

# **BENEFIT**

## Characters

**Srey Norris**

*Foundation Spokesperson, early thirties*

**Fred MacDonald**

*Foundation President, late sixties*

**Greg Norris**

*Orchidologist, Srey's husband, mid-thirties*

**Cynthia MacDonald**

*Senator, Fred's wife, early sixties*

## Setting

*Present action takes place in a historic Rocky Mountain hotel. Past action takes place in Cambodia, Calcutta and Calgary.*

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*(The murmur of girls in a Cambodian classroom. Lights rise on SREY in an evening gown at a benefit in the Bow Valley. The girls begin to recite the English alphabet. A chiming of crystal glasses slowly drowns the girls out. Crossfade. FRED wears a Tux. He stands at a podium in a Ballroom waving for the chiming to keep coming, then waves for it to stop.)*

FRED            Alright, alright, that's enough... Let's keep 'er goin'—let's start with a thousand here. Gimme one, one, one, one, one, one, one, one, one—two—two—two—two—thousand smackaroos. Gimme three, three, three, three, three— you're barkin' up the right tree—now four. Okay, three and a half, got thirty-five, thirty-six—now we're talkin' Ted—thirty-seven—eight, whoa, whoa, whoa ladies and gentleman, slow down for this old man—thirty-nine hundred.

*(Lights rise on GREG standing beside several Wardian Cases that hold various Orchids.)*

Thirty-nine, thirty-nine, now four, four, no? Goin' once, goin' twice... Sold for thirty-nine hundred to Mrs. Hutchison, the Black Orchid of Sha-zam.

GREG            Anzam.

FRED            The Black Orchid of Anzam—not to be confused with the Black Orchid of Sha-zam, Mrs. Hutchison. Greg, please introduce our next specimen.

GREG            Uhh, the Vanda Teres Gigantea.

FRED            For those who like to live large. Where's it found.

GREG            Borneo. But there are very few growing in the wild.

FRED            You heard the man—either you go to Borneo, where you'll probably contract some virus not yet encountered by the medical world, or you open your cheque book and get this big girl all to yourself. Get 'er goin' Greger.

GREG            Uhh, alright. Let's begin the bidding—

FRED            Gimme twenty-five, twenty-five, twenty-five, twenty-five—twenty-five! Or are you just scratching yourself Mike? Twenty-five.

*(FRED points to GREG.)*

GREG            Uhh. Give me twenty-six. Give me twenty-six. Give me twenty-six. Give me—

FRED            Twenty-six! Twenty-eight, twenty-eight, twenty-eight, twenty-eight,

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twenty-eight—c'mmon y'all, you didn't drive all this way to stare at this pretty face—twenty-eight—twenty-nine—whoa, whoa, whoa, easy—!

*(CYNTHIA in light.)*

Thirty-three, thirty-three—lookin' for thirty-four. No? Goin' once... Goin' twice... Sold, for thirty-three thousand to Mr. Kapoor!

CYNTHIA He's joking, Sanjee.

FRED I promise you won't regret this in the morning.

CYNTHIA Just to remind you folks, what you're getting is more than just a spectacular centrepiece for your table, you're also getting a leading Orchid expert as your personal coach.

FRED That's right—these are Gregory's babies, so you better believe he won't be letting anybody drown his darlings. He's going to make house calls, he's going to teach you, or your Nannies, how to tend to these little ladies—many of whom also come from the Philippines.

CYNTHIA That's right.

*(FRED does a drumroll.)*

Deep in the Cardomom Mountains of Cambodia, in untouched tropical wilderness, is the only place you can find our last exquisite specimen. This, ladies and gentleman, is Greg's crown jewel.

FRED The last Orchid Hunter to try and nab her was shot by the Khmer Rouge.

CYNTHIA It is one of the rarest Orchids in the world.

*(SREY in light.)*

A little secret, because I think you've earned it.

FRED Mm-hm.

CYNTHIA This is the Orchid that brought Greg and Srey together. If not for her, the two young lovers' path's might never have crossed... Isn't that right, Greg?

GREG Uhh, yes. Yes.

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CYNTHIA It struck me as curious, when Greg and Srey first started dating, that the Foundation was operating in many of the same places you find the rarest Orchids.

FRED Mighty convenient, Greg.

CYNTHIA So it's a very special thing that we're able to auction this rare beauty, with the proceeds helping literally thousands of girls in need, isn't it, Srey.

SREY Yes, it certainly is. For those of you who I haven't had the opportunity to meet yet, my name is Srey, and I was the Foundation's first beneficiary. When Fred rescued me, I was an orphan, living in a desperate situation on the streets of Phnom Penh. With the support of the Foundation, I received safe haven—before coming to Calgary to receive an education, and then going on to study at University in Edmonton.

FRED I know—I know—Deadmonton, but there's no reasoning with this one.

SREY Since Fred first rescued me, the Foundation has grown in amazing ways.

FRED Nobody rescued anybody—if anything, Srey saved me—and I have been in the incredibly fortunate position, with this Foundation, to provide an education to thousands of other remarkable young women. You are an inspiration.

*(FRED kisses SREY's hand. GREG exits.)*

CYNTHIA As many of you know, we now operate globally, working to raise the status of women and girls in India, Southeast Asia, Africa and South America.

SREY But none of our work would be possible if not for the incredible support offered by all of you, here, in this room.

*(Crossfade. GREG sits in darkness in an ante-chamber off the Ballroom.)*

FRED *(Off.)* I'll hold you to that—I'll hold you to that.

*(Enter FRED. His shirt has been stained with red wine. Flicking on various lights, FRED searches for the master switch. There is no master switch. FRED crosses to the closet, whistling cheerfully as he searches for a shirt. He pulls one out.)*

Greg! Didn't see you there.

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*(FRED drapes the shirt and takes off his jacket.)*

An accident. Hip checked one of the waitresses. Looked like someone exploded.

