



Kavithalaya

The 14th Annual Writers' Workshop

2006

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14th Annual Writers' Workshop

Swedish Compund, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu

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American College, Madurai*



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Foreword

Who reads forewords? Yes, it's a rhetorical question. I mean to despair over the form--the necessity of forewords, the uselessness of them, their neglect and well-earned soporific reputation for long, boring lists of names of people to be thanked. Forewords will only do in a reading emergency, such as when the train is stuck on the tracks miles from a newsstand.

You see, forewords should be exciting. Talking trees, repentant murderers, failed romances, terrorists and questions about the very fabric of this universe and our place in it. This should be the stuff of forewords. Then people would read them. They would better reflect the contents of the book they precede. But if they did that, then, well, they wouldn't be forewords anymore. They'd be part of the sweetness and light, and not a foreword to it.

So, sadly, the traditional task is still before this foreword. I can't escape it really. You still need to know where this book came from (though please don't ask why as that's far too philosophical for a little foreword).

The 2006 Writer's Workshop is almost entirely responsible for the creation of this Kavithalaya. Our visiting author, Manjula Padmanabhan, inspired a group of students from Kodai and Madurai to put pen to paper in a wide-range of exercises, from responses to images, to super-short "micro-fictions" and on the theme of domestic help. Great thanks goes to her (though not complete responsibility) for all that follows on the subsequent pages.

Everyone who contributed has been officially named somewhere, whether next to their story or on the Credits page. So let's not go over it all again, except to offer true thanks to all involved.

Please Enjoy--



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Monologues

You Cheat

M. Samkumar

*How could you do this to me, babe?
I mean, I don't understand.
You know how much I loved you, right?
I can't believe you are doing this.
You...You just cheated me, right?
Now, now don't give me that innocent
Look of yours, as if nothing happened.
What made you do this?
I thought I gave you everything you wanted
Didn't I?
I sacrificed my time, my interests, life and
My everything for you.
Come on! How could you even think
Of doing this?
You know we have two kids right?
You know, its just disgusting:
That's it! That's it! I can't take it
Anymore.
Everything between you and me is over.
From now on we have absolutely nothing
To do with each other.
Just leave me and the kids alone.
Get out! I don't want to see you
Anymore. Get out, Get out!*



The Victim

T. David Jayaraj Franklin

He was running straight towards me. Why? I didn't know.

There was something shiny in his raised arm. Maybe a knife--To kill me? I didn't know.

I saw terror in his eyes--wide-open eyes. I thought I breathed my last. The scene is still fresh in my memory. The man approaching me--in slow motion--not just slow motion--but ultra motion. Don't you know ultra motion--they are using it now in cricket replays--replays to every ball bowled and I like the commentaries too--a variety of Englishes from Sanjay Manjrekar to Viv Richards to Geoff Boycott. They are all players from yesteryears and--Oh! I am digressing.

The man was right in front of me. I was terrified. Just imagine yourself in my situation. I never breathed for seconds.

My eyes were open-aghast. Who knows? May be I looked like the other person--terrified.

He pushed his belly forward, tilted his head and neck backwards and cried, "Aah!"

He fell down--his head butting me backwards.

I thought there was a dagger stuck in his back--yes there was one with a black plastic handle--something similar to one we had in our kitchen. But it was a bit longer than what we had.

The thud should have made his nose bleed. There was a lot of blood where he lay. It was a different colour of blood: it was not as dark as I had imagined. They say different blood groups have different shades. A doctor friend of mine also told me so. Hope I am right.

Again digressing.

The murderer stared straight into my eyes. For a moment, I thought I was safe--he had no more daggers for me. But it quickly vanished--his blood stained hands and shirt splattered in red.

Maybe on the poor body or nearby, I didn't know where, but I fainted and fell down.



POSSIBLE REBIRTH
M. R. Mani Bharathy Raja

I was once a tree
Being so, had a happy life
They cut me
For their living.
That marked my first death,
A painful death
That gave me a second birth.
Of course births are painful.
They turned me into a chair.
I had nice carving on me
My beauty was given importance
I was at the centre of the hall
One day I lost my one leg.
That marked my second death.
Now,
I ruminate over my second death.
And a possible rebirth.



FROM RICHES TO RAGS

Paul Love

I was born a large, magnificent sheet of bright red cloth. People called me a table cover, and I sat in the shop window surrounded by smaller pieces that were duller in hue, and rabidly envious of my brilliant complexion. But one by one they left me, for shoppers took one look at my price tag, turned up their noses and chose one of my cheaper neighbours. Finally, though, one pompous man came and admired me for thirty seconds, turned to his wife with “let’s take it honey,” pulled out his fat purse and we were off and gone to his palatial home.

What a time we had! There were gala dinner parties, and I was so huge that sixteen people could easily sit around the table I covered. At first I was in my element. Guests would marvel at my texture, my blushing hue, and my shining elegance, and I revelled in their lavish comments.

One day someone spilled a glob of greasy soup on me. “No matter,” I heard, “The dhobi will take care of that in no time.” So I was taken out and scrubbed and beaten, and scratched and beaten, for almost an hour, until all the spots were gone. Such punishment! It hurt unbearably. I had never known that kind of pain before.

This routine continued and became more frequent. Finally there came a time when the dhobi sighed, wrinkled his nose and gestured as if there was nothing more that he could do. Soon I found I was not brought out of the cupboard so often, and when I was it was for smaller groups and much more ordinary people.

One night after the guests had departed from a drab and boring dinner, my master’s wife roughly grabbed me off the table, threw me on the floor, and mumbled out that I was good for nothing but to be cut up and made into a shirt for her husband. My master demured. But since wives usually decide what their husbands will wear, the scissors went to work on me, and soon I was on my master’s back going to the office. There I heard his boss asking my master if he thought he had discovered the fountain of youth. I couldn’t quite understand why he said that. There were other comments--most of them rude, or not very nice--and I could sense my master was becoming restless and perturbed. This was an unbearable change from the loving

admiration with which people used to regard me.

And so I was metamorphosized once again. I was cut up and made into a dish towel! If I felt insulted before, I was even more embarrassed to scrub other people's dishes, with concern for their cleanliness, not for mine. It did help a bit to see how bright and shining I was able to make so many cups and saucers, as I dried and rubbed and polished them. But always as I did so there was the memory of the days when I held them while they and I sat on a lavish dinner table.

