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# Nēthrā

A non-specialist journal for lively minds



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES, COLOMBO

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**Nēthrā**

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**Devika Brendon** runs English Only, a private English college in Sydney, where she teaches a diverse range of students preparing for the University Entrance Exam. She has written poems and short stories which have been published internationally, and won prizes for her poetry and short fiction. She is currently working on her first novel, 'Largesse'.

**Sivagnanam Jeyasankar** is the Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Arts, Department of Fine Arts, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

**Sunela Jayawardene** is an Environmental Architect who spends her free time exploring the wilds of Sri Lanka, with her husband and two daughters.

**Shane Joseph** a Sri Lankan born Canadian has only recently taken to creative writing. He writes about the migratory experience with such honesty that he is bound to follow in the footsteps of other, illustrious, Sri Lankan born Canadian writers.

**Carl Muller** is Sri Lanka's best known writer. With an enormous corpus of literature to his credit, the indefatigable Muller writes as though a pen is never far from his hand. *Wedding Night* is his most recent collection of short stories published in 2007. Mullers work is not only widely read, he has won several awards for his work and is the biggest draw in literary circles.

**Anura Saparamadu** is a teacher of English as a second language and an inveterate writer. In all likelihood, he is Sri Lanka's only travel writer. His first book, and as he claims 'prolly my last' will be launched in the first quarter of 2008.

**Roman Skaskiw** grew up in New York City. He completed an undergraduate degree in computer science at Stanford University. He is currently a fiction student at the Iowa Writer's Workshop.

**Tanya Uluwitiya** is currently working as an Assistant Lecturer of the Department of English of the University of Kelaniya. Her research interests focuses on female writers of fiction and poetry with a special interest in the Post-colonial female writer.

I took on the role of editor in 2004 inheriting the mantle from the late great Regi Siriwardene. But I have been associated with the International Centre of Ethnic Studies long before that, from 1989 to be precise. It was more than a place of employment, it was more than a job. It became throughout my involvement with them a home, a friendship, a haven, a university, a world. Similarly *Nethra* was more than a journal. It was a sounding board, a conversation, a debate, an information bank. And all this was long before I even dreamt I would become the editor of *Nethra*. Under Regi, *Nethra* thrived and flourished and became a name. I in retrospect had the easy job, to continue what he began yet to mark it with my own stamp. I think I did it.

So, it is with great sadness that I now write my last editorial.

Both *Nethra* and the ICES stood for something during a time when creative and intellectual stimulation was hard to come by. Today we have a whole generation of thinkers, artists, writers and activists who have sheltered under the umbrella of the ICES, who debated with Regi, Neelan, Sunil Bastian, Jayadeva Uyangoda, and Radhika Coomaraswamy among many others.



*Nethra* has featured the writings of the finest minds, both academic and creative under Regi's editorship. When Radhika requested that I take it over I was frankly overwhelmed and scared. Today looking back at *Nethra's* journey of growth, I am proud to have been associated with it.

For my swan song as editor I have decided to close the year with an issue that highlights creative writing in English. Only one of the authors is American, the rest are Sri Lankan or of Sri Lankan heritage. The pieces presented here reflect a diverse examination of life and the world around us. While one piece, a poem by S. Jeyasankar reflects the conflict that exists in Sri Lanka, the rest of the pieces are firmly located in Sri Lankan fiction reflecting the culture, language, traditions and idiosyncracies that pervade our life.

So dear readers I wish you a wonderful New Year and leave you with a poem by Kabir.

*Tell me, O Swan, your ancient tale.  
From what land do you come, O Swan? To what shore will you fly?  
Where would you take your rest, O Swan, and what do you seek?*

*Even this morning, O Swan, awake, arise, follow me!  
There is a land where no doubt nor sorrow have rule: where the  
terror of Death is no more.  
There the woods of spring are a-bloom, and the fragrant scent "He  
is I" is borne on the wind:  
There the bee of the heart is deeply immersed, and desires no  
other joy.*

## THE LITMUS TEST

*Asitha Ameresekere*

The first rays of Monday morning's sun gracefully illuminated Rajasingha's broad bald head, causing him to stir from sleep. He blinked, glanced at the porcelain clock hanging above the mirror, and smiled. Five thirty. How wonderful a cup of tea would be now.

Bandula shuffled through the bedroom door with a cup of plain tea.

"Good morning, sir!" the old servant shouted into his master's ear as he slammed the cup onto the bedside table. Rajasingha shut his eyes and mouth leaving only his abused ears to monitor the cripple's exit. The short heavy panting was punctuated by the wooden leg scraping the floor, a footstep, then scraping, until finally the door shot sharply into its lock.

Rajasingha exhaled. Thank God that buffoon's gone, he thought. On mornings like this, he seriously considered giving his servant another mahogany leg to match the existing one. He looked again at the clock. Five thirty-two. He'd let the sun warm his head for three more minutes, then get up. He was not an idle man and no devil would make a workshop out of him. There was work to be done. The fair began in less than thirteen hours.

At exactly six o'clock he was at the breakfast table. His spotless shirt matched his spotless trousers and both were colour co-ordinated with his socks and shoes. A gold-edged watch circled his wrist. Sterling silver links secured his cuffs. A matt-black pen hung in his shirt pocket, perfectly straight.

He was ready for breakfast.

He stared at the bare wall before him, then at his watch, then at the bare wall again. Where was the idiot? How long did it take to boil a three minute egg? Three minutes, one would presume. He had never had any trouble with his eggs before, none at all. It was important for the egg to be eaten at the correct time. Rajasingha had come to appreciate the energy-releasing qualities of the six o'clock egg, the gun start it gave to the blood circulation, the buzz it shocked the fringes of the brain with. It didn't matter in what state one ended the day, one always began it with an egg. So what had happened? Had the fool been hit by a passing lorry while chasing a pregnant chicken across a road?

The pantry door slammed open into the drinks cabinet. Rajasingha's doubts vanished as his servant hobbled towards him carrying a large tray with an even larger lid on it. His eyes widened as the ship descended on the table. Soon its lone passenger would begin a very different journey, he thought, now glaring at the lid almost willing it to fly off and reveal its stowaway. It was the same tray and lid his servant had carried in through that door every day for seventeen years, and in all that time there lay under that lid the same item: a solitary three minute egg.

Bandula lifted the lid.

"Lot of pology, sir. No egg today. Only pineapple."

Sure enough, there on the tray was a sorry slice of pineapple. Rajasingha closed his eyes. It was going to be a bad day.

With the morning papers read, Rajasingha rested in his easy chair located in the corner of his spacious study. This was his personal domain, a room no one could enter except for his students and himself. Its door was locked even to Bandula and for this reason a thick layer of dust covered the floor and furniture. Rajasingha didn't mind because in this room even the dust seemed dignified.

He glanced at his watch. Eight fifty-six. A quick flick through his diary and he'd know who would be sitting at his desk

at nine: Fernando. Ah Fernando, he thought. A good solid boy who never missed the middle stump. Of course his personal pronouns were atrocious but given time, that too would be as accurate as his bowling.

The doorbell shook the tutor from his thoughts and a few seconds later a young man appeared at the study door.

"Good morning, sir!" he bellowed wearing a broad, toothy smile and a loud yellow, green and shocking pink tee shirt. He was a tall lad whose ferocious appetite had encouraged the swelling of a small potbelly. He had a chubby face with ears that flapped whenever there was a strong wind; a trait some old women in the village felt was a lucky one to have. Rajasingha simply thought it a product of nature's more humorous side.

"Hello Fernando. You're early."

"Yes! You couldn't wait to come!" he beamed.

"You mean, *you* couldn't wait to come."

"Yes sir, that is what he said," he replied sitting at the leather-topped desk.

The hour progressed with the speed of a packed, lop-sided bus crawling up the Kandy road. Howler followed howler as Fernando struggled with the basics of the English language, sweating copiously and constantly drying his fat fingers on his trousers. His tutor on the other hand was perfectly dry.

"So finish the composition for next week and learn those past irregulars. You'll thank me in later life," Rajasingha concluded and closed the textbook quietly.

"Yes sir! No problems sir! She will be doing those things, sir!" the student paused, fiddling with his pencil. Rajasingha sensed a question being carefully constructed in the boy's mind. He hoped the tenses would be consistent.

"Sir? Er... is Dilshani coming to the fair tonight?" The words fell awkwardly from his mouth and managed to cover all ranges of pitch.

"Why do you ask?" The tutor's voice hadn't altered but he knew he had come to the point of the lesson.

"I... I was thinking, that's all. I was thinking if you were going."

"I'm not going."

"No, er... is *he* going?"

"Who?"

"Dilshani. Is... is Dilshani going?"

Rajasingha savoured the terrifying pause that followed while his pupil writhed and suffered under his expressionless stare like a leech in salt. It was cruel, he knew, but necessary. All prospective suitors had to pass the litmus test in order to continue through to the next stage. The burning question now was which colour would Fernando turn?

"I don't think Dilshani will be going to the fair tonight. Same time next week or do you want an earlier lesson?" enquired Rajasingha flicking through his diary. From the corner of his eye he noticed Fernando frantically throwing nouns and verbs together like a desperate cook. He had reached the point where correct sentence structure was of no importance and general sense was everything. The boy's eyes suddenly lit up.

"I can fit you in on Friday at eleven," lied Rajasingha looking blankly at the 'Tuesday' page. "Or are you otherwise engaged? Hmm?"

Fernando turned yellow.

"Er... no, sir. Thank you. Next week, em, Monday. Thank you, sir. Good... goodbye, sir." He almost tripped over the rug as he hurried out of the door.

A lesser man would have been ashamed of himself but Rajasingha was more than that. He had seen too many young men sit at his desk and attempt to climb the heady heights of English grammar - only to fall like moths from a burning bulb - to have his conscience mauled at by guilt. When the pride of an eager young man was scratched, it seemed to hurt forever but would be forgotten in a week. An old man however, once stung, would endure the pain for the remainder of his days.

