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A TREMOR IN INDIA

by

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CHARACTERS

RENNIE	highly educated Parsi woman, age 40
MITCHELL	retired American entrepreneur, age 64
PUNIT	Mitchell's shrewd staffer, late 30s
PAUL	Mitchell's son, American entrepreneur, mid 40s
VICEROY	tall, elegant racketeer, 50s, from northern India
MEREDITH	Paul's American wife, late 30s, direct and forceful

TIME

April 2008

SETTING

Shimla, India in the foothills of the Himalayas and ten hours north of New Delhi by rail or bus. Once the former summer retreat of British India, Shimla is the largest hill station in India and perhaps the key associated town with the old Raj. Most likely, the name is derived from 'Shyamla' a title of the goddess Kali whose temple was discovered in the wooded region of Jackoo early in the 1800s. Although Kali - linked with disease, death and destruction - is often seen dressed with skulls and a bloody sword in one of her many arms, she is worshiped lovingly by many as the Divine Mother. Her cult, popular in the lower castes, frequently include animal sacrifices. The community's beautiful locale was born out of the crisis in the early 19th Century Gurkha Wars. Favored and cultivated by traders, the government and the privileged classes, Shimla grew quickly and became a small enclave for ambitious military officers and also those who had been banished from India for crimes and social transgressions. Known as a viable place to escape the punishing Indian heat, Lord Lawrence arrived as Viceroy in 1864 - thus establishing the official summer home of the Raj. In 1966, Shimla became the capital of the newly created state of Himachal Pradesh, bordering the turbulent state of Kashmir.

SCENE ONE
(A LARGE LIVING ROOM IN A LARGE
CLIFF HOUSE IN SHIMLA, INDIA.
EARLY APRIL, 1999.)

RENNIE

I don't think the meat is good. Lamb in particular. You can tell right away. The color, it's the color. Oh, but the smell is never quite predictable either. It's as if the meat were whispering vile things in your ear. And your ear will never be clean again. That is the penalty for being nice, darling. You are too nice. In spirit and in the flesh.

MITCHELL

In spirit?

RENNIE

In the flesh.

MITCHELL

What did you say?

RENNIE

The smell is never quite the same.

MITCHELL

The smell is rather rancid. I don't give a shit about lamb. I hate lamb. I hate fowl. I hate seafood.

RENNIE

What do you want to eat?

MITCHELL

Some goddamn thing without chutney.

RENNIE

You're looking wan, Mitchell.

MITCHELL

I couldn't sleep.

RENNIE

Yes.

MITCHELL

Sleep is all I have to do, according to every Tandoori doctor with a lisp.

RENNIE

The shades are dark enough, darling.

MITCHELL

Then I must try to nap.

RENNIE

I'll go out to shop.

MITCHELL

But the smell . . .

RENNIE

I cracked the window open.

MITCHELL

I think it's something to ignore. We have to learn to ignore many things these days. I had an illicit delivery this morning. Cigars. One hundred dear hand rolled cigars. From Cuba, Rennie. Well, I certainly paid enough. A case of fine French merlot would cost as much. Such are my habits. The cigars came with the crisp English newspapers. And they manage to pile up higher than the bannister.

RENNIE

I don't want you to get sick again.

MITCHELL

But the smell . . .

RENNIE

You're sneaking cognac.

MITCHELL

Dear Lord, am I?.

RENNIE

You've trained the monkeys to steal for you.

MITCHELL

These diabolical monkeys are impossible to train, and I've tried many times. One old female was careful enough to clip my nose hairs with the pedicure scissors. God's truth, Rennie. At

least they've stopped defecating along the window ledge.

RENNIE

Something to tell old neighbors at the governor's mansion?

(FROM THE KITCHEN, PUNIT ENTERS WITH A BOX OF LETTERS. HE SETS
THE BOX A FEW FEET FROM MITCHELL'S CHAIR)

PUNIT

These are the last from your office.

MITCHELL

Are you sure?

PUNIT

(IRONIC)

No.

(PAUSE)

I destroyed the files, Mr. Randolph.

MITCHELL

Anyone see you?

PUNIT

Of course not.

MITCHELL

I had no choice. Everything had to go. Security.

PUNIT

Security is important, sir. I was fast than a cheetah.

MITCHELL

Sit down, Punit.

PUNIT

I really have to be going.

MITCHELL

Sit, you're making me nervous.

PUNIT

(SITS)

I'm very late, sir.

MITCHEL

Off to Delhi?

RENNIE

He has family waiting.

MITCHELL

I don't pay him enough. Isn't that so, Punit?

PUNIT

You could always pay me more, yes. That is so.

MITCHELL

(TO RENNIE)

He's said it before. Speaks his mind when he's half pissed. My funds are not what they were. This is embarrassing. I expected a large final disbursement from overseas, but the world markets are sinking to hell. Asian flu is worse than syphilis.

RENNIE

Mitchell . . .

MITCHELL

No economic penicillin. Were the police following you?

PUNIT

No, sir.

MITCHELL

Are you sure?

PUNIT

Yes, sir.

MITCHELL

You know I pay some of the police officers.

PUNIT

Sir.

MITCHELL

Handsomely. Every two months. In rupees or British pounds. Rennie disapproves.

PUNIT

Each man has a large family.

MITCHELL

That box looks very heavy. Thank you, Punit. I'm glad that Rustom brought you to my attention. There's not much trust in this country. And don't blame the assholes of Pakistan.

PUNIT

We've all been swindled in the course of growing old.

MITCHELL

Not Rennie. She has a third eye which protects her.

PUNIT

Older Indian women are assisted by certain gods.

MITCHELL

Indeed they are.

PUNIT

Particularly older women.

RENNIE

I'm not that old, gentlemen.

PUNIT

They start with Kali - the Divine Mother with the bloody killer's sword in hand.

MITCHELL

I suppose it starts in childhood and culminates in the decrepit master bedroom.

RENNIE

Call it a lady's well earned maturity.

MITCHELL

Last winter we went to Agra and Rennie gave me her very esoteric tour of the Taj. We were not alone. There were persistent ghosts, of course. In the evening mist, she led me about with uncanny insight and alchemy. I didn't see Mughal architecture, not at all. The portals of the most benign structure to grace this planet were at her disposal. All my cultivated vulgarity left me suddenly.

RENNIE

Were that only true.

MITCHELL

She wants me to marry her, Punit.

RENNIE

You have to divorce before you can marry.

MITCHELL

You have to marry before you can divorce.

RENNIE

He needs to leave, Mitchell.

MITCHELL

What time is your train?

PUNIT

In an hour, sir.

MITCHELL

Then you should go now.

PUNIT

Thank you, Mr. Randolph.

MITCHELL

When you come back to Shimla, I have a few more chores for you.

(PUNIT NODS AND EXITS)

He's a good Parsi if ever there was one.

RENNIE

There's very little Parsi blood in him. He's Muslim through and through.

MITCHELL

I beg to differ.

RENNIE

Why did he have so much difficulty with lost family members in Kashmir?

MITCHELL

It's how he holds his head. It's his British affinities too. You're very defensive about Parsi culture.

RENNIE

I'll defend my birthright.

MITCHELL

At any rate, Rustom found him at the university and swears by him.

RENNIE

You can find all kinds of people at the university, Mitchell.

MITCHELL

In the school of divinity?

RENNIE

The corrupt and the blessed entwined for life. Yes, he has sufficient integrity - I grant you.

(PAUSE)

You won't marry me ever. You're a classic coward.

MITCHELL

So I am. A true classic. When would you like to marry? After the monsoon?

RENNIE

Where is your blasted wife?

MITCHELL

In the holy Catholic hospital.

RENNIE

Unconscious?

MITCHELL

Depends on which doctor reports in. Why do you want to marry me? It wouldn't change a thing.

RENNIE

I suppose for the sheer novelty.

MITCHELL

You don't intend to go to New York or London.

RENNIE

Hiding here is not my life's goal.

MITCHELL

I understand.

RENNIE

I don't think you do.

MITCHELL

You saved my life in London. I would have been arrested. I was pressing my luck. Didn't want to leave but such is life. Imagine that we go back to London.

RENNIE

(LAUGHS SWEETLY)

The little thatched cottage in Hampstead?

MITCHELL

(BEGINS TO EXAMINE THE CONTENTS OF THE BOX)

You've some family in England.

RENNIE

No, I don't.

MITCHELL

They act like family.

RENNIE

Shimla is our safest haven. I loved you too much too soon and I should take back the things I gave you. All my money that you had spent. You wouldn't even notice.

MITCHELL

I notice everything, darling. That's my only talent these days. Perhaps I've lost a fortune and half my sanity since the day I set foot in on this cursed continent. I notice everything regardless of place, time or gender.

RENNIE

Then be thankful for that.

MITCHELL

I am. I pray to the most decadent angels.

RENNIE

And in return they torture you.

MITCHELL

No, they would say they're lavishing positive attention, Rennie.

RENNIE

There was a man who came looking for you yesterday.

Oh dear . . .

MITCHELL

An American.

RENNIE

You chased him away.

MITCHELL

Yes.

RENNIE

Thank you.

MITCHELL

He'll be back.

RENNIE

What makes you say that?

MITCHELL

My dull instincts.

RENNIE

How was he dressed?

MITCHELL

Like an American businessman.

RENNIE

Perhaps he brought on this obscene odor. Do you really think I'm too nice?

MITCHELL

That's what makes you unmistakably amoral.

RENNIE

You were about to say - evil.

MITCHELL

You're not evil. That takes a bigger commitment. And that's beyond your vocabulary, thank God.

RENNIE

END OF SCENE
SCENE TWO
(THE NEXT DAY. PAUL COVINGTON
IS AT THE DOOR WAITING FOR A
RESPONSE)

RENNIE

I think I was very clear yesterday.

PAUL

You were and I appreciate your candor. But it's not a casual matter. I came a great distance.

RENNIE

I'm sorry.

(ABOUT TO CLOSE THE DOOR)

PAUL

There's a lot of money involved. Randolph's money, actually.

RENNIE

You really must go.

PAUL

Please. I have some cash with me.

(HE PRODUCES AN ENVELOP)

It's from Geneti-Tech. A Maryland enterprise. We couldn't wire it to Randolph's bank. There was a problem with the last four numbers. Or someone put a freeze on his account. It's an above board thing. I swear to you.

