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# QUIRK

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## QUIRK, EPISODE V: NEW MORALITIES

**In keeping with our tradition for quirky themes, we present the fifth edition of Quirk – a natural progression from “My Place in Anarchy”. Our mission remains the same: to spark a literary revolution - college style! We solicit your support, creative outpourings, and shared enthusiasm. And keep an eye out for December, when we come out with our sixth, featuring “Comfortably Dumb!”**  
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2. Eight Bands, One Magazine and Two Cities | 3. Franz Ferdinand en concert | 4. Didi | 5. The Convert | 7. The Waiting Room | 8. The Strawberry Dialogue

## Discord

The Gen X bubbly cola sipping mall frequenter, dressed extravagant, tank tops and jeans or whatever is no longer chic. The coffee day infestation continues with no respite; unsuccessful attempts at creating a charming cafe culture that resulted in providing a hangout for mascara clad college goers and their escorts. While the young males are regular drunks their dainty partners refer to themselves as social drinkers and participants of both sexes are very secretive about this issue concerning alcohol consumption for the want of progressive parents who would understand the efficacy in experiencing certain things in life early. Casual sex? Yes.

And No (Off the record). They have begun to frequent Pecos, now renovated with glossy hippie murals and still sticking to classic rock beats that echo tirelessly on Saturday nights, bouncing against the walls. Fits fine. These sections of people from fairly affluent suburbs live to make life eventful. A sense of fear however lies embedded within their minds, which prevents them from venturing across the fence, down the road and instigating self-destruction. So they have the ambience, the music, the beer, but what seems non-existent is comfort. Generation Y I presume had something to do with chromosomes, bras, or covert feminist conspiracies to detract potential suitors from entering the husband market. Mojo's opened recently and it's where I will enjoy a beef lunch this afternoon. My stash of weed is nearly over and I'm in no condition to be on the road.

Infants are bawling and yelping for help, baffled by all the contradictory messages and advertisements on the backs of auto-rickshaws. It is not intended for the middle and upper class sections of the populace; the atrociously underpaid dark skinned day labourers treading on precariously mounted scaffoldings that will soon metamorphose into glass buildings, will also not give a moment's notice to it. Megara sits beside me in the back of Phaon's sedan, with him driving and an anxious Adonis jumping about the other front seat, afraid that his speed trip will be squandered in transit. We watch the traffic light timer counting down and another electronic display showing the temperature, wedged at the Trinity circle intersection between an over packed public bus and a glittering black C class Mercedes. Concerts have become tedious; pubs have yielded functionality and touristy cosmetic makeovers have begun to emboss concrete slabs all around. I wonder aloud who might possibly have suggested we head to this part of the city, for all it does is trigger reminders of how significant a characteristic it is of Indians, to do things impassionedly, just for the sake of doing so; of how adept we are at adapting ourselves to excel at what is internationally in vogue: information technology or god men, acid binges or long talks, street theatre or entrepreneurship; a vulgar cross between a bohemian gorilla and an ecstasy fuelled, enthusiastic yuppie. He must be here somewhere. But where? Smack in the middle of this anarchy smokes the jaded auto driver, oblivious of what ridiculous messages don his vehicle's rear. And I can't find my man.

*People keep walking in and around, with noisy exclamations, animated and excited, while I sit on the bench and watch. I am not quite broken but the drugs must be getting to me. I feel painfully dull and it is such a great bore to have to constantly rock along with the thoughts, wishing for something. Something lost. Most definitely. It is three personalities now, maybe four, but only one to tell the rest. That must be me. I'll have to smoke a cigarette to keep from feeling hungry. Who's to say that my days aren't prepaid for, like my morning classes? I need something dangerous to fiddle around with, something that will put me to sleep. Something tardy on a magazine cover has me tangled. What a silly thing to do. This person I haven't met is singing about me, somewhere halfway across the world in a country I have never seen. I cannot quite fit in as a tourist, or as a native, which I have tried twice today.*

Some are talking of shrooms and smack, some of the horrendous drive to electronics city, of the new lounges and cover charges, of the amputation of intelligence the residents of this city have willingly undergone, unwilling to gamble. Bangalore Times speaks of a skewed anarchy: Diet blunders and monorail. It's about to rain heavily and I wish I had stayed home. Sleeping, passing the seconds casually, on a break, is not something very common here. Like it or not we had made ourselves easy prey for those sneering people who jump at every opportunity to pigeonhole the 'young' and devious generation. It becomes clear then that to survive here you have to learn to hate and loathe, compete and smoke more pot, or shun globalisation and the American way with diplomatic words. One cannot ignore the fact that most of the peepers in the bus are not going to, and possibly never will, disembark at any stop on this, the best-known road in town. Green appears and we begin to crawl along. This week 'The Smiths' have conquered our car's stereo time, with Morrissey presently leading everyone to orgasm by repeatedly droning "I've lost my faith in womanhood, I've lost my faith in womanhood". Last week it was Franz Ferdinand; next week it's to be the Replacements.

"You've been staring at that damned rick for minutes Fink. Do something." Meg screams exhaling heavily in my face. Her head is on my lap and the only warmth I feel is from the burning cigarette she holds. I'm stroking her hair, and every minute or so I feel a chilly sensation spread through me, and despite all the strange events that circumstance has recently thrown at us I realise I do care a lot for her. It doesn't mean much to either of us though, for these temporal spikes of emotion encountered during the course of time is quite a crock, considering we have a nice stash of golden brown dust to chase at home. No one will say it, but there is an odd edginess about the air, and everyone would rather skip the formalities, return to their beds and music, and stare at the ceiling.

"When are we going to stop appreciating and criticising, and actually create something of our own?" mumbles Ado. No one says anything. The silence between songs is filled with motor sounds and occasional shouts.

"Never". A cigarette is lit.

Four boxes of matchsticks, aluminium foil, three packs of cigarettes and an improvised pipe made of cardboard lie heaped on my bathroom floor, which leaves little to the imagination; this bathroom plays host to illicit activities galore, including those sanctioned by nature. Phao very cautiously and caringly unfolds the small, proficiently folded paper, and reveals a gram of exquisite brown sugar (being lumped though makes it look deceptively insufficient for five people). In a few minutes he gets things sorted out and breathes in the

first potent and bitter plume of smoke, takes a drag from a cigarette handed to him and a few seconds later exhales a dense cloud of smoke, all in a single flamboyant move.

"It's bitter", he complains; we just gaze blankly at the foil, waiting our turn. It comes quickly enough and before we know it ten rounds of the circle is complete.

This wasn't the only pretext for us gathering here. We had resolved to complete composing a song that we started on the day previous. The bedroom is a mess of cables, amplifiers, guitars and an assortment of better than average distortion pedals. With their ear for music and my diary of cryptic verses, we have always sensed the inevitability of a musical composition being born from the ash of all the cigarettes smoked here, to create rather than just listen. But today the song remains incomplete. Everyone rests drowsily, with their eyelids closing and opening intermittently, plunging them in and out of vivid and chaotic landscapes, a Freudian feast. I suppose enough has been written and said on the subject of intoxicating substances, their increasing role in college and school communities, from very varied perspectives, and it is unlikely that any radical change in this regard will be witnessed in course of the (arguable) evolution of human civilisation.

How was it that we had become so jaded but content all the same? When exactly did we surrender our innocence, each in his or her peculiar manner, and under what compulsions? Time and space had tenaciously flung us an infinite degree apart; this moat of separation five years in the making however, was drained subtly and effectually when we reunited. We still are however five isolated islands, with one final summer to slack away, after a mechanical decade of languid education, before our children wake up to a life so twisted and complicated we'd scarcely believe it was moulded by our very own hands. We needed to draw a bold line.

Four in the circle. It's been three days, melancholic as expected, spent mostly in the depths of sleep; a fragile attempt to avoid dwelling on how abstinence really wasn't my primary concern at the moment. Also during such periods the trifles of everyday living, which though keeping this chaotic jumble of people in a manageable but nonetheless anarchic order, would leave me repulsed and troubled. But it wasn't that. Simplicity is often deceiving when one considers that all it takes is some brown sugar and a truly loving circle of friends. Why then does this misty aura of denial pervade room 110? Why the charade? What I am referring to transcends the oddities and 'quirks' of any university hostel; any cancer afflicting an educational system, as is the case in India, will I think be doubly malignant in 'elite' institutions as much as we would like to believe otherwise. Anyway this is more of a personal issue I have with circles of pot smokers babbling away, rather than with any single person or place. I'm a bit edgy waiting for the next chase. And these nasty traffic snarls with impatient primates blaring horns, prodding and provoking. I just can't be bothered to react.

