Musings 2013

Vol. XII

An Anthology of Poems and Short Stories

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Musings Volume XII: Editorial

Musings Volume XII is ready! This is the first time that it is coming out online – a green initiative showing the increasing awareness of BITS Pilani, Pilani campus towards a more sustainable environment. Going online has another big merit. Musings XII will be a readily available resource, archived for future generations and can be accessed from any part of the world.

Musings, the annual magazine from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, is a show-case of the talents of the students and instructors. The poems, short stories and artworks express the creativity and all the excitement associated with it; at the same time, they give glimpses of a multi-talented milieu that is equally comfortable and adept in technology and art. Like any good piece of art, many of the works in the magazine, inspire and surprise at the same time, with their imaginary brilliance.

The Editorial Team would like to express their sincere thanks to all the contributors for adding heart and soul to Musings XII. Special thanks to our graduated student Rahul De for his contribution in the selection and design of the artworks. We would like to place on record our thanks to the artists Mayank Grover, Shreyansh Jain, Pratibha Aggarwal, Jyotsana Akurati and Amitesh Ranjan for their brilliant artworks. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Prof. B.N. Jain, Vice-Chancellor BITS Pilani, Prof G. Raghurama, Director, BITS Pilani, Pilani campus, Prof. R. N. Saha, Deputy Director, Research and Administration and Prof G Sundar, Deputy Director, Work Integrated Learning Programmes whose invaluable support has made this effort a success. We would also like to acknowledge the Head, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prof. Geetha B for her unflinching support and keen interest throughout the course of this project.

Musings was ideated as a launch pad to recognize, foster and appreciate creative talents. This volume, like its predecessors, also captures “stories” of people associated with BITS Pilani, Pilani campus – “stories” that bear testimonies to their rich and complex personalities. As the editorial team, we hope that the current issue will give opportunity to our readers to sit back and enjoy varied contributions that continue to imagine and shape lives beyond the daily, mundane existence.
Index

Poems

My Alma mater
Arise Awake and Stop Not
From Mother…
Please Look at Me
Artwork: Mythical
Still, Standing Still
My Alter Ego
The Beauty that is Her
I Don’t Know What To Do Next
In the Classroom
My City
Not Every Silence is Lived Alone
Ramblings
Ageless
Friends with Destiny
Hope
Insomnia
Artwork: Natalie Portman

Dr. Sangeeta Sharma 5
Dr. Pushp Lata 7
P.C. Sande 8
Dr. Hare Krishna Mohanta 9
Amitesh Ranjan 11
Ruchika Sharma 12
Dr. Devika 13
Harsh Nambiar 14
Ashish Bihani 15
Ajita Mahajan 16
Amit Vikram Dutta 17
Nishchay Sharma 18
Shasanka Mishra 19
Himanish Ganjoo 20
Yashraj Tripathy 21
Revant Gupta 23
Manasi Tyagi 24
Jyotsana Akurati 25
Nostalgia
Chetan Aditya 26
Blues from the Valley
Manan Bhatia 27
The Athlete
Vijay Shankar 28
Artwork: Cleo
Pratibha Agarwal, Shreyansh Jain 30
The Day of the Hero
Mangesh Gawankar 31
Artwork: Amor
Jyotsana Akurati 32
The Mona Lisa Smile
Abhishek Ghosh 33
Turmoil
Harsh Thakar 36
Where is Your God Now?
Abhinav Kumar 37
Whispers of a Silent Night
Vinayak Kesarwani 38
Winter Solstice
Arun Kumar Poonia 39
When My Grandpa Vanished
Yashodhara 41

Artwork: Hitman
Mayank Grover 43
A Blind’s Colourful World
Sarvesh 44
March 23rd
Yajnaseni Saha 45
The Unnoticeable Admirer
Sarvesh Allawadi 47
The World Has Moved On
Sahil Khatkar 50
From the Mind of a “Wanna be a Writer”
Archit Aggarwal 52
Artwork: Sherlocked
Shreyansh Jain 53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infiltrated</td>
<td>Niel Patel</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fallen Prince</td>
<td>Palash Siddamsettiwar</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strange Chain</td>
<td>Pratik Aghor</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pleasure of the Moment</td>
<td>Chirag Ramnani</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dream, the Reality and the In-between</td>
<td>Arpit Malhotra</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Satyaam Takhellambam</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Aftermath</td>
<td>Yashraj Tripathy</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Master</td>
<td>Krishnaroop Chaudhuri</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabolical</td>
<td>Himanish Ganjoo</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Theft</td>
<td>Skandha Gopalan</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POEMS
My Alma Mater

The serene tranquil place Pilani

     Not a city nor a town
     But so beautiful abound
     In all aspects and ground

     It has nurtured many brains
     Has been used as springboard
     To take a leap to foreign land
     Without forgetting their mother land

     Many flocked from different places
       Jammu to Kanyakumari
       Bombay to Nagaland
       All find solace in this land

     My alma mater makes the place more unique
       As it has a big tower
       Which also represents
         A lot of power

     The place has fragrance
       All around
     The ambience of academics
     Makes everyone spellbound
     It has lot of charm for visitors
     The temple of the
Goddess Saraswati
The amazing Birla Museum
The statues of great Leaders

I wish the tower stands tall
As it witnesses the changes
The building getting underground
The fresh water turning foul

May this place remain green till eternity
Though there is factually no certainty
My love for the place remains immeasurable
Still the old memories are more desirable

Dr. Sangeeta Sharma
Arise, Awake and Stop Not

Along the sea shore
Heard an uproar
Birds crying
Herds flying
Trees trembling
Sea frowning
Darkness darkness everywhere
No light to be seen anywhere

Felt I choked
What made me so shocked?
Thanked I God
Just a dream
Couldn’t scream
Inner bliss lost
Fear fret wrought

Yesterday Taj was blast
Last month Pune was aghast
Year before Jaipur was bombast
Years before WTC was lost

Felt I crushed
Beyond my trust
Why do people fight?
Nature can’t bear the sight

Arise, Awake and stop not, Vivekananda says
When will man arise
To see the bright light

Peace within needs to be lived
Drive has to be taken
Stop not till furry vanishes
Pain diminishes
Faith revives
Peace rekindles
Love rejoice

Dr. Pushp Lata
From Mother…

Be wise my daughter,

Open your heart to wisdom and she will honour you,

Wear her like bangles on your wrist, like a fine gold chain on your neck-

For wisdom is more desirable than beauty,

So much more substantial than charm!

Let wisdom guide your words my daughter,

Then you will speak what is good,

Gentle words of wisdom can pierce a heart, and healing words defy an army.

Your gracious speech will be your help!

Let wisdom guard your heart my daughter,

Listen carefully to what you hear, test the ideas you let through the door,

Let sound judgment be your plumb line, discernment and discretion your jewels,

Let understanding be the ground you walk on!

Let wisdom lend you patience my daughter,

Trusting not the impulse of the moment, or fearing what is yet to come.

Be not enticed, neither dejected,

…..Look at me, I have waited… my life’s wine has sweetened,

The dross has burned out yielding gold…pure gold from the furnace!

I love you my daughter, be wise…

P. C. Sande
Please Look at Me

When you got up, I thought
You would look at Me,
But alas! You remained busy,
In getting ready,
For your office.

At office, I thought
You’ll have some time
To think of Me,
But alas! You remained busy
In reading and replying to your emails
And in net-surfing.

When you came back in the evening,
I thought now you have time,
To spend at least one minute with Me,
But alas! You remained busy
In watching TV.

I am not against you watching TV,
Or surfing the internet,
But I am concerned
For your well-being.
Sometimes I see you in tension
And pressure from office,
That time I think, now at least
You will seek some advice or solace from Me.

But alas! You release your burden
On your poor family members
And they get disturbed.

When I see you quarrel
For very silly matters
I don’t feel like staying there,
But I am helpless
I cannot leave you alone
Because I have come to take you.

You have gone through various phases of life
And each time I am with you
I am situated in your heart as a super soul
But you are ignoring Me.

I am giving you memory, knowledge, intuition
And making you forget your bad occasions
But that you don’t know.
I am still looking for the day
When you will look at Me.

Dr. Hare Krishna Mohanta
Mythical

Amitesh Ranjan
Still, Standing Still

Wounded, Bewildered, Desolated
Destitute, Diverted, Deluded
Taking hike in all these vast oceans
Sulking into sinking ship
Wondering my life could be
With or without you

Rather hurt than feel nothing at all
Lost in the maze
Enjoying the pain, trying to take it all
Wondering what my life could be
With or without you

Colours of emotions are all vain
Betraying time took a howl
While I was trying it to be tame
Wondering was it all vain?
What my life could be
With or without you.

Still holding hand, feeling the warmth.
Still waiting, just once, only once for your smile
Still, still I stand still in that moment.
Still wish I could turn this wheel
Could steer it the way I feel
Can bring you back and snatch all the moment.
And wondering what my life could be
With or without you.

Ruchika Sharma
My Alter Ego

It creates flaws in my personality I never knew existed
Checks me if I talk about something really negative in others
Forces me not to focus on the blackness of others but the sheen it effulges
Tells me not to say anything against its aides, friends, relatives, what to say of it
Mock my innocence and exemplifies my simplicity because others said so
Oh! It’s my alter ego.

Tells me I am not beautiful because it feels that way
Reasons to tell me I remind him of the humble clan when I wear anklets
Growls to tell me the things I should be doing
Shouts at me for not carrying out the responsibilities
It holds not responsibilities but rights and I had to bow
Oh! It’s my alter ego.

Constantly confronts me; never by my side
Berates my aides, my persona, to diminish me to punitive
Even for a relationship so sacred and primitive
Compares me to the most heinous virtues of the fallen souls
Exposes the nonexistent inefficiencies to keep me at my toe
Oh! It’s my alter ego.

The revelations lead me on a path
I unravel not my alter ego but my soul
Pieces are pierced through to trace the dross so prominently and persistently pursued
Relentless scouring rummaging cleans all the gross
Serenity prevails and it fades when illumination glows
Now I am own my own but the hunt is still on
Oh! Where is my alter ego gone?

Dr. Devika
The Beauty that is Her

Full of life she stands
On the patio of life.
Pretty in a way that is her
Flower abloom amidst all strife.

She is to be cherished
A gift from the heavens straight.
How else would I have found her
If not for some fortunate fate!?

Her smile is the golden sunshine
Her voice early morning dew.
Her laughter a bell a chime
Her realization a dream true.

She is the lady
She is the perfect blend.
I feel blessed for having her close
Absolute bliss the time we spent.

I know it is love
I know this is real, so real.
Just looking for the right words
To tell her how I feel.

What if she says ‘no’
Still frightens me..
But I ought to give it a try
And go down on one knee..

She is my dream
And my dreams, I must chase.
For even if she would never be mine,
Her memories would set all ablaze..

Harsh Nambiar
I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT

Night swallows
The blazing sun and obstinate afternoon,
Wind sings
Of pebble monsters
And clay sculptures.

Dark veins are bulging out of bald heads
And big blank black eyes stare at me.

Terrified, I struggle with the shackles
That tie me to a fading world.
Drops of colour tumble down the wall
While time and heat consume their traces.

The nude paintings which were
Once so vivid
Have dissolved to death.
Lines have blurred
The centre of mass has slurred
Memories charred
And voices marred.

I am leaving on a half shattered boat
While raindrops howl on the roof of
My half drowned hut,
I do not know what is next.

ASHISH BIHANI
IN THE CLASSROOM

He speaks and he speaks like a godly geek
I hear his voice and though I hear him speak
But am I really listening to what he says?
Or I am lost, lost in the good old days!!

He acts and acts his best to arouse my interest
And it goes, goes over my head like a handful of dust..
    I look outside at the gold shining leaves
    Nodding my head, I am still in my dreams!!!

Oh, there’s a question, question to what he taught,
I wonder, whatever he said, the poor child bought!!
    Lifetime and scope is all what he talks,
But revolving in my head are the cold morning walks!!

AJITA
MY CITY

And so my time here is soon to be done,
and like every year that moment has come,
when my bags are packed and my plans are set,
I have to depart for a distant, desert nest.

Neither banished nor exiled, I go freely, and of my own choice
But even that knowledge doesn't dim nor reduce
For 'ere tomorrow
I'll surely know the bitter taste of sweet sorrow.

For I will miss my city, the city of my birth,
The place where I learnt of joys of laughter and mirth.
I know its roads its streets and its alleys,
It knows my moods, my loves and my follies.

I may curse and blame it all the time,
For being different and not up to the times.
Yet in my heart I know the truth for it strikes me everyday,
For every reason I give to go, It gives me a thousand more to stay.

