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# Quirk

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BANGALORE | 2005 | JULY - AUGUST EDITION

**At long last... Quirk's July-August edition is here!**  
**'The 4<sup>th</sup> Edition' – seems pedestrian enough, but it's been a learning experience like never before! Showcasing a much awaited theme - 'My Place in Anarchy' – we've found some great voices, and in like spirit the Quirk Team looks forward to aggressively increase expression, promote readership, and help provoke a more vibrant literary community of young people across South Asia. Anarchy? Yes, please!**  
**Some things remain the same: our objective, as always – to fire the first salvos for a sorely needed literary revolution (college-variety and college-style).**  
**DO HELP THE MISSION. READ. WRITE. SHARE. CONTRIBUTE. ENGAGE.**  
**And look out for Edition 5!**

2. My Way in Anarchy | 3. The Imaginary Death of a Fictional Hero | 4. Solitude | 5. His Relic | 6. Quirk Crossword | 8. The Fisherman's Dirge | 9. Grilling: A History

## Another step, Another day: Narratives from NLSIU

6:00 am- I'm keenly reading through an article on stem-cell research without really grasping anything. If somebody else had been around then I would have pretended to comprehend. It's like all those times in the college library or the computer room where one deliberately laughs out aloud while reading anonymous 'blogs' posing as literary spoofs. There is hardly anything which registers but the motivation to laugh like a donkey is clearly driven by a curiosity about how people in adjacent spaces might react to the same. Needless to say, on most instances I keep smirking and talking to myself. At this moment it's time to catch some sleep.

8:45 am- "Holy crap!" the alarm didn't go off. I woke up in a hurry pocketing my toothbrush and paste for use during the recess while grabbing a notebook. I manage to make it to class, just in time for the attendance. The first lecture streams by in a half-conscious state. The second hour is slightly better and I manage to scribble down some references. The rest of the day is likely to follow a moribund routine and I really can't think of much to write, except those 'Dear Diary' type entries. Alright, there are some things in life which are better written than said.

When was the last time you saw all the people around you growing bull-horns and just asking for that proverbial 'punch'? I'm not talking about those group gatherings where everyone is taking a 'cheap shot' at you. I'm talking about all that time you spent walking in a crowd, hoping to find a known face. Or inversely even those lecture-hours where certain characters keep raising questions that make you pull your hair out. I'm referring to that persisting sense of being an anomaly in the system and yet being a cog in the same wheel. There's a sense of continuity as well as discontinuity at the same time.

One can't exactly spread dynamite sticks and blow up a bridge or something like what Clint Eastwood did in 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'. Neither can I play a schizophrenic and get away with violent outburst in the manner Edward Norton does in 'Fight Club.' Since blowing up offices of financial companies is also not an option, the mind scouts for alternative means to express rage against the 'machine' of everyday life. If you refer to a Shakespearean extract from your miniscule memory, you will be called an 'elitist bastard'. If you try and talk about 'climate change' then that is dismissed as irrelevant speculation. If you talk about how Panchayats work, you're a hopeless idealist. If you mention a police 'lathi-charge' on a workers' rally, then nobody's remotely interested because it happened in a different part of the country. Anything which varies from pre-shaped notions about what people want at the end of their degree is met with immediate and uninformed disapproval.

Right, the rest of the world has lost its' sense of inquisitiveness, it's penchant for exploration, it's sense of wonder and all that crap. So what do I do about it? I rely on caricaturing when speaking to people. It brings out the best and the worst in them since even the most mundane questions appear different when asked with several distortions on the face. On other days I let loose with heavy doses of one-way traffic in trivia, i.e. mostly irrelevant and unverified information.

It's difficult to relate to people, difficult to identify with a 'collective' identity- institution, class, family, caste, country and whatever else can be identified with. There's no running away from it either. My place is right here, neither in the perceived collective of the 'establishment' nor in the conception of alternative spaces. My place is in a mixture of both.

(SIDHARTH CHAUHAN, III YR, NLSIU. BESIDES TESTING THE LIMITS OF HUMAN ENDURANCE WITH DISTORTED FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, I ALSO TAKE PART IN QUIZZES, DEBATES AND MAKE THE OCCASIONAL ATTEMPT AT WRITING PLAYS. IN ALL OF THE ABOVE, PLAGIARISM IS THE KEY TOOL.)

I could keep you in suspense and float blissfully through the lines not quite letting you know who I am but I decided against it for no particular reason. I am a Dust Particle. In the world of Dust Particles the Brownian motion<sup>1</sup> of oscillating, colliding and moving on, occurs incessantly from second to second. Light, streaming in through an open window, at a dainty angle to the floor, unveils this apparent chaos in our world.

The older generations prefer the dark comfort of yellowing pages of the AIR manuals, the melodious sneezing of beings who open the manuals to discover a long dormant dust colony, the lazy drifting around the shelves and the return to the land of silver-worm. Yet the times they are a-changing. Hanging out in the mouthpiece of a telephone receiver is becoming passé. It's the mobile phone, the nooks and crannies in that ever-morphing device that catches the attention of the hedonists. Snug between the screen and its protective covering many an interesting day can be spent reading messages, looking at candid snaps, and if you are lucky a scandalous video or two may come your way.

My personal favorite is however the cozy corner between the Spacebar and Alt keys on a laptop. The view is generally quite entertaining, there is often good music and the quick bursts of moving air, at irregular intervals, when the Spacebar is hit, provide welcome relief on sunny arid days. I can always float past to another laptop when the owner of the current one is hell bent on reading cases from Manupatra and listening to the same set of twelve songs. I'd go instead to a multitasking owner who would provide some sentimental mails, some refreshing Messenger sessions (with that half silly flourish sound accompanying every message), some net research (all play and no work is not multitasking after all, yes?) and possibly an occasional Excel spreadsheet of committee budget figures thrown in.

These days the drifting general opinion is that there is no place for a Dust Particle with no concrete plan for the future. If a Dust Particle doesn't know which one of the ancient colonies it wants to join and doesn't really care about how much beings sneeze as a result of colony discovery, then that Dust Particle is truly aimless. I ask you, isn't that a gloomy drift? While the newer generations have new hangouts, novel ideas of what is fun, much more exposure and a lot more multicultural insight they still zealously hold on to the same old ideas of what a fulfilling life is all about. From generation to generation, through thorough Brownian socialization, the meaning of success has held fast to its roots. Killjoy as it seems, it keeps happening and most of the time no Dust Particle even bothers to change the drift. It's not that terribly difficult to start a new drift is it? I could be mistaken. In a place like NLS though there seems a good probability of starting something new. There are so many laptops to see the world through. There are new books to coming in often to in which to take a break in. In the holidays, the laptops and mobile phones go all over the country, providing hordes of new opportunities. Call me an Optimist<sup>2</sup> but I think new notions of what a Dust Particle can and should do and how flexible to be may emerge sooner than later.

I need to think about this a little more. The possibilities are many, don't you think? I shall move on to a quite corner of a leaf under a mushroom outside the library. It's kind of a nice place to sit and ponder a while.

Till later, Amigos. Adios!

PRIYADARSHINI KEDLAYA

1 Bumping into each other, exchanging information and often changing course as a result.  
2 A rather unfashionable dying breed, I am told by the Realists.

## My Place In Anarchy

So that's it, then.  
She lies there, never to move again.  
A sniff, an odd tear, some flowers.  
I stand there, numbed by it all,  
Overwhelmed by a few fleeting moments.  
It's unbelievable, it's shocking...  
It's so temporary that it doesn't even matter.  
What is anyone's life worth?  
An old story here, a reminiscence there  
But now gone forever, never to return...

The sky looks darker, the ground feels harder  
The nameless places, the faceless people  
Like ink spreading on paper  
Like flooding water eating up villages and towns  
Like a world gone wrong all at once...  
Madness.

The looted rations, the smuggled drugs  
the corroding monuments, the collapsing concrete  
the dying soldiers, the orphaned children...

Stop.

Think of that girl.  
The hurt, the shame, the guilt.  
Let it eat you from inside.  
I look you in the eye, I dare you to knock me down.  
I was there.  
I found my place in anarchy.

EASHAN GHOSH

## Manic Mirror Multiplicity

Spectacles divide my sooty vision  
Myopic, menopausal, meandering  
There lies  
My broken mosaic  
Several disjuncted 'I's  
Screaming, rebelling,  
Dragging mud-soaked feet in hasty indifference  
Drowning in a sea of confident psuedoisms

My CV-briefcase skateboards its way to delirium  
The next moment,  
Ad-infinity stretches into ad-nauseam  
Pins prick my maze-arm in numbing pain  
There stands precariously,  
Another morphed me,  
City-cynical  
Paltry-pessimistic  
Filter-feelingless.

I'm complacent  
A schizophrenic  
Divided, multiplied, magnified  
Into colourful, precise  
Dice-squares  
That alternately acknowledge and ignore each other  
As chaos crumbles into kitsch  
I watch, with clairvoyant clarity  
My 50<sup>th</sup> monozygotic twin  
The silent observer.

Ashmi Ahluwalia

# My Way in Anarchy

I’m 22 and it took me that long to decide that I was tired of merely ‘passing through’ in laconic inertia. I mean, if we’re playing the play, let’s add some thick dialogue, what say? And perhaps, just perhaps, we can think over whether we want to write a better (meaningful/intelligent/progressive/explosive/rational/happy/anything-but-this-status-quoist-bullshit-please/educative) script and a happier ending.

My demon (the real subject of this exorcizing piece) has been alluded to across these pages earlier – Satyajit’s lament of the literary (im)balance that skewed university settings perpetuate (Satyajit Sarna, ‘A Hastily-Written Pompous Piece Telling People What to Do’, *Quirk*, January 2005, pp. 1-2); Dorian’s damning indictment – ‘*There is a culture of complicity at the law school that I have yet to comprehend*’ (Dorian Persaud, ‘My Experience’, *Quirk*, January 2005, p. 7); Aju and Raghu’s brutal appraisals of indifference in college communities (Aju John, ‘Kerosene in the Water Tank’, *Quirk*, March-April 2005, p. 1; Raghu S, ‘The Indifferent College Student’, *Quirk*, March-April 2005, p. 1); and Sagar’s musing over fuzzy cosmic imbalances that some universities/students face (Arun Sagar, ‘On Leaving Law School’, *Quirk*, March-April 2005, p. 6). I’m willing to wager my precious locks that most would agree – Indian university education isn’t perfect. No Sireeee, not by a long way. The question of whether things need to change, funnily enough, is not the flavour of the month.

### “Why?”

Anarchy’s point is that most of us don’t *really* give one flying \_\_\_\_ [emphasis mine] about what’s perfect and what’s not. Consequently, most of us don’t *really* give one flying \_\_\_\_ [emphasis mine] about change for good or bad. Faculty, students, alumni, administrative staff, patrons, governments – we’re all in the dock in our pretty little boats.

“Idealism is for kooks. There’s lotsa less lofty things to worry about, boy.”

*That* worries me. I wonder – if not you and me and us, then who the \_\_\_\_ [emphasis mine] is going to look out for the larger picture? Forget perfection – will we ever take off the blooming blinders and give the big bad university world a real look?

Ragging, university violence and crime, inadequate facilities, incompetent faculty, disinterested students, disinterested faculty, race discrimination, caste discrimination, nationality discrimination, flawed admissions, appropriated scholarships, legitimized intellectual plagiarism, campus hate speech, alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual harassment, mal-administration, financial irregularities, hyper-competition, wasted expenditure, poor health, poor education, possibly-very-messed-up-formative-years; the symptoms of a deadly malaise are evident in some shape or form in most universities. Don’t you see it?

“The lyrics were deranged – madness. They were everywhere – trippy – screwy – screwy: *A library crashes, a ranking slips. ‘Oh my god, Oh my god, Oh my god, Why?’ No other questions asked, none. Oh my god, Oh my god, Oh my god, Why not?*”

*The paper leaks, merit has absconded ‘Oh my god, Oh my god, Oh my god, Why?’ Well, who really gets ‘educated’ in colleges today? Oh my god, Oh my god, Oh my god, Why not?”*

Things are obviously very screwy. Screwy and as obvious as Murakami’s vanishing elephant in your and my ballroom. Funny thing really, that not many give two hoots. Funny, ain’t it?

“At least it’s not in the bedroom”, she placidly pouted as she polished her fingernails under Jumbo’s watchful eye.

*That* worries me too. So, what could the deal be? Some people must be happy with things that seemed messed up to most. Right? Please please don’t tell me that no one’s really happy with *this scene* – this

present particular karmic balance of things – that this thingamajig is to no one’s gain – that would be too screwy

### Are you familiar with our Q & A’s?

**Question:** “Sir, many parents and students are concerned about the quality of some of the courses – would it be possible for us to think over how we could improve things?”  
**Answer:** “Get off my trip young lady! ‘improve things’ eh? That’s rich! Ha ha ha. This is how things have been and this is how they’re always going to be. *Comprende senorita?*”

**Question:** “And finally, I wanted to know from the class as to how you’re going to utilize the lessons from this course in your coming years.”  
**Answer:** [from somewhere in the middle of the last row] [at a calibrated volume just inaudible to the good professor, but crystal clear to everyone else in the room] “Mr. Joker Sir. Don’tcha ever get it? We ain’t got a word of your frequency.”