Ten twenty-two. Eight minutes to - a flick through the pages - de Silva. Now there was a boy with a head on his shoulders. An 'A' student with an inclination towards anything artistic. He would never fail to bring his latest offering of poetry or a sketch of some distant imaginary land or mythical creature to the class and sit awaiting his tutor's comments, quietly quivering with anticipation. He had been gifted with the looks of an artist: wavy black hair and a chiselled facial bone structure grandmothers dream about caressing. If he weren't a mere mortal residing in a village outside Tangalle, he'd be a god on the dizzy Olympian heights dining on life-giving ambrosia and heavenly nectar.

"Good morning, sir. I am in the paddy field."

Sadly, he had a problem with his tenses.

"Oh? And what *were* you doing in the paddy fields?"

Rajasingha corrected subtly, waving him into Fernando's sweaty seat.

"I am looking at the colours in the paddy field for my painting. I will be doing a sketch." He produced the sketch from among his textbooks.

Rajasingha laid the paper flat on the desk and examined the drawing. Even with dubious perimeters and no colour apart from the grey of the pencil, the scene glowed with life, pulling the old man's mind into a place blooming with cows, crows and rice. How wonderful a sketch this was, he thought. How wonderful an artist de Silva was. How wonderful a match he'd be for...

"When it is finished I have presented it to my fiancée."

The paddy field spell snapped.

"Fiancée? What fiancée?" He stared at his pupil's inane smile. One he recognised from the countless boys all smitten by his one and only daughter. This fiancée simply had no place in the equation.

"We will be planning it for months sir, and now finally I can sing it to the world!" The boy looked as if he would take flight there and then. His tutor by contrast felt nailed to his chair.



"Congratulations. What's her name?" he managed.

"Oh it was a beautiful name, sir," beamed de Silva. "She was called Dilshani, but I am calling..."

"Dilshani?" cried Rajasingha. A dozen mixed emotions fluttered in and out of his mind.

"Yes sir, Dilshani Pereira. Did you know her?"

Rajasingha sighed with relief at the surname then suddenly remembered the tense.

"What? Is she dead?"

"Dead?" de Silva sprang to his feet. "But I will be talking to her this morning!"

The old man sat back in his chair, breathed out heavily and motioned his student to sit.

"We really must do something about your tenses, son." He opened his book to the present continuous. "So I suppose you'll be going to the fair with her tonight, hmm?" he asked quietly.

"I was looking forward to it, sir."

"Well have a good time."

"We did, sir, we did."

After de Silva had flown away, Rajasingha ordered his eleven thirty-five tea. As he waited for Bandula to run to the nearest plantation, he dreamed his eleven thirty-five dream. It was a beautiful vision full of flowers and music and exotic fragrances and brides and grooms. The wedding would be splendid and no expense would be spared. This was a wedding the village would *never* forget and neither would Dilshani. Having said that, weddings weren't among Rajasingha's deck of cards. He had always left that to his wife's department, somewhat foolishly assuming that she would live to see her daughter happily settled, or simply settled at any rate. So the onus had fallen upon his shoulders and there it would stay until a suitable boy appeared and joyfully welcomed the burden. If Atlas could transfer the weight of the world to Heracles, reasoned Rajasingha, then why couldn't he himself do the same to some unsuspecting lad? And where was that tea?

The tea arrived with Bandula accompanied by a tray of goodies.

"Do you want to see my goodies, sir?" asked the beaming servant craftily holding the tray just out of his master's line of vision.

"Bring it here then."

He dropped the tray below Rajasingha's nose and rotated it slowly so as to give him a sniff of each offering.

"My tray has many goodies, no? Will you be liking this angel cakey or this pocolate cakey, sir?"

"I'll have the poco... chocolate cake, thank you," he answered wrenching an uneven black lump from the tray.

"Eat and later tell me, sir," Bandula swivelled on his stump and left.

Rajasingha peered warily at the mass in his hand. He was half tempted to full toss it straight through the window and watch it split the money tree outside clean in two, which no doubt it would. Instead he laid it on the desk for the ants to shatter their teeth on.

Eleven fifty-three. Bundi Mendis would be plodding up the garden path in seven minutes. Every one called him "Bundy" because he was not a slight young man. Everything about him was big: big arms, big legs and above all, a big stomach which extended all the way around to his back. Personality-wise, he was as jovial as a mustang on Stag Night, always cracking terrifyingly inappropriate jokes and butting into as many conversations in a room as possible just to ensure that his presence was felt. He was a good all-rounder, thought Rajasingha. And very well connected.

"... So I gave the poor chap a small money and said him to go and come. Then I came here straight and narrow," finished Mendis leaving his tutor to place the facts of the tangled story into some sort of coherent order. In the end he gave up and opened the textbook.

"Fascinating, Mendis. Shall we?"

After blundering through the lesson with the elegance of a flu-stricken rhino, Mendis eventually established the difference between 'enough' and 'too' and mopped his sweaty brow.

"Can I have a water please sir?" he asked feverishly.

"Just water?" said Rajasingha turning a page, "Or will you be needing a glass as well?"

Mendis slapped his forehead with his palm.

"Ah yes, yes, sorry, sorry! A *glass* of water, please."

Rajasingha poked his head round the door and called Bandula. When he sat down he prepared the litmus.

"And which lucky lady has the pleasure of your company tonight at the fair, hmm?" he asked without looking up.

There was no response. He looked at Mendis' wide grin and then at the small black crumb clinging to his chin. He glanced at Bandula's half-eaten chocolate offering ... half-eaten? Ants don't move that fast, he thought, noticing the subtle movements of Mendis' jaw.

"I hope it isn't *too* hard for your palate. Another bite, perhaps?"

Mendis whipped the glass from the tray as soon as Bandula entered with it, drained the water and rushed to the door.

"No, sir, I've had enough, thank you," and with that he was gone. Just as well, thought Rajasingha. Litmus tests required empty stomachs.

The afternoon dragged on with boys arriving and departing the Rajasingha residence like patients at the local dental surgery, each satisfied with the treatment for their ailment. As for the dentist's complaint, he could find no relief. There were only so many tests one could conduct in a day.

At two o'clock, Peiris came in for his dosage. He was a short stocky lad with a phlegmy lisp who had difficulty with prepositional phrases. He was going to the fair, but with his mother. A negative litmus result.

Three ten. Ratnayake. Well-mannered, shy and adequate in the looks department. Continued an on-going struggle with phrasal verbs. Would like to go to the fair but felt too unconfident to ask permission from his parents. The paper turned yellow: unsatisfactory.

Four zero-three. Gamage. Ridiculously tall and skinny but chatty, if slightly confused at times. Had never understood irregular past participles and probably never would. Wasn't going to the fair because his only pair of trousers had shrunk in the wash. No points for organisation.

Five twelve. Dias. Thin, walked at an angle of forty-five degrees and was incapable of making a decision. Found countable and uncountable nouns baffling. Couldn't decide whether to go to the fair or not. A litmus disaster.

At six fifteen Rajasingha lay back in his chair and rested his eyes. Damn, he thought. Another day had gone. The cream of the village had passed through his doors. The fair started in fifteen minutes.

No hope lay in his last pupil for the day. Manju Weerakoon was highly motivated, intelligent and genial. Unfortunately he was only twelve. And late. Rajasingha tapped his nails on the desk to an old tune and let his mind wander once more to his dream, now blurred and hazy. He didn't even notice the knock on the door.

"Excuse me sir." The words came from a tall, sharp-featured young man who looked remarkably similar to...

"I'm Jayantha Weerakoon, Manju's brother," he announced in a soft husky voice. Rajasingha sat up, still half-immersed in the dream. "My brother sends his apologies for not coming to your class today. He's ill with a fever." Rajasingha wanted those last two sentences repeated: they flowed into his ears like honey, not a drop of grammatical blood spilt. How could it be that this stranger could speak such mellifluous English while most of his own pupils not only murdered the Queen's tongue on a daily basis, but several other royal members too?

"He wanted to know whether you could teach him this Friday perhaps, that is, if he gets better." Yes Friday, thought Rajasingha almost deliriously. Friday, Saturday, even Sunday would do!

"Fine," he croaked.

"Alright sir, I'll tell him. Thank you, sir. Goodnight."

Rajasingha suddenly tuned into the situation and scrambled for the litmus apparatus before the young man turned away.

"Em, you're not going to the fair tonight by any chance, are you?"

Jayantha Weerakoon looked back.

"Yes, sir. I am. See you there." And then with a flash of his smile, he disappeared into the glow of the evening sun.

The old man sat on the edge of his chair for a moment, pondering the last couple of minutes, then realised that the paper had not been pulled out. He hurried to the porch only to find the lone stranger already halfway down the garden path. Damn, he thought. Damned fish got away.

Suddenly the fish turned briefly and waved. Rajasingha's hand shot up automatically to return the gesture. But it was only after a full five second salute that he realised that the wave was not directed at himself. The net curtain of the front bedroom of his house dropped sharply. Light dawned on him as he sat down on the veranda and waited.

Six twenty-three. He tapped the old tune out on the chair-arm and stared at the setting sun. He'd give her three minutes. The orange light filled the porch. He closed his eyes but still felt the beams penetrate through to his brain. The dream gradually began to take shape again, no longer burred but clear and bright, the flowers and characters now coming into focus. It was a lovely sight.

Six twenty-nine. All these days, no, years, he had prepared and conducted the test with virtually the same result. Today he realised that he was not the only handler of litmus paper. Why hadn't his wife told him about all these things before?

At six thirty he opened his eyes and looked straight up at his daughter's face. How wonderful she looked in that white linen dress surrounded by the unreal light of the sun. Her dark brown eyes passed a message of desperation to him, one which he hadn't seen before, but somehow knew exactly what it meant.