*(FRED undoes his bow tie.)*

But this place could sustain a nuclear strike and I would still have a fresh shirt—starched, pressed—blinding white. Cynthia accepted early that I make a mess of things.

*(FRED takes off his cuff-links and unbuttons his shirt.)*

What we need to do is lure people in here one at a time. Then, once we have the room secure, we let them negotiate for their freedom with a gift made payable to the Foundation.

*(He gets the shirt off.)*

The difficulty will be keeping them quiet.

*(FRED goes to the drinking station and pours two glasses of Scotch.)*

Enough Scotch should do the trick.

*(He takes a glass to GREG.)*

We have the plan, now we must implement it.

*(FRED hands a glass to GREG.)*

Men of action unite.

*(FRED clinks GREG's glass. Only FRED drinks.)*

No, Gregory, you will not bow out of the festivities so easily. We need you out there, running interference for Srey. Cynthia's got her hands full with the Right Honourable Deputy Minister. Walks around like he's some kind of living legend ever since he got all that press up North. Harpooned a Beluga. I've seen the footage. The poor thing surfaces to say hello, and on cue, Phil spears her. Didn't even kill the poor thing—all blood and blubber thrashing around in the water—you can hear his Innu handler shouting at him to let go of the line, but he's not listening—he's just grinning—holding onto the line like he's trout fishing.

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*(FRED sips.)*

Between you and me, I would've loved to have seen him get pulled into the water with her. Even the most peaceful of creatures can be pretty fearsome when they've had a spear thrust into them.

*(FRED sips.)*

Must be tough, when's she's just gotten back, having to share her like this.

*(GREG is silent. FRED sips.)*

It's a struggle, trying to balance the schedules of two busy people. Cynthia and I had a system where we wouldn't talk when we were apart, but then go into lockdown when we were under the same roof. Sometimes we'd stay here, in the Chateau. Jacuzzi, fire, seafood tower. It was nice. There's something to be said for properly missing somebody.

*(FRED sips.)*

Ever since Cynthia got named to the Senate we're lucky if we're in the same time zone more than once a month. Maybe we'll go into permanent lockdown for our second retirement. I think they call that death.

*(Enter CYNTHIA.)*

CYNTHIA You're supposed to be changing your shirt.

FRED I'm counselling Greg.

*(CYNTHIA goes and gets FRED's jacket and bow tie.)*

CYNTHIA He's depressed because you just pimped his orchids.

*(CYNTHIA pulls FRED out of the chair.)*

FRED For a good cause!

CYNTHIA Still.

*(FRED puts down his Scotch and does up his shirt buttons.)*

FRED How are things going with Phil?

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CYNTHIA His nose is a tap.

FRED The Right Honourable Deputy Minister needs a handkerchief...

CYNTHIA The thing with the Barracuda, he's told you, why Phil can't breathe out of his right nostril?

GREG No.

CYNTHIA Turks and Caicos. A group of us were down there. We went night diving, that's when the strange fuckers come out. The guide, he told us, "whatever you do, don't shine your light in the eyes of a Barracuda."

FRED Told us three times.

CYNTHIA So what does Phil do? First one in the water, turns his lamp on—

FRED Barracuda.

CYNTHIA Bad luck, granted, turn away, swim.

FRED Anyone else would have turned.

*(CYNTHIA helps FRED with his bow-tie.)*

CYNTHIA We get back home safe and sound, he gets corrective surgery, heals up fine— but his nose won't stop running.

FRED So he starts suing.

CYNTHIA The diving operator, the tour guide, the resort, the travel agent—

FRED The headlamp manufacturer in New Zealand—

CYNTHIA And he wins, out of Court.

FRED Aggro eccentric.

CYNTHIA Not your typical bureaucrat.

*(FRED struggles with his cuff-links.)*

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FRED           The problem with cuff-links is they don't always cooperate...

*(CYNTHIA does FRED's cufflinks for him. FRED picks up his drink, passing it from hand to hand.)*

CYNTHIA       I don't care if he loses control of all his bodily functions, so long as his Department gives us the nod...

*(CYNTHIA helps FRED into his jacket, FRED switching his Scotch from hand to hand.)*

But to guarantee that, we you need out there on the floor, gents.

FRED           You're the one he wants...

CYNTHIA       Aw, thanks love.

*(CYNTHIA kisses FRED on the cheek and then ushers him toward the door. SREY enters in a hurry.)*

SREY           I think I lost her.

*(SREY takes off her heels, inspecting her feet.)*

CYNTHIA       Who's after you.

SREY           Mrs. Peterson, she's been shadowing me the entire night.

CYNTHIA       She's like a Terrier in heat.

SREY           She wants my personal assurance that any donation she makes will not go toward propping up the yellow menace in the Far East.

FRED           We promise nothing.

SREY           Can someone tell her I'm not Chinese.

CYNTHIA       Why not set the old bag straight.

SREY           I wouldn't dream. We Chinese are very polite.

*(SREY mock curtsies, then kisses GREG on the cheek.)*

Dance with me.

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*(SREY pulls GREG up from his seat. They waltz. Greg is not coordinated.)*

One two three, two two three.

*(FRED's grabbed CYNTHIA, the man can move.)*

One two three, two two three. Yes. There. You've got it.

*(SREY spins herself.)*

FRED        The lady prefers to lead.

CYNTHIA    Always.

SREY        And dip.

FRED        And switch.

*(SREY with FRED, CYNTHIA with GREG.)*

CYNTHIA    They're expecting us out there.

SREY        Let them drink.

FRED        Alcohol is our ally.

SREY        That's right.

CYNTHIA    Tell that to the Waitress you just laid straight.

FRED        Sometimes I talk with my hips...

*(FRED dips SREY. Everyone stops dancing.)*

CYNTHIA    So where are we at?

SREY        Second wave of hors d'oeuvres.

FRED        We threw them making them bid for their centrepieces.

CYNTHIA    Then main course.

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SREY            Then you speak.

