

Varsha Seshan's Creative Writing Programme

WORDS

Issue 5 | July 2024

by writers
aged 9-14



Poems

Plays

Stories

VARSHA SESHAN'S CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAMME: GUEST SESSION

HOW TO RHYME WITHOUT REASON

WITH ANUSHKA RAVISHANKAR

Explore the world of nonsense and learn how to write verse that makes no sense at all.

Saturday, 20 Apr 24 5:30 to 6:30 pm
₹400 per head Ages: 9-14

Contact: Varsha - 9890798756




The ABCs of Blogging

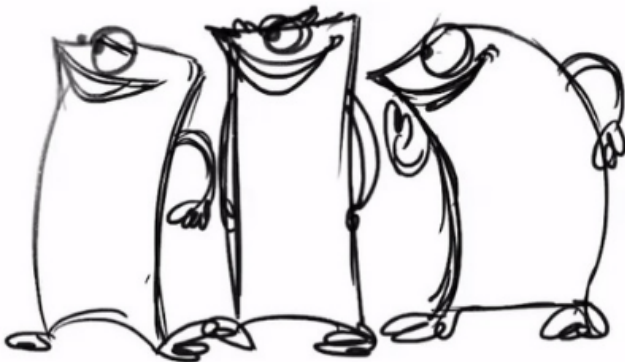
WITH ANUPAMA DALMIA

What is a blog?
Popular formats of blogging
What to ask yourself when you start
Blog reach and audience growth
Good platforms to create a free blog

... and much more!



Guest Sessions



Character Design

WITH PRIYANKAR GUPTA



Contents

Poems

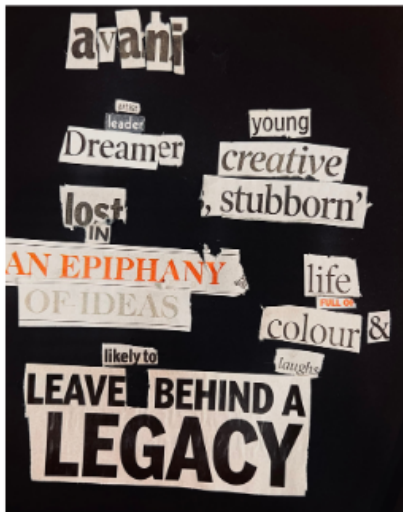
The City of Rain and Sun	16
The Land of Rain and Snow	16
The City of Memories	17
My Home in the Plains	17
I Can't Write a Poem!	25
7 a.m. Regrets	33
Winter	33
The City of Wandering Souls	36
The City of Bollywood	36
The Dance of the Streets	37
The Chessboard	37
The City of Harmonious Chaos	54
The Kaleidoscopic City	54
The Coven of Dreams	55
The Gadbad Falooda City	55
I Still Can't Write a Poem!	71
The Emerald Land	92
The City of Green	93
The Land of Casino Hotels	93
It's Impossible to Write a Poem!	110
Limericks	114

Plays

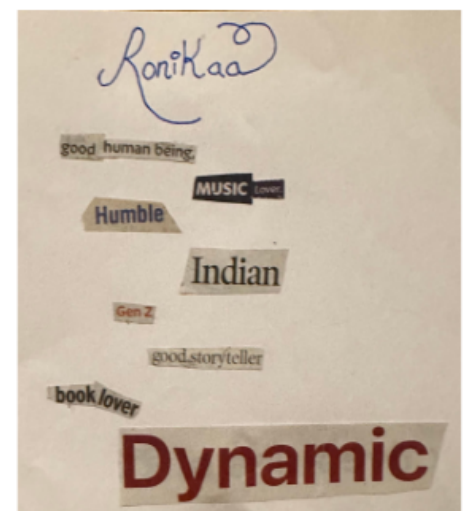
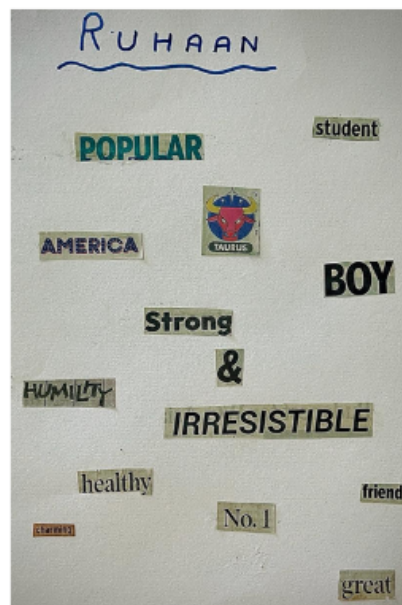
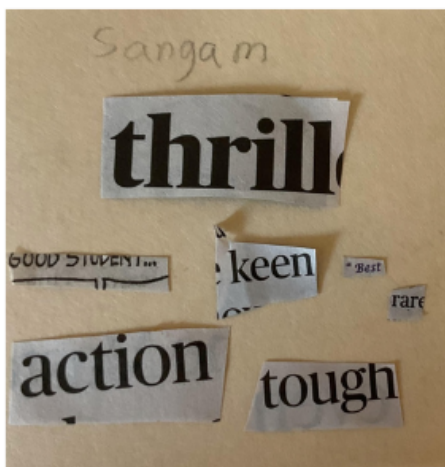
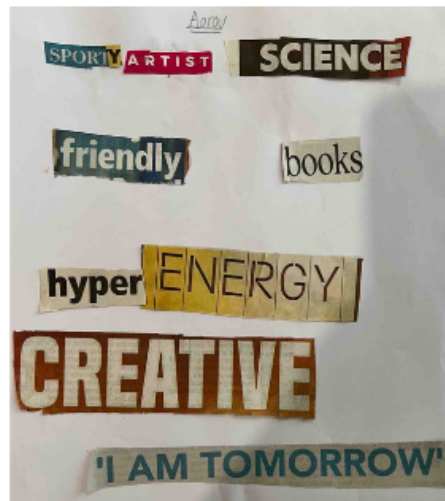
Hide and Seek	6
Walking on Eggshells	22
The First Day	26
Aunt Timothy	30
A Goddess' Whim	40
A Riddle for the Gods	44
A Fairy Tale Heist	60
The Prince and the Pirate	68
A Web of Lies	74
Horses Shouldn't Bet	82
Lost	100
The Zombie's Eyes	106

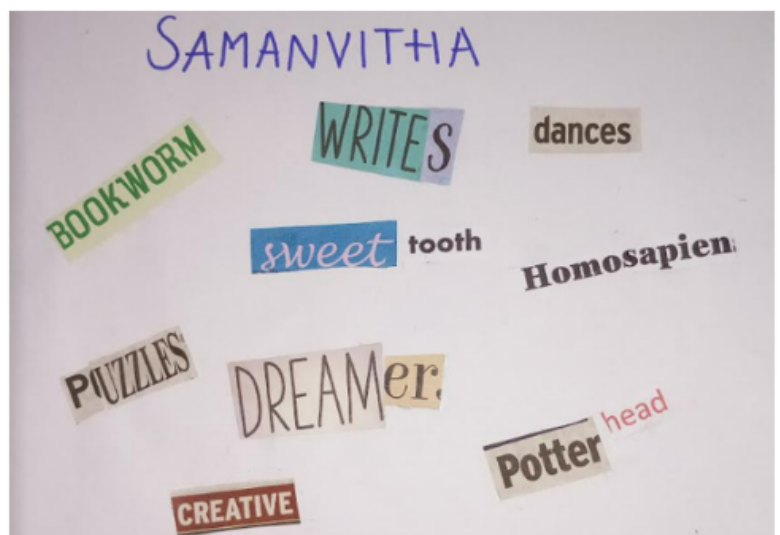
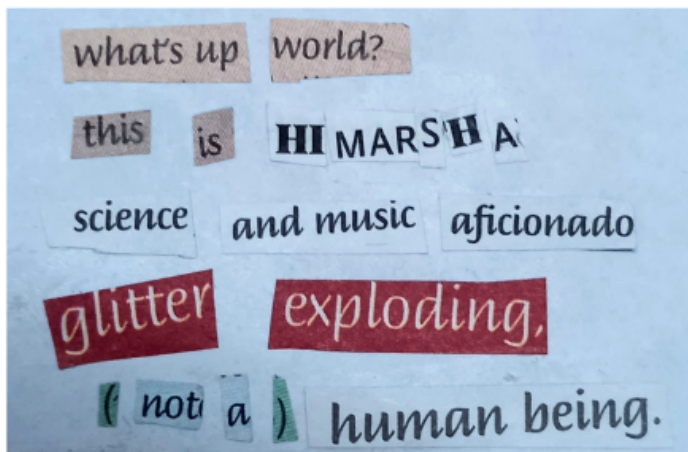
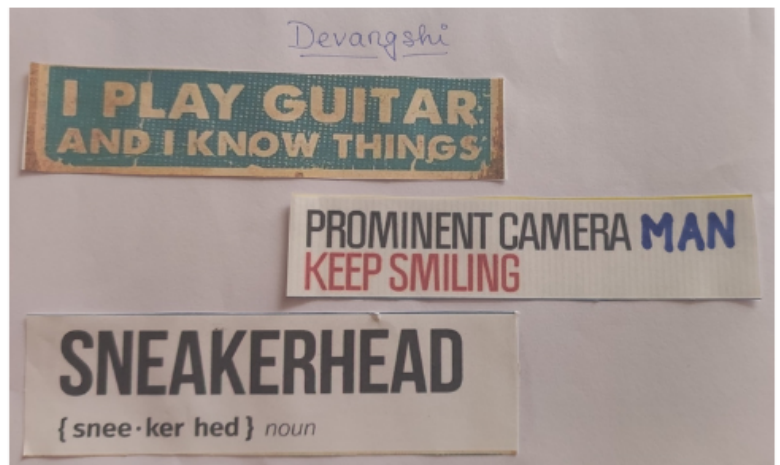
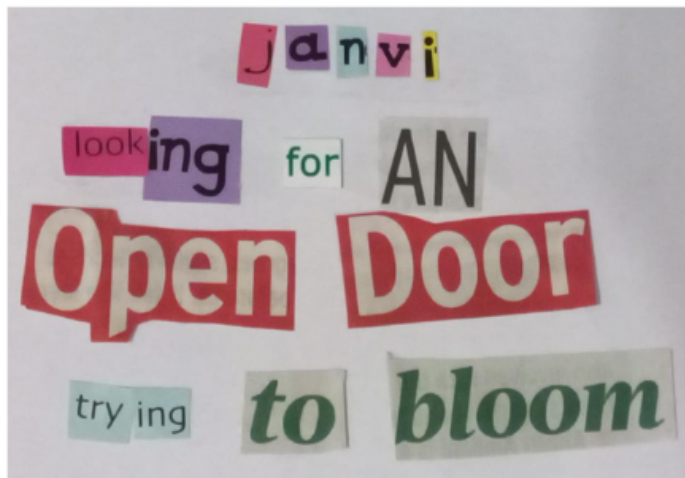
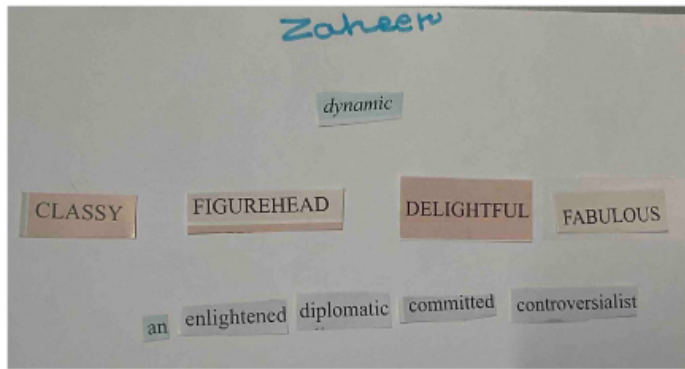
Stories

Stuck	14
Duct Tape Apocalypse	18
Rocket Science	31
Room 321	34
Treasure Hunt	38
A Night in Devfroalm	43
Jumpscare	48
Out of the Bag	56
Sunrise	66
The Babysitter	72
Loneliness	80
A Night of Secrets	88
Blood Bouquet	94
Wilson! I'm Waiting!	102
Paying the Price	109
Steal the Show	111
Camping Disaster	115



Meet the writers





Hide and Seek

Nirai Iniyan

Characters

DEACON

JAYMES

RUMPELSTILTSKIN

EVIL QUEEN (AGNES KNIGHT)

(It is a lazy afternoon, sky full of clouds. Two siblings, Jaymes and Deacon, are playing hide and seek in the woods. Deacon is counting to 50 while Jaymes has run off.)

DEACON (finishes counting and turns) Ready or not, here I come!

(A giggle is heard.)

DEACON I can hear you, Jay!

(Another giggle is heard, this time from behind a bush. Deacon races forward and pushes through the plant.)

DEACON Gotcha!

JAYMES No, you haven't. You have to catch me first!

(With this, JAYMES takes off and DEACON follows. As they run, the shadows grow darker and the woods become thicker. DEACON suddenly pauses, having lost sight of JAYMES.)

DEACON (frowning) This isn't funny anymore Jay! We need to go back home, you know. It's getting dark.





(A snicker sounds from a hidden clearing. DEACON pushes through and sees RUMPELSTILTSKIN.)

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Lost something, have we dearie?

DEACON Who are you?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (appalled) Who am I? Who are you? What are you? Why do tea trays fall out of the sky?

DEACON (slowly, confused) They don't.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Really? What a shame!

(RUMPELSTILTSKIN flicks his fingers, unbothered.)

DEACON (uncomfortably, blurts out) Have you seen my brother?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Your brother?

DEACON Yes, my brother.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Short, eight years old, talks too much?

DEACON (beginning to look hopeful) That's him!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (shrugging) Never heard of him.

DEACON (confused) But you just--

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Would you look at the time; I'm late for tea! Well, best be off.

DEACON Wait!

(But RUMPELSTILTSKIN is off, already walking away. DEACON runs after him, trying to keep up with much effort.)

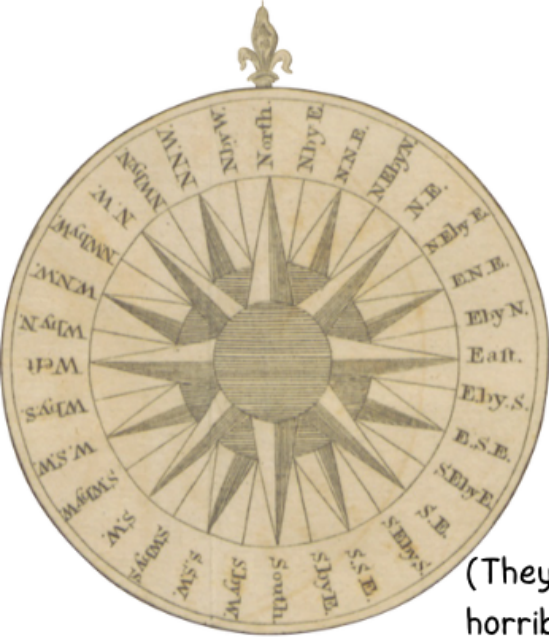
RUMPELSTILTSKIN (after some time; hissing irritably) Oh, for Morgana's sake, what do you want?! You're messing with my compass – now I don't have a clue as to where tea is being held.

(As he complains, RUMPELSTILTSKIN slips a bottle out of his pocket and – a moment later – back in. This goes unnoticed by DEACON.)

DEACON (panting) I need to find my brother! And how am I messing with your compass?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN You just are. And as for your brother, I haven't got a clue as to where he is.

DEACON But you do!



RUMPELSTILTSKIN (sighs) If I help you, will you leave me and my compass alone?

DEACON (beaming) Of course I'll leave you alone!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN And my compass?

DEACON And your compass.

(They both shake hands, before DEACON begins gasping horribly. She leans against the nearest tree, and falls forward.)

DEACON (wheezing) What did you do?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN I'm helping you find your brother! The only problem is you want to take him home and I can't have that. So a sedative is my only option. (He fishes out the bottle and cheekily waves it in front of her face.)

DEACON You lied to me!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN I didn't lie to you! I don't lie, thank you very much. I just bent the truth a little, a couple of tricks and manipulated you – you know, the usual.

(DEACON collapses to the ground, now still. RUMPELSTILTSKIN snaps his fingers, allowing her body to float in mid air. With another snap, they are transported to his cottage. He uses his magic once more to chain her to the wall and then takes the sedative bottle from his jacket and puts it on a nearby potioner table.)

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (in a singsong voice) Yoo hoo! Agnes, are you there?

(Lights flicker and curtains billow dramatically. A beautiful middle-aged woman enters, walking slowly down the stairs. It's the EVIL QUEEN.)

EVIL QUEEN (coldly) I've told you not to call me that.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN And I've told you to leave my dinner alone but I guess neither of us is getting what we wanted.

(JAYMES is spotlighted in a large bird cage hanging from the ceiling.)

JAYMES (reaching forward and rattling the cage bars) Is that Deacon? Hey, what have you done to my sister? What do you want with her?!

(EVIL QUEEN snaps her fingers. JAYMES opens his mouth to yell again but finds out he can't speak.)



EVIL QUEEN While I don't generally indulge insolent children (looks pointedly at JAYMES), she does seem a little too old to satisfy your power.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN She's not dinner – she's nosy. I figured you'd appreciate her.

EVIL QUEEN (unimpressed drawl) How thoughtful.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (puffing out his chest) Why, thank you!

EVIL QUEEN (pinching the bridge of her nose and sighing) And I'll deal with your incompetence later.

For now, I require assistance with my mirror...

(Both of them disappear into the other room, voices fading. Meanwhile, DEACON drowsily wakes up.)

DEACON (slurring speech) Huh? Wha--where am I?

JAYMES (excitedly rattling the cage bars) Deacon! Deacon! Up here!

DEACON (looking up, shocked) Jaymes?!

JAYMES I was so scared Dee! There's this creepy green dude with a half-hunchback and then there's this scary lady and they want to cook me alive! Then you came and pow pow, they're arguing--

DEACON (still a little sleepy) I don't understand Jaymes, what are you talking about?

JAYMES I'm saying they want to kill us Dee! What do we do?

DEACON (paling drastically) Oh Jaymes ... I don't know.

(There is a dramatic pause, only to be broken when the EVIL QUEEN throws back the doors and enters with RUMPELSTILTSKIN.)

EVIL QUEEN (pursing her lips) So ... you're the irritation I have to deal with.

DEACON (mocking) So ... you're the nuisance who gave me a neck pain.

EVIL QUEEN (snarling) I am Agnes Knight, the fairest, the strongest, and quite possibly the most dangerous queen you will ever meet in the rest of your miserable little life, which admittedly isn't going to be that long. I suggest you watch.

DEACON It's Deacon. And aren't you joy; it's a wonder you're queen.

Play

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (piping up) Technically, she lost the throne to her upstart step-daughter after nearly killing her--

EVIL QUEEN Quiet!

(Silence falls. EVIL QUEEN turns, looking daggers at DEACON. She reaches down and tilts the girl's chin up.)

EVIL QUEEN (loud whisper) Such a defiant soul. I shall take great pleasure in your death. (lets her go, before standing up and brushing her dress off) You'll die as soon as your eyes set on the first light of dawn.

(EVIL QUEEN storms off, leaving RUMPELSTILTSKIN to eagerly approach JAYMES's cage. Both the siblings shriek, scared for his life.)

EVIL QUEEN (offstage) Rumpelstiltskin, you fool!

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (pauses and grumbles) Can't even have a decent snack around here and she expects me to slave off; I'm the fool, am I?

(RUMPELSTILTSKIN continues to mutter as he exits. Instantly, both siblings sag with relief.)

JAYMES We need to find a way out of here! I'm too young to die!

DEACON Oh, hush! We need a plan – a good one.

JAYMES (ponders for a moment before jumping up) Oh oh oh! I know!

DEACON I said a good plan Jay, not one that will definitely kill us.

JAYMES (offended) It won't definitely kill us! There's only like a 78% chance of that.



(They continue talking; through the small window, we see the sun set and the moon rise until it is nearly dawn. EVIL QUEEN strides in, RUMPELSTILTSKIN tottering after her.)

EVIL QUEEN (smirking) Tell me Rumpelstiltskin, is it so sadistic of me to enjoy the girl's death?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (grumpily) Very.

EVIL QUEEN Sweetest thing you ever said to me.

JAYMES (muttering) Then I can definitely relate with the half-hunchback.

EVIL QUEEN (sneering) Oh don't worry, you'll get your chance at death. I would give it to you personally but I have a deal with Rumpelstiltskin here.

DEACON (snorting) Would you look at that Jay, she remembers the deal after all?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (frowning) What are you talking about?

JAYMES Wow, and here we thought you would've figured it out?

EVIL QUEEN (tapping her foot and rolling her eyes) Oh be a darling and be of at least a bit of use before we kill you. Who knows? We might keep you around a little longer.

(The siblings pause and look at each other with a shrug.)

JAYMES (subtly winks at Deacon; says out loud in a thoughtful and reluctant manner) Oh nothing ... I suppose that's just how henchmen and their master work.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (furious) What did you say?!

DEACON Would you look at that Jaymsie, he knows it too.

JAYMES Right you are Dee.

EVIL QUEEN (scornfully) This is ridiculous! We're partners, both of whom this arrangement is mutually beneficial to--

DEACON Yeah, yeah, I know the old dance and song.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (snarling) Is what they're saying true?

EVIL QUEEN Of course not! Don't be a dimwit--



Play

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Oh, so I'm a dimwit, am I?

EVIL QUEEN You got beaten by a princess without even half a brain cell just because you couldn't stop howling your name like a braggart; what do you expect?!

(They both continue arguing, voices growing louder with each sentence. During this, JAYMES swings his bird cage and attempts to grab the keys off EVIL QUEEN'S belt. Meanwhile, DEACON kicks the potioneer table, making a bottle fall onto her waiting lap; she hastily shoves it into her pocket. She goes unnoticed.)

EVIL QUEEN (whips around at JAYMES) So ... this was your plan all along. To pit us against each other, only to escape when you do. Well, I'm pleased to say that this won't be happening! (turns to RUMPELSTILTSKIN) Eat the boy, would you? It would be a lovely parting present for his sister.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN Sounds terrible. (cackles) How lovely!

DEACON No, wait! You can't!

(All heads swivel in her direction.)

EVIL QUEEN (walking forward smugly) Oh, I can't?

DEACON No, you can't. It's cruel! Why would you do something so horrible; he's not even ten!

EVIL QUEEN Well, they do call me the Evil Queen for fun, do they?

DEACON (desperately) Don't you have a sibling?

(A moment of silence. RUMPELSTILTSKIN's eyes dart around nervously.)

EVIL QUEEN I did.

DEACON Then what happened?

(Spotlight on EVIL QUEEN. She walks to centre stage.)

EVIL QUEEN (clasping her hands) She was good – far better than me. My, you can say, better half.

JAYMES Then how exactly did you stoop to kidnapping kids in a creepy, badly lit cottage?

RUMPELSTILTSKIN (offended) My cottage is brilliant! Have you ever stumbled on dramatic effects?



EVIL QUEEN

(ignoring RUMPELSTILTSKIN) Because years ago, on a beautiful starry night, we ran off from our house. We ran and ran until we reached an old cliff before the lake to look at and into the sky. (She takes a deep, rattled breath) Then there was a stable boy, from the other house; I barely knew him but we were laughing and talking like we were friends for years.

DEACON

And then?

EVIL QUEEN

Then she came up to me – kept calling me. And I got so frustrated, I snapped. I told her I was busy; next thing I knew, her body was being fished out of the lake. (She turns back to the three of them.) So I lost it. Slowly, I forgot what it was to be Agnes Knight because no, I wasn't her. I was the Evil Queen.

DEACON

I'm sorry for your loss.

(EVIL QUEEN nods but says nothing else. Understanding her order, RUMPELSTILTSKIN grabs the keys so that they can begin.)

DEACON

Which is why you're going to understand why I'm doing this.

(Before anything can be said, DEACON pops open the bottle she stole earlier and flings it at EVIL QUEEN and RUMPELSTILTSKIN. They both scream, RUMPELSTILTSKIN dropping the keys in the process. DEACON pulls it to her with her legs, quickly unlocking her chains before running to JAYMES and freeing him as well.)

JAYMES

What are we going to do now?

DEACON

Run!

(They bolt for the door, throwing it open and running off. The sun is rising, shining on their faces as they gasp.)

JAYMES

Man, I am never playing hide and seek again!

(CURTAIN)





Stuck

Himarsha Mulchandani

It was hard to breathe.

It was hard to move.

To be fair, it was quite hard to do anything really.

I couldn't quite remember how long I'd been here. Days? Weeks? Months?

The familiar ticking of the clock was somewhere far off in another land, the sunlight was a mere dream, and the numbing cold? It was the kind that could seep into the very fabric of your soul.

I shivered and tried to reach out for anything--but to no avail. I just touched the cold hard confinement around me, the only barrier in my life, the only thing stopping me from breathing in fresh air, and bathing in the warmth of the sun.

It's depressing to hear the world move on without me. Footsteps continually thudding around, distant laughter, and on days when I'm lucky, a glimpse of light.

I used to be a part of that world.

Up until one day, when I was mercilessly thrown out of the orbit of my routine and far, far, away from the love of my life. I wondered where Jules was now, and I truly hoped her life wasn't threatened like mine.



To see her again before I died would be the greatest joy of my life. To sway with her in the cool breeze would be like tasting heaven. After all, who was I without her?

Absolutely nothing. Just a soul wandering in the middle of nowhere.

A part of me hoped I'd be the first one to come back out alive.

The other part of me knew that the chances of me being found here were one in a million. Why would someone risk their lives to come search for me, lest they themselves got lost here?

While I drowned in a cold spiral of my thoughts, the whole world around me tilted.

At first, I thought it was just me hallucinating, but then, in a moment of euphoria, warmth seeped into my prison.

A hand groped for me in the shadows.

Oh my goodness--could that possibly be--was that Jules I saw in the distance?

I clung to the hand, and climbed above, joy radiating from my pores ... this was my chance, I could finally be free--

A shrill voice snapped me out of my thoughts.

"Mom! I found my sock!"

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

Using 'In the Land of Milk and Honey' by Joyce Carol Thomas as our mentor text, we wrote poems in free verse about a place we know well.