"You want to go to the fair, Dilshi?"

Her eyes smiled and she nodded.

"Let's go then." And at that moment, more than any other in his life, he wanted to hear her voice, something he had never heard.

Anyway, miracles didn't happen overnight, thought Rajasingha escorting his daughter down the path. At least, they didn't happen in a little village outside Tangalle.

But there was always tomorrow.

## THE LAST PAVILION

*Suncla Jayawardene*

At the time  
Long shadows slice the forests  
And the Nightjars call to the night...  
I found in a tangle of vines  
Worn and wasted  
Stone steps rising high!  
I paused... As,  
at dusk in these jungles  
Bear and elephant will arise  
But  
The stone steps seemed  
To slip beneath my tired feet  
Carry me...Until  
below  
The forest canopy spread  
Shivering  
Bronze and glossy  
To some distant strains  
Drifting down  
On a sunset breeze...  
And the steps climbed on  
Thin and winding  
And reached up and over  
Where the face of weathered rock



*Ancena Hussain*

Bowed down to be blessed  
By the sky.

I stood with the sky behind me  
And before me  
Broken stone and deep, dark waters.  
Columns still stood  
Clearly defined  
Long ago  
Lost pavilions  
Pools and courtyards...  
That the steps had led me to.  
I stood beside that water  
And sourced the gentle strains

Music that lifted and hurried...  
The rhythm was matched  
By tapping  
Of so many  
*salamba* shod feet!  
That kept the beat  
Of some forgotten land.  
And between the blooming lotus  
Reflected in the pools  
I saw,  
Between the roofless columns  
Like wraiths...  
Bronzed shoulders and fine cotton draped  
Clasped with gold worked buckles...sabers clipped  
loose  
Across loins.  
I whirled around  
And watching my every move...

The men leaned indolently  
The women smiled...aloof.

Gleaming arms reached and twisted  
As they danced in the light of the lamps  
Brass hung heavy and smoky  
Sweet scents  
Camphor, Agar, Sandalwood.  
The light caught in shards  
Highlighted  
Ears hanging heavy with jeweled hoops,  
And golden lotus petals  
That lay upon  
Oiled, glistening breasts  
Painted shawls  
Stretching and unwinding  
Jasmine garlands in their hair  
I heard laughter  
Gentle whispers  
Invitations in deep timbre  
Wet footsteps from the pools...  
Shadows entwined in lesser courtyards  
Beneath  
The sliver of moon  
And a million stars were witness.

But already  
They were dipping  
Beyond the pavilions and pools...  
A sunrise promise  
Rose and silver  
Was lining the forest mantle

That spread to the farthest horizon  
In a still  
Unblemished land.  
And as the long shadows reappeared...  
A single lotus was forgotten  
As, hurrying  
The warriors gathered  
Rested spears and flaming torches  
The women  
The garlands and shawls  
And beckoned  
For I had followed...  
And we rode  
On an icy dawn breeze  
To a world of  
Dreams and sorrow.

Fiction

## DO THEY SHOOT DOGS IN CANADA?

*Shane Joseph*

Martin James' brother Paul was born two days after Easter in 1961. Martin remembered the strange antiseptic smell of the hospital when they visited Mum and the baby; and the smell hovered over the infant even when Paul was brought home, despite the talcum powder and lotions they poured over him. Paul's arrival saw his parents shift focus from Martin, until then, their only child; they looked distracted, for the baby was colicky at night. They quarrelled – Dad even slept in the spare room as he had to go to work the next day and Mum cried often, as she lulled Paul to sleep and stuck a sucked out breast in the little bugger's mouth. Martin didn't like Paul much and couldn't understand why everyone fussed over him. Even Dad stopped reading Martin his favourite western comics at bedtime. Dad had stopped reading comics altogether – his one pastime. He was so busy.

When they took the baby over to Grandma's for the official "showing" after the Christening, Jess, the Alsatian, had just littered again. Jess' litter varied, as different dogs crept over the fence to mate during her heat periods. The pups were golden hued this time, and one particularly lively fellow caught Martin's attention.

"I want to take him home," Martin cradled the pup and announced firmly to the shrinking pool of aunts and uncles who were cooing and passing Paul around like a rare commodity. Many extended family members who had already emigrated to Australia or Canada would never see Paul, and others in the room but 'in process', would probably see him just this once.



Dad looked up embarrassed and stared at his older son. "Let's talk about it later."

"No, I want him today," Martin said, barely holding back his tears.

Grandma stepped into the fray. "Oh, let him have one, child. I was going to put those creatures to sleep anyway. Jess is a puppy factory; the pups grow up and come back to mate with her and it goes on and on..."

So, as Mum and Dad cuddled Paul in the taxi, Martin petted the little pup in his arms, naming it Goldie before they got home.

Goldie grew up fast – it ran everywhere and followed Martin all the time, at first not quickly enough to keep pace, but catching up by the day. The James' lived in the Buddhist temple town of Kelaniya, a few miles outside the capital city Colombo. Their home was a townhouse down Perera Gardens, a large estate thick with tropical vegetation. Fifteen rental units occupied the estate: small two and three-bedroom bungalows. The road running through Perera Gardens was sandy and the houses, ringed lawns on which large coconut trees spouted. This was Martin's, and now Goldie's, stomping ground.

During the dry season, Martin took his bicycle rim out daily, propelling it with a well worn stick lodged into the crevice running through its circumference. He ran through the estate, weaving in and out of the trees. The trick was not to let the rim run away or fall down, despite twigs, cow dung and stones littering the route. With the wind flapping behind him, the familiar confines of the estate were comforting: amused glances from neighbours going about their household chores, smells of curry as he neared kitchens, or of smoke when someone was incinerating garbage. As a six-year old, he could roam about freely and so it didn't bother him, as it did his parents, to be a Christian in a garden full of non-Christians. This became his and Goldie's routine for the next six months. In that time, the puppy emerged into a full grown dog and soon it was Martin who had trouble keeping pace.

Martin ignored Paul and Seetha the ayah, who carried the baby whenever she was through with her housework. Seetha was an "old maid" and had no children of her own. Paul had suddenly become "her child" and at times she would even shoo Martin away from the baby. After all, Martin could never be one of hers, because she had come to work at the James household only last year.

Martin yearned for the long walks his mother would take him on outside the estate before Paul arrived, for the stories she read him on those walks when they would sit under the shade of the coconut grove where the Kelani River skirted the southern end of Perera Gardens. She had been an English teacher briefly, before she married and stayed home to raise the children. Her favourite books were Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Martin was captivated by the courage of Hector and Paris, but Odysseus was his real hero. However, Mum could not do any of that any more on account of being busy with the baby. Thus Goldie became Martin's sole focus, since everyone else had sidelined him.

One day, when Seetha was out in the garden watering the cannas, keeping an eye on Paul kicking and sucking his rattle on the blanket spread on the lawn, Goldie ambled over, sniffed and drooled on the baby. Seetha dropped the hose and screamed at the dog. She threw a twig at it, at which point Goldie snapped at her viciously. Part of her frustration, Martin realized, was that the dog had been active in the garden recently and had pissed on the plants several times. The ayah kicked out in surprise, spewing her broken English. "Ayyo! What happened this dog? Biting now, hah?"

Martin quickly sprang to Goldie's aid, fearing Seetha might stone it next, like she had Gunadasa's dog, when the old widowed accountant watched her bathing at the well in her *diyareddah* one day. On that occasion, Martin stumbled on her soaping herself slowly and deliberately under the wet cloth, while the accountant grinned by the fence and his dog barked as if in heat. Upon seeing Martin, Seetha quickly dropped her hands, picked up a stone and hurled it at Gunadasa's dog, shouting, "*Para Balla!*" while the accountant shuffled off, smiling.

Now, as Martin pulled Goldie away from Seetha, he sensed the agitation in the animal. It roared and snarled and dribble was thick on its tongue. That night it barked a lot and Dad got up several times shouting "That bloody dog! What the hell has got into it?"

The next morning, Martin found Goldie with a thick ring of foam around its mouth. It had run about the house in the night drooling on everything. Seetha rushed out of the kitchen where she slept on her mat at night, shouting, "Aney – *pissu balla!*"

"My dog isn't mad!" Martin protested, but Mum had an alarmed look on her face and locked Paul up in her room. Goldie was tied to the coconut tree by the well in the back garden for the rest of the day, where it howled and frothed even more.

That evening, the neighbours, led by old Gunadasa himself, came in procession to the James house to say that they couldn't put up with a mad dog in the estate and could the James' "please do something about it."

"What the hell do you want me to do, Gune?" Dad yelled. He'd just cycled home from another gruelling day at his job as a clerk in the city, after scouring the shops for a particular brand of powdered milk for Paul, the only kind the infant could digest.

"Must put it to sleep or take to the vet or something, no?" Gunadasa looked at the rest of the sombre looking neighbours who nodded in unison.

"There is no vet in Kelaniya. I'll have to take the animal into Colombo. Can you give me a lift in your car?"

"Are you mad, James – with a mad dog inside?"

"Then you'll have to wait 'til I have the time to do this. I've got other priorities – like finding milk for the baby. There was only one tin available today. This bloody country is going to the dogs with all this import control bullshit."

"Well, we've warned you." The neighbours nodded sadly.

The next morning a dead rat was found floating in the James' well and the water was undrinkable.

"Bloody cowards!" said Dad.

"They are trying to tell us something, Victor," Mum said.

"I suppose I'll have to wring that dog's neck and give them the carcass as proof."

"No – don't hurt Goldie," Martin interrupted, almost choking on his jam sandwich. "Goldie is sick. You take Paul to the doctor all the time – why not Goldie?"

"Because animals are not equal to humans." Dad said and shut off further discussion.

