

RECORDING #9980581/337-45 [resumed and finalised]
Original recording (03:35GMT/10-08-2007)
Operator code AD074

TIM MILLER:

I found something, Saskia. Something extraordinary. And I was lying. I followed Hrishi to that place and I stayed there because I wanted to. You see, in that room is where they make the paan, sorry, not the paan, it's in that room where they make the paan special.

SM:

What? What's in the room?

TM:

A young girl...

SM:

A prostitute.

TM:

Not a prostitute. She's Hrishi's sister, but with them you can never tell. These people, they band together from necessity. Who knows who she really is or if Hrishi is really her brother? That's what they told me at least.

SM:

Go on.

TM:

When I came in, I was in a terrible way. All my body ached, I was dizzy, the hallways moved like a plane in a storm, my feet dragged on the floor - Hrishi had to pull me up at times or I would have fallen in that pit and would still be there to this day, probably stripped of money and clothes and left for dead. But they took me in.

SM:

Why would they do that?

TM:

I'll get there. She took me into that room as if I was her child, cradling me on her lap and stroking my face. She held me as she talked to her brother. They knew what ailed me. I had tasted the paan, too much of the paan, and the only cure was to have more. They explained this to me but I couldn't understand what they wanted to do - the room had no paan in it at all. It was a small cubicle with a bed, no windows, plastic bags on the corner. Pretty much like any of the other minimal rooms in that filthy neighbourhood. The life of those people is stripped down to their function, and the same applies to where they live. So there was no paan anywhere, but it didn't matter, it didn't matter at all.

<<operator note: Saskia Miller seems to start a sentence but never gets round to finishing it. Tim resumes>>

TM:

She took off her headscarf and with it a black, greasy wig she wore underneath it.

SM:

Why would she wear a wig? Wasn't she young? Was she sick or something?

TM:

No, she was totally bald. And not shaved bald either, but as bald as a baby's cheeks. Or even balder than that, like hair never grew on her face, ever.

SM:

Go on.

TM:

Without her headscarf the shadows over her eyes lightened and I finally noticed them. Blue, Saskia, they were blue.

SM:

She might have had a British father, that's likely, don't you think?

TM:

You don't understand, they weren't just blue, they were almost white in colour. Transparent even. No pupils to mar them. They were these white balls that just looked at you, the iris a faint blue contour, but not there clearly. She looked at me, or maybe wasn't, and smiled.

SM:

Tim, are you sure you want to go on?

TM:

What do you mean?

SM:

Are you sure you want to keep going on making this up? It doesn't help you. At all!

TM:

I will show you all this when I get back, I've got proof.

SM:

Tim, you've got to get back, rest for a few days, a few weeks, get some counselling and then get your life going again.

TM:

Let me go on, Saskia. It will make sense in the end.

SM:

Tim, you must get back to London right now. You can't stay there.

TM:

I haven't changed my ticket. I'm still flying back on Sunday, the 12th.

SM:

How are things with double-E?

TM:

Well, I told them to fuck off. I don't need the job any more.

SM:

We do need the job, Tim. That was our agreement, remember?

TM:

We don't because I'm starting my own company. In fact, I'm just wrapping up here in India and working on the details of that. I can tell you, 100% sure, we're going to be rich. Then we can sell the business and retire and enjoy the money.

SM:

How's that going to happen?

TM:

If you let me fucking finish, you will understand, okay?

SM:

Okay.

TM:

Right then.

SM:

Do. Go on Tim. Let's hear it.

TM:

She took off the top of her sari. You know the sash bit that goes over the shoulder. She then placed my head on a pillow, very gently, and stood up. Took off the rest of her clothes. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't want to have sex with her of course, she was just a kid really, but she kept stripping. And then she was naked. Her body was that of a woman, probably, I don't know, sixteen, but she was completely sleek, with no hair, no bumps, no moles, no birthmarks. Like a fish or a snake. I mean the skin tone was like Hrishi's, but that's as far as it went. And she glistened, as if she was covered in oil from head to toe.

SM:

Please stop, Tim. You have no idea how this is affecting me.

TM:

She got close to me. I imagined she would reek. She lives in this shanty town with no toilets, no showers that I could see, no sanitation except these streams of brown liquid shit down the streets that are stepped over and flood into houses when it rains. She is one more of these desperate people with no hygiene, no concept of how to present themselves. But she didn't reek. Instead, if she smelled of anything, it was of paan. She smelled of paan. And then I understood. It was then that I understood where paan came from. It came from her. It was all over her skin but most strongly on her...

SM:

Cunt?

TM:

I wanted to move, I wanted to get away but I couldn't. I was too wasted, too tired, too mesmerised to go anywhere. To even push her away, or to scream and plead with Hrishi to finish it. So I just lied there, helpless. She placed a knee on each side of my head. The oil dripped onto my face.

<<operator's note: Tim clears his throat, there's a pause before he

resumes>>

TM:

It was so intense. It was like the other paans I had had, but times a hundred. It was pure. Her skin hung there, glowing with the promise of something extraordinary, something divine. Looking up at her, I was looking up at heaven. It got lower and lower and I closed my eyes and savoured it. I gorged on it, couldn't get enough, but that was okay as there was no end to it. She stroked my hair but was silent. I don't know if she enjoyed it or not, but at the time I wouldn't have noticed it either.

SM:

Tim...

TM:

Let me finish this. I must finish this. If you are the only person who'll ever hear it, doesn't matter but I will finish this.

SM:

Go on.

TM:

Time passed. Can't tell you how long it was overall. But definitely a few hours. I must have fallen asleep. When I woke up she was gone and I was alone in the bed. I felt great - as if I was twenty again, back in the university, still playing fullback, still immune to drink, all-nighters, disappointments, aches, and...

SM:

Marriage?

TM:

Hrishi sat on a chair, going through my wallet. I felt so good I didn't even get mad. He was taking out my cards and putting them on his pocket. I asked him about it, and he shrugged and smiled. It was okay, I thought. I'd just call the credit card companies later and report them stolen. We've got them insured with all this travelling anyway. He came to sit on the bed close to me. Asked if I had enjoyed the purer paan. Of course I had. Come to think of it, I don't know how I had lived so long without it.

SM:

What did he want? He couldn't keep you there forever.

TM:

No. He had a business proposal.

<<operator's note: another silence, this one 7 seconds long>>

TM:

He told me of the village where he and his sister came from. It is away from the cities. The other Indians avoid it because all the people there are of a very low caste. But in this village, hidden from visitors, are dozens of women like Hrishi's sister. I don't know if they have some kind of birth defect or deformation, but they are all like her. Imagine that, hidden somewhere in the jungle, a village where all the women are like her.

SM:

I don't understand how that is a business.

TM:

Saskia, bless you. You are so smart but don't you see? These people are sitting on a goldmine. They have a fantastic product. I mean, I am proof of that, I love it. It makes you feel great, it's completely organic. All they need is someone with some business sense like me.

SM:

This is madness, Tim.

TM:

No, we just need to set up production, brand it, market it, and put it on every shelf in every supermarket in the world. This is not madness, Saskia, this is business.