CYNTHIA        The bit about the teacher—

FRED            Then drinks—

SREY            Then dessert—

FRED            Then drinks—

CYNTHIA        Then you speak—

FRED            Then drinks—righteous lubricant, I call it—

CYNTHIA        Then I introduce the Deputy Minister—

FRED            And we toast everybody for their generosity, and the mighty governing party for awarding us millions in new funding!

CYNTHIA        They haven't awarded anything yet.

FRED            Right. Everything rests on tonight.

*(CYNTHIA shakes her head, exiting. FRED finishes his drink, indicating he'll be following.)*

SREY            You're going to drive her to an early grave.

FRED            No way! Let the ladies dictate strategy—that's what I always's say. I'm just a dithering old fool...

*(FRED kisses SREY on the cheek.)*

GREG            No.

*(FRED and SREY look at GREG.)*

I think it's noble. This work you do. I would never have met Srey, if not for you.

FRED            Oh, I don't know...

GREG            Give credit where credit is due.

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*(GREG stands.)*

FRED        Anyone would've done the same in my position.

GREG        You created the position.

FRED        You've got me there.

GREG        Bringing Srey here. Giving her this opportunity, to work for the Foundation—this organization, which has been so important, the difference, in her life—not only that—not only that, but taking her in, treating her like one of your own—

FRED        Family.

GREG        Like family.

FRED        It's all about family.

GREG        It goes beyond charity.

FRED        That's what we like to think.

GREG        This makes you uncomfortable I realize, but I've seen, up close, your work. That Srey was one of those girls, born with nothing, living... I can't begin to imagine what her life must have been like.

FRED        And look at her now.

GREG        My happiness is owed in large part to you.

*(GREG puts out his hand.)*

And I am grateful.

*(Beat. FRED takes GREG's hand.)*

Grateful.

*(GREG does not let go of FRED's hand. SREY puts her hand on GREG and FRED's hands. GREG lets go.)*

FRED        Well... Okeydoke, Greger.

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*(FRED downs the last of his Scotch.)*

We'll see you out there!

*(FRED exits. GREG breathes in through his nose and out through his mouth.)*

SREY           What's going on with you?

*(Glasses ringing off. A field in Cambodia, 2008. GREG breathes in through his nose and out through his mouth to calm himself.)*

GREG           *(In bad Khmer.)* Stop!

SREY           *(Khmer, off.)* What—

GREG           *(Khmer)* Minefield.

SREY           *(Khmer, off.)* No it's not.

GREG           *(Khmer.)* Mine-field.

SREY           *(Khmer, off.)* No it's not.

*(Enter SREY.)*

GREG           Stop!

SREY           What are you yelling about?

GREG           Mine...field.

SREY           What are you talking about?

GREG           Minefield.

SREY           I understood. Who told you this was a minefield?

GREG           A soldier. He's gone to get help.

*(Pause.)*

SREY           Are you Mormon?

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GREG No.

SREY What are you doing here?

GREG I'm a Horticulturalist.

SREY Plants.

GREG Specifically, Orchids.

SREY So technically you're an Orchidologist.

GREG Yes.

SREY Then why didn't you say that.

GREG People don't know what that is.

SREY You've come to Cambodia to steal Orchids.

GREG To collect samples.

SREY In Cambodia.

GREG Yes.

SREY Of Orchids.

GREG Yes.

SREY You've come to Cambodia to steal Orchids.

GREG To collect samples—I'm a Conservationist, I have a license.

SREY Who issues this license?

GREG The International Institute of Orchidology—it's an arm of the International Institute of Botany.

SREY Which is an arm of the International Institute of Horticultch-ology.

GREG Horticulturists and Botanists operate under the same flag, globally.

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SREY        You are a Botanist Horticulturalist Orchidologist Conservationist.

GREG        Yes.

SREY        And you've come to steal Orchids.

GREG        There are several rare species in these hills that have never been properly documented because the area was off limits. If samples are not collected, these species could potentially be lost forever to unscrupulous Orchid Dealers.

*(SREY shakes her head.)*

I'm serious.

SREY        No—I've just never heard someone use unscrupulous in a sentence.

*(SREY stares at GREG.)*

How long have you been standing here?

*(GREG slowly turns his wrist to look at his watch.)*

GREG        Fifty-eight minutes. The soldier took my phone, he's calling a mine disposal team.

*(SREY stares at the sun.)*

SREY        Nobody is coming.

*(Pause.)*

GREG        What do you mean.

SREY        This field was de-mined.

*(Pause. GREG doesn't move.)*

GREG        How do you mean.

SREY        The Canadian government paid to have this whole district made safe.

*(Pause.)*

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GREG           How do you know this.

SREY           I'm close with the Senator who spearheaded the initiative. My foundation runs an orphanage over that ridge. The girls play kickball here. It's the kickball field.

*(Pause.)*

GREG           Where are they now.

SREY           In class.

*(SREY walks up to GREG.)*

You are not going to die today.

*(SREY extends her hand.)*

My name is Srey.

*(Glasses ringing off. Bow Valley.)*

What's going on, Greg?

*(GREG shakes his head.)*

GREG           Ringing. I hear ringing. Ringing together with this feeling like I'm...

SREY           Our guests are waiting.

GREG           They're not ours. They're Fred's. Fred's and Cynthia's.

SREY           What are you talking about?

GREG           Them out there, they'll be fine, they don't need you, or me, the fundraiser will continue—speeches will be made, heart strings will be played, funds will be raised. I want us to leave.

SREY           Why?

GREG           To get away from this place.

SREY           You know I can't leave.

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GREG Since you've gotten back we've barely spoken.

SREY I've had a lot on my mind, I'm sorry.

GREG Normally you tell me what's on your mind.

SREY Sometimes I need to separate the sense from the nonsense.

GREG We make sense of things together.

SREY I don't ask questions when you're blasting Mozart's Requiem in your herbarium.

GREG It's a converted woodshed, it's hardly a herbarium.