My mind's a soup. My nervous system seems frail and I realise how my cheeks have sunken in. It bothers me little that I draw ghastly stares of contempt from a presumptuous majority exercising racism at its worst. The kind of attitude based not on skin or religion but on lifestyle. I play around with my brain, asking much from it, exposing it to a whole lot of puppets and toys, amusement parks and manuals of psychology. Once here you can never truly return to that old place, where the idea of 'personality', 'identity', 'character' is constant, where wheels don't spin. Conflict and chaos is the idiot's drug, and shock the only mood stabiliser.

*Your participation in the prescribed and complicated institutions of society has an unreal nature about it. You were never really there. Every morning before leaving you stripped yourself by the bed and wore so comfortably a tailored suit, which was shallow and meaningless and although it fit you perfectly you felt strange. To walk confidently with your head held high and your posture correct meant leaving the more important aspects of your nature on the bed. After a fair amount of contemplation and experimentation you rejected the idea of rejection, yet things are not very different now. You feel you know things that no one else does, while you simultaneously wonder if the reason for your estrangement was the drugs. You are quite sure that people cannot call you an escapist anymore, and if they do well it is borne from that instinctive urge to stereotype. You tell yourself it is nothing to be afraid about. But fear was never the problem. If anything it was a lack of it.*

*You figured for yourself how little money matters, and how much it does. Because you now have felt that gnawing desperation eat into your mind when you are broke and try so hard to keep from thinking about that wretched bank balance. It is not going to leave you alone. And you sing along –*

*'Ideals don't take the place of meals'*

*You feel silly for having to have a Harvard graduate tell you that. All this still means squat for you will unabashedly fight the claws of an ever-growing global culture of consumerism. Again all of this is only in your head, for you are staring into a COMPAQ computer monitor gently tapping your REEBOK floaters on the floor. Contradiction arising out of complexity, something you thought was a truism and didn't need elaborating. You soon realise your powers of reasoning are quite undeveloped, though you will never admit to it. You scream "BIG FUCK!!" and light a cigarette. One of the few handy products that all this insanity has managed to give birth to? You chuckle to yourself. You dabble with writing and read excessively. This you realise soon enough is yet another excuse. An excuse not required because you really haven't done anything 'wrong'. Well whatever the reasons, if they do indeed exist, reading and writing are the only two activities, which provide some genuine relief for your troubled mind. And yes, the drugs too.*

It is evident that intolerance borrows its roots from a cauldron of conflicting cultural forces. Aesthetically engineered generation wars are perpetuated subtly, condoned by almost every mass media outlet. Vices are no longer abstract principles stemming from detailed reasoning and debate by bearded old wise men. The subjective symbolism associated with morality and virtue has been stripped of its splendour and charm and is now represented by trivial activities such as smoking, drinking liquor, casual sex and drug abuse, which determine the 'character' or 'goodness' of an individual according to some inane logic that is employed when seeking to understand the multitude of complexities and motivating factors that govern human behaviour and action. Can there possibly be anything more irrational, idiotic and inexcusable for a supposedly 'intelligent' and superior group of beings (as we often remind ourselves) to live?

# EIGHT BANDS, ONE MAGAZINE AND TWO CITIES

Faced with a theme like “New Moralities”, I have the compelling urge to talk about pre-marital sex, marijuana and abortion. I automatically begin to defend my right to choose to do anything and anyone, and temporize about the importance of escaping the narrow constraints of Social Morality. There is the inexplicable desire to justify and glorify everything one believes in, to Defy and Flout things, to provoke and attack – all in suitably foul language. Essentially, I react like a child faced with the prospect of having her candy taken away – and I recoil with convulsive terror at the mention of morality. This, when writing to a magazine such as Quirk, which from all I can gather, respects candy just as much as I do. My reaction, hence, is entirely uncalled for. Presumably one is supposed to go deeper than reflexive and stereotypical defensiveness? Why argue so vehemently for something that really isn’t being contested? I would put it down to my (not inconsiderable) pleasure in picking a fight I know I can win – who doesn’t love feeling superior? But I don’t think it is sufficient explanation, for this is a trend I detect in *most* ‘youth oriented’ things of a certain kind – done with varying degrees of sophistication and eloquence. I could be charged with unfair generalization, but I do think it is a problem that needs to be addressed at a collective level. Can we all really be that immature?

But first, what is the candy that one is so desperate to defend? What is our morality?

Sex. Drugs. Universal and time-honoured symbols of disenchanted and dissolute youth<sup>1</sup>. Each generation rediscovers them, claims them (and, I assume, the things they stand for) as its own, and then Grows Up and Gets Responsible. Circle of life... that sort of thing. It’s our turn now. Here’s our morality. Fuck. Dope. Drink. Smoke. Don’t, if you don’t feel like it. Deconstruct and dismiss everything till it loses all imposed meaning and existence. Till it is *pure*, or is rendered irrelevant. Talk about the importance of Individual Space and Thought, Perfect Equality... all that stuff. Maybe we’ll get lucky and never grow up. Most likely we will. Either way, we all agree that for the moment we have a different morality from Society and all those freaks that run it...use the jargon of your choice... Bourgeois Capitalists, Establishment, The Mainstream, The Moral Police, Big Brother. Even in this we provide freedom. Aren’t we ducky?

Now can we all move on? Get over it, even? I’m not saying that the all the stuff above isn’t bloody good and worth walking around with... I’m merely arguing that we all know that it is, so why talk about it where it isn’t threatened? I’m contending that we stop harping on the fact that the content of our morality is different, and styling ourselves the New Radicals Changing Society, the great brown hope. The first is self-evident, the second pompous and, well, fairly idiotic. Our opinions aren’t new and they aren’t particularly radical. Sex, Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll. Nihilism. Anarchism. They *have* been around for a while, however little one likes to concede that. Then there’s the argument that Society is finally sitting up and taking notice, and that’s what all the furor is about: A New Social Morality – a spanking new morality that combines the best of both worlds – if that is even possible<sup>2</sup>. That is, of course, based on the conclusion that Society *is* taking notice and changing – one for which there really is no evidence. If anything, it’s growing more conservative, narrower and *less* responsive. So, ultimately, all that we do is repeatedly say the same thing and convince the same people- an entertaining and gratifying exercise, but a singularly pointless one<sup>3</sup>.

We can do one of two things, the way I see things. We can try to come up with a truly new morality, or we can change focus. The first is certainly not going to be accomplished by talking about how stunningly intelligent and right the present one is... and it smacks of fixing what ain’t broke to prove a trivial point. Therefore, I assume this isn’t a feasible option, or a necessary one. The second is the one I propose. We switch from talking about the content of our morality to talking about the nature of our morality. We analyze morality not by its content, but by how it works.

Obviously, this requires a working definition of morality, a thing I have been strenuously avoiding. But here goes. I commit. I consider morality to be a way of looking at the world and sorting it out. A way to figure out how to get about life in a fairly confusing place. Morality, therefore, functions as a neat little boxing machine – good and evil, accepted and taboo, right and wrong... and so forth. Killing Bad. Truth Good. Despite all caveman associations, it’s still a useful thumb rule. Morality is not a metaphysical thing that can, in itself, be rejected- we all have and require some morality, however abstract. There is no one outside morality, no one that can claim to be free of morality- not even ‘us’<sup>4</sup>. We can – and do – claim to be outside a specific morality. Hence, Morality, however sophisticated and philosophical, boils down to filters and standards. The first is personal – it shapes world views; the second social – it ensures a measure of predictability in social spaces. But who comes up with these filters and standards? A ‘Killing Good, Truth Bad’ type boxing would be just as good morality as the other. Who decides what the rules are? Let’s not even go down social consensus path. Obviously it’s the fuckers that run the world, the jargon-inspiring ones.

But what about our morality? Who decides that? The answer is just as obvious the other one. It’s the fuckers that run our world... The musicians, the novelists, the TV writers... the ‘alternate intellectuals’<sup>5</sup>. They create our standards, provide our filters. They are the ones we look to provide shape to a movement, to tell us how to defy whatever it is one wants to defy. It’s the ultimate irony – one establishment tells you to defy another and precisely how to do it. And establishments they are. Allegedly the spokespeople of movements, don’t they really create them, or, to be fairer, radically alter them and come to define them? Which way does the association work – the Sex Pistols with punk, or punk with the Sex Pistols? More critically, can one conceive punk today *without* the Sex Pistols, or more fundamentally, the Ramones? So are punkheads (presumably a subset of ‘us’) really just adherents of a movement created by eight bands, one magazine and two cities? The analogy can, I think, be extended to the alternate movement at large just as easily it can be to the mainstream. Further, being one of the eight bands is as much a result of access, privilege and plain bloody luck as being Britney Spears is.

