



Kavithalaya

The 17th Annual Writers' Workshop 2009





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Jointly hosted by *Kodaikanal International School* and The Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation, *American College, Madurai*



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Kodaikanal Mission Union, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu

6 - 8 August 2009



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Credits

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Foreword

“An author ought to write for the youth of his generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of the afterward.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Falling into the last category in Fitzgerald’s list of those who endeavour to use the pen – in today’s parlance the computer – in a creative enterprise involving the art of writing, we have strayed a bit in attempting to append the foreword to this compendium of creative nuggets - Kavithalaya

Writing as an art form has been the indulgence of many people in the past – be it grand, soul-stirring works of literature from the pen of the great masters or small, intimate bits of writing that were aimed at a more coterie readership. The Belles Lettres - literary implying fine or beautiful writing – of an age gone by, focused primarily on the aesthetics of language, thereby bringing writing into the domain of art. Such works may cover poetry and prose, fiction and fact and its subject matter is just about anything under the wide blue mantle we call our firmament.

In a nutshell, this is what the latest edition of Kavithalaya is all about: The outcome of a three day writers’ workshop conducted by the writer Ms. Usha K.R., under the auspices of Kodaikanal International School and the American College of Madurai. It is a joint venture held annually in which students of both these institutions participate together – a tradition that has been maintained for the last 17 years. This year the workshop was held on the 6th, 7th and 8th of August 2009. We are, indeed, grateful to Ms. Usha, who took time off from her busy schedule to be with us those three days, to guide our budding writers with her valuable inputs and encouraging words.

We hope you enjoy the works in this volume and our advice to young litterateurs is again taken from another man of letters – Ray Bradbury: “If I were asked to name the most important items in a writer’s make-up, the things that shape his material and rush him along the road to where he wants to go, I could only warn him to look to his zest and see to his gusto.”

We stand indebted to Mr.Pramod Menon (HoD, English) and his wife, Ms.Sheela Menon, for peerlessly steering Kavithalaya for many years.

Peter Strange / Sudeep Ghosh
KIS

Contents

CREDITS	2
FOREWORD	3
RIGHT MOVE - <i>Andrew Roshan</i>	7
FINDING A FRIEND IN LIFE - <i>Andrew Roshan</i>	10
ULTIMATE SUCCESS - <i>Ondara Zablon Kerima</i>	12
MY KIND OF MAN - <i>Beatrice Akinyi, A.</i>	14
DOWN THE LAKE - <i>Beatrice Akinyi, A.</i>	17
BEAUTY - <i>Kishore Selvababu</i>	19
BEING BRITTLE - <i>D. Kalaivani.</i>	21
EVIL IS THE NATURE OF MAN - <i>J. Jehoson Jires</i>	22
ON A TRAIL - <i>Giftsy Dorcas E.</i>	23
COLOUR PLAY - <i>Giftsy Dorcas E.</i>	25
THE PATH FINDER - <i>S. Sujithkumar.</i>	26
ENTANGLING LOVE - <i>J. Jothi Viknesh</i>	29
STOLEN MOMENTS - <i>J. Jothi Viknesh</i>	30
THE ONE LOVE UNASKED - <i>A. Monica Sherin</i>	31
UNTITLED - <i>K.M. Vikram</i>	32
A CAMP IN THE GRASSLAND - <i>Srinidhi, A.</i>	33
UNTITLED - <i>Ankit R. Hiran</i>	35
THE RECESS IS ON - <i>T. David Jeyaraj</i>	38
OFF-LINE - <i>T. David Jeyaraj</i>	39
LEADER LIMERICKS 2009 - <i>Deborah M. Cordonnier</i>	40

GOLDDLOCKS AND THE THREE BISON - <i>Paul Love</i>	41
PROVIDENCE - <i>Shanzezh Ameen</i>	44
HIS MEMORY - <i>Krithika Vanamali</i>	46
MY LOVE, COMPRESSED FOREVER - <i>Andry DeJong</i>	48
LEONYD DEMIDOV - <i>Narsingh Dixit</i>	49
THE SPLENDOR OF MUSIC - <i>Oona Yadav</i>	55
THE WRITER'S BUS - <i>Ridi Khan</i>	56
THE STEREOTYPE - <i>Karishma Joshi</i>	57
THE MARKETPLACE - <i>Amulya Gyawali</i>	60
THE CITY TONIGHT - <i>Mythili Sayanna</i>	62
THE BOATMAN'S SAGA - <i>Anushka Mehrotra</i>	63
DEATH OF A CIRCUS FREAK - <i>Gaurav Dua</i>	71
SEVEN MEN - <i>Gaurav Dua</i>	73



RIGHT MOVE

Andrew Roshan

I opened the little door of my house. My house has only three tiny rooms: a bed room, a kitchen and a bath room. As I moved in, a blank sheet of paper flew towards the kitchen, blowing lots of dried leaves inside. Even those leaves which were already in the bed room were in a hurry to reach the kitchen. It looked as if they were competing in a marathon race.

My eyes suddenly took a right turn towards the windows, which were left wide open. I had completely forgotten to shut the windows in the morning before leaving for work. Now hesitantly, I moved towards the kitchen and bent as if I were half dead and picked up that long white paper. I placed it on my dusty desk which had not been cleaned for a month or more. I can't remember precisely when I cleaned it last. But at present this blank paper has seduced the thoughts which were swimming in my mind since the afternoon.

In the afternoon I had met my good old friend Rakesh on an official visit. For the past 15 years Rakesh had not come to the attention of my sharp eagle eyes. As a journalist I persistently keep on moving. I know almost every nook and corner of Chennai city. For a journalist it is hard to find some free time and have fun with friends; it is even very tough to find a day to visit my family in Palani. Meeting with Rakesh was in fact a surprising thing. My own eyes could not believe a person like Rakesh was sitting in the chair which was meant for the Director of the Rogas Metal Company.

My boss had particularly asked me to arrange an interview with the Rogas Company, because this company has won a national award for its contribution towards the exchequer.

At first sight I could see a gentleman-like quality on Rakesh's features, and he appeared as if he had accomplished everything in life. His office was well kept. The environment inside was very pleasant. The air conditioner made the place more comfortable to be in than outside. It made me forget the bumpy two-wheeler ride to that spot.

Rakesh was calm and composed in his speech. This interaction with him was a new experience for me. For approximately three hours he shared his life with me.

It was March 18 in the year 1992. Rakesh and I were sitting in the classroom which was meant for VIII standard students. The History teacher was instructing a

class on the freedom struggle, when suddenly the Principal's P.A appeared at the door. He asked Rakesh to go with him to the Principal's office.

Rakesh had lost his beloved mother, who was everything to him. She wouldn't be there anymore to soothe him when he was troubled by his father's unnatural behaviour because Rakesh's father had not shown much concern towards his family.

He was just a "chattha hai" kind of person person. He never bothered to develop his grocery shop business which was located in front of the school where Rakesh and his siblings were studying. He would casually waste large sums of money on drinking.

Whenever he was drunk no one could speak a word to him. If some passer-by tried to talk to him, it was certain that there would be a fight soon. He would even go to the extent of beating up his children and his wife. At times, Rakesh would protest... but in vain.

Rakesh's mother would keep silent, never spoke a word, but consoled the children. She protected her children like a hen protecting her chicks from hungry eagles.

Now 'Amma' is no more. She has left Rakesh and his siblings defenceless and derelict. The relatives who came for the funeral seemed concerned for the kids. But nobody was persistent about their welfare. Rakesh and his siblings were left with their unsuitable father.

Now Rakesh had to cook and do all the household work and look after his younger sister and brother. Right from his school days, Rakesh loved to take challenges and he was capable of facing them. Sometimes he had to go to bed without eating. As days passed by, his father started going out of town for some business. He simply left the children to care for themselves and disappeared for weeks at a time. Rakesh had no clue as to which clown gave his father such a lumpish suggestion.

During these days an old friend of Rakesh's father named Mr. Ranganath came to visit them. On seeing the pathetic situation at home and the condition of the children, he asked all three of them to go with him. Rakesh was hesitant, but seeing his younger sister and brother getting ready to go, he obliged. This was the beginning of a new life that they had never imagined was possible. Rakesh's father did not bother to get in touch with for his children. He was rather happy to live single.

Mr. Ranganath had a son, who later married Rakesh's sister, and now she has two children. Rakesh finished his M.B.A. with distinction and today he runs Mr. Ranganath's firm, the "Rogas Company."



FINDING A FRIEND IN LIFE

Andrew Roshan

I was searching for him everywhere,
But I could not find him;

I was searching for him in the crowd,
But he was hiding from me;

I was searching for him at the lake side,
But the mist concealed him;

I was searching for him in the water,
But the current had moved him away;

I was searching for him in the sky,
But the clouds swathed him;

I was searching for him on the sea shore,
But waves have driven him away;

I was searching for him in my pleasure,
But I could not feel him;

I was searching for him in the garden,
But he had merged with nature.

But wait! I have found him--my treasure,
Oh! So late I have found him;

I have found him in my strife,
Giving me serenity;

I have found him in my hesitations,
Giving me convictions;

I have found him in my distraction,
Giving me directions;

I have found him in my solitude,
Giving me company;

At last I have found him--my friend,
A true friend for life.



ULTIMATE SUCCESS

Ondara Zablon Kerima

It was 6 am early on a chilly Monday. John was walking down to the city store. He had been working here, for the past one decade. This must be another hard week, he said as he opened the old blue faded gate. Despite the great deal of hard work, he had never gotten a promotion.

Things were not working out well for poor John. A week ago a women's activist group had approached him and accused him of domestic violence. He had quarrelled with his wife over a trivial matter. His two children had been dismissed from school, due to default of fees. He has also not cleared his fee arrears in Jamu Institute of Management where he was pursuing part-time Business Management classes.

The last two days, his old landlord had argued with him over his delay in paying his monthly rent, which had been due a week earlier. A fortnight before that, he had spent all his savings on his mother's funeral. She had passed away after a long battle with lung cancer. After that he was left with an empty purse.

One fine morning after a winter sunrise, his youngest daughter Shelly woke up complaining of headache, cold, dizziness and fever. The symptoms persisted and he decided to get medical treatment for her. At the Mission Hospital, Shelly was diagnosed with a killer disease: swine flu H1N1. It is known to have claimed 300 lives in the span of a week. Luckily, after a series of diagnostic procedures, Shelly was cured and discharged from the hospital.

John and his wife were very thankful. However, the task ahead was more Herculean than ever - paying the bills. They had exceeded their manageable limit. They agreed to take a loan from the IBC Bank. Soon afterwards they cleared up the pending bills.

The next evening, just before retiring, he got a letter from his employer, Mr. Kassim. He threatened to sack John, if he did not show up at the work place. The following morning he woke up as before. He left for work only to find a new employee in the store; for sure John was fired that day.

A week later, he wrote his final Management examinations. When the results were out, he had passed very well.

One evening, when he was reading a national newspaper, he came across a job

advertisement. He applied for this job which was in the most reputable National Stock Exchange Company. When the eagerly awaited results were published, he was the first applicant to be short listed for the hotly contested position.

Later, he was invited to attend an orientation programme at the company's head offices. As a result of his good performance record, during the firm's annual General meeting, he was promoted from his sales managerial position to the docket of Sales Executive Officer.

By this time he had amassed a lot of wealth and he initiated a number of developmental projects in his home town. He also opened a home for the under privileged in the society.

In the recent global awards ceremony held in Berlin, John was voted among top 100 most influential personalities in the globe, among other celebrities. John never imagined that this could happen to him. "I feel immensely honoured," he exclaimed, "for any one from any walk of life can stand beside giants!"



MY KIND OF MAN

Beatrice Akinyi, A.

The thundering of the drumbeats could be heard ten villages away. Tonight, the new moon would show its face again; at least, that's what the village astrologer had predicted ten days ago. The fields were ripe, a sign of God's faith on us. It was a rich harvest and everyone had plenty to eat and drink until the next season. You could tell from the jolly faces that sat round the thick mango tree that has given shelter to the folks for as long as I can recall. The people sat around it and slowly sipped "busaa" from the common ancestral pot. Thin energetic women could be seen pacing up and down tending to the fire; patiently, they sat by their husbands' feet, tending to their every need, faithful and devoted.

This was the season. It was frightening and exciting at the same time, countless evenings had been spent in one ancient woman's nest. She stank like dried vegetables! Still, we had to sit by her feet and listen to the endless series of talks she had for us. She was preparing us for womanhood. The young men too, were not left alone; they always went somewhere deep into the forest. I always wondered what they were being told. Funny enough, they kept avoiding us whenever we met the elders; we never played or danced together in the evenings as was the daily routine.

I missed him a bit, just a little bit, maybe because he was my mother's eldest sister's son. It was easy to tell. He was one of my own. I only played with him. Even when I felt like crying over anything stupid, he would comfort me. And just like that, we grew into each other, more than what was expected of us.

I had never seen a naked man before, not so many, not like these. I looked at them with renewed curiosity; each one of them, till the last one. My discovery startled me and I found myself choking with laughter. I couldn't laugh. They proceeded to the river bank and rubbed their bodies with the black mud till only their sparkling white teeth could be seen. "What madness was this?!" Still I waited and waited. After what seemed to be like an eternity they walked to the other side of the river and made a tent from some twigs on the river bank. They lit a fire and I kept wondering what the deal was. Patiently I waited as the old man took a blade and sterilized it red hot from the burning fire. Strangely, the young men stood with both hands at the back of their necks, all of them in the same way.

