

■ The 15th Annual Writers' Workshop 2007

Kavithalaya



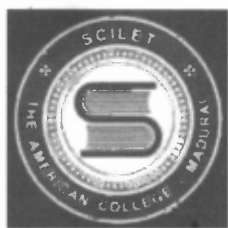


Kavithalaya

15th Annual Writers' Workshop

Kodaikanal Mission Union, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu

9-11 August 2007



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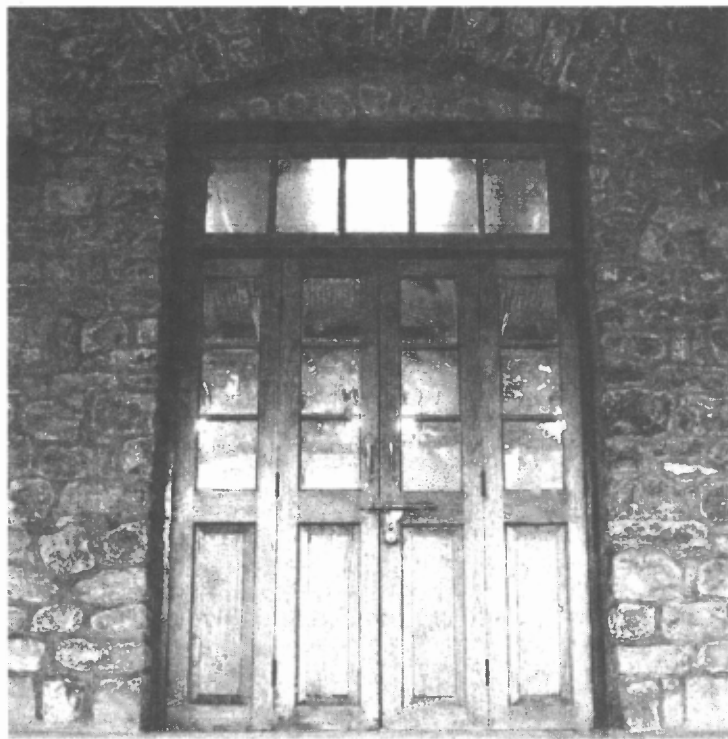
*Jointly hosted by Kodaikanal International School and
The Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation,
American College, Madurai*

Foreword

This year's writer's workshop was held in the KMU on the Highclerc Campus in Kodaikanal. The workshop leader was Dr. Lakshmi Kannan, a well-known South Indian writer whose works are published in English and Tamil. As always, lectures and discussions were held inside, then writers scattered to write on their own. Many stayed inside, but most found places to sit outside and around the building. On the bases of the granite columns in front of the main doors seemed the most popular place to sit, discuss and write. In some ways, the 'Kavithalaya' or house of poetry was brought to life in and around the building.

As the magazine came together, the KMU's architectural elements lent themselves to the design. You'll find the columns on almost every page, holding up the Kavithalaya. Below is the doorway inside.

But every house of poetry needs art to store, both literary and visual. You'll also find some of the drawings and water colors of Brian O'Neill, the current artist in residence at KIS. Enjoy.



Credits

WRITER IN RESIDENCE

Dr. Lakshmi Kannan

DIRECTOR

Pramod Menon, KIS

FACILITATORS

T. Ganesh Babu, SCILET

Deborah Cordonnier, SCILET

Paul Love, SCILET

Ravindran Solomon, SCILET

Joel Gnanadoss Timothy, SCILET

EDITOR

Strother Purdy, KIS

ART

Brian O'Neill, KIS, watercolors

Strother Purdy, KIS, photos

Richard Pike, KIS, photos

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First Impressions

Praveen Moses, P

Frank was not in the best of spirits. There was this vivid feeling of butterflies flying around in his stomach. Today was the day. He would either be a winner or a loser. He would either be heralded as a hero or he would make a fool of himself.

He knew his game. He was an expert, but still not a pro. He was here to show that he belonged; that his inclusion in the squad was just. Oh, how he hoped he wouldn't shake so much.

The talent scouts had said he'd go places with his game. He'd believed them. He had bragged to his folks that he was going to be a star. His daddy had nodded and shaken him by the hand. His mother had embraced her baby and cried. His Celie, his sweet Celie, had looked at him, tenderly with her soft brown eyes and had blown him a kiss. He'd felt like he'd been in a room full of balls and hoops.

He slammed his locker shut. He had a bad feeling he was going to screw it. He had always played excellently, except that one time, when he first tried out for the school team. He had been nervous and had fumbled a lot. What if he was destined for a repeat performance? What if he was to be booed off court?

He looked up, sensing someone beside him. It was the tall form of one of the senior players on the team. He had seen him on the sports channels innumerable times. What did this guy of all people want with him?

The guy placed a hand on his shoulder and said, "Frank, right?"

"Do yourself a favour. Just pass me the ball and you won't regret doing anything stupid."

The players were called up.

He thought about what Celie had said.

"Forget anyone's even there. Just do your stuff and be yourself."

He remembered what the big guy had said.

He passed the ball. The first quarter 19-20.

Conflicting thoughts! He tried to get his best move right. A step. Two. A good jump with great lift. Slam! The ball bounced off the ring. Oh God! What had he done? Silence reigned. The first half 37-39.

He decided to play it safe. He passed again. The third quarter 51-53.

Celia's voice--"Be yourself." He looks at the guy, then fakes and takes a three. It sinks in. A 360 slam and two lay ups. That ends it.

76-71 in favour.

Frank's sight was getting a bit blurred under the persistent flashes of cameras. He was also being a little mobbed. He looked about and found the guy he was looking for making his way to the locker room. His head was hanging way down. He again looked at the ever-growing mob of paparazzi and fans around him. So, this was what stardom felt like. He could visualize what his folks would say. He needed to call Celie. Yes, he had loads to talk about. He was here; he belonged.



Abduction?

K. Mythili

Who could miss the fower garnished house and the ghee dribbling ladoos? The entire town was mustered into Girija's house. It was her wedding and her father's happiest day ever. Her sister and brother were brimming with excitement. The gathering droned, "Is it a wedding or a festival?" Decked with gold and wrapped in silk, Girija entered like an angel. The crowd's eyes were on the pandal... the priest started chanting mantras... and then came a loud cry... "the bridegroom is missing."

Soon there was confusion. Girija's mother fainted, her father gasped for breath and her brother was mad with fury. But Girija smiled, took her mobile and whispered, "Plan.... Success! Meet you in a short while..."



IGNORANCE? (One-Act Play)

K. Mythili

Characters

Prasad - Father

Sheela - Mother

Preeti - Daughter

Grandmother

Velu - Servant

(A big isolated house on the outskirts of the city. The sun ascends and Preeti wakes up from her bed).

Scene-I

(Preeti walks out of her room...)

Grandma : Pittu, come here darling...! (She ignores the loving call of her grandmother).

Velu : (from kitchen) Papa, chai or milk?
(Velu, the servant's voice meant nothing to her. She opens the gate and goes near a thorny plant that is decked with yellow flowers).

Preeti : (as if speaking to a human being) Hi, friend. How do you do? You look so tired... hmm. Wait! (Bends towards the plant) I will get you some water.

(She waters the plant and goes back to her bed-ridden grandmother).

Grandma : (looking at the wall clock) Oh... It's time for school... (turns towards Preeti) Why didn't you get ready?

Preeti : (reluctantly) I don't feel like going to school.

Grandma : (pauses, motionless) O.K. Get me the phone. I want to talk to your parents.

Preeti : (suddenly faring up) Who are they?
Ha! I do whatever I wish. (harshly
at her grandmother) You mind your
own business! (Preeti's aggressive
behaviour terrifies her grandmother).

Scene-II

(Preeti cherishes loneliness for the rest of the
day in her room and goes out for an evening
walk then).

(a knock is heard at the door... Velu goes and
opens. Preeti is back).

Preeti : (sits comfortably on the settee)
Velu, get me two cups of tea...!

Velu : Two... ?

Preeti : Yeh... One for me and another for
my new friend

(She relaxes herself).

Velu : New friend?... (?) But... where is he?

Preeti : (She gets irritated and gives a
scornful look at Velu). Can't you see?
He is sitting next to me (stretching
her hand as if someone is sitting
nearby). I found him by the roadside
(smiling coyly). He gave me good
company (happily). So I invited him
to come home...

Velu : But... (stammeringly) P... Pa... Papa!
Nobody is he... here?

Preeti : (raising her voice in anger) Do you
think I am mad?

(Velu, almost frightened and confused offers
'them' tea and narrates Preeti's abnormality
to her grandmother. Grandmother struck with
panic, rings up her parents and asks them to

come immediately).

Scene-III

(Preeti was left with her grandmother when she was three. Prasad, Preeti's father, being a military officer was subjected to transfer. Sheela, Preeti's mother felt that this would create a problem for Preeti's studies and future. They visit Preeti once or twice in a year).

(Preeti's parents arrive and she is annoyed by the unusual gathering in her house. Sheela breaks the silence).

Sheela : Preeti, how are you, beti? (a long silence... she does not reply and walks into her room.) Oh? (Sheela is taken aback).

Prasad : (furiously) Preeti... Just wait! (going towards her) we have come to see you (no response from Preeti). Didn't you hear your mother?

Preeti : Of course! Why not?... I am still alive (shrinkingly) What do you want me to say? ... (laughs mockingly) You want me to lie... ? that I am fine, ha?

(Prasad and Sheela are speechless. They are awestruck by her replies and gestures).

Prasad : (after a pause, he recovers himself and softens his voice). Why are you irregular in your studies? Why do you bunk school often?

Preeti : (turning her face from her father) I am not interested...

Prasad : (frustrated) Then what do you want to do?

Preeti : (with mock seriousness) Why do you want me to say that to you?

Prasad : (aggressively) To whom do you want to speak then? (bursts in anger) to your rubbish friend... the filthy plant?

Preeti : (feels insulted and shouts) Dad!!! (drops of tears from her eyes) Why do you cow me down?

Grandma : (caringly, she goes near Preeti). No... No... Beti. We care for you. Why don't you understand?

Preeti : (with a scornful look) Shut up! You old...

Prasad : Preeti! (smouldering with fury) Stop it! (almost raising his hand to slap her).

(Preeti runs into her room. Prasad, dejected, sits on the settee. Sheela tries to pacify him).

Scene-IV

(The sitting room is full of emotions and dead with silence. Preeti does not turn up. Prasad is drenched in his thoughts. Grandmother goes on whining and Velu is disappointed with the happenings. Sheela slowly tries to talk with Prasad).

Sheela : Prasad, What do you think of taking Preeti to a psychiatrist?

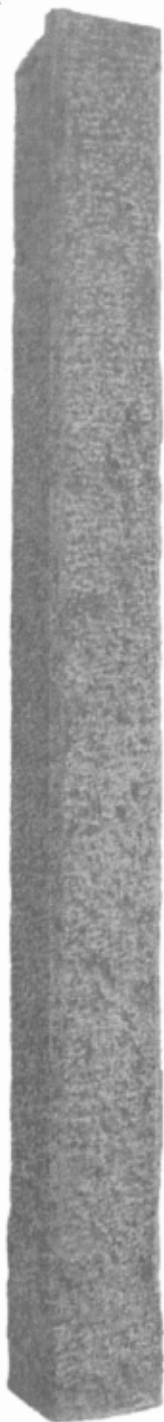
(Prasad does not reply).

Prasad : Velu... (clears his throat) Velu...!

Velu : (comes and bends near Prasad) Saab!

Prasad : Pack things... We are taking Preeti with us!

(Sheela and Grandmother are annoyed and stunned).



Grandma : What... ?

Sheela : Her studies... ?

Prasad : (not affected by the queries) What
she needs is not a psychiatrist but
parental care and love!

(All come out of their ignorance).



A Mosquito

P. Roland Rencewigg

[Sighing heavily] Hummm... !!! No use in trying to taste the blood of Paulji, who is always fresh and filled with the fragrance of perfume.

For the past three days I've been trying to rest on his body and suck a drop of his blood, but I couldn't. First of all, I found it very difficult even to enter his house. All his windows, ventilators and doors are nested with nets. Last night, despite those obstacles, I somehow managed to barge in. But I couldn't go near his bedroom because of the strong repellent which was deadly. The 'Goodknight' burning bright frightened a poor creature like me. In fear of being killed, I dashed out through the main door. I had to rest for a while to bring my heart beat to normal...

My God! It is twilight. As usual, I have to go to Room No.53, in Washburn Hall. That is the ideal place for me. It is my Palace where I'm the king, reigning Roland, every night. But I'm vexed of drinking that thick B-Positive blood of his. His room has no nets. He sleeps with his doors and windows wide open. There are no mosquito repellents. I hide myself inside his sweat-smelling dirty clothes, hanging clumsily in all corners of his room. He is a corpse in his sleep. He wears just a 'lungi' and does not blanket himself. I've seen many people. The moment I rest on them and feel their body with my sting, their hands come in search of me involuntarily. Some people at least turn or make swift body movements. But this brat lies still, even if I inject my sting with all my might! He is such a bloke!!!

Oh! It is fully dark! I can't delay any more. Bye. Meet you on November 22, when college reopens.



Is It Love?

P. Roland Rencewigg

Vicky sat thinking about his last summer vacation. Those sixty unforgettable days with his Mama Ponnu, Malu

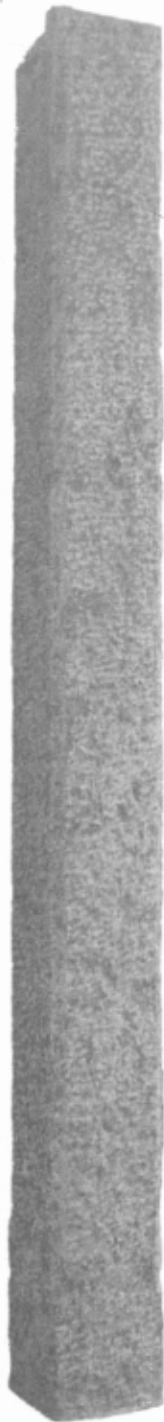
Vicky and Malu knew very little of each other. Vicky was in Madurai and Malu in Chennai. They were of the same age. Vicky was going to Malu's house for the first time after his last visit there during his eighth standard summer vacation.

At Malu's place, Ravi, her dad, gave a warm welcome to Vicky. Vicky was looking through the door to the next room, expecting to see Malu. "Hello Athaan" came Dinu, the younger brother of Malu. Vicky smiled in disappointment. Where is malu? he wanted to ask. "WHERE IS MALU?" asked Ravi. Vicky feared and wondered how Ravi could read his mind. "I'm drying the clothes, Dad," came Malu's voice from the terrace. "I'll go and see her," said Vicky and leapt through the steps in no time. He saw Malu.

The sun was shining with all its night to compete with Malu's glowing face. Her face was resplendent. She was wearing a green chudi, without Duppatta.

"Hi Malu," Vicky cried in excitement. There were mutual enquiries between them. "How did you do your exam?" Malu asked. "I could have done much better than you," said Vicky, winking his eyes. Malu blushed and 'pinched' Vicky's stomach.

Vicky did not expect this. It made some emotional changes in Vicky. He had had many such pinches before from Malu, on his hairless stomach and moustache less face. He used to react violently. It was the same PINCH. Not on the immature hairless abdomen of Vicky, but on the belly with hairs exhibiting Vicky's



maturity. The pinch was also not by the immature eighth standard girl, Malu, but by a symmetrically arranged lass.

Ravi decided that Vicky and Malu should do their entrance coaching for medicine at Vicky's place as it was economical to do so. Vicky and Malu were accompanied by Dinu. Once when they had to cross a road, Vicky suddenly caught hold of Malu's hand. He was astonished by his daring to catch hold of her. All the three reached Vicky's house in Madurai.

On the 'FIRST NIGHT' at Vicky's place, Malu was lying right next to Vicky, at a distance. None of the family members minded them sleeping next to each other as they still remembered 'the Vicky and Malu of the eighth standard.' Vicky wanted to turn and have a look at Malu, but he was afraid. Fifteen minutes passed. He thought that she might have slept by then. He turned. He was shocked. Her nose was almost touching his, with her eyes wide open. He desired for her to be in such a state. But he didn't expect this. "Don't you feel like sleeping?" she asked smiling. 'HOW WILL I, WITH YOU NEXT TO ME,' he thought. "I'm trying to sleep," he replied and turned. Next morning on their way to their coaching centre by bus, Malu said, "Vicky, you threw your legs on me, last night," with a smile as if she enjoyed it. Vicky felt humiliated, but was smiling in his heart.

Vicky had a lot of affection for Malu. He had never been in love. But he had a principle, that one should love only one girl. Malu's actions made him think that she was in love with him. She used to say, "I'm feeling sleepy" and leaned on Vicky's shoulder, during their travel. Sometimes, she laid her head on Vicky's lap saying, "I'm uncomfortable." Sometimes she grabbed him to go to a shopping centre. She would say, "Today your clothes were good."

Though Vicky enjoyed all these things and

wished to love Malu and have her as his life-partner, he wanted to know if he was the only man in her heart. Malu used to get a lot of phone calls to which she would reply in a whisper. Vicky asked her directly, "Have you ever been in love?" She resented his question at first. But she admitted that Raj, her classmate loved her. She didn't say if she reciprocated his love. Vicky hated this. He wanted to uproot the shooting love for Malu in him.

The very next day, Malu again leaned on Vicky. Though Vicky's conscience didn't permit this, his physical emotions did not resent her actions. 'SHE BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE!' condensed his mind and not his body. Vicky enjoyed her physical closeness. He wanted to cut off Malu from her friends. He sent Malu's mobile phone with Dinu when he left.

Days rolled by. Malu had Vicky, the only person of her opposite sex, to communicate with. Their physical closeness went deeper. Very often they cut their classes and went to the movies. Vicky, to satisfy his conscience, asked Malu, "What am I to you, chellam?" An instant reply came, "Lover."

Vicky was overwhelmed in joy. Days moved very quickly. They enjoyed all their youthful pleasures. They often exchanged kisses. Their entrance exams were over. Both were placed in different colleges at Chennai where Malu resided. Vicky was put in a hostel. He was happy that he was going to be with Malu.

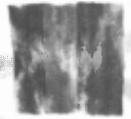
Vicky met Malu every morning and evening. Whenever he went to her house there were physically close and often exchanged kisses. But soon Raj began to interrupt Vicky, and not Malu. Vicky expected Malu to spurn him. But she spoke to him as usual. Vicky feared that she might drift towards Raj.

Once, when Vicky was at Malu's house, she was speaking to Raj over the phone. Vicky was suspicious. "I have replied to your mail,"

Vicky could hear Malu melting over the phone. He was taken aback. He found that Raj was still there in her heart. Vicky took Malu's diary without her knowledge and found that it was filled with the name, Raj, and his deeds, everywhere. Nowhere could he find the name 'Vicky.' Vicky asked Malu very bluntly, "Do you love me or Raj? If you love me, you should cut his relationship." He expected her to say, "NO VICKY, I LOVE YOU, ONLY YOU!" But she said, "How could I break with him all of a sudden. That would be pitiable. You have been with me for two months only! But he... He has been after me for two years!"

Vicky understood that Malu didn't have any real love for him. He realized that her kisses and promises were all temporary. Every day Vicky saw Malu with Raj. He stopped going to her. But he couldn't leave or forget her just like that, as she did. He was not as hard-hearted as she was.

"Vicky, I'm planning to go to my Mama's house for the upcoming summer vacation." Ben came running to Vicky. Vicky wiped his tears and sighed heavily.



**Dialogue at a Traffic Signal in
Madurai**

S. Pinky Shama Johnny

Traffic Police : Hey you! Stop right there.

Pinky : Oh my God!

Traffic Police : Come on, get off your scooty
and park it on the side.

Pinky : (aside) I knew this would happen. (to
the officer) Excuse me sir, but I am on
my way to college and I am already
late.

Traffic Police : Do you think all the others
do not have anything to do? Where is
your helmet?

Pinky : I'm sorry sir... I left it at home. I
usually wear one every day but today
I left it at home.

Traffic Police : Why didn't you wear it today?
Did you get your helmet to leave it at
home? (has an angry look)

Pinky : No. There was some problem with my
vehicle this morning when I started
it. So I came looking for a mechanic
shed to check the alignment of the
wheel of my scooty.

Traffic Police : But I caught you without a
helmet and I warned you five days
ago.

Pinky : (a little annoyed) Did you just say that
you warned me a few days ago?

Traffic Police : Yes I did (almost yelling at
her). Hope you don't have any
problem in hearing. Now, stop
questioning and pay a spot fine of a
hundred rupees.

Pinky : (fully disturbed) Why should I pay a fine? I go through this way every day and I do wear a helmet too. Moreover I can see that you are not stopping all of them. You are cunning enough to pick out a few who look gullible. How can you lie that you had caught me for the same reason earlier? I usually wear a helmet! Everyday!

Traffic Police: Alright! Alright! I... forgot or... probably mistook you to be someone else.

Pinky : But... How could you just forget and charge me for it? I do not have any money and even if I did, I would not have paid a fine to such a rude police officer like you (goes towards her vehicle and tries to start it).

Traffic Police : Do you think you can snub a police officer and get away with it, without paying a fine?

Pinky : (almost hysterical) Do what you can. I do not have money and I'm late to college.

Traffic Police : How can I let you go while the others are waiting here? How will I be able to answer them?

Pinky : I don't think I have to bother about a police officer like you who is worried about money more than safety (picks up a mobile phone and places a call).

Traffic Police : (expression on his face changes) Alright! You can go now.

Pinky : No! I would wait because you asked me to. Let us both face the consequences (the mobile phone is still not replaced).

Traffic Police : But I said you can go Madam (tone is feeble). It is for your safety

that we insist on wearing a helmet while riding. Please wear one next time. You may go now (gulping down the pressure in his throat).

Pinky : (quickly starting the vehicle and speeding away) Tee Hee... (aside) that was so wicked of me. But next time I would never ride my scooty without a helmet... No... not even in my dream... if I do, I shall see to it that I do not get caught by the same traffic police officer!!! Tee Hee... (speeds off with excitement).



Unpredictable Moments

S. Pinky Shama Johnny

The pain was excruciating for her and she had difficulty in breathing. Gayathri lay there gasping for breath and trying to push hard. She felt weak and lifeless though she had a beautiful life inside her. Again, she tried with all her might and then the sudden squeal of an infant was all that could be heard. Gayathri could not wait to lay her hands on what she had just brought into the world. She could hear voices saying, "What a lovely baby...!" Gayathri was pleased with herself.

Then there was another voice saying, "She is a replica of her mother." This statement struck Gayathri with awe. She dreaded to think of carrying a 'girl baby' to her husband's place. There had never been talks about the gender of the baby but Gayathri knew that her in-laws were like many Indians, who gave importance to the male gender. Gayathri wept, she could not think properly because of her weak physical condition. Everything seemed to be muddled and vague. She desperately wanted to protect the baby. But, 'how'?

She heard her mother greeting her mother-in-law outside the maternity ward. She was petrified and she could feel her heart palpitating like never before. She tried to pretend to be asleep, but it was hard for her at that moment. Leela, her mother-in-law, came in with the baby in her arms. Leela seemed to be beaming with joy. She leaned towards Gayathri and said softly, "Bhahu, you have given birth to a Lakshmi." Leela kissed Gayathri on her forehead and said, "God bless you."

Suddenly Gayathri was startled by the loud sound of fire crackers. Leela smiled and said, with a naughty twinkle in her eyes, "Your husband is celebrating." Leela stood cradling the baby in her arms. She was never to be blessed with one of her own, but her daughter-in-law had brought home 'Lakshmi' for her.

A Man's Demands
S. Pinky Shama Johnny

He asked for love,
She became his love.

He wanted to be cared for,
She became his mother.

He longed to be a part of her life,
She became his wife.

An heir for his property,
A beautiful young son.

He stayed away at nights,
She knew the reason.

He asked her not to question,
She did not agree.