RENNIE

We're not in need of money.

PAUL

Fifty thousand to start. Mr. Sheldon sent me.

RENNIE

Lawrence Sheldon?

PAUL

Perhaps you'll let me see him now.

RENNIE

He's not here.

PAUL

But I've been watching the house all morning.

RENNIE

Who are you?

PAUL

Paul Covington.

(GENTLY OFFERS HER THE MONEY. SHE CANNOT ACCEPT)

I used to work for Geni-Tech.. Like Mr. Randolph. Call Sheldon if you'd like. I have his number.

(SNEEZES INTO HIS SLEEVE)

I was traveling with my wife. Not much luxury, let me tell you. As soon as one enters New Delhi.

RENNIE

Does Mitchell know you?

PAUL

He should

(SHOWS AN OLD PHOTO)

Here we are in New York during Christmas. Maybe ten years ago.

RENNIE

That's not Mitchell.

PAUL

He had more hair then. You do know that? You're not even looking at the photo. Keep it. Show it to him.

(PAUSE. HE PLACES PHOTO ON TABLE BY THE PHONE)

My wife got sick. She's furious. No matter how many vaccinations before coming. I was too sick the first week. Hell, I lost ten pounds.

(SNEEZES AGAIN)

I heard that you teach at the local college.

RENNIE

Said who?

PAUL

The private guard downstairs.

RENNIE

Not this year. Migraines.

PAUL

A linguist?

RENNIE

Yes.

PAUL

Was there ever a Tower of Babel?

RENNIE

(BORED AND BOTHERED)

I really don't know.

PAUL

You must have met Mitchell in London just before John Major lost his election.

RENNIE

Yes, that's right.

PAUL

And one thing led to another. Suddenly you both move to India. How fascinating.

RENNIE

What exactly are you insinuating?

PAUL

May I please use your phone?

RENNIE

(AFTER A PAUSE, POINTS TO PHONE)

Mr. Covington, you're getting on my nerves.

(HE SMILES AND BEGINS TO DIAL)

I've some errands, so . . .

PAUL

(ON PHONE)

Hello. It's Paul Covington. I've decided to stay another two days and I don't want to change rooms. Yes. That's right and please contact the house physician. Thank you.

(HANGS UP. PLACES ENVELOP WITH CASH ON TABLE)

When I was in college, I wanted to be a very modern linguist but I stammered too much. Tell Mr. Randolph that I'm at the Oberoi Clark. And I do want to see him immediately.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

(THE NEXT DAY)

MITCHELL

I didn't know you worked for the UN.

PUNIT

It was a temporary post, sir.

MITCHELL

You never brought it up before.

PUNIT

My fault, Mr. Randolph. You never asked.

MITCHELL

It's one thing to hide a prison record.

PUNIT

Not my intention whatsoever.

MITCHELL

Don't lie to me, Punit.

(SILENCE)

You're more comfortable talking to Rennie.

PUNIT

She's very kind before afternoon tea.

MITCHELL

There are many people to whom she extends sympathy. And I can't dissuade her. Your political injuries have touched her. Well, that's a woman's mentality and that's why women live longer. You'd give her the same consideration were things reversed.

PUNIT

Indeed, sir.

MITCHELL

Life does cruel things. Gives us misfortune atop a mountain of gold. I had a wonderful plan to retire in style.

PUNIT

I lost half my family in Kashmir.

MITCHELL

I'm deeply sorry, Punit. All the more because it was thoroughly avoidable.

PUNIT

Sir.

MITCHELL

I didn't know Parsis were at risk. You've earned your sorrow.

(PAUSE)

You still have a son.

PUNIT

He's all I have.

MITCHELL

And he guarantees your soul immortality.

PUNIT

My name, if not my soul.

MITCHELL

All the same. In my case, it could be the reverse.

PUNIT

How random life is.

MITCHELL

You told me that you outlived a curse. Was that really true?

(SILENCE)

You once told me that you met the Devil incarnate in Bombay during a political rally.

(SILENCE)

You once told me that you had pissed away a small fortune during a pleasant winter.

PUNIT

Winter's always pleasant in the high mountains, sir.

MITCHELL

That's not what I asked.

PUNIT

Were you asking me a question?

MITCHELL

You're very charismatic, Punit, but I see your failure.

PUNIT

Certainly, failure has its limits. I come from a small town where hideous women throw curses for sport. If bad things have happened to me, I must be responsible, sir. And it's true that I've been to Bombay in an election year. But I've never seen Satan.

MITCHELL

You had several million rupees.

PUNIT

I don't remember at all.

MITCHELL

And you bought horrendous stocks before the market crashed.

PUNIT

I regret little but my timing.

MITCHELL

We regret too much.

PUNIT

Until the next world. Your office is vacant, Mr. Randolph. My job was very thorough.

MITCHELL

I met your son some months ago.

PUNIT

I don't remember.

MITCHELL

He's like you in many ways. Do you find that flattering?

PUNIT

I don't know, Mr. Randolph.

MITCHELL

Think of it as flattering.

PUNIT

Had my son met you, he would have said so.

MITCHELL

A polite answer.

PUNIT

I cannot be too polite in this climate.

MITCHELL

When you're done with me you'll be back working for the UN.

PUNIT

Perhaps not.

MITCHELL

Rampant corruption?

PUNIT

As bad as the local banks, sir.

MITCHELL

I dreamt last night one of us had died, the other barely survived. And all the beautiful, young women were naked above the waist.

PUNIT

An unlucky dream, Mr. Randolph. I wouldn't drink strong tea before bedtime.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

(LATER THAT SAME DAY.
A HOTEL LOBBY. PUNIT IS SITTING
WITH AN ATTACH CASE OPEN ON
HIS LAP. ONCE OR TWICE HE LOOKS
UP TO GLANCE ABOUT THE LOBBY.
AFTER CHECKING HIS WATCH, HE
SHUTS THE ATTACH AND PLACES
IT BY THE SIDE OF HIS CHAIR. IN
THE NEXT MOMENT, HE RISES AND
EXITS - LEAVING THE ATTACH
DELIBERATELY)

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIVE
(LATER THAT DAY, MITCHELL'S HOME)

PAUL

My wife Meredith and I were free that weekend. We hired a cab to Kurfi to see the Himalayas on the first clear day. But the snow came suddenly, we turned right around. The roads were incredibly deadly. Wrecks every ten miles. I thought we were going to crash. So many wretched caravans going absolutely nowhere. The driver then took us to Jakhu Hill where to his surprise the snow was just a dusting. This was a safer road back to Shimla. We drove to the ascent rather than hike it. We stopped at the Hanuman Temple - the famous monkey temple. We got out of the cab and went into the garish monkey shrine where candles were burning, along side masses of cheap glittering tinsel. The dull looking fakir sits beside an electric heater. He reeked over urine. It is said the shrine holds the footprints of Hanuman, the grand monkey god, as he stopped on route to Laxman - the wounded brother of Rama. We passed the gates of the temple and started up the steep path. Bizarre sounds of monkeys and birds. We were walking briskly. I was ten feet ahead of her. Suddenly, a large monkey ran by and grabbed her leg. Meredith felt the piercing nails from its hand. In a flash, the monkey flew up her chest and grabbed her eyeglasses. My wife's blind without her glasses. The damn beast, growling from hell, flew thirty feet up a tree. She threw rocks every which way.

(PAUSE)

I keep telling this story.

MITCHELL

Is it a story?

PAUL

No. Of course not. We hurried back to the cab. I told the driver what had happened. There was some blood along my wife's eyebrows. The monkey had scratched her deeply. The driver insisted we try to get her glasses back. He and I went back up the mountain walk to find the monkey. I was quite scared at this point. A hundred monkeys had arrived as if summoned by the large, thief monkey. The driver skipped up to the rock pile where sat a gypsy woman. She was the ugliest woman I could imagine. The driver spoke Hindustani to her. The monkey slid down the tree and the gypsy threw a bag of food at the creature. The monkey dropped the glasses and ran with the loot. She followed us back to the cab. The driver gave her some rupees. She demanded much more.

MITCHELL

So you emptied out your wallet.

PAUL

I didn't. The driver just raced off while her hand hung along his window.

MITCHELL

And you call that lucky?

PAUL

We needed to get rabies shots. Meredith, that is.

MITCHELL

Christ.

PAUL

You've been to the local hospital.

MITCHELL

Yes.

PAUL

What can one say?

MITCHELL

So that's why your wife went back to the States?

PAUL

Actually, to London. With the second shot, she had enough. You see, before finding the doctor you have to buy the rabipur drug on your own from any street stand pharmacy. God only knows

if they really refrigerate prescriptions in their little mini-bars..

MITCHELL

Living here, I know better than to entertain criminal monkeys.

PAUL

I suppose that was my first harsh lesson in India.

MITCHELL

It won't be your last.

PAUL

You have the envelop I left with Rennie?

MITCHELL

Unmarked money?

PAUL

Please don't insult me.

MITCHELL

You could be fronting for the Feds.

PAUL

Have you any idea how bad the situation is back home?

MITCHELL

I trust it will get worse.

PAUL

You don't give a shit, do you?

MITCHELL

Grow up, Paul.

PAUL

Word's gotten out. The newspapers know. Military contracts are under new scrutiny all because your former company had shipped 36 stains of killer pathogens to Iraq.

MITCHELL

Christ, we had US Government approval and some stains came right from the Army's Research Center in Maryland. And we're talking over 10 years ago.

PAUL

You profited twice over and didn't lose a night of sleep.

MITCHELL

I broke no explicit laws at that time.

PAUL

And then you defrauded some heavy rollers with a non-existent bio-tech fund.

MITCHELL

That's only half true. The fund collapsed due to accounting irregularities. I was conned along with the board members. Listen, I don't really care what happened Stateside. Things went bad for a lot of people. I could have lost a lot of money for no particular ideal. I had no real hand in stockpiling Saddam's war chest. You've spent too many resources looking for me.

PAUL

I want to clear my own name . . . and yours.

MITCHELL

To hell with my name. I'm not even worth a three line obituary.

PAUL

Don't con me, Mitchell.

MITCHELL

Your name's untainted.