Amit Vikram Dutta
NOT EVERY SILENCE IS LIVED ALL ALONE

Not every silence is lived all alone.
Seasons of oblivion aren’t always void.
Darkness sometimes, is not the answer.
Not every night is in sleep enshrined.

Love nailed to a cross, buried in infancy.
Unborn yet, a slumber of sullen eyes.
In caustic calm, an absence. Even as
Graveflowers on her garden stone cry.

Drink down your eulogies from lips of black.
Wring from your mouths, no words on death.
Fawn over the whispers she contrives in air.
In ill languages, kill not the sound of her breath.
In your rare quiet her voice is realized.
In the sleep of my morbid dreams she comes alive.

Nishchay Sharma
Ramblings

O breeze that whistles past
Know not thee the horrors u numb
O freezing hand pawing my heart
Bleeding, tainted I mock the past.

The chill is not what daunts me
Nay the shell the heart craves
Being strong was never a choice
But a baggage forced upon by time.

A pained heart is the choice bestowed
On a silent heart least endowed
O poor soul, what fortress unbreached
Have you built for thee
There's no escape, just darkness
Untouched by warmth of kindness.

This endless swarm rushing by
Is this what you dread, behold and sigh
Break free, O wild one:
Let not a link of the shackles remain
It’s the present thee had craven
And therein lies your heaven.  

Shasanka Mishra
AGELESS

An aged light, her eyes betrayed,
Living keenest, but dismayed,
Immersed in thought, she lived serene,
An aged soul, 'neath face so frayed.

With lines and lines her face ablaze,
And long and distant fell her gaze,
With tales of life and wisdom brimmed,
I wonder in her, all's a daze.

And years will be to her the plain,
That rushes past with such disdain,
Like flashes full of throbbing life,
Which keep her fired in every grain.

I wonder how it feels inside,
With roles a thousand that confide,
And make your soul and face so calm,
With smooth, limitless time to bide.

A thousand days and as much fire,
You must have faced, and will to pyre,
That left you hard and still as stone,
In weather fair, as storms most dire.

To thousand roles you gave élan,
To all that makes you strong yet wan,
I spin this bardic, simple song,
An ode to you, and all your clan.

For e'en in age, you stay serene,
The tower of calm, with all that's been,
Though palest skin and lines adorn,
In all you are all grace's queen.

Himanish Ganjoo

20
Friends with Destiny

As I wandered the streets of life,

Meandering and twisting like a kite

There she was, dressed in white.

She shot through me like ecstasy, eyes like drops of silver,

Looking at her I thought to myself,

What a September, What a September, What a September!

She made her way across my life, filling the troughs,

Heightening the highs,

I danced away into the night, screaming to the world,

What a September, What a September, What a September!

The Septembers rolled by,

The seasons changed,

Out went the summers of love,

In came the autumn of pain,

I stood there, verdict less, weeping for myself,

Why that September, why that September, why that September!

As life seemed to give up on me

One late evening in the blues of spring
We walked into each other again

Looking at me ever so lovingly,

She reminded me,

What a September, what a September, what a September

Now, as the Septembers rolled by,

I would take her to a beach with twinkling stars and brushing waves,

I would look into her eyes and say,

O girl, a ring I have, one ring for you,

Which I want you to have, as I want you by me,

Every September, Every September, Every September

Yashraj Tripathy
Hope

A life’s worth of grief, pain and anguish and all the times we weep;

A moment of respite, happiness is a lone star in the sadness of the night;

Darkness shrouds the sky, the sun will shine bright one day;

Hope is but an illusion, delusion that is our crutch I say;

O seeker of good times, know the price you pay;

For the cheer does not stay, mountains will defy the strongest of gales,

A glimmer a day urges them to say;

One day, one day, oh the fools can pray;

Even with the last breath the blackness doesn’t end, a new cycle of pain begins;

No rest, no respite, no matter how hard you fight;

In Lupe’s den mankind is destined to stay.

Revant Gupta
Insomnia

Painted pale with greenish tinge,
Dyed in aura, it shone
On a clear night sky
Among those pieces of jewels,
I gazed, moved on, I gazed,
As they say, is convention,
Lie down at night, shed yourself.
And though I usually run amok at them
That night I wanted to rest...

But those stars; they love me so
Again I waved to and fro
I gazed, I moved, I gazed.
They smiled back aptly
And didn't let me sleep
I saw it fade,
From mystique black
To sea blue
Until finally, it was just
The beautiful color of dawn!

I grew up as it died
Ahoy!! Dear night!
I'll wait for you
Again; tonight
Whether it comes or not, this heck of a sleep,
You, I know, will definitely be mine.

Manasi Tyagi
NATALIE PORTMAN

Jyotsana Akurati
Nostalgia

Ah it comes,
Without invitation, incitation.

With astute prowess,
It captivates the mind.

Plunging into despair,
Bursting with joy,
Relentless excitement,
Pangs of fear,

Highs and lows.

A formless, endless being,
The eternal refrain

All that remains towards the end.

Chetan Aditya
Blues from the valley

At some far off land,

Behind the walls of abstraction

Outside the frame of time and space,

Beyond our perception

Is a place where the bird still chimes

With a voice that rhymes

Where the music is mellow

And the songs make sense

Where the nature blooms of life

And the life still has time

Time to play, time to smile

For no reason or rhyme

Manan Bhatia
The Athlete

A tide of cold breeze brushed past my shoulder.
Every breath I drew felt heavier now;
Every heartbeat rippled through my body.
CONJURE SPEED. I AM SPEED.
Time froze, coagulated in its path. This is it!

I sink deep into the blocks, to spring into action.
A wild surge of power, I know, is to be unleashed;
To catapult my body beyond the line
UNLEASH POWER. I AM POWER.
The athlete in me lives to see this moment; seize it!

I closed my eyes to summon my soul.
Cold sweat trickled down my neck;
Did a surge of fear go down my spine?
I SHRUNK. I AM PUNY.
The past is here to wreak havoc; I’m dark!

I plummeted down the corridors of time.
Those days of failures; they revolved around me;
The crowd waiting to see me fail; I’m alone.
I WAS NO HERO. I FELL.
No one to cheer for me; my spirits dampened!

The fire rises, charring my heart; pain.
Time indeed proved a fickle mistress;
I was tied down, I was paralyzed.
I CAN’T RUN. I CAN’T WIN.
Life gave way to utter survival; I craved death!

Failure stared me in the face, casting its shadow
Upon the light of my dreams; they’re lost.
Hopes ceased to exist in a world that worshipped winners.

I GO DOWN. HOPES SHATTERED.

Take me back, oh Lord, if the real life is death!

Then there was light, it immersed me.
The sun had descended upon the Earth; bright.
I gazed at myself as in a hallowed mirror.
OPEN YOUR EYES. INSPIRE THYSELF.

Find what you seek! Was it failure, in vain?

No! I can’t let myself pass away.
I can’t succumb to the clutches of fear;
I’m bound to find light, stay and fight.
FAILURE’S NOT FINAL. RISE.
Conquer my fears, break the darkness!

I opened my eyes to the present.
I’ve broken the walls of the past; the chains of fear;
I hear the crowd cheering for US ALL.
I SEE IT. I FEEL IT.

My mind is clear; a single target looms!

If the time lifts me aloft, I shall touch the skies.
I shall colour my future, render it value;
Now the stage is set and I shall take it.
I’M AN ATHLETE. I’M INSPIRED.

Ten seconds to glory!

THE FINAL CUE. GUNSHOT. ADRENALINE. SPEED.

Vijay Shankar
The day of the Hero

Part I Dawn
The darkness had finally lost
Its eternal fight for dominance
The pitch black pit of despair
Had given birth to a saviour
The frosty orphans were crying
His innocence was far too great
The tender feeling of warmth
Had cleansed the world of hate

Part II Afternoon
The disciplinarian was shining
As the world bathed in light
His justice had shaped enemies
Looking for a reason to fight
Yet he stood, forlorn and proud
Fighting his solitary battle
He fed the orphans, and them all
As they tested his mettle

Part III Dusk
The tempest has begun to settle
Everything has turned so crude
The agents of darkness cover
Everything that once was good
The bloody sky is witnessing
The hero bleeding to death
The orphans have started crying,
Scared of their frosty breath

Night
The world sleeps peacefully,
Thinking about their next messiah
And so he goes unsung
Who sacrificed his life, for them

Mangesh Gawankar

31
The Mona Lisa Smile

I

On a vacant, carefree week-end,
With ‘Stairway to Heaven’ playing in my head,
I stared vacantly from my bedroom ledge
Down onto the mound of shacks.

But in a matter of moments,
I was filled with disbelief in my eyes,
Because I had been cheated on with too many lies.

There had always been a jigsaw of tin huts,
Clinging to the boundary of our colony,
That the construction workers called 'home'.

A slum without an inch to spare,
To which none of us had shown enough care.
But this afternoon, everything had changed,
And I cannot forget that innocent girl.

II

I watched the bulldozers raze it to the ground-
All the happy homes reduced, once again, to a mound.

Earlier in the day, on the street,
I had met the same girl, who haunts me now,
Her withered face, her brittle smile
That always graced those thirsty lips,
Sent a shiver down my spine.
I watched her smile even when the bulldozers came,
    And it truly rung through the air,
    As the world she had laboured to build
    Came crashing down.
    She had nothing-no parents, no house, no joy.

    Was she simply destined to build
    Homes for the rich,
    And remain herself, homeless?

    And yet we are told God never hurts innocent children?

    She never had an identity
    And lived on the border of life and death.

    She earned every meal,
    And had no reason to be punished,
    And yet her hopes were made to kneel
    On the whims and fancies of corrupt contractors.

    While I have no reason to complain-
    I lead a happy life with loved ones,

    Yet, I have never managed to keep
    My gratitude shining as bright as a thousand suns.

    I ran to her and held her hand,
    But she was the one who hushed my fears,
    I learned to smile amidst adversity that day,
Her eyes were dry and lacked any signs of tears.
I didn’t want that moment to pass.

And all of a sudden, her breath staggered,
Her face started to become pale,
And then, she stopped breathing,
I was so helpless, I was only seething.

On her face, I still saw a faint, serene smile,
That gave me the courage to move on,
The memory is gradually leaving me now…

But now I know why she was smiling,
All her sorrows were brushed away
In an instant of pain
By a divine hand
In an act of mercy
When she was too young to blame God for everything,
At the tender age of sixteen.

Abhishek Ghosh
Turmoil

I wish upon the falling star,
Voyager to the land of the fallen,
Unto my mind's sweet desire
Pleasure and repose bring

I urge my wandering mind,
Glance yonder side,
Far Horizons Beyond,
The answers thou seek lies.

I whisper to the horizon far,
Arbitrator great divine.
Pacify sky tumultuous,
Burning the earth red.

I pray to the grand endless sky,
Shine a bright guiding light,
Nimbus amongst clouds,
Heavenly and holy shine

I sing to the floating clouds,
Tarry for a lion's sleep.
Engulf in thy shadow dark
Dry warm earth cracked

I call to the shadow cold,
Wrap me in thy shroud,
Star nay shine, in thy black,
Comfort dwelleth in thy lap

Harsh Thakar
Where is Your God Now?

When the world was facing catastrophe,
When the people were in pain,
When the vulgar led life in misery,
And the rich counted gains,
Where was your God then?

When hatred was in the people,
When envy was the order,
When love had, but died in the souls
Of the men once so kind and gentle,
Where was your God then?

When knowledge was questioned,
When belief was threatened,
When wisdom of the wise men
Was called names and challenged,
Where was your God then?

People are dying of hunger,
Children are born deformed,
Kin kills kin for paper,
And death comes before one’s born,
Where is your God now?  

Abhinav Kumar
Whispers of a Silent Night

As I sit and watch the moon shine through the clouds,
There is silence all around me.
Today the world has decided not to be loud.
Is it all a part of His plan?

I feel Darkness
Overwhelming and engulfing me.
Even as the rays of the moonbeam
Light up my face.

This Darkness is different,
For it is not, filled with evil intent,
With longings murderous
Of annihilating my foes.
Nor is it callous and cold,
Bent on running riot in the world,
For all the wrongs been done to me

This darkness is different,
For evil designs he has,
All of them for me!

In his hands, gently he holds my head.
Bringing his face closer, in my ears he whispers.
Sweet reminders of all my failures and fears,
Of the wrongs been done to me, of the fallen tears,
Of all the hurt that I’ve gathered through the years.

He holds out his hand for me to take,
Walks with me to the place
From where I saw the moon rise.
Then, with a hand that is firm,
Pushes me off the edge,
To send me on my journey
From one hell to another.

