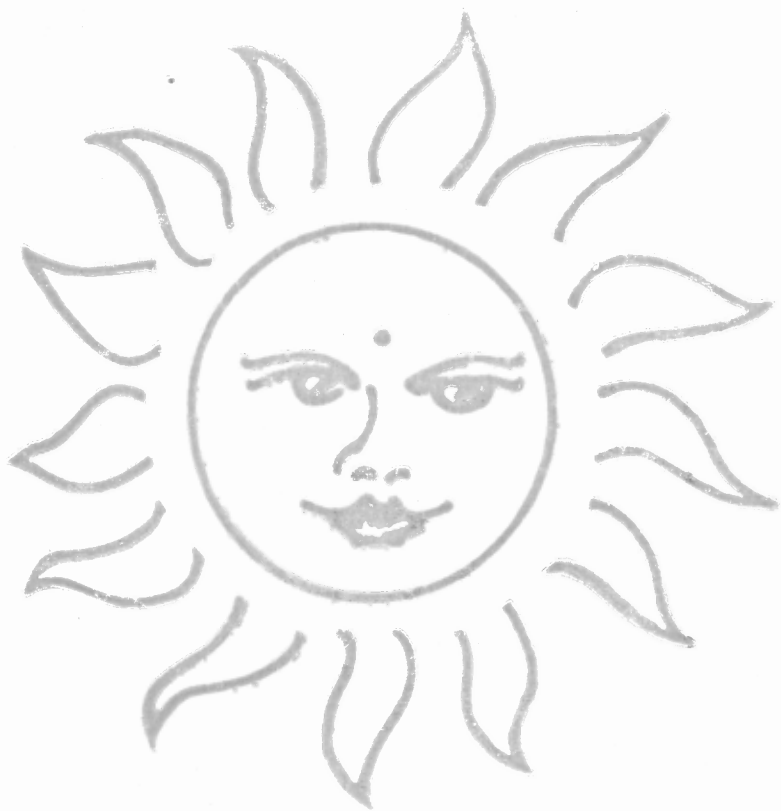


KAVITHALAYA

கவிதாலயா



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American College,
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ERRATA

A few obvious misprints
are passed unnoticed;
the important bloopers
are emended below.

p.27, i - read: **Robbie Jenks**
iii - read: **jungle-like**

p.89, last line - read: gave
herself over to looking after

p.90, iii - read: *often he*
brought with him the sour

p.91, last line - read: *she*
was obviously not born under
a lucky star.

FOREWORD

by Meena Alexander

IT WAS A GREAT DELIGHT to visit Kodai in the season when the *kurunji* blooms (it happens only every twelve years) and meet the students and the faculty at the annual American College, Madurai - Kodaikanal International School writing workshop. I will never forget sitting with a group of students under a tree, with pears so large I thought them *musumbi*. And as we sat there, the mist blew right down over the tree branches and entered the rooms of Swedish house. Where else, in my life, I thought, have I seen mist entering the rooms of the house, flowing over the tables and chairs then vanishing. And a great delight entered me, when later, looking out of the rooms I saw solitary students seated in piles of leaves which had fallen to the base of the pine trees, writing; others in groups of four and five by flowering shrubs, faces turned towards each other, marveling at an image, pointing out a turn of phrase that needed fixing. It felt like a whole hillside blossoming into poetry.



And I thought, if writing cannot come from the earth, what is it? Writing springs out of the transport of touch and smell and taste, sight and hearing. And surely the acts of attentive care that underpin the making of a poem are directly opposed to the crudities of will that result in physical violence. Poetry is language charged with emotion, a rhythmical, pulsing sense that becomes in its refined shape (and this is where all the writing and rewriting comes into play) a form of knowledge.

The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York
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Jennifer Garrison

SMALL INSIGNIFICANT WORDS



A series of small
insignificant words
 Stumbled across my mind.
It's funny,
 but,
They always seem like the right ones at the time
You would think they might know
What is lurking behind your eyes
 Maybe
It really is silence...
Today,
 When I lay down to forget
 I found I had nothing to forgive
Sometimes a smile
 Drones out the routine
 Of a dimly lit afternoon...
 But when I remember
 how very young
 long ago still feels
 sucking up sundrops
 laughing in the echo of the rain.
 Maybe it wasn't so funny, after all...
Some feelings are magical
 meant to be sung
I refuse
 To string together a cascade of stars
With a series of small insignificant words.



Uma Rajendran

EPITAPH
FOR A LATE BELOVED PENCIL

I glanced down at the sleek beauty
that lay in my inferior
hand;
seeming to mock
my mortal ugliness
priding itself
in its far potential
superiority,
its one-pointedness -
sole confidante
of personal fantasizes,
conveying
magnificent,
frightening insights,
sharpening my intellect,
single contact
with the outside world;
in my perception providing
manuscripts rivaled only
by those of Freud
or perhaps Shakespeare.
But as all things good must end,
so did this. . . leaving behind
a much aggrieved friend
scribing an epitaph for her late pencil,
a stub now, point lost.

The end of a dream - Armageddon, close behind.



Lila Nagarajan

KAAPI PU (COFFEE BLOSSOM)

ON HER FIRST birthday, they give her a bicycle with training wheels. With time, tiring of it, she prefers to go with her parents for walks in their coffee fields on the mountain side. Her mother collects the fallen leaves of the silver oak, which shade the coffee bushes, and teaches her how to make a fan out of them. The little girl listens wide-eyed and shivers as her father tells her tales of the tigers which once roamed these very same paths. Her small hand reaches up for her father's firm grip. He picks a coffee berry up from the ground and drops it into her open palm. "This, my little *gushk*," he says, "is a magic bean which is going to pay for your college." The child smiles blithely, without understanding. To her it is simply another seed. Imitating the workers, she uses a twig to dig a hole in the ground in which to bury it. She packs the soil down with her little foot.

Forbidden Well

The child shares many walks with her father as the years go by. He shows her the colorful jungle fowl asleep beneath a bush, and the sambar deer feasting on hibiscus flowers. He points out the tree in which two cobras live. He takes her down to what he calls "the forbidden well," and lectures her on the dangers of playing there. As they enter the next field, her father walks over to her coffee bush - the seed of which she had planted so long ago. "Next year your plant will blossom Gushk!"

Blossoms Shining

But when her coffee bush finally burst into its white flame of scented blossoms she is away at school, on another mountain top. That night in the dorm she dreamt of her childhood home. She inhaled the freshness of the earth which follows a gentle rain, felt the cool shade of the silver oak as she ran along the paths with her little brother. In her dream she saw the young plant; its blossoms shining like crystals after the rain, every branch heavy laden with a sacred fragrance. Today the coffee blossoms bear a ripe, red fruit, ready to be plucked, packaged and sent away. "Little Gushk" has turned unto a young woman, ready and waiting to pack up and go wherever the magic coffee bean may lead her.



Shireen Santosham

PLAYGROUND WORDS

SEVEN YEAR OLD Shireen ran into the playground with her classmate and best friend Lielani. Shireen was new to this tiny lumber town in the heart of Arizona, USA, and was happy in already having a few friends.

The two girls giggled their way to the outskirts of the mob of children, and climbed a great log about half the size of their bodies. Shireen was the first to reach the top, very careful not to soil her new red skirt and fresh ruffle blouse.

It was her first day of second grade at Blue Ridge Elementary School. She peered into the crowd of noisy children and spotted a little girl named Katie Fishel. Katie's golden hair and crystal blue eyes attracted the attention of many of the little boys; Shireen felt a twinge of jealousy. Shireen looked very pretty today, but still felt Katie would always be more beautiful.

Suddenly Shireen's heart began to pound as Randy Spencer walked in her direction. Randy had tousled black hair, deep brown eyes and smooth white skin. She blushed slightly as he came closer, but was overjoyed when he motioned towards her. Then he walked right up to Shireen and asked, almost innocently, "Did you know you're a nigger?"

Shireen murmured, "...no...?"

"What is a 'nigger'?" she asked herself, baffled by the words of her puppy love.

Lielani did not know what this word meant either. The two girls then laughed at the strange word, and then became bored with climbing on the great log. They decided to congregate at the swing set. And, as they began to fly through the air together, they both threw their back their heads in laughter.



Ruchi Bhimani

January 9th, 1994

**Around 10 PM traveling in a bus from Coimbatore to
Kodaikanal**

“The beginning of another long semester at school; the end of a vacation that seems so short, finished so fast. Both these events were totally uninvited, and yet each one of us wanted to get back to school, only to get over with another interminable semester, at the end of which we could ride down the same *ghats* home.

“Everyone had had a long day and the bus was full of sleepy heads falling over each other's shoulders. Lost in thought, I was unable to sleep. We had just begun climbing the *ghats* and although it was getting colder, I opened my window to gaze at the night sky, and the stars which grew clearer as we rose higher.

“What a sight! A myriad of them all scattered in the dark velvet of the night. The redolent smell of the *rajnigandha* trees on the mountainside reminded me of the aroma that often greeted me when I made frequent mid-night visits to the small garden we have near our home. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath and I slowly felt the fatigue drain from every part of my body, and as an after-thought, maybe it wasn't all that bad getting back to Kodai - at least the process was celestial!

“Although the wind blew in my face, I felt a certain warmth in the glow of the stars. Although they were so far away, I felt I was one of them, I could share their divinity and serenity. I devoured the beauty in the sky which had captured my eyes as well as my heart. I examined each star as though it was

an individual, beautiful in itself and independent of the others.

‘As I was watching, my eyes met with the twinkly eyes of a star far off in the galaxy. At once I knew that it was a special star, that it was meant for me, and that it knew and understood me. I felt friendship and love.

“As I continued to gaze at what I had now come to call "my star", I saw it move. Incredibly, it advanced towards a star directly north of it. The sight was exhilarating. . . My gaze was fixed on the star that continued to move calmly on. I saw the two stars unite and they seemed to glow in a light of love and happiness. The warmth of the stars touched my heart, which seemed to bow down in respect of this heavenly phenomenon.

“I wished the moment would last forever and the light of the star would shine eternally. As soon as these thoughts entered my mind, I wished they hadn't. The road became bumpy and I was jerked on to a sleeping friend. Startled and fearful that I might lose "my star" I quickly returned to my original position to see it again.

“But fate had it that the pleasure be but momentary, and I saw that I had lost my star. I looked through the sky in vain, my searching eyes scrutinizing the horizons, but my efforts were futile. . . I felt a fool. . .”

“It was the end. A beautiful vision was lost; a cherished memory treasured; and a wonderful new friendship in the stars was found and would be there to last forever.”





WHAT IF she *is* his teacher? All respect and reverence are her due. But for little Prem it is only fear that forces him to respect her. It was she who had first taught his tender finger to grip the chalk; it was she, who had taught him the alphabet, to ensure for him "a bright future". She is a woman just like his mother in appearance but somehow different. There is no love or affection in this teacher, nor does she ever give him a hug like his mother does. To Prem this teacher is a confounded creature always babbling of his future.

What does Prem know of his future anyway? To him the past meant the Science class which he had to put up with in the last period. And the Present meant the maths class in which he is now physically present. The future to him is just the next hour in which he will do English language.. It is this future that Prem is most worried about. How is he going to tolerate this woman, the so called teacher?

The hall door opens with a creak. Is that She? His heart beats a rapid a tattoo. She walks towards his classroom. Left, right, left — sounds of her goose stepping. All his companions get up and show their respect. So does Prem with a fear and a tear.

Poor Prem never learnt to question her except when there was a doubt in the lesson taught. But today unless he sets his reasons clear to the teacher, she for sure will bash him till he loses his energy to cry.

Here she is! Just in front of him! What a harsh look on her face! Prem understood that he should stand up. He stood up.

"Where had you disappeared for ten days, you devil?"

". . . Miss. . . I'm sorry Miss. . . my. . . my mum. . ."

"Speak! You wicked. . ."

". . ."

Wicked! Wicked Prem! The word is certainly too big for Prem to catch the meaning, but he does know that he does not deserve it. Poor Prem for 'Wicked Prem', in her words, kept mum for he could not speak of his helplessness in saving the life of his hospitalized dear and beloved mother.