PAUL

What you've done in the last five years has already damaged me.

MITCHELL

Sit down, have a drink. This is ludicrous. Everything can't be perfect.

PAUL

You're my father, for fuck's sake.

MITCHELL

(GENTLY DOWNPLAYING THIS)

Stop saying that.

PAUL

I've a chance to a legitimate future. It's down to an attractive IPO, that's all. The reports read extremely well. Morgan Stanley's behind us. In fact, much of Wall Street is. Our capitalization has surpassed analysts' projections.

MITCHELL

You're as clean as snow. So stop your crying.

PAUL

(NEXT TWO LINES OVERLAP)
Stories get leaked overnight.

MITCHELL

Not about me.

PAUL

You're dead wrong.

MITCHELL

I'm very dead.

PAUL

I don't care to risk this.

MITCHELL

Oh, that's bullshit. Not even a dozen Interpol cops could connect us.

PAUL

You chose to hide, but that's not my . . .

MITCHELL

Who put you through college?

PAUL

You're such an asshole.

MITCHELL

You want your public stock to fly. You will fly, my dear boy.

PAUL

Are you my father?

MITCHELL

What difference does it make?

PAUL

It would give me peace of mind.

MITCHELL

Why the hell should you have peace of mind?

PAUL

Are you my father?

MITCHELL

Is there evidence?

PAUL

DNA? You co-signed dozens of personal, legal documents.

MITCHELL

All meaningless now.

PAUL

That's not the point.

MITCHELL

What is the point?

PAUL

My mother swore that you were.

MITCHELL

Then take her for her word.

PAUL

It's not good enough for me.

MITCHELL

Good enough for you?

PAUL

You're laughing at me.

MITCHELL

No, I respect you too much. You know the timeless expression: it's a wise child who knows his true father. You're in good company.

(PAUSE)

Look Paul, you can realize why my life has changed this drastically. Don't drag me into some old business that won't add up to anything. I left Maryland for my sanity. I gave nothing of large value to any foreign power. Certainly not to the madman of Baghdad. I'm not a spy. I'm

not a company mole. Not a common thief. I sold Iraq some things they were about to buy from France.

PAUL

You lie to yourself.

MITCHELL

Maybe I do. What do you really want?

PAUL

I want you to come back with me.

MITCHELL

(LAUGHING MILDLY)

I have no passport, Paul. You must know that.

PAUL

We can get the State Department to issue another one.

MITCHELL

Right. And off to jail go I.

PAUL

Just go to trial and present your case.

MITCHELL

Did your mother put you up to this?

(POURING TWO DRINKS OF SCOTCH)

PAUL

Don't mention her.

MITCHELL

That was my transgression.

PAUL

You can be a pig.

MITCHELL

A surviving pig.

(UNCOMFORTABLE WITH PAUL'S GAZE)

What now?

PAUL

Mother died last month.

MITCHELL

(PAUSE)

I'm sorry. It was to be expected. A very modest funeral?

PAUL

Yes.

MITCHELL

As only she would have it.

PAUL

(PAUSE)

You should have been present.

MITCHELL

You're right.

PAUL

Did the thought occur to you?

MITCHELL

Yes. I had received your wire.

PAUL

You could have phoned.

MITCHELL

I was too depressed. I still loved her, hard as that might seem.

PAUL

Very hard.

MITCHELL

Be in my shoes for a moment. I didn't live well. I acted like a coward. I'm paying for this stupidity twenty times over. I hate myself. This is not a luxury retirement. And I'm uncertain about how and where I will end up.

(HANDS ONE DRINK TO PAUL)

PAUL

Take it to trial, Mitchell.

MITCHELL

You want to see me hang? Is that it?

PAUL

That depends.

MITCHELL

Christ Almighty. Drink up. This drift will go endlessly.

PAUL

I thought you gave up scotch?

MITCHELL

(IGNORING PAUL)

When you were a boy, you had these bizarre, aristocratic airs, pretending that nobility ruled the day. You collected for UNICEF while parading in an expensive, Halloween costume. You used to marvel over the British royals. Maybe it was cute for a year or so, but the consequences were painful. The kind of stench usually blamed on the Kennedys, Hollywood elite, and the bloated neighbors across the street.

(PAUSE)

Why the hell would I give up scotch?

(PAUSE)

You came half way across the world to get me to do you a questionable business favor. Are you insane? Did your wife put you up to this? She's not a very clever woman, Paul. Your first adult mistake was to have married the biggest bitch in New Jersey. Whom did you wish to impress? What was the true cost benefit when you made this irrevocable, shitty decision? Or did you go forward to seek out a slow and lengthy punishment? Only virgin boy scouts are clean. You're a lousy businessman, but you love money more than life itself.

PAUL

I love the freedom of honest money.

MITCHELL

And as a rat, I merely love freedom.

PAUL

Living here?

MITCHELL

Hiding here, yes.

PAUL

Others will track you down.

Who?
MITCHELL

Agents from Washington.
PAUL

Only you. Only an idiot would fly to New Delhi.
MITCHELL

You wanted me to come.
PAUL

That's your fantasy.
MITCHELL

I know you wanted me.
PAUL

Christ in Heaven, pick up your drink. If any one wanted you, it was Rennie. She phoned you enough times.
MITCHELL

I never got her calls.
PAUL

Because she thought you were my daughter. Sweet Paula.
MITCHELL
(DRINKING LIBERALLY)

I always wanted a girl. Perhaps it was my first lie to Rennie.
(PAUSE)

I saw an awful shooting the other day near the church. Two men were bullying a small street vendor. They used sticks to beat his donkey. For no clear reason. From a distance came three rapid shots. The two large businessmen fell to the ground. Instantly dead. Police appeared out of the gutter. There were a few more shots from the sniper atop a deserted building. Two more bullets directed toward me.

There's a contract out on your name.
PAUL

You're right.
MITCHELL
(PAUSE)

I've been a strong supporter of these high placed Jews. I had my reasons. My old trade partners. In the circles of my work , it was sound business practice . I gave to many foundations, politicians and bond drives. I feel quite different now in Asia.. Antagonistic. I've always been anti-Semitic. Overseas it's indeed fashionable. One can be neutral. Or opinionated. But one cannot be a saint. One cannot be too stupid. One cannot afford but be selfish. Thankfully in India, one avoids seeing too many Jews.

PAUL

My wife is Jewish.

MITCHELL

I know.

PAUL

You really amaze me.

MITCHELL

I had the destiny to be a tender troll. I followed my destiny. I don't understand why you would marry a materialistic Jew. It'll only become apparent to you after it's too late. You're not a snot nosed kid anymore.

PAUL

You could have agreed to meet my wife.

MITCHELL

I would have insulted her.

PAUL

She's been insulted before.

MITCHELL

I would have tried to sleep with her.

PAUL

Fabulous.

MITCHELL

What are you trying to prove? I'm just an old crank.

(PAUSE)

If you were smart, you would leave immediately and never contact me again. Dunn and Bradstreet won't trace me to you, nor will Moody's. Besides, the Army was equally negligent. At least those headquartered in Fort Detrick, Maryland.

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PAUL

That will come up in court.

MITCHELL

Not in a million years. Everything has been covered up by the best professional dissemblers.

PAUL

Who were the dissemblers?

MITCHELL

We only knew them as the seven dwarves. I think they were rather short with us.

PAUL

Fine, your dealings will destroy my career.

MITCHELL

Then you lack creativity, Paul.
(RENNIE ENTERS)

RENNIE

Is he staying for dinner?

MITCHELL

No, darling. This irate, young man has overstayed his welcome.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIX

(HOTEL LOBBY, LATER THAT DAY)

PAUL

Mr. Patel, it was good of you to meet me here.

This is a serious problem, I suppose. PUNIT

I think so. PAUL

Are you staying this hotel? PUNIT

Yes. PAUL

How are the meals? PUNIT

What? PAUL

I heard about your wife. There are two explanations. PUNIT

Yes? PAUL

Either she is accident prone. PUNIT

She isn't. PAUL

Or someone put a curse on her. PUNIT

A curse? PAUL

These things do happen, Mr. Covington. Even at the end of the century. PUNIT

My wife's doing much better. PAUL

That's good. PUNIT

But she had to leave India. PAUL

Just as well. You seem composed, however. PUNIT

Reasonably so. PAUL

You resemble, Mr. Randolph. PUNIT

Do I? PAUL

Oh, yes indeed. PUNIT

When I wear a leisure suit. PAUL0

I thought I knew him very well. Things have changed recently. PUNIT

My father has cancer. PAUL

I know that, yes. PUNIT

He refuses to go for treatment. At least that's what he told me. PAUL

Mr. Randolph had an adverse reaction to chemo therapy. It destroyed his business imagination. PUNIT

That's an odd thing to say. PAUL

Pardon me. PUNIT

I suppose he wants to die quickly.

PAUL

You'll have to ask him.

PUNIT

What will happen to you?

PAUL

I come and go like the house cat.

PUNIT

You're more involved than that. Are you aware of his work with a Maryland company?

PAUL

No.

PUNIT

You are aware, Punit.

PAUL

I only read his magazines.

PUNIT

PAUL

I'll get the truth one way or another. You've handled most of his papers at the office. I've watched you.

PUNIT

Custodial chores. Nothing more.

PAUL

He's a criminal.

PUNIT

Is that right?

PAUL

Did you think he was just a broker for legal vaccinations and serums?

PUNIT

Yes.

PAUL

Why cover for him, Punit?

PUNIT

If you want to punish your father, leave me be. You can't buy me.

PAUL

I don't want to buy you. I can see that you're cultivated by integrity.

(PAUSE)

And for a university man you're smart about the street. The combination makes you very valuable.

PUNIT

There's an epidemic to the north of Delhi. Innocent people suffer. Mr. Randolph has agreed to lend his help.

PAUL

Every month there's an epidemic. There's no point to his offer.

PUNIT

This one's far worse.

PAUL

Something biblical?

PUNIT

Often things are.

PAUL

I believe you.

PUNIT

Thank you.

PAUL

(PAUSE)

I have a favor to ask.

PUNIT

Please don't. Even if your intentions are good, you'll only compromise me and my family. We do things differently here because human life is cheap. A billion souls in search of a charity meal. A billion crying mouths in the dead of the night.