Today as I hang on the laundry line with other torn and dingy cloths, I muse sadly about the future. Showpiece, tablecloth, shirt, dish towel--who knows what my next life will be?



LOVE AND DUTY

G. Alan

Stage setting: A voice cries from the darkness, "I let him go." A tall man walks into the foreground. The beam of light from behind makes a silhouette.

Police officer: I let him go. There were no signs of remorse. He never begged or cried. Check my records if you want, they are clean. Look at my stars, count them one, two, three, four. You see, my hands are as pure as Christ's. No culprit escapes my eyes.

With flashlights, the Kaki uniform is visible, but the face is still obscure.

PO: He murdered a girl; some people whispered that he even molested her. Only God knows the truth.

The stage is lit with floodlights. The face is now visible. An empty prison cell is seen in the background.

PO: It was I who investigated the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. India believed in my honesty and it still believes in me, but I had to do it. You see it was painful to see him in the cell.

All the lights are put off. The stage is pitch dark. Pin drop silence.

PO: Will a lion ever eat its cub?
The criminal is my only son.
Please don't tell anyone.
I let him go.

The slogan "I'll never betray my country," echoes in darkness.

TREE

A. Balasubramanian

(Bala enters the German Settlement campus in Kodaikanal for a workshop. In the lunch-break, he stands before a Eucalyptus tree and sees some persons cutting the wood. Then he looks at that tree. To his astonishment, the tree starts to speak)

Hey kid! What do you think? It's my relative's son, Cyprus. He fell down in the wind-storm and now they are chopping him. Poor fellow, died in his young age.

I think you are one among the few persons who can hear my voice. I have been living in this place for more than 150 years with my family and relatives. The Earth is my mother and the Sun is my father. In 1907, the German people occupied this place without asking any permission from me or my parents. Instead, they got the permission from the British government. Who are they to give permission? Selfish fellows.

They cleared many of my friends and relatives from this place and constructed some buildings.



Hey, you know one thing? My relatives passed a message from the United States of America through a strong wind. We communicate with each other through wind. My relative is suffering a lot from pollution and global warming. He also cautioned me that many industrial American devils and European devils have planned to start new factories in India.

Here also, I suffer a lot from pollution. Slowly the concentration of the green house gases rises in the air. So my father is punishing me a lot during the daytime and these green house gases enjoy it. But fifty years back, my father was very kind and affectionate to me. He knows what I liked and always kept me cool. But now I miss them all, because of the greenhouse gas devils.

I have a question to ask: Don't you fools have any place to live in? You came here and exploited our freedom, and because of your over population you are killing us. Are we doing the same to you? Think about it and stop killing us. We too have life.

Some of my relatives die and fall because of old age. Why can't you people use them alone for domestic needs. You people burn us to have a warm environment. I inhale the smoke that comes out of the chimneys and get back to the sweet memories of my old relatives and friends, who have passed away from the earth. I weep a lot for them.

Then finally, I cried to God: Why are we alone unable to run, walk, or move from one place to another? God replied that we were his best servants, we don't disturb anyone, we live for others, and we were the symbol of patience.

I felt light from His words. I live myself and I don't expect anything from you humans. I don't ask any money. But Oh! I think I have to get some money for my service. If you continue with these environmental hazards, then I will retire from my service and you will be the only sufferer.

Hey, man, consider me as one among you. Please I need your affection and care, nothing else.

Please share this information with your friends. See you next year, if I survive. Bye.

A WAYSIDE FLOWER
S. P. Kasthuriba Devasena

The sun is rising. Today is the gifted day, the precious day. This is the first and last day of my life. Oh! God make my life a fruitful one.

(After a few hours)

Yes, God has answered my prayers. There comes a tiny girl. She may pluck me and use me to decorate herself.

But...but...it seems that she will strike me with her shoes. She is busily running behind a butterfly, which came and sat on me just a minute ago. Ah! She runs unmindful of my presence.

Hey, little one! Please, see me. I am here. Don't destroy me. Take me with you and I will be happy.

(The girl goes without affecting the flower.)

Thank God, you saved my precious life.

(A deep silence prevails. Then there comes a rustling sound from somewhere.)

What's it? Where is it coming from? I guess I'm in danger. I'm right. It's a cow. It is eating away all the grass. I think it will harm me too.

My God, it is coming near me. I am gone, gone forever.

(The flower shuts her eyes tight. A cowherd drives the cow the other way.)

Thank you my boy. Thank you. You have done a great help, saved a life.

But, it is already late. The sun will set soon. No one is in need of me, it seems. There comes an ant, it is much smaller than me. Its life is more dangerous I suppose. But it seems very busy and also happy. I have to learn a lot from this ant in order to lead an optimistic life. I should not waste my life in fear.

Ah! There comes my Saviour. She is having a flower basket in her hand. She has got all my friends with her. I hope she takes me also.

My dear lady, please help me, take me with you. Otherwise, my life will become a futile one. Please...please...

(The lady comes near the flower, plucks it and decorates the sanctum sanctorum of God with the flower. The flower heaves a sigh of relief in the form of its soul.)

ADAMANT EVE

T. Ganesh Babu

HELLO...is it Umesh I am talking to? It's me, darling! Do you hear me all right? Sorry dear, I don't have much time to talk. I just wanted to say that I have just reached Chennai safely.

In my hurry I forgot to tell you to check whether I properly switched off the gas stove or not. Please check that. And do inform the milkman that we do not need the milk for a week. Also don't forget to pay the electricity bill in a day or two before they disconnect the power to our house. And another thing. Did you see me putting the leather wallet into my suitcase? Because I was hurriedly packing my things, I vaguely wonder whether I put it or not. Please check that also. And if it is there, send it to me by courier. For in that wallet only I put my necklace which I intended to wear for the weekend party.

...Hello, Hello, HelloAre you listening to meeeee?....Or...

Is the phone dead???!!!

VOICE OF THE MODERN LADY MACBETH

D. Leema Davidson

(There is darkness everywhere in the stage. A lady walks in bearing a candle and it sweeps away the darkness of the stage.)

