

SLICE OF LIFE:
A Collection of Short Stories

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Edited by

**Dr. H. Kalaivani, Ms. R. Sindhu, Dr. S. Haritha
and Ms. V. Jennifer Rani.**

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THE SILENCE OF MY TRUTH

Sixteen felt heavier when I hid part of myself, every breath measured, every step taken on eggshells. My days blended into one another like scripted smiles, cautious words, and an ache that swelled in the quiet moments. The weight of being different, of being unseen yet utterly exposed to myself, was a secret I carried like a stone in my chest. The world in which I lived was box-loving—a world in tight, neat corners where everybody fitted; my truth was frightfully vast. Discussions regarding prospective futures felt like piercing blades concealed in benevolent affection. “When you meet a girl you like,” they would say, their faces beaming with certainty. The air grew suffocating, thick with expectations that didn’t belong to me. My voice remained buried in my throat, trapped under the weight of their dreams. That night, the weight became unbearable. The walls seemed to close in, and my chest grew so tight that I couldn’t breathe. Tears flowed silently until a raw scream shattered the air, echoing in the void I had hidden for years. Trembling, I picked up a notebook and poured out my truth. And each word, cracking the stone inside me, sent through the fissures an alien light, certainly not acceptance but defiance, a small ember of hope that I grasped hold of. Laying the pen down finally ended the emptiness in my head but filled me with the presence of quietness, it felt finally enough.

I am **Vishnu R**, a final-year undergraduate student from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. I always believed in making meaningful connections with people and believed in the upliftment of others and inclusiveness. I feed on intellectual curiosity, seeking diverse perspectives to enrich my understanding. With a love for creativity and storytelling, I aim to leave a positive impact wherever life takes me.

A DAY OF GUILT AND GRACE

It started as any other day. My world revolved around the simple joys of the middle class, six years of marriage, two years of motherhood, and endless love for my baby boy. That morning, the pink line on the pregnancy test changed everything. Excited, I ran to my husband, whose face lit up with dreams of names and futures. We hadn't planned for a second child, but this surprise felt like a gift from the universe.

But the joy was short-lived. My mother-in-law arrived that evening, and her reaction to the news shattered my heart. "Why would you want a second child? Raising one is enough!" Her words felt like daggers, questioning my worth as a mother and a wife. When my husband left for work, her whispers turned into relentless accusations. Her demand for an abortion broke the fragile happiness I'd nurtured that morning. Drowning in despair, I sought solace in the bathroom. Clutching a bottle of acid, my mind spiraled. But as I fumbled, I dropped the bottle, and fumes overwhelmed me. Pain gripped my body as blood poured out. Guilt replaced despair as I begged my husband to rush me to the hospital. At the hospital, thoughts consumed me as I waited. Then, like a miracle, I heard my baby's heartbeat. Against all odds, she survived. Nine months later, I held my baby girl, my second chance. To the world, it was a tragic accident. To me, it was the day we died and were reborn.

Dr. S. Sudha is an Associate Professor of English at The Madura College (Autonomous), Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. She has been working in the institution for over thirteen years. She has published around 20 articles in reputed journals and resented some at national and international seminars. She has published a book on "JOB FAIR KEYS"

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HIDDEN GEMS - EXPERIENCING INDIA'S CHILLNESS

Wow!! What a Country!! Surrounded by Oceans to the South and Himalayas on the North, India is one of such countries with forests, mountains, beaches and much more. Winters are one amongst the climate that turns our Himalayas into a natural wonderland. A dream to many is to experience live snowfall in the lifetime. Jammu Kashmir is flocked with tourists starting from December till end of March as this wonderland offers breathtaking views and memories for lifetime. Time flies is what you say while you are here. “Chillai Kalan” [Persian word meaning ‘Major Cold’] is a 40 Day extreme weather in Kashmir where Srinagar’s Dal Lake get frozen. A Shikara ride in this lake with awe struck view of mountains blanketed snow is the best experience. Not yet, if you are around Gulmarg, which is very close to Srinagar offers a Gandola ride. This is the world’s second largest and second highest cable car project with 2 phases which runs from Gulmarg to Kongadori to chairlift phase. Along with riding, one can go for activities like skiing, snow skating, ice hockey, paragliding, zorbing must. Experience the culture where Kashmiri locals both men and women seen wearing Pharan – a long woolen gown and carrying Khanger – a traditional earthen firepot which is used to keep warm and ward off freezing cold. Let’s experience this wonderland soon and cheer ourselves on with hot Khawa.

Vennelakanti Indrani, I am a passionate traveler with an aim to explore the country. By profession, I am pursuing my doctoral studies.

THE SUDDEN DEMISE

Sadly, at the late evening she got a call from her mother; that her cousin had lost her father. Grief drenched and she was worried about her cousin, as she had already lost her mother when she was five years old.

She had informed her family and booked the train tickets for Renigunta. Her uncle left this world at the age of forty-nine that is quite unbearable. Everyone started to go for the condolence's visit.

The family had boarded the train and in that travel people were overloaded with the thoughts of the demise which had left her cousin's future in vain. Finally she had reached the cremation ground and after the death ceremony; she spoke to her cousin to come Chennai. Cousin too accepted to go along with them to Chennai but passed glances to a strange boy who was wearing a brown hat and that boy was seemed to be standing throughout the day next to her father's coffin.

She had observed the boy from aside and cousin waved bye to her neighbours and boarded the train for Chennai. For two weeks the family hadn't got any doubt and took care of her well.

A month passed, she heard the news from her mother that the cousin had left the house and eloped with the brown hat boy who was in the death ceremony. This proved that fate predominated that her cousin had different plans in the very day of the demise.

G.Malathy, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Science-English, Rajalakshmi Engineering college, Thandalam - 602105. (Having totally seven years of teaching experience, possess a patent and published two journals; attended two international conferences looking forward much more in literature)

A MORNING WALK ALONG SEMBAKKAM POONGA

Each morning, as the world yawns awake, I set out on a short ride to Sembakkam Poonga. My two-wheeler hums beneath me, eager to reach the park where my feet will take over, carrying me through paths lined with emerald greens. As the sun spills gold across the horizon, I breathe in the crisp air, feeling its gentle embrace.

Stepping onto the gravel track, a hush falls over me—a calmness that only nature can bestow. The rhythmic crunch of footsteps mingles with birdsong, creating a melody that soothes the restless mind. Senior citizens claim shaded benches, their animated chatter weaving stories of bygone days. Walkers glide past, their headphones cocooning them in private worlds, while badminton players volley shuttles with bursts of laughter.

At the heart of the park lies the pond—a mirror to the morning sky. Ducks paddle lazily, cormorants dive like seasoned performers, and egrets stand poised as though guarding secrets of the water. Trees stand sentinel—Punnai Maram, neem, banyan, badam—whispering welcomes in the breeze. They seem to know me now, as I know them.

I pause to let the scene sink in. Nature asks unspoken questions—When did we last pause to listen? Do we admire or truly care? My thoughts drift, tethered by wonder.

A playful dog trots alongside, its tail wagging an invitation to explore. I smile and move on, the day's worries lighter, my steps echoing the heartbeat of the earth.

Priyanka Soman is a teacher at The School (KFI) for around six years, where she currently teach music, social studies, and chemistry. Over the past decade, she've taught junior, middle, and senior students, finding joy in fostering curiosity and learning. Teaching is a calling she embraced early on, inspired by my mother, who was also a dedicated educator. Outside the classroom, she is passionate about music, birdwatching, and studying trees. She collect Hot Wheels cars,

which adds a touch of nostalgia to my hobbies, and she thoroughly enjoy reading Ruskin Bond's evocative works. She was also deeply inspired by J. Krishnamurti's teachings, which continually encourage me to explore and engage with the world around her in meaningful ways.

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THE UNDYING SPIRIT OF NAYA

Once in a small village in Africa, there lived a young girl named Naya. She was born into a loving family who loved her unconditionally. Sadly, she was separated from her friends and family and sold to the slave traders. Her life took a completely different turn, and she was sent to America in a slave ship. The ship in which she travelled for at least a month was cramped, as she was not alone and enslaved. She suffered from disease, hunger, and abuse like her fellow Africans. However, she did not give up hope and stayed strong by holding onto her memories of her family, culture, and homeland. Upon arriving in America, Naya was sold to a plantation owner, where she had to work endlessly with other fellow slaves. She was often beaten up and at times spent days without food. Years passed, and her determination never wavered. She became a leader among her fellow slaves and inspired them to fight for their dignity as well as their freedom. One day when her owners were not present, she found an opportunity to escape with her friends. She bravely made a break for freedom, navigating treacherous terrain and avoiding slave catchers. Finally, after years of enslavement, Naya found freedom. She found a different community where she was welcomed and supported. Her legacy continues to inspire the future generations to never give up hope and fight oppression, no matter what the circumstances are.

Dr. Ramandeep Mahal is currently working as an Assistant Professor of English at Guru Nanak Khalsa College Yamunanagar. She has almost twelve years of teaching experience. Her research interests include Anglo-American Literature. She is the author of more than twenty research articles and book chapters. Her expertise includes British literature, and American Literature.

SHADOW OF TRUST

Emily was a cheerful and lively young girl where laughter lit up every room she entered .her friends seemed to encourage her praising her talents and dreams but behind her back their were different they often spoke negatively about her doubting her abilities and mocking her aspiration. As a days passed she feeling a strange heaviness as if the support she believed in was slowly shattering much like rust creeping over a shiny piece of iron rusting it's surface. one afternoon as Emily walked through the local market she came across an old craftsman .He was restoring a rusted iron as a treasure with patience and care. she was so curious and asked why he bothered with something so damaged? the craftsman smiled and said “iron can never be destroyed by others but only buy its own rust .similarly people are not defeated by the world but by their own thoughts” those words stayed in Emily's mind she realized her own doubts about herself are rusting her soul. it wasn't her friends who were harming her ,it was her own belief in their words. that day Emily decided to cleanse her life of negativity. She distanced herself from friends and started to focuses on her talents which polished her to shine. Emily's transformation was slow but profound she became a symbol of courage proving that the only things capable of defeating her was her own thoughts by recognizing and addressing the rust within, she reclaimed her strength and confidence becoming unbreakable.

This story reflects the essence of life's battles: the power to rise lies within us. true strength isn't about avoiding rust but knowing how to remove it.

Im **Priyadarshini .M** an aspiring poetess and storyteller, I have a deep passion for crafting meaningful narratives . I hold MA in English literature and enjoys exploring themes of resilience ,self discovery and life's complexities through my writing. I believe in the power of words to inspire and connect people.

PEPPER'S PERFECT PLAN

It all started with the doorbell. Dinner had arrived, and our black Labrador, Pepper, scurried over to investigate, his tail wagging with excitement.

As we exchanged pleasantries with the delivery guy, Pepper stood nearby, unusually calm but with a wagging tail. Little did we know that his eyes and mind however, were locked on the steaming pack of hot idlis resting on the table.

“Good boy, Pepper,” we said absentmindedly, not noticing the glint of determination in his eyes.

We turned to close the door, and that was his moment. Silent as a shadow, Pepper struck. One second, the idlis were there; the next, they were gone. All that remained was an empty plastic wrapper dangling from his mouth as he bolted to his favourite spot: the bed.

“PEPPER!” we yelled, but he was already deep in his feast, licking every crumb with gusto. By the time we reached him, the idlis were history. Pepper sat there, looking ludicrously pleased with himself, his tail wagging furiously as if to say, “It was Worth it.”

The smell of Idly lingered in the air as we tried to scold him, but it was difficult to stay mad at that lovely face. From that time on, every time the doorbell rang, Pepper assumed his cute avatar, ready for another heist. Lesson learned: never underestimate a 10-year-old lab with a love for idlis and perfect timing.

Smt. **Nandana N.G.** is an Assistant Professor of English at Government First Grade College, Malleshwaram, Bengaluru, with 17 years of experience teaching undergraduate students. She has published 15 papers in her field, developed Econtent showcasing her academic dedication. Passionate about reading and storytelling, she brings creativity to her teaching and writing. A dog enthusiast, who finds joy and inspiration in their companionship. She continues to blend her love for literature, and storytelling in all her endeavours.

THE FORGOTTEN FAMILY

Sankar's world always revolves around his laptop and Mobile. At the age of 27, he was a successful software engineer though his personal life had been a series of missed connections. One evening, his mother, Kalaivani, a widow now, called him to dinner. He replied rudely as his eyes were glued to his screen.

