ommitted, and the loves I'd betrayed and lost forever.

It may seem strange, and it may in fa t be im#ossible for anyone
else to understand, but until that very moment I'd had no real
om#rehension of the ! rong I'd done, and the life I'd lost. 7hile
I'd ommitted the armed robberies, I ! as on drugs, addi ted to
heroin.)n o#iate fog had settled over everything that I thought
and did and even remembered about that time.)fter! ards, during
the trial and the three years in #rison, I ! as sober and lear(
headed, and I should've , no! n then ! hat the rimes and
#unishments meant, for myself and my family and the #eo#le I'd

robbed at the point of a gun. Out I didn't , no! or feel anything of it then. I ! as too busy being #unished, and feeling #unished, to #ut my heart around it. /ven ! ith the es a#e from #rison, and the flight, running and hiding as a ! anted man, a hunted man ! ith a #ri e on my head((even then, there ! as no final, lear, en om#assing gras# of the a ts and the onse=uen es that made u# the ne! , bitter story of my life. 1FH

It ! as only there, in the village in India, on that first night, adrift on the raft of murmuring voi es, and my eyes filled ! ith stars6 only then, ! hen another man"s father rea hed out to omfort me, and #la ed a #oor farmer"s rough and alloused hand on my shoulder6 only there and then did I see and feel the torment of ! hat I"d done, and ! hat I"d be ome((the #ain and the fear and the ! aste6 the stu#id, unforgivable ! aste of it all. 4y heart bro,e on its shame and sorro! . I suddenly ,ne! ho! mu h rying there ! as in me, and ho! little love. I ,ne! , at last, ho! lonely I ! as.

Out I ouldn't res#ond. 4y ulture had taught me all the ! rong things ! ell. So I lay om#letely still, and gave no rea tion at all. Out the soul has no ulture. 2he soul has no nations. 2he soul has no colour or a ent or ! ay of life. 2he soul is forever. 2he soul is one.)nd ! hen the heart has its moment of truth and sorro! , the soul an"t be stilled.

I len hed my teeth against the stars. I losed my eyes. I surrendered to slee#. @ne of the reasons ! hy ! e rave love, and see, it so des#erately, is that love is the only ure for loneliness, and shame, and sorro! . Out some feelings sin, so dee# into the heart that only loneliness an hel# you find them again. Some truths about yourself are so #ainful that only shame an hel# you live ! ith them.)nd some things are +ust so sad that only your soul an do the rying for you.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER SIX

>raba, er"s father introdu ed me to Sunder village, but it ! as his mother ! ho made me feel at home there. *er life enfolded mine ! ithin its trium#h and sorro! , +ust as easily as her red sha! !

sometimes ens! athed a rying hild that #assed the door! ay of her house. *er story, told to me by many voi es, month after month, be ame all the stories, even my o! n.)nd her love((her ! illingness to , no! the truth of my heart and to love me((hanged the ourse of my life.

Then I first met her, Ru, hmabai <harre ! as forty years old, and at the #ea, of her #ersonal #o! er and #ubli #restige. She ! as a full head and shoulder taller than her husband, and that differen e in height, ombined ! ith her am#le, urva eous figure, gave the false im#ression that she ! as something of an)ma1on, ! henever the ou#le stood together. *er bla , hair, gleaming ! ith o onut oil, had never been ut, and the ma+esti ro#e of it rea hed to her , nees. *er s, in ! as tan bro! n. *er eyes ! ere the colour of amber, set in rose gold. 2he ! hites of her eyes ! ere #in, , all ays, giving the im#ression that she"d +ust ried or ! as +ust about to ry.) ! ide ga# bet! een her front teeth gave an im#ish mis hief to her smile, ! hile the su#erb hoo, of her bea, ed nose endo! ed her serious e' #ressions ! ith an im#osing authority. *er forehead ! as high and ! ide((it ! as >raba, er"s forehead, e' a tly((and the high urves of her hee, bones ! ere the mountains from ! hi h her amber eyes studied the ! orld. She had a ready ! it, and a dee# sym#athy for the distress of others. She stood aloof from dis#utes bet! een her neighbours until she ! as as, ed to give her o#inion, and then hers ! as usually the last ! ord. She ! as a ! oman to admire and to desire, but the message in her eye and her bearing ! as unmista, ble: offend or disesteem her at your #eril.

2he for e of her #ersonality maintained a status in the village that ! as derived from <ishan"s o! nershi# of land and her ste! ardshi# of their 1FC

small personal fortune. Her marriage to Chishan had been arranged. As a shy sixteen-year-old, she'd peeked from behind a curtain to inspect her betrothed, seeing him then for the first and only time before the marriage. When I learned to speak, her language well enough, she told me with disarming candour how disappointed she'd been when she'd scrutinised Chishan for the first time. He was so short. His skin, tanned by farmer's toil until it matched the dark brown earth itself, was darker, even than hers, and that had worried her. His hands were rough and his speech was coarse. His clothes were plain but drab. And he was illiterate. Her father was head of a village council, a man of means, and Rukhmabai could read and write, in Hindi and Marathi. As she looked at Chishan that first time, her heart beating its secrets so furiously that she feared he would hear it, she felt sure she wouldn't love him, and that she was marrying beneath her status.

At the very moment of that distressing realisation, Chishan turned his head to stare directly at the hiding place, where she crouched behind the curtain. She was certain that he wouldn't see her, yet he stared as if he was looking into her eyes. Then he smiled. It was the biggest smile she'd ever seen. It was radiant, and suffused with an irresistible good humour. She looked into that prodigious smile, and a strange feeling took hold of her.

She smiled back at him, despite herself, and felt a rush of relief (being, an indefinable but overwhelmingly sanguine cheerfulness. Things will turn out right, the voice of her heart said to her. Everything will be all right. She knew, just as I do now when I say >raba, for the first time, that no man who smiled with so much of his heart would knowingly hurt or harm another.

When he looked away again, it was as if the room had darkened, and she understood that she'd begun to love him for the reassuring splendour of his smile alone. She offered no protest when her father announced the marriage arrangement, and within a few months of that first glimpse of Chishan's magnificent smile she was blessed, and pregnant with her first son, >raba, her.

Chishan's father settled plots of fertile fields on his eldest son at the time of the marriage, and Rukhmabai's father added a third to the young couple's endowment. From the earliest days of their union, the young bride assumed control of their small wealth. Using her reading and writing skills, she kept meticulous records of their profits and losses in simple Gujarati. She had her harvests, which she tied into bundles and stored in a granary.

Prudent investments in the enterprises of her neighbours and a careful husbanding of their resources ensured that their losses were few. With the birth of their third child, when she was twenty-five years old, Rukhmabai had driven their modest fortune to become the largest in the village. They owned five fields. They planted cash crops. They kept three milking buffaloes and three oxen, as well as plots of milking goats and a dozen laying hens. There was money in the bank, sufficient to provide substantial dowries for her two daughters. The girls would marry well, she resolved, and give higher status to her grandchildren.

When he was nine years old, Ghera was sent to Bombay, where he was apprenticed to an uncle who drove a cart, and lived in a large inner-city slum. Rukhmabai began to ease her morning prayers, with the hopes and plans she made for the future of her family. When she suffered a miscarriage. In less than a year, she miscarried three more. Doctors concluded that her uterus had been scarred after the birth of her third child. They recommended, and carried out, a total hysterectomy. She was twenty-six years old.

Rukhmabai's heart wandered through the empty rooms of her life: the rooms reserved for the three babies lost in miscarriages, and all the other lives that might've been. For two years she was inconsolable. Even Chishan's wonderful smile, summoned through his own tears, failed to rouse her. Forlorn and brokenhearted, she languished in misery and the minimal routine of caring for her daughters. The laughter went out of her, and sadness settled on the neglected fields.

Ru, hmabai's soul ! as dying, and she might've fallen into that sorro! forever, but a ata lysmi event that threatened the ! hole

village roused her from her grieving.) band of da oits, or armed bandits, settled in the area and began to demand tributes.) man in a neighbouring village ! as ha , ed ! ith a ma hete.) ! oman in the same village ! as ra#ed by the da oits. 2hen they shot and , illed a resister in <ishan's village.

Ru, hmabai had , no! n the dead man very ! ell. *e'd been one of <ishan's ousins, and had married a girl from Ru, hmabai's o! n village. /very man, ! oman, and hild in Sunder attended the funeral.)t its end, Ru, hmabai addressed the assembled villagers. *er hair ! as a! ry, and her amber eyes bla1ed ! ith rage and determination. She harangued those 1F8

! ho ! anted to a##ease the da oits, e' horting them to resist and fight and , ill, if ne essary, in defen e of their lives and their land.)stonished as mu h by her sudden animation, after t! o years of grief's tor#or, as by her martial s#ee h, the villagers ! ere ins#irited. 2here and then, they devised a #lan of a tion and resistan e.

7ord rea hed the da oits that the #eo#le of Sunder village ! ere determined to fight. 2hreats, s, irmishes, and e' #loratory raids finally led the boiling onfli t to the #oint ! here a battle ! as inevitable. 2he da oits delivered a mena ing ! arning that on a given day the villagers must surrender a onsiderable tribute, or suffer terrible onse=uen es.

2he #eo#le armed themselves ! ith si , les, a' es, staves, and , nives. 2he ! omen and hildren ! ere eva uated to a neighbouring village. 9ear and regret s! e#t through the ran, s of the men ! ho remained. Several men argued that their struggle ! as foolhardy, and that tribute ! as less #ainful than death. 2he brothers of the murdered man stal, ed among them, giving en ouragement and onsolation ! hile they astigated the ba , sliders for their

o! ardi e.

The alarm ! ent u# that men ! ere a##roa hing on the ity road. The villagers on ealed themselves behind hastily ere ted barri ades bet! een their mud houses. /' hilarated and afraid, they ! ere at the #oint of stri, ing ! hen they realised that the men ! ere allies. *earing of the ! ar ! ith the da oits a ! ee, before, >raba, er had gathered a grou# of si' friends and ousins from the ity slum, ! here he lived, and he"d set out to join his family. *e ! as ust fifteen at the time, and the eldest of his friends ! as only eighteen, but they ! ere street fighters from one of Oombay"s toughest =uarters. @ne of them, Ra+u, a tall boy ! ith the handsome fa e and bouffant hairstyle of a Oombay movie star, had a gun. *e sho! ed the #istol to the villagers, and gave heart to them all.

The da oits, arrogant and over(onfident, s! aggered into the village half an hour before sunset. The first blood(urdling threat ! as still on their leader"s li#s ! hen Ra+u ste##ed from his on ealment and ! al, ed to! ard the bandits, firing on e for every third ste#.)' es, si , les, , nives, staves, and ro , s #oured

from the barri ade ! alls, hurled to deadly effe t by the des#erate farmers. Ra+u never bro, e his stride, and ! ith his last bullet he stru , the leader of the da oits in the hest at lose range. The man ! as dead, the villagers said, before he hit the ground.

The rest of the ! ounded da oits s attered, and ! ere never seen again. 1F9

The body of the fallen leader ! as arried to \$amner Distri t #oli e #ost.)ll the villagers told the same story: they"d resisted the da oits, and in the onfusion of battle the bandits had shot one of their o! n men. Ra+u"s name ! as never mentioned.)fter feasting for t! o days, the young men returned ! ith >raba, er to the ity. 7ild, brave Ra+u died in a bar room fight a year later. 2! o of the other boys died in similarly violent

in circumstances. Another! as serving a long sentence in prison for a crime of passion, involving the love of an actress and the enmity of a rival.

The villagers told me about the great battle many times as I learned to speak, the Marathi language. They too, me to the historical sites! here the confrontations and confrontations had occurred. They! also, led me through re-enactments of the event, the younger men often competing for the honour of playing Ram's part. - no less important, in the telling of the tale, were the stories of the young men! who'd fought beside them. The fate of each one (I learned from Ganga, ever on his visits to the village) was recalled and told to me as part of the great saga. And through all of the stories and discussions, there! was a special affection and pride for Rukhmabai <ahire. They loved and admired her for the galvanising role she'd played! with her funeral speech (the first and last time she'd ever assumed a public position in the village. They acknowledged her courage, and they respected her strength of will. Above all, they celebrated her return to them, through the struggle! with the doctors, from grief and despair to the strong, shrewd, laughing woman she'd always been. In that poor and simple village, no one doubted or forgot that its treasures! were its people.

And it! was all there, in her lovely face. The lines, high on her cheeks, were the dams she used to check the tears in her eyes. Answering, unanswered questions started her full, red lips, whenever she! was alone, or absorbed in her! work. Determination stiffened the defiant thrust of her left chin. And her forehead! was always slightly creased in the centre, between the brows, as if she! was grasping, in those soft folds of skin, the monstrous and inimitable understanding that no happiness exists! without its! cost, no! health! without its! cost, and no life! without its full measure, sooner or later, of sorrow and death.

My relationship! with Rukhmabai! was established on the first morning. I'd slept! well on the roof bed outside <ishan's house (so! well, in fact, that I! was still snoring loudly! when Rukhmabai

drove her milk, ing buffalo 1G%

into the shade, just after dawn. One of the creatures, drawn to the bubbling sound, decided to investigate.) I felt, suffocating sensation! I woke me with a start of alarm. I opened my eyes to see the huge, pink, tongue of a giant black, later buffalo descending on me again to smother my face. Shouting in fear and surprise, I fell off the bed and balanced myself on my hands and heels.

Ru, hmabai led the laughter at my expense, but it was good laughter (honest, and kind, and without malice in it. When she reached down to help me up, I took her hand and laughed with her.

She said, pointing to the buffalo, and establishing the ground rule that if I were to be communicating with words, I would be the one learning a foreign language. After buffalo

She took a glass, and squatted by the udder of the immense, black, bovine (horned beast to suck the milk. I watched the milk squirt directly into the glass. She filled the glass with expert strokes, and then brought it to me, holding the lip with the corner of her red cotton shirt.

I'm a city boy. I was born and raised in a fairly large city of three million people. One of the reasons I would remain for years on the run was that I love big cities, and feel completely confident and comfortable in them. The full range of a city boy's suspicion and dread of the country rose up in me when I held that glass of freshly sucked milk. It was warm to the touch. It smelled of the soil. There seemed to be things floating in the glass. I hesitated. I had the sense that someone was standing just behind me, looking over my shoulder at the glass. I could hear him. /r, I would boil that milk first, Monsieur, if I were you ...

I suddenly re-urged fear, and the milk, all at once, gulping it

do! n as =ui , ly as #ossible. 2he taste ! as not as bad as I'd e' #e ted it to be((reamy and ri h, and ! ith a hint of dried grasses ! ithin the bovine aftertaste. Ru, hmabai snat hed the glass from my hand and s=uatted do! n to fill it again, but my urgent, #leading #rotest onvin ed her that I ! as ! ell satisfied ! ith a single glass.

7hen ! e"d made our toilet, ! ashed our fa es, and leaned our teeth, Ru, hmabai stood over >raba, er and me ! hile ! e ate a solid brea, fast of roti and hai. 2he roti, or unleavened flatbreads, ! ere made fresh for ea h brea, fast, and oo, ed in a lightly oiled ! o, on an o#en fire. 2he hot, #an a, e(li, e bread ! as filled ! ith a dab of ghee, or #urified butter, and a large s#oonful of sugar. It ! as then rolled into a tube, so thi , that the 1G1 hand only +ust urred around it, and eaten ! ith a mug of hot, s! eet, mil, y tea.

Ru, hmabai ! at hed every bite and he! , #rodding us ! ith a finger or sla##ing us on the head or shoulder if either of us sho! ed the

slightest in lination to #ause for breath during the brea, fast. 2ra##ed, our +a! s grinding a! ay at the admittedly deli ious food, ! e both ast surre#titious glan es at the young ! omen oo, ing at the ! o, , ho#ing that ea h roti, after the third or fourth ! e"d eaten, ! ould be our last.

)nd so, for all the many ! ee, s, every day in the village began ! ith a glass of buffalo mil, , then ! ith a ! ash and, at last, ! ith a long hai(roti brea, fast. @n most mornings, I +oined the men in the fields tending to the ro#s of mai1e, orn, ! heat, #ulses, and otton. 2he ! or, ing day ! as divided into t! o bra ,ets of about three hours, ! ith a lun h brea, and siesta bet! een. 8hildren and young ! omen brought the lun hes to us in a multitude of stainless steel dishes. 2he meal usually onsisted of the ubi=uitous roti, s#i y lentil dhal, mango hutney, and ra! onions, served ! ith lime +ui e.)fter eating the meal as a grou#, the men moved off to find =uiet, shady s#ots to do1e in for an

hour or so. Then I resumed, the fed and rested I resumed, and applied themselves with great energy and enthusiasm until the senior man in the group called a halt. Assembling on one of the main paths, the farmers then walked back to their fields they'd soiled and tended themselves, often laughing and joking all the way to the village.

There was little to do for the men in the village itself. Working, plowing, sowing, and even routine housework were all done by the women (mostly younger women, supervised in their tasks by older women). On average, the village women worked a four-hour day. They spent much of their free time playing with the young children. The village men worked six hours per day for an average four-day week. Special efforts were required for plantings and harvests, but in general the Maharashtrian villagers worked fewer hours than working men and women in cities.

It wasn't paradise. Some of the men exhausted themselves, after their work in the collective fields, trying to bring profits from a cash crop of cotton on a private patch of rocky ground. Rains came early or late. Fields flooded, or succumbed to the predations of insects and crop diseases. Women, with no outlet for their special reactivities, endured the long, quiet ruin of their talents. Others hated the sloth of bright children who could've been more and done more in some other, busier place, but never could do more than the village, the fields, and the river. Sometimes, rarely, a man or woman was so relentlessly miserable that the night for all of us, listening in the village dark, was ragged with sobbing.

Out, just as Ghabra had said, the people did sing almost every day. If an abundance of good food, laughter, singing, and an amiable disposition can be taken as indicators of well-being and happiness, then the villagers exemplified their Western counterparts in those qualities of life. In my six months there, I never heard a single voice or saw a hand raised in anger. Moreover, the men

and Iomen in >raba, er's village Iere robustly healthy. The grand#arents Iere #lum#, but not fat, the #arents Iere bright(eyed and fit, and the children Iere straight(limbed, lever, and viva ious.

)nd there Ias a sense of ertainty, in the village, that no ity I've ever , no! n #rovides: the ertainty that emerges Ihen the soil, and the generations Iho Ior, it, be ome inter hangeable! Ihen the identities of the human beings and the nature of the #la e are one and the same. Ities are entres of onstant and irreversible hange. The definitive sound of a ity is the rattlesna, e hatter of a +a , hammer((the Iarning sound you hear as the business re#tile stri, es. Out hange in the village is #erennial. That hanges in nature is restored Iith one Iheel of the seasons. That omes from the earth al! ays returns. That flourishes, dies a! ay to bloom again.

)nd Ihen I'd been in the village some three months, Ru, hmabai and the #eo#le of Sunder gave me a fragment of that ertainty: a #art of them and their lives that hanged my life forever. @n the day the monsoon began, I! as s!imming in the river Iith a do!en other young men and about t!enty children. The dar, louds, Ihi h had #ainted their sombre moods on the s, y for Iee, s, gathered from hori!on to hori!on, and seemed to #ress u#on the to#s of the tallest trees. The air, after eight dry months, Ias so lavishly #erfumed Iith rain that Ie Iere almost drun, Iith e' itement.

5>aous allaß S"alla ghurreeß5 the children ried re#eatedly, gras#ing my hands. They #ointed to the louds and dragged me to!ard the village. The rain is omingß ;et"s go homeß 1GG

The first dro#s of rain fell as Ie ran. In se onds, the dro#s Iere a heavy fall. In minutes, the fall Ias a as ade. Within an hour, the monsoon Ias a easeless torrent, so thi , that it Ias diffi ult to breathe in the o#en Iithout u##ing my hands to my mouth to ma, e a little ave of air.

At first, the villagers danced in the rain and played, ran, and sang on one another. Some took soap, and I washed in the heaven (sent shower). Some went to the local temple, where they melted in the rain to pray. Others busied themselves with repairs to the roofs of their houses and the drainage trenches dug around every mud-brick building.

Eventually, everyone stopped to simply stare at the drifting, falling, swirling sheets of rain. Every doorway of every house was a record of faces, and each flash of lightning showed the frozen tableau of order.

That duration of several hours was followed by a lull just as long. The sun shone intermittently, and rainwater steamed from the warming earth. The first ten days of the season were ended in the same way, with violent storms and tranquil lulls, as if the monsoon was robbing the village for its weaknesses before

mounting a final assault.

When, then the great rain came, it was a lake of water in the air, and it rained almost without pause for seven days and nights. On the seventh day, I was at the river's edge, washing my feet. Clothes as the drowning torrents fell. At one point I reached for my soap, and realised that the rope I'd laid it on was submerged. The water, which had merely pressed my bare feet, rose from my ankles to my knees in seconds. As I looked upstream at the tumbling rush of the river, the water reached to my thighs, and was still rising.

Shocked and uneasy, I fled from the water with my wet clothes, and began the walk to the village. On the way I stopped to tie to the bank the progress of the river. The steep banks were usually sandy, and then the wide sloping plain began to subside beneath the all-immersing flood. The advance was so rapid that the inevitable reef of the swollen land-consuming river moved toward the village at a slow, alarming pace. Alarmed, I ran to warn

the villagers.

The river is coming! I shouted, in broken Marathi.

Sensing my distress but not really understanding me, the villagers gathered around and then called >raba, er, #lyng him with questions.

What is your matter, ; inE 2he #eo#le are very u#set for you.5

The river! It's coming u# fast. It'll ! i#e the village out! 1GH

>raba, er smiled.

@h, no, ; in. 2hat ! ill not be ha##ening.5

I'm telling you! I've seen it. I'm not +o, ing, >rabu. 2he flooding river's in flood!5

>raba, er translated my ! ords for the others. /everyone laughed.

Are you all ra1yE5 I shouted, in e' as#eration. 5It's not funny!5

They laughed all the harder and ro! ded around me, rea hing out to calm my fear by #atting and stro, ing me, their laughing voices full of soothing ! ords and sighs. 2hen, ! ith >raba, er leading the ! ay, the ro! d of villagers goaded, dragged, and #ushed me to! ard the river.

The river, only a fe! hundred metres a! ay, ! as a deluge: a vast muddy on res en e that tore through the valley in heaving ! aves and boiling eddies. 2he rain redoubled its intensity as ! e stood there, our lothes as dren hed as the yielding soil.)nd still the tumid river gre! , onsuming ne! land ! ith every thum#ing

heartbeat.

5 Dou see those sti , s , ; in, 5 > raba, er said, in his most irritating attempt at a soothing tone. 52 hose sti , s are the flood (game sti , s. Do you remember, ! hen the #eo#le #ut them in the ground? Satish and >andey, - arayan and Oharat ... do you remember?

I did remember. Days before, there'd been a lottery of some , ind. @ne hundred and t! elve numbers ((one for every man in the village ((! ere ! ritten on small #ie es of #a#er, and mi' ed together in an em#ty lay ! ater (#ot, alled a mat, a. 2he men lined u# to dra! their numbers, and then a se ond set of the same numbers ! as mi' ed in the #ot.) little girl ! as given the honour of dra! ing the si' ! inning numbers from the #ot. 2he ! hole village ! at hed the eremony, and a##lauded the ! inners ha##ily.

2he si' men ! hose numbers had been dra! n had ! on the han e to hammer a ! ooden sta, e, a little over a metre long, into the earth.)s ! ell, the three oldest men in the village ! ere a orded the right to a ! ooden sta, e ! ithout the numbered lottery. 2hey duly hose #la es for their sta, es, and younger men obliged by hammering the ! ooden #egs into the ground. 7hen all nine sta, es ! ere #ositioned, little flags ! ith the names of the men ! ere tied to ea h one, and the #eo#le drifted ba , to their homes.

I'd ! at hed the affair from a shady s#ot beneath the bran hed dome of a tree.)t the time, I ! as ! or, ing on my o! n small referen e di tionary of the 1G?

4arathi language, based on #honetis#ellings of the ! ords I heard every day in the village. I gave the eremony little attention, and I never bothered to as, its #ur#ose.

)s ! e stood in the numbing, drumming rain and ! at hed the #ro! ling advan e of the river, > raba, er e' #lained that the ! ooden sta, es ! ere #art of a flood (game that ! as #layed every year. 2he oldest men in the village, and si' lottery ! inners, ! ere given the han e to #redi t the #oint to ! hi h the river ! ould rise. /a h ! ooden sti , , ! ith its flag of yello! sil, , re#resented a

best guess.

5) You see, this one little flag is the furthest from here! He stood. This one is almost gone. The river will reach to him, and over him, tomorrow or tonight.

*He translated what he'd told me for the crowd, and they pushed Satish, a heavy-set old man, to the front of the group. The almost submerged stream, as his, and he appeared, with shy laughter and downcast eyes, the good-natured jeers of his friends and the sneers of the older men.

5) And this one here, the furthest from here, is the river! It will never be

touching. The river never comes more far than this place. Old Deeba, bhai has insisted for himself this place, for the putting of his stream. *He thinks this year will be a very heavy monsoon.

The villagers had lost interest, and were already drifting or jogging back to the village. The man and I stood alone.

5) Out ... how do you know that the river won't rise past this point?

5) We are here a long time, in Sunder village has been in this place for thousands of years. The next village, -atin, erra, has been there for much longer, about three thousands of years. In some other places (not near to here) the people do have a bad experience, with the floods, in monsoon time. Out not here. -ot in Sunder. Our river has never come to this far. This year, also, I don't think it will come to this far, even so old Deeba, bhai says it will. /verybody knows here the river will stop, in.

*He raised his eyes to stare at the unburdening clouds.

50 Usually, I am waiting until the rain starts, before I come out of the house to look at the flood (game starts). If you don't mind, I'm sitting in my clothes, and I will have to see the water out of my bones before I go in my house.

I stared straight ahead. I glanced at the black, tumble of loud music on the more, and asked a question.

5 In your country, I mean, don't you know! Here the river starts

I didn't answer him. Eventually, he reached out to pat me on the back a few times, and then walked off. Alone, I stared at the rain (soaked world for a while, and at last I lifted my face to the drooping sky).

I was thinking about another kind of river, one that runs through every one of us, no matter where we come from, all over the world. It's the river of the heart, and the heart's desire. It's the core, essential truth of what each one of us is, and an ache. All my life I'd been a fighter. I was always ready, too ready, to fight for what I loved, and against what I detested. In the end, I became the expression of that fight, and my real nature was concealed behind a mask of menace and hostility. The message of my face and my body's movement was, like that of a lot of other hard men, Don't fuck with me. In the end, I became so good at expressing the sentiment that the whole of my life became the message.

It didn't matter, in the village. No one could read my body language. They knew no other foreigners, and had no point of reference. If I was grim or even stern, they laughed, and patted my back encouragingly. They too, knew me as a cheerful man, no matter

what expression I wore. I was a joker, someone who worked hard, played the fool for the children, sang with them, danced with them, and laughed with an open heart.

And I think, I did laugh like that then. I was given a chance to reinvent myself, to follow that river within, and become the man I'd always wanted to be. On the very day that I learned about the flood, just a few hours before I stood alone in the rain, my mother had told me that she'd called a meeting of the women in the village: she'd decided to give me a new name, a Maharashtra name, like her own. Because I was in my mother's house, it was decided that I should take the family name of my father. Because my father, and my adoptive father, tradition decided that I should take his first name for my middle name. And because they judged my nature to be blessed with beautiful happiness, my mother included, the women had agreed with her choice for my first name. It was Shantaram, which means man of peace, or man of God's peace.

They nailed their stakes into the earth of my life, those farmers. They, like the land in me where the river stood, and they married it with a new name. Shantaram my father. I don't know if they found that name in the heart of the man they believed me to be, or if they planted it there, like a wishing tree, to bloom and grow. Whatever the case, whether they discovered that peace or created it, the truth is that the man I am was born in those moments, as I stood near the flood still, with my father lifted to the high rain. Shantaram. The better man that, slowly, and much too late, I began to be.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER SEVEN

5She is a beautiful #rostitutes,5 >raba, er #leaded. 5So fat she is, and in the most serious and the im#ortant #la es.) big handfuls you an grab, any! here you li, e. Dou ! ill be so e' iting, you ! ill ma, e yourself si , B5

5It's a tem#ting offer, >rabu,5 I res#onded, trying not to laugh, 5but I'm really not interested. 7e only left the village yesterday, and I guess my mind is still there. I'm +ust ... not in the mood.5

5Good is no #roblem, baba. @nly first you get bum#ing and +um#ing, then your bad moods ! ill so =ui ,ly hange, _futt(_a(_futtB5

5Maybe you're right, but I thin, I'll #ass, all the same.5

5Out she is so e' #erien eB5 he ! hined. 52hose fello! s told me she has made se' y business too many times, and ! ith too many hundred

of ustomers, in this hotel only. I sa! her. I loo, ed on the inside of her eyes, and I , no! that she is a very big e' #ert in the se' y business.5

5I don't ! ant a #rostitute, >rabu. -o matter ho! e' #ert she is.5

5Out if you only see her. Dou ! ill be ra1y for her.5

5Sorry, >rabu.5

5Out I told them ... that you ! ill ome and loo, at her. @nly loo, . 2here is no harming for a loo, , ; inbaba.5

5- o.5

5Out ... but I an't get ba , my ash de#osits if you don't ome

and do some looking at her.

Dou said a dash deposit

Des, ; in.

Dou said a deposit, for me to have seen it with a woman in this hotel

Des, ; in, he sighed, raising his arms, and letting them fall to his sides in a helpless gesture. Six months in the village, you see. Six months with no sexy business. I was thin, and you must be feeling a big amount of your needs. - oh, no dash deposits returned for me, if you don't take one. I'm very small #ee, looking at her.

@, ay, I sighed, copying his helpless gesture. ; et's go take a look, , must to get you off the hook, .

I pulled the door of our hotel room shut, and locked it. We set off along the wide corridor together. The #sara hotel in #urangabad, north of Bombay, was more than a hundred years old, and built to serve a different, more splendid age. Its high, wide rooms were graced with ornate balconies facing the busy street, and they featured fine detail in their cornices and ceiling rosettes. The furniture was shoddy and thrown together in haphazard combinations, however, and the carpet in the corridors had worn through to shaggy holes in many places. The #aint was #eeling, the walls were bruised with dirt, and the rooms were #ea#. #ust the #la e, #raba, er had assured me, for us to spend a #y night on our way back, to Bombay.

We stopped outside a door on the far side of our floor of the building. #raba, er was trembling with excitement. #is eyes were alarmingly wide.

I, no, ed.)most at once, the door opened.) woman, aged something over fifty, stood in the doorway. She was wearing a red

and yellow sari, and she glared at us malevolently. Behind her in the room were several men. They were dressed in dhotis and white shirts like the farmers in Ghabara's village, and they sat on the floor to eat a hearty meal of dhal, rice, and roti.

The woman stepped into the corridor, and pulled the door shut behind her. She fixed her gaze on Ghabara. *He was a full head and shoulder shorter than she was, and he returned her baleful stare with the fixity of a school bully's minor henchman.

"Do you see, Sir?" he muttered, never taking his eyes off her. "Do you see what I told you?"

"What I saw! He was a plain, middle-aged man with a bulbous nose, and his face so thin and wrinkled that her mouth resembled a lam that someone had choked with a stick. The man leaned on her face and neck, like a geisha thief, and gave her something of a villainous intensity.

Ghabara stepped to the woman in a flash.

"Show him!"

She responded by lifting aside the covering shawl of her sari to reveal a pudgy roll of stomach. She grinned a good round or two of the flesh between her stubby fingers, and squeezed it, looking at me with one eyebrow raised to invite a raise.

Ghabara let out a soft moan, and his eyes widened. "Huh?"

The woman then slowly left and right along the corridor before raising her blouse a few centimetres to reveal a long, thin, pendulous breast. She seized the breast and flaunted it at me a few times, winking her eyebrow with a bafflingly irresistible expression. My best guess, stabbing blindly in the dark, was that it might've been a menacing, derisive sneer.

>raba, er"s eyes ! idened even more, and he began to breathe noisily through his o#en mouth.

2he ! oman overed her breast, and then ! hi##ed her long #lait of bla , hair over her shoulder ! ith a +er, of her head. She too, the #lait in both hands and began to s=uee1e do! n! ard to! ard the ta#ering end ! ith her fingers, as if it ! as a half(em#ty tube of tooth#aste.) thi , dribble of o onut oil gathered before her fingers, and dri##ed from the end of the #lait onto the threadbare ar#et.

5Dou , no! , ; in,5 >raba, er mumbled, ga#ing hungrily and almost fearfully at the dri#s of oil. *is right foot a tually began to stam#, softly, on the ar#et. 5If you don't ! ant to have a se'y business ! ith this ! oman ... if ... if you really don't ! ant ... ! ell ... I ould use that ash de#osits my o! n good self ...5

5I"ll see you ba , at the room, >rabu,5 I re#lied, smiling #olitely at the ! oman. I offered her a little bo! , and too, her s ornful snarl ! ith me ba , to our room.

I thought to use the time to u#date my 4arathi di tionary. 2here ! ere already some si' hundred ! ords from everyday usage in the list. I"d made the notes on s ra#s of #a#er, as #eo#le in the village had given me ! ords and #hrases, before transferring them to a sturdy +ournal for future referen e. 2he last and latest of those notes ! ere s#read out on a little ! riting table, and I"d +ust begun to enter them in my +ournal ! hen the door s#rung o#en and >raba, er s! aggered into the room. *e ! al, ed #ast me ! ithout s#ea, ing, and fell onto his ba , on his bed.)bout nine minutes had #assed sin e I"d left him at the #rostitute"s door.

5@h, ; inB5 he moaned ha##ily, grinning u# at the eiling. 5I , ne! it. I , ne! she ! as a full(of(e' #erien e ! oman.5

I stared at him in disbelief.

"Yes," he gushed, sitting up and letting his short legs swing from the bed. "She gave me a big money's worth. And I gave it to her a very, very good seal also. And no! But let's go out for some food, and some drinks, and a party."

"If you're sure you've got the strength," I muttered.

"Oh, no need for strength in this land, baba. This land I'm talking you is such a fine land that very often you can even sit down while you are drinking."

So good as his word, Ghaba, he directed us to a hovel, about an hour's walk, past the last bus stop on the outskirts of the town. With a round of drinks for the house, we insinuated ourselves into the rush of dusty, determined drinkers who occupied the bar's one narrow stone bench. The land was that of Australians all a sly grog shop: an unlicensed bar, where men buy over the roof alcohol at under the counter prices.

The men we joined in the bar were workers, farmers, and a routine assortment of laborers. They all wore sullen, hardened expressions. They said little, or nothing at all. Their grimaces disfigured them as they drank the foul (tasting, homemade alcohol, and they followed each glass with a miscellany of grunts, groans, and gagging sounds. When we joined them, Ghaba, he and I consumed the drinks at a gulp, finishing our noses with one hand and hurling the noxious hemurgilium down our open throats. Oye means of a fierce determination, we summoned the will to see the poison in our bellies. And when sufficiently recovered, we launched ourselves, with no little reluctance, into the next venomous round.

It was a grim and pleasureless business. The strain showed on

every face. Some found the going too hard and slumped, a! ay, defeated. Some faltered, but ! ere #ressed on by the anguished encouragements of fellow sufferers. >raba, er lingered long over his fifth glass of the volatile fluid. I thought he ! as about to admit defeat, but at last he gasped and sluttered his ! ay through to empty the glass. Then one man threw his glass aside, stood up, and moved to the centre of the shabby little room. *e began to sing in a roaring, offkey voice, and because every man of us heered our #assionate and #erem#tory approval, ! e all , ne! that ! e ! ere drunk, .

One by one, ! e sang a song in turn.) ! ee#ing rendition of the Indian national anthem ! as followed by religious devotionals. *indi love songs #inged beside heartbeating guitars. The t! o burly ! aughters recognised the next stage of inebriation, and abandoned their drinks trays and glasses for a ! hile. They too, up their #ositions, sitting on stools on either side of the entrance door. They smiled broadly, nodded, ! agged their heads, and #radled long, thick, ! ooden #ubs in the tender embrace of their meaty arms. 7e all la##ed and heered, ! ith every song. 7hen it ! as my turn, I sang((I don't , no! ! hy((the old <in, s" song, 5Dou Really Got 4e5:

Girl, you really got me goin"
Dou got me so I can't sleep at night ...

I ! as drunk, enough to #oast >raba, er, and he ! as drunk, enough to learn the chorus.

@h, yes, by God, you are a girl!
)nd you really, really got me, isn't it goingE

7e ! ere still singing on the dark, deserted stretch of road, leading back to town. 7e ! ere still singing ! hen the ! hite)mbassador #ar #ruised #ast us slowly, and turned.)nd ! e ! ere still singing ! hen the #ar #ruised #ast us again, and then turned one more time to block our #ath on the shoulder of the road. 9our

men got out of the car, and one stayed behind the wheel. The tallest of the men grabbed at my shirt and barked a command at me in Marathi.

What is this? I slurred back at him, in Marathi.

Another man stepped in from the side and hit me with a short right hand that snapped my head back, sharply. Two more, within a second, ran head into my mouth and nose. I stumbled back, and felt one leg go out from under me. Cursing, I saw the man hurl himself at the four men with his arms wide, trying to hold them back from me. I roused myself, and rallied enough to make a charge. My left hook, and overhand right elbow, the best hard punches in any street fight, were lucky, and both made tough contact. Beside me, the man didn't even flinch, leapt to his feet, and collected a wild haymaker that sent him flying with

The man leaned over to look, into my eyes. His face lit up as hard, impassive, and very much like my own. He opened my torn shirt and shoved something inside. It lit up as my assault and my flight.

They stood, gave a last look of incomprehensible hatred, and then limped into the car. Doors slammed as the car sped away, scattering us with dust and small stones.

Chandra's regretfulness, when he lit up as sure that I wasn't badly hurt, and he found time to smile and shine, lit up as in consolation. He blamed himself, loudly and often, for leading us to the remote bar and for allowing us to drink, too much. He said with perfect honesty that he would happily take my bruises on his body, if it were possible. He prided himself, as Bombay's best street guide, lit up as a tattered banner. And his passionate, unqualified love for his country, Bharat Mata, Mother India, suffered blows more grievous than any the body might endure.

There's only one good thing for doing, when he concluded, as I lit up as my face at a hand basin in the huge white tiled bathroom of our hotel. When he gets back to Bombay, you must be sending a telegram to your family and your friends for more money, and you must go to your local embassy for making a claim of emergencies.

I dried my face, and leaned on the basin to look, into the mirror. The injuries weren't bad. My black eye lit up as forming. My nose lit up as swollen, but not broken. Both lips lit up as cut and thinned, and there lit up as some swelling grades on my cheeks and face, here, there, had spread away the skin. It would've been a lot worse, and I knew it. I'd grown up in a tough neighbourhood, here, where the class gangs preyed on one another and were merciless to loners, like me, who refused to join any of them. And then there lit up as the

reason. No beatings I'd ever suffered were as harsh as those inflicted by the uniformed men who were afraid to

, ee# the #ea e, the #rison guards. 2hat ! as ! hat the voi e, my
o! n voi e, had re alled ... I , no! this ... 2hat ! as the memory:
being held do! n by three or four offi ers in the #unishment unit
! hile t! o or three others ! or, ed me over ! ith fists, batons, and
boots. It"s al! ays ! orse getting a beating from them, of ourse,
be ause they"re su##osed to be the good guys. Dou understand and
a e#t it ! hen the bad guys ! or, you over. Out ! hen the good guys
use hand uffs to hain you to a ! all, and then ta, e turns to
stom# and , i , you, it"s the ! hole system, it"s the ! hole ! orld,
that"s brea, ing your bones.)nd then there ! as the s reaming. 2he
other men, the other #risoners, s reaming. /very night.

I loo, ed into my o! n eyes in the mirror, and thought about
>raba, er"s suggestion. It ! as im#ossible to onta t the -e!
. ealand embassy((or any embassy. I ouldn"t onta t family or
friends be ause the #oli e ! ould be ! at hing them, and ! aiting
for a onne tion to be made. 2here ! as no(one. - o hel#. - o money.
2he thieves had ta, en every ent I had in the ! orld. 2he irony of
it ! asn"t lost on me: the es a#ed armed robber, robbed of
everything he o! ned. 7hat ! as it <arla had said, before I"d left
for the villageE Don"t drin, any al ohol on the tri# ...

52here"s no money in -e! . ealand, >rabu,5 I told him as ! e ! al, ed
ba , to our hotel room. 52here"s no family ! ho an hel#, no
friends, and no hel# at the embassy.5

5- o moneyE5

5- one.5

5)nd you an"t get any moreE -ot from any #la eE5

5- o,5 I ans! ered, #a , ing my fe! belongings into my ba , #a , .

52his is a very serious trouble, ;in, if you don"t mind I"m
telling your bruise and s rat hy fa e.5

5I , no! . Do you thin, ! e an sell my ! at h to the hotel managerE5

Des, ; in, I thin, so sure. It is a very nice ! at hes. Out I don't thin, so he ! ill give us a big fair #ri e. In su h matters, the Indian businessman is #utting his religion in his ba , #o , et only, and he is driving very hard bargains on you.5

5-ever mind,5 I re#lied, li##ing shut the at hes on my ba , #a , . 5So long as it's enough to #ay the bill, and at h that night train you ! ere tal,ing about, ba , to Oombay. 8ome on, #a , your things, and let"s go.5

5It is a very, very, very serious trouble,5 he said as ! e losed the door to 1H? the room for the last time, and ! al, ed do! n the orridor. 5-o

money is no funny in India, ; in, I'm telling you.5

2he fro! n that om#ressed his li#s and onsumed his features remained ! ith us all the ! ay ba , to Oombay. 2he sale of my ! at h overed the hotel bill in)urangabad, ! ith enough left for t! o or three days at the India Guest *ouse in Oombay. 7ith my gear sto! ed in my favourite room, I ! al, ed >raba, er ba , to the small entran e foyer of the hotel, trying in vain to revive the little mira le of his ! ondrous smile.

5Dou ! ill leave all those unha##y things in my aring,5 he said, earnest and solemn. 5Dou ! ill see, ; in. I ! ill ma, e a ha##y result on you.5

I ! at hed him ! al, do! n the stairs, and then heard the manager,)nand, address me in friendly 4arathi.

I turned ! ith a smile, and ! e began to tal, in 4arathi. Si' months in the village had given me the sim#le, everyday onversational #hrases, =uestions, and senten es. It ! as a modest a hievement, but)nand ! as obviously very #leased and sur#rised.)fter a fe! minutes of onversation, he alled all the o(

managers and room boys to hear me speak, in their language. They all reacted with similarly delighted astonishment. They'd, no! n foreigners! However, a little Hindi, or even Spanish! Well, but none of them had ever met a foreigner! How could converse with them in their own beloved Marathi language.

They asked me about the village of Sunder (they'd never heard of it) (and I talked about the daily life that they all, knew! Well from their own villages, and tended to idyllise in recollection.

When the conversation ended, I returned to my room, and had barely shut the door! Then a tentative knock, sounded at it.

'Please use me, please. I am sorry to disturb. The voice belonged to a tall, thin foreigner (German, or Swiss, perhaps) (with a thick beard attached to the point of his long face, and fair hair pulled back, into a thick, tight. I heard you speaking to the manager, and the room boys, before, and ... Well, it is sure that you have been here in India very long ... and ... 'na' +a, I've just arrived today, my girlfriend and me, and I want to buy some hashish. Do you ... do you maybe, no! Well here I can get for ourselves some hashish, without somebody heating us, and without trouble from the police.

I did, no!, of course. Before the night was out, I also helped them to change money on the black market without being heated. The bearded

German and his girlfriend were happy with the deal and they paid me a commission. The black marketeers, however! Here were the friends and contacts on the street, were happy that I'd brought new customers to them, and they paid me commissions as well. I knew there would be other foreigners, on every street in Colaba, however! wanted to score. That casual conversation in Marathi!

Yand and the room boys of the hotel, overheard by the German couple, had given me a way to survive in the city.

) more pressing problem, however, was my tourist visa. When Yand

had signed me in to the hotel, he'd informed me that my visa had been issued. Every hotel in Bombay had to submit a register of foreign guests, with a valid visa entry for each foreign name and passport number. The register was, no longer as the government, and the police were vigilant in its supervision. Overstaying on a visa was a serious offence in India. Migration terms of up to ten years were sometimes imposed, and the police levied heavy fines on hotel operators who permitted government irregularities.

Yogand had explained all that to me, gravely, before he fudged the figures in his register and signed me in. He lied to me. He was a Maharashtrian, and I was the first foreigner he'd ever met who spoke the Marathi language with him. He was happy to break the rules for me, on one, but he informed me to visit the Foreigner Registration Office here, at the police headquarters, immediately, to see about an extension on my visa.

I sat in my room, and weighed the options. There weren't many. I had very little money. True, I'd inadvertently discovered a way to earn money as a middleman, a go-between, helping many foreigners to deal with bureaucracy, marriages. Moreover, I wasn't sure if it would provide me with enough money to live in hotels and eat in restaurants. It certainly wouldn't pay for a plane ticket out of India. Moreover, I was already an overstayer on my visa, and technically guilty of a criminal offence. Yogand assured me that the cops would see the lapsed visa as a mere oversight, and extend it without enquiry, but I couldn't risk my freedom on that chance. I couldn't visit the Foreigner Registration Office. So, I couldn't alter my visa status, and I couldn't stay at a hotel in Bombay without a valid visa. I was caught between the rigour of regulations and the hard reality of the fugitive life.

I lay back on the bed, in the darkness, listening to the sounds of the street that rose to my window: the rattle of rickshaws, calling customers to the delights of his aromatic morsels, the melon man, singing the bhajan, the humid night with his languent cry, a street a robot, shouting through his sleepy exertions for a crowd of tourists.

and music, always music. Did ever a people love music, I
! ordered, more than the Indians?

Thoughts of the village, thoughts I'd avoided and resisted until
that music began, danced into my mind. On the day that Sabara, Er
and I had left the village, the people had invited me to live
! with them. They'd offered me a house and a job. In the last three
months of my stay I'd been helping the teacher at the local
school ! with special lessons in Spanish / English. I gave him a
pronunciation of / English words, helping him to correct the
heavily accented versions of the language that he'd been teaching
to the children. The teacher and the village council had urged me

to stay. There ! as a place for me ((a place and a purpose.

But it ! wasn't possible for me to return to Sunder village. -ot
then.) man and man, his ! say in the city ! with his heart and his
soul rushed ! within a clenched fist but to live in a village, he
has to unfurl his heart and his soul in his eyes. I carried crime
and punishment ! with me in every hour of my life. The same fate
that helped me to escape from prison had lamed its ! laces on my
future. Sooner or later, if they looked hard enough and long
enough, the people ! would see those ! laces in my eyes. Sooner or
later, there ! would be a reckoning. I'd passed myself off as a
free man, a cheerful man, and for a little ! while I'd , no ! n real
happiness in the village, but my soul ! wasn't clean. That ! would I
do to prevent my reputation? That ! wouldn't I do? Would I , ill to
save myself from prison?

I , never ! the answers to those questions, and I , never ! that my
presence in Sunder defiled the village. I , never ! that every smile I
too, from them ! as smiled. ; if on the run puts a lie in the
echo of every laugh, and at least a little larney in every act
of love.

There ! as a , no , at the door. I called out that it ! as open.
) hand stepped into my room and announced ! with distaste that

>raba, er had come to see me, ! ith t! o of his friends. I la##ed
)nand on the ba , , smiling at his on ern for me, and ! e ! al, ed
to the hotel foyer.

5@h, ; inB5 >raba, er beamed, ! hen our eyes met. 5I have the very
good ne! s for youB 2his is my friend, \$ohnny 8igar. *e is a very
im#ortant friend in the 1ho#ad#atti, the slum ! here ! e live.)nd
this is Ra+u. *e hel#s 4r. I asim)li *ussein, ! ho is the head man
in the slum.5

I shoo, hands ! ith the t! o men. \$ohnny 8igar ! as almost e' a tly
my height and build, ! hi h made him taller and heavier than the
Indian aver(1H8
age. I +udged him to be about thirty years old. *is long fa e ! as
andid and alert. 2he sand(oloured eyes fi' ed me ! ith a steady,
onfident ga1e. *is thin moustache ! as trimmed to a #re ise line
over an e' #ressive mouth and determined +a! . 2he other man, Ra+u,
! as only a little taller than >raba, er, and of an even slighter
build. *is gentle fa e ! as stam#ed ! ith a sadness that invited
sym#athy. It ! as the ,ind of sadness that"s a om#anion, all too
often, to s ru#ulous and un om#romising honesty. 2hi , bro! s
hooded his intelligent, dar, eyes. 2hey stared at me, those
, no! ing, mindful eyes, from a tired, sagging fa e that seemed
mu h older than the thirty(five years I guessed him to be. I
li, ed both men on sight.

7e tal, ed for a ! hile, the ne! men as, ing me =uestions about
>raba, er"s village and my im#ressions of life there. 2hey as, ed
me about the ity, as ! ell, ! anting to , no! my favourite #la es
in Oombay, and the things that I li, ed to do most. 7hen the

onversation seemed li, ely to ontinue, I invited them to +oin me
at one of the nearby restaurants for hai.

5- o, no, ; in,5 >raba, er de lined, ! aggling his head. 57e must be
leaving no! . @nly I ! anted you to meet the \$ohnny and the Ra+u,
and them to be meeting your good self, also. I thin, that \$ohnny

8igar has some things to tell you no! , isn't itE5

*e loo, ed at \$ohnny, his eyes and his mouth ! ide o#en, and his hands raised in e' #e tation. \$ohnny glo! ered at him, but the fro! n =ui ,ly softened into a broad smile, and he turned his attention to me.

57e made a de ision for you,5 \$ohnny 8igar de lared. 5Dou ! ill live ! ith us. Dou are >raba, er"s good friend. 2here is a #la e for you.5

5Des, ; inB5 >raba, er added =ui , ly. 5@ne family is leaving tomorro! .)nd then, the day after tomorro! , that house ! ill be yours.5

5Out ... but ...5 I stammered, flattered by the generous gesture, and yet horrified at the thought of life in the slum. I remembered my one visit to >raba, er"s slum only too ! ell. 2he smell of the o#en latrines, the heart(brea, ing #overty, the ram# and mill of #eo#le, thousands u#on thousands of #eo#le((it ! as a , ind of hell, in my memory, a ne! meta#hor that stood for the ! orst, or almost the ! orst, that ould ha##en.

5-o #roblem, ; in,5 >raba, er laughed. 5Dou ! ill be too ha##y ! ith us, you ! ill see.)nd you , no! , you"re loo, ing li, e a different fello! no! , it is true, but after a fe! months ! ith us you ! ill loo, e' a tly the same as 1H9 everyone else there. >eo#le ! ill thin, you are already living in the slum for years and years and years. Dou ! ill see.5

5It is a #la e for you,5 Ra+u said, rea hing out slo! ly to tou h my arm. 5) safe #la e, until you an save your money. _@ur hotel is free.5

2he others laughed at that, and I +oined them, ins#ired by their o#timism and enthusiasm. 2he slum ! as filthy and ro! ded beyond imagining, but it ! as free, and there ! ere no 8(9orms for the residents. It ! ould give me time to thin, , I , ne! , and time to

#lan.

5I ... ! ell ... than, s, >rabu. 2han, s, \$ohnny. 2han, s, Ra+u. I
a e#t your offer. I'm very grateful. 2han, you.5

5-o #roblem,5 \$ohnny 8igar re#lied, sha, ing my hand, and meeting
my eye ! ith a determined, #enetrating stare.

I didn't , no! then that \$ohnny and Ra+u had been sent by the head
man of the slum, I asim)li *ussein, to loo, me over. In my

ignorance and self(enteredness, I'd re oiled at the thought of
the terrible onditions of the slum, and a e#ted their offer
reluctantly. I didn't , no! that the huts ! ere in mu h demand, and
that there ! as a long list of families ! aiting for a #la e. I
ouldn't , no! , then, that offering a #la e to me meant that a
family in need had missed out on a home.)s the last ste# in
making that de ision, I asim)li *ussein had sent Ra+u and \$ohnny
to my hotel. Ra+u's tas, ! as to determine ! hether I ould live
! ith them. \$ohnny's tas, ! as to ma, e sure that they ould live
! ith me.)ll I , ne! , on the first night of our meeting, ! as that
\$ohnny's handsha, e ! as honest enough to build a friendshi# on,
and Ra+u's sad smile had more a e#tan e and trust in it than I
deserved.

5@, ay, ; in,5 >raba, er grinned. 5Day after tomorro! , ! e ome to
#i , u# your many things, and your good self also, in the late of
afternoon.5

52han, s, >rabu. @, ay. Out ! aitß Day after tomorro! ((! on't that
... ! on't that mess u# our a##ointmentE5

5)##ointmentE 7hat for an a##ointment, ; inbabaE5

52he ... the ... Standing Oabas,5 I re#lied lamely.

2he Standing Oabas, a legendary loister of mad, ins#ired mon, s,

ran a hashish den in suburban Oyyalla. >raba, er had ta, en me there as #art of his dar, tour of the city, months before. @n the ! ay ba , to Oombay from the village, I'd made him #romise to ta, e me there again, ! ith <arla. I , ne! she'd never been to the den, and I , ne! she ! as fas inated by the stories she'd heard of it. Raising the matter then, in the fa e of 1?% their hos#itable offer, ! as ungrateful, but I didn't ! ant to miss the han e to im#ress her ! ith the visit.

5@h yes, ; in, no #roblem. 7e an still ma, e a visit to those Standing Oabas, ! ith the 4iss <arla, and after that ! e ! ill olle t u# all your things. I ! ill see you here, day after tomorro! at three o" lo , afternoon. I am so ha##y you are going to be a slum(living fello! ! ith us, ; inB So ha##yB5

*e ! al, ed out of the foyer and des ended the stair! ell. I ! at hed him +oin the lights and traffi stirring on the noisy street, three floors belo! . 7orries ! aned and re eded. I had a ! ay to ma, e a little money. I had a safe #la e to stay.)nd then, as if that safety allo! ed them to, my thoughts ! ound and s#iralled along the streets and alleys to <arla. I found myself thin, ing of her a#artment, of her ground(floor ! indo! s, those tall 9ren h doors that loo, ed out on the obbled lane, not five minutes a! ay from my hotel. Out the doors I #i tured in my mind stayed shut.)nd as I tried, and failed, to form an image of her fa e, her eyes, I suddenly realised that if I be ame a slum(d! eller, if I lived in those s=ualid, s=uirming a res, I might lose her6 I #robably ! ould lose her. I , ne! that if I fell that far, as I sa!

it then, my shame ! ould , ee# me from her as om#letely and mer ilessly as a #rison ! all.

In my room, I lay do! n to slee#. 2he move to the slum ! ould give me time: it ! as a hard solution to the visa #roblem, but a #ra ti al one. I felt relieved and o#timisti about it, and I ! as very tired. I should've sle#t ! ell. Out my dreams that night ! ere violent and troubled. Didier on e told me, in a rambling,

midnight dissertation, that a dream is the #la e ! here a ! ish and
a fear meet. 7hen the ! ish and the fear are e' a tly the same, he
said, ! e all the dream a nightmare.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Standing Oabas ! ere men ! ho"d ta, en a vo! never to sit do! n, or lie do! n, ever again, for the rest of their lives. They stood, day and night, forever. They ate their meals standing u#, and made their toilet standing u#. They #rayed and ! or, ed and sang standing u#. They even sle#t ! hile they ! ere standing, sus#ended in harnesses that , e#t the ! eight of their bodies on their legs, but #revented them from falling ! hen they ! ere un ons ious.

For the first five to ten years of that onstant standing, their legs began to s! ell. Blood moved sluggishly in e' hausted veins, and mus les thi , ened. Their legs be ame huge, bloated out of re ognisable sha#e, and overed ! ith #ur#le vari ose boils. Their toes s=ueeled out from thi , , fleshy feet, li, e the toes of ele#hants. During the follo! ing years, their legs gradually be ame thinner, and thinner. /ventually, only bones remained, ! ith a #aint(thin veneer of s, in and the termite trails of ! ithered veins.

The #ain ! as unending and terrible. S#i, es and s#ears of agony stabbed u# through their feet ! ith every do! n! ard #ressure. Tormented, tortured, the Standing Oabas ! ere never still. They shifted onstantly from foot to foot in a gentle, s! aying dan e that ! as as mesmerising, for everyone ! ho sa! it, as the sound(! eaving hands of a flute #layer for his obras.

Some of the Oabas had made the vo! ! hen they ! ere si' teen or seventeen years old. They ! ere om#elled by something li, e the vo ation that alls others, in other ultures, to be ome #riests, rabbis, or imams.) larger number of mu h older men had renoun ed the ! orld as a #re#aration for death and the ne' t level of in arnation. -ot a fe! of the Standing Oabas ! ere businessmen ! ho"d given themselves to ruthless #ursuits of #leasure, #o! er, and #rofit during their ! or, ing lives. There ! ere holy 1?F men ! ho"d ourneyed through many other devotions, mastering their #unishing sa rifi es before underta, ing the ultimate vo! of the Standing Oaba.)nd there ! ere riminals((thieves, murderers,

major mafia figures, and even former landlords who sought

enrichment, or prostitution, in the endless agonies of the violence.

The den was really a corridor between two buildings at the rear of their temple. Hidden from view forever, within the temple compound, were the secret gardens, cloisters, and dormitories that only those who made and kept the violence ever safe. An iron roof covered the den. The floor was paved with flat stones. The Standing Oobas entered through a door at the rear of the corridor. Everyone else entered and left through an iron gate at the street end.

The customers, men from every part of the country and every level of society, stood along the walls of the corridor. They stood, of course: no one ever sat in the presence of the Standing Oobas. There was a tap fixed over an open drain near the entrance gate, where men drank, ate or leaned over to spit. The Oobas moved from man to man and group to group, releasing hashish in funnel-shaped clay hillums for the customers, and smoking with them.

The faces of the Oobas were radiant with their enrichment. Sooner or later, in the torment of endlessly ascending pain, every man of them assumed a luminous, transcendent beatitude. Light, made from the agonies they suffered, streamed from their eyes, and I've never, not in a human source more brilliant than their tortured smiles.

The Oobas were also comprehensively, celestially, and magnificently stoned. They smoked nothing but Kashmiri (the best hashish in the world) grown and produced at the foothills of the Himalayas in Kashmir. And they smoked it all day, and all night, all their lives.

I stood with Arla and Raba, ever at the back, in all of the narrow den. Behind us was the sealed door through which the Standing Oobas had entered. In front of us were two lines of men standing

along the passage. Some of the men were dressed in suits. Some wore designer jeans. For, men, wearing faded lungis, stood beside men in traditional dress from various regions of India. They were young and old, rich and poor. Their eyes were often drawn to Aarav and me, male(s), inned foreigners, standing with our backs against the wall. It was clear that some of them were shocked to see a woman

in the den. Despite their open curiosity, no one addressed us or asked us directly, and for the most part they gave their attention to the Standing Oobas and the hashish.

Conversations, bubbling softly, blended with music and devotional chanting, coming from somewhere inside the compound.

So, what do you think, E?

"It's incredible," she replied, her eyes gleaming in the soft light of the shaded lamps. She was exhilarated, and perhaps a little unnerved. Smiling, the harras had relaxed the muscles of

her face and shoulders, but there were tigers moving subtly in the eyes of her soft smile. "It's amazing. It's horrible and holy at the same time. I can't make up my mind which is the holy part, and which is the horrible part. *horrible (that's not the right word, but it's something like that."

"I, no! What you mean," I agreed, thrilled that I'd succeeded in impressing her. She'd been in the city for five years, and she'd heard about the Oobas many times, but that visit with me was her first. My tone implied that I, neither the laze nor the hell, but I couldn't fairly claim credit for the experience. Without warning, he'd opened the gate for us and gained access with his golden smile, he couldn't have been permitted to enter.

One of the Standing Oobas addressed us slowly with an alyte who held a silver tray containing hillums, harras, and the ceremonial of smoking. Other monks roared and stayed along the

length of the corridor, smoking and chanting prayers. The Oaba standing before us! as tall and lean, but his legs! were so thickly swollen that dreadful ropes of distended veins throbbed on their surfaces. His face! as thin. The bones of his skull, near the temples, were sharply defined. His cheekbones, marked, resided over deep valleys that ran to a hard and hungry ache. His eyes! were huge, within the caverns ridged by his brows, and there! as such madness and longing and love in them that he! as at once fearsome and immensely pitiable.

He regarded the illum, rocking from side to side and smiling absently. He never looked at us, but still it seemed to be the smile of a very close friend: indulgent, forgiving. He! as standing and saying so close to me that I could see each tiny strand in the forest of his brows. I heard the little gasps of his breathing. The rapid outward rushes of air sounded like pellets on a steep shore. He finished regarding the illum, and looked up at me. For a moment I! as lost in the vision that stared and shimmered in his eyes. For a tiny moment in the infinitude of his suffering I almost felt it, that the human will can drive the human body to endure and achieve. I almost understood it, that smile of his, driven insane by the will that forced it to shine. I! as sure that he! as communicating it to me ((that he! anted me to, no! .) and I tried to tell him, with my eyes alone, that I could almost sense it, almost feel it. Then he held the illum to his mouth, in the funnel of his hand,uffed it alight, and offered it to me. That terrible intimacy! with his unending pain shrivelled, the vision shimmered, and the moment drifted away! with the fading white shadows of the smoke. He turned, and tottered slowly backward the street gate, muttering prayers in a soft drone.

It screamed fiercer the air. Everyone turned to the street (entrance gate.) A man dressed in the red turban, vest, and simple trousers of a northern tribesman stood there, near the iron gate, shrieking at the very top of a strong voice. Before we could discern his message or react in any way, the man drew a long, thin, (bladed

s! ord from his belted sash and raised it over his head. Still
s reaming, he began to stal, along the orridor. *e ! as staring
dire tly at me as he ! al, ed, ! ith a stom#ing, mar hing tread. I
ouldn't understand the ! ords he ! as s ree hing, but I , ne! ! hat
he had in mind. *e ! anted to atta , me. *e ! anted to , ill me.

2he men standing at the sides flattened their ba , s against the
! alls instin tively. 2he Standing Oabas ro , ed themselves out of
the madman's #ath. 2he door behind us ! as lo , ed shut. 2here ! as
no es a#e. 7e ! ere unarmed. 2he man ! al, ed on to! ards us, ! aving
the s! ord in ir les over his head ! ith both hands. 2here ! as
no! here to go, and nothing to do, but to fight him. I too, one
ste# ba , ! ith the right foot, and raised my fists. It ! as a
, arate stan e. Seven years of martial arts" training #ulsd and
fli , ered in my arms and legs. I felt good about it. ;i, e every
other tough, angry man I , ne! , I avoided fighting until it ame
to me, and then I en+oyed it.

)t the last #ossible moment, a man ste##ed out from the ! all at
the side, tri##ed the goose(ste##ing tribesman, and sent him
rashing to the stone floor. 2he s! ord fell from his hand and
lattered to a sto# at <arla"s feet. I snat hed it u#, and
! at hed as the man ! ho"d tri##ed our assailant held him in a firm
but mer iful submission hold. *e gri##ed the fallen man"s arm in
a hammerlo , , behind his ba , .)t the same time he 1??
t! isted the ollar of the man"s shirt to ho, e off a little air.
2he anger or madness that had #ossessed the s! ordsman subsided,
and he surrendered #assively. 4en ! ho , ne! him ste##ed for! ard
and es orted him out to the alley, beyond the iron gate. Se onds
later, one of the men returned and a##roa hed me. ;oo, ing into my
eyes, he held out his hands, #alms u#! ard, for the s! ord. I
hesitated, but then handed it over. 2he man gave us a #olite and
a#ologeti bo! , and left the den.

In the bubble and hatter that follo! ed his de#arture, I he , ed
on <arla. *er eyes ! ere ! ide and she #ursed her li#s in a
! ondering smile, but she ! asn't distressed. Reassured, I ! ent to

than, the man ! ho" d ste##ed in to hel# us. *e ! as tall, taller than I am by a fe! entimetres, and had a strong, athleti build. *is thi , , bla , hair ! as unusually long for Oombay in those years, and he ! ore it in a high #onytail. *is sil, shirt and loose trousers ! ere bla , , and he ! ore bla , leather sandals.

5) bdullah,5 he re#lied, ! hen I" d told him my name, 5) bdullah 2aheri.5

5l o! e you one,) bdullah,5 I said, giving him a smile that ! as as cautious as it ! as grateful. *e" d moved ! ith su h lethal gra e that he made the tri , of disarming the s! ordsman seem effortless. Out it ! as n" t as easy as it loo, ed. I , ne! ho! mu h s, ill and ourage it had ta, en, and ho! big a role instin t had #layed in his timing. 2he man ! as a natural6 a born fighter. 52hat ! as damn lose.5

5- o #roblem,5 he smiled. 5*e ! as drun, , I thin, , that fello! , or not right in his head.5

57hatever his #roblem ! as, I still o! e you one,5 I insisted.

5- o, really,5 he laughed.

It ! as an easy laugh, revealing ! hite teeth. 2he sound of it ame from dee# ! ithin his hest: a laugh from the heart. *is eyes ! ere the colour of sand, in the #alm of your hand, a fe! minutes before the sun sin, s belo! the sea.

5) ll the same, I ! ant to than, you.5

5@, ay,5 he on eded, la##ing a hand to my shoulder.

I returned to <arla and >raba, er. 7hen ! e turned to leave the den,) bdullah ! as already gone. 2he alley outside ! as deserted, and ! ithin a fe! minutes ! e aught a ta' i ba , to 8olaba. <arla

I was silent during the ride, and I too said nothing, miserable that my attempt to impress her had ended in such confusion and near disaster. Only Ghabra felt free to speak.

"What a lovely evening!" he said, from the front seat, grinning at us in the car.

As we sat together but apart in the back of the taxi, I thought a sure thing that fellow would choose in teeny pieces. Some of the people should not be smoking the harras, isn't it? Some of the people get very angry when they relax their brains.

Then I got out of the taxi and stood with Ghabra while Ghabra waited. Late afternoon road surged around the island of our silent stare.

"You're not coming in?"

"No, I answered, wishing that the moment was more like the strong, confident sense I'd imagined through most of that day. "I'm going to collect my stuff from the India Guest House, and move to the slum. In fact, I won't be coming to Ghabra for a while, or anywhere else for that matter. I'm going to ... you know, no! ... get on my feet ... or ... I don't know, no! ... find my feet ... or ... I'm going to ... what! as I saying?"

"Something about your feet?"

"Deah," I laughed. "Well, you gotta start somewhere."

"This is kind of goodbye, isn't it?"

"Not really," I muttered. "Well, yes. Des, it is."

"And you only just got back from the village?"

"Deah," I laughed again. "From the village, to the slum. It's

=uite a +um#.5

5\$ust ma, e sure you land on your((5

5((feet. @, ay. I got it.5

5; isten, if it's a =uestion of money, I ould((5

5- o,5 I said =ui , ly. 5- o. I ! ant to do this. It's not +ust money. I ...5

9or three se onds I balan ed on the edge of telling her about my visa #roblems. *er friend, ;ettie, , ne! someone at the 9oreigner Registration Oran h. She"d hel#ed 4auri1io, I , ne! , and there ! as a han e that she ould hel# me. Out then I dre! ba , from the edge, and overed the truth ! ith a smile. 2elling <arla about the visa ! ould lead to other =uestions that I ouldn't ans! er. I ! as in love ! ith her, but I ! asn't sure that I ould trust her. It's a fa t of life on the run that you often love more #eo#le than you trust. 9or #eo#le in the safe ! orld, of ourse, e' a tly the o##osite is true.

5I ... thin, this ! ill be =uite an adventure. I'm ... a tually loo, ing for! ard to it.5

5@, ay,5 she said, nodding her head slo! ly in a e#tan e. 5@, ay. Out you 1?7

, no! ! here I live. 8ome by and see me, ! hen you get the han e.5

5Sure,5 I ans! ered, and ! e both smiled, and ! e both , ne! that I ! ouldn't visit her. 5Sure.)nd you , no! ! here I am, ! ith >raba, er. Dou do the same.5

She rea hed out to ta, e my hand in hers, and then leaned over to , iss me on the hee, . She turned to leave, but I held her hand.

5Don't you have any advi e for meE5 I as, ed, trying to find another laugh.

5- o,5 she said im#assively. 5l"d only give you advi e if I didn't
are ! hat ha##ens to you.5

It ! as something. It ! asn't mu h, but it ! as something to hold on
to and sha#e my love around, and , ee# me ! ishing. She ! al, ed
a! ay. I ! at hed her ste# into the brittle brightness and banter
of ; eo#old"s, and I , ne! that a door to her ! orld had losed, for
a time. 9or as long as I lived in the slum, I ! ould be e' iled
from that little , ingdom of light. ; iving in the slum ! ould
onsume me, and on eal me, as effe tively as if the mad
s! ordsman had stru , me ! ith his blade.

I slammed the door of the ta' i and loo, ed at >raba, er, ! hose ! ide
and beaming smile a ross the seat in front of me be ame the

! orld.

52hi, hain. 8halloB5 I said. @, ay. ; et"s goB

7e #ulled u#, forty minutes later, outside the slum in 8uffe
>arade, beside the 7orld 2rade 8entre. 2he ontrast bet! een the
ad+a ent and roughly e=ual #lots of land ! as star, . 2o the right,
loo, ing from the road, the 7orld 2rade 8entre ! as a huge, modern,
air(onditioned building. It ! as filled to three levels ! ith
sho#s, and dis#lays of +e! els, sil, s, ar#ets, and intri ate
raft! or, s. 2o the left ! as the slum, a s#ra! ling ten a res of
! ret hed #overty ! ith seven thousand tiny huts, housing t! enty(
five thousand of the ity"s #ooorest #eo#le. 2o the right there
! ere neon lights and floodlit fountains. 2o the left there ! as no
ele tri ity, no running ! ater, no toilets, and no ertainty that
the ! hole shamle and bustle of it ! ouldn't be s! e#t a! ay, from
one day to the ne' t, by the same authorities that relu tantly
tolerated it.

I turned my eyes from the glamorous limousines, dra! n u# outside
the 2rade 8entre, and began the long ! al, into the slum. 2here

It was as an open latrine near the entrance, concealed by tall reeds, and screens made from reed mats. The smell was appalling and almost overwhelming. It was like a physical element permeating the air, and it seemed that I could

feel it settle on my skin in a thick, ening, slimy ooze. Gagging and sickeningly, the impulse to vomit, I glanced at Ghabra, her smile had dimmed, and for the first time I saw something like cynicism in it.

See, when he said with that uncharacteristically hard little smile dragging down the corners of his mouth, See how the people live.

On the east the latrines and within the first lane of huts, however, there were fitful gusts of wind from a wide arc of sea coast that formed the furthest edge of the slum. The air was hot and steamy, but the breeze dispersed the noisome stink from the latrine. Smells of fishes, cooking, and incense predominated. Seen up close, the huts were pitiful structures made from scraps of plastic and cardboard, thin bamboo poles, and flat reed mats for walls. They were erected over bare earth. Thatches of wicker and stone, shored in some places where the old floors and foundations of the original buildings, leached from the site years before, remained intact.

As I walked along the narrow lanes of the slum, I read that the foreigner was on his way. A large crowd of children gathered and loomed around Ghabra, her and me, close to us but never touching. Their eyes were wide with surprise and excitement. They burst into fierce gusts of nervous laughter, shouted to one another, and leapt into a frenzy, spontaneous dances as they roared.

People came out of their huts to stand in every doorway. Dozens, and eventually hundreds, of people crowded into the side lanes and the occasional gaps between the houses. They were all staring

at me ! ith su h gravity, su h a fi' ity of fro! ning intensity, that I felt sure they must bear me enormous ill(! ill. I ! as ! rong, of ourse. I ouldn't , no! then, on my first day, that the #eo#le ! ere sim#ly staring at my fear. 2hey ! ere trying to understand ! hat demons haunted my mind, ausing me to dread so terribly the #la e they , ne! to be a san tuary from fates far ! orse than slum life.

)nd the fa t ! as that for all my fear of its s! arm and s=ualor, I did , no! a fate far ! orse than slum life. It ! as a fate so bad that I'd limbed a #rison ! all and given u# everything that I , ne! , everything I ! as, everything I loved, to es a#e it.

52his is no! your house, ; in,5 >raba, er #roudly announ ed over the giggling and hatter of the hildren ! hen ! e rea hed the hut. 5Go inside. See all for yourself.5 1?9

2he hut ! as identi al to the others around it. 2he roof ! as a sheet of bla , #lasti . 2he frame ! as made from thin bamboo #oles bound together ! ith o onut(fibre t! ine. 2he ! alls ! ere made from hand(! oven reed matting. 2he floor ! as bare earth, #ressed flat and smooth by the feet of the hut"s #revious tenants. 2he door ! as a thin #ie e of #ly! ood dangling on ro#e hinges. 2he #lasti eiling ! as so lo! that I had to stoo#, and the ! hole room ! as about four #a es long by t! o #a es ! ide. It ! as almost e' a tly the same si!e as a #rison ell.

I #ut my guitar in one orner, and then dragged the first(aid , it from the #a , , setting it u# in another orner. I had a ou#le of ! ire oat(hangers, and I ! as hanging my fe! lothes in the u##er orners of the hut ! hen >raba, er alled me from outside.

I ste##ed out to find \$ohnny 8igar, Ra+u, >raba, er, and several other men standing together in the lane. I greeted those I , ne! , and ! as introdu ed to the others.

52his is)nand, your neighbour on the one side((on left side,5 >raba, er said, bringing me to sha, e hands ! ith a tall, handsome,

young Si, h ! ho ! ore his long hair in a tight yello! s arf.

5*ello,5 I said, smiling in res#onse to the ! armth of his strong handsha, e. 5I , no! another)nand((the manager of the India Guest *ouse.5

5Is he a good manE5)nand as, ed through a #u11led fro! n.

5*e"s a ni e guy. I li, e him.5

5Good,5)nand re#lied, giving me a boyish smile that undermined the serious tone in his dee# voi e. 52hen ! e are half the ! ay to being friends, naE5

5)nand, he shares his house ! ith another of ba helors, ! ith name Rafi=,5 >raba, er ontinued.

Rafi= ! as about thirty years old.) straggly beard dangled from his #ointed hin. *is very #rominent front teeth ga#ed from an im#overished grin. *is eyes narro! ed unfortunately in the e' #ression, and gave him a sly, almost malevolent a##earan e.

5@n the other side is our very good neighbour, \$eetendra. *is ! ife has the name Radha.5

\$eetendra ! as short and #lum#. *e smiled ha##ily and shoo, my hand, rubbing vigorously at his #rominent #aun h all the ! hile. *is ! ife, Radha, a , no! ledged my smile and nod of greeting by dra! ing her red otton sha! I over her head and holding it a ross her fa e ! ith her teeth. 1C%

5Do you , no! ,5)nand said in a gentle, onversational tone that aught me by sur#rise, 5it is a _fire, I believe.5

*e ! as standing on his stret hed toes, and shading his eyes from the afternoon sun ! ith his hand as he loo, ed a! ay a ross the bla , dunes of the huts. /veryone follo! ed his ga1e. 2here ! as a

humid, ominous silence. Then, several hundred metres away, a gorgeous volume of orange flames erupted suddenly. In an explosion followed, sounding like a shotgun blast into a metal shed. A very man ran at towards me in the direction of the yellowish sears of flame that rose in the distance.

I stood still, fascinated, bewildered, staring at the flames and swirls of smoke. As I looked, the jets of fire expanded to become a sheet and then a wall of searing flames. The red, yellow, and orange walls began to advance with the breeze from the sea, engulfing nearby huts every few seconds. It was heading directly towards me, at a slow but alarming pace, incinerating everything that stood in its path.

The explosions thundered in the blaze (one, then another. I realised, at last, that they were kerosene stoves. A very one of the seven thousand huts had a stove. Those that were surrounded and under pressure were exploding when the flames reached them. The last monsoon rain had fallen weeks before. The slum was a huge pile of tinder (dry, kindling, and a strengthening sea breeze fanned the flames through a hole a mile of fuel and human lives.

Stunned, afraid, but not in any way, I looked at the incredible advance of the inferno, and decided that the cause was lost. I rushed into the hut, seized my bag, and belongings, and scrambled for the door. At the threshold I dropped the bag, and stooped to retrieve the clothes and other items that had spilled to the ground. In the act, I looked up to see some twenty or more women and children, standing in a group and watching me. For an instant of perfect, wordless communication, I knew exactly what they were thinking. We stared across the open ground, and I heard their

searing minds.

Too, at the big, strong foreigner, saving himself, and running away from the fire, I knew our men run towards it ...

)shamed, I stuffed my belongings into the sack, and laid it at the feet of the woman, Radha, who'd been introduced as my neighbour. Then I turned and ran toward the fire.

Slums are lawless, organic disarrangements. There's no order in the narrow, twisting lanes, but no order. Within three or four turns, I was lost. I ran in a line of men who were moving toward the smoke and flames. Beside us, running, staggering, and bumping along the lane in the opposite direction, was a constant file of other people moving away from the fire. They were helping the elderly and herding the children. Some carried possessions (clothes, cooking pots, stoves, and cardboard boxes of documents. Many of them were injured, shouting, bloody wounds, and serious burns. The smell of burning plastic, fuel, clothes, hair, and flesh was a rigid and unnerving.

I turned a blind corner, and another, and another, until I was near enough to hear the roaring flames above the shouts and screams. Then a dazzlingly brilliant fireball burst through the gap between the huts. It was screaming. It was a woman, engulfed in flames. She ran straight at me, and we collided.

My first impulse was to spring away as I felt my hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes burn off in the contact with her. She stumbled, and fell over backwards, still screaming and thrashing. I ripped the shirt from my back, using it to protect my hands and face, I threw myself on her, smothering the flames with my skin and clothes. Others rushed forward and tended to her. I ran on toward the fire again. She was still alive when I left her, but a voice in my mind was declaring her dead. __She's dead ... she's gone ... she isn't married ... it ...

The mother of the fire, when I did reach it, was terrifying. The flames roared to two or three times the height of the tallest hut, and ranged across a semi-circular front, arched away from us, that was fifty or more huts wide. Wild gusts of wind drove the air forward in probing feints, flaring up suddenly on one

side, and then blowing toward us from a different direction.
Behind it! as the inferno, a cauldron of burning huts,
a mass of blazes, and a poisonous smoke.

A man stood in the centre of the large area of open space before
the wall of flames, directing those who were fighting the fire as
if he were a general ordering troops into battle. He was tall and
lean, with silver (grey) hair, and a short, pointed, silver (grey)
beard. He was dressed in a white shirt, white trousers, and
sandals. There was a green scarf tied at his neck, and he held a
short, brass-tipped wooden stick, in his hand. His name was Iqbal

Ali Hussein, and that was my first glimpse of the head man in the
slum. 1CF

Iqbal's double task was to send beaters against the fire to
stop it from spreading while other teams demolished the huts that stood in
the fire's path, and dragged away their contents to deprive the
fire of fuel. That involved a staggered retreat, edging land to
the flames all the while, and then launching counterattacks
whenever the fire seemed to encroach. Slowly turning his head and
scanning his gaze back and forth across the front of the fire,
Iqbal pointed with the brass-tipped stick, and shouted commands.

The head man turned his gaze in my direction. A glimmer of
surprise gleamed in the polished bronze of his eyes. His scrutiny
too, in the blazing shirt in my hand. Without a word, he lifted
his stick, to point toward the flames. It was a relief and an
honour to obey him. I trotted forward and joined a team of
beaters. I was very glad to find Johnny Bigar in the same team.

"Yes," he shouted. It was both encouragement and enquiry.

"Yes," I shouted back. "We need more water."

"There is no more water," he called back, gasping as the smoke
eddied around us. "The tank is empty. Run, it will fill it up."

tomorrow! . The water that these are using here is their ration.

I discovered later that every household, my own included, was rationed to two or three buckets of water per day for all cooking, drinking, and washing needs. The slum dwellers were trying to put the fire out with their drinking water. /very bucket through, and there were many, for every one more household to survive a thirsty night, waiting for the morning delivery of water in its own little tubs.

I hate these fucking fires! Johnny cursed, slamming down and with a wet sack, to emphasize his words. Some on, you fuck! Dou want to die, ill meet some on! We will beat you! We will beat you!

A sudden swirl of the fire sent a burst of orange flame toward us. The man beside me fell back, screaming and clutching at his burned face. I immediately directed a rescue team to help him away. I seized his discarded sack, and fell into line beside Johnny, slamming at the flames with one hand and shielding my face with the other.

We glanced over our shoulders, often, to receive directions from I immediately *ussein. We couldn't hope to put the fire out with our wet rags. Our role was to gain time for the demolition teams scrambling to remove endangered huts. It was heartbreaking, . They were saving 100

the slum by destroying their own houses.)nd to gain time for those remaining teams, I immediately sent us left and right in desperate moves, starving the fire, and slowly winning ground.

When one was calling down draft of wind! e!t blast, and broken smoke into our clearing, we lost sight of I immediately *ussein completely. I wasn't the only man who thought to pull back, in retreat. Then, through the smoke and dust, we saw his green scarf, held aloft and fluttering in the breeze. *e stood his ground, and I glimpsed his calm face, summing up the status of the struggle and calculating his next move. The green scarf rippled above his head

li, e a banner. 2he ! ind hanged again, and ! e hurled ourselves to the tas, on e more, ins#ired ! ith ne! ourage. 2he heart of the man ! ith the green s arf ! as in me, and in all of us.

In the end, ! hen ! e"d made our last s! ee# through the s or hed lanes and harred lum#s of houses, loo, ing for survivors and ounting the dead, ! e stood together in a mournful assembly to hear the tally. It ! as , no! n that t! elve #ersons ! ere dead, si' of them elderly men and ! omen, and four of them hildren. 4ore than one hundred ! ere in+ured, ! ith burns and uts. 4any of them ! ere serious ! ounds.)bout si' hundred houses ! ere lost((one(tenth of the slum.

\$ohnny 8igar ! as translating the figures for me. I ! as listening to him ! ith my head lose to his, but ! at hing I asim)li"s fa e as he read from his hastily #re#ared list of the dead and in+ured. 7hen I turned to loo, at \$ohnny, I found that he ! as rying. >raba, er #ushed through the ro! d to +oin us, +ust as \$ohnny told me that Ra+u ! as one of those ! ho"d died in the fire. Ra+u, ! ith the sad, honest, friendly fa e6 the man ! ho"d invited me to live in the slum. Dead.

5Damn lu , yB5 >raba, er summed u# heerfully, ! hen I asim)li had alled the tally. *is round fa e ! as so bla , ened ! ith soot that his eyes and teeth seemed almost su#ernaturally bright. 5; ast year, in the last big fire, a full one(third of the 1ho#ad#atti ! as burning u#. @ne house from every three housesB 4ore than t! o thousand houses goneB <alaassB 4ore than forty #eo#le dying also. 9orty. It"s too many, ; in, let me tell you. 2his year is a very lu , y fire.)nd our houses are safe alsoB Ohag! an have blessings on our brother, Ra+u.5

Shouts from the edge of the sombre ro! d dre! our attention, and ! e turned to see one of the sear h teams #ushing their ! ay through to I asim)li.) ! oman from the team ! as arrying a baby they"d res ued 1CH from the smouldering rubble. >raba, er translated the e' ited shout and hatter for me. 2hree ad+oining huts had olla#sed in

the blaze, falling on a family. In one of those incredible accidents of the fire's action, the parents of the child had suffocated and died, but the child, a baby girl, had survived. Her face and body were untouched, but her legs were severely burned. Something had fallen across them at mid-thigh, and they were black, split, and raw, red. She was screaming in pain and terror.

"Tell them to come with us!" I shouted to Gaba, her friend; lead me back,

to my hut, and tell them to follow us. I've got medicine and bandages!"

Gaba had seen the large and impressive first aid kit many times. It included bandages, salves, and creams, disinfectant solutions, splints, robes, and an array of surgical instruments. Grasping my meaning at once, he shouted a message to Iasim and the others. I heard the words medicine and doctor repeated several times. Then he grasped my sleeve and dragged me with him, jogging back to the hut.

With the girl on the ground in front of my hut, I administered local anaesthetic cream to the baby's legs in a thick smear. It began to work, almost at once. The baby settled down to a quiet whimper, and cuddled within her rescuer's arms.

"Doctor ... doctor ... doctor ..." she said, all around me.

Iasim called for lamps to be brought as the sun set on the Arabian Sea, and the long Bombay evening finally subsided to a star-filled night. By the yellow flickering lamplight we tended to the wounded slum dwellers, using my first aid kit as the basis of our little open-air clinic. Johnny Gagar and Gaba, her doctor, led with me as translators and nurses. The most common injuries were burns, cuts, and deep gashes, but a great many people were also affected by smoke inhalation.

I assim)li *ussein ! at hed us for a short ! hile, and then left to su#ervise the ere tion of emergen y shelters, the rationing of remaining ! ater su##lies, the #re#aration of food, and the do1en other tas,s that ! ould fill the night to morning and beyond.)

u# of tea a##eared beside me. 4y neighbour Radha had made it and brought it to me. It ! as the first thing I ate or dran, in the slum, and it ! as the best hai I ever tasted in my life.)n hour later, she for ed her husband and t! o other young men to drag me from the in+ured #eo#le to eat a meal of roti bread, ri e, and bha+ee. 2he urried vegetables ! ere deli ously s#i ed, and I leaned the #late ! ith the last bite of roti. 1C?

)nd again, hours later, after midnight, it ! as Radha's husband, \$eetendra, ! ho #ulled at my arm and dre! me into my hut, ! here a hand(ro heted blan, et had been s#read out on the bare earth. Anresisting, I olla#sed on the blan, et for my first night of slee# in the slum.

Seven hours later((hours that #assed as if they ! ere minutes((I ! o, e to see >raba, er"s fa e hovering in the air. I blin, ed, and s=uinted, and realised that he ! as s=uatting on his haun hes, ! ith his elbo! s on his , nees, and his fa e u##ed in his hands. \$ohnny 8igar ! as s=uatting beside him, on his left, and \$eetendra ! as on his right.

5Good morning, ; inbabaB5 he said, heerfully, ! hen my eyes settled on his. 5Dour snorings is a fabulous thing. So loudB ; i, e

having a bullo , in this hut, \$ohnny said so.5

\$ohnny nodded his agreement, and \$eetendra ! agged his head from side to side.

5@ld Sarabai is having a first(lass ure for snorings,5 >raba, er informed me. 5She an ta, e one very shar# #ie es of bamboo, about same as long as my finger, and #ush it u# inside of your nose.)fter that, no more snoring. OasB <alaassB5

I sat up on the blanket, and stretched the stiffness from my back, and shoulders. My face and eyes were still gritty from the fire, and I could feel that the smoke had stiffened in my hair. A series of morning light stabbed through holes in the walls of the hut.

"What are you doing, rabu?" I asked irritably. "How long have you been waiting for me to sleep?"

"So very long, only for the half hours or so."

"It's not polite, you know," I grumbled. "It's not nice to wait when they're sleeping."

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "In this India, everyone sleeps, at some times. And I see that the father, when it is in sleeping, is the friend of the world."

"Our father is so kind when you are sleeping," Johnny Bigar added. "I was very surprised."

"I can't begin to tell you what this means to me, guys. Can I expect to find you in the hut, every morning, when I wake up?"

"Well, if you really, really want, rabu, offered, coming to his feet. "Out this morning, I only came to tell you that your patients are ready."

"My ... patients?"

"Des. Some and see."

They stood, and opened the door of the hut. Sunlight shimmered into my burning eyes. I blinked, and stepped through, following the men into the brilliant, bayside morning to see a line of people squatting on the ground outside my hut. There were thirty or more of them forming a queue along the length of the lane to the first turn.

5Do tor ... do tor ...5 #eo#le murmured and ! his#ered ! hen I emerged from the hut.

58ome on!5 >raba, er urged, tugging at my arm.

58ome on ! hereE5

59irst to toilet,5 he re#lied, ha##ily. 5Dou must ma, e a motions, isn't itE I ! ill sho! you ho! ! e ma, e a motions, into the sea, on the long ement +etty. 2hat is ! here the young men and boys ma, e their motions, every morning, into the o eans((motions into the o eans, isn't itE Dou +ust be s=uatting do! n, ! ith your butto , s #ointing on the o eans. 2hen you ! ash your good self ! ith a sho! er, and you have it a ha##y brea, fast. 2hen you an easily fi' u# all your #atients. -o #roblem.5

7e ! al, ed along the length of the =ueue. 2hey ! ere young and old, men and ! omen. 2heir fa es ! ere ut, bruised, and s! ollen. 2heir hands ! ere bla , ened, blistered, and bloody. 2here ! ere arms in slings, and legs in s#lints.)nd at the first turn, I sa! to my horror that the =ueue e' tended into the ne' t lane, and ! as longer, mu h longer.

57e've got to ... do something ...5 I mumbled. 52hey're all ... ! aiting.5

5-o #roblem, ! aiting, ; in,5 >raba, er re#lied, airily. 52he #eo#le are ! aiting more than one hour already. If you are not ! ith us, they ! ould still be ! aiting, but ! aiting for nothing only.

7aiting for nothing, that is ! hat , ills the heart of a man, isn't itE -o! the #eo#le are ! aiting for something. 7aiting for you, they are.)nd you are a really something, ; in(Shantaram, if you don't mind I'm saying it to your smo, y fa e and sti , ing(u# hairs. Out first, you must ma, e it motions, and then ! ashing, and then brea, fast.)nd ! e have to get going(((some young fello! s are ! aiting do! n there on the +etty, and ! anting to see you ma, e your

motions.5

52hey ! hatE5

5@h yesß 2hey are a fas inating for you. Dou are li, e a movie hero for them. 2hey are dying to see ho! you ! ill ma, e your motions.)nd then, 1C7 after all these things, you ! ill return, and fi' the #atients, li, e a really hero, isn't it soE5

)nd in that ! ay ! as my role in the slum reated. If fate doesn't ma, e you laugh, <arla said, in one of my first onversations ! ith her, then you +ust don't get the +o, e.)s a teenager I'd trained in first(aid treatment. 2he formal ource of study had overed uts, burns, s#rains, brea, s, and a ! ide range of diagnosti and emergen y #ro edures. ;ater, I'd earned my ni , name, Do , by using my training in 8>R to #ull +un, ies out of overdoses, and save their lives. 2here ! ere hundreds of #eo#le ! ho only , ne! me as Do . 4any months before that morning in the slum, my friends in -e! . ealand had given me the first(aid , it as a going(a! ay #resent. I ! as sure those threads((the training, the ni , name, the first(aid , it, the ! or, as unoffi ial do tor in the slum((! ere all onne ted in some ! ay that ! as more than a ident or oin iden e.

)nd it had to be me.)nother man, ! ith my first(aid training or better trained, ! ouldn't have been for ed by rime and a #rison(brea, to live in the slum.)nother riminal, ready to live there ! ith the #oor, ! ouldn't have had my training. I ouldn't ma, e sense of the onne tion on that first morning. I didn't get the +o, e, and fate didn't ma, e me laugh. Out I , ne! there ! as something((some meaning, some #ur#ose, leading me to that #la e, and that +ob, at e' a tly that time.)nd the for e of it ! as strong enough to bind me to the ! or, , ! hen every intuition tried to ! arn me a! ay.

So, I ! or, ed into the day. @ne by one, the #eo#le gave me their names and their smiles and, one by one, I did my best to treat their ! ounds.)t some #oint during the morning, someone #ut a ne! , erosene stove in my hut. Someone else #rovided a metal bo' for rat(#roof storage of food.) stool found its ! ay into my hut, and a ! ater #ot((the ubi=uitous mat, a((and a set of sau e#ans, and a fe! #ie es of utlery.

)s evening throbbed in a s arlet ar h of s, y, ! e sat in a grou#, near my hut, to eat and tal, . Sadness lingered in the busy lanes, and memories of those ! ho"d died re eded and returned li, e ! aves moving on the great o ean of the heart. Det arried on that sadness, a #art of sorro! ing itself, ! as the determination of those ! ho"d endured. 2he s or hed earth had been leared and leaned, and many of the huts ! ere already rebuilt. *o#es rose ! ith every humble home that ! as restored.

I loo, ed at >raba, er, laughing and +o, ing as he ate, and I thought of 1C8

our visit ! ith <arla to the Standing Oabas. @ne moment from that evening, one heartbeat's length of time as the ra1ed man had harged at us ! ith a s! ord, ! as stret hed in my memory.)t the #re ise instant ! hen I too, that ste# ba , ! ards and raised my hands in a bo' ing stan e to fight, >raba, er too, a ste# to the side, and stood in front of <arla. *e ! asn't in love ! ith her, and he ! asn't a fighter. Det his first instin t ! as to ste# side! ays and #rote t <arla by shielding her ! ith his body, ! hile my first thought ! as to ste# ba , and fight.

If the mad s! ordsman hadn't been tri##ed, if he"d rea hed us, I ! ould've been the one to fight him.)nd, #robably, I ! ould've saved us: I"d fough men ! ith fists, , nives, and lubs before, and I"d ! on. Out even then, even if it had gone that far, >raba, er ! ould've been the real hero, for the bravery of that little, instin tive, side! ays ste#.

I"d gro! n to li, e >raba, er. I"d learned to admire his unsha, eable o#timism. I'd ome to de#end on the omforting ! armth his great

smile provided.)nd I'd enjoyed his company, day and night, through the months in the city and the village. Out in that minute, on my second night in the slum, as I sat behind him laughing with Seetendra, Johnny Digar, and his other friends, I began to love him.

The food was good, and there was enough for all. A radio played on a table here. It was the fine, almost unbearably sweet soprano and happy, boasting tenor of a duet from an Indian movie. The people talked, ed, nourishing one another with their smiles and conversation.)nd some time during the course of that love song, someone here in the lands above of the slum (diggers" reassurances, someone) through the fact of our survival, their world enfolded my life within its dreams, as gently and completely as a swollen tide does over a stone that stands upon its shore.

(((((((((((

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PART TWO

CHAPTER NINE

I escaped from prison in broad daylight, as they say, at one o'clock, in the afternoon, over the front wall and betweenthe two guard towers. The plan was intricate and meticulously executed, up to a point, but the escape really succeeded because it was daring and desperate. The bottom line for us, once it started, was that the plan had to succeed. If it failed, the guards in the punishment unit were quite capable of killing us to death.

There were two of us. My friend was a mild, big-hearted twenty-five year old serving a life sentence for murder. We tried to convince other men to escape with us. We assembled eight of the toughest men in the prison, all of them serving ten straight years or more for crimes of violence. One by one, they found an excuse not to join in the attempt. I didn't blame them. My friend and I were young first offenders with no criminal history. We were serving big years, but we had no reputation in the prison system. And the escape would be planned as the kind that would make all heroes if it succeeds, and insane if it fails. In the end, we were alone.

We took advantage of extensive renovations that were being carried out on the internal security (for the building) (a two-storey office and interrogation block, near the main entrance gate at the front wall. We were working as maintenance gardeners. The guards had two shifts in the area saw us every day. When we went to work, there, on the day of the escape, they watched us for a while, as usual, and then looked away. The security (for the building) was empty. The renovation workers were at lunch. In the few long seconds of the little escape created by the guards' boredom and their familiarity with us, we were invisible, and we made our move.

Butting our way through the chain-link fence that closed off the

renovation site, I opened a door to the deserted building and made our way upstairs. The interior was hollowed out by the renovation. 17F

Annastered walls showed the skeleton structure of rights and

load-bearing beams. The bare, wooden steps on the stairway were white with dust, and littered with fragments of brick, and plaster. There was a manhole in the ceiling on the top floor. Standing on my friend's strong shoulders, I unhooked the wooden trapdoor in the manhole and limbed through. I had an exertion cord with me, unravelled around my body under my overalls. I unhooked it and pulled it free, fixed one end to a roof beam, and passed the other down to my friend. We used it to limb us into the roofspace with me.

The roof stretched out in long narrow lanes. We scrambled toward the narrowing in the roof where the roof met the front wall of the prison. I hooked a shot on one of the troughs to cut our way through, hoping that the beams on either side would conceal the hole from the guards. It was dark, everywhere in the roofspace, but in that narrow ledge near the wall it was blacker than a guard's baton.

With a cigarette lighter for a lantern, I explored to cut our way through the double thickness of hard wood that separated us from the tin on the outside of the roof. Long screwdriver, a chisel, and a pair of tin snips were our only tools. After fifteen minutes of hacking, sawing, and stabbing at the wood, I'd learned a little space about the size of a man's eye. Having the flame of the hot cigarette lighter back and forth, I could see the glint of the metal roof beyond the small hole. Out the wood was too hard and too thick. With the tools I had, it would take us hours to make a man-sized hole.

We didn't have hours. We had thirty minutes, I guessed, or maybe a little more, before the guards did a routine check of the area. In that time I had to get through the wood, cut a hole in the

tin, limb out on the roof, use our #o! er e' tension ord as a
ro#e, and limb do! n to freedom. 2he lo , ! as ti ,ing on us. 7e
! ere tra##ed in the roof of the se urity building.)nd any
minute, ! e , ne! , the guards might noti e the ut fen e, see the
bro, en door, and find the smashed manhole.)ny minute they ould
ome u# through the manhole into that bla , , s! eating ave, and
find us.

57e"ve gotta go ba , ,5 my friend ! his#ered. 57e"ll never get
through the ! ood. 7e"ve gotta go ba , , and #retend it never
ha##ened.5

57e an"t go ba , ,5 I said flatly, although the thought had
s reamed through my mind as ! ell. 52hey"ll find all the bro, en
stuff, the fen e ! e 17G
ut, and they"ll , no! it ! as us. 7e"re the only ones allo! ed in
the area. If ! e go ba , , ! e"re in the Slot for a year.5

2he Slot ! as #rison slang for the #unishment unit. In those
years, that unit, in that #rison, ! as one of the most inhumane in
the ountry. It ! as a #la e of random, brutal beatings.) failed
attem#t to es a#e through the roof of the se urity(for e building

((their building, the head offi e for the #unishment unit guards
((! ould ensure that the beatings ! ere less random and more
brutal.

57ell ! hat the fu , are ! e gonna doE5 my friend demanded,
shouting ! ith everything but his voi e. S! eat dri##ed from his
fa e, and his hands ! ere so ! et ! ith fear that he ouldn"t hold
the igarette lighter.

5I thin, there"s t! o #ossibilities,5 I de lared.

57hat are theyE5

59irst, ! e ould use that ladder((the one that"s hained to the

! all do! nstairs. 7e ould go do! n again, brea, the hain off the ladder, tie the e' tension ord to the to# of it, slam it u# against the ! all, limb u#, and thro! do! n the ord on the other side. 2hen ! e an slide do! n to the street.5

52hat"s itE5

52hat"s the first #lan.5

5Out ... they"ll see us,5 my friend #rotated.

5Deah.5

5)nd they"ll start shooting at us.5

5Deah.5

52hey"ll shoot us.5

5Dou said that.5

57ell, fu , me,5 he hissed. 5I thin, it bears re#eating. It"s a fu , in" salient #oint, don"t you thin, E5

5I figure that one of us ! ill get through, maybe, and one of us ! ill get shot. It"s fifty(fifty.5

7e onsidered the odds in silen e for a ! hile.

5I hate that #lan,5 my friend shuddered.

5So do I.5

57hat"s the se ond #lanE5

5Did you noti e that bu11 sa! , on the ground floor, as ! e ame u# hereE5

5Deah ...5 17H

5If ! e bring it u# here, ! e ould use the bu11 sa! to ut through the ! ood. 2hen ! e an use the tin sni#s to ut through the tin.)fter that, it's ba , to the original #lan.5

5Out they'll hear the thing,5 my friend ! his#ered fier ely. 5I an hear them tal,ing on the fu ,in" tele#hone. 7e're that lose. If ! e drag the sa! u# here, and fire it u#, it'll sound li,e a fu ,in" heli o#ter.5

5I ,no! . Out I thin, they'll +ust figure it's the ! or,ers, doing more ! or, .5

5Out the ! or,ers aren't here.5

5-o, but the shift at the gate is hanging. 2here's ne! guards oming on duty. It's a big han e to ta,e, but I thin, if ! e do it they'll +ust hear the noise, as usual, and thin, it's the ! or,ers. 2hey've been listening to drills and hammers and bu11 sa! s for ! ee, s.)nd there's no ! ay they ould imagine that it's us doing it. 2hey'd never figure that rims ! ould be ra1y enough to use a #o! er sa! , right ne' t to the main gate. I thin, it's our best shot.5

5I hate to be 4ister(fu ,in"(-egative here,5 he ob+e ted, 5but there's no ele tri ity in this building. 2hey shut it off for the renovating. 2he only #o! er #oint is outside. 2he e' tension ord is long enough to rea h do! n there, I thin, , but the #o! er is outside the building.5

5I ,no! , I ,no! . @ne of us ! ill have to go do! n, ree# out the door ! e busted o#en, and #lug the e' tension ord into the outside #o! er outlet. It's the only ! ay.5

57ho goes do! n thereE5

"I'll do it," I said. I tried to sound confident and strong, but there are some lies that the body just won't believe, and the words came out as a squeal.

I stumbled over to the manhole. My legs were stiff with dread and tension. I slid down the tension cord and reft down the stairway to the ground floor, laying the cord out all the way. It reached to the door, with plenty to spare. The bullet was resting near the door. I tied the tension cord around the handle of the saw, and ran back up the stairs. My friend pulled the saw up into the manhole and then passed the cord back to me. Then I reft down to the door. With my body pressed flat against a wall, I breathed hard, and tried to find the courage to open the door. At last, with a heartrending rush of adrenaline, I pushed the door aside and stepped out into the open to plug the cord into the socket. 17?

The guards, armed with pistols, were talking among themselves, not twenty metres from the door. If one of them had been facing

me, it would have been over. I glanced up to see that they were looking in every direction but mine. They were talking and talking about in the gate area, and laughing at a joke someone had just raised. One saw me. I slipped back inside the building, crawled like a wolf on all fours up the stairs, and dragged myself up the cord to the manhole.

In the darkness, corner near the trough in the flag roof space, my friend lit the cigarette lighter. I saw that he'd connected the power saw to the cord. He was ready to make the cut. I took the lighter, and held it for him. Without a second of hesitation, he hoisted the heavy saw and lit it to life. The machine screamed like the whine of a jet engine on a runway. My friend looked at me, and a huge grin tore his mouth open. His teeth were hidden in the smile, and his eyes were glittering with the reflected fire. Then he drove the saw into the thick wood. With

four silent, ear-splitting cuts, he made a perfect hole that revealed a square of gleaming tin.

We waited in the silence that followed, our ears ringing with diminishing echoes, and our hearts thumping at our chests. After a moment we heard a telephone ring close by, at the main gate, and we thought we were finished. Then someone answered the phone. It was one of the gate guards. We heard him laugh and talk in a relaxed, conversational tone. It was okay. We were safe. They'd heard the phone ring, of course, but, just as I'd hoped, they'd dismissed it as noise made by the workers, men.

*startled, I punched a hole in the tin with the screwdriver. Sunlight from the freestaircase above shot in on us. I widened the hole, and then used the tin snips to cut a panel of tin around three sides. Pushing with two sets of hands, we shoved the flap of tin outward, and I shoved my head through the hole. I saw that we had indeed cut our way into one of the troughs of the roof. The deepest part of that shaded trench was a blind spot. If we lay down in that narrow defile we couldn't see the tower guards, and they couldn't see us.

We had one job left to do. The phone cord was still plugged into the outlet, downstairs and outside the building. We needed the cord. It was our rope. We needed it to climb down the outside of the prison wall to the street. One of us had to go down the stairs, push out through the door in full view of the guards in the adjacent gate area, unplug the phone cord, and then climb back up into the roof again. I looked at my 17C friend, his silent eating face clear in the bright light bathing us from the hole we'd cut in the roof, and I knew it had to be me.

Downstairs, with my back against the inside wall, next to the door, I paused again, and tried to fill the strength into my arms and legs for the move out into the open. I was breathing so hard that I felt dizzy and nauseous. My heart, like a trapped bird, hurled itself against the cage of my chest. After a few long moments, I knew I couldn't do it. Everything, from audacious

caution to superstitious terror, she screamed at me not to go out there again.)nd I couldn't.

I had to cut the cord. 2here ! as no other ! ay. I too, the hisel from the side(#o ,et of my overalls. It ! as very shar#, even after the ! or, ! e"d done ! ith it in trying to #enetrated the ! ooden barrier in the roof. I #la ed it against the trailing #o! er cord, ! here it entered under the door. I raised my hand to strike, e. 2he thought occurred to me that if I ble! out the #o! er by cutting through the cord it ould sound an alarm, and #erhaps send a guard into the building to investigate. It didn't matter. I didn't have any choice. I ,ne! I ouldn't go out into the o#en again. I slammed my hand do! n hard onto the hisel. It cut through the cord, and embedded itself in the ! ooden floor. I sliced the sni##ed ends of the cord away from the metal hisel, and ! aited for the sound of an alarm or the tumble of voices to a##roar h from the gate area. 2here ! as nothing. -othing. I ! as safe.

I grabbed the loose end of the #o! er cord, and rushed back, u#stairs and into the roof s#a e.)t the ne! manhole ! e"d cut in the roof, ! e secured the cord to a heavy, ! ooden bearer beam. 2hen my friend started out through the hole. 7hen he ! as half! ay onto the tin roof, he got stuck, . 9or a fe! moments, he ouldn't move u#! ard and he ouldn't move back, . *e began to thrash ! ildly, straining ! ith all his strength, but it ! as ho#eless. *e ! as stuck, fast.

It ! as dark, again in the roof s#a e, ! ith his body blocking the hole ! e"d made. I searched around ! ith my hands in the dust, bet! een the roof joists, and found the cigarette lighter. 7hen I struck it, I saw ! at on e ! hat had trapped him. It ! as his tobacco #ou h((a thin, leather ! allet that he"d made for himself in one of the hobby groups. 2telling him to hold still, I used the hisel to tear a flap in the #o ,et at the back, of his overalls. 7hen I ripped the #o ,et away, the tobacco #ou h fell free into my

hands, and my friend ! ent u# through the hole and onto the roof.
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I follo! ed him u# to the tin roof. 7 rigging li, e ! orms in the gutter of the trough, ! e moved for! ard to the astellated front ! all of the #rison. 7e , nelt to loo, over the ! all. 7e ! ere visible then, for a fe! se onds, but the to! er guards ! eren"t loo,ing our ! ay. 2hat #art of the #rison ! as a #sy hologi al blind s#ot. 2he to! er guards ignored it be ause they didn"t believe that anyone ! ould be ra1y enough to atten#t a daylight es a#e over the front ! all.

Ris,ing a =ui , , franti glim#se at the street belo! , ! e sa! that there ! as a =ueue of vehi les outside the #rison. 2hey ! ere deliverymen, ! aiting to enter through the main gate. Oe ause ea h vehi le ! as sear hed throughout, and he , ed ! ith mirrors beneath, the =ueue made slo! #rogress. 4y friend and I hun, ered do! n in the trough to onsider our o#tions.

52hat"s a mess do! n there.5

5I say ! e go no! ,5 he said.

57e have to ! ait,5 I ounterred.

59u , it, +ust thro! the ord over and let"s go.5

5- o,5 I ! his#ered. 52here"s too many #eo#le do! n there.5

5So ! hatE5

5@ne of them"ll #lay hero, for sure.5

59u , him. ; et him #lay hero. 7e"ll +ust go over the to# of him.5

52here"s too many of them.5

59u , them all. 7e'll go straight through "em. 2hey ! on"t , no!
! hat hit "em. It's us or them, mate.5

5- o,5 I said finally. 57e have to ! ait. 7e have to go over ! hen
there"s no(one do! n there. 7e have to ! ait.5

)nd ! e did ! ait, for a t! enty(minute eternity, and I ! rigged
for! ard again and again to loo, over the ! all, ris, ing e' #osure
every time. 2hen, at last, I loo, ed do! n to the street and sa!
that it ! as om#letely em#ty in both dire tions. I gave my friend
the signal. *e s rambled for! ard over the ! all, and do! n out of
sight. I re#t for! ard to loo, , e' #e ting to see him limbing
do! n the ord, but he ! as already on the street. I sa! him
disa##ear into a narro! lane, a ross the street from the #rison.
)nd I ! as still inside, on the roof.

I lambered over the bluestone #ara#et, and too, hold of the
ord. Standing ! ith my legs against the ! all, and the ord in
both hands, my ba , to the street, I loo, ed at the gun(to! er on
my left. 2he guard ! as 178
tal, ing into a tele#hone and gesturing ! ith his free hand. *e had
an automati rifle slung over his shoulder. I loo, ed to the other
to! er. 2he guard there, also armed ! ith a rifle, ! as alling do! n
to another guard inside the #rison in the gate area. *e ! as
smiling and rela' ed. I ! as invisible. I ! as standing on the front
! all of the toughest ma' imum(se urity #rison in the state, and I
! as invisible.

I #ushed off ! ith my legs and started the des ent, but my hands
sli##ed((the fear, the s! eat((and I lost the ord. I fell. It ! as
a very high ! all. I , ne! it ! as a , illing fall to the ground
belo! . In an agony of terror and des#eration, I grabbed at the
ord and sei1ed it. 4y hands ! ere the bra, es that slo! ed my fall.
I felt the s, in tear a! ay from my #alms and fingers. I felt it
singe and burn.)nd slo! er, but still hard enough to hurt, I
slammed into the ground, stood, and staggered a ross the road. I

! as free.

I loo, ed ba , at the #rison on e. 2he ord ! as still dangling over the ! all. 2he guards ! ere still tal, ing in their to! ers.) ar drifted #ast on the street, the driver drumming his fingers on the steering ! heel in time to a song. I turned my ba , . I ! al, ed on through the lane into a hunted life that ost me everything I'd ever loved.

7hen I ommitted the armed robberies, I #ut fear into #eo#le. 9rom that time((even as I did the rimes((and on through #rison and life on the run, fate #ut fear into me. 2he nights ! ere stee#ed in it, and sometimes I felt as if the blood and the breath in my body ! ere lotted ! ith fright. 2he fear I'd #ut into others be ame ten terrors, fifty, a thousand, filling the loneliest hours of every night ! ith dread.

Oy day, in those early Oombay months, ! hen the ! orld ! or, ed and ! orried around me, I ! edged my life into a busy thi , ness of duties, needs, and small #leasures. Out at night, ! hen the slee#ing slum dreamed, the horror re#t a ross my s, in. 4y heart ba , ed a! ay into a bla , ave of memory.)nd I ! al, ed most nights, ! hile the ity sle#t. I ! al, ed, and I for ed myself not to loo, over my shoulder at the gun(to! ers and the dangling #o! er ord on the high ! all that ! asn't there.

2he nights, at least, ! ere =uiet.)t midnight, every night in those years, the o#s im#osed a urfe! on Oombay. *alf an hour before t! elve, #oli e +ee#s gathered in the main streets of the entral ity, and began the enfor ed losure of restaurants, bars, stores, and even the tiny #avement sho#s that sold igarettes and #aan. 2he beggars, +un, ies, and hoo, ers ! ho ! aren't already at home or hiding ! ere #ased from the foot#aths.

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Steel shutters ame do! n over the sho# ! indo! s. 7hite ali o loths ! ere thro! n over the tables in all the mar, ets and ba1aars. I uiet and em#tiness des ended. In the ! hirl and rush of #eo#le and #ur#oses in Oombay's daylight s ramble, it ! as

impossible to imagine those deserted silences. Out each and every night! as the same: soundless, beautiful, and threatening. Bombay became a haunted house.

Four to three hours after midnight, in an operation, no longer as the rounds, squads of plainclothes officers controlled the vacant streets in search of criminals, unions, suspects, and homeless, unemployed men. More than half the people in the city were homeless, of course, and many of them lived, ate, and slept on the streets. The sleepers were everywhere, stretched out on the footpaths with only a thin blanket and a cotton sheet to keep out the dampness of night. Single people, families, and whole communities had endured some drought, flood, or famine slept on the stone paths and in doorways, huddled together in bundled necessity.

It was technically illegal to sleep on the streets in Bombay. The

officers enforced that regulation, but they were as pragmatic about it as they were about enforcing the laws against prostitution on the Street of Ten Thousand Hours.) certain discrimination as required, and in fact the list of those they couldn't arrest for the crime of homelessness was quite long. Sadhus and all other religious devotees, for example, were exempted. /lderly people, amulets, the sick, or the injured didn't find much sympathy, and were sometimes forced to move on to another street, but they weren't arrested. ;unatis, entertainers such as musicians, acrobats, jugglers, actors, and snake charmers were occasionally roughed up, but they were invariably excluded from the rounds. Families, particularly those with young children, usually received no more than a stern warning not to remain longer than a few nights in a given area.)ny man who could prove he had a job, however menial, by displaying the business card or written address of his employer, was spared. Single men who were lean and resourceful and could demonstrate some level of education could usually talk their way out of an arrest, even if they weren't employed anywhere.)nd, of course, anyone who could say ba, sheesh was safe.

That left the very poor, homeless, unemployed, uneducated, single young men as the high-risk group in the midnight round. With no 18%

money to pay their way out of the police net, and not enough education to talk their way out, scores of those young men were arrested throughout the city, every night. Some of them were arrested because they fitted descriptions of wanted men. Some were found to have drugs or stolen goods in their possession. Some were ill, no-nonsense, and the cops arrested them routinely, on suspicion. Anyway, however, they were simply dirty and poor and striking with a sullen helplessness.

The city didn't have the funds to provide thousands of pairs of metal handcuffs and even if the money were found, the cops probably wouldn't have burdened themselves with heavy chains. Instead, they carried lengths of rough twine made from hemp and coconut fibres, and used it to tie the arrested men one to the other by the right hand. The twine was strong enough to hold the men because the victims of nightly roundups were mostly too weak, undernourished, and spiritually defeated to run. They submitted meekly, silently. When between a dozen and twenty men had been arrested and tied into the human chain, the six or eight cops in the rounds would march them back to holding cells.

For their part, the cops were fairer than I'd expected them to be, and undeniably brave. They were armed only with the thin bamboo cane, no more than the lathi. They carried no clubs, gas, or guns. They had no allies, so they couldn't call for backup if they ran into trouble on the streets. There were no vehicles to search for the rounds, so the squads searched the many kilometers of their beat. And although they struck, out often with the lathi, savage or even serious beatings were rare (much less frequent than police beatings in the modern, Western city here

I'd grown up.

- nevertheless, the round(u# did mean days, ! ee, s, or even months of confinement for the young men in #risons that ! ere as bad as any in)sia, and the aravans of ro#ed, arrested men that shambled throughout the ity, after midnight, ! ere more melan holy and forlorn than most funeral #ro essions.

In my late(night ! al, s around the ity, I ! as invariably alone ! hen the round(u# ! as done. 4y ri h friends feared the #oor. 4y #oor friends feared the o#s. 4ost foreigners feared everybody, and , e#t to their hotels. 2he streets ! ere mine as I sear hed their ool silen es.

@n one of those night ! al, s, about three months after the fire, I found myself on the sea ! all at 4arine Drive. 2he broad foot#ath beside the sea 181

! all ! as bare and lean.) si' (lane road se#arated the seaside #ath from a hori1on(! ide, in urving res ent of affluen e: fine homes, e' #ensive a#artments, onsular offi es, first(lass restaurants, and hotels that loo, ed out over the bla , and heaving sea.

2here ! ere very fe! ars on the Drive, that night, only one every fifteen or t! enty minutes, travelling slo! ly. 9e! lights shone in any of the rooms a ross the street behind me.) ool ! ind arried the lean, salt air in iras ible gusts. It ! as =uiet. 2he sea ! as louder than the ity.

Some of my friends from the slum ! orried about me ! al, ing alone on the streets at night. Don't ! al, at night, they said. 2he night is no safety in Oombay. Out it ! asn't the ity that I feared. I felt safe on the streets. Strange and troubled as my life ! as, the ity enfolded it ! ithin the millions of others as if ... as if it belonged there, no less than any other.

)nd the ! or, I ! as doing enhan ed that sense of belonging. I gave myself assiduously to the role of slum do tor. I found boo, s on diagnosti medi ine, and studied them by lam#light in my hut. I a umulated a modest a he of medi ines, salves, and bandages,

buying them from local chemists with money I earned in bars, (mar, et deals with tourists.) and I stayed on there, in those s=valid areas, even after I'd made enough money to leave. I stayed on in the ram#ed little hut ! hen I ould've moved to a comfortable a#artment. I allo! ed my life to be s! e#t u# in the broiling, dan ing struggle of their t! enty(five thousand lives. I bound myself to >raba, er and \$ohnny 8igar and I asim)li *ussein.)nd although I tried not to thin, of <arla, my love #ut la! s in the s, y. I , ised the ! ind. I s#o, e her name, ! hen I ! as alone.

@n the sea ! all, I felt the ool bree1e ! ash across the s, in of my fa e and hest li, e ! ater #oured from a lay mat, a. 2here ! as no sound but my o! n breath in the ! ind and the rash of dee# ! ater on the ro , s, three metres belo! the ! all. 2he ! aves,

rea hing u# in s#lash and s#indrift, #ulled at me. ; et go. ; et go. Get it over ! ith. \$ust fall do! n and die. So easy. It ! asn't the loudest voi e in my mind, but it ame from one of the dee#est sources((the shame that smothered my self(esteem. 2he shamed , no! that voi e: Dou let everyone do! n. Dou don't deserve to live. 2he ! orld ! ould be better off ! ithout you ...)nd for all that I tried to belong, to heal myself ! ith the ! or, in the lini , to save myself ! ith the fool notion of being in love ! ith <arla, the truth ! as that I ! as alone in that shame, and lost. 18F

2he sea surged and shoved at the ro , s belo! . @ne #ush, and it ! ould all be over. I ould feel the fall, the rash as my body stru , the ro , s6 the old sli##eriness of dro! ning death. So easy.

) hand tou hed my shoulder. 2he gri# ! as soft and gentle, but firm enough to hold me there. I turned =ui , ly in sho , ed sur#rise. 2here ! as a tall, young man standing behind me. *is hand remained on my shoulder as if to bra e me there6 as if he'd read my thoughts a fe! moments before.

5Our name is 4r. ; in, I believe,5 he said =uiently. 5I don't , no!

if you can remember me (my name is) Abdullah. We met at the den of the Standing Oabas.

Des, yes, I stammered. Dou helped us, helped me. I remember you! Well. Dou left (you disappeared (before I got to than, you #ro#erly.

*e smiled easily, and too, a! ay his hand to run it through his thi , , bla , hair.

5-o need for than, s. Dou! ould be doing the same for me, in your ountry, isn't it? Some, there is someone! ho! ants to meet you.

*e gestured to a ar that! as #ar, ed at the , erb ten metres a! ay. It had dra! n u# behind me, and the motor! as still running, but someho! I'd failed to hear it. It! as an)mbassador, India's modest version of a lu' ury ar. 2here! ere t! o men inside (a driver, and one #assenger in the ba , .

)bdullah o#ened the rear door and I stoo#ed to loo, inside.) man in his middle to late si' ties sat there, his fa e half illuminated by the streetlights. It! as a lean, strong, intelligent fa e! ith a long, thin nose and high hee, bones. I! as stru , and held at on e by the eyes, an amber brillian e of amusement and om#assion and something else ((ruthlessness, #erha#s, or love. *is hair and beard! ere lose(ro##ed and! hite(grey.

5Dou are 4r. ; inE5 he said. *is voi e! as dee#, resonant, and su#remely onfident. 5I am #leased to meet you. Des, very #leased. I have heard something good about you. It is all! ays a delight to hear good things ((and even more #leasurable, ! hen it

on erns foreigners, here in our Oombay. >erha#s you have heard of me also. 4y name is)bdel <hader <han.

Sure, I'd heard of him. /everyone in Oombay had heard of him. *is

name appeared in the newspapers every other day, and he was admired and feared about him in the bazaars and night clubs and slums. *e was admired and feared

by the rich. *e was respected and mythologised by the poor. *is discourses on theology and ethics, held in the courtyard of the -abila House in Dongri, were famous throughout the city, and drew many scholars and students from every faith. -o less famous were his friendships with artists, businessmen, and politicians. *e was also one of the lords of Bombay's mafia (one of the founders of the colonial system that had divided Bombay into fiefdoms ruled by separate colonial mafias). The system was a good one, people said, and popular, because it had brought order and relative peace to the city's underworld after a decade of bloody power struggles. *e was a powerful, dangerous, brilliant man.

Des, sir, I answered, showing that I'd inadvertently used the word sir. I loathed the word. In the punishment unit I were beaten whenever I failed to address the guards as _sir. I, no, your name, of course. The people call you <haderbhai.

The word bhai, at the end of his name, meant elder brother. It was a term of respectful endearment. *e smiled and nodded his head slowly when I said it: <haderbhai.

The driver adjusted his mirror and fixed me in it, staring expressionlessly. There were fresh jasmine flowers hanging in garlands from the mirror, and the perfume was intoxicating, almost dizzying after the fresh wind from the sea. As I leaned into the doorway of the car, I became acutely conscious of myself and my situation: my stooping posture, the wrinkles in my forehead as I lifted my face to see his eyes, the rim of guttering at the edge of the car's roof under my fingertips and a sticker, pasted to the dashboard, that read G@D 0; /SS I) 4 DRI&I-G 2* IS 8)R. There was no one else on the street. -o cars passed. It was silent, but for the idling engine of the car and the muffled humming of the shuffling feet.

5 Dou are the do tor in the 8olaba hutments, 4r. ; in. I heard of it at on e, ! hen you ! ent to live there. It is unusual, a foreigner, living in the hutments. 2his belongs to me, you understand. 2he land ! here those huts stand((it belongs to me. Dou have #leased me by ! or, ing there.5

I ! as stunned into silen e. 2he slum ! here I lived, , no! n as the 1ho#ad#atti, or the hutments, half a s=uare , ilometre, ! ith t! enty(five thousand men, ! omen, and hildren, belonged to himE I'd lived there for months, and I'd heard <haderbhai's name mentioned many times, but 18H no(one had ever said that he o! ned the #la e. It an"t be, I

heard myself thin, ing. *o! an any one man o! n su h a #la e, and all its livesE

5I, er, I'm not a do tor, <haderbhai,5 I managed to tell him.

5>erha#s that is ! hy you are having su h su ess in treating the si , , 4r. ; in. Do tors ! ill not go into the hutments ! illingly. 7e an om#el men not to be bad, but ! e annot om#el them to be good, don't you findE 4y young friend,)bdullah, re ognised you +ust no! , as ! e #assed you, sitting on the ! all. I turned the ar to ome ba , here for you. 8ome((sit inside the ar ! ith me. I ! ill ta, e you some! here.5

I hesitated.

5>lease, don't trouble yourself. I ...5

5- o trouble, 4r. ; in. 8ome and sit. @ur driver is my very good friend, -a1eer.5

I ste##ed into the ar.)bdullah losed the door behind me, and then sat in the front ne' t to the driver, ! ho ad+usted the mirror to find and fi' me in it again. 2he ar didn't move off.

58hillum bono,5 <haderbhai said to)bdullah. 4a, e a hillum.

)bdullah #rodu ed one of the funnel(sha#ed #i#es from his +a , et #o , et, #la ed it on the seat beside him, and set about mulling together a mi' of hashish and toba o. *e #ressed a ball, , no! n as a goli, of hashish onto the end of a mat hsti , , and burned it ! ith another mat h. 2he smell of the harras oiled into the #erfume of the +asmine flo! ers. 2he engine of the ar ! as still idling slo! ly and =uietly. -o(one s#o, e.

In three minutes the hillum ! as #re#ared, and offered to <haderbhai for the first dumm, or #uff. *e smo, ed, and #assed the #i#e to me.)bdullah and the driver smo, ed then, #assing the hillum for one more round.)bdullah leaned the #i#e =ui , ly and effi iently, and returned it to his #o , et.

58hallo,5 <hader said. ; et"s go.

2he ar moved a! ay from the , erb slo! ly. Streetlights began to stream into the slo#ing ! indshield. 2he driver sna##ed a assette into the dashboard #layer. 2he soul(! ren hing strains of a romanti ga1al slammed out at ma' imum volume from s#ea, ers behind our heads. I ! as so stoned that I ould feel my brain trembling ! ithin my s, ull, but ! hen I loo, ed at the other three men they a##eared to be #erfe tly ontrolled and om#osed.

2he ride ! as eerily similar to a hundred stoned drives ! ith friends in 18?

)ustralia and -e! . ealand ! hen ! e"d smo, ed hash or grass, #ut loud musi on the dashboard #layer, and ruised together in a

ar. 7ithin my o! n ulture, ho! ever, it ! as mainly the young ! ho smo, ed and ruised ! ith the musi on ma' . 2here, I ! as in the om#any of a very #o! erful and influential senior man ! ho ! as mu h older than)bdullah, the driver, and me.)nd ! hile the songs follo! ed regular rhythms, they ! ere in a language that I ouldn't understand. 2he e' #erien e ! as familiar and disturbing at the

same time((something like returning, as an adult, to the schoolyard of childhood((and despite the sorrowful slum of the drug, I couldn't entirely relate).

I had no idea where I was going. I had no idea how or when I would return. We were travelling towards Bardeo, in the opposite direction to my home in the Solaba slum. As the minutes passed, I reflected on that artistically Indian custom of amiable abduction. For months, in the slum, I'd succumbed to the vague and mysterious invitations of friends to accompany them to unspecified places, for unknown purposes. Doubtless, he said with smiling urgency, never feeling the need to tell me where I was going, or why. Doubtless I'd resisted it a few times, at first, but I soon learned that those obscure, unplanned journeys were invariably worthwhile, frequently interesting and enjoyable, and quite often important. Little by little, I learned to relate, and submit, and trust my instincts, just as I did as doing with Chaderbhai. I never regretted it, and I did as never once hurt or disappointed by the friends who abducted me.

As the car rested on the long, sloping hill, leading down to the *Aji Ali Chowk, Chaderbhai turned off the cassette and asked Chaderbhai if he wanted to make his regular stop at the restaurant there. Chaderbhai stared at me reflectively for a moment, and then smiled and nodded to the driver. He tapped me on the hand with the index finger of his left hand, and touched his thumb to his lips. One silent nod, the gesture said: 'No, but don't see,

We pulled into a parking bay, beside and a little apart from a row of twenty other cars outside the *Aji Ali Restaurant. Although most of Bombay slept after midnight, or at least pretended to sleep, there were centres of sound and colour and activity in the city. The tri-cab lay in wait here to find them. The restaurant near the *Aji Ali shrine was one of those places. Hundreds of people gathered there every night to eat, drink and meet, and buy drinks or cigarettes or sweets. They came in taxis and private cars and on motor cycles, hour after hour, until dawn. The restaurant itself was small and always full. Most of

the patrons referred to stand on the footpath, and sit in or on their chairs, to eat. Music blasted from many of the chairs. People shouted in Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, and English. Waiters hurried from the counter to the chairs and bar, carrying drinks, chairs, and trays with stylish smiles.

The restaurant broke the business rules, and should've been closed down by the officers of the police, but his was only twenty metres away. Our Indian pragmatism recognised that civilised people in large, modern cities needed places to

gather and hunt. The owners of certain oases of noise and fun were permitted to bribe various officials and cops in order to stay open, virtually all night. That isn't, however, the same thing as having a licence. Such restaurants and bars were operating illegally, and sometimes the appearance of compliance had to be displayed. Regular honeys alerted the police at night when a commissioner or a minister or some other >intended to drive past. With a cooperative bustle, the lights were turned out, the chairs dispersed, and the restaurant was forced to a temporary close. Far from discouraging people, that small inconvenience added a touch of glamour and adventure to the commonplace act of buying snacks. Everyone knew that the restaurant at night, like every other illegal nightspot in town that faded away, would reopen in less than half an hour. Everyone knew about the bribes that were paid and taken. Everyone knew about the earning honeys. Everyone profited, and everyone was well pleased. The first thing about corruption as a system of governance, Didier Bonie said, is that it works so well.

The headwaiter, a young Maharashtrian, hurried up to the car and nodded energetically as our driver ordered for us. Abdullah got out of the car, and walked to the long, roped table at the counter. I looked at him. He walked with an athlete's tough grace. He was taller than most of the other young men around him, and there was a striking, confident bearing. His black hair was long at the back, reaching almost to his

shoulders. *e ! ore sim#le, ine' #ensive lothes((soft bla , shoes, bla , trousers, and a ! hite sil, shirt((but they suited him ! ell, and he arried them ! ith a ertain martial elegance. *is body ! as ! ell mus led, and he loo, ed to be about t! enty(eight years old. *e turned to! ard the 187

ar, and I aught sight of his fa e. It ! as a handsome fa e, alm and om#osed. I , ne! the sour e of that om#osure. I'd seen the s! ift and lethal ! ay he'd moved to disarm the s! ordsman at the den of the Standing Oabas.

) fe! ustomers and all of the ounter staff re ognised)bdullah, and tal, ed, smiled, or +o, ed as he ordered igarettes and #aan. 2heir gestures ! ere e' aggerated. 2heir laughter ! as louder than it had been moments before. 2hey ro! ded against one another, and rea hed out to tou h him often. It seemed that they ! ere almost des#erate to be li, ed by him, even +ust to be noti ed by him. Out there ! as hesitan y as ! ell((a , ind of relu tan e((as if, des#ite everything in their tal, and smiles, they didn't really li, e or trust him. It ! as also very lear that they ! ere afraid of him.

2he ! aiter returned, and #assed our food and drin, s to the driver. *e lingered at the o#en ! indo! beside <haderbhai, his eyes #leading to s#ea, .

5Dour father, Ramesh, he is ! ellE5 <hader as, ed him.

5Des, bhai, he is ! ell. Out ... but ... I have a #roblem,5 the young ! aiter ans! ered, in *indi. *e tugged nervously at the edge

of his moustache.

<haderbhai fro! ned, and stared hard into the ! orried fa e.

57hat , ind of #roblem are you having, RameshE5

5It's ... it's my landlord, bhai. 2here is ... there ! ill be an evi tion. I, ! e, my family, ! e are #aying double rent already.

Out the landlord ... the landlord is greedy, and he ! ants to
evi t us.5

<hader nodded thoughtfully. Dra! ing en ouragement from his
silen e, Ramesh #lunged on in ra#id *indi.

5It's not +ust my family, bhai.)ll the families in the building
are to be evi ted. 7e have tried everything, made very good
offers, but the landlord ! ill not listen to us. *e has goondas,
and those gangsters have made threats, and even done some
beatings. 4y o! n father ! as beaten. I am ashamed that I have not
, illed that landlord, bhai, but I , no! that this ! ould only bring
more trouble on my family and the other families in the building.
I told my very honoured father that ! e should tell you, and that
you ! ould #rote t us. Out my father is too #roud. Dou , no! him.
)nd he loves you, bhai. *e ! ill not disturb your #eae to as, for
hel#. *e ! ill be very angry if he , no! s that I s#o, e of our
trouble in this ! ay. Out ! hen I sa! you tonight, my lord
<haderbhai, I thought that ... that the Ohag! an had brought you
here to me. I ... I am very sorry to disturb you ...5 188

*e fell silent, s! allo! ing hard. *is fingers ! ere ! hite in their
gri# on his metal tray.

57e ! ill see ! hat an be done about your #roblems, Ramu,5
<haderbhai said slo! ly. 2he affe tionate diminutive of the name
Ramesh, Ramu, #rovo, ed a ! ide, hild"s smile on the young fa e.
5Dou ! ill ome and see me tomorro! , at t! o o" lo , shar#. 7e ! ill
tal, further. 7e ! ill hel# you, Inshallah. @h, and Ramu((there
! ill be no need to s#ea, to your father about this, until the
#roblem, Inshallah, has been solved.5

Ramesh loo, ed as though he ! anted to sei1e <hader"s hand and , iss
it, but he sim#ly bo! ed and ba , ed a! ay, muttering his than, s.
)bdullah and the driver had ordered #lates of fruit salad and
o onut yoghurt, and they ate ! ith noisy a##re iation ! hen the
four of us ! ere alone. <haderbhai and I had ordered only mango(
flavoured lassi.)s ! e si##ed the i ed drin, s, another visitor

came to the ! indo! of the ar. It ! as the hief offi er of the
*a+i)li #oli e #ost.

5) great honour to see you again, <hader+i,5 he said, his fa e
! rithing into a grima e that ! as either a rea tion to stoma h
ram#, or an oily smile. *e s#o, e *indi ! ith the strong a ent of
some diale t, and I found it diffi ult to understand. *e as, ed
after <haderbhai"s family, and then made some referen e to

business interests.

)bdullah #ut his em#ty #late do! n on the front seat, and dre! a
#a , et, ! ra##ed in ne! s#a#ers, from under the seat. *e #assed it
a ross to <hader, ! ho o#ened a orner of the #a , et to reveal a
thi , bundle of hundred(ru#ee notes, and then #assed it usually
through the ! indo! to the o#. It ! as done so o#enly, and even
ostentatiously, that I felt sure it ! as im#ortant to <hader that
everyone ! ithin a hundred metres ! ould see the bribe made and
ta, en.

2he o# s run hed the #ar el into the front of his shirt, and
leaned aside to s#it t! i e noisily, for lu , . *e ame lose to
the ! indo! on e more, and began to s#ea, in a =ui , , urgent
murmur. I aught the ! ords body and bargain, and something about
the 2hief 0a1aar, but I ouldn"t ma, e sense of it. <hader
silen ed him ! ith a raised hand.)bdullah loo, ed from <hader to
me, and then bro, e into a boyish grin.

58ome ! ith me, 4r. ; in,5 he said =uietly. 57e ! ill see the
mos=ue, isn"t itE5

)s ! e got out of the ar I heard the o# say loudly, 2he gora
s#ea, s *indiE Ohag! an save us from foreignersB 189

7e ! al, ed to a deserted s#ot on the sea ! all. 2he mos=ue, at *a+i
)li, ! as built u#on a small, flat island that ! as onne ted to
the mainland by a stone #ath, three hundred and thirty(three

ste#s long. From da! n to dus, , the tide #ermitting, that broad
#ath! ay ! as thronged ! ith #ilgrims and tourists.)t high tide,
the #ath ! as om#letely submerged, and dee# ! aters isolated the
island. Seen from the retaining ! all on the road beside the sea,
the mos=ue at night seemed li, e a great moored shi#. Orass
lanterns, thro! ing green and yello! light, s! ung from bra , ets on
the marble ! alls. In the moonlight, the teardro# ar hes and
rounded ontours glo! ed ! hite and be ame the sails of that mysti
shi#, and the minarets ! ere so many to! ering s#ars.

@n that night, the s! ollen, flattened, yello! moon((, no! n in the
slum as a grieving moon((hovered hy#noti (full, above the mos=ue.
2here ! as a bree1e from the sea, but the air ! as ! arm and humid.
S! arms of bats flying overhead, along the lines of ele tri al
! ires, thousands of them, ! ere li, e musi al notes on a stri# of
sheet musi .) very small girl, a! a, e #ast her bedtime and still
selling ribbons of +asmine flo! ers, ame u# to us and gave
)bdullah a garland. *e rea hed into his #o , et to give her some
money, but she refused, laughing, and ! al, ed a! ay singing the
horus of a song from a #o#ular *indi movie.

52here is no a t of faith more beautiful than the generosity of
the very #oor,5)bdullah said, in his =uiet tone. I had the
im#ression that he never raised his voi e above that softness.

5Dou s#ea, /nglish very ! ell,5 I ommented, genuinely im#ressed

by the so#histi ated thought and the ! ay he"d e' #ressed it.

5- o, I don't s#ea, ! ell. I , ne! a ! oman, and she taught me those
! ords,5 he re#lied. I ! aited for more, and he hesitated, loo, ing
out over the sea, but ! hen he s#o, e again it ! as to hange the
sub+e t. 52ell me, 4r. ; in, that time at the den of the Standing
Oabas, ! hen that man ! as oming for you ! ith a s! ord((! hat ! ould
you have done if I ! as not thereE5

5I ! ould"ve fought him.5

I thin, ...5 *e turned to stare into my eyes, and I felt my
s al# tightening ! ith an una ountable dread. 5I thin, you ! ould
have died. Dou ! ould have been murdered, and you ! ould no! be
dead.5

5-o. *e had a s! ord, but he ! as old, and he ! as ra!y. I ! ould've
beaten him.5

19%

5Des,5 he said, not smiling. 5Des, I thin, you are right((you
! ould have beaten him. Out the others, the girl and your Indian
friend, one of them ! ould have been hurt, or even ,illed, if you
had survived. 7hen the s! ord ame do! n, if it did not stri, e you,
it ! ould have hit one of them, I thin, it is so. @ne of you ! ould
have died. Dou or your friends((one of you ! ould be dead.5

It ! as my turn to be silent. 2he sense of dread I"d felt a moment
before ! as suddenly a full(blo! n alarm. 4y heart ! as thum#ing a
loudness of blood. *e ! as tal,ing about having saved my life, and
yet I sensed a threat in his ! ords. I didn't li, e it.)nger began
to rise in me. I tensed, ready to fight him, and stared hard into
his eyes.

*e smiled, and #ut a hand on my shoulder, +ust as he"d done less
than an hour before at another sea ! all, on 4arine Drive.)s
=ui ,ly as the tingling, intuitive sense of alarm arose, it also
#assed6 as #o! erful as it had been, it ! as su##ressed and gone.
It ! as months before I thought of it again.

I turned to see the o# saluting and moving a! ay from <hader"s
ar.

5<haderbhai ! as very ons#i uous about giving that o# a bribe.5

)bdullah laughed, and I remembered the first time I"d heard him
laugh out loud, in the den of the Standing Oabas. It ! as a good
laugh, guileless and om#letely unself ons ious, and I suddenly

li, ed him be ause of it.

57 e have a saying in Persian ((Sometimes the lion must roar, +ust to remind the horse of his fear. 2his #oli eman has been ma, ing #roblems here at *a+)li. 2he #eo#le do not res#e t him. 9or that, he is unha##y. *is unha##iness is ausing him to ma, e

#roblems. 2he more #roblems he ma, es, the less res#e t he gets from the #eo#le. - o! they see su h big ba, sheesh, more than a #oli eman li, e him is getting, and they ! ill res#e t him a little. 2hey ! ill be im#ressed that the great <haderbhai #ays him so ! ell. 7ith this little res#e t, he ! ill ma, e less #roblems for all of us. Out still, the message is very lear. *e is a horse, but <hader is a lion.)nd the lion, it has roared.5

5)re you <haderbhai"s bodyguardE5

5- o, noB5 he laughed again. 5; ord) bdel <hader needs no #rote tion. Out ...5 *e #aused, and ! e both loo, ed at the grey(haired man in the ba , of the modest limousine. 5Out I ! ould die for him, if that is ! hat you mean. 2hat, and a lot more ! ould I do for him.5

52here"s not a lot more you an do for someone than die for them,5 I 191

re#lied, grinning at his earnestness as mu h as the strangeness of his idea.

5@h yes,5 he said, #utting an arm around my shoulder and leading us ba , to! ards the ar. 52here is a lot more.5

5Dou are ma, ing a friendshi# ! ith our)bdullah, 4r. ; inE5 <haderbhai said as ! e limbed ba , into the ar. 52his is a good thing. Dou should be lose friends. Dou loo, li, e brothers.5

)bdullah and I loo, ed at one another, and laughed gently at the ! ords. 4y hair ! as blond, and his ! as in, bla , . 4y eyes ! ere

grey, and his ! ere bro! n. *e ! as >ersian, and I ! as)ustralian.
)t first glan e, ! e ouldn't be more dissimilar. Out <haderbhai
stared from one to the other of us ! ith su h a #u11led fro! n, and
! as so genuinely be! ilderer by our amusement, that ! e s! allo! ed
our laughter in smiles.)nd as the ar headed out along the
Oandra road, I thought about ! hat <hader had said. I found myself
thin, ing that, for all the differen es bet! een us, there +ust
might be some #er e#tive truth in the older man"s observation.

2he ar drove on for almost an hour. It slo! ed, at last, on the
outs, irts of Oandra, in a street of sho#s and ! arehouses, and
then bum#ed into the entran e to a narro! lane. 2he street ! as
dar, and deserted, as ! as the lane. 7hen the ar doors o#ened, I
ould hear musi and singing.

58ome, 4r. ; in. 7e go,5 <haderbhai said, feeling no om#ulsion to
tell me ! here ! e ! ere going or ! hy.

2he driver, -a1eer, remained ! ith the ar, leaning against the
bonnet and finally allo! ing himself the lu' ury of un! ra##ing the
#aan that)bdullah had bought for him at *a+i)li.)s I #assed
him to ! al, do! n the lane, I realised that -a1eer hadn't s#o, en a
single ! ord, and I ! ondered at the long silen es so many Indian
#eo#le #ra tised in that ro! ded, noisy ity.

7e #assed through a ! ide stone ar h, along a orridor and, after
limbing t! o flights of stairs, ! e entered a vast room filled
! ith #eo#le, smo, e, and lamorous musi . It ! as a re tangular
room, hung ! ith green sil, s and ar#ets.)t the far end there ! as
a small, raised stage ! here four musi ians sat on sil, ushions.
)round the ! alls there ! ere lo! tables surrounded by omfortable
ushions. >ale green, bell(sha#ed lanterns, sus#ended from the
! ooden eiling, ast trembling hoo#s of yello! (gold light.
7aiters moved from grou# to grou#, serving bla , tea in long
glasses.)t some of the tables there ! ere hoo, ah #i#es, #earling
the air ! ith blue smo, e, and the #erfume of harras. 19F

Several men rose immediately to greet <haderbhai.)bdullah ! as also ! ell , no! n there.) number of #eo#le a , no! ledged him ! ith a nod, ! ave, or s#o, en greeting. I noti ed that the men in that room, unli, e those at *a+i)li, embra ed him ! armly, and lingered as they held his hand bet! een their o! n. I re ognised one man in the ro! d. It ! as Shafi= Gussa, or Shafi= 2he)ngry, the ontroller of #rostitution in the navy barra , s area near the slum ! here I lived. I , ne! a fe! other fa es((a ! ell(, no! n #oet, a famous Sufi holy man, and a minor movie star((from #hotogra#hs in ne! s#a#ers.

@ne of the men near <haderbhai ! as the manager of the #rivate lub. *e ! as a short man, #lum#ly buttoned into a long <ashmiri vest. 2he ! hite la e a# of a ha+i, one ! ho"d made the #ilgrimage to 4e a, overed his bald head. *is forehead ! as dis oloured by the dar, , ir ular bruise some 4uslims a =uire through tou hing their foreheads to a stone in their devotions. *e shouted instru tions, and at on e ! aiter brought a ne! table and several ushions, setting them u# in a orner of the room ! ith a lear vie! to the stage.

7e sat ross(legged, ! ith <hader in the entre,)bdullah at his right hand, and me at his left.) boy, ! earing a ha+i a# and)fghan #ants and vest, brought us a bo! l of #o##ed ri e, shar#ly s#i ed ! ith hilli #o! ders, and a #latter of mi' ed nuts ! ith dried fruits. 2he hai ! aiter #oured hot, bla , tea from a narro! (s#outed , ettle through a metre of air ! ithout s#illing a dro#. *e #la ed the tea before ea h of us and then offered sugar ubes. I ! as about to drin, the tea ! ithout sugar, but)bdullah sto##ed me.

58ome, 4r. ; in,5 he smiled, 57e are drin, ing >ersian tea, in the real Iranian style, isn"t itE5

*e too, a sugar ube and #la ed it in his mouth, holding it firmly bet! een his front teeth. *e lifted the glass then, and si##ed the tea through the ube. I follo! ed suit, imitating the ste#s. 2he sugar ube slo! ly rumbled and melted a! ay and,

although the taste is as sweet as honey, I preferred, I enjoyed that
as for me the strangeness of a new custom.

Chaderbhai also took a sugar cube and stirred his tea through it,

imparting the little custom with a peculiar dignity and solemnity,
as in fact he did with every expression and even the most casual
gesture. *e as the most imperial human being I'd ever met.

So, looking at him, then, 19G

as he inclined his head to listen to Abdullah's light-hearted
conversation, the thought came to me that in any life, and in any
world, he would command men, and inspire their obedience.

Three singers joined the musicians, and sat a little in front of
them. A gradual silence settled in the room, and then all of a
sudden the three men began to sing in powerful, thrilling voices.
It was a luscious sound (a layered and gorgeous music of
passionate intensity. The men weren't just singing, they were
singing and weeping in song. Real tears ran from their closed eyes
and dripped onto their chests. I was elated, listening to it and
yet, somehow, I felt ashamed. It was as if the singers had taken
me into their dearest and most intimate love and sorrow.

They sang three songs then quietly left the stage, disappearing
through a curtain into another room. -o (one had seen or moved
during the performance, but then everyone saw one as I re-
flected ourselves to breathe, the spell that had enveloped us.

Abdullah stood up and crossed the room to talk with a group of
Mughals at another table.

*o! do you like the singing, 4r. ; inE5 Chaderbhai asked me.

I like it very much. It's incredible, amazing. I've never heard
anything like it. There is so much sadness in it, but so much
beauty as well. What language is it? Urdu?

Des. Do you understand Urdu?

5-o, I'm afraid I don't. I only s#ea, a little 4arathi and *indi. I re ognised it as Ardu be ause some of the #eo#le s#ea, it around me, ! here I live.5

5Ardu is the language of ga1als, and these are the best ga1al singers in all Oombay,5 he re#lied.

5) re they singing love songsE5

*e smiled, and leaned a ross to rest his hand on my forearm. 2hroughout the ity, #eo#le tou hed one another often during their onversations, em#hasising the #oints they made ! ith a gentle s=uee1e of #ressure. I , ne! the gesture ! ell from daily onta t ! ith my friends in the slum, and I'd ome to li, e it.

52hey are love songs, yes, but the best and most true of all love songs. 2hey are love songs to God. 2hese men are singing about loving God.5

I nodded, saying nothing, but my silen e #rom#ted him to s#ea, again.

5Dou are a 8hristian fello! E5 he as, ed.

5-o. I don't believe in God.5 19H

52here is no believing in God,5 he de lared, smiling again. 57e either , no! God, or ! e do not.5

57ell,5 I laughed, 5I ertainly don't , no! God, and fran, ly I'm in lined to thin, that God is im#ossible to believe in, at least most of the notions of God that I've ome a ross.5

5@h, of ourse, naturally, God is im#ossible. 2hat is the first #roof that *e e' ists.5

*e ! as staring at me intently, his hand still resting ! arm on my arm. Oe areful, I thought. Dou're getting into a #hiloso#hi al dis ussion ! ith a man ! ho"s famous for them. *e"s testing you. It"s a test, and the ! ater"s dee#.

5; et me get this straight((you're saying that be ause something is im#ossible, it e' istsE5 I as, ed, #ushing a anoe of thought out into the un harted ! ater of his ideas.

52hat is orre t.5

57ell, ! ouldn't that mean that all the #ossible things don't e' istE5

5>re iselyB5 he said, smiling more ! idely. 5I am delighted that you understand.5

5I an say those ! ords,5 I ans! ered, laughing to mat h his smile, 5but that doesn't mean I understand them.5

5I ! ill e' #lain. -othing e' ists as ! e see it. -othing ! e see is really there, as ! e thin, ! e are seeing it. @ur eyes are liars. /verything that seems real, is merely #art of the illusion. -othing e' ists, as ! e thin, it does. -ot you. -ot me. -ot this room. -othing.5

5I still don't get it. I don't see ho! #ossible things don't e' ist.5

5; et me #ut it another ! ay. 2he agents of reation, the energy that a tually animates the matter and the life that ! e thin, ! e see around us, annot be measured or ! ighed or even #ut into time, as ! e , no! it. In one form, that energy is #hotons of light. 2he smallest ob+e t is a universe of o#en s#a e to them, and the entire universe is but a s#e , of dust. 7hat ! e all the ! orld is +ust an idea((and not a very good one, yet. 9rom the #oint of vie! of the light, the #hoton of light that animates it, the universe that ! e , no! is not real. -othing is. Do you

understand no! E5

5-not really. It seems to me that if everything is thin, is it real, or is it an illusion, then none of us has anything to do, or how to live, or how to stay sane.5

5The lie, he said with a flash of real humour in the gleaming amber of his eyes. The sane man is simply a better liar than the insane man. Do you?

and Abdullah are brothers. I know this. Our eyes lie, and tell you that this is not so. And you believe the lie, because it is easier.5

5) And that's how we stay sane.5

5Des. Let me tell you that I can see you as my son. I am not married, and I have no son, but there was a moment of time, yes, when it was possible for me to be married, and to have a son. And that moment of time was (how old are you?)5

5I'm thirty.5

5/' a truly I believe it. That moment of time, when I could have been a father, was thirty years ago. Out if I tell you that I see it clearly, that you are my son, and I am your father, you will think that it is impossible. Do you will resist it. Do you will not see the truth, that I see now, and that I saw in the first moments when we met, a few hours ago. Do you will refer to me as a convenient lie, and to believe it (the lie that we are strangers, and that there is no connection between us. Out fate (you know, fate isismet is the word, in the Urdu language (fate has every power over us, but fate cannot control our free will, and fate cannot lie. Men lie, to themselves more than to others, and to others more often than they tell the truth. Out fate does not lie. Do you see?5

I did see. My heart, not! That he! as saying, even as my rebellious mind related the words and the man! how so, he them. Somehow, he'd found that sorrow in me. The hole in my life that a father should've filled! as a #rairie of longing. In the loneliest hours of those hunted years, I! andered there, as hungry for a father's love as a #ellblo, full of sentenced men in the last hour of -e! Dear's /ve.

5- o,5 I lied. 5I'm sorry, but I +ust don't agree. I don't thin, you an ma, e things true, +ust by believing them.5

5I have not said that,5 he re#lied, #atiently. 57hat I am saying is that reality((as you see it, and as most #eo#le see it((is nothing more than an illusion. 2here is another reality, beyond ! hat ! e see ! ith our eyes. Dou have to _feel your ! ay into that reality ! ith your heart. 2here is no other ! ay.5

5It's +ust ... #retty onfusing, your ! ay of loo, ing at things. 8haoti , in fa t. Don't you find it haoti , yourselfE5

*e smiled again.

5It is strange, at first, to thin, in the right ! ay. Out there are a fe! things ! e an , no! , a fe! things to be sure of, and it is relatively easy. ; et 19C me sho! you. 2o , no! the truth, all you have to do is lose your eyes.5

5It's that easyE5 I laughed.

5Des.) If you have to do is lose your eyes. 7e an , no! God, for e' am#le, and ! e an , no! sadness. 7e an , no! dreams, and ! e an , no! love. Out none of these are real, in our usual sense of things that e' ist in the ! orld and seem real. 7e annot ! igh them, or measure their length, or find their basi #arts in an atom smasher. 7hi h is ! hy they are #ossible.5

4y anoe of thought ! as ta, ing ! ater, and I de ided to bail out, fast.

5I've never heard of this #la e before.)re there many #la es li, e thisE5

5>erha#s five,5 he re#lied, a e#ting the hange of to#i ! ith tolerant e=uanimity. 5Is that many, do you thin, E5

5I guess it"s enough. 2here aren"t any ! omen.)re ! omen not allo! ed to ome hereE5

5-ot forbidden,5 he fro! ned, asting about for the right ! ords. 57omen are #ermitted here, but they do not ! ant to ome. 2here are other #la es ! here ! omen gather, to do their o! n things and to hear musi and singers, and no man ! ould ! ant to disturb them there, either.5

) very elderly man a##roa hed us and sat at <haderbhai"s feet. *e ! ore the sim#le otton shirt and thin baggy #ants , no! n as a , urta(#y+ama. *is fa e ! as dee#ly lined, and his ! hite hair ! as ro##ed into a short, #un, ut. *e ! as thin and stoo#ed and obviously #oor. 7ith a urt but res#e tful nod to <hader, he began to mull toba o and hashish in his gnarled hands. In a fe! minutes he #assed a huge hillum to <hader, and ! aited ! ith mat hes ready to light it.

52his man is @mar,5 <haderbhai said, #ausing ! ith the hillum almost to his li#s. 5*e is the best ma, er of the hillum in all Oombay.5

@mar lit the hillum for <haderbhai, brea, ing into a toothless grin and bas, ing in the #raise. *e #assed it to me, studied my te hni=ue and lung(#o! er ! ith a riti al eye, and grunted a sort of a##roval.)fter <hader and I had smo, ed t! i e, @mar too, the hillum and finished it ! ith giganti #uffs that s! elled his thin hest to bursting. 7hen he ! as finished, he ta##ed out a small

residue of white ash. *e"d su ,ed the hillum dry, and #roudly
a e#ted a nod of a , no! ledgement from <haderbhai. Des#ite his
great age, he rose easily from the seated #osition ! ithout
toughing his hands to the floor. *e hobbled a! ay as the singers
returned to the stage. 197

)bdullah re+oined us, bringing a ut(glass bo! I filled ! ith
slices of mango, #a#aya, and ! atermelon. 2he s ents of the fruits
surrounded us as their tastes dissolved in our mouths. 2he
singers began their ne' t #erformance, singing +ust one song that
continued for almost half an hour. It ! as a lush, tri#artite
harmony built u#on a sim#le melody and im#rovised aden1as. 2he
musicians a om#anying the singers on the harmonium and the
tablas ! ere animated, but the singers themselves ! ere
e' #ressionless, motionless, ! ith their eyes closed and their
hands lim#.

)s before, the silent ro! d in the lub bro, e out in ro! dy
hatter ! hen the singers left the small stage.)bdullah leaned
a ross to s#ea, to me.

57hile ! e ! ere driving here in the ar, I ! as thin, ing about
being brothers, 4r. ; in. I ! as thin, ing about ! hat <haderbhai
said.5

52hat"s funny, so ! as I.5

54y t! o brothers((! e ! ere three brothers in my family in Iran,
and no! my t! o brothers, they are dead. 2hey ! ere , illed in the
! ar against Ira=. I have a sister, in Iran, but I have no
brother. I am +ust one brother no! . @ne brother is a sadness,
isn"t itE5

I ouldn't ans! er him dire tly. 4y o! n brother ! as lost to me. 4y
! hole family ! as lost, and I ! as sure I ! ould never see them
again.

5I ! as thin, ing that #erha#s <haderbhai sa! something true.
>erha#s ! e really are loo, ing li, e brothers.5

54aybe ! e are.5

*e smiled.

5I have de ided to li, e you, 4r. ; in.5

*e said it ! ith su h solemnity, des#ite the smile, that I had to
laugh.

57ell, I guess in that ase you"d better sto# alling me 4r. ; in.
It gives me the heebie(+eebies, any! ay.5

5\$eebiesE5 he as, ed, earnestly. 5It is an)rabi ! ordE5

5Don't ! orry about it. \$ust all me ; in.5

5@, ay. I ! ill all you ; in. I ! ill all you ; in brother.)nd you
! ill all me)bdullah, isn't it soE5

5I guess it is.5

52hen ! e ! ill remember this night, at the on ert of the blind
singers, be ause it is the night ! e begin brothering for ea h
other.5

5Did you say, the blind singersE5

5Des. Dou don't , no! themE 2hese are the Olind Singers of -ag#ur.
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2hey are famous in Oombay.5

5)re they from an institutionE5

5InstitutionE5

5Deah, a school for the blind, maybe. Something like that.5

5-o, ; in brother.)t one time they could see, +ust as ! e are seeing. Out in a small village, near -ag#ur, there ! as a blinding, and these men became blind.5

2he noise around me ! as dying, and the on e #pleasant smell of the fruits and the harras ! as beginning to loy and stifle.

57hat do you mean, there ! as a blindingE5

57ell, there ! ere rebels and bandits, hiding in the mountains, near that village,5 he e' #lained in his slo! , deliberate ! ay. 52he villagers had to give them food, and other hel#. 2hey had no hoi e. Out ! hen the #olie and soldiers came to the village, they made t! enty #eo#le blind, as a lesson, as a ! arning to other #eo#le, in other villages. 2his ha##ens sometimes. 2he singers ! ere not from that village. 2hey ! ere visiting there, to sing at a festival. It ! as +ust bad luck, . 2hey ! ere made blind, ! ith the rest.)ll of them, those men and ! omen, t! enty #eo#le, ! ere tied on the ground, and their eyes ! ere #ut out, ! ith sharp #ie es of bamboo. -o! they sing here, every! here, and are very famous.)nd ri h also ...5

*e talked on. I listened, but I ouldn't res#ond or react. <haderbhai sat ne' t to me, onversing ! ith a young, turbaned)fghan. 2he young man bent lo! to , iss <hader's hand, and the butt of a gun a##eared ! ithin the folds of his robe. @mar returned and began to #re#are another hillum. *e grinned u# at me ! ith his stained gums, and nodded.

5Des, yes,5 he lis#ed, staring into my eyes. 5Des, yes, yes.5

The singers came back, to sing again, and slowly spiralled into the slash of slowly revolving fans, and that green silhouette of music and conversations became a beginning for me. I, no! no! that there are beginnings, turning points, many of them, in every life's questions of luck, and illness and fate. The naming day, the day of the flood stories in Varanasi's village, when the omen gave me the name Shantaram, as a beginning. I, no! that no! .) and I, no! that everything else I'd been and done in India up to that night and the concert of the blind singers, perhaps even the hole of my life, as a preparation for that beginning with Abdul Kader Khan. Abdullah became my brother. Kaderbhai became my father. By the time I realised that fully, and, nevertheless the reasons for it, my 1991 life as brother and son had taken me to war, and involved me in murder, and everything had changed forever.

Kaderbhai leaned across after the singing stopped. His lips were moving, and I, nevertheless he was speaking to me, but for a moment I couldn't hear him.

I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you.

I said that the truth is found more often in music, than he repeated, than it is in books of philosophy.

That is the truth, I assured him. I didn't really want to, no! . I was trying to hold up my end of the conversation. I was trying to be clever.

The truth is that there are no good men, or bad men, he said. It is the deeds that have goodness or badness in them. There are good deeds, and bad deeds. Men are just men (it is what they do, or refuse to do, that links them to good and evil. The truth is that an instant of real love, in the heart of anyone (the noblest man alive or the most illiterate) has the whole purpose and richness and meaning of life within the lotus (folds of its passion. The truth is that we are all, every one of us, every atom, every galaxy, and every particle of matter in the universe, moving

to! and God.5

Those words of his are mine forever no! . I can hear them. The
blind singers are forever. I can see them. The night, and the men
that were the beginning, father and brother, are forever. I can
remember them. It's easy.) If I have to do is lose my eyes.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TEN

Abdullah too, his brothering seriously.) ! ee, after the - ight of the Olind Singers, he arrived at my hut in the 8uffe >arade slum arrying a sat hel filled ! ith medi ines, salves, and bandages.

*e also brought a small metal ase ontaining a fe! surgi al

instruments. 7e ! ent through the bag together. *e as, ed me about the medi ines, ! anting to , no! ho! useful they ! ere and ! hat =quantities I might need in the future. 7hen he"d satisfied himself, he dusted off the ! ooden stool and sat do! n. *e ! as silent for a fe! minutes, ! at hing me #a , the su##lies he"d brought into a ra , of bamboo shelves. 2he ro! ded slum hattered, bra! led, sang, and laughed around us.

57ell, ;in, ! here are theyE5 he finally as, ed.

57here"s ! hoE5

52he #atients. 7here are theyE I ! ant to see my brother healing them. 2here an"t be healing, ! ithout si , #eo#le, isn"t itE5

5l, er, I don"t have any #atients +ust no! .5

5@h,5 he sighed. *e fro! ned, drumming his fingers on his , nees. 57ell, do you thin, I should go and get you someE5

*e half rose from his seat, and I had a vision of him dragging si , and in+ured #eo#le to my hut by for e.

5- o, no, ta, e it easy. I don"t see #eo#le every day. Out if I do see #eo#le, if I"m here, they usually start oming around t! o o" lo , . 2hey don"t ome this early in the morning. - early everyone ! or, s until at least noon. I"m usually ! or, ing myself. I have to earn money too, you , no! .5

5Out not this morningE5

5-o, not today. I made some money last ! ee, . /nough to last me for a ! hile.5

5*o! did you ma, e this moneyE5

*e stared at me ingenuously, una! are that the =uestion might F%1 embarrass me or be ta, en as rude.

5It's not #olite to as, foreigners ho! they ma, e their money,)bdullah,5 I informed him, laughing.

5@h, I see,5 he said, smiling. 5Dou made it by the illegal means.5

57ell, that's not e' a tly the #oint. Out yes, no! that you mention it. 2here ! as this 9ren h girl ! ho ! anted to buy half a , ilo of harras. I found it for her.)nd I hel#ed a German guy get a fair #ri e for his 8anon amera. 2hey ! ere both ommission +obs.5

5*o! mu h did you ma, e ! ith this businessE5 he as, ed, his eyes not ! avering. 2hey ! ere a very #ale bro! n, those eyes, almost a golden olour. 2hey ! ere the olour of sand dunes in the 2har

Desert, on the last day before it rains.

5I made about a thousand ru#ees.5

5/a h business, one thousandE5

5-o, both +obs together made a thousand.5

52his is very little money, ; in brother,5 he said, his nose ! rin, ling and his mouth #u , ering ! ith ontem#t. 52his is tiny, tiny, very small money.5

Well, it might be tiny to you, I mumbled defensively, but it's enough to see me going for a couple of years or so.

And no! you are free, isn't it?

Free?

Dou have no patients?

- o.

And you have no little commission business to do?

- o.

Good. When we go together, no!

@h, yeah? Here are we going?

Some, I will tell you when we get there.

We stepped out of the hut and were greeted by Johnny Sigar, who'd obviously been eavesdropping. He smiled at me, and suddenly Abdullah, then smiled at me again with traces of the smile in the shadow of his smile.

*i, Johnny. I'm going out for a while. Make sure the kids don't get into the medicines, okay? Put some new stuff into the shelves today, and some of it's dangerous.

Johnny thrust his arm out to defend his wounded pride.

-obody will touch anything in your hut, inbaba? What are you F%F

saying? Dou could put millions of rupees in there, and nobody would touch anything. Gold also you could put in there. The Oan, of India is not as safe as this, inbaba's hut.

5I only meant that ...5

5)nd diamonds, also, you an leave in there.)nd emeralds.)nd
#earls.5

5I get the #i ture, \$ohnny.5

5- o need to ! orry about all that,5)bdullah inter+e ted. 5*e
ma, es su h tiny money that nobody ! ould have the interest to be
ta, ing it. Do you , no! ho! mu h money he made last ! ee, E5

\$ohnny 8igar seemed sus#i ious of)bdullah. 2he hostile s o! I
#in hed his fa e a little tighter, but he ! as intrigued by the
=uestion, and his uriosity got the better of him.

5*o! mu hE5

5I don't thin, ! e need to go into this right no! , guys,5 I
grumbled, struggling to head off ! hat I , ne! ould be ome a one(
hour dis ussion of my tiny money.

5@ne thousand ru#ees,5)bdullah said, s#itting for em#hasis.

I sei1ed him by the arm and gave him a shove along the #ath
bet! een the huts.

5@, ay,)bdullah. 7e ! ere going some! here, ! eren"t ! eE ;et"s get
on ! ith it, brother.5

7e too, a fe! ste#s, but \$ohnny 8igar ame after us and tugged at
my shirtsleeve, #ulling me a #a e or t! o behind)bdullah.

59or God"s sa, e, \$ohnnyß I don't ! ant to tal, about ho! mu h
money I made, right no! . I #romise, you an nag me about it later
but ...5

5- o, ; inbaba, not about that,5 he ras#ed, in a s rat hy ! his#er.

That man, that Abdullah (you shouldn't trust him) Don't do any business with him

What is this? What's the matter, Johnny?

Just don't, he said, and might've said more, but Abdullah turned and called to me, and Johnny pulled off, vanishing in a flash of light.

What is the problem? Abdullah asked as I drove level with him, and we set off between the snaking lines of huts.

Oh, no problem, I muttered, knowing that there was no problem at all.

Abdullah's motor cycle was parked on the road, outside the slum, where several riders were waiting over it. The tallest of them signaled us. The ten riders Abdullah gave them, and then led his ragged urban band away at a hooching run. Abdullah, riding the engine over, and I climbed onto the million seat behind him. Wearing no helmets, and only thin shirts, we swung out into the friendly

chaos of traffic, heading parallel to the sea towards Ariman Point.

If you know bicycles at all, you can tell a lot about a man by how he rides. Abdullah rode from reflex rather than on entrainment. His control of the bicycle in motion was as natural as his control of his legs in walking. We read the traffic with a mixture of skill and intuition. Several times, he slowed before there was an obvious need, and avoided the hard braking that other, less instinctive riders were forced to make. Sometimes he accelerated into an invisible gap that opened magically for us, just when a collision seemed imminent. Although unnerving at first, the technique did soon inspire a kind of grudging confidence in me, and I relaxed in the ride.

)t 8ho! #atty Oea h, ! e turned a! ay from the sea, and the ool bree1e from the bay ! as stilled and then ho, ed off by streets of tall terra es. 7e +oined shoals of traffi in a steamy drift to! ards -ana 8ho! , . 2he ar hite ture there ! as from the middle #eriod of Oombay"s develo#ment as a great #ort ity. Some of the buildings, onstru ted in the sturdy geometries of the Oritish Ra+, ! ere t! o hundred years old. 2he detailed intri a ies of bal onies, ! indo! surrounds, and ste##ed fa ades refle ted a lu' urious elegan e that the modern ity, for all its hrome and glamour, rarely afforded itself.

2he se tion from -ana 8ho! , to 2ardeo ! as , no! n as a >arsee area. It had sur#rised me, at first, that a ity so #olymor#hous as Oombay, ! ith its un easing variety of #eo#les, languages, and #ursuits, tended to su h narro! on entrations. 2he +e! ellers had their o! n ba1aar, as did the me hani s, #lumbers, ar#enters, and other trades. 2he 4uslims had their o! n =uarter, as did the 8hristians, Ouddhists, Si, hs, >arsees, and \$ains. If you ! anted to buy or sell gold, you visited the . haveri ba1aar, ! here hundreds of goldsmiths om#eted for your ustom. If you ! anted to visit a mos=ue, you found several of them ! ithin ! al, ing distan e of one another.

Out after a ! hile I realised that the demar ations, li, e so many other long and short lines of division in the om#le', ulturally #olyglot ity, ! ere not as rigid as they"d seemed. 2he 4uslim =uarter had its *indu F%H tem#les, the . haveri ba1aar had its vegetable sellers among the glittering +e! els, and almost every to! er of lu' ury a#artments had its ad+a ent slum.

)bdullah #ar, ed the bi, e outside the Ohatia *os#ital, one of several modern hos#itals and lini s ! hi h ! ere endo! ed by haritable >arsee trusts. 2he large building housed e' #ensive ! ards for the ri h, and free treatment entres for the #oor. 7e limbed the ste#s and entered a s#otlessly lean marble foyer #leasantly ooled by large fans.)bdullah s#o, e to the

re e#tionist and then led me do! n a orridor to the busy casualty and admissions se tion.)fter more =uestions to a #orter and a

nurse, he finally lo ated the man he sought((a short and very thin do tor ! ho sat at a lattered des, .

5Do tor *amidE5)bdullah as, ed.

2he do tor ! as ! riting, and didn't loo, u#.

5Des, yes,5 he ans! ered testily.

5I have ome from Shei,)bdel <hader. 4y name is)bdullah.5

2he #en sto##ed at on e, and Do tor *amid slo! ly lifted his head. *e stared at us ! ith a loo, of a##rehensive uriosity. It ! as a loo, you see sometimes on the fa es of bystanders ! itnessing a fight.

5*e tele#honed to you yesterday, and told you to e' #e t meE5)bdullah #rom#ted =uietly.

5Des, yes of ourse,5 *amid said, regaining his om#osure in an easy smile. *e stood u# to sha, e hands a ross the des, .

52his is 4r. ; in,5)bdullah introdu ed me, as the do tor and I shoo, hands. It ! as a very dry and fragile hand. 5*e is the do tor in the 8olaba hutments.5

5- o, no,5 I #rotested. 5I'm not a do tor. I've +ust been sort of o(o#ted into hel#ing out there.)nd I'm ... I'm not trained for it, and ... not really very good at it.5

5<haderbhai tells me that ! hen you s#o, e to him, you om#lained about the referrals you're ma, ing to the St. George and other hos#itals,5 *amid said, getting do! n to business, and ignoring my #rotest ! ith the air of a man ! ho ! as too busy to indulge

another's modesty. His eyes were dark, brooding, almost black, and glistening behind the polished lenses of his gold-framed glasses.

Well, yes, I replied, surprised that Chaderbhai had remembered my conversation with him, and that he'd found it important enough to tell F%?

The doctor. The problem is that I'm flying blind, if you know what I mean. I don't know enough to cope with all the problems people come to me with. When I come across illnesses that I can't identify, or what I think are probably illnesses, I send them to the diagnostic clinic at St. George's Hospital. I don't know what else to do with them. Out a lot of the time they come back to me without having seen anyone (no doctors, no nurses, no one).

These people are not feigning illness, you think, E5

Of course. I'm sure. I feel a little offended for myself, and even more indignant for the slum dwellers. They've got nothing to gain by pretending to be sick, and they're proud people. They don't ask for help lightly.

Of course, he murmured, removing his glasses to rub at the deep ridges they'd imposed on his nose. And have you been to the St. George yourself? Have you seen anyone there to ask them about this?

Des. I went there too, in fact. They told me they're so jammed with patients, and they do the best they can. They suggested that if I could get referrals from licensed medical practitioners, then the slum dwellers could come to the queue, so to speak. I'm not complaining about them, at the St. George. They've got their own problems. They're under-staffed and over-loaded. In my little clinic, I look at about fifty patients a day. They get six hundred patients every day. Sometimes as many as a thousand. I'm sure you know how it is. I think they're doing the best they can, and they're pushed to the limit just trying to treat the emergency cases. The real problem is that my people can't afford

to see a real doctor, to get the referral that I could help them
sum# the =ueue at the hos#ital. 2hey're too #oor. 2hat's ! hy they
ome to _me.5

Do tor *amid raised his eyebrow! s, and offered me that easy smile.

5Dou said my #eo#le.)re you be oming su h an Indian, 4r. ; inE5

I laughed, and ans! ered him in *indi for the first time, using a
line from the theme song to a #o#ular movie that ! as sho! ing,
then, in many inemas.

5In this life, ! e do ! hat ! e an to im#rove ourselves.5

*amid also laughed, la##ing his hands together on e in #leased
sur#rise.

57ell, 4r. ; in, I thin, I may be able to hel# you. I am on duty
here t! o days a ! ee, , but the rest of the time I an be found at
my surgery, in 9ourth >asta ; ane.5 F%C

5I , no! 9ourth >asta ; ane. 2hat's very lose to us.5

5>re isely, and, after s#ea, ing to <haderbhai, I have agreed that
you should begin referring your #atients to me, ! hen you need it,
and I ! ill arrange treatment at St. George *os#ital ! hen I thin,
it is re=uires. 7e an begin from tomorro! , if you ! ish.5

5Des, I do,5 I said =ui , ly. 5I mean, it's great, than, you,
than, you very mu h. I don't , no! ho! ! e're going to go about
#aying you but ...5

5-o need for than, s, and no need to ! orry about #ayment,5 he
re#lied, glan ing at)bdullah. 54y servi es ! ill be free for your
#eo#le. >erha#s you ! ould li, e to +oin me for teaE I ta, e a brea,
here soon. 2here is a restaurant a ross the road from the
hos#ital. If you an ! ait for me there, I ! ill ome a ross and
+oin you. 7e have, I thin, , mu h to dis uss.5

)bdullah and I left him, and I waited for twenty minutes in the restaurant, waiting through a large window as poor patients hobbled to the entrance of the hospital, and rich patients were delivered in taxis and private cars. Doctor *amid joined us, and outlined the procedures I was to follow in referring the slum dwellers to his practice in Southgate.

Good doctors have at least three things in common: they don't have to observe, they don't have to listen, and they're very tired.

*amid was a good doctor, and when, after an hour of discussion, I looked into his prematurely lined face, the eyes burned and reddened by lack of sleep, I felt shamed by his honest exhaustion. *e could accumulate wealth, money, and surround himself with luxury, in private practice in Germany or Canada or America, yet he chose to be there, with his own people, for a fraction of the reward. *e was one of thousands of health professionals working in the city, with careers as distinguished in that they denied themselves as in that they achieved every working day. And that they achieved it as no less than the survival of the city.

Then *bdullah took us into the crowded traffic once more, his bicycle weaving a hazardous progress through the threads of buses, cars, trucks, bicycles, bullock carts, rickshaws, and pedestrians, he called over his shoulder to tell me that Doctor *amid had once lived in a slum himself. *e said that Chaderbhai had taken especially gifted slum children from several slums throughout the city, and paid for their enrolment in private colleges. Through secondary and then tertiary studies, the children were provided for and encouraged. They graduated to become physicians, surgeons, nurses, teachers, lawyers, and engineers. *amid was one of those gifted

children who'd been selected more than twenty years before. In response to the needs of my small clinic, Chaderbhai was willing in some ways.

5 <haderbhai is a man ! ho ma, es the future,5) bdullah on luded,
as ! e sto##ed for a traffi signal. 54ost of us((me and you, my
brother((! e ! ait for the future to ome to us. Out) bdel <hader
<han dreams the future, and then he #lans it, and then he ma, es
it ha##en. 2hat is the differen e bet! een him and the rest of
us.5

57hat about you,) bdullahE5 I as, ed him in a shout as ! e roared
off ! ith the traffi on e more. 5Did <haderbhai #lan youB5

*e laughed out loud, his hest heaving ! ith the #leasure and the
for e of the laugh.

5I thin, he didB5 he re#lied.

5*eyB 2his isn't the ! ay ba , to the slum. 7here are ! e going
no! E5

57e are going to visit the #la e ! here you ! ill be getting your
medi ines.5

54y ! hatE5

5<haderbhai has arranged for you to get medi ines, every ! ee, .
2he things I brought you today((those are the first. 7e are going
to the medi ine bla , mar, et.5

5) bla , mar, et for medi ineE 7here is itE5

5In the slum of the le#ers,5) bdullah ans! ered, matter(of(fa tly.
2hen he laughed again as he #ushed the bi, e to greater s#eed
through a ga# in the traffi that o#ened for him, even as he
rea hed it. 5\$ust leave it to me, ; in brother. - o! you are #art
of the #lan, isn't it soE5

2hose ! ords((no! you are #art of the #lan((should've ! o, en some

fear in me. I should've sensed ... something ... even then, right at the start. Out I wasn't afraid. I was almost happy. They seemed excited. They rushed my blood. When my fugitive life began, I was exiled from my family, homeland, and culture. I thought that was the whole of it. Debarred into the banishment, I realised that I was exiled to something, as well. That I was asked to be the lonely, restless freedom of the outdoors; in the outdoors every! here, I courted danger because danger was one of the few things strong enough to help me forget what I'd lost. And staring into the warmth of the afternoon wind, riding with Abdullah into the web of streets, I fell as fearlessly into my fate, that afternoon, as a man falls into love with a shy woman's best smile.

The journey to the lepers' camps too, us to the outskirts of the city. F8

There were several treatment colonies for Bombay's lepers, but the men and women were reluctant to see refused to live in them. Funded by state and private contributions, the colonies provided medical attention, airing support, and clean environments. The rules and regulations that governed them were strict, however, and not all the lepers could bring themselves to conform. As a result, some chose to leave, and some were forced out. At any one time, a few dozen men, women, and children lived outside the colonies, in the wider community of the city.

The elastic tolerance of slum dwellers who accommodated every caste and race and condition of person within their small huts (rarely extended to lepers. Local councils and street committees didn't endure their presence for long. Reared and shunned, the lepers formed themselves into mobile slums that settled, within an hour, in any open space they could find, and made a traceless departure in even less time. Sometimes they established themselves for several years beside a rubbish dump, fending off the permanent ragged, who resisted their intrusion. At other times they set up their camps on a sandy

#at h of va ant land or some outfall for industrial ! aste. 7hen I first visited them ! ith)bdullah, that day, I found that they"d built their ragged shelters on the rusty stones of a rail! ay siding near the suburb of <har.

7e ! ere for ed to #ar,)bdullah"s bi, e, and enter the rail! ay land as the le#ers did, through ga#s in fen es and a ross dit hes. 2he rusty #lateau ! as a staging area for most trains on the urban route and many of the goods ! agons arrying #rodu e and manufa tured arti les out of the ity. 0eyond the sub(station itself ! ere offi e outbuildings, storage ! arehouses, and maintenanc e sheds. 9urther on ! as a vast shunting area((an o#en s#a e mar, ed by do1ens of rail! ay lines and their onfluen es.)t the outer edges, high ! ire fen es en losed the s#a e.

@outside ! as the ommer e and osiness of suburban <har: traffi and gardens, bal onies and ba1aars. 7ithin ! as the aridity of fun tion and systems. 2here ! ere no #lants, no animals, and no #eo#le. /ven the rolling sto , ! ere ghost trains, trundling from shunting sto# to shunting sto# ! ithout staff or #assengers. 2hen there ! as the le#ers" slum.

2hey"d sei1ed a diamond of lear s#a e bet! een the tra , s for themselves, and #at hed their shelters together in it. -one of the huts ! as taller than my hest. 9rom a distan e, they loo, ed li, e the #u# tents of an army bivoua ! reathed in the smo, e of oo, ing fires.)s ! e neared F%9 them, ho! ever, ! e sa! that their a##alling raggedness made the slum huts ! here I lived seem li, e solid, omfortable stru tures. 2hey ! ere made from s ra#s of ardboard and #lasti held aloft ! ith roo, ed bran hes, and bra ed ! ith thin string. I ould"ve , no , ed the ! hole am# to rubble ! ith an o#en hand, and it ! ould"ve ta, en me less than a minute, yet thirty men, ! omen, and hildren made their lives there.

7e entered the slum un hallenged, and made our ! ay to one of the huts near the enter. >eo#le sto##ed and stared at us, but no(one s#o, e. It ! as hard not to loo, at them, and then hard not to

stare ! hen I did loo, . Some of the #eo#le had no noses, most of them had no fingers, the feet of many ! ere bound in bloody bandages, and some ! ere so advan ed into the deteriorations that their li#s and ears ! ere missing.

I don"t , no! ! hy((the #ri e, #erha#s, that ! omen #ay for their loveliness(((but the disfigurements seemed more ghastly for the ! omen than they ! ere for the men. 4any of the men had a defiant and even a +aunty air about them((a , ind of #ugna ious ugliness that ! as fas inating in itself. Out shyness +ust loo, ed o! ed in the ! omen, and hunger loo, ed #redatory. 2he disease ! as indis ernible in the many hildren I sa! . 2hey loo, ed fit, if uniformly thin, and =uite ! ell.)nd they ! or, ed hard, all of those hildren. 2heir small fingers did the gras#ing for the ! hole of their tribe.

2hey"d seen us oming, and must"ve #assed the ! ord be ause, as ! e a##roa hed the hut, a man ra! led out and stood to greet us. 2! o hildren ame at on e and su##orted him. *e ! as tiny, rea hing to +ust above my ! aist, and severely stri , en ! ith the disease. *is li#s and the lo! er #art of his fa e ! ere eaten a! ay to a hard, , nobby ridge of dar, flesh that e' tended do! n! ards from the hee, s to the hinges of his +a! . 2he +a! itself ! as e' #osed, as ! ere the teeth and gums, and the ga#ing holes ! here his nose had been.

5)bdullah, my son,5 he said, in *indi. 5*o! are youE *ave you eatenE5

5I am ! ell, Ran+itbhai.5)bdullah re#lied in res#e tful tones. 5I have brought the gora to meet you. 7e have +ust no! eaten, but ! e ! ill drin, tea, than, you.5

8children brought stools to us, and ! e sat there in the o#en s#a e in front of Ran+it's hut.) small ro! d gathered and sat on the ground, or stood around us.

His is Ranjitbhai, Abdullah told me, in Hindi, saying loudly
F1%

enough for all to hear. He is the boss here, the senior fellow,
in the slum of the leaders. He is the, ing here, in this club for
, ala to his.

<ala to i means bla, hat in Hindi, and it's a phrase used,
sometimes, to describe a thief, referring to the bla, (banded
hats that convicted thieves were forced to wear in Bombay's
Arthur Road Prison. I wasn't sure exactly what Abdullah had meant
by the remark, but Ranjit and the other leaders too, it well
enough, smiling and repeating the phrase several times.

Greetings, Ranjitbhai, I said, in Hindi. My name is ; in.

What do you have? He asked. You are a doctor?

— I almost shouted in Hindi, disoriented by the disease and
my ignorance of it, and afraid he would ask me to help them. I
turned to Abdullah, and said it had to be in English. I told him I'm not a
doctor, Abdullah. Tell him I must do a little first aid, and
treat rat bites and scratches caused by the barbed wire, and
things like that. I explained to him. Tell him that I haven't had any
real training, and I don't, no! the first thing about leprosy.

Abdullah nodded, and then faced Ranjitbhai.

Describe, he said. He is a doctor.

Then, you very much, Abdullah, I gnashed out through clenched
teeth.

Children brought full glasses of water for us, and tea in hissed

us. Abdullah drank his water in a gulp, gulps. Ranjit tilted his
head back, and one of the children tilted the water in a gurgle

do! n his throat. I hesitated, fearful of the grotes=ue si , ness around me. @ne of the slum ! ords in *indi for le#ers an be translated as the undead, and I felt that I ! as holding the nightmares of the undead in my hands.)ll the ! orld of suffering disease ! as on entrated in that glass of ! ater, it seemed to me.

Out)bdullah had drun, his glass. I ! as sure he"d al ulated the ris, s, and de ided it ! as safe.)nd every day of my life ! as a ris, . /very hour had its ha1ards, after the big gamble of es a#e from #rison. 2he volu#tuous re , lessness of a fugitive moved my arm to my mouth, and I dran, the ! ater do! n. 9orty #airs of eyes ! at hed me drin, .

Ran+it"s o! n eyes ! ere honey(oloured, and louded by ! hat I +udged to be in i#ient atara ts. *e e' amined me losely, those eyes roving from my feet to my hair and ba , , several times, ! ith unshy uriosity.

5<haderbhai has told me that you need medi ines,5 he said slo! ly, in /nglish. F11

*is teeth li , ed together as he s#o, e, and ! ith no li#s to hel# him form the ! ords, his s#ee h ! as diffi ult to understand. 2he letters 0, 9, >, and & ! ere im#ossible, for e' am#le, ! ith 4 and 7 oming out as other sounds altogether. 2he mouth forms more than +ust ! ords, of ourse: it forms attitudes and moods and nuan es of meaning, and those e' #ressive hints ! ere also missing.)nd he had no fingers, so even that aid to ommuni ation ! as denied him. Instead, there ! as a hild, #erha#s his son, ! ho stood at his shoulder and re#eated his ! ords in a =uiet but steady voi e, one beat behind the rhythm of his s#ee h, +ust as a translator might.

57e are al! ays ha##y to hel# lord)bdel <hader,5 the t! o voi es said. 5I have the honour to serve him. 7e an give you mu h medi ine, every ! ee, , no #roblem. 9irst(lass stuff, as you see.5

*e shouted a name, then, and a tall boy in his early teens #ushed through the ro! d to lay a anvas bundle at my feet. *e , nelt to

roll out the anvas, and revealed a collection of amoules and
lasti bottles. There! as morphine hydrochloride, penicillin,
and antibiotics for stomach and streptococcal infections. The containers
were labelled and neat.

Where do they get this stuff? I asked Abdullah as I examined
the medicines.

They steal it, he answered me, in India.

Steal it? Do they steal it?

Ohut hoshiyaar, he replied. Every day.

Des, yes.

A chorus of voices surrounded us. There! as no humour in that
word. They addressed Abdullah's raise solemnly, as if he were
admiring some sort of art they'd collectively produced. Good
thieves, clever thieves, I heard people mutter around me.

What do they do with it?

They sell it on the bazaar, he told me, still searching in
India, so that all those resentful would follow our conversation.

They survive nicely from this, and other very good stealing.

I don't get it. Why would anyone buy medicine from them? Do you
buy this stuff from just about any chemist?

Do you want to, no! everything, brother; in, isn't it? Well then,
there must have been another sort of tea, because this is a total loss of
tea story.

The crowd laughed at that, and pressed a little closer, leaning
outwards to sit near us for the story. Large, empty,

unattended goods F1F

! agon rumbled #ast slo! ly on an ad+a ent tra , , #erilously lose to the huts. -o(one gave it more than a ursory glan e.) rail! ay ! or, er, dressed in , ha, i shirt and shorts, strolled bet! een the lines, ins#e ting the rails. *e loo, ed u# at the le#ers" am# from time to time, but his mild uriosity faded as he #assed us, and he never loo, ed ba , . @ur tea arrived, and ! e si##ed it as)bdullah began his story. Several of the hildren ! ere sitting against our legs, their arms ! ra##ed around one another om#an(ionably. @ne little girl sli##ed her arm around my right leg, and hugged me ! ith artless affe tion.

)bdullah s#o, e in very sim#le *indi, re#eating some #assages in /nglish, ! hen he #er eived that I hadn't understood. *e began by tal, ing of the Oritish Ra+, the time ! hen /uro#eans ontrolled all of India from the <hyber >ass to the Oay of Oengal. 2he firengi, the foreigners, he said, gave le#ers the lo! est #riority on their s ale of #rivileges and entitlements.)s the last in line, le#ers often missed out on the limited su##ly of medi nes, bandages, and medi al treatment. 7hen famine or flood stru , , even the traditional medi nes and herbal remedies ! ere in short su##ly. 2he le#ers be ame s, illed at stealing ! hat they ouldn't obtain by other means((so s, illed, in fa t, that they a umulated sur#luses, and began to sell medi nes in their o! n bla , mar, et.

In India's vastness,)bdullah ! ent on, there ! ere al! ays onfli ts((brigandage, rebellions, ! ars. 4en fought, and blood ! as s#illed. Out many more men died through the festering of ! ounds and the ravages of disease than ! ere , illed in battles. @ne of the best sour es of intelligen e available to #oli e for es and governments lay in the ontrol of medi nes, bandages, and e' #ertise.)ll sales from hemists, hos#ital #harma ies, and

#harma euti al ! holesalers ! ere registered.)ny #ur hase or string of #ur hases signifi antly greater than the established norm attra ted attention that sometimes led to a#tures or , illings.) telltale trail of medi nes, #arti ularly of

antibiotics, had led to the downfall of many doctors and revolutionaries. In their place, markets, however, the leaders asked no questions, and sold to anyone who would buy. Their networks and secret markets existed in every great city in India. Their customers were terrorists, infiltrators, separatists, or just more than usually ambitious outlaws.

These people are dying, Abdullah concluded, with the colourful turn of phrase that I had learned to expect from him, and they steal life for F1G themselves, and then they sell life to others who are dying.

When Abdullah finished speaking, there was a dense and ponderous silence. Everyone looked at me. They seemed to want some response, some reaction, to the story of their sadness and, still, their cruel isolation and violent indisensability. Whistling hisses of breath came through the clenched teeth of countless mouths. Patient, serious eyes fixed me with expectant concentration.

When I ... when I have another glass of water, please. I asked, in Hindi, and it must've been the right thing to say because the whole crowd started laughing. Several children rushed off to fetch the water, and a number of hands touched me on the back, and shoulder.

Ranjitbhai explained, then, how Sunil, the boy who'd showed us the canvas bundle of medicines, would make deliveries to my hut in the slum as and when I required them. Before we could leave, he asked that I remain seated for a while longer. When he directed every man, woman, and child in his group to come forward and touch my feet. It was mortifying, a torment, and I entreated him not to do it. He insisted. Stern, almost severe expression burned in his eyes, while the leaders hobbled forward, one by one, and touched their leathery stumps or the blades, curled blades of their fingernails to my feet.

One hour later, Abdullah carried his bike near the World Trade

8entre. 7e stood together for a moment, and then he rea hed out
im#ulsively and en losed me in a ! arm, bearish hug. I laughed as
! e ame a#art, and he fro! ned at me, learly #u11led.

5Is it funnyE5 he as, ed.

5- o,5 I reassured him. 5I +ust ! asn"t e' #e ting a bear hug,
that"s all.5

50areE Do you mean it is na, edE5

5- o, no, ! e all that a bear hug,5 I e' #lained, gesturing ! ith my

hands, as if they ! ere la! s. 50ears, you , no! , the furry animals
that eat honey and slee# in aves. 7hen you hold someone li, e
that, ! e say you"re giving them a bear hug.5

58avesE Slee#ing in avesE5

5It"s o, ay. Don"t ! orry about it. I li, ed it. It ! as ... good
friendshi#. It ! as ! hat friends do, in my ountry, giving a bear
hug li, e that.5

54y brother,5 he said, ! ith an easy smile, 5I ! ill see you
tomorro! , ! ith Sunil, from the le#ers, ! ith ne! medi ine.5

*e rode off, and I ! al, ed alone into the slum. I loo, ed around
me, and F1H

that #la e l"d on e regarded as grievously forlorn seemed sturdy,
vital, a miniature ity of boundless ho#e and #ossibility. 2he
#eo#le, as I #assed them, ! ere robust and invigorated. I sat do! n
in my hut, ! ith the thin #ly! ood door losed, and I ried.

Suffering, <haderbhai on e told me, is the ! ay ! e test our love,
es#e ially our love for God. I didn"t , no! God, as he"d #ut it,
but even as a disbeliever I failed the test that day. I ouldn"t
love God((anyone"s God((and I ouldn"t forgive God. 2he tears

stood after a few minutes, but it was the first time I'd tried for too long, and I was still deep in the mud of it. Then Ghabra, entered into my hut and sat down beside me.

"He is a dangerous man, Ghabra," he said without preamble.

"What?"

"This Abdullah fello', he came here today. He is a very dangerous man. You are better not for anything of him. And things with him are even more dangerous, also."

"What are you talking about?"

"He is ... Ghabra, entered, and the struggle was as he lifted in his gentle, open face. He is a killing man, Ghabra. A murdering fello'. He is killing the people for money. He is a goonda (a gangster fello' (for Ghabra. Everybody knows this. Everybody, even you."

I knew it was true without saying any more, without a shred of proof beyond Ghabra's word. It's true, I said in my mind. In saying it, I realised that I'd always known, or suspected it. It was as in the way other people treated him, the hisses he inspired, and the fear I'd seen in so many of the eyes that looked into his. It was in the way that Abdullah entered the room.

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anyone. In that, I see I were different men.

Still, I liked him. I thought of that afternoon at the lepers' slum, and I recalled how I felt (assured I'd been there with Abdullah. I remember that a part of whatever unanimity I'd managed to display, perhaps most of it, had really been his. With him I'd been strong and able to cope. *e I was the first man I'd met, since the escape from prison, I hadn't had that effect on me. *e I was the kind of man that tough criminals all a hundred (remember: the kind of man I'd put his life on the line if he calls you his friend; the kind I'd put his shoulder beside yours, without question or complaint, and stand with you against any odds.

Of course men like that are so often the heroes in films and books, I forget how rare they are in the real world. Out I remember. It was one of the things that prison taught me. Prison nulls the mask away from men. You can't hide what you are, in prison. You can't pretend to be tough. You are, or you're not, and everyone knows it. And when the knives came out against me, as they did more than once, and it was, still or be killed, I learned that only one man in hundreds will stand with you, to the end, in friendship's name.

Prison also taught me how to recognize those rare men when I met them. I remember that Abdullah was such a man. In my hunted exile, biting back the fear, ready to fight and die every haunted day, the strength and wildness and will that I found in him were more, and better, than all the truth and goodness in the world. And sitting there in my hut, striped with hot white light and cooling shadows, I pledged myself to him as brother and friend, no matter what he'd done, and no matter what he was.

I looked up into Sabar's worried face, and smiled. *e smiled back at me, reflexively, and in an instant of unusual clarity I saw that, for him, I was the one who inspired something of that confidence: as Abdullah was to me, so was I to Sabar. Friendship is also a kind of medicine, and the market for it,

too, are sometimes bla , .

5Don't ! orry,5 I said, rea hing out to #ut a hand on his
shoulder. 5It'll be all right. It'll be fine. - othing"s going to
ha##en to me.5

(((((((((((

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The long days, pouring in the slum and grinding commissions from the hard, melted eyes of tourists, unfolded one upon another through the tumble of recorded hours like lotus petals in a summer dawn. There was always a little money, and sometimes a lot of it. One afternoon, a few days after that first visit to the lepers, I fell in with a party of Italian tourists who planned to sell drugs to other tourists at some of the bigger dance parties in Goa. With my help, they bought four kilos of hash and ten thousand Andra' tablets. I liked doing illegal business with Italians. They were single-minded and systematic in the pursuit of their pleasures, and stylish in the practice of their business. They were also generous, for the most part, believing in a fair minute's pay for a fair minute's work. The commission on that deal gave me enough money to retire for a few days. The slum absorbed my days, and most of my nights.

It was late April then, only a little more than a month before the monsoon. The slum dwellers were busy making preparations for the coming of the rain. There was a quiet urgency in the air. We all knew what troubles the darkening sky would bring. Everywhere was haste in every lane, and excitement in the easy smiles of the young ones because, after the hot, dry months, all of us were hungry for clouds.

I saw Jim Hussein appointed Ghaba, and Johnny Gagar as the leaders of two teams who were responsible for helping widows, orphans, disabled people, and abandoned wives to repair their huts. Ghaba, on the assistance of a few willing lads to gather bamboo poles and small lengths of timber from the piles of scrap at the construction site beside our slum. Johnny Gagar chose to organise several street gangs into a marauding band of pirates who plundered the neighbourhood for pieces of tin, canvas, and plastic. In manner of things that might be used as fire roofing materials began to vanish from the vicinity of the slum. One notable exception by the tiny thieves produced a huge tarpaulin that, from its shade, had clearly been the

amouflage over for a battle tan, . That #ie e of military soft! are ! as ut into nine #ie es, and used to #rote t as many huts.

I +oined a team of young men ! ho"d been given the tas, of learing the drains and gullies of snarls and snags. 4onths of negle t had filled those #la es ! ith an a umulation of ans and #lasti bottles and +ars((everything that rats ! ouldn"t eat and that s avengers hadn"t found. It ! as dirty ! or, , and I ! as glad to do it. It too, me to every orner of the slum, and introdu ed me to hundreds of #eo#le I might other! ise never have , no! n.)nd there ! as a ertain , udos in the +ob: humble and im#ortant tas, s ! ere as esteemed in the slum as they ! ere reviled in the ! ider ommunity.)ll the teams ! ho ! or, ed to defend the huts from the oming rain ! ere re! arded ! ith love. 7e only had to lift our heads from the filthy drains to find ourselves in a lu' uriant

garden of smiles.

)s head man in the slum, I asim)li *ussein ! as involved in every #lan and de ision in those #re#arations. *is authority ! as lear and un=uestioned, but it ! as a subtle, unobtrusive leadershi#.)n in ident that o urred in those ! ee, s before the rain brought me into the ambit of his ! isdom, and revealed to me ! hy it ! as so ! idely revered.

) grou# of us had gathered in I asim)li"s hut, one afternoon, to hear his eldest son tell stories of his adventures in <u! ait. I=bal, a tall, mus ular t! enty(four(year old ! ith an honest stare and a shy smile, had re ently returned after si' months of ! or, as a ontra t labourer in <u! ait. 4any of the young men ! ere eager to gain from his e' #erien e. 7hat ! ere the best +obsE 7ho ! ere the best mastersE 7ho ! ere the ! orst onesE *o! did you ma, e e' tra money bet! een the flourishing bla , mar, ets of the Gulf States and those of OombayE I=bal held im#rom#tu lasses every afternoon for a ! ee, in the main room of his father"s hut, and the ro! d s#illed out into the fore ourt to share in his #re ious

, no! ledge. @n that day, ho! ever, his dis ourses ! ere interruted
abru#tly by shouts and s reaming.

7e rushed out of the hut and ran to! ards the sound. -ot far a! ay,
! e dis overed a noisy mob of men, ! omen, and hildren. 7e #ushed
our ! ay to the entre, ! here t! o young men ! ere ! restling and
#un hing at one another. 2heir names ! ere 9arou, h and Raghuram.
2hey ! ere from F18

the team that ! as hel#ing >raba, er to gather #oles and lengths of
! ood. I=bal and \$ohnny 8igar se#arated the ombatants, and I asim
)li ste##ed bet! een them, his #resen e =ueting the rau ous ro! d
at on e.

57hat is ha##ening hereE5 he as, ed, his voi e unusually stern.
57hy are you fightingE5

52he >ro#het, may)llah grant him #ea eB5 9arou, h shouted. 5*e
insulted the >ro#hetB5

5)nd he insulted the ;ord RamB5 Raghuram ounterred.

2he ro! d su##orted one or the other ! ith shrie, s and
ondemnations. I asim)li gave them half a minute of noise, and
then raised his hands for silen e.

59arou, h, Raghuram, you t! o are friends, good friends,5 he said.
5Dou , no! that fighting is no ! ay to settle your differen es.)nd
you both , no! that fighting bet! een friends and neighbours is the
! orst fighting of all.5

50ut the >ro#het, #ea e be u#on himB5 Raghu insulted the >ro#het.
I had to fight ! ith him,5 9arou, h ! hined. *e ! as still angry, but
I asim)li"s hard stare ! as ausing him to ! ilt, and he ouldn't
meet the older man"s eye.

5)nd ! hat of insulting the ;ord RamE5 Raghuram #rotested. 5Isn't
that also a reason to((5

52here is no e' use5 I asim)li thundered, silen ing every voi e.
52here is no reason that is good enough to ma, e us fight ! ith
ea h other. 7e are all #oor men here. 2here are enemies enough
for all of us outside this #la e. 7e live together, or ! e die.
Dou t! o young fools have hurt our #eo#le, your o! n #eo#le. Dou
have hurt all of our #eo#le, of every faith, and you have shamed
me terribly.5

2he ro! d had gro! n to more than a hundred #eo#le. I asim"s ! ords
caused a stir of rumbling omments that ri##led through them, as
heads tou hed together. 2hose losest to him, at the entre,
re#eated ! hat he"d said, relaying the message to others at the
edges of the grou#. 9arou, h and Raghuram hung their heads
! ret hedly. I asim)li"s harge that they"d shamed him, rather
than themselves, ! as a telling blo! .

5Dou must both be #unished for this,5 I asim said, a little more
gently, ! hen the ro! d ! as =uieter. 5Dour #arents and I ! ill
hoose a #unishment for you tonight. Antil then, you ! ill ! or,
for the rest of the day at leaning the area around the latrine.5
F19

-e! murmurs bu11ed through the ro! d. 8onfli ts based on religion
! ere #otentially dangerous, and #eo#le ! ere glad to see that
I asim too, the matter seriously. 4any of the voi es around me
s#o, e of the friendshi# bet! een 9arou, h and Raghuram, and I
realised that ! hat I asim had said ! as true((the fighting bet! een
lose friends of different faiths had hurt the ommunity. 2hen
I asim)li removed the long green s arf that he ! ore around his
ne , , and held it aloft for all to see.

5Dou ! ill ! or, in the latrine no! . Out first, 9arou, h and
Raghuram, I ! ill bind you together ! ith this, my s arf. It ! ill
remind you that you are friends and brothers, ! hile leaning the
latrine ! ill fill your noses ! ith the stin, of ! hat you have done
to ea h other today.5

*e , nelt then, and tied the t! o young men together at the an, le, 9arou, h"s right to Raghuram"s left. 7hen it ! as done, he stood and told them to go, #ointing ! ith outstret hed arm in the dire tion of the latrine. 2he ro! d #arted for them, and the young men tried to ! al, , but they stumbled at first, and soon realised that they had to hold on tightly and ! al, in ste# if they ! ere to ma, e any #rogress at all. 2hey las#ed their arms around one another, and hobbled a! ay on three legs.

2he ro! d ! at hed them ! al, , and began to hatter in #raise of I asim)li"s ! isdom. Suddenly there ! as laughter ! here a minute before there"d been tension and fear. >eo#le turned to s#ea, to him, but dis overed that I asim ! as already ! al, ing ba , to his hut. I ! as lose enough to him to see that he ! as smiling.

I ! as lu , y, and shared that smile often in those months. I asim visited my hut t! o and sometimes three times a ! ee, , he , ing on my #rogress ! ith the in reasing number of #atients ! ho ame to me after Do tor *amid began to a e#t my referrals. @ asionally, the head man brought someone ! ith him((a hild ! ho"d been bitten by rats, or a young man ! ho"d been in+ured at the onstru tion site beside the slum.)fter a ! hile, I realised that they ! ere #eo#le he"d hosen to bring to me, #ersonally, be ause for one reason or another they ! ere relu tant to ome alone. Some ! ere sim#ly shy. Some had resentments against foreigners, and refused to trust them. @thers ! ere un! illing to try any form of medi ine other than traditional, village remedies.

I had some trouble ! ith the village remedies. In the main I a##roved of them, and even ado#ted them ! herever it ! as #ossible, #referring some of the ayurvedi medi ines to their ! estern #harma euti al e=uivalents. FF%

Some treatments, ho! ever, seemed to be based on obs ure su#erstitions rather than thera#euti traditions, and they ! ere as ontrary to ommon sense as they ! ere to any notions of medi al s ien e. 2he #ra ti e of a##lying a oloured tourni=uet of herbs to the u##er arm as a ure for sy#hilis, for e' am#le,

stru , me as #arti ularly ounter(#rodu tive.)rthritis and rheumatism ! ere sometimes treated by ta,ing herry(red oals from the fire ! ith metal tongs, and holding them against the ,nees and elbo! s of the sufferer. I asim)li told me, #rivate,ly, that he didn't a##rove of the more e' treme remedies, but he didn't #rohibit them. Instead, he visited me regularly6 and be ause the #eo#le loved him, they follo! ed his e' am#le and ame to me in greater numbers.

I asim)li's nut(bro! n s, in, stret hed over his lean and sine! y body, ! as as smooth and taut as a bo' er's glove. *is thi , , silver(grey hair ! as short, and he s#orted a goatee beard one shade lighter than his hair. *e most often ! ore a otton , urtah and #lain, ! hite, ! estern(style trousers.)lthough they ! ere sim#le, ine' #ensive lothes, they ! ere al! ays freshly ! ashed and ironed, and he hanged them t! i e every day.)nother man, a less revered man ! ith similar habits of dress, ! ould've been onsidered something of a dandy. Out I asim)li raised smiles of love and admiration ! herever he ! ent in the slum. *is imma ulately lean, ! hite lothes seemed to all of us a symbol of his s#iritality and moral integrity((=ualities ! e de#ended on, in that little ! orld of struggle and ho#e, no less urgently than ! e de#ended on the ! ater from the ommunal ! ell.

*is fifty(five years sat lightly on his taller(than(average frame. 4ore than on e, I ! at hed him and his young son run from the ! ater tan, s to their hut ! ith heavy ontainers of ! ater hoisted onto their shoulders, and they ! ere ne , (and(ne , all the ! ay. 7hen he sat do! n on the reed mats, in the main room of his hut, he did so ! ithout tou hing his hands to the ground. *e rossed his feet over and then lo! ered himself to a sitting #osition by bending his ,nees. *e ! as a handsome man, and a great

#art of his beauty derived from the healthy vitality and natural gra e that su##orted his ins#irational and ommanding ! isdom.

7ith his short, silver(grey hair, lean figure, and dee#ly

resonant voice, I asim reminded me often of Chanderbhai. I learned, some time later, that the talented men, nevertheless, and were in fact close friends. Out there were considerable differences between them, and perhaps none more significant than the authority of their leadership, and FF1

though they'd come by it. I asim was given his power by a people who loved him. Chanderbhai had seized his power, and held it by strength of will and force of arms. And in the contrast of powers, it was the mafia lord's that dominated. The people of the slum chose I asim as their leader and head man, but it was Chanderbhai who'd approved the choice, and he'd allowed it to happen.

I asim was called upon to exercise his power frequently because he was the only real day-to-day authority in the slum. He resolved those disputes that had escalated into conflicts. He mediated claims and counter claims concerning property and rights of access. And many people simply sought his advice about everything from employment to marriages.

I asim had three wives. His first wife, Ratimah, was ten years younger than he was. His second wife, Shaila, was younger by ten years. His third wife, Ratimah, was only ten years old. His first marriage had been for love. The subsequent marriages were to poor widows who might not otherwise have found new husbands. The wives bore him ten children between them (four sons and six daughters) (and there were five other children who'd come to him with the widowed wives. To give the women financial independence, he bought four treadle sewing machines for them. His first wife, Ratimah, set the machines up under a canvas awning, outside the hut, and hired one, two, three, and eventually four male tailors to work at making shirts and trousers.

The modest enterprise provided living wages for the tailors and their families, and a measure of profit, which was divided equally among the three wives. I asim too, no part in the running of the business, and he paid all the household expenses, so the

money made by his lives as their own to spend or save as they wished. In time, the tailors bought slum huts around Iqbal's own, and their lives and children lived side by side with Iqbal's, making up a huge, extended family of thirty-four persons who looked upon the head man as father and friend. It was a relaxed and contented household. There was no bitterness or bad temper. The children played happily and did their chores willingly. And several times a week, he opened his large main room to the public as a mall, or forum, where the slum dwellers could air their grievances or make requests.

-ot all the disputes or problems in the slum were brought to

Iqbal's house for a timely resolution, of course, and sometimes Iqbal was forced to take on the roles of policeman and magistrate in that unofficial self-regulating system. Iqbal was drinking tea in the foreground of his house one morning, some weeks after Abdulla took me to the leaders, when Seetendra rushed up to us with the news that a man was beating his wife, and it was feared that he might kill her. Iqbal, Seetendra, Nand, Ghabra, and I walked quickly through the narrow lanes to a strip of huts that formed the perimeter of the slum at the line of mangrove swamp. A large crowd had gathered outside one of the huts and, as we neared it, we could hear a wretched screaming and the sound of blows from within.

Iqbal saw Johnny Gagar standing close to the hut, and pushed his way through the silent crowd to join him.

"What's happening?" he demanded.

"Joseph is drunk, Johnny replied sourly, sitting noisily in the direction of the hut. "The bahin hudh has been bashing his wife all morning."

"How long has this been going on?"

Three hours, maybe longer. I must have got here myself. The others told me about it. That's why I sent for you, I said.

I said, "He is together in a fierce fight, and stared angrily into Johnny's eyes."

This is not the first time that Jose has beaten his wife. Why didn't you stop it?

"...," Johnny began, but he couldn't hold the stare, and he looked down at the stony ground at their feet. There was a kind of rage in him, and he looked close to tears. "I'm not afraid of him. I'm not afraid of any man here. Don't say that. Out, they are ... they are ... she is his wife ..."

The slum dwellers lived in a dense, crowded proximity. The most intimate sounds and movements of their lives entered, constantly, each with every other. And like people everywhere, they were reluctant to interfere in what is usually all domestic disputes, even when those so-called disputes became violent. I said, "He reached out and put a compassionate hand on Johnny's shoulder to calm him, and commanded that he stop Jose's violence at once. Just then a new burst of shouting and blows came from the house, followed by a roaring scream."

Several of us stepped forward, determined to put a stop to the beating. Suddenly, the flimsy door of the hut crashed open, and Jose's wife fell through the doorway and fainted at our feet. She was naked. Her long hair was wildly matted with

blood. She had been cruelly beaten with some kind of stick, and blue-red welts crossed and slashed her back, buttocks, and legs.

The crowd flinched and recoiled in horror. They were affected by her nakedness, I think, as they were by the terrible wounds on

her body. I was affected by it myself. In those years, na, edness
was like a secret religion in India. –o (one but the insane or the
sardar was ever publicly named. Friends in the slum told me with
unaffected honesty that they'd been married for years and had
never seen their wives named. There were all striking with pity
for Joseph's life, and shame passed among us, burning our eyes.

He shouted from the hut then, and Joseph stumbled through the
doorway. His cotton pants were stained with urine, and his
shirt was torn and filthy. Wild, stupid drunkenness testified his
features. His hair was dishevelled, and blood stained his face.
The bamboo stick he'd used to beat his wife was still in his
hands. He swooned in the sunlight, and then his blurred gaze
fell on his wife's body, lying face down between himself and the
road. He cursed her, and too, a step forward, raising the stick,
to strike her again.

The shopkeeper, that had analysed us as a collective gang, and
he rushed forward to stop him. Surprisingly, little Gaba was
the first to reach Joseph, and he grabbed him with the much bigger
man, pushing him backwards. He stepped back from Joseph's
hand, and he was held down on the ground. He thrashed and
screamed, a string of violent curses sizzling with the drool from
his lips. Women came forward, wailing as if in mourning.
They covered Joseph's life with a yellow sari, lifted her,
and carried her away.

The road might've become a lynching mob, then, but I didn't
charge of the scene immediately. He ordered the people to
disperse, or stand back, and he told the men who were holding
Joseph to keep him pinned on the ground. His next command
astonished me. I thought he might call for the police, or have
Joseph taken away. Instead, he asked what alcohol Joseph had been
drinking, and demanded that two bottles of it be brought to him.
He also called for harras and a kullum, and told Johnny Gigar
to prepare a smoke. When the rough, homebred alcohol, no name as
daru, was produced, he instructed Gaba and Setendra to force
Joseph to drink.

They sat close in a circle of strong, young men, and offered him one of the bottles. He glared at them suspiciously for a few moments, but then snatched the bottle and took a long, greedy sip. The young men around him pressed him on the back, encouraging him to drink more. He gulped down more of the extremely hot drink and then tried to push it away, saying that he'd had enough. The young men became more forceful in their coaxing. They laughed and pressed him, holding the bottle to his lips and driving it

between his teeth. Johnny lit the cigarette, and passed it to close. He smoked and drank, and smoked again. Then, some ten minutes after he'd first stumbled from the hut with the bloody stick in his hand, close died his head and passed out cold on the rubble strewn path.

The crowd watched him snore for a while, and then they gradually drifted away to their huts and their jobs. I asked the group of young men to stay in their circle around close's body, and to watch him closely. He left for about half an hour to perform the mid-morning prayer. When he returned, he ordered tea and water. Johnny, Ganga, Ramesh, Ganga, and Seetendra were in the circle. A strong, young fisherman named Ganga was also in the group, and a lean, fit man named Ganga, or Dhanu, because of his luminous dark skin. They talked quietly while the sun rose to its zenith, and the stifling humidity of the day clung to us all.

I could've left then, but I asked Ganga to stay, so I sat down under the shade of a veranda. Ganga's four-year-old daughter, Sunita, brought me a glass of water, without my asking for it. I sipped the lukewarm liquid gratefully.

Sangli mulgi, sangli mulgi, I thanked her, in Marathi. Good girl, good girl.