*(SREY starts laughing.)*

SREY Are we bickering?

*(SREY takes GREG's face.)*

What's the matter, Greg?

GREG My toes and my fingers have lost feeling. My heart is pounding...

SREY You can stay in here if you like, you don't have to come back out.

GREG I won't sit here one second longer while he leads you around like some kind of prize.

SREY Pardon me?

*(Applause off.)*

GREG We're celebrating—we're celebrating the privilege, the privilege—the privilege of helping those who can't help themselves—helping Fred help those to help themselves—listen to him work his magic—the man, the giant. How he moves mountains like the rest of us move rocks.

SREY You've never had a problem with Fred before tonight.

GREG They clapped like that for you and me, at our wedding. I never realized we had so many friends, Srey.

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SREY        We're very lucky.

GREG        I don't care, about them. Our friends. I don't care about Fred, about his countless acts of kindness. To me, you're the only thing that matters.

SREY        My working with Fred has suddenly become a problem.

GREG        None of this means anything, I love you—

SREY        You love me—

GREG        That's the only thing that matters—

SREY        I know you love me—

GREG        I won't ever stop.

*(Pause.)*

SREY        On the most important night the Foundation has ever had, you've decided to reaffirm your love, after degrading me in the back room.

GREG        I've not degraded anyone.

SREY        A prize, being led about.

GREG        I can't eat, I can't sleep... The man of the hour, with you, out there... With me, in here, choking, on air. You don't see what I see, you're inside, apart of the machinery.

SREY        You're not making sense, Greg.

GREG        Of course not—of course I'm not—nothing about us ever has. This incredibly self-assured, magnificent human being criss-crossing the globe helping children in need, choosing me. Do you want to know what I did when you were away? I cross-bred an Australian Lady Slipper with a Canadian Lady Slipper. You are enrolling girls in school, literally saving the world, and I'm at home creating mutant Angiosperms.

SREY        I'm away too much, I know.

GREG        This isn't about you being away.

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SREY           Why do you suddenly have a problem with Fred—our friends—the Foundation.

GREG           You are the Spokeswoman, their Cambodian blossom, the living proof of what can be grown with the gift of education.

SREY           This is my job.

GREG           You are my wife.

SREY           The two aren't in opposition.

*(Pause.)*

GREG           The first time you brought me to one of these things I was terrified, could barely speak. You took me, by the hand, and pulled me into a closet. You didn't say anything. I couldn't see your face. I could just feel you, against me, breathing. When we went back out I wasn't scared anymore, because none of it mattered. I had you.

SREY           You still do.

GREG           My only. My only.

*(GREG pulls a letter from his pocket.)*

“My only. You belong to me. Our love survives through secret, no common person could ever understand it. I can still feel your body... Pressed against me... Your fingers tracing...”

*(Pause.)*

I read it. Again and again. Until the sentences became words, that became letters, that became...

*(Pause.)*

The feeling, expressed so simply. Describing you... In a way I've never been able.

*(Pause.)*

To have my love told back to me...by a man I've treated like your father...

*(Long pause.)*

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SREY        How did you...

*(Pause.)*

How.

*(Pause.)*

GREG        I open your mail when you are away. As you've asked me.

*(Applause off.)*

I can't say that anything is breaking. It hasn't happened that way. There's just this feeling... This feeling that something has gone dreadfully wrong inside of me.

The two of you floating around out there, like I've seen before, only now I see how he guides you, how he leads you. Thinking...I'd rather scratch out my eyes before watching. Then in here, Fred joking, undressing. Thinking, I'd rather rip off my ears before listening. Then the two of you, dancing, thinking I'd rather cut out my tongue before saying...

*(Pause.)*

So, there you have it. Your husband. Blind, deaf, dumb.

*(Crossfade. FRED stands with a plate of hors d'oeuvres on the Ballroom floor.)*

FRED        I've seen Srey leave some very powerful people tongue tied. We were in the Big Apple, the U.N had the heads of a bunch of charities out. Not sure who came up with the speaking order—maybe we drew lots—but of the dozen or so groups that had come to speak, Srey was the closer. We heard about everything you could dream—the plight of the domestic Caribou in Siberia, the problem with cousins with cousins in the Solomons...

*(FRED nibbles.)*

The real doozy was the last speaker before Srey. He was one of those Forest People from the Democratic Republic of the Congo—he stood about four and a half feet tall. He'd come to plead with the U.N to pass a resolution to stop the killing of his people. But not just the killing, mind you. Apparently, just about every warring party in the Virunga were hunting Forest People like animals—

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“harvesting us like bush meat,” the poor little fellow squeaked.

*(FRED nibbles.)*

So I figured we were dead in the water. But Srey got up there, and in the most gracious way imaginable, thanked all the speakers that had come before her. Then, she somehow wove every one of their causes and grievances together, and explained that all could be made better by simply educating the girls of the world.

And everyone stood and clapped for her, as if she were the keynote speaker.

*(FRED nibbles.)*

Srey’s not special. She is spectacular.

*(Crossfade. Cambodia, 2008. GREG has various Orchids laid out on a field table, which he carefully packages and labels.)*

SREY        A crocodile's been eating pigs. They've taken pictures of the crocodile's footprints, and judging by the size of these, they know that this crocodile is pretty big. Tourists come to try to catch a glimpse of the beast, but they're grabbed by separatists; the government panics, declares the whole area off limits. So the crocodile just continues, eating people's pigs. Three years pass, the tourists are freed, the separatists agree to lay down their weapons, and a team of biologists descend on the island determined to capture the crocodile for Science.

*(Pause. SREY has become distracted with GREG.)*

GREG        And.

SREY        And?

GREG        Did they catch it?

SREY        Yes. What was I talking about?

GREG        A crocodile, in the Philippines.