I am the nameless, but so called arrogant Lady Macbeth. Oh! Candle! Take my justification to the limelight. I am a woman of hope, trust and will power. It is necessary that one of the two of us must be ambitious in order to survive happily. As Macbeth is not ambitious, the responsibility falls into my hand. And so when the witches promised us three things the first two happened naturally: Thane of Cawder, Thane of Glamis. The third one is King of Scotland. I wanted my husband to be a king, because of the love I had for him. Moreover, he is no way inferior to King Duncan. Oh! He is more than a king. He was even addressed as Bellona's bridegroom and the darling of good chance. As for quality, it is certain he is superior to King Duncan. I encouraged him to come up in life as a normal wife would do. If I had kept quiet and waited for the third one to happen, probably, the killing of Duncan or even Macbeth would have been done by someone else to become a king. I don't want myself to be a woman merely associated with kindness. I preferred to survive as I wished.



“Power” makes the world. So I preferred that. Can anyone find a person without any desire for power? The flame that comes from the candle shakes itself indicating “never.”

No, never. Though everyone has this desire I fixed my destination, and my courage boosted me to reach that. I don’t find anything wrong in my deed.

Many may call me “unwomanly.” It won’t bother me. If I fix a target I should attain it. I don’t want any obstacle to hinder my action. Some may attribute motherly qualities to women and force them never to do things differently. So I claimed that “I can throw away my child from my lap against the wall” in order to complete the deed.

The deed was done and Macbeth became the king.

And it happened as I wished. Poor Macbeth failed to enjoy his victory. But I am sure I don’t want to walk in the night as a mad fellow feeling guilty.

(The candle light continues to sweep away the darkness and lady Macbeth’s face glitters as if she is satisfied by her attitude.)



GOD - A BAD OR GOOD CREATOR

K. Mythili

(The stage is serious, dark and gloomy. The light is thrown on a part of the stage where a girl is sitting by the side of her table and busily writing a letter. She slowly lifts her face from her work and addresses the audience...)

I have begun this letter a hundred times but could not complete it. Don't think that I am unable to write and don't think that I have nothing to say. But to whom do you expect me to write? To my mother? Father? Friend? Or brother? (angrily throws the pen aside) I have none... no one...



(She becomes excited and cannot control her tears trickling down her face.)

At the age of six, I used to wonder why God has created us orphans. Sister Carolyn said that orphans are God's children and are the blessed who shall inherit the earth. But I said, "I don't want to be blessed. I would rather be cursed and have a mother or a father."

(She takes the glass full of water and drinks it in one draught)

Mental anguish and loneliness were the reasons which I believed took me nearer to God. I spent most of my time in the church praying to God, serving him, chatting with him and reading the Holy Bible. I felt as if I had answers to all my queries. I was totally removed from "blindness, loneliness, and terror" and was filled with "faith, hope, and charity."

(She stands from her chair and strolls towards her cot which lies beside the table, and sits comfortably.)

Later, I was forced to go out for schooling. I felt left out among my friends and teachers. They glanced at me as if I were a different creature. I could not play, read, and eat with them. Mental troubles deprived me of my education. At this very point I started doubting my religion.

(She stands up from her bed as if she is going to get into some more serious matter and comes to the front edge of the stage.)

We say, "God is love." If his love is so great, and if he loves all his children, why are we cast down so far? Why can't he create all human beings as equals? Why does he discriminate one from the other?

(The audience is startled by the powerful statements.)

Every human being is a creation of God. And my life is an example of the creation of darkness. Darkness denotes evil. Now say, is God noble or evil?

(The audience becomes restless, noisy and they start moving out of the theatre, as if they are uninterested. But this question will pester our mind forever and ever.)

WHY ME?

S. Pinky Shama Johnny

(A woman with heavy make-up and flashy clothes enters her room like a wild animal that is ready to attack)

Why don't they understand that I'm a human being too? I have feelings and it hurts when they treat me like an outcast.

How do I explain my plight to those women who treat me like a piece of shit? I did not come to Mumbai to take this as my profession. How can I make them understand that I was forced into this kind of flesh trade...and...and that it was my own father who sold me off into such ugly hands, when I was only sixteen?

Will they believe me if I talk the truth? I don't think so...They don't even want to look at me, so how will they listen to me?

God this is so damn frustrating!

Nobody likes me and I feel lost in a world of strangers.

Almost every night I sleep with a stranger, which leaves me with no time to dream. But I do dream about a secure future too. I wanted to go to school and live like the privileged. And now like many other girls of my age, I dream of marrying and living with a person who would really care, share and dare (to correct me when I'm wrong).

But my world is closed and I'm caught up in this clumsy place. When I open the window, I end up looking at other girls, like you, Sumeetha, in whose eyes, I only see myself. Those black longing eyes reflect my image.

I want to get married, but who would marry me? Some men claim to be madly in love with me, but when I talk about marriage, they are nowhere to be found.

Those women will not understand the plight of a woman like me, unless they experience the physical and the mental pressure that I suffer every night. The strange stench in the air and this sick atmosphere makes me feel

like I'm in my grave already...buried alive, from where I can never get out.
Never...ever...get out...

Why has god pushed me into this? Why? **Why me?**

(Pauses to listen to somebody and then continues.)

No...no...No...Sumeetha, you don't understand...

I'm not like the others who would feel bad for a while and then get used to it...I cannot become thick skinned...

I'm...I'm different...I...I don't know what to say...

(The voice of a pimp is heard.)

There she goes...oh God!...I guess the bitch wants me to get dressed. Oh...!
Who wants to get dressed up like a bride every night? I just...Aw! Forget it.

All right, Sumeetha, got to go now...It's my turn tonight...and it has always been me...Sometimes I feel that there's no God. Even if there is one I don't think he has a heart. He wouldn't have thrown us into this hell, if he had one. When I die, I know I'll be declared a sinner and thrown into hell. So what about heaven?

But I think Hell would be better than this...this...filthy place.

Don't you think so?

(The pimp screams out for her again, angrily.)