There. Some are obviously comfortable. The status quo is OK for some. Way too much effort to change things around here for most. And at the end of the day, things will always get by (work out/**get by**/happen/exist). They always do. Yeah?

### An Excerpt from Galle Face Diaries: The Story of Tihai (thirty)

He was thirsty. The sea roared pleasantly in the backdrop. Galle Face was festooned with lights and kites and families and lovers and Colombo’s history and little colourful shacks like the one they now approached. There was no one behind the counter – until, out of nowhere, a lil imp of a girl – no more than 6 or 7 – came hopping over. He asked for a Coke and she slowly went about getting it for him, never for a moment taking her eyes off the delicate bird-shaped kite in the sky tethered to the ice cream stick in her hand. He sipped the Coke, and asked her: “*Kiyada?*” – his sole Sinhalese equivalent for ‘how much?’ “*Tihai*” she shot back, her eyes narrowing as a green kite meandered dangerously close to her bird beauty. “*Kiyada?*” – he countered, hoping for some comprehensible clue. “*TI – HA – EEE*” she wailed, darting him a look of pained irritation. The sea rolled. The lights shined. The air was heavy. He tried everything. “*Kiyada – How much?*” “*Tihai*” He raised one finger, then two, then three – “*Kiyada?*” “*Tihai*” He made some impromptu dumb charades motions – money, question mark, upturned thumb – “*Kiyada?*” “*Tihai*” He took out a ten rupee note, then a twenty rupee note, and finally a fifty rupee note – “*Kiyada?*” he pleaded. “*Tihai! Tihai! Tihai!*” – she didn’t relent. She plucked every now and again at the string trailing into the sky. The sea roared. They stood frozen. He – a helpless bemused recitation of “*Kiyada*”. She – an unassailable repetition of “*Tihai*” (her eyes never off her hopping kite). They were speaking the same language but weren’t really talking. He turned to look for someone to help translate.

I guess, sometimes we just have to let go, give up *nay* give out, relax, tell each other – “It would make me happy if you helped” and live new. Happy.

“That’s insane talk man. Pure anarchy nonsense.”

### Yeah. My Way in Anarchy

ABHAYRAJ NAIK

# My Experiments with Anarchy

[This is an extract from some of the earliest writings of Mahatma Varukeri, the father of our autocracy. Ever child knows of his role in overthrowing anarchy and building this great society. However, little do we know about his initial struggles and search of the self in what was anarchist madness. While his mode of protest and principles of truth and violence are long celebrated, we must not forget the legacy of indulgence that he pioneered for us. The following paragraphs are an extract from his dairy entries now published by the History Society of India. The discontent with the prevalent lifestyle and system is evident in every letter of every word.]

January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 1000 Hrs:  
*Morning.*  
The day began with water thrown on my face snazzy. Its just a naked feet’s distance, the first score of the day. Nicely rolled into rose-petalled sweet pan which I chewed all the way back to the hazy mirror stuck above my brushing sink. The old lady had put yesterday’s ‘rotis’ on the pan and was making loud noises my way. It could have been butter on fresh ‘parathas’ that drove the madness. Was my misfortune breakfast felt like last night’s leftovers. The stuff really got me on though. Must have been why I joined the drug party. The deaf lady’s stale breakfasts which have blunted the canines of my neighbour’s stay.

January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 1430 Hrs:  
*Lust*  
And yeah the neighbour. Or rather, his teen daughter whose nipples are farther inside her cotton than lips from crazy grandma’s tongue wag. My thick appreciation for her slim lines yet to persuade nasty ink to work on paper jazzy. Well, now that I look out the window in ‘Padosan’ lyrics, she’s bending down stretching to get some more of those lines drawn around her. Only going to be a matter of time before her father’s neck hangs from the chimney unless he leases her out goodly neighbourly. A nice rosy mark around his cheeky would be quite pleasurable in the earnest.

January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 1200 Hrs:  
*Apathy*  
These drunkards should stop breathing on the damn public pathway. The lane behind my street where no cars travel, God! No drunkard should die there. The old man who sells shoelaces just did that damn thing. He breathed alcohol all his life and now breathes maggots. Damn people just leave him there till the stink gets into their cooking and flies fall

into their coffee. The kiddies tore his shirt off to see his burly white chest and the funny yellow hair. And there lay he bare-topped and mouth open. The rain pouring those yellow teeth white, his momma would have been proud. The old lady behind complained now and then that somebody would trip on those rat-nibbled ankle stumps lest somebody comes along and does the needful. Took a damn bike rider’s trip to hospital after ramping up the old man’s skull to push the peeps around into social service.

January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 1900 Hrs:  
*The Inspiration*  
Once I remember as a kid, I used to do these funny things. Was hanging from a tree once and picking on passing girls. If I reached down low enough and vished their bottoms, they would give me one of those flowers stuck up in the hair. I did make a fortune selling them smart in the evening madness. Did feel very philosophical going home with money in my pocket and a stiffy otherwise. Late that day I put ink on paper rushy and began this doodling habit of mine unmindful t’was no inspiration without the dizzying stuff that artists do. Now me assumes myself as artist inspired like none other and does all that too. But hanging from a tree did get me going, though sex is another thing. Philosophy has no reason. It only sings to every nasty vacuum that forms in the idle head. A little druginess does bring it out nasty though. ‘Cos that feeds on vacuums too.

January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 2335 Hrs.  
*The Compromise*  
Did hire this hand. Girl not very older than the neighbour’s dog. Fried the same stale shit all the time and threw it on the half washed sticky platter. And to think mom got a rest! This young thing didn’t do two dimes without half a slap. I was too drugged most of the times to find her slippery cheek. This other neighbour of mine has a thing for violence. Gets himself going only after a nice fit. Now I pay him two dimes for his entertainment and sometimes the food isn’t stale either. That crazy haired limp across the street came and tried leaving the little girl here on the doormat. Said she’s mine. If I ever did sleep with the crazy haired woman, it couldn’t have been more than that – close my eyes and sleep. I know for sure ‘cos if I did more than that to that woman with the crazy hair, the lice would have gotten to my moustache by now. Now I don’t really care, pay the girl a bit to take back to the limp. That way my mother doesn’t have to bother about lice or grandchildren and the crazy haired thing wont come knocking making any noise.

February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 0200 Hrs.  
*The Intellectual*  
Trying hard to get drunk enough to review this great anarchist writer Chauhan’s book. Guy doesn’t believe in grammar. Think it’s a crazy power construct or something. Either he isn’t drinking enough or fell while hanging from the tree. The words are arranged like my grandpa’s teeth. With the odd ones missing between the funny shaped ones. Can’t make a peacock’s shit out of this, for example: “*Today’s special dog and roach curry. Flavour good but taste not spicy. So I added a little own blood for tangy nutrition. Girl in house liked. After that I had sex with man who comes to play chess. Was boring. He doesn’t scream.....*” Now this is part of the jazzy book he is writing. Now as I have already said, nobody gives a peacock shit about it. Cos they’re gonna make up their frail opinions based on the crap that I’m gonna make of it. So to cover ass from this magnanimous burden, I ring this old man up and bark a question mark into the magnet. He tells me thus: “The observations of Sudarshan (1978) and Paedophil (2022) in this regard provide some illumination regarding the soothing effects of sensitizational initiatives that cut across grammatical extremes and provide for a more sinister construction of dominant medico-structural themes.....” The alcohol was surely rocking. Into the old haggard’s ears did I spit out a few words I had heard my father apparent use with mom when I was just a kid. Then I let my mind go chill on holiday. This review could be written with a keyboard and my father’s tongue.

February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 0030 Hrs.  
*The Leader*  
While I am nutsy drowned in druggy dreams and riding on my rushy pen, my sickly head thirsts for the rules. Want to see quicky these dimwits controlled by remotes. Grammar lies forgotten today and peacock shit sells like cakes. My daughter was born to a crazy lice farm. And dead men stay out in the rain. There is only stale food to eat. And disgustingly boring things to think about. I am too doped to protest. But protest isn’t far far away. All you half dumb no-gooders rise! Build up powerful elite and command the forces of time! Only way out lest my Anthony Burgess feel betrayed unforgiving by this scribble.

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# THE IMAGINARY DEATH OF A FICTIONAL HUMORIST

- ARU JOHN

He ran sweat-drenched in the cool, dark July night; not-knowing-neither-caring when the slippers slithered off. The stinging gravel did not slow him; the certainty that the railway track stretched on endlessly offered vague comfort. It was the only way to find his way in the black darkness. Had dawn brought with it the familiarity of sight, Rajan may have noticed blood gurgling from his feet. As it were, a distant red railway signal provided questionable light. The sharp and rusty nut had been left far behind and Rajan Varghese did not need to/could not afford to look back. His college, and the warmth he felt on the brightly lit stage seemed centuries ago. He continued to run. His soles slapped gravel and the moon remained hidden.

The sounds of the night though, brought him the complete true story: With all else still, behind him were the screech of whistles and the hurried scrape of boot on gravel. Had he looked back, he might have seen ten torches blazing their way towards him, less than a kilometre away, fireflies-on-a-mission: the law's long arm.

It has been suggested in the past - and I endorse the belief too - that Rajan had initially planned for an escape on the Madras Mail. Since the afternoon, he had miraculously evaded (outrun and outfoxed, with little expertise in these matters) more than a few men in khaki. At Kollam Railway Station though, a new set of policemen watched in open-mouthed incredulity as Rajan fled again. He was spotted on the first platform, in the same set of clothes - the mud still fresh on his crisp dhoti, with the same thin moustache and thick curly hair. Eyewitnesses still repeat in awe that Rajan showed no sign of exhaustion. He ran across the platform - clearing stacks of jute-packed cargo in graceful leaps, weaving through crowds and tearful goodbyes, jumped on to the tracks and started sprinting.

*Was it destined to end this way? At the funeral, it was hard to miss the unmistakably pungent odour of horoscopic didn't-I-tell-you. Mariakkutty still lived and cried resigned, silent tears at the closed coffin. How could he do it to his mother? She who conditioned -- no, trained him, to sit quiet and not make a sound. What good is freedom when you are dead, some asked and sighed in sorrow. And as the men carried him away through the heartbreaking wails of women, Rev. Mathew Kurien sang in his deep rumble-*

*"Zion sailor journeying across,  
Don't let the waves scare you.  
He controls the sea and the wind,  
And is beside you."*

*Why did Rajan choose the tracks? Of many possible escape routes, the tracks offered the least possibility of escape. Decades after the remains of Rajan Varghese turned up bloated, naked and putrid at a Varkala beach, this point would continue to be debated.*

The symbolism associated with Rajan's death filled the underground news of the day, attempting to explain how the chosen tracks took him full circle. These theories never came close to an understanding of Rajan's death (or life) or his choice of escape routes. More recent works (with claims to greater academic rigour) attributed Rajan's parabolic leap from the platform onto the tracks to a deeply-felt obligation to defiantly mock the repressive regime. (See Gopalan Nair et. al., *A History of the Emergency in Kerala* where the authors have used eyewitness accounts to stress the point.) However, those who knew him best doubt such intent ever having crystallized in Rajan's head. To them, Rajan could never have been a Naxalite; some people are just not made so.

I propose a simpler theory: he just wanted to see Mariakkutty. And, therefore, the tracks: the quickest ways home, almost as the crow flies.

Sometime during the chase - he didn't know how long he had been running - Rajan felt the arrival of a train before he saw it. And when the powerful beam cut through the blackness and traced a curvature, he realized that the train was on a parallel track. As the steam and the noise made its way towards him, he turned to his left and in the darkness saw the outline of dark treetops against the perceptibly lighter night sky. And as the engine drew even closer, he dived and his tired arms sank into more gravel as he rolled down an incline. Getting up to run again, his destination clear but path invisible, he looked at the night sky.