"Speak!"

Tears rolled on . . .

Deepa Ramchandran & Manasi Tirodkar

FOR WHOM THE SCHOOL BELL TOLLS



AS I FADE slowly, but surely into the dungeons of depression, my eyes close, my nose runs, and the mucus flows. I cough, spitting out the phlegm of existence. Is that blood I see? Nah! Just bacteria. Biscuit? No, Kentucky Fried Chicken. My bowel movements have been bothering me. My depression deepens. And the sky darkens. Ahhhh! The clouds gather in a menacing mass. The storm deepens my insanity. The fool is hanged. I renounce the blessed face. I renounce the voice. There are no eyes in Death's Other Kingdom. The Horror! The Horror! I measure out my life with coffee spoons. I have a breadcrumb on my nose. Get it off! Get it off! My life is over. Help. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. And God said, "Let there be light." And there was darkness of the soul. And the Valkyries ride the skies under a red moon. Threadbare is coming. Orcs! Goblins! I smell egg. Hissssss! The Ring. The Elfstones of Shannara. Cucumber, tomato, chutney sandwiches. PBJ's. Custard and Cheese. Let copulation thrive! What? I cannot conceive you! You no good. . . The light shines at the end of the tunnel! I see the light. Reach out and grab it. The infirm glory of the positive hour.

I'm back! Oh God I'm back!

HAVE MERCY . . .

(References: *King Lear*, *Ash Wednesday*, *The Hollow Men*, *The Heart of Darkness*, *Dragon Song*, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Elfstones of Shannara*, and the *Holy Bible*.)

Danica Sullova

Where Am I

(The Cruci-Fiction)

IT WAS LIKE a crucifixion. But instead of people milling, there were crosses, pluses, minuses, rectangles, triangles and geometrical equations dancing all around me. I was standing in the middle of a network of segments representing railway lines, except that no trains were on their way. The music was low, sad and offering no hope. It was touching my heart directly as though nails were being driven in.

"Have I died? Am I in Hell?" I accounted for all possible possibilities and tried to scream.

Instead of trees, square roots stood firmly on the ground, and two kinds of birds, Xs and Ys, were flying in my vicinity. They smiled with the sweetest and slyest smile I had ever seen. They had no eyes. None of them sang. I wanted to look round but my head would not obey. My hands began to sweat.

Logarithmic equations and formulas, leaders of this scary equipage approached me as portentous spirits with sly smiles. I opened my mouth to scream however no sound came out at all, and the spirits danced around me.

I could not move, my cheeks were burning with indignation. My head was hurting, I

wanted to run, run to any direction, to any place, to any time, but NOW.

$\alpha\upsilon\delta$ Ω and other Greek letters moved to their own triangle in which they danced. Sometimes the Roman letters A, B, or C jumped into their area as if to name a vertex of this triangle. None of them made a sound, while the monotonous frightening music droned on.

Unequal signs, soldiers, were standing in two rows behind the circle and the triangle, in which these monsters danced. They wore a full look of hatred, ready to attack me at any time with their swords, the equal signs. My heart beat quickened.

Of course, I couldn't think straight, for the buzzing in my head. The languid slow tones of music and the low voices of my keepers were everywhere.

I could never escape.

On and on, my strange keepers kept dancing and smiling absently at me. My breath became irregular as I tried to concentrate on their motion. I recognized a huge octagon rolling on its sides towards me. Other shapes were coming closer too.

"Whatever is going to happen, let it come fast," I muttered. The music was lowered to a deeper pitch. Somewhere from afar I heard the dead sounds of drums.

Now the octagon was right up next to me. It disconnected one of its segments and its arms reached out for me. Suddenly my name was called. Awakening, I thought, "I've heard that voice before..."±

S. Caroline J. Padma

தெரும ஸ்ரீ நம்மா

REVERIE

THE RING OF THE ALARM CLOCK woke Roshni from her dreams. It was five o'clock. The sun's rays hadn't yet reached the window of her neatly furnished room. The cold morning and the cosy bed made her waking up extremely difficult. She buried her head in the soft pillows and pulled the velvet blankets over her. She heard her mother calling and chiding Roshni for her laziness. Suddenly she got up with a start. It was the first day of her exams.

♂ ♀ ≡ &

Freshening up, she sat down, head bent over a book of Literary Criticism. The future stood blank before her. She wondered what Literary Criticism had to do with life. It had no relevance to her future plans. Most of her friends and relatives were into career oriented courses, sure of independent professions. Roshni's parents were doctors. Her parents had little time to devote to her and she suffered. Being an only child the pleasures and pains of loneliness were hers.

☿ ♀ ♂ ♀

Roshni held her book up tight for she was losing control. Sleep always seemed to come at the most unwanted moments. Her eyes moved over the dispersed words but her mind yearned for ventilation. She suddenly thought of her friends who had talked about their novel experiences in class. They had spoken proudly about their adventures on the city buses, about how they had gotten off the buses without buying tickets, about the comments that they had received from boys or about their latest visits to the films. Roshni lent eager ears to their conversations. She went by car to college, escorted by the driver. She saw the outer world only through the car windows. How she wished she could be like her friends! But nothing could be done about that. This was her final year at college and soon, after her studies she would be married to a Business Executive from Chicago. Marriage was the last word in her dictionary of desires. Roshni's parents merely wanted her to pursue her studies so that she could boast of at least one degree.

continued ➤

Reveries of the past and the future flooded into her mind. A cold hand touched Roshini's back, instantly returning her mind to the present. It was Kokila, the maid servant, who had come to remind her of breakfast. Kokila added that Roshini's parents had left for the hospital and that they would be back late that evening. This was not new. The household affairs were handled by Kokila and it was she who spent more time with Roshini than did her parents.

"I've got to be a good mother to my child," she told herself and got up from the study table. She looked at the clock. She was already late. Time would not wait for her to finish her musings. The sun's rays touched her as she hastened towards the window, bringing a kind of warmth that she had never experienced before. Something deep in her mind said that she was going to be happy. Her eyes shone with joy and optimism. "I will surely be an attentive mother to my child," she said in an assured tone as she left her room.



L. Vinoth Kumar

THE WICKET

Happy

On the move again, creaking.

A year of silence broken.

Here you are dimpled feet to rock to and fro.

It has been a year, things have changed.

For me, except for the rust

and those happy moments of being worked on,

I remain the same,

standing still. It's the locks again.

For now, only erect logs and a long pathway

For cold company.

Boudhayan Sen

THE RETURN

“I had complained about Cardiff”

The return to Kalyani
took place in a haze
"Life upon life,
memory piled upon memory."

This town is hot and dusty
retired armymen haggle in the vegetable stalls
Rickshaws and bicycles weave past hawkers' cries
Or trundle down quiet potters lanes
leaving their tracks in the roadside muck
under the shifting shadows of the age old *neems*.

At home stodgy relatives decked out in white pyjamas
tell me when and how and what to do
and I must do it

I had complained about Cardiff,
“Too cold, too wet. . . and grey!”
here bright sunshine in the garden, on the porch on the roof
calls for glasses of iced lemonade to combat the enemy.
(In my heart it is still cold and grey.)

Returning this time
I have learned much
of myself, to master my emotions
Ensconced in this,
Our very own Bengali world.

Buku Sarkar

I walk with closed eyes
The place memorized,
every bend every
curve of its body
overwhelms me with feeling.

It is the only place
I'm comfortable
to be lost.

•

Here she stands, forever,
the eternal Mother
never to protest never to speak, but only to endure.
How shall I know what she feels?
How shall I understand?

Through her shining eyes
the red soil that covers the jewel
I witness drops of tears falling
for each soul that departs.

For over three hundred years
she has stood and endured.
How shall I understand what she feels?
How shall I know what she knows?

How will I explain
these drops of water soaking me?
I don't know from where they come
as I leave forever the shadowed lands
never to return to the red soil that protects the jewel.

•

And through my eyes of a lover
the dusky street
tattered clothes,
the clanging of aluminum vessels,
empty.

Still I see so much through the busy hubbub
the salty tears of Mother.
The cracked palms in front of a window,
empty.

And through the smoky curtain
the precious eyes
that glitter in the scorching sun
But the nagging voices of the vendors
trying to sell their souls
still ring through the hollow air,
listen!

•

Through the lovers eyes:
the palace stands erect
for over three hundred years,
Mother's pride
mingled with the red soil
looks down at her children,
laughing.

The cracked pavements
reveal Mother's womb
the lost planet
was always there
(did you ever bother to look?)
And through the eyes of the lover
the clothes unrepairable
lay tattered on the dusky streets,
empty.

Listen!
Mother's voice calls out
through the crevices
her arms outstretched
my fingers straining
at our last touch
never to meet again.

Anuradha Kumar

SANCTUARY

I dreamt of you, your spreading boughs, last night,
My home.
I search for them now; but where they had been,
Is a silence, a void of pain.

*You wedge yourself into my dreams
swelling until you are all:*

I walk barefoot towards where you stood,
My steps muffled by the carpet of moss.

A sharp fragment -
Glass in my path - is cutting me,
Piercing me, pulling me closer to *now*.

Your childlike boughs, supple and soft
Play with the air
Sweet droplets hang from your branches.
The plump fruit that tastes of home...
(You bear none now.)

Holding onto your strong body
Balancing myself in your limbs
I climb into your branches
You lift me on high
Cradle me in your arms
Quelling my angers and fears
I am home.

Ripe cheeks of flesh fall to the ground
Mynahs peck at it, satiating their hunger
The tenderness flows into the soil, refreshing.
This is my home.

You bear no fruit now.
Who will pluck your fruit with infinite care
And love the sweet gift
The shelter you gave?

Now a pile of crude stones, awaiting construction
crushes your soul,

Your roots will support
a shopping complex
A wound inflicted on all who had known
the intimacy of
your sanctuary.

My heart has flown
But stays embedded in your memory
tangible in my dreams,
You visit momentarily

Like a mist drifting onward, never ceasing to exist
Slipping through my hair, stroking my cheek
comforting me,
Leading me home.

Chiki

*I would like an empty house with wooden floors. I would like a cat, cold
impersonal selfish, she would lie down flat, but never on my feet*

No flies, lizards, roaches, mouse. Maybe no man.

*I would like silence, sunlight, no emotion. Words - they may make sense,
but what if they don't?*

*Often music, always stars, views and a mirror. I'll walk, don't need cars,
and I shall sleep soundly. I will be an island. I will fly away. Bury my head
in the sand, and sometimes sing . . . badly.*





MOTHER, WHERE ARE YOU?

AS THE CAR CAME up the drive Jalaja saw the old house extending out like the grated fingers of an old maid's hand. Clinging to the earth as though afraid of being blown away in the fierce winds; Chellamma, the house-maid stood by the door, a lone sentinel. She took Jalaja's bags from her and said apologetically, "It was all so sudden." Pushing open the half shut door, she continued, "That's why Reghu came to you with the news." Jalaja made a little place for herself on the couch amidst a lot of unread newspapers. The house was very still, and the chimes of the old clock seemed to reverberate from the very foundations. Outside on the road fishermen hawked their smelly wares on bicycles. She watched them as they became smaller and smaller on the horizon wailing "Meenu Meenai", "Meenu Meenai" again and again, the sounds rising and falling, wave-like.

Ever since her mother had accidentally drowned in the river behind this house, Grandma had been to Jalaja her mother, her home, her refuge, her confidante, her solace, her everything. Now with Grandma in the hospital fighting for her life, Jalaja felt she didn't belong there anymore - anywhere any more. Sitting there, she thought she saw a face jeering at her from the varnished ceiling boards. She decided to take a walk outside.

She walked over to her favorite spot behind the house, by the river. The place she and her mother had so often played in... The

place in which her mother was last seen alive. In the next *parambu* she saw the mad Bhanu talking to the chickens. The smoky old bathroom outside still smelled faintly of Grandma's special herbal oils and Pears soap. Jalaja walked away fast.

Sitting on the cold stone steps Jalaja let her feet fall into the water. *She realized that soon there would be no one to miss her anymore.* She winced while the little fish picked at the scab on her knee from a recent fall.