SREY        Right. It was the biggest crocodile ever captured alive. Media ran with stories about it for weeks; about the crocodile's eggs, about the crocodile's teeth, about all those poor victim pigs. Meanwhile, four U.S Servicemen were caught at a brothel in the Philippines, where the twenty-two girls rescued were all under sixteen, but no one reported a thing. Twenty-two child sex slaves could not compete.

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*(GREG shakes his head. SREY stares at him.)*

So. Orchid hunting. That's very... Specialized.

GREG Orchid hunting was considered a noble enterprise in Victorian times.

SREY Huh. So where are some hotspots? For Orchids.

GREG The Philippines. Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos. The last virgin rain-forests of West Africa. The jungles of Colombia—controlled by the rebels, where it's helpful to know random facts about Che Guevara and Coca.

SREY Ever been taken prisoner?

GREG Been held at gunpoint. No one believes the Orchid thing at first, but if I rattle off enough random Orchid facts they usually lose interest pretty fast. A common characteristic of men with guns, regardless of their politics, is that they can't stand nerds. It's probably why we're the first to be eliminated in any purge.

*(GREG cinches a bag.)*

SREY Hit me.

GREG With.

SREY A random Orchid fact.

*(SREY holds an imaginary gun to GREG's chest.)*

GREG Orchids are the most diverse of the flowering plants, which posed a conundrum for Darwin, who could find no history of their evolution. One hundred million years ago they simply appeared on the scene, and boom, there was an explosion. The only explanation? They descended from the heavens. Orchids are so specialized to their environments that some species can only be found in one corner of a country, in one corner of a Province, in one corner of a district, in one corner of a field.

*(SREY holds her fingers against GREG's chest.)*

SREY Orchids...

*(SREY and GREG stare at each other.)*

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GREG       Yup.

*(Crossfade. Bow Valley. CYNTHIA sits in the Ballroom talking to the Deputy Minister.)*

CYNTHIA   Heli-skiing in the Swat. Down, down, farther down, I kept telling the Pilot. "No, no Mrs. MacDonald, I cannot take you any farther, this is as close as we get." So I said fuck it, and jumped. Completely disappeared, swallowed right up. Could hear Captain whats-his-nuts flying off. Frontier Corps my ass, those sorry sonsofbitches wouldn't know adventure if it bit them in the ass. Punched forward, punched back, punched up. Light. Light, like five feet up. Took me the better part of an hour to get myself out, that powder was so soft. But it was worth it, those mountains spread out all around. The Switzerland of Pakistan is what we called the Swat before they shot the shit out of it. Education's not gonna cure that.

We have a chart, it shows the Foundation's growth since we got this whole thing off the ground—a flow chart, or Excel—I don't know, it's a goddamn chart—anyway, eight years ago, it's like a tsunami hit. We weren't in a position to be throwing soirees like these before Srey arrived. Suddenly we were the hottest ticket in town—and this was at the height of another goodwill wave to Afghanistan and another African famine. The same charities were saying the same things they did in the eighties—but Srey, she changed the rules of the game. The other groups would fly people over to give testimonials, show their stumps and their scars, but Srey did what none of them were doing. She built rapport. People started seeing these girls in Cambodia as their own—never mind that they couldn't pronounce their names—because Srey talked to them in a way they could understand. Not about unimaginable horrors in distant lands.

*(Crossfade. GREG and SREY in silence in the ante-chamber.)*

GREG       When we first met, I wouldn't talk about you. With my friends, with my parents. I'd try to block you out of my mind. So long as I had control away from you, I was okay if I lost it with you. And I lost it. Quick. It bothered me, that something so amazing could come so easy. I felt dishonest, in some way. But you made me believe. Through sheer force of personality. To believe. My parents still don't know that you asked me. You proposed to me. Swept me off my feet.

And I've been happy. So happy. Simply...orbiting. Orbiting around this remarkable human being, who through some stroke, is my wife.

And then I open that letter. And I go from this constant, orbiting around the woman I love, to just...floating.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

Having to think about you in this detached way. Because if I let what I'm feeling sit inside me...

*(Pause.)*

You share a history I couldn't begin to imagine, so maybe it's not such a strange thing that I can't picture you with him.

*(Pause.)*

Two weeks. Two weeks with you away.

*(Pause.)*

Then you're home, beside me. Sleeping...listening to you breathing. Thinking...this cannot be. This cannot be.

SREY I'd like you to meet Greg.

*(A street in Calcutta, 2009. FRED wears a linen suit, fanning himself with a sunhat.)*

FRED The famous Greg! I was beginning to think Srey had invented you.

*(GREG extends his hand. FRED grabs it, pulling him in for a hug.)*

I'm a hugger.

*(GREG awkwardly hugs FRED. FRED releases him.)*

Bugger with the rickshaw tried to pull one over—I told him, "Don't be fooled by my complexion my man, this is not my first time in Calcutta."

*(SREY and FRED embrace, FRED kissing SREY on both cheeks.)*

You positively radiate.

SREY It's the heat.

FRED Greg and I look like we're allergic to the place.

*(FRED sneezes.)*

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

I am allergic to this place. Bugger took a shortcut through the flower bazaar—I've had every blossom known to man shoved in my face.

*(FRED wipes his face with a handkerchief.)*

Flowers are your area of expertise, are they not?

GREG Orchids.

FRED Right. I've always found orchids quite pornographic. Would you describe Orchids as the bad girls of the plant world?

GREG Most Orchids are hermaphroditic.

FRED Ahh, the plot thickens...

*(FRED winks at SREY.)*

How do you deal with it.

GREG Deal...?

FRED With the pressure.

GREG I...

FRED Of being the one that Srey has searched for the world over.

GREG I...

FRED And living just up the Bow River—but your paths cross on a minefield in Cambodia—and here we are meeting in the armpit of India.

*(FRED laughs.)*

Strange, this world. I stumbled across Srey in Cambodia too. She was just like one of these kids you see running around...

*(FRED squeezes SREY's arm.)*

Srey's never introduced Cynthia and I to a special someone before. There've been suitors, mind you, but they were all put to the sword.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

*(FRED shakes GREG's hand.)*

It's a pleasure to meet you.