The City of Rain and Sun

Kabir Srinivasan

If you are caught in a sudden storm
If eagles soar above
If you smell the durian
Well, you're in Singapore, the city of rain and sun

if otters cross the roads
If green doesn't mean envy, but trees
If sparrows chirp at sunrise
You're in the city of rain and sun

Here, the smell of herbal soup is more aromatic than roses
The aging forests mourn the deaths of trees
There are more cyclists than cars
This is the city of rain and sun.

Explore the World

The Land of Rain and Snow

Aarya Jain Baldawa

If you always sleep in
Even though dawn arrives early
If cold slips through the window
You know you're in Seattle,
The land of rain and snow

If cars wait their turn
If graffiti splatters the walls
If bagels taste like heaven
You know you're in Seattle,
The land of rain and snow

Rolling hills, stray cats
And a lot of gum on a wall
Are all quite familiar
When you're in Seattle
The land of rain and snow



The City of Memories

Sunandini Sen

If Holi is an explosion of colour,
If gol gappa places are always crowded,
If there are minarets at every corner,
You'll know you're in
The City of Memories.

The colours of the sashaying silks in shops.
The scent from the local chai joint,
The celebrations of Eid at Chandni Chowk.

Buried in history,
Palaces, buildings, towers,
Running your hands across
The rugged surfaces,
You will feel the past
Alive
At your fingertips.

In Delhi, I left behind,
Friends, family,
But I took with me
Memories.
Memories of visiting Lodi Gardens,
Memories of the freezing winters,
Memories of everything.

Where people are warm and kind,
Where winters bring heaters and hot tea,
Where you can still smell history,
Delhi,
The City of Memories.



My Home in the Plains

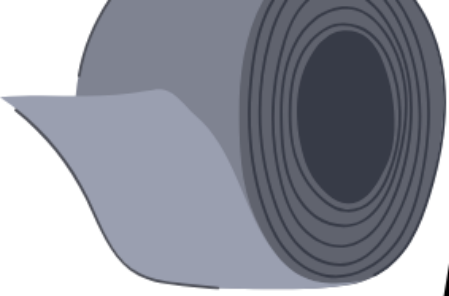
Devangshi Duttagupta

If yellow taxis paint the street,
If blue buses honk their familiar tune,
If the narrow lanes are filled with chatter
You'd know you were in Kolkata,
My home in the plains.

Sweet shops, like scattered gems,
Adorn the bustling streets,
A kaleidoscope of colours,
Guiding you to my familiar place.

In the maze of markets,
Where time slows its pace,
Bright fruits beckon with their hues,
Each step tells a story of trade and taste.

Roaming through the maze-like lanes,
You'd find history in every footstep,
You'd find the soul of the entire city,
In every yellow taxi and blue bus that remains,
In Kolkata--my home in the plains.



Duct Tape Apocalypse

Himarsha Mulchandani

Ten rolls of duct tape mocked me from a distance.

A bundle of cardboard sat atop the kitchen tabletop nonchalantly.

And I stared at them with such malevolence that I was sure I could burn them with my eyes.

While I was busy contemplating wiping out duct tape from the face of the earth, an anguished scream drilled into the centre of my skull--and it didn't stop until I rushed into Vic's bedroom with eyes wider than an ostrich's and saw her hair stuck to duct tape.

"What even were you trying to do?" I screamed at her. "I knew this was this was a bad idea! But no, you had to go ahead like the stubborn idiot you are, and make the entire school project out of duct tape!"

"Well since I'd already started by the time you got here, there was no point putting all my hard work to waste!" Vic said with a pout.

I scoffed, "Hard work? You hadn't even started working on the duct tape hammock yet. All I saw you doing was scrolling through Pinterest when I came in. Now either you need to change your definition of 'hard work' or I seriously need to rethink my life choices."

"Well stop standing there and help me!" she wailed.

"I swear I'll never stay over at yours especially when your parents aren't at home," I rambled on.

"You done? Can you please get the tape out of my hair now? And there was no need to stare at the duct tape like that, Amaira, I could see you in the hall."

"Dude, staring at the tape like that is completely justified if it'll fail you in ninth grade. Remind me again--why did you choose to make a hammock out of duct tape out of all the things in the universe?"

Vic grinned cheekily. "Well, it might as well be fun."

I sighed and shuffled over, pulling hard at the remaining part of the tape that hadn't messed up her perfectly curled hair. This was not fun.

Vic shrieked as the damned thing stuck to me instead of coming off.

Reflexively, her hands, which were holding another dreaded piece of duct tape, flew up to her head--and in an attempt to stop her, I pushed them down to her mouth. In a moment of terror, I realised what I had done.

The tape was now stubbornly stuck to her lips, and her eyes were shooting daggers at me.

"S-sorry?" I said sheepishly, not feeling one bit of what I had just said.

She pointed at me, then at my neck and pretended to slice it open.

I couldn't help but laugh as muffled, angry sounds came from her, "You look like a food-deprived chihuahua!"

That led to more violent actions that are best left unsaid.

"Okay wait," I barely managed to say that between all the wheezing and the punches coming from Vic, "I need you to cooperate with me right now. We're going to get up and grab the scissors, and I'll free my hand from your hair. Then we'll figure out what to do next, but I think we'll be all right since I've successfully rendered you speechless. No more bad ideas."



Story

That was followed by attempted murder. I grabbed the nearest dog-eared duct tape and threatened her with it, but instead, she grabbed it, peeled it off, stuck it to the sleeve of my shirt while hovering an inch above my bare arm and then, mercilessly slapped on the adhesive.

"How could you?" I asked, horrified.

She mumbled something that closely sounded like her trademark, "Serves you right."

After I was done freeing my hand from her hair, I turned around to be greeted by terrific blue eyes that glinted with the spark of a new idea.

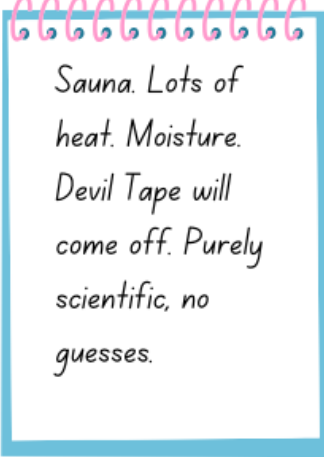
This was bad.

"No, no, no, whatever you're thinking, we're not doing it."

She motioned for me to give her something to write on.

I wearily passed her the notepad.

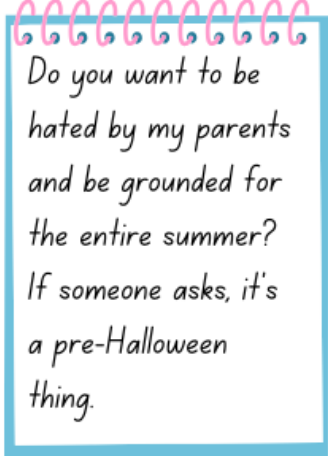
After an eternity of scribbling, she held the note proudly in front of me. It said--



Sauna. Lots of
heat. Moisture.
Devil Tape will
come off. Purely
scientific, no
guesses.

I stared at her incredulously,
"Dude, there are people out there!
Keep your science to yourself."

More scribbling--



Do you want to be
hated by my parents
and be grounded for
the entire summer?
If someone asks, it's
a pre-Halloween
thing.

"But Halloween's five months away!" I whined.

She glared at me.

"There's only thirty minutes before your parents get back home!" I whined some more.

She raised her eyebrows.

"I don't want to do this!" I whined again, shrinking in front of her steely gaze.

Before I could protest, Vic grabbed me with one hand, shoved some money in her pockets and dragged me out of the house.

For a person covered with more duct tape than I was, she walked like it was the newest fashion statement.

I mostly slouched and turned red whenever someone stared at us on the sidewalk.

By the time we reached the sauna I was pretty sure we'd gone viral on the internet, and had a million followers on our Instagram fan-page.

The receptionist stared at us when we walked in, unable to say anything. Vic looked her straight in the eyes and blatantly slammed a wad of cash on the desk. She let us in almost instantly.

As soon as the door closed behind us, I doubled over in fits of laughter. Vic flung herself down on the floor and I could tell by the way her eyes crinkled that she wanted to laugh as much as I was laughing.

Soon, her hair puffed up like a porcupine and just as the heat was getting unbearable, I felt the duct tape come off. Vic sensed it too.

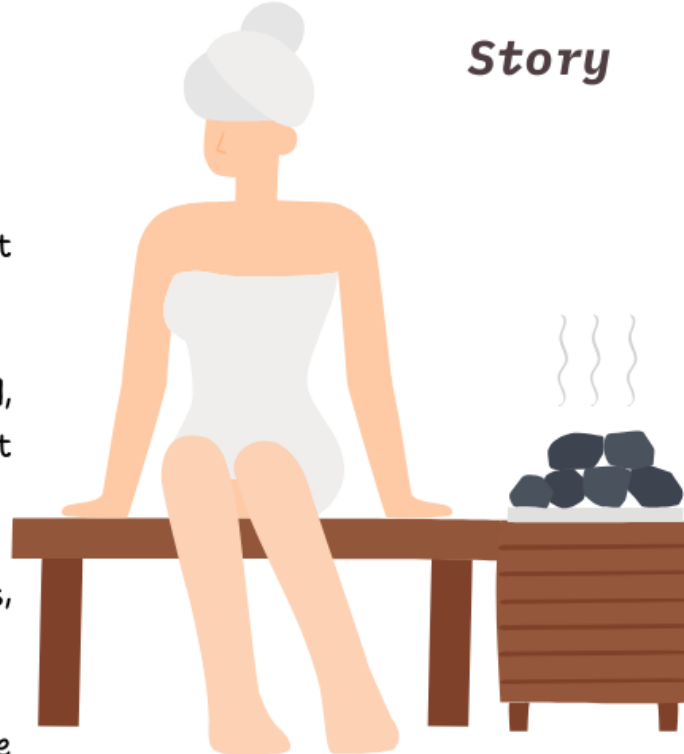
"Okay, for what it's worth, I do not regret covering your mouth with duct tape," I said breathlessly, leaning back with my eyes closed.

And even though I didn't want to admit it, I was relieved when I heard Vic's voice say, "If you say that one more time, I won't hesitate to duct tape you to the principal's office."

With that, we both grinned and headed out of the sauna.

Before walking out, Vic threw an off-handed glance at the receptionist and said, "We owe you lady."

She was kind enough to not ask us why.



Walking on Eggshells

Avani Gupta

Characters

HUMPTY DUMPTY: a white duck

RED RIDING HOOD: a human girl (21)

ROBIN HOOD: a human boy (28)

(HUMPTY DUMPTY, a white duck the size of a cow, is sitting in a little clearing in the middle of a dense forest, tied up, when ROBIN HOOD emerges from behind the trees.)

ROBIN Hello, Humpty.

(HUMPTY stares.)

ROBIN I'm sorry I had to do this to you. But ... you know ... desperate times call for desperate measures.

HUMPTY What do you want from me? Where am I?

ROBIN I suppose stories don't always tell the truth, do they? The people still mourn your supposed death. Ironical really, seeing it was more of a birth than a death.

HUMPTY H-How do you know about that?

ROBIN Well, did people really not think being an egg, you'd probably hatch at some point too? Surprising how nobody figured it out yet.

HUMPTY Who are you?

ROBIN You're in Sherwood Forest and a man with red hair, a beard, a green uniform with a matching hat with a feather on top is standing before you. Who do you think I am, Humpty? Surely I haven't aged so much as to have become unrecognisable!





HUMPTY (eyes widening in realisation; unintentionally letting a little quack slip out) Is-is that really you? **The** Robin Hood? Whatever would someone like you want with me?

ROBIN Oh, this has nothing to do with you. Red will get you back to your pond-- assuming she cares about your friendship enough to take the trouble to come save you.

HUMPTY Red?

ROBIN Yes ... we have a ... difficult relationship, although I worry about her constantly.

HUMPTY Worry? Red certainly doesn't see it that way.

ROBIN Like I said, difficult relationship.

(As RED RIDING HOOD enters, HUMPTY is pulled back amongst the trees, out of view.)

RED There. I'm here. Are you happy? Now let him go.

ROBIN Oh hello, nice to see you too.

RED Where's Humpty?

ROBIN You know you can't avoid me forever.

RED I don't have time for this, Robin, give me the duck and save us both the time and the trouble.

(HUMPTY is brought in, feet and wings tied up. He looks from ROBIN to RED in confusion and anticipation.)

ROBIN There's your oversized duck.

HUMPTY (offended, grumbling under his breath) Muscular. Fluffy too.



(RED cuts the ropes from around HUMPTY's body.)

ROBIN You always have had a talent for holding childish grudges for an unbelievably unnecessary time ... but eight years is a bit of a stretch even for you.

RED (turning around to face ROBIN) Excuse me? Childish grudges?

HUMPTY Will someone please fill me in? How do you even know each other?

ROBIN Come on, we both know this is just your stubbornness.

RED Robin, you left me. You ruined me and then left me.

HUMPTY Oh ... I see what this is! No wonder they bicker like old married couples ...

ROBIN Ruined you? I saved you!

HUMPTY Hang on, you were the huntsman that saved Red Riding Hood from the big bad wolf? Huh, you really were her Prince Charming then.

ROBIN (turning back to look at Humpty in confusion) What? No, you do realise that Red and I--

RED (interrupting) We both know that's not what I'm talking about, Robin. I lost everything because of you.

ROBIN We were kids, Red. You know I never meant to hurt you.

RED (teary) Well you did. Maybe you didn't realise it; maybe you chose to ignore it, but you did. Dad couldn't look me in the eye again. Not after my foolishness got Grandma killed. You went and boasted to the whole village how you killed your first wolf. You just didn't realise that while you became a hero, I became famous as an incapable, dumb little girl who couldn't even take a basket of biscuits to her grandma. And then you left me all alone and became "The Robin Hood of Sherwood forest", while I raised myself, desperately trying to prove myself capable and make a life for myself. But this is just a childish grudge, isn't it?

(ROBIN stands there, stunned and speechless, while RED climbs onto HUMPTY)

HUMPTY (whispering to ROBIN as he prepares to take off) How'd you miss all of that for eight years?

ROBIN (scoffing) You're the one who mistook siblings for lovers.

HUMPTY Wait, WHAT?

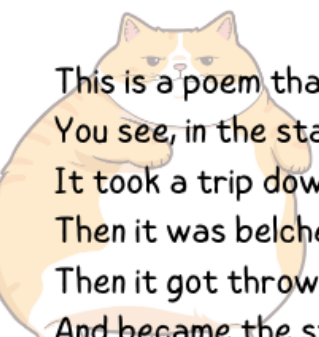
ROBIN Robin Hood. Red Riding Hood.

(CURTAIN)



I Can't Write a Poem!

Aarav Khandelia



This is a poem that refused to be written
You see, in the start, it was fiercely bitten
It took a trip down a fat cat's belly
Then it was belched and became something smelly
Then it got thrown into a garbage can
And became the stinky club's loyal fan
It then hitched a ride to the deep blue sea
but the poem got eaten by a giant pea!
This is the story of a poem unwritten
And the whole thing started with it being bitten!

Aarya Jain Baldawa

In a faraway place, in a forgotten time
berries were black, trees blue and lime
A poem refused point-blank to be written
First it decided to hide in a mitten
Then under my blanket and below my bed
Now cushioned by fur on my dog's head
Always playing or sleeping with fleas
Drinking water and eating frozen peas.
Bowling at the arcade or taking a quiz
No one in this universe knows where it is.



Ronikaa Vijan

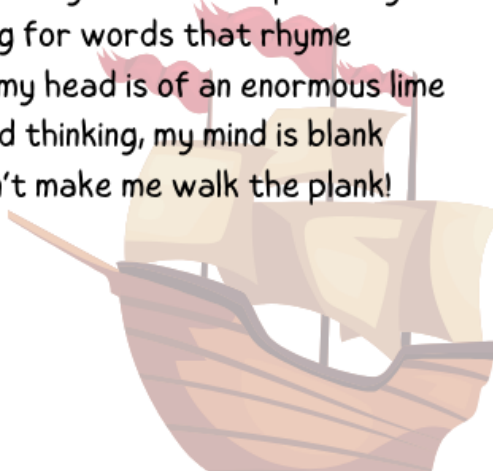
My paper flew, like a bird in the sky,
With a grin and a twirl, it said goodbye.
That's why I struggle to write my verse,
Writing a poem now feels like a curse.

The paper chuckled, feeling so light,
Gave one last glance, then took flight.
I'm left in dismay, with nothing to say,
Without paper, my thoughts just stray.

Yet in the silence, a whisper of hope,
A new blank page, a chance to cope.
With pencil in hand, I start anew,
Finding solace in words, tried and true.

Kabir Srinivasan

I'm thinking and thinking but nothing comes to mind
I can't write a poem on this page which is lined
It is impossible! Like seeing through fogs
Everything's distracting me: from ships to logs
I keep on searching for words that rhyme
but the picture in my head is of an enormous lime
I'm still thinking and thinking, my mind is blank
Please, Ma'am, don't make me walk the plank!



The First Day

Janvi Barman

I take a deep breath, pushing the translucent door to Mrs Sukhwani's office open. She sighs, barely noticeably, before looking up at me and smiling.

"Good morning, Taha. Excited for your first day?"

I try to look confident (keyword: try). "Yes, ma'am."

"I trust Eila from HR showed you around?"

"She did, ma'am. She told me I could start assisting you right away."

She looks like she's trying not to laugh at me, but maybe I'm seeing things. "Great. To start off, could you ...?" She looks around her desk. I get the same feeling I used to get when I wanted to help my mother in the kitchen and she told me to mix something that was evidently already mixed so I could feel useful. "Ah, yes." I snap out of my thoughts. Mrs Sukhwani explains to me very slowly, "So, there's this big, like, filing cabinet thing outside the break room, okay? And one of the drawers has 'Quality Check Reports' written on it. Now, I need you to open that drawer," she pretends to open a drawer, "and get me this," she draws a rectangle in the air, "red folder." My heart drops. "Can you do that for me, please?"

I can't say no. I can't even imagine how incompetent I would seem. This lady is already treating me like I'm ten. I don't want to feel like I'm being shunned by a teacher on the first day of school again. Not again. I hate this. I hate feeling like I can't do these easy things right.

Maybe I can just wing it. "Sure, ma'am. I'll be right back."

She smiles at me so sweetly I feel like I just got diabetes. I give her a half smile back.



I turn and leave the office, making my way to the break room.

It's fine. This is fine. It's a folder. It's just a folder, and I'm, like, a man now. A man. With a job. I'll find it.



I push the door to the office open. "Uh, ma'am, here's your, um, folder." I put the thing down on Mrs Sukhwani's desk. I cringe internally as I see my sweaty fingerprints on it. I discovered with a little bit of investigation (I opened it) that it had reports from 2024 inside it. I assumed she would want the folder for this year.



"Ah, great," she says. I feel like I can breathe again. But then she actually looks at the folder and frowns, tapping her bright nails against them. "Did I ask for this one?" she wonders out loud. I feel a bead of sweat forming at my temple. "I must've. Ah, my bad then. I need the, uh, the red one, I'm so sorry. Could you run back and get that for me, Taha?" She shoots me another condescending, sweet smile.

"Oh, no problem, ma'am. No worries at all. I'll just go get that for you."

I turn to leave and my palm is so sweaty that I fail to grip the door handle. However, I process the fact that the door isn't open far too late and walk straight into it, bumping my nose. Mrs Sukhwani snorts, covering it up with the fakest sneeze I've ever heard.

"Bless you," I say instinctively.

"Thank you, Taha. Be careful on your way out."

"Yes, ma'am."



Story



I return to the office with another folder in hand, feeling incredibly nauseous. "Ma'am, uh, is this the right folder?"

Mrs Sukhwani looks up from her computer screen and squints.

"Oh, I forgot about this one," she says, taking it from my hands and examining it. "This is from my first year here, I think ..."

Oh my god, is this the folder you want or not?

"Ah, well, I don't blame you, I did say red. I'd consider this more of an orange tone, however ..."

I'm struck with an overwhelming urge to break something.

"Okay, Taha, listen."

"Uh, yes, ma'am."

She makes the most intense eye contact ever and the fact that her eyes are light doesn't help in the slightest. "There is a folder in that drawer which is a very rich, cherry red. And on the back, there's a big white scratch. I need that one. Can you get that one, Taha?"

Okay. This, I can do. "Yes, ma'am, right away. I'm so sorry."

She smiles, but it doesn't seem all so fake anymore. "Oh, there's no need to apologise."

"Uh, yes, ma'am. I'll be right back."

I leave the office once more, rather gracefully in comparison to last time.





I open the door once more, holding the correct folder and beaming with pride.

"Here you go, ma'am."

Mrs Sukhwani takes it from my hands. "Ah, yes, that's the one. Thank you so much, Taha, I'm sorry I made you run around like that."

"No problem at all, ma'am."

"Now, could you do something else for me?"

I swallow. "Of course."

"Could you get me some coffee from the break room, no sugar?"

Tears of joy nearly spring to my eyes. "Sure, ma'am."

I turn and begin to push the door open.

"Oh, one more thing."

My eye twitches. "Yes, ma'am?"

"Could you get it for me in my favourite mug? It's just, like, a solid green colour."

My hand slides off the door handle slowly. A few beats of silence pass.

"Taha?"

"Ma'am ..."

"Uh, yes?"

"I'm ... I'm colourblind."





Aunt Timothy

Aarya Jain Baldawa



Characters

MZIA: a cat

KYLE: another cat

AUNT TIMOTHY: a fat cat

(MZIA and KYLE are walking up a small hill.)

MZIA What did you do, Kyle?! Tell me!

KYLE (sheepishly) I-I may have gambled our planet away ... t-to my Aunt Timothy ...

(MZIA slaps her forehead but then giggles.)

KYLE What's wrong with my aunt being named Timothy? They just thought she was a boy at birth.

(MZIA stops laughing and points to the distance.)

MZIA Is that your aunt?

KYLE Yeah.

MZIA Lol.

AUNT TIMOTHY (suddenly) Kitty, this space is mine now and you can't speak on it.

MZIA Jeez, I'm not a kitty.

AUNT TIMOTHY Whatever. Kyle, darling, you promised me a planet.

MZIA He will hand it over to you in three minutes.

AUNT TIMOTHY Hmph.

(A couple of steps away MZIA pulls out a pen and paper and writes 'planet' in bold.)

MZIA My plan is that you will hand this paper to Aunt Timothy and say 'Here's your planet'.

KYLE When did you come up with this?

MZIA (checks her watch) One minute ago.

KYLE Cool. (He walks over to AUNT TIMOTHY and gives her the paper.) Here's your planet.

AUNT TIMOTHY (flips hair, annoyed) Bet-making children these days.

(AUNT TIMOTHY walks off.)

(CURTAIN)

Rocket Science

Aarav Khandelia

It was a cool autumn morning in San Francisco, specifically the Golden Gate Bridge Elementary School. A first grade, spectacled boy named Howard made his way around to Rocket Science, his nose stuffed in a book all about the mysterious substance antimatter. As surprising as it may sound, Howard had a building in the school named after himself because he was smarter than any other pupil and was the only one allowed to enter the building! Well, he was the smartest, until a new kid showed up in the school. His name was Stanford, with his deep blue eyes, messy hair, and thick blue specs. It looked like he had been up coding all night.

"Huh, who is he? Is he smart or average? Well, I'll find out soon enough!" Howard blurted out loud, just within earshot of Stanford.

"You think I am average do you?" asked Stanford. "Ask me any question and I will answer it."

"Okay, what is the formula for rocket thrust?" Howard challenged him.

"Hah, that's easy, the formula is, Thrust: $F = \dot{m}V_e + (p_e - p_0)A_e$." Stanford winked.

"What!? How do you know that?" Howard asked, his jaw dropping.

"I work for NASA," Stanford answered, matter-of-factly.

"How can you work for NASA?" Howard asked.
"You are just a child!"

"I am the smartest child," Stanford corrected, "I am Stanford. You can check on Google."



Story



Furious, Howard opened his phone he had created himself, the ZR 70000 PRO. And sure enough, Stanford was proven to be the smartest child in the world! Stanford smirked at Howard, and now the battle of the nerds had officially started. Stanford answered any questions thrown at him, whereas Howard just sat back sulking about the fact that he was not the smartest kid in the school. To add to Howard's frustration, the building named Howard was replaced with the name Stanford. Howard was depressed. Stanford had outsmarted him in every way possible, but he also thought it was impossible for a kid to be that smart.

So, one day, he made a decision. "If I ask him about his family and where he lives, and if I can go over to his house, I might figure how he is so clever," Howard thought. He walked up to Stanford. "Hey Stan, where do you live? Can I come over and meet your family tomorrow?"

"Uh, I don't have a family. They are all dead. I am the only one left in my family, and I live on the streets because a house would be too lonely for me," he explained, not looking the least bit sad.

"Aw, sorry about that! How do you feel about it?" Howard asked gently.

"ERROR, ERROR, I AM A ROBOT, I DON'T HAVE FEELINGS, FUNCTION STOPPED." And the robot disguised as Stanford passed out.

"I knew there was something odd about this guy!" Howard immediately called the police. "Hello, I need your help." He explained the whole story, and Mister Robot, AKA Stanford, was broken and dismantled, since that is the only way to stop a robot.

Villanelles

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

A villanelle is a very defined form of poetry. There are 19 lines in all. Lines 1, 6, 12 and 18 are the same. Lines 3, 9, 15 and 19 are the same, and should rhyme with the previous set, as well as with lines 4, 7, 10, 13 and 16. Plus, lines 2, 5, 8, 11, 14 and 17 must rhyme. Whew!

7 a.m. Regrets

Janvi Barman

I really should've woken up earlier today
I don't think I'll make it to school on time
Why does it always play out this way?

My alarm rang loudly, but I didn't obey
I just stayed in bed without reason or rhyme
I really should've woken up earlier today

I wish I'd listened to what that song had to say
when it shook me awake with its chirp and chime
Why does it always play out this way?

Flat on my stomach, half-conscious I lay
flopping around like a blob of slime
I really should've woken up earlier today

Why'd I stay up so late? I really can't say
With eight hours of sleep, I'd feel so sublime
Why does it always play out this way?