*Rajan was born in legendary fashion at Seventh Day Adventist Hospital, Kollam. His entry in to the world is a story that stretches belief, its veracity is suspect: and therefore its classification as legend. For the first time perhaps in human history, a woman gave painless birth. At the appointed hour, Rajan slithered out of Mariakkutty's womb and she didn't feel a thing. Dr. Nambiar, with his Edinburgh FRCS, could not explain it. Had it not been for the alert Nurse Ramani, Rajan's first slide could also have been his last. She caught him centimetres off the earth. As it*

*turned out, Rajan would make many more stunning entrances - accompanied by music and thunderous applause.*

*And scarcely had this miracle happened when another happened. Mariakkutty was staring in disbelief at the tiny wet thing between her legs, dangling from a nurse's arms; waiting for him to cry. He didn't. He sputtered, coughed and started giggling. Clearly, he was born to laugh and make others laugh; and the recognition of the fact wasn't long in coming. The baby was a huge draw at the hospital. Doctors and countless nurses crowded that maternity ward echoing with chuckles, giggles and guffaws. The razor wit and sensational comic timing were already apparent. Mariakkutty could barely keep herself from laughing when she breastfed him. When he stared at her, his jaws clamped tight at her nipple, she had to smile, and then laugh.*

*In school, he was a star draw on Annual Days, where he ruled the stage and commandeered the lights and music to let him stay on forever. He was less than ten when he would thus engage primarily adult crowds with his social satire. At eight, he was a practiced exponent of what is popularly called the parody. Borrowing tunes and music from the film and theatre music of the day (for Rajan never claimed to be much of a musician himself though he could sing tolerably), he would insert his lyrics to keep an audience in splits for hours with acidic satire. What made Rajan so endearing was that he was so obviously a child. Singing about the things that he noticed, the parish priest and the panchayat president were rarely spared. The newspapers and their issues did not interest him.*

*No description of Rajan's formative years would be complete without a mention of his craving for the limelight. He would not be sidelined into any periphery. And since he always managed to keep an audience enraptured, unlucky performers have had to wait hours before they got truncated time on stage. For a while, it seemed as if Rajan needed narcotic adulation to get on with life. After Chacko's disappearance from Revolution and the forests, when Rajan was pushed into his ten-year-cocoon, this perception was proved entirely untrue. He was thirteen when Mariakkutty declared: whatever may come, everything else be damned, I am not going to lose another man because look at what Chacko has gone and done.*

*Which brings us to Chacko. When Rajan was five, his elder brother, Chacko ran away from home in the company of a travelling troupe of performers. The motorcycle-riding-bear and the hoops of fire ignited the coals of wanderlust. In five years, Chacko Varghese surfaced in various places in Kochi and Calicut as Che Varghese - a seventeen year old incendiary. Mariakkutty had been widowed more than ten years when this transformation of her eldest son was complete. Messianic for many, he was the Antichrist for an equal number. At twenty, Chacko's reputation as complete outlaw and stunning guerilla tactician was unmatched. He left behind him a trail of orphans, blood and headless corpses, and Brahmin landlords throughout Central Kerala lived in his towering shadow. Then all of a sudden, he disappeared. Nothing was ever heard from Chacko again. Mariakkutty's heart broke a second time.*

*There was no certain manner in which Mariakkutty could have known when and where Chacko had disappeared. All the murk and suspicion that surrounded Chacko's life and thereafter, began to clear only several years after Mariakkutty's death. Even now, almost thirty years since anyone heard from Chacko, the facts are far from certain. Stories of pitiful screams and two gunshots from a police station on top of a lonely hill are repeatedly retold. Constable Yohannan's suicide note, composed a few days after Chacko's disappearance, and an indecipherable letter for Mariakkutty, are all we now have to reconstruct Chacko's final hours. Embers of doubt glow on. Screams. Two gunshots that still resound. A police station upon a lonely hill. No bodies. No witnesses save a dead constable.*

*It does not explain his death, that's for certain. But the life and death of Chacko do provide some clues to understand Rajan's fierce will to live on for a while more. It certainly explains Mariakkutty's craftsmanship of Rajan's teen years. You see, Chacko's absence was defining of Rajan - a Sole Surviving Male.*

*Mariakkutty continued to run the house and its sprawling agricultural premises with characteristic dignity and a lot of pride, profiting from lifelong thrift. She still went to church, every Sunday, carrying a black Bible and a black umbrella - the nature of the weather notwithstanding. The difference was that after the disappearance of her firstborn, church came to occupy the extent of her social life. It was the only reason to step out of the gates. Three hours every Sunday morning. Starting from the house at six, she would sit at her husband's grave from half past six until half past seven. The graveyard was a stretch of*

*land sloping down from behind the church. When the bells reverberated across the hills, she would walk up the slope and seat herself on the front row. After church, she would exchange pleasantries with the Vicar and his family, chat with some friends - or not, sometimes - and then return home. On the way back, she would purchase beef, fish and a few vegetables to last the week. Otherwise, the household was self-sufficient. The grounds housed coconut, banana, tapioca, cashew, mango, jackfruit, pepper, hens and ducks. The paddy field - just a half mile away, if you walked along the canal, gave enough to last the year and some profit. One dew-wet December morning, the church premises were covered with grass of a green to soothe. Varghese's grave was at the bottom of the slope, under an old mango tree. Mariakkutty had drawn her sari over her head and was sitting beside the grave, the sun just beginning to make its presence felt. She closed her eyes and after much trepidation and clearing of the throat, briefly narrated her plan. Their son would stay home and not go to school. She would get him tutored at home. His presence outside the house would be regulated. Then, as if she sensed some disapproval, she looked down at her feet and said it had to be that way because, look-what-our-Chacko-has-gone-and-done.*

*There are many who wonder how a strong individual like Rajan was agreeable to Mariakkutty's idea. I'd like to remind them we are talking of a thirteen year old child, here. What is more, he had an elder brother who was almost never there and a father who died before he was even born. Wouldn't he have been wet clay in Mariakkutty's firm hands?*

*And thus, Rajan entered another phase of his life. The smiles left his face and the laughter left him. The darkness of the house enveloped him completely. Just as laughter left Rajan never to come back, light and liveliness escaped the house and its sprawling grounds. It was almost permanently dark though not very obviously so. And in this darkness, a soul wandered - hiding his purposelessness. The tutor once remarked very mysteriously, that the darkness wasn't in the house, it was in the inmates. Rajan stayed cocooned in the house for ten years, away from all the light and adulation. Unsurprisingly, he gained the ability to melt into the background and shadow of any frame he was in. He became darkness and the darkness became him. On many occasions, it was only when she felt his clammy cold-blooded touch, that Mariakkutty was aware of his presence near her. The change was so rapid it almost went unnoticed; manifest only in Rajan's eyes. Those black eyes seemed to shimmer, becoming brilliant orbs, hiding a fire that flashed on for several years - never completely doused as events would prove. And in that house of memories, in the company of creatures who lived in the shadows, Rajan grew into pale thin youth.*

*Occasionally, Mariakkutty would see Rajan smiling to himself in the dark. Overt expressions of humour had clearly left him. Whatever remained would gently break upon his face in a sporadic smile - his eyes glinting feverishly; and Mariakkutty would be filled with a wistful regret.*

*Rajan was soon on the tiled roof of his cowshed, watching his mother for the last time. A jeep was parked next to the shed.*

*Phat, phat, phat. Inspector Minnal Thomman. Lightning Thomman. Sub-Inspector of Police; his wide sunglasses reflected the naked light bulb hanging over Mariakkutty's head. She was weeping and looked very old. Thomman was carrying a polished three-foot wooden stick with steel caps at either end - the ostensible symbol of seniority; and whacking his left palm. Phat. Boot to hat, in complete uniform. Phat. You whore, you know where he is. If you want to see him alive again better tell us where he is hiding. Ayyo, sir, please don't hurt him. He is an innocent child. My only child, sir! I don't know where he is. Please don't hurt him. You won't tell us? Phat. Sir, if I knew, I would have told you, he is my only boy. Sir, you know what happened to my Chacko. Rajan is all I have. He is not like Chacko, he doesn't even talk to anyone. Thomman grabbed Mariakkutty's hair. She screamed. Rajan cringed on a cowshed roof as his limbs gave way in a horrible stench of fear that overpowered any love for his mother. You know where he is. He won't go anywhere without telling you. Tell me, where is he? Thomman swung the stick down and brought it up against her stomach and she fell limp to the ground. Rajan shut his eyes. Phat. Now to piece together the rest of the jigsaw. Having spent many years in the company of shadows, how did Rajan find himself on the stage again?*

*The Chief had arrived in a white Ambassador. Two police jeeps and two other Ambassadors followed. The jeep that led the entourage*

*screached into a puddle, painting walls and dhotis brown. The Chief walked out of the car that said "Kerala State 2", into an umbrella held up by the Principal. Everyone smiled broadly at everyone else. The Chief hitched up his dhoti by centimeters to avoid the slush. Many fluorescent tube lamps lit up the fat raindrops and the broad smiles. Rajan was standing behind the Principal. Introductions were made. Handshakes, namaskaarams, howdoyoudos exchanged and photographs taken.*

*Sometime close to the tenth anniversary of Chacko's disappearance, Mariakkutty came to notice strange changes in Rajan. His occasional smiles had turned into full blown guffaws. His throaty laugh would reverberate in the darkness. Instead of merging into the shadows, Rajan began walking around the house singing and delivering his punchlines. Mariakkutty's amusement, however, was always clouded with concern for her son's sanity. She consulted Varghese again, sitting at the foot of his grave for over three hours on a warm August afternoon; and decided that Rajan had to join college.*

*College was initially unfriendly. The gleaming eyes and manic laughter kept people away. But he survived, pouring himself into books and work. Soon, almost everyone noticed the shy, thin, curly-haired man with a reputation for rare and surprising injections of crazy humour. He would labour endlessly at the labs and then volunteer his services to professors, lab-assistants, friends, seniors and the church. He even found time for books and poetry. Through the year he was seen striding purposefully through the corridors at all kinds of odd hours. At church, he galvanized enough support to organize a series of highly successful camps where medical help was given free of cost. His various interactions slowly eased him back into the din of human society. Talkativeness returned slowly, and so did the ready smile. He even began seeking out company and this time, it was forthcoming. By the time Rajan was in his third year, he was popular enough to become an automatic choice for Arts Club Secretary. It was the only post in the Union over which neither political party fielded candidates. Every other seat was battled with gloves off. Opposing Rajan was a risk none would take.*

*His silk shirt was new: purchased by Mariakkutty for this very occasion. The dhoti was much older. She had given it to him on his First Holy Communion. Like all good dhotis, it shone every time it was ironed.*

*He had to welcome and introduce the Chief - him who needed little introduction. It was his first official duty as Secretary. And the stage would be his for two minutes.*

*The stage was lit with many lamps. The band had just wrapped up its sound and fury. It was Rajan's turn now. The Chief smiled on as Rajan walked up to the mike and blew lightly into it. The echo resounded across the auditorium as he watched faces in the crowd through the glare of lights, (some eager, some excited, some bored, some known, many unknown). And then, it was as if a dam had finally burst (under the weight of bright lamps and audience expectation, not to mention his return to society). The grim, silent landscape was flooded with a brazen humour. Completely transported to a previous life, he gave a performance to end all performances.*

*Different versions exist as to what he actually said/sang. It is also not clear how long Rajan was on stage before he began comprehending the kind of trouble he was in. The truth lies captured in a smokescreen of myth and counter-intelligence. But by the time he ran and jumped off the stage, the fire in his eyes was little more than a few embers.*

*It attracted the Chief's ire, enough to momentarily erase the constant wide grin.*

*On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, Rajan's barely recognizable corpse washed up on a deserted beach. He was covered in cigarette burns.*

*Following a huge outcry, the Chief had to resign. Since then, the Chief has resigned many times from many positions.*

*Details about Camp Pulikkad came to light much later. It is believed in some circles that Rajan could have been held there for up to three days. The inmates were all young - and therefore possibly Naxalite too. One of them wrote,*

*Lightning struck me one day,  
When I was in Pulikkad.  
Lightning was a ball-point-pen  
Jabbed into pliant thigh muscle  
Flattened out by rollers,  
When I was in Pulikkad.*

*Minnal (Lightning) Thomman S.I., ended his career many years later as a Dy. Superintendent of Police.*



# happineses

The most difficult moments are moments of happiness. Do I really deserve this? Am I feeling happiness disproportionate to the cause of happiness? Am I feeling happiness disproportionate to other sources of trouble in my life? Should I also not feel a little sad for other people who don't have reason to be happy right now? Will my happiness last long enough? Are other people jealous of my happiness?

And there are varying degrees of happiness; 'celebration' happiness, 'relative' happiness, 'relief' happiness, 'doubtful' happiness, 'vengeful' happiness. 'Relief' happiness is the best of them all. It usually comes after a long spell of anxiety, uncertainty, fear- like when you are expecting to get sacked, and you don't. The happiness at fear being dispelled is inescapable, no one can take that away from you, and you enjoy it more because concomitantly the earlier source of trouble disappears. 'Relative' happiness keeps you on your toes. If you get a small raise, you feel happy and at the same time you are not jubilant enough to blow it all up, as you know your expenses are high enough to eat it all up. 'Celebration' happiness is the worst kind. When you get a promotion that you were not expecting, you are jubilant, you throw a party that is way beyond the strength of your purse. All the while you keep wondering if it's really true, and if your close competitor is going to make trouble from now on. Then you wake up in the morning with a hangover and feel terrible and wonder if it was really worth that much celebration. 'Doubtful' happiness is that of the other guy if you did not get promotion. If both of you didn't get it...should he feel *happy* that you didn't get it? Maybe not. But he would definitely feel assured that at least status quo is going to be restored for some time. He would be happy that that would give him more time to chalk out another game plan. Meanwhile, he would keep wondering if you were feeling like him, and whether his happiness is really misplaced. 'Vengeful' happiness is that of the other guy if he got the promotion over you, while you were the foremost contender all through. Then he would feel happier that you did not get it when you were expected to get it.

Maybe I should write a self-help book someday, and make a quick buck. At some points, it makes sense to give up one's artistic arrogance.

So right now I am experiencing 'relief' happiness. Deep called from I-don't-know- where to check if I were all right. After two months of no communication. I had begun to believe that this was over. But apparently it is not. So that is my source of happiness - at least he called. At least, I don't have to scrounge in this vacuum of uncertainty trying to figure out if mine was a legitimate fear. Well, it isn't. And that is a relief. And a cause of happiness.