Goldie's condition worsened. At night, Martin stole in food for the animal, now moved into the spare room and chained to the bed in deference to the neighbours. There was frothy spittle, urine and feces all over as the animal had no way to "go outside". And a terrible smell of something rotting; like meat in the open-air market at the end of a hot day. Seeing his master, Goldie stopped barking and took on a plaintive look that convinced Martin the animal was not mad, perhaps ill – just like Paul was, with colic periodically.

Things got serious when Seetha's mother Kodagamage Margaret Nona arrived on the scene. Martin did not like Margaret, with her blood red mouth and missing teeth; she chewed betel incessantly and spewed forth indiscriminate streams of crimson spit wherever she settled. Therefore, Mum never invited her into the house. Margaret would sit by the well and boast about how well her seven daughters were doing, employed as domestics in various homes, and how she visited each one monthly to check on working conditions. "I guarantee my daughters will not have illicit love affairs, unwanted pregnancies – none of that," Margaret constantly reminded Mum. Today, however, she was in a different mood, Martin observed, hovering in the vicinity.

"My daughter will need twenty-one injections in the stomach," Margaret said with finality, raising her sari and squatting on the back porch after listening to Seetha's recounting of recent events. She spoke in Sinhala, placing Mum, with her comfort for the patois English of the Dutch Burghers, at an immediate disadvantage in the debate.

"The dog is not mad. At least, we have no proof yet," Mum said, in halting Sinhala.

"Then you must find out. Soon. Or I will have to find another place for my daughter. Think of it – even your baby will need injections now."

"What do you expect us to do?"

"There are ways. Poison."

"No!" Mum was furious at the suggestion. "I thought you people don't kill animals?" Martin hugged the hem of her skirt, trying to shut out these diabolic plans.

"We can always go to the temple afterwards and do pooja. I can arrange for a man to come and dispose of the animal."

"You will have to talk to my husband before you do anything." Mum went indoors dragging Martin with her.

That evening Mum and Dad talked in whispers for a long time on the back porch.

From scraps of the hushed conversations that Martin picked up, it became clear that the animal couldn't just be disposed of. It had to be analyzed for rabies at the dog pound laboratory in Borella.

"And they only want the head at the laboratory!" Dad hissed.

"Shh!" Mum countered.

"I wish you would make up your mind and get your sister to sponsor us," Dad said. Ever since Independence, I've become more of a stranger here. Very soon there will be no Burghers left in Ceylon."

"Canada is not easy either. It's a lot of hard work. No servants. And it's cold."

Martin was forbidden from going into the spare room and food for the room's four legged occupant was now dropped in from the outside window. Martin would peer in the bars of the window at Goldie, who though weakening, summoned the courage to bark whenever anyone came by, disgorging clumps of brownish-yellow phlegm. Its eyes poured over Martin, seemingly to imply, "Why?"

The 'problem solver' arrived on a Sunday, three days after Poya day, the day of the full moon. He carried a single barrel shotgun that looked like it had last seen action in WWI. He was thin and tall and wore a white sarong and banyan. He looked through the window and wrinkled his nose. "Can't take him out, mahattaya."

"What do you mean?" Dad had taken two shots of arrack before the shotgun man arrived. It was early in the day, but Dad had cut his toe working with the mammoty in the back garden and needed a pain killer. Martin guessed Dad had been distracted in his labours. He had been distracted all week.

"This dog is too far gone," the man replied. "We'll have to shoot it through the window."

Dad downed his glass but did not say anything. He looked beaten.

"I guess I'll have to say goodbye to the clothes in the spare room," Mum said in resignation.

"But Buddhists don't kill," Martin said. "Isn't that why you asked me not to shoot birds in the paddy field with my pellet gun? Because of what people would say?"

"This is different son," Dad said putting his arm around Martin. The logic still did not add up for Martin and he struggled for other arguments.

"Why can't we get the vet to come, instead of this man?"

"Vets don't make house calls. Animals are not important," Dad said. Then turning to the man he said, "The laboratory needs the head."

Martin took his favourite book *Call of the Wild* and forced himself to stare at the pages at the other end of the house when the shot echoed like a cannon. He dropped the book and ran to the back of the house where Mum was throwing up by the well.

They later cleaned up the spare room; bloodied clothes, furniture and knick-knacks, piled up by the trash heap for burning. Every time Mum, Dad or Seetha came out of the room, their faces took on ever-lightening shades of ashen that even the bright sunlight

failed to rejuvenate. Margaret had suddenly shown up and was carrying Paul, who was howling worse than Goldie ever did, but everyone was too distracted to pay attention. Margaret directed mopping-up operations, while Paul bawled away.

Martin stomped over to Margaret and Paul. "I HATE YOU!"

The gunman sat under the guava tree chewing betel, until Dad stopped what he was doing and gave the man some money. The man got up, hauling his heavy weapon, joined his hands in a 'thank you', bowed and left. Dad finally brought out a rug with something wrapped inside it. He took it over to the communal latrines located about fifty yards from their row of attached houses.

The James's designated lavatory was at the far corner of 'latrine alley' where the jungle encroached on the southern end of Perera Gardens. Martin followed in a daze. Approaching, he heard cursing. Dad was muttering to himself with the rug open on a block of concrete – Goldie's head looked intact, but its stomach had exploded and hung in place by skin and bloody entrails. Dad swung the axe to chop off the head. After several swings, his cursing started again.

"Martin, go and get the kitchen knife. This skin is too thick for the axe." Dad barked.

Martin stayed frozen.

"Damn you, child! You and your bloody pets." Dad limped back to the house, the bandage on his foot turning brown in the sand and mud. He emerged a few moments later with the knife in his hand. Martin suddenly got life in his legs and ran, not toward the house but through the garden and out into the estate. He wished for his bicycle rim and that he could sail away from all of this with the wind on his tail. But his rim had been in the spare room and was now on the trash heap.

Martin gathered stones and pelted them at the coconut trees – one tree per neighbour. He reserved a tree each for Margaret, Seetha and the gunman – and they got a double whamming. Sobbing

interfered with his aim and a few stray shots landed on Gunadasa's roof. When Martin had exhausted himself and wound his way back to the house, Dad was mounting his bicycle, a travel bag slung over his shoulder. He had changed into his work clothes but hadn't shaved. He wore only one shoe; his other foot, quite swollen, was wrapped in a fresh bandage.

"Can you cycle all the way, dear?" Mum looked worried. She now had Paul in her arms. Margaret and Seetha were nowhere to be seen.

"Do I have any choice?" Dad growled and pushed off. The bike wobbled every time Dad pressed down on the pedal with his injured foot. It would take him three hours to get to the laboratory, each way.

Goldie did not get a funeral, but received a cremation instead. At least, that's how Martin remembered it. As the pyre of bloodied contents from the spare room blazed that evening on the dirt heap, Goldie's headless cadaver reposed upon them. Martin's eyes were riveted on the burning flesh, even though Mum said he should not look.

Dad returned home late that night and had a high fever for the next three days, having to call in sick for a week until the swelling subsided and allowed him to bicycle to work again. Just as he was mending, a letter arrived from the laboratory.

"Those assholes!" said Dad, waving the note in his hand. "The dog had distemper!"

The next day Mum gave Seetha notice. "I'll look after my children myself," she said wiping back tears and hugging Paul closer to her.

That afternoon Martin caught her writing a letter. "I'm asking my sister to sponsor us to Canada. Do you remember the pictures she sent? Churches with tall spires, Niagara Falls and all that?"

"Do they shoot dogs in Canada?"

"No. At least, I don't think so," she said as she continued to write, but her face now wore a frown.

Martin went outside. A new bicycle rim leaned against the wall by the well; compensation from his father for the trials they had just gone through. Very soon, he was wheeling it faster and faster through Perera Gardens. Instead of coconut palms, he imagined leafless trees and a white landscape; seeing a golden retriever running ahead, turning back from time to time to bark gloriously into the morning sunshine glinting off the snow.

## MONSTERS

*Roman Skaskiw*

Once upon a time, monsters lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea, and on some nights, after dark, the monsters who lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea would rub their horrible eyes, and stretch their horrible wings, and brush their horrible feathers, and stomp their horrible feet which looked like human hands, and descend into the valley where a nation of people occupied the land, and when they descended into the valley where a nation of people occupied the land, they brought with them sacks of marbles which glimmered like the stars overhead,

And excited children would run the streets, announcing the monsters' arrival, and the school master, first folding his spectacles, then replacing a bookmark in the yellowed pages of some long-forgotten text, would shuffle to the schoolhouse, iron key heavy in the pocket of his night gown, children bouncing alongside, beside themselves with anticipation, and he would grip the sweat-blackened rope, the little hands of as many children as could crowd around him joining in the task, and with a slow, grave cadence of his shoulders and back, the school master would sound the bell whose peal proclaimed the arrival of the monsters who lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea,

And the people of the valley would greet them, walk them to the town square, where already, fires burned, and wheelbarrows full of split logs were being dumped in anticipation of the long night,

And the people would receive in the palms of their hands the marbles which glimmered like the stars overhead, and people turned the monster's marbles before their eyes and look through them at their roaring fires to admire them, and would invite the monsters who lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea to sit with them, and enjoy the warmth and the light of their fires.

In exchange for the marbles which glittered like the stars overhead, the people whose nation occupied the valley sang songs for the monsters and told stories until the chunk of moon fell into the sea, and stars overhead began to fade,

And then the monsters who lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea would rise from the log benches, and rub their horrible eyes and stretch their horrible wings and brush their horrible feathers and stomp their horrible feet which looked like human hands, and return to the caves in the mountains by the sea.

Such celebrations went on for so many generations, that "Monster," the word itself, all but lost its normal connotation, and was, for the most part, used as simply and innocently as the word "bird," or "visitor," or "house," though with slightly greater enthusiasm, because the people, for the most part, cherished the marbles which glittered like the stars overhead, and, for the most part, enjoyed singing songs, and telling stories to the monsters who lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea.