All that's left to do is to rush and to pray
that if my mom speeds, I'll make it on time
I really should've woken up earlier today
Why does it always play out this way?

Winter

Sunandini Sen

Winter is a cruel yet beautiful thing.
Pine trees and coldness both, they grow,
Finally ending with the birth of Spring.

Icy gust on the cheeks, a painful sting,
The land covered with white, shining snow,
Winter is a cruel yet beautiful thing.

The frost arrives, to windows it does cling.
The cold wind howls, violently it does blow,
Finally ending with the birth of Spring.

Sickness, fevers, colds, it does bring
With snowflakes, warm tea, cookies of dough,
Winter is a cruel yet beautiful thing.

But the birds, braving the cold, they sing,
Because they know that Winter will go
Finally ending with the birth of Spring.

Christmas, cheer and joy it does bring,
Wish for the cold to stay, though we know
Winter is a cruel yet beautiful thing,
Finally ending with the birth of Spring.



Room 321

Avani Gupta

"Great. Just what I needed. I've been working like a dog for the past ten hours, but no, that just isn't good enough for him, is it? Out of the one hundred and ninety eight nurses in this hospital, he chooses me and says, "Aiza, would you mind getting the patient in room 321 down here?" Yes, I do mind," Aiza grumbles under her breath, as she taps her feet impatiently, aggressively pushing the call button of the elevator.

Room 321. She walks up to the door, but just as she looks up to knock, she realises it's half ajar.

"Sir? There's someone here to see you."

The only reply she receives is the sound of a hairdryer. She peers into the room through the gap, to find someone drying their waist long hair, sitting in a bathrobe with their back to the door.

"Oh, even better. I'm twenty minutes late as it is, and now he gives me the wrong room number," she scoffs.

She quietly shuts the door, and storms back toward the elevator.

DING

As the elevator opens, Ezra walks out, smiling. "Ah, Aiza! Did you get Patient 45329 from room 321?"

"Uh, Sir, i think you gave me the wrong room number," Aiza says, trying her best not to sound irritated.

"Um, are you sure? I'm quite sure it was the right one.."

"Yes. I am. Sir," Aiza replies, her frustration escalating.



"Okay, well, try rooms 132, 312 and 213," he says casually, walking away.

"Excuse me?"

"Don't worry, you'll find him!" Ezra says as he walks down the corridor.

"This is just unbelievable."

KNOCK KNOCK

"Oh, I'm sorry, Ma'am, I must have the wrong room."

KNOCK KNOCK

"Excuse me, Sir? Oh, never mind, terribly sorry to bother you."

KNOCK KNOCK

"I see you're doing pretty well, Aiza!" Ezra says, giving her a thumbs up, and walking past her toward the elevator.

"Hold on, I'm sorry, fire me if you will, or maybe I'll just quit by then, but this is unbelievable! Just try rooms 132, 312 and 213? I've been working tirelessly for the past ten hours, and I'm exhausted! And you can't even tell me the right roo—"

"Ah! There he is!" Ezra exclaims, his gaze shifting to behind Aiza.

Aiza turns around, to see a sardar in a wheelchair, coming out of room 321, wrapping a turban around his waist long hair.

"Oops."

Explore the World

The City of Wandering Souls

Himarsha Mulchandani

welcome, weary traveller,
to the city of wandering souls.
there's a paan stall round every corner,
a monkey lurking in every nook,
incense sticks in every street,
and cobblestone paths wherever you go.

you're in the kingdom of primordial beings,
the kingdom born out of fire,
the kingdom, where
each step leads you closer,
to the heart of Varanasi--
the city of wandering souls.

the narrow streets will try to
c r u m b l e your strength,
and just when you can't breathe--
just when your hope starts to falter,

you'll be hit by golden sunlight,
the spicy air,
maybe even a monkey in the city square--
hawkers will surround you,
and people will gawk
it is **then**, dear wanderer,
you'll truly be welcomed
to the city of wandering souls.



The City of Bollywood

Ronikaa Vijan

If large, bustling markets surround you,
If the historic Gateway stands tall and proud,
If you can see food stalls on every street,
Welcome to Mumbai,
The city of Bollywood.

If people live a fast-paced lifestyle,
If the nightlife is exhilarating,
And the traffic is loud but normal,
Welcome to Mumbai,
The city of Bollywood.

The vada pav is a burst of spices and flavours,
People start the day by rushing to catch the local,
And the skyscrapers shoot up like Jack's beanstalk,
This is Mumbai, the City of Bollywood!



The Dance of the Streets

Advika Gupta

Welcome to the Dance of the Streets
Tickets aren't expensive:
A truckload of spirit and a pocketful of dreams

A cool breeze
A wisp of hair on your face
You brush it aside to notice ...
A cow sauntering across the road?
Of course it is--it's Bangalore
You'll forever be on your toes
at the Dance of the Streets

Amidst barely moving traffic,
Your gaze falls upon buildings
As serious as the workers that enter them
And trees that arch and stretch
To form a cave over your head

'Oyyy!' comes a bellow.
An indignant truck driver
Snaps you back
To reality, where traffic has moved
At last
They believe they are the heroes
Of the Dance of the Streets
Your ears, thoroughly confused--
Chatter, honks, barks and yells
fill the air,
Along with ... rain?
Wasn't the sun grinning cheekily, moments ago?
Well, it was--but you're watching
the Dance of the Streets

Anything can happen



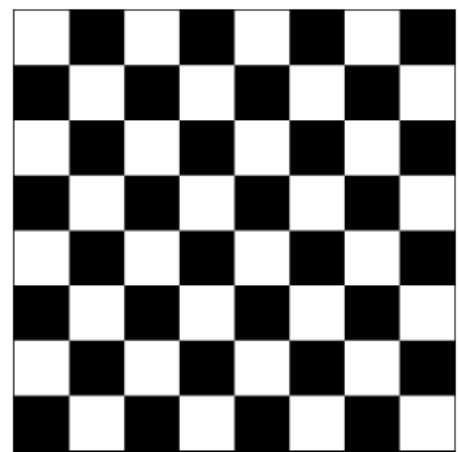
The Chessboard

Janvi Barman

Fontainebleau is a chessboard
of cobblestone and fresh green grass
divided into squares by the canal and the river

the mighty chateau--
a home for the king and queen
drunkards and daydreamers and dog-walkers--
little pawns
tall, strong trees--
rooks, protecting the commune

in the shadow of the chateau
surrounded by moss-wrought sidewalks
being followed around by the river Loing
I feel like myself,
like a pawn on a cobbled chess board



Treasure Hunt

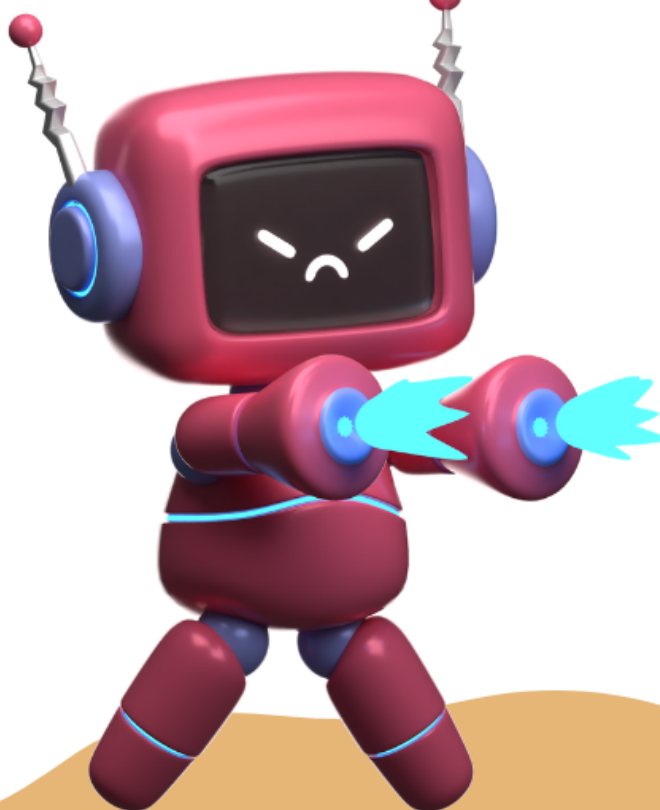
Kabir Srinivasan

Dave woke up with a bump on his forehead. A huge, ten-foot long painting had fallen off the ancient wall and onto him. It had been made by his great-grandfather. On the cobweb-covered surface of the painting, was an enormous image of many mysterious mythical creatures that Dave's mother used to tell him about. The frame was battered, as if it had been broken and stuck together with glue. Suddenly, a faint creaking noise sounded from the old painting, like a door with rusty hinges. Placing his hands on where the noise came from, he just heard more creaks. Dave sat on his bed and scratched his head in confusion. "Where is the creaky noise coming from?" he asked himself.

Just when Dave was about to give up on trying to find what made the sound, a fraction of the frame slid open. In utter awe, Dave grasped the frame and pulled, revealing ... a slightly torn map with a giant x and a bronze sword! Dave knew that a map and sword could only mean one thing: treasure!



Dave hatched a plan for the next day. He would follow the map and find the treasure. Leaving his house, the adventure began for Dave, only for him to find a problem: the x mark was on an island that was one and a half hours away from his house. "Well, I will have to face this to find the treasure. I know! I can borrow a boat from the dock," stated Dave. Dave raced to the dock; he found a pair of oars and jumped into the canoe. And he rowed and rowed.



Reaching the island, Dave raced to the x mark on the map. Only to find that a robot had beaten him to it.

"I was sent here by the evil emperor," said the robot.

Dave readied his sword. He would fight the robot. But it was fast and shot lasers out of guns. It was a hard fight with the enemy able to defend itself against the sword with its hands.

Exhausted, Dave fell to the floor. He couldn't go on.

But the robot continued the onslaught, finally grasping the sword from Dave.

When the robot was about to spear Dave through, the boy had a sudden burst of energy and splashed water onto the robot. He knew from school that water will cause electric devices to short circuit, and that is exactly what happened.

Dashing to the chest, Dave experienced relief like nothing he had ever experienced.

Dave opened the box and inside was the tiniest, thirty-centimetre tall dragon! Then Dave made a silent vow to protect it for ever.

A Goddess' Whim

Sunandini Sen



Characters

ARACHNE

MEROPIS

IODAMA

(The Underworld. A dark, desolate place. Ghosts and spirits float about. ARACHNE sits quietly in a corner, gazing at her hands. IODAMA is standing silently. Enter MEROPIS.)

MEROPIS (anxiously looking around) Where am I even?

ARACHNE (raising an eyebrow) Ah, a new one.

MEROPIS Whatever do you mean by that? Tell me what this place is!

IODAMA The Underworld, dear. Haven't you ever heard of it?

MEROPIS (confused) Wait, what? Oh. I get it now. Thanks a lot, Olympians! You have officially ruined my life.

ARACHNE Huh?

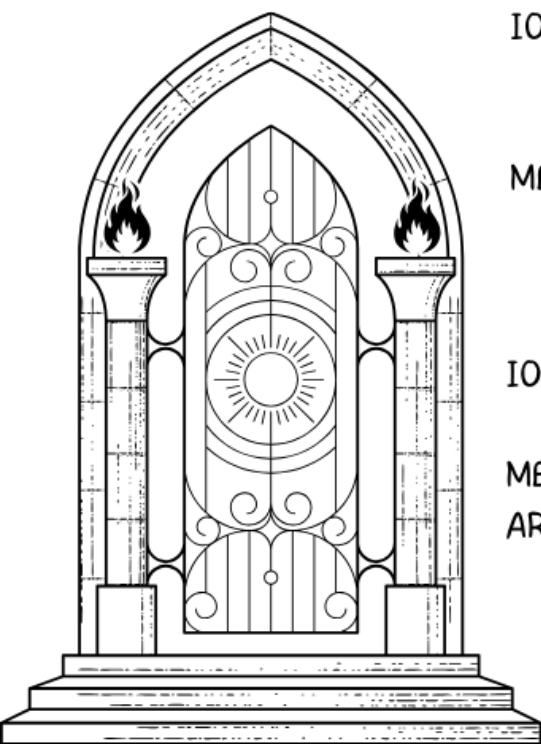
IODAMA Logically speaking, you don't have a life anymore. (MEROPIS glares at her) I mean, you're technically dead.

MEROPIS (angrily) As if it wasn't enough to turn me into a bird. You had to send me to the Underworld. The Underworld of a religion I don't even believe in! Ugh.

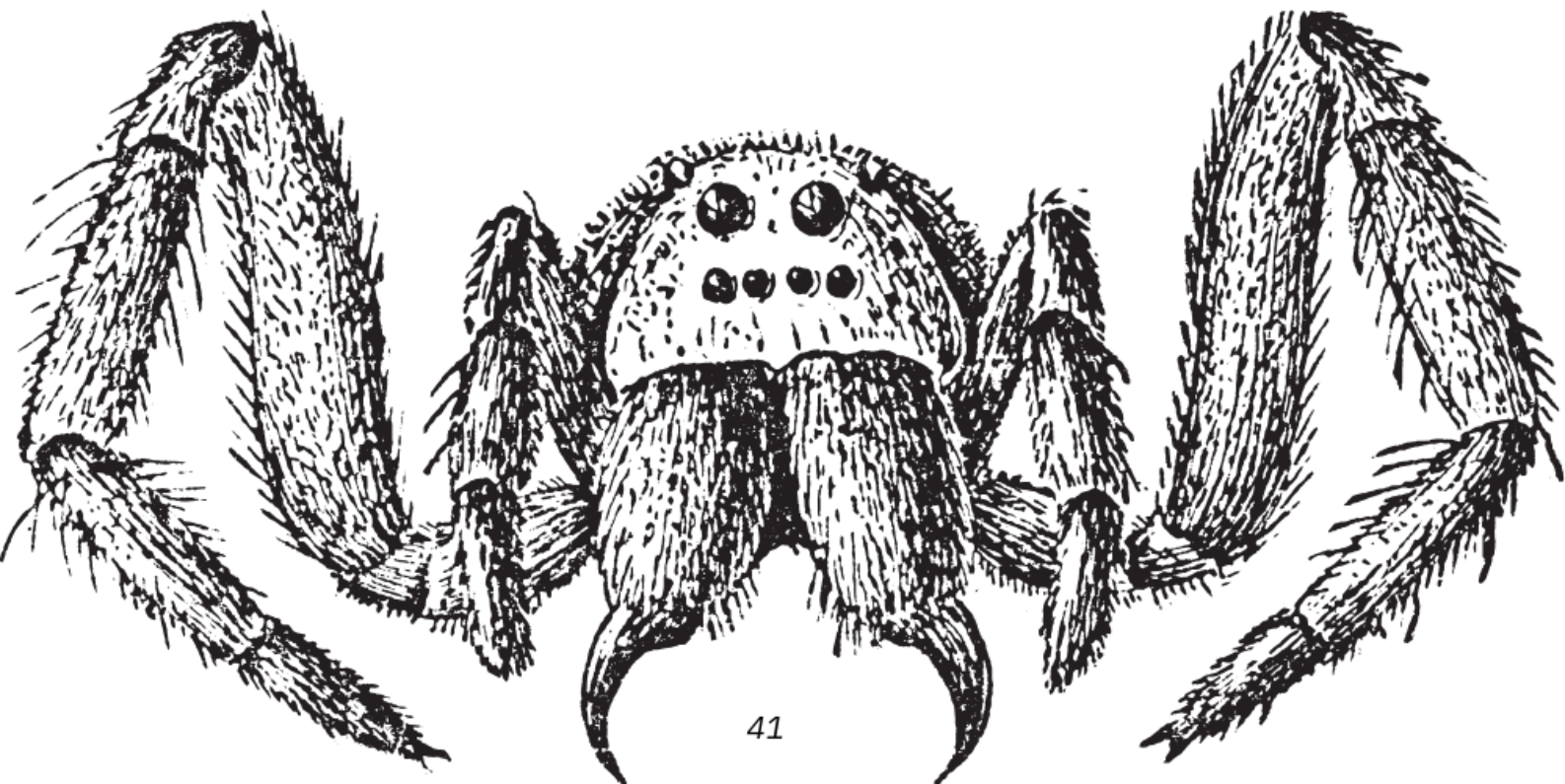
IODAMA (whispering to ARACHNE) What's with her? She seems a bit crazy to me.

MEROPIS I can hear you, you know.

ARACHNE Alright. Why're you so upset? Death comes for everyone. Every mortal, I mean.



- MEROPIS Don't ask.
- IODAMA (gently) Okay, we can start by introducing ourselves. I am Iodama.
- ARACHNE And I'm Arachne.
- MEROPIS My name's ... Meropis.
- ARACHNE Out with it. What happened to you? I can see you're kind of irritated.
- MEROPIS Kind of, my foot! (sighs) I am literally so unlucky. I was living my best life on the island of Kos in the Aegean Sea with my dad and siblings. It was pretty much great, until a goddess got mad because some random mortal didn't worship her.
- IODAMA Why wouldn't you worship her? She was a Greek goddess, yes?
- MEROPIS (impatiently) You see, we were atheists. We didn't believe in the Greek religion and the Greek Pantheon. And it's fine, actually. But, this high-and-mighty goddess came to our doorstep one evening and demanded that we worship her!
- ARACHNE Kind of unreasonable, honestly.
- MEROPIS And she demanded a huge sacrifice too. As self-respecting humans, we refused and she turned us into birds. Then, because she probably had anger issues, she reappeared before me one day and there was a flash of light. And here I am now.
- IODAMA That's kind of dark.
- ARACHNE (with a laugh) Being turned into a bird is better than being turned into a spider. I was a weaver in Athens, living a very normal life. That was until a goddess grew jealous of my weaving skills and challenged me to a contest to see who could weave better.





MEROPIS

Who won?

ARACHNE

Yours truly. The said goddess got so angry, she turned me into a spider. Then, because even as I spider I wove better, she crushed me with her bare hands and I've been here ever since.

IODAMA

(sadly) I was the most devout priestess in Athens. One night, as I was closing up the temple, I saw a shining light. It was the goddess I had always admired and devoted my life to! She held up a mask or head or something like that, and before I knew it, I was here--

MEROPIS

--in the Underworld.

(IODAMA nods.)

ARACHNE

Yes, Iodama, you were betrayed pretty badly by your goddess.

MEROPIS

(with a laugh) One thing I've noticed here is that all the people who sent us here definitely had anger issues.

(ARACHNE laughs. IODAMA grins as well.)

IODAMA

What was the name of the goddess who cursed you, Meropis?

MEROPIS

I won't say. I don't really want to take her name, at all. Arachne, who brought YOU down here?

ARACHNE

I hate her anyway. Don't ask me to tell you who she was.

IODAMA

Alright. We'll say the name of the person who sent us here at the same time.

(MEROPIS and ARACHNE nod.)

IODAMA

Ena, thio, tria--

EVERYONE

(together) Athene!

(They stare at each other in bewilderment.)

(CURTAIN)



A Night in Devfroalm

Aarya Jain Baldawa

There was a town not far from here, called Devfroalm. It was a scary town, with assassins. Every night, the assassins chose to kill one civilian. But, that civilian still stood a chance, as a mythical physician had powers to save somebody. Either the affected civilian or someone else.

At night, the three assassins met, plotting to poison a civilian. "But if we choose her, she might signal!" Scarlett Misterly said.

Logon Dumbmouth added, "No, can't kill Ms Pirene, she baker, make bread; we eat."

"Shut up, Dumbmouth," said Myra West. "Let's poison Briana Kilder, that girl who is always suspicious. I think she's the physician."

"That is a hard assumption to make, Myra," Scarlett lectured.

"I want poison Briana!"

"Briana, it is then."

They crawled into Briana Kilder's apartment and threw a poisoned arrow at her heart before disappearing.

The doctor sneaked away from the assassins. "Life in Devfroalm is tricky," Scarlett said as she gave Briana a dose of medicine.

"Another day, another lie," she whispered.



A Riddle for the Gods

Aarav Khandelia

Characters

ZEUS: Supreme lord of the Olympians

PERSEUS: The forbidden child

HERCULES: The most famous Greek hero

DAEDALUS: Creator of the labyrinth

POSEIDON: God of the sea

KRONOS: Lord of time



Scene One

(Twelve glittering thrones surround a village in the sky. PERSEUS and HERCULES are on the stage, but hidden from view in the half light. Enter ZEUS. He sits on his chair and switches on his Olympus PC.)

ZEUS Huh! This is new. This piece of news says that "the ruler of the golden age will escape the pit, unless killed by the slayer of Medusa, the son of the sky god himself, by using the sword buried deep in the sparkling ocean, near the palace of the sea god, by today, high noon!" (yelling) Daedalus!

DAEDALUS (yelling back) Coming, Grandpa Zeus!

(Enter DAEDALUS. He comes in and kneels before ZEUS.)

DAEDALUS Yes, my lord?

ZEUS I need you to help me solve this riddle. it says, "the ruler of the golden age will escape the pit, unless killed by the slayer of Medusa, the son of the sky god himself by using the sword buried deep in the sparkling ocean, near the palace of the sea god, by today, high noon!"

DAEDALUS (pauses, then gasps) Grandfather, don't you realise? It means that Kronos will escape from Tartarus, and can only be stopped by a sword near Poseidon's palace and Kronos must be killed by your son, Perseus. The deadline is today high noon!

PERSEUS (pointing at HERCULES, who is beside him) Me and Hercules are up for the challenge!

ZEUS AND DAEDALUS Gha! Where did you two come from?

PERSEUS AND HERCULES Uhh, we were here the whole time.

ZEUS (picking up the phone) Let me call Poseidon. He might provide us a shortcut.

POSEIDON (offstage, with a sigh) What do you want, Zeus?

ZEUS (sweetly) Can you send three dolphins to pick up Hercules, Perseus and me? We ... are on a top secret mission.

POSEIDON Only if you promise to tell me everything afterwards.

ZEUS All right, all right!

BLACKOUT

Scene Two
(The Aegean Sea)

ZEUS (excitedly) I see something shimmering.

PERSEUS (moving closer) Nope, that is just a piece of aluminium foil.

HERCULES Wait a second, I thought that the Aegean Sea was litter free?

ZEUS (with disgust) Not with the mortals littering the place.

POSEIDON (suddenly appearing) Looking for this?

(POSEIDON twirls the sword, grinning.)

ZEUS, PERSEUS AND HERCULES How did you know we were looking for that?

POSEIDON (tutting) I am the Sea god; the sea spirits told me EVERYTHING.

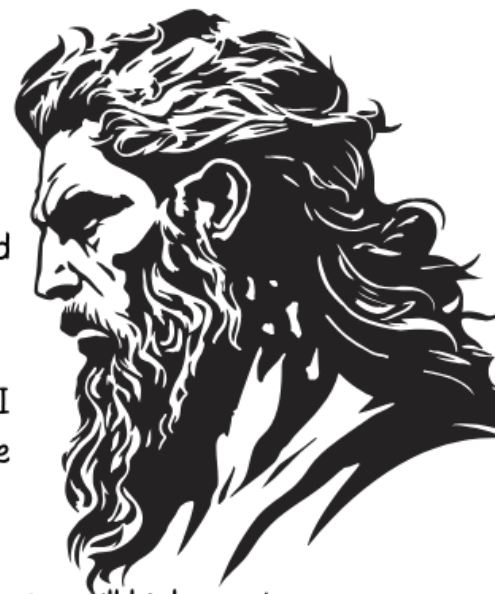
ZEUS Do you know the part about Kronos?

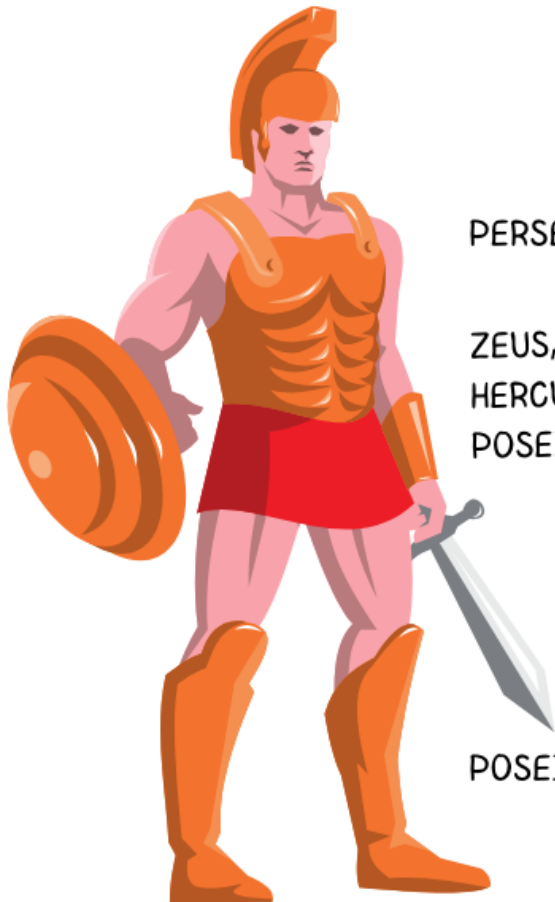
POSEIDON (rolling his eyes) Duh, I know everything. And I will only give you this sword if you let me come with you!

ZEUS You are always so pushy!

HERCULES This no time to argue! There are only fifteen minutes till high noon!

(Everyone starts panicking.)





PERSEUS Has anyone realised that we have no clue where the Underworld is?

ZEUS,
HERCULES AND (blinking) Oh. Right.
POSEIDON

(Everyone starts panicking again.)

POSEIDON (booming) Everyone, stop! I have a plan.

(Everyone stops panicking.)

POSEIDON I can locate the River Styx. Maybe Kronos will be at the exit of the Underworld. Though it's halfway across the world.

ZEUS (quickly, before anyone starts panicking) I can teleport us, everyone get on my back.

(POSEIDON, PERSEUS AND HERCULES climb on ZEUS's back.)

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Three

(The River Styx: a stinky gloomy river against a pitch black sky. Spotlight on KRONOS.)

KRONOS (with arms outstretched) Bring it on, sons and grandchildren.

POSEIDON This is no time for jokes! Today, you will die!