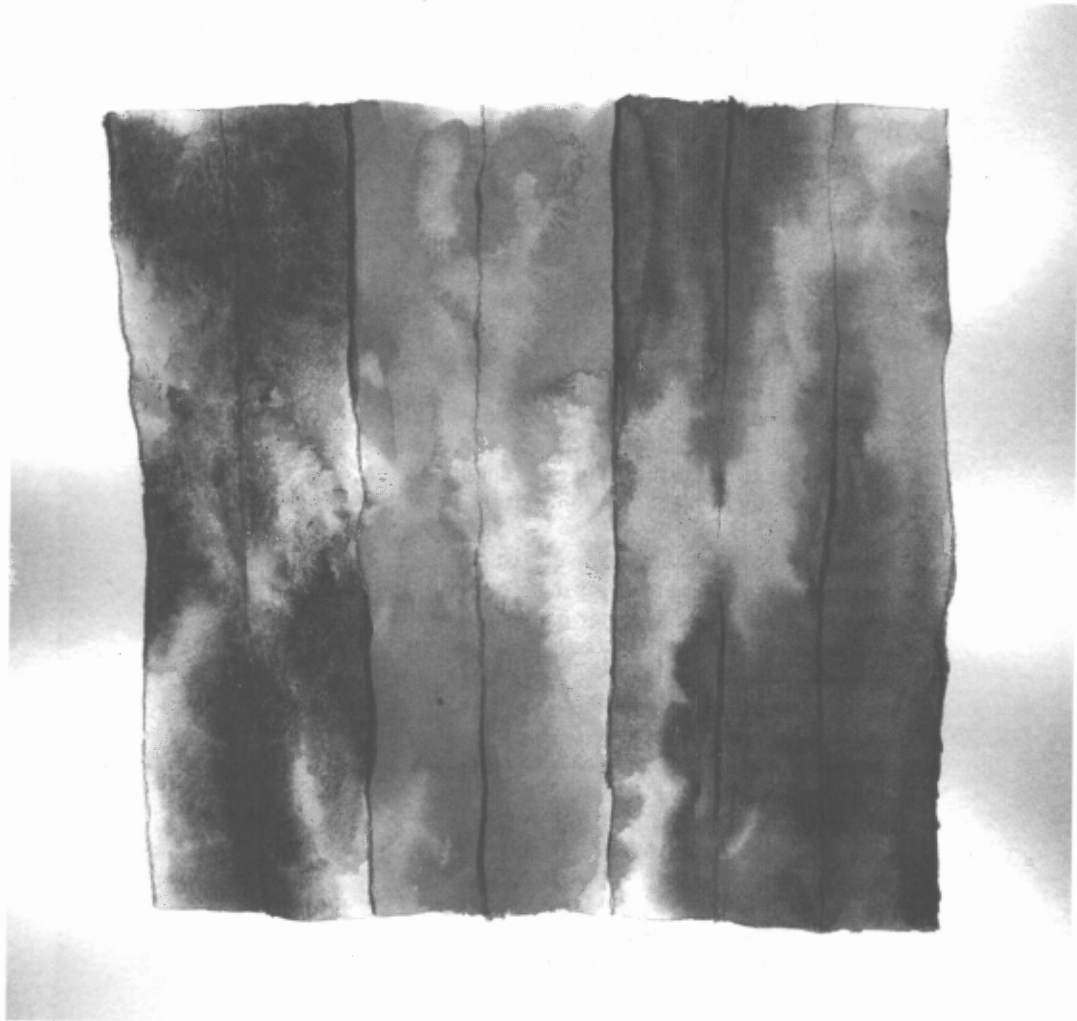
He demanded freedom,
She did not understand.

He fung the court notice at her,
She signed it.

For the frst time, She met his eyes,
Not seeking pity...

Only to say, "GET LOST!!!"





Lady of Kodai Lake¹

Deborah Cordonnier

'Twas the night before the Workshop,
And all through Kodaikanal
Not a creature was stirring, not even Deepu.
The notebooks were stacked on the mantle with care
In hopes that the muses soon would be there.

The Kodai students were all smug in their beds,
While visions of translations danced in their heads.
And Paul Love in his nightie, and Pramod in his cap
Had just settled their brains for a much-needed nap.

When out on the lake there arose such a splatter
Joel sprang from his bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the doorway he flew like a fash,
Tore open the window, which went down with a crash.

The moon shone so bright o'er the lake's dark glow.
That it gave a great light to the objects below.
When, what to his wondering eyes should appear,
But a paddleboat and fourteen writers, how dear!

A woman, their captain, so lively--such zest!
Ravi knew in a moment it must be our guest.
More rapid than doggies, her paddlers they came.
And she whistled and shouted and called them by name:

Now Roland! Now Pinky!
Now Arun and Betty!
Come Leema! Come Nirmal!
Come Vicky, Praveen, and Sam!
On Mythili! On Shrini!
On Shamee and Dhunraj!

To the edge of the lake,
To the edge of the wall,
Now Paddle away, Paddle away,
Paddle away All!

And then, in a twinkling, Gee Bee saw with alarm,
The huffng and puffng and failing of arms.

¹ Apologies to Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863). "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," also known as "A Visit From St. Nicholas", was written in 1822, and under the condition of anonymity by the author was first published in the New York Sentinel in 1823. In 1844, Clement Clarke Moore claimed authorship. Moore's father Benjamin Moore, Bishop of New York, presided at George Washington's inauguration.

As he was shaking his head and turning around,
In walked Lakshmi Kannan. Please applaud all around.

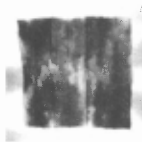
She was dressed all in pink, from her head to her toe!
And her clothes were all drenched from the water below.
A bundle of writings she had fung on her back,
And she looked like an editor all set to attack!

Her translations--how they twinkled! Her stories so merry.
Her poems were like roses; her sci-f was so scary.
Her face was a blush and wore a wry smile
While her hair was pulled up in a fashionable style.

She had a hearty laugh, and a good sense of humor.
Indeed, loving students confirm such a rumor.
The ink of her pen she used on each sheet.
And the words that she wrote were a helpful critique.

She spoke not a word, but continued her work.
She read all the verses, with a grin or a smirk.
Then laying her pen alongside of the prose,
She gave a quick nod—to return she now chose.

She sprang to her paddleboat, to her writers gave a
whistle,
And away they all few like a modern-day missile!
And we heard her exclaim, 'ere she paddled out of sight:
"Thanks for a great Workshop,
and to all,
a Good Write!"



Tears Speak When Words Fail

D. Leema Davidson

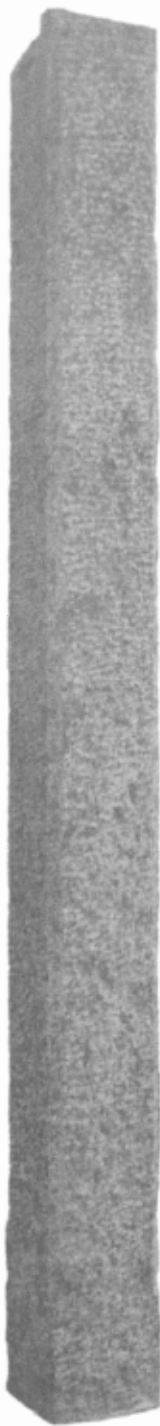
"Oh, No! I am not interested in having a trip to Ooty. Why don't we opt for any other place," shouted Jessy at the top of her voice. But her friends silenced her by saying that the selection of place was not at all important. Their sole intent was to enjoy being with their friends.

Reeta compromised by saying, "Let's have fun, Jessy. O.K.?" Jessy too agreed to join with them. And the day came. Jessy, the tall, lean and good-looking girl presented herself in such a manner that the entire gang passed a quick glance at her with great jealousy. The apple pink dress that she wore gave her a majestic look.

They had the peak of enjoyment even while traveling. They reached Ooty by eight o' clock on the following day. They all relished every moment passing comments on the passers-by. As they felt hungry, they stopped the van to buy apples. Jessy preferred to stay in the van itself but out of her friends' compulsion she stepped down. As usual the girls started passing comments on the apple seller, a poor, puny lady.

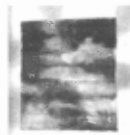
One mocked the way she dressed and the other ridiculed the way she spoke English. The poor lady couldn't understand the bombastic language that the girls used. She innocently addressed them as "One apple, eight rupees, want you?" As soon as she uttered these words, the entire gang burst into laughter. Rosy suppressed her giggling and made fun of her by saying, "Your English is so good. Did you have your education in Cambridge?" And everyone started laughing again even louder, except Jessy.

Reeta questioned her immediately: "Oh Jessy, come on, why are you keeping quiet? Come on, join with us." And the entire gang moved slowly, unable to control their laughter. Jessy



accompanied them, one step, two step, three, four and five and suddenly she stopped her friends saying that she felt like buying apples. Now she asked them to continue walking so that she could come and join them. Jessy turned and her sight was filled with the picture of the poor apple seller. She came near her. Their eyes spoke for a moment and the tears dropped from Jessy's fooded eyes.

She couldn't utter any word except, "AMMA!"



Silver Tongued!!!

D. Leema Davidson

John, a tall, lean and handsome man from Goa who didn't know Tamil visited Kallipatti for his research work. He asked a man, "Can you direct me to this address?" and the man without uttering any syllable brought him to his Muthalali who was "good" at English.

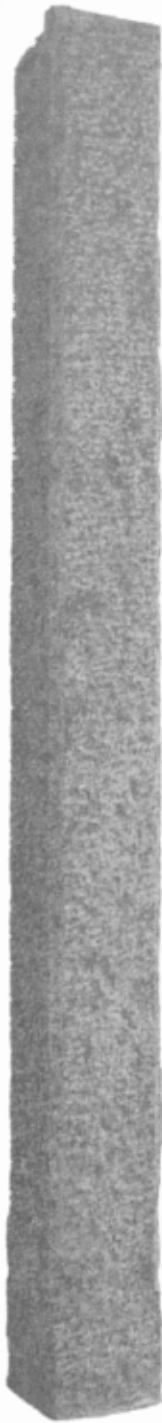
The Muthalali was very proud, and in order to show his wit, he said, "Come, come. First say, which English speak you. Because you not blame me for mistake in English. Right. There is two grammars of English, Britan and American. I know two English. You say which English know you, I that English talk."

John couldn't control his giggling but he managed to continue his conversation with him. As by the wish of the Muthalali, a day was fxd to give a warm welcome to John. The day came. The entire village was gathered together.

The Muthalali felt as if it was a proud privilege for him to welcome John. He portrayed himself as an intellectual and started, "For all people, I welcome you. This place no English people. Only I, I alone. I, this village head, worked hardly (hard) and working hardly to grow English. But no change in people's speak." And he also boasted about himself saying "Teaching staffs in this village also not good in English. See, (he turned towards John). In my house, I class take to staffs!"

The innocent village people wondered at their Muthalali's profciency in English. On the other hand, John was unable to bear his self-appreciation and stood up from his chair and addressed the audience "Vanakkam!... Nantri."

Time passed. John was treated well by the villagers throughout his stay in that village. John couldn't hurt the ego of the Muthalali because the Muthalali was a nice man except for boasting about himself as an



English speaker. Often, John came forward to improve his English indirectly. But Muthalali couldn't correct himself.

And the final day of John's departure came. John bid farewell to everybody. He came near Muthalali and as usual Muthalali started, "Thank God John. You manage because, I alone English speaking, otherwise..."

John smiled and called Ramu, a puny boy who had been running a petty shop in that village, to bid farewell to him. He came and said, "O.K. Sir! Really I had a good time with you. I hope that the entire village has helped you in all your deeds. Your leaving makes us feel bad because we are going to lose such a jovial guy like you."

The Muthalali stood aghast. When he was sure that Ramu moved away, Muthalali shamelessly asserted, "See, John, I training give, he good English."



Crime

(A translation of a Tamil short story, "Kuttram" by P. Jeyaprakasam)

M. Shameena Parveen

Ramasamy stood in front of his hut. It was not yet time for the trains to come. The active hours of the trains had ended in the morning itself.

He was working as a railway gate keeper. He had spent the major part of his life in opening and closing gates. He was counting his days until retirement. He had planted many shrubs around his hut. They met his domestic needs.

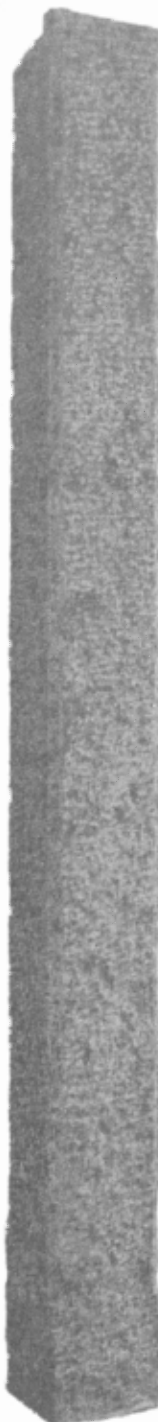
The paddy crops were tossing their heads in the water in front of his hut. It was the untended land of the government. He grew crops in that land. After monsoon, the rain water became stagnant. He ploughed the land all by himself.

There was a cotton mill beside the land. More than a thousand labourers worked there. The waste water from the mill got mixed with the water in the land. It acted as a good fertilizer. Some labourers advised Ramasamy not to use the water from the mill as it would spoil the crops. He listened to their advice with a smile. But he did not care. He knew the nature and language of the land, as he had once owned a feld. The crops danced like angels under the spell of his sweat. They slept on hearing his lullaby. He nurtured the crops like a mother.

Now he had no land of his own. His father had sold half of the feld and he sold the rest for the welfare of his children.

His father had said to him, "Paddy should be in water up to the neck level. It is like our beloved daughters. We should provide them with mandatory things." That was why he accepted the water from the mill.

"Dad, here is lunch for you." His attention was diverted on hearing the voice of his



youngest daughter, Dhanam. It was a routine for her to give him lunch on her way to school and to collect the tiffin box on her way back. She was studying in the last year of school. She gave the tiffin box to him and began walking. The father was looking at the daughter who was walking away. She looked dull without any jewels. Wiping his tears Ramasamy thought in his mind, "Daughter! Let the harvest get over and your studies will also be over! There will be jewels for your ear and neck."

The bell rang as an indication of a train's arrival. He started closing the gate. In a few moments the train came and it went. When he started opening the gate he heard the bell ringing again. He knew that there were no more trains at this hour. He closed the gate again.

There came a trolley with a well dressed officer seated on it. Two servants came pushing the trolley. The trolley stopped when it came near Ramasamy. He saluted the officer. The officer's eyes widened in surprise on seeing the grown up paddy. Ramasamy's body shivered in fear.

The officer asked in anger, "Who is cultivating paddy here?" With folded hands Ramasamy answered, "It's ours."

"Is it ours? Does this untended land belong to you and me? The one who runs the government is not our father to share this land. Doesn't all the untended land belong to the government? I am going to complain about this to the government."

Ramasamy stood with his head bowed, "Being an untended land I had the urge to cultivate, Sir. Please forgive me."

The officer knew his name. The official said with fire in his voice, "Ramasamy! You are a criminal. If I let you go they will punish me as a criminal. I have to inform the government

about this. Be ready.”

The official left. So many officials had gone through this way but none had noticed the crops. How come the crops fell in the sight of this young officer? The young official would not hesitate to take action.

It was the day of harvest! His sight remained fixed on the crops. Everything went well. Though that officer was young, he was good. He did not take any action. Ramasamy was saved.

The harvesting was going on swiftly. As Ramasamy was busy with harvesting, his brother Velayudham took care of the railway gate.

A man called Manicka Pandaram supervised the harvesters. He took great pleasure in harvesting such a fertile crop. “I have never seen this kind of prosperity in any other field.”

“How many bags of rice will I get?” asked Ramasamy.

“Not less than fifteen.”

“Will it come to fifteen?”

“Sure. See whether this Manickam’s words become true or not after measuring the paddy. If you get fifteen bags you should give me a grand feast.” On hearing this the women in the field laughed. Ramasamy too laughed innocently. While they were laughing like this a man came there on a bicycle. He called Ramasamy to come to him.

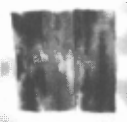
Ramasamy recognized that man. He was none other than the one who had accompanied that officer. Ramasamy felt uneasy as though he was enveloped with darkness.

The man questioned Ramasamy about the number of paddy bags. His sight fell on the heap of grain. Ramasamy answered with fear,

"It will come to 10 or 15 bags."

"Send half of the bags to that young officer's home. As he is good he doesn't complain about you. You should respect him and his magnanimity. O.K., I will come and collect the bags at night." Then he left the place in haste. Ramasamy looked in that direction with tears in his eyes.

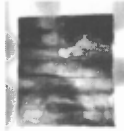
On seeing his tears Dhanam asked, "Who is that man, dad?" Wiping his tears Ramasamy told his daughter, "Dear, you can't have jewels just now. Let us see next time." Dhanam couldn't understand the words of her shivering father.

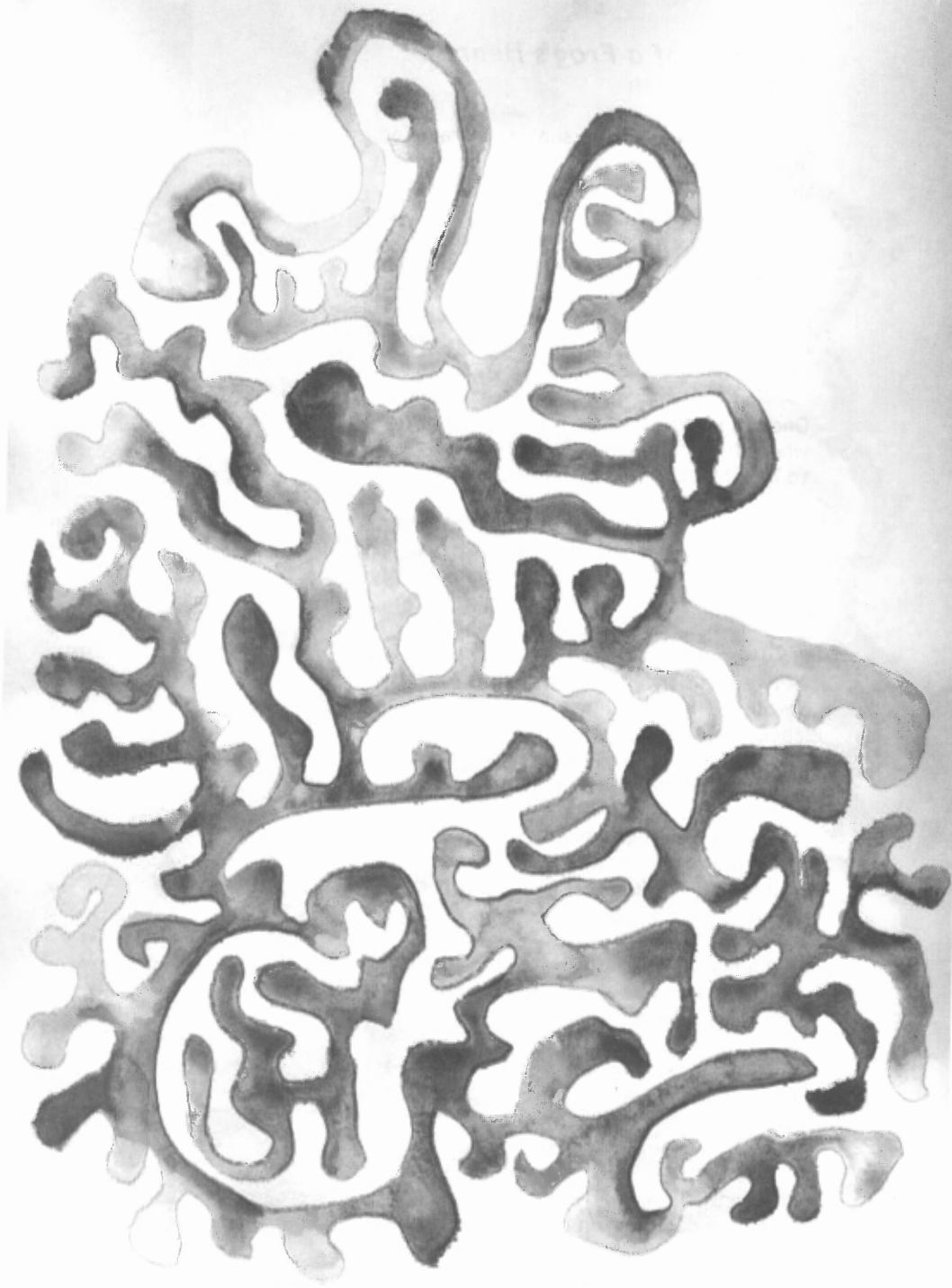


Lost and Found

M. Shameena Parveen

He was sitting on a bench in Bryant Park. It was a lovely day. The birds were singing and couples were enjoying quiet solitude on the scattered benches. He looked across at a bench a few metres away. The girl--she was looking at him. Those blue eyes spoke volumes. He couldn't mistake what they were trying to convey. He studied her face, her hair, her hands. Everything was just right. He had this gut feeling it was her. They stood up together. They walked with measured steps towards each other. He asked, "Martha? It's me." They hugged instinctively. It was a long embrace. It definitely had been long--too long since their mother and father had divorced.





Anatomy of a Frog's Heart

R. Nirmal Rajah

Humid was the air. The sun's rays travelled through the dew on the grass blades, which shimmered like pearls. The grass was high. The frog felt it and dwelt upon its short size. Its gleaming eyes stared upon a girl's legs. She moved her leg slowly (actually she was playing). He saw the smooth, long, beautiful legs. He leapt, leapt and leapt near the girl; he saw the golden anklet in her legs that chimed like a thousand bells.

Once the frog had been a handsome prince who ruled a vast empire. But he was cursed to be a hideous frog by an evil sorcerer.

He went closer. He looked at the girl from an angle that enhanced her beauty. He exclaimed, "Oh! Is she a girl or a heavenly angel?"

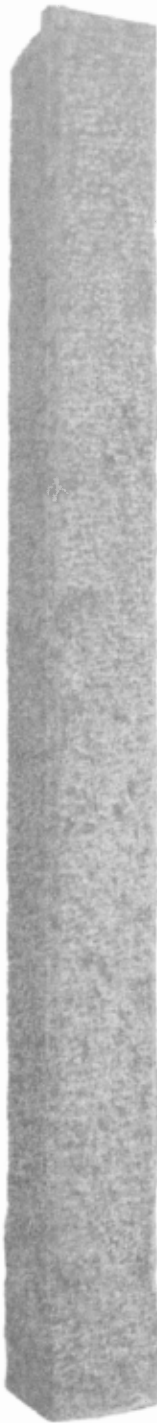
He wanted to hold her long, silky black hair in between his fingers, but alas! His hands were webbed. Her alluring eyes, her sensational chocolaty lips, the copper brown colour of her skin, her radiant face and her elegant physique all made her gorgeous.

Although the frog prince had seen a lot of beautiful maidens, this one was unique. He called out, "Hello, Miss Fair." But it came out as a croaking sound.

Suddenly she turned towards the frog prince. Her eyes widened and gleamed in the sunlight. She went near the frog and bent low.

The frog prince was puzzled. He felt the thumping of his wildly beating heart. His thoughts raved, maddened, puzzled. He tried to leap away from her, but he couldn't.

She bent so low that the frog prince felt her soft silky dark hair on him, which she tucked away with her hands revealing her magnificent beauty.



She gently held the prince in her palms close to her face. The frog experienced her warmth in her palms.

The prince imagined, "Now she will kiss me and help me to get rid of this hideous figure, and then I will make her my queen!" He was so excited that he fainted.

When the frog prince reopened his eyes, he was lying down. He saw his girl, Miss Fair. Now he could hold her cheeks in his hands and kiss her on her lips. He twitched his hands, but he couldn't move. He turned to his side, but to his horror he saw himself 'Crucified,' nailed to a wooden plank in a tray. "Oh my God! I am still the same thing--a frog!" he exclaimed.

