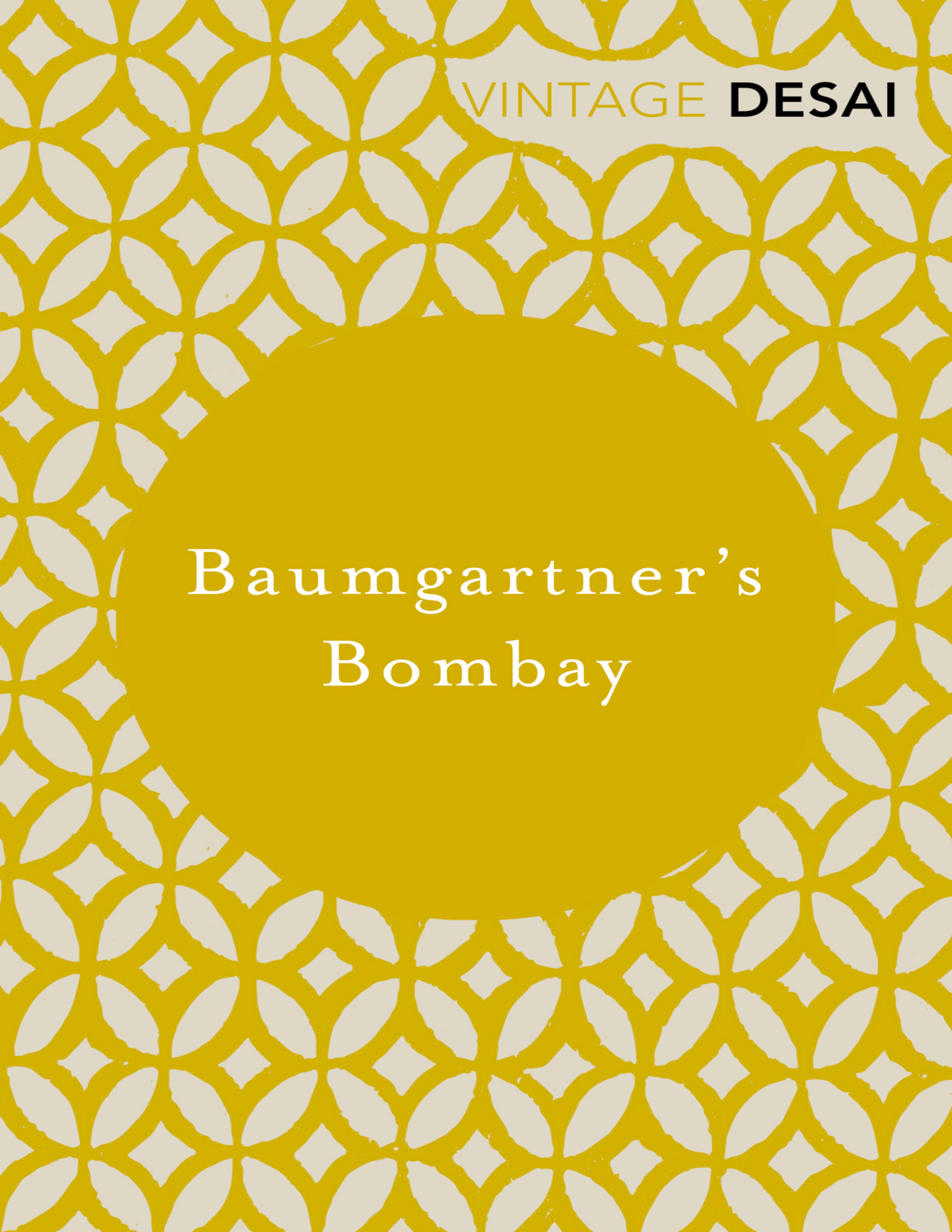




VINTAGE **DESAI**

Baumgartner's
Bombay

VINTAGE

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About the Book

Hugo Baumgartner is a man who doesn't belong anywhere. He's a Berlin Jew who travelled to India to escape the Nazis and, after years spent the mercy of his past and his tumultuous adopted land, he has now retired to a seedy cat-filled apartment behind Bombay's Taj Hotel. But destiny has not finished with Baumgartner, in this haunting tale of the afflictions of exile.