There lived one old man among the people whose nation occupied the valley, who had no voice with which to sing songs, and no imagination with which to tell stories, and when the monsters who lived in the caves, in the mountains by the sea descended into the valley, he would spend the night in his cottage, stuffing his ears with balls of wax, and wishing for quiet.

"I don't like monsters," he announced one morning, after a particularly rowdy celebration. "They're untrustworthy and they smell like rotten mushrooms, and they're dangerous too, and I'll prove how dangerous they are."

He slipped on his marble-studded walking shoes, put his pet chicken on a leash and hiked along the cold running stream to the caves in the mountains by the sea,

And since the sun still burned overhead and no monsters were to be seen, the old man and his pet chicken lay in the mouth of a cave to rest, and because the hike along the cold running stream was rather long, and the old man and his pet chicken both rather old, they quickly fell asleep in the mouth of the cave in the mountains by the sea.

Just as the burning sun dipped into the water, a young monster arrived from deep inside the cave, and the young monster rubbed his horrible eyes and stretched his horrible wings and brushed his horrible feathers and stomped his horrible feet which looked like human hands, and when he did so, he trampled the wing of the old man's pet chicken.

"Help me! Help me!" the old man cried as he ran back along the cold running stream, back to the valley where a nation of people occupied the land, leaving his pet chicken behind and losing one of his marble-studded walking shoes along the way. "I am just an old man and the monsters are attacking me." He screamed until his face turned red. "They've eaten my favorite chicken too! And stolen one of my marble-studded walking shoes, which had been in my family for generations! Look how old and weak I am! Why would the monsters attack me?"

"Because they are monsters!" His granddaughter shrieked as she ran out to meet him, tears in her eyes. "That's why they attacked you and ate your favorite chicken too, and stole one of your marble-studded walking shoes!"

"It had been in his family for generations." one of the young men explained to his friends that evening, as the fearful sobs of the old man's granddaughter still trembled in the air.

"And they smell like rotten mushrooms too," the young man's friends said to their own friends that night, as the fearful sobs of the old man's granddaughter still shuddered throughout the valley.



It was just after midnight when the people whose nation occupied the valley set out along the cold running stream to the caves in the mountains by the sea, where many monsters now rubbed their horrible eyes, and stretched their horrible wings, and brushed their horrible feathers, and stomped their horrible feet which looked like human hands, and the monsters watched as the young men scaled the cliffs overlooking their caves, and they watched as the young men began hurling down large jagged stones.

Many were crushed.

The rest of the people surrounded the caves, and threw whatever they happened to carry with them: hammers, walking sticks, dining utensils, a long-forgotten text and whatever they could find: stones, dirt. Even the few little children whose excitement led them to defy their mothers and follow the angry mob to the caves, even they contributed, flinging small handfuls of pebbles toward horrible monsters.

Then, runners were sent to the valley to retrieve as many sharp pencils as they could find, and when they returned, the people used the pencils to flushed out the few surviving monsters who'd fled back into the caves in the mountains by the sea, and poking with the sharp pencils, they chased them over the mountains, and into the moonlit sea.

In the years that followed, the price of marbles skyrocketed on the commodities exchanges, then leveled off, and the people adjusted their consumer habits accordingly,

And the historians among the people whose nation occupied the valley, engaged in vigorous, sometimes divisive debates about whether the young men were key in defeating the horrible monsters, or whether the old man deserves credit,

And the old man's granddaughter, now with grandchildren of her own, could be seen telling stories about the days when monsters still lived in the caves in the mountains by the sea, and about how they attacked her grandfather, and ate his favorite chicken too, and stole one of his marble-studded walking shoes

which had been in her family for generations, and how he escaped, and about the great battle in which the outnumbered people finally defeated the horrible monsters who smelled like rotten mushrooms. Then she often paused in her storytelling, turning her eyes toward the sea, where for three generations now, a sentry stood, day and night, with a hand grenade in his pocket, just in case the monsters returns. She would draw a slow, contemplative breath, before telling the listeners gathered around her rocking chair, that her grandfather's marble-studded walking shoe was still somewhere out there, in the vast sea, and that she hopes it washes up ashore some day, because it had been in her family for generations.

The shoe never returned, but neither did the monsters, and the people lived happily ever after.

## WEDDING NIGHT

Carl Muller



Ameena Hussein

Peter stared at the card with an expression that chiselled his eyes, his mouth - every line of his thin lips. The breath whistled at his teeth and his fingers tightened on the small rectangle of art-board. He wanted to tear it to bits. His shoulders shook, and with a small exclamation, he moved to a chair, falling heavily into it. Getting married! Joanna! *His* Joanna! He flung the card away, gripped the arms of the chair; stared at the window where sunlight turned the thin blinds into figures that danced in his head. *How she had danced... he, love-wrapped, pain-wracked... She had danced around him, her eyes limpid... her small girl smile... A colt of a girl... she fifteen, he forty-two... God, how he wanted her...* Not that her parents had minded; not at first anyway. He, Peter Mendis, was the nice neighbour. Joanna would climb the head of his chair, chortle at his bald spot while tweaking the hair that grew out of his ears. She was a merry ten-year-old then. She would race to the window; poke her head out... *that head with its cap of shiny curls... her teeth wedges of sunshine...* 'Hello, Uncle Peter, what did you bring me?'

*She was twelve... racing upstairs, her lean legs berry-brown...* He sat and watched her, crossing his legs tightly for the fire would not go away, and she came to him saying 'Read me a story.' ...*She had buried herself in him, so warm... smelling of sweet sweat and talcum...* his hands trembled and his voice grew husky as he made a circle of his arms; she, her book and her young body becoming part of him.

He had never failed to bring her gifts – always things they could do together: jig-saw puzzles, Happy Families, scroll crosswords, and at forty, he would tell his thirteen-year-old, 'Why, you're such a big girl now! I have a nice scented powder for you. You race around so much; surely you sweat in many places...'

It had been so easy, and she, loving her 'uncle' so much, could never think less of this man who touched her, caressed her, pressed his lips to her forehead. *How she had laughed delightedly when he began to play Incy Wincy Spider, his fingers travelling up her thighs, his hand disappearing under her skirt to press against her cleft...*

Joanna's mother froze on the day she saw it all. With a gasp she stepped back, then through the curtain, called to her daughter. 'What are you doing with him?' She had then marched out to tell Peter to go, never to come again. She was near-hysterical when her husband came home.

'I'll kill the old bastard!' Mr. Fonseka had roared.

'Kill him!' his wife screamed, 'and then kill her also!'

'Damn him. This is all *your* fault, letting her be alone with him! I'll – I'll go to the police!'

'You're mad? You want to bring shame on us all?'

'And what does she say?'

'What can she say? So innocent. She's crying because I told him to get out.'

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Peter couldn't think how or why the invitation had arrived. So many years... was this a vindictive show of triumph? They hated him. Did they want to show that they had won? *Come and see... Joanna is marrying... She will never be yours. Never! Come and feel the dust fall from your heart to your guts!* He picked up the card with an oath. He knew her parents. They would never ask him to the wedding.

Ah, of course, she was marrying old Samuel's son. So that's it. Samuel had sent the card. His face cleared. So Samuel's son was

marrying his Joanna, was he? He knew old Samuel. Never wanted his son far from the nest. Wife had died a couple of years ago.

He went to the 'phone. The line was busy. He called back that afternoon. Busy again. What the devil was Samuel doing? When he spoke to his friend that evening, Samuel explained that the wedding was tying up the 'phone. 'So much to do, Peter. Say, did you get the invitation?'

'Yes, but Sam... I can't make it. You don't know how ill I am. The doctor says I need a change and a long rest. I meant to call you earlier, but this wedding business came as a bit of a surprise. You will have your hands full and I cannot impose.'

'Nonsense. You know how it is. I'm stuck in this damn big house and I have now given a part of it to Ralph. When he marries next week, the couple will stay here. Everything's taken care of. The girl is a good sort. No trouble at all.'

'So they will live with you?'

'Of course. Ralph won't move out and leave me alone. You know the east wing... four rooms, and it's all theirs. Anyway, what's your worry? Come, I'll be glad of your company. You think Ralph will give me the time of day with a wife on his hands?'

'I see... then I'll come.'

'Fine. Come tomorrow. Stay as long as you like.'

'Thanks a lot, Sam. I really need the rest.'

'Don't worry about a thing. Old Constance is still here. Remember her – the housekeeper? Damn good cook too. The cook doesn't like her, naturally. He thinks the kitchen is his domain.'

'I'll leave in the morning. Anyway, we will have time together. Surely the couple will go on their honeymoon...'

'No. Straight home. I've done them proud. New furniture, separate kitchen, everything's laid on. Even the Fonseka's – nice sort – are pleased.'

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Peter drove through the gates of "Acacia Dene," Samuel's big house in the rolling Agra valley, and was received by a beaming host. 'My gosh, men, you do look poorly. Come in, come in.'

It was a splendid house. Samuel had made his pile in tea and held a controlling interest in several plantations. Time was when servants swarmed the place, and Kitty, Samuel's wife, would hum as she tended the beds of azaleas, Shasta daisies and Japanese chrysanthemums. She loved her lilies the most; the Arums, Leopard lilies, the Golden lily and the beautiful red-and-white-streaked Knight's Star that was her special pride. Long ago, she had taken him around and smiled. 'When Ralph marries, I'll fill the church with lilies. Come and see my Madonnas... such a perfect white... and do you see those? The flowers have golden rays. Auratums. There is the purple also, but those are not yet in bloom.'

Yes, the old days. The garden was neglected now and even the red and butter marigolds were overgrown and massed together, too dense to flower. Peter found the room to his liking. He sat in the little anteroom to the hall, looking over the unkempt lawn, the line of Silky Oaks in the distance silhouetted against the blue lines of the mountains.