Vinayak Kesarwani
Winter Solstice

(A Tribute to Nirbhaya: Delhi gang rape victim)

The winter solstice
Gives no solace.
Suffering burns the soul.

The smallest day,
Begins with the eternal suffering.
Whom should I believe,
Who is real for me?
Those who pray, empathize and surround
Or those hounds?
The question of humanity:
Unsure, hangs perplexed!

The removed small intestine
Poses a question of survival.
The damaged liver, aches
While the "liver" I, is living dead
On this hospital bed.

Should I ask God
Where the fault lies?
Is it my body,
Or their mind?
Both created by you, O God!

This curse-verse
You read and feel
And forget,
For another day
Another suffering.
Humanity suffers
Short term memory loss.

My long suffering
On this small day
Won't make a big impact,
On seemingly sinking humanity.
My suffering is only one life long,
Fortunately.
Unfortunately,
Humanity will suffer forever.

And the critic in you
Searching in this curse-verse
A pattern, a way
But How can it
Be well-knit??

Arun Kumar Poonia
When My Grandpa Vanished

The news just came to me,
Because it was no one else but he.
And my throat had a clot,
I simply couldn't understand life’s plot.

Yes! They said my grandpa died,
Moaning and weeping simply I cried.
I did not have the guts to see my grandmother,
Went to my two brothers and we consoled each other.

From his flawless and evergreen smile,
We thought for a while.
Him taking us to market,
Buying us toys, candies and jackets.
So beautiful was he,
Thought my two brothers and me.
Him sitting under mango tree,
And we three playing with him like bees.

Suddenly where did he go?
We have no clue!
One thing that binds us and granny till now,
Is that one day he will come to us anyhow.
Today, we sleep alone with granny,
But we know grandpa gives us his company.
People say he has died,
But believe me, my grandpa has just vanished and is still with me.

Yashodhara
SHORT STORIES
Hitman

Mayank Grover
A BLIND’S COLOURFUL WORLD

Mr and Mrs Sharma were an ideal couple. They had rented a flat in siddheshwari apartments and were living a happy life together. Both of them were employed in the same firm and theirs was a lone marriage. Whatever a person desires, like car, flat, wealth, parents’ lone, respect etc., they had it all. The only thing they lacked was the joy of being parents even after trying for months they couldn’t have a child. Many a times Ragini used to get sentimental over it but raj used to change the topic to take her mind off it. It was there 3rd marriage anniversary and Ragini was really excited as Raj had promised her that it would be the best day of their life. They took off from the office early that day. Ragini was surprised as Raj took the car to the outskirts of the city and stopped in front of an old building. The board in front of the building read orphanage and Ragini got excited and hugged Raj. They went inside and were taken to a room where around 50 children were doing one or the other activity. Raj wanted to adopt the healthiest boy whereas Ragini wanted the cutest. At last they went with Ragini’s choice and brought the child to their home after completing the paper work and named him Darshan. Darshan was brought up with the best facilities, best school, and fabulous toys. All his demands were met as he was their only child. One day it was raining heavily but Darshan wanted to eat ice-cream and thus was forcing his father. When Raj pushed him away Darshan approached Ragini and she took the car keys. Raj tried to stop her but Darshan had become adamant and Ragini being his mother could not refuse it. In that bad whether they drove for the market but while they were on the bridge the tires of the car slipped and the car fell into the river. A lot of people gathered and they were able to save Darshan who was fatally injured. But they could not find Ragini in the river. Raj was informed about it and he ran towards the hospital. When he came to know that Ragini was not found at the site of the accident, he got shocked and blamed Darshan for the accident. Darshan was in operation theatre at that time and after the operation doctors were able to save him but not his eyes. They came home the next day but Raj developed a hatred towards Darshan as he blamed him for his wife’s death. Even after two months the police was unable to find Ragini or her dead body. Raj’s parents forced him and made him marry a girl called Yashoda so that Darshan can be taken care of properly. Yashoda loved both of them a lot but couldn’t fill the void created in their hearts. Raj was still unable to forget Ragini. And he started drinking on regular basis. One day Yashoda saw Darshan’s old paintings and she was startled to see his brilliant work. She encouraged him to take up painting again although Raj thought of his work as garbage. Darshan worked extremely hard and started painting again with Yashoda’s help. One day Yashoda’s brother Ravi, who was organiser of art gallery came to their home. He also liked Darshan’s work and was surprised that a blind person can also paint that well. He even offered to put his work on display and earn money from it but Darshan disagreed. He didn’t want someone to put a price tag on his art. One day few people came to Raj’s house and threatened him to return their money but Raj was drunk at that time and he used abusive words for them. They had a brawl and when Darshan and Yashoda intervened they got hurt too. They gave Raj a week to return their money but Raj ignored him. Darshan thought a lot that night and called Ravi. Rabi agreed to sell all his paintings but told him that the price might not be that high. Still Darshan took out all the painting from the wall and gave it to Ravi the next day. They got enough money to pay the loan taken from moneylenders and gave it to them the next week. Raj felt remorse and asked Darshan to forgive him for his horrible behaviour. Darshan forgave him and Raj promised him that he’ll never take up drinking again. So after that they lived as a happy family.

-Sarvesh
March 23rd

The mobile was ringing at an interval of merely 10 seconds. It gave Manjushree the notion of headache. Why doesn’t the rest of the world even want to provide her few hours of complete solitude to introspect? She doesn’t even want to check who’s calling her. It may be her five-year old daughter, her mother, her patients, or simply anyone. She just wants to think herself free from every bonding she shares with any person.

Being a doctor is one of the most wonderful professions, Manjushree thinks. To cure the patients, to see the smile on the faces of their family members, to try while leaving no stone unturned, to save the patient makes life challenging, but full of bliss, satisfaction as well. She keeps thinking of how she used to pacify the anger, despair and sorrow of all those family members who lost their loved ones in an accident. Today she can understand how it feels when one suffers from such trauma.

The profession of being a doctor gave Manjushree the chance to meet Pradip, an MD of chest medicine from AIIMS, one of the premiere Institutes of Medical Sciences in India. At first sight she fell in love with him as he was unique with his own style, look, mannerism, knowledge, care and his pure sense of dedication to his patients. They gradually became friends, and it is joyful for her to think that now she is Mrs Pradip Agarwal. Life has become a wonderful journey as it has been blended with love, trust and hope after Pradip came into her life.

It was only three days back when both of them had gone to attend the medical conference which was scheduled at 10 AM. She dressed so beautifully that Pradip appreciated her beauty in simply the same way he did when they met for the first time. They started quite early from home, around 6 O’clock by their private car. Both of them sat together on the back seat and it was a pleasure for them to have a discussion on several topics of medical science and the human anatomy, some case studies as well. The driver was heading the car quite fast as it was quite early in the morning with little traffic. The road between the house and the main town had always been beautiful: there was greenery covering the hills by the side of the road, the canopy of tall trees covered with red Krishnachura flowers, giving a scenic effect. They were enjoying the beautiful sight along with the fresh morning breeze, when suddenly a lorry came rushing like a giant with its annoying horn disturbing the peace of the beautiful morning. Pradip peeped through the car’s window to find what was happening. Their driver had skilfully taken the car to the extreme left but what he had failed to notice was another car behind the lorry, which in the process of hastily overtaking it had suddenly come before their car. “Broom”!! With the blinking of eyes everything changed before her sight. Though she and the driver got minor cuts and injuries, Pradip was moaning, and seemed to be in severe pain, clutching his arm. The internal injury was severe, he could understand, he felt as if the bones of his hand had been all churned to bits. Within a few minutes, a police van came to the spot and took both of them to a Government
Hospital in town. But the X-ray report was terrible! That very day Manjushree brought him to India’s best Orthopaedics Hospital, which is located in Chennai. She felt relaxed as the country’s best orthopaedic surgeon, who was taking his charge, assured her complete recovery by the intended operation.

The next day, she woke up very early in the morning. She went straight to Pradip. He was still groaning in severe pain. Pradip, a cricket lover, was very depressed to know that the World Cup Final 2003, between India and Australia was taking place just then, and he wasn’t in a condition to watch it, to cheer for his country. Manjushree smiled and told him that she would keep him updated about it. She, being a doctor insisted that the surgeon allow her in the operation theatre, but they declined. Time appeared to stretch on into what seemed to her like a century, while she waited outside the theatre. After four long hours, the doctors called her inside. She went in with high hopes but in there, at least ten doctors and nurses were surrounding him. Some doctors were giving him chest massage. Running, she went near to him, still with a little hope. His body had become blue. She called him, touched his hand gently, but there was no response. She couldn’t even imagine this ever happening to her dearest husband in even a nightmare. She cried aloud, she shouted. The hospital staff covered his body, and carried him away. This was the first time she actually understood the pain the family members undergo upon losing their loved ones. She sat silently. Being a doctor, how could she blame another doctor for this ironic fate of her family, their daughter and her own!

The phone has started ringing again. Now she finally picks it up. “Hello Mumma! It’s Pammi here. Tell Papa it’s good that he didn’t watch the World Cup Final. India has lost very pathetically”. Manjushree cuts the call. Tears drop from her eyes. It was March 23rd, 2003.

-Yajnaseni Saha
The Unnoticeable Admirer..

It feels so weird at times, when you have feelings for someone but you can't share them with the person, not because you are dumb or do not have the guts to utter it out. Trust me I'm not gonna bore you with some handicapped guy's story or a lover's emo drama. Sometimes you just have to let the other person go.. try to keep yourself busy in other things to disallow the feelings to come rushing back and simply move on in life because the relationship which you wanted to have with her is just impossible.. After an unsuccessful attempt of proposing my close friend Preeti, who was my senior in the college, I decided its time to simply forget the past and look forward to the future. Sounded awesome initially but the only glitch was it wasn’t that simple. The more i tried to sway away the feelings I had for her, the more they widened the hole in my heart.. She on the other hand, had moved on. Her career was back on track and she even got into a relationship with a guy who fulfilled the ten qualities which she had once written in a checklist and termed it as: 'The 10 crucial Lineaments'. My life was also slowly and steadily getting back on track. I was working in an IT firm as a summer intern. The hectic work in the office from Monday to Friday, acted as a firewall and protected me from thinking about the beautiful yet painful memories of the past, the boring lifeless present and the unpredictable future. But then used to come the weekend.. The nature of an individual can change with time but my plans for the weekend could never change! T'was fixed, Friday night, casual Drinks with colleagues at a sports bar, 2 pegs of a high priced whisky, that too On the Rocks! Saturday, ordering Dominos Pizza for lunch by using the same old buy 1 get 1 free coupon, but never giving the coupon to the delivery guy. Saturday evening, with other Interns and college friends who were doing their internships in other nearby firms.. Cheap whiskey in the steel tumblers used for drinking water, smoke filled room with the only light, that of the car's headlights running on the road.. and then as soon as 5-6 pegs used to get in, the feelings and the memories used to rush out. Suddenly everyone used to talk about their Exes, first love, real love, fake love and their time pass relationships. The lyrics of the sad songs being played in the cell phone used to make much more sense with every sip of beer.. Time used to fly.. and in few hours, everybody used to sleep comfortably on the floor with the bed sheet and the pillows lying untouched on the beds. Next day by the time I used to get up, all the friends had gone and I had a lot of mess to clean, to keep me busy for the rest of the day.

That Monday morning was the usual boring one until I had reached the office, but as soon as I reached my cubicle, I was startled to see her, or as i used to call her, 'the only one', standing in front of me with a smile, so beautiful, that was ten times bigger than the smiley which she used to text me back in the college days when everything in my life was perfect.. Anyways, she told me that she just got recruited in the firm, knew I was doing my internship there and thus wanted to meet me. After a casual talk, she left for her cubicle and I came back to mine. I was really excited because now there was hope but was a bit worried too because I didn't know her relationship status, not the Facebook one, which was single btw, but the real one. To have a nice impression, I sent an intra-division mail saying, 'Got my second last stipend,
Donuts at my desk :). I knew chocolate donuts were her favourite and she wouldn't be able to resist this time too. As per plan, she replied, 'In a minute!! :D' And was in fact there in just 15 seconds!! After a nice little chit chat, she asked me if I could accompany her to the cafeteria for lunch. Voila!! why not, I replied. I wrote barely few lines of code that day in the office and the entire day, googled, 'best love quotes', read the poems and the songs I had written in the mean while for her, admiring her beauty, her nature, her presence and her smile on my blog.