Then the frog prince saw a group of girls in white dresses along with the girl Miss Fair! An elderly woman cried aloud, "Okay girls, now you shall dress the frog and study its anatomy. Be careful that you see its heart beating."

The frog prince felt a searing pain as the scissors of Miss Fair probed through his body. Then Miss Fair exclaimed, "Oh! I see his heart---!"

The frog prince said in agony, "Do you see my love in that---?" and everything went black.



Parts of Speech of India **Dhanraj, S.**

A million deaths
A million births
And India
Had its freedom.
Six decades
Have blown over
Since Freedom.

India
The proper Noun
Has been independent; but
Indian
The proper Adjective
Not yet.

Is this not partial?

This has brought on
The arrogant invasion of
The Pronouns
Caste
Religion and
Class-discrimination,
Presuming and trying to
Occupy the position of nouns.
So Serving,
The essential Verb,
Is spoilt
Like poisoned milk.

My obligation
Is to let
Fellowship
Act like a connecting Preposition
To bind together
The Noun and
Pronouns, with
The help of
Love,
The Conjunction.

When
This happens
The whole world

*Will exclaim
The Interjection*

Hurrah!

*At its
Completed human growth.*



A Murder by Mother

(A translation of a Tamil short story, "Amma Oru Kolai Seithaal" by Ambai)

J. Jothi Viknesh

Saying 'Amma' makes my heart flutter with memories.

I was four years old and not in the state to comprehend many things, like why Kalyani my elder sister (recently married) fainted so frequently, or why Appa kept bothering about my future.

One day I observed Amma early in the morning boiling water in a chulha. Her dishevelled hair spread all over her shoulders. Her hair was obscuring half her face and the other half reflected the fury of fre. She noticed me and got up, her hair tumbling down to her knees. The hooks on her blouse, undone, baring her nerved bosom, made me regard her as fre's own daughter who has just come down from heaven. Was she my Amma? Was it really her?

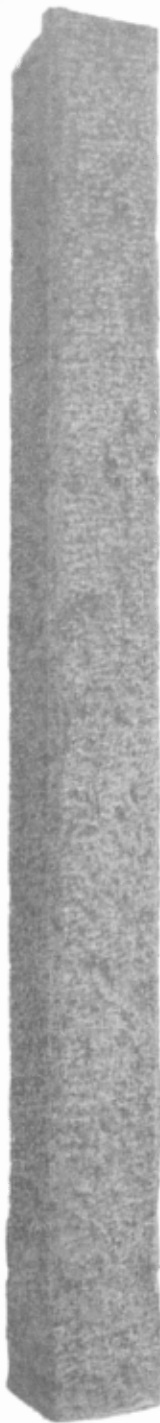
A holy fre had been set up in our home, because of Amma's red lips and the bright kumkum on her forehead. She appeared to be an idol of raging fre, "the goddess Kali."

While having an oil bath, I saw Amma's fairness and her chiseled mane, and asked her, "Why are you so fair and I so dark?"

She smiled at me and said, "Now, my darling. Who dares question your beauty?"

There is no connection between these events, but in everything Amma played the key role. She was the endless and unconquerable fre that burns impurities and absolves this world. With a single smile she would make me feel endless pleasure. I don't know if it was she who fed me these feelings or my own imagination. But she was steadily growing in me.

Then I was 13 years old. My skirts became



short and Amma lengthened them. One day lying on her lap, I asked, "Amma, what is puberty?"

Silence... and then the reply came, "I would like you to be just like this, playful, unconcerned and light-hearted."

Amma went to see my cousin-sister Radha, who would be visited by a suitor. She had to be absent on that very important day which served as a turning point in my perception of life.

It was Kalyani who bathed me and was hard-handed. She bored me with complaints that I was old enough to look after myself. It was Deepavali and Amma had made new clothes for me. I prayed to God and put them on. Feeling happy, mischief lurking in me, I ran to the back yard to pluck fowers from the large tree as I always did. It was still dark and as I was climbing down with fowers the sound of a cracker shattered the silence around me. My heart skipped a beat or two and my whole body shivered. I jumped down and ran home.

Now daylight was spreading everywhere and in this light I discovered stains in my new skirt. I called my sister and showed her. She gaped at it for a moment and ran shouting for father.

I observed myself in the mirror and asked, "Has something happened to me?" And even while asking I could feel that something has indeed happened to me. I started perspiring with fear, as Amma had told me to be as I was, and I had changed.

I couldn't control myself and sat down weeping bitterly. Everyone around me tried to soothe me by saying nothing wrong had happened and that it should happen in every girl's life. I could not digest it. If only Amma was here for me to lie on her lap and hear her saying, "What happened to you has made you more beautiful." I waited eagerly for her return. Kalyani had wired her yesterday.

I didn't play with others during the games period. I just sat underneath a tree and went home late, only to be given a lecture from Kalyani saying I was not to roam outside alone after hours.

Amma returned with a gloomy face. The suitor had rejected Radha saying she was a dark skinned girl. Father reminded her that they too had a dark skinned girl who has now come of age. Amma now looked at me. The moment anxiously awaited had arrived. I just wanted to sink in her arms crying loudly being engulfed by her everlasting love. I wanted to tell it all to her.

She stared at me with new cold eyes unfamiliar to me and snapped, "What the hell made you hasten for this? Now this will be a great burden on me."

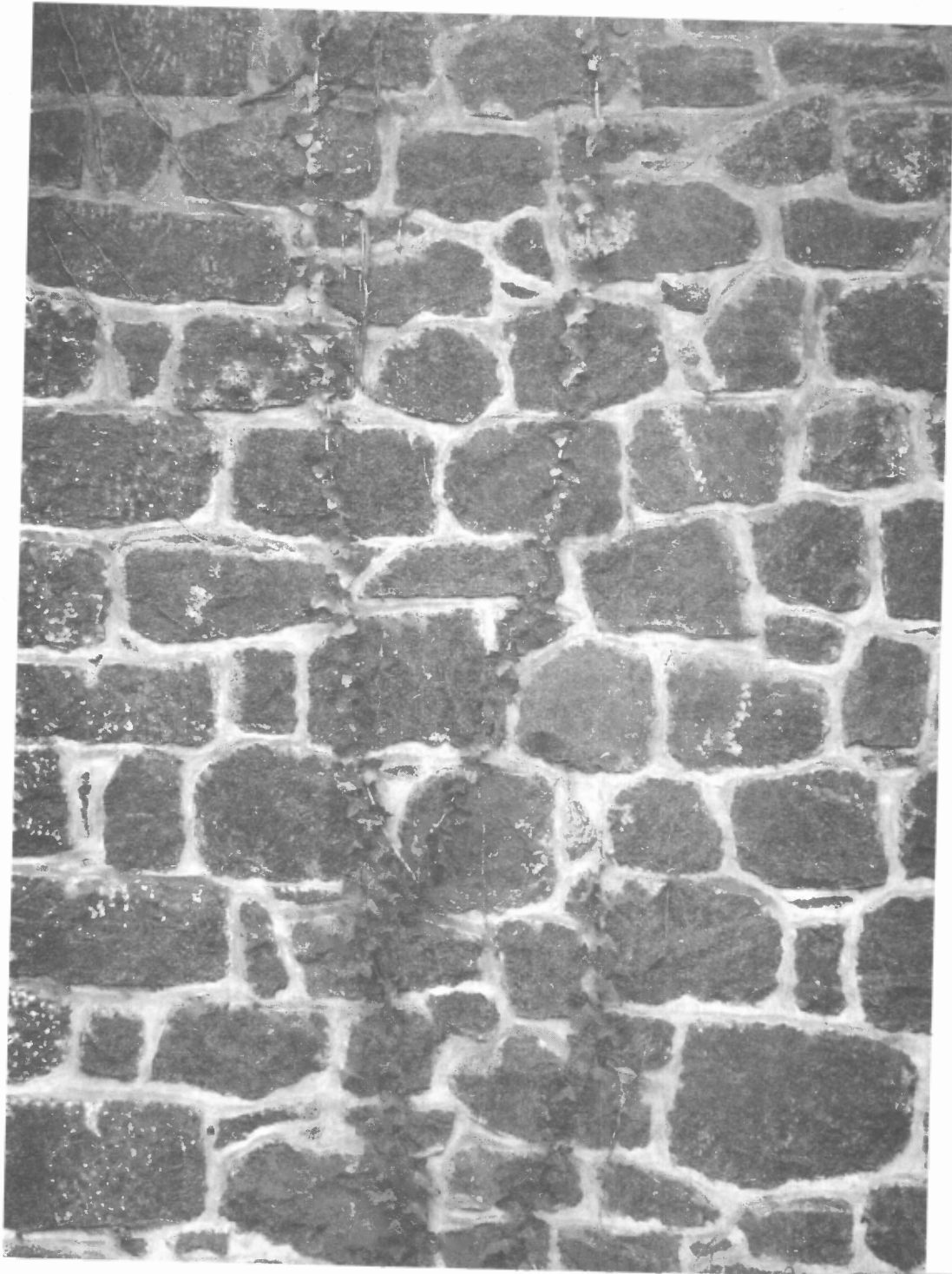
"Whom is she blaming?" thought I. The ground gave way under me, voiceless questions thundering my heart.

I could now see the fierce flames arise from her red lips, and now reddened eyes which burned her mask and showed a simple fallible human mother.

Those merciless cold words shredded every bud of beauty that she had helped me to develop.

Her blazing fire has not only burned the impurities but the buds as well.





The Earth Saver

J. Jothi Viknesh

The bus started, spitting a lot of smoke. Naren was seated in the fifth seat from the driver. He was a tall, sturdy-looking man, with a square face and an unfriendly look. He was a critic in a popular newspaper.

The smoke from the bus made him think of pollution. "Man has abused nature by depriving her of her beauty and polluting her," he thought. "Industries and factories are releasing tons of sewage on the rivers and seas thus polluting them. Automobiles are the chief reason for poking holes in the ozone."

"Man is cutting down hundreds of acres of trees every day for his needs. He is excavating and mining for natural resources and does not replace them. He is constantly converting pleasant sceneries to pathetic slums. Man thinks of himself as a great organism. But what he truly is, is a social animal, clothed, cunningly destroying others. He has not even left the extreme places. He has reached the highest place on earth, 'Mount Everest,' and contaminated it with his plastic. He has reached the deep oceans and polluted them with his radioactive sewage. He has even reached space and polluted it. This is ridiculous. I am ashamed of myself that I am a man." Naren said to himself.

Now he noticed a polythene cover fly by him through the window. He saw that the pretty lady before him had just thrown it away. He looked at her menacingly, but she threw him a beautiful smile and he went speechless.

And all this did not prevent him from throwing away the empty biscuit packet out of the window, while exhibiting his concern for Mother Nature.

The Forgotten Home

J. Jothi Viknesh

Suresh, the General Manager of Sundaram Motors, was always considered a man of high esteem. Everyone thought of him as one who never made mistakes. He had joined the company as a clerk and had reached this position by sleepless nights. He was completely obsessed with his office, and only after entering home he would remember his family.

One night Suresh as usual went home, parked his car and knocked on the door. The door was opened by his wife, Sumati, followed by his 10-year-old son Ganesh. Only now did he remember that Ganesh's exams were over and vacation had commenced. Every year they would select a famous holiday-spot and spend their vacation at that place.

Sumathi began to talk, "Honey, where shall we spend our vacation this year? We have already visited all the spots in India. Shall we go to Singapore this year?"

"All my friends are planning to visit their grandparents' village. Shall we?" asked Ganesh, his eyes gleaming eagerly.

"What!? You want to visit that village? Broken walls! Tiled huts! Mud floors! You won't stay there for a single day," warned Sumathi.

"Yes, son! There's not even a toilet! You would have to go to the lakeside to attend nature's call. They've got no power, there's no TV, you will get really bored..."

"If it were so, then grandpa and grandma would have suffered and missed a lot, Dad! You should have looked after them. Why didn't you?" interrupted Ganesh incredulously.

Suresh felt a great hammer hit on his head. Next day Ganesh was happily sitting in the car on his way to the village.

Return to Nature

Frederick Samuel, I.

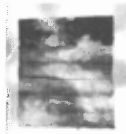
Up on the hill
The road
Melted into a
Serpentine contour.
It climbed up
Showing its wet façade
Like the slimy coat
Of a viper.
Nothing
Was found there
To mark its end.
It trekked
Through the woods
Towards infinity
Like the incessant diaries
Which carry
The endless fantasies
Of an Arabian chronicler's
Thousand and one nights.
I think it would never have
Felt solitude.
All the lush,
Green pastures
Of the wild--
It always sensed
Their cheerful presence
Talking and giggling
With them.

Unaware of all these
The people
Are really
Frittering their lives away
The splendid forests
Of the woodlands
Have always attempted in vain
To let the humans know
Their fine presence
Till their demise.
The men expend their days
Leaving
The beauty of Nature unseen,
Leaving its melodies unheard,
And its copiousness unenjoyed.



No problem.

*Dear Nature
I'm here
Trying to hear and see and
Enjoy and grab
The words
You possess for us*



Sitayana

(A translation of a Tamil short story, "Sitayanam" by Thilagavathi, I.P.S.)

Frederick Samuel, I.

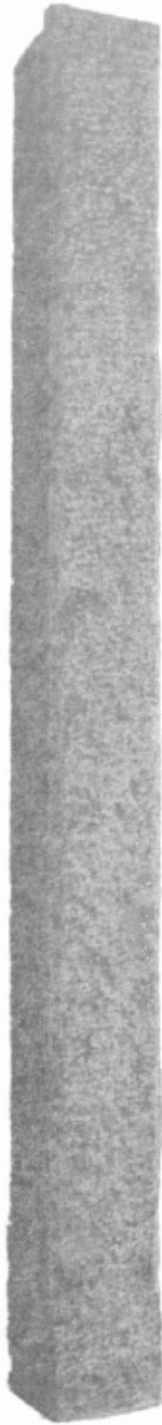
A smile spread over Sita's lips. A smile of weariness, bitterness and agony. A smile of contempt. She said, "Iyamsita..." to herself repeatedly.

These were the words her beloved father Maharaja Janaka said to Sri Rama as he handed over his daughter to him in marriage: "Here's my daughter Sita. She will go with you in all your ways. Receive this gift of mine. Long live you two! She will be with you like your shadow, chaste and fortune. She will not separate from you." Will not separate? It had been eighteen years by now, after her separation from Sri Rama. As the wheel of time rotated, the sorrow of separation had bruised her body and spirit and remained a scar. Her luster had faded; tiredness, grief and aging had made her look much like the bagasse of sugarcane.

The same mantra of marriage had sown sweetness in her; had sown anger; had sown hatred; had sown bitterness; today, all her actions were now very serene. The mind and emotions had retired into her body. The mind always dwelt in a space beyond desire and hatred.

Vaideki lay on the grass mat in the Barnashala next to sage Valmiki's ashram. He was teaching Lava and Kusa to sing the story of Rama without any faw. The lines transported Sita backwards into the past.

The love she had for Rama who once had broken the bow in order to marry her, and the way she went to the forest with him, came to her mind. She remembered the days when she was playing with mainas and parrots, despite having the privilege of her succeeding reigning queen. She ruminated about her going to the forest with Rama, not being able to bear the



loneliness, even amidst a lot of nurses, friends and relations.

The comfort or wealth or superiority that the palace life gave didn't appear great to her. All her desire was to stay with Rama always, inseparable. This same desire had paved the way to today's permanent separation.

When Lakshmana brought her in a chariot to the banks of the Ganges, she had never thought about being separated from Rama permanently. She only thought that he had given permission to help the wives of sages with some dress and food. She believed that her husband was really helping her to fulfill her desire, being a woman who was pregnant. When Lakshmana wailed and said that it was the king's order to leave her in the forest, he disclosed the reason: "Is it fair to a king to attack from behind? Isn't this the sagacious warrior who killed Vali, hiding behind him?"

Janaki was very shocked. She cried, wailed and lamented. She writhed because his father's word spelt Rama's fame and slurred and shamed Sita. This wife of the great Emperor shrunk in agony and humiliation choker her. Even when Ravana abducted her, his act of stealth was condemned by her. When Hanuman offered to carry her to Rama from Sri Lanka, she refused this plan saying it wasn't fair to a Kshatriya woman to do so. Such a woman's heart was scorched by this act of Rama, cheating her as if a small child is gulled.

Didn't she set fire on herself to prove her chastity, just for his satisfaction? Didn't she suffer all the misfortunes of Ashokavana? Didn't she tolerate all the tortures caused by the demons? She put up with all the troubles and problems only because she thought that Rama would come and redeem her; if she had not done so before he came, it would have been a disgrace to him. All she was rewarded with were the dagger-like words of Rama at their first meeting after the redemption.

Didn't he tell that he had killed Ravana only because he was an enemy, and not to redeem Sita?

As she was walking in the forest with her two sons, Vaideki grinned at a Samshubah tree. The boys blinked mysteriously.

It was on a Samshubah tree at Ashokavana that Sita was planning to hang herself to death, not being able to bear the separation from Rama. She was worrying that he would hate her for her stay at another man's place. Because Hanuman came there at the correct time, this plan was thwarted. Had she died the same day, she would have escaped these disgrace and agony. At least when she was in Ashokavana she had some hope; but now, an empty smile filled her lips vaguely.

Every deodar tree and kongu tree and ashoka tree gave her different feelings. Every maina and parrot and pigeon and sparrow reminded her of something. Sometimes the children feared this kind of mysterious state of their mother, sitting and gazing somewhere. After Valmiki had taken them into the ashram, they learnt to be calm at such times.

Loneliness and isolation became the sole company of Sita. The young men who were studying in the ashram would sometimes tell her that great sages like Atri, Brihu and Agasthiya used to visit the place. Sita would listen to them without any interest. When Rama had slain Tadaka and Vali, there were at least some people to interrogate these acts and condemn them. May be she wondered what all the penance, wisdom, justice and virtue were for when not one of them came forward to question the injustice caused to her.

Many celebrations and spring seasons had passed by. Her sons grew up as youthful heroes of all arts. However, Sita was close to neither of them. She was Janaki's daughter. She was living all alone like water drops would



on the petals of a lotus.

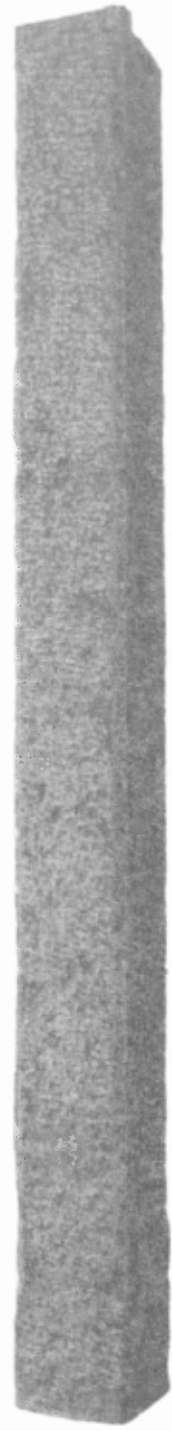
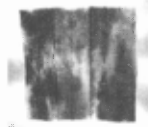
Then one evening the sage came, with Lava and Kusa. They hadn't come for quite some days. She served food whenever they came and listened to the news they used to carry. When they expected some reaction, she would just remain silent. Even when she came to know about Rama's slaying of Lavana and Sambuva through them, and Satrugana's coronation at Madurai, and Rama's Aswamedha Yajna too, silence was the only reply. Only when they delivered the news that Rama had conducted a yajna with a golden statue of the queen by his side, there was a smile of indifference, satire and bitterness on her lips, just for a second.

Sage Valmiki put it in a nutshell: "Oh Lady! Your sons staged the story of Rama successfully in Ayodhya. The Emperor recognized your children who were very much identical to their father. We'll prove the excellence of your chastity tomorrow in the royal court."

Sita's heart erupted like a volcano. Her eyes emitted fire. Her face grimaced. Her body, that was weary from aging, grew red. Again a fire-trial after so many years? Again a confinement just because some launderer or apothecary passed out some nonsensical comment? Didn't he have that clear mind that at least the demon Vibhishana had? Wasn't he as clear at least as the monkey Hanuman was? When Lakshmana got angry at Bharatha who came to attack with a big army, Rama explained Bharatha's greatness to him. Wasn't he able to understand his wife's character?

The lady thought for a while. She cursed herself. Why such sudden separation? Isn't this good evidence that he recognized the successors of the Raghu dynasty of Dharmathma, Nauhsa, Sahara, Bhagiratha and Dhileepa? Why again a proof before her grown up sons and the royal court? What for? With a body and spirit that were burnt

to ashes... What life will she be able to live? Being pregnant, the days when she passed and panged for her husband's nearness-- those days were gone. Gone were the days of her children's shame and disgrace at being fatherless. Her hair had become grey, and aging had shown its prowess over the bodies of both of them. Still Rama hadn't felt sorry for his wrong. Again he was giving a chance, like a king who would punish a convict. Sita surged up. She broke her father Janaka's promise. She thought it was better to die than to live with Rama as a queen. She entered the soil. She died.





**Says Lady Macbeth to Lady
Macbeth**

-- Reason is a lie

K. Arun Kumar

"None of the hours she thought about it,
None of the hours I thought about it,
All the hours I believed it.
And one, I made myself think
And so I did it.

I rowed my boat
I rowed my boat
to hell," says Lady Macbeth to Lady Macbeth

"This Lady,
Mandated Macbeth
To own the queen's crown and be my king too.
As pace, a space
Over which my thought extended,
And so I did it...

I rowed my boat
I rowed my boat
to hell," says Lady Macbeth to Lady Macbeth.

"Where did my centre go,
When I drugged the men
And when I pretended to murder?

Peel, peel my skin to see it,
Can I do it now... no...
And so I did it...

I rowed my boat
I rowed my boat
to hell," says Lady Macbeth to Lady Macbeth.

Father! That single term is the reason
In sleep I was walking
And awake in my bed.
On my skin had your bloodstain
Even stood in my brain
And blurred my vision
Father that single lie is the reason
And so I did it...

I rowed my boat
I rowed my boat
to hell," says Lady Macbeth to Lady Macbeth.



*"Why do you add me to the witches
and call me the fourth one?
I am the Belzebub,
I am the Hecate,
I am the Graymalkin,
Caught the fish without
Putting my leg into the water*

*I am the reason behind
Everything.
I am the lady who lived
In death.
And so I did it...
I rowed my boat
I rowed my boat
to hell," says Lady Macbeth to the dead one.*



**A God, A Bird, A Rainbow, A
Garden, A Gardener**
K. Arun Kumar

*Seven rays of colour
are the goaded consciousness of sunlight,
a defracted focus.*

*A bird with the stretched wings
foats across the colourful bours.*

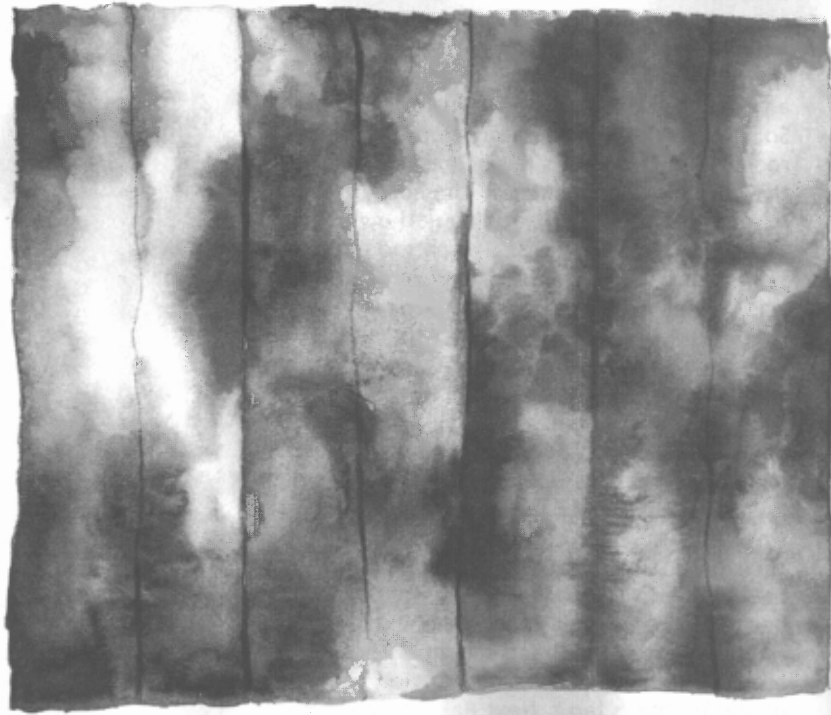
*God, the creator
looked down at the garden.
The gardener, a creator, looked from beneath
and observed the beauty also.*

*God created
the bird,
the rainbow,
the garden,
and the gardener,
and able to see the beauty*

*But...
the gardener was able to see only
the garden,
the bird,
the rainbow,
and the barren sky*

*God and the Gardener,
both saw beauty
Who is the creator?
God or Gardener?*





Surprise

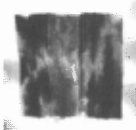
Srinidhi, A.