He did not go to the wedding and did not appear at the house party. The maid, Celestine, brought him something on a tray. He made it known that he was a very sick man. Even when Ralph told his bride, 'Uncle Peter has come to stay. He's in his room. He's ill. Daddy invited him to rest here,' Joanna was not paying much attention. Her eyes were half-closed, her lips slightly parted as Ralph's hand reached for the top of her thigh. When the last guest had gone, old Samuel weaved to an empty chair. The whisky spun in slow circles and Constance smiled. 'Don't disturb the dorai,' she told the hired help.

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Father Clement, O.S.B., was not an impatient man. His small Morris Minor was as old as could be, but he liked the little car that sat low

on the road and had enough room for the few things he always carried – a leather case, a smattering of prayer cards and his black robes which would be necessary on Sundays.

The rain was terrible. It sheeted down relentlessly and the priest worried. There was too much water on the road, covering the ruts and potholes, flowing off the humps, swirling piles of dirt along. He was in the highlands, having left St. Xavier's at eight where he was housemaster at St. Xavier's College. A much-respected disciplinarian, he had schooled generations of restless boys.

The journey to Agra was to visit his sister. Bessie was old and lived for his visits, so few and far between. Oh, she was comfortable enough. She had the widow Mottau with her and they would talk, talk, talk. Father Clement smiled. Those two, he thought. What a pair. They were the only two women he knew of who could carry on a perfectly intelligible conversation over the simple procedure of boiling an egg.

'They do rattle on,' he had sighed, and even Father Benedict had grinned. 'So why go and get an earful?'

'Why not? She's my sister. It makes her day. She tells everyone that her brother the priest is coming. She will hang new curtains and fuss around the house and stuff everyone with stories of our childhood and how she could never believe that I had joined the church.'

'Terrible,' Father Benedict had laughed, 'and she'll talk your head off, I suppose.'

'Oh, that she will, but that's Bessie for you. I'll stay over, say Mass at the church there and be back Sunday evening.'

When the Morris Minor died on him, he did not think it unreasonable to say 'damn!' Luckily, a small roadside garage was at his right and he found that his horn could make appeal. The man who pushed his head through the window, saw the Benedictine priest, and hurriedly called a mechanic. The car was coaxed to a side of the road. 'Very bad driving in this rain. Small car – very low – water flooded in the radiator sure.'

Father Clement sighed. He was stranded. 'What is this place? Great Valley? And Agra... nine miles? How long will you take?' 'Don't worry, Father... Must drain it and dry, but can't do tik-tak-tuk.'

'I understand.' He sat on a bench, deep in thought. Bessie lived far from Agra town. Then his face lit up. Willie! Of course, there was Willie. Wily Willie, he had called the shouting scamp of a boy in school. That was six years ago, but Father Clement always kept in touch with his flock. Willie had done well. He ramrodded Sycamore Estate in Agra. Had a beautiful house in the valley. He reached for his case and his much-thumbed address book. 'You have a telephone?' he asked.

William Roderick was startled to hear his old teacher's voice. 'Father – sir, sir, that you sir? You're in Great Valley... yessir... I'll come and pick you up. What is this garage? Roadside place... keep an eye on the car, sir. They'll steal parts from under your nose. I'm coming... straightaway... now, yessir.'

Willie barked at the garage owner, he evidently had some clout. He wanted the car in shape in four hours, rain or no. Father Clement climbed into his Mitsubishi and they sliced through the rain with a defiant hiss.

Willie was apologetic. 'Father... sir, having a small party at my place. Planters and wives. Told them they could stay over, it being Sunday tomorrow, but don't worry, I'll find a room for you.'

'Can't you take me to my sister's place? It's past your house, on the fork road – about twelve miles, I think.'

'I can do that, Father, but later. Can't stay away too long. Had to make apologies before I left. My company agents are also there and the Planters' Association Chairman as well.'

'Then...'

'Don't worry, sir. See, we are already at the turn to the house. You come in. I'll find you a room. Later tonight, when the main guests have left, I'll take you to your sister's. Company agents are also staying over...' He frowned. 'Must get you a room.'

Father Clement was thankful to escape into the house where, washed and tidied, he looked ruefully at the mud stains on his cassock. The uproar of the party made him frown. Surely, Willie had someone who could drive him to Bessie's.

With some distaste, he went to the hall where many regarded him with surprise. 'Roderick is in the dining room,' said one.

Another said, 'Nah. Saw him in the portico with Spenser's wife,' and there were shouts of approval. Wily Willie was as wily as ever. When Willie was eventually found on a sofa in an outer room, he was in no condition to make conversation. 'You're drunk,' said Father Clement.

'That's Willie for you,' a guest chuckled. 'Drinks like an owl, then falls over and won't get up. No good talking to him, Father, he's blotto.'

Father Clement shrugged. He stalked to the kitchen. 'Show me a room,' he said.

'But all the rooms taking. Every room all taking. Some ladies already inside...'

'Nonsense. This is a big house. There must be a room.'

'Have to the side portion, but no one is there. Nobody go there. Even Master not go there.'

'Why?'

The cook rolled his eyes. 'Don' know why. If Father like, I show.'

'Please do.'

Father Clement found the room musty, but large and very inviting. The big double bed was soft and the ceiling lights made the rosewood furniture gleam intimately. 'This is excellent,' he said. 'Will you bring me something to eat? A plate of whatever you have will do.'

He sat tiredly on the bed, looked around. The windows were shut, heavily curtained. There was an inner door leading to yet another bedroom that was bare. When he had eaten of some pastries and young asparagus and ignored the oily meat, he went to the

bathroom. Wonder what Bessie was doing... she would have surely prepared supper.

Coming out of the bathroom, he shivered. *Who had drawn back the curtains?* Cold air rushed in through the open windows. The door to the adjoining room was also open and in it, too, the windows were open. Annoyed, he shut the windows, drew the curtains, banged shut the door to the adjoining room. With his teeth beginning to chatter, he dived into bed, pulling the thick coverlet over him. Slowly, he relaxed in his own body warmth. Now to sleep, he thought.

The click was loud, and it jerked him awake. In the dim light of the window, he saw that the connecting door was open. *But he had shut it...* The footsteps were slow, stealthy, crossing the room, approaching his bed. Then a figure stood at the foot of the bed. Father Clement half rose. He was looking into the face of a middle-aged man, a man who glared malevolently at him. As the priest stared in horror, the face twisted evilly. It leaned over him and in the faint light there was a flash of steel.

\*\*\*\*

Willie rose to meet his old teacher at the breakfast table.

'Father – sir, you slept here – you found a room... God, don't know why I took that last drink. Just got up. It's past eight. You want to go to your sister's now?'

Father Clement drank tea. He said no to breakfast rolls, to eggs, to toast, to jam. 'I took a room nobody uses. Whole section of rooms actually. The cook told me nobody goes there.'

Willie gave a sharp cry. 'You're – you're alright sir—'

'Of course I'm all right. But there was a man there... in the empty room.'

'Can't be sir, there is nobody there. Been like that for ages.'

'There was somebody there last night. Out with it, Willie. I thought you had left all your schoolboy pranks behind.'

\*\*\*\*

It was only after he had said Mass at the small Agra church that Father Clement went to his sister. 'It's almost lunch time,' Bessie complained, 'how long will you stay? Do you know how worried we have been? I telephoned the school also.' The priest sighed. 'The car broke down.' His head swam. The story would have to be told. He told it.

He tried to picture that room and relived the events of the night before. ...He dove to the floor in a tumble of bedclothes, striking the floorboards with his shoulder. His upper arm was on fire and warm blood ran down to his elbow. He heard the footsteps again, and the sound of a door closing. Scrambling to his feet, he switched on the lights. The cut on his arm was just a flesh wound. He found an old bottle of throat gargle on a shelf and a box of hygienic pads, near-mildewed. He quickly washed his wound clean and tied it with one of the pads. He then dragged blanket, pillows and the heavy quilt to the landing, propped himself against a wall and waited out the hours.

\*\*\*\*

'But – but... I would never have put you in any of those rooms, sir... honest,' Willie said. They told me the story when I moved in. A planter used to live here with his son Ralph. On his wedding night, the house was full of guests...

...The next morning, Ralph and Joanna were found dead with Peter's body lying across the marriage bed. The knife used to stab the young couple was buried in his chest. By the time the police thumped in, Samuel had shot himself with the .44 he kept in his bureau. The blood was everywhere.