At lunch time, we took a table in the corner and began talking. Before I could finish up my meal, she finished the hopes which I had since morning.. She told me about how excited she was to find such a nice job, just two weeks before her marriage. Marriage... so soon?? What are you 30?? I asked surprisingly. She chuckled and told me she had found the love of her life and even her parents felt that it’s the right time for her to marry. Does he fit to your 10 point criteria? I asked and she laughed again and nodded her head. The other interns on the other table winked at me and started talking loudly about me. They did it because in India, when you see your friend with a girl, you convince yourself that they are committed and get busy in pulling your friend's leg when the girl is around him. That's more like a stupid custom in India! The first half of my day seemed as if I was flying in the air with a balloon tied around my head and the second half was as if somebody pierced the balloon with a needle. In the evening, i asked her if she wanted to grab a cup of coffee but she told me that she had to leave early as her fiancé, Vikram, would pick her up for shopping. I pretended to be happy, although I was grinding my teeth while walking towards my desk. After few minutes, she got up, waved and left. I went near the office pantry and was now waiting for her to reach the main gate. She went out, crossed the road and there he was.. the bloody ten pointer who stole my love.. although one sided but still, I always preferred to think as if he stole her from me.

Vikram’s arrival brought a million dollar smile on Preeti’s face. I wanted to go back to my desk but also wanted to get her last look for the day. Suddenly, a truck coming from the other end, lost its balance and hit their bike. Both of them fell in the middle of the road and the bike fell on Vikram’s leg. Still, instead of pulling his leg out, he covered Preeti like a shield so as to protect her from the nearby speedy vehicles. I ran out as fast as I could and asked the security guard to call up the ambulance. Both of them were unconscious and were brought to a nearby hospital. The doctor told us that both were hurt badly and Vikram immediately needed blood with B- blood group which co-incidentally was my blood group too. If at that moment, the doctor wanted blood for Preeti, i would have bled to death for her but he wanted it for Vikram.. I was confused.. On one hand, this guy was the fiancé of the love of my life. He was taking her away from me but on the other hand, it wasn’t his fault that Preeti loved him and not me. I stepped up and told the doctor that I would give the blood but on one condition that my identity would never be revealed. The doctor agreed and after taking my blood, started Vikram’s operation. I checked upon Preeti, who was still unconscious and then came back to my flat.

The entire night the image of Vikram, trying to save Preeti without even caring about himself, stayed in my mind. Until now I had seen such things just in bollywood movies. The next day, i bought a bouquet and went to the hospital. Both of them were still unconscious
but as Preeti’s parents were present in her room, so instead I gave the bouquet to a sick boy lying in the general ward and came back. Next day onwards I booked bouquets online and sent them to her with few poetic lines admiring her. I did that daily until my internship got over and just wanted to see her once, before leaving the city. Unfortunately it took her a lot of time to recover from the accident and I could never meet her. I don’t know whether she even read all those letters which I’d sent along with the bouquets, I even don’t blame the almighty that I never got her love but I thank him for at least giving me the chance to become her unnoticeable admirer...

-Sarvesh Allawadi
The World has Moved On

It was two years ago that I thought of writing this, yet until now I never realized why. As I stood on the rooftop of a tiny little brick house I was living in; whether it was under a blistering hot sun or surrounded by a cloudy winter haze, I do not remember; I saw a man walking on the street. A tall lanky fellow, fair complexioned, middle-aged. Dressed neither too shabbily nor too exuberantly, there was nothing really special about him. Just a normal middle-aged guy walking on the street, like so many others around him. So, why did this thin-legged skinny fellow catch my attention? Because of his beard.

That white tangle, just reaching below his chin, got me thinking. Who was this guy? What was his business? His slow but sure gait, the far-away look in his eyes, his battered shoes, and that white beard. I couldn’t understand why it mystified me to such an extent, it’s not like I didn’t have a bushy black one on my cheeks too. But I just sat there, as he slowly walked by, thinking of what could have resulted in his being there. Was he on an early morning stroll? Had some tragedy befallen him, taking away the pace that should have accompanied that lanky frame? Did the dreamy expression smell of liquor, or was it a memento of his long and twisted life?

A few days later, I saw him working on a construction site, with a toe protruding from the battered shoe, an elderly lady beside him.

Just last year, I was sitting in a hospital waiting for my turn, when I looked out the window and saw a rag-picker. Draped in battered and blackened clothes, hair as messy as a twig nest, walking with a bag made of a dirtier cloth, this rag-picker was little different from any of the others that hog the streets elsewhere. Thin as a stick, frail and tall, the thing that struck me was, again, his dirty grey beard. A sense of déjà vu swept over me as my mind wandered to similar thoughts regarding his current condition.

Had he always been just a rag-picker and a beggar, or had he once led, if not luxurious, at least a more respectable life? Why was he here alone, why wasn’t he accompanied by others as unfortunate as him? When I went out of the hospital a few minutes later, I saw him babbling around, shouting nonsensical things at people. Maybe an outburst against what life had bestowed upon others but not him. It was then that I realized that he was different from other quiet beggars on the street, he was very vocal, almost to the point of being loud and much more interactive than years of solace should have left him. Infact, he was crazy.

A few days later, on another visit to the hospital, I saw him sitting in a shady corner, silent. His eyes looked stony. Silence seemed to have finally overtaken him.

“When The Levee Breaks”, I have always felt a mystical power emanating from this Led Zeppelin song, much like “Kashmir”. I sat in the Metro listening to it, on a day when a sandstorm and smog fused to give a dystopian aura to the waves of trees going by. It was
probably the earliest metro that day, for straight up above I could almost see the dark sky with stars shining like unpolished diamonds. But in the east, there was the outline of the Sun behind that sheet of brown air. In the distance, I could see the silhouette of old warehouses and buildings. The metro hurtled past it all, higher that the tree tops, giving an illusion of a vast waste land in a world that had Moved On, much like Roland Deschain’s In-
World.

There beside me, as I looked out the window with a Led Zep-induced reverie, came and sat a foreigner. As you may have guessed already, he had a long white beard. He sat with his hands folded in his lap as if in prayer, a constant expression on his sun-burnt face. He wore a loose T-shirt over his tall thin body, and carried nothing with him but a bottle of water and a cell-phone. Deep-set eyes, tall face and a much overused shoe.

Again, that same old train of thought began. What was he doing in this country? Was he a religious man who had come to India for his spiritual needs, or was it for a mere business? Why was he alone, and so silent, unmoving? Had he been around to see Led Zep perform this song on-stage?

I never saw him again.

What was it with the beard that intrigued me so much? Why did I make a mental note to write about these incidents when I was witnessing them? Why are these memories so crystal clear?

The mystery behind this unfathomable connection with long white beards and tall lanky frames was, to some extent, solved recently as I sat in my room, looking at the books I had read years ago. I realized that those men were an incarnation of some of the imaginary characters that I had grown up with. They reminded me of childhood, when the world seemed such a nice little place to live in. When there no worries, and you didn’t have to think of what to do in the next hour. Ah, such mysteries those characters with long white beards had seemed then.

But the reason behind my subconscious desire to write about them was the inherent sadness they generated. These bearded men made me realize that the real world is not so ideal, it is not one where everything turns out well in the end. It works on hard rules, not mystic forces. Old men with beards are just old men with beards. There are no Gandalf or Dumbledore in real life.

-Sahil Khatkar
From The Mind of a “Wanna be a Writer”

It wasn’t the first time I was viewing all this. Scores of people around me and hundreds waiting for their turns. Turn to get a picture clicked and get their copies signed by me which would give them something to boast on social networking websites and among their friends. Children stood on their toes to have a look at their most favourite writer, one who thinks the same way as they did. Soon a camera flashed at a distance and the bright light pinched my eyes. I was instantly thrown back on my rickety bed. Yes, it wasn’t the first time I was viewing all this.

It all began with the arrival of summers a few years back when I was overjoyed as I would be entering the secondary school soon. Characters were born, words were searched and a story was formed. The first one was Billie-the dog who dreamt of being an astronaut, not because he wanted to see how earth looked from that far or how it felt to be one amongst few who reached there but he would imagine how his tail would wag in the outer space. The dog, who was clever like a cat, made his impression on my cousin’s mind. The characters grew meeker and I became insane as the days passed. I know it’s not easy to make people read what you want them to, but it’s not so tough at the same time. My mind, which is occupied by many thoughts, has many stories to tell … some day they shall be told. Some day for sure!!

-Archit Aggarwal
Sherlocked

--Shreyansh Jain
Infiltrated

“This cannot be a good sign.” Eight constables were lying dead on the ground, all were shot from a far range, the BSF inspector observed. He had no idea how this situation had occurred. He radioed a backup team which was waiting some ten minutes away. It was a moonless night, he had found the bodies but was sure something was not adding up, these BSF soldiers could not have died on their own. He had a torch but there was no way he could have seen anyone with the dry sand blowing in Rajasthan desert, the terrorists were running some distance away. He proceeded towards the fence. The barbed wire fence was cut on both sides of the border; there he saw more bodies, not of his own countrymen, not even of the Pakistani army Uniform. The two bodies had guns and weapons on them. He wondered if it was some kind of setup. It had been fifteen minutes already since the last communication with the head constable there. This was a very critical situation because clearly terrorists or militants or enemy soldiers had entered. Inspector knew he had to act as quickly as possible. He had known what had happened when Pakistani soldiers had entered Kargil and set off one of the bloodiest wars in Indian history. Though India eventually won the war, the price was huge. Over five hundred soldiers had been killed and over a thousand were wounded. He quickly called deputy commandant and explained the situation. The deputy commandant issued orders immediately for an emergency search team. BSF the Border Security Force were quick to assemble a team to search around the area. The local police and the surrounding city police stations were informed.

The director general of the BSF Haamir sat in his office. It was a position of honour to be holding one of the important posts in India but today nothing mattered as he had let his country down. He had made a mistake somewhere; he thought he should have been more careful in planning the patrol areas. He would resign soon due to his mistake but right now he had to act. He called up Director of RAW, which is the Research & Analysis Wing, the country’s external intelligence agency and the Director of IB, which is the Intelligence Bureau, the country’s internal intelligence agency and informed them of the breached border.

Meanwhile the terrorists were hiding in an old and empty house; they had sneaked their way into a village in Bakhasar in Rajasthan and found the house just as their handlers had told. They found all their plans, papers, weapons, satellite phones, money and bags just as they were told. They had plans to wreak havoc in India. All had different plans, they only were supposed to be together till one night then they would separate their ways. They were supposed to wait for a call.

The Director of IB is the post held by the senior most officer of India, Mr. Sekhon was not new to situations of this kind. He had just heard about the breach, it was 3 am and was thinking about the measures to take. He was one of the brightest officers of the country and one of the most important. He knew he had to act intelligently and quickly. He had to definitely inform the Prime Minister about this. There would be lot of talk in the whole country about this once the media came to know about it. He knew that if the terrorists had gotten inside the country they must be hiding at some nearby village. He called the Director
General of the BSF Mr. Haamir and confirmed about searching the nearby place. He then asked the Deputy Director of IB to connect to all the phones including mobiles in the infiltrated area via the Spyter System and listen to the conversations. The IB is authorized to conduct taping of phones and listening to conversations without a warrant. He knew that it might prove useless as the Spyter System could not interfere with the satellite phones and generally the terrorists used satellite phones so that they could not be tracked or traced. It was going to be a long night. He called the Prime Minister and informed him of the situations that had developed. He answered his queries and promised to do his best.

The Director of RAW, Mr. Nyar had also begun his work. RAW contacted all the spies in Pakistan to know whether it was the military who had breached. He was not completely satisfied but it looked like the military had nothing to do with this according to his sources. It was terrorists most likely, but there have been rumours of connections between the army and the terrorists many times. It didn’t matter who they were right now, they had gained entry and they could wreck havoc in India. The dreadful thing was that now that they were inside, he had no idea when they would strike. It could be days or a few months after which they blew up some place or attacked innocent citizens or hijacked vehicles or help the local terrorists and militant groups of India. He called up the Prime Minister and told him about the whole scenario.

The next day the Prime Minister called a meeting of the National Security Council which includes the Directors of IB and RAW. The clock was ticking and they didn’t know how much time they had on their hands.

-Niel Patel
The Fallen Prince

A fool, a disappointment, and a failure he was labeled. And none were surprised. Never were there any cries for help, nor were there tears of shame and guilt, but it showed. It showed on his face and on the face of many in the court who had to face the consequences of his actions, for that what he did was nothing but a shameful reminder of the man he has become. He himself was now only a distant memory of the person he was meant to be, supposed to be.