On a cool pleasant day, when the children were enjoying their vacation, a strange being inhabited the Desais' living room. Its name was Surprise. It created such a noise in the living room. The children were seen whispering always, giggling and doing mischievous things. They were enjoying themselves. But when mother came and peeped in all the noise and whispers vanished immediately. Mother was not interested in spoiling the happiness of the children. After all, they had come on vacation to be happy! So mother kept herself away from the living room. Father too was not concerned about the odd things happening in the house. The parents seemed to be noticing nothing at all. They didn't question Disha when she asked for some money. The children were so excited. It was only about three days until Mother's Day.

When the day arrived, mother woke up late in the morning, so that the children could keep their secrets to themselves. This particular day seemed to be going very slowly. In the evening mother was looking gorgeous, wearing a light blue saree matching her eyes. She was fantastic. The children approached their parents where they were sitting in the hall. Hema, the younger most, went near her mother and exclaimed, "Darling mummy, Happy Mother's Day," and she gave her mother a beautiful handkerchief and settled herself on her mother's lap. Next Rakul brought his paintings that had mothers picture with the words, "Sweetest Mom in the World." Daniel gave his present, a mother doll, and planted a kiss on mother's cheeks. Then Disha gave mother a wonderful dress. Mother was greatly excited and paralyzed with joy. Tears rose in her eyes. The place was very silent. The silence was broken by father, who said looking at all his four lovely kids, "Yes, it is really very nice to think that we are gifted with a mother who takes care of us. She is the most precious mother in the world." He smiled around and

said, "I have a bit of my own surprise." He then took out a beautiful frame for a family photo. Then father called in a photographer, and the children gathered around their parents and said all together, "Cheese!"

There was a click and a happiness that filled everyone's heart.



My First Experiences in India

Beatrice Akinyi

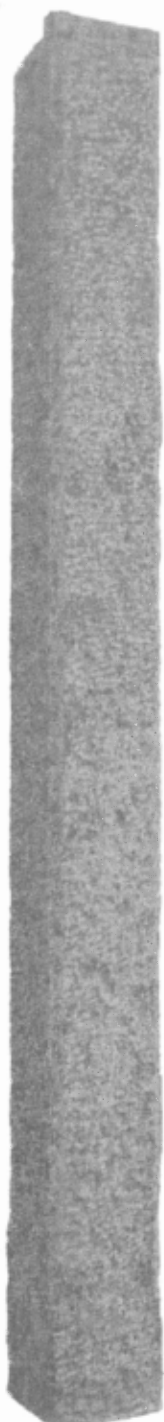
Like any other student fresh from high school, going to another continent was a major thrill for me. I was so excited about the whole idea and couldn't wait for the time to reach when I'd finally find myself in India, a place which I'd have to call a home away from home. I had so many expectations, big ones, and for so long I looked forward to them.

The first day I landed in India at Bombay airport, I was so thrilled by the people and all the activities that went on, the ever-focused pilots, cabin crew members and the way they carried on. The best I could do was just admire them and say that "one day I will have the world in my palms."

Armed with so much to look forward to, I headed to my assigned station where I would be attending my college. The moment I reached the outskirts of the Madurai airport reality struck me! How could so many people exist? I mean, the roads were crowded and to make it worse there was also a great traffic, with many people moving in all directions. Everything seemed to be moving at the same time, cows and dogs wandered aimlessly on the roads. Apparently they were also part of the traffic!

Everything seemed to be the opposite of what I had anticipated. I was disappointed. I felt extremely sorry for myself, and wished I could just take the next available flight back home. The first few days, I was homesick and kept wondering how I was going to spend the next few years--which now seemed to be a lifetime spent in misery. Everything, everywhere seemed to be congested to a maximum, no matter what time of the day it was.

Everyone around me made me feel so different. They seemed best at doing that. Some would just stare and stare, as if they were seeing a partly evolved human being. At



times I felt like breaking down, but I had to hold my head high. I wouldn't allow myself to look inferior in front of all of them.

Apart from all the nasty experiences I had on my first few days, I marveled at the way the Indians valued their meals. You couldn't walk for more than two minutes without bumping into a food vendor and the ever-present eating customers. These people worshipped their meals. I experienced a whole new set of people who are dedicated to their cultural practices. They strictly observed their traditions and taboos with undying dedication until they looked like slaves doomed forever.

Staying away from home, I must admit, was very hard for me. All the time I wished I wasn't in this place. I longed for the time when I would be able to go back to my native place. All the time I experienced the true meaning of "East, West Home is Best."

But I realized that instead of always feeling sorry for myself it would be better if I embrace the situation and keenly take control of it. That way I learned handy means of survival that have enabled me to stay up to this minute. Life is hard everywhere, especially in new places. This way I have tried to be comfortable, although no day passes without me thinking and wishing that I were home where I belong.



That Black Friday ***Beatrice Akinyi***

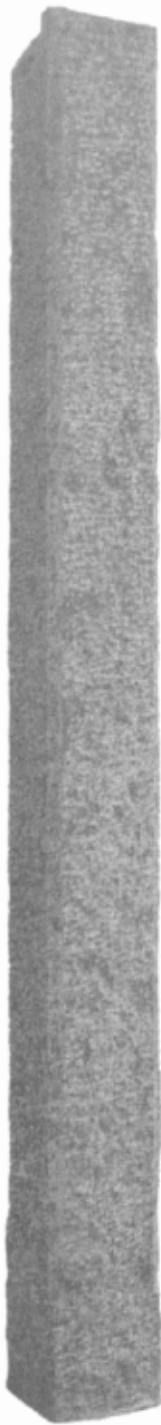
Tension filled the air as the jury rose to give the verdict, "found guilty." My dear mother collapsed, sprawled unconscious in the courthouse. No one needed to hear the judge passing his sentence on us. Everyone knew too well what befell a man found guilty of masterminding the looting of government funds. The sentence was death by the electric chair. I was very well conversant with this. Actually I anticipated this and welcomed it with a satisfying sigh.

How I was caught was not a question. I presented myself to the relevant authorities and what everyone asked was why I did that, why I sacrificed my life sheepishly. Most of them would not understand, even if it took eternity to make them see the logic behind the whole situation.

I saw myself as a hero, a symbol of bravery in the most unheard of situations. I mean, how many government officials and characters of the highest ranks had stolen from the society, and they just went undetected, enjoying the fruits of humble hardworking people who toiled every single day trying to overcome poverty. These people became richer and richer as long as the time allowed them to.

With the help of my other three colleagues, we stole from our mighty government and gave the proceeds to the society. It was better that way, and for that we had to face the consequences. No one knew where the looted money had disappeared. Only the fear-stricken faces present in the courthouse that black Friday could explain that we were their heroes.

As the commotion went on inside the courthouse, I sailed in a world of my own. I was a satisfied man ready to enter a different world where violence and poverty knew no existence. I was shaken back to reality by



the fear-stricken faces of my three other colleagues. Together we were to be executed before daybreak on Friday morning. They had seemed strong all through the proceedings, maybe even stronger than I was. The proceedings had lasted for more than fourteen months. How could we plead guilty and still no sentence was given? No one understood.

We were led back to our tiny cell with no sense of life except for a tiny crack on the roof. I experienced an unexplainable surge of strength. In the few hours to come, I would meet my maker and explain to him the plight of his humble creation. That fateful night we slept like we hadn't slept for months. No dreams, no nightmare, nothing! Even the renowned bedbugs and lice gave us some sense of tranquility. Nothing mattered. We had carried out our responsibility as thoughtful human beings. From a distance not so far away prison keys jingled, footsteps heavier with each nearing distance. The door to our tiny cell jerked open. We were harshly chained together and led out in a single line. I was the first one to be led to the electric chair. The moment I was blindfolded, I saw the rays of sunshine brightening with the ever-nearing distance.

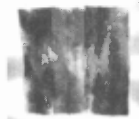


A Weak-Heart

A.G. Deepak Gnana Prakash

"What happened...? Ah... Ah...! A lucky guy...! Can a man do this...? Sh... sh...! But its not possible...! Shut your mouth, don't talk for him...! Yes... yes... he can... because she was a woman of that nature...! Students were murmuring, lingering outside the faculty room, eager for some more hot news from inside. They did not know the real reason that caused Prof. Yamini to weep. The rumour was that Prof. Kaushal had kissed Prof. Yamini. The students playfully spread this rumour throughout the college.

Prof. Yamini was an attractive and voluptuous woman but Prof. Kaushal was an innocent man. Prof. Yamini opened her heart to stop the rumour from spreading like forest fire. In one of her classes she said, "I was not kissed by Prof. Kaushal." "Then, why were you weeping on that day...?" came an embarrassing question from a student. There was a long silence. At last she said, "Because of your baseless insensitive rumours, I cried."



To you...

A.G. Deepak Gnana Prakash

Hi,
I am God.
I don't have any other name.
Some believe me and some, hmmm...
Some boobies say that
I am love, passion
 tradition, solution
 and bla, bla, bla
But I say,
 I am exasperated
My friends, please forgive me
If I discourage you,
Because this world has debased me.
I created this world with peace
But you encompass it with
 terrorism and violence.
What will Luci think of me...?
He will tease me with his tail.
Please don't believe in the words of Plato,
 Neither is he a prophet
 Nor a holy man
Nor is the poet,
 Who creates and shapes his poem
 And makes Me the central character
 In his monologues.
Friends,
Its for you; to
 Change the World,
 Change Yourself, and
 Change your Fates,
Being a creator,
I request you
 Love me... or... hate me
 But please.. don't.... try to...
Cheat me with your deceptions.



Small Poems
Ravindran Solomon

laughter

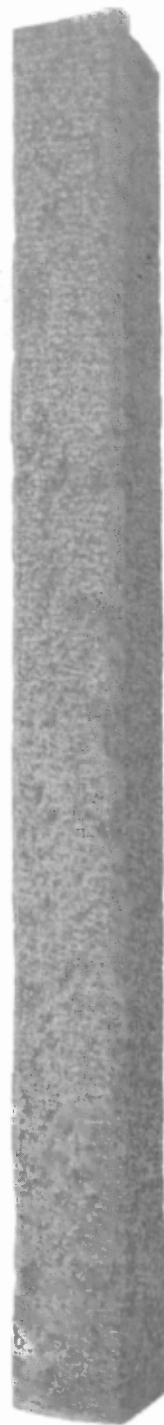
*a little raindrop
slams on the ladybird.
the bug scuttles off
in fear--screeching crickets.*

chain reaction

*the fy got away
from the brandy glass.
somehow a spider
trips on its web--drunk*

hate

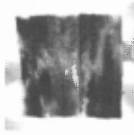
*quietly fows the stream
smooth as the pebbles.
who knows the seething
--barracudas.*



The Rivals
T. Ganesh Babu

The sea
Keeps sending
Relentless and rhythmical
A number of lines of poetry...
That's the way of the waves.

But,
The senseless shore
Shamelessly
Sends them back...
Every one of them.



**(Interrupted before giving a
title)**

T. Ganesh Babu

Consulted dictionaries, thesauruses;
Collected dainty(?) words and phrases;

Now,
The problem is...
How to put them in order.

With the available ingredients
I switched on the stove in my head
To write something;

Interrupts a voice:
"HEY, YOU! DON'T TAKE ME FOR A RIDE."
Was it Poetry?



Crossing the Horizon

(A translation of a Tamil short story, "Thodu Vaanam Arugil Varum" by Thilagavathi, J.P.S.)

Joel Gnanadoss Timothy

"Somehow or other, I must die today," Kokila murmured ruefully to herself but firmly believing in her words. Taking one's own life is not that easy. She thought about the different ways of dying. The first thing that struck her was to lie like a sacrificial lamb on a railway track, waiting for a speeding train to smash her to pieces. The pain of such a gruesome death made her shudder. In a way, she was lucky. There was not a single railway station in their village. She had to walk eighteen kilometres even for a railway track. Need one walk that long to her death? Kokila examined all possible ways of dying.

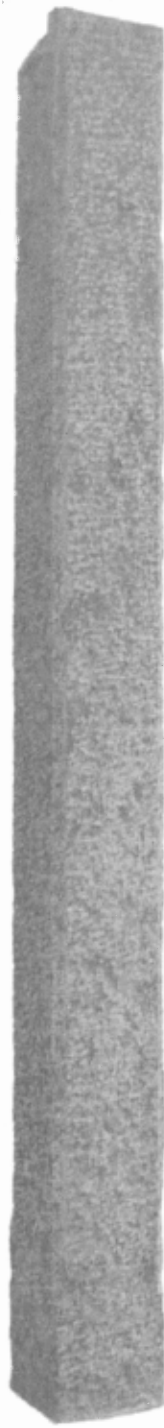
Disappointment covered her face as she bent down to draw kolam in front of their house. She stood there with a coconut shell full of kolam powder, the pleats of her sari tied up at her hip.

Vidhya, her elder sister stood admiring Kokila's beauty.

"There is no point in blaming others who get attracted to you. You are made of ivory. Look at your hair. How lovely! Curly, seductive black wires. Who cannot but desire you the moment he sets his eyes on you?" There was motherly concern and tenderness in her voice. Vidhya brimmed with pride, as she saw the ravishing beauty of her sister. She knew that Kokila's angelic face allured men like bees to a scented flower.

"Akka, even you?"

Kokila would often become impatient and weary of all the praises lavished on her. She was not excited or overwhelmed by such dreary comments. Vidhya continued to tease her, despite her protests.



The family ran a small grocery shop for their livelihood, which their father, Vaiyapuri, looked after. Life was comfortable. Everything changed drastically when Vaiyapuri was diagnosed of diabetes and blood pressure, and had to stay home most of the time. His wife, a total stranger to the ways of the world, tried to keep the business going. For her, survival became a challenge.

Vidhya was the eldest unmarried daughter in the family. She had patiently waited for ten long years, after completing tenth standard. Still no Prince Handsome had chosen her. This fact gnawed at the minds of both Vaiyapuri and his wife. More than his ill health, her daughter's unmarried state worried him.

Vaiyapuri's doctor repeated the same monotonous mantra for cure.

"What is the use of worrying unnecessarily about your daughter's marriage, Vaiyapuri? Anxiety will take you nowhere. Everything in life has its own course and will happen at the right time. You spoil your health by worrying too much."

Gopu, Vidhya's brother was five years younger. Kokila was born when Gopu was eight years old. The family showed a great amount of interest in Gopu's education. They wanted him to complete his degree in college. Only their mother functioned like an anchor, trying to hold together many lives along with a collapsing business.

"Your father will recover only when Vidhya gets married," she would lament. "Our family deity, the goddess at Maangaadu, should shower her blessing."

Vidhya's mother underwent many austerities, did penance, sacrificed many pleasures, and tortured her body to see Vidhya happily married. Vidhya too, for her part went on pilgrimage to the abode of the deity at Maangaadu, offered poojas, recited numerous

slokas. But fate stubbornly refused to be friendly.

What could poor Vidhya do when her sister Kokila was preferred by men who came to see her? Dissatisfied, Vidhya questioned the necessity of marriage. Why marry at all? Let me be what I am. Why should a man give me social acceptance? Several vows made to different gods and goddesses had not been useful.

It was hard to silence the ever-curious, probing relatives who only showed false concern. "Why has this happened to her? Her astrological signs are good," they would banter. "Why is she still unmarried? Isn't she healthy?" In this manner would come the scary, snooping questions.

Others who came to visit the family were equally inquisitive. "Dowry is not an obstacle to her getting married," they puzzled, "but the ethereal beauty of Kokila drives men away from Vidhya."

One day their mother called Kokila and informed her that a man was coming to 'see' Vidhya,

"Listen," she said, "be extremely careful not to show yourself to them and thus destroy Vidhya's future. Don't come out of the kitchen. Go to your friend's house."

The words stung like a wasp though her mother did not mean to hurt Kokila. She began to sob softly.

Vidhya could not control her anger after hearing her mother's remarks. She came out of her room and gently chided her mother.

"Ma! Why are you so cruel? Why do you make her cry unnecessarily? She cannot be held responsible for what she has not done. Beauty is not sin and it is not her fault. What men think about me is not her mistake," explained

Vidhya.

Vidhya embraced her sister and tried to console her.

"You silly! Will anyone cry like a baby for this? Do whatever you usually do when they are here."

A realisation dawned on Kokila that her beauty had become a burden. She was the real impediment to Vidhya's happiness. This guilt hung heavy upon her and imprisoned her. She wanted to destroy what nature had so benevolently bequeathed on her. Thoughts fooded her mind. They only aggravated her guilt feeling. She wondered at the irony that fate offered. Those who were less good looking than Vidhya were married whereas she was not. She felt sorry for her sister.

Kokila would burst out at those who rejected Vidhya like a spewing volcano. "You bastards! You must be really mad to spurn Vidhya. What does she lack, eh? She is modest, and graceful and she will be a good homebuilder. For you men, appearance and beauty are more important. Oh, how ignorant you all are! You do not know what real beauty is."

Kokila's decision to commit suicide was not baseless. Her death, she was convinced, would open up marriage prospects for Vidhya. Kokila now detested her charming body because in her presence Vidhya became ugly.

Overcome with frustration, Kokila took a bottle out of her dressing table, hid herself behind the line of sarees hanging on a string. She looked through the window. Perfect moonlight outside. The alchemic power of the moon's rays turned the coconut leaves into gold and emerald. She took a flight into the future. She saw her own husband, scenes of conjugal bliss filled her fantasy. She could hear love prattles. Tears rolled down her cheek uncontrollably.

She opened the bottle.

"Hey Kokila," called Vidhya from the other room. Agitated she let the bottle slip out of her hand. It fell down and smashed on the floor.

"I guessed so much. I knew you would come to such a foolish decision. You had a confused look on your face since this morning."

"Akka, please leave me alone. I want to die. I do not want to make other people's life miserable," whimpered Kokila.

"Stop talking like an idiot. You are no trouble at all, dearest Kokila. In fact you are my saviour. You have saved me from lustful beasts who only look at the colour of the skin and the curvaceous body. They humiliate and dishonour women. Only you helped me see the truth more clearly. They are all hollow men. I am waiting for a man who will respect a woman as his own soul and his very breath. I will wait for him, Kokila," Vidhya consoled.

The cloud that shrouded Kokila's mind disappeared like the sun's rays that dispel the darkness.

"Akka!" said Kokila. She laid her head on Vidhya's shoulder and wept.



Servant
Paul Love

*She brings the morning into my kitchen
each day at six o' clock,
Tap-dances across the floor
to the kerosene stove
Which springs to light
like a birthday cake
Wreathed with candles.*

*Soon the oatmeal is bubbling,
pearl-like in the sauce pan,
Then an egg is frying,
a perfect bull's-eye
in its satiny setting.*

*"You like?" she asks.
But long before I form an answer
She's off and running,
slyly stealing bougainvillea blossoms
From a neighbour's vine,
to shape a bouquet for my table
Fit to win prizes
at a mega-city's festival.*

*And I wonder. What will
she eat for breakfast?
What fowers will adorn
her tiny two-room cottage?
Does she live only for the pleasure
she creates for other people?*

Perhaps so. For after all, she serves.



Memories
Prajakta Gawde

Every childhood friend I spent my time with,
For every moment, I cherished it.
Those times of sorrow, those times of joy,
On every step they went sweeping by

Those strings of memories in my kind,
Play a song eccentric kind.
They make me feel nostalgic,
Then come my tears trickling for no rhyme, no
logic.

Every crush of my young time,
Brings a slight blush on that cheek line.

All the pranks and acts of sadism,
Brings it all back for all sorts of criticism.

Not a day passed by,
When my mind didn't let the memories die.

Let one incident escape my mind,
Yet another one closes in like a blind.

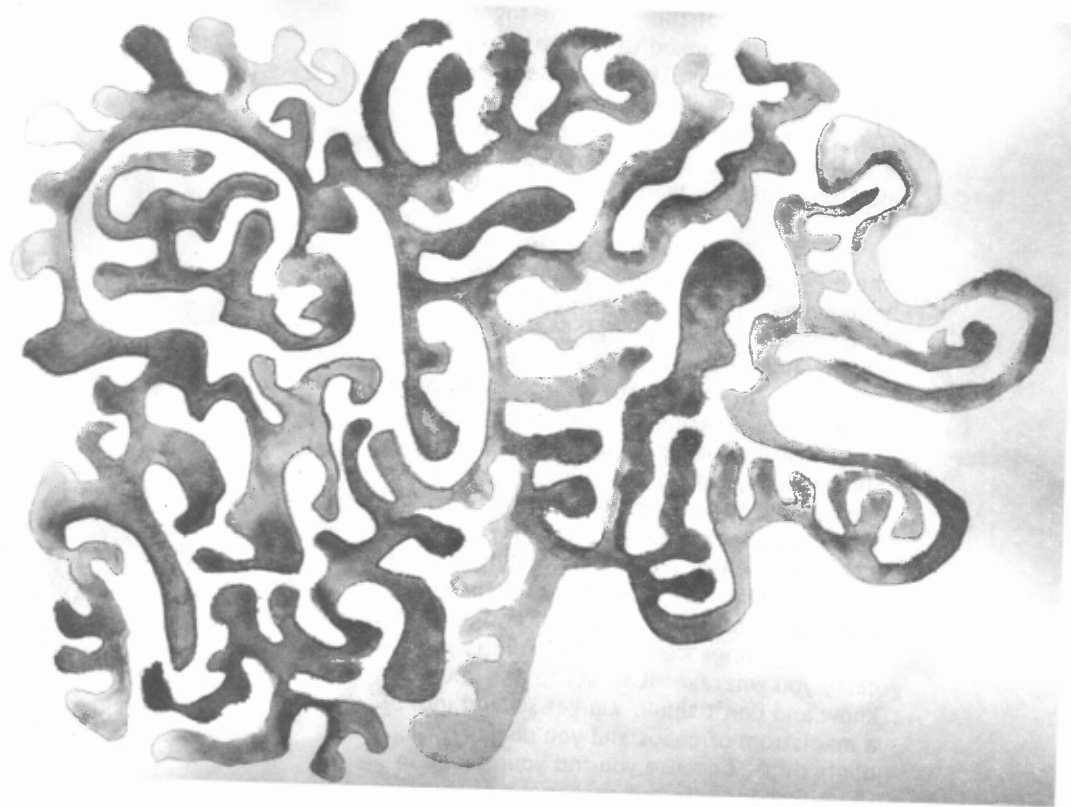
The ones I cherish for all the ages I know,
Has become my friend for times when I am
low.

The memories play a little game with me,
Tickling, jumping, kicking and mocking freely.
I love them as my children,
They care about me as if I were their veteran.

The joke they crack about me,
Oh!!!! They're just something I can't bury.

The noises they make like trees talking softly,
Makes me feel as if they whisper inaptly.

Memories, Oh!! What a possession of mankind,
You better cherish it or you will lose them for
a lifetime.