PAUL
It's a simple favor.

PUNIT
A man loses his hands and becomes a beggar.

PAUL
I want to fly him home with me.

PUNIT
To murder your father.

PAUL
Why the hell would I?

PUNIT
Because he wanted to murder you.

PAUL
No. He's not that melodramatic and I'm not that redundant.

PUNIT
Maybe you are.

PAUL
(PAUSE)
I think I'm very ill. My stomach. Horrible cramps.

PUNIT
You do look ill. But we have no doctors of merit.

PAUL
I take pills.

PUNIT
Pills are good.

PAUL
And you?

PUNIT
Alcohol is poison.

Alcohol is.
(WINCING IN PAIN)
I'll pay you a great sum of money.

PAUL

Everyone says that, yes.

PUNIT

(PAUSE)
How much?

PUNIT

Triple what he pays you.

PAUL

Mr. Randolph pays me less than a cab driver.

PUNIT

Name your price.

PAUL

I'll tell you tomorrow. My wife has a better head for business.

PUNIT

Talk to your wife.

PAUL

Tell me something, Mr. Covington. Why does Superman wear a red cape and boots?

PUNIT

(SITTING DOWN, FOLDING HIS ARM)
I honestly don't know.

PAUL

Tight red trunks too. Women want to make love to him because he dares to wear red.

PUNIT

It's as good as any other theory.

PAUL

Red makes the heart race.

PUNIT

PAUL

Like a valentine.

PUNIT

You don't share the same name with Mr. Randolph.

PAUL

It's complicated. He changed his name after I was born.

PUNIT

I see.

PAUL

I'm sure he's changed his name several times over the years.

PUNIT

I'll tell you my price tomorrow, sir.

(PAUSE)

Are you certain that you are his son?

END OF SCENE

SCENE SEVEN
(MITCHELL'S HOME, NEXT DAY)

RENNIE

Mr. Randolph is very ill today.

PUNIT

I am sorry to hear that.

RENNIE

He was up all night. The doctor came by today. He'll have to go to the hospital. This time it's very serious, I'm afraid to say. In his sleep, he's had tragic premonitions. I don't think you should come by any more. Do you understand?

PUNIT

I do, madam.

RENNIE

Then why do you stare at me?

PUNIT

There is more work to do.

RENNIE

There is no more work, Punit. The office has disappeared and, with it, all business contacts. Forget you ever came to this household. Promise me that.

PUNIT

This is most extreme.

RENNIE

I don't give a damn how it looks.

PUNIT

I always tell the truth, madam.

RENNIE

Promise me.

PUNIT

I cannot make promises in my present condition. I have my own worries and I have my sense of honor.

RENNIE

Honor?

PUNIT

It is a clean, helpful word, Madam.

RENNIE

I know the distinction between right and wrong.

PUNIT

Know that I did wrong. First with Mr. Randolph, then with his son.

RENNIE

Mr. Randolph is a terrible influence on you, Punit.

PUNIT

Perhaps.

RENNIE

You've been approached by Mr. Covington?

PUNIT

Yes.

RENNIE

Did he offer you money?

PUNIT

Yes.

RENNIE

And you took the money.

(SILENCE)

Then I cannot trust you anymore.

PUNIT

You never trusted me, Madam.

RENNIE

Oh, but I did.

PUNIT

He's Mr. Randolph's natural son. That is mostly a fact, yes? One cannot separate something in the family. If they mean each other extreme harm, well, there are many such stories in the holy books. You don't have to hear the testimony of two crossed souls to believe this much. I believe in fate, madam, not freedom. Freedom is illusion. We are led to do the things we do

because we are led to do these things. This is why we kill our heroes. And this is why our heroes destroy a nation. I am less a noble man, despite the will of my family. And for hire as this is my chosen station in life. I was not destined to be a rag-picker. If you can find evidence to trust yourself, than you can extend that courtesy to me.

RENNIE

Quite a speech for a pliant Parsi.

PUNIT

I take that as a compliment.

RENNIE

It wasn't.

PUNIT

You'll need me if Mr. Randolph goes to the hospital.

RENNIE

I don't think so, unless you're thoroughly clairvoyant.

PUNIT

The palms of my hands can detect a change in the air.

(PAUSE)

There are unsavory people making the rounds, it is true of course. And there are restless gangsters from Bombay who act on the luckless sleeper train to Himachal Pradesh. They have reason to hurt Mr. Randolph.

RENNIE

Bombay gangsters?

PUNIT

They'll not hesitate to shoot his very eyes out. He seems not to know. I did more than close out his office, madam. I was booked and bonded. I made trips to the bank. Gave alms to the poor to ward off demons. Believe me, some very distinguished bankers sell information for the price of a good cotton suit. A lone gunman will kill for a pack of unopened, imported cigarettes. This is India, after all.

PUNIT/RENNIE

People have to eat.

RENNIE

Enough.

PUNIT

Have I not spelled out the danger?

RENNIE

I will not let him die.

PUNIT

Madam, you're too educated to rely on the whims of chance or magic.

RENNIE

I carry a pistol.

PUNIT

Yes, I know.

RENNIE

And I have nerve.

PUNIT

That much I know. But it will give you no pleasure.

RENNIE

How you've changed, Punit. How much you have changed. Some awful days have gone by, that's true. Empty your pockets.

PUNIT

Why?

RENNIE

Just do it.

PUNIT

I have nothing but filthy coins.

RENNIE

I want to count the coins.

(HE EMPTIES HIS POCKETS OF SOME COINS. SHE EXAMINES THE COINS)

Thank you.

PUNIT

I had to bury my family. We cried for weeks. With bitter age one learns how to mourn the dead. You were very giving to us.

RENNIE

Actually, the dead mourn the living. I have watched my father from both sides of the grave.

PUNIT

Both sides now?

RENNIE

You and I know what it is to be haunted.

PUNIT

And how to greet the uninvited.

RENNIE

I can see your ghosts.

PUNIT

Then pity me, madam.

RENNIE

I do. More than you'll ever realize. Your ethnicity is mercurial. I cannot comprehend how or why your family was in Kashmir.

PUNIT

Allow me to take you to the hospital.

RENNIE

No.

PUNIT

I can bring good luck to Mr. Randolph.

RENNIE

He told me that people will soon be after you.

PUNIT

Mr. Randolph knows my loyalty. It was said in anger.

RENNIE

I forbid you to be party to us.

PUNIT

Place your faith in God.

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RENNIE

How can I when the devil has entered our little world.

PUNIT

If he has, then my death will be in vain.

END OF SCENE

SCENE EIGHT
(MITCHELL'S HOME, LATER
THAT DAY)

MITCHELL

I can't eat a thing.

RENNIE

Drink the damn mango juice.

MITCHELL

I can't.

RENNIE

What am I going to do with you?

MITCHELL

Go to the bank and withdraw all the cash.

RENNIE

There is no more cash.

MITCHELL

We've one more account under a business name.

RENNIE

I don't want to be a widow.

MITCHELL

A gorgeous black widow. Come here and let me plant a kiss.

(PAUSE)

I'm not going yet. While you were away, I went to the idiot "reader" below the leather store. She felt my bumps, traced my veins . . .

RENNIE

Mitchell . . .

MITCHELL

My veins are good.

RENNIE

Why do these primitive things.

MITCHELL

She said I'd have another five years. I'm making you cry.

RENNIE

You are.

MITCHELL

Twenty thousand rupees.

RENNIE

Will you tell me why?

MITCHELL

Severence pay.

RENNIE

To Punit?

(MITCHELL NODS)

You're over your head in bad debts. It won't stop at twenty thousand.

MITCHELL

He'll take my son for a drive.

RENNIE

Punit? You're putting all of us in peril.

MITCHELL

Nonsense.

RENNIE

What the hell's gotten into you?

MITCHELL

I can't find the effective pain killers, darling, and I'm falling into very foul moods. Maybe this is the aftermath of underground nuclear testing. I could take a semi-automatic rifle and shoot outside the window.

RENNIE

Paul has brought out the worst in you.

MITCHELL

In truth, he's just a boy.

RENNIE

We could leave for Gwaillor before he knows.

MITCHELL

No.

RENNIE

Why stay here?

MITCHELL

The air's much better in the foothills. We can have a beautiful wedding at Christchurch.

(SMILES ODDLY)

I bought a ring which will fit this time. I'm very serious.

(PAUSE)

There's no more business to tend to. Except the latest religious bloodshed. Why tempt fate?

RENNIE

I hate when you toy with me.

MITCHELL

Do you love me that much, Rennie? Because that's what I feel for you.

(COUGHS ROUGHLY)

Mitchell . . .

RENNIE

God damn it . . .

MITCHELL

Lie down.

RENNIE

(MORE COUGHING)

Got to get dressed to go out. And I don't want you to follow me.

MITCHELL

END OF SCENE

SCENE NINE
(PAUL'S HOTEL LOBBY, NEXT DAY)

PUNIT

He's a rather tall elegant man with jade black eyes and a carved wood walking stick. He likes to be called the Viceroy, because he has a common surname. He's a frequent guest at Shimla's India Institute. Typically, you'll find him crouched in the corner suite overlooking the meadow. Little stinking cigars between his knotty, arthritic fingers. A ghostly, ugly man, indeed, hiding a scowl in the manner of a woman securing her hyman. You'll never see him in the company of respectable women. That's the way he is. I took from him. Months before meeting Mr. Randolph. Yes, I took my orders from the Viceroy. As I took my orders from your father. What choice did I have? He beats peasants and politicians with his stick. He eats monkeys barely cooked. An undisguised terror? Perhaps. He impregnated the entire Shankar family, but didn't give a rupee in family support. The Viceroy had reason to extort riches from Mr. Randolph. Yes, it was something as strong as the tug of the full moon.

PAUL

Did you alert my father?

No. PUNIT

Why not? PAUL

Out of fear. I fear the Viceroy. PUNIT

(PAUSE)

Half of Shimla fear the Viceroy.

(PAUSE)

We fear him in this life, and in the afterlife, Mr. Covington.

