

Kavithalaya

The 17th Annual Writers' Workshop 2009

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The 17th Annual Writers' Workshop 2009

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

Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peter Strange / Sudeep Ghosh
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RIGHT MOVE

Andrew Roshan

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

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

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

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

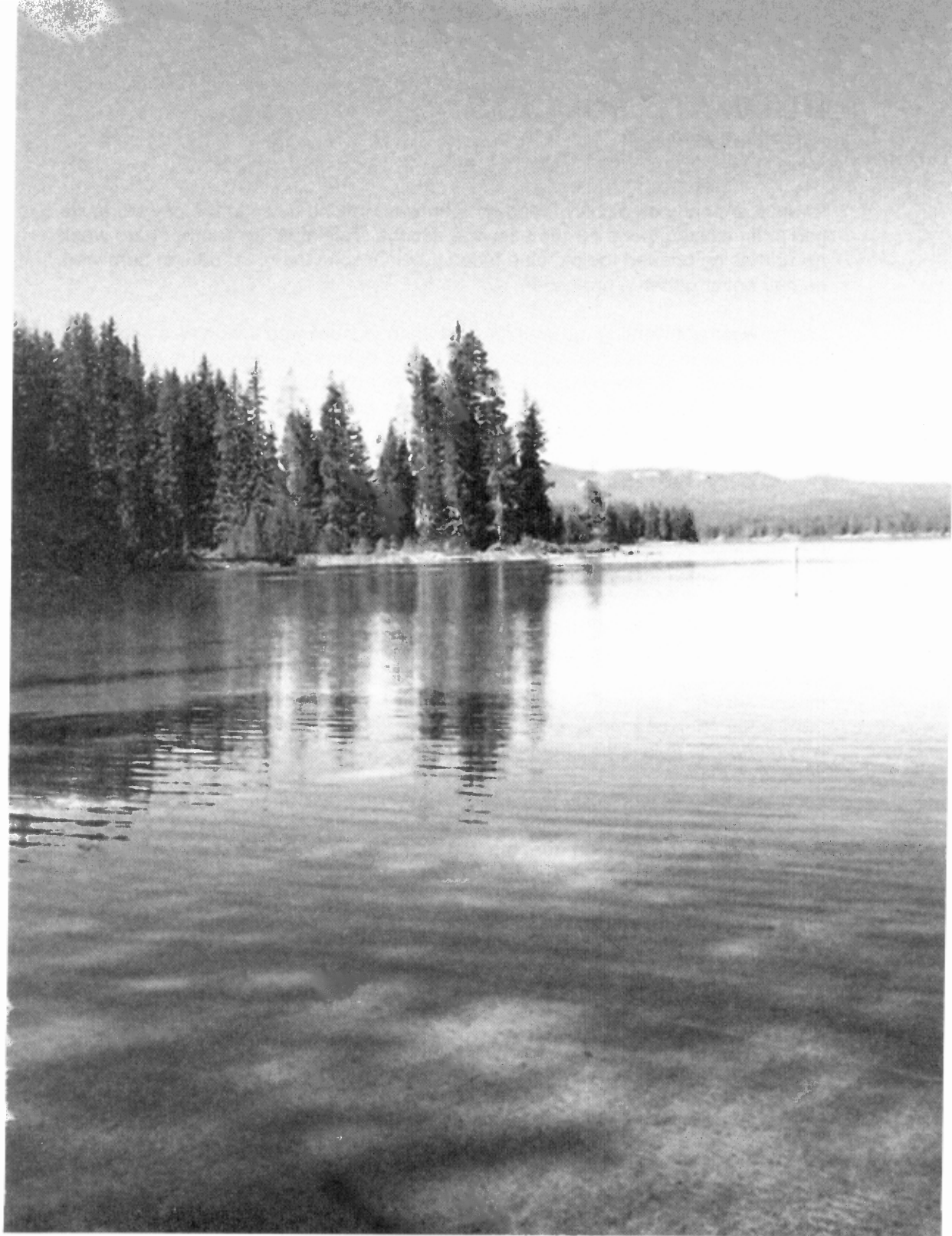
At first sight I could see a gentleman-like quality on Rakesh's features, and he appeared as if he had accomplished everything in life. His office was well kept. The environment inside was very pleasant. The air conditioner made the place more comfortable to be in than outside. It made me forget the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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

DOWN THE LAKE

Beatrice Akinyi, A.

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

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

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

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

BEAUTY

Kishore Selvababu

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

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

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

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

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

BEING BRITTLE

D. Kalaivani

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

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

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

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

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

'Ding Dong': there goes the bell!

ON A TRAIL

Giftsy Dorcas E.

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

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

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

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

Love always,
Juliet

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

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

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

COLOUR PLAY

Giftsy Dorcas E.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENTANGLING LOVE

J. Jothi Viknesh

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

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

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

The posters all over the city next day read:

COME ONE, COME ALL...

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

DON'T MISS IT!!!

THE ONE LOVE UNASKED

A. Monica Sherin

The one,

Who always makes me feel fulfilled
My precious treasure...

Who always regards me as an angel

Regardless of what I do
My eternal admirer...

Who always showers me with pure divine love

My adamant lover...

Who always gives and forgives

My own Jesus Christ...

Who always was there to save me

When I tripped
My attentive saviour...

Who lost so I could win...

Who starved so I could eat...

Who lay awake so I could sleep...

Who came down to earth so I could fly...

Who was always behind me so I could be ahead...

The One ☐ MY DAD

A CAMP IN THE GRASSLAND

Srinidhi, A.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNTITLED

Ankit R. Hiran

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OFF-LINE

T. David Jeyaraj

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

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

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BISON

Paul Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Love,

Big Sister

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



Leonyd Demidov

Narsingh Dixit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, I'm really sorry I asked. I can't imagine how you must be feeling right now."

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

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

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

Leonyd's face grew pale.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was puzzled, "I don't understand..."

The Splendor of Music

Oona Yadav

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

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

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

The Stereotype

Karishma Joshi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Oh! Sure!'

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

'Why not?'

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

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

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

I smiled at him and nodded.

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

'Wha... sorry?'

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

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

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

XXX

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

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

The Boatman's Saga

Anushka Mehrotra

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm going to tell you a story"

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

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

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

"You must hear my story."

"WHAT? Are you insane?!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

honeymoon?"

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

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

"Will you continue the story?" Naman urged on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"She slipped"

"WHAT?" Maya and Naman both yelled together.

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

A small sob escaped this throat

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

"What? It ends with her dying?!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Death of a Circus Freak

Gaurav Dua

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

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

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

Seven Men

Gaurav Dua

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