The dinner table, once a place of family gathering and conversations, now is abandoned. Sankar's sister, Varsha, quietly ate while scrolling through her tablet.

Their mother sighed, placing a plate in front of Sankar. Her eyes were filled with longing for the family they once had.

The next day, Kalaivani didn't greet Sankar with her usual smile.

Instead, she sat in her chair, clutching an old family photo. Her silence unsettled him.

"What's wrong, Amma?" he asked, finally placing his phone aside.

"I miss us, Sankar," she said in trembling voice and expressed, "We are in the same house but are miles apart. Mobile brought us closer to the world, but it's taken us away from each other."

Sankar stared at his mother, guilt washing over him. That evening, he called for a "Mobile-free dinner." Initially, it was difficult for them, but soon they were laughing, sharing stories, and rediscovered each other.

Sankar realized that the world beyond his profession, and screen was richer, more valuable and fulfilling. The devices that had once dominated their lives were now left behind as the family reconnected.

Dr. K. Siva Sankar, a literature enthusiast, is serving as the Head of the Department of English Literature at SRM Arts and Science College, Kattankulathur. He finds joy in reading & creating heartfelt poems and stories. He has published numerous papers in UGC &

Scopus Indexed Journals. He deeply values simplicity & cherishes a life free from excessive reliance on technology. His work & writings reflect his admiration for meaningful & authentic living.

STRANDED IN KINDNESS

Mohan, a city dweller used to the hustle and indifference of urban life, found himself stranded in a remote village after his car broke down. The rain lashed down in torrents. He cursed his luck while trying to get a signal on his phone. Frustrated, he trudged through the mud, his shoes sinking with each step.

Spotting a small home with a flickering lantern, he hesitated but knocked on the door. A frail old man, Ramu, opened it. “Come in, son,” he said with a warm smile, ushering Aditya inside.

Mohan was stunned by the simplicity of the home. The walls were bare, and the furniture was old, but the atmosphere was welcoming. Ramu’s wife quickly brought a towel and a cup of tea.

“I don’t have much to offer, but you’re welcome to share what I have,” Ramu said.

Mohan hesitated and asked, “Why are you helping me? You don’t even know me.”

Ramu chuckled. “a guest is like God for us. Kindness and love cost nothing, and it brings us joy.”

That night, Mohan slept on a simple cot but felt warmth he had never known in his luxurious city apartment.

Dr. K. Siva Sankar, a literature enthusiast, is serving as the Head of the Department of English Literature at SRM Arts and Science College, Kattankulathur. He finds joy in reading & creating heartfelt poems and stories. He has published numerous papers in UGC & Scopus Indexed Journals. He deeply values simplicity & cherishes a life free from excessive reliance on technology. His work & writings reflect his admiration for meaningful & authentic living.

ROOTS OF RESILIENCE

In a quiet village near Tiruttani, a woman lived with her husband, their in-laws, and a deeply ingrained tradition that valued sons over daughters. Her first child was a girl, but the family, hoping for a male heir, pressured her to conceive again. Over the years, she gave birth to five more daughters, each arrival met with growing disappointment.

Desperate to fulfill the family's expectations, they forced her to undergo a ritual to ensure her next child would be male. She finally gave birth to a son, and the household erupted in celebration. Yet, their greed for more male heirs persisted, and she was coerced into another pregnancy. The seventh child, however, was another daughter.

The family, once supportive yet demanding, began to crumble. Tragedy struck as the in-laws succumbed to illness and tension, leaving the woman widowed and alone with her seven children. The once-vibrant household became eerily quiet, marked by loss and abandonment.

Despite the overwhelming hardships, the woman found strength in her daughters and son. The irony of the family's obsessive tradition was stark—though they had long sought a male to carry their legacy, it was the daughters who now stood by their mother.

In the solitude of her home, she resolved to nurture her children equally, rejecting the biases that had haunted her family. Together, they would forge a future that valued unity and resilience over outdated traditions.

Mrs. S.L. SOWMIYA M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Research Scholar, VIT

THE TURNING TIDE

In the dimly lit jail cell, Advocate Richie sat opposite a trembling man, resting his weathered briefcase between them. Advocate Richie, known for his wealth, unyielding demeanor and steep fees, was hired by the court to represent the convict, Samuel.

Samuel worked as a construction laborer, barely earning enough to keep his family afloat. One day, Samuel requested for the wages he had worked for additional time. The employer delayed on his plea and finally neglected. Samuel pressed his plea for the pending wages and the employer was exasperated into humiliating Samuel and mocking his family's plight. In a moment of desperation and rage,

Samuel lashed out, unintentionally striking the employer with a heavy object, leading to fatal injury.

Samuel's voice cracked as he recounted his crime, "I didn't mean to kill him, Sir. It was a scuffle... I needed money to feed my family. My mother, she's bedridden. My wife, weak from hunger, and my daughters – just ten and seven – they cry themselves to sleep most nights." Tears streamed down his face.

Advocate Richie folded his arms, his expression unreadable. "Need doesn't justify the murder," he said coldly.

"But desperation blinds judgment," Samuel pleaded, his voice rising, "Many Advocates attended me, inquired till I get exhausted and finally demanded huge fees to get rid of the case." He begged Advocate Richie to relieve him from this hell in heaven.

Richie stared at him, unmoving, but something shifted within. His broken childhood reflected in front of his eyes, the cruel nights he and his widowed mother scraped by on charity. The convict's anguish felt too familiar. Richie did not soothe him, rather he told him to be bold till the next hearing in the court.

Days passed, Richie was gathering his prepared prompts for Samuel's hearing which was not less than a day. Things went upside

down as Samuel ended his life in the jail which shuts down Advocate Richie for a moment.

Since that tragic day, Richie dedicated himself to serve the needy through Legal aid for nothing and cheered up the convicts and victims through a statement, “As you live, you have infinite chances.

I am **Infant Paul Renato**, pursuing my final year Bachelor of English Literature in St Xavier’s College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli. I like to write short stories during my leisure time based on my observation from real life experiences. I have been appreciated and awarded with prizes which boost up me in writing stories.

IN THE QUIET OF US

Anuradha stood by the window, watching the rain blur the city lights. Each drop mirrored the turmoil within her. Her world was split—one of obligations and the other, a secret haven where she was truly seen.

Krish had walked into her life when she was merely existing. Their first conversation had been about books, but their connection ran deeper than words. With him, she rediscovered laughter, passion, and a version of herself she thought was long buried.

But love wasn't enough to absolve the guilt that gripped her. Society's voice was loud, its judgment sharper than the rain cutting through the night. "A woman's duty is to her family," they would say, branding her feelings as betrayal. No one cared to see the suffocation in her marriage or the joy Krish brought her.

He never asked her to leave her family, nor did he promise her the world. What they shared was unspoken and sacred—a bond beyond societal definitions. When they sat together in silence, sipping chai or watching the sun dip into the horizon, they found a peace that words could never capture.

"Are you happy?" Krish asked one evening, his gaze unwavering.

"Yes," she whispered. "But they'll never understand."

"They don't need to," he replied, taking her hand. "This is ours, not theirs."

Anuradha knew their love would forever be hidden, misunderstood, but its purity was theirs alone—a rebellion against the world, a solace against its chaos.

Dr. Misha T. P. is an Assistant Professor of English at Chellammal Women's College, Chennai. With a Ph.D. in English and over three years of teaching experience, she specializes in literature and writing skills. She has cleared the UGC NET with JRF twice, showcasing her

academic excellence. Her research interests include narratives of transnational belonging in South Asian diaspora literature and intersections of identity in literature. Passionate about nurturing young minds, she believes in the transformative power of education and storytelling.

FIRST KISS

Life is Unpredictable! people say, that's true. I am Neha, a 19 Year-old girl, being on the verge of adolescence it is mandatory to love and to be loved by someone, but for me both have been a nightmare, this is because I did not have a good relationship with my father. He rarely talks to me, and he has no idea what grade I am in, but for me, holding his hands, telling him the entire day's story, hugging and kissing him have been a dream. He provides me money, but not his time. I feel jealous on seeing a child kissing his father and walk along the road, meanwhile I released that I haven't kissed my father ones in my life. As time flies and things become usual. One morning, I heard the door bell ring, I awoke with half-opened eyes and opened the door where I saw my father arrive with a group of people, including a police officer. My hands started shivering, and I felt strange. The police officer added solemnly, "I'm sorry your father was involved in an accident and died on the scene." They also stated that he had insured money of two crore in the bank, which will be delivered to me soon. People, including my father, didn't realize that all I needed was his love, not money. My eyes did not well up with tears; instead, I kneeled down and kissed him on the forehead, which was my first kiss with him.

Catherin. A is an Ph.D Research Scholar from The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam College for Women, she has got a great passion for writing, which is visualized by the medals and awards she has received for her writing. You, My Only Destiny is her first debut novel which is available in amazon and flipkart. Her love for reading has made her come out with such creative writing. Reading books and creative writing are her hobbies. She has the aura of creating scenes, so it is very much hoped to see many innovative pieces from her.

IT NEVER HAPPENED

There was a NEVER HAPPENED in the midst of some bushes and Peepal. THE NEVER HAPPENED roads were east to west, houses north to south and people were down to up. NEVER HAPPENED had never happened treaty among men and women, victim and predators, children and adults, Pen and paper, books and children, school and education.

One day a scuffle HAPPENED among Basant, Ambika, Ramaasare and Jheenak over a piece of land enough for growing one potato plant. Each other had punched enough dozens to the face, legs, bottom, and back of Ramassare since Ramaasare was not a south Indian hero, he fell on the ground and yelled to help, some people came to cry for him. The sarpanch came to take him hospital.

The punching round had occurred impromptu before the evening meal of the fat cousin of white mother couldn't get any greens that night. The sarpanch came back without Ramaasare and called Jewri for some entertainment, she couldn't dance. The scene had had a pair of ears and the narrator could recall this much:

Jewri: no no don't come, don't come near me.

Sarpanch: your man will be OUT of the hospital!

Jewri: no, you can't do that

Sarpanch: it's happening...

After shortest 3300, Ramaasare was lying at the grandeur of his potato size hut with two tablets of paracetamol and one bandage on his half wound. Two and half days later, his wounded half naked body rolled down. And the Sarpanch played his snakes to get one beegha farm land for one lakh to get Jheenak no jail.

A decade later, Jheenak was in jail, the sarpanch was blind, Jewri was untraceable Ambika and Basant were in the ground near the brick kiln. People in house say it NEVER HAPPENED.

Ms. Suchita, Research Scholar, Department of Education, DU

THE UNFORGOTTEN TEA CUP

Sanjana, an elderly woman, was tidying her kitchen. She happened to see a cup there, on the verge of shattering. She examined it closely and discovered that it is her husband's cup because she is too elderly to see clearly. As a surprise for him, she has chosen to get a new cup in its stead. She also did that nicely. On a pleasant evening, they were enjoying a cup of tea and a snack while lounging on the balcony. She used a fresh cup to serve her husband tea as she had previously intended. When her husband saw that it contained tea, he appeared somewhat displeased and departed the balcony without taking a sip.

Saravanan, her spouse, cherishes the priceless memories and antiques they have at home. When the clock struck half past eight, Sanjana made the decision to comfort her husband, who was concerned over the cup being replaced. When they were talking about it, her husband said that since the cup was a gift for their wedding, it was an ill omen to see one of them getting old and on the verge of breaking. He did not feel well enough to drink tea in the new one, therefore.

She continued to ponder about the chat with her spouse throughout her regular work the following day. She began to reminisce about their peaceful times as a newlywed couple. How he gave her gifts and how, as newlyweds, they sat awkwardly and were enthusiastic about their future together when they first shared tea. As the years passed, she gave birth to a girl named Siju Latha and a boy named Sonu a year later. The couple had to elope since their parents were unable to support them, and they both endured great hardships in raising their children, as all Indian parents do.

After he was hired as a bank officer, their lives gradually began to normalize. She reflects on the changes in her life very often and their kids are now married and have kids of their own.

The stove suddenly emitted a boom noise and was shut off. With a sigh, she switched on the burner and began brewing tea. When the clock struck 5 p.m., she rushed to the balcony with tea and snacks for herself and her husband in the same old cup. She waited for her husband to arrive; the time has passed five and ten minutes, but he was yet to arrive. Suddenly, the reality hit her harder that her spouse would never return because he died two years ago. Her eyes welled up with tears, and she lamented that

“He will never be back!”