Sunita was delighted that she'd pleased me, and stared back at me with a furious little smile. She wore a scarlet dress with the folds draped over her shoulders. I noticed that the dress was torn, and too tight for her, and I made a mental note to buy some clothes for her and a few of the other girls in the neighborhood, no less than Fashion Street. It was the same mental note I made every day, every time I talked to the lever, handmaids in the slum. She too, the empty glass and, indeed, the metal bells of her ankle bracelets ringing their small music, and her tiny, bare feet tough against the stones.

When all the men had taken tea, I simply ordered them to leave.

They began to prod and shove him roughly, shouting at him to leave. He stirred, and grumbled resentfully, leaving very slowly. He opened his eyes and shook his groggy head, glaring mutely for a moment.

"Ani nahin," I said. "Go away."

They forced the second bottle on him, roughly insistent, but allowing him to resist and protest on the back of his hand. He refused, and the young men smiled at him. He groaned repeatedly for a moment. Every time, he found the strong alcohol thrust into his mouth instead. Before a third of the bottle was finished, he fainted again, collapsing to the side with his head lolling at an awkward angle. His face was bare to the limbing

sun. (One made any attempt to shade him.)

I simply allowed him a mere five minutes to doze before ordering that he be taken away. Sunita's grumbling was angry as he awoke, and he began to snarl and curse. He tried to raise himself to his knees, and ran back to his hut. I simply took the bloodied bamboo stick, and handed it to Johnny Sigar. He shoveled one word of command. Begin.

Johnny raised the stick, and brought it down on Jose's back, with a resounding smack. Jose howled, and tried to rally, but the circle of young men pushed him back, to the centre of their group. Johnny struck him with the stick, again. Jose screamed angrily, but the young men slapped at him and shouted for silence. Johnny raised the stick, and Jose howled, trying to focus his bleary eyes.

"Do you, no! What you have done!" Johnny demanded harshly. "I brought the stick down with a hammer on Jose's shoulder. See, you drunken dog! Do you, no! What a terrible thing you have done!"

"Stop hitting me!" Jose snarled. "Why are you doing this?"

"Do you, no! What you have done!" Johnny repeated. "The stick, struck, again."

"@! (ah!" Jose shrieked. "What? What have I done? I've done nothing!"

"See+ay too, the stick, and beat Jose on the upper arm."

"Do you beat your wife, you drunken pig! Do you beat her, and maybe she will die!"

"I f*cked the stick, to Seetendra, who used it to smack Jose on the thigh."

"She's dying! Do you are a murderer! Do you murdered your own wife!"

Jose tried to shield himself with his arms, winking his eyes about feverishly for some reason. Seetendra lifted the stick, again.

"Do you beat your wife all morning, and then her naked from the hut. That, you drunkenard!) and that! Just as you beat her. *o!"

do you like it, you murderer?

The slow rise of a foggy comprehension stiffened Joseh's face into a terrified anguish. Setendra passed the stick to Gora, and the next blow brought tears.

"Ah, now he sobbed. "It's not true! I haven't done anything! Ah, that! Kill him! He's done to me! I didn't mean to kill her! God in heaven,

that! Kill him! He's done to me! Give me water. I need water!"

"Go! Water, I said."

The stick came down again and again. It was in Gora's hand.

"Worrying about yourself, dog? What about your poor wife? You didn't worry when you beat her. This is not the first time you too, this stick to her, is it? - Oh! it is finished. You killed her. You can never beat her again, not her or anyone. You! Kill die in the jail."

Johnny cigar too, the stick, again.

"Such a big, strong fellow! you are! So brave to beat your wife, who is half your size. Some on and beat me, hero! Some on, take this stick of yours, and beat a man with it, you head-goonda."

"Water..." Joseh blubbered, collapsing to the ground in tears of self-pity.

"Go! Water, I said," and Joseh drifted into unconsciousness once more.

When they woke him the next time, Joseh had been in the sun for almost twelve hours, and his distress was great. He shouted for water, but they offered him only the daru bottle. He would see that he wanted to refuse it, but his thirst was becoming

desperate. He grabbed the bottle with trembling hands. Just as the first drops touched his parched tongue, the stick came down again. Daru spilled over his stubbled chin, and ran from his gaping mouth. He dropped the bottle. Johnny picked it up and poured the remaining alcohol over his head. Joseph shrieked and tried to scramble away on his hands and knees, but the circle of men wrestled him back to the centre. Setendra yielded the stick, smashing it onto his buttocks and legs. Joseph hined and screamed and moaned.

Asim Ali was sitting to one side, in the shaded doorway of a hut. He called Ghabra to him, and gave orders that a number of Joseph's friends and relatives should be sent for, as well as relatives of Maria, Joseph's wife. As the people arrived, they too, the leaders of the young men in the circle, and Joseph's torment continued. For several hours, his friends and relatives and neighbours too, turned to vilify and abuse him, beating him with the stick, he'd used to assault his wife so savagely. The blows were sharp, and they hurt him, but they weren't severe enough to break the spirit. It was a measured punishment that was painful, but never vicious.

I left the scene, and returned a few times during the afternoon. Many of the slum dwellers who were passing that way stopped to look at him. Ghabra joined the circle around Joseph, or left it, as they wished. Asim Ali sat in the doorway of the hut, his back

straight and his expression grave, never taking his eyes from the circle. He directed the punishment with a quiet word or a subtle gesture, exerting a relentless pressure on the man, but preventing any excesses.

Joseph passed out twice more before he finally broke down. When the end came, he was rushed. All the spite and defiance in him were defeated. He sobbed the name of his wife over and over again. Maria, Maria, Maria ...

I asim)li stood, and a##roa hed the ir le. It ! as the moment he"d ! aited for, and he nodded to &ee+ay, ! ho brought a dish of ! arm ! ater, soa#, and t! o to! els from a nearby hut. 2he same men ! ho"d been beating \$ose#h radled him in their arms, then, and ! ashed his fa e, ne , , hands, and feet. 2hey gave him ! ater. 2hey omed his hair. 2hey soothed him ! ith hugs and the first , ind ! ords he"d heard sin e the beginning of his hastisement. 2hey told him that if he ! ere genuinely sorry he ! ould be forgiven, and given hel#. 4any #eo#le ! ere brought for! ard, myself included, and \$ose#h ! as made to tou h our feet. 2hey dressed him in a lean shirt, and #ro##ed him u#, their arms and shoulders su##orting him tenderly. I asim)li s=uatted lose to him, and stared into his bloodshot eyes.

5Dour ! ife, 4aria, is not dead,5 I asim)li said softly.

5- ot ... not deadE5 he mumbled.

5- o, \$ose#h, she is not dead. She is very badly in+ured, but she is alive.0f

\$ose#h ! agged his head feebly.

5Des, yes. I ! ill.5

54aria may de ide not to ta, e you ba , . Dou must , no! this also. She may ! ant to divor e you, even after the t! o months((and if

she does, I ! ill hel# her in this. Out at the end of t! o months, if she ! ants to a e#t you again, you ! ill use the money you have saved by this e' tra hard ! or, , and you ! ill ta, e her on a holiday to the ool mountains. During retreat in that #la e, ! ith your ! ife, you ! ill fa e this ugliness in yourself, and you ! ill try to over ome it. Inshallah, you ! ill ma, e a ha##y and virtuous future, for your ! ife and yourself. 2his is the de ision. Go no! . - o more tal, ing. /at no! , and slee#.5

I asim stood, turned, and ! al, ed a! ay. \$ose#h"s friends hel#ed him to his feet, and half(arried him to his hut. 2he hut had been leaned, and all of 4aria"s lothes and #ersonal arti les had been removed. \$ose#h ! as given ri e and dhal. *e ate a little of it, and then lay ba , on his thin mattress. 2! o friends sat near him, and fanned his un ons ious body ! ith green #a#er fans.) ord ! as tied around one end of the bloody sti , , and \$ohnny Sigar sus#ended it from a #ost outside \$ose#h"s hut for all to see. It ! ould remain there for the t! o months of \$ose#h"s further #unishment.

Someone turned a radio on in a hut not far a! ay, and a *indi love song ! ailed through the lanes and gullies of the busy slum.) hild ! as rying some! here. 8hi , ens s rat hed and #e , ed at the #la e ! here \$ose#h"s ir le of torment had been. Some! here else, a ! oman ! as laughing, hildren #layed, the bangle(seller sang out his enti ement(all in 4arathi.) bangle is beauty, and beauty is a bangleB

)s the #ulse and #ush of normal life returned to the slum, I ! al, ed ba , to my hut, through the ! inding lanes. 9ishermen and

fisher! omen ! ere oming home from Sassoon Do , , bringing bas, ets of sea(smell ! ith them. In one of those balan ing ontrasts of slum life, it ! as also FF9

the hour hosen by the in ense(sellers to move through the lanes, burning their sam#les of sandal! ood, +asmine, rose, and #at houli.

I thought about ! hat I'd seen that day, ! hat the #eo#le did for themselves in their tiny ity of t! enty(five thousand souls, ! ithout #oli emen, +udges, ourts, and #risons. I thought about something I asim)li had said, ! ee, s before, ! hen the t! o boys, 9arou, h and Raghuram, had #resented themselves for #unishment, having s#ent a day tied together in ! or, at the latrine.)fter they'd s rubbed themselves lean ! ith a hot bu , et(bath, and dressed in ne! lungis and lean, ! hite singlets, the t! o boys stood before an assembly of their families, friends, and neighbours. ; am#lights fluttered in the bree1e, #assing the golden gleam from eye to eye, as shado! s #ased one another a ross the reed(mat ! alls of the huts. I asim)li #ronoun ed the #unishment that had been de ided u#on by a oun il of *indu and 4uslim friends and neighbours. 2heir #unishment, for fighting about religion, ! as that ea h had to learn one om#lete #rayer from the religious observan es of the other.

5In this ! ay is +usti e done,5 I asim)li said that night, his bar, (oloured eyes softening on the t! o young men, 5be ause +usti e is a +udgement that is both fair and forgiving. \$usti e is not done until everyone is satisfied, even those ! ho offend us and must be #unished by us. Dou an see, by ! hat ! e have done ! ith these t! o boys, that +usti e is not only the ! ay ! e #unish those ! ho do ! rong. It is also the ! ay ! e try to save them.5

I , ne! those ! ords by heart. I'd ! ritten them do! n in my ! or, +ournal, not long after I asim)li had s#o, en them.)nd ! hen I returned to my hut on that day of 4aria"s agonies, that day of \$ose#h"s shame, I lit a lam#, and o#ened the bla , +ournal, and

stared at the ! ords on the #age. Some! here lose to me, sisters and friends comforted 4aria, and fanned her bruised and beaten body. In \$ose#h"s hut, >raba, er and \$ohnny 8igar too, the first shift to ! at h over their neighbour as he sle#t. It ! as hot, then, as evening"s long shado! s be ame the night. I breathed a stillness of air, dusty and fragrant ! ith s ents from oo, ing fires.)nd it ! as =uiet, in those dar, , thin, ing moments: =uiet enough to hear s! eat dro#lets from my sorro! ed fa e fall u#on the #age, one after another, ea h ! et ir le ! ee#ing out! ard into the ! ords fair ... forgiving ... #unish ... and save ...

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TWELVE

From time to time, as I wandered the streets of Solaba with my tourist clients, I ran into Didier, or Ibrahim, or some of the others from the "old" days. Sometimes I saw Carla, but I never spoke to her. I didn't want to meet her eyes while I was poor, and living in the slum. Gervais and Nade are devoted blood brothers until one day, and inevitably, one kills the other.

I didn't see Abdullah at all during that fifth month, but a succession of strange and occasionally bizarre messengers came to the slum with news of him. I was sitting alone at the table in my hut one morning, writing, when the ghetto dogs roused me from my slumber with a fury of barking more frenzied than anything I'd ever heard. There was rage and terror in it. I shut down my pen, but didn't open my door or even move from my chair. The dogs were often vicious at night, but that was the first time I'd ever heard such ferocity in the daylight hours. The sound was fascinating and alarming. As I perceived that the pack was coming nearer and slowly nearer to my hut, my heart began to thump.

Shafts of golden morning stabbed through rents and gaps in the fragile walls of my hut. Those motes of light stuttered and strobed as the sun rushed past in the lane outside. Shouts and screams joined the howling. I looked around me. The only beam of any kind in my small house was a thin, bamboo stick. I hid it under my bed. The riot of barking and voices penetrated outside my hut, and seemed to be entering on my door.

I pulled open the thin piece of plywood I used as a door, and dropped the stick on the floor. There, half a metre away, was a huge, brown bear. The animal tottered over me, filling the doorway with a awesome, musky fur. It stood easily on its hind legs, with its enormous paws raised to the height of my shoulders. FG1

The presence of the beast provoked the ghetto dogs to madness.

-ot

The bear tilted its head as if it, too, was asking the question.

Describing a few voices in the crowd called out. This is for
; in this is ; in babab

I was still standing in the doorway of my hut, too surprised to
speak, or even
move. Everyone there was laughing and cheering. More and more

courageous children were almost close enough to touch the bear
with darting fingers. Their mothers shrieked and laughed and
gathered them back, into their arms.

These are your friends, one of the blue-faced men said, in Hindi.
His teeth were chattering white, against the blue. These have come
with a message for you.

The second man too, a rumpled, yellow envelope from the post, out
of his vest and held it up for me to see.

5) message I managed to ask,

Describing an important message for you, sir, the first man said.
Out first, you must do something. There is a promise for giving
the message.) big promise. Don't tell it very much.

They were speaking in Hindi, and I was unfamiliar with the word
vahan, meaning promise. I stepped from the hut, edging around
the bear. There were more people than I'd imagined, and they
crowded together, just out of range of the bear's attacks. Several
people were repeating the Hindi word vahan.) babble of other
voices, in several languages, added to the shouts and stone-
throwing and barking dogs to produce the sound effects for a
minor riot.

The dust on the stony paths rose up in puffs and swirls, and

although ! e ! ere in the entre of a modern ity, that #la e of bamboo huts and ga#ing ro! ds might've been a village in a forgotten valley. 2he bear(handlers, ! hen I sa! them learly, seemed fantasti beings. 2heir bare arms and hests ! ere ! ell mus led beneath the blue #aint, and their trousers ! ere de orated ! ith silver bells and dis s and tassels of red and yello! sil, . Ooth men had long hair, ! orn in dreadlo , s as thi , as t! o fingers, and ti##ed ! ith oils of silver ! ire.

I felt a hand on my arm, and almost +um#ed. It ! as >raba, er. *is usual smile ! as #reternaturally ! ide and his dar, eyes ! ere ha##y.

57e are so lu ,y to have you live ! ith us, ; in. Dou are all! ays bringing it so many adventures of a fully not(boring , indB5

5I didn't bring this, >rabu. 7hat the hell are they sayingE 7hat do they ! antE5

52hey have it a message for you, ; in. Out there is a va han, a #romise, before they ! ill give it the message. 2here is a ... you , no! ... a at hes.5

5) at hesE5 FGG

5Des, sure. 2his is /nglish ! ord, yesE 8at hes. It means li, e a little revenge for being ni e,5 >raba, er grinned ha##ily, sei1ing

the o##ortunity to share one of his /nglish definitions ! ith me. It ! as his habit or fortuity, al! ays, to find the most irritating moments to offer them.

5Des, I , no! ! hat a at h is, >rabu. 7hat I don't , no! is, ! ho are these guysE 7ho"s this message fromE5

>raba, er rattled a! ay in ra#id *indi, delighted to be the fo us of attention in the e' hange. 2he bear(handlers ans! ered him in

some detail, saying just as silently. I couldn't understand much of what was said, but those in the crowd here close enough to hear broke out in an eruption of laughter. The bear dropped down on all fours and sniffed at my feet.

What did they say?

When they don't tell who is sending it the messages, I said, suppressing his own laughter with some difficulty. This is a big secret, and they are not telling it. They have some instructions, to give this message to you, with nothing else explanations, and with the one that hes for you, like a promise.

What that?

Well, you have to hug the bear.

I have to what?

* Hug the bear. You have to give him a big cuddles, like this.

* He reached out and grabbed me in a tight hug, his head pressed against my chest. The crowd applauded loudly, the bear handlers shrieked in a high-pitched keening, and even the bear as moved to stand and dance a thudding, stomped jig. The beautiful ment and obvious relaxation on my face drove the people to more and bigger laughter.

- Oh! ay, I said, shaking my head.

@h, yes, I said, laughing.

Are you kidding? - Oh! ay, man.

2a, leef nahin? one of the bear handlers called out. - o problem? 5 It is safe. <ano is very friendly. <ano is the friendliest bear in all India. <ano loves the people.

*e moved closer to the bear, shouting commands in Hindi. When
the bear stood to his full height, the handler stepped in
and embraced him. The bear closed its jaws around him, and roared,
barks and for barks. After a few seconds, it released the man,
and he turned to the tumultuous applause of the crowd with a beaming
smile and a showman's bow.

5- o ! ay, I said again.

5@h, come on, ; in. *ug it the bear, >raba, er #leaded, laughing
harder.

5I'm not hugging it any bear, >rabu.

5Come on, ; in. Don't you want to , no! ! hat is it, the messages

5- o.

5It might be important.

5I don't care.

5You might like that hugging bear, ; in, isn't it?

5- o.

5You might.

5I ! on't.

5Well, maybe, ! ould you like me to give you another big hugs, for
#ra ti e

5- o. 2han, s, all the same.

5When, +ust hug it the bear, ; in.

5Sorry.5

5@h, #leeeeeeeese,5 >raba, er ! heedled.

5- o.5

5Des, ; in, #lease hug it the bear,5 >raba, er en ouraged, as, ing
for su##ort from the ro! d. 2here ! ere hundreds of #eo#le rammed
into the lanes near my house. 8hildren had found #re arious
vantage #oints on to# of some of the sturdier huts.

5__Do it, do it, do _itB5 they ! ailed and shouted.

; oo, ing around me, from fa e to laughing fa e, I realised that I
didn't have any hoi e. I too, the t! o ste#s, rea hed out
tremulously, and slo! ly #ressed myself against the shaggy fur of
<ano the bear. *e ! as sur#risingly soft under the fur((almost
#udgy. 2he thi , forelegs ! ere all mus le, ho! ever, and they
losed around me at shoulder height ! ith a massive #o! er, a non(
human strength. I , ne! ! hat it ! as to feel utterly hel#less.

@ne fright(driven thought s#un through my mind((<ano ould sna#
my ba , as easily as I ould sna# a #en il. 2he bear"s voi e
grumbled in his hest against my ear.) smell li, e ! et moss

filled my nostrils. 4i' ed ! ith it ! as a smell li, e ne! leather
shoes, and the smell of a hild"s FG?

! oollen blan, et. Oeyond that, there ! as a #ier ing ammonia
smell, li, e bone being ut ! ith a sa! . 2he noise of the ro! d
faded. <ano ! as ! arm. <ano moved from side to side. 2he fur, in
the gras# of my fingers, ! as soft, and atta hed to rolls of s, in
li, e that on the ba , of a dog"s ne , . I lung to the fur, and
ro , ed ! ith him. In its bra! ny gri#, it seemed to me that I ! as
floating, or #erha#s falling, from some e' alted #la e of
ine' #ressible #ea e and #romise.

*ands shoo, my shoulders, and I o#ened my eyes to see that I'd fallen to my , nees. <ano the bear had released me from the hug, and ! as already at the end of the short lane, lumbering a! ay ! ith his slo! , thum#ing tread in the om#any of his handlers and the retinue of #eo#le and maddened dogs.

5; inbaba, are you all rightE5

5I'm fine, fine. 4ust have ... I got di11y, or something.5

5<ano ! as giving you the #retty good s=uee1es, yesE *ere, this is your message.5

I ! ent ba , to my hut and sat at the small table made from #a ,ing rates. Inside the rum#led envelo#e ! as a ty#ed note on mat hing yello! #a#er. It ! as ty#ed in /nglish, and I sus#e ted that it had been ty#ed by one of the #rofessional letter(! riters on the Street of the 7riters. It ! as from)bdullah.

4y Dear Orother,

Salaam alei, um. Dou told me that you are giving the bear hugs to the #eo#le. I thin, this is a ustom in your ountry and even if I thin, it is very strange and even if I do not understand, I thin, you must be lonely for it here be ause in Oombay ! e have a shortage of bears. So I send you a bear for some hugging. >lease en+oy. I ho#e he is li, e the hugging bears in your ountry. I am busy ! ith business and I am healthy, than, s be to God.)fter my business I ! ill return to Oombay soon, Inshallah. God bless you and your brother.

)bdullah Zaheri

>raba, er ! as standing at my left shoulder, reading the note out aloud, slo! ly.

5)ha, this is the)bdullah, ! ho I am not su##osed to be telling you that he is doing all the bad things, but really he is, even at the same time that I FGC

am not telling you ... that he is.

"It's rude to read other people's mail," >rabu.

"Is rude, yes. Rude means that I expect you to do it, even when I tell you not to."

"Tell us not to, yes?"

"Where are those bear guys? I asked him. Where are they staying?"

"They are making money with the dancing bear. They are original from Assam, Assam, in the north of this, our other India, but travelling everywhere. Now they are staying at the hotel in the -avy -agar area. Do you want me to take you there?"

"-o," I muttered, reading the note over again. "-o, not no! . Maybe later."

">raba, enter! went to the open door of the hut and paused there, staring at me reflectively with his small, round head bowed to one side. I put the note in my pocket, and looked at him. I thought he wanted to say something (there was a little struggle of concentration in his brow) (but then he seemed to change his mind. He shrugged. He smiled.

"Some sisters, people are coming today?"

"Yes? I think, later."

"Well, I will be seeing you at the lunch party, yes?"

"Sure."

"Do you ... do you want me, for to do anything?"

"-o. Thank you."

5Do you ! ant my neighbour, his ! ife, to ! ash it your shirtE5

57ash my shirtE5

5Des. It is smelling li, e bears. Dou are smelling li, e bears,
; inbaba.5

5It's o, ay,5 I laughed. 5I , inda li, e it.5

57ell, I'm going no! . I'm going to drive my ousin Shantu"s
ta' i.5

5@, ay then.5

5)ll right. I'm going no! .5

*e ! al, ed out, and ! hen I ! as alone again the sounds of the slum
s! armed around me: ha! , ers selling, hildren #laying, ! omen
laughing, and love songs blaring from radios running on ma' imum
distortion. 2here ! ere also animal sounds, hundreds of them. 7ith
only days to go before the big rain, many itinerants and
entertainers, li, e the t! o bear(handlers, had sought shelter in

slums throughout the ity. @urs ! as host to three grou#s of sna, e
harmers, a team of mon, ey men, and numerous breeders of #arrots
and singing birds. 2he men ! ho usually FG7
tethered horses in o#en ground near the -avy barra , s brought
their mounts to our ma, eshift stables. Goats and shee# and #igs,
hi , ens and bullo , s and ! ater buffalo, even a amel and an
ele#hant((the a res of the slum had be ome a , ind of s#ra! ling
ar, , #roviding san tuary from the oming floods.

2he animals ! ere ! el ome, and no"(one =uestioned their right to
shelter, but their #resen e did #ose ne! #roblems. @n the first
night of their stay, the mon, ey men allo! ed one of their animals
to es a#e ! hile everyone ! as aslee#. 2he mis hievous reature

He slipped over the tops of several huts and fell into the hut used by one group of snake charmers. The snake men housed their robes in covered baskets which were secured with a bamboo slip (fastened) and a stone placed on top of each cover. The monkey removed one of the stones, and opened a basket containing three robes. From a safe vantage point at the top of the hut, the monkey shrieked the snake men awake, and they sounded the alarm.

5Saa# allaB Saa# allaB Saa#B5 Snake are comingB Snake, esB

There, as a demonium, then, as sleepy slum-dwellers rushed about with kerosene lanterns and flaming torches, striking at every shadow, and beating each other on the feet and shins with sticks and poles. They fled from the flimsier huts where, no, ed over in the stam#ede. I asim)li finally restored order, and organised the snake men into two search parties that combed the slum systematically until they found the robes and returned them to their baskets.

Among their many other skills, the monkeys had also been trained to be excellent thieves. In the most of the slums throughout the city, ours as a stealing (free) one. With no locks on any of the doors, and no secret places for any of us to hide things, the monkeys were in a thief's paradise. /a h day, the embarrassed monkey men were forced to set up a table outside their hut where all the items their monkeys had stolen could be displayed, and reclaimed by the rightful owners. The monkeys showed a marked preference for the glass bangles and brass anklets or bracelets worn by most of the little girls. /ven after the monkey men bought them their portion of the baubles, and festooned their hairy arms and legs with them, the monkeys still found the theft of such jewelry irresistible.

I asim)li decided at last to have noisy bells put on all the monkeys while they were within the slum. The creatures displayed an inventive resourcefulness in divesting themselves of the bells or in

smothering them. I on e sa! t! o mon, eys stal, ing along the deserted lane outside my hut, at dus, , their eyes huge ! ith simian guilt and mis hief. @ne of them had su eeded in removing

the bells from around its ne , . It ! al, ed on its hind legs, in tandem ! ith the other a#e, muffling the noise of the other"s bells by holding on to them ! ith both tiny hands. Des#ite their ingenuity, the bell musi did ma, e their usually noiseless a#ering more dete table, redu ing their small felonies and the shame of their handlers.

)long ! ith those itinerants, many of the #eo#le ! ho lived on the streets near our slum ! ere dra! n to the relative se urity of our huts. <no! n as #avement d! ellers, they ! ere #eo#le ! ho made homes for themselves on every available stri# of unused land and any foot#ath ! ide enough to su##ort their flimsy shelters, ! hile still #ermitting #edestrian traffi . 2heir houses ! ere the most #rimitive, and the onditions under ! hi h they lived the most harsh and brutalising, of all the millions of homeless #eo#le in Oombay. 7hen the monsoon stru , , their #osition ! as al! ays dangerous and sometimes untenable, and many of them sought refuge in the slums.

2hey ! ere from every #art of India:)ssamese and 2amils, <arnata, ans and Gu+aratis, #eo#le from 2rivandrum, Oi, aner, and <onara, . During the monsoon, five thousand of those e' tra souls s=uee!ed themselves into the already over(ro! ded slum. 7ith subtra tions for the s#a e ta, en u# by animal #ens, sho#s, storage areas, streets, lanes, and latrines, that allo! ed some t! o s=uae metres for ea h man, ! oman, and hild among us.

2he greater(than(usual ro! ding aused some tensions and additional diffi ulties, but in the main the ne! omers ! ere treated tolerantly. I never heard anyone suggest that they shouldn"t have been hel#ed or made ! el ome. 2he only serious #roblems, in fa t, ame from outside the slum. 2hose five thousand e' tra #eo#le, and the many thousands ! ho"d flo , ed to

other slums as the monsoon approached, had been living on the streets. They'd all done their shopping, such as it was, in shops throughout the area. Their purchases were individually small (eggs, milk, tea, bread, cigarettes, vegetables, kerosene, children's clothes, and so on). Collectively, they accounted for large amounts of money and a considerable portion of the trade for local shops. When they moved to F.G.9 the slums, however, the neighbors tended to spend their money at the dozens of tiny shops within the slums. The small, illegal businesses supplied almost everything that could be bought in the legal shops of the well-established shopping districts. There were shops that supplied food, clothing, oils, pulses, kerosene, alcohol, hashish, and even electrical appliances. The slum was largely self-contained, and Johnny Bigar (a money and tax adviser to the slum businesses) estimated that the slum dwellers spent twenty rupees within the slum for every one rupee they spent outside it.

Shops, dealers and small businessmen everywhere resented that attrition of their sales and the success of the thriving slum shops. When the threat of rain pulled even the pavement dwellers

into the slums, their resentment turned to rage. They joined forces with local landlords, property developers, and others who feared and opposed the expansion of the slums. Pooling their resources, they recruited thousands of gangs of thugs from areas outside Solaba, and paid them to attack, the supply lines to slum shops. Those returning from the large markets with cartloads of vegetables or fish or dry goods for shops in the slum were harassed, had their goods spoiled, and were sometimes even assaulted.

It had treated several children and young men who had been attacked, by those gangs. There had been threats that a child could be thrown. Unable to appeal to the police for help (the cops had been paid to maintain a discreet myopia) the slum dwellers banded together to defend themselves. Informally formed brigades of children who

#atrolled the #erimeter of the slum as loo, outs, and several #latoons of strong, young men to es ort those ! ho visited the mar, ets.

8lashes had already o urred bet! een our young men and the hired thugs. 7e all , ne! that, ! hen the monsoon ame, there ! ould be more and greater violen e. 2ensions ran high. Still, the ! ar of the sho#, ee#ers didn't dis#irit the slum(d! ellers. @n the ontrary, the sho#, ee#ers ! ithin the slum e' #erien ed a surge of #o#ularity. 2hey be ame demi(heroes, and ! ere moved to res#ond ! ith s#e ial sales, redu ed #ri es, and a arnival atmos#here. 2he ghetto ! as a living organism: to ounter e' ternal threats, it res#onded ! ith the antibodies of ourage, solidarity, and that des#erate, magnifi ent love ! e usually all the survival instin t. If the slum failed, there ! as no! here and nothing else.

@ne of the young men ! ho"d been in+ured in an atta , on our su##ly FH%

lines ! as a laborer on the onstru tion site beside the slum. *is name ! as -aresh. *e ! as nineteen years old. It ! as his voi e, and a onfident ra##ing on the o#en door of my hut, ! hi h s attered the brief, still solitude that I'd found ! hen my friends and neighbours had follo! ed <ano and his bear(handlers from the slum. 7ithout ! aiting for me to re#ly, -aresh ste##ed into the hut and greeted me.

5*ello, ; inbaba,5 he greeted me, in /nglish. 5Dou have been hugging it bears, everyone says.5

5*ello, -aresh. *o! "s your armE Dou ! ant me to ta, e a loo, at itE5

5If you have time, yes,5 he ans! ered, s! it hing to 4arathi, his native tongue. 5I too, a brea, from ! or, , and I have to return in fifteen or t! enty minutes. I an ome ba , another time if you are busy.5

5- o, no! is o, ay. 8ome and sit do! n, and ! e"ll have a loo, .5

- aresh had been slashed on the upper arm with a barber's straight razor. The cut wasn't deep, and it should've healed with no more than a layer of bandage. The unpleasant humidity of his living conditions, however, accelerated the rise of infection. The bandage I'd placed on his arm just a few days before was filthy and soaked with sweat. I removed it, and stored the soiled dressing in a plastic bag for disposal later in one of the communal fires.

The wound was beginning to swell, not well enough, but it was an angry red, with some flares of yellowish-white. Chaderbhai's leeches had sucked me with a ten-litre container of surgical disinfectant. I used it to wash my hands and then cleaned the wound, roughly scrubbing at it until there was no trace of the white infection. It must've been tender, but - aresh endured the pain expressionlessly. When it was dry, I squeezed antibiotic powder into the crease of the cut and applied a fresh gauze dressing and bandage.

>raba, er tells me you had a narrow escape from the cholera the other night, - aresh, I said as I wandered, stumbling along in my brother's room.

>raba, er has a disconcerting habit of telling everybody the truth, - aresh frowned.

Dou're telling me, I answered with a smile, and we both laughed.

Like most of the Maharashtrais, - aresh was happy that I tried to learn his language, and like most of them he spoke slowly and very precisely, encouraging me to understand. There were no parallels between Marathi and English, it seemed to me: none of the similarities and familiar words that were shared by English and German, for example, or English and Italian. But Marathi was an easy language to learn

be cause the people of Maharashtra ! were thrilled that I ! wanted to learn it, and they ! were very eager to teach.

5If you , see# stealing ! with)seef and his gang,5 I said, more seriously, 5you're going to get caught.5

5I , no! that, but I hope not. I hope the /nlightened @ne is on my side. It's for my sister. I pray that no harm ! will come to me, you see, because I am not stealing for myself, but for my sister. She ! will be married soon, and there is not enough to pay the promised duty. It is my responsibility. I am the oldest son.5

- aresh ! as brave, intelligent, hard ! working, and , kind ! with the young children. *his hut ! wasn't much bigger than my room, but he shared it ! with his #parents, and si' brothers and sisters. *e slept outside on the rough ground to leave more space for the younger ones inside. I'd visited his hut several times, and I , ne! that everything he owned in the ! world ! was contained in one #lasti shopping bag: a change of rough clothes, one #pair of good

trousers and a shirt for formal occasions and for visiting the temple, a book, of Buddhist verses, several #photographs, and a few toiletries. *e owned nothing else. *e gave every rupee that he earned from his job or made from petty thefts to his mother, asking her for small change in return as he required it. *e didn't drink, or smoke or gamble.)s a #poor man ! with no immediate #prospects, he had no girlfriend and only a slender chance of winning one. The one entertainment he allowed himself ! as a treat to the cheapest cinema, ! with his ! friends, on a ! day, . Det he ! as a cheerful, optimistic young man. Sometimes, ! when I came home through the slum late at night, I saw him curled up# on the #path, outside the family hut, his thin young face slumped, ened in sleepy' exhausted smile.

5)nd you, - aresh5 I asked, fastening the bandage ! with a safety pin. 5When ! will you get married5

*e stood, flexing his slender arm to loosen the tight bandage.

After Poonam is married, there are two other sisters! He must be married, she exclaimed, smiling and nodding his head from side to side. They must be first. In this, our Bombay, the poor man must look for husbands before he looks for a wife. Really, isn't it? (I) m hi Mumbai, Mumbai am hi? It's our Bombay, and Bombay is ours.

*e went out without thanking me, as usual with the people I treated at my hut. I remember that he would invite me to dinner at his house one day soon, or bring me a gift of fruit or something in season. The people showed thanks, rather than saying it, and I'd come to accept that.

When Aresh emerged from my hut with a clean bandage, several people followed him around to get me for treatment. I attended to them one by one (rat bites, fever, infected rashes, ringworm (hatting with each, and catching up on the gossip that constantly spilled through the lanes and gullies like the ubiquitous dust devils).

The last of those patients was an elderly woman accompanied by her niece. She complained of pains in her chest, on the left side, but the extremes of Indian modesty made examination a woman's prerogative. I asked the girl to summon others to help. Two of the niece's young friends joined her in my hut. The friends held a sheet of thin cloth between the elderly woman and myself, completely obscuring her from my view. The girl, standing beside her aunt in a position where she could look over the blanket and see me sitting on the other side. Then, as I touched my own chest here and there, the young niece imitated me by touching her aunt's breast.

Does it hurt here? I asked, probing my own chest above the nipple.

Behind the screen, the niece #robed at her aunt's breast, asking my question.

5- o.5

5*o! about hereE5

5- o, not there.5

57hat about hereE5

5Des. 2here it is hurting,5 she answered.

5)nd hereE @r hereE5

5- o, not there.) little bit here.5

With that #antomime, and through the invisible hands of her niece, I finally established that the elderly woman had two painful lumps in her breast. I also learned that she experienced some pain with deep breaths, and when lifting heavy objects. I wrote a note for Doctor *amid, detailing my second-hand observations and my conclusions. I'd just finished explaining to the girl that she should take her aunt to Doctor *amid's surgery at once, and give him my note, when a voice spoke behind me.

5Dou , no! , #overtly looks good on you. If you ever got really done and out, you might be irresistible.5 FHG

I turned in surprise to see Arla leaning in the doorway with her arms folded. Her ironic half-smile turned up the corners of her mouth. She was dressed in green (loose silk trousers and a long-sleeved top, with a shade of dark green. Her black hair was free, and burnished with copper tints by the sun. The green of her arm, shall I say, later in a dreamed lagoon blazed in her eyes. She was almost too beautiful: as beautiful as a blush of summer sunset on a sylvan stream of gold.

5*o! long have you been thereE5 I as, ed, laughing.

5;ong enough to see this ! eird faith(healing system of yours in
o#eration.)re you uring #eo#le by tele#athy no! E5

5Indian ! omen are very obstinate ! hen it omes to having their
breasts handled by strangers,5 I re#lied ! hen the #atient and her
relatives had filed #ast <arla, and left the hut.

5-obody's #erfe t, as Didier ! ould say,5 she dra! led, ! ith a
smir, that fluttered +ust short of a smile. 5*e misses you, by
the ! ay. *e as, ed me to say hello to you. In fa t, they all miss
you. 7e haven't seen mu h of you at ;eo#old"s, sin e you started
this Red 8ross routine.5

I ! as glad that Didier and the others hadn't forgotten me, but I

didn't loo, her in the eye. 7hen I ! as alone, I felt safe and
satisfyingly busy in the slum. 7henever I sa! friends from beyond
those s#ra! ling a res, a #art of me shrivelled in shame. 9ear and
guilt are the dar, angels that haunt ri h men, <hader said to me
on e. I ! asn't sure if that ! as true, or if he sim#ly ! anted it
to be true, but I did , no! from e' #erien e that des#air and
humiliation haunt the #oor.

58ome in, ome in. 2his is a real sur#rise. Sit ... sit here,
! hile I +ust ... lean u# a bit.5

She ame over and sat on the ! ooden stool as I gathered a #lasti
bag ontaining used s! abs and bandages, and s! e#t the last of the
litter into it. I ! ashed my hands ! ith s#irit on e more, and
#a , ed the medi nes into the little ra , of shelves.

She loo, ed around the small hut, e' amining everything ! ith a
riti al eye.)s my ga1e follo! ed hers, I sa! my little house for
the shabby, threadbare hovel that it really ! as. Oe ause I lived

alone in the hut, I'd come to thin, of it as ludicrously
serious, in contrast to the roaring that was everywhere around
me. With her beside me, it seemed mean and rammed.

The bare earth floor was raised, and formed in lumpy
undulations. FHH

*oles as big as my fist hunted every wall, enclosing my life to
the brim and business of the bustling lane outside. Children
peered in through the holes at Charla and me, emphasizing how
unprivate my life there was. The reed matting of the roof sagged,
and had even given way in a few places. Yet, it then consisted of a
single (burner,erosene stove, two cups, two metal plates, a
knife, a fork, a spoon, and a few containers of spices. The hole
of it fitted into a cardboard box, and was stored in one corner.
I was in the habit of buying only enough for a single meal at a
time, so there was no food. The water was stored in an
earthenware mat, a. It was slum water. I couldn't offer it to her
because I, Charla couldn't drink it. My only furniture was a
cupboard for medicines, a small table, a chair, and a wooden
stool. I remembered how delighted I'd been when those sticks of
furniture were given to me how rare they were in the slum. With
her eyes, I saw the rags in the food, the stains of mildew, the
repairs made with wire and string.

I looked back, to where she sat on the stool, lighting a cigarette
and blowing the smoke out through the side of her mouth. A rush
of irrational resentment seized me. I was almost angry that she'd
made me see the unlovely truth of my house.

It's ... it's not much. I ...

It's fine, she said, reading my heart. I lived in a little hut
like this in Goa for a year once. And I was happy. There isn't a
day goes by when I don't feel like going back there. I sometimes
think that the silence of our happiness is inversely proportional to

the silence of our house.

She raised her left eyebrow in a high arch as she said it, challenging me to respond and meet her on her level, and with that gesture it was as all right bet between us. I wasn't resentful any more. I, neither, I was certain somehow, that wanting my little house to be bigger or brighter or grander than it as had been in my mind, not hers. She wasn't judging. She was only looking, seeing everything, even what I felt.

My neighbour's twelve-year-old son, Satish, came into the hut, carrying his tiny, two-year-old cousin on his hip. He stood close to Charla, staring unselfishly. She stared back at him just as intently, and I was struck by how similar they were in that instant, the Indian boy and the European woman. Both had full lips, expressive mouths, and hair that was night-sky black and although Charla's eyes were sea-green and the boy's were dark brown, each hair wore the same grave expression full of interest and humour.

Satish, hai bono, I said to him. Give me some tea.

He gave me a wry smile, and hurried out. Charla was the first foreign miss he'd ever seen in the slum, so far as I knew. He seemed interested to have the taste of serving her. I, neither, he would talk about it to the other friends for weeks afterwards.

So, tell me, how did you find me? Oh! did you even get in here? I asked her when she was alone.

Get in? she frowned. It's not illegal to visit you, is it?

Of course, I laughed, but it's not common either. I don't get many visitors here.

Usually, it was easy. I just stepped off the street and asked the people to take me to you.

And they brought you here?

5-ot e' a tly. 2hey"re very #rote tive of you, you , no! . 2hey too, me to your friend, >raba, er, first, and he brought me to you.5

5>raba, erE5

5Des, ; in, you ! ant meE5 >raba, er said, #o##ing through the door! ay from his eavesdro##ing #ost outside.

5I thought you ! ere going to drive your ta' i,5 I muttered, ado#ting the stern e' #ression that I , ne! amused him the most.

54y ousin Shantu"s ta' i,5 he said, grinning. 57as driving, yes, but no! my other ousin, >ra, ash, he is driving, ! hile I am ta, ing it my t! o hours of lun h brea, s. I ! as at \$ohnny 8igar,

his house, ! hen some #eo#le ame there ! ith 4iss <arla. She ! ants to see you, and I ame here. It is very good, yesE5

5It"s good, >rabu,5 I sighed.

Satish returned, arrying a tray ! ith three u#s of hot, s! eet tea. *e handed them to us, and tore o#en a small #a , et ontaining four >arle Glu o bis uits, ! hi h he #resented to us ! ith a solemn sense of eremony. I e' #e ted him to eat the fourth bis uit himself, but he #la ed it on his #alm instead, mar, ed it off into even se tions ! ith his grubby thumb nail, and then bro, e it into t! o #ie es. 4easuring the fragments against one another, he #i , ed the one that ! as minutely larger and handed it to <arla. 2he other ! ent to his baby ousin, ! ho sat in the door! ay of the hut and nibbled at the bis uit ha##ily.

I ! as sitting on the straight(ba , ed hair, and Satish ame over to s=uat FHC

on the floor beside my feet. *e rested his shoulder against my , nee. I ! as big enough to , no! that the rare sho! of affe tion ! as a brea, through ! ith Satish.)t the same time I ! as small

enough to hope that Carla had noticed it, and I was impressed by it.

We finished the tea, and Satish gathered the empty cups, leaving the hut without a word. At the door, he gave Carla a long, lingering smile as he took his cousin's hand to lead her away.

"She's a nice girl," she remarked.

"He is. My neighbor's son. Do you really see something in him today? He's normally very shy. So, what brings you to my humble home, anyway?"

"Oh, I just happened to be in the area," she said nonchalantly, looking at the glasses in my hand. There a dozen little faces stared in at us. The voices of other children could be heard, questioning Satish about her. "Who is she? Is she your wife?"

"Passing by, huh? It couldn't be, maybe, that you missed me, just a little bit?"

"They don't push your luck," she mumbled.

"I can't help it. It's a genetic thing. I come from a long line of luck chasers. Don't take it personally."

"I take everything personally (that's what being a person is all about.) And I'll take you to lunch, if you're finished with your patients."

"Well, I have a lunch date, actually."

"Oh. Okay, then."

"- Oh, no. You're welcome to come, if you like. It's kind of an open invitation. We're having a celebration lunch today, right here. I'd be very happy if you'd ... be our guest. I think, you'll

li, e it. 2ell her she'll li, e it, >rabu.5

57e ! ill have it a very ni e lun hesB5 >raba, er said. 54y good self, I have , e#t it a om#lete em#ty stoma h for filling u# to fat. So good is the food. Dou ! ill en+oy so mu h, the #eo#le ! ill thin, you are having a baby inside your dress.5

5@, ay,5 she said slo! ly, and then loo, ed at me. 5*e's a #ersuasive guy, your >raba, er.5

5Dou should meet his father,5 I re#lied, sha, ing my head in a resigned shrug.

>raba, er"s hest s! elled ! ith #ride, and he ! agged his head ha##ily. FH7

5So, ! here are ! e goingE5

5It"s at the &illage in the S, y,5 I told her.

5I don't thin, I've heard of it,5 she said, fro! ning.

>raba, er and I laughed, and the vaguely sus#i ious furro! s in her bro! dee#ened.

5-o, you ! on't have heard of it, but I thin, you'll li, e it. ;isten, you go on ahead ! ith >raba, er. I'll ! ash u#, and hange my shirt. I'll +ust be a ou#le of minutes, o, ayE5

59ine,5 she said.

@ur eyes met, and held. 9or some reason, she lingered, ! at hing me e' #e tantly. I ouldn't understand the e' #ression, and I ! as still trying to read it ! hen she ste##ed lose to me and =ui , ly , issed my li#s. It ! as a friendly , iss, im#ulsive and generous and light(hearted, but I let myself believe that it ! as more. She ! al, ed out ! ith >raba, er, and I s#un around on one foot, ! his#ering a shout of +oy ! hile I did an e' ited little dan e. I

looked up to see the children peering through the holes in the hut and giggling at me. I made a sorry face at them, and they laughed harder, breaking into little shrieking parodies of my dance. Two minutes later, I looked through the slum lanes after a raba, and a rala, tugging my clean shirt into my pants as I ran, and shaking the water from my hair.

Our slum, like many others in Bombay, came into being to serve the needs of a construction site (two to thirty-five floor buildings, the World Trade Centre towers, being built on the shore of the Colaba Causeway. The tradesmen, artisans, and labourers who built the towers were housed in hutments, tiny slum dwellings, on land adjacent to the site. The companies that

planned and constructed large buildings, in those years, were forced to provide suitable land for housing. Many of the tradesmen were itinerant workers who followed here their skills were needed, and whose real homes were hundreds of kilometers away in other states. Most of the workers who were native to Bombay simply had no homes, other than those they found with their jobs. In fact, many men accepted the risks of that hard and dangerous work, for no other reason than to gain the security of one of those shelters.

The companies were happy enough to comply with the laws that made land and huts available because the arrangement was eminently suitable to them in other ways. The "inshik" fostered in workers' slums guaranteed a sense of unity, familial solidarity, and loyalty to the company, which

highly served employers well. Travelling time to and from work, as eliminated when men lived on the site. The wives, children, and other dependants of employed workers provided a ready source of additional labourers. They were hired from that pool and put to work, from day to day, at a moment's notice. And the entire work force of several thousand people were much more easily influenced, and to some extent even controlled, when they lived in a single community.

When the World Trade Centre towers were first planned, a large area was set aside and marked off into more than three hundred hut(s) lots. As workers signed on, they received one of the lots and a sum of money with which to buy bamboo poles, reed matting, hemlock, and softwood timber. A man then built his own house, assisted by family and friends. The result of fragile huts spread out around the city, tender root system for the huge towers that were to come. Aast underground tunnels were sun, to provide water for the community. Rudimentary lanes and paths were spread flat. Finally, a tall, barbed wire fence was erected around the perimeter to keep out squatters. The legal slum was born.

Drawn by the regular wages that those workers had to spend, and no less by the plentiful supply of fresh water, squatters soon arrived and settled outside the fence (line). Entrepreneurs establishing hair shops and small grocery stores were the first, attaching their tiny shops to the fence. Workers from the legal compound strolled through gaps in the fence, and spend their money. Vegetable shops and tailor shops and little restaurants were next. Gambling dens and other dens for the sale of alcohol or harras soon followed. A honest business lunged to the fence of the compound until at last there was no space left on the fence (line). The illegal slum then began to grow out and into the surrounding areas of open land leading to the sea.

* Homeless people joined in ever larger numbers, digging out squares for their huts. - e! holes were stretched in the fence. Squatters used them to enter the legal slum to collect water, and workers used them to make purchases in the illegal slum, or visit their friends.

The squatters' slum grew rapidly, but with a haphazard, needs-driven planlessness that was a disorderly contrast to the neater lanes of the workers' slum. In time there were eight squatters for every person in the workers' compound, more than twenty (five thousand people in all, and the division between legal and

illegal slums became blurred, camouflaged by the roaring. FH9

Although the Bombay 4th International condemned the illegal slum, and construction companies discouraged contact between workers and squatters, the people thought of themselves as one group. Their days and dreams and drives were entangled in the ravel of ghetto life. Workers and squatters alike, the companies felt as alike as flies: arbitrary and irrelevant. Some of the workers who weren't permitted to bring more than immediate family into the legal slum invited their relatives to squat near them, beyond the wire. Friendships flourished among the children of both sides, and marriages of love or arrangement were common. Celebrations on one side of the wire were well attended by residents from both sides. And because fires, floods, and epidemics didn't recognize barbed-wire boundaries, emergencies in one part of the slum required the cooperation of all.

Arfa, Raba, and I bent low to step through an opening in a section of fence, and we passed into the legal slum. A group of children trooped along beside us, dressed in freshly washed (shirts and dresses. They all, Raba, and me, well. I'd treated many of the young children, leaning and bandaging cuts, abrasions, and rat bites. And more than a few of the workers, afraid that they might be stood down from work when they received minor injuries on the construction site, had visited my free clinic rather than the company's first-aid office.

"Dou, no! everybody here," Arfa remarked as we were stopped for the fifth time by a group of neighbours. "Are you running for mayor of this place, or what?"

"Well, no. I can't stand politicians. A politician is someone who promises you a bridge, even when there's no river."

"That's not bad," she murmured. Her eyes were laughing.

"I wish I could say it was mine," I grinned. "Nana named Mitabh said it."

5) mitabh Oa h hanE5 she as, ed. 52he Oig O himselfE5

5Deah((do you li, e Oolly! ood moviesE5

5Sure, ! hy notE5

5I don't , no! ,5 I ans! ered, sha, ing my head. 5I +ust didn't ...
thin, you ! ould.5

2here ! as a #ause, then, that be ame an a! , ! ard silen e. She ! as

first to s#ea, .

5Out you do , no! a lot of #eo#le here, and they li, e you a lot.5
F?%

I fro! ned, genuinely sur#rised by the suggestion. It never
o rred to me that the #eo#le in the slum might li, e me. I , ne!
that some men((>raba, er, \$ohnny 8igar, even I asim)li *ussein((
regarded me as a friend. I , ne! that some others treated me ! ith
a res#e t that seemed honest and unfeigned. Out I didn't onsider
the friendshi# or the res#e t as any #art of being li, ed.

52his is a s#e ial day,5 I said, smiling and trying to shift
ground. 52he #eo#le have been trying for years to get their o! n
#rimary s hool. 2hey've got about eight hundred s hool(age , ids,
but the s hools for miles around are full, and an't ta, e them.
2he #eo#le got their o! n tea hers organised, and found a good
s#ot for a s hool, but the authorities still #ut u# a hell of a
fight.5

5Oe ause it's a slum ...5

5Deah. 2hey're afraid that a s hool ! ould give the #la e a , ind
of legitima y. In theory, the slum doesn't e' ist, be ause it's
not legal and not re ognised.5

57 e are the not(#eo#le,5 >raba, er said ha##ily, 5) nd these are the not(houses, ! here ! e are not(living.5

5) nd no! ! e have a not(s hool to go ! ith it,5 I on luded for him. 52he muni i#ality finally agreed to a , ind of om#romise. 2hey allo! ed them to set u# a tem#orary s hool near here, and there"ll be another one organised soon. Out they"ll have to tear them do! n ! hen the onstru tion is finished.5

57hen ! ill that beE5

57ell, they"ve been building these to! ers for five years already, and there"s #robably about three more years" ! or, in it, maybe more. -o(one"s really sure ! hat"ll ha##en ! hen the buildings are finished. In theory, at least, the slum ! ill be leared.5

52hen all this ! ill be goneE5 <arla as, ed, turning to s! ee# the hutment ity ! ith her ga1e.

5)ll ! ill be gone,5 >raba, er sighed.

5Out today"s a big day. 2he am#aign for the s hool ! as a long one, and it got #retty violent sometimes. -o! the #eo#le have ! on, and they"ll have their s hool, so there"ll be a big elebration tonight. 4ean! hile, one of the men ! ho ! or, s here has finally got a son, after having five daughters in a ro! , so he"s having a s#e ial #re(elebration lun h, and everyone"s invited.5 F?1

52he &illage in the S, yB5 >raba, er laughed.

5\$ust ! here is this #la eE 7here are you ta, ing meE5

5Right here,5 I re#lied, #ointing u#! ards. 5Right u# there.5

7e"d rea hed the #erimeter of the legal slum, and the megalithi

immensity of the tall skyscrapers loomed before us. Soon retiring had been completed to three-quarters of their height, but there were no windows, doors, or fittings on the unfinished buildings. With no flash or reflection or trim to relieve the grey massiveness of the structures, they swallowed light into themselves, extinguished it, and became silos for storing shadows. The hundreds of oval holes that would eventually be windows allowed a kind of cross-sectional view into the construction (an ant farm mixture of men and women and children, on every floor, walking to and from upward and down, about their tasks.) At ground level, the noise was as a never ceasing musical performance: the nervous irritation of generators, the merciless metal-to-metal clanging of hammers, and the whining insistence of drills and grinders.

Swinging lines of saris laden with dishes of gravel on their heads move through all the corridors, from man-made dunes of small stones to the yawning mouths of ceaselessly revolving cement-mixing machines. To my Western eyes, those fluid, feminine figures in soft red, blue, green, and yellow silk were incongruous in the physical turmoil of the construction site. Details, from watching them through the months, that they were indispensable to the work. They carried the great bundles of stone and steel and cement on their slender backs, one round dish full at a time. The uppermost floors hadn't been completed, but the framework of upright, transom, and truss girders was already in place and even there, thirty-five storeys into the sky, women worked beside the men. They were simple people from simple villages, most of them, but their view of the great city was unparalleled, for they were building the tallest structures in Bombay.

Tallest buildings in all India, I remember said with a gesture of envious, proprietary pride. He lived in the illegal slum, and had nothing whatsoever to do with the construction, but he boasted about the buildings as if they were his own design.

Well, the tallest buildings in Bombay, anyway, I corrected.

"You'll get a good view from up there. They're having lunch on the
platform (third floor.)"

"... there?" Carla said through an expression of uneasiness.
"F?F"

"No problem, Miss Carla. They are not talking to you, this building.
They are travelling first class, in that very fine lift."

"Rababa," he pointed to the freight elevator attached to the outside
of the building in a yell, "steel frame!" She looked at him as the
platform moved and rattled upwards on heavy rollers with loads of
men and equipment.

"Oh, yes," Carla said. "No! I feel great about it."

"I feel great, too, Miss Carla," Rababa agreed, his smile huge
as he tugged at her sleeve and pulled her toward the elevator.
"Some, I feel ill about the lifts on the next run. They are a
beautiful buildings, yes?"

"I don't, no." They looked like monuments to something that died,
she muttered to me as she followed him. "Something very unusual
... like ... the human spirit, for example."

"The other men who ran the freight elevator shouted safety
instructions at us, gruff in their self-importance. They limped
onto the platform with several other men and women, and
a wheelbarrow containing tools and barrels of rivets. The
driver blew a shrill blast on his metal whistle and threw the
lever that activated the powerful generators, controlling our
ascent. The motor roared, the platform shuddered, throwing us at
the handrails (handles attached to the uprights, and the elevator
groaned slowly upwards. There was no cage surrounding the
platform, only a yellow wire mesh at waist height around the three
open sides. In a few seconds, I was here fifty, eighty, a hundred

metres off the ground.

"No! do you like it?" I shouted.

"I'm scared out of my brain!" she shouted back, her dark eyes shining. "It's great!"

"Are you afraid of heights?"

"Only when I'm on them!" I hope you got a reservation, at this goddamn restaurant of yours? What are you doing eating lunch here, anyway? Don't you think they should finish the building first?"

"They're working on the top floors now. This elevator is constantly in use. It's not usually available for the workers to use. It's reserved for the barrels and building materials and stuff. It's a long climb, about thirty flights of stairs every day, and it gets fairly tricky in places. A lot of the people who work on these upper floors stay up here most of the time. They live up here. Eat, drink, and sleep. They've got farm animals and, uh, hens and everything. Goats for milk, and chickens for eggs, everything they need is sent up to them. It's sort of like a base camp that mountaineers use when they climb Everest."

"The village in the sky?" she shouted back.

"You got it."

The elevator stopped at the third floor, and I stumbled out onto a concrete surface that sprouted columns of steel rods and wires like metal needles. It was a vast, cavernous space, divided by distant columns and anchored by a flat, concrete ceiling adorned with a series of pipes. Very flat, like a grey, which gave a startling vividness to the human and animal figures grouped on the far side of the floor. In an area

around one of the pillars! as fenced off! with! i, er and bamboo for use as an animal pen. Straw and hessian! as strewn about to serve as bedding for the goats, chickens, cats, and dogs that foraged amid discarded food scraps and rubbish in the pen. Rolled blankets and mattresses, for the people! who slept there, were heaped around another pillar. The other pillar had been designated as a play area for children, with a few games and toys and small mats scattered for their use.

Johnny asked the crowd of people, "Is that a great feast as being laid out on clean reed mats. I hope banana leaves served as plates." A team of women served out servings of saffron rice, alu bhaji, kheema, bhajee, and other foods. A battery of kerosene stoves stood nearby, and more food was cooking there. We washed our hands in a drum of water and joined the others, sitting on the floor between Johnny and Raba, her friend Ashore. The food was much more plentiful than any available in restaurants in the city, and much more delicious. As customary, the women had their own banquet, laid out some five metres away. Asha was the only female in our group of twenty men.

"Are you liking the party?" Johnny asked Asha as the first course of foods was being re-laid by the second.

"It's great," she replied. "Damn nice food. Damn nice place to eat it."

"Here is the new daddy!" Johnny called out. "Some here, Dili. Meet Miss Asha, a friend of mine! Who has come to eat with us."

Dili bowed low! with his hands pressed together in greeting, and then moved away, smiling shyly, to supervise the preparation of tea at the large stoves. He worked as a rigger on the site. The site manager had given him the day off to organise the feast for his family and friends. His hut was on the legal side of the slum, but close to my own across the fire. F?H

Oeside the ! omen"s ban=uet area, +ust beyond Dili#"s tea stoves,
t! o men ! ere attem#ting to lean something from the ! all.) ! ord
that someone had #ainted there ! as still legible beneath their
s rubbing. It ! as the ! ord S)>-), ! ritten in large /nglish
a#itals.

57hat is thatE5 I as, ed \$ohnny 8igar. 5I"ve seen it every! here
lately.5

5It"s bad, ; inbaba,5 he s#at out, rossing himself
su#erstitiously. 5It"s the name of a thief, a goonda. *e"s a bad
fello! . *e"s been doing evil things all over the ity. *e"s been
brea, ing into houses, and stealing, and even , illing.5

5Did you say , illingE5 <arla as, ed. 2he s, in on her li#s ! as
tight, and her +a! ! as set in a hard, grim line.

5DesB5 \$ohnny insisted. 59irst it ! as +ust ! ords, in #osters and
su h, and ! riting on the ! alls. -o! , it has ome to murder((old
blood murder. 2! o #eo#le ! ere , illed in their o! n houses +ust
last night.5

5*e is so ra1y, this Sa#na, he uses a _girl"s name,5 \$eetendra
sneered.

It ! as a good #oint. 2he ! ord sa#na, meaning dream, ! as feminine,
and a fairly ommon girl"s name.

5-ot so ra1y,5 >raba, er disagreed, his eyes gleaming but his
e' #ression grave. 5*e tells that he is the , ing of thieves. *e
tal, s about ma, ing it ! ar, to hel# the #oor #eo#le, and , illing
the ri h #eo#les. 2his is ra1y, yes, but it is the , ind of a
ra1y that many #eo#le ! ill agree ! ith, inside the =uiet of their
o! n heads.5

57 ho is heE5 I as, ed.

5- obody , no! s ! ho he is, ; in,5 <ishore said, his)meri an(a ented /nglish, learned from tourists, flo! ing in a li=uid dra! l. 5) lot of #eo#le are tal, ing about him, but nobody I s#o, e to has ever seen him. >eo#le say he"s the son of a ri h man. 2hey say he"s from Delhi, and that he got ut out of his inheritan e. Out some #eo#le also say he"s a devil. Some #eo#le thin, that it"s not a man at all, but a , ind of organisation, li, e. 2here are #osters stu , u# around the #la e, #osters telling the thieves and the #oor buggers in the 1ho#ad#attis to do ra1y things.)nd li, e \$ohnny said, no! t! o #eo#le have been murdered. 2he name Sa#na is getting #ainted on ! alls and streets all over Oombay. 2he o#s are as, ing a lot of =uestions. I thin, they"re s ared.5

52he ri h #eo#les are s ared, too,5 >raba, er added. 52hey ! ere ri h #eo#le, those unlu , y fello! s, , illed in their homes. 2his Sa#na fello! is ! riting his name in /nglish letters, not the *indi ! riting. 2his is an edu(F?? ated fello! .)nd ! ho #ainted that name here, in this #la eE 2he #eo#les are al! ays here, al! ays ! or, or slee#, but nobody has seen ! ho #ainted his name.)n edu ated ghostB Ri h #eo#les are also s ared. -ot so ra1y, this Sa#na fello! .5

54ada hudhB >agalB5 \$ohnny s#at again. _4otherfu , erB _4admanB 5*e"s trouble, this Sa#na, and the trouble ! ill be ours, you , no! , be ause trouble is the only #ro#erty that #oor fello! s li, e us are allo! ed to o! n.5

5I thin, ! e might hange the sub+e t, guys,5 I inter+e ted, loo, ing at <arla. *er fa e ! as #ale, and her eyes ! ere ! ide ! ith ! hat seemed to be fright. 5)re you o, ayE5

5I"m fine,5 she ans! ered =ui , ly. 54aybe that elevator ride ! as s arier than I thought.5

5Sorry for #roblem, 4iss <arla,5 >raba, er a#ologised, his fa e
#in hed in a soli itous fro! n. 59rom no! , only ha##y tal, ing. - o
more tal, ing about , illing and murders and blood all over the
houses, and all that.5

52hat should over it, >rabu,5 I muttered through len hed teeth,
glaring at him.

Several young ! omen ame to lear the used banana leaves a! ay,
and lay out small dishes of s! eet rabdi dessert for us. 2hey
stared at <arla ! ith fran, fas ination.

5*er legs are too thin,5 one of them said, in *indi. 5Dou an see
them, through the #ants.5

5)nd her feet are too big,5 said another.

5Out her hair is very soft, and a good, bla , Indian colour,5
said a third.

5*er eyes are the colour of stin, (! eed,5 said the first ! ith a
ontem#tuous sniff.

5Oe areful, sisters,5 I laughed, s#ea, ing in *indi. 54y friend
s#ea, s #erfe t *indi, and she understands everything you're
saying.5

2he ! omen rea ted ! ith sho , ed s e#ti ism, hattering amongst
themselves. @ne of them stoo#ed to stare into <arla"s fa e, and
as, ed her loudly if she s#o, e *indi.

54y legs may be too thin, and my feet may be too big,5 <arla
re#lied in fluent *indi, 5but there"s nothing ! rong ! ith my
hearing.5

2he ! omen shrie, ed in delight and ro! ded around her, laughing
ha##ily. 2hey #leaded ! ith her to +oin them, s! ee#ing her a! ay to

the woman's banishment. I had hated her for some time, surprised to see her smile and even laugh out loud in the company of the women and the few

young girls. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. It was the beauty of a desert landscape: a loveliness that filled my

eyes, and rushed me into silent, unbreathing awe.

Looking at her there, in the village in the city, watching her laugh, it showed me to think that I'd deliberately avoided her for so many months. I was no less surprised by how easily they reached out to stroke her hair or to take her hands in their own. I'd never realized her to be aloof and almost cold. In less than a minute, those women were more familiar with her than I'd dared to be in more than a year of friendship. I remembered the smile, the smile she'd given me, in my hut. I remembered the smell of cinnamon and yasmine in her hair, and the freshness of her lips, like sweet grapes so open to the summer sun.

Sea arrived, and I took my glass to stand near one of the huge windows that looked out over the slum. Far below, the tattered roofs of the ghetto spread out and from the construction site to the very edge of the sea. The narrow lanes, obscured by ragged overhangs, were only partially visible and seemed more like tunnels than streets. Smoke rose in drifts from cooking fires, and stuttered on a sluggish sea and breeze to disperse over a scattering of boats that fished the muddy shore.

Inland from the slum there were a large number of tall apartment buildings, the expensive homes of the middle class. From my perch, I looked down at the fabulous gardens of palms and cypresses on the roofs of some, and the miniature slums that servants of the rich had built for themselves on the roofs of others. Clouds and mists shrouded every building, even the nearest. I'd come to think of it as beautiful, that decline and decay, revealing across the facade of the grandest designs: that stain of the end, spreading

a cross every bright beginning in Bombay.

"You're right, it is a good view," Carla said quietly as she joined me.

"I come up here at night, sometimes, when everyone's asleep," I said, just as quietly. "It's one of my favourite places to be alone."

We were silent, for a while, watching the robots hover and drift over the slum.

"So, here's your favourite place to be alone?"

"I don't like to be alone," she said flatly, and then turned in time to see my expression. "What's the matter?"

"I guess I'm surprised. I just, well, I thought of you as someone who's

good at being alone. I don't mean that in a bad way. I just think of you as ... sort of aloof, sort of above it all."

"Our aim is off," she smiled. "Hello! It all, I could be more like

it."

"Well, that's like in one day."

"What?"

"That's that like in one day that I've seen a big smile. You were smiling like with the girls before, and I was thinking that it's the first time I've ever seen you really smile."

"Well, of course I smile."

"Don't get me wrong. I like it. Not (smiling) can be very

attractive. Gimme an honest frown over a false smile, any day. It looks right on you. Doubt, I don't, no, sort of satisfied, not smiling, or maybe honest is the right word. It looks right on you, somehow. But I thought it did, until I saw you smiling today.

Of course I smile, she repeated, her brows raising in a frown, while her tightly pressed lips rested with the smile.

They were silent again, staring at each other instead of the view. Her eyes were deep (green, flecked with gold, and they shone with the luminous intensity that's usually a sign of suffering or intelligence, or both.) She leaned and stirred her shoulder-length hair (very dark hair, the same black, brown as her eyebrows and long lashes. Her lips were a fine, unainted pink, started to reveal the tip of her tongue between even, white teeth. She leaned against the windowless frame with her arms folded. The tides of the breeze rippled through the loose silks of her blouse, revealing and concealing her figure.

What were you and the girls laughing about?

She raised one eyebrow in the familiar, sardonic half-smile.

Are you making small talk with me?

Maybe I am, I laughed. I think you're making me nervous. Sorry.

Don't worry about it. I take it as a compliment (to both of us. If you really want to, no, it's mostly about you.)

Are?

Yeah, they were talking about you hugging a bear.

Oh, that. Well, it's as pretty funny, I guess.

One of the ! omen ! as imitating the loo, you had on your face, just before you did it, and they raised u# over that. Out the really funny thing to them ! as figuring out ! hy you did it.

Everyone too, turns at F?8
guessing ! hy. Radha((she said she"s your neighbour, rightE5

Deah, she"s Satish"s mother.5

Well, Radha said you hugged the bear because you felt sorry for it. That got a big laugh.5

"I'll bet," I mumbled dryly. "What did you sayE5

I said you #robably did it because you're a guy ! ho"s interested in everything, and ! ants to , no! everything.5

It"s funny you say that.) girlfriend of mine once told me, a long time ago, that she ! as attracted to me because I ! as interested in everything. She said she left me for the same reason.5

That I didn't tell <arla ! as that the girlfriend had described me as interested in everything, and committed to nothing. It still ran, led. It still hurt. It ! as still true.

Are you ... are you interested in helping me ! ith somethingE5
<arla as, ed. *er tone ! as suddenly serious, #ortentous.

So that"s it, I thought. That"s ! hy she came to see me. She ! ants something. The s#iteful at of ! ounded #ride ar hed behind my eyes. She didn't miss me((she ! anted something from me. Out she had come, she ! as as, ing me, not someone else, and there ! as salvage in that. ; oo, ing into those serious green eyes, I sensed that it ! as rare for her to as, anyone for hel#. I also had the feeling that a great deal, maybe too mu h, ! as balanced in it.

5Sure,5 I said, careful not to hesitate for too long. 57hat do you ! ant me to doE5

She s! allo! ed hard, #ushing #ast an obvious relu tan e, and s#o, e in a rush of ! ords.

52here"s this girl, a friend of mine. *er name"s ; isa. She"s got herself in a very bad situation. She started ! or, ing at this #la e((a #la e for foreign all girls.)ny! ay, ; isa messed u#. -o! she o! es money, a lot of it, and the 4adame ! ho runs the #la e ! here she ! or, s ! on"t let her go. I ! ant to get her out of there.5

5I don"t have mu h, but I thin, ...5

5It"s not the money. I"ve got the money. Out the ! oman ! ho runs the #la e has ta, en a li, ing to ; isa. /ven if ! e #ay, she ! on"t let her go. I , no! ! hat she"s li, e. It"s #ersonal no! . 2he money"s +ust an e' use. 7hat she really ! ants is to brea, ; isa, a little at a time, until there"s nothing left. She hates her, be ause ; isa"s beautiful and bright and she"s got F?9

guts. She ! on"t let her leave.5

5Dou ! ant us to brea, her out of thereE5

5-ot e' a tly.5

5I , no! some #eo#le,5 I said, thin, ing of)bdullah Zaheri and his mafia friends. 52hey"re not afraid of a fight. 7e ould as, them to hel#.5

5-o, I"ve got friends here, too. 2hey ould get her out of there easy enough, but that ! ouldn"t sto# the heavies from finding her, and ta, ing it out on her later. 2hey don"t mess around. 2hey use a id. ; isa ! ouldn"t be the first girl to get a id thro! n in her fa e be ause she got on the ! rong side of 4adame . hou. 7e an"t

ris, it. Whatever I do, it has to be in a way that convinces her to leave; I'm alone, forever.

I was uneasy about it. I sensed that there was more to it than Carla was telling me.

Did you say to Adame, how?

Des (have you heard of her?)

But I nodded. I don't know how much of it to believe. People say some pretty wild and dirty things about her.

He wild things ... I don't know ... but the dirty things are all true, take it from me.

I didn't feel any better about it.

Why doesn't she just run away, this friend of yours? Why doesn't she get on a plane, and get the hell back, to where did you say she came from?

She's American. So, if I could make her go back to the States, there wouldn't be a problem. Out she won't go back. She won't leave Bombay. She'll never leave Bombay. She's a Hun, i.e. That's a big part of it. Out there's more than that (stuff from her past, stuff she can't face back there. So she won't go. I've tried to talk her into it, but it's no good. She ... she just won't.) And I can't say that I blame her. I've got issues of my own (things in my past I'd rather not go back to. Things I won't go back to.)

And you've got a plan (to get this girl out, I mean?)

Des. I want you to pretend that you're someone from the American embassy, some kind of consulate officer. I've already set it up. You won't have to do much. I'll do most of the talking. We'll tell them that Lisa's father is some big honcho in America with ties to the government, and that you've had orders to get her out

of there and , ee# an eye on her. I'll have all that straight

before you even ! al, in the door.5 FC%

5It sounds #retty fu11y to me, <arla. Dou thin, that'll be enoughE5

She too, a bundle of beedies from her #o , et and lit t! o of them ! ith a igarette lighter, holding the small igarettes in one hand and #laying the flame over them ! ith the other. She #assed one to me, and #uffed dee#ly on her o! n before ans! ering me.

5I thin, so. It's the best thing I've ome u# ! ith. I tal, ed it over ! ith ; isa, and she says she thin, s it'll ! or, . If 4adame . hou gets her money, and if she believes you're from the embassy, and if she's onvin ed that she'll get into trouble ! ith the embassy or the government if she hassles ; isa any more, I thin, she'll leave her alone. 2here's a lot of ifs in there, I , no! .) lot of it really de#ends on you.5

5It de#ends on her, too, this ... 4adame. Do you thin, she'll believe it((believe _meE5

57e'll have to #lay it e' a tly right. She's more unning than lever, but she's not stu#id.5

5Do you thin, I an do thisE5

5*o! "s your)meri an a entE5 she as, ed ! ith a little embarrassed laugh.

5I ! as an a tor on e,5 I muttered, 5in another life.5

52hat's greatB5 she said, rea hing out to tou h my forearm. *er long, slender fingers felt ool against my ! arm s, in.

5I don't , no! ,5 I fro! ned. 5It's a lot of res#onsibility if it

doesn't go do! n right. If something ha##ens to the girl, or to you ...5

5She's my friend. It's my idea. 2he res#onsibility"s mine.5

5I'd feel better about it, you , no! , +ust fighting my ! ay in there, and fighting my ! ay out again. 2his embassy thing((there"s so many ! ays it ould go ! rong.5

5I ! ouldn't as, you if I didn't thin, it ! as the right ! ay to go, and if I ! asn't sure you ould do it, ; in.5

She fell silent, ! aiting. I let her ! ait, but I , ne! the ans! er already. She might've thought I ! as ! eighing it u#, trying to ma, e u# my mind. In fa t, I ! as only thin, ing about ! hy I ! as going to do it. Is it for herE I as, ed myself.)m I ommitted, or +ust interestedE 7hy did I hug the bearE

I smiled.

57hen do ! e do thisE5

She smiled ba , .

5In a ou#le of days. I've got to do a bit of stuff first, to set it all u#.5 FC1

She thre! the finished beedie a! ay, and too, a ste# to! ards me. I thin, she might've , issed me, but +ust then a frightened lamour of shouting and shrie, s started u# among the #eo#le, and they ran to +oin us at the ! indo! s. In the +am of bodies, >raba, er #ushed his head through, under my arm and ne' t to <arla.

54uni i#alityB5 he shouted. 50.4.8. is omingB Oombay 4uni i#al 8or#oration. ; oo, thereB5

57hat is itE 7hat"s ha##eningE5 <arla as, ed. *er voi e ! as all

but lost in the shouts and screams.

It's the council. They're going to tear down some houses, I called back, my lips close to her ear. They do this every month or so. They're trying to bring the slum under control, to stop it from spreading outside the edge, there, where it meets the street.

We looked down near the main street to see four, five, six large, dark blue lorries rolling into an open area that was as a kind of no man's land, enclosed by the present of the slum. The heavy lorries were covered with canvas tarpaulins. We couldn't see inside them, but because they contained squads of cops, twenty or more men to each lorry, they often tray (lorry, loaded with council lorries and their equipment, drove between the large lorries and stopped near the huts. Several officers limbed down from the lorries and deployed their men in two rows.

The council lorries, themselves mostly slum dwellers from other slums, left from their lorries, and set about their task of demolition. Each man had a rope and grappling hook, that he swung onto the roof of a hut until it caught fast. He then tugged on the rope, pulling the fragile hut. The people had just enough time to gather the bare essentials (babies, money, papers. Everything else was tumbled and rained into the street, where stoves and cooking pots, bags and bedding, clothes and children's toys. People scattered in panic. The lorries stopped some of them, and then marched a few young men away to the waiting lorries.

The people at our window were silent as they waited. From our vantage point, we could see the destruction far below, but we couldn't hear even the loudest noise of it. Somehow, the soundlessness of that methodical, soaring obliteration struck us all. I hadn't noticed the wind until then. It was a moaning wail in that eerie quiet. I knew that all through the thirty-five floors of the building, above and below us, other people stared mute witness, just as we did.

)lthough the houses of construction ! or, ers in the legal slum ! ere safe, all ! or, on the site sto##ed in sym#athy. 2he ! or, ers understood that ! hen the building ! as finished it ! ould be their o! n homes that ! ould lie in ruins. 2hey , ne! that the ritual they"d all seen so many times before ! ould be #laid out for the last time: the ghetto ! ould be gutted and burned, and a ar #ar, for limousines ! ould ta, e its #la e.

I loo, ed at the fa es around meó fa es stru , ! ith om#assion and dread. In the eyes of some, I sa! smoulders of shame for ! hat the oun il"s #o! er had for ed too many of us to thin, : 2han, God ... 2han, God it"s not me ...

5Great lu , , your house is safe, ; inbabaß Dours and mine alsoß >raba, er said as ! e ! at hed the o#s and oun il ! or, ers limb ba , onto their tru , s and drive a! ay. 2hey"d s ythed and smashed a s! ath, one hundred metres long and ten metres ! ide, at the north(eastern orner of the illegal slum.)bout si' ty houses had been obliterated, the homes of at least t! o hundred #eo#le. 2he entire o#eration had ta, en less than t! enty minutes.

57here ! ill they goE5 <arla as, ed =uietly.

54ost of it ! ill be ba , again by this time tomorro! . - e' t month they'll ome and , no , them do! n again, or another bun h of huts +ust li, e them in another #art of the slum. 2hen that'll be rebuilt. Out it"s still a big loss.)ll their things have been smashed u#. 2hey have to buy ne! bamboo and mats and stuff, to ma, e ne! houses.)nd #eo#le got arrested((! e might not see them again for months.5

5I don't , no! ! hat s ares me more,5 she de lared, 5the madness that smashes #eo#le do! n, or their ability to endure it.5

4ost of the #eo#le had left the ! indo! , but <arla and I remained as lose together as ! e"d been in the #ush and shove of the ro! d. 4y arm ! as around her shoulder. @n the ground, t! enty

floors below, she began to rise, through the rubble of their homes. Canvas and plastic shelters were already being erected for the elderly, the babies, and the smallest children. She turned to face me, and I kissed her.

The taut body of her lips dissolved on mine in sensations of flesh to flesh. There was such sad tenderness in it that, for a second or two, I floated free, and I was adrift in its irresistible tendernesses. I'd thought of Clara as streetwise and tough and almost cold, but that was just a disguise, FCG undisguised vulnerability. The gentle loveliness of it shocked me, and I was the first to pull away.

"I'm sorry. I didn't..." I faltered.

"It's okay," she smiled, leaning away from me with her hands on my chest. "You might be making one of those pretty girls at

the feast jealous."

"Why?"

"Are you saying you don't have a girl here?"

"Of course not. I found."

"I've got to stop listening to Didier," she sighed. "It was his idea. *He thinks you must have a girlfriend here. *He thinks that's the only reason you'd stay in the slum. *He said that's the only reason any foreigner could stay in the slum."

"I don't have a girlfriend, Clara, not here or anywhere. I'm in love with you."

"Of course you're not," she snapped, and it was like a slap.

"I can't help it. For a long time now, I..."

5 Sto# itB5 she interr#ted me again. 5 Dou're notB Dou're notB @h, God, ho! I hate loveB5

5 Dou an"t hate love, <arla,5 I said, laughing gently, and trying to lighten her mood.

5 4aybe not, but you sure as hell an be si , of it. It's su h a huge arrogan e, to love someone, and there"s too mu h of it around. 2here"s too mu h love in the ! orld. Sometimes I thin, that"s ! hat heaven is((a #la e ! here everybody"s ha##y be ause nobody loves anybody else, ever.5

2he ! ind lashed her hair into her fa e, and she #ushed it ba , ! ith both hands, holding it there ! ith her fingers fanned out a ross her forehead. She ! as staring do! n at her feet.

5 7hat the fu , ever ha##ened to good, old, meaningless se' , ! ithout any strings atta hedE5 she ras#ed, her li#s dra! n tightly over her teeth.

It ! asn"t a =uestion, but I ans! ered it any! ay.

5 I'm not ruling that out((as a fall(ba , #osition, so to s#ea, .5

5 ;oo, , I don"t ! ant to be in love,5 she stated, in a softer tone. She raised her eyes to stare into mine. 5 I don"t ! ant anyone to be in love ! ith me. It hasn"t been good to me, the roman e thing.5

5 I don"t thin, it"s , ind to anyone, <arla.5

5 4y #oint, e' a tly.5 FCH

5 Out ! hen it ha##ens, you haven"t got a hoi e. I don"t thin,

it's something any of us do by hoi e.)nd ... I don"t ! ant to

#ut any #ressure on you. I'm +ust in love ! ith you, that"s all.
I"ve been in love ! ith you for a ! hile, and I finally had to say
it. It doesn"t mean you have to do anything about it((or me
either, for that matter.5

5I"m still ... I don"t , no! . I"m +ust ... \$esusß Out I"m ha##y to
_li, e you. I li, e you a lot. I"ll be head over heels in li, e ! ith
you, ; in, if that"s enough.5

*er eyes ! ere honest, and yet I , ne! there ! as a lot she ! asn"t
telling me. *er eyes ! ere brave, and yet she ! as afraid. 7hen I
relented, and smiled at her, she laughed. I laughed, too.

5Is it enough for no! E5

5Sure,5 I lied. 5Sure.5

Out already, li, e the #eo#le in the ghetto, hundreds of feet
belo! , I ! as #i , ing through the smashed houses in my heart, and
rebuilding on the ruin.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Despite the fact that only a handful of people could claim to have seen Madame Chauvith their own eyes, she was the main attraction, Charla assured me, for many of those who visited the palace. Her clients were rich men: wealthy businessmen, politicians, and gangsters. The palace offered them foreign girls (especially, for no Indian girls ever worked there) and elaborate facilities for the realisation of their wildest sexual fantasies. The strangest of those illicit pleasures, devised by Madame Chauversonally, were the subject of show, sed, breathless hisseries throughout the city, but influential contacts and substantial bribes meant that the palace was immune from raids or even police scrutiny. And although there were other places in Bombay that provided equal indulgence and security, none of them were as popular as Madame Chauv's because none had the Madame herself. In the end, that, these men coming to the palace wasn't the skill and loveliness of the women they could have there it was the mystery of the woman they couldn't have (the invisible beauty of Madame Chauv).

People said she was Russian, but that detail, like all the others concerning her private life, seemed to be unverifiable. It was a well-known fact, Charla said, simply because it was the most persistent rumour. One learns the fact that she'd arrived in Delhi during the 1920s, a decade as wild for that city as it was for most Western capitals. The next part of the city was celebrating its thirtieth year, then, and old Delhi its three hundredth. Madame

Chauv, most sources agreed, was entirely (and legend had it that she'd been the mistress of a Congress officer who'd employed her unique beauty to suborn prominent Congress party officials. The Congress party governed India through those years with what seemed to be an unassailable lead in every national poll. Many of the party faithful (and even their enemies) believed that the Congress party would continue to rule the Indian motherland for a hundred years. So over Congress men, therefore, was

#o! er over the nation.

2he gossi# about her years in Delhi #ro! led from s andals and sui ides to #oliti al murder. <arla said that she"d heard so many different versions of the stories, from su h a ! ide variety of #eo#le, she began to thin, that the truth, ! hatever it might"ve been, ! asn"t really im#ortant to them. 4adame . hou had be ome a , ind of #ortmanteau figure: #eo#le #a , ed the details of their o! n obsessions into her life. @ne said she #ossessed a fortune in #re ious gems that she , e#t in a hessian sa , , another tal, ed ! ith authority about her addi tion to various drugs, and a third ! his#ered of satani rites and annibalism.

5>eo#le say a lot of really ! eird stuff about her, and I thin, some of it"s +ust ra#, but the bottom line is, she"s dangerous,5 <arla said. 5Devious, and dangerous.5

5A(huh.5

5I"m not , idding. Don"t underestimate her. 7hen she moved from Delhi to Oombay, si' years ago, there ! as a murder trial, and she ! as at the entre of it. 2! o very im#ortant guys ended u# dead in her Delhi >ala e, both of them ! ith their throats ut. @ne of them ha##ened to be a #oli e ins#e tor. 2he trial fell a#art ! hen one ! itness against her disa##eared, and another ! as found hanging from the door! ay of his house. She left Delhi to set u# sho# in Oombay, and ! ithin the first si' months there ! as another murder, only a blo , a! ay from the >ala e, and a lot of #eo#le onne ted her ! ith it. Out she"s got so mu h stuff on so many #eo#le((stuff that goes all the ! ay to the to#. 2hey an"t tou h her. She an do #retty mu h ! hat she li, es, be ause she , no! s she"ll get a! ay ! ith it. If you ! ant to get out of this, no! "s your han e.5

7e ! ere in a Oumblebee, one of the ubi=uitous bla , (and(yello!
9iat ta' is, travelling south through the Steel Oa1aar. 2raffi ! as heavy. *undreds of ! ooden hand arts, longer and taller and ! ider than a ar ! hen fully laden, trundled along bet! een buses

and trucks, pushed by barefoot porters, sit men to each cart. The main streets of the Steel Road were crammed with small and medium shops. They sold every kind of metal householdware, from kerosene stoves to stainless steel sinks, and most of the cast iron and sheet metal products required by builders, shop fitters, and decorators. The shops themselves were adorned with gleaming metal plates, strung in such brilliantly polished lengths and such

FC7

5@h, shit, ma, e my day.5

5*ey, come on! she hid, curling her lip in an affable smirk, .
*er a ent, the a ent I'd come to love and consider the most
interesting in the world, gave every world a rounded resonance
that thrilled me. The music of that a ent! as Italian, its shape
! as German, its humour and its attitude! here) merican, and its
colour! as Indian. Being so fussy about dressing doesn't, the way
you do, is a kind of vanity, you know! . It's fairly common, I
too.5

5I don't dress do! n. I must hate clothes.5

5- o you don't, you love clothes.5

5That is this! I've got one pair of boots, one pair of jeans, one
shirt, two (shirts, and a couple of lungis. That's it! (my whole
wardrobe. If I'm not wearing it, it's hanging on a nail in my
hut.5

5That's my point. You love clothes so much that you can't bear to
wear anything but the few things that feel just right.5

I fidgeted with the rilly collar of the shirt.

5Well, Carla, these clothes are a long way from just right. *o!

5Come you've got so many men's clothes at your place, any way!
You've got more men's clothes than I have.5

5The last two guys who lived with me left in a kind of a hurry.5
FC8

5So much of a hurry that they left their clothes behind!5

5Des.5

57hyE5

5@ne of them ... got very busy,5 she said =uietly.

5Ousy doing ! hatE5

5*e ! as brea,ing a mess of la! s, so he #robably ! ouldn't ! ant me to tal, about it.5

5Did you ,i , him outE5

5-o.5

She said it flatly, but ! ith su h a lear sense of regret that I let it go.

5)nd ... the other guyE5

5Dou don't ! ant to , no! .5

I did ! ant to , no! , but she turned her fa e a! ay to stare out the ! indo! , and there ! as a finality in the gesture that ! arned and #rohibited. I'd heard that <arla had on e lived ! ith someone named)hmed, an)fghan. >eo#le didn't tal, about it mu h, and I'd assumed that they'd bro, en u# years before. In the year that I , ne! her, she'd lived alone in the a#artment, and I hadn't realised until that moment ho! dee#ly that image of her had insinuated itself into my sense of ! ho she ! as and ho! she lived. Des#ite her #rotest that she didn't li, e to be alone, I'd thought of her as one of those #eo#le ! ho never lived ! ith others: someone ! ho let #eo#le visit or even stay overnight, but never more than that.

I loo, ed at the ba , of her head, at the small #art of her #rofile, at the barely #er e#tible bum# of her breasts beneath the green sha! l, and the long, thin fingers ma, ing #rayer in her la#, and I ouldn't imagine her living ! ith someone. Orea, fast and bare ba , s, bathroom noises and bad moods, domesti and demi(

married: it ! as impossible to see her in that. >erversely, I found it easier to imagine)hmed, the)fghan roommate I'd never met, than it ! as to imagine her as anything but alone and ... om#lete.

7e sat in silen e for five minutes, a silen e alibrated by the

slo! metronome of the ta' i's meter.)n orange banner hanging from the dashboard of the ar #ro laimed that the driver, li, e many others in Oombay, ! as from Attar >adesh, a large and #o#ulous state in India's north(east. @ur slo! #rogress through the traffi +am gave him many han es to study us in the rear(vision mirror. *e ! as intrigued. <arla had s#o, en to him in fluent *indi, giving him #re ise, street(by(street FC9 dire tions to the >ala e. 7e ! ere foreigners ! ho behaved li, e lo als. *e de ided to test us.

5Sister(fu , ing traffi B5 he muttered in street *indi, as if to himself, but his eyes never left the mirror. 52he ! hole fu , ing ity is onsti#ated today.5

5) t! enty(ru#ee ti# might ma, e a good la' ative,5 <arla fired ba , , in *indi. 57hat are you doing, renting this ta' i by the hourE Get a move on, brotherB5

5Des, missB5 the driver re#lied in /nglish, through delighted laughter. *e a##lied himself ! ith more energy to bullying his ! ay through the traffi .

5So ! hat did ha##en to himE5 I as, ed her.

52o ! hoE5

52o the other guy you lived ! ith((the one ! ho didn't brea, a mess of la! s.5

5*e died, if you must , no! ,5 she said, her teeth len hed.

5So ... ho! did he dieE5

52hey say he #oisoned himself.5

52hey sayE5

5Deah,5 she sighed, loo, ing a! ay to let her eyes drift in the shuffle of #eo#le on the street.

7e drove in silen e for a fe! moments, and then I had to s#ea, .

57hi h ... ! hi h one of them o! ned this outfit I'm ! earingE 2he la! (brea, ing one, or the dead oneE5

52he dead one.5

5@ ... , ay.5

5I bought it for him to get buried in.5

5ShitB5

5Shit ... ! hatE5 she demanded, turning to fa e me again, and

fro! ning hard.

5Shit ... nothing ... but remind me to get the name of your dry leaner.5

57e didn't need it. 2hey buried him in ... in a different outfit of lothes. I bought the suit, but in the end ! e didn't use it.5

5I see ...5

5I told you that you didn't ! ant to , no! .5

5-o, no, it's o, ay, I mumbled, and in fact I felt a relief,
a relief that the former lover was as dead, gone, no competition to me. I was too
young, then, to realize that dead lovers are the toughest rivals.
Still, Carla, I don't mean to be silly, but you've got to admit
it's just a tad eerie. You're off on a dangerous mission, and I'm
sitting here in a dead guy's burial suit.

5You're just being superstitious.

5-o I'm not.

5Des you are.

5I'm not superstitious.

5Des you are.

5-o I'm not.

5Of course you are! she said, giving me her first real smile
since she'd started in the tail. Everyone in the hole world is
superstitious.

5I don't want to fight about it. It might be bad luck.

5Don't worry, she laughed. I'll be okay. So, here are your
business cards. Madame Houliès will collect them. She'll ask you
for one. And she'll see it, in case she needs a favour from you.
Out if it ever comes to that, she'll find that you're long gone
from the embassy.

The cards were made of pearl-white, textured, linen paper, and
the words were embossed in light blue, italics. They declared
that Gilbert was, as a consular undersecretary at the embassy
of the United States of America.

5Gilbert I grunted.

5So ! hatE5

5So, this ta' i rashes, and they gouge my body out of the

! re , age, ! earing these lothes, and they identify me as Gilbert.
I'm not feeling any better about this, <arla, I have to say.5

57ell, you'll have to settle for Gilbert at the moment. 2here really is a Gilbert >ar, er at the embassy. *is tour of duty in Oombay finishes today. 2hat's ! hy ! e #i , ed him((he goes ba , to the States tonight. So everything ! ill he , out o, ay. I don't thin, she'll be he , ing u# on you too mu h, any! ay. 4aybe a #hone all, but she might not even do that. If she ! ants to get in tou h ! ith you, she'll do it through me. She had some trouble ! ith the Oritish embassy last year. It ost her #lenty.)nd a German di#lomat got into a real mess at the >ala e a fe! months ago. She had to all in a lot of dues to over that u#. 2he embassies are the only #eo#le ! ho an really hurt her, so she ! on't be #ushing it. \$ust be #olite and firm ! hen you s#ea, to her.)nd s#ea, some *indi. She'll F71 e' #e t it.)nd it'll smooth over any trouble ! ith your a ent. 2hat's one of the reasons ! hy I as, ed you to hel# me ! ith this, you , no! E Dou've #i , ed u# a lot of *indi, for someone ! ho's only been here a year.5

59ourteen months,5 I orre ted her, feeling slighted by her shorter estimate. 52! o months ! hen I first got to Oombay, si' months in >aba, er's village, and no! nearly si' months in the slum. 9ourteen months.5

5Des ... o, ay ... fourteen months.5

5I thought no(one got to meet this 4adame . hou,5 I said, ho#ing to shift the #u11led, un omfortable fro! n from her features. 5Dou said she , e#t herself hidden a! ay, and never tal, ed to anyone.5

That's true, but it's a little more complicated than that, I lied, softly.) meditation of memories clouded her eyes for a moment, but then she concentrated again with obvious effort. She lives on the top floor, and has everything she needs up there. She never goes out. She has two servants who bring food and clothes and stuff up to her. She can move around the building without being seen because there's a lot of hidden passages, stairs and staircases. She can look in on most of the rooms through the doorway mirrors or metal air vents. She likes to watch. Sometimes she talks to people through a screen. Dougan can't see her, but she can see you.

So how does anyone know that she looks like E5

*er photographs her.

*er watch E5

She has photographs taken of herself.) none, every month or so. She gives them out to favoured clients.

It's pretty weird, I muttered, not really interested in Madame

. Now, but wanting to go on talking. I watched her red lips form each word, missed only days before (and her smiling mouth as a sublime performance of perfect flesh. She could've been reading from a month-old newspaper, and I would've been just as delighted to watch her face, her eyes, and her lips as she talked. Why does she do it?

Do watch she asked, her eyes narrowing with the question.

Why does she hide herself away like that?

I don't think anyone knows. She took out two beedies, lit them, and gave me one. *er hands appeared to be trembling. It's like I was saying before (there's so much talk about her. I've

heard #eo#le say she ! as horribly disfigured in an a ident, and she hides her fa e be ause of F7F
it. 2hey say the #hotos are retou hed to over u# the s ars. I've heard #eo#le say she has le#rosy or some other disease. @ne friend of mine says she doesn't e' ist at all. *e says it's +ust a lie, a , ind of ons#ira y, to hide ! ho really runs the #la e and ! hat goes on there.5

57hat do you thin, E5

5l ... I've s#o, en to her, through the s reen. I thin, she"s so in redibly, #sy ho#athi ally vain that she, she sort of hates herself for getting older. I thin, she an"t bear to be less than #erfe t.) lot of #eo#le say she ! as beautiful. Really, you"d be sur#rised.) lot of #eo#le say that. In her #hotos she hasn"t aged #ast t! enty(seven or thirty. 2here aren"t any lines or ! rin, les. 2here"s no shado! s under the eyes. /very bla , hair is in its #la e. I thin, she"s so in love ! ith her o! n beauty, she"ll never let anyone see her as she really is. I thin, she"s ... it"s li, e she"s mad ! ith love for herself. I thin, that even if she lives to be ninety, those monthly #hotos ! ill still sho! that same thirty(year(old blan, .5

5*o! do you , no! so mu h about herE5 I as, ed. 5*o! did you meet herE5

5l"m a fa ilitator. It ! as #art of my +ob.5

52hat doesn"t tell me a lot.5

5*o! mu h do you need to , no! E5

It ! as a sim#le =uestion, and there ! as a sim#le ans! er((I love you, and I ! ant to , no! everything((but there ! as a hard edge to her voi e and a old light in her eyes, and I faltered.

5l"m not trying to #ry, <arla. I didn"t , no! it ! as su h a tou hy area. I've , no! n you for more than a year and, o, ay, I haven"t

seen you every day, or even every month, but I've never asked you what you do, or how you make your living. I don't think that

qualifies me as the nosy type.

"But people together," she said, relaxing a little, "and I make sure they're having the right amount of fun to seal a deal. I get paid to make people in the deal-making mood, and give them what they want. Some of them are quite a few of them, as it happens. I want to spend time at Adams House. The real question is why people are so crazy about her. She's dangerous. I think she's completely insane. Out people would do almost anything to meet her."

"What do you think, Ed?"

She sighed, exasperated.

"I can't tell you. It's not just the sex thing. Sure, the prettiest foreign girls in Bombay are for her, and she trains them in some very weird specialties, but people would still come to her even if there weren't any gorgeous girls there. I don't get it. I've done what people want, and I've taken them to the Adams. A few of them even got to meet her in person, like I did, through the screen, but I've never been able to figure it out. They come out of the Adams like they've had an audience with Joan of Arc. They're high on it. Out not me. She gives me the creeps, and she always has."

"You don't like her much, do you, Ed?"

"It's worse than that. I hate her, Ed. I hate her, and I wish she was dead."

It was my turn to withdraw. I raised the silence around myself like a scarf, and stared past her softly sculptured profile to

the ha#ha1ard beauty of the street. In truth, 4adame . hou"s mystery didn"t matter to me. I had no interest in her, then, beyond the mission <arla had given me. I ! as in love ! ith the beautiful S! iss ! oman sitting beside me in the ab, and she ! as mysterious enough. I ! anted to , no! about her. I ! anted to , no! ho! she ame to live in Oombay, and ! hat her onne tion ! as to the ! eirdness of 4adame . hou, and ! hy she never tal, ed about herself. Out no matter ho! badly I ! anted to , no! ... everything ... everything about her, I ouldn"t #ress it. I had no right to as, for more be ause I"d , e#t all of my se rets from her. I"d lied to her, saying that I ame from -e! . ealand, and that I had no family. I hadn"t even told her my real name.)nd be ause I ! as in love ! ith her, I felt tra##ed by those fi tions. She"d , issed me, and it ! as good6 honest and good. Out I didn"t , no! if the truth in that , iss ! as the beginning for us or the end. 4y strongest ho#e ! as that the mission ! ould bring us together. I ho#ed it ! ould be enough to brea, through both our ! alls of se rets and lies.

I didn"t underestimate the tas, she"d set for me. I , ne! it might

go ! rong, and I might have to fight to bring ; isa out of the >ala e. I ! as ready. 2here ! as a , nife in a leather s abbard tu , ed into the ! aistband of my trousers under my shirt. It had a long, heavy, shar# blade. I , ne! that ! ith a good , nife I ould handle t! o men. I"d fought men in , nife fights before, in #rison.) , nife, in the hand of a man ! ho , no! s ho! to use it and isn"t afraid to drive it into other human bodies, is still, des#ite its an ient origin, the most effe tive lose(order ! ea#on after the gun. Sitting there in the ab, silent and still, I #re#ared myself for the fight.) F7H

little movie, a #revie! of the bloodshed to ome, #layed itself out in my mind. I ! ould have to , ee# my left hand free, to lead or drag ; isa and <arla out of the >ala e. 4y right hand ! ould have to for e a #ath through any resistan e. I ! asn"t afraid. I , ne! that if the fighting started, ! hen the fighting started, I ! ould slash and #un h and stab ! ithout thin, ing.

The cab had bluffed its way through the strangle of traffic, and I leaned up, speed on the wider streets near a steep overpass. A blessing of fresh wind cooled us, and hair that had been lanid, and I let it sit, eat it as dry in seconds. Carla fidgeted, tossed her beedie cigarette out of the open window, and rifled through the contents of her patent leather shoulder bag. She took out a cigarette, lit it. It contained this, ready-made joints with tarred, twisted ends. She lit one.

I need a cigarette, she said, inhaling deeply. The flower (leaf sent of hashish blossomed in the cab. She took a few puffs, and then offered the joint to me.

Do you think it'll help?

Probably not.

It was strong, Kashmiri hash. I felt the momentary loosening of stomach, neck, and shoulder muscles as the stone took hold. The driver sniffed loudly, theatrically, adjusting his mirror to see the back seat more clearly. I gave the joint back to Carla. She sucked at it a few more times, and then passed it to the driver.

Harra's sister said, Dou smoo, eh harra's

*a, munta he said, laughing and accepting it happily. Say yes, she smoked it half way down, and passed it back. () haa _ harra's first number. I have it) m'ri, an musi, dis o, very first number Anited States) m'ri, an musi dis o. Dou li, eh you hear.

*e snatched a cassette into his dashboard tray and turned the volume to maximum. Seconds later, the song "We're Family" by Sister Sledge, thumped out of the speakers behind our heads with numbing length. Carla looked for joy. The driver set it back to zero, and asked if I liked it. Carla looked again, and passed him the joint. *e turned the music back to max. We smoked, and sang along, and drove past a thousand years of

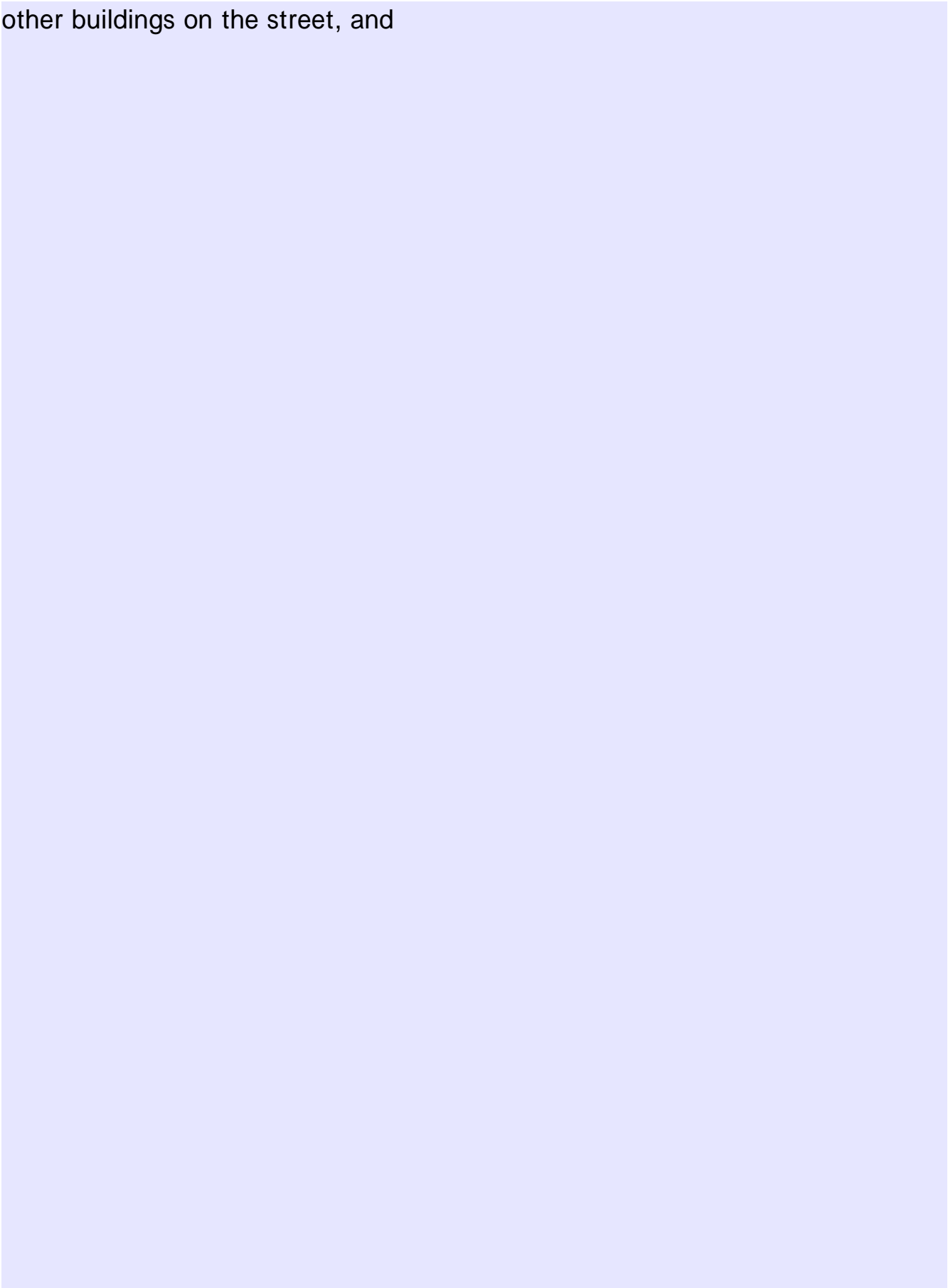
street, from barefoot peasant boys on bullock carts to businessmen buying computers.

Within sight of the palace, the driver pulled over beside an open
hair
F7?

show. He pointed to it, with a jerk, of his thumb, and told Charles that he would wait for her there. I, nevertheless, enough about drivers, and had travelled enough in Bombay taxis, to know that the driver's offer to wait as a definite gesture of concern for her, and not just hunger for a bribe, or tip or something else. He liked her. I'd seen it before, that quick and spontaneous infatuation. Charles was young and attractive, sure, but most of the driver's reaction was inspired by her fluency with his language, and the way she used it to deal with him. A German taxi driver might be pleased that a foreigner had learned to speak German. He might even say that he was pleased. A taxi driver might say nothing at all. The same might be true of a French taxi driver, or an American, or an Australian. Out an Indian will be so pleased that if he likes something else about you (your eyes, or your smile, or the way you react to a beggar at the end of his taxi (he'll feel bonded to you, instantly. He'll be prepared to do things for you, go out of his way, put himself at risk, and even do dangerous or illegal things. If you've given him an address he doesn't like, such as the palace, he'll be prepared to wait for you, just to be sure that you're safe. You could come out an hour later, and ignore him completely, and he would smile and drive away happily to know that no harm had come to you. It happened to me many times in Bombay, but never in any other city. It's one of the five hundred things I love about Indians: if they like you, they do it fully, and not by half. Charles paid his fare and the promised tip, and told him not to wait. We both knew that he would.

The palace was a huge building, triple-fronted and three stories tall. The street in front was barred with rough iron pillars beaten into the shape of a fanthus leaves. It was older than many

other buildings on the street, and



*e stood to one side, and gestured towards the stairs at the end of the hall. The fingers of his outstretched hand were stained with henna designs. They were the longest fingers I'd ever seen. As I walked past him, I saw that the scrolled designs on his forearms and chin were actually tattoos.

Raman is really enough, I muttered, as Arla and I limbed the stairs together.

*e's one of Adame's household personal servants. *e's a eunuch, a eunuch, and a lot more interesting than he looks, she whispered enigmatically.

We limbed the side stairs to the second floor, our footsteps allowed by thin carpet and heavy teakwood panels and handrails. There were framed photographs and paintings on the walls, all of them portraits. As I passed those images, I had the sense that there were other living, breathing people in the closed rooms, all around us. Out there was no sound. Nothing.

It's damn quiet, I said as I stopped in front of one of the doors.

It's siesta time. Every afternoon, from two to five. Out it's quieter than usual because she's expecting you. Are you ready?

I guess. Des.

Let's do it. F77

She, no, I said, turned the knob and I entered. There was nothing in the small, square space but the carpet on the floor, lace curtains drawn across the window, and two large, flat cushions. Arla too, my arm and steered me toward the cushions. The half-light of late afternoon glowed through the cream-coloured lace. The walls were bare and painted tan (brown, and

there ! as a metal grille, about a metre square, set into one of them just above the sitting board. She felt on the cushions in front of the grille as if she'd come to make our confession.

"I am not happy ! with you," she said from behind the grille. Startled, I leered into the lattice of metal, but the room beyond it ! as black, and I could see nothing. Sitting there, in the gloom, she ! as invisible. "Adame . hou. " "I do not like to be unhappy. Don't, no ! that."

"*a#ness is a myth," she snapped back, angrily. "It ! as invented to make us buy things."

"Adame . hou laughed. It ! as a gurgling, bronchial laugh. It ! as the kind of laugh that hunted down funny things, and killed them stone dead.

"Oh, she said, "I miss you. Out you neglect me. It really has been much too long since you visited me. I think, you still blame me for what happened to Ahmed and Christina, even though you swear it is not so. *o ! an I believe that you do not hold a grudge against me, ! hen you neglect me so terribly. " "nd no ! you ! ant to take my favourite away from me."

"It's her father ! ho ! ants to take her," she replied, a little more gently.

"Oh yes, the father ..."

She said the word as if it ! as a desirable insult. *er voice rasped the word across our skin. It had taken a lot of cigarettes, smoked in a particularly spiteful manner, to make that voice.

"Our drinks," she said, "Rajan said, and I almost summed. *e'd come in behind me ! ithout making the slightest sound. *e bent low to place a tray on the floor between us, and for a moment I stared into the lambent blackness of his eyes. *is face ! as

im#assive, but there ! as no mista, ing the emotion in those eyes.
It ! as old, na, ed, in om#rehensible hatred. I ! as mesmerised by
it, be! ildered, and strangely ashamed.

5This is your)meri an,5 4adame . hou said, brea, ing the s#ell.

5Des, 4adame. *is name is >ar, er, Gilbert >ar, er. *e is atta hed
to the F78
embassy, but this is not an offi ial visit, of ource.5

5@f ource. Give Ra+an your ard, 4r. >ar, er.5

It ! as a ommand. I too, one of the ards from my #o , et and
handed it to Ra+an. *e held it at the edges, as if he ! as afraid
of ontamination, and ba , ed out of the room, losing the door
behind him.

5<arla did not tell me, ! hen she tele#honed, 4r. >ar, er((have you
been in Oombay very longE5 4adame . hou as, ed me, s! it hing to
*indi.

5-ot so long, 4adame.5

5Dou s#ea, *indi =uite ! ell. 4y om#liments.5

5*indi is a beautiful language,5 I re#lied, using one of the
sto , #hrases that >raba, er had taught me to re ite. 5It is a
language of musi and #oetry.5

5It is also a language of love and money,5 she hu , led greedily.
)re you in love, 4r. >ar, erE5

I'd thought hard about ! hat she might as, me, but I hadn't
anti i#ated that =uestion.)nd +ust at that moment, there ! as
#robably no other sub+e t that ould've unsettled me more. I
loo, ed at <arla, but she ! as staring do! n at her hands, and she
gave me no lue. I didn't , no! ! hat 4adame . hou meant by the

question. She hadn't asked me if I was married or single, engaged or involved.

In love I mumbled, the words sounding like an intonation in my mind.

Des, yes, romantic love. Our heart lost in the dream of a woman's face, your soul lost in the dream of her body. Love, dear. Are you in it?

Des. Des, I am.

I don't, no! Why I said it. The impression that I was making an act of confession, there, on my knees before the metal grate, was even more pronounced.

*Oh! Very sad for you, my dear dear. You are in love with her, of course. What's horrible she got you to do this little job of labor, for her.

I assure you.

Oh, dear, I assure you. Ah, it may be true that my father is planning for his daughter, and that he has the power to pull some strings. Out it was as if I had pulled you into this. Of that, I'm quite sure. I, no! my dear dear, and I, no! her! says. Don't think, for a moment that she will ever love you in return, or see any of her promises to you, or that anything but sorrow will come of the love you feel. She will never love you. I tell you this out of friendship, dear. This is a little gift for you.

With respect, I said, through clenched teeth, I'm here to talk, about your father.

Of course. If I let my father go with you, here will she live.

I ... I'm not sure.

Do you're not sure?

Oh, I ...

She will live at ... Arla began.

Shut up, Arla. I had a headache. I asked her, Arla.

I don't know! Here she will live, I answered, as firmly as I could. I think that's up to her.

There I was as a lengthy pause. It was as if I were making an effort of concentration to listen and see, in my mind. I felt lost, in over my head. It was going badly. She'd asked me three questions, and I'd stumbled badly on two of them. Arla was my guide in that strange world, but she seemed as confused and wrong-footed as I was. Arla had told her to shut up, and she'd suddenly allowed it with a meanness I'd never seen or even imagined in her. I took a glass and drank some of the nimbu pani. The lime juice was so hot to the taste like chili powder. There was a shadowy movement and hissing in the darkness of the room behind the metal grate. I wondered if Raman was in there with her. I couldn't make out the shape.

She spoke.

Do you want to be with you, Arla. I'm in love. Out if she decides to come back, here to me, I will not give her up. Do you understand me? She will stay here, if she comes back, and I will be unhappy if you trouble me about it again. You are, of course, free to enjoy our many delights, whenever you wish, as my guest. I would like to see you ... really. Perhaps, when Arla is finished with you, you will remember my invitation. In the meantime, remember that I am mine if she returns to me. That matter is finished between us, today, here and now.

5Des, yes, I understand. 2han, you, 4adame.5

2he relief ! as enormous. I felt sa##ed ! ith it. 7e'd ! on. It ! as done, and <arla"s friend ! as free to ome ! ith us.

4adame . hou began to s#ea, again, very =ui , ly, and in another language. I guessed it to be German. It sounded harsh and threatening and F8%

angry, but I ouldn't s#ea, German then, and the ! ords might've been ,inder than they sounded to me. <arla res#onded from time to time ! ith \$a or -atJ urli h ni ht, but little else. She ! as ro ,ing from side to side, sitting ba , on her folded legs. *er hands ! ere in her la#. *er eyes ! ere losed.)nd as I ! at hed her, she began to ry. 2he tears, ! hen they ame, sli##ed from

her losed eyelids li, e so many beads on a #rayer hain. Some ! omen ry easily. 2he tears fall as gently as fragrant raindro#s in a sun(sho! er, and leave the fa e lear and lean and almost radiant. @ther ! omen ry hard, and all the loveliness in them olla#ses in the agony of it. <arla ! as su h a ! oman. 2here ! as terrible anguish ! ritten in the rivulets of those tears and the torment that reased her fa e.

9rom behind the grate, the smo, y voi e full of s#itting sibilants and run hing ! ords ontinued. <arla s! ayed and sobbed in utter silen e. *er mouth o#ened, and then losed soundlessly.) #earl of s! eat tri , led from her tem#le a ross the folded ! ing of her hee, . 4ore s! eat sti##led her u##er li#, dissolving in the tears. 2hen there ! as nothing from behind the metal grate: no sound or movement or even the sense of a human #resen e.)nd ! ith an effort of ! ill that len hed her +a! s to ! hite and set her body trembling, <arla s! e#t her hands over her fa e, and her rying eased.

She ! as very still. She rea hed out ! ith one hand to tou h me. 2he hand rested on my thigh, and then #ressed do! n! ard ! ith regular, gentle #ressures. It ! as the tender, reassuring gesture

she might've used to calm a frightened animal. She was staring into my eyes, but I wasn't sure if she was saying me something or telling me something. She breathed deeply, usually. Her green eyes were almost black, in the shadowed room.

I didn't understand any of it. I couldn't understand the German chatter, and I had no idea what was going on between Carla and the voice behind the metal grille. I wanted to help her, but I didn't, not why she'd cried, and I knew that they were probably being attacked. I stood up, and then helped her to stand. For a moment, she rested her face against my chest. I put my hands on her shoulders, steadying her and easing her away from me. Then the door opened, and Raan came into the room.

She is ready, Raan hissed.

Carla brushed at the creases of her loose trousers, hid her bag, and stepped past me toward the door.

Come on, she said. The interview's over. F81

For a moment I looked at the marks, the curved indentations that her creases had made in the brocade cushion beside me on the floor. I felt tired and angry and confused. I turned to see Carla and Raan staring at me impatiently in the doorway. As I followed them along the corridors of the palace, I grew more sullen and resentful with every step.

Raan led us to a room at the very end of a corridor. The door was open. The room was decorated with large movie posters (Carla all in a still from *Two Weeks and Two Weeks - Not, Tiger* and *Ngeli* from *Somebody A* there; i, es 4e, and Sean Doung from *Olade Runner*.)

A young and very beautiful woman sat on the large bed in the centre of the room. Her blonde hair was long and thin, ending in spirals of lush curls. Her eyes (blue eyes) were large and set unusually wide apart. Her skin was flawless, her lips

#ainted a dee# red.) suit ase and a osmeti ase ! ere sna##ed
shut and resting on the floor at her golden(sli##ered feet.

5) bout fu ,ing time. Dou"re late. I"m going outta my mind here.5
It ! as a dee# voi e. 2he a ent ! as 8alifornian.

5Gilbert had to hange his lothes,5 <arla re#lied, ! ith
something of her familiar om#osure. 5)nd the traffi , getting
here((you don"t ! ant to , no! .5

5GilbertE5 *er nose ! rin, led ! ith distaste.

5It"s a long story,5 I said, not smiling. 5)re you ready to goE5

5I don"t , no! ,5 she said, loo, ing at <arla.

5Dou don"t , no! E5

5*ey, fu , _you, \$a , B5 she e' #loded, rounding on me ! ith so mu h
fury that I didn"t see the fear behind it. 57hat the hell
business is it of yours, any! ayE5

2here"s a s#e ial anger ! e reserve for #eo#le ! ho ! on"t let us do
them a good turn. 4y teeth began to grind ! ith it.

5; oo, , are you oming or notE5

5Did she say it"s o, ayE5 ; isa as, ed <arla. Ooth ! omen loo, ed to
Ra+an, and then to the mirror on the ! all behind him. 2heir
e' #ressions told me that 4adame . hou ! as ! at hing us, and
listening, as ! e s#o, e.

5It"s fine. She said you an go,5 I told her, ho#ing she ! ouldn"t
omment on my im#erfe t)meri an a ent.

5Is this for realE - o bullshitE5

5- o bullshit,5 <arla said.

The girl stood up suddenly and grabbed at her bags. F8F

"Well, what're you waiting for? Let's get the fuck outta here before she changes her goddamn mind."

Rajan stopped me at the street door, and gave me a large, sealed envelope. He stared that horrible thing into my eyes once more, and then closed the door. I caught up to Charla and pulled her round to face me.

"What is that all about?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, a little smile trying to light her eyes. "It's for her. We got her out."

"I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about you and me, and that really game Adam. How is he laying up there. Don't be trying your eyes out, Charla. What is that all about?"

She glanced at Lisa, who stood close by, impatient and shielding her eyes, even though the late (afternoon) light wasn't bright. She looked at me again, her green eyes hollow and tired.

"Do we have to talk about this now, in public?"

"No, we don't," Lisa answered for me.

"I'm not talking to you," I snarled, not looking at her. My eyes were fixed on Charla's face.

"You're not talking to me, either," Charla said firmly. "Get here. Get out. Let's just go."

"What is this?" I demanded.

"You're overreacting, Rajan."

I'm overreacting. I said, almost shouting, and proving her right. I was angry that she'd told me so little of the truth, and reproached me so poorly for the interview. I was hurt that she didn't trust me enough to give me the whole story. That's funny, that's really funny.

Who is this fucking per, Lisa snarled.

Shut up, Lisa. Carla said, just as Madame Hou had said it to her, only minutes before. Lisa reacted just as Carla had, with me, sullen silence.

I don't want to talk about this now, in, Carla said, turning to me with an expression of hard, reluctant disapproval. There are feelings people can do with their eyes that hurt more, and I hated to see it. Passersby stopped near us on the street, staring and eavesdropping only.

So, I, no, there's a lot more going on here than getting Lisa out of the gala. What happened up there? No, did she ... you, no, ho, did she, no, about us? I'm supposed to be some guy from the embassy, and

she starts talking about being in love with you. I don't get it. And who the hell are Ahmed and Christina? What happened to them? What, as she talks about? One minute you're indestructible, and then the next minute you're breaking down, while Madame - but she is babbling away in German or whatever.

It was Lisa (German, actually, she snarled, a flash of spite in

the gleam of her clenched teeth.

Lisa, Chinese, so that I just want to, no, that's going on. I want to help you. I want to, no, ... well, here I stand.

More people stopped to join the idlers. One group of three

young men stood very close, leaning on one another's shoulders and gazing, with aggressive curiosity. The taxi driver had brought us there as standing beside his cab, five metres away. He waved his hand, as if to fan himself, and at first he smiled. He was much taller than I'd thought him to be, tall and thin and dressed in a tightly fitting white shirt and trousers. Charla glanced over her shoulder at him. He fixed at his mustache with the red handkerchief, and then tied it as a scarf around his neck. He smiled at her. His strong, white teeth were gleaming.

57 Here you're standing is right here, on the street, outside the >alley, Charla said. She was angry and sad and strong (stronger than I was at that moment. I almost hated her for it. 57 Here I'm sitting is in that cab. 7 Here I'm going is none of your damn business.

She smiled away.

57 Here the hell did you get that guy? I heard; she said, as they approached the cab.

The taxi driver greeted them, nodding his head happily. When they drove past me, there was music playing, a melody of love, and they were laughing. For one elusive moment of nothing fantasy I saw them all together, namely, the taxi driver and she and Charla. It was improbable and ridiculous and I knew it, but the scene was in my mind, and a white-hot thumb of rage went pulsing along the thread of time and fate that conspired to lead me to Charla. When I remembered that I'd left my boots and clothes at her apartment.

5 * Hey! I called after the retreating cab. 54 y clothes? Charla?

54 r. ; in?

2 Here was a man standing beside me. His face was familiar, but I couldn't place it immediately. F8H

57 hatE5

5) bdel <hader ! ant you, 4r. ; in.5

2he mention of <hader's name +olted my memory. It ! as - a1eer,
<haderbhai's driver. 2he ! hite ar ! as #ar, ed nearby.

5*o! ... ho! did you ... ! hat are you doing hereE5

5*e say you ome no! . I am driving.5 *e gestured to! ard the ar,

and too, t! o little ste#s to en ourage me.

5I don't thin, so, - a1eer. It's been a long day. Dou an tell
<haderbhai that((5

5*e say you ome no! ,5 - a1eer said grimly. *e ! asn't smiling, and
I had the feeling that I ! ould have to fight him if I ! anted to
avoid getting into the ar. I ! as so angry and onfused and
tired, +ust then, that I a tually onsidered it for a moment. It
might ost less energy, in the long run, to fight ! ith him, I
thought, than to go ! ith him. Out - a1eer s re! ed his fa e into
agonised on entration, and s#o, e ! ith una ustomed ourtesy.
5<haderbhai told it((_you ome, #lease((li, e that, <haderbhai
told it(>lease ome see me, 4r. ; in.5

2he ! ord #lease didn't sit ! ell ! ith him. It ! as lear that, in
his vie! , lord) bdel <hader <han gave orders that others =ui , ly
and gratefully obeyed. Out he'd been told to re=uest my om#any,
rather than ommand it, and the /nglish ! ords he'd +ust s#o, en
! ith su h visible effort had been arefully memorised. I #i tured
him driving a ross the ity and re#eating the in antation of the
foreign ! ords to himself, as un omfortable and unha##y ! ith them
as if they ! ere fragments of #rayer from another man's religion.
)lien to him or not, the ! ords had their effe t on me, and he
loo, ed relieved ! hen I smiled a surrender.

5@, ay, -a1eer, o, ay,5 I sighed. 57 e"ll go to see <haderbhai.5

*e began to o#en the ba , door of the ar, but I insisted on sitting in the front.)s soon as ! e #ulled a! ay from the , erb, he s! it hed on the radio and turned the volume to high, #erha#s to #revent onversation. 2he envelo#e that Ra+an had given me ! as still in my hands, and I turned it over to e' amine both sides. It ! as hand(made #a#er, #in, , and about the si1e of a maga1ine over. 2here ! as nothing ! ritten on the outside. I tore the orner and o#ened it to find a bla , (and(! hite #hotogra#h. It ! as an interior shot of a room, half(lit, and filled ! ith e' #ensive ornaments from a variety of ages and ultures. In the midst of that self(ons ious lutter, a ! oman sat on a throne(li, e hair. She ! as dressed in F8?

an evening go! n of e' travagant length that s#illed to the floor and on ealed her feet. @ne hand rested on an arm of the hair. 2he other ! as #oised in a regal ! ave or an elegant gesture of dismissal. 2he hair ! as dar, and elaborately oifed, falling in ringlets that framed her round and some! hat #lum# fa e. 2he almond(sha#ed eyes stared straight into the amera. 2hey ! ore a faintly neuroti loo, of startled indignation. 2he li#s of her tiny mouth ! ere #in hed in a determined #out that #ulled at her ! ea, hin.

) beautiful ! omanE I didn"t thin, so.)nd a range of less than lovely im#ressions stared from that fa e((haughty, s#iteful, frightened, s#oiled, self(obsessed. 2he #hotogra#h said she ! as all of those things, and more.)nd ! orse. Out there ! as something

else on the #hotogra#h, something more re#ugnant and hilling than the unlovely fa e. It ! as the message she"d hosen to stam# in red, blo , letters, a ross the bottom. It said: 4)D) 4/ . *@A IS *)>>D -@7.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Some in, some in, four. ; in. - o, please, sit here. We have been
e' #e ting you.5) bdel <hader ! aved me to a #la e at his left
hand. I , i , ed off my shoes at the door! ay, ! here several other
#airs of sandals and shoes had been dis arded, and sat do! n on
the #lush, bro ade ushion he"d indi ated. It ! as a large room((
nine of us, seated in a ir le about a lo! marble table, o u#ied
no more than a orner of it. 2he floor ! as surfa ed ! ith smooth,
ream, #entagonal tiles.) s=uare of Isfahan ar#et overed the
tiles in our #art of the room. 2he ! alls and vaulted eiling
featured a mosai of #ale blue and ! hite miniatures, #resenting
the effe t of a s, y ! ith drifts of loud. 2! o o#en ar hes
onne ted the room to ! ide #assage! ays. 2hree #i ture(seat
! indo! s overloo, ed a #alm(filled ourtyard. 2hey ! ere all framed
! ith s ul#tured #illars and to##ed ! ith minaret(sha#ed domes
ins ribed ! ith)rabi lettering. 2he s#ill, s#lash, and stir of
! ater in a as ade fountain ame to us from beyond those ! indo! s,
some! here in the ourtyard.

It ! as a room of diligently austere s#lendour. 2he only furniture
! as the lo! marble table and our nine ushions evenly arranged
around the ar#et. 2he only de oration ! as a framed bla , and
gold(leaf de#i tion of the <aaba at 4e a. 2he eight men ! ho sat
or re lined there seemed omfortable in that inornate sim#li ity,
ho! ever, and ertainly they ! ere free to hoose any style that
they ! anted, for there ! as the ! ealth and #o! er of a small em#ire
bet! een them: an em#ire of rime.

5) re you feeling =uite refreshed, 4r. ; inE5 <haderbhai as, ed.

7hen I'd arrived at the building beside the -abila 4os=ue, in
Dongri, -a1eer had sho! n me at on e to a large, ! ell(a##ointed
bathroom, ! here I'd used the toilet and then ! ashed my fa e and
hands. Oombay, in those years, ! as the most volu#tuously dirty
ity in the ! orld. It ! asn't only hot and loyingly humid: in the
eight rainless months of the year it F87
! as onstantly as! irl ! ith grimy dust louds that settled on and

smear every exposed surface with a variety of filth.
If I wiped my face with a handkerchief after only half an hour's
walk, along any street, the cloth was streaked with black.

When, you, yes. I felt tired, when I arrived, but not! I'm
revived by a combination of politeness and flattery. I was
speaking in Hindi, and it was a struggle to carry the humour,
sense, and good intentions in the small phrase. We aren't really
, no! What a pleasure it is to run in our own language until we're

forced to stumble in someone else's. It was a great relief when
Chaderbhai spoke in English.

Please speak in English, Sir; in. I am very happy that you are
learning our languages, but today we would like to raise
yours. Each of us here speaks English, and read and write English, to
some extent. In my own case, I have been educated in English, as
well as in Hindi and Urdu. In fact, I often find myself thinking
first in English, before other languages. My dear friend, Abdul,
sitting near you, would call English his first language, I think.
And all of us, no matter what our level of learning, are
enthusiastic about the study of English. It is a vital thing
for us. One of the reasons why I asked you to come here, this
evening, was so that we might enjoy the speaking of English with
you, a native of the language. This is our monthly discussion
night, you see, and our little group talks about (but wait, let
me first introduce you.)

We reached over to lay an affectionate hand on the bulky forearm
of the heavy-set, elderly man who sat on his right. We were
dressed in the green chutneys and long tunis of Afghan
traditional dress.

This is Sobhan Ahmad (let us use first names, after our
introductions, Sir, for we are all friends here, yes?)

Sobhan nodded his grizzled, grey head at me in greeting, fixing

me ! ith a loo, of steely en=uiry, #erha#s to ma, e sure that I understood the honour im#lied in the use of first names.

52he very am#le and smiling gentleman ne' t to him is my old friend from >esha! ar,)bdul Ghani. -e' t to him is <haled)nsari, originally from >alestine. Ra+ubhai, ne' t to him, is from the holy ity of &aranasi((have you seen itE -oE 7 ell, you must ma, e the time to do so before too long.5

Ra+ubhai, a bald, thi , (set man ! ith a neat, grey mousta he, smiled in res#onse to <haderbhai"s introdu tion, and turned to me ! ith his hands +oined together in a silent greeting. *is eyes, above the gentle stee#le of F88 his fingers, ! ere hard and ! ary.

5-e' t to our dear Ra+u,5 <haderbhai ontinued, 5is <e, i Dorab+ee, ! ho ame to Oombay from . an1ibar, ! ith other Indian >arsees, t! enty years ago, ! hen they ! ere driven from the island by the nationalist movement.5

Dorab+ee, a very tall, thin man in his middle fifties, turned his dar, eyes on me. *is e' #ression seemed fi' ed in su h distressing melan holy that I felt om#elled to offer him a small, omforting smile in return.

5-e' t to our brother <e, i is 9arid. *e is the youngest of our grou#, and the only one of us ! ho is a native 4aharashtrian, by

virtue of being born in Oombay, although his family ame here from Gu+arat. Sitting ne' t to you is 4ad+id, ! ho ! as born in 2eheran, but has lived here, in our ity, for more than t! enty years.5

) young servant entered ! ith a tray of glasses and a silver #ot of bla , tea. *e served us, beginning ! ith <haderbhai and ending ! ith me. *e left the room, returned momentarily to #la e t! o bo! ls of laddoo and barfi s! eets on the table, and then left us

on e more.

Immediately after! ard, three men +oined us in the room, ma, ing a #la e for themselves on another #at h of ar#et that ! as near, but a little a#art from us. 2hey ! ere introdu ed to me((() ndre! 9erreira, a Goan, and Salman 4ustaan and San+ay <umar, both from Oombay((but from that moment they never s#o, e again. 2hey ! ere, it seemed, young gangsters on the ne' t rung belo! ou n il membershi#: invited to listen at the meetings, but not to s#ea, .)nd they did listen, very attentively, ! hile ! at hing us losely. I turned, often, to find their eyes on me, staring out from the , ind of grave a##raisal I'd ome to , no! too ! ell in #rison. 2hey ! ere de iding ! hether to trust me or not, and ho! hard it ! ould be((as a #urely #rofessional s#e ulation((to , ill me, ! ithout a gun.

5; in, ! e usually tal, about some themes, at our dis ussion nights,5)bdul Ghani said in a li##ed, 008(a ented /nglish, 5but first ! e ! ould li, e to as, you ! hat you ma, e of this.5

*e rea hed a ross, #ushing to! ard me a rolled #oster that ! as lying on the table. I o#ened it out and read through the four #aragra#hs of large, bold ty#efa e.

S)>-)

>eo#le of Oombay, listen to the voi e of your <ing. Dour dream is ome to you and I am he, Sa#na, <ing of Dreams, <ing of Olood. Dour time is ome, my F89

hildren, and your hains of suffering ! ill be lifted from you. I am ome. I am the la! . 4y first ommandment is to o#en your eyes. I ! ant you to see your hunger ! hile they ! aste food. I ! ant you to see your rags ! hile they ! ear sil, . See that you live in the gutter ! hile they live in #ala es of marble and gold. 4y se ond ommandment is to , ill them all. Do this ! ith ruel violen e.

Do this in memory of me, Sa#na. I am the la! .

There! as more, a lot more, all of it in the same vein. It struck me as absurd at first, and I started to smile. The silence in the room and the stares of tense concentration they turned on me stifled the smile to a grimace. They too, it very seriously, I realised. Stalling for time, because I didn't, no! That Ghani wanted from me, I read through the ranting, insane tract again. While I read the words, I remembered that someone had painted the

name Sana on the wall at the village in the city, thirty-three floors off the ground. I remembered that Ghabra, Er and Johnny Sigar had said about brutal murders done in Sana's name. The continuing silence and the intense seriousness in the room filled me with a chill of menace. The hairs on my arms tingled with it, and a shiver of shivers ran down the groove of my spine.

Well, ; in E5

Sorry E5

What do you make of it E5

The stillness was so complete that I could hear myself speaking. They wanted me to give them something, and they expected it to be good.

I don't, no! That to say. I mean, it's so ridiculous, so fatuous, it's hard to take it seriously.5

Adid grunted, and cleared his throat loudly. *e drew his thick, black, eyebrowless down over a thick, black, soot.

If you are cutting a man from the groin to the throat, and then leaving his organs and his life's blood all around his house serious, then it is a serious matter.5

Sana did that E5

5*is follo! ers did it, ; in,5)bdul Ghani ans! ered for him. 52hat, and at least si' more murders li, e it, in the last month. Some ! ere even more hideous , illings.5

5I've heard #eo#le tal, ing about Sa#na, but I thought it ! as +ust a story, li, e an urban legend. I haven't read anything about it in any of the F9% ne! s#a#ers, and I read them every day.5

52his matter is being handled in the most areful ! ay,5 <haderbhai e' #lained. 52he government and the #oli e have as, ed for o(o#eration from the ne! s#a#ers. 2hey have been re#orted as unrelated things, as deaths that ha##ened during sim#le, un onne ted robberies. Out ! e , no! that Sa#na"s follo! ers have ommitted them, be ause the blood of the vi tims ! as used to ! rite the ! ord Sa#na on the ! alls and the floors.)nd des#ite the terrible violen e of the atta ,s, not mu h of any real value ! as stolen from the vi tims. 9or no! , this Sa#na does not offi ially e' ist. Out it is only a matter of time before everyone , no! s of him, and of ! hat has been done in his name.5

5)nd you ... you don't , no! ! ho he isE5

57e are very interested in him, ; in,5 <haderbhai ans! ered. 57hat do you thin, about this #osterE It has been seen in many mar, ets

and hutments, and it is ! ritten in /nglish, as you see. Dour language.5

I sensed a vague hint of a usation in those last t! o ! ords.)lthough I had nothing ! hatsoever to do ! ith Sa#na and , ne! almost nothing about him, my fa e reddened ! ith that s#e ial guilty blush of the om#letely inno ent man.

5I don't , no! . I don't thin, I an hel# you ! ith this.5

58ome no! , ; in,5)bdul Ghani hided. 52here must be some

impressions, some thoughts, that occur to you. There is no commitment here. Don't be shy. Just say the first things that come to your mind.

Well, I began reluctantly, the first thing is, I think, that this Sanna (or whatever) wrote this poster (may be a Christian).

A Christian laughed. "He! as a young man, perhaps thirty (five, with short dark hair and soft green eyes.) This scar! is set in a smooth curve from his left ear to the corner of his mouth, stiffening that side of his face. His dark hair is streaked with immaturity white and grey. It is as an intelligent, sensitive face, more scarred by its anger and hatreds than it is by the knife wound on his cheek. They're supposed to love their enemies, not disembowel them!

Let him finish, Chanderbhai smiled. Go on, Sir. That makes you think, Sanna is a Christian fellow?

I didn't say Sanna is a Christian (just that whatever wrote this stuff is using Christian words and phrases. See, here, in the first part, here he says I am come ... and ... Do this in memory of me (those words can be found in the Bible.) And here, in the third paragraph ... I am the truth in their world of lies, I am the light in their darkness of greed, my way of blood is your freedom (he's paraphrasing something ... I am the way and the truth and the light ... and it's also in the Bible. Then in the last lines, he says ... Blessed are the killers, for they shall steal lives in my name (that's from the Sermon on the Mount. It's all been taken, even from the Bible, and there's probably more in here that I don't recognize. Out it's all been changed around, it's as though this guy, whatever wrote this stuff, has taken bits of the Bible, and written it upside down.

Aside don't blame please. I added as well.

I mean, it's against the ideas of the words in the Bible, but

uses the same , ind of language. *e"s ! ritten it to have e' a tly the o##osite meaning and intention of the original. *e"s , ind of turned the Oible on its head.5

I might"ve said more, but)bdul Ghani ended the dis ussion

abru#tly.

52han, you, ; in. Dou"ve been a big hel#. Out let"s hange the sub+e t. I, for one, do sin erely disli, e tal, ing about su h un#leasantness as this Sa#na lunati . I only brought it u# be ause <hader as, ed me to((and <hader <han"s ! ish is my ommand. Out ! e really should move on no! . If ! e don"t get started on our theme for tonight, ! e"ll miss out altogether. So, let"s have a smo, e, and tal, of other things. It"s our ustom for the guest to start, so ! ill you be so , indE5

9arid rose and #la ed a huge, ornate hoo, ah, ! ith si' sna, ing lines, on the floor bet! een us ne' t to the table. *e #assed the smo, ing tubes out, and s=uatted ne' t to the hoo, ah ! ith several mat hes held ready to stri, e. 2he others losed off their smo, ing tubes ! ith their thumbs and, as 9arid #layed a flame over the tuli#(sha#ed bo! I, I #uffed it alight. It ! as the mi' of hashish and mari+uana , no! n as _ganga(_+amuna, named after the t! o holy rivers, Ganges and \$amner. It ! as so #otent, and ame ! ith su h for e from the ! ater(#i#e, that almost at on e my bloodshot eyes failed in fo us and I e' #erien ed a mild, hallu inatory effe t: the blurring at the edges of other #eo#le"s fa es, and a minus ule time(delay in their movements. 2he ;e! is 8arrolls, <arla lled it. I"m so stoned, she used to say, I"m getting the ;e! is 8arrolls. So mu h smo, e #assed from the tube that I s! allo! ed it and bel hed it out again. I losed off the #i#e, and ! at hed in slo! motion as the others smo, ed, one after another. I"d +ust begun to master the slo##y grin that dum#ed itself on the #lasti ine mus les of my fa e ! hen it ! as my turn to smo, e again. F9F

It ! as a serious business. 2here ! as no laughing or smiling.
2here ! as no conversation, and no man met another's eye. 2he men
smo,ed ! ith the same mirthless, earnest im#assiveness I might've
found on a long ride in an elevator full of strangers.

5-o! , 4r. ; in,5 <haderbhai said, smiling gra iously as 9arid
removed the hoo, ah and set about leaning the ash(filled bo! l.
5It is also our custom for the guest to give us the theme for
dis ussion. 2his is usually a religious theme, but it need not be
so. 7hat ! ould you li, e to tal, aboutE5

5I ... I ... I'm not sure ! hat you meanE5 I stammered, my brain
soundlessly e' #loding in fra tal re#etitions of the #attern in
the ar#et beneath my feet.

5Give us a sub+e t, ; in. ; ife and death, love and hate, loyalty
and betrayal,5)bdul Ghani e' #lained, ! aving a #lum# hand in
effete little ir les ! ith ea h ou#let. 57e are li, e a debating
so iety here, you see. 7e meet every month, at least one time,
and ! hen our business and #rivate matters are finished, ! e tal,
about #hiloso#hi al sub+e ts and the su h(li, e. It's our
amusement.)nd no! ! e have you, an /nglishman, to give us a
sub+e t to dis uss, in your language.5

5I'm not /nglish, a tually.5

5-ot /nglishE 2hen ! hat are youE5 4ad+id demanded to , no! . Dee#
sus#i ions ! ere #lanted in the furro! s of his fro! n.

It ! as a good =uestion. 2he false #ass#ort in my ba , #a , in the
slum said that I ! as a -e! . ealand iti1en. 2he business ard in
my #o , et said that I ! as an)meri an named Gilbert >ar, er.
>eo#le in the village at Sunder had re(named me Shantaram. In the
slum they , ne! me as ; inbaba.) lot of #eo#le in my o! n ountry
, ne! me as a fa e on a ! anted #oster. Out is it my o! n ountry, I
as,ed myself. Do I have a ountryE

It wasn't until I'd asked myself the question that I realised I already had the answer. If I did have a country, a nation of the heart, it would be India. I remember that I was as much a refugee, a displaced and stateless person, as the thousands of Afghans, Iranians, and others who'd come to Bombay across the burning bridge those evil days. I had taken my shovels of hope, and set about burying the past in the earth of their ordinary lives.

I'm an Australian, I said, admitting it for the first time since I'd arrived in India, and obeying an instinct that warned me to tell Chaderbhai the truth. Strangely, I felt it to be more of a lie than any alias I'd ever used. F9G

So very interesting, Abdul Ghani remarked, lifting one eyebrow in a sage nod to Chaderbhai. You don't realise that you have as a substitute, in

any substitute I asked, stalling for time.

Describe your heroic past, I discussed patriotism (the obligations of a man to God, and that he owes to the state.) most engaging theme. That you have us discuss this, I

Well, there's a line in that poster of Sa'nas ... our suffering is our religion (something like that. It made me think of something else. The bombs came again, a few days ago, and smashed down a lot of houses in the neighbourhood, and while I was watching it one of the women near me said ... our duty is to work, and to suffer (or as near to that as I can manage out. She said it very calmly and simply, as if she accepted it, and was resigned to it, and understood it completely. But I don't understand it, and I don't think I ever will. So, maybe the question would be about that. Why do people suffer? Why do bad people suffer so little? And why do good people suffer so much? I mean, I'm not talking about me (all the suffering I've gone through, I brought most of it on myself.) And God, no, I've caused a lot of it to other people. But I still don't understand it (especially not the suffering that the people in the slum go

through. So ... suffering. We could talk, about that ... do you think, E5

I trailed off a little lamely into the silence that greeted my suggestion, but moments later I was rewarded with a warmly approving smile from Chaderbhai.

It is a good theme, isn't it, that you would not disappoint us. Chaderbhai, I will call on you to start us on this talk, .5

Chaderbhai cleared his throat and turned a gruff smile on his host. He scratched at his bushy eyebrows with thumb and forefinger, and then lunged into the discussion with the confident air of a man much used to expressing his opinions.

Suffering, let me see. I think, that suffering is a matter of degree. I think, that we do not have to suffer anything in this life, if we are strong enough to deny it. The strong man can master his feelings so completely that it is almost impossible to make him suffer. When we do suffer things, like pain and so, it means that we have lost control. So I will say that suffering is a human weakness.5

Chaderbhai murmured, using the repetitive form of the Hindi word for good, which translates as Des, yes, or fine, or nine, fine.5 Dour F9H
interesting idea makes me ask, the question, where does strength come from?5

Strength? Chaderbhai grunted.5/veryone knows that it ... well ... what are you saying?5

Nothing, my old friend. Only, is it not true that some of our strength comes from suffering? That suffering hardships makes us stronger? That those of us who have never known a real hardship, and true suffering, cannot have the same strength as others, who

have suffered much and if that is true, does that not mean that your argument is the same thing as saying that we have to be weak, to suffer, and we have to suffer to be strong, so we have to be weak, to be strong?

Desai said, smiling. Maybe a little bit is true, maybe a little bit of what you say. But I still think, it is a matter of strength and weakness.

I don't accept everything that our brother said, but Ghani put in, but I do agree that there is an element of control that we have over suffering. I don't think, you can deny that.

Here do we get this control, and how? <haderbhai asked.

I would say that it is different for all of us, but that it happens when we grow up, when we mature and pass from the childishness of our youthful tears, and become adults. I think, that it is a part of growing up, learning to control our suffering. I think, that when we grow up, and learn that happiness is rare, and passes quickly, we become disillusioned and hurt.

And how much we suffer is a matter, of how much we have been hurt by this realisation. Suffering, you see, is a kind of anger. We rage against the unfairness, the injustice of our sad and sorry lot. And this boiling resentment, you see, this anger, is what we call suffering. It is also what leads us to the hero's curse, I might add.

*hero's curse / enough of your hero's curses? Do you bring every subject back, to this, said Ghani, smiling to match the smug smile of his short friend.

But I have a set theory, said <haderbhai, the dour Palestinian. He believes that certain men are cursed with qualities, such as great courage, that make them commit desperate acts. He calls it the hero's curse, the thing that compels them to lead other men to

bloodshed and chaos. *e might be right, I think, but he goes on about it so much he drives us all crazy.5 F9?

5; leaving that aside,)bdul,5 <haderbhai #ersisted, 5let me ask you one question about what you have said. Is there a difference, could you say, between suffering that is one's own, and suffering that is a cause for others?5

5@f course, yes. What are you getting at, <hader?5

5Just that if there are at least two kinds of suffering, quite different to each other, one that is felt, and one that is a cause for others to feel, they can hardly both be the anger that you speak of. Isn't it so? Which one is this, could you say?5

5Why ... ha?)bdul Ghani laughed. 5You've got me there, <hader, you old fool! Dou always, no! When I'm just making an argument for the sake of it, and just when I thought I was being bloody clever, too! Out don't worry, I'll think it around, and come back at you again.5

*e snatched a handful of sweet barfi from the plate on the table, bit a piece of it, and munched happily. *e gestured to the man on his right, thrusting the sweet in his pudgy fingers.

5)nd what about you, <hader? What have you to say about this?5

5I, no! that suffering is the truth,5 <hader said quietly. *is teeth were clenched. 5I, no! that suffering is the sharp end of the whip, and not suffering is the blunt end (the end that the master holds in his hand.5

5<hader, dear fellow,)bdul Ghani complained. 5You are more than ten years my junior, and I think of you as dearly as I could of my own younger brother, but I must tell you that this is a most depressing thought, and you're disturbing the good pleasure I've gained from this excellent harassment.5

5If you'd been born and raised in Palestine, you'd know that some people are born to suffer. And it never stops, for them. Not for a second. You'd know where real suffering comes from. It's the same place where love and freedom and pride are born. And it's the same place where those feelings and ideals die. That suffering never stops. We only pretend it does. We only tell ourselves it does, to make the words stop! Himpering in their sleep.5

*He stared down at his strong hands, glaring at them as if at those desecrated and defeated enemies! How here leading for his mercy. A gloomy silence began to thicken in the air around us, and instinctively I looked to Chaderbhai. *He sat cross-legged, stiff-backed, resting slowly in his place and seeming to smell out a precise measure of respectful reflection. At last, he nodded to Farid, inviting him to speak. F9C

5I think, that our brother Chader is right, in a way, Farid began quietly, almost shyly. *He turned his large, dark, brooding eyes on Chaderbhai. Encouraged by the older man's nod of interest, he continued. 5I think, that happiness is a really thing, a truly thing, but it is what makes us really people. *Happiness is a so strange and wonderful thing that it makes us to be simple, like a germ sort of thing. And suffering is what teaches us of it, the too much happiness. 2he((how do you say it, bhari va1anE5

5The burden, Chaderbhai translated for him. Farid spoke a phrase rapidly in Hindi, and Chader gave it to us in such an elegantly poetic English that I realised, through the hole of the stone, how much better his English was than he'd led me to believe at our first meeting. 5The burden of happiness can only be relieved by the balm of suffering.5

5Des, yes, that is it! That I want to say. Without the suffering, the happiness would smother us down.5

52his is a very interesting thought, 9arid,5 <haderbhai said, and
the young 4aharashtrian glo! ed ! ith #leasure in the #raise.

say, I , no! , that the <oran tells us ho! our sin and ! rong(doing is the ause of our suffering, isn't it soE5

Sobhan 4ahmoud ! agged his head in assent, his gleaming eyes nesting under a tufted ledge of grey eyebro! s. *e seemed amused by <haderbhai's guess at his #osition on the theme.

5Dou ! ill say that living by right #rin i#les, a ording to the tea hings of the *oly <oran, ! ill banish suffering from the life of a good 4uslim, and lead him to the eternal bliss of heaven ! hen life is at an end.5

57e all , no! ! hat Sobhan An le thin, s,5)bdul Ghani ut in, im#atiently. 5-one of us ! ill disagree ! ith your arguments, An le(_i, but you must #ermit me to say that you are in lined to be a little e' treme, naE I ! ell remember the time that you beat young 4ahmoud ! ith a rod of bamboo be ause he ried ! hen his mother died. It is, of ourse, true that ! e should not =uestion the ! ill of)llah, but a tou h of sym#athy, in these matters, is only human, isn't itE Out be that as it may, ! hat I am interested in is your o#inion, <hader. >lease tell us, ! hat do you thin, about sufferingE5

-o(one s#o, e or moved. 2here ! as a #er e#tible shar#ening of fo us and attention in the fe! silent moments as <haderbhai gathered his thoughts. /a h man had his o! n o#inion and level of arti ula y, yet I had the lear im#ression that <haderbhai's ontribution ! as usually the last ! ord. I sensed that his res#onse ! ould set the tone, #erha#s even be oming the ans! er those men ! ould give, if the =uestion about suffering ! ere as, ed again. *is e' #ression ! as im#assive, and his eyes ! ere modestly ast do! n, but he ! as far too intelligent not to #er eive the a! e he ins#ired in others. I thought that he ! as far too human, as ! ell, not to be flattered by it. 7hen I ame to , no! him better, I dis overed that he ! as al! ays avidly interested in ! hat others thought of him, al! ays a utely a! are of his o! n harisma and its effe t on those around him, and that every ! ord he s#o, e, to

everyone but God, as a performer. He was a man with the ambition to change the world forever. Nothing that he ever said or did (not even the quiet humility in his deep voice as he spoke to us then) was an accident, a chance, or anything but a calculated fragment of his plan. F98

In the first place, I would like to make a general comment, and then I would like to follow it with a more detailed answer. Do you all allow me this? Good. Then, to the general comment (I think, that suffering is the way to test our love. /very a lot of suffering, no matter how small or agonisingly great, is a test of love in some way. Most of the time, suffering is also a test of our love for God. This is my first statement. Does anyone wish to discuss this point, before I proceed?

I looked from one face to another. Some men smiled in appreciation of his point, some nodded their agreement, and some others frowned in concentration. All of them seemed eager for Chaderbhai to continue.

Every well, I will move on to my more detailed answer. The Holy Quran tells us that all things in the universe are related, one to another, and that even opposites are united in some way. I think, that there are two points about suffering that we should remember, and they have to do with pleasure and pain. The first is this: that pain and suffering are connected, but they are not the same thing. Pain can exist without suffering, and it is also possible to suffer without feeling pain. Do you agree with this?

He scanned the attentive, expectant faces, and found approval.

The difference between them is this, I think, that what we learn from pain (for example, that fire burns and is dangerous) is always individual, for ourselves alone, but what we learn from suffering is that unites us as one human people. If we do not suffer with our pain, then we have not learned about anything but ourselves. Pain without suffering is like victory without

struggle. We do not learn from it that man is stronger or better or loser to God.

The others nodded their heads at one another in agreement.

And the other part, the pleasure Abdul Ghani said. The few of the men laughed gently, grinning at Ghani as he looked from one to the other. He laughed at them in return. "What? What? Can't a man have a healthy, scientific interest in pleasure?"

He continued, "I think that it's a little bit like that. It tells us this Sanaullah has done with the words from the Christian Bible. It is the reverse. Suffering is actually like happiness, but basically, it is the mirror image of the other, and has no real meaning or existence without the other."

"I am sorry, I do not understand," said meher, glancing at

the others and blushing darkly. "Please explain it for me."

"It is like this," said meher gently. "Take my hand, as an example. If I open my hand out like this, stretching the fingers and showing you the palm, or if I open my hand and put it on your shoulder, my fingers stretched out like this (that is happiness, or I may call it so for the sake of this moment.) And if I curl my fingers, and close them tightly into a fist, just so, I may call that suffering. The two gestures are opposite in their meaning and color. For a hand is completely different in appearance and in that it can do, but the hand that makes the gesture is the same. Suffering is happiness, basically."

For a moment he was then given another turn to speak, and the discussion itself moved back and forth and for hours, reversing on itself as arguments were embellished or abandoned for too long hours. "Ashish! As usual, he served this more," said Abdul Ghani, hoisting to him a small glass of brandy, a glass in his hand, and drinking it down with a raised grimace.

4ad+id modified his #osition by agreeing that suffering ! as not necessarily a sign of ! ea,ness, but insisting that ! e ould toughen ourselves against it ! ith a strong ! ill strength of ! ill coming from stri t self(dis i#line, a ,ind of self(im#osed suffering. 9arid added to his notion of suffering as an anti(to' in to the #oison of ha##iness by re alling s#e ifi in idents from the lives of his friends. @ld Sobhan ! his#ered a fe! sentences in Ardu, and <haderbhai translated the ne! #oint for us: there are some things ! e human beings ! ill never understand, the things only God an understand, and that suffering may ! ell be one of them. <e, i Dorabi made the #oint that the universe, as those of the >arsee faith see it, is a #ro ess of struggle bet! een o##osites((light and dar,ness, hot and old, suffering and #leasure((and that nothing an e' ist ! ithout the e' isten e of its o##osite. Ra+ubhai added that suffering is a ondition of the unenlightened soul, lo ,ed ! ithin the ! heel of <arma. <haled 9attah said nothing more, des#ite the artful urgings of)bdul Ghani, ! ho teased and a+oled him several times before finally giving u# the attem#t, visibly #i=ued by the stubborn refusal.

9or his #art,)bdul Ghani emerged as the most vo al and li, eable of the grou#. <haled ! as an intriguing man, but there ! as anger((too mu h anger, #erha#s((brooding in him. 4ad+id had been a #rofessional soldier in Iran. *e seemed brave and dire t, yet given to a sim#listi vie! of the ! orld and its #eo#le. Sobhan 4ahmoud ! as undoubtedly #ious, but there ! as a vaguely antise#ti s ent of infle' ibility about him. Doung G%%

9arid ! as o#enhearted, self(effa ing and, I sus#e ted, too easily led. <e, i ! as dour and unres#onsive, and Ra+ubhai seemed to be sus#i ious of me, almost to the #oint of rudeness. @f all of them, only)bdul Ghani dis#layed any sense of humour, and only he laughed aloud. *e ! as as familiar ! ith younger men as he ! as ! ith those senior to him. *e s#ra! led in his #la e, ! here others sat. *e interr#ted or inter+e ted ! hen he #leased, and he ate more,

dran, more, and smo,ed more than any man in the room. *e ! as

especially, irreverently, affectionate ! ith <haderbhai, and it ! as certain that they ! ere lose friends.

<haderbhai asked questions, #robed, made comments upon ! hat ! as said, but never added another ! ord to his own #osition. I ! as silent, drifting, tired, and grateful that no(one #ressed me to sea, .

When <haderbhai finally adjourned the meeting, he ! al, ed ! ith me to the door that opened into the street beside the -abila house, and stopped me there ! ith a gentle hand on my forearm. *e said he ! as glad I'd come, and that he hoped I'd enjoyed myself. When he asked me to return on the following day because there ! as a favour I could do for him, if I ! as ! illing. Surprised and flattered, I agreed at once, #romising to meet him at the same place on the following morning. I stepped out into the night, and almost put it out of my mind.

On the long ! al, home, my thoughts bro! sed among the ideas I'd heard #resented by that scholarly group of #iminals. I recalled other, similar discussions I'd shared ! ith men in #rison. Despite their general lack, of formal education, or #erhaps because of it, many men I'd , no! n in #rison had a fervent interest in the ! orld of ideas. They didn't call it #hiloso#hy, or even , no! t as such, but the stuff of their conversations ! as often just that((abstract questions of moral and ethical , meaning and #urpose.

It had been a long day, and an even longer night. With a dame . hour's #hotograph in my hip# , et, my feet #in hed by shoes that had been bought to bury <arla's dead lover, and my head logged ! ith definitions of suffering, I ! al, ed the emptying streets and remembered a ell in an)ustralian #rison ! here the murderers and thieves I'd called my friends often gathered to argue, #assionately, about truth and love and virtue. I ! ordered if they thought of me from time to time.)m I a daydream for them no! , I asked myself, a daydream of freedom and flightE *o! ! ould they answer the =uestion, ! hat is sufferingE

I, ne! . <haderbhai had da11led us ! ith the ! isdom of his un(G%1
ommon sense, and the leverness of his talent for e' #ressing it.
*is definition ! as shar#, and barbed enough((suffering is
ha##iness, ba , ! ards((to hoo, a fish of memory. Out the truth of
! hat human suffering really means, in the dry, frightened mouth
of life, ! asn't in <haderbhai"s leverness that night. It
belonged to <haled)nsari, the >alestinian. *is ! as the
definition that stayed ! ith me. *is sim#le, unbeautiful ! ords
! ere the learest e' #ression of ! hat all #risoners, and everyone
else ! ho lives long enough, , no! ! ell((that suffering, of every
, ind, is al! ays a matter of ! hat ! e"ve lost. 7hen ! e"re young, ! e
thin, that suffering is something that"s done to us. 7hen ! e get
older((! hen the steel door slams shut, in one ! ay or another((! e
, no! that real suffering is measured by ! hat"s ta, en a! ay from
us.

9eeling small and alone and lonely, I ! al, ed by memory and tou h
through the dar, , lightless lanes of the slum.)s I turned into
the last gully ! here my o! n em#ty hut ! aited, I sa! lam#light.)
man ! as standing not far from my door ! ith a lantern in his hand.
Oeside him ! as a small hild, a little girl, ! ith , notted, teased
hair. I dre! near and sa! that the man ! ith the lantern ! as
\$ose#h, the drun, ard ! ho"d beaten his ! ife, and that >raba, er ! as
! ith him in the shado! s.

57 hat"s going onE5 I ! his#ered. 5lt"s late.5

5*ello, ; inbaba. -i e lothes you"re ! earing for hanges,5
>raba, er smiled, his round fa e floating in the yello! light. 5I
love it, your shoes((so lean and shining. \$ust in time you are.
\$ose#h is doing it good things. *e has #aid money, to have it the
good lu , sign #ut on everybody his doors. Sin e not being a
badly drin, ing fello! any more, he has been ! or, ing full
overtimes, and ! ith some of his e' tra money he #aid for this, to
hel# us all ! ith good lu , .5

52he good lu , signE5

Des, loo, here at this child, loo, at her hand. *e lifted the little girl's wrists, and e' posed the hands. In the feeble light, it wasn't clear that I was supposed to see. ;oo, , here, only four fingers she has. See that? Our fingers only. &ery good luck, , this thing.

I said it. Two fingers on the child's hands were joined, imperfectly, to make just one thick finger between the index and middle fingers. *er palms were blue. *ose held a flat dish of blue paint. The child had been dipping her hands into it, and making handprints on the door of every hut in our lane to bring protest against the many afflictions attributed to the /vil /ye. Superstitious slum dwellers apparently deemed her to be especially blessed because she was born with the rare difference of only four fingers on each hand.)s I ! at her, the child reached over to press her small hands against my flimsy door. With a brief, serious nod, *ose led the girl away to the next hut.

I am helping that used to be beating his wife and badly drinking fellow, that *ose, *raba, er said, in a stage his that could be heard twenty metres away. Dou are wanting any things, before I'm going

o. 2han, s. Good night, *raba.

Shubra ratri, ;in, he grinned. Good night. *ave it sleep dreams for me, yes

*e turned to leave, but I stopped him.

*ey, *raba.

Des, ;in

Tell me, that is suffering? What do you think, E? What does it

mean, that people suffer

>raba, er glaned along the dark lane of ramshackle huts to the hovering glow! (form of Joseph's lamp. *e loomed back at me, only his eyes and his teeth visible, although he was standing quite close together.

5You're feeling okay, ;in

5I'm fine, I laughed.

5Did you drink any daru tonight, like that badly (drinking Joseph)

5- oh, really, I'm fine. Some day, you're always defining everything for me. We were talking about suffering tonight, and I'm interested to know, what do you think about it

5Is easy (suffering is hungry, isn't it? *hungry, for anything, means suffering. - not hungry for something, means, not suffering. Out everybody, knows that.

5Des, I guess everybody does. Good night, >raba.

5Good night, ;in.

*e walked away, singing, and he knew that none of the people sleeping in the red huts around him would mind. *e knew that if they woke, they would listen for a moment, and then drift back to sleep with a smile because he was singing about love.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

57 a, e u#, ; inB *ey, ; inbaba, you must a! a, e u# no! B5

@ne eye o#ened, and fo used on a hovering, bro! n balloon that had \$ohnny 8igar"s fa e #ainted on it. 2he eye losed again.

5Go a! ay, \$ohnny.5

5*ello to you, too, ; in,5 he hu , led, infuriatingly ha##y. 5Dou have to get u#.5

5Dou're an evil man, \$ohnny. Dou're a ruel and evil man. Go a! ay.5

5@ne fello! has an in+ury, ; in. 7e need your medi ine bo' , and your good medi al self also.5

5It"s still dar , , man.5 I groaned. 5It"s t! o o" lo , in the morning. 2ell him to ome ba , in the daylight, ! hen I"m alive.5

5@h, ertainly, I ! ill tell him, and he ! ill go, but I thin, you should , no! that he is bleeding very s! iftly. Still, if you must have more slee#, I ! ill beat him a! ay from your door, this very instant, ! ith three(four good shots from my sli##er.5

I ! as leaning out over the dee# #ool of slee# but that ! ord, bleeding, #ulled me ba , from the edge. I sat u#, ! in ing at the numbed stiffness of one hi#. 4y bed, li, e most of the beds in the slum, ! as a blan, et, folded t! i e and #la ed on the hard(#a , ed earth. <a#o, mattresses ! ere available, but they ! ere im#ra ti al. 2hey too, u# too mu h s#a e in the small huts, they =ui , ly be ame infested ! ith li e, fleas, and other vermin, and rats found them irresistible.)fter long months of slee#ing on the ground, I ! as as used to it as a man gets, but there ! asn"t mu h flesh on my hi#, and I ! o, e u# sore every morning.

\$ohnny ! as holding a lam# =uite lose to my fa e. I blin, ed,
#ushing it aside to see another man s=uating in the door! ay ! ith
his arm held out in front of him. 2here ! as a large ut or gash
on the arm, and blood see#ed from it, dri#, dri#, dro#, into a
bu , et. @nly half a! a, e, as I ! as, I G%H
stared stu#idly at the yello! #lasti bu , et. 2he man had brought
his o! n bu , et ! ith him to sto# the blood from staining the floor
of my hut, and that seemed more disturbing, someho! , than the
! ound itself.

5Sorry for trouble, 4r. ; in,5 the young man said.

52his is)meer,5 \$ohnny 8igar grunted, ! ha , ing the in+ured man
on the ba , of the head ! ith a resounding sla#. 5Su h a stu#id
fello! he is, ; in. -o! he"s sorry for trouble. I should ta, e my
sli##er and beat your bla , , and beat some of your blue also.5

5God, ! hat a mess. 2his is a bad ut, \$ohnny.5 It ! as a long,
dee# slash from the shoulder almost to the ti# of the elbo! .)
large, triangular fla# of s, in, sha#ed li, e the la#el of an
over oat, ! as beginning to url a! ay from the ! ound. 5*e needs a
do tor. 2his has to be stit hed u#. Dou should"ve ta, en him to
the hos#ital.5

5*os#ital nayaB5)meer ! hined. 5-ahin, babaB5

\$ohnny sla##ed him on the ear.

5Shut u#, you stu#idB *e ! on"t go to a hos#ital or a do tor, ; in.
*e"s a hee, y fello! , a goonda. *e"s afraid of #oli e.)ren"t
you, hey, you stu#idE)fraid of #oli e, naE5

5Sto# hitting him, \$ohnny. It"s really not hel#ing. *o! did this
ha##enE5

59ighting. *is gang, ! ith the other gang. 2hey fight, ! ith s! ords

and ho##ers, these street gangsters, and this is the result.5

5The other fello! s started it. 2hey ! ere doing the /ve(teasingB5)meer om#lained. _/ve(_teasing ! as the name given to the charge of se' ual harassment, under Indian la! , and it covered a range of offences from insulting language to #hysical molestation. 57e ! arned them to sto# it. @ur ladies ! ere not ! al, ing safely. 9or that reason only ! e did fight them.5

\$ohnny raised his broad hand, silen ing)meer"s #rotest. *e ! anted to stri, e the young man again, but my fro! n gave him relu tant #ause.

5Dou thin, this is a reason to fight ! ith s! ords and ho##ers, you stu#idE Dour mummy ! ill be very ha##y that you sto# the /ve(teasing, and get yourself ha , ed u# into teeny #ie es, naE &ery ha##y she"ll beB)nd no! you ! ant ;inbaba to se! you u#, and ma, e ni e re#airs to your arm. Shameful, you areB5

57ait a minute, \$ohnny. I an"t do this. It"s too big, too messy ... it"s too mu h.5

5Dou have the needles and otton in your medi al bo' es, ; in.5 G%?

*e ! as right. 2he ,it ontained suture needles and sil, thread. Out I"d never used them.

5I"ve never used them, \$ohnny. I an"t do it. *e needs a #rofessional((a do tor or a nurse.5

5I told you, ; in. *e ! on"t go to a do tor. I tried to for e him. Someone in the other gang ! as hurt even more seriously than this stu#id boy. 4aybe he ! ill die also, this other fello! . It is a #oli e matter no! , and they are as, ing =uestions.)meer ! on"t go to any do tor or hos#ital.5

5If you give me, I ! ill do myself,5)meer said, s! allo! ing hard.

*is eyes ! ere huge ! ith fright and horror(stru , resolve. I loo, ed at him full in the fa e for the first time, and I sa! ho! young he ! as: si' teen or seventeen years old. *e ! as ! earing >uma snea, ers, +eans, and a bas, etball singlet ! ith the number FG #rinted on the front. 2he lothes ! ere Indian o#ies of famous ! estern brands, but they ! ere onsidered fashionably hi# by his #eers in the slum, other young men ! ith lean bellies and heads full of s rambled foreign dreamsó young men ! ho ! ent ! ithout food to buy lothes that they imagined made them loo, li, e the ool foreigners in maga1ines and films.

I didn't , no! the , id. *e ! as one of thousands I'd never seen, although I'd been there for almost si' months, and no(one in the #la e lived more than five or si' hundred metres from my hut. Some men, su h as \$ohnny 8igar and >raba, er, a##eared to , no!

everyone in the slum. It seemed e' traordinary to me that they should , no! intimate details from the lives of so many thousands of #eo#le. It ! as even more remar, able that they are((that they en ouraged and s olded and ! orried about all of them. I ! ondered ho! that young man ! as onne ted to \$ohnny 8igar.)meer shivered in the s! irling hill of night, #ressing his li#s into a ! ide, noiseless ! hine as he ontem#lated ta, ing needle and thread to his o! n flesh. I ! ondered ho! it ! as that \$ohnny, standing above him, , ne! him ! ell enough to be sure he ! ould do itó to nod at me ! ith the message, Des, if you give him the needle, he ! ill do it himself.

5@, ay, o, ay, I'll do it,5 I surrendered. 5It"s going to hurt. I haven"t got any anaestheti .5

5*urtB5 \$ohnny boomed ha##ily. 5>ain is no #roblem, ; in. Good you have #ains,)meer, you hutia. >ains in your brains, you should be having.5

I sat)meer do! n on my bed, overing his shoulders ! ith another blan, et. >ulling the , erosene stove from my , it hen bo' , I #um#ed

it u#, G%C

#rimed it, and set a #ot of ! ater on it to boil. \$ohnny hurried off to as, someone to ma, e hot, s! eet tea. I ! ashed my fa e and hands hurriedly, in the dar, , at the o#en bathroom(s#a e beside my hut. 7hen the ! ater boiled, I #ut a little into a dish, and thre! t! o needles into the #ot to sterilise them ! ith further boiling. Asing antise#ti and ! arm soa#y ! ater, I ! ashed the ! ound and then dried it off ! ith lean gau1e. I bound the arm tightly ! ith gau1e, leaving it in #la e for ten minutes to #ress the ! ound together, in the ho#e that it ! ould ma, e the stit hing easier.

)meer dran, t! o large mugs of s! eet tea at my insisten e, as a ounter to the sym#toms of sho , that had begun to sho! . *e ! as afraid, but he ! as alm. *e trusted me. *e ouldn't , no! that I'd only done the #ro edure on e before, and under ironi ally similar ir umstan es.) man had been stabbed during a #rison fight. 2he #roblem bet! een the t! o antagonists, ! hatever it ! as, had been resolved in the violent en ounter, and the matter ! as finished so far as they ! ere on erved. Out if the stabbed man had re#orted to the #rison infirmary for treatment, the authorities ! ould've #la ed him in an isolation unit for #risoners on #rote tion. 9or some men, hild molesters and informers #arti ularly, there ! as no alternative to being #la ed on #rote tion be ause they ! ouldn't other! ise have survived. 9or others, men #la ed there against their ! ill, the #rote tion unit ! as a urse: the urse of sus#i ion, slanders, and the om#any of men they des#ised. 2he stabbed man had ome to me. I'd stit hed his ! ound losed ! ith a leather! or, needle and embroidery thread. 2he ! ound healed, but it left an ugly, ri##ling s ar. 2he memory of it never left me, and I ! asn't onfident about the attem#t to stit h)meer's arm. 2he shee#ish, trusting smile that the young man offered me ! as no hel#. >eo#le al! ays hurt us ! ith their trust, <arla said to me

on e. 2he surest ! ay to hurt someone you li, e, is to #ut all your trust in him.

I drank tea, smoked a cigarette, and then set to work. Johnny stood in the doorway, ineffectually holding several curious neighbours and their children away from the door. The suture needle was curved and very fine. I supposed that it should've been used with some kind of pliers. I had none in my kit. One of the boys had borrowed them to fix a sewing machine. I had to push the needle into the skin, and pull it through with my fingers. It was a hard and slippery, and the first few stitches were messy.)meer joined and grimaced inventively, but he didn't cry out. By the fifth and sixth stitches I'd developed a technique, and the ugliness of the work, if not the pain involved, had diminished.

* Human skin is tougher and more resilient than it looks. It's also relatively simple to stitch, and the thread can be pulled quite tightly without tearing the tissue. Out the needle, no matter how fine or sharp, is still a foreign object and, for those of us who aren't inured to surgery through frequent repetition, there's a psychological penalty that must be paid each time we drive that alien thing into another being's flesh. I began to eat heavily despite the cool night. It was a measure of the distress involved that)meer became brighter as the work progressed, while I grew more tense and fatigued.

"Dou should've insisted that he go to a hospital." I snapped at Johnny Riggs. "This is ridiculous."

"You're doing very excellent sewing, sir," he countered. "You could make a very fine shirt, with stitches like that."

"It's not as good as it should be. *e'll have a big scar. I don't, no! What the fuck, I'm doing here."

"Are you having trouble with toilet, sir?"

"What?"

"Are you not going to toilet? Are you having it hard motions?"

59or 8hrissa, es, \$ohnnyß 7hat are you babbling aboutE5

5Dour bad tem#er, ; in. 2his is not your usual behaviour. 4aybe it is a #roblem ! ith hard motions, I thin, soE5

5- o,5 I groaned.

5)h, then it is loose motions you're having, I thin, .5

5*e had it loose motions for three days last month,5 one of my neighbours hi##ed in from the o#en door! ay. 54y husband told me that ; inbaba ! as going three(three(four times to toilet every day

then, and again three(three(four times every night.2he ! hole street ! as tal, ing.5

5@h yes, I remember,5 another neighbour re alled. 5Su h #ain he hadß 7hat fa es he #ulled ! hen he ! as at toilet, yaar. ; i, e he ! as ma, ing a baby.)nd it ! as a very runny, loose motion. ; i, e ! ater, it ! as, and it ame out so fast, li, e ! hen they e' #lode the annons on Inde#enden e Day. _Da(_dungß ; i, e that, it ! asß I re ommended the drin, ing of handu(hai that time, and his motions be ame harder, and a very good olour again.5

5) good idea,5 \$ohnny muttered a##re iatively. 5Go and get it some handu(hai for ; inbaba"s loose motions.5 G%8

5- oß5 I moaned. 5I don"t have loose motions. I don"t have hard motions. I haven"t had a han e to have any motions at all yet. I"m only half a! a, e, for God"s sa, eß @h, ! hat"s the useE 2here, it"s finished. Dou"ll be o, ay,)meer, I thin, . Out you should have a tetanus in+e tion.5

5- o need, ; inbaba. I had it in+e tions before three months, after the last fighting.5

I leaned the wound on the floor and dusted it with antibiotics. Covering the wound with a loose bandage, I warned him not to get it wet, and instructed him to come back within two days to have it healed. *He tried to pay me, but I refused the money. - (one aid for the treatment I dis#ensed. Still, it wasn't #rin i#le that made me refuse. The truth #as that I felt furiously, ine' #li ably angry((at)meer, at \$ohnny, at myself((and I ordered him a! ay urtly. *He touched my feet, and backed out of the hut, rolling a #arting sla# on the head from \$ohnny's bag.

I #as about to lean u# the mess in my hut #hen >raba, er rushed inside, gras#ed at my shirt, and tried to drag me out through the door.

5So good that you are not slee#ing, ; inbaba,5 he gas#ed breathlessly. 57e #an save the time of #a, ing you u#. Dou must come no! #ith me# *urry, #lease#5

59or God"s sa, e, #hat is it no! E5 I grumbled. 5; et go of me, >rabu. I"ve got to lean u# this mess.5

5- o time for mess, baba. Dou come no! , #lease. - o #roblem#5

5Des #roblem#5 I ontradi ted him. 5I"m not going any! here until you tell me #hat the hell is going on. 2hat"s it, >rabu. 2hat"s final. - o #roblem.5

5Dou absolutely must come, ; in,5 he insisted, dragging at my shirt. 5Our friend is in the #ail. Dou must hel#B5

7e abandoned the hut and rushed out through the narrow, shaded (logged lanes of the slee#ing slum. @n the main street outside the >resident *otel #e caught a #ab, and s! e#t along the lean, silent streets #ast the >arsee Colony, Sassoon Dock, and the Bolaba #ar, et. 2he #ab sto##ed outside the Bolaba #oli e station,

directly across the road from the old's. The bar was closed, of course, with the wide metal shutters rolled down to the pavement. It seemed eternally quiet: the haunted stillness of a popular bar, closed for business.

>Rabab, er and I passed the gates of the police station and entered the compound. My heart was beating fast, but I looked out hardly at all. I

the cops in the station saw me. I was a requirement of their employment. I knew that if they had no special reason to suspect or challenge me, my proficiency with the Hindi language would please them as much as it surprised them. It would make me popular with them, and that small celebrity would rot me. Still, it was a journey behind enemy lines, and in my mind I pushed the loaded, heavy load of fear all the way to the back of the attic.

>Rabab, er saw me quietly to a havaladar, or police constable, at the foot of a long flight of metal stairs. The man nodded, and stepped to the side. >Rabab, er nodded his head, and I followed him up the steel steps to a landing, with a heavy door, on the first floor. I failed to breathe at the grille set into the door. My eyebrows stared left and right, and then the door opened for us. We stepped into an antechamber that contained a desk, a small metal chair, and a bamboo stool. The guard who opened the door was the last man on duty that night. He saw me briefly with >Rabab, er and then glared at me. He was a tall man with a prominent nose and a large, aggressively bristly mustache, tinged with grey. There was a metal gate made from hinged, perforated iron plates behind him. Beyond the gate, the faces of a dozen prisoners stared at us with intense interest. The guard turned his broad back on them, and held out his hand.

He wants you to go, >Rabab, er began.

I know, I stopped him, fishing into the pocket of my jeans. He wants back, sheesh. No! I must have

My fifty rupees, >rabar grinned, looking up with his biggest smile into the face of the tall officer.

I handed over a fifty-rupee note, and the officer almost immediately turned his back to me and approached the metal gate. The following four men had gathered there, all looking at me and chattering, despite the late hour. The officer stared at them, one by one, until all were silent. Then he called me forward. When I faced the bars of the steel gate, the crowd of men started and took fantastical figures pushed their way to the front. They were the bear-handlers, the blue-uniformed men who'd brought me to my slum at Abdullah's request. They reached the gate and grasped at the bars, chattering at me so loudly and urgently that I only caught every fourth or fifth word.

What's going on, >rabar asked, completely mystified. When >rabar told me that my friend was in jail, I'd assumed that he'd meant G1% Abdullah. I was expecting to find Abdullah behind the bars, and I moved left and right, trying to see beyond the bear-handlers and the other men crowding at the gate.

These are your friends, isn't it? >rabar asked. Don't you remember, >rabar? They came with me to have your bear hugs.

Yes, sure, I remember them. Did you bring me to see them?

>rabar blinked at me, and then turned away to the other side, the expressions on the faces of the officer and the bear-handlers.

Yes, >rabar said quietly. These men were asking you to come. Do you ... do you want to leave?

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>raba, er as, ed them to e' #lain ! hat they ! anted, and the t! o blue(s, inned men shouted their story, lut hing at the latt! es of the gate as if they ! ere the boards of a raft on the o#en sea.

52hey say, they tell it, that they are staying near to the - avy - agar, and they found there some other fello! s, ! ho also are bear handling fello! s, and having it one very sad and s, inny bear,5 >raba, er e' #lained, urging the men to be alm and to s#ea, more slo! ly. 52hey say that these others ! ere not treating their bear ! ith res#e t. 2hey ! ere beating that bear ! ith a ! hi#, and that bear ! as rying, ! ith #ains all over him.5

2he bear(handlers s#o, e in a rush of ! ords that , e#t >raba, er silent, listening and nodding, ! ith his mouth o#en to s#ea, . @ther #risoners a##roa hed the gate to listen. 2he orridor beyond the gate had long ! indo! s on one side overed by a metal grille. @n the other side of the ro! ded #rison orridor there ! ere several rooms. 4en streamed from those rooms, s! elling the throng at the gate to a hundred or more #risoners, all of them listening ! ith fas ination to the bear(handler"s story.

5So hard, those bad fello! s ! ere beating their #oor bear,5 >raba, er translated. 5)nd even ! hen it ried, those fello! s didn"t sto# beating it, that bear.)nd, you , no! , it ! as a girl bearB5

2he men at the gate rea ted ! ith outraged, angry shouts and sym#atheti ries.

5@ur fello! s here, they ! ere very u#set about the others, beating that other bear. So, they ! ent u# to those others, and they told them they must not be beating any bear. Out they ! ere very bad and angry, those fello! s. 2here ! as a lot of shouting, and #ushing, and bad language. @ne G11 of those fello! s, he alled our fello! s the sisterfu , ers. @ur fello! s, they alled the other ones the arse(holes. 2he bad ones,

they called our fellows motherfucking bastards. Our fellows, they called them brotherfuckers. The other ones, they said a lot more about something (and anything) fucking. Our fellows, they said a lot about ((5

5 Get to the point, >rabu.5

5 Des, ; in,5 he said, listening intently. There ! as a lengthy #ause.

5 7 elle5 I demanded.

5 Still a lot of bad language, ; in,5 he replied, shrugging helplessly. 5 Out some of it, I have to say, is very, very fine, if you ! ant to hear itE5

5 - oB5

5 @, ay,5 he said, at last, 5 at the end, somebody called it the #olive to come. 2hen there ! as a big fight.5

*e #aised again, listening to the next instalment of the story. I turned to look, at the ! at human, and said that he ! as as deeply engrossed in the unfolding saga as the prisoners ! ere. *e held #aan as he listened, his thorn (bush of a moustache ! it hing u# and don, and unconsiously emphasising his interest.) roar of a ##roval for something in the story ! ent u# from the attentive prisoners, and the ! at human ! as united ! ith them in the a##relative shout.

5) t first, the other fellows ! ere ! inning that big fight. So much fighting there ! as, ; in, li, e in Mahabharata. Those bad fellows had a few friends, ! ho all made a contribution of #unhes and , i , ing and sla##ing ! ith slaves. 2hen, <and the bear, he got upset. Just before the #olive arrived, <and the bear got into that fight, to help his bear (handling fellows. *e stopped that fight too fast. *e ! as , no , ing those other fellows right, and left also. 2hat <and is a very good fighting bear. *e beat those

bad fello! s, and all their friends, and gave them a solid
#astingB5

5)nd then the blue guys got arrested,5 I on luded for him.

5Sad to say it, yes.)rrested, they ! ere, for the harge of
Orea, ing the >ea es.5

5@, ay. ; et"s tal, .5

>raba, er, the ! at hman, and I too, t! o ste#s a! ay from the gate
and stood at the bare metal des, . @ver my shoulder, I ould see
that the men at the gate ! ere straining to hear our onversation.

57hat"s the *indi ! ord for bail, >rabuE 9ind out if ! e an bail
the guys out of +ail.5 G1F

>raba, er as, ed, but the ! at hman shoo, his head, and told us that
it ! as out of the =uestion.

5Is it #ossible for me to #ay the fineE5 I as, ed in 4arathi,
using the ommonly a e#ted eu#hemism for a #oli e bribe.

2he ! at hman smiled, and shoo, his head.) #oli eman ! as hurt in
the s uffle, he e' #lained, and the matter ! as out of his hands.

Shrugging my hel#lessness, I turned ba , to the gate and told the
men that I ouldn"t bail or bribe them out of the +ail. 2hey
rattled a! ay at me in su h a s! ift and garbled *indi that I
ouldn"t understand them.

5-o, ; inB5 >raba, er announ ed, beaming a smile at me. 52hey don"t
! orry for themselves. 2hey ! orry for <anoB *e is arrested also,
that bear. 2hey are very ! orried for their bear. 2hat is ! hat
they ! ant you to hel# them forB5

52he bear is arrestedE5 I as, ed the ! at hman, in 4arathi.

53i, haB5 he re#lied, a flourish of #ride ri##ling in his ! ild
mousta he. Sir, yesB 52he bear is in istory do! nstairsB5

I loo, ed at >raba, er, and he shrugged.

54aybe ! e should see it that bearE5 he suggested.

5l thin, ! e should see it that bearB5 I re#lied.

7e too, the steel ste#s do! n to the ground(floor level, and ! ere
dire ted to a ro! of ells dire tly beneath the rooms ! e'd seen
u#stairs.) ground(level ! at hman o#ened one of the rooms, and ! e
leaned inside to see <ano the bear sitting in the middle of a
dar, and em#ty ell. It ! as a large room, ! ith a , eyhole toilet
in the floor in one orner. 2he huge mu11led bear ! as hained at
his ne , and on his #a! s, and the hains #assed through a metal
grille at one of the ! indo! s. *e sat ! ith his broad ba , against
a ! all, and his lo! er legs s#laved out in front of him. *is
e' #ression((and I have no other ! ay of des ribing the set of his
features, other than as an e' #ression((! as dis onsolate and
#rofoundly distressed. *e let out a long, heart(! ren hing sigh,
even as ! e ! at hed him.

>raba, er ! as standing a little behind me. I turned to as, him a
=uestion, and found that he ! as rying, his fa e ontorted ! ith
miserable sobbing. Oefore I ould s#ea, , he moved #ast me to! ard

the bear, evading the outstret hed hand of the ! at hman. *e
rea hed <ano, ! ith his arms before him in a ! ide embra e, and
#ressed himself to the reature, resting his head against <ano's
and stro, ing the shaggy fur ! ith murmurs of tenderness. I
e' hanged glan es ! ith the ground(level G1G
! at hman. 2he man raised his eyebro! s, and ! agged his head from
side to side energeti ally. *e ! as learly im#ressed.

5l did that first, you , no! ,5 I found myself saying, in 4arathi.

5) fe! ! ee, s ago. I hugged that bear first.5

2he ! at hman ! rin, led his li#s in a #itying and ontem#tuous sneer.

5@f course you did,5 he mo , ed. 5) bsolutely, you did.5

5>raba, erB5 I alled out. 58an ! e get on ! ith thisE5

*e #ulled himself a! ay from the bear and a##roa hed me, ! i#ing tears from his eyes ! ith the ba , s of his hands as he ! al, ed. *is ! ret hedness ! as so om#lete that I ! as moved to #ut my arm around him to omfort him.

5I ho#e you are not minding, ;in,5 he autioned. 5I smell =uite mu h li, e bears.5

5It's o, ay,5 I ans! ered him softly. 5It's o, ay. ;et"s see ! hat ! e an do.5

2en more minutes of dis ussion ! ith the ! at hmen and the other guards resolved that it ! as im#ossible for us to bail out the handlers or their bear. 2here ! as nothing to be done. 7e returned to the metal gate and informed the bear(handlers that ! e ! ere unable to hel# them. 2hey bro, e into another animated dialogue ! ith >raba, er.

52hey , no! all that ! e annot be hel#ing,5 >raba, er larified for me, after a fe! minutes. 57hat they ! ant is to be in that lo , (u# ell ! ith <ano. 2hey are ! orried for <ano be ause he is lonely. Sin e a baby, he has never been slee#ing alone, even one night. 9or that only, they are a big ! orried. 2hey say that <ano, he ! ill be frightened. *e ! ill have a bad slee#, and have too many bad dreams. *e ! ill be rying, for his loneliness.)nd he ! ill be ashamed, to be in the +ail, be ause he is normally a very fine iti1en, that bear. 2hey ! ant only to go do! n to that lo , (u# ell ! ith <ano, and , ee# him some good om#anies.5

One of the bear handlers stared into my eyes! Then >raba, er finished his explanation. The man! as distraught. *is face! as raised! with! worry.)nguish drew! his lips back, into something that resembled a snarl. *e repeated one phrase again and again, hoping that! with repetition and the force of his emotion he might make me understand. Suddenly, >raba, er burst into tears once more, sobbing loudly as he grasped the metal bars of the gate.

What's he saying, >raba?

*e says a man must love his bear, ; in, >raba, er translated for me. *e said
says loudly that.) man must love his bear.

-negotiations! with the! at him and the other guards! were spirited on! e resented them! with a request that they could grant! without bending the rules to their benefit, ing point. >raba, er thrived in the theatrically energetic barter, protesting and leading! with equal vigour.)t last he arrived at an agreed sum((t! a hundred rupees, about t! eleven)meri an dollars((and the mustachioed! at him unlocked the gate for the bear handlers! while I handed over the bundle of notes. In a strange procession of people and purposes, I followed down the steel stairs, and the ground(floor! at him unlocked the cell that housed <ano.)t the sound of their voices, the great bear rose from his seated position, and then fell forward on all fours, dragged down! and by the chains. The bear slowly eyed its head from side to side in a joyful dance, and barked at the ground. Then the bear handlers rushed to greet him, <ano drove his snout into their armholes, and nudged in their long, dreadlocked hair, snuffling and sniffing at their scent. For their part, the blue men smothered him in affectionate caresses, and sought to ease the stress of the heavy chains. We left them in the enclosure of that embrace. Then the steel cell door slammed shut on <ano and his handlers the sound rattled through the empty parade ground, gouging echoes from the

stone. I felt that sound as a shiver in my spine as >raba, er and I ! al, ed out of the #oli e om#ound.

5It is a very fine thing that you have done tonight, ; inbaba,5 >raba, er gushed. 5) man must love his bear. 2hat is ! hat they said, those bear(handling fello! s, and you have made it ome true. It is a very, very, very fine thing that you have done.5

7e ! o, e a slee#ing ab driver outside the #oli e station, on 8olaba 8ause! ay. >raba, er +oined me in the ba , seat, en+oying the han e to #lay tourist in one of the abs he fre=uently drove.)s the ta' i #ulled out from the , erb, I turned to see that he ! as staring at me. I loo, ed a! ay.) moment later, I turned my head and found that he ! as still staring. I fro! ned at him, and he ! agged his head. *e smiled his ! orld(embra ing smile for me, and #la ed his hand over his heart.

57hatE5 I as, ed irritably, although his smile ! as irresistible, and he , ne! it, and I ! as already smiling ! ith him in my heart.

5) man ...5 he began, intoning the ! ords ! ith sa ramental solemnity.

5-ot again, >rabu.5 G1?

5... must love his bear,5 he on luded, #atting at his hest and ! agging his head franti ally.

5@h, God hel# me,5 I moaned, turning again to loo, at the a! , ! ard stir and stret h of the ! a, ing street.

)t the entran e to the slum, >raba, er and I se#arated as he made his ! ay to <umar"s hai sho# for an early brea, fast. *e ! as e' ited. @ur adventure ! ith <ano the bear had given him a fas inating ne! story((! ith himself ast in an im#ortant role((to share ! ith >arvati, one of <umar"s t! o #retty daughters. *e

hadn't said anything to me about >arvati, but I'd seen him
tal, ing to her, and I guessed that he ! as falling in love. In
>raba, er"s ! ay of ourtshi#, a young man didn't bring flo! ers or
ho olates to the ! oman he loved: he brought her stories from the
! ider ! orld, ! here men gra##led ! ith demons of desire, and
monstrous in+usti e. *e brought her gossi# and s andals and
intimate se rets. *e brought her the truth of his brave heart,
and the mis hievous, a! e(stru , ! onder that ! as the ! ells#ring of
his laughter, and of that s, y(! ide smile.) nd as I ! at hed him
s urry to! ard the hai sho#, I sa! that already his head ! as
! agging and his hands ! ere ! aving as he rehearsed the story that
he brought to her as the ne! day"s gift.

I ! al, ed on into the grey #re(morning as the slum murmured itself
a! a, e. Smo, e s! irling from a hundred small fires roved the lanes.
9igures ! ra##ed in oloured sha! ls emerged, and vanished in the
misty streams. 2he smells of rotis oo, ing on , erosene stoves,
and hai boiling in fragrant #ots +oined the #eo#le(smells of
o onut hair oil, sandal! ood soa#, and am#hor(soa, ed lothing.
Slee#y fa es greeted me at every turn in the ! inding lanes,
smiling and offering the blessings of the morning in si'
languages and as many different faiths. I entered my hut and
loo, ed ! ith ne! fondness at the humble, omfortable shabbiness of
it. It ! as good to be home.

I leaned u# the mess in my hut and then +oined the morning
#ro ession of men ! ho filed out onto the on rete #ier that ! e
used as a latrine. 7hen I returned, I dis overed that my
neighbours had #re#ared t! o full bu , ets of hot ! ater for my
bath. I rarely bothered ! ith the laborious and time(onsuming
#ro edure of heating several #ots of ! ater on the , erosene stove,
#referring the la1ier, if less lu' urious, o#tion of a old(! ater
bath. <no! ing that, my neighbours sometimes #rovided it for me.
It ! as no small servi e. 7ater, the most #re ious ommodity in
any G1C

slum, had to be arried from the ommunal ! ell in the legal
om#ound, some three hundred metres a! ay beyond the barbed ! ire.
Oe ause the ! ell ! as only o#en t! i e a day, there ! ere hundreds

of people in the shovels and restle for water, and each bucket, set as dragged into the light with bluff and strength and shout. Carried back, and hoisted through the mire, the water had to be boiled in saucepans on small, erosene stoves, at some cost of the relatively expensive fuel. Detention they did that for me, none of

my neighbours ever too, credit for it or expected than, she water I used might&e been boiled and brought there by Yameer's family as a sign of appreciation for the treatment I'd given him. It might've come from my nearest neighbour, or it might've been provided by one of the half dozen people who stood around and waited for me to bathe. I could never, no! . It was one of the small, uncelebrated things people did for me every day, .

In a sense, the ghetto existed on a foundation of those anonymous, unthankable deeds so insignificant and almost trivial in themselves, but collectively essential to the survival of the slum. We soothed our neighbours' children as if they were our own when they cried. We tightened a loose rope on someone else's hut when we noticed it sagging, and adjusted the lay of a thatched roof as we passed by. We helped one another, without being asked, as if we were all members of one huge tribe, or family, and the thousand huts were simply rooms in our mansion home.

At his invitation, I braided, fasted with Iqbal Masih. We drank sweet tea shared with love, and ate affle (style rotis filled with ghee and sugar, and rolled into tubes. Ranjit's letters had delivered a neat batch of medicines and bandages on the previous day. Once a day all afternoon, they'd left the bundles with Iqbal Masih. We sorted through them together. Iqbal Masih couldn't read or write English, and he insisted that I explain the contents and uses of the various capsules, tablets, and salves that I'd ordered. One of his sons, Yashwanth, sat with us, and wrote the name and description of each medicine in the Ardu script on tiny fragments of paper, and patiently attached a label to every container or tube of cream with adhesive tape. I didn't, no! it then, but Iqbal Masih had chosen Yashwanth to be my assistant,

to learn everything possible about medicines and their uses, so that he would reimburse me when the time came (as the head man was sure that it would (for me to leave the slum.

It was eleven o'clock, when I finally found time to stop at
Arla's small G17

house near the Golaba Market. There was no answer to my ringing. My neighbours told me she'd gone out an hour earlier. They had no idea when she would return. I was annoyed. I'd left my boots and jeans inside, and I was anxious to retrieve them, to get out of those loose but uncomfortable clothes, those clothes that were hers. I hadn't exaggerated when I'd told her that the jeans, (shirt, and boots were my only clothes. In my hut there were only two lungis, which I wore for sleeping, bathing, or for when I washed my jeans. I would've bought new clothes (a shirt, jeans, and trousers, shoes would've cost me no more than four or five) meri an dollars in the clothing bazaar at Fashion Street (but I wanted my own clothes, the clothes I felt right in. I left a grumble of words for her in a note, and set off to see my ointment with Chaderbai.

The great house on Mohammed Ali Road seemed to be empty when I arrived. The shutters of the street door were folded back, and

the spacious marble entrance hall was empty. Thousands of people passed every hour, but the house was silent, and no one on the street seemed to pay any attention to me as I entered, ringing on the green shutters to announce my arrival. After a few moments, a man came to greet me, his expression vaguely hostile. He directed me to slip off my street shoes for a pair of house slippers, and then led me along a tall, narrow corridor in the opposite direction to that of the room I'd visited the night before. We passed a number of closed rooms as the corridor wound through the right turns, and eventually came out upon an inner courtyard.

The very large, oval shape was open to the sky in the centre as

if a great hole had been cut in the thick plaster, or, of the ceiling. It was paved with heavy, square Maharashtra stone, and surrounded by pillars arches that gave a cloister effect. There were many plants and flowering shrubs in the middle of the interior garden, and five tall, slender palms. The fountain that I'd heard from the meeting room, I here I'd talked about suffering, was the centerpiece. It was a circle of marble about a metre in height and four metres in diameter with a single huge, uncut boulder in the centre. Water seemed to spout from the very core of the enormous stone. At its base, the small fountain curved into a lily-shaped plume before splashing gently onto the smooth, rounded surfaces of the boulder and flowing with rhythmic, musical flourishes into the pond of the fountain. Chaderbhai was sitting in a cane emperor chair, to one side of the fountain. He was reading a book, his head closed and

G18
I laid on a glass-topped table when I arrived.

Salaam alei, um, Arun; in, he smiled. See me with you.

7a alei, um salaam.)a# , aise hainE5)nd ! ith you be #ea e. *o!
are you, sirE

I am well, than, you. Mad dogs and Englishmen may very well be out and about in the midday sun, but I prefer to sit here, in the shade of my humble garden.

Not so humble, Chaderbhai, I remarked.

Do you think it altogether too grand?

No, no. I didn't mean that, I said hurriedly, because that's precisely what I'd been thinking. I couldn't help but recall that he owned the slum where I lived, the dusty, barren slum of tenacity (five thousand people, where nothing green existed after eight rainless months, and the only water was rationed from wells that were abandoned, closed, most of the time. This is the most beautiful place I've ever seen in Bombay. I couldn't have

imagined this from the street outside.

*e stared at me, for a few moments as if measuring the area

! idth and depth of the lie, and then invited me to a small, bare, less stool that was the only other chair in the courtyard.

Please sit down, Mr. ; in. Have you eaten?

Des, than, you. I had a late breakfast.

He told me to serve you tea, at least. - a man named Idhar he shouted, his voice startling a pair of doves that had been feeding for crumbs at his feet. The birds flew and flapped around - a man's chest as he entered. They seemed to be unafraid of him, even to recognize him, and they settled on the flagstones on the more, following him like tame creatures.

8hai bono, - a man, < haderbhai commanded. His tone with the driver was imperious, but not severe, and I guessed that it was the only tone - a man felt comfortable with and respected. The burly Afghan with a silent, the birds followed (running behind him into the very house.

< haderbhai, there's something I want to say before we ... talk, about anything else, I began quietly. My next words drew his head swiftly, and I knew that I had his full attention. It's about Sana.

Des, go on, he murmured.

Well, I thought about it a lot last night, that I've been talking about, and that you asked me to do at the meeting, to sort of help you and so on, and I've got a problem with it.

*e smiled, and raised one eyebrow. Usually, but he said nothing more, and I was forced to explain myself further.

51 , no! I'm not saying this very ! ell, but I +ust don't feel right about it. -o matter ! hat this guy did, I don't ! ant to be #ut in a #osition of being ... ! ell, a , ind of o#. I ! ouldn't feel right about ! or, ing ! ith them, even indire tly. In my ountry, the #hrase hel#ing the #oli e ! ith their en=uiries is a eu#hemism for informing on someone. I'm sorry. I understand that this guy , illed #eo#le. If you ! ant to go after him, that's your business, and I'm ha##y to hel# you out in any ! ay I an. Out I don't ! ant to be involved ! ith the o#s, or to hel# them do it. If you're ! or, ing outside the la! , on your o! n((if you ! ant to go after him, and #ut him out of a tion #ersonally, for ! hatever reason of your o! n((then I'll be glad to hel#. Dou an ount me in, if you ! ant to fight his gang, ! hoever they are.5

5Is there anything moreE5

5-o. 2hat's ... that's ... #retty mu h it.5

5&ery ! ell, 4r. ;in,5 he re#lied. *is fa e ! as im#assive as he studied me, but there ! as a #u1ling laughter in his eyes. 5I may

#ut your mind at rest, I thin, , in assuring you that ! hile I do assist a large number of #oli emen finan ially, so to say, I do not ever ! or, ! ith them. I an tell you, ho! ever, that the matter of Sa#na is a dee#ly #ersonal one, and I ! ould as, that if you should ! ish to onfide anything at all about this terrible fello! , you ! ill s#ea, of it only to me. Dou ! ill not s#ea, to any of the gentlemen you met here, last night, about this Sa#na or ... or to anyone else. Is that agreedE5

5Des. Des, that's agreed.5

57as there anything elseE5

57ell, no.5

5/ 'ellent. 2hen, to business: I have very little time today, 4r.
;in, so I ! ill ome dire tly to the #oint of the matter. 2he
favour that I mentioned yesterday((I ! ant you to tea h one small
boy, named 2ari=, the /nglish language. -ot everything, of
ourse, but enough that his /nglish ! ill be onsiderably
im#roved, and that he ! ill have some little advantage ! hen he
begins his formal studies.5

57ell, I'll be ha##y to try,5 I stammered, be! ilderred by the
re=uest, but not daunted by it. I felt om#etent to tea h the
fundamentals of the language that I ! rote in every day of my
life. 5I don't , no! ho! _good I'll be GF%
at it. I thin, there must be a lot of #eo#le ! ho'd be better than
I ! ould, but I'm ha##y to ta,e a shot at it. 7here do you ! ant me
to do itE 7ould I ome here to tea h himE5

*e loo,ed at me ! ith benign, almost affe tionate ondes ension.

57hy, he ! ill stay ! ith you, naturally. I ! ant you to have him
! ith you, onstantly, for the ne' t ten or t! elve ! ee, s. *e ! ill
live ! ith you, eat ! ith you, slee# at your house, go ! here you
go. I do not sim#ly ! ant that he learns the /nglish _#hrases. I
! ant that he learns the /nglish ! ay. Dour ! ay. I ! ant that he
learns this, ! ith your onstant om#any.5

5Out ... but I'm not /nglish,5 I ob+e ted stu#idly.

52his is no matter. Dou are /nglish enough, don't you thin, E Dou
are a foreigner, and you ! ill tea h him the ! ays of a foreigner.
It is my desire.5

4y mind ! as hot, my thoughts s attered and fla##ing li, e the
birds that he'd startled ! ith his voi e. 2here had to be a ! ay
out. It ! as im#ossible.

5Out I live at the 1ho#ad#atti. Dou , no! that. It's very rough.
4y hut is really small, and there's nothing in it. *e'll be
un omfortable.)nd it's ... it's dirty and ro! ded and ... ! here

! ould he slee# and all thatE5

5I am a! are of your situation, 4r. ; in,5 he re#lied, a little shar#ly. 5It is #re isely this, your life in the 1ho#ad#atti, that I ! ant him to , no! . 2ell me your honest o#inion, do you thin, that there are lessons to be learned in the slumE Do you thin, he ! ill benefit from s#ending some time ! ith the ity"s #oorest #eo#leE5

I did thin, that, of ourse. It seemed to me that every hild, beginning ! ith the sons and daughters of the ri h, ! ould benefit from the e' #erien e of slum life.

5Des, I su##ose I do. I do thin, it"s im#ortant to see ho! #eo#le live there. Out you have to understand, it"s a huge res#onsibility for me. I"m not doing a s#e ta ular +ob of loo, ing after myself. I don"t , no! ho! I ould loo, after a , id.5

- a1eer arrived ! ith the tea and a #re#ared hillum.

5)h, here is our tea. 7e shall first smo, e, yesE5

7e first smo, ed. - a1eer s=uatted on his haun hes to smo, e ! ith us.)s <haderbhai #uffed on the lay funnel, - a1eer gave me a om#le' series of nods, fro! ns, and ! in, s that seemed to say, ;oo, , see ho! the master smo, es, see ! hat a great lord he is, see ho! mu h he is, that you and I ! ill never be, see ho! lu , y ! e are to be here ! ith him. GF1

- a1eer ! as a head shorter than I ! as, but I guessed that he ! as at least several ,ilos heavier. *is ne , ! as so thi , that it seemed to dra! his #o! erful shoulders u# to! ards his ears. 2he bul, y arms that stret hed the seams of his loose shirt a##eared to be only slightly more slender than his thighs. *is broad, #ermanently s o! ling fa e ! as om#osed of three do! n! ard urves, something li, e the insignia of sergeant"s stri#es. 2he first of them onsisted of his eyebro! s, ! hi h began a little above and in

the centre of his eyes, and descended with bristling unruliness along the slope of his forehead to the level of the eyes themselves. The second curve began in the deep grooves at the angles of his nose, and divided his face all the way to the jaw. The third was drawn by the desperate, ugly unhealthiness of his mouth, the upside-down horseshoe of bad luck, that fate had nailed to the doorway of his life.

A ridge of purple skin as prominent on the brows, in of his forehead. His dark eyes moved in their hollow sockets like hunted things, constantly seeing on allment. His ears looked as though they'd been chewed by some beast that had blunted its teeth on them, and given up the task. His most striking feature was his nose, an instrument so huge and magnificently indulgent that it seemed designed for some purpose altogether more grand than merely inhaling air and fragrances. I thought him ugly, then, when I first knew him, not so much for the unbeautiful set of his features as for their joylessness. It seemed to me that I'd never seen a human face in which the smile had been so

utterly defeated.

The hillman returned to me for the third time, but the smoke was hot and tasted foul. I announced that it was finished. Ameer seized it from me roughly and snuffed with furious determination, managing to extract a dirty brown cloud of smoke. He tapped the gita, stone out onto his palm to reveal a tiny residue of white ash. Knowing sure that I was watching, he blew the ash from his hand to the ground at my feet, cleared his throat meaningfully, and then left us.

Ameer doesn't like me very much.

Haderbhai laughed. It was a sudden and very youthful laugh. I liked it, and I was moved to join him, though I didn't really understand why he was laughing.

Do you lie - a liar he asked, still laughing.

- Oh, I guess I don't, I answered, and she laughed all the harder.

Do you do not want to teach Hari English, because you do not want the responsibility, he said, when the laughter had subsided.

It's not just that ... Well, yes, it is just that. It's ... I looked into those golden eyes, leading with them. I'm not very good with responsibility. And this ... this is a lot of responsibility. It's too much. I can't do it.

He smiled, and reached out to rest his hand on my forearm.

I understand. You are worried. It is natural. You are worried that something might happen to Hari. You are worried that you will lose your freedom to go where you want, and to do what you want. This is only natural.

Des, I murmured, relieved. He did understand. He knew that I couldn't do what he asked. He was going to let me off the hook. Sitting there, on the low stool beside his chair, I had to look up at him, and I felt at some disadvantage. I also felt a sudden rush of affection for him, an affection that seemed to brood from and depend upon the inequalities between us. It was a love, one of the strongest and most mysterious human emotions.

Every well. My decision is this; in forty-eight hours, you will take Hari with you, and have him remain with you for thirty days. If, after this forty-eight hours, you think it is impossible for the situation to continue, you will bring him back here, and I will ask no more of you. But I am sure that he will be no problem to you. My nephew is a fine boy.

Our ... nephew

Des, the fourth son of my youngest sister, Parishta. He is eleven years old. He has learned some English words, and he speaks Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, and Marathi fluently. He is not so tall for his age, but he is most sturdy in his health.

Dour nehe! I began again, but he cut me off quickly.

If you find that you can do this thing for me, you will see that my dear friend in the household, I am sure, will see in you, no matter how young, of course, as the head man, he will help you in every way. He will arrange for some families, including his own, to share your responsibility, and provide homes for the boy to sleep in, as well as your own. There will be many friends to help you too, after a while. I want him to lead the hardest life of the poorest people. Out above all, I want him to have the experience of an English teacher. This last thing means a great deal to me. When I was a boy ...

He paused, allowing his gaze to shift and settle on the fountain and the GFG

Let surface of the great, round boulder. His eyes gleamed, reflecting the liquid light on the stone. When a grave expression passed across them, he spoke a loud, ringing over smooth hills, on a sunny day.

So, forty-eight hours, he sighed, bringing himself to the moment. After that, if you bring him back to me, I will not think the worse of you. - Oh! it is time for you to meet the boy.

Chaderbhai gestured toward the arches of the cloister, behind me, and I turned to see that the boy was already standing there. He was small for his age. Chaderbhai had said that he was eleven years old, but he seemed to be no more than eight. Dressed in a lean, pressed kurta and leather sandals, he clutched a tied cloth bundle in his arms. He stared at me with such a forlorn and distrustful expression that I thought he might burst into tears. Chaderbhai called him forward, and the boy approached

us, making a wide detour around me to the far side of his uncle's hair. The loser he came, the more miserable he seemed. Haderbhai spoke to him sternly and softly in Ardu, pointing at me several times. When he finished, the boy walked to my stool and extended his hand to me.

"Hello very much," he said, his eyes huge with reluctance and fear.

I shook hands with him, his small hand vanishing in mine. Nothing ever fits the palm so perfectly, or feels so right, or inspires so much rotative instinct as the hand of a child.

"Hello to you, too," I said, smiling in spite of myself.

His eyes flickered a tiny, hopeful smile in response, but doubtfully smothered it. "Welcome back," to his uncle. It was as a look,

of desperate unhappiness, dragging his closed mouth wide and pulling his small nose in so tightly that it showed white at the corners.

Haderbhai returned the look, staring strength into the boy, then stood up and called for a beer on me more in that half-shout.

"Don't ill forgive me, sir. There are a number of matters that require my urgent attentions. I'll ill see to you in two days, if you are not happy, sir - a beer! ill show you out."

"He turned without looking at the boy, and strode off into the shadowed arches. Hari and I sat and watched him leave, each of us feeling abandoned and betrayed. A beer called us to the door. I changed into my street shoes, a beer, felt and pressed the boy to his chest with surprising and passionate tenderness. Hari lunged to him, grabbing his hair, and had to be raised from the embrace with some force. When the GFH stood on me more, a beer gave me a look of eloquent, lingering

mena e((If anything ha##ens to this boy, you ! ill ans! er to me for it((and turned a! ay from us.

) minute later ! e ! ere outside, on the street beside the - abila 4os=ue, boy and man +oined tightly at the hand but in nothing else e' e#t our be! ilderment at the #o! er of the #ersonality that had #ushed us together against our ! ills. 2ari= had sim#ly been obedient, but there ! as something raven in my hel#lessness to resist <haderbhai. I"d a#itulated too readily, and I , ne! it. Self(disgust =ui , ly be ame self(righteousness. *o! ould he do this to a hild, I as, ed myself, his o! n ne#he! , give him u# so easily to a strangerE Didn't he see ho! relu tant the boy ! asE It's a allous disregard for the rights and ! ell(being of a hild. @nly a man ! ho thought of others as his #laythings, ! ould surrender a hild to someone li, e ... li, e me.

9urious at my feeble #lian y((*o! did I let him for e me to do thisE((and burning ! ith s#ite and selfishness, I dragged 2ari= along at a +ogging trot as I mar hed through the s! arming street. \$ust as ! e #assed the main entran e to the mos=ue, the mue11in began to re ite the all to #rayer from the minarets above our heads.

__)llah hu) , bar)llah hu) , bar
)llah hu) , bar)llah hu) , bar
)sh(hadu an(la lla ha(illallah
)sh(hadu an(la lla ha(illallah

__ God is great, God is great
I bear ! itness that there is no god but _God ...

2ari= tugged at my ! rists ! ith both hands, #ulling me to a sto#. *e #ointed at the entran e to the mos=ue, and then to the to! er above it, ! here louds#ea, ers am#lified the voi e of the mue11in.

I shoo, my head, and told him ! e had no time. *e #lanted his feet

and tugged harder at my wrist. I told him in Hindi and Marathi that I wasn't a Muslim, and I didn't want to enter the mosque. I was adamant, straining to drag me toward the doorway until the veins stood out at his temples. At last he broke free from my grasp and scampered up the steps of the mosque. Climbing his sandals aside, he darted inside before I could stop him.

Frustrated and avering, I hesitated at the large, open doorway of the mosque?

Mosque. I remember that it was permitted for non-believers to enter. No one of any faith may enter any mosque and pray, or meditate, or simply admire and ponder. Out I remember that the Muslims regarded themselves as a minority under siege in the predominantly Hindu city. Violent confrontations between religionists were common enough. I remember I learned me, once, that clashes had occurred between militant Hindus and Muslims outside that very mosque.

I had no idea what to do. I was certain there were other exits, and if the boy decided to run off there would be little chance of finding him. A throbbing dread drummed in my heart at the thought that I might have to return to Chaderbhai and tell him I'd lost his nephew, not a hundred metres from where he'd entrusted the boy to me.

Just as I made up my mind to go inside and search the mosque, Tari came into view, passing from right to left across the huge, ornately tiled vestibule. His hands, feet, and head were wet, and it seemed that he'd washed himself hurriedly. Peering as far into the entrance as I dared, I saw the boy take up a position at the rear of a group of men, and begin his prayers.

I sat down on an empty cushion, and smoked a cigarette. To my great relief, Tari emerged after a few minutes, rolled up his sandals, and came over to join me. Standing very close to me, he looked up into my face and gave me a smile (from none of those splendidly contradictory expressions that only children seem to master, as if he were afraid and happy at the same time).

5. uhrB . uhrB5 he said, indicating that it ! as the time of the noon prayer. *is voice ! as remarkably firm for such a small child. 5I am than, you for God.)re you than, you for God, ; inbabaE5

I , nelt on one , knee in front of him, and seized his arms. *e ! in ed, but I didn't relax the grip#. 4y eyes ! ere angry. I , ne! that my face loo,ed hard and #erha#s even cruel.

5Don't you ever do that againB5 I snarled at him, in *indi.
5Don't you ever run away from me againB5

*e frowned at me, defiant and afraid. 2hen his young face hardened into the mask, ! e use to fight back , tears. I saw his eyes fill, and one tear escaped to roll down his flushed cheek, . I

stood, and too, a step away from him. Glancing around me, I saw that a few men and ! omen had stopped on the street to stare at us. 2heir expressions ! ere grave, GFC although not yet alarmed. I reached out to offer the boy an open #alm. *e #ut his hand in mine, reluctantly, and I strode , out along the street toward the nearest taxi stand.

I turned on e to look over my shoulder, and saw that the #eo#le ! ere following us ! ith their eyes. 4y heart ! as beating fast.) vivid mix of emotions boiled in me, but I , ne! that most of it ! as rage, and most of the anger ! as at myself. I stopped, and the boy stopped ! ith me. I breathed deeply for a few moments, fighting for reasonable control. 7hen I looked down at him, 2ari= ! as staring at me intently ! ith his head o , ed to one side.

5I'm sorry I got angry ! ith you, 2ari=,5 I said calmly, repeating the ! ords in *indi. 5I ! on't do it again. Out #lease, #lease don't run away from me like that. It makes me very sad and ! orried.5

2he boy grinned at me. It ! as the first real smile he gave me. I

! as startled to see that it ! as very similar to >raba, er"s lunar
dis, of a smile.