Aren’t we, therefore, just as mass produced? Are we just the yang to the teenybopper’s yin? Is there any escaping hegemony and imposition? Is it so bad to be subject to a hegemony so wide it barely exists? Punk isn’t the only alternate music, and the range is wide enough to satisfy *anyone*, right? Is the fact that the alternate supports significantly more expression and freedom and affords so more choice than the mainstream make it irrelevant that, at the end of the day, there is only a finite choice of manufactured philosophies and options? Is there a way to change things, if one should choose to, or is hegemony an inescapable fact of life and only varies in degree? Does the alternate represent the minimum degree of hegemony feasible, or is further relaxation possible?<sup>6</sup>

I propose that this is what we talk about, not what fucking geniuses we are for being punkheads in the first place, and choosing it over Britney Spears.

– NANDINI RAMACHANDRAN.

<sup>1</sup> One does not imply the other, of course. One can quite happily be dissolute without any reason to be disenchanted. Presumably the reverse is possible as well, but I can’t imagine it would be much fun.  
<sup>2</sup> Whether it would be selling out or transformation is, of course, a matter of perspective.  
<sup>3</sup> Making the crucial assumption that there is a point to anything, and if there is, it can be defined or specified. Also assuming the virtue of not being pointless. And the virtue of virtue. How I love sond guessing things.  
<sup>4</sup> A definition I cannot even attempt, despite the one-liner on morality. Clearly, I merrily skipped over truckloads of nuances and qualifications along the way to that one.  
<sup>5</sup> For want of a better word, though I realize that ‘alternate’ is defined by the ‘mainstream’ to a degree I don’t think ‘our morality’ is. Our morality has a significant component of self definition to it – it operates on an internal logic- but a link to the mainstream is inevitable.  
<sup>6</sup> All this has been said before, and said significantly better. It’s hardly a new idea – how alternate is the alternate? I believe, though, that it bears repetition.

UNDESIRABLES

this concerns every one of you rubber-necked souls

in the decor of this spectacle  
the eye meets only things and their prices  
meanwhile  
everyone wants to breathe and nobody can  
and many say ‘we will breathe later’  
and most of them don’t die because they are already dead

you are hollow and so are your needs and desires

if only we had enough time  
I would stop to tell you  
hand you a pamphlet that screamed out loud  
I want neither to be ruled nor to rule  
that would remind you to be a little careful  
next time  
when you come sniffing drainpipes down the back-alley  
because we the crazy lonely undesirables  
are violent  
when oppressed albeit gentle when free

start by dreaming and forget everything you’ve been taught

you think you can tell us what to do?  
you think you can dictate us  
and make us follow your rules  
to let you chart our fate?  
we refuse to be licensed  
inventoried registered sermonized  
indoctrinated beaten gassed or booked  
by you

when you can’t get inspiration accept entertainment

coming soon to this location where we stand today  
charming ruins of a once glorious yesterday  
buried beneath the sand  
remember then  
that Mao said sex is okay as long as you don’t do it too often  
if he were here today you’d hear him say  
alcohol can kill so take LSD

put your hands together that God be a leftist intellectual

SHUBHO

## SWIM SUJATHA SWIM!

Zodiac signs, horoscopes, prognostication, divinity  
It’s all bunk I say.  
Doesn’t comply with reason? Sure.  
But then scientific rationality is misguided too  
Them ‘genetic traits’ have a fatal flaw.  
What raises my ire is when  
we say: she’s timid, he’s cranky, she’s sure.  
With such certainty  
like we drew the plan ourselves  
on Sabbath. When He slept.  
Or sometimes there changes *avatar*  
Incarnate as the ‘its his genes’ jibe -  
perpetually dooming what isn’t, what can’t be, to what’s destined to be.  
For isn’t a person what a person does?  
Mad when mad – sane becoming madder more when mad once before?  
I don’t like fate said Neo. Me neither.  
How timid is timid Lakshmi when she pries the knife out of dead  
Lakshman’s cold rapist body?  
Or is miserly Raman miserly Raman really?  
Even when he forsakes six years of hard-earned luxury  
to educate blind beggar girl Sushma?  
Who pulled on his white lungi and weeped  
“*Sethji, Theen din se khaaya nahi.*”  
We do, we change, we are, we do.  
And when we don’t  
It’s destiny! Your karma! *Uppar Wala Jaane!* Kismet!  
And the sallow sly man in the pure white robe  
and whiter beard  
Will echo sagely: “Never take her close to water. She’s destined to die  
of drowning, Padma ji.”  
And so Sujatha never learns to swim.  
When she dies of lymphomatic cancer years later  
Padma ji’s dead. And *Guruji* too.  
Dead and forgotten.  
Except for garlanded white bearded pater photograph  
in young *Swami* Anjarek’s *ashram* holy.  
It’s all bunk, I say.  
And maybe I’m wrong, who knows?  
To be exquisitely parodied as ‘our Naikship’  
by Huxley’s ‘destined’ descendant removed by four.  
But Sujatha should be learning to swim.  
If not, when that ship sinks, they win.

ABHAYRAJ NAIK



# THE CASE OF THE RASPBERRY RHINOCEROS

**11:50 pm.** It was a chilly, still night when the sound of the shot shattered the silence. The body fell to the floor with a dull thud. It lay, sprawled uncomfortably, on the cold tar. Pools of blood could be seen forming around it, indistinguishable from black oil in the meager light of the street lamps that illuminated the scene. The two black cars drove away from the body. Another shot rang out. One turned suddenly, lost control, hit a street lamp and turned over. The other sped away into the night.

**7:00 pm. The same evening.** The Godfather lay in hospital. He was dying and he knew it. Who would have thought this could happen to him. *If only I could have the Raspberry Rhinoceros with me.* His mind and body were both decaying; he flitted in and out of consciousness. .... *I wish I were back at home. I want mama, and the hot stew... the Raspberry Rhinoceros...when will it come to me... Valmiki needs it...and the sunshine fields, where I first met Marie..* In his moments of lucidity, the Godfather remembered the Raspberry Rhinoceros. A beautiful ruby that was the largest of its kind in the world. But it had been in the family for as long as anyone could remember. The Godfather held it. And today he would bequeath it to his appointed successor. *My arm aches, what are these drops they pour into me?* The godfather shifted uneasily. *All those rainbow colors, along the sky. And that cloud that is you Marie. I miss you.... You went away... when will Valmiki come....it must be done, or the Family will perish.* Death seemed to loom closer, and the Godfather slipped further away. The only thought that kept him alive was that of the Raspberry Rhinoceros. When would Prufrock come and give it to him, and when would Valmiki take it? Today, by 12:00 he would have discharged his final duty to the Family. *Today I can come to you Marie.*

**8:00** In a shady, murky part of town, J. Alfred Prufrock hurriedly threw his last few things into his bag. *I've had enough.* Today would be the day of freedom. He would complete his last duty to the Family, and then leave forever. *I won't miss a bit of this, I won't. The smell of this place, the mould and grease. The dirt, the slime.* He had had enough. His life had been hell for the past few years, when he gotten mixed up with the Family. *Foolish move. Should have never done it.* It was amazing what the temptation of easy money and little power could do. It was enough to get a simple man involved with the Family. *But tonight these nightmares will be over. By 12:00 I will be at the airport, with Venice and France waiting for me.* J. Alfred Prufrock opened the safe and pulled out the simple cardboard box. It never ceased to amaze him. The box looked too simple; it could contain a pound of sponge cake. But of course it didn't. It held the Raspberry Rhinoceros. The largest and most expensive ruby in the world. He had to give it to the Godfather, but he wasn't planning to. Not personally anyway. He would just get in sent over somehow. Valmiki was a good idea. Valmiki was meeting the Godfather anyway at night; J. Alfred Prufrock had delivered the message himself. *Must be some Family work, the senile man is hardly capable of anything anymore. It is time he chose his successor; he won't be around for too long anyway.*

He could hear Diana move in the adjacent room. He scowled. *The bitch, narcissistic, self-centered woman.* How had he ever imagined himself in love with her? She was one thing he definitely wouldn't miss. He would miss her coffee though, and the apple pie from the bakery below. *Maybe I'll take some with me.* J. Alfred Prufrock snapped his bag shut. The plan was simple. He would leave here by 10:30, drop the Raspberry Rhinoceros off at Valmiki's place, and get to the airport by 12:00 latest. *I hope it works out. I've been through so much, it has to. Paris at last, it's the city of dreams. I will live amongst genius, visit the louvre everyday, and breathe in my freedom.* J. Alfred Prufrock smiled to himself, and pulled his bag to one side of the room. At 12:00 tonight, he would be a free man.