About the Author

Born and educated in India, **Anita Desai** is the author of many novels and short stories, and has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times for her novels *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* and *Fasting, Feasting*. She is the Emerita John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a fellow of both the American Academy of Arts and the Royal Society of Literature.

ALSO BY ANITA DESAI

Cry, the Peacock
Voices in the City
Bye-Bye, Blackbird
Where Shall We Go This Summer?
Games at Twilight
Fire on the Mountain
Clear Light of Day
Village by the Sea
In Custody
Baumgartner's Bombay
Journey to Ithaca
Fasting, Feasting
Diamond Dust
The Zigzag Way
The Artist of Disappearance
The Complete Stories

I wish to express my gratitude to Girton College, Cambridge, for having provided me with a year of perfect conditions for work.

ANITA DESAI

Baumgartner's Bombay

VINTAGE

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are
extended, Are removed, destroyed,
restored ...

T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker'

Chapter One

Although she had fled the blood-spattered scene and fled the collected crowd of identical individuals – one-legged, nose-picking, vigilant-eyed – and hurried down the street at a speed uncommon for her, a speed no one would have thought possible on those high red heels that were no longer firm but wobbled drunkenly under the weight of her thick, purple-veined legs, Lotte slowed as she neared her door. Her body seemed to thicken and clot, her actions slowed till she was nearly at a standstill. She opened the door with fumbling, ineffective movements as though she had forgotten its grammar, her fingers numb, tongue-tied as it were. Entering the room, she shut the door behind her heavily, taking great care with the locks and bolts and chains, afraid the crowd might follow her, may even now be approaching her room, preparing to shoulder its way into it. When every lock was in place, she leant against the door in the theatrical manner that came naturally to her – pressing a packet of letters to her breast as years ago she had pressed a flower against a bosom still plump and warm, flounced with white lace and spotted with red spots, singing all the while to the stage-lights, her mouth open, a tunnel of red from which might issue either a trill or a howl. Pressing the bits of paper to her now shrunken and flabby bosom, she breathed long harsh breaths that rasped her throat.

They slowed themselves till her breath caught and snarled itself in a sob. Then she moved, putting down the packet on the table and feeling her way to the stove. There she lit the gas flame and put on the small, dented kettle. While she did so she had something on which to concentrate, her lip held by one front tooth, and she did not need to think of anything. Not Hugo. Not God. Nothing. Her face drew

towards its centre, all the lines around the eyes, the nose, the mouth, concentrating in a frown, as she found the coffee, measured it into a cup, laid it out on the table beside the packet of paper. Touching that with her small finger which she could not quite control, which gave a jerk outwards, wilfully, she let out the sob she had been holding inside her: Hugo, Hugo, *mein Gott*, Hugo, what's happened, *was ist dann, wie kannst du ...* then bit her lip, brought all her fingers together, on to the kettle handle, lifted that and filled her cup. She warmed milk in a pan. She found the sugar bowl. Then put them all together – cup, coffee, milk, sugar – concentrating on her movements, not allowing another jerk, another sob.

Finally she lowered herself on to her chair at the table, to drink. But did not drink. The cup waited, the coffee steamed, together they invited. But Lotte had pushed the cup aside, swung violently round in her chair to the shelf by the table, let her hands hunt through the objects there, greasy and used and familiar, dropping and pushing them away till her fingers found the bottle she wanted. Wrenching off the top, she brought it close to her with one hand, found a stained, smeared glass into which she poured some gin, and drank, holding the bottle and the glass close to her breast to keep them from shaking or falling. Lotte's mouth, now crumpled and wet and quavering, and the glass and bottle, all held close to each other, for company, as if hunted, as if in hiding.