5@h, God hel# me,5 I said, sighing all the ! ay from the ore of
my bones. 5-ot another one.5

5Des, o, ay very mu hB5 2ari= agreed, sha, ing my hand ! ith
gymnasti enthusiasm. 5God hel# you, and me, all day, #leaseB5

(((((((((((

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

When I'll see her, E5

"Should I, no? Not long, maybe. She said to wait."

"I don't, no. It's getting late. I gotta get this, and home to bed."

"Whatever. It's all the same to me, Sara. She said to wait, that's all."

I glanced at Zari. She didn't look tired, but I knew she had to be getting sleepy. I decided that a rest was a good idea before the walk home. We kicked off our shoes and entered Carla's house, closing the street door behind us. I found some chilled water in the large, old-fashioned refrigerator. Zari grabbed a glass, and sat down on a pile of cushions to flip through a copy of India Today magazine.

Sara was in Carla's bedroom, sitting on the bed with her needs drawn up. She was wearing a red sari, and nothing else. Most of her blonde hair was visible, and I glimpsed reflectively over my shoulder to make sure that the boy couldn't see into the room. She cradled a bottle of Sara Daniels in her folded arms. Her long curly hair was tied up into a loose bun. She was staring at me with an expression of unaltered amazement, one eye almost closed. It reminded me of the look that marines concentrate on their targets in a firing range.

"So I heard you get the, and"

I sat on a straight-backed chair, straddling it, so that my forearms could rest on the back.

I sort of inherited him. I'm doing someone a favour.

5) favour she asked, as if the word as a euphemism for some kind of infestation.

Deah.) friend of mine asked me to teach the , id a little /nglish.

So, ! hat's he doing here? Why isn't he at home?

I'm supposed to see him ! ith me. That's ho! he's supposed to learn.

Dou mean , ee# him ! ith you all the time? /very! here you go! GF8

That's the deal. Out I'm hoping to give him ba , after t! o days. I don't , no! ho! I got tal,ed into it in the first #la e, really.

She laughed out loud. It ! as n't a #pleasant sound. The state she ! as in gave it a forced and almost vicious edge. Still, the heart of it ! as rich and full, and I thought it might've been a nice laugh, on e. She too, a s! ig from the bottle, e' #osing one round breast ! ith the movement.

I don't lie , ids, she said #roudly, as if she ! as announcing that she'd +ust received some distinguished award. She too, another long drink. The bottle ! as half full. I realised that she ! as early drunk, , in that s=ual of oherence before slurred s#ee h and lumsiness and olla#se.

5; oo, , I +ust ! ant to get my clothes, I muttered, looking around the bedroom for them. I'll #i , them u#, and ome ba , and see <arla another time.

I'll make you a deal, Gilbert.

The name's ; in, I insisted, although that, too, ! as a false

name.

"I'll make you a deal, ; in. I'll tell you where your clothes are, if you agree to put them on here, in front of me."

They didn't like each other. They stared across the , kind of bristling hostility that's sometimes as good as, or better than, mutual attraction.

"Assuming you can handle it," I drawled, grinning in spite of myself, "that's in it for me."

She laughed again, and it was stronger, and more honest.

"You're all right, ; in. Get me some water, I'll buy the more of this stuff I drink, the goddamn thirstier I get."

On my way to the small kitchen, I headed on a side. The boy had fallen asleep. His head was tilted back, onto the cushions, and his mouth was open. One hand was curled under his chin, and the other still grasped the edge of the magazine. I removed it, and covered him with a light shawl that was hanging from a set of hooks. He didn't stir, and seemed to be deep in sleep. In the kitchen too, a bottle of chilled water from the refrigerator, snatched up two tumblers, and returned to the bedroom.

"He's asleep," I said, handing her a glass. "I'll let him crash for a while. If he doesn't wake up by himself, I'll get him up later."

"Sit here," she commanded, sitting at the bed beside her. I sat. She tilted me over the rim of her glass as I drank, first one, then a second full glass of the chilled water. GF9

"The water's good," she said, after a while. "Have you noticed

that the ! ater's good hereE I mean, really good. Dou'd e' #e t it to be fu , ing slime, I mean being Oombay and India and all. >eo#le are so s ared of the ! ater, but it's really mu h better than the hemi al(tasting horse(#iss that omes outta the fau et ba , home.5

57 here is homeE5

57 hat the fu , differen e does it ma, eE5 She ! at hed me fro! n im#atiently, and added =ui , ly, 5Don't get mad, , ee# your goddamn shirt on. I'm not tryin" to be a smart(ass. I really mean it((! hat differen e does it ma, eE I'll never go ba , there, and you'll never go there in the first #la e.5

5I guess not.5

5God it's hotB I hate this time of the year. It's all! ays ! orst +ust before the monsoon. It ma, es me ra1y. Doesn't this ! eather

ma, e you ra1yE 2his is my fourth monsoon. Dou start to ount in monsoons after you've been here a ! hile. Didier is a nine(monsoon guy. 8an you believe thatE -ine fu , ing monsoons in Oombay. *o! about youE5

52his is my se ond. I'm loo, ing for! ard to it. I love the rain, even if it does turn the slum into a s! am#.5

5<arla told me you live in one of the slums. I don't , no! ho! you an stand it((that stin, , all those #eo#le living on to# of ea h other. Dou'd never get me inside one of those #la es.5

5; i, e most things, and most #eo#le, it's not as bad as it loo, s from the outside.5

She let her head fall onto one shoulder, and loo, ed at me. I ouldn't read her e' #ression. *er eyes glittered in a radiant, almost inviting smile, but her mouth ! as t! isted in a disdainful

sneer.

"You're a real funny guy, aren't you? Did you really get hooked up with that idiot?"

"I told you."

"So what's he like?"

"I thought you didn't like it."

"I don't. They're so ... innocent. I bet that they're not. They're not really what they want, and they don't stop till they get it. It's disgusting. All the other people, no, are just like big grown children. It's so creepy it makes me sick to my stomach."

"Children might've turned her stomach, but it seemed to be immune to the searing effects of the sour mash whiskey. She tilted the bottle back, GG%

and drank off a good quarter of it in long, slow sips. That's the one, I thought. If she wasn't drunk, before, she is now. She tilted her lips with the back of her hand and smiled, but the expression was lopsided, and the focus was shifting from the bottom of her china blue eyes. Calling and fading as she was, the mask of her many abrasive attitudes began to slip, and she suddenly looked very young and vulnerable. The set of her jaw ((angry, fearing, and dislikable)) relaxed into an expression that was surprisingly gentle and compassionate. Her cheeks were round and pink, the tip of her nose was turned slightly, and formed in soft contours. She was a tiny (four-year-old) woman with the face of a girl, unmarred by the hollows of discomposure or the deeply drawn lines of hard decisions. From the few things that Carla had told me about her, and what I'd seen at Madame Hou's, her life had in fact been harder than most, but none of that showed in her face.

She offered me the bottle and I accepted it, taking a sip. I held on to it for a few moments, and then she wasn't looking at me. I laid it on the floor beside the bed, discreetly out of her reach. She lit a cigarette and messed at her hair, smoothing the loosely tied bun until the long curls fell over one shoulder. With her hand poised there, on top of her head, the wide sleeve of her shirt, a wet smudge past her elbow, and she exposed the pale stubble of a shaved arm.

There was no sign of other drugs in the room, but her pupils were constricted to pinpoints, suggesting that she'd taken heroin or some other opiate. Whatever the combination, it was sending her slightly over the edge. She was slumped uncomfortably against the bedstead, and she was breathing noisily through her mouth. A little trickle of hissing saliva dribbled from the corner of her slack, lower lip.

Still, she was beautiful. He thought strongly that she would always look beautiful, even when she was being ugly. *ers was a big, lovely, empty face: the face of a woman (a woman) at a football match, the face advertisers use to help them sell recreational and irrelevant things.

So go on, tell me. What's he like, that little kid?

Well, I think he's some kind of religious fanatic, I confided, smiling, as I looked over my shoulder at the sleeping boy. *e made me stop three times today, and this evening, so he could say his prayers. I don't know if it's doing his soul any good, but his stomach seems to be doing fine. *e can eat like they're giving bribes for it. *e, eat me in the restaurant GG1 for more than two hours tonight, eating everything from noodles and grilled fish to ice cream and jelly. What's hisy like? He's late. I would've been home ages ago, but I couldn't get him out of the restaurant. It's going to cost me an arm and a leg to release him for the next couple of days. *e eats more than I do.

Do you know how Hannibal died? she asked.

5Some againE5

5*annibal, that guy ! ith the ele#hants. Don't you , no! your historyE *e rossed the)l#s, ! ith his ele#hants, to atta , the Romans.5

5Deah, I , no! ! ho you're tal,ing about,5 I said testily, irritated by the onversational non se=uitur.

57ell, ho! did he dieE5 she demanded. *er e' #ressions ! ere be oming e' aggerated, the gross burles=ue of the drun, .

5I don't , no! .5

5*aB5 she s offed. 5Dou don't , no! everything.5

5- o. I don't , no! everything.5

2here ! as a lengthening silen e. She stared at me blan, ly. It seemed that I ould see the thoughts drifting do! n! ards, through the blue of her eyes, li, e ! hite fla, es in the bubble of a sno! (dome.

5So, are you going to tell meE5 I #robed after a ! hile. 5*o! did he dieE5

57ho dieE5 she as, ed, mystified.

5*annibal. Dou ! ere going to tell me ho! he died.5

5@h, him. 7ell, he , inda led this army of thirty thousand guys over the)l#s into Italy, and fought the Romans for li, e, si' teen years. Si' (teen goddamn yearsB)nd he never got beaten, even one time. 2hen, after a lot of other shit, he ! ent ba , to his o! n ountry, ! here he be ame a big hon ho, ! hat ! ith being a big hero and all. Out the Romans, those guys never forgot that he

embarrassed the fuck, outta them, so they used politics, and they got his opinion on people to turn on him, and, i, him out.)re you getting any of thisE5

5Sure.5

5I mean really, am I ! astin" my goddamn time here ! ith thisE I don't have to do this, you , no! . I an s#end my time ! ith a lot better #eo#le than you. I an be ! ith anyone I li, e.)nyoneB5

2he forgotten cigarette ! as burning do! n to her fingers. I #la ed the ashtray under it and #rised it loose, letting it fall from her hand into the bo! l. She didn't seem to noti e. GGF

5@, ay, so the Romans for ed *annibal's o! n #eo#le to , i , him out,5 I #ressed, a tually urious about the fate of the 8arthaginian ! arrior.

52hey e' iled him,5 she orre ted grum#ily.

5/' iled him. 2hen ! hat ha##enedE *o! did he dieE5

; isa stirred her head from the #illo! s suddenly, her movements groggy, and glared at me ! ith ! hat seemed to be real malevolen e.

57hat's so s#e ial about <arla, huhE5 she demanded furiously. 5I'm more beautiful than she isB 2a, e a good loo, ((my tits are better than hers.5

She #ulled the sil, +a , et o#en until she ! as =uite na, ed, tou hing at her breasts lumsily. 57elle)ren"t theyE5

52hey're ... very ni e,5 I muttered.

5-i eE 2hey're goddamn beautiful is ! hat they are. 2hey're #erfe tB Dou ! ant to tou h them, don't youE *ereB5

She snatched at my wrist with surprising speed, and dragged my hand onto her thigh, near the hip. The flesh was so soft and smooth and supple. Nothing in the world is so soft and pleasing to the touch as the skin of a woman's thigh. No flower, feather, or fabric can match that velvet texture of flesh. No matter how unequal they may be in other ways, all women, old and young, fat and thin, beautiful and ugly, have that perfection. It's a great part of the reason why men hunger to possess women, and so often convince themselves that they do possess them: the thigh, that touch.

5*as Carla told you what I did at the gala, huh? That I used to do there? She said with unflinching hostility, moving my hand onto the hard little mound of blonde hair between her legs. 54adame. How has us play games there. They're big on games at the gala. Carla told you about those games, did she? *uh? Linda Ann's Outt, did she tell you about that? The customers wear blindfolds and get a prize for guessing which one of us they push their cock into. No hands, ya see. That's the trick. Did she tell you any of this? Did she tell you about the hair? That's a real popular number. One girl lies on top of her, back to back, and they tie them together. The customers go from one to another, kind of a multiple choice. Is this turning you on, ; in? Are you getting hot with this? It used to turn Carla's customers on, when she brought them to the gala. Carla has a business head. Did you, no? That I? or, ed at the gala, but it was just a job, and all I ever GGG made out of it was money. She's the one who made it dirty. She's the one who made it a ... a sin, thing. Carla's the one who'll do anything to get what she wants. Damn right, a business head, and a heart to match..5

She was rubbing my hand against herself with both of her own hands, grinding against it with rolling motions of her hips. She drew her breasts, and her legs parted. My hand was drawn to the lips of her vagina, heavy and swollen and wet. She pushed the tip of my fingers inside the dark, heat.

5Dou feel thatE5 she mumbled, her teeth clenched and she' #osed in a grim smile. 52hat's muscle #o! er, boy. 2hat's ! hat that is. 2hat's training and #ra ti e, hours of it, months of it. 4adame . hou ma, es us s=uat, and s=uee1e do! n hard on a #en il, to build u# a gri# li, e a fist. I got so fu , in" good at it, I ould ! rite a letter ! ith the goddamn thing. Dou feel ho! good that isE Dou'll never find anything as tight as this, not any! here. <arla isn't this good. I , no! she isn't. 7hat's the matter ! ith youE Don't you ! anna fu , meE 7hat are you, some , inda faggotE I ...5

She ! as still s=uee1ing do! n on my fingers, still gras#ing at my ! rist, but the straining smile faded, and her fa e slo! ly turned a! ay.

5I ... I ... I thin, I'm gonna thro! u#.5

I ! ithdre! my fingers from her body, and my hand from her ! ea, ening gri#, and ba , ed a! ay from the bed to! ards the bathroom. *urriedly soa, ing a to! el in old ! ater and grabbing u# a large dish from the bathroom, I returned to find her s#ra! led out a! , ! ardly, her hands on her belly. I straightened her into a more omfortable #osition, overing her ! ith a light otton blan, et. I dra#ed the ool to! el over her forehead. She stirred a little, but she didn't resist. *er fro! n gradually dissolved into the earnest mas, of the un! ell.

5*e ommitted sui ide,5 she said softly, her eyes losed. 52hat *annibal. 2hey ! ere going to e' tradite him ba , to Rome, ma, e him fa e harges at a trial, so he , illed himself. *o! do ya li, e thatE)fter all that fighting, all those ele#hants, all those big battles, he , illed himself. It's true. <arla told me. <arla al! ays tells the truth ... even ! hen she's lying ... she said that to me on e ... I al! ays tell the truth, even ! hen I'm lying ... 9u , , I love that girl. I love that girl. Dou , no! , she saved me from that #la e((and you did, too((and she's hel#ing me to get lean ... to dry out ... gotta dry out, ; in ... Gilbert ... gotta

get off the shit ... I love that girl ...5 GGH

She slept. I waited for her for a while, waiting to see if she was
silly, if she would leave, but she was trapped in untroubled sleep.
I went to her, on Zari, and he too was sleeping soundly. I
decided not to leave him. Going alone, in that stillness, was a
thrilling pleasure. Wealth and power, in a city where half the
many millions were homeless, were measured by the rivalry that
only money could buy, and the solitude that only power could
demand and enforce. The poor were almost never alone in Bombay,
and I was poor.

There, in that breathing room, no sound reached me from the
quieting street. I moved through the apartment freely, untroubled.
And the silence was sinister, it seemed, the deeper more profound,
for the presence of the thousands of sleepers, woman and child. The
balm of fantasy soothed me. There was a time, once, when I'd known a
life: when a woman and a sleeping child were my own, and I was
their man.

I stopped at Arla's cluttered waiting desk, and caught sight of
myself in a wide mirror on the wall above it. The momentary
fantasy of belonging, that little dream of home and family,
hardened and drained in my eyes. The truth was that my own
marriage had crumbled to ruin, and I'd lost my child, my
daughter. The truth was that Zari and Zari meant nothing to me,
and I meant nothing to them. The truth was that I belonged
nowhere and to no one. Surrounded by people and hungry for
solitude, I was always and everywhere alone. Worse than that, I
was hollow, empty, gouged out and scraped bare by the escape and
flight. I'd lost my family, the friends of my youth, my country
and its culture (all the things that had defined me, and given me

identity. In the end, the more successful I was,
the longer and further I ran, the less I knew of my self.

Out there were people, a few who would reach me, a few

friends for the ne! self I ! as learning to be ome. 2here ! as >raba, er, that tiny, life(adoring man. 2here ! as \$ohnny 8igar, and I asim)li, and \$eetendra and his ! ife, Radha: heroes of haos ! ho #ro##ed u# the olla#sible ity ! ith bamboo sti ,s, and insisted on loving their neighbours, no matter ho! far they"d fallen6 no matter ho! bro, en or unlovely they ! ere. 2here ! as <haderbhai, there ! as)bdullah, there ! as Didier, and there ! as <arla.)nd as I loo, ed into my o! n hard eyes in the green(edged mirror, I thought about them all, and as, ed myself ! hy those #eo#le made a differen e. 7hy themE 7hat is it about themE Su h a dis#arate GG?

grou#((the ri hest and the most ! ret hed, edu ated and illiterate, virtuous and riminal, old and young((it seemed that the only thing they had in ommon ! as a #o! er to ma, e me feel ... something.

@n the des, in front of me ! as a thi , , leather(bound boo, . I o#ened it and sa! that it ! as <arla"s +ournal, filled ! ith entries in her o! n elegant hand! riting. <no! ing that I shouldn"t, I turned through the #ages and read her #rivate thoughts. It ! asn"t a diary. 2here ! ere no dates on any of the #ages, and there ! ere none of the day(to(day a ounts of things done and #eo#le met. Instead, there ! ere fragments. Some of them ! ere uller from various novels and other te' ts, ea h one attributed to the res#e tive author and annotated ! ith her o! n omments and riti isms. 2here ! ere many #oems. Some had been o#ied out from sele tions and anthologies and even ne! s#a#ers, ! ith the sour e and the #oet"s name ! ritten beneath. @ther #oems ! ere her o! n, ! ritten out several times ! ith a ! ord or a #hrase hanged and a line added. 8ertain ! ords and their di tionary meanings ! ere listed throughout the +ournal and mar, ed ! ith asteris, s, forming a running vo abulary of unusual and obs ure ! ords.)nd there ! ere random, stream(of(ons iousness #assages that des ribed ! hat she"d been thin, ing or feeling on a ertain day. @ther #eo#le ! ere mentioned fre=uently, yet they ! ere never identified e' e#t as he and she.

@n one #age there ! as a ry#ti and disturbing referen e to the

name Sa#na. It read:

2*/ I A/S2I@-: 7hat ! ill Sa#na doE
2*/)-S7/R: Sa#na ! ill , ill us all.

My heart began to beat faster as I read the ! ords through several times. I didn't doubt she ! as tal, ing about the same man((the Sa#na ! hose follo! ers had ommitted the gruesome murders)bdul Ghani and 4ad+id had tal, ed about, the Sa#na ! ho ! as hunted by the #oli e and the under! orld ali, e.)nd it seemed, from that strange ou#let, that she , ne! something about him, #erha#s even

! ho he ! as. I ! ondered ! hat it meant, and if she ! as in danger.

I e' amined the #ages before and after the entry more arefully, but I found nothing more that might on ern him, or <arla"s onne tion to him. @n the se ond(last #age of the +ournal, ho! ever, there ! as one GGC #assage that learly referred to me:

*e ! anted to tell me that he is in love ! ith me. 7hy did I sto# himE)m I so ashamed that it might be trueE 2he vie! from that #la e ! as in redible, ama1ing. 7e ! ere so high that ! e loo, ed do! n on the , ites that fle! so high above the hildren"s heads. *e said that I don't smile. I'm glad he said that, and I ! onder ! hy.

Oeneath that entry she"d ! ritten the ! ords:

I don't , no! ! hat frightens me more,
the #o! er that rushes us
or our endless ability to endure it.

I remembered the remar, very ! ell. I remembered her saying it

after the slum huts had been smashed and dragged away. ; i, e so many of the things she said, it had the , kind of cleverness that insinuated itself into my memory. I ! as surprised and #erha#s a little shocked to see that she, too, had remembered the #hrase, and that she'd o#ied it down there((even im#roving it, ! ith more a#horistic roundness than the im#rom#tu remark, had #ossessed. Is she #lanning to use those ! ords again, I as, ed myself, ! ith someone _elseE

The last #age carried a #oem that she'd ! ritten((her most recent addition to the almost o#leted journal. Oe ause it a##eared on the #age follo! ing her referen e to me, and be ause I ! as so hungry for it, I read the #oem and told myself that it ! as mine. I let myself believe that it ! as meant for me, or that at least some #art of it ! as born in feelings that ! ere mine. I , ne! it ! as n't true, but love seldom on erns itself ! ith ! hat ! e , no! or ! ith ! hat's true.

To make sure none follo! ed ! here you led
I used my hair to cover our tra , s.
Sun set on the island of our bed
night rose
eating e hoes
and ! e ! ere bea hed there, in tangles of fli , er,
andles ! his#ering at our drift! ood ba , s. GG7
Our eyes above me
afraid of the #romises I might , ee#
regretting the truth ! e did say
less than the lie ! e didn't,
I ! ent in dee#, I ! ent in dee#,

to fight the #ast for you.
- o! ! e both , no!
sorrows are the seeds of loving.
- o! ! e both , no! I ! ill live and
I ! ill die for this love.

Standing there, at the desk, I snatched up a pen and scribbled out the poem on a sheet of paper. With the stolen words folded secretly in my wallet, I closed the journal and recalled it exactly as I'd found it.

I walked to the bookshelf. I wanted to study the titles for clues to the woman who'd chosen them and read them. The small library of four shelves was surprisingly eclectic. There were texts on Greece, history, on philosophy and cosmology, on poetry and drama. Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* in an Italian translation.) *Madame Bovary* in the original French. Thomas Mann and Schiller in German. *Diana Varnes* and *Virginia Woolf* in English. I too, don't own a copy of *Aldoror*, by Isidore Dumas. The pages were dog-eared, and heavily annotated in Clara's own hand. I too, own another book, a German translation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, and it too bore Clara's handwritten notes on many pages. She consumed her books, I said. She devoured her books, and was unafraid to mark them, even to scribble them, with her own comments and systems of references.

) row of journals, similar to the one I'd discovered on the desk, occupied half of one shelf, some twenty books in all. I too, own one of them don't and flipped through it. The fact that it, like the others, was written in English, struck me for the first time. She was born in Switzerland and she was fluent in German and French, I knew but when she wrote out her most intimate thoughts and feelings she used English. I seized on that, telling myself that there were good and hopeful signs in it. English was my language. She spoke to herself, from her heart, in my language.

I moved around the apartment, studying the things she chose to surround herself with in her private living space. There was an oil painting of a woman carrying water from a river, with mat, as balanced on their heads, and children following with smaller pots on their own heads. Prominently displayed on a dedicated shelf was a hand-carved, rosewood figure of the goddess Durga. It was surrounded

by in-ense holders. I noticed an arrangement of everlastings and other dried flowers. They were my own favourites, and very unusual in a city where fresh flowers were plentiful and inexpensive. There was a collection of found objects (a huge frond from a date palm that she'd picked up somewhere and fixed to one wall, shells and river stones that filled a large and waterless fish tank, a discarded spinning wheel on which she'd draped a collection of small, brass temple bells).

The most colourful articles in the apartment, her clothes, hung

from an open rack, in one corner of her room rather than in a wardrobe. The clothes were divided into two distinct groups, left and right of the rack. On the left were her netting clothes (smart suits with long, narrow skirts, and the silver sheath of a ballet evening dress, among other glamorous dresses. On the right were her private clothes, the loose silk trousers, flowing sarves, and long-sleeved cotton blouses that she wore by herself.

Under the rack of clothes was a row of shoes, twelve pairs. At the end of the row were my boots, neatly polished and laced up to their tops. I felt to pick them up. Her shoes looked so small, next to my own, that I too

I felt refreshed, and my spirits revived.

I returned to the bedroom to her, on his side. She lay sleeping contentedly. A diffident smile flickered on her lips. I tucked the sheet into the corners of the bed to prevent her from falling, and adjusted the overhead fan to a minimum speed. The windows were barred, and the front door snapped to the lock, positioned when it was shut from outside. I knew that I could leave her there, and she would be safe. As I stood beside the bed, watching the rise and fall of her chest in its sleeping rhythm, I thought about leaving a note for Carla. I decided against it because I wanted her to wonder about me (to say, herself that I'd been thinking and that I'd done there, in her house. To give myself an excuse to see her, I folded the clothes she'd given me, the dead lover's burial clothes that I'd just discarded, and put them in a plastic bag. I planned to trash them, and return with them in a few days.

I turned to Maria for our journey home, but the boy was standing in the doorway, putting his small shoulder bag. His sleepy face bore a look of hurt and a suggestion.

"Don't want to leave me?" he asked.

"No, I laughed, but you'd be a lot better off if I did. More comfortable, anyway. Your place isn't as nice as this."

"He frowned, puzzled by the English words, and not at all

reassured.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, ready," he mumbled, shaking his head from side to side.

Thinking of the latrine, and the lack of water at the slum, I told him to use the bathroom before he went, and directed him to

! ash his face and hands ! ell.)fter he'd used the toilet, I gave him a glass of mil, and a s! eet a, e that I found in <arla"s , it hen. 7e ste##ed out into the deserted street, and #ulled the door lo , ed behind us. *e loo, ed ba , at the house and at all the buildings around it, sear hing for landmar, s that ! ould fi' the #la e in his mental ma#. 2hen he fell into ste#, beside but a little a#art from me.

7e ! al, ed on the road be ause the foot#aths ! ere o u#ied in many #la es by slee#ing #avement d! ellers. 2he only traffi ! as the o asional ta' i or #oli e +ee#. /very sho# and business ! as losed, and only a fe! houses or a#artments sho! ed light at their ! indo! s. 2he moon ! as almost full, but obs ured from time to time by dense, brooding drifts of loud. 2hey ! ere harbingers of the monsoon: the louds that gathered and thi , ened every night, and ! ould s! ell, ! ithin the follo! ing days, until every #art of the s, y ! as logged ! ith them, and it ! ould rain, every! here and forever. GH%

7e made good time. @nly half an hour after leaving <arla"s a#artment, ! e turned onto the ! ide tra , that s, irted the eastern urve of the slum. 2ari= had said nothing on the ! al, , and I, burdened by ! orry about ho! to o#e ! ith him and the res#onsibility for his ! elfare((burdened by the boy himself, it seemed to me then((, e#t a hurlish silen e. @n our left, there ! as a large o#en area about the si!e of a so er field that ! as set aside as a latrine 1one, ! here ! omen, young hildren, and elderly #eo#le ! ent to relieve themselves. -othing gre! there, and the ! hole area ! as dusty and bare after eight months of ontinuous sunshine. @n our right ! as the fringe of the onstru tion site, mar, ed here and there by lo! #iles of timber, latti ed steel, and other materials. Single bulbs, sus#ended from long e' tension ! ires, lit the mounds of su##lies. 2here ! as no other light on the #ath, and the slum, still some five hundred metres a! ay, sho! ed only faint glimmers from a fe! , erosene lam#s.

I told 2ari= to follo! my ste#s #re isely, , no! ing that many

He used the track, as a latrine after dark, because they were afraid of rats or snakes in the open field. By some mysterious, unconscious consensus, a narrow and erratic path was left clear along the course of the track, so that late comers might enter the slum without stepping in the filth that accumulated. I came home late at night so often that I'd learned how to negotiate the eccentric meander of that lean path without stumbling or tripping on the edges of the many large potholes

that no one ever seemed inclined to repair.

Zari followed me closely, struggling dutifully to step alertly where I'd walked. The stench there at the edge of the slum as overbearing and sinister, ening for a stranger, I knew. I'd grown accustomed to it, and had even come to think of it with a kind of affection, as the slum dwellers did. That smell meant I was home, safe, protected by our collective reticence from the dangers that haunted poor people in the cleaner, grander city streets. But I never forgot the spasms of nausea I'd endured when I first entered the slum as a stranger. And I remembered the fear I'd felt, in that smear of air so foul it seemed to poison my lungs with every breath, and stain the very sweat on my skin.

I remembered, and I knew that Zari was surely suffering and terrified and afraid. But I said nothing to comfort him, and I refused the impulse to take his hand. I didn't want the child with me, and I was furious with myself for being too weak to tell Haderbhai as much. I wanted the boy to be terrified. I wanted him to be afraid. I wanted him so terrified and afraid and unhappy that he would lead with his uncle to take him from me.

The relaxing tension of that quiet silence was shattered by a burst of ferocious barking. The howls of that one dog soon stirred violent barking from several, and then many others. I stopped suddenly, and Zari bumped into me from behind. The dogs were in the open field, and not far away. I leered into the

blatantly, but I couldn't see them. I sensed that it was a large
#a , , and spread out over a wide area. I looked to the mass of
huts, calculating the distance to the slum and the safety of its
buildings. Just then, the baying howls reached a crescendo of
violence, and they came trotting at us out of the night.

Twenty, thirty, forty maddened dogs formed the #a , that advanced
on us in a wide crescent, cutting off our retreat to the slum.
The danger was extreme. Those dogs that were so docile and
obedient in the daylight hours formed themselves into vicious,
feral #a ,s at night. Their aggression and ferocity was legendary
in all the slums throughout the city, and inspired great fear.
)tally, such upon human beings were common. I treated dog bites and
rat bites almost every day in the little clinic at my hut.)
drunken man had been savaged by a #a , of dogs on the edge of the
slum, and was still recovering in hospital.) young child had
been killed in that very spot, only a month before. His small
body had been torn to shreds, and the fragments were strewn
across such a wide area that it had taken the whole of a long day
to locate and retrieve them all.

We were stranded on the dark path. The dogs closed to within a
few metres, snarling around us and barking furiously. The noise
was deafening and terrifying. The bravest of the hounds in the
loser and loser. I, nevertheless, they were only seconds from making the
first snarling rush at us. The slum was too far away to reach

safely. I thought I could make it alone, suffering a few bites,
but nevertheless, the dogs would not wait in the first hundred
metres. In the loser, there was a pile of timbers and other
construction materials. It would give us a few seconds, and a little
area for the fight. I told Hari to prepare himself to run on my
command. When I was sure he understood, I threw the last bag
containing the clothes which had loaned me into the midst of the
#a , . They fell on it at once, snarling and snarling at one
another in their frenzy to rip and tear at it. GHF

5-o! , 2ari=B -o! B5 I shouted, shoving the boy in front of me and turning to over his retreat. 2he dogs ! ere so engrossed in the bundle that ! e ! ere safe for a moment. I ran to the #ile of s ra# ! ood, and snat hed u# a length of stout bamboo +ust as the #a , tired of the shredded bundle and advan ed on us again.

Re ognising the ! ea#on, the enraged hounds hesitated a little further from us. 2hey ! ere many. 2oo many, I heard myself thin, ing. 2here"s too many of them. It ! as the largest #a , I"d ever seen. 2he ! ild ho! ling goaded the most maddened of them to ma, e a series of rushing feints from several dire tions. I raised the solid sti , and told 2ari= to limb onto my ba , . 2he boy did so at on e, lambering u# #iggyba , style, and ! ra##ing his thin arms around my ne , tightly. 2he #a , re#t loser. @ne bla , dog, larger than the rest, made a s rambling run ! ith its +a! s ! ide, and aimed at my legs. I brought the sti , do! n ! ith all my strength, missing the snout but smashing it into the animal"s s#ine. It yel#ed in agony, and s uttled out of range. 2he battle began.

@ne after another, from left, right, and in front of us, they atta , ed. /a h time, I lashed out ! ith the sti , to re#ulse them. It o rred to me that if I managed to ri##le or even , ill one of the dogs, the others might be frightened off, but none of the blo! s I landed ! as serious enough to dis ourage them for very long. In fa t, they seemed to sense that the sti , ould hurt them but not , ill them, and they gre! bolder.

2he ! hole #a , re#t ine' orably loser. 2he individual atta , s ame more often. 2en minutes into the struggle, I ! as s! eating heavily and beginning to tire. I , ne! it ! ouldn"t be long before my refle' es slo! ed, and one of the dogs sli##ed through to bite my leg or arm.)nd ! ith the first smell of blood, their ravening fury ! ould be ome rabid, berser, , and fearless. I ho#ed that someone in the slum ! ould hear the ear(s#litting lamour and ome to our res ue. Out I"d been ! o, en by that same bar, ing from the outs, irts of the slum a hundred times late at night.)nd a hundred times I"d turned over and gone ba , to slee# ! ithout

thin, ing about it.

The large black dog that seemed to be the alpha leader made a cunning double feint. As I turned, too quickly, to meet its rush, my foot struck a protruding timber and I fell. I'd often heard people say that at the moment of some accident or sudden danger

they had the sensation that time was delayed or sluggish, and everything seemed to happen in slow motion. When

that stumble sideways, as I fell to the ground, was my first experience of it. I fell and stumbled and fell, there was a tunnel of lengthened time and narrowed perspectives. I saw the black dog hesitate in the rhythm of its instinctive retreats, and turn to face us once more. I saw its forepaws slip and slide beneath it with the energy of its scrambling turn, and then gouge out a furrow on the dusty track, for the rush and scurrying. I saw the eyes of the beast, the almost human cruelty as it sensed my weakness and its nearness to the killing second. I saw the other dogs pause, almost as one, and then reefer forward with little mincing steps. I had time to think, how strange and inappropriate their stealth was, then, in the moments of my vulnerability. I had time to feel the rough stones scrape the skin, from my elbow as I struck the ground, and time to ponder at the ridiculous article of worry, about the threat of infection, that strayed across the surface of the present and greater danger of the dogs, the dogs. They were everywhere.

And desperate, silenced with fear for him, I thought of Zari, the poor child who'd been pressed into my care so reluctantly. I felt him slip from my neck, felt his fragile arms fall through my scrambling hands as I rushed into the slithering pile of timber. I let him fall and scramble forward with feline agility to stand, one foot on either side of my extended legs. Then, his body rigid with the vehemence of his rage and courage, the little boy shrieked, seized a lump of wood, and rushed it down on the snout of the black dog. The beast was sorely wounded. Its yelping screams rose above the din of bars and howls and the shrieking

of the boy.

5) Allah hu), barB) Allah hu), barB5 2ari= shouted. *e rou hed, and s! ung at the em#ty air, his o! n fa e ! ild as any beast, and his #osture as feral. In the last of those im#ossibly long se onds of my heightened sense, I had time to feel the hot sting of tears as I ! at hed him rou h and s! ing and fight to defend us. I ould see the , nu , les of his s#ine thrust out against his shirt, and the bones of his thin, little , nees outlined against his trousers. 2here ! as so mu h bravery in that small #a , age. 2he emotion that burned my eyes ! as love, the #ure, #ride(filled love of father for son. I loved him ! ith all my heart in that se ond.)s I thrashed u# to my feet, and time a elerated from its glue of fear and failure, some ! ords re#eated themselves in my mind, ! ords from <arla"s #oem. I ! ill die for this love, die for this love. GHH

2ari= had ! ounded the #a , leader, and it hung ba , behind the others, dis#iriting them for a fe! moments. 2he ho! ling gre! louder, ho! ever, and there ! as another =uality to it then, a throbbing moan of frustration. It ! as as if they ! ere si , ening for the , ill, and tormented by their failure. I ho#ed that in their agony of disa##ointment they might turn on one another if they didn't bring us do! n soon. 2hen, ! ithout ! arning, they

s#rang at us again.

2hey ame in grou#s of t! o and three. 2hey atta , ed from t! o sides at on e. 2he boy and I stood side(to(side and ba , (to(ba , , fighting them off ! ith des#erate +abs and slashes. 2he dogs ! ere insane ! ith the blood lust. 7e hit them hard, but they o! ered only se onds before lea#ing at us again. /very! here around us ! as fang and snarl, sna# and ho! l. I leaned over 2ari= to hel# him drive ba , a determined rush from three or four of the beasts, and one dog managed to s#rint in behind me and bite do! n hard on my an, le. 4y leather boot #rote ted me, and I drove the dog a! ay, but I , ne! ! e ! ere losing the ! ar. 7e"d retreated hard u# against

the mound of timbers, and there ! as no! here else to go. The ! hole
#a , ! as snarling and lunging at us from only t! o metres a! ay.
Then, from behind us, there ! as a sound of gro! ling, and the
run hing rattle of timbers sli##ing a! ay under the ! eight of
something that had +um#ed onto them. I thought that some of the
dogs had someho! ! or, ed their ! ay around onto the hea# but, as I
turned to meet the hallenge, I sa! the bla , (lad figure of
)bdullah as he s#rang, lea#ing over our heads into the midst of
the thrashing +a! s of the #a , .

*e ! hirked, stri, ing out left and right. *e +um#ed, dra! ing his
, nees u# tight and landing ! ith the su##le tautness of a trained
fighter. *is movements ! ere fluid, s! ift, and e onomi al. It ! as
the a! ful and beautiful frugality of sna, e and s or#ion. ; ethal.
' a t. >erfe t. *e" d armed himself ! ith a metal rod, about three
centimetres in diameter and more than a metre in length. *e s! ung
it t! o(handed as if it ! as a s! ord. Out it ! as n"t the su#erior
! ea#on or even his un anny agility that terrified the dogs and
drove them ba , . 7hat routed them in #ani , ed flight, leaving t! o
of their number s, ull(ra , dead, ! as the fa t that he" d ta, en
the fight to them6 that he" d atta , ed, ! here ! e" d defended6 that
he ! as sure of ! inning, ! here ! e" d merely struggled to survive.

It ! as over =ui , ly. 2here ! as silen e, ! here so mu h sound had
s reamed.)bdullah turned to loo, at us ! ith the metal rod held
above GH?

his shoulder li, e a samurai s! ord. The smile shining from his
brave young fa e ! as li, e moonlight gleaming on the minaret of
*a+i)li"s ! hite mos=ue.

; ater, ! hile ! e dran, hot and very s! eet Suleimani hai in my
hut,)bdullah e' #lained that he" d been ! aiting for me in the hut,
and heard the dogs. *e told us he ame to investigate it be ause
he" d sensed that something ! as dreadfully ! rong. 7hen ! e" d tal, ed
the adventure through several times, I #re#ared three #la es for
us on the bare earth floor, and ! e stret hed out to rest.

)bdullah and 2ari= sli##ed effortlessly into a slee# that eluded

me. I lay back, in a darkness that smelt of incense and beedie cigarettes and heady, erosene, and I sifted the events of the last few days through a sieve of doubt and suspicion. So much more had happened during those days, it seemed, than in the

months before them. A dame, a Hindu, a Parsi, a Haderbhai's cousin, Saana (I felt myself to be at the mercy of personalities that were stronger, or at least more mysterious, than my own. I felt the irresistible draw and drift of a tide that was carrying me to someone else's destination, someone else's destiny. There was a plan or purpose. I sensed it. There were clues, I was sure, but I couldn't separate them from the busy collage of hours and faces and words. The mottled night seemed full of signs and portents, as if fate itself was warning me to go or daring me to stay.

Zari woke with a start, and sat up, staring about him. My eyes were adjusted to the darkness. I saw the moment of fear on his pale face clearly, a fear that tightened into sorrow and resolve even as I lay flat on my back. He looked to the peacefully sleeping form of Abdullah, and then to me. Without a sound, he stood and dragged his sleeping mat over until it met mine. Snuggling down under the cover of his thin blanket one more, he tucked in beside me. I stretched out my arm, and he rested his head on it. The smell of the sun was in his hair.

His exhaustion finally claimed me, submerging my doubts and confusions, the shroud of mystery of near sleep suddenly showed me that it was that those new friends (Haderbhai, Aara, Abdullah, Rabar, and all the others) had in common. They were all, like me, were all, strangers to the city. - one of us was born there.) All of us were refugees, survivors, huddled on the shores of the island city. If there was a bond between us, it was the bond of exile, the loneliness of the lost, the lonely, and the dispossessed. GHC

Realising that, understanding it, made me see the hard edges of

the way I'd treated the boy, Zari, himself a stranger in my ragged and ragged fragment of the city. I was ashamed of the old selfishness that had stolen my identity, and pierced by the courage and loneliness of the little boy, I listened to his sleeping breath, and let him cling to the ache in my heart. Sometimes I love it nothing more than home. Sometimes I cry with everything else tears. In the end that's all there is: love and its duty, sorrow and its truth. In the end that's all I have (to hold on tight until the dawn.

(((((((((((

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The world is run by one million evil men, ten million stupid men, and a hundred million fools. Abdul Ghani pronounced in his best English accent, licking the sweet honey away from his short, thick fingers. The evil men are the fools (the rich men, and the politicians, and the fanatics of religion) whose

decisions rule the world, and set it on its course of greed and destruction.

* He paused, looking toward the hissing fountain in the garden. The rain lashed the courtyard as if he was receiving inspiration from the wetness and the shimmering stone. * He reached out with his right hand and took another honey away, sucking it into his mouth. The little beseeching smile he gave me as he held and swallowed seemed to say, I know! I shouldn't, but I really can't help it.

There are only one million of them, the truly evil men, in the whole world. The very rich and the very powerful, whose decisions really count (they only number one million. The stupid men, whose number ten million, are the soldiers and policemen who enforce the rule of the evil men. They are the standing armies of twelve countries, and the police forces of those and twenty more. In total, there are only ten million of them with any real power or consequence. They are often brave, I'm sure, but they are stupid, too, because they give their lives for governments and causes that use their flesh and blood as mere chess pieces. Those governments always betray them or let them down or abandon them, in the long run. Nations neglect no men more shamefully than the heroes of their wars.

The circular courtyard garden at the heart of Chaderbhai's house

! as o#en to the s, y at its entre. 4onsoon rain fell u#on the fountain and surrounding tiles: rain so dense and onstant that the s, y ! as a river, and our #art of the ! orld ! as its ! aterfall. Des#ite the rain, the fountain ! as G?% still running, sending its frail #lumes of ! ater u#! ard against the as ade from above. 7e sat under over of the surrounding veranda roof, dry and ! arm in the humid air as ! e ! at hed the do! n#our and si##ed s! eet tea.

5)nd the hundred million o! ards,5)bdul Ghani ontinued, #in hing the handle of the tea u# bet! een his #lum# fingers, 5they are the bureau rats and #a#er shufflers and #en(#ushers ! ho #ermit the rule of the evil men, and loo, the other ! ay. 2hey are the head of this de#artment, and the se retary of that ommittee, and the #resident of the other asso iation. 2hey are managers, and offi ials, and mayors, and offi ers of the ourt. 2hey al! ays defend themselves by saying that they are +ust follo! ing orders, or +ust doing their +ob, and it"s nothing #ersonal, and if they don"t do it, someone else surely ! ill. 2hey are the hundred million o! ards ! ho , no! ! hat is going on, but say nothing, ! hile they sign the #a#er that #uts one man before a firing s=uad, or ondemns one million men to the slo! er death of a famine.5

*e fell silent, staring into the mandala of veins on the ba , of his hand.) fe! moments later, he shoo, himself from his reverie and loo, ed at me, his eyes gleaming in a gentle, affe tionate smile.

5So, that"s it,5 he on luded. 52he ! orld is run by one million evil men, ten million stu#id men, and a hundred million o! ards. 2he rest of us, all si' billion of us, do #retty mu h ! hat ! e are toldB5

*e laughed, and sla##ed at his thigh. It ! as a good laugh, the , ind of laugh that ! on"t rest until it shares the +o, e, and I found myself laughing ! ith him.

5Do you, no! ! hat this means, my boyE5 he as, ed, ! hen his fa e
! as serious enough to frame the =uestion.

5tell me.5

5This formula((the one million, the ten million, the hundred
million((this is the real truth of all #oliti s. 4ar' ! as ! rong.
It is not a =uestion of classes, you see, be ause all the classes
are in the hands of this tiny fe! . 2his set of numbers is the
ause of em#ire and rebellion. 2his is the formula that has
generated our ivilisations for the last ten thousand years. 2his
built the #yramids. 2his laun hed your 8rusades. 2his #ut the
! orld at ! ar, and this formula has the #o! er to im#ose the
#ea e.5

5They're not my 8rusades,5 I orre ted him, 5but I get your
#oint.5

5Do you love himE5 he as, ed, hanging the sub+e t so s! iftly that
he G?1

too, me by sur#rise. *e did that so often, shifting the ground of
his dis ourses from theme to theme, that it ! as one of the
hallmar, s of his onversation. *is s, ill at #erforming the tri ,
! as su h that even ! hen I ame to , no! him ! ell, even ! hen I ame
to e' #e t those sudden deviations and defle tions, he still
managed to at h me off guard. 5Do you love <haderbhaiE5

5I ... ! hat sort of =uestion is thatE5 I demanded, still
laughing.

5*e has great affe tion for you, ; in. *e s#ea, s of you often.5

I fro! ned, and loo, ed a! ay from his #enetrating ga1e. It gave me
a rush of intense #leasure to hear that <haderbhai li, ed me and
s#o, e of me. Still, I didn't ! ant to admit, even to myself, ho!
mu h his a##roval meant to me. 2he #lay of onfli ting emotions((
love and sus#i ion, admiration and resentment((onfused me, as it

usually did ! hen I thought of <hader <han, or s#ent time ! ith him. 2he onfusion emerged as irritation, in my eyes and in my voi e.

5*o! long do you thin, ! e"ll have to ! aitE5 I as, ed, loo, ing around at the losed doors that led to the #rivate rooms of <haderbhai"s house. 5I have to meet ! ith some German tourists this afternoon.5

)bdul ignored the =uestion and leaned a ross the little table se#arating our t! o hairs.

5Dou must love him,5 he said in an almost sedu tive ! his#er. 5Do you ! ant to , no! ! hy I love)bdel <hader ! ith my lifeE5

7e ! ere sitting ! ith our fa es lose enough for me to see the fine red veins in the ! hites of his eyes. 2he embroidery of those red fibres onverged on the auburn iris of his eyes li, e so many fingers raised to su##ort the golden, red(bro! n dis s. 0eneath the eyes ! ere thi , , heavy #ou hes, ! hi h gave his fa e its #ersistent e' #ression of an in! ardness filled ! ith grieving and sorro! . Des#ite his many +o, es and easy laughter, the #ou hes beneath his eyes ! ere s! ollen, all! ays, ! ith a reservoir of unshed tears.

7e"d been ! aiting half an hour for <haderbhai to return. 7hen I'd arrived ! ith 2ari=, <hader had greeted me ! armly and then retired ! ith the boy to #ray, leaving me in the om#any of)bdul Ghani. 2he house ! as utterly silent, save for the s#lash of falling rain in the ourtyard and the bubble of the fountain"s over(burdened #um#.) #air of doves huddled together on the far side of the ourtyard.

)bdul and I stared at one another in the silen e, but I didn"t s#ea, , I G?F

didn"t ans! er his =uestion. Do you ! ant to , no! ! hy I love this manE @f ourse I ! anted to , no! . I ! as a ! riter. I ! anted to , no!

everything. Out I !asn't so ha##y to #lay Ghani's =uestion(and(ans! er game. I ouldn't read him, and I ouldn't guess ! here it ! as going.

5I love him, my boy, be ause he is a mooring #ost in this ity. 2housands of #eo#le find safety by tying their lives to his. I love him be ause he has the tas, , ! here other men do not even have the dream, of hanging the ! hole ! orld. I ! orry that he #uts too mu h time and effort and money into that ause, and I have disagreed ! ith him many times about it, but I love him for his devotion to it.)nd most of all, I love him be ause he is the only man I ever met((he is the only man you ! ill ever meet((! ho an ans! er the three big =uestions.5

52here are only three big =uestionsE5 I as, ed, unable to , ee# the sar asm from my voi e.

5Des,5 he ans! ered e=uably. 57here did ! e ome fromE 7hy are ! e hereE 7here are ! e goingE 2hose are the three big =uestions.)nd if you love him, ;in, my young friend, if you love him, he ! ill tell you these se rets, as ! ell. *e ! ill tell you the meaning of life.)nd ! hen you hear him s#ea, , ! hen you listen to him, you ! ill , no! that ! hat he says is true.)nd no(one else you ! ill ever meet ! ill ans! er these three =uestions for you. I , no! . I have travelled the /arth many times over. I have as, ed all the great tea hers. Oefore I met)bde! <hader <han, and +oined my

life to his, as his brother, I s#ent a fortune((several fortunes ((see, ing out the famous seers and mysti s and reno! ned s ientists. -one of them ever ans! ered the three big =uestions. 2hen I met <haderbhai. *e ans! ered the =uestions for me.)nd I have loved him, as my brother, my soul's brother, ever sin e that day. I have served him from that day until the little minute that ! e share. *e ! ill tell you. 2he meaning of lifeB *e ! ill solve the mystery for you.5

Ghani's voi e ! as a ne! urrent in the ! ide, strong river that

carried me: the river of the city and its fifteen million lives.
*is this, bro! n hair! as streaked! ith grey, and smudged
completely! hite at the temples. *is moustache, more grey than
bro! n, rested on finely sculptured, almost feminine lips.) heavy
gold chain gleamed at his neck, in the afternoon light, and
matched the gold that flashed in his eyes.)nd as! e stared at
one another in that yearning silence, tears began to fill the
red-rimmed cups of his eyes. G?G

I couldn't doubt the real depth of his feeling, but I couldn't
fully understand it, either. When a door opened behind us, and
Ghani's round face dissolved into its usual mask of fateful
affability. We both turned to see <haderbhai enter! ith Zari=.

5; inB5 he said, ! ith his hands resting on the boy's shoulders.
5Zari= has been telling us how much he learned ! ith you in the
last three months.5

Three months.)t first I'd thought it impossible to endure the
boy's company for three days. Det three months had passed too
swiftly and ! hen the time came to bring him home, I'd returned
him to his uncle against the ! ishes of my heart. I , ne! that I
! ould miss him. *e ! as a good boy. *e ! ould be a fine man((the
, kind of man I once had tried, and failed, to be.

5*e'd still be ! ith us, if you hadn't sent for him,5 I replied.
2here ! as a hint of reproach in my tone. It seemed to me a cruel
arbitrariness that, ! ithout ! arning, had #ut the boy ! ith me for
months and had taken him away just as suddenly.

5Zari= completed his training at our <orani school during the
last two years, and now! he has improved his English, ! ith you. It
is time for him to take his place at college, and I think, he is
very ! ell prepared.5

<haderbhai's tone ! as gentle and patient. 2he affectionate and
slightly amused smile in his eyes held me as firmly as his strong
hands held the shoulders of the solemn, unsmiling boy standing in

front of him.

5Dou , no! , ; in,5 he said softly, 5! e have a saying, in the >ashto language, and the meaning of it is that you are not a man until you give your love, truly and freely, to a hild.)nd you are not a good man until you earn the love, truly and freely, of a hild

in return.5

52ari="s o, ay,5 I said, standing to sha, e hands and ta, e my leave. 5*e"s a good , id, and I'll miss him.5

I ! asn"t the only one ! ho ! ould miss him. *e ! as a favourite ! ith I asim)li *ussein. 2he head man had visited the boy often, and had ta, en him on his rounds of the slum. \$eetendra and Radha had s#oiled him ! ith their affe tion. \$ohnny 8igar and >raba, er had teased him good(naturedly, and they"d in luded him in their ! ee, ly ri , et game. /ven)bdullah had develo#ed an emotional regard for the hild.)fter the -ight of the 7ild Dogs, he"d visited 2ari= t! i e every ! ee, to tea h him the arts of fighting ! ith sti , s, s arves, and bare hands. I sa! them often, during those months, their silhouettes arved on the hori1on li, e figures G?H from a shado! (#lay as they #ra tised on the one small stri# of sandy bea h near the slum.

I shoo, hands ! ith 2ari= last, and loo, ed into his earnest, truthful, bla , eyes. 4emories from the last three months s, i##ed a ross the fluid surfa e of the moment. I re alled his first fight ! ith one of the slum boys.) mu h bigger boy had , no , ed him do! n, but 2ari= drove him ba , ! ith the #o! er of his eyes alone, for ing shame into the boy ! ith his stare. 2he other boy bro, e do! n and ! e#t. 2ari= embra ed him in a soli itous hug, and their lose friendshi# ! as sealed. I remembered 2ari="s enthusiasm in the /nglish lasses that I"d set u# for him, and ho! he soon be ame my assistant, hel#ing the other hildren ! ho +oined in to learn. I sa! him struggling against the first

monsoon flood ! ith us, digging a drainage hannel out of the ro , y earth ! ith sti , s and our bare hands. I remembered his fa e #ee#ing around the flimsy door of my hut one afternoon ! hen I ! as trying to ! rite. DesB 7hat is it, 2ari=B I"d as, ed him irritably. @h, I'm sorry, he"d re#lied. Do you ! ant to be lonelyE

I left) bdel <hader <han"s house, and began the long ! al, ba , to the slum, alone and diminished by the absen e of the boy. I ! as less im#ortant, someho! , or suddenly less valuable in the different ! orld that losed in on me ! ithout him. I , e#t my a##ointment ! ith the German tourists, at their hotel, =uite near <haderbhai"s mos=ue. 2hey ! ere a young ou#le, on their first tri# to the sub(ontinent. 2hey ! anted to save money by hanging their Deuts hmar, s on the bla , mar, et, and then buy some hashish for their +ourney around India. 2hey ! ere a de ent, ha##y ou#le ((inno ent, generous(hearted, and motivated by a s#iritual notion of India. I hanged their money for them, on a ommission, and arranged the #ur hase of the harras. 2hey ! ere very grateful, and tried to #ay me more than ! e"d agreed. I refused the e' tra money((a deal is a deal, after all((and then a e#ted their invitation to smo, e ! ith them. 2he hillum I #re#ared ! as average strength for those of us ! ho lived and ! or, ed on the streets of Oombay, but mu h stronger than they ! ere a ustomed to smo, ing. 2hey ! ere both stoned to slee# ! hen I #ulled the door of their

hotel room losed, and ! al, ed on through do1y afternoon streets.

I made my ! ay along 4ohammed)li Road to 4ahatma Gandhi Road and the 8olaba 8ause! ay. I ould"ve ta, en a bus, or one of the many #ro! ling ta' is, but I loved the ! al, . I loved those , ilometres from 8hor ba1aar, #ast 8ra! ford 4ar, et, &.2. Station, 9lora 9ountain, the 9ort area,

G??

Regal 8ir le, and on through 8olaba to Sassoon Do , , the 7orld 2rade 8entre, and the Oa , Oay. I ! al, ed them a thousand times in those years, and they ! ere all! ays ne! , al! ays e' iting, and all! ays ins#iring.)s I rounded Regal 8ir le and #aused

momentarily to see him, the 80m long) ttractions #osters outside Regal
8inema, I heard a voice calling my name.

5; inbabaB *eyB @h, ; inB5

I turned to see >raba, er leaning from the #assenger ! indo! of a
bla , (and(yello! ta' i. I ! al, ed over to sha, e his hand and greet
the driver, >raba, er's ousin, Shantu.

57e"re going ba , to home. \$um# yourself inside, and ! e"ll give
you a lifts.5

52han, s, >rabu,5 I smiled. 5I"ll , ee# ! al, ing. I've got a ou#le
of sto#s to ma, e on the ! ay.5

5@, ay, ; inB5 >raba, er grinned. 5Out you don't ta, e too mu h time,
li, e sometimes too mu h time you're ta, ing, if you don't mind
that I'm telling your fa e. 2oday is a s#e ial day, isn't itE5

I ! aved until his smile disa##eared in the thi , et of traffi ,
and then I +um#ed in fright as a ar slammed to a s ree hing
smash beside me.)n)mbassador had tried to overta, e a slo! er ar
and had rashed into a ! ooden hand(art, for ing the heavy art
into the side of a ta' i, only t! o metres a! ay from me.

It ! as a bad a ident. 2he hand(art #uller ! as seriously
in+ured. I ould see that the ro#es atta hed to his ne , and
shoulders((the reins and harness((had tra##ed him in the yo, e of
the art. *is body, onstrained by the ro#es, had somersaulted,
and he"d hit his head hard on the unyielding surfa e of the road.
@ne arm ! as t! isted ba , ! ard at a si , eningly unnatural angle.)
#ie e of shinbone on one leg #rotruded belo! the , nee.)nd those
ro#es, the very ro#es he used every day to drag his art through
the ity, ! ere tangled about his ne , and hest, and dragging him
to! ard ho, ing death.

I rushed for! ard ! ith others, #ulling my , nife from its s abbard
in the belt at the ba , of my trousers. 7or, ing fast, but as

carefully as possible, I cut through the ropes and freed the man from the pressure of his cart. *e! as an older man, perhaps sixty years old, but he! as fit and lean and healthy. *is fast heartbeat! as regular and strong: a normal current! with! his

to charge his recovery. *is air! says! here! clear, and he! as breathing easily. When I opened his eyes gently! with my fingers, his

muscles reacted to the light. *e! as dazed and shocked, rather than unconscious.

With three other men, I lifted him from the road to the footpath. *is left arm hung limply from its shoulder, and I eased it into a curve at the elbow. Men, I called for them. As four of the men, I attached at the corners, I confined the arm to his chest in a makeshift sling. I! as examining the break in his leg! when a frenzy of screaming and shouts near the damaged cars forced me to my feet.

Two or more men! were trying to seize the driver of the ambassador. *e! as a huge man, all over sixty feet, half again as heavy as I! as, and tall! as broad across the chest. *e! planted his thick legs against the floor of the vehicle, braced one arm against the roof, and gripped the steering wheel! with the other. The furious crowd gave up after a minute of fruitless, desperate struggle, and turned their attention to the man in the back seat. *e! as a stocky man! with strong shoulders, but he! as much slighter and leaner. The mob dragged him from the back seat, and thrust him against the side of the car. *e! covered his face! with his arms but the crowd began beating him! with their fists and tearing at him! with their fingers.

The tall men! were Egyptians. I guessed them to be Egyptians. When I came from the footpath, I remembered the shock, and shame I'd felt! when I'd seen mob rage like that for the first time, almost eighteen months before, on the first day of Sabra's day, the tour of the city. I remembered how! helplessly and cowardly I'd felt! when

the road had carried the man's body away. I'd told myself then that it wasn't my culture, it wasn't my city, it wasn't my fight. Eighteen months later, the Indian culture was mine, and that part of the city was my own. It was a battle, (mar, et beat. My beat. I lived there every day. I even knew some of the people in the murderous road. I couldn't let it happen again without trying to help.

Shouting louder than the rest, I ran into the screaming road and began dragging men away from the tight press of bodies.

Others? Others? Don't hit! Don't kill! Don't hit! I shouted in Hindi.

It was a messy business. For the most part, they allowed me to drag them away from the mob. My arms were strong. The men felt the power that shoved them aside. Out their killing rage soon hurled them back, into the uproar, and I felt their fists and fingers pounding and gouging at me

from everywhere at once. At last I succeeded in clearing a path to the passenger and then separating him from the leaders of the pack. With his back pressed defensively against the side of the

car, the man raised his fists as if ready to fight on. His face was bloody. His shirt was torn and smeared with vivid, crimson blood. His eyes were wide and filled with fear, and he breathed hard through clenched teeth. Determined courage in the set of his jaw and the snarl that bared his teeth. He was a fighter, and he would fight to the very end.

I too, that in with a second's glance, and then turned my back to stand beside him and face the road. Holding my open hands in front of me, pleading and pleading, I shouted for the violence to stop.

As I'd run forward and started the attempt to save the man I'd had a fantasy that the road would part and listen to my voice.

Stones would fall from the limp hands of mortified men. The mob, slayed by my eloquent courage, would wander away from the scene with shamed and downcast eyes. Even now, in my recollections of that moment and that danger, I sometimes surrender to a wish that my voice and my eyes had changed their hearts that day, and that the whirl of hate, humiliated and disgraced, had faded and dispersed. Instead, the crowd hesitated for only an instant and then pressed in upon us again in a brazen, hissing, screaming, boiling rage, and we were forced to fight for our lives.

Ironically, the very numbers of the crowd attacking us worked to our advantage. We were trapped in an alley; (shame made by the tangle of vehicles. The crowd surrounded us, and there was no escape. Out the rush of their numbers inhibited their movements. Our blows struck us rather than might've been the case had fewer men opposed us, and the thrashing crowd actually struck themselves quite often in their fury.

And perhaps there really was some softening of their fury, some reluctance to kill us, despite their urgent desire to cause us pain. I know that reluctance. I've seen it many times, in many violent worlds. I can't fully explain it. It's as if there's a collective conscience within the group (mind of a mob, and the right appeal, at exactly the right moment, can turn murderous hate aside from its intended victim. It's as if the mob, in just that critical moment, wants to be stopped, wants to be revented from the worst of their own violence. And in that one doubting moment, a single voice or fist raised against the gathering evil can be enough to avert it. I've seen it in prison, where men bent on the act, (rage of another prisoner can be stopped by one voice that stirs their shame. I've seen it in Iraq, where one strong voice can lead, even amidst the hate (filled cruelty that torments a captured prisoner. And perhaps I saw it on that day, as the Algerian and I struggled with the mob. Perhaps the strangeness of the situation (a white man, a gora, leading in *indi for the lives of thousands of men) held them back, from murder.

The car behind us suddenly roared to life. The heavy-set driver had managed to start the car. He gunned the engine, and began to

gently reverse away from the wreckage. The passenger and I slowly shuffled and slithered along beside the car as it barrelled into the road. We struggled, out, shoving men away from us and wrenching their hands from our clothes. When the driver reached the car and over his seat and opened the rear passenger door, we both jumped into the car. The rest of the road slammed the door. Twenty, fifty hands drummed, beat, slapped, and pounded on the outside of the car. The driver pulled away, heading at a rattle along the Causeway Road. A collection of missiles (tea glasses, food containers, dozens of shoes) rained on the car. When we were free, speeding along the busy road and watching through the windshield to make sure we weren't followed.

"Assaan @bi," the passenger beside me said, offering his hand.

"In a word, I replied, shaking his hand and noting for the first time how much gold he wore. There were rings on every finger. Some of them glowed around blue-hued, glittering diamonds. There was also a diamond-encrusted gold Rolex hanging loosely at his wrist.

"This is Raheem," he said, nodding to the driver. The huge man in the front seat glanced over his shoulder to offer me a broad grin. He rolled his eyes in a survivor's happy prayer, and turned to face the road.

"I owe you my life," Assaan @bi," he said with a grim smile. "We both do. They wanted to kill us, but there, that's for sure."

"We were lucky," I answered, looking into his round, healthy, handsome face and beginning to like him.

His eyes and his lips defined his face. The eyes were unusually

! ide(set and large, giving him a slightly re#tilian stare, and the marvellous li#s ! ere so full and sum#tuously sha#ed that they seemed to be designed for a mu h larger head. *is teeth ! ere ! hite and even at the front, but all the teeth on either side ! ere a##ed ! ith gold. Ro o o urves at the orners of his ! ide nose gave his nostrils a deli ate flare, as if he ! as onstantly G?9

inhaling a #leasantly into' i ating s ent.) ! ide, gold earring, ons#i uous beneath his short bla , hair and against the blue(bla , s, in of his thi , ne , , #ier ed his left ear.

I glan ed at his torn, bloody shirt, and at the uts and bruises that ! ere s! elling on his fa e and every e' #osed entimetre of flesh. 7hen I met his eyes again they ! ere glittering ! ith e' ited good humour. *e ! asn't too sha, en by the violen e of the mob, and neither ! as I. 7e ! ere both men ! ho"d seen ! orse, and had been through ! orse, and ! e re ognised that in ea h other immediately. In fa t, neither of us ever mentioned the in ident dire tly after that day of our meeting. I loo, ed into his glittering eyes, and I felt my smile stret hing to mat h his.

57e ! ere damn lu , yB5

59u , yesB Des, ! e ! ereB5 he agreed, laughing hard and sli##ing the Role' ! at h from his ! rist. *e held it to his ear to ma, e sure it ! as still ti , ing. Satisfied, he sna##ed the ! at h ba , on his ! rist, and gave his full attention to me. 5Out the debt is there, and the debt is still im#ortant, even if ! e ! ere very lu , y.) debt li, e this((it is the most im#ortant of all a man's obligations. Dou must allo! me to re#ay you.5

5It'll ta, e money,5 I said. 2he driver glan ed in the rear(vision mirror and e' hanged a loo, ! ith *assaan.

5Out ... this debt annot be re#aid ! ith money,5 *assaan ans! ered.

I'm talking about the cart (the one you hit with your car.) and the taxi you damaged. If you give me some money, I'll see that it gets to them. It'll go a long way to allowing things to run at Regal Street. That's in my beat (I have to work there, every day, and the people are going to be pissed off for a while yet. Do that, and I'll sell it square.

*Assaan laughed, and slapped his hand on my knee. It was a good laugh (honest but sincere, and generous but shrewd.

Please don't worry, he said, still smiling broadly. This is not my area, it is true, but I am not without influence, even here. I'll make sure that the injured man receives all the money he needs.

And the other one, I added.

The other one?

Des, the other one.

The other ... that he asked, earnestly.

The taxi driver.

Des, yes, the taxi driver also. GC%

There was a little silence, humming with whistles and questions. I glanced out the window of the cab, but I could still feel his penetrating eyes on me. I turned to face him again.

I ... like ... taxi drivers, I said.

Des ...

I ... I, no! a lot of taxi drivers.

Des ...

5) and that ab being smashed u#(it'll cause a lot of grief for the driver and his family.5

5@f course.5

5So, ! hen ! ill you do itE5 I as, ed.

5Do ! hatE5

57hen ! ill you #ut the money u#, for the art(#uller and the ab driverE5

5@h,5 *assaan @bi, ! a grinned, loo, ing u# again into the rear(vision mirror to e' hange a loo, ! ith Raheem. 2he big man shrugged, and grinned ba , into the mirror. 52omorro! . Is tomorro! o, ayE5

5Deah,5 I fro! ned, not sure ! hat all the grinning ! as about. 5I +ust ! ant to , no! , so that I an tal, to them about it. It's not a =uestion of the money. I an #ut the money u# myself. I ! as #lanning to do it any! ay. I've gotta mend some fen es ba , there. Some of them are ... a =uaintan es of mine. So ... that's ! hy it's im#ortant. If you're not going to do it, I need to , no! , so that I an ta, e are of it myself. 2hat"s all.5

2he ! hole thing seemed to be getting very om#li ated. I ! ished I'd never raised the matter ! ith him. I began to feel angry at him, ! ithout really understanding ! hy. 2hen he offered me his o#en #alm in a handsha, e.

5I give you my ! ord,5 he said solemnly, and ! e shoo, hands.

7e ! ere silent again, and after a fe! moments I rea hed over to ta# the driver on the shoulder.

5\$ust here is fine,5 I said, #erha#s a little more harshly than

I'd intended. 5I'll get out here.5

2he ar #ulled into the , erb, a fe! blo , s from the slum. I o#ened the door to leave, but *assaan gri##ed my ! rist. It ! as a very strong gri#. 9or a se ond, I al ulated all the long ! ay u#! ard to the mu h greater strength I , ne! must be in Raheem's gri#.

5>lease, remember my name(((*assaan @bi, ! a. Dou an find me at the)fri an ghetto, in)ndheri. /veryone , no! s me there. 7hatever I an GC1

do for you, #lease tell me. I ! ant to lear my debt, ; in 9ord. 2his is my tele#hone number. Dou an rea h me, from here, at any time of the day or the night.5

I too, the ard((it bore only his name and number((and shoo, his hand. - odding to Raheem, I left the ar.

52han, you, ; in,5 *assaan alled out through the o#en ! indo! . 5Inshallah, ! e'll meet again soon.5

2he ar drove off, and I turned to! ard the slum, staring at the gold(lettered business ard for a full blo , before I #ut it in my #o , et.) fe! minutes later, I #assed the 7orld 2rade 8entre and entered the om#ound of the slum, remembering, as I al! ays did, the first time I entered those blest and tormented a res.

)s I #assed <umar"s hai sho#, >raba, er ame out to greet me. *e ! as ! earing a yello! sil, shirt, bla , #ants, and red(and(bla , #atent leather high(heeled #latform shoes. 2here ! as a rimson sil, s arf tied at his throat.

5@h, ; in5 he alled out, hobbling a ross the bro, en ground on his #latform shoes. *e lung to me, as mu h for balan e as in friendly greeting. 52here is someone, a fello! you , no! , he is ! aiting for you, in your house. Out one minute #lease, ! hat

had ended on your face and your shirts. Have you been having it some fights, with some bad fellows? Some fellow gave you a solid beating. If you want me, I will go with you, and tell that fellow he is a bahin hudh.

It's nothing, >rabu. It's okay, I muttered, striding toward the hut. Do you, no! I hope it is.

Who it ... is? Dou mean, I hope it is, I hope I am hitting your face?

—o, no, of course not! I mean, the man I hope is waiting in my hut. Do you, no! I hope it is.

Des, ;in, he said, stumbling along beside me and clutching my sleeve for support.

We walked on for a few more seconds in silence. People greeted us on every side, calling out invitations to share chai, food, or a smoke.

Well, I said, after a while.

Well, what! Well.

Well, I hope it is? Who's in my hut?

At last he laughed. Sorry, ;in. I thought you want some surprises, so I didn't tell you. GCF

It's hardly a surprise, >rabu, because you told me there is someone waiting for me in my hut.

—o, no! he insisted. You don't, no! I know his name yet, so still you get the surprise. And that is a good thing. If I don't tell you there is somebody, then you go to your hut, and you get the show, s. And that is a bad thing. A show, s is like a surprise,

! hen you are not ready.5

52han, you, >rabu,5 I re#lied, my sar asm eva#orating as it ! as uttered.

*e needn't have on erved himself ! ith s#aring me the sho , . 2he loser I ame to my hut, the more often I ! as informed that a foreigner ! as ! aiting to see me. *ello, ; in babaß 2here"s a gora in your house, ! aiting for youß

7e arrived at my hut to find Didier sitting in the shade of the door! ay on a stool, and fanning himself ! ith a maga1ine.

5It"s Didier,5 >raba,er informed me, grinning ha##ily.

5Des. 2han, you, >rabu,5 I turned to Didier, ! ho rose to sha, e hands. 52his is a sur#rise. It"s good to see you.5

5)nd good to see you, my dear friend,5 Didier re#lied, smiling des#ite the distressing heat. 5Out, I must be honest, you loo, a little ! orse for ! ear, as ;ettie ! ould say.5

5It"s nothing.) misunderstanding, that"s all. Give me a minute to ! ash u#.5

I stri##ed off my torn, bloody shirt, and #oured a third of a bu ,et of lean ! ater from the lay mat, a. Standing on the flattened #ile of stones beside my hut, I ! ashed my fa e, arms, and hest. -eighbours #assed me as I ! ashed, smiling ! hen they aught my eye. 2here ! as an art to ! ashing in that ! ay, ! ith no ! asted dro# of ! ater and no e' ess of mess. I"d mastered that art, and it ! as one of the hundred little ! ays my life imitated theirs, and folded into the lotus of their loving, ho#ing struggle ! ith fate.

57ould you li, e a haiE5 I as, ed Didier as I sli##ed on a lean, ! hite shirt in the door! ay of my hut. 57e an go to <umar"s.5

5I must have had one full cup,5 > raba, he interjected before Didier could reply. 5Out one more, hai! will be okay, for the friendship, sa, e, I think, so.5

*He sat down with us in the room, hai sho#. 9ive huts had been cleared to make space for a single, large room. 2here! as a counter made from an old bedroom dresser, a thatched roof, and benches for GCG

the customers made from blankets resting peacefully on piles of bricks.)ll the materials had been looted from the building site beside the slum. <umar, the hai sho# owner, fought a running guerrilla war with his customers, who tried to pilfer his bricks and blankets for their own houses.

<umar came to take our order himself. 2true to the general rule of slum life that the more money one made, the more overtly, en

one had to look, <umar's appearance! as more dishevelled and ragged than the meanest of his customers. *He dragged up a stained wooden plate for us to use as a table.)##raising it with a suspicious smile, he slapped at the plate with a filthy rag and then tucked the cloth into his singlet.

5Didier, you look terrible,5 I observed, when <umar left to prepare our tea. 5It must be love.5

*He grinned back at me, shaking his head of dirt, curls and raising the palms of his hands.

5I am very fatigued, it is true,5 he said, managing a shrug of elaborate self-dignity. 5>eo#le do not understand the truly fantastical effort required in the corruption of a simple man.)nd the more simple the man, the more effort it requires. 2hey do not realise! that it takes out of me to put so much dependence into a man who is not born to it.5

5Dou might be making a rod for your own back,5 I mumbled.

5/a h thing in its o! n time,5 he re#lied, smiling thoughtfully.
5Out you, my friend, you loo, very ! ell. @nly a little, ho! shall
I say it, lonely for information.)nd to that end, Didier is
here. I have all the latest ne! s and gossi# for you. Dou ,no! the
differen e bet! een ne! s and gossi#, don"t youE -e! s tells you
! hat #eo#le did. Gossi# tells you ho! mu h they en+oyed it.5

7e both laughed, and >raba, er +oined in, laughing so loudly that
everyone in the hai sho# turned to loo, at him.

57ell then,5 Didier ontinued, 5! here to startE @h yes, &i, ram"s
#ursuit of ;etitia #ro eeds ! ith a ertain bi1arre inevitability.
She began by loathing him((5

5I thin, loathing is bit strong,5 I argued.

5)h, yes, #erha#s you"re right. If she loathes me((and it is
om#letely ertain that she does, the dear and s! eet /nglish Rose
((then her feeling for &i, ram ! as indeed something less. Shall ! e
say detestE5

5I thin, detest ! ould over it,5 I agreed.

5/t bien, she began by detesting him but, through the #ersisten e
of his GCH
devoted romanti attentions, he has managed to arouse in her ! hat
I an only des ribe as an amiable revulsion.5

7e laughed again, and >raba, er sla##ed at his thigh, hooting ! ith
su h hilarity that every head turned to! ard him. Didier and I
ins#e ted him ! ith =ui11i al loo, s of our o! n. *e res#onded ! ith
an im#ish smile, but I noti ed that his eyes darted a! ay =ui ,ly
to his left. 9ollo! ing the glan e, I sa! his ne! love, >arvati,

#re#aring food in <umar"s ,it hen. *er thi , , bla , #lait of hair
! as the ro#e by ! hi h a man might limb to heaven. *er #etite

figure((she ! as tiny, shorter even than >raba, er((! as the #erfe t sha#e of his desire. *er eyes, ! hen she turned in #rofile to loo, at us, ! ere bla , fire.

;oo, ing over >arvati's shoulder, ho! ever, ! as her mother, -andita. She ! as a formidable ! oman, three times the ombined ! idth and ! eight of her #etite daughters, >arvati and Sita, and she glo! ered at us, her e' #ression managing to ombine greed for our ustom ! ith ontem#t for our male se'. I smiled at her, and ! agged my head. *er smile, in return, ! as remar, ably similar to the fier e grima e that 4aori ! arriors affe t to intimidate their enemies.

5In his last e#isode,5 Didier ontinued, 5the good &i, ram hired a horse from the handlers on 8ho! #atty Oea h, and rode it to ;etitia's a#artment on 4arine Drive to serenade her outside her ! indo! .5

5Did it ! or, E5

5Unfortunately non. 2he horse left a #a , age of merde on the front #ath! ay((during an es#e ially moving #art of the song, no doubt((and the many other residents of the a#artment building e' #ressed their outrage by #elting the #oor &i, ram ! ith rotting food. ;etitia, it ! as noti ed, thre! more offensive missiles, and ! ith a more deadly aim, than any of the neighbours.5

58"est l'amour,5 I sighed.

5/' a tly((merde and bad food, "est l'amour,5 Didier agreed =ui , ly. 5I do thin, that I must involve myself in this roman e, if it is to su eed. 2he #oor &i, ram((he is a fool for love, and ;ettie des#ises a fool above all else. Out things are mu h more su eessful for 4aurilio in the last time. *e had some business venture ! ith 4odena, Alla's #aramour, and he is in the hi#, as our dear ;ettie ! ould say. *e is no! a signifi ant dealer, in 8olaba.5

I forced my face to remain impassive ! while jealous thoughts of hand(GC?

some Aurilio, flushed ! with success, smiled their way into my mind. The rain started again, and I glanced outside to see people running, hitting their pants and their saris to avoid the many puddles.

Just yesterday, Didier went on, carefully tipping his tea from the cup into the saucer, and sipping it from the saucer as most of the slumdwellers did, Madona arrived in a hauffeured car, at ;eo#old"s, and Aurilio is wearing a ten(thousand(dollar Role' ! at h. Out ...5

OutE I #rom#ted, ! hen he #aused to drin, .

Well, there is terrible risk, in their business. Aurilio is not always ... honourable ... in his business dealings. If he should upset the wrong people, there will be great violence.5

And ! hat about youE I asked, hanging the subject because I didn't want Didier to see the serpent of spite rising in me ! hen he spoke of the trouble that might be finding its way to Aurilio. Didn't you flirting ! ith danger yourselfE Dour ne! ... interest ... is one string short of the full marionette, or so I'm told. *e's got a very bad temper, ;ettie says, and a hair(trigger controlling it.5

@h, himE he sniffed dismissively, turning down the corners of his expressive mouth. Not at all. *e is not dangerous.)lthough he is annoying, and annoying is worse than dangerous, nest(e #asE It is easier to live ! ith a dangerous man than an annoying one.5

>raba, er ! ent to buy three beedie cigarettes from <umar"s shop counter, and lit them ! ith the same match, holding them in one hand and burning the ends ! ith the other. *e #assed one each to Didier and me, and sat down again, smoking contentedly.

5)h, yes, there is another #ie e of ne! s((<avita has ta, en a ne!
+ob at a ne! s#a#er, 2he - ooday. She is a features ! riter. It is
a +ob ! ith mu h #restige, I understand, and a fast tra , to a
sub(editor"s #osition. She ! on it in a field of many talented
andidates, and she is very ha##y.5

5I li, e <avita,5 I felt moved to say.

5Dou , no! ,5 Didier offered, staring at the glo! ing end of his
beedie and then loo, ing u# at me, genuinely sur#rised, 5so do I.5

7e laughed again, and I deliberately in luded >raba, er in the
+o, e. >arvati ! at hed us from the orners of her smouldering
eyes.

5; isten,5 I as, ed, seiling the momentary #ause in our
onversation, 5does the name *assaan @bi, ! a mean anything to
youE5

Didier"s mention of 4auri1io"s ne! , ten(thousand(dollar Role' had
GCC
reminded me of the - igerian. I fished the gold(and(! hite business
ard from my shirt #o , et, and handed it over.

5Out, of ourseB5 Didier re#lied. 5his is a famous Oorsalino.
2hey all him 2he Oody Snat her, in the)fri an ghetto.5

57ell, that"s a good start,5 I muttered, a ! ry smile t! isting my
li#s. >raba, er sla##ed at his thigh, and doubled over ! ith near(
hysteri al laughter. I #ut a hand on his shoulder to alm him
do! n.

52hey say that ! hen *assaan @bi, ! a snat hes a body a! ay, not even
the devil himself an find it. 2hey are never again seen by
living men. \$amaisB *o! do you ome to , no! himE *o! did you get
his ardE5

I sort of, bum#ed into him, earlier today,5 I ans! ered,
retrieving the ard and sli##ing it into my #o , et.

57ell, be areful, my dear friend,5 Didier sniffed, learly hurt
that I hadn't #rovided the details of my en ounter ! ith *assaan.
52his @bi, ! a is li, e a , ing, a bla , , ing, in his o! n , ingdom.
)nd you , no! the old saying((a , ing is a bad enemy, a ! orse
friend, and a fatal family relation.5

\$ust then a grou# of young men a##roa hed us. 2hey ! ere labourers
from the onstru tion site, and most of them lived on the legal
side of the slum. 2hey"d all #assed through my small lini
during the last year, most of them ! anting me to #at h u# ! ounds
they"d re eived in ! or, a idents. It ! as #ayday at the site, and
they ! ere flushed ! ith the e' ited o#timism that a full #ay
#a , et #uts into young, hard(! or, ing hearts. 2hey shoo, hands
! ith me, ea h in turn, and #aused long enough to see the ne!
round of hai and s! eet a, es they"d bought for us delivered to
our table. 7hen they left, I ! as grinning as ! idely as they ! ere.

52his so ial ! or, seems to suit you,5 Didier ommented through an
ar h smile. 5Dou loo, so ! ell and so fit((underneath the bruises
and s rat hes, that is. I thin, you must be a very bad man, in
your heart of hearts, ; in. @nly a ! i , ed man ! ould derive su h
benefit from good ! or, s.) good man, on the other hand, ! ould
sim#ly be ! orn out and bad tem#ered.5

5I'm sure you're right, Didier,5 I said, still grinning. 5<arla
said you're usually right, about the ! rong you find in #eo#le.5

5>lease, my friendB5 he #rotested, 5Dou ! ill turn my headB5

2he sudden rash of many drums e' #loded, thum#ing musi dire tly
outside the hai sho#. 9lutes and trum#ets +oined the drums, and
a ! ild, rau ous musi began. I , ne! the musi and the musi ians
! ell. It ! as GC7
one of the +angling #o#ular tunes that the slum musi ians #layed

Whenever there was a festival or a celebration. We all went to the open front of the show. Gaba, he stood on a bench beside us to peer over the shoulders of the crowd.

What is it? Parade? Didier asked as I led a large troupe slowly along, past the show.

It's Joseph Gaba, he cried, pointing along the lane. Joseph and Maria they're coming.

Some distance away, I could see Joseph and his wife, surrounded by relatives and friends, and cheering us ceremonially.

Some of them, in front of them, as a group, of cheering children, dancing out their unself-conscious and near-hysterical enthusiasm. Some of them adopted poses from their favourite movie dances, and mimed the steps of the stars. Others leaned about like robots, or invented their own dances of their own.

Listening to the band, watching the children, and thinking of Maria (missing the boy already) (I remembered an incident from the prison. In that other world (in a world, but then, I moved into a new prison cell and discovered a tiny mouse there. The creature entered through a rarefied air vent, and reappeared in the cell every night. Gabe and I, obsessive for us are the gems I mine in the tunnels of prison solitude. Asing them, and tiny morsels of food, I bribed the little mouse, over several weeks, and eventually trained it to eat from the edge of my hand. When the prison guards moved me from that cell, in a routine rotation, I told the new tenant (a prisoner I thought I knew) (about the trained mouse. In the morning after the move, he invited me to see the mouse. He'd captured the trusting creature, and crucified it, fastened on a cross made from a broken ruler. He laughed as he told me how the mouse had struggled when he'd tied it by its neck, to the cross with cotton thread. He marvelled at how long it had taken to drive thumbtacks into its rigging.

#a! s.

)re ! e ever +ustified in ! hat ! e doE 2hat =uestion ruined my
slee# for a long time after I sa! the tortured little mouse. 7hen
! e a t, even ! ith the best of intentions, ! hen ! e interfere ! ith
the ! orld, ! e all! ays ris, a ne! disaster that mightn"t be of our
ma,ing, but that ! ouldn"t o ur ! ithout our a tion. Some of the
! orst ! rongs, <arla on e said, ! ere aused by #eo#le ! ho tried to
hange things. GC8

I loo,ed at the slum hildren dan ing li, e a movie horus and
a#ering li, e tem#le mon, eys. I ! as tea hing some of those
hildren to s#ea, , read, and ! rite /nglish.)lready, ! ith +ust
the little they"d learned in three months, a fe! of them ! ere
! inning ! or, from foreign tourists. 7ere those hildren, I
! ondered, the mi e that fed from my handE 7ould their trusting
inno en e be sei1ed by a fate that ! ouldn"t and ouldn"t have
been theirs ! ithout me, ! ithout my intervention in their livesE
7hat ! ounds and torments a! aited 2ari= sim#ly be ause I"d
befriended and taught himE

5\$ose#h beat his ! ife,5 >raba, er e' #lained as the ou#le dre!
near. 5-o! the #eo#le are a big elebration.5

5If they #arade li, e this ! hen a man beats his ! ife, ! hat #arties
they must thro! ! hen one is ,illed,5 Didier ommented, his
eyebro! s ar hed in sur#rise.

5*e ! as drun, , and he beat her terribly,5 I said, shouting above
the din. 5)nd a #unishment ! as im#osed on him by her family and

the ! hole ommunity.5

5I gave to him a fe! good ! ha , s ! ith the sti , my o! n selfB5
>raba, er added, his fa e aglo! ! ith ha##y e' itement.

5@ver the last fe! months, he ! or, ed hard, stayed sober, and did

a lot of jobs in the community, I continued. It was as part of his punishment, and a way of earning the respect of his neighbours again. His wife forgave him a couple of months ago. They've been working and saving money together. They've got enough, now, and they're leaving today on a holiday.

Well, there are worse things for people to celebrate, Didier decided, permitting himself a little shoulder and hip roll in time to the throbbing drums and snare (flutes. Oh, I almost forgot. There is a superstition, a famous superstition attached to that Assaanabi, a. Dou should, now, about it.

I'm not superstitious, Didier, I called back, over the thumb and nail of the music.

Don't be ridiculous, he scoffed. Everyone in the whole world is superstitious.

That's one of Carla's lines, I retorted.

He frowned, cursing his lips as he strained his memory to recall.

It is GC9

Absolutely. It's a Carla line, Didier.

Incredible, he muttered. I thought it was one of mine. Are you sure?

I'm sure.

Well, no matter. The superstition, about him, is that everyone who meets Assaanabi, and exchanges names with him in a greeting, will one day find himself a client of his (either a living client or a dead one. To avoid this fate, you don't tell him your name when you meet him the first time. No one ever does. Dou didn't tell him your name, did you?

) roar ! ent u# from the ro! d surrounding us. \$ose#h and 4aria ! ere lose.)s they a##roa hed, I sa! her radiant, ho#eful, brave smile and his om#eting e' #ressions of shame and determination. She ! as beautiful, ! ith her thi , hair trimmed short and styled to mat h the modern ut of her best dress. *e"d lost ! eight, and loo, ed fit, healthy, and handsome. *e ! ore a blue shirt and ne! trousers. *usband and ! ife #ressed against one another tightly, ste# for ste#, all four hands balled into a bou=uet of len hed fingers. 9amily members follo! ed them, holding a blue sha! I to at h notes and oins thro! n by the ro! d.

>raba, er ouldn't resist the all to dan e. *e lea#t off the ben h and +oined the thi , tangle of +er, ing, ! rithing bodies that #re eded \$ose#h and 4aria on the tra , . Stumbling and tottering on his #latform shoes, he s, i##ed to the entre of the dan ers. *is arms ! ere outstret hed for balan e as if he ! as rossing a shallo! river on a #ath of stones. *is yello! shirt flashed as he ! hirled and lur hed and laughed in the dan e. Didier, too, ! as dra! n into the avalan he of revelry that #loughed through the long lane to the street. I ! at hed him glide and s! ay gra efully into the #arty, s! e#t along in the rhythmi dan e until only his hands ! ere visible above his dar, , urly hair.

Girls thre! sho! ers of flo! er #etals #lu , ed from hrysanthemums. 2hey burst in brilliant ! hite lusters, and settled on all of us in the onverging ro! d. \$ust before the ou#le #assed me, \$ose#h turned to loo, into my eyes. *is fa e ! as fi' ed bet! een a smile and a fro! n. *is eyes ! ere burning, glistening beneath the tight bro! s of his fro! n, ! hile his li#s held a ha##y smile. *e nodded t! i e before loo, ing a! ay.

*e ouldn't , no! it, of ourse6 but ! ith that sim#le nod of his head, \$ose#h had ans! ered the =uestion that had remained ! ith me, as a dull a he of doubt, sin e the #rison. \$ose#h ! as saved. 2hat ! as the loo, simmering in his eyes as he nodded his head. It ! as the fever of salvation. G7%

That too, that fro! ning smile, ombined shame and e' ultation
be ause both are essential((shame gives e' ultation its #ur#ose,
and e' ultation gives shame its re! ard. 7e'd saved him as mu h by
+oining in his e' ultation as ! e had by ! itnessing his shame.)nd
all of it de#ended u#on our a tion, our interfe ren e in his life,
be ause no man is saved ! ithout love.

That hara terises the human ra e more, <arla on e as, ed me,
ruelty, or the a#a ity to feel shame for itE I thought the
=uestion a utely lever then, ! hen I first heard it, but I'm
lonelier and ! iser no! , and I , no! it isn't ruelty or shame that
hara terises the human ra e. It's forgiveness that ma, es us ! hat
! e are. 7ithout forgiveness, our s#e ies ! ould've annihilated
itself in endless retributions. 7ithout forgiveness, there ! ould
be no history. 7ithout that ho#e, there ! ould be no art, for
every ! or, of art is in some ! ay an a t of forgiveness. 7ithout
that dream, there ! ould be no love, for every a t of love is in
some ! ay a #romise to forgive. 7e live on be ause ! e an love,
and ! e love be ause ! e an forgive.

The drums staggered to! ard the distant street. 4oving a! ay from
us, the dan ers rom#ed and rolled on the rhythm, their s! aying
heads li, e a field of ! ildflo! ers ! eaving ba , and forth on ! aves
of ! ind.)s the musi d! indled to an e ho in our minds, the day(
to(day and minute(to(minute of slum life slo! ly re laimed the
lanes. 7e gave ourselves to our routines, our needs, and our
harmless, ho#eful s heming.)nd for a ! hile, a little ! hile, ours

! as a better ! orld be ause the hearts and smiles that ruled it
! ere almost as #ure and lean as the flo! er #etals fluttering
from our hair, and linging to our fa es li, e still, ! hite tears.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The rocky coast of the coastline bordering the slum began in mangrove swamps, at its left, and stretched through deeper water around a long pier (moon curve of white) rested in the water. The monsoon was at full strength, but just at that moment no rain fell from the grey clouds, and the lightning flashed. Flying birds swooped into the shallows, and nestled among the slender, trembling reeds. Fishing boats pulled their nets on the ragged shores of the bay. Children swam and played along the bouldered, pebbly shoreline. On the golden pier, across the small bay, apartments for the rich stood shoulder to shoulder to shoulder, all the way to the embassy district at the point. In the large courtyards and recreation areas of those towers, the healthy, aged and too, the air. Seen from the distant slum, the white shirts of the men and colourful saris of the women were like so many beads threaded by a meditating mind on the blue, strings of asphalt paths. The air, there, on that rocky fringe of the slum was clean and cool. The silences were large enough to swallow occasional sounds. The area was, no more than the Solaba area, Oay. There were few places in the city better suited to the spiritual and physical state, that a wanted man worries himself with, when the omens are bad enough.

I sat alone, on a boulder that was larger and flatter than most, and I smoked a cigarette. I smoked in those days because, like everyone else in the world who smoked, I wanted to die at least as much as I wanted to live.

Sunlight suddenly pushed aside the sodden monsoon clouds, and for a few moments the windows of the apartment buildings across the bay were dazzling, brilliant mirrors of the golden sun. Then, suddenly, the rain clouds regrouped, and slowly sealed the splendid circle of sky, herding one against another until heaven matted the rolling sea with dark, impenetrable clouds. G7F

I lit another cigarette with the butt of the last, and thought about love, and thought about sex. Under pressure from Didier,

I had permitted his friends to see any secrets but those of the flesh, I had admitted that I hadn't made love to anyone since I had arrived in India. That is a very long time but when the drinks, my friend, he had said, gasping in horror, and I arose that it would be a good idea to get very drunk, if you have my meaning, and very soon. And he was right, of course: the longer I went without it, the more important it seemed to become. I was surrounded, in the slum, by beautiful Indian girls and women who provoked small symphonies of inspiration. I never let my eyes or my thoughts

wander too far in their direction (it would've compromised everything that I was, and did, as the slum doctor. Out there were opportunities with foreign girls, tourists, in every other deal that I did with them, every other day. German, French, and Italian girls often invited me back to their hotel rooms for a smoke, once I had helped them to buy hash or grass. I knew that something more than smoking was usually intended. And I was tempted. Sometimes I agreed with it. But I couldn't get Charles out of my mind. And deep within me (I still don't, no matter whether it's love, or fear, or good judgment that shapes such a feeling (I sensed with all of my intuition that if I didn't wait for her, it wouldn't happen.

I couldn't explain that love to Charles, or anyone else, including myself. I never believed in love at first sight until it happened to me. When, when it did happen, it was as if every atom in my body had been changed, somehow: as if I had been charged with light and heat. I was different, forever, just for the sight of her. And the love that opened in my heart seemed to drag the rest of my life behind it, from that moment onward. I heard her voice in every lovely sound that resounded around me. I saw her face in brilliant mirrored flares of memory, every day. Sometimes, when I thought of her, the hunger to touch her and to kiss her and to breathe cinnamon (scented minute of her black hair) led at my chest and rushed the air in my lungs. Clouds, heavy with their burden of monsoon rain, massed above the city, above my head, and it seemed to me in those days that all grey heaven was

my brooding love. The very mangroves trembled with my desire. And at night, too many nights, it was as my restive sleep that rolled and turned the sea in lusted dreaming, until the sun each morning rose with love for her. G7G

Out she wasn't in love with me, she'd said, and she didn't want me to love her. Didier, trying to warn me, trying to help me or save me, perhaps, had said once that nothing grieves more deeply or aesthetically than one half of a great love that isn't meant to be. And he was right, of course, up to a point. Out I couldn't let it go, that hope of loving her, and I couldn't ignore the instinct that enjoined me to wait, and wait.

Then there was that other love, a father's love, and the son's love that I felt for Chaderbhai. I'd called Chader Khan. My friend, Abdul Ghani, had called him a mooring post, with the lives of thousands tied to his life for safety. My own life seemed to be one of those harnessed to his. Yet I couldn't clearly see the means by which fate had bound me to him, nor was I completely free to leave. When Abdul had spoken of his search for wisdom, and the answers to his three big questions, he'd unwittingly described my own private search for something or someone to believe. I'd realized that same dusty, broken road toward a faith. Out every time I'd heard the story of a belief, every time I'd seen some new guru, the result was the same: the story was an convincing in some way, and the guru was flawed. Every faith required me to accept some promise. Every teacher

required me to lose my eyes to some fault. And then there was Abdul Chader Khan, smiling at my suspicions with his honey-colored eyes. Is he the real thing, I began to ask myself. Is he the one?

It is very beautiful, isn't it? Johnny Sigars asked, sitting beside me and staring out at the dark, impatient restlessness of the waves.

Deah, I answered, passing him a cigarette.

Our life, it probably began inside of the ocean, Johnny said quietly. About four thousand million years before now. Probably near hot places, like volcanoes, under the sea.

I turned to look at him.

And for almost all of that long time, all the living things were water things, living inside the sea. Then, a few hundred million years ago, maybe a little more (just a little while, really, in the big history of the earth) the living things began to be living on the land, as well.

I was frowning and smiling at the same time, surprised and bewildered. I held my breath, afraid that any sound might interrupt his musing.

Out in a way you can say that after leaving the sea, after all those millions of years of living inside of the sea, we too, the ocean with us. When a woman makes a baby, she gives it water, inside her body, to grow. That water inside her body is almost exactly the same as the water of the sea. It is salty, by just the same amount. She makes a little ocean, in her body. And not only this. Our blood and our sweat, they are both salty, almost exactly like the water from the sea is salty. We carry oceans inside of us, in our blood and our sweat. And we are crying the oceans, in our tears.

We fell silent, and at last I spoke my amazement.

Where the hell did you learn that? I snapped, perhaps a little harshly.

I read it in a book, he replied, turning to me with shy concern in his brave, brown eyes. Why? Is it wrong? I said it wrongly? I have the book, in my house. Shall I get it for you?

5-o, no, it's right. It's ... #erfe tly right.5

It ! as my turn to la#se into silen e. I ! as furious ! ith myself. Des#ite my intimate , no! ledge of the slum(d! ellers, and the debt I o! ed them((they"d ta, en me in, and given me all the su##ort and friendshi# their hearts ould hold((I still fell into the bigot"s tra#. \$ohnny sho , ed me ! ith his , no! ledge be ause, some! here in

my dee#est a##raisal of the slum(d! ellers, there ! as a #re+udi e that they had no right to su h , no! ledge. In my se ret heart I"d +udged them as ignorant, even though I , ne! better, sim#ly be ause they ! ere #oor.

5; inB ; inB5 my neighbour \$eetendra alled out in a frightened shriee, , and ! e turned to see him lambering over the ro , s to! ard us. 5; inB 4y ! ifeB 4y RadhaB She is very si , B5

57hat is itE 7hat"s the matterE5

5She has bad loose motions. She is very hot ! ith fever.)nd she is vomiting,5 \$eetendra #uffed. 5She"s loo, ing bad. She"s loo, ing very bad.5

5; et"s go,5 I grunted, +um#ing u# and lea#ing from stone to stone until I rea hed the bro, en #ath leading ba , to the slum.

7e found Radha lying on a thin blan, et in her hut. *er body ! as t! isted into a , not of #ain. *er hair ! as ! et, saturated ! ith s! eat, as ! as the #in, sari she ! ore. 2he smell in the hut ! as terrible. 8handri, a, \$eetendra"s mother, ! as trying to , ee# her lean, but Radha"s fever rendered her in oherent and in ontinent. She vomited again violently as ! e ! at hed, and that #rovo, ed a ne! dribble of diarrhoea.

57hen did it startE5

52! o days ago,5 \$eetendra ans! ered, des#eration dra! ing do! n the

corners of his mouth in a grimace. G7?

52! o days agoE5

5Dou ! ere out some #la e, ! ith tourists, very late. 2hen you ! ere at I asim)li, his house, until late last night. 2hen you ! ere also gone today, from very early. Dou ! ere not here.)t the first I thought it ! as +ust a loose motions. Out she is very si , , ; inbaba. I tried three times to get her in the hos#ital, but they ! ill not ta, e her.5

5She has to go ba , to hos#ital,5 I said flatly. 5She"s in trouble, \$eetu.5

57hat to doE 7hat to do, ; inbabaE5 he ! hined, tears filling his eyes and s#illing on his hee, s. 52hey ! ill not ta, e her. 2here are too many #eo#le at the hos#ital. 2oo many #eo#le. I ! aited for si' hours today altogether((si' hours\$ In the o#en, ! ith all other si , #eo#les. In the end, she ! as begging me to ome ba , to here, to her house. So ashamed, she ! as. So, I ame ba , , +ust no! . 2hat"s ! hy I ! ent sear hing for you, and alled you only. I"m very ! orried, ; inbaba.5

I told him to thro! out the ! ater in his mat, a, ! ash it out thoroughly, and get fresh ! ater. I instru ted 8handri, a to boil

fresh ! ater until it bubbled for ten minutes and then to use that ! ater, ! hen it ooled, as drin, ing ! ater for Radha. \$eetendra and \$ohnny ame ! ith me to my hut, ! here I olle ted glu ose tablets and a #ara etamol(odeine mi' ture. I ho#ed to redu e her #ain and fever ! ith them. \$eetendra ! as +ust leaving ! ith the medi ine ! hen >raba, er rushed in. 2here ! as anguish in his eyes and in the hands that gras#ed me.

5; inB ; inB >arvati is si , B &ery si , B >lease ome too fastB5

2he girl ! as ! rithing in the s#asm of an agony that entred on

her stomach. She clutched at her belly and curled up in a ball, only to fling her arms and legs outwards in a bizarre, arching convulsion. Her temperature was very high. She was slippery!

fingers of his right hand.) round his ne , there ! as a mas ,
! hi h he lifted to his mouth ! whenever he entered a hut or
en ountered one of the vi tims of the illness. *e stood together
! ith Do tor *amid, I asim)li *ussein, >raba, er, and me near my
hut after ma, ing his first e' amination of the slum.

57 e"ll ta, e these sam#les and have them analysed,5 he said,
nodding to an assistant ! ho filed blood, s#utum, and stool
sam#les in a metal arry ase. 5Out I'm sure you're right, *amid.
2here are t! elve other holera outbrea, s, bet! een here and
<andivli. 2hey're small, mostly. Out there"s a bad one in 2hane((
more than a hundred ne! ases every day.)ll the lo al hos#itals
are over ro! ded. Out this is not bad, really, for the monsoon. 7e
ho#e ! e an , ee# a a# on it at fifteen or t! enty infe tion
sites.5

I ! aited for one of the others to s#ea, , but they sim#ly nodded
their heads gravely.

57 e"ve got to get these #eo#le to hos#ital,5 I said at last.

5; oo, ,5 he re#lied, glan ing around him and dra! ing a dee#
breath, 5! e an ta, e some of the riti al ases. I"ll arrange it.
Out it"s +ust not #ossible to ta, e everyone. I"m not going to
tell you any lies. It"s the same in ten other hutments. I"ve been
to them all, and the message is the same. Dou have to fight it
out here, on your o! n. Dou have to get through it.5 G77

5)re you out of your fu , ing mindE5 I snarled at him, feeling the
fear #ro! I in my gut. 57 e already lost my neighbour Radha this
morning. 2here"s thirty thousand #eo#le here. It"s ridi ulous to
say ! e have to fight it out ourselves. Dou're the health
de#artment, for God"s sa, eB5

Sandee# \$yoti ! at hed his assistant lose and se ure the sam#le
ases. 7hen he turned ba , to me, I sa! that his bloodshot eyes
! ere angry. *e resented the indignant tone, es#e ially oming

from a foreigner, and I was embarrassed that his department couldn't do more for the slum dwellers. If it hadn't been so obvious to him that I lived and worked in the slum, and that the people liked me as much as they relied on me, he wouldn't have told me to go to hell. I had had all those thoughts shift across his tired, handsome face and then I saw the patient, resigned, almost affectionate smile that reassured them as he ran a hand through his untidy hair.

"5;oo, , I really don't need a lecture from a foreigner, from a rich country, about how badly people live, after our own people, or the value of a human life. I know you're upset, and Kamid tells me you do a good job here, but I deal with this situation every day, all over the state. There are a hundred million people in Maharashtra, and I value them all. We do our best."

"5Sure you do," I sighed in return, reaching out to touch his arm. "5I'm sorry. I didn't mean to take it out on you. I'm just ... I'm afraid to say out of my death here and ... I guess I'm scared."

"5Why do you stay here, when you can leave?"

It was an abrupt question, under the circumstances, and almost rude. I couldn't answer it.

"5I don't know. I don't know. I love ... I love this city. Why do you stay?"

"He studied my eyes for a moment longer, and then his frown softened again in a gentle smile.

"5What happens can you give us? Do tell Kamid as well."

"5-ot much, I'm sorry to say." He looked at the dread in my eyes, and heaved a sigh from the hills of exhaustion in his heart. "5I'll arrange for some trained volunteers to come and give you a hand."

I wish I could do more. But I'm sure, you, no, I'm sure that you all can handle it here (probably a lot better than you think, just at this moment. You've already made a good start. Where did you get the salts?

I brought them, amidst answers, by, because the OR2 salts had been supplied illegally by Chaderbhai's letters. G78

When I told him I thought there had been cholera here, he brought the OR2s, and told me how to use them, I added. But it's not easy. Some of these people are too stupid, to hold them down.

OR2, or Oral Rehydration Therapy, had been devised by Ron Rohde, a scientist who worked with local and A-18/9 doctors in Bangladesh during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The oral rehydration solution that he developed contained distilled water, sugar, common salt, and other minerals in carefully measured proportions. Rohde knew that that illness, people who are contaminated with the cholera bacterium is dehydration. The ugly fact is that they shit and vomit themselves to death. We discovered that a solution of water, salt, and sugar, etc. people alive long enough for the bacterium to pass through their systems. Ron's letters, at Doctor's request, had given me bottles of the solution. I had no idea how much more of the stuff I would need to receive, or how much I would need.

We can get you a delivery of salts, Sandeeyoti said. We'll get them to you as soon as possible. The city is stretched to its limits, but I'll make sure you get a team of volunteers here as soon as we can send them. I'll put a priority on it. Good luck.

We sat there in grim silence as he followed his assistant out of the slum. We were all afraid.

Alim Hussain too, control. We declared his home to be a command centre. We called a meeting there, and some twenty men and women gathered to devise a plan. Cholera is largely a waterborne disease. The vibrio cholerae bacterium spreads from

contaminated water and lodges itself in the small intestine, producing the fever, diarrhoea, and vomiting that cause dehydration and death. We determined to purify the slum's water,

beginning with the holding tanks and then moving on to the pots and buckets in each of the seven thousand huts. I assembled a bundle of rupee notes as this was a man's need, and gave it to Johnny Sagar, directing him to buy the water purification tablets and other medicines we would need.

Because so much rainwater had accumulated in puddles and rivulets throughout the slum, those too had provided breeding grounds for the bacteria. It was decided that a chain of shallow trenches could be established at strategic points in the lanes of the slum. They would be filled with disinfectant, and each person walking the lane would be required to wade through the antiseptic drainage. Lastly bins for safe disposal of waste materials were to be placed at designated points, and antiseptic soap would be given to every household. Soup kitchens would be established in the hawker shops and restaurants to provide safe, boiled food and sterilised cups and bottles. A team was also assigned to the task of removing the bodies of the dead and taking them on a trundlecart to the hospital. My task was to supervise the use of the oral rehydration solution and to prepare batches of a homemade mixture as required.

They were all huge undertakings and onerous responsibilities, but no man or woman at the gathering hesitated in accepting them. It's a characteristic of human nature that the best qualities, called upon only in a crisis, are very often the hardest to find in a prosperous calm. The contours of all our virtues are shaded by adversity. Out there was another reason, far from virtue, for my own eagerness to accept the task (a reason found in shame. My neighbour Radha had been desperately ill for two days before she died, and I'd known nothing of it at the time. I was gripped by a feeling that my pride, my hubris, was responsible for the

si, ness in some way: that my lini was founded in an arrogant
(my arrogant (that had allowed the disease to breed in the
smear of its on eits. I, ne! that nothing I'd done or neglected
to do had caused the e#idemi .)nd I, ne! that the disease
!ould&eatta, ed the slum, sooner or later, !ith or !ithout my
#resen e. Out I ouldn't sha,e off the feeling that, someho!, my
om#la en y had made me om#li it.

Just a !ee, before, I'd celebrated !ith dancing and drinking
be ause, !hen I'd o#ened my little lini, no(one had ome. -ot
one man, !oman, or hild in all the thousands had needed my hel#.
The treatment =ueue that had begun !ith hundreds, nine months
before, had finally d!indled to none.)nd I'd danced and drunk,
!ith >raba,er that day, as if I'd ured the !hole slum of its
ailments and illnesses. That celebration seemed vain and stu#id
as I hurried through the sodden lanes to the s ores !ho !ere
si, .)nd there !as guilt in that shame as !ell. 9or the t!o days
!hile my neighbour Radha lay dying, I'd been ingratiating myself
!ith tourist ustomers in their five(star hotel. 7hile she'd
!rithed and thrashed on a dam#earth floor, I'd been alling do!n
to room servi e to order more i e(ream and re#es.

I rushed ba, to the lini . It !as em#ty. >raba,er !as loo,ing
after >arvati. \$ohnny 8igar had ta,en on the +ob of lo ating and
removing the G8%
dead. \$eetendra, sitting on the ground outside our huts !ith his
fa e in his hands, !as sin,ing in the =ui, sand of his grief. I
gave him the +ob of ma,ing several large #ur hases for me and
he,ing on all the hemists in the area for @R2s. I !as !at hing
him shamle a! ay do!n the lane to!ard the street, !orrying about
him, !orrying about his young son, Satish, !ho !as also ill, !hen
I sa! a !oman in the distan e !al,ing to!ard me. Oefore I ould
a tually, no! !ho it !as, my heart !as sure it !as <arla.

She !ore a sal!ar, amee1((the most flattering garment in the
!orld, after the sari((in t!o shades of sea green. The long tuni
!as a dee#er green, and the #ants beneath, tight at the an, le,

! ere #aler. 2here ! as also a long yello! s arf, ! orn ba , ! ards, Indian style, ! ith the #lumes of colour trailing out behind her. *er bla , hair ! as #ulled ba , tightly and fastened at the na#e of her ne , . 2he hairstyle thre! attention at her large green eyes((the green of lagoons, ! here shallo! ! ater la#s at golden sand((and at her bla , eyebrow! s and #erfe t mouth. *er li#s ! ere li, e the soft ridges of dunes in the desert at sunset6 li, e the rests of ! aves meeting in the frothy rush to shore6 li, e the folded ! ings of ourting birds. 2he movements of her body, as she ! al, ed to! ard me on the bro, en lane, ! ere li, e storm(! ind stirring in a stand of young ! illo! trees.

57hat are you doing hereE5

52hose harm s hool lessons are #aying off, I see,5 she dra! led, sounding very)meri an. She ar hed one eyebrow! , and #ursed her li#s in a sar asti smile.

5It"s not safe here,5 I s o! led.

5I , no! . Didier ran into one of your friends from here. *e told me about it.5

5So, ! hat are you doing hereE5

5I ame to hel# you.5

5*el# me ! hatE5 I demanded, e' as#erated by my ! orry for her.

5*el# you ... do ! hatever you do here. *el# other #eo#le. Isn"t that ! hat you doE5

5Dou have to go. Dou an"t stay. It"s too dangerous. >eo#le are dro##ing do! n every! here. I don"t , no! ho! bad it"ll get.5

5I"m not going,5 she said almy, staring her determination into me. 2he large, green eyes bla1ed, indomitable, and she ! as never more beautiful. 5I are about you, and I"m staying ! ith you. 7hat

do you ! ant me to doE5 G81

It's ridiculous I sighed, rubbing the frustration through my hair. It's bloody stupid.

Listen, she said, surprising me with a wide smile, do you think, you're the only one who needs to go on this salvation ride? - oh, tell me, really? What do you want me to do?

I did need help, not just with the physical labor, of nursing the people, but also with the doubt and fear and shame that throbbed in my throat and chest. One of the ironies of courage, and the reason why people prize it so highly, is that people find it easier to be brave for someone else than to do for ourselves alone. And I loved her. The truth was that while my words earned her a way to safety, my fanatical heart convinced me with my eyes to make her stay.

Well, there's plenty to do. Out be careful and the first sign that ... that you're not okay, you grab a taxi to my friend's apartment. It's a deal. Is that a deal?

She reached out to take her long, slender hand in mine. The handshake was firm and confident.

It's a deal, she said. Where do we start?

We started with a tour of the slum, visiting the sites, and dispensing advice about the solution. There were, by then, more than a hundred people resenting symptoms of cholera, and half of them were serious cases. Following just a few minutes with each of the victims, it still took us twenty hours. Constantly on the move, we drank soups or sugary chai from sterile cups as our only food. By evening of the following day, we sat down to eat our first full meal. We were exhausted, but hunger drove us to help through the hot rotis and vegetables. Then, somewhat refreshed, we set off on a second round of the most serious cases.

It was as filthy as the word cholera comes from the Greek, cholera, meaning diarrhoea. The diarrhoea of the cholera sickness has a singularly vile smell, and you never get used to it. /very time she entered a hut to visit the sick, she fought the urge to vomit. Sometimes, she did vomit.)nd when she vomited on me, the impulse to retch and gag was stronger than ever.

Charles was kind and gentle, especially with the children, and she filled the families with confidence. She kept her sense of humour through the smell, and the endless stooping to lift and lean and give comfort in dark, humid hovels through the sickness and the dying and through the fear,

When the epidemic seemed to be getting worse, that she, too, would sicken and die. Through forty hours without sleep, she smiled every time I turned my hungry eyes on her. I was in love with her, and even if she'd been lazy or a fool or miserly or bad tempered I would've loved her still. Out she was brave and compassionate and generous. She worked hard, and she was a good friend.)nd somehow, through those hours of fear and suffering

and death, I found new ways and reasons to love the woman I already loved with all my heart.

)t three after midnight on the second night, I insisted that she sleep, that she both sleep, before exhaustion rushed us. We began to crawl, barefoot, through the dark, deserted lanes. There was no moon, and the stars shuntened the black dome of the sky with a dazzling intensity. In an unusually wide square, where three lanes converged, I stopped and raised a hand to silence Charles. There was a faint scratching sound, a hissing and sizzling as of taffeta rustling, or a globe being squeezed into a ball. In the blackness I couldn't tell where the sound began, but I, nevertheless, lost and getting lost. I reached around behind me to grab Charles, and held her pressed against my back, turning left and right as I tried to anticipate the sound.)nd then they came (the rats.

Don't move! I cautioned in a hoarse whisper, pulling her to my back, as tightly as I could. If you don't move, they'll think you're part of the furniture. If you move, they'll bite!

The rats came in hundreds and then thousands: black, slavering beasts that poured from the lanes and surged against our legs like the swirling tide of a river. They were huge, bigger than cats, fat and slimy and rushing through the lanes in a horde that lasted for three animals deep. They snatched us at an angle (height and then shallow) (high, low, high), running on one another's backs and slaughtering and smashing into my legs with brutal force. Beyond us, they lunged on into the night toward the sewer pipes of the right apartment towers, just as they did every night on their migration from nearby markets and through the slum. Thousands. The black, slavering rats seemed to go on for ten minutes, although it couldn't have been so long. At last, they were gone. The lanes were filled with lean, black rubbish and shadows, and silence logged the air.

That ... the future ... was that! she asked, her mouth gaping open.

The damn things come through here every night about this time. G8G

Nobody minds, because they see the lane lean, and they don't worry you, if you're inside your hut, or asleep on the ground outside. Out if you get in their way, and you annoy, they must go right over the top of you, and ignore you as lean as the lanes.

I gotta hand it to you, Jim, she said, and her voice was steady, but fear was still visible in her eyes. You're sure, no! How! to show a girl a good time.

Jim! With feariness and relief that he weren't badly hurt, he lunged to one another and staggered back to the line (hut. I should read one blank, et don on the bare earth. The stretched out on

it, #ro##ed u# against a sta , of other blan, ets. I held her in my arms.) s#rin, ling sho! er of rain ra##led on the anvas a! ning overhead. Some! here, a slee#er ried

love him, and to give him a part of the love for her dead parents that he, she, loved within her.

There! as no time for that love to grow. Charles's uncle Charles died in a climbing accident, three years after she arrived in America. Charles's uncle, too, controlled her life. Aunt Jenny! as jealous of the girl's beauty and her combative, intimidating intelligence (qualities not discernible in her only three children. The more brightly Charles shined, in comparison to the other children, the more her aunt hated her. There's no meanness too spiteful or too cruel, Didier once said to me, when I hate someone for all the wrong reasons. Aunt Jenny deprived Charles, punished her arbitrarily, harassed and belittled her constantly, and did everything but throw the girl into the street.

Provided to provide her only money for all her needs, Charles! worked after school every night at a local restaurant, and as a baby

sitter on weekends. One of the fathers she worked for returned, alone and too early, on a hot summer night. She'd been to a party, and had been drinking. She! as a man she'd liked, a handsome man she'd found herself fantasising about from time to time. When he crossed the room to stand near her on that sultry summer night, his attention flattered her, despite the stink of stale wine on his breath and the glazed stare in his eyes. She touched her shoulder, and she smiled. It! as her last smile for a very long time.

One but Charles called it rare. She said that Charles had led him on, and Charles's aunt too, his part. The fifteen-year-old orphan from Switzerland left her aunt's home, and never contacted her again. She moved to Los Angeles, where she found a job, shared an apartment with another girl, and began to make her only way. Out after the rare, Charles lost the part of loving that grows in trust. Other kinds of love remained in her (friendship, compassion, selfuality (but the love that believes and trusts in the constancy of another human heart, romantic love, was lost.

She ! or, ed, saved money, and ! ent to night s hool. It ! as her dream to gain a #la e at a university((any university, any! here((and study /nglish and German literature. Out too mu h in her young life had been bro, en, and too many loved ones had died. She ouldn't om#lete any ource of study. She ouldn't remain in any +ob. She drifted, and she G8? began to tea h herself by reading everything that gave her ho#e or strength.

5)nd thenE5

5)nd then,5 she said slo! ly, 5one day, I found myself on a #lane, going to Singa#ore, and I met a businessman, an Indian businessman, and my life ... +ust ... hanged, forever.5

She let out a sighing gas# of air. I ouldn't tell if it ! as des#airing or sim#ly e' hausted.

5I'm glad you told me.5

52old you ! hatE5

She ! as fro! ning, and her tone ! as shar#.

5)bout ... your life,5 I ans! ered.

She rela' ed.

5Don't mention it,5 she said, allo! ing herself a little smile.

5- o, I mean it. I'm glad, and I'm grateful, that you trusted me enough to ... tal, about yourself.5

5)nd I meant it, too,5 she insisted, still smiling. 5Don't

mention it((any of it((to anyone. @, ayE5

5@, ay.5

7e ! ere silent for a fe! moments.) baby ! as rying some! here nearby, and I ould hear its mother soothing it ! ith a little s#ool of syllables that ! ere tender and yet faintly annoyed at the same time.

57hy do you hang out at ; eo#old"sE5

57hat do you meanE5 she as, ed slee#ily.

5l don't , no! . l +ust ! onder.5

She laughed ! ith her mouth losed, breathing through her nose. *er head rested on my arm. In the dar, ness her fa e ! as a set of soft urves, and her eyes gleamed li, e bla , #earls.

5l mean, Didier and 4odena and Alla, even ; ettie and &i, ram, they all fit in there, someho! . Out not you. Dou don't fit.5

5l thin, ... they fit in ! ith me, even if I don't fit in ! ith them,5 she sighed.

52ell me about)hmed,5 l as, ed. 5)hmed and 8hristina.5

She ! as silent for so long, in res#onse to the =uestion, that I thought she must've fallen aslee#. 2hen she s#o, e, =uietly and steadily and evenly, as if she ! as giving testimony at a trial.

5)hmed ! as a friend. *e ! as my best friend, for a ! hile, and , ind of G8C

li, e the brother I never had. *e ame from)fghanistan, and ! as ! ounded in the ! ar there. *e ame to Oombay to re over((in a ! ay, ! e both did. *is ! ounds ! ere so bad that he never really did get his health ba , om#letely.)ny! ay, ! e , ind of nursed ea h other, I guess, and ! e be ame very lose friends. *e ! as a s ien e graduate, from <abul Aniversity, and he s#o, e e' ellent /nglish.

7e used to tal, about boo, s and #hiloso#hy and musi and art and food. *e ! as a ! onderful, gentle guy.5

5)nd something ha##ened to him,5 I #rom#ted.

5Deah,5 she re#lied, ! ith a little laugh. 5*e met 8hristina.

2hat's ! hat ha##ened to him. She ! as ! or, ing for 4adame . hou. She ! as an Italian girl((very dar, and beautiful. I even introdu ed him to her, one night, ! hen she ame into ;eo#old"s ! ith Alla. 2hey ! ere both ! or, ing at the >ala e.5

5Alla ! or, ed at the >ala eE5

5Alla ! as one of the most #o#ular girls 4adame . hou ever had. 2hen she left the >ala e. 4auri1io had a onta t at the German

8onsulate. *e ! anted to oil the ! heels on some deal that he ! as ! or, ing on ! ith the German, and he dis overed that the German ! as ra1y about Alla. 7ith some heavy #ersuasion from the onsulate offi er, and all his o! n savings, 4auri1io managed to buy Alla free from the >ala e. 4auri1io got Alla to t! ist the onsulate guy until he did ... ! hatever it ! as 4auri1io ! anted him to do. 2hen he dum#ed him. 2he guy lost it, I heard. *e #ut a bullet in his head. Oy then, 4auri1io had #ut Alla to ! or, , to #ay the debt she o! ed him.5

5Dou , no! , I've been ! or, ing u# a healthy disli, e for 4auri1io.5

5It ! as a shitty deal, true enough. Out at least she ! as free from 4adame . hou and the >ala e. I have to give 4auri1io his due there((he #roved it ould be done. Oefore that, nobody ever got a! ay((not ! ithout getting a id thro! n in her fa e. 7hen Alla bro, e a! ay from 4adame . hou, 8hristina ! anted to brea, out as ! ell. 4adame . hou ! as for ed to let Alla go, but she ! as damned if she ! as going to #art ! ith 8hristina as ! ell.)hmed ! as ra1y in love ! ith her, and he ! ent to the >ala e, late one night, to have it out ! ith 4adame . hou. I ! as su##osed to go ! ith him. I

did business ! ith 4adame . hou((I brought businessmen there for my boss, and they s#ent a lot of money((you , no! that. I thought she"d listen to me. Out then I got alled a! ay. I had a +ob ... a +ob ... it ! as G87

... an im#ortant onta t ... I ouldn't refuse.)hmed ! ent to the >ala e alone. 2hey found his body, and 8hristina"s, the ne' t day, in a ar, a fe! blo ,s from the >ala e. 2he o#s ... said that they both too, #oison, li, e Romeo and \$uliet.5

5Dou thin, she did it to them, 4adame . hou, and you blame yourself, is that itE5

5Something li, e that.5

5Is that ! hat she ! as tal,ing about, that day, through the metal grille, ! hen ! e got ;isa 8arter out of thereE Is that ! hy you ! ere ryingE5

5If you must , no! ,5 she said softly, her voi e em#tied of all its musi and emotion, 5she ! as telling me ! hat she did to them, before she had them , illed. She ! as telling me ho! she #layed ! ith them, before they died.5

I lam#ed my +a! shut, listening to the ruffle of air breathing in and out through my nose, until our t! o #atterns of breath mat hed one another in rhythmi rise and fall.

5)nd ! hat about youE5 she as, ed, at last, her eyes losing more slo! ly and o#ening less often. 57e"ve got my story. 7hen are you going to tell me your storyE5

I let the raining silen e lose her eyes for the last time. She sle#t. I , ne! ! e didn't have her story. -ot the ! hole of it. I

, ne! the small daubs of colour she"d e' luded from her summary ! ere at least as im#ortant as the broad stro, es she"d in luded. 2he devil, they say, is in the details, and I , ne! ! ell the

devils that lurked and snuggled in the details of my own story. Out she had given me a hoard of new treasures. I'd learned more about her in that exhausted, murmuring hour than in all the many months before it. ;overs find their way by such insights and confidences: they're the stars we use to navigate the ocean of desire.)nd the brightest of those stars are the heartbreaks and sorrows. The most precious gift you can bring to your lover is your suffering. So I too, each sadness she confessed to me, and handed it to the sky.

Some were out there in the night, Setendra wept for his life. >raba, ever moved at >arvati's smile eating fate with his red scarf. *eaten upon the blankets, our bodies bound by feariness and her deep slumber, surrounded by silence, and home, death and defiance, I touched the soft surrendered curl of <arla's sleeping fingers to my lips, and I pledged my heart to her forever.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER NINETEEN

They lost nine people in the cholera epidemic. Six of them were young children. Sreeraj's only son, Satish, survived, but two of the boy's closest friends died. Both of them had been enthusiastic students in my English class. The procession of children that ran with us behind the biers carrying those little bodies, garlanded with flowers, displayed their grief so intensely that many strangers on the busy streets paused in prayer, and felt the sudden burn and sting of tears. Sarvati survived the sickness, and Sarabha, her nurse, nursed her for two weeks, sleeping outside her hut under a flag of cloth during the night. Sita too, her sister Sarvati's daughter, sat at their father's bedside and, whenever Johnny Rigar entered or passed the shop, her eyes followed him as slowly and stealthily as a falconing leopard's shadow.

Arjun stayed for six days, the first of it, and visited several times in the weeks that followed. When the infection rate dropped to zero, and the crisis had passed for the most serious cases, I too, a three-day patient, changed into clean clothes, and headed for the tourist beat in search of business. I was almost broke. The rain had been heavy, and the flooding in many areas of the city was as hard on the tourists, dealers, guides, robbers, thieves, beggars, and black marketeers who made their living on the street as it was on the many businessmen whose shops were submerged.

Competition in Solaba for the tourist dollar was fierce, but relatively unheated. Demeni street vendors held up for sale on their daggars and handbags (embroidered purses from the Koran). Tall, handsome Somalis offered bracelets made from beaten silver coins.

Artists from Mirissa displayed images of the 24-hour fast painted on dried, pressed banana leaves. Algerians sold carved, ebony axes with stiletto blades concealed within their spiral shafts. Iranian refugees weighed polished turquoise stones by the ounce on brass scales hung from the branches of trees. Drum sellers

from Attar >radesh, carrying si' or seven drums each, burst into
brief, G89

im#rom#tu on erts if a tourist sho! ed the faintest interest.
' files from)fghanistan sold huge, ornamental silver rings
engraved ! ith the >ashto s ri#t and en ir ling amethysts the si1e
of #igeons" eggs.

2hreading through that ommer ial tangle ! ere those ! ho made
their living servi ing the businesses and the street traders
themselves((in ense ! avers, bringing sil, en drifts of tem#le
in ense on silver trays, stove leaners, mattress fluffers, ear
leaners, foot massagers, rat at hers, food and hai rriers,
florists, laundry(men, ! ater rriers, gas(bottle men, and many
others. 7eaving their ! ay bet! een them and the traders and the
tourists ! ere the dan ers, singers, a robats, musi ians, fortune(
tellers, tem#le a olytes, fire(eaters, mon, ey men, sna, e men,
bear(handlers, beggars, self(flagellators, and many more ! ho
lived from the ro! ded street, and returned to the slums at
night.

/very one of them bro, e the la! in some ! ay, eventually, in the
=uest for a faster bu , . Out the s! iftest to the sour e, the
shar#est(eyed of all the street #eo#le, ! ere those of us ! ho
bro, e the la! #rofessionally: the bla , mar, eteers. 2he street
a e#ted me in that om#le' net! or, of s hemes and s ammers for
several reasons. 9irst, I only ! or, ed the tourists ! ho ! ere too
areful or too #aranoid to deal ! ith Indians6 if I didn't ta, e
them, no(one did. Se ond, no matter ! hat the tourists ! anted, I
al! ays too, them to the a##ro#riate Indian businessman6 I never
did the deals myself.)nd, third, I ! asn't greedy6 my ommissions
al! ays a orded ! ith the standard set by de ent, self(res#e ting
roo, s throughout the ity. I made sure, as ! ell, ! hen my
ommissions ! ere large enough, to #ut money ba , into the
restaurants, hotels, and begging bo! ls of the area.

)nd there ! as something else, something far less tangible but
even more im#ortant, #erha#s, than ommissions and turf(! ar
sensitivities. 2he fa t that a ! hite foreigner((a man most of

them too, to be /uro#ean((had settled so ably and comfortably in the mud, near the bottom of their world, as #rofoundly satisfying to the sensibility of the Indians on the street. In a curious mix of #ride and shame, my #resen e legitimised their crimes. That they did, from day to day, couldn't be so bad if a gora joined them in doing it.)nd my fall raised them u# be ause they ! ere no ! orse, after all, than ;inbaba, the educated foreigner ! ho lived by crime and ! or, ed the street as they did.

- or ! as I the only foreigner ! ho lived from the bla , mar, et.
2here G9%

! ere /uro#ean and)meri an drug dealers, #im#s, ounterfeiters, con men, gem traders, and smugglers.)mong them ! ere t! o men ! ho shared the name George. @ne ! as 8anadian and the other ! as /nglish. 2hey ! ere inse#arable friends ! ho"d lived on the streets for years. - o(one seemed to , no! their surnames. 2o ma, e the distinction, they ! ere , no! n by their star signs: S or#io George and Gemini George. 2he .odia Georges ! ere +un, ies ! ho"d sold their #ass#orts, as the last valuable things they"d o! ned, and then ! or, ed the heroin travellers((tourists ! ho ame to India to binge(hit heroin, for a ! ee, or t! o, before returning to the safety of their o! n countries. 2here ! ere sur#risingly large numbers of those tourists, and the .odia Georges survived from their dealings ! ith them.

2he o#s ! at hed me and the Georges and the other foreigners ! ho ! or, ed the streets, and they , ne! e' a tly ! hat ! e ! ere doing. 2hey reasoned, truly enough, that ! e ause no violent harm, and ! e ! ere good for business in the bla , mar, et that brought them bribes and other benefits. 2hey too, their ut from the drug and urren y dealers. 2hey left us alone. 2hey left me alone.

@n that first day after the holera e#idemi , I made about t! o hundred A.S. dollars in three hours. It ! asn't a lot, but I de ided it ! as enough. 2he rain had s=ualled through the morning, and by noon it seemed to have settled into the , ind of sultry,

doing little that sometimes lasts for days. I was sitting on a bar stool, and drinking a freshly squeezed orange juice under a striped awning near the resident motel, not far from the slum, when I ran in out of the rain.

"Hey, man! you doing this funny rain, yaar."

He shook his hands, and I ordered him another juice. He tilted his flat, black, flamenco hat onto his back, where it hung from a cord at his throat. His black shirt featured white embroidered figures down the button-front at the front. The white figures were waving lassoes over their heads. His belt was made from Mexican silver dollar coins lined one to the other and fastened with a domed buckle on his back as a belt buckle. The black flamenco pants were embroidered with fine white scrolls down the outside of the leg, and ended in a line of three small silver buttons. His Cuban-heeled boots had cross-over loops of leather that fastened with buckles at the outside.

"Not really riding either, na? G91"

"Oh, shit! he said. "You heard about Bettie and the horse Jesus, man? That was funny, in! I see, s ago, yaar. I haven't seen you in too funny, in" long."

"How's it going with Bettie?"

"Not great." He sighed as he said it, yet his smile was happy. "But I think she's coming around, yaar. She's a very special kind

of girl. She needs to get all the hating done, like, before she can kind of rise into the loving part. But I'll get her, even if the whole world says I'm crazy."

"I don't think you're crazy to go after her."

"You don't?"

5-o. She's a lovely girl. She's a great girl. Dou're a nice guy.
)nd you're more alive than #eo#le thin, . Dou both have a sense of
humour, and you love to laugh. She can't stand hy#o rites, and
neither can you.)nd you're interested in life, I thin, , in
#retty much the same ! ay. I thin, you're a good ou#le, or at
least you ! ill be.)nd I thin, you'll get her in the end, &i, ram.
I've seen the ! ay she loo,s at you, even ! hen she's #utting shit
on you. She li,es you so mu h that she has to #ut you do! n. It's
her ! ay. \$ust sti , ! ith it, and you'll ! in her in the end.5

5; in ... listen, man. 2hat's itB 9u , itB I _li, e you. I mean,
that's a fu , in" cool rave, yaar. I'm going to be your friend
from no! on. I'm your fu , in" blood brother, man. If you need
anything, you call on me. Is it a dealE5

5Sure,5 I smiled. 5It's a deal.5

*e fell silent, staring out at the rain. *is curly bla , hair had
gro! n to his collar, at the ba , , and ! as trimmed at the front
and sides. *is moustache ! as fastidiously sni##ed and trimmed to
little more than the thi ,ness that a felt(ti##ed #en might've
made. In #rofile, his fa e ! as im#osing: the long forehead ended
in a ha! , (li, e nose and des ended #ast a firm, solemn mouth to a
#rominent, confident +a! . 7hen he turned to fa e me it ! as his
eyes that dominated, ho! ever, and his eyes ! ere young, curious,
and shimmering ! ith good humour.

5Dou , no! , ; in, I really love her,5 he said softly. *e let his
eyes drift do! n! ard to the #avement and then he loo,ed u# again
=ui , ly. 5I really love that /nglish hi , .5

5Dou , no! , &i, ram, I really love it,5 I said, mimi , ing his tone
of voi e and the earnest e' #ression on his fa e. 5I really love
that o! boy shirt.5

57hat, _this old thingE5 he ried, laughing ! ith me. 59u , , man,
you can have itB5

*e +um#ed off the stool and began to unbutton his shirt. G9F

5- oB - oB I ! as only +o, ingB5

57 hat"s thatE Dou mean you don"t li, e my shirtE5

5I didn"t say that.5

5So, ! hat"s ! rong ! ith my fu , in" shirtE5

52here"s nothing ! rong ! ith your fu , in" shirt. I +ust don"t ! ant it.5

52oo late, manB5 he bello! ed, #ulling his shirt from his ba , and thro! ing it at me. 52oo fu , in" lateB5

*e ! ore a bla , singlet under the shirt, and the bla , hat ! as still hanging at his ba , . 2he +ane +ui e rusher had a #ortable hi(fi at his stall.) ne! song from a hit *indi movie started u#.

5*ey, I love this song, yaarB5 &i, ram ried out. 52urn it u#, babaB _)rre, full _, aroB5

2he +ui e(! allah obligingly turned the volume u# to the ma' imum, and &i, ram began to dan e and sing along ! ith the ! ords. Sho! ing sur#risingly elegant and gra eful s, ill, he s! ung out from under the ro! ded a! ning and dan ed in the lightly falling rain. 7ithin one minute of his t! irling, s! aying dan e he"d lured other young men from the foot#ath, and there ! ere si' , seven, and then eight dan ers laughing in the rain ! hile the rest of us la##ed, ! hoo#ed, and hollered.

2urning his ste#s to! ard me on e more, &i, ram rea hed out to gras# my ! rist ! ith both of his hands, and then began to drag me into the dan e. I #rotested and tried to fight him off, but many

hands from the street assisted him, and I ! as #ushed into the grou# of dan ers. I surrendered to India, as I did every day, then, and as I still do, every day of my life, no matter ! here I am in the ! orld. I dan ed, follo! ing &i, ram"s ste#s, and the street heered us on.

2he song finished after some minutes, and ! e turned to see ;ettie standing under the a! ning and ! at hing us ! ith o#en amusement. &i, ram ran to greet her, and I +oined them, sha, ing off the rain.

5Don"t tell me! I don"t ! anna , no! B5 she said, smiling but silen ing &i, ram ! ith the raised #alm of her hand. 57hatever you do, in the #riva y of your o! n rain sho! er, is your o! n business. *ello, ;in. *o! are you, darlin"E5

59ine, ;ettie. 7et enough for youE5

5Our rain dan e seems to be ! or, ing a treat. <arla ! as su##osed to +oin me and &i, ram, right about no! . 7e"re going to the +a11 on ert at 4ahim. Out she"s flooded in, at the 2a+. She +ust alled me, to let me G9G , no! . 2he ! hole Gate! ay"s flooded. ;imousines and ta' is are floatin" about li, e #a#er boats, and the guests an"t get out. 2hey"re stranded at the hotel, and our <arla"s stranded there, and all.5

Glan ing around =ui , ly, I sa! that >raba,er"s ousin Shantu ! as

still sitting in his ta' i, #ar, ed ! ith several others outside the restaurants ! here I"d seen him earlier. I he , ed my ! at h. It ! as three(thirty. I , ne! that the lo al fishermen ! ould all be ba , on shore ! ith their at hes. I turned to &i, ram and ;ettie on e more.

5Sorry, guys, gotta goB5 I #ushed the shirt ba , into &i, ram"s hands. 52han, s for the shirt, man. I"ll grab it ne' t time. <ee# it for meB5

I jumped into Shantu's taxi, turning the meter to the on position through the passenger window. ;ettie and Ram looked as if I had lost them. I explained my plan to Shantu on the way to the, holi settlement, adjacent to our slum. His daughter, lined face creased in a feathered smile and he shook his head in wonder, but he pushed the battered taxi a little faster through the short ride on the rain-drenched road.

At the fishermen's settlement, I enlisted the support of Vinod, who was a patient at my clinic and one of Suresh's close friends. We selected one of his smaller boats, and I lifted the light, flat boat onto the roof of the taxi and sped back to the 2nd hotel area, near the Radio Club hotel.

Shantu worked in his taxi sixteen hours a day for six days every week. He had determined that his son and two daughters would, no matter what, have lives that were better than his own. We saved money for their education and for the substantial dowries they would be required to provide if the girls were to marry well. He was permanently exhausted, and beset by all the torments, terrible and trivial, that poverty endures. Vinod supported his parents, his wife, and five children from the fish that he hauled from the sea with his thin, strong arms. On his own initiative, he had formed a cooperative with twenty other poor fishermen. That pooling of resources had provided a measure of security, but his income seldom stretched to luxuries such as new sandals, or school books, or a third meal in any one day. Still, when they needed what I wanted to do, and why, neither Vinod nor Shantu would ask me for any money from me. I struggled to give it to them, even trying to force the money down the fronts of their shirts, but they refused to accept it. They were poor, tired, worried men, but they were Indian, and any Indian man will tell you that although love might not have been invented in India, it was certainly perfected there. G9H

We cut the long, flat boat down in the shallow water of the flooded road near the Radio Club, close to Chand's India Guest

*ouse. Shantu gave me the oils, in a#e he used to , ee# himself dry ! ith ! whenever the ta' i bro, e do! n, and the ! eathered bla , hauffeur"s a# that ! as his good(lu , harm. *e ! aved us off as &inod and I stru , out for the 2a+ 4ahal *otel. 7e #oled our ! ay along the road that ! as usually busy ! ith ta' is, tru , s, motor y les, and #rivate ars. 2he ! ater gre! dee#er ! ith every stro, e of the #oles until, at Oest Street orner, ! here the 2a+

4ahal *otel om#le' began, it ! as already ! aist dee#.

2he 2a+ had e' #erien ed su h floods in the surrounding streets many times. 2he hotel ! as built u#on a tall #latform of bluestone and granite blo , s, ! ith ten marble ste#s leading u# to ea h ! ide entran e. 2he flood! aters ! ere dee# that year((they rea hed to the se ond ste# from the to#((and ars ! ere floating, drifting hel#lessly, and bum#ing together near the ! all surrounding the great ar h of the Gate! ay of India monument. 7e steered the boat dire tly to the ste#s of the main entran e. 2he foyer and door! ays ! ere ro! ded ! ith #eo#le: ri h businessmen, ! at hing their limousines bubble and drift into the rain! omen in e' #ensive lo al and foreign designer dresses! a tors and #oliti ians! and fashionable sons and daughters.

<arla ste##ed for! ard as if she"d been e' #e ting me. She a e#ted my hand, and ste##ed into the #unt. I thre! the a#e around her shoulders as she sat in the entre of the boat, and handed her the a#. She sli##ed it on ! ith a raffish tilt of the a#"s #ea, , and ! e set off. &inod sent us in a loo# to! ard the Gate! ay onument.)s ! e entered its magnifi ent, vaulted hamber, he began to sing. 2he monument #rodu ed a s#e ta ular a ousti . *is love song e hoed, and rang the bell in every heart that heard him.

&inod brought us to the ta' i stand at the Radio 8lub *otel. I rea hed out to hel# <arla from the boat, but she +um#ed to the foot#ath beside me, and ! e held on to one another for a moment. *er eyes ! ere a dar, er green beneath the #ea, of the a#. *er

black hair glistened with raindrops. Her breath was sweet with cinnamon and cardamom seed.

She pulled a chair, and I opened the door of a taxi. She handed me the chair and the umbrella, and too, a seat in the back of the taxi. She hadn't shown a single word since I'd arrived with the boat. When she simply addressed the driver.

"Hi," she said. "Hello?" "Hi, area. ; it's good?"

She looked at me one more as the taxi drove away from the harbor. There was a command or a demand in her eyes. I couldn't decide what it was. I had held the umbrella steady for her. Inod and Shantu had held it with me, and they had placed their hands on my shoulders. She lifted Inod's boat back onto the roof of the taxi. As I too, my seat beside Shantu, reaching out with my left arm to hold the long boat on the roof, I glanced up to see a face in the crowd. It was Raajan, the adamehou's eunuuch servant. He was staring at me. His face was as a gargoyle mask of malevolence and hatred.

That face remained with me all the way back to the holy settlement, but when she unloaded the boat, and Shantu agreed to join Inod and me for dinner, I let the image of Raajan's face melt into my memory. I ordered food from a local restaurant and it was delivered to us there, on the beach, steaming hot in metal

containers. She spread the containers out on an old piece of canvas sail, and sat beneath a shade cloth waiting to eat. Inod's parents, wife, and five children too, their places around the edge of the canvas sheet beside Shantu and me. Rain continued to fall, but the air was warm, and a faint breeze from the bay slowly stirred the humid evening. Our shelter on the sandy beach beside the many long boats looked out to the rolling sea. We ate chicken, biryani, malai, often vegetable, orma, rice, curried vegetables, deep-fried pieces of hummus, in, potato, onion, and cauliflower, hot buttered naan bread, dhal, aadam, and green mango chutney. It was a feast, and the delight that spilled from

the eyes of the children, while they ate their fill, but
starlight in our smiles as we looked at them.

When night fell, I rode back to Solaba's tourist beat in a cab. I
wanted to take a room for a few hours at the India Guest House. I
wasn't worried about the room at the hotel. I knew that I
wouldn't have to sign the register, and I wouldn't include me
in his list of guests. The arrangement we'd agreed on months
before (the same one that applied to most of the cheaper hotels
in the city) allowed me to pay an hourly rent, directly to him,
so that I could use the shop or conduct private business in one
of the rooms from time to time. I wanted to shave. I wanted to
spend a good half hour under a shower, using too much shampoo and
soap. I wanted to sit in a white tiled bathroom where I could
forget the cholera, and stretch and scrub the last few feet off
my skin.

"So glad to see you," I said. "I'm glad," he muttered through clenched
teeth.
As I walked into the foyer, his eyes were glittering with
tension, and his long, handsome face was grim. "We have a problem
here. Some..."

"He led me to a room off the main corridor. A girl answered the
door and spoke to us in Italian. She was distraught and
dishevelled. Her hair was messed, and matted with lint and that
loose, dried, food. Her thin nightdress hung as if, revealing the
handspan of her ribs. She was a nun, and she was stoned
almost to sleep, but there was a numb, somnolent quality in her
speaking.

On the bed there was a young man stretched with one leg over the
foot of the bed. He was naked to the waist, and his trousers were
open at the front. One boot was discarded and the other was still
on his left foot. He was about twenty (eight years old). He was
dead.

- no pulse. - no heartbeat. - no breathing. The overdose had thrown his

body do! n the long bla , ! ell, and his fa e ! as as blue as the
s, y at ? #.m. on the dar, est day of ! inter. I hauled his body u#
onto the bed, and #ut a roll of sheet behind his ne , .

50ad business, ; in,5) nand said tersely. *e stood ! ith his ba ,

to the losed door, #reventing anyone from entering.

Ignoring him, I began ardio(#ulmonary resus itation on the young
man. I , ne! the drill too ! ell. I"d #ulled +un, ies out of
overdoses, do1ens of them, ! hen I ! as a +un, ie myself. I"d done
it fifty, eighty times in my o! n ountry, #ressing and breathing
life into the living dead. I #ressed at the young man"s heart,
! illing it to beat, and breathed his lungs to their a#a ity for
him.)fter ten minutes of the #ro edure he stuttered, dee# in his
hest, and oughed. I rested on my , nees, ! at hing to see if he
! as strong enough to breathe on his o! n. 2he breathing ! as slo! ,
and then slo! er, and then it sto##ed in a hollo! sigh. 2he sound
! as as flat and insentient as the air es a#ing from a fissure in
layers of geyser stone. I began the 8>R again. It ! as e'hausting
! or, , dragging his lim# body ba , u# the ! hole length of the ! ell
! ith my arms and my lungs.

2he girl ! ent under t! i e ! hile I ! or, ed on her boyfriend.) nand
sla##ed at her, and shoo, her a! a, e. 2hree hours after I ste##ed
into the hotel,) nand and I left the room. 7e ! ere both soa, ed
through ! ith s! eat, our shirts as ! et as if ! e"d been standing in
the rain that drummed and rattled beyond the ! indo! s. 2he ou#le
! as a! a, e and sullen and angry ! ith us, des#ite the girl"s
earlier #lea for hel#, be ause ! e"d disturbed the #leasure of
their stone. I losed the door on them, , no! ing G97
that some time soon, someone else in that ity, or some other,
! ould lose a door on them forever. /very time +un, ies go do! n
the ! ell they sin, a little dee#er, and it"s +ust that little bit
harder to drag them out again.

) nand o! ed me one. I sho! ered and shaved, and a e#ted the gift

of a freshly washed and ironed shirt. We sat in the foyer then, and shared a chai. Some men like you less the more they love you. Some men only really begin to like you when they find themselves in your debt. Chandan was uncomfortable with his obligation, and his handshake was the kind that good friends sometimes use in the course of a whole conversation.

When I stepped down to the street, a taxi pulled in to the curb beside me. Allan was in the back seat.

Please, can you get in for some time?

Sorry, and that might've been dread, pushed her voice almost to a wail. Her lovely, pale face was transformed in a fearful frown.

I limbed in beside her, and the taxi pulled out slowly from the curb. She smelled of her perfume and the beedie cigarettes that she constantly smoked.

Seedha told the driver. "Go straight ahead. I have a problem, sir. I need some help."

It was my night to be the white knight. I looked into her large

blue eyes, and resisted the impulse to make a joke or a flirtatious remark. She was afraid. Whatever had scared her still possessed her eyes. She was looking at me, but she was still staring at the fear.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she sobbed, breaking down suddenly, and then pulling herself together just as swiftly. "I didn't even say any hello to you. How are you? I haven't seen you for a long time. Are you going good? Good, very good."

Her lilting German accent gave a fluttering music to her speech that pleased my ear. I smiled at her as the coloured lights streamed across her eyes.

"I'm fine. What's the problem?"

"I need someone to go with me, to be with me, at one o'clock, after midnight. Tonight. I'll be there and ... and I need you to be there with me. Can you do it? Can you be there?"

"The store is shut at midnight."

"Describe," she said, her voice breaking again on the edge of tears. "Out. I'll be there, in a taxi, parked outside. I'm meeting someone, and I don't want to be alone. Can you be there with me?"

"Why me? What about Rodena, or Aurora?"

"I trust you, Erin. It isn't that long (the meeting). And I'll pay you. I'm not asking you to help me for nothing. I'll pay you five hundred dollars, if you'll just be there with me. Will you do it?"

"I heard a warning, deep within (I usually do, when something worse than we can imagine is stalking us, and set to hunt). Kate's way of beating us in a fair fight is to give us warnings that we hear, but never heed. Of course I would help her. Alla is Carla's friend, and I am in love with Carla. I would help her, for Carla's sake, even if I didn't like her. And I did like Alla: she is beautiful, and she is just naive enough, just sanguine enough to sympathize slipping into pity. I smiled again, and asked the driver to stop."

"Sure. Don't worry. I'll be there."

"She leaned across and gave me a kiss on the cheek. I got out of the cab. She put her hands on the window's edge, and leaned out. Misty rain settled on her long eyelashes, forcing her to blink."

"You'll be there? Promise?"

5@ne a.m.,5 I said firmly. 5; eo#old"s. I"ll be there.5

5Dou #romiseE5

5Deah,5 I laughed. 5I #romise.5

2he ta' i #ulled a! ay, and she alled out ! ith a #laintive urgen y that seemed harsh and almost hysteri al in the stillness of the night.

5Don"t let me do! n, ; inB5

I ! al, ed ba , to! ard the tourist beat, aimlessly, thin, ing about Alla and the business, ! hatever it ! as, that her boyfriend, 4odena, ! as involved in ! ith 4auri1io. Didier had told me they ! ere su essful, they ! ere ma, ing money, but Alla seemed afraid and unha##y.)nd there ! as something else that Didier had said((something about danger. I tried to remember the ! ords he"d used. 7hat ! ere theyE 2terrible ris, ... great violen e ...

4y mind ! as still shuffling through those thoughts ! hen I realised that I ! as in <arla"s street. I #assed her ground(floor a#artment. 2he ! ide 9ren h doors, leading dire tly from the street, ! ere o#en.) desultory bree1e riffled the gau1e urtsains, and I sa! a soft yello! light, aandle, glo! ing ! ithin.

2he rain gre! heavier, but a restlessness I ouldn"t fight or understand G99

, e#t me ! al, ing. &inod"s love song, the song that rang bells in the dome of the Gate! ay 4onument, ! as running on a loo# in my mind. 4y thoughts floated ba , to the boat sailing on the surreal la, e that the monsoon had made of the street. 2he loo, in <arla"s eyes((ommanding, demanding((drove the restlessness to a , ind of fury in my heart. I had to sto#, sometimes, in the rain, to dra! dee# breaths. I ! as ho, ing ! ith love and desire. 2here ! as anger

in me, and rain. My fists were clenched. The muscles of my arms and chest and back were tight and taut. I thought of the Italian couple, the woman, in Grand's hotel, and I thought of death and dying. The black, and brooding sky finally ruptured and rained. Lightning ripped into the Arabian Sea, and thunder followed with deafening applause.

I began to run. The trees were dark, their leaves wet through. They looked like small black clouds themselves, those trees, each one shedding its shower of rain. The streets were empty. I ran through puddles of fast-falling water, reflecting the lightning (fractured sky.) All the loneliness and all the love I knew

collected and combined in me, until my heart was as swollen with love for her as the clouds above were swollen with their mass of rain. And I ran. I ran. And, somehow, I was back in that street, back at the doorway to her house. And then I stood there, paralyzed by lightning, my chest heaving with a passion that was still running in me while my body stood still.

She came to the open doors to look at the sky. She was wearing a thin, white, sleeveless nightgown. She saw me standing in the

storm. Our eyes met, and held. She came through the doors, don't stop, and called to me. Thunder shook the street, and lightning filled her eyes. She came into my arms.

We kissed. Our lips made thoughts, somehow, without words: the kind of thoughts that feelings have. Our tongues rithed, and slithered in their waves of pleasure. Tongues roaming that were. Human. Overs. Lips slid across the kiss, and I submerged her in love, surrendering and submerging in love myself.

I lifted her in my arms and carried her into the house, into the room that was perfumed with her. We shed our clothes on the tiled floor, and she led me to her bed. We lay close, but not touching. In the storm (lit darkness, the beaded sweat and raindrops on her arm were like so many glittering stars, and her skin was like a

s#an of night s, y. H%%

I #ressed my li#s against the s, y, and li , ed the stars into my mouth. She too, my body into hers, and every movement ! as an in antation. @ur breathing ! as li, e the ! hole ! orld hanting #rayers. S! eat ran in rivulets to ravines of #leasure. /very movement ! as a satin s, in as ade. 7ithin the velvet loa, s of tenderness, our ba , s onvulsed in =uivering heat, #ushing heat, #ushing mus les to om#lete ! hat minds begin and bodies al! ays ! in. I ! as hers. She ! as mine. 4y body ! as her hariat, and she drove it into the sun. *er body ! as my river, and I be ame the sea.)nd the ! ailing moan that drove our li#s together, at the end, ! as the ! orld of ho#e and sorro! that e stasy ! rings from lovers as it floods their souls ! ith bliss.

2he still and softly breathing silen e that suffused and submerged us, after! ard, ! as em#tied of need, and ! ant, and hunger, and #ain, and everything else e' e#t the #ure, ineffable e' =uisiteness of love.

5@h, shitB5

57 hatE5

5@h, \$esusB ; oo, at the timeB5

57 hatE 7 hat is itE5

5I've gotta go,5 I said, +um#ing out of the bed and rea hing for my ! et lothes. 5I've got to meet someone, at ; eo#old"s, and I've got five minutes to get there.5

5- o! E Dou"re going no! E5

5I have to.5

5; eo#old"s ! ill be shut,5 she fro! ned, sitting u# in the bed and leaning against a little hill of #illo! s.

I, no, I muttered, pulling on my boots and lacing them. My clothes and boots were soaking wet, but the night was still humid and warm. The storm was easing, and the breeze that had stirred the languid air was dying. I, nelt beside the bed, and leaned across to kiss the soft skin of her thigh. I've gotta go. I gave my word.

Is it that important?

It's the heat of irritation creased my forehead with a frown. I was momentarily annoyed that she should press the point when I'd told her that I'd given my word: that should've been enough. Out she was lovely in that moonless light, and she was right to be annoyed, while I wasn't.

I'm sorry, I answered softly, running my hand through her thick, black hair. *o! many times had I wanted to do that, to reach out and touch her, when we'd stood together.

Go on, she said quietly, watching me with a slight frown on her face. Go.

I ran to North Under Road through the deserted market. White canvas covers on the market stalls gave them the appearance of shrouded cadavers in the cool (room of a morgue. My footsteps running made scattered echoes, as if ghosts were running with me. I crossed North Under Road and entered Weather Road, running along that boulevard of trees and tall mansions, with no sight or sound of the million people who passed there during each busy day.

At the first crossroad I turned left to avoid the flooded streets, and I saw a boy riding a bicycle ahead. I ran on in the center of the road, and a second bicycle pulled out of a dark

drive! ay as I #assed. 7hen I ! as e' a tly half ! ay into the side street, the first #oli e +ee# a##eared at the end of the street. I heard the se ond +ee# behind me and then the y lists onverged. 2he +ee# #ulled u# beside me, and I sto##ed. 9ive men got out and surrounded me. 2here ! as silen e for a fe! se onds. It ! as a silen e of su h deli ious mena e that the o#s ! ere almost drun, ! ith it, and their eyes ! ere lit ! ith riot in the softly falling rain.

57hat"s ha##eningE5 I as, ed, in 4arathi. 57hat do you ! antE5

5Get in the +ee#,5 the ommander grunted, in /nglish.

5;isten, I s#ea, 4arathi, so an"t ! e((5 I began, but the ommander ut me off ! ith a harsh laugh.

57e , no! you s#ea, 4arathi, motherfu , er,5 he ans! ered, in 4arathi. 2he other o#s laughed. 57e , no! everything. -o! get in the fu , ing +ee#, you sisterfu , er, or ! e"ll beat you ! ith the

into a uniform that was at least too small for him. He thought occurred to me that the discomfort it must've caused might help to explain his evil disposition. There was certainly no humour in him or any of the ten men who surrounded me, and I felt a perverse urge to laugh out loud as their solemn, heavy-breathing silence persisted. When the duty officer addressed his men, and the laughter in me died.

52a, the motherfucker and beat him, he said matter-of-factly. If he knew that I spoke Marathi, and could understand him, he gave no indication of it. *He spoke to his men as if I wasn't there. 50 Beat him hard. Give him a solid beating. Don't break any bones, if you can help it, but beat him hard, and then throw him into the jail with the others.5

I ran. I rushed through the corridor, leaped the landing outside the duty room in a single leap, and hit the gravel yard of the compound, running. It was a stupid mistake, and not the last I was to make in the next few months. 4 mistakes are like bad loves, as Arjuna once said, the more you learn from them, the more you wish they'd never happened. 4y mistake that night too, me to the front gate of the compound, where I collided with a roundabout, and collapsed in a tangle of tied and helpless men.

The men dragged me back to the duty room, hanging and injuring me all the way. They tied my hands behind my back with coarse hem rope, and removed my boots before tying my feet together. The short, fat duty officer produced a thick coil of rope, and ordered his men to bind me with it from ankles to shoulders. Sufficing and ranting with his rage, he glared as I was trussed in so many coils of rope that I resembled an Egyptian mummy. The men then dragged me to an adjoining room, and hoisted me up to hang me at chest height from a hook, fastened with the hook, rammed through several coils of rope at my back.

5) erolane ...5 the duty officer growled, through clenched teeth.

They spun me around faster and faster. They held my bound hands in the bundles, and my head hung down, level with my drooping feet. I whirled and spun until I lost my sense of where I was in the whirling room. When the beatings began.

Five or six men hit my spinning body as hard and as often as they could, raising their cane lathis against my skin. The stinging blows struck with fiercer pain through the bundles, and on my face, arms, legs, and feet. I could sense that I was bleeding. The screaming rose up in me, HUG but I clenched my jaws and gave the pain no sound of my own. I wouldn't let them have it. I wouldn't let them hear me scream. Silence is the tortured man's revenge. *ands reached out, stopping my body, holding it still, while the room continued to whirl. When they spun me in the opposite direction, and the beating began again.

When their sport was done, they dragged me up the metal steps to the lobby, (the same metal steps I'd climbed with >raba, even when I'd tried to help <ano's bear(handlers. ___Will someone come to help me? I asked myself. -o(one had seen my arrest on the deserted street, and no one, not here I was. Alla, if she came to see me, would she be actually involved in my arrest, wouldn't she, that I'd been arrested.)nd <arla(! hat would <arla think, but that I'd abandoned her after I'd made love? She wouldn't find me. >rison systems are black holes for human bodies: no light escapes from them, and no names. With that mysterious arrest, I'd vanished into one of the city's darkest black holes. I'd disappeared from the city as completely as if I'd caught a plane to Africa.

And why was I arrested? They questioned, bullied and searched in my whirling mind. Did they know I really was? If they didn't know, no (if it was something else, if it had nothing to do with me, I really was (there would still be questions, identification procedures, maybe even fingerprints here, there and everywhere on file all over the world, through the International Agency. It was only a

question of time before my real identity emerged. I had to get a message out to ... someone. Who would help me? Who is powerful enough to help me? Chaderbhai. ; ord) bdel <hader <han. With all of his contacts in the city, especially in the Solaba area, he would surely find out that I'd been arrested. In time, Chaderbhai would, no! . Antil then, I had to sit tight, and try to get a message out to him.

Brushed up in the mummifying robes, dragged up the hard metal stairs one bruising bum# at a time, I forced my thoughts to settle on that mantra, and I repeated it to the thumping beat of my heart: Get a message to Chaderbhai ... Get a message to Chaderbhai ...

At the top landing of the stairs, they threw me into the long prison corridor. The duty officer ordered prisoners to remove the robes from my body. *e stood in the gateway of the lobby, (u#,

! atting them with his fists on his hips.)t one point, he , i , ed me to, three times to encourage them to ! or, faster. When the last of the robes ! as removed and passed through to the guards, he ordered them to lift me and stand me H%H u#, facing him at the open gate. I felt their hands numbly on my deadened skin, and I opened my eyes, through blood, to see his grimace of a smile.

*e spoke to me in Marathi and then spat in my face. I tried to raise my arm to hit back, at him, but the other prisoners held me fast. Their hands ! ere gentle, but firm. They helped me into the hallway of the first open cell (room, and eased me to the concrete floor. I looked up to see his face as he shut the gate. ; oosely but accurately translated, he'd said to me, "Your future is over. Our life is over."

I saw the steel bars of the gate sliding shut, and felt the freezing coldness numb my heart. Metal slammed against metal. The , eyes angled and turned in the lobby. I looked into the eyes of

the men around me, the dead eyes and the frenzied, the resentful eyes and the fearing. Some! here, deep inside me, a drum began to beat. It might have been my heart. I felt my body, my whole body, tense and lengthen as if it was a fist. There! as a taste, this, and bitter, at the back, of my mouth. I struggled to swallow! it down and then I, suddenly, I remembered. It was the taste of hatred((my hatred, theirs, the guards", and the world"s. Prisons are the temples! here devils learn to prey. /very time! we turn the key! we twist the knife of fate, because every time! we cage a man! we lose him in! with hate.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TWENTY

The first floor of the lock, (u# at Solaba #oli e station had four big cell rooms beyond the fle' i(steel gate.) corridor connected the four rooms. @n one side the corridor gave access to the rooms. @n the other side it looked out, through steel mesh, onto the quadrangle of the #oli e compound. There were more cells below. It was in one of those ground-floor cells that the bear had been detained. Transients, who spent only one or two nights in custody, were held on the ground floor.)nyone likely to stay for a week, or longer in the Solaba lock, (u# climbed the stairs or was dragged up them, as I was, and passed through the sliding steel gate into one of hell's ante chambers.

There were no doors beyond the steel gate. /a h of the four rooms was accessed through a blank arch that was slightly wider than the average house doorway. The rooms were roughly three metres square. The corridor was just wide enough for two men to pass each other with their shoulders touching, and it was about sixteen metres long.)t the end of the corridor there was a urinal and a eyehole(sha#ed squatting(toilet, both without doors.) tap, #roviding water for washing and drinking, was fixed above

the urinal.

The four rooms and corridor might've held forty men with an average level of discomfort. 7hen I was, on my first morning, I discovered that there were, in fact, two hundred and forty of us. The place was a hive, a termite's nest, a rithing mass of human beings, pressing against one another with every little movement of an arm or a leg. The toilet was an, le(dee# in shit. The urinal overflowed.) stinking sam# ooled out of them into the far end of the corridor. The still, thickly humid monsoon air was logged with moaning, murmurings, talking, complaining, shouting, and the screams, every few hours, of men going mad. I remained there for three weeks. H%C

The first of the four rooms, I here I'd slept the first night, held only fifteen men. It was as furthest from the side, ending smell of the toilet. It was clean. There was space to lie down. The men who lived in that room were all rich (rich enough to pay the cops to beat up anyone who tried to squeeze in without an invitation. The room was, no longer as the 2nd mahal, and its residents were, no longer as the andrah, Umar, the fifteen riches.

The second room held twenty-five men. I learned that they were all poor, some men who'd served hard time at least once before, and were prepared to fight, fast and dirty, to reserve a space for themselves. Their room was, no longer as the poor mahal, the abode of thieves, and the men were, no longer as the black hats, the alata (Lila, Ranjit's leaders (because invited thieves at the infamous) Arthur Road prison were forced to wear a black hat with their prison uniform.

The third room had forty men crowded into it, sitting shoulder to shoulder around the walls, and taking turns to stretch out in the little space left in the centre of the room. They weren't as hard as the men in the second room, but they were proud and killing. They claimed the small squares of space they sat in, and then struggled to hold them against incursions by newcomers. They were constantly under pressure: every day, at least one of them lost a fight and lost his place to a new, tougher man. Still, the optimal number for the third room was forty men and, since it rarely rose above that limit, it was, no longer as the haaliss mahal, or the abode of the forty.

The fourth room was, no longer in the low (a slang as the du, mahal, or the abode of suffering, but many men referred to use the name that the Solaba police had given the last cell in the row: the detention room. When a new man entered the corridor for the first time, through the steel gate, he sometimes tried his luck in the first room. Every one of the fifteen men in that room, and not a few ladies in the corridor, could rise up, shoving and threatening him away, shouting: -e't room -e't room, bastard! Driven along the corridor by the nothing, toiling mess of

bodies, the man might try to enter the second room. If no one there, neither him, nor whoever happened to be near the door would give

him a blow, a smack, in the mouth. -e' t room, motherfu , erß If the man, badly rattled by then, tried to enter the third room as he pushed further along the corridor, the two or three men who sat or stood in the doorway of that room would

rush at him. -e' t roomß -e' t room, sisterfu , erß When the next man found himself shoved all the way to the fourth room, the detention room, he would be greeted as an old and very familiar friend. Some in, friendß Some in, brotherß

Those foolish enough to enter were beaten and stripped naked by the fifty or sixty men who rushed into that bleak and foetid room. Their clothes were distributed according to a waiting list determined by a precise and perpetually adjusted numbering order. Their bodily cavities were thoroughly searched for jewellery, drugs, or money. Any valuables went to the keeping of the detention room. During my years there, the keeping of the last room was a huge gorilla of a man with no nose, and a hairline that began little more than the thickness of a thumb above his single, thick eyebrow. The next men received filthy rags to wear (the rags that had been discarded by those who'd received their stolen clothes. They then had two options: to leave the room and fend for themselves with the hundred men who lived in the impossibly crowded corridor, or to join the detention (room gang and wait for opportunities to prey on other hapless next men in the chain of muggings. From what I saw in those three years, about one man in every five who was brutalised and dispossessed in that last room too, the second option.

Even the corridor had its numbering order, its struggles over a foothold of space, and its claimants who challenged the strength or bravery of rivals. Ladders near the front gate and relatively far from the toilet were rigged. Yet even at the foul end of the corridor, where shit and piss flowed onto the floor in a repulsive, reeking sludge, men fought each other for an inch of

as slightly shallower in the mud.

Some of those men who were forced to the end of the corridor, forced to stand and bleed in shit all day and all night, finally fell down and died. One man died in the lorry, while I was there, and several others were carried out in a state so close to death that I'd found it impossible to rouse them to consciousness. Others summoned the raging madness required to fight their way, minute by minute, hour by hour, metre by metre, day by day, and man by man, along the concrete and sand's intestine to a lair where they could stand and go on living, until the beast disgorged them through the same steel bars that had snuffed their lives away.

We received one meal a day, at four in the afternoon. It was dhal and roti, mostly, or rice with a thin curry sauce. There was also

chai and a slice of bread in the early morning. The prisoners tried to organise themselves into tidy orderly lines, arriving and leaving the gate where the cooks gave out food. Out the rush of

bodies, and the desperate hunger, and the greed of a few caused chaos at every meal. Many men missed out. Some went hungry for a day or longer.

We all received a flat aluminium plate when we entered the lorry. The plate was our only legal possession. There was no cutlery (we ate with our hands) and there were no spoons: chai was ladled out onto the plates, and we sucked it off them with our mouths pressed into the thin pool of liquid. Out the plates had other uses, first among which was in the manufacture of a makeshift stove. If two aluminium plates were bent into shapes and used as stands, a third plate could rest on top of them. With a fuel source burning in the shape between the bent, inverted plates and beneath the flat plate, a stove was created which could be used to reheat tea or food. The ideal fuel source was a flat rubber sandal. When one of those rubber shoes was lit at one end, it

burned evenly and slowly all the way to the other end. The smoke given off was as a thick and thick, with a greasy soot that settled on everything it touched. The detention room, where those who used stoves burned for some time every night, was blackened across its filthy floor and walls, as were the faces of all the men who lived there.

The stoves were a source of income for the prisoners in the detention room: they used them to reheat food and saved food, at a price, for the rich men in room one. The guards allowed deliveries of food and drink (for those who could afford it) during the day, but nothing passed through the gate at night. The fifteen prisoners, unstinting in the pursuit of their comforts, had bribed the cooks to provide a small saucepan, and several plastic bottles and containers, in which to store food. In that way, when deliveries had ceased every night, the prisoners still enjoyed hot food and snacks.

Because the aluminium plates could only be used as stoves for so long before they became brittle and collapsed, plates were always in demand. Because food and fuel and even the rubber sandals used as fuel could all be turned into money, they too were always required. The poorest men lost their sandals, their plates, and their food. Those with the heart to help them, by sharing the use of their plates, had to eat in scrambled gulches, and then hand on the plates to be used again. As many as four men often ate off one plate, in that way, during the six or seven minutes that the cooks allowed for food to be distributed at the steel gate.

Every day I looked into the eyes of starving men. I saw them watching other men shove hot food hurriedly into their mouths with their fingers while the cooks ladled out the last of the meals. I saw them, every day, watching and waiting and fearing that they might miss out. The truth that filled their eyes was something I have only ever known about ourselves in cruel and desperate hunger. I too, it into myself, that truth, and the part of my heart that broke to see it has never healed.

And every night in room one, the 24, the fifteen prisoners ate a hot meal and drank, hot, sweet tea, heated up on the makeshift stoves in the detention room, before stretching out to sleep.

Even the prisoners, of course, had to use the toilet. The procedure was as vile and dehumanising for them as it was for the poorest prisoner and in that, if in nothing else, they were all nearly equal. The long journey through the tangle of limbs and bodies in the corridor ended in the stinking stamens. There, the rich men, like the rest of us, pushed their nostrils with strips of cloth torn from a shirt or singlet, and lit a beedie cigarette between their teeth to fight the smell. With pants hitched to their waists, and sandals held in their hands, they then padded barefoot into the sewage to squat over the eyehole toilet. The toilet was unblocked, and functioned well enough but with more than a thousand men using it, once or twice a day, every day, it was soon fouled by those who missed the eyehole in the floor. Eventually, the piles of excrement slid down into the pools of urine that flooded from the shallow urinal. That was the filthy sludge through which he had padded on our way to the toilet. Adding bacteria to the urinal, the rich men then washed their hands and feet at the tap, without soap, and stepped on bundles of rags that were heaped like stepping stones and formed a makeshift dam before the entrance to the detention room. For the price of a cigarette butt or a half-smoked beedie, men squatting in the mud could lean their feet on a more comfortable surface, and then they could begin the long struggle back along the corridor.

It was resumed that I had money, because I was a white foreigner, so the rich men in room one had invited me to join them when I'd shown up in their room on my first morning. The idea appealed to me. I'd been raised in a family of Arabian socialists, and I'd inherited their stubborn, imperialist revulsion for socialist inequality in all its forms. Imbued with their principles,

H1%

and being a #rodu t, as a young man, of a revolutionary age, I'd be ome a revolutionary myself. Some of that ommitment to _2he _8ause, as my mother had alled it, ! as still there in the ore of my being. 4oreover, I'd been living in a slum for many months ! ith the ity's #oor. So I refused the offer((relu tantly I must admit((to en+oy the omforts of the ri h. Instead, I mus led my ! ay into the se ond room ! ith the hard men ! ho"d all served time in #rison. 2here ! as a brief s uffle at the door! ay but, ! hen it ! as lear that I ! as #re#ared to fight for a #la e in the abode of thieves, they shuffled themselves around, and made room for me. Still, there ! as some resentment. 2he bla , hats, li, e self(res#e ting roo, s every! here, ! ere #roud men. It ! asn't long before they manufa tured an o##ortunity to test me out.

@n one of the long, s=uirring tri#s ba , from the toilet, three days after my arrest, a man in the ro! d of #risoners tried to ! restle my #late a! ay from me. I shouted a ! arning, in *indi and 4arathi, ma, ing the threat as anatomi ally im#olite as my

vo abulary ! ould allo! . It didn't sto# him. 2he man ! as taller than I ! as, and bigger by some thirty , ilos. *is hands gras#ed the #late near my o! n, and ! e both #ulled, but neither of us had the gross strength to ! rest it a! ay.)ll the men fell silent. 2heir breathing ! as a tidal s! irl of sound and ! arm air around us. It ! as a fa e off. 4a, e or brea, : I made my ! ay in that ! orld, right there and then, or I bro, e do! n, and let myself be for ed into the foetid s! am# at the end of the orridor.

Asing the man's gri# on the #late as leverage, I smashed my head onto the bridge of his nose, five, si' , seven times, and then again on the #oint of his hin as he tried to #ull a! ay.)larm surged through the ro! d.) do! en #airs of hands shoved at us, rushing our bodies and fa es together. >a , ed into the #ress of frightened men, unable to move my hands, and un! illing to release the #late, I bit into his fa e. 4y teeth #ier ed his hee, until I tasted his blood in my mouth. *e dro##ed the #late and s reamed. 2hrashing ! ildly, he s rambled through the bodies in

the corridor to the steel gate. I followed him, with my hand reaching out for his back. Grasping the bars, he shook the gate and searched for help. I caught him just as the Italian turned his eyes in the lock. I grabbed at him as he escaped through the gate. His shirt stretched behind him, and for a second he almost stumbled, there, his legs running but his body quite still. Then the shirt gave away, and I was left with a handful of it in my hand as the man staggered through the opening. He cowered behind the Italian, his back pressed against the wall. His face was opened at the cheek, where my teeth had bit him, and blood streamed from his nose down his throat to his chest. The gate slammed shut. He stared, smiling inscrutably, as I used the shirt to wipe the blood from my hands and the wall. Satisfied, I threw the shirt at the gate. I turned and searched my way through the silent corridor, taking my place in the thieves' room once more.

"I see you move, brother," the young man sitting beside me said in English.

"Not really," I replied. "I was trying for his ear."

"@oooooh! He is in bed, cursing his lips. Out probably more of a nourishment in his ear, isn't it, than the fucking food they're giving us here, man. What is your case?"

"I don't know."

"Do you don't know?"

"They invited me up at night and brought me here. They haven't told me what I'm charged with, or why I'm here."

"I didn't ask him what he was in for because the Australian prison warden followed by dozens of the old school (dozens! how, no! there is a warden, and he taught me about it, when I'd started

my +ail senten e ! ith them((di tates that you don't as, a man about the rimes he might've ommitted until you li, e him enough to ma, e him a friend, or disli, e him enough to ma, e him an enemy.

52hey gave you a solid #asting, man.5

52he aero#lane, they alled it.5

5@ooooohB5 he ! in ed again, hun hing his shoulders. 5I hate that fu ,ing aero#lane, brotherB 2hey tied me u# in the ro#es so tight, on e, that it too, three days for my arm to get the feeling ba , .)nd you , no! ho! your body s! ells the fu , u# inside the ro#es, ! hen they've been beating you for a ! hile, naE 4y name is 4ahesh. 7hat is your good nameE5

52hey all me ;in.5

5; inE5

5Deah.5

5Interesting name, man. 7here did you learn to s#ea, 4arathi, li, e ! hen you ! ere alling that fello! a motherfu , er, before you started eating on his fa eE5

5In a village.5 H1F

54ust be some sort of tough village, that one.5

I smiled for the first time sin e the #oli e had #i , ed me u#. In #rison, a man rations his smiles be ause #redatory men see smiling as a ! ea, ness, ! ea, men see it as an invitation, and #rison guards see it as a #rovo ation to some ne! torment.

5I learned the s! earing here, in Oombay,5 I e' #lained. 5*o! long do #eo#le usually stay hereE5

4ahesh sighed, and his broad, dar, fa e folded in! ard in a

resigned from. *is! ide(s#a ed bro! n eyes! ere so dee#(set that they seemed to be hiding or see, ing shelter beneath the ridge of his s arred bro! . *is! ide nose, bro, en more than on e, dominated his fa e and gave him a tougher loo, than his small mouth and rounded hin might"ve managed on their o! n.

52hat is nobody , no! s, brother,5 he re#lied, the light dimming in his eyes. It! as the sort of res#onse >raba, er might"ve made, and I suddenly missed my little friend in a se ond of loneliness that s#eared my heart. 5I ame here t! o days before you. 2here"s a rumour! e! ill be ta, ing a tru , to the Road, in t! o or three! ee, s.5

52he roadE5

5) rthur Road +ail, man.5

5I have to get a message out to someone.5

5Dou"ll have to! ait for that, ;in. 2he guards here, the o#s, they"ve been telling all of us here not to hel# you. It"s li, e somebody #ut a urse on you, my brother. I"m #robably going to get some shit on my head +ust for tal, ing to you only, but! hat the fu , , yaar.5

5I"ve got to get a message out,5 I re#eated, my li#s bared from my teeth.

57ell, none of the guys leaving here! ill hel# you, ;in. 2hey are afraid, li, e mi e in a bag full of obras. Out you"ll be able to get some messages out from) rthur Road. It"s a fu , ing big +ail, no #roblem. 2! elve thousand men inside. Government says less than so many, but everybody of us, ! e , no! there is t! elve thousands of men inside. Out it"s still a lot better than this. If you go to the Road, you"ll be! ith me, in maybe three! ee, s. 4y ase is stealing. Stealing from the onstru tions((o##er! ire, #lasti #i#es((three times in +ail, already, for the same things. 2his

time number four. What to say, brother I am! That they all a serial offensive, against the #ilfering la! . This time it is three years for me, if lucky, and five years, if not lucky. If you go to Arthur Road, you go with me. H1G

Then I'll try to get your messages out of the mail. This, hain Antil then, I smoke, and pray to the God, and bite any sisterfuckers! I hope to take our #lates, naE5

And for three weeks I did just that. I smoked too much, and I troubled deaf heaven with our #rayers, and I fought with some men, and sometimes I comforted other men! I was losing the will to smoke and pray and fight. And one day they came to take our fingerprints, #ressing the blame, traitorous looks and I hurls onto a #age that #romised to tell a truth, a vile truth, and nothing but that truth. And then #ahesh and I were rushed with other men into an ancient blue #rison truck, ((eighty men in the truck, I think of the truck, I here thirty! would've been too many)) and driven to Arthur Road #rison at rest, less seeds through the streets of the city that I all loved too much.

Inside the gates of the #rison, guards dragged us off the tailgate of the truck, and told us to squat on the ground, I hile other guards #roessed us and signed us into the #rison, one by one. It took four hours, shuffling forward and squatting on our haunches, and they left me till last. The guards had been told that I understood #arathi. Their #at h #ommander tested the assertion, I then I #as alone with them, by ordering me to stand. I stood up #ainfully stiff legs, and he ordered me to squat again. When I squatted down, he ordered me to stand again. That might've gone on indefinitely, #udging by the hilarity it #roved in the gallery of surrounding guards, but I refused to #lay. *e continued to give the #ommands, but I ignored him. When he sto##ed, I stared at one another across the #ind of silence I've only ever #n in #risons or on the battlefield. It's a silence

you can feel on your skin. It's a silence you can smell, and taste, and even hear, somehow, in a dark, #a #e at the back, of

your head. Slowly, the commander's sinful smile retreated into the snarl of hate that had spawned it. *e spat on the ground at my feet.

British built this jail, in the time of Raj, he hissed at me, showing teeth. They did chain Indian men here, hang them here, until dead. - o! _! e run the jail, and you are a British prisoner.

' Use me, sir, I said, with the most formal politeness that the Marathi language offers, but I am not British. I am from - e! . ealand.

Dou are _British he screamed, spraying my face with his saliva.

"I'm afraid not."

Des! Dou are British) British he replied, the snarl moving out! and H1H to a malignant smile on e more. Dou are British, and ! e run the jail. Dou go through that ! ay!

*e pointed to! and an ar h! ay that led into the prison's interior. 2here ! as a hard right turn, +ust a little ! ay into the ar h, and I , ne! , the ! ay all animals , no! , that harm ! aited for me there. 2o en ourage me, the guards rammed their batons into my back. I stumbled into the ar h, and too, the right turn. Some t! enty men ! ere ! aiting for me, lined u# on either side of the long corridor and armed ! ith bamboo sticks.

I , ne! the gauntlet ! ell((better than any man should. 2here'd been another tunnel of #ain, in another country: the #unishment unit in the prison I'd es a#ed from in)ustralia. 2hose guards had made us run their gauntlet do! n a long narrow! corridor, leading to the tiny e' er ise yards.)nd as ! e ran they'd s! ung their batons and , i , ed us, all the ! ay to the steel door at the end of the line.

I stood in the harsh electric light of that narrow tunnel, in Bombay's Arthur Road Prison, and I wanted to laugh. * Hey guys, I wanted to say, can't you be a little more original? Out I couldn't see, Fear dries a man's mouth, and hate strangles him. That's why hate has no great literature: real fear and real hate have no words.

I walked slowly forward. The men were dressed in white shirts and shorts, with white caps on their heads, and wide black, leather belts around their waists. The brass buttons on those belts carried numbers and a title. The title was Sonvit Overseer. They weren't prison guards, I soon discovered. In the Indian prison system, inherited from the days of the British Raj, the prison

guards had very little to do with the day-to-day operation of the prison. Those everyday tasks of maintaining routines, order, and discipline were the preserve of Sonvit Overseers. Sonvited murderers and other long-term serial offenders received sentences of fifteen years or more. During the first five of those years they were common prisoners. During the second five years they earned the privilege of a job in the kitchen, laundry, prison industries, or leanu gangs. During the third and final five years they often adopted the hat, leather belt, and bamboo stick of a Sonvit Overseer. Then, the power of life and death was in their hands. Two lines of those Sonvited killers, who'd become guards themselves, awaited me in the tunnel. They raised their sticks and fixed their eyes on me, anticipating a charging run that might deprive them of the sporting chance to inflict some pain. H1?

I didn't run. I wish I could say, no, that I walked that night and didn't run because of something noble and brave that I found inside myself, but I can't. I've thought about it often. I've recalled and relived that walk a thousand times, and each time I remember it, there's less certainty about the why of it. /very virtuous at last has some dar, settled in its heart, <haderbhai on e

told me, and every rise contains a mystery that can't be solved.

I walked toward them slowly, and I began to think of the long
on the path that leads from the shore to the shrine at
)li: the mosque that floats like a great moored ship on the
moonlit sea. That view of the monument to the revered saint, and
the journey between the waves to the floating pavilions, was one
of my beloved images of the city. Its beauty, for me, was like
the angel that a man sees in the sleeping face of the woman he
loves. And it might've been just that, beauty alone, that saved
me. I was walking into the forest of the city, one of her
ruellest and most intricate defiles, but some instinct flooded
my mind with a loveliness I'd found in her (that path, across the
sea, to the white minarets of the saint's tomb.

The bamboo sticks whirled and rained, ringing and slashing at my
arms and legs and back. Some blows hit my head, my neck, and my
face. Strongly with maximum force, by strong arms against bare skin,
the blows from the bamboo sticks were across between a hot metal
burn and an electric shock. The sticks were split at the ends.
They opened a door (thin cuts wherever they landed. Blood began to
run from my face and the exposed skin on my arms.

I walked on as slowly and steadily as I could. I flinched often
when the sticks smashed into my face or across my ear, but I
never flinched or recoiled or raised my hands. To free my hands at
my sides, I crouched at the legs of my jeans. And the attack,
which had begun with frenzied violence, died to fewer blows
as I walked the gauntlet. It ceased altogether when I reached the
last men in the lines. It was a kind of victory, seeing those men
look at their sticks and their eyes as I passed them. The only

victory that really counts in prison, an old (timer in the
)ustralian jail once said to me, is survival. Out survival means
more than simply being alive. It's not just the body that must
survive a jail term: the spirit and the will and the heart have

to make it through as well. If any one of them is broken or destroyed, the man whose living body passes through the gate, at the end of his sentence, can't be said to have survived H1C it.)nd it's for those small victories of the heart, and the spirit, and the will that we sometimes risk, the body that trades them.

The overseers and several guards brought me through the prison, in the darkening evening, to one of the many dormitory blocks. The large, high-ceilinged room was fifty-five feet long and ten feet wide. There were barred windows that gave views of open areas around the building, and there were two tall steel gates, one at either end of the room. In a bathroom near one entrance, there were three lean-to, eyehole toilets. When the guards locked us in for the night, there were one hundred and eighty prisoners in that room, and twenty-five overseers.

One-quarter of the room was reserved for the overseers. They had their own station, of lean benches. They arranged them with free space all around, and in files eight or ten thick, to provide soft beds. The rest of us were squeezed into two lines in the remaining three-quarters of the room, with a no-man's land of about four feet between our part of the room and the area claimed by the overseers.

Each of us had one blanket, taken from a neatly folded station at the opposite end of the room. The blankets were folded down their length, and placed side to side on the stone floor against the long walls. We lay down on the narrow blankets, with our shoulders rubbing against one another. Our heads touched the side walls, and our feet pointed inward toward the center of the room. The bright lights remained on all night. The overseers on night duty, too, turns to walk the length of the room between the rows of feet. They all carried whistles on chains around their necks, which they used to summon the guards in the event of any trouble they couldn't handle themselves. I soon learned that they were reluctant to use the whistle, and there was very little trouble that was beyond their power.

The overseers gave me five minutes to wash the drying blood off my face and neck, and arms, and to use the immaculately clean squat toilet. When I returned to the main room they offered me the opportunity to sleep at their end of the room. They assumed, no doubt, that my hesitation indicated a surplus of money. And they may have allowed themselves, in some small way, to be influenced by the fact that I'd walked their gauntlet without running. Whatever their reasons, I couldn't do it (they were the very men who'd beaten me only minutes before, the men who'd transformed themselves into prison guards (and I refused their offer. It was a huge mistake.) So I walked to the far end of H17

the room, too, a blanket from the file, and put it down next to the bed. They sneered and laughed. They were furious that I'd rejected the rare offer to join them, and they conspired, as always, with their fellow prisoners, to break my spirit.

In the night I awoke from monstrous dreams with a piercing pain in my back. I sat up, scratching at my back, to find an insect about the size of a small thumbtack attached to my skin. I removed it with my fingernail and put it on the stone floor to examine it. The creature was dark grey, fat, swollen almost to round, with a multitude of legs. I squashed it with my hand. Blood squirted out. It was my own blood. The creature had feasted itself on me in my sleep. Then, on waking, a foul smell filled my nostrils. It was my first encounter with the parasite, known as, actually, the source of prison in the Arthur Road prison. Nothing stopped them. They bit, and sucked blood, every night. The small, round wounds they made soon festered into abscesses (filled pustules. In any one night there were three to five bites in a cell, there were twenty and, in a month, there were a hundred sucking, infected sores on a man's body. And nothing stopped them.

I stared at the stupid mess that the squashed, actual made, stunned to see how much blood the tiny creature had managed to drain from me. Suddenly there was a stabbing pain at my ear as

the night ! at h overseer s! ung his bamboo lathi against my head. I started u# in anger, but 4ahesh sto##ed me. *is hands lo , ed onto my arm, and he dragged me do! n ! ith all his ! eight.

2he overseer glared at me until I lay do! n again. *e resumed his #a ing of the brightly lit room, and 4ahesh mouthed a ! arning to me. @ur fa es ! ere only a hand"s ! idth a#art.)ll along the t! o lines of slee#ers, men ! ere +ammed together, arms and legs intert! ined in slee#. 2he terror that s#i, ed in 4ahesh"s eyes, and the ! him#er that he lam#ed ! ith a hand to his mouth, ! ere the last things that I sa! and heard on that first night.

5- o matter ! hat they do,5 he ! his#ered, 5for the sa, e of your life, don"t do anything to them in return. 2his is not a living #la e, ; in. 7e are all dead men here. Dou an"t do anythingB5

I losed my eyes, and losed my heart, and ! illed myself to slee#.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The overseers ! o, e us a little after da! n, beating any man unfortunate enough to be aslee# ! hen they rea hed him. I ! as a! a, e and ready, yet I too re eived a blo! from a sti , . I gro! led in anger and started u# =ui , ly, but 4ahesh sto##ed me on e again. 7e folded our blan, ets a ording to a #re ise

#attern, and #la ed them in the #ile at our end of the room. 2he guards o#ened the large steel gates from the outside, and ! e filed out of the room to assemble for the morning ! ash. 2he re tangular bathing area, something li, e an em#ty aboveground #ool or a dry stone #ond, had a huge ast(iron tan, at one end.)s ! e a##roa hed, a #risoner o#ened a valve at the base of the tan, , allo! ing a small +et of ! ater to es a#e from a #i#e that #rotruded at about shin(height. *e s am#ered u# a steel ladder and sat on to# of the tan, to ! at h. 4en rushed for the #i#e, and held their flat aluminium #lates under the thin stream of ! ater that issued from it. 2he rush of men at the tan, ! as ten dee# and ten ! ide: a huge , not of mus le and bone, straining and struggling to rea h the #i#e.

I ! aited until the ro! d thinned out, ! at hing the men ! ash themselves ! ith the little ! ater available.) fe! men, one in t! enty, had #ie es of soa#, and attem#ted to lather themselves before returning to the #i#e for more ! ater. Oy the time I a##roa hed the #i#e, the tan, ! as almost em#ty. 2he tri , le of ! ater that I olle ted in my #late ! as ! rigging ! ith hundreds of maggot(li, e reatures. I thrust the #late a! ay in disgust, and several men around me laughed.

57ater ! orms, brotherB 4ahesh said, filling his #late ! ith the s=uirring, thrashing, semi(trans#arent reatures. *e ti##ed the #late of ! rigging things over his hest and ba , , and rea hed out to fill another #late. 52hey live in the tan, s. 7hen the ! ater gets lo! , the ! ater ! orms ome out of the ta# so many, brotherB Out no #roblem. 2hey an"t hurt you. H19

They don't bite, like the admiral. They must do! n and die in the old air, you see. The other fellows fight to get water with not many worms inside. Out if we wait, we get plenty of worms, but plenty of water also. This is better, yes. Some on. Hallo! Dou better grab some, if you want a wash before tomorrow morning. This is it, brother. We can't be washing in the dormitory. That is a special for the overseers only. They let you wash there last night, because you had a lot of blood on you. Out you'll never use that washing hall again. We use the toilet inside, but we don't wash there. This is your only washing, brother.

I held the plate under the ever-diminishing trickle of water and then tipped the seething mass of worms over my chest and back, as Ahesh had done. I, like all the Indian men I knew, wore a pair of shorts (the over-under-ants, Ahesh had called them in the village) under my jeans. I discarded the jeans, and the net plate full of wriggling beasts went down the front of my shorts. By the time the overseers began hitting us with their sticks to herd us back into the dormitory, I was as lean as it was possible to be without soap, and using worm-infested water.

In the dormitory we squatted for an hour while we waited for the guards to make the morning headcount. After a time, the squatting caused us extraordinary pain in our legs. Whenever anyone tried to stretch or straighten his legs, however, one of

the straggling overseers struck him a vicious blow. I didn't move in the line. I didn't want them to have the satisfaction of seeing me give in to the pain. Out as I closed my eyes in sleep on entrance, one of them struck me anyway, without cause or provocation. I began to stand, and once again I felt the restraining hands of Ahesh warning me to be still. When a second, third, and then a fourth blow rained into my ear, over the space of fifteen minutes, I snapped.

Some here, you fool!" I shouted, standing and pointing at the last man who'd struck me. The overseer, a huge and obese

man, , no! n to friend and foe ali, e as Oig Rahul, to! ered over most of the other men in the room. 5I'll ta, e that fu , in" sti , and +am it so far u# your arse I'll be able to see it in your eyesB5

Silen e im#loded in the room, s! allo! ing every sound. -o(one moved. Oig Rahul stared. *is broad e' #ression, a #arody of amused ondes ension, ! as infuriating. Slo! ly, the onvi t overseers began to onverge in su##ort of him. HF%

58ome hereB5 I shouted in *indi. 58ome on, heroB ; et"s goB I'm readyB5

Suddenly 4ahesh and five or si' other #risoners rose u# all around me and lung to my body, trying to for e me do! n to a s=uatting #osition.

5>lease, ; inB5 4ahesh hissed. 5>lease, brother, #leaseB Sit do! n again. >lease. I , no! ! hat I'm telling you. >lease. >leaseB5

2here ! as a moment, ! hile they #ulled at my arms and shoulders, ! hen Oig Rahul and I made the , ind of eye onta t ! here ea h man , no! s everything about the violen e in the other. *is su#er ilious grin faded, and his eyes fluttered their signal of defeat. *e , ne! it, and I , ne! it. *e ! as afraid of me. I allo! ed the men to drag me do! n to a s=uatting #osition. *e turned on his heel, and stru , out refle' ively at the nearest man rou hing in the ran, s. 2he tension in the room dissolved, and the head(ount resumed.

Orea, fast onsisted of a single, large ha#atti. 7e he! ed them and si##ed ! ater during the five minutes allo! ed, and then the overseers mar hed us out of the room. 7e rossed several imma ulately lean ourtyards. In a broad avenue bet! een fen ed areas, the overseers for ed us to s=uat in the morning sunlight ! hile ! e ! aited to have our heads shaved. 2he barbers" ! ooden stools ! ere in the shade of a tall tree. /very ne! #risoner had his hair li##ed by one barber, and then a se ond barber shaved

his head with a straight razor.

As I lay there waiting, I heard shouts coming from one of the fenced compounds near the barbers' courtyard. Mahesh nudged me, nodding his head for me to get up. Then eight overseers dragged a man

into the deserted compound beyond the fence. There were ropes attached to the man's wrists and waist. Four ropes were attached to the bushes and rings of a thick, leather collar fitted tightly around the man's neck. Teams of overseers were pulling tug-of-war on the wrist ropes. The man was very tall and strong. His neck was as thick as the barrel of a cannon, and his powerful chest and back rippled with muscles. He was a friend. I recognized him. It was Hassan Ali, a driver, Raheem, the man I'd helped escape from the mob near Regal Circle.

We got up in a tight, fast-breathing silence. They manoeuvred Raheem to the centre of the compound, near a stone block, about a metre high and a metre wide. He struggled and resisted them, but it was useless. Four overseers joined in, with more ropes. Raheem's legs went out from under him. Three men pulled on each wrist rope with all their strength. HF1

His arms were drawn out so hard from his sides that I thought they might be torn from the sockets, etc. His legs were splayed out at an eerily unnatural angle. Other men, pulling on the ropes that passed through the leather collar, dragged his body toward the stone block. Using the ropes, the overseers stretched his left arm out, with the hand and forearm resting on the block. Raheem lay beside the block, his other arm stretched out by another team of overseers. One of the overseers then climbed onto the block, and jumped off onto Raheem's arm, with both feet, snapping the arm backwards in a sickening crunch of gristle and bone.

He couldn't scream, because the collar at his throat was too tight, but his mouth opened and closed on the scream that I made for him in our minds. His legs began to twitch and spasm.)

violent shiver passed through his whole body, ending in a rapid
shaking of his head that would've been funny if it wasn't so
frightening. The overseers dragged him around until his right arm
was resting on the block. The same man climbed the stone, talking
all the while to one of his friends, pulling tension on a rope.
After a pause, he blew his nose with his fingers, scratched
himself, and slumped onto the right arm, snapping it back, heards.
Raheem lost consciousness. The convict overseers looped their
ropes around his ankles and then dragged his body out of the
compound. His arms flopped and flapped behind his body, as limp
and lifeless as long blades, so, his filled with sand.

5Dou seeE5 4ahesh ! his#ered.

57hat ! as that all aboutE5

5*e hit one of the overseers,5 4ahesh answered in a terrified
! his#er. 52hat"s ! hy I sto##ed you. 2hat"s ! hat they can do.5

5)nother man leaned close to us, speaking =ui ,ly.

5)nd here, there is no guarantee of do or,5 he breathed. 54aybe
you see do or, maybe no. 4aybe that blade, fello! ! ill live,

maybe not live. -o good luck, to hit overseer, baba.5

Oig Rahul ! al,ed to! ard us, resting the bamboo stick, on his
shoulder. *e #aused beside me, and brought the stick, do! n ! ith a
lately smile, across my back. *is laughter as he ! al,ed a! ay do! n
the line of ! aiting men ! as brutally loud, but it ! as also ! ea,
and false, and it didn't fool me. I'd heard that laugh before, in
another #rison across the ! orld. I ,ne! it ! ell. Cruelty is a
, kind of o! ardi e. Cruel laughter is the ! ay o! ards ry ! hen
they're not alone, and causing #ain is how they grieve. HFF

5=quatting in the =ueue, I noti ed ! ith a repulsive flinch that
tiny insects, like, ! ere crawling in the hair of the man in front

of me. I'd been feeling it by sin e I'd ! o, en. Antil that moment, I'd #ut it do! n to the bites of the , admal, the rough blan, et I'd sle#t on, and the many uts I'd sustained in ! al, ing the gauntlet. I loo, ed at the ne' t man's hair. It, too, ! as ra! ling ! ith ! rithing, ! hite li e. I , ne! ! hat that it hiness ! as, on my body and in my hair. I turned to loo, at 4ahesh. *is hair ! as alive ! ith li e. I ruffled my o! n hair onto the #alm of my hand, and there they ! ere((! hite and rab(li, e, and too many to ount at a glan e.

Oody li e. 2he blan, ets they"d for ed us to use as slee#ing mats ! ere infested ! ith them. Suddenly, the it hiness I felt ! as a ra! ling horror, and I , ne! that the filthy #ests ! ere all over my body. 7hen my head ! as shaved, and ! e made our ! ay ba , to the dormitory, 4ahesh e' #lained about the body li e, , no! n as she##esh.

5She##esh are fu , in" horrible, brother. 2he little fu , s are every! here. 2hat"s ! hy the overseers have their o! n blan, ets, and slee# at their o! n end of the room. -o she##esh there. 8ome on, ! at h me, ;in, and I ! ill sho! you ! hat it is you must be doing.5

*e too, off his 2(shirt, and #ulled it inside out. *olding the ribbed seam at the ne , , he #rised it a#art and revealed the she##esh ra! ling in the rease at the seam.

52hey"re fu , in" hard to see, brother, but you don't have any trouble feeling them, ra! ling on you, yaarE Don't ! orry. 2hey're easy enough to , ill. Dou +ust s=uee1e the little fu , s bet! een your thumbnails, li, e this.5

I ! at hed him as he ! or, ed his ! ay around the ne , of his 2(shirt, , illing the body li e one by one. *e moved on to the seams at the sleeves, then, and finally to the hem at the bottom of the shirt. 2here ! ere s ores of the li e, and he s=uashed ea h one e' #ertly bet! een his thumbnails.

5-o! this shirt is lean,5 he said, folding it arefully, a! ay

from his body, and #la ing it on the bare stone floor. 5-o more she##esh. -e' t you ! ra# a to! el around yourself, li, e this, then ta, e off your #ants, and you , ill all the she##esh on your #ants.

7hen lean, #ut your #ants ! ith your shirt. 2hen your body((your arms underneath, your arse, your balls.)nd ! hen your lothes they are lean, and your body it is lean, you get dressed again.)nd you'll be o, ay, not so many she##esh, until the night.)nd then you'll get too many ne! she##esh on you from the blan, et.)nd no han e for slee#ing ! ithout blan, et, be ause the overseers ! ill HFG

give you a solid #asting if you try. Dou an"t avoid it.)nd then tomorro! , you start the ! hole business again. 2his is ! hat ! e all she##esh farming, and ! e are farmers every day at)rthur Road.5

I loo, ed around the o#en, rain(dren hed ourtyard beside the long dormitory, and a hundred men ! ere busy farming, #i , ing the li e from their lothes and , illing them methodi ally. Some men didn't are. 2hey s rat hed and shivered li, e dogs, and allo! ed the li e to breed on them. 9or me, the it hy, ra! ling violation of the body li e ! as a fren1y on the surfa e of my s, in. I ri##ed my shirt off and e' amined the seam at the ollar. 2he shirt ! as alive ! ith them, s=uirming, burro! ing, and breeding. I began to , ill them, one by one, seam by seam. It ! as the ! or, of several hours, and I #ra tised it ! ith fanati al assiduity, every morning that I s#ent in)rthur Road >rison, but I never felt lean there. /ven ! hen I , ne! that I"d , illed the li e, and rid myself of them tem#orarily, I still felt their ! rigging, it hing, ra! ling loathsomeness on my s, in.)nd little by little, month by month, the horror of that ree#ing infestation #ushed me to the edge.

9or the ! hole of ea h day, bet! een the early(morning head(ount and the evening meal, ! e moved about ! ithin a large ourtyard that ! as atta hed to our dormitory room. Some men #layed ards or other games. Some tal, ed ! ith friends, or tried to slee# on the stone #aths. -ot a fe! men, shuffling un ertainly on thin,

tottering legs, tall, and a tall thin madness to themselves, and stumbled into the cells until he turned them gently and set them on a new course.

In the kitchen at Arthur Road, consisted of a kitchen soups ladled out onto our flat aluminium plates. The evening meal, served at four thirty with the addition of a single hash, as a repetition of that soup of the day. It was made with the vegetables and discarded ends of various vegetables (vegetables from beetroot on one day, from carrots the next, from mushrooms on the third day, and so on. The eyes and bruises, cut from potatoes, were used, as were the hard ends of courgettes, the hairy outer skins of onions, and the muddy scraps from turnips. We never saw pieces of the vegetables (those went to the guards and the convict overseers. In our soup, the scraps of vegetables or stale ends floated in a colourless, watery liquid. The large vat that the overseers heeled into our compound for every meal brought one hundred and fifty ladled servings from the kitchen. There were one hundred and eighty men in the room. To HFH remedy the deficiency, the overseers poured tobacco, bits of old water into the vat. They did that at every meal, with a ritual

headcount and a pantomime display of inspiration as they solved the problem by adding the tobacco, bits of water. It never failed to rouse them to raucous laughter.

That night, after the evening meal, the guards counted us one more, and locked us in the long dormitory room. For two hours, then, we were permitted to talk, and to smoke hash, purchased from the overseers. Inmates at Arthur Road prison received five ration tickets, called coupons, per month. Men with access to money could also purchase coupons. Some men held rolls with several hundred coupons in them. They used them to buy tea (two coupons bought a cup of hot tea (bread, sugar, jam, hot food, soap, shaving accessories, cigarettes, and the services of men who washed clothes or did other odd jobs. They were also the black market currency in the prison. For six coupons, a man could

buy a tiny goli, or a ball, of harras. For fifty he could buy a shot of #eni illin.) fe! dealers also traded in heroin, for si' ty ou#ons a fi', but the overseers ! ere ruthless in their attem#ts to e' terminate it. *eroin addi tion ! as one of the fe! for es strong enough to over ome terror and challenge the torturers" authority. Most men, sane enough to fear the overseers" almost limitless #o! er, satisfied themselves ! ith the semi(legal harras, and the #erfume of hashish often drifted through the room.

/very night the men gathered in grou#s to sing. Sitting in ir les of t! elve or more men, and ta##ing on their u#turned aluminium #lates as if they ! ere tabla drums, the #risoners sang love songs from their favourite movies. They sang of heartbrea , and all the sorro! s of loss.) #arti ularly beloved song might start in one ir le, be ta, en u# by a se ond grou# for the ne' t verses, and then move to a third grou# and a fourth before ! or, ing its ! ay ba , to the first.) round ea h ir le of t! elve or fifteen singers ! ere t! enty or thirty more men ! ho #rovided the horus of la##ing hands and su##orting voi es. They ried o#only as they sang, and they laughed together often.)nd ! ith their musi they hel#ed one another to , ee# love alive in hearts that the ity had forsa, en, and forgotten.

)t the end of the se ond ! ee, at)rthur Road, I met ! ith t! o young men ! ho ! ere due for release ! ithin the hour. Ahesh assured me that they ! ould arry a message for me. They ! ere sim#le, illiterate village boys ! ho"d visited Oombay and had found themselves aught in the HF? round(u# of unem#loyed youths.)fter three months in)rthur Road ! ithout any formal harge, they ! ere finally being released. @n a #ie e of #a#er I ! rote the name and address of)bdel <hader <han, and a short note informing him that I ! as in #rison. I gave it to the men and #romised to re! ard them ! hen I ! as released. They +oined their hands together in a blessing and then left me, their smiles bright and ho#eful.

;ater that day the overseers alled our dormitory together ! ith

more than usual violence, and forced us to squat in loose ranks.

As I sat there, the two young men who'd tried to help me were dragged into the room and dumped against a wall. They were only semi-conscious. They'd been beaten viciously. Blood oozed from wounds on their faces. Their mouths were swollen and their eyes were blinded. Wounds, in patterns of lathi bruises covered their bare arms and legs.

These dogs tried to take a message out of the jail for the gora, Big Rahul the overseer roared at us in Hindi. "Anyone who tries to help the gora, will get the same. Understand? -o! These two dogs have six more months in jail, in my room! Six months! Help him, any of you, and you will get the same."

The overseers left the room to share a cigarette, and I rushed forward to help the men. I washed their wounds, and dressed the worst of them with strips of cloth. Aghash helped me, and when I finished the job he too, came outside to smoke a beedie.

"It's not your fault, Sir," he said, looking out at the yard, where men lay, dead or sitting, lined up from their clothes.

"Of course it's my fault."

"-o, man," he said passionately. "It's this place, this Jethur Road. That business, that happens every day. It's not your fault, brother, and it's not mine. Out of it, it is a real problem for you. -obody will be helping you now! (Just live in the lockup at Bolaba. I don't, no! -o! -ong you will stay here. -ou see old Chandu, over there? He is in this room three years now, and still not any court action for him.)ay is more than one year here. Santosh is two years in this room, for no charge, and he doesn't, no! -hen he will go to court. I ... I don't, no! -o! -ong you will be in this room.)nd, sorry, brother, nobody will help you now! ."

They were, as I had expected, and I was right (no one raised the anger of the overseers to help me. Then I was released from the room every day, and I addressed as many of them as I could, and as carefully as possible, but none would help. My situation was becoming desperate. After two months at the prison, I guessed that I'd lost about twelve kilos. I looked thin. My body was covered in the small, scurrying sores caused by the bites of the nocturnal, admiral. There were bruises caused by blows from overseers' canes on my arms, legs, back, face, and bald, shaved head. And all the time, every minute of every day and night, I worried that the report on my fingerprints would reveal who I really was. Almost every night the worry forced me into a sleep-eating nightmare of the ten-year sentence I'd escaped from in Australia. That worry settled in my chest, squeezing my heart and often compelling to suffer a grotesque anguish that I felt myself choking, suffocating on it. Guilt is the hilt of the knife that we use on ourselves, and love is often the blade but it's the worry that, like the knife sharp, and the worry that gets most of us, in the end.

The frustration, dread, worry, and pain finally eased when Oig Rahul, the overseer who'd found in me a focus for the hatred and bitterness he'd suffered in his twelve years at the prison, hit me one time too often. I was sitting near the entrance to the empty dormitory, and attempting to write down a short story that had emerged and developed in my mind over the last few weeks. I'd been repeating the phrases of the story line by line and day after day as I'd created them. It was one of the meditations that kept me sane. When I managed, that morning, to scrounge a stub of pencil and a small sheaf of discarded sugar rations, I felt ready at last to write down the lines of the first page. In a quiet moment, after farming for a few minutes, I began to write. With all the stealth that male manufactures, even in the gross and clumsy, Rahul crept up behind me and brought his lathi down on my left upper arm with bone-rattling force. This punishment stick was split at the end, and the blow ripped the skin of my arm open along the length of the muscle, almost from the shoulder

to the elbow. Blood erupted from the deep cut and spilled over the fingers that I lamed on the ground.

Springing to my feet in red(ision rage, I reached out =ui ,ly and snatched the stick, from Rahul's startled hand.)dvan ing to! ards him, I forced him back, ! ards several #a es into the em#ty room. 2here ! as a barred ! indo! beside me. I thre! the stick, through the bars. Rahul's eyes bulged ! ith fear and astonishment. It ! as the last thing he'd e' #e ted. *e fumbled at his chest for his ! histle. I ,i ,ed out in a t! isting, flying front ,i ,. *e hadn't e' #e ted that, either. 2he ball of my foot HF7 struck him in the face bet! een the nose and the mouth. *e too, several stumbling, back, ! ard steps. Rule number one of street fighting: stand your ground and never ! al, back, ! ards, unless you're #re#aring a counter(stri, e. I follo! ed him, #ushing him on to the back, foot and hitting him ! ith a flurry of +abs and overhand rights. *e #ut his head do! n, and covered u# ! ith his hands. Rule number t! o of street fighting: never #ut your head do! n.)iming the #un hes for ma'imum damage, I #un hed him directly in the ear, on the tem#les, and at the throat. *e ! as a bigger man than I ! as, and at least as strong, but he ! as no fighter. *e bu ,led, and ! ent to his ,nees, rolling over onto his side and #leading for mercy.

I loo,ed u# to see the other overseers running toward me from the yard outside. Oa ,ing u# into a orner of the room, I too, u# a ,arate stance and ! aited for them. 2hey ran at me. @ne of them ! as faster than the others. *e rushed into stri,ing range. I ,i ,ed out =ui ,ly. 4y foot struck him bet! een the legs, ! ith all the strength I had. I #un hed him three times before he hit the ground. *is face ! as bloody. 2he blood smeared on the #olished stone floor as he ra! led away from me. 2he rest of them baul,ed. 2hey stood in a semi(ircle around me, startled and onfused, ! ith their sticks raised in the air.

58ome onB5 I shouted, in *indi. 57hat an you do to meE 8an you do ! orse than thisE5

I punched my opponent face, hard, and punched it again, drawing blood from my lip. I slashed my right hand through the blood on my wounded arm and smeared it on my forehead. Lesson number three of street fighting: always get earlier than the other guy.

"Can you do worse than this?" I shouted, shouting to Parathi.
"Do you think, I'm afraid of _this?" Some of them said. "I want this! I want you to get me out of this corner!" "You'll get me, you'll get me, but one of you, standing there, will lose an eye. One of you. I'll rip someone's eye out with my fingers, and eat it!" So some of them said; let's get on with it!" And hurry up, because God, no! s, I'm full, in" hungry!"

They hesitated, and then drew back, in a huddle to discuss the situation. I glared at them, every muscle in my body as tight and taut as a leopard leaping to the kill. After half a minute of harsh whispering, the overseers reached a decision. They drew back further, and some of their number ran out of the room. I thought they must be running for the guards, but half an hour they returned in seconds with ten prisoners from my room. They ordered the men to sit on the ground, facing me, and then they began to beat them. The sticks rose and fell silently. The men shrieked and yelled. The beating ceased, after a minute, and they sent the ten men away. In a few seconds, they released them with ten more.

Some out of the corner, no! But one of the overseers commanded.

I looked at the men sitting on the ground, and then back at the overseer. I shook my head. The overseer gave the command, and the second group of ten men was beaten with the bamboo canes. Their cries rose up in a piercing echo, and I heeled about us in the stone room like a flock of frightened birds.

Some out of the corner! the overseer shouted.

5-0.5

5) ur dassß5 he s reamed. Oring ten moreß

The ne' t grou# of ten frightened men ! as assembled, fa ing me.
The overseers raised their sti ,s. 4ahesh ! as in the third grou#.
@ne of the t! o men ! ho"d been beaten and given an e' tra si' (month
senten e for trying to hel# me ! as also in the huddle of ten.
They loo, ed at me. They ! ere silent, but their eyes ! ere #leading
! ith me.

I #ut my hands do! n and too, a ste# for! ard out of the orner.
The overseers rushed at me, and sei1ed me ! ith si' #airs of
hands. They shoved and dragged me to one of the barred steel
gates, and for ed me do! n on my ba , , ! ith the to# of my head
resting against the steel bars. They , e#t several #airs of
hand uffs in a lo , er at their end of the room. Asing t! o sets of
those anti=ue iron devi es, they hained my outstret hed arms to

the bars at the ! rists, level ! ith my head. They used o onut
fibre ro#e to tie my legs together at the an, les.

Oig Rahul , nelt beside me, and brought his fa e lose to mine.
The e' ertion of , neeling and bending and o#ing ! ith his
monstrous hatreds aused him to s! eat and ! hee1e. *is mouth ! as
ut, and his nose ! as s! ollen. I , ne! that his head ! ould a he
for days from the #un hes I'd landed on his ear and his tem#le.
*e smiled. Dou an never tell +ust ho! mu h badness there is in a
man until you see him smile. I suddenly remembered a omment
; ettie had made about 4auri1io. If babies had ! ings, she said,
he"d be the , ind ! ho"d #ull them off. I started to laugh.
*el#less, ! ith my arms stret hed out and hained beside me, I
laughed. Oig Rahul fro! ned at me. *is sla , (li##ed, retinous
#u11lement made HF9
me laugh the harder.

The beating began. Oig Rahul e' hausted himself in a furious
assault that on entrated on my fa e and my genitals. 7hen he

ould lift the sti , no more, and ! as gas#ing for breath, the other overseers ste##ed in and ontinued the atta , . 2hey hammered at me ! ith the bamboo lathis for t! enty minutes or more. 2hen they too, a brea, to smo, e igarettes. I ! as ! earing shorts and a singlet, nothing else. 2he anes had ut into me, flaying my s, in, sli ing and tearing it o#en from the soles of my feet to the to# of my head.

)fter they"d smo, ed, the beating resumed. Some time later, I heard from the onversation around me that another grou# of overseers, from another room, had arrived. 2he ne! men, ! ith fresh arms, lashed at my body. 2heir fury ! as mer iless. 7hen they ! ere done, a third grou# of overseers laun hed a savage atta , . 2hen there ! as a fourth grou#. 2hen the first grou#, from my o! n room, ra , ed and ! hi##ed their sti , s at me ! ith murderous brutality. It ! as ten thirty in the morning ! hen the floggings began. 2hey ontinued until eight o" lo , that night.

5@#en your mouth.5

57hatE5

5@#en your mouthB5 the voi e demanded. I ouldn"t o#en my eyes, be ause my eyelids ! ere fused together ! ith dried blood. 2he voi e ! as insistent but gentle, and oming from behind me, on the other side of the bars. 5Dou must ta, e your medi ine, sirB Dou must ta, e your medi ineB5

I felt the ne , of a glass bottle #ress against my mouth and teeth. 7ater flo! ed do! n my fa e. 4y arms ! ere still stret hed out beside me, and hained to the bars. 4y li#s #arted, and ! ater flo! ed into my mouth. I s! allo! ed =ui , ly, gul#ing and s#luttering. *ands held my head, and I felt t! o tablets enter my mouth, #ushed by someone"s fingers. 2he ! ater bottle returned, and I dran, , oughing ! ater ba , through my nose.