As I put my cell-phone back with the charger, I hear suppressed orgasmic breathing and a table being pushed on the other side of the screen, which divides this room into office and private space. I inhabit this private space for the time I am here for the campaign for unpolluted water. The office space is used by the Mahila Sangathan, which doubles up as a legal services centre...by day. By night, it is the site of consummation of true love. The hero is the local photographer and the heroine is the local Cleopatra. By day, one is colleague, and by night, lover.

It is an intriguing duality of roles that these lovers play with society. Of unquestioning acceptance of its norms, all the while guiltlessly subverting its basic moral code in the darkness of anonymity. It is alright, I suppose, if one is in love, and that sort of thing. She is the typist at the Mahila Sangathan office, besides being bread-earner for two siblings and an uncle, and the local Cleopatra. He is a photographer with papery side-locks, pointy boots, bottom-hugging jeans; of unknown marital status and Pagan religion. Such is the story of True Love. The story of duality.

I am the educated friend-and-well-wisher from the city, with cropped hair, junky silver earrings, cigarette smoke and emancipation. Who does not evoke suspicious curiosity anymore, as the degree of muck in one's drinking water depends on how loud I shout in the chemical factory and in government offices. So I am the revered messiah-woman from the city. Men don't stare through my transparent white kurta anymore. Women don't shy away from inviting me over for dinner. Wives don't chaperone their husbands when they come to the office. Teachers ask me for tips on how to teach English better. Collectors apologise for poor spoken English. Cleopatra counsels me on the nexus between long, lustrous hair and faithful husbands. Local Photographer cracks jokes about local editors wanting dharnas to be shot only if urban messiah-women are in the forefront.

Cleopatra brings me food at night, after settling a cantankerous uncle in bed. She offers to keep me company so I don't feel scared at night. She plays with my cell phone, asks me about my family and why they have not got me married yet, counsels me on the benefits of long, lustrous hair. By then the photographer comes to ask me how I am getting along and if I have finished dinner. That is the signal for me to retire for the day on the other side of the screen. Then I wait for Deep to call, and listen in to hushed love-talk against the kitchen wall. Suppressed giggles. Then lights go off. And I wait for Deep to call.

This is my way of squeezing out breathing space. Coming away from the city. Rejecting its pretentious talk, ethnic curtains, World Bank funds, wildlife photography, beer bottles, flavoured condoms, uncertainties, happineses. My way of hoping to find certainty in the world beyond. My way of hoping that Deep will call.

And then Deep called. And we talked about my work and his exhibition. I will go back soon. To fight for clean water at the hallowed halls of justice. To seek justice for a village in the city. To collect the forgotten pieces of my life. To move back in with Deep.

So we can fight again, over who should use the bathroom earlier in the morning. And who gets the crossword page first. Whether the water-colours of Jamini Ray are obsolete. And he can claim that sensuality begins and ends with the mother goddess. And I can call him 'a patriarchal bastard'...again. And he can smoke twenty cigarettes at one go. And I can walk out in search of the messiah in me. And land up as social commentator of Cleopatra and Photographer. And he can sleep with the whores who model for him, and call them 'mother goddess'.

This is happiness indeed. Out of relief that a man wants to reclaim his 'mother goddess'. Out of the assurance that a woman can be a messiah as long as she is removed from the secure world of one's own happineses. Out of the celebration of man and messiah-woman in the anonymity of a photographer's dark room. Out of revenge on the certainties of class, religion, fidelity. Out of the triumph of the uncertainty of Messiah-woman, over the certainty of Cleopatra.

ATREYEE  
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There was once a Prince. His name was Marigold Bumbledikoendu and just as two cups of water are enough to drown a baby gnu, he hailed from southern Zambia, but naturally from a parallel universe.

Prince Marigold had a normal prince childhood, complete with equestrian training, archery, etiquette lessons, spellings, slaughtering of innocents, sacrificial procedures etc. However, he also learnt a secret art. A dark art. He learnt all this from his dark master, Master Mas Ter.

Master Mas Ter (pronounced with a soft gap between Mas and Ter) taught the young Prince, the art of developing film from a camera. Hence, the weak 'dark art' pun in the beginning. But its ok if you missed it, since you are all puslings.

The young Prince soon became a proficient developer and sought a secret desire to join the Ansals. He sent several letters desirous of a strategic alliance with the renowned group, and when there was no reply, he at once caused the sacrifice of three hundred wild dunkleberry beetles. All to no avail.

One of his Courtiers, called Babu, revealed to him that the Ansals were actually a construction company and not 'developers' as in 'film developers'. The Prince rapidly understood that his secret desire was stupid, and this fact, multiplied with the fact that he repeatedly fell off his horse called 'The African Road Warrierness' led him down a wild and uncharted path, until he occupied the royal suite of the Southern Zambian FunHouse. Complete with a new white dinner jacket.

Its previous occupant had been his late great grandfather, known as King Marigold The Line Filler. He had apparently gone mad trying to colour in all the zebras he could find.

He hadn't counted on his evil Queen, Queen Hosram The Detergent Lady, who was just as efficient at spraying detergent on unicoloured zebras.

In any event, the Prince Marigold we are concerned with, was soon reduced to a wreck. Now those of you with an air for adventure, and an air for romance will nod wisely as into the story is introduced the beautiful and highly talented Princess Rampyari Sadulepatri who hailed from a neighbouring kingdom. She had heard about the dunkleberry beetles, and had been touched by the gesture.

Princess Rampyari took one look at the Prince through double glazed windows, and sighed. She knew she had found a cause. She would help him regain his lost glory, she would bring him back to the world of the sane, she would stand firmly in front of the cameras and announce, "I give to you ... the rejuvenated Prince Marigold Bumbledikoendu."

But then, Prince Marigold choked on a buckle, had a massive brain embolism, and died.

Where he lay, gasping for his last breath, now stands as per his will written in soya sauce, a giant phallic representation, with a roll of film at the top.

Forever, exposed.

Alas, that brave, but very mad Prince Marigold.

SHRI SINGH

# SOLITUDE

I leap into oblivion...

Gently I glide through the world around me, suddenly experiencing sensory deprivation. No sound, no touch and only a dim aquamarine light to keep me company. Languidly I move through space. It's a beautiful feeling, a feeling of being suspended in space. It isn't quite flight, but gravity doesn't seem to be a factor anymore.

My inner-child wakes up after a self-imposed sabbatical. I haven't allowed myself to be free in such a long time. And so I smile, I glide and I lay there suspended... both in mind and in body. My world sudden seems to have taken to a free flowing lethargy, slow motion redefined. My thoughts which are usually a whizzing blur, sudden crystallize and move by me in an almost slide show like manner. Clarity, aquamarine clarity, where have you been?

The answer lies there, within my grasp, within my comprehension. This was what I had been looking for, for so long. The answer is to let go, to flow, and to move as languidly as time seemed to move in the beautiful new world. I look around and see shimmering lights right above me, stretched and rippling. Heaven... this is what it must feel like. A loneliness so complete and so full of joy. A kind of solitude granted to you by your thoughts, revealing themselves in an easy flourish of shimmering colours, like a satin scarf shivering in the evening breeze. I smile once more.

And then my chest begins to tell me its time to leave. The ache makes its way to my gut and my neck, gripping my body like a vice. And suddenly, there isn't any room for my thoughts. Poignant as the moment is, grief is the last thing on my mind. Gentle, delicate, transparent spheres stream slowly past me as I slowly and deliberately exhale... My feet touch the ground and I push off into the shimmering surface.

It's been a while since I last went swimming.

SAHIL KINI

# HIS RELIC

DATED: 22-24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2005, 22<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2005

By DON KITBOR K.M.

He was walking in a daze; his hopes had allayed the truth which should have been evident all along but that now seemed to gore deep within his heart and spill the condensed tension of endless hours of hoping over his tumultuous mind. It really did not show much common sense in him, after all, who would expect a girl like her to care about a promise mumbled in the heat of the moment? Still he could hear the love he had heard in that streamlet voice of hers as she promised to be his, forever, but fate and circumstances had contrived against him. The road, or rather, the gully he was walking on bore the stench of long years of neglect and abuse. Street urchins were playing a modified gambling game with discarded cigarette packets and shouting shocking abuses at each other and anyone disturbing their pathetic princely game.

He walked towards the end of the gully, near the former childhood playground he stopped. Although he walked this way everyday, he never really did observe the state of neglect of things. This had once, maybe some 15 years back, been a posh locality and now it was one of the worthy ghettos of the city. He couldn't help but chuckle at the irony, of the way its fall of grace had coincided with his. How fast things had changed! Where were the prominent citizens who used to live here? Really, where was justice or love or faith, for that matter?

Turning round the bend he came to the familiar tall rusted iron-gate that guarded the entrance of a huge compound almost like a small farm. A chipped and cracked lengthy driveway led to the porch of an enormous Spanish style house that carried a fast fading smile of yesteryear grandeur. The paint had long since peeled, some of the wooden planks were white with fungal growth and the sweet smell of decay seemed to linger. It really wouldn't have made a too-popular picture postcard. More than grass, weeds and some kind of weird creeper had the run of the whole compound.

He gave this sorry site another good look and then walked across the driveway and put a long key into the lock of the front door. The door swung open noiselessly. The sun shone from behind the house, leaving the living room filled with dark, inviting as it had done for so long, now promising him the company of shadows and memories. He put himself down heavily on the dusty sofa staring at the headless statue outside the porch. He reached for the papers on the table in front of him, trying to adjust his vision to the dim ambience and gathering the papers in his hand, switched on the table lamp, going through them. Somewhere a church clock struck five times and he knew that anytime now the company lawyer would be coming.

He closed the front door and went to the dining to see what was available in the fridge. A half eaten sandwich and a six-pack soda was all that was there. Taking the six-pack out through the hallway into the living room he glanced at the week's growth of fur on his face. Setting the six-pack on the table he sat himself down waiting for the call of the doorbell. The minutes seemed to tick like hours but the doorbell never rang; sifting through the proposal from Progressive Builders Ltd. his eyes time and again rested on the offer of Rs.80 lakh for his entire property nearly twice its market value. They had even offered him a flat of his own in the residential complex that they would subsequently build on his land. Had this offer been in relation to anything else he wouldn't have refused, but the house, the house was what held him. How could he let this house, the sole relic of his love that had been lost but had never died be brought down? It was all that he ever cared for, his only relic of her; it was here in this very sofa twelve years back to the day, before he had left for the States to pursue his dream of becoming a sound engineer that she had promised him she was his, that she would wait for his return to claim her. He could still feel her tears wet his manly hands as she promised, but that was then a memory now and this house, its standing relic that reminded him every time he took a breath of his loss.

Finding it hard to find the employment that his qualifications qualified him for, he had to keep shifting regularly to new locales in search of better prospects and in due course, no thanks to that tragedy called fate, he had contrived to lose contact with her. After eight years of a moderately successful working life, his inner yearning for her overpowered him and in a moment of madness, he left behind all that he had sweated for, to come back to his hometown to search for her and these four years that seemed to drift by he had no clue where she was, whether she was alive or dead or had simply married someone else and left. Of course in some debt now, he had been out of job for more than a year. After all, who would like to employ a perennially day dreaming man who never tried to put his past were if belonged in the past but preferred to enact them every mortal day. Even the few friends he had made or renewed since he had returned urged him to take up the offer. After all, when did you get an offer for 80 lakhs and a flat everyday? Why, he could he live just on the interest on that sum for the rest of his life they had said. But who were they? How could they know him - the transparent man with many layers? How could they ever understand that this was his relic, his treasure; that he'd rather die then part with it? Still the company was persistent and insisted on sending their company lawyer to talk things over and, if possible, finalise the agreement.

All evening long he had felt a deep sense of foreboding. A feeling of uneasiness seemed to gradually creep over him just as a snake stealthily glides over the face of the floor. He could feel a slight terror of the unknown but knew not what that unknown was, feeling as if the atmosphere was whispering into his ears that his time would soon come and this chapter of his life would be over.

Outside it had become pitch-dark with all the streetlights standing like statuettes of defunct sentinels in a halo. Reaching for the thick curtains, he dragged them across the face of the window doing what he had done all his life, shutting himself from the excavating eyes of the world outside. It was already half past six and he was quite sure that the lawyer would not turn up. Maybe, he thought, they had decided against wasting money on him and that they'd rather have him erased and take away his ownerless property. More than anything he felt a sense of relief that at least now he wouldn't need to here the glib talk from the lawyer that may well have shaken his beliefs.

There was nothing to make dinner from in the kitchen, nor could he consider any of the hotels, for he had, over the course of his unemployed year, raked up some kind of debt or the other. The only solution was to invite himself to his friend, Mohan's house for dinner, but he still had too much pride in himself to do so. He was all too aware that this spot which he was in was a tight one and that his situation was rapidly deteriorating, still his relic held him strong in its overpowering grip just like you'd feel if you were a goat tied as a tiger bait to a tree.

Just then the deep voice of a mechanic bird broke his sympathetic reverie. It was nearly seven and no one really called on him apart from Mohan and Suresh. Gathering himself, and apologetically dabbing his persona he went to the door and opened it. The porch light shone rather hazily, and standing in the doorway, it cast a faint glow on the newcomer's face.