**8:45 pm.** Diana heard J. Alfred Prufrock packing. *Where is he going?* She heard him open the cupboard and knew he was removing the Raspberry Rhinoceros. *Where is he going?* She picked up her skirt and ran to the locked door, trying to see something of what was happening behind it. *Damn this man, what does he think he's doing? Why do I get a feeling that he's planning to run away with the Raspberry Rhinoceros?* Diana wondered what to do. She could go in and confront him. *It will be useless though. I should tell Valmiki.* He should know what was happening. Maybe she would be promoted; maybe Valmiki himself would take her as his concubine. *I look better than his wife does at any rate. But J. Alfred Prufrock worries me....why would he risk running*

*away with the Raspberry Rhinoceros now?* It was so beautiful though. Diana had seen it once, and it had imprinted itself in her memory ever since. It was fire trapped in stone. Liquid and water fused together to produce an object that one felt unworthy to touch. Your heart stopped when you first saw it, and you wondered how such perfection existed. It was tangible poetry and a miracle of nature. Diana shook herself. She would kill herself before she let slime like J. Alfred Prufrock possess the Raspberry Rhinoceros. She hurried to the phone in the hall and called Valmiki up. If J. Alfred Prufrock got away, the Raspberry Rhinoceros would be lost forever.

**9:30 pm.** Valmiki slammed the phone down. Today wasn't the best of days. Two deals had failed miserably. His meeting with Balvac had been dismal to say the least. He turned the paper weight around, as he did when he was worked up. Balvac would not give up till the Family was destroyed. Not that much effort was needed in that direction, the Family was in shatters. *And that stubborn mule refuses to appoint a successor. If only he does, there is so much that can be done.* And if all this wasn't enough, he had a new problem to contend with. It was almost amusing that someone thought they could steal the Raspberry Rhinoceros and get away with it. *That too a non entity like J. Alfred Prufrock. But why did he choose today? I would've had fun ordinarily. I would have given him a slow, painful death. But today I'll have to finish it with a shot. He's a lucky man.* It was a good thing Diana had told him. He spun the weight around faster. If only the Godfather appointed him his successor, he would have the Raspberry Rhinoceros. But now J. Alfred Prufrock was attempting to steal it. *The audacity of the rat. These petty men should never be given such responsibilities. The power goes to their head..... And the Godfather wants me at 12:00. I'll have to tell him that the Family needs a new head. He needs a successor.* Valmiki spun the paper weight faster. He would have to finish the job on the way to the Godfather. *What a waste of time.* The paper weight flew of the table and fell to the floor. A tiny transmitter fell out of it. *Balvac! Valmiki stared at it and then crushed it with his shoe. He's heard my entire conversation with Diana. He knows the Raspberry Rhinoceros is with J. Alfred Prufrock.*

**9:55 pm.** *Damn.* Balvac cursed inwardly. *I wish he hadn't found it so soon.* Not that he needed it anymore though. He knew enough. Tonight, by 12:00, the Raspberry Rhinoceros would be with him. *I have waited so long for this.* It was the only thing Balvac had wanted since the Godfather had exiled him from the Family – the Raspberry Rhinoceros. And tonight he would have it. Imagine entrusting perfection to J. Alfred Prufrock! Balvac would recognize that box anywhere though, simple cardboard holding a treasure like that. *Its almost blasphemous.* But it was the best revenge. *The Family is nothing without the Raspberry Rhinoceros.* Valmiki had been indispensable. Balvac had never liked Valmiki, and it was because of him that Balvac had been exiled. *What do they all see in him? He will probably be made successor though.* If Valmiki was successor, then the Family was truly doomed. Especially once the Raspberry Rhinoceros was out of their control. Tonight, by 12:00, the Raspberry Rhinoceros would be with him.

**11:50 pm** J. Alfred Prufrock was walking towards the airport. Two black cars screeched past him. Valmiki was in one, and Balvac was in the other. A gun emerged from a window and fired a shot. J. Alfred Prufrock fell on the cold tar. Balvac saw him fall and lunged for the brown box that had fallen by the side. He saw Valmiki in the adjacent car, pulled out his gun and fired. Valmiki saw Balvac's gun, tried to turn the car, but was too late. A bullet hit him, the car swerved, hit a lamp and turned over. Balvac sped away into the night.

**12:00** In the hospital, the Godfather breathed his last. He did not see the Raspberry Rhinoceros, J. Alfred Prufrock or Valmiki. Outside Valmiki's door lay an ordinary brown box, with a note attached – *The Raspberry Rhinoceros, from J. Alfred Prufrock.* The next morning it was taken away in the trash. When a crowd gathered around the body and car wreck, it was discovered that the driver of the car was dead as well. Two hundred miles away, when Balvac opened the brown box, he discovered inside it a large, though extremely crumbled apple pie.

SANHITA AMBAST

## Franz Ferdinand en concert

31<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER, ROUEN

One of the advantages (less-remarked upon, but very important in my book!) of living in the West is the veritable profusion of quality rock bands and rock concerts, and this is not limited to just the large cities. I was very pleasantly surprised to learn of an Oasis concert soon after my arrival in Rouen, which is a small town in Normandy, about an hour north of Paris by train, and even more pleased to see posters for a Franz Ferdinand concert the following week. The Oasis concert was enjoyable, though nothing to write home about; Franz Ferdinand, however, are all the rage right now and are known for their high-energy stage performances. The current tour is a promotion of their second album, *You Could Have It So Much Better*, which debuted near the top of the charts in the UK. I had only heard them previously when a certain Bengali gentleman had come into my room back in Nagarbhavi, clutching a CD and exclaiming “You HA-A-A-VE to listen to this...” I was interested by the little I heard, but didn't somehow ever get down to listening to the band again. I was therefore very curious and quite excited when I arrived at the Zenith Parc-Expo, in the outskirts of Rouen, for the concert.

7:00 PM: The bus pulls up outside Zenith, which is a huge indoor stadium that seems to host most of the big concerts in Rouen, including Oasis last week. Lines are already forming at the entrance, the concert is scheduled for 8 PM. Thankfully, tickets are still available. I am alone, being ditched by my friends at the last minute.

7:30 PM: I am finally inside, holding a cool beer in one hand and a hot dog in the other. The security check was ridiculously superficial – to Indian eyes, security all over France, whether in airports or shops or concerts, seems extremely lax. I could have smuggled in a gun if I wanted to. The main stadium is beginning to fill up now – looks like the crowd will be as big as for Oasis last week. Am still not used to rock concerts indoors, and there is a lot of seating at the back but I manoeuvre myself towards the front.

8:05 PM: The lights finally go off, to a big cheer from the crowd, which I would estimate at maybe 1500 – 2000 strong. The opening band are a British band called Editors, and they put in a fairly decent performance of what I suppose you would call post-punk, though only one song really gets the crowd going. They play for about half an hour, and then the lights come on again and there is another irritating wait. The crowd amuse themselves by cheering on a technician who climbs up some sort of a rope ladder to the top of the stage with surprising agility. I drink another beer.

9:00 PM: The main show finally begins! FF starts off with an immediate blast of buzzing guitars and drum assaults. It's a standard four-piece for most of the time, but some sessions players occasionally come and join in the fun. There is big screen as a backdrop, which for most of the time displays a live feed of the concert, but in black and white for a nice effect. The lights and lasers are, of course, spectacular. The band even speaks to the audience in broken French, which is much appreciated – Oasis never even got to ‘merci’. I am quite pleased to not be the worst French speaker in the stadium! The stage performance is fantastic, really high-octane stuff and the crowd just goes wild. What's that you say? The music? Oh, yes. The music. To be quite honest, I find it rather difficult to begin describing the music – like all really good bands, these guys seem to able to go beyond the fixed boundaries that define genre and style. *What is this stuff?* Punk? Neo-punk? Britpop? Disco? Yes, believe it or not, there is a very strong dance element in the music; the buzzing, punkish guitars are accompanied by a very funky, very infectious bass-drum rhythm. I never expected to want to dance in a rock concert, not that I ever want to dance anyway – but my feet can't stop tapping and my body wants to jump, swing, move. [I learnt a few days after the concert that when FF started out one of their avowed aims was to ‘make girls dance.’ Hmmm ...] At the same time, many of the songs have catchy riffs and absolutely delicious pop melodies, the kind that stick in your head for days after you

hear them – refreshingly unusual for a contemporary band. I don't yet know all the song titles, but especial highlights were the hit single ‘Take Me Out’ and ‘This Fire’ with its quite stirring “THIS FIRE...is out of control” chorus. My only complaint is that after a while, the non-stop wall of guitar sound begins to get just ever so slightly monotonous, but the band then shifts gears and plays a few lovely ballads, the best one being ‘Walk Away’ where Koproanos puts in a really emotive vocal performance.