She noticed her spouse's portrait hanging on the wall, and all of a sudden the string of flowers from the frame slipped, allowing her to feel her partner's presence at home.

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THE COFFEE SHOP REGULAR

In a bustling city, Harini, a young graphic designer, finds solace in her favourite coffee shop Adyar Cafe, where she visits every morning before work. The familiar routine of ordering her usual cappuccino and settling into her favourite corner table provides her with a comforting rhythm amidst the chaos of city life.

In a usual day Harini wakes up early morning choosing her regular outfit, and heading to Adyar Cafe. Here, she regularly interacts with Mr. Vijay, an elderly man who regularly visits the shop and shares stories from his past and serves as a mentor figure to Harini. On a particular dreary morning unexpectedly, Harini meets Ajith, a traveller with spontaneity and has an infectious enthusiasm for life. He is temporarily in the city for work. The initial talk was light and playful and as they continue to meet at the coffee shop over the next few days, Harini learns about Ajith's travel and his philosophy. Ajith started to encourage Harini and to come out from her comfort zone and explore the different parts of the city and try new coffee blends. Their playful conversations resulted Harini to step out of her comfort zone and explore the city. As she reconnects with old friends and tries new hobbies, Harini grapples with her fear of change. As Ajith prepares for his departure, she shares heartfelt good bye at Adyar Cafe. When Ajith departs, she feels more connected to herself and the world around her, continuing her journey of self-discovery.

Grefin BM studies final year of B.A. English Literature at DRBCCC Hindu College, Chennai. He is inspired to write short stories and poem. He is a freelance writer and loves to travel long distances. He is good in photography and loves to connect himself with nature.

EVENING REFLECTIONS IN PARK

In a small town tucked between rolling hills, Emma sat on the worn wooden bench at the local park, watching the world unfold around her. The sun was beginning to dip below the horizon, casting a soft orange glow over the landscape. Children ran past, their laughter echoing through the air as they played tag, while a couple sat nearby, sharing quiet words only meant for them.

Emma had been coming to this park every evening for years, finding comfort in its simplicity. It wasn't grand or particularly beautiful, but it was hers. The smell of freshly cut grass, the chirping of the birds settling into the trees, and the rhythmic creak of the swing set had become the soundtrack to her life.

Today had been just like any other. She had spent the afternoon at her favorite local café, sipping on her usual vanilla latte, exchanging smiles with the barista, and reading her book. Life in the town was predictable, steady, but Emma had grown to appreciate its steadiness. It gave her a sense of peace that the hustle of city life never could.

As the sky darkened, she watched an older man sit on the bench next to hers. He had the weathered look of someone who had seen a lot, his face lined with the stories of a life well-lived. He nodded at Emma, a silent acknowledgment of the shared moment. She offered him a soft smile.

"I've been coming here every evening for years," he said, his voice slow and kind. "This bench feels like home."

Emma nodded, knowing exactly what he meant. It wasn't about the bench itself, but the sense of belonging that came from the routine. The comfort of knowing exactly where you would be at the end of each day. She took a deep breath, inhaling the cool evening air. "It's nice, isn't it?" she said quietly.

The man chuckled, a warm, raspy sound. "It's more than nice.

It's life, unfolding just as it should.”

And with that, they both sat in silence, watching the sun finally slip away, knowing that tomorrow, the park would be waiting for them again.

Dr. H. Mohammed Azarudeen, M.A., SET, PhD, working as Guest Lecturer Department of English, at Government of Arts and Science College Theni District. He has 13 years of Teaching Experience in Colleges both in Engineering and Arts and Science College across Tamil Nadu .He has the passion to writing poems and short stories in English and has passion in writing.

JUST ANOTHER INQUISITIVE APPROACH

The dubious assumptions of today's rainfall has been contributed by each one of the old men who were playing cards, except for Palani who neither played cards ever nor did he give them any of his opinions that particular day.

Reshma is his young daughter who is quite witty and strong-willed like her father. She remembers her mother every morning with pujas at the entrance of the room inside the lavishly built house in the 1960s. She grew up to be an expert in her mother tongue, Tamil and she was also a polyglot learning several languages. Reshma intruded the old men saying 'Its going to pour out so much that you imagine in another two hours'. Rana, a young man in his twenties was pretty much disturbed by her and found her irritating. Rana came with his old grandfather Veeran who conducted village gatherings.

Palani had previously found out that Veeran helped with Reshma's higher studies. While Reshma began to show interest in Rana and was lured by his dreamlike physique and style, Palani went out to arrange a marriage for his loving daughter. With great difficulty to let go of her, he accepted on Veeran's request to marry the two.

Rana got up and said 'It has begun to drizzle. Reshma was right! She is a genius'

It was probable for everyone that he wouldn't think twice to marry her. They got married. Reshma later became a French teacher and a mother of two.

Serene Soundarya R J C is a student doing her Masters in English Literature . She is studying in Anna Adarsh College for Women, Chennai. She is a good student. She is well versed in English. She writes poetry and loves to draw.

MY ONLY HOPE

I feel much loved. I'm hopeful about life and everything it has to offer. All thanks to Hope, my dear dog. I got her last winter, a few days before Christmas. I was a different person back then. I always kept to myself, and my dark thoughts consumed me over time.

One day, these dark thoughts resurfaced for no reason. I knew my mind was in a bad place, so I put on my sweater and rushed outside. I went to a cafe nearby. I ordered a cheese sandwich. I still remember munching that sandwich when I reached the public park. A mongrel there caught my eye. I felt pity for the frail creature. I left my half-eaten sandwich beside the frozen fountain before heading home. I didn't notice that the dog was following me till I reached the front door of my house. Before I knew it, I was sharing my home with Snowy. I named the dog Snowy because she was white as snow. I was happy, but also a little upset with Snowy. She often snuck out of the house in the evening; even during the day for a long time. I once locked the front door in anger. I wish I hadn't done that. I deeply regret it to this day. She returned a few minutes later and lingered outside the house for hours together. When I checked outside at night, she wasn't there. Guilt flooded my chest. There was a raging snowstorm outside when I went in search of her. I didn't mind shuffling through a million blizzards for Snowy. I ran towards the public park. She was there as expected. I was astounded to see a litter of puppies lying next to her. There were no signs of life in their eyes. Snowy howled unto the sky and darted into the street. A truck ran over her. I froze in horror at the gruesome sight. My vision blurred as I held her in my arms and raced towards the nearest hospital. I broke down in tears when the doctor told me she wouldn't make it alive. I rushed home and collapsed on the couch, weeping endlessly.

Just then I heard a creature whining outside. That piercing sound was simply unbearable! I followed the trail of sound. It seemed

to be coming from a bush nearby. I saw a puppy that looked exactly like Snowy. She was covered in snow. I hurried inside and shut the front door. I fed her some warm milk and slowly dozed off on the sofa with her head resting on my chest. I felt a strong sense of purpose to care for the puppy. She birthed hope in me that night. Hope was lacking in me my entire life, and now it has been gifted to me. It lives with me; it lives within me. I'm doing very well for myself now; the happiest and healthiest I've ever been.

Hannah Sarah Abraham is an avid reader, introvert, polyglot and animal lover. She loves writing poems, short stories and novellas. She has published several poems in various anthologies and two novellas (T.E.A.R.S. and Children of The Dead). They are available on Amazon and Flipkart. She is currently pursuing an MA in English Literature at AACW (Chennai). Her all-time favourite novel is *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins.

BLEEDING TRUTH

The moment Dr. Jessy entered, the noisy class fell silent. Her sharp gaze and stern expression could subdue even the most unruly students. Though her monotone lectures often dragged, her powerful insights on gender equality and her advocacy for menstrual leave as “a basic right acknowledging women’s pain” were deeply inspiring. Yet, her rigid stance on attendance deterred even the most dedicated students from seeking leave.

Kayal, who suffered debilitating menstrual cramps and dizziness, often whispered, “I can handle any pain but not this.” Despite her agony, what terrified her more was the thought of asking Dr. Jessy for leave—a fear greater than her physical pain.

This time, her periods started midweek, forcing her to miss class. When Malika announced, “Those who were absent yesterday, go and meet madam,” Kayal’s face turned pale, her hands trembled. She returned from the department in tears.

Through sobs, she recounted, “Ma’am said, ‘Period pain is no excuse for leave. Every woman deals with it—it’s normal. If you can’t handle this, how will you face real challenges? Don’t waste my time with trivial excuses.’” Dr. Jessy’s words cut deeper than her pain. Moments later, Karthika, who had taken leave for fever, walked in cheerfully.

“What did madam say to you?” Brinda asked.

“She was kind and accepted my leave without a word,” Karthika replied.

A cold silence enveloped the room. Kayal’s swollen eyes met mine, her pain echoed louder than words.

Dr. P. Karkuzhali is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Chellammal Women’s College of the Pachaiyappa’s Trust, University of Madras, Chennai. She co-edited the books *Subalternity and Literature* (2017) and *Unearthing the Unexplored: A Critical*

Companion to Fourth World Literature (2016). Since 2019, she has been the Editor-in-Chief of *The Text* (ISSN: 2581-9526), an international peer-reviewed journal on language, literature, and critical theory. Her creative work includes the short story “Agal,” featured in *And They Lived... Ever After* (2024) by HarperCollins India, and her Tamil poetry collection *Enna Saaral* (2019) published by Narmadha pathipagam. She has received numerous honors, including **the Kasthuri Ramnath State Award, the Helen Keller State Award, the Wisdom Award, and the Rev. Fr. Lawrence Sundaram Gold Medal** for exceptional performance in the Doctor of Philosophy in English by Pondicherry University.

A SIMPLE ACT OF KINDNESS

Aadhya was a simple and timid girl. She had the potential to learn new things quickly. She was optimistic, hard working and capable. What she lacked, though, is the most important thing to survive in the corporate world- self confidence. She didn't believe in herself. Her lack of exposure to the world resulted in her lack of confidence. She cleared an entrance test and got into a reputable job. She was not confident to socialize among her peers. She was scared to ask for help. A senior of Aadhya observed her for quite some time and tried to talk to her but failed. Aadhya was given a task once, with a warning that she would lose her job, if she failed to do it properly on time. She was scared for her well being as she was already suffering due to her task. Her senior came to her rescue and politely said - "I will help you, just do as I say!" Though she was confused, she had no other option but to comply. She did whatever her senior told her and she was able complete her task on time. The only thing her senior said to her was- " There's no harm in asking for help. We are all learners." Though the incident wasn't big, but the impact that it had on her led to a personality change over the time. A simple act of kindness changed a person's life completely.

Khushpreet is an Assistant Professor of English at Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Yamunanagar. She has recently done her MA in English from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. She is fond of reading British literature and travelling. She plans to teach ahead and wants to explore the world. She is truly passionate about her work and is always eager to connect with people.

THE LIPSTICK

The deep red lipstick glistened, daring her to reveal the truth she'd buried for years. Slowly, she traced it over her lips, each stroke steadying the storm within.

The mirror reflected a face both foreign and deeply familiar. This was her—Aaroahi, not the boy they called Aakash.

“Dinner’s ready!” her mother called.

Her heart pounded and a voice inside whispered, “It’s time.

She wiped the lipstick off, its essence lingering like a song she couldn’t unhear. Tugging her hoodie tighter, she slipped the lipstick into her pocket and headed downstairs.

Her father glanced up. “Late again, beta?”

The word beta hit her like a splinter in her chest.

“I...” Her voice cracked.

“I’m not Aakash,” she said. “I’m Aaroahi. I’ve always been Aaroahi.”

The words hung in the air, trembling like an unshed tear.

Absorbing her confession, her father walked towards her.

“Aaroahi,” he said. “You are brave.” His voice broke, eyes glistening.

“It doesn’t matter who you are. What matters is that you are ours.”

Her mother rushed to wrap Aaroahi in an embrace. “My daughter, my beautiful Aaroahi.”

Aaroahi felt the weight of their love settle over her, quieting the storm inside.

“Now,” her father said, voice lighter though eyes still shining, “pass the dal, Aaroahi. Your mother’s cooking waits for no one.”

For the first time, Aaroahi smiled—not the guarded smile, but one blooming from acceptance. At that table, she wasn’t Aakash pretending to be someone else. She was Aaroahi—seen, loved, and finally, home.