But finally she put them away from her, very carefully, on the table. Then picked up the packet and clumsily slipped off the narrow pink ribbon that held together the cards. For those were not letters, they were postcards except for one or two that had been folded for so long that the several sheets formed a single thickness, like a card. The writing was so faint, so spidery, it formed a kind of skein or web, on the yellowed paper, and seemed closer to the drawing of an intricate plan than the lines of a language. She had to turn

to the shelf again and from amongst the fallen and cluttered objects find the spectacles she hardly ever used because they pinched the top of her nose and left sore marks behind.

As she hooked them over her ears, cursing them out of custom, she told herself: Look at the dates, first look at the dates. Yes, as was to be expected from the appearance of the stiff, brittle bits of paper, the dates were of long ago, the long ago that Lotte hardly remembered – thirty-nine, forty, forty-one – just as she thought, suspected. They made her bunch her fingers, clutch her neck, as if she were choking. Then she had to settle the spectacles on her nose, so she could read.

‘Meine kleine Maus,’ ‘Mein Häschen,’ ‘Liebchen ...’ she murmured the unfamiliar, unaccustomed German, those forgotten endearments, the antiquated baby-language, feeling them on her tongue like crystals of sugar. Her teeth shrank from impact with them. She read on and each line seemed like the other, each card alike: ‘Are you well, my rabbit? Do not worry yourself. I am well. I have enough. But have you enough, my mouse, my darling? Do not worry ...’

Do not worry, do not worry, Lotte mocked, spitting out those pieces of sugar as if they were glass and cut her. With the spit came laughter, and sobs. Little Mouse, *Mäuschen*, do not worry, I am well, I am well. She began to rub the back of her hand against her mouth, rub harder and harder till it hurt, and through the pain and the cries the words continued to come: *Meine kleine Maus, mein Hugo, Geliebter*, I am well and do not worry ...

When she pulled herself together and saw what she was doing, what she had done, she found everything in a mess, reflecting her face, reflecting herself. The coffee spilt, the cards scattered, the bottle emptied, the glass lying on its side. A scene, in miniature, copying the scene at Hugo’s that she had fled.

Getting up from the chair, she stood over it and stared, furious and frightened. She could not allow that here – Hugo

had, *mein Gott*, Hugo – but she could not, she must learn, be careful, not allow ... Forcing back her sobs and cries, she made herself pick up the cup, the glass, the bottle, put them away, wipe the table, pick up the cards, collect them in a packet, and sit down with them on her lap, as calmly, as soberly as she could.

She no longer looked at them. She stared out of the window, at the six panes of glass in three rows, two to each one. She stared at the view she faced every day over her coffee, her gin – the building across the court, its grey concrete walls ribbed with black drain-pipes, the doors opening on to balconies hung with washing, stacked with tins and boxes. Right at the top, a layer of sky. A blank sky, as always, with neither colour nor form. Empty. Afternoon light. Daylight. Perpetual light. And blankness. Even the sounds were perpetual, constant – the radio that blared, the woman that screamed, the children that played, the pots and pans that clanged. They made a wall themselves – of metal, always in commotion.

Lotte's mouth drooped. At the corners, moisture gathered, formed drops, slowly began to slide down her chin, adhesively. The chin shook, dissolved. Lotte began to shake. Her fingers tightened on the cards. Looking down, in order to avoid that sky, that window, that blankness, she tried to pick out the words from the spider's nest of ancient writing. She ought at least to find out who had written them, to Hugo. Sucking at her lips, she stared at the bottom of the first card, the second card, the third. Some were signed 'Mama'. Others 'Mutti'. Some 'Mü'.

Lotte pressed her fingers to her lips, to her eyes, to her ears, trying to prevent those words, that language, from entering her, invading her. Its sweetness, the assault of sweetness, cramming her mouth, her eyes, her ears, drowning her in its sugar. The language she wanted not to hear or speak. It was pummelling her, pushing against her and into her, and with her mouth stuffed she moaned, '*Nein*,

nein, nein, Hugo, no.' Her teeth bit on the crystals and her nerves screamed at their sweetness. All the marzipan, all the barley sugar, the chocolates and toffees of childhood descended on her with their soft, sticking, suffocating sweetness. Enough to embrace her, enough to stifle her, enough to obliterate her. Sugary, treacly, warm, oozing love, childhood love, little mice and bunny rabbits of love – sweet, warm, choking, childish love. Lotte wept and drowned.