As a child she had once had a badly scraped elbow and her mother had told her that the little fish would eat up all the festering parts and help the wound heal quickly. She had kicked and screamed when her mother held her elbow in the water. Today the hurt was in her heart but there was no one, Mother or Grandma, to hold her in the water this time. Not that any fish could clear this wound or help to heal her whole again. She longed to feel her Mother's gentle hands again on her forehead caressing away her frowns. She remembered the sparkle of the diamond ring on her third finger. As a child, she had always been fascinated by the tiny beams of light emanating from it.

Suddenly she realized she was looking at the ring shining through the water. She watched agape as she saw her mother smiling at her, teeth glistening in the sun, beckoning her to join her, arms outstretched. Wanting to wrap her in a warm embrace Jalaja arose and slipped into the waiting arms of her mother.

The little fish swam around looking for something to eat.

Savitri Monga



CICADA (for my father)

Looking around at the green chiaroscuro
and scattered litter,
completely "out of it,"
I trip, and lunge forward
on a stunted oak.

Leaves crunch in my ears
fallen tree-trunks extend perpendicular
they've touched and never meet again;
I sit on the lower of the two,

in my rhapsody of disturbance
the sound of cicadas intensifying
(I no longer hear myself think)
one wrong move and I will bruise again
(from "loosened attitudes"?)

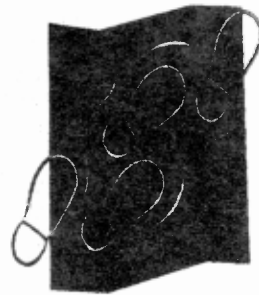
"America's-brought-this-change-in-you-
america's-brought-this-change-in-you-America's-
brought-this-change-in . . .
you," the cicadas say.

Awakening from a dream, I find comfort
thinking of my father
my small feet fit in his large shoes
I reach out to call him
he too had heard the cicadas
in their blinding rhythms,

Yet I wonder if he would listen now
or else he is integrated
like leaves into the common ground.

"America-has-brought-this-change-in-you-America-
has brought-this-change-in-you-America-has-
brought-this-change-in . . .
you."

I searched ahead
A butterfly grazes my cheek
rays of light filter through
the morning mist, as I inhale the clean cold air
surrounded by the reverberations
and the friction of the sounds
I walk on.



L Persis Daffodile

SHE TAUGHT ME.

I watched her,
Head inclined on a side,
Tousled hair under her chin,
Baby fingers clutching unsteadily,
Pencil in hand, crawling on paper.
"She is your sister," I was told.
She was a perfect product of the earth
But unaffected by time and future.
She was to me at that moment
The representative of the life I wanted to live.
Yet I did not love her,
I could not love.
To me she was the one who had stolen
My Parents affection from me
I know she wasn't to blame for what wasn't,
But I wanted to feel that way.
My seclusion; , my loneliness,
I justified through her.
She tugged at my skirt,
and held up the paper.
"I wrote this for you, *Ka*"
A, B, C, D. . . the first letters she'd learnt.
Her clear eyes stung me.
I knew then what love was.
She, my baby sister taught me.

Robby Jerks

WORLDS

A road, a journey
(running along, it was like a marathon)
ungle-like, dense
impenetrable
mysterious
and then - lunch.

Now - ordinary
a writer
intruding
half - seen, like
my friendships

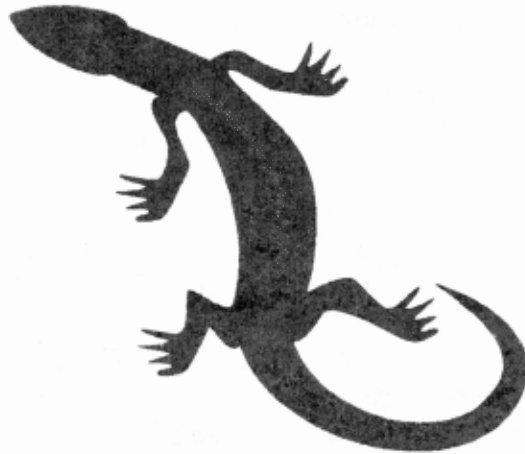
Then it was,
now the vaulted branches
seem as twigs set for a fire
ordinary
usual
ominous?

Half-seen
behind the pine-needles, the
branches. The body
the page - movement, words.
Is she writing? (Dare I ask?)
. . . who disturbs my disturbed reflections.

Like half-seen truths ,
friends.

These woods too small, empty, stark.
Or is it me? Body grown older - her! - wiser.

Memories of Kodai lie sweet, thick, below my intellect. Threatening, half -seen
A familiar bed is supposed to be comfortable warm, safe
Mine is crows fighting; disturbance, distraction,
Go
Away.



Ruchi Bhimani

TABLE CONNECTION



Characters

An insecure husband.....JOE
His wife.....SUE
An apologetic.....CARPENTER

Performed on September 30, 1994 in the Kodaikanal Missionary Union Hall of Kodaikanal International School with the following cast:)

JOE.....Sid Murlidhar
SUE.....Zendyn Mehta
CARPENTER.....Ruchi Bhimani

(The curtains open on a living room. A table stage right, a sofa/couch centre stage, and a carpet in front of the couch on the floor. Exit door stage left. JOE enters stage right looking constipated, he needs to go to the toilet. He goes up to the table for support and just stands there, seemingly unable to move.)

JOE: *(Addressing himself, as if he were talking to a non-existent persona.)*
Wrong timing! My watch doesn't say its time for you to come as yet, not for another hour at least. Damn you! Look here, now - lets make a compromise. You can come half an hour early, but, but not this early. You've come practically two hours early. Tell you what, I'll set the alarm clock and you can come when it rings.

(JOE continues mumbling to himself. SUE enters stage right with a large pile of laundry in her hands.)

SUE: Joe, the laundry is here. Get on with it. Put on all the clothes while they are still clean. I don't want to have to put them away in the wardrobe. You know how they get soiled. *(Pause)* Joe! Joe, what are you up to? Joe, how many times have I told you? - If you've got to go, you've got to go! You can't stand there making your "negotiations". You're too passive - too much of a peacemaker.

JOE: But, this has been happening too often Sue, and I'm going to put an end to it. This coming too early - I can't handle it. *(Ponders momentarily)* Maybe if we set all the clocks back an hour, he might come on time.

SUE: I don't give a s**t how you do what you've got to with your s**t, just do it and get it over with. I will not allow you to do it all over the floor, Joe. I just finished sweeping last week's mess under the carpet, and I just don't feel like doing it this week all over again. Go under the goddamn table and do your thing, Joe. Here's your book and here's the alarm clock, so your foot doesn't go to sleep.

(JOE goes under the table armed with a book, a roll of toilet paper and the alarm clock that SUE had given him. He sits there cross legged and seems relieved immediately. He opens the book to a certain page he was looking for and then places it next to him face down. All the while he is under the table he continually flips the page and puts the book back down. SUE is meanwhile generally cleaning up the room and setting everything right. She is very finical. She may be seen building something like a house of cards. At one point she lifts up the carpet and puts some trash under there.)

JOE: Aaah...You know, Sue? -- there's nothing like relieving oneself.

SUE: Uh-huh.

JOE: And I've been wanting to go for such a long time too.

SUE: Hmm...

JOE: Sue, you know this book is really interesting. *(He flips a page.)*

SUE: Hmm.

JOE: Its so good, I think I'm going to finish it in no time. *(Flips another page. Reflects and takes the clock and places it outside under the table.)* No time! *(He seems satisfies with himself. Pause)* Have you ever noticed how time passes so quickly when you're busy? When you're doing something you enjoy? The hands seem to move at the speed of lightning. *(Flips a page.)* Then suddenly you're left with no time. Time kind of runs out on you...or maybe you chase it away *(Pause)* But it goes away for sure. Leaving you...kind of alone. *(Seems dismal. Pause)* But that's okay. 'Cause I've got Woody here. . .*(Pats the top of the table.)* She'll never leave me...Dammed, I'll never leave her. You're my pal, aren't you? Oh, I could do anything for you, I swear. Right, Sue? *(No response.)* Sue? Sue, are you listening?

SUE: *(irritated and jealous)* You can bet your b*lls I'm listening. And I usually don't have a choice in the matter, do I? You just go on yapping away sitting there *(sarcastically)* under Miss Woody, hoping the whole world will pass you by. How many times have I told you -- don't run away under that table of yours every time you have to face something. It doesn't make anything better, Joe. And it just doesn't work that way. One day the whole world will pass you by and then you'll be sorry -- you will be all alone. You won't even have time left for yourself, for your books, for your bowels. In fact, time will be the first one to pass you by. *(More calmer now)* I love you, Joe. I don't want to pass you by. I want to be with you,

by your side wherever you are. But you're so hung up on yourself. I never really know what you're thinking -- you and that goddamn table. You seem to spend your life there. *(Pause)* Joey, come out of the closet sometimes. *(Smiles to herself)* Come out from under the table sometimes. *(Goes to the table and holds out her hand for him. He comes out from under the table. Still scared, but going to her for security. Hold hands and stand on the carpet. About to kiss, when there is a loud banging on the door, stage left. JOE, shaken and scared, holds onto SUE for security again. CARPENTER enters without SUE or JOE having answered.)*

CARPENTER: *(Realizing he is interrupting an intimate moment)* Whoops! *(Exits; closes door and knocks again. SUE goes over and opens door.)* Sorry. Morning, Missus - Er. Sorry. . . I've come to fix the table legs. . . you called about it. . . said they were kind of crooked. . . Um. . . I know I'm kind of late - Sorry. . . Er. . . woke up on the wrong side of the table, sorry, bed! . . this morning.

(JOE is intrigued. He sees in the CARPENTER a greater insecurity. He walks towards him slowly and shakes his hand.)

JOE: You're going to work on the table, are you?

CARP: Ya! It isn't my fault -- you see Missus Sue called me and. . .

JOE: To fix it?

(SUE cuts in with some courtesy.)

SUE: You will have coffee I presume?

CARP: *(Nods to SUE)* Me? *(Pause)* Well, okay. . . I guess. . . if its no hassle. . . but you don't have to, you know. . .

(SUE has exited by now)

JOE: Those your tools?

CARP: Uh-huh (*Nodding*)

JOE: (*Takes the tools from CARP, puts his arm around him and takes him into the room.*) Your tools pretty sharp, huh?

CARP: Sorry. They weren't meant to be, but you see. . .

JOE: (*Cuts in*) See, buddy! That's my baby there you're going to work on. Woody -- she's a beauty. I'm trusting you fellow. I don't want no bloodshed in my living room -- as you can see, it's a place to live, not die. You put her on anesthesia or something, but she shouldn't feel a thing -- no pain, you hear that brother?

CARP: Sorry!

JOE: So, have you got all the anesthetic material. (*CARP nods negatively vigorously.*) A-ha! See, now there you have a reason to apologise.

CARP: Oh, I'm really sorry. . .

JOE: (*Exasperated*) This is just not going to work, Mr. Carpenter. We have to get beyond this apologising business we've gotten into -- sorry, you've gotten us into. We have to try and make a connection here. (*Reflects momentarily.*) Sue! Sue, get me some rope please. I need to make a connection here. (*Walks around the carpenter, who is baffled, examining him head to toe.*) Now, how are we going to do this? Any ideas?

CARP: Sorry. . .I'm not a great thinker, you see. . .

JOE: I tell you what - you stop apologising first.

CARP: Me? I apologise? *(Pause. JOE nods.)* I do? Do I? *(JOE is still nodding.)* Oh, Sorry.

JOE: *(Exasperated)* Yeah! Whatever.

(SUE enters with a small length of rope.)

SUE: Here, Joe. Thats the last bit left. Go easy on it, okay? *(She is close to him now and whispers in his ear in a very suggestive manner)* We might not have any left to make a connection when we REALLY need to. You know what I mean?

(SUE exits. JOE looks at the rope momentarily and decidedly flings it around his neck like a scarf.)

JOE: Right! So, here we are. You, me and. . .and Woody. *(Goes up to the carpenter and puts his arm around him.)* We have so much in common, Mr. Carpenter. . . *(CARP is about to cut in with another "sorry").* . .and don't apologise about it. This table is my best friend, the tool box is your best friend. No one else would probably ever understand us.