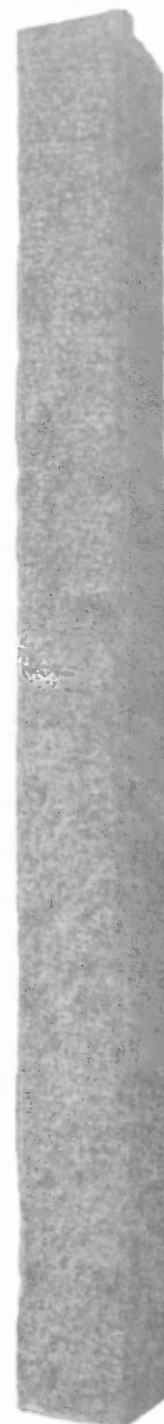


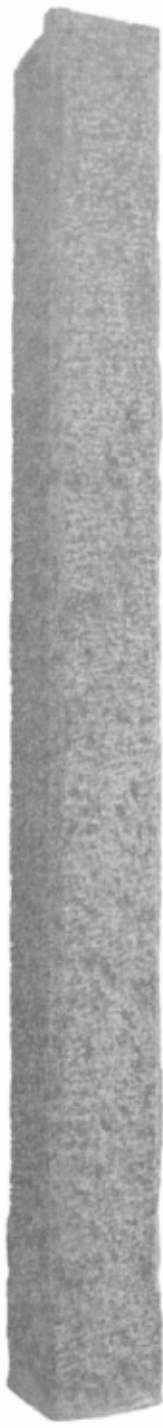
A Toy Horse **Rahul Chak**

A toy horse, dismembered, chipped and cracked, sat half-buried in the sand at Chowpatty Beach. The water was grey and went four thousand miles to the coast of Oman; the sky was metallic with clouds that seemed to darken and lighten with the wobbly passage of time, and the fingertip of a struggling sun poked through a torn patch of a cumulonimbus. The high-rises of Nariman Point rose from behind a faint film of evening smog. Some fishing boats floated on the water, and the occasional motor boat sped across the horizon, leaving a trail of froth in its wake.

I sat on a low wall dividing the beach from the busy road behind me, beside a gang of young men and women, college kids I guess, who teased passengers and drivers in cars and in auto-rickshaws that passed by. I sat on that low wall, staring out at the infinity of the Arabian Sea, hearing the college kids hooting and whistling, hearing the sounds of traffic and hawkers, but not listening, watching the sea and the people, but not registering. There are times when you just give up, not in a negative sense, nor in a seemingly positive sense, but you just give up consciousness and awareness and presence of self and not think about anything. You let this cloud lift you and carry you wherever it wants to and you don't know and don't think. You get sucked into a maelstrom of chaos and you don't resist, don't think, because you find your peace in the dissonance, in the cacophony of spinning and rattling and howling and whistling and whispering.

I was in that state right now, wearing a blue business shirt with my tie loosened, my shoes and socks off my feet and strewn on the thick surface of sand. There was a patch of sweat on my shirt; it was not noticeable, but I could feel it, and coming out of the air-conditioned sanctuary of the hotel had felt like being smothered by a wet blanket in a heated room.





Now, however, I was absent; I was not in my body, nor in my mind.

After minutes of staring at the sea, I picked up my shoes and socks and proceeded to put them on. A polio-stricken beggar in brown rags, holding a steel pot, rolled on his little wooden skateboard and stopped beside me. The blackened heel of his right leg rested on his left shoulder, twisted into a serpentine pose, and his left foot had two small toes. He had a black moustache and beard, and a rag was tied around his head. I turned away from him; a little apprehensive, a little sick in the stomach. He didn't look at me. He didn't clang his bowl, made no demands, didn't moan.

Seconds later, the beggar spoke. 'That horse,' he said in English that was surprisingly fluid. I still looked away from him, but I was now fully in my senses, fully aware of everything around me. I listened to the hawkers, to the honking, to the happy shrieks of children playing in the sand, to the gunfire of hoarse voices rattling from inside a tea-stall across the street, to the primal drumbeat of music from a gleaming black Benz stopped at a red light, to the excited jabber of French tourists who walked by and pointed at the sea; anything to keep my mind off the sight beside me.

'My father made that horse,' he continued. Neither he nor I looked at each other. 'I did not play when I was young. I see the other children played when I was young, but I did not play. I am like this.' I wore my shoes, my socks, straightened my tie, tucked in my shirt and started walking back to the hotel.

A flock of pigeons, black against a glum, darkening sky, flew from the top of the Gateway of India to a decomposing building across the street. A large horde of pigeons waddled on the platform and on the side of the street, and another flock, not too far away, congregated at a point to feast on

grains thrown by some Indian tourists.

I entered the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, completely oriented and aware of everything now, and my Indian business partner smiled and approached me in the lobby. We shook hands.

'How's your trip been so far, buddy?' he asked.

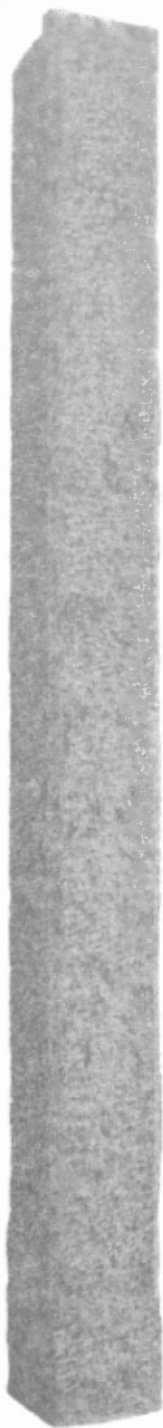
I'd been here only a few days. 'Uh, it's been okay, yeah, it's been good.'

'Good, good. Come on, we're starting in a few minutes.'

The meeting started, presentations were made, there was applauding, and it ended. I don't know how much time it took. I was not aware of the time, not aware of anything in that conference room. I was thinking about the beggar, a representative of the hundreds of thousands of tarnished hopes and crushed dreams, yet another element of the desolation I'd seen in this country.

I'd felt it first when flying into the airport on my flight from Frankfurt. The first thing I saw was the slum. Miles and miles of slum, of decay, of this indescribable, inescapable gloom, this dirge which keeps slithering through the meninges of my mind every night. I'd felt the hopelessness everywhere in this city, and I didn't want to see any more of it. I wanted to get the hell out of here, back to Evanston, back to glass and chrome and antiseptic highways that led to antiseptic suburbs whose antiseptic houses were shaded by bright green trees in late spring and summer and then by snow-coated, dreamlike trellises of wood in winter.

But something was pulling me back to Chowpatty Beach, to the despair of the toy horse, to the beggar who didn't beg, to the dusty sea, to the food stalls and tea businesses and billboards, the bullock-carts



and Benzes, auto-rickshaws and automobiles, to the street where cars and cabs sped by without giving a passing glance to the diseased, rag-covered souls who lumbered on the sidewalk and stopped beside the urine-soaked wall every few steps to breathe and rest; to where the teenagers with spiked hair and glistening cell phones and arresting scents laughed, cursed and joked while walking over browned, blackened humans that slept alongside street dogs. I saw the very rich and the very poor; the famous and the nobodys; five star hotels and sordid slums - so many extremes that in these very extremes I found a strange...equilibrium.... this strange but seemingly perfect sense of balance that pulled me back to the beach, the toy horse, the beggar. Inside my head was a perpetual, stationary tornado, a tornado whose merciless scream of agony gave me pleasure, whose yell of madness gave me sanity and peace, whose spinning walls soothed the fluids in my head and caressed my heart and ribs and liver and soul. There were no difficulties I was necessarily escaping from, seeking refuge from, but it was the balance of opposites, the microcosm of every imaginable element of life, whether abstract or concrete, that was unavoidable and inescapable, and I was merely a strip of metal being pulled to a monstrosity of an electromagnet.

So a hotel car dropped me off at the same point near that wall. I got off and sat there, not waiting for anything, not expecting the diseased man to arrive on his little skateboard. The sea was there for me to stare at, and so I did. Took off my shoes, socks, fung them aside, loosened my tie and untucked my shirt. He showed up five minutes later, rolling along on his wooden transport.

He didn't look at me. 'That horse,' he said. His voice was well-modulated, 'My father made that horse.'

I spoke now, not looking at him. 'Why?'

Gazing at the grey sea, he said, 'His job.'

'Why's it here, at the beach?'

'Employer said he pay my father extra for building that horse. Birthday present for Baby - boss's daughter. That must be best horse. My father says, okay. I make it. But making horse my father, he breaks his hand. Hammer. Wrist breaks. Boss says - you no good now. Father has no job. My father get angry. He get drunk that night and walk into sea, singing Mohammad Raf song.' He stopped there and continued staring straight ahead. All of this was said dispassionately, like a TV reporter giving the weather update. I waited for him to continue, but he was quiet, staring into the grey

I felt a sudden thump on my back. I turned around to see my Indian business partner, Dev, the same guy who'd received me at the hotel.

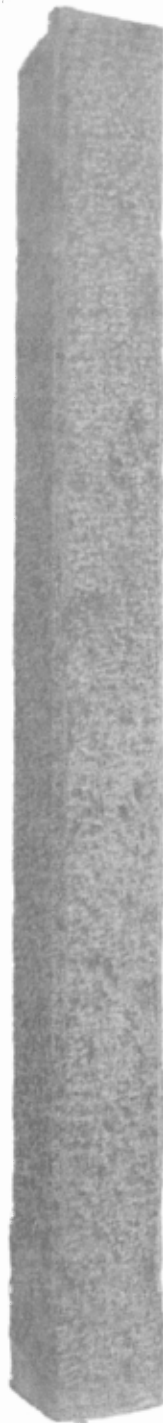
'Man, how you doing?'

'Good,' I responded. 'Yeah, yeah, I'm good.'

'Good, good,' he said. Now he started to stare at the sea, and I thought he'd be transfixed like me and the beggar, but he stooped a bit and said, 'Yaar, if I were you, I'd try to find some better looking company to hang out with, you know -'

'What d'you mean?' I shot back, surprising myself with my unexpected defensiveness.

He raised an eyebrow. 'I mean, obviously, I mean, why the hell would you want to be around guys like this?' He gestured toward the polio-stricken beggar. 'You know, white guys like you need to know how to, you know, gel with India, man. You just don't know how it is here, yaar. You know, the government's finally got some plan to get these schmucks off our streets, you know what I'm saying?'



I nodded and looked at the beggar through the periphery of my vision. He was still looking straight-ahead, but I wasn't sure if he was listening or not. Dev patted me on the shoulder. 'Alright, yaar, see you later.' He walked a few paces away and then called out over the drone of car engines and human jabber, 'Man, I was just kidding about the government's plan.' He shook his head and smirked, looking at the diseased soul beside me. 'These guys are here to stay.' He hailed a cab and left.

The beggar continued immediately after Dev got into the cab. 'I had polio. Father's boss send two men to my house; they see horse not fnish, so, they beat me with cycle chain, and they break horse. They throw horse there, on beach. It has been years. Everyday, it is there. Nobody steal it. Nobody want it.'

'So, you keep coming here to make sure?'

'I like that horse. My father made it.' Still the objective tone of a newsreader or a weather reporter. I started to think about this man's life. Must have been hell. Makes one harder than a damn diamond.

I had a sudden urge to change the subject. 'You listen to music?'

'Heh?'

'Do you hear music?' I said slowly.

'Yes. Yes, I hear music. Movies. Hindi movies. What you hear?'

I tried to think of some music I listened to frequently, and CCR immediately came to mind. 'CCR,' I said, nodding slowly. 'Yeah, CCR.'

'Heh?'

'Creedence Clearwater Revival.'

'Heh?'

'It is a 70's Country Rock band. American,' I said slowly.

'Oh-ho.' He and I watched the pallid saffron sun drift down beneath the horizon.

I waited a minute and asked, 'What's with the horse?'

'Heh?'

'You want it back?' I pointed at the ruins of the toy horse.

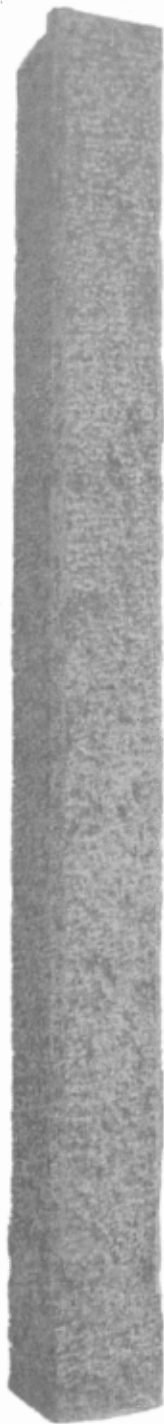
'I want to go away from here. I don't want sleep on road. Cars drive fast. Many people like me die in car accident. We are run over like ants. I want horse to take me far away.' No emotion in the voice, not a quaver. Like a sterile North American interstate.

All of a sudden, like a big wave crashing on the shore, I felt an indefatigable fatigue. My stomach was growling now, and I wanted to head back to the hotel, order a club sandwich with coleslaw up to the room, watch the news and hit the sack. I yawned and said, 'I will fix the horse for you. You will have it back. You will go far away from here on your Dad's horse, okay?'

'Yes?' He didn't look too excited about this prospect. 'Then I come tomorrow morning, and you fix.'

'Yes. I promise,' I said, and without looking at him or bidding farewell, I hailed a cab and went back to the hotel. He didn't turn around to say bye either.

Back in the hotel room, I feasted on my dinner: a big club sandwich with a side-order of coleslaw. The local news channel was on, and the most recent event was that of a drunk nineteen-year old in a BMW SUV who'd run over some pavement dwellers. Whatever the



beggar's name was, he wasn't kidding about these episodes of drunk-driving. And since I was leaving India tomorrow, there was no way I was really going to fix his toy horse. The truth was, however, that I did want to fix his toy horse.

I lost count of how long I waited at the beach. The morning was the same, except that the polio-stricken beggar didn't come rolling on his little wooden skateboard, and the decrepit toy horse was no longer on the beach. I checked the time, and it was about time for me to hail a cab and get to the airport. It was late afternoon now.

Before leaving, I took one last look at the spot where the toy horse had been for so long...had I even asked the beggar how many years it had been since it was unceremoniously dumped into the sands of the beach? I glanced around, but no sign of the guy. I had this sudden, sharp gut feeling that he might've been run over in last night's episode of drunk-driving. As I got into the cab and drove onward to the airport, I wondered about the reliability of the beggar's story. How much of it was real, how much fiction?

The thought kept piercing the back of my head, though - could he have been one of the pavement dwellers from last night's accident? The young driver had been briefly interviewed. He was on his way back from a night out at some disco. Sounded a little sloshed. He chewed gum and smirked as he talked, like he was sharing some secret joke with himself. I was most probably right. Not a coincidence that the beggar didn't show up on his skateboard today.

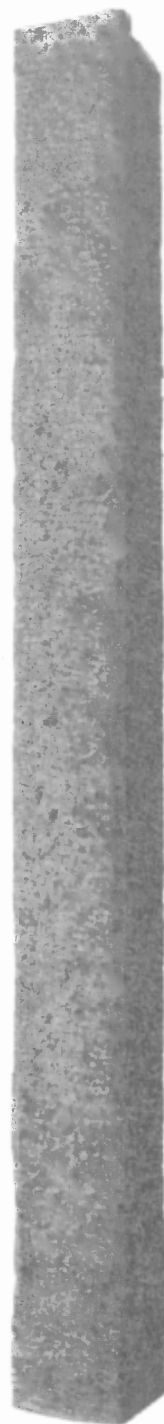
I wasn't going to mourn or feel sad or submit to all this emotional crap. The man was hard, harder than a damn diamond. You don't pity and tsk-tsk people like that.

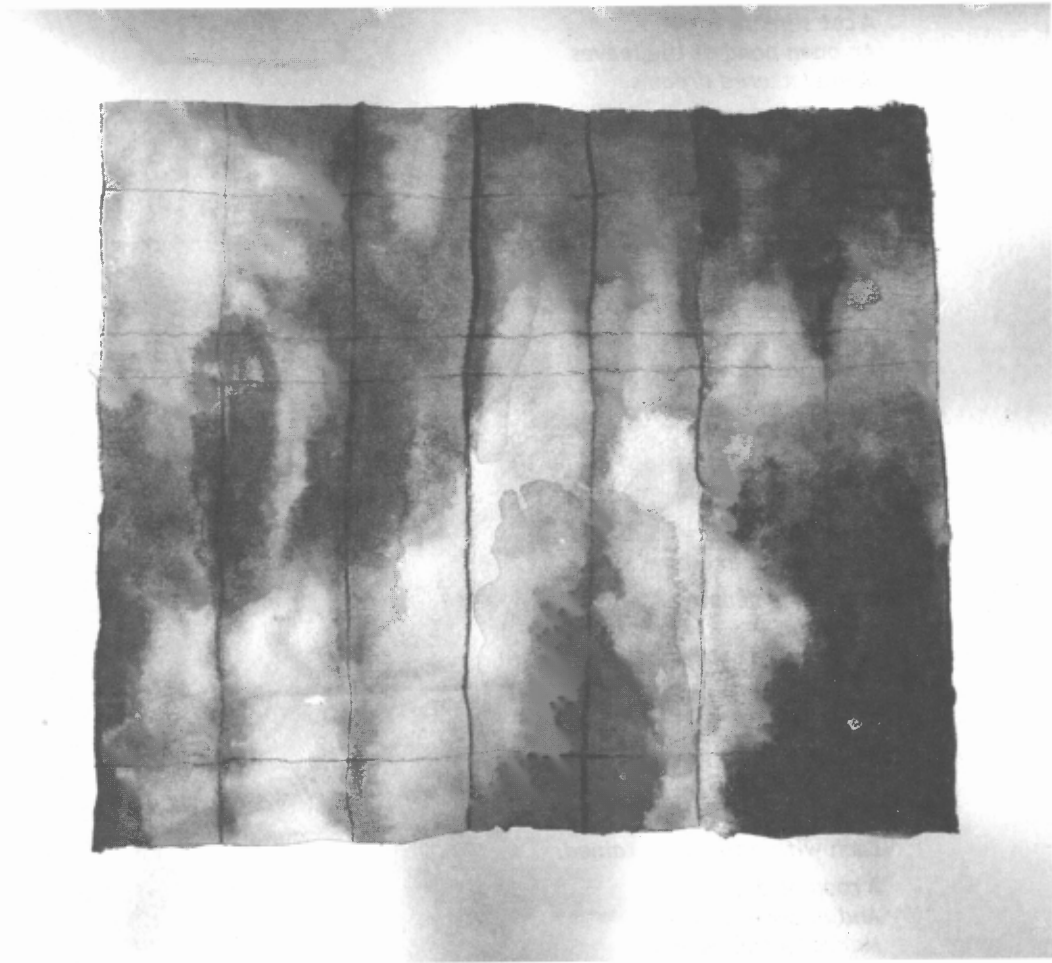
I got out of the cab and paid the driver. I stood outside the entrance to the airport

and looked around me, one last look at this...unbelievable balance of extremes, this genuinely crazy place, then I went on to the check-in counter. I was leaving with this strange, new feeling of acceptance, of lack of resistance, of letting yourself sink, sink to new heights.

Now, I was heading back to Evanston, imagining a drive across a sterile highway to a sterile suburb where nothing goes wrong, where white houses with red-striped awnings sit shaded by bright green trees in late spring and summer and by snow-coated, dreamlike trellises of wood in winter.

As the plane took off under a dark sky, I peered down at the vast sea of humanity that lived in the decadence of the slum, and I saw the high-rises looming over this enormous lake of huts, and then the plane was flying over the bliss and the forgetfulness of the Arabian Sea, and I tried not to think or feel ...kept pushing the thought away. I'd kept half of my promise. The toy horse did take him far away from this place, right?





Transcendent Ramblings
Aaron Chamberlain

I walked down a broken road,
A road that costs the
World to tread.

A cat slinking around
An open pond of lily leaves
And scattered dreams.

A raindrop whistled and
Burned the air.
Eating through my ear.

A snowflake in a sea
Of sand. A treasure held
Within my hand.

A day of darkness,
A night of mist.
A way into the maze.

A journey sweet
As every word.
A soul split in two.

A wrinkled time
Of neurotic fear.
Hearts held in a bowl.

A room of people.
All alone.
Each one in conversation.

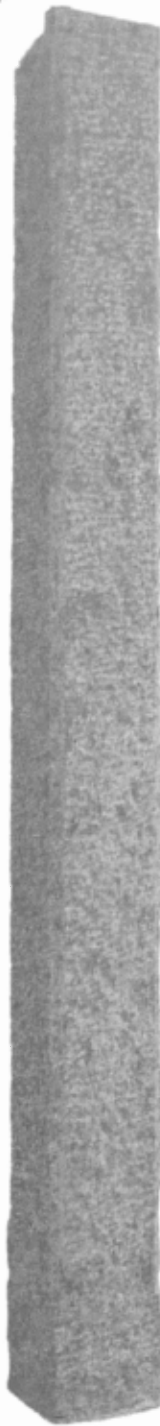
A yellow smile,
Upon a fre
That burns deep in my brain.

A fower repugnant,
A spring polluted
Each within itself contained.

A road of dirt,
And dusky grains.
Making such a sound.

An angel walked upon
The road. Peering,
As if missed

An angel made the road
For me.
On that day we kissed.



Short Story

Taira Malaney

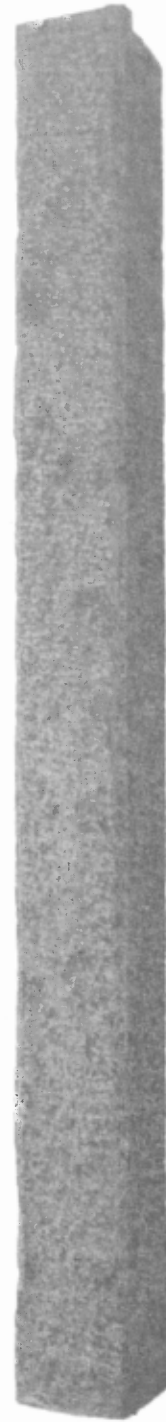
A feeling of nostalgia swept over the girl, as she leaned outside the bus in a welcome of the fresh air. In an attempt to distract herself from the sickness, she focused on everything outside the window. In the distance, the mountains looked as if they had been artificially made, with terraces and terraces of farming land. It was like something one would cut out of paper with a zigzag scissor. As the bus neared the villages, heads turned around, torn away from the concentration of their daily duties. The girl leaned harder against the window, as the bus swerved at a sharp turn. She stared out the window once again, and it took a couple of seconds before she realized what she was looking at. White. White, and all the colors that are present in a pure, plain white. The clouds seemed to be at ground level, as if one could walk right through them, while standing in the valley below. They stretched all the way into the sky, where they finally merged into a soft, slightly pinkish, blue sky. Not able to tear her eyes away from this unusual sight, the girl continued to stare at it. She began to notice a pointy tip sticking out of one of the clouds. Slowly, after looking around a bit, she noticed these white pointy tips sticking out all over the clouds. It was no imagination. She was looking at the snowy white tips of a range of Himalayan mountains. Her eyes were literally glued to this sight, as if afraid that on looking away, they would disappear. Her body seemed on the verge of bursting with the emotions that swept over her, like an overflowing river, trying desperately to find a source to relieve itself from its overwhelming bulk.

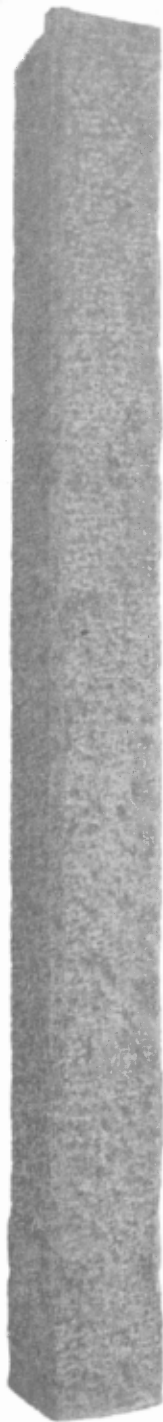
Still staring. Looking, but not seeing anything. Except color. That was the only thing that seemed to register in her blank mind. The harsh, somehow disturbing green, the color that resembled secrets hidden within. The color was actually a barrier, doing everything in its control to hide away all the activity

going on underneath. This green color was all one could see. But when one delves deeper into it, one realizes how this simple color has literally made a wall between the two different worlds. The forest, and everything else. All that could be seen, and all that could not.