* * *

When Baumgartner shut the door and came out on the landing, he had to take great care the cats did not slip out. Fritz, still dragging his battered hind leg and with blood turned to a black and shining crust where his ear once was, had been indicating with increased impatience that he was ready for the streets again and tried to hobble out from between Baumgartner's legs, but was scraped up and returned to the dimness and safety of the flat, while Mimi had made a swift dart like a cobra's head for the exit but been pressed back gently with a murmur: 'Now you wait here, *mein Liebchen*, and I bring you something tasty – a piece of sausage, hah? *Blutwurst, Leberwurst, Bratwurst – was willst du?*' He laughed at his daily joke so that the warts on his nose all bunched together in a purplish lump that wobbled and his eyes disappeared in nests of wrinkles. Mimi was not amused, she was hungry and bit him sharply in the thumb. '*Ach, Liebchen*,' he moaned, drawing back the thumb and nursing it in his fist, 'that was naughty, was it not?' She withdrew, her back still arched in outrage, and he shut the door on her, assuring her through the crack, 'Something I will bring back for you, so be good now, please, for a little,' and made his way down the stairs.

They were ancient stairs, worn into hollows at the centre, and each heavy tread raised dust. He felt carefully for the safe hollow of each board as he went down, holding an

empty plastic bag in his hand, reminding himself to be careful, not to fall and cause trouble in his old age. Down in the hall which was unfurnished but for the cooking smells of the building that collected and boiled and steamed within its green walls, the watchman on his stool shifted his legs to let Baumgartner pass, smiling faintly out of politeness but with a twist of distaste at the corner of his mouth. The plastic bag was empty but the watchman knew how it would stink when he returned. Also, Baumgartner rarely washed his clothes; they emanated a thick, cloudy odour that he himself found comforting in its familiarity but some considered offensive. His eyes were short-sighted and blinked half-shut against the glare that thrust itself in at the door and so he did not notice that watchman's expression as he passed him on his perch under the wooden board that bore the tenants' names - Hiramani, Taraporevala, Barodekar, Coelho, da Silva, Patel - mumbled 'Good morning, *salaam*', and went down the steps into the street with his bag, uncertain as ever of which language to employ. After fifty years, still uncertain. Baumgartner, *du Dummkopf*.

The glare came from the sea, down at the end of the street, glittering solder in the morning heat and heavy and sullen at low tide, but Baumgartner did not turn his face in its direction. He had to look down and watch his feet as he picked his way past the family that lived on the pavement in front of Hira Niwas. They worked constantly at reinforcing the shelter they had built here, flattening out packing-cases for walls and tin cans for the roof, attaching rags to the railing around Hira Niwas and stretching them on to their own rooftop; yet it remained tremulously impermanent and Baumgartner took care not to run into one of the sticks that propped it up or the rope on which the washing hung. He had to avoid the gnarled and rotting feet of the man who always lay in a drunken stupor at this time of the morning, his head inside the shelter and his legs outside, like pieces of wood flung down, as well as the pile of cooking pots that

the woman washed in the gutter so that they shone like crumpled tinfoil in the glare, and the heaps of faeces that the children left along the same gutter, and the squares of greasy paper from which they had eaten their food the night before. It was a familiar sight to Baumgartner, as he was to them, with his plastic bag in his hand and his shoes slit at the sides for comfort, but they still had to watch each other, to be vigilant.

The woman, washing, automatically edged her sari over her face with a twitch of her wet hand as she did in the presence of any male; actually she hardly thought of Baumgartner, a lump in grey pants, as one: the gesture was a conditioned one, now instinctive. The child that had the straw-coloured and straw-textured hair of the famine-struck standing about its head like Struwwelpeter's in Baumgartner's nursery book, sat on its haunches, straining to defecate. It looked up at Baumgartner as it looked at all passers-by, its face clenched with the problem: should it sing out for money, for *baksheesh*, or not waste its small, painfully hoarded energy? In the case of Baumgartner, the problem was easily solved: he clearly had nothing to give, they all knew that, the family on the pavement that watched him set out daily with his plastic bag. So she drew the snot on her upper lip back into her nostrils with a contemptuous snort and began to wail for her mother who cursed her casually, simply as a comment on life, on all their lives.