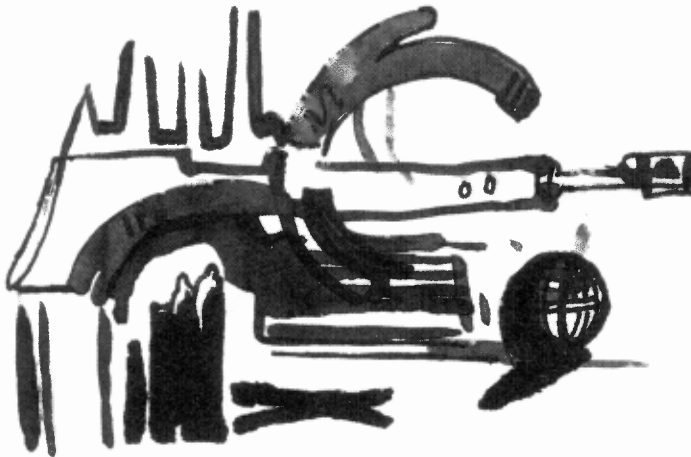
I'll be there in a minute...umph...It's me...but Why me? It's been five long years and it's still me...

(Shrugs her shoulders, closes the window and gets ready for the night workshop.)

TERRORIST

Praveen Moses P.

My life--I don't know what it means, what it's worth, what it has in store for me. It all started, I remember so clearly, on that fateful day. My mother, I can still see her face, was raped again and again and again by those men, no, animals. They made me watch. Oh! How long could I? How long? I can still see it in my mind. I was beaten and left to die right next to my mother's body. She had died from the pain she had experienced. I awoke, I don't know when, to see the ravaged body next to me, no more a person but a mass of black flesh. I felt an arm touch me. I flinched. A face smiled down--almost human but not completely. A voice asked me if I wanted revenge. I think I nodded--I'm not sure. I was carried away, cared for and nursed back to health. Then I was taken to see a man, someone important it seemed. He took me by the hand, spoke kindly to me and told me that I could have my revenge, sweet revenge. I don't remember seeing his face. I think he had a cloth covering the lower part of it. I was trained in handling arms and was told that I had to help out in their cause, the cause they believed in truly. They were fighting for the freedom of their community. I believed in their cause. I had seen my mother's plight with my own two eyes. I still see it in my dreams. It's been thirteen years now. I still haven't had my revenge. They say that the time is at hand. But every time we strike, it's at people like mother, innocent people who haven't to my knowledge harmed any of us. Why can't we just leave them in peace? Oh, what meaning has my life? Tell me, please.





BACKDROP: THE HOUSE IN ITS RUINED STAGE

L. K. Priyavathana

I was brought up with much care and affection. Branded cement, bricks were used to make me strong. Labourers toiled day and night to give me a perfect shape. It took nearly one year to give me a definite structure. They used different colour paints to make me attractive.

Panditji came. He started chanting mantras before the fire. Then they brought in Golden Lakshmi, the cow. Many people came and they ate, and enjoyed themselves. I was blinking. Then they named me, and called that day the opening ceremony.

They divided me, and named the parts kitchen, hall, bedroom, store room. Furniture, utensils and musical instruments were brought in and placed in their respective places. I appeared a meaningful and useful person.

A few members stayed with me and used me. They celebrated Birthday parties, festivals, marriages. I saw both their happy and their sad days. Once in a while they cleaned me and made me look beautiful. Many generations passed, and I'm getting old now. Slowly as time passed I was left alone. Only snakes, insects, cows, and trees now give me company and I have lost my beauty. I am the old house that got ruined by time and neglected by everyone.



Write to Inspire

Amrutha Pulikottil

Would you rather stab my heart 21 times so that I would not live to tell the story or would you rather take a thin razor blade and cut a thin, shallow line right next to my heart, (causing my blood to trickle millilitre by millilitre) so that I would live to tell the painful story? That's what you want. You want me to learn a lesson. And the scar would do just that. It would make sure that I never forgot the details of my near death. That was the purpose of your attempt, you didn't want to kill me, you just wanted to hurt me. There is always a gentler way of voicing yourself. Inflammatory writing does nothing but provoke a fire. Inspiring writing engraves itself in your hearts instigating you to make a difference. Inflammatory writing evokes anger, hatred and fury against the author. It does not raise awareness. It does nothing but increase the blood pressure levels of our population. Write inspiring stories about inflammatory issues, they will raise awareness without comprising your passion. Write to inspire, write to encourage, write to move.

RICKY MINNOW

L. Shakti Arun

Late afternoon, I felt drops of water in my body. How could this be!! What is going on?

Oh I couldn't breathe. Where are my friends? Tom, Jean, Nancy, Sean.

Where are you guys? What's happening? Ohh!!! Hrr!!! (GETTING AIR FOR BREATHING)

I can't speak. My eyelids are drooping. God please don't let me down, Help me to be with my friends... Please god... Please.

Come on Rick, you can do it. You have the power of the shark and lungs of a whale.

You can make it, live without food for three days. You can make it dude! You can, yes

Yes! Yes! You can!! AHH!!! You made Rick. You did it . Who is this? (Surprise)

Is it Nancy? Thank god its you! Where are the other guys? NoAre they dead? I hope they are safe in a better place. Nancy, let's move from here. I think this place won't be a good place to speak, lets move from here quick.

Are you ok!!! Do you want to take rest. I think this will be a better idea. ahh ...

It makes me better than you. BAMP! BAMP! BAMP! (Sound of a ship)

What? What's going upon us? Swim as fast as you can. Quick Nancy, Quick, Take cover near the coral behind. BAMP! BAMP!BAMP!.. It is a ship.

Stupid people making us sick with the chemicals they have! Take cover.

Inside the bush! Inside the bush! Ya, inside the bush. What are you doing?

Come Nancy Come, Nancy come. What happened to you. Nancy, Oh no!!! She is stuck in the net! Nancy wait, let me help you.

BLUB!!!BLUB!!!BLUB!!! CHEMICALS, NO. Stay there, don't strain. Put your fins out , Blip, Blip, Blip, got you. Hrrr...With my full strength I've got her... come with me hurry, hold my fins quick, it's nearing us. Hold tightly, I wont let you down ..

I won't let you down.. Trust me Nancy.. We have neared the corals, get inside the coral, Quick. . There is room for only one of us, get inside quick. I will be safe in another place.

Be there for a while; don't open your mouth and eyes. I will come and pick you up.