Miss. Divya Nair is presently serving as an Assistant Professor at the School of Education and Research, MIT Art, Design and Technology

University, Pune. She is currently pursuing PhD and holds degrees in MSc Microbiology , M.Ed. , MA Psychology, NET with JRF (Education), NET (Psychology). Her works have been published in esteemed international publications such as CRC Press Taylor and Francis, USA; Emerald Insight, England; Wiley, US; Springer, New-York; Springer-Nature, London; IGI-Global, Pennsylvania, among others. She has received accolades for her research, winning the best research paper award at both national and state levels. She received the editor's choice award and outstanding entry award in the International Creative Writing Contest, judged by Chetan Bhagat. Beyond academics, her interests span Classical Dance and Classical Singing, where she holds the title of Nritya Visharad in Bharatnatyam and Mohiniattam. She has authored numerous poems and short stories in English and Hindi, earning several awards for her literary contributions.

LOVE IS IN THE MUSIC CLASS

Music is the essence of Jatin's life. He was a maestro in keyboard playing . He has got all the name & fame in his town and out. He has played with celebrities too. One day when he was free, he got a call from Bhupinder, a friend of him who is a drum player, to come for a brief practice session. He was free so he accepted the offer. When he reached the decided place he was mesmerized to see the singer, she was the girl whom he loved secretly. He had seen that girl at many musical events & he has feelings for that girl. He was so happy that day, he did his work silently. After some jamming sessions the girl appointed him as a permanent musician in her team. Jatin helped the girl to make her sing melodiously. Now both of them became good friends. They did so many programs together. One day Jatin proposed the girl all alone & the girl accepted him.

After that the life of Jatin has taken U-turn. He was a good Musician but he has no formal degree for any job. Because of his family pressure, he became professional in early age to fed his family. But he always wanted to complete his studies. The girl helped him a lot. She geared him & he completed his graduation. He took admission in a reputed university for Masters. This life is a dream for Jatin. Now, he is a professor in a reputed institute. He has got all that he wanted. Love is all about mutual growth which we all learn from this.

Ms. Renu, Assistant Professor of English in Guru Nanak Khalsa College Yamunanagar.

WHAT IS LIFE? WHY IS LIFE?

Shaje had always felt like a shadow in her own life. From a young age, she had been told who to be, how to act, and what to value. People surrounded her, but their presence was fleeting, conditional. They came to her only when they needed something—a favor, support, or a listening ear. Each encounter left her feeling hollow, as though she existed only to serve the needs of others.

One day, sitting alone in her small, quiet room, she had a sudden realization: her life had never truly been her own. Every decision, every sacrifice, had been made for someone else. She thought about the countless times she had ignored her own dreams and desires, convincing herself that others' happiness mattered more.

"Why am I living like this?" she asked herself aloud, her voice trembling. That question became her turning point.

Shaje began to unravel the threads of her life. She spent days journaling, meditating, and reading about the meaning of life and self-worth. Slowly, she pieced herself together, not as the obedient figure others expected, but as the woman she wanted to become. She discovered a love for art and started painting, pouring her emotions onto canvas. Her talent flourished, and soon her work gained recognition.

Years later, Shaje stood at the opening of her first art gallery. She smiled as she greeted visitors, her heart brimming with joy. She had found her purpose, her happiness. She was no longer living for others—she was living for herself.

Ms. Joe Elevation.J, B.A. English, Holy Cross College Autonomous, Tiruchirapalli.

UNRECOGNISED PHASE

The Ferocious Sun said, “I appear in your dreams to turn you ash with my power.” “O My God!” I said I woke up and ran to realise that it was asleep. I also saw the sunrise followed by grooming and bicycled to the library, usually to steal traditional ink pens secretly from the clerk’s desk as he takes off to nod at slogans recited on natural resource conservation at the reading hall. He arrives at 12 pm to resume his supervision which after some time follows a nap. At the yawn after, he had a Rasthali species banana and undo the peel all at once and bothered the fruit as one bite and stored it for finer rumination just like illiterates do. The peel did not have a happy gesture. Following this, No sooner had I borrowed the book renewal date, another human animal pounced mouthfully into the kalapadi species of mango and threw the seed as if blindfolded. Out the parking lot, a noise stream by a lorry and a fresh mist of dust made a blurry sight and breathing uncomfortable. Dumpingly, this followed a speaker scream, “Hello! Speaker bro, are you a free consultation for hearability? Especially here.” I reached home controlling my breath out of sniffing the garbage embraced on the roadside. Wearing a pig gut extracted and stained lipstick, I stepped at the entrance, it poured as my Mother threw kitchen wastes irrespective of bin allocation. Now, I realise the dream may be true someday. Ash Human against irrespective trashing. Imagine. There may or not be the presence of natural health, it would have sprouted mango in 3 seconds if commercialisation records. The misty dust disappeared by exchanging lorry to my cycle at least for a few phases. Few phases. For life.

Ms. ANJALAI MOOGAMBIGAI M, pursuing Masters in English Literature in Anna Adarsh College for Women, a fast running worm of English and languages. My laureated understanding – Sew the story at your dimension. Here’s the true freedom.

THE UMBRELLA EXCHANGE

The rain poured without mercy, drenching the streets. Shuba stood under a shop canopy, shivering. She never carried an umbrella – too much hassle, she always thought.

A man approached, holding a bright yellow umbrella. He wasn't young, with graying hair and deep wrinkles, but his smile was gentle. "Take this," he said.

Shuba hesitated. "But what about you?"

He shrugged, water dripping from his coat. "I live close. You look like you've got farther to go."

Before she could refuse, he pressed the umbrella into her hands and walked away, fading the storm.

The umbrella had a name scribbled faintly on one panel: Suseela. Curious, Shuba wondered about its story, but life moved on.

Years later, Shuba still carried it. She had mended its fabric and painted flowers on it. It wasn't just an umbrella – it was her treasure. One day, in a coffee shop, an older woman noticed it and gasped. "That umbrella...where did you get it?"

"A man gave it to me during a storm," Shuba replied.

Tears filled the woman's eyes. "That was my husband. He gave it away on his last walk before cancer took him. He said someone else needed it more."

Shuba stared at the umbrella, her heart tightening.

It wasn't just an umbrella. It was a legacy, a quiet act of kindness connecting two strangers, carrying hope through life's storms.

I'm **Ishwarya KT**, a 1st year Computer science and engineering student in K Ramakrishnan College of Technology who is passionate about storytelling. My dream is to publish stories that touch hearts and spark imagination. When I'm not writing, you will find me sketching or exploring creative ideas. I believe every story starts with a spark.

THE LAST TRAIN HOME

The evening sky was painted in hues of orange and purple as the last train pulled into the station. Clara stood on the platform, her heart heavy with a mix of anticipation and sorrow. It had been five years since she had left her hometown, chasing dreams that felt so far away now. She had promised herself she would return, but life had a way of complicating plans.

As she waited, the familiar sounds of the station enveloped her—the distant whistle of the train, the chatter of travelers, and the rhythmic clattering of luggage wheels against the concrete. Each sound tugged at her memories, reminding her of the laughter shared with friends and the warmth of family gatherings. But today, she was alone.

The train doors slid open with a hiss, and Clara stepped inside, finding a window seat that offered a view of the landscape she once knew so well. The train lurched forward, and she watched as the cityscape faded into rolling fields and distant hills. Each mile felt like a step back in time.

As darkness fell, Clara's thoughts drifted to her mother. The last time they spoke was over a phone call filled with strained words and unspoken regrets. Her mother had been ill for some time, and Clara's career had kept her away. Guilt gnawed at her; she wished she had made more time for visits, for conversations that mattered.

Suddenly, the train jolted, pulling her from her reverie. She glanced around at the other passengers—some lost in their own worlds, others engaged in quiet conversations. A young couple sat across from her, their hands intertwined as they whispered sweet nothings to each other. Clara smiled wistfully; love seemed to bloom effortlessly for them.

As the train approached her destination, Clara's heart raced. She could almost hear her mother's laughter echoing in her ears, see her warm smile lighting up the room. But what if it was too late? What if she arrived only to find that all she had left were memories?

The train screeched to a halt at the small station that felt both foreign and familiar. Clara stepped off onto the platform, taking a deep breath of crisp night air. She looked around, searching for any sign of her mother.

And then she saw her—standing by a weathered bench, frail but radiant under the station lights. Clara’s heart swelled with emotions as she rushed forward. Her mother’s eyes sparkled with tears as they embraced tightly.

“I thought you wouldn’t come,” her mother whispered, voice trembling.

“I’m here now,” Clara replied, holding on as if afraid to let go.

They spent hours talking under the stars, sharing stories and laughter that filled the gaps left by time. Clara poured out her heart about her struggles and triumphs, while her mother spoke of resilience and hope. As dawn broke over the horizon, Clara realized that this moment was everything she had longed for—a chance to reconnect and heal old wounds. In that quiet station filled with memories, they found each other again.

No longer burdened by guilt or regret, Clara understood that love could bridge any distance—even those created by time and circumstance. And as they boarded the train back home together, she knew this journey was just beginning.

Moral: True love can conquer time and distance.

Dr. C. PRIYA, Associate Professor, Department of English, School of Engineering and Technology, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Samayapuram, Tiruchirappalli – 621 112,

CUPS OF COFFEE

Two coffee cups sat on the dining table, each engraved with a word: one read HIS, and the other HER. The HER cup remained untouched, while the HIS cup was used daily by Shari. Every morning, his wife, Jaena, prepared his coffee with care, serving it with a gentle kiss on his forehead. No matter how hectic their schedules were, they always made time to share a few precious moments together on the balcony, cherishing the warmth of their relationship amidst the chaos of life. The HIS cup was always filled to the brim, brimming not only with coffee but also with Jaena's affection. As Shari sipped his morning brew, Jaena would sit by his side, lovingly gazing at him until he drained the last drop. Though he often urged her to try the coffee, she would always decline, not being fond of its taste. In return, she often encouraged him to reduce his coffee intake for his health, but Shari couldn't bring himself to let go of his favourite ritual. One evening, Shari had to leave town for a business meeting. The next morning, for the first time, Jaena filled the HER coffee cup to the brim and tasted it. Meanwhile, Shari refrained from drinking his coffee, missing her presence deeply. The distance between them made them realize the depth of their bond. From that day on, both cups—HIS and HER—began to alternate in being filled, symbolizing a newfound understanding and shared connection in their relationship.

Dr. I. Jane Austen is an accomplished academic with expertise in English Literature, currently serving at VISTAS. She has previously worked as an Assistant Professor at DMI College of Engineering. Passionate about empowering students, she has actively contributed to workshops, seminars, and international conferences, publishing extensively in reputed journals. She holds a Ph.D. in English from Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology. A gold medalist in her postgraduate studies, she also has experience in journalism and creative projects, such as short films and research documentation. She

is committed to excellence in education and research.

192 HOURS OF BATTLE

I lay alone in the hospital on a freezing, rainy night. Care takers were busy, and patients slept. Feeling bored, I stared at the ceiling and the window. Everything looked murky, making me horror. However, I felt warmth from my friends-enemy who escorted me.

As I stayed the ward, I cuddled my dear friend, a flabby water pot in a sky-blue dress and cap. It slaked my thirst with my first drink whenever, sparkling crystal-clear in the meek hospital light.

I drop tears not just from bodily pain, but also from the longing for love and family. I was selfish, using and then dumping my tissue friend. It ended up in my small table wastebin companion, which wasn't concerned. Despite being unnecessary, the tissue paper and wastebin were my buddies, providing comfort during tricky times. They may seem unimportant, but they were my friends. My "storm shield" was a well a tissue paper that expunged away my lonely tears. I'd like to introduce my frenemy, who treated me without discrimination, showing no empathy. I hid under my blanket for warmth, but couldn't switch off the fan. Mosquitoes lurked nearby to attack with their sharp needles. For 8 days, 192 hours, I endured the cold, unable to escape the bloodthirsty frenemy. It relieved my loneliness, yet irritated me, troubling sleep. Its silence would bring eternal peace. My pulse meter beeped, reminding me I was alive. "Be grateful for what you have, for others' struggle and pain run deeper."

Ms.S.Nazeerunisha Begam, Born in Kovilpatti, pursued her B.A. in English and B.Ed., laying the foundation for her future academic pursuits. Pursuing her M.A. in English at G. Venkataswamy Naidu College, Kovilpatti. Research focuses on English Language Teaching, exploring innovative methods to enhance language learning. Received a seed money fund for project "Phonetic vs Traditional Method of Teaching," a testament to academic excellence.