10:15 PM: The band take a break and go offstage for a few minutes. When they return, they have streams of fake blood running down their faces, which are painted with bruises and cut marks. I find it rather cheesy and can't think of an explanation until I realise that it's Halloween tonight or tomorrow. The band really revs up its stage act in the second half of the concert. Koproanos jumps onto the drum set at one time, though I can't see exactly what part of it he's standing on! McCarthy (lead guitar) at another time jumps onto one of the bass stacks near the stage, and at yet another time there are no less than three drummers playing on the same drum set! A bit gimmicky, but quite cool. The band plays a few more short songs, and then extends them into rather long jams with the two guitars playing around that unstoppable rhythm section. It's not clear how much of the jamming is improvised, but it's really good just the same.

11:00 PM: They finish with a rousing power chord crescendo, and the atmosphere in the stadium is absolutely electric; it has to be experienced yet cannot really be described. The crowd begins to leave, still abuzz. It has been quite an evening to remember. I can't wait to get my hands on FF's CDs to see if they are as impressive in the studio as they are live.

ARUN SAGAR

# DIDI

I write this, not in search of forgiveness, or even sympathy, but because it is the truth – the one thing about my story, notorious as it is, that you have not yet heard. To be sure, it is not the demonstrable and verifiable truth of the kind that will persuade you, my dear reader, and nor is it the truth that banishes all doubt. But it is the truth nonetheless – the horrible and fantastic truth about *Didi’s* death.

You know, of course, that I loved the old woman dearly. Who in Ranikhet did not? She was the eldest among us, and the most venerable, and her house, with its red tiled sloping roofs and sunny open courtyards, seemed the warmest shelter there was, in that cold and bleak hill town. I had been her doctor ever since I made my home in those parts, more than fifteen years ago, and there had grown, in all that time, a bond between us that was strong, and close. She was, I knew, a lonely woman, and though her servants and retainers cared deeply for her, and the townsfolk respected her, it was for me that she would call when, in the closeness of her chambers, she wished for a companion. And so it was in those last few days, when the sickness – and something else – came upon her, that she sent for me.

But here I must beseech you, dear reader, to cast aside all that you have heard about this dreadful episode, and listen, with as open and unbiased a mind as you can, to my telling of it. Do not doubt me, then, when I say that the story begins, *not* on the day that the maid Anuradha came running up to my door with news of *Didi’s* illness, but in the week before, when I first became conscious of *its* presence. It would come upon me with suddenness, at perfectly commonplace moments – dinnertime, in conversation with my wife, tending to my plants – that drowning feeling of sorrow, desolate and doomed, and so consuming it would suffocate me, till I could hardly breathe. I could not explain it, and to those who enquired – for it was evident from my behaviour that something was amiss – I would say it was merely a spasm. But all the while I would dread its coming. And that was not all; for there was something else too – another distinct and awful sensation that overcame me, on so many occasions, in that week. An urgency, a nagging insistent urgency, a mad restlessness, that was terrible to experience, for, try as I might, I could not fathom its origin, still less its meaning. You will understand, then, that I was almost glad to hear of *Didi’s* condition, for it meant work, a channel – I hoped – for these raging energies and, by the same token, a respite from that terrible despair. I was not worried for her, for such illnesses are not unusual in the hills, and I could see, on the first brief examination, that this was but a slight fever, brought on by the shifting autumn weather, and certain to pass quickly. But as the days passed, so did my conviction, for was she not growing steadily paler, steadily weaker? Outwardly, there was nothing wrong with her, and not even old age, that convenient, if often apposite, scapegoat, could explain this, for *Didi’s* was a tough constitution; not in the least infirm. Yet her condition grew worse, and so, I found, did my own mood darken, until now I felt it almost *settle* upon me – that melancholy animation, that desperate vitality – a single fused emotion, with, I now felt sure, a single origin. But what was it?

I might have known; it was *her* wisdom that would understand. And so we come to that evening, dear reader, when, summoned, I sat by her bedside, looking down at those pinched and gaunt features – too gaunt! – watching worriedly, as her eyes opened slowly and gently, casting their kindly gaze over me. And just *then*, for the briefest instant, I saw – there was no mistaking it – a flash of fear, pure and stark and startling to behold – as if, for that moment, she was looking, not at me, but at something else, something frightful. It passed, but now she was breathing heavily, and when I reached to take her hand in mine, I felt her shudder, slightly, but perceptibly.

‘*Didi*’, I spoke softly, ‘What is the matter?’

It was a long time before she answered, and I could sense, in the interim, that the old woman was fighting something, summoning all of her courage and strength, until now, when she spoke, her voice was calm, and clear–

‘*Raja*’, it was what she always called me, ‘I am in danger.’

‘Nonsense! It is just a long convalescence – your fever is gone, and besides, I have brought medicines for – ’

‘Wait, listen to me.’ There was authority in her voice, strong and assured. I fell silent, and she continued.

‘Do you know, *Raja*, that my mother once worked for your great-grandfather?’

I shook my head. I knew very little of this relative, and nothing that was worth remembering. He had, I knew,

been a rich man, and a great landowner, but also a tyrant, feared by his family and hated by the labourers he employed. His death, I recalled dimly, had not been natural, but nor had his passing been much mourned.

‘We were in Missouri then’, she went on, ‘He had a palatial house there, overlooking the whole town below. My mother was a secretary of sorts, she kept accounts for his business, and she would write his letters. It was unusual work for a woman, in those days, but I remember how excited we all were about it. And I was so happy in those first few weeks in Missouri. I loved the mountain air, and the pine smells and the crunch of gravel on the narrow twisting streets. But then it all changed, all because of him.’

Her voice had dropped low now, and she was speaking slowly and heavily, and with a great and intense bitterness that startled me; I had never heard it from her before.

‘He was an awful man. The servants were terrified of him, and the workers despised him. He would drink often, you know, and when he drank he was abusive and violent – a terrible sight. And then I discovered that my mother, also, was his victim – that he would shout at her and beat her. I think I knew, the very first time I saw her washing those bruises, that I was going to kill him.’

She looked away from me now, but continued speaking.

‘Once the idea came to me, it would not let go. I was only a girl, you know, but I thought it all out closely and carefully, meticulously. In those winter days he would sleep in his bedchamber by the heat of the gas, but every window would be open – he would always fasten them open before he slept. Then one night, he came in more drunk than usual. I watched him from our rooms on the ground floor – I watched everyday– as he tottered up the steps. And so I followed him. By some great luck, he had forgotten, on that night, to lock his door, and I waited till he was asleep – passed out, from the alcohol – and then I went in and shut each window, and finally, the door behind me. He was dead in the morning, poisoned to death. Of course, they all thought it was an accident. But my mother and I left the house soon after. I never told her, but I think, somehow, that she knew ’

*Didi* stopped to look at me. There was a queer apprehension in her eyes, as if she were scared of what she might see in mine, but then I spoke, and it was gone–

‘You did no wrong. The man deserved it.’

And I meant it. For my great grandfather was nothing to me, merely a name better forgotten than remembered, and I felt only an immense pity for this old woman, that she should have had, in her life, an experience such as this. Perhaps, I thought to myself, she thinks that she is cursed by what she did; perhaps now, when she feels close to the end, she is seeking my forgiveness. So I said again–

‘You did nothing wrong.’

She smiled, and took my hand, and squeezed it gently. But now again – where *did* this horror come from – I could feel it rising up all over me on every side, constricting me, but also impelling me, always, towards something – what was it? She could sense it too, I realized, for she held onto my hand tightly now, and she spoke loudly, so I could hear her words cutting through that black despair.

‘He is here now, *Raja*. I can feel him. He wants his revenge, after all these years. A man like him could not rest without his revenge.’

‘He is not!’ I almost screamed the words, and in the same instant, I felt the darkness melt away, and I was my own master again. Now I continued, furiously, my blood rushing, and my heart hammering wildly.

‘Why do you speak of such nonsensical things? It is *this* that makes you sick and unwell, this mad superstition of yours.’

But my outburst did not faze her. She only sighed, and said, with a weariness that brought me up short –

‘I am not mad, *Raja*. I am an old woman; I have seen many things in my life. And I know the presence of evil when it is close. That is why I called you here tonight, because I know he is here. And although I do not know what it is that he wishes to do, I know that he cannot do it without you.’

Her words sent a chill running up my spine, a slow thrilling horror. Was it possible? Could it be him, my unknown ancestor, who was casting his shadow over my soul?