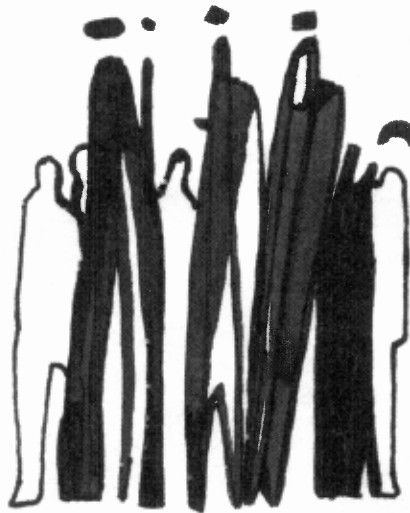
Don't go anywhere Nancy; I will be there as soon as possible.

BLUB!!!BLUB!!!BLUB!!

OOOOP!!! (Took a breath for my life.) Closed my mouth and eyes, dark shades passed my eyelids. My scales were itching but I was helpless. Many things were running in my mind, friends, Nancy, chemicals. After some time the dark shades vanished. The next second, I went to Nancy, she had fainted and was lying upside down. I opened her fins and tried first aid.. 1 2 3 4 5 (crying) GET UP. . 1 2 3 4 5 GET UP ...

No sign.. I taught she was dead, crying besides the coral. A small bubble passed through me. I saw my face. But I couldn't recognize what it was, went quickly to Nancy and looked at her and realized that she was alive. Jumped with joy. KISSING HER. Moving around like a maniac.

Do you know why? She is my wife. Many things to come and how are we going to face them? It's left to us.



THE VOICE OF THE FOETUS

M. Shameena Parveen

(The stage is dark and a woman is standing in the spot light with hands on her stomach.)

I am a babe and a girl too.

I need milk
but my mother has a special drink for me.

I would love to be a graduate;
now I am an illiterate.

I fight for education,
but it's in vain.

I want to have a gold ornament;
but I had a gold covering.

I would like to have good food each day
but my mother reserves it only for my brother.

I quarrel with my brother
and get a nice thrashing from him for no wrong on my part.

I ask my brother to give me a pen;
instead he gives me a spoon.

I long to visit many places,
but find myself under house arrest.

I love to be with my mother;
But in the next life I am married:

I care for my in-laws;
they care only for my jewels



I wish to see my babe;
my husband gives me the scan report.

I want to give birth to a babe;
but my in-laws abort it; it's a girl.

I wish to live long in this world,
but they give me a fire bath.

Oh God! Is it the fate of girls? I know God is saying yes.

Dear mom, Forgive me.
I don't want to come to this cruel world.
Let me dissolve in your womb.

Mother,
I love you.

In My Shoes

Amrutha Pulikottil

(A middle-aged man with a long, untrimmed, white beard walks in. He sits on his bed, takes his shoes off, and slips on a pair of bathroom slippers. Pulling his bathrobe over himself, he walks towards the music system. He turns on the music. One can hear “Whiskey Lullaby” in the background and the soft sound of water hitting his back.)

“What a boring life he must lead? He never gets further than the bathroom. If he’s lucky, he may get to see the kitchen tonight. I wonder if Master has had his supper already. What a boring life he leads. Master slips him on before a shower, slips him off before bed, and then slips him on again when he wakes up. I pity him. I bet he’d love to live in my shoes for a day.”

“I’ve trekked on the Himalayas. I’ve seen the clouds part to reveal the valley below. I’ve been to five countries, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, China and Nepal, at the same time. I didn’t even need to get a visa. Master is very adventurous I love adventure. I love the Disco too but I have no say in this matter. I’ve seen the busy city of Delhi, crowded with hawkers and beautiful women dressed in sarees. Some in churidars but most in jeans. It’s sad. I prefer traditional clothing. The flowing cloth on a woman’s body is a prettier sight than tight jeans exposing unsightly fat. Master told his friend that he would like to see the true Delhi. Master’s Friend took us to see the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal is not in Delhi, it is in Agra but Master’s Friend said that Agra was the true Delhi. I was in not position to argue; Master had placed his backpack over me so that its base wouldn’t get dirty. That hurt my feelings but as I said, I was in no position to talk.”

(The middle-aged man walks in, slips off his bathroom slippers. He changes into his pyjamas and heads downstairs, barefoot. He comes back up with milk and cookies, grabs a book off the table and slumps into bed.)

“Poor Master, exhausted after today’s adventure. Poor him, for being so unfortunate. How sad his life must be? He didn’t even get to see the kitchen.”

“Last year, I walked along the coast of Kerela. Then Master decided that seeing one side of the world wasn’t enough, so we walked along the beaches

of Tamil Nadu a week later. Master said Bombay was so much more Indian than Delhi, so we visited Bombay two months ago. We were at Rajasthan four years ago. Master spilt scrumptious chicken curry on me. I didn't get a taste of the paratas though. I had a bumpy camel ride an hour after dinner. Then, Master and another friend danced the night away around a bonfire in the desert. The next morning, we were on a train to Jaipur. It's not as pink as people say. We drove to Delhi four days later and caught a flight to Kathmandu. Master loves Nepal. Nepal is God's own country to him; I'd have to say Kerela."

(Shoe's voice gets softer as he goes on. His last word is hardly audible. He falls asleep. Snoring sounds are heard.)

"I love adventure. I'm not complaining but I want more. I want to see Paris, Rome, Miss. Liberty, Big Ben... I want to see more of the world. I cannot be satisfied with the West and East coasts of South India. I want to go higher than the Himalayas. I want to go further than the Indian Ocean. I want to see the Sidney Harbor. I want to be dipped into the ice-cold water of Alaska. I want to see the Pyramids. I want to see the Congo. I want to do something daring, outrageous and out of the norm. I want to be a unique shoe. Other Nike shoes have done similar things, I want to be unique."

(Matthew runs into his dad's rooms and glances at the shoe rack. All formal shoes. He looks at the floor and sees a pair of Nike shoes. He puts them on in a hurry and scurries off to school.)

(Shoe wakes up and wonders what he is doing away from the comforts of the carpeted floor and on white tiled one instead.)

"I feel weird. There's too much space between Master's toes and me. Where am I? This is not Master's study. It's not the kitchen. He wouldn't dare wear me to the bathroom. It's not his office either. Where am I? It's dark and cold. Maybe, I'm outside. I see a sign. H, a, r, l ...Harley's Pub. I'm on the wrong side of town! This is the dirty side! Why is Master on the drty side?"