A GOOD DEED IS NEVER LOST

It is a common desire among young people to attain wealth and make progress in their lives. Unfortunately, the inability to achieve their goals can lead to feelings of frustration and disillusionment. God's blessings are abundant, but often people overlook or underestimate their significance.

Amidst the backdrop of a humble lower- middle class life, Karthick's story unfolds, a narrative of struggle, Resilience, and the unyielding pursuit of a better tomorrow" As a dedicated and hardworking individual, he holds the position of Mechanic at a prominent private firm. Despite working hard as a mechanic, he struggles to make ends meet for his family.

Swathi wife of Karthick, frequently expresses her frustration with Karthick's current job, urging him to seek better opportunities and she keeps on criticizes his stagnant career, willing him to make a change. His workplace is a minefield of criticism. With colleagues eager to point out his flaws and undermine his progress. The constant criticism of his coworkers makes it tough for him to get ahead; his commitment to him job is unwavering, yet he frequently finds himself perplexed by the negative feedback from his coworkers.

After a long toil, Karthick often seeks solace in the worn balcony of his modest home, his heart heavy with the weight of unfulfilled dreams and unanswered prayers. Karthick's life is a battleground, with his wife's stinging words and his coworkers' toxic criticism creating a perfect storm of frustration and despair. The relentless criticism from both home and work has made him feeling like he is drowning in a sea of negativity.

Like a warrior armed with hope and resilience, he charges into battle against the forces of negativity, his optimism soon started shining like a shield of light. With a heart full of positivity and a spirit that refuses

to be extinguished, Karthick rises up against the darkness of negativity with unwavering determination he decided to press on.

He had an insatiable hunger to succeed and his desire for career growth only grew stronger. With a conscience clear as crystal, he walks in the light of hope, trusting that God's benevolence will soon illuminate his path. His life was about to take a dramatic turn. It was a dark and gloomy night, with no moon in sight, as he made his solitary walk home from the company. In a heart stopping instant, Rahul Sharma's vehicle hurtled into the median the impact sending shards of glass and twisted metal flying, as he lay wounded, his cries for help echoing through the darkness.

Rahul Sharma is none other the boss of Karthick's firm. He soon figured out that his boss was in big trouble. He carefully lifted his injured boss and hastened to the main road, intent on securing a vehicle to transport him to a medical facility. With no money on him, he was in a light spot, as the doctor repeatedly asked for a payment of 2500 Rs. In a moment of desperation, He remembered the Golden ring on his finger, a token from his wedding. With no shops open at midnight, he rushed to the pawn shop owner's home, hoping to exchange the ring for the necessary funds.

Karthick's boss called him; asking him to get his wife to the hospital. The boss wife rushed to the hospital and was overcome with emotion as she thanked him for his heroic efforts in rescuing her husband from the brink of disaster. He embarked on the solitary journey back to his residence; as he entered his home, his wife was furious when she found the ring in his finger was missing. She greeted him with a mixture of anger and worry, rebuking him for his delayed return: She was still fuming, and his explanations fell on deaf ears, unable to calm her down.

As the news of the accident and Karthick's bravery spread, it created a buzz that resonated throughout the company. Two weeks after the incident, Karthick's boss, accompanied by his family, paid a visit to Karthick's residence to express their heartfelt gratitude.

In a touching gesture, his boss returned the gold ring he had pawned, and additionally presented a beautiful chain for his wife and daughter as a token of appreciation. The week that followed was one of the triumphs for Karthick as his boss honoured him with a prestigious promotion to chief mechanic, coupled with a generous salary as a reward for his heroism and comparison.

With a heart full of gratitude, he thanked God for the blessings he had received, including his wife's renewed love and affection.

My name is **Rajesh Kumar S.** working as an Assistant Professor, Department of English at St. Joseph's College (Arts & Science), Kovur, Chennai. I have 14 years of experience in teaching and published review article, Journals and presented many papers in the international conference and also wrote two poems. I have received awards like best Aspiring author Award, Consistent award, and my area of specialization is Translation and Culture Studies.

“A HEART UNLOVED”

It is evident that in every child's eye, a spark of joy shines bright, fueled by the love and happiness shared with parents. A child's emotional well-being is closely tied to their ability to express happiness with their loved ones. The love of a child knows no bounds, no questions, and no doubts, only an unshakeable devotion to those who hold dear.

Children who miss out on the nurturing love of their parents can become troubled, their young hearts heavy with the weight of neglect and longing. Porkodi is one who even scared to stand before his father. Her father was a hot tempered man who often yelled and used bad words, creating a difficult home environment for her. The harsh realities of her father abrasive personality, his anger and aggression casting a long scar in her heart.

The pain of her father's rejection was a constant companion to Porkodi, his harsh words and tone striking fear in her heart and leaving her desperate for a glimpse of love. Like a bird with broken wings, Aisha's spirit was crushed by her father's rejection, her soul crying out for the love and acceptance she so desperately needed.

She was terrified of her father's temper, and even as a child, she would shake with fear whenever he got angry. As Porkodi's father behavior continued to deteriorate, her mother realized that she had no choice but to send her daughter to live with her brother, hoping to provide a safer and more nurturing environment.

She was sent to live with her maternal uncle, but she did not receive the love and affection, she had hoped for from her aunt. Aisha's aunt made her do all the household work and gave her spoiled food to eat. Despite the poor treatment, she remained calm and never retaliated against her aunt. Even when her mother visits Aisha's lips remained sealed, her eyes hiding the pain and suffering she endured at her aunt's

hands.

The prolonged emotional abuseshe suffered at the hands of her father and aunt had a profound impact on her psyche, leaving a deep seated scar that would take years to heal. She still hopes that her father will realize his mistakes and apologize for hurting her and her mother. Her story is a reminder that childhood experiences can have a lasting impact on our lives.

My name is **Mrs. V. Aswitha**, working as an Assistant Professor, Head, Department of English at St. Joseph's College (Arts & Science), Kovur, Chennai. My area of specialization is Gender studies. I have 14 years of experience in teaching and published articles in various journals, presented papers in national and international conferences and judges for inter & intra collegiate competitions. I have received awards like Consistent award, and Aspiring author award.

A DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY

In a picturesque village nestled in the heart of the countryside, a young girl grew up surrounded by rolling hills, lush green fields, and memories that would last a lifetime. The village, with its quaint charm and warm hospitality, is a place where traditions are woven into everyday life. It was here that Madhu's story began, in a family where love, hard work, and discipline were deeply valued in a joint family. Situated on a well-known Temple Car Street, Madhu's childhood house is a peaceful and tranquil area. Her heart was gladdened by the calming symphony produced by the sound of temple bells and the soft rustle of leaves in the surrounding trees. A serene river meandered behind their house, its placid waters mirroring the splendor of the surroundings. The village's rich history and legacy are reflected in the graceful curves of the silver-lined bridge that crossed the river.

As the first of three daughters, Madhu felt a sense of responsibility from a young age. Her father, determined to build a better life, had taken on the responsibility of caring for his siblings and eventually found stable work as an office assistant in a cooperative mill. He wanted to marry her daughters in order to fulfill his commitments towards the familial responsibilities. Madhu was the victim as a first daughter of the man who seemed to be a hitler of the family once.

Despite the pressures of tradition and expectation, her thirst for knowledge and education only grew stronger. She pursued her studies with dedication, often finding solace in the world of books and learning. As she blossomed into a capable and determined individual, her path began to unfold. Marriage came too early, but it didn't deter her from her goals. She didn't want to sit simply at home by losing her identity. Always she wants to be unique. She started continuing her higher education to stand ideal. Though she was having many

family hurdles, she constantly believing that education is the key way for success especially for the girl child. With the support of her family, she continued to chase her dreams, earning academic accolades and building a life filled with purpose. Her mother, who had once worried about her future, now beamed with pride at his accomplished daughter. Years of perseverance and hard work culminated in completing her Doctorate, a testament to her unwavering commitment to education. Teaching is her true passion, and she finds joy in inspiring young minds. Today, she teaches higher studies students, sharing her knowledge and expertise with enthusiasm. Yet, Madhu's journey is far from over. She continues to work tirelessly, driven by an insatiable hunger to learn and grow. Her eyes are set on new heights, and she is determined to reach them, one step at a time. Now she is the mother of two children, she throws light on the life of them. She seems to be a lady hitler of the family now where she realising the responsibility of the dedicated father. She strongly believes that education is the way for freedom and empowerment. Education empowers individuals by equipping them with knowledge, critical thinking skills, and opportunities, ultimately leading to greater autonomy and self-determination.

Dr.S.Sarala, Assistant Professor ,Department of English, SRM Arts and Science College, Kattankulathur.

A LIFE ALMOST LOST

Pain anchors me to this bed ; I don't even know where it hurts anymore—it feels like everything does. I can't see clearly, nor do I hear well. But one thing is certain: these are my final moments. The slow drip of medicine mirrors the last grains in my hourglass.

People walk in and out of my hospital room, speaking to me as if they've known me forever. Yet, I barely recognize them. It's terrifying to realize I'm forgetting things, piece by piece. At almost 80, regret weighs heavier than the thought of leaving.

All the risks I feared taking , now seem ridiculous. I wish I had boarded that flight to my dream city instead of fearing the unknown. Told that one man how I felt, despite my fear of rejection. Gone on that world tour instead of getting lost in routines.

Oh, how I wish it were 2025 again—when I was just 21!

The voices fade, my vision blurs, and I black out.

“Happy 21st!”

I wake with a jolt, gasping. My heart pounds as I reach for my phone. It's 2025. A notification pops up—confirming my booked seat on a flight.

M.AFRA TAJ

B.A English literature ,

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A DAUGHTER'S LOVE

There was a young girl named Meera who was born in a regional town, Krishnagiri, Tamil Nādu. She belonged to a Middle-class family. Her father, Saravanan was working in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and her mother Meenakshi is a lecturer working in a private college. Meera's father would visit his family once in a year. When Meera was twelve years old, she said to her mom in a childish way that everyone's father is residing with their child and showing their love, "Why can't my father come and stay with me?". On one day during a casual conversation Meenakshi told her husband about their daughter's longing. On hearing, it made a huge impact on Saravanan though he has given his life to CRPF. Meera's father made a decided to give a voluntary retirement from serving to the Nation. But Meera doesn't know that this decision is going to change her life into a disaster. Even after the arrival of Meera's father, they didn't stay together as a family, as he was working as a farmer in a rural village of Dharmapuri district. After five years, Meera wrote her board exams and her family decided to stay together. She was very happy that she has her father's love forever. But fate played a role, her father Saravanan died in a road accident. Now, she is yearning for her father's love who is in heaven.

Hi! This is **Neha**, I was born in Krishnagiri where I did my schooling in a Matriculation school, I pursued my UG in Presidency College, Chennai and right now I am pursuing my Master in English at Periyar University Centre for Post Graduate and Research Studies, Dharmapuri. This short story is based on a real-life incident which happened in my own life.

A COMPLETE JOURNEY

As the early sunlight entered through the curtains, Priya sat on the side of the bed with a small pair of baby socks in her hands. Long ago, a friend had gifted those socks to her.

Giri brought two cups of tea and sat next to her. “Next week is another test,” he murmured quietly, trying to conceal his concern.

Priya gave a nod but remained silent. She was emotionally spent from the never-ending cycle of visiting doctors, treatments and tests. “Perhaps it's time to consider another plan,” she whispered softly.

Giri put his hand on hers. “Adoption?” he asked gently.

Form filling and procedures took place over the course of several months.

On the day of adoption, they saw many babies, but one baby had the most glowing smile they had ever seen. The baby grasped Priya’s finger, and it made her feel like a mother.

With tears in her eyes, she held the baby. She felt motherhood at that very moment.

For the first time in those 10 years, their house felt alive the day they brought her home. Baby’s laughs echoed through the rooms, the socks were on the legs of the baby and they both felt so happy.

That night, as they put the baby to sleep, Giri said, “She is our new beginning.”

With excitement, Priya nodded and said, “She is our miracle.” So, they named her “Miracle.”

Mrs.V.Vidneyangelpriyadharshini is working as an Assistant Professor of English in Dhanalakshmi Engineering College (Autonomous), Perambalur. She has more than twelve years of experience in the teaching field. Her areas of interest are African American Literature, Indian Writing in English, English Language

Teaching, etc., She has published several articles and journals in both national and international levels.