KRONOS Need I remind you that I am the god of time? I can stop time at its very place.

(PERSEUS jumps up and slices KRONOS's neck.)

KRONOS (holding out his hand and cackling) Ha ha ha ha! I can stop the earth from moving! Is that all you got?



PERSEUS (gritting his teeth) Not a chance.

(PERSEUS unleashes a flurry of attacks. KRONOS blocks them all. PERSEUS throws the sword at KRONOS'S neck and it tears a hole through.)

KRONOS Nooooooooo!

(Everyone gawps.)

POSEIDON (softly) After all these years, I can't believe that Father is finally dead.

ZEUS I never thought that he would die. If Tartarus doesn't teach him a lesson, this will.



(BLACKOUT)

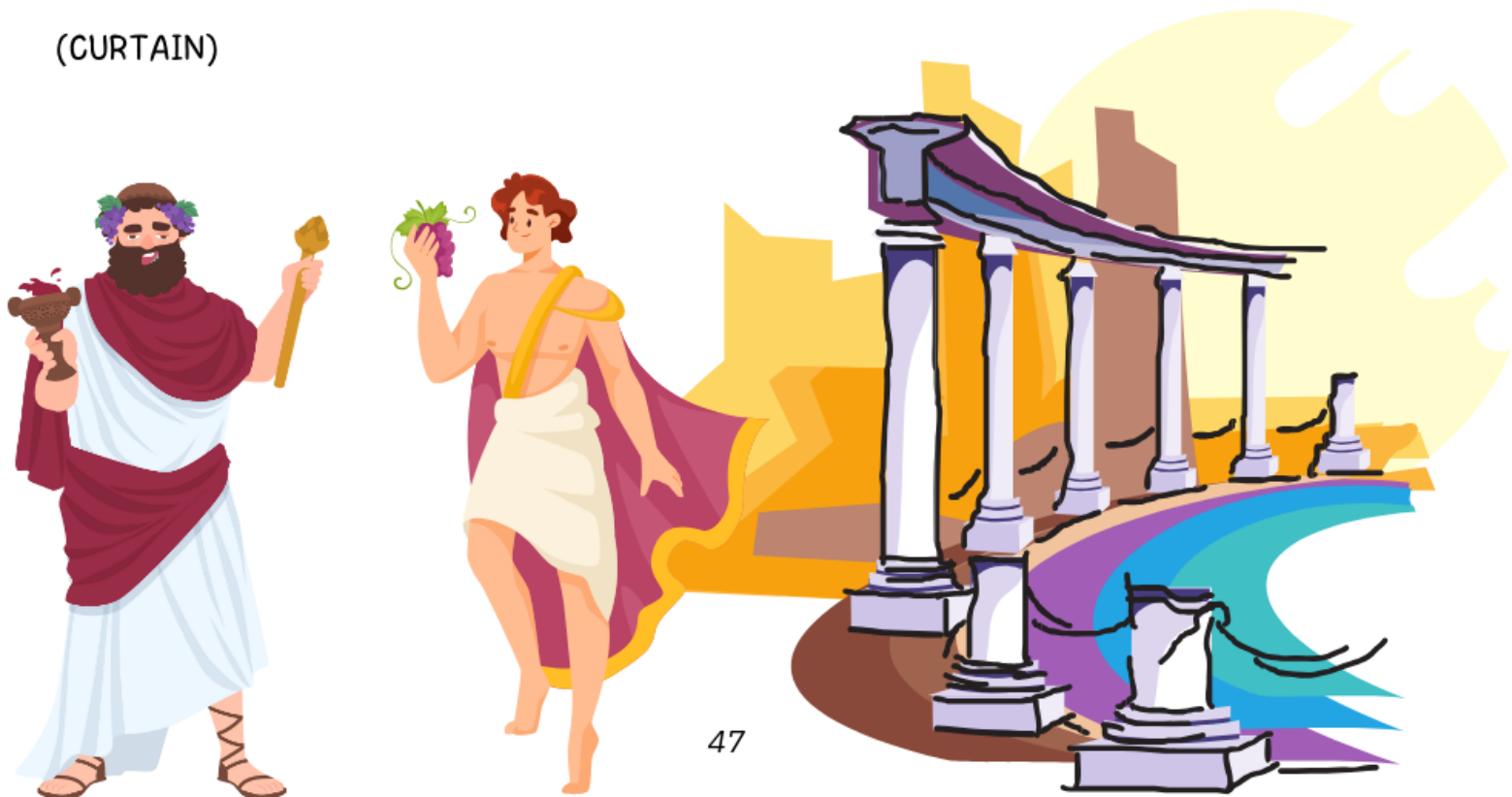
Scene Four

(All the immortals are scattered on a lush courtyard surrounded by flowers. DAEDALUS walks up on to a lit stage.)

DAEDALUS Today we honour the brave ones, who showed the fearsome attitude of courage. We no longer have to live in the fear of falling to the Titan lord! Cheers to our heroes! Cheers to Zeus, Poseidon, Perseus and Hercules!

ALL To Zeus, Poseidon, Perseus and Hercules!

(CURTAIN)



Jumpscare

Janvi Barman

"I hate this," Keyaa complains.

"You need to stop being such a little ... cowardly lion."

"Do you mean scaredy cat?"

"Have you not heard of the Wizard of Oz?"

Silence.

"Keyaa?"

"I'm scared."

I sigh.



The call goes silent. I can hear her low quality mic picking up her breathing. What a wimp. It's just a game. I realise I can't hear the sound on the game anymore, so I turn my volume all the way up, adjusting my headphones. A joker-looking apparition pops up on my screen. Keyaa SCREAMS, entirely drowning out the jumpscare sound effect. My ear drums scream too, almost as loud. I throw my headphones off, screw my eyes shut and pinch my nose bridge. My vision dulls and my ears ring. What the hell, Keyaa? I slow my breathing for a few moments before turning down my volume and putting my headphones back on.

"Ziya?"

"Hi."

"You okay?"

"Yeah, apart from the fact that I turned my volume all the way up because I couldn't hear anything, and your unreasonably loud scream of absolute terror combined with your McDonald's intercom mic genuinely almost made me black out."

"Wait, actually?"

"YES, actually! Okay, it's fine, just keep going."

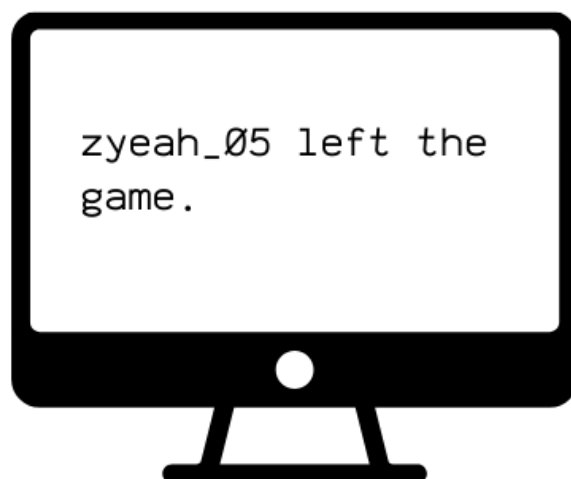
"Oh, absolutely not. You're insane. I do not have the ... the capacity to play any more of this stupid game today."

"Okay, just because you can't handle a level one animated jumpscare doesn't mean the game is stupid. Have you ever considered that you're the stupid--"



"I will not be bullied into this."

I sigh dramatically. "Fineee."



"Are you sleeping over tomorrow or am I too much of a wimp for you to hang out with?"

"Ugh, I mean ... I guess I could tolerate you."

Story

Keyaa giggles. "Mhm, I'm sure you could."

"Okay."

"Okay." I hear Deeva Aunty call out in the background.

"I have to go. Dinner," Keyaa explains. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Sure, see you."

"See you."



"Okay," Keyaa says, flopping onto her bed, lying on her stomach, kicking off her fluffy bunny slippers. She pulls out a note on her phone as I sit next to her. The background is a pastel rainbow gradient with skulls on it. I smile. "See, so it's, like, both of our aesthetics combined," she had said when we first made it.

Zeeyuh and keyaa's buckte list yayyy

was typed across the top. She scrolled down, through all of the things that had been ticked off. "Found it," she said as she ticked off 'bake pizza'. "Genuinely can't believe you didn't wreck yours. I don't trust you in kitchens."

"Listen, I am a 5-Star Michelin chef, okay?"

"Name one thing you can cook without a recipe."

"Hot water."

A beat of silence.

We both start laughing.

"Okay, sure, valid. Also, Michelin Stars only go up to three."



I take too long to think of a witty retort so Keyaa interrupts me as soon as I open my mouth. "What are we doing next?" she asks, scrolling through the list. I spot a bit of flour on her shoulder. When I reach out to brush it off, she yelps and drops her phone on the bed.

"Breathe, Keyaa, I'm just un-flouring you," I say.

"It's because of your stupid horror game," she whines. "I keep getting spooked."

I smile. "Pretty sure that's just a you thing, not a game thing." Something on the list catches my eye. "Why is Dreadr ticked off? We didn't finish playing. We got, like, ten minutes in before you wimped out."

She pouts at me, looking up at me faux-innocently with her brown doe eyes. "It's too scary."

"Come on, everyone who plays Dreadr is like, nine. That's why I wanted to start you off with it."

"The games get scarier?"

"Keyaa. You'll manage. Please."

"No."

"Please."

"No."

"Please."

"No."

"Please."

"No! Okay, you can choose anything else from the list and I'll do it."

I sigh. "Fine," I say, taking her phone and scrolling through the list. "Ooh, can I do your makeup?"

She giggles. "Sure. Oh, Ma said we have to be asleep by, like, three."

"That's reasonable. Wait, let me use the bathroom real quick."



Story

"No, don't leave me alone," she complains. "It's night now. The joker thing will come get me if you're not here."

"Okay, so you want me to just, not do my business?"

"Ziya, you have to make sacrifices for the people you love."

I roll my eyes. "Be back in a second."

"Okay," she pouts.



My eyelids fly open as I hear easily the most terrified scream I've ever heard in my life, making my ears ring and chills go down my spine. I stumble out of bed, realising Keyaa isn't on the other side. I almost black out because of how fast I stand up. My heart rate quickens. I stand still for a second, regaining my balance. Everything's gone silent. I see the bathroom door closed.

Wait.

Wait.

No.

I bang on the door. "Keyaa?" I call.

Silence. I can't even hear her breathe.

I soften my tone. "It's not real. Open the door. It's okay--"

I jump as the door unlocks and a heavy, vanilla scented weight falls onto me. I catch my breath.

"Keyaa--"

A hand falls onto my shoulder and I scream. Consequently, Keyaa screams. The entity laughs, making my hair rise ...



The entity being Deeva Aunty. She turns the light on.

"I hate you!" Keyaa whisper-screams as she beats her fists against my back. "Why would you--what's wrong with you?"

"What exactly happened here?" Deeva Aunty asks.

Keyaa escapes my grip. "Mā! Mā, I don't want this girl in my house. Look!" Deeva Aunty raises an eyebrow as Keyaa opens the bathroom door to reveal a poor-quality printout of the joker from Dreadr stuck to the back of the door. Deeva Aunty snorts, and then breaks into a chuckle and then places her hands on her knees and starts to full-on giggle. Just like Keyaa does.



I begin to explain myself, "I put it up at like, nine last night, I didn't know you wouldn't use the bathroom for six hours straight! And then it had been so long that I forgot about it and I promise, I swear on my life, Keyaa, I didn't mean to scare you in the middle of the night."

Deeva Aunty finally regains her composure. "Oh my god, that's ... that's hilarious."

Keyaa's face has 'I DISAGREE' written all over it.

"Come on, I'll make us some hot chocolate. I doubt any of us will be able to sleep peacefully right now – Keyaa from fear, Ziya from ... I don't know ..."

"Guilt?" I suggest meekly.

She laughs. "Yes, you from guilt, and me from amusement."

She walks towards the kitchen with both of us in tow.

For the Love of Bangaluru

The City of Harmonious Chaos

Avani Gupta

If traffic sounds like friendly chatter
If rain is just everlasting background noise
If roads are parking lots, packed tyre to tyre
You're in Bangalore --
The city of harmonious chaos

At every turn opens a new world
Every street throbs with a different life
Pubs and parties keep the city awake,
in the city of harmonious chaos

If
 the trees smile
 the city blooms
 the flowers breathe
 Every single time it rains
You're in the city of harmonious chaos

Where sunny days have the coolest breeze
Where foggy mornings radiate warmth
Where rainy days are the best ones:
the city of harmonious chaos



The Kaleidoscopic City

Samanvitha Prasad

If there's a skyscraper always gazing down at you
If the summers are as pleasant as springs
If you find yourself in a jam every ten minutes
You're in Bangalore, no doubt,
the kaleidoscopic city

An unending orchestra always in the background --
Vehicles honking, engines revving, birds chirping
Accompanied by an unexpected pitter-patter

A new restaurant tempting you at every corner
The air, a blend of petrichor and exhaust fumes
Trees lined up with a backdrop of towering buildings

Arched trees, covering the bustle below
Someone brushing past you in a hurry,
Vehicles inching forward bit by bit,
This is Bangalore,
the kaleidoscopic city



The Coven of Dreams

Nirai Iniyan

If the year-round weather is pleasant
If it's the cats that chase the dogs
And on the streets, vendors howl
Then perhaps you're in Bangalore
the Coven of Dreams

If the people are as sweet as sugar
And blenders run high in the air
Like my mother calling me for dinner
Then perhaps you're in
the Coven of Dreams

If each street is a different world
Yet each world is the same
in the heart and in the soul
Then perhaps you're in Bangalore
the Coven of Dreams

The Gadbad Falooda City

Kenisha Katiyar

You can sprain your neck looking up at skyscrapers
or you can spend all day plucking fruits at a farm
when you find both side by side, you should know that
you are in the Gadbad Falooda City

You wake up to the aroma of sweet pancakes
or spicy sambhar from your kitchen
You can end your day with
Idli, dosa and a natti meal or
Thai, Korean, Continental and Japanese cuisine

Snake like metros
or cycling from house to house
but mostly you are snarling through a traffic jam,
waiting for the vehicles to move
is like watching paint dry
This is the Gadbad Falooda city

You run out happily ready for a swim
but then you feel a drop fall on your hand
you look up to see the grey clouds of misery
hovering above your head and you wonder
where did the sun go?
This is the Gadbad Falooda city

Wherever they come from,
whether they wear Kanjeevaram or Kazo
Ultimately at the end of the day
everyone comes together and
make what I like to call
The Gadbad Falooda city--
Bangalore



Out of the Bag

Advika Gupta

"Ow!"

Jeff said this a lot. That time, it was because he had bumped his head on his caravan door--again.

"Well, that was the ... fourth customer I left unsatisfied this week! Mochi, we really need to figure out something more ... size appropriate, huh?" he said to his white and ginger calico, who was ... chewing his brand new t-shirt?

"MOCHI!" yelled Jeff, realising the t-shirt wasn't the only thing that had been chewed up. "Aw, c'mon, I thought we were working on this, girl?"

Jeff set down his bulky plumber's backpack, picked up Mochi and held her in front of his face. "You, little missy, are very lucky that I love you."

Mochi mewed indifferently and hopped out of Jeff's arms, reunited with the t-shirt.

Jeff began picking up torn clothes and crumpled papers from all over his tightly packed little caravan. He held a bill up and ran his hand through his hair. "Wo-o-o-w, gas prices have, um, really gone up haven't they?" he laughed nervously.

A loud rrrrrrip interrupted Jeff's thoughts.

"Mochi! Give that here!" Jeff exclaimed, starting a hopeless battle of tug-o-war with his t-shirt and Mochi.

Just then, Jeff's phone rang. "Grrr. We will finish this," he said, glaring at his cat.

"Hello? This is Jeff Gonzales speaking from Plumble, how may I help you? Mhm, 2pm? Could

I get your address please? Got it! Thank you for calling, I'll be there."

Jeff hung up and pumped his fists in the air. "Mochi, that was Adelaine Carter -- one of the richest women in town! She asked for a fountain to be fixed at two o'clock! If I don't mess this one up--somehow--it could solve a lot."



Jeff took a deep breath--but not too deep--he was afraid that was enough to knock over one of the million fragile-looking showpieces that adorned Adelaine Carter's massive foyer.

"This is it, Mochi. The wealthiest client I've ever worked for who could possibly solve a big chunk of my money problems. And you, young lady, better stay in there, or my future as a plumber will go down the drain ... pun intended. Okay, that was bad. Whew. Not nervous, not nervous, not nervous ..." Jeff whispered, seemingly to his backpack.

"Sir, all you alright? Are you talking to your ... backpack--" the butler standing at the door asked suspiciously.

"To myself! Myself and no one else, hehe. I do that ... often," Jeff interrupted, chuckling nervously.

"Yes sir ... of course. Ah! Miss Adelaine! This is Mr Gonzales," said the butler, turning to a short woman, no more than five feet, who had just entered the room, wearing a fiery red pant suit. Jeff quickly slung on his backpack and stood up, revealing his ... altitude.

"OH! Um, hello, Mr Gonzales, thank you for coming at such short notice," Adelaine said, craning her neck upwards so much that it was practically parallel to the floor.

"N-no, of c-course, Ma'am. What c-can I do?" Jeff mumbled, his own chin grazing his chest.

"You see that beauty of a fountain over there? Isn't it stunning?" demanded Adelaine, gesturing to a huge, ornate display in the corner of the room.

"Yes, Ma'am, it's b-beautiful." This client really wasn't helping Jeff's nerves.



Story

"Well, I want it to be even more beautiful, and for that it needs to work! The poor thing hasn't been working for almost a month now. I'm in half a mind to think it's homesick--it is from Pa-ree after all ... but it's also possible that a pipe or something is blocked."

"I'll take a look at the drainage, Ma'am," Jeff replied, not quite sure how he was going to do that. The space around the fountain was small. Very small.

Jeff squeezed himself behind the fountain and got to work. But every few seconds, a muffled 'OW!' escaped his mouth, for he'd have bumped his knee or elbow or--most of all--his head somewhere.

"Mr Gonzales, are you alright?" Adelaine asked, concerned.

"YES. I'm fine!" Jeff said quickly.

"Are you ... sure?" Adelaine asked again, after a few more 'Ow!'s.

Jeff pushed himself out from behind the fountain, rubbing his head and sighed. "No. No, I'm not. I'm too big for this. There's something blocking the pipe but I practically need to go into the fountain to take it out. I'm sorry, I was ... hoping to finally do something right, but I guess I'll really have to give up on this job," he said sullenly. Then, remembering where he was, Jeff shook his head quickly. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't be telling you all of this. I'll, um, send one of my, uh, smaller friends to help you by tomorrow. Sorry again, Ma'am."

Jeff gave Adelaine a sad smile, zipped open his backpack to pack up ... and realised two seconds too late why that was a big mistake.

Mochi hopped out swiftly and shook her head, bewildered by the sudden light. Jeff, whose face was red with embarrassment, quickly scooped her up in his arms and looked nervously at a horrified Adelaine.

"Why ... is there a cat ... in my foyer?" she fumed.

"No, Ma'am, uh you see, she's, um ... I'm really sorry, but I had to ..."

While Jeff stuttered and stumbled, Mochi's nose was twitching wildly. She smelled something--and she needed to find out what it was. Her instincts taking over, she pushed off from Jeff's arms and landed neatly in ... the fountain.



"MR GONZALES, GET THAT CAT OUT OF MY PRIZE FOUNTAIN THIS INSTANT!" Adelaine yelled furiously.

"Yes, Ma'am!" Jeff hurried over to it, but by the time he squeezed himself back behind it and peered in, all he could see was Mochi's tail sticking out of the fountain's drain. "Mochi, you ... argh! Get out of there!" Jeff tried to pull Mochi out of the drain as hard as he could without hurting her, but she seemed to be determined to stay. Jeff gave Adelaine a helpless look. Adelaine shot daggers up into his eyes.



Jeff kept pulling and staring desperately at Mochi's tail, until finally, finally, she shimmied out of the drain, all the previously white parts of her now black, and a ... dead rat in her mouth?

"Mochi, yuck! You are such an ... ugh, how did you, oh never mind. Let's leave this nice lady in peace and--"

Jeff was cut off by a loud sputter. All four heads in the room turned to the fountain and stared in amazement as it spit and gushed to life, soon spewing water enthusiastically, like nothing had ever happened.

"You-your cat ... fixed my ... fountain from Pa-ree?!" Adelaine gaped at Mochi, who was busy with her rat.

"My cat fixed your fountain from Paris! I did say I'd send one of my smaller friends," Jeff gazed proudly at Mochi.

"Ha! I knew there was something weird about that backpack." The butler looked at it triumphantly.

"Right, Ma'am, I think that'll be about ... 300 dollars, including the costs for same-day service." Jeff calculated quickly, trying very hard not to squeal at the amount.

Adelaine hid a smile as she fished out her wallet and took out the money. She held it out to Jeff, who accepted happily. He picked up Mochi, careful not to touch the rat, strapped on his backpack, and walked out the ornate doors, a bounce in his step.

As the butler closed the door behind him, Jeff heard an indignant yell.

"Butler! Why are there RATS in my house?"





Characters

MINNI

FAIRY GODMOTHER

JULIET

CINDERELLA

GOLDILOCKS

ROMEO

GUARD 1

GUARD 2

Scene One

(MINNI is sitting in a small cafe, munching on a muffin and scrolling through Instagram. FAIRY GODMOTHER enters the cafe and looks around for a table when she spots MINNI. FAIRY GODMOTHER pulls a chair and sits down beside her.)

FAIRY GODMOTHER Hey, Elf.

(MINNI looks up from her phone.)

MINNI Urgh, another fairy.

FAIRY GODMOTHER (taken aback) Dude, I didn't ask to be born as a fairy.

MINNI Hey, you're the one who put Cindy and that shoe prince in charge of the kingdom. I've heard of that guy, roaming around with a size 6 shoe.

FAIRY GODMOTHER I thought she was a size 7.

MINNI Who cares? I gifted her a size 9 on her birthday; I didn't find out until this morning.

FAIRY GODMOTHER Hang on, aren't you the elf, Minni, who turned into a snake and scared me last evening?

MINNI (smirking) Yep, guilty. But come on, that was hilarious!

FAIRY GODMOTHER Hilarious, my foot! You scared the breath out of me!

(FAIRY GODMOTHER keeps her wand on the table. Just then, the tip of the wand sparkles and a young lady appears in front of them. She has long, dark brown hair and wears a tee and jeans.)

MINNI Where'd you get that tee from? Zara or Myntra?

FAIRY GODMOTHER Shut up. (She turns towards the lady.) Hey, aren't you that, uh ... Millet girl from Shakespeare?

MINNI Her name's Riley.

JULIET My name's Juliet Capulet!

MINNI Hey, I thought you spoke in thees and thys.

JULIET I like to keep up with the latest generation. I bought it from Myntra. Way cheaper.

MINNI I know, right?

FAIRY GODMOTHER And where's your Romeo?

JULIET Ah, another day, another millennium. And here I thought eternal love was supposed to be ... well, eternal. Turns out it's just eternal headaches. Who needs Romeo anyway? I've got Crossword vouchers, a Netflix subscription and pizza delivery now. Much more reliable, I must say.

(A loud crash is heard and a cylindrical object falls from the roof on MINNI's head. JULIET giggles. MINNI pulls out a note from the cylindrical object.)



Play

FAIRY GODMOTHER Hmm, in my day, it used to be a pigeon delivering letters. What is it though?

(MINNI quickly reads the note and keeps it on the table, looking bamboozled.)

MINNI (still shocked) The queen of the Charming Kingdom is NOT CINDERELLA anymore!

FAIRY GODMOTHER WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!

(MINNI drinks a glass of water, takes a deep breath and then replies.)

MINNI Cinderella, apparently, has been sent to live with her stepmom again. The new queen is ... Goldilocks.

JULIET (turning to FAIRY GODMOTHER) Is that even possible?

FAIRY GODMOTHER Yes, it is. One of the very important fairies back in my childhood made a special orb for every character of every fairy tale, from the Evil Queen to Little Bo Peep. For example, now Rapunzel's orb and Flynn Rider's orb are kept together, as they eventually get married. But when someone relocates the orb, things automatically change. Goldilocks must have kept her orb with Prince Charming and Cinderella with her stepmom and sisters.

MINNI Hasn't Goldilocks been on the run for stealing valuable magical objects?

JULIET Yeah, but I don't think they ever found her.

(FAIRY GODMOTHER's wand, which is placed on the corner of their table, zaps, and a cupcake and soda appear.)

JULIET Oo! I'll take the cupcake please!

MINNI How'd that happen?

FAIRY GODMOTHER My magic's fading away, I'll have to pass it down to someone or else the kingdoms will go haywire as my wand's the only thing that keeps 'em all connected. You'll see Snow White marrying Prince Charming & Belle roaming around with Naveen!

MINNI (frustrated) We can't just let Goldilocks waltz in and take over the kingdom! We need a plan!

JULIET (grinning) Well, we could always lure her into a trap with a giant bowl of porridge. She won't be able to resist that!

FAIRY GODMOTHER (rolling her eyes) Oh sure, let's defeat the villain with carbs. That's a first in fairy tale history.



MINNI (with a mischievous grin) Hey, stranger things have happened in fairy tales. Remember that time when Rumplestiltskin got outsmarted by a talking donkey?

FAIRY GODMOTHER (laughing) Touché, Minni. Touché.

JULIET (smirking) I may have gotten an idea!

MINNI (sarcastically) Oh what, we invite her to our house, keep three bowls of porridge, three chairs and three beds and when she sleeps, we'll murder her?

FAIRY GODMOTHER Not bad!

JULIET (rolling her eyes) Ha ha, hilarious Minni! (She turns to FAIRY GODMOTHER.) Fairy Godmother, where will the orbs be?

FAIRY GODMOTHER Well, the orbs of the fairytale characters of the Charming Kingdom are in the castle. I had them cleaned last evening.

JULIET (clapping) Perfect! Tonight, why don't we go and re-position the orbs?

MINNI Yeah, right, we just waltz in, say to Goldie, "Hey, we're just here to take away your newly received power? We'll have tea later."