He took the blade and passed it on the skin of one of the men! "What torture was this?" He did the same thing with each one till he reached the last man. As he approached him, even before he brought the blade next to his skin, the young

man screamed, terrified as if he had seen a ghost! The scream itself registered instantly: it was him! But why was he crying like that, why didn't everyone else cry like him? At that moment I was determined to reach out of him, tell him not to worry, with the same assurance he used to give me every time. An owl flew and rested its wings landing on the rooftop. It flew no more, no matter how many pebbles you threw at it. However, my feet felt heavy and I couldn't move a muscle. I didn't know what was yet to take place.

The other men held him captive as the old man efficiently did his work. He moaned and moaned, probably from the unbearable pain. Together, they were led to the jungle where they would come out as proper men. This, I learnt from the woman who was preparing us for womanhood.

Two weeks later, they came back from the jungle, ready and fully aimed for adulthood.

"Were they being told the same thing like us?" The thought of it made me wonder even more and every time I asked him he kept saying it was nothing. "I'll tell you some other time, later." As much as I can remember, we never played, danced or went for a swim by the lake any more.

The feast was building now. It was going to be a blast, and everyone was looking forward to it. You could tell by the faces that filled the village. Everyone was here, distant cousins, old friends and the usual onlookers from other clans. By dawn tomorrow, the young men would be led down the river. The long awaited day had finally arrived no women were allowed on the scene. It was whatever was going to happen.

That night, I went to sleep earlier than usual. By dawn, I would be up. I would see whatever they were doing by midnight. I couldn't sleep a wink. His image flashed on in my mind: "What might he be doing now?" What are they telling him!" they must be doing something I had no clue of. By the crow of the first cock, I stealthily walked down to the river. It was quiet and dark, my curiosity masked my fear. The river flowed swiftly in harmony with the dawning young day, welcoming the big day ahead. They were nowhere to be seen. Maybe they had gone to a different location. "Idiots!" I would find them anyway. Just as I was about to leave my hiding place, the now familiar beats thundered again and again. They were coming! All of them, they danced to the drumbeats and were led by the old man who was their mentor. To my surprise, they were stark naked! Naked as the day, as stark naked file of men! I almost took flight but feared what would happen if I was to be caught red-handed.

Everyone was eagerly waiting for them. The women could be heard from the background, singing and chanting songs of praise for the born warriors. I watched intently. He wasn't one of them, he just wasn't with them. "What could have happened to him?" When all the welcoming was over, everyone was silent. On a hideous goatskin, at the edge of the village, he stood there, shaken and terrified. He looked down and avoided any eye contact. Just then, the old man emerged from the now feasting group of old men, a calabash in hand. He officially announced that the small boy standing there, cried on that day! "What did that mean?" Instantly, his mother covered her head probably to avoid shame and ran to her son. His father too walked away from the village and never looked back. "What did all these mean?" No one offered a possible explanation. Instead, everyone else busied himself for the night to come. "He was not man enough," they kept telling me. "Find a better one," they insisted. "Who would I choose?" Maybe they were right.

I was the first one to step forward to choose my future husband from the anxious faces standing around. Then I remembered, I had seen all of them that early morning. I had seen them. I could vividly remember their faces, their expressions as the blade neared and neared their flesh. I pleasantly smiled to myself. Satisfied, I picked my own kind of man; a man who would protect me from anything, and from the rest of the world. A man who would face the world without an inch of a wink in his eyes!

DOWN THE LAKE

Beatrice Akinyi, A.

This spot, this same old spot, where he had always rowed his boat to and fro around the lake and found himself on the same spot. It's been years now, 40, 50 or even more, yet, he couldn't remember the exact day or year he was born. But that didn't matter at all, "Who cared about birthdays anyway?" Gazing up the same window, he couldn't see her today, "She's always there, looking at me, and she must be looking at me." "Or am I the one who is always staring at her?" The thought itself made his stomach churn mockingly. Yet he couldn't help smiling shyly, silently.

The sight of missing her vague image disturbed him a little bit. Mystically, he kept turning his head up towards the same direction he had become accustomed to over the years. Everything looked the same, the same sparkling curtains seemed to be in harmony with the huge spotless windowpanes and the bright light that shone and set beyond the horizon. Nothing had changed. He had only grown old and torn apart probably from the various lives he had tried to put together. She too had grown beautiful. "She must be twenty one by now! And those eyes! Those huge blue eyes, brown eyes or were they pink or green?" The imagination of it all made him chuckle uncontrollably. He had never seen her. He might never see her. This realization staggered him back to reality. He waited patiently for any passenger to make his day lucky.

She was walking down the steps now. She always wondered what lay beyond the lake. For so many years, she hadn't gone outside the house, "It's always safe inside here, stay put," her papa's beaten voice could be heard every summer before he left for the great waters, and for so long he never came home. She had everything but always longed for the priceless stuff. This reminded her of her pink panda that lay lifeless in the basement, before answering the persistent shrill of the bell. She headed straight for the basement and held her pink panda tightly to her chest and wept silently. "I can't even tell you my secret...shhhhhh...they were watching my back." She would constantly whisper to the doll, the only thing that remained from her mama.

It was on her second birthday, she was a little kid then, barely able to talk properly, a slow learner perhaps, yet, she remembered the same elegant voice that only belonged to Joanna, who was her mother. She preferred to be called that way. On that day, she could tell something was terribly wrong. Joanna held her in her arms tightly, almost squeezing the feeble life out of her developing lungs. She stayed there, captured, yet protected from impending danger.

Joanna never had time for her, not like this. She was always planning charity dinners or doing something related. As a little girl, she had always felt the distance grow as she was surrounded by different nannies every week. "Sleep baby sleep" ... Joanna continued rocking her lovingly, "Joanna is going to take a walk down the lane. I will be right back when you wake up." She didn't sleep; instead, she picked her new panda and stood by the window. Everything was normal, things moving up and down, and instantly, she saw Joanna! Joanna ran hysterically towards the lake. She thought Joanna was having the moment of her life, "Maybe she's playing like some of the kids featured on holiday adverts on T.V." It was then that the nanny on call tucked her in and peacefully she slept. She woke up but Joanna never came home. None bothered to tell her where she went. They were always at her service.

It was 15 years on and now she was ready to meet Joanna. The chaperon assigned to her was ready to show her around. The door bell rang again and again. Stupidly she threw the dirty panda aside, and out they went to the guarded gates. Slowly, the gates opened, and ahead stood the same old and mighty lake. Maybe, as old as God!

The opening gates and the two strolling figures caught his attention! He had never seen anyone walk down the lane from this side of the lake. He lowered his eyes from the window to the young girl and boy who seemed to be talking about something important. Suddenly, he remembered that phrase. The only fresh words he had practiced to perfection in order to draw her attention to him. He pronounced them with unquestionable accent. As the two figures drew nearer, he gasped for some fresh air. Eloquently, he conveyed his message to her. In return, she waved a five dollar bill in his face, and off they went. She was going to meet Joanna. They had a lot to catch up on, in the years that had faded by. A lot!

BEAUTY

Kishore Selvababu

When I was old enough to ask
I wanted to know what beauty is.
I went to explore if I could,
Pestered for one simple six letter word.
Is it what I chase?
Thinking it a product on sale.

I went down the hills, looking at
The trees, birds and clouds
Adding to nature's kingdom
Tall trees not beautiful, birds invisible
Clouds weeping to cry on the birds
Is it what I chase
Or what I can purchase?

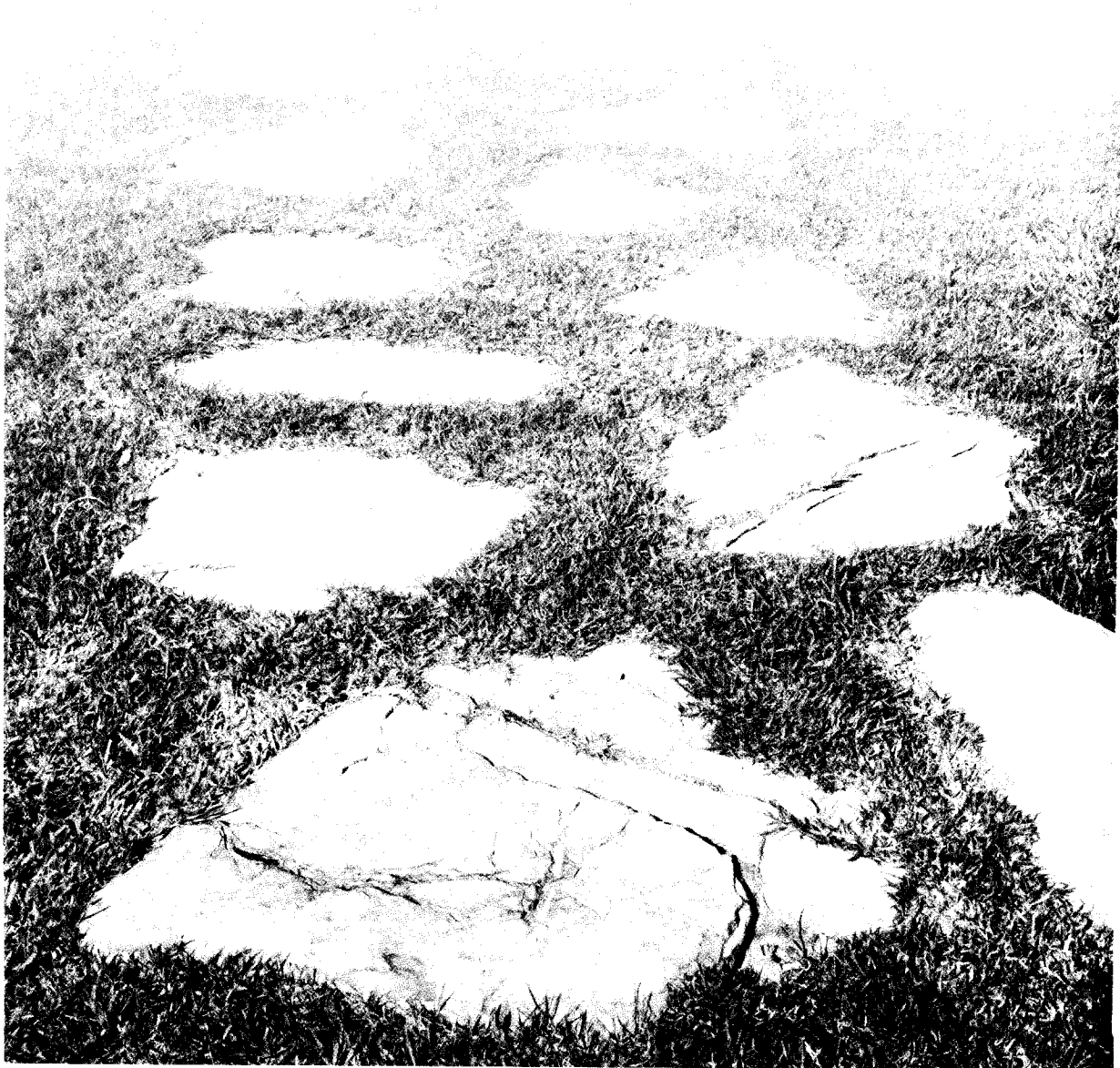
Asked a man passing by
Said he, lad I never saw beauty
But I could feel what it is!
Came to know blind he was.
I sat in a meadow wondering,
Is it what I chase
Or what I can purchase?

Saw a girl in a show
Was the crowd crazy about her!
When they said she was beautiful
I rushed out, only to see
Mere flesh and blood.
Down I sat thinking,
Is it what I chase
Or what I can purchase?

In the kitchen by an onion
Bringing resemblance to my mind
Of peels that turn out nothing
But bring tears to my eyes
Stricken with grief, I sat asking
Is it what I chase

Or what I can purchase?

On my bed I dreamt at night
Startled by God, enlightening me:
"Beauty is nothing outward to see
But in the heart beauty must be."



BEING BRITTLE

D. Kalaivani

Who began it first? It was he who started it. He asked me to find the papers which he gave me yesterday. I was busy preparing the breakfast then. In spite of that, I came to his rescue. I searched for the papers on the table, in the cupboard and in my handbag. I have the strange habit of putting things in the bag. For no one dares to touch my bag, and in my opinion it is the safest locker in the whole world. While I was searching, he approached me and said "move away" in the most unpleasant manner and simultaneously pushed me away.

I said "I will find it for you." But he only turned a deaf ear to my words and searched hastily, by pulling out all the things from the cupboard, which I had arranged carefully after a day's work.

Even that can be excused. But he had thrown away my very first gift to him; the one which I had made myself for him; the brittle glass slide, on which I engraved my love stronger, which fell to the ground and got cracked. Brittle.... too brittle was not only my gift but also my temperament.

I was also shattered at my heart. Doesn't he know me? Doesn't he know my nature? Then, why did he behave in such an unkind manner?

No, he is not unkind. Definitely not towards me. I know him and who knows him better than I do! I also know that he knows me better than anyone else in the world, next to my mother. Definitely he will apologize to me, as soon as he arrives.

'Ding Dong': there goes the bell!

EVIL IS THE NATURE OF MAN

J. Jehoson Jiresh

I am a clear lake, but I am sad that things around me are not clean--especially the people. I have seen many things like toiling boatmen rowing on me and small mischievous kids jumping into me. I have seen entangled honeymooners, ebullient visitors, howling vendors who make my surroundings grim. On the whole I have seen both good and bad, the rise and fall of people. Even now I have a story about a politician and an ordinary boatman.