Her mind was still frozen on the image of the snow-capped mountains. With all these thoughts drifting through her mind, she had failed to realize that the bus was still moving on, following the same process again and again. Up the mountain, and down again. The steady repetitive rhythm of the engine would make one feel lethargic. The girl fought against her body to keep herself awake. On looking out of the window now, all that could be seen was rock. Barren, plain, solid rock. This rock was called mica. Mica was a type of rock that was mostly found around that area. Already, there was such a vast change from the environment in Kathgodam. The rude, selfish behavior of the people there was hard to believe, after one interacted with the warm-hearted and very welcoming village people during a stop for food. When they fed the girl parathas, she felt that they were doing it as if she was their own child. Their love and dedication for what they did gave off very positive vibes, and, soon, the girl found herself leaving with extreme satisfaction and happiness. For them, it seemed, money was not everything.

On driving through a village, one tends to welcome the sight and smell of civilization that is missed after a while. The girl found herself looking out of the window with keen interest at the people carrying out their daily duties. Lifestyle. Something that can be watched for hours on end. She caught sight of a woman, maybe 70 years old. Her screwed up face was breathless from the activity she did, which, once must have been a much easier job for her. She paused to admire her work, and obviously unsatisfied by it, began to scrub at the silver dishes once again. The old straw





brush and wet mud she used, hardly made it easier for her. The woman knew that without the hard work that she put into washing the vessels, she could not expect a perfect result. Her desire to work hard and to enjoy the results was what kept her alive.

The village passed by, and the bus climbed higher into the mountains. The vegetation grew richer, and pretty soon, even the rocky mountains were covered in lush, green plants. The once barren space was now occupied with bigger homes, probably belonging to wealthier people. The atmosphere changed. Kathgodam must now be thousands of miles away. When she looked into the mountains beyond the valley, the girl could see many tiny dots, which were all the villages on the other side. All these tiny dots were surrounded by the intimidating, monstrous foothills of the Himalayas. But there is something about this environment that a city person will never know. The girl would never know how it is to be intimidated by the beauty and the power that nature brings about here. In a place like this, she, nature, is someone who is never challenged.

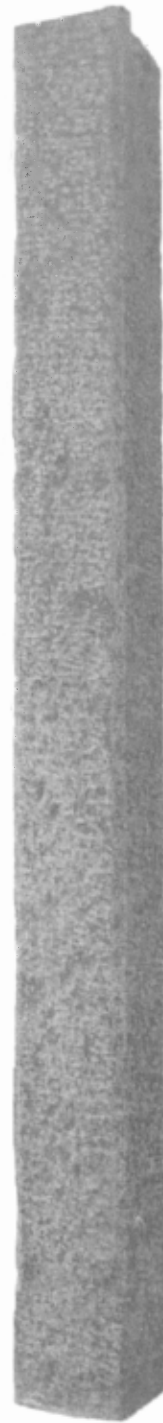
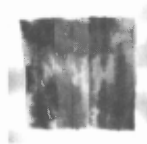
Squinting out into the sun-bathed mountains, the girl could feel the air was becoming much cooler, and she began to appreciate the comforting warmth of the sunlight, that ever so rarely made its appearance, as if after a struggle against the cloudy skies of the winter. One can just imagine how lovely it feels to have the mixture of this warmth and the chilly wind gently caress one's body. As easily as this pleasure comes, the light blue sky is replaced by the existence of an overcast and cloudy sky that casts a shadow over everything. Suddenly, the girl was engulfed in the disturbingly cold air, feeling as if the warmth had been ripped away from her body.

She was now almost in Mukhteshwar. The atmosphere was like that of a hill station, except that there was much less civilization

in this area. As the bus got closer to the campsite where she would be staying, it passed a much more urbanized village, beyond which there were four or five proper hotels. This was like the center of Mukhteshwar, where there was the most activity, and majority of the place's population. As traveling was the only activity done for the past two days, the girl was eager to get to the site.

Beyond the deep valley that lay on one side of the road, the last remains of what must have been a beautiful sunset could still be seen. The rays were spread all over the skies, starting off with a vibrant yellow, and fading out into the foreshadowing orange that is sometimes mistaken for a pink. The sky itself seemed to have transformed. The baby blue that was first present was slowly turning into the vibrant purple that one usually imagines but never dreams of seeing in nature.

Still not able to accept this breathtaking sight, the girl ignored the racket created by everyone, as the bus reached the campsite. The comfort of being on steady land was once again regained. So far, everything that she had seen had overwhelmed her, and by now, she was exhausted. This day was clearly like no other day in the girl's life. She had seen a new side to 'beauty'.





Solemn thanks

Arjun Thapar

*This poem has been written in two parts.
It describes one view of the nature of
friendship. The first part deals with the
true, helping, caring friend. The second part
describes another nature of what we call
friendship.*

Part 1

*Thank you, my friend
For smiling in times of despair;*

*Thank you my friend
For making me laugh when the world made me
cry;*

*Thank you, my friend
For holding my hand when the world let go;*

*Thank you, my friend
For bringing me to light when the world
pushed me into darkness;*

Part 2

*But, what thanks do I owe you now,
When I followed you and you led me over the
cliff?*

*What thanks do I owe you now?
When the emptiness in my heart is far more
beyond the limits of the universe;*

*Tell me now my friend,
What you did to me, was an act of hatred or
betrayal?*

*Why, when I looked at you for help,
You looked but then did not respond;*

*Did I fall so low in your eyes?
As to never be looked upon by you;*

*But now, my mind is clear
I have neither doubt nor hatred;*

But I still have one more reason to thank you



*That you made yourself very clear in
the beginning*

*You thought of the pain my heart
would suffer when I would get to know
later on*

*That you wanted something which I
could not give.
And then, your life to you would seem
to go on*

*But I would have to live with this truth
from now on
Choose friends carefully then bring
them close*

*For if you do not
Then be doomed to lose him and never
regret*

*Goodbye and solemn thanks to you
For those two years;*

*May you find happiness somewhere
where I could not reach.*



The Wall

Prajakta Gawde

*Wallowing at the site of a self-constructed
huge wall,
Thinking about the things that lie on the
other side of that worldly hall.*

*Wondering how the other side of the world
works,
Is this unknown desire which constantly lurks.*

*Every brick of that pompous wall,
Can make you feel as if it were unjustly tall.*

*Overcoming nature of the wall,
Suppresses the strength of us all.*

*Shouldn't we break the barrier?
Without being a ruthless warrior.*

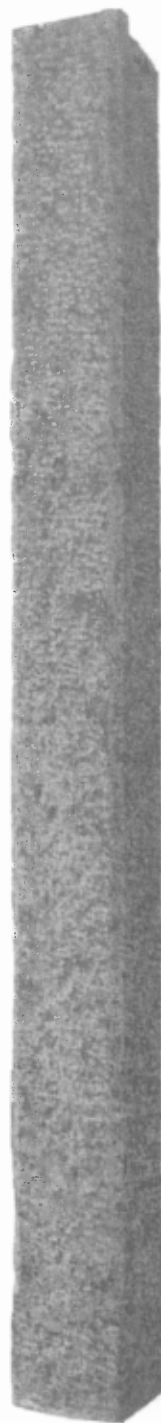
*Each brick can be sorted out,
Before our minds become narrow and stout.*

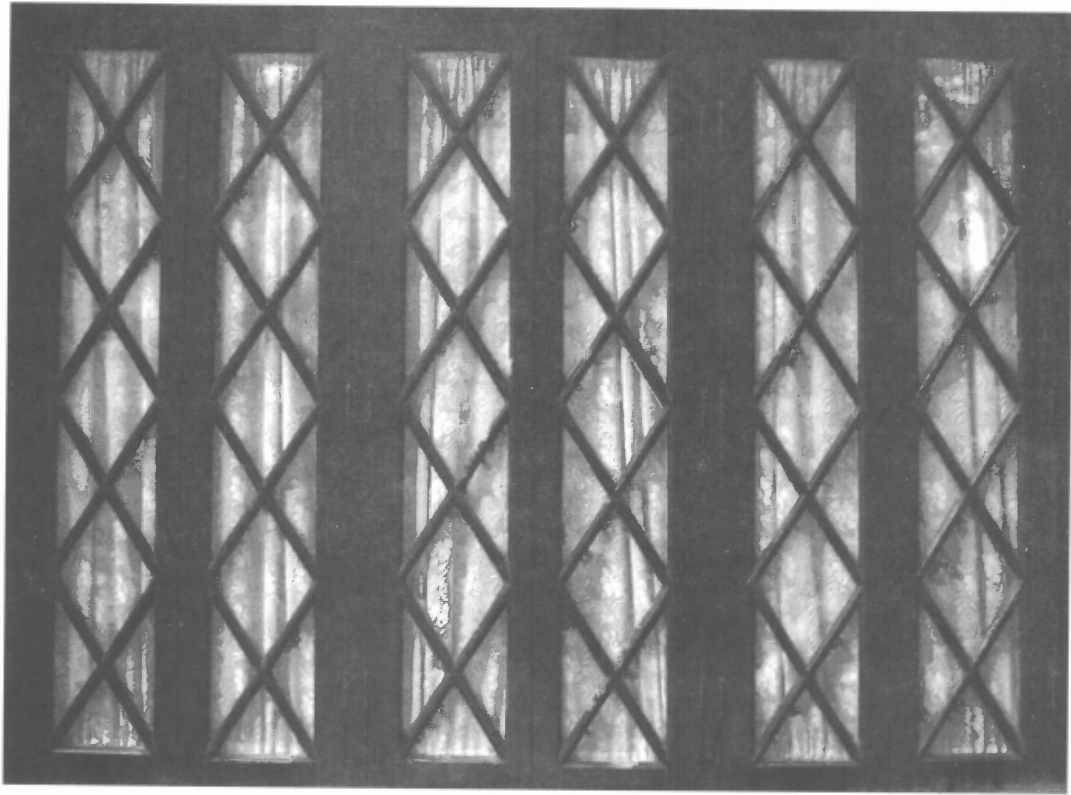
*Whether white, brown or black,
The wall divides more than a lack.*

*Blinds every man or woman,
Restricting the world from being heaven.
Over and sides of the wall,
You see a light beam of happiness oblivion to
all.*

*Open your eyes to see the unknown.
Forget the prejudices that had been sown.*

*Let every soul come together,
By breaking down the wall forever.*

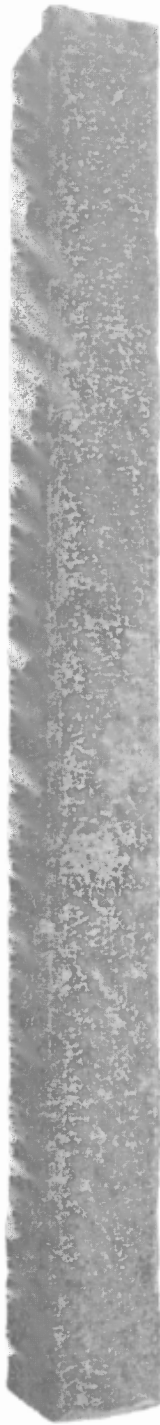




WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!?!??

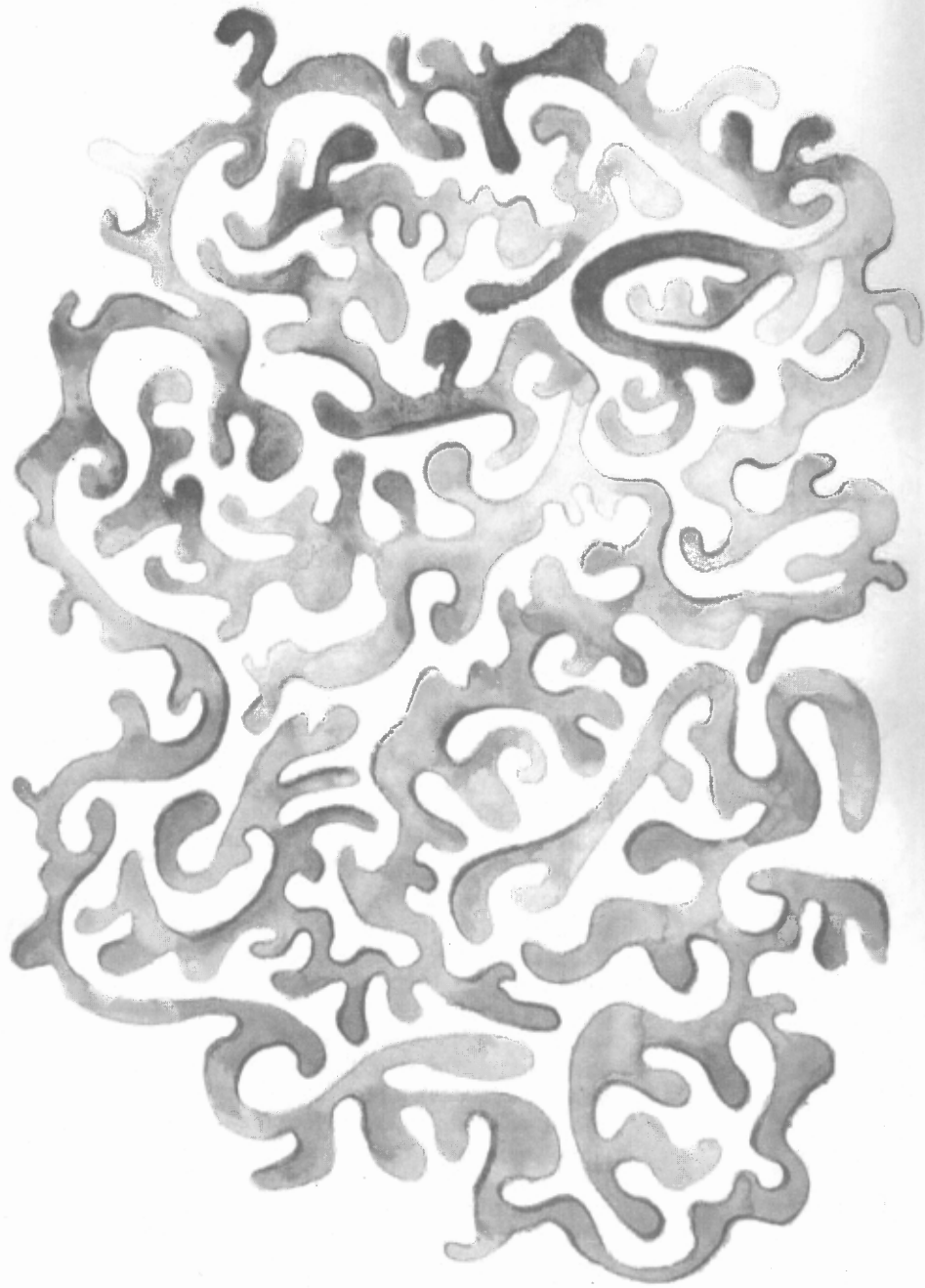
Saatvika Kantamneni

It was a bright and sunny day. Lakshmi had woken up early as she was going to conduct a creative writing workshop in Kodaikanal International School today. But as she got up, realized this day would be like no other. Sitting on her table was a huge card which read, 'IF YOU WANT TO REACH YOUR WORKSHOP ALIVE AND ON TIME, DO AS WE SAY.' She was trembling with fear when the phone rang and without her having to pick it up, someone spoke, "We know you are going to conduct a creative writing workshop in KIS but we will not let you go unless you come with us. If you love your life, get ready and come out into your backyard and don't try to run." Too terrified to think, she did just as she was told, still not aware of the whole situation. She went into her backyard wondering what would happen next when suddenly the whole area was filled with smoke. When it cleared up, she saw herself standing in a strange circular room filled with electronic gadgets. As she began to grasp the situation, a sight made her scream and laugh at the same time. Standing in front of her were pink midgets with curly green hair, blue eyes and dull. Expressionless faces. They made her sit and after she calmed down, one of the alien midgets spoke, "Welcome, lady. We don't want to harm you but if you don't help us, the consequences could be disastrous." Slowly Lakshmi replied, "Who are you, why have you brought me here and what do you want?" The same alien spoke again, "We are the citizens of planet DULLNMUNDANE which lacks creativity. We are very hardworking but the lack of creativity makes it difficult for us to do productive work. One day we decided that we needed to do something about this problem and searched the universe for the planet with the highest creativity. Our search brought us to your planet earth and after modifying our search, we found that Kodaikanal International School had the highest concentration of creative minds. The numbers were so alarming that we could not stop ourselves and started building a machine



which would absorb all the creativity from the school. But our deficiency of creativity took us ten years to make it and even then it has one small problem, that's why we need your help."

After fully taking in what she had just heard, Lakshmi asked, "What is the problem and why should I help you when you will take away all our creativity?" Sniggering, the alien replied, "If you don't help us, apart from you losing your life, we will use our machine as it is and it will take away everything from your brain, not only your creativity." "Oh dear!" Lakshmi said, "What is your problem? I'll help you." "Good," the alien said, "we cannot understand what colour the 'activate' button should be." Stumped by the question, she replied, "Well, it can be any colour you like, be creative!" This angered the aliens and they shouted out, "That's what we can't do, we can't be creative. Just give us an answer!!" Trembling, she said, "Red, make it red. But can't you find a better way to solve your problem where you don't harm anyone?" An alien replied, "We cannot think of anything else, if you have a better idea we don't mind." Lakshmi thought for a while and told them to take her to KIS as she had a solution. After reaching the school, it being two hours since her expected time of arrival, she went to the workshop and told everyone what had happened and what she intended to do. Everyone agreed and walked up to the place where the aliens were standing. Then Lakshmi spoke, "We have agreed on an exchange program that will benefit both of us." "What is it?" the aliens asked. She said, "We will send Mr. Menon to your planet for one semester and he will help you with your creativity while you leave a friend behind who can tell us about your planet." Satisfied with the plan, the aliens took Mr. Menon and left a friend behind. Then, Lakshmi started her workshop and everything went back to normal.





Going Home

Rahul Chak

The bright red convertible pulled into the driveway, and some brown leaves on the road parted in swirling eddies as the car's headlights blinked twice and the vehicle stopped with the engine running. The girl got out and checked her multicolored hair, pinched her belly to see if the little ring would fall out, then rolled her tongue over her teeth to see if the ring on her tongue was intact. She waved goodbye to her friends, and as the Benz CLK pulled out of the driveway and zoomed away into the night, she rang the doorbell compulsively, furious with the nightly delay in opening the door. Her father opened the door and she stormed into the house, finging her purse on the couch. It bounced off the black leather and landed on the beige carpet. She sprinted up the stairs, and her father called her name.

'Shut up!' She shrieked and locked herself in her room.

She rolled up her sleeves and went into the bathroom. She washed her face and caressed the soft purple skin under her left eye. She reached into the cabinet on the wall and pulled out a pair of scissors, then gritted her teeth and stabbed right above the wrist. Black blood fowed out and formed a ring around her arm. A few drops splashed onto the marble floor, and she sat on her blood, contorting her face and repeatedly thumping her head against the double doors beneath the sink. She was close to unconsciousness, oblivion, and she let the tears fow and form patches on her shirt. She produced a Marlboro, lit it and smoked, staring vacantly through the thick, comforting clouds at the night outside.

Ron O'Hara eased into the black

couch in front of the TV and switched it on, just for the sound of something other than the dirge of the wind slicing through the trees outside. He wished the wind were a lot stronger, so he could just sink into the blissful violence of nature and be at peace with himself, knowing that right now, he was not, and his home was not.

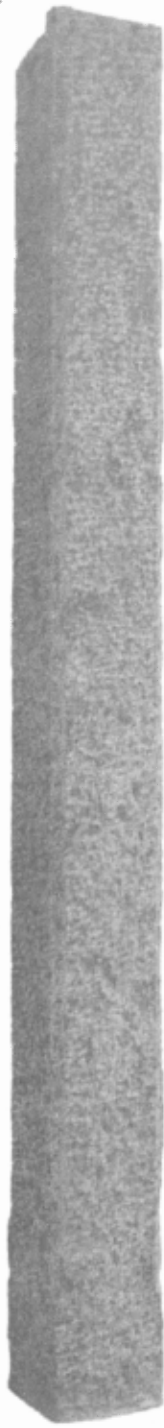
He stretched out and dropped his heels on the thick arm of the couch. He shut his eyes and pressed his shoulders. The senseless voices on CNN and the light elevator music between programs lulled him to sleep.

He got up the next morning, sweating just a little bit, and not completely in his senses, looked blankly around the living room. The granite kitchen counter had a pair of bowls on it, and there was another bowl half-washed in the sink amidst a small crowd of pans and glasses. The New York Times was tightly wrapped in an orange plastic sheet on the dining table, and there was a kettle of tea beside a plain white cup. His eyes followed the carpeted stairs to his daughter's room, and the door was ajar. He caught a glimpse of the poster of a semi-naked male pop star glued to her wall, but he was unruffled.

Pale yellow light filtered into the room through the drawn curtains, and he parted them to be greeted by a cheerful sunny morning. The silver-white Lexus, radiating an aura of money and majesty, had a glistening light bouncing off its silver rim, and the bright trees were reflected like crystal in the car's hood.

O'Hara had a quick shower, brushed, changed into his work apparel and got into the car. He smiled at his gorgeous garden, his fountain and bird-bath, started the car and headed south for Lower Manhattan.

Traffic was mercifully light at the moment, so he cruised down the Bruckner Expressway and diverted with the rest of the traffic flow for the Whitestone Bridge. After paying the guy at the tollbooth, he headed for the 59th Street Bridge and was in line for about six minutes before he was finally in Midtown.



Now, of course, during the morning rush hour, there was no chance in hell to make it in less than ten minutes. The meeting would have started by the time he reached SoHo.

Allie O'Hara sat with her friends for lunch at a grubby diner in Chinatown with a view of the street and a small portion of the top of the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

A Chinese waiter with oiled hair parted in the middle, dressed in black with a white apron covering his chest winked and pouted his lips at her as he wiped a steel saucer with a yellowed handkerchief. She ignored him, although she relished the attention. Some cooks yelled orders in Chinese from the kitchen, and the waiter opened the double doors and went in. Allie's friends, dressed more or less the same way as Allie, started eating their chicken wantons. It was a school day.

Adam, her friend from the eleventh grade, straightened the blue and green follicular knives rising from his head and asked, 'Suh-weet, did you see that Lexus go by?'

Allie nodded and stabbed her dumpling with her fork and pushed her hair back. 'Yeah. That was my dad.' She spoke in a low voice and didn't look up from her plate, almost abashed that she'd said this.

'Looks like a total loser,' Angie, a friend from the twelfth grade, remarked as she checked her refection in her steel plate.

Allie nodded again and sort of laughed. 'Yeah, he is. What a complete freako. I mean, my mom used to freak out whenever I even brought up the fact that you and I were hanging out, but she doesn't really care now. My dad stands at my door every damn morning and gives me this stupid look.' She stuck her jaw out and widened

her eyes, producing a primal grunt from her throat. Her friends chuckled.

'At least you have an iPod,' Adam said helpfully. 'I mean, the guy can't be a complete jackass. I mean, your dad is, like, your ATM, Allie.'

She didn't reply, but nodded and continued eating. The Chinese waiter emerged from the kitchen and began whistling a tune, glancing frequently at Allie as he wiped the counter and opened the door for patrons leaving and entering.

Adam took his wallet out of the hind-pocket of his jeans and counted his money. 'Crap, we could've - Allie, what's your cash like?'

'Green and papery.'

The group laughed, but Adam quickly asked, 'How much do you have?'

