

The starving, the dead, the slaves. And through it all, the purr and rustle of Prabaker's voice. There's a truth that's deeper than experience. It's beyond what we see, or even what we feel. It's an order of truth that separates the profound from the merely clever., and the reality from the perception. We're helpless, usually, in the face of it; and the cost of knowing it, like the cost of knowing love, is sometimes greater than any heart would willingly pay. It doesn't always help us to love the world, but it does prevent us from hating the world. And the only way to know that truth is to share it, from heart to heart, just as Prabaker told it to me, just as I'm telling it to you now.

-p 84

I suddenly knew how much crying there was in me, and how little love. I knew, at last, how lonely I was.

But I couldn't respond. My culture had taught me all the wrong things well. So I lay completely still, and gave no reaction at all. But the soul has no culture. The soul has no nations. The soul has no colour or accent or way of life. The soul is forever. The soul is one. And when the heart has its moment of truth and sorrow, the soul can't be stilled.

I clenched my teeth against the stars. I closed my eyes. I surrendered to sleep. One of the reasons why we crave love, and seek it so desperately is that love is the only cure for loneliness, and shame, and sorrow. But some feelings sink so deep into the heart that only loneliness can help you find them again. Some truths about yourself are so painful that only shame can help you live with them. And some things are just so sad that only your soul can do the crying for you.

p 124

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 size of our happiness is inversely proportional to the size of our house."

p 244

What characterizes the human race more, Karla once asked me, cruelty or the capacity to feel shame for it? I thought the question acutely clever then, when I first heard it, but I'm lonelier and wiser now, and I know it isn't cruelty or shame that characterizes the human race. It's forgiveness that makes us what we are. Without forgiveness, our species would've annihilated itself in endless retributions. Without forgiveness,, there would be no history. Without that hope, there would be no art, for every work of art is in some way an act of forgiveness... Without that dream, there would be no love, for every act of love is in some way a promise to forgive. We live on because we can love, and w love because we can forgive. p- 370

I let the raining silence close her eyes for the last time. She slept. I knew we didn't have her story. Not the whole of it. I knew the small daubs of color she'd excluded from her summary were at least as important as the broad strokes she'd included. The devil, they say, is in the details, and I knew well the devils that lurked and skulked in the details of my own story. But 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. Lovers find their way by such insights and confidences: they're the stars we use to navigate the ocean of desire. And 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 took each sadness she

confessed to me, and pinned it to the sky. – p. 387

That worry settled in my chest, squeezing my heart and often swelling to such 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 worry that keeps the knife sharp, and worry that gets most of us, in the end. –p426

But it *was* a terrible humiliation. The worst things that people do to us always makes *us* feel ashamed. The worst things that people do always strike at the part 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. -p 432

“ After a while, all I could smell and taste was my own blood. All I could hear was the lathis ripping into me.”

“I know, Lin–”

“No, let me finish. There was a minute, right in the middle of it, that was ... so weird.. it was like I was floating, outside myself, looking down at my own body, and at them, and watching everything that was going on. And ... I got this weird feeling ... this really strange kind of *understanding*... of everything that was happening. I knew *who* they were, and *what* they were and *why* they were doing it. I knew it all really clearly, and then I knew that I had two choices – to hate them or to forgive them. And .. I don't know why, or how, but it was absolutely clear to me that I had to forgive them. I had to, if I wanted to survive. I know it sounds crazy–”

“It doesn't sound crazy,” he said flatly, almost regretfully.

“It still seems crazy to me. I haven’t really ... figured it out, yet. But that’s exactly what happened. And I did forgive them. I really did. And I’m sure, somehow that *that’s* what got me through it. I don’t mean that I stopped being angry – shit, if I’d gotten free and gotten a gun, I probably would’ve killed them all. Or maybe not. I don’t know. But the point is that I *did* forgive them, right there and then, in the middle of it. And I’m sure that if I didn’t do that – if I’d just hated them – I wouldn’t have made it through till Khader got me out. I would’ve gone under. The hate would’ve killed me.” -p 467-8

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“... we avoid chaos, in building houses and dividing land and so forth by having an

agreed standard for the measure of a unit of length. We call it a meter, In the same way , we can only avoid chaos in the world of human affairs by having an agreed standard for the measure of a unit of morality. ”

“I’m with you.”