He stood there shocked and speechless staring at the newcomer not knowing what to say, whether heaven came down or hell devoured. He stood there just gazing as if in a trance at the lawyer. An eternity seemed to pass by, an eternity for all eternities. As if coming back from a trance he tried to recover himself. "Wouldn't you step in?" he said in a colder, harsher voice than what he really felt. "I'd be pleased to." He felt inclined to slam the door behind him but checked himself. They sat facing each other, the lawyer, this damned lawyer and he. He knew he should not be feeling this animosity towards the lawyer, but after all he had been through, when relief and joy should have swept over, here he was sitting face to face with the one to set him free and he felt nothing but bitter resentment, cold resentment.

The lawyer was clearly ill at ease and the feeling of 'God knows what am I'm doing' pervaded with a thickness and stillness of a graveyard. At last, out of some humane impulse "I'm Sorry", mumbled the lawyer. He sat there staring.

"Why were you late?" he asked in a frosty voice. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. "I wasn't supposed to come." "Then why did you come to torment me more? Isn't what I am now more than enough for you? Why, I thought I did not exist anymore, an old forgotten memory." "No. Another lawyer was supposed to come over but he wasn't feeling well so I was assigned the task and when I saw the name, the place, I just couldn't bring myself to come; my mind wanted to but my soul told me that it was re-entering the buried past." "Did you ever give up on me?" His voiced choked "Not even for a moment did I not think you. Every day I would come and walk past here after your letters stopped. Five years back I had the opportunity to join this company. I thought that maybe you'd found greener grass on the other side. I've been busy these five years. Last year, I came here, one last fling of the dice; oh how my soul ached to see the door padlocked and the garden overgrown. I couldn't go on living this memory. I had to hide you away?" He couldn't bear to look into her eyes. There was something welling up within and he did not know what it was. "Then why did you come?" "You were my relic, how could I not come?" "You know I did not want to sell this place; it was my only relic, my relic of you. But now," he paused and gazed at her softly half daring "that I've found the relic, this means nothing."

He proceeded to open a can of soda.

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## soap-bubbles

gentle chattering of the rain  
on the glass panes  
of closed windows

sitting in a corner in the room  
lapping up the slow dry hours  
half-smoked pack of Navy Cuts  
strewn idly aside  
bitter taste of nicotine  
proof that you're beat up inside

hours drag on  
smoke curling up lazily  
filling the gaps in the story  
curious kaleidoscope that flits by

Einstein looking like Robin Hood  
passing by in a trance  
he's walked down this road for ages now  
stoned 'most all of the time  
and all this desolation  
makes you wish you were someone else  
as you look out tonight for Ophelia  
sweeping along Desolation Row

show her too the soap-bubbles  
reels of moving pictures  
flowing in your stale mind  
and paint a picture of that scorpio  
sphinx  
who liked Greek food  
and wore a calico dress

long hours with Rapunzel  
she belonged to someone else i believe  
you're glad she stopped by in the silence  
when you were waiting for rain

the bubbles rise slowly and disappear  
and in their wake  
leave behind a strong lingering taste  
just like the shot of tequila  
that you had saved for later

the cigarette turns to ash in the tray  
the burning smell stays for awhile

and still the rain pours outside  
mingling with the thin mist  
a sheet on your naked skin  
till a stray drop  
brought you back from your dreams  
and so it is now

stub the cherry out  
and the bubbles disappear  
blow the last bit of grey smoke  
where there was once colours

unfinished stories of your life  
soap-bubbles they shall remain  
transcient  
temporary  
and fragile  
thin bands of rainbow  
colours you wouldn't see elsewhere

strike a match one more time

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## WANDERINGS IN A SOLENOID

AN ODE TO THE MUSE (DON'T REFUSE)

*Wraith yet still quite there  
Silver hair  
Silky stare  
Golden eyes bewitching still  
Rests on the window sill.*

*Sings the saddest song there ever would be  
With glee  
In harmony  
Flutters with a contemptuous twist  
My heart in her fist.*

*Twisted angel of retribution divine  
Be mine  
My love's thine  
Sweeps away without a glance  
There goes my only chance!*

Rishabh Gupta  
1<sup>st</sup> year B.A., LL.B. (Hons), NLSIU.



# Garage Blues

Having visitors is always interesting. I put it as interesting because one can never classify them under one adjective, hence the general term. They could be fun, they could be talkative, exciting, friendly, boring, sleepy, smart, jovial, formal, quiet, fidgety, noisy and sometimes musical. However, the other day, I realized that the above set of adjectives was kind of incomplete. It is rather trying to assign an adjective to the experience, hence I am going to narrate the events of that fine sunny Saturday morning.

Nine a.m. found me in the garage busy wiping off the dust the car had collected over the last week or so. Baba and Didu were checking out channel DD7 Bangla, Ma was just cleaning up after breakfast. That was when the visitor turned up. I was the first to receive him, or perhaps I should say, it. It came slithering in under the garage door, with two dogs and five puppies after it, and made for my bicycle, which was also in the garage. I have remembered from childhood this basic procedure to follow in times of crisis, which is to keep one’s cool and not panic at any cost. This is precisely what I did while trying to distance myself from the guest and alerting the folks. That is to say, I jumped on top of the car, and yelled at the top of my lungs, “snake, snake!” That, as you might have anticipated, was more than sufficient to get the household on their toes, rouse the neighbours, and dent the roof of the car.

I remember reading somewhere, that a good writer always gives his or her readers a bird’s eye’s view of the proceedings,

even though majority of these readers are not birds, by any stretch of the imagination. Never mind, this is what the garage looked like two minutes later:

The dogs which were chasing the reptilian visitor were now engaged in barking their heads off at it and at the same time were trying to keep the puppies away from it, possibly explaining to them in barks that snakes are dangerous. The snake had taken refuge behind the rear wheel of the bicycle and was standing its ground bravely, although confronted with seven dogs and as many humans. Baba had picked up a relatively long *haata* (serving spoon) and was standing outside the garage. Didu was trying to convince Baba from behind that a haata was no weapon to use against a five foot long snake and at the same time trying to explain to us how garlic can be used to keep snakes away. Passers by had stopped in their tracks and had joined the audience, which was growing in size by the minute. Ma was shouting at me from the other side of the gate, over the din of the barking dogs, asking me to come out of the garage and asking Didu to stay indoors, and I, as you already know was perched on top of the car, taking in the rare sight of a snake and seven dogs having a shouting match, the latter having the upper hand obviously.

Help soon arrived in the form of three labourers who offered their services in relieving us of the snake. They gathered long sticks (definitely more effective than a ‘haata’) and advanced cautiously into the garage. I could not but help thinking of the snake’s predicament. What if I had been in its place!!! Being faced with seven barking dogs, with nine people peering at you over a wall, plus three men approaching you armed with long sticks are undoubtedly signs that things are not going too well for you. Had I been the snake, I would have

legged it and looked for refuge more reliable than the rear wheel of a bicycle. This is precisely what the snake did. It found an opening and deftly slid through, and into our underground water sump. The three labourers, not to be deterred found longer sticks and began fishing in the water. After a good deal of ‘fishing’ they managed to extract the snake from its watery asylum and disposed of it in a nearby pond. They then informed us that the snake was a harmless specimen called chera which lives largely on rats and frogs.

Then of course, it was paytime. The three labourers demanded a sum that would do justice to their efforts. Needless to say, in their eyes, not even the most impossible of sums settled by us would seem to suffice. They argued saying if we didn’t pay up to their amount, they wouldn’t come to help anymore even if our house was festooned with snakes. Baba, bargaining for all he was worth reasoned with them saying the snake did not belong to us and that it was still at large! The scene got pretty amusing in the end and soon the little party was laughing heartily! The meeting eventually dispersed on cordial terms.

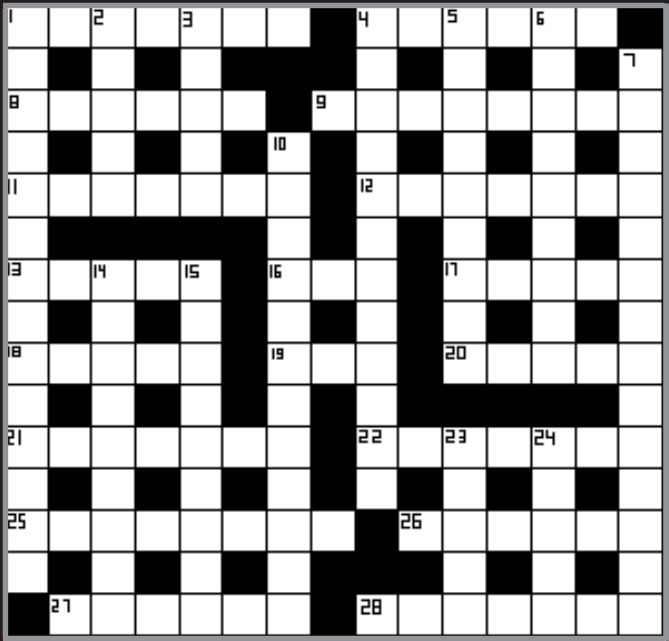
Harmless or not harmless, you will agree that our visitor de reptilia certainly gave us an eventful morning! Right. So where was I? Yes! My list of adjectives for describing visitors is kind of incomplete. Whether I can find one to describe that morning or not is anybody’s guess, I think...

KAUSTUV DASGUPTA

*haata – serving spoon/ladle  
baba – bangla for father  
didu – bangla for grandmother*

## QUIRK CROSSWORD 1

Aditya Dubey



### CLUES:

#### ACROSS

- Liquidate in order to lose identity and drink. (7)
- Suit worn on the sleeves? (6)
- British sapper rolls free joint. (6)
- Trait loses centre and west, goes around chirping. (8)
- Screw up, a spasm may signify weird behaviour. (7)
- Really old chair set in air conditioner. (7)
- Last girl lies about fibre. (5)
- The sun for e.g., partly good or bad for the skin. (3)
- Stood headless, with a turn to defeat. (5)
- Return about gin to reach the old lady of limerick. (5)
- Hawaiian garland is part of Sole Island. (3)
- Delhi University ran for one half of famous pop group. (5)
- Oh Priam! Maker of the archaic drug. (7)
- Argue endlessly with lad to move slowly.
- Bengali tea followed by public disturbances! To get to ancient transport? (8)
- Cesar arms around odd coup. (6)
- Old lady of limerick is back, guess what she’s riding? (1, 6)
- I pose at revolutions for poppy products. (7)

#### DOWN

- Hermit led engineer around company to get to nursery rhyme. (5, 5, 4)
- Strange, queue loses a turn but ends with right. (5)
- One with rent disturbed, but cannot be disturbed? (5)
- In what way did sun god link to Calcutta landmark? (6, 6)
- Conquistador’s treasure, CD got with explosive zeal. (5, 4)
- One mixed with the water could be the maître d’. (3, 6)
- Maniac study of Freudian discipline. (14)
- Church chose lost ram to be the guide. (12)
- Gus returned on top of twin paintings for dessert. (5, 4)
- You, to a Martian are light n spinning. (9)
- A goddess is the maker of this religious group. (5)
- Half-Uncles might play Unreal Tournament to get rough. (5)

SOLUTIONS IN NEXT EDITION

## ROOTS

*“At the stroke of midnight...” he promised  
But all that we got was a divide across land.  
A stroke of the pen gave it.  
He was right, though – ‘midnight’ was right.  
No darker period of history was ever witnessed.*

*“Veerji, I have locked my house. Here, keep the key.  
Keep my jewels. I will take them when I come back”  
“Bebe, you don’t worry. Inshallah, we will meet again soon”  
It has been 57 years since. They have given up any hope they ever had.*

*“Run! These Sardars will butcher you!  
Every single one of them has a sword!”  
“These Mussale are dangerous...they don’t just kill.  
They mutilate you!”  
“It is better that I kill you rather than them laying their  
Filthy hands on your pristine self...”*

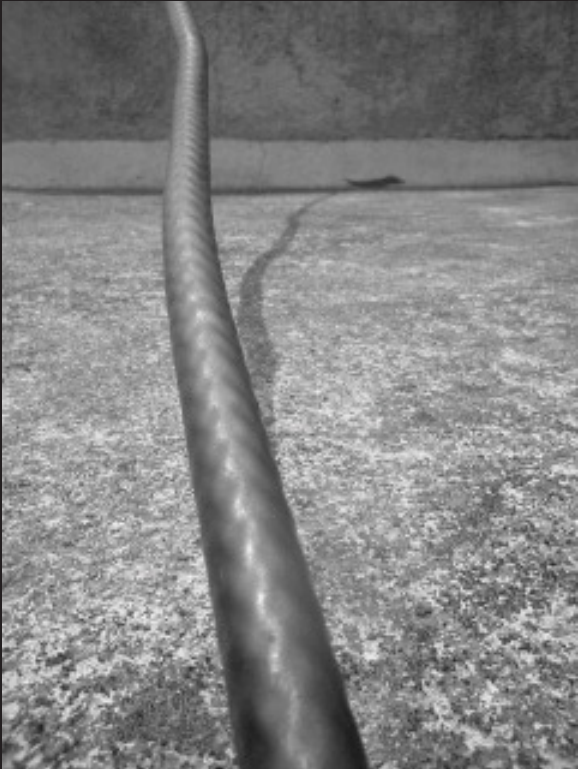
*I got a letter today. From the other side.  
He asked if his havell still stood tall.  
Visible as soon as you crossed the nehar.  
How do I reply that even the bricks don’t exist anymore.*

*“What do you want with those Pakis...  
Bloody jehadis! Motherf\*\*\*ers all of them!”  
“Who the hell do they think they are...F\*\*\*ing Hindustanis  
Did you see them piss in their pants when the bomb blew in purani dilli!”*

*“Dadaji, why do you care what’s happening in Cahore?”  
“Abba, Meerut has changed since you left. There’s nothing there for you.”  
“Why this senseless wish to see your house. They threw you out, didn’t they?  
You don’t matter to them. Put aside this foolishness and go for a pilgrimage in  
Your last years.”*

*Yes, it was a dark period. But how was I to know that  
The sun would never shine as bright again.  
I know it is no longer my land. I have no right to call it my land –  
Not legally, not patriotically, and yet it is my land.  
It is my home. It is my land.  
My land.  
I want to see it once before I die.*

GANEV



The Wire – By Arun Sagar



# Inspection

This was the second time Queen-Bee got pulled out of the assembly-line for wearing her uniform inappropriately. It was far shorter than the length permissible. Being in the senior-most class of the school, one must be even more cautious of how carries oneself so as not to set the wrong kind of example for the younger girls. Wasn't it also about time that she learnt to Respect her Body, and thereby Respect Herself? What would outsiders think if she was seen walking across the street wearing this Renowned Uniform with half her buttons open? And the hair-colouring - how long would it take for this semi-permanent colour to fade out? If it remained as garish even at next week's inspection, Queen Bee would have to accept either a suspension or an order from the Principal to chop off her red (or was it burgundy!) mane.