"I cannot believe Matthew. Wait till Master hears about this. He will be ashamed of Matthew. He will disown Matthew. Matthew is a disgrace to the Smith household. Matthew is not a gentleman; gentlemen do not steal. I am ashamed of Matthew. Get me off your feet this instant!"

(Matthew quickly runs into his father's bedroom. He kicks the shoes off his feet and runs back into his room. Police sirens and heard in the background)

"I've seen one corner of the world. I wanted to see the other three. Thanks to Matthew, I got what I wanted. He exposed me to something daring, outrageous and out of the norm. I cannot believe what he did but I've got another adventure to boast about. I hate Matthew for wearing me to his crime scene. Master wears him only to the bathroom. He lives such a limited life. He sees the blue tiles everyday. He has never seen another floor. I've travelled all over India, I've been blessed with many experiences but I wish I was never subjected to this. I dreamed of adventure but what happened tonight is no adventure. I prefer the beaches, the clouds and the desert songs. I never wanted this. Now look at Matthew, his adolescent desire to act "daring" has thrown him into this. I pity him. I pity Matthew more than I pity Slipper. Matthew has seen too much. Slipper has seen to less. I have seen enough."

(Shoe stares at Matthew behind bars. Master is seated on a bench in the police station)



Passe, Present, Tense

Amrutha Pulikottil

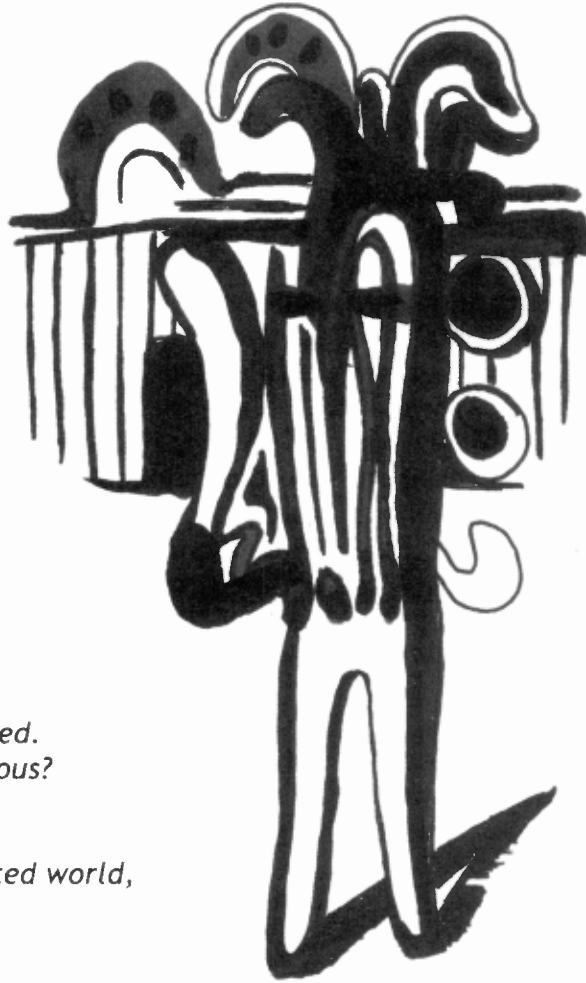
The date is 3rd July 2006.

Amrutha attempts to write the past in present tense after being inspired by a book titled *The Autograph Man*. She ponders over the past, her past. Is there anything worthy about her life? Does she have what it takes to be an idol, an icon, a role model? The power of three, yet another subject of her thoughts. She listens to “No Peace Yes War” by Cherry Filter featuring MC Sniper but war doesn’t fit in with her thoughts today. Today, her music is merely for the rhythm she doesn’t give a dime for the words or their meaning. Her thoughts go back to the power of three. Why is it that people say that three is a powerful number? Is it because Jesus ressurecated on the third day? Is it because of the illusion the Charmed Ones give? Is it because the more people the more power? Is it because three words, three terms, three synonyms are stronger than one, solitary, lone word? What is the reason for the power of three? More important, what is the power of three? And why not seven, or four or a hundred? Why three? Her thoughts walk backwards to her first one, is my life worth living? She counts how many people her life has been influential to. Not many she says to herself. How educated is she? Not very she says out loud. Her cat looks at her. How creative is she? Her brain writes “you’re not an artist” into the air. She erases it. She asks herself if she has ever done something worth recieving credit for? No. Has she ever helped an old lady cross the road? No. Has she ever helped a classmate with their homework? No. The power of three. The power of three. The power of three. What is so special about the power of three? It hits her. The newspaper. And an answer. She is only 16 years old. According to recent statistics and by looking at her health records, she has a good 70 or more years ahead of her. Life is a lot more than helping others, helping yourself and making a cushioned seat in society. It will take her a couple of years to figure what else life is worth but until then, she plans to live it.

Only a Game?

Yogee Pandya

*Life is a strange phenomena
Why we exist,
We do not know.
We act superior,
Though we have no control.
Our minds are a potential threat,
A fraction of which is not even **used**.
Is that why the world is spontaneous?
Its fate will will its own destiny,
And in the end it doesn't matter.
We're insignificant in a collaborated world,
Like a scorching fleshy wound,
Sizzling with the desire to know.
Don't be afraid,
We're just being played,
Just like any other game.
In our pristine form,
We are all ciphers.
The system creates and destroys us.
Only a few achieve a meaning in life,
Who knows, you might be one of 'em
But remember this,
He is out there,
He is not dead,
And you are not alone.
And that's how the game is played.*



Micro-Fiction

The Maid

G. Alan

“Make tea. I’m tired, Alice.” Mrs. Lily, the mistress of the house, trudged towards the bed.

Alice, the maid, craned her neck in the direction of the bed and chuckled when her mistress snored at regular intervals.

Furtively she switched on the television for the first time. With quick steps she neared the refrigerator to take the strawberry cream.

Her eyes swiveled around the room and locked on Mrs. Lily’s purse. Swiftly her left hand explored the purse and her right scooped the ice cream.

“Alice, stop it.” A lady yelled.

The ice cream slipped into the purse.

Alice, transfixed, sauntered towards the bedroom door and peeped through the open door to see Mrs. Lily sleeping like a bear.

The television blared.



DOMESTIC HELP

A. Balasubramanian

The telephone rang!!!

My father spoke from the office. "My friends will come to our house for a tea party this evening. So make some good preparations."