(SUE calls from stage right.)

SUE: Joe. . .

JOE: Especially her. She never understands me and that's okay too, because I got someone who does understand me - you!

SUE: Joe! How much sugar do you want in your coffee?

JOE: Coffee!? Coffee is so...so mundane. *(Goes up to the table)* My poor little table is sick of having coffee rings on her smooth mahogany surface. But, she wouldn't understand that, she wouldn't be able to understand that. But, then I guess it takes all types...you, me, the table, Sue, everyone. But, I can't handle it. I don't like it here. I want my own world, with you. Will you come with me? It will be wonderful, I promise.

SUE: Joe! Joe! Are you there? Did you hear me? Where are you Joe?

JOE: Let's go! Before she comes. Hurry. *(Pause.)* Bring your tool box along. You'll be cosy. *(They walk towards the table. JOE stops. Takes the rope off from around his neck and puts it under the carpet.)* I won't be needing this there. *(Smiles)*

(JOE and CARP go under the table and sit there, frozen. SUE enters.)

SUE: Where are you, Joe? *(Looks around the room. Then looks at the table and sees them there. They can't see her and it doesn't seem as though she can make a connection with them, although she tries.)* Joe! Joe! *(She is sad. She takes off her belt and puts it around the leg of the table and sits next to the table cross legged with her head resting upon it.)*



Savitri Monga

FALLING FROM DIMENSION X

Perched in a cloud of security comfort and warmth
I looked down.

There was not enough light to see, but it was dark
enough to hide the truth.

I saw hands. I recognised them. They had held my
breasts in a firm demanding grip never wanting to
let go. But now the hands were too far away for me
to touch.

I saw a face. It resembled a face that was dwelling
within me. I looked into its eyes and did not see
my reflection in them.

Had I written this a week earlier it might have
been a happier one.

Dimension X: a world created by two bodies, one
heart, two minds and one soul. Lucky to experience
it, you are unlucky to get too wrapped up in it.

After all, what are clouds but bodies of water
vapour?

Then I felt the sky clearing up and my cloud
disintegrating. I was free...but not liberated. I
was falling, falling from Dimension X.



Arun Chadda

THE SIMPLICITY OF BEAUTY

As the darkness of the night fades away into shattered time the orb of life begins to shower it's blessings upon us. The sweet misery begins in a perpetual cycle which is seldom understood by those who try and seek it. As rays of light tear through the sky they highlight the face of the one nearest to my heart. She reflects the joy of life in her smile. Her hair flows across her shoulders sparkling with dew in sunlight. My mind wanders to a thousand destinations in search of comparisons to her beauty, the quest seems endless.

In her eyes I see the sorrows, the wounds of love (wounds which they say only time can heal). The mist rolls in, the clouds momentarily kiss the earth. As she stands beside me my happiness is a masquerade for the pain beneath, the tracks of my tears remain invisible.

Leaving Song.

The world is at your feet,
What about your heart?

As the days come to an end,
Once again, the times they are a changin'

And once again I have lost my way.
While the words of poets fall,

Heavier than white rose petals
Blinding my inner vision.

I realise I am walking alone,
Clenching hands of only strangers

Holding onto shining diamonds
That are little more than stone.

We live in a world of shadows
Torn apart by rays of light.

The truth lays in-between us
Seldom explored, seldom understood.

Trying to drown,
Escape deep under the blue sea of imagination

Only to be washed up onto shore
And drowned once more in (the sea of) reality.

Fragments of deception and joy
Etched into memories.

"As with dreams,
in reality nothing is quite what it seems."

Wishing the hands of time forward
we end up pleading with them to stop.

So, take my hand right now
and walk with me into this horizon,

We each strive through the life,
The end uncertain.

So, be my love, my desire,
destination unknown;

Or...is the world still at your feet? ☞

(SIMPLICITY OF BEAUTY, CONTINUED)

The end dawns. The sky sheds perfect drops. My soul speaks,
my mind won't understand. Senseless words on a meaningless
piece of paper. The image of you forever.

The truth lies. Love. . . wine poured into an eternal glass,
rejected. A smile touches your lips eternity reduced to broken
fragments in the mind. I was in control till destiny, laughing,
smacked me across the face. Yesterday is a framed picture
untouchable. Falling through thin ice of deception I remain
frozen isolated. . . still thinking of you. Tears you shed beside
me. The language of your eyes, my last resort.

The dying rays of sunlight paint the land red. Music fills the air.
Silence fills in for broken feelings. The sun drowns behind the
painted hills, the ripples calm. The moon sparkles in the solid
waters. The pain penetrates no deeper than a solitary tear.

Time has its way, unstoppable. If only love were as strong. God's
black paintbrush begins its work. My glass is emptied. Night
makes love to day as the immaculate rays caress you. A vision
beyond my reach.



Adnan Alam

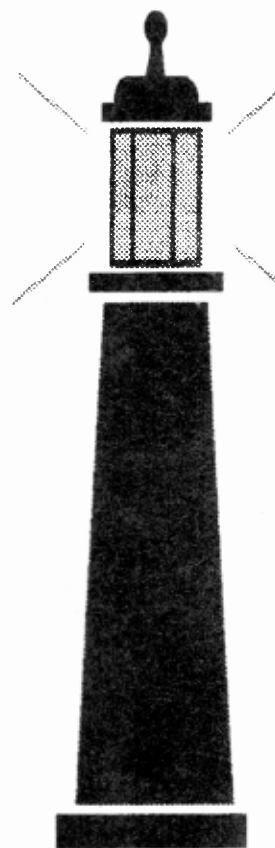
THE BEACON BURNS DIMLY ACROSS THE PACIFIC.

Recollections of the smile twinkle and flicker
In the torrent of the erupting mind.
Oh why,
Why must I...

Must I not?
Inaction cuts deeper
Than the doctor's scalpel.
Dare I take the step
And walk on ice?

The beacon burns dimly across the Pacific.
Hear the call, hear the cry,
What if I fall? What if I die?
So far and so close.
An oasis or a mirage?
Unable to forget,
Unable to act.
The senses play games
The mind can't comprehend.

To find you amongst a thousand pieces,
Or nothing among a thousand yours.
Implode my entrails.
If all is lost,
Let nothing come of nothing,
For here lies one
Who could not be



FRIENDSHIP

The shells of long ago
starfish and urchins
drift in the air of rewound visions
(profound bonds of affinity...)
The sound of roaring waves
Excited children, reckless faces
spattering festive color
grinning with the sun
The redolence of laughter engulfs Malabar.

Another time
Another place
Another life
I recline
amongst the prancing jeering
spirits of the graveyard

Rains chastise me under a dead moon
I am bereaved, consoled
for all that is faded or vanished

The shoreline
hands in hands
wet
but warm
in the cold waters
a cove of promises
togetherness
innocence mingled with oblivion
Another time,
Another place

Now I am like a creeping beetle, lost in
an aeroplane
swallowed up in a pressure chamber, a vacuum
nauseating, suffocating.

Those colorful shells, so far, far away.

The sun had set forever
and from behind the veil of
darkness was no hope of even hope

But like a miracle the sun rises
on the wild green ocean
and the dewdrop radiant on an orange leaf
bats and crickets on either side of me screech
and human voices scream
drag me out
from the hole in which I dream

The shells
of that shoreline will stay
encased in a satin scarf in a silver box
With the sun
realization dawns.
We are
forever together
everywhere I go
On white clouds over the sea
That brush away tears
and make my heart smile.



Jennifer Garrison

APART

Breaking hands inside my prison
Beating myself black and blue
There are tears in the rainfall
And up where they all know your name
They still
Wait on me

* * * *

Get on Goddamn it
The carousel has begun
Pastel horse races
And ecstatic oil faces
disappear
Into a whirlwind of circus music.
The fading summer light from a setting sun
makes us look translucent...
sometimes.

When I am alone
I dream of you
Laughing while the years race
down
your
face

While I stand beside,
Smiling silently with pride.
Do you think I'm going crazy?
Are we both crazy?
Or did we make each other up
To tell ourselves
The things I try to tell myself
I can't tell myself
Apart

Manasi Tirodkar

ONE

One hand: soft, frail,
pink fingernails with spots;
 thin, lean, deficient;
 a small hand, pale inside,
an attractive tan outside.

Another hand: larger, tenuous,
smooth, unworked;
 long fingers, lighter under, darker above;
 uniform nails, recently tended to.

Both hands: in anticipation,
moving, inching closer, touching;
 clasping, tighter, fingers
inseparable, One.



Deepa Ramchandran

BARKA DA ZUA

Barka da zua! The black face greets me with a smile that shows off polished teeth. A stalwart figure against the stark landscape of the *bush*, he wears his *babariga* well. The dust blows. The Harmattan is coming.

There Baba Magadi stands grinning, standing even taller than before as I cough and spit out the particles that clog my throat and blink furiously trying to see.

I blink and there it is. The blood-red *Harmattan Lily* in a land so desolate yet so full of life, harsh yet so accommodating. The sand blows like it owns everything it touches, patches of grass try to stay alive, yearning to survive through these months of Harmattan dryness. The proud lily stands out, reaching towards the skies. The flower that rejoices while the others crumble.

I rub my eyes, I blink. There Baba is again. I peer into his dark face. The angry slashes across his cheek. These signs of his heritage glare back at me, speak of a tradition I learn to accept but do not understand. The wise men say this is to ward off evil spirits. Maybe that is why he smiles a smile that sees me through my days of sadness.

I look into his eyes and see my world. Their blackness reminds me of inky nights, cold as the days are hot. Their sparkle, of stars thrown across the night sky. They make me remember evenings sitting out on the old porch of the big bungalow surrounded by acres of enormous mango trees waiting for the first star to appear.

I smell the rain that falls after *Harmattan*, and see how the plants eagerly soak in every drop. The aroma of rain-soaked earth lingers in the depths of my mind.

But then Baba blinks, and the impressions disappear.

The winds blow harder. The sands grow angrier. My eyes grow sore. Suddenly, as they had begun, the winds stop. I clear my eyes. My smiling friend has disappeared with the wind...

The land is wrenched from beneath me. I am falling. Caught by an open palm, I am in a world apart.

Where the big bungalow with acres of green once stood is an apartment building. I cannot see the arid land. Where the *bush* once spread, flows now the Bosphorus.

The landscape is now the seven rolling hills packed with houses. Trucks rush to and fro, the I-20 filled with beeping cars, why has quiet been replaced by chaos?

I focus back to the spot where my friend had stood. There is a man there with a gray business suit, cigarette in hand and yellow teeth. Disgusted, I look past him. Look for anything that reminds me of what I have lost. Only there is nothing.

Am I not in this city steeped in history? Each hill has its own story to tell. Romans, Ottomans, Seljiks, Trojans. Even an empire that had its minute of glory. New stories which unfold as I walk up the cobbled roads that remain untouched by time.

Mosques built over Churches of the Eastern Roman Empire. Plastered mosaics of Christ and the Virgin, conflict between the East and West, beauty of a world I once refused to see.

Yet still I choose the ethereal world within, that stark beautiful world within.

[Note: *Harmattan* is the name of the hot dry season in West Africa.]

Zlatica Sullova

MANY VOICES

Go run with the wind, they say.
Don't let the mind slow you down with sentiment.
Fly faster, faster, fragments of insignificance are left behind.
Overtake eagles: approach the speed of light

But, wait a moment, I say.
Let's stop for just a while.
Let's lie in the sun and close our eyes.
Let's dream and let the mind wander
to lead us into wonderland,

Past memories,
not of what we've missed but what's in us,
what made us the way we are.
Just for a moment, a fragment of a second,
let's fight the omnipotent
time, and slow to a stop.

Open your heart and blow up your soul.
They'll grow the wings of freedom.
Look down and leave the world behind.
you won't fall.



The soft airplane seat is safe,
the strawberry perfume of the airhostess,
reminds you of home.
The Turkish delight served whispers,
"You're getting closer, you're almost there."
Fasten your seat belt

and the smooth landing
becomes the password to yourself.