Hi, I am a politician. It was my poverty which made me a politician. Credits go to the valuable gift of the gab I possessed. I was once the law minister of my state. This absolute power kindled me to adapt all the strategies possible to earn honour and wealth. I too had a fall when I was thrown out of my position. All of a sudden the income tax people rushed into my house to enquire about me. I had no other option than to throw all my money into the lake. Just think how deplorable it is to see all my wealth sink in the water.

Hi, I am a poor boatman living in a hut near the lake. Money was my only need. I was leading a peaceful life in spite of poverty. My wife works as a maid in the house of a politician on the other side of the lake. I came to know through my wife that the politician had thrown all his money into the lake. I was eager to collect it. I caught some money floating on the water. Since I was not content, I went deep into the water to find the rest.

Hi, I am the lake again. Do you know what I did to the boatman? I ordered my good old tenant crocodile to wait for him. Coming back to the politician, he lost everything he had earned by illegal means. The boatman could have led a peaceful life without the affluence of wealth. Because of his greed he lost his precious life. On seeing these happenings around me I have developed one idea: Man is evil!

ON A TRAIL

Giftsy Dorcas E.

Withering trees stood beyond the road. Jeremy watched the trees and walked further down the lane. He crossed a number of isolated shops, but looked at them without interest. He arrived at a junction. He stepped on a dry leaf, it shredded to pieces. The slight noise drew his attention and lifting his feet he glanced at the gruesome devastation caused by him. It was a teak leaf that had fallen prey to the heavy thud of his feet.... Jeremy was disturbed.

"Have you taken everything?" asked his wife. Her concerned voice came from the dining hall. "Yes, I have," replied Jeremy looking around to check if he had indeed taken all his things. He then carried his suit case to the living room. Jeremy's wife had just entered the room. "Well, then," she said with a sad look on her face, "If you are all set and ready, it's time to go on, Mr. Original. Don't forget your wife, and..." "How can I ever forget my angel's face? I will call you as soon as I reach there." They hugged and kissed each other. His wife accompanied him to the gate and let him go reluctantly.

The train left the station, after its departure was announced. Jeremy had taken his place by a window. When the train began to move he felt his short picket, to make sure he had his wallet. It was a black wallet with imprints of embossed human figures in different postures. It had been gifted by his wife, as the first expression of her love for him. She had slipped in a paper with the gift that poetically expounded her love. The words had been

One relation like you is enough to enjoy for my entire life...
But one life is not enough to enjoy with you the bliss of life.

Love always,
Juliet

Jeremy smiled at the recollection. He took out his wallet and looked at the photo of his Juliet that was safely tucked in it. The train had increased its speed and was moving towards its destiny.

On reaching the serenity of the Darjeeling hills with its salubrious climate, he felt rejuvenated. It seemed to him a promising place to get over his abysmally low power of creation.

Bang. The sound of a falling box in a store house brought Jeremy back to reality. He jerked like a frightening mouse. "The smallest streak of light can dazzle the

eye," he thought to himself. The leaf had caused a tingle. Images flooded into his mind. The path was rugged. Jeremy fumbled. His inability to write had created a vacuum in his life and he had encountered a number of problems over the past months. He had been waiting all these months for a stimulant that would force him to unleash his magic with words.

"I have to write, I have to prove my worth." Jeremy quickened his pace as he neared his cottage. The room he entered was sparsely furnished. His gaze rested on the painting on the wall. Women clothed in yellow were sieving flour. Black and yellow streaks complimented the green background. He slowly moved towards the desk by the window and taking up his book and pen slowly began to record the words that germinated in his mind. He began with—"Even the tiniest thing has its purpose in life...."



COLOUR PLAY

Giftsy Dorcas E.

Scooping some colours of life,
Proceeding towards a spectacle...
I'm mesmerized.
Relishing the sourness of violet,
Penning some thoughts in indigo,
Dipping in the coolness of blue,
Gliding in the maternal care of green,
Refreshing in the youthfulness of yellow,
Absorbing the radiance of orange,
Ignited in the forceful red,
Energy flows through me like a current.
Strategies I devise for success.
Lessons I learn from loses.
I'm grateful to be a part of this breath-taking colour play.

THE PATH FINDER

S. Sujithkumar

After attending a laborious meeting with my colleagues on a lonely Saturday evening, I returned to my room. The room was well-lit with large open windows, as if it was a part of the beautiful ambiance out there. I leaned across an easy arm chair located at the right most corner of the room. Thoughts running through my tired mind, I looked out.

The telephone rings. Walking across to the other side of the room, I pick it up. A company correspondent on the line informs me that our company has lost a big tender of a public firm. He informs me in a cramped voice that Raviraj Associates had grabbed it. Raviraj Associates has been accused in the past of stealing information about the tenders of other companies by malicious means. The company has violated corporate ethics several times in the past but every time gets acquitted through legal loopholes. The news affects me personally more than professionally, but I am accustomed to it.

I get back to my easy chair. I continue gazing outside the window. I remember Kakaji in times of anxiety. This reminds me of our first encounter.

A decade ago, when I was a young man, I lived with my dad, Mr. Premkumar. He worked in Calvin House of Chartered Accountants. My exams were over and I had a big vacation to relax and plenty of free time. Out of sheer boredom, I started visiting my father's workplace. It was a large commodious place with a bunch of serious looking people trying to find things in their huge stacks of files. Their attitude towards me gave me a pleasant feeling of authority as if I, not my father, headed the place.

A few visits later, my dad introduced me to Mr. Ramshankar Pandey. I remember Dad speaking about him during dinner, about his dedication and sincerity. He was a tiny, scraggy middle-aged man with a stern voice. He was wearing a pure white shirt with a black overcoat and a dhoti. His attire reminded me of the Bapu of British Raj days. I greeted him, "Hello, Sir." He turned suddenly and said, "Hello, dear."

He seemed to be in a state of disquiet. I remained silent. They talked about some monetary matters. He left the room with the same hurriedness as when he entered. He seemed to be an assiduous man having little interest apart from his work. I appreciated that.

At night, during dinner, I remembered to ask my dad what was wrong with Mr. Pandey. My dad informed me that his subordinate had misplaced an important file. The benignant man was working to fix the problem. Again, I appreciated it.

I visited the office a few weeks later. As I entered the narrow passage which opens into a big round room, a familiar voice beckoned me. I turned around to find Mr. Pandey. We exchanged greetings. I asked him if I could call him 'Kakaji' which means uncle. Smilingly, he nodded. He asked me to accompany him to his house. I agreed.

I walked along with him towards the corner of the street which opens near his home. A woman in a dark red sari waited for us. Kakaji informed me that she is his wife. I made several visits to their home afterwards. Their connubial relationship bemused me. Kakaji's wife would never forget to serve me some tasty savouries every time I visited. One day as usual she kept a plate of Jalebi on the table. Tasting it, I said, "Delicious." She replied immediately "Babu too likes it." I enquired about Babu. She said Babu is their son who lives with his grandparents in another city.

My dad decided to send me to Bombay for my college. Carrying the memories of my hometown, I left and joined St. Xavier's College. I studied business there. Very soon I was engaged in heavy study schedules. For the first few months, I talked to my family over the phone but soon the frequency grew less. Days, months and years passed. I couldn't come back home during my holidays, as I started doing internships in various firms. I came back completing the entire course with a diploma in business.

My dad welcomed me. His eyes glittered with a sense of pride that he could hardly hide. I enquired about Kakaji. His eyes glittered again but differently this time. He asked me to visit them. I walked down the same lane remembering my old days. I reached their home. Near the home, I saw a lady in a bright sari. Her face looked pale. Her body showed her sadness. I was stunned to find her to be Kakaji's wife. She was in contrast with how I saw her first. I entered the room. I saw Kakaji's photograph garlanded with fresh flowers. I felt weak in my knees.

Gathering words, I asked her what happened. She said some false case of money laundering was filed against him which he couldn't bear. He had a fatal heart attack. Saying this, she went inside. A few moments later, she came back with a plate of sweets and a glass of water and kept it on the table with the same grace-- the only remnant of her past.

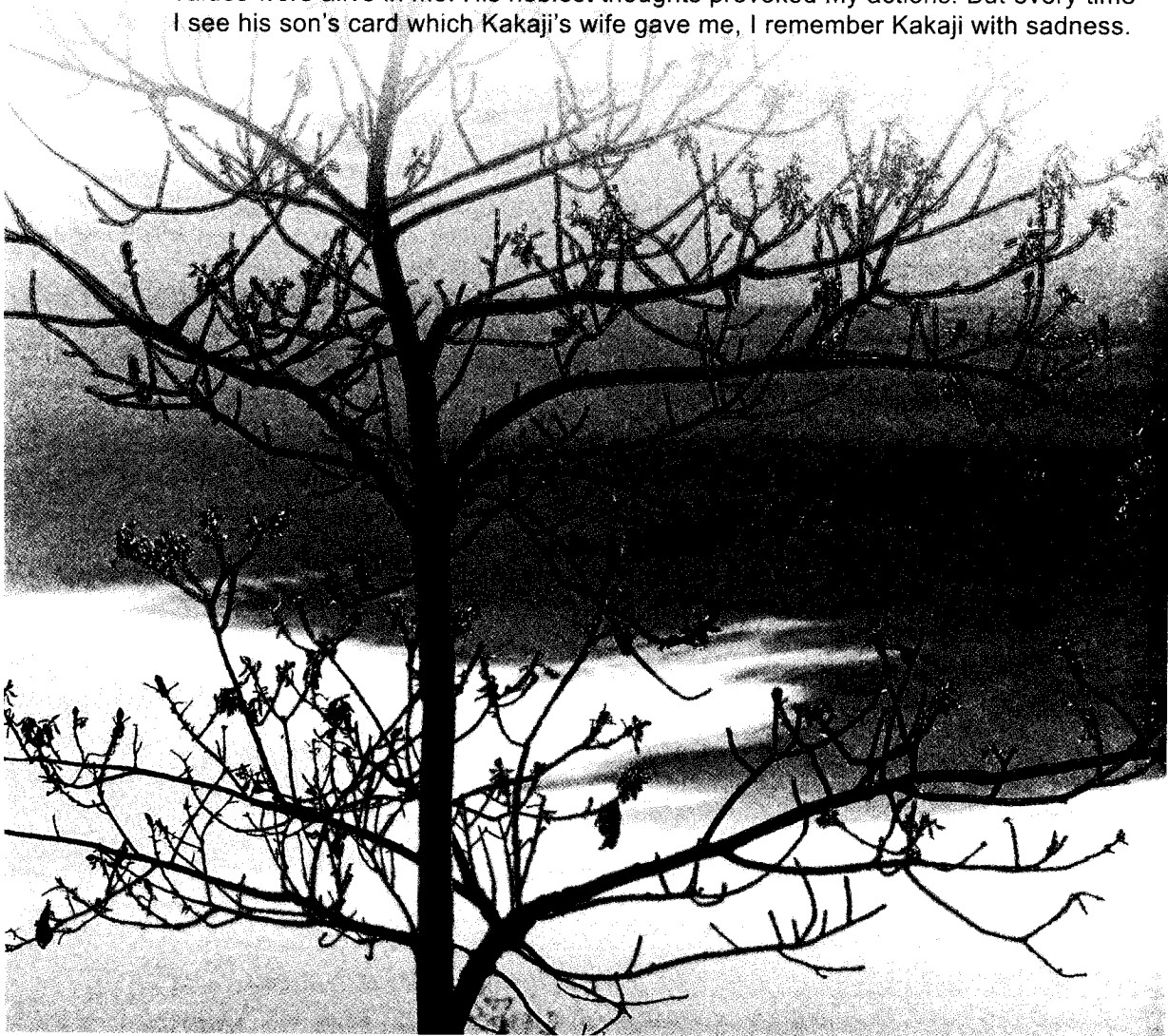
My father retired. I decided to start my own venture and try my business skills in

Bombay. I paid my last visit to Kakaji's house. Kakaji's wife said that Babu too lived now in Bombay. She gave me his visiting card, which reads

Raviraj Pandey
Raviraj Associates
Bombay.

She advised me to visit him. I tried giving some money to Kakaji's wife which she firmly refused to accept.

After a bit of a struggle in Bombay, I was successful in getting a firm started. I found Kakaji in every honest, sincere and assiduous employee in my office. His values were alive in me. His noblest thoughts provoked my actions. But every time I see his son's card which Kakaji's wife gave me, I remember Kakaji with sadness.



ENTANGLING LOVE

J. Jothi Viknesh

My name is Tom. I've been working in this exhibition for the past two years. They give me food, good accommodation, also medical allowance when needed. My only job is to entertain the onlookers. Lots of people work with me. I had a good life but soon things started going downhill... I felt lonely... I was still a stranger. Soon my enthusiasm ebbed away and life seemed hopeless.

Then she came out of the mist, bringing hope bringing love... I was bowled over at first sight. Her head was a bit large for her body, her eyes way too large. But I didn't care. I was too concerned with her 'other' assets. I tried in many ways to impress her but she was reluctant. At first, she felt homesick and stayed away from everyone, so they gave her a room opposite mine. I was content watching her move gracefully in her room, her long slender legs criss-crossing through the floor. Slowly she started eyeing me...mischievously. When I saw her she blushed so much that her whole body turned red. We became closer and closer, and we could feel the heat between us... love was growing faster and faster and we grew restless...

Everyone was happy that we were in love, as it was reflected in our work. I felt like I was being born again in her arms... we hugged... we kissed... legs entangling in and out. Wait!!! It's not the end of the story.

The posters all over the city next day read:

COME ONE, COME ALL...