‘Such things of evil’, *Didi* was saying, ‘have no power over you in the next world, unless they can reach you in this. They need a conduit for that, a human agency of flesh and blood to do their bidding. And *you*, you are his only surviving kin.’

There was a long silence, and the thoughts tumbled through my head, confused and frightened and jostling with each other. But then it was all clear, suddenly clear, and when I spoke, my voice never wavered.

‘It does not matter, *Didi*’, I said, ‘even if you are right, and he is here, it does not matter. For I am the puppet of no man, dead or alive. And now here, all these revelations cannot be good for your health. So take this medicine, and drink it, and you will be better in the morning.’

I swear to you, dear reader, that at that moment, the thing – whatever it was – had no power over me, that I was more free of it then, than I had ever been, in all of those days. I poured the medicine that I had brought into a teaspoon, and she drank it there, in front of me, propped up on her little bed. Then I stooped to kiss her forehead, and it was cool, and I looked to her eyes, and they were no longer frightened, and I smiled, and it was returned.

‘Thank you, *Raja*’, she said, as I turned away and left.

But oh! The *next* morning! Did I not sense it from the very first? That doom and foreboding which blanketed me as I woke, which numbed me to the frantic cries at the door – ‘Come quick! Come quick! *Didi* has not woken!’ That choking despair which propelled me, racing down the street to her house, and up the steps to her bedchamber, where she lay just as I had left her the night before. Her eyes were closed, and her brow smooth and unfurrowed. She looked calm and rested and at peace, just entirely at peace, and yet the sight of her lying there, still and completely motionless, filled me with nothing but dread. They were all crowded around in that close room – the manservants and the maids and the caretakers – all waiting for me to act. But when I knelt to feel for her pulse, I could feel none. And when I stooped to listen for her heartbeat, I could hear none. And at that moment, I felt the shadow blot everything else out, till there was nothing left to do, but to say, as I said, feeling myself slip away – ‘She is dead.’

She was buried the same evening, down by the lake, as she had always wished, and with no ceremony, for what relatives did she have? But the whole town grieved for her.

And *now*, dear reader, yes, *now* we come to the most horrific part of my tale – the chief horror of which you are, no doubt, already acquainted with. But I pray to you again, forget what you have heard, push it all aside, and consider, if you will, my own feelings – my own account. For I knew, in the days after *Didi’s* burial, that I would be afflicted no longer with that desolate madness of the weeks before. And for a while, I took heart from the knowledge that she had died as I had left her that night – the night that I had overmastered him – that she had died – unaccountably, yes – but at peace. But slowly, oh so slowly, another, and monstrous, thought grew upon me. Could it be, I wondered, that the evil was gone now, *not* because she had escaped its grasp – but *because it had her within it*? And now that thought seized me, and tormented me, and no matter what I did, I could not rid myself of it. Where, I asked myself, had I failed her? In what way had he used me? For on the night that she had called me, on the last night that I treated her, had I not thrown aside his shadow? Assuredly, I had. Then *how*? And then I saw it– *this was how*. Not on the night before, but on the *next morning* – the morning that I had woken with his evil taint on my spirit, the morning, I now saw, that I had pronounced her dead.

And *is it not to my credit*, dear reader, that the moment I knew, I rushed back to the old house, that I shouted for the servants, still huddled in their shared mourning – ‘To the Lake!’, I shrieked, mad with the horror of it all, ‘To the Lake!’. And yes, we tore the earth aside, our shovels swinging wildly back and forth, and none more furiously than my own, and we swung the lid of her coffin open – till *there, there*, she was before us – her face transformed, contorted – blue and black and strangely swollen – her eyes torn open in terror, her mouth, her nose, layered with froth, her fingernails – oh how she must have suffered! – broken and bloodied. I looked away, sick. But I could sense – I can still sense – the burning accusation in every stare.

ADITYA SUDARSHAN



# THE CONVERT

I was 10 then. I lived in a different world — a world that I can only dream of now; a world where my biggest responsibility was to rise before 8 in the morning and not say “Arrey, 5 minutes Amma”; a world where my only prayer to God would be “Swami (I always address Him that way), please, please bring such heavy rain that the roof of the school building flies away and we have a holiday for at least a week”.

And one splendidly bright morning in the month of August (the clear blue sky would have sent a chill down my spine had it not been a holiday), I was entertaining my friends, all comfortably seated around the computer monitor, when, there was a knock on the door. I sprinted towards the door, silently hoping that it was a courier so that I could try out my new signature that had the ‘S’ all loopy and winding.

I couldn’t tell whose face was more disappointed. I saw no courier boy with a pen and paper in his hand and all they saw was a 10-year old who looked as if he had been told that he had to go back to school for an extra hour. The woman, however, smiled. I did the same, rather uncertainly. She looked about thirty and she had brought along a friend, a granny and a little girl.

“Yenu beku?” I asked (what do you want?)

“Ammey illva?” she asked back (Isn’t your mother there?). ‘Malayalis’ I thought.

“No, no one is at home” I replied, quickly switching languages. Better Malayalised English than Malayalised Kannada.

“Oh” she said, unable to mask her disappointment.

Then they had a little discussion amongst themselves while I practised some shots with the cricket bat that lay outside, getting restless with every passing second.

Then they suddenly stopped talking. She looked at me solemnly and asked, “What is your name, kutty?” (Aha, kutty! definitely Malayalis!)

“Sharan.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“Yes.” (What is this?)

“Really? Which god?”

“Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Saraswathi, Vishnu...”

“You are Hindu!”

“Yes. I also like Brahma. He is my favourite. But we never pray to him”

“So, Shravan—”

“Its Sharan. And Oh! I almost forgot. I like Ganapthi too. I got prize for drawing him last year, you know?”

“Very good” she said, clearly unimpressed. “Are you habby with your life?”

“Happy? Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yes, umm...No” (Something told me she wanted ‘No’.)

“Why aren’t you happy?” she asked, now clutching a cross that she wore around her neck.

“I don’t know.” (You tell me!)

“I know, child. This world is so full of misery and zuffering. Even small children like you have so many problems.”

“!!?” (I had absolutely no idea what she was driving at.)



But, do you want to be really habby?” “Mmm? Yes, I think so.” (Please just let me go)

“Then read this bassage,” she said, extracting an old bound book that I immediately recognised as the ‘Bible’. “Okay.” I said, and holding the book that was surprisingly heavy said, “Pasalm 23.”

“Not Basalm, Psalm!”

“Psalm 23. A day will come when the tiger and the deer will live in harmony.....a child will put his hand in a snake’s hole without fear” (I was beginning to get bored)

“Child, do you underzand whad it means?”

“Yes”

“What does it mean?”

“Jungle book. I knew it was copied from somewhere. Was Kipling a Christian?” “Gibling? Who Gibling?”

“The author of Jungle book! It used to come on DD too! Don’t you remember the song? Jungle Jungle patha chala hey.....” I sang one full paragraph before I realised that she was not interested and quickly sang the first line again and stopped, looking slightly sheepish.

“But child, the paragraph is not about some Jungle book. It has a very deep

meaning. It speaks of paradise on the earth. Where there exists perfect harmony and absolutely no fear. Do you understand me?”

“Paradise? I have been there. What ice creams you get! And the book shop next to it, what is it called? I forgot. Anyway, I bought an Enid Blyton there”

“No, No, child, Paradise is heaven. You get everything there. That is where He resides — Jehovah, the father of Jesus. The ultimate supreme being....”

“No, Paradise is not heaven! That other shop, ‘Muktha’ is definitely heaven. You get better ice-creams there and the choco-bars’ I continued, looking mistily, “Only 5 Rs 50 paisa!”

“No, child. It’s Jehovah — father of Jesus Christ”

“Jehovah? I thought it was Thomas or someone like that.”

She stood and just stared at me. Clearly it was a battle lost and it was time to go. I waited for her to make a move. At last, she fished in the back parts of her bag and handed over a small book that spoke of Jehovah and his son, Jesus Christ. She then added, somewhat tentatively,

“Son, I was wondering if you could give some monetary help.”

“Monetary help? No, actually, I am busy now, and I am playing with my friends. So, I really can’t help. I am sorry.”

“No, No, no help. Only some money.”

“Money? I have no money.”

“Actually, we give that book only to people who give donations....”

“Then, you can have it back. I have no problems.”

“No, keep it child. Read it and become pure” she said sadly and turned to leave.

And then he came. My heart missed a beat, and I ran to the gate bumping into one of the three women, not even bothering to apologise. He smiled and gave me the post, a pen and the paper where I had to sign. I cracked my knuckles, practised writing the signature in mid-air and then with a flourish of fingers and ink, signed on the sheet. And the loopy and stylish ‘S’ came out just perfect!