My mother thought of preparing some more dishes for the tea party. She had four servants for her help. All the servants had more than fifteen years of experience. They were a good example of ideal workers.

My mother started preparing some sweets with the help of her servants. Suddenly, to her surprise, three of her four servants went on an unconditional strike.

My father and his friends came home by 5 p.m.

With the help of her only servant available, namely the gas stove, she served tea to his friends that evening.

After they left I asked my mother, "Why did three of the four servants go on an unconditional strike?"

My mother replied politely, "There was a power failure."

DOMESTIC HELP

T. David Jayaraj Franklin

She appeared at the kitchen door, just when Arun's friends were settling down at the dining table.

It is not common for Arun to bring his friends home and so he was tensed.

At the sight of the new person at the door, their faces grew cold.

Arun turned and stared at her.

"How many times have I warned you, not to come before me in shabby clothes."

She disappeared into the kitchen.

"She is our SERVANT," Arun said, stressing the last few syllables.

The party got over.

Arun took his cricket bat and rushed out. Before crossing the door, he shouted.

"I am sorry ma."

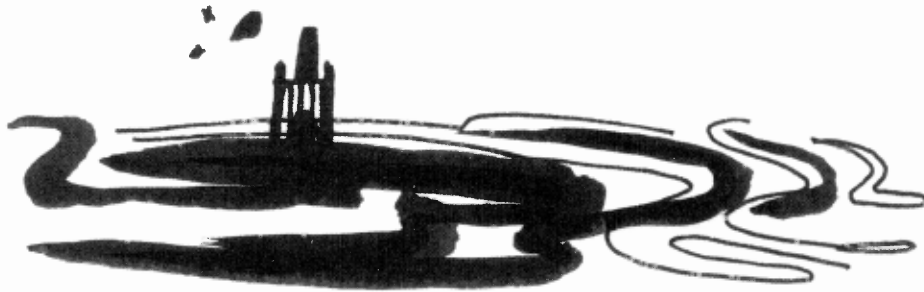
ROMEO AND JULIET

T. Ganesh Babu

He was heroic. He won her by vanquishing all the other suitors in physical combat.

When he advanced and touched her and rubbed his shoulders against her, she glanced at him sideways with pride. There was a twinkle in her eyes.

They were walking in unison only till the end of that lane. There they were caught and thrown into the municipality van along with the other stray dogs.



MY DARLING

S. P. Kasthuriba Devasena

I have been awaiting my darling for three hours. She is the most charming angel in the world. Her cheeks are as soft as a feather. She hugs and kisses me whenever she meets me. Today, I have brought her something which she likes most. But, she has not turned up.

At last, I can hear someone at the door. Must be my darling. Yes, it is she who comes in. She rushes towards me and gives me the same kiss. I give her the 'Cadburys,' and my five-year old cousin blushes.

DON'T RISK YOURSELF

D. Leema Davidson

The mistress of the abode steps in wearily with her son and rushes to the kitchen to prepare coffee.

“Let me do all your work! Please don’t risk yourself,” says Booma, the young, charming servant maid.

The mistress is flattered by these words and it builds confidence in her that “Booma is a loyal servant.” Compared to Booma’s service in that house her salary is so meagre, but she does things happily. Even the mistress wonders at her volunteering.

Often the mistress used to think that she should take a risk and find a good bride for her son.

One fine morning, Booma calls her mistress, “Aunt!” holding the hands of her son. The mistress stands aghast.

Booma is consoling and ready to pacify her mother-in-law.



THE BRIGHT NIGHT

K. Mythili

The drowsy eyes hesitated to move further. She shut down her computer and gazed at her watch. It was half past eleven. She locked her chamber and strolled towards her quilt. At that very moment, she was startled by a strange noise. Sharpening her ears, she found that it was the sound of a leaking tap. Plop! Plop! Plop! The howling and the grunting sound of the night's creatures grasped her attention. The shuttering of the window panes struck her ears like thunder. She was soon haunted by the night's friend, horror. To add panic to the night, the power was shut down and she became dumbstruck. She gasped for breath, when she heard the screech of the door and the footsteps. The clock struck twelve; the room became bright with candle lights, as her parents sang "Happy birthday Sally."

MELLANIE

Paul Love

Mellanie was our African-American cook when I was a five-year old. Every day I pestered her with questions. How old are you Mellanie? Did you ever go to school? Do you ever drink Mellanie? What should I be when I grow up Mellanie? She would always laugh or wink or even hug me as she ladeled out her answers.

One morning I found Mellanie radically changed. There was a smile on her face, but a demure one. My questions got only sedate, one-word answers. Finally, unable to take it any longer I blurted out "What happened Melanie? Did your husband give you an extra kiss this morning?" "Young man," came the response, "My husband just won a million dollar lottery. When you grow up, you'll be working for me!"



MY WOOD CUTTER

M. Samkumar

As I was walking back to my bedroom from my living room some creepy noise from outside made me turn and look through the window. All I could see was the dark woods not far from my house. But as I looked closer I saw a dark figure move with heavy footsteps. All of a sudden in a blink of an eye I couldn't see the figure and I couldn't hear the footsteps anymore. I didn't know why I did this but I went out into the woods to check out if what I had seen was reality or just an illusion. I was relieved to see nothing when I entered the woods. But something made me go on. As I went deeper into the woods some kind of sound broke the silence. I thought it was the hissing of a snake, but as I walked on it started to sound different; it sounded more like somebody breathing. As I went closer and closer the rhythmic breathing got louder and heavier, and all of a sudden the breathing stopped and the same dark figure which I had seen jumped out and cried, "Run!"

I don't remember if I ran or not. But the tree fell.

DOMESTIC HELP

S. Pinky Shama Johny

There was a weird looking man, standing with great expectations at one corner of the street. He was staring daggers at me. His disheveled looks and his half cut ears pumped up the fear factor in me, which gave me the worst creeps that I've ever experienced.

I tried, but in vain, to hide the quizzical expression on my face, as I walked away. Except for the fact that he was partially retarded, I couldn't get any other information about him from my neighbours.

The strange encounter had disturbed me, but I tried to take a nap in the afternoon to get him out of my head. It was then that I heard the doorbell for more than six times at a stretch. I rushed to the door, sensing the impatience of the visitor. Then I realized that it was the same bogeyman at the door.