Baumgartner knew that family as well as a devout Christian is familiar with the Holy Family in the cattle stall; he knew all the looks, the voices and words in their gamut. But he never walked past them, never turned his back without feeling the hairs on the back of his neck rise, a brief prickle of – not exactly fear, but unease, an apprehension. He knew the absolute degradation of their lives; he knew the violence it bred – the brawling in the night, the beating, the weeping. Now the effect of it all had become dulled, but

in the beginning it had appalled, and he remembered that – how he had returned to Hira Niwas one night, soon after they had set up abode on the pavement, a part of the migrant wave from the drought-stricken countryside, refugees from famine, or riots, and the woman had been screaming as though run over by an automobile. He had found a crowd of onlookers already gathered there, watching the man beat his wife with his fists and then kick her down, grab her by her hair and drag her up the street, swearing. ‘What is happen?’ asked the concerned Baumgartner of the watchman at the door. ‘Is murdering her? Is police not come?’ The watchman had shrugged – he did not consider Baumgartner worth talking to – but some of the onlookers turned round with amused looks and explained, ‘Drunk man saying his wife behaving badly with other men, so he is beating her.’ ‘He is killing her,’ Baumgartner bleated, wondering at their nonchalance. ‘We better call police.’ But no one moved. When the man began to beat his wife’s head against the pavement so that the blood spilt and gushed he hurried up to him and caught him by his shoulder only to be flung off and hurled against the wall. Some in the crowd helped him to his feet, saying, ‘Don’t trouble, sir, no good people. Both drinking too much.’ Baumgartner tottered to his feet and allowed them to push him away. He did nothing more, knowing himself incapable of anything, but although the man had been too blind with liquor and fury to know what he was doing, Baumgartner was sure he had taken note of his intervention. After so many years and so many similar scenes, he remembered the look that the man had flung over his shoulder at him when he had tried to intervene, and the yellow, blood-streaked eye of the drunkard, murderous. It still brought out the prickle, those beads of sweat on his neck, and he walked by, hunching his shoulders protectively, fearing them. They watched him fearlessly – to them he was nobody, an old

man with an empty bag. Finishing with the pots, the woman spat into the gutter, then bent to pick them up.

Baumgartner did not turn towards the sea. That was for the evening, when the breeze came up with the tide, and the sun fell headlong into the waves, livid and melodramatic in its orange and purple flames, and people strolled, for pleasure, buying themselves peanuts to eat or coconuts to drink from, and one was not conspicuous if one loitered too. But now everyone was out on business – cars and people had a purpose, everyone bustled, the vehicles became entangled in their hurry and horns hooted in furious impatience. The morning scene had no tropical languor for all that it was hot; the Bombay style was brisk, Baumgartner thought regretfully, brisk and businesslike.

He was very aware of his lack of business; if he were ashamed of it, he was relieved too, relieved not to join the crowd, the traffic, but to amble alone into the lanes and alleys that made off from the main road, and shuffle past the old dingy houses that no one bothered to paint, that stood perpetually in the shadows, and where life washed up in drifts, like debris. Scuffing through that litter, he turned into the dark doorway of the quiet and nearly empty Café de Paris.

Here he met with the first smile of the day, but so slight and sardonic and well concealed behind a bush of tobacco-coloured moustache, that he did not see it. Nor did the café proprietor's eyes reflect it; they were the bottomless pits of a cynic and a melancholic and so the smile was no more than a grimace. Baumgartner did not mind; he did not see, being still dazzled by the light of the streets, that explosion of light that his weak eyes could hardly tolerate. Groping for a chair, he lowered himself on to its comfortless tin seat by a marble-topped table, placing his hands on it for coolness and grateful for the green murk of the Café de Paris: Farrokh wasted little money on electricity.