“At the moment, most of our ways of defining the unit of morality are similar in their intentions, but they differ in their details. So the priests of one nation bless their soldiers as they march to war, and the imams of *another* country bless *their* soldiers as they march out to meet them. And everybody who is involved in the killing, says that he has God on his side. There is no objective and universally acceptable definition of good and evil. And until we have one, we will go on justifying our own actions while condemning the actions of the others.”

“And you’re putting the *physics* of the universe up as a kind of platinum-iridium bar?”

“Well, I do think that our definition is closer, in its precision, to the photon-second measure than it is to the platinum-iridium bar, but the point is essentially correct. I think that when we look for an objective way to measure good and evil, a way that all people can accept as reasonable we can do no better than to study the way that the universe works, and its nature— the quality that defines the entire history of it – the fact that it is constantly moving towards greater complexity. We 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. The Holy Koran, for example is often telling us, instructing us, to study the planets and the stars to find truth and meaning.”

“I still have to ask the question, why use *this* fact about the tendency of toward complexity, and not some other fact? ...”

–p484-5.

[convers ct’d]

Moreover, my short , bow-legged friend, whose bulk arms seemed to jut outward from the tree-trunk of his thick neck and chest, was by far the best dancer in the entire assembly, and quickly earned their admiration. The whole secret and invisible inner life of the man, his full creative and spiritual endowment, was expressed in the dance. And that face –

I'd said, once, that I'd never seen another human face in which the smile was so utterly defeated – that scowl-creased face was transfigured in the dance until his honest, selfless beauty was so radiant that it filled my eyes with tears.

“Tell me once more,” Abdel Khader Khan commanded, with roguish smile in his eye, as we watched the dancers from a vantage point beneath a shaded wall.

I laughed. When I turned to look at him, he laughed as well.

“Go on,” he urged. “Do it to please me.”

“But you’ve heard this twenty times from me already. How about you answer me a question instead?”

“You tell me once more, and then I will answer your question.”

“Okay. Here goes. The universe began about fifteen billion years ago, in almost absolute simplicity, and it’s been getting more and more complex ever since. This movement from the simple to the complex is built into the web and weave of the universe, and it’s called the tendency toward complexity. We’re the products of this complexification, and so are the birds, and the bees, and the trees, and the stars, and even the *galaxies* of stars. And if we were to get wiped out in a cosmic explosion, like an asteroid impact or something, some other expression of our level of complexity would emerge, because that’s what the universe *does*. And this is likely to be going on all over the universe. How am I doing so far? ”

I waited, but he didn’t reply, so I continued with my summary

“Okay, the final or ultimate complexity – the place where all this complexity is going – is what, or *who*, we might call God. And anything that promotes, enhances, or accelerates this movement toward God is good. Anything that inhibits, impedes, or prevents it is evil. And if we want to know if something is good or evil – something like war and killing and smuggling guns to mujaheddin guerrillas, for example – then we ask the questions: “What if everyone did this thing? Would that help us, in this bit of the universe, to get there, or would it hold us back? And then we have a pretty good idea whether it’s good or evil. What’s more important, we know *why* it’s good or evil. There, how was that?”

–pp 705

“My father was a teacher of chemistry and mathematics. He was much older than my mother when he married her. By the time I started school, my father was the headmaster. He was a brilliant man, I was told, for only a brilliant Jew could rise to the position of headmaster in a French school. The *racisme* the anti-Semitism, in nand around Marseilles at that time , so soon after the war, was like a sickness. It was a guilt that pinched at them, I think. My father awas a stubborn man– it is a kind of stubbornness that permits one to become a mathematician, isn’t it? Perhaps mathematics *itself* is a kind of stubbornness, do you think? -p 544

‘He loved me, and I loved him, it was true, but he made an error of the judgement. He gave my love a test. He allowed me to discover the secret place where he kept a large sum of cash. I could not resist the temptation that he offered me. I took the money and ran away. I loved him, but I took his money, and Iran away. For all his wisdom, he did not know that love cannot be tested. Honesty can be tested, and loyalty. But there’s no test for love. Love goes on forever, once i begins, even if we come to hate the one we love. Love goes on forever because love is born in the part of life that does not die. - p 547

‘Do you trust him?’

‘With my life.’

‘Why?’