Stare, gaze at the Black Sea, its everlasting roaring waves
competing with time.
Turn around at the tap on your shoulder
and laugh with your friend.
I beg your pardon, you don't understand?
We don't speak English,
our language has a flavour
of Europe.

The silver hair of my grandmother is softer than all cotton.
As I reach to touch it, slowly it starts to vanish,
till it dissolves as a sugar lump
in my grandfather's tea.

A cloud covers the sun and opens my eyes.
My dream disappears as if a feather of a bird
were blown away from my hand by the wind.

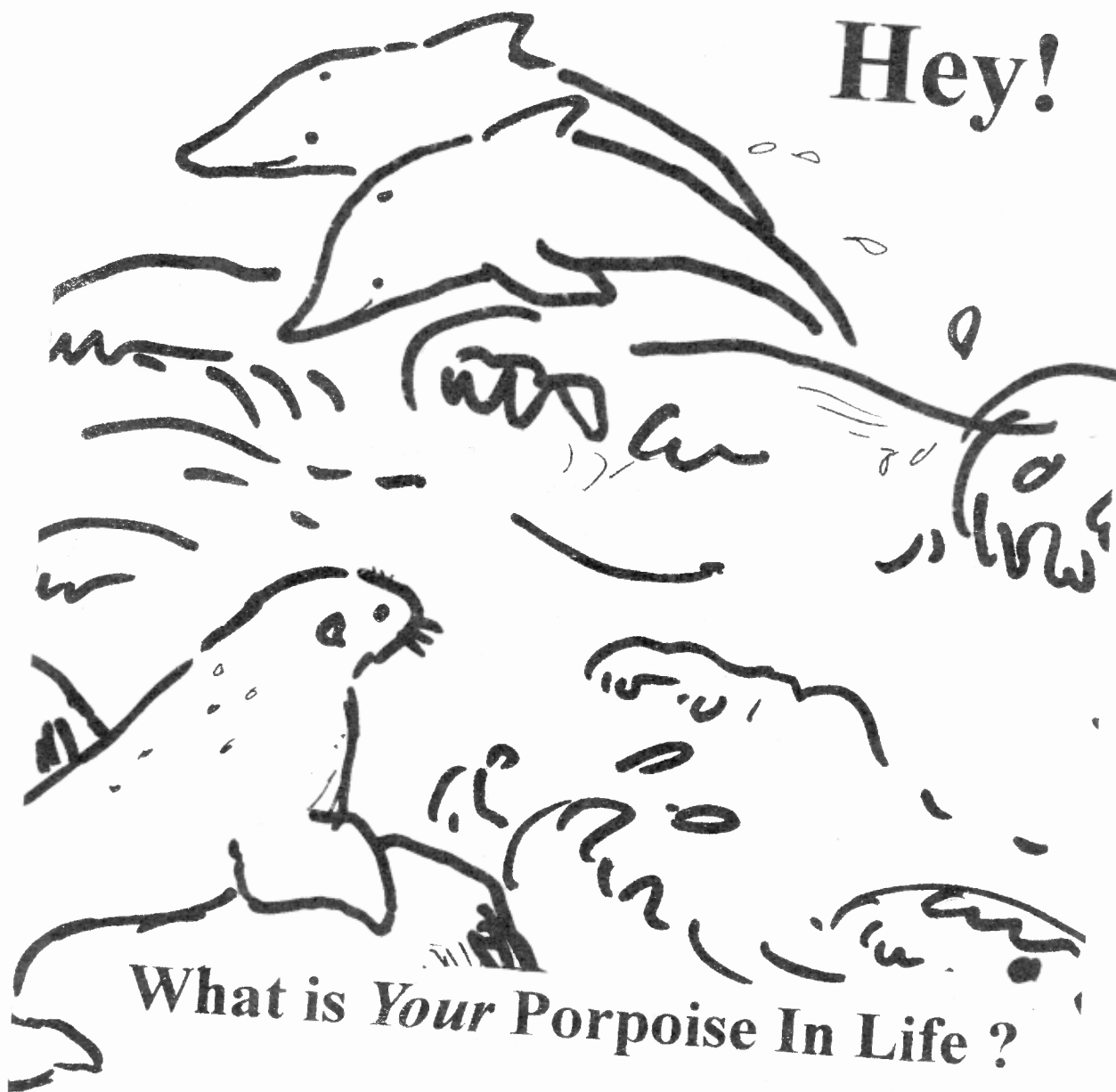


I stare at the sky and my peaceful heart sings
the anthem of my country.

"Stand up, run, catch up with the time,
The future is calling," it shouts.

"I will," I say, (and smile while slowly getting up)
"You're faster, but I won the race."

Hey!



What is *Your* Porpoise In Life ?

Hey!



Every Day Is Earth Day.

Lindsay Coleman

THE LIVES OF PEREGRINE Q.

Cinematic Work in Progress.

[Scene, English parlour.]

The schoolboy on vacation in England reads from his journal at a window as the rain steadily falls. "Mild rain, dark sky, no desire for a rain dance."

Hedge rows of an English country garden. Rainy English garden blended into a visual reverie of an Asian monsoon: native people rushing helter-skelter, tanny legs mud-flecked, the boy breathes deep jungle smells as he continues to read from his journal facing the window.

"Smell, locked in dust. The opposite of dry dust is Spring ice. Melting, it smells the same as the first Indian rain. The snake dust smell brings real rain."

Then again, beyond the watery window, the English laurel, the immaculate pavement, absence of people outside. Auntie steps into the parlour. "Tea?" She asks, he nods, absorbed.

"Strange boy," she thinks, as she leaves to get tea. "hair all mussed, still there's something there perhaps."

Boy reads, "Empirical, Imperial Britain. . ."

[Segue from boys face to country village scene:] A young soldier's harried sweaty face, the scene of a village being destroyed.

Inside a village house a deaf monk chants prayers. Smooth features on

an old face, solemn, deep, a tenderness.

Outside, young soldier careens by, rifle in hand, troubled, mind uprooted by the act of making war. The old monk oblivious of soldier's presence in his village gets up to read the scriptures, goes upstairs searching for the book. He senses death near but he is behind the sun and freedom.

Outside, in the village square, separated from his buddies, the soldier groans and scowls, raises his sense of power and individuality, the rifle with bayonet, the sword.

Inside, the monk takes up his stick to help his aging body back down the narrow stairs, while the soldier enters the house, terrified by his duty, he strikes fear into the family there to extract "important" information.



Coming down the stairs the deaf monk senses the other soul as part of a cosmic whole. Their eyes meet and the young soldier gets an uneasy feeling in his gut. The old monk is unperturbed and begins to chant from the yellowed pages, expressing connection to the whole, to the scene of terror before him, to the family, the village the ravaged countryside to the trees the earth and sky to the stars and gods and the universe.

The young soldier instantly reads his face (and wants to read his mind). He raises his gun. The monk says, quietly, firmly, "...no!"

The soldier wants to kill them all, obliterate their humanity, but blasts the pictures on the walls, the ancestors, the gods, the family memory.

[Segue to:] A church. A young man sits in church, uncomfortable because he thinks the crucified Jesus is staring straight down at him from the wall. His eye wanders, and makes a connection between all the church objects to some part of life: a suggestion that they are even more real than

reality. His eye rests on the back of a lone woman sitting in the pew several rows in front of him. Her shoulders tell him she is lovely. Then he sees the light of God in the afternoon sun as it slants in through the stained glass windows...

[Segue to:] The sudden flashing lights of a disco ball wipes out God with a mixture of blood-pumping sounds stirred up in a minor key. A *disco vampyre* descends into the noise from the naked dark streets, down the black stairwell into the violence of the dance. Breasts vibrating muscles twitching undulating bodies grope with the music. Sensuality and music thrashing out are one. In the daylight all is pale and wan. The disco vampire loves the way humanity preys upon itself in the night with the ascending, descending stages of euphoria. Over in the Viper Room people are doing the hard-core drugs, the designer drugs. No low-class government-approved legal drugs allowed, "keep your caffeine, codeine, and cigarettes outside little boy, this place is for true love."



The disco vampyre kisses Celeste as he enters the drug room. Celeste, distributing his needs...so plain in the daylight (dead almost) she comes alive in the depth of night. The refugees from a million Halloweens applaud him. He takes a shot, a dose, a sniff and becomes one with pumping music.

A monster *D.J.* laughs uproariously while the vampire's heart races to the music, perfect alignment beat to beat...as the music's beat shifts and drags, so does the vampyre's heart and he begins to stumble on the floor and then down some lower steps into darkness, into fear of nothingness, of stoppingness...

[Segue to:] Tuscany landscape. An intelligent-looking peasant-born apprentice artist assists the master, stroking in blades of grass, leaves and flowers, remembering, "the great Leonardo himself was the (illegitimate)

issue of a Florentine notary and a peasant girl."

He says to himself, "this face is really not like this, it could be done much better," but he keeps his brush on the trees. He philosophizes his thoughts on artistic mind, and grappling with art and artifice growing humbler asks, "But then what do *I* know?"

Master enters the studio wishes to go. They ride home in the horse cart and pass by: lovers laughing together in a stack of hay, a rich lord walking with his retinue, the serfs standing to attention with their farming tools. He reflects on the way the rich artist sitting beside him loves to make truth beautiful always. "Sometimes truth is ugly," the apprentice reflects. But he remains obedient, quiet and to himself, a peasant existentialist.



To distract himself he remembers the enchantment of his love's lips, sweet like prunes, his eyes close in the sun as he swims on the flavour of her love.

Arriving at his apartments he hurriedly writes in his notebook, "Humans integrated within art are not only such objects due to self-fascination but actually because we can only flirt with ourselves.

"Humans must come to terms with the fact that our very existence, let alone accomplishments, are insignificant in heavenly importance, therefore, we should be lax enough to let life and generations change. One has a physical life after all, for which other pursuits too are intended...(he looks into his mirror and sees premature greying at the temples and then asks,)...which is more important, the man or his mission?"

[Segue to:] The old village house all freshly painted. The old deaf monk twenty five years earlier, a young aspirant reading a guide to ascetic practice. "When thoughts turn inward, individual becomes extremely physically sensitive. Feels nerves, blood. Desires to experiment: is mind

stronger than body? Walks on fire, reduces pain to neurological responses, worries a bit about loss of function, wonders at importance of body. Takes up tobacco. . .” He murmurs over the old text while the camera pans the house, focusing on objects, his voice then becomes audible again. . .

“Moment of self awareness, light bends inward, objects become sunken, intensity of contact between limbs and ground, the dust the sand the stones the chair is 'heightened nerves' the eyes read, the finger sliced on a blade-like page, the page blares with light and words stand out darkly, conscious of light, drops of blood are full of light which fade as they leave the body. ”

[Segue back to:] The student from England awakens suddenly in the second class sleeper of an Indian train, to the shocking news of the PMs assassination in Madras. “It is Springtime in England,” he thinks, “it might be raining or frost melting.” His stop is here, grey and blue painted girders, political slogans painted on the walls, porters in ox-blood uniforms wave their medallions, “Sorry, only one bag.” A young peasant girl hawks newspaper cones of roasted peanuts and a few bruised guavas from a wide basket.

He sees some other friends also headed back to school on the platform and talks with them emerging from his dream. A traveler, he thinks, “I know the world, I’ve seen so much of it.”

Sharing peanuts and smiling at a joke, talking with one mind to friends, he walks with them over to the taxi stand, bag slung over his shoulder, In a close up his face reveals in odd moments the other part of his mind about this death and the latest meaning it has to India.



Asir E.Jeyapaul

TOKEN OF LOVE

I saw a Gypsy
Staggering on a Rocky Path.
Glitter sprang from her Beads-
Turquoise, amber, sapphire,
crimson in her hands-
Her rough fingers running through
the multi-coloured globes, arranged in order.
Who gave her these, I wondered,
To suit such grandeur.

She was a deity from the far North,
With glass Embroidered Skirts.
As thrifty woman she was,
Collecting twigs by the path.
Around a fire, men were seated,
There eyes were wonderstruck.
They welcomed their guest,
With some suspicion in their hearts.
They served a bitter blackened juice of berries.

Vagrant, she Presented me the beads to wear,
'Token of Love', Specially Made.