WATCH MR. AND MRS. TOM... TWO HUGE, WILD EIGHT LEGGED ADULT OCTOPUSES MAKING LOVE, PLAYING HAPPILY. THIS IS A ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY OF WATCHING OCTOPUSES IN LOVE...

DON'T MISS IT!!!

STOLEN MOMENTS

J. Jothi Viknesh

Stolen seconds from minutes,
My eyes searching yours,
As bees searching honey...

Stolen minutes from hours,
Our lips embracing each other's,
As a drowning person gasping for breath...

Stolen hours from days,
Our arms around each other cuddling,
As a new born around its mother huddling...

Stolen days from years,
Others laughing at my plight without your sight,
As a lost child in an endless night...

Stolen years from my life,
I thought, "At last! I've got myself a wife"
Wait!!! Everything shredded by a merciless knife...

As justice for my stealth,
With an unjust hand I'm dealt...

All my life I lament,
The moment you stole away from me!

THE ONE LOVE UNASKED

A. Monica Sherin

The one,
Who always makes me feel fulfilled
My precious treasure...

Who always regards me as an angel
Regardless of what I do
My eternal admirer...

Who always showers me with pure divine love
My adamant lover...

Who always gives and forgives
My own Jesus Christ...

Who always was there to save me
When I tripped
My attentive saviour...

Who lost so I could win...
Who starved so I could eat...
Who lay awake so I could sleep...
Who came down to earth so I could fly...
Who was always behind me so I could be ahead...
The One MY DAD

UNTITLED

K.M. Vikram

No way to choose, it must be done, got to claw my way in, or be left behind
No way about it, it must be done, grab a hold, or be swallowed whole
No way to break it, win the race, mine will be done.
I see a room full of people, room just for one
If I don't live it up now, the time won't ever come.

Watch me unravel, watch me unwind
Rewind
Watch me depressed, watch me rejected
Everything I am, I hate
Watch me directionless, watch me confused
Now watch me motionless, knowing this is all we ever had.

I tell myself,
I don't want to be a man who tells stories, I know
Everything forsaken from my hands before I ever felt them
Let this be the last time, that I ever gave a damn
Face buried in my hands, I know
This is all I could ever mean, I know
I know

This is a story of deprivation
This is a story of apathy
This is a story of the self indulgence
This is a story of unshackled momentum
The story of perduration.

Nothing can touch me now
I am a smutty criminal,
My thoughts are my crime
I'll defile this whole city
One wall at a time.

A CAMP IN THE GRASSLAND

Srinidhi, A.

Small wild geese landed on the open grassland by the camp where they routinely fed in grey flocks, filling the vicinity with loud gagging. Through my binoculars I could see them feeding on the grass, their curved necks and reddish breasts glowing in the rays of the morning sun rising over the estuary. In the morning, isolated patches of mist drifted across the grass from the vast estuary. The birds' domain was then totally enveloped by a spectral misty shroud.

Unarmed, carrying only my binoculars, I trudged up the river bank which was overgrown with tall reeds. The river dries up in summer and the scorching silt on its bed is teeming with dirty tortoises. This is where the birds feed in winter where large fish are to be found. Waiting for a catch, like motionless soldiers, the keen eyed herons continuously keep watch on the river banks.

I walked across the grassland. A wolf's fresh trail ran in a long chain along the narrow path that had been trampled. At night the wolf would force its way to the collective farm's sheep and many a time we heard the camp's leader rushing outside with his rifle and yelling at the top of his voice into the darkness... ("You Bastard... Be off with you!")

The wolves feared neither the fierce dogs barking wildly and rushing at them in the dark, nor the loud shrieking nor the futile firing of the rusty rifle.

"Damn them!" cursed the camp's leader, rushing out in his pyjamas at night whenever the dogs barked furiously. Wakened by the din, we heard his cursing, the dry click of the bolt and the piercing sound of a shot. Encouraged by the blast, the dogs rushed un-fearing at the invisible enemy in the dark. We heard barking, whining, a snarl and the growl of a fight.

"Missed again! The thief got away!" angrily snapped our anxious host, returning and putting his rifle back in the corner.

From morning till evening the camp resounded with the vibrant gagging of wild geese migrating to their winter feeding grounds in large grey flocks and long narrow lines forming a curtain in the sky. A visiting hunter experiences a strange emotion on hearing the familiar cry of a flock of birds. It is as if the birds are calling one to join them. Lowering my arms sadly, I watched the gaggles of geese flying overhead... I looked at the birds' stretched necks and listened to the flapping of their powerful wings, and a succession of childhood memories came flooding back. I followed the birds' swift flight, and an urge to travel, see and live filled me once again with glowing, youthful strength...



UNTITLED

Ankit R. Hiran

There is always a difference in opinion, or rather a debate, whether ghosts exist or not. The argument could go either way. It depends on the person on how he takes it. Science has shown that there is always an uncertainty about the existence of the ghosts. Persons who believe there is god also believe that ghosts exist. For the other section, they do not. In this context, the story following would tell you what happened in a village named Chinch Pokhli.

A person was reported dead by the villagers near a lake. The body bore marks of injury. It was five o'clock in the morning when the body was discovered. The CID was called and investigation was in the pipeline. Within an hour, the villagers had come en-masse to find out why the CID had arrived. To their surprise, their Thakur was murdered, the head of the village. There was total chaos. The CID was not able to control the crowd. Strangely, there was not even a drop of blood on the body or surrounding the body. Ironically the body was gravely wounded. There was utter confusion as to what might have actually happened there. No blood, no tool, no wild animal nearby, whatsoever. There was certainly no clue that would have helped the CID find the cause of death.

The body was then taken to the forensic lab. It was Dr. Salukya, the best known forensic lab specialist there, who took up the case. Dr. Salukya was a renowned professional. When the body was brought to him, he realized that it was a peculiar case. He worked on the body for a long time but drew only a blank. Never, before this case, had he failed in his attempts. All efforts he was putting into this task were proving to be futile. When he examined the body closely, he was suddenly reminded of what he had studied just a year back: something about ghosts, supernatural powers and so forth.

He now switched roles, from a doctor to that of an exorcist. When he was examining the body, he found a letter 'A' under the tongue. It was very strange, somebody writing under the tongue with a sharp edged metal. But that was how the case was. Dr. Salukya found himself drawn to this case, for this was vastly distinct from his routine job. Another thing which the doctor found was a piece of mirror behind the ear. When Anupam, the son of the Thakur was informed about the cause of the Thakur's death, he was aghast. This information set fire to the village, and many started vacating it. They couldn't imagine an evil power taking the life of their Thakur. Never had this happened before. Those who were in the village went back home and packed themselves safely inside their homes.

On the other side, Dr. Salukya had worked enough on the body and felt like calling on the Thakur's family in person the next morning. He came to know that Anupam was the Thakur's son, Aastha, his daughter and Arundhati, his wife. He thought that one of these must have assumed ghostly power and killed the Thakur, because he had seen the letter 'A' under his tongue. He asked, "Didn't you love your Babuji?" Anupam grew furious being interrogated by the doctors. "What sort of question is this?" he asked. The doctor then averted his attention and asked some general questions. He then walked around the entire home. He noticed a framed picture of a girl who had passed away. But not giving much significance to this, he left for his lab.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when the sun had completely set. Anupam grew impatient. He doubted the doctor and thought of visiting his Swamiji, whom he used to visit every weekend. It was not wise to go anywhere in the night because the only way that led to Swamiji's home passed by the same lake where Thakur died. As was expected, the evil power took his life too. The CID and Dr. Salukya were called again. The framed picture of the girl crossed Salukya's mind when he was on his way. He dropped his suspicion from the Thakur's family and rushed to the Thakur's home.

"What happened to this girl? How did she pass away?" asked the doctor straight away as soon as he entered the home. Arundhati, with tears in her eyes, replied, "She loved a young man, a son of Kisar who hailed from an economically downtrodden family. She was afraid of revealing this to her Babuji. One day, not being able to conceal the truth, she expressed everything. Thakurji felt very insulted and sent his aadmi to bring the young man and warn him. She knew her Babuji would sentence her love to death. So she sent a message through one of her friends to the young man, wanting him to meet her immediately before the Thakur's men could find him. They met secretly and she said, "Look dear, I can't marry you. My Babuji is against our love. I don't want you to get into any trouble. Thakurji's aadmis are in search of you. Please run away from this village. Forgive me. I am sorry." Saying this she shot herself and he couldn't keep her from dying. Finding the young man near the body, the villagers produced him before the Thakur. When asked how the daughter died, with great pain the young man started saying everything that actually happened. Thakur grew furious as he was listening. Anupam, who was standing at the back, was not able to stand the humiliation and hit the young man with a mirror. He hit him so hard that he died on the spot.

Dr. Salukya now became certain of the person who had taken the lives of the Thakur and Anupam. One thing Dr. Salukya found absolutely strange about the village was there were no mirrors or glass pieces in the entire village, nor was there any shop selling mirrors. He did not understand why it was so. He believed

that this fact was linked to the case he was dealing with.

Dr. Salukya now planned to save the lives of the rest of the people in the village, and trap that ghostly power. It was ten o'clock in the night, when Aastha was walking through the same path which was dangerous. The ghostly power now was on the verge of making Aastha its third victim when Dr. Salukya, who was hiding himself appeared. With the help of a special chain, he stopped it from taking the life of Aastha and screamed, "Who are you? What do you want? Why are you taking the lives of the innocent people?" The voice roared back, "Don't call them innocent! Ruthless people! I don't know how God is permitting them to live." Dr. Salukya in surprise asked, "Tell me, Tell me what have they done to you?" The voice wept, "What have they not done? Firstly they threatened my love so much that she committed suicide. And when I was trying to explain to the Thakur, somebody hit me so hard that I could not even breathe. I hate myself. I could not even save her. I do not want to see my face. I would kill myself otherwise. And that is why I have destroyed all the mirrors and glasses and all steel vessels. Before destroying them, I would not go away."

The power of the special chain could resist him only for a while. Ajitesh gained extra power in order to attack the doctor and he warned Dr. Salukya to go away before he would also be killed. The doctor with Aastha started running out of the forest. They ran so fast. Ajitesh followed them. When Dr. Salukya and Aastha were out of the forest, the doctor suddenly got an idea. He jumped down with Aastha. The ghostly power without realizing where they had jumped, followed them. Unfortunately, it was the lake and before Ajitesh could go in, he saw his own image and killed himself. The doctor had finally saved Aastha and the other villagers. Everybody thanked him and he felt satisfied.

THE RECESS IS ON

T. David Jeyaraj

For want of a loan, a share was lost
For want of the share, an index was lost
For want of the index, a firm was lost
For want of the firm, a job was lost
For want of the job, a girlfriend was lost
For want of the girlfriend, an engagement was lost
For want of the engagement, a wedding was lost
For want of the wedding, a honeymoon was lost
For want of the honeymoon, a trip was lost
For want of the trip, a boat-ride was lost
For want of the boat-ride, a boatman was free
And as he was free, a recess was gained.

OFF-LINE

T. David Jeyaraj

I found the route to Bristol from Birmingham
Saw the interiors of St. Peter's
Peeped into the lives of Brangelina
Followed the cricket match in progress
Saw the future through the eyes of the labmen
Tried to trace where my 8th great-grandfather came from
I was busy on-line.

The bell rang.
A stranger.
"The way to door no. 28?"
"This is 15; I am not sure where 28 is"
He went to 16.
On-line again,
I continued my Birmingham to Bristol.

LEADER LIMERICKS 2009

Deborah M. Cordonnier

There was once a muse named GB
Who helped workshop poets to see
That beauty is truth
And never uncouth!
Indeed beauty and truth are the key.

There is a new writer named Ebie
Who loves poems written by Debbie.
He memorized some lines
While paying some fines.
Now he's all tangled up in a webbie.

There once was a teacher named Joel
Who loved to compose rock n' roll
He spent most his time
Teaching rhythm and rhyme
And now, he's a great singer of soul.

There once was a teacher named Joel
Whose haircut was shaped by a bowl
One slip of the arm
Did his left ear harm
Now, he's praying for his ear to be whole.

There is a young teacher named Dave
Who once lived in a cave
He feared the bright lights
Walking only at nights
Once he saw the light, he learned to be brave.

There is a young teacher named Dave
Who is trying hard to behave
He studied each night
Which makes him uptight
But now he's the college students fave.

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BISON

Paul Love

A fairytale, with apologies to
“Goldilocks and the Three Bears”--which was its inspiration

Once upon a time, not too long ago, there lived a family of Bison: Mother Bison, Father Bison and Baby Bison, on the edge of a deep dark forest. I mention Mother Bison first, for this family was part of a larger Bison herd that was completely matriarchal in its organization. Most of the other Bison lived deeper into the forest, but our Bison family was quite modern and forward looking. They were brave enough that they lived on the edge of the forest where they could see a nearby town from their thicket, and even make occasional visits to that town when it was safe to do so. The neighbouring town was called Motikanal, because it was bisected by a large beautiful channel of water that its citizens were very proud of.

At first both communities--Bison and Human--lived comfortably in peace with each other. The Bisons were quite clever and self-sufficient, the Humans were somewhat slower--but as long as the Bisons knew their place and kept to it, the Humans felt relatively secure and satisfied. However, before long, our Bison family began to grow restless. Mother Bison thought it would be so nice to have some of the flowers that grew alongside the Motikanal, in order to decorate the thicket in which they lived. Father Bison knew there were fish in the Motikanal! How great they would be to cook and eat from his leaf plate for dinner. Baby Bison longed to swim in the Motikanal, for you know, of course, Bison are able to swim almost from the day of their birth. So, bit by bit, our Bison family began to make forays into the town of Motikanal, to swim, to pick flowers and to snatch fish from the canal.