JULIET Urgh! Your sarcasm gets on my nerves!

FAIRY GODMOTHER I know a spell that could silence her for a little while, just a year or so.

MINNI I have magical fingers and I know how and on whom to use them, thank you very much.

JULIET (ignoring MINNI'S glares) In secrecy, we'll do all of this ... Like a heist!

MINNI I suddenly like you!

FAIRY GODMOTHER It's dangerous, girls. And I feel that there's a catch to this. Two random people wouldn't come and help me.

MINNI (in a French accent) I want a job at the castle that brings me close to royalty.

JULIET And I want to escape Romeo! I'm on the run from him.

MINNI You're a born rebel.

FAIRY GODMOTHER I can help with both. Fine, we'll do it tonight.

(BLACKOUT)



(The scene opens to JULIET, MINNI and FAIRY GODMOTHER standing in a room filled with towering shelves of books, a bonfire about to extinguish and a few comfortable chairs.)

JULIET Are we supposed to be in their library?

FAIRY GODMOTHER Not at all!

(That instant, the door opens and in comes a young lady with luscious, long blonde hair tied in a ponytail, and wearing a blue nightgown, a gold crown carefully placed on her head.)

FAIRY GODMOTHER Goldilocks! What a pleasant surprise!
GOLDILOCKS Hello, there. Godmother, you didn't
tell me I was to expect guests!

(FAIRY GODMOTHER smiles nervously.)

JULIET Hey! I'm gonna ask you one simple question and YOU are going to answer that, understood?

GOLDILOCKS Darling, we're not playing 'good cop, bad cop'. Guards! Take 'em away.

(Enter two burly GUARDS.)

GUARD 1 Come on, all of you! Don't waste our time, we've got bigger fish to fry.

JULIET Oh please!

(She jumps and kicks both of GUARDS in the face. They fall, unconscious.)

FAIRY GODMOTHER Your turn, Goldie.

(FAIRY GODMOTHER points her wand at GOLDBLOCKS but nothing happens. GOLDBLOCKS cackles.)

GOLDILOCKS What happened Godmother? Lost your magic?

(FAIRY GODMOTHER's wand suddenly zaps at GOLDBLOCKS, turning her into a guinea pig. MINNI comes running from a secret passageway behind one of the bookshelves.)



MINNI Whoa, that was fairly simple. When we were transported here, I found myself in the orb room. I relocated the orbs while y'all were ... doing your thing.

JULIET (picking up the guinea pig) You know, the whiskers really suit you if it makes you feel better.

(The door opens again and CINDERELLA comes rushing in.)

CINDERELLA Thank you so much, Fairy Godmother.

(MINNI clears her throat.)

CINDERELLA You too! And Godmother, I've got something for you.

(She pulls out a wand from the satchel that she is wearing. It is identical to the FAIRY GODMOTHER's.)

FAIRY GODMOTHER How do you have it?

CINDERELLA I broke it last week so replaced your wand with a wand that I bought from one of the toy sellers. Here, I got Mother Goose to fix yours.

MINNI So much for 'kingdoms going haywire'!

FAIRY GODMOTHER Uh ... Thanks?

CINDERELLA (turning to MINNI) I'm granting you a job at my castle as an advisor, does that work?

JULIET Minni, you cast a spell, didn't you?

MINNI (chuckling) I may have, I may not.

(The door opens and a young man runs in. He has dark brown hair and light blue eyes. JULIET looks away.)

ROMEO Juliet! O Juliet! Thy Romeo is here!

MINNI (rolling her eyes) Looks like someone didn't get the script.

(CURTAIN)



Sunrise

Aarya Jain Baldawa

The early morning was still coloured black and blue as Rose jumped out of her bed and tip-toed to her brother's room. "Matt, come on!" she whisper-shouted. They walked out and called their third sibling, Grace.

"GRACE!" Matt practically screamed. "Why is she such a heavy sleeper?" he mumbled.

"Coming," Grace sighed.

They were a family of five, six if you counted the cat, seven if you counted the hamster. Grace was the oldest child and Rose and Matt were twins. (Matt wouldn't admit it but he was the youngest by seven minutes.) Their parents were strict. Like super strict, and they were homeschooled mostly everyday but the month of June and alternate Sundays.

"Shouldn't we ask Mother for permission?" Matt asked.

"Scaredy cat," Grace and Rose said in sync.

"Where are we even going?" Matt questioned, but got no reply. They walked up to the roof of the two-storey house. "Why are we here?"

"You'll know soon enough," Grace said while Rose overlapped, "You better be thankful-- me and Grace have gone at least twenty times. We thought you might want to come."

As if God's plan was to go the opposite of what Grace and Rose wanted, the purple-ish sky clouded up and became dark and grey. The rain poured.



"I came prepared!" Grace said and got three mini umbrellas out of her huge purse.

Matt smiled and stood up. A moment later, he screamed, "What the heck!"

Matt slipped from the roof and dangled mid-air, holding the edge for his life. "No, no, no!" he added as his shorts slipped off, revealing hot pink underwear.

Rose stifled a laugh and Grace grabbed another umbrella and said "Matt, shh, do you want to wake Mother up?"

Matt grabbed the umbrella, and Grace and Rose pulled him up with much effort.

"How much do you weigh?" grumbled Rose.

A moment later, Matt was safely on the roof. He grabbed his Grace's hands and pulled her into the attic.

"Thank goodness," Matt sighed with relief.

"Dude, hot pink?" laughed Grace.

Matt slapped his head.

They watched the sunrise, as they intended to. But instead of from the roof, they watched it from the safety of their rooms.

The Prince and the Pirate

Avani Gupta

Characters

HAPPY: Pirate, male, 30

GRANNY: HAPPY's grandmother, 82

PRINCE LOUIS THE 101st: Gypsy, 36

HARRY: PRINCE LOUIS THE 101st's father, 68

Scene One

(HAPPY and GRANNY are wandering aimlessly down a winding path and can see a caravan in the distance. Neither of them speaks. GRANNY is sulking and HAPPY is ... well, happy.)

HAPPY Oh Granny, cheer up, what're you so upset about?

(GRANNY turns to look at him, appalled.)

GRANNY YOU STUPID CHILD WE'VE JUST GONE BROKE AND HOMELESS IN UNDER TWELVE HOURS.

HAPPY Oh, I see ... (pause) But why're you so upset?

(GRANNY stands there, staring at him.)

HAPPY Oh, I know! You're upset because that funny old man in the pink jumpsuit took your stuff.

GRANNY (sarcastically) You mean the part where he took all my money or the part where he took my house? Oh wait--or the part he took THE WHOLE PLANET THAT I'VE RULED FOR HALF A CENTURY?

HAPPY Wait, wait, I know this! It's one of the three ... um ... the second one ...?

GRANNY (looking up and mumbling) God help me.

(As GRANNY and HAPPY pass by the faded, rusted caravan, a lively voice comes from behind them.)

LOUIS (smiling broadly) Hello! I'm Prince Louis the 101st!

GRANNY (eyes suddenly lighting up) Prince?

HAPPY Hullo!

(PRINCE LOUIS and HAPPY shake hands. Smiling charmingly, GRANNY pushes HAPPY aside and shakes hands with PRINCE LOUIS.)

GRANNY So, you're a prince? Like i have a huge mansion and an even bigger fortune kind of prince? Pleasure to meet you!

LOUIS Well, I am a prince! Bu--

GRANNY Great, let's go.

LOUIS Let's go ...? Where?

GRANNY (pretending to be offended) What kind of prince doesn't offer to show a poor old lady around their palace?

LOUIS Oh ... of course, um, come in!

GRANNY (looking around in confusion) Uh ... where?

LOUIS My caravan!

HAPPY How lovely!

GRANNY (looking at the faded and rusted caravan, forcing a smile) Just lovely.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Two

(The inside of the caravan. The door is next to a few shelves. There is a window on the opposite side. In front of that is a small tea table with three stools. PRINCE LOUIS and HAPPY take a seat and start chatting, while GRANNY looks around.)

GRANNY Surely this isn't where you live, is it, Prince?

HAPPY Actually Granny, Louis just told me tha--

LOUIS Yes! I was j-just saying, I, Prince Louis, do not live here. I live in a palace. A big one. With a lot of gold.

HAPPY Bu--

Play

GRANNY (with a sigh and a smile) Wonderful. Now, Prince Louis with a lot of gold, could you take us to your palace?

LOUIS Uhh ... Of-of course! Except it's ... um ... it's under renovation ... you know, so it can be even more ... princely?

GRANNY Oh, that's no bother! I'm sure the mon--I mean, uh, the beauty is still the same!

HAPPY Oh, Granny, don't bother him, let's just chat here!

LOUIS Right! Let's just stay here!

(GRANNY sits down reluctantly, annoyed.)

GRANNY So, Prince Louis, where are you headed?

LOUIS Hm?

GRANNY You must be going somewhere in this ... thing.

LOUIS Oh. Of course. Uh, actually, I was just driving. I like it here.

GRANNY (slightly disgusted) You do? Even after living in what I imagine your palace to look like?

HAPPY Oh, Granny, what're you talking about! What palace?

LOUIS My very much existent palace of course!

GRANNY Don't mind him, he's a bit slow.

HAPPY But Loui--

(Suddenly, someone knocks on the door of the caravan, and GRANNY opens it. HARRY, an old, bald man wearing a ridiculous pink jumpsuit enters.)

GRANNY (shocked and furious) YOU.

LOUIS Oh! Dad!

GRANNY DAD? THIS DEVIL IS YOUR DAD?!

HAPPY Oh, hello! Nice to see you again!

HARRY WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

LOUIS Hold on, you two know each other?

GRANNY Know each other?! HE STOLE MY HOME, MY MONEY, AND MY PLANET.

HARRY I WON THAT BET FAIR AND SQUARE.

(HARRY and GRANNY continue screaming at each other at the top of their lungs.)

GRANNY Hold on, but why did you even need the money? You're a prince!

LOUIS Heh heh, funny story you see ... I'm the 101st prince ... the 95th and 96th lost everything ...

GRANNY So your crazy father took my money because you're poor and probably don't even have a palace?

HAPPY Oh, Granny, what've I been telling you all this time?

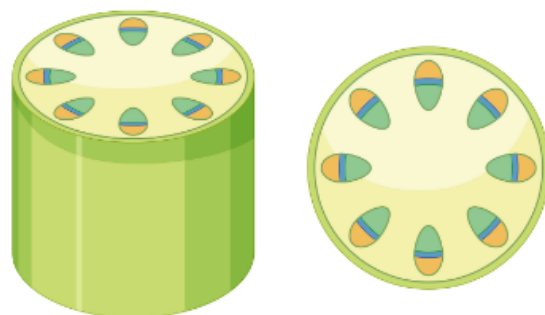
(CURTAIN)



I Still Can't Write a Poem!

Advika Gupta

My teacher told me to write a poem.
But I'd rather study xylem and phloem
Or fractions or dance or anything at all
That doesn't involve this long rhyming haul.



I don't hate poems; I love them in fact,
But the WordHippo website has sadly been hacked.
And not one rhyme can my lazy brain write
So dear reader, do you see my plight?

Kenisha Katiyar

I can't write a poem tonight,
not with my hands bound so tight
behind a chair, knotted with rope.

All I can do is sit and hope
Hope that the gun pointing at my head
won't shoot and leave me dead.
Yes, dear reader, I have been kidnapped!
In a dark, tiny room, you see, I'm trapped.

Janvi Barman

'Dear Respected Sonal Ma'am,
I'm writing this e-mail to tell you, today
I won't be able to finish my assignment
due to my fingers running away.
In fact, they eloped with my sense of meter!
The officiant will be the concept of rhyme.
The lengthy, epic-like guest list includes
the ability to think, and all my free time.
Until they return my calls or write home
I'm rendered useless as a writer, you see,
I sincerely ask for some extra time.
Do accept my humble plea.'

In here, a poem, I cannot write
as I have no paper, pen or graphite
In here, a poem I can not frame.
The kidnappers are to blame!





Miguel thought it would be a normal babysitting day with normal kids and normal parents, but unfortunately for him, that wasn't the case.

As the siblings' parents stepped out of the house, Reina exclaimed, "Bye-bye, kids! We'll be back in ..." She glanced at her gold watch without properly checking it, then continued, "In three hours? Well, don't trouble this innocent man, okay? Adiós, mis lindos niños!" With that, they shut the door.

"Hello! Mi nombre es Miguel. What are your names?" asked Miguel.

The boy was about to speak but was cut off by the girl. "My name is Jade," she said, innocently swaying from side to side with her hands behind her back. The way she said it made him feel that this was a normal household, a normal day, especially after the last house he went to.

Then the boy elbowed Jade in the ribs.

"OWY! HE HIT ME, SEÑOR, HE HIT ME!" screamed the girl.

Miguel intervened, placing himself between the siblings, who were now hitting him instead of each other.

"Ow, ow, ow!" Miguel muttered, wondering how those little niños could hit so hard. He crouched down to the boy's level. "What is your name and why did you hit your sister Jade?" Miguel asked sternly.

"My name doesn't matter. To answer your second question, I was about to say my name," said the boy with his arms crossed, tapping his feet on the floor.

"Tienes mucha actitud para un niño," Miguel muttered under his breath.

"What did you just say?!?" said Juan, his eyes flashing with anger.

"No, no, no ..." Miguel said nervously, scratching the back of his head. Suddenly, Miguel had an idea. "Okay, you kids hang tight, I will get something from my car."

A few minutes later, Miguel returned with a pickle jar. His eyes widened in shock. The walls were covered in ink blotches, the red carpet smeared with white paint, and the floor flooded with water. "Not again," said Miguel, hunching his back.

Juan started, "You may be wondering how I--"

Jade interrupted, "We--"

"Sí, sí, how we did this in a matter of seconds, right?" Juan asked, turning toward his sister, then back to Miguel. "I. Ate. Chocolate."

"What?" Miguel exclaimed.

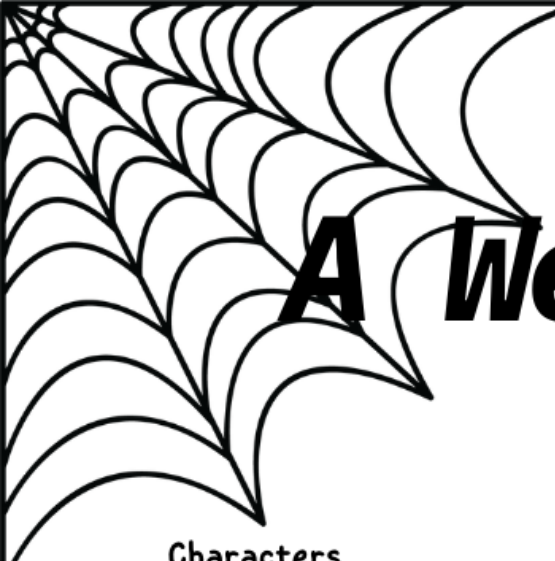
"You see, something that my parents don't even know is that whenever I eat a piece of chocolate, I get a power which is mostly useless," said Juan with a smirk as if he had done something cool.

Miguel ignored the mess and the fact that it was impossible. He remembered the pickle jar in his hand, which he had gotten because he was practically starving. "This jar," he lied, "can apparently only be opened by one person, and this jar of pickles ... has been passed down to me through generations ... and it is my job to see if you can open this." Miguel, despite being starving, passed the jar to the girl. The little girl held the jar in her tiny hands, and then, you guessed it, she dropped it ...

And at that very moment, the parents returned home. Reina had her hand on her husband Antonio's shoulder and was giggling uncontrollably. Perhaps they had gone to the bar instead of the movies. Miguel did not know. They looked inside, and Reina's giggling gradually ceased.

"Oh Dios! Qué le has hecho a mi casa?!" exclaimed Antonio angrily. He grabbed Miguel by the shirt. "Piérdete, SAL DE MI CASA!"

Smartly, Miguel ran out of the house and never came near that street again!



A Web of Lies

Janvi Barman

Characters

ITSY BITSY SPIDER

INCY WINCY SPIDER

FAN

THE PRESS

SWMUC (SPIDER WHO MAKES UNWARRANTED COMMENTS)

SAMMY WAMMY SPIDER

Scene One

(A press conference. ITSY BITSY SPIDER sits leisurely on a chair up on a stage to the right. A small table with a mic sits in front of him and four of his legs rest upon it. A pair of sunglasses rests on his face. He looks bored and uninterested and is examining the hairs on the ends of one of his legs. To the right, fans and reporters line up behind a microphone stand, clipboards and cameras in hand. Their murmurs and whispers fill the room. FAN comes up to the mic.)

FAN (in a shy, feminine voice) Um, Mr Bitsy, Sir! It's a pleasure to get to speak to you, I, um, I'm such a huge fan of your book--

ITSY BITSY Yes, yes, the pleasure is all mine. Do you have a question for me?

FAN Yes, Sir! I wanted to ask, um, do you think it's possible for, um, a disabled spider to climb up a water spout like you did?

ITSY BITSY (under his breath) Let's hope they don't bash me on The Web for this ... (to FAN) Well, I think there are some things that we are born with or given that are out of our control. One must accept them and remember, you are worth more than your, er, water-spout-climbing skills. A disabled spider, although they may not be able to climb a water spout, has much more to offer as a spindividual.

FAN I agree, Sir! Thank you--

ITSY BITSY Yes, lovely chat. Next spider, please!

INCY WINCY (in a faux high pitched voice) Oh, Itsy Bitsy! I'm your biggest fan! I have come to profess my love for you!

(Irritated and confused, ITSY BITSY looks away from his own leg and looks eyes with INCY WINCY SPIDER. His eyes widen.)

ITSY BITSY Incy?

INCY WINCY (in his regular voice) That's right, brother. Long time no see, hm? How is fame treating you?

ITSY BITSY (taking his legs off the table and turning to fully face INCY WINCY) What are you doing here? Back in Spinneret City?

INCY WINCY You didn't think I'd be gone forever, did you? Of course I'd be back. Back for my revenge.

ITSY BITSY (laughing nervously) Revenge? Come on, blood is thicker than water after all ...

(INCY WINCY pushes aside the barrier between the floor and the stage, climbing up onto it. THE PRESS' murmurs get louder. The spiders in line look at each other in confusion and concern.)

ITSY BITSY (taking off his sunglasses) What--

INCY WINCY (clearing his throat loudly) Can I have everyone's attention, please? I have a very interesting story to tell about my brother, here. (gestures to ITSY BITSY)

(THE PRESS goes quiet.)

INCY WINCY (under his breath) That worked better than expected. (to THE PRESS) Back when we were teenagers, Itsy was always a little bit of an attention seeker, a story stealer, if you will--

ITSY BITSY NO! Don't listen to him!

INCY WINCY (to ITSY BITSY) Well, if you are who you say you are, then you can prove I'm lying, can't you? What are you scared of? (to THE PRESS) What he's been hiding is that I'm the one who climbed the water spout.

(THE PRESS gasps.)

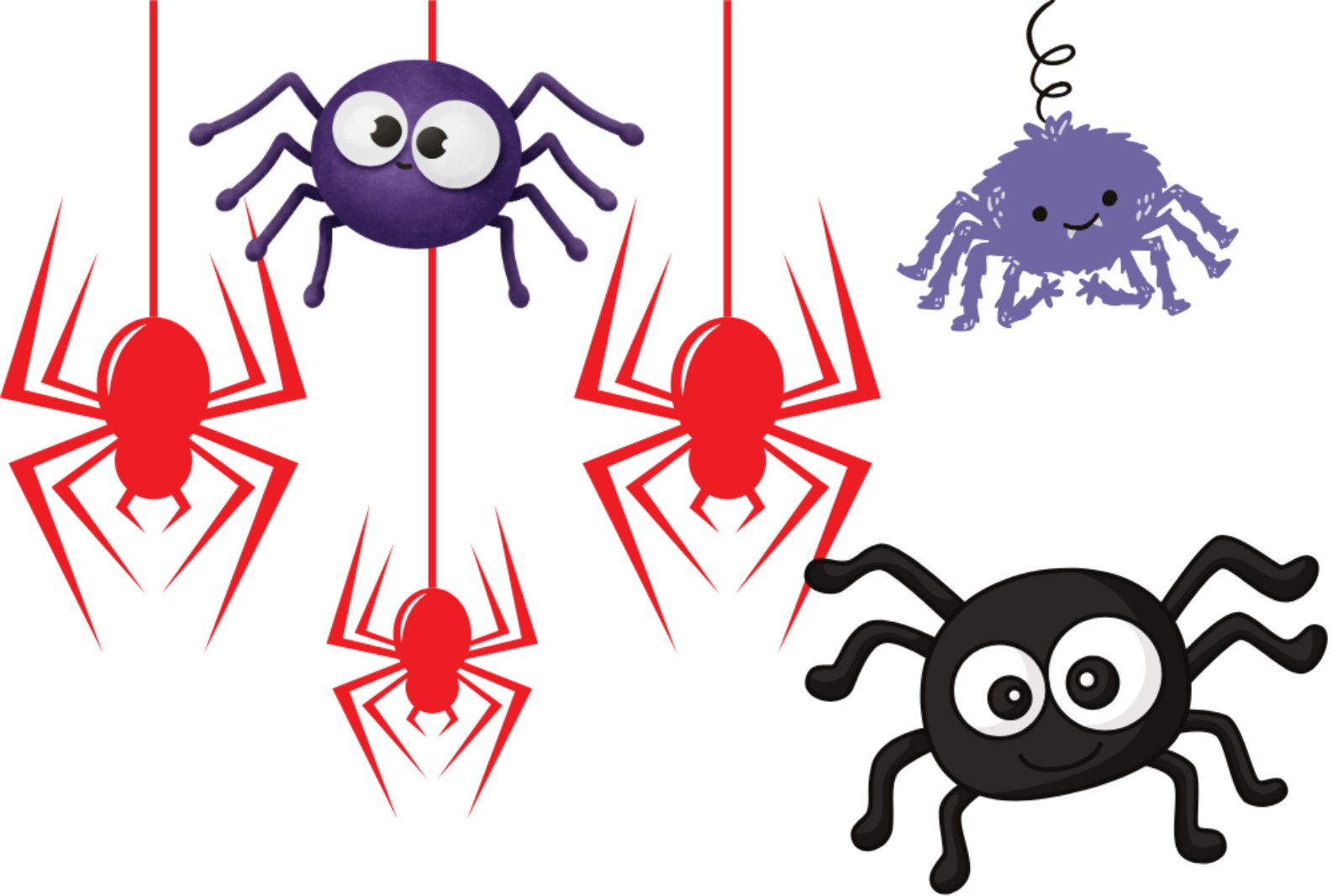
SWMUC Plot twist!

INCY WINCY I'm the one who got washed out and climbed it again. And I'm the one who wrote the book all of you love and adore. I WROTE 'HOW TO CLIMB BACK UP THE SPOUT' TEN YEARS AGO!

SWMUC Prove it!

ITSY BITSY He can't!





INCY WINCY That's what all our friends and family said when Itsy stole my manuscript and passed it off as his own! I was always the outcast. Always the misfit. Why would anyone ever believe me over my perfect, overachieving brother? So he got away with it, and I fled the city in sorrow, not being able to bear seeing him prosper over something I wrote! But I'm not the same spider, no. I can prove it, now.

SWMUC How?!

INCY WINCY I'm glad you asked! Let's all take a trip, shall we? A trip to the human house right outside of the city where Itsy Bitsy Spider allegedly climbed up the water spout. Although it's been deemed off limits, I'm sure our beloved Mr Bitsy can tell his guards to let us in for this special occasion. I'll meet all of you there in ... (looks at his watch) fifteen minutes? (turns to ITSY BITSY) Show up, little brother. If you have the guts, that is.

(THE PRESS explodes into chaotic chatter as INCY WINCY exits the room through the door on the left. THE PRESS stumble over each other as everyone rushes to leave the room.)

ITSY BITSY Yarn it ...

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Two

(The back wall of a house with a water spout running down it. THE PRESS are scattered across the grassy lawn, chattering excitedly. INCY WINCY stands near the water spout, tapping one of his legs impatiently. A long black spider-sized limousine enters. THE PRESS swarms around it. The door opens and ITSY BITSY emerges. THE PRESS explodes in simultaneous cheering and booing. ITSY BITSY fights his way through THE PRESS and comes to INCY WINCY's side.)

INCY WINCY Oh, Itsy! I didn't expect to see you here, thank you ever so much for gracing us with your presence.

(THE PRESS quiets down to hear their conversation.)

ITSY BITSY What do you want me to do to prove my innocence, Incy? Let's get this over with.

INCY WINCY (checks his watch) Climb the water spout.

(THE PRESS gasps.)

SWMUC No way!

INCY WINCY Yes, way! I mean, Itsy was the one who did it in the first place, wasn't he?

ITSY BITSY I was ...

SWMUC DO! IT!

SWMUC AND
INCY WINCY DO! IT! DO! IT!

THE PRESS,

SWMUC AND DO! IT! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT!

INCY WINCY

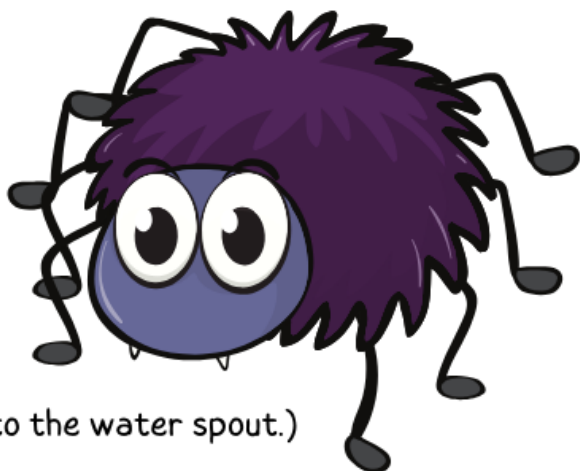
ITSY BITSY FINE! I'll do it!

(THE PRESS explodes in cheers as ITSY BITSY crawls into the water spout.)

INCY WINCY I don't doubt that he can climb the spout! But what I do know, is that in ...
(checking his watch) ten seconds, exactly at five-thirty, the water spout drains every day, just like it did all those years ago when it washed me out. Itsy wouldn't have climbed up the spout if he knew that, would he?