Is he the Devil? PAUL

PUNIT
Who can tell these days? When a towering monster with a murderous walking stick knows your name, knows your deep pain and your weaknesses, who comes to your door in the middle of the night . . . there are few such Devils here who leave a calling card. I am no hero to this village, my friend. Shimla has no heroes. The Viceroy took notice the day Mr. Randolph first entered the Colonial bank. I was there. The day was fated. Buckets of rain fell. Streets were flooded. The Viceroy stood behind him on cue for the teller. As the clerk rubber banded the money, the Viceroy counted aloud - his thin lips biting the air.

(PAUSE)

It is sorrowful bad luck to have the Viceroy hovering in a bank. Worse still when he's standing over your shoulder. Worse still involving him in any business.

(PAUSE)

He'll hurt you too, Mr. Covington. That I am quite sure.

Why would he bother with me? PAUL

PUNIT
Because you sneak around Shimla like a thief. And because you are progeny.

PAUL
I gather my father owes him a large sum of money?

PUNIT
How large I do not know.

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PAUL

All the more reason for him to leave with me.

PUNIT

Leave at once, if you care about your safety and your wife's.

PAUL

My wife's in London.

PUNIT

Yes, that would be your best destination too, sir. When you return to your hotel, make certain that you are not followed. Alert the front desk. Call the police. Double lock your door and avoid going out at night. And I would buy a hand gun.

PAUL

Why are you trying to scare me?

PUNIT

I owe Mr. Randolph a favor. He posted bond for me. It's a long story, you don't want to hear it.

PAUL

You rattling me, Punit.

PUNIT

Mr. Randolph has my loyalty. I won't leave him defenseless.

PAUL

Then apparently you risk your own life.

PUNIT

My life was never intended to prolong the error of a bad decision.

PAUL

There's an unpainted, broken statue at the railway station. The figure resembles you, honest to God.

PUNIT

I know the statue.

PAUL

I keep seeing it each day I change my return ticket. The statue's eyes follow me from counter to counter. I ask this statue questions that should embarrass me. People look at me. I have to

laugh like a fool.

PUNIT

Every Indian statue has a personal issue.

PAUL

And each visit to the station, there's a diseased man without legs on a broken cart which rolls in circles. He holds my trousers for dear life.

PUNIT

A gentle leper is your only friend.

(PAUSE)

There's no poetic cure for leprosy, and an open wallet is unheard of. Buy a cheap hand gun, Mr. Covington. And you won't have to think so much.

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE TEN
(MITCHELL'S APARTMENT, LATER
THAT DAY)

RENNIE

We've painted the rooms because the gloom was everywhere, Mr. Covington. We have to orchestrate our moods, or suffer the consequences. I get very depressed when Mitchell suffers a set-back. A subtle yellow often lifts the spirit. But the carpets clash violently and I now doubt all my decisions.

PAUL

I know that feeling.

RENNIE

Do you?

PAUL

It's what brought me here despite the violence.

RENNIE

It's not a good feeling, Mr. Covington. I don't understand the recent attacks on Christians. It's unbecoming of my country. All I feel is shame. An Australian missionary and his poor two sons the newest victims.

PAUL

The police arrested 47 Hindu youth.

RENNIE

So I've heard.

(SILENCE)

You've been talking to Punit at your hotel.

PAUL

I asked him a few questions.

RENNIE

Each day that you linger hurts Mitchell. You do realize that? You have a real choice, my husband doesn't. You really ought to avoid Punit. This Parsi is going through a trying period too. His opinions vary by the hour.

PAUL

Punit talked about a criminal known as the Viceroy. Do you know such a person?

RENNIE

No.

PAUL

A very tall and prominent man with a walking stick?

RENNIE

Mitchell has nothing to do with such a person.

PAUL

Perhaps he does, but failed to tell you?

RENNIE

I doubt it.

PAUL

Come on. This thing is terrorizing him.

RENNIE

But must you annoy us?

PAUL

A stranger entered my bedroom last night. He had the room key. Said nothing. Stood a few feet away from me. Smoked a foul cigar. Coughed like a dead man. What did I say? How long did I go on? Was he listening to me at all? Cretins are following me. Half the food's poisoned. The hotel clerks spy my faxes and open my personal mail. Perhaps everything can be traced to this man called the Viceroy. And he will probably attack Mitchell.

RENNIE

Or it will be cancer which will kill him.

PAUL

You know which is worse.

RENNIE

You may very well be Mitchell's son. I don't care one way or another. Family ties have no meaning. Particularly in your case.

PAUL

My father ran away from us.

RENNIE

He had to.

PAUL

My mother had several injuries in her life which would have devastated most women. Mitchell enjoyed cheating on her during her financial successes.

RENNIE

She was in business?

PAUL

You don't know?

RENNIE

No.

PAUL

She was a key analyst to the health industry. Had wonderful investment opportunities whenever

firms merged. Never squandered her earnings. She gave away her money freely to charities and friends. And never loved another man after Mitchell left.

RENNIE

A remarkable woman.

PAUL

Yes.

RENNIE

So you were in the middle.

PAUL

When you're in the middle, inevitably you take someone's side.

RENNIE

Sons are closer to their mothers.

PAUL

So they say.

(PAUSE)

Mitchell said nothing about her?

RENNIE

Not fully, sad to say.

PAUL

Don't cover for him.

RENNIE

I can't be jealous of a ghost, Mr. Covington.

PAUL

What did he say about her?

RENNIE

And offend you?

PAUL

Please.

RENNIE

He said your mother's a witch. Over and over again.

(PAUSE)

I heard all the horror stories. No man would suffer for such a woman. Don't blame him for desertion.

PAUL

My mother's dead.

RENNIE

May the dead rest in peace.

PAUL

What kind of witch are you?

RENNIE

The kind that bakes little children in wood ovens. The kind that sustains Mitchell through dire sickness.

PAUL

Then come with him to the States.

RENNIE

Impossible. My hands burn. Yours are cold. Nothing is just. I've had five miscarriages, so if anyone, I am the one who fears the curse. Don't scoff. Untouchables serve as constant reminders. We fight for the most basic things in life, in hope that we are spared the worst. Your father completed his will, but I refuse to read it while he has a living breath. I gave up my belief in fairy tales, thinking sensible thoughts for a change. Do you know the smell of smoldering flesh? Can you smell it in the distance?

PAUL

I gave you enough money.

RENNIE

Mitchell took the money.

PAUL

You spent nothing?

RENNIE

No.

PAUL

You made it easier for him to choose this kind of life.

RENNIE

Maybe so.

PAUL

Staying in Shimla would be a disaster. Talk it over with him.

RENNIE

We have. Money's not the problem.

PAUL

The authorities will be lenient in light of his health.

RENNIE

My husband won't risk the trip. He thinks your mother is still alive, despite whatever you say. You know he fears arrest.

(UNSEEN BY PAUL, MITCHELL ENTERS SLOWLY, LOOKING VERY ILL.)

But that's what you want.

PAUL

You're not even married to Mitchell, but you've the gall to call him your husband.

MITCHELL

I had an odd dream set in old Delhi's train yard. Bon fires everywhere. Hostile dogs, goats, chickens, snakes . . . consuming flesh right off the bone.

(TURNING DIRECTLY TOWARD PAUL)

When you came to my aid, out flew a pair of business class tickets. Then peels of mad laughter. Did someone pack my wool socks? Is it time? I'm left in the fucking gutter amid every wretched plague. Your mother's dead. I know. My heart broke long before you heard the news. You were out of the country. An old friend phoned long distance. I've been in mourning. Your mother and I used to dance at Roseland. We were in love for many fine years. After three miscarriages, you arrived like a rude afterthought. You took her maiden name. I wanted a daughter to attend to me. Not a son to handle the last days of awe. And you had the task to bury her under a grey frigid Massachusetts sky.

(PAUSE)

I want another twenty years. I've plans for things. Philanthropy.

(TO RENNIE)

Why do all Shimla merchants cheat us so?

(SITS DOWN, TO PAUL)

When you came, I just grew decrepit. I was the brightest of men. The one with the most promise. The benevolent character who wore a sheer mask. That was my greatest strength. A naked soul with a vestige of religion. What a revelation.

(PAUSE)

We harbor cancers, Paul. You and I both.

RENNIE

Best to lie down in bed.

MITCHELL

Not now.

PAUL

Listen to Rennie.

MITCHELL

Can you name your own illness? Jaipur. Jaipur. The magnificent pink city of light.

RENNIE

Darling . . .

MITCHELL

I owe a small fortune to the tall, vindictive man. He'll come after both of us, that's the way he works. Tonight. Tomorrow. He will come, that's the comfort of horror. I must have been warned a dozen times. If I owe a thousand, he'll extract a million. If not from me . . . certainly from you. That's how it's done in India. From the father to the son. He will extract a very public death. He kills simians to injure the Gods. And ungodly temple monkeys will kill for him.

END OF SCENE

SCENE ELEVEN
(PAUL CARRIES A SUIT CASE, IN TRANSIT)

OUTSIDE HOTEL. NEXT DAY)

PAUL

Just under a week, I've packed my things. Had a series of bad dreams last night. My father won't budge. He will die soon. If I knew things were this wretched, I'd have thought twice before My wife said as much. I hate women's premonitions. One can hear harrowing gun shots late into the night and nobody reacts. One can see corpses by the dung heap at sunrise. One can mouth the still prayers of the unwashed dead or be struck by a pack of rabid dogs in the yellow stained mountain snow.

(PAUSE)

My wife called again from London. She said not to be extreme. Even if I executed a well written will.

(PAUSE)

The Oberoi Hotels of the exotic world. The Hiltons and the Sheratons too. I could lose myself in each one. Stay in bed and pretend to be my father. Pretend to forget the chain of errors and lies. I could name his cancer. Or I could breath again. Or simply stop breathing. I could inherit his failed memory. I could. Wait for the ghost of a remote Christmas. And there would be genuine well being. For those who can pray.

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWELVE

(MOMENTS LATER. PAUL'S HOTEL ROOM,

UPON ENTERING HE FINDS THE VICEROY
SITTING AND SMOKING)

VICEROY

The door was unlocked.

PAUL

I locked it before going out.

VICEROY

Blame the chambermaid. She looks like a whore. You really should secure your hotel room day or night. This is a dangerous part of town. I assumed you had checked out

PAUL

I came back for my address book.

VICEROY

(HOLDING THE BOOK IN HIS HAND)

This?