But not for long. One by one a few of the humans began to wake up to the fact that some of their flowers were missing. One moonlit night two of the humans were sitting by the canal, and saw with their own eyes a Bison scooping fish out of the dark water--and they ran for their lives, certain that the Bison would attack them next. And the following night, one little human boy claimed he saw with his own eyes a small Bison swimming gracefully along the canal itself.

What to do? The human families were puzzled and terrified by what was happening. “Next time we’ll shoot them” one gruff old human man said. “No, no” another responded. “That will only bring more Bison into town to take revenge on us. Bison of a tether flock together” he wisely pointed out. “Let’s try to placate them,” one of the human ladies timidly suggested. But finally the humans decided to do nothing and hide whenever the Bison appeared. “Soon the Bison will have

enough, and go away" they reasoned.

But how foolish human beings can be! The clever Bisons continued to enjoy flowers, fish and swimming more than ever before. Not only that, the Bisons family became bolder every day. One morning, in bright daylight, the three of them roared into town bounced into the front yard of the Mayor of Motikanal and attacked the bright shiny silver mini-van that sat in the front driveway. Being human and trusting, they had foolishly left their keys in the van itself. So Baby Bison, with his slender, soft flexible horns opened the front door inserted the keys into the ignition, and off they went. And what a sight they were! Baby Bison sitting calmly in the driver's seat, confidently steering the van through town, mother Bison lounging on the roof of the van, and father Bison trotting along behind. And most of the humans were hiding--under tables, in closets, garages or sheds or wherever they could hide. Finally the three Bisons had enough, and drove the mini-van back to where they had found it, confident that they could "steal" it again and go for another "joy ride" whenever they wished.

Now the Humans had to do something. It seemed that things were going from bad to worse, until...SUDDENLY one of the smallest of the humans went to her parents--and in a wee small voice whispered "maybe I can help." She was called "Goldilocks" because of the beautiful blond hair that crowned her head. "Hummph!" Her father growled, "What can you do?" "I can dance for them." "Ha Ha Ha!" Her father came again. "Who wants to watch you dance?"

Now it seems that Goldilocks had been taking dancing lessons for quite some time. She had been practicing, and was really becoming quite skilful. "All right," her father finally conceded, "go ahead and try."

The next night was full moon. As soon as the moon rose, Goldilocks skipped off from home and ran, almost to the edge of the woods. Then she set up her tape recorder, started the music, and before you know it, there she was--dancing. Dancing what? Would you believe it?--a careful, skilful beautiful Bharata-natya!

By this time the Bison family had heard the music and came to the edge of the forest to see what was happening. And they scarcely could believe their eyes! There was a young human being dancing, and it was beautiful to watch! One by one other Bison families came to see. Soon there was a whole crowd of Bison, not just watching, but some of the even started dancing, themselves!

Each night that week Goldilocks would go to the edge of the forest, set up her recorder and start dancing. Each night more of the Bisons would come out and dance alongside her.

After a few days, Goldilocks had other duties to tend to at night, and so her trips to the forest edge became less frequent. But each time the Bison heard music, they were quick to come to the forest edge and join in the fun and the dancing.

Finally, to make a long story short, the Bison became satisfied with living in the forest and mingling with humans only when dance time came. And Goldilocks practiced more and more Bharata-natya because of all that the dance had done for her and her village. Peace returned to the town of Motikanal and was never threatened again.



Providence

Shanzezh Ameen

Dear little Brother,

I want you to remember yourself just as you are now, because that is how I will always remember you. Curly hair sticky with popsicle juice, flashing, crooked white teeth, and small fingers grasping my face when I tuck you in goodnight, leaving you in the care and attention of the closet devoid of monsters, the stuffed animals, the moon and the stars; God's nightlights to keep you from being scared.

But little brother, the glow of starshine can't protect you forever. Everything you know and trust in will be gone for good; the weekday mornings of warm toast with home-made jam dripping down your wrists with every bite-or even the simple nuances of family disappearing altogether. It will start with a forgotten trip to the ice cream parlor, then the cancellation of Christmas. Everything will slip through your palms like sand on the beach of a golden summer vacation. The grains will slip by so slowly, taken by the wind in microscopic increments, you won't even notice until it's all gone.

A fallen, ruined, patriarch. A delicate fairy, pretty and isolated, looking at the world through the bottom of a wine glass. Don't worry now, little brother; I know this is a lot of words and sentences that you may not understand. You may not understand why I left as well. But how do I explain to a five year old that his hero, a savior that picked him up and made him fly, wrapped his fingers around that little boy's sister's neck so hard she couldn't breathe? How do I explain to him that his mother, the picture of mother Mary, in all goodness, trailing the smell of flowers, seeks solace in the very bottles that she poured down the drain when discovered in her husband's study? They're supposed to do no wrong, I thought. They're supposed to be manifestations of God. But the realization that your parents are human can transform and free you, like it freed me. It made my fingers stop counting rosary beads in the name of God, made me stand up from kneeling down and facing the wall, and run into the arms of the boy next door.

I can only imagine what it seemed like to you, little brother. The sounds of me being slammed up against the wall by the shadow of your father, an unemployed shell to be filled with women and alcohol, and still praying every night with those dirty hands. One thing you couldn't hear but I could see, was the wide eyes of the mother, clutching the evidence; a photo strip found in pockets of dirty jeans. The frozen smiles and arms around waists that caused so much fury, such banishment from the only home I knew.

Five, only five. Old enough to understand something is going on, too young to understand why.

Too young to know that your family isn't even half of what it used to be, that you have to leave the house that we said was blessed. You lost the luxury of play time, Sunday morning cartoons, bicycle rides around the ancient trees of the sunny neighborhood, where the leaves rustled and whispered stories of comfort. You live with the grandmother whose fingers, curled, frozen, and pained, does nothing but give you looks of pity, and every Sunday, sitting in the backseat on the way to church, you stick your blond head out of the window, breathe in, smell the earth, and remember what it used to be like. When your mother didn't call once a week just to listen to your voice, and the only thing you could hear through the receiver is her crying.

Little brother, you may be too young to know this, but you do. And I'm sorry I left you. I tucked you in one more time, and could still sense your smell, baby lotion and milk, clinging to me like an aura. Clutching the cross on a chain in my hand, I put all my faith and fear into what exactly was my undoing. I packed, and as if I have done this a thousand times before, as if it was meant to be, I put my left foot out the window on the gutter of the roof, and crossed over my right foot on the shingle. While I was running down the street, my backpack pounding against me with each step, my breaths harsh with fear, I crawled into the car parked down the street, the street where I imagine you riding your bike, the heat of the summer air warming your bones, and making you... happy.

Little brother, I will never forget you. I think about you every day.

Love,

Big Sister

His Memory

Krithika Vanamali

Once lost, now found.
Memory of a missing sound.
Hand held, touch felt,
The feeling of a heart melt.

Going back to the time that passed,
To the beginning when moments stood still,
And visions of the unfortunate event,
Haunted my mind against my will.

Crying, screaming, and gasping for air.
I needed that warmth and that care.
The loneliness I felt within,
Was like my one and only holy sin.

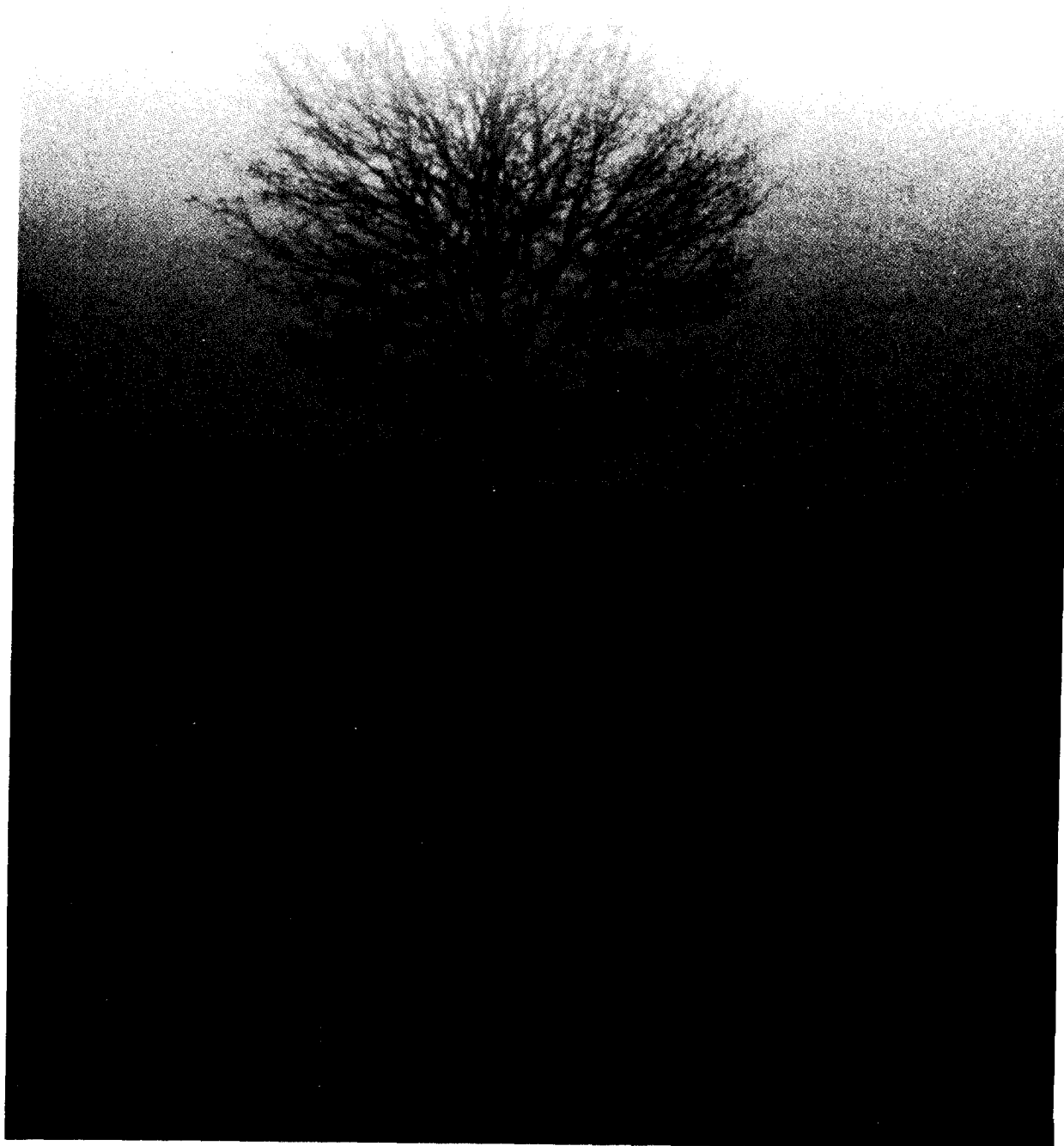
I recall the day he dropped down dead.
Last glance into my eyes, his final words were said.
All the world so full of lies,
Mysteries untold and let lose like flies.

Questions rising from the grave,
Hollow whispers from within the cave.
Everything stood still as if intended,
Yet so many answers unattended.

Today I look back at his smile,
The longing that made me wait a while.
The one who had always steered the wheel,
Is still here to invoke the feel.

Making sure no wrong turns were made,
Making sure all those memories would fade.
Guiding my soul through unknown territory,
To finally strive and relieve me from my melancholy.
I arrived here at the end,
To once again begin to send,
My soul on another journey,
To be once again told in my own destiny.

Once found, now lost,
Surrounding me like a ghost.
Vision blurred, lessons to learn,
But his mystical presence I still yearn



My Love, Compressed Forever

Andry DeJong

Through the flirtatious fluttering of eyes
Through the budding love and discovery of self
Through passion, through hisses and moans of painful ecstasy
Yes...
Comes the minute speck of life.

Through the heartbreak of abandonment,
Through the fear of being alone, the shame, the guilt, the denial.
Oh God not this...
Comes prolonged waiting.

Through two hearts beating together,
Through the same blood in the same veins,
Comes the swelling of life as round and beautiful as mother earth.
I am the earth. I nourish.

Through torture.
Through the cries and screams of unbelievable agony
Oh God help me... I am being torn into two...
Comes a gush of life.

After this ecstasy, after this wait.
After this pain, after this petrifying hate, this fear...
Comes love....
Love for this small being of happiness, hurt, disappointments, everything, nothing,
all the bad, all the good...
It is my love, compressed forever.
Thank you

Leonyd Demidov

Narsingh Dixit

Towards the end of an oppressive afternoon in mid-July, a young man walked out of a little street of Ventsburg. He was out to do his daily job, which in his case was to pickpocket and survive on the money he attained from doing such an immoral task. As he walked towards St. Kopenhagen, his face began to drip with sweat as the torturous heat was unbearable. He wore a vest which was white once upon a time, but was now indescribably filthy. Along with that, he wore a very shabby pair of trousers, folded up to his knees, which were ripped at various places and one could say had not been washed for ages. This attire was coupled with a pair of black slippers. The city was where the 'real deal' was. Crowded with many people, it was where he could easily pickpocket anyone and slip by without the person even realizing it. He was very good at it; maybe one could even use the term 'professional.' Many rich men and women trotted along the streets looking for shops to buy clothes, house ware appliances, and other daily-life necessities. St. Kopenhagen was actually a very safe place with few crimes; this was probably the biggest reason why no one suspected the young gentleman.