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 we did any of that. I don’t know what it is. A 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.’

-p 556

Khaderbhai once said that every virtuous act is inspired by a dark secret. 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 dark inspiration. What I do know now, and didn't know 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 we've done have run their course, it's the good we did that can save us. But then, when salvation speaks the secrets we kept, and the motives we concealed, creep from their shadow, they cling to us, those dark motives for our good deeds. Redemption's climb is steepest if the good we did is soiled with secret shame.

But I didn't know that then. I washed my hands in the cold, uncaring sea, and my conscience was as silent and remote as the mute, unreachable stars.

-p 563

A Dutch mercenary in Kinshasa once told me that the only time he ever stopped hating himself was when the risk he faced became 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 [on his motorcycle], and the stillness in my my heart was almost like being at peace.

-p 583

At first, when we truly love someone, our greatest fear is that the loved one will stop loving us. What 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 whole of my heart, Prabaker, I still love you. And sometimes my friend, the love that I have and can't give to you, crushes 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. -p 629

[On Addictions] Heroin 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 peace disperse fear and suffering. Thoughts drift like ocean weeds and vanish in the distant, grey somnolency, unperceived and indeterminable. The body succumbs to cryogenic slumber. The listless heart beats faintly and breathing slowly fades to random whispers. Thick nirvanic numbness clogs the limbs, and downward, deeper, the sleeper slides and glides toward oblivion, the perfect and eternal stone. The chemical absolution is paid for, like everything else in the universe, with light. The first light that junkies lose is the light in their eyes. A junkie's eyes are as lightless as the eyes of Greek 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. Junkies kill desire with the same weapon they use on hope and dream and honor: the club made from their craving. 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 junkie will give up the woman he loves, rather than go without, sooner or later, every hard junkie becomes a devil in exile.

- p 630

Whatever the reason, I felt dishearteningly alone in the city. I'd lost Prabaker and Abdullah, my closest friends, in the same week, and with them I'd lost the mark on the psychic map that says *You Are Here*. Personality and personal identity are in some ways like co-ordinates on the street map drawn by our intersecting relationships. We know who we are and we define what we are by references to the people we love and our reasons for loving them. I was that point in space and time where Abdullah's wild violence intersected with Prababaker's happy gentleness. Adrift, then, and somehow un-defined by their deaths -p 632

I could've loved her [Lisa]. Maybe I already did love her a little. But sometimes the

worst thing you can do to a woman is to love her. And I still loved Karla. I loved Karla.

-p 639

The tears, when they come to some men, are worse than beatings. They're wounded worse by sobbing, men like 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 when it speaks we hear not one but a hundred sorrows in the heartbreak. We know that crying isn't a weakness, but a kind of strength. Still, the weeping rips us root by tangled root from the earth, and we crash like fallen trees when we cry.

p. 640

..Are you saying that light is God?'

'No, ' he answered and that sudden, fearful depression lifted from his features, driven off by a look that I could only read as a loving smile. 'I do not think that light is God. I think it is possible, and it is reasonable to say, that light is the *language* of God. Light may be the way that God speaks to the universe, and to us.' -731

It was just that all the hope and love was so empty, so meaningless. And if you prove to a man how vain his hope is, how vain his hoping was, you kill the bright, believing part of him that wants to be loved. -p737

A clear thought came to me, unbidden, and surging in my mind like the spoken words of a poem. I knew why Khaled Ansari was so determined to help Habib. I suddenly knew with perfect understanding what Khaled was really trying to do. *He's trying to save himself*, I said, more than once, feeling my numb lips tremble with the words, but hearing

them in my head. And I knew, as I said the words and thought them, that I didn't hate Khader or Karla' I couldn't hate them.

I don't know why my heart changed so suddenly and so completely. It might've been the gun in my hand – the power it gave me to take life, or let it be– and the instincts, from my deepest nature, that had prevented me from using it. It might've been the fact of losing Khaderbhai. For, as he walked away from me, I knew 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. Whatever the reason, the change moved through me like a monsoon rain in the steel bazaar, and left no trace of the swirling, murderous hate I'd felt only moments before.

-739

They'd lied to me and betrayed me, leaving jagged edges where 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 kill love. You can't even kill it with hate. You can kill *in-love*, and loving and even loveliness. You can kill them all, or numb them into dense, leaden regret, but you can't kill 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. Every act of love, every moment of the heart reaching out, is a part of the universal good: it's a part of God, or what we call God, and it can never die.