## MAD MEN ON THE ROOF OR MANUFACTURING IDPS

*S.Jeyasankar*

In the middle of a thick forest  
There was a beautiful palace  
In that palace resides  
A prince, definitely brave  
And surely with a beautiful princess

You, me and we, all alike  
Love to hear these stories again and again  
Fairytale we call these stories,  
Again and again we love to hear these tales  
Though we categorized them for children

But my story here is different  
A different story entirely  
I will narrate this story  
Not to make others sleep or laugh  
But to wake the senses— all—including mine  
And put an end to these stories  
All over the world

Bright flares of the multi barrels  
Engulf the city like waves of the Tsunami  
And the intriguing sound they make  
Crash into the sky and tear it apart  
Multi barrels roar beside hospitals

Multi barrels roar beside schools  
Multi barrels roar beside the *chanthai*  
Multi barrels roar beside the *kachcheri*

The battles of the borders  
Are executed in the city centre  
And display the might of brave men  
With brand new massacre machines,  
Of  
The hands that produce  
Manuals for the new world order

Bright flares of the multi barrels  
Engulf the city like waves of the Tsunami  
And the intriguing sound they make  
Crash into the sky and tear it apart

Multi barrels roar beside hospitals  
Multi barrels roar beside schools  
Multi barrels roar beside the *kachcheri*  
Multi barrels roar beside the *chanthai*

Women have deserted their homes and fields  
Children have deserted their schools and playgrounds  
Cattle have deserted and destroyed their grazing fields  
The devastation of unharvested paddy fields  
Mark the distorted life of the people

Bright flares of the multi barrels  
Engulf the city like waves of the Tsunami  
And the intriguing sound they make  
Crash into the sky and tear it apart

Multi barrels roar beside hospitals  
Multi barrels roar beside schools  
Multi barrels roar beside the *chanthai*

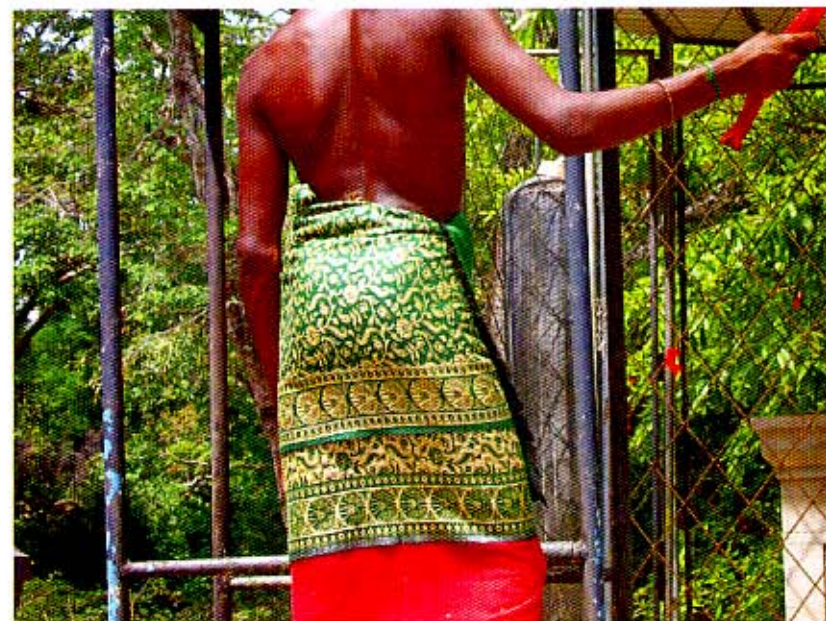
Multi barrels roar beside the *kachcheri*  
 The hands that till land and create life  
 Were emptied, forced to be barren  
 And made dependent in a day  
 The hands and minds that create  
 Were uprooted, alienated  
 And reproduced as internally displaced  
 In order to manufacture them as  
 Democratic citizens of a unified state  
 Of the local Masters  
 And as a cheap labor force and a consumer mass  
 For the global conglomerates

Bright flares of the multi barrels  
 Engulf the city like waves of the Tsunami  
 And the intriguing sound they make  
 Crash into the sky and tear it apart

Multi barrels roar beside hospitals  
 Multi barrels roar beside schools  
 Multi barrels roar beside the *chanthai*  
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My story here is different  
 An entirely different story  
 I want to narrate this tale  
 Not to make others sleep or laugh  
 But to wake the senses— all —including mine  
 To put an end to these stories  
 All over the world

In the middle of the city  
 Oh sorry, excuse me...  
 In the middle of the thick forest  
 There was...



Ameena Hussein

## THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

*Devika Brendon*

I went out to dinner with my friend Adrian the other day – it was great. But it went on too long – the food was delicious, and we talked about everything we needed to discuss – thoroughly and in satisfying detail. And when he drove me home we sat in the car and talked more, under the streetlight outside my house.

It is September in Sydney, and spring and summer are coming at once. The air is getting warmer, and fragrant flowers are rioting all over the garden that has been so bleak and bare over this long winter we are emerging from.

After we got out of the car, I noticed that he was frowning. He had a red mark on his forehead, which I didn't want to see there. I reached out my hand and erased the mark with my right thumb. And that was all. No mark. No trace. And I went into my house and found my husband still awake.

We got married in April. And it's early days yet. We haven't had time to really have a honeymoon – to be alone together, in the private interior world of married people. I still have the fairy jasmine bath ballistics he gave me, wrapped in confetti, waiting for the time I need in order to really enjoy them.

That time may not come now. He wanted to know why a dinner that began at 730ish was ending at 2.30 in the morning of the next day, why Adrian and I had so much to say to each other,

and why I reached out and touched his face outside our house. I wanted to know why he was watching, and why he was thinking what he was thinking.

My mouth spoke clichés, while my mind rejected each as the wrong thing to say. I saw it all from his point of view. But I was angry, because if Adrian and I wanted to be closer, we could have been, any time in the last ten years. And we had not. I am faithful, and always have been.

He said: You shouldn't be looking outside this.

I said: It is not ambiguous and unresolved. We know exactly where we are.

He said: Marriage is an exclusive intimacy.

I said: Well, we are married – it happened in April.

He said: Happened – as if it was something that was done to you, without your consent.

I said: There's no point talking. Think what you like.

And he said: This is standing in the way of our progress. The way you don't see that we forsake all others.

And I said: Maybe it's too much of a sacrifice to ask. Being alone together forever and forever.

And we slept apart, because there was angry distance between us that the physical closeness of sharing a bed would make agonizing. That was yesterday, and I have been thinking back on our life together since April. We share many things, but there is a necessary separateness, and the space I need for that, that I reserve for that, is greater than his.

Marriage is not what I thought it would be – a safe place, a nest, a shelter. Marriage can be a storm, so turbulent in the way it makes you fight for the boundaries that blur, that separate what is

yours and theirs. Inside the frame of reference. The wedding took place in April, blue and gold, filled with confetti and jasmine, and the marriage is what has been unfolding slowly since.

He is right, I have not made the transition. There are too many people who are too important to me. What I feel for them makes what I can give to him less than it should be, less than he wants. There is too much going on outside.

So I am sitting in the kitchen, drinking cold clear milk, sleepless again, feeling the change of seasons even inside the house, listening to the sound of the tumble dryer, drying my clothes for the next few days. He does his gear separately. All my fly-away chiffons and transparent fragilities would be shredded by his tough corduroys and wrangler sternness. Male clothes are so uncompromising.

There is one shirt of his I really love – a blue chambray. I told him I liked it, and he wore it so often it has become soft through many washes. I get up and look for it. It is hanging up in the laundry. I embrace it, as if he were wearing it, and put it on over my nightdress. I wonder if washing our clothes together, eating together, sharing so much of our daily lives, will connect us over time.

I feel sure that can only happen if I give consent to a deeper access, or we could just become housemates, sharing the expenses for the sake of convenience.

I go to the window facing the front of the house, where he saw me reach out to Adrian. I see what it must have looked like, to a watchful, sleepless man, whose heart has softened over time. I go upstairs to find him. He is not asleep.

I see the room we share, in shadows, softened into a space of tenderness.

I say: There is nothing outside this that I want.

## GOODBYE MANHATTAN

*Anura Saparamadu*

“JFK, Terminal 4,” I tell the cabbie as I bang the door shut. Punjabi MC is blaring on the radio and the incense smoke is almost thick enough to mask the fact that Michael Schumacher behind the wheel hasn’t quite showered in three weeks. The cabbie shield proclaims that Malkot Singh is the operator of this particular vehicle. Malkot’s wearing a baseball cap on top of his turban. Hmm, what kind of an Indian is he; I idly wonder – perhaps one from Cleveland?

As the cab races up the ramp to the tollbooths of the Triboro Bridge, I take one glance back at the Upper East Side, silhouetted by the bright sunshine of a brutally cold wintry day. ‘Goodbye, I’ll miss this place,’ I whisper to a place that I called home for the past twenty years. I shake my head in amazement that I decided to leave the city I love to go to a place so far removed from everything I took for granted almost all my adult life. Well, not much I can do now, ’cos I’ve already given up the rent controlled apartment, given away all my furniture and even cancelled my Blockbuster card. My on-again off-again flame Audrey was livid while the wicked witch, er, I mean the ex-wife, was ecstatic that I was moving to another continent many time zones away. Besides, the airline ticket was non-refundable. Oh, well, off to new adventures, I think as I gag on the sweat and incense mixed pong.

“Acha baba, you are from India?” yells the driver as he races away from the tollbooth. “You can smoke if you like dude.”

Malkot smiles a toothless grin while lighting up a Marlboro. So much for the Taxi & Livery Commission's vaunted anti-smoking campaign. I smile and light one up myself. After all the flight to Rome is non-smoking, so better light up while I can. "Nope, I'm from the Upper East Side," I mindlessly repeat the old mantra the wicked witch always used whenever somebody asked her about her nationality.

"Psha, but your family, they're Indian, no?"

What the hell, I think, won't be seeing too many Pakis in Italy, so why not chat with the bugger? "Actually I was born in Sri Lanka." I tell the cabbie.

"You Sinhalese or Tamil?" The sod is quite the probing sociologist. Wouldn't be too surprised if he asks me if I got my Green Card yet, which is usually about the third question that comes out of every tri-state area South Asian's mouth. But Sherlock Holmes must have figured my papers were probably all in order since I'm going to the airport, and he starts to discuss the state of the city after the incident. By this he means the little hullabaloo where some suicidal crazies flew two planeloads of passengers into the twin towers.

"You know, my son works at the World Financial Center for Merrill Lynch and saw everything from his office window," Malkot Singh says. "He's an investment banker." My ears perk up when I hear this 'cos it's not everyday you meet an unwashed cabbie whose son is a big muckety-muck down on Wall Street. "Oh, yeah? Where did your son go to school?"

"Acha baba, he went to NYU. Graduated five years ago and now he's a VP," Malkot glances at me through the rearview mirror and smiles proudly. "And my daughter's at Columbia Medical School."

"That's great," I reply. "Went to NYU myself," I tell him. Life in the big city is funny that way 'cos things ain't always what they seem to be. "So tell me something. If your son's a VP at Merrill, how come you still drive a cab?"