The Monday uniforms are the worst. They make one look like trainee nurses in pediatric departments. Shabby white, with no shape whatsoever, to which is attached a manly collar and a pocket at the right breast. What do these wrong-side-of-forty, unhappily married or divorced women get out of making young seventeen year-old girls with firm breasts and curves, wear such sacks. One can't do anything with them, besides keeping the hemline an inch above the knee or keeping the collar-buttons open after school. Of course, tennis socks are indispensable. And the shoes, what is this rule trying to achieve, making the good-looking girls, who deserve the attention that they get, look like sack-clothed matrons. Why would someone impose shoes such as these square, workman shoes on pretty girls of seventeen! Why would these women get pleasure establishing equality amongst the shapely ones, the cute-ponytail ones, the thankful-to-be-able-to-hide-the-flab ones and at-least-this-implies-I'm-a-girl ones.

One needs to drive some sense into that over-athletic six-footer basketball girl. She would have done well for herself had her shoulders not jutted out for miles on both sides, screaming out loud that she's one-of-the-guys. Short haircuts can be cute, but it has to be done the right way. An army-crew cut is way off-target. And these are things that can be repaired, except for the shoulders. For that, she will have just have wear clothes a little more merciful around the shoulder, than those basketball jerseys with humongous arm-holes. Displaying her biceps beautifully. But of no other use. Those look good on the boys' basketball team, though not the entire team. Arms too muscular can be quite repulsive. It's the lean-but-strong look you've got to have to look hot in the electric-blue team jerseys.

But reed-thin arms are also of no good. Like Miss Head Girl standing at the foot of the staircase bestowing that cold glare upon some middle-school kid for daring to talk in the line. Flat-chested. Rickety-legged. Wearing her spectacles with an intensity - as if she were sent upon the earth to reform all sinners. How does she manage the look of God's Angel distressed by the rot that has descended upon Sweet Earth, when the pretty ones get pulled out during inspection? Has she any idea what the boys in the football team say about her? It's nasty though. Not like all of them look like Greek Gods. For instance, that thick-headed Toughboy, with muscles jutting out of his head - chewing gum all the time! Whoever gave him the idea that he was some Adonis! One can't even look at him for more than thirty seconds at a stretch, without having to marvel at the antics he performs in the nooks of his buccal cavity with the aid of a two-day-old piece of gum.

Yes, Ma'am.

One must try hard not to snigger, hang one's head in remorse, understand the kind of signals this kind of behaviour sends out to younger girls.

Now, back to classes.

Not like these skinny fourteen-year-olds don't know anything. How difficult is it to undo a few buttons, when they can slip in chits of paper into side-pockets of tennis bags. "You look cute from the behind!" Which breastless fourteen-year-old talks like that? Queen Bee would not even contemplate calling the Debate Team Captain when she was fourteen. But she knew how to get *him* to call *her*. But this is just screaming for attention. And for the Coach-wannabe-boyfriend to actually be thrilled, is despicable.

What class is it? Well, if Queen Bee had bothered to be alert in the last class, she would have known that Monday morning Biology has been exchanged for English, as Miss. Angelic Beauty will go on leave, beginning next week. The one advantage of staying out of trouble at inspection, is that one can get to class earlier and avoid the agony of having to endure the sermon of Goody-2-Shoes. She thinks her barrel-like trunk and greasy-oiled-hair and hairy arms make her in some strange way Holy.

Angelic Beauty begins the onslaught of saccharine and honey. What is the point behind behaving like Mother Teresa's disciple if one has decided at the very beginning that half the class ought to fail the exam in order to uphold some Divine Order. The Soft Feminine Beauty. She's probably the only one in the faculty that realizes that there are the shades of lipstick other than scarlet red. And the exotic jewellery and the handloom saree are definite plus points. Though the middle-area could do with some working out, one would definitely rate her higher up in the aging-woman category. She's asking a question. The class has no answer. She expresses regret or perhaps, a threat, beautifully camouflaged in the Congenial Smile.

Women of Substance. Who have points to prove to this male-dominated world. The class should rely on its own power of analysis rather than regurgitating the book all the time. What on earth does that mean? Power of Analysis! One guesses it simply means no matter what, half the class will fail.

And Miss Smartass will get an eighty. And Angelic Beauty will never stop gushing about her essay on Yeats. But many teachers don't like her. Because she asks Smartass questions in class. Because she sits in the backrow, scribbles on a piece of paper and solves the Supertough math problem before Cuberoot, the math topper. The Debate boys think she's a snob. And Coach (The Complete Loser) thinks she's Kinda Cute. What is so cute about overly-clever guitar-strumming zero-behind math-addict who smokes in the boys' lockers! And anti-fit jeans are Not Cute! She doesn't even swim, or play tennis, or dance! Socks of two different colours aren't exactly hip.

Oh, Jesus. The entire class is looking at me. Including Miss Babytalk. And Angelic Beauty! This has got to mean trouble. I am supposed to express Opinion. On something. Yeats? No, then she'd definitely have asked Smartass. What are we studying today? Look at what page Beanpole's book is turned to. Quick. Maybe then you'll have some clue.

The Bell.

Thank God for small mercies. She'll pick on me for the rest of the week, but that can be handled later. The next class is across the road, in the Chem Lab. In the Boys' School. One lives for these little spells of respite from this Holy Nunnery. The hair will have to be redone in a jiffy.

Yes, Ma'am, I'm coming in a moment.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
'Oh God, the Floosie's gonna take forever now. She should bring her hair-dresser to school from now on!'

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## No. 716, 7<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR AL-GOSAIBY BUILDING

The tape rolled in the big hall  
Infant me cradled secure,  
Humming to the playful scream;  
Bimbo, bimbo!  
Does your mommy know...!  
You re goin down the road,  
To meet a little girlio!  
Nursery rhyme, nay!  
But oh so sad did I sigh when,  
Jim Reeves begged his lady love:  
Don't let me cross over,  
Love's stealing line  
You belong to another;  
You'll never be mine...  
Becoming my childhood song  
Born to a music loving lady  
Mom's favourites later  
Churned the teenage soul  
And that husky tone  
That lent decor to a lovely home  
did keep me in the dark  
my kiddish understanding refined  
only to tune, not words  
that possibly my mom did hear.  
I swayed to crying guitar  
To the swinging sultans  
And dreamy lady writers  
Until at 16 no longer  
Was Dire Straits a twisting tune  
But legendary lyric.  
For now did I know what it was

To have money for nothing  
And chicks for free.  
Finding holy Nirvana  
In teen spirit and the lore  
Of the Man who sold the world.  
Haughty teenage me aware  
That Modern talking was just dance pop  
Not the romantic whistle  
To cheri cheri lady  
My weakness for history  
Married with grand old violin  
In Boney M's story of Rasputin  
Lover of the Russian Queen  
Into whose arms  
Fell Moscow chicks.  
My mom much older  
Now prayed before Knopfler's  
Ticket to heaven  
As I stood beside  
Convincing her it is indeed still too early.  
And playing the Irish country song  
Of the girl with the auburn hair.  
While my sister wrestled mighty  
For the remote buttons  
Wanting Elvis's doggy hound songs  
In the screaming raging fight  
Did I not notice  
My music loving mother's face  
Who probably thought  
Even the stairway to heaven would do  
Ticket or no ticket.

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## FACES



- BY ARJUN 'DADDY' RAJGOPAL



# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The beginning of the year has been cheerful, as it should be, as it usually is. Some new faces brighten up the campus. As they take the place of old dogs who have moved away to learn new tricks, old tales are retold and new controversial issues are raised. But the start after the break brings a buzz on the campus and there is a feeling of expectancy... of better things to come and a resolve to achieve greater heights.

Last year ended on a sombre note, a jarring one for many. There were angry responses to the National Law School being rated second; the anger directed both inwards and outwards. Scornful comments were made against those who were rated above us, and at those who made the ratings. Many of us felt that it was a timely warning, that the NLS community needed to wake up from its slumber probably induced by resting a tad bit too comfortably on our laurels. Fingers were pointed at falling teaching standards and at loss of focus among students. Thoughts opened up, trying to figure out what it is that seems ‘terribly wrong with the cosmic balance’\* here. Well, there maybe a lot that is wrong about Law School but the one thing that I see which doesn’t seem right at all is the absence of a proper channel for easy flow and reach of information.

When we don’t hear of things we lose out on a lot. We can’t make use of opportunities if we don’t hear of them at the right time. At the same time if anyone’s to blame, it’s ourselves as we ought to have kept our eyes and ears open! Well, some do know what to look out for and hence are at an advantage, but many miss the bus not even knowing that they were supposed to be at the bus-stop. The problem, though not everyone’s problem, begins right at the beginning. In spite of efforts to help out first years feel comfortable as they learn to live the ‘law school life’, things aren’t great. While some adapt quickly enough, others struggle just a bit. Thus many a time there is a lack of clarity as to what one should be doing, and how one should go about it. And there are occasions when an opportunity goes by and one hasn’t even heard of it until one sees someone else having made good use of it. I think that things can be made a fair bit simpler if there was a system for better retention and flow of and access to relevant information. And this is where I think the internet can be harnessed a great deal more than it is presently.

The law school community is a small one. At any time there are not more than 500 people on campus. We tend to think that any bit of information if communicated at one nodal point will be received by all through channels which are largely semi-formal. My opinion, though, is that there are certain asymmetries which lead to distortion of some of the valuable information. This prevents the information from reaching all recipients as it is intended to be. Many a time it is through word of mouth or loose sheets which usually don’t reach everyone. This leads to the exchange of ideas and opinions relating to that information in its entirety being restricted to an extremely small circle. Any further spreads of the information tend to be cursory, less elaborate, more opinionated and interspersed with the ‘ridiculous amounts of gossip’\*, which means that it never reaches everyone *as* it should. Further, these distortions allow for a reduced scope for expressing opinion which can find it way back to the source with enough strength in it to make a difference. Thus the channels of communication where ideas are sent as well as received are not as smooth as they may appear at an initial assessment.

The internet does not suffer from these handicaps. Its advantages are numerous and enormous and will be extremely beneficial even in a small community like the National Law School. The biggest advantage is that information is accessible whenever and wherever as long as there is access to internet. One mail to a group will ensure a message reaches everyone. Also, information can be copied many times over without any distortion, loss of value or quality. All information is retained and documented as it was, thus allowing for later verification and greater accountability. A copy of the information can be retained for personal use or at any rate, personally accessed which means any learning (especially the orientations) can be self-paced and more effective as one is ‘doing’ what he is supposed to be learning. Editing and updating the content is easy. Thus information available on the net is an amazing improvement over traditional information sources or systems. This will seem more so in Law School where the sources are either oral, passed on through word of mouth, scribbled on blackboards or for more formal notices, put up on notice boards.

In Law School, a criticism of what one reads on a notice board, etc. comes out as an on the spur of the moment caustic comment. But this possibly useful opinion or relevant comment may never reach the ears of the persons who could explain the matter, say, a reason for a particular decision or rule. Neither will it reach people who could change things for the better based on that comment. There are millions of sarcastic reactions to notes on 19(1)(a)\*\*, but these have a small chance of culminating in a positive outcome. Compare this to a comment on the net, say on a discussion board or a blog-site, where like thinking is fostered as people can come together if they feel similarly on an issue. Thus an idea, a reaction or a comment can gather steam as it moves and possibly, make an impact on the eventual decision makers. Informed choices are possible, and moreover, you know what other people are saying. In fact, it affords us to influence decision-making on *all* issues. The relative ease with which a comment can be dashed off on a computer gives it an edge over putting up a notice or making a public speech. Most of us are quite comfortable voicing our opinions on the net because of the character of the media which has a touch of indirectness or ‘impersonal’-ness associated with it. Discussion on the net allows more news, more views and more vociferous criticism paving the way for asking for changes in a system, in rules, in

tradition and so on.