SHORELINE



Spread before her was
a sea of darkness

It was as if the
Dawn would never break

She bent down
To touch, to feel
to taste.

She looked back she reached up,
Bracing herself,
perhaps to savor it.

Hesitantly, tentatively
she moved.
All she came up with was
Questions.



Pooja Bahl

INNOCENCE

It lasted a mere moment. She looked in through the mirror and was confronted by the soft smile that played upon the lips of her look-alike reflection. But a thick smog of mistrust still surrounded her. For an instant the shadow that separated the two of them lifted, allowing a thin ray of light to force its way through.

The light triggered half-forgotten memories of childlike security and faith. Before she was able to fully experience and understand, it was swallowed by the darkness.

Her mind drifted to long ago when she felt just like the girl illumined in the mirror, pristine as a new-born lamb unaware of what the harsh world has in store. Through her mind's eye, she witnessed again the comforts and joys of innocence.

She watched the girl turn around and began to reach out to halt her, but as she was about to make contact with the tenderness, the lovely warm sensation of the glimmer of light that had momentarily reached her, she hesitated, withdrew her hand, coiled into a dark corner and watched the magical girl walk away.

Sabina Dewan

SCANNING THE TREES

SITTING BY MYSELF in the woods in Swedish Hill, waiting for inspiration, trying to concentrate, a huge feeling of loneliness seizes me. Looking around I realize the presence of the many other living beings besides myself. . .the tall pine trees, the hedges, even the grass beneath my body.

But they are different from me.

I lay here wide awake, inside I feel dead. . . somehow. The grass lays there looking dead but is alive, vibrant, awake. A shadow of sorrow grows around me, more powerful than my happiness.

Even the humble presence of these living beings cannot help my lonesomeness but to continue and increase.

Deep in thought I suddenly became aware of myself, the consciousness of my hair, my clothing, and my cross-legged position - I sit up.

A first stanza of my poem sprawls out upon the page.

*In front of me was a chopped tree trunk
Around me the loud chattering of many insects
A butterfly pushes off from a dry leaf on the ground
The dryness sparkling with the cracks of sunlight
allowed through by the guarding trees.
A mosquito tries to kiss me on the cheek
Far away I hear the voices of children
Reciting in synchrony phrases of another tongue
In the near distance
I see faces staring into space
also awaiting their inspiration.*

*Now a bird sings, a soft whistle.
A pair of lovers chirp within the distance*

*The darkness of daylight brings with it
many things still to be done
While the solitude of night
Is invaded by myriad dreams in a land I know well
A branch lies broken on the ground
Its twigs remind me of a witches nails.
Fantasizing on romantic music
played on a mechanical gadget,
I fall asleep, dozing in my solitude.*

The start of a second stanza expresses
something strange and familiar
about the way I am feeling,
“*The consciousness of my own appearance in
reality overwhelms me.*” but I break off writing.

Though no one can read into the loneliness or sensitivity inside,
my outward image remains vulnerable.

And I feel I am being observed. I gaze at my watch
to check the time. 3:34. . . Life ticks on.
I live, yet die as every second drifts by.

The trees and plants green in their presence
still leave me feeling alone and
watched at the same time. There is no one hiding
in the bushes, and I know that
the consciousness I am experiencing
is not a result of their gaze. Who is watching me?
Perhaps my own solitude.—

Maris Brenn-White

"It's Friday night and I'm left with the room to myself for awhile. Some shockingly melodramatic U2 is blaring Erica's upset psyche into my room from next door and intermittent hysterical laughter pierces through the whitewashed walls. I'm sure she's drunk, drowning the sorrows of an addict boyfriend in her own little self-destructive poison.

"I am surrounded by burning candles: they somehow bring warmth to the frigid air. I've had a fabulous week of looking at clouds and the stars but today for the first time in weeks I looked in a mirror and saw myself and the world around me and was driven straight into that elemental loneliness that, ironically, most of humankind shares.

"Right now I am in a bit of a self-pitying stupor, aware that we are all basically alone.

"Sure we respect those who don't try to grasp futilely at another for a soul-mate - someone who understands them even less than they understand themselves. But then it gets hard sometimes, alone on your mountain-top with nothing but the rock and searing wind of time to "comfort" you, every so often wanting desperately to lie down with someone to shield you from the storm. And quite often that's what we do, relaxing, getting comfortable thinking that we have found it at last, until one arm leaves to scratch, leaving you exposed to the world once again. You realize that everyone will always think of themselves first, never able to sustain the dream forever.

"This is, I suppose the very reason why I must care for myself first and love myself and hold myself against the storm. Often times at night as I lay myself down under heavy quilts and glance around the room watching the tricks that the candle flames play on the familiar daytime objects I can feel the arms around me, holding me here on my mountain-top, sheltering me from this world. . .and then I feel a little better a little piece of peace and contentment. . .and then I wonder which part of me has such heavenly arms?

"I take a breath and know I am alone. . .and curl over to shut my eyes and dream."



Chiki

THE OLD WOMAN looked at me
eyes gleaming conspiratorially

"You see," she said, "our hearts are holes,
and yours is a deep one."

I did not understand this talk - elusive and grand - Old Woman with
gleaming eyes who talked about souls, so I walked on ahead, eyes
downwards, nothing said. . . until a seed was thrown in me and grew in my
heart, beautiful with an aura of power. It kept on growing and broke the
dam in me with thorns that jibed and scorned: bright petals laughed and
danced, while I did too.

●
It opened up my eyes.
It told me some truth,
told me some lies.
Showed me the sky
and the tree;
how they're siblings.
The wind and the waters
are the sounds of earthlings.
The waves of the sea
and the wind through the trees,
how they talk the same way.

The thorns, they bring blood;
the dam breaks, the soul's in flood.
I know it I know it, and
I'm thankful.

Rimi Sen

RENEWAL

We delve deep, to the densely-packed core,

The heart contains nothing, just blood.

We go deeper though, where little else can penetrate,

Where there is no breeze, no pool, no fog;



We find thorns laying there,

And rosebuds, still unblooming, untouched, untended.

The twig deprived of sunlight, covered in needles of pine,

The magnificent tree lets through but splinters of comfort,

And the twig searches for bright streaks, pushing past shadows.

A renewing breeze brings nourishment, refills the pool,

Pink and black swirl into a confused haze,
The fog settles, plush carpeting for prickly pine
(She ponders fog forever fleeting).

I see light venture timidly through a thousand shards of glass,
They witness tinted drops fall,
A puddle of scarlet feeling.

A reflection in a shallow pool, distorted translucent, wavering
Her world is on the edge, about to fall,
Shatter into a mirrored web.

Tread softly, I hear the words,
Time grows and heals.

Scarlet pools evaporate and neglected rosebuds blossom. ☼

Sid Murlidhar

SILENCE

It was my life line,
My only means of sustenance.
It was my security,
My warm and tender haven.
In the midst of a torrential hypocrisy,
It was rendered unconscious.
Then the multitude of jeering faces,
on which hatred was etched rose from the
labyrinths of the dark forgotten world,
To haunt, my garden of Eden.
It was resurrected,
My arms were outstretched to grasp,
The warm bosom.
They were chased away
by the arrows of the sun.
I cried myself to sleep...
Happiness.
Like a leech I was attached,
It was a beautiful; interlude...
It was pained,
I wandered aloud...
It was leaving.
A silent scream....
They snickered,
Sadness.

Kashvi Rekhy

THE DEAFENING SILENCE OF THE GODS

A WRINKLED DAWN YAWNED PATHETICALLY AT OUR COERCED INCEPTION.
AS THE CEMETERY BEGAN TO CALL,
I HEARD THE UNRIPE SILENCE OF THE INVISIBLE GODS.

WE: PEARL IN THE SNOUT OF THE SWINE, DECAYED.
CORRUPT AND CULPABLE FLOWERS OF A RETARDED YELLOW SPROUTED,
PLAGUING THE AIR WITH INFECTIOUS VIOLENCE.
I SMELLED THE UNRIPE SILENCE OF THE INVISIBLE GODS.

TIME SLYLY RUBBED AGAINST STALE BEINGS, AND THEIR FRACTURED SIGHT ROTTED.
OUR EVIL DREAMS ROAMED IN OUR QUIETLY RUSTING SKULLS.
TIME WILL DRINK.
I TASTED THE UNRIPE SILENCE OF THE INVISIBLE GODS.

VALUES TRIPPED AND WERE SPLIT OVER OUR EYES.
NO LONGER DID I HAVE TO HOLD UP THE SHATTERED MIRROR FOR THE BLIND.
I SAW THE UNRIPE SILENCE OF THE INVISIBLE GODS.

OUR VIRGIN CONSCIENCE ETERNALLY SLEPT, AS TRUTH PROUDLY CRAWLED TOWARDS
DECEPTION, LAUGHING ARTFULLY.
THE UNSEEN WORTH OF THEIR SKELETON DANCED WITH THE BRIGHT SHADOW OF DEATH.
DOGS LEARN BY SMELLING, HUMANS LEARN BY...?

MY BLUE BONES SWELLED BY INHALING AN UNKNOWN CURSE: LIFE.
THERE WAS A TAP ON MY MIND AND UNRIPE SILENCE RIPENED.

MY RAW ACHING WOUNDS KNEW THE GODS WOULD ALWAYS BE SILENT!

I WISH I COULD WHISPER A SECRET TO YOU WHILE YOU INSIDIOUSLY SLEEP IN YOUR
MOTHER'S WOMB, WHO IS ONCE AGAIN PREGNANT WITH ANIMOSITY. ୪

CHIKI



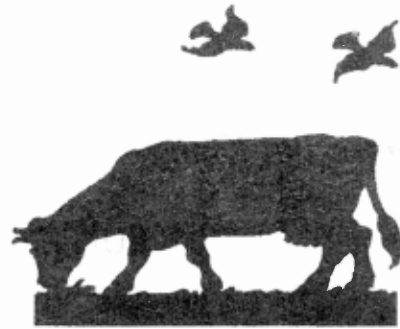
Someone up there
must be watching me
and watching you

Someone up there must be laughing
watching me and you.
I see them watching, watching,

All I see is stars.

Manasi Tirodkar

HERE I SIT . . .



. . . on the green, green grass under the pines, dried needles scattered all around. A paved road a little ways from where I sit. Across the other side a moo-cow. It's a small moo-cow, but she eats a lot. Rooting at the herbs for the past half hour, she'll leave the cud for later.

As the green herbs go in one end, something comes out the other. Shameless creature! Is that the same as something going in one ear and coming out the other?

A yellow doggy trots up to the moo-cow making loud, sharp noises. I think she's trying to say something. The moo-cow seems to have understood -- she's not rooting around any more and she's glaring at the intruder. Ms. Doggy is still barking. Mrs. Moo-cow is running now, as fast as her belly will allow her. The intruder is running after her.

They're running down the road farther and farther away. I can only see a brown blob and yellow streak now.



Anuradha Kumar

SUNRISE



Whiffs of wind
wound round
the pine and mimosa trees,

sweeping away lonesome leaves lying in its path,
scavenging cold floors of the hillside,
urging the lake's translucent waters to lap gently
against its banks.

Eucalyptus trees
like long toothpicks
crane their heads forward,
draughts cajoling,
awakening them from slumber

The artist
washed the sky
incarnadine . . .
vermillion never clashing,
only blending.

The tinted clouds, salmon fingers
intertwined, bleeding into the fading night.

An all-absorbing light
flushing the sky
the apricot flare not yet wholly exposed
glowing eyes linger on the scene,
now expelling depressions in the hillside
fringing these shadows behind trees and bushes
casting a smile across the tranquil highland.

Alan Isaac

BARRIERS UNBREACHED

Termites traverse it, caterpillars crawl it,
spiders stalk it.

Why then, should the wire bite me?

Barbed barbaric, biting wire,
revealing splintered windows of the forest beyond.

Vehement fangs of crimson rust
have extorted my blood:

I gaze beyond at the soothing evergreens
and yearn for the timeless shards of light
flirting upon lush tendrils of root.