Will, or William the VII, was the once much adored prince, and the son to king Alexander, of the great Prussian empire, an empire so esteemed and feared at the same time by its many subjects, allies and enemies. Words of its greatness reached ears all over the four lands of the world. People travelled for months to be a part of this Prussian empire, to experience the life only a country as great as this one, could give. It was a true medieval portrayal of the mythical land of Eden. Gold, jewels, coins and possessions held equal importance as love, respect and glory to its people and rulers. It was a land where God himself would have stepped upon to live and to celebrate his many gifts to the world. But it was a land where life was celebrated not in peace, but in battles, victories and above all, glory.

No true greatness could come without bearing the costs of waging wars and leading battles to even the people you once loved and cared for, and this empire was no different. Allies turn against you, for success prompts hope, and with hope comes the promise of glory. A glory that few achieve, yet all pursue. This pursuit for glory was what led to the battle of the legendary battle of the Bloodstone Valley. A battle fought between Prussia and their once-loved Georgia. It was an imprudent attempt on the part of the Georgian emperors to wage a war on Prussia, yet the smell of success and hope for glory led them to stab their own ally. It wasn’t a feeble attempt, and it showed. King Alexander was all but defeated at the hands of the traitors, as they were to be labeled. Arin, the king of Georgia and the well-known schemer of great sieges had led another great battle. Arin knew that the vast number of archers and cannons in the Prussian empire held no importance in the shallow valley of Bloodstone, for it was ceiled by the low rocks that would render the archers and cannons useless. They could have been useful only if they could get closer to their enemy without getting attacked. But given the power and skill of swords Georgia had at their disposal, they looked frail. But it was the valiance and intelligence of Will that led them to the win they deserved. It was his counter-plan, his swift execution of it that led Prussia out of one of the worst defeats they would have ever faced.

This great win, twelve years ago, seemed like a distant memory. These twelve years had changed a lot in Will. Many thought that maybe the smell of glory got to him too, for he was never the celebrated warrior and the valiant fighter he once was. And this day could just be the final blow in the already shaken reputation of the fallen prince. He had led three jesters into the king’s court. On his many requests, the king listened and gave them the chance to perform and be a part of the biggest gathering the country ever sees. Things didn’t exactly go as Will planned, for he wanted to get his father’s ears back. It turned out one of the jesters
was a man sent from the long known enemy-state of Dorth. He had with him a device, a
device so small yet so powerful it blasted through a 100 yards of men, stone and steel.
Hundreds in the court died, including the great king Alexander. I was a matter of shame that
he had to die not at the hands of a great warrior, not by sword or arrow, but by a cheap trick
from the wicked men of Dorth. And the blame was to fall to Will, who couldn’t judge the
man for who he was or could have the enterprise to do a proper check on the man before
allowing him such royal access.

The kingdom reeled, but it was William who faced the consequences of his own actions the
most. He couldn’t believe what he just did. How rash he had been. And being the one the
kingdom would now fall to, he couldn’t have been more anxious. But it moved something in
him. He realized he had been missing that motivation, that fire of vengeance and that will to
make himself the man he was supposed to be. In his horrendous mistake, he realized he
wasn’t looking at the world the right way. It wasn’t the world he was supposed to coast
through, for the responsibilities on his shoulders were far too much. He yet couldn’t show the
people around him, but he knew that it was this blow that would finally become the savior of
him. He just might be able to turn around and rectify all the mistakes he once made. That he
just might be able to carry and build upon the glories his forefathers achieved. So there stood
a new king, the fallen prince, nigh the throne of the greatest empire the world saw, yet a king
the empire looked down upon, a king who would have to prove his worth to the world. But
would he? Only time could tell.

-Palash Siddamsettiwar
The Strange Chain

He was walking alongside a road, only feeling the presence of road around him. It was as if walking on a bridge hanging nowhere in a dark, vast space. He continued walking despite all questions ringing inside his head. Everything was black and white. He somehow knew that seemingly infinite road was going to end somewhere. He now tried to observe the road, tried to remember it. Straining his brain a little bit, he was able to remember where he came from. It was as if floating in a deep ocean of his own consciousness with noise of silence to accompany him.

As he remembered, he was on a top of a mountain. Everything was grey black then, and he had a blue flower in his hand. He couldn't tell what the significance of that rose was but it was the only thing that made his mind happy. It was about to rain. He looked at a black sky and then looked back down to see a clear ocean. But there was something wrong. It was not going to rain. The grey-black surrounding was not due to upcoming rain, he was standing on an active volcanic place that was going to erupt. The lava was approaching him slowly and ruthlessly from all sides. He could feel the rise in temperature. He wanted to escape, but there was no way out. The volcano was going to melt his body. He was trapped on a small piece of land which, in matter of seconds was going to be destroyed by volcano. He didn't know why but he, for a millisecond had a thought of that blue flower with him. But it was no longer with him and when his eyes swept the area around, he saw it at the border of volcanic flow. He tried to grab it with trembling hands and fearful face, and he was now skydiving.

The fear was still inside his body and mind. He thought it was due to the height. He didn't have a clue about his experience with lava, nor did he remember his jump from the plane. He didn't even recognize that he was unable to recall about plane from which he jumped. He was floating in air with his body horizontal and hands opened like wings. He saw tiny cities and nearly rectangular farms and at the right moment, he dived. His body was no longer floating on air but he was approaching ground with an enormous speed, like eagle approaching his prey. He opened his parachute and he was now walking on a road. Now it was clear how he got there; but how did he get to the volcano? He rewound his memory.

And he thought he was in water before he arrived at volcano.

'Yes! For sure!' He thought. He was in clear Blue Ocean wearing a diving suit and was observing fish-flocks. He saw a beautiful pattern they made and it was like time was frozen for him. He was feeling an existence of warm water around him. He needed to dig further in time. And now he recalled almost everything.

He was in a park, remembering or precisely, thinking about road. He wasn't aware how he got there. Sitting on a bench, all he could see and hear was pure white sunlight reflecting from green grass blades and chattering of a lonely finch. He was also able to locate the sky as clear as ocean with white clouds floating around. He had an appointment with someone. He couldn't remember who he or she was but he knew he had to sit there. It was important for him to attend his guest. But his invitee was no ordinary. He or she was playing games with him. He became aware that he didn't know what type of bench he was sitting on. As soon as he tried to think about the bench, he was no longer sitting on that bench. Instead, he found himself on a roller-coaster, thinking about a park. He couldn't figure out why he was
thinking about a park sitting on a roller coaster...He had completely forgotten his presence in the park. He found people around him making noise but he could not hear voices around him. But he was able to pick a blue colour of the side-bar. Neither had he 'noticed' the other mute things shouting around him. It was so normal that he took its realness for granted. He couldn't even tell, why, in the first place he was on a roller-coaster. He could feel the gravity acting on him and as roller coaster descended, he could feel formation of a lump of fear in his stomach. And before the roller-coaster rose again, he was in deep blue water, thinking about a roller-coaster. He neither could tell why or how he got there, nor did he think of explaining it; because there was no-one but him to explain. He ignored the thought of roller-coaster presuming it was a Déjà Vu. That's how he got to the volcano and following the trail, to this road.

He found a bench where he sat in the silent noise of black Universe. And finally his guest arrived.

When he saw her, his every part of body was full of adrenaline. He didn't know why he would always get that feeling while she was around. He wanted to run, but instead, he just sat there with a smile on his face. She was beautiful. He knew she wasn't real. She was his friend and a teacher. She had taught him all the philosophy he knew till then about the strange world around him.

She asked him, “Have you noticed the fact that you've been observing only blue shades all the way in your whole journey.” And then he noticed it. It had something to do with all of this.

“Why is so?” He asked her.

“It was a symbol that your subconscious mind has created for you to conquer all the difficulties in your quest. I must tell you, it represents your timeline. Every particle in this Universe has its own time.”

She told him, “If you remember how you got here, that means you've learned today's lesson.” She paused and waited for right moment to say, “What a confusing statement...I'm speaking of time where there's no today and no tomorrow for granted...It's only now... I've taught you a mixture of two paces of time. The arrow of all almighty time forces us from past to present and present to future. But if you could recognize its essence, you can rule it. You can mix backward and forward flow of time to get wonderful results, at least in imagination. For example, just for an analogy, think of watching a crying girl walking backwards. She is, presumably going back in time, but simultaneously, for her falling tears, time is running forward. You just did the same. You were thinking in past while running forward in time. Isn't that wonderful?” His heart was pounding by then and he couldn't take it anymore. The energy needed to be released somewhere. As he saw a light at the end of the road, his pounding heart stopped for a second and when it started, he was awake in his bed with his heart still beating at a high pulse...

-Pratik Aghor
The Pleasure of the moment

“A great life isn't about huge things;
It's all about small things that make a big difference!"

So often we see many people who keep cribbing about small little things every now and then. Their complain list never ends. At the same time there are people who are always happy and relaxed.

Life is full of variety of moments that we keep facing, while some are happy, some are sad; some are sweet, some bitter; some are boring, some enjoyable. But there are some special moments which make you forget all the pains of your life. So which are those moments??

Suppose you’re fond of Ice-creams, recall that time of your life when you had a delicious Ice-cream, now focus on the moment when the ice cream enters your mouth, doesn’t it feel great? Let’s look at another example, say someone is passionate about cricket; just think of the moment when you see Sachin bat, or India lifting the World Cup.

These moments may not last long, perhaps for as long as one second or even a fraction of it. But even that minute moment gives such immense pleasure. Let’s take another example, it’s a spring season, a full moon night, you’re on your terrace and gently, cold breeze goes through your face. Feels amazing! Another example, you’re tired after a busy day, think of the moment you’re lying on the bed and someone gives you a massage. For some people that moment may be spending time with their love.

Most of us, after schooling, live away from home. The very moment of planning next trip to home makes us happy, now think of the moment when we get home, the glee in eyes of our parents; the moment our mother cooks us delicious food and makes us eat with her own hand; the moment dad get us a lots of chocolates and goodies; the love, the care we get are simply unique!

The list of such exotic moments is practically endless, the idea is to enjoy those moments and cherish them. In present world everyone desires for a stress-free life, but pressure does get to us. It’s important to deal with it constructively. Even in such situations these moments keep happening, all we need to do is to notice and appreciate them. Often we make our lives complicated by worrying too much about the end results that we forget to enjoy the journey! Why not enjoy what’s already on plate rather than what’s yet to come!! The point is these are the moments that make our life better, make life fun. These are the moments that keep us going in an environment where tension and stress never cease. Sometimes even such small little things give immense joy that other things fail to give. Enjoy the little things in life....for one day you’ll look back and realize they were the big things!

So, live for the moment and extract as much pleasure as you can, coz these moments keep coming one way or another.

Enjoy the Ice-Cream before it melts!!!!

-Chirag Ramnani
"Because you have not attended even one class of my course till now, I'm failing you" said professor Srivastav in a declarative tone. "But sir, attendance is not compulsory in BITS. And anyway I never understood anything in the lectures. What's the point then?" I asked the professor with a frustration on my face. By his expressions I could make out that he was dead serious. I was standing there with my hands at the back, pleading with him to reconsider my case. My heart-beat rate had risen. This happened with me every time I found myself in a helpless situation. I did not want an ‘NC’ on my CG card. “Sir I have never indulged in any of these... activities. I follow all the rules. I am a firm believer in god, sir, please sir! I don't even have a girlfriend. I’ve been sincere this semester. It’s just that I did not understand this subject...sir please...” I have no idea why I was telling him all those things. I always found myself justifying for random things in situations like this. Maybe I was trying to make a point. It’s hard to explain what it was.

"You do what you want to and I’ll do what I have to", said professor Srivastav, this time in a challenging tone. It seemed as if he was intentionally torturing me. I must have upset him further by outright telling him that I did not understand anything in his lectures.

He turned around to walk away when I reached out for his hand to plead. He was taken aback by my gesture and immediately withdrew his arm from my trembling clutches.

Yes, I was trembling. I was scared.

“Don't touch me', he shouted.

“Sir, I promise I’ll attend all the remaining classes. Please don't fail me”, I pleaded while trying to squeeze whatever little drops of mercy the professor was known to have. Sweat had made my hands moist. He must have found it disgusting.

I followed him in the hallway pleading, “sir please, sir...I have never broken any rule...I’m sorry sir...sir please...”

I was getting irritated by the professor’s indifference towards me. I knew the irritation would soon turn into rage and anger.

Meanwhile I was following the professor in the dark dusty corridor of the Faculty Division building, begging him to reconsider my case. He stopped in front of his room. I stopped too. There was a momentary silence. He turned around and said "Don't drill me, ok. Just go and attend the rest of the classes".