She is a budding poet and has published poems with the hope of sharing her insights that have shaped her. She is highly motivated and loves the cultural exchange aspect of English teaching.

A LONER'S SOLACE: SLICE OF LIFE

Mitra always visits Mittai Kadai, a cafeteria to sit to have a sip of coffee with some special snacks prepared in the shop. It has been her habit ever since she starts to earn at the age of eighteen. The fifty year old Spinster finds a support system in the cafeteria as it feeds her with foods, thoughts and emotionally a shade to a bird which is exposed to harsh summer. Though a loner, she is a happy, independent woman who lives a simple and a life of contentment.

The cafeteria provides variety of experience as she watches people from various walks of life. Having comfortably seated in her corner table where people will not be usually prefers to sit and watch people while sipping her coffee. The recluse that she desires is as equal as her spinsterhood which normally people will not opt for. An English teacher who is good at language and also good at observing people. “Literature feeds and nourishes soul of a human” is her personal opinion.

Mitra loves her life. She feels utmost contentment with her life and completed a full cycle of a daughter, sister, aunt and a teacher. People may dodge at her life of being a single woman sans a husband and children. The world looks at it as void and may try to fill it up with lot more activities. But she accepts her life gracefully as it comes to her. She has neither regret nor grudge. Her life gets fulfilled with her taily child, “Joy” who smuggles and rubs his face when she comes.

Dr. N. Bavithra is working as Assistant Professor in the Department of English(SF), Thiagarajar College, Madurai-9 since 2022. Currently teaching language and literature to undergraduate students. She is an amateur short story writer who has participated and published in online platforms for creativity.

THE POSTMAN'S LAST LETTER

Ted, a retired postman, sat alone in his quiet home. Retirement left him with too much time to think—about the years gone by, the people he had met, and the mistakes he couldn't forget. He wondered if his life had truly mattered. One night, he had a strange dream. An Angel and a Demon stood at the gates between heaven and hell, arguing over his soul. The Demon sneered, "Ted belongs to us, he lost his way and forgot what kindness is". The Angel calmly replied, "He's made mistakes, but there's always hope for change."

In the dream, the Angel gave Ted a task: "Go back home for 12 hours and bring something that truly represents your life. It will decide your future." Ted found himself back in his house. He searched through chairs, photos, and old letters, but none felt right. Time was running out. With only 15 minutes left, he opened a dusty drawer and found a letter he had written as a child—a letter to his future self. Its words were filled with dreams, kindness, and hope.

Ted woke up holding the letter, tears in his eyes. He finally remembered the person he once was—the one who believed in love, hope, and second chances. That forgotten letter didn't just remind him of who he used to be; it gave him the strength to become that person again.

Ted's story wasn't over. It was just beginning.

Subalakshmi is a postgraduate student pursuing an M.A. English literature. She has a passion for storytelling, with a special interest in exploring human emotions and life's deeper meanings through fiction. Her work reflects the beauty of everyday moments and human emotions. She also manages a literary You Tube channel, Fantasy Litspark Studio, where she shares literary insights and summaries. She aspires to inspire readers through her writing while continuing her academic journey in literature.

A SLOW HOUR

The café was virtually empty as Clara sat down at her customary corner table, the sunlight catching the edges of the dust motes whirling in the breeze. She looked at the clock -2:37 PM. It was always calm at this time, a break before the late afternoon rush.

Lena, the barista, was behind the counter, lost in contemplation as she wiped down the equipment. Clara caught her eye, and their brief exchange seemed heavy with something neither of them could define. The kind of weight that results from staying in the same place for too long without saying much.

The door jingled, and two men entered—Paul and Tom, both in their mid-thirties, with the same exhausted expression of people who had long accepted the monotony of their daily routines. Paul sat across from Clara, briefly glancing at her before returning his attention to the menu. Tom stayed by the door for a minute, peering out into the street, as if waiting for something that wouldn't arrive.

Clara's thoughts strayed. How long has she been coming here? Weeks? Months? Years? Everything blended together. She wondered what it meant to simply be here, in this ephemeral time, surrounded by strangers who, for unexplained reasons, sought the solace of this commonplace setting.

Lena handed a cup of coffee across the counter to Paul, and their hands touched briefly. The exchange was rapid, as is everything else here.

"Do you think any of these matters?" Clara's voice was barely a whisper, more for herself than anybody else. Lena halted and looked up from her cloth. "What do you mean?"

Clara didn't respond. The sound of a car horn rang outside, and the moment ended.

Tom finally sat next to Paul. They did not speak. The clock

ticked on.

The air in the café was thick with silence now. The hum from the refrigerator grew louder and more irritating. The coffee machine gave a final sputtering sigh, and the milk steamer went silent.

It felt like the world was slowing down around them, or maybe it was just Clara, whose thoughts were spinning slower and slower with every passing minute.

She looked out the window, watching the world go by—people walking with purpose, some looking down at their phones, some lost in their own private worlds. Wasn't it strange that she didn't seem to care? That even in the midst of other people's lives, her own seemed like a minuscule speck in the vast, indifferent blur?

Lena came over and refilled Clara's cup without saying anything. Their gazes briefly met, but neither spoke. They were familiar, and they understood each other without using words.

Clara had visited this café for years, but they had never spoken more than niceties. Perhaps that's all there was to say. After all, the world has moved on without them having to fill the air with anything important. Tom was the first to interrupt the hush. "Do you ever wonder if we're just... waiting?" His voice was harsh, like if he hadn't used it for a long time.

Paul looked up from his coffee, his eyes remote. "Waiting for what?"

"Anything," Tom said, examining the window as if the answer was waiting just outside. "I do not know. Something to make sense of everything, I suppose."

Clara squirmed uneasily in her seat, feeling like an intruder in their private conversation. Lena, too, ceased her movements, her hands stuck in mid-air.

"Maybe there is no sense," Paul replied last, his tone tinged with resignation. "Maybe we are simply here. And that's it. The comments hung heavy in the air between them, leaving each person to think on their own view of reality. For a minute, no one moved. There

was no word, glance, or anything. Everything seemed to have been spoken, even if nothing had been said at all.

Outside, the sky altered, the light changed gently, and the clock on the wall chimed faster than usual. Time seems to have its own purpose.

Dhanasekar Palanisamy is a budding writer and translator. Professionally, he is an academician. His passion towards literature lets him be a voracious reader and a writer. He published 2 books, 2 book chapters, edited 2 anthologies of poems and short stories. He published poems in print and e-magazines.

A WALK IN CLOSED EYES

“Again, Oh come on wake up “I muttered under my breath when I heard “Poorna, what does the ligand CN- do?” my sleep flew away as I answered "It causes the pairing of electrons" just a second after the question was asked and applause. Before I could gather what happened the bell rang and Shankari mam said “Thank you students” and left the class. Five minutes later I found myself standing next to her apologizing for sleeping in the class on my own however the words, “Most of them were yet you were attentive and sleeping so that wouldn’t bother but try to avoid it dear” shocked me.

I reminisce as I proudly wear the Shaurya Chakra after hearing “awarded to Ms Poorna for valiantly taking over the conspirers in the same team and ultimately saving other teams”. As I crossed the stage the words “a deceitful liar, did she step down to catch them red-handed? Who can believe this?” tore my heart.

Seeing my disoriented pace from the stage, Tiwari consoled me: “Hey, why do you always hear the wrong words and worry? Remember the time...” I interrupted, and we both said, “I sleep with total attention to my surroundings, but all girls point me to a question to be answered, thinking I’m asleep, but I ace it.”

“Ya, that’s life and you must just listen to your heart and leave the haters behind. “, added Tiwari as we made our way to our seats.

S.Bhagyawathy alias "Mind Warrior" is a math enthusiast born in 2006 in Sivakasi. She likes to express her thoughts through words. An avid daydreamer, always thinking about numerous possibilities. She is making her debut in writing through this short story. She loves playing quizzes and taking on challenging tasks.

APPLE OF MY EYE

Sam felt a wave of relief wash over him at the doctor's words, his heart swelling with hope for Naina's future. As they celebrated this milestone together, he couldn't help but reflect on the strength they had both shown through the ordeal. Naina wakes up in her bed tiredly and notices Sam near her; she is under her chemo treatment and is hospitalized. Sam, her childhood friend, cares a lot for her, and she also likes him more than a friend but hides it from him. Naina doesn't like visitors visiting her; she gets annoyed by their pity, looks towards her, and gets angry at them. She is only comfortable with Sam, who is near her all the time. One day Sam acts weird near Naina, and she smells something fishy. Sam went near the nurse station and started a conversation with the nurse who checks on Naina. He asks the nurse if it is possible for him to take Naina out for an hour. The nurse rejects at first because Naina was in the middle of her treatment, and it won't be possible to send her out, but when Sam requests more, she accepts. Sam went out for a while, informing Naina that he suddenly got a sudden job. While he was out, Sam went to the beach and arranged a pathway with pebbles and bunny toys and arranged flowers. He wanted Naina to feel happy and special; after all this work, he returned to the hospital, where Naina questioned him about the work, but Sam somehow managed to cook stories so Naina doesn't get doubts. The next day Sam asked Naina to wear a pretty frock and took her out with her glucose inserted; he then took her to the beach. Naina was so happy to finally feel fresh air and get a view other than the boring hospital view. Suddenly Naina noticed that she was walking in a pathway created by someone and spoke about it to Sam. Sam asked her to go forward while he used the restroom nearby. She also did the same, and she noticed all those bunny toys. She then heard a blast sound and saw that way, and when she turned to continue walking, she noticed she

was standing in the middle of a heart, and Sam knelt down before her holding flowers. She understood that it was a proposal and felt so happy inside but faked her emotions out. Sam confessed his feelings, and Naina accepted but was sad when Sam asked why. She replied that she was a patient and continued saying her life is uncertain, but Sam stopped her and said that his feelings were real and he will stay loyal. After hearing this, Naina hugged Sam, and they started kissing. Suddenly Naina felt something strange, and she fainted. Sam was shocked to see her in such a state and rushed to the hospital, where she was admitted, and when the doctors examined her, they shifted her to ICU, and Naina was under operation. Sam was afraid and waited out, doctors stated that Naina's condition was critical Sam prayed to God and when the doctor asked him to see her he went, Naina was unconscious she slowly opened her eyes and witnessed Sam standing near her with eyes full of tears, he started speaking to her and shared her view on their future he stated that after her recovery he will build a house near a valley with beautiful view and organize everything as per her choice he continued and when he spoke about their baby a nurse interrupted, the nurse asked Sam to be out so she can inject medicine to Naina. Naina showed a positive recovery. Sam's friends brought him some food because he had an empty stomach since Naina fainted but Sam refused to have it. After one week everything was back to normal, and the doctor visited Naina to deliver the good news that her cancer is curing; she just requires two more treatment sessions so her cancer will be cured forever. Hearing this, Sam started dancing in joy, and with a smile, he looked at Naina. Rather than saying his usual I LOVE YOU, Sam said, YOU ARE THE APPLE OF MY EYE. Naina felt happy hearing those words because those are words said referring to something or someone that means a lot to us. Thereafter they lived a happy life.

Madhumitha S is a final-year English Literature student at VET Institute of Arts and Science, Erode with a profound love for storytelling. She brings narratives to life, capturing emotions and

themes through her writings. Inspired by literature, she channels her creativity into crafting stories that leave a lasting impression.

BLOOD FOR THE MOTHERLAND

Twenty-five years ago, my home was filled with contentment until the man came on a discreet Friday morning. His voice quivered and he said “I regret to inform you...” The words melted and echoed in my ears. My father? Gone? No. It might be a gaffe.

My mother and elder sister rushed to the nearby police station along with him to confirm the news. I was all alone with my younger sister and brother thinking about this could be some mix-up and they’ll be back from the station any time and say it’s not our father (Appa), he’s still with us.

My world distorted, my heart clogged. Appa? The man who behind our one and only hope- how could he leave us just like this? We were at Appa’s native where we found that the coffin was covered by a perfect creased national flag at the cenotaph surrounded by the police officials (CISF) for the formal procession with a ceremonial gunfire salute.

“Heroes never die,” I slurred, tears gushing freely down my face. But they do. The man who created the world secure for us was gone now. When my mother marched up to the stage on the “Flag Day” for receiving the Gallantry Award, Questions lined up in my thoughts which went unanswered still.