'Two thousand.'

'You're rich,' Angie remarked with a full mouth.

'Yeah, but why the hell would my dad give me two grand? I stole it from the guy's wallet while he was sleeping, for Christ's sake.'

'Cool,' Adam said casually and browsed through some tracks on his iPod. 'He placed the earphones to his ears and said, 'You know, with all this cash, we could've eaten at Delmonico's instead of this damn place.'

Frank, relatively modest in personality and dress, but liked by nearly everyone in high school, said, 'You know, you usually get the best food at places as seemingly putrid as, say, a place like this.'

No one responded for a few seconds, then Allie said, 'Nerd,' and everyone laughed politely.

'What!' Frank said, smiling. 'I'm not kidding!'

The group finished, and they left the little diner after paying. The Chinese waiter said a nasal 'Bye' to Allie as the group fled out.

Outside, in the warm noon, the group strolled past boutiques and hawkers and forists as they made their way through the Lower East Side's cramped labyrinth of narrow, pothole-ridden streets; lazy puffs of steam rose from a few manholes. As usual,



vans and trucks were forced by lack of space to enter the bike lanes and endanger the lives of innocent bike messengers, as is the case with most old cities whose streets were never designed to carry this large a population. Walking, driving or standing here was a futile and stressful battle for space.

They bought a hotdog each at a stand in front of an old apartment building whose topmost ledge was lined with frenzied pigeons.

They passed a small electronics store and a smaller cosmetics store, and Allie suggested. 'Let's do what we do best.'

Angie and Adam nodded and smirked. Frank understood and left after making up an excuse.

'Borrow without asking,' Angie said, and exchanged glances with Allie and Adam. The three giggled and Angie and Allie went into the cosmetics store while Adam made his way past a small crowd of Hispanics and entered Jay's Electros.

After successfully taking whatever they wanted for free, without the knowledge of the storeowner, of course, they united in front of a rusting lamppost and laughed. They walked north now and found a basketball court surrounded by a fence, in front of a pair of bulky housing projects undergoing completion. Adam put his fingers through the fence and jammed his face into it. 'Could we join in?' he yelled over the roar of drills and trucks. The black youngsters nodded as they played, and the three friends joined in the game.

It hadn't been three minutes when a scrawny black guy emerged from an alley and offered the threesome a plastic packet with round white things in it.

'Pay me later, yeah?' the black guy drawled, staring at them vacantly. Adam didn't take his eyes off the packet, but Angie snatched the packet from the man and immediately used the substance inside it. Her eyes rolled into her head and she produced a cigarette and lit it. Thick clouds of smoke spewed out from the tight hole made by her lips as she pushed her rainbow hair back and

sprawled on the ground in front of a decayed wall. Her head lolled from side to side, and smoke rose from her mouth like the fumes of a dormant volcano.

Allie grimaced, and she and Adam left the court and knelt beside Angie as she lay limp on the rugged tarmac. Any attempt to do anything for her would be futile, so Allie produced a Marlboro and Adam lit it for her, and then lit one for himself. They sat against the wall, smoking and watching the construction and the basketball match. Angie murmured incomprehensibilities and continued to stink.

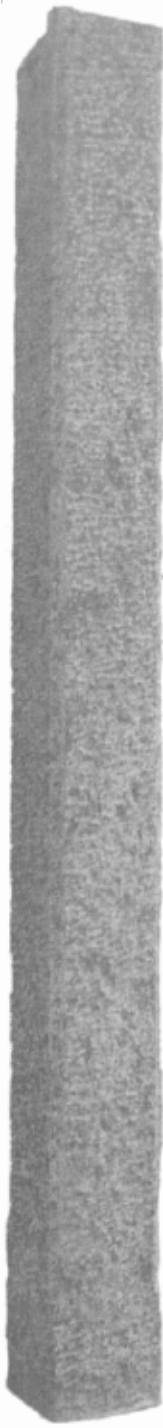
Ron O'Hara dug his nails into the leather of the steering wheel and turned off the radio. More than ever, he wanted to be home and see his living room, his wife, his daughter, his aquarium.

It was raining and the sky was now a morose grey, and he didn't want to be under its foreboding canvas. But there was holy hell right now with traffic backed up for god knows how many miles. He could see cars and pickups slowly, very, very slowly, paying the tolls and moving on with life. Cars and cabs and limos with the advantage of an EZPass got through this godforsaken rush hour jam faster than the underprivileged traffic line, which was where Ron was stuck right now.

After nearly half an hour of being static, the silver-white Lexus finally arrived at the tollbooth, and Ron paid and got on with his life. He checked the side-view mirror, and he was shocked to see the line extending to Northern Manhattan.

As he cruised back home to Westchester, now that traffic was leagues better than the madness to the south, he took a hand off the wheel, sighed and rubbed his index finger and thumb against his forehead in a slow, relaxing rotation. He turned on the radio and switched to a jazz station.

The day had been hell. He'd arrived ten minutes late for the breakfast presentation in Windows on the World and had been humiliated by the presenter and laughed at



and whispered of by the executives and other patrons breakfasting there. He'd never been this embarrassed and ashamed of himself. And he was a resident of one of the wealthiest counties in the United States, a millionaire with a collapsing job, a collapsing home and a collapsing family. There were times when he wished he was never born, and there were times, although infrequent, like when he would admire his perfect suburban house set against a brilliant blue suburban sky, that he felt like the king of the world. He wanted to feel that way again.

It was quiet now, and a few houses were lit as the Lexus glided into the neighborhood and pulled into the driveway. The lights in the O'Hara home were off.

O'Hara got out of the car and unlocked the door to the house. He turned on the lights in the living room and went to his room. He slowly opened the oak door and the dim yellow light from the living room swept across the bed, gradually illuminating the undulations of the comforter. His wife was sleeping with her back turned towards the door. He quietly closed the door and sat on his place of solace, the couch in front of the TV. He checked his silver Rolex; his daughter would be dropped off by her friends at around nine.

As expected, the convertible pulled into the driveway. O'Hara heard a door open and shut outside, and then he heard his daughter marching up to the door. Before she could ring the bell, O'Hara got off the couch and opened the door. She was checking her left eyelid in a small mirror. Her face was pallid, and her neck was visibly sweating. She breathed out, and O'Hara got the distinct stench of tobacco.

'Hi, sweetheart,' O'Hara said softly with a genuine smile. Allie stuffed the mirror in her purse and walked past her father.

She fung her unzipped purse on the couch, and a few bottles of nail-polish and eyeliner tumbled out onto the carpet.

O'Hara eyed them and asked, 'Where did you get those?'

Allie reached her door and said, 'At a store,

where one usually buys stuff. Just put the stuff back and bring the purse up to my room.'

'I will, honey, but frst, let's talk about what you want to do for your birthday.'

Allie shook her head and glared at her father. 'Liar. You're just saying that to keep me happy. Goddamn you, I'll change my damn name if you're actually thinking of anything for me. I'm turning seventeen, Ron. It's a special age, you stupid jacka -'

O'Hara slowly shook his head, trying his best to not explode. 'Honey, I'm your father, and I have bought you a gift -'

'Liar. Oh, and I heard that you got screwed at your little meeting -'

'Allie, is that any way to speak to your father?' His voice was soft, but it had gotten sharper now.

Allie shook her head. 'You're not my father. You're pathetic. What did I tell you about coming home late? What did I tell you about going out with your friends? What did I tell you about smoking? What did I tell you about this, about that, about this, about that, about this, ABOUT THAT! That's, like, all I've heard my entire life from you! Oh, yeah, and you're at your stupid work most of the time! And you suck at it!'

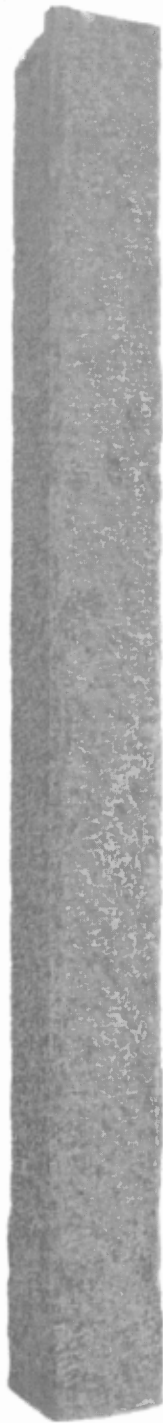
'Allie, please, sweetie, come here -'

'Die!' She locked herself in.

Her birthday was on the twelfth of September, which was in two days, so he tried to control a rage and shame and the ever worsening lurch of desperation that had been building inside him ever since his daughter had started growing up.

He sunk into the couch and stretched out, wept, grunting as he turned on the TV. He lowered the volume and shut his eyes, letting the voices of news reporters and background music on CNN lull him to sleep. A minute before he shut down for the night, he heard a bit of the weather report, saying that tomorrow, Tuesday, would have bright sunshine and brilliant blue skies.

Ron O'Hara woke up feeling a lot better, a lot better after crying last night and letting



all the negativity out of him.

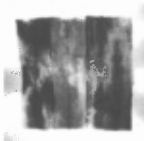
He pulled the gift-wrapped book out from below the couch and went up stairs to his daughter's room. The door was locked, so he placed the box on the carpet and went down after getting ready for the meeting.

The Waters Financial Technology Congress was being held at Windows on the World, and Ron O'Hara was on the list for the 8:30 a.m. appointment, Tuesday, September 11, 2001, and he had promised himself he wouldn't be an ass and miss the meeting. The sun was smiling at him, and he smiled back.

He got into his Lexus, which gleamed beautifully in the sunlight, and navigated out of Westchester and entered Manhattan through the Triboro Bridge.

He arrived at the plaza and walked across to the lobby of One World Trade Center, taking the elevator up to Windows on the World.

At 8:48 in the morning, a commercial jetliner crashed into the 109th floor of the North Tower, possibly an accident. At 9 in the morning in Westchester, a teenage girl picked up a gift from outside her room and locked herself in, howling and cursing herself.



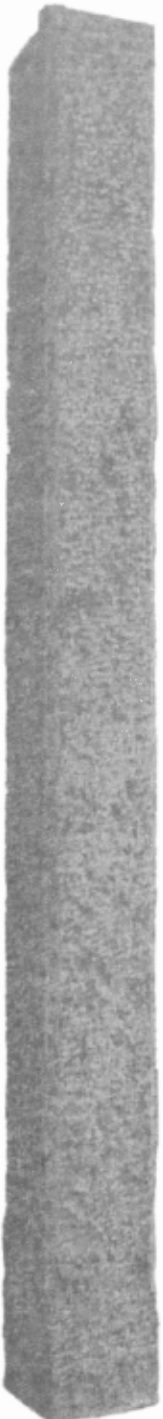
Balasubramaniam

Mira Khandpur

"Where is Balasubramaniam?" The tall woman asked with a frown. When no one responded to her question she sighed and reluctantly walked to the door and peered outside for any signs that he was coming. Sinking down into a chair in the corner, she checked the time again. "Kat warned me this might happen," she mumbled to herself and began to contemplate her toenails.

The bell rang noisily from the upper quad, and all of a sudden the earlier deserted corridors were filled with students rushing out of classes; the sounds of lockers slamming and eruptions of excited giggling flooded the hallways and seeped into abandoned corners. As the second bell went, the sound began to die down, and as classroom doors closed, the hustle and bustle was contained inside. A small group of students remained in the corridor, however, and slowly began to walk toward the large, cold room that was filled with rows upon rows of writing tables and chairs. In one corner, a woman in a bright suit was slumped in a chair staring at her feet. On hearing the students enter, she got up and walked briskly to the front of the room, motioning for everyone to take a seat.

"Good afternoon, everyone." She said politely, and then glanced at her watch again. She needed him to show up immediately. She couldn't run a novel analysis without the author. Suddenly, as if it were magic, the door flew open and a short bald man in a grey suit entered balancing a cup of coffee on top of the three thick folders he clutched in his arms. She breathed a sigh of relief and quickly introduced the man to the students as Mr. K.P Balasubramaniam from Madurai, renowned author of the international bestseller "South Indian Love Affair." But before she could excuse herself from the room and praise God that he had shown up after all, he turned to her, smiling, and in his thick south Indian accent confessed he wasn't the famous Balasubramaniam, and was only there to deliver a message. He dug into his coat pocket for what seemed like at least a year and produced a small dirty piece of paper with a hand scribbled message: "sorry, can't make it. Will be there at three o'clock.-KPB" The tall woman stared at the scrap of paper with disbelief



which then turned to horror. The little man in the grey suit shook her hand hard enough to brake about forty fingers, grabbed his folders and untouched coffee and headed out the door. She faced the students again, and all of them looked back at her. It was a terribly intense moment. She hated being in situations like this. Her eyes fed to the clock on the opposite wall where it showed half past two. 'Okay,' she thought, 'I can handle this- just a half hour.' She looked back slowly at the rows of waiting children, their faces seeming to contort into evil smirks and glares. She shuddered away a sudden image of them eating her because she had failed to bring them the author she had promised.

"Um," she began, "Mr. Balasubramaniam seems unavailable at the moment, but he will be here in half an hour. So if you'd like, you can just read from the copies of his bestseller that are on your tables until then."

"Why's he late, then?" called someone from the back.

"I'm afraid I have no idea."

"Can't you begin the discussion?"

"Um..I don't think.."

"Go on, then, aren't you an English teacher?"

"That's correct."

"So start."

"Perhaps we should wait for him."

"Naw, let's start."

"But..."

"Start!"

She walked over to the large board and picked up the chalk, thinking all the while how she could possibly avoid talking about the bestseller that she had not read and knew nothing about. Concentrating harder than ever in her life, she wrote the title of the book, and came to terms with her only two remaining options. She could either confess that she hadn't read the book, or she could make up the story, and analyze it. She quickly thought back to when she was a student; no one really paid attention through these things. She decided that she could get away with making up her own version of "South Indian Love Affair" however risky it may seem. She

convinced herself that none of the students really cared, and none were paying attention. Taking a deep breath she began.

So absorbed was she in her story that when the door swung open at five minutes past three she didn't have enough time to feel fear and embarrassment that the author might walk in to hear her mangle and distort his story. Luckily, however, it was just a confused and late student, whom she requested to take a seat immediately, and continued. At four o'clock, she dramatically ended the discussion on the story that she had fashioned, realizing that after all of that, Balasubramaniam was not going to show.

The students gathered their things noisily and left at a speed that was almost insulting to her. All except one: the boy who was late. He smiled at her and began to walk over to where she stood. It was the type of smile that makes you suspect that the 'smiler' is trying with all his or her might not to laugh out loud and perhaps fall over from that great intensity of laughter.

"That was a terrific analysis of the story, except I don't recall reading a lot of the events that you spoke about."

"You mustn't have read it carefully enough, I'm sure."

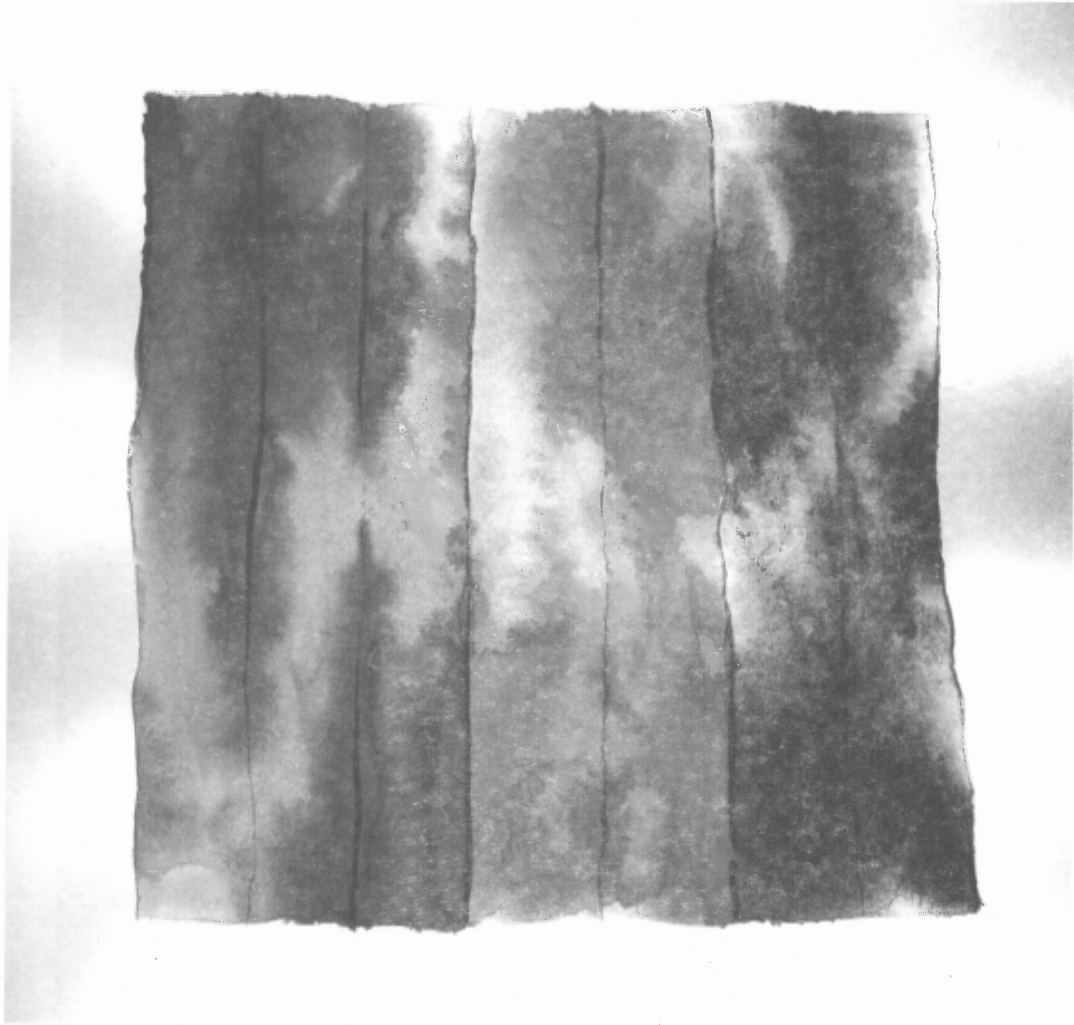
"I must disagree with you on that; I'm sure I read it very well indeed."

She looked at him strangely, like he knew something she didn't. He continued to smile at her, and she glanced away making the awkward silence between them even worse; and all at once she realized.

"Who are you?" she whispered a discomfort climbing slowly up her spine and taking residence in her stomach.

"K.P. Balasubramaniam."



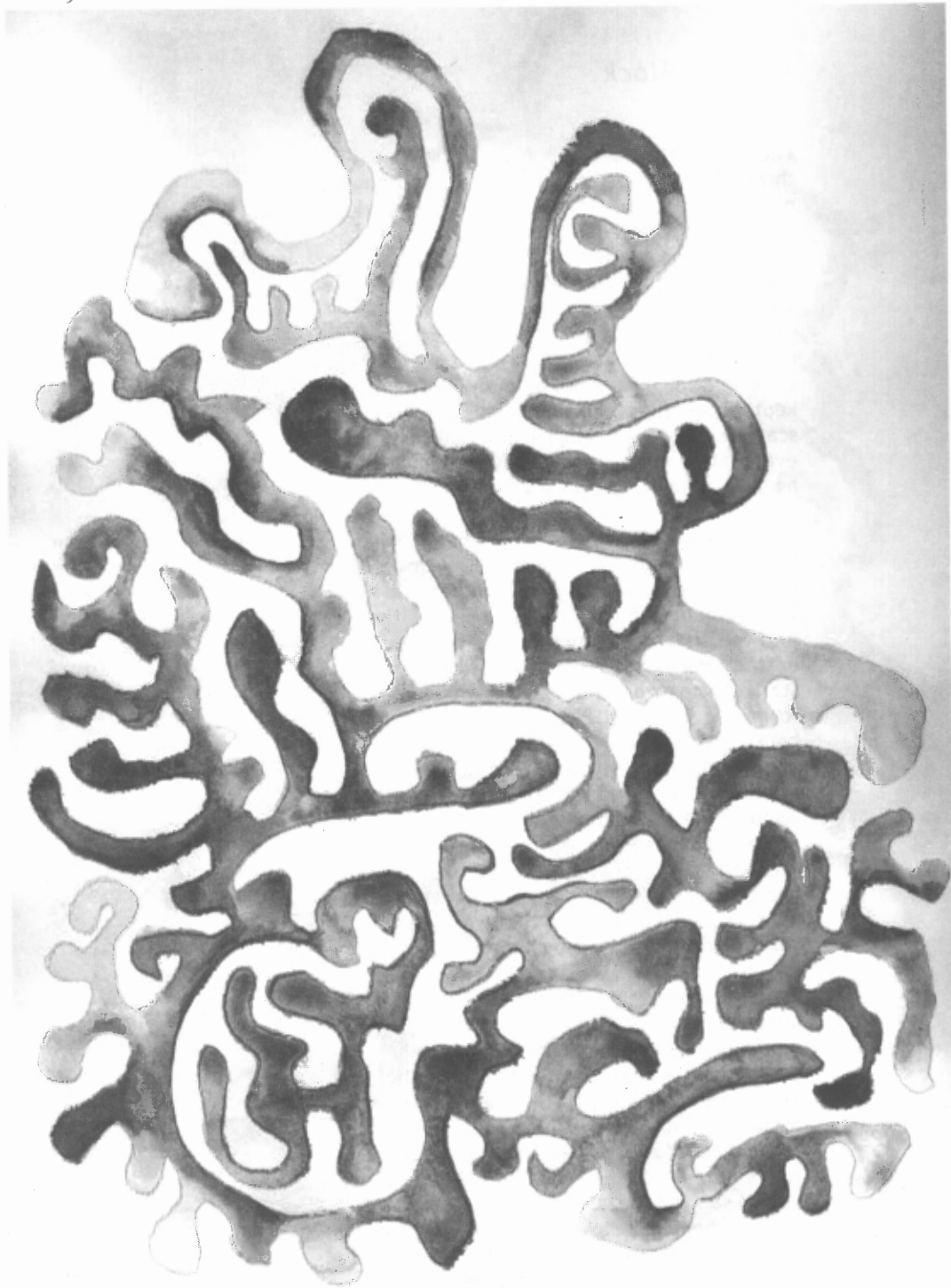


The Writer's Workshop

Richa Gupta

Early morning up I was,
To attend a workshop
For a creative cause.
I ran here,
I ran there,
Getting late was always fair. - WHY is it fair?
I got to the room
Where the writer
Us was supposed to groom.
But "Ah!" said a note of apology,
"I can't make it today"
O! Never mind
Try next day.
The note was from Hill Top,
Right across the street,
Reminds me of the ice cream
On my Hindi treat!
May be she was there,
Cuddled in her bed
Coughing and sneezing
Blowing her nose
And holding her head!
May be she found out
About poor husband stout,
And his extra marital affair
Which started in Times Square!
It could be some other odd reason
Is it the effect of the season??
Or is she in a mess
Because of treason??
May be she went riding last evening
And fell off her steed...
Maybe the lake tried to swallow her
And she still isn't freed...
I hope to see her tomorrow
To relieve my curiosity.
If need be, I shall share her sorrow
To relieve my anxiety.





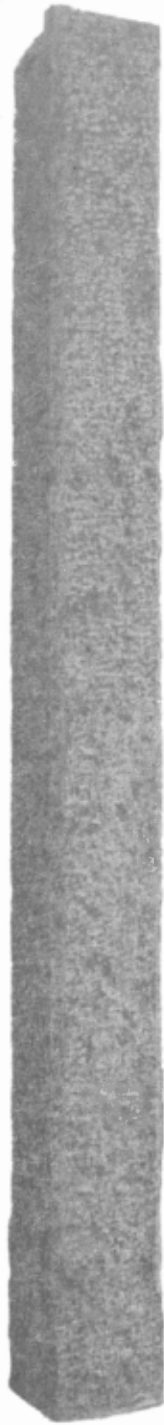
Writer's Block

Naina Chhiber

The clouds dispersed as sunlight shone through. I stood perched upon a rock staring out into the future. What did I see? A chapel historically poised upon a green hill and a blurred vision of the seasonal rain. I kept staring hoping my eyes were deceiving me. This would be my home for the next few years of my life. Children of all ages jumped around the main gate as I watched my family stare in awe. This would be me. The clouds kept dispersing as the rain began to fall in a scattered and sparse fashion. Puddles were evaporating while being slowly refilled once again by that same cold sky-water.