That was it. 'Enough of the subjugation', I thought. I pounced upon the professor and punched his face hard. He was shocked by my move and tried to stop me. He couldn’t. Simultaneously I was pouring my heart out- “What the hell did I do to you? Who the f#%k do you think you are? Why are you so harsh to students all the time? I don't give a f#%^ about your course, ok?
Not a damn fu#%ing rat’s ass! Go screw your subject! You know why? You know why!” I shouted that last question. “Because that's all you have to screw! So go screw it!” I finished my answer with a final blow on his face.

I stood up and saw the unconscious old man. He must have been in his late 40s, almost my father's age. I was still breathing heavily with the rage. I looked around the empty corridor while wiping off the saliva from my face and realized what a blunder I had committed. There was an utter silence in the dusty corridor. I heard some hustle of students coming from the adjoining corridor. For once I just wished to God that all the people in the world would somehow vanish. Obviously I did not want anybody to see what I had done.

Buzz...Buzz...Buzz...Suddenly I felt a vibration near my crotch. I scratched that area. There was something there. It was vibrating...buzz...buzz...buzz.... 'What the hell is that?' I thought. 'Is it my mobile? Vibrating? Oh yes, I had put an alarm. Is it 6 a.m. already?' I realized it was all a dream on being woken up by a vibrating cell- phone. I turned the alarm off.

"Oh God!” I said with a cracking morning voice, 'what was I doing to the guy?’ I thought. I checked the time with half open eyes just to be sure. It was indeed 6 a.m. The brightness of the screen caused irritation in my eyes. I remembered I had planned to go for a jog. I looked outside the window. It was still dark. I sat there for a while with half open eyes thinking about the dream. It was warm inside the blanket and it was biting cold outside that door. I did not want to go for a jog at that time. But I did not want to break my routine either. Hence I got out of the bed to roam about in the wing for a while. It was pitching dark. The evening star was visible due north. No light was on in any of the visible rooms. The washroom light was still on. That meant that the chowkidar was still asleep. Usually I wake up at 6:30 in the morning and the chowkidar is up by then to switch of all the lights. I had woken up a little early that day.

I strolled in the wing for some time, waiting for the calls of nature. That day was a post Oasis holiday. It was kind of silly standing there in the wing at 6:10 a.m. when all my friends were snoring inside warm comfortable rooms.

After easing myself from the calls of nature I got ready to go for the jog.

Just when I came out of the hostel, a cool breeze sent shivers down my body. The sky had suddenly turned grey-blue. The clouds had appeared very abruptly. Lightning confirmed the presence of thick clouds loaded with water. It was going to rain. Winter rains are rare in Pilani. I liked the feel of it. It was time for the Western Disturbances to be generous towards this part of India. Rare, it was!

Usually when I go for a morning jog the mess workers are on their way to work. But the roads were absolutely empty that day. It might have been because I had woken up early. I jogged a little extra that day. I wanted to enjoy the weather. The lightning had increased. The breeze had a typical odor. It was fresh. The rains were about to bring a relief from the dry winters of Pilani. One really strange thing about that day was that no one, not even the students that had come from other colleges to attend the fest, were up.
I did the last stretch sprinting and came back to the hostel. I sat outside the hostel on the pavement for a while to regain my breath. The wind had increased its speed. Slight drizzle had started. I sat there to soak in the moments of winter rains. The little drops that occasionally fell on me made Goosebumps rise on my arms and elsewhere. The winds were chilly by then. I closed my eyes to the music that the rains created and wished that I could forever be in the trance. The silence had engulfed me and I could hear myself breath. I could hear the rain drops falling on the earth. I could hear the winds passing by. I could feel the happiness of the migratory birds. I had never felt so alive and so close to god in my entire life. It was as if I had everything I had wished for.

A lightning strike brought me back from my reverie and I opened my eyes to see the innumerable drops of water falling from the flat umbrella of god that they call 'sky'. It was as if the heavens and the earth were tied by infinite thin shining strings of water droplets and that through that lightning strike the heavens had granted me a wish.

I had regained my breath by then and the rain was getting heavier. So, I decided to go inside. There was no electricity in the whole of the hostel. Nobody had woken up. I checked the time. It was 6:56 a.m. I wanted to sleep for a while. I decided to wait for the mess to open at 7:30 and then sleep after having a breakfast. Till then I decided to listen to some songs on my phone. The calendar showed a date that sparked restlessness in my mind, 7th of November, my ex-girlfriend’s birthday. I was wondering whether I should wish her. But just then I realized I couldn’t. My phone had no signal. I came out of the room thinking it might catch a signal out in the open, but in vain. So I put on some songs to assuage whatever thoughts crossed my mind. The rains, by then, were reduced to slight drizzling. The winds had the chill in them that occasionally made me shiver from cold. The thick clouds were still there.

There was no electricity so I decided to sit on the hostel pavement while thoughts about 'her' crossed my mind. I saw the wet empty tents where the eating stalls were during Oasis. They were gloomy, they were scary and they reminded me of something.

I was feeling low, emotionally. I felt like talking to someone. But no one was up. The drizzling, by then, had stopped. The only voice that could be heard was of the occasional lightening and the pipes pouring out water from the roof tops. I looked at the closed doors of the rooms. I felt as if the whole world had locked itself up behind doors and I, somehow, was left out in the open. The thought sent a shiver down my spine. I continued listening to the songs.

Suddenly I heard a loud crackling noise. I did not know which side it came from. I pulled out the earphones and hurriedly ran towards the adjoining wing. There was nobody there. The empty wing resembled the empty corridor that I had seen earlier that morning in the dream. Suddenly there was a lightning strike and the bloodied face of the unconscious old man flashed in front of me I was scared, really scared. I desperately wanted to see a fellow Homo sapien. I slowly walked towards the next wing. There was a deafening silence in whole of the hostel. In my desperation I even tried to call her but my phone had no signal. I restarted it but it couldn't catch the signal. I wanted to throw my phone away at that moment. The fear had
turned into irritation. It was 7:28 a.m. by then, according to my phone clock. Mess was about to open, and I was starting to feel hungry. I put the headphones back into my ears and locked the room.

To my utter distress, the mess was closed. I almost blurted out "what the f#%k" with my voice fading away towards the last word. I checked the time. It was 7:35 a.m. I wiped the condensed water droplets from the window to peep inside the mess. Although the view wasn't clear due to the water droplets that had settled on the other side of the window, but I could very well make out that there was nobody inside. It was strange; very peculiar indeed. I had no choice but comeback to the hostel. I ate whatever biscuits I had to satisfy my hunger. But I knew it would be tough for me to sleep with an (almost) empty stomach and some thousand thoughts racing through the neural paths of my cerebrum. I decided to give it a try. 'It's strange that even the mess has not op

I was woken up by an alarm. It was not the same alarm that had woken me up earlier that morning. I turned the alarm off and checked the time. It was 10:01 a.m. “When did I change the alarm tone?” I was confused. Lying there I started to recall whatever had happened before I had slept. I remembered that I had gone for a jog earlier that morning. I remembered that nothing was working that day. I remembered that, strangely, I had not seen even a single human being since the time I had woken up earlier that morning. I turned around to see the light switch. It was still on but the light was still off. In the retrospect I was making sure that whatever I was remembering was not just a dream. I even remembered the dream I had the previous night. I remembered what I had wished for in my dream- that all the people in this world should vanish. The train of thought took my friends who had been ‘vanished’ since morning. I suddenly remembered what one of my friends had once told me about the myth of Astu-Purush. I immediately got up and ran towards my friend’s room and started banging the door hard. There was no answer. I shouted my friend's name while breathing heavily. ‘Can it happen? No! It’s just a myth!' I was scared. I remembered I had been this scared earlier that day in the dream. The dream! "Oh god! I did not wish for this", I said while slowly stepping backwards facing the closed door. I came back to my room, locked the door behind me and stood against it breathing heavily. It was as if I was running away from somebody. It was ironic. I started remembering the dream moment by moment. Seldom are dreams recallable. But I had not forgotten that one. I remembered the dark dusty corridor, professor Srivastav. I remembered the noise that had come from the adjoining corridor and then the lethal wish. ‘Was there a dead soul over my head at that time? Was it of professor Srivastav? Did I...oh sweet mother of God! Had I killed professor Srivastav? Was he dead?’ with that thought flashed the image of an old man’s body lying in blood. My legs had started trembling "Oh
God! No! No...Please! Please! I did not mean to do that. Please forgive me lord, please please, please!"

I had not been so frightened in my entire life. With every moment passing by, I wished that it was all a big dream. Random faces were flashing in my head, my parents, my relatives, my friends, all those strangers, all of them who were gone, vanished! I decided to sit because it was getting hard to stand. Water had appeared in my eyes. I saw the door. And then I imagined the world outside it. It was empty. I looked around at the walls of my tiny room. It seemed as if the walls were moving. There was an utter silence around me. I could hear my heart-beat. I could hear drops of water fall from the roof-tops. I could hear crickets stridulate in a loud screeching voice outside the door. It seemed they were coming for me.

Suddenly I heard some footsteps. They were getting louder. I shrank back in my bed. And then there was a knock at the door. My body jerked with the knock. I gulped the lump that had formed in my throat and slowly got up and moved towards the door.

"Oye Arpit! Open up you f#%ker! Can't you wake up somebody normally, you asshole!" with that voice I heard the tube light flicker. It flickered a few times and finally started glowing in its full glory.

I immediately went outside and hugged my friend. "Get off me bhenc%#d!" he said while pushing me off his body. I did not know whether to tell him why I was hugging him or not. I decided not to. I was ecstatic. It was as if the whole world had been given a new life. I was still lost in my thoughts when I heard my friend shout in my ear "redi chalega?" I agreed. I took my wallet and phone. My phone had a missed call. Yes, it had caught the signal. I started walking towards my friend’s room. I saw the chowkidar sitting in the sun. I greeted him with a smile. He greeted me back. My friend had put 'Paradise' by Coldplay on his speakers.

...in the night, the stormy night

She closed her eyes

In the night, the stormy night

Away she’d fly

And dreamed of para- para- paradise

I quietly wiped off the tears from my eyes while walking towards my friend's room. The sky was partly clear by then. The sun was shining brightly among the scattered clouds. Its rays made little water drops that had settled on the grass blades shine like pearls. I extended my arm to let the sun's rays fall on me. I heard the birds chirping. I looked up towards the sky. I could see the sun's rays cutting through the branches of the trees to grant the earth its share of the sun’s warmth. And there, at that moment I realized the importance of the innumerable unknown faces that we see or don't see on a crowded street, in a jam packed auditorium, in a faint corner of the world, or maybe on the other side of a wrong number. Whether you know
them or not, whether they love you or not, or for that matter whether you love them back or not, their mere existence reassures your heart that there’s somebody out there just like us to whom we are as important as they are to us. I wished my ex-girlfriend a happy birthday through a message.

...so lying underneath the stormy skies

*She said I know the sun must set to rise*

*This could be para- para- paradise!*

Later that day, I called my parents and all my relatives to know how they had been. They said that they all were alright. To my utter relief they had not vanished.

But before doing all of that, there, at that moment, I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, turned towards the sky, and said "thank you God!"

Arpit Malhotra
Shame

A loud slam of the front door woke Rita up from her afternoon nap. Looking at the old trusted clock on the wall, she was startled. Mahesh should not be home for another three hours; yet she could hear him go to the living room, swearing under his breath. The last time it happened, she recalled, he had an argument with his boss and was in a rage for three days. *Rita was a brave woman but she feared for her husband,* feared that he was a little too upright, a little too stubborn for the world that she had grown up in.

She found her husband on the couch, staring intently at the ceiling. The lines on his forehead seemed deeper somehow; and as she sat down beside him, he reached for her hand and clasped it without a word. One look into his wife’s eyes and he seemed to recoil with shame and pain at the same time. The very same eyes that always used to brim with strength and resolution, now stared back at him questioningly.

“We’re over,” he whispered.

“What do you mean?”

“I am going to resign. They tried to force me, to turn a blind eye while they embezzle crores from the public. But I shall *not* have that on my conscience.”

“We’ll sort it out,” she said, “We have each other.”

At this, Mahesh let out a dry cynical laugh. Rita was taken aback; her husband had never been this derisive, and even if he had, not to her. As if unable to take her gaze, he got up and left, slamming the front door. Rita could hear the car start; her husband shouted, “I’m sorry.” Before she could say anything, he had already left.

Driving 35 km/hr above the speed limit, his right foot heavy as lead on the accelerator, Mahesh could think of nothing but what happened at his office.

“You have no choice but to go along with this,” his boss warned.

“I like to think I do.”