As Leonyd Demidov neared the city, he began to ponder about which type of person he would like to make a fool today. He then came to a conclusion and mumbled to himself, "It should be a woman, who is in a very happy mood and is looking forward to a good day." Since Leonyd was extremely good at his chore, he tried to make it further interesting by picking out which sort of person he would like to pickpocket. He somehow made this profession into a game out of which he had a great time. He entered Fickenwich Street, which was his favorite; mainly because the street was always flooded with many tourists and foreigners from other cities. This street was recommended to people for shopping as it had many different types of stores which catered to everyone's needs. Leonyd entered the street with a grin on his face. He began to search for his ideal woman. He passed by many stores and paced in and out of them not being able to find a woman who was in such a happy mood. One looked depressed while the other screamed at her child, one was upset about the food she had eaten while another was infuriated about the soda that just fell on her priceless t-shirt. Leonyd couldn't seem to find any woman who was happy and cheerful. "Heck, even the ones with their boyfriends seem to be having such a hard time. Am I out of luck today?" thought Leonyd to himself.

But then walking out of the grocery store was the most beautiful woman Leonyd had ever seen. She was fair, had hair reaching up to her shoulders. She was wearing a fascinating dress which ended at her knees and she had an eye

catching frame. Leonyd was right next to the grocery store when this woman walked out. He was frozen to the ground as she smiled and walked past him. She had an aura of a celebrity. He smiled, "She is it." She was carrying a small bag on her right shoulder, "That's where the money is," thought Leonyd as he started to follow her. In her left hand was the bag of groceries. While he began to follow this lady, he began to analyze one of his techniques he was going to get her money and ruin her day. But for some arbitrary reasons, he held back; something was stopping him from doing it. More than analyzing his way to get the money and make his day, he was fantasizing about her beauty and charm, the way she walked and the way she carried herself. "What's wrong with me?" He began to question himself and his emotions. As he kept questioning his spontaneous attitude, he came up with another idea. Since the time he saw, she had sat down in a coffee shop. He said, "Perfect." This was because the service was very poor in this coffee shop and the coffee took a really long time to be served.

Leonyd stopped following her and began to walk the other way. Quick and agile he was; he hurriedly began to hunt for his new victim. "Voila!" there was a man going into an ATM to get some money. "I love it when things go my way...But isn't that always?" he laughed. He waited for about 40 seconds and the man came out putting his money into a leather wallet into his right back pocket. Leonyd sprinted towards him, like a bull running towards the red cloth in a bull fight. He banged into him causing himself and the man to fall down. Astounded, the man got up and began screaming at Leonyd, "How dare you do something like that to a man like me? Do you know who I am? This is the biggest mistake of your life boy!" Leonyd was pretty much used to these complaints and said innocently, "Sorry Sir, I meant no harm. I was being chased by my friend and I was completely unaware of the fact that you were standing right where you are right now at the time we bumped against each other." The man gazed at him like filth and decided not to waste further time on such useless matters and walked past him. Leonyd at the time of the clash had managed to slip his hand in the man's back pocket and put it in his own.

Leonyd smirked, dusted his hands off and walked to the closest store to purchase some new clothes. Before entering the store he just looked into the wallet he just stole and was speechless. "1000 EUROS!!!" he silently screamed in his mind. He took a deep breath and walked in the store with a smile of accomplishment as that had been the greatest sum of money he had ever stolen. The employees glared at him with distain. He managed to find himself a nice t-shirt and a pair of blue jeans. One of the employees whispered to his friend, "Can he even afford the pair of Levi's he just picked up?" They laughed. He went to the cashier and the bill was 121 Euros. The cashier stared at him with a questioning look. Leonyd smiled, and took out his wallet and gave the cashier a 200 Euro bill. The cashier

was astonished and frowned at the man while receiving the payment. She returned the change and Leonyd hurriedly walked out with his newly purchased garments. He walked into the public bathroom and quickly changed into his new clothes. He washed his face and set his messy hair. One could say that now he looked a little presentable. "Oh shit! How could I forget to buy shoes?" He ran back quickly to the same department store and asked one of the employees where the shoe section was. Leonyd, on the spur of the moment, ran to the right side of the store and saw about fifty pairs of shoes stacked up on a horizontal rack. He was confused which pair to buy as he could afford any one of them. He decided to be simple and bought a white pair of Converse, just like a passer-by he had seen walking outside. He went to the same cashier, gave her a smile and paid her. After receiving his change he speedily put on his shoes in the store and sighed in relief that he was ready for his next step of the day.

All this was done for one major reason: to get to know that stunning woman he had seen about twenty minutes ago. Before he reached the coffee shop, he glanced at his new and improved reflection on one of the windows of the shops. He walked in with style and was noticed by a few young girls as he walked in. He walked directly towards the lady he was interested in and sat on her table. Leonyd had never gone up to a girl in his whole life but luckily he was a good observer, so he had picked up some ways to flatter girls. He was very confident about what he was going to say. He sat down and looked straight into her eyes and said, "Hey the..."

"Were you the man who was following me around," she cut him short.

"Oh, you must be mistaken, I'm just a regular visitor of this coffee shop," he said to her in a nervous tone since she had managed to recognize him.

"Yea, you must be right, since he almost looked like a beggar whereas you look quite like a remarkable man. Or am I wrong?" She looked at him, waiting for a reply.

"Oh yes, you are quite right. I am a man that may be of your interest," said Leonyd with a confident look "and, as a matter of fact, you are quite a gorgeous woman yourself." He gave her a smile and was wishing that he was doing well.

She laughed and said, "So tell me about you."

"Sure," he paused "How about..."

"Or should I go first?" She cut in on him.

"Sure," He paused, "By the way, I don't know how I could be so forgetful but my name is Leonyd Demidov."

"I'm Rodya Samenovna," she smiled "and this is my story."

He looked at her intently and was waiting to get to know her. He was complimenting her lips and her eyes as she began to speak. He was wondering how anyone could possibly be so beautiful.

"I work in a coffee shop back home, a one similar to this but with faster service." She paused "God, my coffee still hasn't come," she complained.

And there at last came a middle aged woman who looked very upset doing the job as one could easily recognize. She had a plate in her hand on which the cup of coffee stood. She walked up to the table where Leonyd and Rodya were sitting and apologized for the delay, "I'm sorry, Madam for the delay, but unfortunately today, we are having problems with the coffee making machine" she said. She placed the cup of coffee in front of Rodya and looked at Leonyd, "Would you like anything, Sir?"

"No, thank you. You may go now" he said and the woman hurriedly walked away as she knew she had to serve another five customers who must be fretful with the delay.

"So back to where I was," Rodya began "I am the manager of the coffee shop I work in. It is quite a tiring job and the salary is poor. I save up most of my money to enjoy things such as this dress that I am wearing right now. This cost me 68 Euros."

Leonyd was just looking at the way she was talking, the way she was moving her hands as she explained things. He looked at the way she smiled so often and how pretty the small mole beside her upper lip was. He suddenly noticed a change in her face, a saddened look. This caused him to wake up from his world and he began to listen to her again.

"...and my parents left me when I was young. They died in a terrible fire." She ended and looked at him.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he looked at her and asked "so you lived alone? Don't you have any siblings?"

There was a long pause before she spoke, "I had one brother...who is...not part of this world anymore." It was difficult for her to get these words out of her mouth.

“Oh, I’m really sorry I asked. I can’t imagine how you must be feeling right now.”

“It has been a while,” she said “but his story haunts me even today.”

“If I may,” he asked “could you tell me his story?”

“After our parents died, my elder brother, Amba, was the only person in the world I had. He was an excellent brother but the way he began to earn money for us was wrong. He started to pickpocket.”

Leonyd’s face grew pale.

“And I told him many times that that was wrong but he said there was no other option.” She continued, “For a year he had been stealing from people and getting food in the house but then came the day when everything went wrong,” she paused “He had managed to pickpocket a man from the Mafia.” She stopped and looked at Leonyd.

Leonyd realized that it was uneasy for her to speak, so he said, “It is ok. You don’t have to say the rest. I can imagine what could have happened next.”

A tear rolled down Rodya’s face. “Why...do there have to be people like them?” She burst into tears.

There was a brief moment of silence and unexpectedly the door of the coffee shop was burst open and three men walked in. All of them were suited in black and had guns in their hands.

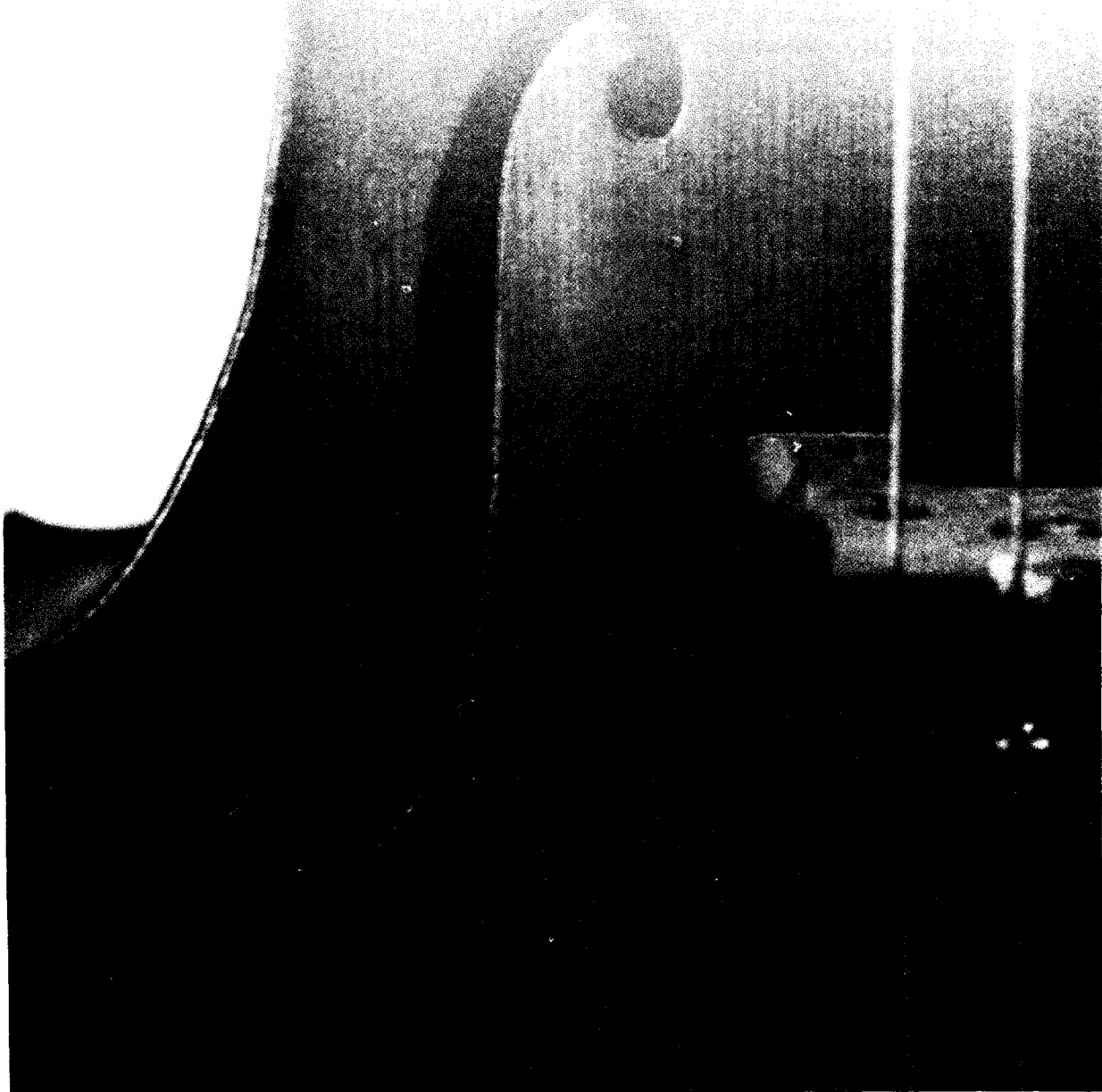
Leonyd froze. The attire of these men resembled the man he had pick pocketed an hour ago.

“Oh my God, it’s them. They were there last time too. Please Leonyd help me. I think they are here for me.”

Leonyd looked at her helplessly and said, “I had a really good time today Rodya. You are an amazing girl. Go ahead and live your life to the fullest and remember one thing: To enjoy the sweetness of life, you must have the power to forget the past.”

She was puzzled, “I don’t understand...”

The three men had reached their table by now. One of them pointed his gun towards Leonyd, "Get up... Now!" he said. Leonyd obeyed and got out of his chair. The three men dragged the lifeless Leonyd towards the door. Leonyd just stared back at Rodya with an ounce of life left in him and tears trickling down his eyes. All four of them disappeared out of the shop and everyone in the coffee shop just stared at the door with fear. No one spoke. There were three sounds of gunshots after the men took Leonyd away. That was the end of Leonyd Demidov, a man who didn't expect his death to be on such a perfect day.



The Splendor of Music

Oona Yadav

The brilliance of a symphony
Simple truths in a harmony
The expository stage of an orchestra
Or merely the knowledge of a past era

Resonating strings stretched over wood
Inspire us in the present, glorifying those who could
Russia, Germany, Austria and France
Produced works so consuming, we're left in a trance

Be it the booming double bass or percussion
The works we now play, make us rich in inheritance
It's the music that makes one feel free
And this feeling brings boundless joy to me.