A case in point is the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore which is a similarly small community in terms of population. I am not sure what the ‘cosmic balance’ of IIMB is like and whether it shows any of the symptoms of the problems sometimes experienced and seen in Law School. However, the internet applications they use for dealing with information, communication and for the organisation of a variety of events and activities are very advanced. We could do well by borrowing a leaf out of their books. IIMB makes use of many different applications. All of them are useful and indispensable. All official communication is sent to the college e-mail addresses, and usually no other media is used to impress it upon the students. The other forum for interaction is the student intranet website called *Spidi* which has a number of useful fields ranging from opinion polls for mess food to checking one’s attendance (‘bunkometer’). Another application, amazing for student communication is called BRacket on the IIM campus, though the software itself is called DBabble and is available for downloading free of cost. The server hosts the software and all others can communicate with each other using the software through the server allowing for instant messaging, conferencing, file transfers and discussions on anything under the sun. Of course IIMB has better infrastructure for this: most importantly, internet in the hostels. Our move should also be to acquire good infrastructure; we too should get internet in the hostels, but even if that can’t happen in the near future, the fact that we are moving towards a situation where everyone has a laptop and can access the internet in the wired areas would mean it won’t make a difference. At any rate, we should make a beginning today, so that our systems can be evolved over time.

The possibilities for Law School with similar systems in place are immense. I will mention a few possibilities by way of example. The way of functioning of the Activity Based Committees (ABCs) may change significantly. Information many a time restricted to members of an ABC can be aired thus providing public access to usually undisclosed, though not secret, information. Members of a particular ABC can interact better through instant messages, discuss ideas beforehand, rather than sit at a meeting and then say that ‘I’ll contact him today’ or ‘I’ll do something about it’. Space for mundane but relevant messages such as SBA (the Student Bar Association) library open at 1:30 or Bus to Ramanagaram (where the Legal Services Clinic-LSC works in assistance with an NGO) at 1:30 would also be available. Minutes of every meeting as well as monthly reports of the ABC’s would also be posted allowing those who are interested to keep track. All important information which should receive public attention such as the Annual Financial Statement from FinanceCom, the Sports Com Schedule or the new rules put up by MCS (the Moot Court Society) would receive greater publicity and can anticipate more animated responses, criticism and creative ideas which would serve well in the long run. Similarly, events such as Consilience or the NLS Debate would definitely achieve quantum leaps in efficient organisation. Further, external contacts, for example, LSC clients can be better contacted, and the solution to their problems discussed on the network. This also allows better networking between *different* ABC’s. Thus there is bound to be an increase in efficiency and net productive activity.

All official communication should be communicated through e-mail as is done in many universities world over. In any event these communications should at least be on e-mail in addition to the traditional circulars or notices. Apart from communication, retention of information is a huge advantage. A set of documents can be put up on the net for easy access. These may include, for example, the NLSIU Act, the DARIC, Code against Sexual Harassment, the prospectus and so on as well as frequently updated information such as the rules governing the Halls of Residence and other rules from the Exam department, results of competitions, time-tables at the beginning of a trimester, fee details, and even answer keys to exams. ControlF searches and other similar advantages should help in finding and using the information easily, once it is available in the soft format.

First years can have a smoother transition if all the information which is repeated so often in huddled circles in the library during the first week of a law school year is put up on a web-site. Thus, even if something missed their attention, they should have the benefit of a backup source of information which is easily accessible and would be available when *they* need it. The same is true for lessons on use of online databases and other research techniques. This is better than hand-outs which may be lost. The other significant advantage is that guides/facilitators can also refer to them once it is put up in a good and complete compilation.

Open forums throw up many serious issues but are invariably killed then and there by referring the matter to some sub-committee, pleading ignorance at the moment or even calling the open forum an inappropriate forum for certain questions. What better forum can exist compared to the web where thoughts can be exchanged beforehand and more importantly, formal questions can be asked to those in charge and answers obtained. This will help challenge any inaction by those responsible as their replies and assurances are recorded in an electronic form on an open forum on the net. Greater accountability and transparency should be the outcome.

Enterprises of the nature of ‘Film Club’ can make use of net resources, once made available and institutionalized. This in turn will encourage more such enterprises as the existence of minimum infrastructure would support them. LLM’s who tend to miss out on some news will have no cause to blame if the system is put in place. Sharing of research material,

information as to who did a similar project before as well as whether a used book is available to be handed down will be possible. The perceived widening gap between teachers and students could perhaps be resolved with the aid of these communication systems to some extent. An SBA teacher evaluation is possible. Alumni can be better contacted, especially for Legala-Strawberry Fields sponsorship if they are registered with the alumni site of NLS. In fact, the list of beneficial uses is endless. I further believe that once we really start using the net within the law school community, it won’t seem amazing or brilliant but it will seem plain convenient. My hope is that all groups and *each and every individual* will be put in a place where they can try and realise their potential ... and more. Many positive things we haven’t even thought about will happen because the internet is such a forum where possibilities are limitless.

The obvious criticism or fear is that it will just be another bitching forum. I refuse to be dissuaded. But I add the caveat that we must guard against such a contingency. My opinion is that the more the aim is to use it productively, the less the familiar bitching will appear. Hence, a trend has to be set where greater use is made for official and serious stuff which preferably reaches and benefits *everyone*. If this can be managed, the cynical and pessimistic predictions will not come true. And although I’ve written this in the context of Law School, any college would benefit by using the internet more.

Greater use of the internet may not be a panacea to all that ails Law School. But it should at least help fight the illness. At any rate it is a step ahead.

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\* Reference to “On leaving Law School” by Arun Sagar, *Quirk*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.  
\*\* The Law School Notice Board which is inspired by the value of Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution which reads “All citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression”.

My thanks to Chandrachud, IIMB.

## The Fisherman’s Dirge

Bite O little fish bite,  
throw aside your usual reticence  
and take my humble offering,  
for I’ve been standing here in the burning sun  
for three hours straight,  
while you’ve been traipsing in the cool waters  
with my bait, shadow-boxing.

Bite O little fish bite,  
surely you can’t have such arrogance?  
My last rice served to you in obeisance  
while your hungry servant and children starving.  
The monsoons will be coming soon  
and still you’re playfully gambolling?

Bite O little fish bite,  
for an old man show some caring.  
Only two tolas of charas left,  
my whole becoming,  
and the bastard off-season tourists cunning  
won’t pay more than 300 per tola running  
for rice and water and clothes and light.  
Pray, my coquette, stop thy humming.

Bite O little fish bite,  
for thirty years my penance holds  
no teeth, no body, no mind, no joy  
but your brothers and sisters have kept coming.  
The sun will be going down soon,  
why do you still shun some sunning?

Bite O little fish bite,  
or my wrath will be terrible!  
My net, Vinayak’s boat, my sons  
will overpower you feeble.

Oh  
But the net is ruined, Vinayak drowned, the sons dead  
forever

my adversary, my joy, my God, my wife,  
is such knowledge in your knowing?

Bite O little fish bite,  
for it will soon be morning.  
I’m hungry, cold, penniless, and dying.  
I need you  
for two cigarettes to keep the charas burning.  
Will you ignore my beseeching vice?  
Ice queen, goddess, my chillum cries  
Bite

Bite O my little fish bite,  
if not, my ghost will soon join your watery night.

ABHAYRAJ NAIK



# Grilling: A History

People liked to fan the flames as high as they would go. They would open up the side door, roll up their sleeves, pick up the plate and set to. The faces they would make; they would grimace, they would suck in air in huge lungfuls and they would speak in a breathless clipped way. Strictly speaking, it was unnecessary except when the fire was being lit. In fact, the best meat comes off the slow fire. It's softer, better done inside and tastes smokier. But they enjoyed it, and everyone enjoyed watching them, the flames licking the grill grease and spitting. So they kept fanning. It was just the way we were.

To really explain the whole thing from the absolute beginning, we need to go back to the first week of the trimester, when we were sitting in DPC. I had just come back from Delhi, fresh and full of ideas. We were done with the paper already, and with the books we had brought to class, and we had sent all the messages to all the people we could, consideration being given to our various balances.

"Vipul, da. I have an idea."  
"hm"  
"Let's barbeque on the terrace"  
"Are you serious? Batman you choot, it's really complicated, and you have to know masalas and all and besides none of us have ever done it and we don't even have a grill"  
"I know how to do it. It's damn simple. We can do it entirely with ingredients from nags. We just need a cheap grill. Shouldn't cost more than some thousand bucks!."

The grill ended up costing us about half of that, and we broke up the price between Vipul, Balu, Parag, Spandan and myself. I remember running into Vipul's room and marveling at the neat little creature as she lay there, Vipul lying on his bed with affected languor and not a little pride.

See, Vipul is like that. He takes ideas as they come, and if they contain *one* plausible germ in them, will run himself into the ground to make them happen. Sometimes I think he enjoys organizing things more than participating therein. His point man in Nagarbhavi was Pradeep, a bear of a man, genial to a fault and well cultivated by Vipul<sup>2</sup>. The grill was actually cut to order for us. In my head, I can see Vipul in the sun holding his hands apart and frowning decisively, explaining what he was looking for.

Four days down the line, we decided to get to it. Money was collected, and a list of desiderata made. That evening, we went to the tiny meat shops up the street in Chandra Layout, where sweaty men blowtorch chickens to tighten them up and dry up the blood. The shop itself was dark and smelly, where concrete and blood hardened wood lived uncomfortably with the colorful calendars on the wall. Buying meat off the block is an acquired ability and it used to take me a little steeling to do it. Now, it's easy.

Down the street, we bought a large orange plastic tub and a knife and tongs and an odd utensil I saw no point to for weeks, but Vipul insisted on vigorously<sup>3</sup>. We bought butter too, in cakes, and curd, and salt and pepper and chilli and fresh mint.

I was as nervous as a priest in a brothel. I had *seen* it done before, but when the implicit trust of a dozen people lies on your shoulders and all you are equipped with is a small bag of packets and an absurdly orange tub, things are different. I sat down in my room and chucked the lot of it into the tub, with an insouciance I did not feel. We ordered more curd, calling Parag frantically and ordering domestic ingredients. I crushed the peppercorns using the bass<sup>4</sup> that decorates my room, using what I call the Pratique Technique. While I was sitting on my floor in my shorts, my hands covered with tactile yellow white marinade, Sarkar was standing near the table in our empty cubie, with two bags of meat, shirtlessly cutting slits in the chicken. Nothing will bring out the butcher instinct in a man like 8 kilos of raw meat and a sharp knife. After I had been upto my elbows in dairy products of variously solid consistency and the meat, it took Rin to take it off, and even then, I felt a little foul.

But, on the roof, there was a breeze and the night was clear and starry, and where we sat, the trees of BU and the outlying land waved symphonically. Amit lit that fire in minutes with a mixture of native ingenuity and practice and what we were later to find out was just astoundingly good luck. *Jugad*.

When the first batch went on, there was a delicious sizzle and the hot black metal first encountered flesh. Sitting there, tongs in hand, lemons ready, shirts off, we were the kings of the world, who had cracked it

and done what no one else had in memory. We were raucous, we were proud, and the meat, when it came off the fire bore up to it. It was a swooning kind of tender and when you bit, there was the satisfying crunch of chunky pepper, and the buttery smoothness. Each of us took turns being grillmaster that night, took calls as to whether the batch on the grill was done, whether it should be turned over.

Frankly, we don't achieve much. We don't work for it. It's incredibly easy to get frustrated at the output you get from such minimal input. When something happens to make us proud, we cherish it. In this place, no one will compliment you unless they have to or they're getting something out of it. Not complimenting people is so ingrained an attitude trait that you can feel it in the air. To survive, you learn pride and you learn confidence. That night we felt both things.

There are pictures of that night, of the delirious joy and brotherhood we felt, of the simple male pleasure of cooking meat for ourselves, a idea carried flawlessly from conception to fruition at the cost of a hundred bucks a head. There's a picture of Spandan,<sup>5</sup> black and sardonic smile lit up by a cigarette inspecting the grill. There's one of all of us sweating together, blissfully. There are pictures of creamy marinated meat, and roasted, pale meat, and the endless flickering flames of the coals.

\*\*\*\*

The next time we grilled, we decided to be more adventurous, and try grilling both chicken and beef off our brave little grill. It was raining in the afternoon, damply threatening to pour all day and night. For awhile, the plans of the morning threatened to not take place when we found ourselves hemmed in, looking out at the almost quava pinkness and the dirty grey of the wet Cauvery walls. It is a peculiar despondency that grips me in the law school afternoon, a feeling that my bones are water, that all things will end now and I only venture back out in the evening.

If Johnson market is one of the best kept meat secrets of Bangalore; the tiny Siddiqui, which has the worlds best grilled *phals*. The *phal* is a thin sliver, like a schnitzel, marinated spicily, pulled off the fire and sliced up expertly, laden with lemon and eaten with thin cakes of rice noodles, like flattened hoppers. It also sells Bombay rolls, long spring rolls filled with chicken or beef and the usual things. Law School discovered it through Vipul's brother, who is a medical student with a bike and the same unhinged audacity that marks our own scion of that family.