SHARAN



# SMELLS LIKE RAIN, SHE SAID

she gave up two years ago  
couldn't stay back any more time  
makes her feel tired, she said  
to wait for me to change  
here where one person's tears  
is the same as another person's smile

and Jack of Hearts goes walking  
gathering lilies down the dusty road  
while his friend the lonely joker  
is being punished today by Desdemona  
for wanting her when she didn't know

who lays down the crumbs  
that tempt you once again  
towards the one you left behind  
'tis a dream, she said  
a dream where i was sleeping  
i dreamed that i awoke

sometimes they wonder why i still linger  
not unlike Cervantes' mad chaser of dreams  
when even the fortune-telling gypsy  
has picked up all her cards  
and trudged her way back home

'twas a lazy sunday when  
i received a letter from her  
been quite a long while now  
since she remembered me and wrote  
how was i doing, she asked  
was that supposed to be a joke?

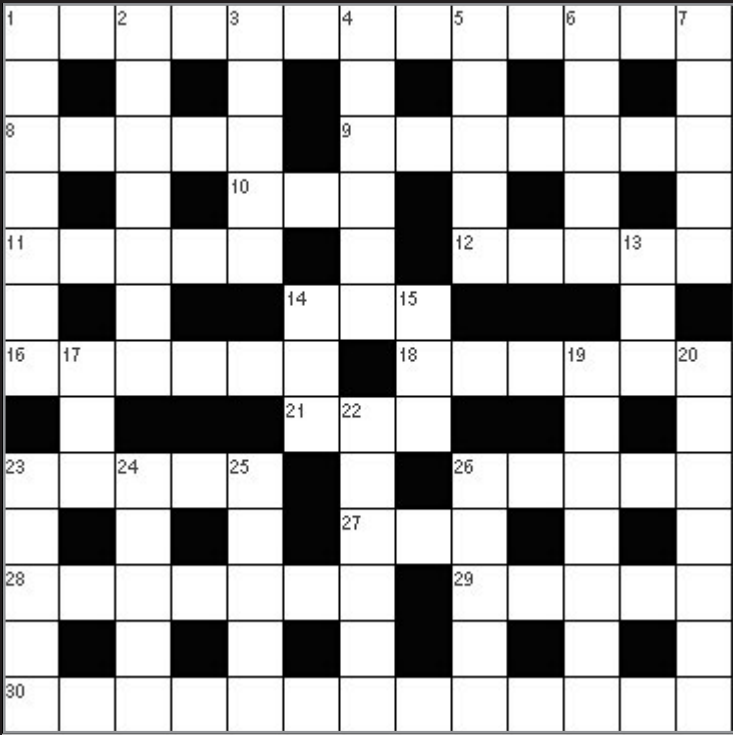
guess she didn't notice  
the clouds of storm gather and fall in a blind rush  
while the lonesome hobo still stands alone  
waiting patiently on the edge of the square  
waiting for a stray drop of hope

been too long in this maze of dreams  
'cept nothing but a half-empty bottle  
a little bit of green and some smokes  
stiff upper lip Jeeves, what?  
we need that sorely now  
desperate for the Piper's tune to blow  
you've heard my truth *nina*  
I'll listen, now tell me yours  
smells like rain, she said  
outside the sky is breaking  
I must find my way and go home

SHUBHO  
shubho@nls.ac.in

## QUIRK CROSSWORD 2

Aditya Dubey



### CLUES:

#### ACROSS

- 1. Kafkaesque transformation? (13)
- 8. Approximately mix ice with car. (5)
- 9. Done with ice for opiate medicine. (7)
- 10. Latin god is incomplete deity. (3)
- 11. Painted divinities with nothing inks. (5)
- 12. Miami bays fall into poetic void. (5)
- 14. Large goals contain the self. (3)
- 16. I clear mess made by pastry. (6)
- 18. Unfinished fast leads American intelligence to façade. (6)
- 21. Feline performance? (3)
- 23. Sceptic comes out of New York City circuit. (5)
- 26. Chap with Indian Airlines causes a craze. (5)
- 27. Boxer takes on forty thieves. (3)
- 28. ??? (7)
- 29. IT Cos tutored student of ancient Greek school. (5)
- 30. Cheater sourly betrays in an unfaithful manner. (13)

#### DOWN

- 1. Mechanic loses end to contraption. (7)
- 2. Rum toil leads to havoc. (7)
- 3. Dames can be sweet agents of intoxication. (5)
- 4. Caring about Formula 1 for e.g. (6)
- 5. Dehydration reins in Greek monster. (5)
- 6. Slippery thin question? (5)
- 7. Meats get lost in the vapour. (5)
- 13. Winter sport must skip endlessly. (3)
- 14. Vera lost her head creating an epoch. (3)
- 15. Half a toffee to be had frequently. (3)
- 17. Sob sounds arid. (3)
- 19. Church decrees announce heavy artillery. (7)
- 20. Let Hana cry and end up in chaos. (7)
- 22. Note before rush for the morally pure. (6)
- 23. Teach to deceive? (5)
- 24. Amateur tries E in vain. (5)
- 25. Humorous clown? (5)
- 26. Its so dim to screw up. (5)

### SOLUTION TO QUIRK CROSSWORD 1

#### ACROSS

- 1.Tequila, 4.Hearts, 8.Reefer, 9.Twitter, 11.Erratic, 12.Archaic, 13.Lisle, 16.Orb, 17.Outdo, 18.Niger, 19.Lei, 20.Duran, 21.Morphia, 22.Gradual, 25.Chariots, 26.Marcus, 27.A Tiger, 28.Opiates

#### DOWN

- 1.Three blind mice, 2.Queer, 3.Inert, 4.Howrah Bridge, 5.Aztec Gold, 6.The Waiter, 7.Psychoanalysis, 10.Schoolmaster, 14.Sugar Tart, 15.Earthling, 23.Akali, 24.Uncut.

# COUNTING DOWN THE DAYS

NATALIE IMBRUGLIA  
SONY BMG MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT  
RELEASED 2005  
RATING: 3.75 OUT OF 5

When did Natalie Imbruglia get so cheerful? The singer best known, ironically, for the one single she didn't write – a cover of Ednaswap's *Torn* – started her career as an angsty pop-rocker and was seen as a sort of Alanis-lite when her debut album, *Left Of The Middle*, came out in 1997. Eight years, two albums and a wedding later, Imbruglia has changed direction completely, producing possibly her most buoyant album yet. Gone is the angst that marked her debut and sophomore albums (and lyrics such as "Ignore reality / There's nothing you can do about it"), replaced by more songs about being in love than ever before. As usual, Imbruglia's lyrics are her strong point, as is evident right from "Shiver", the first single, and even such unabashedly romantic odes as "Starting Today" (which features the lyrics "I've stopped believing that the world's going crazy and if it is you'll save me"). In fact, *Counting Down The Days* manages to feature eleven songs about being in love, all of which sound like realistic takes on the situation rather than the manufactured boy-band pop variety of undying love. It's not all sweetness and light, though – "On The Run" is a song that could easily have fitted in *White Lilies Island*, Imbruglia's particularly angst-ridden 2001 album, just for its lyrics ("I'm on the run again from me") but it's the only track on this album that goes that far and almost seems out of place as a result. Imbruglia shares songwriting credits on all but two of the tracks on this album – her new husband, Daniel Johns of the band Silverchair, contributes "Satisfied", a rather catchy love song with slightly dark lyrics, yet the breeziest melody on the album, while Dan Glendining's "Come On Home" turns out to be one of the weakest tracks on the album. Unlike her earlier work, *Counting Down The Days* has simpler melodies and more straightforward

instrumentation, making it an optimistic, summery album without sounding irritatingly bouncy. Even tracks such as "Sanctuary" end up being among the strongest on the album just on the pure energy infused into the vocals. However, as was the case with *White Lilies Island*, Imbruglia's 2001 album, *Counting Down The Days* lacks strong singles. While *Counting Down The Days* is not nearly as radio-unfriendly, its beauty lies in its cohesiveness and how good it sounds as a whole, not in the strength of individual tracks, which means that it's deprived of the instant appeal of her debut or even most other albums in her genre, especially since this her poppiest album yet. "When You're Sleeping", for example, is a well-written acoustic love song that would mean a lot to particular people based on their individual contexts, but hardly catches your attention on the first listen. In fact, very few of the tracks immediately catch your attention, especially since many of them segue seamlessly into each other (such as "Shiver" and "Satisfied") and it takes a few listens for the album to really draw your attention. (The one exception is "Honeycomb Child", which uses violins and a music box in the background and only just straddles the line between comforting and creepy.) Then again, the strong point of this album is its simplicity – the lyrics and melody are simpler and happier than ever before, and the instrumentation, even when it veers towards the elaborate, is in just the right amounts to prevent the songs from sounding overblown. This is certainly her most mature album yet, but it's debatable as to whether this is her best – while it never pretends to be more than what it claims to be, it unfortunately falls into the trap that Alanis Morissette fell into with her last two albums: now that the angst is gone, so is a certain *je ne sais quoi*, and although this is a good album in itself, it leaves you waiting for at least one absolutely astounding track, which never comes.