"Baba, I used to be a lawyer in Srinagar before I came over here twenty five years ago. Couldn't find a job so I started driving a cab and today I own three medallions," Malkot grins. Damn! That probably puts him in the highest tax bracket in the borough of Manhattan. "Where you off to?"

"I'm going to Rome," I tell the cabbie who is busy swearing at a limo driver on the Van Wyck Expressway. "Fucking limo drivers just don't know how to handle the afternoon traffic," he snarls as he dodges a SUV and shoots past the Interboro Parkway exit and onto the home stretch before hitting JFK.

"Rome?" The traffic has thinned out considerably and he's cruising towards the airport. "You going on vacation? You know baba, there are thousands of Indians in Italy," he says. "People from my village they all go to Italy nowadays because it's hard to get visas to go to England or America." Why am I not surprised about this, I wonder. "Nope, I'm leaving 'cos I found a job there."

"Good for you my friend," Malkot says as he swerves onto JFK Expressway. "This city is shit after the towers collapsed. Some idiots were hassling me right after 9/11 and called me a towelhead and said I should go back to Saudi Arabia. I told 'em I was a fucking Sikh and that I hate Muslims just as much as they do and to please get the fuck off my cab." He cackles at the idiocy of the thought that he could be lumped together with the infidels. "You Muslim?" he asks as an afterthought. I shake my head no. Billboards whiz by and soon Malkot sidles up to the curb and pops the trunk. "Here you go my friend." He smiles at me. "International departures."

## BROWN PORRIDGE

*Tanya Uluwitiya*

The lines at the International Terminal at JFK are interminably long and the never ending renovations don't help matters either. The flight doesn't leave for another three hours but the security checks are so long and tedious I wonder if I'll make it through in time. The newly appointed Federal Security Agents, who in an innocent pre-9/11 era were mere minimum wage security guards, now seem to take their jobs much more seriously and treat every passenger like a potential mass murderer. Two Hasidic men in front of me get the royal treatment because, as everybody knows, all men with long flowing beards wearing black robes are terrorists.

"Das ist ja aber 'ne Schweinerei," protests one of them, "Ve're Israelis. Vy would ve carry bombs?"

The guard motions to her obese supervisor who waddles over and says, "Gentlemen, could you please come with us?" and drags the protesting Hassids inside a covered cubicle, most likely for a full cavity body search.

The guard gives me the bent eye, "You Muslim?" she asks me. "No, I'm Jewish actually," I lie with a straight face. "No kidding? Didn't know there were Indian Jews," she smiles and waves me through. "Oh yeah, Bombay is full of them," I smile back as I pick up my bags and run into the terminal. That was pretty painless and I've got enough time for a last cigarette before I board the Alitalia flight to Fiumicino.

Munsif looked up from the steaming pot of green-gram porridge to the voice of Ashoka, a regular customer who turned up at the same time every working day. Ashoka had already taken out his wallet and was searching for a twenty rupee note, the weight of his messenger bag making him lean onto his left a little. Munsif deftly ladled out a spoonful of porridge into a brown tumbler which was hanging on hooks which were in turn attached to the sides of the trolley that he transported the pots in. Another spoonful and the tumbler had been filled to the brim with the light brown liquid, which looked more like sludge scooped off the gutter than the filling drink that it was. The masticated green-gram together with coconut-milk and salt was one of his most saleable items. The other two pots contained sweet-sago porridge and vegetable soup.

"Oh you've already served the green-gram....I was thinking of something different today...maybe the sago." Ashoka smiled, looking a wistful.

"No problem." Munsif obliged, pouring the green-gram back into the pot, he took a fresh tumbler and poured in the sago, its thick milky consistency visible in the clear glass. He took a rectangular piece of newspaper from a stack that he had already prepared and wrapped the glass in it and handed it to Ashoka with care. The porridge was steaming hot and the thin newspaper did not provide any insulation against the heat of the glass. With



his fingers burning Ashoka drank a sip of the liquid, the taste of the porridge obliterated by the heat scalding his tongue. He would wait till it became warm and then he would relish the taste of the sago, feeling its slimy-sweet consistency in his mouth. He was usually the first customer at this time of the day but soon the space around Munsif's bright blue trolley would be filled with customers, their minds set on something nutritious before a long train journey home.

The traffic on the fly-over was hectic at any time of the day. Vehicles entering Colombo zoom over the bridge, looking down on the railway tracks and the old road below, a bird's eye view of the surrounding area. The new apartment building which had sprung up less than a year ago stands right next to the fly-over, its lower floors facing the flood of traffic but miraculously spared the dust and fumes with a constantly functioning air conditioning system; climate control for those who could afford it. The space created between the fly-over and the road below had its own unique character. An old woman who had made it her home had claimed one of the concrete pillars supporting the road above, her own. Around it was piled her belongings in cardboard boxes together with her pet dog, a scrawny brown mutt who barked at anyone who got close enough. Everyone had their own little piece of space in this no-man's-land.

Munsif leaned against the concrete pillar behind him. It was covered in several layers of posters so that the original concrete was not even visible. The paper provided a kind of padding against the rough surface of the pillar as he looked at Ashoka who stared distractedly at the ground as he drank the porridge. He was starting to show a hint of a gut, his short sleeved shirt stretching a little just above his belt. Munsif knew that Ashoka worked in the little work shop that undertook the repairing of faulty computers. It was located in a small building facing the railway tracks, its original light blue paint covered in a grey film of dust making it look sad and nostalgic. "Ruwan's Computer

Repairs" it said in peeling blue letters. Ashoka would spend his working hours cramped inside the little room on the top floor together with two other technicians, fighting for space with the carcasses of former computers. The building would shake from foundation up as the trains passed by it at regular intervals, their horns blaring making him lose his concentration. Ashoka wished he could quit his job and at night he would lay in his bed staring at the patterns of cracks on the wall knowing that he could not. His stomach crunching up from inside out as claustrophobic visions of the little room near the railway track crossed his mind. All day he could feel the tension building up, rising like mercury in a thermometer till it would knot up right at the base of his neck. At home he would complain that his neck hurt as his mother would apply medicinal oil between his shoulders.

"Sir, my son is learning computers too." Munsif said, his voice cheerful. "Oh that's good." Ashoka said without interest. He was irritated by the enthusiasm in the other man's voice. The enthusiasm of an innocent.

"How old is your son?" Ashoka asked.

"He just did his O/L exam. Staying at home so I told him to learn some computers. It will get him a good job." Ashoka looked at Munsif as he handed the tumbler to him. He looked a man in his forties, grey hair gathered at his temples like a prediction of what's to come. Ashoka wished that the man had not told him about his son. He was reminded of his own father, who probably thought of him with the same naïve pride in a future that would be somehow brighter.

"Yea well, I hope things work out for him." Ashoka heard himself say as his mind was taken over by the image of the cramped room he worked everyday. He had a long journey ahead of him in a train full of people just like him, circus acts without an adoring audience, each one pleased with his performance for the day. Ashoka didn't have the patience to listen to another man's dreams, when his own were so far from coming true.

Ashoka had not seen Munsif for the past week as he walked under the bridge to get to the train station. He was not the only one who had been wondering of the whereabouts of the man with the blue trolley. Waiting on the platform for his train, Ashoka overheard snatches of a conversation between two men. One of them had looked in his direction and had given a smile of acknowledgment.

"Don't you know what has happened to that guy who sells porridge? He has been chased out from the spot. I heard he had been beaten up and told to leave by the local *chandia*"

"But what's the reason? He wasn't causing any trouble and his green-gram porridge is the best I've tasted anywhere." The younger of the two swayed his head in disbelief.

"I agree but I think it's for the best. The new guy is a Sinhala boy and he is selling vadai and chick peas. I just had some, they were pretty good. We shouldn't let them take over, these Muslims or they will take over everything." The older of the two said, pulling his belt over his paunch and adjusting his shirt.

"But *machang*....it doesn't make sense. That guy also has the same right to be there."

"Hmmm...I agree but what makes sense these days, huh?" The older man in his wise-man's voice smiled benevolently as the train pulled into the station.

That night as Ashoka lay in his bed trying to make sense of the patterns of cracks on the walls in his room, he remembered the enthusiasm in Munsif's voice, the pride in the heart of a parent. Why had he not recognized that Munsif was merely trying to share his joy with him and respond to him with more feeling. This man pushing his bright blue trolley every afternoon with the strength of his dreams for his children. Ashoka thought of his father in the next room, his old-man's face lighting up every evening as he returned from work. His son who had achieve more than he could ever imagined with his carpenters hands and Ashoka merely feeling the tiredness of his limbs after standing for an hour in the train.



Ameena Hussain

In the middle of the night he woke up in a cold sweat and listened to his own breathing. In his dream he had seen Munsif with his smiling face and blue trolley and he had felt anger rising within him like a black wave he could not control. Ashoka saw his fists curling up and the veins on his arms stand like mountain ridges. His body felt like a spring uncoiling as all his energy seemed to focus on the other man's face. Soft human flesh crumpled as blood began to flow from an open gash, an inverted clown's smile, bright red blood mixing with the brown green-gram porridge dribbling from an innocent man's mouth.

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**THE LITMUS TEST**  
***Asitha Ameresekere***

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**DO THEY SHOOT DOGS IN CANADA?**  
***Shane Joseph***

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**MONSTERS**  
***Roman Skaskiw***

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**WEDDING NIGHT**  
***Carl Muller***

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**THE HONEYMOON IS OVER**  
***Devika Brendon***

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**BROWN PORRIDGE**  
***Tanya Uluwitiya***

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**THE LAST PAVILION**  
***Sunela Jayawardene***

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**MAD MEN ON THE ROOF OR  
MANUFACTURING IDPS**  
***S.Jeyasankar***

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**GOODBYE MANHATTAN**  
***Anura Saparamadu***