The Writer's Bus

Ridi Khan

From his appearance, one would gather that he was nothing out of the ordinary. He had long curly hair and wore a simple plaid shirt. Appearance was the least of his concern as he never bothered to trim his out-grown, salt-and-pepper beard. But he was truly something out of the ordinary. I sat two seats behind him on the 8 o' clock bus that had taken me to my construction site and wondered why a man of such fame and glory would dawdle among people of my class. I instantly identified him, Raymond Trust, the most discussed and successful writer in town.

He sat alone by the window and gazed out of it with pure meditation and focus, as if he was looking at a painting. I wondered if he appeared to be the same when, traveling in his luxury cars. I was overwhelmed by a great deal of questions that I wished to ask. Why are you here Sir? Why has a man of your class decided to travel by bus? But I remained immovable and pinned to my seat. I was at my destination, but still pinned. I refused to move, but more importantly, I refused to be ignorant.

He turned around and took notice of this, and gave me with a comforting smile. I had a sudden rush of confidence surging through my body. I stood up, and paced my steps carefully towards this brilliant man, with the sun illuminating his skin at this point. He greeted me politely and asked me to sit beside him; his voice was tranquil. Not a word was uttered by me.

"Are you wondering why I am here?" He spoke with in an assured tone. I nodded. With that he smiled a little more and explained, "You see young man, when you look at the bus, it is nothing out of the ordinary. If you look closely, you will see that every passenger plays the role of a writer, perhaps a better writer than me. As I sit here, I am high above the pavement, high enough for me to catch the sight of everything that passes by. From here, I see the way the birds see from the mountains. Not just a portion of the world, but the entire world itself, all for me to conquer. When I sit here, I am surrounded by an audience who judges me and my thoughts, who wonders why I am the way I am. They try to judge what I see and the way I see it. Therefore, my job is not to write, but to show what I perceive and what better way to do that than to sit in a bus, high above the pavement and explore the amazing, the bizarre or the astonishing".

Sometimes in life, you find the extraordinary locked inside the chest of the ordinary.

The Stereotype

Karishma Joshi

It was typical a Tuesday morning. Actually, not so typical because it was the first day of a new year, but boring enough. I was walking to school, contemplating the next eight hours that I would spend sitting in cold, dark classrooms, mindlessly taking down notes. The sky seemed to emphasize with me; it was dark, cloudy and threatening to rain. I moodily kicked a stone along the pavement, and watched it descend into a crack.

I turned the corner and was faced with chaos. I could hear a child crying, wailing. It chilled me to hear it. People had formed a circle around where the sound was coming from. They were all silent, so all I could hear was the sobbing. As I approached the circle, it began to thin, and I could see a child, a little girl, sitting on the road and screaming with pain.

I've always had an aversion to blood but when I saw that child sitting there, sobbing her eyes out, sitting in a pool of it, I couldn't look away. Her right foot was squashed. It had been a hit-and-run accident. No one was going forward to help her. I noticed that she was dressed in ragged clothes and her hair was an unruly mess. Her face was smeared with dirt. I don't know how long I stood there, staring at the child, but when I looked up, everyone else had disappeared. Why should they care about some kid who looked like she had never had a shower before, I mused. She was none of their business. Tears began to swim in my eyes but it didn't register to me that I should act fast and help the girl before it was too late.

Suddenly, something shoved against me. I turned around. A tall boy of about sixteen was looking at me. He had hair that flopped into his eyes, which were pale brown. . He looked like a motorcyclist, straight out of a film, who would wear a black leather jacket and not let the cigarette out of his mouth.

'Help me carry her,' he demanded brusquely. I did so, silently. As I touched the girl, my mind seemed to process what I was seeing and I retched. The child began wailing even harder. The boy, seeing that I was going to be no help, wrapped his arms around the child, picked her up, and placed her on the backseat of his bike. He looked at me, straight into the eyes, with a gentleness that I hadn't expected to see in someone who looked like him, said 'thanks', and was gone. I wasn't sure what the thanks were for since I hardly did anything but throw up and add to the confusion of the situation.

I was late for school. At first, the guards wouldn't let me through the gate but then the principal turned up and I got a special escort to his office. I guess because I've never visited his office before; he let me off with a warning and a lecture about how I must not be late, and ...blah blah blah. All the same, he wasn't happy when I couldn't explain why I was late. The whole day was a blur. I was thinking about the bleeding child and the boy with floppy hair, wondering where and how they were, and if the latter had managed to get the former to the hospital on time. I think my friends gave me up as a bad job on that day because I sat like a zombie in all my classes, only responding with nods when I was asked a question. Walking home, I kept my eyes open for the boy, hoping that by some miracle he would appear and tell me how the child was.

The next day was still a blur until I saw him. The same boy, with floppy black hair and pale brown eyes. With his parents. And the principal. Dressed in torn, baggy jeans and a black t-shirt his eyes looked sulky and defiant; so different from the compassion that I had seen in him the day before. From what I could make out, he was a new student, who had skipped school yesterday, for reasons he refused to divulge. Was it the same guy?

He was sitting in my French class when I next saw him. I walked up to him and asked him straight - 'How is she?'. He looked at me blankly for a second. He opened his mouth to ask who I was and then suddenly a flicker of recognition crossed his eyes and he replied 'She's going to be fine,' he said gruffly, 'I took her to a government hospital; the doctor told me to come back after school to see her. They're going to put her in an orphanage after she's better. She'll always have a limp, though.'

'Oh! Thank God she's going to survive. I'll always hate myself for standing there like an idiot and staring.'

'You've never seen an accident before?'

'No. Have you?'

'Yeah. I've been in one. With my friends.' He glanced at me sideways expecting shock or alarm, which was not forthcoming. 'Aren't you going to ask me why I was joy-riding?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'I don't know. I don't think you want to tell me. And if that's the case, then I don't want to know.'

He stared at me for a second, obviously expecting me to say more, but when I didn't he asked, 'Do you want to come?'

'Come where?' I asked stupidly. I was mesmerized by this boy. Where was the compassionate person I had seen yesterday? This guy just looked like one of those guys, the ones our mothers warn us to fight shy of.

'Umm... to the hospital...?'

'Oh! Sure!'

'Okay. But don't tell anyone, okay? I don't do the caring thing.'

'Why not? '

He looked surprised, 'I don't know... I don't think anyone would believe I had a caring pulse in my body. What's the point trying to convince them? Anyways, after school?'

I nodded. The teacher's voice boomed out, 'And do you have something to share with us?' He glowered at us. 'No, Sir,' we both muttered. We were both smiling. He passed me a note.

'3 pm, school gate? By the way, my name is Pete.' Smiley Face.

I smiled at him and nodded.

'And what's the answer, Peter?' the teacher

'Wha... sorry?'

'Maybe if you had been in school yesterday, you would have known the answer," the teacher was smirking at him with the "I know what you did last summer, or more in context, yesterday expression"

But I knew better. He hadn't bunked school yesterday to go joy-riding, to drink or smoke. He had bunked school to help a poor orphan, who the rest of the world was too busy to care about. And I respected him for that.

The Marketplace

Amulya Gyawali

Amidst the chaos in a busy marketplace, a man stood still, oblivious to his surroundings. People were shouting, screaming, pushing, shoving; yet this man, he didn't seem to care. His gaze was fixed on something particular, yet it was impossible for anyone to point out what he was staring at since every inch in this market was occupied with people, stalls, tables and goods to be sold.

On the contrary, he knew exactly what his attention was fixed on. It was his mother, selling vegetables in the closest vegetable stall to where he stood. It was his mother, the same mother who never raised him, whom he had never met and the mother who would probably not recognize her son. He felt the urge to go and finally talk to the person whom he would have recognized from a mile away, the person whose picture was resting under his pillow at this very instant. However, he decided it wasn't that simple.

XXX

This man was around 28 years old; he was the CEO of the big steel company of that city. He lived in a nice three-bedroom apartment in the middle of the city. He had gone through school, topping every class, captaining the school teams in all the different sports and winning all prizes up for grabs. In short, he was a model student. Toward the end of his schooling, such was his potential that he could get into any career field that we wanted to.

Finally, he opted for business management, and his progress was so alarming, that by the second year, he was recruited into the steel industry to oversee the management of the factories and production. Since then, he had received several better offers to move to better jobs with better salaries, yet he opted to stick to existing job, because of his fear for changes.

Yet, he lived a happy life, even outside his job. He had a large circle of friends and was popular amongst them. He had a fiancé, whom he was expected to marry later that year. And he had the respect of his co-workers and employers and all the people about whom he cared, seemed to care about him as well. He lived an ordinary but great life. Yet...

XXX

When he was just a small boy, his mother had left, without an explanation or a reason. He was three at that time, therefore, had limited memories about his

mother. However, he was convinced that his mother had left only because she had no choice. His elder sister, who had raised him after his mother left, had described his mother as “an angel, who loved her children more than herself.” So this man was convinced that his mother had left to protect him and not to hurt him. And all his life, he swore that he would find his mother and make amends for all the years of separation.

XXX

And in the midst of a busy marketplace, this man stood, staring at his mother, whom he had yearned for the most throughout his early life. However, instead of making an acquaintance he craved for so much, he walked away from his mother, without saying a word to her. His life was set and despite his obsession for finding his mother, he was too afraid of the things that might change; and yet again, a fear for change stopped this man from his life's greatest dream.

Meanwhile, his mother; she continued her day, working hard to sell as much as she could, so that she could live another day, week and month. She left in the evening, packing up her stall, semi-satisfied with her earnings of the day. Little did she know that her son, whom she had so reluctantly left 25 years ago, had been closer to her than ever before.

The City Tonight

Mythili Sayanna

It's a beautiful, quiet, starry night.
But black's the only colour in sight.
The darkness wraps itself around me
And I find myself sailing in the night sea.

There's a chill in the air.
And a longing in my stare.
I need some colour to brighten up tonight,
To escape to the city of the dazzling lights.

And just as my longing grows more and more
I see a spark igniting far below.
An ember jumps up and illuminates the sky,
I look up and see it come to life.

Glittering gold and shimmering red,
The colours play around with my head.
The light is a distraction as it pours down
The riotous colours light up everything around.

For a long time the colours seem to stay
Their explosions chase the stars away.
I sit and stare at this terrific sight
And know that I'm in the city of dazzling lights.

The Boatman's Saga

Anushka Mehrotra

She pulled up her dress as she stepped into the boat. She smiled at her fiancé.... sorry! She kept forgetting that they had got married that very morning. He was her husband. She smiled even wider at him, and he gave her a big hug, as he joined her in the boat. She looked around with a gasp in her breath. "Kerala is so beautiful, I'm so glad we came here for our honeymoon, Naman!" She looked adoringly at him, and he brushed her hair behind her ear. "Just enjoy..... this boat-ride is just the first step, there are more surprises in store". "I love you." She cried, kissing him. They both cuddled up and Naman reached over to tap the boatman who was setting up for the boat trip. The man didn't listen, so Naman roughly shoved him in his bare back. The man turned around, and wearily looked at him. "Yes, Sahib?"

"We're ready to leave... I think you should start moving"

"Sir... I need a little more time to untie the boat"

"Oh for God's sake! I planned this months ago and you're doing all this now!"

"Sorry Sahib, it's just that... I'm an old man, it takes me a while to untie the rope"

"Hurry up! Being an old man doesn't give you the excuse to slack off. I think you're just lazy!"

Naman sat back down with a huff. The boat man shook his head sadly as he fumbled with the knot of the rope. Finally, he got it open and he pulled the rope into the boat. He tucked the end of his nara into this lungi and picked up the oar. He slowly began rowing.

"Just our luck... we had to get an old man." Naman spat the last two words out, contemptuously. "Look, how slow he's going"

"Oh... come on, Naman... this way we can cuddle together and enjoy the sunset." she said, smiling at him. The boatman seemed no happier with this interjection. She was obviously trying to get Naman to calm down and was in no way concerned with what he was saying to the old man. She wasn't taking the side of the old man, she just didn't want her husband agitated on their honeymoon.

"It's just that... I wanted to give you the perfect honeymoon, Maya!"

“And it is perfect...because you’re here with me”

“Aww! That’s so sweet!” And as he reached over to hug her, Naman kicked the old man sharply in the back. The boatman turned around and Naman glared at him, as if saying ‘Go faster, you’re ruining the surprises I have in store!’

The old man sighed, and tried moving his arms faster.

“Kerala is so beautiful!” Maya sighed, leaning against the boat and gazing up at the colourful sky. “It just... takes my breath away”

“I’m so glad you like it”

“Where are we going?”

“To our ‘Honeymoon Suite’”

“And where is that?”

“You’ll see”

“I can’t wait!” Maya leaned back again and suddenly shot up. “Eeeeww!”

“What is it?” Naman asked, concerned

“I felt something squishy!”

Naman’s face became bright red as he picked up a dead fish which was lying at the bottom of the boat. “WHAT IS THIS?” he roared at the boatman, “I try to give my wife the best honeymoon possible and you have this dead fish in the boat! You have ruined my honeymoon, you incapable old WORM!”

As soon as he heard the last word, a change came over the old boatman. His face got darker, and his white eyebrows furrowed into a frown. Names were something he would not tolerate. Ever. Especially from honeymooners.

“You think this is a bad honeymoon?! You think finding a fish in a boat is enough to ruin what is supposed to be the best day of your life? A honeymoon is not about fancy hotels, beach houses, royal boat-rides and wonderful food. It’s about spending a holiday with the one you love. Just the two of you. And you think a fish is going to ruin that? If so, you two have no future.”