I almost suffered a heart attack on seeing his toothless grin. Suddenly I had a sense of relief and was almost elated, when he uttered the four-lettered word.

I was only too happy to give away the clothes for ironing as he repeated the word, "Iron" again. "Domestic Help," I said, smiling myself.





DOMESTIC HELP

Praveen Moses P.

He came into the kitchen at 5:30 just like I've known him to in the past year. He started his chores at the same time he got in.

He soaked the clothes before he went off to wash the dishes and sweep the house. When done, he got back to the soaking clothes to squeeze them out and hang them up to dry.

He brought in the paper and the milk that's delivered to the doorstep and put the milk to boil while he browsed through the fridge, looking for what to make for breakfast.

He went to the bedroom and chanced to glance at the full-length mirror and what did he see?

Me!

GOOD DRIVER

L. Shakti Arun

“Where are you going?” asked Dallas, my driver, who was also my bodyguard. He was sitting near me giving some instructions.

He was lean, taller than me. Turn left! Turn right! Turn on the indicator! Horn!

Put on the brake! Screaming at me STOP!!!!!!!!!!

The red light was on. “Move. Let me drive.” He switched on. Hmm, Good driving, brother!

Five years of experience. I was amazed by his driving....Really good. Next he was overtaking many cars, until he reached a high speed of 220 mph...

The electricity went off.





DOMESTIC HELP

M. Shameena Parveen

I have been seeing her right from my childhood. Her foot has touched every nook and corner of our house. She is the one who plays with me, takes me to school, gives me food, and helps me to bathe and dress. She does all the housework in addition to taking care of me. She boosts my courage and knows my likes and dislikes. She has known me for twenty-three years and tomorrow is my twenty-second birthday.

She is more than a maid. She is my mother.

I WISH TO BE A SERVANT

D. Leema Davidson

Joseph often carried me on his shoulders and made me feel comfort;
Mary fed me with delicious food and love;
Austin took me to school and brought me what all I wanted;
Jeni concentrated on my dressings and good-looks;
They glorified me as a significant princess;
They never bothered to serve me as servants;
They never expected salary for their magnanimity;
Their true service made me wish
To be a loyal servant to them
Because,
They are the members of my family.



The Cruelty of Time

Nitya Chhiber

“Okay, so what exactly happened that day, which was so long ago? Our eyes had met across the room. You were good-looking. I saw that you too found me attractive. Then, why didn’t you approach me at the end of the lesson? I thought women were the more passive and the shy sex. I personally was conservative and personally was confused about whom to date. The class was huge and there were plenty of other good-looking male students to choose from. I decided to keep the memory of your flirtatious glance and continued with living my life.

Then, I got your email- you had tracked me down. So you still remember me? You still have feelings of lust for me? I am taken aback. Do you know, you are now dealing with a married woman now? I have a very pleasant relationship with my husband, which I do not want to sabotage. So forget me.”

(She was still sitting on the dinner table but this time, with her favorite, comfort food- chocolate.)



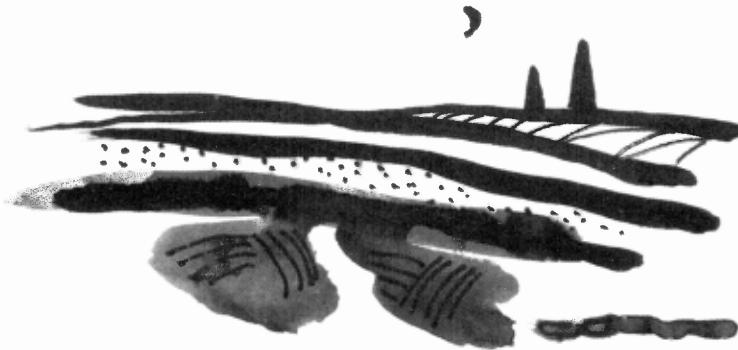
Religion, Royalty, Sex and Mystery

Amrutha Pulikottil

She was spread across the floor like the Vitruvian Man still adorning her royal blue uniform, which was partially torn. Opposing her family's decision to marry a Brahmin pandit; instead she ran away from home and married into the lowest caste. She lay motionless on the white marble floor. Her royal blue, torn uniform was decorated with red designs.

The sarpanch accompanied by my grandfather walked around her taking in all the details. She was holding a broom in her hand. Who did it? The question that would soon arise amongst the community was the same that arose between my grandfather and the sarpanch, who did it?

I walked in, my grandfather ordered the other servant to take me out but it was too late. I had taken a picture in my head; there lay Ranjana on the floor, motionless, mute and mort.



Translations

Give, Eat and Love

Thomas H. Pruiksma

*When doing good to a man, do not ask
If he'll do good.*

*Tall-standing coconut palms,
Tireless and growing, drink water at their roots
And return it, sweet, from above.*

*Between the king and the careful poet, the poet
Has greater glory.*

*Apart from his kingdom
A king has nothing. Every place a poet goes
He is praised.*

*Even if you wallow, weeping year after year,
Will those who have died come back?*

*You of this earth
Weep not. That is our way. Till going, give
--What is it to us?--give, eat, and love.*



*Tough does not beat tender. Arrows
Pierce elephants, not cotton.
Rods of iron
Cannot crack stone, but a green tree's roots
Split rocks.*

*Can anyone make a bird's nest, a beehive, a spider's web,
A hill for the ants that chew wood?
Do not speak
Of your strength with strong words. For every one,
Something comes easy.*

(Poems from the classical Tamil poet, Avvaiyar (12th century))

RED-ALERT
N. Poovalingam

*I never feared
the bad dreams
about you.*

*I have often dreamt
of you
rolling down a
mountain slope
But I knew
you would somehow
grab hold of a tree-branch.*

*In my dreams
of your drowning in water
I prayed to the water-nymphs
with faith.*

*In another one of my dreams
you were sick
and
I told you
that you would recover
with the light of dawn.*

*But I was crying
all through last night
for that one dream
in which
you were lost.*

(A Tamil poem “Abhayam” by Manushya Puthiran)



*Majula Padmanabhan and workshop participants
Swedish Compound, Kodaikanal, August 5, 2006*



14th Annual Writers' Workshop, 2006

*Jointly hosted by Kodaikanal International School and the
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