*(Lights fade on FRED. Bow Valley. SREY and GREG sit in silence. First a few, then many tables are thumped in the Ballroom.)*

GREG        Another toast.

*(GREG raises his glass.)*

“Each one of these glasses represents a hundred girls the world had forgotten, who now are receiving the gift of an education.”

SREY        That is not something invented. This is bigger than you and I. The Foundation, the work that we are doing, is the most important thing.

*(Pause.)*

GREG        I live with you. I've been to the schools, the orphanages. The Foundation is your life. That's been true for as long as I've known you. But you are mine. My life. The fate of humanity, and the fate of you and I, are two separate things.

SREY        I realize.

*(Pause.)*

GREG        If one of your girls was in trouble, if the Foundation were threatened, you would do whatever you had to to defend them.

SREY        Yes.

GREG        Regardless of the repercussions.

SREY        Yes.

GREG        Do you love him?

*(SREY is silent.)*

Tell me what is happening.

SREY        Nothing.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

GREG        You are the most honest person I have met in my life...

SREY        I have not lied.

GREG        Then we have different definitions.

SREY        I would never betray you, Greg.

*(Pause.)*

GREG        Strange to see you this way.

*(Pause.)*

The fact you don't show weakness. I found it off putting, at first. But I got over it. Your past shaped you, you are the woman I love... Period. Don't ask, don't question. But this...

*(Pause.)*

I need you to tell me what is happening.

SREY        Nothing.

*(Pause.)*

GREG        Alright.

*(GREG begins taking off his Tux.)*

SREY        What are you doing—

GREG        Nothing.

SREY        Stop.

GREG        I'm not doing anything.

SREY        Please don't—

GREG        This was a gift,. You took the measurements, Fred got it stitched—I got married in it. He walked you down the aisle, he gave you away, and then we got

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

married—in a Tux Fred gifted me.

SREY Stop, Greg.

GREG Honestly? I've never felt comfortable in the thing.

SREY That letter has nothing to do with you and I—

GREG He describes your body pressed against his, Srey.

*(Enter CYNTHIA. GREG stands in a state of undress.)*

CYNTHIA And, switch! Not another word, Fred is floundering out there—you know how he massacres the pronunciation of those towns and villages. Greg's lost his shirt.

*(CYNTHIA stares at SREY.)*

I'll speak?

*(SREY nods. CYNTHIA goes to leave.)*

Far be it from me to tell you how important this night is for the Foundation, Greg, but if we let anything get in the way of this fundraising train, we're going have to deal with a small army of angry young ladies—and hell hath no fury like six thousand school girls who couldn't write their exams because they never got their pencils.

*(CYNTHIA exits.)*

GREG The letter.

SREY The letter is from before.

GREG Before what?

SREY The letter is from before—that's what matters.

GREG From before we met.

SREY The letter is from before—Fred did not send it.

GREG Then who did?

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

*(SREY is silent.)*

He wrote it.

*(SREY is silent.)*

The letter is from before—you're going to have to give me more than that.

SREY        The letter was written before we met—I don't need to give you anything, Greg.

*(FRED darts in through the door with a nerf gun. He stands at the side of the door. SREY has come to FRED's office in Calgary one week before the benefit.)*

FRED        Ahh!

*(FRED empties the nerf gun out the door.)*

Sorry to keep you waiting—the fuckers had me pinned down in accounting.

SREY        You got rid of the chairs.

FRED        Never see clients in here—discourages underlings from lingering.

SREY        I'll be brief.

FRED        Not you, Srey.

*(FRED kisses SREY on the cheek.)*

Welcome back.

SREY        The government has agreed to put us on a shortlist of preferred charitable Foundations.

FRED        Cynthia's worked her magic in the Senate.

SREY        If we're selected, they'll award us ten dollars for every dollar we raise ourselves.

FRED        I think they call that hitting the jackpot.

SREY        We haven't been selected yet.

FRED        We'll work our magic on the Right Honourable Deputy Minister at the benefit.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

SREY           A reporter wants to do a feature on you, she wants to know if you want her to highlight anything in particular.

FRED           That my innumerable good deeds are matched only by my panther like physique.

*(SREY smiles.)*

Get Dysentery? That's the only time you didn't laugh at my jokes, Srey.

SREY           I'm fine.

FRED           Something wrong with one of the girls? With Greg?

SREY           Nan contacted me.

FRED           Nan.

*(Pause.)*

I went to hear what she had to say.

*(Pause.)*

She lives beside a garbage heap, outside Phnom Penh.

*(Pause.)*

She taps her tea in the same way. And clucks, like a chicken. A mother hen.

*(SREY pops off one of her high-heels, rubbing her foot, absent.)*

At the ceremony at the Palace the night before, I sat in front of the T.V cameras with Generals, Ambassadors, Executives...I could speak with them, laugh with them, argue with them... But with Nan...

*(Pause.)*

I remember how I used to stare at her face. At her teeth, the fuzz on her cheeks, the veins, pumping... I would sing a little rhyme to myself and imagine someone gently pulling her head back and slowly running a blade across her throat. Like you would with a chicken. Funny thing for a kid to sing about.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

But sitting there, across from her, in that shack... it felt like someone was holding my head back. This woman. Living in filth. Sitting across from me, smiling, with a knife against my throat.

*(Pause. FRED goes to SREY and puts his hand on her shoulder. Pause. SREY slowly rests her head against FRED's hand. SREY takes her head off FRED's hand.)*

FRED        She's threatening.

*(Pause.)*

Again.

SREY        She spent twenty years in a Cambodian prison.

*(Pause.)*

She thinks you put her there.

*(Pause.)*

She told me she's paid her debt, to society. Now... She says she wants to enjoy the "sunshine".

FRED        She's an old woman living on a garbage heap.

SREY        Who can make me feel like I'm eight years old again.