What could crossed his mind, in his last moments? Did we all flashed or was his duty blocked him completely? How could he abandon his three daughters and a son? How come he was not aware of that we barely need him more than the nation? My Appa, My Hero ever, was disappear into thin air for the nation and the people who were not knew even his name and his sacrifice.

My Appa wasn’t just a soldier of the nation. He was the HERO of our hearts, and though we lost him, his spirit remains unbroken within us. For that, I will ever be proud to be his daughter!

Dr.Rajalakshmi Alagumalai, currently working as Assistant Professor of English and Foreign Languages, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal, with 15 years of experience in Teaching and Research. This short story is the unforgettable part of my own life, particularly my brave father Late.S.Alagumalai who served in the Indian Oil Corporation, Assam, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and the recipient of Gallantry Award (2003). He fought against ULFA terrorists and sacrificed his life for the nation. I dedicate this story to my mother- without her, I wouldn't be who I am today. Through this attempt, I offer my tribute to my 'Appa,' whose bravery and love continue to guide me forever.

BLOOMING FLOWERS

I sighed for the thousandth time, feeling nervous.

I wasn't prepared for the unprecedented storm that was about to consume me-

No. None of it. It was just a board exam. It seemed daunting, but it was not. I had hammered

away at mock tests and course books the entire year. However, an unsettling flutter in my chest

wouldn't settle, no matter how much I tried to meditate. My mother reminded me to get proper

sleep tonight, and I decided to call it a day. Lying down on my bed, various thoughts began to

swirl in my mind.

Shut up. I told myself. Get some rest.

Waking to the chirping birds as usual, I got up and sat down on my desk to revise. Every minute

mattered right now.

With a pounding heart, I walked to the bus stop. I stopped on my tracks as I reached there. The

sun was shining brightly in the sky. As I was freaking out, something caught my eye, easing my

heart.

Two blooming flowers

I swear on every beautiful thing I've seen in my life, nothing ever made me feel more peaceful

than seeing a flower blooming, unfolding its creased petals. I never saw a flower blooming, not

right as I looked at it. And I knew at that moment that I was going to ace my exam. I let out a

breathy laugh.

You'll do it, you always do.

"Thanks buddies." I whispered to the flowers, heading away.

Saanvi Pundhir, a 15 year old girl who loves to express herself and her powerful imagination through her pieces of writing- poetry and stories. I am a science student in 11th grade, Nehru World School preparing for JEE. And along with that my passion lies in literature, novels, poetry. This story conveys the raw emotions of before heading for a big exam and the comfort of seeing something beautiful right before it, knowing it is a sign you'll do good.

CAMARADERIE

On October 31st, 2017, just 11 days before my grandpa's 77th birthday, Chennai was enveloped in heavy rain, prompting schools to close. My parents are unwell, took the day off work, which gave my brother and me the chance to visit our aunt's house, where my grandpa was staying.

After enjoying a warm breakfast, we engaged in a lively game of cricket in the hall, filling the room with laughter and camaraderie despite the gloomy weather outside. As lunchtime approached, my aunt went to wake Grandpa but discovered he was unresponsive. In that moment of panic, we rushed to his side, only to realize the heartbreaking truth.

What followed was a whirlwind of memories—afternoons spent watching historical shows, the thrill of the 2011 World Cup final, and the rare sight of my grandpa shedding tears. I recalled the countless chess matches we played, where he often let me win to see my joy. The day he gifted me my first cricket bat remains a treasured memory, as do our daily morning walks together, where he shared fascinating stories, wisdom, and small treats.

These memories formed a profound tapestry of love and learning that I now cherish deeply. While that day was filled with sorrow, it reinforced the importance of the moments we create with loved ones. My grandpa's story—rich with experiences and connections—continues to shape my perspective, reminding me that the value of life lies in the relationships we nurture and the memories we build together.

I'm **S. Suriya**, a third-year literature student at Mar Gregorios College of Arts and Science, Chennai. I'm excited about writing stories that explore human emotions. Some of my works have been featured in college magazines and on department notice boards, which I cherish. I refine my dream of making a meaningful contribution to the literary world, for me storytelling is a way to connect with the soul.

DEAR DIARY

Nia is 16 years old little girl. She writes dairy everyday before going to bed.

one day she was late to school and all the special classes are over. When she about to go home it's already late at night. So she was afraid to go...on the time there were some boys on the side, she was too afraid to cross them. Unusually the street lights were off. There full of darkness and the shining light of moon around her. Later , she hardly summon the courage and takes that side to go home, suddenly she felt those boys were following her . Time goes by she felt their presence at 10 feet distance. She started to panic hard. Without seeing backside of her, finally she reached her home safely. And the boys gone. After a while she realised they were tried to help her to reach her home safely. On that night she writes in her dairy that ; she is very thankful to them.

Next day morning she goes to school. The way was blocked by some boys there. She is very reluctant to take the path . A boy noticed, she is being hesitated . He pull his friend to make her go. She smiled and went.

On the night again she writes in her dairy that ;

“ Not all the boys are devil, some are there like angles”

This how nia writes her every moment of her life in her dear dairy..!!

Amin Mahdooma, II English literature

DO NOTHING

“What is this! Such a large area left uncared for! How reckless the landlord! Oh God! Wealth accumulates only for such fools!” Amma exclaimed.

We shifted to the new house today. Amma came with us to help with the arrangements. Though it is a rented house, after a long time, we have moved to this spacious place with three rooms, a large hall, and a kitchen.

Since it is the summer holidays, the children are busy helping me with the arrangements. He took care of fixing all the electronic goods. The house looked remarkable after two days of effort. He left early this morning and planned to eat out.

I woke up very late; the children are still sleeping. I prepared my favorite ginger tea and sat near the window for the first time. I thought about Amma’s comment on the nearby reckless landlord.

I noticed two neem trees, meadows, and countless small plants. I was enthralled by the chirping of a variety of birds—mynahs, sparrows, crows, pigeons, hens, and small, yellow-beaked birds the size of butterflies. Bees, beetles, squirrels, and other tiny insects joined in, forming a beautiful minstrelsy of nature.

I felt completely satiated by this lovely treat from nature and relished my tea in great amusement. The gentle breeze added to the charm. I silently thanked the landlord for providing such an ethereal experience by doing nothing.

I was reminded of the Five Star chocolate slogan: “Eat 5 Star and Do Nothing.”

The writer of the short story “Do Nothing” is **Dr. U. Anamica**, Assistant Professor of English. She has been serving at Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women (Autonomous), Periyakulam, since 2007. Her passions include literature and teaching. She loves reading

books and listening to music. Dr. Anamica is keenly interested in creative writing and encourages her students to think and write creatively. She is also deeply committed to exploring new areas of research.

ECHOES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Sheela was born into an orthodox middle-class family. Since childhood, she struggled with an inferiority complex, believing she was ugly. To make matters worse, her mother constantly criticized her, saying, "You are useless." As a result, Sheela withdrew from others.

One day, a new teacher, Radha, joined her school. She was kind and observant. During a debate session, she noticed Sheela's exceptional articulatory skills and encouraged her to participate in more debates. Though hesitant at first, Sheela gained confidence through Radha's support and words: "You can do it." Over time, Sheela became a remarkable orator.

Years later, Sheela was invited as the chief guest at her former school. Excited to see Radha, she was devastated to learn of her teacher's passing. Overcome with grief, she found it difficult to take the stage. Gathering her strength, she addressed the students: "I was once like you—afraid to speak, unsure of myself. But one teacher changed my life with just a few words. If my words can inspire even one of you today, I have honoured my teacher's legacy."

As the hall filled with applause, a young girl timidly approached her. "I want to be a speaker like you, but I don't think I'm good enough," she admitted.

Sheela smiled, placed a hand on her shoulder, and repeated the words that once changed her life: "You can do it." Radha's legacy lived on.

K.Suria Dharshini is an emerging writer currently pursuing M.A English in V.V. Vanniaperumal College for women , Virudhunagar. With a deep passion for literature, she is exploring her creative voice through writing. Her works reflect a blend of introspection and storytelling. Suria aims to connect with readers through her heartfelt narratives. As a new writer, she is excited to grow and share her journey with the world.

FANTASY CROW

Maya is hideous and dark in colour. She has big eyes and she is loathe by everybody. Friends and neighbours mocked her. But she is a talented girl, but her talents are rejected by her outer appearance. She doesn't know how to handle the traumatic incidents. At the time itself she estrange herself from others. She locked her room and start painting. She creates the fantasy world. And she shared all the joy and sorrow things to the fictional character. One fine day she sit under the tree in the ground. The boy comes and talks with an admiring manner. Maya jolt and minutely watched his attitude. But she depart from the place. And she started to narrate the incident to the fictional characters. The next day the boy came and starts talking. Maya also start talking to the boy and they both shared their past traumatic events. Maya doesn't think about the fantasy world. And Maya start fear of talking to the boy and she is started to hide herself from him. He comes daily and waiting for her. Maya suffers lots. Atlast she run away from the hiding place and goes infront of him. They both look each other.

Princy Helan is a postgraduate student pursuing an M.A.English in Sri Kaliswari College. She is passionate about writing short stories, quotes, and painting. Her works reflect the inner thoughts of human emotions, feelings, and suffering. She uses her mastermind behind this short story. The story reflects her love and passion for literature. This story, " Fantasy Crow," is a piece of her powerful imagination. " Within these stories, the reality blends, and the impossible comes to life. Dare to dream?"

“THREE MA GIC TRINKETS.”

The Inky Pinky Ponky Shop appeared without warning, nestled between towering buildings. Its wooden door gleamed, visible only to the lost. One afternoon, a troubled young soul, burdened by doubt, stepped inside. Behind the counter stood an old woman, her silver hair in a loose bun. She smiled knowingly. “Choose wisely, dear. Magic shows what you need.”

The young person hesitated before reaching for the magic comb. As they ran it through their tangled hair, their reflection shimmered in an ornate mirror. A royal gown adorned them, a crown resting on their head. Their heart pounded. “I was always a princess?” they whispered. The woman nodded. “Self-worth isn’t about appearance, but how you see yourself.”

Next, they lifted the magic spectacles. The moment they put them on, whispers filled their ears. “He hides his sadness.” “She fears being alone.” The truths were raw, unfiltered. A lump formed in their throat. Overwhelmed, they tore off the glasses, hands trembling.

“Knowing others’ secrets does not bring peace,” the woman said gently. “Understanding does.”

Finally, they stepped into the magic footwear. Instantly, the world melted into golden rivers and endless joy—Eden Garden. Birds sang, the air smelled of honey, yet something felt missing. “Can happiness exist without those we love?” they murmured.

The shopkeeper chuckled. “Magic only reveals. The real journey is yours.”

With quiet realization, they stepped back into the world, carrying no trinkets—only wisdom. True beauty, happiness, and peace had always been within them, waiting to be found.

T.Backiyalakshmi,MA (pursuing),DCA,II MA English- V.V.V College, Virudhunagar-23601102

SARA AND ALEX

Sara Andrews is at a pivotal moment in her career, having recently been promoted to a position at a branded apparel showroom. However, her journey was shadowed by a painful past. At the age of fourteen, she had developed a crush on her neighbour, Alexander. Unbeknownst to her, Alexander reciprocated her feelings until a tragic event altered the course of their lives.

Simon Forrester, Alexander's father, was a notoriously cruel man, exhibiting hostility towards everyone, particularly women and young girls. One evening, after classes, Sara intended to meet Alexander at a lakeside park to express her feelings. To her surprise, Alexander confessed his feelings for her at that moment. As Sara stood in awe, Simon appeared and tried to bully his son in front of Sara. When Sara tried to defend Alex, Simon was furious and started hitting Sara. In a desperate act of self-defense, Sara pushed him, causing him to fall from a ramp and into the lake. Although Alexander tried to intervene, he could not stop his father from falling. Simon suffered a stroke in the water and floated lifeless to the horror of Sara and Alex. Following the incident, Sara fled in tears while Alexander attempted to apologize. The authorities labelled the incident as a suicide, leading to no further turmoil. When Sara confided in her parents, they reacted with anger and fear, subsequently sending her to live with her aunt in the United States. She chose to study well, seeking a fresh start. Now, upon her return to her hometown, she had decided to live with her friend Juliet. Although many aspects of her life have changed, the guilt of that fateful day lingered in her heart.