THOMAS JOHN

# BEHIND STONE EYES

4:00 a.m.  
Clang!  
The temple bell  
Sweet scent of sandalwood  
Pungent aroma of jasmine aggarbattis  
The bubbling murmur of dhoti clad priests  
As that of a brook  
A crack, a shaft of light  
Yawn, Right I'm up.

12 noon  
The world is a changing  
The faithful have no faith anymore  
Their demands are fickle their prayers material  
Look at the man  
Prostrate before me  
A wealthy tycoon  
With a meaty account  
Nonetheless, some more won't hurt  
What does he do?  
Grease the grubby palm of a priest  
Lace it with some coconut oil and a gold coin or two  
Exclusive audience granted  
Gods for sale  
Yet the hungry beggar  
Who desires a crumb  
Is shooed away  
With a contemptuous kick  
Stone eyes see.

6:00 p.m.  
My blessings invoked  
For a "holy" union  
The bride pretending shame and humility  
A crocodile tear smears  
Kajal lined eyes  
Yet the folds of her designer sari slip  
Twice before, the bride-groom  
Has been blessed  
Under similar circumstances  
I do not judge  
Or comment  
Yet the world is a changing

2:00 a.m.  
Stone idols last a long time  
Witness to the travails of mankind  
How men are thinking anew  
Re-charting right and wrong  
Renewing beliefs and worship  
Money is a newer god  
With omnipotence and greater power  
Shaping a concordant system  
With parallel needs  
Yawn! Off to bed.

RISHABH GUPTA

# THE WAITING ROOM

We are all acting,  
embracing roles in utter devotion  
until it becomes our subtle dogma  
a few dare to change the lines  
of the script with mild inquisition  
a voice at the door of the theatre says  
look busy cause the lord watches,  
break a leg the boss is watching  
take out your hands mother is watching  
construct in haste a conversation,  
for the girl in pink is watching.  
inside the black suit he wears like a skin,  
the boss's small heart beats monotonously  
look cold distant but alert  
they should always think your watching.

We are all waiting.  
musing ourselves and our hands  
with countless verbs of our choice  
carefully selected from a shiny dictionary  
In the waiting room assembled in comfort  
we have picked our tools of killing time  
the boy with freckles plays with a boat  
perhaps he awaits his union with the sea  
an aged  
man tired and weary sweeps  
the floor till it sounds squeaky clean  
a gentlemen in black admires his yellow pencil  
and with his scientific calculator  
even he is waiting for real numbers.

wait why am i talking about you?  
when i am the one most eagerly waiting  
with sweaty palms and rocking knees.  
Something must break the ice...  
strangle this suburban stagnancy  
which so closely resembles serenity.  
my angst skates on the hard ice,  
it is a little girl with earmuffs  
whistling away some dead anthem or tune  
that still carries the echo of life  
of glory of war of picnics and of victory  
that little girl is my silent desperation  
to the people watching she is just a girl  
flying on white in yellow naivete  
she enjoys their delusion for it obscures  
the furious dance of her feet  
that little girl is my thought  
skating on the ice of snoring society  
she carves it slowly and patiently  
careful not to crack the frozen segments  
shrewd wise and clever is the little girl  
for she knows that waves of change  
must be small strong  
and many

what use if the ship were to drown  
in the storm of recreation?  
She knows and she skates and she sees  
all around her to be a long rain dance  
only her eye sees the finger crossed  
inside the pockets of insulated coats  
All except the little girl are waiting  
no perhaps even she is waiting  
for someone to fall and break the ice

-UMER NAUMANA



# THE STRAWBERRY

# DIALOGUE

## TEXT AND SUBTEXT

Writing about rock shows is one of the few untainted joys of my life since I always find something good to write about.  
(That's just a cool opening line, actually I never EVER write about rock shows. It's just a thing that I don't do.)

They're just enjoyable.  
(If the music sucks, the ambience is good. If the ambience sucks, you're tripping good and don't care. If the music's good, you're in heaven.  
Somehow, listening to that tripe that fiddles in through the radio, the music's almost always good. Rock shows are just so eminently enjoyable.)

I've been thinking about Strawberry Fields this year.  
All kinds of things: will there be too much metal? Will it rain? Is Pentagram good? How many cigarettes will we confiscate? Can we have a practical mosh pit? Will it be better than last year? Or the year of Medici?...  
(I hope it's REALLY GOOD.)

How many people do you think will be there?



(Well, Strawberry Fields is often advertised as "India's biggest rock show". A dubious claim me thinks, but then again, there is a certain unique flavour to the bloody thing.)

The very concept for starters: a bunch of precocious law students fixing a grand gig bang in the middle of Bangalore. A 'college rock show' in a huge (very very huge, by college rock show standards) music enclosure in Palace Grounds.

Then there's the small cultish global following of students, professionals, and families who congregate, every November, in Bangalore. They're hooked for many different reasons.  
'It's the music. I dunno, there's something magical about it, man...'  
'I fell in love at Strawberry Fields. I can't stop coming.'  
'It's on the college music scene, machan. Lots of famous bands started here only. That's why.'  
'I'm not sure, it may have something to do with you people studying law. It somehow seems comfortably organized.'  
'Nice milling scene, if you know what I mean.'  
.....

The food on offer is always fantastic.  
(I binge eat at the Pecos food counter. Pity that there's no beer around, but that's OK as long as the music is good.)

They seem to be fairly serious with their deal about cigarettes, alcohol and dope within the concert enclosure, and what you think of that depends on what you think of that, I guess.

The first couple of days are just wonderful to relax through. Comfortable, not-too-crowded, with the occasional unbelievably good band arbitrarily turning up.

Then the monster final day hits, where all hell explodes.  
(If the music is good.)

Crowds. Fancy Lights. Kebabs and sundaes and all that jazz.  
(Pretty red roses being delivered around with mind-boggling frequency.)

And of course, the MONSTER BLOODY SOUND. Makes you dream of one day owning a system that could give you this kind of mindblowing auditory input.

If the music is good, that is.  
(It's always good.)

It's so bloody corny to end with Strawberry Fields forever.  
(Corny is as corny does. Strawberry Fields Forever.)

VENUE : PALACE GROUNDS, BANGALORE.  
PRELIMS : 16TH TO 17TH, DECEMBER.  
FINALS : SUNDAY, 18TH DECEMBER.  
HEADLINING ACT : PENTAGRAM  
SOUND AND LIGHT : REYNOLDS.

### Quirk: Unveiling Edition 5

A new edition of Quirk releases every two months, with each edition showcasing a particular theme of relevance to the university community. We introduced ourselves with 'Why Literature' in January, gave expression to 'The Indifferent College Student' in March-April, grappled with 'The Artist and the Critic' in May-June and showcased 'My Place in Anarchy' in July-August. In our newest avatar, we present: **'New Moralities'.**

### Writing for Quirk: The November-December Issue

We really do appreciate new writers contributing to Quirk. Apart from pieces exploring the theme, we encourage contributions of all other kinds - articles, poetry, stories, prose, visual art, crosswords, quizzes, trivia.....the list goes on. No restrictions on content or style or form. Go ahead, and surprise us with your literary offerings - you meet our quirky quality standards, we're good to publish!

The theme for the November-December edition of Quirk is **'Comfortably Dumb.'** The flexible deadline for submissions is **December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005.**

Email your submissions to [quirk@nls.ac.in](mailto:quirk@nls.ac.in) . For postal submissions, send your contributions to (please mark the envelope with 'Attn: Mr. Suhas Baliga'):  
The Quirk Editorial Collective  
National Law School of India University  
Nagarbhavi  
Bangalore - 5600072  
India

### Contribute to Quirk

Quirk is a not-for-profit student-driven organization with an ambitious mission to promote literary interest in the college community while serving as a comfortable forum for quality literary expression for young writers across South Asia. Copies of the print edition are distributed free of cost in select locations across South Asia, and each edition is also available through Quirk's growing online presence at <http://www.quirk.in> .

We remain extremely indebted to Reliance Industries Ltd., for their very generous contribution and their continuing support towards Quirk.

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