‘Tea, *sahib*? Coffee?’ he asked as he came across since the waiter was still in the kitchen, noisily preparing the cutlery and the crockery for the day’s custom. He leaned over the table, placing his raw, meaty hands on its edge and frowning at a smear of grease on the marble that he wiped with the napkin he carried on his shoulder.

‘Och, Farrokh, so good. Yes, tea, pliss, tea is nice,’ sighed Baumgartner, feeling the perspiration trickle down his neck and back, almost audibly. ‘And something for the pussycats, yes? You have something from last night, Farrokh?’ he coaxed, edging the plastic bag across the table at him.

Farrokh gave another of his dour smiles that failed to light his eyes. He took the bag from Baumgartner resignedly and went to the kitchen door with it, handing it to one of the boys who worked there in striped underpants and tattered vests and with towels flung over their shoulders. Then he called back to Baumgartner, ‘I’ll have it ready for you later, I told them keep fish curry for you. It’s hot. Your cats like *masala*, spice, chilli, turmeric, *jeera*, bay leaf?’

Baumgartner had no option but to smile and nod. He was in debt to Farrokh and the other restaurateurs who filled his bag for him with the remains of the food cooked the night before. Without their help he could not feed the cats that flocked to him in the alleys, knowing him to be the Madman of the Cats, the Billéwallah Pagal, or the sick and maimed ones he picked up from the streets and carried home to nurse, telling them they would have to leave when they were cured but never finding the heart to turn them out.

In return, he gave them his custom. He could not really afford to patronise cafés, however third-rate their quality and competitive their rates, but it was necessary to remain a customer, not to slip down to being a beggar. Baumgartner was not as unconscious as one might think of the dividing line. Planting himself heavily at the table and grasping the glass of thick, milky tea that had been set before him by the waiter’s wet and dripping hand, he made

himself play the role of customer. It would not do to smile and thank the waiter, he had to remember he was paying for what he got, remind them also that he would pay. In that comfortable knowledge he could raise his head after the first gulp and look across to the counter where, behind glass cases containing livid yellow queen cakes with pink icing and plates of fried salted savouries, Farrokh stood swatting flies. Over his head the tinsel garland he had hung around the tinted portrait of his god Zoroaster stirred and twinkled like a ring of bluebottles in the shadows. It was almost impossible to read the faded sign he had hung beneath it: TRUST IN GOD, or the handwritten label attached to the sign: *Terms Strictly Cash*.

‘Mmm.’ Baumgartner tried to show his appreciation of the hot, the thick, the suffocatingly sweet tea. He tried to think of some repartee he might have with the dour Farrokh. There was a time when he had enjoyed every opportunity to talk, even to strangers, particularly to strangers since all acquaintance with them, however quick, however warm, had to be fleeting, leaving him to go on alone. Now the habits of a hermit were growing upon him like some crustaceous effluent; it required an effort, an almost physical effort, to crack it, to break through to the liquidity and flow and shift and kinesis of language. Crustaceous – crab – ungainly turtle: that was how he thought of himself, that was how he saw himself – an old turtle trudging through dusty Indian soil.

On this morning he was still struggling to find some item of news that he might discuss with Farrokh – for Farrokh read a Gujarati newspaper spread on the counter before him with ferocious attention and could always be roused by mentioning the name of a politician or referring to any political situation, being at heart a suppressed and thwarted leader of men like every other Indian he had ever met – when Farrokh folded up the grease-yellowed paper, leant across with his elbows on it, between the case with the

sponge cakes and the case with the fried samosas, and jerked his unshaven chin gloomily in the direction of the far end of the room. 'D'you see that one there?' he asked conspiratorially. 'He was here last night, we had to turn him out when we closed, then found him in the doorway when we opened up this morning. Back he is here, and I don't know what to do with him - throw him out?' He made the appropriate gestures with his powerful arms and no one could have mistaken his intention.