PAUL

Yes.

(RETRIEVES IT AWKWARDLY)

Who are you?

VICEROY

A business associate of your father's. No surprise, you know. All bankrupt foreigners end up in my hands. Like a bail's bondsman. Do you need to eat? We can call up for dinner.

(PAUSE)

Perhaps not. You've too many things on your mind. Please close the door. You never know who's lurking outside.

(RELUCTANTLY, PAUL CLOSES DOOR)

I love food, yet I can't gain a bloody pound. I love money, yet every sweet enterprise alludes me. I can't have sex. I've hideous scars along my shaft. A war wound? I never wore a uniform. I'm superstitious because of my mother. We need so few things in life to make us happy. Your father's not happy. In fact, I've never seen a man more miserable. He carries that ludicrous aura of financial power.

(PAUSE)

Do you think this is a cane? Or a walking stick?

PAUL

What's the difference?.

VICEROY

A dark artisan carved it with a fruit knife.

PAUL

One can admire it all the same.

VICEROY

Yes, exactly my sentiment. One can admire it all the same.

PAUL

I'm running late, if you'll excuse me . . .

VICEROY

Put the light on. By the table, that lamp . . .

(PAUL TURNS THE LAMP ON)

A good reading light is hard to find in Shimla.

(PAUSE)

Your father speaks some Hindustani. I'm flattered by his efforts.

PAUL

He's gifted in many languages.

VICEROY

He is your father?

PAUL

Yes, I believe so.

VICEROY

Does he call you Paul, or Mr. Covington?

(PAUSE)

He calls me the Viceroy. A nickname.

VICEROY

The name simply grew.

PAUL

An interesting name.

VICEROY

A colonial name. If you're British, yes.

(PAUSE)

Your father and I had a talk the other day..

So he has said.

PAUL

He owes a vast sum of money.

VICEROY

I know.

PAUL

Then I don't have another word.

VICEROY

You've threatened him.

PAUL

(POLITE DENIAL)
No, I'm a public personality.

VICEROY

He's dying from his illness.

PAUL

Yes, I know and I'm very sorry. Let me get to the point. You have a new corporation in need of foreign participation. He told me. I could be your Asian partner.

VICEROY

I don't want an Asian partner.

PAUL

I will add immeasurably to your enterprise and fund raising. Business visas unnecessary. I'll revise your prospectus. Bio-tech is tomorrow's India. We can draw up a tax-free start-up in Delhi. Better cures for leprosy. Cheaper formulas for anthrax. Show me your ledger.

VICEROY

When you knock properly on my door.

PAUL

I don't knock, Mr. Covington. I'm your ruling class.

VICEROY

What else did my father tell you?

PAUL

VICEROY

More than what you would like. More than what I read in the Herald Tribune. So I think we're close to a deal.

PAUL

Hardly. My country's SEC regulates things stringently.

VICEROY

Very amusing.

PAUL

I'm leaving the country tomorrow.

VICEROY

I certainly hope not. There's a beautiful woman downstairs waiting to meet you.

PAUL

(LOOKS AT WATCH)

I'm going to have to ask you to go.

VICEROY

Well, at least I think she's beautiful. If you see decadence as the ultimate form of beauty.

PAUL

She works for you.

VICEROY

She does favors for me. I do favors for her.

PAUL

I'm married.

VICEROY

Yes, I know. Where is your wife?

PAUL

She left.

VICEROY

India was brutal to her.

PAUL

Yes.

VICEROY

Doesn't she like to shop?

PAUL

These days I don't know what the hell she likes.

VICEROY

Call for the woman in the lobby. This woman likes to shop.

(PAUSE)

If you don't like her, you can just shoo her away. But if you let her stay, she has these marvelous stories like Sheherazade.

PAUL

What do you really want?

VICEROY

To move the earth like a great quake. Certainly she will move your feet.

PAUL

You sent this woman to see my father.

VICEROY

Yes.

(PAUSE)

Sons and fathers. What they have in common and share in secret.

(PAUSE)

One favorite story she tells is about a young child and a Bengal tiger. A family had lost their son on a mountain trail. The tiger stole the boy but he taught the animal to think about playful things.

(PAUSE)

We need playful things.

PAUL

I don't know.

VICEROY

Bio-tech research costs are killing profits. Employ Indian scientists and laboratories, you will gain. You know where to reach me?

PAUL

I can find out.

VICEROY

Good.

(PAUSE)

I don't think your father will die this year. He hasn't earned his ticket to Hell just yet..

PAUL

A very kind observation.

VICEROY

Well, it's up to him.

(PAUSE)

Excuse me then, I must go.

(AT THE DOOR)

Please don't keep her waiting downstairs. She too has a cruel side.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THIRTEEN
(MITCHELL'S HOME, LATER THAT DAY))

MITCHELL

A large rabid monkey got into the upstairs vestibule.

PUNIT

I'll see to it.

MITCHELL

These little gorillas shit everywhere.

PUNIT

Sir.

MITCHELL

And who cleans up after them?

PUNIT

Shimla has this problem since creation.

MITCHELL

These fat monkeys are trained.

PUNIT

You know a curse presides over anyone who dares train one.

MITCHELL

You used to.

PUNIT

Years and years ago. I didn't know any better, Mr. Randolph. And I'm still paying for the mistake.

MITCHELL

You were an excellent trainer.

PUNIT

I once knew the right words, sir.

MITCHELL

Say the words, Punit. I want this house rid of all monkeys.

PUNIT

Better to rid the house of all strangers. The monkeys only spread disease. Or they aid procreation for those inclined to believe. They select the correct house to serve the gods of Fertility.

MITCHELL

I'd rather have immunity than fertility.

PUNIT

That sounds like a bumper sticker, sir.

MITCHELL

You're quite right.

PUNIT

And your lady companion?

MITCHELL

Why would she want a child?

PUNIT

A force of destiny and nature.

MITCHELL

That means nothing.

PUNIT

It's colloquial.

MITCHELL

Spare me these bon mots.

(PAUSE)

You're talking to the Viceroy. You get money from him. It's been an arrangement over many months. Don't deny it. I don't want Paul to be hurt in any way. Do you understand?

PUNIT

Whatever I say will be unacceptable, sir.

MITCHELL

You can say that you understand.

PUNIT

I understand, Mr. Randolph.

MITCHELL

I made a very poor business decision after Rennie and I moved here from London. The banks refused to participate and I fell in with the Viceroy. Because I was desperate, I had underestimated him. That's how stupid I was.

(PAUSE)

A year ago, I was beaten severely during an afternoon walk along Observatory Hill. It was my first violent encounter with him and the local code. I had to go to a hospital. To this day, I cannot walk normally. There was no warning. I was ignorant a second time. He had little patience. This was the beginning of my education. Regrettably, I had more to learn.

PUNIT

He has brutalized me too, sir. First with his stick.

MITCHELL

He wants all my assets, here and abroad.

And more, sir.

PUNIT

I can only guess who is more evil.
(PAUSE)
He plans to murder my son.

MITCHELL

I don't think so.

PUNIT

There was a chilling note left on the door.

MITCHELL

He won't kill your son.

PUNIT

Paul should just get to airport today.

MITCHELL

Mr. Covington already met local disturbance.

PUNIT

How do you know?

MITCHELL

I just know, sir.
(RENNIE ENTERS WITH A TEA TRAY)

MITCHELL

(TO RENNIE)
I intend to go back with him to Maryland.

RENNIE

Mitchell . . .

MITCHELL

I've changed my mind.

RENNIE

Then you're an idiot of outrageous proportion.

(SHE SERVES HIM TEA AND THEN POURS HERSELF A CUP)

MITCHELL

He's too naive to protect himself.

RENNIE

Mr. Covington has enough money to save his neck.

MITCHELL

You want him dead, don't you?

RENNIE

Mitchell, I don't really care one way or another.

MITCHELL

If you really loved me, you'd care.

RENNIE

My life is here with you. There's no other world.

MITCHELL

I'm going back to the States, Rennie.

RENNIE

(CONTEMPTUOUS)

Do what you will.

MITCHELL

Though I don't deserve to be in remission. You'll come with us.

PUNIT

(AWKWARDLY)

Mr. Randolph, this is my last visit.

RENNIE

Remission is an act of God, Mitchell.

MITCHELL

(TO PUNIT)

Is that what you think?

PUNIT

You can pay me now, sir.

MITCHELL

(TO RENNIE)

I can't sleep at night. That's how bad things have become. Pack your bags, darling. As I followed you from London here, you can do the same.

(COUGHING UP BLOOD)

Punit, I want you to come with me to America.

PUNIT

I cannot, sir.

MITCHELL

Why not?

PUNIT

A thousand reasons. For one, the police took my passport.

MITCHELL

I'll buy their cooperation.

PUNIT

It's much harder now than years before.

MITCHELL

Everyone says that horseshit.

PUNIT

But it's true.

MITCHELL

You're coming with me. Do you know that when I die you get a sixth of my estate?

RENNIE

The morphine is talking, darling.

MITCHELL

The morphine is laconic, Rennie.

RENNIE

You're thinking this way because of Paul's mother.

MITCHELL

(SARCASTIC)

What has that to do with poor Punit?

RENNIE

Mitchell, you're going mad.

PUNIT

If you don't want to pay me now, you can send an envelop tomorrow, sir.

MITCHELL

I'll send it in a week.

PUNIT

You may be gone in a week.

RENNIE

You mean he may drop dead in a week.

PUNIT

We all fear sudden departures, madame.

RENNIE

(TO MITCHELL)

He's been meeting with your son.

MITCHELL

How do you know?

RENNIE

It's on his face.

MITCHELL

(TO PUNIT)

Have you?

PUNIT

(OVERLAPPING PREVIOUS LINE)

Not in the manner stated.

MITCHELL

Rennie, how the hell do you say these things in front of others?

RENNIE

Only I can protect you.

You enjoy these stunts.

MITCHELL

No.

RENNIE

You do.

MITCHELL

There are many sides of loyalty.

RENNIE

Only one side.

MITCHELL

RENNIE

We learn about loyalty the hard way, like the promise to love. I would sacrifice my life for you, darling.

PUNIT

I haven't been disloyal to you, sir.

RENNIE

He gave cash to Punit.