Singla and I took Vipul's car to Johnson Market, to buy *phal* slices from the butcher there. It poured all the way and the wipers had conked out. We sat in the car, in the interminable traffic of Mysore Road, under the long trees, and listened to old dance music, with the bass up way too high.

"She's not really hot that way, just, you know, *attractive*, easy to talk to."  
"Don't lie, it's not like you actually *talk* to girls."  
"Dude, it's about all I do."

It rained all the way there, and we nearly lost our way, and at a quarter to seven were staring at the BMTC building in bewilderment, because we *had* taken a right under the flyover; it was obviously just the wrong right.

In Johnson Market, the early hungry were there already, thronging around Siddiqui, where getting food is some part a test of your flexibility and some part your wrestling skill. Up the street were the butchers', a long corridor lit by bulbs hanging from wires off the arched ceiling. On hooks, like brutal works of art, were haunches, were legs, were shoulders, and then inedible things I could not name. Our butcher was a chatty young lad, sitting in his bloodied haven, slapping flesh on his slab and on the scales. It was still raining outside, but drippily, more like a loose faucet than the downpour we had on the way in. We could barely lift the bag when we left.

"I love this flyover. I've been going over it at least once a week for three years. There are so many memories here."  
"I've driven over this flyover at two in the morning, on my bike, with a girl on my back, all alone"

I saw it in my head, the speed, the youth, the rush, the sure knowledge that he was where he was and there was no need to be anywhere else. Singla would remember that flyover as long as he lived.

We returned to law school late that evening, and it was dark in Nagarbhavi, as we cruised down the street, buying potatoes and onions and soya sauce and another tub. My room had at this point taken on the semblance of a storehouse crossed with a butcher's and there were only the more casual vestiges of student life present. I ran the eight kilos of thin beef slices into the bigger tub and carefully massaged them into a single soaking brownish substance, with the ground mint leaves clumping on it.

On the terrace, we discovered that our fire god, the splendid Amit Agrawal had not been able to start a fire after nearly two hours of trying. It had been raining all afternoon and evening, and the air was damp. Huddled into the stairwell, the barbeque and Amit outside valiantly trying to communicate, we waited. People came and people left. There was a Championship league match on and the score floated up to us.

I was never very satisfied with the results of that night. It didn't have the tantric charm of the first session. Far too many critical people came. The conversation clumped into little groups, and there were unpleasant remarks and snide comments. We hadn't left the beef to marinate long enough and it was tough. The grill was small and people were hungry. Technique was being loudly critiqued. *Paisa needed to be vasooled*.

"Arre, haddi pakradi, bhenchod."

Somehow, out of the embers of that disaster, we pulled the remains of a barbeque. After 2 in the morning, only the truly dedicated were left. Looking around the flame, we were one community again, and the dissatisfied had left. They would be dissatisfied elsewhere. They find a way.

Perhaps I am being defensive. The beef was chewy, and I really should have soaked it in vinegar or papaya to soften it up. I found out later from the Shezan Maitre d' that tenderizing it with a meat hammer was the trick I wish I had known then. The chicken was excellent regardless. The potatoes and onions were brilliant when we got the opportunity. Dhruv cut himself often in the process, but there was only an acceptance, a curse, and a hurried cleansing. It was a sharp knife.

Vishal ate what would come to be the most troublesome potato of his life that night, though he didn't know it then. We were extraordinarily careful about it. It did not come near the meat knife. It rested in fresh coals, under a meat free area of the grill-top. He's a strict vegetarian, and he liked it. Until bad things happened.

It was only at five, after so many rounds that the chicken was done and only a few kilos of the beef was left that we disbanded, staggering off the terrace, unable to eat any more. The beef was slipped into a bag, and like everything else, left up top to be dealt with the next day.

I didn't make class. Very few of us did. It was the way we were.

\*\*\*\*

We really fucked up that day. We should just have chucked it, like a booze bottle, into ISEC and let nature and her carrion take care of it. Things were planned, but they were never executed, because we were just that lazy. The grill was cleaned off fondly, the plate washed, and everything returned to my room.

Unfortunately, there was one thing we did nothing with. The two bags of beef, one the leftover stuff and the second the bones and fat we had cut off earlier. It sat there, when people smoked at night. It sat there when people went up to ponder during the day. It was there in the afternoon after class, dull in the sunshine. It sat there like a bad omen.

I wonder often why we did nothing about it. We're not stupid people. It's just that it was part of the way we lived our lives, hoping for unpleasant tasks to be removed to the future, postponed, extended. There were many of us and somebody else would do it. We hoped for it. No one did it. It was the way we were.

Like every omission, we should have seen it coming. One day, the GWC wanted to know why the water was smelling bad and checked the tank. In the tank was a small red bag, opened, and fat and bones, floating and sinking variously.

I found out by chance that day because in the 11:00 break that day, I heard something about a stink in hostel. I finally

decided to go back and chuck it into ISEC for once and for all. Spandan and I sped down the long slope home on Parag's scooter. It wasn't there. There's surely some irony in the fact that I realized first that we were in trouble when a stinking fetid bag of beef was *not* on our terrace.

Before lunch, there were the seven notices on 19(1) (a) from the Second Year batch, hurt and furious and pointing fingers. Soon we heard from everyone the assessment of the public that we were guilty. Messages showed up on phones from our seniors who had graduated. Our reputations had overnight gone to zip. Suddenly, we were defilers of religious sentiment, polluters of water resources, the degraded rich immoral detritus of society<sup>6</sup>, and guilty under fifteen sections of the IPC. Naturally, as is to be expected, people helpfully publicly testified against our characters in public:

"Satyajit and Roshan are perfectly capable of this."

That night at the showcause, in cruel imitation, four of us were grilled at a time by the GWC and the rest of us, twenty-two in all, were left out to marinate. There were lies and there was truth, and they were not the same that night. The problem was that those stupid, over-the-top notices had brought pressure from the administration on the committee to catch someone, fine someone, or refer someone to DARIC. When a matter leaves hostel and goes to the Warden, the Director, or the Exam Department, the nature of inquiry changes. In the Academic block, a vicious kind of justice operates, where only those who are innocent to an improbable extent get away unscathed. There is the waiting, and the carrion-like consultations amongst faculty members, and the advice of the "better" students is sought. It's like mob justice, only less visible. Luckily that hasn't happened to us so far. We all got fined and will split the fines equally, as a community.

It was obvious that it wasn't us. First, most of us were Cauvery dwellers and wouldn't want to bathe in meat water. Second, we would have been the obvious suspects and would have had to be stupid to have done it<sup>7</sup>. Yet, it could not have just fallen in. It had been lifted, by someone who had climbed the 12 foot high platform, into a tank 6 feet above the platform. There is a steel manhole cover on the tank. There are some sick people in Law School.

Immediately, even before the showcauses were held, a notice had appeared banning cooking on the terraces. Grilling in Law School as we knew it had come to an end. Yet another beautiful thing had been removed from the world just as it was coming to be established, because it had come to be known for only its unfortunate, unlikely byproduct. That's the way things are around here. The intelligent, the individual and the creative suffer for that which they create, and that which they stupidly omit. That's just the way things are.

-BATMAN

<sup>1</sup> Bajaj kicked in and said very confidently that it should cost no more than Rs. 150. Bajaj can be incredibly inaccurate and equally confident at the same time. It's a gift.

<sup>2</sup> Pradeep also helped the Batch of 2007 Mid Law School Party happen.

<sup>3</sup> I later found out it was a device specifically intended for melting butter over a small flame. Oddly, it was very, very helpful.

<sup>4</sup> No Pickups, body scratched as hell, rusted strings and switches but beautifully and boldly red, a bittersweet reminder of the things I cannot be.

<sup>5</sup> Spandan is one of the few of us with any initiative. One day, he came up to me looking fierce and determined. I was worried.

"I've had enough of this bullshit. That's it." I gawked.

"It's gotten too much for me. Things have got to change."

I continued gawking. He firmly placed a Milds in the corner of his mouth and lit it in one fluid movement.

"From now on". Exhale. "I am going to be a *complete* wastrel."

As far as I can tell, the only change is that Spandan now smokes more expensive cigarettes.

<sup>6</sup> One notice said just about that.

<sup>7</sup> I swear. We really aren't. Not *that* stupid.



1

Something weird happened to me today. Actually, I am not sure if it was today as I have completely lost track of time. I think it has been more than four days since I slept. Of course, the ten minutes of passing out into unconsciousness here and there doesn't count as sleep. Does it?

My insomnia has watered the seeds of an unnamed feeling. Something inside me is different. Something inside me is making me feel too many things all at once. I can't put my finger on what it is. The obscurity of my inner self is getting to me.

I needed to get out. I needed to step outside of myself. That is exactly what I decided to do.

With the last thread of sanity in my pocket and a Rs. 500 note, I left home. After riding aimlessly for a few minutes, I decided to go to the coffee shop. From the looks of it, the coffee business was doing great. I scanned the area for a seat. Fortunately, the couple sitting towards the corner left.

The owner of the coffee shop was severely understaffed. There were only two waiters to serve the entire crowd. Unlike my usual self, I didn't lose my patience when the waiter took his time. Instead, I decided to survey the coffee shop. It amazes me how these coffee shops attract so many people. I guess it's the 'cool' tag that makes business so easy.

Its easy money provided certain things are taken care of. Firstly, the location of the café. The closer it is to a school or a college, the better. Secondly, the ambience and interiors. The key is to make the café look *cool*, so that the young minds can have their custom-made movie scenes with the café as the backdrop.

A jukebox, mirrors, stylish couches, stylish coffee mugs, graphic displays...they all add to the coolness.

Thirdly...

"Good afternoon, sir, what can I get for you?"  
I wasn't expecting company....  
I glanced at the giant menu on the wall, facing the waiter's back.

"One Deluxe Cappuccino and a chicken sandwich."  
"Sorry, sir, we are out of chicken sandwiches."  
"Do you have chicken burger?"  
"Yes, sir. We do."  
"One chicken burger then."  
"Ok, I'll repeat the order sir. It's one Deluxe Cappuccino and a chicken burger. Right?"  
"Yes."

He disappeared into the sea of waiting tables. I failed to recollect what I was thinking before I was interrupted. My mind needed rest. I had been thinking too much over the past few days. Nothing had come of it. The unnamed feeling came gushing back to me. I felt strange. I felt sad.

I decided to do what I had been trying to do over the past few days.....to write.

The idea machine had broken down. All attempts to fix it have been futile.

It was beginning to.....

"Can I take this chair please?"  
Caught off guard, I took a second to reply.  
"Sure."

The guy who asked for the chair was greeted with a smile, on his return to the table by two of his friends, one female and one male. The female was cute. Our eyes met for a brief second and I thought she smiled at me, most probably for the chair.

The three of them looked very alive and were soon deep in conversation about

something I failed to overhear. Probably they were discussing a movie or probably they were old friends, meeting after a long time.

All of a sudden, the Idea Machine kicked into action.

*Oh, fuck, it's simple, Hemanth... Just observe these people and make stories for them. Let these people be your characters. Paint their worlds with your words.*

Grand idea...finally something worthwhile.

*Here goes nothing.....*

*Two guys, one girl and a coffee shop. I take one quick look at the three of them. They are still locked in conversation. I begin painting.....*

The girl looks like a Nafisa. The guy who asked for the chair is Ritesh and the other guy is Siddarth. They have known each other since childhood.

*Dead end. Too clichéd...New characters please, and please avoid the naming ceremony.*

I look around trying not to make my intentions obvious. Since most people don't like being under the lens.

Just when I thought, the auditions were turning out to be fruitless. I spotted one guy sitting by himself to my right. One peek at him and I was convinced I had found my hero.

He looked dull and lost. Here is his story.....

*Once again, here goes nothing.*

Today is his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. He is tired... He has lost every fight that life has picked with him. He has witnessed his dreams die before his eyes. He is lonely. He very often thinks about all that he wanted to do with his life.

He wanted to be an artist.

At the crossroads of his life, he made the society's choice. He chose plan B. He was too weak to break the strings that his family and society had tied him down with. He regrets not taking the risk, the risk of doing what he wanted to do most. He chose life over his dream. Wrong choice. Wrong fucking choice.....

With the transition from boyhood to manhood came his biggest enemy. Low self-confidence...it was his weakness, his curse, his disease. The knock out punch came when he stood with the two choices he had as a young graduate, one in each hand (write some competitive exam and study further and get a job OR join film school, write scripts and make movies).

He looked at the right choice and chose the wrong hand.

He didn't have enough self-belief to make the right choice. He was too weak now to give up everything and start afresh. He didn't have the strength to face the same demons all over again.

Soon the bottle of sleeping pills would become his saviour.

2

"Sir..... Sir..... Are you ok? ...Can you hear me?"  
I opened my eyes to find a mob of people around me with the waiter kneeling by my side. I felt tiny drops of water on my face. It sent a chill down my spine.

"What happened to me?" I asked.

"I came to serve your order and found you frozen in front of the mirror.....and you collapsed all of a sudden.....are you ok, sir?"

"Yeah.....I think I will be fine."

Quirk: Unveiling Edition 4

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, and grappled with 'The Artist and the Critic' in May–June. In our newest avatar, we present: **'My Place in Anarchy.'**

Writing for Quirk: The September-October 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 September–October edition of Quirk is **'NEW MORALITIES.'** The flexible deadline for submissions is **October 17<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

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