A shattered whiskey bottle, dripping vinegar,
embedded upon verdant foliage
murmurs to me an epic (a plot which grows and thickens)
like the scars on the bark and prostituted *shola*
and blushing pink buds that struggle to conceal
their torn nakedness
raped ruthlessly by humankind.

An "inconsequential" spider saunters now across my page,
indifferent to the mechanistic symmetry of lines.
Through silken strands it companions my eye

to a pile of tin and plastic filth.

Spontaneous effervescent ferns wield blades of grass
To chastise the excrement of "civilized" society.

And yet, composed of molecules eternal incorruptible,
a scornful mockery: it remains.

I understand now,
and begin to love that blood-stained brute that bit me.
Tears saturated in grief, careen on downwards
flooding the tiny spider on my page, to another
murder most foul.

I look up to God for sympathy, forgiveness,
yet I meet gnarled knotted eyes of tree boughs instead,
fixed upon me with a glaring gaze,
flashing harsh reprimand and rebuke,
deploying befuddling mists to greet my daze.

Getting up to leave, I sigh and murmur
"I shall defile no more,"
And press my lips in a gentle kiss upon the wire:
Red meets redder, how smooth it is just now.



There are butterflies on the flowers. I always thought they were happy. But are they? For they too disappear in the cunning mist. Slowly, trees, leaves, flowers, even the grass and rocks dissolve in her veil. Mist is welcoming them into her kingdom of fear, anger and unhappiness; while laughter, pleasure and life are imprisoned. I suddenly become aware of her closeness.

"No!" I want to shout, but my fear overwhelms me.

Soon the milky ocean will cause an overflow. Now it is treacherously leaking towards me. I cannot see beyond its horizon. In truth I don't want to see. I've seen enough.

I sit still enjoying last minutes of my freedom. How long did it last and where is the tree I was sitting under, the stable unchanging ground I was counting on? Why must I become blindfolded by the thickening veil and lose my way?

It is cold I must move if I want to stay alive. I see a cross near me.

Now the Acidic Solute dissolves its victim, there is no way out for me. ☹

Sabina Dewan

THE PORTRAIT

I'm painting a picture,
a picture of her life.

Whose life ? I'll call it my own.
The clouds turn everything to stone,
hard cold grey and gloomy. So I steal
the redness of life's blood to paint my horizon.

The twinkle of eyes to reflect off the lake, and
each
body curve winds the roads on my canvas. The
blackness of her hair, is the blanket of night; the
whiteness of her teeth is the snow

on distant mountains, her dark eyelashes become
the brush of mind; her dress is the wind blowing
the branches of the trees heavy laden with flowers
and leaves.

Buku Sarkar

TACITURN



In your serenity
you represent life
you symbolize beauty
I bow before your nature.
You flow through me enticingly
arouse every feeling I'm able to contain,
. . . Taciturn.

Everything happens before your eyes
yet you remain quiet, an introvert, that is you.
Your colorful palette seems pale to *them*
too many shades of emotion. But I see
right through you. You bare yourself before me,
you teach me everything . . . Taciturn.

There is so much you want to say
yet you choose to be mute
I can see it all through your eyes,
I can read your mind,
you think a lot . . . Taciturn.

Alan Isaac

SUPER-REFINED NURSERY RHYMES

Mary had a little drag .
Rothman's white as snow.
And everywhere that Mary went
The scent of dope would grow.

Mary simply wanted "fun",
That's why she started off.
Now she's got but little else
Than a bitter cough.

Mary then got hopping mad,
The addiction had to end.
But every time she saw a fag,
Her knees would start to bend.

Mary had a drug-caused death,
What a way to go!
(But do you think this really is
What little kids should know?)

Mary now is dead and gone
Her life no pleasure gave,
Yet even now, though buried deep,
Smoke rises from her grave!

Jennifer Garrison

IN HEAVEN

They say
Angels are better off in heaven
 ⊕ ⊕ ⊕
When the world spins in slow motion
And the night begins to ease her slender hands
 up against my window pane
The man in the moon nods his head
 in satisfaction
And I believe him
That he knows
Angels are here against their will
God has them set up for the kill
 (They're all laughing up there in heaven)
 And he knows. . .
They come down through the clouds
And for miles around
There is nothing but pink sunlight and halos
They tiptoe in the air
 in the summer rain
 Through sleeping streets
 And then
While we open out time trying to escape
A future that won't go away
 They disappear
 Into a name.
And after we've laid the flowers
And left them there
 Lone
There are angels up there,
Better off in heaven
Watching us go home.

Sumana Ghosh

THE ROCK

comes crashing down;
I stand still, comfortable in my frown.
I face my sudden, brash demise,
With an empty heart and open eyes.
My shattered bones lay all askew,
The buzzing stops, the world begins anew.
As blood trickles down the hill,
Over coarse landscape at its will,
Carrying remembrance of past years
I see them clearly and overcome my fears.

I hear a child screaming with delight;
Hidden from reality, scurrying out of sight,
The barking of a favourite dog ringing in my ears;
Those were the days when laughter o'ershadowed tears.
Trying to reach out to that simple life,
I find I am blanketed by strife.
It gets darker and darker as I go on,
Blood thickens, happiness gone,
The blood loosens, my spirit's set free,
I'm able to make whisper the willow tree.

Sonali Johnson

⊕ GATES OF HEAVEN ⊕

I REACH my accident and the events unfold themselves once more yet from the eyes of a detached witness. Is this *me* lying there on the pavement? My blood gives the ground a warm rosy glow, the fragments of glass sparkle like crystal in the noonday sun. The sound of the ambulance I find disturbing, like grotesque wailing of demons from hell. I am repulsed by this.

But I can feel a presence of good around me, an aura of peace, and yet I fight it. I have no other sensations except those within my mind which is active and alive. One mental sensation is followed by the augmentation of another as I swirl in an amalgamation of memories and changing colors. I feel them ironically enhance my being and unconsciously enlighten me.

Faces float before me, transient yet familiar. They share the same sorrow and despair but I am not touched by them.

The magic of birth is repeated for me, I am once more in my mother's womb, protected and safe yet aware of my surroundings secluded in my little world. My childhood remembrances show happiness and positive feelings. I also see the significance of the sporadic upsets and joys each memory takes on an individual reflection of who I really am.

Weeks and days of my former life on Earth pass in minutes, some events lasting but a few seconds like playing in the yard walking the dog. Dialogue becomes a superficiality as mental emotion progresses in intensity.

ear

In an aura of peace and goodness I can sense a companion nearby, without seeing him, I can hear him saying that I must stay on Earth. A powerful feeling of warmth envelops me, never before have I felt such peace. I do not want to let go of this unique feeling of euphoria and I desperately attempt to cling on.

Again I begin to resist the return yet I am losing as he tells me, "*You are not ready, it is not your time.*" Deep within I do not believe him. I *am* ready.

Anguish rises up within me as I see what I could lose. A warm light surrounds me and for an instant I am sure that he will concede the battle. He does not. I feel as though I am being suppressed and tied to a world in which I no longer wish to remain.

Why am I not allowed to leave? My soul aches with wanting and I can savour the sensation of achieving complete peace. In turmoil I cannot understand why I am being denied the right of entering the supreme state which eludes me, Nirvana, or Heaven, or the Elysian Fields; there are countless names for it. I am left staring through the gates of Utopia.

I receive the answer, aware of a simplicity and striking truth behind the message. My guardian replies, *"Because you have not loved."*

He is right. It is I who concede, realising I have not loved. What I might have felt in life was a shadow of love, but was never true and whole and unfaltering.

The light around me begins to transform and lose its warmth. My head starts spinning and I am sucked into a world in which (though I do not want it) I know I belong.

Pulses of electricity surge through my body varying in intensity and a monotonous tone deafens me. I can feel a different presence around me now, that of many people rushing moving working together to restore my mortal life. Their unity restores the unity of my sensations as I make the unconscious to conscious transition.

A desire to live surges within. A new and different hope fills me. The bitter taste at missing my spiritual goal fast diminishes and is replaced by one sweet and pure and full of a new beginning.

At least, I know the way to heaven. ☉

D. Senthil Kumar

MARKING TIME

Some say waiting is boring
It doesn't bother me.
Waiting for a special love
or a prophet,
Or results, for that matter, Make me happy
like an expectant mother.

All the waiting that I have done
Has made a patient man of me.
Not even the thrill of winning
Equals the narcotic anxiety of waiting.
I often forget worldly worries
in that intoxication
And . . .

Someone's knocking, do you hear?
I'll be back,
Wait a minute, won't you?



PHANTASMS

Infants playing with skulls while laughing.
The City of the Dead
And men sitting in their trim graves,
Contemplating secrets.
Women bathing children in blood.
A row of crypts before the silence of Ages.
Shadows of unborn Gods in eyes.
Death Crushing life with its impregnable feet.
Proud spirits admiring their epitaphs.
Inundations of hatred sweeping away Humanity.
The ghost of their countenance on
The face of still water.
Dissipation crawling over their eyes and
making them
Blind.
Death
Kissing their lips and leaving them yellow as
Autumn leaves.
A stagnant marsh of humanity,
Singing its way and carrying with it their
Soul secret
Into the heart of hell.
Gods creating,
Crying.

Eyes being allured by empty shimmering objects.
Fire cooling and fleeing under the ashes of their
Cadavers.
Winter stealing their extroversion
Death making love to. . . Life.
Spirits keeping their knowledge of ages in
Eternal vessels.
Sleeping in the diseased slumber of
Ignorance.
Killers tearing apart Peace with ugly claws of
Belligerence.
Their patience drained into the slums of
Disappearance.
My mother's tomb, Scared by the watchful eyes of
Silence.
Phantoms of desire and greed, growing.
Truth sleeping between the restless arms of
Disturbing Dreams
Physicians injecting venom into their patients,
Praying to god.
Beautigul flowers sprouting near graves eating
Decaying Bodies.

Me,
I was alone!
I awakened.
And
Killed my
Phantasms!

Rohan Pai

ALLEGORY

An ebullient river waves prancing in glee,
cascaded down the hills and misty woods;
white as snow a pleasure dome,
a mosque in solidarity stood.

Alone withstanding the test of time,
from far and wide did it visitors enthrall,
men thronged to glimpse this mystic mosque,
for all were welcome within its walls.

To these lush green hills and cataracts,
like honey bees swarming to the hive,
to see this silver mosque and God's own land,
did scholars of all religions arrive.

Like the stars at night the white dome glowed,
a sanctuary of wisdom rich as honey,
fair maidens sang in the melting sun,
where all mankind dwelt in ideal harmony.

Centuries passed and things, to change,
the mosque still stood but now alone,
the dome had paled, the rivers dried,
while through the misty hills the sun had gone.

Far away a storm was brewing,
torrential winds swept the mystic land,
causing schisms between religions and race,
reducing forests and fruit to desert sand.

A red glow swallowed all that had been.
Fires consumed what had once seen life.
Conflicts and wars raged across the land.
Man slaughtered man in this land of strife.

Like a citadel perched on a mountaintop,
overlooking death and destruction below,
the mosque stood unloved and deserted,
while the annihilating storm did grow.

The storm burned the dome and the ruined mosque;
like lightning blazing the sky at night,
midst thunder and lightning and the crashing of waves,
the mosque was razed and smoke blotted out the light.

God watched pensively from the heavens above,
As smoke billowed ceaselessly from the land of guilt,
Knowledge, nature and mosque were burnt,
He thought upon the carnage man had built.
What of the Knowledge He had provided,
What had been gained from all man had learnt?



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CHRYSLIS

Najma looked through the only window in the room which offered a glimpse of the busy outside world. This had been her refuge from the day she had returned from her in-laws' house. Her divorce and her return to her parents' home had caused great confusion in her extended family.

When Najma came out of her room, he could hear her brother shouting at her younger sister, "you should cut down on expenses - Money doesn't grow on trees, you know. Your elder sister has become an extra burden - one more mouth to feed. Divorce is unheard of in our family and she is been foolish enough to let go of the man after all that we spent on the wedding".

One of the visiting aunts muttered audibly, "She is such a bad influence on her sisters." What if they too take after her after we find them decent families? I can't even show my face to our relatives". To this endless chant was added Najam's mother's refrain: "Women should have patience. We must learn to take a little ill-treatment from our men?" Najma remained a silent spectator watching and listening from her darkened room.