MITCHELL

How much?

RENNIE

Enough to return to Kashmir.

MITCHELL

Why go there now?

RENNIE

That's not the point.

PUNIT

I don't merit this scrutiny.

RENNIE

The last two days were horrific. Punit is setting Paul up for a fall.

MITCHELL

Enough is enough. Right now I think you're all a bunch of liars. The air is wretched. And the tea is very weak, dear. Are we out of tea?

(PAUSE)

We must be out of tea.

(TO PUNIT)

You could have started a happier life in another country in the west. How stupid can you be?

(PAUSE)

You have my word and get your money. You'll have more money than you before.

(TURNING TO ADDRESS RENNIE TOO)

And the two of you will never see me again.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOURTEEN

(THE N

VICEROY

Up the stone walk by the hospital are seventeen apothecaries. You can go to any one, but I suggest that you seek out the one under the blue awning. A blind chemist works there. Only go there when he's inside. He'll know you right away. That's it. Give him this slip of paper. You needn't pay him. Do you understand? He'll give you the prescription. You can thank him by touching his arm. If you see a policeman, look the other way. Although nothing is illegal. Naturally, you don't tell your wife about this.

MITCHELL

She's not my wife.

VICEROY

Are you sure? She acts likes one.

MITCHELL

Quite.

VICEROY

Educated at Oxford? I was told that she was your wife.

MITCHELL

We only live together.

VICEROY

Certainly a cozy arrangement. What will she inherit?

MITCHELL

That's not your business.

VICEROY

I'm afraid it is, my friend.

MITCHELL

I've made provisions.

VICEROY

Why bother? The wench deserves a leaf of grass. And what about your son?

(PAUSE)

I gave up smoking. Each doctor scared me, no matter what you pay them. I had to give up alcohol. And sweets and puddings. Gave up sex. Or some aspects of ergonomic sex. It's too much to forsake our basic nature. I miss cigarettes, Mr. Randolph, above all else. Tobacco helped me to think. I saw solutions before there were problems. I saw great invention of things to come. Hidden mechanisms of the city. I saw the end of the world. All for the price of tobacco.

MITCHELL

Let my son go back.

VICEROY

He was to leave today.

MITCHELL

He's ignorant of everything.

VICEROY

Maybe so, but he is now invaluable to me.

(PAUSE)

Mr. Randolph, do you secretly side with Pakistan?

MITCHELL

No.

VICEROY

Then you back the Hindi Nationalists.

MITCHELL

I've no political bearing whatsoever.

VICEROY

You believe that?

MITCHELL

I have to.

VICEROY

Your son may never leave India.

MITCHELL

I beg you.

VICEROY

Then fall to your knees old man.

(PAUSE)

I was once a very handsome young man, Mr. Randolph. I had opportunity to sleep with the most splendid ladies in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. The warmth of their magnificent wombs. But I avoided marriage because of my love of business. If that were a mistake, perhaps I'll pay in my next life. That's a natural fact. Debt keeps rising for future lives. You can bequeath your worldly business to your own blood, to a corrupt government, or to a memorable teenage mistress in a black negligee.

MITCHELL

How much more do you want?

VICEROY

More than you offer.

MITCHELL

And if I go to the police?

VICEROY

They'll beat you like an animal. I'll see to that.

MITCHELL

(PAUSE)

I'll sign over everything to you now. Please let my son alone.

VICEROY

A lesson learned late is still timely.

(PAUSE)

Are you certain that you're not married? Who makes your bath warm in the morning? Your woman is in a position to act out a little drama. No matter that your son was another complication. This is India. People have to eat. Have to perform. Have to suffer in silence. Come sit by me. I don't want to appear loathsome. Sit. Sit. You're pacing like a condemned man. Every community has a tale of the village idiot. I revere the village idiot. A holy moron sent from Heaven to try us. If we don't see our image inside him, then we are punished. In my dreams I cook meals for him, change his bed pan, clean his lesions. Compassion for others, Mr. Randolph. Your last reassurance.

MITCHELL

How comforting.

VICEROY

For a time I thought Punit played that role. But it is assumed now by your son. Yes, figuratively if not literally.

(PAUSE)

Throughout this year I had extended this courtesy to you.

MITCHELL

I didn't know.

VICEROY

Only God knows. An essential Indian belief. Good and evil battle, but only God knows the outcome. God knows the day history will end, the names of your enemies, the purity of your drinking water, and the potency of your seed.

(OPENS UP A SACHEL AND REMOVES A RING AND WRISTWATCH)

MITCHELL

Paul's?

VICEROY

Yes, in truth. These are his possessions. He's alive. My word to you.

(PRODUCING A FOLDER AND PEN)

It's time to sign the remaining papers. God bless.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIFTEEN
(PAUL'S HOTEL ROOM. PAUL
AND THE VICEROY SIT FACING
ONE ANOTHER)

VICEROY

Every wondrous living thing has a heart which beats one billion times before dying. The humming bird, the scavenging rat, the stalking tiger, the charging elephant, the desperate merchant. The life span for each creature may vary, but the phenomenon is the same number. One billion, my friend. Uncanny? One billion people inhabit India. Each individual has a heart which will beat one billion times before a natural death. One billion times one billion. Can another nation make this claim?

(PAUSE)

I have no heart, Mr. Covington. There's no beat inside my chest. Honest to God. Put your hand here, feel. My mother wouldn't give me a heart. This was beyond her. All that's inside is a cold jewel from unrecorded history. The army refused my enlistment. They couldn't detect any human organ. They wouldn't accept the note from my physician. So I sat out the war. It made me very lonely. Yet I imagine my heart beats just like yours.

(PAUSE)

A billion times before dying.

(PAUSE)

I have your passport, poor boy. And your valuable papers. I have your essential vocabulary. And your badge of honor. In return, I give you a perfectly cold jewel. As if we were to meet at the world's highest summit. Exchange vows. Meet as strangers. Depart as intimates. Test the fear of annihilation. To fear the test. A pound of flesh. Are you ready to shit in the street? Know how to beg? Know India? A cow infinitely more precious than a man. Stone the bus driver should he run down one calf. The defanged cobra in the basket. Another lost simian led by gypsies. I pity you, Mr. Covington. Love thy father.

(PAUSE)

A billion times before dying.

(PAUSE)

Mr. Covington, don't let me go on like this, please. Drink your soup before it gets cold. The moon is very bold tonight. Its light keeps you silent. Silence is your best friend.. That's the least of your worries. I want your heart. It will be mine. And you will be free tomorrow. As you had wished. Your father will throw petals on the ground and the wind will lift your spirit high.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIXTEEN
(MITCHELL'S HOME. ONE WEEK
LATER. PAUL'S WIFE MEREDITH
STANDS AT THE FRONT DOOR)

MEREDITH

The driver is still with me, just outside, yes . . .

RENNIE

Where is your purse?

MEREDITH

Under my coat.

RENNIE

Tell him to drive around. He can return this evening, if that's convenient.

(PAUSE)

Would you rather I speak to him?

MEREDITH

No, I just didn't know how to gauge the time.
(BRIEFLY EXITING)

RENNIE

(AFTER A PAUSE, LOUDLY)
Mitchell, Paul's wife is here.
(PICKS UP A FEW STRAY SHAWLS AND NEWSPAPERS)
Mitchell?
(IN A MOMENT, MEREDITH RETURNS)
Everything alright?

MEREDITH

I think so.

RENNIE

Mr. Randolph had a relapse and has very little energy.
(PAUSE)
Can I get you a drink? Please sit. You must be in shock.

MEREDITH

I am.
(REMOVES HER COAT AND SITS)

RENNIE

You're welcome to stay here overnight. We've an extra room.

MEREDITH

Thank you, but I've a hotel reservation and I'm expecting several calls.

RENNIE

Did you contact the authorities?

MEREDITH

Yes. The most obtuse group of imbeciles I've ever met. I was treated like some fortune hunter.

RENNIE

In my country there are many people who rush to profit from human disaster. These measures are civic protocol.

MEREDITH

Still, it was truly awful.

RENNIE

But you've made headway?

MEREDITH

(NODDING WEARILY)

Tomorrow I'll sign the release papers.

RENNIE

If you come into any language problem, I can translate. It's the least we can do.

MEREDITH

Thank you. The American Embassy has assigned someone to help.

(PAUSE)

I don't quite understand how Paul's body ended up in Uttar Pradesh.

RENNIE

Apparently, he was doing a business on his way back to New Delhi.

MEREDITH

That doesn't sound right. I knew his travel schedule to the day and hour.

RENNIE

Perhaps he felt the need to surprise himself. At any rate, I'm in the dark about the details, Mrs. Covington. I'm deeply sorry about your loss. On last count, over 100 people were killed and 2,500 houses destroyed. There are still tremors all through northern India. Even here, we felt the quake for nearly half a minute. 6.8 magnitude. It hits us all rather powerfully. So many were lost in fires and avalanches. At least you can return with his body. Please, let me bring you something to drink. Tea? Something stronger?

MEREDITH

Brandy?

RENNIE

Of course.

(PREPARES A BRANDY)

I thought you were coming tomorrow.

MEREDITH

I caught the first plane from London. I was going out of mind with anxiety.

RENNIE

Just as well. I suppose we were destined to meet.

MEREDITH

I don't know the meaning of any of these god-awful events.

RENNIE

It's crazy to assign meanings to natural forces.

MEREDITH

We were married less than a year.

RENNIE

Yes.

(INTERRUPTING)

Mr. Randolph . . . Mitchell . . . told me.

(SERVING BRANDY)

Please, call me Rennie. That would make me feel more comfortable.

(PAUSE)

Mitchell wants very much to speak with you. He feels responsible for the tragedy. In his mind, he would have preferred to have traveled back to the west with your husband. He says this repeatedly.

MEREDITH

Why the hell didn't he accompany Paul?

RENNIE

For one, Mitchell's illness. But beyond that, he has no valid passport.

MEREDITH

My husband thought that he could have made the trip through special provisions.

RENNIE

We don't traffic through the black market.

MEREDITH

I meant the US State Department. Paul had already prepared the groundwork with them. You know he had some connections with the government.

RENNIE

(CALLING ALOUD)

Mitchell? Are you able to join us out here?

