

A SMALL PRICE TO PAY

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CHARACTERS

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| JUMBADI | The near-death ruler of a small country who wants only to protect his people by disposing of the funds in the royal treasury to somewhere his evil uncle cannot reach them. |
| NAGIB | A stoic advisor to Jumbadi, thoughtful but nervous |
| PRUNDI | A slightly less-experienced and notably more impulsive advisor to Jumbadi. |

SETTING

Bedroom of His Majesty, Jumbadi, ruler of a small country somewhere in the world.

SCENE

(Lights up on the bedchamber of Jumbadi. The wan ruler is lying in his royal bed, clearly in failing health. There is a knock at the door.)

JUMBADI

Come.

(The door opens, and two men enter: Nagib and Prundi, well-dressed and somber advisors to his majesty. They approach the bed, their faces betraying a nervousness about having to deliver unwelcome news.)

NAGIB

Good morning, Your Majesty.

PRUNDI

Many blessings to you, your—

JUMBADI

Yes, yes. What news?

PRUNDI

The court is concerned over your health, your—

JUMBADI

Do not bother me with that nonsense, Prundi. What news from America?

(The advisors share a nervous, uncomfortable look.)

No. No, it is not possible. Still no response?

NAGIB

Nothing, Your Majesty.

JUMBADI

You are sure the email went through?

NAGIB

As certain as anyone can be of such things, Your Majesty.

JUMBADI

Stop with all the ‘your majestys’ already. You heard nothing. No response at all?

(Nagib shakes his head.)

And what of the requests we sent earlier this week? Did anyone reply to those?

NAGIB

I’m sorry, your... I’m sorry, Jumbadi. There has been no response from anyone.

JUMBADI

Well, I suppose we have no choice but to reach out to the others on our list.

PRUNDI

Actually, Your Majesty, we...

JUMBADI

Out with it, Prundi.

PRUNDI

(Swallowing hard...)

We did, sire.

JUMBADI

You did what?

PRUNDI

We already sent emails to the others.

JUMBADI

And?

NAGIB

There was no response from them either.

JUMBADI

Impossible!

NAGIB

I’m afraid—

JUMBADI

You explained about my failing health?

NAGIB

We did.

JUMBADI

And about the terrible things my uncle will do to our people should he get his greedy hands on the royal treasury?

PRUNDI

We did, your—

JUMBADI

And you made it very clear that I am willing to share this wealth with whoever is kind enough to assist us?

NAGIB

Extremely clear, Your Majesty.

JUMBADI

And you are telling me that not a single person on the list has responded?!? With the opportunity to earn fifteen million American dollars, not a single person has even written back!?!

PRUNDI

Well...

JUMBADI

What? Well what?

PRUNDI

We have received some emails back from someone named Hot Sweaty Love Mama Twenty Seven. But she does not appear to be focusing on our current problem.

(Jumbadi shakes his head in frustration. Finally...)

JUMBADI

I see no alternative. We will have to expand our list. We must reach out to more of the Americans until we find someone who is willing to help.

(Nagib and Prundi share another concerned look.)

What? What are you not telling me?

NAGIB

We did, Your Majesty.

JUMBADI

You already contacted others??

(Nagib nods.)

How many?

(Nagib and Prundi look at each other nervously.)

Fifty people? More? A hundred?

NAGIB

More.

JUMBADI

A thousand names? Surely not ten thousand?

NAGIB

More.

JUMBADI

I have no patience for this, Nagib. Out with it. How many Americans did you email?

NAGIB

All of them.

JUMBADI

All... You... You contacted... *all* of the Americans?

PRUNDI

All those who have an email address...

JUMBADI

You are telling me you contacted every single American, and not *one* is willing to accept the monies in our treasury? You lie! How can this possibly be?

NAGIB

We do not know for certain, Your Majesty, but... we have a theory.

JUMBADI

Go on.

NAGIB
We think...

PRUNDI
We think that perhaps...

NAGIB
Perhaps... they do not believe you.

JUMBADI
Do not believe!?!? Did you not explain about my uncle!? About how he will torture my people for his own cruel pleasure!?

NAGIB
We did.

JUMBADI
Did you write the sentence in all capital letters like I instructed?

PRUNDI
I typed it myself, Your Majesty.

JUMBADI
And still they do not believe?!

NAGIB
Prundi and I took the liberty of consulting with a doctor Bandri. She—

JUMBADI
Who is this Bandri?

NAGIB
She is a professor of psychology at the university. She suggests that perhaps the people feel this is, as the Americans say, ‘too good to be true’.

(Jumbadi just stares at him, dumbfounded. Then...)

JUMBADI
Too good... too good... to...

NAGIB
To be true. Yes.

Then all hope is lost. JUMBADI

Well... PRUNDI

Well? JUMBADI

We spoke with some other scholars, and... we think we might have an idea that could work. NAGIB

Go on. JUMBADI

We were able to identify one demographic that is particularly responsive to opportunities, even when they feel there is little to no chance that they could actually realize any benefit from their efforts. NAGIB

I see. JUMBADI

A group of people willing to pour hour after hour of heart-wrenching effort into tasks that are seemingly hopeless. NAGIB

Enough already. Who are these people? JUMBADI

Playwrights. PRUNDI

Playwrights? People who write... JUMBADI

Plays. Yes. NAGIB

Like Shakespeare. JUMBADI

Well... uhh... sure. NAGIB

JUMBADI

There cannot be that many of these playwrights, however.

PRUNDI

Oh, no, Your Majesty. There are. Thousands and thousands of them.

JUMBADI

Thousands of Shakespeares?

NAGIB

Well, I would not go that far. But certainly thousands of playwrights.

JUMBADI

Then what are you waiting for? Email them at once. Tell them of the dangers to—

NAGIB

Well...

JUMBADI

What?

NAGIB

These people... these playwrights... only respond to certain types of opportunities. Playwriting competitions.

PRUNDI

And festivals.

JUMBADI

So you are saying that if we want to give away all our money...

NAGIB

Yes, Your Majesty. We will have to arrange for playwriting competitions.

(Jumbadi considers this for a moment, then...)

JUMBADI

Very well. For the good of the people. A grand theater festival with a prize of fifteen million dollars.

(Another nervous between the advisors.)

What? What now?

NAGIB

Actually, we believe *that* would only have the same effect as before. To make them feel truly comfortable, we will need to offer smaller prizes.

JUMBADI

How small?

PRUNDI

Fifty dollars. Maybe one hundred.

NAGIB

Two hundred, tops.

JUMBADI

But... That would mean holding tens of thousands of festivals.

PRUNDI

We were thinking to maybe also give the winners a tee-shirt. Or a coffee mug.

(Jumbadi just stares at them.)

NAGIB

We didn't say it was a good idea.

PRUNDI

And that's not the worst of it.

JUMBADI

There's more?!?

NAGIB

We would need judges.

PRUNDI

There would be hundreds of thousands of submissions.

JUMBADI

Where could we possibly find these judges?

NAGIB

There is only one place, Your Majesty. Our nation's people.

JUMBADI

Very well. I do not see that we have any choice. Make the arrangements. After all, if we do not empty the royal coffers, my uncle will subject our people to unspeakable horrors. Reading a few—

NAGIB

Hundred.

JUMBADI

Okay, reading a few *hundred* scripts from these Shakespeares—

PRUNDI

Not so many Shakespeares out there, actually.

JUMBADI

Even still, reading a few hundred scripts from amateur playwrights is a small price for the people to pay to escape my uncle's torture chambers, no?

(The advisors share a look that says "I wouldn't be so sure of that". Lights out.)