“Why you.... how DARE you talk to me like that!” Naman roared. He did not like the

boatman's harsh tone, and frankly, he was getting a little frightened. He was a city man while the boatman, even though he was old, was a hardened villager.

"I'm going to tell you a story"

"WHAT THE.....? No! I refuse to hear your tale, you stupid old man! Now just row the boat and take us to where we're supposed to go."

"You have to listen to me, and there's nothing you can do about it, since I'm the one who's rowing the boat, which means I get to control it."

"How DARE you tell us how our honeymoon should be!"

"You must hear my story."

"WHAT? Are you insane!?!"

"I refuse to continue until you hear my story." The boatman dropped his oar and sat down, cross-legged on the floor of the boat. He picked up the rope, which had a rock tied to it, and dropped it in the water with a large splash. "Self - made anchor" he informed the frightened honeymooners.

"I don't care what that is!" Naman squeaked, "Please get this story over with!"

Maya squealed in fear, and the boatman looked shocked. "Oh! Don't be frightened. I'm not a madman. But you must hear my story, it will teach your husband." The boatman glared at Naman, "Some manners."

Maya squealed again, and the boatman ignored her. "I can't stand people treating me this way. Especially on their honeymoon." He looked straight ahead into the sunset.

"Now I'll start my story, it's about honeymooners. Like you" He did not look at the faces of the newlyweds as he continued with his tale.

"On this very same river, 20 years ago, lived a boatman. He was young, friendly and had many friends. He had lived in Kerala his whole life and knew most of the villagers very well. One day, one of his close friends got married. His wife was a beautiful woman, and she, like him, had lived in Kerala her whole life. They had known each other for a long time, since their parents were friends. They had fallen in love, and their parents were happy because they were planning on arranging the marriage of these two anyway....."

"Can you please spare us the details!" Naman said angrily. But he stopped talking

the minute the boatman glared at him. He seemed to shrink into the side of the boat, and the old man, satisfied at seeing how frightened Naman was, continued his story.

"Anyway, the man was a poor man..."

"Which man? The boatman or the one getting married?"

"The one getting married. Now, this man couldn't afford to take his wife on a honeymoon. He was very, very poor, but he still wanted to give his wife a wonderful day. So, he called up his friend, Mohan, the boatman, and asked him if he could give them a slow, romantic sunset boat ride on the lake. It was all he could afford."

"The man getting married.... what was his name?" Naman interjected again

The boatman seemed to be getting annoyed at being interrupted so many times. He hesitated before answering, "Raju..... His name was Raju..... So, anyway, Raju called up his friend Mohan and asked if they could rent the boat. However, though Mohan was a very nice man, he told Raju that he couldn't afford to give any free rides, and Raju told him that he didn't want a free ride, he wanted to pay. This shocked Mohan, but he agreed."

The boatman took a deep breath and looked at his confused passengers. "That's it?!" Maya asked, incredulously. This was the first time she had spoken in a long time.

"No of course not! That is not the end of the story."

"So? Then continue!"

The boatman took another breath before continuing.

"A few days after their wedding, Raju told his wife that he was going to surprise her. He took her blindfolded to the lake and then he unwrapped her blindfold. She was so thrilled when she figured out what Raju had planned. She was as happy with her simple boat ride, just as you are with your fancy hotels and honeymoon sweets - what are those anyway?"

"Huh?" Naman asked, confused

"Honeymoon sweets. Is that some sort of chocolate that you eat on your

honeymoon?"

"No! It's a type of hotel room."

"Oh" The boatman furrowed his eyebrows, thinking deeply.

"Will you continue the story?" Naman urged on

"Yes, most definitely. So.... er.... where was I?" He chuckled "Me and my bad memory"

"When Raju took his wife for the boat-ride"

Oh yes! So, Raju took his wife to the lake, and Mohan was waiting there in his boat. He was feeling bad for taking money from his close friend, so he decked up the boat beautifully, and he helped Raju and his wife in carefully. Then he started rowing. He rowed slowly so that Raju and his wife could just sit there, enjoying each other's company. He took them on a long route. It was a little different from his normal route, and after a while, rowing on this new route, he suddenly realized what a big mistake he had made."

The boatman stopped and began massaging his feet, as though he's been hiking instead of sitting down.

"What do you mean!" Maya said, indignantly, "Continue! I want to know what happens!"

The boatman smiled inwardly, as he continued with his story.

"The boat got stuck on some overgrown sea weeds. He tried to untangle them, but they seemed to be stuck. He was panicking. They were in the middle of the river; it didn't seem possible for them to jump over to the shore. If they didn't do this, they'd have to wait hours, maybe even days to be rescued. They had no food, or water, and the sun was setting fast. It would be dangerous to be on the river at night, the boat could float, and they might drift to the rapids. They would all die. He called Raju over, and whispered the problem in his ear. He didn't want to worry his wife."

"What's the wife's name?" Maya asked, seemingly intrigued

"Manjitha. She was a beautiful, innocent girl, so young and caring. Mohan didn't want to worry her, and so he told Raju all this secretly. Raju was very worried,

but he knew he had to tell his wife. He turned to her and calmly explained the problem. She knew the problem was more than just getting to the shore. Neither she nor Raju could swim, and the water was very deep. She was very worried, but she bravely held up. She didn't even cry. She just asked if there was anyway they could get to the shore. They would never be able to survive days on this boat. They had nothing to sustain them - no water, no food, no proper place to sleep. Then, Mohan got an idea"

"He said that he would swim across and go get some help. They would have to wait in the boat for him to come back. Hopefully, he felt, he would be able to make it with some help before nightfall. However, bad luck was upon them that night. As soon as Mohan reached the shore, he began running so fast, he tripped and fell on a tree root. He knocked his head on a rock and passed out."

The boatman shook his head remorsefully, "It wasn't his fault, of course. But...." his voice caught in his throat, "It was the greatest mistake he ever made."

Maya's mouth fell open. By now, even Naman was interested. "What do you mean? What happened?" he asked, dumb-founded. "What happened to poor Manjitha?"

"Now, Raju had to do something. Mohan had passed out and Manjitha needed to be rescued." He shook his head, as though trying to remember. "Then he..... yes..... Then he spotted a few rocks. They were wet and slippery, very far apart, but they were leading to the shore. There were about five rocks, yes, they were quite some distance apart, but with a few hops and jumps he felt that they could possibly make their way to the shore. However, there was a risk... the water was incredibly deep after all."

"Raju told Manjitha that he would go to the shore, and get help to come and rescue her. But Manjitha was a strong girl. She said that she didn't need rescuing. She told Raju that. He took a deep breath, "That if he could do it, she could too. She said that.... that she was going to cross the river with him, and I.... I mean, after much hesitation, Raju agreed. It was dangerous, but he managed to cross the river quickly. Then he asked her to come across. She got up in her red and gold decked sari, with her head covered, even in such a dangerous situation. And she began to cross...."

His voice cracked, and he stopped speaking.

"What happened?" Maya asked gently.

"She slipped"

"WHAT?" Maya and Naman both yelled together.

"Yes, she slipped. Raju reached out his hand to try and grab hers, but he couldn't reach. She splashed powerlessly in the deep water, until the weight of her heavy sari weighed her down. She sank like a rock. Her head went under and she couldn't breathe. Raju tried his best, screaming for help between sobs. He tried to look for a stick to reach her, to help her get to the shore, but he couldn't find one. All he could see were rocks and small twigs through his blurry, tear-filled vision. She drowned, and Raju couldn't do anything, because he couldn't swim. He had to stay there helplessly, watching her die."

A small sob escaped this throat

"She died, and Raju was devastated. Mohan woke up a few hours later, and was very, very repentant for what had happened, what he felt he had done. He could never forgive himself. And.... and that's the end of the story."

"What? It ends with her dying?!"

"Yes.... not all stories end happily." He bowed his head sadly, but as he did this, he picked up the oar and rowed around a few bends, before stopping in front of a fancy beach hotel."

"Oh, my God! You kept us in this boat, listening to your sappy story, when our hotel was just five minutes away!? Naman gnashed his teeth, getting angry again.

"So we weren't late, were we? You needed to be here by 8, and I got you here by 8."

Naman was furious. He quickly paid the man, and tried to pull Maya out of the boat. She however was giving the old man a pitiful look. "What a sad story" she said, her eyes wide.

As Naman pulled her out, he thought he heard the man say "It was all my fault...."

Maya seemed still a bit sad from the story. "Maya! Today is our honeymoon! I want you to forget about that man and his lame story and enjoy today."

"Of course I will Naman!" Maya said, slightly forcing a smile, "It's just that, that story... I think it was true"

"Of course it was true. He was Mohan. But he can't do anything about it now can he? He should just not go that route again. That's all. Just thank god he didn't kill us."

"I know... But, he seemed so sad.... should we have tipped him more?"

"But he's already gone" Naman said, trying to avoid spending more money on the irritating boatman.

"Here's the man who owns the boat company! We can give it to him"

Maya walked up to a man standing on the little pier, waiting to greet them.

"Hello sir" Maya said to the smiling man.

"Hello and welcome to the Exotic Beach Club Hotel, I hope you enjoy your stay, and I trust your boat ride was pleasant?"

"Yes thank you very much!" Maya said, giving a side look to Naman who was muttering angrily under his breath. "Er... we were wondering, could you please give this to Mohan?" She gave the owner a wad of notes.

"Who?" the man asked, confused

"Mohan... our boatman."

"Er.... did he tell you his name was Mohan?"

"No! We just thought...."

"No, his name is Rajesh. He's been working here for about 18 years. He actually learnt how to row and swim just to join our company! I'll give him this money tomorrow, though. Right now, he's gone home. We allowed him to go home early because this is the anniversary of something bad that happened in his family about 20 years ago, whatever that is. Every year on this day he takes a half day leave. Surprisingly, on the half of a day he does work, he only takes honeymooners on his boat." The owner laughed, "Crazy or what? Anyway, the porters will be coming to take your luggage. Once again, I hope you enjoy your stay."

And with that, the owner of the boat company walked away, leaving behind a very bewildered Naman and a completely startled Maya.

Death of a Circus Freak

Gaurav Dua

Eddy the Scary was once a circus freak,
unloved by all, his life was bleak.
His childhood was broken; his mind was a mess,
Never, once, did he ever have rest.
From the torments of all the other little boys,
They broke his soul along with his toys,
Only refuge this boy ever had, was when he sketched away
On his little sketch pad.
Soon Eddy found work, where he would fit in.
The circus had given him a new chance to begin
He changed everything and left home happily
But he still sketched away, to let his mind free.
Even though he no longer cares for his name,
Or what his school taught him, he sketched all the same,
For the sketchbook was a fortress, in which eddy could hide,
He could laugh, he could cry, and draw what he felt inside.

One day while walking, away from his show.
His body was brightened by a headlight's glow.
Some drunken teenagers, looking for a good time.
Were in a car committing petty crimes.
He ran down the street and hid behind the dumpsters.
But they found him and beat him,
That group of drunken youngsters.
He cried and he howled, and he begged for their mercy.
But they didn't stop. oh, what a pity.
When the sun soon rose, over the town.
A young, little boy found Eddy's body around.
His shirt was tattered, and his eyes were torn out.
His bones were broken, if only they heard his shouts.
They looked for the criminals, but they were long gone.
The teenagers woke the next day, not remembering what was wrong.
These little rich kids were stupid and cruel.
But for the rest of their lives, these kids had it cool.

At the funeral the next day, nobody came
The circus had left, gone on to fame.
Here was his life, Eddie's race had been run

Nothing to show for it, except the drawings he'd done.
His sketchbook was old and dirty by now
And was trashed the day the circus left town.
T'was collected by men and thrown into a truck.
Compacted in with some garbage and muck,
And once it reached its final station,
The garbage was burned, the books final destination.
And now there was nothing to remember Eddy the Scary.
A cruel end to a life so dreary.



Seven Men

Gaurav Dua

There were seven men around a table, I was one of them,
all of us had guns, none of us were friends,
all of us had jobs, children and a few of us had wives.
but none of us could handle our guilt-ridden minds.
Each of us were empty shells of who we were before.
Mistakes we made and couldn't take, Fools we all were.
Each of us wanted to take the chance and fix things there and then,
each of us were alive but dead and wanted it to end.
One by one we picked up our guns, our shaky hands held them to our brains,
we all knew that it was wrong, but we were all insane.
Finishing it together, we thought it would all go well,
pull the trigger, the deed is done, we're all going to hell,
the bravest of us cowards stood up and said "Mom, I'll be there soon"
he took a shot and fell to the ground, gunshot echoing across the room.
one by one, the six of us, stood up. Our demons we would silence.
I was the last one to do so, so I saw all the self-aimed violence.
One man was sprawled across the table, a letter clutched in his hand,
probably a will for his daughter, I doubt she'd understand.
I saw the blood all over the room and the smell was making me ill
I finally pulled the trigger, but there was no bullet, time stood still
I was the only one of them who was denied his right,
to put himself to sleep forever, to end his worthless life.
I was sick and I couldn't think and I couldn't fix it and I cried,
and I envied all those bleeding men, those men who all have died.
and I hit myself and screamed until my throat was sore,
once again, I was without a friend, alone I was once more.
Pack some bullets next time, I thought to myself, lesson learnt.
The death that would never come was the death that I so yearned.
I left the room and the building and I started to walk the streets.
All the eyes were watching me and the blood upon my sleeves.
Once again I could not do things according to the plan,
and so I walked and walked and walked, an empty shell of what once was a man.



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