-740

I realised that I didn't need their brilliance any more. It couldn't help me. All the cleverness in all the world couldn't stop my stomach from knotting around its prowling fear. When you know you're going to die, there's no comfort in cleverness. Genius is vain, and cleverness is hollow, at the end. The comfort that does come, if it comes at all, is that strangely marbled mix of time and place and feeling that we usually call wisdom. For me, on that last night before the battle, it was the sound of my mother's voice, and it was the

life and death of my friend Prabaker. -766

It was what love would be like, if love was a sin. It was what music would be, if music could kill you.” -779.

‘That’s a hell of a health plan– an Afghan with a Kaloshnikov pointed at your doctor.’
-789

Standing there, invisible to her, I was astonished and bewildered to realize 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– *What? Had I really wanted to kill her* –was 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. -809

Farid was trying to be a new Abdullah. He loved him, you know. He loved him like a brother. And I think he was trying to *be* Abdullah. I think he got the idea that we needed a new Abdullah to win the war for us. But it doesn’t work, does it? I tried to tell him that. I tell that to all the young guys– especially the ones wh try to be like *me*. You can only ever be yourself. The more you try to be like someone else, the more you find yourself standing in the way. Hey, here’s the guys?’ -834

-851 As the stars slowly reappeared in the silent endlessness of the sky, I cut the last mooring rope of grief, and surrendered to the all-sustaining tide of destiny. I let him go. I said the words, the sacred words, *I forgive you...*

And it was good. And it was right. I let the tears fall. I let my heart break on my father's love, like the tall waves beside me that hurled their chests against the wall, and bled onto the wide white path.

Fate always gives you two choices, the one you should take, and the one you do.

-858

'Please help us, Lord', Scorpio intoned, his eyes shut and his face raised to heaven, which seemed, roughly, to be in the middle of the balcony on the third floor of the Veejay Premnath Academy of Hair Coloring and Ear Boring. 'Please guide us to know what's right, and to do the right thing. And you can start, God, if you're of a mind, by helping out with the little business deal we're doing with the Belgian couple tonight. I don't have to tell you, Lord and Lady, how tricky it is to supply customers with good-quality cocaine in Bombay. But, thanks to your providence, we managed to find ten grams of A-grade snow- and, given the real bad drought on the streets, that was a mighty slick piece of work on your part, God, if you'll accept my professional admiration. Anyway, Gemini and me, we sure could use the commission on that deal, and it would be kinda nice not to get ripped off, or beaten up, or maimed, or killed- unless of course, that's in your plan. So , please light the way, and fill our hearts with love. Signing off now, but keeping the line open, as always, I'll say Amen.' -862

And maybe he's right, I thought. Maybe his way of remembering Maurizio and Ulla was 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 junkie. I couldn't bear it that love was broken, and that happiness had cindered so suddenly into sorrow. So I ruined my life, and hurt a lot of people on the long way down. Modena, instead, had worked 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 walk back to Abdullah and the others, I discovered

something that I should've known, as Modena did, right from the start. It was something simple: so simple that it took a pain as great as Modena's to shake me into seeing it. He'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—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.

... The cloak of the past is cut from patches of feeling and sewn with rebus threads. Most of the time, the best we can do is wrap it around ourselves for comfort or drag it behind us as we struggle to go on. But everything has its cause and its meaning. Every life, every love, every action and feeling and thought has its reason and significance: its beginning, and the part it plays in the end. Sometimes we do see. Sometimes we see the past so clearly and read the legend of its parts with such acuity that every stitch of time reveals its purpose, and a kind of message is enfolded in it. Nothing in any life, no matter how well or poorly lived, is wiser than failure or clearer than sorrow. And in the tiny precious wisdom that they give to us, even those dread and hated enemies, suffering and failure, have their reason and their right to be.

-p 871-2.

I know now that when the loving, honest moment comes it should be seized , and spoken, because it may never come again. -p. 881

Salman and the others.. were pretending that their little kingdoms made them kings; that their power struggles made them powerful. And 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 power that has any real meaning is the power to better the world. -905

It's always a fool's errand to be alone with someone you shouldn't have loved -921.