I looked back at what I dreamt this vision to be like. That familiar aura that surrounded my vision was disturbing. I rubbed my eyes vigorously before once again looking farther into the distance. The emerald green trees dotted with aging brown leaves was a stark contrast to the muddy brown water flowing down the hill. I sat down on the wet bench and kept staring. The air seemed to become thinner as I gasped for air. The sight symbolized a perfect state I was not used to. Happy children floating around this perfect, protected and serene environment, as I knew life was not this organized. I kept staring and gasping for those gulps of air that made me realize the true world that was being concealed from all these children.

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I blindly hugged my parents. A faint mixture of murmurs echoed in my ears as I saw their bodies move beyond the gate out into the vast world. Cars sped by them as I continued to look at their backs. The blurred vision was comforting. Having to see their clear faces would have made it harder. The car pulled up as I saw my mother enter. The last thing I saw was her scarf blow in the window as the car drove away. The tears streamed down even harder. A child walked past me speaking



a foreign language. I could distinguish their laughter as more young girls skipped past me. Teenagers were disinterested as they yelled and conversed about trivial things that meant nothing to anyone but themselves.

A pane of metal lay beside me on the table. "Rules" it read. I smiled at a passerby as the tears on my cheeks began to harden. I wiped my face and looked straight ahead. Questions were asked. Answers were given. Soothing looks were given to me as I stared up at the sky. Blue clouds were emerging from behind as the gloom grey clouds began to dip with the setting sun. The time had come. I had no choice. So I picked up my bag and read the pane beside me one last time.

"Kodaikanal International School."

And in the distance I faintly saw a rainbow emerge from behind the clouds.



The Symphony of Death

Ronak Ganatra

For endless days across the unending sands
She had walked on clamped feet, scuttled on
thatched hands
From moonset to moonrise, her legs dragged
her on
Curiosity drove her forwards, her eyes wanting
to look what lay beyond

With every move, agony encased her every
muscle
She wanted to give it up, the pain and the
dark puzzle
Not knowing how to react, she lingered there
Retrospection on her life, senses going bare

All reason faded, awaiting fate
Facing the world alone, knocking on heaven's
gate
Finally she felt it, the sudden surge of mortal
end
Helpless now, she couldn't pretend

She fell to her knees, and she drew her last
breath,
Never to rise again, she embraced her death...





Murder I wrote

Deea Ariana

"Excuse me, do you have any tea left?"
Splosh! In went his prong-less trident into the
bucket of chlorinated water. Thomp! Thomp!
He marched towards the swinging doors, and
was soon out of my sight.
I went back to my writing.

"Will coffee do?" A blunt yet deep voice asked
from behind. The trident still grasped in his
hands.
"Uh, yes. Thanks."
Once more he took the opportunity to dip his
trident back into the bucket and proceeded
with his mopping.
I went back to my writing.

For a mere second, I was distracted by the
swishing and finging knives. Then it suddenly
ended with a loud "clob". The man dropped
his seemingly harmless weapon and sped
towards the swinging doors, where inside was
the source of it all.
"Bwaaaaaaak!" A screech erupted,
pronouncing its own death. As if that weren't
enough, I too had to go beyond those doors,
weakened and paralysed by the excitement
that seduced me. I just had to witness the
murder!!

The 'inside' wasn't dark. It was in fact well
lit. The light reflected off the batches of
steel that lay abandoned; weapons of mass
destruction to the only thing that gives us
pleasure through the mouth. But the red
stains that made itself visible right before
me was not unexpected, though gruesome.
A rusted cleaver lay at the far end of the
hall. On the opposite were gigantic cauldrons
warming themselves for the grand finale. The
shelves were stacked with myriads of unusual
powders, whose aroma from a single puff,
diffused in the air, and....hold on, where have
all the people gone? Who in the right mind
would desert the laboratory of gastronomic
creations?



“How may I help you?” The same deep and blunt voice startled me, again from behind. I peeked from the corner of my left eye. In place of the trident was a large, fat and fierce piece of rusted metal. I peeked from the corner of my right eye. In his other hand were chunks of fresh pink meat. Then I turned straight and, caught a glimpse of the far end of the hall. The cleaver, it’s missing! But when did he.....

“Oye!” another voice added to the backdrop. “Is the tandoor chicken ready?” it continued. “NO!” bellowed the man with the looks of a murderer. At that, he pushed me aside and proceeded towards the huge cauldron like tandoors, and dropped the freshly slaughtered chicken in. I went back to my writing.



A Walk in the Rain

Aahana Miller

There was absolutely nothing to do in Kodai that day, so I dragged myself around the campus trying to find something that could occupy my time.

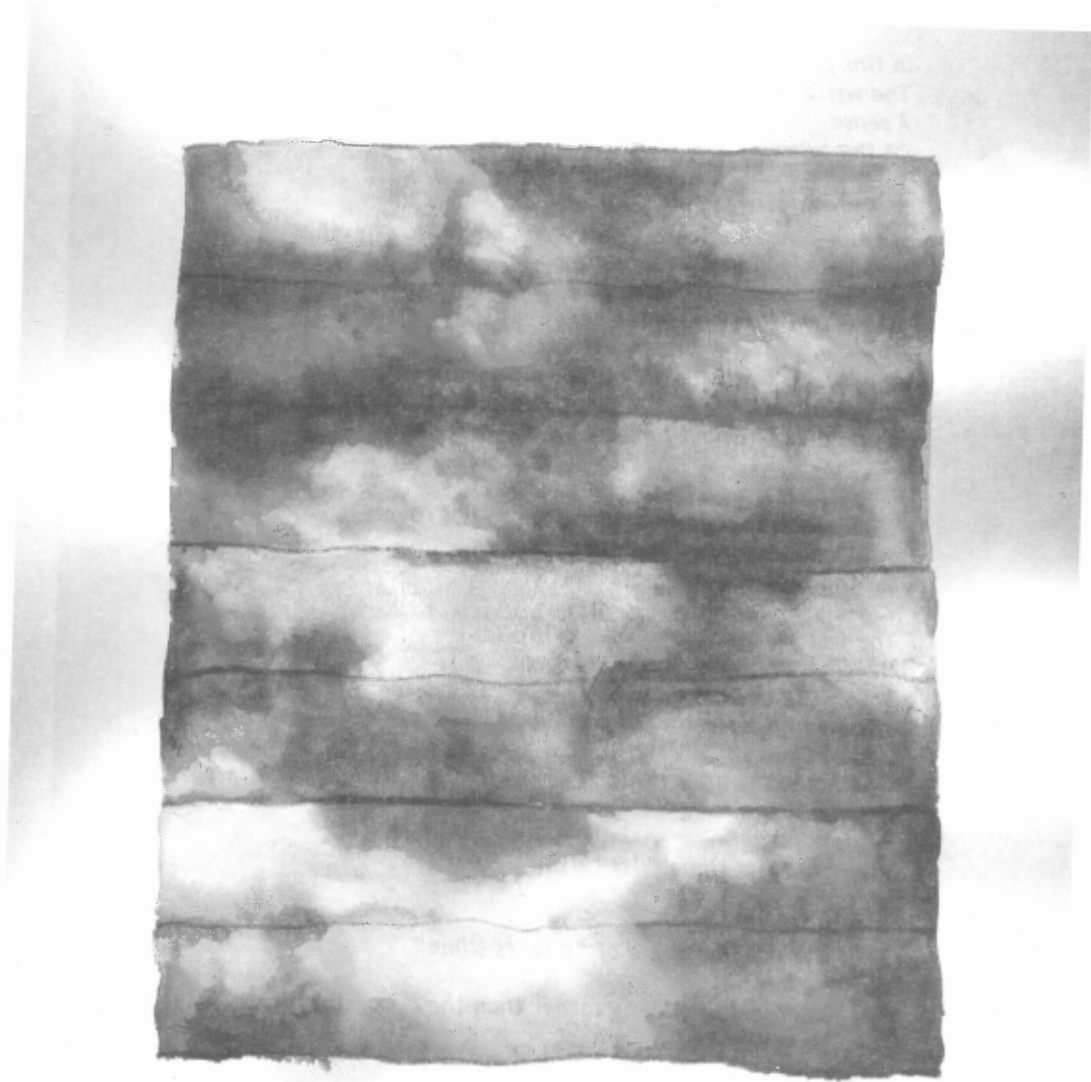
I turned around to look at the sky, and watched it turn a murky grey. The clouds thickened and hard, fast pellets of rain began falling down.

I felt a pang of pain with every drop. What seemed to be mere shooting of bullets soon turned into the rapid firing of flames. I felt the pain rise through my body as each drop scarred me. Nevertheless, the only thing that I wanted to do then was to drink tea, so I walked down the tar road to the corner teashop.

As I walked back up the tar road, it had turned a muddy brown and the grass was now almost olive. Drops fell like salty tears trickling down the sappy green leaves, dropping off their edge and fusing with the ground. The puddles mirrored the translucent sky as blissful drops descended slowly from the heavens. I walked through the emptiness of the school and realized that I was happy, happy with life and happy with the tea in my hand. It was then that I passed the dining hall and decided to sit at my favorite place, the cement platform above the dining hall.

I placed my foot on the grill of the window to climb over, but the rusted hinges loosened themselves from the tight grip of the screws. The grill fell down on the roof, its crashing sound ringing in my ears. I stepped out onto the platform slowly placing the grill back. Resting my back against the cold, stone wall, I looked out at the sky that was now clearing up. In less than a minute, the sky had pushed the clouds aside and was now smiling down at me. Sounds were going in and out of my head and the colors around me began vibrating. I had forgotten the world. I wished that this moment would last forever.

All of a sudden, someone tapped me on my shoulder. It was Mira and I knew that it was time to go back. I felt happy, but the tea and my hand had gotten cold.



Unseen Passage Commentary **Aditya Menon**

In this poem
The writer is trying to convey
A sense
Of the process of writing.

The poem's title
Is ambiguous.
It is not clear what is unseen-
Poem, passage or commentary

The speaker or persona
Appears to be a student of literature,
But then again,
It could be the poet himself.

These lines are in free verse;
That is, they aren't in any narrow cell of rhyme,
But they are broken up into quatrains
Making them all the more poetic.

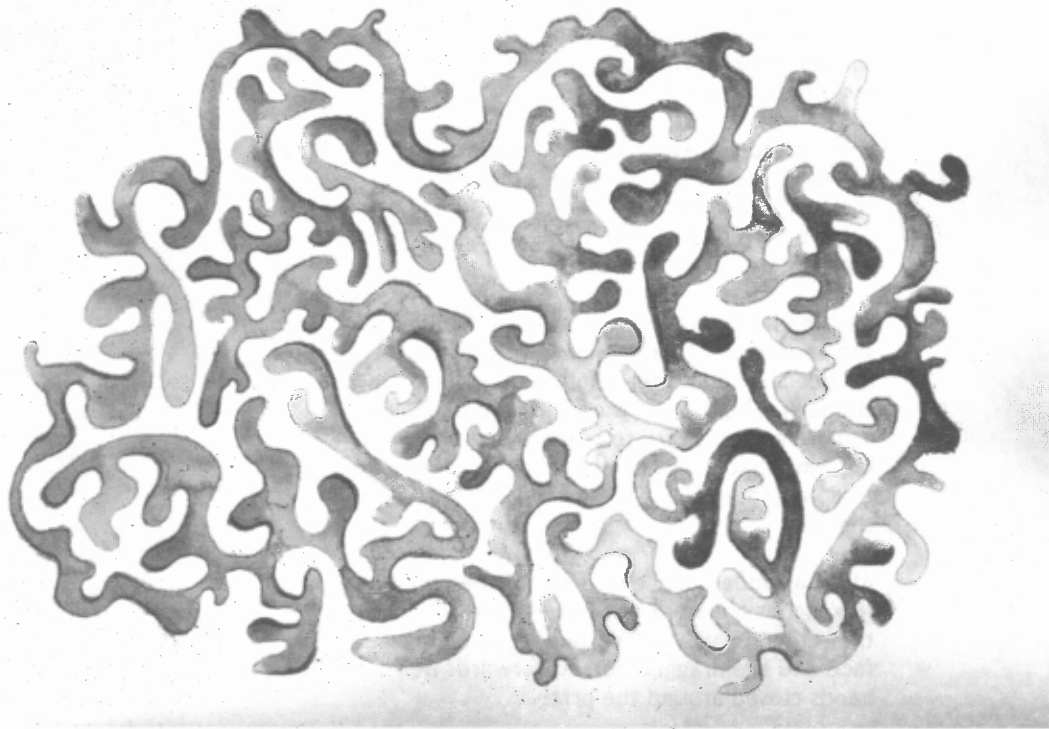
The first five stanzas
Have hardly any concrete imagery
But in the sixth
The reader is startled by the image

Of "a pen inching its way
Across a page,
Oozing ink
Like a slug its slime."

It is well worth noting
That the sibilant sound of "slug its slime"
Draws attention
To the process of writing rather than the product.

The diction
Is evidently
A curious mix
Of poetic register and literary terms.

With its rich ambiguity
The poem as a whole
Conveys the message encapsulated in the last line:
"Who can tell the commentary from the poem?"



Agony

Ria Gyawali

The instant she woke up, a pain shot through her. Something let out a long, low growl that escalated into a roar. She scrambled out of bed, still tangled up in her sheets and almost immediately doubled over and fell to the floor.

The pain was unbearable.

She needed to reach the phone somehow, but she was shaking furiously, unable to move, unable to scream.

She started her agonizing journey. Inching forward, she let out long gasps of pain and the floor under her screeched, resembling a witch's howling laughter as her red-fingernails marred its wooden surface.

All the energy drained out of her tired limbs, she paused. Another attack was about to hit her. She could feel it in the pit of her stomach. The excruciating wait was as tiring as her venture to try to reach the phone. Knowing that it was coming and not being able to do anything about it, she waited, still on the floor.

All of a sudden, her eyes spotted the phone, a few inches ahead of her. She needed to make that crucial call. A determined look on her face and she dragged herself forward. Her hands closed around the prize.

Not a second to lose, she made that call. Letting out a sigh of relief, she sat up slowly. Her body, a lifeless marionette, was unable to hold her up so she rested against the coffee table. Her phone fell out of her slightly shivering hands and she held them together to stop them from shaking. The morning light filtering through the dusty green curtains illuminated her face.

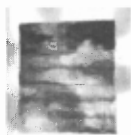
If not for the inner turmoil, she would have

given Bellini's Madonna competition.

Nevertheless, peace was not to be had. She either waited a second too long, or it attacked a second too early; either way, her peace was shattered. The attack seemed to be the secret of her energy as her previously motionless body sprang to life. As if her feet had a mind of their own, they led her to the place she needed to go.

Fumbling at the handle, which was on the receiving end of a long stream of profanities, she managed to open the door. It was coming and she needed to get there before it got the best of her. At long last, she found relief. Now slumped down on the cold, wet tiles of the bathroom floor, her lids shut over her eyes.

Goddamn diarrhoea.

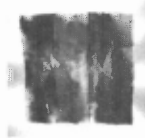


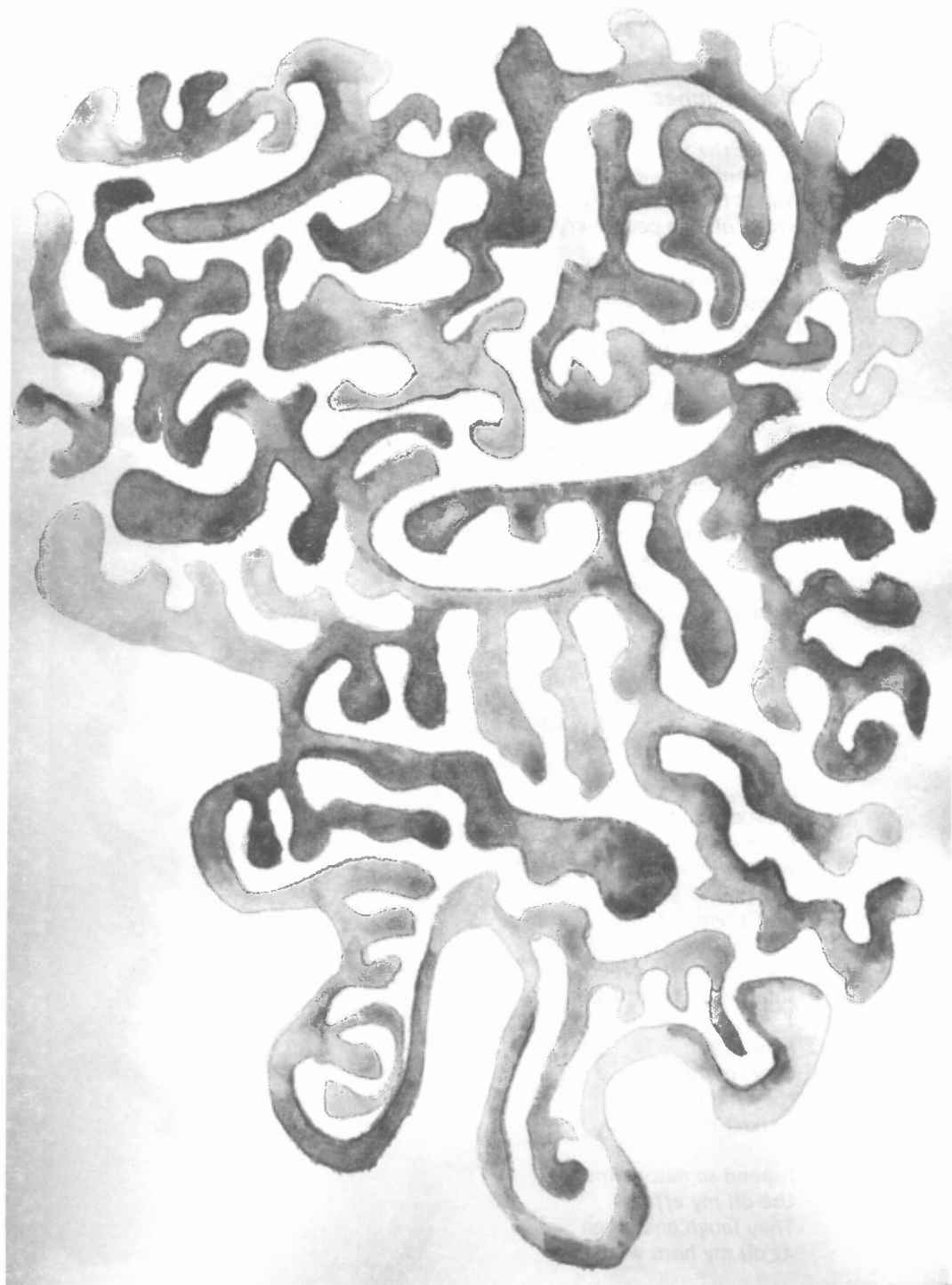
Broken Mirror
Azra Bhagat

Put on perfume, go out of my room
Still 16 so I'm heading to school
The girls start to stare, like I really care
It's a crazy world so I'm quite prepared

School is a bore, the guys will all snore
But the girls are all too busy to put their
make-up on
"Is my hair ok?", "Will he like my new shoes?"
All they really care about is parties and booze

It's a new generation, malls are inspiration
Charity, clarity has no inclination
It's a money run nation, no time for
information
Only the materialistic holds our fascination.





Poems

Bianca Jones

Why is the world so rich
whilst all the people die?
Why is the land so dry
whilst all the people cry?

How can we let life go
without even a fight?
How can we stay afloat
when it's easier to find fight?

Doesn't anyone wonder?
Doesn't anyone care?
What about the constant pain?
What about the constant lives slain?

Doesn't anyone notice?
Couldn't anyone spare?
Just one cent, one thing
to help save another?

Selfish
Lies
Broken
Lives

Meet our world
Corrupted, alone
in its own Isolation
when all we had to do was try

I let them read
see my thoughts
they take with greed
shinning in their dishonest eyes.

I try to run
I try to hide
they find it fun
to hurt my pride

I spend so much time
Use all my effort.
They laugh and laugh
At all my hard work.

*I hate these people
I hate this life
everything so depressing
everything so wrong*

*Let me go
Help you see
that there is more to life
than hurting me*

*I sat on the ground
Isolated, alone
for no one notices
the girl with the crooked eyes*

*Leave us alone, I hear girls cry
you only like us for our legs
our breasts, our looks
not for us*

*I turned away
I tried to run
But I saw nowhere to turn
only could I hear
only could I cry
for no one notices
the girl with the crooked eyes*

*Leave you alone?
To us they won't near the others
Screamed. And why?
'Cos our hair ain't right?*

*It was then I cried
At least they knew where they stood
I knew, I sighed
No one could Love the girl with the crooked
eyes*

*I watched him from across the room
His brown eyes moving ever so slow
His body rippled beneath his shirt
but he'll never notice me*

*His smile bright by day
the same smile somewhat quiet by night
He brushed his hair from his face*

But he'll never notice me

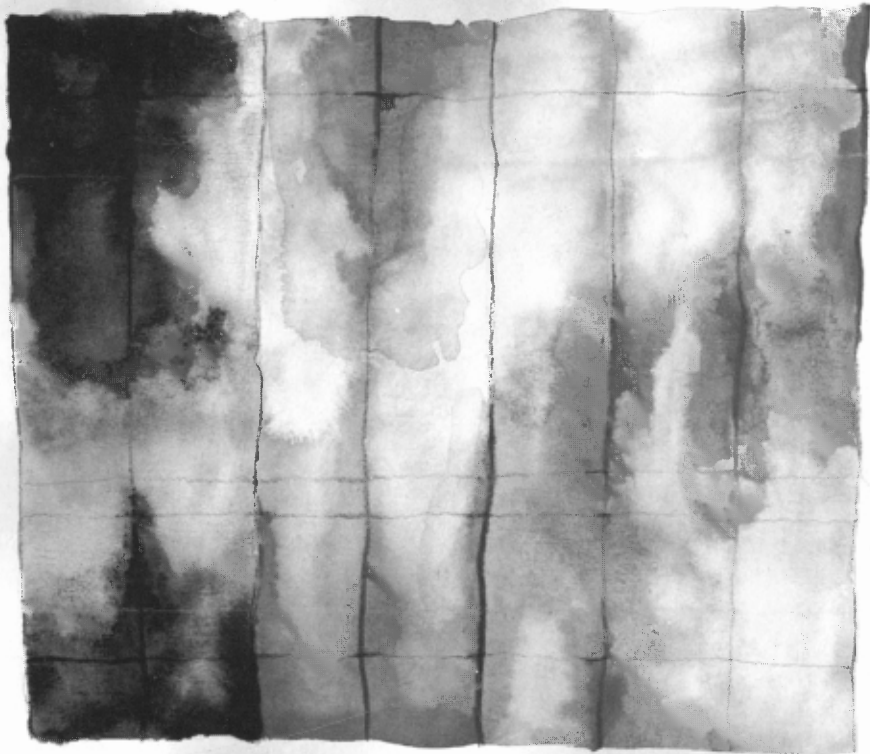
Me, the girl who can't speak out
for shyness rules my speech.
Me, the girl with the crooked eyes
for sight lacked in each.

His muscular hand I wanted in mine
I wanted his touch, his love
I knew, I sighed
He'll never notice me

Me, the girl who knew his name
but will never speak it
Me, the girl who had no fame
But wished he didn't need it

How I wished he'd notice me
Maybe one day he shall
But never, oh never
Will he love me
With that, I have no doubt







2007 Workshop in progress



15th Annual Writers' Workshop

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