(PAUSE)

Paul's father was in tears when we got the news. I've never seen him so distraught in all the time we've been together.

MEREDITH

Why then did Paul have such a hard time with him during this visit?

RENNIE

You'll have to ask Paul's father.

MEREDITH

I'm asking you, Rennie.

RENNIE

We all have complicated feelings for our parents.

MEREDITH

And you didn't sense that Paul was facing some danger each day in Shimla?

RENNIE

No more than any other tourist.

MEREDITH

He wasn't a tourist. He had talked to you and Mitchell about his fears.

RENNIE

Certainly not to me.

MEREDITH

You're not telling me the truth.

RENNIE

I'm trying to be sensitive to you and to your husband's memory.

MEREDITH

Did it ever occur to you that my husband died under other circumstances?

RENNIE

How so?

MEREDITH

Foul play.

RENNIE

It didn't occur to us.

MEREDITH

The last phone calls from Paul were quite frightening. His hotel room was broken into. He was followed around town. There were death threats.

RENNIE

This is news to me, Mrs. Covington.

MEREDITH

Meredith.

RENNIE

Meredith.

MEREDITH

I have to say how damn angry all this makes me.

RENNIE

Yes . . .

MEREDITH

Paul was an honest businessman. He couldn't have fallen into the wrong hands.

RENNIE

I realize.

MEREDITH

It's rather plain, Rennie.

RENNIE

You'll have to discuss this with the police.

MEREDITH

I was hoping that you'd have a piece of the puzzle. That was my impression from Paul's phone calls. He said that you factored into the equation. And all this crap about the earthquake sounds like . . .

RENNIE

Pure crap?

MEREDITH

He had no reason to be anywhere other than Shimla.

RENNIE

Men often have hidden business agendas unknown to their wives.

MEREDITH

He shared everything with me. Every file, contract and client.

RENNIE

Then why did you flee two weeks ago?

MEREDITH

I never wanted him to make this journey. When we got here, I knew the trip was futile. Knew that Mitchell would treat Paul like dirt.

RENNIE

Then you must feel some guilt too about . . .

MEREDITH

Don't toy with me, Rennie.

RENNIE

Guilt is a powerful emotion. Mitchell's guilt is killing him faster than his cancer.

MEREDITH

And what about your guilt?

RENNIE

I have none.

MEREDITH

There's guilt written all over your face.

RENNIE

If so, I'll deal with it as best I can.

MEREDITH

You're not very convincing.

RENNIE

I'd rather be convincing.

MEREDITH

(PAUSE)

Paul mentioned some thug by the name of the Viceroy. Do you know him?

RENNIE

Indeed I do.

MEREDITH

Is he a link to Paul's death?

RENNIE

What is a link, my dear? Am I a link to you? None of this can change the reality of being crushed to death in a rural building.

MEREDITH

I don't think he died there.

(DRAWS WARMTH FROM THE BRANDY)

Did you hear me?

RENNIE

Only God would know such things.

MEREDITH

Only God?

RENNIE

Only God and peasants.

MEREDITH

And had there not been an earthquake, there would have been a report about some fatal bus accident in a monsoon.

RENNIE

We have monsoons only in the summer. Your grief is twisting your thinking, Meredith.

MEREDITH

Paul's father was neck deep in bad loans.

RENNIE

Not exactly true.

MEREDITH

Really? My husband was targeted. He was squeezed to help the payment plan. That's how thugs play the game. Look at me. You know that Mitchell is in financial trouble.

RENNIE

Yes, I know.

MEREDITH

Then why act obtuse?

RENNIE

I suppose I can't help it..

MEREDITH

I don't like you, Rennie.

RENNIE

I know.

MEREDITH

I've lost my husband forever.

(PAUSE)

He came here to do something moral.

RENNIE

Often human tragedy tells its ending at the beginning. The longer I live, the more that rings true. Money plays some role in the finale.

(LONG SILENCE)

Punit said something about Paul running into the Viceroy. That's really all I know.

MEREDITH

Then help me report this. It will validate what really happened. I said as much to the police over the phone. They just don't care.

RENNIE

Of course. They prefer not to deal with any serious organized crime.

(PAUSE)

Punit said fires from the earthquake took the Viceroy's life. But it wasn't in the newspaper.

MEREDITH

That would be a coincidence.

RENNIE

Yes, well, his legal name was Ashok Bashey and every day I look for his obituary. A crime boss throughout Himachal Pradesh. If he's dead, there's little the police can do. The authorities and the press may not connect the two names right away.

MEREDITH

And I'm supposed to accept this at face value.

RENNIE

You'll accept whatever feels right. That I'm sure. If you want, I'll come with you to police headquarters and you can make these thoughts known to your satisfaction.

MEREDITH

Thank you.

(MITCHELL ENTERS SLOWLY IN BATHROBE)

I don't believe his killer is dead.

MITCHELL

We'll never know for sure.

MEREDITH

In a few days you'll know. You'll run into him again.

MITCHELL

The Viceroy?

MEREDITH

In a week. A month.

MITCHELL

Paul wasn't murdered.

MEREDITH

How do you think he died?

MITCHELL

He was buried alive by natural causes.

MEREDITH

And you can sleep at night saying that?

MITCHELL

My child, I just don't sleep at all.

MEREDITH

I'm collecting his body tomorrow, filing my own report, and flying home. It's pointless to find any common justice in your shitty little world.

RENNIE

It is pointless. And mourning, the only thing that is true.

MEREDITH

(ON THE VERGE OF TEARS)

Did you ever love him?

RENNIE

He did, yes . . .

MEREDITH

(HARD LOOK AT MITCHELL)

You get to survive him, despite everything.

MITCHELL

I'm miserable. I didn't ask him to fly here.

MEREDITH

That makes no fucking difference.

MITCHELL

Your husband was impossible.

MEREDITH

I'll say.

MITCHELL

And he had impossible things to prove.

(RENNIE SITS DOWN, DEFLATED AND REMOTE)

MEREDITH

You found the most inappropriate country to give you sanctuary.

MITCHELL

Inappropriate? Who is to judge?

(PAUSE)

I never thought I'd end up in Shimla. Never thought I'd die a pauper. The money always felt jinxed by sin. I should have died in place of Paul. I even tried to arrange that, but once again, no luck.

MEREDITH

I don't believe you.

MITCHELL

I suspected violence aimed at me, primarily.

(PAUSE)

Paul had life insurance. He was well vested in pension plans and positioned to make several million with his IPO. To my predators, his death was not immediately profitable to them, but the blow would hit home. Paul knew this. I told him so in so many words. His death yields not

one rupee. My son knew. The boy knew. Your husband knew. We all knew. And we waited until the earth actually ruptured. I can see your sorrow and your spite, Meredith. You can take anything you want from me, from this house . . .

MEREDITH

I want the truth from you.

RENNIE

He's told you everything.

MITCHELL

Paul was killed, yes. But we must accept the earthquake.

MEREDITH

Go to the police and tell them everything you know.

MITCHELL

There'll be more violence if I go to the police.

MEREDITH

You're incredibly selfish.

MITCHELL

All my life. That's my character and I'm halfway to hell.

MEREDITH

Yes, all cowards are halfway to hell. The Viceroy's alive and you are all accessories to Paul's murder.

(SHE PICKS UP HER COAT AND PURSE)

The expansive gates of hell welcome you both.

(EXITS. SILENCE)

MITCHELL

She's in god-awful pain.

RENNIE

I can see.

MITCHELL

Now I want to run after her.

RENNIE

Don't.

MITCHELL
This could have been handled much better.

RENNIE
You're right.

MITCHELL
She means nothing to you.

RENNIE
What do you expect?

MITCHELL
I grew close to Paul in a matter of days.

RENNIE
Don't lie, Mitchell.

MITCHELL
I grew to like my son.

RENNIE
Then grieve for him properly. And break all contact with his wife.

MITCHELL
She'll be on a plane tomorrow and we'll never hear from her again.

RENNIE
You'll be phoning her.

MITCHELL
A courtesy call when she's back home.

RENNIE
What's the use?

MITCHELL
I don't know, darling.

RENNIE
I think you should know everything.

MITCHELL

OK.

(PAUSE)

The Viceroy's dead?

RENNIE

That's right.

MITCHELL

Did you see his body?

RENNIE

Yes.

MITCHELL

What else is there to know?

RENNIE

There are other henchmen.

MITCHELL

I didn't think there were.

RENNIE

Your son was murdered.

MITCHELL

What makes you say that, Rennie?

RENNIE

Because it's true.

MITCHELL

Why do you want to hurt me so late in the day?

RENNIE

I resent your former marriage with madness.

MITCHELL

I know.

RENNIE

I had to free myself from my hatred.

MITCHELL

There's no way to free yourself.

RENEE

I found a way.

MITCHELL

This is your ugly side, Rennie..

RENEE

It's who I am. It's why you have stayed with me for so long.

(PAUSE)

I paid someone to take care of the Viceroy, which inadvertently caused Paul's death. Therefore, I'm responsible.

MITCHELL

Oh God . . .

RENNIE

I gave some money to two young men who were stringers for the Viceroy. A large sum of money. I convinced them to risk everything.

MITCHELL

Where did you get the money?

RENNIE

You don't know my holdings, Mitchell. I also risked everything. I thought you would be happy by this. Paul caused his own death by lingering here too long.

MITCHELL

Don't be obscene, Rennie.

RENNIE

I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry.

(PAUSE)

There's no pressing threat now that the Viceroy's gone. But accidents do happen

(PAUSE)

You won't be leaving India. You won't be leaving me. What more can one say, Mitchell? I've done all the things you needed to have done. But you didn't have to bark out any orders. And you're free from the shame of it. It's on my head alone. Your son had a chance to save himself, but he was outrageous and arrogant.

(SHE KISSES HIM)

I refuse to live without you.

(SILENCE)

Look at me, Mitchell.

(PAUSE)

Look at me.

(MITCHELL, DEEPLY DISTURBED, TURNS AWAY)

I refuse to live without you. Don't you know what that means?

(SHE WALKS PART WAY TO HIM)

I never loved a man as much as I love you. I never risked so much in my life.

(PAUSE)

And I would even die for you. We have so little time.

(HIS FACE ASHEN, HE TURNS AWAY)

END OF PLAY