FRED        You shouldn't have gone. I would have come.

SREY        You would've flown across the world to talk to an old lady living on a garbage heap.

FRED        To save you from having to.

SREY        She says she has proof.

*(Pause.)*

FRED        I'm not afraid.

SREY        She could do damage.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

FRED She has no proof of anything.

SREY Even with what she has to say.

FRED Then you're saying pay.

SREY We can't pay.

FRED So what are you suggesting we do, Srey?

SREY Deny. Everything.

*(Pause. FRED nods.)*

FRED I'll talk to Cynthia. She knows how to deal with false allegations.

*(FRED exits. Chateau Lake Louise.)*

GREG At the ceremony, outside Phnom Penh, under that Banyan tree... It was just you and me. The opposite of our wedding in Calgary. No witnesses. Just us. Making our promise.

I told you I would stand beside you, always, no matter what.

*(Pause.)*

We do not talk about the past. I have respected that. But I can't pretend I haven't read what I have read.

*(Pause.)*

The letter is from before we met. From when you were in University—

SREY It's from before.

GREG Fred and Cynthia sponsored you, paid to bring you over—why would he write you if you were living in his house?

SREY He didn't.

GREG They're from before that?

SREY My guests are waiting—

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

GREG I don't care, Srey. It's from before that, from when you were in Cambodia, from when you were a teenager—

SREY Why did you agree to marry me—not knowing anything about me, about my history?

GREG I know that you suffered, terribly. Why would anybody want to remember those things. And Fred rescued you. He saved you.

SREY The Foundation saved me.

GREG When was the letter written.

*(Pause.)*

SREY When I was nine.

*(Crossfade. CYNTHIA stands at the podium in the Ballroom.)*

CYNTHIA Fred and Srey make things personal. But they ask me to speak because I come at this thing differently. I'm not going to lie—you will not find me in a hut in some tropical backwater that you can't find on a map. So I am not going to insult anybody's intelligence here tonight and tell you some sob story designed to pry pennies from Grannies. I've got a different kind of anecdote.

There was an incident a few years back at one of our schools, where a teacher ran into financial hardship, and so began charging students a fee to let them write their exams—a common practice in the Developing World. So what did our girls do? They drew up a letter in Khmer and a letter in English, detailing the teacher's transgressions, and delivered them to Srey when she visited their classroom—right after she'd shaken the hand of the teacher in question. Srey's reaction? She asked the girls what should be done. First, they asked for the dismissal of the Headmaster, for having had poor oversight over the teacher. Then, they asked that the teacher be criminally charged, for the wrong he had done them. And when it comes to incarceration in a Cambodian prison...

*(CYNTHIA whistles.)*

Srey didn't make excuses, about poverty being the root cause of corruption, and how the teacher should be forgiven. She rightly viewed the teacher's actions as a threat to everything we are doing, and let our girls decide how to deal with him.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

*(Crossfade. GREG stands in the ante-chamber.)*

GREG        You were nine.

*(Pause. SREY goes for GREG, he steps away.)*

                 He needs to be in prison.

SREY        We are raising money—we are raising an incredible amount of money, for girls who have nothing. I am fighting for every penny.

GREG        What—what are you saying?

SREY        I never wanted to tell you this thing—

GREG        This thing?

SREY        It has nothing to do with you and I.

GREG        He wrote those words to you when you were a child, Srey?

SREY        Those words have no bearing—

GREG        Are you hearing what you're saying?

SREY        I am asking you to listen to what I am saying.

GREG        Pennies. You're fighting for every penny.

SREY        Nobody is waiting in the wings—no government, no church, no celebrity—all those girls have is me.

GREG        He's out there raising money for a charity—a pedophile—predator is out there raising money for children in need.

SREY        He's not a predator.

GREG        No—he's your benefactor, your employer—the power he's got over you—

SREY        Fred does not control me.

*(GREG pulls away from SREY.)*

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

Has something been done to you Greg?

GREG        Something has been—was done, to my wife.

*(SREY stares at GREG.)*

SREY        You can't even look at me

*(Pause. GREG looks at SREY.)*

GREG        You're defending him.

SREY        I'm not.

GREG        How can you protect him?

SREY        I'm protecting the Foundation.

GREG        The Foundation will survive without him, he needs to be shown for what he is.

SREY        Achieving what?

GREG        Justice.

SREY        For who.

GREG        For you.

SREY        I've said what I want.

GREG        To let him continue, his work.

SREY        To let me continue mine—I'm telling you that saying anything will seriously compromise the work we are doing.

*(Laughter off.)*

GREG        People need to know what he's done.

*(SREY shakes her head.)*

SREY        I want you to look at me.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

*(SREY grabs GREG's face.)*

I was one of those children we are helping.

GREG I realize.

SREY I am one of those girls, Greg.

*(Pause.)*

GREG This is how he keeps you in line. By having you tell your story, again and again at these things.

*(Pause.)*

You were alone, no family, no one to protect you. He... The Foundation took you in, Fred showed you kindness...if it can be called that. Since you were a child, he has been the biggest thing in your life. The power that gives him...

*(Enter FRED.)*

FRED They've got a Muskox set up between the washrooms.

*(FRED crosses to the drinking station.)*

People are taking turns mounting it and getting their picture snapped.

*(He pours a Scotch.)*

Aren't Muskox endangered?

*(He pours a second Scotch.)*

There must be some rule against getting them stuffed.

*(FRED takes a Scotch to GREG.)*

I told Phil—I told the Right Honourable Deputy Minister, that if he ever encounters a Muskox in the wild, he must try and maintain eye contact at all times. If you turn, the Muskox will interpret it as a sign of weakness, and charge.

GREG No one has any idea.

## **Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie**

FRED        Nope. MuskoX are just giant goats.

SREY        Please, don't.

GREG        She was nine years old.

*(Pause. FRED smiles.)*

FRED        What's he talking about?

GREG        Srey believes the Foundation will be ruined, when people find out what you've done.