“Think about your life, your family. You know what we want, and what we can do to you if you don’t give it.”

“Leave my family out of this, if you please.”

“Well, you should have thought of that before you had an affair with your goddamn secretary.”

Mahesh pressed harder on the accelerator. He could now think of a million things to say. “It was just the one time.” “She was the one who led me on.” “I ended it before it got serious.”
All he remembered saying was, “Please don’t tell Rita.”

He should have said, “I will not let my personal demons weaken me into helping you steal 5 crores,” but all he said was, “I will see what I can do.” His foot pressed the pedal till it scraped the metal floor.

Rita was worried. Her husband had not come and it was already half an hour past midnight. Around 2.30 in the night, he turned up with a pale expression on his face. “I have done it,” he said, “I have mailed my resignation.” She hugged him but he only said, “Let’s go to bed, I’ve had enough.”

Waking up the next morning, Rita did not find her husband by her side. She checked the clock and she realized she had overslept. She noticed the milk and omelet her husband had made, and she smiled to herself. The morning paper was neatly arranged at the side table. She remembered her husband talking about giving her a breakfast in bed since forever, but he never had the time to do it. He used to the first few months into the wedding, but work caught up with him, he had said.

She opened the paper and the headlines read, “Disgraced IAS officer resigns, cheated on wife.” Immediately she rushed into the living room, and reeled in shock at the sight. Her husband had hung himself on the ceiling.

-Satyaam Takhellambam
The Aftermath

That place always had something about it. Whether it was the greenery, the dilapidated fast-food stall or the hubbub of students, I didn’t know. But, this abode reminded me of friendship, love and everything good. I always felt ‘The Island’ held a deeper meaning, much more than it let on. It was surrounded by a museum, a cenotaph, a laboratory and some old classrooms. It was contained within the relics of engineering education in India. I didn’t know whether it meant to comfort us that we were in safe hands or whether it was pushing us to excel. The best time for going there was when the golden rays of our father would scream through the trees and graze our faces, before going down. Sunset, I mean.

That was the time, when I always saw her.

She used to come with her friends, after classes. I would be jealous of them, getting the licence to chat and have fun with her when she could just as well be laughing at my jokes. I could be her source of entertainment, a joker, a rabbit or a jellyfish perhaps.

I had seen girls prettier than her, but she had a certain aura about her, the way she smiled, the way she kept pushing her hair behind her ears and the manner in which she used to call for the waiter. Her left hand did something, but the physics of that simple gesture was simply incomprehensible, inimitable. She always used to hold a black diary, one wonders what she wrote in that, did she write about me, did she know that I dragged myself through harrowing classes the entire day just to see her for an hour.

Just to say nothing, sit there and watch her enchant me with her total ignorance towards me.

It was the same always, every day for a month.

My friends had noticed my heartache but there was little they could do as they themselves had never interacted with anything remotely feminine apart from their mothers. I just had to go up and say *hi, I am Sameer.* I knew, if she didn’t reply I would faint and in the dodgiest of cases if she did respond, I would faint, nevertheless. She would be gone for ever no matter what. So, it was worth a shot.

It was a bloody Sunday, when I finally got the chance to embark on this risky mission. She was alone. Her annoying array of bodyguards had crossed over to hell, never to come back again. I gathered my Qi, and went up to her. We started conversing, became friends, married and lived happily forever. These were a few of the things which were coming into my mind others such as the fact that she could have a manly voice or that she could be a sea monster were not to be seeded.

An hour later, I was moaning, not because she had slapped me or anything but the pain was in the left side of the thoracic cavity. I had gone down to her and played my part well, but she had somehow misread the script. So, instead of keeping silent she whispered.

*Get lost, you pervert!*
Now, this is something, you don’t get to hear every day do you? I could be many things, but a pervert, I am not. Or am I? Come to think of it, my continuous stalking of her may have seemed a bit unpleasant on my part. But, as you know, my intentions were purely scientific.

*****

I should have played it cool and waited for another month or for a year maybe.

Exams were upon us, and the syllabus was far from over. It was as if you were sliding through an endless tunnel of slime. It had been a week after that unfortunate adventure of mine. I was in the library, mugging away an extremely difficult chapter of Quantum Chemistry. She sat down in front of me and unloaded her barrage of weapons which would help her in the battle tomorrow. There was the black diary too. She appeared to have noticed me and started studying.

She didn’t look up for an hour and when she did, she looked past me, got up, had some water and returned back to her book.

In the meanwhile, I was wondering, did she suffer from amnesia or had I let my beard grow a little too shabby. While, I was contemplating the ill-effects of shaving with a lawn-mower, she looked straight into my eyes and her eyes widened in shock and then narrowed down in anger. She got up, packed her arsenal and left. I had to do something; I couldn’t let her haunt me for ages to come.

Hey, you!

I said when I went after her and finally caught her just outside the library. She turned around and didn’t say anything, but, just stared at me. I finally had a chance to put forward a case, I suppose.

* I am sorry; I just wanted to be friends.

Her expression somewhat sobered. I don’t know what is it about girls and their endless ability to forgive other people but thanks to that, there was a glimmer of hope.

* It’s okay; I am Siya, by the way.

* Oh! I am sober!

She smiled and waved at me.

* I am done for today, See you around.

This did not just happen.

-Yashraj Tripathy
“So, did you accept it?”
“Of course, I had to; it was the Pope who asked!”
“But you’re a sculptor – you hardly paint!”
“Christ was a carpenter. Sometimes you have to change your profession if a higher authority asks you to.”

Michelangelo Buonarroti and his apprentice Silvio walked down the rest of the steps of the Papal residence in silence. It was a warm summer day at Rome and everyone hoped it would rain soon. However the villa of Pope Julian II, surrounded by vineyards and farms, was on the outskirts of the city where the weather was more clement. A horse-drawn carriage with the Papal emblem on it was waiting for them at the bottom of the marble steps. They got in and it sped off across the pebbled driveway and towards Rome.

“So what exactly do you have to do?” Silvio broke the silence, interrupting Michelangelo’s train of thoughts. He was known for his short temper, but somehow it never reflected on Silvio. He just couldn’t be angry at his 18 year old apprentice. Silvio talked too much, but he was the best student he ever had. He remembers the first time Silvio came to him. His father was a Florentine fruit merchant and had brought him to the master. Michelangelo had looked at Silvio for a moment, and then asked him to draw the most beautiful thing he had ever had. He remembers the first time Silvio came to him. His father was a Florentine fruit merchant and had brought him to the master. Michelangelo had looked at Silvio for a moment, and then asked him to draw the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, in under a minute. This was how the master tested. Most aspiring candidates would attempt portraits of mythical heroes, gods and churches, and would break down in tears after Michelangelo handed them back their unfinished sketches. But what Silvio did was something extraordinary; Michelangelo shook his father’s hand and kissed Silvio on the forehead, a sign of his acceptance as an apprentice. Silvio had drawn a perfect circle – the most beautiful thing in the world.

“So what exactly do you have to do?” Silvio asked again. The only reason Michelangelo brought him along was because he was his favorite student. He was beginning to regret that. Nevertheless he replied.
“Do you know of the Capella Sistina at the Vatican?”
“The Sistine Chapel? In the Apostolic Palace?”
“Yes. That one.”
“Aren’t all the walls painted there? I think Ghirlandaio and Botticelli got there before you. You don’t have an inch to paint!”
“I do, young Silvio.” Michelangelo said calmly. “Sometimes one must look up to the heavens. The walls are covered, but the ceiling isn’t. Pope Julian II asked me to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.”
“It will be a difficult task, Signor Michelangelo. Painting vertical at that great height; and the ceiling must be a quarter of an acre!”
Michelangelo smiled. “That is the least of my problems, son. I haven’t got the first clue of what to paint on it.”

They didn’t speak a word for the rest of the journey. When they reached home, Michelangelo locked himself in his study. He didn’t even open the door for food or drink. Silvio returned to the studio and idly scribbled on a paper with a piece of charcoal.

The next morning they traveled to the Sistine chapel. Silvio had been there hundreds of times, but this was different. Today the chapel was a bit too silent, like a gigantic beast waiting, slowly breathing. Silvio watched as Michelangelo paced walls, stroking his fingers over all the frescoes on the walls, as if to find some help, some guidance.

Then they both looked up.

The white ceiling of this chapel spread over their heads like a vast snow desert. Its blank expanse was haunting.

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” muttered the master. He closed his eyes and put his hand over his face.

“Maybe you could paint scenes from the Bible.” Silvio suggested.

“Yes, but what? Have you seen that vast ceiling? I would die before I could cover that behemoth with paint.”

He closed his eyes again. A few moments later, he opened them, pointed a bony finger at Silvio and said, “Go to the Papal Archives. Read the Old Testament properly. See if you can find anything useful.”

“Will I be allowed there? I mean, I’m just a -”

“Tell them Michelangelo Buonarroti sent you.”

When Silvio returned that evening, Michelangelo was already home. He was making some sketches. Crumpled sheets of paper and broken wood pencils were strewn everywhere. He checked Silvio’s notes and tossed them aside. Silvio was disappointed, but he couldn’t complain. If the greatest artist of the time couldn’t come up with an idea, how could his novice.

Three days passed. Every morning they would go to the Chapel, stare at the walls and the ceiling for hours, and come back. Michelangelo would lock himself up in his room and wouldn’t come out. He was getting frailer by the day.

One night Silvio was in his study, buried in texts, treatises and theses. Michelangelo was in barricaded his room. The servants were reheating his food for the fourth time when there was a knock on the door.

A servant went to open it. Silvio came out to see who it was. He saw the visitor and froze. He stood there gaping with awe.

It was the genius and his master’s greatest rival, Leonardo da Vinci.

“Greetings, is your master home?” asked the bearded man. Like always, he was dressed quite shabbily.

“Y-y-yes, Signor Leonardo,” stammered Silvio. The servants hurried away to fetch wine for the guest. “Go right in.”

Da Vinci walked up to Michelangelo’s study door and called, “Michel, open, it’s Leo.”

72
A few moments later the door unbolted from the inside and Da Vinci walked in. He closed the door behind him. Silvio sat outside, his mind racing, wondering what they were talking about inside.

After an hour Da Vinci left. Silvio rushed inside his master’s room, forgetting strict instructions against doing so. He found Michelangelo looking outside the window.

“What did he say, signor?” cried Silvio. Michelangelo whispered. “The origin, the beginning…”
“What does it mean? Say something!” screamed Silvio, getting very impatient.
“I have got it Silvio; I know what to do…” Michelangelo said, his eyes gazing across the Roman night sky.
“What? What will you paint?”
Michelangelo did not speak. Instead, he pointed towards his table. Silvio ran to it. There was only one book which was open. It was the Bible, translated by St Jerome. Silvio read the familiar verse that had been marked by a red pencil. He had read that verse several times throughout his life. But this time, it meant something else, something new to him.

It was Genesis 2:7.

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground…”

Silvio looked towards Michelangelo. The great man was still staring out of the window, crying.

-Krishnaroop Chaudhuri
Diabolical

As if into the Devil’s lair I have descended, where the soul burns as the body does with fever. The pain knows no relent nor gives comfort. The being, like the torso, lies weak, shivering and maimed. Dirty hands reek, like the consciousness drenched in the stench of sin. Inside, there is only the dolorous din of a thousand different thoughts and ponderings, the cries that result from trying to sieve the enduring from the transient.

The fever makes me feel warmer than it is outside. It is hard to even move. In my pursuit of sleep the questions begin to haunt me. The confusion they bring along merges seamlessly with my headache to escalate it. I twist and turn in discomfort, but no posture brings relief. I lay thinking about the nature of desire, battling the uneasiness, as my tiredness from the day finally takes over and glides me to a precursor of sleep.

This state between sleep and wakefulness is a curious one. A mosaic of thoughts comes and goes. I survey the ruins of lost love. It still stumps me, like an elegantly bowled googly. The more I think, the more it hurts, in the heart, and in the head. It seems like some queries have no answers to them.

Though logic dictates that desires are only impediments to the spiritual path, and only reduce clarity, it is hard to listen to the path of logic sometimes. Perhaps desire is like this thought process I’m having right now. The more you listen to it, the more it traps you. The headache is irritating: not mind-numbingly painful, but nonetheless without a visible end. I think of the world we live in, where love is no more than a lyric in allegories and ballads, and there are only the ends cared about, and not the means. It confuses and pains me more and more.

Noises burst my bubble from time to time. Noises from the outside, cheerful boyish banter, loud, piercing, make an explosive cocktail with the headache and my troubled thoughts. My calves ache, and a shiver runs through me, making me snuggle deeper into my quilt. Sleep comes, though there is no clear distinction of what is happening. The state is like being drugged. Consciousness is only partial, and thoughts flit between the realm of the mind and that of reality. Surreal and subliminal the state is, and I am alone.