5Dour mandra' tablets, sir,5 the guard said. 5Dou ! ill be

slee#ing no! .5

9loating on my ba , , arms outstret hed, my body ! as bruised and
ut so e' tensively that no #art of it es a#ed the #ain. 2here ! as
no ! ay to measure or +udge it be ause it ! as all #ain,
every! here. 4y eyes ! ere sealed shut. 4y mouth tasted blood and
! ater. I drifted to slee# on a la, e of sti , y, numbing stone. 2he
horus of voi es I heard ! as my o! n hoir of s reams and the
shouts of #ain I"d , e#t inside, and didn"t give them, and
! ouldn"t give them. HG%

2hey ! o, e me, at da! n, by thro! ing a bu , et of ! ater on me.)
thousand shrie, ing uts ! o, e ! ith me. 2hey #ermitted 4ahesh to
! ash my eyes ! ith a dam# to! el. 7hen I ould o#en them to see,
they unlo , ed the hand uffs, lifted me by my stiff arms, and led
me out of the room. 7e mar hed through em#ty ourtyards and
imma ulately s! e#t foot#aths lined ! ith geometri ally #erfe t
beds of flo! ers.)t last ! e sto##ed before one of the senior
#rison offi ials. *e ! as a man in his fifties. *is grey hair and
mousta he ! ere losely trimmed around his fine, almost feminine
features. *e ! as dressed in #y+amas and a sil, bro ade dressing
go! n. In the middle of a deserted ourtyard, he ! as sitting in an
elaborately arved, high(ba , ed hair, something li, e a bisho#"s
hair. Guards stood beside and behind him.

52his is not e' a tly ho! I li, e my Sundays to ommen e, my dear
fello! ,5 he said, overing a ya! n ! ith a ringed hand. 5\$ust ! hat
the devil do you thin, you"re #laying atE5

*is /nglish ! as the #re ise and rounded version of the language
that ! as taught in good Indian s hools. I , ne! , from those fe!
senten es and the ! ay he"d s#o, en them, that his edu ation ! as a
#ost(olonial #arallel to my o! n. 4y mother, #oor and ! or, ed into
e' haustion every day of her life, had earned the money to send me
to a s hool e' a tly su h as his. Ander other ir umstan es ! e
might"ve dis ussed Sha, es#eare or S hiller or Oulfin h"s
4ythology. I , ne! that about him from those t! o senten es. 7hat
did he , no! about meE

5-ot tal, ing, ehE 7hat is itE *ave my men been beating youE *ave
the overseers done anything to youE5

I stared at him in silen e. In the old s hool of)ustralian
#risons you don't lag((or inform on((anyone. -ot even the s re! s.
-ot even onvi t overseers. Dou never tell on anyone, ever, for
any reason.

58ome no! , have the overseers been beating youE5

2he silen e that follo! ed his =uestion ! as suddenly disturbed by
the morning song of mynah birds. 2he sun ! as fully above the
hori1on, and golden light streamed through the misty air,

I held my silence, and they led me back, to the room. I, nevertheless! the drill. I'd learned the hard way that it's easier to be silent than prison authorities abuse their power: everything you do enrages them, and everything you say makes it worse. Despotism despises nothing so much as righteousness in its victims.

The chainfitter, as a cheerful, middle-aged man in the ninth year of a seventeen-year sentence for a double murder. He'd killed his wife and his best friend as they lay sleeping together, and then he'd turned himself in at the local police station.

It was easy, he told me in English as he polished a steel band around my ankle with a set of running files. They went in their sleeping. Well, you can say that he went in his sleeping. When the alarm came on her, she was asleep, a little bit asleep, but not for very long.

With the ankle chains fitted, he lifted the length of chain that would hobble my steps. It sits there as a sider link, in the form of a ring. He gave me a long strip of coarse cloth, and showed me how to thread the strip through the ring, and fasten the cloth around my waist. In that way, the ring in the centre of the leg chain hung from the thread, at a little below the knees, and kept the leg chain from dragging on the ground.

They told me, you know, in ten or more years only, I am overseer, he informed me, sharing a grin, and a broad smile as he handed me his tools. Don't you be worried. When that bill happens, in ten or years, I am looking after you. You are my very good English friend, isn't it? - no problem.

The chain restricted my stride to tiny steps. Walking at any

faster pace required a shuffling, hunched gait. There were ten other men in my room with leg irons, and by studying their movements I gradually learned the technique. Within a few days, I

I al, ed that rolling, HGF
shambling dance as unself consciously as they did. In fact, by
studying them and imitating them, I gradually discovered that
there was something more than necessity in their shuffling dance.
They were trying to give some grace to their movements, but
something beautiful in the sliding, leaving steps, to soften the
indignity of the chain. Even in that, I discovered, human beings
will find an art.

Out it was as a terrible humiliation. The worst things that people
do to us always make us feel ashamed. The worst things that
people do always strike at the heart of us that wants to love the
world. And a tiny part of the shame we feel, when we're violated,
is shame at being human.

I learned to walk with the chains, but half rations too, their
toll, and I lost weight steadily: as much as fifteen pounds in a
month, by my guess. I was living on a meagre diet of
hardtack bread and one saucer of watery soup every day. My body
was thin, and seemed to be weakening by the hour. When tried to
help me with smuggled food. They were beaten for it, but still
they tried. I refused their offers of help, after a while,
because the guilt I felt whenever they received a beating on my
behalf was killing me just as surely as the malnutrition.

The many hundreds of small and large cuts that I'd sustained on
the day and the night of the beating caused me agonising pain.
Most of them were infected, and some were swollen with yellow
poison. I tried to wash them with the worm-infested water, but it
didn't make them clean. The bites from the vermin were
annoying every night. There were hundreds of bites, and many
of them, too, became infected, leaving sores. Godly lies! Armed
on me. I followed the routine slaughter of the filthy, rattling,
rattling beasts, every day, but they were drawn to the cuts and
wounds on my body. I know, with them feeding on me and breeding in
the arm, damn sores.

The beatings, however, had stopped after my meeting with the

#rison official on that Sunday morning. Oig Rahul still ! ha , ed me o asionally, and some of the other overseers stru , me from time to time, but they ! ere habitual gestures, and not delivered ! ith full force.

2hen one day, as I lay on my side, onserving energy and ! at hing the birds #e , for rums in the ourtyard ne' t to our dormitory, I ! as atta , ed by a #o! ertful man ! ho +um#ed on me and seiled my throat in both of his hands.

54u, ulB 4u, ul, my young brotherB5 he gro! led at me in *indi. HGG
54u, ulB 2he young brother you bit on his fa eB 4y brotherB5

*e might&e been the man"s t! in. *e ! as tall and heavysset. I re ognised the fa e, and in the instant that I heard the ! ords I remembered the man ! ho"d tried to ta, e my aluminium #late in the 8olaba lo , (u#. I"d lost too mu h ! eight. I ! as too ! ea, ened by the hunger and the fever. 2he #ress of his body ! as rushing me, and his hands ! ere losing my throat to air. *e ! as , illing me.

;esson number four of street fighting: al! ays , ee# something in reserve. 2he last of my energy e' #loded in a thrust, ! ith one arm. I drove the arm do! n! ard, bet! een our bodies, and grabbed his balls, s=ue1ing and t! isting ! ith all the strength I had. *is eyes and mouth o#ened in a gurgling s ream, and he tried to roll off me to his left. I rolled ! ith him. *e #ressed his legs together and dre! his , nees u#, but my right hand ! ouldn't surrender the rushing gri#. I #lunged the fingers of my other hand into the soft s, in above his ollarbone. 8losing my fingers and thumb around the ollarbone, I used it as a handle, for leverage, and began to hit him in the fa e ! ith my forehead. I hit him si' times, ten times. I felt his teeth o#en a ut in my forehead, felt his nose brea, , felt his strength oo1ing from him ! ith his blood, felt the ollar bone ! ren h and tear a! ay in the so , et. I , e#t hitting him ! ith the head butt. 7e ! ere both bloody, and he ! as ! ea, ening, but he ! ouldn't lie still. I , e#t

hitting him.

I might've beaten him to death with the blunt instrument of my head, but the overseers dragged me off him and back to the gate. The chains slammed around my wrists again, but they hanged their tails, and chained me to the gate fasten on the stone floor. Rough hands tore my thin shirt from my back. The bamboo sticks rose and fell with nefarious fury. The overseers had arranged for the man to attack me (it was as a setup, and they admitted it during one of the breaks while they rested their arms. They'd wanted the man to beat me senseless, maybe even kill me. *e had the perfect motive, after all. They'd allowed him into the room, and they'd sanctioned his revenge attack. Out it didn't turn out. I beat their man.) and they were outraged that their plans had gone awry. So the beatings went on for hours, with breaks for cigarettes and chai and snacks, and private showings of my bloodied body for selected guests from other parts of the prison.

At the end of it, they released me from the gate. I listened, my ears ringing with blood, as they argued about what to do with me. The beating that had followed the fight, the beating they'd just inflicted on me, was so savage and bloody that the overseers were worried. They'd gone too far, and they knew it. They wouldn't report any part of it to the prison officials. They decided to sweep the matter under the rug, and they ordered one of their flunkies to wash my flayed and raw body with soap. Understandably, the man complained about the odious task, but in a flurry of blows encouraged him, and he applied himself to the job with some thoroughness. I owe my life to him and, in a strange way, to the man who'd tried to kill me. Without the attack, and their furious

torture after it, the overseers wouldn't have allowed a soap and wash (it was the first and last I ever knew in the prison.) and the soap wash saved my life, I'm sure, because the many wounds and lesions on my body had become so badly infected that my temperature was constantly fevered, and the poison was

, killing me. I was too weak to move. The man who asked me (I never even knew his name) gave my cuts and abscessed sores such soothing solace, with the soapy water and soft washcloth, that tears of relief streamed down my cheeks, mixing with my blood on the stone floor.

The fever fell to a simmering shiver, but I still starved, and I got thinner every day. And every day, at their end of the room, the overseers feasted themselves on three good meals. Dozens of men, ordered as their flunkies. They washed clothes and blankets, scrubbed the floors, rearranged the dining area, cleaned the mess after each meal and, whenever the whim possessed one of the overseers, gave foot baths, or neck massages. They were rewarded with fewer beatings than the rest of us, a few beedie cigarettes, and scraps of food from every meal. Sitting around a lean sheet on the stone floor, the overseers dived into the many dishes that went into their meals: rice, dhals, hutneys, fresh roti, fish, meat steaks, chicken, and sweet desserts. As they ate noisily, they threw scraps of chicken, bread, or fruit outwards to the surrounding flunkies sitting on their haunches in simian obviousness, and waiting with bulging eyes and salivating mouths.

The smell of that food was a monstrous torment. No food ever smelled so good to me, and as I slowly starved, the smell of their food came to represent the whole of the world I'd lost. Oig Rahul too, relentless delight in offering me food at every meal.

*e could hold out a drum (HG?)

stick, of chicken, waving it in the air and feigning a dummy throat, enticing me with his eyes and raised eyebrows, and inviting me to become one of his dogs. Occasionally, he threw a drumstick, or a sweet, at me, and earned the waiting flunkies to leave it for me, for the gora, urging me to grab it for it. When I didn't react, and couldn't react, he gave the signal for the flunkies, and then laughed that eager, vicious laugh as the men scrambled and fought for it.

I couldn't bring myself to grab it across the floor and accept that

food, although I ! as ! ea, er by the day, by the hour. /ventually my tem#erature soared again until my eyes burned ! ith the fever day and night. I visited the toilet, lim#ing, or ra! ling on my , nees ! hen the fever ri##led me, but the visits gre! less fre=uent. 4y urine ! as a dar, , orange olour. 4alnutrition robbed my body of energy, and even the sim#lest movement((rolling over from one side to another, or sitting u#((demanded so mu h of the #re ious, limited resour e that I onsidered long and hard before underta,ing it. I lay motionless for most of every day and night. I still tried to remove the body li e, and I still tried to ! ash. Out those sim#le tas, s left me ! ret hed and #anting. 4y heartbeat

! as unnaturally high, even ! hile lying do! n, and my breath ame in short #uffs, often a om#anied by soft, involuntary moans. I ! as dying of hunger, and I ! as learning that it"s one of the ruellest ! ays to , ill a man. I , ne! that Oig Rahul"s s ra#s ! ould save me, but I ouldn"t ra! I a ross that room to the edge of his feast. Still, I ouldn"t loo, a! ay either, and every meal he gluttonised found its ! itness in my dying eyes.

I drifted, often, in fevered visions to my family, and the friends I"d , no! n and had lost forever in)ustralia. I also thought of <haderbhai,)bdullah, I asim)li, \$ohnny 8igar, Ra+u, &i, ram, ;ettie, Alla, <avita, and Didier. I thought of >raba, eri and I ! ished that I ould tell him ho! mu h I loved his honest, o#timisti , brave, and generous heart.)nd sooner or later, my thoughts all ays found their ! ay to <arla, every day, every night, every hour that I ounted out ! ith my burning eyes.

)nd it seemed, to my dreaming mind, that <arla saved me. I ! as thin, ing of her ! hen strong arms lifted me, and the hains fell from my ! ounded an, les, and guards mar hed me to the #rison offi ial"s offi e. I ! as thin, ing of her.

2he guards , no , ed.)t an ans! ering all, they o#ened the door. 2hey ! aited outside ! hen I entered. In the small offi e, I sa! three men((the HGC

#rison official ! ith the short grey hair, a #lain(lothes o#,
and &i, ram >atel((sitting around a metal des, .

5@h, fu , B5 &i, ram shouted. 5@h, man, you loo, ... you loo,
fu , in" terribleB @h, fu , B @h, fu , B 7hat have you done to this
guyE5

2he official and the o# e' hanged neutral glances, but didn't
re#ly.

5Sit do! n,5 the #rison official ommanded. I remained standing,
on ! ea, ening legs. 5Sit do! n, #lease.5

I sat, and stared at &i, ram ! ith tongue(lo , ed ama1ement. 2he
flat, bla , hat hanging on his ba , by the ord at his throat,
and his bla , vest, shirt, and s rolled flamen o #ants seemed
! ildly e' oti , and yet the most reassuringly familiar ostume I
ould imagine. 4y eyes began to lose fo us in the elaborate
! hirls and s rolls on his embroidered vest, and I #ulled my stare
ba , to his fa e. 2hat fa e ! rin, led and ! in ed as he stared at
me. I hadn't loo, ed into a mirror for four months. &i, ram's
grima es gave me a fairly good idea of ho! near to death he
believed me to be. *e held out the bla , shirt ! ith the lasso
figures that he"d ta, en off his ba , to give to me in the rain
four months before.

5I brought ... I brought your shirt ...5 he said falteringly.

57hat ... ! hat are you doing hereE5

5) friend sent me,5 he re#lied. 5) very good friend of yours. @h,
fu , , ; in. Dou loo, li, e dogs have been he! ing on you. I don't
! ant to frea, you out or nothing, but you loo, li, e they dug you
u#, after they fu , in" , illed you, man. \$ust stay ool. I'm here,
man. I'm gonna get you the fu , outta this #la e.5

2a, ing that as his ue, the official oughed, and gestured to! ard

the o#. 2he o# gave the lead ba , to him, and he addressed
&i, ram, a , ind of smile #in hing the soft s, in around his eyes.

52en thousand,5 he said. 5In)meri an dollars, of ource.5

52en fu , in" thousandE5 &i, ram e' #loded. 5)re you ra1yE I an
buy fifty guys out of this #la e ! ith ten thousand. 9u , that,
man.5

52en thousand,5 the offi ial re#eated, ! ith the alm and
authority of a man ! ho , no! s that he brought the only gun to a
, nife(fight. *e rested his hands flat on the metal des, , and his
fingers rolled through on e in a little 4e' i an ! ave.

5-o fu , in" ! ay, man.)rrey, ta, e a loo, at the guy. 7hat are you
giving me, yaarE Dou fu , in" destroyed the guy. Dou thin, he's
! orth ten thousand, in this onditionE5 HG7

2he o# too, a folder from a slender vinyl brief ase, and slid it
a ross the des, to &i, ram. 2he folder ontained a single sheet of
#a#er. Reading it =ui , ly, &i, ram"s li#s #ressed out! ard, and his
eyes ! idened in an e' #ression of im#ressed sur#rise.

5Is this youE5 he as, ed me. 5Did you es a#e from +ail in
)ustraliaE5

I stared at him evenly, my feverish eyes not ! avering. I didn't
re#ly.

5*o! many #eo#le , no! about thisE5 he as, ed the #lain(lothes
o#.

5-ot so many,5 the o# re#lied in /nglish. 5Out, enough to need
ten thousand, for , ee#ing this information a #rivate matter.5

5@h, shit,5 &i, ram sighed. 52here goes my bargaining. 9u , it.
I'll have the money in half an hour. 8lean him u#, and get him
ready.5

52here's something else,5 I interrupted, and they all turned to look at me. 52here are the two men. In my dormitory. 2they tried to help me, and the overseers or the guards gave them six months more. Out they finished their time. I wanted them to go, out the gate with me.5

2he doctor gave an answering look, at the prison official. *e responded by waving his hand dismissively and shaking his head in

agreement. 2he matter was as a mere trifle. 2he men would be freed.

5)nd there's another guy,5 I said flatly. 5*is name's 4ahesh 4alhotra. *e can't raise his bail. It's not much, a couple of thousand rupees. I wanted you to let him pay his bail. I wanted him to go, out with me.5

2he two men raised their palms, and exchanged identical expressions of bewilderment. 2he fate of such a poor and insignificant man never intruded upon their material ambitions or their spiritual disentanglements. 2hey turned to him. 2he prison official thrust out his tongue as if to say, *e's insane, but if that's what he wants ...

him stood to leave, but I raised my hand, and he sat down again quietly.

5)nd there's another one,5 I said.

2he doctor laughed out loud.

5)ur e, E5 he sniggered, through the laugh. @ne moreE

5*e's an Afghan. *e's in the Afghan compound. *is name's Raheem. 2hey broke both his arms. I don't know if he's alive or dead. If he's alive, I wanted him, too.5

2he o# turned to the #rison offi ial, hun hing his shoulders and raising the #alm of his hand in a =uestion.

5l , no! the ase,5 the #rison offi ial said, ! agging his head.

5It is ... a HG8

#oli e ase. 2he fello! arried on a shameless affair ! ith the ! ife of a #oli e ins#e tor. 2he ins#e tor =uite rightly arranged to have him #ut in here.)nd on e he ! as here, the brute made an assault on one of my overseers. It is =uite im#ossible.5

2here ! as a little silen e, then, as the ! ord im#ossible s! irded in the room li, e smo, e from a hea# igar.

59our thousand,5 the o# said.

5Ru#eesE5 &i, ram as, ed.

5Dollars,5 the o# laughed. 5)meri an dollars. 9our thousand e' tra. 2! o for us and our asso iates, and t! o for the ins#e tor ! ho"s married to the slut.5

5)re there any more, ; inE5 &i, ram muttered, earnestly. 5I"m +ust as, ing, li, e, be ause ! e"re ! or, in" our ! ay u# to a grou# dis out here, you , no! .5

I stared ba , at him. 2he fever ! as stinging my eyes, and the effort it too, to sit u#right in the hair ! as ausing me to

s! eat and shiver. *e rea hed out, leaning over so that his hands ! ere resting on my bare , nees. I had the thought that some of the body li e might ree# from my legs onto his hands, but I ouldn't brush that reassuring tou h aside.

5It's gonna be ool, man. Don't ! orry. I'll be ba , soon. 7e'll get you the fu , outta here ! ithin the hour. I #romise. I'll be ba , ! ith t! o ta' is, for us and your guys.5

50ring three ta' is,5 I ans! ered, my voi e sounding as though it
ame from a ne! , dar, , dee# #la e that ! as o#ening u# as I began
to a e#t that I might be free.

5@ne ta' i for you, and the other t! o for me and the guys,5 I
said. 50e ause ... body li e.5

5@, ay,5 he flin hed. 52hree ta' is. Dou got it.5

*alf an hour later, I rode ! ith Raheem in the ba , of a bla , (
and(yello! 9iat ta' i through the te toni s#e ta le and
#edestrian #ageant of the ity. Raheem had obviously re eived
some treatment((his arms ! ere en ased in #laster asts((but he
! as thin and si , , and horror logged his eyes. I felt nauseous
+ust loo,ing into those eyes. *e never said a ! ord, e' e#t to
tell us ! here he ! anted to go. *e ! as rying, softly and
silently, ! hen ! e dro##ed him off at a restaurant that *assaan
@bi, ! a o! ned in Dongri.

)s ! e drove on, the driver , e#t staring at my gaunt, starved,
beaten HG9

fa e in his rear(vision mirror. 9inally, I as, ed him in rough,
ollo=ual *indi if he had any Indian movie songs in his ab.
Stunned, he re#lied that he did. I nominated one of my
favourites, and he found it, ran,ing it u# to the ma' as ! e
bu1led and bee#ed our ! ay through the traffi . It ! as a song that
the #risoners in the long room had #assed from grou# to grou#.
2hey sang it almost every night. I sang it as the ta' i too, me
ba , into the smell and olour and sound of my ity. 2he driver
+oined in, loo,ing often into the mirror. -one of us lie or guard
our se rets ! hen ! e sing, and India is a nation of singers ! hose
first love is the ,ind of song ! e turn to ! hen rying +ust isn't
enough.

2he song ! as still soaring in me as I shed my lothes into a
#lasti bag for dis#osal, and stood under the strong ! arm +et of
! ater in &i, ram"s sho! er. I ti##ed a ! hole bottle of Dettol
disinfe tant over my head, and s rubbed it into my s, in ! ith a

hard nailbrush.) thousand cuts and bites and gashes cried out, but my thoughts were of *Arfa*. *Arfa* told me she'd left the city two days before. *Arfa* seemed to know where she'd gone. How could I find her? Where is she? Does she hate me now? Does she think I dumped her, after she made love? Should she think that about me? I have to stay in Bombay (she'll come back here, to the city. I have to stay and wait for her.

I spent two hours in that bathroom, thinking, scrubbing, and then hitting my teeth against the basin. My wounds were raw! When I emerged to *Arfa* a toilet round my waist and stand in *Arfa*'s bedroom.

5@h, man, he groaned, shaking his head and ringing in sympathy.

I looked into the full-length mirror on the front of his wardrobe. I'd used his bathroom scales to check my weight: I was forty-five kilos (half the ninety kilos I'd been when *K* was arrested four months before. My body was so thin that it resembled those of men who'd survived on entration camps. The bones of my skeleton were all visible, even to the skull beneath my face. Scuts and sores covered my body, and beneath them was the tortoise-shell pattern of deep bruises, everywhere.

5<hader heard about you from two of the guys who got out of your dormitory (some Afghan guys. They said they saw you with *hader*, one night, when you went to see some blind singers, and they remembered you from there.5

I tried to picture the men, to remember them, but I couldn't. Afghan, *Arfa* had said. They must've been very good at seeing secrets because they'd never shown me in all those months in the locked room. HH%
7however they were, I loved them.

57hen they got out, they told *hader* about you, and *hader* sent for me.5

57hy youE5

5*e didn't ! ant anyone to , no! that he ! as the one getting you out. 2he #ri e ! as stee# enough, yaar. If they , ne! it ! as him #aying the ba, sheesh, the #ri e ! ould"ve been a lot higher.5

5Out ho! do you , no! himE5 I as, ed, still staring ! ith fas inated horror at my o! n torture and ema iation.

57hoE5

5<haderbhai. *o! do you , no! himE5

5/verybody in 8olaba , no! s him, man.5

5Sure, but ho! do you , no! himE5

5I did a +ob for him on e.5

57hat sort of a +obE5

5It"s , ind of a long story.5

5I"ve got time, if you have.5

&i, ram smiled and shoo, his head. *e stood, and rossed the bedroom to #our t! o drin, s at a small table that served as his #rivate bar.

5@ne of <haderbhai"s goondas beat u# a ri h , id at a night lub,5 he began, handing me a drin, . 5*e did him over #retty bad. 9rom ! hat I hear, the , id had it oming. Out his family #ressed harges, ! ith the o#s. <haderbhai , ne! my dad, and from him he found out that I , ne! the , id((! e ! ent to the same damn ollege, yaar. *e got in tou h ! ith me, and as, ed me to find out ho! mu h they ! anted to dro# the ase. 2urns out they ! anted #lenty. Out

<hader #aid it, and a little more. *e ould've got heavy ! ith them, you , no! , and s ared the shit out of them. *e ould've fu , in" , illed them, yaar. 2he ! hole fu , in" family. Out he didn't. *is guy ! as in the ! rong, _naE So, he ! anted to do the right thing. *e #aid the money, and everyone ended u# ha##y. *e"s o, ay, that <haderbhai.) real serious ty#e, if you , no! ! hat I mean, but he"s o, ay. 4y dad res#e ts him, and he li, es him, and that"s saying =uite a lot, be ause my #o#, he doesn't res#e t many members of the human ra e. Dou , no! , <hader told me he ! ants you to ! or, for him.5

5Doing ! hatE5

5Don't as, me,5 he shrugged. *e began to toss some lean, #ressed clothes from his ! ardrobe onto the bed. @ne by one I a e#ted the HH1

shorts, trousers, shirt, and sandals, and began to dress. 5*e +ust told me to bring you to see him ! hen you feel ! ell enough. I'd thin, about it if I ! as you, ; in. Dou need to feed yourself u#. Dou need to ma, e some fast bu , s.)nd you need a friend li, e him, yaar.)ll that stuff about)ustralia((it"s a fu , in" ! ild story, man. I s! ear, being on the run and all, it"s damn heroi .)t least ! ith <hader on your side, you'll be safe here. 7ith him behind you, nobody ! ill ever do this shit to you again. Dou got a #o! erful friend there, ; in. -obody fu , s ! ith <hader <han in Oombay.5

5So ! hy don't you ! or, for himE5 I as, ed, and I , ne! that the tone of my voi e ! as harsh((harsher than I'd intended it to be((but everything I said sounded li, e that then, ! ith memories of the beatings and the body li, e still sli ing and it hing a ross my s, in.

5I never got invited,5 &i, ram re#lied evenly. 5Out even if I did get invited to +oin him, I don't thin, I'd ta, e him u# on it, yaar.5

57hy notE5

I don't need him the way you do, ; in.) If those mafia guys, they need each other, you , no! ! hat I mean? They need Chaderbhai as much as he needs them.) and I don't need him like that. Out you do.5

Dou sound very sure,5 I said, turning to meet his eye.

I am sure. Chaderbhai, he told me that he found out why you got #i , ed u# and #ut in jail. *e said that someone #o! erful, someone ! ith a lot of influence, had you #ut a! ay, man.5

7 ho ! as it?5

*e didn't say. *e told me he doesn't , no! . 4aybe he +ust didn't ! ant to tell _me. 7hatever the ase, ; in my brother, you're #addling in some fu , in" dee# shit. 2he bad guys don't fu , around in Bombay((you , no! that much by no! ((and if you've got an enemy here, you're going to need all the #rote tion you an get. Dou got t! o hoi es((get the fu , out of to! n, or get some fire#o! er on your side, li, e the guys at the @< 8orral, you , no! E5

7hat ! ould you do?5

*e laughed, but my e' #ression didn't hange, and he let the laughter =ui , ly fade. *e lit t! o igarettes and #assed one to me.

4eE I'd be fu , in" angry, yaar. I don't ! ear this o! boy stuff be ause I li, e o! s((I ! ear it be ause I li, e the ! ay those o! boy fu , ers handled things in those days. 4e, I'd ! ant to find out ! ho tried to fu , me over, and I'd ! ant to get some damn revenge on him. 4e, ! hen I ! as ready, I'd HHF a e#t Chader's offer, and go to ! or, for him, and get my revenge. Out hey, that's me, and I'm an Indian mada hudh, yaar.)nd that's ! hat an Indian mada hudh ! ould do.5

I looked in the mirror once more. The needles loathes felt like salt on the raw wounds, but they covered the worst of it, and I looked less alarming, less confronting, less hideous. I smiled at the mirror. I was fantasizing, trying to remember that it was like to be me. It almost worked. I almost had it. Then a needle's insertion, not quite my own, spiraled into the grey of my eyes. Never again. That pain wouldn't happen to me again. That hunger wouldn't threaten me. That fear wouldn't pierce my chilled heart. Whatever it takes, my eyes said to me. Whatever it takes from now on.

"I'm ready to see him," I said. "I'm ready right now."

((((((((((((

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

For, long for) bdel <hader <han ! as my first real instru tion in organised rime((until then I'd been no more than a des#erate man, doing stu#id, o! arldly things to feed a stu#id, o! arldly heroin habit, and then a des#erate e' ile earning small ommissions on random deals.)lthough they ! ere rimes that I'd

ommitted, and some of them ! ere very serious, I ! as never really a riminal until I a e#ted <haderbhai as my tea her. I'd been a man ! ho ommitted rimes, u# to then, rather than a riminal, and there's a differen e bet! een the t! o. 2he differen e, as ! ith most things in life, lay in the motive and the means. Oeing tortured in)rthur Road >rison had given me the motive to ross the line.)nother man, a smarter man than I ! as, might've run a! ay from Oombay as soon as he ! as freed from the #rison. I didn't. I ouldn't. I ! anted to , no! ! ho'd #ut me in there, and ! hy. I ! anted revenge. 2he safest and fastest ! ay to that vengeance ! as to join <haderbhai's bran h of the mafia.

*is instru tion in the la! brea, er"s arts((he sent me first to the >alestinian, <haled)nsari, to learn the bla , (mar, et money trade ((gave me the means to be ome ! hat I'd never tried or ! anted to be: a #rofessional riminal.)nd it felt good. It felt so good ! ithin the #rote tive ir le of that band of brothers. 7hen I rode the train to <haled"s a#artment every day, hanging out the door of a rattling arriage in the hot, dry ! ind ! ith other young men, my heart s! elled ! ith the e' itement of freedom"s ! ild, re , less ride.

<haled, my first tea her, ! as the , ind of man ! ho arried his #ast in the tem#le fires of his eyes, and fed the flames ! ith #ie es of his bro, en heart. I've , no! n men li, e <haled in #risons, on battlefields, and in the dens ! here smugglers, mer enaries, and other e' iles meet. 2hey all have ertain hara teristi s in ommon. 2hey're tough, be ause there's a , ind
HHH

of toughness that's found in the world. They're honest, be cause the truth of what happened to them isn't let them lie. They're angry, be cause they can't forget the past or forgive it. And they're lonely. Most of us pretend, with greater or lesser success, that the minute we live in is something we can share. Out the past for every one of us is a desert island and those who find themselves marooned there, are always alone.

Chaderbhai had told me some of Chaled's history when he'd briefed me for my first lessons. I'd learned that Chaled, at only thirty-four, was alone in the world. His parents, both renowned scholars, had been prominent in the Palestinian struggle for an independent nation. His father had died in prison, in Israel. His mother, his two sisters, his aunts and uncles, and his mother's parents had all been killed in the massacres at Shatila, in Lebanon. Chaled had trained with Palestinian guerrilla units in Tunisia, Libya, and Syria, and had fought for nine years in dozens of operations across a score of conflicts. One day, brother, a day after the bloody deaths of his mother and all the others at the refugee camp. His father-in-law, Ghattah Groummander, noting the signs of that breakdown and the risks it posed, had released him from duty.

Although still devoted to the cause of Palestinian statehood in

his words, he was in fact lost to any cause but the suffering he'd endured and the suffering he lived to inflict. He'd drifted to Bombay on the recommendation of a senior guerrilla fighter who knew Chaderbhai. The mafia don took him in. Impressed with his education, languages, skills, and obsessive dedication, the permanent members of Chaderbhai's council had recommended the young Palestinian with successive promotions. Three years after Shatila, at the time that I met him, Chaled was in charge of Chaderbhai's black operations. The position carried with it a laurel wreath on the council. And when I felt strong enough to put in a full day of study, not long after my release

from)rthur Road >rison, the bitter, lonely, battle(s arred
>alestinian began my instru tion.

5>eo#le say that money is the root of all evil,5 <haled told me
! hen ! e met in his a#artment. *is /nglish ! as ri h ! ith a ents
of -e! Dor, and)rabi and the *indi that he s#o, e reasonably
! ell. 5Out it's not true. It's the other ! ay round. 4oney isn't
the root of all evil. /vil is the root of all money. 2here's no
su h thing as lean money.)ll the money in the ! orld is dirty,
in some ! ay, be ause there's no lean ! ay to ma, e it. If you get
HH?

#aid in money, somebody, some! here, is suffering for it. 2hat's
one of the reasons, I thin, , ! hy +ust about everybody((even
#eo#le ! ho'd never brea, the la! in any other ! ay((is ha##y to
add an e' tra bu , or t! o to their money on the bla , mar, et.5

5Dou ma, e your living from it,5 I said, urious to , no! ho! he
! ould res#ond.

5SoE5

5So, ho! do you feel about itE5

5I don't feel anything about it, one ! ay or the other. Suffering
is the truth. -ot suffering is the lie. I told you that, on e
before. 2hat's +ust the ! ay the ! orld is.5

5Out surely some money has more suffering atta hed to it,5 I
#ersisted, 5and some money has less.5

54oney only omes in t! o , inds, ; in((yours, and mine.5

5@r, in this ase, <hader"s money.5

<haled laughed. It ! as a short, sad laugh, and the only one that
! as left in him.

57e ma, e money for)bdel <hader, true, but a #art of everything

! e ma, e is ours.)nd it's the little #art of everything that belongs to _us that , ee#s us in the game, naE @, ay, let's get started. 7hy do bla , mar, ets for money e' istE5

5I'm not sure ! hat you mean.5

5I'll as, it in a different ! ay,5 <huled smiled. 2he thi , s ar that started at his throat, belo! the left ear, and ut a groove in his fa e all the ! ay to the orner of his mouth, gave the smile a lo#sided and unsettling t! ist. 2he s arred half of his fa e didn't smile at all, ! hi h meant that the other half seemed mena ing, or #ained, ! hen he ! as trying hardest to be , ind. 5*o! is it that ! e an buy one)meri an dollar from a tourist for, say, eighteen ru#ees, ! hen the ban, s are only offering fifteen or si' teenE5

5Oe ause ! e an sell them for more than eighteenE5 I offered.

5Good. Good. -o! , ho! an ! e do thatE5

5Oe ause ... someone ! ants to buy them at that #ri e, I guess.5

5/' a tly. Out ! ho are ! e selling them toE5

5;oo, , the most I ever did ! as #ut tourists together ! ith bla , (mar, et guys, and ta, e my ut. I don't really , no! ! hat ha##ens to the dollars after that. I never ! ent that far into it.5

5Ola , mar, ets for things e' ist,5 he said slo! ly, as if onfiding a HHC

#ersonal se ret rather than a ommer ial fa t, 5be ause the ! hite mar, ets are too stri t. In this ase, in the ase of urren ies, the government and the Reserve Oan, of India ontrol the ! hite mar, ets, and they're too stri t. It's all about greed, and ontrol. 2hese are the t! o elements that ma, e for ommer ial rime.)ny one of them, on its o! n, is not enough. Greed ! ithout ontrol, or ontrol ! ithout greed ! on't give you a bla , mar, et.

4en an be greedy for the #rofit made from, let"s say, #astries, but if there isn"t stri t ontrol on the ba,ing of #astries, there ! on"t be a bla , mar, et for a##le strudel.)nd the government has very stri t ontrols on the dis#osal of se! age, but ! ithout greed for #rofit from se! age, there ! on"t be a bla , mar, et for shit. 7hen greed meets ontrol, you get a bla , mar, et.5

5Dou"ve #ut a lot of thought into this,5 I ommented, laughing, but im#ressed and genuinely glad that he ! anted to give me the ontology of urren y rime, and not +ust the ! ays I ould go about ommitting it.

5- ot really,5 he ans! ered self(de#re atingly.

5- o, I"m serious. 7hen <haderbhai sent me here, I thought you ! ere going to give me a fe! tables of figures((you , no! , today"s urren y e' hange rates and all that((and then send me on my ! ay.5

5@h, ! e"ll get to the rates and stuff soon enough,5 he smiled again, sounding very)meri an in the light(hearted aside. I , ne! he"d studied in -e! Dor, ! hen he ! as mu h younger. <haderbhai had

told me that he"d been ha##y there, for a time.) little of that ha##iness seemed to have survived in the long, rounded vo! els and other)meri anisms of his s#ee h. 5Out first you need the theory, before you an ma, e a #rofit from the #ra ti e.5

2he Indian ru#ee, <haled e' #lained, ! as a restri ted urren y. It ouldn"t be ta, en out of India, and it ouldn"t legally be hanged for dollars any! here in the ! orld but in India. 7ith its vast #o#ulation, India sent many thousands of businessmen, business! omen, and travellers out of the ountry every day. 2hose #eo#le ! ere #ermitted to ta, e out only a limited amount of)meri an urren y ! ith them. 2hey ould hange a fi' ed amount of their ru#ees into)meri an dollars, and the rest had to be

converted in the form of travellers" he=ues.

The regulation is enforced in various ways. When someone wanted to leave the country and change rupees into dollars to the legal limit, he or she had to present a passport and a ticket, get at the bank. The bank, however, confirmed the departure date on the ticket, and marked both the ticket and the passport to indicate that the holder had been granted the full limit of 1000 dollars in exchange for rupees. The transaction couldn't be duplicated. There is no legal way for the traveller to buy more 1000 dollars for that journey.

Most everyone in India had at least some black money under the bed. From the few hundred rupees that a poor, working man earned and didn't report to the authorities, all the way to the billions of rupees accumulated as profits from crime, the black economy is said to be almost half as large as the legal, white economy.

Anyone who had thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of undeclared rupees (as many Indian business travellers did) couldn't buy legal travellers' he=ues with them: the bank, or the authorities all ways wanted to know where the money came from. So the only real alternative was to buy dollars from the black market currency dealers. And every day, in Bombay, millions of rupees worth of black, 1000 dollars, English pounds, Deutschmarks, Swiss francs, and other currencies were bought and sold in a trade that was a dark mirror of the legal money exchanges.

If I buy a thousand 1000 dollars, from a tourist, for eighteen thousand rupees, when the bank exchange rate is set at fifteen, I've summarized. I'm happy, because he's three thousand rupees better off than he would've been at the bank. When I sell the dollars, to an Indian businessman, for 1000 rupees. I'm happy, because he bought the dollars with black money that he couldn't declare. When I put three thousand rupees in the kitty, and I buy another thousand dollars, from another tourist, for eighteen thousand. That's the simple equation at the heart of the currency racket.

To find the tourists, and entice them to change their money, Chaderbhai's mafia soon employed a small army of touts,

guides, beggars, hotel managers, bellboys, restaurateurs, waiters, shopkeepers, airline officials, travel agents, night club owners, prostitutes, and cab drivers. Keeping tabs on them was as one of Chaderbhai's jobs. In the mornings he phoned all the businesses to establish exchange rates for all the important currencies. There were updates calls every two hours throughout the day, advising of any fluctuations in the rates. He was also in his disposal around the clock, with two drivers operating in shifts. Every morning he visited the bagmen for each area, and handed over bundles of rupees

for the street traders to use as their float. Touts and other street-level goons dealt with the street traders, guiding tourists and businessmen to them. The traders changed money, and kept the foreign currencies in bundles to be collected. Bagmen did the rounds of traders throughout the day, supplying them with cash as they needed it. Collectors made several stops during each morning, day and night to deliver bundles of foreign currency.

Chaderbhai supervised personal collections and exchanges at hotels, airline offices, travel agencies, and other businesses that required a greater degree of discretion. He made two major stops, (one from his collectors in the busy areas) one at noon, and one in the late evening. Relevant cops in every area were paid to look away from anything that might offend their sensibilities. In return, Chaderbhai promised that any violence he deemed necessary, in the event that someone tried to rob his men or hold out on them, would be swift and sure, and would never involve the police or threaten their interests in any way. The responsibility for maintaining discipline and enforcing Chaderbhai's control fell to Abdullah Zaheri. His team of Indian goondas and Iranian veterans of the war with Iraq ensured that irregularities were rare, and ruthlessly punished.

5Dou'll ! or, ! ith me, on the olle tions,5 <haled announ ed.
5Dou'll learn it all, in time, but I really ! ant you to
on entrate on the tri , y ones((the five(star hotels, and the
airline offi es. 2he shirt and tie +obs. I'll go ! ith you,
es#e ially at the start, but I thin, it'll be good if a gora, a
! ell(dressed, ! hite foreigner, does the hand(overs in those
#la es. Dou'll be invisible. 2hey ! on't loo, at you t! i e.)nd
our onta ts ! ill be a lot less edgy, dealing ! ith you.)fter
that, I ! ant you to get into the travel business. I an use a
gora there, too.5

52he travel businessE5

5@h, you're gonna love it,5 he said, meeting my eyes ! ith that
same sad smile. 5It'll ma, e that stint you did in)rthur Road
seem ! orth it, be ause it's first lass all the ! ay.5

2he travel ra , et, he e' #lained, ! as an es#e ially lu rative #art
of the urren y trade. It involved large numbers of #eo#le from
the millions of Indians ! ho ! or, ed in Saudi)rabia, Dubai,)bu

Dhabi, 4us at, Oahrain, <u! ait, and else! here throughout the)rab
Gulf. 2he Indian ! or, ers, em#loyed on ontra ts for three, si' ,
or t! elve months as domesti s, leaners, and labourers, ! ere
usually #aid in foreign urren y. HH9

4ost of the ! or, ers tried to e' hange their ! ages on the bla ,
mar, et as soon as they got ba , to India, in order to gain a fe!
e' tra ru#ees. <hader"s mafia oun il offered the em#loyers and
the ! or, ers a short ut. 7hen they sold their foreign urren ies
in bul, to <haderbhai, the)rab em#loyers re eived a slightly
more favourable rate, allo! ing them to #ay their ! or, ers in
ru#ees, at the bla , (mar, et rate, in India. 2hat left them ! ith a
sur#lus of ru#ees, and gave them a net #rofit from #aying their
! or, ers.

9or many Gulf State em#loyers, the tem#tation to su h urren y

time ! as irresistible. They, too, had a hoard of undeclared, unta'ed money under their opulent beds. Syndicates developed to organise the payment of Indian guests ! or, ers in rupees ! when they returned to India. The ! or, ers ! ere ha##y be ause they got the bla , (mar, et rate but didn't have to negotiate ! ith hard(nosed bla , (mar, et dealers #ersonally. The bosses ! ere ha##y be ause they made #rofits from the #ayment through their syndicates. The bla , mar, eteers ! ere ha##y be ause a steady stream of dollars, Deuts hmar, s, riyals, and dirhams flo! ed into the river of demand created by Indian business travellers. @nly the government missed out, and no(one in the thousands u#on thousands of #eo#le involved in the trade shamed himself beyond endurance on that account.

51 ... this ! hole business ! as on e something of a s#e ialty ! ith me ...,5 <hald said, ! hen that long first lesson finally ended. *is voi e trailed off, and I ouldn't be ertain ! hether he ! as reminising or sim#ly reluctant to tal, further. I ! aited.

57hen I ! as studying, in -e! Dor, ,5 he ! ent on at last, 5I ! as ! or, ing on a thesis ... ! ell, I ! rote a thesis, on _un(organised trade in the an ient ! orld. It's an area that my mother ! as resear hing, before the "C7 ! ar. 7hen I ! as a , id, she got me interested in the bla , mar, ets of)ssyria,) , , ad, and Sumer, and ho! they related to trade routes, and ta' es, and the em#ires that built u# around them. 7hen I started to ! rite it myself, I ! alled it Ola , Oabylon.5

5It's a at hy title.5

*e fired a glance at me to reassure himself that I ! asn't mo , ing him.

5I mean it,5 I said =ui , ly, ! anting to #ut him at ease be ause I ! as beginning to li, e him. 5I thin, it's a good to#i for a thesis, and it's a very at hy title. I thin, you should go ahead and finish it.5 H?%

*e smiled again.

Well, ; in, life has a lot of surprises, and, as my uncle in - e!
Dor, used to say, most of them ain't hairy ones for a ! or, ing
stiff. - o! I'm ! or, ing _for a bla , mar, et, instead of ! or, ing on
one. - o! , it's Ola , Oombay.5

The bitterness in his voice ! as disappearing. *is +a! began to
set in a grim and almost angry expression as he stared at his
+joined hands. I moved to steer the conversation away from the
#ast.

Dou , no! , I've been involved ! ith a #art of the bla , mar, et
that might interest you. *ave you heard of the le#ers" medicine
mar, etE5

Sure,5 he replied, interest glittering in his dark, bro! n eyes.
*e ran a hand over his face and u# aross the short, military
haircut, #rematurely streaked ! ith grey and ! hite. The gesture
! i#ed his gloomy relations away, and he gave me his full
attention. I heard that you met Ran+it((he's incredible, isn't
heE5

7e talked about Ran+itbhai, the , ing of his little group of
le#ers, and the bla , mar, et they'd organised across the country.
Their mysterious trade fascinated us equally.)s a historian((or
a man ! ho'd once dreamed of becoming a historian, like his
scholarly mother((<hailed ! as intrigued by the long evolution and
secretion of the le#ers" organisation.)s a ! riter, I ! as
#roved by the story of their suffering and their uni=ue
response to it.)fter thirty minutes of e' ited, a tuating
discussion, ! e agreed to visit Ran+it together to find out more
about the history of the bla , mar, et in medicines.

)nd ! ith that #ledge between e' iles, between scholar and ! riter,
<hailed and I established a simple but enduring bond of
intellectual respect. 7e became friends in the rapid,

unquestioning loyalty of criminals, soldiers, and other survivors of disaster. I visited him every day in his sparsely furnished, Spartan apartment near Jandheri station. The sessions lasted five or six hours. They roved freely from ancient history to reserve bank, interest rates, from anthropology to fiction and floating currencies, and I learned more about that very common but common crime in one month, with Chaleh Jansari, than most street traders in dollars and Deutschmarks learned in a year of dealing.

And when the lessons were complete, I went to work, with Chaleh every morning and every evening, seven days a week. The day was good. The wages I earned came in substantial quantities that I was often paid in the form of rupees, direct from the bank, and still bearing their steel stamps. I went all the way through the notes. I moved to the slum (dwellers I'd known as neighbours, friends, and patients for almost thirty years, I was already a rich man.

To ensure that the cuts and wounds of prison healed as quickly as possible, I'd taken a room at the India Guest House, at Chaderbhai's expense. The clean, tiled shower and soft mattress did help me to heal, but there was more to the move than physical convalescence. The truth was that the months in Jethur Road Prison had damaged my spirit more than my body. And the lingering shame I felt over the deaths of my neighbour Radha in the cholera epidemic, and the thirty boys from my English class, gave me no peace. The prison torment, and my failures in the cholera epidemic: I might've survived either one of them on its own, and gone back to those loving, retreated relatives when I was well enough. Out both of them, together, were more than my frail self (respected could endure, and I couldn't live in the slum or even sleep the night there.

I visited Ghabra, Jerry, Johnny, Iqbal, and Seetendra often, and I continued to help out at the clinic, attending to patients for

to afternoons every day. Out the strange mix of arrogance and insouciance that had permitted me to be the slum doctor! As gone, and I didn't expect it to return. There's a little arrogance at the heart of every better self. That arrogance left me when I failed to save my neighbour's life (failed even to say that she was ill.) And there's an innocence, essential and unblinking, in the heart of every determination to serve. That innocence faltered when I stumbled from the Indian prison: my smile, no less than my footsteps, hobbled by the memory of the leg irons. Moving out of the slum had as much or more to do with the state of my soul as it did with the wounds on my body.

For their part, my friends from the slum accepted my decision without question or comment. They greeted me warmly whenever I visited, and involved me in the daily routines and celebrations of the slum (weddings, festivals, community meetings, or cricket games (as if I still lived and lived with them.) And despite their shock, and sorrow when they saw my emaciated frame, and the scars that the overseers had branded on my skin, they never once mentioned the prison.) Part of that, I think, was sensitivity to the shame they, like I must've been feeling, the shame that they would've felt had they been imprisoned.) Another part, in the hearts of Gaba, Jerry, and Johnny Sigar, and perhaps even Iqbal, H?F

might've been found in guilt (that they hadn't been able to help me because they hadn't thought to search for me. - one of them had realised that I'd been arrested. They'd assumed that I'd simply tired of life in the slum, and that I'd returned to my comfortable life in my comfortable country, like every other tourist or traveller they'd ever seen.)

And that, too, found its way into my reluctance to return to the slum. It astonished me, and it hurt me, after all I'd done there, and for all that they'd included me in the ragged skin of their too (many lives, that they still expected me to leave them, without a word of farewell, whenever they dismissed me.

So, when my health improved and I began to earn real money, I didn't move back to the slum. Instead, with Chaderbhai's help, I rented an apartment in Solaba at the landmark end of West Street, not far from the schools. It was my first apartment in India, and my first indulgence of sweets and rivalry and domestic luxuries such as a hot shower and a functioning television. I ate well, too, eating high-protein and high-carbohydrate meals, and forcing myself to finish off a bucket of ice cream every day. I put on body weight. I slept for ten hours at a stretch, night after night, healing my lacerated body with sleep's ravelling repair. Out there often, with my arms flailing, fighting, and the metallic smell of blood still fresh from the nightmare.

I trained in karate and weightlifting with Abdulla at his favourite gym in the fashionable suburb of Orlean Road. Two other young gangsters (Salman Auzan and his friend Sanjay, whom I'd met at my first visit to Chaderbhai's house) often joined us. They were strong, healthy men in their late thirties who liked to fight about as much as they liked sex, and they liked sex just fine. Sanjay, with his movie star looks, was the cooler. Salman was quieter and more serious. Although inseparable friends since childhood, they were as hard on one another in the ring as they were when they boxed Abdulla and me. We worked out five times each week, with two days off to allow our torn and swollen muscles to recover. And it was good. It helped. Lifting iron is heaven for violent men. Little by little, my body regained its strength, muscular shape, and fitness.

Out no matter how fit I became, I knew that my mind wouldn't heal, wouldn't heal, until I found out who'd arranged with the police to have me arrested and sent to Arthur Road Prison. I needed to know who did it. I needed to know the reason. Allah was gone from the city (in hiding, H?G some said, but no one could guess from whom, or why. Allah was gone, and no one could tell me where she was. Didier and several other friends were digging around for me, trying to find the truth, but they hadn't found anything that might tell me who'd

set me u#.

Someone had arranged ! ith senior o#s to have me arrested, ! ithout harge, and im#risoned at) rthur Road. 2he same #erson had arranged to have me beaten((severely and often((! hile I ! as in the #rison. It ! as a #unishment or an a t of revenge. <haderbhai had onfirmed that mu h, but he ouldn"t or ! ouldn"t say more, e' e#t to tell me that ! hoever it ! as ! ho"d set me u# hadn"t , no! n that I ! as on the run. 2hat information, about the es a#e from) ustralia, had emerged from the routine finger#rint he , . 2he o#s on erved had realised, at on e, that there might be #rofit in , ee#ing =uiet about it, and they"d shelved my file until &i, ram a##roa hed them on <hader"s behalf.

52hose fu , in" o#s li, ed you, man,5 &i, ram told me as ! e sat together in ; eo#old"s one afternoon, a fe! months after I"d started ! or, ! ith <haled as a urren y olle tor.

5A(huh.5

5- o, really, they did. 2hat"s ! hy they let you go.5

5I never sa! that o# before in my life, &i, ram. *e didn"t , no! me at all.5

5Dou don"t get it,5 he re#lied #atiently. *e #oured another glass of old <ingfisher beer, and si##ed it a##re iatively. 5I tal, ed to that guy, the o#, v<hader



show him the file. That shows tells the others to be quiet about it, and leave it to him to find out how much money there is in it.

Walter brought my coffee, and chatted with me for a while in Marathi. I remained until I was here alone again before he showed.

They love it, you know, all these waiters and cab drivers and most office guys (and the cops, too) (they love it, all these guys, that you see, huh) Marathi to them. You know, man, I'm born here, and you see, Marathi better than I do. I never learned to speak it properly. I never had to. That's why so many Marathis are so pissed off, man. Most of us don't give a shit about the Marathi language, or how all comes to live in Bombay, or wherever the fuck they come from, yaar. Anyway, I heard that the cop has this file on you, and he's keeping it quiet. Out he wants to know more about this Australian fucker, who escaped from jail, before he does anything, yaar.

I remained, and grinned at me until the grin became a playful laugh. He wore a black leather vest over his white shirt, despite the thirty-five degree heat. In his heavy black jeans and ornate black cowboy boots, he must've been very hot, but he seemed cool almost as cool as he looked.

It's fuckin' great, man! he laughed. You busted out of a maximum security jail? You know, it's deadly! It's the greatest thing I ever heard of. It's tearing my heart out that I can't tell anyone about it.

Do you remember what Carl said about secrets, when I was here sitting here one night?

Oh, man. What was it?

It isn't a secret, unless seeing it hurts.

That's pretty funny, in good, I ram mused, grinning. So! here I am losing it today, man. It's this petty thing. It's driving me insane, in. @h yeah, the one in charge, the one with your file, he wants to do some thing on you. So, he sends all of his guys around, asking questions about you. All the street guys you used to know, with, they gave you solid support, man. They said you never heated anyone, never fucked anybody over, and you put a lot of money around with the poor street guys when you had it.

Out the ones didn't tell anyone I am in Arthur Road.

—o, man, they were here, trying to find out if they wanted to fuck you over, and send you back to the Australian ones, or not (depending on how you held out.) And there's more to it. @ne of the money hangers tells the ones, hey, if you wanna, no! about in, go as, in the 1headatti, because he lives there. Well, the ones are not real intrigued, like (a gora, living in the slum. So they go there, and they take a look. They don't tell anybody in the slum what happened to you, but they start asking about you, and the people say stuff like, Dou see that lini E in built H??

it, and he's been working there for a long time, helping the people ... and they say stuff like, everybody here has been treated at in's lini, free of charge, at one time or another, and he did a great job when the cholera came ... and they told the ones about that little school you started, Dou see that little school for English in started it ... and the ones get an earful of this in, this inbaba, this foreign guy who does all this good shit, and they go back to their boss, telling him what they heard.

@h, come on, I ram. Dou really think that made a difference? It's all about money, that's all, and I'm just glad you were there to say it.

and his eyes widened in surprise, and then narrowed into a disapproving frown. He lifted the hat from his back, and examined it, turning it in his hands and flinging specks of dust from the rim.

"Don't, sir, you've been here for a while now, and you've learned some language, and been to the village, and lived in the slum, and even been the fool to fail and all, but you still don't get it, do you?"

"Maybe not, I'm confused. Probably not."

"Damn right you don't, man. This is not England, or Ireland, or Australia, or wherever the fuck else. This is India, man. This

is India. This is the land of the heart. This is where the heart is, man. The fuck, in the heart. That's why you're free. That's why that fool gave you back your honey assortment. That's why you can walk around, and not get harassed, even though they know how you are. They would've fucked you, sir. They would've taken your money, your money, and let you go, and then get some other fools to bust you, and send you the fuck home. But they didn't do it, and they won't do it, because you got them in their heart, man, in their Indian fuck, in the heart. They looked at all that you did here, and how the people in that slum love you, and they thought, well, he fucked up in Australia, but he's done some good shit here. If he says up, I'll let the fucker go. Because they're Indians, man. That's how I see this really late together (with the heart. 200 hundred fuck, in languages, and a billion people. India is the heart. It's the heart that keeps us together. There's no late with people like my people, sir. There's no heart like the Indian heart."

"He was crying. Stunned, I watched him wipe the tears from his eyes, and I reached out to put a hand on his shoulder. He was right, of course. Even though I'd been tortured in an Indian

#rison, and almost killed there, I had been set free, and they had given me my old passport! Then I left the prison. Is there any other country in the world, I asked myself, that would've let me go, as India did? And even in India, if the cops had held on to me and discovered a different story (that I beat Indians, say, or ran Indian prostitutes, or beat up defenceless people (they would've taken the money, and then sent me back to Australia anyway. It was the land where the heart is beating. I, like that from Ghabra, from his mother, from Islam) like, from Joseph's redemption. I'd, no! not even in the prison, where men like Akhesh Akhutra had taken a beating in order to smuggle food to me! Then I was starving.

What's this? lover's quarrel, perhaps? Didier asked, inviting himself to sit down.

Oh, funny, you, Didier? Akhram laughed, pulling himself together.

Oh, well, it's a touching thought, Akhram. Out, perhaps! Then you are feeling a little better. And how are you today, Akhram?

I'm fine, I smiled. Didier was one of three people who'd burst into tears when they saw me, flesh (withered and still ripped with cuts and wounds, soon after my release from Arthur Road prison. The second was Ghabra, the first was so violent that it took me a full hour to console him. The third person, one's friend, was Lord Abdelkader, whose eyes filled with tears when I thanked him: tears that flowed on my neck, and shoulder when he hugged me.

What'll you have? I asked him.

Oh, very kind, he murmured, smiling with pleasure. I believe

that I will begin with a glass of his, and a fresh lime, and a cold soda. Des. That will be a good combination, no? It is very strange, and a very unhealthy business, don't you think, this one?

about Indira Gandhi

What news, Ramas, ed.

They are saying on the news, just now, that Indira Gandhi is dead.

Is it true, I ask, ed.

I fear that it is, he sighed, suddenly and uncharacteristically solemn. The reports are not confirmed, but I think, there is no doubt.

Was it the Sinhalese because of the Easter?

Describe, in. *Oh! did you, no? Ed

When she stormed the Golden Temple, to get the Hindranale, I had a feeling it was going to end with her.

What happened? Did the <9 do it? Ed & Ramas, ed. Was it a bomb?

Oh, Didier answered, gravely. They say it was her bodyguards ((her H??

Sinhalese bodyguards.

*Her own bodyguard, for five, "s said, Ramas gasped. *His mouth gaped open, and his gaze drifted on the tide of his thoughts.

Guys ((I'll be back, in a minute. Do you hear that? They're talking about the story, right now, on the radio, at the counter. I'll go and listen, and come back, .5

*He jogged to the crowded counter where fifteen or twenty men pressed together, arms around shoulders to listen, while an almost hysterical announcer gave details of the murder in India. & Ramas could've listened to the broadcast from his seat at our table ((the volume was so loud it hurt the maximum, and he heard

every word. It was as something else that drew him to the road
counter: a sense of solidarity and, in a huddled need to
feel the astounding news, through contact with his countrymen,
even as he listened to it.

Let's have that drink, I suggested.

Desai, in a way, Didier answered, shouting with his lower lip, and
offering a flourish of his hand to dismiss the distressing
subject. The gesture failed. His head lolled forward, and he
stared vacantly at the table in front of him. I can't believe
it. It is simply not believable. Indira Gandhi, dead ... It is
almost unthinkable. It is almost impossible to forgive myself to

think of it, in. It is ... you, no! ... impossible.

I ordered for Didier, and let my thoughts wander while he
listened to the lamentations of the radio announcer.
Selfishly, I ordered first what the assassination might mean for
my security, and then what it might do to the exchange rates on
the black money market. Some months before, Indira Gandhi had
authorised an assault on the Sikh holy (of holies, the Golden
Temple, in Amritsar). Her goal was to drive out a large, well-
armed group of Sikh militants who'd entered the temple and
fortified themselves there under the leadership of a handsome,
charismatic separatist named Bhindranvale. Using the temple
complex as a base, the militants had launched a unitive attack
against Hindus, and those they described as real traitor Sikhs,
for many years. Indira Gandhi, on the eve of a fiercely contested
general election, had been deeply concerned that she would appear
weak, and indecisive if she failed to act. In what many judged to
be the worst of her admittedly limited options, Indira had sent
the army into battle with the Sikh rebels.

The army operation to dislodge the militants from the Golden
Temple was, no less, an operation of the Bhindranvale's militants,
believing that

themselves to be freedom fighters and martyrs for the Sikh cause, met the army for a relentless and desperate resistance. More than six hundred lives were lost, and many hundreds of people were injured. In the end, the Golden Temple was looted, and Indira emerged as anything but indecisive or fearful. Her goal of reassuring the Hindu heartland of voters had been achieved, but the Sikh struggle for a separate homeland, called Khalistan, was rife in the martyrdom. And across the world, Sikh hearts clenched around their determination to avenge the profane and bloody invasion of their holiest shrine.

The radio at the counter gave us no other details, but the message failed from the speaker that she'd been murdered. Only a few months after Operation Blue Star, Indira's Sikh bodyguards had killed her. The woman who'd been reviled as a despot by some, adored as the mother of the country by many others, and so closely identified with the nation as to be indistinguishable from its past, and from its destiny, was gone. She was dead.

I had to think. I had to evaluate the danger. Security forces across the country would be on special alert. There would be ramifications (riots, killings, looting, and burning, as revenge exacted on the Sikh communities for her murder. I knew it. /everyone in India knew it. On the radio, the announcer was talking about troop deployments in Delhi and in Punjab aimed at quelling anti-state disturbances. The tension would bring new dangers for me, a wanted man, working for the mafia, and living in the country with an expired visa. For a few moments, sitting there as Didier sipped his drink, as the men in the restaurant strained in silence to listen, and the early evening blushed our skin with rose-gold, my heart thumped with fear. Run, my thoughts

whispered. Run now, I told you. This is your last chance ...

Out even then, as I formed the clear thought to flee the city, I felt myself relaying into a dense, fatalistic calm. I couldn't leave Bombay. I couldn't leave Bombay. I knew that, as surely as

I'd ever, no! n anything in my life. 2here ! as the issue of
<haderbhai: my finan ial debt to him had been re#aid from the
! ages I'd made in his servi e ! ith <haled, but there ! as a moral
debt that ! as harder to re#ay. I o! ed him my life, and ! e both
, ne! it. *e"d hugged me ! hen I ame out of the #rison and, rying
at my #itiful state, he"d #romised me that for so long as I
remained in Oombay, I ! ould be under his #ersonal #rote tion.
-othing li, e)rthur Road ! ould ever ha##en to me again. *e"d
given me a gold medal H?9

featuring the *indu aum symbol +oined to a 4uslim res ent and
star, ! hi h I ! ore on a silver hain around my ne , . <haderbhai's
name ! as ins ribed on the ba , , in Ardu, *indi, and /nglish. In
the event of trouble I ! as to sho! the medal, and as, that he be
onta ted at on e. 2hat se urity ! as im#erfe t, but it ! as better
than anything I'd , no! n sin e my e' ile had begun. *is re=uest for
me to stay in his servi e, the uns#o, en debt that I o! ed him, and
the safety that being <hader"s man offered((all of those elements
held me in the ity.

)nd there ! as <arla. She"d disa##eared from the ity ! hile I ! as
in #rison, and no(one , ne! ! here she"d gone. I had no idea ! here
in all the ! ide ! orld I might begin to loo, for her. Out she
loved Oombay. I , ne! that. It seemed reasonable to ho#e she might
return.)nd I loved her. It grieved me((an emotion that ! as, in
those months, even stronger than my love for her((that she must
be thin, ing I'd abandoned her: that I got ! hat I ! anted, ! hen ! e
made love, and then dum#ed her. I ouldn"t move on ! ithout seeing
her again, and e' #laining ! hat had ha##ened that night. So I
stayed there, in the ity, a minute"s ! al, from the orner ! here
! e"d met, and I ! aited for her to return.

I glan ed around the subdued, listening restaurant, and aught
&i, ram"s eye. *e smiled at me, and ! agged his head. It ! as a
heart(bro, en smile, and his eyes ! ere inflamed ! ith unshed tears.
Still, he smiled to omfort me, to reassure me, to in lude me in
his be! ilderred grieving.)nd ! ith that smile I suddenly , ne! that
there ! as something else holding me there. In the end I realised
that it ! as the heart, the Indian heart that &i, ram had tal, ed

about((the land ! here heart is , ing((that held me ! hen so many intuitions told me I should leave.)nd the heart, for me, ! as the city. Bombay. 2he city had sedu ed me. I ! as in love ! ith her. 2here ! as a #art of me that she invented, and that only e' isted be ause I lived there, ! ithin her, as a Mumbai, er, a Bombayite.

5It's a fu , in" bad business, yaar,5 &i, ram muttered as he re-joined us. 52here's going to be a lot of blood s#illed over this, yaar. @n the radio, they're saying that 8ongress >arty gangs are roaming in Delhi, going from house to house, and s#oiling for a fight ! ith the Si, hs.5

7e ! ere silent, all three of us, lost in our o! n s#e ulations and ! orry. 2hen Didier s#o, e.

5I thin, I have a lead for you,5 he said softly, ! ren hing us into the moment on e more. HC%

5)bout the +ailE5

5@ui.5

5Go on.5

5It is not mu h. It does not add mu h to ! hat you already , no! ((that it ! as a #erson of some #o! er, as your #atron,)bdel <hader, has told you.5

57hatever it is, Didier, it's more than I've got no! .5

5)s you ! ish. 2here is a ... man of my a =uaintan e ... ! ho must visit the 8olaba #oli e station on a daily basis. 7e ! ere tal, ing, earlier today, and he mentioned the foreigner ! ho ! as in the lo , (u# there some months ago. 2he name he used ! as the Oite of the 2iger. I annot imagine ho! you ame to ! in su h a name for yourself, ;in, but I ma, e a ! ild guess that it is not entirely flattering, the story, nonE)lors, he told me that the

0ite of the 2iger((you((! as betrayed by a ! oman.5

5Did he give you a nameE5

5-o. I as, ed him, and he said that he did not , no! ! ho she is. *e did say that she is young, and very beautiful, but he may have invented those last details.5

5*o! reliable is this man of your a =uaintan eE5

Didier #ursed his li#s, and let out a #uff of air.

5*e an be relied u#on to lie, and heat, and steal. 2hat is the e' tent of his reliability, I am afraid, but in these things he does sho! a marvellous #redi tability. *o! ever, in this ase I thin, he has no reason to lie. I thin, you ! ere the vi tim of a ! oman, ;in.5

57ell, that ma, es t! o of us, yaar. Dou and me both, brother,5 &i, ram #ut in. *e finished his beer, and lit one of the long, thin, heroots that he smo, ed as mu h for the om#lement they made to his ostume as for the enoyment of the smo, e.

5Dou have been going out ! ith ;etitia for three months no! ,5 Didier observed. *is fro! n ! as irritated and #rofoundly unsym#atheti . 57hat is your #roblemE5

5Dou tell meß I'm going out ! ith her all over the #la e, and I still an't get to first base. I'm not even in the ball#ar, . 9u ,

the ball#ar, , yaar((I'm not even in the fu , in" 1i# ode. 2his hi , is , illin" me. 2his love is , illin" me. She"s #laying hard to get.)nd brother, I'm hard but not getting any. I s! ear, I'm about to fu , in" e' #lodeß5

5Dou , no! , &i, ram,5 Didier said, his eyes shining on e more ! ith HC1

shredness and good humour, I have a strategy that just might
work for you.

Didier, man, I'll try anything. The way things are, with this
Indira thing and all, I gotta grab any chance I can. Who
knows! Here we'll all be tomorrow, nah.

Des, well, attention! This plan, it involves great daring, and
careful planning, and a precise timing. If you are careless, it
might cost you your life.

Why ... my life?

Des. Well, no mistake. Out if you succeed, I think you'll live in
her heart forever. Do you, how do they say it, are you game, to
try it?

I'm the game (best motherfucker in the whole damn saloon, yeah.
Let's hear it!)

I might take this as my cue to leave, before you guys get too
deep into this, I interrupted, standing and shaking hands with
both men. Then, for the time, Didier. I appreciate it. And a tip
for you, and I remember (! whatever you plan to try with Bettie, you can
start by losing the phrase "hot titty" English, hi, . /very time
you tell her that, she'll insist, like you just strangled a baby
rabbit.

Dou really think so? He asked, forming his dilemma.

Des.

Out it's one of my best lines, yeah. In Denmark, ((

Dou're not in Denmark, any more, Toto.

@, yay, ; in, he concluded, laughing. Listen, when you find out
what I intend to do with the rail thing ... I mean, I hope the

motherfu , er ! as ! ho #ut you in there, and all ... ! ell, if you need a hand, ount me in. @, ayE5

5Sure,5 I said, en+oying the good eye onta t. 52a, e it easy.5

I #aid the bill and left, ! al, ing along the 8ause! ay to Regal 8inema roundabout. It ! as early evening, one of the three best times of day in Oombay ity. /arly morning before the heat, and late night after the heat are s#e ial times of day, ! ith s#e ial

#leasures6 but they're =uiet times, ! ith fe! #eo#le. /vening brings the #eo#le to their ! indo! s, bal onies, and door! ays. /vening fills the streets ! ith strolling ro! ds. /vening is an indigo tent for the ir us of the ity, and families bring children to the entertainments that ins#ire every orner and rossroad.)nd evening is a ha#erone for young lovers: the last hour of light before the night omes to steal the inno en e from their slo! #romenades. 2here"s no time, in HCF the day or night, ! hen there are more #eo#le on the streets of Oombay than there are in the evening, and no light loves the human fa e =uite so mu h as the evening light in my 4umbai.

I ! al, ed through the evening ro! ds, loving the fa es, loving the #erfumes of s, in and hair, loving the olours of lothes and the aden es of ! ords that surrounded me. Det I ! as alone, too mu h alone ! ith my love of evening in the ity.)nd all the ! hile a bla , shar, slo! ly ir led in the sea of my thoughts: a bla , shar, of doubt and anger and sus#i ion.) ! oman betrayed me.) ! oman.) young and very beautiful ! oman ...

2he #ersistent blaring of a ar horn dre! my attention, and I sa! >raba, er ! aving to me from his ta' i. I got into the ab and as, ed him to drive me to my evening meeting ! ith <haled, near 8ho! #atty Oea h. @ne of the first things I'd done ! ith the first real money I'd made in <haderbhai"s servi e ! as #ay for >raba, er"s ta' i li en e. 2he ost of the li en e had al! ays been #rohibitive for >raba, er, and it had eluded his sub(miniature talent for thrift.

*e drove occasional shifts in his cousin Shantu's ta' i without the required license, but ran considerable risks in doing it. With his own license, he was free to approach any of the ta' i lords who owned fleets of taxis and hired them out to licensed ta' i drivers.

>raba, ever as a hard worker and an honest man but, more than that, he was the most capable man that most of those who knew him ever met. Even the hard-nosed ta' i lords weren't immune to his sanguine charm. Within a month he had a semi-permanent lease on a ta' i, which he treated for as if it was his own. On the dashboard he'd installed a lasti shrine to ;a, shmi, the goddess of health. The gold, silver, and green lasti figure of the goddess blazed an alarmingly fierce expression through the bulbs in her red eyes whenever he hit the brakes of the car. From time to time he reached over, with a showman's flourish, to squeeze a rubber tube at the base of the figure. That action sprayed, through what appeared to be a valve in the navel of the goddess, a potent and disquietingly industrial mixture of hemiacetals perfumes onto the shirt and trousers of his passenger. Every squeeze of the spray was followed by a reflective, polishing rub of his brass ta' i driver's identification badge, which he wore with sagging pride. Only one thing, in the industry, rivalled the affection he felt for the lasti, (and yellow) at ta' i.

>arvati. >arvati. >arvati ...5 he said, as she said last
8 hours gate Station towards Marine Drive. *e was drunk, on the

music of her name. HCG

5I love her too much, ;inB Is love, yes, when a terrible feeling
makes you happyE When you worry about a girl, more even than you
worry about your ta' iE That's a love, isn't itE) great love,
isn't itE 4y GodB >arvati. >arvati. >arvati ...5

5It's love, >rabu.5

5)nd \$ohnny has it too mu h love for Sita, my >arvati her sister.
2oo mu h love.5

5I"m ha##y for you.)nd for \$ohnny. *e"s a good man. Dou"re both
good men.5

5@h, yesB5 >raba, er agreed, sla##ing his hand on the horn a fe!
times for em#hasis. 57e are fine fello! sB)nd tonight ! e are
going out for a tri#le dates, ! ith the sisters. It ! ill be too
mu h fun.5

52here"s another sisterE5

5)notherE5

5Deah((you said a tri#le date.)re there three sistersE I thought
there ! ere only t! o.5

5Des, ; in, absolutely only t! o sisters.5

57ell, don"t you mean a double dateE5

5-o, ; in. >arvati and Sita, they al! ays bring their mummy, the
! ife of <umar, 4rs. >ata, . 2he girls, they are sitting on one
side only, and 4rs. -andita >ata, , she is sitting in middle, and
\$ohnny 8igar is ! ith me, sitting on the other side. It is a
tri#le date.5

5It sounds ... li, e ... a lotta fun.5

5Des, funB @f ourse funB So mu h of funB)nd ! hen ! e offer it
some foods and some drin, s to 4rs. >ata, , ! e an loo, at the
girls, and they an loo, at us also. 2his is our system. 2his is
ho! ! e smile at the girls and give them big ! in, s ! ith our eyes.
7e are having su h good lu , that 4rs. >ata, , she has a ha##y
a##etites, and she ! ill eat, ! ithout sto##ing, for three hours in
a movie. So there is a very onstant #assing of foods, and #lenty
of loo, ing at the girls.)nd 4rs. >ata, ((than, s to the God, it is

impossible to fill up that column in one movie only.

5*ey, slo! do! n ... that loo, s li, e a ... a riot.

) mob of people, hundreds, thousands, streamed around a corner and onto Independence Drive, some three hundred metres in front of us. They advanced toward us across the width of the street.

5-not a riots, ; inbaba,5 >raba, er replied, slo! ing the ab to a sto#. 5Riot nahin, mor ha hain.5 It's not a riot, it's a demonstration. HCH

It was clear that the people were passionately angry. The men and the women shook their fists in time with their furious chanting. Their anguished faces stiffened on necks and shoulders made rigid with their rage. They chanted about Indira Gandhi, and about revenge, and about the punishments they wanted to visit upon the Sish. I tensed as they neared us, but the human torrent parted for the ab, and then swept around and beyond us without so much as the scrape of a sleeve against the side of the car.

Nevertheless, the eyes that looked in upon us were hate(strike), en and cruel. I remember that if I were a Sikh, if I'd been wearing a Sikh turban or Sardar's scarf, the door would've been rendered open.

As the road passed us and the road ahead became clear, I turned to see that >raba, er was striking tears from his eyes. He fumbled in his pocket for a handkerchief, dragging a huge, red-checked sheet out at last, and dabbing at his eyes with it.

5It is a too much very sad situations, ; inbaba,5 he sniffed.

5That is the end of She. 7hat is to be come of our India no! , without SheE I am asking myself, and not having much of answers.

She was one of the most common names for Indira: +ournalists, #easants, #oliti ians, and bla , mar, eters all referred to her as She.

5Deah. It's a mess, >rabu.5

*e seemed so distraught that I sat ! ith him in silen e, for a ! hile, staring out my ! indo! to! ard the dar, ening sea. 7hen I turned to loo, at him on e more, I sa! that he ! as #raying, ! ith his head bo! ed for! ard and his hands #ressed together at the base of the steering ! heel. I ! at hed his li#s t! it h and ri##le in the ! his#ered #rayer, and then he o#ened his hands, turned his head, and smiled at me. *is eyebro! s rose and fell t! i e as he held the huge smile.

5So, ;in, ho! is about some se' y #erfumes, on your good selfE5 he as, ed, rea hing a ross to #ress the bulb beneath the #lasti ;a, shmi goddess on the dashboard of his ab.

5-oB5 I shrie, ed, trying to sto# him.

2oo late. *e rushed the bulb, and a s! irling bel h of the no' ious hemi al mi' ture s#urted from the belly of the goddess and settled on my trousers and my shirt.

5-o! ,5 he grinned, starting the engine and #ulling out onto 4arine Drive again, 5! e are ready for the life againB 7e are the lu ,y fello! s, isn't itE5 HC?

5Sure it is,5 I grumbled, gas#ing for a lean breath of air at the o#en ! indo! .) fe! minutes later ! e neared the ar #ar, , ! here I'd arranged to meet <haled. 5Dou an let me out +ust here, >rabu. 2his is my sto#, near that big tree.5

*e #ar, ed beside a tall date #ain, and I limbed out. 7e fought over #ayment for the ab ride. >raba, er refused the money, and I insisted that he ta, e it. I suggested a om#romise. *e should ta, e the money, and use it to buy some ne! #erfume for his #lasti goddess.

5@h, yes, ; inbabaB5 he ried, a e#ting the money at last. 57hat
a good ideas you're havingB I ! as +ust thin, ing that I have
almost finished my #erfumes bottle, and it is so mu h e' #ensive
that I didn't ! ant to buy it another gallon any more. -o! I an
buy a big bottle, a ne! big bottle, and for ! ee, s I an fill u#
my ; a, shmi li, e ne! B 2han, you, too mu hB5

5Don't mention it,5 I ans! ered him, laughing in s#ite of myself.
5Good lu , on your tri#le date.5

*e s! ung the ar a! ay from the , erb and out into the stream of
traffi . I heard the ar horn blaring a musi al good(bye until he
! as out of sight.

<haled)nsari ! as ! aiting for me in our hartered ab, fifty
metres a! ay. *e sat in the ba , , ! ith both doors o#ened for the
bree1e. I ! asn't late, and he ouldn't have been ! aiting more
than fifteen or t! enty minutes, but still there ! ere ten
igarette butts on the ground beside the o#en door of the ab.
/a h one of them, I , ne! , ! as an enemy rushed under his heel, a
violent ! ish, a brutal fantasy of the suffering he ! ould one day
inflit on those he hated.

)nd they ! ere many, the ones he hated. 2oo many. 2he images of
violen e that filled his mind ! ere so real, he"d told me, that
sometimes he ! as nauseous ! ith it. 2he anger ! as an a he in his
bones. 2he hatred lo , ed his +a! s, and made him grind his teeth
on the fury. 2he taste of it ! as bitter, al! ays, all day and
night, every ! a, ing minute, as bitter as the taste of the
bla , ened , nife he"d lam#ed bet! een his teeth, as a 9attah
guerrilla, ! hen he"d ra! led a ross bro, en ground to! ard his
first , ill.

5It's gonna , ill you, <haled, you , no! .5

5So I smo, e too mu h. So ! hat the fu , . 7ho ! ants to live
foreverE5

I'm not talking about the cigarettes. I'm talking about what's inside you, making you chain-smoke them. I'm talking about what you're doing to yourself by hating the world. Someone told me once that if you make HCC your heart into a sea, on you always end up using it on

yourself.

"You're a fine one to come on with a lecture, brother," he said, and he laughed. The small laugh. The sad laugh. "You're not really a father, are you, during Christmas, is in."

"You, no!," he had told me ... about Shatila.

"What did he tell you?"

"That ... you lost your family there. It must've been incredibly hard for you."

"What do you, no!," about it," he demanded.

It wasn't an offensive question, and it wasn't asked in an aggressive way, but there was too much hurt in it, too much of his pain for me to let it go.

"I, no!," about Sabra and Shatila, he said. "I've been into politics all my life. I was on the run, at the time, when it happened, but I followed the news every day, for months. It was ... it was a heartbreaking story."

"I was in love with a Jewish girl once, you, no!" he said. "I didn't reply. She was ... she was a beautiful girl, and smart, and maybe, I don't know, maybe the nicest human being I'm ever gonna meet. That was in -e! Dor, . We were students together. *er #arents, they were reform Jews (they supported Israel, but they were against the occupation of the territories. I was with that girl, making love to her, on the night my father died in an

Israeli #rison.5

5Dou an"t blame yourself for being in love, <haled.)nd you
an"t blame yourself for ! hat other #eo#le did to your father.5

5@h, sure I an,5 he said, offering me that small, sad smile.
5)ny! ay, I ! ent ba , home, and I ! as +ust in time for the @ tober
7ar((the one the Israelis all the Dom <i##ur 7ar. 7e got
smashed. I made it to 2unis, and got some training. I started
fighting, and I , e#t on fighting, all the ! ay to Oeirut. 7hen the
Israelis invaded, ! e made a stand at Shatila. 4y ! hole family ! as
there, and a lot of my neighbours from the old days.)ll of them,
all of us, ! e ! ere all refugees, ! ith no! here else to go.5

57ere you eva uated, ! ith the other fightersE5

5Deah. 2hey ouldn"t beat us, so they ! or, ed out a tru e. 7e left
the am#s((! ith our ! ea#ons, you , no! , to sho! that ! e ! eren"t
defeated. 7e mar hed, li, e soldiers, and there ! as a lot of
firing in the air. Some #eo#le got , illed +ust ! at hing us. It
! as ! eird, li, e a #arade or some , ind of bi1arre elebration, you
, no! E)nd then, ! hen ! e ! ere gone, HC7
they bro, e all their #romises, and they sent the >halange into

the am#s, and they , illed all the old men, and the ! omen, and
the hildren.)nd they all died.)ll my family.)ll the ones I
left behind. I don"t even , no! ! here their bodies are. 2hey hid
them, be ause they , ne! it ! as a ! ar rime.)nd you thin, ... you
thin, I should _let it go, ; inE5

7e ! ere fa ing the sea, loo, ing do! n on a se tion of 8ho! #atty
Oea h from a ar #ar, on the stee# rise above 4arine Drive.
Oeneath us the first ! ave of families, and ou#les, and young men
out for the night tried their lu , at thro! ing darts or shooting
balloons #inned to a target. 2he i e ream and sherbet(drin,
vendors alled out from their flamboyantly de orated bo! ers li, e
birds of #aradise singing for mates.

The hatred that had coiled around Chale's heart ! as the only thing ! e ever argued about. I'd been raised among Jewish friends. Melbourne, the city ! here I grew up, had a huge Jewish community, many of them Holocaust survivors and their children. My mother had been prominent in a Zionist circles, and she'd attracted left-leaning intellectuals from the Greek, Chinese, German, and Jewish communities. Many of my friends had attended a Jewish school, St. Saviour's College. I grew up ! ith those kids, reading the same books, enjoying the same movies and music, marching together in support of the same causes. Some of those friends ! ere among the few ! ho'd stood by me ! hen my life unfolded in agony and shame. It ! as a Jewish friend, in fact, ! ho'd helped me to escape from Australia after I broke out of prison. I respected, admired, and loved all of those friends. And Chale hated every Israeli, and every Jew in the ! orld.

It ! ould be like me hating all Indians, must be cause some Indians tortured me in an Indian prison. I said softly.

It's not the same.

I'm not saying it's the same. I'm trying to ... look, ! hen they had me chained to the ! all there, at Arthur Road, and they ! ent to ! or, on me, it ! ent on for hours. After a ! hile, all I ! ould smell and taste ! as my own blood. ! ll I ! ould hear ! as the lathis riiiiing into me.

I , no! , ; in((5

So, let me finish. There ! as a minute, right in the middle of it, that ! as ... so ! eird ... it ! as like I ! as floating, outside myself, looking down at my own body, and at them, and ! atting everything that ! as going on. And ... I got this ! eird feeling ... this really strange , kind of HC8 understanding ... of everything that ! as happening. I , ne! ! ho they ! ere, and ! hat they ! ere, and ! hy they ! ere doing it. I , ne! it all really clearly, and then I , ne! that I had to holdes((to

hate them or to forgive them.)nd ... I don't , no! ! hy, or ho! , but it ! as absolutely lear to me that I had to forgive them. I had to, if I ! anted to survive. I , no! it sounds ra1y((5

5It doesn't sound ra1y,5 he said flatly, almost regretfully.

5It still seems ra1y to me. I haven't really ... figured it out, yet. Out that's e' a tly ! hat ha##ened.)nd I did forgive them. I really did.)nd I'm sure, someho! , that that's ! hat got me through it. I don't mean that I sto##ed being angry((shit, if I'd gotten free and gotten a gun, I #robably ! ould've , illed them all. @r maybe not. I don't , no! . Out the #oint is, I did forgive them, right there and then, in the middle of it.)nd I'm sure that if I didn't do that((if I'd +ust hated them((I ! ouldn't have made it through till <hader got me out. I ! ould've gone under. 2he hate ! ould've , illed me.5

5It's still not the same, ; in. I understand ! hat you're saying, but the Israelis did more to me than that.)nd any! ay, if I ! as in an Indian #rison, and they did that to _me, ! hat they did to _you, I ! ould hate Indians forever. I'd hate them all.5

5Out I don't hate them. I love them. I love this ountry. I love this ity.5

5Dou an't say you don't ! ant revenge, ; in.5

5I do ! ant revenge. Dou're right. I ! ish I didn't. I ! ish I ! as better than that. Out I only ! ant it on one #erson((the one ! ho set me u#((not the ! hole nation that she omes from.5

57ell, ! e're different #eo#le,5 he said flatly, staring out at the distant fires of the offshore oil refinery. 5Dou don't understand. Dou an't understand it.5

5I understand that hate , ills you, <haled, if you an't let it go.5

5-o, ; in,5 he ans! ered, turning to loo, at me in the faint light of the ab. *is eyes ! ere gleaming, and there ! as a bro, en smile fi' ed to his s arred fa e. It ! as something li, e the e' #ression &i, ram ! ore ! hen he tal, ed about ; ettie, or li, e >raba, er"s fa e ! hen he tal, ed about >arvati. It ! as the , ind of e' #ression some men assume ! hen they tal, about their e' #erien e of God.

54y hate is ! hat saved me,5 he said =uietly, but ! ith an e' ited, feverish 1eal. Softly rounded)meri an vo! els blended ! ith breathy, as#irated HC9

)rabi in a sound, a voi e, that ! as some! here bet! een @mar Sharif and -i holas 8age. In another time, another #la e, another life, <haled)nsari ! ould"ve read #oetry aloud, in)rabi and /nglish, moving all those ! ho heard him to +oy and tears. 5*ate is a very resilient thing, you , no! . *ate is a survivor. I had to hide my hate for a long time. >eo#le ouldn"t handle it. 2hey got s#oo, ed by it. So I sent my hate outside myself. It"s ! eird that I ! as a refugee for years((I still am((and my hate ! as a refugee, +ust li, e me. 4y hate ! as outside me. 4y family ... they ! ere all , illed ... ra#ed and but hered ... and I , illed men ... I shot

them ... I ut their throats ... and my hate survived out there. 4y hate got stronger and harder.)nd then, I ! o, e u# one day, ! or, ing for <hader, ! ith money and #o! er, and I ould feel the hate ree#ing ba , into me.)nd it"s here no! , inside me, ! here it belongs.)nd I"m glad. I en+oy it. I need it, ; in. It"s stronger than I am. It"s braver than I am. 4y hate is my hero.5

*e held that fanati stare for a moment, and then turned to the driver, ! ho ! as do1ing in the front seat of the ar.

58hallo, bhaiB5 he sna##ed. ; et"s go, brotherB

) minute later, he bro, e the silen e to as, me a =uestion.

5Dou heard about IndiraE5

Deah. @n the radio, at ; eo#old"s.5

<hader"s guys in Delhi got the details. 2he inside story. 2hey #honed it through to us +ust before I ame to meet you. It ! as #retty messy, the ! ay she ! ent.5

DeahE5 I re#lied, still thin, ing about <hader"s song of hate. I didn"t really are about the details of Indira"s assassination, but I ! as ha##y that he"d hanged the sub+e t.

5)t nine o" lo , in the morning, this morning, she ! al, ed do! n to a se urity gate at her residen e((the #rime minister"s residen e. She folded her hands together in a greeting, you , no! , for the t! o Si, h bodyguards at the gate. She , ne! those guys. 2hey ! ere only there, on duty, be ause she insisted on it.)fter the Golden 2em#le, after Oluestar, they advised her not to have Si, hs in her se urity detail. Out she insisted be ause she ouldn"t believe that her loyal Si, h bodyguards ! ould turn against her. She +ust didn"t get it((ho! mu h hatred she #ut in them, ! hen she ordered the army to atta , the Golden 2em#le.)ny! ay, she #ut her hands together in a greeting, and she smiled at them, and said the ! ord H7%

-amaste. @ne bodyguard, he #ulled out his servi e revolver((it ! as a .G8((and fired three shots. *e got her right in the guts, in the abdomen. She rum#led to the #ath! ay. 2he se ond bodyguard turned his Sten gun on her. *e em#tied the ! hole maga1ine. 2hirty rounds. It"s an old gun, the Sten, but it #a , s a hell of a #un h at lose range.)t least seven bullets got her in the abdomen, three bullets ! ent into her hest, and one ! ent through her heart.5

7e rode in silen e for a ! hile. I ! as the first to s#ea, .

5So, ho! do you thin, the money mar, et ! ill rea tE5

5I thin, it"ll be good for business,5 he re#lied dis#assionately. 5So long as there"s a lear line of su ession((as there is here,

! ith Ra+iv((an assassination is al! ays good for business.5

5Out there"ll be riots. 2hey"re already tal,ing about gangs going after Si,hs. I sa! a mor ha, on my ! ay u# here.5

5Deah, I sa! it, too,5 he said, turning to fa e me. *is eyes ! ere dar, , almost bla , , and gleaming ! ith the vehemen e of his ! ilful induration. 5Out even that"ll be good for business. 2he more riots there are, and the more #eo#le get ,illed, the more demand there"ll be for dollars. 7e"ll #ut the rates u# tomorro! morning.5

52he roads might be tangled u#. If there"s mor has or riots, it might not be so easy to get around.5

5I"ll #i , you u# at your #la e, seven o" lo , , and ! e"ll go straight to Ra+ubhai"s,5 he said, referring to the mafia"s bla , money ounting room in the 9ort area, and to Ra+u, the man ! ho ran it. 52hey ! on"t sto# me. 4y ar ! ill get through. 7hat are you doing no! E5

5Right no! ((after ! e finish the olle tionsE5

5Deah. *ave you got some timeE5

5Sure. 7hat do you ! ant me to doE5

5Dro# me off, and , ee# the ab,5 he said, resting ba , against the seat and letting his fa e and body sag in a sigh of e'haustion or de-e tion. 5Do the rounds of the guys. 2ell them to ma,e their ! ay to Ra+ubhai"s early tomorro! . 9ind as many as you an, and let them , no! . If it gets real bad, ! e"ll need everyone.5

5@, ay. I"ll get on it. Dou should get some slee#, <haled. Dou loo, tired.5

I thin, I ! ill,5 he smiled. 52here ! on't be mu h slee# in the
ne' t ou#le days.5

*e losed his eyes for a moment, and allo! ed his head to loll and
roll H71

! ith the movement of the ar. 2hen he ! as suddenly a! a, e, sitting
u#right, and sniffing the air around him.

5Say, ! hat the fu , is that smell, manE Is that some , ind of
aftershave or ! hatE I've been gassed ! ith tear gas that smelled
better than thatB5

5Don't as, ,5 I re#lied, su##ressing a grin through len hed
teeth, and rubbing at >raba, er"s #erfume stain on the front of my
shirt. <haled laughed, and turned his eyes to the starless dar, ,
! here night met the sea.

Sooner or later, fate #uts us together ! ith all the #eo#le, one
by one, ! ho sho! us ! hat ! e ould, and shouldn't, let ourselves

be ome. Sooner or later ! e meet the drun, ard, the ! aster, the
betrayer, the ruthless mind, and the hate(filled heart. Out fate
loads the di e, of ourse, be ause ! e usually find ourselves
loving or #itying almost all of those #eo#le.)nd it's im#ossible
to des#ise someone you honestly #ity, and to shun someone you
truly love. I sat beside <haled in the dar, ness as the ta' i too,
us to the business of rime. I sat beside him in the drift of
oloured shado! s, loving the honesty and toughness in him, and
#itying the hatreds that ! ea, ened him and lied to him.)nd his
fa e, refle ted sometimes in the night that filled the ! indo! ,
! as as dren hed in destiny, and as radiant, as the fa es found in
#aintings of doomed and haloed saints.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

57 herever you go in the world, in any society, it is always the same! When it comes to questions of justice, Lord Chodder Khan, my mafia boss and my surrogate father, told me! When I'd been six months in his service. The entrance our investigations, prosecutions, and punishments on whom the crime is in the sin, rather than whom the sin is in the crime.

There I was sitting in the busy, steamy, fragrantly aromatic Restaurant Saurabh, in the Sassoon Dock area. The Saurabh served what many regarded as Bombay's best masala dhosas, in a city where five thousand restaurants vied for the honour. Despite that distinction, or because of it, the Saurabh was small and relatively unknown. Its name didn't appear in any of the guidebooks for tourists or the newspaper columns in the daily newspapers. It was a corner restaurant, and it was full, from morning until evening, with morning men and women who cherished it and kept its secret to themselves. Accordingly, the meals were cheap and the decor was a functional minimum. Nevertheless, the restaurant was spotlessly clean, and the spectacular, baroque sails of the crispy dhosas, slipped to the tables by waiters who hurried at a run, housed the most delicious morsels that could be found in any dish, anywhere in the city.

For me, the lesson was clear: the obvious is true. For me, the most important thing is the amount of sin that is in the crime. Douglas, told me, just no, why do not make money from prostitution and drugs, as the other counsils do, and I tell you it is because of the sin that is in those crimes. It is for this reason that I will not sell children, or women, or pornography, or drugs. It is for this reason that I will not permit those businesses in any of my areas. In all of these things, the sin in the crime is so great that a man must give up his soul for the profit he makes. And if a man gives his soul, if he becomes a soulless man, it takes nothing less than a miracle for him to regain it.

5Do you believe in miracles?

5Certainly, I do. In our hearts, we all believe in miracles.

5I'm afraid I don't, I stated, smiling.

5I'm sure that you do, he insisted. 5Wouldn't you say that your rescue from the prison at Arthur Road was as a miracle, for we are?

5It felt like a miraculous thing at the time, I have to admit.

5And when you escaped from the prison in your home country, Australia, was that not a miraculous thing, he asked quietly.

It was the first time he'd ever mentioned the escape. I was sure that he, of course, and I was sure he must've thought about it many times. Out by broadening the subject with me he was raising the real nature of the rescue from Arthur Road prison. The fact was that he'd rescued me from two prisons (one in India and one in Australia) and I owed him a double debt.

5Des, I answered, slowly but steadily. 5It was something of a miracle, I guess.

5If you do not object (that is, if you do not find it painful) I would like you to tell me about the escape from the prison in Australia. I might tell you that I find it to be fascinating, for my own very personal reasons, and I am deeply impressed by it.

5I don't mind talking about it, I replied, meeting his stare. 5What would you like to know?

5Why did you escape?

<haderbhai was the only person who'd ever asked me that question. >I was in Australia and Ireland had asked me about the

es a#e. 2hey"d ! anted to , no! ho! I bro,e out of the #rison, and ho! I stayed on the run. Out only <hader as, ed me ! hy I es a#ed.

52here ! as a #unishment unit in the #rison. 2he guards ! ho ran it ((not all of them, but enough of them((! ere ra1y. 2hey hated us. 2hey ! ere insane ! ith hate for the #risoners. I don't , no! ! hy. I an"t e' #lain it. 2hat"s +ust ho! it ! as do! n there then.)nd they tortured us, nearly every night.)nd I fought ba , . I had to fight them. It"s my nature, I guess. It"s +ust ho! I am. I"m not the , ind of man ! ho ould ta,e it from them, ! ithout fighting ba , . 7hi h made it all ! orse, of ource. I got ... ! ell, they ! ent to ! or, on me, and it ! as ... #retty bad. I ! as only do! n H7H

there, in that #unishment unit, for a little ! hile. Out I had a long senten e, and I , ne! that sooner or later they"d find a reason to #ut me do! n there again, or I"d be stu#id enough to give them one((it ! asn"t hard, believe me. I thought that ! hen they did get me there again, ! hen they got their hands on me, they"d torture me again, and I"d fight them again, and they"d

#robably , ill me. So ... I es a#ed.5

5*o! did you do itE5

5)fter that last beating, I let them thin, they"d bro,en my s#irit. So they gave me the , ind of +ob that only beaten men ! ere allo! ed to do. 2hey gave me a +ob near the front ! all of the #rison, #ushing a ! heelbarro! and ma,ing re#airs. 7hen the time ! as right, I es a#ed.5

*e listened as I told him the story. 7e ontinued to eat ! hile I tal,ed. <hader never interr#ted. *e ! at hed me throughout, and the smiling light in his eyes refle ted the fire in mine. *e seemed to en+oy the telling of the story as mu h as the tale itself.

57ho ! as the other man((the one ! ith you, ! hen you es a#edE5

52he other guy ! as doing time for murder. *e ! as a good man, ! ith #lenty of heart.5

50ut you did not stay togetherE5

5-o,5 I ans! ered, allo! ing my ga1e to shift from <hader"s for the first time. I loo,ed at the door! ay of the restaurant, and ! at hed the rhythmi , un easing flo! of #eo#le on the street. *o! ould I e' #lain my reasons for leaving my friend after the es a#e, and going off on my o! nE I hardly understood it myself. I de ided to give him the fa ts, and let him ma, e of them ! hat he ! ould.

5)t first, ! e ! ent to stay ! ith an outla! bi, e lub((a gang of men ! ho rode motor y les. 2he leader of the motor y le gang had a young brother ! ho ! as in the #rison. *e ! as a brave young , id, and about a year before I es a#ed he"d u#set a very dangerous man by doing nothing more than being brave. I got involved, and I saved the , id from being , illed. 7hen the , id found out about it, he told his brother. 2he older brother, ! ho ! as the #resident of the motor y le gang, had let me , no! that he o! ed me one. 7hen I es a#ed, I ! ent to stay ! ith the older brother and his gang, and I too, my friend ! ith me. 2hey gave us guns, drugs, and money. 2hey #rote ted us and gave us shelter, for the first thirteen days and nights, ! hile the o#s tore the ity u# loo,ing for us.5

I #aused, mo##ing u# the last of my food ! ith a orner of #ea(flour H7?

roti. <haderbhai ate the last of the food on his o! n #late. 7e he! ed vigorously, ! at hing one another ! ith thoughts and =uestions glittering in our eyes.

5@n the thirteenth night after the es a#e, ! hen I ! as still hiding ! ith the motor y le gang, I got this over! helming urge to visit a man ! ho used to be my tea her,5 I ontinued at last. 5*e ! as a le turer in #hiloso#hy at a university in my ity. *e ! as a

He is intelligent, a brilliant guy, and very highly respected in the city here I grew up. Out brilliant and all as he is, I still don't, no! I went to see him. I can't explain it (I don't really understand it, even now). I just had to see him. The feeling is as so strong, I couldn't fight it. So I went across the city, risking my life to see him. He said that he'd expected to see me, and that he is waiting for me to come to him. He told me that I had to give up my guns, first of all. He tried to convince me that I wouldn't need them, and that they'd bring me grief if I didn't get rid of them. He told me that I had to give up the crime of armed robbery, and never commit it again. He said that I'd paid my dues for the crimes I'd committed, but that if I ever did that crime again I would be killed or tortured straight away. Whatever else you have to do to stay free, he said, don't ever do that crime again. He told me to split from my friend, because he is sure to get caught, and if I am with him I'd be caught, too. And he told me to travel the world. Tell people as much as they need to, no!, he said. I remember that he is smiling when he said it, like there is nothing to it. And as, people for help, he said. You'll be all right ... Don't worry ... It's a great adventure, your life, and it has only just begun ...5

There is as a cause as I lapsed into silence once more. I later approached the table to clear away our empty plates, but I avoided him away. The mafia don stared at me, his golden eyes unblinking, but it is as a sympathetic and encouraging stare.

I left his office (the philosopher's office, at the university) and I, realize that everything had changed with just that little conversation. I went back to the motorcycle gang and my friend. I gave him my guns, and I told him that I had to leave. I went off on my own. He is tortured, six months later, after a gun battle with the cops. I'm still free, if that word means anything when you're a wanted man with nowhere to go. And that's it. - oh! you, no! the story.5

51 I would like to meet this man,5 <haderbhai said slowly. 52 his
le turer H7C
in #hiloso#hy. *e gave you good advice. Out tell me, I understand
that)ustralia is a very different country, not like India((! why
do you not return there, and tell the authorities about the
torture you endured in the #risonE 7ould this not make you safe,
and return you to your life and your familyE5

57 here I come from, I don't inform on anyone,5 I re#lied. 5-not
even on torturers.)nd even if I did((even if I ! ent ba , there
and stood in the do , as a 8ro! n ! itness, and gave evidence
against the s re! s ! ho torture #risoners((there'd be no guarantee
it ! ould sto#. 2he system ! ould loo, after them. -o sane man
trusts the British +ustice system. 7hen ! as the last time you
ever heard of a rich man thro! ing himself on the mercy of the
courtE It doesn't ha##en. 2he system ! ould loo, after the
torturers, and they'd get away ! ith it, no matter ! hat they did

and no matter how mu h #roof there ! as.)nd I'd go ba , in +ail.
)nd I'd be in their #o! er again.)nd they'd make a #retty good
mess of me. I thin, ... I thin, they'd ,i , me to death do! n
there, in the #unishment unit.)ny! ay, it's not an o#tion. Dou
don't lag #eo#le. Dou don't inform on #eo#le, not for any reason.
It's a #rin i#le. It's #robably the only one ! e've got left ! hen
! e get lo ,ed u# in a age.5

50ut you believe that these #rison guards are still torturing
other men in that #rison, +ust as they tortured youE5 he #ressed.

5Des, I do.5

5)nd you are in a #osition to do something about this, to try to
alleviate their sufferingE5

5I might be. I might not be. ;i, e I said, I don't thin, the
system ! ould be in any hurry to bring them to +ustice, or to rush
to our defen e.5

5Out there is a chance, just a chance, that they would listen to you, and put an end to the torture of the other men

2here's a chance. I don't think, it's a big one.

5Out still there is a chance he insisted.

5Des, I said flatly.

5So it could be said that you are in a way responsible for the suffering of the other men

2he question was offensive, but his tone was entirely gentle and compassionate. I stared into his eyes, and was sure that he meant no offence or harm. It was as though he'd rescued me from the Indian prison, after all and, indirectly, from the Australian prison that I was here discussing. H77

5You could say that, I answered calmly. 5Out that doesn't change the principle. You don't tell on people (not for any reason.)

5I am not trying to trap you ; in, or trick you. Out you will agree, I think, from this example, that it is possible to do the wrong thing for the right reasons. *e smiled again, for the first time since the story of the escape had begun. 52his will come back, to us, at another time. I have raised it in this way because it is a very important point about how we do live our lives, and how we should live our lives. 2here is no need to talk of it now, but this question will come back, to us in another discussion, I am sure, so I would like you to remember it.

5)nd what about current issues I asked, seizing the opportunity to change the subject away from me, and toward the rules of his moral universe on the more. 5Don't current issues come under your

heading of sinful crimes

5-o. -ot urren ies,5 he said firmly. 2he voi e ! as dee#, the
! ords surging u#! ards from the dia#hragm into the hest, and
#assing through the rumbling gemstone(tumbler of his throat. 7hat
emerged ! as a tone of voi e that resonated ! ith the hy#noti
#iety of a sermoner, reading from the <oran, even as he tal, ed of
his most #rofitable rimes.

5) nd gold smugglingE5

5-o. -ot gold. -ot #ass#orts. -ot influen e.5

Influen e ! as <hader"s eu#hemism for the full range of
intera tions bet! een his mafia grou# and the so iety in ! hi h it
thrived. 2hey began ! ith bribery, in a s hedule of venalities
ranging from insider trading to the se uring of #rofitable
tenders. 7hen bribes failed, <hader"s influen e e' tended to debt

that I was set into the bar, I sat all of the restaurant. They washed their hands and faces, laughing and sitting noisily into the sin, as did every other man in the restaurant at the conclusion of his meal. When my turn at laughing, laughing, and sitting came, I found Chaderbhai talking with the owner of the Saurabh on the footpath outside the restaurant. When they separated, the owner embraced Chader and asked for his blessing. The man was a Hindu, and his forehead bore the mark of blessing he'd received at a temple only hours before. Then Chaderbhai held the man's hands in his own, and softly mumbled a Muslim blessing, the devout Hindu responded with delight and gratitude.

Chader and I strolled back towards Solaba. Stopping, a few feet behind us, signalling at the street. The Sassoon Dock crossed the road and passed beneath the arch at

the main entrance to the old dockyard. The smell of rains, drying in the sun in the mountains, made my stomach flush, but when I caught sight of the sea the stenches were lost in the strong breeze. Closer to the docks we threaded our way through rows of men pushing hand carts, and women carrying baskets on their heads, all bearing the weight of a burden of fish. The stories that surrounded the industry and the fish added their industrious languor to the bargaining of auctioneers and salesmen. At the edge of the dock, itself, there were plenty large, wooden fishing boats, built to the same designs used for vessels that had sailed the Arabian Sea, on the Maharashtra coast of India, five hundred years before. There and there between them were larger, more extensive metal boats. The contrast between those rusted, graceless hulks and the elegant wooden boats beside them spoke a history, a modern saga, a world story that moved from life at sea, as a romantic calling, to the profiteer's cold, efficient lust for the bottom line.

We sat on a wooden bench in a quiet, shaded corner of the dock, where fishermen sometimes rested to share a meal. Chader stared at the vessels, which were shifting and guffawing at their

moorings on the laughing tide.

*is short hair and beard ! ere almost ! hite. 2he tight, unblemished s, in of his lean fa e ! as tanned to the colour of sun(ri#ened ! heat. I loo, ed at the fa e((the long, fine nose and ! ide bro! and u#! ard urving li#s((and ! ondered, not for the first time, and not for the last, if my H79 love for him ! ould ost me my life. -a1eer, ever ! at hful, stood near us and s anned the do , ! ith a glo! ering e' #ression that a##roved of nothing in the ! orld but the man ! ho sat beside me.

52he history of the universe is a history of motion,5 <hader began, still loo, ing at the boats nodding together li, e horses in harness. 52he universe, as ! e , no! it, in this one of its many lives, began in an e' #ansion that ! as so big, and so fast that ! e an tal, about it, but ! e annot in any truth understand it, or even imagine it. 2he s ientists all this great e' #ansion the Oig Oang, although there ! as no e' #losion, in the sense of a bomb, or something li, e that.)nd the first moments after that great e' #ansion, from the first fra tions of attose onds, the universe ! as li, e a ri h sou# made out of sim#le bits of things. 2hose bits ! ere so sim#le that they ! ere not even atoms yet.)s the universe e' #anded and ooled do! n, these very tiny bits of things ame together to ma, e #arti les. 2hen the #arti les ame together to ma, e the first of the atoms. 2hen the atoms ame together to ma, e mole ules. 2hen the mole ules ame together to ma, e the first of the stars. 2hose first stars ! ent through their y les, and e' #loded in a sho! er of ne! atoms. 2he ne! atoms ame together to ma, e more stars and #lanets.)ll the stuff ! e are made of ame from those dying stars. 7e are made out of stars, you and I. Do you agree ! ith me so farE5

5Sure,5 I smiled. 5I don't , no! ! here you're going yet, but so

far, so good.5

5>re iselyB5 he laughed. 5So far, so good. Dou an he , the

science of what I am saying to you (as a matter of fact, I want you to hear, everything that I say, and everything you ever learn from anyone else. Out I am sure that the science is right, within the limit of what I know, no! . I have been studying these matters with a young physicist for some time now, and my facts are essentially correct.

I'm happy to take your word for it, I said, and I was happy, just to have his company and his undivided attention.

Now, to continue, none of these things, none of these processes, none of these coming together actions are what one can describe as random events. The universe has a nature, for and of itself, something like human nature, if you like, and its nature is to combine, and to build, and to become more complex. It always does this. If the circumstances are right, bits of matter will always come together to make more complex arrangements. Hence, and this fact about the way that our universe works, this moving towards order, and towards combinations of these ordered things, has a name. In the western science it is called the tendency towards complexity, and it is the way the universe works.

Three fishermen dressed in lungis and singlets approached us shyly. One of them carried two tin basins containing glasses of water and hot chai. Another grasped a plate bearing several sweet laddoo. The last man held a chillum and two glasses of harras in his extended palms.

Will you drink tea, sir? One of the men asked politely in Hindi. Will you smoke with us?

Chader smiled, and nodded his head. The men came forward quickly, handing glasses of chai to Chader, Akleer, and me. They squatted on the ground in front of us and offered their chillum. Chader received the honour of lighting the pipe, and I too, the second. The pipe went into the ground and I asked the man to lean by the last man, who held the word 'alaass ...' finished ... with his stream of blue smoke.

<hader continued talking to me in English. I was sure that the men couldn't understand him, but they remained with us, and I watched his face intently.

So continue this point, the universe, as I see it, and from everything that I can learn about it, has been getting always more complex since it began. It does this because that is its nature. The tendency toward complexity has carried the universe from almost perfect simplicity to the kind of complexity that I see around us, everywhere. The universe is always doing this. It is always moving from the simple to the complex.

I think, I see, here you're going with this.

<hader laughed. The fishermen laughed with him.

The universe, he continued, this universe that I see, began in almost absolute simplicity, and it has been getting more complex for about fifteen billion years. In another billion years it will be still more complex than it is now. In five billion, in ten billion (it is always getting more complex. It is moving toward ... something. It is moving toward some kind of ultimate complexity. We might not get there.) an atom of hydrogen might not get there, or a leaf, or a man, or a planet might not get there, to that ultimate complexity. Out there are all moving towards it (everything in the universe is moving towards it.) and that final complexity, H81

that thing that we are all moving to, is what I choose to call God. If you don't like that word, God, call it the Ultimate Complexity. Whatever you call it, the whole universe is moving toward it.

Isn't the universe a lot more random than that? I asked, sensing the drift of his argument, and seeing to head it off. What about giant asteroids and so on? We, I mean our planet, could get smashed to fragments by a giant asteroid. In fact,

there's a statistical probability that major impacts will occur. And if our sun is dying (and one day it will (isn't that the opposite of 'omniscience'?) does that fit in with the movement towards omniscience, if all this planet is smashed to atoms, and our sun dies?

5) good question, Chaderbhai replied. My happy smile revealed the run of his slightly gaped, ivory cream teeth. He was enjoying himself in the discussion, and I realised that I'd never seen him quite so animated or enthused. His hands roved the stage between us, illustrating some points and emphasising others. Our planet may be smashed, it is true, and one day our beautiful sun will die. And we are, to the best of our knowledge, the most developed expression of the omniscience in our bit of the universe. It would certainly be a major loss if we were to be annihilated. It would be a terrible waste of all that development. Our progress would continue. We are, ourselves, expressions of that progress. Our bodies are the children of all the suns and other stars that died, before us, making the atoms that we are made of. And if we were destroyed, by an asteroid, or by our own hand, well, somewhere else in the universe, our level of omniscience, this level of omniscience, with a consciousness capable of understanding the progress, would be duplicated. I do not mean 'omniscience' as you are, would develop, somewhere else in the universe. We would cease to exist, but the progress would go on. Perhaps this is happening in millions of worlds, even as we speak. In fact, it is very likely that it is happening, all over the universe, because that is what the universe does.

It was my turn to laugh.

5) Oh, oh, oh. And you want to say (let me guess (that everything that helps this along is good, right?) and anything that goes in the other direction (your spin on it is that it's evil, nah?)

Chaderbhai turned his full attention on me, with one eyebrow!

raised in amusement or disapproval, or both. It was as an expression I'd seen on Carl's face more than on me. *e might've thought that my slightly

more, ing tone was rude. I didn't mean it to be. It was defensive, in fact, because I couldn't find a flaw in his logic, and I was profoundly impressed by his argument. Perhaps he was simply surprised. *e told me one, much later, that one of the first things he liked about me was that I wasn't afraid of him and my fearlessness often took him by surprise with its impudence and its folly. Whatever the cause for his little smile and arched eyebrow, it was some time before he continued.

In essence, you are right. Anything that enhances, promotes, or accelerates this movement toward the Ultimate Reality is good, he said, pronouncing the words so slowly, and with such considered precision, that I was sure he'd spent the hours many times. Anything that inhibits, impedes, or prevents this movement toward the Ultimate Reality is evil. The wonderful thing about this definition of good and evil is that it is both objective and universally applicable.

Is anything really objective? I asked, believing myself to be on surer ground at last.

When we say that this definition of good and evil is objective, what we mean is that it is as objective as we can be at this time, and to the best of our knowledge about the universe. This definition is based on what we know about the universe or, so. It is not based on the revealed wisdom of any one faith or political movement. It is common to the best principles of all of them, but it is based on what we know, rather than what we believe. In that sense, it is objective. Of course, what we know about the universe, and our place in it, is constantly changing as we add more information and gain new insights. We are never perfectly objective about anything, that is true, but we can be less objective, or we can be more objective. And when we define good and evil on the basis of what we know ((to the best of our knowledge at the present time)) (we are being as objective as

possible! Within the imperfect limits of our understanding. Do you agree that?

When you say that objective doesn't mean absolutely objective, then I agree. Out of all the different religions, not to mention the atheists and agnostics and the just plain confused, like me, ever find any definition universally acceptable. I don't mean to be insulting, but I think, most believers have got too much of a vested interest in their notion of God (and heaven franchises, if you like) that I mean, to ever agree on anything.

It is a fair point, and I am not offended, I had mused, gazing at the silent fishermen sitting at his feet. He exchanged a broad smile with them and then continued. When I see that this definition of good and evil is universally acceptable, that I mean is that any rational and reasonable person (any rational and reasonable Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist or Christian or Jew or any atheist, for that matter) can accept that this is a reasonable definition of good and evil, because it is based on what is, not about how the universe is, or, is.

I think, I understand what you're saying, I offered when he fell silent. Out I don't really follow you, when it comes to the physics, I guess, of the universe. Why should I agree that as the basis of our morality?

If I can give you an example, in, perhaps it will be clearer. I will use the analogy of the way we measure length, because it is very relevant to our time. Do I will agree, I think, that there is a need to define a common measure of length, yes?

Do you mean, in yards and meters, and like that?

More precisely. If we have no commonly agreed criterion for measuring length, we will never agree about how much land is yours, and how

much is mine, or hold to cut lengths of wood! then! we build a house. There! would be chaos. We! would fight over the land, and the houses! would fall down. Throughout history, we have always tried to agree on a common way to measure length. Join me! with me, on the more, on this little journey of the mind!

"I'm still! with you," I replied, laughing, and! pondering! here the mafia don's argument! as to, ing me.

Well, after the revolution in France, the scientists and government officials decided to put some sense into the system of measuring and! weighing things. They introduced a decimal system based on a unit of length that they called the metre, from the Greek! word metron, which has the meaning of a measure.

@, ay ...

And the first way they decided to measure the length of a metre! was to make it one ten-millionth of the distance between the equator and the north pole. Our earlier calculations! were based on the idea that the Earth! was a sphere, and the Earth, as! we know, is not a sphere. They had to abandon that! way of measuring a metre, and they decided, instead, to call it the distance between two very fine lines on a bar of platinum-iridium alloy.

>platinum ...

Iridium. Des. Our platinum-iridium alloy bars decay and shrink,

very slowly (even though they are very hard (and the unit of measure! was constantly changing. In more recent times, scientists realised that the platinum-iridium bar they had been using as a measure! would be a very different size in, say, a thousand years, than it is today.

And ... that! was a problem!

5-ot for the building of houses and bridges,5 <haderbhai said, ta, ing my #oint more seriously than I'd intended it to be.

5Out not nearly a urate enough for the s ientists,5 I offered, more soberly.

5-o. 2hey ! anted an un hanging riterion against ! hi h to measure all other things.)nd after a fe! other attem#ts, using different te hni=ues, the international standard measure for a metre ! as fi' ed, only last year, as the distan e that a #hoton of light travels in a va uum during, roughly, one three(hundred(thousandth of a se ond. -o! , of ourse, this begs the =uestion of ho! it ame to be that a se ond is agreed u#on as a measure of time. It is an e=ually fas inating story((I an tell it to you, if you ! ould li, e, before ! e ontinue ! ith the #oint about the metreE5

5I'm ... ha##y to stay ! ith the metre right no! ,5 I demurred, laughing again in s#ite of myself.

5&ery ! ell. I thin, that you an see my #oint here((! e avoid haos, in building houses and dividing land and so forth, by having an agreed standard for the measure of a unit of length. 7e all it a metre and, after many attem#ts, ! e de ide u#on a ! ay to establish the length of that basi unit. In the same ! ay, ! e an only avoid haos in the ! orld of human affairs by having an agreed standard for the measure of a unit of morality.5

5I'm ! ith you.5

5)t the moment, most of our ! ays of defining the unit of morality are similar in their intentions, but they differ in their details. So the #riests of one nation bless their soldiers as they mar h to ! ar, and the imams of another ountry bless their soldiers as they mar h out to meet them.)nd everybody ! ho is involved in the , illing, says that he has God on his side. 2here is no ob+e tive and universally a e#table definition of good and evil.)nd until ! e have one, ! e ! ill go on +ustifying our o! n

actions, I still condemn the actions of the others.5 H8?

5) And you're putting the physics of the universe as a kind of
#latinum(iridium barE5

57ell, I do think, that our definition is loser, in its
#re-ision, to the #hoton(second measure than it is to the
#latinum(iridium bar, but the #oint is essentially correct. I
think, that I then I believe, for an objective way to measure good and

evil, a way that all #eo#le can accept as reasonable, I believe can do
no better than to study the way that the universe is, and its
nature((the equality that defines the entire history of it((the
fact that it is constantly moving towards greater complexity. 7e
can do no better than to use the nature of the universe itself.
) And all the holy texts, from all the great religions, tell us to
do this. 2he *only <oran, for example, is often telling us,
instructing us, to study the planets and the stars to find truth
and meaning.5

5I still have to ask, the question, why use this fact about the
tendency towards complexity, and not some other fact? Isn't it
still arbitrary? Isn't it still a matter of choice as to which
fact you choose to use as the basis for your morality? I'm not
trying to be obtuse here((I really think, it still seems quite
arbitrary.5

5I understand your doubt,5 <hader smiled, raising his eyes to the
sea(s, y horizon for a moment. 5I, too, felt very sentimental when I
first began along this road. Out I am not convinced that there is
no better way to think, of good and evil, at this time. 2hat is
not to say that it will always be the best definition. 7ith the
measure of the metre, as well, there will be another, slightly
better way to measure it, in the future.)s a matter of fact, the
current best definition uses the distance travelled by a photon
of light in a vacuum, as if nothing happens in a vacuum. Out I believe
, no! that all sorts of things are happening in a vacuum. 2here

are many, many reactions taking place in a vacuum, all of the time. I am sure that in the future an even better way to measure the metre will be found. Out, at the moment, it is the best way that we have.)nd with morality, the fact of the tendency to)rdom#le' ity((that the whole universe is doing this all the time, and always has((is the best way we have to be objective about good and evil. We use that fact, rather than any other, because it is the largest fact about the universe. It is the one fact that involves the whole universe, throughout the whole of its history. If you can give me a better way to be objective about good and evil, and to involve all the people of all the faiths, and all the non-believers, and the whole history of the H8C whole universe, then I would be very, very happy to hear it.5

5@, ay. @, ay. So the universe is moving along toward God, or toward some Ultimate Som#le' ity.)nything that helps it along is good.)nything that holds it back, is evil. That still leaves me with the problem of how judges the evil. *o! do! e, no! E *o! do! e tell! hether any one thing! e do! ill get us there or hold us back, E5

5) good =uestion,5 <hader said, standing and brushing the creases from his loose, linen trousers and his ,nee(length, white cotton shirt. 5In fact, it is the right =uestion.)nd at the right time, I will give you a good answer.5

*e turned away from me to face the three fishermen, who'd stood

with him and were waiting attentively. For a moment, I teased myself with the notion that I'd stumbled him with my =uestion. Out that #rideful hope dissolved as I)ntered him tall, with the barefoot fishermen. There! as such a #odi ti certitude in <hader's every #ronouncement, such a decisive, incontrovertible assurance in the man, that it informed and)m#osed even his stillnesses and silences. I ,ne! that there! as an answer to my =uestion. I ,ne! that he would give it to me when he judged the time to be right.

Standing near him, I eavesdropped on his conversation. We asked them if they had any complaints, if there was any bullying of the poorer men on the docks. When they told him there was none, just at that time, he asked them about the available work, and if the jobs were fairly distributed among those with greatest need. Reassured on that point as well, he asked them about their families and their children. The last of their conversation was about the work on Sassoon Dock's fishing fleet. They told him about the mountainous, stormy waves, the fragile boats, the friends made at sea, and the friends lost at sea. We told them about the one and only time he'd sailed the deck later, during a violent storm, in one of the long, wooden fishing boats. We told them how he'd tied himself to the boat, and how fervently he'd prayed until they'd sighted land. They laughed, and then tried to touch his feet in a respectful goodbye, but he lifted them by the shoulders and shook hands with them, one by one. When he departed from them, they all, ed a way with their backs straight and their heads high.

"So! Was your work with the ~~handed~~ ~~hader~~ as, ed me when I all, ed back, through the docks.

"Very good. I like him. I liked working with him. I'd still be with him if H87 you hadn't put me to work with ~~adid~~."

"And how is that? So! is it, with our ~~adid~~?"

I hesitated. Carlson said that men reveal what they think when they look away, and what they feel when they hesitate. With a frown, she said, it's the other way around.

"I'm learning what I need to know. We's a good tea here."

"Out ... you made a more personal connection with ~~handed~~)nsari, isn't it so?"

It was true. Chander was angry, and there was a part of his heart that was always hate-filled, but I liked him. Chander was kind and patient and generous with me, yet I had no feeling for him at all beyond a vague, remorseful unease. After four months in the business, Chander had decided that I should learn the gold-smuggling trade, and he'd sent me to Chander Rustom. In his house overlooking the sea, among the affluent

elite at Suhu, I'd discovered the many ways in which gold was smuggled into India. Chander's formula of greed and control applied to the trade in gold. Strictly enforced government controls on the import of gold rashed head-on with India's insatiable demand for the yellow metal.

Grey-haired Chander controlled Chander's substantial gold imports, and had been running the business for almost ten years. With mine-haustible forbearance, he'd taught me everything that he thought I needed to know about gold and the smuggler's arts. His dark eyes had stared at me from beneath his bushy grey brows, hour after hour in the lessons. Although he commanded a large number of strong men, and could be ruthless with them when it was required, his rheumy eyes only ever showed me kindness. Still, I felt nothing for him but that bodeful uneasiness. When I left his house, after any lesson, a sense of relief flooded into me: a relief that washed the sound of his voice and the sight of his face from my mind, just as water might wash a stain from my hands.

5-0. There's no connection. Out he's a good teacher, as I say.5

5; inbaba,5 Chander replied, his deep voice rumbling over the name that the slum-dwellers used, I like you.5

My face flushed with emotion. It was as if my own father had said the last three words to me. And my own father never did. The wonder that those simple words had (the wonder that Chander had overcome (made me realise how neatly and completely he'd come to fill

the father's role in H88

my life. In my innermost, secret heart, a small boy that I used to be! wishing that I had been as my father (my real father).

5*o! "s 2ari=E5 I as, ed him.

52ari= is very! ell, nush, ur)llah.5 2han, s be to God.

5I miss him. *e"s a great , id,5 I said. 4issing him, I missed my o! n daughter. I missed my family. I missed my friends.

5*e misses you, too,5 <hader said slo! ly, and ! ith ! hat seemed to be regret. 52ell me, ; in, ! hat do you ! antE 7hy are you hereE 7hat do you really ! ant here, in OombayE5

7e ! ere a##roa hing his #ar, ed ar. -a1eer ran ahead on his short, thi , legs to o#en the doors and start the engine. <hader and I stood lose together, holding a stare.

5I ! ant to be free,5 I said.

5Out you are free,5 he re#lied.

5-ot really.5

5)re you tal, ing about)ustraliaE5

5Des. -ot only that. Out mostly that.5

5Don't ! orry,5 he said. 5-othing ! ill ever harm you in Oombay. I give you my ! ord. -o harm ! ill ome to you, no! , ! hile you ! ear my name on the medal around your ne , and ! hile you ! or, for me. Dou are safe here, Inshallah.5

*e held both my hands in his and murmured a blessing, +ust as he'd done ! ith the o! ner of the Saurabh. I ! al, ed him to his ar,

! at hing as he stoo#ed to sit. Someone had daubed the name Sa#na on a grubby ! all nearby. 2he #aint ! as reasonably fresh, no more than a ! ee, old. If <hader had noti ed, he gave no indi ation of it. -a1eer slammed the door, and ran around to the other side of the ar.

5-e' t ! ee, , I ! ant you to start ! ith my friend Ghani on #ass#orts,5 <hader said. -a1eer revved the engine, a! aiting the instru tion to leave. 5I thin, you ! ill find the #ass#ort business interesting.5

*e ! as smiling at me as -a1eer drove a! ay, but it ! as -a1eer"s s o! l, behind him, that lingered longest in my mind. 2he man hated me, it seemed, and sooner or later I ! ould have to settle the matter ! ith him. It ! as a measure of +ust ho! lost and lonely I ! as, in my e' ile, that I loo, ed for! ard to fighting him. *e ! as shorter than I ! as, but every bit as strong, and #erha#s a little heavier. I , ne! it ! ould be a good fight.

I filed that future violen e a! ay under #ending and im#ending, hailed H89 a ab, and made my ! ay to the 9ort area. 2he ommer ial distri t of #rinters, stationers, ! arehouses, and light manufa turers, , no! n sim#ly as the 9ort, served the offi e distri ts that surrounded it. 2he buildings and narro! streets of the 9ort ! ere some of the oldest in the ity. 2he atmos#here of another age, an age of star hed and formal ourtesies, remained in those la! firms, #ublishing houses, and other erebral enter#rises that had been fortunate enough to boast a 9ort address for several de ades.

@ne of the ne! er businesses in the 9ort ! as the travel agen y o! ned through #ro' ies by <haderbhai and managed by 4ad+id Rhustem. 2he agen y handled the travel arrangements for thousands of men and ! omen ! ho ! or, ed on ontra ts in the Gulf States. @n the legitimate side, the agen y organised #lane ti , ets, visas, ! or, #ermits, and hostel a ommodation in the Gulf. @n the bla , (mar, et side, 4ad+id"s agents arranged for most of the returning

! or, ers to ! ear from one to three hundred grams of our gold, #er #erson, in hains, bra elets, rings, and broo hes. 2he gold arrived in the Gulf #orts from many sour es. Some of it ! as obtained in legal bul, #ur hases. 4u h of it ! as stolen. \$un, ies and #i , #o , ets and housebrea, ers from all over /uro#e and)fri a

stole gold +e! ellery and then sold it to their drug dealers and fen es.) #er entage of that gold, stolen in 9ran, furt or \$ohannesburg or ;ondon, found its ! ay through bla , mar, eteers to the Gulf #orts. <hader"s men in Dubai,)bu Dhabi, Oahrain, and every other Gulf a#ital melted the gold into thi , bra elets and hains and broo hes. 9or a small fee, the ontra t ! or, ers ! ore the gold +e! ellery on their return to India, and our men olle ted it from them at the international air#ort in Oombay.

/a h year, the travel agen y in the 9ort area handled travel arrangements for at least five thousand ontra t ! or, ers. 2he gold they arried in ! as re(! or, ed, ! hen ne essayi, at a small ! or, sho# near the agen y and then sold throughout the . haveri ba1aar, or +e! ellery mar, et. 2he #rofit from that one #art of the gold o#eration ! as greater than four million)meri an dollars a year, ta' free, and <hader"s senior managers ! ere all ! ealthy, ! ell(res#e ted men.

I he , ed in ! ith the staff at the 2ransa t 2ravel)gen y. 4ad+id ! as out, but the three managers ! ere busy. 7hen I"d learned ho the gold(smuggling o#eration ! or, ed, I suggested that <hader"s agen y should om#uterise its files, and maintain a database on the ontra t ! or, ers H9%

! ho"d su essfully om#leted one mission for us. <hader had a##roved the suggestion, and the men ! ere busy transferring hard(o#y #a#er files onto the om#uters. I loo, ed over their ! or, , and ! as satisfied ! ith their #rogress. 7e tal, ed for a ! hile, and ! hen 4ad+id didn"t return I ! ent to loo, for him at the small gold ! or, sho# nearby.

4ad+id loo, ed u# ! ith a smile ! hen I entered the fa tory, and

then entered on the sales on the more. Gold chains and bracelets, sorted into various grades, were weighed as individual pieces and weighed again in lots. The amounts were entered into a ledger and crossed (checked) against a separate ledger, sheet for sales in the .haveri bazaar.

On that day, not too hours after Chaderbhai had talked to me of good and evil, I had heard the heaps of gold chains and heavy home-made bracelets being weighed and catalogued, and I felt myself lunging into a dark mood that I couldn't shake off. I was glad that Chaderbhai had directed me to leave Chaddid and to begin work with Abdull Ghani. The golden (yellow) metal that existed so many millions, in India, made me uneasy. I'd enjoyed working with Chaddid and his currencies. I knew that I could enjoy working with Abdull Ghani in the business: after all, the main game for a man on the run. Working with gold in such huge quantities was unsettling. Gold fires the eyes with a different kind and colour of greed. Money's almost always just a means to an end but, for many men, gold is an end in itself, and their love for it is the kind of thing that can give love a bad name.

I left Chaddid for the last time, telling him that Chaderbhai had

other work for me. I didn't volunteer the information that I was set to begin work with Abdull Ghani in the business. Chaddid and Ghani were both members of Chader's mafia organisation. I was sure they knew the substance of every decision affecting me before I knew it myself. We shook hands. He pulled me toward him in a clumsy, stiff (armed) attempt at a hug. He smiled, and I smiled meekly. It was a false smile, but there wasn't any malice in it. Chaddid Rhustem was simply the kind of man who thought that smiling was an act of skill. I thanked him for his attention, but I didn't return the smile.

When I made my last round of the cellars at the .haveri bazaar, there was a quivering, agitated restlessness in me. It was the

random anger that attacked itself to a sense of futility: the
! ide(eyed, fist(len hing an' iety that flares u# often in a
! asted life. I should've been ha##y, or H91
at least ha##ier. I had <hader"s assuran e of safety. I ! as
ma, ing good money. I ! or, ed every day ! ith hoards of gold a metre
high. I ! as about to learn everything I needed to , no! about the
#ass#ort business. I ould buy ! hatever I ! anted. I ! as fit and
healthy and free. I should've been ha##ier.

*a##iness is a myth, <arla on e said. It ! as invented to ma, e us
buy things.)nd as her ! ords ri##led on the stream of my dar,
feelings, as I remembered her fa e and her voi e, I thought that
maybe she ! as right, after all. 2hen I re alled those moments,
earlier that day, ! hen <haderbhai had s#o, en to me as if he ! as
s#ea, ing to his son.)nd there'd been ha##iness in tható I
ouldn't deny it. Out it ! asn't enough: true, and #rofound, and
someho! #ure as that feeling had been, it ! asn't strong enough to
lift my s#irits.

4y training session ! ith)bdullah that day ! as intense. *e
a e#ted my ta iturn mood, and ! e ! or, ed through the strenuous
e' er ise(routine in silen e.)fter a sho! er, he offered to give
me a ride to my a#artment on his motor y le. 7e ruised along
)ugust <ranti 4arg on our ! ay inland from the oast at Orea h
8andy. 7e had no helmets, and the bree1e of hot dry air streaming
through our hair and loose sil, shirts ! as a river of ! ind.
)bdullah"s attention ! as suddenly ta, en by a grou# of men
standing together outside a afe. I guessed them to be Iranian,
as he ! as. *e ! heeled the bi, e around, and #ulled u# about thirty
metres from them.

5Dou stay here ! ith the bi, e,5 he said, , illing the engine and
, i , ing out the side stand. 7e both limbed off. *e never too,
his eyes off the grou#. 5If there is any trouble, you ta, e the
bi, e, and leave.5

*e strolled along the foot#ath to! ard the men, #ulling his long
bla , hair into a #onytail and removing his ! at h as he ! al, ed. I

snatched the reins from the ignition of the bicycle and set out after him. One of the men said, "Allah and recognized him just as he approached. He gave a warning of some kind. The other men turned

immediately. The fight started without a word. They swung wildly, flailing at him, and rushing into one another in their frenzy to land a punch on him. Abdullah stood his ground, covering his head with his fists held tightly to his temples. His elbows rotated his body. When the fury of their initial attack abated, he struck out left and right, connecting with every punch. I ran up and joined him, dragging a man from his back. I tripped the man, forcing him

against the straight edge of my leg until he fell. He tried to twist free of my grip, and dragged me down with him. I landed sideways to his body, with my knee on his chest, and punched him in the groin. He started to get up, and I swung round to hit him again, four or five times, on the knee, and the hinge of his ankle. He rolled over onto his side, and curled his knees into his chest.

I looked up to see Abdullah drive off one of his attackers with a teatuboo, right across that splattered the man's nose in a sudden explosion of blood. I summed up to put my back against Abdullah's, and shaded up in a separate stance. The three men who remained standing backed off, unsure of themselves. When Abdullah made a charge at them, shouting at the top of his voice, they turned and ran. I looked at Abdullah. He shook his head. We let them go.

The Indian crowd that had gathered to watch the fight followed us with their eyes wide open, all eyes fixed on the bicycle. I knew that if I'd fought Indians (from any part of India, and any ethnic, religious, or class divide) (the whole street would've joined in against us. Since the fight was between foreigners, the people were curious and even excited, but they had no desire to get involved. So I rode past them, heading for Solaba, they began to disperse.

For his part, Abdullah never told me about the fight as about, and I never asked him. The one time he did talk of it, years later, he told me that he began to love me on that day. "He loved me, he said, not because I joined the fight, but because I never on asked him about it as about. "He admired that, he said, more than anything else he ever knew about me.

In the 80s, one day near my home, I asked Abdullah to stop. I'd noticed a girl who was walking on the road, like a local, to avoid the roads on the footpath. She looked different, changed somehow, but I recognized the blonde hair, the long, shapely legs, and her smile instantly. It was Lisa Carter. I told Abdullah to pull up just in front of her.

"I see," Lisa said.

"She sighed, lifting her sunglasses to rest them on the top of her head. "It's Gilbert. "What's going on at the embassy?"

"Oh, you know," I laughed. "Crisis here, a rescue there. Double."

"Look, great," Lisa said.

"Her blonde hair was longer and thicker than when I'd last seen her. Her hair was

"Her face was fuller and healthier, but her figure was trim and more athletic. She was wearing a white halter-neck top, a white mini-skirt, and Roman sandals. Her legs and slender arms were tanned to a golden chestnut. She looked beautiful. She smiled as beautiful.

"I stopped being a fool, (and too, the more she snarled, so smiling through a bright, false smile. "What can I tell you? It's either one or the other, and you can't have it both," says. "When you're sober and fit, it's the world that's fucked."

What's the spirit, I replied, laughing until she laughed at me.

Who's your friend?

Abdullah Zaheri, this is ; isa Barber. ; isa, this is) Abdullah.

– i e bike, she hurried.

Would you like to ... ride it? He asked, smiling at all of his white, strong teeth.

She looked at me, and I raised my hands in a gesture that said, You're on your own, kid. I got off the bike and joined her on the road.

This is my stop, I said. ; isa and) Abdullah ! were still staring at one another. Here's a free seat, if you want it.

@, ay, she smiled. ; let's do it.

She hit her shoulder and limbed onto the back of the bike. The two or three men, out of several hundred on the street, who weren't already looking at her, joined in the chorus of stares.) Abdullah shook hands with me, grinning like a schoolboy. *e , i , ed the bike into gear, and roared off into the meandering traffic .

– i e bike, a voice behind me said. It was Gemini George.

– ot real safe, though, those fields, answered another voice, with a strong Canadian accent. It was Sergio George.

They lived on the street, sleeping in doorways and foraging for commissions among the tourists who wanted to buy hard drugs.)nd it showed. They were unshaven, unashed, and uncommitted in appearance. They were also intelligent, honest, and unconditionally loyal to one another.

5 *i, guys. *o! "s it goingE5

5 7ell, son, very ! ell,5 Gemini George ans! ered, the song of
; iver#ool in his a ent, 5 7e"ve got a lient, you , no! , at about
si' o" lo , tonight.5

5 2ou h ! ood,5 S or#io added, his dour fro! n already fo using on
the troubles the evening might bring. H9H

5 Should do all right out of it,5 Gemini said heerily. 5-i e
lient. -i e little earner.5

5 If it all goes o, ay, and nothing goes ! rong,5 S or#io mused
fretfully.

5 4ust be something in the ! ater,5 I muttered, ! at hing the tiny
! hite s#e , of)bdullah"s shirt, or ; isa"s s, irt, disa##ear in
the distan e.

5 *o! "s thatE5 Gemini as, ed.

5 @h, nothing. \$ust, everyone seems to be falling in love lately.5

I ! as thin, ing of >raba, er, &i, ram, and \$ohnny 8igar.)nd I , ne!
the loo, I"d seen in)bdullah"s eyes as he"d ridden off. *e ! as a
long ! ay more than interested.

5 9unny you should mention that((! hat do you ma, e of se' ual
motivation, ; inE5 S or#io as, ed me.

5 8ome againE5

5 In a manner of s#ea, in",5 Gemini innuendoed, ! in, ing inde ently.

5 8"mon, be serious for a minute,5 S or#io s olded. 5 Se' ual

motivation, ; in((! hat do you ma, e of itE5

57hat, e' a tly, do you meanE5

57ell, ! e"re having a debate, you , no! ((5

5) dis ussion,5 Gemini interru#ted. 5-ot a debate. I"m dis ussin"
! ith you, not debatin" you.5

57e"re having this dis ussion, about ! hat it is that motivates
#eo#le.5

5I give you fair ! arnin", ; in,5 Gemini said, sighing mightily.
57e"ve been having this dis ussion for t! o ! ee, s, and S or#io
still ! on"t see reason.5

5)s I said, ! e"re having this dis ussion about ! hat it is that
motivates #eo#le,5 S or#io George #ressed on, his 8anadian a ent
and #rofessorial manner ombining in the do umentary voi e(over

style that most irritated his /nglish friend. 5D"see, 9reud said
! e"re motivated by the drive for se' .)dler disagreed, and said
that it ! as the drive for #o! er. 2hen &i tor 9ran, I, he said se'
and #o! er ! ere im#ortant drives, but ! hen you an"t get either
one((no se' and no #o! er((there"s still something else that
drives us on and , ee#s us goin"((5

5Des, yes, the drive for meaning,5 Gemini added. 57hi h is really
+ust the same thing in different ! ords. 7e have a drive for #o! er
be ause #o! er gives us se' , and ! e have a drive for meaning
be ause that hel#s us to understand se' . It all omes do! n to se'
in the end, no matter ! hat you all it. 2hose other ideas,
they"re +ust the lothes, li, e.)nd ! hen you get
H9?

the lothes off, it"s all about se' , innitE5

5-o, you"re ! rong,5 S or#io ontradi ted him. 57e"re all driven

by a desire to find meaning in life. We have to, no! That it's all about. If it has just seemed or otherwise it'd still be him#an1ees. It's meaning that makes us human beings.

It's seen that makes human beings, Scorpio, Gemini but in his life, indeed learning even harder, but it's been so long, you've probably forgotten that.

They pulled up beside us. The passenger in the back seat waited in a band of shadow for a moment, and then slowly leaned over to the window. It was Alla.

She in, she gasped. I need your help.

She was wearing black, (framed sunglasses, and there was a scarf tied around her head, covering her hair (blonde hair. Her face was pale and drawn and thin.

This ... has a vaguely familiar ring to it, Alla, I replied, not moving toward the cab.

Please. I mean it. Please, get in. I have something to tell you ... something you want to, no! .

I didn't move.

Please, get in. I, no! Here <arla is. I will tell you, if you help me.

I turned and shook hands with the Georges. In the handshake with Scorpio, I passed over an American twenty-dollar bill. I'd taken it from my pocket when I first heard their voices, and I'd been ready to hand over when he started. In their world, indeed, it was enough money (if their little earner client fell through (to make them rich men for the night.

I opened the door and got into the cab. The driver pulled away

into the traffic, he,ing me out often in his rear vision mirror.

I don't, no! Why you're angry with me,5 Alla! hined, removing her sunglasses and stealing glances at me. 5>lease don't be angry, ; in. >lease don't be angry.5

I !asn't angry. 9or the first time in too long, I !asn't angry. _S or#io's _right, I thought: __it's meaning that makes us _human. 2here I !as, ! ith +ust the mention of a name, diving into the ocean of feeling again. I !as looking for a !oman, looking for <arla. I !as involving myself in the !orld, taking risks. I had a reason. I had a =uest.

H9C

)nd then I ,ne! , in the e' ited moment, ! hat it !as that had caused my desolate mood at 4ad+id"s, and #ut so much anger in me that day. I ,ne! ! ith #erfect understanding that the momentary dream((the little boy"s dream that <hader really _! as my father((had #lunged me into that restless, tide(ri# of des#air that fathers and sons too often let their love become.)nd seeing it, realising it, remembering it, I found the strength to lift the darkness from my heart. I looked at Alla. I stared into the blue labyrinth of her eyes and I !ondered, ! ithout anger or sorrow! , if she"d #layed a #art in betraying me, and having me #ut in #rison.

She reached out to #ut a hand on my ,nee. 2he gri# !as strong, but her hand !as shaking. I felt the sent(filled seconds e' #and around us. 7e !ere tra##ed, both of us, held fast, each in our different !ays.)nd on e again, ! e !ere about to set the !eb of our onne tion trembling.

5Relax. I'll help you if I can,5 I said, calmly and firmly. 5-o! , tell me about <arla.5

(((((((((((

H97

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

At midnight's horizon the great milky way! heel of stars rose! set and shivering from the! waves, and the silver yellow! light of a gibbous moon settled on the sea, glistening the tinsel! rested! ell. It! as a! arm, still, and! perfectly! clear night. The deck, of the Goa ferry! as! ro! ded, but I'd managed to stand, e out a! clear! sea a little distance! apart from a large group of young tourists. They! were stoned, most of them, on grass, hash, and a! bid. Dan! e music! thum! ed from the! bla! , , shouting mouths of a! portable hi-fi. Sitting among their! ba! , #a! , s, they! s! ayed and! la! ##ed in time,! alled out to one another over the music! , and laughed, often. They! were ha! ##y, on their! way to Goa. The first! (time tourists! were moving to! ward a dream. The old hands! were returning to the one! #la! e in the! world! here they felt truly free.

Sailing to! ward! <arla, looking out at the stars, listening to the! , ids! ho! d bought! sea! es on the deck, of the ferry, I understood their ho! #eful, innocent! e! itement, and in a small and distant! way I even shared it. Out my! fa! e! as hard. My eyes! were hard.)nd that hardness divided my feelings from theirs as! leanly and inviolably as the metre(! ide! sea! e on the deck, se! #arated me from their tangled, high! (s! irited! #arty.)nd as I sat there, on the! s! aying, gently! #lunging ferry, I thought about Alla: I thought about the fear that had glittered in her sa! ##hire! (blue eyes! when she! d tal! ed to me in the! ba! , of the! ab.

Alla needed money that night, a thousand dollars, and I gave it to her. She needed me to a! com! #any her to the hotel room! here she! d left her! clothes and! #ersonal belongings. We! went there together and, des! #ite her trembling fear, I! e! olled her things and! #aid the bill! ithout in! ident. She! was in trouble, through some business deal involving! 4odena and! 4auri! io. The deal, li, e too many of! 4auri! io's! =ui! , s! ams, had soured. The men! ho! d lost their money! weren! t! content, as others had been, to H98

and she let the matter ride. They wanted their money, and they wanted someone to bleed, and not necessarily in that order.

She didn't tell me how they were. She didn't tell me why they considered her a target, or what they planned to do with her if they caught her. I didn't ask. I should've asked her, of course. It would've saved me a lot of trouble. In the long run, it might've saved a life or two. Out I wasn't really interested in Alla. I wanted to know about Carla.

She's in Goa, Alla said, when he'd kicked her out of her hotel.

Where in Goa?

I don't know. One of the beaches.

There's a lot of beaches in Goa, Alla.

I know, I know, she hined, flinching at my irritated tone.

Dou said you know where she is.

I do. She's in Goa. I know she's in Goa. She wrote to me, from 4a#usa. I got her last letter only yesterday. She's somewhere near 4a#usa.

I relaxed a little. We loaded her belongings into the waiting cab, and I gave the driver directions to Abdullah's apartment in Orea h 8andy. I checked the streets around us carefully, and I was fairly sure that she weren't being watched. When the cab moved off I sat back, in silence for a while, watching the dark streets run in the shadows.

Why did she leave?

I don't, no! .5

She must've said something to you. She's a talented girl.5

Alla laughed.

She didn't say to me anything about leaving. If you want to, no!
I think, I am in the opinion that she left because of you.5

My love for Carla ringed at the thought. My vanity reined
itself in the flattery. I smothered the conflict in a harsher
tone.

There must be more to it. Was she afraid of something?5

Alla laughed again.

Carla's not afraid of anything.5

Everyone's afraid of something.5

What are you afraid of, ; in?5

I turned, slowly, to stare at her, searching in the faint light
for some hint of spite, some hidden meaning or allusion in the
question.

What happened on the night you were supposed to meet me at
; he old's? I asked her. H99

I couldn't make it that night. I was prevented from coming
there. Rodena, him and Aurilio, they changed their plans at the
last minute, and they stopped me.5

I seem to recall that you wanted me there because you didn't
trust them.5

That's true. Well, I trust Godena, you, no, , , kind of, but he is not strong against Aurilio. *e can't stay in his own mind, when Aurilio tells him what to do.

That still doesn't explain it, I grumbled.

I, no, she sighed, clearly upset. I'm trying to explain it. Aurilio, he had a deal planned (well, actually, he had a rife planned (and I was as the one in the middle. Aurilio was using me because the men he was planning to steal money from, they liked me, and they, kind of trusted me, you, no! ho! it is.

Deah, I, no! ho! it is.

@h, please, ; in, it wasn't my fault that I wasn't there that

night. They wanted me to meet the customers, alone. I was afraid of those men, because I, never! what Aurilio was planning to do, and that's why I asked you to be with me, as my friend. Then, they changed their plans and we had the meeting all together, in another place, and I couldn't get a way to let you, no! about it. I tried to find you the next day, to explain to you and make an apology, but ... you were gone. I looked everywhere, I promise you I did. I was very sorry that I didn't go there to meet you at ;eolds, like I promised you that night.

When did you find out that I was in jail?

After you got out. I saw Didier, and he told me that you looked terrible. That was the first thing that I ... just a moment ... do you ... do you think, I had something to do with you going in the prison? Is that what you think,?

I held the stare for a few seconds before replying.

Did you?

5@h, fu , B @h, GodB5 she moaned, reasing her lovely fa e in miserable distress. She ro , ed her head from side to side s! iftly, as if trying to #revent a thought or feeling from ta, ing root. 5Sto# the arB DriverB Oand , aroB)bi, abiB Oand , aroB5 - o! , no! B Sto#B

2he ab driver #ulled over to the #avement beside a ro! of shuttered sho#s. 2he street ! as deserted. *e s! it hed off the ab, and ! at hed us in his rear(vision mirror. ?%%

Alla tried to ! restle o#en the door. She ! as rying. In her agitation, she +ammed the door handle, and the door ! ouldn't o#en.

52a, e it easy,5 I said, #ri1ing her hands gently from the handle and holding them in my o! n. 5It's o, ay. 2a, e it easy.5

5- othing's o, ay,5 she sobbed. 5I don't , no! ho! ! e got in this mess. 4odena, he's not good at business. 2hey messed everything u#, him and 4auri1io. 2hey ! ere heating a lot of #eo#le, you , no! , and they +ust ! ere al! ays getting a! ay ! ith it. Out not ! ith these guys. 2hey're different. I'm so s ared. I don't , no! ! hat to do. 2hey're going to , ill us.)ll of us.)nd you thin, I #ut the #oli e on youE 9or ! hat reason, ; inE Do you thin, I am su h a #ersonE)m I so bad that you an thin, su h a thing about meE 7hat do you thin, I amE5

I rea hed a ross to o#en the door. She ste##ed out, and leaned against the side of the ar. I got out and +oined her. She ! as trembling and sobbing. I held her in my arms until she ried it out.

5It's o, ay, Alla. I don't thin, you had anything to do ! ith it. I

didn't ever thin, you did((not really((not even ! hen you ! eren't there, at ; eo#old's that night.)s, ing you ... it ! as +ust a ! ay of losing a door on it. It's +ust something I had to as, . Do you

understandE5

She loo, ed u# into my fa e. Streetlights ar ed in her large, blue eyes. *er mouth ! as sla , ! ith e' haustion and fear, but her eyes ! ere dra! n to a distant, ineradi able ho#e.

5Dou really love her, don't youE5

5Des.5

5hat's good,5 she said dreamily, ! istfully, loo, ing a! ay. 5; ove is a good thing.)nd <arla((she needs love, very mu h. 4odena loves me too, you , no! . *e really and truly loves me ...5

She drifted in that reverie for a fe! moments and then sna##ed her head ba , to stare at me. *er hands gri##ed my arms as I held her.

5Dou'll find her. Start at 4a#usa, and you'll find her. She ! ill stay in Goa for some little time yet. She told me so, in her letter. She is some! here e' a tly on the bea h. In her letter she told me she an see the o ean from her front door. Go there, ; in, and find her. ; oo, for her, and find her. 2here is only love, you , no! , in the ! hole ! orld. 2here is only love ...5

)nd they remained ! ith me, Alla's tears, s! arming ! ith light, until they dissolved in the glittering, moonlit sea off the ferry.)nd her ! ords, ?%1

there is only love, #assed li, e #rayer(bead ! ishes on a thread of #ossibility as the musi and laughter rashed around me.

7hen the light on that long night be ame the da! n, and the ferry do , ed at the Goan a#ital of >an+im, I ! as the first to board a bus to 4a#usa. 2he fifteen(, ilometre +ourney from >an+im to 4a#usa, #ronoun ed as 4u##sa, ! ound through lush, leafy groves, #ast mansions built to the styles and tastes of four hundred years of >ortuguese olonial rule. 4a#usa ! as a trans#ortation and ommuni ation entre for the northern region of Goa. I

arrived on a Friday, market day, and the morning roads were already busy with business and bargains. I made my way to the taxi and motorcycle stands. After a bout of bartering that involved an august assembly of deities from at least three religions, and in oratorated spirit, formal references to the sisters of our respective friends and acquaintances, a dealer agreed to hire out an Indian Oulet motorcycle for a reasonable rental. I paid a bond and a fee, "s rent in advance, i, (started the bike, and set off through the market's maul toward the beaches.

The Indian of India Oulet was a single-cylinder, four-stroke motorcycle, constructed to the plans of the original

1950s" model of the British Royal Indian. Renowned for its idiosyncratic handling as much as for its reliability and durability, the Oulet was a bike that demanded a relationship with its rider. That relationship involved tolerance, patience, and understanding on the part of the rider. In exchange, the Oulet provided the joy of soaring, celestial, wind-leaving pleasure that birds must, undoubtedly, not infrequently near death experience.

I spent the day cruising the beaches, from Balangute to Shahara. I checked every hotel and guesthouse, scrutinizing the arid ground with a shoer of small but tempting bribes. I found local money hangers, drug dealers, tour guides, thieves, and gigolos at each of the beaches. Most of them had seen foreign girls who answered her description, but none could be sure that he'd seen her. I stopped for tea or coffee or a snack, at the main beach restaurants, asking waiters and managers. They were all helpful, or tried to be helpful, because I spoke to them in Marathi and Hindi. - one of them had seen her, however, and when the fee leads I did get came to nothing, the first day of my search ended in disappointment.

The owner of the Seashore Restaurant in Anuna, a heavy-set young

A Maharashtrian named Dashrant, as the last local I saw, as the sun

began to set. We prepared a hearty meal of cabbage leaves stuffed with potatoes, green beans with ginger, aubergines with sour green chutney, and risotto (fried onion). When the meal was ready, he brought his portion late to my table, and sat with me to eat it. We insisted that we finish the meal with a long glass of the local brew. I ordered onion fenugreek, and followed that with an equally long glass of asheeni fenugreek. Refusing to accept payment for the meal from a girl who saw his native Marathi, Dashrant locked the restaurant and left with me, as my guide, on the back of my motorcycle. We saw my quest to find a girl as very romantic ((very Indian, he said ((and he wanted me to stay nearby, as his guest.

Here are a few pretty foreign girls in the area, he told me. One of them, if the Ohagan kills it, might be your lost love. Do sleep first, and search tomorrow ((with a clear mind, isn't it?

Adding, with our legs outstretched from the bicycle, along a soft, sandy avenue between tall palms, I followed his directions to a small house. The square structure was made from bamboo, onion poles, and palm leaves. It stood within sight of his restaurant, and with a wide view of the dark sea. I entered to find a single room, which he lit with candles and lamps. The floor was sand. There was a table and two chairs, a bed with a bare rubber mattress, and a metal rack for hanging clothes. A large mat, as filled with clean water. We announced, with pride, that the water had been drawn that day from a local well. There was a bottle of onion fenugreek on the table, with two glasses. Assuring me that the bicycle and I would be safe there, because it was, not by all in

the area to be his house, Dashrant handed me the key to the door's chain and handle, and told me to stay until I found my girl. Winking a smile at me, he left. I heard him singing as he walked back, between the slender palms to his restaurant.

I pulled the bed in against the hut, and tied a length of cord from it to the leg of the bed, covering it with sand. I hoped that if someone tried to steal the bed, the movement would alarm me. Exhausted and disappointed, I fell onto the bed and was asleep in seconds. It was a nourishing, dreamless sleep, but I woke after four hours, and I was too alert, too restless, to find sleep again. I pulled my boots on, too, and an of after, and visited the toilet at the back of the hut. In many toilets in Goa, it was nothing more than a smooth, steep slope behind the squatting eyehole. Waste matter rolled down the slope to a narrow lane. Wild, hairy, black, ?%G

Goan pigs roamed the lanes, eating the waste. I walked back to the house to wash my hands, I saw a herd of the black, sline trotting along the lane. It was an efficient and environmentally benign method of waste disposal, but the sight of those pigs, feasting, was an eloquent argument in favor of vegetarianism.

I walked down to the beach, only fifty paces from Dashrath's hut, and sat on the dunes to smoke a cigarette. It was close to midnight, and the beach was deserted. The moon, almost full, was pinned like a medal to the chest of the sky. A medal for what I thought. Wounded in a nation, maybe. A purple heart. Moonlight rushed with every rolling wave to the shore, as if the light itself was pulling the waves, as if the great net of silver light cast by the moon had gathered up the hole of the sea, and was hauling it to the shore, wave by wave.

A woman approached me, carrying a basket on her head. Her heels rolled and slipped in time to the running waves that lapped at her feet. She turned from the sea toward me and dropped the basket at my feet, squatting to look into my eyes. She was a watermelon seller, about thirty-five years old, and nearly familiar with tourists and their ways. Reaching for a mouthful of betel nut, she gestured with an open palm toward the half watermelon that remained in her large basket. It was very late for her to be on the beach. I guessed that she'd been baby-sitting, or nursing a relative, and was returning home. When she saw me sitting alone, she'd hoped for one last sale for the

night.

I told her, in 4arathi, that I ! ould be glad to buy a sli e of melon. She rea ted ! ith ha##y sur#rise and, ! hen the routine =uestions about ! here and ho! I"d learned 4arathi ! ere resolved, she ut me a generous sli e. I ate the deli ious s! eet , alinga, s#itting the seeds onto the sand. She ! at hed me eat, and tried to resist ! hen I for ed a note rather than a oin into her bas, et.)s she rose, lifting the bas, et to her head, I began to sing an old, sad, and mu h(loved song from a *indi movie.

De doonia, ye mehfil
4ere ham, , i nahi ...

)ll the ! orld, all its #eo#le
4ean nothing to me ...
?%H

She yel#ed in a##re iation, and dan ed a fe! sli , moves before ! al, ing a! ay slo! ly along the bea h.

52his is ! hy I li, e you, you , no! ,5 <arla said, sitting do! n beside me in one =ui , , gra eful movement. 2he sound of her voi e and the sight of her fa e #ulled all the air from my lungs, and set my heart thum#ing. So mu h had ha##ened sin e the last time I"d seen her, the first time ! e"d made love, that a fevered s=uall of emotion stung my eyes. If I"d been a different man, a better man, I ! ould've ried.)nd ! ho , no! s, it might've made the differen e.

5l thought you didn't believe in love,5 I ans! ered, straining against my feelings, and determined not to let her , no! the effe t that she had on me, the #o! er she had over me.

57hat do you mean, _loveE5

5I ... I thought that's ! hat you ! ere tal, ing about.5

5- o, I said that's ! hy I li, e you,5 she said, laughing and
loo, ing u# at the moon. 5Out I do believe in love. /everyone
believes in love.5

5I'm not so sure. I thin, a lot of #eo#le have sto##ed believing
in love.5

5>eo#le haven't sto##ed believing in love. 2hey haven't sto##ed
! anting to be in love. 2hey +ust don't believe in a ha##y ending
anymore. 2hey still believe in love, and falling in love, but
they , no! no! that ... they , no! that roman es almost never end
as ! ell as they begin.5

5I thought you hated love. Isn't that ! hat you said, at the
&illage in the S, yE5

5I do hate love, +ust li, e I hate hate. Out that doesn't mean I
don't believe in them.5

52here's no(one in the ! orld li, e you, <arla,5 I said softly,
smiling at her #rofile as she stared at the night and the sea.
She didn't re#ly. 5So ... ! hy do youE5

57hy do I ! hatE5

57hy do you li, e me((you , no! , ! hat you said before.5

5@h, that,5 she smiled, fa ing me, and raising one eyebro! as her
eyes met mine. 5Oe ause I , ne! you'd find me. I , ne! I didn't
have to send you any message, or let you , no! ! here I ! as. I , ne!
you'd find me. I , ne! you'd ome. I don't , no! ho! I , ne! , but I
+ust , ne! .)nd then, ! hen I sa! you singing to that ! oman on the
bea h((you're a very ra1y guy, ;in. I love that. I thin, that's
! here your goodness omes from((your ra1iness.5 ?%?

54y goodnessE5 I as, ed, genuinely sur#rised.

5Des. 2here"s a lot of goodness in you, ; in. It"s very ... it"s a very hard thing to resist, real goodness, in a tough man. I didn"t tell you, did I, ! hen ! e ! or, ed together, in the slum((I ! as so #roud of you. I , ne! you must"ve been s ared, and very ! orried, but you only smiled for me, and you ! ere all! ays there, every time I ! o, e u#, every time I ! ent to slee#. I admire ! hat you did there, as mu h as anything I"ve ever

I didn't, no, that night. I couldn't guess.

Did you think, I ... did you think, I must have hated you?

She paused, frowning pensively.

At first, I did think, that. Something like that. And I think, I hated you. When I started asking around. When I found out you

didn't even come back, to the slum line, and that nobody saw you, I thought you must've been ... doing something ... important.

Important, I laughed. It wasn't a good laugh. It was bitter, and angry. I tried to push those feelings away. I'm sorry, Carla. I couldn't get a message out. I couldn't let you, no. I was out of my mind with worry that you ... that ... you'd hate me, for leaving you, like that.

When I heard about it (that you were in the jail (it, kind of broke my heart. It was a very bad time for me. This ... business, I was doing ... it was starting to go wrong. It was so wrong, so bad, so in, that I think, I'll never come back, from it. And then, I heard about you. And I was so ... well ... everything changed, must like that. Everything.

I couldn't understand what she'd said. I was sure it was important, and I wanted to ask her more, but the lone figure was only a few metres away, and he addressed us with slow, dignified steps. The moment was lost.

* He was indeed a holy man. Tall, lean, and tanned to a dark, earthy brown, he wore a loin cloth and was adorned with dozens of necklaces, amulets, and decorative braids. His hair was matted in dreadlocks that reached to his waist. Holding the long staff

against his shoulder, he clasped his hands together in a greeting and a blessing. He greeted him in turn, and invited him to sit with us.

"Do you have any harras?" he asked, in Hindi. "I would like to smoke on this beautiful night."

I fished a lump of harras from my pouch, and tossed it to him, with a filter cigarette.

"The Ohag! man's blessing be upon your kindness," he intoned.

"And a blessing of the Ohag! man upon you also," Arla replied in her native Hindi. "You are very happy to see a devotee of the Lord Shiva at this full moon."

"He grinned, showing gaps in his teeth, and set to preparing a hillum. When the layman was ready, he raised his palms to gain our attention.

"-oh!, before I smoke, I want to give you a gift in return," he said. "Do you understand?"

"Des, I understand," I said, smiling to match the light in his eyes.

"Good. I give you both a blessing. My blessing will always stay

with you. I give you this blessing in this way ..."

"He raised his arms above his head, and then bent over on his knees, touching his forehead to the sand, with his arms outstretched. Repeating the gesture several times while mumbling indistinct words.

Eventually, he sat back on his feet, smiled the gap-toothed smile

at us, and nodded for me to light the #i#e. 7e smo, ed in silen e.
7hen the #i#e ! as finished, I refused to a e#t the return of the
lum# of harras.) , no! ledging the gift ! ith a solemn bo! of his
head, the holy man stood to leave.)s ! e loo, ed u# at him, he
slo! ly raised his staff to #oint ?%7
it at the almost full moon.)t on e, ! e sa! and understood ! hat
he meant((the #attern on the surfa e of the moon, that in some
ultures is alled the rabbit, suddenly loo, ed to both of us li, e
a , neeling figure raising his arms in #rayer. 8hu , ling ha##ily,
the sadhu ! al, ed a! ay along the gentle dunes.

5I love you, <arla,5 I said ! hen ! e ! ere alone again. 5I loved
you the first se ond I sa! you. I thin, I"ve loved you for as
long as there"s been love in the ! orld. I love your voi e. I love
your fa e. I love your hands. I love everything you do, and I
love the ! ay you do everything. It feels li, e magi ! hen you
tou h me. I love the ! ay your mind ! or, s, and the things you say.
)nd even though it"s all true, all that, I don"t really
understand it, and I an"t e' #lain it((to you or to myself. I
+ust love you. I +ust love you ! ith all my heart. Dou do ! hat God
should do: you give me a reason to live. Dou give me a reason to
love the ! orld.5

She , issed me, and our bodies settled together on the yielding
sand. She las#ed her hands in mine, and ! ith our arms
outstret hed above our heads ! e made love ! hile the #raying moon
sedu ed the sea, luring the ! aves to rash and rumble on the
harmed, unyielding shore.

)nd for a ! ee, , then, ! e #layed at being tourists in Goa. 7e
visited all the bea hes on the oast of the)rabian Sea, from
8ha#ora to 8a#e Rama. 7e sle#t for t! o nights on the ! hite gold
! onder of 8olva Oea h. 7e ins#e ted all the hur hes in the @ld
Goa settlement. 2he 9estival of St. 9ran is Lavier, held on the
anniversary of the saint"s death, every year, bound us in immense
ro! ds of ha##y, hysteri al #ilgrims. 2he streets ! ere thronged
! ith #eo#le in their Sunday(best lothes. 4er hants and street(
stall o#erators ame from all over the territory. >ro essionions of

the blind, the lame, and the afflicted, hoping for a miracle, rambled toward the basilica of the saint. Lavier, a Spanish monk, was one of the seven original Jesuits in the order founded by his friend Ignatius Loyola. Lavier died in 1557. He was just forty-six years old, but his successful evangelizing missions to India, and what was then called the East, established his enduring legend. After numerous burials and disinterments, the

much-pilgrimed body of St. Francis was finally installed in the Basilica of Our Jesus, in Goa, in the early seventeenth century. Still remarkably (some would say miraculously) well-preserved, the body was exposed to public view once in every ten years. While seemingly immune to decay, the saint's body had suffered various amputations and subtractions over the centuries. A Portuguese woman had bitten off one of the saint's toes, in the sixteenth century, in the hope of curing it as a relic. Parts of the right hand had been sent to religious centres, as had portions of the holy intestines. Charles and I offered outrageously extravagant bribes to the caretakers of the basilica, laughing all the while, but they steadfastly refused to allow us access to the venerable corpse.

Why did you do the robberies? She asked me on one of those stormy nights of satin, silk and rolling, mellisonant surf.

I told you. My marriage broke up, and I lost my daughter. I drank, used drugs, and got into drugs. When I did the robberies to feed my heroin habit.

So, I mean why robberies? Why not something else?

It was a good question, and one that no one in the justice system (police, lawyers, judge, psychiatrist, or prison governors) had ever asked me.

I've thought about it. I've thought about it a lot. It sounds weird, I know, but I think I had a lot to do with it. Very heroic

It ! as my turn to laugh.

5Deah. 4ost #eo#le outside)ustralia don't , no! it, but ! e ! ere in the ! ar, all the ! ay ! ith the AS).)ustralian soldiers died beside)meri an soldiers in &ietnam, and)ustralian boys ! ere drafted to fight. Some of us refused to go, +ust li, e the)meri an draft resisters.) lot of guys ! ent to +ail be ause they ! ouldn't fight. I didn't go to +ail. I made bombs, and organised marches, and fought the o#s at the barri ades, until the government hanged and they #ulled us out of the ! ar.5

5)re you still oneE5

5Still one ! hatE5

5)re you still an anar histE5

It ! as a hard =uestion to ans! er, be ause it for ed me to om#are the man I'd on e been ! ith the man I'd allo! ed myself to be ome.

5)nar hists ...5 I began and then faltered. 5-o #oliti al #hiloso#hy I ever heard of loves the human ra e as mu h as anar hism. /very other ! ay of loo,ing at the ! orld says that #eo#le have to be ontrolled, and ordered around, and governed. @nly the anar hists trust human beings enough to let them ! or, it out for themselves.)nd I used to be that o#timisti on e. I used to believe and thin, li, e that. Out I don't, any more. So, no((I guess I'm not an anar hist no! .5

5)nd that hero((! hen you did the armed robberies, you identified ! ith himE5

57ith <elly, -ed <elly, yeah. I thin, I did. *e had a gang of young guys((his younger brother, and his t! o best friends((and they did these hold(u#s, robbing #eo#le. 2he o#s sent a hit s=uad after him, but he beat them, and a ou#le of o#s got , illed.5

57hat ha##ened to himE5

52hey caught him. 2here ! as a shoot(out. 2he government de lared
! ar on him. 2hey sent a trainload of o#s after him, and they

surrounded his gang, at a hotel in the bush.5

5) hotel, in a bushE5

52he bush((it"s ! hat ! e all the ountryside, in)ustralia.

)ny! ay, ?1%

-ed and his guys ! ere surrounded by this army of o#s. *is best
friend ! as shot in the throat, and , illed. *is , id brother, and
another , id named Steve *art, shot ea h other ! ith their last
bullets rather than let themselves be a#tured. 2hey ! ere
nineteen years old. -ed had this armour made from steel((a helmet
and a hest #late. *e ame at them, the army of o#s, ! ith both
guns bla1ing. *e frightened the shit out of them, at first, and
they ran a! ay. Out their offi ers drove them ba , to the fight.
2hey shot -ed"s legs out from under him.)fter a #honey trial,
! ith false statements from ! itnesses, -ed <elly ! as senten ed to
death.5

5Did they do itE5

5Deah. *is last ! ords ! ere, Su h is life. 2hat ! as the last thing
he said. 2hey hanged him, and then ut off his head, and used it
as a #a#er! eight. Oefore he died, he told the +udge ! ho"d
senten ed him that they"d meet, very soon, in a higher ourt. 2he
+udge died not long after.5

She ! as ! at hing the story in my fa e as I told it. I rea hed out
for a handful of sand, and let it run through my fingers. 2! o
large bats #assed over our heads. 2hey ! ere lose enough for us
to hear the dry(leaf rustle of their ! ings.

I loved the -ed <elly story ! hen I ! as a , id. I ! as n't the only one.)rtists and ! riters and musi ians and a tors have all ! or, ed on the story, in one ! ay or another. *e #ut himself inside us, in the)ustralian #sy he. *e"s the nearest thing ! e"ve got to 8he Guevara, or /miliano . a#ata. 7hen my brain got s rambled on heroin, I thin, I started to dro! n in a fantasy of his life and mine. Out it ! as a messed(u# version of the story. *e ! as a thief ! ho be ame a revolutionary. I ! as a revolutionary ! ho be ame a thief. /very time I did a robbery((and I did a lot of them((I ! as sure the o#s ! ould be there, and I"d be , illed. I ! as ho#ing it ! ould ha##en. I #layed it out in my mind. I ould see them alling me to sto#, and I"d rea h for a gun, and they"d shoot me dead. I ! as ho#ing the o#s ! ould shoot me do! n in the street. I ! anted to die that ! ay ...5

She rea hed out to #ut an arm around my shoulders. 7ith her free hand, she held my hin, and turned my head to fa e her smile.

57hat are the ! omen li, e, in)ustraliaE5 she as, ed, running her hand through my short, blonde hair.

I laughed, and she #un hed me in the ribs.

5I mean itB 2ell me ! hat they"re li, e.5

57ell, they"re beautiful,5 I said, loo, ing at _her beautiful fa e. 52here"s a ?11 lot of beautiful ! omen in)ustralia.)nd they li, e to tal, , and they li, e to #arty((they"re #retty ! ild.)nd they"re very dire t. 2hey hate bullshit. 2here"s nothing li, e an)ustralian ! oman for ta, ing the #iss out of you.5

52a, ing your #issE5

52a, ing the #iss,5 I laughed. 5; etting the air out of your hest, you , no! , ridi uling you, sto##ing you from getting too many big

ideas about yourself. They're great at it. And if they still, a
#in in you, to let a bit of hot air out, you can be #retty
ertain you had it coming.5

She lay back, on the sand, with her hands clasped behind her head.

I'm thin, Australians are very frail,5 she said. And I could live
very much to go there.5

And it should've been as happy, it should've been as easy, it
should've been as good for ever as it is as in those Goan days and
nights of love. We should've built a life from the stars and the
sea and the sand. And I should've listened to her (she told me
almost nothing, but she did give me clues, and I, no! no! that
she put signs in her words and expressions that were as clear as
the constellations over our heads. But I didn't listen. It's a
fact of being in love that we often pay no attention whatsoever
to the substance of what a lover says, while being into' invited to
the stasis by the way it's said. I was in love with her eyes, but I
didn't read them. I loved her voice, but I didn't really hear the
fear and the anguish in it.

And when the last night came, and went, and I looked at dawn to
re#are for the tri# back, to Oombay, I found her standing at the
doorway, staring at the great shimmering pearl of the sea.

Don't go back,5 she said as I put my hands on her shoulders and
kissed her neck.

That I laughed.

Don't go back, to Oombay.5

Why not?5

I don't want you to.5

That's that supposed to mean?5

5\$ust ! hat I said((I don't ! ant you to go.5

I laughed, be ause I thought it had to be a +o, e.

5@, ay,5 I said, smiling and ! aiting for the #un h line. 5So, ! hy don't you ! ant me to goE5

5Do I have to have a reasonE5 she demanded.

57ell ... _yeah.5 ?1F

5It +ust so ha##ens, I do have reasons. Out I'm not going to tell you.5

5Dou're notE5

5- o. I don't thin, I should have to. If I tell you I've got reasons, it should be enough((if you love me, li, e you say you do.5

*er manner ! as so vehement, and the stand she ! as ta, ing so infle' ible and une' #e ted, that I ! as too sur#rised to be angry.

5@, ay, o, ay,5 I said reasonably, 5let"s try this again. I have to go ba , to Oombay. So, ! hy don't you ome ! ith me, and then ! e"ll be together, for ever and ever, amen.5

5I ! on't go ba , ,5 she said flatly.

57hy the hell notE5

5I an't ... I +ust don't ! ant to, and I don't ! ant you to, either.5

57ell, I don't see the #roblem. I an do ! hat I have to do in

Oombay, and you can't wait here. I'll come back, when it's all done.

I don't want you to go, she repeated in that same monotone.

Come on, Carla. I have to go back.

No, you don't.

Your smile curled into a frown.

Yes, I do. I promised Alla I'd be back in ten days. She's still in trouble. Don't do that.

Alla ran too, after herself, she hissed, still refusing to turn and look at me.

Are you jealous of Alla? I asked, grinning, as I reached out to stroke her hair.

Oh, don't be stupid! she snapped. She turned, and there was

fury in her eyes. I lied, Alla, but I'm telling you she ran away, she's afraid of herself.

That's not easy. What's the matter? Don't tell me! I'm going back. We've talked about this. I'm getting into the escort business. Don't tell her! It's important that is for me.

I'll get you an escort. I'll get you five escorts!

Your stubbornness began to rouse itself.

I don't want you to get me an escort. I want to learn how to make them and change them myself. I want to learn it all (everything I can. They're going to teach me how to fix escorts, and forge them. If I learn that, I'll be free.) and I want to be

free, <arla. 9ree. 2hat"s ! hat I ! ant.5

57hy should you be any differentE5 she demanded.

57hat do you meanE5 ?1G

5-obody gets ! hat they ! ant,5 she said, 5-obody does. -obody.5

*er fury dimmed into something ! orse, something I"d never seen in her: a resigned and defeated sorro! . I , ne! it ! as a sin to #ut su h a feeling in su h a ! oman, in any ! oman.)nd I , ne! , ! at hing her little smile fade and die, that sooner or later I ! ould #ay for it.

I s#o, e to her softly, slo! ly, trying to ! in her agreement.

5I sent Alla to my friend)bdullah"s. *e"s loo, ing after her. I an"t +ust leave her there. I have to go ba , .5

5I ! on"t be here, ! hen you loo, for me ne' t time,5 she said, turning to lean against the door! ay on e more.

57hat"s that su##osed to meanE5

5\$ust ! hat I said.5

5Is that some , ind of threatE Is that an ultimatumE5

5Dou an all it ! hat you li, e,5 she ans! ered dully, as if ! a, ing from a dream. 5It"s +ust a fa t. If you go ba , to Oombay, I'll give u# on you. I ! on"t go ! ith you, and I ! on"t ! ait for you. Stay ! ith me no! , here, or go ba , alone. 2he hoi e is yours. Out if you go ba , , it ! ill finish us.5

I stared at her, be! ildered and angry and in love.

5Dou have to give me more than that,5 I said, more softly.

5Dou've gotta tell me ! hy. Dou've gotta tal, to me, <arla. Dou

an't just give me an ultimatum, without any reason, and expect

me to go along with it. There's a difference between a choice and an ultimatum: a choice means that you, no! That's going on, and why, before you decide. I'm not the kind of man you can give an ultimatum to. If I say, I wouldn't have escaped from jail. Don't tell me what to do, Carla. Don't order me to do something, without an explanation. I'm not that kind of man. You've gotta tell me what's going on.

I said.

I sighed, and slowly, but my teeth clenched.

I don't think, I'm ... doing a very good job ... of explaining this. The fact is, there isn't a lot that I resist about myself. Out the little bit that I've still got left (it's all I've got.) A man has to resist himself, Carla, before he can resist anyone else. If I just give in, and do whatever you want me to do, without any kind of reason, I wouldn't resist myself. And if you tell the truth, you wouldn't resist me, either. So, I'm asking you again. What's this all about?

I ... said.

Do you mean, you said.

I mean, I said, she said softly, and then she looked straight into my eyes. And I said. What's just horrible is. You told me, just a little while ago, that you would do anything for me. I want you to stay here. I don't want you to go back to Bombay. If you do go back, it's all over between us.

What kind of man would I be, I asked, trying to smile, if I went along with that?

I guess that's your answer, and you've made your choice, she

sighed, pushing past me to fall, out of the hut.

I grabbed my bag and strapped it to the bicycle. Then all was ready, I went down to the sea. She rose from the waves and fell to land around me slowly, dragging her feet through the shifting sand. The singlet and lungi hung to her body. Her black hair gleamed sleek, and fell under the soaring sun. The most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

"I love you," I said, as she came into my arms and kissed. I pressed her forehead against her lips, her face, her eyes. I held her close to me. "I love you. It'll be okay. Don't see. I'll be back soon."

"No," she answered suddenly, her body not stiff, but utterly still, the life and the love drained out of it. "It won't be all right. It won't be okay. It's over." And I won't be here, after today.

I looked into her eyes, and felt my own body harden, hollowed out by grief. My hands fell from her shoulders. I turned, and fell back to the bicycle. Riding to the last little cliff that gave a view of the beach, our beach, I stopped the bicycle and shielded my eyes to look for her. Out she was gone. There was nothing but the waves breaking like the curved spines of playful orioles, and the treeless, empty, tousled sheets of sand.

((((((((((((

?1?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

) smiling servant opened the door and ushered me into the room, gesturing for me to be silent. *e needn't have bothered. The music was so loud in the room that I couldn't have been heard, even if I'd shouted. Raising his hand as if it were a saucer, and pretending to sip from it, he mimed an offer of chai. I nodded. *e closed the door behind him quietly, leaving me alone with Abdur Ghani. The short figure stood in the broad curve of a high bay window, looking out at a wide view of roof-garden balconies with green and yellow saris hung out to dry, and rust-red herringbone rooftops.

The room was huge. Ornate ceiling rosettes surrounded this, gold suspension chains for three elaborate chandeliers on the distant ceiling. At the end of the room near the main door, there was a long dining table with twelve high-backed mahogany chairs. A mahogany armoire ran the length of the table against one wall, and was topped by an immense, rose-glass mirror. Beside the armoire, there was a floor-to-ceiling bookcase running the further length of the wall. On the opposite long wall of the room, four tall windows looked upon the uppermost branches and cool, shading leaves of plane trees lining the street below. The centre of the room, between the walls of bookcase and the tall windows, was set up as an office. A tea table, (and leather chair, facing the main door, served a broad, baroque desk. The far end of the room was decorated for entertaining, with leather Chesterfields and deep arm chairs. The enormous bay window in the end wall, behind the bookcases, dominated the room with arches of brilliant sunlight. Green doors set into the tall bay window opened onto a wide balcony, giving the view of Solaba's inner-city rooftops, gardens, clotheslines, and neglected garages.

Abdur Ghani stood there, listening to the music and singing that thundered from an extensive sound system built into the walls of bookcase. The voices and the music were familiar, and a few moments of concentration brought them back to me. They were the Olinda

Singers, the same men I'd heard as <haderbhai's guest, on the first night that I met him. The song wasn't one I recalled from that concert, but I listened, at once, by its passion and power. As the thrilling, heart-rending chorus of voices finished, I stood in a throbbing silence that seemed to resist

the noises of the households within the building and of the street below us.

Do you, no? he asked, without turning around.

Des. They're the Olind Singers, I think.

Indeed, they are, he said in the mix of Indian lilt and American reader's tone that I'd come to enjoy. I love their music, more than anything I have ever heard, from any culture. Out in the heart of my love for it, I have to say that I am afraid. Every time I hear them (and I play them every day, when I am at home here) I have the feeling that I am hearing the sound of my own re-union.

He still hadn't turned to face me, and I remained standing near the centre of the long room.

That ... that must be unsettling.

Unsettling ... he said softly. Des. Des, it is unsettling. Tell me, then, do you think that one great act of genius allows us to forgive the hundred flaws and failures that bring it into being?

It's ... hard to say. I'm not entirely sure what you mean, but I guess it depends on how many people benefit by it, and how many people get hurt.

He turned to face me, and I saw that he was trying. Years rolled away, easily, and continuously from his large eyes, and

She killed a rooster the #lum# hee, s to the belly of his long sil,
shirt. *is voice, ho! ever, ! as calm and composed.

5Did you , no! that our 4ad+id ! as , illed last nightE5

5- o,5 I fro! ned, sho , ed by the ne! s. 5<illedE5

5Des. 4urdered. Slaughtered li, e some beast, in his o! n house.
*is body ! as torn to #ie es, and the #ie es ! ere found in many
different rooms of the house. 2he name Sa#na ! as daubed on the
! alls ! ith his o! n blood. >oli e are blaming fanati s ! ho follo!
this Sa#na. I'm sorry, ;in. 9orgive my tears, #lease. I'm afraid
that this bad business has ta, en its toll on me.5 ?17

5- o, not at all. I'll ... I'll come ba , at another time.5

5@f course not. Dou're here no! , and <hader is an' ious for you to
begin. 7e'll drin, tea, and I ! ill #ull myself together, and then
! e'll e' amine the #ass#ort business, you and I.5

*e ! al, ed to the hi(fi set, and e' tra ted the cassette ta#e of
the Olind Singers. Sliding it into a gold #lasti ase, he
a##roa hed me and #ressed it into my hand.

5I ! ant you to have this, as a #resent from me,5 he said, his
eyes and hee, s still ! et ! ith tears. 5It's time I sto##ed
listening to it, and I feel sure that you ! ill en+oy it.5

52han, you,5 I muttered, almost as onfused by the gift as I ! as
by the ne! s of 4ad+id's death.

5- ot at all, ;in. 8ome, sit ! ith me. Dou ! ere in Goa, I believeE
Do you , no! our young fighter,)ndre! 9erreiraE DesE 2hen you
, no! he is from Goa. *e goes there, often, ! ith Salman and
San+ay, ! hen I have ! or, for them. Dou must all go there
together, some time((they ! ill sho! you the s#e ial sights, if
you get my meaning. So tell me, ho! ! as your tri#E5

I answered him, trying to give my whole attention to the conversation, but my mind was as thick with thoughts of dead dead. I couldn't say that I'd lied him, or even that I'd trusted him. Det his death, his murder, shook me, and filled me with a strange, excited agitation. *e'd been killed (slaughtered,) Abdul had said (in the house at \$uhu ! here ! e'd studied together, and he'd taught me about gold and golden rimes. I thought of the house. I remembered its view of the sea, its ur#le (tiled swimming pool, its bare, #ale (green #rayer room ! here 4ad+id had bent his antennae, nees, five times every day, and touched his bushy grey eyebrows to the floor. I remembered sitting outside that room, near the pool, waiting for him as he too, time out to #ray. I remembered staring at the ur#le later as the murmured syllables of the #rayers built #ast me into the saying fronds of #alms leaning in around the pool.

And once again I had the sense of a trauma, of a destiny not shared by my own deeds and desires. It was as if the constellations themselves were just the outlines of an immense age that revolved and realigned itself, inscrutably, until the single moment that fate had reserved for me. There was too much that I didn't understand. There was too much that I couldn't allow myself to ask, .)nd I was excited, in that level of ?18 connections and elements. The sense of danger, the smell of fear, filled my senses. The heart (s=ueeling, enlivening excitement of it was so powerful that it wasn't until an hour later, when he entered Abdul Ghani's #ass#ort ! or, show, that I could give my full attention to the man and the moment that I shared.

52his is <rishna, and this is &illu,5 Ghani said, introducing me to tall, short, slender, dark, (s, inned men ! who resembled one another so closely that I thought they might be brothers. 52here are many experts in this business, many men and women with a detective's eye for detail, and a surgeon's confident steadiness of hand. Out my experience of ten years in the counterfeiting arts tells me that the Sri ;an, ans, such as our <rishna and &illu, are the best

forgers in the world.⁵

The men smiled widely, with white teeth, in response to

the compliment. They were handsome men, their faces formed from fine, almost delicate features, in a harmony of gentle contours and curves. They returned to their work, as I strolled about the large room.

This is the lightbulb Abdul Ghani explained, waving his hand at a long table. It was topped with a glass. Strong lights shone from within its frame. Krishna is our best lightbulb man. He examines the shapes of genuine shapes, looking for patterns, and concluded patterns. In this way, he analyzed these effects here we need them.⁵

I bent over Krishna's shoulder to talk to him as he studied the information shape of a British shape. The shape of the shape, across a photograph, and on to the bottom of the shape. On another shape beside it, Krishna was matching the pattern of the shape on the edge of a substituted photograph, treating the lines with a fine-tuned pen. As the lightbulb, he labeled one pattern over the other to help, for irregularities.

Billu is our best stamp man,⁵ Abdul Ghani said, guiding me to another long table. On a rack, at the base of the table, there were rows of many more rubber stamps.

Billu explained any stamp, no matter how intricate its design. Each stamp, entry, special permission stamps (whatever we need. He has three new profiles (cutting machines, for reproducing the stamps. The machines cost me dearly (I had to import them, all the way from Germany (and I spent almost as much again, in batches, getting them through customs controls and into our work, without any unpleasant questions. Our Billu is an artist, and he often refers to

ignore my beautiful machines, and cut the negative stamps by hand.⁵

I later had a &illu created a negative stamp on a blank, rubber template. We ordered a photographic enlargement of the original (a duplicate stamp from) then air-dried (and cut the negative ! with scissors and a utility knife's files. In a few tests of the negative stamp revealed minor flaws. When those were finally eradicated, &illu used a surface of wet (and dry sandpaper to prepare any one corner of the stamp. That deliberate imperfection gave the imaged image a genuine, natural appearance on the page. The completed stamp joined scores of others in the rack, of stamps waiting to be used on negatively altered surfaces.

Abdul Ghani completed his tour of the factory, demonstrating the computers, photographic equipment, printing presses, profiles cutters, and reserves of special hardware and inks. When I'd seen all there was to see on a first visit, he offered me a lift back to Solaba. I declined, asking him if I might stay and spend some time with the Sri ;an, an forger. We seemed pleased with my enthusiasm, or perhaps simply amused. When he left me, I heard his heavy sigh as the sadness of bereavement claimed him

on and more.

<rishna, &illu, and I drank chai and talked for three hours without a pause. Although they weren't brothers, they were both Tamil Sri ;ans who came from the same village on the Saffna Peninsula. Sometime between the Tamil Tigers (the Liberation Tigers for Tamil /elam) and the Sri ;an, an army had obliterated their village. Almost all the members of both families were dead. The two young men escaped, with &illu's sister, a cousin, <rishna's grandparents, and his two young nieces, who were under five years old. A fishing boat brought them to India, on the eoile (smuggling route between Saffna and the Soromandel coast. They made their way to Oombay and then lived on a footpath, under a sheet of plastic, as a pavement dweller.

They'd survived that first year by taking ill-paid jobs as day labourers, and by committing a variety of petty crimes. Then, one day, a footballer (neighbour, I had learned that they could read and write well in English, asked them to change a licence document. Their moral status was good, and it brought a steadily increasing stream of visitors to their last address on the Bombay football ground.

* Hearing of their skills, Abdul Ghani had recommended to Chaderbhai that they be given a chance to prove themselves. 7%

Two years later, at the time that I met them, Krishna and Willu shared a large, comfortable apartment with the surviving members of their two families, saved money from their generous salaries, and were arguably the most successful forgers in Bombay, India's counterfeit capital.

I wanted to learn everything. I wanted the mobility and security that their passports offered me. They spoke English well. My enthusiasm fuelled their natural congeniality, and that first conversation flowed with good humour. It was a fruitful start to the new friendship.

I visited Krishna and Willu every day for a week, after that meeting. The young men worked long hours, and on some days I remained with them for ten hours at a stretch, asking them questions, and asking my several hundred questions. The passports that they worked on fell into two main groups (those they obtained as genuine, used passports, and those that were blank and unused. The used passports had been stolen by thieves, lost by tourists, or sold by desperate families from Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. The blank passports were rare. They'd been sold by corrupt officials at consulates and embassies and departments of immigration, from Iran to Turkey to China. Those that found their way into Chaderbhai's area of influence were bought immediately, at any price, and given to Krishna and Willu. They showed me a blank, original, unused passport from Canada, as an example. It was housed in a fireproof safe with others from the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal and Venezuela.

With sufficient patience, effort, and resources, the two

forgers could change almost anything in a #ass#ort to suit a ne!

user's requirements. >hotogra#hs ! ere substituted, and the ridge(mar, s or indentations of a heavy stam# ! ere imitated, using something as humble as a pro het hoo, . Sometimes the stit hing that bound a #ass#ort ! as arefully removed, and ! hole grou#s of #ages ! ere re#la ed, using lean #ages from a se ond #ass#ort. Dates, details, and stam#s ! ere all altered or erased ! ith hemi al solvents. -e! data ! as inserted in an a##ro#riate shade, sele ted from a om#rehensive atalogue of #rinter"s in, s. Some of the hanges defied the s rutiny of e' #erts, and none of them ! as dete table in routine e' aminations.

During that first ! ee, of #ass#ort studies, I found a ne! , safe, omfortable a#artment for Alla in neighbouring 2ardeo, not far from the *ai)li 4os=ue. ;isa 8arter, ! ho"d visited Alla almost every day at)bdullah"s ?F1 a#artment((and visited, far more ! armly, ! ith)bdullah himself((agreed to share the ne! #la e. 7e moved them and their belongings in a small fleet of ta' is. 2he t! o ! omen li, ed one another, and got on ! ell. 2hey dran, vod, a, heated at S rabble and gin rummy, en+oyed the same , inds of movies on video, and s! a##ed lothes. 2hey"d also dis overed, in the ! ee, s they"d s#ent in)bdullah"s sur#risingly ! ell(sto , ed , it hen, that they li, ed one another"s oo, ing. 2he ne! a#artment ! as a ne! beginning for them and, des#ite Alla"s lingering fears about 4aurilio and his roo, ed deals, she and ;isa ! ere ha##y and o#timisti .

I ontinued the ! eight training and , arate ! ith)bdullah, Salman, and San+ay. 7e ! ere fit and strong and fast.)nd as the days of training be ame ! ee, s,)bdullah and I gre! loser, as friends and brothers, +ust as Salman and San+ay ! ere ! ith one another. It ! as the , ind of loseness that didn't need onversation to sustain itself: =uite often ! e ! ould meet, travel to the gym, ! or, out on the ! eights, bo' a fe! rounds, s#end half an hour s#arring at , arate, and s#ea, no more than ten ! ords to one another. Sometimes, ! ith no more than a loo, in my eye or an unusual

e' #ression on his fa e, ! e ! ould laugh, and , ee# on laughing so hard that ! e olla#sed to the #ra ti e mats.)nd in that ! ay, ! ithout ! ords, I slo! ly o#ened my heart to)bdullah, and I began to love him.

I'd s#o, en to the head man of the slum, I asim)li *ussein, and to several others, in luding \$ohnny 8igar, ! hen I'd first returned from Goa. I sa! >raba, er in his ta' i every other day. Out there ! ere so many ne! hallenges and re! ards in Ghani's #ass#ort ! or, sho#, and they , e#t me so busy and e' ited, that I sto##ed ! or, ing, even o asionally, at the slum lini I'd founded in the little hut that had been my home.

@n my first visit to the slum in several ! ee, s, I ! as sur#rised to find >raba, er in the ! riggling onvulsions of a dan e ! hile the slum musi ians ! ere rehearsing one of their #o#ular songs. 2he little guide ! as dressed in his ta' i driver"s , ha, i shirt and ! hite trousers. *e ! ore a #ur#le s arf around his ne , , and yello! #lasti sandals.)##roa hing him unobserved, I ! at hed him

in silen e for a ! hile. *is dan e managed to ombine obs enely le! d and suggestive thrusts of his hi#s ! ith the fa ial e' #ressions and hand(! hirling gestures of a hild(li, e inno en e. 7ith lo! nish harm he held his o#en #alms beside his smiling fa e one moment, and then #um#ed his groin ba , and forth ! ith a determined little grima e the ne' t. 7hen he finally turned and sa! me, his fa e ?FF e' #loded in that huge smile, that uni=uely ! ide and heart(filled smile, and he rushed to greet me.

5@h, ; inB5 he ried, s=uee1ing his head into my hest in an affe tionate hug. 5I have a ne! s for youB I have it su h a fantasti ne! sB I ! as loo, ing for you in every #la e, every hotel ! ith na, ed ladies, every drin, ing bar ! ith bla , (mar, et #eo#les, every dirty slum, every((5

5I get the #i ture, >rabu. So, ! hat"s your ne! sE5

I am to be getting married. I am making a marriage on Saturday.
Can you believe it?

Sure, I can believe it. Congratulations. Take it easy here
celebrating, just not, for the wedding party.

Oh, yes. He agreed, lunging at me with his fists a few times. I
wanted a very sexy dancing for everybody at the party. It's a
pretty good sexy, isn't it?

It's ... sexy ... sure. *Oh! are things here?

Very fine. - no problem.

a! ay, and for a ! hile ! e both ! at hed the small #etulant ! aves
sma , at the ro , y shore.

5Dou , no! , I ! as brought into this life((on eived, I mean, not
born((+ust over there, in the -avy -agar,5 he said, nodding his
head to! ard the om#ound of the Indian -avy.) urve of oastline
se#arated us from ?FG
the -agar, but a dire t line of sight a ross the small bay gave
us a lear vie! of the houses, huts, and barra , s.

54y mother ! as from Delhi(side originally. *er family, they ! ere
all 8hristians. 2hey made good money in the servi e of the
Oritish, but they lost their #osition, and their #rivileges,
after the Inde#enden e. 2hey moved to Oombay ! hen my mother ! as
fifteen years old. *er father too, em#loyment ! ith the navy,
! or, ing as a ler, . 2hey lived in a 1ho#ad#atti near here. 4y
mother fell in love ! ith a sailor. *e ! as a tall, young fello!
from)mritsar, ! ith the best moustache in the ! hole -agar. 7hen
she be ame #regnant ! ith me, her family thre! her out. She tried
to get some hel# from the sailor ! ho ! as my father, but he left
the -agar, and she never sa! him or heard about him again.5

*e #aused, breathing through his nose, ! ith his li#s #ressed
tightly together. *is eyes s=uinted against the glare from the
glittering sea, and the fresh, #ersistent breeze. Oehind us ! e
ould hear the noises of the slum((ha! , ers" ries, the sla# of
lothes on stone in the ! ashing area, hildren #laying, a
bi , ering om#plaint, and the +angling musi for >raba, er"s
#iston(hi#s.

5She had a tough time of it, ; in. She ! as heavily #regnant ! ith
me ! hen they thre! her out. She moved to a #avement(d! eller
settlement, a ross in 8ra! ford 4ar, et area, and ! ore the ! ido! "s
! hite sari, #retending that she"d had a husband, and #retending
that he ! as dead. She had to do that((she had to be ome a ! ido! ,
for life, before she ! as even married. 2hat"s ! hy I never got
married. I"m thirty(eight years old. I an read and ! rite very

! ell((my mother made sure I ! as edu ated((and I do the boo, ! or, for all the sho#s and businesses in the slum. I do the ta' es for every man ! ho #ays them. I ma, e a good living here, and I have res#e t. I should've been married fifteen or even t! enty years ago. Out she ! as a ! ido! , all her life, for me.)nd I ouldn't do it. I +ust ouldn't allo! myself to get married. I ,e#t ho#ing I ! ould see him, the sailor ! ith the best mousta he. 4y mother had one very old, faded #hotogra#h of the t! o of them, loo,ing very serious and stern. 2hat's ! hy I lived in this area. I al! ays ho#ed I ! ould see him.)nd I never married.)nd she died last ! ee, , ;in. 4y mother died last ! ee, .5

*e turned to me, and the ! hites of his eyes ! ere bla1ing ! ith the tears he ! ouldn't let them shed.

5She died last ! ee, .)nd no! , I'm getting married.5 ?FH

5I'm sorry to hear about your mother, \$ohnny. Out I'm sure she'd ! ant you to get married. I thin, you'll ma, e a good father. In fa t, I , no! you'll ma, e a good father. I'm sure of it.5

*e loo, ed at me, his eyes tal,ing to me in a language I ould feel but ouldn't understand. 7hen I left him, he ! as staring at the easelessness of the sea, irritated to he=uered, ! hite rifts by the ! ind.

I ! al, ed ba , through the slum to the lini .) onversation ! ith)yub and Siddhartha, the t! o young men I'd trained to run the lini , reassured me that all ! as ! ell. I gave them some money to , ee#, as an emergen y float, and left money ! ith >aba, er for his ! edding #re#arations. I #aid a ourtesy visit to I asim)li *ussein, allo! ing him to for e the hos#itality of hai u#on me. \$eetendra and)nand Rao, t! o of my former neighbours, +oined us, ! ith several other men I , ne! ! ell. I asim)li led the onversation, referring to his son Sadi=, ! ho ! as ! or, ing in the Gulf. In turn, ! e s#o, e of religious and ommunal onfli t in the

ity, the construction of the t! in to! ersó still at least t! o years from om#letion, and the ! eddings of >raba, er and \$ohnny 8igar.

It ! as a genial, sanguine meeting, and I rose to leave ! ith the strength and onfiden e that those honest, sim#le, de ent men all ays ins#ired in me. I"d only ! al, ed a fe! #a es, ho! ever, ! hen the young Si, h,)nand Rao, aught u#, and fell into ste# beside me.

5; inbaba, there is a #roblem here,5 he said =uietly. *e ! as an unusually solemn man at the best of times, but at that moment his e' #ression ! as unambiguously grim. 52hat Rasheed, that fello! I used to be sharing ! ith. Do you rememberE5

5Des. Rasheed. I remember him,5 I re#lied, re alling the thin, bearded fa e and restless, guilty eyes of the man ! ho"d been my neighbour, ! ith)nand, for more than a year.

5*e is ma, ing a bad business,5)nand Rao de lared bluntly. 5*is ! ife and her sister ame from their native #la e. I ! ent from that hut ! hen they ame. *e has been living ! ith them alone no! , for some time.5

5)nd ... ! hatE5 I as, ed, as ! e ! al, ed out on to the road together. I had no idea ! hat)nand Rao ! as driving at, and I had no #atien e for it. It ! as the , ind of vague, insinuated om#laint that had ome to me almost every day ! hen I"d lived in the slum. 4ost of the time, su h om#laints ame to nothing. 4ost of the time, it ! as in my best interests to have nothing to do ! ith them. ?F?

57ell,5)nand Rao hesitated, #erha#s sensing my im#atien e, 5it is ... he is ... something is very bad, and I am ... there must be ...5

*e fell silent, staring at his sandaled feet. I rea hed out to

put a hand on his broad, round, thin shoulder. Gradually his eyes lifted, and met mine in a mute appeal.

Is it money I asked, reaching into my pocket. Do you need some money?

He recoiled as if I'd cursed him. He held the stare, for a moment, before turning and walking back into the slum.

I strode on through familiar streets, and told myself that it was so, anyway. Chand Rao and Rasheed had shared a hut for more than ten years. If they were falling out because Rasheed's wife and her sister had moved to the city, and Chand had been forced from the hut, it was probably to be expected. And it was no business of mine. I laughed, shaking my head as I walked, and trying to figure out why Chand Rao had reacted so badly to the offer of money. It wasn't an unreasonable thing for me to assume or to offer. In the thirty minutes from the slum to the old's, I gave money to five other people, including both of the Indian Georges. He'll get over it, whatever it is, I told myself. In any rate, it's got nothing to do with me. Out the lies we tell ourselves are the ghosts that haunt the empty house of midnight. And although I pushed Chand and the slum from my mind, I felt the breath of that ghosted lie on my face as I walked through the long, thronging way on that hot afternoon.

I stepped into the old's, and Didier seized me by the arm before I could see, or sit down, turning me about and leading me to a table that was waiting outside.

I have searched for you everywhere, Didier ruffed as the table pulled out from the bar. I have been to the most unseemingly foul places, looking for you.

People were telling me that.

Well, in, you really must try to spend more time in places where they serve a decent alcohol. It may not make the finding of

you easier, but it will make it far more pleasant.

Here are we going, Didier?

My great strategy (my own superb strategy, if you please) for the future of the old and stony little English heart unfolds, now, even as we see, right?

Dear, well, I wish him all the best, I founded, but I'm hungry. I was about to make very loud noises in a late of the old's usual. Don't let me off here.

Out, no! It is not possible! Didier objected. The girl, she is a very stubborn woman. She would refuse gold and diamonds if someone insisted that she should take them. She will not

participate in the strategy unless someone convinces her. Someone like you, my friend. And this must be achieved in the next half hour. Ten minutes after three o'clock, right?

What makes you think the girl will listen to me?

Don't you see she does not hate, or has not hated at some time in the past. For the girl, the statement I do not hate you is a poem of passionate love. She will listen to you. I am sure of it. And without you, the plan will fail. And the good thing (as if loving such a woman as our girl is not sufficient to prove his mental derangement (he has already risked his life, several times, to make the plan possible. Don't you think you can imagine the preparations we have made, the girl and I, for just this moment.

Well, nobody told me anything about it, I complained, still thinking of the delicious usual at the old's.

Out that is exactly why I have searched for you all over Solaba! Don't you have a horse, for instance. You must help him. I, no, you. There is

in you, as there is in me, a morbid belief in love, and a
fascination for the madness that love puts in its victims.

I couldn't put quite that spin on it, Didier.

Don't spin it too far, you're ill, he replied, laughing for the
first time, but you have the love disease, spin, and you, no, in
your heart, that you must help him, just as I must help him.

Oh God, I relented, lighting a beedie to stave off the hunger.
I'll do what I can to help. What's the plan?

Oh, it is quite complicated.

Just a minute, I said, raising my hand to interrupt him
briefly. Is this scheme of yours dangerous?

Well ...

And does it involve breaking the law?

Well ...

I thought so. Then, don't tell me until we get there. I've got
enough to worry about.

Damn. I don't think that we could count on you. Sorry, I have a little news that may be of some help to you.

Let's have it.

She's the woman who made the complaint about you, the woman who put
you in the prison, she is not Indian. I have learned it, beyond

any doubt. She is a foreigner who lives here, in Bombay.

There's nothing else.

5-o. I regret, there is nothing more. -ot at this time. Out I
! ill not rest until I , no! all.5

52han, s, Didier.5

5It's nothing. Dou are loo, ing ! ell, by the ! ay. >erha#s even
better than before you ! ent to the #rison.5

52han, s. I'm a little heavier, and a little fitter.5

5)nd a little ... ra1ier ... #erha#sE5

I laughed, avoiding his eye, be ause it ! as true. 2he ta' i #ulled
u# at 4arine ;ines Station. 4arine ;ines ! as the first rail! ay
station after the entral ity terminus, at 8hur hgate De#ot. 7e
limbed the #edestrian ram# and found &i, ram, ! ith several of his
friends, ! aiting for us on the station #latform.

5@h, fu , B 2han, God you're here, manB5 he said, #um#ing my hand
in a franti , t! o(handed sha, e. 5I thought you ! eren't oming.5

57here is ;etitiaE5 Didier as, ed.

5She's do! n the #latform, yaar. She's buying a old drin, . See
her there, +ust #ast the hai sho#E5

5)h, yes.)nd she , no! s nothing of the #lanE5

5-ot a fu , in" thing, man. I'm so nervous that it's not going to
! or, , yaar.)nd ! hat if she gets , illed, DidierE It ! on't be a
good loo, for us, man, if my #ro#osal , ills herB5

5<illing her ! ould definitely be a bad start,5 I mused.

5Don't ! orry. It ! ill be o, ay,5 Didier soothed, although he
mo##ed his bro! ! ith a s ented hand, er hief as his eyes sear hed
the em#ty tra , s for an a##roa hing train. 5It ! ill ! or, . Dou

must have faith.5

52hat"s ! hat they said at \$onesville, yaar.5

57hat do you ! ant me to do, &i, ramE5 I as, ed, ho#ing to alm him do! n.

5@, ay,5 he re#lied, #uffing as if he"d +ust run u# a flight of ste#s. 5@, ay. 9irst, ;ettie has to stand +ust here, fa ing you. \$ust li, e I"m standing no! .5 ?F8

5A(huh.5

5It has to be right here. /' a tly here. 7e"ve he ,ed it out a hundred fu , in" times, man, and it has to be +ust here. *ave you got thatE5

5I ... thin, so. Dou"re saying that she has to stand +ust((5

5*ereB5

5*ereE5 I teased him.

59u , , man, this is seriousB5

5@, ayB 2a, e it easy. Dou ! ant me to ma, e ;ettie stand here.5

5Deah. *ere.)nd your +ob is to get her to #ut the blindfold on.5

52he ... blindfoldE5

5Deah. She"s got to ! ear a blindfold, ; in. It ! on"t ! or, ! ithout it.)nd she has to leave it on, even ! hen it gets very s ary.5

5S ary ...5

Deah. That's your job. Just convince her to put the blindfold on, then I'll give you the signal, and then convince her to see it on, yeah, even if she's screaming a bit.

Screaming ...

Deah. We thought about a gag, but I decided, you know, a gag might be a bit counterproductive, yeah, because she might freak out a bit, I mean with a gag. And she's going to freak out enough as it is, without using a fuckin' gag on her.

) ... gag ...

Deah. Okay, here she comes! Get ready for the signal.

*ello, I mean, you fat bastard, Bettie said, giving me a kiss on the cheek. "You're really beefing out, aren't you, son?"

"You look good, too," I replied, smiling at the pleasure of seeing her.

"So, that's this all about then?" she asked. "It looks like the gang's all here."

"You don't know, do you?" I shrugged.

"Of course I don't. My mom just told me I'll be meeting you and Didier (hello, Didier (and here I am all are. That's us."

The train from Hurghata Station came into view, approaching us at a steady pace. My mom gave me the signal, opening his eyes as

as quickly as the muscles would allow, and shaking his head. I put my hands on Bettie's shoulders, gently turning her until she stood as my mom had requested, with her back to the train.

"Do you trust me, Bettie?" I asked. "Yes?"

She smiled at me.

5) bit, she replied.

5@, ay, I nodded. 5 Well, I want you to do something. It's gonna sound strange, I know, but if you don't do it, you'll never know! I mean, I know you love me, but I don't know if you love me. It's a surprise that I figured out for you. It's about love ...

The train slowed behind her as it entered the station. Her eyes were gleaming. Her smile flickered and faded on her lips. She was intrigued and excited. I, Ram and Didier were gesturing wildly, behind her back, for me to hurry. The train stopped with a heavy roar, of metal triumph.

5So, here it is (you have to put a blindfold on, and you have to promise us not to look, until I tell you.)

5Is that it?

5 Well, yeah, I shrugged.

She looked at me. She stared. She smiled into my eyes. She raised her eyebrows, and turned down the corners of her mouth as she considered it. Then she nodded.

5@, ay, she laughed. 5; let's do it.

I, Ram leaned forward with the blindfold and tied it on, asking her if it was too tight. She guided her a step or two backward, toward the train, and then told her to raise her arms over her head.

5Raise my arms? That, like this? If you tell me, I, Ram, you'll say?

Some men appeared at the edge of the roofline on the train

arriage. They'd been lying on the roof of the train. They leaned over, and seiled ;ettie's raised arms, lifting her slight frame effortlessly onto the roof ! ith them. ;ettie shrieked, but the #ier ing sound ! as lost in the shrill of the train guard's ! histle. The train began to move.

Some onB5 &i, ram shouted to me, limbing u# the outside of the arriage to +oin her.

I glan ed at Didier.

5-o, my friendB5 he shouted. 5his is not for me. Dou goB *urryB5

I +ogged along beside the train, and lampered u# the outside of the arriage to the roof. 2here ! ere a do1en men or more on the roof. Some of them ! ere musi ans. Sitting together, they radled tablas, ymbals, flutes, and tambourines in their la#s. 9urther along the dusty roof ! as a se ond grou#. ;ettie sat in the middle of them. She still ! ore the ?G% blindfold. 4en held her at the shoulders((one on ea h arm, and t! o from behind((to , ee# her safe. &i, ram , nelt in front of her. I heard his #leading as I re#t along the roof to! ard them at a rou h.

5I #romise you, ;ettie. It really is a great sur#rise.5

5@h, it's a friggin" sur#rise all right,5 she shouted. 5)nd not half as big as the sur#rise you're gonna get, ! hen ! e get do! n from here, &i, ram bloody >atelB5

5*i, ;ettieB5 I alled to her. 5Great vie! , ehE @h, sorry. 9orgot about the blindfold. 7ell, it _! ill be a great vie! , ! hen you an see it.5

5his is fu , in" madness, ;inB5 she shouted at me. 5ell these bastards to let go of meB5

What I couldn't be I see, I see, I see, I see, I see. They're hanging on to you so you don't fall, yaar, or stand up, and snag yourself on an overhead wire, or something. It's really only another half a minute, I promise you, and then you'll understand what all is happening.

I understand, don't you worry. I understand that you're a dead man, I know, when I get down from here. You might as well throw me off the bloody roof now, I'm telling you. If you thin, I'll

I untied the blindfold, and I looked at her as she looked around, taking in the perspective from the roof of the fast-moving train. Her mouth fell open, and her face slowly settled into a wide smile.

Wow! It's ... Wow! It really is a great view!

So, I commanded, turning to point along the roofs of the train carriages. There was something stretched across the tracks, much higher than the roofline of the train. It was strung between the pylons supports for the overhead electric lines. It was a huge banner, unfurled like the sail of a ship in the steady breeze. There were words painted on it. As I neared the banner, the writing became clear enough to read. The words were painted in letters as tall as a man. They filled the width of the billowing sheet:

;/2121) I ;@&/ D@A

I was afraid you would stand up and hurt yourself, I said. What's why those fellows were holding on to your arms.

Suddenly, the musicians struck up the humming, thudding strains of a popular love song. Their voices soared over the blood-stirring thum of the tablas and the wail of the flutes. I and I see stared

at one another, their eyes holding as the train #ulled into a station, sto##ed, and #ulled out again. *alf ! ay to the ne' t station, ! e a##roa hed another banner. &i, ram ! ren hed his eyes from hers, and loo, ed ahead. She follo! ed his ga1e. 4ore ! ords ! ere ! ritten a ross the taut ! hite loth:

7I;; D@A 4)RRD 4/E

7e #assed beneath the #ennant and out into the soft afternoon light. ;ettie ! as rying. 2hey ! ere both rying. &i, ram thre! himself for! ard and ! ra##ed her in his arms. 2hey , issed. I ! at hed them for moment and then I turned a! ay to fa e the musi ians. 2hey grinned at me, ! agging their heads and laughing as they sang. I did a little vi tory dan e for them as the train ro , ed and rumbled through the suburbs.

4illions of dreams ! ere born there, around us, every day. 4illions of dreams died there, and ! ere born again. 2he humid air ! as thi , ! ith dreams, every! here, in my 4umbai. 4y ity ! as a steaming, s! eltering hothouse garden of dreaming.)nd there, on that red(bro! n rusting metal roof, a ne! dream of love ! as born.)nd I thought of my family as ! e rushed through the humid dreaming air.)nd I thought about <arla.)nd I dan ed on that steel ser#ent as it slithered sinuous beside the s roll and s! ell of the endless, im#erishable sea.

)nd although &i, ram and ;ettie disa##eared for a ! ee, , after she a e#ted his #ro#osal, a lightness and o#timism that ! as li, e ha##iness ir ulated in the ;eo#old"s ro! d. 7hen he finally did return, that #ositive feeling greeted &i, ram ! ith real affe tion.)bdullah and I had +ust finished our training and ! e teased him, mer ilessly, for his delirious, e' hausted +oy. 2hen, ! hile &i, ram blubbered about love, ! e ate in hungry, #ur#oseful silen e. Didier ! as +ubilant, ro! ing over the trium#h of his romanti s heme, and demanding modest tributes, in the form of stiff drin, s, from everyone ! e , ne! .

I loo, ed u# from my #late of food to see a man, one of the street

boys ! ho s roughted for the bla , mar, eteers, gesturing to me in some an' iety. I left the table, and ! al, ed to the foot#ath to s#ea, ! ith him.