SREY        That would be certain.

GREG        I did not promise to stand by this man.

*(Enter CYNTHIA.)*

CYNTHIA    Why are we locking ourselves away at our own event?

*(Silence.)*

              What is going on?

*(Pause.)*

SREY        Greg received a letter, from Phnom Penh, when I was away.

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA    Who sent this letter?

GREG        I don't know.

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA    Fred told me. That somebody is trying to extort money from the charity.

GREG        This isn't about money.

*(GREG hands the letter to CYNTHIA. She reads it. She folds it. Pause)*

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

CYNTHIA Poetry.

*(Pause.)*

Poetry.

*(Pause. CYNTHIA folds the letter again.)*

What we're hopefully all appreciating, is that whoever sent this, will do anything to see that they get paid.

*(Pause.)*

So for all our sakes, after tonight, I think we need to distance ourselves from the Foundation, for a time—until this problem goes away.

*(Pause.)*

GREG What are you saying?

*(Pause.)*

SREY I'm not walking away.

CYNTHIA It's heartbreaking. But if we pay, we will completely compromise our ability to help anybody.

SREY I am not walking away.

CYNTHIA No one's walking away.

GREG Fred wrote that to Srey when she was nine.

CYNTHIA This letter proves nothing.

SREY I will not abandon the work we are doing.

CYNTHIA Nobody is abandoning anything.

SREY I will not walk away from the work we are doing.

GREG You know. You know everything.

## **Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie**

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA If our guests, out there, get even a hint that there is substance to any allegations, we will not loose face, we will loose access. Access we will never regain.

SREY Our access means nothing if we turn our backs on the girls we are helping.

GREG You're not worried about the girls, or Srey. You're worried about your standing.

CYNTHIA Our standing has been the only thing that's allowed us to help anybody.

SREY I am not walking away.

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA You are free to do as you like. But Fred and I need to distance ourselves from this thing.

SREY Your standing is what allows for all this. Your standing gives us access. We are talking about thousands of girls.

CYNTHIA Fred and I can not risk everything.

SREY Nobody is walking away.

*(Short pause.)*

CYNTHIA What are you saying?

*(Pause.)*

SREY The risk of allegations being made public is one thing. My denial is another thing.

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA You're threatening.

*(Pause.)*

SREY Allegations would be damaging. What I would have to say, would be damning.

*(Silence.)*

## **Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie**

CYNTHIA You would betray Fred and I.

*(Pause.)*

SREY You have been the most important people in my life...

*(Pause.)*

But walking away would destroy everything.

FRED Srey, please...

GREG I want you to walk away.

FRED I loved Srey—

GREG I want people to know what you did to her—

FRED I've always loved Srey—

GREG I want people to know that you hurt her—

FRED I never hurt anybody—

CYNTHIA Shut-up Fred—

GREG I want people to know that when you claimed to be helping children, you were hurting them—and that you knew, and protected him.

FRED I never hurt anyone.

GREG You rescued her, off the street.

FRED She was barely alive—she was barely alive—people were stepping over her like she wasn't even there.

GREG You saved her, so you could hurt her.

SREY That is not true—

GREG And you knew—you knew he hurt her—

CYNTHIA I love Srey like a daughter—

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

GREG           What kind of mother protects a man who hurts her daughter?!

CYNTHIA       My husband is flawed and stupid—but he has only ever shown love to all who've known him.

GREG           Love.

SREY           Love.

*(Pause.)*

You don't know the truth...of my life. You don't know what Fred saved me from.

*(Silence.)*

I was not an orphan, to begin. I had a mother. A father. Three brothers. My father died when I was eight. My mother could not cope. My brothers were older and could fend for themselves, but I could not... So I was given. To a woman. A woman named Nan. She told my mother she would pay for my education. In exchange, I would work, in her house. On my first day... Nan auctioned my virginity. For two years, I worked in this way. When I was not working, me and the other girls were kept under lock and key. I was made to see ten, twenty clients a day.

I met Fred in this way. Unlike many, he was kind to me. He even wrote to me.

*(Pause.)*

When I was ten, working had broken me. I was no use to anybody...

*(Pause.)*

So Nan took me, and dumped me.

*(Pause.)*

When Fred learned I had been thrown on the street...he searched for me.

*(Pause.)*

He found me.

*(Pause.)*

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

SREY            Fred started the Foundation's first orphanage, for me. He hired nurses who made me healthy, teachers, who educated me.

*(Pause.)*

He loved me.

*(Pause.)*

FRED            Srey saved me.

*(Pause.)*

SREY            Then Nan came.

*(FRED puts his head in his hands. Pause.)*

She'd learned that Fred had taken me in, off the street. She threatened. To expose him.

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA       He was blind... Blinded by his guilt, and the hurt that had been done to Srey... He was prepared to give Nan anything. Everything.

*(Pause.)*

So I made certain that Nan paid. For what she did to Srey, and those other children.

*(Pause.)*

SREY            She spent twenty years in prison.

*(Pause.)*

CYNTHIA       She should never have been let out.

*(Pause.)*

SREY            When I was last in Phnom Penh, she saw me, on television.

## Benefit\_Matthew MacKenzie

*(Pause.)*

The woman, who made money from my misery, wants to be paid, for me, again.

*(Silence. SREY sits beside GREG. Silence.)*

GREG        Why did you never tell me?

*(Pause.)*

SREY        Because my history has nothing to do with you and I.

*(Pause.)*

I will never walk away from the work we are doing.

*(Pause.)*

But I want you beside me. Always.

*(Pause. SREY stands. She kisses GREG on the forehead. She touches FRED's hand. She touches CYNTHIA. SREY exits. Silence. GREG slowly dresses.)*

GREG        I am going to go stand with my wife.

*(Exit GREG. Lights fade on FRED and CYNTHIA. A chiming of crystal glasses. Girls in a Cambodian classroom reciting the English alphabet slowly drown the glasses out.)*

*END*