(THE PRESS hurriedly parts, moving away from the mouth of the water spout.)

INCY WINCY And now, gentlespiders ...





(A strong stream of water gushes out of the water spout, drenching all the spiders who cannot move far enough away in time. THE PRESS explodes in chaos and screams. It gushes for around fifteen seconds. The water finally stops to reveal ITSY BITSY trembling on the ground, choking and coughing up water. Two spiders who appear to be dressed as his guards rush to his side. One pats his back aggressively and the other drapes him in a blanket. ITSY BITSY attempts to speak and chokes.)

SWMUC EVERYONE! Quiet down! He's trying to say something.

(THE PRESS goes quiet. ITSY BITSY locates INCY WINCY amongst THE PRESS and locks eyes with him.)

ITSY BITSY You ... win ...

(THE PRESS cheers and shouts. A few spiders lift INCY WINCY onto their backs. THE PRESS gradually exits, INCY WINCY crowd surfing on their backs.)

THE PRESS Incy Wincy Spider climbed up the water spout! Down came the rain and washed the spider out! Out came the sun and dried up all the rain and Incy Wincy Spider climbed up the spout again!

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Three

(A television screen. SAMMY WAMMY SPIDER sits behind a table on screen in a suit and tie with a dazzling smile.)

SAMMY WAMMY Welcome back to the Sunday Night Show with Sammy Wammy Spider! I'm your host Sammy or Sam for short, and tonight on the show I'm honoured to have the very spider who returned to Spinneret City after ten years with the grandest possible entrance--Incy Wincy Spider!

(Applause is heard as the camera cuts to INCY WINCY, sitting at the other end of the table, a pair of sunglasses on his face.)

INCY WINCY Thank you, Sammy, for having me! It's an honour to be here.

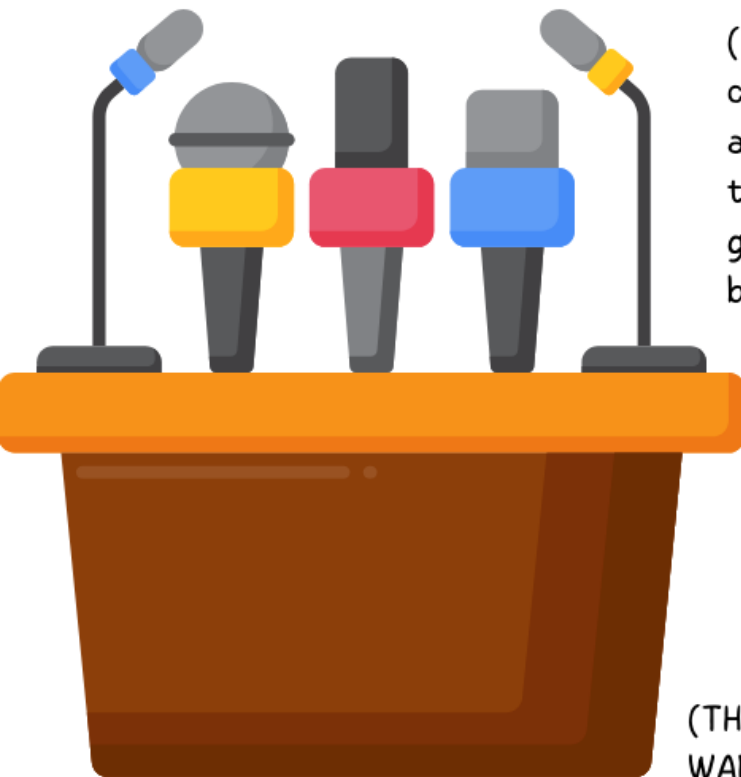
SAMMY WAMMY I see you're rocking your brother's signature sunglasses tonight?
 INCY WINCY Well, it was my brand first before he stole it. You know, as he does.

(Laughter.)

SAMMY WAMMY (with a hearty laugh) As he does, huh? That's crazy. I don't think a celebrity's reputation has ever been ruined this quickly.

INCY WINCY It was karma, in my opinion.

SAMMY WAMMY Oh, I agree completely! Actually, I have a viral clip of your brother, Itsy Bitsy, from a reporter's live stream that I'd like to share with our audience tonight ...



(SAMMY WAMMY brings out a tablet. The camera zooms in on its screen. ITSY BITSY appears in the unstable video, trembling on the ground, covered in a blanket, one of his guards patting his back. He tries to speak but coughs up water.)

SWMUC EVERYONE! Quiet down!
 He's trying to say something.

(THE PRESS goes quiet.)

ITSY BITSY You ... win ...

(THE PRESS explodes in cheers. SAMMY WAMMY puts the tablet away as laughter is heard.)

SAMMY WAMMY Now, I wanna hear all about how you two got into that situation, the entire story, all the deets, from the very beginning. But before that, I want everyone watching to order a copy of the Spinneret City Times Bestseller, 'How to Take What's Yours' by Incy Wincy Spider!

INCY WINCY You won't regret it! (pulls down his sunglasses and throws the camera a wink)

(CURTAIN)





Loneliness

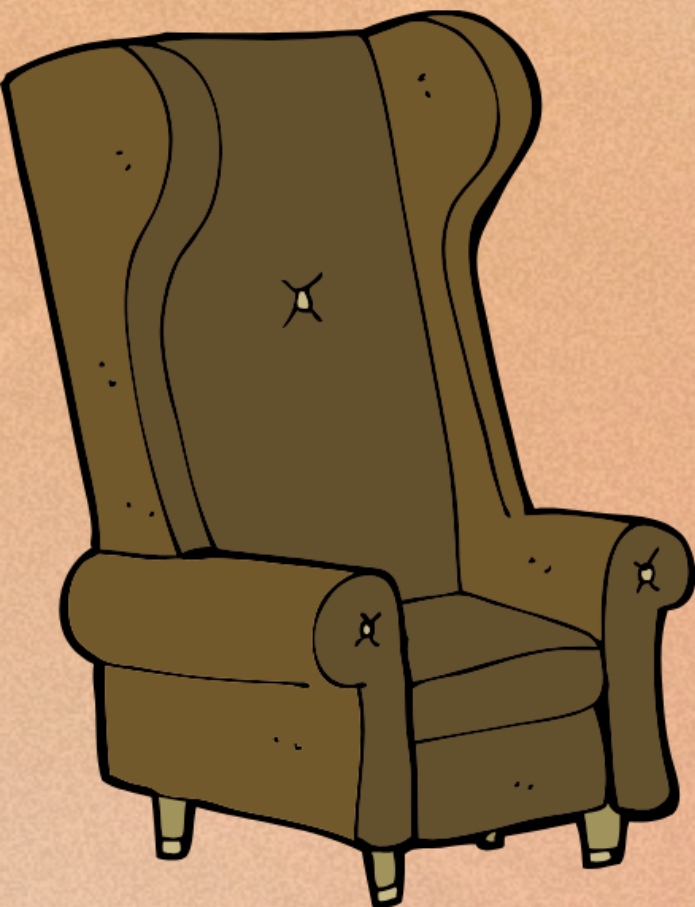
Sunandini Sen

I sigh. Life is so boring nowadays. Especially since Sam went off to college. No one even pays attention to me anymore. The entire family just passes me by every day, going off to do their respective jobs and tasks, as I sit quietly in the corner of the living room.

At least when Sam was here, I had a friend. We'd spend time together, every single day. An hour. Two hours. Sometimes even five hours, if he had the time. Never less than an hour.

Even on his worst days, when he came home from school, teary-eyed and crying, I'd be there to console him. His closest companion. His one and only confidante. His best friend. I knew my company would always cheer him up.

He would always spend at least an hour with me, however exhausted he was. That was why I loved him so much. I knew he loved me too; of course he did. We were the best of friends.



One day, when he came home from school, I immediately knew it was one of his bad days, from his red eyes and sad expression. He sat down before me, and said, "Everyone treats me so terribly. But, I know you'll always be there for me. You're my best friend. I'll never leave you."

We were as thick as thieves. It was always Sam and me. Me and Sam. That was until one day, the end of the school term. I knew school had ended for Sam, and he'd go off to college. I never thought that he'd go somewhere so far, hundreds of miles away.

He began to spend more time with me. I suspected something was afoot, but Sam's genuine smile reassured me and I dismissed it as a simple worry.

On the day I didn't know would be our last together, he sat down beside me. "I have to go," he said, looking away from me, avoiding his eyes. Tears welled up inside of me. As he happily described the new campus life he would get to experience in the college he was going to, the new friends he would make, my heart broke into pieces.

He had promised that he would never leave me. Why did he have to break it?

He reassured me. "It's only for some time. I'll be back soon."

I believed him and waited. I waited. A day. A month. A year. Still, he did not come. When two years had passed, on his birthday he called up his parents and told them to not keep me in the house anymore. He said I was useless and that I was taking up unnecessary space.

My heart broke for the second and final time.

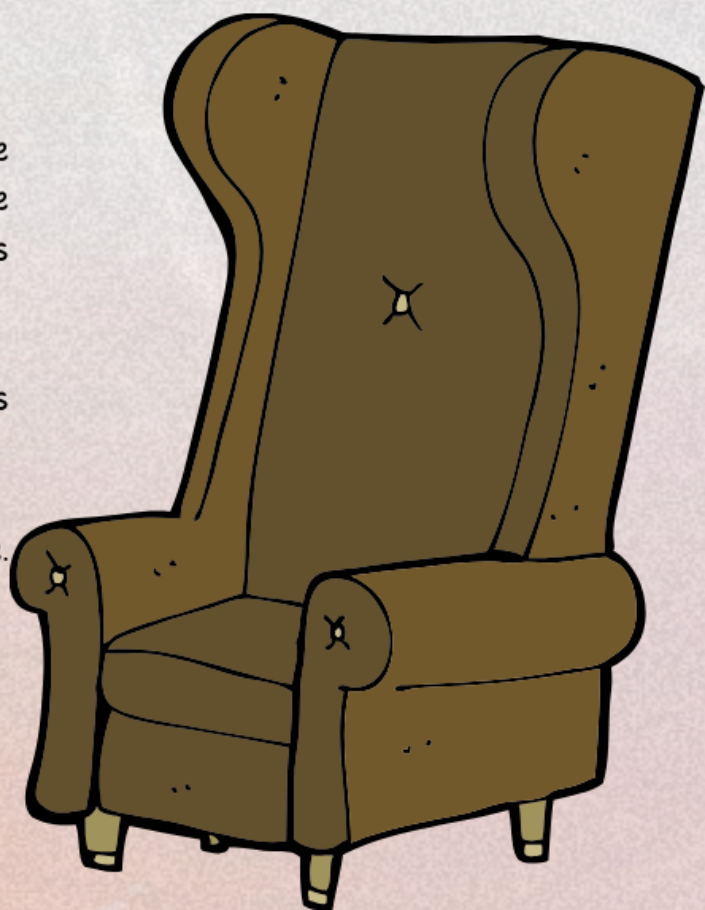
I gave up waiting. I realised how happy he was in his new life. I realised he didn't love me anymore. I realised I had to let him go.

And so I did.

Now, I sit here, in the corner of the living room. The dust and cobwebs settle on me regularly. No one bothers to clean me anymore. I remember the days when I used to shine, as Sam would polish me himself.

I still think about him, sometimes. Where is he now? Is he happy? Does he even miss me?

I know the answer to the third question, of course. Who would remember a childhood piano, after all?



Horses Shouldn't Bet

Nirai Iniyan



Characters

ISABELLE
FREDDY III
FELONY
PRINCESS DIANE
MAX
RANDOM STUDENT
GARDENER
TRIO OF SERVANTS

Scene One

(Schoolchildren are loitering around and chatting with one another. ISABELLE is sitting on a bench in the playground, sketching, when her best friend, MAX, runs up to her.)

MAX There's a horse looking for you.

ISABELLE (absentmindedly) Uh huh, you can give him my math note--wait, did you just say a horse was looking for me?

MAX Yep! He just appeared out of a door hanging mid air along with this creepy grandma.

ISABELLE (blinking) Creepy grandma?

MAX Yep. She's too happy. And she keeps offering me cabbage.

ISABELLE Say what now?!

(FREDDY III trots into the playground, earning stares and whispers from the pointing students. Next to him is FELONY, munching on some cabbage.)

FELONY (walking up to RANDOM STUDENT) You should eat cabbage! It's nutritious. Gives you gas though.



RANDOM STUDENT Th-thank you?

FELONY (wildly grinning) Not a problem! Say, you know where Isabelle is?

(Instantly, everyone points to ISABELLE. Seeing this, FELONY and FREDDY III walk up to her.)

ISABELLE (laughing nervously) Hi?

FELONY Good evening! My name is Felony. I take it you're Isabelle?

ISABELLE Er, yes. Wait, did you just say felony? Like, an illegal act, felony? Oh my god, are you a felon? Are you holding me hostage--because I can tell you right now, my dad is going to be super stingy about the ransom!

FELONY (sighing) I get this all the time. I swear, you kids need to come up with better reactions. My name is Felony. I am not a felon, which is admittedly contradictory. I can do nothing about your dad being stingy about a hypothetical ransom. Now that we got that out of the way, this (gestures to horse) is Freddy III and--

ISABELLE Did you just say you have a horse named Freddy III?

(FREDDY III throws back his head and snorts.)

FELONY He's not my horse--and we can't very well name him the second. His father was, after all, Freddy XXIV.

ISABELLE How on earth does that--?

FELONY So will you help us?

ISABELLE I ... guess I--

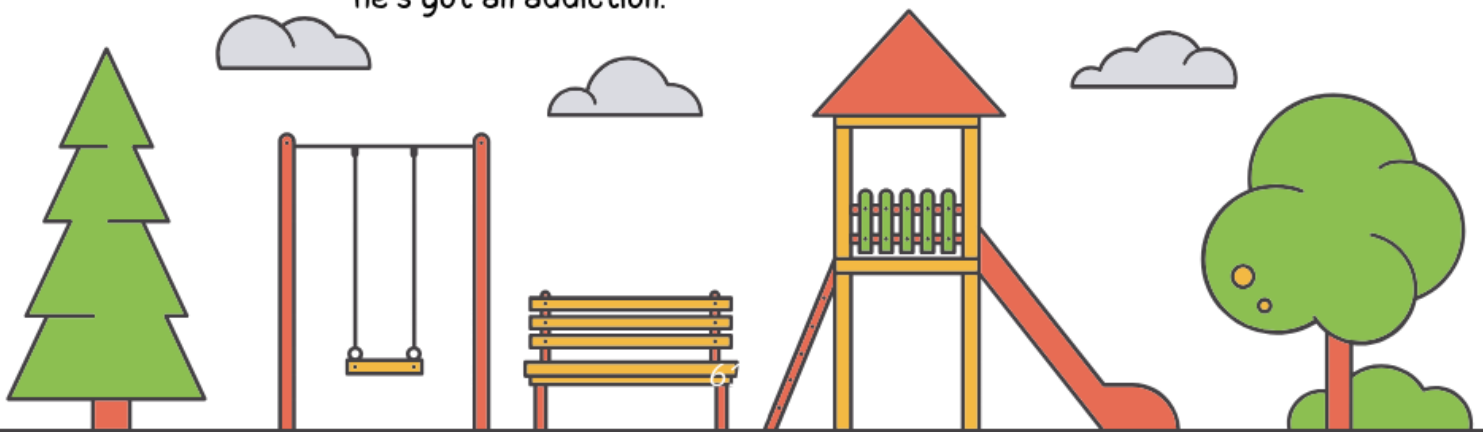
FELONY (beaming) Excellent! Now the problem is Freddy is a stupid horse--

ISABELLE I'm sorry, a stupid horse?

FELONY Yes, a stupid horse. He was an intelligent horse before.

ISABELLE (slowly) That seems more like an IQ issue ...?

FELONY The problem is he had a bet with Princess Diane. He's an avid gambler, you see (glancing at FREDDY III before loudly whispering), he's got an addiction.



Play

(FREDDY III sneezes in FELONY's hair)

FELONY Oh, you know it's true, you old sleazebag! Anyway, he already lost a lot of things to her 'cause of it--his auto, his golden horseshoe, his planet--

ISABELLE I'm sorry, did you just say he lost a PLANET?!

FELONY Yes, yes, now stop interrupting me! (mutters) Youngsters these days. (normal voice) So this time, she took his intelligence and refuses to give it back unless we send a champion to retrieve it.

ISABELLE O ... okay?

FELONY (sighing) You're the champion.

ISABELLE I'm sorry, WHAT?!

FELONY I said--

ISABELLE I HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME!

FELONY (beaming) Great! Then how 'bout we make our way there, ya?

ISABELLE M-MAKE OUR WAY THERE?!

(FELONY raises her hand and underneath ISABELLE, a portal appears.)

ISABELLE (falling through) This feels like a safety haaaazaaaard!

(Above, FELONY and FREDDY III look down the portal.)

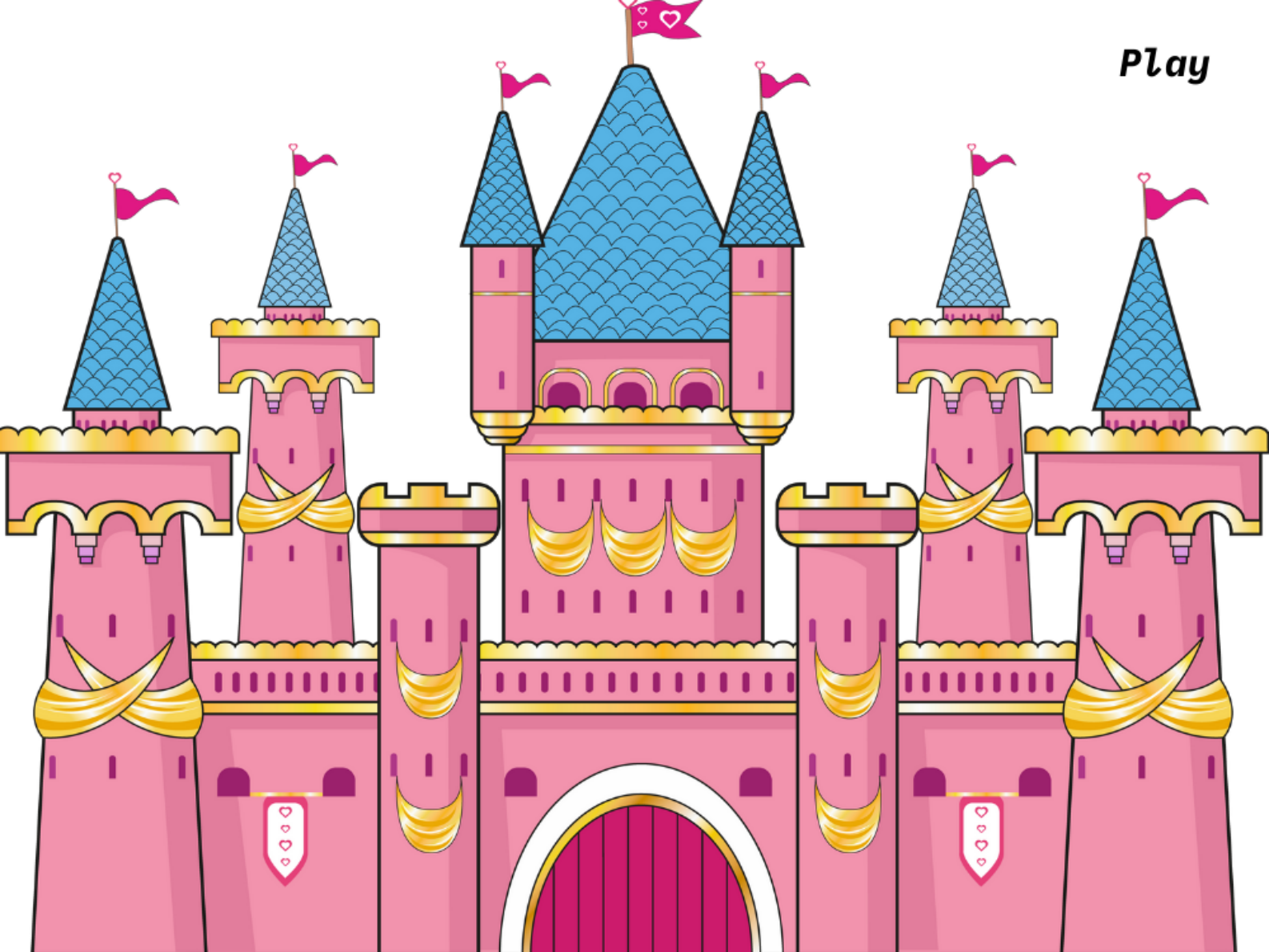
FELONY Well then? After you, you silly horse.



Scene Two

(They are now in front of a giant, pink castle. ISABELLE is pacing around, gulping and gasping and muttering. FELONY offers her cabbage, which she politely refuses before continuing with her panicking. FREDDY III is ... a horse. I don't know? He's grazing? Yeah, let's go with that--grazing and staring at the other two like Edward Cullen.)

ISABELLE (muttering to herself) It's okay Isabelle, it's okay. All you've got to do is go up to a grumpy princess and demand a horse's intelligence back. It's totally cool.



FELONY (speaking through a mouth full of cabbage) Sounds great and all but are you going to do anything or ...?

ISABELLE (gulping) Oh, right ...

(FREDDY III neighs encouragingly. ISABELLE walks up to the door and knocks. The door swings open; gulping once more, she looks back at FELONY and FREDDY III, who give her a thumbs/hoves up. She marches forward, immediately entering PRINCESS DIANE's throne room.)

DIANE (screaming and raging) ... and I want every rose in the kingdom painted white! Or red! I don't care but it better not be pink!

GARDENER (trembling) But Your Majesty--

DIANE Don't make it pink!

ISABELLE (muttering to herself) Well, she's in a good mood.

(Hearing her, PRINCESS DIANE turns towards ISABELLE. She looks disarranged, her hair wild and dress in tatters. Meanwhile, GARDENER exits.)

DIANE (pointing at ISABELLE) You! Who are you?!

ISABELLE (stammering) Well, Your Majesty, my name is Isabelle--

Play

DIANE Good enough for me! Isabelle, for the past month, I have been struck by a disease that leaves my novel incomplete, my brain unable to function and my stomach to indigest spaghetti!

ISABELLE You mean writer's block?

DIANE I don't care what it's called! I want you to get rid of it -- finish my story for me!

ISABELLE But I'm an art student!

DIANE I'll give you whatever you want -- just do it!

ISABELLE (intrigued) Anything? Okay ... what's the story about?

(Pleased, DIANE walks up to ISABELLE, beginning to flourish her arms. Then she pauses.)

DIANE Servants! My red cushion!

(TRIO OF SERVANTS totter in, hastily placing a velvet red cushion onto the floor and nervously scurrying off. PRINCESS DIANE stands on the cushion, still somehow shorter than ISABELLE. She is not happy.)

DIANE (still frowning) Once upon a time, there were two star crossed lovers.

ISABELLE (after a long pause) And?

DIANE (tossing her hair) That's it.

ISABELLE ... okay. Let's say they both seemed to be peasants but one of them was actually royalty. Then one day, the royal one disappears and is not heard from for a long time, which leaves the peasant heartbroken.

DIANE (eagerly) I'm listening.

ISABELLE There's a dragon terrorising the kingdom, which is why the royal one was called back -- anyone who vanquished the dragon would have the royal one's hand in marriage and a large bag of gold. When the peasant thought of winning the gold for ... their ill mother, they found out about the royal one.

DIANE (squealing) Drama!

ISABELLE Yep; so there's heartbreak, drama, peasant gets angry, blah blah blah, they vanquish the dragon, blah blah blah, and they live happily ever after.

(ISABELLE turns to PRINCESS DIANE and is surprised to see that she is furious.)

ISABELLE ... is something wrong?



DIANE The ending is too happy. I demand that you change it!

ISABELLE Er, one of them dies when vanquishing the dragon?

DIANE Too sad!

ISABELLE (exasperated) Fine, they both die along with the dragon and reunite in the afterlife. Satisfied now?

DIANE (smugly) Very. Oh, this book is going to be brilliant! Not that it already wasn't because I was writing it. It'll be a bestseller--revered through the lands. The most--

ISABELLE Yeah, my reward?

DIANE (scowling) Alright, what do you want?

ISABELLE Freddy III's intelligence.

DIANE Oh, that. You can have it; it stinks anyway.

ISABELLE I'm sorry, STINKS?!

(PRINCESS DIANE snaps her fingers, making TRIO OF SERVANTS bring a box. With another snap of her fingers, they open it.)

ISABELLE Are those dentures?!

DIANE (tossing them to Isabelle) All yours.

(PRINCESS DIANE exits along with TRIO OF SERVANTS. ISABELLE is pulling a face and holding the dentures with the tips of her fingers until she makes it back outside of the palace.)

FELONY Oh good, you got it! We gotta get them to the dentist's, of course, to put them back. Anywho, nice working with you! Let's move it, Freddy; we have a tight scheduled appointment.

(FREDDY III raises a hoof and waves goodbye. They both exit. ISABELLE stands there stunned.)

ISABELLE You know what, I'm not even going to question it. I just want to go back home, with a hot chocolate, a fluffy pillow and a good book to read ... just not Princess Diane's ...

(CURTAIN)



A Night of Secrets

Ronikaa Vijan

"Mum, hurry up!" Alicia yelled, her foot tapping and eyes swiftly darting from the clock to her mum's bedroom.

"I'm ready!" Mum replied. She entered the living room dressed in a black top, cardigan, black pants with a snake logo and high-heeled boots, hair let loose.

"Mum looks beautiful, she always does," Alicia thought.

"Excited?" Mum asked, grabbing the car keys real quick.

"Of course! We've been desperately waiting to watch the 'Eras Tour' in the cinema since Taylor announced the film on her Instagram story. Come on; don't act silly, Everly Garcia." Alicia rolled her eyes and sat in the car. She was electrified by the thought of watching Taylor Swift on the silver screen for two HOURS!

As usual, Alicia fell asleep almost immediately inside the car, dreaming of hugging Taylor and getting the '22' hat.

The car came to a sudden halt, waking up Alicia with a jerk.

"We're here, hon!" Mum exclaimed, humming the tune of a 'Reputation' song.

