

Sleeping Dogs

by Clare Simons

My husband tells the story of the sleeping dog over a thousand cups of chai, across hectares of land, on stalled express trains, and into the heart of India. He sees grace in the story. I see the future. It all begins with Shiva.

The filthy mongrel is asleep. Not a flea moves, disrupting his dreams of *chapatis* and lentils fried in ghee. His scarred ears flop on the cool concrete and shut out the din of the train station. Burlap sacks of mustard seeds shield his mangy hind from dusty feet, toppling bundles, and thrashing sticks. The stray has claimed a safe hideout for the night.

My husband sprints to the ticket window, rupees in hand, ready to pay for our one-way, second-class, sleeper berths to Tiruvannamalai and the holy mountain of Lord Shiva, The Supreme God of Creation and Destruction. He does not see the dog or hear me scream.

Fangs through flesh—down to the bone—blood through khaki. The mutt vanishes into the electric air. Scott staggers, genuflects before the inescapable forces of India. The mongrel's bite unleashes *Kundalini shakti*—*She Who Is Coiled* at the base of the spine—amps his *Ida* and *Pingala* channels, pulsing currents of pink and blue light through all 72,000 *nadi*'s—clears his *Ajna* chakra—unlocks the door to the glory of Brahman. Shiva's bite is a grace. *Diksha* is bestowed.

In a gasp, in a heartbeat, my husband is initiated.

A good Samaritan raises Scott to his feet. The man's eyes dart from Scott's bloody leg to his ghostly face, then settle on me. "Hospital," the man says, "I take. I call. No problem."

I nod, yes, and mean, *Whatever you think; I have no idea.*

The man slings Scott's limp arm over his narrow shoulders and drags my husband out of the train station to a parking lot filled with motorcycles. Scott holds tight to the unbidden savior's small waist and is whisked away down an alley crowded with women

in saris carrying bundles on their heads and into a traffic circle of *putt-putts* at evening rush hour. Scott never looks back.

I take a cab to our hotel and wait for the call.

His rescuer takes Scott to a government hospital and leads him to a window in the wall where they are handed a flimsy slip of paper. They pass through a screen door, down a green-tiled hallway lined with white plastic lawn chairs populated by gap-mouthed men, gaunt, impassive women, and children too lifeless to cry.

A security guard leads Scott and his helper into a dank room. Scott nearly faints when he sees the high stone pedestal slab with a hose stuffed into a putrid drain in the concrete floor of the morgue. A lightbulb sparks off and on overhead. The security guard gestures to the table and Scott obeys; he sits.

“Soap?” the guard says.

“Soap?” Scott says.

His helper nods yes and runs from the room, returning, minutes later, with a small bar of soap covered in wax paper that cost two-rupees. The guard pulls the hose out of the drain and washes the blood off Scott's pants and knee. He soaps and rinses the wound many times, then stuffs the hose back down the drain. Scott grips the cold stone and almost falls but his ally catches him by the waistband.

“Doctor is there,” the guard says, pointing, and leads them into another fetid room.

A smug, young government doctor examines Scott's leg and gives him a shot for rabies and a prescription for five more injections.

“Stitches?” Scott asks.

“No stitches. Not in the tropics.” The doctor scribbles something on their now-limp admittance slip and hands it to Scott's helper.

“Keep the wound clean. Pay outside.”

He points at a filthy sheet that covers another door, mutters something that must have meant “Next” into the air, and an auntie wobbles in, propped up by two adoring schoolgirls.

His benefactor leads Scott to a sunny courtyard rimmed by more of the lawn chairs and pots of red geraniums.

“Take rest,” he says, and puts a dusty bottle of orange soda into Scott’s trembling hand.

Scott downs the drink. “What is your name?”

“Anish, it means *He Who Keeps Good Company*. Krishna is my God.”

Anish leads Scott to the Cashier’s Desk where two civil servants, vestiges from the Crown, rock on the back legs of their white plastic chairs and sip chai. One bureaucrat scratches himself and returns to his large font newspaper.

“Two-hundred rupees. Correct change,” the other says.

Scott pays his debt, about five dollars, with currency that feels like cloth. The laconic worker stamps the paper with the panache of a monarch’s seal and dismisses Scott with a wave of a fat finger.

Scott tries to put a twenty-dollar bill into Anish’s hand, but he waggles his head in protest. Scott tries again after the motorcycle ride back to our hotel, but the man disappears into the shadows and a sea of vehicles back in evening’s rush hour traffic.

Despite medical evidence that there isn’t an iota of proof in the *Mortality & Morbidity Study*, a 452-page HMO report compiled by the team of physicians who supervised Scott’s death and the in-house risk-management attorneys who covered their ass and by two sweet friends with advanced medical degrees who gingerly read the document and told me the rabies virus from the dog did not attach to my husband’s ganglia, and no pathogens bided their time in his bloodstream, despite all this—I believe a different truth.

It was the rapture of Lord Shiva that called the pathogens to rise up, burst through the gross, casual, astral and etheric bodies, spew sepsis into the white blood cells, urine, brain and bring my warrior to his knees for one last surrender to The One who whispered “Come with me on a joy ride with the top down on Saturday night along Main Street, across Route 66, up the coast road, fly over Carmel-by-the-Sea, be the envy of



Scott Rice

those who know a hero in a classic ride when they see one, go beyond the cosmology of the three worlds fourteen planes five spheres thirty-six evolutes three bodies five sheaths and merge in the universal I Am That.

Cha Cha Cha.

All Is Shiva.



Clare Simons' essays about Amma, India's hugging saint were published in *Parabola* and *Spirituality & Health* Magazines. "The Greatest" appeared on the official Muhammad Ali website along with works by Joyce Carol Oats and Norman Mailer. Her creative nonfiction can be found on *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Faith Hope & Fiction*, *Manifest Station*, *The Write Launch* and *Persimmon Tree*.

Simons was the press person and gatekeeper to the stories of the terminally ill patient-plaintiffs defending Oregon's Death With Dignity Act at the U.S. Supreme Court, and worked for passage of assisted dying laws in several states. Publication of her memoir is forthcoming. To learn more, visit her website: <https://www.clare-simons.com/>

Note: Scott Rice (1949-2016) was a mover of people and things. After retiring, he traveled into the heart of India, her villages, as disaster-relief volunteer for Embracing The World, a global humanitarian and charitable NGO, founded by his guru Sri Mata Amritandamayi. For more information visit their [website](#).