Baumgartner could not twist his neck any longer; it had long ago become set; he had to turn himself right around on the small swivel of the tin chair and look into the dark corner at which Farrokh so balefully glared. There he could make out nothing at first but what seemed like a bag of pale fur on the table; it might have been a cat. He found himself giving an involuntary twitch that started in his neck and ran down his shoulder and through his arm, making his hand turn over on the table in a flutter of excitement: could Farrokh have found him a cat, a homeless one? In his amazement he opened his small, watery eyes wide to take in its condition, and made out two solid baked brick-red arms of human flesh that lay on either side of it, protectively. It was only another human being, another - but here Baumgartner pulled himself together: it was too easy to use the coarse language everyone else used these days, to be uncharitable. And it might be a fellow countryman, although of another generation, for the head, covered with such a mass of blond curls, surely was youthful. Nordic possibly, it was so pale - if not Teutonic. It lay helplessly on the table-top, like something carelessly left behind, the arms that sprawled about it sunburnt to a raw, meaty red on which the bracelets he wore seemed incongruous in their delicacy, their femininity. Angel-child, raw meaty man, helpless lass - he was all three. That was how young men were now, Baumgartner knew - they saw no difference

between what was considered masculine or feminine, and, as for Baumgartner himself, he was too old for it to matter.

Having taken in all the details he could gather, and failed to add them together into a known quantity, he turned back to Farrokh for further information. To his surprise, Farrokh abandoned the familiar weapon of the newspaper and the safe barrier of the counter and came out from behind it, tying up his pyjama strings under the long loose white vest he wore, and sat down on a chair at Baumgartner's table, a rare act of confidence. Clearly he was under some pressure that made him behave so uncharacteristically since Farrokh, for all his squalor and sourness, was also a dignified man who made much of wearing the sacred thread, of reading the scriptures and remaining aloof from all those of an inferior race, to him a mass of *mleccha*. For all the kindness shown him, Baumgartner had always felt he belonged to the latter.

Today he chose to display a different persona to the bemused Baumgartner. Touching him on the shoulder with an unaccustomed familiarity, pressing his thick white fingertips into Baumgartner's unresisting shoulder, he lisped, 'You - you and I, we are of a different age. Not that one's -' letting go of Baumgartner's shoulder, he flipped his hand in the direction of the slumped young man with the utmost derision. 'He, he belongs to this new race - men who remain children, like pygmies, dwarfs. Yes, I know they are very tall - I know they are growing bigger and bigger, these jungly heathens of today. Eat and sleep and lie about in the sun all day, they grow like turnips you leave in the ground - *too* big.' He made a ferocious noise through the many hairs in his nostrils. 'But what is there inside all that big, strong flesh and bones? Hanh?' he queried threateningly. 'Anything there? No? You are right. Nothing. Empty. Hollow. Hah!'

His enormous, thick, white hand plucked another gesture out of the air above Baumgartner's head. It commanded the

waiter in the kitchen door to bring more tea for Baumgartner, for all that Baumgartner weakly protested, uneasy at the thought of paying for more tea than he wanted. 'To you - I am ready to give more tea,' Farrokh assured him, plucking at the vest on his chest as if offering that as well, with all its holes and stains, magnanimously. 'But for *that* one - why should I bend my back, dirty my hands? Hah? What for? For a kick from his boot - the boot in which he climbed Himalaya, I suppose. Already he has kicked his parents in the face, I think - rich parents, giving their son motor bike, motor car, watch, money, ticket to India, everything. Then what do they get? Boot in the face, goodbye and get off. Hah? That is how they come - to Afghanistan, to Nepal, to India. Tell their parents they don't want job, they don't want work. Tell them big big lies about Hindu gods, say they love Buddha, say they want to visit temples, live in ashrams. Yes, they visit temples and live in ashrams alright,' Farrokh sneered, 'but do they look at Buddha - or at Rama, or Krishna or any other god? I know what they do. *You* know what they do, Bommgartner *sahib*? Get drugs in these ashrams, drugs from those pundits and other people like them. *That* is why they come to India, and Nepal, and Afghanistan. I say let them take drugs - let them kill themselves - why not? I care? I just call police and tell them remove them, throw them into gaol, into city morgue. But what I don't like, Bommgartner *sahib*, is how they come to India, spoil Bombay, spoil Goa, spoil holy temples, spoil my restaurant. Why for? Have we invited them? No! Then why they come? And what do they give in return, hah? Do they pay my bill? No. When Rashid goes to them with the bill, then they pull out pockets, show the big holes, say, "No money, no pay." Just like that.' Farrokh slapped the table with his hand, making Baumgartner draw back. 'Just like that. And what you can do? Call police because boy has not paid bill for two rupees? No, you have to forget. Then they go to shop - I have seen them myself, picking up bread,