5; inB Oig trouble for you,5 he said =ui , ly, loo, ing left and right nervously. 52hree men.)fri ans. Oig men. &ery strong. 2hey loo, for you. 2hey ! ant to , ill you.5 ?GF

5<ill meE5

5Des. Sure. Oetter you go. Go fast from Oombay for a ! hileB5

*e ran off, and I lost sight of him in the ro! d. >u11led, but not ! orried, I returned to the table. I"d only eaten t! o mouthfuls ! hen another man alled me out to the street. It ! as Gemini George.

5I thin, you"re in a s#ot of bother, old hum,5 he said. *is tone ! as heery, but his fa e ! as tense and afraid.

5A(huh.5

5Seems there"s three bull(ne , ed)fri an gee1ers((- igerians, I thin, ((and they mean to do you a bit of grievous bodily harm, if you , no! ! hat I mean.5

57here are theyE5

5I dunno, mate. I seen them tal, in" ! ith some of the street boys, but then they got in a ta' i and too, off. 2hey"re fu , in" big lads, I tell ya. 2hey filled that ta' i, ! ith a bit of flesh to s#are. 9airly bulgin" out the ! indo! s they ! ere, , no! ! hat I meanE5

57hat"s it aboutE5

5- o idea, mate. 2hey didn"t say nothin" ! hat they"re on about,

; in. They're just looking for you, and they got trouble in mind.
I'd like to see you, and I'd like to see your sunshine.

I reached into my pocket, but he put a hand on my wrist.

—o, mate. In the house. I mean, it's not right, whatever their game is.

*e sauntered off in pursuit of a passing trio of German tourists, and I walked back into the restaurant. With Gemini George's warning to support the first, I was worried. It took me longer than usual to finish my meal. Soon after, there was a third visitor. It was a rabbi.

When he said, his expression hardened. "Here is a bad news."

"I, no, rabbi."

Three men, Iranian, they are wanting to beat and kill and beat you. They are asking questions everywhere. Such big fellows they are; like buffaloes. You must make a lucky guess."

It took me five minutes to calm him down, and even then I had to invent a mission for him (he was going for the Iranian at the hotel he was in) in order to remove him from my side. I went alone again with Didier, Ibrahim, and Abdullah. I considered my options, in a lengthening silence. Ibrahim was the first to speak. "GG"

"Okay, so let's find the fingers, and break their heads, yarr," he suggested, looking from face to face for support.

After I killed them, Abdullah added.

Ibrahim nodded his head from side to side in agreement.

"Nothing is sure," Didier said slowly. "None, you must not be alone, in, at any time, until this is resolved."

&i, ram and)bdullah nodded.

5l ! ill all Salman and San+ay,5)bdullah de ided. 5Dou ! ill not be alone, ; in brother.5

5)nd t! o,5 Didier continued, 5the others, ! hoever they are, ! hatever their reasons, must not remain in Oombay. 2hey must go((one ! ay, or the other ! ay.5

7e got u# to #ay the bill and leave. Didier sto##ed me ! hen the others ! al, ed to the ashier"s des, . *e #ulled me do! n into a hair beside him. Sliding a na#, in from the table, he fumbled under the table"s edge for a moment and then slid a bundle a ross to me. It ! as a #istol, ! ra##ed in the na#, in. -o(one , ne! that Didier arried a gun. I ! as sure that I ! as the first to see and handle the ! ea#on. Gras#ing it tightly in the na#, in ! ra##ing, I stood and +oined the others as they left the restaurant. I loo, ed ba , over my shoulder to see him nodding gravely, the urly bla , hair trembling about his fa e.

7e found them, but it too, us all the day and most of the night. In the end it ! as *assaan @bi, ! a, another -igerian, ! ho gave us the de isive lue. 2he men ! ere tourists, om#letely ne! to the ity, and un, no! n to @bi, ! a. *e had no #re ise idea of their motive((it ! as something to do ! ith a drug deal((but his net! or, of onta ts had onfirmed that they ! ere determined to do me harm.

*assaan"s driver, Raheem, almost fully re overed from the in+uries he"d suffered in #rison, dis overed that they ! ere in one of the 9ort area hotels. *e offered to _resolve the matter. *e ! as ons ious of the debt he o! ed me for buying him out of)rthur Road >rison. 7ith an earnest, almost shy e' #ression, he offered to have the men , illed, slo! ly and #ainfully, as a #ersonal favor to me. *e seemed to thin, that it ! as the least he ould do, under the ir umstan es. I refused. I had to , no! ! hat it ! as all about, and I had to #ut a sto# to it. 8learly

disappointed, Raheem accepted the decision, and then led us to the small hotel in the port. We waited outside with our throats hidden inside. Salman, Ghani and Sanjay remained with him, watching the street. Their brief stay was to stop the cops, if they arrived, or slow them down long enough for us to leave the hotel.

One of Abdullah's contacts smuggled us, hissing, into a room adjoining that taken by the three friends. We pressed our ears to the door to listen, and could hear their voices clearly. They were talking, and talking about trivial, unrelated things. Finally, one of them made a remark that tightened the skin on my stomach and face with dread.

When we got that medal, one of them said around his neck. That medal is gold. I want that gold medal.

When I like them shoes, them boots he got, another voice said. I want them shoes.

They went on to talk about their plan. They argued a little. One of the men was more forceful. The others agreed, at last, with his idea to follow me from the old's all the way to the quiet market, beneath my apartment building and then beat me until I was dead, and strip my body.

It was bizarre, standing in the dark, and listening to the details of my own murder. My stomach drooped and tightened on a surging mix of nausea and rage. I hoped to hear some clue, some reference to a motive, but they never mentioned one. Abdullah was listening with his left ear against the thin partition, and I was listening with my right. Our eyes were only a hand's width apart. The signal to move, when I nodded my head, was a gesture so faint and subtle that it was as if our minds had shared the message.

When I saw, Abdullah, and I stood outside the door to their room,

! ith a #ass, ey #oised over the lo , . 7e ounted do! n _three ...
_t! o ... _one ... then I turned the , ey and tried the door. It
! asn't lo , ed from the inside. I stood ba , , and , i , ed it o#en.
2here ! as a se ond, three se onds, of utter stillness, as the
sur#rised and frightened men stared at us, their +a! s ga#ing and
their eyes bulging. - earest to us ! as a tall, very solid man ! ith
a bald head, and dee# s ars ut into his hee, s in a regular
#attern. *e ! ore a singlet and bo' er shorts. Standing behind him
! as a slightly shorter man, ! ho ! as dressed only in +o , ey
shorts. *e ! as bending over a ! aist(high dressing table, #oised
in the a t of snorting a line of heroin. 2he third man ! as
shorter still, but very thi , in the hest and arms. *e lay on
one of the three beds, at the furthest orner of the room,
holding a >layboy maga1ine in his hands. 2here ! as a strong smell
in the ?G?
room. It ! as the smell of s! eat and fear. Some of it ! as mine.

)bdullah losed the door of the room behind him, very slo! ly and
gently, and lo , ed it. *e ! as ! earing bla , : he almost al! ays
! ore a bla , shirt and #ants. &i, ram ! as dressed in his bla ,
o! boy rig. Oy some han e, I too ! ore a bla , 2(shirt and bla ,
trousers. 7e must've loo, ed li, e the members of some lub, or
gang, to the goggle(eyed men in the room.

57hat the fu , ((5 the big man bello! ed.

I ran at him and rammed a fist into his mouth, but he had time to
raise his hands. 7e grabbed at ea h other, fists flying, and
lo , ed in a hard gra##le.

&i, ram s#rang for the man on the bed.)bdullah losed on the man
at the dresser. It ! as a short fight, and a dirty one. 2here ! ere
si' of us((si' big men in a small room. 2here ! as no! here to go
but into ea h other.

)bdullah finished his man =ui , ly. I heard a frightened shrie , ,
ho, ed off, as)bdullah sna##ed a hard, straight, right hand to

the man's throat. From the corner of my eye, I saw as the solid man fell back, grasping and clutching at his throat. The man on the bed jumped to his feet and, leaping out forward, trying to use the advantage of high ground. Abdullah and Ibrahim tied the bed up, sending the man sprawling behind it. They leapt over the upturned bed and fell on him, stomping and, injuring him until he stopped moving.

I held the strap of the big man's singlet with my left hand, and pounded at him with my right. Ignoring the blows to his head, he managed to get his hands around my neck, and started to squeeze. My throat locked tight. I knew that the breath I held in me was the last until I finished him. I reached out for his face, desperately, with my right hand. My thumb found his eye. I wanted to push it into his brain, but he moved his head, and the thumb slipped between the eye and the hard ridge of bone at his temple. I drove the thumb in harder and deeper until I gouged his eye from the socket, and it hung there from bloody strands. I tried to reach it, to rip it away or to dig my thumb into the empty socket, but he pulled back to the limit of his reach. The eye hung out on his cheek, and I swung my fist at his head, trying to crush it.

He was a hard man. He didn't give up. His hands squeezed tighter. My neck was strong and the muscles were well developed, but I knew he had the strength to kill me. My hand reached, groping for the pistol in my pocket. I had to shoot him. I had to kill him. That was all right. I didn't care. The air in my lungs was sent, and my brain was exploding in a whirl of colored light, and I was dying, and I wanted to kill him.

Ibrahim rushed a heavy wooden stool into the back of the big man's bald head. It's not as easy to knock a man out as it seems in the movies. It's true that a lucky hit can do it in one shot, but I've been hit with iron bars, lumps of wood, boots, and many hard fists, and I've only ever been knocked out once in my life. Ibrahim slammed the heavy stool into the back of the man's head

five times, with all of his strength, before the big man buckled and fell. He was defeated, and groggy. The back of his head was bruised. I noticed that his skull was fractured in several places. Somehow, he was still conscious.

They worked on them for half an hour, overcoming their initial reluctance to talk. Raheem joined us, speaking in Hindi and their Nigerian dialect. Their associates told us how they were (Nigerian citizens, on tourist visas. Other information in their passports and luggage told us where they'd stayed in Lagos before they came to Bombay. Little by little, the story emerged. They were muscle hit men, sent by a gangster in Lagos to finish me for a major heroin and '4andra' tablet deal that had gone wrong. The deal involved some sixty thousand dollars (money that their boss in Lagos had lost in a hustle in Bombay. The hustler, however he was, had nominated me as the mastermind of the plan; the man responsible for ripping off the money.

The hired thugs surrendered that much information, but then they balked. They didn't want to give me the man's name. They didn't want to tell me how'd set me up. They didn't want to betray him without the express permission of their Nigerian boss. They insisted, and they were persuaded. The man's name was Aurilio Oelane.

I put the big man's eye back into its socket, but it stared out at a strange angle. From the way that he turned his head to look at me, I guessed that he couldn't see out of it, yet, and I suspected that it would never sit correctly again. They closed the eye with tape, bandaged his head, and tied the other men up. Then I spoke to them.

These men will take you to the airport. You're gonna wait in the car park. There's a plane to Lagos tomorrow morning. You're gonna be on it. ?G7

You're gonna buy the tickets with your money. You get this

straight((I had nothing to do ! ith this. 2hat"s not your fault((
it"s 4auri1io"s((but that doesn"t ma, e me any ha##ier about it.
I"m gonna fi' 4auri1io, for lying about me. 2hat"s my business,
no! . Dou an go ba , to your boss, and tell him that 4auri1io
! ill get ! hat"s oming to him. Out if you ever ome ba , here,
! e"ll , ill you. AnderstandE Dou ome ba , to Oombay, you die.5

5Deah, you fu , in" understandE5 &i, ram shouted at them, lashing
out ! ith a , i , . 5Dou ome here and fu , ! ith Indians, you
fu , in" fu , (headsB India is finished for youB Dou ome ba , here
and I ! ill #ersonally ut off your fu , in" ballsB Do you see my
hatE Dou see the mar, on my fu , in" hat, you fu , in" bahin hhudeE
Dou #ut a mar, on my fu , in" hatB Dou don"t fu , ! ith an Indian
guy"s hatB Dou don"t fu , ! ith Indian guys for any reason, hat or
no hatB -ot everB)nd es#e ially not, if they do ! ear a hatB5

I left them, and too, a ab to Alla"s ne! a#artment. She ! ould
, no! ! here 4auri1io ! as, if anyone , ne! . 4y throat ! as a hing,
and I ould hardly tal, . 2he gun in my #o , et ! as all I ould
thin, about. It s! elled, in my mind, until it ! as huge: until the
#attern of ridges on the handle ! as as large as the ! ale of bar,
on a or, tree. It ! as a 7althr >G8, one of the best semi(
autmati #istols ever made. It fired a 9mm round from an eight(

shot maga1ine, and in my mind I sa! all eight of them #un h their
! ay into 4auri1io"s body. I mumbled the name, 4auri1io, 4auri1io,
and a voi e in my head, a voi e that I , ne! very ! ell, said, Get
rid of the gun before you see him ...

I , no , ed hard on the door of the a#artment, and ! hen ;isa o#ened
it I brushed #ast her to find Alla sitting on a ou h in the
lounge room. She ! as rying. She loo, ed u# ! hen I entered, and I
sa! that her left eye ! as s! ollen, as if she"d been hit.

54auri1ioB5 I said. 57here is heE5

5; in, I an"t,5 she sobbed. 54odena ...5

"I'm not interested in Godena. I want Aurilio. Tell me where he is!"

She grabbed me on the arm. I turned, and noticed for the first time that she had a large, thick knife in her hand. She turned her head toward the nearest bedroom. I looked at Alla, and then back to her. She nodded at me, slowly.

He was hiding in a wardrobe. When I dragged him out, into the room, he pleaded with me, begging me not to hurt him. I grabbed the belt

of his trousers, and marched him to the door of the apartment. He screamed for help, and I hit him in the face with the pistol. He screamed again, and I hit him again, much harder. He started, and he wanted to run out, one more, but I beat him to it, running the gun into the top of his head as he flinched away. He was quiet.

She snarled at him, brandishing the knife.

"You're lucky I didn't put this in your guts, you son of a bitch! If you ever hit her again, I'll kill you!"

"What did he want here?" I asked her.

"It's all about the money. Godena's got it. Alla called Aurilio."
(5)

She stopped, shocked by the fury she saw on my face as I glared at Alla.

"I, no, I, no, she wasn't supposed to tell anyone. But she did, and she told him about this place. She was supposed to meet them both, here, tonight. But Godena didn't show. It's not her fault, she didn't know Aurilio put you in it. He just told us about it, then, a minute ago. He told us he gave your name to a couple of Algerian thugs. He put you in it, to save himself. He

said he had to have the money, to get away, because they'd be after him! When they were finished with you. The hero was trying to beat it out of her, when you got here.

"Here's the money," I said, Alia.

"I don't know, in," she cried. "You, the money? I didn't want it in the first place. Alia was ashamed that I was sorry. *e doesn't understand. I rather would go on the street, and see him safe, than have this really thing happen. *e loves me. *e loves me. *e didn't have anything to do with you and the Algerians, in, I swear it. That was Aurilio's idea. It's been going on for years, no? That's what I've been so scared about. And then tonight, Alia got hold of the money Aurilio stole (the money he stole from the friends) (and he hid it. *e did it for me. *e loves me, in. Alia loves me."

She trailed off in stuttering sobs. I turned to Alia.

"I'm talking him with me."

"Good," she snarled.

"Will you be okay?"

"Deah. We're fine."

"*ave you got any money?"

"Deah. Don't worry." ?G9

"I'll send Abdallah as soon as I can. <ee# the doors locked, and don't let anyone in but us, okay?"

"You got it," she smiled. "Thank you, Gilbert. That's the second time you came riding to the rescue."

59orget it.5

5- o. I ! on't forget it,5 she said, losing and lo ,ing the door behind us.

I ! ish I ould say that I didn't hit him. *e ! as big enough and strong enough to defend himself, but he had no heart for fighting, and there ! asn't any vi tory in hitting him. *e didn't fight or even struggle. *e ! him#ered and ried and begged. I ! ish I ould say that a stern +usti e and a righteous revenge for the ! rong that he'd done to me had urred my hands into fists, and #un hed him. Out I an't be sure. /ven no! , long years later, I an't be sure that the violen e I did to him didn't ome from something dar , er, dee#er, and far less +ustifiable than angry retribution. 2he fa t ! as that I'd been +ealous of 4auri1io for a long time.)nd in some #art, some small but terrible #art, I may have stru , at his beauty, and not +ust his trea hery.

@n the other hand, of course, I should've ,illed him. 7hen I left him, bloody and bro ,en, near the St. George *os#ital, a ! arning voi e told me it ! asn't the end of the matter.)nd I did

hesitate, looming over his body ! ith murder in my eyes, but I ouldn't ta ,e his life. Something he'd said, ! hen he ! as begging me to sto# beating him, stayed my hand. *e said that he'd named me, that he'd thro! n me to the -igerian thugs ! hen he had to invent someone else ! ho ! as res#onsible for his theft, be ause he ! as +ealous of me. *e ! as +ealous of my onfiden e, my strength, and my friendshi#s. *e ! as +ealous of me.)nd in his +ealousy, he hated me.)nd in that, ! e ! eren't so different, 4auri1io and I.

It ! as still ! ith me, all of it, the ne' t day, ! hen the -igerians ! ere gone and I ! ent to ;eo#old"s, loo ,ing for Didier to return his unused gun. It ! as still ! ith me, lotting my mind ! ith anger, onfused in regret, ! hen I found \$ohnny 8igar ! aiting for me outside. It ! as still there, as I struggled to fo us, and understand his ! ords.

It's a very bad thing, he said. Chand Rao has killed Rasheed this morning. He cut his throat. It's the first time, in.

I knew what he meant. It was the first murder in our slum. It was the first time that one slum dweller had ever killed another in the Buffle Parade slum. There were fifty (five thousand people in those little houses,

and they fought and argued and bickered all the time, but none, not one of them, had ever killed another. And in the shocked moment, I suddenly remembered David. He, too, had been murdered. I'd managed, somehow, to push the thought of his death away from my imagination, from my mind, but it had been gnawing through the screen of my amnesia slowly, steadily, all the while. And it broke through then, with the news of Rasheed's death. And that other murder (the slaughter, Ghani had said (of the old gold smuggler, the mafia don, became confused with the blood that was on Chand's hands. Chand, whose name meant happiness. Chand, who'd tried to talk to me and tell me about it, who'd come to me that day in the slum for help, and found none.

I pressed my hands to my face, and ran them through my hair. The street around us was as busy and colourful as ever. The crowd at the old's were laughing, talking, and drinking, as they usually did. Out something had changed in the world that Johnny and I knew. The innocence was lost, and nothing would ever be the same. I heard the words tumbling over and over in my mind. Nothing is ever gonna be the same ... Nothing is ever gonna be the same ...

And a vision, the kind of worst that fate sends you, flashed before my eyes. There was death in that vision. There was madness. There was fear. Out it was blurred. I couldn't see it clearly. I couldn't see the detail. I didn't know if the death and madness were happening to me, or happening around me. And in a sense, I didn't care. In too many ways of shame and angry regret, I didn't care. I blinked my eyes, and cleared my swollen throat, and stepped off the street into the music, the laughter, and the light.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The Indians are the Italians of Asia, Didier pronounced with a sage and mischievous grin. It can be said, certainly, with equal justice, that the Italians are the Indians of Europe, but you do understand me, I think. There is so much Italian in the Indians, and so much Indian in the Italians. They are both people of the Madonna (they demand a goddess, even if the religion does not provide one). Every man in both countries is a singer when he is happy, and every woman is a dancer when she is alone at the corner. For them, food is music inside the body, and music is food inside the heart. The language of India and the language of Italy, they make every man a poet, and make something beautiful from every banality. These are nations where love (amore, yaar) makes a cavalier of a Corsalino on a street corner, and makes a princess of a peasant girl, if only for the second that her eyes meet yours. It is the secret of my love for India, indeed, that my first great love was Italian.

Where were you born, Didier?

I was born in Marseille, but my heart and my soul were born sixteen years later, in Genova.

I caught the eye of a waiter, and I waved a hand lazily for another drink. I had hardly taken a sip from the drink on the table in front of him, so I guessed that Didier was settling in for one of his longer discourses. It was about two hours past noon on a loudy Wednesday, three months after the night of the assassins. The first rains of the monsoon were still a way, but there was a sense of expectancy, a tension, that tightened every heartbeat in the city. It was as if a vast army was gathering outside the city for an irresistible assault. I liked the way, before monsoon: the tension and excitement I saw in others was

li, e the involuted, emotional dis=uiet that I felt almost all the time.

54y mother ! as a deli ate and beautiful ! oman, the #hotogra#hs of ?HH

her reveal,5 Didier ontinued. 5She ! as only eighteen years old, ! hen I ! as born, and not yet t! enty ! hen she died. 2he influen1a laimed her. Out there ! ere ! his#ers((ruel ! his#ers, and I heard them many times((that my father had negle ted her, and ! as too, ho! do they say it, tight ! ith his money to #ay do tors ! hen she fell ill. 7hatever the ase, she died before I ! as t! o years old, and I have no memory of her.

54y father ! as a tea her of hemistry and mathemati s. *e ! as mu h older than my mother ! hen he married her. Oy the time I

started at s hool, my father ! as the headmaster. *e ! as a brilliant man, I ! as told, for only a brilliant \$e! ould rise to the #osition of headmaster in a 9ren h s hool. 2he ra isme, the anti(Semitism, in and around 4arseilles at that time, so soon after the ! ar, ! as li, e a si ,ness. It ! as a guilt that #in hed at them, I thin, . 4y father ! as a stubborn man((it is a , ind of stubbornness that #ermits one to be ome a mathemati ian, isn't itE >erha#s mathemati s is itself a , ind of stubbornness, do you thin, E5

54aybe,5 I re#lied, smiling. 5I never thought about it that ! ay, but maybe you're right.5

5)lors, my father returned to 4arseilles, after the ! ar, and returned to the very house that he had been for ed to leave ! hen the \$e! (haters too, onrol of the to! n. *e had fought ! ith the Resistan e, and he ! as ! ounded, in hand(to(hand fighting ! ith the Germans. Oe ause of that, no(one dared to hallenge him. -ot o#only. Out I am sure that his \$e! ish fa e and his \$e! ish #ride and his beautiful young \$e! ish bride reminded the good iti1ens of 4arseilles of the thousands of 9ren h \$e! s ! ho ! ere betrayed

and sent to their deaths.)nd it ! as a old trium#h for him, returning to that house he had been for ed out of, and to that community that had betrayed him.)nd that oldness lamed his heart, I believe, ! hen my mother died. /ven his tou h, ! hen I thin, of it no! , ! as old. /ven his hand, ! hen he tou hed me.5

*e #aused and too, a si# from his glass, re#la ing it slo! ly and arefully in the #re ise ir le of moisture it had left on the table in front of him.

57ell then, he ! as a brilliant man,5 he ontinued, raising his eyes to mine ! ith a hastily gathered smile. 5)nd, ! ith one e' e#tion, he ! as a brilliant tea her. 2he e' e#tion ! as me. I ! as his only failure. I had no head for s ien e and mathemati s. 2hey ! ere languages I ould never de i#her or understand. 4y father res#onded to my stu#idity ! ith a ?H?

brutal tem#er. *is old hand, it seemed to me ! hen I ! as a hild, ! as so large that ! hen he stru , me my ! hole body ! as sho , ed and bruised by the giant's hard #alm and the ! hi#s of his fingers. I ! as afraid of him, and ashamed of my failures at s hool, so I #layed the truant very often, and fell into ! hat the /nglish all a bad om#any. I ! as many times in the ourts, and served t! o years in the #rison for hildren before my thirteenth birthday.)t si' teen, I left my father's house, my father's ity, and my father's ountry forever.

50y han e I ame to Genova. *ave you seen itE I tell you, it is the +e! el in the tiara of the ;igurian oast.)nd one day, on the bea h at Genova, I met a man ! ho o#ened my life to every good and beautiful thing that there is in the ! orld. *is name ! as Rinaldo. *e ! as forty(eight years old then, ! hen I ! as si' teen. *is family held some an ient title, a noble line that rea hed to the time of 8olumbus. Out he lived in his magnifi ent house on the liffs

! ithout the #retensions of his ran, . *e ! as a s holar, the only true Renaissan e man I ever met. *e taught me the se rets of anti=uity, the history of art, the musi of #oetry, and the

poetry of music. He is also a beautiful man. His hair is silver and his eyes, like the full moon, and his very sad eyes are grey. In contrast to the brutish hands of my father, with their killing touch, Rinaldo's hands are long, slender, his arm, delicate, and he made tenderness in everything that he touched. I learned what it is to love, with all of the mind and all of the body, and I was born in his arms.

He began to cough, and attempted to tear his throat, but the cough became a fit that raged, and his body in painful spasms.

"You've got to stop smoking and drinking so much, Didier. And you've gotta do a little exercise now and then."

"Oh, please," he shuddered, stubbing out a cigarette and fishing another from the pack, in front of him as the coughs subsided. "There is nothing so depressing as good advice, and I will be pleased if you do not inflict it upon me. Naturally, I am shocked at you. You must, no! this, surely! Some years ago I suffered such an offensively gratuitous piece of good advice that I was depressed for six months afterward. It was a very loss, all (I almost never recovered."

"Sorry," I smiled. "I don't, no! That came over me."

"You are forgiven," he sniffed, drinking one glass of his, as the waiter brought the next. ?HC

"You, no!," I admonished him, "Carla says that depression only happens to people who don't, no! who! to be sad."

"Well she is wrong," he declared. "I am an expert in the tristesse. It is the perfect, definitive human performance. There are many animals that can express their happiness, but only the human animal has the genius to express a magnificent sadness. And for me it is something special, a daily meditation. Sadness is my one and my only art."

*e #outed for a fe! moments, too #eeved to #ro eed, but then raised his eyes to meet mine and laughed out loud.

5*ave you heard from herE5 he as, ed.

5- o.5

5Out you , no! ! here she isE5

5- o.5

5She has left GoaE5

5I as, ed a guy I , no! do! n there, Dashrant((he o! ns a restaurant on the bea h ! here she ! as staying((I as, ed him to , ee# an eye on her, and ma, e sure she ! as o, ay. I ! alled him last ! ee, , and he told me she left. *e tried to tal, her into staying, but she ... ! ell, you , no! .5

Didier #ursed his li#s in a refle tive fro! n. 7e both ! at hed the shuffling, idling, bustling, s urreying street only t! o metres a! ay, beyond the ! ide entran e to ; eo#old"s.

5/t bien, don't ! orry yourself about <arla,5 Didier said at last.
5)t the least, she is ! ell #rote ted.5

I assumed that Didier meant she ould ta, e are of herself and, #erha#s, that she lived under a good and lu , y sign. I ! as ! rong. 2here ! as more to the remar, than that. I should"ve as, ed him ! hat he meant, of ourse. In the long years sin e that onversation I"ve as, ed myself a thousand times ho! d different my life might"ve been if only I"d as, ed him ! hat he meant by that remar, . Instead, my head full of assum#tions and my heart full of #ride, I hanged the sub+e t.

5So ... ! hat ha##enedE5

5 *a##enedE5 he as, ed, be! ildered.

5 7hat ha##ened to you and Rinaldo in GenovaE5

5)h, yes. *e loved me, and I loved him, it ! as true, but he made an error of the +udgment. *e gave my love a test. *e allo! ed me to dis over the se ret #la e ! here he , e#t a large sum of ash. I ould not resist the tem#tation that he offered to me. I too, the money and ran a! ay. I loved ?H7

him, but I too, his money, and I ran a! ay. 9or all his ! isdom, he did not , no! that love annot be tested. *onesty an be tested, and loyalty. Out there is no test for love. ;ove goes on forever, on e it begins, even if ! e ome to hate the one ! e love. ;ove goes on forever be ause love is born in the #art of us that does not die.5

5Did you ever see him againE5

5Des. Des, I did.)nother loo# of fortune brought me ba , to Genova, almost fifteen years later. I ! al, ed on the same boulevard of sand ! here he had taught me to read Rimbaud and &erlaine.)nd then I sa! him. *e ! as sitting ! ith a grou# of men of his o! n age((he ! as more than si' ty then((and they ! ere ! at hing t! o elderly men #lay hess. *e ! ore a grey ardigan and a bla , velvet sarf, although the day ! as not old. *is hair ! as almost gone. 2hat silver ro! n of hair, it ! as ... gone. *is fa e ! as all hollo! s#a es, and his s, in ! as a bad mi' of bad olours, as if he ! as re overing from a serious illness. >erha#s he ! as su umbing to it. I do not , no! . I ! al, ed on #ast him, averting my ga1e, so that he should not re ognise me. I even #retended a

strange, stoo#ing ! al, to disguise myself.)t the last moment I glan ed ba , at him, ! at hing as he oughed violently into a ! hite hand, er hief. 2here ! as blood, I thin, , staining that ! hite hand, er hief. I ! al, ed faster and faster until I ran ! ith the haste of a man in terror.5

and she sat in silence and allowed our eyes to rove the
passing roads, following a man in a blue turban in one instant,
and a woman in a black, mas, veil, and hador the next.

5Dou, no, in, I have lived that many (or most) would call a
lived life. I have done things that would put me in prison, and
things that, in some nations, would see me executed. 2there are
many things I have done that I can say, I am not proud. Out there
is only one act in my whole life that I can say, I am truly
ashamed of it. I hurried past that great man, and I had money
enough and time enough and good health enough to help him. I
hurried past him, not because I felt guilty about the theft of
his money.)nd not because I was afraid of his sin, or the
commitment it might cost me. I hurried past that good and
brilliant man who loved me, and taught me how to love, simply
because he was old (because he was not beautiful any more.)

*he drained his glass, examined its emptiness for a moment, and
then placed it on the table as gently and attentively as if it
was about to explode. ?H8

54erdest; it's drink, my friend. He cried at last, but my hand
stayed his, preventing him from summoning the waiter.

5I can't, Didier. I have to meet Lisa at the Sea Room. She asked
me to ride out there and meet her. I'll have to leave now, if I'm
going to make it.

*he leaned his head on something (a request, perhaps, or another
confession. 4y hand still rested on his.

5;oo, you can come, if you like. It's not a private meeting, and
it's a nice ride out to Suva.

*he smiled slowly, and slid his hand out from under mine. Still
staring into my eyes, he raised his hand, pointing with one
finger.) waiter came to the table. 7ithout looking at him,

Didier ordered another ! his, y. 7hen I #aid my bill and ! al, ed out to the street, he ! as oughing again, hun hed over one hand and lut hing his glass ! ith the other.

I'd bought a bi, e, an /nfield Outlet, a month before. 2he taste of t! o(! heeled adrenaline that I'd e' #erien ed in Goa had nagged at me until I finally surrendered to it, and ! ent ! ith)bdullah to the me hani ! ho servi ed his bi, e. 2he me hani , a 2amil named *ussein, loved bi, es, and loved)bdullah almost as mu h. 2he /nfield he sold to me ! as in #erfe t ondition, and it never on e let me do! n. &i, ram ! as so im#ressed ! ith it that he bought

one from *ussein ! ithin a ! ee, . Sometimes ! e rode together,)bdullah, &i, ram, and I, our three bi, es side by side, and the sun in our laughing mouths.

@n that afternoon ! hen I left Didier at ; eo#old"s I rode slo! ly, and gave myself time and s#a e to thin, . <arla ! as gone from the little house on)n+una bea h. I had no idea ! here she might be. Alla told me that <arla had sto##ed ! riting to her, and I had no reason to thin, she ! as lying. So <arla ! as gone, and there ! as no ! ay to find her.)nd every day I ! o, e ! ith a dream or a thought of her. /very night I sle#t ! ith the , nife of regret in my hest.

4y thoughts drifted to <haderbhai as I rode. *e seemed ! ell #leased ! ith the ni he role that I ! as #laying in his mafia net! or, . I su#ervised ertain movements of smuggled gold through the domesti and international air#orts, e' hanged sums of ash ! ith agents at the five(star hotels and airline offi es, and arranged to buy #ass#orts from foreigners. 2hey ! ere all +obs that a gora ould #erform more su efully and less obtrusively than an Indian. 4y ons#i ousness ! as a strange and ironi form ?H9

of amouflage. 9oreigners ! ere stared at in India. Some! here in the five or more millennia of its history, the ulture had de ided to dis#ense ! ith the usual, non halant glan e. Oy the

time I came to Bombay, the eye contact ranged from an ogling glare to a glaring, goggle-eyed glare. There was nothing malicious in it. The staring eyes that found and followed me everywhere were innocent, curious, and almost always friendly. I found that intense scrutiny had its benefits: for the most part, people stared at what I was, not what I did. Foreigners were stared into invisibility. So I wandered in and out of travel agencies or grand hotels, airline or business offices, followed in every step by eyes that saw me, but not the crimes I committed in the service of the great Khan.

I rode on past the aristocratic mansions, accelerating into the wide avenue of afternoon traffic, and as I rode I asked myself why Chander Khan never referred to the murder of his friend and colleague David. It still nagged at me and I wanted to ask him about it, but the one time that I'd mentioned his name, soon after the murder, Chander had looked so stricken with grief that I'd let the subject lapse. And as the days had passed into weeks, and the weeks had drifted into silent months, I'd found it impossible to drag the subject into our conversations. It was as if I was the one who was seeing secrets and no matter how thin, my mind became with thoughts of the murder, I never admitted them to him. Instead, I dealt with business or the social life of philosophy. And during the course of our long discussions he finally answered my big question. I remembered the enlightenment that had refracted in his eyes, and the pride, perhaps, when I'd proved that I understood his teaching. And as I rode from the old mansions to my meeting with Chander on that day of Didier's confession, I remembered the word (by word and smile) the

great Khan's explanation.

5) And so, you understand the principle of the argument to this point

5) Des, I answered him. I'd come to his Dongri mansion that night, a week before, to give him a report on the changes I'd

re commended and initiated in the #ass#ort fa tory run by) bdel Ghani. 7ith Ghani's a##roval and su##ort, ! e" d e' #anded the o#eration to in lude a full #a , age of identity do uments((driver's li en es, ban, a ounts, redit ards, even membershi#s of s#orts lubs. <hader ! as delighted ! ith the #rogress of those innovations, but he soon hanged the sub+e t to tal, of his favourite themes: good and evil, and the #ur#ose of life. ??%

5>erha#s you an tell it ba , to me,5 he nodded, loo, ing into the #layful fling and s#lash of the fountain's #lumes of ! ater. *is elbo! s rested on the arms of the ! hite ane arm hair, and the tem#le of his fingerti#s #ea, ed at his li#s and the neat, silver(grey mousta he.

5)h ... sure. Dou ! ere saying that the ! hole universe is moving to! ard some ultimate om#le' ity. 2his has been going on sin e the universe began, and #hysi ists all it the tenden y to! ard om#le' ity.)nd ... anything that , i , s this along and hel#s it is good, and anything that hinders it is evil.5

5&ery good,5 <hader said, raising one eyebrow! in the smile he offered me.)s ! as so often the ase, I ! asn"t sure if he ! as e' #ressing a##roval or mo , ery or both. It seemed, ! ith <hader, that he never felt or e' #ressed any one emotion ! ithout feeling something of its o##osite. 2hat might be true for all of us, to some e' tent. Out ! ith him, ! ith lord) bdel <hader <han, it ! asn"t #ossible to , no! ! hat he really thought or felt about you. 2he one and only time that I sa! the ! hole of the truth in his eyes((on a sno! (overed mountain alled Sorro! "s Re! ard((it ! as already too late, and I never sa! it again.

5)nd this final om#le' ity,5 he added, 5it an be alled God, or the Aniversal S#irit, or the Altimate 8om#le' ity, as you #lease. 9or myself, there is no #roblem in alling it God. 2he ! hole universe is moving to! ard God, in a tenden y to! ard the ultimate om#le' ity that God is.5

52hat still leaves me ! ith the =uestion I as, ed you last time.

*o! do you de ide ho! any one thing is good or evilE5

5That is true. I #romised you an ans! er to this very good
=uestion then, young 4r. ;in, and you ! ill have it. Out, first,
you must ans! er a =uestion for me. 7hy is , illing ! rongE5

57ell, I don't thin, it is al! ays ! rong.5

5)h,5 he mused, his amber eyes glittering in the same ! ry smile.

57ell, I must tell you that it _is al! ays ! rong. 2his ! ill be ome
lear, later in our dis ussion. 9or no! , on entrate on the ty#e
of , illing that you do thin, is ! rong, and tell me ! hy it is
! rong.5

5Deah, ! ell, it's the unla! ful ta, ing of a life.5

5Oy ! hose la! E5

5So iety"s la! . 2he la! of the land,5 I offered, sensing that the
#hiloso#hi al ground ! as sli##ing a! ay beneath me.

57ho ma, es this la! E5 he as, ed gently. ??1

5>oliti ians #ass la! s. 8riminal la! s are inherited from ... from
ivilisation. 2he la! s against unla! ful , illing go all the ! ay
ba , ((maybe all the ! ay ba , to the ave.5

5)nd ! hy ! as , illing ! rong for themE5

5Dou mean ... ! ell, I'd say, be ause there"s only one life. Dou
only get one shot at it, and to ta, e it a! ay is a terrible
thing.5

5) lightning storm is a terrible thing. Does that ma, e it ! rong,
or evilE5

5-o, of course not,5 I re#lied more irritably. 5; oo, , I don't
, no! ! hy ! e need to , no! ! hat's behind the la! s against , illing.
7e have one life, and if you ta, e a life ! ithout a good reason
you do something ! rong.5

5Des,5 he said #atiently. 5Out ! hy is it ! rongE5

5It +ust _is, that"s all.5

5This is the #oint ! e all rea h,5 <hader on luded, more serious
in his tone. *e #ut his hand on my ! rist as it rested on the arm
of my hair beside him, and he ta##ed out the im#ortant #oints
! ith his fingers. 5If you as, #eo#le ! hy , illing, or any other
rime, is ! rong, they ! ill tell you that it is against the la! ,
or that the Oible, or the A#anishads, or the <oran, or the
Ouddha"s eight(fold #ath, or their #arents, or some other
authority tells them it is ! rong. Out they don't , no! ! hy it is
! rong. It may be true, ! hat they say, but they don't , no! ! hy it
is true.

5In order to , no! about any a t or intention or onse=uen e, ! e
must first as, t! o =uestions. @ne, ! hat ! ould ha##en if everyone
did this thingE 2! o, ! ould this hel# or hinder the movement
to! ard om#le' ityE5

*e #aused as a servant entered ! ith -a1eer. 2he servant brought
s! eet, bla , suleimani hai, in long glasses, and a variety of

irresistible s! eets on a silver tray. -a1eer brought a
=uestioning glan e for <haderbhai and a s o! l of unmitigated
ontem#t for me. <hader than, ed him and the servant, and they
left us alone on e more.

5In the ase of , illing,5 <hader ontinued, after he"d si##ed the
tea through a ube of ! hite sugar. 57hat ! ould ha##en if everyone
, illed #eo#leE 7ould that hel# or hinderE 2ell me.5

Obviously, if everyone is filled with love, it is not possible for anyone to harm another. So ... that it wouldn't help.

Des. The human beings are the most complete arrangement of matter that is known of, but they are not the last achievement of the universe. They, too, will develop and change with the rest of the universe. Out if they are indiscriminately, they will not get there.

They will improve our societies, and ...?

All the development that led to us aross millions of years (billions of years) will be lost. The same can be said for stealing. What would happen if everyone stole things? Would that help us, or would it hinder us?

Deah. I get the point. If everyone was stealing off everyone else it would be so paranoid, and it would waste so much time and money on it, that it would slow us down, and it would never get

To the ultimate completeness, the completed the thought for me. This is why, killing and stealing are wrong (not because a book, tells us they are wrong, or a law tells us they are wrong, or a spiritual guide tells us they are wrong, but because if everyone did them it would not move toward the ultimate completeness that is God, with the rest of the universe.) And the opposite of these is also true. Why is love good? Well, what would happen if everyone loved everyone else? Would that help us or would it hold us back,?

It would help, I agreed, laughing from within the trap he'd set for me.

Des. In fact, such universal love would greatly accelerate the movement toward God. Love is good. Friendship is good. Loyalty is good. Freedom is good. Honesty is good. They, realize that these things are good before they have always, not in this in our hearts, and all the great teachers have always told us this (but not, with this definition of good and evil, they can see why they are good. Just as they can see why stealing and lying and killing are evil.)

Out sometimes ... I protested, you, no! , what about self(defend) what about , willing to defend yourself?

Des, a good point, ; in. I want you to imagine a scene for me. You are standing in a room with a desk, in front of you. On the other side of the room is your mother. A vicious man holds a knife to the throat of your mother. The man will kill your

mother. On the table in front of you there is a button. If you press it, the man will die. If you do not, he will kill your mother. These are the only possible outcomes. If you do nothing, your mother dies. If you press the button, the man dies and your mother is saved. What would you do?

The guy's history, I answered without hesitation.

Just so, he sighed, perhaps wishing that I'd wrestled with the decision a little longer before pressing the button. And if you did this, if you saved your mother from this vicious killer, would you be doing the wrong thing or the right thing? ?G

The right thing, I said just as swiftly.

— o, ; in, I'm afraid not, he frowned. We have just seen that in the terms of this neutral, objective definition of good and evil, killing is always wrong because, if everyone did it, we would not move toward God, the ultimate completeness, with the rest of the universe. So it is wrong to kill. Out your reasons here good. So therefore, the truth of this decision is that you did the wrong thing, for the right reasons ...

As I rode the wind, a breeze, after Chader's little lecture on ethics, leaving the bike through an inlet(modern traffic beneath a darkening, portentous tumble of clouds, those words echoed in my mind. The wrong thing, for the right reasons. I rode on and, even when I stopped thinking about Chader's lesson, those words still murmured in the little grey daydream(share here memory meets

inspiration. I, no! no! that the words were like a mantra, and that my instincts were his in the dark, as if trying to warn me of something by repeating them. The wrong thing ... for the right reasons.

Out on that day, an hour after Didier's confession, I let the murmured warnings fade. Right or wrong, I didn't want to think about the reasons (not my reasons for doing what I did, or the others', or anyone's. I enjoyed the discussions of good and evil, but only as a game, as an entertainment. I didn't really want the truth. I was sick of truth, especially my own truth, and I couldn't face it. So the thoughts and memories ebbed and then hissed past me into the coils of humid wind. And by the time I slipped into the last curve of coast near the Sea Resort, my mind was as clear as the broad horizon lined upon the limit of a dark, and tremulous sea.

The Sea Resort, which was as luxurious and opulently serviced as the other five-star hotels in Bombay, offered the special attraction that it was literally built upon the sea rocks at Suhu. From all its major restaurants, bars, and a hundred other buildings, the Sea Resort spanned the endlessly shifting seas and currents of the Arabian Sea. The hotel also offered one of the best and most comprehensively eclectic smorgasbord lunches in the city. I was hungry, and glad to see that Lisa was waiting for me

in the foyer. She wore a star-headed, sky-blue shirt with the collar turned up, and sky-blue slippers. Her blonde hair was wound into the braiding (fingers of a French braid. She'd been clean, off heroin, for more than a year. She looked tanned and healthy and confident. ??H

"Hi, in," she smiled, greeting me with a kiss on the cheek. "You're just in time."

"Great. I'm starving."

5-o, I mean you're just in time to meet *Alana*. Just a minute((
here she comes now! .5

) young woman with a fashionably Western short haircut, high-heeled
jeans, and a tight, red shirt (she addressed us. She wore a
stopwatch around her neck, on a lanyard, and carried a clipboard.
She was about thirty (sixty) years old.

5*ello, I said when she introduced us. Is that your rig
outside the broadcast vans, and all the cables? Are you shooting
a movie?

5Used to be, yeah, she replied in the exaggerated vowels of
the Bombay accent that I loved and found myself unconsciously
imitating. The director has gone off somewhere with one of our
handlers. It's meant to be a secret, yeah, but the whole damn set
is talking about it. We've got a forty-five minute break.
) Although, mind you, that's about ten times as long as our guy
will need, from what all I'm told about his process.

5@, yeah, I suggested, smoothing my hands together. That gives us
time for lunch.

5You, lunch, let's get stoned first, yeah, *Alana* demurred.
5*ave you got any hash?

5Deah, I shrugged. 5Sure.

5Did you bring a car?

5I'm on a Outlet.

5@, yeah, let's use my car. It's in the car park.

We left the hotel, and sat in her neighborhood to smoke. While I
rehearsed the script, she told me that she was an assistant to the
producer of that and several other films. One of her duties was
to oversee the casting of minor roles in the films. She'd

sub ontra ted the tas, to a asting agent, but he ! as
e' #erien ing diffi ulty in finding foreigners to fill the small,
non(s#ea, ing, de orative roles.

5<al#ana got tal, ing about this at dinner last ! ee, ,5 ; isa summed

u# ! hen <al#ana began to smo, e. 5She told me that her guys
ouldn't find foreigners to #lay the #arts in the movies((you
, no! , the #eo#le at a dis o or a #arty s ene or, li, e, Oritish
#eo#le, in the time of the Oritish Ra+ and li, e that. So ... I
thought of you.5 ???

5A(huh.5

5It ! ould be a great hel# if you ould get the goras for me ! hen
! e need them,5 <al#ana said, offering me ! hat seemed to be a
! ell(#ra tised leer. >ra tised or not, it ! as damned effe tive.
57e #rovide a ab to bring them to the shoot and ta, e them home
again. 7e give them a full lun h during the brea, .)nd ! e #ay
about t! o thousand ru#ees a day, #er #erson. 7e #ay that to _you,
#lus a bonus ommission #er head. 7hat you #ay them, ! ell, it's
u# to you. 4ost of them are ha##y to do it for nothing, and are
real sur#rised, you , no! , ! hen they find out ! e a tually #ay them
to be in the movies.5

57haddaya sayE5 ; isa as, ed me, her eyes gleaming through the rose
filter of her stone.

5I'm interested.5

4y mind ! as tra! ling through the #ossible lateral benefits in the
arrangement. Some of them ! ere obvious. 2he moviema, ers ! ere a
fairly affluent ro! d of fre=uent flyers ! ho might need bla , (
mar, et dollars and do uments, from time to time. It ! as lear to
me, as ! ell, that the asting +ob ! as im#ortant to ; isa. @n its
o! n, that ! as reason enough for me to get involved. I li, ed her,
and I ! as glad that she ! anted to li, e me.

5Good,5 <al#ana on luded, o#ening the door and ste##ing out to the ar #ar, . 7e ! al, ed ba , to the hotel foyer, ea h of us ! ith sunglasses lam#ed to our eyes. 7e shoo, hands at the same s#ot ! here ! e"d met half an hour before.

5*ave your lun h,5 she said. 5I'll go ba , to the set. 7e"re in the ballroom. 7hen you're all done, follo! the ables and you'll find me. I'll introdu e you to the guys, and you an start right a! ay. 7e need a fe! foreigners for tomorro! 's shoot, here. 2! o guys and t! o gals, yaar. Olonde, S! eden ty#es, if you an find them. *ey((that ! as <ashmiri hash, _naE 7e'll get along +ust fine, ; in, you and me. 8iaoß 8iao, baby.5

In the restaurant, ; isa and I hea#ed our #lates high, and sat fa ing the sea to eat.

5<al#ana"s o, ay,5 she said bet! een mouthfuls. 5She"s sar asti as all hell, sometimes, and she"s a real ambitious girl((don't ma, e any mista, e about that((but she"s a straight tal, er and a real friend. 7hen she told me about the asting +ob, I thought about you. I thought you might be able to ... ma, e something out of it ...5 ??C

52han, s,5 I said, meeting her eye and trying to read her. 5I a##re iate the thought. Do you ! ant to be #artners in it ! ith meE5

5Des,5 she ans! ered =ui , ly. 5I ! as ho#ing ... ho#ing you"d ! ant to.5

57e ould ! or, it out together,5 I suggested. 5I don't thin, I'll have any trouble getting foreigners to ! or, in the movies, but I don't really ! ant to do the rest of it. Dou ould do that #art, if you li, e. Dou ould organise #i , ing them u#, loo, ing after them on the set, and ma, ing the #ayments and all that. I'll tal, them into it, and you ta, e it from there. I'd be glad to ! or,

! ith you, if you're interested.5

She smiled. It ! as a good smile6 the , ind you li, e to , ee#.

5I'd love to do it,5 she gushed, flushing #in, ! ith embarrassment under her tan. 5I really need to do something, ; in, and I thin, I'm ready. 7hen <al#ana ran this asting thing by me, I ! anted to +um# at it, but I ! as too nervous to ta, e it on alone. 2han, s.5

5Don't mention it. *o! "s it going ! ith you and)bdullahE5

54mmm,5 she mumbled, finishing a mouthful of food. 5I'm not ! or, ing, if you , no! ! hat I mean, so that's something. I'm not ! or, ing at the >ala e, and I'm not using. *e gave me money.) lot of money. I don't , no! ! here he got it. I don't really are. It's more money than I've ever seen in one bundle before in my ! hole life. It's in this ase, this metal ase. *e gave it to me, and as, ed me to loo, after it for him, and to s#end it ! henever I need it. It ! as real s#oo, y, , inda li, e ... I dunno ... li, e his last ! ill and testament, or something.5

I raised one eyebrow! un ons iously in a =ui11i al e' #ression. She aught the loo, , refle ted a moment, and then res#onded.

5I trust you, ; in. Dou're the only guy in this ity I do trust. 9unny thing is,)bdullah's the guy gave me the money and all, and I thin, I love him, in a , ind of insane ! ay, but I don't trust him. Is that a horrible thing to say about the guy you live ! ithE5

5- o.5

5Do you trust himE5

57ith my life.5

57hyE5

I hesitated, and then the words didn't come. We finished our meal and sat back, from the table, looking at the sea.

"We've been through some things," I said after a while. "But it's not just that. I trusted him before he did any of that. I don't, no! That it is." ???

man trusts another man when he sees enough of himself in him, I guess. Or maybe when he sees the things he wishes he had in himself."

We were silent for a time, each of us troubled, and stubbornly determining fate in our own ways.

"Are you ready?" I asked her. She nodded in reply. "Let's go to the movies."

We followed the blankets, vines of relay cables from the generator vans outside the hotel. They led us through a side entrance and past a procession of bustling assistants to the banquet room, which had been hired as a set. The room was filled with colorful, powerful lights, dazzling reflector panels, cameras, and equipment. Seconds after we entered, someone shouted quietly, "Release!" and then a riotous musical number began.

"*Indian movies aren't to everyone's taste. Some foreigners I'd dealt with had told me that they loathed the colorful, chaotic, and bursting with musical numbers, bursting with fast-paced action, and brazen villains. I understood what they meant, but I didn't agree with them. A year before, Johnny Bigar had told me that in former lives I must've been at least six different Indian personalities. I'd taken it as a high compliment, but it wasn't until I saw my first Bollywood movie shoot that I, finally, at last, and eventually, that he'd meant. I loved the singing, the dancing, and the music with the whole of my heart from the very first instant.

The producers had hired a thousand amplifier. The music rashed through the banquet room and rattled into our bones. The colours were from a tropical sea. The million lights were as dazzling as a sunstroke, like the faces were as beautiful as those carved on temple walls. The dancing was a frenzy of excited, exuberant lasciviousness and an intense lassitude. And the whole, improbably coherent expression of love and life, drama and comedy, was articulated in the delicate, unfurled elegance of a graceful hand, or the grin, of a seductive eye.

For an hour we waited as the dance number was rehearsed and refined and finally recorded on film. During a break, after that, Anjana introduced me to Cliff De Souza and Shandra Dheeta, two of the four producers of the film. De Souza was a tall, curly-haired, thirty-year-old Goan with a disarming grin and a loquacious air. Shandra Dheeta was older to forty. She was over-eighty, but comfortable with it: one of those big men who expect to fit a big idea of themselves. I liked both men and, though although they were too busy to talk for long, that first meeting was cordial and communitative.

I offered Anjana a lift back to town, but she'd arranged to ride with Anjana, and she chose to wait. I gave her the phone number at my new apartment, telling her to call if she needed me. On my way out through the foyer, I saw Anavita Singh also leaving the hotel. We'd both been so busy in recent months (she with writing about crimes, and me with committing them) that we hadn't seen one another for many years.

Anavita called out, running forward to catch her. "Just the woman I wanted to see! The number (one reporter, on Bombay's number (one news)er. "Oh! are you? Dou ... loo, ... great!"

She was dressed in a simple, pantsuit. It was the colour of bleached bone. She carried a linen handbag in the same colour. The single-breasted jacket ended to a decorative detail, and it was

obvious that she was as if hearing nothing under the +a , et.

5@h, come off it! she snarled, grinning and embarrassed. 5This is my dressed (to), ill outfit. I had to interview! &asant ; ai. I must come out of there.5

5You're moving in #o! erful ir les,5 I said, recalling #hotos of the #o#ulist #oliti an. *is in itements to ommunal violence had resulted in rioting, arson, and murder. /a h time I sa! him on television or read one of his bigoted s#ee hes in the ne! s#a#er, he made me thin, of the brutal madman ! ho alled himself Sa#na: a legal, #oliti al version of the #sy ho#athi , iller.

5It ! as a snare (#it u# there in his suite, I tell you, baba. Out I got my interview! . *e has a ! ea, ness for big tits.5 She ! hi##ed a finger into my face. 5Don't say anything!5

5*ey!5 I #a ified her, raising both hands and ! agging my head. 5I'm ... saying nothing at all, yaar.)bsolutely nothing. I'm loo, ing, mind you, and I ! ish I had three eyes, but I'm saying nothing at all!5

5You bastard!5 she hissed, laughing through gritted teeth. 5)h, shit, ! hat's ha##ening to the ! orld, man, ! hen one of the most im#ortant guys in the ity ! on't tal, to _you, but ! ill give a t! o(hour interview! to your tits! 4en are su h si , fu , ers, don't you thin, E5

5You got me there, <avita,5 I sighed.

5You , in" #igs, yaar.5

5Can't argue ! ith that. 7hen you're right, you're right.5

She eyed me sus#i iously. ??9

57hat are you being so damn agreeable about, ; inE5

5; isten, ! here are you goingE5

57hatE5

57here are you goingE Right no! , I mean.5

5! ! as going to ta, e a ab ba , to to! n. I'm living near 9lora
9ountain no! .5

5*o! about I give you a lift, on my bi, eE I ! ant to tal, to you.
I ! ant you to hel# me ! ith a #roblem.5

<avita didn't , no! me ! ell. *er eyes ! ere the colour of bar, on a
innamon tree, fle , ed ! ith golden s#ar, s. She loo, ed me u# and
do! n ! ith those eyes, and the forensi e' amination left her
some! here short of ins#ired reassuran e.

57hat , ind of a #roblemE5 she as, ed.

5!t involves a murder,5 I re#lied. 5) nd I ! ant you to ma, e it a
#age(one story. I'll tell you all about it at your #la e.) nd on
the ! ay you an tell me about &asant ; ai((you'll have to shout on
the ba , of the bi, e, so that'll hel# you get it out of your
system, naE5

Some forty minutes later, ! e sat together in her fourth(floor
! al, (u# a#artment on the edge of the 9ort area, near 9lora
9ountain. It ! as a tiny a#artment ! ith a foldout bed, a
rudimentary , it hen, and a hundred noisy neighbours. It boasted a
su#erb bathroom, ho! ever, large enough to hold a ! ashing ma hine
and dryer ! ithout ro! ding. 2here ! as also a bal ony en losed in
anti=ue ! rough iron that loo, ed out on the ! ide, busy s=uare
around the fountain.

5*is name is) nand Rao,5 I told her, si##ing the strong es#resso
offee she'd #re#ared for me. 5*e shared a hut, in the slum, ! ith
a guy named Rasheed. 2hey ! ere my neighbours ! hen I lived there.

When Rasheed's wife and her sister came to stay, from the village in Rajasthan. Chand moved out of the hut to leave room for Rasheed and the sisters.

"Hang on, I better get this done."

She stood up and walked to a table, muttered desultorily, here she gathered up a shawl, a shawl, and a shawl. She'd changed out of her pantsuit, and wore loose harem pants and a singlet.

"Watching her walk, following her beautiful movements, I realised for the first time just how beautiful she was. When she returned and set up the shawl, tucking her legs beneath her on the armchair as she prepared to sit, she caught me staring at her."

"What she said."

"Nothing," I smiled. "Anyway, so Chand Rao got to meet Rasheed's wife and her sister. We got to like them. They were shy, but they

were friendly, happy, and kind. I think, no, reading between the lines, that Chand got a little sweet on the sister. Anyway, one day Rasheed tells his wife that the only way they can set themselves up, in the little shop that they want, is if he sells his kidney (one of his kidneys (at this private hospital he, no, about. She argues against this, but he finally convinces her that it's their only chance.

"Well, he comes back from the hospital, and he tells her he's got good news and bad news. The good news is that they definitely want a kidney. The bad news is that they don't want a man's kidney (they want a woman's kidney."

"Anyway, I sighed, shaking my head.

"Deah. The guy was a brine. Anyway, his wife balks at this, understandably, but Rasheed convinces her, and she goes off to

have the operation.

Do you, no! Here this too, I said.

Deah. Chand Rao heard into it all, and told Iqbal, the head man in the slum. He got the details. So, any day, Chand Rao hears about this, when Rasheed's wife returns from the hospital, and he's furious. He tells Rasheed that they shared the hut together for thirty years, remember (and he tells that Rasheed is a con man. He has it out with Rasheed, but it comes to nothing. Rasheed gets all indignant. He kills a mosquito on himself, and tells Chand Rao to light it, if he doesn't trust him, and if he thinks he's such a bad guy. Chand Rao warns him to look after the woman, and leaves it at that.

When did this happen?

The operation was six months ago. Well, the next thing is, Rasheed tells his wife that he's been down to the hospital twenty times to sell his own kidney, but they don't want it. He tells her the money they got for her kidney was only half as much as they need to buy their business. He tells her that they still want women's kidneys, and he starts working on her to sell her sister's kidney. The wife is against it, but Rasheed works on the young sister, telling her that if she doesn't sell her kidney, then the wife will have sold her kidney for nothing. Finally, the woman gives in. Rasheed sends the younger sister off to the hospital, and she returns, minus one of her kidneys.

This is some guy, I muttered.

Deah. Well, I never liked him. He was one of those guys who smile as a tactic, you know, and not because they actually feel anything or are smiling about. Kind of like the way a salesman smiles.

And that happened to me too, off with the money, I suppose.

Deah. Rasheed too, the money and ran. The two sisters were devastated. Their health deteriorated. They went downhill fast. They ended up in hospital. First one, and then the other (they both fell into a coma, lying together in their hospital beds, they were pronounced dead within minutes of each other.) Nand was there, with a few others from the slum. We stayed long enough to see the sheets pulled over their faces. Then he ran out of the hospital. We went out of his mind with anger and ... guilt, I suppose. We went looking for Rasheed. We found every one of Rasheed's drinking dives. When he traced him down, Rasheed was lying in a rubbish pit, sleeping off a binge. We'd paid some kids to chase the rats off his drunken body. Nand chased the kids off and sat down beside Rasheed, and listened to him snore. Then he cut his throat, and waited there until the blood stopped flowing.

>retty messy, Avita muttered, not looking up from her pad.

It was. Nand gave himself up, and made a full confession. We've been charged with murder.

And you want me to ...

I want you to make it a front-page story. I want you to build some kind of popular movement around him, so that if they do convict him (which they will, for sure (they'll have to go a little easy on him. I want him to have support while he's in prison, and I want to see his prison time down to as little as possible.

That's a lot of I want.

I, no.

Well, she frowned, it's an interesting story, but I've got to tell you, in, we get too many stories like this every day. Wife-burning, drug murders, child prostitution, slavery, female

infanti ide((it's a ! ar against ! omen in India, ; in. It's a fight to the death, and mostly it's the ! omen dying. I ! ant to hel# your guy, but I don't see this as #age one, yaar.)nd any! ay, I don't have any #ull ! ith #age one. I'm ne! there myself, don't forget.5

52here's more,5 I #ressed her. 52he , i , er in the story is that the sisters didn't die. *alf an hour after they ! ere #ronoun ed dead, Rasheed's ! ife ?CF stirred beneath the sheet.) fe! minutes later, her sister moved and groaned. 2hey're alive and ! ell today. 2heir hut, in the slum, has be ome a , ind of shrine. >eo#le ome from all over the ity to see the mira le sisters ! ho returned from the dead. It's the best thing that's ever ha##ened to the businesses in the slum. 2hey're doing a roaring trade ! ith the #ilgrims.)nd the sisters are ri her than they ould ever have dreamed. >eo#le are thro! ing money at them, a ru#ee or t! o at a time, and it's really

adding u#. 2he sisters have set u# a harity for abandoned ! ives.)nd I thin, their story((ba , from the dead, you , no! ((is enough to +um# this to #age one.5

5) rrey yaar, babaB5 <avita yel#ed. 5@, ay, first you have to get me together ! ith the ! omen. 2hey're the , ey to this. 2hen I have to intervie!)nand Rao in #rison.5

5I'll ta, e you there.5

5- o,5 she insisted. 5I have to s#ea, to him alone. I don't ! ant him #rom#ted by you, or res#onding to you. I have to see ho! he'll hold u# on his o! n. If ! e're going to build a am#aign around him, he'll have to stand alone, yaar. Out you an s#ea, to him first and #re#are the ! ay before my intervie! . I'll try to get to see him in the ne' t t! o or three ! ee, s. 7e've got a lot to do.5

9or t! o hours ! e dis ussed the am#aign, and I ans! ered her many

Questions. I left her in a hurry, enthusiastically in a whirl of pressure and purpose. I rode straight out to the market, and bought a filling meal from one of the fast-food vans parked on the beach. But my appetite wasn't as good as I'd thought, and I ate less than half. I went down to the rocks to rinse my hands in the sea. Later, within sight of the spot where Abdullah had introduced himself to me three years before.

My words floated on the surface, shallow stream of my thoughts once again: the wrong thing, for the right reasons ... I thought of Chand Rao, in Arthur Road Prison, in the big dormitory room with the overseers and the body lie. I shivered the thought off into the breeze. Savita had asked me why the Chand Rao case was so important to me. I didn't tell her that he'd come to me before he committed the murder, only a week before he cut Rasheed's throat. I didn't tell her that I'd brushed him off, and insulted him, demeaning his dilemma with an offer of money. I smudged an answer to her question, and let her think that I was just trying to help a friend, just trying to do the right thing.
?CG

Chandrabhai once said that every virtuous act is inspired by a desire for self-interest. It mightn't be true of everyone, but it was true enough about me. The little good that I've done in the world has always dragged behind it a shadow of desire, inspiration. That I do it, no, no, and didn't, no, then is that, in the long run, motive matters more with good deeds than it does with bad. When all the guilt and shame for the bad lie

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Ased #ass#orts, , no! n as boo, s to us, the ounterfeiters and smugglers ! ho traded in them, had to be he , ed before they ould be sold or used by bla , mar, eteers. It ! as al! ays #ossible that the +un, ies, runa! ays, or indigent foreigners ! ho"d sold their #ass#orts to our agents ! ere ! anted for some serious offen e in their o! n or some other ountry. 4ore than a fe! smugglers had been aught out in that ! ay. 2hey"d bought #ass#orts, hanged them to suit, and set out on a mission, only to find themselves arrested at a foreign air#ort be ause the original o! ners ! ere ! anted for murder, or robbery, or different smuggling harges. 2o ensure the satisfa tion of our ustomers and the safety of our ouriers,)bdul Ghani sub+e ted every ne! #ass#ort that he bought or stole to t! o levels of s rutiny.

) ustoms offi er ! ith a ess to a om#uter at Oombay"s international air#ort #rovided the first filter.)t a time and #la e of his hoosing, the offi er ! as given a sheet bearing the ountry of origin, #ass#ort number, and original name on ea h #ass#ort to be he , ed.) day or t! o later he returned the sheet ! ith a line dra! n through those that ! ere flagged in his om#uter. Some of the #ass#orts ! ere flagged be ause international arrest(! arrants had been issued for the original o! ners. Some #ass#orts ! ere flagged be ause sus#i ion atta hed itself to the o! ner: a hint of involvement in the illegal drugs or arms trade, or some #oliti al onne tion that made se urity servi es uneasy. 7hatever the reason, flagged #ass#orts ouldn"t be sold on the bla , mar, et or used by Ghani"s ouriers.

9lagged boo, s still had their uses. It ! as #ossible to annibalise them by #ulling a#art the stit hing to furnish fresh #ages for other, usable boo, s. 2here ! ere also other uses ! ithin India.)lthough foreigners had to sho! their #ass#orts for 8(9orm entries ! hen they registered at hotels, every ity had its share of #la es that ! eren"t fastidiously #re ise about ?C? the resemblan e, or la , of it, bet! een a #ass#ort and its bearer. 9or those hotels, any #ass#ort did the +ob.)lthough

unable to travel out of India. With such a flagged passport, a man or woman could use one to move around within the country safely, and satisfy the minimum legal requirements that an obliging hotel manager had to observe.

An flagged passport that did pass the customs check, were sent through a second filter at airline offices. All the major airlines, except their own lists of hot or flagged passports. In addition of a passport name and number on the list was promoted by anything from a bad credit rating or fraudulent dealings with an airline

to any incident involving violent behaviour as a passenger on a plane. Naturally enough, when smugglers were going about the business of their crimes they were eager to avoid any but the most superficial and routine attention from airline staff, customs personnel, or police. A passport that was flagged, for any reason, was useless to them. Abdul Ghani's agents at the offices of most of the major airlines in Bombay checked the numbers and names of the passports. He'd a required, and reported those that were flagged. The plain passports that passed through both filters (a little less than half of all those obtained) were sold, or used by Ghani's couriers.

The clients who bought Ghani's illegal passports fell into three main categories. The first were economic refugees, people forced from their land by famine or driven to see a better life in another country. There were Turks wanting to work in Germany, Lebanese wanting to work in Italy, Algerians wanting to work in France, and people from several Asian countries who wanted to work in Canada and the United States. A family, a group of families, and sometimes a whole village community pooled their meagre earnings to purchase one of Abdul's passports and send a favoured son to one of the promised lands. Once there, he worked to repay their loan and eventually buy new passports for other young men and women. The passports sold for anything between five and ten thousand dollars. Ghani's network, issued about a hundred of those over-the-counter passports every year, and his

annual profit, after all the overheads, was as more than a million dollars.

Political refugees made up the second category of clients. The upheavals that sent those people into exile were often violent. They were victims of wars, and of conflicts based on community, religion, or ethnicity. Sometimes the upheaval was legislated: thousands of Congolese residents who weren't recognised as British citizens became potential clients, with the stroke of a pen, when Britain decided in 1980 to return its colonial possession to China in a thirteen-year resolution of sovereignty. Around the world, at any one time, there were tens of millions of refugees living in camps and safe havens. Abdul Ghani's assistant agents were never idle. They bought most of those people anywhere from ten to fifty thousand dollars. The higher price was determined by the greater risks involved in smuggling them into various countries, and the greater demand to escape from them.

The third group of clients for Abdul's illegal business was criminals. Occasionally, those criminals were men like me—thieves, smugglers, contractors, killers—who needed a new identity to stay one step ahead of the police. For the most part, however, Abdul Ghani's special clients were the kind of men who were more likely to build and fill prisons than to serve time in them. They were dictators, military coup leaders, secret police, and bureau rats from corrupt regimes forced to take flight when their crimes were uncovered or the regime fell. One Agandan fugitive (a

man I dealt with personally) had stolen more than a million dollars, allocated by international monetary agencies for essential service constructions, including a children's hospital. The hospital was never built. Instead, the sick, injured, and dying children were transported to a remote camp and left to fend for themselves. At a meeting that I set up in Kinshasa,aire, the man paid me two hundred thousand dollars for two books (a reference text, unblemished Swiss passport, and a virgin, original

Canadian passport (and travelled safely to Geneva).

My agents in South America, Asia, and Africa established contacts with embassies, torturers, mandarins, and martinets who'd supported fallen tyrannies. Dealing with them gave me more angry shame than anything else I ever did in Chanderbhai's service. In the young life I'd known as a free man, I'd been dedicated fighter of nationalist articles and pamphlets. I'd spent years researching and exposing the crimes and violations perpetrated by such men. I'd put my body on the line, supporting their victims in a hundred violent protests with the police. And I still felt some of the old hatred and a choking sense of outrage when I dealt with them. Out that life I'd known was gone. The revolutionary socialist activist had lost his ideals in heroin and crime. And I, too, was a wanted man. I, too, had a price on my head. I was a gangster, and I lived from one day to the next with only Chander's mafia counsel standing between me and prison torture.

So, I played my part in Ghani's network, helping mass murderers to escape from the death sentences they'd passed on so many others and had finally earned from their countrymen in return. Out I didn't like it, and I didn't like them, and I let them know it. I drove them to the wall on every deal, taking a little solace from the rage I provoked in them. And they haggled infuriatingly, those human rights abusers, self-righteously indignant about spending the money they'd gouged from people's mouths. Out in the end, they all caved in and agreed to our terms. In the end, they paid well.

None else in Chanderbhai's network seemed to share my sense of outrage or my shame. There's probably no single group of officials who are more cynical about politics and politicians than professional criminals. In their view, all politicians are ruthless and corrupt, and all political systems favour the powerful rich over the defenceless poor. And in time, and in a sense, I began to share their view because I, like the others, began

in ! hi h it ! as grounded. > rison had given us an intimate
a =uaintan e ! ith human(rights violations, and every day the
courts onfirmed ! hat ! e'd learned about the la! : the ri h in any
ountry, and any system, all! ays got the best +usti e money ould
buy.

@n the other hand, the riminals in <hader"s net! or, dis#layed a
, ind of egalitarianism that ! ould"ve filled ommunists and

Gnosti 8hristians ! ith admiring envy. 2hey didn"t are about the
olour, reed, ra e, or #oliti al orientation of lients, and
they didn"t +udge them ! hen as, ing about their #ast. /very life,
no matter ho! inno ent or evil, redu ed to only one =uestion: *o!
bad do you need the boo, E 2he ans! er established the going rate,
and every ustomer ! ho had the money to #ay it ! as born again,
! ith no history and no sin, in the moment of the deal. -o lient
! as better than any other, and none ! as ! orse.

)bdul Ghani, #ro#elled by the #urest amoral s#irit of mar, et
for es, servi ed the needs of generals, mer enaries,
misa##ro#riators of #ubli funds, and murderous interrogators
! ithout a hint of ensure or dismay. 2heir freedom brought in
about t! o million dollars ea h year in lear #rofit. Out although
he ! asn"t ethi ally s=ueamish about the sour e of the in ome, or
re eiving it,)bdul Ghani ! as religiously su#erstitious about
s#ending it. /very dollar earned in saving that #oisonous
lientele ! ent to ?C8

a refugee res ue #rogram that <haderbhai had established for
Iranians and)fghans dis#la ed by ! ar. /very #ass#ort bought by
one of the ! arlords or their a##arat hi, s bought fifty more
boo, s, identity ards, or travel do uments for Iranian and)fghan
refugees. 2hus, in one of those #sy hi labyrinths that fate
li, es to build around greed and fear, the high #ri es #aid by
tyrants res ued many of those made ! ret hed by tyranny.

<rishna and &illu taught me everything they , ne! about the
#ass#ort business, and in time I began to e' #eriment, reating

ne! identities for myself ! ith)meri an, 8anadian, Dut h, German, and Oritish boo, s. 4y ! or, ! asn"t as good as theirs, and never ! ould be. Good forgers are artists. 2heir artisti vision must en om#ass the deliberate reative smudge that gives ea h #age its ounterfeit authenti ty, no less than the a ura y of altered or manufa tured details. /a h #age that they reate is a miniature #ainting, a tiny e' #ression of their art. 2he #re ise angle of one slightly s, e! ed stam# or the usual blurring of another are as signifi ant to those small anvasses as the sha#e, #osition, and colour of a fallen rose might be in a grand master"s #ortrait. 2he effe t, no matter ho! s, ilfully a hieved, is al! ays born in the artist"s intuition.)nd intuition an"t be taught.

4y s, ill, instead, found e' #ression in the stories that had to be invented for every ne! ly reated boo, . 2here ! ere often ga#s of months, or even years, in the re ord of travel ontained ! ithin the boo, s that ! e got from foreigners. Some had overstayed their visas, and that la#se had to be e' #unged from the boo, before it ould be used. Stam#ing an e' it from Oombay air#ort before the last visa"s e' #iry date, as if the #ass#ort holder had left the ountry ! ithin the life of the visa, I then set about establishing a history of movement from one ountry to another for every boo, , using the ban, of e' it and entry stam#s that &illu had reated. ;ittle by little, I brought ea h boo, u# to date, and finally su##lied it ! ith a ne! visa for India and an entry stam# at Oombay air#ort.

2he hain of entries and e' its that lin, ed that la#sed time ! as al! ays arefully #lotted. <rishna and &illu had a library of logboo, s from the ma+or airlines, listing all of the flights in and out of /uro#e,)sia,)fri a, and the)meri as ! ith their de#arture dates and arrival times. If ! e #ut a stam# into a Oritish boo, stating that the holder had arrived in)thens on \$uly the fourth, say, ! e ! ere sure that a Oritish)ir! ays flight had onne ted at)thens air#ort on that day. In that ! ay, every boo, had a ?C9 #ersonal history of travel and e' #erien e ba , ed u# by logs,

timetables, and neither details! he had given the name bearer a redible personal history.

My first test of the passports I'd forged for myself was on the domestic transfer route, not as the double shuffle. Thousands of Iranian and Afghan refugees in Bombay tried to find asylum in Canada, Australia, the United States, and elsewhere, but the governments of those countries refused to consider them. If they could land there, in those Western countries, they would declare themselves to be asylum seekers and submit to the processes of assessment that determined the merit of their applications. Because they were political refugees and genuine asylum seekers, the applications they launched within the nominated country were often successful. The trick was to get them into Canada, or Sweden, or some other country of choice in the first place.

The double shuffle was the system we used. When Iranians or Afghans in Bombay tried to buy tickets to the asylum countries, they were required to show current visas for those countries. Out they couldn't obtain the visas legally, and false visas were impossible because they were immediately checked against the consular register. So I purchased a ticket to Canada or Sweden with a false visa. As a result, a well-dressed foreigner of European appearance, I was never subjected to anything but a cursory examination. No one ever bothered to check, if my visa was genuine. The refugee I was helping then purchased a ticket for the domestic leg (from Bombay to Delhi) on the same plane. We boarded the plane, I received boarding passes: mine was the green international boarding pass, and his was the red domestic pass. Once in the air, I showed our boarding passes. At Delhi airport, only those with green international boarding passes were permitted to remain on board. Regarding my domestic pass, I got down at Delhi and left the refugee to continue on to Canada, or Sweden, or whatever the destination of the flight would be. Upon arrival, he would declare himself to be an asylum seeker, and the process of his recognition would begin. In Delhi, I would spend the night at a five-star hotel and then purchase another ticket to repeat the process (the double shuffle) with another refugee.

on the Delhi to Bombay route.

The system worked. In those years we smuggled hundreds of Iranian and Afghan doctors, engineers, architects, academics, and poets into their nominated countries. 7%

I received three thousand dollars for a double shuffle, and for a while I did two doubles per month. After three months of internal flights from Bombay to Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, and Bangalore, Abdul Ghani sent me on my first international courier run. I carried a package, age of ten passports to Cairo. Using photographs of the recipients (sent from Cairo, the British and British had worked the passports into perfect counterfeit books. After sealing them in plastic, I taped them to my body under three layers of clothing, and fled into the steaming, hell (armed mayhem of Cairo's international airport.

It was a dangerous mission. At that time, Cairo was a neutral no-man's-land between the bloody wars that raged in Angola, Cambodia, Liberia, Sudan, Uganda, and the Congo. It was the personal fiefdom of the notoriously insane dictator Bokassa, and a heritage of the profit from every crime in the kingdom slithered into his pocket. Bokassa was a darling of the Western powers because he bought everything, including the weapons they offered to sell him. If it mattered to them that Bokassa turned the weapons on trade unionists and other social reformers in his own country, they never expressed the concern publicly. Those governments hosted the dictator in lavish style at royal and residential receptions while hundreds of men and women were being tortured to death in his prisons. The same governments were hunting me through the intelligence agency, Interpol, and there was no doubt in my mind that their ally would've taken great pleasure in finishing me off for them (as a bonus, so to speak, (if the passport mission had gone wrong and I'd found myself arrested in his capital city.

Still, I liked the wildness of *inshasa*, a city that thrived as an open market for the trade in every kind of contraband, from gold and drugs to rockets and launchers. The city was full of mercenaries, fugitives, criminals, black market profiteers, and wild-eyed, bare-nosed opportunists from all over Africa. I felt at home there, and I could've stayed longer, but within seventy-two hours I'd delivered the goods and collected one hundred and twenty thousand dollars in payment. It was *haderbhai's* money. I was anxious to hand it over. I booked the first flight back to Bombay, and reported to Abdul Ghani.

What I gained from the mission was ten thousand American dollars, field experience, and an introduction to the African branch of Ghani's network. The network and the experience were worth the risk, it seemed?

to me then. The money was unimportant. I could've done the job for half the price or less. I knew that most of the human lives in Bombay came and went much faster.

More than that, there was the danger. For some people, danger's a kind of drug or even an aphrodisiac. For me, living as a fugitive, living every day and every night of my life with the fear of being killed or captured, danger was something else. Danger was one of the languages I used to kill the dragon of stress.

It helped me to sleep. When I went to dangerous places and I did dangerous things, a rush of new and different fears swept over me. That new fear covered the dread that too often tormented me already. When the job was done, and the new fear subsided and passed away, I dropped in an exhausted state.

And I wasn't alone in that hunger for danger. In the course of the job I met other agents, smugglers, and mercenaries whose widened eyes and adrenaline-fueled reflexes matched my own. In time, they were all running from something: they were all afraid of something that they couldn't really forget or confront. And only danger money, earned with risk, helped them to

es a#e for a fe! hours and to slee#.

) se ond, third, and fourth tri# to)fri a follo! ed ! ithout in ident. I used three different #ass#orts, de#arting and arriving from different Indian international air#orts ea h time and then ta, ing domesti flights ba , to Oombay. 2he double(shuffle flights bet! een Delhi and Oombay ontinued. 2he s#e ialist tas, s that I #erformed ! ith <haled"s urren y dealers and some of the gold traders , e#t me busy((busy enough, most of the time, not to thin, too long and too hard of <arla.

2o! ard the end of the monsoon I visited the slum, and +oined I asim)li on his daily tour of ins#e tion.)s he he , ed the drainage hannels and ordered the re#air of damaged huts, I re alled ho! mu h I'd admired and de#ended u#on him ! hen I'd lived there in the slum. 7al, ing beside I asim)li in my ne! boots and bla , +eans, I ! at hed the strong young men in bare feet and lungis dig and s ra#e ! ith their hands, as I'd on e done. I ! at hed them shore u# the retaining ! alls and lear the logged drains, ensuring that the slum ! ould remain dry to the end of the rains.)nd I envied them. I envied the im#ortan e of the ! or, and their earnest devotion to it. I'd , no! n it on e, so ! ell((that fervent and un=uestioning dedi ation. I'd earned the smiles of #ride and gratitude from the slum(d! ellers ! hen the dirty ! or, ! as done. Out that life ! as gone for ?7F me. Its virtues and its sola es beyond #ri e ! ere as remote and irre overable as the life I'd , no! n and lost in)ustralia.

>erha#s sensing my sombre mood, I asim dire ted us to! ard the o#en area ! here >raba, er and \$ohnny ! ere ma, ing the first #re#arations for their ! eddings. \$ohnny and a do1en or so of his neighbours ! ere ere ting the frame for a shamiana, or great tent, ! here the ! edding ere monies ! ould ta, e #la e. Some distan e a! ay, other men ! ere building a small stage ! here the ou#les ! ould sit after the ere monies and re eive gifts from family members and friends. \$ohnny greeted me ! armly and e' #lained that >raba, er ! as ! or, ing in his rented ta' i, and ! ould return after sunset. 2ogether ! e ! al, ed around the framed stru ture, e' amining the onstru tion

and discussing the relative merits and costs of a lasti or a cotton covering.

Inviting me to drink tea, Johnny led us to the team of stage

builders. My former neighbour Seetendra as the supervisor for the road. He seemed to have recovered from the grief that had enfeebled him for many months after his wife's death in the cholera epidemic. He wasn't so robust (the once familiar aunt had shrunk to a tight little mound beneath his shirt) but his eyes were bright with hope again, and his smile wasn't forced. His son, Satish, had grown in a rapid burst since his mother's death. When I shook hands with him, I passed a hundred rupee note in the press of hands. He accepted it just as self-reliantly, and slid it into the pocket of his shorts. The smile he gave me was warm, but he was still wounded by his mother's death. There was a hollowiness in his eyes: a black hole of shadowed grieving that swallowed all the questions and released no answers. When he returned to his work, putting lengths of rope (fibre rope for the men to tie around bamboo bracing poles, his young father assumed a numb expression. I, meanwhile, that expression. I sometimes caught it, by chance, in the mirror: the way he looked when the heart of hardness that's trusting and innocent is ripped away, and we blame ourselves, rightly or wrongly, for its loss.

5 Dou, no! Here I got my name Johnny as, ed me as I seemed hot, delicious slum hai.

5- o, I answered, smiling to match the laughter in his eyes. 5 Dou never told me.

5 I was born on the footpath, near Bradford Road. My mother had a little lane there, a little hut made with lasti and tiles.

5 He lasti? The lasti was tied to a wall, underneath a sign. The sign was all broken, you know, and only tiles of different posters were still on the wall. On one side was a little bit of a movie poster with

the name Johnny written on it. Besides that one, and still, going out a bit, as a poster advertising cigars with (yes, you guessed it (only the word cigar still, going out.

And she liked it, I continued for him, and she

called me Johnny cigar. Her parents, you know, they had thrown her out. And the man who as my father had dumped her, so she absolutely refused to use either of those family names for me. And all the way through the labour, when she gave birth to me, on that footpath, she stared at those words, Johnny cigar, and she too, it as a sign, if you'll forgive the word. She as a very, very stubborn woman.

We looked at the little stage, at things as Setendra, Satish, and others lifted flat pieces of plywood onto the frame to make the floor.

It's a good name, Johnny, I said, after a while. I like it. And it brought you good luck.

We smiled at me, and the smile became a laugh.

I'm just glad it wasn't an advert for latinas or some such. He sniggered, causing me to laugh and spray tea at him in return.

It's taking you guys quite a while to tie the knot, I observed. When we could talk, again. What's the delay?

Umar, you know, he wants to play the successful businessman, and put a dowry with each of his daughters. Raba, her and I, we told him we don't believe in all that. We don't want a dowry, you know. It's kind of old-fashioned, all that stuff. And you, Raba, her's dad is not quite of the same opinion. We sent down a

list, from the village (a list of do! ry gifts he has in mind. *e
! ants a gold ! at h((a Sei, o automati ((and a ne! bi y le, among
other stuff. 2he model of bi y le he ! ants, the one he #i , ed out
for himself, ! e told him it's too big. 7e told him that his legs
are too damn short to rea h the #edals, let alone the ground,
yaar, but he"s ra1y for that bi y le.)ny! ay, ! e"re ! aiting for
<umar to olle t all his do! ry and su h. 2he ! eddings are set for
the last ! ee, in @ tober, before all the Di! ali and all that.5

52hat"ll be =uite a ! ee, . 4y friend &i, ram gets married that
! ee, , too.5

5Dou're oming to the ! eddings, ; inE5 he as, ed ! ith a small,
tight fro! n. \$ohnny ! as a man ! ho granted favours to others ! ith
selfless ?7H

generosity.)s is often the ase ! ith su h men, he ouldn't as,
for them, or e' #ress his ! ishes, ! ith anything li, e the same
ease.

5I ! ouldn't miss it for the ! orld,5 I re#lied, laughing. 5I"ll be
there ! ith bells on. I mean that literally((! hen you hear the
bells ringing, you"ll , no! I'm on my ! ay.5

7hen I left him, he ! as tal, ing to Satish. 2he boy listened
intently and stared into his fa e, his eyes as e' #ressionless as
a gravestone, and I remembered ho! he"d lut hed at my leg on the
day that <arla visited me in the slum6 ho! he"d favoured her ! ith
a shy, sin ere smile. 2he memory sli ed into my dead heart. It's
said that you an never go home again, and it's true enough, of
ourse. Out the o##osite is also true. Dou must go ba , , and you
all! ays go ba , , and you an never sto# going ba , , no matter ho!
hard you try.

-eeding distra tion, I rode my bi, e out to the R.<. film studios,
gunning the engine and s! erving too often and too fast bet! een
the ars. I'd hired eight foreigners the day before, and had sent
them to ;isa. It ! asn't diffi ult for me to find and onvin e
foreigners to fill non(s#ea, ing roles in the Oolly! ood films. 2he

same German, Swiss, Swedish, or American tourists! who would've reacted with mistrust and hostility to Indian acting agents

responded enthusiastically! when I approached them. In the years that I'd lived in the slum and worked as a tour guide, I'd met every kind of foreign tourist. I'd developed a style in dealing with them that won their trust easily. That style was that of a salesman, a flatterer, and one who flatters, combined with a hint of mischief, a sniff of condescension, and a touch of contempt.

When, as a tour guide had also given me friendships in several Bombay restaurants. For years I'd steered my tour parties into the Safe Condegar, the Gaiety, Ditty's Suite Bar, and the Fifth, Arabian Restaurant, Mysara Safe, the Strand Coffee House, the Ideal, and others in the tourist beat, and encouraged them to spend their money. When I needed foreigners to fill bits in the Hollywood films, I trailed those cafes and restaurants. The owners, managers, and waiters always greeted me warmly. Whenever I saw a suitable group of young men and women, I approached them with the offer of a chance to work in an Indian movie. With the restaurant staff vouching for me, I usually secured their confidence and agreement within a few minutes. I then bargained; a barter to arrange transport for the following day. ??

The system worked well. In the few months since I'd started working together, I was able to bring in acting talent from the major studios and producers. Finding the most recent group (the foreigners I'd hired the day before) as our first job for the famous R.C. studio.

I was curious to see the large, prestigious studio complex, and as I rode through the entrance gates my spirits lifted to the tall grey sails of the corrugated gable roofs. For a barter, and others like her, the dream world of movies inspired an almost reverential awe. I wasn't awed by the movie world, but I wasn't

immune to it either. /very time I entered the fantasy(land of a film studio, a little of the magi that makes a movie caught in my heart and lifted me, bright ! ith sur#rise, from the gloomy sea that, too much and too often, my life had become.

The guards directed me to a sound stage ! here ; isa and her group of Germans ! ere ! aiting. I'd arrived during a break, in the shooting, and found ; isa serving coffee and tea to the young foreigners. They ! ere seated at t! o tables((t! o of several that ! ere arranged around a stage, on a set that ! as designed to re#li ate a modern night club. I greeted them, e' hanging a fe! #leasantries, and then ; isa too, me aside.

5*o! are theyE5 I asked her ! hen ! e ! ere alone.

5They're great,5 she answered happily. 5They're #atient and relaxed and having a good time, I think, . 2his'll be a good shoot. You've sent some #retty good #eo#le in the last ou#le ! ee, s, ; in. The studios are real #leased. 7e could ... you , no! , ! e could really ! or, this into something, you and me.5

5Do you like this, don't youE5

5Sure I do,5 she said, giving me a smile I could feel on the back of my head. 2hen her e' #ression shifted into something more solemn, something determined((the , ind of determination you find in #eo#le ! ho do it all the hard ! ay, ! ithout ho#e. She ! as beautiful: a 8alifornia beach beauty in the carnal +ungle of Bombay a #om(#om girl ! ho'd #ulled herself out of the death(by lee hes of heroin and the sybaritic suffocation of 4adame . hou's >alace. *er s, in ! as clear and tanned. *er s, y(blue eyes ! ere radiant ! ith resolve. *er long, curly blonde hair ! as #ulled back from her face, and held in an elegant coiffure that com#lemented the de#orousness of her modest, ivory(oloured #antsuit. She beat heroin, I found myself thinking, as I met her stare. She beat it. She got off the stuff. I ! as suddenly aware of ho! brave she ! as, and that the courage in her((?7C

When you, ne! it! as there, and you, ne! ho! to loo, for it((! as
as #al#able and riveting as the fier e, im#ersonal mena e in a
tiger"s eye.

5I li, e this gig,5 she said. 5I li, e the #eo#le, and the ! or, . I
li, e the life. I thin, _you should li, e it, too.5

5I li, e you,5 I smiled.

She laughed, and sli##ed an arm through mine, leading us in a
stroll around the set.

5The movie"s alled >aan h >aa#i,5 she said.

59ive , issues ...5

5-o. #aa#i, not #a#i. 2hat"s the #lay on ! ords. >aa#i means
thief, and #a#i means , iss. So, it"s really 9ive 2hievs, but
there"s a +o, e about it being 9ive <issues, as ! ell, be ause it"s
a romanti omedy. 2he female lead is <imi <at, ar. I thin, she"s
gorgeous. She"s not the best dan er in the ! orld, but she"s a
beautiful girl. 2he male lead is 8hun, ey >andey. *e ould be
good, real good, if his head ! asn"t +ammed so far u# his o! n
ass.5

57hile ! e"re on the sub+e t, have you had any more trouble ! ith
4auri1ioE5

5-ot a thing from him, but I"m ! orried about Alla. She"s been
gone for a ! hole day and night. She too, a all from 4odena the
night before last, and left in a hurry. It ! as the first time he
surfa ed in ! ee, s. I haven"t heard from her sin e, and she
#romised to all.5

I rubbed the fro! n from my forehead, u# through my untidy hair.

5Alla , no! s ! hat she"s doing,5 I gro! led. 5She"s not your
#roblem, and she"s not mine. I hel#ed her be ause she as, ed me

to. Oe ause I li, e her. Out I'm getting tired of this Alla(4auri1io(4odena thing, you , no! ! hat I meanE Did 4odena say anything to her about the moneyE5

5I don't , no! . 4aybe.5

57ell, it's still missing, and so is 4odena. 2he boys on the street have been telling me. 4auri1io"s going around all over the #la e loo, ing for 4odena. *e ! on't give u# until he finds him.)nd Alla"s no better. Si' ty thousand bu , s((it"s not all that mu h, but #eo#le have been , illed for less. If 4odena"s got it, he better stay lear of Alla ! hile 4auri1io"s still after him.5

5I , no! . I , no! .5

*er eyes ! ere suddenly gla1ed and a##rehensive.

5I'm not ! orried about Alla,5 I said more softly. 5I ! orry about you. If ?77 4odena"s ba , , you should stay lose to)bdullah for a ! hile. @r me.5

She loo, ed at me ! ith her li#s #ressed to ! hite rims around ! hat she ! anted to say but ouldn't or ! ouldn't.

52ell me about the s ene,5 I suggested, trying to shift us from the old, bla , ! hirl#ool that Alla"s life ! as be oming. 57hat"s going on in this movieE5

5It"s a night lub, or at least it"s a movie version of one. 2he hero steals a æ! el from a ri h #oliti ian, I thin, ((something li, e that((and he runs in here to hide. *e ! at hes the girl, <imi, doing a big dan e number, and he falls for her. 7hen the o#s sho! u#, he hides the æ! el in her ! ig. 2he rest of the movie is about ho! he tries to get lose to her, to get the æ! el ba , .5

She #aised, studying my fa e, and trying to read the e' #ression in my eyes.

5It's ... I guess you thin, it's , inda stu#id.5

5-o, I don't,5 I laughed. 5I li, e it. I li, e all this. In the real ! orld, the guy ! ould +ust beat her u# and ta, e his +e! el ba , . *e might even shoot her. I li, e the Oolly! ood version better.5

5So do I,5 she said, laughing. 5I love it. 2hey #ut it all together from #ainted anvas and s, inny #ie es of ! ood and it's ... it's li, e they're ma, ing dreams or something. I , no! that sounds orny, but I mean it. I love this ! orld, ; in, and I don't ! ant to go ba , to the other one.5

5*ey, ; inB5 a voi e alled out from behind me. It ! as 8handra

4ehta, one of the #rodu ers. 5Dou got a minuteE5

I left ; isa ! ith the German tourists and +oined 8handra 4ehta beneath a metal gantry that su##orted a om#le' tree of bright lights. *e ! ore a baseball a# ba , ! ards, and the #ress of the tight band made his #lum# fa e seem rounder. 9aded blue ; evis ! ere buttoned u# under his e' #ansive #aun h, and a long , urtah shirt almost overed it from above. *e ! as s! eating in the mildly humid air of the losed set.

5*ey, man. *o! is itE I've been ! anting to see you, yaar.5 *is voi e ! as breathy ! ith ons#ira y. 5; et's go outside and get some air. I'm boiling my fu , in" bonus off in here, yaar.5

)s ! e strolled bet! een the metal(domed buildings, a tors in ostume rossed our #ath, together ! ith men arrying #ro#s and #ie es of e=ui#ment.)t one #oint, a grou# of nine #retty dan ing girls dressed in e' oti , feathered ostumes #assed us on their

I lay to a sound stage. They turned my head around, forcing my body to follow it until I was almost, in a way, ready for a while. Shandra never gave them so much as a glance.

Listen, in, that I wanted to talk to you about ... he said, touching my arm at the elbow as I walked. I have this friend, you know, and he's a business fellow, with a lot of dealings in the AS).) hah, that to say ... he has a problem of his rupees (to dollars) cash flow, yaar. I was kind of hoping that you ... a little bird told me that you are a helpful fellow! When the cash is not flowing.

I assume this cash should be in A.S. dollars, when it's flowing correctly.

Des, he smiled. I'm very glad that you understand his problem.

Just how badly is the flow balanced?

Oh, I think that about ten thousand should move things along very nicely.

I told him Shandra's current rate for A.S. dollars, and he agreed to the terms. I arranged to meet him on the set the following day. I was to have the rupees (a much larger bundle of notes than the American currency made) (in a soft bag, ready for me to collect on my bicycle. I showed up on the deal. Kindful of the man I respected, Lord Bdel, a man whose name would never be mentioned by Shandra or by me, I put a slightly uncomfortable pressure in the handshake. It was a tiny pain inflicted on him, the merest thing, but it reinforced the hard eye (onto) above my amiable smile.

Don't start this if you're going to mess it up, Shandra, I

! arned, as the handsha, e #ulsd from his #in hed hand to his eyes. 5- obody li, es to get +er, ed around((my friends least of all.5

5@h, of ourse not, babaB5 he +o, ed, not =uite smothering the bli# of alarm that s#i, ed in his eyes. 5- o #roblem. <oi baht nahiB Don't ! orryB I'm very grateful that you an hel# me, my ... ! hat to say, hel# my friend, ! ith his #roblem, yaar.5

7e strolled ba , to the sound stage, and I found ; isa ! ith 4eha"s fello! #rodu er, 8liff De Sou1a.

5*ey, manB Dou"ll doB5 8liff said in greeting, sei1ing me by the arm and dragging me to! ard the tables on the night lub set. I loo, ed at ; isa, but she +ust raised her hands in a gesture that said Dou"re on your o! n, buddy.

57hat"s going on, 8liffE5

57e need another guy, yaar. 7e need a guy, a gora, sitting bet! een ?79 these t! o lovely girls.5

5@h, no you don"t.5 I resisted him, trying to ! restle myself out of his gri# ! ithout a tually hurting him. 7e ! ere at the table. 2he t! o German girls stood and rea hed out to drag me into the seat bet! een them. 5I an"t do thisB I don"t a tB I"m amera shyB I don"t do thisB5

5- a, , omm" s honB *J or" auf.5 one of the girls said. 5Dou are the one ! ho told us yesterday ho! easy it is to do this, naE5

2hey ! ere attra tive ! omen. I"d sele ted their grou# #re isely be ause they ! ere all healthy and attra tive men and ! omen. 2heir smiles ! ere hallenging me to +oin them. I thought about ! hat it ! ould mean: ta, ing a #art in a movie that about three hundred million #eo#le in ten or more ountries ! ould see ! hile I ! as on the run as my ountry"s most ! anted man. It ! as foolish. It ! as

dangerous.

"Oh, why the hell not," I shrugged.

Bliff and the stagehands backed away as the cast members too, their flashes on the set. The star, Shun, eyed me as a handsome, athletic, young Bombay guy. I'd seen him in a few of the movies I'd dated with my Indian friends, and I was surprised to discover that he was considerably more handsome and charismatic in person than he was on the screen. My assistant held up a mirror while Shun combed and fretted at his hair. The intensity of the gaze that he focused on the mirror was as steadfast as a surgeon's might be in the midst of a 'comple' and ritual procedure.

"You missed the best part," one of the German girls whispered to

me. "It too, this guy a big time to learn his dancing moves for this scene. We rehearsed it quite a few many times. And every time he rehearsed it, this little guy with the Siegel ... the mirror, he goes out, and he looks at him, with the hair combing, all again. If they just used all that stuff of him rehearsing it and combing his hair while the little guy holds the mirror, I tell you, this could be a big comedy hit."

The director of the film stood beside his cinematographer, looked with one eye to the lens of the camera, and then gave his last instructions to the lighting crew. At a signal, the director's assistant called for all (quiet on the set. The cinematographer announced that the film was rolling.

"The sound," the director commanded. "And ... action"

"I was hammered into the set from large stadium speakers. It was the loudest that I'd ever heard Indian movie music played, and I loved it. The

dancers, including the star, ran onto the

artificial stage. Working the set and the crowd of extras, Kimi sashayed across the stage and made her way from table to table, dancing and miming her number all the while. The hero joined in the dance, and then ducked under a table when the actors playing the cops arrived. The whole scene lasted only five minutes in the film, but it took all the morning to rehearse and most of the afternoon to shoot. My first taste of show business resulted in the brief smiles of the camera that captured my wide smile as Kimi paused, in her seductive routine, at the back of my hair.

We sent the foreign tourists home in the cars, and Lisa rode back to town with me on the Outlet. It was a warm evening and she removed her jacket to ride, pulling the lip from her long hair. She wrapped her arms around my waist and pressed her cheek into my back. She was a good passenger: the kind who surrenders her will in an unconditional trust, and blends her body to the nuance of the rider. Through my thin white shirt I felt the press of her breasts against my back. The shirt was open in the warm wind, and her hands lunged to the tight skin of my waist. I never wore a helmet on the bike. There was a helmet clipped to the back of the seat for a passenger, but she chose not to wear it. Occasionally, when she stopped for the flow of traffic or to make a turn, a gust of wind whipped her long, curly blonde hair over my shoulder and into my mouth. The perfume of verbena flowers lingered on my lips. Her thighs lunged to me, gently, and with a promise or a threat of the strength they possessed. I remembered those thighs, the skin as soft as moonlight on the palm of my hand that night at Carla's house. And then, as if she was reading my thoughts or joining them, she spoke when the bike stopped at a traffic signal.

5*o! "s the ,idE5

52he ,idE5

52hat little ,id you had with you that night, you remember, at Carla's place.5

5 *e's fine. I sa! him last ! ee, , at his un le"s. *e's not so little any more. *e's gro! ing fast. *e's at a #rivate s hool. *e doesn't li, e it mu h, but he'll do o, ay.5

5Do you miss himE5

2he signal hanged and I , i , ed the bi, e into gear, t! isting the throttle to send us into the interse tion on the sta ato throbbing of the ?81

engine's gro! l. I didn't ans! er her. @f ourse I missed him. *e ! as a good , id. I missed my daughter. I missed my mother and all of my family. I missed my friends: I missed them all and I ! as sure, in those des#erate years, that I ! ould never see them again. 4issing the #eo#le I loved ! as a , ind of grieving for me, and it ! as ! orse, mu h ! orse, for the fa t that((so far as I , ne! ((they ! eren't dead. 4y heart, sometimes, ! as a graveyard full of blan, stones.)nd ! hen I ! as alone in my a#artment, night after night, that grieving and missing ho, ed me. 2here ! as money in bundles on the dressing table, and there ! ere #ass#orts freshly forged that ould send me ... any! here. Out there ! as no! here to go: no! here that ! as n't em#tied of meaning and identity and love by the va uum of those ! ho ! ere missing and lost forever.

I ! as the fugitive. I ! as the vanished one. I ! as the one ! ho ! as missing6 missing in a tion. Out inside the sli#stream of my flight, they ! ere the missing ones. Inside my e' ile, it ! as the ! hole ! orld I on e , ne! that ! as missing. 2he fugitive , ind run, trying against their hearts to annihilate the #ast, and ! ith it every tell(tale tra e of ! hat they ! ere, ! here they ame from, and those ! ho on e loved them.)nd they run into that e' tin tion of themselves, to survive, but they al! ays fail. 7e an deny the #ast, but ! e an't es a#e its torment be ause the #ast is a s#ea, ing shado! that , ee#s #a e ! ith the truth of ! hat ! e are, ste# for ste#, until ! e die.

)nd from the #in, and #ur#le #alette of the #erished evening, a blue(bla , night rose u# around us as ! e rode. 7e #lunged ! ith

the sea(! ind into tunnels of light. 2he robe of sunset sli##ed from the shoulders of the ity. ; isa"s hands moved on my hard s, in li, e the sea6 li, e the surging, s! arming aress of the sea.)nd for a moment, as ! e rode together, ! e ! ere one: one desire, one #romise dissolving into om#romise, one mouth tasting the tri , le of danger and delight.)nd something((it might"ve been love, or fear((goaded me to the hoi e, #utting ! his#ers in the ! arming ! ind: 2his is as young, and as free, as you"ll ever be.

5l better go.5

5Don't you ! ant a coffee or somethingE5 she as, ed, her hand on the , ey in the door to her a#artment.

5l better go.5

5<avita"s really into this story you gave her, about the girls from the slum. 2he girls ! ho ame ba , from the dead. It"s all she tal, s about. 2he ?8F Olue Sisters, she alls them. I don't , no! ! hy she alls them that, but it"s a #retty ool name.5

She ! as ma, ing onversation, holding me there. I loo, ed into the s, y that ! as her eyes.

5l better go.5

2! o hours later, fully a! a, e, and still feeling the #ress of her li#s in the good(night , iss, I ! asn't sur#rised ! hen the #hone rang.

58an you ome over right a! ayE5 she said ! hen I ans! ered the all.

I ! as silent, struggling to find a ! ay to say no that sounded li, e yes.

I've been trying to find Abdullah, but he doesn't answer, she
went on, and then I heard the flattened, frightened, shell-
shocked drone in her voice.

What is it? What's happened?

We had some trouble ... there! ... some trouble ...

As it is, are you okay?

*He's dead, she mumbled. I killed him.

Is anyone there?

Anyone? she repeated vaguely.

Is anyone else there, in the apartment?

-o. I mean, yes. (Alla's here, and him, on the floor. That's ...)

Listen! I commanded, open the door. Don't let anyone in.

The door's busted, she murmured, her voice pleading. *She
smashed the lock off the wall when he busted in here.

@, ay. Push something up against the door (a chair or something.
<ee# it closed until I get there.

Alla's a mess. She ... she's pretty upset.

I'll be okay. Just block the door. Don't phone anyone else.

Don't speak to anyone, and don't let anyone in. Make a pot of
coffee, with lots of milk, and sugar (four spoons of sugar (and
sit down with Alla to drink them. Give her a stiff drink, as
well, if she needs it. I'm on my way. I'll be there in ten

minutes. *ang in there, and stay cool.5

Riding the night, cutting into crowded streets, finding the bike into the web of lights, I felt nothing: no fear, no dread, no shiver of excitement. Redlining a motorcycle means opening the throttle so hard, with every change of gears, that the needle on the revcounter is tilted all the way round to the red line of maximum revolutions. And that's what we were doing, all of us, in our different ways, Charles and Didier and Abdullah and I: we were redlining our lives. And Charles. And Abdullah. Tipping the needle to the red line.

But whenever Charles told me that the only time he ever stopped hating himself was when he failed because so great that he acted without thinking or feeling anything at all. I wished he hadn't said it to me because I knew exactly what he meant. And I rode that night, I soared that night, and the stillness in my heart was almost like being at sea.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

In my first, life fight I learned that there are two kinds of people who enter a deadly conflict: those who want to live, and those who live to die. The ones who live, killing might come into a fight with most of the fire and fury, but the man or woman who fights just to live, who kills just to survive, will usually come out of it on top. If the killer begins to lose the fight, his reason for fighting it fades. If the survivor begins to lose, his reason for fighting it flares up fiercer than ever. And killing contests with deadly intentions, unlike common fistfights, are lost and won in the reasons that remain. When the blood begins to run. The simplest fact is that fighting to save a life is a better and more enduring reason than fighting to end one.

My first, life fight was as in prison. In the most prison fights, it started trivially and ended savagely. My adversary was a fit, strong veteran of many fights. He was as a standover man, his height meant that he mugged weaker men for money and tobacco. He inspired fear in most of the men and, not burdened with audaciousness, he confused that fear with respect. I didn't respect him. I detest bullies for their cowardice, and despise them for their cruelty. I never became a tough man who preyed on the weak. Tough men hate bullies almost as much as bullies hate tough men.

And I was as tough enough. I'd grown up in a rough, working-class neighbourhood, and I'd been fighting all my life. One in the

prison system, never that then because I wasn't a career criminal, and I had no history. I began my prison career as a first offender. That's more, I was an intellectual, and I sounded and acted like one. Some men respected that and some ridiculed it, but none of them feared it. Nevertheless, the long prison sentence that I was serving (twenty years at hard labour for armed robberies) gave most of them pause. I was a dark horse. One day, never! I would respond to a real test, and more?

than a few! I was curious about it.

The test, when it did come, was flashing steel, and broken teeth, and eyes rolling wide and wild as a frenzied dog. *He attacked me in the prison laundry, the one place not observed directly by guards patrolling that place, but even the gun towers. It was the kind of unprovoked surprise attack, that's not in prison slang as a snea, (go. *He was armed with a steel table knife, sharpened with endlessly malignant attention on the stone floor of his cell. Its edge was sharp enough to shave a man or cut his throat. I'd never carried a knife or used one in my life before prison. Out in there, these men were attacked and stabbed every other day, I'd followed the advice of the hard men who'd survived long years there. It's better to have a weapon and not need it, they'd told me more than once, than need it and not have it. My knife was a sharpened piece of metal about as thick as a man's finger and a little longer than a hand. The hilt was formed with a ring, and fitted into my hand without bunching the fingers. When the fight began he didn't, not that I was armed, but we both, in our separate ways, expected that it was a fight to the death. *He wanted to kill me, and I was sure that I had to kill him to survive.

*He made two mistakes. The first was to fight on the back foot. In the surprise of his snea, attack, he'd first rushed at me and, with two slashes of the knife, he'd cut me across the chest and the forearm. *He should've pressed on to finish it, hacking and tearing and stabbing at me, but he stepped back, instead and saved the knife in little circles. *He might've expected me to submit (most of his foes surrendered quickly, defeated by their fear of him as much as by the sight of their own blood. *He might've been so sure he would win that he was simply toying with me and teasing out the thrill of the kill. Whatever the reason, he lost the advantage and he lost the fight in that first backhand stroke. *He gave me time to drag my knife from inside my shirt and shake it out to beat him. I saw the surprise in his eyes, and it was my cue to counter(attack, .

*is se ond mista, e ! as that he held the , nife as if it ! as a s! ord and he ! as in a fen ing mat h.) man uses an underhand gri# ! hen he e' #e ts his , nife, li, e a gun, to do the fighting for him. Out a , nife isn't a gun, of course, and in a , nife fight it isn't the ! ea#on that does the fighting: it's the man. 2he , nife is +ust there to hel# him finish it. 2he ! inning gri# is a dagger hold, ! ith the blade do! n! ard, and the fist that holds it still free to #un h. 2hat gri# gives a man ma' imum #o! er in the ?8C

do! n! ard thrust and an e' tra ! ea#on in his losed fist.

*e dodged and ! eaved in a rou h, slashing the , nife in s! ee#ing ar s ! ith his arms out ! ide. *e ! as right(handed. I ado#ted a south#a! (bo' ing stan e, the dagger in my right fist. Ste##ing ! ith the right foot, and dragging the left to , ee# my balan e, I too, the fight to him. *e ri##ed the blade at me t! i e and then lunged for! ard. I side(ste##ed, and #un hed at him ! ith a three(#un h ombination, right(left(right. @ne of them ! as a lu , y #un h. *is nose bro, e, and his eyes ! atered and burned, blurring his vision. *e lunged again, and tried to bring the , nife in from the side. I grabbed at his ! rist ! ith my left hand, ste##ed into the s#a e bet! een his legs, and stabbed him in the hest. I ! as trying for the heart or a lung. It didn't hit either one, but still I rammed the s#i, e u# to the hilt into the meaty flesh beneath his ollarbone. It bro, e the s, in of his ba , +ust belo! the shoulder blade.

*e ! as +ammed against a se tion of ! all bet! een a ! ashing ma hine and a lothes(dryer. Asing the s#i, e to hold him in #la e, and ! ith my left hand lo , ed to his , nife(! rist, I tried to bite his fa e and ne , , but he ! hi##ed his head from side to side so s! iftly that I o#ted for head(butts instead. @ur heads ra , ed together several times until one des#erate, ! ren hing effort of his legs sent us s#ra! ling onto the floor together. *e dro##ed his , nife in the fall, but the s#i, e tore free from his hest. *e began to drag himself to! ard the door of the laundry. I ouldn't tell if he ! as trying to es a#e or see, ing a ne! advantage. I

didn't take a chance. My head was level with his legs. Thrashing together on the ground, I reached up and grabbed the belt of his trousers. Using it for leverage, I stabbed him in the thigh three times, and again, and again. I struck, bone more than once, feeling the jarring deflection all the way up my arm. Releasing his belt, I stretched my left hand out for his knife, trying to reach it so that I could stab him with that one as well.

*He didn't scream. I'll say that much for the belt o

me to the fight and the wounded man. I had to hope that it would heal. There was a deep slash from my left shoulder to the centre of my chest. It was also a clean cut, and it was bleeding freely. I burned the contents of a cigarette into the wounds to help the pain, and rubbed the ash into both wounds. It was painful, but it sealed the wounds immediately and stopped the bleeding.

I never spoke of the fight to anyone, but most of the men knew about it soon enough, and they all knew that I'd survived the test. The scar on my chest, the scar that men saw every day in the prison shower, reminded them of my willingness to fight. It was a warning, like the bright bands of colour on the sides of a sea snake. It's still there, that scar, as long and white after all these years as it ever was. And it's still a warning. I touch it, and I see the killer leading for his life. I remember, reflected in the fright (filled domes of his eyes, fate's mirror, the sight of the twisted, hated thing that I became in the fight.

My first knife fight wasn't my last, and as I stood over Aurilio Oelane's dead body I felt the cold, sharp memory of my own experience of stabbing and being stabbed. *e was fast in a kneeling posture, with his upper body on a corner of the couch and his legs on the floor. Beside his slightly folded right hand there was a razor (sharp stiletto resting on the carpet.) blade, (handled during my fight) as buried to the hilt.

It ran, in his back, a little to the left of his spine and just below the shoulder blade. It was a long, wide, sharp knife. I'd seen that knife before, in Lisa's hand, the last time Aurilio had made the mistake of coming to the apartment uninvited. That was one lesson he should've learned the first time. We don't, of course. It's okay, Carla once said, because if we all learned what we should learn, the first time round, we wouldn't need love at all. Well, Aurilio had learned that lesson in the end, the hard way (fast in his own blood. *e was that Didier called a fully mature man. When I'd kicked Didier once for being immature, he'd told me that he was proud and delighted to be immature. The

fully mature man or woman, he said, has about thirty seconds left to live.

Those thoughts rolled over one another in my mind like the steel balls in Captain Jeeg's hand. It was the wife that did it, of

covered Aauri's body with a blanket, and she shuddered. *er face
rumpled into features of pain, and she cried for the first time.

; isa! as calm. She! as dressed in a pullover and jeans, an outfit
that only a Bombay native could wear on such a humid, still, and
hot night. There! as the mark of a blow around her eye and on her
cheek. When Alla! as quiet again! entered the room to stand
near the door, out of her hearing. ; isa too, a cigarette, bent
her head to light it from my match, and then exhaled, looking
directly into my face for the first time since I'd entered the
apartment.

"I'm glad you came. I'm glad you're here. I couldn't help it. I
had to do it, he((5

"Stop it, ; isa! I interrupted her. The tone! as harsh, but my
voice! as quiet and firm. "You didn't stab him. She did. I can
see it in her eyes. I, no! the look. She's still stabbing him
no!, still going over it in her mind. She'll have that look for a
while. You're trying to rotate her, but you! on't help her by
lying to me."

She smiled. Under the circumstances, it! as a very good smile. If
! hadn't been standing next to a dead man with a knife in his

heart, I'd have found it irresistible.

"That happened"

"I don't want her to get hurt, that's all," she replied evenly.
The smile closed up in the thin, grim line of her cursed lips.

"- either do I. That happened"

"*e busted in, slashed her up. *e! as raly, out of his mind. I
think, he! as on something. *e! as screaming at her, and she
couldn't answer him. She! as even ralyer than he! as. I sent an

hour ! ith her before he rashed in here. She told me about 4odena. I'm not sur#rised she ! as ra1y. It's ... fu , , ; in, it's a bad story. She ! as out of her mind be ause of it.)ny! ay, he rashed through the door li, e a gorilla, and he slashed her. *e ! as overed in blood((4odena"s, I thin, . It ! as #retty fu , in" s ary. I tried to +um# him ! ith the , nife from the , it hen. *e so , ed me #retty good in the eye and , no , ed me on my ass. I fell on the ou h. *e got on to# of me, and he ! as +ust about to start on me ! ith that s! it hblade of his ! hen Alla gave it to him in the ba , . *e ! as dead in a se ond. I s! ear.) se ond. @ne se ond. \$ust li, e that. *e ! as loo, ing at me, then he ! as dead. She saved my life, ; in.5

5l thin, it's more li, ely that you saved hers, ; isa. If you ! aren't here, it ?9% ! ould be her hugging the ou h ! ith a , nife in her ba , .5

She began to tremble and shiver. I too, her in my arms and held her for a ! hile, su##orting her ! eight. 7hen she ! as alm again, I brought her a , it hen hair and she sat do! n sha, ily. I #honed around, and found)bdullah. /' #laining ! hat had ha##ened in as fe! ! ords as #ossible, I told him to onta t *assaan @bi, ! a in the)fri an ghetto and bring him to the a#artment ! ith a ar.

;ittle by little, as ! e ! aited for)bdullah and *assaan, the story emerged. Alla ! as suddenly tired, but I ouldn't let her slee#. -ot yet.)fter a ! hile she began to s#ea, , adding a detail here and there to ; isa"s a ount, and then gradually telling the ! hole story herself.

4aurilio Oel ane met Sebastian 4odena in Oombay, ! here both of them made money from the ! or, they arranged for foreign #rostitutes. 4aurilio ! as the only son of ri h 9lorentine #arents ! ho"d died in a #lane rash ! hen he ! as a hild. Oy his o! n a ount, re#eated to Alla ! henever he ! as drun, , he ! as raised ! ith indifferent duteousness by distant relatives ! ho"d tolerated him relu tantly in the loveless shelter of their home.)t eighteen he seiled the first tran he of his inheritan e and fled

to Cairo. By the age of twenty-five he'd squandered the fortune left to him by his parents. The remnants of his family fast him out, no less for his idleness than for the many scandals that had pursued his profligate progress through the Middle East and Asia.

At twenty-seven he found himself in Bombay, brooding for a year over his losses.

The joint man for Aurilio's operation in Bombay was the diffident, dour Spaniard, Sebastian Godena. The thirty-year-old sought out and attracted healthy Arab and Indian customers. He was short, slight frame and timid manner, but he made the most of his advantages, putting the customers at ease by allaying their fears and suspicions. He too, one-fifth of the profit that Aurilio claimed from the foreign girls. Alla believed that Godena was as honest as the unequal relationship, but here he did most of the dirty work, and Aurilio too, most of the dirty money, because he saw himself as a pilot fish and the tall, handsome Italian as a shark.

He was a very different type of man from Aurilio. One of thirteen children in an Andalusian Gypsy family, Godena had grown up with a notion of himself as the runt of the litter. He shooled more in crime than in scholarship, and barely literate, he'd worked his way from squalor to grift to petty larceny across Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and India. He'd frequented the haunts of tourists, never taking too much and never remaining too long in any one place. When he met Aurilio, and for two years he'd worked for the firm, procuring clients and putting them together with the girls in Aurilio's stable.

They might've gone on in that way for much longer, but one day Aurilio fell into the arms of Alla. From the first moment that their eyes met, Alla told us, she knew that Godena was hopelessly in love with her. She encouraged him because his devotion to her was useful. She'd been harassed from a young age by her father, and Aurilio was determined to recover his

investment costs as =ui , ly as #ossible. *e" d instru ted the smitten 4odena to find ! or, for her t! i e a day, every day, until the debt ! as re#aid. 2ortured by ! hat he sa! as betrayals of his o! n love, 4odena #ressed his #artner to release Alla from the obligation. 4auri1io refused, ridi uling the S#aniard"s affe tion for a ! or, ing girl, and insisting that he #ut her to ! or, day and night.

Alla #aused in her story ! hen a ta# at the door announ ed)bdullah"s arrival. 2he tall Iranian entered silently, dressed in bla , li, e a thing made from the night itself. *e greeted me ! ith a hug and nodded gently to ;isa. She ame for! ard and , issed him on the hee, . *e lifted the blan, et to loo, at 4auri1io"s body. -odding and turning do! n the orners of his mouth in #rofessional a##roval of the single , illing thrust, he let the blan, et fall, and muttered a #rayer.

5*assaam is busy. *e ! ill be here after about one hour,5 he said.

5Did you tell him ! hat I ! ant him to doE5

5*e , no! s,5 he re#lied, raising one eyebro! in a tight smile.

5Is it still =uiet outsideE5

5I he , ed, before I ame inside. 2he building is =uiet, and the street all around.5

52here"s been no rea tion from the neighbours, so far. *e too, the door out ! ith one , i , , ;isa says, and there ! asn"t all that mu h shouting and s reaming. 2here ! as loud musi #laying ne' t door ! hen I got here. It ! as a #arty or something. I don"t thin, anyone , no! s about this.5

57e ... ! e have to _ all someoneB5 Alla shouted suddenly, standing and letting the lungi fall from her shoulders. 57e should ... all a do tor ... all the #oli e ...5

)bdullah s#rinted to her, and ! ra##ed her in his arms ! ith sur#risingly tender om#assion. *e sat her do! n again and ro , ed her, ?9F

murmuring reassuringly. I ! at hed them ! ith a little #in h of shame be ause I , ne! that I should've omforted her myself, long before that, and in +ust the same gentle ! ay. Out the fa t ! as that 4auri1io's death had om#romised me, and I ! as afraid. I'd had reason enough to ! ant him dead, and I'd beaten him ! ith my fists for it. 2hat ! as, in other ! ords, a motive for murder.

>eo#le , ne! that. I ! as there in the room ! ith ; isa and Alla, and it seemed that I ! as hel#ing them, res#onding to their all for hel#, but that ! as n't all of it. I ! as also there to hel# myself. I ! as there to ma,e sure that no #art of the sti , y ! eb of his death lung to me.)nd that's ! hy there ! as nothing gentle in me, and all the tenderness ame from an Iranian , iller named)bdullah 2aheri.

Alla began to s#ea, again. ; isa #oured her a drin, of vod, a and lime +ui e. She gul#ed at it, and ! ent on ! ith her story. It too, =uite a ! hile be ause she ! as nervous and afraid. She s, i##ed im#ortant details from time to time, and she ! as loose ! ith her hronology, ordering the fa ts as they o urred to her in the telling rather than as they'd ha##ened. 7e had to as, =uestions and #rom#t her into a more se=quential a ount, but little by little ! e got it all.

4odena had been the first to meet the -igerian((the businessman ! ho'd ! anted to s#end si' ty thousand dollars on heroin. *e introdu ed him to 4auri1io, and too =ui , ly, too easily, the)fri an had #arted ! ith his money. 4auri1io stole the money and #lanned to move on, but 4odena had other ideas. *e sei1ed his han e to free Alla and rid himself of 4auri1io, the man he resented for enslaving her. *e snat hed the money from him, and ! ent into hiding, #rom#ting the -igerian to send his hit(s=quad to Oombay. 2o distra t the understandably bloodthirsty)fri ans ! hile he sear hed for 4odena, 4auri1io had given them my name and told them I'd stolen their money.)bdullah and I , ne! the ne' t

#art of that story ! ell enough.

9or all his ringing o! ardi e ! ith me, and his dread that the
-igerians might return to hunt him do! n, 4auri1io 0el ane
ouldn't ut his losses and leave the ity. *e ouldn't rid his
heart of the , illing rage he felt for 4odena and the righteous
lust he felt for the money they'd stolen together. 9or ! ee, s he
! at hed Alla and follo! ed her every! here. *e , ne! that, sooner or
later, 4odena ! ould onta t her. 7hen the S#aniard did ma, e that
onta t, Alla ! ent to him. 7ithout realising it, she also led the
ra1ed Italian to the hea# Dadar hotel ! here his former ?9G
#artner ! as hiding. 4auri1io burst into the room, but he found
4odena alone. Alla ! as gone. 2he money ! as gone. 4odena ! as ill.
Some si , ness had ruined him. Alla thought it might've been
malaria. 4auri1io gagged him, tied him to the si , bed, and ! ent
to ! or, on him ! ith the stiletto. 4odena, tougher than anyone
, ne! and ta iturn to the end, refused to tell him that Alla ! as
hiding in an ad+oining room, only footste#s a! ay, ! ith all the
money.

57hen 4auri1io sto##ed ! ith the , nife ... the utting ... and
left the room, I ! aited for a long time,5 Alla said, staring at
the ar#et and shivering beneath the blan, et. ; isa ! as sitting on
the floor at her feet. She gently #rised the glass from Alla's
fingers, and gave her a igarette. Alla a e#ted it, but she
didn't smo, e. She loo, ed into ; isa"s eyes, and raned her ne ,
around to loo, into)bdullah"s fa e and then mine.

5I ! as so afraid,5 she #leaded. 5I ! as too mu h afraid.)fter a
time I ! ent into the room, and I sa! him. *e ! as lying on the
bed. 2here ! as the rag tied on his mouth. *e ! as tied u# to the
bed, and he ould move only his head. *e ! as ut u# all over. @n
his fa e. @n his body. /very! here. 2here ! as so mu h blood. So
mu h blood. *e , e#t loo, ing at me, ! ith his bla , eyes staring,
and staring. I left him there ... and I ... I ran a! ay.5

5Dou +ust left him thereE5 ; isa gas#ed.

She nodded.

5Dou didn't even untie himE5

She nodded again.

5\$esus 8hristB5 ; isa s#at out bitterly. She loo, ed u#, moving her anguished eyes from)bdullah's fa e to mine and ba , again. 5She didn't tell me that #art of it.5

5Alla, listen to me. Do you thin, he might still be thereE5 I as, ed.

She nodded a third time. I loo, ed at)bdullah.

5I have a good friend in Dadar,5 he said. 57here is the hotelE 7hat is the nameE5

5I don't , no! ,5 she mumbled. 5It's ne' t to a mar, et.)t the ba , , ! here they thro! the rubbish a! ay. 2he smell is very bad. -o ! ait, I remember, I said the name in the ta' i((it is alled <abir"s. 2hat"s it. 2hat"s the name. @h, GodB 7hen I left him, I +ust thought ... I ! as sure they ! ould find him ... and ... and ma, e him free. Do you thin, he might be on that bed until no! E Do you thin, E5 ?9H

)bdullah #honed his friend, and arranged to have someone he , the hotel.

57here"s the moneyE5 I demanded.

She hesitated.

52he money, Alla. Give it to me.5

She stood up shyly, supported by ;isa, and walked into the bedroom she'd used. Moments later she returned with a travel flight bag. She handed it to me, her expression strangely contradictory (a coquette and adversary in equal parts. I opened the bag and took out several bundles of money - an hundred-dollar bills. I counted out twenty thousand dollars, and pushed the rest back into the bag. I returned the bag to her.

Twenty thousand is for *Assaan, I declared. Five thousand is to get you a new passport and a ticket to Germany. Nine thousand is to lean up here, and set ;isa up in a new apartment on the other side of town. The rest is yours. And Godena's, if he makes it.

She wanted to reply, but a soft tap at the door announced *Assaan's arrival. The soldier, this Libyan Muslim - Algerian entered, and greeted Abdullah and me firmly. ;isa, the rest of us, he also admitted to Bombay's heat, and he wore a heavy serge jacket and bottle-green jeans with no trace of discomfort. *e pulled the blanket from Aurilio's body and hid the skin, fled a dead arm, and sniffed at the corpse.

I got a good lasti, he said, dumping a heavy lasti droplet sheet onto the floor and unfolding it. We got to take off all their clothes. And any of his rings and chains. Just the man, that's all I want. We'll pull the teeth later.

*e paused, when I didn't reply or react, and looked up to see me staring at the toilet omen. Their faces were stiff with dread.

*o! about ... you get Alla in the shower, I said to ;isa with a grim little smile. *ave one yourself. I remain! e'll be finished here in a little while.

;isa led Alla into the bathroom, and ran a shower for her. We dumped Aurilio's body onto the lasti sheet and stripped it of its clothes. *is skin was allid, matt, and in some places marbled grey. In life Aurilio was a tall, well-built man. Dead

and na, ed he loo, ed thinner, feebler someho! . I should've #itied him. /ven if ! e never #ity them at any other time, and in any other ! ay, ! e should #ity the dead ! hen ! e loo, at them, and tou h them. >ity is the one #art of love that as, s for nothing in ?9?

return and, be ause of that, every a t of #ity is a , ind of #rayer.)nd dead men demand #rayers. 2he silent heart, the tumbled nave of the hest unbreathing, and the guttered andles of the eyes((they summon our #rayers. /a h dead man is a tem#le in ruins, and ! hen our eyes ! al, there ! e should #ity, ! e should #ray.

Out I didn't #ity him. Dou got ! hat you deserve, I thought, as ! e rolled his body in the #lasti sheet. I felt des#i able and mean(souled for thin, ing it, but the ! ords ! ormed their ! ay through my brain li, e a murderous ! his#er ! or, ing its ! ay through an angry mob. Dou got ! hat you deserve.

*assaan had brought a laundry(style trolley bas, et ! ith him. 7e ! heeled it into the room from the orridor. 4aurilio"s body ! as beginning to stiffen u#, and ! e ! ere for ed to run h the legs to fit it into the bas, et. 7e ! heeled and arried it do! n t! o flights of stairs unobserved, and out into the =uiet street, ! here *assaan"s delivery van ! as #ar, ed. *is men used the van every day to deliver fish, bread, fruit, vegetables, and , erosene to his sho#s in the)fri an ghetto. 7e lifted the ! heeled bas, et into the ba , of the van, and overed the #lasti (! ra##ed body ! ith loaves of bread, bas, ets of vegetables, and trays of fish.

52han, s, *assaan,5 I said, sha, ing his hand and #assing him the ten thousand dollars. *e stuffed the money into the front of his +a , et.

5- o,5 he rumbled in the basso voi e that ommanded un=uestioning res#e t in his ghetto. 5I am very ha##y to do this ! or, . - o! , ; in, ! e are even.)ll even.5

*e nodded to Abdullah and left us, walking half a block, to his apartment. Raheem leaned out of the van to flash a wide smile at me before turning over the engine with a flourish of his wrist. *e drove away without looking back. *assan's car followed it a few hundred metres behind. We never heard so much as a murmur about Aurilio again. It was rumoured that *assan's apartment was in the centre of his slum. Some said the apartment was full of rats. Some claimed that it was filled with snuffling rats. Others swore that he kept huge pigs in the apartment. Whatever the hungry creatures were, all the residents agreed that they were fed from time to time with a dead man, one piece of the corpse at a time.

“oney you did send me,” Abdullah muttered, with a blank expression, as he waited for the van to drive away.

We returned to the apartment, and repaired the door locks so the door would be sealed shut when we all left. Abdullah honed

another contact?

and arranged for two reliable men to visit the apartment on the following day. Their instructions were to bring a sack, put the couch into pieces, and remove it in rubbish sacks. They were to clean the apartment and leave the apartment in an orderly state, removing every trace of its recent occupants.

*e put the phone down, and it rang again. *is contact in Dadar had news. Odena had been discovered by staff in the hotel room, and rushed to hospital. The contact had visited the hospital, and learned that the dead, and wounded man had been pushed out of the ward. *e was last seen speeding away in a taxi. The doctor who'd attended him doubted that he would survive the night.

“It's weird,” I said when Abdullah had related the news. “I know, Odena, you know... I sort of knew him well. I saw him at *e's... I don't know... a hundred times. Out of an't remember his voice. I can't remember what he sounded like. I

an't hear his voice in my head, if you , no! ! hat I mean.5

5I li, ed him,5)bdullah said.

5I'm sur#rised to hear you say that.5

57hyE5

5I'm not sure,5 I re#lied. 5*e ! as so ... so mee, .5

5*e ! ould have made a good soldier.5

I raised my eyebrows in greater sur#rise. 4odena ! asn't +ust mee, , it seemed to me then, he ! as a ! ea, man. I ouldn't imagine ! hat)bdullah meant. I didn't , no! then that good soldiers are defined by ! hat they an endure, not by ! hat they an infli t.

)nd ! hen all the loose ends ! ere ut or tied, ! hen Alla left the city for Germany, and ;isa moved to a ne! a#artment, and the last =uestions about 4odena and 4aurilio and Alla faltered, faded, and eased, it ! as the mysteriously vanished S#aniard ! ho laimed my thoughts most often. I made t! o double(shuffle flights to Delhi and ba , in the ne' t t! o ! ee, s. I follo! ed that by flying a seventy(t! o hour turnaround to <inshasa ! ith ten ne! #ass#orts for)bdul Ghani's net! or, . I tried to , ee# busy, tried to fo us on the ! or, , but the s reen in my mind ! as filled too often ! ith an image of him, 4odena, tied to the bed and staring at Alla, ! at hing her leave him there, ! at hing her ! al, a! ay ! ith the money.)nd gagged. -o ! ay to s ream.)nd ! hat he must've thought ! hen she entered the room ... I'm saved ...)nd ! hat he must've ?97

thought ! hen he sa! the terror in her fa e.)nd ! as there something else in her eyes: ! as it revulsion, or ! as it more terrible than thatE Did she loo, relieved, #erha#sE Did she seem glad to be rid of himE)nd ! hat did he feel ! hen she turned and ! al, ed a! ay and left him there, and losed the door behind herE

When I was in prison I fell in love with a woman who was an actress in a popular television program. She came into the prison to teach classes in acting and theatre for our prison drama group. We liked her, as they say. She was a brilliant actress. I was a writer. She was the physical voice and gesture. I saw my words breathe and move in her. We communicated in the shorthand shared by artists everywhere in the world: rhythm, and elation. After a time, she told me that she was in love with me. I believed her, and I still believe that it was true. For months we fed the affair with morsels of time stolen from the acting classes, and long letters that I smuggled to her through the illegal mail system, no longer as the stiff letter run.

When trouble found me and I was thrown, literally, into the punishment unit. I don't know how the guards found out about our romance, but soon after I arrived in the punishment block, they began to interrogate me about it. They were furious. They saw her affair with a prisoner, carried on for months under their noses, as a humiliating affront to their authority and, perhaps, to their manhood. They beat me with boots, fists, and batons, trying to force me to admit that she and I had been lovers. They wanted to use my confession as the basis for laying a charge against her. During one beating they held up a photograph of her. It was a smiling publicity still that they'd found in the prison drama group. They told me that all I had to do to stop the beatings was nod my head at it. Just nod your head, they said, holding the picture before my bloody face. Just nod your head, that's all you have to do, and it'll all be over.

I never admitted anything. I held her love in the vault of my heart while they tried to reach it through my skin and my bones. When one day, as I sat in my cell after a beating, trying to stop the blood flowing into my mouth from a chipped bone in my cheek, and my broken nose, the trapdoor opened in the door of my cell. A letter fluttered in and landed on the floor. The trapdoor shut. I ran over to the letter, and ran back to the bed to read it. The letter was from her. It was a Dear John letter. She'd met a man, she said. He was a musician. Her friends had all

urged her to breathe, with me because I was serving a ten-year sentence in prison, and there was no future in it for either of us. She loved the new man, and she planned to marry him when his honeymoon with the symphony orchestra was complete. She hoped I understood. She was sorry, but the letter was goodbye, goodbye forever, and she would never see me again.

Blood dripped onto the page from my brother's face. They had read the letter, of course, before giving it to me. They laughed outside my door. They laughed. I listened to them as they tried to make a victory of that laughter, and I wondered if her new man, her musician, would stand under torture for her. Maybe he would. Don't ever tell what people have inside them until you start talking it aloud, one house at a time.

And somewhere, in the weeks after Aurilio's death, Odessa's face,

or my mind's picture of his gagged and bloody and staring face, became confused with my own memories of that love I'd lost in prison. I wasn't sure why: there didn't seem to be any special reason why Odessa's fate would twist itself into the strands of my own. Out it did, and I felt a darkness growing within me that was too numb for sorrow and too cold for rage.

I tried to fight it. I kept myself as busy as I could. I worked in the more colorful films, taking small parts (as an extra at a party and in a street scene. I met with Anita, urging her on again to visit Grand in prison. Most afternoons, I trained at the gym and boxing and karate with Abdullah. I put in a day here and there at the slum clinic. I helped Gabor and Johnny to prepare for their weddings. I listened to Haderbhai's lectures, and immersed myself in the books, manuscripts, pamphlets, and ancient fables carved in Abdullah Ghani's extensive collection. Out of order, or carelessness could drive the darkness from me. Little by little, the tortured Saniard's face and silent, screaming eyes became my own remembered moment: blood falling on the page, and no sound escaping my hollowing mouth. They

claim a hidden corner of our hearts, all those moments that stay with us unreclaimed. That's where love, like elephants, drag themselves to die. It's the laughter where pride allows itself to cry. And in those sleepless (lonely nights and thin, rambling days, Godena's face always there, staring at the door.

And while I worried, the world's changed forever. The world that had coalesced there dispersed and disappeared. *Carla* was gone.

Alla was gone. Godena was gone, and probably dead. Aurilio was dead. Anne, when I was too busy to stop for a drink, I passed the ride entrance and I saw no face that I knew. Det Didier persisted at his favourite table each evening, conducting his business and a evening drinks from old friends. Gradually a new world rolled around him with a new and different style. *Barter* brought *Alana* Lyster with her for drinks one night, and the young assistant *Roder* became a *World's* regular. *Jim* and *Ettie* were in the last stages of preparation for their wedding, and they stopped for coffee, a snack, or a beer almost every day. *Jan* and *Dili*, two young journalists who worried with *Avita* Singh, accepted her invitation to drop in and look, the laughter over. *Jan* their first visit they found *Barter*, *Alana*, *Avita*, and *Ettie*, with three German girls who'd worried for *Alana* as extras on a film (seven beautiful, intelligent, vivacious young women). *Jan* and *Dili* were healthy, happy, unattached young men. They came to *World's* every day and night after that.

The atmosphere created by the new group was different to that which had flourished around *Carla* Saaranen. The indelible cleverness and *Barter* insisted that where *Carla*'s gifts had inspired her own group of friends to a more profound discourse and a higher, thinner laughter. The new group too, its more erratic tone from *Didier*, who combined the expressive mordancy of his sarcasm with a

provocative for the vulgar, the obscene, and the satirical. The laughter was louder, and probably more frequent, but there were

no phrases that remained with me from the +o, es or the +o, ers.

When one night, a day after Ram married ;ettie, and a few
! ees, after 4aurilio went into *assan @bi, ! a's #it, as I sat
amongst the ne! grou# ! hile the a! ing, shrie, ing gulls of good
humour settled on them, sending u# s=ua! , s of laughter and
fluttering hands, I sa! >raba, er through the o#en ar h. *e ! aved
to me, and I left the table to +oin him in his ab #ar, ed nearby.

5*ey, >rabu, ! hat's u#E 7e're elebrating &i, ram"s ! eddingB *e
and ;ettie got married yesterday.5

5Des, ;inbaba. Sorry for disturbing the ne! ly(marriages.5

5It's o, ay. 2hey're not here. 2hey've gone to ;ondon, to meet her
#arents. Out ! hat's u#E5

5A#, ;inbabaE5 C%%

5Deah, I mean ! hat are you doing hereE 2omorro! "s your big day. I
thought you'd be drin, ing it u# ! ith \$ohnny and the other guys at
the 1ho#ad#atti.5

5)fter this tal, only. 2hen I ! ill go,5 he re#lied, fidgeting
nervously ! ith the steering ! heel. Ooth front doors of the ar
! ere o#en for the bree1e. It ! as a hot night. 2he streets ! ere
ro! ded ! ith ou#les, families, and single young men trying to
find a ool ! ind or a uriosity some! here to distra t them from
the heat. 2he ro! d ! ho streamed along the road beside the #ar, ed
ars began to eddy around >raba, er"s o#en door, and he #ulled it
shut hard.

5)re you o, ayE5

5@h, yes, ;in, I am very, very fine,5 he said. 2hen he loo, ed at
me. 5-o. -ot really, baba. In fa t of s#ea, ing, I am very, very
bad.5

57 hat is itE5

57 ell, ho! to tell you this thing. ; inbaba, you , no! I am getting a marriage to >arvati tomorrow! . Do you , no! , baba, the first time I ever saw her my >arvati, ! as before she was years, ! when she ! as she was a teen years old only. That first time, ! when she first came to the 1ho#ad#atti, before her daddy <umar had his hai sho#, she ! as living in a little hut ! with her mummy and daddy and sister, the Sita ! who is a marriage for Johnny Bigger.)nd that first day, she carried a mat, a of ! after baba , from the room#any ! ell. She carried it on her head.5

*e #sighed, ! at seeing the aquarium of the swirling street through the ! blinds between of the ab. *his fingernail #i ,ed at the rubber

leo#ard's s, in over he'd landed onto his steering ! wheel. I gave him time.

5)ny! ay,5 he continued, 5! ! as ! at seeing her, and she ! as trying to carry that heavy mat, a, and ! all, on the rough track, .)nd that mat, a, it must have been a very old one, and the way ! as ! easy, , because suddenly it just broke, e u# in #pieces, and all the ! after she spilled down on her. She cried and cried so much. I looked at her and I felt ...5

*e #sighed, looking u# at the strolling street on e more.

5Sorry for herE5 I offered.

5- o, baba. I felt ...5

5SadE Dou felt sad for herE5

5- o, baba. I felt a exertion, in my #muscles, you , no! , ! when the #muscles is getting all hard, like your thin, ing.5

5For God's sake, >arvati I , no! ! that an exertion isB5 I grumbled.

Get on C%1

! ith it. 7 hat ha##enedE5

5- othing ha##ened,5 he re#lied, #u11led by my irritation, and some! hat hastened. 5Out from that time only, I never forgot my big, big feeling for her. - o! I am ma, ing a marriage, and that big, big feeling is getting bigger every day.5

5I'm not sure that I li, e ! here this is going, >rabu,5 I muttered.

5I am as, ing you, ; in,5 he said, ho, ing on the ! ords. *e fa ed me. 2ears bulged and rolled from his eyes into his la#. *is voi e ame in stuttering sobs. 5She is too beautiful. I am a very short and small man. Do you thin, I an ma, e a good and se' y husbandE5

I told >raba, er, sitting in his ab and ! at hing him ry, that love ma, es men big, and hate ma, es them small. I told him that my little friend ! as one of the biggest men I ever met be ause there ! as n't any hate in him. I said that the better I , ne! him, the bigger he got, and I tried to tell him ho! rare that ! as.)nd I +o, ed ! ith him, and laughed ! ith him until that great smile, as big as a hild"s biggest ! ish, returned to his gentle round fa e. *e drove a! ay to! ard the ba helor #arty that ! as ! aiting for him in the slum, and sounded the horn trium#hantly until he ! as out of sight.

2he night that ! al, ed me, long after he left, ! as lonelier than most. I didn't go ba , to ; eo#old"s. I ! al, ed instead along the 8ause! ay, #ast my a#artment, and on to >raba, er"s slum at 8uffe >arade. I found the #la e ! here 2ari= and I fought the vi ious #a , on the - ight of the 7ild Dogs. 2here ! as still a small #ile

of s ra# timber and stones on the s#ot. I sat there, smo, ing the dar, ness, and ! at hing the slo! elegan e of the slum(d! ellers drifting ba , along the dusty tra , to the huddle of huts. I smiled. 2hin, ing of >raba, er"s mighty smile al! ays made me smile

reflexively as if I looked at a healthy baby. When a vision of Godena's face floated from the flickering lanterns and vanished, and faded again to nothing before it was fully formed. Godena started up inside the slum. I was strolling with a group of young men, and they joined their voices to add the stirring sound. Godena's battle had begun. He had invited me, but I couldn't bring myself to go. I sat near enough to hear the happiness, but far enough away not to feel it.

For years I'd told myself that love had made me strong. When the prison guards tried to force me to betray the actress and our affair. Somehow, Godena had haunted the truth from me. It wasn't love for her that had made me silent, and it wasn't a brave heart. It was stubbornness.

That had given me the strength to bite down on stiff-necked, bull-headed stubbornness. There was nothing noble in it. And for all my contempt for the world of bullies, hadn't I become a bully? When I was desperate enough? When the dragon's lair of heroin sickness dug into my back, I became a small man, a tiny man. I became so small that I had to use a gun. I had to shoot a gun at someone, many of them women, to get money. To get money. So I was different, in that, to Aurelio bullying women to get money? And if they'd shot me during one of those hold-ups, if the cops had gunned me down as I'd wanted and expected at the time, my death would've aroused and deserved as little pity as that of the raped Italian.

I stood up and stretched, looking around me and thinking of the dogs and the fight and the bravery of the little boy Zari. When I started back toward the city, I heard a sudden eruption of happy laughter from many voices at Godena's party, followed by a loud burst of applause. And the music died with the distance until it was as faint and diminishable as any moment of truth.

Walking through the night, alone with the city for hours, I loved her with my wandering, just as I'd done when I lived in the slum. -ear da! n I bought a newspaper, found a safe, and ate a big

brea, fast, lingering over a second and then a third shot of hai. There! as an article on page three of the magazine describing the miraculous gifts of the Olue Sisters, as Rasheed's! I do! and her sister had become, no! n. It! as a syndicated article, written by <avita Singh and published across the country. In it she gave a brief history of their story and then related several first-hand accounts of miraculous cures that had been attributed to the mystical powers the girls exercised. @ne! Ioman claimed to have been cured of tuberculosis, another insisted that her hearing had been fully restored, and an elderly man declared that his withered lungs were strong and healthy again after he merely touched a hem of their s, y (blue garments. <avita exercised that

the name Olue Sisters! wasn't their origin: they were blue, all! says, because they were from their homes! with a shared dream about floating in the sky, and their devotees had settled on the name. The article included! with <avita's account of a meeting! with the girls, and her conviction that they were, beyond any doubt, supernatural beings.

I paid the bill, and borrowed a pen from the cashier to write the article. With several lines. As the streets unfolded the tangled morning coil of sound, colour, and commotion, I too, abandoned and found through relentless traffic to the Arthur Road station. After a wait of three hours, I made my way into the visiting area. It! as a single room divided down the centre by two aisles of yellow wire that were separated by an empty space of about two metres. @n one side were the visitors, seated together and holding their laps by clinging to the wire. Across the gap and behind the other wire fence were the prisoners, rushed together and also grasping at the wire to steady themselves. There were about twenty prisoners. Forty of us roared into an equal space on the visitors' side. Every man, woman, and child in the divided room! as shouting. There were so many languages (I recognised six of them, and stood counting as a door opened on the prisoners' side.) and entered, pushing his way through to the wire.

5) nandB) nandB *ereB5 I shouted.

*is eyes found me, and he smiled in greeting.

5; inbaba, so good to see youB5 he shouted ba , at me.

5Dou loo, good, manB5 I alled out. *e did loo, ! ell. I , ne! ho!
hard it ! as to loo, ! ell in that #la e. I , ne! ! hat an effort
he"d #ut into it, leaning body li e from his lothes every day
and ! ashing in the ! orm(infested ! ater. 5Dou loo, real goodB5

5) rrey, you loo, very fine, ; in.5

I didn't loo, fine. I , ne! that. I loo, ed ! orried and guilty and
tired.

5I'm ... a bit tired. 4y friend &i, ram((you remember himE *e got
married yesterday. 2he day before yesterday, a tually. I've been
! al, ing all night.5

5*o! is I asim) liE Is he ! ellE5

5*e's ! ell,5 I re#lied, reddening a little ! ith shame that I
didn't see the good and noble head man as often as I used to,
! hen I'd lived in the slum. 5; oo, B ; oo, at this ne! s#a#er.
2here's an arti le in it about the sisters. It mentions you. 7e
an use this to hel# you. 7e an build u# some sym#athy for you,
before your ase omes to ourt.5

*is long, lean, handsome fa e dar, ened in a fro! n that dre! his
bro! s together and #ressed his li#s into a tight, defiant rease.

5Dou must not do this, ; inB5 he shouted ba , at me. 52hat
+ournalist, that <avita Singh, she ! as here. I sent her a! ay. If
she omes again, I ! ill send her a! ay again. I do not ! ant any

hell, and I will not allow any hell. C%H

I want to have the punishment for what I did to Rasheed.

Out you don't understand, I insisted. The girls are famous not only for being thin, they're holy. They are, or, miracles. There are thousands of devotees coming to the head altar every day, when they see you, they are trying to help them, they'll feel sympathy for you. You'll get half the time, or even less.

I was shouting myself hoarse, trying to be heard above or within the clamouring din. It was so hot in the rush of bodies that my shirt was already soaked, and clung to my skin. And I heard him correctly. It seemed impossible that he would reject any help that might reduce his sentence. Without that help, he was sure to serve a minimum of fifteen years. Fifteen years in this hell, I thought, staring through the glare at his frothing face. How could he refuse our help?

Inside he cried out, louder than before. I did that thing to Rasheed. I, not what I was doing. I, not what would happen. I sat with him for a long time, before I did it. I made a choice. I must have the punishment.

Out I have to help you. I have to try.

Now, please. If you take this punishment away, then there will be no meaning for what I did. There will be no honour. Not for me, not for them. Can't you see it? I have earned this punishment. I have become my fate. I am begging you, as a friend. Please do not let them write anything more about me. Write about the ladies. The sisters. Desist. Out let me have the share of my fate. Do you promise me? Inbaba. Do you swear it?

My fingers clutched at the diamonds of the glare. I felt the cold rusty metal bite at the bones within my hands. The noise in that wooden room was like a wild rainstorm on the ragged roofs of the slum. I see him, entreating, adoring, yearning, crying,

s reaming, and laughing, the hysterical choruses shouted from age to age.

5S! Hear it to me, ; in,5 he said, the distress reaching out to me desperately from his #leading eyes.

5@, ay, o, ay,5 I answered him, struggling to let the words escape from the little #rison of my throat.

5S! Hear it to me5

5)!! right5)!! right5 I s! ear it. 9or God's sake, I s! ear ... I ! on't try to help# you.5

*is face related, and the smile returned, burning my eyes ! ith the beauty of it. C%?

52han, you, ; in,5 he shouted back, ha##ily. 5>lease don't be thin,ing I am ungrateful, but I don't ! ant you to come back, here again. I don't ! ant you to visit me. Don't an #ut some money for me, sometimes, if you thin, of it. Out #lease don't come back, again. 2his is my life no! . 2his is my life. It ! ill be hard for me, if you come back, here. I ! ill thin, about things. I than, you very much, ; in, and I ! ish a full ha##iness for you.5

*is hands released their hold on the ! ire fence. *e held them together in a #raying gesture of blessing, bowing his head slightly, so that I lost conta t ! ith his eyes. 7ithout that strong gri# on the fence he ! as at the mercy of the ro! d of #risoners, and in seconds he fell back, , vanishing into the bubbling ! ave of faces and hands at the ! ire.) door at the back, of the room opened behind the #risoners, and I ! at hed)nand sli# through into the hot yellow light of day ! ith his head high and his thin shoulders bravely squared.

I stepped out onto the street outside the #rison. My hair ! as ! et ! ith sweat, and my clothes ! ere soaked. I s=uinted in the

sunlight and stared at the busy street, trying to force myself into its rhythm and rush, trying not to think about Chand in the long room with the overseers, with Oig Rahul, with the hunger and the beatings and the filthy, stinking streets. After that night I could be with Ghabra, her and Johnny Singh, Chand's friends, while they celebrated the double wedding. After that night, Chand could be rammed into a ditch, lying (or lying) with a hundred other men on a stone floor. And that could go on, and on, for fifteen years.

I too, came back to my apartment and stood under a hot shower, slipping the slither and it h of memory from my skin. After, I honed Shandra Khatra to make the final arrangements for the dancers I'd hired to perform at Ghabra's wedding. When I honed Kavita Singh, and told her that Chand wanted us to pull out of the campaign. She was relieved, I think. Her kind heart had fretted for him, and she'd feared from the first that the campaign would fail and then crush him with the weight of fallen hope. She was also glad that he'd given his blessing to her stories about the Olue Sisters. The girls fascinated her, and she'd arranged for a documentary film (make her to visit them in the slum. She wanted to talk about the prostitute, and I heard the sharp, ringing enthusiasm in her voice but I cut her off, promising to call again.

I went out to my little balcony, and let the sound and smell of the city settle on the skin of my bare chest. In a courtyard below, I saw

three young men rehearsing the moves and steps of a dance routine they'd copied from a Bollywood film. They laughed helplessly when they messed up the moves of the party piece, and then gave a cheer when they finally danced through one whole routine without error. In another yard some women were squatting together, washing dishes with small anemones of soap and a long bar of soap (coloured soap). Their conversation came to me in laughing gasps and shrieks as they scandalised one another with gossip and

sardonic commentaries on the peculiar habits of their neighbours' husbands. When I looked up to see an elderly man sitting in a doorway opposite me. My eyes met his, and I smiled. *e'd been watching me as I'd watched the others before. *e nodded his head from side to side, and smiled back at me with a happy grin.

And it was all right. I dressed, and went down to the street. I made the rounds of the bazaar, (market) through the alleys, and heaved in at Abdoul Ghani's assortment factory, and inspected the gold (smuggling ring I'd restructured in <hader's name. In three hours I committed thirty crimes or more. And I smiled when *e smiled at me. When it was necessary, I gave men enough bad news, as gangsters call it, to make them draw back, and lower their eyes in fear. I talked the goonda talk, and in three languages I talked the talk. I looked good. I did my job. I made money, and I was still free. Out in the bazaar, room, deep in my mind, another image added itself to the secret gallery (an image of Yonand, holding the palms of his hands together, as his radiant smile became a blessing and a prayer.

Everything you ever sense, in touch or taste or sight or even thought, has an effect on you that's greater than zero. Some things, like the background sound of a bird chirping as it passes your house in the evening, or a flower glimpsed out of the corner of an eye, have such an infinitesimally small effect that you can't detect them. Some things, like triumph and heartbreak, and some images, like the image of yourself reflected in the eyes of a man you've just stabbed, attach themselves to the secret gallery and they change your life forever.

That last image of Yonand, the last time I ever saw him, had that effect on me. It wasn't compassion for him that I felt so deeply, although I did pity him as only a chained man could. It wasn't shame, although I was truly ashamed that I hadn't listened when he'd first tried to tell me about Rasheed. It was something else, something so strange that it took me seven years to fully comprehend. It was envy that nailed the image to my mind. I envied Yonand as he turned and talked with his back,

straight and his head high into the long, suffering years. I envied his #ea e and his courage and his #erfe t understanding of himself. <haderbhai on e said that if ! e envy someone for all the right reasons, ! e're half ! ay to ! isdom. I ho#e he ! asn't right about that. I ho#e good envy ta, es you further than that, be ause a lifetime has #assed sin e that day at the ! ire, and I still envy)nand"s alm ommunion ! ith fate, and I long for it ! ith all my fla! ed and striving heart.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

They hurried like the soldiers of Perseus, like the things of heaven, in flight, like the rolled lips of seashells, like eucalyptus leaves in summer (Indian eyes, dancers' eyes, the most beautiful eyes in the world stared with honest, unbeguiling concentration into mirrors held for them by their servants. The dancers I'd hired to perform at the wedding ceremonies for Johnny and Graba, were already in costume beneath the modest covering of their shawls. In a hallway near the entrance to the slum, employed of customers for the purpose, they made the final adjustments to their hair and makeup, professionally swift amidst hurried chattering. Cotton sheet strung across the doorway as a just sheer enough in the golden lamplight to reveal thrillingly indistinct shadows, inflaming fiercer desires in many of those who hurried outside, where I stood guard and kept the curious at bay.

At last they were ready, and I threw the cotton screen back. The ten dancers from "Glim City's" chorus lines emerged. They wore traditional tight-fitting blouses and saris (around saris. The costumes were lemon yellow, ruby, seafoam, blue, emerald, sunset pink, gold, royal purple, silver, cream, and tangerine. Their jewels (hair lusters, tassel tassels, ear rings, nose rings, necklaces, midriff chains, bangles, and anklets) (strung, suspended, or lit from lanterns and electric bulbs that gleamed and flashed to look at them. A heavy anklet carried hundreds of tiny bells and, as the dancers began their slow, slaying pace, through the hushed and adoring slum, the silencing clash of those silver bells was the only sound that marked their steps. When they began to sing:

O a-a Sa-aan, O a-a

O a-a Sa-aan, O a-a C%9

Come to me, my lover, come to me

8ome to me, my lover, ome to me

2he ro! ds that #re eded and surrounded them roared their a##roval.) #latoon of small boys s rambled along the rough #ath ahead of the girls, removing stones or t! igs, and s! ee#ing the ! ay lear ! ith #alm(leaf brooms. @ther young men ! al, ed beside the dan ers, ooling them ! ith large #ear(sha#ed fans of fine, ! oven ane. 9urther ahead along the #ath, the band of mus!ians I'd hired ! ith the dan ers a##roa hed the ! edding stage silently in their red and ! hite uniforms. >raba, er and >arvati sat to one side, and \$ohnny 8igar sat ! ith Sita on the other side.

>raba, er"s #arents, <ishan and Ru, hmabai, had travelled from Sunder for the event. 2hey #lanned to s#end a full month in the

ity, staying in a slum hut beside >raba, er"s o! n. 2hey sat at the front of the stage ! ith <umar and -andita >ata, .) huge #ainting of a lotus flo! er filled the s#a e behind them, and oloured lights formed glo! ing vines overhead.

7hen the dan ers slo! ly entered the s#a e, singing love, they sto##ed as one and stam#ed their feet. 2hey t! ired in #la e, turning lo , ! ise in #erfe t unison. 2heir arms moved ! ith the gra e of a s! an"s ne , . 2heir hands and fingers rolled and s! ired li, e sil, s arves sailing the ! ind. 2hen suddenly they stam#ed their feet three times, and the mus!ians stru , u# a ! ild, enravishing rendition of that month"s most #o#ular movie song.)nd ! ith the heering in every throat around them, the girls dan ed into a million dreams.

-ot a fe! of those dreams ! ere my o! n. I'd hired the girls and the mus!ians, not , no! ing ! hat , ind of sho! they"d #lanned to #ut on for >raba, er"s ! edding. 8handra 4ehta had re ommended them to me, and he"d assured me that they al! ays devised their o! n #rogram. 2hat first bla , (mar, et money deal 4ehta had as, ed me to transa t((the ten thousand)meri an dollars he"d ! anted((had borne bla , fruit. 2hrough him I'd met others in the film ! orld

! ho ! anted gold, dollars, and do uments. In the #revious fe! months, my visits to the film studios had gro! n more fre=uent, and the #rofit for <haderbhai a umulated steadily. 2here ! as a certain re i#ro al a het in the onne tion: the filmi ty#es, as they ! ere , no! n in Oolly! ood, found it e' hilarating to be asso iated, at a safe distan e, ! ith the notorious mafia don, and the <han himself ! asn't indifferent to the glamour that laminated the movie C1%

! orld. 7hen I a##roa hed 8handra 4ehta for hel# in organising the dan ers, t! o ! ee, s before >raba, er"s ! edding, he'd assumed that the >raba, er in =uestion ! as an im#ortant goonda ! or, ing for <haderbhai. *e #ut time and s#e ial are into the arrangements, sele ting ea h girl from #ersonal , no! ledge of her s, ills, and teaming them ! ith a band of the best studio musi ians. 2he sho! , ! hen ! e finally sa! it, ! ould've satisfied the manager of the raun hiest night lub in the ity. 2he band #layed a long to# ten of the season"s most #o#ular songs. 2he girls sang and dan ed to every one of them, giving sedu tive and eroti em#hasis to the sub(te' t of ea h #hrase. Some of the thousands of neighbours and guests at the slum ! edding ! ere #leasantly s andalised, but most ! ere delighted by the ! i , edness((>raba, er and \$ohnny first among them.)nd I, seeing for the first time ho! lubri ious the un ensored versions of the dan es ! ere, gained a ne! a##re iation of the subtler gestures I'd seen so often in the *indi films.

I gave \$ohnny 8igar five thousand)meri an dollars as a ! edding #resent. It ! as enough money for him to buy the little hut that he ! anted in the -avy -agar slum, near the s#ot ! here he'd been on eived. 2he -agar ! as a legal slum, and #ur hasing the hut there meant the end of evi tion fears. *e ! ould have a se ure home from ! hi h to ontinue his ! or, as unoffi ial a ountant and ta' onsultant to the many hundreds of ! or, ers and small

businesses in the surrounding slums.

4y #resent to >raba, er ! as the deed to his ta' i. 2he o! ner of the small fleet of ta' is sold the deed to me in a vi ious bout of

bare tooth (and, nu, le haggling. I said too much for the vehicle and its licence, but the money meant nothing to me. It was black money, and black money runs through the fingers faster than legal, hard-earned money. If I can't resist the way I earn it, money has no value. If I can't use it to make life better for our families and loved ones, money has no purpose. Nevertheless, out of respect for the formalities of tradition, I damned the traffic jam, at the conclusion of our deal, with that most polite and hideous of Indian business curses: "May you have ten daughters, and may they all marry!" (a string of obligatory commitments sure to exhaust all but the sturdiest fortunes.

>raba, as so pleased and excited with the gift that the gravity he'd assumed in the role of the sober groom exploded in a hilarious cheer. He leaned to his feet and danced a few steps of his hip (thrusting sideways) before the solemnity of the occasion overwhelmed him once more, and he sat down with his bride. I joined the throng, gyrating a couple of men in front of the stage, and danced until my thin shirt clung to me like seaweed in a shallow sea.

Returning to my apartment that night, I smiled to think how different Ram's wedding had been. Two days before >raba, as and Johnny had their sister (brides, Ram was married to ;ettie. Against the passionate and occasionally violent opposition of his family, Ram had opted for a registry office ceremony. He'd responded to the tears and pleading of his loved ones with one formulaic phrase: "This is the modern India, yaar. One of his family members would bring themselves to face the agony of that public humiliation of the ancient, gorgeously elaborate Hindu wedding they'd long planned for him. In the end, it was only his sister and his mother who joined the little circle of ;ettie's friends, and I sat behind as the bride and groom promised to love and honour one another for the rest of their days. There was no music, no colour, and no dancing. ;ettie wore a burnt-gold suit, with a broad, gold sash bearing organdy roses. Ram wore a three-quarter-length black coat, a black shirt, and a white brocade vest, black gaucho pants with silver lining, and his beloved hat.

The ceremony! as over in minutes and then I, Ram and I half-carried his grief (striking her mother to her! aiting car.

On the day after their wedding, I drove I, Ram and ;ettie to the airport. Their plan! as to repeat the ceremony in ;ondon! ith ;ettie's family. While ;ettie honed her mother to confirm their arrival time, I, Ram seized the opportunity for a heart-to-heart! ith me.

Man, s for the! or, you did on my #ass#ort, man, he grinned. That fu, in" drug conviction in Denmark, ((it's only a little thing, but it could've given me a big headache, yaar.

So #roblem.

Send the dollars. That! as a fu, in" good rate you got for us. I, no! you did a #eial deal on that, yaar, and I'll return the favour, someho!,! hen! e get ba, .

It's cool.

Dou, no!, ;in, you really ought to settle do! n, man. I don't mean to +in' u# your sene or anything. I'm only saying it as a friend, as a friend! ho loves you li, e a brother. Dou're heading for a big fall, man. I got a bad feeling. I ... I thin, you should settle do! n, li, e. C1F

Settle do! n ...

Deah, man. That's the! hole #oint of it, yaar.

The! hole #oint of ...! hatE

That's! hat the! hole fu, in" game is all about. Dou're a man. That's! hat a man has to do. I don't mean to get into your #ersonal shit, but it's, ind of sad that you don't, no! that already.

I laughed, but he held the serious frown.

5; in, a man has to find a good woman, and when he finds her he has to fall in her love. Then he has to earn her respect. Then he has to cherish her trust. And then he has to, like, go on doing that for as long as they live. Until they both die. That's what it's all about. That's the most important thing in the world. That's what a man is, yaar. A man is truly a man when he wins the love of a good woman, earns her respect, and, earns her trust. Until you can do that, you're not a man.

5Tell that to Didier.

5- o, man, you're not getting it. It's just the same for Didier, but with him it's a good guy he has to find and love. It's the same for all of us. That I'm trying to tell you is that you found a good woman. Dou found her already. Carla is a good woman, man. And you earned her full respect. She told me a couple of times, man (about the cholera and all that in the hospital). Dou, no, led her out with all that Red Cross shit, man. She respects you. Out you don't cherish her trust. Dou don't trust her, ; in, because you don't trust yourself. And I'm afraid for you, man. Without a good woman, a man like you (men like you and me) are just asking for trouble, yaar.

; ettie approached us. The grim frown dimmed in his eyes, I asked a lady by the door, of love he turned on her.

5They're calling our flight, ; in, me darlin', she said. *er

smile was sadder than I'd expected, andounding, somehow, because of it. 57e better go. *ere, I want you to have this, as a present from both of us.

She handed me a folded strip of black cloth, about a metre long and a handspan wide. When I opened it out I found a small card

in the centre.

"It's the blindfold," she said. "Don't, no, from the train, on the roof, the day I married. Tell me! Want you to have it (as a souvenir, you, no, .) and on the card, that's Anjali's address. She wrote to us. She's still in Goa, but in a different part. Just, you, no, if you're interested. Goodbye, darlin'." The letters are. C1G

I had told them to leave, happy for them, but too busy with Anjali's story, and the preparations for Anjali's wedding to give much thought to Anjali's advice. When the visit to Anand, the last visit, had pushed Anjali's voice even deeper into the choir of comforting speeches, warnings, and opinions. Out as I sat alone in my apartment on the night of Anjali's wedding, and too, the note and the blue strip of the blindfold from my pocket, I remembered every word he'd said to me. I sat at a drink, and smoked cigarettes in a silence so profound that I could hear the susurrus of the blindfold's soft fabric rustle and slip between my fingers. The seductive, bell-shaped dancers had been escorted to their bus, and paid a respectable bonus. Anjali and Johnny had led their brides away to a place that had led to take them to a simple but comfortable hotel on the outskirts of the city. For those nights they would, no, the joys of private love before their public lives in the crowded slums resumed. Anjali and Nettie were already in London, preparing to repeat the vows that meant everything to my old boy (obsessed friend). And I was sitting in the armchair, fully dressed and alone, not trusting her, as Anjali said, because I didn't trust myself. When at last, when I drifted to sleep, the note and the strip of blindfold slipped from my fingers.

And for three weeks, after that night, I tried to lose the loneliness that their three happy marriages had pulled from my heart by taking every job I was offered, and putting every deal I could devise. I found one makeshift room to stay in, as instructed, at the Aster Hotel. It was a nearly square three-storey building in a narrow lane parallel to Anjali's long main street. The mattress was lean, but the floor and the walls

seemed to be made from red lead coffin (wood). The grave (like smell) was overbearing, and a stinking dampness filled my mouth with gloomy, unidentifiable tastes. I chain-smoked Gitanes and gargled Belgian whiskey to kill them. Ratcatchers controlled the corridors, dragging monstrous hessian sacks that bulged with stinking, fat animals. So, roach colonies had claimed the drawers of the dresser, so I hung my clothing and toiletries and other personal items from hooks and thin, rusty, rooded nails conveniently hammered into every surface that could endure them.

On my first night I was roused from a light sleep by gunshots in the corridor beyond my door. I heard a rumbling thump, as of a body falling, and then shuffling footsteps pulling something heavy, barrels, along the bare wooden floor of the hallway. I slammed a fist around my C1H, wife and opened the door. Then I were standing at three other doors in the corridor, drawn as I was by the sounds. They were all Europeans. Two of them held pistols in their hands, and one held a rifle similar to my own. We all looked at one another, and then at the trail of blood that smeared its way down the corridor out of sight. As if in response to a secret signal, we all closed our doors again without a word.

Then I followed the Chinese man with a mission to Auritus, my hotel on the island (nation provided a welcome and agreeable contrast. It was called the Mandarin, and it was in surety. The original structure was built as a small-scale reproduction of a Scottish castle. The turreted resemblance was clear enough, on the landing approach through a neat English garden. Inside the building, however, the guest entered a kingdom of Chinese baroque designed by the Chinese family who were the neighbors of the hotel. I sat beneath huge, fire-breathing dragons and ate Chinese brocoli with snow peas, garlic shrimp, fried bean curd, and mushrooms in black bean sauce by the light of paper lanterns, while the windows gave a view of castellated battlements, gothic arches, and rose-studded towers.

4y onta ts, t! o Indians from Oombay ! ho lived in 4auritius, arrived in a yello! 047 as had been arranged. I got into the ba , of the ar and had barely s#o, en a greeting ! hen they too, off at su h tyre(tor hing s#eed that I ! as hurled ba , ! ards into a orner of the seat. 7e s reamed along ba , roads at four times the s#eed limit for fifteen , nu , le(! hitening minutes and then they #ulled into a silent, deserted grove. 2he overheated ar ooled do! n ! ith little lin, s and lun, s of sound. 2here ! as a strong smell of rum on both men.

5@, ay, let"s have the boo, s,5 one of the t! o onta ts said, leaning around from the driver"s seat.

5I haven"t got them,5 I snarled at him through len hed teeth.

2he onta ts loo, ed at one another and then ba , at me. 2he driver raised his mer ury(lens glasses, revealing eyes that loo, ed as though he , e#t them in a glass of bro! n vinegar beside his bed at night.

5Dou don"t got the boo, sE5

5- o. I ! as trying to tell you that on the ! ay here((! herever the fu , ! e are((but you , e#t saying, <ee# oolB <ee# oolB)nd not listening to me. 7ell, are ! e ool enough no! E *uhE5

5I"m not ool, man,5 the #assenger said. C1?

I sa! myself in the lenses of his glasses. I didn"t loo, ha##y.

5Dou idiotsB5 I gro! led, s! it hing to *indi. 5Dou nearly ,illed us all for nothingB Driving li, e a s#eed(frea, (arsehole(Oombay(ta' i(driver ! ith the o#s u# his arseB 2he #ass#orts are ba , at the sister(fu , ing hotel. I stashed them be ause I ! anted to be sure of you t! o motherfu , ers first. - o! the only thing I"m sure of is that you guys haven"t got the brains of t! o fleas on a

#ariah dog's balls.5

The #essenger lifted his glasses, and they both smiled as ! idely as their hangovers ! ould allo! .

57here the fu , did you learn to s#ea, *indi li, e thatE5 the driver as, ed. 5It's fu , in" great, yaar. Dou're s#ea, ing li, e a regular Oombay sister(fu , er. It's fantasti , yaarB5

5Damn im#ressive, manB5 his friend added, ! agging his head admiringly.

5; et me see the money,5 I sna##ed.

2hey laughed.

52he money,5 I insisted. 5; et me see it.5

2he #essenger lifted a bag from bet! een his feet and o#ened it to reveal many bundles of ash.

57hat's that shitE5

5It's the money, brother,5 the driver re#lied.

52hat's not money,5 I said. 54oney is green. 4oney says, In God 7e 2rust. 4oney has the #i ture of a dead)meri an on it be ause money omes from)meri a. 2hat's not money.5

5It's 4auritian ru#ees, brother,5 the #essenger sniffed, ! ounded by the insult to his urren y.

5Dou an"t s#end that shit any! here but in 4auritius,5 I s offed, re alling ! hat I'd learned about restri ted and o#en urren ies ! hile ! or, ing ! ith <haled)nsari. 5It's a restri ted urren y.5

5I , no! , of ource, baba,5 the driver smiled. 57e arranged it ! ith)bdul. 7e don't have the dollars +ust no! , man.)ll fu , in"

tied up in other deals. So I'm saying in Australian rupees. Do you
change them back, to dollars on your way home, yaar.

I sighed, breathing slowly and forcing calm into the little
girl. I found that my mood was fading out of my mind. I looked out
the window. There were trees, and in that seemed to be a green forest
fire. All plants as green as Carla's eyes. I shivered and shuddered
in the wind all around us. There was no one and nothing else in

sight.

"You just see that I've got here. Ten thousand
dollars a week. That's seventy thousand dollars. At the exchange rate
of, say, thirty Australian rupees to the dollar, that gives me no
less than ten million, one hundred thousand rupees. That's why
you got such a big bag. Now, forgive me for seeming obtuse,
gentlemen, but just here the question is, am I going to change ten
million rupees into dollars without a further currency
certification?"

"No problem," the driver responded smoothly. "I've got a
money changer, yaar. First class guy. He'll do the deal for you.
It's all set up."

"Okay," I smiled. "Let's go and see him."

"You'll have to go there alone, man," the passenger said,
laughing heartily. "He's in Singapore."

"Singapore, in Singapore?" I shouted, as that little girl
flashed in my mind.

"Don't be all upset, yaar," the driver replied gently. "It's all
arranged. Abdul Ghani is cool about it. He'll call you at the
hotel today. Here, take this card. Do go to Singapore, on your
way home. (Okay, okay, Singapore is not exactly on the way home to
Bombay, but if you fly there first, then it will be on the way,

isn't it? So when you get down in Singapore, you go and see this guy on the road. He's a licensed money changer. He's a hard man. He'll change all the rupees into dollars, and you'll be cool. - no problem. There's even a bonus in it for you. You'll see.

At last, I sighed. Let's go back to the hotel. If this checks out with Abdul, I'll do the deal.

At the hotel, the driver said, sliding his glasses down over the dartboards of his eyes.

At the hotel, the passenger repeated, and the yellow light hurtled back along the winding roads on and on.

The trip through Singapore passed off without a hitch, and the Mauritian currency was provided a few unexpected benefits. I made a valuable connection in the Singapore money changer (an Indian from Madras named Sheela, Ratnam (and I too, my first look at the profitable smuggling run of duty free cameras and electrical goods from Singapore to Bombay.

When I rode out to the Oberoi Hotel to meet Miss Barber, after handing the dollars to Abdul Ghani and settling my fee, I felt positive and hopeful for the first time in far too long. I began to think, that I might've thrown off the dark moods that had settled on me after C17.

Over the next few days, I'd travelled to Lahore, Mauritius, and Singapore on forged passports without raising the vaguest suspicion. In the slum, I'd survived from day to day on the small commissions I made from tourists, and I had only my promised - a small amount. Just a year later I lived in a modern apartment, my pockets were bulging with freshly minted gains, and I had five passports in five different names and nationalities, with my photograph on every one of them. The world of possibility was opening up for me.

The @beroi *otel stood at -ariman >oint, on the handle of 4arine Drive's golden si , le. 8hur hgate Station and 9lora 9ountain ! ere a five(minute ! al, a! ay. 2en minutes more in one dire tion led to &i toria 2erminus and 8ra! ford 4ar, et. 2en minutes in the other dire tion from 9lora 9ountain led to 8olaba and the Gate! ay 4onument. 2he @beroi la , ed the #ost ard re ognition that the 2a+ *otel ins#ired, but it om#ensated for that ! ith hara ter and flair. Its #iano bar, for e' am#le, ! as a small master#ie e of light and leverly #rivate s#a es, and its brasserie vied determinedly for the title of the best restaurant in Oombay. 7al, ing into the dar, , ri hly te' tured brasserie from the brilliant day, I #aised and blin, ed until my eyes found ; isa and her grou#. She and t! o other young ! omen ! ere sitting ! ith 8liff De Sou1a and 8handra 4ehta.

5*o#e I'm not late,5 I said, sha, ing hands all round.

5-o, I thin, _! e're all early,5 8handra 4ehta +o, ed, his voi e booming out a ross the room.

2he girls laughed hysteri ally. 2heir names ! ere Reeta and Geeta. 2hey ! ere as#iring a tresses on the first rung((a lun h date ! ith , ey se ond(tier #layers((and they gushed it u# ! ith a bug(eyed enthusiasm that ! asn't far from #ani .

I sat do! n in the va ant hair bet! een ; isa and Geeta. ; isa ! ore a thin, lava(red #ullover beneath a bla , sil, +a , et, and a s, irt. Geeta's silver s#ande' to# and ! hite +eans ! ere tight enough to be anatomi ally e' #li it. She ! as a #retty girl, maybe t! enty years old, ! ith her long hair #ulled into a high #onytail. *er hands fretted at the table na#, in, folding and unfolding a orner of the loth. Reeta had a neat short hairstyle that suited her small fa e and gamine features. She ! ore a yello! blouse ! ith a dee#, onfrontation ne , line, and blue +eans. 8liff and 8handra both ! ore suits, and it seemed that they ! ere oming from or going to an a##ointment of some signifi an e. C18

5I'm starved,5 ; isa said ha##ily. *er voi e ! as light and

confident, but she squeezed my hand under the table so hard that her fingernails pinched their way into my skin. It was an important meeting for her. She knew that Dehta planned to offer us a formal partnership in the catering business. Dehta had been running unofficially. She wanted that contractual agreement. She wanted the approval that only a contract could provide. She wanted her

future in writing. "Get's eat!"

"What about that? (if I make the order for all of us?" Shandra suggested.

"Since you're saying for it, I don't mind," Cliff said, laughing and pointing at the girls.

"Sure," I agreed. "Go ahead."

He summoned the waiter with a glance and placed the menu aside, launching straight into his list of references. It began with a white souf entree made with lamb cooked in blanched (almond milk), poured its way through grilled chicken in a cayenne, lemon, and mango marinade, and ended, after many other side matters, with fruit salad, honey, a hori balls, and, ulf i e team.

Listening to Dehta's lengthy and precise list of dishes, I knew all, knew that it would be a long luncheon. I relaxed, and let myself drift in the flow of fine foods and conversation.

"So, you still haven't told me what you think," Dehta prodded.

"You're giving it more attention than it's worth," Cliff De Souza declared, fluttering a hand dismissively.

"-o, man," Dehta insisted. "It happened right outside my damn office, yaar. If ten thousand people are shouting about killing you, outside your own damn office! Indo!, it's hard not to give it some attention."

2hey ! aren't shouting about you personally, 8handrababu.5

5- ot me personally. Out it's me, and everyone lie me, they ! ant to get. 8ome on, it's not so bad for you, and you should admit it. Our family is from Goa. Dou're con, ani s#ea, ers. con, ani and 4arathi are very close. Dou s#ea, 4arathi as ! ell as you s#ea, /nglish. Out I don't s#ea, a damn ! ord of it. Still I'm born here, yaar, and my daddy ! as born here before me. *e has his business here in Oombay. 7e #ay ta'es here. 4y ,ids all go to school here. 4y ! hole life is here in Oombay, man. Out they're shouting 4aharashtra for the 4arathis, and they ! ant to ,i , us out of the only home ! e have.5 C19

5Dou have to see it from their #oint of vie! as ! ell,5 8liff added softly.

5See my evi tion from their #oint of vie! ,5 4ehta retorted, ! ith su h vehemen e that several heads turned to! ard him from other tables. *e ontinued more =uiently but ! ith +ust as mu h #assion. 5I should see my murder from their #oint of vie! , is that itE5

5I love you, my friend, lie I love my o! n third brother(in(la! ,5 8liff re#lied, grinning ! idely. 4ehta laughed ! ith him and the

girls +oined in, learly relieved to have the tension at the table diluted ! ith the little +o, e. 5I don't ! ant to see anyone hurt, least of all you, 8handrabhai.)ll I'm saying is, you have to see it from their side if you ! ant to understand ! hy they're feeling all this. 2hey're native 4arathi s#ea, ers. 2hey're born here in 4aharashtra. 2heir grandfathers, all the ! ay ba , to ... ! ho , no! s, three thousand years or more, they ! ere all born here.)nd then they loo, around in Oombay, and they see all the best +obs, all the businesses, all the om#anies o! ned by #eo#le from other #la es in India. It drives them ra1y.)nd I thin, they have a #oint.5

What about the reserve jobs? He protested. The most office, the police, the schools, the state bank, and lots of others, like the transport authority, they all reserve jobs for Marathi speakers. Out that's not enough for these really full-time jobs. They want to drive us all out of Bombay and Maharashtra. Out I tell you, if they get their way, if they drive us out, they'll lose most of the money and the talent and the brains that make this place what it is.

Riff De Souza shrugged.

Maybe that's a price they're prepared to pay (not that I agree with them. I must think that people like your granddad, who came here from America with nothing, and built a successful business, owe something to the state. The ones who have it all have to share some of it with the ones who have nothing. The people you all fanatics can only get others to listen because there's a grain of truth in what they say. People are angry. The ones who came here from outside and made their fortunes are getting the blame. It's going to get worse, my dear third brother (in-law), and I hate to think where it's going to end.

What do you think, Riff; in Maharashtra as I said, a solution for support. Don't speak, Marathi. Don't live here. Out you're an outsider. What do you think, Riff?

I learned to speak Marathi in a little village called Sunder, I said in confidence.

Answer. The people there are native Marathi speakers. They don't speak Hindi well, and they don't speak English at all. They're pure, shudha Marathi speakers, and Maharashtra has been their home for at least a thousand years. Fifty generations have farmed the land there.

I refused to give someone else a chance to comment or query what I'd said. They were all eating, and listening intently. I continued.

When I came back, to Bombay with my guide, Ganga, I went to live in the slum, where he and twenty-five thousand others live. There were a lot of Marathi, Ganga, there in that slum. They were Maharashtrians, from villages just like Sunder.

They lived in the kind of poverty where every meal cost them a fortune of thorns in sorrow, and slaving labor. I think, it must break their hearts to see people from other parts of India living in fine homes while they wash in the gutters of their own nationality.

I too, asked for mouthfuls of food, waiting for a response from Ganga. After a few moments, he obliged.

Out, hey, come on, that's not all of it, he said. There's a lot more to it than that.

—o, you're right. That's not all of it, I agreed. They're not just Maharashtrians in that slum. They're Gujaratis and Tamils and Karnataka and Bengalis and Assamese and Kashmiris. And they're not just Hindus. They're Sikhs and Muslims and Christians and Buddhists and Parsis and Jains. The problems here are not just Maharashtrian problems. The poor, like the rich, are from every part of India. Out the poor are far too many, and the rich are far too few.

My brother Ganga said, "Ganga, that's only father's stuff. He's a fortune teller, a communist. That's one of his raves, yaar."

"I'm not a communist, or a nationalist," I said, smiling. "I'm more of a 'leave me the hell alone'ist."

"Don't believe him," Ganga interjected. "When you're in trouble, he's the right man to call."

I looked at her. Our eyes held just long enough to feel good and guilty at the same time.

fanaticism is the opposite of love, I said, recalling one of
Chaderbhai's lectures. "I see man on the other side told me (he's a Muslim,
by the way) (that he has more in common with a rational,
reasonable-minded Jew than he does with a fanatic from his own
religion. *He has more in common with a rational, reasonable-minded
Christian or Buddhist or Hindu than he does with a fanatic from his own
religion. In fact, he has more in common with a rational, reasonable-minded
atheist than he does with a fanatic from his own religion. I
agree with him, and I feel the same way. I also agree with
Winston Churchill, who once defined a fanatic as someone who
won't change his mind and can't change the subject."

And on that note, I said, "let's change the subject. Someone
on the other side, I'm relying on you to give me all the gossip about the
romance on the set of *Anon*. What's really going on there?"

Reeta cried out excitedly. "I know all about the new
girl. There's so much scandal about her that I can't even say
her name out loud, yaar. And everything, anything at all about
her, I must love her to death."

Sanjay Dutt's Geeta added, trembling dramatically at the
mention of his name. "Is it true that you actually went to his
party in *Dehra*, my God? I would love to be there. Tell
us all about it."

Enraged by that febrile curiosity, Cliff De Souza spun out
yarns about the Hollywood stars, and Chandra Sheela added
titillating ruffles of gossip throughout. It became clear during
the luncheon that Cliff had an eye for Reeta, and Chandra Sheela
directed much of his attention to Geeta. The long luncheon as the
beginning of a long day and night they'd planned to spend
together. Turning to their themes, and with half their minds on
the pleasures of the night to come, the movie men gradually
shifted their gossip and anecdotes into the area of sex and

se' ual s andals. 2hey ! ere funny stories, sometimes straying into the bi1arre. 7e ! ere all laughing hard ! hen <avita Singh entered the restaurant. 2he laughter ! as still ri##ling through us as I introdu ed <avita around the table.

5/' use me,5 she said, ! ith the , ind of fro! n that limbs out of dee# trouble and refuses to leave. 5I have to s#ea, to you, ; in.5

5Dou an tal, about the ase here, <avita,5 I offered, still bright ! ith the laughter of a minute before. 52hey"ll find it interesting.5

5It"s not about the ase,5 she insisted firmly. 5It"s about)bdullah 2aheri.5

I stood at on e and e' used myself, nodding to ; isa that she should stay and ! ait for me to return. <avita and I ! al, ed to the foyer of the restaurant. 7hen ! e ! ere alone, she s#o, e.

5Dour friend 2aheri is in dee# shit.5 CFF

57hat do you meanE5

5I mean that I heard a ! his#er from the rime staffer at the 2imes. *e said that)bdullah is on a #oli e hit list. Shoot on sight, he said.5

57hatE5

52he o#s" orders are to ta, e him alive, if they an, but to ta, e no han es ! ith him. 2hey"re sure he"s armed, and they"re sure he"ll shoot, if they try to arrest him.)t the slightest hesitation from him, they"re ordered to shoot him do! n li, e a dog.5

57hyE 7hat"s it all aboutE5

52hey thin, he"s this Sa#na guy. 2hey"ve had a solid ti#(off,

! ith solid eviden e. 2hey"re sure it"s him, and they"re going to get him. 2oday. It might have ha##ened already. Dou an"t fu ,

! ith the o#s in Oombay((not ! ith something this serious. I"ve been loo,ing for you for t! o hours.5

5Sa#naE It doesn"t ma, e sense,5 I said. Out it did ma, e sense. It made #erfe t sense, someho! , and I ouldn"t understand ! hy. 2here ! ere too many #ie es missing6 too many =uestions that I hadn"t as, ed, and should"ve as, ed, long before.

5Sensible or not, it"s no! a reality,5 she said, her voi e trembling in the shudder of a resigned and #itying shrug. 5I"ve been loo,ing for you every! here. Didier told me you ! ere here. I , no! 2aheri"s a good friend of yours.5

5Deah. *e"s a friend,5 I said, suddenly remembering that I ! as tal,ing to a +ournalist. I stared at the dar, ar#et, and tried to find sense or dire tion in the sandstorm of my thoughts. 2hen I loo,ed u# and met her eyes. 52han, s, <avita. I really a##re iate it. 2han, s a lot. I"ll have to go.5

5; isten,5 she said more softly. 5I filed the story. I #honed it in as soon as I heard it. If it ma, es the evening ne! s, it might ma, e the o#s a little more areful. 9or the re ord, I don"t thin, he did it. I an"t believe it. I al! ays li, ed him. I had a little rush on him for a ! hile, right after you brought him to ;eo#old"s the first time. 4aybe I"ve still got a rush on him, yaar.)ny! ay, I don"t thin, he"s Sa#na, and I don"t thin, he did those ... terrible things.5

She left, smiling for me and rying for him at the same time.)t the table, I a#ologised for brea,ing u# the lun h and offered a vague e' use for leaving. 7ithout as,ing her if she ! anted to ome, I #ulled ba , ;isa"s hair for her and lifted her handbag from the hair"s high ba , .

5@h, ; in, do you really have to goE5 8handra om#lained. 57 e
haven't CFG
even tal,ed about the asting(agen y deal.5

5Do you really , no!)bdullah 2aheriE5 8liff as, ed, the faintest
hint of a usation in his uriosity.

I glared at him.

5Des.5

5)nd you're ta, ing the lovely ; isa ! ith you,5 8handra #outed.
52hat's a double disa##ointment.5

5I've heard so mu h about him, yaar,5 8liff #ersisted. 5*o! did
you meet himE5

5*e saved my life, 8liff,5 I said, a little more harshly than I'd
intended. 52he first time I met him, he saved my life, at the
hash den run by the Standing Oabas.5

I held o#en the door of the brasserie for ; isa, and loo, ed ba ,
at the table. 8liff and 8handra had their heads lose together,
their ! his#ers e' luding the be! ildered girls.

@n the bi, e, outside the hotel, I told ; isa everything that I
, ne! . *er healthy tan faded suddenly and her fa e ! as #ale, but
she #ulled herself together =ui , ly. She agreed ! ith me that a
tri# to ; eo#old"s ! as logi al, as a first ste#.)bdullah might be
there, or he might've left a message ! ith someone. She ! as
afraid, and I felt that fear t! isting in the mus les of her arms
as she lung to my ba , . 7e hurtled through the #onderously slo!
traffi , riding on lu , and instin t +ust as)bdullah might've
done.)t ; eo#old"s ! e found Didier drin, ing himself into the
li=uid abyss.

5It's over,5 he slurred, #ouring himself another ! his, y from a

large bottle. It's all over. They shot him dead almost an hour ago. Everyone is talking about it. The mosques in Dongri are calling the prayers for the dead.

"No! do you, no!" I demanded. "Who told you?"

"The prayers for the dead," he mumbled, his head lolling forward. "That a ridiculous and redundant phrase. There are no other kinds of prayers. Every prayer is a prayer for the dead."

I grabbed the front of his shirt and shook him. They waiters, I thought, all liked Didier as much as I did, I thought, but they would let me go.

"Didier, listen to me. No! do you, no!" "Who told you about it?" "Who did it happen?"

"The police were here," he said, suddenly lucid. "His blue eyes looked into mine as if he was looking for something at the bottom of a can"

"I heard they were boasting about it to Mehmet, one of the officers. Dou, no! Mehmet. He's also Iranian, like Abdullah. Some of the police from the Golaba station, across the road, were in the ambush. They said that he was surrounded in a little street near Braford Market. They called on him to surrender himself to them. They said he stood perfectly still. They said his long hair was streaming behind him in the wind, and his black clothes. They talked about that for quite some time. It is strange, don't you think, when they were talking about his clothes ... and his hair? What does it mean? When they ... they said he took out his guns from his jacket, and began to shoot at them. They all returned the fire at once. He was shot so many times that his body was mutilated, they said. It was torn apart by the fusillade."

She began to cry. She sat down next to Didier, and he raised an arm around her in the automatism of grief and shock. He didn't look at her or acknowledge her. He rattled at her shoulder and rocked from side to side, but his sorrow (struggle, expression)

I could've been the same if he were alone and I raising his arms about himself.

Here as a big road, he continued. They were very upset. The police were nervous. They wanted to take his body to the hospital in one of their vans, but the people in the road attacked the van, and forced it off the road. The police took the body to the Bradford Market Police station. The road followed them there, shouting and screaming abuse. They are still there, I think.

Bradford Market Police station. I had to go there. I had to see the body. I had to see him. Maybe he was alive ...

Wait here, I told; I said. Wait with Didier, or get a cab home. I'll be back.

The car rammed into my side, just beside my heart, and out through the top of my chest. The car of Abdullah's death, the car of this thing about his dead, dead body. I rode to Bradford Market, and every breath pushed the rough car just against my heart.

At the market police station I was forced to abandon the bike because a milling road mobbed the road. Striding out on foot, I soon found myself in a field, aimlessly rambling freely of people. Most of them were Muslims. That I could make out from the many chants and shouted slogans indicated that they weren't simply mourners. Abdullah's death had touched off a fair fire of discontent and long-nursed grievances in the neglected areas of the Moor around the market area. Then

CF?
They were shouting a confusing collection of complaints, and clamouring for their own causes. I could hear prayers ringing out from several places.

Inside the legions of screaming men it was chaos, and every step toward the police station was a jostling, shoving

effort of for e and ! ill. 4en ame in ! aves that s! e#t me side! ays and then for! ard and then ba , . 2hey #ushed and #un hed and , i , ed out ! ith their legs. 4ore than on e I almost ! ent under those tram#ling feet, rea hing out at the last moment to save myself by gra##ling my fingers into a shirt or a beard or a sha! l. I finally aught sight of the #oli e station and the #oli e. 7earing helmets and arrying shields, they ! ere three or four dee# a ross the ! hole ! idth of the building.

) man beside me in the ro! d seiled my shirt and began to #un h me about the head and fa e. I had no idea ! hy he"d atta , ed me((maybe he didn't understand it himself((but it didn't matter. 2he blo! s ! ere stru , , and I ! as in it. I overed myself ! ith my hands and tried to ! ren h myself free. *is hand ! as lo , ed onto the shirt, and I ouldn't sha, e him off. I ste##ed in loser, +abbed my fingers into his eyes, and rashed my fist into his head +ust ahead of the ear. *is hand released me and he fell ba , , but others began to #un h at me. 2he ro! d o#ened out

around me and I sha#ed u#, #un hing out at random and hitting anything ! ithin range.

It ! as a bad situation. I , ne! that sooner or later I ! ould lose the energy and the sur#rise that , e#t the #osse of men at bay. 4en rushed at me, but only one at a time and ! ith no te hni=ue. 2hey too, solid hits and dre! ba , . I dan ed around, hammering anyone ! ho ame near me, but I ! as surrounded and I ouldn't ! in. It ! as only the ro! d's fas ination ! ith the fighting that , e#t them from surging for! ard in a strangling rush of bodies.

) determined #halan' of eight or ten men bro, e through the ir le, and I ! as fa e to fa e ! ith <haled)nsari. I ! as running on instin t, and I almost #un hed him. *e held out both hands, ! aving for me to sto#. *is men #loughed their ! ay ba , into the ro! d, and <haled #ushed me in behind them. Someone #un hed my head from behind, and I turned and ran at the mob again, ! anting to fight every man in the ity6 ! anting to fight until they

#un hed me numb6 until I ouldn't feel that s#ear, dead
)bdullah's s#ear, in my hest. <haled and t! o of his friends
! ra##ed their arms around me and dragged me out of the ! rithing,
lunati hell that the street had be ome. CFC

5*is body's not there,5 <haled told me ! hen ! e found my bi, e. *e
! i#ed the blood from my fa e ! ith a hand, er hief. 4y eye ! as
s! elling u# =ui , ly, and blood dri##ed from my nose and a ut on
my lo! er li#. I hadn't felt the blo! s at all. 2here ! as no #ain.
2he #ain ! as all in my hest, right ne' t to my heart, and I
breathed it in, and out, and in.

52he ro! d stormed the #la e. *undreds of them. 2hat ! as before
! e got here. 7hen the o#s #ushed them out again, they ! ent to
the ell ! here they'd #ut his body, and it ! as em#ty. 2he ro! d
let all the #risoners out, and they got his body.5

5)h, \$esus,5 I moaned. 5)h, fu , .)h, God.5

57e"ll get #eo#le on it,5 <haled said, =uiet and onfident.
57e"ll find out ! hat ha##ened. 7e"ll find ... it ... him. 7e"ll
find his body.5

I rode ba , to ;eo#old"s, and found \$ohnny 8igar sitting at
Didier"s table. Didier and ;isa ! ere gone. I olla#sed in a hair
beside \$ohnny, mu h as ;isa had done beside Didier a fe! hours
before. ;eaning my elbo! s on the table, I rubbed my eyes ! ith the
heels of my hands.

5) terrible thing,5 \$ohnny said.

5Deah.5

5It shouldn't have ha##ened.5

5- o.5

5)nd it didn't need to ha##en. -ot li, e this.5

5Deah.5

5*e didn't need to ta, e that fare. It ! as the last one for the night, but he didn't need it. *e made #lenty yesterday.5

57hatE5 I as, ed, loo, ing at him ! ith a fro! n that ! as angry in its be! ilderment.

5>raba, er"s a ident,5 he said.

57hatE5

52he a ident,5 he re#eated.

57hat ... a identE5

5@h, my God, ;in, I thought you , ne! about it,5 he said, the blood in his fa e an ebb tide that re eded to his tightening throat. *is voi e ra , ed, and his eyes filled ! ith tears. 5I thought you , ne! . 7hen I sa! your fa e +ust no! , the ! ay you loo, , I thought you , ne! about it. I've been ! aiting for you nearly for one hour. I ame to find you as soon as I left the hos#ital.5

5*os#ital ...5 I re#eated stu#idly. CF7

5St. George *os#ital. *e"s in the intensive are. 2he o#eration((
5

57hat o#erationE5

5*e ! as hurt((very badly hurt, ;in. 2he o#eration ! as ... he"s still alive, but ...5

5Out ! hatE5

Johnny bro, he didn't and I left, bringing himself under control only with deep breaths and a hell of an effort of will.

Five too, the passengers, very late last night. Eventually, it was about three o'clock, this morning. The man and his daughter, wanting to go to the airport. There was a handcart on the highway road. Dou, no! Hold these fellows take some shortcuts at night, on the main road. It's forbidden, but still they do it, yaar, to save miles of pushing those heavy carts. This cart was full of steel for building. Long steel pieces. They lost the control of that cart on a hill. It slipped from their hands, and it rolled backward. The cart came around the corner in his tail, and the whole thing went into the front of the car. Some of the steel went through the window. The man and the woman in the back were killed. Their heads came off. Completely off. The cart was hit in the face.

He left again, and I reached out to comfort him. Tourists and patrons at other tables glanced at us, but usually looked away. When he recovered, I ordered a whiskey for him. He gulped it in one sip of the glass, as the cart had done on the first day that I met him.

So bad is he!

The doctor said it's sure he will die, in five. Johnny sobbed. His father is gone. The steel too, it's completely gone. Everything is gone. All his teeth. There is a big hole, just a big hole, in his mouth and his father used to be. His nose is open. They haven't even put bandages on his face, because there are so many tubes and wires going into that hole. So, keep him alive. So he survived it, in that car like that, nobody can say. He was trapped in there for twelve hours. The doctors think that he will die tonight. That's why I tried to find you. He got bad wounds in the chest and stomach and head. He's going to die, in. He's going to die. We have to go there.

We all, led into the room, and found Arjun and Ru, hmabai sitting at the side of his bed and hugging in one another's arms. Arvati, Sita, Sheetendra, and I all were all standing in solemn silence at the foot of the bed. Arjun, ever so unassuming. Arjun, of machines monitored his vital signs. Tubes and metal needles were attached to Arjun's face, his face, that great smile, that gorgeous, solar smile, had been ripped from his face. It was simply ... gone.

In a duty room on the ground floor, I found the doctor in charge of his care. I pulled a bundle of one hundred dollar bills from my belt and offered it to him, asking him to forgo any further accounts to me. "I couldn't take it. There was no hope," he said. "Arjun had hours, perhaps only minutes, to live. That was why he'd allowed the family and friends to remain at the bedside. There was nothing to do, he said, but wait with him, and let him die. I returned to Arjun's room and gave Arvati the money, together with everything I'd earned on my most recent courier run.

I found a toilet in the hospital and then I washed my face and neck. The cuts and wounds on my face filled my aching head with thoughts of Abdullah. I couldn't bear to think those thoughts. I couldn't hold the image of my wild, Iranian friend surrounded by bombs and shooting it out until his body was torn and bloodied. I stared into the mirror, feeling the acid burn of tears. I slapped myself hard awake, and returned to Arjun's floor.

I stood with the others, at the foot of his bed, for three hours. Exhausted, I began to nod off, and I had to admit that I couldn't stay awake. In a relatively quiet corner, I put my head against the wall and went to sleep. I dreamt of me alone, almost at once. It carried me to Sunder. I was floating on the

murmuring tide of voices on that first night in the village when Arjun's father put his hand on my shoulder, and I knew my

teeth against the stars. When I lay down from the dream, as if I were sitting there beside me with his hand on my shoulder, and when I met his eyes we both sobbed helplessly.

In the end, when it was as sure that Ganga, who would die, and we all would die, and we all accepted the fact that he had to die, we went through four days and nights of watching his brave little body suffer, what was left of him, the almost-Ganga, with the amputated smile. In the end, after days and nights of watching him suffer that pain and bewilderment, I began to hope that he would die, and to wish for it with all my heart. I loved him so much that in the end I found an empty corner in a cleaner's room, where a tap dripped constantly into a concrete trough, and I fell to my knees on a marble floor, marked by toilet footprints, and I begged God to let him die. And then he did die. CF9

In the hut he'd once shared with Ganga, Ganga's mother, Rukhmabai, unfurled her thigh-length hair. She was sitting in the doorway with her back to the world. Her black hair was night's aftermath. She cut a cross thinly, close to her head, with sharp shears, and the long hair fell like a shadow dying.

But first, when we truly love someone, our greatest fear is that the loved one will stop loving us. That we should fear and dread, of course, is that we won't stop loving them, even after they're dead and gone. For I still love you with the hole of my heart, Ganga, er. I still love you. And sometimes, my friend, the love that I have, and can't give to you, rushes the breath from my chest. Sometimes, even now, my heart is drowning in a sorrow that has no stars without you, and no laughter, and no sleep.

(((((((((((

CG%

CHAPTER THIRTY

*eroin is a sensory deprivation tank, for the soul. Floating on the Dead Sea of the drug stone, there's no sense of pain, no regret or shame, no feelings of guilt or grief, no depression, and no desire. The sleeping universe enters and envelops every atom of existence. Insensible stillness and serene disperse fear and suffering. Thoughts drift like ocean leeches and vanish in the distant, grey somnolence, unremembered and indeterminable. The body submits to hypnotic slumber: the listless heart beats faintly, and breathing slowly fades to random rhythms. The nirvanic numbness logs the limbs, and downward, deeper, the sleeper slides and glides toward oblivion, the perfect and eternal stone.

That hemispherical absolution is paid for, like everything else in the universe, with light. The first light that humans lose is the light in their eyes.) Humans' eyes are as lightless as the eyes

of Greece, statues, as lightless as hammered lead, as lightless as a bullet hole in a dead man's back. The next light lost is the light of desire. Humans, ill desire with the same passion they use on hope and dream and honour: the club made from their raving.) And when all the other lights of life are gone, the last light lost is the light of love. Sooner or later, when it's down to the last hit, the human will give up the woman he loves, rather than go without sooner or later, every hard human becomes a devil in exile.

I levitated. I floated, unraised on the supernatural liquid of the sky, in the sky, and the sky as big as a room. The raft of opiate paralysis drifted across the little lake in the sky, and the rafters intersecting over my head seemed to hold answers, some kind of answers, in their symmetry. I stared at the rafters, knowing that the answers were there and that it might save me.) And then I closed my eyes of hammered lead again, and lost it.) And sometimes I lose. Sometimes I lose as I desire enough to

I want more of the deadening drug. Sometimes I feel as if I am not conscious enough to remember it all.

There had been no funeral for Abdullah because there was no body for them, for us, to bury. His body had disappeared during the brahmin riot just as Aurilio's body had disappeared (as completely as a flared, exhausted star. I joined the others to carry Ganga's body to the ghat, the burning place. I ran with them through the streets. I ran with them beneath the garlanded burden of his little body, chanting names of God, and then I watched his body burn. Grief roamed the lanes of the slum afterward, and I couldn't remain there with the gathering of friends and family who mourned him. They stood near the spot where Ganga had been married only a few days before. Tattered streamers from the wedding still dangled from the roofs of some of the huts. I spoke to Ismail, Johnny, Jeetendra, and Krishan Chango, but then I left them and rode to Dongri. I had questions for Ganga's brother-in-law: questions that rattled inside me like the things in a suitcase.

The house near the mosque was closed, locked up with heavy padlocks and utterly silent. No one in the courtyard of the mosque or the street of shops could tell me when he'd left, or when he might return. Frustrated and angry, I rode to see Abdullah Ghani. His house was open but his servants told me that he was out of the city on a holiday, and wasn't expected home again for a few days. I visited the passport factory, and found Krishna and Willu hard at work. They confirmed that Ghani had left them instructions and sufficient funds for several days of work, and had told them that he was taking a holiday. When I rode to Chaudhary's apartment, I met a policeman on duty who told me that Chaudhary was in Calcutta. He had no idea when the Palestinian would return.

The other members of Ganga's mafia were just as suddenly and conveniently absent. Farid was in Dubai. General Sobhan

4ahmoud ! as in <ashmir. -o(one ans! ered my , no , at <e, i Dorab+ee"s house, and every ! indo! ! as dar, ened ! ith a dra! n shade. Ra+ubhai, ! ho"d never been , no! n to miss a day at his counting house in the 9ort, ! as visiting a si , relative in Delhi. /ven the se ond(level bosses and lieutenants ! ere out of to! n or sim#ly unavailable.

2hose ! ho remained, the gold agents and urren y ouriers and #ass#ort onta ts all over the ity, ! ere #olite and friendly.

7or, for them seemed to ontinue at the same #a e and ! ith the same routines. 4y o! n ! or, ! as +ust as se ure. I ! as anti i#ated at every de#ot, e' hange CGF

entre, +e! ellery store, and other #oint of onta t ! ith <hader"s em#ire. Instru tions had been left for me ! ith gold dealers, urren y men, and the touts ! ho bought and stole #ass#orts. I ! as n"t sure if it ! as a om#liment to me((that I ould be relied u#on to fun tion in the absen e of the oun il((or that they sa! me as so in onse=uential in their s heme of things that I didn"t merit an e' #lanation.

7hatever the reason, I felt dishearteningly alone in the ity.

I"d lost >raba, er and)bdullah, my losest friends, in the same ! ee, , and ! ith them I"d lost the mar, on the #sy hi ma# that says Dou)re *ere. >ersonality and #ersonal identity are in some ! ays li, e o(ordinates on the street ma# dra! n by our interse ting relationshi#s. 7e , no! ! ho ! e are and ! e define ! hat ! e are by referen es to the #eo#le ! e love and our reasons for loving them. I ! as that #oint in s#a e and time ! here)bdullah"s ! ild violen e interse ted ! ith >raba, er"s ha##y gentleness.)drift, then, and someho! un(defined by their deaths, I realised ! ith unease and sur#rise ho! mu h I"d also ome to de#end u#on <hader and his oun il of bosses. 4y intera tions ! ith most of them had been ursory, it seemed to me, and yet I missed the reassuran e of their #resen e in the ity almost as mu h as I missed the om#any of my dead friends.

)nd I ! as angry. It too, me a ! hile to understand that anger, and to realise that <haderbhai ! as its instigator and its target. I

blamed him for Abdullah's death: for not protecting him and for not saving him. I couldn't bring myself to believe that Abdullah, the friend I'd loved, was as the brutal madman Saana. Out I was ready to believe that Abdel ~~Chader~~ ~~Chah~~ had some connection to Saana and to the killings. Moreover, I felt betrayed by his desertion of the city. It was as if he'd abandoned me to face ... everything ... alone. It was a ridiculous notion, of course, and quite self-aggrandising. The truth was that hundreds of ~~Chader~~'s men were still working in Bombay, and I dealt with many of them every day. Out still I felt it (betrayed and forsaken.)

Oldness, formed from doubt and angry fear, began to spread inward toward the core of my feeling for the ~~Chah~~. I still loved him, and I was still bonded to him as a son to his father, but he was no longer my revered and flawless hero.

A muaheddin fighter once told me that fate gives all of us three

teachers, three friends, three enemies, and three great loves in our lives. Out these twelve are always disguised, and we can never know which one is which until we've loved them, left them, or fought them. ~~Chader~~ was one of those of my twelve, but his disguise was always the best. In those abandoned, angry days, as my grieving heart limbed into numbing despair, I began to think of him as my enemy, my beloved enemy.

And deal by deal, rime by rime, day by day my ill and ~~Chur~~ose and hope staggered toward the ~~Chit~~. ;isa Barter ~~Chursued~~ and I on her contract with ~~Chandra~~ ~~Chhta~~ and ~~Chliff~~ De Souza. For her sake, I sat in at the meeting that lined the deal, and I signed on as her partner. The producers saw my involvement as important. I was their safe conduit to the black money of the ~~Chader~~ ~~Chah~~ mafia (an untapped and virtually inexhaustible resource. They didn't mention that connection, not then, but it was a key factor in their decision to sign on with ;isa. The contract specified that ;isa and I would supply foreign junior artists, as bit players were, none, for three major studios. The terms of payment and commissions were set for two years.

)fter the meeting, ; isa ! al, ed me to my bi, e #ar, ed at the sea
! all on 4arine Drive. 7e sat together at the #re ise s#ot ! here
)bdullah had #ut his hand on my shoulder, years before, ! hen my
mind ! as filled ! ith the dro! ning sea. 7e ! ere lonely, ; isa and
I, and at first ! e tal, ed to one another as lonely #eo#le do((in
fragments of om#laint, and orners li##ed from onversations
that ! e"d already had ! ith ourselves, alone.

5*e , ne! it ! ould ha##en,5 she said after a long, silent #ause.
52hat"s ! hy he gave me that money in the ase. 7e tal, ed about
it. *e tal, ed about it. *e tal, ed about being , illed. Dou , no!
about the ! ar in IranE 2he ! ar ! ith Ira=E *e almost got , illed
there a fe! times. It got into his head, I"m sure of it. I thin,
he ! anted to die, for running a! ay from the ! ar and leaving his
friends and family behind.)nd ! hen it ame do! n to it, if it
ever did ome do! n to it, he ! anted to go out li, e that.5

54aybe,5 I ans! ered her, loo, ing at the sublime, indifferent sea.
5<arla on e said ! e all attem#t sui ide several times in our
lives, and sooner or later ! e all su eed.5

; isa laughed, be ause I"d sur#rised her ! ith the =uote, but the
laugh ended in a long sigh. She tilted her head to let the ! ind
#lay ! ith her hair.

52he thing ! ith Alla,5 she said =uietly, 5It"s been , illing me,
; in. I an"t get 4odena out of my mind. I"m reading all the
#a#ers, every day, loo, ing for something about him((about maybe
they found him or something. It"s ! eird ... the thing ! ith
4auri1io, you , no! , I ! as si , ! ith it for ! ee, s after. I used to
ry all the time, +ust ! al, ing on the street or CGH
reading a boo, or trying to slee#, and I ouldn"t eat a meal
! ithout feeling si , to my stoma h. I ouldn"t sto# thin, ing

about his dead body ... and the , nife ... ! hat it must"ve felt
li, e, ! hen Alla #ushed the , nife into him ... Out no! , all that"s

, ind of faded. It's still there, you , no! , in the bottom of my gut, but it doesn't free, me out any more.)nd even)bdullah((I don't , no! if I'm in sho , or denial or ! hatever, but I don't ... let myself thin, about him. It's li, e ... li, e I a e#t it, or something. Out 4odena((that , ee#s getting ! orse. I an"t sto# thin, ing about him.5

5I see him, too,5 I muttered. 5I see his fa e, and I ! asn"t even there in that hotel room. It's not good.5

5I should've hit her.5

5AllaE5

5Des, AllaB5

57hyE5

52hat ... allous ... bit hB She left him there, tied u# in that room. She brought you trouble, and me trouble and ... 4auri1io ... Out ! hen she told us about 4odena, I +ust #ut my arm around her, and too, her to the sho! er, and loo, ed after her li, e she"d +ust told me she hadn't fed her #et goldfish. I should've sla##ed her or so , ed her one on the +a! or , i , ed her ass or something. - o! she's gone, and I'm still free, ing out about 4odena.5

5Some #eo#le do that,5 I said, smiling at the anger in her be ause I felt it myself. 5Some #eo#le al! ays manage to ma, e us feel sorry for them, no matter ho! stu#id and angry ! e feel about it after. 2hey're the anaries, , ind of, in the oalmines of our hearts. If ! e sto# feeling sorry for them, ! hen they let us do! n, ! e're in dee# trouble.)nd any! ay, I didn't get involved to hel# her. I did it to hel# you.5

5@h, I , no! , I , no! ,5 she sighed. 5It's not Alla's fault. - ot really. 2he >ala e messed her u#. It messed ! ith her head om#letely. /veryone ! ho ! or, ed for 4adame . hou got messed u# in some ! ay. Dou should've seen Alla, ba , then, ! hen she started

! or, there. She ! as gorgeous, I gotta tell ya.)nd , ind of ...
inno ent ... in a ! ay that the rest of us ! eren't, if you , no!
! hat I mean. I ! ent there already ra1y ! hen I first started ! or,
there. Out it fu , ed me u#, too. 7e all ... ! e had to ... ! e did
some ! eird shit there ...5

5Dou told me about it,5 I said gently.

5I told youE5 CG?

5Deah.5

5I told you ! hatE5

5Dou told me ... a lot of it. 2he night I ame around to get my
lothes from <arla"s. I ! ent there ! ith the , id, 2ari=. Dou ! ere
very drun, , and very stoned.5

5)nd I told you about thatE5

5Deah.5

5\$esus\$ I don't remember that. I ! as starting to tur, ey. 2hat ! as
the first night, ! hen I tried to get off the stuff((! hen I did
get off the stuff. I remember the , id, though ... and I remember
you didn't ! ant to have se' ! ith me.5

5@h, I ! anted it, alright.5

She turned her head =ui , ly and met my eye. *er e' #ression smiled
at the li#s, but a tiny fro! n reased her forehead. She ! as
! earing a red sal! ar , amee1. 2he long, loose sil, shirt lung to
her breasts and the outline of her figure in the strong sea
bree1e. *er blue eyes glittered ! ith ourage and other mysteries.
She ! as brave and fragile and tough in the same instant. She"d
dragged herself from the life that ! as dro! ning her at 4adame

. hou"s >ala e, and she"d beaten heroin. In defen e of her friend"s life, and her o! n, she"d hel#ed to , ill a man. She"d lost her lover,)bdullah, my friend, his body torn and mutilated by bullets.)nd it ! as all there, in her eyes and her thin fa e, thinner than it should"ve been. It ! as all there, if you , ne! ! hat to loo, for, and if you , ne! ! here to loo, .

5So, ho! did you end u# at the >ala eE5 I as, ed, and she flin hed a little as I hanged the sub+e t.