Alicia and her mum hurriedly rushed to the theatre, got popcorn and some water, and darted inside.

The movie started and gave her an adrenalin rush. Alicia was overwhelmed with a feeling of bliss, and danced her heart out.



It was a night of high energy, singing, dancing, and fun. Everly and Alicia exited the cinema hall with cheeks flushed with excitement, aching feet, but a core memory. A night neither of them would forget.

As they stepped into the cool night air, Alicia's bracelet slid down her arm and onto the floor. As she reached out for it, she was pinned on the wall by a gang of men.

"Where's Everly?" one of them questioned Alicia.

Alicia gulped. "I don't know what you're talking about," she replied, her voice shaky.

A man who had been standing silently in the corner came up, pinned her harder, held Alicia by the collar and shook her.

"No one messes with my DAUGHTER!" Everly screamed, appearing from the side after paying for a water bottle.

Everly moved to shield Alicia, but was pushed back.

"MOM!" Alicia yelled.

Unfazed, Everly rolled up her sleeves and punched the man in the face, sending him reeling. Another man charged, but she delivered a roundhouse kick, dropping him to the ground.

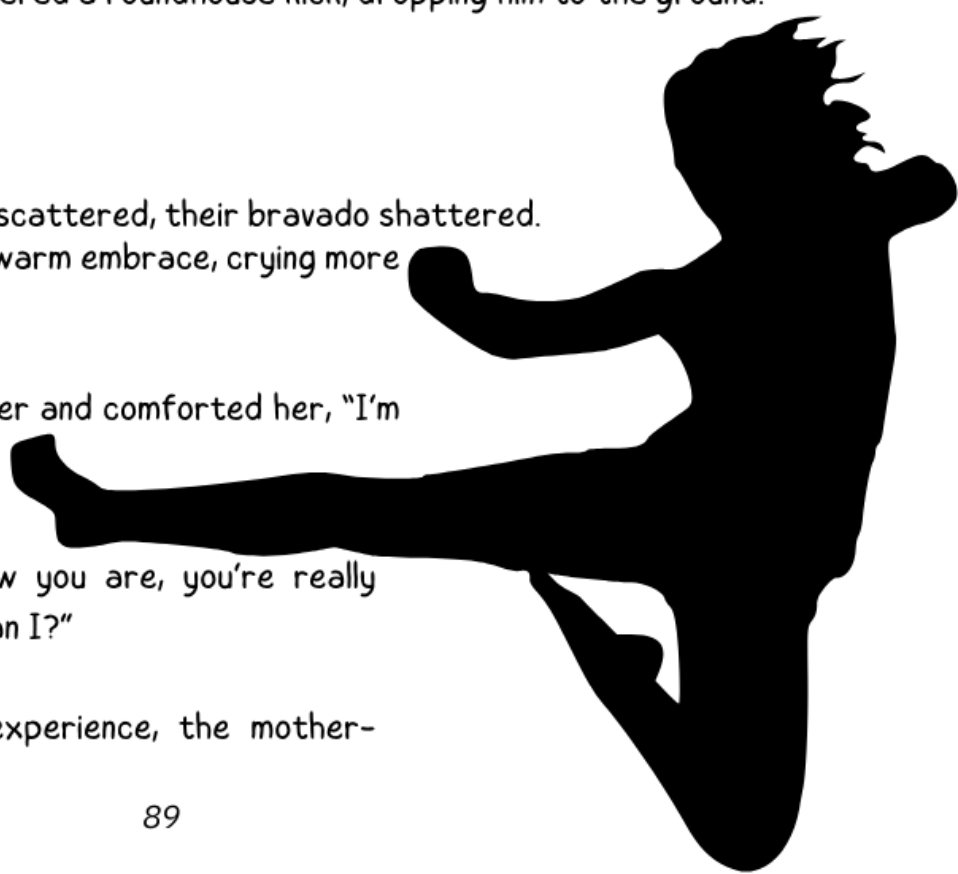
"Who's next?" she challenged.

The remaining men hesitated, then scattered, their bravado shattered. Everly rushed and pulled Alicia in a warm embrace, crying more than her daughter.

Alicia pulled her mum to her shoulder and comforted her, "I'm fine, Mom."

Everly smiled and replied, "I know you are, you're really brave. But, I can't help worrying, can I?"

With this terrifyingly-awesome experience, the mother-daughter duo exited the area.



Story

But on the journey home, Alicia couldn't sleep. There was just too much to think about. The scene of her mum singlehandedly battling those men replayed in her mind, and her respect for her mom grew. She had always known her mum was strong, but seeing her in action had deepened her admiration. The bravery and determination her mum had shown in that chaotic moment revealed a side of her Alicia had never fully appreciated. As she stared out the window, she felt a renewed sense of gratitude and connection to the incredible woman who had just saved her.

"Earth to Alicia! Hello? We're home!" Mum called.

Alicia snapped out of her world and got off the car.



While Mum made tea, Alicia kicked off her boots and switched on the TV.

"BREAKING NEWS! A priceless diamond from tonight's exhibition in Avelin has been stolen!" The lady on the news yelled and an image of a sparkling diamond was shown.

Alicia sighed and switched off the television to drink the tea in peace with her mom.

"That was amazing what you did there! I mean, seriously! I never knew you knew how to fight! And you punched and kicked like that's been your job for years!"

Mum muttered something under her breath.

"You said something?" Alicia asked.

"Nope! It's getting late, sweetheart. We'd better go to bed after tea."

Alicia nodded and slurped down her tea.

After a warm bath, Alicia snuggled into bed with mom. Just as she was about to go into REM, Alicia woke up and noticed that her mum wasn't beside her. Alicia woke up, clipped up her ruffled hair that didn't allow her to see, and slid down on the staircase railing. Mum wasn't there but on the kitchen island was her purse and beside it was a familiar diamond, the one she'd seen on the news.



Alicia gasped. Her eyes grew impossibly wide as she recognized the diamond sitting in the middle of her kitchen island. She moved towards it slowly, as if it were a sleeping lion. Alicia gripped it and observed the priceless object carefully. She felt her heart in her throat as a voice came from behind.

"Honey," Mum stood in the corridor in her PJs, phone in hand and a triumphant look on her face.

"Mum, what's this doing here?" Alicia asked, her hands quivering as she still held the diamond.

Everly sighed. "I didn't want you to know, Alicia. The less you know, the safer you are. But, I think it's finally time."

"Are you a ... thief, Mum?"

Everly laughed and replied, "Not exactly. I work for a secret organisation that hunts down stolen objects and artefacts and returns them safely to their original place. This, we got news from sources, was about to be stolen by one of the most dangerous networks dealing with priceless objects around. I was given the responsibility of keeping it safe; the one which was stolen was a fake one."

"Wow," Alicia remarked. She felt a little guilty for her previous question now. "Wait, so those men at the cinema, were the part of the network? And, what next?" Alicia asked, thousands of questions reeling in her head.

"Yep, and they knew you're my daughter as they have been spying on the agents that are targeting them, including me. To answer your second question, now, we go."

"Where?"

"London. To hand it over to an official there and track down another ancient piece worth millions that was stolen three years back. Are you ready?"

Alicia nodded; it was just the beginning.

Explore the World

The Emerald Land

Aabha Sardesai

If you can see the sun above you gleaming,
If you can see rainbows rise in the frequent rain,
If music echoes like lightning and thunder,
Then you're in Goa, the emerald land.

If people around you are kind and sweet
If life here begins to loosen with the breeze
If a crow's call seems like a music note
Why, you're in Goa, the emerald land.

A run along the beach
and a sunset,
the angry sun bathing in the sea's
calm waves.

A run along the beach
leads to a single powerful flower
warning the unruly sea to keep at bay.

A run along the beach
could lead you to picnickers and tourists
and maybe guitarists who would give you a little
wave.

My homeland,
My heart,
A piece of my soul,
Is embedded in the soil of:
Goa, the emerald land.

The City of Green

Ruhaan Garg

If the birds are chirping,
And the sun is rising over the cream coloured buildings,
if the Sikhs are chanting at four in the morning.
Then you are in the city of green.

If the sun is blazing as hot as ever,
if the lake's water is glistening,
and the trees are dancing in the breeze.
Then you are in the city of green.

If the school bells are ringing,
the street yellow with buses,
and the children cycling home.
Then you are in the city of the green.

If it smells like the Gurdwara's halwa,
And the clothes drying on balconies.
If you see people eating pakoras,
and hear the honking of cars.
Then you are in the city of green.

If the families are humongous,
dancing all around,
with stars as their audience.
Then you know you are in the city of green.
The city of green: Chandigarh



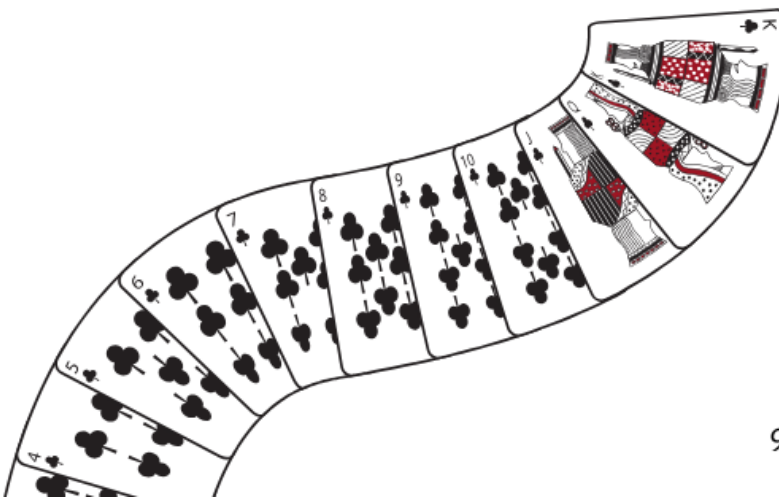
The Land of Casino Hotels

Aarav Khandelia

If themed hotels colour the streets
If you hear screaming in the middle of the night
If the city shines all the time
Why, you are in Las Vegas
Land of casino hotels!

If waves of heat tickle your skin
If flashy ads line the Strip
If you see a VIP in a limousine
Why, you're in Las Vegas,
The land of casino hotels!

Each hotel practically a town:
Shopping, restaurants and glamorous shows
You never have to go out
and face the scorching desert sun
In Las Vegas
The land of casino hotels.



Blood Bouquet

Janvi Barman

I thought I did enough research, I thought I was prepared for this, but experiencing all of her symptoms firsthand is so ... frustrating. And overwhelming. And I feel so disappointed in myself because ... she's just a kitty. And she's adapting. I can't blame her. I close the article I was reading and spin around in my chair. I see Char curled up in the corner of my room, where she's been for the majority of the past two days she's been here. I slap my hands over my face. What am I doing wrong here? I'm feeding her, I'm cleaning her litter, I'm trying so so hard to love her, but she just won't love me back. I sigh deeply and marinate in self pity for a few moments. I feel ... sick. Like, genuinely sick. Bile rises in my throat. I stand and quickly run to my bathroom, shut the door behind me, get on my knees in front of the toilet bowl and begin to cough aggressively. I feel myself cough up blood, its metallic taste flooding my mouth. I begin to catch my breath when another litany of coughs seizes me. I feel like I'm coughing up ... feathers? They tickle my throat as they come up and out, making me cough even more. I breathe heavily, my mouth agape. I look down and freeze. Not feathers. Petals. Fresh, yellow sunflower petals float on the toilet water, blood swirling beneath.

No.

No.



"Hello?" Riyaah says from the other end of the call.

"Hanahaki is real," I say, without missing a beat.

"The--you--what?"

"What 'what'? Hanahaki. Flower disease you based your novel off of. It's real."

"Is that a question or a statement?"



"Riyaah. I'm freaking out. Take me seriously. Please."

"Uh, okay, why do you think it's re--"

"BECAUSE I JUST--MAYBE BECAUSE I THREW UP FLOWER PETALS INTO MY TOILET, RIYAAH? WHAT DO I DO RIGHT NOW?"

"Oh my god. Um. Okay, you get it when you love someone who doesn't love you back, and you haven't told me about any new crushes."

I take a deep breath. "How do I fix it? I don't have time to be living in fanfiction."

"What colour were the petals?"

"Yellow, sunflower?"

"Okay, then those symbolise, like, friendship and loyalty, right? So, who do you love as a friend who doesn't love you back?"

I turn to face the corner of my room in which Char sits, nearly motionless, looking straight back at me with slit-like pupils.

"Vansh?" Riyaah asks into the newfound silence of the call.

"Char."

"Char ..."

She pauses. "Oh. Oh."

Tears well up. "It's not just adjustment blues. She hates me."

"Vansh. That can't be it. I've seen you play with her and Coal at the shelter before you adopted her. She loves you."

I choke up. "Okay, if you're the smartest person on the planet and obviously you know best, I guess that can't be it. And it's not like I can even tell anyone apart from my sister because they'll diagnose me with another mental illness. You're so helpful. Thanks."



Story

"Vansh--"

I hang up.



I lie on my back, staring up at the dark ceiling. I can still hear Char meowing faintly, even through my headphones which are set to noise cancelling. I've been trying to go to sleep for an hour after my third petal-expulsion of the day but I can't, partially because of the meowing, partially because I never sleep this early and partially because I have no idea how to treat this supposedly fictional disease.

I give in, groping around for my phone on my bedside table. I call Riyaah. It rings exactly once before she picks up.

"Okay, so now you decide to call me back after I've been trying to reach you for the past four hours? Are you okay?"

I close my eyes. I'm flooded with guilt. She was just trying to help and I hung up on her and ignored all her calls. She's probably been worried sick. Can't I do anything right? Can't I stop myself from hurting one person that I love?

She sighs. "I'm sorry."

"I don't ... I don't know what to do. I feel so, like ... powerless. I threw up flowers again twice after we talked."

A beat of silence passes before "Vansh, what if she doesn't love you anymore because you separated her from her sister?"

My heart nearly stopped. I thought about it.

"Is that a dumb question? Sorry--"

"No. I think you're right."

"Really?"

"Really," I reply, throwing my blanket off myself and turning my lights on.



A fifteen minute drive and a bucket full of blood and petals later, I walk into the shelter, Char's carrier in hand. The bell above the door rings. "Hi, Kiki."

Kiki lifts his head from his phone and comes out from behind the counter, taking the carrier from me gently. "What's good?" he asks. He walks deeper into the shelter with me in tow.

"Decided to bring her back," I reply.

He hums. "Feeling, like, not ready?"

I thought about how much I should tell him. Maybe I should leave the fictional disease for a different day -- he looked tired. "It was mainly because ... I think Char missed Coal a little too much, and you know I didn't take Coal in the first place because I'm not ready for both of them."

"Listen, man, you've worked with these kittens for months. And with so many more since you started here. I get it, I do, but in a bit, if you feel like you're ready to take both of them on, you totally should." He stops and sets Char's carrier down beside Coal, who is asleep, curled into a ball. He opens it, finding her asleep inside it. "They need a home."



Story

"Yeah. Is my girl asleep? I haven't seen her sleep so peacefully in a while."

"Sure is. Let's leave her here."

I sigh deeply. "Thanks for staying late, Kiaan."

He smiles at me, slapping a hand onto my pyjama-shirt-clad shoulder. A wave of embarrassment hits me as I remember I'm in my pyjamas, especially when Kiki's so decked out in his three layers of shirts and baggy jeans and epic sneakers and chains and purple hair. "Full name moment?"

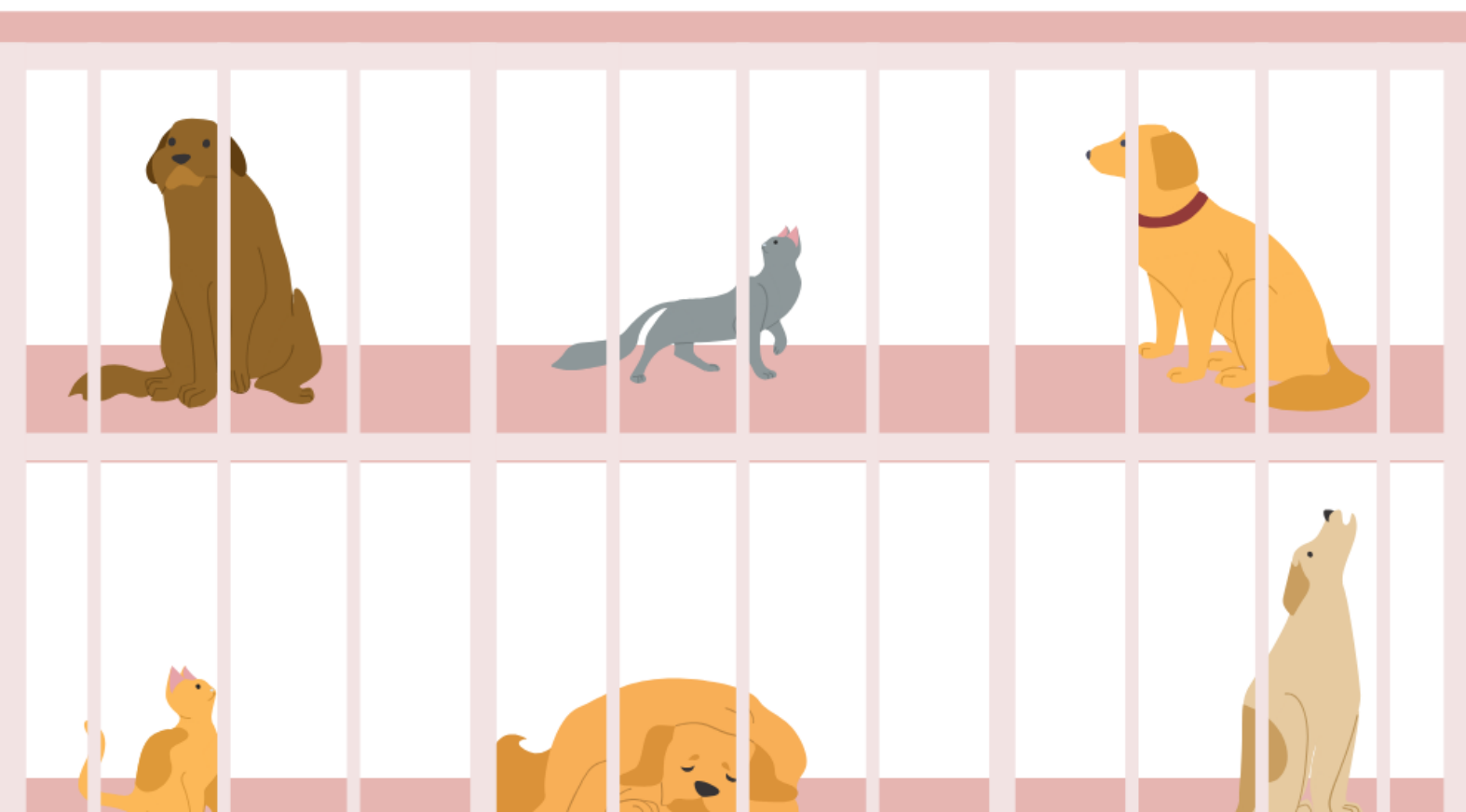
I smile to the best of my ability. "It's because I mean it."

"Nah, don't mention it. I was actually gonna wait anyway 'cause I ordered from this new Chinese place and I didn't know they would deliver so late--"

The bell chimes. "Hello?" someone calls into the mostly quiet shelter.

"Right on time. I think I ordered too much for just me, though. You hungry?"

I smile. "A little."



I watch the sun rise from my kitchen window. I didn't sleep well, but I didn't wake up to cough up any more petals. You win some, you lose some. I stir sugar into my tea. I wonder if Riyaah is awake. I want to tell her what happened last night. I take a sip of my tea only to feel it come back up. What? I thought this was done with. I don't scream only in fear of getting blood all over my kitchen floor. I only just manage to get to my bathroom before throwing up into my toilet for the fifth time in twenty-four hours.

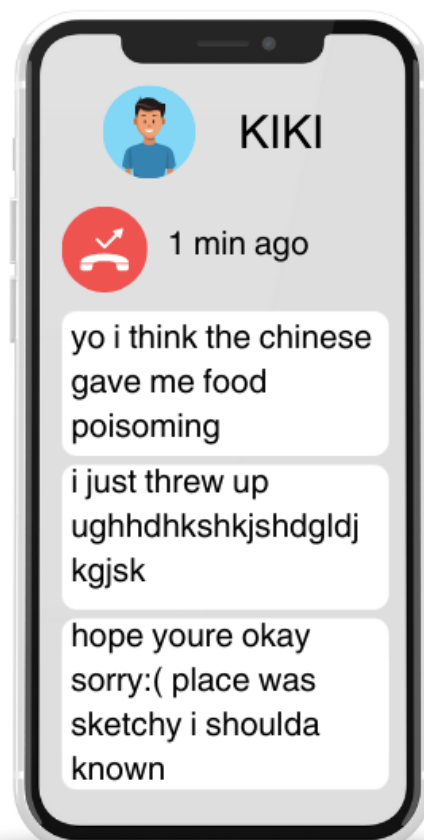
I catch my breath, digging my nails into my thighs. Tears tickle my face and blur my vision.

Wait.

That was ... puke. Like, real vomit. Not blood. Not petals.

What?

My phone rings in the pocket of my pyjamas. I try to flush the toilet and wash my mouth as fast as possible, but the ringing stops by the time I'm done. I sigh and take it out of my pocket.



I sigh the deepest sigh of relief in history, I think. I've never been more grateful to have food poisoning.



Lost

Kenisha Katiyar

Characters

WIZARD

JULIE: a lost camper

Scene One

(JULIE is lost in a forest and it is raining heavily. She sees an old rusty caravan hidden in the vines to her left and knocks. A short, grumpy man dressed in grey robes opens the door.)

WIZARD (snaps) What do you want?

JULIE (shivering) It is raining outside, and it is cold. I am lost, so could I stay inside for some time?

WIZARD And why should I trust you? You might just be another traitor who wants through snoop through my stuff and use it for your good!

JULIE (confused) Um, I promise you I will not do anything of that sort. I just need to stay somewhere till it stops raining.

WIZARD Fine, but only if you promise to keep your eyes closed the whole time.

JULIE The whole time!?

WIZARD Well of course!!

JULIE Alright, alright, I guess it's better than nothing.

Scene Two

(JULIE walks in with her eyes closed; she trips on the very first step and lands flat on her face. WIZARD starts cackling.)

JULIE (annoyed) Stop laughing!

WIZARD Hey, it's the most entertaining thing I have seen in the past twelve years.

JULIE (attempting to sit on a chair) Twelve years? Man, how long have you been living in this piece of junk?!

WIZARD (angrily) This piece of junk is the only thing protecting you from the rain!

(Silence)

WIZARD And as for what I have been doing in here, I have been looking for a solution to end the civil war.

(Silence)

JULIE The civil war? You know that ended a hundred and fifty years ago, right?

WIZARD (snorting) What? Next, are you going to tell me that slavery is illegal? Or that you don't use horses to travel anymore?!

JULIE (nodding) Slavery is illegal. And no, we don't use horse to travel any more, but they are used for sports or carrying goods.

WIZARD (head in hands) So the civil war ended a hundred and fifty years ago?

JULIE Yup.

WIZARD Who won? Actually, I do not want to know.

(Silence)

WIZARD Aren't you a little surprised by all of this?

JULIE I guess a little bit, I mean with you being a wizard and all.

WIZARD (looking up sharply) How do you know I am a ...? (angrily) You opened your eyes! You broke your promise!

JULIE Well, I thought we were friends now?

WIZARD (spitting) Well, friend, looks like your fate is to end like the others who made the same mistake before you!

JULIE Others ...? What did you do ...? What are you going to do to me?!!!

(JULIE runs for the door but WIZARD grabs his staff resting on the table to his right and vaporises her.)

WIZARD (smiling to himself) One more child vaporised. For me that's fifty more years of life.

(CURTAIN)



Wilson!

I'm Waiting!

Aabha Sardesai

"Next!" calls the secretary. I stand up, palms trembling, heart racing, feet shaking. "Are you next dearie?" asks the secretary in her trembly voice, pushing back her thin grey hair.

"I am," I say. "At least, I think I am ... am I?"

The secretary chuckles throatily. "What's your name, dearie?"

"Wilson, Katy Wilson."

She clicks and clacks on her computer. "Yes, you're up next, dearie."

Ugh. I was half expecting her to say no. Oh well. "Oh, okay, yes, thank you ..." I squint and look at her name tag. "Martha!"

"Oh, you're welcome dearie!"

I take as deep a breath in as I can, and let it out slowly.

"Go on dearie!" says Martha. "Don't be scared, now!"

I give a tentative knock on the door, to receive a gruff "Come in!" I step in and glance at the décor. A small grey desk, beige sofa, grey carpet, beige wallpaper, grey pen-holder, ochre walls. Was it too much to wish that my employer would be an Elle Woods?

"Take a seat, Miss Wilson," he says. "It's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Joe Holcroft, and I am the head of this branch. Now a few things to clear up. This is an on-site job, so if you get it, I would, of course, expect you to be punctual. If you have any allergies, you will have to tell me about them before I give you your site. Third, you will be expected to

maintain a level of professionalism throughout your endeavour here. Right. Now, I have taken a look at your resumé, and it shows great promise. Exceptional result in your entrance exams, and an amazing record of leadership in your school and college years. Which is good, because, you are, of course, applying for the position of team 'Leader.' Heh heh. Right. So, Miss Wilson, tell me, how do you feel that you can take this company forward?"

"Well," I say tentatively, "I'll be invested in the job with all my mind and heart. I'll make sure that all deadlines will be met, and everything will be done punctually. And umm ... yes."

"Ooo-kay," he says, a weak smile on his face. "What else can you ..." He asks a bunch of generic questions that I'm pretty sure he got off Google. How am I pretty sure? They're the exact same questions I practised in front of the bathroom mirror. Ding, ding, ding. The interview is a BREEZE.

"Right. Miss Wilson, you show a great amount of enthusiasm and dedication. The job is yours."

"It is?" I squeak, glancing about like a bewildered rabbit.

"It is," he confirms. "Now, as I did mention earlier, this is an onsite job. You will be expected to be present at the site assigned to you during all working hours. Any allergies?" he asks, bringing his bushy eyebrows close together.