picking up bananas, saying, "I am hungry, no money, my mummy-daddy no send money, please give me," and you know what kind of people we are in India, Bommgartner *sahib*, can we refuse food to anybody?' Baumgartner obediently shook his head, thinking of his plastic bag with shame, with a pang. But Farrokh was not referring to him at all, he was going along in the full flood of his indignant rhetoric. 'All the time we are giving, giving - to bull walking in the street like a lord every morning, to the beggar, to the leper, to the fakir who comes to my restaurant with tin can and marigold garland and snake round his neck so I give, give him money to go away and not trouble my customers. To all - give, give. My religion says: give, give. Yes, but that is enough. Why must I give to rich, bad children from England, from America? Is it we who must give them or their own people, their mummies and daddies, rich-rich uncles-aunties in *foren*?'

Farrokh was so incensed that his hand kept slapping the marble table-top again and again, smacking it as he might smack the cheek of an offender. Bubbles of spit grew on his moist red underlip and were caught in the bush of his moustache from which they fell in drops. Baumgartner looked from them to the hand on the table, slapping and slapping, till his own cheek felt worn and numbed.

'Kick them all out, kick them over the sea, I say - hanh? But how? They have no money for ticket, they say. They come here very grand - tickets, rucksacks, trekking boots, everything. Then everything goes - in Afghanistan, in Nepal already it starts to go, so they can buy hashish, buy *ganja*, all those powders they have to take like babies take milk. So when they come here nothing is left - rucksack empty, feet bare. What to do? Bommgartner *sahib*, what to do?'

As requested, Baumgartner shook his head silently.

'Go to Goa, that is what,' Farrokh bawled violently, leaning forward as if to throw Baumgartner backwards. Forced to raise his hand and wipe his face of flying spit bubbles,

Baumgartner pretended to be smoothing down his hair instead, politely. 'Goa they all hear about, you can be sure. Golden sand, palm trees, cheap *feni* to drink, music on the beach, dancing naked – you know what goes on there?'

No, Baumgartner indicated.

'No, I also not. Such things were not in my day. I only knew school, shop, work, wife, children – that is my life. But these – these baby-men who come now from America, from England, they know another kind of life, Bommgartner *sahib*, they have other life. Music they have to have, hashish they have to have, women they have to have – not wife, not like my wife, but *women*. And all in Goa they can get, under coconut tree, under moon and star. So there they go. Pay fisherman ten rupees to build hut with coconut palm leaf. Crawl in with woman, with hashish, not come out for two day, three day, five day even.' A note of envy had entered Farrokh's voice. It slowed, came to a standstill, exhausting itself in a sigh. His chin sank down into the mat of black hair on his chest. 'Such a life,' he sighed, and Baumgartner felt that regret had overtaken the censure in his tone. Perhaps he could now excuse himself and slip away?

But Farrokh clenched his hands, knitted together the fingers on which small hairs grew in tufts, and roared, 'How long it go on, hanh? How long? Soon they need money. Go to post office. Has letter come from my dear mummy, my darling daddy? No? Must have, please look, look again, they must send! No, no letter, no money. Then they begin to scream – shout filthy language, abuse – begin to cry, sit in post office and howl like babies. Friends come, take them away, give them hashish. Next day, again post office, again: My money come? No? Look again, you pig, you swine, you Indian ass, they shout, my money must come, my daddy will send, he love me, my mummy love me. But no letter – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, no letter. So then they go to Anjuna beach, sell rucksack, sell watch, sell everything. Just like fisherwomen,' Farrokh laughed with contempt,