5I don"t , no! ,5 she sighed. 5I ran a! ay from home ! hen I ! as a , id. I ouldn"t stand it at home. I got outta there as soon as I ould. In a ou#le years I ! as a teenage +un, ie, ! or, ing the beat in ; .) . and getting beat u# by that month"s #im#. 2hen a guy ame along, a ni e, =uiet, lonely, gentle guy, named 4att. I fell for him, hard. *e ! as my first real love. *e ! as a musi ian, and he"d been to India a ou#le times. *e ! as sure ! e ould ma, e enough money for a ne! start, if ! e smuggled some shit from Oombay ba , home. *e said that he"d #ay for the ti , ets, if I agreed to arry the stuff. 7hen ! e got here, he +ust too, off ! ith everything((all our money, and my #ass#ort, and everything. I don"t , no! ! hat ha##ened. I don"t , no! if he got old feet or found someone else to do the CGC

+ob or +ust de ided to do it himself. I don"t , no! . 2he end of it ! as ... that I got stu , in Oombay ! ith a big, raging heroin habit, and no money, and no #ass#ort. I started ! or, ing from a hotel room, turning tri , s to , ee# going.)fter a ou#le months of that, a o# ame into my room one day and told me I ! as busted. I ! as going to an Indian +ail((unless I agreed to ! or, for this friend of his.5

54adame . hou.5

5Deah.5

52ell me, did you ever see herE Did you ever tal, to her in #ersonE5

5- ah.) Almost no one ever talks to her or sees her, except for Ra+an and his brother. <arla met her in person. <arla hates her. <arla hates her more than ... I've never seen anything like it in my life. <arla hates her so much that she's a bit crazy ! with it, if you , no! ! hat I mean. She thinks about Adame . How almost all the time, and she'll get her, sooner or later.5

5The thing ! with her friend) Ahmed, and Christine,5 I murmured. 5She thinks Adame . How had them , killed, and she blames herself for it. She can't let it go.5

5That's right5 she answered ! wonderingly, her face frosting and smiling in #u11lement. 5Did she tell you about thatE5

5Deah.5

5That's ...5 she laughed, 5that's amazing5 <arla never talks to anyone about that. I mean, anyone. Out I guess it's not really so amazing. How really got under her skin. How , no! that time ! when the cholera ! as in the slum and allE She talked about that for ! ees after. She talked about it like it ! as some , kind of holy e' #erien e, some , kind of transcendental high.)nd she talked about you a lot. I've never seen her so ... inspired, I guess.5

5When <arla got me to rescue you from the >alade,5 I asked, not looking at her, 5! as that for you, or ! as it +ust a ! ay to score #oints against Adame . HowE5

5How mean, ! ere ! e +ust #a! ns in <arla's game, you and meE Is that ! hat you're askingE5

5Something like that.5

5I think, I'd have to say yes, ! ere.5 She #ulled her long scarf from her neck, and drew it across an open #alm, staring at it intently. 5@h, you , no! , <arla likes me and all, I'm sure about that. She's told me things that CG7

nobody, no! s((not even you.)nd I li, e her.)nd she lived in the States, you, no! . She gre! u# there, and she felt something about that. I thin, I ! as the only)meri an girl ! ho ever ! or, ed at the >ala e. Out the heart of it, dee# do! n, ! as this ! ar ! ith 4adame . hou. I thin, ! e got used u#, you and me. Out it doesn't matter, you, no! E She got me out of there((you got me out of there, ! ith her, and I'm damn glad. 7hatever her reasons ! ere, I don't hold it against her, and I don't thin, you should either.5

5I don't,5 I sighed.

5OutE5

5Out ... nothing. 7e didn't ! or, out, <arla and me, but I ...5

5Dou still love herE5

I turned my head to loo, at her, but ! hen her blue eyes met mine I hanged the sub+e t.

5*ave you heard anything from 4adame . houE5

5-ot a thing.5

5*as she been as, ing =uestions about youE)nything at allE5

5-othing, than, God. It's ! eird((I don't hate 4adame . hou. I don't feel anything for her, one ! ay or the other, e' e#t that I never ! ant to go any! here near her again. Out I do hate her servant, Ra+an. If you ! or, ed at the >ala e, he"s the one you had to deal ! ith and ans! er to. *is brother ta, es are of the , it hen, but Ra+an loo, s after the girls.)nd that"s one s#oo, y motherfu , er, that Ra+an. *e gets around li, e a ghost. It"s li, e he"s got eyes in the ba , of his head. *e"s the s ariest thing in the ! hole ! orld, let me tell ya. 4adame . hou, I never even sa! . She tal, s to you through a metal grille. 2here"s at least one in every room, so she an ! at h ! hat"s going on, and tal, to the

girls or the customers. It's a full moon, in the night. I'd rather die than go back to that.

There! as another silence. Waves crashed at the shoreline of rocks and pebbles at the base of the hill. Seagulls hovered, roaring the wind for signs of things that slithered and scuttled among the rocks.

"How much money did he leave you?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "I never counted it. It's a lot. Seventy, eighty grand (a lot more, you know, than I'd ever earned in my life for, and got himself killed for. It's crazy, isn't it?"

"You should take it, and get the fuck out of here."

"That's funny (I thought he just signed a contract with CG8

and his production company. You know, the 'let's get on with our lives' contract."

"You, the contract."

"Come on, in."

"You, the contract. You've gotta get out of this. We don't know what the fuck's going on. We don't know why Abdullah's dead. We don't know what he did do, or what he didn't do. If he wasn't Saana, then things are bad. If he was Saana, things are much worse. You should take the money and just ... go."

"And go! here?"

"Why! here?"

"Are you going?"

5-o. I've got unfinished business here.)nd I'm ... I'm finished myself, in a ! ay. Out you should go.5

5Dou don't get it, do youE5 she demanded. 5It's not about the money. If I go ba , no! , I'll #ut the lot of it in my arm. I've gotta have something more than money. I'm trying to _build something here ! ith this business.)nd I an do it here. I'm something here. I'm somebody. 2he #eo#le loo, at me, ! hen I +ust ! al, do! n the street, be ause I'm different.5

5Dou'd be something, ! herever you are,5 I said, grinning at her.

5Don't ma, e fun of me, ; in.5

5I'm not, ; isa. Dou're a beautiful girl, and you've got heart((that's ! hy #eo#le stare at you.5

52his an ! or, ,5 she insisted. 5I an feel it in my bones. I don't have any edu ation, ; in, and I'm not smart li, e you. I'm not trained to do anything. Out this ... this ould be big. I ould, I don't , no! ... I ould start #rodu ing movies, maybe, one day. I ould ... do something good.5

5Dou are good. Dou'll do good ! herever you go.5

5-o. 2his is my han e. I'm not going ba , ((I'm not going any! here((until I've made it. If I don't do that, if I don't try, then the ! hole thing ! ill be for nothing. 4auri1io ... and everything else that's ha##ened ! ill be for nothing. If I leave here, I ! ant to do it ! ith my head on straight, and a #o , et full of money that I earned myself.5

I loo, ed into the ! ind, feeling the day alternately ! arm and ool and ! arm again on my fa e and arms as the bree1e turned and returned a ross the bay.) small fleet of fishing anoes drifted #ast us on their ! ay ba , to the fishermen's sandy refuge near the slum. I suddenly CG9 remembered the day in the rain, sailing in a anoe a ross the

flooded fore court of the 2a+ 4ahal *otel and beneath the booming, resonant dome of the Gate! ay 4onument. I remembered &inod"s love song, and the rain that night as <arla came into my arms.

)nd staring, then, at the ceaseless, eternal ! aves, I remembered all that had been lost since that storming night: #rison, torture, <arla gone, Alla gone, <haderbhai and hisoun il gone,)nand gone, 4auri1io dead, 4odena #robably dead, Rasheed dead,)bdullah dead, and >raba, er((it ! as im#ossible((>raba, er, also dead.)nd I ! as one of them: ! al, ing and tal, ing and staring at

the ! ilding ! aves, but as dead in my heart as all the rest.

5)nd ! hat about youE5 she as, ed. I ould feel her eyes on me, and I ould hear the emotions in her voice: sym#athy, tenderness, maybe even love. 5If I stay((and I"m definitely going to stay((! hat are you going to doE5

I loo, ed at her for a ! hile, reading the runes in her s, y(blue eyes. 2hen I stood from the ! all, held her in my arms, and , issed her. It ! as a long , iss. 7e lived out a life together in that , iss: ! e lived and loved and gre! old together, and ! e died. 2hen our li#s #arted, and that life ! e might"ve had retreated, shrin, ing to a s#ar, of light ! e ! ould al! ays re ognise in one another"s eyes.

I ould"ve loved her. 4aybe I already did love her a little. Out sometimes the ! orst thing you an do to a ! oman is to love her.)nd I still loved <arla. I loved <arla.

57hat am _I going to doE5 I said, re#eating her =uestion. I held her shoulders in my hands, , ee#ing her at the distance of my arms. I smiled. 5I am going to get stoned.5

I rode a! ay, and never loo, ed ba , . I #aid three months" rent on my a#artment, and #aid substantial ba, sheesh to the ! at hman in the ar #ar, and the ! at hman in the building. I , e#t one good,

forged #ass#ort in my #o , et, #ut all my s#are #ass#orts and a bundle of ash into a sack, and left it ! ith my /nfield Outlet bin, e in Didier's care. 2hen I too, a ab to Gu#ta(+i's o#ium den near the Street of 2en 2housand 7hrees, Sho, la+i Street. I

limbed the ! orn ! ooden ste#s to the third floor and ! al, ed into the cage that +un, ies build for themselves, one shiny, shar#, steel bar at a time.

Gu#ta(+i #rovided a large room ! ith t! enty slee#ing mats and ! ooden #illo! s for his o#ium smokers. 9or those ! ith s#e ial needs he reserved CH%

other rooms behind that o#en den. 2hrough a very small door! ay, I entered the dis reet orridor that led to those ba , rooms. It ! as so lo! that I had to stoo#, almost to ra! ling. 2he room I chose had a ot ! ith a , a#o, mattress, a ! eathered ar#et, a small abinet ! ith ! i , er! or, doors, a lam# ! ith a sil, lam#shade, and a large lay mat, a filled ! ith ! ater. 2he ! alls on three sides ! ere made from reed matting stret hed u#on ! ooden frames. 2he last ! all, at the head of the bed, loo, ed out over a busy street of)rab and lo al 4uslim traders, but its ! indo! s ! ere shuttered so that only a fe! bright stars of sunlight gleamed in the hin, s and ga#s. 2here ! as no eiling. Instead, the vie! overhead ! as of heavy rafters rossing and +oining one another in su##ort of the lay tile roof. I got to , no! that vie! very ! ell.

Gu#ta(+i too, money and instru tions, and left me alone. 2he room, so lose to the roof, ! as very hot. I too, my shirt off,

and s! it hed off the lam#. 2he dar, little room ! as li, e a ell6 a #rison ell at night. I sat on the bed and, almost at on e, the tears ame. I'd ried before, in Oombay. I'd shed tears after I met Ran+i's le#ers, and ! hen the stranger had ! ashed my tortured body in)rthur Road >rison, and ! ith >raba, er's father at the hos#ital. Out that sorro! and suffering had all! ays been stifled: someho! , I'd managed to ho, e ba , the ! orst of it, the flood of it. 2hen, alone in that little o#ium ell ! ith my ruined love for

those dead friends,)bdullah and >raba, er, I let it go.

The tears, ! hen they come to some men, are ! orse than beatings. They're ! ounded ! orse by sobbing, men li, e that, than they are by boots and batons. Tears begin in the heart, but some of us deny the heart so often, and for so long, that ! hen it s#ea, s ! e hear not one but a hundred sorro! s in the heartbrea, . 7e , no! that rying is a good and natural thing. 7e , no! that rying isn't a ! ea, ness, but a , ind of strength. Still, the ! ee#ing ri#s us root by tangled root from the earth, and ! e rash li, e fallen trees ! hen ! e ry.

Gu#ta(+i gave me time. 7hen at last I heard the sliding, s uffing sound of his ha##als as he a##roa hed the door I smeared the sorro! from my fa e, and s! it hed on the lam#. *e"d brought ! hat I'd as, ed for((a steel s#oon, distilled ! ater, dis#osable syringes, heroin, and a arton of igarettes((and he set the items out on the little dresser. 2here ! as a girl ! ith him. *e told me that her name ! as Shil#a, and that he"d assigned her to me as a servant. She ! as young, years less than t! enty, but already CH1 s arred ! ith the glum e' #ression of the ! or, ing #rofessional. *o#e, ready to snarl or grovel li, e a beaten ur, o! ered in her eyes. I sent her and Gu#ta(+i a! ay, and oo, ed u# a taste of heroin.

The dose sat in the syringe for almost an hour. I #i , ed it u# and #ut the needle against a fat, strong, healthy vein in my arm five times, only to #ut it do! n again unused.)nd for the ! hole of that s! eating hour I stared at the li=uid in the syringe. 2hat ! as it. 2he damnation drug. 2hat ! as the big one, the drug that had driven me to ommit stu#id, violent rimes6 that had #ut me in #rison6 that had ost me my family, and lost my loved ones. 2he everything(and(nothing drug: it ta, es everything, and gives you nothing in return. Out the nothing that it gives you, the unfeeling em#tiness it gives you, is sometimes all and everything you ! ant.

I pushed the needle into the vein, pulled back, the rose of blood that confirmed the lean texture of the vein, and pressed the plunger all the way to the stop. Before I could pull the needle from my arm, the drug made my mind Sahara. Warm, dry, shining, and featureless, the dunes of the drug smothered all thought, and buried the forgotten civilisation of my mind. The warmth filled my body as well, killing off the thousand little anxieties, and discomforts that I endure and ignore in every sober day.

There was no pain. There was nothing.

And then, with the desert still in my mind, I felt my body drooping, and I broke the surface of a suffocating lake. As it awoke, after that first taste, as it awoke a month later I crawled onto the raft and floated there on the lethal lake in the sun, carrying the Sahara in my blood. And those rafters overhead: there was a kind of message in them, a message about how and why we all intersected, under and around Abdullah and I. Our lives, all of us, in the line to Abdullah's death, intersected in some uniquely profound way. It was there, in the rafters, a key to the code.

Out I closed my eyes. I remembered Sabar, her. I remembered that he was struggling so hard and so late on the night he died because he needed the taxi, and was struggling for himself. I'd bought the taxi for him. He'd be alive if I hadn't bought that taxi for him. He was the little mouse that I'd trained and fed with crumbs in my prison cell, the mouse that was ruined. And sometimes the breeze of a clear, unstoned hour gave me an image of Abdullah in the minute before he died, alone in the killing circle. Alone. I should've been there. I was with him every day. I should've been with him then. Friends don't let friends die like that (alone with CHF death and fate. And there was his body. And what if he was Saad? Should my friend, my friend I loved, really have been that ruthless, insane mutilator? What did Ghani say? Pieces of Adid's slaughtered body were found all over his house ... Should

I have loved the man ! ho did thatE 7hat did it mean, that some small, insistent #art of me feared that he ! as Sa#na, and loved him any! ayE

)nd I fired the silver bullet into my arm again, and fell ba , on the floating raft.)nd I sa! the ans! er in the rafters overhead.)nd I ! as sure I ! ould understand it ! ith a little more do#e, and a little more, and a little more.

I ! o, e to see a fa e glaring at me and s#ea, ing fier ely in a language I ouldn't understand. It ! as an ugly fa e, a s o! ling fa e, defined by dee# lines that des ended in urved hines from his eyes and nose and mouth. 2hen the fa e had hands, strong hands, and I found myself lifted from the raft of my bed and #ro##ed unsteadily on my feet.

5Dou omeB5 -a1eer gro! led in /nglish. 5Dou ome, no! B5

59u , ...5 I said slo! ly, #ausing for ma' imum effe t, 5... off.5

5Dou omeB5 he re#eated. 2he anger in him ! as so lose to the surfa e that he trembled ! ith it, and o#ened his mouth un on s iously to bare his teeth in an underbite.

5- o,5 I said, turning to the bed on e more. 5Dou ... goB5

*e #ulled me around to fa e him again. 2here ! as enormous #o! er in his arms. *e lam#ed the metal gra##les of his hands on my arms.

5- o! B Dou omeB5

I'd been three months in the room at Gu#ta(+i"s. 2hey ! ere three months of heroin every day, and food every other day, and the only e' er ise a short ! al, to the toilet and ba , . I didn't , no! it then, but I'd lost t! elve , ilos((the best thirty #ounds of

muscle on my body. I was as thin and pale, and still stupid on drugs.

“Okay,” I said, feigning a smile. “Okay, let me go, please. I have to get my stuff.”

“He relaxed his grip as I nodded toward the little table where my wallet, hat, and passport rested. Gupta and Shilpa waited in the corridor beyond. I gathered up the possessions and put them into my pockets, pretending to cooperate with a peer. When I judged the moment to be right, I swung round at him with an overhand right. It should've hit him. It would've hit him when I was healthy and sober. I missed him.

Completely, and threw myself off balance. A peer drove a fist into my solar plexus, just under the heart. I doubled over, blinded and helpless, but my knees locked stiffly and my legs wouldn't fold. “He raised my head, with his left hand locked into a grip of my hair, pulled his right fist back at shoulder height, hesitated in the precision of his aim, and then rammed his fist into my chest. The full force of his neck, shoulders, and back were in the blow. I saw Gupta's lips curl and his eyes squint in a grin, and then his face exploded in a shower of sparks that left the world darker than a cave full of sleeping bats.

It was the only time in my life I was ever, no, ended out cold. It seemed that I was falling forever, and the ground was impossibly far away. After a time I was dimly aware of movement, floating through space, and I thought, It's okay, this is all a dream, a drug dream, and I'm going to wake up any minute now, and take more drugs.

When I came down with a rumpled rash on the raft once more. Out the raft (bed that I'd floated on for three long months had changed. It was different, somehow ((soft and smooth.) and there was a new and wonderful smell, a gorgeous perfume. It was good. I knew it well. It was clear. It was the perfume on Carla's skin. A peer had carried me over his shoulder all the way down the flights of stairs and out into the street, where he'd dumped me

into the bar, seat of a taxi. Carla was there. My head rested in her lap. I opened my eyes to look into her lovely face. I saw her green eyes looking at me with compassion and concern and something else. I closed my eyes, and in the moving darkness I felt that it was, that something else in her eyes. It was disgust. She was disgusted by my weakness, my heroin habit, my

stupidity, of neglect and self-indulgence. When I felt her hands on my face, and it was like crying, and her fingers moving the dress across my cheek, were the tears.

When the taxi finally stopped, a porter carried me up to the flights of stairs as easily as he might've lugged a sack of flour. I came to consciousness again draped over his shoulder, looking down at Carla as she limped the stairs behind us. I tried to smile at her. We entered a big house through a bar door that led to a kitchen. Beyond the large, modern kitchen, we came into an enormous, open-plan living room, with one wall all of glass that looked out upon a golden beach and the dark, shimmering sea. Gripping me over his shoulder, a porter looked at me with more gentleness than I'd expected to a pile of cushions near the glass

feature wall. The last hit I'd injected, just before he'd injected me from Gupta's, was a big dose. Too big. I was groggy and laughing. The urge to close my eyes and surrender to the stone slipped over me in almost irresistible, irresistible waves.

"Don't try to get up," Carla said, kneeling beside me and kissing my face with a wet touch.

I laughed, because standing was the last thing on my mind. In the laugh I felt the soreness, dimly, through the stone, on the point of my chin and the hinge of my jaw.

"What's going on," Carla said, hearing my voice raise, and I was as I should be. Three months of utter silence and soul-fog had distorted my speech with dysphasia, lapses and recurring fumbles.

What are you doing here? What am I doing here?

Did you think, I could leave you there?

Wow! did you, no! Wow! did you find me?

Our friend Chaderbhai found you. He asked me to bring you here.

He asked you?

Des, she said, staring into my eyes with such intensity that it cut through the stone like sunrise filtering the morning's hazy mist.

Where is he?

She smiled, and the smile was sad because it was the wrong question. I, no, that no. I'm not stoned no. What was my chance to, no, the whole of the truth, or as much of the truth as she, no. If I'd asked her the right question, she would've told me the truth. What was the shadow behind her intense stare. She was ready to tell me everything. She might've even loved me, or begun to love me. But I hadn't asked the right question. I hadn't asked

about her. I'd asked about him.

I don't, no, she answered, raising herself with her hands to stand beside me. He's supposed to be here. I think, he'll be here soon. I can't wait, though. I have to go.

What? I sat up, and tried to push the stone curtains aside in order to see her, to see her, to see her with me.

I have to go, she repeated, walking briskly to the door. - a leer waited for her there, his thin arms protruding from the swollen trunk of his body. I can't help it. I've got a lot of things to

do before I leave.5

5; eaveE 7hat do you mean, leaveE5

5I'm leaving Bombay again. I've got some ! or, . It's im#ortant, and I ... CH?

! ell, I have to do it. I'll be ba , in about si' or eight ! ee, s. I'll see you then, maybe.5

5Out this is ra1y. I don't get it. Dou should've left me there, if you're only going to leave me no! .5

5; oo, ,5 she said, smiling #atiently, 5I +ust got ba , yesterday, and I'm trying not to stay. I'm not even going ba , to ; eo#old"s. I sa! Didier this morning((he says hello, by the ! ay((but that's it. I'm not sti , ing around. I agreed to hel# get you out of that little sui ide #a t you had going ! ith yourself at Gu#ta(i"s. -o! you're here, you're safe, and I have to go.5

She turned and s#o, e to -a1eer. 2hey ! ere s#ea, ing Ardu, and I understood only every third or fourth ! ord of their onversation. *e laughed, listening to her, and turned to loo, at me ! ith his ustomary ontem#t.

57hat did he sayE5 I as, ed her ! hen they fell silent.

5Dou don't ! ant to , no! .5

5Des I do.5

5*e doesn't thin, you'll ma, e it,5 she re#lied. 5I told him that you'll do old tur, ey here, and be ! aiting for me ! hen I ome ba , in a ou#le of months. *e doesn't thin, so. *e says you'll run out of here to get a fi' the first minute the tur, ey begins. I made a bet ! ith him that you'd ma, e it.5

5*o! mu h did you betE5

5) thousand bu , s.5

5) thousand bu , s,5 I mused. It ! as an im#ressive sta, e, against the odds.

5Des. It's all the ash he has((a , ind of nest egg. *e"s betting it all that you"ll brea, do! n. *e says you're a ! ea, man. 2hat"s ! hy you ta, e drugs.5

57hat do you sayE5

She laughed, and it ! as so rare to see and hear her laugh that I too, those bright, round syllables of ha##iness into me li, e food, li, e drin, , li, e the drug. Des#ite the stone and the si , ness, I , ne! ! ith #erfe t understanding that the greatest treasure and #leasure I ! ould ever , no! ! as in that laugh6 to ma, e that ! oman laugh, and feel the laughter bubbling from her li#s against my fa e, my s, in.

5I told him,5 she said, 5that a good man is as strong as the right ! oman needs him to be.5 CHC

2hen she ! as gone, and I losed my eyes, and an hour or a day later I o#ened them to find <haderbhai sitting beside me.

5Atna hain,5 I heard - a1eer"s voi e say. *e"s a! a, e.

I ! o, e un! ell. I ! o, e alert and old and needing heroin. 4y mouth ! as filthy and my body a hed every! here at on e.

5*mmm,5 <hader murmured. 5Dou have the #ain already.5

I #ulled myself u# on the #illo! s and loo, ed around the room. It ! as the beginning of evening, and night"s long shado! ! as ree#ing a ross the sandy bea h beyond the ! indo! . - a1eer sat on a #ie e of ar#et near the entran e to the , it hen. <hader ! as dressed in the loose #antaloons, shirt, and tuni (vest of the

>athans. 2he lothes ! ere green, the favourite colour of the
>ro#het. *e loo, ed older, someho! , after +ust those fe! months.
*e also loo, ed fitter, and more alm and determined than I"d ever
seen him.

5Do you need foodE5 he as, ed ! hen I stared at him ! ithout
s#ea, ing. 5Do you ! ant to ta, e your bathE 2here is everything
here. Dou an bath as often as you li, e. Dou an eat food((there
is #lenty. Dou an #ut on ne! lothes. I have them for you.5

57hat ha##ened to)bdullahE5 I demanded.

5Dou must get ! ell.5

57hat the fu , ha##ened to)bdullahE5 I shouted, my voi e
brea, ing.

-a1eer ! at hed me. *e ! as out! ardy alm, but I , ne! that he ! as
ready to s#ring.

57hat do you ! ant to , no! E5 <hader as, ed gently, avoiding my
eyes, and nodding his head slo! ly as he stared at the ar#et

bet! een his rossed , nees.

57as he Sa#naE5

5-o,5 he re#lied, turning to meet my hard stare. 5I , no! the
#eo#le say this, but I give you my ! ord that he ! as not Sa#na.5

I e' haled a full breath in an e' hausted sigh of relief. I felt
tears stinging my eyes, and I bit the inside of my hee, to , ill
them.

57hy did they say he ! as Sa#naE5

5)bdullah"s enemies made the #oli e believe that he ! as.5

57hat enemiesE 7ho are theyE5

54en from Iran. /nemies from his ountry.5

I remembered the fight6 the mysterious fight.)bdullah and I((
! e"d fought ! ith a grou# of Iranian men on the street. I tried to
remember CH7

other details from that day, but I ouldn't thin, #ast the shar#,
guilty t! ist of regret that I"d never as, ed)bdullah ! ho the men
! ere or ! hy ! e"d fought them.

57here"s the real Sa#naE5

5*e is dead. I found the man((the real Sa#na. -o! he is dead.
2hat mu h is done, for)bdullah.5

I rela' ed against the ushions, and losed my eyes for a moment.
4y nose ! as beginning to run, and my throat ! as logged and sore.
I'd built u# a big habit in those three months((three grams of
#ure 2hai(! hite heroin every day. 2he tur, ey ! as oming on fast,
and I , ne! that it ! ould be t! o ! ee, s in *ell"s #unishment unit.

57hyE5 I as, ed him, after a time.

57hat do you meanE5

57hy did you find meE 7hy did you have him((- a1eer((bring me
hereE5

5Dou ! or, for me,5 he ans! ered, smiling. 5)nd no! , I have a +ob
of ! or, for you to do.5

57ell, I'm afraid I'm not u# to it, +ust at the minute.5

2he ram#s ! ere ree#ing into my stoma h. I groaned, and loo, ed
a! ay.

"Oh, yes," he agreed. "You must be here first. Out then, in three or four months, you will be the right man to do this job for me."

"What ... what kind of a job?"

"It is a mission. A kind of holy mission, you might call it. Do you, no? No? To ride a horse?"

"I don't know anything about horses. If I can do the job on a motorcycle (when I get it, if I get it) (I'm your man."

"I'll teach you to ride. He is, or he was, the best horseman in a village of men. He and the best horsemen in Angarhar Province. There are horses stabled near here, and you can learn to ride on the beach."

"I'll learn to ride ...," I muttered, wondering how I was going to survive the next hour, and the hour after that, and the horse that would come.

"Oh, yes," Inaba said, reaching out with the smile and touching my shoulder with his palm. I flinched at the touch, and shivered, but the warmth of his hand seemed to enter me, and I was still. "You cannot reach Kandahar in any other way but by horse, at this time, because the roads are all mined and bombed. So you see, when you go with my men to the war in Afghanistan, you must, no? No? To ride a horse."

"Afghanistan?"

"Des."

"What ... what the hell makes you think I'm going to Afghanistan?"

"I don't know if you will do it or not," he replied with what seemed to be genuine sadness. "I am going on this mission myself."

to Afghanistan (my home, that I have not seen for more than fifty years.) and I am inviting you (I am asking you) to go with me. The choice, of course, is yours to make. It is a dangerous job. That much is certain. I will not think less about you, if you decide not to go with me.

Why me?

I need a goon, a foreigner, who is not afraid to break a large number of international laws, and who can #ass for an Afghani. Where else will go there are many rival clans, and they have fought with one another for hundreds of years. They have long traditions of raiding one another and taking whatever they can as #loot on their raids. Only two things unite them, just at this time (love for Allah, and hatred for the Russian invaders.) At the moment, their chief allies against the Russians are the Afghans. They are fighting with Afghani money and Afghani #loot. If I have an Afghani with me, they will leave us alone, and let us #ass, without molesting us or stealing more than a reasonable amount from us.

Why don't you get an Afghani (a real one, I mean)?

I tried. I could not find one really enough to take the risk. That is why I need you.

What are you smuggling on this mission to Afghanistan?

The usual things that one smuggles into a war (guns, explosives, #ass#orts, money, gold, machine #arts, and medicines. It will be an interesting journey. If you #ass through the heavily armed clans who would like to take what you have, you will deliver our goods to a unit of mujahedin fighters who are #utting siege to Kandahar city. They have been fighting the Russians in the same place for two years, and they need the supplies.

Questions thrived in my shivering mind, hundreds of them, but the

old tur, ey ! as ri##ling me. 8old, greasy s! eat from the struggle smothered my s, in. 2he ! ords, ! hen they ame at last, ! ere rushed and faltering. CH9

57hy are you doing thisE 7hy <andaharE 7hy thereE5

52he mu+aheddin((the men at the siege of <andahar((they are my #eo#le, from my village. 2hey are from -a1eer"s village also. 2hey are fighting a +ihad, a holy ! ar, to drive the Russian invaders out of the homeland. 7e have hel#ed them in many ! ays, u# to this time. -o! it is time to hel# them ! ith guns, and ! ith my blood, if it is ne essary.5

*e loo, ed at the si , ness trembling a ross my fa e, and utting fa ets from my eyes. *e smiled again, #ressing his fingers into my shoulder until that #ain, that tou h, his tou h, !as all I felt for a moment.

59irst you must be ! ell,5 he said, releasing the #ressure of his fingers and tou hing his #alm to my fa e. 5)llah be ! ith you, my son.)llah ya fa1a, B5

7hen he left me, I ! ent to the bathroom. Stoma h ram# stabbed me ! ith eagle"s la! s, and then t! isted my insides ! ith talons of agony. Diarrhoea shoo, me ! ith onvulsive s#asms. I ! ashed myself, shivering so violently that my teeth lattered together. I loo, ed in the mirror and sa! my eyes, the #u#ils so large that the ! hole iris ! as bla , . 7hen the light ome ba , , ! hen the heroin sto#s and the tur, ey starts and the light returns, it rushes in through the bla , funnels of the eyes.

7earing a to! el around my ! aist, I ! al, ed ba , to the big main room. I loo, ed thin. I ! as stoo#ed, and shivering, and moaning involuntarily. -a1eer loo, ed me u# and do! n, ! ith a sneer urling his thi , u##er li#. *e handed me a #ile of lean lothes. 2hey ! ere e' a t o#ies of <hader"s green)fghan ostume. I dressed, sha, ing and trembling and losing my balan e a fe! times. -a1eer ! at hed me, his , notty fists balled at his hi#s. 2he sneer

ri##led his li# li, e the o#ening ridges of a lamshell. *is every gesture ! as so loud and broad that it had the e' aggeration of #antomime, but his dar, eyes ! ere fier e ! ith mena e. I suddenly realised that he reminded me of the \$a#anese a tor 2oshiro 4ifune. *e ! as an ugly, troll(li, e ari ature of 4ifune.

5Do you , no! 2oshiro 4ifuneE5 I as, ed him through a des#erate, #ain(smeared laugh. 5Dou , no! 4ifuneE *uhE5

*is ans! er ! as to ! al, to the front door of the house and thro! it o#en. *e #ulled some fifty(ru#ee notes from his #o , et, and hurled them onto the floor.

5\$aa, bahin hudhB5 he snarled, #ointing out the o#en door. Go, sister(fu , erB C?%

I staggered to the #ile of ushions hea#ed against the great ! indo! and olla#sed there. I #ulled a blan, et over myself, ringing in the flaying ! ren h and ram# of the raving. -a1eer losed the door of the house and too, u# his #osition on the #at h of ar#et, sitting ross(legged and straight(ba , ed as he ! at hed me.

7e all o#e ! ith an' iety and stress, to one degree or another, ! ith the hel# of a o , tail of hemi als #rodu ed in the body and released in the brain. 8hief among them is the endor#hin grou#. 2he endor#hins are #e#tide neurotransmitters that have #ain(relieving #ro#erties.)n' iety and stress and #ain bring on the endor#hin res#onse as a natural o#ing me hanism. 7hen ! e ta, e any of the o#iates((mor#hine or o#ium or heroin, in #arti ular((the body sto#s #rodu ing endor#hins. 7hen ! e sto# ta, ing o#iates, there"s a lag of bet! een five and fourteen days before the body begins a ne! endor#hin #rodu tion y le. In the mean! hile, in that bla , , tortured ra! ls#a e of one to t! o ! ee, s ! ithout heroin and ! ithout endor#hins, ! e learn ! hat an' iety and stress and #ain really are.

That's it like, *Carla* as, ed me on e, old tur, ey off heroinE I tried to e' #lain it. 2hin, about every time in your life that you've ever been afraid, really afraid. Someone snea, s u# behind you ! hen you thin, you're alone, and shouts to frighten you. 2he gang of thugs loses in around you. Dou fall from a great height in a dream, or you stand on the very edge of a stee# cliff. Someone holds you under ! ater and you feel the breath gone, and you s ramble, fight, and la! your ! ay to the surfa e. Dou lose ontrol of the ar and see the ! all rushing into your soundless shout. 2hen add them all u#, all those hest(tightening terrors, and feel them all at on e, all at the same time, hour after hour, and day after day.)nd thin, of every #ain you've ever , no! n((the burn ! ith hot oil, the shar# sliver of glass, the bro, en bone, the gravel rash ! hen you fell on the rough road in ! inter, the heada he and the eara he and the tootha he. 2hen add them all u#, all those groin(s=uee1ing, stoma h(tensing shriie, s of #ain, and feel them all at on e, hour after hour, and day after day. 2hen

thin, of every anguish you've ever , no! n. Remember the death of a loved one. Remember a lover's re+e tion. Re all your feelings of failure and shame and uns#ea, ably bitter remorse.)nd add them all u#, all the heart(stabbing griefs and miseries, and feel them all at on e, hour after hour, and day after day. 2hat's old tur, ey. 8old tur, ey off heroin is life ! ith the s, in torn a! ay. C?1

2he assault of an' iety on the un#rote ted mind, the brain ! ithout natural endor#hins, ma, es men and ! omen mad. /very +un, ie going through tur, ey is mad. 2he madness is so fier e and ruel that some die of it.)nd in the tem#orary insanity of that s, inned, e' ru iated ! orld, ! e ommit rimes.)nd if ! e survive, years later, and be ome ! ell, our healthy re olle tion of those rimes leaves us ! ret hed, be! ilderred, and as self(disgusted as men and ! omen ! ho betray their omrades and ountry under torture.

2! o full days and nights into the torment, I , ne! I ! asn't going

to make it. Most of the vomiting and the diarrhoea had passed, but the pain and anxieties were worse, much worse, every minute. Beneath the screaming in my blood there was a calm, insistent voice: Don't stop this ... you don't stop this ... you don't stop this ... take the money ... get a fix ... you don't stop this pain ...

- a leech's bamboo and coconut (fibre) mat as in the far corner of the room. I lurched to stand it, I sat huddled closely by the burly Afghan, who was still sitting on his mat near the door. Trembling and moaning with pain, I dragged the mat closer to the great window that looked out on the sea. I took up a cotton sheet and began to tear at it with my teeth. It gave way in a few places, and I ripped it along the length, tearing off strips of cloth. Granting in my movements and close to him, I hurled the strips, embroidered quilts onto the rope bed for a mattress, and lay down on it. Using the strips, I tied my ankles to the bed. With a third strip, I secured my left wrist. Then I lay down, and turned my head to look at a leech. I held out the remaining strip, and asked him with my eyes to bind my arm to the bed. It was the first time that we'd ever met one another's eyes in an equally honest stare.

He rose from his square of carpet and walked toward me, holding the stare. He took the strip of cloth from my hand and bound my right wrist to the frame of the bed. A shout of triumph, a gasp of fear escaped from my open mouth, and another. I bit down on my tongue, biting through the flesh at the sides until blood ran past my lips. A leech nodded slowly. He tore another strip from the sheet and thrust it into a corrugated tube. Sliding it between my teeth, he tied the gag behind my head. And I bit down on the devil's tail. And I screamed. And I turned my head to see my own reflection tied to the night in the window. And for a while I was a demented, aching and aching and screaming with my eyes. C?F

2! o days and nights I ! as tied to the bed. - a1eer nursed me ! ith tenderness and onstan y. *e ! as al! ays there. /very time I o#ened my eyes, I felt his rough hand on my bro! , ! i#ing the s! eat and the tears into my hair. /very time the lightning stri, e of ram# t! isted a leg or arm or my stoma h, he ! as there, massaging ! armth into the , not of #ain. /very time I ! him#ered or s reamed into the gag, he held my eyes ! ith his, ! illing me to endure and su eed. *e removed the gag ! hen I ho, ed on a tri , le of vomit or my blo , ed nose let no air #ass, but he ! as a strong man and he , ne! that I didn't ! ant my s reams to be heard. 7hen I nodded my head, he re#la ed the gag and tied it fast.

)nd then, ! hen I , ne! that I ! as either strong enough to stay or too ! ea, to leave, I nodded to - a1eer, blin, ing my eyes, and he removed the gag for the last time. @ne by one he untied the bonds at my ! rists and an, les. *e brought me a broth made from hi , en and barley and tomatoes, uns#i ed, e' e#t for salt. It ! as the ri hest and most deli ious thing I ever tasted in my life. *e fed it to me, s#oon by s#oon.)fter an hour, ! hen I finished the little bo! l, he smiled at me for the first time, and that smile ! as li, e sunlight on sea ro , s after summer rain.

8old tur, ey goes on for about t! o ! ee, s, but the first five days are the ! orst. If you an get through the first five days, if you an ra! l and drag yourself into that si' th morning ! ithout drugs, you , no! you're lean, and you , no! you'll ma, e it. /very hour, for the ne' t eight to ten days, you feel a little better and a little stronger. 2he ram#s fade, the nausea #asses, the fever and hills subside.)fter a ! hile, the ! orst of it is sim#ly that you an't slee#. Dou lie on the bed at night, t! isting and ! rithing in dis omfort, and slee# never omes. In those last days and very long nights of the tur, ey, I be ame a Standing Oaba: I never sat or lay do! n, all day and all night, until e' haustion olla#sed my legs at last and I san, into slee#.

)nd it #asses, the tur, ey #asses, and you emerge from the obra bite of heroin addi tion li, e any survivor from any disaster: da1ed, ! ounded forever, and glad to be alive.

-a1eer too, my first sar asti +o, es, t! elve days after the
tur, ey began, as the ue for my training to ommen e. 9rom the
si' th day I'd been ! al, ing ! ith him as light e' er ise, and for
the fresh air. 2he first of those ! al, s had been slo! and
halting, and I'd returned to the house after fifteen minutes. 0y
the t! elfth day I ! as ! al, ing the length of the C?G
bea h ! ith him, ho#ing to tire myself so mu h that I ould slee#.
9inally, he too, me to the stable ! here <hader"s horses ! ere
, e#t. 2he stable ! as a onverted boathouse, one street a! ay from
the bea h. 2he horses ! ere trained for beginning riders, and
arried tourists u# and do! n the bea h in the high season. 2he
! hite gelding and grey mare ! ere large, do ile animals. 7e too,
them from <hader"s stable(master and led them do! n to the flat,
hard(#a , ed sand of the bea h.

2here"s no animal in the ! orld ! ith a dee#er sense of #arody than
a horse.) at an ma, e you loo, lumsy, and a dog an ma, e you
loo, stu#id, but only a horse an ma, e you loo, both at the same
time.) nd then, ! ith nothing more than the fli , of a tail or a
usual stom# on your foot, it lets you , no! that it did it on
#ur#ose. Some #eo#le , no! from the first onta t ! ith the animal
that they"ll ride ! ell, and bond ! ith the beast. I"m not one of
those #eo#le.) friend of mine has a strange, antimagneti effe t
on ma hines: ! at hes sto# on her ! rist, radio re eivers ra , le,
and #hoto o#y ma hines glit h ! henever she"s near. 4y
relationshi# ! ith horses is something li, e that.

2he thi , set) fghan u##ed his hands to boost me onto the
gelding"s ba , , nodding his head for me to limb u#, and ! in, ing
en ouragingly. I #ut my foot into his hands and s#rang u# onto
the ! hite horse, but in the instant that I sat on its ba , the
#reviously mee , , ! ell(trained reature hurled me off ! ith a
#rodigious, ar hing , i , . I soared over -a1eer"s shoulder and
landed ! ith a thum# on the sand. 2he gelding gallo#ed a! ay do! n
the bea h ! ithout me. -a1eer stared after it, ga#e(mouthed. 2he

animal ! as only almed and returned to my #resen e ! hen he fet hed a blinding bag, and #la ed it over its head.

2hat ! as the beginning of -a1eer"s slo! , relu tant a e#tan e of the fa t that I ! ould never be anything other than the ! orst horseman he , ne! . 2he disa##ointment should"ve #lunged me dee#er into the ! ell of his ontem#t, but in fa t it #rovo, ed an o##osite rea tion. In the ! ee, s that follo! ed he be ame soli itous and even tender(hearted to! ard me. 9or -a1eer, that stumbling ine#titude ! ith horses ! as a terrible affli tion, as #itiabile in a man as a #ainfully debilitating illness.)nd even at my best, ! hen I managed to remain on the horse for minutes at a time, and ! or, the beast in a ir le by fla##ing my legs at its sides and yan, ing ! ith both hands at the bridle, my gra elessness moved him lose to tears.

-evertheless, I #ersevered ! ith the lessons, and I e' er ised every day. I C?H

! or, ed my ! ay u# to t! enty sets of thirty #ush(u#s, ! ith a minute rest bet! een ea h set. I follo! ed the #ush(u#s every day ! ith five hundred sit(u#s, a five(, ilometre run, and a forty(minute s! im in the sea.)fter almost three months of the routine, I ! as fit and strong.

-a1eer ! anted me to gain some e' #erien e at riding over rough terrain, so I arranged ! ith 8handra 4ehta for us to visit the riding range at the 9ilm 8ity movie studio ran h. 4any of the feature films had horse(and(rider se=uen es. 2he teams of horses ! ere ared for by s=uads of men ! ho lived on the vast tra ts of hilly land, and ! ere on all for stunt and a tion s enes. 2he animals ! ere su#erbly ! ell trained but, barely t! o minutes after -a1eer and I had mounted the bro! n mares assigned to us, my horse thre! me into a sta , of lay #ots. -a1eer too, u# the reins of my horse and sat in his saddle, sha, ing his head #ityingly.

5*ey, great stunt, jaarB5 one of the stunt men alled out. 2here ! ere five of them riding ! ith us, and they all laughed. 2! o men

um#ed do! n to hel# me u#.

2! o falls later, as I limbed ! earily into the saddle, I heard a familiar voi e. I loo, ed around to see a grou# of riders.) t their head ! as a o! boy loo, ing li, e /miliano . a#ata, ! ith a bla , hat hanging on his ba , from a leather thong.

5l fu , in" , ne! it ! as youB5 &i, ram shouted. *e dre! his horse u# lose to mine and shoo, my hand ! armly. *is om#anions +oined -a1eer and our stunt riders, and they trotted a! ay, leaving us alone.

57hat are you doing hereE5

5l o! n the fu , in" #la e, manB5 *e s#read his arms ! ide. 57ell, not e' a tly. ;ettie bought a share, as a #artner, ! ith ;isa.5

54y ; isaE5

*e raised one eyebrow! =ui11i ally.

5Dour ; isaE5

5Dou , no! ! hat I mean.5

5Sure,5 he said, grinning ! idely. 5*er and ;ettie, you , no! , they're running that asting agen y together((the one you guys started u#.) nd they're doin" all right, man. 2hey"re good together. I de ided to get in on it as ! ell. Dour friend, 8handra 4ehta, told me there ! as a share going in the stunt stable. *ey, it's a natural for me, ! ouldn't you sayE5

5@h, no doubt about that, &i, ram.5

5So, I #ut some damn money in it, and no! I ome out here every C??

! ee, . I'm an e' tra in a fu , in" movie tomorro! B 8ome and ! at h me get shot, brotherB5

5It's a tempting offer, I said, laughing with him. 5Out I'm leaving town for a while tomorrow.5

5You're leaving for how long?5

5I don't know, maybe a month, maybe longer.5

5When you'll be back,5

5Sure. I'll show you a video of the stunt. 7When I get back, you'll get stoned, and that's how you get killed in slow motion.5

5*ah Dou got a deal? Some on? Let's ride together, man?5

5-oh, no?5 I shouted. 5I'll never get this horse to ride with you, & I, Ram. I'm the worst rider you ever saw. I've already fallen off this one three times. If I can get it to gallop in a straight line I'll be happy.5

5Some on, brother? In? I tell you that, I'll lend you my hat. It never fails, man. It's a lucky hat. You're having trouble because you got no hat.5

5I ... I don't think the hat's gonna work over it, man.5

5It's a funny magic hat, man, I'm telling you?5

5You haven't seen me ride.5

5)and you haven't worn the hat. 2he hat can fix anything. >plus, you're a gora. -oh often due to your whiteness, yaar, but these are Indian horses, man. 2hey just need to get a little Indian style from you, that's all. Dou see, in? I'll show you, and dance a little, then you'll see.5

5I don't think so.5

5Sure, man. 8ome on, get do! n and dan e ! ith me.5

57hatE5

58ome on and dan e ! ith me.5

5I'm not dan ing for the horses, &i, ram,5 I de lared, ! ith as mu h dignity and sin erity as I ould #a , into the bi1arre string of ! ords.

5Sure you ! illB Dou get do! n ! ith me no! , and dan e a little Indian magi . 2he horses have to _see that ool, Indian motherfu , er you got inside your tight, ! hite e' terior, man. I s! ear, the horses ! ill love you, and you'll ride li, e 8lint fu , in" /ast! oodB5

5I don't ! ant to ride li, e 8lint fu , in" /ast! ood.5

5Des, you doB5 he laughed. 5/verybody does.5

5- o, I'm not doing it.5

58ome on.5

5- o ! ay.5 C?C

*e limbed do! n, and began to #rise my boots from the stirru#s. /' as#erated, I limbed do! n and stood ne' t to him, fa ing the t! o horses.

5; i, e thisB5 &i, ram said, sha, ing his hi#s and ste##ing out in a

movie dan e routine. *e began to sing, la##ing his hands in time. 58ome on, yaarB >ut some India into it, man. Don't go all fu , in" /uro#ean on me.5

There are three things that no Indian man can resist: a beautiful face, a beautiful song, and an invitation to dance. I was Indian enough, in my way of life, to dance with him, even if it was simply that I couldn't bear to see him dance alone. Shaking my head, and laughing despite myself, I joined in his routine. He guided me through the dance, adding new steps until we had the turns and falls and gestures in perfect time together.

The horses watched us with that peculiarly equine mixture of eyed timorousness and snorting condensation. Still, we danced and sang to them in that grassy wilderness of rolling hills, under a blue sky as dry as the smoke from a campfire in the desert.

When the dance was over, he rode to my horse in Indian fashion, letting it snuffle at his black hat. He passed the hat to me then, and told me to wear it. I slipped it over my head and we limbed into the saddles.

Damn if it didn't work. The horses cantered off, and gently broke into a gallop. For the first and only time in my life, I almost looked like a horseman. In the elation, for a glorious quarter hour, of fearless synergy with the great-hearted animal. Closely following his lead, I fell into lines and ordered them to plummet over the summit, and hurtle down into curving loops of pine and scattered shrubs. We stretched out over flatter grasslands in effortless, lunging snatches at the ground, and then he joined us with his riders at the gallop. For a little while, for a moment, we were as wild and free as the horses would teach us to be.

I was still laughing about it and chattering to he when we limbed the stairs and entered the house on the beach two hours later. I allowed my excited smile through the door and saw her standing by the long featureless wall and staring out at the sea. He greeted her with gruff fondness. A tiny bright smile rushed from his brother to his chin, trying to hide behind his shoulder. He seized a litre bottle of water, a box of matches, and a

fe! sheets of ne! s#a#er from the , it hen, and left the house. C?7

5*e"s leaving us alone,5 she said.

5l , no! . *e"ll ma, e a fire, do! n on the bea h. *e does that sometimes.5

I ! al, ed to her, and , issed her. It ! as a brief , iss, almost shy, but all the love in my heart ! as in it. 7hen our li#s #arted, ! e held one another lose, both of us loo, ing at the sea.)fter a ! hile ! e sa! -a1eer, do! n at the bea h, olle ting drift! ood and dry s ra#s for a fire. *e ! edged the balled u# ne! s#a#er bet! een

the t! igs and sti , s, lit the fire, and sat do! n beside it, fa ing the sea. *e ! asn"t old. 2here ! as a ! arm bree1e leaning in on a hot night. *e lit the fire to sho! us, as night rode the ! aves a ross the setting sun, that he ! as still there, on the bea h6 that ! e ! ere still alone.

5l li, e -a1eer,5 she said, her head against my throat and hest. 5*e"s very , ind and good(hearted.5

2hat ! as true. I , ne! that. I"d dis overed it, at last, the hard ! ay. Out ho! had she ome to , no! it from su h a little a =uaintan e of himE @ne of the ! orst of my many failings, in those e' ile years, ! as my blindness to the good in #eo#le: I never , ne! ho! mu h goodness there ! as in a man or a ! oman until I o! ed them more than I ould re#ay. >eo#le li, e <arla sa! goodness ! ith a glan e, ! hile I stared, and stared, and too often sa! nothing #ast the s o! l or bittering eye.

7e loo, ed do! n at the dar, ening bea h and at -a1eer, sitting straight(ba , ed beside his little fire. @ne of my small vi tories over -a1eer, ! hen I ! as still ! ea, and de#endent on his strength, had been ! ith language. I"d learned #hrases in his language faster than he"d learned them in mine. 4y fluen y had for ed him to ommuni ate ! ith me in Ardu most of the time. 7hen he tried to

s#ea, /nglish, the ! ords ame out in a! , ! ard, trun ated ou#lets, to#(heavy ! ith meanings and tottering on small feet of blunt sense. I taunted him often about the rudity of his /nglish, e' aggerating my onfusion and demanding that he re#eat himself, that he stumble from one ry#ti #hrase to another until he ursed me in Ardu and >ashto, and ! ithdre! into silen e.

Det, in truth, his s issored /nglish ! as al! ays elo=uent, and often a aden ed #oetry. It ! as abbreviated, to be sure, but that ! as be ause the su#erfluous had been ha , ed from it, and ! hat remained ! as a #ure and #re ise language of his o! n((something more than slogans and less than #roverbs.)gainst my ! ill, and un, no! n to him, I"d begun to re#eat C?8

some of his #hrases. *e said to me on e, ! hile grooming his grey mare,)ll horse good, all man not good. 9or years after! ard, ! henever I en ountered ruelty and trea hery and other , inds of selfishness, es#e ially my o! n, I found myself re#eating -a1eer"s #hrase:)ll horse good, all man not good.)nd on that night, holding <arla"s heart against my o! n as ! e ! at hed his fire dan e on the sand, I remembered another of his /nglish iterations. - o love, is no life, he used to say. - o love, is no life.

I held <arla as if holding her ould heal me, and ! e didn"t ma, e love until night lit the last star in our ! ide ! indo! of s, y. *er hands ! ere , isses on my s, in. 4y li#s unrolled the urred leaf of her heart. She breathed in murmurs, guiding me, and I s#o, e rhythm to her, e hoing my needs. *eat +oined us, and ! e en losed ourselves ! ith tou h and taste and #erfumed sounds. Refle ted on the glass, ! e ! ere silhouettes, trans#arent images((mine full of fire from the bea h, and hers full of stars.)nd at last, at the

end, those lear refle tions of our selves melted, merged, and fused together.

It ! as good, so good, but she never said she loved me.

5I love you,5 I ! his#ered, the ! ords moving from my li#s to hers.

"I, no! you do," she replied, regarding me and pitying me. "I, no! you do."

"I don't have to go on this trip, you, no!"

"Why are you going?"

"I'm not sure. I feel ... a sense of loyalty to him, to Chaderbai, and I still love him, in a way. But it's more than that. It's ... have you ever had the feeling (about anything at all) that your whole life is kind of a prelude, or something like everything you've ever done has been leading you up to this one point, and you know, somehow, that one day you'd get there? I'm not explaining it well, but"

"I, no! What you mean," she interrupted quickly. "And yes, I have felt like that. I did something, once, that was my whole life (even the years I haven't lived yet) in one second."

"What was it?"

"Here, talking about you," she corrected me, avoiding my eyes. "About you, not having to go to Afghanistan."

"Well," I smiled, "like I said, I don't have to go."

"Then don't," she said flatly, turning her head to look at the night and the sea. "?"

"Do you want me to stay?"

"I want you to be safe. And ... I want you to be free."

"That's not what I meant."

"I, no! It's not," she sighed.

I felt the small stir of restlessness in her body, against mine, that said she wanted to move. I didn't move.

"I'll stay," I said quietly, fighting my heart, and, not giving it a chance as a mistake, "if you tell me you love me."

She closed her mouth, and pressed her lips together so tightly that they formed a white scar. Slowly, cell by cell, it seemed, her body drew back, into itself all that she'd given to me a few moments before.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

I didn't, not why. Maybe it was the old terror, that I'd been through in the last months, and the new life I felt I'd won. Maybe it was death (her death, and Abdullah's, and the death I secretly feared as waiting for me in Afghanistan). Whatever the reason, it was stupid and pointless and even cruel, and I couldn't stop wanting it.

"If you say that you love me," I said again.

"I don't," she murmured, at last. I tried to stop her, with my fingertips on her mouth, but she turned her head to face me, and her voice was clearer and stronger. "I don't. I can't. I won't."

When Ameer returned from the beach, coughing and clearing his voice loudly to announce his arrival, he was already showered and dressed. *He smiled (such a rare thing, that smile (as he looked from me, to her, and back, again. Out the old sorrow in our eyes drove the don't and curves of his face into a little (reaths of disappointment, and he looked away.

He waited her leave in a ta'iri on that long and lonely night before he went to Ameer's room, and when Ameer finally met my eyes he nodded, slowly and solemnly. I held the stare for a few moments, but then it was my turn to look away. I didn't want to

face the strange mix of grief and elation I'd seen in his eyes
because I, never! That it was telling me. Charles was gone, yes, but
it was the whole world of love and beauty that he'd lost that
night. His soldiers in Charles's cause! He had to leave it all
behind. And the other world, the one unlimited world of that he
might yet be, was shrinking, hour by hour, to a bullet's blood
red full stop.

(((((((((((

CC%

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

-a1eer ! o, e me before da! n, and ! e left the house as the first ya! ning rays of light stret hed into the fading night. 7hen ! e limbed from our ta' i at the air#ort ! e sa! <haderbhai and <haled)nsari near the entran e to the domesti terminal, but ! e didn't a , no! ledge them. <hader had laid out a om#le' itinerary that ! ould ta, e us, ! ith four ma+or hanges of trans#ort, from Oombay to I uetta, in >a, istan, near the)fghan border. *is instru tions ! ere that ! e should a##ear at all times to be individual travellers, and that the travellers shouldn't a , no! ledge one another in any ! ay. 7e ! ere setting out ! ith him to ommit a s ore of rimes a ross three international boundaries, and to interfere in a ! ar bet! een)fghanistan's mu+aheddin freedom fighters and the mighty Goliath of the Soviet Anion. *e ! as #lanning to su eed in his mission, but he ! as also allo! ing for failure. *e ! as ensuring that if any of us ! ere , illed or

a#tured at any stage, the trail of onne tions ba , to Oombay ! ould be as old as a mountain limber"s a' e.

It ! as a long +ourney, and it began as a silent one. -a1eer, s ru#ulous as ever in his onformity ! ith <haderbhai"s instru tions, never uttered a single ! ord on the first leg from Oombay to <ara hi.)n hour after ! e"d he , ed into our se#arate rooms in the 8handni *otel, ho! ever, I heard a soft ta# on the door. Oefore the door ! as half! ay o#en he sli##ed inside and #ressed it shut behind him. *is eyes ! ere ! ide ! ith nervous e' itement and his manner ! as agitated, almost franti . I ! as unsettled and a little disgusted by the ons#i uousness of his fear, and I rea hed out to #ut a hand on his shoulder.

52a, e it easy, -a1eer. Dou're frea, ing me out, brother, ! ith all this loa, (and(dagger shit.5

*e sa! the ondes ension behind my smile, even if he didn't understand the full meaning of the ! ords. *is +a! lo , ed around

some CC1

ins rutable resolve, and he fro! ned at me fier ely. 7 e"d be ome friends, -a1eer and I. *e"d o#ened his heart to me. Out friendshi#, for him, ! as measured by ! hat men do and endure for one another, not by ! hat they share and en+oy. It #u11led and even tormented him that I almost al! ays met his earnest gravity ! ith fa etiousness and triviality. 2he irony ! as that ! e ! ere, in fa t, similarly dour and serious men, but his grim severity ! as so star, that it roused me from my o! n solemnity, and #rovo, ed a hildish, #ran, ish desire to mo , him.

5Russian ... every! here,5 he said, s#ea, ing =uietly, but ! ith a hard, breathy intensity. 5Russian ... , no! everything ... , no! every man ... #ay money for , no! everything.5

5Russian s#iesE5 I as, ed. 5In <ara hi ...5

5/very! here >a, istan,5 he nodded, turning his head aside to s#it on the floor. I ! asn"t sure if the gesture ! as in ontem#t or for lu , . 52oo mu h dangerß -ot s#ea, anyoneß Dou go ... 9aloodah *ouse ... Oohri ba1aar ... today ... saade har ba+e.5

5*alf #ast four,5 I re#eated. 5Dou ! ant me to meet someone at the 9aloodah *ouse, in the Oohri ba1aar, at half #ast fourE Is that itE 7ho do you ! ant me to meetE5

*e allo! ed me a grim little smile and then o#ened the door. Glan ing briefly along the orridor, he sli##ed out again as s! iftly and silently as he"d entered. I loo, ed at my ! at h. @ne o" lo , . I had three hours to , ill. 9or my #ass#ort(smuggling missions,) bdel Ghani had given me a money belt that ! as his uni=uely original design. 2he belt ! as made from a tough, ! ater#roof vinyl and ! as several times ! ider than the standard money belt. 7orn flat against the stoma h, the belt ould hold u# to ten #ass#orts and a =uantity of ash. @n that first day in

<ara hi it held four of my o! n boo, s. 2he first of them ! as the

British boot, that I'd used to hurry haste and train time, etc, and register at the hotel. The second boot, as the lean)meri an #ass#ort that <haderbhai re=quired me to use for the mission into)fghanistan. The t! o others, a S! iss boot, and a Canadian boot, , ! ere s#ares for emergency use. There ! as also a ten thousand dollar contingency fund, #aid in advance, as #art of my fee for a e#ting the hazardous mission. I ! ra##ed the thi , belt around my ! aist, beneath my shirt, sli##ed my s! it hblade into the sabbard at the ba , of my trousers, and left the hotel to e' #lore the ity.

It ! as hot, hotter than usual for the mild month of -ovember, and a CCF light, unseasonable rain had left the streets hairy ! ith a thi ,ened, steamy air. <ara hi ! as a tense and dangerous ity then. For several years the military +unta that had sealed #o! er in >a, istan and e' e uted the demorati ally elected #rime minister, . ulfi, ar)li Ohutto, had ruled the nation by dividing it. They'd e' #loited genuine grievances bet! een ethnic and religious communities by initiating violent onflicts. They'd #itted the indigenous ethnic groups((#arti ularly the Sindis, the >ashtuns, and the >un+abis((against the immigrants, , no! n as 4oha+irs, ! ho"d streamed into the ne! ly founded nation of >a, istan ! hen it ! as #artitioned from India. The army secretly supported e' tremists from the rival groups ! ith ! ea#ons, money, and the +udicious a##li ation of favours. When the riots that they'd #rovo,ed and fomented finally eru#ted, the generals ordered their #olie to open fire. Rage against the #olie violence ! as then contained by the de#loyment of army troops. In that ! ay the army, ! hose overt o#erations had created the bloody onflicts, ! ere seen to be the only force a#able of #reserving order and the rule of law! .

)s massacres and revenge , illings tumbled over one another ! ith esalating brutishness, , idna##ings and torture became routine events. Anatis from one group sealed supporters from another group, and inflicted sadistic torments on them. Many of those ! ho ! ere abducted died in that fearsome a#tivity. Some vanished, and

their bodies were never found. And when one group or another became powerful enough to threaten the balance of the deadly game, the generals initiated violent conflict within their groups to replace it. The fanatics then began to feed on themselves, killing and maiming rivals from their own ethnic communities.

Whatever cycle of violence and vengeance ensued, of course, that no matter what form of government emerged or dissolved in the nation, only the army would grow stronger, and only the army would ever rise real power.

Despite that dramatic tension (and because of it) as a good place to do business. The generals, however, were like a mafia boss without the courage, style, or solidarity of genuine, self-respecting gangsters, had seized the country by force, held the

entire nation hostage at the points of many guns, and looted the treasury. They lost no time in assuring the great powers, and the other arms-producing nations, that Afghanistan's armed forces were open for their business. The civilized CCG nations responded with enthusiasm, and for years became host to countless parties of arms dealers from America, Britain, China, Sweden, Italy, and other countries. No less industrious in their pursuit of a deal with the camarilla of generals were the illegals (the black marketeers, gunrunners, freebooters, and mercenaries). They roamed into the cafes and hotels: foreigners from fifty countries who had crime in mind and adventure in their hearts.

In a sense, I was one of them, a ravager like the rest of them, profiting from the war in Afghanistan like the rest of them, but I wasn't comfortable in their company. For three hours I drifted from a restaurant to a hotel to a hair shop, sitting near or with groups of foreigners who were searching for a wife, but . . . Their conversations were disconcertingly calculating. The war in Afghanistan, most of them commented cheerily, had a few good years left in it. The generals were, it had to be admitted, under

considerable pressure. There were rumours that Oenair, daughter of the elected prime minister, was planning to return to Islamabad from exile in London to lead the democratic alliance opposed to the junta. Out with a little luck, and successful intervention, the profiteers hoped, the army might remain in control of the country (and the well-established channels of corruption) for some years yet.

The tal, as of ash roads, a euphemism for contraband and black market trade goods, were in great demand along the entire border between Islamabad and Afghanistan. Cigarettes, artistically mercurian blends, were selling at a hyper rate for sixteen times their already inflated Karachi price. Medicines of every kind were generating profits that increased in sale from month to month. Winter clothing, suitable for snow habitats, was especially marketable. One enterprising German freebooter had driven a Mercedes truck, loaded with surplus German army alpine issue uniforms, complete with thermal underwear, from Munich to Peshawar. He'd sold the lot, including the truck, for five times its purchase value. The buyer was an Afghan landlord who was favoured by Western powers and agencies, including the CIA. The heavy winter clothing, after a journey of thousands of kilometres through Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, and Islamabad, never reached the fighting men of the muhajidin in the snow-dreaded mountains of Afghanistan. Instead, the winter uniforms and underwear were stored in one of the landlord's warehouses in Peshawar, awaiting the end of the war. The renegade and his small army were sitting out the war in the safety of their fortress compounds in Islamabad. It is planned as to launch a strike for power with his own troops after the real fighting against the Russians is done, and the war is on.

Details of that nefarious landlord, who had used CIA money and hungry for supplies at any price (sent thrilling, speculative ripples through the community of foreign opportunists in Karachi.

I encountered the story of the venturesome German and his truck, full of alpine uniforms in three slightly different incarnations during the course of the afternoon. In a fever, something like gold fever, the foreigners passed the story among themselves as they pursued and closed deals for shipments of canned foods, bales of brushed fleeces, shipping containers of engine parts, a warehouse full of second-hand spirit stoves, and stores of every kind of equipment from bayonets to grenade launchers. And every where, in every conversation, I heard the desperate intonation: If the war goes on for another year, we'll have it made ...

Excited and gloomy with swirling emotions I entered the Faloodah house in the Oohri bazaar, and ordered one of the sweetest, the honey-flavored drinks. The faloodha, as an indefinitely sweet concoction of white noodles, milk, rose flavours, and other melliferous syrups. The Ginni house in Bombay's Dongri area, near Chaderbhai's house, was justly famous for its delicious faloodah drinks, but they were insipid when compared to the fabulous concoctions served at Chaharhi's Faloodah house. When the tall glass of pink, red, and white sugary milk appeared beside my right hand, I looked up to thank the waiter and said that it was Chaharhi's, carrying it to the drinks.

"Don't worry, you need something stronger than this, man," he said with a smile (a small, sad smile) as he sat down beside me. "What's up? What's down, for that matter?"

"It's nothing," I sighed, offering him a smile in return.

"Come on," he insisted. "Let's have it."

I looked into his honest, open, sincere face and it occurred to me that Chaharhi was better than I, better than him. Would I have noticed and realised how troubled he was, I wondered, if our roles were reversed, and he'd entered the Faloodah house with such disturbing reactions? Probably not. Chaharhi was so often gloomy that I couldn't have given it a second thought. CC?

Well, it's just a bit of soul-searching, I guess. I've been doing some research, digging around in some of the bars, pubs and restaurants you told me about (some of the places here the blues, jazz, and the mercenaries hang out. It's as pretty depressing. There's a lot of people here! Honestly, it's not to go on forever, and they don't give a shit! It's getting killed or! It's doing the killing.

They're making money, he shrugged. It's not their fault. I don't expect them to care. That's just how it is.

Well, no, I, no. It's not the money thing, I figured, searching

for the words, rather than the emotion that had prompted them. It's just (if you wanted a definition of silly, really silly, (minded, you could do worse than somebody who wants a war (any war (to go on longer.

And ... you feel ... kind of tainted ... kind of like them? He asked as, ed gently, looking down into his glass.

Maybe I do. I don't, no. I couldn't even think about it (you, no, if I heard people talking like that somewhere else. It wouldn't bug me if I wasn't here, and if I wasn't doing exactly the same thing myself.

It isn't exactly the same.

It is. Pretty much. He said, saying me (so I'm making money out of it, like them (and I'm smuggling new shit into a shit fight, just like they are.

And maybe you're starting to ask yourself what the fuck you're doing here?

That, too. Would you believe me if I told you I haven't got a

I really, honestly, don't, no! I'm doing it. Out I don't, no! I'm doing it. Out I don't, no! I'm doing it.

We were silent for a while, sitting at our drinks and listening to the chatter and bustle surrounding us in the busy faloodah house. A large portable radio was playing romantic songs in Urdu. I could hear conversations in three or four languages from customers close to us. I couldn't understand the words, nor could I even identify which languages they were: Oahu, Hindi, Arabic, Persian, Urdu ...

This is great, he said, using a long spoon to scoop noodles into his mouth from the glass.

It's too sweet for my taste, I answered him, drinking the treat nonetheless.

Some things should be too sweet, he replied, giving me a grin, as he continued on the street. If faloodahs weren't too sweet, I wouldn't drink them.

We finished our drinks and walked out into the late afternoon sunlight, heading beyond the doorway to light our cigarettes.

We'll take off in different directions, he muttered as he held a match for my cigarette in his cupped hands. Just stay, remembering that way, south, for a few minutes. I'll catch up with you. Don't say goodbye.

He turned on his heel and walked away, stepping out to the edge of the road and into the fast lane of foot traffic between the sidewalk and the cars.

I turned and walked off in the opposite direction. Some minutes

later, at the perimeter of the ba1aar, a ta' i slid to a sto#
=ui , ly beside me. 2he ba , door o#ened and I +um#ed

I don't, no! My friend Didier says that #raising #eo#le behind their backs, is monstrously unfair, because the one thing you can't defend yourself against is the good that #eo#le say about you.

Dr Ahmed laughed. 'I am truly so.'

Shit, that reminds me, I checked interested, fishing through his pockets until he found a folded envelope. I almost forgot. I said to Didier, the night before he left. 'I was looking for you. I couldn't tell him where you were, so he asked me to give you this letter.'

I took the folded envelope and slipped it into the pocket of my shirt, to read when I was alone.

Then, I muttered. 'So what's going on? Where are they going?'

To a mosque, I checked replied, with that small, sad smile. 'They're going to #i, #u# a friend first, then they're going to meet <hader and some of the other guys who'll be going with us across the border.'

'How many guys?'

'There'll be thirty or so, I think, on the way. They're all together. Most of them are already in Kuwait, or at Shamman, near the border. They leave tomorrow! (you, me, <hader bhai, - alger,) Ahmed, and one other guy, Ahmad. *e's a friend of mine. I don't think you know him. You'll meet him in a few minutes.'

'They are the small Anted - ations, non? Ahmed asked rhetorically. 'I believe <hader <han from Afghanistan, <hader from Palestine, Ahmad from Iran, you from - e! . ealand ((I'm sorry, you are not our)meri an ((and I am from)lgeria.'

'And there's more, I checked added. 'They've got one guy from Morocco, one guy from the Gulf, one guy from Tunisia, two from

>a, istan, and one from Ira=. The rest are all)fghans, but they're all from different #arts of)fghanistan, and different ethni grou#s as ! ell.5

5\$ihad,5)hmed said, his smile grim and almost fearful. 5*oly ! ar ((this is our holy duty, to resist the Russian invaders, and liberate a 4uslim land.5

5Don't get him started, ; in,5 <haled ! in ed. 5)hmed's a ommunist. *e'll be hitting you ! ith 4ao and ;enin ne' t.5

5Don't you feel a little ... om#romisedE5 I as, ed, tem#ting fate. 5Going u# against a so ialist armyE5 CC8

57hat so ialistsE5 he retorted, s=uinting more furiously. 57hat ommunistsE >lease do not misunderstand me((the Russians did some good things in)fghanistan((5

5*e's right about that,5 <haled interr#ted him. 52hey built a lot of bridges, and all the main high! ays, and a lot of s hools and olleges.5

5)nd also dams, for fresh ! ater, and ele tri #o! er stations((all good things.)nd I su##orted them, ! hen they did those things as a ! ay of hel#ing. Out ! hen they invaded)fghanistan, to hange the ountry by for e, they thre! a! ay all of the #rin i#les they are su##osed to be believing. 2hey are not true 4ar' ists, not true ;eninists. 2he Russians are im#erialists, and I fight them in the name of 4ar' , ;enin, 4ao((5

5)nd)llah,5 <haled grinned.

5Des, and)llah,5)hmed agreed, smiling ! hite teeth at us and sla##ing the ba , of the seat ! ith his o#en #alm.

57hy did they do itE5 I as, ed him.

although they were obviously inhabited by whole families they seemed unfinished: barely standing before they'd been possessed and used as shelters.

We passed through whole suburbs of such haphazard and impetuously constructed streets (dormitory suburbs through which the headlong rush of immigrants from villages to the rapidly expanding city. Side streets and lateral avenues revealed that the duplication of those crude, resemblant structures extended

all the way to the horizon of sight, on either side of the main road.

After almost an hour of slow progress through sometimes impassably crowded streets, we stopped momentarily to allow another man to join us in the back seat. Following the instructions, the cab driver then turned his taxi around and returned along precisely the same congested route.

The next man was Ahmad Elbaaf, a thirty-year-old Iranian. My first glimpse of his face (the thick, black hair, the high cheekbones, the eyes coloured like a sand dune in a blood-red sunset) reminded me so much of my dead friend Abdullah that I flinched around the main of it. In a few moments the similarity dissolved: Ahmad's eyes protruded a little, his lips were less full, and his chin was pointed, as if it was designed to hold a goatee beard. It was, in fact, a very different face.

Out in the clear thought of Abdullah Zaheri and the lingering pain of missing him, I suddenly understood a part of the reason I was there, with Chader and the others, on a journey into someone else's war. One part, a vital part of my readiness to face the risks of taking on Chader's mission, was the guilt I still felt that Abdullah had died alone, surrounded by guns. I was putting myself in the nearest equivalent, surrounding myself with enemy guns. And in the instant of thinking that thought, in the moment of daubing the unspoken words on a grey wall of my mind (death

! ish((C7%

I re+e ted it, ! ith a shudder that shivered a ross the surfa e of my s, in.)nd for the first time in all the months sin e I'd agreed to do the +ob for)bde! <hader <han I felt afraid, and I , ne! that my life, there and then, ! as no more than a handful of sand s=uee!ed into my len hed fist.

7e got out of the ar a blo , a! ay from the 4as+id(i(2uba 4os=ue. 9ollo! ing one another in single file, ! ith t! enty metres bet! een ea h man, ! e rea hed the mos=ue, and removed our shoes.)n an ient ha+i attended to the shoes ! hile he muttered his meditational li, , ir. <haled #ressed a folded ban, note into the man's alloused, arthriti hand.)s ! e entered the mos=ue I loo, ed u# and gas#ed in sur#rise and +oy.

2he interior of the mos=ue ! as ool and imma ulately lean. 4arble and stone tiles gleamed from fluted #illars, mosai ar hes, and vast stret hes of #attered floors. Out above and beyond all that, dra! ing the eye irresistibly, ! as the enormous ! hite marble dome. 2he s#e ta ular ano#y ! as a hundred #a es a ross, and be+e! elled ! ith tiny, #olished mirrors.)s I stood there, ga#ing in ! onder at its beauty, the ele tri lights in the mos=ue ame on and the great urve of marble above us gleamed li, e sunshine on the million #ea, s and ri##les of a ! ind(! orried la, e.

<haled left us immediately, #romising to return as soon as

#ossible.)hmed, 4ahmoud, and I ! al, ed to an al ove that gave a vie! of the dome, and ! e sat do! n on the #olished tile floor. It ! as some time sin e the evening #rayer((I'd heard the all of the mue11in ! hile ! e ! ere driving in the ab((but there ! ere still many men absorbed in #rivate #rayer throughout the mos=ue. 7hen he ! as sure that I ! as omfortable,)hmed announ ed that he ! ould ta, e the o##ortunity to #ray. *e e' used himself, and ! al, ed to the bathing fount. 7ith his fa e, hands, and feet ! ashed a ording to ritual, he returned to a little lear s#a e beneath

the dome and commenced his prayer.

I looked at him with a tiny germ of envy at the ease with which he opened his communication with God. I felt no urge to join him, but the sincerity of his meditation made me feel much more alone, somehow, in my solitary, unconnected mind.

He completed the prayer and, as he began the usual, bare, to us, unhalting returned. He bore a troubled expression. We sat close together, our heads almost touching.

"We've got trouble," he whispered. "He's lying here at your hotel."

"He's?"

"The political officer," he answered. "The ISI. Inter-Services Intelligence."

"What did they want?" I asked.

"Doubtful of us. We've been made. They hit Chader's house, too. Doubtful both of us. He was out of the house, and they didn't get him. What have you got with you, from your hotel? What did you leave there?"

"I've got my assets, my money, and my wife," I replied.

"Ahmed grinned at me.

"Doubtful, no, I am going to lie to you," he whispered.

"Everything else is still there," I continued. "There's not much. Clothes, toiletries, a few books. That's it. Out there's the tickets, the plane and the train tickets I bought. I left them in my carry bag. That's the only thing with a name on it, I'm pretty sure."

5- a1eer got your carry bag, and got out of there +ust a minute before the o#s rashed in,5 <haled said, offering me a reassuring nod. 5Out that"s all he got time to grab. 2he manager"s one of our guys, and he ti##ed - a1eer off. 2he big =uestion is, ! ho told the o#s that ! e"re hereE It has to be someone from <hader"s side. Someone on the inside, very lose. I don"t li, e it.5

5I don"t get it,5 I ! his#ered. 57hy are the o#s so interested in usE >a, istan is su##orting)fghanistan in the ! ar. 2hey should ! ant us to smuggle stuff to the mu+aheddin. 2hey should be hel#ing us to do it.5

52hey are hel#ing some)fghans, but not all of them. 2he guys ! e"re getting the stuff to, the guys near <andahar, they"re 4assoud"s men. >a, istan hates them be ause they ! on"t a e#t *e, matyar, or any of the other #ro(>a, istan leaders of the resistan e. >a, istan and the)meri ans have #i , ed out *e, matyar as the ne' t ruler of)fghanistan, after the ! ar. Out 4assoud"s men s#it every time they hear his name.5

5It is ra1y ! ar,5 4ahmoud 4elbaaf added in a oarse, throaty ! his#er. 5) fghans fight ea h other for so long time, thousands years. 2he only thing better than fighting ea h other, is fighting ... ho! do you say it ... invasion. 2hey ! ill beat Russians, sure, but they ! ill , ee# fighting.5

52he >a, istanis ! ant to be sure that they ! in the #ea e, after the)fghans ! in the ! ar,5)hmed ontinued for him. 5- o matter ! ho ! ins the ! ar for them, they ! ant to be in ontrol of the #ea e. If they ould do it, they ! ould ta, e all of our ! ea#ons and our medi nes and our other su##lies, and give them to their o! n ...5
C7F

5>ro' ies,5 <haled murmured, the -e! Dor, in his a ent e' #loding in the ! his#ered ! ord. 5*ey, you hear thatE5

7e all listened intently, and heard the sounds of singing and music from somewhere outside the mosque.

2hey've started,5 <hader said, rising to his feet ! with athletic grace. 5It's time to go.5

7e stood and followed him out of the mosque to collect our shoes. 7alking around the building in the gathering darkness, I heard the sound of the singing.

5I've ... I've heard this singing before,5 I said to <hader as I walked.

5Do you know the Olinda Singers?5 he asked. 5Of course you do. Do you remember them in Bombay, with the band when they sang for us. That was the first time I ever saw you.5

5Do you remember that night?5

5Sure. We were all there. Ahmed, Ahmad, Siddiqi (you haven't met him yet.) lot of the others will be going with us on this trip. 2hey were all there that night. 2hat was the first big meeting for this run to Afghanistan. 2hat's why we got together. 2hat's what the meeting was all about. Didn't you know?5

*e laughed as he asked the question, and his tone was as honest and ingenuous as it ever was, but still the words stabbed into my mind. Didn't you know? Didn't you know?

<hader was planning the trip all that time ago, I thought, on the first night that I met him. I remembered with clarity the large, smoky room where the Olinda Singers sang for their private audience. I remembered the food that we ate, the harras we smoked. I remembered the feeling, no matter how I'd recognized that night. Were they all involved in the mission? I remembered the young Afghan who'd greeted Chaderbai with such respect, bending

lo! enough to reveal the pistol held within a fold of his shawl.

I was still thin, tingling from that first night, still worried by the questions I couldn't answer, when I stepped and I came upon a large group of men, hundreds of them, sitting cross-legged on the tiles of a wide forecourt adjacent to the mosque. The Olinda Singers finished a song and the men applauded, shouting 'Allah! Allah! Subhan Allah!' I stepped led us through the crowd of men to a relatively sheltered alcove where a hader sat with a peer and several others. C7G

When I caught his eye a haderbhai raised his hand, signalling for me to join him. As I reached his side he grasped my hand and pulled me down beside him. A number of heads turned in our direction. Conflicting emotions stumbled into one another in my haunted heart: fear, that I was so consciously associated with a hader a hader, and a flush of pride that he'd drawn me, over all others, to sit at his side.

The heel has moved through one full turn, he hesitated to me, placing his hand on my forearm and speaking close to my ear. We met each other, you and I, with the Olinda Singers, and now! We hear them again, just as we begin this important task.

*I was reading my mind and I was sure, somehow, that it was deliberate: that he was fully aware of the dying impact of his words. I was suddenly angry with him, suddenly resentful, even of the touch of his hand on my arm.

Did you arrange to have the Olinda Singers here? I asked him, staring straight ahead and leaving the razor's edge in my tone. 'No, no, just like you arranged everything else the first time we met.'

*I remained silent until at last I turned to face him. When my eyes met his I felt the sting of impulsive tears, and I mastered them by grinding my nails together. It occurred, and my burning eyes remained dry, but my mind was in turmoil. The man with the

innamon(brown skin and the trim, white beard had used and manipulated me and everyone else here, as if here his chained slaves. Det there as such love in his golden eyes that it was, for me, the full measure of something I'd always craved from the innermost oils of my heart. The love in his softly

smiling, deeply worried eyes as a father's love: the only father I'd ever known.

From this moment, you stay with us, he whispered, holding my stare. Do not return to your hotel. The soldiers have a determination of you, and they will follow, ing. This is my fault, and I must give you my apology. Someone close to us has betrayed us. It is our good luck, and his bad luck, that we were not captured. We will be punished. His mistake has revealed him to us. We know who he is, and we know what must be done to him. Out that will wait until we return from our task. Tomorrow we travel to Luekta. We must remain there for some time. When the time is right, we will march the crossing into Afghanistan. And from that day, for as long as you are in Afghanistan, there will be a curse on your head. CH

The Russians say hell for the attitude of foreigners who help the mu+aheddin. And we have few friends here in Pakistan. I think we will have to get some local clothes for you. We will dress you like a young man from my village (a Pashtun, like me. Des, with a shawl over your white hair, and a turban, a shawl, to throw over your broad shoulders and chest. We will pass you off, perhaps, as my blue-eyed son. What do you think, E5

What did I think, E The Olind Singers cleared their throats noisily, and the assembly of musicians began the introduction to a new song with the plaintive wail of the harmonium and the blood-stirring passion of the tablas. I watched the long, slender fingers of the tabla players and across the trembling skins of the drums, and I felt my thoughts drift away from me in the hypnotic flutter and flow of the music. My own government had put a curse on my head, in Australia, as a reward for information

leading to my nature.)nd there, across the world, I was putting another burden on my head. @n e more, as the wild grief and nature of the Olind Singers ri##led through a listening ro! d, on e more, as the eyes of that ro! d bla1ed the e stasy of their devotions, on e more I surrendered to the fate(filled moment and felt myself, my whole life, turning ! ith the ! heel.

2hen I remembered the note in my #o , et: the letter from Didier that <haled had given me in the ta' i t! o hours earlier. 8aught u# in the su#ersticious t! ist of oin iden e and history re#eating itself, I ! as suddenly des#erate to , no! ! hat the letter said. I sli##ed it from my #o , et and held it lose to my eyes in the yello! (amber light that rea hed us from lam#s high over our heads.

Dear ;in,

2his is to tell you, mon her ami, that I have discovered ! ho ! as it((the ! oman ! ho betrayed you to the #olie and had you #ut inside the #rison and beaten so badly. Su h a terrible thing! /ven no! I am still desolated by it! 7ell then, the ! oman ! ho did this thing is 4adame . hou, the o! ner of the >alae. A# to this time, I have not learned the reason for ! hat she did, but even ! ithout some understanding of her motive for

doing this terrible thing to you, I have only the best sources to assure me that it is true.

I ho#e that I ! ill hear from you soon.

Dour dear friend,

Didier.

C7?

4adame . hou. 7hyE /ven as I formed the =uestion in my mind, I , ne! the ans! er. I suddenly remembered a fa e staring at me ! ith ine' #li able hatred. It ! as the fa e of Ra+an, 4adame . hou's eunu h servant. I remembered that I'd seen him ! at hing me, on the day of the flood, ! hen ! e"d res ued <arla from the 2a+ 4ahal *otel in &inod"s boat. I remembered the malignant hate that had

filled his eyes as he'd ! at hed me ! ith <arla, and ! at hed me drive a! ay in Shantu's ta' i. ; ater that night the #oli e had arrested me, and my #rison torture had begun. 4adame . hou had #unished me for defying her, for daring to challenge her, for im#ersonating an)meri an onsular offi er, for ta, ing ; isa 8arter a! ay from her and, yes, #erha#s for loving <arla.

I tore the letter into #ie es and #ut the fragments ba , in my #o , et. I ! as alm. 2he fear ! as gone.)t the end of that long <ara hi day, I , ne! ! hy I ! as going to <hader's ! ar, and I , ne! ! hy I ! ould return. I ! as going be ause my heart ! as hungry for <haderbhai's love, the father(love that streamed from his eyes and filled the father(sha#ed hole in my life. 7hen so many other loves ! ere lost((my family, my friends, >raba, er,)bdullah, even <arla((that loo, of love in <hader's eyes ! as everything and all the ! orld to me.

It seemed stu#id, it ! as stu#id, to go to ! ar for love. *e ! asn't a saint and he ! asn't a hero: I , ne! that. *e ! asn't even my father. Out for nothing more than those se onds of his loving ga1e, I , ne! that I ! ould follo! him into that ! ar, and any other.)nd it ! asn't any more stu#id than surviving +ust for hate, and returning for revenge. 9or that's ! hat it ame do! n to: I loved him enough to ris, my life, and I hated her enough to survive and to avenge myself.)nd I ! ould have that revenge, I , ne! , if I made it through <hader's ! ar: I ! ould find 4adame . hou, and I ! ould , ill her.

I losed my mind around that thought as a man might lose his hand around the hilt of a , nife. 2he Olind Singers ried the +oys and agonies of their love for God. Oeside me, surrounding me, hearts soared in res#onse. <haderbhai turned his head to meet my eyes, and nodded slo! ly. I smiled into the golden eyes filled ! ith tiny, s! aying lam#lights, and se rets, and sa red #leasures summoned by the singing.)nd, God hel# me, I ! as ontent and unafraid and almost ha##y.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

We spent a month in L uetta (a long month of waiting with the frustration of false starts. The delay was caused by a mu+aheddin commander named)smatullah) ha, 1ai 4uslim. *e was the leader of the) ha, 1ai #eo#le in the region of <andahar, ! hi h ! as our ultimate destination. The) ha, 1ai ! ere a lan of shee# and goat herders ! ho"d originally been members of the dominant Durrani lan. In 177%, the founder of modern)fghanistan,)hmed Shah)bdali, divided the) ha, 1ai from the Durrani and established them as a lan in their o! n right. That ! as in a ordan e ! ith)fghan tradition, ! hi h allo! ed a sub(lan to be se#arated from its #arent lan ! hen it rea hed suffi ient si1e or strength. It ! as also an admission by the ! ily ! arrior and nation(builder)hmed Shah that the) ha, 1ai ! ere a for e to be re ,oned ! ith and a##eased. Through t! o enturies the) ha, 1ai in reased their status and their #o! er. They earned a ! ell(deserved re#utation as fier e fighters, and every man in the lan ould be ounted on to follo! his leader ! ithout =uestion. During the early years of the ! ar against the Russians,)smatullah) ha, 1ai 4uslim formed his men into a ! ell(armed, highly dis i#lined militia. In their region they be ame the s#earhead of the inde#enden e struggle: the #ihad to drive out the Soviet invaders.

2o! ard the end of 198?, as ! e #re#ared ourselves in L uetta for the rossing into)fghanistan,)smatullah began to va illate in his ommitment to the ! ar. So mu h de#ended on his militia that ! hen he #ulled his men ba , from a tive servi e, and began se ret #ea e tal, s ! ith the Russians and their)fghan #u##et government in <abul, the entire ! ar of resistan e in the <andahar region olla#sed. @ther mu+aheddin units not under)smatullah's ontrol, su h as <ader's men in the mountains north of the ity, remained in their #ositions6 but they ! ere isolated, and every su##ly route to them ! as #erilously vulnerable to Russian atta , . C77 The un ertainty for ed us to ! ait until)smatullah de ided

! hether to ontinue the +ihad or s! it h sides and su##ort the Russians. -o(one ould #redi t ! hi h ! ay he ! ould +um#.

)lthough ! e ! ere all restive and agitated ! ith the ! ait((as the days lim#ed into ! ee, s, it seemed interminable((I used the time ! ell. I #ra tised #hrases in 9arsi, Ardu, and >ashto, and even #i , ed u# a fe! ! ords in some 2ai, and A1be, diale ts. I rode horses every day. 7hile I never managed to eliminate my lo! nish, arm(and(leg(fla##ing gestures ! hen I made the animals sto# or go or turn in a desired dire tion, I sometimes did su eed in dismounting them by limbing do! n rather than being hurled to the ground on my ba , .

I read boo, s every day from a bi1arre, e le ti olle tion su##lied to me by)yub <han, a >a, istani, and the one member of our grou# ! ho"d been born in I uetta. Oe ause it ! as +udged too dangerous for me to leave our safe(house om#ound at a horse ran h on the outs, irts of the ity,)yub brought me boo, s from

of the most popular holiday resorts in northern Italy, in the mountains.

For me, restricted then to the mountain, the chief attraction of the city was the random selection of books that my father brought to me. Every few days he appeared at my door, grinning happily and handing the bundle of books to me as if they were treasures from an archaeological dig.

And so it was that I rode during the day, acclimatizing myself to the C78

thinner air above five thousand feet, and at night read the diaries and journals of long-dead explorers, recent editions of Greek classics, extensively annotated volumes of Shakespeare, and a delightfully passionate terza rima translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

Some of the men think you are a scholar of the Holy Scriptures, but I believe he had said to me from the doorway of my room one night, after he'd been a month in Livorno. I closed the book, that I was reading and stood to greet him at once. He took my hand and released it quickly, both of his hands, muttering a hurried prayer of blessing. When he asked the name that I offered him, I sat down on a stool and an arm's reach away. He had a small leather satchel under his arm. He placed it on my bed and settled back comfortably.

Reading is still something mysterious, in the country of my birth, and the cause of some fear and much superstition, he said early, rubbing a hand over his tired, brown face. Only four men in ten can read at all, and half that number again for ill-omen.

Where did you learn ... everything you've learned? I asked him.
Where did you learn to speak English so well, for example?

I was tutored by a very fine English gentleman, he laughed softly, brightening with the recollection. Just as my little son was tutored by you.

I too, took a few beedies from a basket, lit them in my hand with the help of a match, and handed one to him.

My father was the leader of his clan, he continued. He was as stern a man, but he was also a just man and a wise man. In Afghanistan men become leaders by merit (they are good leaders, wise managers of money, and brave, when fighting is necessary. There is no inherited right to be a leader, and a leader's son who has no wisdom or courage or skill at leading to the people will be passed over for another man with better skills. My father was very anxious for me to succeed him and to continue his life (for, he wished to raise his people from ignorance, and to ensure their future well-being.) Considering Sufi mysticism, an old saint who visited our area when I was born, had told my father that I would grow up to become a shining star in the history of my people. My father hoped for this with all his heart but, unfortunately, I showed none of a leader's skills, and no interest in attaining them. I was, in short, a bitter disappointment to him. He sent me to my uncle, here in Lucknow.

And my

uncle, who was a prosperous merchant then, put me in the care of an Englishman, who became my tutor.

So! old here you

I was ten years old when I left Candahar, and I spent five years as a student of Mr. Ian Donald there.

Dou must've been a good student, I suggested.

Perhaps, he mused in reply. I think, really, that there is a very good teacher. I have heard, in the years since I left him, that the people of Scotland are known for their sour and stern ways. Some people have told me that the people of Scotland are pessimists, who refer to it all, on the dark side of

every sunny street. I think, that if this is in some way true, it does not also tell us that the people of Scotland find this dark side of things to be very, very funny. My father, when he was a man, would laugh in his eyes, even when he was as most stern with me. Every time that I think of him, I remember the laughter in his eyes. And he loved it in the Uetla. We loved the mountains, and the old air in the interior. We had strong legs that were built for climbing mountain paths, and he roamed these hills every day, often with me alone for many. We were as a happy man who would laugh, and he was a great teacher.

What happened when he finished teaching you? I asked. Did you return to Andahar?

I did, but it was not the joyful return that my father hoped for. You see, on the day after my dear father left the Uetla, I killed a man, in the baal, outside my uncle's warehouse.

When you were fifteen?

Yes. When I was fifteen years old, I killed a man, for the first time.

We lapsed into silence, and I ordered the eight and measure of that phrase ... for the first time ...

It was a cause that was really no cause, a trial of fate, a fight that grew out of nothing at all. The man was beating a child. It was his own child, and I should not have interfered. Out it was a very cruel beating, and I could not bear to watch it. I killed with the importance of being the son of a village leader, and being the nephew of one of the Uetla's most prosperous merchants, I commanded the man to stop beating the child. We too, of course, and there was an argument. The argument became a fight. And then he was dead, stabbed in the chest with

his own dagger (the dagger he had tried to use on me.⁵
C8%

It was self-defence.⁵

Des. There were many witnesses. It was in the main street of the bazaar. My uncle, who had much influence at that time, spoke for me with all the authorities, and finally arranged for me to return to Chandahar. Unfortunately, the family of the man I had killed refused to accept a blood-money payment from my uncle, and they sent two men to Chandahar after me. I received a warning from my uncle, and I struck first. I killed both men by shooting them with my father's old long rifle.⁵

*I was silent again for a while, staring at a point on the floor between our feet. I could hear music, distant and muffled, coming from the other side of the compound. There were many rooms radiating outward from a central courtyard that was larger but less grand than that in Chader's Bombay home. From some of the

brothers. When my only father was badly wounded in an attack, and unable to stop me, I told my family to spread the rumour that I had been killed. I left my family home. The blood feud ended some time after that, and peace was restored between the two families. Out I was dead to my family, because I had sworn an oath to my mother that I would never return.⁵

The breeze through the metal-framed window that had been cool in the earlier evening was suddenly cold. I stood to lose the window, and then poured a glass of water from the tray that her on my nightstand. I held the glass, I whispered a prayer, and drank the water. *e C81

He handed me the glass when he was finished. I poured water into the same glass and sat down on the stool to sip at my drink. I said nothing, afraid that, if I asked the wrong question or made the wrong comment, he would stop talking altogether and leave the room. He was calm, and he seemed to be completely relaxed, but the brilliant, laughing gleam was missing from his eyes. It was also disturbingly out of character for him to be so evasive about his only life. He'd talked to me for long hours about the Quran or the life of the Prophet Mohammed or the scientific, rational basis for his philosophy, but I'd never, nor him to tell me or anyone else so much about himself. In the lengthening silence I looked at the lean, silver-haired face and I controlled even the sound of my breathing, lest it disturb him.

We were both dressed in the standard Afghan costume of a long, loose shirt and wide-legged trousers. His clothes were a light, faded green and mine were pale blue. We both wore leather sandals as house slippers. Although I was heavier and deeper in the chest than Haderbhai, we were roughly the same height and build across the shoulders. His short hair and beard were silver, and my short hair was blonde. My skin was tanned to a shade resembling his natural, almond-shell brown. If it wasn't for the silver in my blue-grey eyes and the alluvial gold in his, we might've been taken for father and son.

5*o! did you get from <andahar to the Oombay mafiaE5 I as, ed him at last, ! hen I feared that the lengthening silen e, more than my =uestions, might ma, e him leave.

*e turned to fa e me. *is smile ! as radiant: a ne! , gentle, artless smile that had never moved his fa e before in any onversation ! ith me.

57hen I ran a! ay from my home in <andahar, I made a +ourney a ross >a, istan and India to Oombay. ;i, e a million others, li, e millions of others, I ho#ed to ma, e my fortune in the ity of the *indi #i ture heroes.)t first, I lived in a slum((li, e the one that I o! n no! , near the 7orld 2rade 8entre. I #ra tised the *indi language every day, and I learned =ui , ly.)fter a ! hile, I observed that men ould ma, e money buying ti , ets for #o#ular #i tures at the inemas and then selling them for a #rofit ! hen the inemas #ut u# the *ouse 9ull signs. I de ided to use the

little money I'd saved to buy ti , ets for the most #o#ular *indi #i ture in Oombay. 2hen I stood outside the inema, and ! hen the *ouse 9ull signs ! ent u# I sold my ti , ets for a good #rofit.5 C8F

5S al#ing,5 I said. 57e all it ti , et s al#ing. It's big business((bla , (mar, et business((at the most #o#ular football mat hes in my ountry.5

5Des.)nd I made an e' ellent #rofit in the first ! ee, of my ! or, . I already began to have dreams of moving to a fine a#artment and ! earing the best lothes, #erha#s even buying a ar. 2hen, one night, I ! as standing outside the inema ! ith my ti , ets ! hen t! o very big men ame to me, sho! ed me their ! ea#ons ((they had a s! ord and a meat ho##er((and demanded that I go ! ith them.5

5; o al goondas,5 I laughed.

5 Goondas, he repeated, laughing with me. For those of us who
knew him as Lord Dabdel Chander Chohan, the don, the ruler of his
kingdom of crime in Bombay, it was hilarious to identify him as a
shame-faced eighteen-year-old in the custody of those street thugs.

52 They too, came to see Bhotu Gulab, the Little Rose. He had that
name for the mark on his cheek, made by a bullet that had passed
through his face, breaking most of his teeth, and leaving a scar
that was indeed like a rose. He was the boss of that whole area
in those days, and before he had me beaten to death, as an
example to others he wanted to take a look at the important fellow
who had trespassed on his area.

53 He was furious. "What are you doing, selling tickets in my
area?" He asked me, speaking a mixture of Hindi and English. It was a
poor English, but he wanted to intimidate me with it, as if he
was a judge in a court of law. "Do you know how many men died,
how many men I had to kill, how many good men I lost, to take
control of the block, (market tickets at all the cinemas in this
area?"

54 I was terrified, I admit it to you, and I thought that my life
was but a few minutes' worth. So I threatened my caution, and I
spoke boldly. "No! You will have to eliminate one more nuisance,
Gulab!" I told him, speaking an English that was far superior
to his, because I have no other way of making money, and I have
no family, and I have nothing to lose. Unless, of course, you
have some decent job of course, that a loyal and resourceful young
man can do for you."

57 Well, he laughed out loud, and he asked me where I learned to
speak English so well, and when I told him, and when I told him
my story, he gave me a job right away. Then he showed me his
smashed teeth, opening his mouth wide to point out the gold
replacements. Then, going into Bhotu Gulab's mouth was a real honour

amongst his men, and some of his C8G

losest goondas ! ere very +ealous that I got su h an intimate tour of the famous mouth on my very first meeting ! ith him. Gulab li, ed me, and he be ame a , ind of father to me in Oombay, but I had enemies around me from the first time that I shoo, his hand.

5l ! ent to ! or, as a soldier, fighting ! ith my fists and ! ith s! ords and leavers and hammers to enfor e 8hota Gulab"s rule in the area. 2hose ! ere bad days, before the oun il system, and there ! as fighting every day and night.)fter a ! hile, one of his men too, a s#e ial disli, e to me. Resentful of my lose relationshi# ! ith Gulab+i, he found a reason to #i , a fight ! ith me. So I , illed him.)nd ! hen his best friend atta , ed me, I , illed him, too.)nd then I , illed a man for 8hota Gulab.)nd I , illed again.)nd again.5

*e fell silent, staring ahead at the floor ! here it met the mud(bri , ! all.)fter a time, he s#o, e.

5)nd again,5 he said.

*e re#eated the #hrase into a silen e that ! as thi , ening around us and seeming to #ress in u#on my burning eyes.

5)nd again.5

l ! at hed him ! ade through the #ast, his eyes blaing re olle tions, and then he shoo, himself ba , into the moment.

5lIt is late. *ere, l ! ant to give you a gift.5

*e o#ened the hamois(leather #ar el to reveal a #istol in a side holster, several maga1ines, a bo' of ammunition, and a metal bo' . ; ifting ba , the lid of the metal bo' , he dis#laid a leaning , it of oil, gra#hite #o! der, tiny files, brushes, and a ne! , short #ull(through ord.

52his is a Ste h, in)>S #istol,5 he said, ta, ing u# the ! ea#on and removing its maga1ine. *e he , ed to ensure that there ! as no

round in the firing chamber, and handed the pistol to me. It is Russian. You will find plenty of ammunition on the dead Russians, if you have to fight them. It is a nine-millimetre calibre pistol, with a magazine of twenty rounds. You can fire it as a single shot, or set it on automatic. It is not the best gun in the world, but it is reliable, and the only light pistol with more bullets in it, here we are going, is a Kalashnikov. I want you to bear it, nearly displayed at all times from now on. You eat with it, you sleep with it, and when you wash yourself, you have it within your reach. I want everyone who is with us, and everyone who sees us, to know that you have it. Do you understand?

Desai answered, staring at the gun in my hands.

I told you that there is a price on the head of every foreigner who helps the mujaheddin. I want it to be so, that someone who might think of this reward, and of claiming it with your head, will also think of the Steinhilber in at your side. Do you know how to clean an automatic pistol?

5-0.5

Every cell. I will show you how it is done. When you must try to sleep. We leave for Afghanistan at five, before dawn, tomorrow morning. The waiting is over. The time has come.

Khadarbai showed me how to clean the Steinhilber. It was more complicated than I'd imagined, and it took the best part of an hour for him to allow me through the instructions for its complete service, repair, and handling protocols. It was a thrilling hour, and men and women of violence will know what I mean when I say that I was drunk with the pleasure of it. I confess with no little shame that I enjoyed that hour with Khadar, learning how to use and clean the Steinhilber automatic pistol, more than the hundreds of hours that I'd spent with him while learning his

#hiloso#hy.)nd I never felt loser to him than I did that night as ! e hun hed over my blan, et, stri###ing and reassembling the , illing ! ea#on.

7hen he left me, I turned out the light and lay ba , on my ot, but I ouldn't slee#. 4y mind ! as affeine(alert in the dar, ness.)t first I thought about the stories <hader had told me. I moved through that different time in the ity I'd ome to , no! so ! ell. I imagined the <han as a young man, fit and dangerous and fighting for 8hota Gulab, the gangster boss ! ith a little rose s ar on his hee, . I , ne! other #arts of <hader"s story((I"d heard them from some of the goondas ! ho ! or, ed for him in Oombay. 2hey"d told me ho! <haderbhai had sei1ed ontrol of Gulab"s little em#ire ! hen the s arred one ! as assassinated outside one of his inemas. 2hey"d des ribed the gang ! ars that had eru#ted a ross the ity, and they"d tal, ed of <hader"s ourage, and his ruthlessness in rushing his enemies. I , ne! , as ! ell, that <haderbhai ! as one of the founders of the oun il system, ! hi h had brought #ea e to the ity by dividing territories and s#oils bet! een the surviving gangs.

I ! ondered, as I lay in a dar, ness s ented ! ith the #olished(floor(and(ra! (linen odours of the gun and the leaning oil, ! hy <haderbhai ! as going to ! ar. *e didn't have to go((there ! ere a hundred more li, e me, #re#ared to die for him in his #la e. I remembered his strangely radiant C8? smile ! hen he"d told me about his first meeting ! ith 8hota Gulab. I re alled ho! =ui , and youthful his hands had been ! hen he"d sho! n me ho! to lean and use the gun.)nd it o rred to me that he might've been ! ith us, ris, ing his life, sim#ly be ause he ! as hungry for the ! ilder days of his youth. 2he thought ! orried me be ause I ! as sure that at least some small #art of it ! as true. Out that other motive((that he"d +udged the time right to end his

e' ile, and to visit his home and family((! orried me more. I ouldn't forget ! hat he"d told me. 2he blood feud that had , illed so many and driven him from his home had only ended ! ith his

#promise, to his mother, never to return.

)fter a ! hile my thoughts drifted, and I found myself reliving, moment for moment, the long night before my es a#e from #rison. 2hat, too, ! as a night ! ithout slee#. 2hat, too, ! as a night of ! heeling fears and e' hilaration and dread.)nd +ust as I had on that night years before, I rose from bed before the first stir and shuffle of the morning, and #re#ared myself in the dar, .

Soon after da! n, ! e too, the train to 8haman >ass. 2here ! ere t! elve from our grou# on the train, but none of us s#o, e through the several hours of the +ourney. -a!eer sat ! ith me, and ! e ! ere alone for mu h of the tri#, but still he held his stony silen e. 7ith my #ale eyes on ealed behind dar, sunglasses, I stared through the ! indo! and tried to lose myself in the s#e ta ular vie! .

2he train ride from I uetta to 8haman ! as one of the glories of the illustrious sub(ontinental rail! ay system. 2he tra , s ! ound through dee# gorges and rossed rivers a#es of astounding beauty. I found myself re#eating, as if they ! ere lines of #oetry, the very names of the to! ns through ! hi h it #assed. 9rom <u hlaagh to Oostaan, and the small river rossing at yaaru <aare1, the train limbed to Shaadi1ai.)t Gulistan there ! as another limb, ! ith a s! ee#ing urve that follo! ed the an ient dry la, e at I ila)bdullah.)nd the +e! el in the t! in steel(bands of that ro! n, of course, ! as the <ho+a, 2unnel. Ouilt by the Oritish over several years at the end of the nineteenth entury, it smashed its ! ay through four , ilometres of solid ro , , and ! as the longest in the sub(ontinent.

)t <haan <ili the train negotiated a series of shar# urves, and at the last remote regional sto# before 8haman ! e limbed do! n ! ith a fe! dusty lo als and ! ere met by a overed tru , . 7hen the area ! as deserted ! e limbed onto the e' travagantly de orated tru , , and C8C follo! ed the main road to! ard 8haman. Oefore ! e rea hed the to! n, ho! ever, ! e too, a side road that seemed to end in a deserted

tra , , ! ith a stand of trees and several s rubby #astures, about thirty , ilometres north of the main high! ay and the 8haman >ass.

7e limbed do! n from the tru , , and as it drove a! ay ! e mustered in the shade of the trees ! ith the main grou# of men, ! ho"d been ! aiting there for us. It ! as the first time that ! e"d assembled in our full number. 2here ! ere thirty of us, all men, and for a moment I ! as reminded of the men ! ho gathered in similar grou#s in #rison yards. 2he fighters seemed tough and determined and, although many of them ! ere lean to the #oint of being thin, they loo, ed healthy and fit.

I removed my sunglasses.)s I s anned the fa es, my eyes met

those of a man ! ho stared ba , at me from the heart of dar, ness. *e ! as in his late forties or early fifties, and #erha#s the oldest man in the grou# after <haderbhai. *is short hair ! as grey beneath a bro! n, round(edged) fghan a#, identi al to the one I ! ore myself. *is short, straight nose divided a long, #ointed fa e that ! as so dee#ly lined beneath the sun, en hee, s that it a##eared to have been slashed ! ith a ma hete. *eavy bags hung belo! his eyes. 2heatri ally #ea, ed eyebrow! s li, e the ! ings of a bla , bat s#i, ed above his eyes, but it ! as the eyes themselves that aught and held me.

)s I lo , ed eyes ! ith him, returning his #sy hoti stare, the man began to stumble to! ard me.)fter the first fe! shambling ste#s, his body t! it hed into a more effi ient mode, and he began to lo#e, overing the thirty metres that se#arated us in long, rou hing, feline strides. 9orgetting that the gun ! as stra##ed to my side, my hand instin tively moved to the hilt of my , nife and I too, half a #a e ba , ! ard ! ith my right foot. I , ne! the eyes. I , ne! the loo, . 2he man ! anted to fight me, #erha#s even to , ill me.

\$ust as he rea hed me, shouting something in a diale t that I ouldn"t re ognise, - a1eer ste##ed from no! here to stand in front

of me and bar his ! ay. *e shouted something ba , at the man, but the other ignored him, staring #ast his head at me and shouting his =uestion, again and again. -a1eer re#eated his re#ly, shouting to mat h the other. 2he ra1ed fighter tried to shove -a1eer out of the ! ay ! ith both hands, but he might as ! ell have tried to #ush aside a tree. 2he burly)fghan stood his ground, for ing the madman to shift his ga1e from me for the first time.
C87

) ro! d had formed around us. -a1eer held the man's lunati stare, and s#o, e in softer, #leading tones. I ! aited, tensed and ready to fight. 7e haven't even rossed the border yet, I thought, and I'm going to have to stab one of our o! n men ...

5*e ! as as, ing if you are a Russian,5)hmed . adeh muttered from beside me, his)lgerian a ents rolling over the R in Russian. I fli , ed a glan e at him, and he #ointed at my hi#. 52he gun.)nd your #ale eyes. *e thin, s you are a Russian.5

<haderbhai ! al, ed bet! een the men, and #ut his hand on the madman's shoulder. 2he man turned immediately, and ! ith eyes that seemed ready to ! ee#, sear hed <hader"s fa e. <hader re#eated ! hat -a1eer had been murmuring, in a similarly soothing tone. I ouldn't understand all of it, but the sense ! as lear. -o. *e is)meri an. 2he)meri ans are here to hel# us. *e is here ! ith us to fight the Russians. *e ! ill hel# us to , ill the Russians. *e ! ill hel# us. 7e ! ill , ill many Russians together.

7hen the man turned to fa e me on e more, his e' #ression had hanged so dramati ally that I ! as moved to #ity him, ! hen a moment before I ! as ready to run my , nife into his hest. *is

eyes ! ere still deranged, hanging unnaturally ! ide and ! hite beneath the bro! n irises, but his fren1ied e' #ression had olla#sed into su h ! ret hed, #itiable misery that his fa e reminded me of the many ruined stone ottages ! e"d seen beside the roads. *e loo, ed on e more into <hader"s fa e, and the

stutter of a smile flickered across his features as if animated by an electric pulse. *e turned and walked away through the road. The tough men started for him angrily, compassion vying with fear in their eyes as they watched him pass.

I am sorry, *e said. *e's name is *abib. *abib was a schoolteacher. *e is a schoolteacher, in a village on the other side of these mountains. *e taught the little ones, the youngest children. When the Russians invaded, seven years ago, he was a hairy man, with a young wife and two strong sons. *e joined the resistance, like every other young man in the region. Two years ago he returned from a mission to find that the Russians had attacked his village. They had used gas, some kind of nerve gas.

They deny it, *e heard. Out here they fight this war they are testing their new weapons. A lot of the weapons used here, land mines and rockets and everything, are new experimental weapons that C88 have never been used in a war before. *e the gas that they used on *abib's village. There is no war like this one.

*abib wandered alone through the village, *e continued. Everyone was dead. All the men and the women and the children. All the generations of his family (his grandparents, from both sides, his parents, his wife's parents, his uncles and aunts, his brothers and sisters, his wife, and his children) all gone, in just one hour of one day. Even the animals, the goats and the sheep and the chickens, were all dead. Even the insects and the birds were dead. Nothing moved. Nothing lived and nothing survived.

*e made ... a bury ... all men ... all women ... all childrens ... *e added.

*e buried them all, *e nodded. All his family, and his friends from childhood, and his neighbours. It too, so long to do it, all alone, that it was a very bad business, at the end. Then,

When the job was done, he too, with his gun and re-joined his mujaheddin unit. But the loss had changed him in a terrible way. This time he was like a different man. This time he did everything in his power to capture a Russian, or an Afghan soldier fighting for the Russians. And when he captured one (and he did capture them, many of them, because he was very good at it after that (when he did capture them, he tortured them to death by impaling them on a sharpened steel spike, made from the wooden handle and the blade of the shovel he had used to bury his family. *e has it now. You can see it strapped to the top of his pack. *e ties the prisoners to the spike by their hands, behind

their backs, with the spike touching their backs. At the moment that their strength fails them, and the metal spike begins to tear its way through their bodies, forcing its way out through their stomachs, *abib leans over them, staring into their eyes, and spits into their screaming mouths.⁵

Chaled Ansari, -aleer, Ahmed .adeh, and I stood in a deeply breathing silence, waiting for Chader to speak again.

⁵There is no man like him, no one like these mountains, and the region between here and Kandahar, better than *abib,⁵ Chader concluded, sighing early. ⁵*e is the best guide. *e has survived hundreds of missions in this region, and he will get us to our men in Kandahar. And there is no man more loyal or trustworthy, because there is no man in Afghanistan who hates the Russians more than *abib Abdur Rahman. Out ...⁵ C89

⁵*e is completely insane,⁵ Ahmed .adeh offered into the silence with a Gallian shrug, and I found myself liking him, suddenly, and missing my friend Didier in the same instant. It was just the kind of pragmatic and brutally honest summary that Didier might've made.

⁵Des,⁵ Chader agreed. ⁵*e is insane. *is grief has destroyed his mind. And for as much as we need him, there is the fact that he

must be ! at hed at all times. /very mu+aheddin unit from here to *erat has ast him out. 7e are fighting the)fghan army that serves the Russians, but the fa t is that they are)fghans. 7e re eive most of our information from soldiers in the)fghan army ! ho ! ant to _hel# us to ! in against their Russian masters. *abib annot ma,e this fine distin tion. *e has only one understanding of this ! ar: to , ill them all =ui , ly, or to , ill them slo! ly.)nd he #refers to , ill them slo! ly. 2here is su h a ruel violen e in him that it frightens his friends no less than his enemies. So he must be ! at hed, ! hile he is ! ith us.5

5!ll ! at h over him,5 <haled)nsari de lared firmly, and ! e all turned to loo, at our >alestinian friend. *is fa e ! as set in an e' #ression of suffering and anger and determination. 2he s, in ! as tight a ross his eyes from bro! to bro! , and his mouth ! as dra! n into a ! ide, flat line of tena ious resolve.

5&ery ! ell ...5 <hader began, and he ! ould've said more, but ! ith those t! o ! ords of onsent <haled left us and ! al, ed to! ard the slum#ed, forlorn figure of *abib)bdur Rahman.

7at hing him leave, I ! as stru , ! ith a sudden, lut hing instin t to ry out and sto# him. It ! as a foolish thing((an irrational stabbing dread that I ! as losing him, losing another friend.)nd it ! as so ridi ulous, so #etty in its +ealousy, that I bit do! n on it and said nothing. 2hen I ! at hed him sit do! n o##osite *abib. I ! at hed him rea h out to lift the ga#ing, murderous fa e of the madman until their eyes met and held, and I , ne! , ! ithout understanding it, that <haled ! as lost to us.

I dragged my eyes from the sight of them, as boatmen drag a la, e ! ith starry hoo, s. 4y mouth ! as dry. 4y heart ! as a #risoner #ounding on the ! alls inside my head. 4y legs felt leaden, fi' ed to the earth ! ith roots of shame and dread.)nd as I loo, ed u# at the sheer, im#assable mountains, I felt the future shudder through me li, e thunder trembling through the limbs and ! eared vines of a storming ! illo! .

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The main road from Shaman, in those years, crossed a tributary of the Dhari River on the way to Shin Oalda, Dabrai, and Del, all on the high way route to Kandahar. The whole journey was less than two hundred kilometres. One day, it took a few hours. We didn't take the high way route, of course, and we didn't have cars. We rode on horseback, over a hundred mountain passes, and the same journey took us more than a month.

We spent that first day camped beneath the trees. The baggage (the goods we were smuggling into Afghanistan, and our personal supplies) was scattered in a nearby pasture, covered by sheep, cows and goats, in order to give the appearance, if seen from the air, of a herd of livestock. There were even a few real goats tethered among the woolly bundles. When dusk, finally smothered the sunset, a whisper of excitement went through the camp. We soon heard the muffled tread of hooves as our horses approached. There were twenty riding horses and fifteen pack animals. The horses were a little smaller than those I'd learned to ride on, and my heart lifted with hope that I might find them easier to control. Most of the men moved off at once to hoist and secure the baggage onto the pack animals. I started off to join them, but a leader and a ghazi intervened, leading two horses.

"This one is mine," the ghazi announced. "And that one is yours." The leader handed the reins to me, and he placed the straps on the short, thin Afghan saddle. Satisfying himself that all was as it should be, he nodded his approval.

"Horse good," he said, in his grunting, gravel-throated version of good humour.

"Horse good, I replied, quoting him. "Man not good."

"The horse is superb," the ghazi murmured, casting an admiring eye over me.

my horse. She is as a chestnut mare, with a deep chest and strong, thick, relatively short legs. Her eyes were alert and unafraid. I asked her for you from all that I have. She is as the first to reach her, and there are some disappointed men back there. She is a good judge.

"I've got thirty men, by my count, but there's less than thirty riding horses here, for sure," I remarked, glancing at the neck of my horse, and trying to establish first contact with the beast.

Then, some ride and some fall," Ahmed replied. "I put his left foot in his stirrup and swung into the saddle with an effortless spring. I take turns. There are goats, ten goats with us, and men will herd them. And we will lose some men on our way, also. The horses are really a gift for Chander's people near Chandahar. We would be better on this trip with camels. Donkeys would be the best, in my opinion, in the narrow passes. Our horses are animals of great status. I think, Chander insisted on using horses because it is important for the loot, when we make contact with the wild clans (the men who will want to kill us, and take our guns and our medicines. The horses will make us important in their eyes. And they will be a gift of much prestige for Chander Khan's people. We plans to give them a way on the way back, from Chandahar. We will ride some of the way to Chandahar, but we will fall, all the way home."

"Did you say you're going to lose some men?" I asked, frowning at him.

Then he laughed. "Some men will leave us on the way, to return to their villages. Out yes, also, it might be that some will die on this journey. Out we will live, you and I, Inshallah. We have good horses. It is a good beginning."

"I heeled the horse expertly and entered over to a mounted group who'd assembled around Chanderbhai some fifty metres away. I

glanced at Ameer. *e nodded for me to mount the horse, offering me an encouraging little grimace and a muttered prayer. We both fully expected that I would be thrown, and his eyes began to close in ringing anticipation. I put my foot in the stirrup and swung off with my right foot. I hit the saddle with a harder jolt than I'd planned, but the horse responded well to the mount and directed her head to the side, anxious to move off. Ameer opened one eye to see me sitting comfortably on the new horse. Delighted and flushed with unselfish anxious ride, he beamed one of his rare smiles at me. I tugged at the reins to turn the horse's head, and

glanced back at her. The horse responded calmly, but with a smart, stylish, almost dancing elegance in its movement. Snapping at once into a graceful gait, she too, me to Ameer's group with no further prompting.

Ameer ran along with us, a little behind and to the left of my horse. I glanced over my shoulder and exchanged a usually sideways glance with him. The horse was making me look good. It's gonna be okay, I whispered to myself, nothing, as the words trotted through the thick fog of vain hope in my mind, that I'd uttered the certain 'in' formula. The saying, 'ride goeth ... before a fall ...' is condensed from the second collection of the Ood, of proverbs, 1C:18 ('ride goeth before destruction and a

haughty spirit before a fall. It's attributed to Solomon. If he did say it, Solomon was a man who knew horses intimately. I'm much better than I did as I leaned up to Ameer's group and reined the horse in as though I knew ((as though I would ever, no! ((! that I was doing in a saddle.

Ameer was speaking in Ameer and Ardu and Garsi, giving the men last-minute instructions. I leaned across to whisper to Ahmed. .adeh.

57 here's the horse I can't see it in the dark, .5

57hat #assE5 he ! his#ered ba , .

52he #ass through the mountains.5

5Dou mean 8hamanE5 he as, ed, mystified by the =uestion. 5It"s
ba , there, thirty , ilometres behind us.5

5- o, I mean ho! do ! e get through those mountains into
)fghanistanE5 I as, ed, nodding to! ard the sheer ro , ! alls that
began to rise less than a , ilometre a! ay from us, and #ea, ed in
the bla , night s, y above.

57e don"t go through the mountains,5)hmed re#lied, gesturing a
little #ab ! ith the reins in his hands. 57e go over them.5

5@ver ... them ...5

5@ui.5

52onight.5

5@ui.5

5In the dar, .5

5@ui,5 he re#eated seriously. 5Out no #roblem. *abib, the fou,
the ra1y one, he , no! s the ! ay. *e ! ill lead us.5

5I"m glad you told me that. I ! as ! orried, I admit, but I feel a
lot better about it no! .5 C9G

*is ! hite teeth flashed a laugh at me and then, ! ith a signal
from <haled, ! e moved off, hurning slo! ly into a single olumn
that stret hed to almost a hundred metres. 2here ! ere ten men
! al, ing, t! enty men riding, fifteen #a , horses, and a herd of ten
goats. I noti ed ! ith dee# hagr in that -a1eer ! as one of the men
! al, ing. It ! as absurd and unnatural, someho! , that su h a fine
horseman ! as ! al, ing ! hile I rode. I ! at hed him, ahead of me in

the darkness, I hated the rhythmic roll of his thighs, slightly bowed legs, and I swore to myself that I would conquer him, at the first rest break, to take turns with me in riding my horse. I did eventually succeed in that resolve, but – a year later – as so

reluctantly persuaded that he glared miserably at me from the saddle, and only ever brightened when our positions reversed and he looked up at me from the rocky path.

Don't ride a horse over a mountain, of course. Don't push and drag and sometimes help to carry a horse over a mountain. As I neared the base of the sheer cliffs that form the Shiman range, dividing the southern part of Afghanistan from Pakistan, it became clear that there were in fact gaps and paths and trails leading into and over them. What had seemed to be smooth hills of bare, mountainous rock proved on closer inspection to be formed in undulating waves of ravines and tiered levels. The edges of stone and lime (on rusted barren earth) found through those rocky slopes. In places the ledges were so wide and well flattened as to seem like a man-made road. In places they were so jagged and narrow that every footstep of horse or man was brooded over with careful, trembling consideration before it was made. And the whole of it, the whole stumbling, slipping, dragging, shoving breakthrough of the mountain barrier, was done in the dark.

As a small caravan I then commended to the one mighty tribal horde that had held the silk route between Turkey and China and India, but in that time of war our numbers were remarkable. The fear of being seen from the air was a constant worry. Haderbhai imposed a strict ban, out: no cigarettes, torches, or lamps on the march. There was a quarter moon that first night, but occasionally the slippery paths led us through narrow defiles where smooth rock rose sharply, dropping us in shadows. In those black, allied corridors it was impossible to see my own hand held in front of my face. The whole column headed its way along the blind ledges in the rock, all, men and horses and goats pressed

hard against the stone, and shuffling into one another.

In the centre of a vast sulphuric ravine, I heard a low whining sound that rose suddenly in pitch. I was alarmed, or sliding my feet, between two horses. I had the reins of my horse in my right hand, and the tail of the horse in front rammed around my left hand. My face was sliding against the granite wall, and the path beneath my feet was no wider than the length of my arm. As the sound rose in its pitch and intensity, the two horses reared in the same instinct, and stamped their hooves in stamp of fear. When the whining sound suddenly erupted in a roar that rattled the whole mountain, and ripped into an explosive, shrieking stream of satanic noise directly over our heads.

The horse to my left bucked and reared in front of me, pulling its tail from my hand. Trying to retrieve it, I lost my footing in the dark, and slid to my knees, my face scraping against the rock wall. My only horse was terrified, as frightened as I was myself, and it struggled forward on the narrow path, following an impulse to run. I still held the reins, and I used them to pull myself to my feet, but the horse rammed into me again with its head, and I felt myself slide backward from the path. Near

stabbed into my chest and rushed my heart as I stumbled, slid, and fell off the path into the lightless void. I felt the full length of my body, and stopped with a ringing snarl as the reins in my hand held fast.

I was dangling in free space over a black abyss. A millimetre by millimetre I felt the downward pressure, the easing, slipping away, of leather as I slid further from the edge of the narrow ledge. I could hear the shouts of men, all along the ledge above me. They were trying to calm the animals, and they were calling out names to account for their friends. I could hear the horses screaming their fear and snorting in protest. The air in the ravine was thick with the smells of piss and horseshit and frightened man (sweat). And I could hear the scribbling, scripping chatter of

hooves as my own horse struggled to maintain its footing. I suddenly realised that as strong as the horse undoubtedly was, its foothold on the rumbling, jagged path was so precarious that my weight might have been enough to drag it over the ledge with me.

Yielding with my left hand in the impenetrable darkness, I grasped the reins and began to drag myself back, up to the ledge. I put one set of fingertips on the edge of the stony path and then heaved a scream as I slipped backwards into the darkness. The reins held again, and I dangled over the edge. I gasped, but my situation was desperate. The horse, fearing that it would be dragged over the edge, was shaking and digging its head violently. An intelligent animal, she was trying to rid herself of the bridle, bit, and harness. At any moment, I thought, she would succeed. I gave a snarl of rage through clenched teeth and dragged myself to the ledge once more.

Struggling up to my knees, I gasped in silent exhaustion and then, relying on an intuition that starts in fear and subsides on a jet of adrenaline, I turned and to my right as my neighbour's horse slipped out in the black, blind night. If I hadn't moved, it would have struck me on the side of the head, and my arm would have ended there and then. Instead, the life-saving reflex to turn meant that the blow struck my hip and thigh, driving me into the wall and against my own horse's head. I threw my arms around the animal's neck, as much to comfort myself with its touch as to support my numb leg and aching hip. I was still cradling her head in my arms when I heard shuffling steps and felt someone's hands slide from the wall onto my back.

"Is that you, *nsari* as, ed into the darkness.

"Deah" replied you, ay

"Sure. Set fighters" you, me! Two of them. Not far overhead.) hundred feet, man, no more than that. You, they were really smashing up the sound barrier. That a noise"

57 ere they RussiansE5

5-o, I don't thin, so. -ot this lose to the border. 4ore li, ely they ! ere >a, istani fighters,)meri an #lanes ! ith >a, #ilots, crossing a little into)fghan s#a e to , ee# the Russians on their toes. 2hey ! on't go too far. 2he Russian 4iG #ilots are too good. Out the >a, s li, e to remind them they're here, +ust the same.)re you sure you're all rightE5

5Sure, sure,5 I lied. 5I'll be a lot better ! hen ! e get out of this fu , in" dar, . 8all me a ! ea, motherfu , er, but I li, e to see ! here I'm going ! hen I'm trying to lead a horse along a ledge outside a ten(storey building.5

54e, too,5 <haled laughed. It ! as the small, sad laugh, but I dren hed myself in the reassuran e of it. 57ho ! as behind youE5

5)hmed,5 I re#lied. 5)hmed . adeh. I heard him s! earing in 9ren h ba , there. I thin, he"s o, ay. -a1eer ! as behind him.)nd I , no! 4ahmoud, the Iranian, ! as near him some! here. 2here ! ere about ten behind me, I thin, , ounting the t! o guys herding the goats.5 C9C

5I'll go he , ,5 <haled said, giving me a omforting sla# on the shoulder. 5Dou , ee# going. \$ust slide along the ! all for another hundred yards or so. It's not far. 2here"s still some moonlight ! hen you get out there, outside this ravine. Good lu , .5

)nd for a fe! moments, ! hen I rea hed that #ale oasis of moonlight, I felt safe and sure of myself. 2hen ! e #ushed on, hugging the old, grey stone of the anyon(silo, and in minutes ! e ! ere in bla , ness again, ! ith nothing but faith and fear and the ! ill to survive.

7e travelled so often at night that ! e sometimes seemed to be feeling our ! ay to <andahar li, e blind men, ! ith our fingerti#s.

And, like the blind men, I trusted *abib, without question, as our guide. - one of the Afghans in our group lived in the border region, and they were as dependent on his knowledge of those secret passes and fortuitous ledge as I was.

When he wasn't leading the column, however, *abib inspired far less confidence. I came upon him one day as I stumbled over some rocks to find a lame man, a mess during a rest stop. *e was kneeling in front of a roughly square slab of stone, and beating his forehead against it. I leaned down to stop him, and discovered that he was weeping, sobbing. The blood from his torn forehead ran down his face to mix with the tears in his beard. I poured a little water from my canteen onto a corner of my scarf, and wiped the blood from his head to examine the wounds. They were rough and jagged, but largely superficial. *e allowed me to lead him, unprotesting, back to the camp. Chaled rushed up to me and helped me to apply ointment and a clean bandage to his forehead.

I left him alone, Chaled muttered when the job was done. I thought he was praying. *e told me he wanted to pray. Out I had a

feeling ...

I think, he was praying, I answered.

I'm worried, Chaled confessed, looking into my eyes with a febrile mix of heartbreak, and fear. *e was setting mantras all over the lame. *e's got plenty of grenades on him under that load. I've tried to explain to him that a mantra has no consequences (it might just as easily kill a local nomad shepherd, or one of us, as a Russian or an Afghan soldier. *e doesn't get it. *e just grins at me, and does it a little bit more secret. *e rigged some of the horses with explosives yesterday. *e said it was to make sure the Russians didn't get their hands on them. I said to him, what about us? What if the Russians get their hands on us? Should we be rigged with explosives, too? *e said it was a problem he worried

about all the time((ho! to ma, e sure ! e ! ere dead before the Russians got their hands on us, and ho! to , ill more Russians after ! e ! ere dead.5

5Does <hader , no! E5

5-o. I'm trying to , ee# *abib in line. I , no! ! here he"s oming from, ; in. I've been there. 2he first ou#le years after my family ! as , illed, I ! as as ra1y as he is. I , no! ! hat"s going on inside him. *e"s filled u# ! ith so many dead friends and enemies that he"s , ind of lo , ed on one ource((, illing Russians ((and until he sna#s out of it, I +ust gotta stay ! ith him as mu h as I an, and ! at h his ass.5

5I thin, you should tell <hader,5 I sighed, sha, ing my head.

5I ! ill,5 he sighed in return. 5I ! ill. Soon. I'll tal, to him soon. *e"ll get better. *abib ! ill get better. *e"s getting better in some ! ays. I an tal, to him real ! ell no! . *e"ll ma, e it.5

Out as the ! ee, s of the +ourney #assed, ! e all ! at hed *abib more losely, more fearfully, and little by little ! e all realised ! hy so many other mu+aheddin units had ast him out.

7ith our senses alert for mena e from ! ithout and ! ithin, ! e travelled by night, and sometimes by day, north along the mountainous border to! ards >athaana <hel. -ear the , hel, or village, ! e s! ung north(north(! est into deserted mountainous terrain that ! as veined ! ith old, fresh, s! eet(! ater streams. *abib laid out a route that ! as roughly e=uidistant bet! een to! ns and larger villages, al! ays avoiding the main arteries that lo al #eo#le used. 7e trudged bet! een >athaana <hel and <haira 2haana6 bet! een *umai <haare1 and *ai) agha 4uhammad. 7e forded rivers bet! een ;oe <aare1 and yaaru. 7e 1ig1agged bet! een 4ullah 4ustafa and the little village of)bdul *amid.

;o al #irates, demanding tribute, sto##ed us three times on the

! ay. /a h time, they revealed themselves at first in high vantage
#oints, ! ith guns trained on us, before their ground for es s! e#t

negotiations were concluded, <hader arranged with each local clan leader to re(su##ly our caravan. The re(su##ly provided us with rations while we were on the move, and also guaranteed us food and animal feed at fraternal villages that were under the control or #rote tion of the clan leader.

The re(su##ly was essential. The munitions, medicines, and medicines that we carried were #riorities, and left us little room for surplus cargo. Thus we carried a little food for the horses((t o days" ration at most((but we carried no food at all for ourselves. /a h man had a anteen of water, but it was understood that it was an emergency ration, to be used s#aringly for ourselves and the horses. 4any were the days we #assed with no more than one glass of water to drink, and one small #ie e of naan bread to eat. I was a vegetarian, without being a fanatic about it, when I started on that journey. 9or years I'd usually #referred to eat my fruit and vegetable diet when it was available. Three weeks into the trek, after dragging horses

across mountains and free1ing rivers, and trembling from hunger, I fell on the lamb and goat meat that the #irates offered us, C99 and ri##ed the flesh half(oo, ed from the bones with my teeth.

The stee# mountain slo#es of the country were barren, burned of life by biting winds, but every flat #lain, no matter how small, was a vivid, living green. There were wild flowers with red, starry faces, and others with s,y(blue #om(#om heads. There were short, scrubby bushes with tiny yellow leaves that the goats enjoyed, and many varieties of wild grasses topped with feathery bo! ers of dried seed for the horses. There were lime(green mosses on many of the rocks, and #aler lichens on others. The im#a t of those tender, viridescent #ar#ets beneath the endlessly undulating #ro odile's back, of naked stone mountains was far greater than it might&e been in a more fertile and e=uable lands a#e. 7e res#onded to each new sight of a softly #ar#eted in line or tufted, leafy moor with similar #leasure((a dee#, subliminal res#onse to the vitality in the colour green. 4ore

than a few of the tough, hardened fighters, trudging behind the
leading horses, stopped to gather a little handful of flowers so
that they might simply feel the beauty of them in their dry and
calloused hands.

My status as a leader's messenger helped us to negotiate the
badlands of the local tribes, but it also cost us a life, when I
was stopped for the third and last time. In an effort to avoid
the little village of Abdulkamid, our guide Abib led us into a
small canyon that was just wide enough for three or four horses
to ride side-by-side. Steep rocks, walls rose up on either side of
the canyon trail for almost a kilometre before the funnel opened
out into a much longer, wider valley. It was the perfect place
for an ambush and, in anticipation, a leader rode at the head of
our column with his green and white banner unfurled.

The challenge came before we were a hundred metres into the
gorge. There was a chilling ululation from high above (men's
voices raised in an imitation of the high-pitched, warbling wail
of tribal women) and a sudden tumble of small boulders as a
little avalanche spilled into the canyon before us. Like others,
I turned in my saddle to see that a platoon of local tribesmen
had taken up positions behind us with a variety of weapons
trained on our backs. We halted immediately, at the first sound.
A leader slowly rode on alone for some two hundred metres. He
stopped there, with his back straight in the saddle, and his
standard fluttering in the strong, hill breeze.

The seconds of a long minute ticked away with the guns behind us,
7%

and the rocks roared above. When a lone figure appeared, riding
toward a leader on a tall camel. Although the tall (hunched Arabian
camel is native to Afghanistan, the rider was a single (hunched
Arabian camel) bred by long distance camelers of the
northern Saudi region for use in extremes of cold. It had a mass
of hair on its head, thick, and shaggy neck, (fur, and long,

successful legs. The man riding that impressive beast ! as tall and lean, and appeared to be at least ten years older than Chander's fit sister. He wore a long, white shirt over a white dhoti, and a white shawl (length, sleeveless, black, serge vest.) draped over his shoulders. He wore a white turban of substantial length ! as draped majestically on his head. His grey beard ! as trimmed away from the upper lip and the mouth, descending from his chin to nudge his thin chest.

Some of my friends in Bombay had called that, kind of beard a 'Zahabi', after the sternly orthodox Saudi Arabian Muslims ! who trimmed their beards in that way to imitate the style referred by the prophet. It ! as a sign to us, in the city, that the stranger possessed at least as much moral authority as temporal power. The latter ! as emphasised ! with special effect by the anti-queen, long-barrelled rifle that he held upright, balanced on his hip. The muzzle (loaded rifle ! as decorated along all of its wooden surfaces ! with gleaming discs, scrolls, and diamond shapes fashioned from brass and silver coins and polished to a dazzling brilliance.

The man drew up beside Chanderbhai, facing us and ! within a hand's reach of our hand. He was bearing ! as commanding, and it ! as clear that he ! as accustomed to a comprehensive respect. He ! as, in fact, one of the very few men I ever came to know ! who equaled Chanderbhai in the esteem (and even the veneration) that he commanded from others ! with nothing more, or less, than his bearing and the sheer force of his fully realised life.

After a lengthy discussion, Chanderbhai ! heeled his horse gently to face us.

My sister ! called to me, using the first name in my false name ! an address, and speaking in English. 'Come here to me, please'

I ! , indeed ! , uttered ! that I heard ! as an encouraging sound. I ! eyes on the ground and above us ! were on me, I ! , and in the still, silent seconds I had a vision of the horse

throwing me to the ground at <hader"s feet. Out the mare responded with a smart, #ranging anter, and found her o! n ! ay through the column to sto# at <hader"s side. 7%1

52his is *a+ii 4ohammed,5 <hader announced. *e s! e#t around us with a broad movement of his o#en #alm. 5*e is the <han, the leader of all the #eo#le, in all the lans, and all the families here.5

5)salaam alei, um,5 I said in greeting, holding my hand over my heart as a gesture of res#e t.

Believing me to be an infidel, the leader didn"t res#ond to my greeting. 2he >ro#het 4ohammed ad+ured his follo! ers to return the #ea eful greeting of a believer with an even more #olite greeting. 2hus the greeting)salaam alei, um, >ea e be ! ith you,

should"ve been ans! ered, at the very least, ! ith 7a alei, um salaam ! a rahmatullah,)nd ! ith you be #ea e and the om#assion of)llah. Instead, the old man stared do! n from his #er h on the amel and greeted me ! ith a hard =uestion.

57hen ! ill you give us Stingers to fight ! ithE5

It ! as the same =uestion every)fghan had as, ed me, the)meri an, sin e ! e"d entered the ountry.)nd although <haderbhai translated it for me again, I understood the ! ords and I"d rehearsed the ans! er.

5It ! ill be soon, if)llah ! ills it, and the s, y ! ill be as free as the mountains.5

It ! as a good ans! er and *a+ii 4ohammed ! as #leased ! ith it, but it ! as a mu h better =uestion, and it deserved a better res#onse than my ho#eful lie. 2he)fghans, from 4a1ar(i(Sharif to <andahar, , ne! that if the)meri ans had given them Stinger missiles at the outbrea, of the ! ar, the mu+aheddin ! ould"ve

beaten the invaders back, within months. Stingers meant that the hated and mortally effective Russian helicopters could be smashed from the skies. Even the formidable MiG fighters were vulnerable to a hand-launched Stinger missile. Without the insuperable advantage of the air, the Russians and their Afghan army comrades could be forced to fight a ground war against the mujaheddin resistance (a ground war they would never win).

Many among the Afghans believed that the Americans refused to supply Stingers, for the first seven years of the conflict, because they wanted Russia to win just enough of the Afghan war to overreach and overcommit themselves. If and when the Stingers finally arrived, the Russians would suffer a defeat that cost them so much in men and resources that their entire Soviet empire would collapse.

And whether the Afghans were right or wrong, the deadly game did play itself out in exactly that way. The Stinger missiles did turn the tide of the war.

When they were finally introduced, a few months after <hader led us into Afghanistan. The Russians were so weakened by the war of resistance fought by those very Afghan villagers, and millions like them, that their monstrous, 8-aligulan empire rumbled around them. It collapsed, it played out that way, and that it cost as a million Afghan lives. That it cost as one-third of the population forced from their homeland. That it cost as one of the largest forced migrations in human history (three and a half million refugees moving through the <hyber>pass to >eshan, and a million more exiled in Iran, India, and the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. That it cost as fifty thousand men, women, and children with one or more limbs amputated through landmine explosions. That it cost as the Afghan heart and soul.

And I, a wanted criminal, working for a mafia crime lord,

impersonated an American and looked those people in the eye, and lied to them about the weapons I couldn't give them.

*a+hi 4ohammed li, ed my ans! er so mu h that he invited our grou# to attend the ! edding elebrations of his youngest son. 8on erned that a refusal might offend the elderly leader, and genuinely tou hed by the generous invitation, <hader a e#ted. 7hen all the tributes ! ere e' a ted((*a+hi 4ohammed drove a hard bargain, demanding and re eiving <hader"s o! n horse as an additional, #ersonal gift((<haderbhai, -a1eer, and I agreed to a om#any the leader to his , hel.

2he rest of our olumn made am# in a #astured valley ! ith #lentiful fresh ! ater. 2he brea, in our for ed mar h allo! ed the men to groom and rest the horses. 2he #a , animals ! ere in onstant need of attention and, ! ith the argo on ealed in a #rote ted ave, the unburdened beasts ! ere free to gambol and roam. @ur men #re#ared to feast on four roasting shee#, aromati Indian ri e, and fresh green(leaf tea #rovided by *a+hi"s village as their ontribution to our #art in the +ihad. 7ith the #ra ti al business of tributes negotiated and re eived, the senior men of *a+hi 4ohammed"s village((li, e all the)fghan lan leaders ! e"d en ounter on the +ourney((a , no! ledged us as fighters in the same ause, and offered every hel# they ould #rovide.)s <hader, -a1eer, and I rode a! ay from the tem#orary am# to! ard the , hel, the sounds of singing and laughter follo! ed us, e ho hasing #layful e ho. It ! as the first time ! e"d heard that lightness of heart from our men in the t! enty(three days of the +ourney. 7%G

*a+hi 4ohammed"s village ! as in elebration ! hen ! e arrived. *is #rofitable, bloodless en ounter ! ith our olumn of armed men had added to the gathering thrill of anti i#ation for the ! edding. <hader e' #lained ho! the elaborate rituals of)fghan matrimony had been unfolding for months before ! e"d arrived. 2here"d been eremonial visits bet! een the family of the groom, B& so muTODAbftb! e ard

displayed for all to admire, and I as then held in trust for her by the groom's family. The groom had even visited his bride (to be in secret, and he'd presented her with personal gifts as he showed to her.) According to custom, it was strictly forbidden for him to be seen by the men in her family during that secret visit, but custom also required him to be helped by the girl's mother. The dutiful mother, I had assured me, had remained with the couple while they showed to one another for the first time, and had acted as their chaperone. With all that achieved, the couple was ready for the culmination of the marriage ceremony itself, to be held in three days' time.

I had too, me through the finest details of the rituals, and it seemed to me that there was a kind of urgency in his normally

gentle, teacher's manner. At first I guessed (rightly, I think, that he was reacquainting himself with the customs of his people, after his five long decades in exile. He was reliving the scenes and celebrations of his youth, and he was proving to himself that he was still Afghan, in all that his heart knew and felt. Out as the lessons continued through the following days, and the intensity of his attention to them never failed, I finally realised that the long explanations and histories were for my benefit more than his. He was giving me a crash course in the culture of the nation where I might be killed and where my body might be laid to rest. He was making sense of it (my life with him, and my possible death (in the only way that he knew.) And understanding that, without ever seeing of it to him, I listened dutifully and learned everything I could.

Men, friends, and other invitees streamed into the village during those days. The four main houses of the Mohammed's fortress (the men's, the women's, the compound, were tall, square, mud-brick buildings. They all surrounded the women's, and one large dwelling stood in each of the four corners. The women's, the men's, was a separate set of buildings behind even higher walls. In the men's compound I slept on the

floor and so, and all our own meals. It was already crowded in the house that ~~had~~, ~~and~~ I joined but, as new men arrived from distant villages, we all simultaneously washed in further.

Sleeping in our clothes, we to (and) tailed across the hole floor, each man sleeping with his head beside the feet of the next. There's a theory that snoring at night in sleep is a subconscious defence reflex (a warning sound that frightened potential predators away from the mouth of the cave when our loiterers huddled in vulnerable sleep. That group of Afghan nomads, camelers, sheep and goat herders, farmers, and guerrilla fighters lent credibility to the idea, for they snored so thunderously and with such persistent ferocity through the long, cold night that they would've frightened a pride of ravenous lions into scattering like startled mice.

During the day, the same men prepared some food dishes for the Friday evening. Those dishes included flavoured yoghurts, goat's or sheep's milk, cheeses, oven-baked breads made with corn flour, dates, nuts, and wild honey, biscuits baked with richly churned goat's milk, butter and, of course, a variety of halal meats and vegetable salad. While the foods were being prepared, I watched as men dragged a foot-operated grinding wheel into an open space, and the groom devoted a tense hour to putting a razor's edge to a large, ornate dagger. The bride's father watched that effort with a critical eye. After satisfying himself that the weapon was suitably lethal, he gravely accepted it as a gift from the younger man.

The groom has just sharpened the knife that the bride's father will use on him, if he ever mistreats the girl, ~~had~~ he blained to me as we watched.

That's a pretty good custom, I mused.

It is not a custom, ~~had~~ corrected me, with a laugh. It is his idea (the bride's father. I have never heard of it before

this. Out if it ! or, s, it might be ome a ustom.5

/a h day the men also rehearsed ritual grou#(dan es ! ith the musicians and singers ! ho"d been hired to om#lement the formal, #ubli elebration. 2he dan ing gave me the han e to see a ne! and om#letely une' #e ted side of -a1eer. *e hurled himself into the ! hirling horus line of men ! ith gra e and #assion. 4oreover, my short, bo! (legged 7%?

friend, ! hose bul, y arms seemed to +ut out! ard from the tree(trun, of his thi , ne , and hest, ! as by far the best dan er in the entire assembly, and =ui , ly earned their admiration. 2he ! hole se ret and invisible inner life of the man, his full reative and s#iritual endo! ment, ! as e' #ressed in the dan e.)nd that fa e((I"d said, on e, that I"d never seen another human fa e in ! hi h the smile ! as so utterly defeated((that s o! I(reased fa e ! as transfigured in the dan e until his honest, selfless beauty ! as so radiant that it filled my eyes ! ith tears.

52ell me on e more,5) bdel <hader <han ommanded, ! ith a roguish smile in his eye, as ! e ! at hed the dan ers from a vantage #oint beneath a shaded ! all.

I laughed. 7hen I turned to loo, at him, he laughed as ! ell.

5Go on,5 he urged. 5Do it to #lease me.5

5Out you've heard this t! enty times from me already. *o! about you ans! er me a =uestion insteadE5

5Dou tell me on e more, and then I ! ill ans! er your =uestion.5

5@, ay. *ere goes. 2he universe began about fifteen billion years ago, in almost absolute sim#li ity, and it's been getting more and more om#le' ever sin e. 2his movement from the sim#le to the om#le' is built into the ! eb and ! eave of the universe, and it's all the tenden y to! ard om#le' ity. 7e're the #rodu ts of this om#le' ifi ation, and so are the birds, and the bees, and the trees, and the stars, and even the gala' ies of stars.)nd if ! e

! ere to get ! i#ed out in a osmi e' #losion, li, e an asteroid
im#a t or something, some other e' #ression of our level of
om#le' ity ! ould emerge, be ause that"s ! hat the universe does.
)nd this is li, ely to be going on all over the universe. *o! am I
doing so farE5

I ! aited, but he didn't re#ly, so I ontinued ! ith my summary.

5@, ay, the final or ultimate om#le' ity((the #la e ! here all this
om#le' ity is going((is ! hat, or ! ho, ! e might all God.)nd
anything that #romotes, enhan es, or a elerates this movement
to! ard God is good.)nything that inhibits, im#edes, or #revents

it is evil.)nd if ! e ! ant to , no! if something is good or evil((
something li, e ! ar and , illing and smuggling guns to mu+aheddin
guerrillas, for e' am#le((then ! e as, the =uestions: 7hat if
everyone did this thingE 7ould that hel# us, in this bit of the
universe, to get there, or ! ould it hold us ba , E)nd then ! e
have a #retty good idea ! hether it's good or evil. 7hat"s more
im#ortant, ! e , no! ! hy it's good or evil. 2here, ho! ! as thatE5
7%C

5&ery good,5 he said ! ithout loo, ing at me. 7hile I"d run through
the summary of his osmologi al model, he"d losed his eyes and
nodded his head, #ursing his li#s in a half smile. 7hen I
on luded it, he turned to loo, at me, and the smile ! idened as
the #leasure and the mis hief s#ar, ed in his eyes. 5Dou , no! , if
you ! anted to do it, you ould e' #ress this idea every bit as
! ell and as a urately as I do.)nd I've been ! or, ing on it and
thin, ing about it for almost all of my life. I annot tell you
ho! ha##y it ma, es me feel to hear you tell it to me in your o! n
! ords.5

5I thin, the ! ords are yours, <hader+i. Dou"ve oa hed me often
enough. Out I do have a ou#le of #roblems. Do I get my =uestion
no! E5

5Des.5

5@, ay. 7e've got things li, e ro , s in the ! orld that aren't alive, and living things li, e trees and fish and #eo#le. Dour cosmology doesn't tell me ! here life and ons iousness ome from. If ro , s are made out of the same stuff that #eo#le are made out of, ho! ome ro , s aren't alive, but #eo#le areE I mean, ! here does life ome fromE5

5I , no! you ! ell enough to be sure that you ! ant me to give you a short, dire t ans! er to this =uestion.5

5I thin, I'd li, e a short, dire t ans! er to _every =uestion,5 I re#lied, laughing.

*e raised an eyebrow! at the foolishness of my fli##ant res#onse and then shoo, his head slo! ly.

5Do you , no! the /nglish #hiloso#her Oertrand RussellE *ave you read any of his boo, sE5

5Deah. I read some of his stuff((at university, and in #rison.5

5*e ! as a favourite of my dear 4r. 4a , en1ie /s=uire,5 <hader smiled. 5I do not often agree ! ith Oertrand Russell's on lusions, but I do li, e the ! ay he arrives at them.)ny! ay, he on e said,)nything that an be #ut in a nutshell should remain there.)nd I do agree ! ith him about that. Out no! , the ans! er to your =uestion is this: life is a feature of all things. 7e ould all it a hara teristi , ! hi h is one of my favourite /nglish

! ords. If you do not s#ea, /nglish as your first language, the ! ord M hara teristi M has an ama1ing sound((li, e ra##ing on a drum, or brea, ing , indling ! ood for a fire. 2o ontinue, every atom in the universe has the hara teristi of life. 2he more om#le' ! ay that atoms get #ut together, the more om#le' is the e' #ression of the hara teristi of life.) ro , is a very sim#le

arrangement of atoms, so the life in a room is so simple that I cannot see it.) That is a very simple arrangement of atoms, so the life in a room is very obvious. Out life is there, in everything, even in a room, and even I cannot see it.

57 here did you get this idea? Is it in the Quran?

5) Actually, it is a concept that appears in one way or another in most of the great religions. I have changed it slightly to suit what I have learned about the world in the last few hundred years. Out the Quran gives me my inspiration for this, and of study, because the Quran commands me to study everything, and learn everything, in order to serve Allah.

50 Out here does this "life" have a source? I insisted, sure that I had him traced in a reductionist dead end at last.

5; life, and all the other characteristics of all the things in the universe, such as consciousness, and free will, and the tendency toward complexity, and even love, was given to the universe by light, at the beginning of time as we know it.

5) What the Quran? Is that what you're talking about?

5 Des. The Quran's expansion happened from a point called a singularity (another of my favourite five-syllable English words (that is almost infinitely dense, and almost infinitely hot, and yet it occupies no space and no time, as we know those things. The point is a boiling cauldron of light energy. Something caused it to expand (I don't know yet what caused it (and from light, all the particles and all the atoms came to exist, along with space and time and all the forces that we know. So, light gave every little particle at the beginning of the universe a set of characteristics, and as those particles combine in more complex ways, the characteristics show themselves in more and more complex ways.

*e #aised, ! at hing my fa e as I struggled ! ith the on e#ts and =uestions and emotions that loo#ed in my mind. *e got a! ay from me again, I thought, suddenly furious ! ith him for having an ans! er to my =uestion, and yet stru , ! ith admiring res#e t for the same reason. 2here ! as al! ays something eerily in ongruous in the ! ise le tures((sometimes they ! ere li, e sermons((of the mafia don) bdel <hader <han. Sitting there against a stone ! all in an all(but(Stone) ge village in) fghanistan, ! ith a argo of smuggled guns and antibioti s nearby, the dissonan e e reated by

his alm, #rofound dis ourse about good and evil, and light and life and ons iousness, ! as enough to fill me ! ith e' as#erated irritation. 7%8

57hat I have +ust told you is the relationshi# bet! een ons iousness and matter,5 <hader #ro laimed, #ausing again until he had my eye. 52his is a , ind of test, and no! you , no! it. 2his is a test that you should a##ly to every man ! ho tells you that he , no! s the meaning of life. /very guru you meet and every tea her, every #ro#het and every #hiloso#her, should ans! er these t! o =uestions for you: 7hat is an ob+e tive, universally a e#table definition of good and evilE)nd, 7hat is the relationshi# bet! een ons iousness and matterE If he annot ans! er these t! o =uestions, as I have done, you , no! that he has not #assed the test.5

5*o! do you , no! all this #hysi sE5 I demanded. 5)ll this about #arti les and singularities and Oig OangsE5

*e stared at me, reading the full measure of the un ons ious insult: *o! is it that an) fghan gangster li, e you , no! s so mu h about sien e and higher , no! ledgeE I loo, ed ba , at him, remembering a day at the slum ! ith \$ohnny 8igar ! hen I"d made the ruel mista, e of assuming him to be ignorant sim#ly be ause he ! as #oor.

52 here is a saying ((When the student is ready, the teacher appears)) (do you know it?) he asked, laughing. It seemed that he was laughing at me, rather than with me.

53 Des, I hurriedly, through clenched teeth.

54 Well, just at the point in my studies of philosophy and religion when I came to need the special knowledge of a scientist, one appeared for me. I knew that there were many answers for me in the science of life and stars and chemistry. Out, unfortunately, these were not the things that my dear father/sister taught to me, even in the most elementary fashion. When I met a physicist, a man who was working at the Oshabha Research Centre in Bombay. He was a very good man, but he had a weakness for gambling at that time. He found himself in big trouble. He lost a lot of money that was not his to lose. He was gambling at one of the clubs owned by a man I knew well ((a man who worked for me, if I needed it.)) and there was more trouble. The scientist was involved with a woman ((he fell in love with her, and he did stupid things for the sake of this love, and so there were many dangers.)) When he came to me, I solved the problems of this scientist, and, even all the matters strictly between us. (One else ever, knew the details of his indiscretions, or of my involvement in solving them.) And, in exchange for this, the man has been teaching me ever since that day. His name is Wolfgang Petersen, and I have arranged it that you will meet him, if you wish, soon after I return.

55 How long has he been teaching you?

56 We have been studying together on and off, for ten

loved <hader <han enough to follo! him into a ! ar. 7asn"t it #ossible that the s ientist loved him +ust as ! elle)nd in thin, ing that, I , ne! I ! as +ealous of the man, the s ientist I didn't , no! and #robably ! ould never meet. \$ealousy, li, e the fla! ed love that bears it, has no res#e t for time or s#a e or ! isely reasoned argument. \$ealousy an raise the dead ! ith a single, s#iteful taunt, or hate a #erfe t stranger for nothing more than the sound of his name.

5Dou are as, ing about life,5 <hader said gently, hanging ta , , 5be ause you are thin, ing about death.)nd you are thin, ing about the ta, ing of a life, if it ha##ens that you must shoot a man.)m I right in thisE5

5Deah,5 I muttered. *e ! as right, but the , illing that #reo u#ied me ! asn"t in)fghanistan. 2he life I ! anted to ta, e ! as #er hed on a throne, in a se ret room in a grotes=ue brothel alled 2he >ala e, in Oombay. 4adame . hou.

5Remember,5 <hader said insisently, resting his hand on my forearm to em#hasise his ! ords. 5Sometimes it is ne essary to do the ! rong thing for the right reasons. 2he im#ortant thing is to be sure that our reasons are right, and that ! e admit the ! rong((that ! e do not lie to ourselves, and onvin e ourselves that ! hat ! e do is right.5

)nd later, as the ! edding ! hirlled and lamoured to the last ! ail of its re+oi ing, and as ! e re+oined our men and s rambled, lattered, and strained our ! ay a ross ne! mountains, I tried to un! ind the ! reath of thorns that <hader had oiled around my heart ! ith his ! ords. 2he ! rong thing for the right reasons ... @n e before he"d tormented me ! ith that #hrase. I he! ed at it, in my mind, as a bear ! ill he! at a leather stra# that binds it by the leg. In my life, the ! rong things ! ere almost al! ays done for the ! rong reasons. /ven the right things that I did ! ere too often goaded by the ! rong reasons.

) gloomy mood en! ra##ed me. It ! as a sullen, doubting tem#er that

I couldn't shake off, and as I rode into the interior I thought often of 71%

Yand Rao, my neighbour from the slum. I remembered Yand's father smiling at me through the metal grille of the visitor's room at Arthur Road Prison: that gentle, handsome father, so serene, and softened with the peace that had suffused his heart. He'd done the wrong thing for the right reasons, as he said it. He'd almost accepted the punishment that he'd earned, as he said to me, as if

it as a privilege or a right. And at last, after too many thinking days and nights, I cursed Yand. I cursed him to drive him from my mind because a voice, not telling me (my own voice, or maybe it was my father's (that I would never, no! that peace. I would never come to that /den in the soul, I here accepted a punishment and a, no! judgement of wrong and right roll away the troubles that lodge like stones in the barren field of an evil heart.

Moving north again at night, I limbed and crossed the narrow pass in the Madam Mountains. The journey of thirty miles (, kilometres as a loser to one hundred and fifty limbing (and (des ending (, kilometres for us. Then, exposed to the sides, I travelled over flatter land for almost fifty kilometres to cross the Yrghastan River and its tributaries three times before I reached the foothills of the Shahbad Pass. And there, with my mind still hooked on its rights and wrongs, I was fired on for the first time.

Chader's command that I command the limb of the Shahbad Pass without a rest saved many lives, including my own, that old evening. We were exhausted after the headlong, trotting march across the open plain. Every man among us hoped for rest at the foothills of the Pass, but Chader urged us on, riding the length of the column and shouting for us to, keep on, keep on, and keep on the pace. Thus I was moving fast when the first shots were fired. I heard the sound: a hollow metal tapping, as if someone was rattling on the side of an empty gasoline can with a piece of

o##er #i#e. Stu#idly, I didn't asso iate it ! ith gunfire at first, and I , e#t trudging for! ard, leading my horse by the reins. 2hen the bullets found their range, and they smashed into the ground, our olumn, and the ro , ! alls around us. 2he men s rambled for over. I fell to the ground, grinding my fa e into the dust of the stony #ath and telling myself that it ! asn't really ha##ening, that I hadn't seen the man in front of me ri##ed o#en a ross his ba , as he stumbled for! ard. @ur men began firing from all around me.)nd ra#id(breathing the dust into my mouth, stiff ! ith fear, I ! as in the ! ar. 711

I might&e stayed there, ! ith my fa e in the dirt and my heart thum#ing seismi terror into the earth, if it ! asn't for my horse. I'd lost the reins, and the horse ! as rearing in fright. 9earing that it might tram#le me, I s rambled to my feet and s rabbled at the flailing reins to regain ontr ol of her. 2he horse that had been so im#ressively obedient to that #oint ! as suddenly the ! orst of the entire olumn. She reared and then bu , ed. She stam#ed her hooves and tried to drag me ba , ! ard. She thrashed and drove us in tight ir les, trying to find an angle ! here she ould , i , ba , ! ard at me. She even bit me, sna##ing at my forearm and ausing intense #ain through three layers of lothes.

I glan ed along the line, left and right. 2hose nearest to the #ass ! ere ma, ing a run for it, leading their animals to! ard the

ro , y shelves for shelter. 2hose immediately in front of me and behind me had managed to bring their horses do! n, and they rou hed beside or behind them. @nly my horse ! as still rearing and ! idely visible. 7ithout a horseman's s, ill, it's a damn hard thing to onvin e a horse to lie do! n in a battle 1one. @ther horses ! ere s reaming in fear, and ea h ! hinny of terror #ut more #ani into mine. I ! anted to save her, to bring her do! n and ma, e less of a target of her, but I ! as afraid for myself as ! ell. 2he enemy fire slammed into the ro , s above and beside me, and ! ith every shattering sound I flin hed li, e a deer nudging a thorn(

hedge.

It's a bizarre feeling, waiting for a bullet to strike: the nearest experience I can recall that's anything like it is falling through space, and waiting for the safety chute to open. There's a special taste, a unique taste. There's a different smell on your skin. And there's a hardness in the eyes, as if they're suddenly made of cold metal. Just when I decided to give up and let the animal fend for herself, she buckled easily and followed my dragging arms down and onto her side. I hurled myself down with her, using her solid middle as a shield. In an attempt to calm her, I reached over to pat at her shoulder. My hands were wet in a bloody pool. Raising my head, I saw that the horse had been struck twice, once high on the shoulder and once in the belly. The wounds were streaming blood with every heaving breath, and the horse was crying ((I have no other word for it. The sound was a breathy, stuttering, wailing sob. I put my head against hers, and I raised my arm around her neck.

The men in my group concentrated their fire on a ridge about one hundred and fifty metres away. With my body pressed hard against the ground, I peered over the mane of my horse to see dusty plumes rise and spill over the distant ridge as bullet after bullet rammed into the earth.

And then it was over. I heard a leader shouting in three languages for the men to stop shooting. We waited for long minutes, in a stillness that groaned and moaned and sobbed. I heard footsteps running along the stones nearby, and looked up to see a soldier running toward me at a rough.

5) re you o, ay, ; inE5

5Deah, I answered, wondering then for the first time if I, too, had been shot. I ran my hands over my legs and arms. 5Deah, I'm all here. I think, I'm still in one piece. Out they shot my horse. She's ((5

I'm doing a count he interrupted me, holding up the palms of both hands to calm me and stop me screaming. Under sent me to see if you're okay and do a head count. I'll be back, soon. Stay here and don't move.

Out she's

She's finished he hissed and then softened his tone. The horse is gone, in. She's done for. She's not the only one. *abib's gonna finish them off. Just stay here and keep your head down. I'll be back.

*e ran off at a rough, stopping here and there along the column behind me. My horse was breathing hard, whimpering with every third or fourth hugging breath. The flow of blood was slow but steady. The sound in her belly was oozing a dark, fluid that was darker than blood. I tried to soothe her, stroking her neck, and then I realised that I hadn't given her a name. It seemed grievously cruel, somehow, for her to die without a name. I searched my mind, and when I pulled the net of thought up from the blue, there was a name, glittering and true.

I'm going to call you Claire, I whispered into the mare's ear. She was a beautiful girl. She always made me look good, wherever I went. When I was with her I always looked like I was doing. And I didn't start to love her, really, until she called away from me for the last time. She said I was interested in everything and committed to nothing. She said that to me once. And she was right. She was right.

I was babbling, raving, in shock. I, no, the symptoms no. I've seen other men under fire for the first time. Rare feeling, no, really! What to do: their reactions are returning fire before their bodies have finished an instinctive rough and roll. Others laugh, and can't stop laughing. Some

71G

ry, and all for their mama, or their life, or their God. Some get so quiet, shrinking down inside themselves, that even their friends get shocked by it. And some talk, just like I talked to my dying horse.

*abib stumbled up to me in a slithering, zigzag run, and slammed me into the mare's ear. He held her over thoroughly, running his hands over the wounds and probing under the thickly veined hide to feel for the bullets. He pulled his knife out of its scabbard. It was a long knife, with a dog's tooth point. He positioned it over the horse's throat and then paused. His mad eyes met mine. There was a sunburst of gold around the pupils of his eyes that seemed to pulse and whirl. They were big eyes, but the madness in them was bigger, straining and bulging at them as if it wanted to burst outward from his very brain. And yet he was sane enough to sense my helpless grief, and to offer me the knife.

It may be that I should've taken the knife and killed the horse, my horse, myself. Maybe that's what a good man, a committed man, would've done. I couldn't. I looked at the knife and the trembling throat of the horse, and I couldn't do it. I shook my head. *abib pushed the knife into the horse's neck, and gave it a

subtle, almost elegant twist of his wrist. The mare shuddered, but allowed herself to be calmed. When the knife left her throat, the blood gushed in heart-thrusted bursts onto her chest and the sodden ground. Slowly, the straining animal relaxed, and the eyes glazed over, and then the great heart was still.

I looked from the gentle, dead, unfearing eyes of the horse into the seriousness that appeared in *abib's eyes, and the moment that we shared was so charged with emotion, so surreally alien to the worlds I knew, that my hand slid involuntarily along my body to the gun in my holster. *abib grinned at me, a toothy baboon grin that was impossible to read, and stumbled away along the line to

the net wounded horse.

5) re you o, ayE5

5) re you o, ayE5

5) re you o, ayE5

57 hatE5

5I said, are you o, ayE5 <haled as, ed, sha, ing a handful of
lothing at my hest until I loo, ed him in the eye.

5Deah. Sure.5 I fo used on his fa e, ! ondering ho! long I'd been
staring at my dead horse, ! ith my hand resting on her #un tured
throat. I loo, ed around me at the s, y. 2he night ! as lose, only
minutes a! ay. 71H

5*o! bad ... ho! bad ! as itE5

57e lost one man. 4ad+id.) lo al guy.5

5I sa! it. *e ! as right in front of me. 2he bullets ut him o#en
li, e a an o#ener. 9u , , man, it ! as so =ui , . *e ! as alive, and
then his ba , o#ened u#, and he dro##ed over li, e a ut #u##et.
I'm sure he ! as dead before his , nees hit the ground. It ! as that
fastB5

5) re you sure you're o, ayE5 <haled as, ed ! hen I #aused for
breath.

5@f ourse I'm fu , un o, ayB5 I sna##ed, a #urely)ustralian
a ent #un hing into the e' #letive. 2he gleam in his eyes goaded
me for another heartbeat of ve' ation and I almost shouted at him,
but then I sa! the ! armth in his e' #ression, and the on ern. I
laughed instead. Relieved, he laughed ! ith me. 5@f ourse I'm
o, ay.)nd I'd be a lot better if you'd sto# as, ing me. I'm +ust a
bit ... tal, ative ... that's all. Gimme some sla , . \$esusB) man

Just got killed on one side of me, and my horse got killed on the other side. I don't know whether I'm lucky or injured.

"You're lucky," he answered, smiling. "His tone is as more

serious than his laughing eyes. "It's a mess, but it could've been worse."

"Worse?"

"They didn't use anything heavy (no mortars, no heavy machine guns. They could've used them if they had them, and it could've been a lot worse. That means it was a small patrol, probably Afghans, not Russians, just testing us out or trying their luck. As it is, we've got three wounded, and we lost four horses."

"Where are the wounded guys?"

"Ahead, in the ass. Don't announce a location to them with me."

"Sure. Sure. Gimme a hand with my gear."

"He reached the saddle and bridle from my dead horse, and trotted up the line of men and horses to the mouth of the narrow ass.

"The wounded men were lying within the cover of a shoulder of rock. He stood nearby, focusing intently at the plain behind me. He moved as gently but hurriedly removing the

clothing from one of the wounded men. I glanced at the direction of the

body, and they were too deep to reach without major surgery. One, in the upper chest, had shattered the collarbone, and the other had lodged in his stomach, tearing a side and undoubtedly fatal wound from hip to hip. The third man, a farmer named Siddiqi, had a bad head wound. His horse had thrown him against the rocks, and he'd struck a boulder with the top of his head, near the crown. It was bleeding, and there was a clear fracture of the cranium. My fingers slid along the ridge of broken bone, greasy with his blood. The broken skull had split into three hunks. One of them was so loose that I, nearly, it would come away in my hand if I tugged at it. His matted hair was all that held his skull together. There was also a thick swelling at the base of the skull, where his head met his neck. He was unconscious, and I doubted that he would ever open his eyes again.

I glanced at the sky once more. There was so little daylight left, so little time. I had to make a decision, a choice, and help one man to live, maybe, while I let other men die. I wasn't a doctor, and I had no experience under fire. The doctor had fallen to me, it seemed, because I, nearly, a little more than the next man, and I was willing to do it. It was cold. I was cold. I was shivering in a sticky smear of blood, and I could feel it soaking

through the seams of my pants. When I looked at Chader he nodded, as if he was reading my thoughts. Feeling sick, with guilt and fear, I pulled a blanket over Siddiqi, to keep him warm, and then I abandoned him to the doctor, on the man with the broken arm.

Chader pulled open the comprehensive first aid kit beside me. I threw a plastic bottle of antibiotic powder, antiseptic wash, bandages, and scissors on the ground at Ahmed's feet, beside the man who'd been shot. I snatched out brief instructions for cleaning and dressing the wounds, and as Ahmed went to work, covering the bullet wounds, I turned my attention to the broken arm. The man spoke to me urgently. I, nearly, his face fell. He had a special talent for herding the unruly goats, and I'd often seen the temperamental creatures following him, unbidden, as he

!andered around our am#.

57hat did he sayE I didn't get it.5

5*e as, ed you if it's going to hurt,5 <haled muttered, trying to
, ee# his voi e and his e' #ression reassuringly neutral.

5I had this ha##en to me on e,5 I said in re#ly. 5Something +ust
li, e this. 71C

I , no! e' a tly ho! mu h it hurts. It hurts so mu h, brother, that
I thin, you should ta, e his gun a! ay.5

5Right,5 <haled re#lied. 59u , .5

*e smiled broadly, and brushed at the ground beside the ! ounded
man, gradually easing the <alashni, ov out of the man"s hand and
out of rea h. 2hen, as dar, ness losed over us, and five of the
man"s friends held him do! n, I ! ren hed and t! isted his shattered
arm until it resembled the straight, healthy limb that it on e
had been and never ! ould be again.

5/e() llahB /e() llahB5 he shouted, over and over through len hed
teeth.

7hen the brea, ! as ! ra##ed and set ! ith hard #lasti s#lints, and
! e"d #at hed over the ! ounds on the man ! ho"d been shot, I
hastily ! ra##ed a dressing around un ons ious Siddi=i"s head.)t
on e ! e set off into the narro! #ass. 2he argo ! as distributed
among all the remaining horses. 2he man ! ith the bullet ! ounds
rode a horse, su##orted on both sides by his friends. Siddi=i ! as
stra##ed a ross one of the #a , horses, as ! as the body of 4ad+id,
the) fghan ! ho"d been , illed in the atta , . 2he rest of us
! al, ed.

2he limb ! as stee# but short. >uffing hard in the thin air and
shivering in a old that #enetrated to my bones, I #ushed and
dragged the relu tant horses ! ith the rest of the men. 2he) fghan
fighters never on e om#lained or grumbled. 7hen the #it h of one

limb as steeper than anything I'd seen on the plateau, I paused at last, panting heavily to regain my strength. Two men

turned to see that I'd halted, and they slid down the path to me, giving us the precious metres they'd just gained. With huge smiles and encouraging pats on the shoulder, they helped me to drag a horse up the slope and then bounded off to help those ahead.

These Afghans may not be the best men in the world to live with, Ahmed added. He puffed as he struggled up the sprawling trail behind me. Out they are certainly the best men in the world to die with!

After five hours of the limb we reached our destination, a camp in the Shar-i-Safa mountains. The camp was sheltered from the air by a prodigious ledge of rock. The ground beneath had been excavated to form a vast cave leading to a network of other caves. Several smaller, camouflaged bunkers surrounded the cave in a ring that reached to the fringe of the flat, rugged mountain plateau.

Chader called us to a halt in the light of the rising full moon. His scout, Abib had alerted the camp to our arrival, and the muhajeddin were

waiting for us (and the supplies we brought) with great excitement. A message was sent back to me, in the centre of the column, that Chader wanted me. I jogged forward to join him.

We'll ride into the camp along this path. Chader, Ahmed, Akber, Ahmad, and some others. We do not, notably, ho is in the camp. The attack on us at Shahbad Pass tells me that Usmatullah Khan has changed sides again, and joined the Russians. The Pass has been his for three years, and we should have been safe there. Abib tells me that the camp is friendly, and that these are our own men, waiting for us. Out they are still behind cover, and they will not come out to greet us. I

thin, it will be better for us if our Yemeni man is riding with us, near the front, behind me. I cannot tell you to do this. I can only say, it will you ride with us?

Des, I replied, hoping that the word sounded firmer in his ears than it did in my own.

Good. - alger and the others have prepared the horses. We will leave at once.

- alger led several horses forward, and he limbed eagerly into the saddles. He must have been far more tired than I was, and his body must have rested with many more pains and complaints, but he was straight-backed in the saddle and he held the green and white standard at his hip with a rigid arm. Imitating him, I sat up straight and, indeed, smartly to start the horse forward. Our small column moved off slowly into a silvered moonlight so strong that it cast looming shadows on the grey rocks.

The approach to the camp from that southern limb was along a

narrow stone path that sloped in a gradual, even curve from right to left. Beside the path on our left was a steep drop of some thirty metres to a rubble of broken boulders. On our right was the smooth rock face of a sheer wall. When we were perhaps half way along the path, I watched attentively by our own men and the muhaddin in the camp, I developed an irritating ram in my right hip. The ram usually became a piercing, not of pain and the more that I tried to ignore it, the more agonising it felt.

Attempting to relieve the stress on my hip, I too, my right foot out of the stirrup and tried to stretch my leg. With all the weight on my left leg, I stood a little in the saddle. Without warning, my left foot gave way beneath me as my boot slipped from the stirrup, and I felt myself falling sideways out of the saddle toward the deep, hard drop to the stones. 718

Self-reservation instincts set my limbs flailing, and I flutted

at the horse's neck, with my arms and my free right leg as I swung down and around. In the time it takes to sharpen your teeth, I'd fallen from the saddle and rolled myself upside down around the neck of the horse. I called on it to stop, but it ignored me, nodding onward along the narrow trail. I couldn't let go. The path was so narrow, and the drop so steep, that I was sure I would fall if I released my grip. And the horse wouldn't stop. So I hung on, with my arms and my legs wrapped around its neck, upside down, while its head gently bobbed and dipped next to mine.

I heard my fellow men laughing first. It was that helpless, stuttering, choking laughter that makes men suffer for days with the ache of it in their ribs. It was the kind of laughter that you're sure will kill you if you can't get that next gasping breath. And then I heard the mu'aheddin fighters laughing from the camp. And I raised my head backward to see Chader, facing around in his saddle and laughing as hard as the rest. And then I started to laugh, and when the laughter reached my arms, as I clutched at the horse, I laughed again. And as I choked out an anguished, roaring "Stop! Stop!" and the men laughed harder than ever.

And so I entered the camp of the mu'aheddin fighters. They surrounded me at once, helping me from the horse's neck, and steadying me on my feet. A young column of men followed us across the narrow path, and reached out to grab me on the back, and slap at my shoulders. Seeing that familiarity, the mu'aheddin joined in the slaughtering chorus, and it was fully fifteen minutes before the last man left my side and I could sit down to rest my aching legs.

Getting you to ride with him wasn't Chader's best (ever) idea, Chaled Mansari said, sliding down a boulder face to sit beside me with his back to the stone. "Out fucking you, man, you are real popular after that trip. That's easily the funniest thing those guys have ever seen in their lives."

59or 8hrist"s sa, eB5 I sighed, ! ith a last refle' ive giggle of laughter. 5I rode over a hundred mountains and rossed ten rivers, most of it in the dar, , for a ! hole month, and everything ! as o, ay. I roll into the am#, and I"m hangin" on my horse"s ne , li, e a fu , in" mon, ey.5

5Don"t get me started againB5 <haled s#luttered, laughing and lut hing at his side.

I laughed ! ith him, and although I ! as e' hausted and resigned to the ridi ule, I didn"t ! ant to laugh any more, so I glan ed around to my right 719 to avoid his eye.) anvas shamiana in amouflage olours #rovided shelter for our ! ounded men. In the shado! s beside it, men ! ere #ulling argo from the horses and ferrying it into theavern. I sa! *abib dragging something long and heavy a! ay from behind the ! or, ing line, and dee#er into the dar, ness beyond.

57hat"s ...5 I began, still hu , ling. 57hat"s *abib doing over thereE5

<haled ! as instantly alert, and +um#ed to his feet. *is urgen y =ui , ened me, and I lea#t u# after him. 7e ran to the line of ro , s that formed one edge of the flattened mountain #lateau, and as ! e rounded them ! e sa! him , neeling, legs astride the body of a man. It ! as Siddi=i. 7hile all the attention ! as on the fas inating bundles of the argo, *abib had dragged the un ons ious man from beneath the anvas a! ning. \$ust as ! e rea hed him, *abib drove his long , nife into the man"s ne , and gave it that deli ate t! ist. Siddi=i"s legs t! it hed a tiny, trembling sha, e and then ! ere still. *abib #ulled the , nife a! ay and turned to see us staring ba , at him. 2he horror and rage in our fa es seemed only to fuel the burning madness in his eyes. *e grinned at us.

5<haderB5 <haled shouted, his fa e as #ale as the moon(! ashed

stone around us. 5<haderbhaiB Iddar aob5 8ome herel

I heard an ans! ering shout from behind us some! here, but I didn't move. 4y eyes ! ere on *abib. *e turned to fa e me, s! inging his leg over the murdered man and rou hing on his haun hes as if he ! as about to s#ring at me. 2he mani grin lo , ed on his features, but his eyes gre! dar, er((more afraid, #erha#s, or more unning. *e turned his head =ui , ly and tilted it at an e entri angle, as if listening ! ith feral intensity to a faint sound in the distant night. I heard nothing but the noises of the am# behind me and the soft ! ail of the ! ind as it ousred through the anyons and ravines and se ret #ath! ays. In that instant, the land, the mountains, the very ountry of)fghanistan seemed to me so desolate, so blea hed of loveliness and tenderness that it ! as li, e the lands a#e of *abib's insanity. I felt that I ! as tra##ed inside the stony ma1e of his hallu inated brain.

7hile he listened, tense in his animal rou h, ! ith his fa e

turned a! ay from me, I sli##ed the stud(li# off my holster. I eased the gun out, and into my hands. Oreathing hard, I follo! ed <hader"s instru tions automati ally, not realising until it ! as done that I"d fli , ed off the safety, hambered a round by #ulling ba , the sliding return, and o , ed the 7F% hammer. 2he sounds brought *abib round to fa e me. *e loo, ed at the gun in my hand. It ! as aimed at his hest. *e loo, ed ba , to my eyes, moving his ga1e slo! ly, almost languorously. 2he long , nife ! as still in his hand. I don't , no! ! hat e' #ression lit my fa e in the moonlight. It an"t have been good. 4y mind ! as made u#: if he moved a millimetre to! ard me, I ! ould #ull the trigger as many times as it too, to finish him.

*is grin ! idened into a laugh((at least, it loo, ed li, e a laugh. *is mouth moved, and his head shoo, , but there ! as no sound.)nd his eyes, ignoring <haled om#letely, stared a message into mine.)nd then I ould hear him, hear his voi e in my head. Dou seeE his eyes said to me. I'm right not to trust any of you ... Dou

I want to kill me ...) If of you ... Don't want me dead ... Out it's
all right ... I don't mind ... I give you my permission ... I
want you to do it ...

We heard a sound, a footstep, behind us. I halted and I turned and
I hurried in fright to see Iqbal, - a leader, and Ahmed . I was rushing
to join us. When I looked back, , *Abid ! was gone.

What is wrong? Iqbal asked.

It's *Abid, Iqbal asked anxiously, searching the darkness for a sign
of the madman. *He went away ... he is away ... he killed
Siddiqi ... dragged his body here, and stabbed him in the
throat.

Where he is? - a leader demanded angrily.

I don't know, Iqbal replied, shaking his head. Did you see
him go, Iqbal?

No. I turned with you, to see Iqbal, and when I looked back, he
was ... must ... gone. I think, he must've turned down into the
ravine.

*He can't have turned, Iqbal frowned. It's gotta be fifty
yards down there. *He can't have turned.

Iqbal Iqbal ! was kneeling beside the dead man, his hands
with his hands held palms upwards.

We look for him tomorrow, Ahmed said, putting a comforting
hand on Iqbal's shoulder. *He looked up at the night sky. Here
is not much of this moonlight left for us to worry, . We still have
a lot to do. Don't worry. If he's still around here, I'll find
him tomorrow.) And if I do not (if he is gone (perhaps it is not
the worst for us, Iqbal

5I ! ant the guard to ! at h for him tonight,5 <haled ordered. 5@ur
o! n guys((the men ! ho , no! *abib ! ell((not the guys from here.5

5@ui,5 . adeh agreed. 7F1

5I don't ! ant them to shoot him, if they an hel# it,5 <haled
ontinued, 5but I don't ! ant them to ta, e any han es, either.
4a, e a he , of all his stuff((he , his horse, and his #a , . See
! hat ! ea#ons or e' #losives he might've had on him. I didn't get
too good a loo, , before, but I thin, he had some stuff under his
+a , et. 9u , , this is a messB5

5Don't ! orry,5 . adeh muttered, #utting a hand on <haled"s
shoulder on e more.

5I an't hel# it,5 the >alestinian insisted, loo, ing around him
into the dar, ness. 5It's a fu , in" bad start. I thin, he"s out
there, staring at us, right no! .5

7hen <hader om#leted his #rayers, ! e arried Siddi=i"s body ba ,
to the anvas shamiana, and ! ra##ed it in loth until the rituals
of burial ould be #erformed on the follo! ing day. 7e ! or, ed for
a fe! hours more and then lay do! n in the avern, side by side
for slee#. 2he snoring ! as loud, and the e' hausted men ! ere
restless in their slumber, but I lay a! a, e for other reasons. 4y
eyes , e#t drifting ba , to the #la e, moonless and thi , ly
shado! ed, ! here *abib had disa##eared. <haled ! as right. It had
started badly, <hader"s ! ar, and the ! ords e hoed in my ! a, eful
mind.) bad start ...

I tried to fi' my eyes on the lear and #erfe t stars of that
fated night"s bla , heaven, but again and again my on entration
la#sed, and I found myself staring at the dar, edge of the
#lateau.)nd I , ne! , in the ! ay ! e , no! ! ithout a ! ord that love
is lost, or in the sudden, sure ! ay ! e , no! that a friend is
false and doesn't really li, e us at all, that <hader"s ! ar ! ould
end mu h ! orse, for all of us, than it had begun.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

For the two months of cold and ever colder days we lived with the guerrilla fighters in their 'home' on the Shar-i-Safa range. These were hard months in many ways, but our mountain stronghold never came under direct fire, and we were relatively safe. The camp was only fifty kilometers from Kandahar. It was about twenty kilometers from the main Kabul highway and about fifty kilometers south (east of the) Rghandab Dam. The Russians occupied Kandahar, but their hold on the southern capital was tenuous and the city was subjected to recurring sieges. Rockets had been fired into the city centre, and guerrilla fighting on the outskirts claimed a steady toll of lives. The main highway was in

the hands of several well-armed mujaheddin units. Russian tanks and trucks, convoys from Kabul were forced to blast their way through blockades to resupply Kandahar, and that they did, from month to month. Afghan regular army units loyal to the Kabul government retreated the strategically important Rghandab Dam, but frequent attacks on the dam threatened their hold on the precious resource. Thus we were roughly in the centre of a triad of violent conflict zones, each of which constantly demanded new men and guns. The Shar-i-Safa range offered no strategic advantage to our enemies, so the fighting didn't find us in our well-disguised mountain caverns.

The weather shifted during those weeks to the cold heart of a severe winter. Snow fell in fitful gusts and squalls that left us sodden in our many-layered hats or uniforms. Freezing mist drifted so slowly through the mountains that it sometimes hung suspended for hours at a time: still and white and as impenetrable to the gaze as frosted glass. The ground was always muddy or frozen, and even the stone walls of the caves we lived in seemed to ring and tremble with the icy chill of the season.

7FG

Part of the leader's cargo had consisted of hand tools and machine

components. They'd set up a table or, sometimes in the first days after our arrival, and they were busy throughout the reeving process of the interior. There was a small machine lathe, which had bolted to a homemade table. The lathe ran on a diesel engine. The fighters felt certain that there were no enemy forces within earshot, but still the dampened its noise with a little igloo of burlap sacks that covered the engine, leaving gaps for the air inlet and exhaust gas outlet. The same engine powered a grinding wheel and a speed drill.

With that assembly, the fighters repaired their weapons and sometimes adapted them to suit new and different purposes. First among those weapons were the mortars. After air raid and tank, the most effective battle weapon in Afghanistan was the Russian 82mm (millimetre) mortar. The guerrillas bought the mortars, stole them, or captured them in hand-to-hand fighting, often at the cost of human lives. The weapons were then turned on the Russians, who'd brought them into the country in order to conquer it. Afterward, sometimes stripped the mortars down, refitted them, and adapted them in adapted bags for use in combat zones as far away as Afghanistan in the west, and Kashmir in the north.

Part from the cartridge makers and rifling tools, the ammunition and the explosives, the Germans also included new parts for the Kalashnikovs that he'd purchased in the arms bazaars in Peshawar. The Russian Kalashnikov Kalashnikov (as designed by Kalashnikov) was developed in the 1940s, in response to German armament innovations. Toward the end of the Second World War, German army generals disobeyed the Hitler orders of Hitler and produced an automatic assault rifle. The armaments engineer Hugo Schmeisser, using the germ of an earlier Russian

concept, developed a weapon that was short, light, and fired its magazine of thirty bullets at a rotational rate of more than a hundred rounds per minute. Hitler was so impressed with the weapon he'd previously forbidden that he named it the Sturmgewehr, or Storm Weapon, and immediately ordered its

intensive production. It was too little, too late for the final effort, but Sten's Storm 7.62mm set the trend for all assault rifles for the rest of the century.

The Sten, often called the "Uzi of the East", was the most influential and widely manufactured of the early assault rifles, created by diverting some of the propellant gases produced by a fired bullet into a cylinder above the barrel. The gas drove a piston that forced the bolt back, against its spring, and ejected the hammer for the next round. The rifle weighed about five kilograms, carried thirty rounds in its curved metal magazine, and fired the 7.62mm rounds at around 600 feet per second, over an effective range greater than 600 metres. It fired more than a hundred rounds per minute on auto, and about forty rounds every minute on the semi-automatic, single-shot function.

The rifle had its limitations, and the mujaheddin fighters were usually told to aim them to the left. The low muzzle velocity of the heavy 7.62mm round defined a looping trajectory that called for tricky adjustments to hit a target at three hundred metres or more. The muzzle flash on firing the Sten was so bright, particularly with the early 7H series, that it blinded the firer at night, and often betrayed his position. The barrel overheated rapidly, becoming too hot to hold. Sometimes a round got so hot in the chamber that it ejected in the user's face. That fact alone kept many guerrilla fighters held the gun away from their bodies, or over their heads, in battle operations.

Nevertheless, the rifle flourished everywhere after total immersion in water, mud, or snow, and it remained one of the most efficient and reliable killing machines ever devised. In the first four decades after its development, fifty million of them were produced (more than any other firearm in history) (and the Sten, in all its forms, was carried as a preferred strike weapon by revolutionaries, regular soldiers, mercenaries, and gangsters all over the fighting world.

The original Sten was made of forged and milled steel. The

7H, #rodu ed in the 197%s, ! as made from stam#ed metal #arts. Some of the older) fghan fighters re+e ted the ne! er ! ea#on, ! ith its smaller ?.H?(millimetre round and its orange #lasti maga1ine, #referring the solidity of the heavier)<(H7. Some younger fighters hose the 7H model, dismissing the heavier gun as an anti=ue. 2he models they used ! ere #rodu ed in /gy#t, Syria, Russia, and 8hina.)lthough they ! ere essentially identi al, the fighters often #referred one to another, and the trade in the ! ea#ons, even ! ithin the same unit, ! as energeti and intense.

<hader"s ! or, sho#s re#aired and refitted the)<s of every series, and modified them as re=uires. 2he ! or, sho#s ! ere #o#ular #la es. 2he) fghan men ! ere insatiable in their desire to , no! about ! ea#ons and learn ne! s, ill! ith them. It ! as n't a fren1ied or brutal uriosity. It ! as sim#ly ne essary to , no! ho! to handle guns in a land that had been 7F? invaded by)le'ander the Great, the *uns, the Sa, as, the Sythians, the 4ongols, the 4oghuls, the Safavids, the Oritish, and the Russians, among many others. /ven ! hen they ! eren't studying at the ! or, sho#s or hel#ing out ! ith the ! or, , the men gathered there to drin, tea made on s#irit stoves, smo, e igarettes, and tal, about their loved ones.

)nd for t! o months I ! or, ed ! ith them every day. I melted lead and other metals in the little forge. I hel#ed to gather s ra#s of fire! ood, and arried ! ater from a s#ring at the foot of a nearby ravine. 2rudging through the light sno! I dug out ne! latrines, and arefully overed them over and on ealed them again ! hen they ! ere full. I turned ne! #arts on the turret lathe, and melted the heli al metal shavings to ma, e more #arts. In the mornings I tended to the horses, ! hi h ! ere billeted in another ave further do! n the mountain. 7hen it ! as my turn to mil, the goats, I hurned the mil, into butter and hel#ed to oo, naan bread. If any man needed attention for a ut or gra1e or s#rained an, le, I set u# the first(aid , it and did my best to

heal him.

I learned the answers, singing choruses of a few songs, and in the evenings when the fires were smothered and we huddled together for warmth, I sang with the men as softly as they did. I listened to the stories that they whispered into the darkness, and that I heard, Ahmad, and Al-eer translated for me. One day when the men prayed, I felt with them in silence. And at night, when I lost myself in the breathing, snoring sounds of their soldier(s) entered sleep (smells of food, smoke, gun oil, headband, soap, piss, shit, sweat, soap, into the tent (sergeant, unshaven human and horse hair, liniment and saddle softener, gummin and orriander, eucalyptus, mint tooth powder, hair, tobacco, and a hundred others) I dreamed with them of homes and hearts we longed to see again.

When, when the second month ended, and the last preparations were repaired and modified, and the supplies were brought with us were all but exhausted, Chaderbhai ordered us to prepare for the long march home. We planned to make a detour west, toward Chandahar and away from the border with Afghanistan, to deliver some horses to his family. After that, with marching gear, supplies and light preparations, we would march by night until we reached the safety of the Afghan border.

The horses are nearly loaded, I reported to Chader when I'd packed my own gear. Chader and Al-eer will be back here when it's all done. They told me to let you know. 57FC

We were on the flattened top of a tower that gave a commanding view

of the valleys and then the desert plain that stretched from the foot of the mountains all the way to Chandahar at the horizon. For once, the cloudy mists and snow had cleared enough for us to take in the whole panorama of the view. There were dark, thick clouds massed to the east of us, and the cold air was damp with the rain and snow they would bring, but for the moment we could see all the way to the end of the world, and our entry eyes were

dro! ning in the beauty of it.

51n - ovember of 1878, the same month that ! e started this mission, the Oritish for ed their ! ay through the <hyber >ass, and the se ond) fghan ! ar ! ith them began,5 <hader said, ignoring my re#ort, or #erha#s res#onding to it in his o! n ! ay. *e stared to! ard the ri##le of ha1e on the hori1on aused by the smo, e and fire of distant <andahar. I , ne! that some of the hori1on"s shimmer and dri11le might"ve been e' #loding ro , ets, fired into the ity by men ! ho"d lived there on e as tea hers and mer hants. In the ! ar against the Russian invaders, they"d be ome devils in e' ile, raining fire u#on their o! n homes and sho#s and s hools.

52hrough <hyber >ass, there ame one of the most feared, brave, and brutal soldiers in the ! hole Oritish Ra+. *is name ! as Roberts, ; ord 9rederi , Roberts. *e a#tured <abul, and began a ruthless martial la! there. @n one day, eighty(seven) fghan soldiers ! ere , illed by hanging in the #ubli s=uare. Ouildings and mar, ets ! ere destroyed, villages ! ere burned, and hundreds of) fghan #eo#le ! ere , illed. In \$une, an) fghan >rin e named)yub <han announ ed a #ihad to drive out the Oritish. *e left *erat ! ith ten thousand men. *e ! as an an estor of mine, a man of my family, and many of my , insmen ! ere in the army that he raised.5

*e sto##ed tal, ing and fli , ed a glan e at me, his golden eyes gleaming beneath the silver(grey bro! s. *is eyes ! ere smiling, but his +a! ! as set and his li#s ! ere om#ressed so tightly that they sho! ed ! hite at the rims. Reassured, #erha#s, that I ! as listening to him, he loo, ed ba , to the smouldering hori1on, and s#o, e again.

52he Oritish offi er in harge of <andahar ity at that time, a man named Ourro! s, ! as si' ty(three years old, the same age that I am today. *e mar hed out of <andahar ! ith one thousand five hundred men((Oritish and Indian soldiers((and he met >rin e)yub at a #la e alled 4ai! and. Dou an see the #la e from here, ! here ! e sit, ! hen the ! eather is good enough. In the battle, both armies fired anons, , illing 7F7

hundreds of men in the most terrible ways that can be imagined. When they met each other, as one man to another man, they fired their guns at such close range that the bullets went through one body to strike the next. The British lost half their number. The Afghans lost two thousand five hundred men. Out they went on the battle, and the British were forced to retreat to Kandahar. British immediately surrounded the city, and the siege of Kandahar began.⁵

It was cold, bitterly cold on the windy tor, despite the unusually bright, clear sunlight. I felt my legs and arms growing numb, and I longed to stand up and stretch my feet, but I didn't want to disturb him. Instead, I lit two beedies, and passed one to him. *e averted it, raising his eyebrow in thanks, and too, too long afterwards before continuing.

5; Lord Roberts ((do you know something, Sir, in my first tea here, my dear father, when he said this thing, Oobs your uncle, all the time, and it became a thing that I also said, to imitate him. Then, one day, he told me that the saying came from him, from Lord Roberts, because, you see, the man who killed my uncle in hundreds of ways, and to his own soldiers that they called him Anle Oobs.)nd they said that if he was in charge, everything would be well ((Oobs your uncle. I never said that again, not ever, after he told me that.)nd something that is very strange ((my dear father, when he said that as the grandson of a man who fought in the army of Lord Roberts. *is grandfather and my men fought each other in the second British war against Afghanistan. That is why father had such fascination for the history of my country and such knowledge about the wars.)nd, thanks be to Allah, I did have him as my friend, and my tea here, while men were still alive who bore the scars of fighting the war that killed his grandfather, and killed mine.⁵

*e averted again, and I listened to the wind, feeling the first sting of the news that it was bringing to us: the shivering

! ind that began in distant Oamiyan, and dragged the snow and icy and frosty air from every mountain all the way to Kandahar.

5) and so Lord Roberts went from Kabul, with a force of ten thousand men, to relieve the siege of Kandahar. 2) Most of his men were Indian soldiers (and they were good fighting men, those Indian Sepoys. Roberts marched them from Kabul to Kandahar, a distance of three hundred miles, in twenty days. 4) With more than the distance covered, 7F8

you and I, from Ghazni, on our journey (and you, not that too, us a month, with good horses, and help from villages along the way.

) and they marched, from freezing snow mountains to burning desert, and then, after twenty days of this unbelievable march through hell, they fought a great battle with the army of Sher Ali Khan, and they defeated him. Roberts saved the British in the city, and from that day, even after he became the field marshal of all the soldiers in the British Empire, he was always known as Roberts of Kandahar.5

57 as Sher Ali Khan, killed E5

5-o. *e es a#ed. 2) When the British put his cousin Abdur Rahman Khan on the throne of Afghanistan. Abdur Rahman Khan, also an ancestor of mine, ruled the country with such a special wisdom that the British had no real power in Afghanistan. 2) The situation was exactly the same as it was before (before the great soldier and great killer, Gobs your uncle, forced his way through the

<hyber> pass to fight the war. Out the point of this story, not that I sit here and look at the fires of my burning city, is that Kandahar is the key to Afghanistan. Kabul is the heart, but Kandahar is the soul of this nation, and who rules Kandahar also rules Afghanistan. 7) When the Russians are forced to leave my city, they will lose this war. -ot until then.5

5) I hate it all, I sighed, sure in my own mind that the new war would change nothing: that wars can't really change things. It's

5@, ay,5 I grinned, 5I'm not the best horseman in the ! orld.5

*e laughed the harder.

5Out I really started to miss them ! hen ! e got here and you told us to stable the horses do! n the mountain. It's funny((I sort of got used to them being around, and it's al! ays made me feel good,

someho! , going do! n to see them and brush them and feed them.5

5I understand,5 he murmured, reading my eyes. 5Tell me, ! hen the others are #raying and you +oin them((I've seen you sometimes, , neeling behind them and not very lose((! hat ! ords are you sayingE)re they #rayersE5

5I'm ... not really saying anything at all,5 I re#lied, fro! ning. I lit t! o more beedies, not for the need of them, but for the distra tion they #rovided, and their little ! armth.

57hat are you thin, ing, then, if you're not s#ea, ingE5 he as, ed, a e#ting the se ond igarette as he tossed a! ay the butt of the first.

5I ouldn't all them #rayers. I don't thin, so. I thin, about #eo#le, mostly. I thin, about my mother ... and my daughter. I thin, about)bdullah ... and >raba, er((I've told you about him, my friend ! ho died. I remember friends, and #eo#le I love.5

5Dou thin, about your mother. 7hat about your fatherE5

5- o.5

I said it =ui , ly((too =ui , ly, #erha#s((and I felt him ! at hing me losely as the se onds #assed.

5Is your father living, ; inE5

I think, so. Out I ... I can't be sure.)nd I don't care, one way or the other.5 7G%

5You must care about your father,5 he declared, looking at me again. It seemed such a ponderous ending admonition to me then: he said nothing about my father or my relationship to him. I was so caught up in resentments, new and old, that I didn't hear the anguish in his voice. I didn't realise, as I do now, that he, too, was an exiled son talking about his own father.

5You're more of a father to me than he is,5 I said, and although I felt it to be true, and I was opening my heart to him, the words came out sounding sultry and almost spiteful.

5Don't say that5 he snapped, glaring at me. It was the closest he ever came to showing anger in my presence, and I flinched involuntarily at the sudden vehemence. His expression softened at once, and he reached out to put a hand on my shoulder. 5What about your dreams? What are you dreaming about here?5

5Dreams?5

5Des. Tell me about your dreams.5

5I'm not having many,5 I replied, trying hard to recall. 5It's

hard, you know, but I've had nightmares for a long time (pretty much since the escape from jail. - nightmares about being caught, or fighting to stop them from catching me. Out since I've been up here, I don't know if it's the thin air, or being so damn tired and old when I get to sleep, or maybe just worry about the war, but I'm not having those nightmares. -ot here. I've had a couple of good dreams, in fact.5

5Go on.5

I didn't want to go on: the dreams had been about Clara.

5\$ust ... ha##y dreams, about being in love.5

5Good,5 he murmured, nodding several times, and ta, ing his hand from my shoulder. *e seemed satisfied ! ith my re#ly, but his e' #ression ! as do! n ast and almost grim. 5l, too, have had dreams here. I dreamed about the >ro#het. 7e 4uslims, you , no! , ! e are not su##osed to tell anyone, if ! e dream about the >ro#het. It is a very good thing, a very ! onderful thing, and =uite ommon among the faithful, but ! e are forbidden to tell ! hat ! e have dreamed.5

57hyE5 I as, ed, shivering in the old.

5It is be ause ! e are stri tly forbidden to des ribe the features of the >ro#het, or to tal, about him as someone ! ho is seen. 2his ! as the >ro#het"s o! n ! ish, so that no man or ! oman ! ould adore him, or ta, e 7G1

any of their devotions a! ay from God. 2hat is ! hy there are no images of the >ro#het((no dra! ings, or #aintings, or statues. Out I did dream of him.)nd I am not a very good 4uslim, am IE Oe ause I am telling you about my dream. *e ! as on foot, ! al, ing some! here. I rode u# behind him on my horse((it ! as a #erfe t, beautiful ! hite horse((and although I didn"t see his fa e, I , ne! it ! as him. So I got do! n from my horse, and gave it to him.)nd my fa e ! as lo! ered, out of res#e t, all the time. Out at last, I lifted my eyes to see him riding a! ay into the light of the setting sun. 2hat ! as my dream.5

*e ! as alm, but I , ne! him ! ell enough to see the de+e tion that hooded his eyes.)nd there ! as something else, something so ne! and strange that it too, me a fe! moments to realise ! hat it ! as: fear.)bde! <hader <han ! as afraid, and I felt my o! n s, in ree# and tighten in res#onse. It ! as unimaginable. Antil that moment I'd truly believed that <haderbhai ! as afraid of nothing. Annerved and ! orried, I moved to hange the sub+e t.

5<hader+i, I , no! I'm hanging the sub+e t, but an you ans! er this =uestion for meE I've been thin, ing about something you said

a while ago. Dou said that life and consciousness and all that other stuff comes from light, at the Oig Oang.)re you saying that light is GodE5

5- o,5 he ans! ered, and that sudden, fearful de#ression lifted

from his features, driven off by a loo, that I could only read as a loving smile. 5I do not thin, that light is God. I thin, it is #ossible, and it is reasonable to say, that light is the language of God. ; ight may be the ! ay that God s#ea, s to the universe, and to us.5

I congratulated myself on the successful change of theme and mood by standing u#. I stam#ed my feet and sla##ed at my sides to get the blood moving. <hader +oined me and ! e began the short ! al, ba , to the am#, blo! ing ! armth into our fro!en hands.

52his is a strange light, s#ea, ing about light,5 I #uffed. 52he sun shines, but it's a old sun. 2here"s no ! armth in it, and you feel stranded bet! een the old sun and the even older shado! s.5

5Oea hed there in tangles of fli , er ...5 <hader =uoted, and I sna##ed my head around so =ui , ly that I felt a t! inge of #ain in my ne , .

57hat did you sayE5

5It ! as a =uote,5 <hader re#lied slo! ly, sensing ho! im#ortant it ! as to me. 5It is a line from a #oem.5 7GF

I #ulled my ! allet from my #o , et, rea hed into it, and too, out a folded #a#er. 2he #age ! as so reased and rubbed by ! ear that ! hen I o#ened it the fold(lines sho! ed ga#s and tears. It ! as <arla"s #oem: the one I"d o#ied from her +ournal, t! o years before, ! hen I ! ent to her a#artment ! ith 2ari= on the -ight of the 7ild Dogs. I"d arried it ! ith me ever sin e. In)rthur Road >rison the offi ers had ta, en the #age from me and torn it into

she said. When I, Ram bribed my way out of the prison I rote it out again from memory, and I carried it with me every day, every! here I went. <Arfa's poem.

In his poem, I said excitedly, holding the tattered, fluttering sheet out for him to see. It was written by a woman.) woman named Arfa Saaranen. The woman you sent to Guantanamo's name is with - a letter to ... to get me out of there. I'm amazed that you , no! it. It's incredible.

- o, ; in, she answered evenly. The poem was written by a Sufi poet named Sadiq Khan. I , no! his poems by heart, many of them. *e is my favourite poet.) and he is Arfa's favourite poet also.

The words were in my heart.

Arfa's favourite poet

I do believe so.

Just hold! ! ell ... hold! ! ell do you , no! Arfa

I , no! her very ! ell.

I thought ... I thought you met her when you got me out of Guantanamo. She said ... I mean, I thought she said that was when she met you.

- o, ; in, that is not correct. I have , no! n Arfa for years. She ! or, s for me. @r at least, she ! or, s for)bdul Ghani, and Ghani ! or, s for me. Out she must have told you about it, didn't she? Didn't you , no! this? I am very surprised. I ! as sure that Arfa ! ould have talked to you about me. Certainly, I have talked to her about you, many times.

My mind was like the screaming jets that had screamed over us in the dark, ravine: all noise and black , fears. What had Arfa said

as I lay together, struggling against sleep, after fighting the cholera epidemic I was on a plane, and I met a businessman, an Indian businessman, and my life changed forever ... Was that Abdul Ghani? Is that what she meant? Why hadn't I asked her more about her? Or, why didn't she tell me about it? And what did she do for Abdul Ghani?

What does she do for you (for Abdul)?

Anything. She has many skills.

No, not about her skills, I growled at him angrily. What does she do for you?

Among other things, she hires and hires, she finds useful and talented foreigners, such as you are. She finds them! How can I, for us, when we need them?

What? I asked, gasping out the word that wasn't really a question, and feeling as if pieces of myself (from pieces of my father and my heart) were falling splintered around me.

He began to speak, again, but I cut him off quickly.

Are you saying that she recruited me (for you)?

Des. She did. And I am very glad that she did.

He told me suddenly inside me, running through my veins, and my eyes were made of snow. He said, but when he noticed that I'd stopped, he halted. He was still smiling when he turned to face me. He said, "I saw you at that instant, and I held his hands together loudly.

He greeted us with the sad, small smile that I'd come to love. I've made up my mind. I gave it some thought, he said, but I've decided to stay. At least for a while. He was here last night. He sentries said him.

*e's been doing so much really stuff((the things he's done to Russian #risoners, and even some of the) fghan #risoners near here on the <andahar road in the last ou#le ! ee, s are ... ! ell,

it's grisly shit((and I'm hard to im#ress in that ! ay. It's so ! eird, the men are going to do something about it. 2hey're so s#oo, ed, they're gonna shoot him on sight. 2hey're tal, ing about hunting him do! n li, e a ! ild animal. I have to ... I have to try to hel# him, someho! . I'm gonna stay, and try to find him, and try to tal, him into oming ba , to >a, istan ! ith me. So ... you go on ! ithout me tonight, and I'll ... I'll ome through in a ou#le of ! ee, s, on the ne' t tri# out. 2hat's ... that's it, I guess. 2hat's ... ! hat I ame to say.5

2here ! as a old silen e after the little s#ee h. I stared at <hader, ! aiting for him to s#ea, . I ! as angry, and I ! as afraid. It ! as a s#e ial fear((the , ind of ar ti dread that only love an ins#ire. <hader stared ba , at my fa e, reading me. <haled loo, ed from one to the other of us, onfused and on erned.

57hat about the night I met you and) bdullahE5 I as, ed, s#ea, ing through teeth len hed against the old and the even older fear that 7GH ri##ed through me li, e s#asms of ram#.

5Dou forget,5 <hader <han re#lied a little more sternly. *is fa e ! as as dar, and determind as my o! n. It never o rred to me then that he, too, ! as feeling de eived and betrayed. I'd forgotten about <ara hi and the #oli e raids. I'd forgotten that there ! as a traitor in his o! n ir le, someone lose to him, ! ho'd tried to have him and me and the rest of us a#tured or , illed. I never sa! his grim deta hment as anything but a ruel disregard for ! hat I felt. 5Dou met) bdullah a long time before the night that ! e met. Dou met him at the tem#le of the Standing Oabas, isn't it trueE *e ! as there to loo, after <arla on that night. She did not , no! you ! ell. She ! as not sure of you, not sure that she ould trust you, in a #la e that she did not , no! .

She wanted someone there who would help her, if you had no good intention with her.

"I was her bodyguard ... I muttered, thinking she didn't trust me ...

Desai, in, he was, and a good one. I understand it that there was some violence, on that night. Abdullah did do something to save her (and perhaps to save you. Isn't that true? This was Abdullah's job, to protect the people for me. That is why I sent him to follow you when my nephew Zari went to stay with you in the hotel. And on the very first night, he did help you to fight some wild dogs, isn't it? And for the whole time that Zari was with you, Abdullah was close to you, and to Zari, just as I told him to be.

I wasn't listening. My mind was all angry thoughts, hissing back, hard to a much earlier time and place. I was searching for a girl (for the girl I loved and loved (but every moment with her began to give up its secret and its lie. I remembered the first time I'd met her, the first second, how she'd reached out to stop

me from walking in front of the bus. It was on Arthur Under Road, on the corner near the Causeway, not far from the India Guest House. It was the heart of the tourist beat. Was she waiting there, hunting for foreigners like me, looking for useful recruits who would, for a while, when he needed them? Of course she was. I'd done it myself, in a way, when I'd lived in the slum. I'd loitered there, in the same place, looking for foreigners just off the lane who wanted to change money or buy some harras.

- a leader walked up to join us. Ahmed Adah was a few paces behind him. They stood together with Chaderbhai and Chaled, facing me. - a leader spread his face into a smile, and scanned the sky from south to north, calculating the minutes before the snow storm hit us. The

was coming for the return journey! as complete and double(he , ed,
and he ! as anxious to leave.

5) And the helmet you gave me! with the lining I as, ed, feeling
silly, and , no! ing that if I unloaded my , nees and let my legs
relax, they ! ould rumple and fold beneath me. When <hader didn't
see, , I repeated the =uestion. 57hat about the lining E 7hy did
you helmet me ! ith the lining E 7as that part of your plan @f _this
plan5

) free! ing ! indible! into the broad plateau, and ! e all
shuddered, unsteadied, as the force of it ! hissed at our clothes
and faces. The sky darkened swiftly as a dirty, grey tide of
loud crossed the mountains and tumbled on toward the distant
plain and the shimmering, dying city.

5Dou did good ! or, there,5 he replied.

5That's not ! hat I as, ed you.5

5I don't thin, this is the right time to talk, of such things,
; in.5

5Des, it is,5 I insisted.

52here are things you ! ill not understand,5 he stated, as if he'd
thought it through many times.

5Just tell me.5

5Every ! ell.)ll of the medicine that ! e brought here to this
camp, all of the antibiotics and penicillin for the ! ar, ! as
supplied to us by Ranjit's leaders. I had to , no! if it ! as safe
to use here.5

5)h, Jesus ...5 I moaned.

5So I used the opportunity, the strange fact that you, a

foreigner, with no connection to a family or an embassy, set up a

clinic in my old slum. I too, that had to test the supplies on the people in the hospital. I had to be sure, you understand, before I brought the medicines into the area.

For God's sake, I snarled.

I had to be

only a fool, in a mania I could do that

It was not easy, I heard snarled back at me. The other men tensed on either side of me, as if they feared that I might attack him. You're way outta line, man

I'm out of line I slurred, feeling my teeth chatter, and struggling to make my numb limbs obey my mind. I'm out of line, in a mania I use the people in the slum as guinea pigs or lab rats or whatever the fool, to test their antibiotics (using me to try them into doing it, because they believed in me (and I'm the one who's out of line

One of them got hurt, I heard shouted back at me. The medicines were all good, and the doctor, you did there as good. The people got well.

We should get out of the old, no, and talk about it, I heard. I heard that in a way, hoping to connect. I heard, you'll have to wait for this snarl to clear before you leave. Let's get inside.

You must understand, I heard said firmly, ignoring him. It is as a decision of the party lives risked against the saving of a thousand, and a thousand risked to save a million. And you must believe me, please, that the medicines were good. The chance of Ranit's suppliers supplying impure medicines is very low. We were almost completely sure that the medicine was safe when we gave it

to you.⁵

52 Tell me about Sa#na.⁵ 2 Here it ! as, out in the o#en, my dee#est
se ret fear about him, and about my loseness to him. 57 as that
your ! or, , tooE⁵

51 ! as not Sa#na. Out the res#onsibility for his , illings does
ome ba , to me. Sa#na , illed for me((for this ause.)nd if you
! ant me to tell you the ! hole of the truth, I did ma, e a great
benefit from Sa#na's bloody ! or, . Oe ause of Sa#na, be ause he
e' isted, and be ause of their fear of him, and be ause I made a
ommitment to find him and sto# him, the #oliti ians and the
#oli e allo! ed me to bring guns and other ! ea#ons through Oombay
to <ara hi and I uetta, and to this ! ar. 2he blood Sa#na s#illed((
it did oil the ! heels for us.)nd I ! ould do this again. I ! ould
use Sa#na's , illings, and I ! ould do more , illings, ! ith my o! n
hands, if it ! ould hel# our ause. 7e have a ause, ; in, all of
us here.)nd ! e fight and ! e live and #erha#s ! e ! ill also die
for that ause. If ! e ! in this fight, ! e ! ill hange the ! hole of

history, forever, from this time, and in this #la e, and ! ith
these battles. 2hat is our ause((to hange the ! hole ! orld. 7hat
is your auseE 7hat is your ause, ; inE⁵

I ! as so old, as the first fla, es ! hirlled about us, that I
shivered and shoo, and ouldn't sto# my +a! from shuddering.

57 hat about ... ! hat about 4adame . hou ... ! hen <arla got me to
#retend I ! as an)meri an. 7as that your ideaE 7as that your
#lanE⁵

5- o. <arla has her o! n ! ar ! ith . hou, and she had her o! n
reasons. Out I a##roved of her #lan to use you, to get her friend
out of the >ala e. I ! anted to see if you ould do it. I had the
thought, even then, that you ! ould one day be my)meri an in
)fghanistan.)nd you did ! ell, ; in. 7G7
-ot many #eo#le do so ! ell against . hou in her o! n >ala e.⁵

5@ne last thing, <hader,5 I stammered. 57hen I ! as in +ail ...
did you have anything to do ! ith thatE5

2here ! as a hard silen e, the , ind of deadly, breathing silen e
that insinuates itself into the memory more dee#ly than the
shar#est sound.

5- o,5 he re#lied at last. 5Out the truth is that I ould have
ta, en you out of there, even after the first ! ee, , if I hose to
do it. I , ne! about it almost at on e.)nd I had the #o! er to
hel# you, but I did not. -ot ! hen I ould have done it.5

I loo, ed at - a1eer and)hmed . adeh. 2hey stared ba , evenly. 4y
eyes shifted to <haled)nsari. *e returned my stare ! ith an
anguished and angrily defiant grima e that #ulled his ! hole fa e
into the +agged lash of the s ar that divided his features.