"No sir, not except almonds."

"Well, you won't be eating almonds at the site, so, no, I suppose?"

"No sir, no allergies."

"So, the site assigned to you is Paddington Station. I will expect you to be there at 9:30 a.m. sharp. Clear?"

"Okay, sir."



Story

"Right, next point. Your salary. You'll be getting a salary of 4,000 pounds, which I will be ready to negotiate if, if, and only if, you show the dedication that I am expecting you will show."

"Of course, sir."

"Sunday is your day off, and Saturday is a half day. Clear?"

"Yessir."

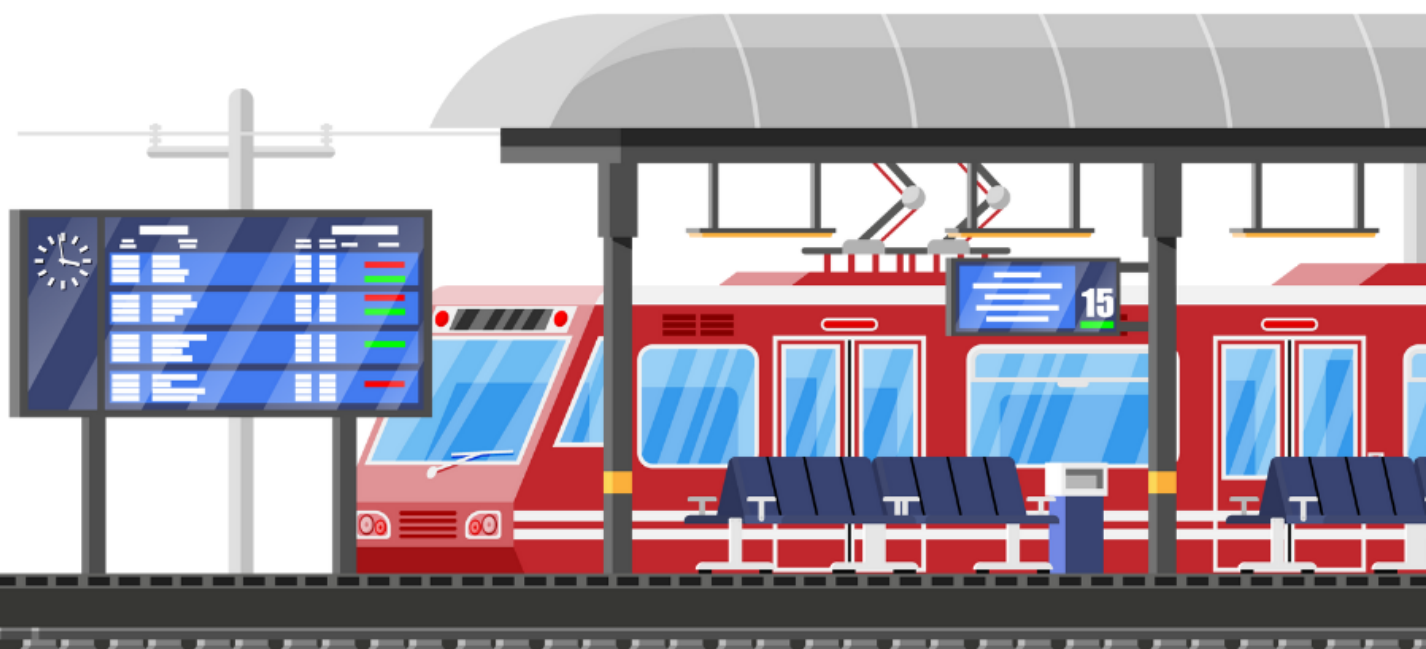
"Good." He presses the button on his intercom, and says in his gruffest voice, "Martha, tell everyone that the position's been filled, please."

Martha says in her usual Marple tone, "Okay sir, I'll tell them." She pauses. "Is Wilson the new Leader sir?"

Holcroft pauses too, his finger hovering over the button. Then he says gently, "Yes, Martha."

"Congratulations, dearie, I knew you could do it!"

I grin at the comment, and leave the cabin with a big smile on my face. After seeing the disgruntled faces of all the others who had come to try out for the job, I try to get rid of it, but, unfortunately, it has a mind of its own. It's rebelling against me now, as I walk out of the office, file in hand. 'I'm not ready to fade,' it says. 'Not yet. Not now.'



I'm on the site bright and early Monday morning. With nothing much to do, I grab my phone and start replying to all the 'Congrats! You rock!' messages that my friends have sent me after hearing I got the job. 8:45 a.m. I grab my book and start reading. The words are so enthralling that I lose track of time. When I look at my watch, it's 9:30. Sharp. Where is everybody? My phone starts buzzing. I pick it up. Wait a minute ... why is Holcroft calling me? I answer the call. "Hello, sir?"

"Wilson! Where are you?"

"Paddington Station sir, I--"

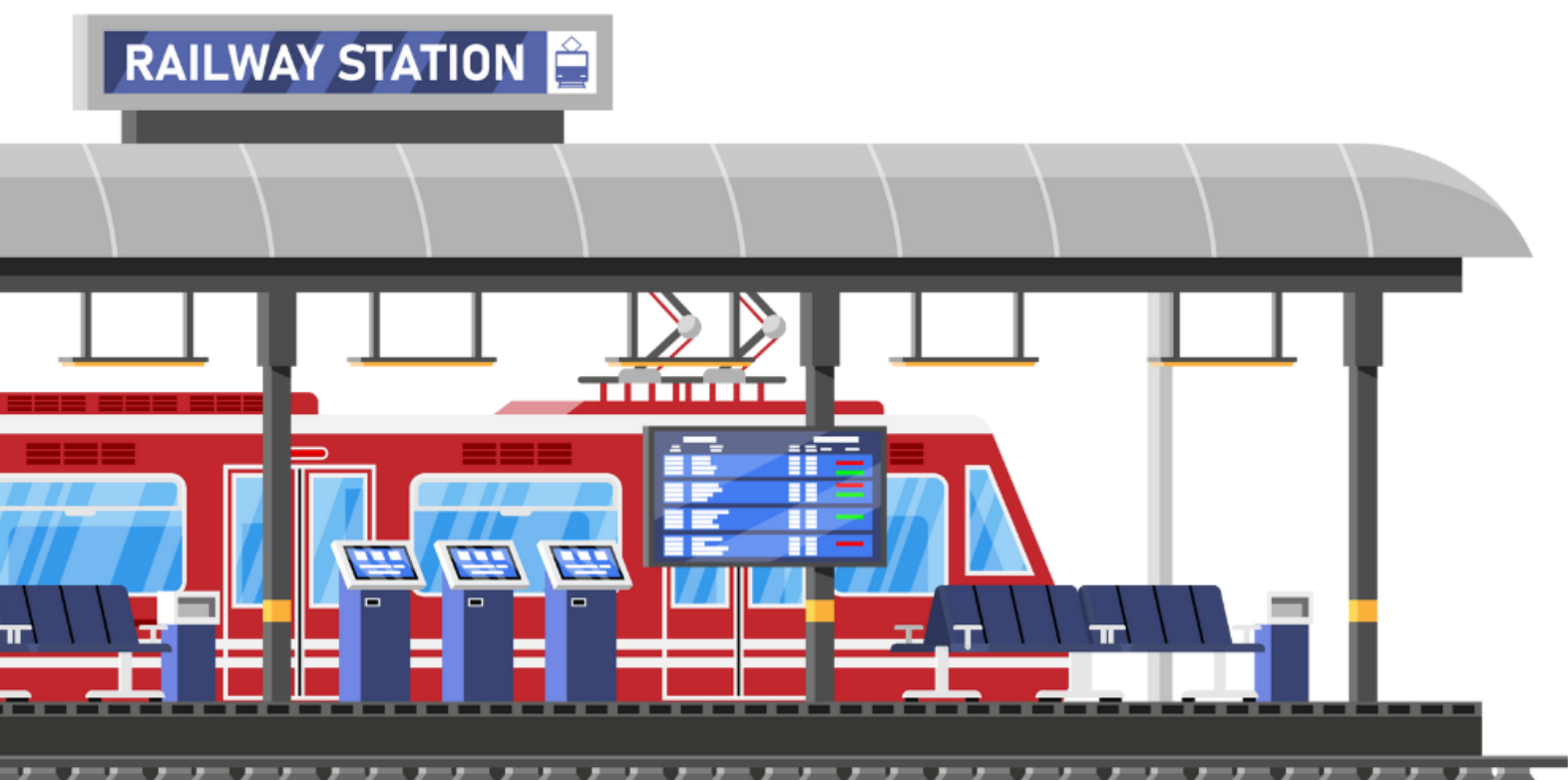
"Well, I'm at Paddington Station too. Thought I'd show you what you needed to do on the site, but you don't show up. Your whole team shows up at 9:15 sharp and you don't show up at all!"

"But sir I don't know--"

"Wilson, I didn't expect this. You are fired."

Beeeeep. Call ended. Ouch.

I get up, walk to the signboard and glance at it. 'Paddington Station.' I walk over to my car. I am NEVER trusting Siri again. Traitor.



The Zombie's Eyes

Aarya Jain Baldawa

Characters

DRACULA: An infinity-year-old vampire

RANDOM ZOMBIE: Just a zombie (maybe Frankenstein's monster)

GHOST: Just a ghost

YOUNG WITCH: A witch with 0 years of experience and 11 years of life

Scene One

(Enter DRACULA. He looks around before sighing. A white object bangs his head.)

DRACULA Ow!

ZOMBIE (whispering) Oh! Sorry!

DRACULA What a wimp! A zombie with manne--

GHOST Cut it out, Dracula!

(DRACULA rolls his eyes.)

GHOST (stifling a yawn) Just sleep like a normal monster.

DRACULA Not my fault I sleep in the day!

ZOMBIE As I was saying ...

DRACULA What now, wimp?

ZOMBIE Have you seen a bunch of eyes?

GHOST A bunch?

ZOMBIE (raising fists, ready to fight) Yeah, you got a problem with that?

GHOST Hey, calm down ... (sternly) It's my job to freak out! I can't believe it! A second mutant zombie. I am one of the all-knowing, immortal ghosts and once, seven millennia ago, a zombie went crazy mutant without his eyes! He destroyed Spookytown!



DRACULA (chuckling softly) That would have been fun to see.
GHOST Well ... It wasn't!
YOUNG WITCH (popping out of nowhere) Found one!
DRACULA, GHOST AND ZOMBIE Ahh!
YOUNG WITCH 'Ahh!' is right, fellows. I have a prophecy for you.
GHOST I thought oracles made prophecies?
YOUNG WITCH Ehh, who cares? Anyways,

**From now to dawn, night will pass
An eye hidden right down the past
A figure, cloaked, bright inside
Holds secrets no one should hide**

(in a sing-song voice) Buh-byyyyee!

(YOUNG WITCH exits.)

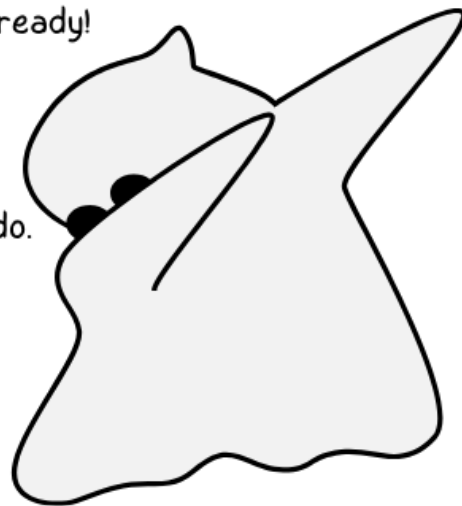
GHOST I know who she was talking about!
DRACULA Really??
GHOST Yes. She was talking about ... MEEEEEE ...!
DRACULA Really??
GHOST Yes, because cloaks went out of fashion four millennia ago and I'm the only one posh enough to wear one! And the stupid secret is time travel. I, known as Awesome All-Knowing Ghost, know how to time travel. (dreamily) I could go in the past, find the eye and be the hero! People from all over will know my name.

ZOMBIE We only need one eye now! The witch found one already!
GHOST Bye, losers! This ghost is BEING THE HERO!!!

(GHOST jumps into a void.)

ZOMBIE That was the stupidest thing I've seen someone do.
DRACULA At least we agree on something.

(BLACKOUT)



Play

Scene Two

(The void opens. GHOST emerges.)

GHOST According to my calculations, I should be in the year 1234.

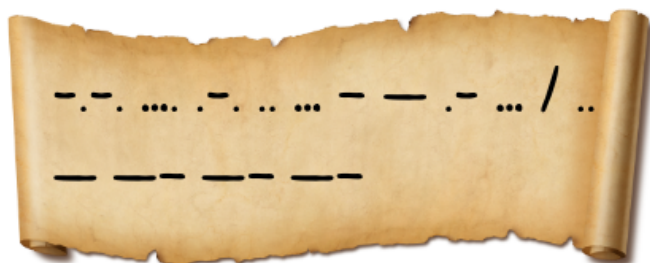
(GHOST spends a few moments searching for the eye.)

YOUNG WITCH Oh, there you are!

GHOST Ahh!

YOUNG WITCH I believe you want to be a hero and save the world? Maybe even become a super hero? Well, if you do, you'll need a lead. Here it is.

(YOUNG WITCH hands him a piece of paper.)



GHOST Is that Morse code?

YOUNG WITCH I'll leave you to find out.

(GHOST sits on a bench and thinks hard.)

GHOST I got it! It says 'Christmas 2000' in Morse!

(GHOSTS jumps into a void. Lights flicker, and he emerges on a different part of the stage. There is a party. Firecrackers boom.)

GHOST This sure is lively.

YOUNG WITCH I think so too.

(As she says that an eye rolls across the floor. GHOST grabs it and jumps into yet another portal. Lights flicker. He emerges on another part of the stage, which is set like Scene One. He hands ZOMBIE the eye.)

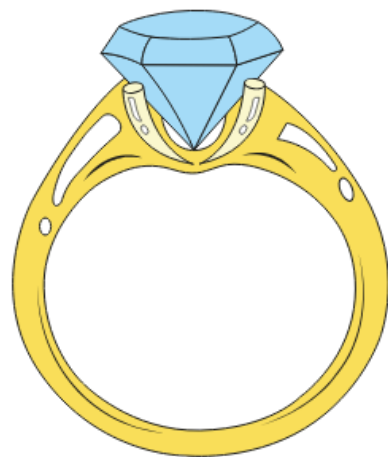
ZOMBIE (taking the eye, smiling) Thank god! I was starting to worry.

(CURTAIN)



Paying the Price

Kabir Srinivasan



"Aaahh!!" screamed David's mother. "What have you done?"

"What?" asked David.

"You're becoming a vampire!"

"But I only wore that flashy-looking ring!"

"That was the great vampire Bob's ring. The ring reveals if you are a monster or not. Then, even if you take it off you remain a vampire. You are one as you have your grandad's blood and he was a vampire. The ring has the eye of a vampire king."

"Now what do I do?"

"You must see the witch; I've heard she has mysterious powers that may help you."

David and his mother arrived at the witch's cottage. They saw her sitting on a toadstool and drinking tea. "What do you want?" snapped the witch grumpily.

"I don't want to be a vampire anymore," said the boy.

"That is very hard. Fly in the air and make your monster relatives proud."

"But I don't want to be a vampire. Please, if I become a vampire, I'll never see my friends again."

"Fine, I will perform a spell that will turn you back into a boy, but it comes with a price: you always have to take a shower in the morning to keep the effects of the spell. Additionally, you can't talk to your friends in the day."

"But I hate showers and I want to play with my friends!"

"Do it or be a vampire."

"Fine, I'll do it." The next day, David taught himself sign language before going to school. Then he could still communicate with his friends.

It's Impossible to Write a Poem!

Samanvitha Prasad

All day long I dodged the deed
At last, I thought--time to proceed.

I finally sat down with a yawn
But then I found my pens, all gone!

I searched the drawers, and under the chair;
my pens had vanished into thin air!

I thought I'd use a twig instead,
But it became a bee and off it fled!

I asked for a quill from good old goose.
But he slipped away with a poor excuse!

So, there I sat, brooding all night
For without my pen, how could I write?

Zaheer Vakeel

I simply can't scribble a verse today,
My trusty typewriter has gone astray!
For in this place where control reigns tight,
My typewriter fears being caught in plain sight.
Under this iron rule so mean,
Creativity is deemed obscene.
So forgive me, friend, I must refrain,
Communism has bound me, it's such a pain!

Sunandini Sen

"You've caught the Writer's block."
That's what the doctors told me,
As I nearly fainted, they added,
"So you can't write, you see."

Dr Wordsmith told me that I
Should get better someday,
There's honestly no telling when
This illness will go away!

Of course, I've been given medicines,
Creativity and Read More, they're called,
I've been advised rest from Distractions,
According to the prescription scrawled.

The best thing I can do is wait
For a few months, perhaps till June,
For the creative juices to start flowing,
But I don't think it'll happen soon.



Steal the Show

Advika Gupta

"Aaaand cut! That was beautiful, stunning, absolutely perfect! Great job, ladies."

I bit my lip. I could hear K's raucous exclamations from two rooms away. "She's too far away to yell at you Anila," I reassured myself. "Just finish the face." There was something oddly calming about painting bruises onto a big-shot actor's face with a brush the width of a strand of hair. It was a bit like having a puppet that's famous. The actor literally had to obey your every command--or else. It was the only time I really felt like I had ... control.

As I dotted on the final strokes of "blood", K came storming into the make-up room, her long, floral scarf billowing behind her. "Hey guys, we'll be filming the next scene in about a half hour, okay? Anila, how's it going?"

"Almost done!" I said, adding the last kink on Jai's forehead. "Jai, you can open your eyes now."

Jai's eyelids fluttered open, revealing a full display of cuts, scratches, and one detailed, LONG bruise across Jai's ear and jawline. Three hours long to be exact. I wiped hours worth of sweat off my forehead and glanced at K nervously.

"Eh ... not ... terrible, Anila. It'll do. Jai, you ready to be shoved into a ditch?"

"Have you met me, K?" Jai grinned.

K grinned back.

I sighed.

That was Kajal for you, our director, who insisted we call her 'K' to make the set more 'close' and 'family-like'.



Story

Everyone on set seemed to adore her, and she them. Everyone except me. There always seemed to be a scratch too big or a puffy eye not puffy enough on every face I painted, and yet the actors were always 'Beautiful, stunning, absolutely perfect!'

"K, uh, would it be okay if I took my break now?"

"Well, Anila you--"

Suddenly, Sia, our prop manager, burst in. "I can't ... find the key for tomorrow's scene ... anywhere!"

"What?! Sia, you'd better be joking right now, we need that key." K massaged the bridge of her nose.

"I'm not, I swear I've looked everywhere. It's gone."

I bit my lip again. This was the fourth missing prop Sia had noticed this week. Not good.

"Okay, well you have to get it by today somehow. It's really important for tomorrow's scene, and I ordered it specially because of its design."

"Okay, but ... just in case I can't find it, do we have a spare?" asked Sia. She looked like a puppy whose ball had rolled under a sofa.

"No, we don't have a spare! We'll just have to find a key somehow, so try hard. Anila, go help Sia. Jai, come with me, you still need to be thrown into a ditch," K ordered.



I dropped my face paint and brush on my table and trooped after Sia into the prop room.

"Okay, so I'm a hundred percent sure it was here before lunch," Sia told me. "I was taking a count and everything was there. I've searched every inch of this room; it's just gone. I think we'll just have to figure out something that looks similar. Any ideas?"



"Um ... no, but let me just check under the ... table. Maybe it, um, slipped off?"

Sia groaned. I gnawed my lip again.

"It's not there," she said. "I checked. Twice."

"Well, you know, no harm in triple checking." Without waiting for Sia to reply, I quickly dove under the prop-stacked table, and emerged a few seconds later. Sia gaped at my open palm.

"How did you ... I swear it wasn't ... was it? Oh, it doesn't matter, thank you thank you thank you Anila! Ooh, K's gonna be so relieved." Sia happily took the ornate wooden key from my hand and skipped off to K.

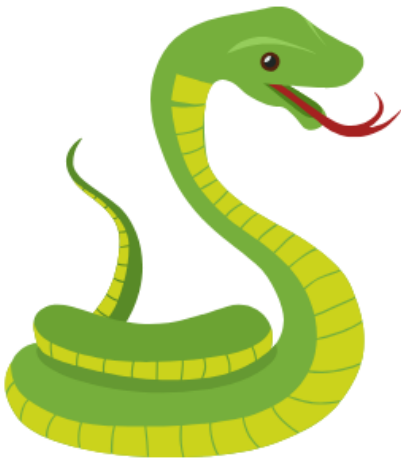
I stood there, watching her leave. Guilt stabbed my stomach, as my teeth did my lip. It was throbbing by this point. I tucked my hands into my now-empty-feeling pockets. I hated lying, and to Sia of all people, but too much was riding on this job.

After all, which movie director would ever hire a kleptomaniac?

Limericks

Aarya Jain Baldawa

There were two cats from Milleny
Each thought there was one cat too many
So they started to fight
And to scratch and bite
Now instead of two cats, there aren't any.



Kabir Srinivasan

There once was a snake who couldn't hiss.
In his head, something was amiss.
He could meow like a cat
And squeak like a rat
But a hiss he'd constantly miss!

Ronikaa Vijan

There once was a fairy quite bold,
With appetite for fire untold.
Her yearning desire
Set the sky afire,
Now her tale's in the stories of old.



Sangamitra Vel

A dino once had a good dream:
An idea to boost his self esteem.
He worked for hours
to create hot showers
Powered by a football team.





Camping! Camping! Camping! I have waited six years to go camping and now we would finally be going to camp. I could already feel the prickly grass on my back and the warmth of the fire on my feet. The smell of burning wood wafting up my nose. Even the croaking of frogs sounded like music.

"JESSICA! JESSICA! YOUR FOOD IS GETTING COLD." Mum's voice brought me back to reality.

Well, camping would have to wait till the weekend; for now, I had homework to tackle.



As a strong wind pushed my hair on my face, I thought to myself, "Wow!" We were actually camping. Standing here in the woods my dream was coming to life every minute.

Another strong gust of wind carried away the newspaper I had been holding. The winds were very strong here. But there was nothing to worry about because the weather forecast had said the weather was clear. Or at least that is what Jane, my sister, had told us it said.

"JESSICA! JANE! GO COLLECT WOOD FOR THE FIRE! IT'S GETTING DARK, SO HURRY!" Dad's loud and deep voice buzzed through my head just as Amy, my golden retriever, came bounding over.

"Come on girl, let's go for a little adventure," I told her.

Story

Amy looked back at me, her adorable chocolate eyes saying, "What are you waiting for?"

I ran around, grabbing the best sticks I could find for the fire. And I did this by myself because Amy and Jane were too busy playing fetch.

"OK at least help me carry the sticks back, you lazy donkey," I teased Jane. She grabbed two. "Wow so helpful Jane."

On our way back Amy managed to get a newspaper stuck on her face. This made her all excited and terrified at the same time.

"Amy!" I shrieked as she rammed into me and I fell down giggling. Next Amy ran into a bush ripping the newspaper apart. We were still giggling and rolling on the grass when I heard a rumble. Then the sky flashed a shade of pink and purple. What was all of this?!! The weather forecast had said the weather was clear. I looked over at Jane who was just as shocked as I was.

Soon droplets of water were falling on my face. I could hear Jane's voice somewhere far away, yelling at me to get up. But I remained sprawled on the wet spiky grass. Each drop of water got bigger and heavier. A faint scent of wet mud made its way up my nose.

This could not be happening. We would have to pack up and go home. My dream to camp was ruined. By now my face was drenched in three things: the rain, my tears and Amy's drool as she licked my face. I would have stayed there all day if it had not been for the insects that were trying to crawl on to me.





The ride back home was in complete silence except for Amy's snores. Once we got back home, I ran into my room and flopped down on the bed. I turned on sad music and just lay there crying till I fell asleep.

My morning started with Amy's golden tail in my mouth as she tried to squeeze into my bed. "Amy!" I groaned gently pushing her away. I lay there staring up at the roof. Hoping that everything that had happened the previous night was just a nightmare. When I looked out of the window, the roads were all dry. My shoulders slumped in relief.

When I went back downstairs for breakfast, the first thing I saw were Jane's two annoying brown ponytails swinging in front of my face as she laughed at me calling me a potato.

"Were you crying after we returned home yesterday?" Dad asked me. Wait, so all that happened yesterday was not just a nightmare! But then why were all the roads dry outside?

"Jessica, we know how badly you wanted to go camping. How about we try again soon?" Mum asked.

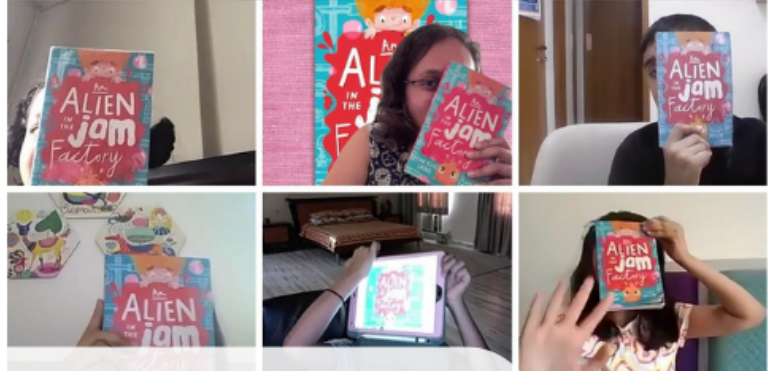
I just nodded in reply.

"And Jane won't read the wrong forecast this time," Dad added.

Wait, what was that supposed to mean? "What did she do?" I questioned. Dad and Mum were both chuckling.

And Jane smiled at me apologetically, "I read the weather forecast for our city, not the countryside."

Well, that explained why the roads outside were dry, and why it rained yesterday at the camp ground. Oh, that little brat. But instead of raging at her I joined the laughter. And so did Amy by barking her head off. Oh, well. The next time I went camping I would make sure to check the weather forecast myself and not trust Jane to it.



Varsha Seshan's Reading and Writing Programmes

www.varshaseshan.com/events/