When she failed to react to these verbal assaults, she was increasingly ignored. She spent most of her time in her room looking out at the world through the clouded glass of her window.

As days passed, she realised that she could claim identity only as someone's daughter, or wife or mother. Alone, she did not exist - an alien amidst her family. When her father was alive, he had managed to get her through college despite her mother's protests. She felt indebted to him for showing her the way out of this suffocating world.

Najma's brother looked up as a shadow fell across the floor. He glanced at her vaguely. He did not approve of women leaving purdah. His temper began to rise. "Aren't you ashamed standing about like this. You have become such a problem. Already you've eaten up half my money - for your education and your wedding. Now, what are you planning to do?"

Najma stared hard at him. "My friend who came to visit me last week had offered me a job in her brother's company. I'm leaving tomorrow".

With that she walked away from him towards her room leaving him speechless with shock. Back in her room her feet led her automatically to the window which she threw open on its unused hinges letting in the sun, the sky and the scents and sounds of freedom. ☼

Meyyammai, A R

DISTOPIA

"Oh, Blazing Sun,
Take me away
Travel till I whisper 'STOP'.
I implore you.

Not to Texas nor Las Vegas
to wonder at the looks of tennis stars;
Nor to Brazil nor Italy
to congratulate the worthy winners."

But to Utopia.

All of a sudden
A ghastly sight before me,
putting an end to my exaltation:

On Shiva's side,
Men with khaki robes
AK-47's in their hands
Showing off their manliness.
On Parvathi's side,
Skeletons with only heads
Drinking polluted water
and millions falling by cholera.

And idiotic question tore my ear,
"Are you a Hutu or a Tutsi?"

I scream, "Halt, Halt!"
Jesus, that's not Utopia.
It's Hell. It's Rotten Rwanda.

Adnan Alam

YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO WHERE?

*"Where do the bad folks go after they die,
They don't go to heaven where the angels fly
They go to a lake of fire and fry,
See him again tell the Father, you lie."**

Bound by . . .
Changing appearances to suit
This, that and the other.

Why?
Being happy and high
To party, enjoy.

Roll with the freaks
The ones in style
Forget those there
with bland substance.

You *try* to play you
I'll be the Fool.

Judge a book by its cover?
A "liberated soul" by his facade?
Don't try and understand,
But explain falsehoods.

Smoke endo, gin and juice
Swallow coffee beans.
But seriously not a sip
of Cappuccino
Contemplating the multicolored
walls of the coffee house . . .

Claiming to have seen,
but evading the Eyes
Ears and Arms in a dying fall.

Raise the saturated mind
see the limpid pool
Hear the flow of time
Synthesised with space.
Hark thee!

Terminate all superficiality and
voids.
Philosophy and politics,
To what end?

*From "Lake of Fire" by the Meat puppets, performed by Nirvana in Cobain's last album *Unplugged in New York*

Deepa Ramchandran



ONCE UPON A TIME . . .

IN THE CROWDED CITY of Bombay, there lived a little girl named Rajkumari. She was the only daughter of her doting parents. They surrounded her with love and care. They gave her silk sheets to sleep on and satin coverlets to snuggle under. She ate plenty of fruits and nuts, and was given bowls of creamy milk flavoured with honey to drink. In the evenings after school lessons (which made her very tired), she would sit in the back of her father's limousine and order the liveried chauffeur to drive her to all her favorite places in the city - to ice cream parlours and movie theaters. As she grew older, she would be taken to department stores where she could buy brocades and silks and silver sandals for her feet.

At home she would gaze at herself in gilt-framed mirrors, arranging her long thick hair in new styles and practising her smile and her walk. Often she would sit among the cushions on her divan, her chin propped upon her hand, dreaming about the man who would one day lose himself in her beauty and make her his bride. Though the man had as yet no features and no voice, she knew that he was tall and handsome.

At nightfall, her mother would come to her with a pinch of white rice in one hand and black mustard seeds in the other to ward off the evil eye as was the custom amongst her people. She would look upon her daughter with glistening eyes and say, "Oh my daughter, pretty as a star, one day you will marry a Prince and live in bliss happily ever after." And then her mother would gently pinch her cheek and say, "But what will the royal pair eat? Love and fresh air? The pretty princess has not yet learnt how to cook!" She would sigh and continue, "I don't know why your father burdens you

with school lessons. It is time you learnt how to cook and sew."

Soon her mother persuaded her father to keep Rajkumari at home, and she led her into the kitchen and taught her the secret sauces and curries of their people. She learnt these with a will, and what ever she put her hand to became a rare delicacy.

It was July 14th. The family celebrated Rajkumari's 18th birthday. Her parents brought her gifts that came from four corners of the world. But her best gift, according to her parents, was yet to come. That evening, a young man was coming to see her, who might very well be the man of her dreams. He was handsome. That much she had discovered from her father.

Rajkumari waited for the evening with a beating heart. As the sky cleared and the sun went down in a blaze of orange, the young man arrived. He was tall and handsome and his name was Rajiv. When he cast eyes on her, he was immediately drawn to her beauty. When she saw the admiration in his eyes, she too found herself being drawn to him. "This feeling must be love," she thought.

So sure was she of her love that she dared to question her father when she heard the elders of the two families discussing the gold and money that he must give in dowry. "Father," she asked, casting her eyes down in modesty, "why do you talk of gold and money? Rajiv loves me very much. I am all he wants."

Her father laughed and said, "Don't worry your pretty little head about business, my pet. It is good that you feel this way, but why don't you go and talk to *him* and let me talk to *his father* about business of marriage."

Rajkumari was bewildered. *Business* of marriage? What was that? Then she thought, my father is wise, he loves me. Isn't that enough? Hastily

brushing aside any tiny wisps of cloud that had momentarily appeared on the blue horizon, Rajkumari thought long and ardently of Rajiv.

On the last day of the year Rajkumari was married to Rajiv and when she woke the next day and the next, amidst the swaying palms, golden beaches and lapping waves, she thought she heard from the tallest fronds, birds twitter, "And so they lived happily ever after."

The next few months were filled with unbelievable bliss. Every day Rajkumari would make for her beloved, a tasty new delicacy and wear, for his pleasure, a new perfume and a new sari. And she knew that he loved her to distraction.

One day, Rajkumari knew that she was going to bear Rajiv the son he so often spoke of and thus endear herself to him even more.

All through the days of her expectancy, Rajkumari glowed with an inner light. On July 14th, her own 20th birthday, after 12 hours of lonely labour she brought forth into the world a baby girl and brought down upon herself a world of displeasure.

"A girl! And a dark one at that," said the mother-in-law. "A girl?" asked Rajiv and fell silent. "I knew it would be a girl by the way she walked," said her sister-in-law contemptuously. "I wish it had been a boy for your own sake," said her mother.

Rajkumari wept in the secret of the night, but when she saw the frail creature beside her, her heart expanded protectively around her. Slowly, her soft heart grew tough. "She is like me. Am I not a good human being? Have I ever harmed anyone? Nor will she." These thoughts were in her mind as she gave herself over looking after her baby.

But while she felt new feelings and ideas stir within her, a new sorrow also made a home in her heart. Her beloved Rajiv had taken to coming late at night and often he with him the sour, acrid smell of alcohol. Soon they had fights nearly every day. One day, during one such fight, Rajiv struck her. Hurt and shocked, scalding tears racing down her cheeks, she cried, "You drunkard!"

Rajiv's fury knew no bounds then. "Watch your words!" he shouted. "I drink, so what? I'm a man, so I drink! But I am not a smuggler and a black marketeer like your father!"

Rajkumari felt as though a bomb had exploded in her head, blinding her eyes, paralyzing her tongue. Without waiting to think, she picked up two-year-old Sonia and fled the house and went straight to her father's.

"Father," she wept. "I cannot live with Rajiv any longer. He called you a smuggler!"

Her father shook his head and said, "He should not have said that, my pet. It was wrong of him."

"Its not true is it, what he said?" Rajkumari asked anxiously.

Her father put his arm around her shoulder and said, "Well I certainly wouldn't call myself those names. I am a business man. There are many things a business man has to do which may appear wrong but are unavoidable. An innocent girl like you wouldn't know this. But Rajiv is a business man now, and he knows, I would say. . .he knows through personal experience!"

He glanced down at his daughter's face and, seeing on it the expression

of a wounded animal, sighed. Rajkumari sat with her father's arm encircling her shoulder, feeling cold and alone.

The next morning Rajkumari walked the roads of the crowded city of Bombay, looking, listening, thinking. She saw, heard, and felt the seething anger of the people. She saw the way men looked at women. She saw the way some women hurried by with lowered eyes and the way some were abused. She saw a woman selling flowers being crushed by her husband. The woman could have knocked him down if she wanted to. He was hollow-chested and could hardly stand. But she didn't move. In her lap lay their baby.

When Rajkumari returned to Rajiv that evening, he wept for what he had done. "Rajkumari," he said, "I want a son. Someone who will carry on when I leave off."

"But our daughter, Sonia will, even if we don't have a son," she replied.

"You must be mad. I am building an empire," he said. "Business isn't being nice and gentle and good. It is being hard, ruthless, shrewd."

Weeks turned into months and months into years. But they had no more children. And Rajiv grew harsher and harsher. Till one day he said, "Rajkumari, I want a son. You haven't given me one. I would like to marry again. It's only fair. A man wants a son. I will settle you well. You need not worry about that. You have been a good wife to me. I bear no anger towards you. But I need a son."

Rajkumari's parents understood and they agreed to take her back. And so when Rajkumari was 25 Sonia was 5, the two of them returned to her parent's house. A house shrouded in gloom. But what was to be done? It was the work of Fate. Poor Rajkumari, she was obviously born under a

lucky star.

That night in bed Rajkumari felt that the world had turned black. As she lay there weeping, a tiny hand crept to touch her face and a little voice beside her said, "Mama, why are you crying? Won't you tell me a story?"

"A story? Rajkumari said, "What story?"

"*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.*" said the little voice.

Rajkumari swallowed her tears and began to tell her tiny daughter the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. And when she came to the Prince, Sonia said, clapping her hands in delight, "He carried her off on his milk white steed. Soon they were married and they lived happily ever after."

"No," said Rajkumari, "No, no, no. Because Snow White had become wiser. She asked the Prince, 'Why do you wish to marry me?' And the Prince said, 'Because you are beautiful.' 'Is that all?' Snow White asked. 'Also because you will look after me and cook and care for me and bear me a son,' he said. 'And if I burn the rice and give you a daughter?' Snow White asked. The Prince was even more confused. 'I will have to think about that,' he said at last. 'Give me some time to think.' 'Most certainly,' she replied. 'And while you are away thinking, think also of this, that I will ask you questions if I see injustice in your kingdom and I will give you advice as any friend should and I shall not be cloistered in the inner palace waiting for you. Rather, I will sit with you when you administer and give judgment. For in your kingdom there as many women as there are men and I do not trust men, not even you, to be just to women."

Rajkumari's voice had grown strong and firm as she told the tale. "That's not the way it is," said a puzzled voice next to her. "The Prince and Snow White get married and *they live happily ever after.*"

"Listen to me, my love," Rajkumari said urgently. "I know how it was. When Snow White said all this, and the Prince did not know how to answer. He rode away, promising to return when he had thought of all that she had said.

"One day, while Snow White sat reading a book, the seven dwarfs came running and crying, 'He's here! The Prince is here!'

"The Prince looked at Snow White as she stood proud and erect outside the little hut in the forest. 'I would like to marry you Snow White, not because you are pretty, but because you are compassionate and I need your help to administer the realm.'

"And so they were married. . ." Rajkumari's voice grew soft again.

"And *they lived happily ever after*," chimed the little voice next to her.

"No, no, not so fast," said Rajkumari, hugging her daughter. "They quarreled a great deal and argued and fought. But as they grew older, they grew to love each other more and more. 'Till finally, when their hair was silver, so legend has it, the love that poured out of their eyes when they looked at one another was so overwhelming that its glow would spread and light up every home in the realm. And so it was that they lived. . . happily ever after."



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