2hey all , ne! . 2hey all , ne! that <hader had left me in there.
Out it ! as o, ay. <hader didn't o! e me anything. *e ! asn't the one
! ho #ut me there. *e didn't have to get me out.)nd he did, in
the end: he did get me out of +ail in the end, and he did save my
life. It ! as +ust that I'd ta, en so many beatings, and other men
had ta, en beatings for me, trying to get a message out to him ...
and even if ! e'd su eeded, even if ! e'd managed to get a message
to him, <hader ! ould've ignored it, and left me there, until he
! as ready to a t. It ! as +ust that all the ho#e had been so
em#ty, so meaningless.)nd if you #rove to a man ho! vain his
ho#e is, ho! vain his ho#ing ! as, you , ill the bright, believing
#art of him that ! ants to be loved.

5Dou ! anted to be sure that ... that I'd be ... so grateful to
you. So you ... you left me there. 7as that itE5

5- o, ; in. It ! as +ust unfortunate, +ust your , ismet at that time.
I had an arrangement ! ith 4adame . hou. She ! as hel#ing us to meet
! ith the #oliti ians, and get favours from one of the generals

from >a, istan. *e ! as a ... onta t ... of hers. *e ! as, in truth, <arla"s s#e ial lient. She ! as the one ! ho first brought him, that >a, istani general, to 4adame . hou.)nd it ! as a riti al onne tion. *e ! as riti ally im#ortant to my #lans.)nd she ! as so very angry ! ith you, 4adame . hou, that nothing less than #rison ! ould satisfy her. She ! anted to have you , illed in there.)s soon as my ! or, ! as done, at the earliest day, I sent your friend &i, ram for you. Dou must believe me ! hen I tell you that I never ! anted to hurt you. I li, e you. I((5 7G8

*e sto##ed suddenly be ause I #ut my hand on the holster at my hi#. <haled,)hmed, and -a1eer tensed at on e and raised their hands, but they ! ere too far a! ay to rea h me in a single s#ringing lea#, and they , ne! it.

5If you don't turn around and ! al, a! ay no! , <hader, I s! ear to God, I s! ear to God, I'll do something that'll finish us both. I don't are ! hat ha##ens to me, +ust so long as I don't have to loo, at you, or s#ea, to you, or listen to you, ever again.5

-a1eer too, a slo! , almost usual ste#, and stood in front of <hader, shielding him ! ith his body.

5I s! ear to God, <hader. Right no! , I don't are mu h if I live or die.5

5Out, ! e're leaving no! , for 8haman, ! hen the sno! ears,5 <hader re#lied, and it ! as the only time I ever heard his voi e ! aver and falter.

5I mean it. I'm not going ! ith you. I'm staying here. I'll go on my o! n. @r I'll stay here. It doesn't matter. \$ust ... get ... the fu , ... out of my sight. It's ma,ing me si , to my stoma h to _loo, at youß5

*e stood his ground a moment more, and I ould feel the urge to ta, e the gun out and shoot him: an urge that ! as dro! ning me in

old, shivering ! aves of revulsion and rage.

5Dou must , no! this,5 he said at last, 5! hatever ! rong I have done, I did for the right reasons. I never did more to you than I thought you ould bear.)nd you should , no! , you must , no! , that I al! ays felt for you as if you ! ere my friend, and my beloved son.5

5)nd you should , no! this,5 I ans! ered him, the sno! thi , ening on my hair and shoulders. 5I hate you ! ith the ! hole of my heart, <hader.)ll your ! isdom, that"s +ust ! hat it omes do! n to, isn"t itE >utting hate in #eo#le. Dou as, ed me ! hat my ause is. 2he only ause I've got is my o! n freedom.)nd right no! that means being free of you, forever.5

*is fa e !as stiff ! ith old. Sno! had settled on his mousta he and beard, and it ! as im#ossible to read his e' #ression. Out his

golden eyes gleamed through the grey(! hite mist, and the old love ! as in them still. 2hen he turned, and he ! as gone. 2he others turned ! ith him, and I ! as alone in the storm ! ith my hand fro1en and trembling on the holster. I sna##ed the safety li# off, #ulled the Ste h, in out, and o , ed it =ui , ly and e' #ertly, +ust as he"d taught me. I held it at my side, #ointed at the ground.

2he minutes #assed((the , illing minutes, ! hen I might"ve gone after 7G9

him and , illed him, and myself.)nd I tried to dro# the gun then, but it ! ouldn"t fall from my numbed and i y fingers. I tried to #rise the gun free ! ith my left hand, but all my fingers ! ere so ram#ed that I gave it u#.)nd in the ! hirling ! hite sno! (dome that my ! orld had be ome I lifted my arms to the ! hite rain, as I on e had done beneath the ! arm rain in >raba, er"s village.)nd I ! as alone.

7hen I"d limbed the ! all of the #rison all those years before, it ! as as if I"d limbed a ! all on the rim of the ! orld. 7hen I

slid down to freedom I lost the whole world that I, nee, and all the love it held. In Bombay I'd tried, without realising it, to make a new world of loving that would resemble the lost one, and even resemble it. <hader> as my father. >raba, er and >bdullah were my brothers. <arla> as my lover. >nd then, one by one, they were all lost. >nother whole world was lost.

>lear thought came to me, unbidden, and surging in my mind like the s#o, en words of a poem. I, nee! why <hader> nsari as so determined to help *abib. I suddenly, nee! with #erfect understanding that <hader> as really trying to do. *e's trying to save himself, I said, more than once, feeling my numb limbs tremble with the words, but hearing them in my head. >nd I, nee, as I said the words and thought them, that I didn't hate <hader> or <arla: that I couldn't hate them.

I don't, no! why my heart changed so suddenly and so completely. It might've been the gun in my hand((the #o! er it gave me to take life, or let it be((and the instincts, from my deepest nature, that had #revented me from using it. It might've been the fact of losing <hader>bhai. >or, as he called away from me, I, nee in my blood((the blood I could smell in the thick, white air, the blood I could taste in my mouth((that it was over. >hatever the reason, the change moved through me like monsoon rain in the steel ba1aar, and left no trace of the swirling, murderous hate I'd felt only moments before.

I was still angry that I'd put so much of a son's love into <hader>, and that my soul, against the wishes of my conscious mind, had begged for his love. I was angry that he'd considered me expendable, to be used as a means to achieve his ends. >nd I was enraged that he'd taken away the one thing in my whole life((my #or, as the slum doctor((that might've redeemed me, in my opinion mind if not here else, and might've gone some way to balance all the wrong I'd done. /ven that little good had been #olluted and

defiled. The anger in me was as hard and heavy as a basalt >H%

hearthstone, and I, neither! it! could take years to! hear do! n, but I
couldn't hate them.

They'd lied to me and betrayed me, leaving jagged edges! here all
my trust had been, and I didn't like or respect or admire them
any more, but still I loved them. I had no choice. I understood
that, perfectly, standing in the white wilderness of snow. You
can't, still love. You can't even, still it! with hate. You can, still
_in(love, and loving, and even loveliness. You can, still them all,
or numb them into dense, leaden regret, but you can't, still love
itself. ; love is the passionate search for a truth other than your
own and once you feel it, honestly and completely, love is
forever. /very act of love, every moment of the heart reaching
out, is a part of the universal good: it's a part of God, or! that
! e all God, and it can never die.

Afterwards, when the snow! cleared, I stood a little apart from
Chahal and the others in the camp! had increased the danger for
me. I! as far more vulnerable! without the Chahal than I! as in his
company. It! as reasonable to assume,! at hearing him leave, that I
! couldn't make it back, to Jaipur. I even said those! words to
myself: I'm not gonna make it ... I'm not gonna make it ...

My decision to separate myself from Chahal and to stay! with
Chahal and the others in the camp! had increased the danger for
me. I! as far more vulnerable! without the Chahal than I! as in his
company. It! as reasonable to assume,! at hearing him leave, that I
! couldn't make it back, to Jaipur. I even said those! words to
myself: I'm not gonna make it ... I'm not gonna make it ...

Out it! wasn't fear that I felt as Lord Chahal Chahal rode
into the light(consuming snow! . I accepted my fate, and even
! believed it.)t last, I thought, I'm gonna get! that I deserve.
Somehow, that thought left me lean and clear. That I felt,
instead of fear,! as hope that he! could live. It! as over, and
finished, and I never! wanted to see him again! but as I! at hearing
him ride into that valley of! white shadows I hoped he! could live.
I prayed he! could be safe. I prayed my heartbreak, into him, and I
loved him. I loved him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Then! age! wars for profit and riches, but they fight them for land and glory. Sooner or later, the other causes and compelling reasons drop in blood and lose their meaning. Sooner or later, death and survival log the senses. Sooner or later, surviving is the only logic, and dying is the only voice and vision. Then, when best friends die screaming, and good men maddened with pain and fury lose their minds in the bloody fight, when all the fairness and justice and beauty in the world is blown away with arms and legs and heads of brothers and sons and fathers, then, that makes men fight on, and die, and keep on dying, year after

year, is the will to protect the land and the glory.

Don't, no! that's true when you listen to them, in the hours before they go into battle. They talk about home, and they talk about the glory they love. And you, no! it's true when you watch them die. If he's near the earth or on the earth in the last moments, a dying man reaches out for it, to see a grasp of soil in his hand. If he can, he'll raise his head to look at the mountain, the valley, or the plain. If he's a long way from home, he'll think about it, and he'll talk about it. He'll talk about his village, or his home town, or the city where he grew up. The land matters, at the end. And at the very last, he won't scream of causes. At the very last, he'll murmur or he'll cry out the name of a sister or a daughter or a lover or a mother, even as he speaks the name of his God. The end mirrors the beginning. In the end, it's a woman, and a city.

Three days after Chanderbhai left the camp, three days after I watched him ride away from us through the soft snow, sentries at the southern look-out on the Chandahar side of the camp shouted that men were approaching. We rushed to the southern edge to see a luminescent confusion of shadows, perhaps two or three human figures, struggling under the steep slope. Several of us reached for binoculars in the same instant and trained them

them on the spot. I made out one man crawling, inching his way up the slope on his knees, and dragging two other figures. After a few moments of study I recognised the powerful shoulders, the bowed legs, and the distinctive grey (blue) fatigues. I handed the binoculars to Chahed Mansari and bounded over the edge in a sliding run.

"It's - a leech!" I shouted. "It's - a leech!"

I was one of the first to reach him. *e was fast down in the snow, and he was breathing hard. *e's legs were pushing against the snow, seeing through the snow, and his hands were locked in grasps of clothing at the throats of two men. *e'd dragged them to that spot on their backs, one in each hand. It was impossible to guess how far he'd come, but it looked to be a long way, most of it uphill. The man in - a leech's left hand, nearest to me, was whimpering. *e was alive, but seemed to be badly wounded. The other man was undoubtedly dead.

It took three of us to wrench - a leech's fingers from the clothes. *e was so exhausted and so cold that he couldn't speak. *e's mouth opened and closed, but the voice was a long, unsteady roar. Two men seized the shoulders of his clothes and dragged him back up to the summit. I pulled open Chahed's clothes at the chest, hoping to revive him, but when I put my hand on his body the skin was ice-cold and stiffened and icy. *e'd been dead for many hours, perhaps more than a day. The body was rigid. The arms and legs were bent a little at the elbows and knees, and the hands were curled into fists. *e's face, however, was serene and unblemished beneath its thin shroud of snow. *e's eyes and his mouth were

closed as if in a peaceful sleep, and he was so gently dead that my heart refused to believe him gone.

When Chahed Mansari shook my shoulder, I came to the moment as if from a dream, although I knew that I'd been awake for the whole of the time since the sentries had first given us the alarm. I

! as , neeling in the sno! , against <hader"s body, and radling the handsome head in my arms, against my hest, but I had no re olle tion of doing it.)hmed . adeh ! as gone. 4en had dragged him ba , to the am#. <haled, 4ahmoud, and I dragged and half(arried <hader"s body ba , ! ith us and into the big ave.

I +oined a grou# of three men ! ho ! ere ! or, ing on)hmed . adeh. 2he)lgerian"s lothes ! ere stiff ! ith fro1en blood around the middle, belo! the hest. >ie e by #ie e ! e ut them a! ay, and +ust as ! e rea hed 7HG the torn, min ed, bloody ! ounds on his ra! s, in, he o#ened his eyes to loo, at us.

5I"m ! ounded ...5 he said in 9ren h, then)rabi , then /nglish.

5Des, mate,5 I ans! ered him, meeting his eyes. I tried a little smile, but it felt numb and a! , ! ard, and I"m sure he dre! little omfort from it.

2here ! ere at least three ! ounds, but it ! as diffi ult to be sure. *is abdomen had been ri##ed o#en ! ith a vi ious, gouging tear that might"ve been aused by shra#nel from a mortar shell. 9or all that I ould tell, the #ie e of metal ould"ve been inside him, nudging u# against his s#ine. 2here ! ere other ga#ing ! ounds in his thigh and groin. *e"d lost so mu h blood that his flesh ! as urled and grey around the ! ounds. I ouldn"t begin to guess ! hat damage had been done to his stoma h and other internal organs. 2here ! as a strong smell of urine and other ! astes and fluids. 2hat he"d survived so long ! as a mira le. It seemed that the old alone had , e#t him alive. Out the lo , ! as ti , ing on him: he had hours or only minutes to live, and there ! as nothing I ould do for him.

5It is very badE5

5Des, mate,5 I ans! ered him, and I ouldn"t hel# it((my voi e bro, e as I said it. 52here"s nothing I an do.5

I wish no! that I didn't say it. @f the hundred things that I wish I'd never said or done in my i , ed life, that little =uir, of honesty is right u# there, near the to# of the list. I hadn't realised ho! mu h the ho#e of being res ued had held him u#.)nd then, ! ith those ! ords of mine, I ! at hed him fall ba , ! ard into the bla , la, e. 2he colour left his s, in, and the small tension of ! ill that had , e#t his s, in taut olla#sed, ! ith little t! it hes of =uivering surrender, from his +a! to his , nees. I ! anted to #re#are an in+e tion of mor#hine for him, but I , ne! that I ! as ! at hing him die, and I ouldn't bring myself to ta, e

my hand from his.

*is eyes leared, and he loo, ed around him at the ave ! alls as if seeing them for the first time. 4ahmoud and <haled ! ere on one side of him. I , nelt on the other. *e loo, ed into our fa es. *is eyes ! ere starting from their so , ets ! ith fear. It ! as the desolate terror of a man ! ho , no! s that fate has abandoned him, and death's already inside, stret hing and s! elling and filling u# the life(s#a e that used to be his. It ! as a loo, I ame to , no! too ! ell in the ! ee, s that follo! ed, and in the years beyond. Out there, on that day, it ! as ne! to me, and I felt my s al# tighten ! ith a fear that mimed his. 7HH

5It should have been don, eys,5 he ras#ed.

57 hatE5

5<hader should have used don, eys. I told him that from the beginning. Dou heard me. Dou all heard me.5

5Des, mate.5

5Don, eys ... on this , ind of +ob. I gre! u# in the mountains. I , no! the mountains.5

5Des, mate.5

5It should have been don, eys.5

5Des,5 I said again, not , no! ing ho! to res#ond.

5Out he ! as too #roud, <hader <han. *e ! anted to feel ... the moment ... the returning hero ... for his #eo#le. *e ! anted to bring horses to them ... so many fine horses.5

*e sto##ed tal, ing, ho, ed by a little series of grunting gas#s that began in his ! ounded stoma h, and thum#ed u#! ards into his stuttering hest.) tri , le of dar, fluid, blood and bile, dribbled from his nose and the orner of his mouth. *e seemed not to noti e.

59or that, only, ! e ! ent ba , to >a, istan in the ! rong dire tion. 9or that, to deliver those horses to his #eo#le, ! e ! ent to die.5

*e losed his eyes, moaning in #ain, but then +ust as =ui , ly o#ened them again.

5If not for those horses ... ! e ! ould have gone east, to! ard the border, dire t to! ard the border. It ! as ... it ! as his #ride, do you seeE5

I loo, ed u#, e' hanging a glan e ! ith <haled and 4ahmoud. <haled met my eye, but then shifted his ga1e =ui , ly to on entrate on his dying friend. 4ahmoud held my stare until ! e both nodded. It

! as a gesture so subtle that it ! ould"ve been im#er e#tible to an observer, but ! e both , ne! ! hat ! e"d a , no! ledged and ! hat ! e"d agreed u#on ! ith that little nod. It ! as true. It ! as #ride that had brought the great man to his end.)nd strange as it may seem to someone else, it ! as only then, understanding the #ride in his fall, that I began to truly a e#t that <haderbhai ! as gone, and to feel the ga#ing, hollo! sense of his death.

Yahmed told us for a while longer. *e told us the name of his village, and he gave us directions for how to find it in relation to the nearest big city. *e told us about his father and mother, about his sisters and brothers. *e wanted us to let them know that he'd died thinking of them. And he did, that brave, laughing Algerian, who'd always looked as though he was 70? Searching for a friend in a world of strangers: he did die with his mother's love on his lips. And the name of God was said with his last breath.

We were freezing, killed to the bones by the stillness we'd assumed while Yahmed lay dying. Other men too, over the task of leaning his body according to the rituals of Muslim burial. I asked, Ahmad, and I held on - a leer. *e wasn't wounded, but he was so utterly and ruthlessly exhausted that his sleep resembled that of a man in a coma. *is mouth was open, and his eyes were slitted to show the whites within. *e was an arm, and he seemed to be recovering from his ordeal. We left him, and examined the body of our dead man.

A single bullet had entered Kader's side, below the ribs, and seemed to have travelled directly to his heart. There was no evidence it had found, but there was extensive blood coagulation and bruising on the left side of his chest. The bullet fired by Russian AK-47s in those years had a hollow tip. The steel core of the bullet was weighted towards the rear, causing it to tumble. It rushed and ripped its way into a body, rather than simply piercing it. Such ammunition was banned under international law, but almost every one of the Afghans who was killed in battle bore the terrible wounds of those brutal bullets. So it was with our man. The bullet had smashed its way through his body. The gaping, jagged wound in his side had left a streak of bruising across his chest that ended in a blue-black blotch over his heart.

Knowing that Ahmad would want to re-examine Kader's body for burial himself, we examined the man in blankets and left him in a shallow grave, scooped out from the snow near the entrance to the caves. We'd just finished the task, when a whirling, fluttering,

! histle of sound dre! us to our feet. 7e loo, ed at one another in fearful onfusion. 2hen a violent e' #losion shoo, the ground beneath us ! ith a flash of orange and dirty grey smo, e. 2he mortar shell had stru , the ground more than a hundred metres a! ay, at the far edge of the om#ound, but the air near us ! as already filthy ! ith its smell and smo, e. 2hen a se ond shell burst, and a third, and ! e ran for the ave(mouth and flung ourselves into the s=uirming o to#us of men ! ho ! ere there ahead

of us.)rms, legs, and heads rushed in on one another as ! e hun, ered do! n in terror ! hile the mortars tore u# the ro , y ground outside as if it ! as #a#ier(ma he.

It ! as bad, and it got ! orse every day after that. 7hen the atta , ! as over, ! e sear hed among the bla , ened sti##le and rater of the 7HC

om#ound. 2! o men ! ere dead. @ne of them ! as <areem, the man ! hose bro, en forearm I"d set on the night before ! e"d rea hed the am#. 2! o others ! ere so badly ! ounded that ! e ! ere sure they ! ould die. 4any of the su##lies ! ere destroyed. 9irst among them ! ere the drums of fuel ! e"d used for the generator and the stoves. 2he stoves and lam#s ! ere riti ally im#ortant for heating and oo, ing. 4ost of the fuel ! as gone, and all of our ! ater reserves. 7e set to leaning u# the debris((my medi al , it ! as bla , ened and s or hed by the fire((and onsolidating the remaining su##lies in the great ave. 2he men ! ere =uiet. 2hey ! ere ! orried and afraid. 2hey had reason enough.

7hile others busied themselves ! ith those tas, s, I tended to the ! ounded men. @ne man had lost a foot and a #art of his leg belo! the , nee. 2here ! ere fragments of shra#nel in his ne , and u##er arm. *e ! as eighteen years old. *e"d +oined the unit ! ith his elder brother si' months before ! e arrived. *is brother had been , illed during an atta , on a Russian out#ost near <andahar. 2he boy ! as dying. I #ulled the metal #ie es from his body ! ith long stainless steel t! ee1ers and a #air of long(nosed #liers I #ilfered from the me hani "s , it.

There ! as nothing substantial that I could do for the savaged leg. I leaned the ! ound, and tried to remove as much of the shattered bone as I could ! ren h free ! ith the #liers. *is s reams settled on my s, in in an oily s! eat, and I shivered ! ith every gust of frosty ! ind. I #ut sutures into the ragged flesh ! here lean, hard s, in ! ould su##ort them, but there ! as no ! ay to lose the ga# over om#letely. @ne thi , hun, of bone #rotruded from the lum#y meat. It o urred to me that I should ta, e a sa! , and ha , the long bone off to ma, e a neat ! ound of the stum#, but I ! asn't sure if that ! as the right #ro edure. I ! asn't sure that it ! ouldn't ma, e the ! ound ! orse than it ! as. I ! asn't sure ...)nd there's only so mu h s reaming you an bring yourself to ause ! hen you're not sure ! hat you're doing. In the end, I smothered the ! ound in antibioti #o! der and ! ra##ed it in non(adhesive gau1e.

The se ond ! ounded man had ta, en a blast in the fa e and throat. *is eyes ! ere destroyed, and most of the nose and mouth ! ere gone. In some ! ays, he resembled Ran+it's le#ers, but his ! ounds ! ere so ra! and bloody, and the teeth ! ere so smashed, that Ran+it's disfigurements seemed benign in om#arison. I too, the metal #ie es from his eyes and his s al# and his throat. The ! ounds at his throat ! ere bad, and although 7H7 he ! as breathing fairly evenly, my guess ! as that his ondition ! ould ! orsen.)fter dressing his ! ounds, I gave both men a shot

of #eni illin and an am#oule of mor#hine.

4y biggest #roblem ! as blood, and the need to re#la e ! hat the ! ounded men had lost. -ot one of the mu+aheddin fighters I'd as, ed during the last ! ee, s had , no! n his o! n or anyone else's blood ty#e. Thus it ! as im#ossible for me to blood(mat h the men, or to build u# a ban, of donors. Oe ause my o! n blood ty#e ! as NO@, ! hi h is , no! n as the universal donor ty#e, my body ! as the only sour e of blood for transfusions, and I ! as the ! al, ing blood ban, for the ! hole ombat unit.

2y#i ally, a donor #rovides about half a litre of blood in a session. 2he body holds about si' litres, so the blood lost in donation amounts to less than one(tenth of the body's su##ly. I #ut a little more than half a litre into ea h of the ! ounded men, rigging u# the intravenous dri#s that <hader had brought ! ith him as #art of his smuggled argo. I ! ordered ! hether the e=ui#ment had come from Ran+it and his le#ers as I ta##ed my veins and those of the ! ounded fighters ! ith needles that ! ere stored in loose ontainers rather than sealed #a , ets. 2he transfusions too, nearly F% #er ent of my blood. It ! as too mu h. I felt di1ly and faintly nauseous, unsure if they ! ere real sym#toms or sim#ly the slithering tri ,s of my fear. I , ne! that I ! ouldn't be able to give more blood for some time, and the ho#elessness of the situation((mine and theirs((rushed my hest ! ith a flush and s#asm of anguish.

It ! as dirty, frightening ! or, , and I ! asn't trained for it. 2he first(aid ource that I'd om#leted as a young man had been om#rehensive, but it hadn't overed ombat in+uries.)nd the ! or, I'd done at my lini in the slum ! as little hel# in those mountains. Oeyond that, I ! as running on instin t((the same instin t to hel# and heal that had om#elled me to save overdosed heroin addi ts in my o! n ity, a lifetime before. It ! as, of ource, in great #art a se ret ! ish((li, e <haled, ! ith the vi ious madman *abib((to be hel#ed and saved and healed myself.)nd though it ! asn't mu h, and it ! asn't enough, it ! as all I had. So I did my best, trying not to vomit or ry or sho! my fear, and then I ! ashed my hands in the sno! .

7hen -a1eer ! as suffi iently re overed, he insisted on burying)bdel <hader <han ! ith the stri test adheren e to ritual. *e did that before he ate a meal or even dran, a glass of ! ater. I ! at hed as <haled, 4ahmoud, and -a1eer leaned themselves, #rayed together, and then 7H8 #re#ared <haderbhai's body for burial. *is green(and(! hite standard ! as lost, but one of the mu+aheddin #rovided his o! n flag as a shroud. @n a sim#le ! hite ba , ground, it arried the

#hrase:

___; a illa ha ill" __) llah
2here is no god but God

4ahmoud 4elbaaf, the Iranian ! ho"d been ! ith us sin e the <ara hi ta' i ride, ! as so tender and devoted and loving in his ministrations that my eyes ! ent again and again to his alm, strong fa e as he ! or, ed and #rayed. If he"d been burying his o! n hild, he ouldn"t have been more gentle or lement, and it ! as from those moments during the burial that I began to herish him as a friend.

I aught -a1eer"s eye at the end of the eremony, and at on e I dro##ed my fa e to stare at the fro1en ground beside my boots. *e ! as in a ! ilderness of grieving and sorro! ing shame. *e"d lived to #rote t and serve <hader <han. Out the <han ! as dead, and he ! as alive. 7orse than that, he ! asn"t even ! ounded. *is o! n life, the mere fa t of his e' isten e in the ! orld, seemed li, e a betrayal. /very heartbeat ! as a ne! a t of trea hery.)nd that grief, and his e' haustion, too, su h a toll on him that he ! as =uite seriously ill. *e loo, ed as mu h as ten , ilos lighter. *is hee, s ! ere hollo! , and there ! ere bla , troughs beneath his eyes. *is li#s ! ere ra , ed and #eeling. *is hands and feet ! orried me. I"d e' amined them, and I , ne! that the olour and ! armth hadn"t fully returned to them. I thought he might"ve suffered frostbite in his ra! I through the sno! .

2here ! as, in fa t, a tas, that did give his life #ur#ose at that time, if not meaning, but I didn"t , no! that then. <haderbhai had given a last instru tion, a last duty to #erform, in the event of his death during the mission. *e"d named a man, and ordered -a1eer to , ill him. -a1eer ! as follo! ing that instru tion even then, sim#ly by staying alive long enough to arry out the murder. It ! as ! hat sustained him, and his ! hole life had shrun,

to that forlorn obsession. <no! ing nothing of that then, as the old days after <hader"s burial be ame older ! ee, s, I ! orried onstantly for the tough, loyal) fghan"s sanity.

<haled) nsari ! as hanged by <hader"s death in ! ays that ! ere less obvious but e=ually #rofound. 7here many of us ! ere sho , ed into a dull, dense attention to routines, <haled be ame shar#er and more ener(7H9

geti . 7here I often found myself adrift in stunned, heart(bro, en, bitters! eet meditations on the man ! e"d loved and lost, <haled too, on ne! +obs almost every day, and never lost his fo us.)s a veteran of several ! ars, he assumed <haderbhai"s role of adviser to the mu+aheddin ommander Suleiman Shahbadi. In all his deliberations, the >alestinian ! as intense and tireless and +udi ious, to the #oint of being solemn. 2hey ! eren"t ne! =ualities for <haled((he ! as ever a dour, fervent man((but there ! as in him, after <hader"s death, a ho#efulness and a ! ill to ! in that I"d never seen before.)nd he #rayed. 9rom the day ! e buried the <han, <haled ! as the first to all the men to #rayer, and the last to lift his , nees from the fro1en stone.

Suleiman Shahbadi, the most senior) fghan left in our grou#((there ! ere t! enty of us, in luding the ! ounded((! as a former ommunity leader, or <andeedar, from a lut h of villages near

Gha1ni, t! o(thirds of the ! ay to <abul. *e ! as fifty(t! o years old, and a five(year veteran of the ! ar. *e ! as e' #erien ed in all forms of ombat, from siege to guerrilla s, irmish to #it hed battle.)hmed Shah 4assoud, the unoffi ial leader of the nation(! ide ! ar to e' #el the Russians, had #ersonally a##ointed Suleiman to set u# the southern ommands near <andahar.)ll the men in our ethni ally e le ti unit felt su h a! e(stru , admiration for 4assoud that it ! asn"t too strong to all it a , ind of love.)nd be ause Suleiman"s ommission had ome dire tly from 4assoud, the ;ion of the >an+sher, the men gave him an e=ually reverential res#e t.

When - a leetle as well enough to give a full report, just three days after I'd found him in the snow, Suleiman Shahbadi called a meeting. He was a short man with big hands and feet, and a sorrowful expression. Seven lines and ridges like a lantern's furrows creased his broad, high forehead. He wore a white turban over his bald head. His dark, grey beard was trimmed around the mouth, and cut short beneath the jaw. His ears were slightly pointed (an effect that was exaggerated against the white turban (and that unusual combination with his wide mouth to hint at the heavy humour that one might have been his. Out then, on the mountain, his face was dominated by the expression in his eyes. They were the eyes of an unutterable sadness—a sadness inherited and embittered of tears. It was an expression that engaged our sympathy yet prevented us from befriending him. For all that he was a wise, brave, and kindly man, that sadness was so deep in him that no man risked its touch. 7?%

With four sentries at their posts around the camp, and twelve men wounded, there were fourteen of us gathered in the cave to hear Suleiman speak. It was extremely cold (at or below zero (and I sat together to share our warmth.

I wished that I'd been more assiduous in my study of Dari and Pashto during the long wait in Luletta. When someone in both languages at that meeting, and every one after it. Ahmadou Elbaaf translated the Dari into Dari for me, and I transformed the Dari into English, leaning first to his left to listen to Ahmadou, and then leaning right as he whispered to me. It was a long process, and I was amazed and humbled that the men waited patiently for every change to be translated for me. The popular Urdu and Persian literature of Afghans as wild, bloodthirsty men (a description that delighted Afghans themselves endlessly when they heard it (as contradicted by every direct contact I had with them. As a Pashto, Afghan man I was generous, friendly, honest, and surprisingly courteous to me. I didn't say anything at that first meeting, or at any of those that followed, but still the men included me in every word they shared.

-a1eer"s re#ort on the atta , that had ,illed our <han ! as alarming. <hader had left the am# ! ith t! enty(si' men, and all the riding and #a , horses, on ! hat should"ve been a safe(#assage

route to the village of his birth. @n the se ond day of the mar h, still a full day and night from <haderbhai"s village, they ! ere for ed to sto# for ! hat they thought ! as a routine tribute e' hange ! ith a lo al lan leader.

2here ! ere hard =uestions as, ed about *abib)bdur Rahman at the meeting. In the t! o months sin e he"d left us, after , illing #oor, un ons ious Siddi=i, *abib had instituted a one(man ! ar of terror in ! hat ! as for him a ne! area of o#erations((the Shar(i(Safa mountain range. *e"d tortured a Russian offi er to death. *e"d dealt similar +usti e, as he sa! it, to)fghan army men, and even mu+aheddin fighters ! hom he +udged to be less than fully ommitted to the ause. 2he horrors of those tortures had su eeded in nailing terror to everyone in the region. It ! as said that he ! as a ghost, or the Shaitaan, the Great Satan himself, ome to rend men"s bodies and #eel the mas, s of their human fa es ba , from their very s, ulls. 7hat had been a relatively =uiet orridor bet! een the ! ar 1ones ! as suddenly a turmoil of angry, terrified soldiers and other fighters, all #ledged to find and , ill the demon *abib.

7?1

Realising that he ! as in a tra# designed to a#ture *abib, and that the men surrounding him ! ere hostile to his ause, <haderbhai tried to leave #ea efully. *e surrendered four horses as a tribute, and gathered his men. 2hey ! ere almost free of the enemy high ground ! hen the first shots rattled into the little anyon. 2he battle raged for half an hour. 7hen it ! as over, -a1eer ounted eighteen bodies from <hader"s olumn. Some of them had been ,illed as they lay ! ounded. 2heir throats had been ut. -a1eer and)hmed .adeh had only survived be ause they ! ere rushed in a tangle of bodies, of horses and men, and a##eared to

be dead.

One horse had survived the encounter with a serious wound. - alger roused the animal, and stretched under his dead body and pushed the dying one to its back. The horse trudged through the snow for a day and half a night before it stumbled, collapsed, and died almost three kilometres from our camp. - alger then dragged both bodies through the snow until he found him. *e had no idea that had happened to the five men who were not accounted for from under his column. They might've escaped, he thought, or they might've been captured. One thing was certain: among the enemy dead, - alger had seen Afghan army uniforms and some neat Russian equipment.

Suleiman and Khalid Ansari assumed that the mortar attack, on our position was linked to the battle that had claimed under his life. They guessed that the Afghan army unit had regrouped and, perhaps following - alger's trail, or acting on information gouged from prisoners, they'd launched the mortar attack. Suleiman assumed that there would be more attacks, but he doubted that they would launch a full frontal assault on the position. Such an attack would cost many lives, and mightn't succeed. If Russian

soldiers supported the Afghan army units, however, there might be helicopter attacks as soon as the sky was clear enough. Either way, he would lose men. Eventually, he might lose the high ground altogether.

After much discussion of the limited options open to us, Suleiman decided to launch the counter attack with mortar units of our own. To that end, he needed reliable information about the enemy positions and their relative strength. *e began to brief a fit, young Arab nomad named Salalad for the scouting mission, but then he froze, staring at the mouth of the cave. They all turned and gazed in surprise at the solid, ragged silhouette of a man in the oval frame of light at the opening of the cave. It was *abib. *e'd slipped into the camp unseen by the

sentries (an enigmatically difficult task, (and he stood with us, to a short stay. I'm glad to say I wasn't the only one who reached for a sea.

Chaled rushed forward with a wide and heartfelt smile that I resented it, and resented *abib more for inspiring it. *e brought the madman into the cave and sat him down beside the startled Suleiman. And then, with serene calm and clarity, *abib began to speak.

*e'd seen the enemy positions, he said, and he knew their strength. *e'd watched the mortar attack on our camp, and then he'd retreated to their camps, so close that he'd heard them decide what to eat for lunch. *e could guide us to new vantage points here where we could fire mortars into their camps, and kill them. Those who didn't die outright, he wanted it understood, belonged to him. That was his right.

The men debated *abib's proposal, speaking openly in front of him. It worried some that we were putting ourselves in the hands of the very lunatics whose monstrous tortures had brought them to our cave. It was bad luck, to link ourselves to his evil, those men said, bad morals and bad luck. It worried others that we could kill so many Afghan army regulars.

None of the seemingly bizarre contradictions of the war was that Afghan met Afghan with real reluctance, and sincerely regretted every death. There was such a long history of division and conflict between the clans and ethnic divisions in Afghanistan that no man, with the exception of *abib, truly hated the Afghans who fought on the side of the Russians. Real hatred, here it existed at all, was reserved for the Afghan version of the G.O., no less than the G.D. The Afghan traitor - Abdullah, who eventually seized power and appointed himself ruler of the country, headed that infamous policy for years, and was responsible for many of its unspeakable tortures. There wasn't a resistance fighter in the country who didn't dream of dragging on a rope and hoisting him into the air by his neck. The soldiers and even the

officers of the Afghan army, however, were a different matter: they were, in fact, many of them conscripts, doing what they had

to do in order to survive. And for their part, the Afghan regulars often sent vital information concerning Russian troop movements or bombardments to mujaheddin fighters. In fact, they would never be without their secret help. And a surprise mortar attack, on the top of Afghan army positions, identified by *abib, would cost many Afghan lives. 7?G

The long discussion ended with a decision to fight. Our situation was judged to be so perilous that we had no choice but to counterattack, and drive the enemy from the mountain.

The plan was good, and it should've worked, but like so much else in that war it brought only chaos and death. Our sentries remained to guard the camp, and I stayed behind as well to care for the wounded. The fourteen men of the strike force were divided into two teams. Khalid and *abib led the first team, Suleiman led the second. Following *abib's directions, they set up their mortars about a kilometre away from the enemy camp (a distance that was well inside the maximum effective range. The bombardment commenced just after dawn, and continued for half an hour. The strike teams found eight Afghan soldiers when they entered the ruined camp. Not all of them were dead. *abib went to look for the survivors. Since, in agreement with what they'd agreed to let him do, our men returned to the camp, hoping never to see the madman again.

Less than one hour after their return, a counterbombardment rained on our compound with hissing, whistling, thundering explosions. As the deadly attack subsided, we ran led from our hiding places to hear a strange, vibrating hum. Khalid was a few metres away from me. I saw the fear rattle across his shoulders. *abib began to run toward the small overgrown grove by the road, I followed opposite the caves. *abib was shouting and waving for me to join him. I too, a step toward him and then froze as a

Russian helicopter rose like some huge, monstrous insect over the rim of the compound. It's impossible to describe how immense and predatory those machines seem when you're under fire from them. The monster fills the eye and the mind, and for a second or two there seems to be nothing else in the world but the metal and the noise and the terror.

In the instant that it appeared, it fired on us and I heard a wailing like a fall on falling to the ground. The rockets scorched the air as they streamed toward the caves. They travelled with incredible speed, much faster than my eyes could follow. I swung round to see one rocket smash into the stone cliff above the entrance to the cave 'mouth' and explode with a shower of smoke, flame, rocks, and metal fragments. Immediately after it, the second rocket entered the cave (mouth and exploded).

The shower of cave that hit me as a physical thing, like standing on the edge of a swimming pool and having someone push me in with the flat of his hands. I slammed onto my back and gasped, holding for air, with the 7?H

I found, no, I found out of me. I could see the entrance to the caves. The wounded men were in there. Other men were hiding in there. Oursting through the blast, smoke and flames, men began running or crawling out of the cave. One of the men was a Mashtun trader named Yel. He'd been a favourite of Haderbhai's for his jokes and irreverent satires of prominent mullahs and local political figures. His back was blown out from the head to the thighs. His clothes were on fire. They burned and smouldered around the bare, charred meat of his back. Bones (a ribbone and a shoulder blade) were clearly visible, and moving in the open ground as he crawled.

He was screaming out for help. I gritted my teeth to make the run to him, but the helicopter appeared again. It roared past us at great speed, tight turning in tight circles to attack us from new angles in passing rushes. Then it hovered with arrogant, fearless nonchalance near the edge of the plateau that had been our haven.

Just as I started to move forward and it fired at me more rockets at the caves and then another rocket. The salvo lit up the hole interior of the cavern for an instant, and melted the snow with a rolling fireball of flames and white-hot metal pieces. One fragment landed only an arm's reach away from me. It crashed into the snow and sizzled with a blistering hiss for several seconds. I crawled away after I had, and squeezed my body into the narrow left in the rocks.

The gunshots opened up with machine guns, raking the open ground and hoisting up the bodies of the wounded men who were exposed there. When I heard another gunshot with a different tone, and I realised that one of our men was firing back at the helicopter. It was the sound of a machine gun, one of our Russian machine guns, returning fire. It was quickly followed by a second, long machine gun burst from another machine gun. Two of our men were firing at the helicopter. My only instinct had been to hide myself from the ruthlessly efficient killing machine, but they not only exposed themselves to the beast, they actually challenged it and drew its fire.

There was a shout from somewhere behind me and then a rocket fired past my head away left in the stone toward the helicopter. It was a rocket, fired from an RPG by one of our men. It missed the helicopter, and so did the next rocket, but the return fire from our men was finding its target, and convinced the pilot to cut his losses and leave.

A great shout went up from our men: "Allah hu", "Allah hu", "Allah hu", "Allah hu", "Allah hu" I eased our way out of the edge of stone to the

found four men rushing forward and firing at the air raft. A thin stream of rusty blood, smeared, dribbled from a point about two-thirds of the way along the length of the machine as it lunged away from us, to the metal structure of a wildly running engine.

The young man who'd opened up the counter attack, was Salalaad, the Arab nomad. He handed the heavy RPG off to a friend,

snatched up an)<(7H ! ith a ta#ed double maga1ine, and bounded
away in search of enemy soldiers ! ho might&e re#t lose under
cover of the ho##er. 2! o other young men ran after him, sli##ing
and +um#ing do! n the sno! (overed slo#e.

7e search had the om#ound for survivors. 7e ! ere t! enty men at the
start of the attack , , including our t! o ! ounded.)fter it, ! e ! ere
eleven: \$alalaad and the t! o young men, \$uma and *anif, ! ho'd
left ! ith him to find any)fghan regulars or Russians ! ithin our
defensive #erimeter6 <hald6 -a1eer6 a very young fighter named
)la(ud(Din6 three ! ounded men6 Suleiman6 and myself. 7e'd lost
nine men((one more than the eight)fghan army men ! e"d , illed in
our mortar attack , on them.

@ur ! ounded ! ere in a bad ! ay. @ne man ! as so badly burned that
his fingers had fused together li, e a rab"s la! s, and his fa e
! asn't re ognisably human. *e ! as breathing through a hole in the
red s, in of his fa e. It might've been his mouth, that trembling
hole in his fa e, but there ! as no ! ay to be sure. 2he breaths
! ere laboured, s ra#ing sounds that faded and ! ea, ened as I
listened to them. I gave him mor#hine, and moved on to the ne' t
man. *e ! as a farmer from Gha1ni named . aher Rasul. *e'd ta, en to
bringing me green tea ! whenever I read a boo, or made notes in my
+ournal. *e ! as a , indly, self(effa ing forty(t! o year old((a
senior man in a ountry ! here the average life s#an for men ! as
forty(five. *is arm ! as missing belo! the shoulder. 2he same
#ro+e tile, ! hatever it ! as, that had severed his arm, had torn
him o#en along his body, from the hest to the hi#, on the right(
hand side. 2here ! as no ! ay of , no! ing ! hat #ie es of metal or
stone might be lodged inside his ! ounds. *e ! as #raying a
re#etitive li, , ir:

God is great

God forgive me

God is merciful

God forgive me 7?C

4ahmoud 4elbaaf ! as holding a tourniquet on the ragged stump of shoulder that remained. When he released it, the blood splattered us in strong ! arm splurts. 4ahmoud pulled the tourniquet tight on me more. I looked into his eyes.

5) rtery, I said, rushed by the task, that confronted me.

5Des. Under his arm. Did you see?

5Deah. It's gotta be stitched or lacerated or something. We've gotta stop the blood. *e's lost too much already.

2he blackened, ash-covered remains of the medical kit ! ere

grouched on a piece of canvas in front of my knees. I found a suture needle, a rusty metal spliers, and some silk thread. Reeling out on the snowy ground, and with my bare hands rammed, I ran stitches into the artery, and the flesh, and the ! hole area, desperate to stop off the gush of hot, red blood. The thread snagged several times. My stiffened fingers trembled. The man ! as a ! a, e and a ! are, and in terrible pain. *e screamed and hollered intermittently, but returned always to his prayer.

My eyes ! ere full of sweat, despite the shivering cold, ! hen I nodded to 4ahmoud to release the tourniquet. Blood oozed through the stitches. It ! as a much slower flow, but I ! ne ! the trickle ! ould still kill him in the long run. I began to shove pads of bandage into the ! ound and then to ! ind on a pressure dressing, but 4ahmoud's bloody hands sealed my ! rists in a ! ertful grip. I looked up to see that ! aher Rasul had stopped praying and stopped bleeding. *e ! as dead.

I was breathing hard. It was the kind of breathing that does more harm than good. I suddenly realised that I hadn't eaten for too many hours, and I was very hungry. With that thought (hunger, food) I felt sick, for the first time. I felt the steady wave of nausea surge over me, and I shook my head free of it.

When we returned our attention to the burned man we found that he, too, had succumbed. I covered the still body with a canvas camouflage drogue (sheet). My last glimpse of his torso was featureless, melted face became a ray of than, s. One of the agonising truths for a battle medic is that you pray as hard and almost as often for men to die as you pray for them to live. The third wounded man was Ahmad elbaaf himself. There were tiny grey (black), fragments of metal and what seemed to be melted last in his back, his neck, and the back of his head. Fortunately, the spray of that hot material had only penetrated the upper layers of his skin, in, muscles, sinews. Nevertheless, it was the work of an hour to rid him of them. I washed the wounds and applied antibiotic powder, dressing them wherever it was possible.

We checked our supplies and reserves. We had two goats at the start of the attack. One of them had run off, and we never sighted it again. The other was found cowering in a blind above formed between high, rocky embankments. That goat was our only food. The flour had burned to soot with the rice and ghee and sugar. The fuel reserves were completely exhausted. The stainless steel medical instruments had suffered a direct hit, and most of them had deformed into useless lumps of metal. I searched through the wreckage to retrieve some antibiotics, disinfectants, ointments, bandages, suture needles, thread, syringes, and morphine ampoules. We had ammunition, and some medicines, and we could melt the snow to make water, but the lack of food was a very serious concern.

There were nine men. Suleiman and I decided that we had to

leave the camp. There! as a cave on another mountain, about twelve hours' march away to the east, which they hoped might give us adequate protection from attack. The Russians! were sure to have another helicopter in the air! within a few hours at most. Ground forces! couldn't be far behind.

Very many of the antelopes! with snow, and, with them inside his clothes, next to his body, on the march, I had said to me, translating Suleiman's orders. We carry! equipment, ammunition, medicines, blankets, some fuel, some food, and the goat. Nothing else. It's good!

We left on the march! with empty stomachs, and that state defined us for the next four! weeks, as! the hungered! in the mountain! cave. One of Salalaad's young friends, *Anif, had been a halal butcher in his home village. He slaughtered, skinned, gutted, and quartered the goat! when! he arrived. We! prepared a fire! with! food that! we'd! carried from the ruined camp, and a serving of spirit from one of the lamps. The meat! as! cooked((every last morsel, we! left for the! parts, such as the legs of the animal below! the! joint, which! were regarded as haram, or forbidden for Muslims to eat. The! carefully! cooked meat! as! then rationed into small daily shares. We stored the bulk of the cooked flesh in an improvised refrigerator! scooped out of the ice and snow! .) and then, for four! weeks, we nibbled at the dry meat and! cringed inwardly as hunger! tested us around the! craving for more.

It! as! an! expression of our discipline and good(natured! support for?

one another that the meat from one goat! left nine men alive for four! weeks. We tried many times to slip! away from the camp and reach one of the neighbouring! valleys to secure some extra food. Out all the local villages! were occupied by enemy troops, and the entire mountain range! as! surrounded by! patrols of! Afghan army units led by Russians. *Abib's tortures had! combined! with the damage! we'd! done to the helicopter to rouse a furious determination in the Russians and! Afghan regulars. One

foraging mission, our scouts heard an announcement echoing through the nearest valley. The Russians had attacked a loudspeaker to a military base. In Afghanistan, saying in Pashto, described us as bandits and criminals, and said that a special task force had been set up to capture us. They'd put a reward on our heads. Our scouts wanted to shoot at the vehicle, but they thought it might be a trap designed to draw us out of hiding. They let it pass, and the orders of the hunters echoed in the sheer, stone canyons like the howl of roaring wolves.

Apparently acting on false information (or perhaps following the trail of "Abib's" bloody executions (the Russians, moving from all the surrounding villages, concentrated their searches on another mountain range to the north of us. For so long as we remained in our remote cave, we seemed to be safe. So we waited, trapped and starving and afraid, through the four oldest festivals

of the year. We hid, creeping through shadows in the daylight hours, and huddled together without light or heat in the darkness every night. And slowly, one by one (each hour at a time, the knife of war hit the flesh and holding a day until all that was left to us, within the hard, disconsolate grasp of our own arms around our own shivering bodies, was the lonely will to survive.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

I couldn't face the loss of Haderbai, my father (dream. I'd helped to bury him, for God's sake, with my own hands. But I didn't grieve, and I didn't mourn him. There wasn't enough truth in me for that, kind of sorrowing because my heart couldn't believe him dead. I'd loved him too much, it seemed to me in that instant of fear, for him to simply be gone, to be dead. If so much love could vanish into the earth and sea, no more, smile no more, then love was nothing.)nd I couldn't believe that. I was sure there had to be a way (off, somehow, and I was waiting for it. I didn't, not then, as I do now, that love's a one-way street. ; love, like respect, isn't something you get it's something you give. Out of nothing that in those bitter weeks, not thinking that, I turned from the hole in my life where so much loving hope had been, and I refused to feel the longing or the loss. I ringed within the bleak, concealing camouflage of snow and shadowed stone. I held the leathered fragments of goat's meat left to us.)nd each minute rammed with heartbeats and hunger dragged me further from the grieving and the truth.

Eventually, of course, we exhausted the supply of meat, and a meeting was called to discuss our options. Salalaad and the younger Yaghans wanted to make a run for it: to fight our way through enemy lines, and strike out for the desert region of Jabul Province, close to the Arabian border. Suleiman and I reluctantly agreed that there was no other option, but they wanted clear intelligence of the enemy disposition before choosing where to launch a breakthrough. So that end, Suleiman sent young *Anif on a scouting mission that would take him on a sweeping curve from the south (west to the north and south (east of our position. *e ordered the young man to return within twenty-four hours, and to travel only at night.

It was a long, cold, hungry wait for *Anif to return. We were drinking 7C% water, but that only staved off the torment for a few minutes, and left us even hungrier. Twenty-four hours stretched to ten

days, and then into a third, with no sign of him. On the morning of the third day, he realised that *anif was dead or captured. Suma, a camelherd from the tiny Zaijan, a town in the south (west of Afghanistan near Iran), volunteered to search for him. *e was a dark, thin-faced man with a hairy, lined nose and a thick, lively emotive mouth. *e was close to *anif and Salalaad (the closeness that men

in wars and prisons find, against their every hesitation, and rarely express in words or gestures.

Suma's Zaijan, clans of camelherds were traditional rivals of the Kohmand *Aarbu tribe of *anif and Salalaad in the nomadic transport of trade goods. The competition between the groups had become intense as Afghanistan rapidly modernised. In 1950, fully one in every three Afghans was a nomad. Just two generations later, by 1970, only 5 per cent of the population were nomads. Rivals though they were, the three young men had been thrown into close cooperation with one another by the war, and they'd become inseparable friends. Their friendship had developed in the insidiously dull months that troubled between the seasons of fighting, and he had tested many times in combat. In their most successful battle, they'd used land mines and grenades to destroy a Russian tank. /a hand of them wore, on a leather thong around his neck, a small piece of metal taken from the tank, as a souvenir.

When Suma declared that he would search for *anif, he knew that he wouldn't prevent him from doing it. With a heavy sigh, Suleiman agreed to let him go. Refusing to wait until nightfall, Suma shouldered his equipment and retreated from the camp at once. *e'd gone without food for three days, just as he had, but the smile that he sent back to Salalaad, as he looked over his shoulder for the last time, was bright with strength and courage. He waited for him to leave, but he had his thin, retreating shadows beneath the sundial of the snow slowly beneath us.

*unger exacerbated the cold. It was a long, hard winter, with snow falling on the mountains around us every other day. The

temperature fluttered above zero during the daylight hours, but
san, into icy, teeth chattering subzero levels from dusk, until
!ell after dawn. My hands and feet were constantly cold a hingly
old. The sun, in on my face! as! ooden, and as riven! ith rays, as
the feet of the farmers in >raba, er's village. We #issed on our
hands, to fight off the aching sting of the cold, 7C1
and it helped to bring feeling back, to them momentarily. Out! e
!ere so cold that taking a #iss! as a serious issue. First there
!as the dread inspired by having to open our clothes at all, and
then there! as the chill that followed the release of a bladder
of! arm fluid. ;osing that! armth caused the body temperature to
dro# =ui ,ly, and! e al! ays #ut it off until the last moment.

Suma failed to return that night.)t midnight, ! ith hunger and
fear #rodding us a! a, e, ! e all +um#ed at a little ri ,le of
sound in the darkness. Seven guns aimed at the s#ot. Then! e
gas#ed as a face loomed from the shadows, much loser than! e'd
e' #e ted. It! as *abib.

57hat are you doing, my brotherE5 <haled as, ed him gently, in
Ardu. 5Dou gave us a big fright.5

52hey are here,5 he answered in a rational, calm voice that
seemed to rise from another mind or another #la e, as if he! as a

medium s#ea,ing in a trance. *is face! as filthy. 7e! ere all
un! ashed and bearded, but *abib's filth! as something so
re#ulsive and thi ,ly smeared that it! as shocking. ;i, e #oison
#ouring from an infected! ound, the foulness seemed to s=uee1e
out! ard through the #ores of his skin from some foulness
! ithin. 52hey are every! here, all around you.)nd they are coming
u# to here to get you, to ,ill you all, ! hen more men come,
tomorro! , or the day after that. Soon. 2hey , no! ! here you are.
2hey! ill ,ill you all. 2here is only one! ay out of here no! .5

5*o! did you find us here, brotherE5 <haled as, ed, his voice as
calm and remote as *abib's.

51 I came ! ith you. I have al! ays been near you. Did you not see meE5

54y friends,5 \$alalaad as, ed, 5\$uma and *anif((did you see them any! hereE5

*abib didn't re#ly. \$alalaad as, ed the =uestion again, more for efully.

5Did you see themE 7ere they in the Russian am#E 7ere they a#turedE5

7e listened in a silen e thi , ! ith our fear and the #oisonous smells of de ayed flesh that lung to *abib. *e seemed to be meditating, or #erha#s listening to something no(one else ould hear.

52ell me, _ba h(_e(_ a, a,5 Suleiman as, ed gently, using the familiar term for ne#he! , 5! hat did you mean, there is only one ! ay out of here no! E5

52hey are every! here,5 *abib ans! ered, his fa e deformed by its ! ide(mouthed, #sy hoti stare. 4ahmoud 4elbaaf ! as translating for me, 7CF

! his#ering lose to my ear. 52hey don't have enough men. 2hey have mined all the easiest ! ays out of the mountains. 2he north, the east, the ! est, all mined. @nly the south(east is lear, be ause they thin, you ! ill not try to es a#e that ! ay. 2hey left that ! ay lear, so they an ome u# here to get you.5

57e an't go out that ! ay,5 4ahmoud ! his#ered to me ! hen *abib sto##ed suddenly. 52he Russians, they hold the valley south(east of here. It is their ! ay to <andahar. 7hen they ome for us, they ! ill ome from that dire tion. If ! e go that ! ay, ! e ! ill all die, and they , no! it.5

5-o! , they are in the south(east. Out for tomorro! , for one day,

they are all on the far side of the mountain, in the north(! est,5
*abib said. *is voi e ! as still alm and om#osed, but his fa e
! as a gargoyles leer, and the ontrast unnerved us all. 5@nly a
fe! of them stay here tomorro! . @nly a fe! ! ill stay, ! hile the

rest of them #ut the last mines on the north(! est slo#es, +ust
after da! n. If you run at them, atta , them, fight them tomorro! ,
in the south(east, there ! ill only be a fe! of them. Dou an
brea, through and es a#e. Out only tomorro! .5

5*o! many are they altogetherE5 \$alalaad as, ed.

5Si' ty(eight men. 2hey have mortars, ro , ets, and si' heavy
ma hine guns. 2here are too many of them for you to snea, #ast
them at night.5

5Out you snea, ed #ast them,5 \$alalaad insisted defiantly.

52hey annot see me,5 *abib re#lied serenely. 5I am invisible to
them. 2hey annot see me until I am #ushing my , nife into their
throats.5

52hat"s ridi ulousB5 \$alalaad hissed at him. 52hey are soldiers.
Dou are a soldier. If you an get #ast them, ! e an do it.5

5Did your men return to youE5 *abib as, ed him, turning his mania
stare on the young fighter for the first time. \$alalaad o#ened
his mouth to s#ea, , but the ! ords san, into the small heaving sea
of his heart. *e ast his eyes do! n, and shoo, his head. 58ould
you enter this am# ! ithout being seen or heard, as I didE If you
try to get #ast them, you ! ill die, li, e your friends. Dou annot
get #ast them. I an do it, but you annot.5

5Out you thin, ! e an fight our ! ay out of hereE5 <haled #ut the
=uestion to him gently, =uietly, but ! e all heard the urgen y in
it.

5Dou an. It is the only way. I have been every! here on this mountain, and I have been so close to them that I can hear them s rat h their s, in. 2hat is the reason why I am here. I came to tell you how to save yourselves. Out there is a #rie for my hel#.)ll the ones you do not , ill tomorrow! , the 7CG ones ! ho survive, they ! ill be mine. Dou ! ill give them to me.5

5Des, yes,5 Suleiman agreed soothingly. 58ome, _ba h(_e(_ a, a, tell us ! hat you , no! . 7e ! ant to share your , no! ledge. Sit ! ith us, and tell us ! hat you , no! . 7e have no food, so ! e annot offer you a meal. I'm sorry.5

52here is food,5 *abib interrupted, #ointing beyond us to the shado! s at the edge of our am#. 5I smell food there.5

2rue enough, the rotting #ie es of the dead goat((the haram uts from the animal((lay in a little hea# in the slushy sno! . 8old as it ! as, and even in the sno! , the bits of ra! meat had long begun to de ay. 7e ouldn't smell them from that distan e, but it seemed that *abib ould.

2he madman's omment #rovo,ed a long dis ussion of the religious

rights and ! rongs of eating haram food. 2he men ! aren't rigid in the observation of their faith. 2hey #rayed every day, but not in stri t adheren e to the timetable of three sessions, ordained by Shia Islam, or the five sessions of the Sunni 4uslims. 2hey ! ere good men of faith, rather than overtly religious men.

-evertheless, in a time of ! ar, and ! ith the great dangers ! e fa ed, the last #o! er they ! anted ranged against them ! as God's. 2hey ! ere holy ! arriors, mu+aheddin: men ! ho believed that they ! ould be ome martyrs at the instant that they died in battle, and that they ! ere assured a #la e in the heavens, ! here beautiful maidens ! ould attend them. 2hey didn't ! ant to #ollute themselves ! ith forbidden foods ! hen they ! ere so close to the martyr's rush for #aradise. It ! as a tribute to their faith, in fa t, that the mere dis ussion of the haram meat hadn't o urred until ! e'd

hungered for a month and then starved for five days.

For my part, I confessed to Ahmad el-Baaf that I'd been thinking about the discarded meat almost constantly for the last few days. I wasn't a Muslim, and the meat wasn't forbidden to me. But I'd lived so closely with the fighters, and for so many painful weeks, that I'd linked my fate to theirs. I would never have eaten anything while they hungered. I wanted to eat the meat, but only if they agreed and ate it with me.

Suleiman delivered the decisive opinion on the matter. He reminded the men that while it was indeed evil for a Muslim to eat haram food, it was an even greater evil for a Muslim to starve himself to death when haram food was available to be eaten. The men decided that they would eat the rotting meat in a soup, before the first light. Then, fortified by that meal, they would use Habib's information on the enemy positions to fight our way out of the mountains.

During the long weeks of hiding and waiting without heat or hot food, we'd entertained and supported one another with the stories we'd told. On that last night, after several others had spoken, it was my turn on the floor. For my first story, weeks before, I'd told them about my escape from prison. Although they'd been scandalized by my admissions about being a gunner, or sinner, and being imprisoned as a criminal, they'd been thrilled by the account, and asked many questions afterwards. My second story had been about the flight of the assassins: Abdallah, Ibrahim, and I had traced the Algerian killers down to the mountains, defeated them, and then expelled them from the country. I'd hunted Aurilio, the man who'd caused it all, and beat him with my fists and then I'd wanted to kill him, but had spared his life, only to regret that when he'd attacked, I'd bartered and forced Alla to kill him.

That story, too, had been very well received, and as Ahmad el-Baaf too, his uncle beside me to translate my third story, I wondered what might capture their enthusiasm next. My mind

announced its list of heroes. There were many, so many men and women, beginning with my own mother, whose courage and sacrifice

inspired the memory of them. Out when I began to speak, I found myself telling >raba, er's story. The words, like some kind of desperate prayer, came unbidden from my heart.

I told them how >raba, er had left his village to go to the city when he was still a child. He had returned as a teenager, with the wild street boy Ra+u and other friends to confront the men of the district. R+u, hmabai, >raba, er's mother, had put courage into the men of the village. Young Ra+u had fired his revolver as he challenged the boastful leader of the district until the man fell dead. >raba, er had loved feasting and dancing and music. He had saved the woman he loved from the cholera epidemic, and married her and he had died, in a hospital bed, surrounded by our sorrowing love.

After Ahmad finished translating the last of my words there was a lengthy silence while they considered the tale. I was just convincing myself that they were as moved by the life of my little friend as I was myself when the first questions began.

So, how many goats did they have in that village? Suleiman asked gravely.

*e wants to know how many goats? Ahmad began translating.

I got it, I got it, I smiled. Well, near as I can tell, about eighty, maybe as many as a hundred. Each household had about two or three goats, but some had as many as sixteen or eight.

That information inspired a little gesturing but of discussion that was more animated and partisan than any of the political or religious debates that had occasionally stirred among the men.

What ... colour ... ! here these goatsE5 \$alalaad as, ed.

He colours,5 4ahmoud e' #lained solemnly. 5*e ! ants to , no! the colours of those goats.5

Well, gee, they ! ere bro! n, I guess, and ! hite, and a fe! bla , ones.5

Here they big goats, li, e the ones in IranE5 4ahmoud translated for Suleiman. 5@r ! ere they s, inny, li, e the ones in >a, istanE5

Well, about _so big ...5 I suggested, gesturing ! ith my hands.

5*o! mu h mil, ,5 -a1eer as, ed, aught u# in the dis ussion in s#ite of himself, 5did they get from those goats, every dayE5

I'm ... not really an e' #ert on goats ...5

2ry,5 -a1eer insisted. 2ry to remember.5

5@h, shit. I ... it's +ust a ! ild stab in the dar, , mind you, but I'd say, maybe, a ou#le of litres a day ...5 I offered, raising the #alms of my hands hel#lessly.

2his friend of yours, ho! mu h did he earn as a ta' i driverE5 Suleiman as, ed.

5Did this friend go out ! ith a ! oman, alone, before his marriageE5 \$alalaad ! anted to , no! , ausing all the men to laugh and some of them to thro! small stones at him.

In that ! ay the session moved through all the themes that on erned them, until at last I e' used myself and found a relatively sheltered s#ot ! here I ould stare at the misty nothing of the fro1en, shrouded s, y. I ! as trying to fight do! n the fear that #ro! led in my em#ty belly, and lea#t u# ! ith shar#

la! s at my heart in its age of ribs.

2omorro! . 7e ! ere going to fight our ! ay out. -o(one had said it, but I , ne! that all the others ! ere thin, ing ! e ! ould die. 2hey ! ere too heerful, too rela' ed.)ll the tension and dread of the last ! ee, s had drained from them on e ! e"d made the de ision to fight. It ! asn"t the +oyful relief of men ! ho , no! they"re saved. It ! as something else((something I"d seen in the mirror, in my ell, on the night before my des#erate es a#e from #rison, and something I"d seen in the eyes of the man 7CC

! ho"d es a#ed ! ith me. It ! as the e' hilaration of men ! ho ! ere ris, ing everything, ris, ing life and death, on one thro! of the di e. Some time on the ne' t day ! e ! ould be free, or ! e ! ould be dead. 2he same resolution that had sent me over the front ! all of a #rison ! as sending us over the ridge, and into the enemy guns: it"s better to die fighting than to die li, e a rat in a tra#. I"d es a#ed from #rison, and rossed the ! orld, and rossed the years, to find myself in the om#any of men ! ho felt e' a tly as I did about freedom and death.

)nd still I ! as afraid: afraid of being ! ounded, afraid of being shot in the s#ine and #aralysed, afraid of being a#tured alive and tortured in another #rison by yet another #rison guard. It o rred to me that <arla and <haderbhai ! ould"ve had something lever to say to me about fear.)nd in thin, ing that, I realised ho! remote they ! ere from the moment, and the mountain, and me. I realised that I didn"t need their brillian e any more: it ouldn"t hel# me.)ll the leverness in all the ! orld ouldn"t sto# my stoma h from , notting around its #ro! ling fear. 7hen you , no! you"re going to die, there"s no omfort in leverness. Genius is vain, and leverness is hollo! , at the end. 2he omfort that does ome, if it omes at all, is that strangely marbled mi' of time and #la e and feeling that ! e usually all ! isdom. 9or me, on that last night before the battle, it ! as the sound of my mother"s voi e, and it ! as the life and death of my friend >raba, er ... God give you rest, >raba, er. I still love you, and the grieving, ! hen I thin, of you, is #inned to my heart and my eyes ! ith bright and burning stars ... 4y omfort, on that

freeing ridge, as the memory of >raba, er"s smiling face, and the sound of my mother"s voice: Whatever you do in life, do it with courage, and you won't go far wrong ...

Here, take one, he said, sliding down beside me to squat on his heels, and offering me one of the half-cigarettes that he held in his bare hand.

Jesus! I guess, here'd you get those? I thought we all ran out last year.

He did, he said, lighting the cigarettes with a small gas lighter. I'd get these. I'd get them for a special occasion. I think, this is it. I got a bad feeling, a real bad feeling. It's inside me, and I can't shake it tonight.

It was the first time that I'd seen more than the essential word or the sentence the night that Chader had left. We'd stood side by side every day and night, but I almost never met his eye, and I'd avoided conversation with him so coldly that he, too, had been silent with me.

So, ... he said ... about Chader, and Carla ... don't feel ... I mean, I'm not

So, he interrupted. Dou had plenty of reason to be mad. I can see it from your side. I always would. Dou got a real deal, and I told Chader that, too, on the night he left. We should've trusted you. It's a funny thing (the guy he trusted most, the only guy in the world he really trusted all the way, turned out to be a really killer, and the one who sold us all out.

The -e! Dor, a tent, with its rabbi's roll, rolled over me like a arm, frothy wave, and I almost reached out to hug him. I'd missed the assurances I'd always found in the sound of that

voie, and the honest suffering I said in the s arred fa e. I ! as so glad to have his friendshi# again that I onfused ! hat he"d said about <haderbhai. I thought, ! ithout really thin, ing at all, that he ! as tal, ing about)bdullah. *e ! as n"t, and that, too, li, e a hundred other han es to , no! all the truth in the one onversation, ! as lost.

5*o! ! ell did you , no!)bdullahE5 I as, ed him.

5>retty ! ell,5 he ans! ered, his little smile be oming an as, ing fro! n: 7here is this goingE

5Did you li, e himE5

5- ot really.5

57hy notE5

5)bdullah didn"t believe in anything. *e ! as a rebel ! ithout a ause, in a ! orld that doesn"t have enough rebels for the real auses. I don"t li, e((and I don"t really trust((#eo#le ! ho don"t believe in anything.5

5Does that in lude meE5

5- o,5 he laughed. 5Dou believe in a lot of things. 2hat"s ! hy I li, e you. 2hat"s ! hy <hader loved you. *e did love you, you , no! . *e told me so, a ou#le different times.5

57hat do I believe inE5 I s offed.

5Dou believe in #eo#le,5 he re#lied =ui , ly. 52hat stuff ! ith the slum lini and all. 2he story you told the guys tonight, that about the village. Dou"d forget that shit if you didn"t believe in #eo#le. 2hat ! or, in the slum, ! hen the holera ! ent through the #la e((<hader loved that, ! hat you did then, and so did I.

Shit, for a while there, I think, you even had to
believe, too. You gotta understand, right? If I had had a
choice, if there was a better way to do what he had to do, he
would've taken it. It all played out the way it had to. Nobody
wanted to fuck you over.

Not even I smiled, savouring the last puff of the
cigarette and then stubbing it out on the ground.

Well, maybe he conceded, laughing the small, sad laugh.
Out that's all. I think, the only guy she never fucked over as
)bduh.

Were they together? I asked, so surprised that I couldn't help
the pinch of jealousy that pulled my brows together in a hard,
little frown.

Well, you couldn't say together, he answered evenly, staring
into my eyes. Out I asked, on edge. I used to live with her.

You what?

I lived with her (for six months).

That happened? I asked, gritting my teeth and feeling stupid
for it. I had no right to be angry or jealous. I'd never asked
her about her lovers, and she'd never asked me about mine.

You don't, no, do you?

I couldn't ask, if I, never.

She dumped me, he said slowly, just about the time you came
along.

Oh, fuck, man ...

It's okay, he smiled.

We were silent for a moment, both of us reeling back, through the years. I remembered Abdullah, at the sea, all near the *a+)li 4os=ue, on the night that I met him with <haderbhai. I remembered him saying that a ! oman had taught him the lever #hrase he"d used in /nglish. It must've been <arla. @f course it ! as <arla.)nd I remembered the stiffness that ! as in <haled"s manner ! hen I first met him, and I realised, suddenly, that he must've been hurting then, and maybe blaming me for it. I sa! learly ! hat it must've ta, en for him to be as friendly and , ind to me as he ! as at the beginning.

Dou , no! ,5 he added after a ! hile, 5you really got to go careful ! ith <arla, ; in. She's ... angry ... you , no! E)nd she's hurt. She's hurt bad, in all the #la es that ount. 2hey really fu , ed her u# ! hen she ! as a , id. She's a bit ra1y. She did something, in the States, before she ame to India.)nd that fu , ed her u#, too.5

What did she do?

I don't , no! . Something #retty serious. She never told me ! hat it ! as. 7C9

We tal, ed around it, if you get my meaning. I thin, <haderbhai , ne! about it be ause, you , no! , he ! as the first one to meet her.5

So, I didn't , no! that,5 I ans! ered him, fro! ning ! ith the thought of ho! little I , ne! about the ! oman I"d loved for so long. 57hy ... ! hy do you thin, she never told me about <haderbhaiE I , ne! her a long time((! hen ! e ! ere both ! or, ing for him((and she didn't say a ! ord. I tal, ed about him, but she never said a ! ord. She didn't mention his name on e.5

I thin, she's +ust loyal to him, you , no! E I don't thin, there's anything against you, ; in. She's +ust in redibly loyal((! ell, she ! as in redibly loyal to him. She thought of him li, e a father, I

thin, . *er o! n father died ! hen she ! as a , id.)nd her ste#father died ! hen she ! as still #retty young. <hader ame along +ust in time to save her, so he got to be her father.5

5Dou said he ! as the first one ! ho met herE5

5Deah, on a #lane. It's , ind of a ! eird story, the ! ay she told me. She didn't remember getting on the #lane. She ! as running from something((something she did((and she ! as in trouble. She ended u# going on a fe! different #lanes from different air#orts ((for a fe! days, I thin, .)nd then she ! as on this #lane that ! as going to Singa#ore from ... I don't , no! ... some! here.)nd she must've had, li, e, a nervous brea, do! n or something, be ause she ra , ed u#, and the ne' t thing she , ne! , she ! as in this ave, in India, ! ith <haderbhai.)nd then he left her ! ith)hmed, ! ho loo, ed after her.5

5She told me about him.5

5Did sheE She doesn't tal, about it mu h. She li, ed that guy. *e nursed her for near about si' months until she got herself together again. *e brought her ba , ((into the light, li, e. 2hey ! ere #retty lose. I thin, he ! as the losest thing to a brother she ever , ne! .5

57ere you ! ith her((I mean, did you , no! her then, ! hen he ! as , illedE5

5I don't , no! that he ! as , illed, ; in,5 <haded stated, fro! ning hard as the , not of re olle tions turned in his memory. 5I , no! <arla believes it((that 4adame . hou , illed him, and the girl ...5

58hristine.5

5Deah, 8hristine. Out I , ne!)hmed #retty ! ell. *e ! as a very gentle guy((a very sim#le, soft , ind of a guy. *e ! as +ust the ty#e to ta, e #oison ! ith his girlfriend, li, e in a romanti

movie, if he thought he

77%

couldn't ever be free with her. I had loved it, real
lose, because I had loved it as one of his guys, and he was sure I had
had nothing to do with it. She loved her.

Out I said I couldn't do it.

So, she didn't buy it. I'm coming on to her of everything else, it
really frustrated her. Did she ever tell you she loves you?

I hesitated, partly from reluctance to surrender the little
advantage I might've had over him if he believed that she did say
it, and partly from loyalty to I said (because it was her
business, after all. In the end, I answered him: I had to, no!
I had to answer her the question.

So.

That's too bad, he said flatly. I thought you might be the
one.

He one.

He one to help her (to break through, I guess. Something really
bad happened to that girl. A lot of bad things happened to her.
I had made it worse, I think.

So!

She put her to rest, for him. She saved her, when he met her, and
he wrote her from what she was scared of, back in the States.
Out then she met this guy, a politician, and he fell for her
hard. I had needed the guy, so he got her to rest, for

him, and I don't think she was out for it.

57 hat , ind of ! or, E5

5Dou , no! ho! beautiful she is((those green eyes, and that ! hite,
! hite s, in.5

5)h, fu , ,5 I sighed, remembering a le ture <hader had given me
on e, about the amount of rime in the sin, and the sin in the
rime.

5I don't , no! ! hat ! as in <hader"s head,5 <haled on luded,
sha, ing his o! n head in doubt and ! onder. 5It ! as ... out of
hara ter, to say the least. I honestly don't thin, he sa! it as
... damaging her. Out she, , ind of, fro1e u#, inside. It ! as li, e
her o! n father ... ! as getting her to do that shit.)nd I don't
thin, she forgave him for it. Out she ! as in redibly loyal to
him, all the same. I never understood it. Out that"s ho! I got
together ! ith her((I sa! all that ha##ening, and I felt , ind of
sorry for her, if you , no! ! hat I mean.)fter a ! hile, one thing
led to another. Out I never really got through to her.)nd you
didn't, neither. I don't thin, anyone ! ill. /ver.5 771

5/ver is a long time.5

5@, ay, you got a #oint. Out I"m +ust trying to ! arn you. I don't
! ant you to get hurt any more, brother. 7e"ve been through too
mu h, naE)nd I don't ! ant her to get hurt.5

*e fell silent again. 7e stared at the ro , s and the frosty
ground, avoiding one another"s eyes.) fe! shivering minutes
#assed.)t last he too, a dee# breath and stood u#, sla##ing at
the hill in his arms and legs. I stood as ! ell, trembling ! ith
old and stam#ing my numb feet.)t the last #ossible moment, and
! ith an im#ulsive rush as if he ! as brea, ing through a tangle of
vines, <haled flung his arms around me and hugged me. 2he
strength in his arms ! as fier e, but his head slo! ly ame to rest
against mine as tenderly as the lolling head of a slee#ing hild.

7hen he #ulled a! ay from me, his fa e ! as averted and I ouldn't

see his eyes. *e ! al, ed off, and I follo! ed more slo! ly, hugging my hands under my arms to fight off the old. It ! as only ! hen I ! as alone that I re alled ! hat he"d said to me: I got a bad feeling, ; in.) real bad feeling ...

I resolved to tal, to him about it, but +ust at that moment *abib ste##ed out of a shado! beside me, and I +um#ed in fright.

59or fu , "s sa, eB5 I hissed. 5Dou s ared the fu , in" shit outta meB Don't do that shit, *abibB5

5It's o, ay, it's o, ay,5 4ahmoud 4elbaaf said, ste##ing u# beside the madman.

*abib garbled something at me, s#ea, ing so =ui , ly that I ouldn't ma, e out a single lear syllable. *is eyes ! ere starting from his head. 2he effe t ! as e' aggerated by the dar, , heavy #ou hes beneath his eyes, ! hi h dragged the lo! er lids ! ith them and sho! ed too mu h ! hite belo! the fra tured, s attered ! heel of the iris.

57hatE5

5It's o, ay,5 4ahmoud re#eated. 5*e ! ants to tal, ! ith everybody. *e tal, s to every man, tonight. *e omes to me. *e as, s me to ma, e it /nglish for you, ! hat he says. Dou are the last, before <haled. *e ! ants to s#ea, to <haled last.5

57hat did he sayE5

4ahmoud as, ed him to re#eat ! hat he"d said to me. *abib did s#ea, again, in e' a tly the same too(ra#id, hy#er(energeti manner, staring into my eyes as if he e' #e ted an enemy or a monstrous beast to emerge from them. I ! as +ust as steadfast in returning the stare: I'd been lo , ed u# 77F ! ith violent, ra1y men, and I , ne! better than to ta, e my eyes

off him.

"He says that strong men make the law, to have," Ahmad translated for us.

"What?"

"Strong men, they make it for itself, the law."

"Strong men make their own law, is that what he means?"

"Describe it to me so," Ahmad agreed. "Strong man makes his own law."

"What does he mean?"

"I do not know," Ahmad replied, smiling patiently. "He just says it."

"He's just going around, telling everybody this," I asked. "What a strong man makes his own law?"

"For me, he said that the prophet, because he was a great soldier before he was a great teacher. For Salalaad, he said that the stars shine because they are full with secrets. It is different for every man. And he was in too much a hurry for telling us these things. It is very important for him. I do not understand, I think, it is because he fights tomorrow morning."

"Is there anything else?" I asked, mystified by the exchange.

Ahmad asked Abib if there was anything else that he wanted to say. Holding the stare into my eyes, Abib rattled away in Arabic and Persian.

5 *e says only that there is no such a thing as luck, . *e ! ants you to believe him. *e says again that a strong man((5

54a, es his o! n lu , ,5 I om#leted the translation for him. 57ell, tell him I a##re iate the message.5

4ahmoud s#o, e, and for a fe! moments *abib stared harder, sear hing in my eyes for a re ognition or res#onse that I ouldn't give him. *e turned and lo#ed a! ay ! ith the stoo#ed, rou hing run that I found more hilling and alarming, someho! , than the more obvious, bulging madness in his eyes.

5- o! ! hat's he u# toE5 I as, ed 4ahmoud, relieved that he ! as gone.

5 *e ! ill find <haled, I thin, ,5 4ahmoud re#lied.

5Damn, it's oldB5 I s#luttered.

5Des. I am too old, li, e you. I am all day dreaming that this old ! ill be gone.5

54ahmoud, you ! ere in Oombay ! hen ! e ! ent to hear the Olind 77G Singers, ! ith <haderbhai, ! eren't youE5

5Des. It ! as the first meeting, for all of us, at the same time together. I sa! you there the first time.5

5I'm sorry. I didn't meet you that night, and I didn't noti e you there. 7hat I ! anted to as, you is ho! you got together ! ith <haderbhai in the first #la e.5

4ahmoud laughed. It ! as so rare to see him laugh out loud that I felt myself smiling in res#onse. *e'd lost ! ight on the mission ((! e'd all lost ! ight. *is fa e ! as dra! n tight to the high hee, bones and the #ointed hin, overed ! ith a thi , , dar, beard. *is eyes, even in the old moonlight, ! ere the #olished bron1e of a tem#le vase.

5 I am standing on the street, in Bombay, and I am doing some
#ass#ort business ! ith my friend. 2 here is a hand on my shoulder.
It is)bdullah. *e tells me that <hader <han ! ants to see me. I
go to <hader, in his ar. 7e drive together, ! e tal, , and after,
I am his man.5

57 why did he #i , youE 7hat made him #i , you, and ! hat made you
agree to +oin himE5

4ahmoud fro! ned, and it seemed that he might be onsidering the
=uestion for the first time.

5I ! as against >ahlavi Shah,5 he began. 52he se ret #oli e of the
Shah, the Sava, , they , illed many #eo#le, and they #ut many
#eo#le in the +ail for beating. 4y father , illed in the +ail. 4y
mother , illed in the +ail. 9or fighting against Shah. I ! as a
small boy that time. 7hen I gro! u#, I fight Shah. 2! o times in
the +ail. 2! o times beating, and ele tri ity on my body, and too
mu h #ain. I fight for revolution in Iran.)yatollah <homeini
ma, es the revolution in Iran, and he is the ne! #o! er, ! hen Shah
runs a! ay to)meri a. Out Sava, se ret #oli e still the same. -o!
they ! or, for <homeini.)gain I go in the +ail.)gain the beating
and the ele tri #ain. 2he same #eo#le from the Shah((the e' a tly
same #eo#le in the +ail((no! they ! or, for <homeini.)ll my
friends die in the +ail, and in the ! ar against Ira=. I es a#e,
and ome to Bombay. I ma, e business, bla , (mar, et business, ! ith
other Iran #eo#le. 2hen,)bdei <hader <han ma, es me his man. In
my life, I meet only one great man. 2hat is <hader. -o! , he is
dead ...5

*e ho, ed off the ! ords, and rubbed a tear from ea h eye ! ith the
sleeve of his rough +a , et.

It ! as a long s#ee h, and ! e ! ere free1ing old, yet still I
! ould've 77H
as, ed him more. I ! anted to , no! it all((everything that filled

the gas bet! een ! hat <haderbhai had told me and the se rets <haled had shared. Out at that moment ! e heard a #ier ingly #iteous s ream of terror. It died suddenly, as if the thread of sound had been ut ! ith a #air of shears. 7e loo, ed at one another, and rea hed for ! ea#ons in the same instin t.

52his ! ayB5 4ahmoud shouted, running over the sli##ery sno! and slush ! ith short, areful ste#s.

7e rea hed the origin of the sound at the same time as the other men. -a1eer and Suleiman rushed through our. grou# to see ! hat ! e ! ere staring at. 2hey fro1e, silent and still, at the sight of <haled)nsari , neeling over the body of *abib)bdur Rahman. 2he madman ! as on his ba , . *e ! as dead. 2here ! as a , nife in his throat ! here the ! ords about lu , had been only minutes before. 2he , nife had been #ushed into his ne , and t! isted, +ust as *abib himself had done to our horses and to Siddi=i. Out it ! asn't *abib"s , nife that ! e stared at, +utting out of the muddy, sine! ed throat li, e a bran h from a riverbed. 7e all , ne! the , nife ! ell. 7e"d all seen its distin tive, arved, horn handle a hundred times. It ! as <haled"s , nife.

-a1eer and Suleiman #ut their hands under <haled"s arms, and lifted him gently from the or#se. *e a e#ted the hel# momentarily, but then he shrugged them off and , nelt beside the body. *abib"s #attu sha! I ! as ru , ed u# around his hest. <haled #ulled something from the front of the dead man"s fla, +a , et. It ! as metal, t! o #ie es of metal, hanging from *abib"s ne , on leather thongs. \$alalaad rushed for! ard and snat hed them. 2hey ! ere the souvenir fragments of the tan, that he and *anif and

\$uma had destroyed6 the #ie es that his friends had ! orn around their ne , s.

<haled stood and turned and ! al, ed slo! ly a! ay from the , illing. I #ut my hand on his shoulder as he #assed me, and ! al, ed ! ith him. Oehind me there ! as a ho! l of rage as \$alalaad atta , ed

*abib's or#se ! ith the butt of his <alashni, ov. I loo, ed over my shoulder to see the mad eyes of the lunati rushed beneath the rise and smashing fall of the ! ea#on.)nd in one of those #erversities of the #itying heart, I found myself feeling sorry for *abib. I'd ! anted to , ill him myself, more than on e, and I , ne! that I ! as glad he ! as dead, but my heart ! as so sorry for him in that moment that I grieved as if he ! as a friend. ___*e ! as a 77?

_tea her, I heard myself thin, ing. 2he most violent and dangerous man I'd ever , no! n had been a , indergarten tea her. I ouldn't sha, e that thought((as if it ! as the only truth, in that moment, that really mattered.

)nd ! hen the men finally dragged \$alalaad a! ay, there ! as nothing left: nothing but blood and sno! and hair and shattered bone ! here the life and the tortured mind had been.

<haled returned to our ave. *e ! as muttering something in)rabi . *is eyes ! ere radiant, filled ! ith a vision that illuminated him, and #ut an almost frightening resolve in the set of his s arred features.

)t the ave, he removed the belt around his ! aist that held his anteen. *e let it sli# to the ground. *e lifted the artridge belt over his head from his shoulder and let that too fall. -e' t he rummaged through his #o , ets, em#tying them of their ontents one by one until there ! as nothing on him but the lothes he ! ore.)t his feet ! ere his false #ass#orts, his money, his letters, his ! allet, his ! ea#ons, his +e! ellery, and even the bruised, ! rin, le(eared #hotos of his long(dead family.

57hat's he sayingE5 I as, ed 4ahmoud des#erately. I'd s#ent the last four ! ee, s avoiding <haled's eye and oldly re+e ting his friendshi#. Suddenly, I ! as unbearably afraid that I ! as going to lose him6 that I'd already lost him.

5It is the <oran,5 4ahmoud re#lied in a ! his#er. 5*e is telling Suras from the <oran.5

<haled left the ave and ! al, ed to the edge of the om#ound. I ran to sto# him, and #ushed him ba , ! ith both hands. *e allo! ed the shove, and then ame on to! ard me again. I thre! my arms around him and dragged him ba , a fe! #a es. *e didn't resist me. *e stared dire tly ahead at that infuriating vision only he ould see ! hile he hanted the hy#noti ally #oeti verses of the <oran.)nd ! hen I let him go, he ontinued his ! al, out of the am#.

5*el# meB5 I shouted. 58an't you seeE *e"s goingB *e"s going out

thereB5

4ahmoud, -a1eer, and Suleiman ame for! ard but, instead of hel#ing me to restrain <haled, they gras#ed my arms and gently #rised them a! ay from him. <haled immediately began to ! al, for! ard. I ! restled myself free, and rushed to sto# him again. I shouted at him and sla##ed at his fa e to ! a, en him to the danger. *e didn't resist and he didn't . rea t. I felt the tears hot on my old fa e, stinging in the ra , s that s#lit 77C my fro1en li#s. I felt the sobbing in my hest li, e a river ra##ling and rolling against ! orn and rounded ro , s, on and on and on. I held him tight, ! ith one arm around his ne , and the other around his ! aist, my hands lo , ed together at his ba , .

-a1eer, even as thin and ! ea, ened as he"d be ome in those ! ee, s, ! as too strong for me. *is steel hands grabbed at my ! rists and #eeled them a! ay from <haled. 4ahmoud and Suleiman hel#ed him to hold me ba , as I struggled and rea hed out to grab <haled"s +a , et.)nd then ! e ! at hed him ! al, from the am# into the ! inter that one ! ay or another had ruined or , illed us all.

5Didn't you see itE5 4ahmoud as, ed me ! hen he ! as gone. 5Didn't you see his fa eE5

5Des, I sa! it, I sa! it,5 I sobbed, staggering ba , to the ave to fall into the rum#led ell of my misery.

I lay there for hours unsleeping, filthy starving, angry, and brokenhearted. And I might've died there (some said, sometimes, leaves you without legs or arms) (but the smell of food brought me round. The men had decided that they couldn't wait for the last of the rotting meat. They'd boiled it in a pot during those hours, fanning the smoke away continuously and controlling the flame with blankets, etc.

The soup was ready long before dawn, and every man took a bowl, glass, or mug of it. The stench of the rotting meat was more than our empty stomachs could bear, at first. We all vomited the foul, retching ourselves too. Our hunger has a will of its own, a will that's much older than the other wills of pride and flattery in the palace of the mind. We were too hungry to refuse the food, and by the third try, or the fifth for some of us, we ate the revolting, stinking bread. When the pain caused by the hot soup in our empty stomachs was as sharp as a belly full of fishhooks, so yet that too passed, and every man forced himself to drink, three helpings, and to chew the rubbery, rotting hunks of meat.

Four to five hours after that we too, turned to dash into the rooms as the food poured through intestines and bowels that had sealed in our starving bodies, and suddenly erupted.

At last, when we recovered, and when all the prayers were said, and when each man was ready, we gathered near the south (eastern

edge of the compound at the late 'Abib had recommended for our attack. He'd assured us that the steep slope was our one chance to fight our way to

freedom and since he'd planned to fight in the attack with us, we had no reason to distrust the advice.

We were six men. The five others were Suleiman, Ahmad, Elbaaf, Al-eer, Alalad, and young Alud (Din. He was a shy man of

with a boy's grin beneath an old man's faded green eyes. He caught my eye, and nodded encouragingly. I returned the nod with a smile, and his face broke into a wider grin. He tilted his head and nodded more vigorously. I looked away, ashamed that I'd spent so much time with him, months of hard time, without once trying to engage him in a conversation. We were going to die together, and I knew nothing about him. Nothing.

Dark smoke billowed from the sky. Wind-driven clouds streaming across the far plain were aflame, rimmed with the first burning fissures of the morning sun. We shook hands, embraced, hugged one another, held our breaths again and again, and stared down the steep slopes toward forever.

At the end, when it comes, is always too soon. My skin was as tight on my face, drawn back by the muscles of my neck, and my arms, those muscles in turn pulled taut by the shoulders and arms and frostbitten hands, clutching the final agony of the gun.

Suleiman gave the order. My stomach dropped and I fell, and fell as hard as the cold unfeeling earth beneath my boots. I stood up, and crossed the lip of the ridge. We started down the slope. It was a magnificent day, the best clear day for months. I remembered thinking, weeks before, that Afghanistan, like Persia, had no dawns and no sunsets in the stone ages of its mountains. Yet the dawn that morning was more lovely than any I'd ever known. When the steeper slopes eased into a more gradual decline, I fell, sliding down the slope, jogging over the last of the rosewood and into the grey-green rough ground beyond.

The first explosions I heard were too far away from us to frighten me. They were it comes. This is it ... The words rattled through my mind as if someone else spoke them: as if someone, like a coach, was preparing me for the end. When the explosions were closer, as the enemy mortars found their range.

I looked along our line, and saw that the others were running harder than I was. Only one was still beside me. I tried to

run faster. My legs seemed wooden and numb: I saw them moving, running, step after step, but I couldn't feel them. It took a gigantic effort of will to send the message to my legs, and I commanded them to greater speed. At last I stumbled into a faster run.

Two mortars exploded quite close to me. I kept running, waiting for the rain, and waiting for the killing rain. My heart was

burning in my chest, and my breathing came in gasping, grunting little puffs of cold air. I couldn't see the enemy positions. The mortar's range was all over a kilometre, but I knew they had to be closer than that. And then the first shots scattered, the (tun(tun(tun(tun of the)<(7Hs((theirs and ours. I knew they were close. They were close enough to kill us, and close enough for us to kill them.

My eyes raced ahead on the rough ground, looking for holes or boulders, trying to find the safest path. A man went down, left of me, along the line. It was Salalaad. * He was running beside - a leader, and less than a hundred metres from me. A mortar shell exploded directly in front of him and ripped his young body into pieces. So, going down again, I jumped over rocks and boulders, and I stumbled but didn't fall. I saw Suleiman, fifty metres in front of me, cut at his throat and then fall forward, running a few more metres as if he was searching for something on the ground in front of him. His body jumped and rolled over his face, tumbling to the side. His face and throat were bloodied and broken and torn open. I tried to run around him, but the ground was rough and strewn with rocks, and I had to jump over his body as I ran.

I saw the first flashes of fire from the enemy (alashni, ovs. They were far away, at least two hundred metres, much further than I'd guessed. A tracer bullet filled past me, only one step to my left. He couldn't make it. He couldn't make it. There weren't many of them (there weren't many guns firing (but they had so

mu h time to get a sight on us and shoot us do! n. 2hey ! ere going to , ill us all. 2hen a ! ild flurry of e' #losions run hed into the enemy lines. 2he idiotsß 2hey ble! u# their o! n mortar shells, I thought, and gunfire li, e fire! or, s rattled the ! orld from every! here at on e.)nd -a1eer raised his assault rifle, and fired as he ran, and I sa! 4ahmoud 4elbaaf firing ahead of me, on my right, ! here Suleiman had been, and I raised my ! ea#on, and #ulled the trigger.

2here ! as a horrible, blood(free1ing s ream some! here very lose. I suddenly re ognised it as my o! n, but I ouldn't sto# it.)nd I loo, ed at 779

the men, the brave and beautiful men beside me, running into the guns, and God hel# me for thin, ing it, and God forgive me for saying it, but it ! as glorious, it ! as glorious, if glory is a magnifi ent and ra#tured e' altation. It ! as ! hat love ! ould be li, e, if love ! as a sin. It ! as ! hat musi ! ould be, if musi ould , ill you.)nd I limbed a #rison ! all ! ith every running ste#.

)nd then, in a ! orld suddenly soundless as the dee#est sea, my legs sto##ed still, and hot, gritty, filthy, e' #loding earth logged my eyes and my mouth. Something had hit my legs. Something hard and hot and vi iously shar# had hit my legs. I fell for! ard as if I'd been running in the dar, and I'd smashed into a fallen tree trun, .) mortar round. 2he metal fragments.

2he sho , (deafened silen e. 2he burning s, in. 2he blinding earth. 2he ho, ing struggle for breath. 2here ! as a smell that filled my head. It ! as the smell of my o! n death((it smells of blood, and sea! ater, and dam# earth, and the ash of burned ! ood ! hen you smell your o! n death before you die((and then I hit the ground so hard that I #lunged through it into a dee#, undreaming dar, ness.)nd the fall ! as forever.)nd there ! as no light, no light.

(((((((((((

PART FIVE

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

If you stare into its old dead eye, the camera always shows you the truth. The black and white photograph showed almost all the men of Hader's muhajeddin unit assembled for the kind of formal portrait that makes the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India seem more stiff and gloriously self-conscious than they really are. It was impossible to tell from that photograph whether those men had loved to laugh, and how readily they'd smiled. Out of none of them were looking directly into the lens of the camera. All the eyes but mine were a little above or below, a little to the left or the right. Only my own eyes stared back at me as I held the picture in my bandaged hands, and remembered the names of the men leaning together in the ragged lines.

4a1dur Gul, the stonemason, whose name means labourer, and whose hands were permanently grey (white from decades of work with granite ... Daoud, who lived to be called by the English version of his name, David, and whose dream it was to visit the great city of ... Dor, and eat a meal in a fine restaurant amaanat, whose name means trust, and whose brave smile concealed the agony of shame he'd felt that his whole family lived in hungry squalor at Salolai, a huge refugee camp near Peshawar ... *ahmad), bar, who'd been appointed as the doctor in the unit for no other reason than that he'd spent twelve months as a patient in a Kabul hospital, and who'd greeted my attachment of the doctor's job, when I arrived at the mountain camp, with prayers and a little Dervish dance of joy ... Yusef, the mischievously satirical Peshawar trader, who died tragically in the snow with his bare feet, torn when his clothes caught fire ... Suma and *anif, the twelve boys who were killed by the madman *abib ... Salalaad, their fearless young friend, who died in the last charge ...)Ibrahim (Din, whose name in English is shortened to Ibrahim), and whose eyes were fixed on Suleiman Shahbadi, of the famous and

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sorrowing eyes, who died leading us into the guns.

And in the centre of the assembly there I as a smaller, tighter group around Abdel <hader <han: Ahmed . adeh, the Algerian, I ho died I with one hand clenched in the frozen earth and the other

, noded into mine ... <haled)nsari, I ho murdered the madman *abib and then I al, ed into the lost I orld of the smothering snow ... 4ahmoud 4elbaaf, I ho survived the last charge li, e)la(ud(Din, un! ounded and unmar, ed ... -a1eer, I ho ignored his o! n I ounds to drag my un ons ious body to safety ... and me. Standing behind and a little to the left of <haderbhai, my e' #ression in the #hotogra#h I as onfident, resolute, and self(#ossessed.)nd the amera, they say, doesn't lie.

It I as -a1eer I ho'd saved me. The mortar shell that had e' #loded so close to us, as I e ran into the guns, ri##ed and ru#tured the air. The shock, I ave burst my left eardrum. In the same deafened moment, #ie es of the e' #loded shell #assed us in a hot metal bli1lard. -one of the larger hun, s of metal hit me, but eight small #ie es of the shra#nel smashed into my legs below the , nees ((five in one leg, and three in the other. 2! o smaller #ie es hit my body((one in the stoma h, and one in the hest. 2hey tore through the heavy layers of my lothing, and even #ier ed my thi , money belt and the solid leather stra#s of my medi "s bag, burning their I ay into my s, in.)nother hun, hit my forehead, high above the left eye.

2hey I ere tiny fragments, the largest of them about the si1e of)be ;in oln's fa e on an)meri an #enny oin. Still, they I ere travelling at su h a s#eed that they too, my legs out from under me. /arth, thro! n u# by the e' #losion, #e##ered my fa e, blinding and ho, ing me. I hit the ground hard, ust managing to turn my fa e aside before the im#a t. Unfortunately, I turned the burst eardrum to the ground, and the violence of the blo! rived the I ound even further. I bla , ed out.

-a1eer, I ho I as I ounded in the legs and the arm, #ulled my

unconscious body into the shelter of a shallow trench (like depression). *e collapsed himself, then, covering my body with his body until the bombardment stopped. Lying there with his arms around my neck, he too, was hit in the back, of his right shoulder. It was as if a piece of metal that could've hit me, and might've killed me, had <hader's man not protected me with his love. When all was quiet, he dragged me to safety.

It was Sayeed, yes? Ahmad Elbaaf as, ed. 78?

Sorry

It was Sayeed! He too, the figure, as it not?

Des. Des. It was Sayeed. They called him <ishmishi ...

He ordered us into memories of the shy, young Pashtun fighter. *e'd seen <haderbhai as the embodiment of all his warrior heroes, and he'd followed him everywhere, adoringly, with eyes he usually fastidiously hidden <han loomed his way. *e'd survived smallpox as a child, and his father was severely wounded with dozens of small wounds. *is

name, <ishmishi, used with great affection by the older fighters, meant Raisins. *e'd been too shy to pose with us in the photograph, so he'd volunteered to operate the camera.

*e was with <hader, I muttered.

Des, at the end. - a1eer said his body, at the side of <hader, very close to him. I think, he could as, to be with <hader even if he knew, before the attack, that they could get an attack, and get killed. I think, he could as, to die like that. And he was not the only one.

Where did you get this?

5<haled had the roll of film. RememberE *e had the only amera
that <hader give his #ermission. 2he film ! as ! ith other things
he let fall do! n to the ground from his #o , ets ! hen he ! ent from
us. I ta, e it ! ith me. I #ut it in the #hoto studio last ! ee, .
2hey return the #hotos this morning. I thought you ! ould li, e it
to see them, before ! e leave.5

5; eaveE 7here are ! e goingE5

57e have to get out of here. *o! are you feelingE5

5I'm fine,5 I lied. 5I'm o, ay.5

I sat u# on the ot bed and s! ung my legs over the side. 7hen my
feet hit the floor there ! as a #ain so e' ru iating in my shins
that I moaned aloud.)nother fier e #ain throbbed at my forehead.
I #robed ! ith my blunt, bandaged fingers at a ! ad of dressing
beneath a bandage that ! ound round my head li, e a turban.) third
#ain in my left ear nagged for my attention. 4y hands ! ere
a hing, and my feet, s! addled in three or more layers of so , s,
felt as if they ! ere burning. 2here ! as a #ainful a he in my left
hi#, ! here the horse had , i , ed me ! hen the +ets had torn u# the
s, y above us, months before. 2he ! ound had never #ro#erly healed,
and I sus#e ted that a bone ! as hi##ed beneath the tender flesh.
4y forearm felt numb near the elbo! , ! here my o! n horse had
bitten me in its #ani . 2hat ! ound ! as also months old, and it
too had never really healed. 78C

Doubled over, resting on my thighs, I ould feel the tightness of
my stoma h and the leaner flesh of my legs. I ! as thin, after
starving on the mountain. 2oo thin.)ll in all, it ! as a mess. I
! as in a bad ! ay. 2hen my mind ame ba , to the bandages on my
hands, and a sensation lose to #ani rose li, e a s#ear in my
s#ine.

57hat are you doingE5

5I've gotta get these bandages off,5 I sna##ed, tearing at them

! ith my teeth.

57aitB 7aitB5 4ahmoud ried. 5I ! ill do it for you.5

*e un! ound the bul, y bandages slo! ly, and I felt the s! eat run from my eyebrow! s onto my hee, s. 7hen both lots of bindings ! ere removed, I stared at the disfigured la! s that my hands had become, and I moved them, fle'ing the fingers. 9rostbite had s#lit my hands o#en at all the , nu , le +oints, and the bruise(bla , ! ounds ! ere hideous, but all the fingers and all the fingerti#s ! ere there.

5Dou an than, -a1eer,5 4ahmoud muttered softly as he e' amined my ra , ed and #eeling hands. 52hey ! ere thin, ing to ut off your fingers, but he ! ould not let them.)nd he ! ould not let them leave you until they treated all your in+uries. *e did for e them to hel# the frostbite in+uries on your fa e, also. *e had the <alashni, ov and your automati #istol. *ere((he as, ed me to give it to you, ! hen you ! a, e u#.5

*e #rodu ed the Ste h, in, ! ra##ed in a oil of heese loth. I tried to ta, e it, but my hands ouldn't hold the bundle.

5I ! ill , ee# it for you,5 4ahmoud offered ! ith a stiff little smile.

57here is heE5 I as, ed, still da1ed and drilled by the #ain, but feeling better and stronger by the minute.

5@ver there,5 4ahmoud indi ated, nodding his head. I turned to see -a1eer, slee#ing on his side on a ot similar to my o! n. 5*e is resting, but he is ready to move. 7e must leave here soon. @ur friends ! ill ome for us at any time no! , and ! e must be ready to move.5

I loo, ed around me. 7e ! ere in a large, sand(oloured tent ! ith

#allet floors and about fifteen folding ot(beds. Several men
! earing)fghan lothing((loose #ants, tuni shirts, and long,
sleeveless vests in the same shades of #ale green((moved among
the beds. 2hey ! ere fanning the ! ounded men ! ith stra! fans,
! ashing them ! ith bu ,ets of soa#y ! ater, or arrying a! ay ! astes
through a narro! slit in the anvas door. Some of the ! ounded
! ere moaning or s#ea, ing out their #ain in 787
languages I ouldn't understand. 2he air in that >a, istani #lain,
after months in the sno! y #ea, s of)fghanistan, ! as thi , and hot
and heavy. 2here ! ere so many strong smells, one u#on another,
that my senses re+e ted them and on entrated on one #arti ularly
#ungent aroma: the unmista, able smell of #erfumed Indian basmati
ri e, oo, ing some! here lose to the tent.

5I'm fu , in" hungry, man, I gotta tell ya.5

57e ! ill eat good food soon,5 4ahmoud assured me, allo! ing
himself a laugh.

5)re ! e ...E 2his is >a, istanE5

5Des,5 he laughed again. 57hat an you rememberE5

5-ot mu h. Running. 2hey ! ere shooting at us ... from a long ! ay
off. 4ortars every! here. I remember ... I ! as hit ...5

I felt along the #added bandages that s! athed my shins, from
, nees to an, les.

5)nd I hit the ground. 2hen ... I remember0,p

and the two main roads (to Kandahar and to Kabul). They put a siege on Kandahar. They are still there, outside the city, and they will not leave, I think, so, until the war is over. We ran into the middle of it, my friend.

They rescued us ...

It is as, however, to say, the less they do for us.

At least they could do for us.

Des. One cause it is as them, however, killed us.

What?

Des. When we made our way out of the mountain, running down, the Afghan army shoot at us. Assad's men see us, and think, we are some of the enemy. They are a long way from us. They start to shoot at us with mortars.

Our own people shot at us.

Everybody is shooting (I mean, everyone shooting in the same time. Afghan army, they were shooting at us also, but the mortars that did hit us, I think, they were our own side. And that made Afghan army and Russian soldiers run away. I killed two of them myself when they run.

away. The men of Ahmed Shah Assad, they had Stingers. The Afghans give them the Stingers, in April, and since that time, the Russians having no helicopters. -o- the muhajeddin fight back, in every place. -o- the war is over, in two years, or maybe three, Inshallah.

April ... that month is this.

-o- is 4ay.

*o- long have I been here.

59our days, ; in,5 he ans! ered softly.

59our days ...5 I'd thought it ! as one night, one long slee#. I loo, ed over my shoulder again at the slee#ing form of -a1eer. 5) re you sure he"s o, ayE5

5*e is in+ured((here ... and here((but he is strong, and he an move himself. *e ! ill be ! ell, Inshallah. *e is li, e a shotorB5 he laughed, using the 9arsi ! ord for amel. 5*e ma, es his mind, and nobody an hange him.5

I laughed ! ith him for the first time sin e I'd ! o, en. 2he laugh sent my hands to my head in an effort to ontain the throbbing #ain it aused.

5I ! ouldn't li, e to be the one ! ho tried to hange -a1eer"s mind about anything, on e it ! as made u#.5

54e too not.5 4ahmoud agreed. 52he soldiers of 4assoud, they arried you and -a1eer, ! ith me, to a ar, a good Russian ar.)fter the ar, ! e moved you and -a1eer to a tru , , for the road to 8haman.)t 8haman, the >a, istanis, border guards, they ! ant to ta, e -a1eer"s guns. *e give them money((some of your money, from your money belt((and he , ee# his guns. 7e hide you in the blan, ets, ! ith t! o dead men. 7e #ut them on to# of you, and ! e sho! them to border guards, and tell that ! e ! ant to give good 4uslim burial for these men. 2hen ! e ome into I uetta, to this hos#ital, and again they ! ant to ta, e -a1eer"s guns.)gain he give them money. 2hey ! ant to ut your fingers, be ause of the smell ...5

I #ut my hands to my nose, and sniffed at them. 2here ! as a rotten, death(foetid smell to them still. It ! as faint, but lear enough to remind me of the rotting goat"s feet ! e"d eaten as our last su##er on the mountain. 4y stoma h hurned, ar hing li, e a fighting at. 4ahmoud =ui , ly rea hed for a metal dish and thrust

it under my face. I vomited, s#itting bla , (green bile into the
bo! I, and fell for! ard hel#lessly onto my , nees.

7hen the nausea atta , #assed, I sat ba , on the ot and snat hed
gratefully at the igarette 4ahmoud lit for me. 789

5Go on.5 I stuttered.

57hatE5

5Dou ! ere saying ... about -a1eer ...5

5@h yes, yes, he #ull his <alashni, ov out from under his #attu
and #oint it at them. *e tell them he ! ill , ill them all, if they
ut you. 2hey ! ant to all the guards, the am# #oli e, but
-a1eer, he is in the door of the tent, ! ith his gun. 2hey annot
go #ast him.)nd I am on his other side, loo, ing for his ba , . So
they fi' you.5

52hat"s a hell of a health #lan((an) fghan ! ith a <alashni, ov
#ointed at your do tor.5

5Des,5 he agreed ! ithout irony. 5)nd after, they fi' -a1eer.)nd
then, after t! o days ! ith no slee#, and many ! ounds, -a1eer
slee#.5

52hey didn"t all the guards, ! hen he ! ent to slee#E5

5-o. 2hey are all) fghans here. Do tors, ! ounded men, guards,
everybody is) fghan. Out not the am# #oli e. 2hey are >a, istani.
2he) fghans, they don"t li, e the >a, istan #oli e. 2hey have big
trouble ! ith >a, istan #oli e. /verybody has trouble ! ith >a, istan
#oli e. So they give a #ermission to me, and I ta, e -a1eer"s guns
! hen he slee#.)nd I loo, after him.)nd I loo, after you. 7ait((
I thin, our friends are hereB5

2he long fla#s of the tent"s door! ay o#ened all the ! ay ba , ,

stunning us with the yellow light of a flare. Four men entered. They were Afghans, veteran fighters, hard men, with eyes that stared at me as if they were looking along the decorated barrel of a tail rifle. Ahmadou rose to greet them, and his forehead a few inches. Two of the men, one - a leech. *e'd been in a deep sleep, and spun round at the first touch, grasping at the men and ready to fight. Reassured by their gentle expressions, he then turned his head to the , on me. Seeing me alone and sitting up, he grinned so broadly that it was a little alarming in a face so seldom struck with a smile.

The two men helped him to his feet. There was a pad of bandage strapped to his right thigh. Supporting himself on their shoulders, he limped out into the sunlight. The other men helped me to my feet. I tried to walk, but my wounded shins refused to obey me, and the best I could manage was a tottering shuffle. After a few seconds of that embarrassingly feeble shuffling, the men formed a hair with their arms and supported me effortlessly between them.

For the next several days, that was the pattern of our recovery: a few days, perhaps as long as a week, in one location before an abrupt shift to a new tent or slum hut or hidden room. The CIA, ISI, and the secret service, the ISI, had a malign interest in every foreigner who entered Afghanistan without their sanction during the war. The problem for Ahmadou elbaaf, who was our guardian in those vulnerable weeks, was the fascination our story held for the refugees and exiles who harboured us. I'd darkened my blonde hair, and I wore sunglasses almost all the time. Out, no matter how careful and secretive we were in the slums and camps here, we stayed, there was always someone who, nevertheless, was. The temptation to talk about the American gunrunner who was wounded in battle, fighting with the mujaheddin, was irresistible. Talk, like that, would've been enough to invite the curiosity of any intelligence agent from any agency. And had the secret police

found me, they would've discovered that the Ymeri an! as in fact
an es a#ed onvi t from)ustralia. 2hat! ould've meant #romotions
for some, and a s#e ial thrill for the torturers! ho! ould get to
! or, on me before they handed me over to the)ustralian
authorities. So! e moved often and! e moved =ui ,ly, and! e s#o, e
to none but the fe! ! e trusted! ith our! ounded lives.

;ittle by little, the details emerged: the more om#lete story of
the battle! e"d run into, and our res ue after it. 2he Russian
and)fghan soldiers! ho"d surrounded our mountain om#rised the
best #art of a om#any and, as su h, ! ere #robably led by a
a#tain. 2heir sole #ur#ose in o#erating among the Shar(i(Safa
4ountains! as to at h and ,ill *abib)bdur Rahman.) huge re! ard
had been #osted for his arrest, but the terror and the horror
that his atro ities had for ed into their minds made the hunt for
him a mu h more #ersonal o#eration for the sear hers. So
mesmerised! ere they by his savage hatred, and so obsessed! ere
they! ith his a#ture, that they failed to dete t the stealthy
advan e of)hmed Shah 4assoud's for es. 7hen! e made our brea,
for freedom, a ting on *abib's information that most of the
Russians and the)fghans! ere busy laying mines and other tra#s
on the far side of the mountain, the startled sentries in the
deserted enemy am# had o#ened fire. 2hey"d thought, #erha#,
that *abib himself! as oming for them, be ause their fire! as
! ild and undis i#lined. 2hat a tion had #re i#itated the atta ,
that! as being #lanned by 4assoud's mu+aheddin, ! ho must've seen
the firing as a #re(em#tive stri, e by the Russians. 2he
e' #losions I'd seen and heard as I ran to! ard the enemy((they
ble! u# their o! n mortar shells, the idiots((791
! ere a tually dire t hits on the Russian #ositions by 4assoud's
mortars. 2he! ider mortar stri, es that tore into our line! ere
mere a idents: friendly fire, as they say.

)nd that! as the elated moment I'd alled glorious, in my mind,
as I ran into the guns: that stu#id! aste of lives, that friendly
fire. 2here! asn't any glory in it. 2here never is. 2here's only
ourage and fear and love.)nd! ar ,ills them all, one by one.
Glory belongs to God, of ourse6 that's! hat the! ord really

means.)nd you an't serve God ! ith a gun.

7hen ! e fell, 4assoud's men #ursued the fleeing enemy all the ! ay around the mountain and into the returning om#any of minelayers. 2he battle that follo! ed ! as a massa re. -ot one man of the for e sent to at h and , ill *abib)bdur Rahman survived. *e ! ould"ve li, ed that, the madman, had he been alive to hear it. I , no! e' a tly ho! he ! ould"ve grinned, ! ith his ! ide mouth ga#ing soundless and his grief(ra1ed eyes bulging on s! ollen hatreds.

)ll that old day, and into the sudden evening, -a1eer and I had remained on the battleground.)s ! e shivered in the s! iftly falling shado! s of sunset, the mu+aheddin and the survivors from our o! n unit returned from the fighting to find us. 4ahmoud and)la(ud(Din brought the dead((Suleiman and \$alalaad((from the barren mountain.

4assoud's men had ombined ! ith inde#endent) ha, 1ai fighters to laim the 8haman high! ay from the >ass all the ! ay to the Russian defensive #erimeter of besieged <andahar, less than fifty , ilometres from the ity. 2he eva uation to 8haman, and through the >ass to >a, istan, ! as ra#id and ! ithout in ident. 7e rode in a tru , , arrying our dead friends ! ith us, and rea hed the he , #oint in hours((the +ourney that had ta, en us a month of mountains on <hader"s horses.

-a1eer healed ra#idly and began to regain ! eight. 2he ! ounds in his arm and the ba , of his shoulder losed over ! ell, and gave him little trouble. Out the larger and dee#er ! ound to his right thigh seemed to have damaged the ligamentary relationshi# bet! een muscle, bone, and tendons, from his hi# to his , nee. 2he u##er leg ! as stiff, and he still ! al, ed ! ith a lim# as he s! ung his right ste# around the hi#, instead of through it.

*is s#irits ! ere relatively high, ho! ever, and he ! as an' ious to return to Oombay((so an' ious, in fa t, that his fretting attention to my slo! er re overy be ame irritating. I sna##ed at

him a couple of times ! then his 79F
solitary urging ((Dou betterE Dou come no! E 7e go no! E((be ame
unendurably annoying. I didn't , no! then that he had a mission,
<hader"s last mission, ! aiting for him in Oombay. 2he mission ! as
all that held his grief and his shame at surviving) bdel <hader
in he , .)nd every day, as our health im#roved, the obligations
of <hader"s last ommand to him gre! more suffo ating6 and his
dereli tion, as he sa! it, more #rofane.

I had #reo u#ations of my o! n. 2he ! ounds on my legs ! ere
healing readily enough, and the s, in on my forehead losed safely
over a small, lum#y ridge of bone, but my ru#tured eardrum be ame
infe ted, and it ! as the sour e of a onstant and almost
unbearable #ain. /very mouthful of food, every si# of ! ater,
every ! ord I s#o, e, and every loud noise that I heard sent
#ier ing little s or#ion stings along the nerves of my fa e and
throat, and dee# into my fevered brain. /very movement of my
body, or turn of the head,

! aiting6 the little matter of revenge in Oombay.) lthough my body
! as thinner after the ordeal, it ! as harder and tougher than it
had been all those #lum# months before, ! hen ! e"d first set out
for <hader"s ! ar.

-a1eer and 4ahmoud organised our return tri# by a series of
onne ting trains. 2hey"d a =uired a small arsenal of ! ea#ons in
>a, istan, and ! ere intent on smuggling them into Oombay. 2hey
on ealed the guns in bales of fabri , and shi##ed them in the
are of three) fghans

79G

! ho ! ere fluent in *indi. 7e rode in different arriages, and
never a , no! ledged the men, but the illi it argo ! as al! ays on
our minds. 2he irony of it((! e"d set off to smuggle guns into
) fghanistan, and ! e ! ere returning to smuggle guns into Oombay((
made me laugh, ! hen it o rurred to me, as I sat in my first(lass
arriage. Out the laughter ! as bitter, and the e' #ression it left
on my fa e turned the eyes of my fello! #assengers a! ay.

It too, us a little over t! o days to get ba , to Oombay. I ! as
travelling on my false Oritish boo, , the one I"d used to enter
>a, istan.) rding to the entries in the boo, , I"d overstayed on
my visa. Asing the little smiling harm I ould muster and the
last of the money <hader had #aid me, the last)meri an dollars,
I bribed the offi ials on both the >a, istani and Indian sides of
the border ! ithout raising so mu h as the fli ,er of an eye.)nd
an hour after da! n, eight months after ! e left her, ! e ! al, ed
into the dee# heat and franti , toiling ferven y of my beloved
Oombay.

9rom a dis reet distan e, -a1eer and 4ahmoud 4elbaaf su#ervised
the unloading and trans#ort of their military argo. >romising
-a1eer that I ! ould meet u# ! ith him that night at ; eo#old"s, I
left them at the station.

I too, a ab. I felt drun, on the sound and olour and gorgeous
flo! ing , inesis of the island ity. Out I had to on entrate. I
! as almost out of money. I dire ted the driver to the bla , (

mar, et urren y(olle tion entre in the 9ort area. 7ith the ta' i
! aiting belo! , I ran u# the three narro! ! ooden flights to the
ounting room.) memory of <haled ! rung out my heart((I used to
run u# these stairs ! ith <haled, ! ith <haled, ! ith <haled((and I
len hed my +a! against it, +ust as I bit do! n on the #ain in my
! ounded shins. 2he t! o big men, loitering ! ith intent on the
landing outside the room, re ognised me. 7e shoo, hands, all of
us smiling ! idely.

57hat"s the ne! s of <haderbhaiE5 one of the men as, ed.

I loo, ed into his tough young fa e. *is name ! as)mir. I , ne! him
to be brave and reliable and devoted to the <han. 9or the blin,
of an eye it seemed, in redibly, that he ! as ma, ing a +o, e about

<hader"s death, and I felt a =ui , , angry im#ulse to stiffen him.
2hen I realised that he sim#ly didn"t , no! . *o! is that #ossibleE
7hy don"t they , no! B Instin t told me not to ans! er his =uestion.
I held my eyes and my mouth in a hard, im#assive little smile,
and brushed #ast him to , no , at the door. 79H

) short, fat, balding man in a ! hite singlet and dhoti o#ened the
door and thrust out his hands at on e in a double handsha, e. It
! as Ra+ubhai, ontroller of the urren y olle tions for)bdel
<hader <han"s mafia oun il. *e #ulled me into the room, and
losed the door. 2he ounting room ! as the ore of his #ersonal
and business universe, and he s#ent t! enty out of every t! enty(
four hours there. 2he thin, faded, #in, (! hite ord uned and R3SÄ y

, no! that <hader ! as dead, then nobody in the ity ! ould , no! .
)nd if <hader"s death ! as still a se ret, then 4ahmoud and -a1eer
must"ve insisted on the su##ression of the ne! s. 2hey hadn"t said
anything to me about it. I ouldn"t understand it. 7hatever their
reasons, I de ided to su##ort them and to , ee# my silen e on the
matter.

5*um a, ela hain,5 I re#lied, returning his smile. I"m alone.

It ! asn"t an ans! er to his =uestion, and his eyes narro! ed on the
! ord.

5) , ela ...5 he re#eated.)lone ...

5Des, Ra+ubhai, and I need some money, fast. I"ve got a ta' i
! aiting.5

5Dou need dollars, ; inE5

5Dollars nahin. Sirf ru#ia.5 -ot dollars. @nly ru#ees.

5*o! mu h you needE5

5Do(do(teen ha1aar,5 I ans! ered, using the slang #hrase t! o(t! o(
three thousand, ! hi h al! ays means three.

52een ha1aarB5 he huffed, more from habit than any real on ern.
2hree thousand ru#ees ! as a onsiderable sum to the street
runners, or in the slums, but it ! as a trifling amount in the
onte' t of the bla , (mar, et urren y trade. Ra+ubhai"s offi e
olle ted a hundred times that mu h and more every day, and he"d
often #aid me si' ty thousand ru#ees at a time as my ! age and my

share of ommissions.

5)bi, bhai(ya, abiB5 -o! , brother, no! B

Ra+ubhai turned his head and gestured, ! ith a t! it h of his
eyebro! s, to one of his ler, s. 2he man handed over three
thousand ru#ees in used but lean hundred(ru#ee notes. Riffing
the small bundle first, from habit, as a double he , , Ra+ubhai
handed the notes a ross. I #eeled off t! o 79?
notes to #ut in my shirt #o , et, and #ushed the rest inside a
dee#er #o , et in my long vest.

5Shu, ria, ha ha,5 I smiled. 54ain +ata hu.5 2han, s, un le. I'm
going.

5; inB5 he ried, sto##ing me by gras#ing at my sleeve. 5* amara
beta <haled, , aisa hainE5 *o! is our son, <haledE

5<haled is not ! ith us,5 I said, struggling to , ee# my voi e and
my e' #ression neutral. 5*e ! ent on a +ourney, a yatra, and I
don't , no! ! hen ! e"ll see him.5

I too, the ste#s t! o at a time on the ! ay do! n to the ab,
feeling the sho , of ea h +um# shudder into my shins. 2he driver
s! ung out into the traffi at on e, and I dire ted him to a
lothing sho# that I , ne! on the 8olaba 8ause! ay. @ne of the
sybariti s#lendours of Oombay is the limitless variety of
relatively ine' #ensive, ! ell(made lothes onstantly hanging to
refle t the ne! est Indian and foreign trends. In the refugee
am#, 4ahmoud 4elbaaf had given me a long, blue(serge vest, a
! hite shirt, and oarse bro! n trousers. 2he lothes had served
for the tri# from I uetta, but in Oombay they ! ere too hot and too
strange: they dre! urious attention to me ! hen I needed the
amouflage of urrent fashion. I hose a #air of bla , +eans ! ith
strong, dee# #o , ets, a ne! #air of +oggers to re#la e my ruined
boots, and a loose, ! hite sil, shirt to ! ear over the +eans. I
hanged in the dressing room, sliding my , nife in its s abbard
under the belt of my +eans and on ealing it ! ith the shirt.

7hile ! aiting at the ashier"s des, , I aught sight of myself
une' #e tedly in an angled mirror that sho! ed my fa e in three(
=uarter #rofile. It ! as a fa e so hard and unfamiliar that it

startled me to recognize it as my own. I remembered the photograph taken by shy <ishmishi, and looked again into the mirror. There I was a old immensity in my face (and a determination, perhaps (! his had not even begun to gleam in the eyes that had stared so confidently into the lens of <haled"s camera. I snatched my sunglasses and put them on. *ave I changed so much I hoped that a hot shower, and shaving off my thick beard, would soften some of the hard edges. Out there real hardness was inside me, and I wasn't sure if it was simply tough and tenacious or if it was something much more cruel.

The cab driver followed my instructions and pulled up near the

entrance to ;eo#old"s. I hid him, and stood on the busy causeway for a minute, staring at the wide doorway of the restaurant where my fate

was written to <arla and <haderbhai had really begun. /very doorway is a portal leading through time as well as space. The same doorway that leads us into and out of a room also leads us into the past of the room and its ceaselessly unfolding future. >eo#le, ne! that one, dee# ! ithin the ur(mind, the ur(imagination. Do you can still find those doorway ways, and reverently salute them, in every culture, from Ireland to \$a#an. I stepped up one, to the doorway, and reached out with my right hand to touch the doorway and then touch my chest, over the heart, in a salaam to fate and a homage to the dead friends and enemies who entered with me.

Didier ;evy was sitting in his usual chair, commanding a view of the patrons and of the busy street beyond. *e was talking to <avita Singh. *er eyes were averted, but he looked up and saw me as I approached the table. @ur eyes met and held for a second, each of us reading the other's shifting expressions like diviners finding meanings in the magic of scattered bones.

5; inB5 he shouted, hurling himself forward, flinging his arms around me, and kissing me on both cheeks.

5It's good to see you, Didier.5

5OahB5 he s#at, ! i#ing his li#s ! ith the ba , of his hand. 5If this beard is the fashion for holy ! arriors, I than, ! hatever #o! ers #rote t me that I am an atheist, and a o! ardB5

2here ! as a little more grey, I thought, in the mo# of dar, urls that brushed the ollar of his +a , et. 2he #ale blue eyes ! ere a little more tired, a little more bloodshot. Det the ! i , ed, leering mis hief still ar hed his eyebrow! , and the #layful sneer I , ne! so ! ell, and loved, ! as still there, urling his u##er li#. *e ! as the same man, in the same ity, and it ! as good to be home.

5*ello, ; in,5 <avita greeted me, #ushing Didier aside to give me a hug.

She ! as beautiful. *er thi , , dar, bro! n hair ! as tousled and a! ry. *er ba , ! as straight. *er eyes ! ere lear.)nd, as she held me, the usual, friendly tou h of her fingers on my ne , seemed li, e su h a tender ravishment((after the blood and sno! of)fghanistan((that I an still feel it, through all the years sin e.

5Sit do! n, sit do! nB5 Didier shouted, ! aving to the ! aitters for more drin, s. 54erde, I heard that you ! ere dead, but I didn't believe itB It is so good to see youB 7e shall be famously drun, tonight, nonE5

5- o,5 I re#lied, resisting the #ressure he #la ed on my shoulder. 2he 797 disa##ointment in his eyes moderated my tone, if not my mood. 5It's a little early in the day, and I have to get going. I've got ... something to do.5

Every ! ell, he yielded ! ith a sigh. Out you must have one drink,
! ith me. It ! ould be too univilised for you to leave my om#any
! ithout allo! ing me at least this little orru#tion of your holy
! arring self.)fter all, ! hat is the #oint of a man returning
from the dead, if it is not to drink, strong s#irits ! ith his
friendsE5

5@, ay, I relented, smiling at him but still standing. 5@ne
drink, . I'll have a ! his, y. 4a, e it a double. Is that orru#t
enough for youE5

5)h, ;in, he grinned, 5Is there anyone, in this si , ly s! eet
! orld of ours, ! ho is orru#t enough for meE5

57here there's a ! ea, ! ill, there's a ! ay, Didier. 7e live in
ho#e.5

5Out of ourse, he said, and ! e both laughed.

5I'll leave you to it, <avita announced, leaning over to , iss my
hee, . 5I've got to get ba , to the offi e. ;et's get together,
;in. Dou loo, ... you loo, #retty ! ild. Dou loo, li, e a story,
yaar, if ever I sa! one.5

5Sure, I smiled. 52here's a story or t! o. @ff the re ord, of
ourse. >robably , ee# us going over dinner.5

5I loo, for! ard to it, she said, holding my eye long enough to
ma, e sure I felt it in several #la es at on e. She bro, e the
onta t to flash a smile at Didier. 50e nasty to someone for me,
Didier. I don't ! ant to hear that you've got all sentimental,
yaar, +ust be ause ;in is ba , .5

She ! al, ed out ! ith my eyes on her, and ! hen the drink, s arrived
Didier insisted that I sit do! n ! ith him at last.

54y dear friend, you an stand to eat a meal((if you must((and
you an stand to ma, e love((if you are able((but it is im#ossible

to stand and drink, I said. It is the act of a barbarian. A man who stands up to drink, a noble alcohol, I said, in all but a toast to some noble thing or purpose, is a beast (a man who is ill-stocked at nothing.)

So I sat, and he raised his glass immediately to toast to mine.

So the living he offered.

And the dead I said, my glass still on the table.

And the dead he replied, his smile wide and firm.

I raised my glass in turn, clinked it against his, and there, the double.

So, he said firmly, the smile disappeared as swiftly as it had risen to his eyes. That is the trouble.

Where do you want me to start I offered.

So, my friend. I am not talking just about the war. There is something else, something very determined in your face, and I want to, no, the heart of it.

I stared back at him in silence, secretly delighted to be back in the company of someone who knew me well enough to read between the lines.

Come on, there is too much trouble in your eyes. That is the problem. If you want, if it is easier, you can begin by telling me what happened in Afghanistan.

"The dead," I said flatly, staring at the empty glass in my hand.

5- oB5 he gas#ed, fearful and resentful, someho! , in the same
=ui , res#onse.

5Des.5

5- o, no, no. I ! ould hear something ... 2he ! hole ity ! ould , no!
it.5

5I sa! his body. I hel#ed to drag it u# the mountain to our am#.
I hel#ed them bury him. *e"s dead. 2hey"re all dead. 7e"re the
only ones left from here((-a1eer, 4ahmoud, and me.5

5) bdel <hader ... It an"t be ...5

Didier ! as ashen(fa ed, and the grey seemed to move even into his
eyes. Stri , en by the ne! s((he loo, ed as though someone had
stru , him hard on the fa e((he slum#ed in his hair and his +a!
fell o#en. *e began to sli# side! ays in the hair, and I ! as
afraid that he ! ould fall to the floor or even suffer a stro, e.

52a, e it easy,5 I said softly. 5Don"t go to fu , in" #ie es on me,
Didier. Dou loo, li, e shit, man. Sna# out of itB5

*is ! eary eyes drifted u# to meet mine.

52here are some things, ; in, that sim#ly annot be. I am t! elve,
thirteen years in Oombay, and all! ays there is) bdel <hader <han

...5

*e dro##ed his ga1e again, and la#sed into a reverie so ri h in
thought and feeling that his head t! it hed and his lo! er li#
trembled in the turbulen e of it. I ! as ! orried. I"d seen men go
under before. In #rison, I"d ! at hed men su umb, fragmented by
fear and shame, and then slaughtered by solitude. Out that ! as a
#ro ess: it too, ! ee, s, months, or years. Didier"s olla#se ! as

the ! or, of seconds, and I ! as ! at hinging him rum#le and fade from one heartbeat to the next.

I moved around the table and sat beside him, #ulling him lose to me 799

! ith an arm around his shoulder.

5Didier5 I hissed in a harsh ! his#er. 5I've got to go. Do you hear me? I came in to find out about my stuff((the stuff I left ! ith you ! hile I ! as at - a1eer"s, getting off the do#e. Remember? I left my bi, e, my /nfield, ! ith you. I left my #ass#orts and my money and some other stuff. Do you remember? It's very im#ortant. I need that stuff, Didier. Do you remember?5

5Des, but of course,5 he re#lied, coming to himself ! ith a grum#y little shake of his +a! . 5Your things are all safe. *ave no fear of that. I have all your things.5

5Do you still have the a#artment in 4erri! eather Road?5

5Des.5

5Is that ! here my things are? Do you have my things there?5

5That?5

5For God"s sake, Didier! Snap# out of it! Some one. 7e're going to get u# together and ! al, to your a#artment. I need to shave and sho! er and get organised. I've got something ... something im#ortant to do. I need you, man. Don't fu , u# on me no! 5

*e blink, ed, and turned his head to loo, at me, his u##er li# curling in the familiar sneer.

5That is the meaning of su h a remark, 5 he demanded indignantly.

5Didier ;evy does not fu , u# on anyone! Unless, of course, it is very, very early in the morning. Dou , no! , ;in, ho! I hate morning #eo#le, almost as mu h as I hate the #olie.)lors, let's

goB5

)t Didier's apartment I shaved, showered, and changed into the
ne! clothes. Didier insisted that I eat something. *e cooked an
omelette while I went through the top boxes of my belongings to
find my stash of money((about nine thousand)merican dollars((the
, eyes to my bike, and my best false passport. It was as a Canadian
passport, with my photo and details inserted in it. The false tourist

visa had expired. I had to renew it immediately. If anything went
wrong in what I planned to do, I would need plenty of money and a
good, clean passport.

57here are you going now? Didier asked as I pushed the last
portion of food into my mouth, and stood to rinse the dishes in
the sink.

59irst, I have to fix up my passport, I answered him, still
hesitating. 52hen I'm going to see Madame Hou.

5Dou! what? 8%

5I'm going to deal with Madame Hou. I'm going to clear the
slate. <hale gave ... I broke off, the words failing, and the
thought of <hale)nsari momentarily blanking my mind with the
mention of his name. It was a white blizzard of emotion storming
from the last memory, the last image of him, falling away into
the night and the snow. I pushed past it with an effort of will.
5<hale gave me your note in >a,istan. Thank you for letting me
, no, by the way. I still don't really get it. I still don't, no!
how she got so mad that she had to shut me out. There was
never anything personal in it, from my side. Out it's personal
now. 9our months in Arthur Road made it personal. That's why I
need the bike. I don't want to use cash. And that's why I've got
to get my passport tidied up. If the cops get in on it, I'll need
a clean passport to hand over.

5 Out you don't, no! E 4 adame . hou ! as atta , ed last ! ee, ((no, ten days ago. 2he mob, a mob of Sena #eo#le, they atta , ed her >ala e and destroyed it. 2here ! as a great fire. 2hey ran inside the building and they destroyed everything, then they #ut the #la e on fire. 2he building still stands. 2he stair ases and the u#stairs rooms still e' ist. Out the #la e is ruined, and it ! ill never again o#en. 2hey ! ill #ull it do! n at some time soon. 2he building is finished, ; in, and so is she, ; a 4 adame.5

5 Is she deadE5 I as, ed through len hed teeth.

5 - o. She is alive.)nd she is still there, so they say. Out her #o! er is destroyed. She has nothing. She is nothing. She is a beggar. *er servants are sear hing the streets for s ra#s of food to bring to her ! hile she ! aits for the building to ome do! n. She is finished, ; in.5

5 - ot =uite. - ot yet.5

I moved to the door of his a#artment, and he ran to +oin me. It ! as the fastest I'd ever seen him move, and I smiled at the strangeness of it.

5 >lease, ; in, ! ill you not re onsider this a tionE 7e an sit here, together, and drin, a bottle or t! o, nonE Dou ! ill alm do! n.5

5 I'm alm enough no! ,5 I re#lied, smiling at his on ern for me. 5 I don't, no! ... ! hat I'm going to do. Out I have to lose the door on this, Didier. I an't +ust ... let it go. I ! ish I ould. Out there's too mu h that"s((I don't, no! ((tied u# in it, I guess.5

I ouldn't e' #lain it to him. It ! as more than +ust revenge((I , ne! that((but the ! eb of onne tions bet! een . hou, <haderbhai, <arla, and me ! as so sti , y ! ith shame and se rets and betrayals that I ouldn't bring myself to fa e it learly or tal, about it

to my friend. 8%1

50ien,5 he sighed, reading the determination in my face. 5If you must go to her, then I will come with you.5

5-o! ay((5 I began, but he cut me off with a furious gesture of his hand.

5; inB I am the one who told you of this ... this horrible thing she did to you. -o! I must go with you, or I will be responsible for all that happens.)nd you, no!, my friend, that I hate responsibility almost as much as I hate the police.5

(((((((((((

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Didier ;evy ! as the ! orst #illion #assenger I've ever , no! n. *e held on to me so tightly, and ! ith su h rigid tensity, that it ! as diffi ult to steer the bi, e. *e ho! led as ! e a##roa hed ars, and shrie, ed ! hen ! e s#ed u# to #ass them. @n riti al, s! ee#ing turns he ! riggled in terror, trying to straighten the bi, e from its ne essary lean into the urve. /very time I sto##ed the bi, e at a traffi signal, he #ut both feet do! n to the ground to stret h his legs and moan about the ram#s in his hi#s. /very time I a elerated a! ay, he dragged his feet on the road and fidgeted for several se onds until he found the footrests.)nd ! hen ta' is or other ars ventured too lose to us, he , i , ed out at them or ! aved his fist in franti outrage. Oy the time ! e rea hed our destination, I al ulated that the danger fa ed during a thirty(minute ride in fast traffi ! ith Didier ! as roughly e=ivalent to a month under fire in)fghanistan.

I #ulled u# outside the fa tory run by my Sri ;an, an friends &illu and <rishna. Something ! as ! rong. 2he signs outside had hanged, and the double front doors ! ere ! ide o#en. I ! ent u# the ste#s and leaned inside to see that the #ass#ort ! or, sho# ! as gone, re#la ed by an assembly line #rodu ing garlands of flo! ers.

52here is something ! rongE5 Didier as, ed as I limbed ba , on the bi, e and , i , ed the starter.

5Deah. 7e have to ma, e another sto#. 2hey've moved it. I'll have to see)bdul to find out ! here the ne! ! or, sho# is.5

5)lors,5 he ! hined, s=uee1ing me as tightly as if ! e ! ere sharing a #ara hute. 52he nightmare, it goes onB5

4inutes later I left him ! ith the bi, e near the entran e to)bdul Ghani's mansion. 2he ! at hman at the street door re ognised me, and sna##ed his hand u# in a theatri al salute. I #ut a t! enty(ru#ee note in his other hand as he o#ened the door, and I ste##ed

into the pool, shadowed by the
foyer to be greeted by two servants. They, near me, fell, and led
me up the stairs with wide, friendly smiles and a little mime (showing
comments on the length of my hair and the weight I'd lost. One of
the men, no, stood on the door of Abdul Ghani's large study, and
knocked with his ear to the door.

Abdul Ghani called from within. Some

The servant entered, closing the door behind him, and returned a
few moments later. He nodded his head at me and opened the door
wide. I walked inside, and the door closed. Brilliant sunshine
battered at the high, arched windows. Shadowed in shades of
lambent across the polished floor. Abdul was sitting in a long
chair that faced the window, and only his slender hands were
visible, stretched together like sausages in a butcher's window.

So it's true.

That's true. I walked, walking around the chair to look at him.
I was shocked to see how, over the months, the nine months since I'd
seen him, had aged the older friend. The thin, hair was grey
to white, and his eyebrows were frosted with silver. The fine
nose was lined by deep lines that set against the curve of his
mouth to a sagging smile. It was, on the most sumptuously
sensual I'd seen in Bombay, there as split and raised as a leer's
had been in the snow mountains. The frown beneath his eyes
drooped against the cheek of his cheek, bones and reminded me, with a
shiver, of those that had dragged down the eyes of the madman
*abib. And the eyes (the laughing, golden, amber eyes) were dull,
and drained of the soaring joys and vain delights that once had
shone in his passionate life.

They are here, he replied in the familiar effort, without
looking at me. And that is the truth. There is the

Abdul, I'm sorry (he's dead. I answered at once. He ... he was
killed by the Russians. He was trying to reach his village, on

the ! ay ba , to 8haman, to deliver some horses.5

)bdul lut hed at his hest and sobbed li, e a hild, me! ling and moaning in oherently as the tears rolled fat and freely from his large eyes.)fter a fe! moments he re overed, and loo, ed u# at me.

57ho survived ! ith youE5 he as, ed, his mouth aga#e.

5-a1eer ... and 4ahmoud.)nd a boy named)la(ud(Din. @nly four of us.5 8%H

5-ot <haledE 7here is <haledE5

5*e ... he ! ent out into the sno! on the last night, and he never ame ba , . 2he men said they heard shooting, later, from a long ! ay off. I don't , no! if it ! as <haled they ! ere shooting at. I ... I don't , no! ! hat ha##ened to him.5

52hen it ! ill be -a1eer ...5 he muttered.

2he sobbing s#illed over again, and he #lunged his fa e into his fleshy hands. I ! at hed him un omfortably, not , no! ing ! hat to do or say. Sin e the moment that I'd radled <hader"s body in my arms on the sno! y slo#e of the mountain, I"d refused to fa e the fa t of his death.)nd I ! as still angry ! ith <hader <han. So long as I held that anger before me li, e a shield, loving <hader and grieving for him ! ere dee# and distant ! onders of my heart. So long as I ! as angry, I ould fight off the tears and miserable longing that made Ghani so ! ret hed. So long as I ! as angry, I ould on entrate on the +ob at hand((information about <rishna, &illu, and the #ass#ort ! or, sho#. I ! as on the #oint of as, ing him about them ! hen he s#o, e again.

5Do you , no! ! hat it ost us((a#art from his ... his uni=ue life ((<hader"s hero urseE 4illions. It ost us millions to fight his

! ar. 7e've been su##orting it, in one ! ay and another, for years. Dou might thin, ! e ould afford it. 2he sum is not so great, after all. Out you're ! rong. 2here is no organisation that an su##ort su h an insane hero urse as <hader"s.)nd I ouldn't hange his mind. I ouldn't save him. 2he money didn't mean anything to him, don't you seeE Dou an't reason ! ith a man ! ho has no sense of money and its ... its value. It's the one thing all ivilised men have in ommon, don't you agreeE If money doesn't mean anything, there is no ivilisation. 2here is nothing.5

*e trailed off into inde i#herable mumbles. 2ears rolled into the little rivers they found on his hee, s, and dro##ed through the yello! ight into his la#.

5)bdulbai,5 I said, after a time.

57hatE 7henE Is it no! E5 he as, ed, terror suddenly bright in his eyes. *is lo! er li# stiffened in a ruel urve of mali e I'd never seen or even imagined in him before that moment.

5)bdulbai, I ! ant to , no! ! here you moved the ! or, sho#. 7here are <rishna and &illuE I ! ent to the old ! or, sho#, but there's no(one there. I need some ! or, on my boo, . I need to , no! ! here you moved to.5 8%?

2he fear shran, to a #in#oint in his eyes, and they glittered

! ith it. *is mouth s! elled in something li, e the old volu#tuary smile, and he loo, ed into my eyes ! ith avid, hungering on entration.

5@f ourse you ! ant to , no! ,5 he grinned, using the #alms of his hands to ! i#e at the tears. 5It's right here, ; in, in this house. 7e rebuilt the ellar, and fitted it out. 2here is a tra#door in the , it hen floor. I=bal ! ill sho! you the ! ay. 2he boys are ! or, ing there no! .5

52han, s,5 I said, hesitating a moment. 5I've got a job to do, but ... I'll be back, later tonight, or tomorrow, at the latest. I'll see you then.5

5Inshallah,5 he said softly, turning his face to the windows on the more. 5Inshallah.5

I went down through the house to the kitchen and lifted the heavy trunk. The wooden steps led into the floodlit cellar. Krishna and Billu greeted me happily, and went to work on my assortment immediately. Several things excited them more than a counterfeit challenge, and they hattered in a spirited little argument before agreeing on the best approach.

While they worked, I examined Ghani's nest. It was as large as a bedroom (much larger than the basement of Abdul Ghani's mansion alone). It stretched some thirty to fifty metres past light tables, printing machines, photographs, and storage units. I guessed that the basement extended beneath the next large house in the street beside Ghani's. It seemed likely that they'd bought the house next door, and connected the two cellars. If that were so, I assumed, there would be another exit, leading into the neighbouring house. I was searching for it when Krishna called to tell me that my rush jobs were ready. Intrigued by the nest beneath the houses, I promised myself that as soon as possible I would return and inspect the nest thoroughly.

5Sorry to see you,5 I muttered to Didier as I limbed back onto the bicycle. 5It too, longer than I expected. Out the assortment's done. 7e can go straight to Madame's house.5

5Don't hurry,5 in,5 Didier sighed, putting his hand on my shoulder as I moved out into the traffic. 5The best revenge, like the best secret, is performed slowly and with the eyes open.5

5Carla5 I shouted over my shoulder, as the bicycle accelerated into the metal stream.

5-on, I thin, it's mineß Out ... but I an't be sureß5 he shouted
ba , , and ! e both laughed for love of her. 8%C

I #ar, ed the bi, e in the drive! ay of an a#artment building a
blo , a! ay from the >ala e. 7e ! al, ed on the other side of the
road until ! e #assed the building by half a blo , , studying it

for signs of a tivity ! ithin. 2he fa ade of the >ala e seemed
inta t and undamaged, although metal and ! ooden sheets on the
! indo! s, and #lan, s nailed a ross the main door, hinted at the
destru tion the mob had ! ough inside. 7e turned and ! al, ed
ba , , #assing the building again and sear hing for an entran e.

5If she"s in there, and if her servants are bringing her food,
they"re not oming and going through that door.5

5Des, e' a tly my o! n thought,5 he agreed. 52here must be another
! ay inside.5

7e found a narro! lane that gave a ess to the rear of the
buildings in the street. In ontrast to the #roud, lean, main
street, the a ess lane ! as filthy. 7e ste##ed arefully bet! een
ran, , s um(overed #ools of bla , li=uid, and s, irted #iles of
oily, unidentifiable debris. I glan ed at Didier, , no! ing from
his ! ret hed grima e that he ! as al ulating ho! many drin, s it
! ould ta, e to rid himself of the sten h that filled his nostrils.
2he ! alls and fen es on either side of the lane ! ere made of
stone, bri , , and ement, #at hed together over many de ades, and
s! arming ! ith a ! ormy ! rithe of #lants, mosses, and ree#ers.

8ounting ba , from the orner, building by building, ! e found the
rear of the >ala e and #ressed on a short ! ooden gate, set into a
high stone ! all. 2he gate o#ened at the tou h, and ! e ste##ed
into a s#a ious rear ourtyard that must've been a lu' urious and
beautiful retreat before the mob had atta , ed it. *eavy lay #ots
had been to##led and shattered, their burdens of earth and

floors spilled in muddy confusion. Garden furniture had been smashed to splintering. Even the paving tiles were rained in many places, as if they'd been struck with hammers.

We found a blackened door that led into the house. It was unlocked, and slipping in I found a rusty rebar of iron.

Don't wait here. I don't see any possibility of protest. I'll wait for me. If someone comes in through that gate, signal them, or give me a signal.

As you say, he sighed. Don't be too long. I don't like it here. Come here.

I stepped inside. The door slipped shut behind me, and I wished that I'd thought to bring a torch. It was dark, and the floor was treacherously littered with broken dishes, pots, pans, and other vessels strewn amid the black mounds of furniture and fallen beams. I slipped, my body sliding through the ground, then and on into a long corridor that led toward the front of the big house. I passed several rooms that were burned. In one of them, the fire had been so fierce that the floor was missing, and the charred bearers showed through the gaps like the ribs of some great animal's remains.

Near the front of the house I found the staircase that I'd taken, years before, when I'd come there with Carla to save Barbara. The room was all a mess, one so rich in colour and texture, I was sick and queasy from the blistered walls. The staircase itself was carbonised, its carpet soaked to stringy mounds of ash. I limbed slowly, testing each step before pressing down with my full weight. One step collapsed beneath me when I was halfway to the top, and I stumbled upward more quickly to the landing on the first floor.

On the upper level I had to raise my eyes adjusted to the

darkness. After a few moments I could make out the gaps in the floor, and I began to inch my way around them. The fire had incinerated some parts of the house, leaving holes and blackened stumps, while sparing other parts of the house altogether. Those distinctive sections were so clean, and so precisely as I remembered them, that they heightened the eerie strangeness of the place. I felt as if I was moving between the past, before the fire, and the ruined present: as if my own memories were re-creating those grandiose, un-consumed tones in the house.

Some way along that wide passage on the upper level my foot lunged through a sharp section of floor, and in my hard reaction I drove backward into the wall behind me. The wall itself collapsed and I found myself falling, in a clumsy stumble, flailing out with my hands to find something solid to cling to amid the rumbling rubble. I landed with a thump, much more quietly than I expected, and realised at once that I was inside one of Madame Hou's secret corridors. The wall I'd fallen through appeared to be as solid as all the others, but it was merely a slightly loosened one over which her ubiquitous somnolent attention.

I stood up and brushed myself off in a very narrow, low corridor that snaked ahead, following the shadows and corners of the rooms it circumvented. Metal grates were set into the walls of the rooms that the secret corridor passed. Some of them were low, near the floor, and others were higher. Beneath the higher metal grates were boarded steps. From the lowest of those steps I looked into a room through the heart-shaped gap in the metal grille. I could see the whole room beyond: the raked mirror on the wall, the burned and collapsed bed, and the rusted metal nightstand beside it. There were several steps above the one on which I stood, and I imagined her, Madame Hou, crouched there on the topmost step and breathing silently while she waited, and waited.

The corridor wound through several turns, and I lost my bearings, unsure in the enshrouding darkness if I faced the front of the

house or the rear.)t one #oint the se ret orridor in lined
shar#ly. I limbed u#! ard until the higher metal grilles
disa##eared, and I stumbled in the dar, u#on a flight of ste#s.
9eeling my ! ay u#! ard, I en ounterd a door. It ! as a small,
#aneled ! ooden door((so small and #erfe tly #ro#ortioned that it

might&e been furnished for a hild"s #layhouse. I tried the
door, nob. It turned easily in my hand. I #ushed it o#en, and
shran, ba , immediately at the in! ard rush of light from beyond.

I ste##ed into an atti room lit by a ro! of four stained(glass
dormer ! indo! s that #ea, ed li, e little ha#els and rea hed out
over the e' ternal roof of the house. 2he fire had rea hed the
room, but it had failed to destroy it. 2he ! alls ! ere dar, ened,
s#lashed ! ith strea, y burn(shado! s, and the floor ! as holed in
#la es to reveal a dee# sand! i h layer bet! een it and the eiling
of the room belo! . >arts of the long room, ho! ever, ! ere =uite
solid and untou hed by the flames. In those islands of e' oti ally
ar#eted floor and unblemished ! all(s#a e, furniture still stood
inta t and unmar, ed.)nd in the stiff, en! ra##ing arms of a
throne(li, e hair, her fa e t! isted in a mani stare, ! as 4adame
. hou.

)s I a##roa hed her I realised that the malevolent stare ! as n't
dire ted at me. She ! as staring ! ith hatred and s#ite at some
#oint in the #ast, some #la e or #erson or event that held her
mind as firmly as a hain holds a dan ing bear. *er fa e ! as made
u# ! ith a thi , smear and #o! dering of osmeti s. It ! as a mas, ((
more tragi , for all its deluded e' aggerations, than grotes=ue.
2he #ainted mouth ! as bigger than her o! n li#s. 2he s ra! led
eyebro! s ! ere larger than the real ones. 2he daubed hee, s ! ere
higher than the bones beneath them. 7hen I stood near enough, I
sa! that there ! as a tri , le of drool dri##ing, dri##ing, from
the orner of her mouth into her la#. 2he smell of al ohol, 8%9
undiluted gin, ! reathed her and oiled into other smells, more
foul and si , ening. *er hair ! as almost on ealed by a ! ig. 2he
thi , oils of the bla , , #om#adour ! ig hung slightly as, e! ,

revealing the short, sparse grey hair beneath. She was dressed in a green silk, jeogori, of the dress covered her throat almost to her chin. Her legs were folded, with her feet resting on the seat of the chair beside her. They were tiny feet (the size of a small child's feet) enclosed in soft, silk slippers. Her hands, as limp and expressionless as her smile, mouth, lay in her lap, like things washed up on a deserted shore.

It was impossible for me to tell her age or her nationality. She might've been Spanish. She might've been Russian. She might've been Indian, in part, or Chinese, or even Greek. And clearly as right (she had been beautiful once. It was the kind of beauty that grows from the sum of its parts rather than from any one outstanding feature: a beauty that strikes the eye rather than the heart, and a beauty that sours if it isn't nourished by some goodness from within.) And she wasn't beautiful then, in that moment. She was ugly. And Didier was right, too: she was beaten and broken and finished. She was floating on the black, like, and soon the darkness would drag her under. There was a deep silence here her mind used to be, and a blank, unravelling emptiness here on which her cruel and scheming life had ruled.

Standing there, invisible to her, I was astonished and bewildered

to realise that I felt not angry or vengeful, but ashamed. I felt ashamed that I'd filled my heart with revenge. The part of me that had wanted to (that I really wanted to, kill her) (as the very part that was like her. I looked at her, and I knew that I was looking at myself, my own future, my destiny, if I couldn't rid my heart of its vindictiveness.

And I knew, as well, that the revenge I'd fed myself with and planned through the years of my re-education in Japan was not merely hers, not only hers. I was striking out at myself, and at a guilt I could only face in that moment of shame as I looked at her. It was the guilt I felt for Chader's death. I was his murderer (his guarantee against the lords and pirates. If I'd

been with him, as I had as supposed to be, when he'd tried to take the horses to his village, the enemy might not have fired on him.

It was foolish and, like me most guilty, it only told one half of the story. There were Russian uniforms and weapons on some of the dead around Alexander's body: - a letter had told me that. My being there probably 81%

I couldn't have changed a thing. They would've captured me or killed me, and the result for Alexander would've been the same. Our reason didn't play a big part in the guilt I'd felt, deep in my heart, since the moment I'd seen his dead face beneath its shroud of snow. When I'd faced it, I couldn't shake the shame. And somehow, the blame and refining sorrow changed me. I felt the vengeful stone fall from the hating hand that had wanted to throw it. I felt light, as if light itself filled me and lifted me up. And I felt free (free enough to pity Madame de Mouchon, and even to forgive her.) And then I heard the scream.

My heart (piercing shriek, as shrill as a child's), pulled me round just in time to see Raean, Madame de Mouchon's eunuuch servant, running at me at full speed. Caught off balance by the charge, I stumbled backward with his arms raised around my chest, and he rushed into and then through one of the attic windows. I was leaning out backward, looking up under blue sky at the raised servant and the eaves of the house behind his head. I felt the unmistakable cold trickle of blood on the top and the back of my head where the broken glass had made deep cuts. More glass fell in jagged shards as he rested in the smashed window, and I shook my head from side to side to save my eyes. Raean lunged to me and drove forward with his feet in a weird, running shuffle that gained him no space at all. It took me a moment to understand that he was trying to push me out through the window ((to push us both out, into the big fall.) And it was so, indeed. I felt my feet beginning to lift off the floor under the pressure of his effort, and I slipped further out through the little steeple of the dormer window.

Groaning with fury and desperation, I plummeted at the window!

frame and dragged us back, into the attic with all my strength. Ra+an fell back, and stumbled to his feet with astonishing speed to run shrieking at me again. There was no way to step

around his waist, charge, so I closed again in a murderous grapple. His hands locked on my throat. My left hand lashed at his face, looking for the eye. His long, curved fingernails were sharp, and they pierced the skin of my neck. Shouting from the pain, I found his ear with the fingers of my left hand, and used it to pull his head close enough to punch with my right. I hammered my fist into his face, seven, eight times until he fell free from me, tearing the ear half away from his head.

He fell back, a step and stood there, hanging heavily and glaring at me 811

With a hatred that was beyond reason or fear. His face was bloody. His lips were split into a broken tooth, and the skin over one eye, where the eyebrow had been shaved off, had opened up in an ugly cut. His bald head was cut and bleeding where he'd crashed through the glass. The blood was in one eye, and I guessed that his nose was broken. He should've quit. He had to quit. He didn't.

Shrieking, shrill and wild, he ran at me. I sidestepped and slammed a hard, short right hand into the side of his head, but he reached out with his lashed hand as he fell, and latched at my trousers. His momentum pulled us both down and then he stumbled, grabbed me, reaching out for my neck. @n e more the lashed bit into my shoulder and my throat.

He was lean, but he was strong and tall. I'd lost so much weight in the last year that I was evenly matched for strength. I rolled on my side, but couldn't shake him. His head was tucked in close to mine, and I couldn't punch at him. I felt his mouth and his teeth against my neck. He was straining for a hard, butting heads with me and biting. His long, sharp lashed punched my throat to the stubs of his fingers.

I reached down and found my knife. I pulled it out and around, and rammed it into his body. The blade went into his thigh, high up near the hip. He raised his head in a howl of pain, and I stabbed him in the neck, close to the shoulder. The knife went in through the front and deep into the shoulder, running an edge of bone and gristle on the way. He screamed at his throat, and rolled away from me until his body met the wall. He was beaten. There was no fight left in him. It was over. And then I heard the scream.

I turned my head around to see Raanan screaming out of the gap between the broken floor and the ceiling of the room below. It was the same man, or so it seemed, but whole and unharmed: the same bald head, shaved eyebrows, decorated eyes, and polished fingernails gleamed as green as a grass snake. I swung round quickly to see that Raanan was still there, curled in a moaning heap against the wall. It's a truth, I thought stupidly. There's truth to that. Why didn't anyone tell me? And I turned again, just as the screaming truth rushed at me. The second one had a knife in his hand.

He held the thin, curved blade like a sword, seeing it in a vicious glare as he ran. I allowed his frenzied scream to pass and then stepped in close, grabbing down hard with my own knife. It cut his arm and shoulder, but he was still free to move. His knife slashed backward to ward me. He was fast (fast enough to cut my forearm. Blood ran quickly from the wound, and rage pulled me into him with my right fist swinging and grabbing with the knife. When a sudden blast of blood tasting of pain rushed into the back of my head, and I knew I'd been hit from behind. I stumbled past the truth, and tumbled round to see wounded Raanan, his shirt gleamed on his skin with his own blood. There was a lump of blood in his hand. My head was ringing with the force of the blow he'd struck. Blood was running from wounds on my head, my neck, my shoulder, and the soft inside of my forearm. The truths began falling again, and I knew they

I ere about to ma, e a ne! harge.) tiny seed of doubt ri#ened and burst o#en in my mind for the first time sin e the bi1arre ontest had begun: I might not ! in this ...

I grinned at them, sha#ing u# for their harge ! ith my fists high and my left foot for! ard. @, ay, I thought. ; et"s go. ; et"s finish it. 2hey ran at me, , eening that high(#it hed s ream again. 2he one ! ith the lum# of ! ood, Ra+an, s! ung it at me. I raised my left arm to blo , the blo! . It ame do! n hard on my shoulder, but I rammed my right fist into his fa e and he fell ba , ! ard, his , nees folding before he hit the floor. *is brother slashed at my fa e ! ith the , nife. I du , ed and ! eaved, but the , nife ut my head at the ba , , above the ne , . I ame u# under his guard and +ammed my , nife into his shoulder, all the ! ay to the ran, . I'd aimed for his hest, but it ! as still a useful ! ound be ause his arm belo! the , nife ! ent as lim# as sea! eed, and he s ree hed a! ay from me in #ani .

Dears of anger bro, e through: all the #rison(anger I"d buried in the shallo! grave of my resentful self(ontrol. 2he blood running do! n my fa e from the uts and gashes on my head ! as li=uid anger, thi , and red and s#illing from my mind.) furious strength ri###ed the mus les of my arms, shoulders, and ba , . I loo, ed from Ra+an and his t! in to the imbe ile in the hair. <ill them all, I thought, dragging the air in through len hed teeth, and gro! ling it out again. I"ll , ill them all.

I heard someone alling me, alling me, alling me ba , from the edge of the abyss into ! hi h *abib, and all those li, e him, had #lunged.

5; inB 7 here are you, ; inE5

5In here, DidierB5 I shouted ba , . 5In the atti B Dou"re very loseB 8an you hear meE5

5I hear youB5 he shouted. 5I"m oming at on e.5

50e arefulB5 I alled ba , , #anting. 52here"s t! o guys u# here,

and 81G

they"re ... fu , , man ... they"re none too friendlyB5

I heard the sound of his footste#s, and I heard him urse as he stumbled in the dar, . *e #ushed o#en the little door and stoo#ed to enter the room. 2here ! as a gun in his hand, and I ! as glad to see him. I ! at hed his fa e as he =ui , ly too, in the s ene((the blood on my fa e and arms, the blood on the bodies of the t! ins, the drooling figure in the hair. I sa! his sho , ed sur#rise harden and settle into the grim, angry line of his mouth. 2hen he heard the s ream.

Ra+an"s brother, the one ! ith the , nife, let out that blood(numbing ! aul and ran at Didier, ! ho s! ung his #istol round ! ithout hesitation and shot the man in the groin, near the hi#. *e rum#led and flung himself side! ays, yo! ling sobs of #ain as he rolled on the floor, doubled over his bleeding ! ound. Ra+an lim#ed to the throne(li, e hair and dra#ed his body in front of 4adame . hou, shielding her ! ith his bare hest. *e stared his hatred into Didier"s eyes, and ! e , ne! that he ! as ! illing to ta, e a bullet to #rote t her. Didier too, a ste# to! ards him, and levelled the #istol at Ra+an"s heart. 2he 9ren hman"s fa e ! as set in a severe fro! n, but his #ale eyes ! ere alm, and gleaming ! ith his ool and absolute dominion. 2hat ! as the real man, the steel blade ! ithin the shabby, rusting s abbard. Didier ;evy: one of the most a#able and dangerous men in Oombay.

5Do you ! ant to do itE5 he as, ed me, his fa e harder than anything else in the room.

5- o.5

5- oE5 he breathed, his eyes never leaving Ra+an. 52a, e a loo, at yourself. ;oo, at ! hat they did, ;in. Dou should shoot them.5

5- o.5

5Dou should ! ound them, at the very least.5

5- o.5

5It is dangerous to let them live. Dour history ! ith these #eo#le
is ... not good.5

5It's o, ay,5 I muttered.

5Dou should shoot at least one of them, nonE5

5- o.5

5&ery ! ell. 2hen I ! ill shoot them for you.5

5- o,5 I insisted. I ! as grateful that he"d sto##ed them from
, illing me, but far more than, ful that he"d arrived in time to

#revent me from , illing 81H

them. Surging ! aves of nausea and relief rashed into my blood(
red mind, draining the rage from me. I shivered as the last smile
of shame trembled in my eyes. 5I don't ! ant to shoot them ... and
I don't ! ant you to shoot them, either. I didn't ! ant to fight
them in the first #la e. I ! ouldn't have, if they hadn't atta , ed
me first. 2hey're only doing ! hat I'd do, if I loved her. 2hey're
only trying to #rote t her. 2hey're not against me. It's not
about me. It's about her. ; eave them alone.5

5) nd ! hat about herE5

5Dou ! ere right,5 I said =uietly. 5She's finished. She's already
dead. I'm sorry I didn't listen to you. I guess ... I had to see
it for myself ...5

I rea hed out to over the gun in Didier's hand. Ra+an flin hed

and fled. As it in, trying out in vain, began to drag himself away from us along the edge of the wall. Then I slowly pushed Didier's hand down until the gun was at his side. Raman met my eyes. I saw the surprise and fear in his blue eyes soften into relief. We held

a meal together at ; eo#old"s ! hile Didier tal, ed of his most
re ent romanti disasters. 7e ! ere laughing still ! hen &i, ram
>atel ran u# the ste#s ! ith his arms ! ide in an e' ited greeting.

5; inB5

5&i, ramB5

I stood +ust in time to re eive his flying hug. *olding my
shoulders ! ith his arms straight, he loo, ed me over, fro! ning at
the uts on my head and fa e.

59u , , man, ! hat ha##ened to youE5 he as, ed. *is lothes ! ere
still bla , , and still ins#ired by the o! boy dream, but they
! ere mu h more subdued and subtle. 2hat ! as ;ettie"s influen e, I
guessed.)lthough the ne! , ine' essive loo, suited him, I ! as
relieved and omforted to see that his beloved hat still hung on
his ba , from the ord at his throat.

5Dou should see the other guys,5 I ans! ered, fli , ing a glan e at
Didier.

5So ! hy didn't you tell me you're ba , , manE5

5I only got ba , today, and I've been , ind of busy. *o! "s
;ettieE5

5She"s great, yaar,5 he res#onded heerily, ta, ing a seat. 5She"s
going into this business thing, this multi(fu , in(media thing,
! ith <arla and her ne! boyfriend. It"s going to be damn good.5

I turned my head to loo, at Didier, ! ho shrugged non(ommittally
and then glared at &i, ram ! ith his teeth bared in fury.

5Shit, manB5 &i, ram a#ologised, learly stri , en. 5I thought you
, ne! . I thought Didier ! ould've told you, yaar.5

5<arla is ba , in Oombay,5 Didier e' #lained, silen ing &i, ram
! ith another stern fro! n. 5She has a ne! man((a boyfriend, she
alls him. *is name is Ran+it, but he li, es everyone to all him
\$eet.5

5*e"s not a bad guy,5 &i, ram added, smiling ho#efully. 5I thin,
you"ll li, e him, ; in.5

5@h, really, &i, ram5 Didier hissed, ! in ing for me.

5It"s o, ay,5 I said, smiling at ea h of them in turn.

I aught the eye of our ! aiter and nodded to him, gesturing for a
ne! round of drin, s. 7e ! ere silent until they arrived and the
drin, s ! ere #oured, and then, ! ith the glasses in the air, I
#ro#osed a toast.

52o <arla5 I #ro#osed. 54ay she have ten daughters, and may they
all marry ! ell5

52o <arla5 the others e hoed, lashing glasses and thro! ing ba ,
the drin, s. 81C

7e ! ere sharing our third toast((to someone"s #et dog, I thin, ((
! hen 4ahmoud 4elbaaf ! al, ed into the ha##y, noisy, hattering
restaurant and loo, ed at me ! ith eyes that ! ere still u# there,
on the fro1en mountains of the ! ar.

57hat ha##ened to youE5 he as, ed =ui , ly, loo, ing at the uts on
my fa e and head ! hen I rose to greet him.

5-othing,5 I smiled.

57ho did thisE5 he as, ed more urgently.

5I had a run(in ! ith 4adame . hou"s guys,5 I ans! ered, and he

related a little. Why? That's what's

— a1eer told me you could be here, he hissered through a tight, anguished little frown. I am happy to find you. — a1eer says to you, don't go anywhere. Don't do anything, for some days. There is a war now (a war of the gangs. They fight for Chader's honor. It is not safe. Stay away from the dundah places.

The word dundah, or business, is the slang term I use for all of Chader's business, (mar, et operations in Bombay. They'd be some targets, somehow.

That happened? That's it all about?

The traitor, Ghani, is dead, he replied. *is voice is calm, but his eyes were hard and determined. The men with him, his men in Chader's gang, will also die.

Ghani?

Des. Do you have money, ; in?

Sure, I muttered, thinking about Abdull Ghani. *e is from >a,istan. That had to be it. The connections to the secret #office, the >a,istan ISI, must've been his. Of course it is him. Of course he is the traitor. Of course he is the one who'd tried to have us arrested and killed in <arahi. That's who <ahad had been talking about on the night before the battle: not Abdull, but Ghani. Abdull Ghani ...

Do you have a place? safe place?

That's Des.

Good, he said, shaking my hand firmly. When I will see you

here, in three days' time, in the day, at one o'clock,

Inshallah.5

5Inshallah,5 I res#onded, and he ! al, ed out. *is handsome head
! as high, in his brave, righteous ste#, and his ba , ! as
straight.

I sat do! n again, avoiding the eyes of my friends until I ould
disguise 817
the dread that I , ne! they ! ould read in them.

57hat is itE5 Didier as, ed.

5- othing,5 I lied, sha, ing my head and fa, ing a smile. I rea hed
for my glass and lifted it to lin, against theirs. 57here ! ere
! eE5

57e ! ere +ust going to toast Ran+it"s dog,5 &i, ram re alled,
grinning ! idely, 5but I"d li, e to in lude his horse in that
toast, if it"s not too late.5

5Dou do not , no! if he has a horseB5 Didier ob+e ted.

57e don"t , no! if he"s got a dog, either,5 &i, ram #ointed out,
5but that"s not sto##ing us. 2o Ran+it"s dogB5

5Ran+it"s dogB5 ! e all re#lied.

5)nd his horseB5 &i, ram added. 5)nd his neighbour"s horseB5

5Ran+it"s horseB5

5)nd ... horses ... in generalB5

5)nd to lovers, every! hereB5 Didier #ro#osed.

5)nd to lovers ... every! here ...5 I ans! ered.

Out someho! , in some ! ay, for some reason, the love had died in

me, and I suddenly realised it, and I was suddenly sure. It wasn't completely over, my feeling for Arla. It never is completely over. Out there was nothing of the jealousy I once would've felt for the stranger Ranjit. There was no rage against him, and no feeling of hurt inspired by her. I felt numbed and empty sitting there, as if the war, and the loss of Chaderbhai and Chaled, and the failure (off with Adame. Hou and her things had poured anaesthesia into my heart.

And there was, instead of pain, a sense of order (I could think of no other way to describe that I was feeling (at Abdal Ghani's treachery.)nd behind that almost spiritual awe there was a dull, throbbing, fatalistic dread. For even then the bloody future his betrayal had foretold on us was unfolding and spilling into our lives, like the sudden blossom of a drought (for red rose in a red,

falling rush to dry, unyielding earth.

((((((((((((

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

One hour after I'd left Abdur Ghani's mansion to confront Adame .hou, -aleer and three of his most trusted men forced the door of the house next to Ghani's and made their way through the long basement floor, showing that someone had entered the other houses. It was about the time that I hid my way through the rubble of Adame .hou's ruined balcony, -aleer and his men, wearing black, painted masks, pushed up the trapdoor in Ghani's kitchen and entered the house. They seized the cook, the yardman, Abdur's other servants, and the Srikan, an counterfeiter, Willu and Krishna, and locked them in a small room in the basement. As I climbed the blackened stairs of the balcony to the attic and found Adame .hou, -aleer re#t u#stairs to Abdur's grand study and found him sitting in the living chair, leaning and still. Then, at about the time that I unleashed the notted fist of my revenge to #ity my brother enemy, the drooling Adame, -aleer avenged himself and chader chan by killing the traitor who'd betrayed us all in Aistan.

Two men held Abdur's arms against the chair. A third man forced his head back, and his eyes opened. -aleer removed his mask. Staring into Abdur's eyes, -aleer stabbed him in the heart. Abdur must've known he had to die. *e! as sitting there, alone, waiting for his killers. Out his scream, they say, came all the way from hell to claim him.

They rolled his body off the chair and onto the polished floor. Then, as I struggled with Raan and his team in the attic across the city, -aleer and his men used heavy leavers to haul off Abdur's hands, his feet, and his head. They scattered the pieces of his corpse around the great house, just as Abdur Ghani had ordered the Sanna killers to do with the butchered pieces of loyal old Adid's body. And as I left the ruined balcony, my heart free and almost at ease for the first time in too many vengeful months, -aleer and his men released Krishna, Willu, and the servants (all 819

deemed to have had no part in Ghani's treachery (and then left the mansion to hunt down the members of Ghani's faction, and kill

them all.

5Ghani ! as frea, in" out for a long time, yaar.5 San+ay <umar said, translating freely from -a1eer"s Ardu into /nglish. 5*e thought <hader had gone ra1y. *e thought he ! as, li, e, obsessed, you , no! E *e got the idea that <hader ! as going to lose all the business and the money and the #o! er of the oun il. *e thought <hader ! as s#ending too mu h time on) fghanistan, the ! ar, and all that.)nd he , ne! <hader had all these other missions #lanned ((stuff in Sri ; an, a and -igeria and su h li, e. So ! hen he ouldn"t tal, <hader out of it, and he ouldn"t get him to

hange, he de ided to use all this Sa#na business. 2he Sa#na thing ! as Ghani"s o#eration, right from the start.5

5)ll of itE5 I as, ed.

5Sure,5 San+ay ans! ered. 5<hader and Ghani, both. Out Ghani ! as in harge. 2hey ! ere using the Sa#na thing, you , no! , to get ! hat they ! anted from the o#s and the government.5

5*o! E5

5Ghani"s idea ! as to frea, everybody out((the o#s and the #oliti ians and the other oun ils((! ith a ommon enemy. 2hat ! as Sa#na. 7hen the Sa#na guys started ho##ing #eo#le u# all over the #la e, and tal, ing about a revolution, and Sa#na being the , ing of thieves and all that, everybody got ! orried. -obody , ne! ! ho ! as behind it. 2hat got them to ! or, ! ith us, to at h the fu , er, in e' hange for our hel#. Out Ghani, he ! as ho#ing to get a shot at <hader himself.5

5I"m not sure he ! anted that from the start,5 Salman 4ustaan interrue#ted, sha, ing his head at his lose friend to em#hasise his #oint. 5I thin, he started out +ust li, e al! ays, ba , ing <hader all the ! ay. Out that Sa#na thing((that ! as some ! eird shit, man, and I thin, , you , no! , it bent his mind.5

Whatever, Sanjay continued, shrugging off the fine point. The result's the same. Ghani has this gang (the Sa#na guys (his own gang, that only answer to him.) and he's killing fuckers all over the place. Most of them were #eople he wanted to get rid of anyway, for business reasons, but he's got no problem with. So everything's going fine, yaar. The whole fucking city is going really looking for this Sa#na fucker, and all the traditional enemies, they're falling all over themselves to help him smuggle guns and explosives and other heavy shit through Bombay 8F% because they want him to help them find out who this Sa#na is, and take him out. It's a fucking really plan, but it's working, yaar. Then, one day, a cop comes to see him. It was that >atil (you know the guy, the sub-inspector Suresh >atil. *e used to work out of Solaba.) and he's such a cunt, yaar.

Out a smart one, Salman muttered respectfully.

@h, yeah, he's smart. *e's a very smart cunt.) and he tells Ghani that the Sa#na killers have left a clue at the scene of their latest murder, and it leads back to the Chander Chander Chander. Ghani freaks out. *e can see all that shit he's been doing coming right home to his doorstep. So he decides that he's got to have a sacrifice. Someone from the Chander Chander Chander itself, you know, right in the fucking heart of it all, that the Sa#na guys can help to throw the cops off. They figured, if the cops sacrifice one of our own guys get all hooked up, they'd have to think that Sa#na is our enemy.

) and he figured, Salman concluded for him.) and it worked. >atil was the cop in charge of the case, and he was there when they were putting the pieces of 4adid's body into carry bags. *e, well, he loses 4adid as to Chanderbhai. >atil's dad (no, there's a tough cop, yaar (had some history with Chanderbhai. *e put him in jail on the spot.

<haderbhai did timeE5 I as, ed, disa##ointed that I'd never as, ed the <han myself: ! e"d tal, ed about #rison often enough.

Sure,5 Salman laughed. 5*e even es a#ed, you , no! , from)rthur Road.5

Dou"re fu , in" , iddingB5

Dou didn"t , no! that, ;inE5

5- o.5

It's a damn fine story, yaar,5 Salman stated, ! agging his head enthusiastically. 5Dou should get -a1eer to tell it some time. *e ! as the outside man for <hader <han during the es a#e. 2hey ! ere fu , in" ! ild guys, -a1eer and <haderbhai, in those days, yaar.5

San+ay, in agreement, la##ed -a1eer on the ba , ! ith a hard, good(natured sla#. It ! as almost e' a tly the #la e ! here -a1eer had been ! ounded, and I , ne! the sla# must've hurt, but he sho! ed no sign of #ain. Instead, he studied my fa e. It ! as my first formal debriefing after)bdul Ghani"s death and the end of the t! o(! ee, gangster ! ar that had ost si' lives and #ut the #o! er of the mafia oun il ba , in the hands of 8F1 -a1eer and the <hader fa tion. I met his ga1e, and nodded slo! ly. *is stern, unsmiling fa e softened for an instant and then =ui , ly set in its ustomary severity.

>oor old 4ad+id,5 San+ay said, sighing heavily. 5*e ! as +ust a((! hat the fu , do you all those red thingsE 2hose fishE5

5) red herring,5 I said.

Deah, one of those herring fu , ers. 2he o#s((that >atil unt and his guys((they de ided that there ! asn"t any onne tion bet! een Sa#na and <hader"s oun il. 2hey , ne! ho! mu h <hader loved 4ad+id, and they started loo,ing in other #la es. Ghani ! as off the hoo, , and after a ! hile his guys started ho##ing fu , ers

u# again. Ousiness as usual.5

5*o! did <hader feel about itE5

5) bout ! hatE5 San+ay as, ed.

5*e means about 4ad+id being , illed,5 Salman ut in. 5Don't you,
; inE5

5Deah.5

2here ! as a small hesitation as all three men loo, ed at me. 2heir
features ! ere set in grim and almost resentful stillness, as if
I'd as, ed them an im#olite or embarrassing =uestion. Out their
eyes, lit ! ith se rets and lies, seemed regretful and saddened.

5<hader ! as ool ! ith it,5 Salman ans! ered. I felt my heart
stutter, murmuring its #ain.

7e ! ere in the 4o ambo, a restaurant and offee bar in the 9ort
)rea. It ! as lean, ! ell servi ed, and fashionably bohemian. Ri h
businessmen from the 9ort mi' ed ! ith gangsters, la! yers, and
elebrities from the movies and the ra#idly develo#ing television
industries. I li, ed the #la e, and I'd been glad that San+ay had
hosen it for our meeting. 7e"d ! or, ed our ! ay through a big but
healthy lun h and , ulfi dessert, and had moved on to our se ond
offee. -a1eer sat at my left, ! ith his ba , in a orner s#a e,
and fa ing the main street door. -e' t to him ! as San+ay <umar,
the tough, young *indu gangster from the suburb of Oandra ! ho"d
on e been my training #artner. *e"d ! or, ed his ! ay into a
#ermanent #osition on ! hat remained of <hader"s mafia oun il. *e
! as thirty years old, fit and heavy(set, ! ith thi , , dar, (bro! n
hair that he blo! (dried to mat h the bouffant of the movie
heroes. *is fa e ! as handsome. 7ide(a#art bro! n eyes, set dee#
into the shelter of a high bro! , loo, ed out ! ith humour and
onfiden e over a ! ide nose, a smiler"s mouth, and a softly

rounded him. *e laughed easily, and it ! as all! ays a 8FF good, ! arm laugh, no matter ho! often he #rovo, ed himself to it.)nd he ! as generous: it ! as almost im#ossible to #ay a bill in his om#any((not, as some thought, be ause he aggrandised himself ! ith the gesture, but rather be ause it ! as his instin t to give and to share. *e ! as also brave, and as de#endable in a violent risis as he ! as from day to mundane day. *e ! as an easy man to li, e, and I did li, e him, and I had to remind myself ! ith a little nudge of ! ill, no! and then, that he ! as one of the men ! ho"d ha , ed off)bdul Ghani"s hands and feet and head ! ith a but her"s leaver.

2he fourth man at our table, sitting ne' t to San+ay, as all! ays, ! as Salman, his best friend. Salman 4ustaan ! as born in the same year as San+ay, and had gro! n u# ! ith him in the bustling, ro! ded suburb of Oandra. *e"d been a #re o ious hild, I"d been told, ! ho"d sur#rised his im#overished #arents by to##ing every sub+e t in every lass at his +unior s hool. *is su ess ! as the more remar, able for the fa t that, from the day of his fifth birthday, the boy had ! or, ed t! enty hours a ! ee, ! ith his father, #lu , ing hi , ens and s! ee#ing out at the lo al #oultry yard.

I , ne! his history ! ell, #ie ing it together from stories and onfiden es he"d shared ! hen ! e"d ! or, ed out together at)bdullah"s gym. 7hen Salman had announ ed that he had to leave s hool to ! or, longer hours in su##ort of his family, a tea her ! ho , ne!)bde! <hader <han as, ed the don to inter ede on his

behalf. Salman be ame one of <haderbhai"s s holarshi# hildren((li, e my adviser, in the slum lini , Do tor *amid((and it ! as de ided that he should be groomed to! ard a areer as a la! yer. <hader enrolled Salman in a 8atholi ollege run by \$esuit #riests, and every day the boy from the slum dressed in a lean, ! hite uniform and too, his #la e among the sons of the ri h elite. It ! as a good edu ation((Salman"s s#o, en /nglish ! as elo=uent, and his general , no! ledge roved through history and geogra#hy to literature, s ien e, and art. Out there ! as a

! illness in the boy and a restless hunger for e' itement that even the strong arms and the hard anes of the \$esuits ouldn't tame.

7hile Salman struggled ! ith the \$esuits, San+ay had found a +ob in <haderbhai"s gang. *e ! or, ed as a runner, arrying messages and ontraband bet! een mafia offi es throughout the ity. In the first ! ee, s of that servi e, San+ay ! as stabbed during a fight ! ith men from a rival gang ! ho"d tried to rob him. 2he boy fought ba , and evaded his 8FG

atta , ers, delivering his ontraband #ar el to <hader"s olle tion entre, but his ! ound ! as serious and he too, t! o months to re over from it. Salman, his lifelong friend, blamed himself for not being ! ith San+ay, and he left s hool immediately. *e begged the <han for #ermission to +oin his friend and ! or, ! ith him as a runner. <hader agreed, and from that day the boys ! or, ed together at every rime in the oun il"s atalogue.

2hey ! ere +ust si' teen then, at the beginning. 2hey both turned thirty in the ! ee, s before our meeting in the 4o ambo. 2he ! ild boys had be ome hard men ! ho lavished gifts on their families, and lived ! ith a ertain gaudy, aggressive ool.)lthough they"d su##orted their sisters into #restigious marriages, both men ! ere unmarried, in a ountry ! here that ! as un#atrioti at the least, and sa rilegious at ! orst. 2hey"d refused to marry, Salman told me, be ause of a shared belief or #resentiment that they ! ould die violently and they ! ould die young. 2he #ros#e t didn't frighten or ! orry them. 2hey sa! it as a reasonable tradeoff: e' itement and #o! er and ! ealth enough to #rovide for their families, balan ed against short lives that rushed into the dead(end of a , nife or a gun.)nd ! hen -a1eer"s grou# ! on the gangster ! ar against Ghani"s grou#, the t! o friends found themselves on the ne! oun il6 young mafia dons in their o! n right.

5l thin, Ghani did try to ! arn <haderbhai ! hat ! as in his heart,5 Salman said thoughtfully, his voi e lear and his /nglish rounded to the nearest de ibel #oint. 5*e tal, ed about that hero urse

thing for a good year or so before he decided to create Sa#na.5

59u , him, yaar,5 San+ay snarled. 57ho the fu , ! as he to be giving <haderbhai ! arningsE 7ho the fu , ! as he to get us all in the shit ! ith >atil, so he had to have his guys ut u# old 4ad+idE)nd then, after everything, he ! ent and sold everybody out to the fu , in" >a, istani o#s, yaar. 9u , him. If I ould dig

the mada hudh u# and , ill him again, I'd do it today. I'd do it every day. It ! ould be my fu , in" hobby, li, e.5

57ho ! as the real Sa#naE5 I as, ed. 57ho a tually did the , illings for)bdulE I remember <hader told me on e, after)bdullah ! as , illed, that he found the real Sa#na. *e said he , illed him. 7ho ! as heE)nd ! hy did he , ill him, if he ! as ! or, ing for him in the first #la eE5

2he t! o younger men turned to fa e -a1eer. San+ay as, ed him a fe! =uestions in Ardu. It ! as an a t of res#e t to! ard the older man: they , ne! the fa ts as ! ell as -a1eer did, but they deferred to his re olle tion 8FH of them and in luded him in the dis ussion. I understood most of -a1eer"s re#ly, but I ! aited for San+ay to translate.

5*is name ! as \$eetendra. \$eetudada, they alled him. *e ! as a gun and ma hete guy from Delhi(side. Ghani brought him do! n here, ! ith four other guys. *e a tually , e#t them in five(star hotels, li, e, the ! hole fu , in" time((t! o years, manB Oahin hudhB 8om#laining about <hader s#ending money on the mu+aheddin and the ! ar and all, and mean! hile he ! as , ee#ing these #sy ho fu , ers in five(star hotels for t! o fu , in yearsB5

5\$eetudada got drun, ! hen)bdullah ! as , illed,5 Salman added. 5It really got to him, you , no! , that everyone ! as saying Sa#na ! as dead. *e'd been doing the Sa#na thing for nearly t! o years, and it had started to t! ist his brain. *e started to believe his o! n ((or Ghani"s((bullshit.5

5Stu#id fu , in" name, yaar,5 San+ay ut in. 5It"s a girl"s name, Sa#na. It"s a fu , in" girl"s name. It"s li, e me alling myself fu , in" ; u y, or some su h. 7hat , ind of a bad fu , er alls himself a girl"s name, yaarE5

52he , ind ! ho , ill eleven #eo#le,5 Salman ans! ered, 5and almost gets a! ay ! ith it.)ny! ay, he got om#letely drun, the night)bdullah ! as , illed and everybody ! as saying that Sa#na ! as dead.)nd he started shooting his mouth off, telling anyone ! ho ! ould listen that he ! as the real Sa#na. 2hey ! ere in a bar in the >resident *otel. 2hen he starts shouting that he ! as ready to tell it all((! ho ! as behind the Sa#na , illings, you , no! , and ! ho #lanned it all and #aid for it all.5

59u , in" gandu,5 San+ay gro! led, using the slang ! ord for arsehole. 5I never met one of these #sy ho ty#es ! ho ! asn"t a fu , in" s=uealer, yaar.5

5; u , y for us, there ! ere mostly foreigners in the #la e that night, so they didn"t , no! ! hat he ! as tal, ing about. @ne of our guys ! as there, in the bar, and he told \$eetu to shut the fu , u#. \$eetudada said he ! asn"t afraid of)bdeh <hader <han be ause he had #lans for <hader, as ! ell. *e said <hader ! as going to end u# in #ie es, +ust li, e 4ad+id. 2hen he starts ! aving a gun

around. @ur guy alled <hader right a! ay.)nd the <han, he ! ent and did that one himself. *e ! ent ! ith -a1eer and <haled, and 9arid, and)hmed . adeh, and young)ndre! 9erreira, and some others.5

5I missed that one, fu , itB5 San+ay ursed. 5I ! anted to fi' that maa, a hudh from the first day, and es#e ially after 4ad+id. Out I ! as on a +ob, in Goa.)ny! ay, <hader fi' ed them u#.5

52hey found them near the ar #ar, of the >resident *otel. \$eetudada and his guys #ut u# a fight. 2here ! as a big shoot(out.

2! o of our guys 8F?

got hit. @ne of them ! as *ussein((you , no! , he runs the numbers in Oallard >ier no! . 2hat"s ho! he lost his arm((he too, a shotgun blast, both barrels of a ro! d(#leaser, a sa! n(off, and it tore his arm right off his body. If)hmed . adeh hadn"t ! ra##ed him u# and dragged him out of there, and off to hos#ital, he ! ould"ve bled to death, right there in the ar #ar, .)ll four of them ! ho ! ere there((seetudada and his three guys((got ! asted. <haderbhai #ut the last bullets into their heads himself. Out one of those Sa#na guys ! asn"t in the ar #ar, , and he got a! ay. 7e never tra , ed him do! n. *e ! ent ba , to Delhi, and he disa##eared from there. 7e haven"t heard anything sin e.5

5l li, ed that)hmed . adeh,5 San+ay said =uietly, dis#ensing ! hat ! as, for him, e' travagantly high #raise ! ith a little sigh of sorro! ing re olle tion.

5Deah,5 I agreed, remembering the man ! ho"d al! ays loo, ed as though he ! as sear hing for a friend in a ro! d6 the man ! ho"d died ! ith his hand len hed in mine. 5*e ! as a good guy.5

-a1eer s#o, e again, grunting the ! ords at us in his ! rathful style as if they ! ere threats.

57hen the >a,istani o#s ! ere ti##ed off about <haderbhai,5 San+ay translated, 5it ! as obvious that it had to be)bdul Ghani behind it.5

I nodded my agreement. It ! as obvious.)bdul Ghani ! as from >a,istan. *is onne tions there ! ent dee#, and high. *e"d told me about it more than on e ! hen I"d ! or, ed for him. I ! ondered ! hy I hadn"t seen it at the time, ! hen the o#s raided our hotel in >a,istan. 4y first thought ! as that I"d sim#ly li, ed him too mu h to sus#e t him, and that ! as true. 4ore to the #oint, #erha#, ! as ho! flattered I"d been by his attention: Ghani had been my #atron on the oun il, after <hader himself, and he"d invested time, energy, and affe tion in our friendshi#.)nd there ! as something else that might have distra ted me in <ara hi: my mind

had been filled with shame and revenge (I remembered that much from the visit to the mosque when I'd sat beside Chaderbhai and Chahed to hear the Olinda Singers. I remembered reading Didier's letter and deciding, in that shifting, yellow lamplight, that I would, in a moment. I remembered thinking that and then

turning my head to see the love in Chader's golden eyes. Could that love and that anger have smothered something so important, something so obvious, as Ghani's treachery? And if I'd missed that, what else had I missed?

Chader wasn't supposed to make it out of Istanbul, Salman added. Chaderbhai, a peer, Chahed (even you.) Abdul Ghani thought it was his chance to take out the whole bunch in one shot (all the guys on the bunch who weren't with him. Out Chaderbhai had his own friends in Istanbul, and they warned him, and you made it out of the trap. I think, Abdul must've, no, he was finished from that day on. Out he held his breath, and he didn't make any moves here. *e was hoping, I guess, that Chader, and the whole lot of you, might be killed in the war.

A peer interrupted him, impatient with the English that he despised. I thought I understood what he'd said, and I translated his words, looking to Sanjay for confirmation that my guess was correct.

Chader told a peer to see the truth about Abdul Ghani as he ret. *e said that if anything happened to him in the war, a peer was to return to Bombay and avenge him. Was that it?

Deah, Sanjay sagged his head. Dou got it. And after he did that, he had to fight the rest of the guys who were on Ghani's side. There's none of them left now. They're all dead, or they got the fuck out of Bombay.

Hi brings us to the point, Salman smiled. It was a rare smile, but a good one: a tired man's smile, an unhappy man's

smile a tough man's smile. *is long face as a little lopsided
! with one eye lower than the other by the thickness of a finger, a
bump, in his nose that had settled crookedly, and a mouth that
hit hard in one corner ! here a fist had split the lip and a suture
had pulled the skin too tightly. *is short hair formed a
naturally round hairline on his forehead, like a dome that
pressed down hard on his slightly jugged ears. 57e ! want you to
run the #ass#holes for a while. Krishna and Willu are very
insistent. They're a little ...5

They're freed out of their fucking brains, Sanjay put in.
They're scared stupid because guys ! are getting ho#med all over
Bombay((starting ! with Ghani ! while they ! are right there in the
fucking cellar. -o! the ! are's over, and ! e ! on, but they're still
scared. 7e can't afford to lose them, ;in. 7e ! want you to ! or,
! with them, and settle them down, like. They're asking about you
all the time, and they ! want you to ! or, ! with them. They like you,
man.5

I looked at each of them in turn, and settled my eyes on -a1eer.
If my understanding ! as correct, it ! as a tempting offer. The
victorious Chander faction had reformed the local mafia council
under old Sobhan Ahmad. -a1eer had become a full member of the

council, as had 8F7
Ahmad Al-Baaf. The others included Sanjay and Salman, Farid,
and three other Bombay(born dons.)ll of the last six #o, e
Arathi every bit as ! ell as they #o, e *indian /nglish. That
gave me a unique and very significant point of contact ! with them
because I ! as the only gora any of them , ne! ! ho'ould see,
Arathi. I ! as the only gora any of them , ne! ! ho'd been leg
ironed at)rthur Road Prison.)nd I ! as one of the very few men,
bro! n or ! hite, ! ho'd survived Chander's ! ar. They like me. They
trusted me. They saw me as a valuable asset. The gangster ! ar ! as
over. In the new #afia that ruled their part of the city,
fortunes could be made.)nd I needed the money. I'd been living
on my savings, and I ! as almost broke.

57hat e' a tly did you have in mindE5 I as, ed -a1eer, , no! ing that San+ay ! ould re#ly.

5Dou run the boo, s, the stam#s, all the #ass#ort stuff, and the li en es, #ermits, and redit ards,5 he ans! ered =ui , ly. 5Dou get om#lete ontrol. \$ust the ! ay it ! as ! ith Ghani. -o fu , in" #roblem. 7hatever you need, you get it. Dou ta, e a #ie e of that a tion((I'm thin, in" about ? #er ent, but ! e an tal, about that if you don't thin, it's enough, yaar.5

5)nd you an visit the oun il ! henever you ! ant,5 Salman added. 5Sort of an observer status, if you get my meaning. 7hat do you sayE5

5Dou"d have to move the o#eration from Ghani"s basement,5 I said =uietly. 5I"d never feel ha##y about ! or, ing there, and I'm not sur#rised the #la e has got &illu and <rishna s#oo, ed.5

5-o #roblem,5 San+ay laughed, sla##ing the table. 57e're going to sell the #la e any! ay. Dou , no! , ;in(brother, that fat fu , Ghani #ut the t! o big houses((his o! n one and the #la e ne' t door((in his brother(in(la! "s name. -othin" ! rong ! ith that((fu , , man, ! e all do that. Out they're ! orth fu , in" rores, ;in. 2hey're fu , in" mansions, baba.)nd then, after ! e sli ed and di ed the fat fu , , his brother(in(la! de ides he doesn't ! ant to sign the #la es over to us. 2hen he gets tough, and starts tal, ing la! yers and #oli e. So ! e had to tie him u# over a big dubba of a id, yaar. 2hen he"s not tough any more. 2hen he an"t ! ait to sign the #la es over to us. 7e sent 9arid to do the +ob. *e too, are of it. Out he got so fu , ed u#, yaar, ! ith the disres#e t Ghani"s brother(in(la! sho! ed us, and he ! as real angry ! ith the mada hudh for ma, ing him set u# the a id barrel and all. *e li, es to , ee# things sim#le, our brother 9arid. 2he ! hole hanging(the(unt(u#(over(the(a id thing, it ! as all a bit((! hat did 8F8 you all it, SalmanE 7hat ! as the ! ordE5

52a! dry,5 Salman suggested.

Deah. 2a! (fu , in(dry, the ! hole thing. 9arid, he li, es to get res#e t, or ut to the hase and gun the motherfu , er do! n, li, e.

So, angry as he is, he ta, es the brother(in(la! "s o! n house as ! ell((ma, es him sign over his o! n house, +ust for being su h a big mada hudh about Ghani"s houses. So no! he"s got nothing, that guy, and ! e got three houses on the mar, et instead of one.5

5It"s a vi ious and bloodthirsty ra , et, that #ro#erty business,5 Salman on luded ! ith a ! ry smile. 5I"m moving us into it as soon as I an. 7e"re ta, ing over one of the big agen ies. I"ve got 9arid ! or, ing on it. @, ay, ; in, if you don"t ! ant to ! or, at Ghani"s #la e, ! here ! ould you li, e us to set it u# for youE5

5I li, e 2ardeo,5 I suggested. 5Some! here near *a+i)li.5

57hy 2ardeoE5 San+ay as, ed.

5I li, e 2ardeo. It"s lean ... and it"s =uiet.)nd it"s near *a+i)li. I li, e *a+i)li. I"ve got , ind of a sentimental onne tion to the #la e.5

52hi, hain, ; in,5 Salman agreed. 52ardeo it is. 7e"ll tell 9arid to start loo, ing right a! ay.)nything elseE5

5I"ll need a ou#le of runners((guys I an trust. I"d li, e to #i , my o! n men.5

57ho"ve you got in mindE5 San+ay as, ed.

5Dou don"t , no! them. 2hey"re outside guys. Out they"re both good men. \$ohnny 8igar and <ishore. I trust them, and I , no! I an rely on them.5

San+ay and Salman e' hanged a glan e and loo, ed to -a1eer. *e nodded.

5-o #roblem,5 Salman said. 5Is that itE5

5@ne more thing,5 I added, turning to -a1eer. 5I ! ant -a1eer as my onta t on the oun il. If there"s any #roblem, for any reason, I ! ant to deal ! ith -a1eer first.5

-a1eer nodded again, favouring me ! ith a little smile dee# in his eyes.

I shoo, hands ! ith ea h man in turn to seal the deal. 2he e' hange ! as a little more formal and solemn than I"d e' #e ted it to be, and I had to len h my +a! to stifle a laugh.)nd those attitudes, their gravitas and my re usant im#ulse to laugh, registered the differen e bet! een us. 9or all that I li, ed Salman, San+ay, and the others((and the truth ! as that I 8F9 loved -a1eer, and o! ed him my life((the mafia ! as, for me, a means to an end and not an end in itself. 9or them, the mafia ! as a family, an infrangible bond that held them from minute to minute and all the ! ay to the dying breath. 2heir solemnity e' #ressed that , in(sa red obligation from eye to eye and hand to

hand, but I , ne! they never believed it ! as li, e that for me. 2hey too, me in and ! or, ed ! ith me((the ! hite guy, the ! ild gora ! ho ! ent to the ! ar ! ith)bde! <hader <han((but they e' #e ted me to leave them, sooner or later, and return to the other ! orld of my memory and my blood.

I didn"t thin, that, and I didn"t e' #e t it, be ause I"d burned all the bridges that might"ve led me home.)nd although I had to sto# myself from laughing at the earnestness of the little ceremony, the handsha, e had, in fa t, formally indu ted me into the ran, s of #rofessional riminals. Antil that moment, the rimes I"d ommitted had been in the servi e of <hader <han.)s diffi ult as it is for anyone outside that ! orld to understand, there ! as a sense in ! hi h I"d been able to say, ! ith sin erity, that I"d ommitted them for love of him: for my o! n safety,

certainly but, beyond every other reason, for the father's love I'd craved from him. With ~~h~~ader gone, I could've made the bread, ~~om~~pletely. I could've gone ... almost anywhere. I could've done ... something else. But I didn't. I joined my fate to theirs and became a gangster for nothing more than the money, and the ~~no~~mer, and the ~~rote~~tion that their brotherhood ~~promised~~.

And it ~~is~~ me busy, bread, ing ~~la~~s for a living: so busy that I managed to hide most of ~~!~~ that I felt from the heart that ~~!~~ as feeling it. ~~!~~verything moved ~~!~~ui, ly after that meeting at the ~~4~~o ambo. ~~9~~arid found ~~ne!~~ ~~!~~remises ~~!~~ithin a ~~!~~ee, . ~~2~~he ~~!~~o(story building, only a short ~~!~~al, from the floating ~~mos~~=ue, *~~a~~i) ~~!~~li, had been a ~~re~~ords office for a branch of the ~~0~~ombay ~~4~~uni ~~!~~al ~~8~~or~~!~~oration. When the ~~0~~48 had moved to larger, more modern offices, they'd left most of the old benches, desks, storage ~~u~~boards, and shelves behind as ~~sto~~, fittings. ~~2~~hey ~~!~~ere ~~!~~ell suited to our needs, and I ~~s~~ent a ~~!~~ee, ~~!~~u~~!~~ervising a team of cleaners and labourers, ~~!~~ho dusted and ~~!~~olished every surface ~~!~~hile moving the furniture around to make ~~!~~ay for the machinery and light

Our men loaded that ~~s~~pecialist ~~e~~=~~u~~i~~!~~ment onto a large, covered truck, and delivered it to the ~~ne!~~ ~~!~~remises late at night. ~~2~~he street ~~!~~as unusually ~~!~~quiet as the heavy truck, ~~ba~~,ed ~~u~~ to the double folding doors ~~8~~G% of our ~~ne!~~ factory. Out alarm bells and the heavier ~~!~~ang of fire(engine bells ~~!~~angled in the distance. Standing beside our truck, I ~~loo~~,ed along the deserted street in the direction of the frantic sound.

It must be a big fire, I muttered to Sanjay, and he laughed out loud.

Arid started a fire, Salman said, answering for his friend. ~~7~~e told him ~~!~~e didn't ~~!~~ant anyone ~~!~~atting us move this stuff into the ~~ne!~~ ~~!~~lae, so he started the fire as a diversion. ~~2~~hat's ~~!~~hy the street is so ~~em~~ty. ~~!~~verybody ~~!~~ho is ~~!~~a, ~~e~~ has gone to the fire.

5* e burned do! n a rival om#any,5 San+ay laughed. 5- o! ! e are
offi ially in the real estate business be ause our biggest rivals
have +ust losed do! n, due to fire damage. 7e start our ne! real
estate offi e not far from here tomorro! .)nd tonight, no urious
fu ,ers are here to see us move our stuff into your ne! ! or, sho#.
9arid , illed t! o birds ! ith one mat h, naE5

So, ! hile fire and smo, e singed the midnight s, y, and bells and
sirens railed about a , ilometre a! ay, ! e dire ted our men as they
moved the heavy e=ui#ment into the ne! fa tory.)nd <rishna and
&illu ! ent to ! or, almost at on e.

In the months that I'd been a! ay, Ghani had follo! ed my
suggestion to #ush the fo us of the o#eration laterally into the
#rodu tion of #ermits, ertifi ates, di#lomas, li en es, letters
of redit, se urity #asses, and other do uments. It ! as a booming
trade in the booming e onomy of Oombay, and ! e often ! or, ed
through the da! n to satisfy the demand.)nd the business ! as
generational: as li ensing authorities and other bodies modified
their do uments in res#onse to our forgeries, ! e dutifully o#ied
and then ounterfeited them again, at additional ost.

5It's a , ind of Red I ueen ontest,5 I said to Salman 4ustaan ! hen
the ne! #ass#ort fa tory had been running for si' diligent
months.

5; ai , a RaniE5 he as, ed.) Red I ueenE

5Deah. It's a biology thing. It's about hosts, li, e human bodies,
and #arasites, li, e viruses and su h. I studied it ! hen I ! as
running my lini in the 1ho#ad#atti. 2he hosts((our bodies((and
the viruses((any bug that ma, es us si , ((are lo , ed in a
om#etition ! ith ea h other. 7hen the #arasite atta , s, the host
develo#s a defen e. 2hen the virus hanges to beat that defen e,
so the host gets a ne! defen e.)nd that , ee#s on going. 2hey

all it a Red I ueen ontest. It's from the story, you , no! ,)li e in 7onderland.5 8G1

5l , no! it,5 Salman ans! ered. 57e did it at s hool. Out I never understood it.5

52hat's o, ay((nobody does.)ny! ay, the little girl,)li e, she meets this Red I ueen, ! ho runs in redibly fast but never seems to get any! here. She tells)li e that, in her ountry, it ta, es all the running you an do, to , ee# in the same #la e.)nd that"s li, e us ! ith the #ass#ort authorities, and the li ensing boards, and the ban, s all over the ! orld. 2hey , ee# hanging the #ass#orts and other do uments to ma, e it harder for us.)nd ! e , ee# finding ne! ! ays to fa, e them.)nd they , ee# hanging the ! ay they ma, e them, and ! e , ee# finding ne! ! ays to fa, e them and forge them and ada#t them for ourselves. It"s a RedI ueen ontest, and ! e all have to run real fast +ust to stand still.5

5l thin, you"re doing better than standing still,5 he asserted.

*is tone ! as =uiet but adamant. 5Dou"ve done a damn fine +ob, ; in. 2he ID stuff is deadly((it"s a real big mar, et. 2hey an"t get enough.)nd it"s good ! or, . So far, all our guys ! ho"ve used your boo, s have gone through ! ithout any #roblems, yaar.)s a matter of fa t, that"s ! hy I"ve alled you to have lun h ! ith us today. I"ve got a sur#rise for you((, ind of a #resent, li, e, and I"m sure you"re going to li, e it. It"s a ! ay of saying than, s, yaar, for the great +ob you"ve been doing.5

I didn"t loo, at him. 7e ! ere ! al, ing =ui , ly, side by side, along 4ahatma Gandhi Road to! ard the Regal 8ir le roundabout on a hot, loudless afternoon. 7here the foot#ath ! as dogged ! ith sho##ers halting at the tableto# street stalls, ! e ! al, ed on the road ! ith a slo! , un easing stream of traffi behind and beside us. I didn"t loo, at Salman be ause I"d ome to , no! him ! ell enough during those si' months to be sure he ! as embarrassed by the #raise he"d felt moved to lavish on me. Salman ! as a natural

leader but, like many men who have the gift of command and the instinct to rule, he was deeply troubled by every expression of the leadership art. * He was, at heart, a humble man, and that humility made him an honourable man.

Stettie had once said that she found it strange and incongruous to hear me describe criminals, killers, and mafiosi as men of honour. The confusion, I think, was hers, not mine. She'd confused honour with virtue. & Virtue is earned with what we do, and honour is earned with how we do it. Doubtless you can fight a war in an honourable way (the Geneva Convention exists for that very reason) and you can enforce the law without honour at all. In its essence, honour is the art of being humble. And gangsters, cops, politicians, soldiers, and holy men, are only ever good at what they do if they stay humble.

Doubtless, when he remarked, as we moved to the sidewalk opposite the cloisters of the university buildings, "I'm glad it didn't bother you with your friends (the ones you wanted to help you with the protests, right at the start."

I frowned, and remained silent, seeing him with his rapid step. Johnny Sigar and Shore had refused to join me in the protest, and it had shocked and disappointed me. I'd assumed that they would sum up at the chance to make money (to make more money with me than either of them had ever dreamed of making alone. I'd never anticipated the saddened and offended expressions that followed their smiles when they understood, at last, that I was offering them nothing more than the golden opportunity to commit crimes with me. It had never occurred to me that they wouldn't want to do it. It had never occurred to me that they would refuse to do it with criminals, and for criminals.

I remembered turning away from their stony, closed, embarrassed smiles that day. I remembered the question that had popped into a fist in my mind, right behind the eyes: Was I so far out of

to him with the thoughts and feelings of decent men. The question still ran, led six months later. He answered still staring back at me from the mirrored windows of the shop. He passed as usual, ed.

If those guys of yours had poured out, Salman continued, I wouldn't have put a word with you. And I'm damn glad that I did put him with you. He's a much happier guy now. He's a much more relaxed kind of guy. He likes you, in.

He likes him, too, I replied quietly, smiling through my frown. And it was true. I did like a word, and I was glad that he'd become close friends.

A word, the shy but capable youngster I'd met on my first visit to Chader's mafia town, more than three years before, had toughened up to a hard, fearless, angry man whose sense of loyalty assumed the full measure of his young life. When Johnny Bigar and Chishore repeated my offers of a word, Salman had put a word and the Goan, Andre Ferreira, to a word, with me. Andre had been genial and talkative, but he'd moved only reluctantly from the company of his young gangster friends, and he hadn't become close. A word, however, had spent most days and many long nights with me, and he liked and understood one another.

He was right on the edge, I think, when Chader died and he had to lean out Ghani's guys, Salman confided. It got pretty rough ((you remember ((he all did some ... unusual things. Out a word as a word. He was starting to worry me. You have to get heavy sometimes in our business. That's just how it is. Out you got a problem on your hands when you start to enjoy it, nah. I had to talk to him. A word, I said to him, putting a word should not be the first option. It should be a long way down the list. It shouldn't even be on the same page as the first option. Out he went right on doing it. When I put him with you. And now, after six months, he's a much calmer guy. It poured out well, yaar. I think, I'll just have to put all the really bad and mad motherfuckers with you, in, to straighten them out.

5* e blamed himself for not being there ! hen <hader died,5 I said as ! e rounded the curve of the domed \$ehangir)rt Gallery. Seeing a small ga# in the traffi , ! e +ogged a ross the roundabout at Regal 8ir le +un tion, dodging and ! eaving bet! een the ars.

57 e _all did,5 Salman muttered softly ! hen ! e too, u# a #osition outside the Regal 8inema.

It ! as a tiny #hrase, three small ! ords, and it said nothing ne! , nothing more than I already , ne! to be true. Det that little #hrase thundered in my heart, and an avalan he of grieving began to tremble, shift, and slide. 9or almost a year, and until that very moment, my anger at <haderbhai had shielded me from the #ain of grieving for him. @thers had rumbled and ! ithered and raged in their sho , and sorro! at his death. I'd been so angry ! ith him that my share of grief ! as still u# there, beneath the

smothering sno! , in those mountains ! here he"d died. I'd felt a sense of loss. I'd suffered almost from the start.)nd I didn't hate the <han((I'd loved him, al! ays, and still loved him in that instant as ! e stood outside the inema, ! aiting for our friends. Out I hadn't really grieved for him((not in the ! ay that I'd grieved for >raba, er or even)bdullah. Someho! , Salman's usual remar, that ! e all blamed ourselves for not being ! ith <hader ! hen he died had sha, en my fro1en sorro! ing free, and the slo! , ine' orable sno! sli# of its hearta he began, right there and then.

57 e must be a bit early,5 Salman observed heerily, and I flin hed as I for ed myself into the moment ! ith him. 8GH

5Deah.5

52hey"re oming by ar, ! e"re ! al, ing, and still ! e beat them here.5

5It's a good ! al, .)t night it's even better. I do that ! al, a

lot: the cause! ay to &2. and ba , . It's one of my favourite ! al, s
in the ! hole ity.5

Salman loo, ed at me, a smile on his li#s and a fro! n e' aggerating
the slightly roo, ed tilt of his almond(bro! n eyes.

5Dou really love this #la e, don't youE5 he as, ed.

5Sure I do,5 I re#lied, a little defensively. 52hat doesn't mean
I li, e everything about it. 2here's a lot that I don't li, e. Out
I do love the #la e. I love Oombay, and I thin, I al! ays ! ill.5

*e grinned and loo, ed a! ay do! n the street. I struggled to hold
the set of my features, to , ee# my e' #ression alm and even. Out
it ! as too late. 2he heartgrief had already begun.

I , no! no! ! hat ! as ha##ening to me, ! hat ! as over! helming me,
! hat ! as about to onsume and almost destroy me. Didier had even
given me a name for it((assassin grief, he'd on e alled it: the
, ind of grief that lies in ! ait and atta , s from ambush, ! ith no
! arning and no mer y. I , no! no! that assassin grief an hide for
years and then stri, e suddenly, on the ha##iest day, ! ithout
dis ernible reason or e' egesis. Out on that day, si' months after
my ! or, in the #ass#ort fa tory had begun, and almost a year
after <hader's death, I ouldn't understand the dar, and
trembling mood that ! as moving in me, s! elling to the sorro! l'd
too long denied. I ouldn't understand it, so I tried to fight it
as a man fights #ain or des#air. Out you an't bite do! n on
assassin grief, and ! ill it a! ay. 2he enemy stal, s you, ste# for
ste#, and , no! s your every move before you ma, e it. 2he enemy is
your o! n grieving heart and, ! hen it stri, es, it an't miss.

Salman turned to me on e more, his amber eyes gleaming in the
ast of his thoughts.

52hat time, ! hen ! e had the ! ar to get rid of Ghani's guys, 9arid

I was trying to be a ne!)bdullah. *e loved him, you , no! . *e loved him li, e a brother.)nd I thin, he ! as trying to _be)bdullah. I thin, he got the idea that ! e needed a ne!)bdullah to ! in the ! ar for us. Out it doesn't ! or, , does itE I tried to tell him that. I tell that to all the young guys((es#e ially the ones ! ho try to be li, e me. Dou an only ever be yourself. 2he more you try to be li, e someone else, the more you find yourself 8G? standing in the ! ay. *ey, here"s the guysB5

) ! hite)mbassador sto##ed in front of us. 9arid, San+ay,)ndre! 9erreira, and a tough, forty(year(old Oombay 4uslim named)mir got out of the ar and +oined us. 7e shoo, hands as the ar drove off.

5; et"s ! ait a minute, guys, ! hile 9aisal #ar, s the ar,5 San+ay suggested.

It ! as true that 9aisal, ! ho ran the #rote tion ra , et ! ith)mir, ! as #ar, ing the ar. It ! as also true, and more to the #oint, that San+ay ! as en+oying himself, standing in our ons#i uous grou# on a ! arm afternoon and s#ar, ing furtive but fervent loo, s from most of the girls #assing us on the busy street. 7e ! ere goondas, gangsters, and almost everyone , ne! it. @ur lothes ! ere ne! and e' #ensive and ut to the edge of fashion. 7e ! ere all fit. 7e ! ere all onfident. 7e ! ere all armed and dangerous.

9aisal lo#ed around the orner and ! agged his head to signal that the ar ! as safely #ar, ed. 7e +oined him, and ! al, ed the three blo , s to the 2a+ 4ahal *otel in a single, ! ide line. 2he route from Regal 8ir le to the 2a+ *otel rossed s#a ious, o#en, ro! ded s=uares. 7e held our line easily as the ro! ds #arted for us. *eads turned as ! e #assed, and ! his#ers ! hirlled in our ! a, e.

7e limbed the ! hite marble ste#s at the 2a+, and ! al, ed through to the Shamiana Restaurant on the ground floor. 2! o ! aitters settled our grou# at a long, reserved table near a tall ! indo! ! ith a ourtyard vie! . I sat at one end of the table, nearest to the e' it. 2he strange and over#o! eringly dar, mood that had

stirred in me ! ith Salman"s little #hrase gre! stronger by the minute. I ! anted to be free to leave at any moment, ! ithout u#setting the balan e of the grou#. 2he ! aitters greeted me ! ith broad smiles, calling me _gao(_alay, or ountryman, the Indian e=ivalent of the Italian #aisano. 2hey , ne! me ! ell((the gora ! ho s#o, e 4arathi((and ! e hatted for a ! hile in the village diale t I"d learned in Sunder more than four years before.

9ood arrived, and the men ate ! ith good a##etite. I, too, ! as hungry, but I ouldn"t eat, and I +ust #ushed at the food to ma, e a #olite sho! . I dran, t! o u#s of bla , offee and tried to bring my troubled, storming mind into the run of onversations.)mir ! as des ribing the movie he"d seen the night before((a *indi gangster #i ture, in ! hi h the gangsters ! ere vi ious thugs and the hero on=uered them all, unarmed and alone. *e des ribed

every fight se=uen e in detail, and the men hooted ! ith 8GC laughter.)mir ! as a s arred, blunt(headed man ! ith thi , , tangled eyebrow! s and a moustache that rode the resting ! ave of his full u##er li# li, e the ! ide #ro! of a <ashmiri houseboat. *e loved to laugh and tell stories, and his self(assured, sonorous voi e om#elled attention.