The darkest corners of your soul may be like this, where the fires of your own making lure you and singe you, the banks of the river in which every drop is a thin line between fortifying your faith and nullifying it. Though most dangerous, it is often important to venture into these diabolical waters. The world is a forest of those who do not see. How can they realize what the path means? How can they grasp the magnitude and direction of love?
I am grappling, in this phase of my journey, with the questions of love, lust and desire. I wonder where that world is where partners and relationships change every few months. I cannot comprehend that world. People lose interest and fade away so often. I fail to understand what is wrong with this world. Then again, what is the cause of desire?

The experience and the questions have changed me, for sometimes it has dented my faith and clouded the light, but at other times it has given me new avenues and horizons spiritually. Perhaps it is essential to let desire ravage you before you can finally detach yourself from it. In my drugged-like state, I pray to God to give me strength and wisdom enough to one day consolidate everything I have learnt on this path of the soul.

It feels like an iron fist is twisting the insides of my head when I wake up. The heat from the fever has made me clammy, and my throat lies parched. Without rhyme or reason, her name is on my lips. In a state of confusion I chant it, loneliness shrouding me. I hear my friends outside. They think I am sleeping. I am still drowsy, and with voices coming from different directions about different things, the experience is almost astral. My eyes itch from the lack of sleep in the past many days, and I make vainly attempts to go back to sleep, for the noise outside makes my head feel no better.

The world still resembles a lit pyre. There is no sigil of peace inside. Sometimes you hold the hand of the devil and walk. In times like those the basest thoughts that lurk inside you come along to pay you visits. However frightening and disabling they may be, the foundations of spiritual advancement lie in pain, and the knowledge of the darker side, rather than blissful ignorance, for though the path is thorny, it will bring you the ultimate joy.

I am still searching. The forests are thick with brambles. What ardour it is to move! The darkness haunts, but is there another way? I am in the jaws of that unholy one, Desire. How tough it is, to willingly break out of its hold. For God carries the cross of our shame, and grants us forgiveness, but it is hard not to sin. The path takes us places unimaginable, through battles most gory. But I still haven’t found, what I’m looking for...

-Himanish Ganjoo
The Theft

CHAPTER-1

The winter of 1956 was one of the best we ever had. This made a lazy town into an even more dormant one. Like every other day, when the rest of the world is going to sleep, I go to work. I was the chief of security at the County Museum. It was an old place which was bought by a wealthy and famous businessman called Redford Green to showcase his family’s entire heritage. Crazy I thought, but hey I at least get a job out of it. There were two other guys working with me. Marcus Cunningham and Jacob Kentucky. Both really smart young men who, to be honest, deserved better jobs.

As I made my way to the museum, I looked up at the winter sky. Snow falling. Dark grey clouds. Leaves withering. Reminded me of how old I’d got. By the time I could see the museum, I was a little out of breath. It was getting dark fast so I quickened my pace. Jacob was on Patrol. He greeted me when I finally made it to the museum. “Good evening, Sir” Jacob said. “A very good evening to you my boy. How’s your wife doing?” I asked. She was pregnant. “Fine, sir. Thank you for asking”. Our little conversation was over.

I walked to the entrance and made my way to my room. The snow had covered half my head and jacket so I brushed it off before entering. I logged into my register and then took my inventory box which had all the items and opened it. All of us working here had one. Mine contained a pistol, some ammo, a baton and a first aid kit. Only the Chief got a pistol. The others only got a baton. I loaded the pistol and kept it in my upholstery tied to my belt.

The guard shift was timed. Each one of us took turns every 3 hours in guarding the main building and patrolling around the museum. The third person used to sit in the security room for a break. Today I was lucky and stayed in the room for a while. But I knew the blizzard would be worse later. I better prepare myself for that, I thought.

It was around midnight. As I was having some coffee, I heard a noise in the main building. A thud. I kept my cup down and went outside taking my baton along just in case. As I went outside, a blast off cold winter breeze hit my body. The front door of the museum must’ve been opened. Strange. I called out “Marcus? Hey Marcus who left the door open?” I got no reply.
CHAPTER-2

Where was Marcus? As I made my way across the museum and I heard a faint groaning noise, I tried following it and saw Marcus on the floor. I rushed to him and picked him up. “Son, are you ok? What happened?” He just pointed towards the front entrance. He could hardly speak.

What was he pointing at? I couldn’t see a thing except for the door which was almost completely open. I carried him to the nearest wall and placed him there. Looked like he had passed out by then. I couldn’t analyze the extent of his injury. I left him there and headed towards the door as Marcus was pointing to it. When I’d almost reached the door, Jacob came in rushing in. He was panting and he quickly said “Mr. Bill, I think there is some in this premises. I saw foot prints leading towards the main door!” “Where were you till now?” I asked. He replied “I was patrolling the other side of the building Sir. Someone must have watched me and entered as I went to the other wing.” “Well, did you see anyone now while coming?” “No sir, but he couldn’t have gone far in this blizzard.” So we both went outside and I said “You take the right and I’ll take the left. Yell for me if you need me. I’ll see you back here in ten minutes if nothing happens”.

I took the left side, scouting for any footprints which would’ve been covered quickly as the blizzard was increasing its fury. As I kept searching, I heard a faint noise coming from the right wing. I wasn’t sure what that noise was. It did sound like someone was calling my name. But I thought it would be better if I went and checked on him. Not knowing what was happening, I ran toward his wing as fast as I can. When I was close enough, I could see Jacob weaving his baton and another man dodging it and returning a few blows. Contemplating the situation, I knew I couldn’t fight a guy who could fight with the younger and stronger Jacob. My only other option was my gun. So I took out my gun and yelled for him to freeze. But the two fought even more vigorously as the intruder tried to flee the scene. He somehow managed to kick Jacob hard enough so he let him go and started running away from me. “Halt!” I screamed but of course he didn’t. it just made him run harder. So I took aim and fired my pistol hoping it would reach some part of my target. I fired one more in his direction just in case and by now Jacob was back on his feet. He ran towards the intruder and yelled “You got him good sir! Got one on target. On his neck.” “Is he dead?” I asked. Hoping I didn’t kill him. I couldn’t live with that feeling. “No sir. He’s still breathing”. Thank god. “Let’s get him to a hospital then and quick”. “Sir, I thought I heard you screaming. When I was coming towards you I saw this intruder.” “But I thought you called me! Maybe it was Marcus warning one of us about this intruder. Well done to Marcus I guess”. We picked the intruder’s body up and made our way to the museum, leaving a trail of blood which was just gruesome.
We placed his body on the front steps and I told Jacob to check on Marcus and then lock up the whole place. I went around to see if everything was in place. I noticed a glass case broken inside which the two most precious gems were kept. Both of them were missing. I ran to search the body of the intruder frantically hoping I find them. I could only find one of the gem’s. I immediately ran out looking for the spot where our intruder was shot.

Thankfully, the trail of blood was still visible but parts of it were already covered with snow. I somehow managed to find the exact location and frantically searched around it. I even dug a little to see if it was covered by the heavy snow. But in vain.

I ran back panting, told Jacob about the gems and asked him to pack up soon. I then went to the guard room. I picked up the phone. Dialed the numbers and spoke “Hello, Mr. Green? Sir, there has been an incident”.
CHAPTER-3

We were sitting in a private cabin of the Greens’ family doctor. He was nursing the wounds of our intruder. And also for Marcus who had a cut on his head for which the doctor had given him a heavy sedative to subside the pain. But before he was sedated we told him about everything that had happened. He tried to say something but none of us could understand what he was saying. He slowly shook his head and fell to the bed as the sedative took its toll.

Jacob and I were waiting outside in the visitors lounge. A small but well maintained cabin. Mr. Green had informed us that it was not unusual that someone would try to steal a part of their families’ heritage and that it infuriated him. So he had called a called a renowned French detective and also a close family friend (which everyone knew), who was in a nearby town to come and give this case a look in such short notice.

It was around 6 in the morning and both of us were tired and anxious about our intruder. We both were residents of this town and we both had never seen him before. I helped myself to the coffee jug kept nearby when the cabin door opened and a man who must have been in his early 30’s and who was certainly in good shape stepped in, looked at me and asked “Hi are you Mr. Bill?” He spoke with a weird accent. I nodded my head and asked “And you are?”
“I’m Mr. Patrice Puton. Mr. Green hired me to investigate a break in”.

To be honest, I was quite taken aback. I was expecting a much older man. At first glance, his face was pale. It was like he had put his face in the snow throughout the night. I beckoned him in and offered him some coffee. “Oh thank you. Very nice of you. The carriage ride till here had me freezing”. That must be why he was so pale. But funny, I’d not heard a thing outside. Maybe because of the winds and the snow. He looked at both of us and in a serious tone asked us “So tell me, What exactly happened?”

We both narrated each part of our experiences while he carefully listened and studied our faces while doing so. He would nod his once in a while and glance away thinking deeply. We couldn’t understand what was going through his head. At the end he asked me, “Where Is this intruder?” “He’s being treated by the doctor in that room”. “And the third guard?” “He had his head stitched and has been given a sedative to ease the pain. He’s In the other room”. The detective nodded and thought for a while.

By then the doctor came out. Mr. Puton stood up and introduced himself. “Can I talk with the patient now, doctor?” “Yes you can but he will not be able to speak properly because his throat has been damaged due to the bullet.” “It won’t take long doctor. I’ve almost everything I need”. Has he solved the case? Maybe he really was brilliant. The doctor hesitatingly agreed. As we were about to join him in the interrogation, he turned to us and said “Sorry gentlemen, I like to work alone. So if you don’t mind..”. We reluctantly agreed. Mr. Puton went inside the room where our intruder was kept. It would’ve been around twenty min when he came out.

He looked at me and said “I need to look at Mr. Marcus’ head to assess his injury. Please give me a moment with him” I nodded. Mr. Puton spent only about two minutes in his chamber.
He was in deep thought. He came out and looked at both of us and said “This maybe hard to hear but I think it’s an inside job” “What do you mean?” I asked. He said “After I spoke to the thief, I realized he couldn’t have done it alone. He had the help of one of your men”.

I was shocked. “It couldn’t have been me or Jacob as he was with me throughout the while. That only leaves...”. Mr. Puton nodded “That’s why I wanted to see the head of this man to confirm my speculation. There was an argument between them and one hit the other. It’s a robbery gone very wrong. I’m sure the other gem must be with Mr. Marcus. When he wakes up, you can ask him and retrieve it”. Mr. Puton looked at the clock. It was almost 7.30 a.m. “I better leave. I’ve another customer who is waiting. Good day gentlemen”. He shook both our hands and left hurriedly.
CHAPTER-4

I did not know what to do that time and at that time the doctor told us that Marcus had come to. I wanted to clarify things for myself before loads of rage and doubt filled me to the brim and I went in to his room.

Before I could speak, Marcus who was looking very pale asked me hurriedly “Who was that man? Did you get the gem back?”

“He was the detective who sent by Mr. Green to solve this case. And what gem are you speaking of?” I replied.

He said “I was partially awake when I saw that man reaching into my coat pocket. I was still feeling weak but I summoned up enough strength to ask him what he was doing. He told me that the other gem was in my pocket and…”

I interrupted “But how did he know that?

He continued saying “The detective said that he interrogated the intruder, who confessed that he hid the gem in my jacket so that none of you would find it. Do you remember that I was pointing to the door?”

“Yes, yes of course!! I totally forgot. Why did you do that?”

“Because there was someone else!!”

Someone else? How many people are involved in this case? “Who was it?” I asked.

“I didn’t get a good look at him but I did hear him call your name very loudly before I passed out Sir”

He called my name? Then that must have been the voice that I heard calling out. But why would he call me? Why would someone call and divert all the attention to themselves or their partner? Things didn’t make sense!

I realized that both me and Jacob weren’t able to verify any of what Marcus was saying. This seemed so new to us even though we were both there that time. The truth began to dawn on how the decision of the detective was spot on.

In my head, I was jumbling up all the facts I just got in to come to a conclusion, when suddenly the doctor entered and said “Bill, there’s someone at the door to see you.” I quickly went outside and a middle aged man was dusting the snow off his jacket. He looked at me and asked “Hi are you Mr. Bill?” He spoke with a familiar accent. I nodded as my forehead started to fill with sweat. “Pardon me for being so late, I’m sure Mr. Green must’ve told you about me. I’m Mr. Patrice Puton.”.

-Skandha Gopalan
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