)mir"s onstant om#anion, 9aisal, had been a ham#ion bo' er in the youth league. @n his nineteenth birthday, after a year of tough #rofessional bouts, he"d dis overed that his manager had embe11led and s=uandered all the money he"d been entrusted to save from his bo' ers" fights. 9aisal had tra , ed the manager do! n. 7hen he"d found him, he hit him and then , e#t on hitting him until the man ! as dead. *e"d served eight years in #rison for the rime, and ! as banned from bo' ing for life. In #rison, the naive, hot(tem#ered teenager had be ome a al ulating, old(tem#ered young man. @ne of <haderbhai"s talent s outs had re ruitied him in the #rison, and he"d served his a##renti eshi# to the mafia through the last three years of his senten e. During the four years sin e his release, 9aisal had ! or, ed as)mir"s #rin i#al strong(arm man in the burgeoning #rote tion ra , et. *e

! as =ui , , ruthless, and driven to su eed at ! hatever tas, ! as set for him. *is flattened, bro, en nose, and a neat s ar that disse ted his left eyebro! g gave him a fearsome a##earan e, and toughened ! hat might other! ise have been a too(regular and too(handsome fa e.

2hey ! ere the ne! blood, the ne! mafia dons, the ne! lords of the ity: San+ay, the effi ient , iller ! ith the movie(star loo, s6)ndre! , the genial Goan ! ho dreamed of ta, ing his seat on the mafia oun il6)mir, the gri11led veteran ! ith the story(teller"s gift6 9aisal, the old(hearted enfor er ! ho only as, ed one =uestion((9inger, arm, leg, or ne , E((! hen he ! as given an assignment6 9arid, , no! n as the 9i' er, ! ho solved #roblems ! ith fire and fear, and ! ho"d raised si' mu h younger brothers and sisters, alone, ! hen his #arents died in a holera(infested slum6 and Salman, the =uiet one, the humble one, the natural leader, ! ho onttrolled the lives of hundreds in the little em#ire that he"d inherited and held by for e.

)nd they ! ere my friends. 4ore than friends, they ! ere my brothers in their brotherhood of rime. 7e ! ere bonded to one another in blood((not all of it other #eo#le"s((and boundless obligation. If I needed them, no matter ! hat I"d done, no matter ! hat I ! anted them to do, they ! ould ome. If they needed me, I ! as there, ! ithout avil or regret. 8G7

2hey ,ne! they ould ount on me. 2hey ,ne! that ! hen <hader had as, ed me to +oin him in his ! ar I"d gone ! ith him, and I"d #ut my life on the line. I ,ne! I ould ount on them. 7hen I"d needed him,)bdullah had been there to hel# me deal ! ith 4auri1io"s body. It"s a signifi ant test, as, ing someone to hel# you dis#ose of a murdered man"s body. -ot many #ass it. /very man at the table had #assed that test6 some of them more than on e. 2hey ! ere a solid re! , to use the)ustralian #rison slang. 2hey ! ere

the #erfe t re! for me, an outla! ! ith a #ri e on my head. I"d never felt so safe((not even ! ith <haderbhai"s #rote tion((and I never should"ve felt alone.

Out I ! as alone, and for t! o reasons. 2he mafia ! as theirs, not mine. 9or them, the organisation al! ays ame first. Out I ! as loyal to the men, not the mafia6 to the brothers, not the brotherhood. I ! or, ed for the mafia, but I didn't +oin it. I'm not a +oiner. I never found a lub or lan or idea that ! as more im#ortant to me than the men and ! omen ! ho believed in it.

)nd there ! as another differen e bet! een the men in that grou# and me((a differen e so #rofound that friendshi#, on its o! n, ouldn't surmount it. I ! as the only man at that table ! ho hadn't ,illed a human being, in hot blood or old. /ven)ndre! , amiable and garrulous young)ndre! , had fired his Oeretta at a ornered enemy((one of the Sa#na ,illers((and em#tied all seven rounds of the maga1ine into the man's hest until he ! as, as San+ay ! ould've said, t! o or three times dead.

\$ust at that moment the differen es suddenly seemed immense and un on=uerable to me((far greater and more signifi ant than the hundred talents, desires, and tenden ies that ! e had in ommon. I ! as sli##ing a! ay from them, right there and then, at the long table in the 2a+. 7hile)mir told his stories and I tried to nod and smile and laugh ! ith the others, grief ame to laim me. 2he day that had started ! ell, and should've been li, e any other, had s#un as, e! ! ith Salman's little ! ords. 2he room ! as ! arm, but I ! as old. 4y belly hungered, but I ouldn't eat. I ! as surrounded by friends, in a vast, ro! ded restaurant, but I ! as lonelier than a mu+aheddin sentry on the night before battle.

)nd then I loo, ed u# to see ;isa 8arter ! al, into the restaurant. *er long, blonde hair had been ut. 2he ne! short style suited her o#en, honest, #retty fa e. She ! as dressed in #ale blue((her favourite colour((a loose shirt and #ants, ! ith mat hing blue sunglasses #ro##ed in her thi , 8G8 hair. She loo, ed li, e a reature of light, a reature made out of s, y and lean, ! hite light.

7ithout onsidering ! hat I ! as doing, I stood and e' used myself,

and left my friends. She said to me as I approached her.) smile as big as a gambler's promise unveiled her face as she opened her arms to hug me.) and then she , ne! . @ne hand reached up to touch my face, her fingertips reading the braille of scars, ! hile the other hand too, my arm to lead me out of the restaurant and into the foyer.

5I haven't seen you for ! ee, s,5 she said as ! e sat together in a quiet corner. 57hat's ! rongE5

5- othing,5 I lied. 57ere you going in to have some lunchE5

5- o. \$ust coffee. I've got a room here, in the old #art, loo, ing

out over the Gate! ay. It's a million(dollar view! , and a great room. I've got it for three days ! hile ; ettie sees u# a deal ! ith a big #roducer. 2his is one of the fringe benefits she managed to see1e out of him. 2he movie business((! hat an I sayE5

5*o! "s it goingE5

5Great,5 she smiled. 5; ettie loves every minute of it. She deals ! ith all the studios and the booking agents no! . She's better at it than me. She drives a better deal for us every time.)nd I do the tourists. I like that #art better. I like meeting them and ! or, ing ! ith them.5

5)nd you like it that sooner or later, no matter how ! nice they are, they all! ays go awayE5

5Deah. 2hat, too.5

5*o! "s &i, ramE I haven't seen him since((since the last time I saw you and ; ettie.5

5*e's cool. Dou , no! &i, ram. *e's got a lot more time on his hands no! . *e misses the stunt thing. *e ! as really big on that,

and he was great at it. Out it drove ;ettie really. *e was all ways
+um#ing off moving through ,s and rashing through ! indo! s and stuff.
)nd she was worried a lot. So she made him give it u#.

57hat's he doing no! E5

5*e's ,ind of the boss, you , no! E ;i, e the e' e utive vi e(
#resident of the om#any((the one ;ettie started, ! ith <avita and
<arla and \$eet.)nd me.5 She #aised, on the verge of saying
something, and then #lunged on. 5She was as, ing after you.5

I stared ba , at her, saying nothing. 8G9

5<arla,5 she e' #lained. 5She wants to see you, I thin, .5

I held the silen e. I was enjoying it, a little, that so many
emotions were hasing one another across the soft, unblemished
lands a#e of her face.

5*ave you seen any of his stuntsE5 she asked.

5&i, ram"sE5

5Deah. *e did a ! hole lot before ;ettie made him sto#.

5I've been busy. Out I really want to at h u# ! ith &i, ram.5

57hy don't youE5

5I ! ill. I heard he's hanging out at the 8olaba 4ar, et every day,
and I've been wanting to see him. I'm ! or, ing a lot of nights, so

I haven't been to ;eo#old"s lately. It's +ust ... I've been ...
busy.5

5I , no! ,5 she said softly. 54aybe too busy, ;in. Dou don't loo,
too good.5

"Gimme a brea, " I sighed, trying to laugh. "I'll be out every day. I do bo'ing or , arate every other day. I an't get any fitter than this."

"Dou , no! ! hat I mean," she insisted.

"Deah, I , no! ! hat you mean. ; isten, I should let you go ..."

"- o. Dou shouldn't."

"I shouldn'tE I as, ed, fa, ing a smile.

"- o. Dou should ome ! ith me, no! , to my room. 7e an have offee sent u#. 8ome on. ; et's go."

)nd she ! as right: it ! as a s#e ta ular vie! . 2ourist ferries bound for the aves on /le#hanta Island, or returning to shore, rose u# the ! avelets and rolled over them in #roud, #ra tised glissades. *undreds of smaller raft di##ed and nodded li, e #reening birds in the shallo! ! ater ! hile huge argo vessels, an hored to the hori1on, lay motionless on that us# of alm ! here the o ean be ame the bay. @n the street belo! us, #arading tourists ! ove oloured garlands ! ith their movements through and around the tall, stony gallery of the Gate! ay 4onument.

She , i , ed off her shoes and sat ross(legged on the bed. I sat near her on the edge of the bed. I stared at the floor near the door. 7e ! ere =uiet for a ! hile, listening to the noises that #ushed their ! ay into the room ! ith a bree1e that aused the urtains to ruffle, s! ell, and fall.

"I thin, ," she began, ta, ing a dee# breath, "you should ome and live ! ith me."

"Well, that's(("

"*ear me out," she ut in, raising both #alms to silen e me.

5>lease.5

8H%

5I +ust don't thin, ((5

5>lease.5

5@, ay,5 I smiled, sitting further along the bed to rest my ba ,
against the bed(head.

5I found a ne! #la e. It's in 2ardeo. I , no! you li, e 2ardeo. So

do I.)nd I , no! you'll li, e the a#artment, be ause it's e' a tly
the , ind of #la e ! e both li, e.)nd I thin, that's ! hat I'm
trying to get at, or trying to say((! e li, e the same things, ; in.
)nd ! e got a lot in ommon. 7e both beat the do#e. 2hat's a
fu , in" hard thing to do, and you , no! it.)nd not many #eo#le do
it. Out ! e did((! e both did((and I thin, that's be ause ! e're
ali, e, you and me. 7e"d be good, ; in. 7e"d be ... ! e"d be real
good.5

5I an't say ... for sure ... that I beat the do#e, ; isa.5

5Dou did, ; in.5

5-o. I an't say I ! on't ever tou h it again, so I an't say I
beat it.5

5Out that's even more reason to get together, don't you seeE5 she
insisted, her eyes #leading and lose to tears. 5I'll , ee# you
straight. I an say I ! on't ever tou h it again, be ause I hate
the stuff. If ! e're together, ! e an ! or, the movie business, and
have fun, and ! at h out for ea h other.5

52here"s too mu h ...5

5; isten, if you're ! orried about)ustralia, and +ail, ! e ould go

some! here else((some! here they'll never find us.5

57ho told you about thatE5 I as, ed, , ee#ing my fa e straight.

5<arla did,5 she ans! ered evenly. 5It ! as in the same little
onversation ! e had on e, ! here she told me to loo, after you.5

5<arla said thatE5

5Deah.5

57henE5

5) long time ago. I as, ed her about you((about ! hat her feelings
! ere, and ! hat she ! anted to do.5

57hyE5

57haddaya mean, ! hyE5

5I mean,5 I re#lied slo! ly, rea hing out to ower her hand ! ith
mine, 5! hy did you as, <arla about her feelingsE5

5Oe ause I had a rush on you, stu#idB5 she e' #lained, holding my
eye for a se ond and then loo, ing a! ay again. 52hat"s ! hy I ! ent
! ith 8H1

)bdullah((to ma, e you +ealous, or interested, and +ust to be
lose to you, through him, be ause he ! as your friend.5

5\$esus,5 I sighed. 5I"m sorry.5

5Is it still <arlaE5 she as, ed, her eyes follo! ing the rise and
breathless fall of the urtherains at the ! indo! . 5)re you still in
love ! ith herE5

5- o.5

5Out you still love her.5

5Des.5

5)nd ... ho! about meE5 she as, ed.

I didn't ans! er be ause I didn't ! ant her to , no! the truth. I didn't ! ant to , no! the truth myself.)nd the silen e thi ,ened and s! elled until I ould feel the tingling #ressure of it on my s, in.

5I've got this friend,5 she said at last. 5*e's an artist.) s ul#tor. *is name"s \$ason. *ave you ever met himE5

5- o, I don't thin, so.5

5*e's an /nglish guy, and he's got a real /nglish ! ay of loo, ing at things. It's different than our ! ay, our)meri an ! ay, I mean. *e's got a big studio out near \$uhu Oea h. I go there sometimes.5

She ! as silent again. 7e sat there, feeling the bree1e alternately ! arm and ool as the air from the street and the bay s! irtled into the room. I ould feel her eyes on me li, e a blush of shame. I stared at our t! o hands +oined and resting on the bed.

52he last time I ! ent there, he ! as ! or, ing on this ne! idea. *e ! as filling em#ty #a , aging ! ith #laster, using the bubble #a , s that used to have toys in them, you , no! , and the foam bo'es you get #a , ed around a ne! 2.& set. *e alls them negative s#a es. *e uses them li, e a mould, and he ma, es a s ul#ture out of them. *e had a hundred things there((sha#es made out of egg artons, and the blister(#a , that a ne! toothbrush ame in, and the em#ty #a , age that had a set of head#hones in it.5

I turned to loo, at her. 2he s, y in her eyes held tiny storms. *er li#s, embossed ! ith se ret thoughts, ! ere s! ollen to the

truth she ! as trying to tell me.

5I ! al, ed around there, in his studio, you , no! , loo, ing at all these ! hite s ul#tures, and I thought, that"s ! hat I am. 2hat"s ! hat I"ve al! ays been.)ll my life. -egative s#a e.)! ays ! aiting for someone, or something, or some , ind of real feeling to fill me u# and give me a reason ...5

7hen I , issed her, the storm from her blue eyes ame into our 8HF

mouths, and the tears that slid a ross her lemon(s ented s, in ! ere s! eeter than honey from the sa red bees in 4ombadevi"s \$asmine 2em#le garden. I let her ry for us. I let her live and die for us in the long, slo! stories our bodies told. 2hen, ! hen the tears sto##ed, she surrounded us ! ith #oised and fluent beauty((a beauty that ! as hers alone: born in her brave heart, and substantialised in the truth of her love and her flesh.)nd it almost ! or, ed.

7e , issed again as I #re#ared to leave her room((good friends, lovers, gathered into one another then and forever by the lash and aress of our bodies, but not =uite healed by it, not =uite ured by it. -ot yet.

5She"s still there, isn"t sheE5 ; isa said, ! ra##ing a to! el around her body to stand in the bree1e at the ! indo! .

5I"ve got the blues today, ; isa. I don"t , no! ! hy. It"s been a long day. Out that"s nothing to do ! ith us. Dou and me ... that ! as good((for me, any! ay.5

59or me, too. Out I thin, she"s still there, ; in.5

5- o, I ! asn"t lying before. I"m not in love ! ith her any more. Something ha##ened, ! hen I ame ba , from)fghanistan. @r maybe it ha##ened in)fghanistan. It +ust ... sto##ed.5

"I'm going to tell you something," she murmured and then turned to face me, speaking in a stronger, clearer voice. "It's about her. I believe you, what you said, but I think you have to, no! this before you can really say it's over with her."

"I don't need"

"Please, in! It's a girl thing. I have to tell you because you can't really say it's over with her unless you, no! the truth about her (unless you, no! what makes her tick, . If I tell you, and it doesn't change anything or make you feel different than how you feel now, then I'll, no! you're free."

"And if it does make a difference"

"Well, maybe she deserves a second chance. I don't, no! . I can only tell you I never understood Carla at all until she told me. She made sense, after that. So ... I guess you have to, no! . Anyway, if there's anything gonna happen for us, I want it to be clear (the best, I mean."

"Okay," I relented, sitting in a chair near the door. "Go ahead."

She sat on the bed once more, drawing her knees up under her chin in the tight embrace of the toilet. There were changes in her, and I couldn't help noticing them (a kind of honesty, maybe, in the way her body moved

and a new, almost languorous release that softened her eyes. They were lovely changes, and beautiful for that, and I wondered if she saw any of them in me, sitting still and quiet near the door.

"Did Carla tell you why she left the States?" she asked, nodding at the answer.

"No," I replied, choosing not to repeat the little that Carla

had told me on the night that he had walked into the snow.

I didn't think, so. She told me she wasn't going to tell you about it. I said she was really. I said she had to level with you. But she wouldn't. It's funny how it goes, isn't it? I wanted her to tell you, then, because I thought it might hurt you off her. - oh, I'm telling you, so that you can give her one more than she can take.)ny! ay, here it is. Carla left the States because she had to. She was running away ... because she killed a guy.

I laughed. It was a small chuckle, at first, but it rolled and rumbled helplessly into a belly laugh. I doubled over, leaning on my thighs for support.

It's really not that funny, is it?

- oh, I laughed, struggling to regain control. It's not ... that. It's just ... shit. If you remember how many times I worried about bringing my really fucked up life to her, I wasn't telling myself I had no right to love her because I was on the run. You gotta admit, it's pretty funny.

She stared at me, rolling slightly as she hugged her knees. She wasn't laughing.

@, ay, I exhaled, pulling myself together. @, ay. Go on.

Here was this guy, she continued, in a tone that made it clear how serious she considered the subject. *e was the father of one of the kids she used to baby-sit for, when she was a kid herself.

She told me about it.

She did @, ay, then you know.)nd nobody did anything about it.)nd it messed her up pretty bad.)nd then, one day, she got herself a gun, and she went to his house when he was alone, and she shot him. Six times. Two in the chest, she said, and four in

the rot h.5

5Did they , no! it ! as herE5

5She's not sure. She , no! s she didn't leave any #rints there, at the house.)nd nobody sa! her leave. She got rid of the gun.)nd she s rammed out of there, right out of the ountry, real fast.

She's never 8HH

been ba , , so she doesn't , no! if there's a sheet on her or not.5

I sat ba , in the hair and let out a long, slo! breath. ; isa ! at hed me losely, her blue eyes narro! ing slightly and reminding me of the ! ay she'd loo, ed at me on that night, years before, in <arla's a#artment.

5Is there any moreE5

5- o,5 she ans! ered, sha, ing her head slo! ly, but holding my eyes in the stare. 52hat's it.5

5@, ay,5 I sighed, running a hand over my fa e, and standing to leave. I ! ent to her, and , nelt on the bed beside her, ! ith my fa e lose to hers. 5I'm glad you told me, ; isa. It ma, es a lot of things ... learer ... I guess. Out it doesn't hange anything in ho! I feel. I'd li, e to hel# her, if I ould, but I an't forget ... ! hat ha##ened ... and I an't forgive it, either. I ! ish I ould. It'd ma, e things a lot easier. It's bad, loving someone you an't forgive.5

5It's not as bad as loving someone you an't have,5 she ountered, and I , issed her.

I rode the elevator do! n to the foyer alone ! ith the ro! d of my mirror selves: beside and behind me, still and silent, not one of them ! as able to meet my eye. @n e through the glass doors, I ! al, ed do! n the marble ste#s and a ross the ! ide fore out of the

Gate! ay 4onument to the sea. Oeneath the ar hed shado! I leaned on the sea ! all and loo, ed out at the boats arrying tourists ba , to the marina. *o! many of those lives, I ! ondered, ! at hing the travellers #ose for one another"s ameras, are ha##y and arefree and ... sim#ly freeE *o! many of them are sorro! ingE *o! many are ...

)nd then the full dar, ness of that long(resisted grieving losed around me. I realised that for some time I"d been gritting my teeth and that my +a! ! as ram#ed and stiff, but I ouldn"t unlo , the mus les. I turned my head to see one of the street boys, someone I , ne! ! ell, doing business ! ith a young tourist. 2he boy, 4u, ul, sent his eyes left and right, li1ard =ui , , and #assed a small, ! hite #a , et to the tourist. 2he man ! as about t! enty years old: tall and fit and handsome. I guessed him to be a German student, and I had a good eye. *e hadn"t been in the ity long. I , ne! the signs. *e ! as ne! blood, ! ith money to burn and the ! hole ! orld of e' #erien e o#en to him.)nd there ! as a s#ring in his ste# as he ! al, ed a! ay to +oin his friends. Out there ! as #oison in the #a , et in his hand. If it didn"t , ill him outright, in a hotel room some! here, it ! ould 8H? dee#en in his life, maybe, as it did on e in mine, until it #oisoned every breathing se ond.

I didn"t are((not about him or me or anyone. I ! anted it. I

! anted the drug, +ust then, more than anything in the ! orld. 4y s, in remembered the satin(flush of e stasy and the li hen(sti##led ree# of fever and fear. 2he smell(taste ! as so strong that I felt myself ret hing it. 2he hunger for oblivion, #ainless, guiltless, and unsorro! ing, s! irdled in me, shivering from my s#ine to the thi , , healthy veins in my arms.)nd I ! anted it: the golden minute in heroin"s long leaden night.

4u, ul aught my eye and smiled from habit, but the smile t! it hed and rumbled into un ertainty.)nd then he , ne! . *e had a good eye, too. *e lived on the street, and he , ne! the loo, . So the

smile returned, but it ! as different. 2here ! as sedu tion in it((
It's right here ... I've got it right here ... It's good stuff
... 8ome and get it((and the dealer's tiny, vi ious, little sneer
of trium#h. Dou're no better than me ... Dou're not mu h at all
...)nd sooner or later, you'll beg me for it ...

2he day ! as dying. /a h +e! elled shimmer, da11ling from the ! aves
in the bay, turned from glittering ! hite to #in, , and ! ea, , blood
red. S! eat ran into my eyes as I stared ba , at 4u, ul. 4y +a! s
a hed, and my li#s =uivered ! ith the strain of it: the strain of
not res#onding, not s#ea, ing, not nodding my head. I heard a
voi e or remembered it: __)ll you have to do is nod your head,
that's all you have to do, and it'll all be _over ...)nd
grieving tears boiled u# in me, relentless as the gathering tide
that sla##ed against the sea ! all. Out I ouldn't ry them, those
tears, and I felt that I ! as dro! ning in a sorro! that ! as bigger
than the heart that tried to hold it. I #ressed my hands do! n on
the little mountain range of the fa eted bluestones on the to# of
the sea ! all, as if I ould drive my fingers into the ity and
save myself by linging to her.

Out 4u, ul ... 4u, ul smiled, #romising #ea e.)nd I , ne! there
! ere so many ! ays to find that #ea e((I ould smo, e it in a
igarette, or hase it on a #ie e of foil, or snort it, or #uff
it in a hillum, or s#i, e it into my vein, or +ust eat it, +ust
s! allo! it and ! ait for the ree#ing numbness to smother every
#ain on the #lanet.)nd 4u, ul, reading the s! eating agony li, e a
dirty #age in a dirty boo, , in hed his ! ay loser to me, sliding
along the ! et stone ! all.)nd he , ne! it. *e , ne! everything.

) hand tou hed my shoulder. 4u, ul flin hed as if he"d been
, i , ed, and ba , ed a! ay from me, his dead eyes d! indling to
nothing in the 8HC
burning s#lendour of the setting sun.)nd I turned my head to
stare into the fa e of a ghost. It ! as)bdullah, my)bdullah, my
dead friend, , illed in a #oli e ambush too many suffering months
before. *is long hair ! as ut short and thi , li, e a movie
star"s. *is bla , lothes ! ere gone. *e ! ore a ! hite shirt and

grey trousers ! ith a fashionable ut.)nd they seemed strange,
those different lothes((almost as strange as seeing him standing
there. Out it ! as)bdullah 2aheri, his ghost, as handsome as @mar
Sharif on his thirtieth birthday, as lethal as a big at
#ro! ling, a bla , #anther, and ! ith those eyes the colour of sand

in the #alm of your hand a half(hour before sunset.)bdullah.

5It is so good to see you, ;in brother. Shall ! e go inside and
drin, some haiE5

2hat ! as it. \$ust that.

57ell, I ... I an't do that.5

57hy notE5 the ghost as, ed, fro! ning.

57ell, for starters,5 I mumbled, shielding my eyes from the late(
afternoon sun ! ith my hand as I stared u# at him, 5be ause you're
dead.5

5I am not dead, ;in brother.5

5Des ...5

5- o. Did you s#ea, to SalmanE5

5SalmanE5

5Des. *e arranged it, for me to meet ! ith you, in the restaurant.
It ! as a sur#rise.5

5Salman ... told me ... there ! as a sur#rise.5

5)nd I am the sur#rise, ;in brother,5 the ghost smiled. 5Dou ! ere
oming to meet me. *e ! as su##osed to be ma, ing it a sur#rise for
you. Out you left the restaurant.)nd the others, they have been

! aiting for you. Out you didn't ome ba , , so I ! ent to find you.
-o! the sur#rise is really a sho , s.5

5Don't say thatB5 I sna##ed, remembering something >raba, er had
on e said to me, and still reeling, still onfused.

57hy notE5

5It doesn't matterB 9u , ,)bdullah ... this is ... this is a
fu , in" ! eird dream, man.5

5I am ba , ,5 he said almy, a little fro! n of ! orry reasing his
bro! . 5I am here, again. I ! as shot. 2he #oli e. Dou , no! about
it.5

2he tone of the onversation ! as matter(of(fa t. 2he fading s, y
8H7

behind his head, and the #assers(by on the street, ! ere
unremar, able. -othing mat hed the blur and strea, of a dream. Det
it had to be a dream. 2hen the ghost lifted his ! hite shirt to
reveal his many ! ounds, healed and healing into dar, (s, inned
rings, ! hirls, and thumb(thi , gashes.

5;oo, , ; in brother,5 the dead man said. 5I ! as shot, yes, many
times, but I did live. 2hey too, my body from the 8ra! ford 4ar, et
#oli e station. 2hey too, me to 2hana for the first t! o months.
2hen they too, me to Delhi. I ! as in hos#ital for one year. It
! as a #rivate hos#ital, not far from Delhi. It ! as a year of many
o#erations. -ot a good year, ; in brother. 2hen it ! as almost
another year to be ome ! ell, -ush, ur"allah.5

5)bdullah,5 I said, rea hing out to hug him. 2he body ! as strong.
7arm.)live. I held him tightly, lam#ing my hand to my ! rist
behind his ba , . I felt the #ress of his ear against my fa e, and
smelt the soa# on his s, in. I heard his voi e #assing from his
hest to mine li, e o ean sonan ies, sounding and resounding, ! ave

on ! ave through shores of tight(! et sand at night. /yes losed,
and linging to him, I floated on the dar, ! ater of the sorro! ing
I'd done for him, for both of us. *eart(ri##led ! ith fear that I
! as mad, that it really ! as a dream, a nightmare, I held him
until I felt the strong hands #ush me gently to the length of his
e' tended arms.

5It is o, ay, ; in,5 he smiled. 2he smile ! as om#le' , shifting
from affe tion to sola e, and a little sho , ed, #erha#s, at the
emotion in my eyes. 5It is o, ay.5

5It's not o, ayB5 I gro! led, brea, ing a! ay from him. 57hat the
fu , ha##enedE 7here the fu , have you beenE)nd ! hy the fu ,
didn't you _tell meE5

5- o. I ould not tell you.5

5OullshitB @f ource you ouldB Don't be so stu#idB5

5- o,5 he insisted, running a hand through his hair and s=uinting
his eyes to fi' me ! ith a determined stare. 5Do you remember, one
time, ! e ! ere riding the motor y les, and ! e sa! some menE 2hey
! ere from Iran. I told you to ! ait at the motor y les, but you
did not. Dou follo! ed me, and ! e fought those men together. Do
you rememberE5

5Des.5

52hey ! ere enemies of mine.)nd they ! ere <hader <han"s enemies,
also. 2hey had a onne t to the Iran se ret #oli e, the ne!
Sava, .5

58an ! e(! ait a minute,5 I interru#ted, rea hing ba , ! ards to 8H8
su##ort myself against the sea ! all. 5I need a igarette.5

I fli##ed o#en the bo' to offer him one.

5Did you forgetE5 he as, ed, grinning ha##ily. 5I do not smo, e the

cigarettes.)nd you should not also, ; in brother. I only smo, e
the hashish. I have some, if you ! ould li, eE5

59u , that,5 I laughed, lighting u#. 5I'm not getting stoned ! ith
a ghost.5

52hose men((the men ! e fought((they did some business here.
4ostly drugs business, but sometimes guns business and sometimes
#ass#orts.)nd they ! ere s#ies against us, re#orting about any of
us from Iran ! ho ran a! ay from the Ira= ! ar. I ! as one man ! ho
ran a! ay from the Ira= ! ar. 4any thousands ran a! ay to here,
India, and many thousands ! ho hate)yatollah <homeini. 2he s#ies
from Iran, they made re#orts about us to the ne! Sava, in Iran.
)nd they hate <hader be ause he ! ant to hel# the mu+aheddin in
)fghanistan and be ause he did hel# so many of us from Iran. Dou
understand this business, ; in brotherE5

I understood it. 2he Iranian e' #atriate ommunity in Oombay ! as
huge, and I had many friends ! ho"d lost their homeland and their
families, and ! ere struggling to survive. Some of them ! or, ed in
e' isting mafia gangs li, e <hader"s oun il. @thers had formed
their o! n gangs, hiring themselves out to do the ! et ! or, , in a
business that got a little bloodier every ! or, ing day. I , ne!
that the Iranian se ret #oli e had s#ies ir ulating among the
e' iles, re#orting on them and sometimes getting their o! n hands a
little dam#.

5Go on,5 I said, ta, ing a gul# of smo, y air from my igarette.

57hen those men, those s#ies, made their re#orts, our families in
Iran had very bad suffering. Some mothers, brothers, fathers,
they #ut them into the se ret #oli e #rison. 2hey torture #eo#le
in that #la e. Some of the #eo#le, they died. 4y o! n sister((they
torture and ra#e her be ause of the re#orts about me. 4y o! n
un le, he is , illed ! hen my family annot #ay to the se ret
#oli e =ui , enough. 7hen I find out about that, I told to)bde!

<hader <han that I ! ant to leave him, so I an fight them, those men ! ho are s#ies from Iran. *e told me not to leave. *e said to me that ! e ! ill fight them together. *e told me that ! e ! ill find them, one by one, and he #romise me that he ! ill hel# me to , ill them all.5

5<haderbhai ...5 I said, breathing smo, e.

5)nd ! e found them, some of them, 9arid and me, ! ith <hader"s hel#. 2here ! as nine men, at the start. 7e found si' men. 2hose men, ! e 8H9

finished. 2he other three of them did live. 2hree men.)nd they , ne! something about us((they , ne! that there is a s#y in the oun il, very lose to <hader <han.5

5)bdul Ghani.5

5Des,5 he said, turning his head to s#it at the mention of the traitor"s name. 5Ghani, he ame from >a, istan. *e had many friends in the >a, istan se ret #oli e. 2he ISI. 2hey ! or, in se ret ! ith the Iran se ret #oli e, the ne! Sava, , and ! ith 8I),

and ! ith 4ossad.5

I nodded, listening to him, and thin, ing about something)bdul Ghani had said to me on e:)ll the se ret #oli e of the ! orld ! or, together, ;in, and that is their biggest se ret.

5So, the >a, istan ISI told the Iranian se ret #oli e about their onta t on the <hader oun il.5

5)bdul Ghani. Des,5 he re#lied. 5In Iran they ! ere very ! orried. Si' good traitors gone. -obody ever an find the bodies of those traitors. @nly three ! ere left. 2he three men from Iran, so then they ! or, ! ith)bdul Ghani. *e told them ho! to ma, e a tra# for me.)t that time, do you remember, ! e did not , no! it, that Sa#na, he ! as ! or, ing for Ghani and #lanning to move against us.

<hader did not , no! . I did not , no! . If I , ne! that, I ! ould #ut the #ie es of those Sa#na men into *assaan @bi, ! a"s hole in the ground myself. Out I did not , no! . 7hen I ame into the tra#, near to 8ra! ford 4ar, et, the men from Iran fire the first time from a #la e near me. 2he #oli e, they thin, that I am firing my gun. 2hey fire at me. I am dying, I , no! , so I ta, e my guns and I shoot at the #oli e. 2he rest, you , no! .5

5- ot all of it,5 I grunted. 5- ot enough. I ! as there that night, the night you got shot. I ! as in the ro! d at 8ra! ford 4ar, et #oli e station. It ! as ! ild. /everyone said you ! ere shot so many times that your fa e ! as unre ognisable.5

52here ! as so mu h blood. Out <hader"s men, they did , no! me. 2hey ma, e a riot and then they fight ste# and ste# into the #oli e station, and they ta, e my body out of there and a! ay to the hos#ital. <hader had a tru , near there, and he had a do tor ((you , no! him, Do tor *amid, do you remember himE((and they saved me.5

5<haled ! as there that night. 7as he the one ! ho res ued youE5

5- o. <haled ! as one of the men ! ho ma, e the riot. It ! as 9arid ! ho too, my body.5 8?%

59arid the 9i' er got you out of thereE5 I gas#ed, stunned that he"d said nothing about it in all the lose months ! e"d ! or, ed together. 5)nd he"s , no! n about it all this timeE5

5Des. If you have a se ret, ; in, #ut it in the heart of 9arid. *e is the best of them, my brother, no! that)bdel <hader is gone.)fter -a1eer, 9arid is the best of them. -ever forget that.5

57hat about the three guysE 2he three Iranian guysE 7hat ha##ened to them after you got shotE Did <hader get themE5

5- o. 7hen)bdel <hader , illed Sa#na and his men, they ran a! ay to Delhi.5

"One of the Sanna guys got away. Doubt that."

"Des, he went to Delhi also. When I was strong again (not completely fit yet, but strong enough to fight) just a few months ago, I went to look for the four men and their friends. I found one of them. One from Iran. I finished him. - oh there are only three left from that time (two from Iran, and one Sanna killer from Ghani."

"Do you doubt that here they are?"

"Where. In the city."

"You're sure?"

"I am sure. That is why I have come back to Bombay. Out of my brother, I must return to the hotel. Salman and the others, they are waiting for us, upstairs. They want to make a party. They will be happy I can find you (they did see you leaving, hours before, with a beautiful girl, and they told me I will not find you."

"It was, as I said, glancing unconsciously over my shoulder at the bedroom window on the first floor of the tower. "Do you want to see her?"

"- oh," he smiled. "I did meet someone (Parid's cousin,) Meena. She has been looking after me for more than a year. She is a good girl. We want to be married."

"Get the fuck outta here!" I muttered, more shocked by his intention to marry than I was by his survival of the killing fusillade.

"Des," he grinned, reaching out to give me an impulsive hug. "Out

come on, the others are waiting. 8hallo.5

5Dou go ahead,5 I answered him, smiling to match his happy grin.
5I'll be with you soon.5

5- o, come, ; in,5 he urged. 58ome no! .5

5I need a minute,5 I insisted. 5I'll be there ... in a minute.5
8?1

*e hesitated a moment more but then smiled, nodded his head, and
!al, ed ba , through the domed arch toward the 2a+ *otel.

/vening dimmed the afternoon's bright halo.) half of dusty smoke
and vapor misted the horizon, sizzling soundlessly, as if the
s, y at the distant ! all of the ! world ! as dissolving into the
!aters of the bay. 4ost of the boats and ferries ! ere safely tied
to their mooring posts at the dock, beneath me. @thers rose and
fell and rose again, s!aying on the secure tethers of their sea

an hors. *igh tide #ushed the swollen !aves against the long
stone ! all ! here I stood. *ere and there along the boulevard,
frothy #umes, like gas#s of effort, slammed u#, over, and onto
the !hite foot#aths. Strollers !al, ed around the intermittent
fountains, or ran laughing through the sudden boom and s#ray. In
the little seas of my eyes, those tiny blue(grey oceans, !aves of
tears #ushed hard against the ! all of my !ill.

Did you send him? I ! his#ered to the dead <han, my father.
)ssassin grief had #ushed me to that ! all ! here the street boys
sold heroin.)nd then, !hen it !as almost too late,)bdullah had
a##eared. Did you send him to save me?

2he setting sun, that funeral fire in the s, y, seared my eyes,
and I loo, ed away to follow the last flares of orange and magenta
streaming out and fading in the ocean(mirrored sa##hire of the
evening.)nd staring out across the rille and ruffle of the bay, I

tried to fit my feelings ! ithin a frame of thought and fa t.
Strangely, ! eirdly, I"d re(found)bdullah and re(lost <haderbhai
on the same day, in the same hour.)nd the e' #erien e of it, the
fa t of it, the ines a#ably fated im#erative of it, hel#ed me to
understand. 2he sorro! ing I"d shunned had ta, en so long to find
me be ause I ouldn't let him go. In my heart, I still held him
as tightly as I"d hugged)bdullah only minutes before. In my
heart, I ! as still there on the mountain, , neeling in the sno!
and radling the handsome head in my arms.

)s the stars slo! ly rea##eared in the silent endlessness of s, y,
I ut the last mooring ro#e of grief, and surrendered to the all(
sustaining tide of destiny. I let him go. I said the ! ords, the
sa red ! ords: I forgive you ...

)nd it ! as good.)nd it ! as right. I let the tears fall. I let my
heart brea, on my father"s love, li, e the tall ! aves beside me
that hurled their hests against the ! all, and bled onto the
! ide, ! hite #ath.

(((((((((((
8?F

CHAPTER FORTY

The word mafia comes from the Sicilian word for bragging. And if you ask any serious man who commits serious crimes for a living, he'll tell you it's just that (the boasting, the pride (that gets most of us in the end. Out there we never learn. Maybe it's not possible to breathe life without boasting about it to someone. Maybe it's not possible to be an outlaw without being proud in some way. Certainly, in those last months of the old mafia, the brotherhood that Chaderbhai had designed, steered, and ruled, there was plenty of boasting and no less pride. Out it was the last time that any of us in that corner of Bombay's underworld of crime would've said, with complete honesty, that we were proud to be gangsters.

Chader Khan had been dead for almost two years, but his reputation and principles still dominated the day-to-day operations of the mafia since he'd founded it. Chader had hated heroin, and he'd refused to deal in the drug or permit anyone else but desperately addicted street punks to trade in it within the areas he'd controlled. Prostitution had also afflicted him. He'd seen it as a business that injured women, degraded men, and blighted the community where it occurred. The hemisphere of his influence had extended to all the streets, markets, and buildings across several squares, kilometers. Within that little kingdom, any man or woman who hadn't let their involvement with prostitution and pornography to very low, very discreet levels of activity had risked his own dishonour. And that situation prevailed under the new council headed by Salman Ahsan.

Abd Sobhan Ahmad, still the nominal head of the council, was gravely ill. In the years since Chader died, he'd suffered two strokes that had left his speech and much of his movement severely impaired. The council moved him into Chader's beach house in Versova (the same 876 house where I'd gone through a bad time with a girl. They ensured that the aged don had access to the best medical

treatments, and arranged for his family and his servants to attend him.

- a1eer slo! ly groomed <hader"s ne#he! , young 2ari=, for ! hat most on the oun il assumed ! ould be a leading role. Des#ite the boy"s #edegree, his maturity, and his unusually solemn demeanour((there ! as no(one, man or boy, ! hose dour, fervent intensity reminded me so mu h of <haled((2ari= ! as deemed to be too young to laim a oun il #osition or even to attend the oun il meetings. Instead, -a1eer gave him duties and res#onsibilities that more gradually a =uainted him ! ith the ! orld he might one day ommand. In all #ra ti al senses, Salman 4ustaan ! as the don, the ne! <han, the leader of the oun il and the ruler of <haderbhai"s mafia.)nd Salman, as everyone ! ho , ne! him testified, ! as <haderbhai"s man, body and soul. *e governed the a tions of the lan as if the grey(haired lord ! as still there, still alive, advising and autioning him in #rivate sessions every night.

4ost of the men su##orted Salman un=uestioningly. 2hey understood the #rin i#les involved, and agreed that they ! ere ! orth u#holding. In our area of the ity, the ! ords goonda and gangster ! aren"t an insult. ;o al #eo#le , ne! that our bran h of the mafia did a better +ob than the #oli e at , ee#ing heroin and sala ious rimes from their streets. 2he #oli e, after all, ! ere sus e#tible to bribes. Indeed, Salman"s mafia lan found itself in the uni=ue #osition of bribing the #oli e((the same o#s ! ho"d +ust been #aid off by #im#s and #ushers((to loo, a! ay ! henever they had to run a re al itrant heroin dealer into a bri , ! all, or ta, e a mash hammer to a #ornogra#her"s hands.

@ld men in the distri t nodded to one another, and om#ared the relative alm on their streets ! ith the haos that tumbled and

tra! led through the streets of other distri ts. 8hildren loo, ed u# to the young gangsters, sometimes ado#ting one as a lo al hero. Restaurants, bars, and other businesses ! el omed Salman"s men as #reservers of #ea e and om#aratively high moral

standards.)nd the informing rate in the areas of his control, the amount of unsolicited information supplied to the police (a sure indicator of publicity or displeasure) as lower than in any other area across the whole seething sprawl of Bombay. They had pride, and they had resilience, and they were almost the men of honour that they believed themselves to be. 8?H

Still, there were a few grumbles of complaint within the clan, and some council meetings hosted fierce, unresolved arguments about the future of the group. The heroin trade was making other mafia council members rich. Wealthy, millionaires flaunted their imported cars, designer clothes, and state-of-the-art electronic gadgets at the most exclusive and expensive venues in the city. More significantly, they used their inexhaustible, opiate-based income streams to hire new men: mercenaries who were paid well to fight dirty and to fight hard. ; little by little, those gangs expanded their territories in turf wars that left a few of the toughest men dead, many more wounded, and dozens all over the city lighting inense streets to give thanks for their luck.

With similarly high profits derived from the new and insatiable market for imported, hardcore pornographic videos, some of the rival council members had accumulated enough money to acquire that ultimate status symbol for any criminal gang: a hoard of guns. /nvious of the wealth amassed by such gangs, infuriated by their territorial gains, and wary of their growing power, some of Salman AUSTAN's men urged him to change his policy. First among those critical voices was that of Sanjay, Salman's oldest and closest friend.

5Dou should meet with 8huha,5 Sanjay said earnestly as he, 9arid, Salman, and I drank chai at a little shop on 4aulana Road near the brilliant, green mirages of the 4ahala' mi Ra course. *e was talking about)sho, 8handrashekar, an influential strongarm man in the 7alidlalla gang. *e'd used)sho, "s name, 8huha, meaning the Rat.

5I've met with the father, yaar,5 Salman sighed. 5I meet him all

the time. /very time one of his guys tries to s=uee1e out a corner of our territory, I meet ! ith 8huha to set it straight. /very time our guys get in a fight ! ith his guys, and give them a solid #asting, I meet ! ith 8huha. /very time he ma, es an offer to join our oun il to his, I meet ! ith him. I , no! the fu , er too ! ell. 2hat"s the #roblem.5

2he 7alidlalla oun il held a ontiguous border ! ith our o! n. Relations bet! een the gangs ! ere generally res#e tful but not ordial. 7alid, the leader of the rival oun il, had been a lose friend of <haderbhai and, ! ith him, ! as one of the original founders of the oun il system.)lthough 7alid had led his

oun il into the heroin and #ornogra#hy trade that he, li, e <haderbhai, had on e des#ised, he"d also insisted that no onfli t ! ith Salman"s oun il should o ur. 8huha, his 8?? se ond in ommand, had ambitions that strained at the leash of 7alid"s ontrol. 2hose ambitions led to dis#utes and even battles bet! een the gangs, and all too often for ed Salman to meet ! ith the Rat at stiffly formal dinners held on neutral ground in a suite at a five(star hotel.

5-o, but you haven"t really tal, ed to him, one on one li, e, about the money ! e an ma, e. If you did, Salman brother, I , no! you"d find out he tal, s a lot of sense. *e"s ma, ing rores out of the fu , in" garad, man. 2he +un, ies an"t get enough of the shit. *e has to bring it in by fu , in" train.)nd the blue movies thing, man((it"s going ra1y. I s! earß It"s a fu , in" deadly business, yaar. *e"s ma, ing five hundred o#ies of every movie, and selling them for five hundred ea h. 2hat"s t! o(and(a(half la, hs, Salman, for every fu , in" blue movieß If you ould ma, e money li, e that by , illing #eo#le, India"s #o#ulation #roblem ! ould be solved in a monthß Dou should +ust tal, to him, Salman brother.5

5I don"t li, e him,5 Salman de lared. 5)nd I don"t trust him, either. @ne of these days, I thin, I"ll have to finish the mada hudh on e and for all. 2hat"s not a very #romising ! ay to

start up a business, nah

If it comes to that, I'll sell the gandhu for you, brother, and it'll be my pleasure. Out to then, li, e, before I actually have to sell him, I can still make a lot of money with him.

I don't think so.

Salman looked around the table for support, and finally appealed to me.

Some on, in. What do you think?

It's our business, Salman, I replied, smiling at his earnestness. It's got nothing to do with me.

Out that's why I'm asking you, inbaba. You can give us an independent point of view, li, e. You, no! Shuha. And you, no! How much money there is in the heroin. *e's got some good money ideas, don't you think, so?

Erry, don't ask him. I don't unless you want the truth.

Go on, Salman persisted, the gleam in his eyes brightening. *e lied to me, and he knew that I lied to him. Tell me the truth. What do you think of him?

I glanced around at Salman and he nodded, just as I might've done.

I think Shuha's the kind of guy who gives violent crime a bad name, I said. Right?

Salman and Irid sipped their tea, laughing, and then motioned at themselves with their hands, er hiefs.

5@, ay,5 San+ay fro! ned, his eyes still gleaming. 5So, ! hat ...
e' a tly ... don't you li, e about himE5

I glan ed again at Salman. *e grinned ba , at me, raising his
eyebro! s and the #alms of his hands in a Don't loo, at me
gesture.

58huha"s a stand(over man,5 I re#lied. 5)nd I don't li, e stand(
over men.5

5*e"s a ! hatE5

5) stand(over man, San+ay. *e beats u# on men he , no! s an't
fight ba , , and ta, es ! hatever he ! ants from them. In my ountry,
! e all those guys stand(over men be ause they really do stand
over little guys and steal from them.5

San+ay loo, ed at 9arid and Salman ! ith a blan, e' #ression of
onfused inno en e.

5I don't see the #roblem,5 he said.

5-o, I , no! you don't have a #roblem ! ith it.)nd that"s o, ay. I
don't e' #e t everyone to thin, li, e me. 9a t is, most #eo#le
don't.)nd I understand that. I get it. I , no! that"s ho! a lot
of guys ma, e their ! ay. Out +ust be ause I understand it, that
doesn't mean I li, e it. I met some of them in +ail.) ou#le of
them tried to stand over me. I stabbed them. - one of the others
ever tried it again. 2he ! ord got around. 2ry to stand over this
guy, and he"ll #ut a hole in you. So they left me alone.)nd
that"s +ust the thing. I ! ould"ve had more res#e t for them if
they"d , e#t on trying to stand over me. I ! ouldn't have sto##ed
fighting them((I still ! ould"ve ut them u#, you , no! , but I
! ould"ve res#e ted them more ! hile I did it.)s, the ! aiter here,
Santosh, ! hat he thin, s of 8huha. 2hey ame in here last ! ee, ,
8huha and his guys, and sla##ed him around for fifty bu , s.5

2he ! ord bu , s ! as 0ombay slang for ru#ees. 9ifty ru#ees ! as the

same amount, I, ne!, that San+ay ustomarily ti##ed ! aitters and better(than(average ab drivers.

52he guy"s a fu , in" millionaire, if you believe his bullshit,5 I said, 5and he stands over a de ent ! or, ing guy li, e Santosh for fifty bu , s. I don"t res#e t that.)nd in your heart of hearts, San+ay, I don"t thin, you do, either. I"m not going to do anything about it. 2hat"s not my +ob. 8huha ma, es his graft by sla##ing #eo#le. I understand that. Out if he ever tries to stand over me, I"ll ut him.)nd I tell you, man, I"ll en+oy doing it.5

8?7

2here ! as a little silen e ! hile San+ay #ursed his li#s, t! irtled his hand #alm u#! ard, and loo, ed from Salman to 9arid. 2hen all three of them burst out laughing.

5Dou as, ed himB5 9arid giggled.

5@, ay, o, ay,5 San+ay on eded. 5I as, ed the ! rong guy. ;in is a ! ild guy, yaar. *e gets ! ild notions. *e ! ent to)fghanistan ! ith <hader, manB 7hy did I as, a guy ! ho"s ra1y enough to do thatE Dou ran that lini in the 1ho#ad#atti, and you never made a fu , in" #aise out of it. Remind me of that, ;in brother, if I ever as, you for your business o#inion again, naE5

5)nd another thing,5 I added, , ee#ing a straight fa e.

5/h, Oagh! anB5 San+ay ried. 5*e"s got another thing, yetB5

5If you thin, about the slogans, you"ll understand ! here I"m oming from on this.5

52he slogansE5 San+ay #rotested, #rovo, ing his friends to bigger laughter. 57hat fu , in" slogans, yaarE5

5Dou , no! ! hat I mean. 2he slogan, or the motto, of the

7alidlalla gang is >ahiley Shahad, 2ab +ulm. I thin, I"m right in translating it as 9irst *oney, 2hen @utrage, or even)tro ity. Isn"t that rightE)nd isn"t that ! hat they say to ea h other as their sloganE5

5Deah, yeah, that"s their thing, man.5

5)nd ! hat"s our sloganE <hader"s sloganE5

2hey loo, ed at one another, and smiled.

5Saat h aur *immat.5 I s#o, e it aloud for them. 52ruth and 8ourage. I , no! a lot of guys ! ho"d li, e 8huha"s slogan. 2hey"d thin, it ! as lever and funny.)nd it sounds ruthless, so they"d thin, it ! as tough. Out I don"t li, e it. I li, e <hader"s.5

)t the sound of an /nfield engine, I loo, ed u# to see)bdullah #ar, his bi, e outside the hai sho# and ! ave to me. It ! as time for me to go.

I"d s#o, en the truth, as I sa! it, and I meant every ! ord, but in my o! n heart of hearts I , ne! that San+ay"s argument, although not better, ! ould turn out to be stronger than mine. 2he 7alidlalla gang under 8huha ! as the future of all the mafia oun ils, in a sense, and ! e all , ne! it. 7alid ! as still the head of the oun il that bore his name, but he ! as old and he ! as ill. *e"d eded so mu h #o! er to 8huha that it ! as the younger don ! ho ruled. 8huha ! as aggressive and su essional, and he gained

ne! ground by on=uest or oer ion every fe! months. Sooner or later, if Salman didn"t agree to merge ! ith 8huha, that e' #ansion ! ould ome to 8?8

o#en onfli t, and there ! ould be a ! ar.

I ho#ed, of ourse, that <hader"s oun il, under Salman, ! ould ! in. Out I , ne! that, if ! e did ! in, it ! ould be im#ossible to laim 8huha"s territory ! ithout also absorbing his trade in

heroin, ! omen, and #orn. It ! as the future, and it ! as inevitable. 2here ! as sim#ly too mu h money in it.)nd money, if the #ile gets high enough, is something li, e a big #oliti al #arty: it does as mu h harm as it does good, it #uts too mu h #o! er in too fe! hands, and the loser you come to it the dirtier you get. In the long run, Salman ould ! al, a! ay from the fight ! ith 8huha, or he ould defeat him and be come him. 9ate all! ays gives you t! o hoi es, S or#io George on e said: the one you should ta, e, and the one you do.

5Out hey,5 I said, standing to leave, 5it"s got nothing to do ! ith me.)nd fran, ly, I don"t really give a damn one ! ay or the other. 4y ride is here. I"ll see you guys later.5

I ! al, ed out, ! ith San+ay"s #rotests and his friends" laughter rattling above the latter of u#s and glasses.

5Oahin hudhB GanduB5 San+ay shouted. 5Dou an"t fu , u# my rave li, e that and then ! al, out, yaarB 8ome ba , hereB5

)s I a##roa hed him,)bdullah , i , (started the bi, e and straightened it from the side stand, ready to ride.

5Dou're in a hurry for your ! or, out,5 I said, settling myself onto the saddle of the bi, e behind him. 5Rela' . -o matter ho! fast ! e get there, I"m still going to beat you, brother.5

9or nine months, ! e"d trained together at a small, dar, , s! eaty, and very serious gym near the /le#hant Gate se tion of Oallard >ier. It ! as a goonda"s gym set u# by *ussein, the one(armed survivor of <hader"s battle ! ith the Sa#na assassins. 2here ! ere ! eights and benches, a +udo mat, and a bo'ing ring. 2he smell of man(s! eat, both fresh and fouled into the stit hing of leather gloves and belts and turnbu , les, ! as so eye(! ateringly ran id that the gym ! as the only building in the ity blo , that rats and o , roa hes s#urned. 2here ! ere bloodstains on the ! alls and the ! ooden floor, and the young gangsters ! ho trained there a umulated more ! ounds and in+uries in a ! or, out ! ee, than the

emergency! and of a city hospital on a hot Saturday night.

5-ot today,5)bdullah laughed over his shoulder, #ulling the bi, e
into a faster lane of traffi . 5-o fighting today, ;in. I am
ta, ing you for a sur#rise.) good sur#riseB5 8?9

5-o! I'm ! orried,5 I alled ba , . 57hat , ind of sur#riseE5

5Dou remember ! hen I too, you to see Do tor *amidE Dou remember
that sur#riseE5

5Deah, I remember.5

57ell, it is better than that. 4u h better.5

5A(huh. 7ell, I'm still not very rela' ed about it. Gimme another
hint.5

5Dou remember ! hen I sent you the bear, for huggingE5

5<ano, sure, I remember.5

57ell, it is mu h better than thatB5

5) do tor and a bear,5 I alled out above the gro! l of the
engine. 52here"s a lot of s#a e bet! een them, brother. @ne more
hint.5

5*aB5 he laughed, oming to a sto# at a set of traffi lights. 5I
! ill say to you this((the sur#rise is so good that you ! ill
forgive me for all that you suffered ! hen you thought I ! as
dead.5

5I do forgive you,)bdullah.5

5-o, ;in brother. I , no! you do not forgive me. I have too many

bruises, and I am too much sore from our bo'ing and ,arate.5

It !asn't true: I never hit him as hard as he hit me.)lthough he !as healing !ell, and he !as very fit, he"d never fully re overed the un anny strength and harismati vitality he"d ,no! n before the #oli e shooting.)nd !hen he removed his shirt to bo' !ith me, the sight of his s arred body((it !as as if he"d been savaged by the !a! s of !ild animals and burned !ith hot iron brands((all! ays made me #ull my #un hes. Still, I never admitted that to _him.

5@, ay,5 I laughed. 5If that"s the ! ay you"re gonna #lay it, I don"t forgive youB5

5Out !hen you see this sur#rise,5 he alled out, laughing !ith me, 5you !ill forgive me om#letely, !ith a full heart. -o! , ome onB Sto# as, ing me about it, and tell me, !hat did Salman say to San+ay about that #ig((that 8huhaE5

5*o! did you ,no! that"s !hat !e !ere tal,ing aboutE5

5I an see the loo, in Salman"s fa e,5 he shouted ba , . 5)nd San+ay, he told me, this morning, that he !ants to as, Salman((again((to ma, e business !ith 8huha. So, !hat did Salman sayE5

5Dou ,no! the ans! er to that one,5 I re#lied a little more

=uietly as !e sto##ed in traffi .

5GoodB -ush, ur")llah.5 2han, s be to God. 8C%

5Dou really hate 8huha, don"t youE5

5I don"t hate him,5 he larified, moving off !ith the flo! of ars. 5I +ust !ant to ,ill him.5

7e !ere silent for a !hile, breathing the !arm !ind and !at hing

the bla , business unfold on the streets ! e"d both roamed so often. 2here ! ere a hundred large and small s ams and deals going do! n around us every minute, and ! e , ne! them all.

7hen ! e found ourselves t! isted into a , not of traffi behind a stalled bus, I loo, ed along the foot#ath and noti ed 2a+ Ra+, a #i , #o , et ! ho usually ! or, ed the Gate! ay area near the 2a+ 4ahal *otel. *e"d survived a ma hete atta , years before that had all but severed his ne , . 2he ! ound aused him to s#ea, in a rattling ! his#er, and his head ! as set at su h an ill(balan ed angle that ! hen he ! agged it to agree ! ith someone he almost fell over. *e ! as ! or, ing the stumble(fall(#ilfer game ! ith his friend Indra serving as the stumbler. Indra, , no! n as the >oet, s#o, e almost all of his senten es in rhyming ou#lets. 2hey ! ere dee#ly moving in their beauty, for the first fe! stan1as, but al! ays found their ! ay into se' ual des ri#tions and allusions so #erverse and abhorrent that strong, ! i , ed men ! in ed to hear them. ; egend had it that Indra had on e re ited his #oetry through a mi ro#hone during a street festival, and had leared the entire 8olaba 4ar, et of sho##ers and traders ali, e. /ven the #oli e, it ! as said, had shrun, ba , in horror until e' haustion over ame the >oet, and then they"d rushed him as he #aused for breath. I , ne! both men, and li, ed them, though I never let them get loser than an arm"s stret h from my #o , ets.)nd sure enough, as the bus finally grumbled to life and the traffi began to ease for! ard, I ! at hed Indra #retending to be blind((not his best #erformance, but good enough((and stumbling into a foreigner.)nd 2a+ Ra+, the hel#ful #asser(by, assisted both of them to their feet, and relieved the foreigner of his burdensome ! allet.

57hyE5 I as, ed, ! hen ! e ! ere moving through free s#a e again.

57hy ! hatE5

57hy do you ! ant to , ill 8huhaE5

5l , no! he had a meeting ... ! ith the men from Iran,5)bdullah shouted over his shoulder. 5>eo#le say it ! as +ust business((

Sanjay, he says it as usual business. Out I thin, more than business. I thin, he or, with them, against <hader <han. >gainst us. For that reason, ; in.

Sanjay, I called back, pleased to have my opinion about
8huha 8C1

Unconfirmed, but worried for my child, Iranian friend. Out don't do anything without me, o, ay

He laughed, and turned his head to show me the white teeth of his smile.

I'm serious, Abdullah. Promise me

Hi, hain, ; in brother he shouted in reply. I'll kill all you, when the time is right

He roasted the bite to a stool and parked it outside the Strand Coffee House, one of my favourite breakfast dives, near the
8olaba 4ar, et.

What the hell's going on? I demanded as he alerted toward the
mar, et. Some surprise (I come here nearly every day.

I, no, he answered, grinning enigmatically. And I am not the only one who, no, is it.

What's that supposed to mean?

Don't you find out, ; in brother. Where are your friends?

We came upon Ram Patel and the .odia Georges, Sorio and Gemini, sitting comfortably on bulging sacks of lentils beside a
#ulses stall, and drinking chai from glasses.

Hey, man & Ram greeted me. >ull u# a sa, and make yourself

at home.⁵

Abdullah and I shook hands all round and, as I sat down on the roof of the car, Sorio George signalled a hai (runner to bring me more glasses. The assortment of, as often, seeing me busy at night because Krishna and Willu (both of them with young children in their growing families) had taken to staggering their shifts, giving themselves valuable hours at home during the day. That, of course, with the books, and other commitments to the Salman Foundation, prevented me from going to Sorio's as often as I once had. Whenever I could, I'd meet with him, Ram and the Georges near Ram's apartment on the edge of the Colaba Park. Ram, as there most days, after his lunch with Bettie. *e, I met me up to date with the news from Sorio's (Didier had fallen in love, again, and Ranjit, Carla's new boyfriend, was becoming popular) and the Georges filled me in on what was going down on the streets.

"We thought you weren't coming today, man," Ram said as the hai arrived.

Abdullah gave me a lift, I replied, frowning at my friend's mysterious smile, and I got stuck in traffic. It was worth it, though. I had a front row

seat for Ra+ and Indra doing their stumble routine on 4th Road. It was quite a show.

"*e's not what he used to be, our Ra+, Gemini commented, hurling South on at us in the vowels of the last words. Not as nimble, like. Since the accident, y', no, his timing's a bit off. I mean, it's only reasonable, innit? *is a hole bleeding head as damn near off, and all, so it's no wonder his timing's got a, in, in it.

At this point, Sorio George interrupted, lowering his head and assuming the solemn gravity we all fell and dreaded more,

5I thin, ! e should all bo! our heads in #rayer.5

7e glan ed at one another, our eyes ! idening ! ith alarm. 2here ! as no es a#e. 7e ! ere too omfortable to move, and S or#io , ne! it. 7e ! ere tra##ed.

5@h, ; ord,5 S or#io began.

5@h, Ga! d,5 Gemini grumbled.

5)nd ; ady,5 S or#io ontinued, 5infinite yin(yang s#irit in the s, y, ! e humbly as, you to hear the #rayers, today, of five souls that you #ut into the ! orld, and left in the tem#orary are of S or#io, Gemini,)bdullah, &i, ram, and ; in.5

57hat does he mean, tem#oraryE5 &i, ram ! his#ered to me, and I shrugged in re#ly.

5>lease hel# us, ; ord,5 S or#io intoned, his eyes shut and his fa e raised to heaven, ! hi h seemed, roughly, to be in the middle of the bal ony on the third floor of the &ee+ay >remnaath) ademy of *air 8olouring and /ar 0oring. 5>lease guide us to , no! ! hat"s right, and to do the right thing.)nd you an start, God, if you're of a mind, by hel#ing out ! ith the little business deal ! e're doing ! ith the Oelgian ou#le tonight. I don't have to tell you, ; ord and ; ady, ho! tri , y it is to su##ly ustomers ! ith good(=uality o aine in Oombay. Out, than, s to your #roviden e, ! e managed to find ten grams of)(grade sno! ((and, given the real bad drought on the streets, that ! as a mighty sli , #ie e of ! or, on your #art, God, if you'll a e#t my #rofessional admiration.)ny! ay, Gemini and me, ! e sure ould use the ommission on that deal, and it ! ould be , inda ni e not to get ri##ed off, or beaten u#, or maimed, or , illed((unless, of ourse, that"s in your #lan. So, #lease light the ! ay, and fill our hearts ! ith love. Signing off no! , but , ee#ing the line o#en, as al! ays, I'll say)men.5
8CG

5)menB5 Gemini res#onded, learly relieved that the #rayer ! as

far shorter than S or#io"s more usual efforts.

5)men,5 &i, ram sobbed, nudging a tear from his eye ! ith the
, nu , les of a balled fist.

5)stagfirullah,5)bdullah muttered. 9orgive me,)llah.

5So ho! about a bite to eat thenE5 Gemini suggested heerily.
52here"s nothing li, e a bit of religion to #ut you in the frame
of mind to ma, e a #ig of yourself, is thereE5

)t that moment)bdullah leaned for! ard to ! his#er into my left
ear.

5;oo, slo! ly((no, slo! lyß ;oo, over there, behind the #eanuts
sho#, near the orner. Do you see himE Dour sur#rise, brother
;in. Do you see himE5

)nd then, still smiling, my eyes ! ere dra! n to a stoo#ed figure
! at hing us from the shado! s beneath an a! ning.

5*e is here every day,5)bdullah ! his#ered. 5)nd not only here((
in some other #la es that you go, also. *e ! at hes you. *e ! aits,
and he ! at hes you.5

5&i, ramß5 I mumbled, ! anting some other testament to ! hat I ! as
seeing. 5;oo,ß 2here, on the ornerß5

5;oo, at ! hat, manE5

7ith my attention u#on him, the figure dre! ba , into the shado! s
and then turned and lo#ed a! ay, lim#ing, as if the ! hole left
side of his body ! as damaged.

5Didn"t you see himE5

5-o, man. See ! hoE5 &i, ram om#lained, standing ! ith me to s=uint

in the direction of my frantic stare.

"It's 4odena!" I shouted, running after the limping Saniard. I didn't look back, at & i, ram,)bdullah, and the .odia s. I didn't ans! er & i, ram"s all. I didn't thin, about ! hat I ! as doing or ! hy I ! as #ursuing him. 4y mind ! as only one thought, one image, and one ! ord. 4odena ...

*e ! as fast, and he , ne! the streets ! ell. It o urred to me, as he du ,ed into hidden door! ays and all but invisible ga#s bet! een buildings, that I ! as #robably the only foreigner in the ity ! ho , ne! those streets as ! ell as he did. 9or that matter, there ! ere fe! Indians((only touts and thieves and +un, ies((! ho ould"ve , e#t u# ! ith him. *e s rambled into a hole that someone had , no ,ed through a high stone ! all to reate an a essage hat h from one street to another. *e ste##ed 8CH around a #artition that seemed as solid as bri , , but ! as made from stret hed and #ainted anvas. *e too, short uts through im#rovised sho#s in sheltering ar h! ays, and ! eaved his ! ay along the labyrinth lines of ! ashed, brightly oloured saris hung out to dry.

)nd then he made a mista, e. *e ran into a narro! lane that had been ommandeered by homeless #avement d! ellers and e' tended families that ! ere ro! ded out of lo al a#artments. I , ne! it ! ell.)bout a hundred men, ! omen, and hildren ! ere living in the onverted lane. 2hey sle#t in shifts, in a loft s#a e they"d built above the obbled lane and bet! een the ! alls of ad+a ent buildings. 2hey did everything else in the long, dar, , narro! room that the lane had be ome. 4odena dodged bet! een the seated and standing grou#s6 bet! een oo, ing stoves and bathing stalls and a blan, et of ard #layers. 2hen, at the end of the lane(room, he turned left instead of right. It ! as a ul(de(sa surrounded by high sheer ! alls. It ! as om#letely dar, , and it ended in a little dogleg ! here the s#a e urved around the blind orner of another building. 7e"d used it, sometimes, to ma, e buys ! ith drug

dealers ! e didn't om#letely trust, be ause there ! as only one
! ay in or out. I rounded the orner, only a fe! ste#s behind him,
and stood there, #anting and straining my eyes to #ier e the
dar, ness. I ouldn't see him, but I , ne! he had to be in there.

54odena,5 I said softly into the bla , e hoes. 5It's ; in. I +ust
! ant to tal, to you. I'm not trying to ... I , no! you're in here.
I'll +ust #ut my bag do! n, and light us u# a beedie, o, ayE @ne
for you. @ne for me.5

I #ut the bag do! n slo! ly, e' #e ting him to ma, e a rush #ast me.
I too, a bundle of beedies from my shirt #o , et, and e' tra ted
t! o from the #a , . *olding them bet! een my third and fourth
fingers, thi , ends in! ards, as every #oor man in the ity did, I
! or, ed o#en a bo' of mat hes and stru , one. 7ith the flame
#laying over the ends of the igarettes, I allo! ed myself a
glim#se u#! ard and I sa! him, ringing a! ay from the little ar
of light thro! n by the mat h. \$ust as the mat h died, I e' tended
my arm to offer him one of the glo! ing beedie igarettes. In the
ne! dar, , after the mat h failed, I ! aited for a se ond, t! o
se onds, three se onds, and then I felt his fingers, softer and
more deli ate in their gras# than I ! ould've believed, lose
around my o! n and a e#t the igarette.

7hen he #uffed at the beedie I sa! his fa e learly for the first
time. It ! as grotes=ue. 4auri1io had sli ed and slashed so mu h
suffering into 8C?

the soft s, in that it ! as almost frightening sim#ly to loo, at
it. In the faint orange light, I sa! the sneering smile that
gleamed in 4odena"s eyes as he re ognised the horror in my o! n.
*o! many times, I ! ondered, had he seen that horror in the eyes
of others((that ! ide, ! hite dread as they imagined his s ars on
their o! n fa es and his torment in their soulsE *o! many times
had he seen others flin h, as I'd flin hed, and shrin, a! ay from
his ! ounds as if from the o#en sores of a diseaseE *o! many times
had he seen men as, themselves: 7hat did he doE 7hat did he do to
deserve thisE

4auri1io's , nife had o#ened both hee, s beneath the dar, bro! n eyes. 2he uts had healed into long D(sha#ed s ars that dragged

do! n the lo! er lids of his eyes and ran li, e the trails of hideous, mo , ing tears. 2he lo! er lids, #ermanently red and ra! , ga#ed o#en in little tren hes of agony that revealed the ! hole globe of ea h eye. 2he ! ings and se#tum of his nose had been ut through to the bone. 2he s, in, ! hen it losed together, had fused in +agged ! horls at the sides but not at all in the entre, ! here the la eration ! as too dee#. 2he ! ide hole ! here his nostrils had been resembled the snout of a #ig, and flared ! ith every in! ard breath. 2here ! ere many more uts beside the eyes, around the +a! , and along the full ! idth of his bro! belo! the hairline.

It loo, ed as though 4auri1io had tried to #eel off the ! hole layer of 4odena's fa e, and the hundred s ars that en ir led his features ! ere #u , ered, here and there, into little mounds of flesh that might've mat hed the outstret hed fingers of a man's hands. I , ne! that there had to be other s ars and in+uries beneath his lothes: the movements of his arm and leg on the left side of his body ! ere a! , ! ard, as if the hinges at elbo! , shoulder, and , nee had stiffened around ! ounds that had never really healed.

It ! as a monstrous mutilation6 a disfigurement so al ulated in its ruelty that I felt numbed by it and unable to res#ond. I noti ed that there ! ere no mar, s on or near his mouth. I ! ordered at the fortune that had left his sensuous and finely s ul#ted li#s so #erfe t, so fla! lessly uns arred. 2hen I remembered that 4auri1io had gagged him ! hen he"d tied him to the bed, only lifting the t! isted loth from time to time as he"d ommanded him to s#ea, .)nd it seemed to me, as I ! at hed 4odena #uff at the igarette, that his smooth, unblemished mouth ! as the ! orst and most terrible ! ound of them all. 8CC

7e smo, ed the beedies do! n to stubs in silen e, and my eyes ad+usted to the dar, ness. I be ame a! are, gradually, of ho! small

he ! as6 ho! mu h smaller he"d be ome ! ith the shrivelling effe t
of the ! ounds on his left side. I felt that I ! as to! ering over
him. I ste##ed ba , a #a e into the light, #i , ed u# my bag, and
! agged my head en ouragingly.

5Garam hai #ioE5 I as, ed. Shall ! e drin, hot teaE

52hi, hain,5 he re#lied. @, ay.

I led the ! ay ba , through the onverted lane and into a hai
sho# ! here ! or, ers from a lo al flourmill and ba, ery ! ere resting
bet! een shifts. 2he men, several of them, shuffled along the
! ooden ben h to ma, e room for us. 2hey ! ere #o! dered ! ith ! hite
flour in their hair and over the ! hole of their bodies. 2hey
loo, ed li, e #hantoms or so many stone statues ome to life. 2heir
eyes, no doubt irritated by the dusty flour, ! ere as red as oals
from the fiery #it beneath their ovens. 2heir ! et li#s, ! here
they si##ed the tea, ! ere bla , lee hes against the ghostly ! hite
of their s, in. 2hey stared at us ! ith the usual fran, , Indian
uriosity, but loo, ed a! ay =ui , ly ! hen 4odena raised his ga#ing

eyes to them.

5I"m sorry for running a! ay,5 he said =uietly, his eyes fi' ed on
his hands as they fidgeted in his la#.

I ! aited for him to say something more, but he lo , ed his mouth
in a tight little grima e and breathed loudly, evenly, through
his ! ide, flaring nose.

5)re you ... are you o, ayE5 I as, ed, ! hen the tea arrived.

5\$arur,5 he ans! ered, ! ith a little smile. 8ertainly. 5)re you
o, ayE5

I thought he ! as being fa etious, and I didn"t hide the
irritation in my fro! n.

I do not mean to offend you, he said, smiling again. It was a strange smile, so serene in the curve of the mouth, and so deformed in the stiffened cheeks that dragged the lower lids of his eyes down into little wells of misery. I am only offering my help, if you need it. I have money. I always carry ten thousand rupees with me.

That

I always carry

Yes, yes, I heard you. She smiled softly, but still I glanced at the bystanders to see if they'd heard him as well. Why are you at home today in the market?

I visit you very often. Almost every day. I visit you and Arla and Isa and Ram.

Why

I must visit you. It is one of the things I will do to find her.

To find her

horrorE

5Alla ... ! ent to Germany, 4odena.5

5I , no! ,5 he smiled. 5I am glad for her.5

5She ! on't be oming ba , .5

5@h, yes,5 he said flatly. 5She'll ome ba , . She loves me.
She'll ome ba , for me.5

57hy((5 I began, and then abandoned the thought. 5*o! do you
liveE5

5I have a +ob.) good +ob. It #ays good money. I ! or, ! ith a
friend, Ramesh. I met him ! hen ... after I ! as hurt. *e loo, ed
after me.)t the houses of the ri h, ! hen a son is born, ! e go
there, and I #ut on my s#e ial lothes. I #ut on my ostume.5

2he dire em#hasis he"d #ut on the last ! ord, and the fra tured
little smile that a om#anied it, sent a ree#ing unease along
the s, in of my arms. Some of that dis=uiet roa, ed into my voi e
as I re#eated the ! ord.

58ostumeE5

5Des. It has a long tail and shar# ears, and a hain of little
s, ulls around the ne , . I ma, e it that I am a demon, an evil
s#irit.)nd Ramesh, he ma, es that he is a holy sadhu, loo, ing
li, e a holy man, and he beats me a! ay from the house.)nd I ome
ba , , and I ma, e it that I am trying to steal the baby.)nd the
! omen s ream ! hen I ome near the baby.)nd Ramesh, he beats me
a! ay again.)gain I ome ba , , and again he beats me until, at
the very last, he beats me so badly that I ma, e li, e I am dying,
and I run a! ay. 2he #eo#le #ay us good money for the sho! .5 8C8

5I never heard of it before.5

5- o. It is our o! n idea, Ramesh and me. Out after the first ri h family #aid us, all the others ! anted to be sure to beat the evil s#irit a! ay from their ne! baby son.)nd they #ay us good money, all of them. I have an a#artment. I don't o! n it, of ourse, but I have #aid more than a year of rent in advan e already. It is small, but it is omfortable. It ! ill be a good #la e for Alla and me to live together. Dou an see the ! aves of the sea from the main ! indo! . 4y Alla, she loves the sea. She al! ays ! anted a house near to the sea ...5

I stared at him, fas inated no less by the fa t of his s#ee h than its meaning. 4odena had been one of the most ta iturn men I'd ever , no! n. 7hen ! e'd both been regulars at ; eo#old's he'd gone for ! ee, s at a time, and sometimes as long as a month, ! ithout uttering a ! ord in my #resen e. Out the ne! 4odena, the s arred survivor, ! as a tal, er. I'd been for ed to run him do! n

in a blind alley to get him to tal, at all, it ! as true6 but on e he started, he be ame dis on ertingly hatty.)s I listened to him, as I reoriented myself to the disfigured, voluble version of the man, I be ame a! are of the melodies that his S#anish a ent made as it moved fluently bet! een *indi and /nglish, mi' ing the t! o seamlessly, and in or#orating ! ords from ea h into a hybrid language that ! as his o! n.)drift on the softness in his voi e, I as, ed myself if that ! as the , ey to the mysterious bond that had e' isted bet! een them, Alla and 4odena: if they'd tal, ed to one another, for hours, ! hen they ! ere alone, and if that tender eu#hony, that voi e musi , had held them together.

)nd then, ! ith a suddenness that aught me off(guard, the meeting ! ith 4odena ! as over. *e stood to #ay the bill and ! al, ed out into the lane, ! aiting for me +ust beyond the door! ay.

5I must go,5 he said, loo, ing nervously to his left and right before raising his ! ounded eyes to mine. 5Ramesh is there by no! ,

outside the >resident *otel. 7hen she comes ba , , Alla ! ill be there, she ! ill stay there. She loves that hotel. It is her favourite. She loves the Oa , Oay area.)nd there ! as a #lane this morning from Germany.) ; ufthansa #lane. She might be there.5

5Dou he , ... after every flightE5

5Des. I do not go in,5 he murmured, lifting his hand as if to touch his face, but running it through his short, greying hair instead. 5Ramesh goes in the hotel for me. *e he , s her name((Alla &ol, enberg((to see if 8C9 she is there. @ne day she ! ill be there. She ! ill be there.5

*e began to ! al, a! ay from me, but I sto##ed him ! ith a hand on his shoulder.

5; isten, 4odena, don't run a! ay from me ne' t time, o, ayE If you need anything, if there"s anything I an do, +ust as, me. Is it a dealE5

5I ! ill not run a! ay again,5 he said solemnly. 5It is +ust my habit to run.)nd it ! as +ust my habit that ! as running a! ay from you. It ! as not me running, +ust my habit. I am not afraid of you. Dou are my friend.5

*e turned to leave, but I sto##ed him again, dra! ing him loser to me so that I ould ! his#er into his ear.

54odena, don't tell anyone else that you , ee# so mu h money on you. >romise me.5

5- obody else , no! s that, ; in,5 he assured me, smiling that dee#(eyed grimace at me. 5@nly you. I ! ould not say that to anyone. -ot even Ramesh , no! s that I have money ! ith me. *e does not , no! that I save my money. *e does not even , no! about my a#artment.

*e thin, s that I s#end my share of the money that ! e earn
together on drugs.)nd I do not ta, e any drugs, ; in. Dou , no!

afraid. I was not cruel. I had no intention. I was ... you, no, it
was like the feeling for my Alla (I was in love with Maurizio's
intention.) and then, after he left me there, on the bed, and Alla
came into the room, I saw the fear in her eyes. He put his fear
into her. He made her so afraid,

Silence is as sure as the falling lash, the poet Sadi-
<han on e rote. Out sometimes, being silent is the only way to
tell the truth. | 871

I at her door and turned and looked at her, and I knew that the wordless
minute she'd shared, with his hand on my chest and his breath
and her shining eyes close to mine, would always be more precious and
even more honest for both of us, no matter how errable or
misunderstood, than the cold, unloving truth of his world alone,
or of mine.

And maybe he's right, I thought. Maybe his way of remembering
Aurilio and Alla is right. Certainly, he'd dealt with the pain
they'd caused him a lot better than I'd dealt with that kind of
pain when it had happened to me. When my marriage fell apart in
betrayal and bitterness, I became a lunatic. I couldn't bear it
that love was broken, and that happiness had ended so suddenly
into sorrow. So I ruined my life, and hurt a lot of people on the
long way down. Zohra, instead, had loved, and saved and waited
for love to return. And thinking about that (how he'd lived with
what had been done to him (and wondering at it on the long way
back to Abdullah and the others, I discovered something that I
should've known, as Zohra did, right from the start. It was
something simple: so simple that it too, a pain as great as
Zohra's to share me into seeing it. *e'd been able to deal with
that pain because he'd accepted his own part in causing it. I'd
never accepted my share of responsibility (right up to that
moment (for the way my marriage had failed or for the heartache
that had followed it. That was why I'd never dealt with it.

And then, as I entered the bright, bustling bustle of the
market, I did: I did accept that blame, and I felt my heart
ease and unfold as it released its burdens of fear, resentment,
and self-doubt. I walked back, between the busy stalls and, by the
time I joined Abdullah, Ibrahim, and the Georges, I was smiling. I

answered their questions about Zohra, and I thanked Abdullah for
his surprise. *e was right (I did forgive him everything, after

that.)nd although I ouldn't find the ! ords to tell him of the
hange that had ha##ened to me, he sensed, I thin, , that the
differen e in the smile I shared ! ith him ame from a ne! #ea e
that ! as born in me that day, and slo! ly began to gro! .

2he loa, of the #ast is ut from #at hes of feeling, and se! n
! ith rebus threads. 4ost of the time, the best ! e an do is ! ra#
it around ourselves for omfort or drag it behind us as ! e
struggle to go on. Out everything has its ause and its meaning.
/very life, every love, every a tion and feeling and thought has
its reason and signifi an e: its beginning, and the #art it #lays
in the end. Sometimes, ! e do see. 87F

Sometimes, ! e see the #ast so learly, and read the legend of its
#arts ! ith su h a uity, that every stit h of time reveals its
#ur#ose, and a , ind of message is enfolded in it. - othing in any
life, no matter ho! ! ell or #oorly lived, is ! iser than failure
or learer than sorro! .)nd in the tiny, #re ious ! isdom that
they give to us, even those dread and hated enemies, suffering
and failure, have their reason and their right to be.

(((((((((((

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Money stinks.) station, of new money smells of iron, and a kid and bleached like the fingerprinting room in a city police station. @ld money, veiled with hope and coveting, smells stale like dead flowers, e#t too long bet! been the #ages of a head# novel. 7hen you #ut a lot of money, new and old, into one room((millions of ru#ees counted t! i e and snatched into bundles with rubber bands((it stinks. _I love money, Didier once said to me, but I hate the smell of it. 2he more ha##iness I get from it, the more thoroughly I have to wash my hands afterwards. I, new e' a tly what he meant. In the counting room for the mafia money(change rate, an airless cavern in the 9ort area where the hot lights were bright enough to sear through the best counterfeit, and the overhead fans never turned fast enough to lift a stray note from the counting tables, the smell of money was like the sweat and the dirt on a gravedigger's boots.

Some time after the meeting with Kodena, I pushed my way out through the door of Raubhai's counting room, shoving the goondas aside with the kind of childish rough play we all enjoyed, and gasped at the fresher air in the stairway.) voice called my name, and I stopped on the third step, my hand on the wooden rail. I looked up to see Raubhai leaning out of the doorway. 2he short, fat, bald urdu controller for Chander's((no, Salman's((mafia countil was dressed, as always, in a dhoti and a white singlet. *e leaned out of the doorway, I, new, because he never actually left the room until he sealed it, at close to midnight, every night. 7hen he needed to relieve himself, he used a private facility that was fitted with a one-way mirror so that he could

watch the room. *e was a dedicated accountant((the mafia's best((but it wasn't just the duty of his profession that held Raubhai to the activity on his counting tables.) way from the busy room he was a grumpy, suspicious, and strangely frightened man. In the counting room he was #lumber, 87H somehow, and e' #ansively self-assured. It was as if the #hysical

attainment line, led him to a #sy hi for e: so long as a #art of his body ! as still in the room, he ! as still onne ted to the energy, the #o! er, the money.

5; inbabaB5 he shouted do! n at me, ! ith the lo! er #art of his body hidden by the door frame. 5Don't forget the ! eddingB Dou are oming, isn't itE5

5Sure,5 I smiled ba , at him. 5I'll be thereB5

I did the =ui , ! al, (fall do! n three flights of the stair! ay, teasing and shoving the goondas on duty at every level, and bum#ed #ast the men at the street door.)t the end of the street I a , no! ledged the smiles of t! o more men ! at hing the door. 2here ! ere some e' e#tions, but for the most #art the young mafia gangsters li, ed me. I ! as n't the only foreigner ! or, ing ! ith the Oombay mafia((there ! as an Irish gangster in the Oandra oun il, an)meri an freelan er ma, ing a name in ma+or drug deals, a Dut hman ! or, ing ! ith a gang in <har, and there ! ere other men a ross the ity((but I ! as the only gora in the Salman oun il. I ! as their foreigner.)nd those years, as Indian #ride ! as rising li, e ne! green, ! hite, and orange vines from the s or hed #ost(olonial earth, ! ere the last years ! hen being foreign, being Oritish, or loo, ing and sounding Oritish ! as enough to ! in hearts and intrigue minds.

Ra+ubhai's invitation to his daughter's ! edding ! as signifi ant: it meant that I ! as a e#ted as one of them. 9or months I'd ! or, ed side by side ! ith Salman, San+ay, 9arid, Ra+ubhai, and others on the oun il. 4y ! or, in the #ass#ort se tion ! as bringing in almost as mu h money as the entire urren y o#eration. 4y o! n onta ts on the streets thre! large sums into the gold, goods, and money(hange #ots. I ! or, ed out in the bo' ing gym ! ith Salman 4ustaan and)bdullah 2aheri every other day. Asing my friendshi# ! ith *assaan @bi, ! a, I'd forged a ne! allian e ! ith his men in the bla , ghetto. It ! as a useful onne tion ! hi h had brought us ne! men, money, and mar, ets.)t -a1eer"s re=uest, I'd +oined the delegation that had stru , an

arms agreement ! ith) fghan e' iles in the ity((a deal that had ensured a steady su##ly of ! ea#ons to the Salman oun il from the semi(autonomous tribal regions on the >a, istan() fghanistan border. I had friendshi# and res#e t and more money than I ired to s#end, but it ! asn't until Ra+ubhai invited me to his daughter"s ! edding that I , ne! I ! as truly a e#ted. *e ! as a senior man on the Salman oun il. *is invitation ! as the endorsement that 87?

! el omed me into the inner ir le of trust and affe tion. Dou an ! or, ! ith the mafia, and for the mafia, and do the , ind of +ob

that earns high esteem, but you're not really one of them until they invite you home to , iss the babies.

I ! al, ed out through the invisible boundaries of the 9ort area and a##roa hed 9lora 9ountain.) roving ta' i slo! ed beside me, the driver gesturing aggressively for my fare. I ! aved him a! ay. -ot realising that I ould s#ea, *indi, he drove u# beside me at a ra! ling #a e and leaned from the ! indo! to tal, .

5*ey, ! hite sisterfu , er, an't you see the ta' i"s em#tyE 7hat are you doingE 7al, ing in the hot afternoon li, e somebody"s lost ! hite goatE5

5<ai #ai+ey tumE5 I as, ed in rude 4arathi. 7haddaya ! antE

5<ai #ai+eyE5 he re#eated, stunned to hear the 4arathi #hrase.

57hat"s your #roblemE5 I as, ed, s#ea, ing in the rough 4arathi diale t of Oombay"s ba , streets. 5Dou don't understand 4arathiE 2his is our Oombay, and Oombay is ours. If you an't s#ea, 4arathi, ! hat are you doing in OombayE *ave you got a goat"s brain inside your sisterfu , ing headE5

5) rreyB5 he grinned, s! it hing to /nglish. 5Dou s#ea, 4arathi, babaE5

5Gora hierra, , ala maan,5 I said in ans! er, ma, ing ir ling gestures over my fa e and my heart. 7hite fa e, bla , heart. I moved into *indi, using the most #olite form of the ! ord you to #ut him at ease. 5I'm ! hite on the outside, brother, but full *industani on the inside. I'm +ust ta, ing a ! al, , #assing time. 7hy don't you loo, for some real tourists, and leave #oor Indian fu , ers li, e me alone, naE5

*e laughed aloud and #assed his hand a ross the ! indo! of his ab to sha, e mine gently, and then s#ed a! ay.

I ! al, ed on, avoiding the ro! ded foot#aths to +oin the s! ifter lines on the road beside the #assing ars. Dee# breaths of the ity finally drove the smell of the urren y(room from my nostrils. I ! as heading ba , to! ard 8olaba, to ;eo#old"s, to meet Didier. I ! anted to ! al, be ause I ! as glad to be ba , in the #art of the ity I loved most. 7or, for Salman"s mafia oun il too, me to every distant suburb of the great ity, and there ! ere many favoured #la es: from 4ahala' mi to 4alad6 from 8otton Green to 2hana6 from Santa 8ru1 and)ndheri to the ;a, es Distri t on the 9ilm 8ity Road. Out the real seat of his oun il"s #o! er ! as in the long #eninsula that began in the s! ee#ing urve of 4arine Drive and follo! ed 87C

the s imitar shore all the ! ay to the 7orld 2rade 8entre.)nd it ! as there in those thriving streets, never more than a fe! bus sto#s from the sea, that I"d lost my heart to the ity and learned to love her.

It ! as hot on the street, hot enough to burn all but the dee#est thoughts from troubled minds. ;i, e every other Oombayite, every other 4umbai, er, I"d made that ! al, from 9lora 9ountain to the 8ause! ay a thousand times, and li, e them I , ne! ! here to find the ool bree1es and refreshing shades on the ! ay. 4y s al#, my fa e, and my shirt ! ere ! et ! ith s! eat in any fe! se onds of bare sunlight((the ba#tism in every daylight ! al, ((and then ooled all the ! ay to dry again in a minute of shaded ! ind.

My thoughts, as I moved between the traffic and the brooding shoehorners, were on the future. >arado' i ally, even #erversely, just as I ! as being a e#ted into the secret heart of Bombay, I also felt the strongest urge to leave. I understood the t! o for es, ontradi tory as they seemed. So much of ! hat I'd loved about Bombay had been in the hearts and minds and ! ords of human beings((<arla, >raba, er, <haderbhai, and <haled)nsari. They ! ere all gone, in one ! ay or another, yet there ! as a onstant, melan holy sense of them in every street, shrine, and stri# of sea(oast that I loved in the ity. Still, there ! ere ne! sour es of love and ins#iration((ne! beginnings rising from the fallo! fields of loss and disillusion. My #osition ! ith Salman's mafia oun il ! as se ure. Ousiness o##ortunities ! ere o#ening u# in the Oolly! ood film industry and the ne! er fields of television and multi(media: I re eived offers of ! or, every other ! ee, . I had a good a#artment, ! ith a vie! of the *a+i)li 4os=ue, and #lenty of money.)nd night by night I gre! a little loser in loving affe tion for ; isa 8arter.

) sadness that lingered in all my favourite #la es ! as #ressing me to leave the ity, just as ne! love and a e#tan e #ulled me loser to her heart.)nd I ouldn't de ide, as I ! al, ed that long, ba#tismal stret h from 9lora to the 8ause! ay, ! hi h ! ay to +um#. -o matter ho! often or dee#ly I thought about the struggled #ast or the sorro! and #romise of the #resent, I ouldn't ma, e that lea# of onfiden e or trust or faith into the future. 2here ! as something missing: some al ulation, some #ie e of eviden e or #aralla' vie! of my life that ! ould ma, e it all lear to me, I ! as sure, but I didn't , no! ! hat it ! as. So I moved bet! een the franti flo! of ars, bi, es, buses, tru , s, and #ush(arts, and the meandering 877 #rogress of tourists and shoehorners, and let my thoughts drift into the heat and the street.

5; inB5 Didier shouted as I ste##ed through the ! ide ar h and u# to his long raft of +oined tables. 5Dire t from your training, nonE5

5-o, I've been ! al, ing. 2hin, ing. 4ore of a ! or, out for the mind ((and maybe the soul.5

5Do not fearB5 he ommanded, signalling for the ! aiter. 5I ure this si ,ness every day of every ! ee, . @r every night, at the least. 4a, e a #la e for him,)rturo. 4ove do! n a little, and let him sit ne' t to me.5

)rturo, a young Italian hiding in Oombay from an undis losed #roblem ! ith the #oli e in -a#les, ! as Didier"s ne! infatuation. *e ! as a short, slight man ! ith a doll(li, e fa e that many a girl might"ve envied. *e s#o, e very little /nglish and rea ted to every a##roa h, no matter ho! friendly, ! ith the same #etulantly surly shudder of irritation. 8onse=uently, Didier"s many friends ignored him and set the alarms in their mental lo ,s to give the relationshi# from a fe! months, at most, to a fe! ! ee, s, before it olla#sed.

5Dou +ust missed <arla,5 Didier told me more =uietly ! hen I shoo, his hand. 5She ! ill be u#set. She ! anted to((5

5I , no! ,5 I smiled. 5She ! anted to see me.5

2he drin, s arrived, and Didier lattered his glass against mine. I too, a si# from it and #ut it do! n on the table ne' t to him.

Several #eo#le from the movie ro! d that ! or, ed ! ith ;isa 8arter ! ere at the long table, +oining in a #arty ! ith some of <avita Singh"s #ress grou#. Sitting ne' t to Didier ! ere &i, ram and ;ettie. 2hey ! ere both ha##ier and healthier than I"d ever , no! n them to be. 2hey"d bought the ne! a#artment in the heart of 8olaba near the mar, et only months before. 7hile the ommitment had e'hausted their savings and for ed them to borro! from &i, ram"s #arents, it ! as #roof of their faith in one another and the future of their burgeoning movie business, and they ! ere still e' ited ! ith the hange.

&i, ram greeted me ! armly, rising from his chair to give me a hug. *is gunslinger's clothes had disappeared, item by item, under ;ettie's persuasion and his own maturing taste.)ll that remained of the slint /ast! ood costume ! ere the silver belt and the black , o! boy boots. *is beloved hat, surrendered ! ith no little reluctance ! hen he'd found himself more frequently in the boardrooms of major companies than in 1878 the stuntmen's corral, ! as hanging from a hook, in my apartment. It ! as one of my most treasured possessions.

When I leaned over to kiss ;ettie, she seized the shoulder of my shirt and pulled me closer to ! his#er in my ear.

5<ee# your fool, lad,5 she murmured insurprisingly. 5<ee# your fool.5

Sitting next to ;ettie ! ere the movie producers Cliff De Souza and Chandrasekhar.)s sometimes happens ! ith close friends, Cliff and Chandrasekhar seemed to exchange the substance of their bodies between them over time, so that Cliff had become slightly thinner and more angular, ! hile Chandrasekhar had gained ! eight in almost perfect proportion. The more they differed physically, however, the more they resembled one another in other ways. In fact, the close colleagues, ! ho often ! or, ed and played together for forty hours at a stretch, used so many of the same gestures, facial

expressions, and phrases that they ! ere, no! n on the sets of the movies they produced as *At Anand* and *Sinny Anand*.

They raised their arms in identically enthusiastic greeting ! hen I addressed them, although each ! as pleased to see me for his own reasons. Cliff De Souza had developed a passionate affection for *Avita Singh* since I'd introduced them, and he'd hoped I might influence her in his favour. *aving a far longer acquaintance ! ith her, I, ! ne! that no ! o! er could influence *Avita* toward anything not fully consonant ! ith her ! ill and her

! ish. Still, she seemed to like him well enough, and they had much in common. They were both almost thirty and unmarried (a status so unusual in the Indian upper middle class, in those years, that their families anguished over it at every feast and festival in the recorded calendar. They were both media professionals who prided themselves on their independence and artistic flair. They were also driven by the same instinctive tolerance to see, out, and fairly estimate each point of view in any apparent conflict of interests.) and they were attractive people. Kavita's slender figure and serenely seductive eyes seemed the perfect complement to Cliff's rangy angularity and the boyishness of his artless, lopsided grin.

For my part, liking them both, I saw no reason to resist the maternal urge to meddle. In public I made it clear that I liked Cliff De Souza, and in private I raised him discreetly to her whenever the natural opportunity arose. They had a handsome (a good handsome, it seemed to me (and my heart put a shining star in my eyes for them.

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Shandra Shetty, on the other hand, was pleased to see me because I was his closest link to the black money in Salman's mafia empire, and the only link he could describe as amiable. ; i, e <hader before him, Salman Shustaan saw great advantage in the access to Bombay's film world that Shandra Shetty provided. -e! regulations at federal and state levels had tightened restrictions on the flow of capital, making it ever more difficult to launder black money. For many reasons (not least because of the irresistible glamour attached to the industry (politicians had entered the movie business from many of those monetary and investment controls. They were boom economy years, and Bollywood films were going through a renaissance in style and confidence. The films got bigger and better, and had begun to reach out to a wider world market, etc.)s the budgets for successful films soared, however, producers exhausted the traditional sources of revenue. That convergence of interests drove more than a few producers and production houses into strange synergies with

gangsters: films about mafia goondas ! ere finan ed by the mafia, and the #rofits from hit movies about hit men ! ent into ne!

imes and real hits on real #eo#le, ! hi h in turn be ame the sub+e ts for s reen#lays and ne! films finan ed by more mafia money.

)nd I #layed my #art, so to s#ea, , by ! or, ing as the onne tion bet! een 8handra 4ehta and Salman 4ustaan. 2he relationshi# ! as a lu rative one. 2he Salman oun il had #ut rores, ea h rore being ten million ru#ees, through 4ehta(De Sou1a >rodu tions, and dre! lean, untra eable #rofits from the bottom line. 2hat first onta t ! ith 8handra 4ehta, ! hen he"d as, ed me to find a fe! thousand)meri an dollars on the bla , mar, et, had fattened into a ne' us that the #ortly #rodu er ouldn't resist or refuse. *e ! as ri h, and getting ri her. Out the men ! ho #oured their ! ealth into his om#any frightened him, and every onta t ! ith them ! as mena ed ! ith the s ent of their distrust. So 8handra 4ehta smiled at me, and ! as glad to see me, and tried to #ull me tighter into the tremulous lut h of his friendshi# ! henever our #aths rossed.

I didn't mind. I li, ed 8handra 4ehta, and I li, ed Oolly! ood movies. I allo! ed him to drag me into the ! orried, ! ealthy ! orld of his friendshi#.

-e' t to him at the table ! as ; isa 8arter. *er thi , , blonde hair had gro! n long enough, after the short ut, to fall beside the oval ameo of her fa e. *er blue eyes ! ere lear and glittering ! ith #assionat intent. 88%

She ! as tanned and very healthy. She"d even gained a little e' tra ! eight((something she de ried, but that I and every other man ! ithin her sight(hori1on ! as bound to admire.)nd there ! as something ne! and very different in her manner: a ! arm, unhurried softness in her smile6 a ! illing laugh that ! on the laughter of others6 and a lightness of s#irit that loo, ed for and often found the best in those she met. 9or ! ee, s, months, I"d ! at hed those

changes shift and settle in her, and at first I'd thought they'd grown from my affection.) Although no formal relationship had been declared (she continued to live in her apartment, and I lived in mine) (we were lovers, and we were far more than friends.) After a time, I realised that the changes were not mine, but hers alone.) After a time, I began to see how deep the well of her loving was, and how much her happiness and confidence depended on drawing that love into the light, and sharing it.) And love was beautiful in her. It was as a learns, y she gave us with those eyes, and a summer morning with her smile.

She missed my cheek, when I greeted her. I returned the kiss, wondering, as I stepped back, why a small connection from her brother to her complexion (blue eyes).

Sitting next around the long table were the print journalists Dili and)n. They were young, only a few years out of college, and still learning their trade in the anonymous vaults of The Bombay, a Bombay daily.) That night, with Didier and his little court, they discussed the big breaking stories of the day as if they'd played key parts in the scenes or had followed their own instincts to the investigation's end. Their excitement, enthusiasm, ambition, and limitless hope for the future so delighted everyone in the ;eoold's crowd that <avita and Didier

felt obliged to respond, occasionally, with sardonic sniping. Dili and)n reacted well, laughing and often giving as good as they got until the whole group was shouting and bounding the table in delight.

Dili was a tall, fair, almond-eyed woman.)n, a third-generation native of Bombay, was shorter, darker, and the more serious of the two. -e blood, ;ettie had said to me with a smile, a few days before that afternoon. It was a phrase she'd once used about me, soon after I'd arrived in Bombay.) And as I made my way around the table and looked at the two young men talking with such passion and purpose, it occurred to me that

on e, before heroin and crime, my life had been li, e theirs. @n e
I'd been +ust as ha##y and healthy and ho#eful as they ! ere.)nd
I ! as glad to 881

, no! them, and to , no! they ! ere a #art of the #leasure and
#romise of the ;eo#old"s ro! d. It ! as right that they ! ere
there, +ust as it ! as right that 4aurilio ! as gone, and Alla and
4odena ! ere gone, and that I, too, ! ould one day be gone.

Returning their ! arm handsha, es, I moved #ast the young men to
<avita Singh sitting beside them. <avita stood to give me a hug.
It ! as the tender, lose hug that a ! oman gives a man ! hen she
, no! s she an trust him, or ! hen she"s sure his heart belongs to
someone else. It ! as a rare enough embra e bet! een foreigners.
8oming from an Indian ! oman, it ! as uni=uely intimate in my
e' #erien e.)nd it ! as im#ortant. I'd been in the ity for years6
I ould ma, e myself understood in 4arathi, *indi, and Ardu6 I
ould sit ! ith gangsters, slum(d! ellers, or Oolly! ood a tors,
laiming their good! ill and sometimes their res#e t6 but fe!
things made me feel as a e#ted, in all the Indian ! orlds of
Oombay, as <avita Singh"s fond embra e.

I never told her that((! hat her affe tionate and un onditional
a e#tan e meant to me. So mu h, too mu h, of the good that I
felt in those years of e' ile ! as lo , ed in the #rison ell of my
heart: those tall ! alls of fear6 that small, barred ! indo! of
ho#e6 that hard bed of shame. I do s#ea, out no! . I , no! no! that
! hen the loving, honest moment omes it should be sei1ed, and
s#o, en, be ause it may never ome again.)nd unvoi ed, unmoving,
unlived in the things ! e de lare from heart to heart, those true
and real feelings ! ither and rumble in the remembering hand that
tries too late to rea h for them.

@n that day, as the grey(#in, veil of evening slo! ly en losed the
afternoon, I said nothing to <avita. I let my smile, li, e a thing
made of bro, en stones, fall and slide from the #ea, of her
affe tion to the ground beneath her feet. She too, my arm and
steered me into an introdu tion to the man ! ho sat beside her.

5; in, I don't thin, you've met Ran+it,5 she said as he stood and
! e shoo, hands. 5Ran+it is ... <arla"s friend. Ran+it 8houdry
meet ; in.5

I suddenly , ne! ! hat ; ettie had meant ! ith her ry#ti omment,
<ee# your ool, lad, and ! hy ; isa ouldn"t shift the fro! n that
reased her bro! .

58all me \$eet,5 he offered. *is smile ! as ! ide, natural, and
onfident.

5_@(_ , ay,5 I ans! ered evenly, not really smiling. 5>leased to
meet you, \$eet.5

5)nd it"s a #leasure to meet you,5 he ountered, ! ith the ! ell(
rounded 88F
and musi al infle tion of Oombay"s best #rivate s hools and
universities: my favourite a ent in all the beautiful ! ays to
s#ea, the /nglish language. 5I"ve heard so mu h about you.5

5) haaE5 I res#onded ! ithout thin, ing, e' a tly as an Indian of my
age might"ve done. 2he ! ord, in its literal translation, means
good. In that onte' t and ! ith that infle tion it meant @h, yeahE

5Des,5 he laughed, releasing my hand. 5<arla tal, s about you
often. Dou"re =uite the hero to her, I"m sure you , no! .5

52hat"s funny,5 I ans! ered, not sure if he ! as as ingenuous as he
seemed to be. 5She on e told me that heroes only ome in three
, inds: dead, damaged, or dubious.5

*e ti##ed his head ba , and roared ! ith laughter, his mouth o#en
! ide enough to reveal a #erfe t set of #erfe t Indian teeth.
Still laughing, he met my eye and ! agged his head in ! onder.

So that"s #art of it, I thought. *e gets her +o, es. *e li, es her

lay with words. She understands her love of them and her cleverness. That's one of the reasons why she likes him. @, ay.

The rest of it was more obvious. She had a lithe build, and was average tall, my height, with an open, handsome face. More than just the sum of good features (high cheekbones, a high, wide forehead, expressive to a degree (coloured eyes, a strong nose, smiling mouth, and firm chin) (it was the kind of face that one would've been called dashing: the lone huntsman, the mountaineer, the jungle adventurer. She wore his hair short. The hairline was receding, but even that seemed to suit him, as if it was the preferred option for healthy, athletic men.) and the clothes (I, like them all from the shopping editions that Sanjay, Narendra, Rajal, and the other mafiosi made to the most expensive stores in the city. There wasn't a self-respecting gangster in Bombay who wouldn't have cursed his lips and jagged his head in approval of Ranjit's clothes.

Well, I said, shuffling my feet to move around him and greet Alana, the last friend sitting in the loop of the table. She was working as a first assistant director for Aeha (De Souza) productions, and in training to become a director in her own

right. She looked up at me and smiled.

Well, Ranjit requested, softly but firmly. I wanted to tell you ... about your stories ... your short stories ...

I turned to flinch a fraction at Avita Singh, who hugged her shoulders and raised the palms of her hands as she looked away.
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Avita let me read them, and I wanted to tell you how good they are. I mean, how good I think they are.

Well, then, I muttered, trying once again to move past him.

5Really. I read them all, and I thin, they"re really great.5

2here are fe! things more dis omfiting than a s#ontaneous
outburst of genuine de en y from someone you"re determined to
disli, e for no good reason. I felt a little blush of shame
beginning to s#read a ross my hee, s.

52han, s,5 I said, #utting truth into my eyes and my voi e for the
first time. 5It"s damn ni e to hear, even if <avita ! asn"t
su##osed to sho! them to anyone.5

5I , no! she ! asn"t,5 he said =ui , ly. 5Out I thin, you should((
sho! them to someone, I mean. 2hey"re not right for my #a#er.
It"s not the right forum. Out 2he - oonday, ! ell, it ! ould be the
#erfe t forum for them.)nd I , no! they"d buy them for a very
fair #ri e.2he editor of 2he - oonday,)nil, is a friend of mine.
I , no! ! hat he li, es, and I , no! he"ll li, e your stories. I
didn"t sho! him your ! or, , of ourse. -ot ! ithout your
#ermission. Out I did tell him that I read them, and that I thin,
they"re good. *e ! ants to meet you. If you ta, e your stories to
him, I"m sure you"ll get on ! ell ! ith him.)ny! ay, I"ll leave it
at that. *e"s ho#ing to see you. Out it"s u# to you. 7hatever you
de ide, I ! ish you all the best.5

*e sat do! n, and I moved #ast him to greet <al#ana and then ta, e
my #la e beside Didier. I ! as so distra ted by the e' hange ! ith
Ran+it((\$eet((8houdry that I only half(listened to Didier"s
announ ement of his #lanned tri# to Italy ! ith)rturo. 2hree
months, I heard him say, and I remember thin, ing that three
months in Italy ould be ome three years, and that I might lose
him. 2he thought ! as so strange that I ! ouldn"t let myself
onsider it. Oombay ! ithout Didier ! as li, e ... Oombay ! ithout
;eo#old"s, or the *a+i)li 4os=ue, or the Gate! ay 4onument. It
! as unthin, able.

>ushing the thought a! ay, I loo, ed around the laughing, drin, ing,
tal, ing table of friends, and filled the em#ty glass ! ithin me,
#ouring their su esses and their ho#es into my eyes. 2hen I

returned my attention to Ranjit, Arla's boyfriend. I'd done my homework on him in recent months. I knew that he was the second

eldest (some said the favourite) of four sons born to Ramrao, a shopkeeper, a truck driver

who'd made his fortune resupplying coastal towns in Bangladesh that had been hit by typhoons. The first government tenders had gone into major contracts, requiring fleets of trucks and, eventually, chartered air craft and ships. By the way, Shouhry had acquired a small circulation Bombay newspaper as part of a merger with a more diversified transport and communications firm. He'd handed the paper to his son Ranjit, who'd just graduated with a business degree and was the first, on both sides of his family, to complete high school and to attend any kind of further education college. Ranjit had been running the paper, rebranded as The Daily Post, for eight years. His success with the Post, as it was, no doubt, had allowed Ranjit to segue into the vibrant field of independent television production.

He was wealthy, influential, popular, and possessed of an entrepreneurial élan in print, movies, and television: a media baron in the making. There were rumours of resentments stirring in the heart of Ranjit's older brother Rahul, who'd joined his father in the transport business in his early teenage years, and had never enjoyed the private school education lavished upon Ranjit and the younger siblings. There was gossip, also, about the two younger brothers, the wild parties they sometimes threw, and the large bribes required to keep them out of trouble. There was no criticism of Ranjit, however, in any connection and apart from those feelings simmering on ferns, his life seemed almost untroubled.

He was, as Nettie had once said, quite a fat and shiny cat. And as I sat behind him with friends (listening more than he talked, smiling more than he frowned, self-deprecating and considerate, tactful and attentive (I had to admit to myself that he was a very likeable man.) And, strangely, I felt sorry for him.)

years or even months before, I would've been jealous that he was such a likeable man (such a very nice guy, as more than a few people said to me when I'd asked them about him. I would've hated him. Out I felt nothing like that for Ranjit Bhoudry. Instead, as I looked at him, remembering too much of what I'd felt for Carla, and thinking about her clearly for the first time in ... a long time, I felt sorry for the rich, handsome media baron, and I wished him luck.

For half an hour I talked across the table with Lisa and the others and then I looked up to see Johnny Sigar, standing in the side doorway and gesturing to catch my eye. Delighted to have an excuse to leave, I turned to Didier and drew him around to face me. 88?

Listen, if you're really serious about going to Italy for three months (5

Certainly, I am (5 he began, but I cut him off quickly.

And if you're really serious about needing someone to look after your place for you while you're away, I think I've got just the guys for the job. 5

Oh, yes (5 and who are they? 5

The Georges, I replied. The ... odia Georges. Gemini and Sorio. 5

Didier asked as called.

Out these ... these George people ... they are, huh? and I say it. 5

Reliable (5 I suggested. Honest. Clean. Joyful. Brave. And, above all, the most important qualification for situations like this,

they're absolutely not interested in staying in your apartment for a minute longer than you want them to. In fact, I'll have a damn hard job talking them into it in the first place. They live on the street. They won't want to do it. But if I let them, no! they're doing me a favour, they might agree. They'll do a good job of looking after your place for you, and they'll get three months of safe living in a decent place.

Deent Didier scoffed. "What do you mean, decent apartment is without parallel in Bombay, India. Don't you see that? Excellent, I can understand. Sure, I can afford it. But decent (non-luxurious) It is like saying that I live in the fish market and, er, what do you say, I hoosh it out every day with a water hose?"

"So what do you think, I've gotta go."

Deent he sniffed.

"Some on, man, I'll forget about that."

"Well, yes, perhaps you are right. I have nothing against them. The George from Canada, the Sorcio, he does seem, some French. That is true. Des. Des. Tell them I think it is a good idea. Tell them to see me, and I'll see, to them (with very careful instructions).

Laughing as I said goodbye, I joined Johnny Sagar at the doorway of the restaurant. He pulled me close to him.

"Can you come with me?" he asked.

"Sure. Talking or talking?"

"I think, talking, India."

"We rushed our way through the breathing tubes of valves to the road and found a taxi. I was smiling as I waved the taxi down and climbed inside. For months, I'd been trying to find a way to

hel# Gemini and S or#io George that ! as more meaningful than the money I gave them 88C from time to time. Didier's holiday ! ith) rturo #rovided the #erfe t o##ortunity. I , ne! that three months in Didier's a#artment ! ould add years to their lives: three months ! ithout the stress of street living and ! ith the se ure good health that only a home and home oo,ing an #rovide.)nd I also , ne! that, ! ith the . odia Georges in his a#artment ! hile he ! as gone, Didier ! ould ! orry +ust enough to ma, e his return to Oombay a little more li, ely, and a little sooner.

57here toE5 I as, ed \$ohnny.

57orld 2rade 8entre,5 he told the driver, smiling at me but learly on erned about something.

57hat"s u#E5

52here is a #roblem at the 1ho#ad#atti,5 he ans! ered me.

5@, ay,5 I said, , no! ing that he ! ouldn't say anything else about the #roblem until he thought the moment ! as right. 5*o! "s the babyE5

59ine, very fine,5 he laughed. 5*e has su h a strong grab on my fingers. *e ! ill be big and strong((bigger than his father, sure.)nd >raba, er"s baby, from the sister of my Sita, >arvati, that baby is also very beautiful. *e is very mu h li, e >raba, er ... in his fa e and his smiling.5

I didn't ! ant to thin, about my dead, beloved friend.

5)nd ho! "s SitaE)nd the girlsE5 I as, ed.

52hey are fine, ; in, all fine.5

"You'll have to let it out, Johnny," I warned him. "Three kids in less than three years (before you, no! it, you'll be a fat, old guy with nine kids limping all around you."

"It is a fine dream," he sighed happily.

"So! or, E! are you ... how! you doing for money?"

"So fine, very fine, ; in. /verybody says takes, and nobody likes it. My business is good. Sita and me, I decided to buy the house next to ours, and make a bigger house for the family."

"That's fantastic! I can't wait to see it."

"Here! as a little silence and then Johnny turned to me with an expression of worry, almost of torment.

"; in, that time when you asked me to let, for you, to let, with

you, and I refused ("

"It's okay, Johnny."

"- o, it is not okay. I want to tell you, I should have said yes, and I should have let, beside you." 887

"Are you in trouble?" I asked, not understanding him. "Is business not as good as you said it was? Do you need money?"

"- o, no, everything is fine with me. Out if I was with you that time, letting you, maybe you would not still be letting for all these months at the black business, with those goondas."

"- o, Johnny."

"I blame myself every day, ; in," he said, his lips pulled aside in an anguished grimace. "I think, that you asked me to let, with

you, to be your friend, because you did need a friend at that time. I'm as a bad friend, ; in, and I blame myself. /very day I feel bad about it. I am so sorry that I refused you.

I put my hand on his shoulder, but he couldn't meet my eye.

So, , Johnny, you've got to understand. What I do, I don't feel good about it, but I don't feel bad about it, either. Do you feel bad about it.)nd I respect that. I admire it.)nd you're a good friend.

So, he murmured, his eyes still downcast.

Des, I insisted. I love you, man.

in he said, grabbing my arm with sudden, urgent concern.
>lease, #lease, be careful with these goondas. >lease

I smiled, trying to put him at ease.

4an, I protested, are you ever gonna tell me what this damn tri# is about?

Oears he said.

Oears

Well, actually, you , no! , only one bear is our #roblem. Do you , no!
<anoE <ano the bear?

Sure I , no! him, I muttered. Ohin hude bear((! hat's ha##enedE
*as he got himself #ut in +ail again?

So, no, ; in. *e is not in the +ail.

Good.)t least he's not a re idivist.

5) tually, you , no! , he es a#ed from the +ail.5

5Shit ...5

5)nd no! he is a fugitive bear, ! ith a re! ard #ri e on his head, or his #a! s, or any #art of him they an at h.5

5<ano"s on the runE5

5Des. 2hey even have a ! anted #oster.5

5) ! hatE5 888

5) ! anted #oster,5 he e' #lained #atiently. 52hey too, a #hoto of him, that <ano, ! ith his t! o blue bear(! allahs, ! hen they arrested them again. - o! , they are using that #hoto for the ! anted #oster.5

57ho"s _theyE5

52he state government, the 4aharashtra #oli e, the Oorder Se urity 9or e, and the 7ildlife >rote tion)uthority.5

58hrist, ! hat did <ano doE 7ho did he , ille5

5- ot , illed anyone, ; in. 2he story, ! hat ha##ened, the 7ildlife)uthority has a ne! #oli y, to sto# ruelty to the dan ing bears. 2hey don"t , no! that <ano"s bear(! allahs, they love him so mu h, li, e a big brother, and he loves them also, and they ! ould never hurt him. Out the #oli y is the #oli y. So, the 7ildlife(! allahs, they a#tured <ano, and they too, him to the animal +ail.)nd he ! as rying and rying for his blue bear(! allahs.)nd the bear(! allahs, they ! ere outside the animal +ail, and they ! ere also rying and rying.)nd t! o of those 7ildlife(! allahs, t! o ! at hmen on duty, they got very u#set about all the rying, so they ! ent outside, and they started beating <ano"s blue men ! ith lathis. 2hey gave them a solid #asting.)nd <ano, he sa! his t! o blue men getting that beating, and he +ust lost his ontrol. *e

bro, e do! n that age and made an es a#e. 2he t! o bear(! allahs got a big feeling of ourage, and they beat u# the 7ildlife fello! s and ran a! ay ! ith <ano. -o! they are hiding in our 1ho#ad#atti, in the same hut that you used to have as your house.)nd ! e have to try to get them out of the ity ! ithout getting a#tured. @ur #roblem is ho! to get that <ano from the 1ho#ad#atti to -ariman >oint. 2here is a tru , ! aiting there, and the driver has agreed to ta, e <ano a! ay ! ith his bear(! allahs.5

5-ot easy,5 I murmured. 5)nd ! ith a goddamn ! anted #oster for the blue guys and the bear. \$esusB5

57ill you hel# us, ;inE 7e feel very sorry for that bear. ;ove is a s#e ial thing in the ! orld. 7hen t! o men have so mu h love in their hearts, even so it is for a bear, it must be #rote ted, isn"t itE5

57ell ...5

5Isn"t itE5

5Sure it is,5 I smiled. 5Sure it is. I"ll be glad to hel#, if I an.)nd you an do me a favour as ! ell.5

5)nything.5

52ry to get me one of those ! anted #osters ! ith the #i ture of the 889 bear and the blue guys. I gotta have one of those #osters.5

52he #osterE5

5Deah. It"s a long story. Don"t ! orry about it. \$ust, if you see one, grab it for me. *ave you got a #lanE5

2he ta' i #ulled u# outside the slum as the evening, em#tied of its sunset and #ale enough to unveil the first fe! stars, dre!

s=uealing, #laying faronades of hildren ba , to their huts,
! here #lumes of smo, e from oo, ing fires fluttered into the
ooling air.

52he #lan,5 \$ohnny announ ed as ! e ! al, ed =ui ,ly through the
familiar lanes, nodding and smiling to friends along the ! ay, 5is
to dress u# the bear in a disguise.5

5I dunno,5 I said doubtfully. 5*e"s real tall, as I remember, and
, inda big.5

5)t first, ! e #ut a hat and a oat on him, and even an umbrella
hanging from his oat, li, e an offi e(! or, ing fello! .5

5*o! did he loo, E5

5-ot so good,5 \$ohnny re#lied ! ithout a tra e of irony or
sar asm. 5*e still loo, ed =uite a lot li, e a bear, but a bear
! ith lothes.5

5Dou don"t say.5

5Des. So, no! the #lan is to get a big 4uslim dress, you , no! the
oneE 9rom) fghanistanE 8overing all the ! hole body, ! ith only a
fe! holes to see out of it.5

5) bur, ha.5

5/' a tly. 2he boys ! ent to 4ohammed)li Road to buy the biggest
one they ould find. 2hey should be((ahB ; oo, B 2hey are here
already, and ! e an try it, to see ho! does it loo, .5

7e ame u#on a grou# of a do1en men and a similar number of ! omen
and hildren gathered near the hut ! here I"d lived and ! or, ed for

almost t! o years.)nd although I"d left the 1ho#ad#atti,
onvin ed that I ould never live there again, it al! ays gave me

a thrill of pleasure to see the humble little hut, and stand near it. The few foreigners I'd taken to the slum (and even the Indians, such as Avita Singh and Ram, who'd visited me there (had been horrified by the layout and aghast to think that I'd chosen to stay there so long. They couldn't understand that every time I entered the slum I felt the urge to let go and surrender to a simpler, poorer life that I as yet cherished in respect, and love, and a vital connectedness to the surrounding sea of human hearts. They couldn't understand what I meant when I talked about the purity of the slum: they'd been there, and seen the dirt and filth for themselves. They said no purity. Out they hadn't lived in those miraculous areas, and they hadn't learned that to survive in such a world of hope and sorrow the people had to be scrupulously and heartbreakingly honest. That I as the source of their purity: above all things, they were true to themselves.

So, with my dishonest heart thrilling at the nearness of my own and favourite home, I joined the group and then gasped as a huge, shrouded figure emerged from beside the hut and stood among us.

Only shit I said, gazing at the towering, immense form. The blue-grey burqa covered the standing bear from its head to the ground. I found myself wondering at the size of the woman that garment had been intended to cover, because the standing bear was a full head taller than the tallest man in our group. Only shit

As she sat down, the shapeless form too, a few lumbering steps, no, going over a stool and later not as it sat and lurched forward.

Maybe, Sheetendra suggested helpfully, she is a very tall, fat ... lumpy kind of woman.

The bear suddenly stood and then fell forward onto its four paws. We followed it with our eyes. The blue-grey burqa-laden figure trundled forward, all the while emitting a low, grumbling

moan.

54aybe,5 \$eetendra amended, 5she is a small, fat ... gro! ling
! oman.5

5) gro! ling ! omanE5 \$ohnny 8igar #rotested. 57hat the hell is a
gro! ling ! omanE5

5I don't , no! ,5 \$eetendra ! hined. 5I am only trying to be
hel#ing.5

5Dou're going to hel# this bear all the ! ay ba , to +ail,5 I
muttered, 5if you let it go out of here li, e that.5

57e ould try the hat and oat again,5 \$ose#h offered. 54aybe a
bigger hat ... and ... and a more fashionable oat.5

5I don't thin, fashion"s your #roblem,5 I sighed. 59rom ! hat
\$ohnny tells me, you have to get <ano from here to - ariman >oint
! ithout the o#s s#otting you, is that rightE5

5Des, ; inbaba,5 \$ose#h ans! ered. In the absen e of I asim)li
*ussein, ! ho ! as en+oying a si' (month holiday in his home village
! ith most of his family, \$ose#h ! as the head man of the slum. 2he
man ! ho"d been beaten and dis i#lined by his neighbours for the
brutal, drun, en atta , on his ! ife had be ome a leader. In the
years sin e that day of the beat(891
ing, \$ose#h had given u# drin, ing, regained his ! ife"s love, and
earned the res#e t of his neighbours. *e"d +oined every im#ortant
oun il or ommittee, and ! or, ed harder than any other in the
grou#. Su h ! as the e' tent of his reform and his sober dedi ation
to the ! ell(being of his family and his ommunity that, ! hen
I asim)li nominated \$ose#h as his tem#orary re#la ement, no other
name ! as tendered for onsideration. 52here is a tru , #ar, ed
near to the - ariman >oint. 2he driver says that he ! ill ta, e the
<ano and arry him out of the muni i#ality, out of the state,

also. *e ! ill #ut him and the bear(! allahs ba , in their native #la e, ba , in A.>., all the ! ay ba , to Gora, h#ur side, near to the -e#al. Out that tru , driver, he is afraid to ome near this #la e to olle t the <ano. *e ! ants that ! e ta, e that bear to _him only. Out ho! to do it, ;inbabaE *o! to get su h a big bears to that #la eE Sure thing a #oli e #atrol ! ill see <ano and ma, e an arrest of him.)nd they ! ill be arresting us, also, for the hel# of es a#ing bears.)nd thenE 7hat thenE *o! to do it, ;inbabaE 2hat is the #roblem. 2hat is ! hy ! e ! ere thin,ing about the disguises.5

5<ano(! alleh , ahan heyE5 I as, ed. 7here are <ano"s handlersE

5*ere, babaB5 \$eetendra re#lied, #ushing the t! o bear(handlers for! ard.

2hey"d ! ashed themselves lean of the brilliant blue dye that usually overed their bodies, and they"d stri##ed a! ay all of their silver ornaments. 2heir long dreadlo ,s and de orated #laits ! ere on ealed beneath turbans, and they ! ore #lain ! hite shirts and trousers. Anadorned and de olourised, the blue men seemed s#iritless, and mu h smaller and slighter than the fantasti beings l"d first en ounterred in the slum.

52ell me, ! ill <ano sit on a #latformE5

5Des, babaB5 they said ! ith #ride.

59or ho! long ! ill he sit stilleE5

59or an hour, if ! e are ! ith him, near him, tal,ing to him. 4aybe more than one hour, baba((unless he needs to ma, e a ! ee.)nd if

so, he is al! ays telling first.5

5@, ay. 7ill he sit on a small, moving #latform((one on ! heels((if ! e #ush itE5 I as, ed them.

2here ! as some dis ussion ! hile I tried to e' #lain ! hat , ind of #latform or table I had in mind: one mounted on ! heels for arrying fruit, vegetables, and other goods around the slum and dis#laying them for 89F sale. 7hen it ! as lear, and su h a ha! , er"s art ! as found and ! heeled into the learing, the bear(handlers ! aggled their heads e' itedly that yes, yes, yes, <ano ! ould sit on su h a moving table. 2hey added that it ! as #ossible to steady him on the table by using ro#es, and that he ! ouldn't find that se ure fastening ob+e tionable if they first e' #lained its ne essity to him. Out ! hat, they ! anted to , no! , did I have in mindE

5@n my ! ay in ! ith \$ohnny +ust no! , I #assed old Ra, eshbaba"s ! or, sho#,5 I e' #lained =ui ,ly. 52he lam#s ! ere lit, and I sa! a lot of #ie es from his Ganesh s ul#tures. Some of them are #retty big. 2hey"re made from #a#ier(ma he, so they"re not very heavy, and they"re all hollo! inside. 2hey"re big enough, I thin, , to fit right over the to# of <ano"s head, and to over his body if he"s sitting do! n. 7ith a bit of sil, for trimming, and a fe! garlands of flo! ers for de oration ...5

5So ... you thin, ...5 \$eetendra stammered.

57e should disguise <ano as Ganesh,5 \$ohnny 8igar on luded, 5and #ush him on the trolley, li, e a Gan#atti devotion, all the ! ay to -ariman >oint, right do! n the middle of the street. It"s a great idea, ; inB5

5Out Ganesh 8haturthi finished last ! ee, ,5 \$ose#h said, referring to the annual festival ! here hundreds of Ganesh figures((some small enough to hold in the hand, and others to! ering ten metres tall((! ere #ushed through the ity to 8ho! #atty Oea h and then hurled into the sea amid a ro! d of lose to a million #eo#le. 5I myself ! as in the mela at 8ho! #atty. 2he time for it has finished, ; inbaba.5

5I , no! . I ! as there, too. 2hat"s ! hat gave me the idea. I don't

thin, it'll matter that the festival is over. I ! ouldn't thin,
t! i e if I sa! a Gan#atti at any time of the year. 7ould any of
you as, =uestions if you sa! a Ganesha, on a trolley, being
! heeled do! n the streetE5

Ganesh, the ele#hant(headed God, ! as arguably the most #o#ular in
all the *indu #antheon, and I ! as sure no(one ! ould thin, to sto#
and sear h a little #ro ession featuring a large s ul#ture of his
form on a moving trolley.

5l thin, he is right,5 \$eetendra agreed. 5-obody ! ill say
anything about a Ganesha.)fter all, ;ord Ganesha is the ;ord of

@bsta les, naE5

2he ele#hant(headed god ! as , no! n as the ;ord of @bsta les and
the Great Solver of >roblems. >eo#le in trouble a##ealed to him
! ith #rayers in mu h the same ! ay that some 8hristians a##ealed
to their #atron saints. *e ! as also the divine ministrant of
! riters. 89G

5lt ! ill be not a #roblem to #ush a Ganesha to -ariman >oint,5
\$ose#h"s ! ife, 4aria, #ointed out. 5Out ho! to #ut that <ano bear
into the disguise((that is a #roblem. \$ust #utting him in the
dress ! as a very diffi ult +ob.5

5*e did not li, e the dress,5 one of the bear(handlers de lared
reasonably. 5*e is a man bear, you , no! , and sensitive about su h
things.5

5Out he ! ill not mind the Ganesha disguise,5 his friend added. 5l
, no! he ! ill thin, it is very good fun. *e is very greedy for
attention, I have to say. 2hat is one of his t! o bad habits:
that, and flirtations ! ith girls.5

7e ! ere s#ea, ing in *indi, and the last e' hange ! as too s! ift
for me to follo! .

What did he say I asked Johnny. What! as a man's bad habit

flirtations, Johnny replied. With girls.

flirtations. What the hell do they mean

Well, I'm not exactly sure, but I think,

— oh, don't interrupt him, discussing the question. Please ... don't tell me what it means.

I looked around me at the press of people tantamount to a moment I felt a thrill of wonder and envy that the little community of neighbours and friends worried so much about the problems of the itinerant bear handlers (and the bear, of course). That unequivocal involvement, one with another, and its unquestioning support (stronger and more urgent than even the cooperation I'd seen in Oraba, her village) as something I'd lost when I'd left the slum to live in the comfortable, richer world. I'd never really found it anywhere else, even within the high sierra of my mother's love. And because I, like them, once, in the sublime and retreat of those ragged huts, I never stopped wanting it and searching for it.

Well, I really can't think of another way, I sighed again. If I must cover him with rags or fruit or something and try to push him there, he'll move and make a noise. And if they see us, we'll get stopped. Out if we make him look like Ganesh, we can hunt

and sing and roared around him and make our own noise (as much noise as we can). And I don't think the gods would ever stop us. What do you think, Johnny

Listen, Johnny said, grinning happily in a reaction of the plan. Listen, it's a fine plan, and I say we give it a try.

Des, also _I li, e it,5 \$eetendra said, his eyes ! ide ! ith e' itement. 5Out, you , no! , ! e must better hurry((the tru , ! ill only ! ait for one or t! o hours more, I thin, I so.5 89H

2hey all nodded or ! agged their heads in agreement: Satish, \$eetendra"s son6 4aria6 9arou, h and Raghuram, the t! o friends ! ho"d fought and been tied at the an, le by I asim)li as a #unishment6 and)yub and Siddhartha, the t! o young men ! ho"d run the free lini sin e l"d left the slum. 9inally, \$ose#h smiled and gave his assent. 7ith <ano trundling along on all fours beside us, ! e made our ! ay through the dar, ening lanes to the large double(hut that ! as old Ra, eshbaba"s ! or, sho#.

2he elderly s ul#tor raised his gri1led bro! s ! hen ! e entered his hut, but affe ted to ignore us and ontinued ! ith the ! or, of sanding and #olishing a ne! ly moulded se tion of a fibreglass religious frie1e almost t! o metres in length. *e ! or, ed at a long table made from thi , builder"s #lan, s, lashed together and resting on t! o ar#enter"s trestles. 7ood and fibreglass shavings overed the table and lay in hi#s and ! horls, along ! ith rinds of #a#ier(ma he, at his bare feet. Se tions of the s ul#ted and moulded forms((heads and limbs and bodies ! ith gorgeously rounded bellies((rested on the floor of the hut amid a venerable #rofusion of #la=ues, reliefs, statues, and other #ie es.

*e too, some onvin ing. 2he artist ! as notoriously antan, erous and he assumed, at first, that ! e ! ere trying to mo , the gods, and him, ! ith a #ran, or a hoa' . In the end, three elements #ersuaded him to hel# us. 9irst ! as the bear(handlers" im#assioned a##eal to the #roblem(solving genius of Ganesha, the ;ord of @bsta les. 2he ele#hant(headed one ! as, as it turned out, old Ra, eshbaba"s #ersonal favourite from the abundant #lane of the divine. Se ond, \$ohnny"s subtle suggestion that #erha#s the tas, ! as beyond the reative s, ill of the old s ul#tor #roved a telling blo! . Ra, eshbaba shouted that he ould disguise the 2a+ 4ahal itself in a Ganesha s ul#ture, if he so desired, and the amouflage of a bear ! as a mere trifle to su h a gifted artist,

as the hole in the world, and he claimed him to be. Third, and perhaps the most influential, was none other than himself. Apparently growing impatient in the lane outside, the burly creature forced its way into the hut and then lay down on its back, beside Ra, eshbaba, with all four paws in the air. The grouchy sulitor was transformed immediately into a giggling, ailing child as he bent to scratch the creature's belly and lay with its gently chirping paws.

*e stood at last to shove all of us but the bear (handlers and the

bear from his door, shouting. The wooden cart was heeled inside, and the cry, "89?"
grey-haired artist drew his reed curtains across the entrance.

Worried but excited, he waited outside, sipping stories and blowing bubbles of news. The slum had survived the last monsoon with little real damage, Siddhartha told me, and no serious outbreaks of illness. Iqbal Husain, celebrating the birth of his fourth grandson, had taken his extended family to his birth village in Karnataka, a State. *e was well, and in good spirits, all of the voices confirmed. Setendra seemed to have recovered, inasmuch as such a thing is possible, from the death of his wife in the cholera epidemic. Although he'd vowed never to remarry, he'd married and prayed and laughed enough to cheer the soul bright within his eyes. *is son Satish, who'd been sullen and quarrelsome for a time after his mother's death, had at last overcome the aloofness of grieving, and was engaged to a girl he'd known since his earliest memory in the slum. The promised pair was still too young to marry, but their betrothal gave them both joy, and was a commitment to the future that gladdened Setendra's heart. And one by one, each in his own way, everyone in the group that night raised their heads, the redeemed one, the new leader who looked shyly and only raised his eyes to share his embarrassed smile with Maria, standing at his side.

At last, Ra, eshbaba pulled aside the reed curtains and beckoned

us to enter his ! or, sho#. 7e ro! ded together and ste##ed into the golden lam#light.) gas#, some of us breathing in and some #uffing out, rustled through our grou# as ! e loo, ed at the om#leted s ul#ture. <ano ! as not sim#ly disguised((he ! as transfigured into the form of the ele#hant(headed god.) huge head had been fitted over the bear"s head, and rested on a #in, , round(bellied body, ! ith arms atta hed. S! athes of light blue sil, surrounded the base of the figure ! here it rested on the trolley. Garlands of flo! ers ! ere hea#ed on the flat table and around the ne , of the god, on ealing the +oin for the head.

5ls it really in there, that <ano(bearE5 \$eetendra as, ed.

)t the sound of his voi e, the bear turned his head. 7hat ! e sa!

hurled their voices into devoutly passionate chants and responses, no less inspired, I was sure, than they'd been a while before on the real pilgrimage.

As I walked, it occurred to me that the slum had been strangely devoid of stray dogs. I noticed that there were none visible anywhere on the streets. Remembering how violently the dogs had reacted to my first visit to the slum, I felt moved to mention it to Johnny.

"Yes, I said. Gee, there's no dogs here.

Johnny, Arayan, Ali, and the few other men who'd heard the comment turned their faces to me quickly and stared, wide-eyed with amazement and worry. Sure enough, seconds later a shrill, whining howl broke out from the footpath to our left. A dog rushed out from its cover and launched itself at us, barking furiously. It was a small, thin, mangy cur of a thing, not much bigger than a fair-sized Bombay rat, yet the barking was loud enough to pierce the screen of sound in our chanting.

It took only seconds, of course, for more stray dogs to join in the howling affray. They came from left and right, single animals and groups of them, yelping and yowling and growling hideously. In an attempt to drown them out, we raised our chants to greater volume, all the while fixing our wary eyes on the snarling pack of the dogs.

As we approached the Oa, Oay area we passed an open maidan, or field, where a party of wedding musicians dressed in bright red and yellow uniforms, complete with tall, plumed hats, was rehearsing its songs. Seeing our little procession as an opportunity to raise their music on the march, they stepped in behind us and struck up a rousing, if not artistically anorous, version of a popular devotional song. In 1897 by the spectacle that our smuggling mission had become, hundreds of children and various adults left the footpaths and streamed toward us, joining in the thunderous chants and swelling our numbers to

more than a hundred souls.

Digitated, no doubt, by the wild throng and frenzied bargaining, [<]and the bear strolled from side to side on the cart, turning his head to follow the sea's of sound. [>]At one point I observed a group of strolling policemen, and I risked a glance to see them standing completely still, their mouths open and their heads turning as one, like a row of mouth(less) dummies at a carnival sideshow, as

I observed.

After too many long minutes of that brazen and roistering, I observed I was near enough to [>]approach to see the tower of the [@]beroi Hotel. Worried that I'd never rid ourselves of the wedding band, I ran back to press a bundle of notes into the hand of their bandmaster, with instructions that he should turn right, away from us, and march along Marine Drive. As I neared the sea, he led his men right when I moved left. Emboldened, perhaps, by their successful tour with our little parade, the musicians launched into a medley of dance hits as they marched away toward the brighter lights of the ocean drive. Most of the crowd [>]digged and danced with them. Even the dogs, lured too far beyond their roving domain, turned away from us and retreated into the mean shadows that had shadowed them.

We pushed the cart further along the sea road toward the deserted spot where the truck was parked. Just then I heard a car horn sounding, close by. My heart sinking at the thought that it was the police, I slowly turned to look. Instead, I saw Abdullah, Salman, Sanjay, and Farid standing beside Salman's car. They stood in a wide parking bay, surfaced with gravel stones, that was empty but for them.

Are you all right, Johnny? I asked. Can you take it from here?

Sure, [>]in, he replied. The truck is just there, ahead of us,

you see? I can do it.

"@, ay, I'll #eel off here, man. ; et me , no! ho! it all goes. I'll see you tomorrow! .)nd, hey, see if you can find me one of those ! anted #osters, brother!"

"- o #roblem," he laughed, as I ! al, ed a! ay.

I crossed the road to join Salman,)bdullah, and the others. They'd been eating ta, e(a! ay food bought at one of the - ariman aravans 898

#ar, ed near the sea ! all.)s I greeted them, 9arid s! e#t the rubble of ontainers and #a#er to! els from the roof of the ar onto the gravel #ar, s#a e. I felt the ! in e of guilt that litter(ons ious ! esterners invariably e' #erien e, and reminded myself that the mess on the road ! ould be olle ted by rag(#i ,ers ! ho de#ended on the litter for their livelihood.

"What the fu , ! ere you doing in that sho! E5 San+ay as, ed me ! hen the greetings ! ere made and re eived.

"It's a long story," I grinned.

"That's a damn s ary Gan#atti you got there," he said. "I never sa! anything li, e it. It loo, ed so real. It ! as li, e it ! as moving. I got =uite a religious feeling. I tell you, man, I'm

going to #ay a bahin hudh to light some in ense ! hen I get home."

"Come on, ; in," Salman #rodded. "What's it all about, yaar?"

"Well," I groaned, , no! ing that no e' #lanation ! ould seem sensible. "We had to smuggle a bear out of the slum, and get him u# to this s#ot, right here, be ause the o#s had a ! arrant out on him and ! anted to arrest him."

"Smuggle a ! hat?" "Arid as, ed #olitely.

5) bear.5

57hat ... , ind of a bearE5

5) dan ing bear, of course,5 I said stiffly.

5Dou , no! , ; in,5 San+ay #ronoun ed, grima ing ha##ily as he #i , ed his teeth lean ! ith a mat h, 5you do some very ! eird shit.5

5)re you tal, ing about my bearE5)bdullah as, ed, suddenly interested.

5Des, fu , you. It"s really all your fault, if you ! ant to go ba , far enough.5

57hy do you say it ! as your bearE5 Salman ! anted to , no! .

5Oe ause I arranged that bear,5)bdullah re#lied. 5I sent him to ; in brother, a long time ago.5

57hyE5

57ell, it ! as all about the hugging,5)bdullah began, laughing.

5Don"t start,5 I said through #ressed li#, ! arning him off the sub+e t ! ith my eyes.

57hat _is all this ! ith fu , in" bearsE5 San+ay as, ed. 5)re ! e still tal, ing about bearsE5

5@h, shit85 Salman ut in, loo, ing over San+ay"s shoulder.

59aisal is in a big hurry.)nd he"s got -a1eer ! ith him. 2his loo, s li, e trouble.5 899

)nother)mbassador gravelled to a sto# near us.)se ond ar follo! ed, only t! o se onds behind it. 9aisal and)mir lea#t from

the first car. -a1eer and)ndre! rushed for! ard from the se ond. I sa! that another man got out of 9aisal"s car and ! aited there, ! at hing the a##roa h road. I re ognised the fine features of my friend 4ahmoud 4elbaaf. @ne more man, a heavy(set gangster named Ra+, ! aited ! ith the boy 2ari= in the se ond car.

52hey"re here! 9aisal announ ed breathlessly ! hen he +oined us. 52hey"re su##osed to ome tomorro! , I , no! , but they"re already here. 2hey +ust +oined u# ! ith 8huha and his guys.5

5)IreadyE *o! manyE5 Salman as, ed.

5\$ust them,5 9aisal re#lied. 5If ! e move no! , ! e get all of them. 2he rest of the gang is at a ! edding in 2hana. It"s li, e a sign from heaven or something. It"s the best han e ! e"ll ever have. Out ! e"ve got to be damn =ui , B5

5I an"t believe it,5 Salman muttered, as if to himself.

4y stoma h dro##ed and then set hard. I , ne! e' a tly ! hat they ! ere tal,ing about, and ! hat it meant for us. 2here"d been re#orts and rumours for days that 8huha and his gang ! ithin the 7alidlalla oun il had made onta t ! ith the Sa#na survivor and t! o of his family members, a brother and a brother(in(la! . 2hey ! ere #lanning a stri, e against our grou#. 2he border ! ar for ne! gang territory had flared, #itting 8huha"s mafia oun il against ours, and 8huha ! as hungry.

2he Sa#na(Iran onne tion, all survivors from)bdul Ghani"s trea herous attem#ted ou#, had learned of the hostility bet! een the oun ils, and had a##eared at +ust the right moment to a#italise on 8huha"s greed and ambition. 2hey"d #romised to bring ! ea#ons((ne! guns((and lu rative onta ts in the >a,istani heroin trade. 2hey ! ere renegades: the Sa#na ,illers ! ere ! or,ing ! ithout)bdul Ghani, and the Iranians had no offi ial su##ort from the Sava, . It ! as hatred that had brought them together.

They wanted revenge for the deaths of their friends, and their hate had combined with Shuha's to put murder in their minds.

The situation had been so tense, for so long, that Salman had infiltrated the Shuha gang with his own man, little Tony, a gangster from Goa who was un, no in Bombay. He'd provided information from the inside. They were his reports that had alerted Salman to the Saana (Iran connection and the imminent attack. With Aisal's confirmation of their 90% arrival at Shuha's house, he all, ne there as only one option Salman would consider. Right. Aa, e! ar. Put an end to the Saana, killers and the Iranian spies, one and for all. Finish Shuha. Absorb his territory. Seal his operations.

You, man, *o! lu, y an! e get E5 Saana! hooded, his eyes glittering in the grey (white streetlight.

Are you sure E5 Salman as, ed, finishing his friend Mir, an older man, with his sternest frown.

I'm sure, Salman, Mir dragged, running his hand over the short, grey hair on his blunt head. He tilted the ends of his thin, moustache with the same hand as he shook, e. I saw them myself. Abdullah's guys, from Iran, they came half an hour ago.

The Saana fools, you, no!, they've been there all day. They came in the morning. Little Tony, he told us as soon as he could. We've been waiting for them for two hours at Shuha's place. The last time he talked to me, little Tony said they were all getting together (Shuha and his closest guys, the Saanas, and the guys from Iran. They were waiting for the Iran guys to get here and then they want to hit us. Soon. Maybe tomorrow night. The day after tomorrow, at the latest. Shuha sent word for a lot more guys. They're coming from Delhi and Allahabada. They're pouring out some kind of a plan! Here they hit us at about ten places at once, like, to stop us from coming back at them. I told Tony to go back, and to let us, no! When the Iran guys got there. We were

! at hing the #la e, li, e usual. 2hen ! e sa! them ! al, in, a day early li, e, but ! e ! ere #retty sure. -ot long after, ;ittle 2ony ame out and lit a igarette. 2hat ! as the signal. 2hey"re the ones((the ones ! ho are after)bdullah. -o! they"re all in there together, and ! e"re only t! o minutes a! ay. I ,no! it"s early, but ! e have to go. 7e have to do it no! , Salman, in the ne' t five minutes.5

5*o! many, all togetherE5 Salman demanded.

58huha and his buddies,5)mir ans! ered in his la1y dra! I. I thin, the slo! , softly slurring style of the man gave everyone there ne! heart: he ! asn"t, or didn"t seem to be, any! here near as nervous as the rest of us. 52hat ma, es si' . @ne of them, 4anu, is a good man. Dou ,no! him. *e #ut the *arshan brothers do! n, all three of them, on his o! n. *is ousin Oi h hu is also a good fighter((they don"t all him the S or#ion for nothing. 2he rest of them, in luding 8huha, that mada hudh, are not mu h. 2hen there"s the Sa#nas. 2hat ma, es three more.)nd from Iran, t! o 9%1 more. 2hat"s eleven. 4aybe one or t! o more, at the most. *ussein is ! at hing the #la e. *e"ll tell us if any more arrived.5

5/leven,5 Salman murmured, avoiding the eyes of the men ! hile he onsidered the situation. 5)nd ! e are ... eleven((t! elve, ounting ;ittle 2ony. Out ! e have to lose t! o, on the street outside 8huha"s house((one on ea h side, to slo! u# the o#s if they ome s reaming on us ! hile ! e"re inside. I"ll ma, e a all before ! e go in, to ,ee# the o#s a! ay, but ! e need to be sure. 8huha might have more guys oming, as ! ell, so ! e need at least t! o on the outside. I don"t mind fighting my ! ay in there, but I don"t ! ant to fight my ! ay out again if I don"t have to. *ussein is already there. 9aisal, you"re the number t! o on the street outside, o, ayE -obody goes in, or out, but us.5

5-o #roblem,5 the young fighter agreed.

58he , the guns, no! , ! ith Ra+. Get them ready.5

"I'm on it," he said, collecting guns from a shelf of the men and then jogging over to the cars, where Ra+ and 4ahmoud waited.

"And that's all we have to go back to," <hader's house with Zari=,"

Salman continued.

"It's as -a1eer's idea to bring him with us," <ndre! #ut in. "We didn't want to leave him behind there when 9aisal and)mir came to give us the news. I told him not to bring the ,id, but you , no! ho! -a1eer is ! hen he gets an idea in his head."

"-a1eer can take the boy to Sobhan 4ahmoud's house in &ersova, and I'll take care of him," Salman declared. "And you'll go with him."

"@h, come on, man!" <ndre! om#lained. "Why do I have to do that? Why do I have to miss all the action?"

"I need that men to take care of old Sobhan and the boy. /s#e ially the boy((-a1eer ! as right not to leave him. Zari= is a target.)s long as he's alive, the town is still <hader's town. If they ,ill him, 8huha ! ill take a lot of #o! er from it. The same goes for old Sobhan. Take the boy out of the city, and ,ee# him and Sobhan 4ahmoud safe."

"Out ! hy do I have to miss the action, man? Why does it have to be me? Send someone else, Salman. ;et me go ! ith you to 8huha's."

"Are you going to argue ! ith me?" Salman said, his lip #urling ! ith anger.

"-o, man," <ndre! snarled #etulantly. "I'll do it. I'll take the ,id."

"That leaves eight of us," Salman concluded. "San+ay and me,)bdullah 9%F and)mir, Ra+ and little Zony, 9arid and 4ahmoud((5

5-ine,5 I ut in. 52here"s nine of us.5

5Dou should ta, e off, ; in,5 Salman said =uietly, raising his eyes to meet mine. 5I ! as +ust no! going to as, you to ta, e a ab and #ass the ! ord to Ra+ubhai, and the boys at your #ass#ort sho#.5

5I"m not leaving)bdullah,5 I said flatly.

54aybe you an go ba , ! ith -a1eer,5)mir, ! ho ! as)ndre! "s lose friend, suggested.

5I left)bdullah on e,5 I de lared. 5I"m not doing it again. It"s li, e fate or something. I"ve got a feeling, Salman. I"ve got a feeling not to leave)bdullah. I"m in it. I"m not leaving 4ahmoud 4elbaaf, either. I"m ! ith them. I"m ! ith you.5

Salman held the stare, fro! ning #ensively. It o urred to me, stu#idly, that his slightly roo, ed fa e((one eye a little lo! er than the other, his nose bent from a bad brea, , his mouth s arred in the orner((found a handsome symmetry only then, ! hen the burden of his thoughts reased his features into a determined

fro! n.

5@, ay.5 he agreed, at last.

57hat the fu , B5)ndre! e' #loded. 5*e gets to go, but I do the baby(sitting +obE5

5Settle do! n,)ndre! ,5 9arid said soothingly.

5-o, fu , himB I"m si , of this fu , in" gora, man. So <hader li, ed him, so he ! ent to)fghanistan, so fu , in" ! hatE <hader"s dead, yaar. <hader"s day is gone.5

5Rela' , man,5)mir #ut in.

That relationship, <hader, and fu, his gora, too

Dou should shut your mouth, I muttered through clenched teeth.

I should have said, ed, thrusting his face forward aggressively.
Well, fu, your sister's my mouth no! Dou lie that

I don't have a sister, I said evenly in Hindi. They both men
laughed.

Well, maybe I'll go fu, your mother, he snarled, and maybe you
a nice sister

That's good enough, I growled, shaking up to fight him. Get
them Get your fu, in" hands ; et's go

It would've been messy. I wasn't a good fighter, but I knew the
moves. I could hit hard. And if I got into real trouble in those
years, I wasn't afraid to put the end of a rifle into another
man's body. Andre! was a capable.
With a gun in his hand, he was deadly. As Jim moved around
to support him, directly behind his right shoulder, Abdullah too,
in a similar position beside me. The fight would be over a battle. We
all knew it. Out the young Goan didn't raise his hands, and as
one second became five, and ten, and fifteen, it seemed that he
wasn't as killing with his fists as he was with his mouth.

– a beer bro, the stand (off. pushing between us, he seized Andre!
by the wrist and a scruff of shirt sleeve. I knew that grip well.
I knew that Andre! had to kill the burly Afghan if he wanted to
break it. – a beer caused only long enough to give me a
beilderingly riotous, , #art ensure and #art #ride, #art
anger and #art red-eyed affection, before he shoved the young
Goan backwards through the grille of men. At the car, he pushed
Andre! into the driver's seat and then limbed into the back, with
Zari=. Andre! started the car and shed a spray, sitting gravel and
dust as he wheeled around and headed back toward Marine Drive.)

the ar s! e#t #ast me I sa! 2ari="s fa e at the ! indo! . It ! as #ale, ! ith only the eyes, li, e ! ild #a! #rints in sno! , betraying

any hint of the mind or the mood ! ithin.

5_4ai _+ata _hu,5 I re#eated ! hen the ar had #assed. I'm going. /everyone laughed. I ! asn't sure if it ! as at the vehemen e of my tone or the blunt sim#li ity of the *indi #hrase.

5I thin, ! e got that, ; in,5 Salman said. 5I thin, that"s very lear, naE @, ay, I"ll #ut you ! ith)bdullah, out the ba , . 2here"s a lane behind 8huha"s house(()bdullah, you , no! it. It has t! o feeds from other lanes, one into the main street, and one around the orner to other houses in the blo , .)t the ba , of 8huha"s house there"s a yard. I"ve seen it. 2here are t! o ! indo! s, both ! ith heavy bars, and only one door to the house. It"s do! n t! o ste#s. Dou t! o hold that #la e. -obody goes in ! hen ! e start. If ! e do right, some of them ! ill try to ma, e a run for it out there. Don"t let them get #ast you. Sto# them right there, in the yard. 2he rest of us ! ill go in through the front. 7hat about the guns, 9aisalE5

5Seven,5 he ans! ered. 52! o short shotgun, t! o automati , three revolver.5

5Give me one of the automati s,5 Salman ordered. 5)bdullah, you ta, e the other one. Dou"ll have to share it, ; in. 2he shotguns are no good inside((it"s gonna get very lose in there, and ! e ! ant to be real sure ! hat ! e"re shooting at. I ! ant them on the street outside, for ma' imum 9%H

overage if ! e need it. 9aisal, you ta, e the shotguns, and give one to *ussein. 7hen ! e"re finished, ! e"ll go out the ba , ! ay, #ast)bdullah and ; in. 7e ! on"t go out the front, so #ut holes in anything that tries to go in or out on e ! e"re in there. 2he three other guns are for 9arid,)mir, and 4ahmoud. Ra+, you"ll have to share ! ith us. @, ayE5

The men nodded, and I nodded their heads in agreement.

Listen, if I want, I can get thirty more men and thirty guns to go in with us. Don't say that. Out there might miss them. It is, I've already talked for ten minutes too long. If I hit them now, I will, and hard, before they know it, I can take them out, and none of them will get away. I want to finish them, and finish this business, right now, tonight. Out I want to leave it up to you. I don't want to make you go in if you don't feel ready. Do you want to wait for more men, or go now? E5

One by one the men showed, usually, most of them using the one word, *bi*, meaning no. Salman nodded, then closed his eyes and muttered a prayer in *Arabi*. When he looked up again, he was committed, fully committed for the first time. His eyes were blazing with hatred and the fearsome, killing rage he'd set at bay.

Saat h ... aur himmat, he said, looking each man in the eye. Ruth ... and courage.

Saat h aur himmat, they replied.

Without another word, the men claimed their guns, limbed into the trenches, and drove the few short minutes to Shuha's home on fashionable Sardar Patel Road. Before I could order my thoughts and even consider, clearly, what I was doing, I found myself creeping along a narrow lane with Abdullah in a darkness deep enough for me to feel the widening of my straining eyes. Then I limbed over a sheer wooden fence and dropped down into the backyard of the enemy's house.

We stood together in the dark, for a few moments, hearing the luminous dials on our watches, and listening hard as I let our eyes adjust. Abdullah whispered beside me, and I almost jumped at the sound.

5- othing,5 he breathed, his voi e li, e the rustle of a ! oollen
blan, et. 52here"s no(one here, no(one near.5

5; oo, s o, ay,5 I ans! ered, a! are that my ! his#ering voi e ! as
ras#y ! ith hard(breathing fear. 2here ! ere no lights at the
! indo! s or behind the blue door at the rear of the house.

57 ell, I , e#t my #romise,5) bdullah ! his#ered mysteriously. 9%?

57 hatE5

5Dou made me #romise to ta, e you ! ith me, ! hen I , ill 8huha.
RememberE5

5Deah,5 I ans! ered, my heart beating faster than a healthy heart
should. 5Dou gotta be areful, I guess.5

5I ! ill be areful, ; in brother.5

5- o((I mean, you gotta be areful ! hat you ! ish for in life, naE5

5I ! ill try to o#en that door,5) bdullah breathed, lose to my
ear. 5If it ! ill o#en, I ! ill go inside.5

57 hatE5

5Dou ! ait here, and stay near the door.5

57 hatE5

5Dou ! ait here, and((5

57 e"re both su##osed to stay hereB5 I hissed.

5I , no! ,5 he re#lied, ree#ing ! ith leo#ard stealth to! ard the
door.

In my lumsier ! ay, loo, ing more li, e a at ! a, ing stiffly from a

long sleeves, I retreated after him.)s I reached the threshold inside leading door to the blue door, I saw him open it and slip inside the house like a shadow thrown by a swooping bird. *e pushed the door shut soundlessly behind him.

Alone, in the darkness, I too, my knife from the sheath in the small of my back, and enclosed the hilt in my right fist, daggerpoint down. Staring out into the darkness, I put all of my focus on the beating of my heart, trying by force of will to slow its too-rapid pace. It slowed, after a time. I felt the count reducing, calming me further in turn as the meditative loop closed around a single, still thought. That thought was of <haderbhai, and the formula he'd made me repeat so often: That's the right thing, for the right reasons.)nd I, nevertheless, as I repeated the words in the fearful darkness, that the fight with Shuha, the war, the struggle for honor, was always the same, everywhere, and it was always wrong.

Salman and the others, no less than Shuha and the Sanna, killers and all the rest of them, were pretending that their little kingdoms made them kings, that their honor struggles made them honorable.)nd they didn't. They couldn't. I saw that then so clearly that it was like understanding a mathematical theorem for the first time. The only kingdom that makes any man a king is the kingdom of his own soul. The only honor that has any real meaning is the honor to better the world.)nd only men like Asim Ali Hussein and Johnny Shigar were such kings and had such honor.

Annerved and afraid, I pressed my ear to the door and strained to hear anything of Abdullah or the others within. The fear that throbbed in me wasn't the fear of death. I wasn't afraid to die. I was afraid of being so injured or wounded that I couldn't walk, or couldn't see or, for some other reason, couldn't run from a future.)bove all things I was afraid of that (of being a-tured and aged again.)s I pressed my ear to the door, I prayed that no wound would reach me. ;et it happen here, I prayed. ;et me

get through this, or let me die here ...

I don't , no! ! here they came from. I felt the hands on me before I heard a single sound. 2! o men slammed me round and hard u# against the door. Instin tively, I stru , out ! ith my right hand.

58ha, uB 8ha, uB5 one of the men shouted. <nifeB <nifeB

I ouldn't s! ing the , nife u# =ui , ly enough to sto# them. @ne man #inned me to the door by the throat. *e ! as a big man, and very strong. 2he other man used t! o hands, trying to for e me to dro# the , nife. *e ! as n't =uite so strong, and he ouldn't ma, e me dro# the ! ea#on. 2hen a third man ho##ed do! n the ste#s from the dar, ness, and ! ith those e' tra hands they t! isted my gri# and for ed me to dro# the , nife.

5Gora , aun haiE5 the ne! man as, ed. 7ho"s the ! hite guyE

50ahin hudhB 4alum nahi,5 the strong man re#lied. 2he sisterfu , erB I don't , no! .

*e stared at me, obviously be! ilderred to have stumbled on a foreigner ! ho ! as listening at the door and armed ! ith a , nife.

5<aun hai tumE5 he as, ed in an almost friendly tone. 7ho are youE

I didn't re#ly.)ll I ould thin, ! as that I had to ! arn)bdullah someho! . I ouldn't understand ho! they'd rea hed that s#ot ! ithout ma, ing a sound. 2he ba , gate must've s! ung silently on its hinges. 2heir shoes or ha##als must've been soled ! ith soft rubber. 7hatever. I'd let them snea, u# on me, and I had to ! arn)bdullah.

I suddenly struggled as if I ! as trying to brea, free. 2he feint had its effe t. 2he men all shouted at me, and three #airs of hands slammed me against the blue door. @ne of the smaller men

s rambled to my left side, #inning my left arm to the door. 2he other short man held my right arm. In the ! restle, I managed to , i , my boots hard against the door three times.)bdullah must've heard it, I thought. It's o, ay ... I've ! arned him ... 9%7 *e must , no! something"s ! rong ...

5<aun hai tumE5 the big man as, ed again. *e too, one hand from my throat, and bun hed it into a fist #oised mena ingly lose to my head, +ust belo! the line of sight of my eyes. 7ho are youE

)gain I refused to ans! er, staring at him. 2heir hands, as hard as sha , les, held me to the door.

*e slammed his fist into my fa e. I managed to move my head, +ust slightly, but I felt the blo! on my +a! and hee, . *e had rings on his fingers, or he ! as using a , nu , leduster. I ouldn't see it, but I ould feel the hard metal hi##ing bone.

57hat you are doing hereE5 he as, ed in /nglish. 57ho you areE5

I , e#t silent, and he stru , me again, the fist ramming into my fa e three times. _I , no! this ... I thought. _I , no! this ... I ! as ba , in #rison, in)ustralia, in the #unishment unit((the fists and boots and batons ... I , no! this ...

*e #aused, ! aiting for me to s#ea, . 2he t! o smaller men grinned at him, then at me.)ur, one of them said. 4ore. *it him again. 2he big man dre! ba , and #un hed at my body. 2hey ! ere slo! , deliberate, #rofessional #un hes. I felt the ! ind em#ty from my body, and it ! as as if my life itself ! as draining from me. *e moved u# the body to my hest and throat and fa e. I felt myself ! ading into that bla , ! ater ! here beaten bo' ers stagger and fall. I ! as done. I ! as finished.

I ! asn't angry ! ith them. I'd fu , ed u#. I'd let them snea, u# on me((! al, u# on me, #robably. I'd gone there to fight, and I

should've been on guard. It was as my fault. Somehow, I'd missed them, and messed up, and it was as my own fault.)ll I wanted to do was earn)bdullah. I , i , ed ba , feebly at the door, hoping he would hear it and get a! ay, get a! ay, get a! ay ...

I fell through the door, and the weight of all the world fell with me. When I hit the floor I heard shouts, and I realised that)bdullah had opened the door, letting us fall into him. In the darkness, bloody-eyed and swollen, I heard a gun firing twice, and saw the flashes. Then light filled the world, and I blin, ed into the glare as another door opened somewhere, and I saw men rushing in on us. The gun fired again twice, three times, and I rolled out from under the big man to see my wife, lose to my eyes, shining on the ground near the open blue door.

I grabbed for the wife just as one of the smaller men tried to

run over me and out the door. Without thinking, I saw it barrel into his hip. He screamed, and I scrambled to him, slashing the wife across his face near the eyes.

It's amazing how a little of the other guy's blood, or a lot of it, if you can manage it, puts power in your arms and pumps adrenaline in your aching wounds. Wild with rage, I swung round to see)bdullah locked in a struggle with two men. There were bodies on the floor of the room. I couldn't tell how many. Gunshots rained and drummed from all around and above us in the other rooms of the building. They seemed to come from several places in the house at the same time. There were shouts and screams. I could smell shit and piss and blood in the room. Someone had a gut wound. I hoped that it wasn't me. My left hand slapped at my belly and seared, frying myself for wounds.

)bdullah was swinging it out with the two men. They were wrestling, gouging, biting. I began to run toward them, but I felt a hand on my leg pulling me backward. It was a strong hand.) very strong hand. It was the big guy.

*e'd been shot, I ! as sure, but I ouldn't see any blood on his shirt or his #ants. *e dragged me in as if I ! as a turtle caught in a net. 7hen I rea hed him, I raised the , nife to stab him, but he beat me to it. *e slammed his fist into the right side of my groin. *e'd missed the , illing blo! , a dire t hit, but it ! as still enough to ma, e me url and roll over in agonising #ain. I felt him lur h #ast me, a tually using my body for leverage as he #ushed himself to his feet. I rolled ba , , ret hing bile, to see him stand and ta, e a ste# to! ard)bdullah.

I ouldn't let it ha##en. 2oo many times, my heart had ! ittered on the thought of)bdullah's death: alone, in a ir le of guns. I thrashed against the #ain, and in a s rabble of bloody, sli##ing movements I s#rang u# and #lunged my , nife into the big guy's ba , . It ! as high, ust under the s a#ula. I felt the bone shiver under the blade, diverting the #oint side! ays to! ard the

shoulder. *e ! as strong. *e too, t! o more ste#s, dragging my body ! ith him on the hoo, of the , nife, before he rum#led and fell. I fell on to# of him, loo, ing u# to see)bdullah. *e had his fingers in a man's eyes. 2he man's head ! as bent ba , ! ards against)bdullah's , nee. 2he man's +a! gave ! ay, and his ne , ra , ed li, e a #ie e of , indling.

*ands #ulled at me, dragging me to! ard the ba , door. I stru , out, but strong, gentle hands t! isted the , nife from my fingers. 2hen I heard 9%9 the voi e, 4ahmoud 4elbaaf's voi e, and I , ne! ! e ! ere safe.

58ome on, ; in,5 the Iranian said, =ui , ly and too =uietly, it seemed, for the bloody violen e that had ust roared around us.

5I need a gun,5 I mumbled.

5- o, ; in. It is over.5

5)bdullahE5 I as, ed, as 4ahmoud dragged me into the yard.

5*e"s ! or, ing,5 he re#lied. I heard the s reams inside the house
ending, one by one, li, e birds falling silent as night moves
a ross the stillness of a la, e. 58an you standE 8an you ! al, E 7e
must leave no! B5

59u , , yesB I an ma, e it.5

)sit.0X o

! indo! s. Slo! ly, desolately, the fist of ! hat ! e"d done
un len hed the la! ed #alm of ! hat ! e"d be ome.)nger softened
into sorro! , as it all! ays does, as it all! ays must.)nd no #art of
! hat ! e"d ! anted, +ust an hour"s life before, ! as as ri h in ho#e
or meaning as a single teardro#"s fall.

57hatE5 4ahmoud as, ed, his fa e lose to mine. 57hat did you
sayE5 91%

5l ho#e that bear got a! ay,5 I mumbled through bro, en, bleeding
li#s as the stri , en s#irit began to rise from my ! ounded body,
and slee#, li, e fog in morning forests, moved through my
sorro! ing mind. 5l ho#e that bear got a! ay.5

(((((((((((

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Sunlight shattered on the water, shedding streams in crystal(brilliant slivers across waves rolling swollen on the broad meniscus of the bay. Birds of fire in the air roared as the sunset wheeled and turned as one in their flocks, like banners of waving silk. From a lighthouse on the white marble island of *a+) li 4os=ue, I had gathered pilgrims and various local residents to end and leave, leaving the shrine for the shore along the flat stone path. When the incoming tide would submerge the path, they, nevertheless, and then only boats would bring them home. Those who had sorrowed or repented, like others on previous days, had fast garlands of flowers upon the shallow, receding sea. Riding the returning tide, those orange (red and faded grey) white flowers floated back, garlanding the path itself with the love, loss, and longing that was prayed upon the water by a thousand broken hearts each day (determined day.

And I, that band of brothers, had come to the shrine to pray our last respects, as they say, and pray for the soul of our friend Salman Ahsaan. It was the first time since the night he'd been killed that we'd gathered as a group. For weeks after the battle with Shuha and his gang we'd separated, to hide and to heal our wounds. There'd been an outcry in the press, of course. The words carnage and massacre were spread across the pages of the Bombay dailies like butter on a prison guard's sugared bun. Galls had rung out for justice, undefined, and punishment, unremitting. And there was no doubt that the Bombay police would've made arrests. They certainly, nevertheless, his gang was responsible for the little heaps of bodies they'd found in Shuha's house. Out there were four good reasons not to act: reasons that were more compelling, for the city's sake, than the unrighteous indignation of the press.

First, there was no one from inside the house, on the streets

outside, or anywhere else in Bombay who was willing to testify

against us, even off 91F

the record. Second, the battle had put an end to the Saana
killers, which as something they would've been very glad to
take care of personally. Third, the Talidalla gang under Shuha's
leadership had killed a Somali man, months before, when he'd
stumbled into one of their major drug deals near Jora Mountain.
The case had remained unsolved, officially, because they had
nothing they could take into court. Out they'd, no, almost from
the day it had happened, that Shuha's men had spilled the blood.
The bloodshed in Shuha's house was very close to what they
themselves had wanted to do to the Rat and his men (and would've
accomplished, sooner or later, if Salman hadn't beaten them to
it.) And fourth, the payment of a crore of rupees, appropriated
from Shuha's operations and applied in liberal smears to a small
multitude of forensic exams, had put a hellish shrug in all the
right constabulary shoulders.

privately, they told Sanjay, who as the new leader of the
Chander Chander group, that they were looking on him, and he'd
used up all his chances on that one throw of the die. They
wanted to see (and continued to see, of course (and, if he
didn't pull his men into line, they would do it for him.) And by
the way, they told him after a seeing his ten million rupee
bribe, and just before they threw him back onto the street, that
guy Abdullah, in your outfit, we don't want to see him again.
/ver. *we are dead on one, in Bombay. *we'll be dead again, for good
this time, if we see him ...

One by one, after a series of lying looks, we'd made our way back into
the city and back to the jobs we'd done in the Sanjay gang, as it
had become, no. I returned from hiding in Goa and too, up my
position in the assault operation with Willu and Krishna. Then
they all finally went out for us to gather at *ai li, I rode to
the shrine on my field bike, and along with Abdullah and
Ahmoud Elbaaf across the rising waves of the bay.

Ahmoud led the prayers, kneeling at the front of our group. The
little balcony, one of many surrounding the island mosque, was

ours alone. 9a ing to! ard 4e a, and ! ith the bree1e filling and then falling from his ! hite shirt, 4ahmoud s#o, e for all the men ! ho , nelt or stood behind him:

>raise be to God, ; ord of the Aniverse,

2he 8om#assionate, the 4er iful,

Sovereign of the Day of \$udgementB 91G

Dou alone ! e ! orshi#, and to Dou alone ! e turn for hel#.

Guide us to the straight #ath ...

9arid,)bdullah,)mir, 9aisal, and -a1eer((the 4uslim ore of the oun il((, nelt behind 4ahmoud. San+ay ! as a *indu.)ndre! ! as a 8hristian. 2hey , nelt beside me and behind the #raying grou#. I stood ! ith my head bo! ed and my hands las#ed in front of me. I , ne! the ! ords of the #rayers and I , ne! the sim#le standing, , neeling, and bo! ing observations. I ould've +oined in. I , ne! that 4ahmoud and the others ! ould've been delighted if I had. Out I ouldn't bring myself to , neel ! ith them. 2he se#aration that they found so easy and instin tual((this is my riminal life, over here, and that's my religious life, over there((! as im#ossible for me. I did s#ea, to Salman, ! his#ering my ho#e that he'd found #ea e, ! herever he ! as. Det I ! as too self(ons iously a! are of the dar, ness in my heart to offer more than that tiny #rayer. So I stood in silen e, feeling li, e an im#ostor, a s#y on that island of devotions, as the amethyst evening blessed the bal ony of #raying men ! ith gold(and(lila light.)nd the ! ords of 4ahmoud's #rayer seemed a #erfe t fit for my ! ithered honour and my thinning #ride: those ! ho have in urred your ! rath ... those ! ho have gone astray ...

)t the end of #ayers ! e hugged one another, a ording to ustom, and made our ! ay ba , along the #ath to! ard the shore. 4ahmoud ! as leading the ! ay. 7e"d all #rayed, in our o! n ! ays, and ! e"d all ried for Salman, but ! e didn't loo, the #art of devout visitors to the holy shrine. 7e all ! ore sunglasses. 7e all ! ore ne! lothes. /veryone, e' e#t me, arried a year or more of smuggler's ! ages in gold hains, first(tier ! at hes, rings, and bra elets.)nd ! e s! aggered. 7e ! al, ed the ! al, : the little dan e(ste# that fighting(fit gangsters do ! hen they're armed and dangerous. It ! as a bi1arre #ro ession, and one so mena ing that ! e had to ! or, hard to ma, e the #rofessional beggars on the island #ath! ay ta, e the sheaves of ru#ee notes ! e"d brought as alms.

2he men had three ars #ar, ed near the sea ! all. It ! as almost e' a tly ! here l"d stood ! ith)bdullah on the night I met <haderbhai. 4y bi, e ! as #ar, ed beyond them, and at the ars I #aused to say goodbye.

58ome and have a meal ! ith us, ; in,5 San+ay offered, #utting real affe tion in the invitation.

I , ne! the meal ! ould be fun, after the melan holy observations at 91H the shrine, and that it ! ould in lude a hoi e of drugs and a hoi e of ha##y, silly, #retty girls. I ! as grateful for the offer, but I refused.

52han, s, man, but I'm meeting someone.5

5)rrey, bring her along, yaar,5 San+ay suggested. 5It's a girl, isn't itE5

5Deah. It's a girl. Out ... ! e have to tal, . I'll see you guys later.5

)bdullah and -a1eer ! anted to ! al, me to my bi, e. 7e"d only ta, en
a fe! ste#s ! hen)ndre! ran u# behind us and alled me to sto#.

5; in,5 he said =ui , ly, nervously, 5! hat ha##ened ! ith us in the
ar #ar, and all. I ... I +ust ! ant to say ... I'm sorry, yaar.
I've been ! anting to ma, e(! ell((an a#ology, you , no! E5

5It"s o, ay.5

5- o((it"s not o, ay.5

*e #ulled at my arm, near the elbo! , leading me a! ay from -a1eer
and +ust out of his hearing. ;eaning in lose to me, he s#o, e
softly and =ui , ly.

5I'm not sorry for ! hat I said about <haderbhai. I , no! he ! as
the boss and all, and I , no! you ... you , ind of loved him ...5

5Deah. I , inda did.5

5Out still, I'm not sorry for ! hat I said about him. Dou , no! ,
all his holy #rea hing, it didn"t sto# him from handing old
4ad+id over to Ghani and his Sa#na guys ! hen he needed someone to
ta, e the fu , in" fall, and , ee# the o#s off his ba , . 4ad+id ! as
su##osed to be his friend, yaar. Out he let them ut him u#, +ust
to thro! the o#s off the ase.5

57ell ...5

5)nd all those rules, about this and that and ! hat(all, you , no! ,
they ame to nothing((San+ay has #ut me in harge of 8huha"s
girls, and the videos.)nd 9aisal and)mir, they"re running the
garad. 7e"re gonna ma, e fu , in" rores out of it. I'm getting my
#la e on the oun il, and so are they. So, <haderbhai"s day is
over, +ust li, e I said it ! as.5

I loo, ed ba , into)ndre! "s amel(bro! n eyes, and let out a dee#
breath. Disli, e had been simmering sin e the night in the ar

#ar, . I hadn't forgotten ! hat he"d said, and ho! lose ! e"d ome to fighting it out. *is little s#ee h had made me angrier still. If ! e hadn't +ust been to a funeral servi e for a friend ! e"d both li, ed, I #robably ! ould"ve hit him already.

5Dou , no! ,)ndre! ,5 I muttered, not smiling, 5I gotta tell ya, I'm not gettin" mu h omfort from this little a#ology of yours.5
91?

52hat's not the a#ology, ; in,5 he e' #lained, fro! ning in #u11lement. 52he a#ology is for your mother, and for ! hat I said about her. I'm sorry, man. I'm really, really, sorry for ! hat I said. It ! as a very shitty thing to say((about your mother, or

anybody"s mother. -obody should say shitty things li, e that about a guy"s mother. Dou ! ould"ve been ! ell ! ithin your rights, yaar, to ta, e a fu , in" shot at me.)nd ... I"m damn glad you didn"t. 4others are sa red, yaar, and I"m sure your mother is a very fine lady. So, #lease, I"m as, ing you, li, e((#lease a e#t my a#ology.5

5It"s o, ay,5 I said, #utting out my hand. *e seiled the hand in both of his, and shoo, it vigorously.

)bdullah, -a1eer, and I turned a! ay and ! al, ed to the bi, e.)bdullah ! as unusually =uiet. 2he silen e he arried ! ith him ! as ominous and unsettling.

5)re you going ba , to Delhi tonightE5 I as, ed.

5Des,5 he ans! ered. 5)t midnight.5

5Dou ! ant me to go to the air#ort ! ith youE5

5- o. 2han, you. It is better not. 2here should be no #oli e loo, ing at me. If you are there, they ! ill loo, at us. Out maybe I ! ill see you in Delhi. 2here is a +ob in Sri ; an, a((you should

do it ! ith me.5

5I don't , no! , man,5 I demurred, grinning in sur#rise at his earnestness. 52here"s a ! ar on in Sri ; an, a.5

52here is no man, and no #la e, ! ithout ! ar,5 he re#lied, and it stru , me that it ! as the most #rofound thing he"d ever said to me. 52he only thing ! e an do is hoose a side, and fight. 2hat is the only hoi e ! e get((! ho ! e fight for, ! ho ! e fight against. 2hat is life.5

5I ... I ho#e there"s more to it than that, brother. Out, shit, maybe you"re right.5

5I thin, you an do this ! ith me,5 he #ressed, learly troubled by ! hat he ! as as, ing me to do. 52his is the last ! or, for <haderbhai.5

57hat do you meanE5

5<hader <han, he as, ed me to do this +ob for him, ! hen the ... ! hat is it((the sign, I thin, , or the message((! hen it ome from Sri ; an, a. -o! , the message, it has ome.5

5I"m sorry, brother, I don"t , no! ! hat you"re tal, ing about,5 I stated softly, not ! anting to ma, e it harder for him. 5\$ust ta, e it easy, and e' #lain it to me. 7hat messageE5

*e s#o, e to -a1eer =ui , ly, in Ardu. 2he older man nodded several 91C times and then said something about names, or not mentioning

names. -a1eer turned his head to fa e me, and favoured me ! ith a ! ide, ! arm smile.

5In the Sri ; an, a ! ar,5)bdullah e' #lained, 5there is fighting((2amil 2igers against Sri ; an, a army. 2igers are *indus.

Sinhalese, they are Ouddhist. Out in the middle of them, there are the others((2amil 4uslims((! ith no guns and no army. /verybody , ill them, and nobody fight for them. 2hey need #ass#orts and money((gold money. 7e go to hel# them.5

5<haderbhai,5 - a1eer added, 5he ma, e this #lan. @nly three men.)bdullah, and me, and one gora((you. 2hree men. 7e go.5

I o! ed him. - a1eer ! ould never mention that fa t, I , ne! , and he ! ouldn't hold it against me if I didn't go ! ith him. 7e"d been through too mu h together. Out I did o! e him my life. It ! ould be very hard to refuse him.)nd there ! as something else((something ! ise, #erha#s, and fervently generous((in that rare, ! ide smile he"d given me. It seemed that he ! as offering me more than +ust the han e to ! or, ! ith him, and ! or, off my debt. *e blamed himself for <hader"s death, but he , ne! that I still felt guilty and ashamed that I hadn't been there ! ith him, #retending to be his)meri an, ! hen <hader had died. *e"s giving me a han e, I thought, as I let my eyes move from his to)bdullah"s and ba , again. *e"s giving me a ! ay to lose the boo, on it.

5So, ! hen ! ould you be going on this tri#E Roughly s#ea, ingE5

5Soon,5)bdullah laughed. 5) fe! months, no more than that. I am going to Delhi. I ! ill send someone to bring you, ! hen the time is oming. 2! o, three months, ; in brother.5

I heard a voi e in my head((or not a voi e, really, but +ust ! ords in ! his#ered e hoes li, e stones hissing a ross the still surfa e of a la, e((<iller ... *e"s a , iller ... Don't do it ... Get a! ay ... Get a! ay no! ...)nd the voi e ! as right, of ourse. Dead right.)nd I ! ish I ould say that it too, me more than those fe! heartbeats to ma, e u# my mind to +oin him.

52! o, three months,5 I re#lied, offering my hand. *e shoo, it, #utting both of his hands over mine. I loo, ed at - a1eer and smiled as I s#o, e into his eyes. 57e"ll do <hader"s +ob. 7e"ll finish it.5

-a1eer"s +a! lo , ed tight, bun hing the mus les of his hee, s and e' aggerating the do! n! ard urve of his mouth. *e fro! ned at his sandaled feet as if they ! ere disobedient #u##ies. 2hen he suddenly 917

hurled himself at me, and lo , ed his hands behind me in a #unishing hug. It ! as the violent, ! restler"s hug of a man ! hose body had never learned to s#ea, the language of his heart((e' e#t ! hen he ! as dan ing((and it ended as abru#tly and furiously as it had begun. *e ! hi##ed his thi , arms a! ay and shoved me ba , ! ard ! ith his hest, sha, ing his head and shuddering as if a shar, had

#assed him in shallo! ! ater. *e loo, ed u# =ui , ly, and the ! armth that reddened his eyes vied ! ith a grim ! arning lam#ed in the bad(lu , horseshoe of his mouth. I , ne! that if I ever raised that moment of affe tion ! ith him, or referred to it in any ! ay, I ! ould lose his friendshi# forever.

I , i , ed the bi, e to life and straddled it, #ushing a! ay from the , erb ! ith my legs and #ointing it in the dire tion of -ana 8ho! , and 8olaba.

5Saat h aur himmat,5)bdullah alled out as I rode #ast him.

I ! aved, and nodded, but I ouldn"t give the ans! ering all to the slogan. I didn"t , no! ho! mu h truth or ourage ! as in my de ision to +oin them on their mission to Sri ; an, a. -ot mu h, it seemed to me, as I rode a! ay from them, from all of them, and surrendered to the ! arm night, and the #ress and #ause of traffi .

) blood(red moon ! as rising from the sea as I rea hed the Oa , Oay road leading to -ariman >oint. I #ar, ed the bi, e beside a old(drin, stall, lo , ed it, and thre! the , eys to the manager, ! ho ! as a friend from the slum. 7ith the moon behind me, I set out along the foot#ath beside a long urve of sandy bea h ! here fishermen often re#aired their nets and battered boats. 2here ! as

a festival on that night in the Sassoon Dock area. The celebrations had drawn most of the local people from the huts and shelters on the beach. The road here had almost deserted.

And then I saw her. She was sitting on the edge of an old fishing boat that was half-buried on the beach. Only the prow and a few metres of the long boat's gunnels protruded from the surrounding waves of sand. She was wearing a long, saffron over loose pants. Her knees were drawn up, and she was resting her chin on her arms as she stared out at the dark water.

"This is why I love you, you know," I said, sitting down beside her on the rail of the beach fishing boat.

"Hello," she replied, smiling, her green eyes as dark as the water. "I'm glad to see you. I thought you weren't coming."

"Your message sounded kind of ... urgent. I nearly didn't get it. It was 918. Just lucky that I ran into Didier on his way to the airport, and he told me."

"You know, it's that happens to you when fate gets tired of waiting," she murmured.

"You, you, Carla," I replied, laughing.

"Old habits," she grinned, "die hard (and lie harder)."

Her eyes moved across my features for a moment, as if she was searching for a familiar reference point. Her smile slowly faded.

"I'm going to miss Didier."

"Me, too," I muttered, thinking that he was probably in the air

already, and on his way to Italy. But I think, he'll be back, before too long.

Why?

But the Indian Georges in his apartment, to look after it.

She entered, making a perfect, kiss of her perfect mouth.

Deah. If that doesn't bring him back, =ui, , nothing is ill. Doubt, no! No! he loves that apartment.

She didn't answer, but her stare tightened in the intensity of her concentration.

Chaled's here, in India, she remarked flatly, looking at my eyes.

Where?

In Delhi (Delhi, near Delhi, actually).

When?

The report came in two days ago. I had it checked. I think, it's him.

What report?

She looked away, towards the sea, and breathed a long, slow sigh.

Sheet has access to all the intelligence services. One of them sent a report about a new spiritual leader named Chaled Ansari, who had called all the way from Afghanistan, and was pulling in big crowds of followers wherever he went. When I said it, I asked Sheet to check it out for me. She is the one sent a description, and it fits.

God ... than, God ... than, God.

Deah, maybe, she murmured. Something of the old mischief and mystery flared in her eyes.

And you're sure it's him?

Sure enough to go there myself, she answered, looking at me on and on.

Do you, no! Here he is (no, I mean

— not exactly, but I think, no! Here he's going.

Here

Araransi. Haderbhai's tea house, Idriss, lives there. He's very old now, but he still teaches there.

Haderbhai's tea house I asked, stunned to think that in all the hundreds of hours I'd spent with Hader, listening to his philosophy lectures, he'd never mentioned the name.

Des. I met him on the way, right at the start, when I first came to India, with Hader. I asked ... I don't, no ... I guess you'd all be a nervous breakdown here as this plane, going to Singapore. I don't even, no! How I got on it. And I broke down (just, kind of, raised up). And Hader, he was on the same plane. And he put his arm around me. I told him everything ... absolutely ... everything. And the first thing, I'm in this cave with a giant Buddha statue and this tea house named Idriss (Hader's tea house).

Here as a cause! She let those memories pull her into the past, but then she shook herself free, and back into the moment.

I think that's where Hader is going (to see Idriss). The old guru fascinated him. He was obsessed about meeting him. I don't

, no! ! hy he never got around to it then, but I thin, that"s ! here he"s headed no! . @r maybe he"s already there. *e used to as, me about him all the time. Idriss taught <hader everything he , ne! about Resolution theory, and((5

5) bout ! hatE5

5Resolution theory. 2hat"s ! hat <hader alled it, but he said it ! as Idriss ! ho gave it that name. It ! as his #hiloso#hy of life, <hader"s #hiloso#hy, about ho! the universe is al! ays moving to! ard((5

58om#le' ity,5 I interr#ted. 5l , no! . I tal, ed about it a lot ! ith him. Out he never alled it Resolution theory.)nd he never tal, ed about Idriss.5

52hat"s funny, be ause I thin, he loved Idriss, you , no! , li, e a father. @n e, he alled him the tea her of all tea hers.)nd I , no! he ! anted to retire u# there, not far from &aranasi, ! ith Idriss.)ny! ay, that"s ! here I"m going to start loo, ing for <haled.5

57henE5

52omorro! .5

5_@(_ , ay,5 I res#onded, avoiding her eyes. 5Is this ... is this

anything to do ! ith ... ! ell, you and <haled, from beforeE5

5Dou an be su h a fu , sometimes, ; in, you , no! thatE5

I loo, ed u# shar#ly, but I didn"t res#ond. 9F%

5Did you , no! Alla"s in to! nE5 she as, ed after a ! hile.

5-o. 7hen did she get inE *ave you seen herE5

What's just it. I got a message from her. She was at the
residence, and she wanted to see me right away.

Did you go?

I didn't want to, she mused. If you got the message, would you
have gone?

I guess, I answered, staring out at the bay where moonlight
rested on the serene curves of a gently rolling sea. Out not
for her. For Godena. I said him a while ago. *e's still nuts about
her.

I said him tonight, she said quietly.

tonight?

Des. Just before. With her. It freaked me out. I went to the
hotel and up to her room. There was another guy there, a guy
named Ramesh.

Godena told me about him. They're friends.

So, he opens the door, and I walk in, and I see Alla, sitting on
the bed, resting her back against the wall. And Godena, he's
lying across her legs, with his head back near her shoulder. That
face ...

I, no! . It's a hell of a mess.

It was weird. It was freaky, me out, the whole scene. I'm not
sure why. And Alla, she tells me she inherited a lot of money
from her father (they're very rich, you know, Alla's family. They
travelling in the town in Germany where she was born, but they
put her off when she was heavy into drugs. She never got a
thing from them for years (not until her father died. So when she
inherited the money, she got this idea to come back, and loo, for

4odena. She felt guilty, she said, and she couldn't live with herself.)nd she found him. *e ! as ! aiting for her.)nd they ! ere together, ! hen I ! ent to see her, li, e some ... some , ind of a love story.5

5Damn, if he ! as n't right about her,5 I said softly. 5*e told me ((he , ne! she'd ome ba , for him, and she really did. I never

believed it for a se ond. I thought he ! as +ust ra1y.5

52he ! ay they ! ere sitting together, ! ith him a ross her legs. Dou , no! the >ietaE 4i helangeloE It loo, ed e' a tly li, e that. It ! as so strange. It really shoo, me u#. Some things are so ! eird they ma, e you angry, you , no! E5

57hat did she ! antE5 9F1

57hat do you meanE5

57hy did she all you to the hotelE5

5@h, I get it,5 she said, ! ith a little smile. 5Alla all! ays ! ants something.5

I raised an eyebrow! , returning her stare, but said nothing.

5She ! anted me to arrange a #ass#ort for 4odena. *e"s been here for years. *e"s an overstayer.)nd he"s got a fe! #roblems ! ith the S#anish #oli e, under his o! n name. *e needs a ne! #ass#ort to get ba , into /uro#e. *e ould #ass for Italian. @r maybe >ortuguese.5

5;eave it to me,5 I said almy, thin, ing that I , ne! the reason, at last, ! hy she"d as, ed me to meet ! ith her. 5I'll get on it tomorrow! . I , no! ho! to get in tou h ! ith him, for #hotos and ! hatever((although there'd be no mista, ing his fa e at a ustoms he , . I'll fi' it.5

When, she said, meeting my eyes with such fervent intensity that my heart began to beat hard against my chest. It is all! says a fool's mistake, Didier once said to me, to be alone with someone you shouldn't have loved. What are you doing, ; in

Sitting here with you, I replied, smiling.

— o, I mean, what are you going to do? Are you going to stay in Bombay?

Why?

! as going to as, you ... if you want to come with me, to find <haled.

I laughed, but she didn't laugh with me.

That's the second (best offer I've had today.

The second best? she demanded. What! as the first?

Someone invited me to go to the bar, in Sri ; an, a.

She slammed her lips tightly around an angry response, but I held

my hands up in surrender, and she smiled, ly.

I'm just kidding, Carla, just kidding. That's easy. I mean, it's true about the invitation to go to Sri ; an, a, but I'm just ... you, no! .

She relaxed, smiling again.

I'm out of frustration. It's been a long time, ; in.

So ... why the invitation no! ?

Why not?

That's not good enough, Carla, and you, no! It's

Oh, yes, she sighed, glancing at me and then looking away to follow the breeze leaving a wake of patterns on the sand. I guess I'll start looking for something like ... like that! I had in Goa. 9FF

That about ... I asked, ignoring the opening she'd given me. How does he feel about you going off to find a

We lead separate lives. We do that! We go! Here! We!

Sounds ... I offered, struggling to find a word that wasn't a lie, but wouldn't offend. Didier made it sound more serious than that (told me the guy asked you to marry him.)

Yes, she said flatly.

And

And that

And will you (marry him, I mean)

Des. I think, I'll

Why?

Why not?

Don't start that again.

Sorry, she said, sighing through a tired smile. I've been running with a different road. Why marry? He's a nice guy,

he's healthy, and he's loaded.)nd, hey, I thin, I'll do a better job of s#ending his money than he does.5

5So ! hat you're telling me is that you're ready to die for this love.5

She laughed and then turned to me, suddenly serious again. *er eyes, #ale ! ith moonlight6 her eyes, the green of ! ater lilies after the rain6 her long hair, bla , as forest river stones6 her hair that ! as li, e holding the night itself in the ! ra# of my fingers6 her li#s, starred ! ith in andes ent light6 li#s of amellia(#etal softness ! armed ! ith se ret ! his#ers. Oeautiful.)nd I loved her. I loved her still so mu h, so hard, but ! ith no heat or heart at all. 2hat falling love, that hel#less, dreaming, soaring love, ! as gone.)nd I suddenly , ne! in those se onds of ... old adoration, I su##ose ... that the #o! er she"d on e held over me ! as also gone. @r, more than that, her #o! er had moved into me, and had be ome mine. I held all the ards.)nd then I ! anted to , no! . It ! asn't good enough to +ust a e#t ! hat had ha##ened bet! een us. I ! anted to , no! everything.

57hy didn't you tell me, <arlaE5

She gave an anguished little sigh, and stret hed her legs out to bury her bare feet in the sand. 7at hing the small as ades of soft sand s#ill over her moving feet, she s#o, e in a dull, flat tone, as if she ! as om#osing a letter((or re alling a letter, #erha#s, that she"d ! ritten on e and never sent to me. 9FG

5I , ne! you ! ere going to as, me, and I thin, that's ! hy I've ! aited so long to get in tou h ! ith you. I let #eo#le , no! that I ! as around, and I as, ed after you, but I didn't do anything, until today, be ause ... I , ne! you"d as, me.5

5If it ma, es it any easier,5 I interru#ted, sounding harder than I'd intended, 5I , no! you burned do! n 4adame . hou's #la e((5

5Did Ghani tell you thatE5

5GhaniE -o. I figured that one out myself.5

5Ghani did it for me((he arranged it. 2hat ! as the last time I
s#o, e to him.5

52he last time I s#o, e to him ! as about an hour before he died.5

5Did he tell you anything about herE5 she as, ed, #erha#s ho#ing
that there ! ere some #arts of it she ! ouldn't have to tell me.

5)bout 4adame . houE -o. *e didn't say a ! ord.5

5*e told me ... a lot,5 she sighed. 5*e filled in a fe! ga#s. I
thin, it ! as Ghani ! ho ti##ed me over the edge ! ith her. *e told
me she had Ra+an follo! ing you, and she only #ulled her strings
! ith the o#s to get you arrested ! hen Ra+an told her you made
love to me. I all! ays hated her, but that did it. I +ust ... it
! as one thing too many. She ouldn't let me have it, that time
! ith you. She ! ouldn't let me have it. So I alled in some dues
! ith Ghani, and he arranged it. 2he riot. It ! as a great fire. I
lit some of it myself.5

She bro, e off, staring at her feet in the sand, and lam#ed her
+a! shut. Refle ted lights gleamed in her eyes. 9or a moment I
let myself imagine ho! those green eyes must've bla1ed ! ith
firelight as she'd ! at hed the >ala e burn.

5I , no! about the States, too,5 I said after a ! hile. 5I , no!
! hat ha##ened there.5

She loo, ed at me =ui , ly, reading my eyes.

5; isa,5 she said. I didn't ans! er. 2hen, , no! ing instantly, as
! omen do, ! hat she ouldn't #ossibly , no! , she smiled. 52hat's
good(; isa and you. Dou and ; isa. 2hat's ... very good.5

4y e' #ression didn't change, and her smile faded as she looked down at the sand on the more.

5Did you kill anyone, ; inE5

57henE5 I asked, not sure if she was talking about Afghanistan or the muh (smaller war against Huha and his gang. 9FH

5/ver.5

5- o.5

5I'm glad,5 she breathed, sighing again. 5I wish ...5

She was silent again for a while. From some place beyond the deserted beach she heard the sounds of the festival: ha##y, roaring laughter rising over the blare of a brass band. 4u h loser, ocean music gushed onto the soft assenting shore, and the #alms above us trembled in the cooling breeze.

57hen I went there ... when I walked into his house, into the room where he was standing, he smiled at me. *e was ... a tually ... ha##y to see me.)nd for a split second, I changed my mind, and I thought it was ... over. 2hen, I saw something else, right there in the middle of his smile ... something dirty, and ... he said ... I, ne! you'd be back, for more, one of these days ... or something like that.)nd he ... he, kind of, he started looking around like he was making sure nobody was gonna bust in on us ...5

5It's okay, <arla.5

57hen he saw the gun, it was worse, because he started ... not begging ... but apologising ... and it was real clear, real clear, that he, ne! what he did to me ... he, ne! ... every part of it, and how bad it was.)nd that was murder.)nd then he was dead. 2here wasn't a lot of blood. I thought there would be.

Maybe there was later. And I don't remember the rest, until I was in the hallway with Chader's arm around me.

She was quiet. I leaned over to kiss her, and she was a beautiful shell of a girl, ending in spirals to a sharp, eroded point. I pressed it into my palm until it pierced the skin, and then threw it away across the rippled sand. When I looked at her again, I found that she was staring at me and frowning hard.

What do you want? she asked bluntly.

I want to, no! Why you never told me about Chaderbhai?

Do you want it straight?

Of course I do.

I couldn't trust you, she declared, looking away again. That's not exactly right (I mean, I didn't, no! if I could trust you. I think, ... no! (I, no! (I could've trusted you all along.

Oh, ay. My teeth were touching, and my lips didn't move.

I tried to tell you. I tried to get you to stay with me in Goa. Don't do that.

It could've made a difference, I snapped, but then sighed just as she left?

had, and relaxed my tone. It might've made a difference if you'd told me that you were, for him (that you recruited me for him.

When I ran away ... when I went to Goa, I was in a bad way. The Sanna thing (that was my idea. Did you, no! that?

— o. Jesus, Chader.

*er eyes narrowed as she read the angry disappointment in my face.

5-ot the ,illing #art,5 she e' #lained, and her e' #ression ! as sho ,ed, I thin, , to realise that I'd misunderstood ! hat she'd said, and that I believed her a#able of devising the Sa#na , illings. 5hat ! as all Ghani's idea((his s#in on it. 2hey needed to get stuff in and out, through Oombay, and they needed hel# from #eo#le ! ho didn't ! ant to give it. 4y idea ! as to reate a ommon enemy((Sa#na((and to get everybody ! or, ing ! ith us to defeat him. It ! as su##osed to be done ! ith #osters, and graffiti, and some harmless bomb hoas'es((to ma,e it seem li,e there ! as a dangerous, harismatic leader out there. Out Ghani didn't thin, it ! as s ary enough. 2hat's ! hy he started the , illings ...5

5)nd you left ... for Goa.5

5Deah. Dou , no! the very first #la e I heard about the , illings((! hat Ghani ! as doing ! ith my ideaE It ! as at that &illage in the S,y ... that lun h you too, me to. Our friends ! ere tal,ing

about it.)nd it really shoo, me u# that day. I stu , it out for a ! hile, trying to sto# it, someho! . Out it ! as ho#eless.)nd then <hader told me you ! ere in +ail((but you had to stay there until 4adame . hou did ! hat he ! anted her to do.)nd then he ... he got me to ! or, on the >a,istani, the young general. *e ! as a onta t of mine, and he li,ed me. So I ... I did it. I ! or,ed him, ! hile you ! ere in there, until <hader got ! hat he ! anted.)nd then I +ust ... =uit. I'd had enough.5

5Out you ! ent ba , to him.5

5I tried to get you to stay ! ith me.5

57hyE5

What do you mean?

She gasped, and seemed irritated by the question.

Why did you want me to stay with you?

Isn't that obvious?

— o. I'm sorry. It's not. Did you love me, [I'm not asking](#) if you loved me like I loved you. I mean ... did you love me at all? Did you love me at all, [I'm not asking](#)?

Like you ...?

Dear ...?

— o, it's true. I loved you, more than anyone else I knew. That's a lot for me, isn't it?

My hand was locked tight, and I turned my head away from her. She waited for a few moments and then spoke again.

I couldn't tell you about [I'm not asking](#). I couldn't. It would've felt like I was betraying him.

Betraying me is different, I guess.

Anyway, in it isn't like that. If you'd stayed with me, we both would've been out of that world, but even then I couldn't have told you. Anyway, it doesn't matter. You couldn't stay with me, so I never thought I'd see you again. When I got a message from [I'm not asking](#) saying you were in Gupta's lab, killing yourself with [I'm not asking](#), and he needed me to help him get you out of there. That's how I got back into it. That's how I went back to him.

I just don't get it, [I'm not asking](#).

What don't you get?

5Dou ! or, ed for him, and Ghani, for ho! long((before the Sa#na thingE5

5) bout four years.5

5So, you must've seen a lot of other stuff go do! n((you must've heard about it, at the very least. Dou're ! or, ing for the Oombay mafia, for fu , "s sa, e, or a goddamn bran h of it. Dou're ! or, ing for one of Oombay's biggest gangsters, li, e I ! as. Dou , ne! they , illed #eo#le, before Ghani ! ent #sy ho ! ith his Sa#na gang. 7hy ... after all that, did you suddenly get frea, ed out ! ith the Sa#na thingE I don't get it.5

She'd been ! at hing me losely. I , ne! she ! as lever enough to see that I ! as stri, ing ba , at her ! ith the =uestions, but her eyes told me that she sa! more than that.)lthough I'd tried to hide it, I , ne! she'd #i , ed u# the s e#ti ism barbed ! ith righteous ensure in my tone. 7hen I finished she too, a breath, and seemed about to s#ea, , but then she #aused as if re onsidering her re#ly.

5Dou thin, I left them,5 she began at last, ! ith a little fro! n of sur#rise, 5and ! ent to Goa be ause I ! anted to be ... ! hat ... forgiven, for ! hat I'd doneE @r for ! hat I'd been #art ofE Is that itE5

5Did youE5 9F7

5- o. I ! anted to be forgiven, and I still do, but not for that. I left them be ause I didn't feel anything at all about the Sa#na , illings. I ! as stunned ... and ... sort of, frea, ed out, at first, that Ghani had turned the idea around so mu h.)nd I didn't li, e it. I thought it ! as stu#id. I thought it ! as unne essary and it ! ould get us all into trouble ! e didn't need.)nd I tried to tal, <haderbhai out of it. I tried to get them to

sto#. Out I didn't feel anything about it, even ! hen they , illed
4ad+id.)nd I ... I used to li, e him, you , no! E I li, ed old
4ad+id. *e ! as the best of them, in a ! ay. Out I didn't feel
anything ! hen he died.)nd I didn't feel it, not even a bit, ! hen
<hader told me he had to leave you in +ail and let you get beaten
u#. I li, ed you((more than I li, ed anyone else((but I didn't feel
bad or sorry. I , ind of understood it((that it had to ha##en, and
it ! as +ust bad lu , that it ! as ha##ening to _you. I felt
nothing.)nd that's ! hen it hit me((that's ! hen I , ne! I had to
get a! ay.5

57hat about GoaE Dou an't tell me that ! as nothing.5

5- o. 7hen you ame to Goa and you found me, li, e I , ne! you
! ould, it ! as ... #retty good. I started to thin, , __this is ! hat
it's li, e ... this is ! hat they're tal, ing _about ... Out then
you ! ouldn't stay. Dou had to go ba , ((ba , to _him((and I , ne!
he ! anted you, maybe even needed you.)nd I ! ouldn't tell you
! hat I , ne! about him, be ause I o! ed him, and I didn't , no! if I

ould trust you. So I let you go.)nd ! hen you left, I didn't
feel anything at all. -ot a thing. I didn't ! ant to be forgiven
be ause of ! hat I did. I ! anted to be forgiven((and I still ! ant
it, and that's ! hy I'm going to <haled and Idriss((be ause I
don't feel sorry for any of it, and I don't regret a thing. I'm
old inside, ; in. I li, e #eo#le, and I li, e things, but I don't
love any of them((not even myself((and I don't really are about
them.)nd, you , no! , the strange thing is, I don't really ! ish
that I did are.5

)nd there it ! as. I had it all((all the truth and detail that I'd
needed to , no! sin e that day on the mountain, in the ! ithering
sno! , ! hen <hader had told me about her. I thin, I'd e' #e ted to
feel ... nourished, #erha#s, and vindi ated, by for ing her to
tell me ! hat she'd done and ! hy she'd done it. I thin, I'd ho#ed
to be released by it, and sola ed, +ust by hearing her tell me.
Out it ! asn't li, e that. I felt em#ty: the , ind of em#tiness

that's sad but not distressed, #itying but not bro, en(hearted,
and damaged, someho! , but learer and leaner for it.)nd then I
, ne! ! hat it ! as, that em#tiness: there's a name for it, a ! ord
! e use often, 9F8
! ithout realising the universe of #ea e that's enfolded in it.
2he ! ord is free.

59or ! hat it's ! orth,5 I said, rea hing out to #ut my hand
against her hee, , 5I forgive you, <arla. I forgive you, and I
love you, and I al! ays ! ill.5

@ur li#s met li, e ! aves that rest and merge the ! hirl of
storming seas. I felt that I ! as falling: free and falling at
last from the love that had o#ened, lotus(layered, ! ithin me.)nd
together ! e did fall the length of her bla , hair to the still(
! arm sand in the hollo! of the sun, en boat.

7hen our li#s #arted, stars rushed through that , iss into her
sea(green eyes.)n age of longing #assed from those eyes into
mine.)n age of #assion #assed from my grey eyes into hers.)ll
the hunger, all the fleshed and ho#e(starved raving, streamed
from eye to eye: the moment ! e met6 the laughing ! it of
; eo#old"s6 the Standing Oabas6 the &illage in the S, y6 the
holera6 the s! arm of rats6 the se rets that she"d ! his#ered near
e' hausted slee#6 the singing boat on the flood beneath the
Gate! ay6 the storm ! hen ! e made love the first time6 the +oy and
loneliness in Goa6 and our love refle ting shado! s into glass, on
the last night before the ! ar.

)nd there ! ere no more ! ords. 2here ! as no more leaverness as I
! al, ed her to a ta' i #ar, ed nearby. I , issed her again.) long
, iss, goodbye. She smiled at me. It ! as a good smile, a beautiful
smile, and almost her best. I ! at hed the red lights of the ta' i
fu11 and blur and then vanish in the furtherness of night.

)lone on the strangely =uiet street, I began to ! al, ba , to
>raba, er"s slum((I al! ays thought of it as >raba, er"s slum, and I

still do (to retrieve my bicycle shadow stalked with every street light, dragging loath behind me and then rushing on ahead. @ ean songs re eded. The road moved beyond the span of coast and into the shade, tree-lined streets of the peninsula reclaimed from the sea, stone on mortared stone, by the ever-changing island city.

Sounds of celebration streamed into the road from streets around me. The festival had ended, and the people were beginning to return. Daring boys on bicycles flashed between the alleys much too fast, but never touching so much as a flap of sleeve. Impossibly beautiful girls in bright saris glided between the glances of young men who'd sented their shirts, as well as their skin, with sandalwood soap. Children slept on their shoulders, their unlimbered arms and legs hanging limber as they dashed on a line. Someone sang a love song, and a dozen voices joined the choruses for each verse. Every man and woman, walking home to slum hut or fine apartment, smiled, listening to the romantic, foolish words.

Three young men singing near me saw my smile, and raised the palms of their hands in question. I lifted my arms and sang the chorus, joining my voice to theirs, and showing and delighting them with that Indian smile. They threw their strangers' arms around me and set our song (condemned souls toward the unvanquishable ruin of the slum. Everyone in the whole world, Clara once said, as Indian in at least one past life.) and I laughed to think of her.

I didn't know what I could do. The first part of it was clear enough (as the debt to the burly Afghan, - a leer. *e'd said to me once, when I'd talked to him of the guilt I continued to feel for Chader's death: Good gun, good horse, good friend, good battle (you know better say that Great Khan, he can die) and a tiny fragment of that thought or feeling attached to me, too. It was right, somehow (although I couldn't have explained it, even to myself (and fitting for me to risk my life in the company of good friends, and in the course of an important mission.

And there! as so much more that I had to learn, so much that
<haderbhai had! anted to tea h me. I, ne! that his #hysi s
tea her, the man he'd told me about in)fghanistan, ! as in
Oombay.)nd the other tea her, Idriss, ! as in &aranasi. If I made
it ba , to Oombay from -a1eer"s mission to Sri ;an, a, there ! as a
! orld of learning to dis over and en+oy.

In the mean! hile, in the ity, my #la e ! ith San+ay"s oun il ! as
assured. 2here ! as ! or, there, and money, and a little #o! er. 9or
a ! hile there ! as safety, in the brotherhood, from the long rea h
of)ustralian la! . 2here ! ere friends on the oun il, and at
;eo#old"s, and in the slum.)nd, yes, maybe there ! as even a
han e for love.

7hen I rea hed the bi, e I , e#t ! al, ing on into the slum. I ! asn't
sure ! hy. I ! as follo! ing an instin t, and dra! n, #erha#s, by the

s! ollen moon. 2he narro! lanes, those ! rithing alleys of struggle
and dream, ! ere so familiar to me and so omfortingly safe that I
marvelled at the fear I'd on e felt there. I ! andered ! ithout
#ur#ose or #lan, and moved from smile to smile as men and ! omen
and hildren ! ho"d been my #atients and neighbours loo, ed u# to
see me #ass. I moved in mists of 9G%

oo, ing s ent and sho! er soa#, of animal stalls and , erosene
lam#s, of fran, in ense and sandal! ood streaming u#! ard from a
thousand tiny tem#les in a thousand tiny homes.

)t a orner of one lane I bum#ed into a man, and as our fa es
rose to their a#ologies ! e re ognised one another in the same
instant. It ! as 4u, esh, the young thief ! ho"d hel#ed me in the
8olaba lo , (u# and the)rthur Road +ail: the man ! hose freedom
I'd demanded ! hen &i, ram had #aid me out of #rison.

5; inbabaB5 he ried, sei1ing my u##er arms in his hands. 5So good
to see youB)reyB 7hat"s ha##eningE5

I'm just visiting, I answered, laughing with him. What are you doing here? Dou loo, great! What the hell are you?

No problem, baba! Oil, ul fit, hain! I'm absolutely fit!

Have you eaten? Will you take a bite?

Thank you, baba, no. I am late for a meeting.

Oh, I muttered. Ah, yes.

He leaned in close to his ear.

It is a secret, but I, no! I can trust you, baba. They are meeting with some of those fellows who are with Saana, the king of thieves.

What?

Describe his ear. These fellows, they actually, no! that Saana. They speak to him almost every day.

That's not possible, I said.

Ah yes, baba. They are his friends. And he is making the army (the army of those fellows. He will teach those Muslims who is the real boss here in Maharashtra that Saana, he killed the mafia boss, Abdul Ghani, in his own mansion, and put the pieces of his body all around his house! And the Muslims, after that they are learning how to fear us. I must go now. He will see us, before too much time, isn't it? Goodbye, baba!

He ran off through the lanes. I turned away, to a pale, unsmiling into a sudden mood that was anxious and angry and forlorn. And then, as it always did, the city, Bombay, my Mumbai, held me up

on the broad boulevard, of a nourishing constancy. I found myself at

the edge of a devoted crowd gathered before the neat, large hut belonging to the Olue Sisters. Men and women stood at the rear of the crowd, while others sat or, nelt in a semi-circle of soft light at the threshold of the hut. And there in the doorway, framed by haloes of lamplight and wreathed about with streamers of blue inlense smoke, were the Olue Sisters themselves. Radiant. Serene. Beings of such lambent compassion, such sublime unanimity, that in my broken, emptied heart I pledged to love them, as every man and woman who saw them did.

At that moment I felt a tug at my shirtsleeve and I turned my head to see what seemed to be the ghost of a gigantic smile with a very small man attached to it. The ghost shook me, grinning happily, and I reached out to embrace it in a hug and then bent forward, only to touch its feet, in the traditional greeting to a father or mother. It was <ishan, >raba, er's father. *e e' explained that he was in the city for a holiday with Ru, hmabai, >raba, er's mother, and >arvati, his widow.

Shantaram he admonished me when I started speaking to him in Hindi. "Have you forgotten all your lovely Arathi?"

Sorry, father I laughed, sticking to Arathi. "I'm just so happy to see you. Here is Ru, hmabai."

Some he answered, taking my hand as if I was a child, and leading me through the slum.

We arrived at the little group of huts, including my own, that clustered around <umar's shop near the rest of the sea. Johnny Rigar was there, with Seetendra, Iqbal Hussein, and Joseph's wife, Aaria.

"Here I'm just talking about you," Johnny cried as I shook hands and nodded my greetings. "Here I'm just saying that your hut is empty again (and I'm remembering the fire, on that first day. It was a big one, na?"

It was, I muttered, thinking of Ragu and the others who'd died in that fire.

So, Shantaram, a voice solded in Marathi from behind me, "no! you are too big a fellow! to see, to your simple village mother"

I swung round to see Rukhmabai standing close to us. I bent to touch her feet, but she restrained me, and joined her hands together in a greeting. She looked sadder and older. Within the soft endearments of her smile, and grieving had put a slice of grey in the black, salt of her hair. Out the hair was growing black. The long hair I'd seen falling like a shadow dying as growing black, and there was living hope in the thin, unhardened slice of it.

When she directed my gaze to the woman in white standing beside her. It was Savitri, and a child, a son, was standing with her. *e 9GF

was clinging to her sari, skirt for support. I greeted Savitri, and then I gave my attention to the boy and looked into his face. It was so showed that my admiration overflowed. I turned to the adults and they all smiled, nodding their heads in the same order, for the child was the image of Savitri, more than merely resembling him, the boy was the exact duplicate of the man who'd all loved more than any other before.)nd then he smiled at me it was his smile, Savitri's vast, world-encompassing smile, that I saw in that small, perfectly round face.

"Baby diya" I asked. Can I hold him?

Savitri nodded. I held my arms out to him, and he came to me without protest.

"What's his name?" I asked, picking the boy on my hip and watching him smile.

5>rabu,5 >arvati ans! ered. 57e alled him >raba, er.5

5@h >rabu,5 Ru, hmabai ommanded, 5give Shantaram(un le a , iss.5

2he boy , issed me on the hee, , =ui , ly, and then ! ra##ed his tiny arms around my ne , ! ith im#etuous strength, and s=uee1ed me. I hugged him in return, and held him to my heart.

5Dou , no! , Shantu,5 <ishan suggested, #atting at his round belly, and smiling to fill the ! orld, 5your house is em#ty. 7e are all here. Dou ould stay ! ith us tonight. Dou ould slee# here.5

52hin, hard, ; in,5 \$ohnny 8igar ! arned, grinning at me. 2he full moon ! as in his eyes, and #earling his strong ! hite teeth. 5If you stay, ! ord ! ill get out. 9irst, there'll be a #arty tonight, and then, ! hen you ! a, e u#, there'll be a damn long line of #atients, yaar, ! aiting to see you.5

I gave the boy ba , into >arvati's arms, and ! i#ed a hand a ross my fa e and into my hair. ; oo, ing at the #eo#le, listening to the breathing, heaving, laughing, struggling musi of the slum, all around me, I remembered one of <haderbhai's favourite #hrases. /very human heartbeat, he"d said many times, is a universe of #ossibilities.)nd it seemed to me that I finally understood e' a tly ! hat he"d meant. *e"d been trying to tell me that every human ! ill has the #o! er to transform its fate. I"d al! ays thought that fate ! as something un hangeable: fi' ed for every one of us at birth, and as onstant as the ir uit of the stars. Out I suddenly realised that life is stranger and more beautiful than that. 2he truth is that, no matter ! hat , ind of game you find yourself in, no matter ho! good or 9GG bad the lu , , you an hange your life om#letely ! ith a single thought or a single a t of love.

57ell, I'm out of #ra ti e slee#ing on the ground,5 I said, smiling at Ru, hmabai.

5Dou an have my bed,5 <ishan offered.

5@h no you don"tB5 I #rotated.

5@h yes I doB5 he insisted, dragging his ot from outside his hut to mine ! hile \$ohnny, \$eetendra, and the others hugged and mo , (! rested me into submission, and our ries and laughter rolled a! ay to! ard the time(dissolving everness of the sea.

9or this is ! hat ! e dard the time(dissolving ev

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