As she arrived at the airport and caught a cab to her friends' home, the passing roads and shops filled her with both nostalgia and a little dread. She stepped out of the car, gathered her bags, and made her way to a

nearby childhood church, and reminisced about her past. To her astonishment, she saw Alexander standing there. Overwhelmed with shock, she quickly retreated to her apartment, grappling with a whirlwind of emotions. Juliet contacted Sara and asked her to attend their neighbor's housewarming event. However, as Sara arrived, she unexpectedly encountered Alex, who rushed toward her. To her dismay, she discovered that the event was hosted by Alex himself.

Roseanne, Alexander's mother, was unaware of Simon's presence and was taken aback upon seeing Sara. She inquired about Sara's journey abroad, but Sara, feeling overwhelmed, evaded the question and asked for directions to the restroom. Once inside, she could no longer contain her emotions and cried out loudly. Alex soon approached and requested to speak with her, but she chose to avoid him. When she finally exited the restroom, he grasped her hands, prompting her to slap him across the face in anger and demand that he leave her alone. At that moment, Juliet arrived, allowing Sara to retrieve her keys and return to their house., consumed by guilt. However, she believed that forgetting his presence and moving on with her life was the only way to survive, so she resolved to embrace a new path. Juliet clandestinely visited Alexander's house to inform him that she was willing to assist in the reconciliation of Sara and Alex. Days turned into week A month has passed since Sara's return, yet feelings of guilt persist. Her emotions remain unchanged day by day.

One fine day Alex visited Juliet's home . At exactly 8 a.m., music began to play, prompting Alex to look around for the source. Suddenly, Sara emerged from a room, dancing while wearing a sleeping mask, seemingly unaware of her surroundings. Juliet requested that she stop, but Sara continued. Eventually, Juliet removed Sara's mask, allowing her to realize the situation. Meanwhile, Alex smiled, feeling a mix of shyness and amusement. As she was leaving the house, he requested a ride, but she declined and opted for a taxi instead. Unfortunately, the driver turned out to be a kidnapper who took her to an abandoned garage.

To her utter shock, she discovered that Simon, Alexander's father, had secretly married another woman and fathered a child named Gloria. The kidnapper introduced herself as Gloria. Just as she was about to stab Sara, Alex arrived and clarified the entire situation regarding Simon, which ultimately brought Sara and Alex closer together. This revelation alleviated Sara's feelings of guilt.

"Guilt is akin to rust; it progresses slowly yet possesses immense power. It can consume a person from within. Therefore, it is essential to forgive yourself and allow that guilt to dissipate."

~51~
HEALING

“Kutrook” cried the barbet as it squeezed its green plumage into the mango bower, entwined with overripe, red coccinia gourds. The sunbird, which could easily be mistaken for a large, grey butterfly, moved out with a whistle and a “chet”.

“Before you leave, can you tell me one thing, tiny one?” asked the barbet. “Sure, why not? If I have an answer, I am bold,” was the response. The barbet wanted to know how the wasteland that the garden had once been – weed-choked, with only crows and ants, where the mango trees and most of the coconut palms refused to bloom – was transformed.

Now, squirrels, insects, flowers, fruit and vegetables were aplenty. The change had not been rapid. At first, the ladysfinger grew one a time. Then the resident humans learnt more about water and manure till each plant bore half a dozen okra.

Said the sunbird, “I know just this. It is a home full of women and girls. There is much love and care.” The bigger, green bird was puzzled, “How so? What happened to the men?”

‘The grandfather died much earlier. The younger man was a soldier who did not return from the war. This is what the crows told me. The family turned much of their longing and uncertainty into harmony with nature. The garden is an extension of their lives inside the home. They find solace in the flapping of the kingfisher’s wings right above them, and in each new bud,” revealed the sunbird, before flying away.

Ravi Kumar is a defence person. He grew up in various parts of the country, but Bihar and Delhi are places identified as home. He is passionate about nature photography and poetry writing. He is currently pursuing his master’s degree in political science.

HEART OF THE MATTER

As the day breaks, the house lights up with activity. The entrance, swept clean, is decorated by the Margazhi kolam. After a bath, I enter the kitchen to prepare the morning breakfast and the lunch. After an hour, I engage in packing them. I serve the dosas, they eat and leave. I drape my black saree, eat my breakfast, and get ready for work. An ordinary day starts with an unusual feel. In two hours, at my workplace, my heart skips its beat. Palpitations soar high, uneasiness clouds, the world whirls, my stomach churns, dismissing all my plans. Washing, cooking, serving, cleaning, mopping, going to work-the machine needs rest. I rush to the nearby clinic where the doctor prescribes the medicine, summons tests. Double dose of medicine and a little rest. The heart subdues but not the dear ones. Reaching home, the family looks at me with muted questions- Who will cook the dinner? Who will make the bed? Who will teach me mathematics? Who will cut vegetables for the next day? The day proceeds so does the daily chores but with a little difference. Washing, cooking, serving, cleaning, mopping, going to work and taking a pill. As the day ends, the house seizes the darkness. What is this life, full of suspense and surprises!

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HIM AND HER

Him

She was not mine. She was way out of my league. Her hair was sun kissed and her eyes were like rich bourbon. I could hardly take my eyes off her. Her smile and laughter lit up her face. I found myself smiling as I was admiring her. I could bet my car that she noticed my gaze but completely ignored me like I was a fly on the wall. Loud laughter and cheers were all around her. I heard through a grapevine of friends that she was engaged and about to marry her high school sweetheart. My heart deflated when I looked at the mirror and wondered if she would have even noticed me. I wished I had had the guts to talk to her. To what purpose though? To get more heart broken. Being a passive introvert all my life, I sighed and started my day.

The moon was bright , the breeze was warm and her hands felt cool. She was nibbling my shoulders and neck and my earlobes. Her tongue danced along my chest and reached my solar plexus. I tried to grab her hair, but my hands touched the sheets. I woke up drenched in sweat and what not. She had bewitched me, body and soul. I had to find someone to fuck and get this pent up energy depleted. It was killing me. Was this a crush, obsession, love or hate? What was this emotion I felt. Its been months since I saw her in the party. I decided to go on a tinder date the next day.

The date was a bummer. Dianne was a wonderful person, just not for me. And she was not 'her'. My amazing idea to get laid and get my libido under control was a flop. All my days were filled with work and nights filled with erotic and exotic dreams of her . Each day urged me to look for her. Finally I gave in and set in motion a dominoes of sorts to enquire her whereabouts.

That's when I heard that she never got married . It appears that her high school sweetheart cheated on her and she found out at an

embarrassing situation. The engagement was off it seems. I felt like kicking myself for not finding it out earlier. I tried to trace her but was not successful.

A few weeks later I visited my hometown and met a few friends. As I walked back home through an alley I heard a small voice. A girl stopped me, she was engulfed in winter clothes. I could barely see her eyes. She asked “ Can I walk with you to the end of the alley? Its dark and I don’t want to walk alone.” I nodded and walked with her . At the main road I waved off.

Her

Abby giggled inside her muffler. ‘He was such a sweetie’ she thought. Abby had seen Edward in the party. He was smiling with his friends. His eyes were emerald green and his teeth were so even. She was drawn to his dimples and she loved the way his eyes crinkled when he smiled. She reminded herself” Your engaged to someone. That too, to your high school sweet heart. Get a grip” and then she had not turned to glance at him. She started remembering him at odd hours. When she was making love to Rick. When she was showering. When she was alone at night. She had steamy dreams and disturbed days. She felt she was either getting wedding jitters or a midlife crisis. On one of these days as I was shopping near Rick’s office I thought I could drop in and surprise him. Well the surprise was for me. I caught him banging his partner Merdith . ,who was also married , in their office. The scene was witnessed by both me and her husband . We caught them with their pants at their ankles. But I was shocked to realize that I was calm all through the ordeal. I walked out and went to my apartment and stayed inside for a week . When I walked out I was single again. I did not cuss Rick or Merdith. I chose to be the better person. I was not deeply in love with Rick. We had grown apart and I always felt safe and secure with Rick. If he had felt stifled he could have spoken with me. But men are idiots. As months passed I moved to my aunt’s town to teach kindergarteners. It was a soulful job and I loved it. I stayed with my aunt Beth and learnt to live small. That when I met him again.

Edward. The guy I met at the party. The one I missed even now. Ed. Not Rick. I wanted to hear him speak. I wanted to sit near him and hear him laugh and joke. I was going to make it happen. I planned to capture his heart and make him long for me as I longed for him. I wanted to make him have steamy dreams about me, just like how I did. But, all my plans will be a secret.

Edward was having brunch the next day at a small restaurant when he heard the voice, "Is this seat taken?" He almost choked on his scrambled eggs. It was 'her'!! How!! He calmed down almost coughing. He cleared his throat and mumbled, "no ..please". She sat across me and I was paralyzed. The girl of my dreams was sitting with me. I was going to capture her heart and never let go. I was going to go way off my league win her over. But I had to speak first. I spoke lightly, "Hi..I'm Edward." "Abby...nice meeting you" And that's how their story began.

HOME COMING

She looked out of the car window. The rain was a curtain of water on the glass. A few stray animals ran for shelter; a lot of umbrellas were opened and, in a few minutes, everything was tranquil. This scenery looked like a beautiful painting to Sheena. Her family was travelling to Vadakara, her hometown in Kerala. Sheena's father was a chemical engineer, while her mother, Sindhu, was a kindergarten teacher. They travelled from Dubai to Kerala.

It was still drizzling when they got out of the car. They were about to reach for the doorbell, when they saw Sheena's grandmother, Madhavi, wandering in the backyard.

She was talking to the cats. "My children are coming! I've made goodies for them. You can have some too, Lola." That's when she noticed their presence.

Grandma welcomed them into the house. They were sent upstairs. They busied themselves with settling in.

"You must be hungry. Come, sit down". Grandma had prepared her signature Kozhikode chicken biryani.

"Sheena, how was school there?"

"It was okay... most children spoke Arabic".

"I-Is that so. Ha... how many times have I told you, Midhun, to send Sheena to a school near our place?"

"But Amma..."

"Ah, you are right, I wouldn't possibly be able to take care of her. I can't even recall the way back home sometimes".

Dad and Ammuma exchanged a few looks before Ammuma started speaking. "Sheena would enjoy visiting some places while you're here."

The next day, they went to the beach. They collected seashells and dipped their feet in the clear seawater. This town truly felt like home.

Parmita is a Class X Kendriya Vidyalaya student based in Trivandrum. She spent her primary school years in Delhi. She enjoys reading detective fiction. Her preferred genre for creative writing is poetry. She also likes travelling.

“BREAK DOWN”

Its evening time, the gentle breeze started blowing along with the chillness of dew; the streets are beautifully decorated with vibrant and radiant lights in every corner. The flux boards and flags of the ruling party were fixed on the both sides of the school entrance. The school located in a semi-urban city was bustling with over 3000 students from surrounding villages, all gathered for the inauguration of a new building by a government minister. The supporters of the minister are more in numbers and the celebration went on well but it got ended late at 07.30 pm. Kaviyan was now in a chaotic state of mind questioning himself that how he is going to reach home.

Already the crowd was heavy and minister's supporters parked the vehicle in the sides of the main roads that created traffic in and around the areas. He seems to be much worried that he didn't inform his mother that he will come late in the evening after the celebration. The students are also plenty in numbers standing in the bus stop to catch the same bus in which he usually travels. He waited anxiously at the bus standing along with many others, and eventually boarded a crowded bus, where he witnessed a fight and a chaotic scene after a tire burst.

Everyone was shocked and confused about what would happen next. Some passengers managed to get off at their stops, but the rest struggled to find a way home. Suddenly, the conductor announced that everyone must get off at the next stop and find another way to travel. People quickly called their families to pick them up. He felt scared and thought, "How will I tell Mom? Who will come to get me? Should I wait for the next bus?" Just then, a voice behind him said, "There is no next bus."

Feeling overwhelmed by the situation, he spoke to himself that "No one can come to take me home." He knew his family's struggles and

felt sad, but he didn't blame them. Instead, he felt sorrow for his mother's condition and wished for her care. He thought, "If my mom were well, she would be the first to come for me." He didn't blame her; he blamed God.

It was time to get off at the village, which was three kilometers away from his home. The only comfort Kaviyan had was that he wasn't alone—some others were also walking in the same direction, so he decided to join them. One of the people asked him, "Have you informed your family? Where is your home?" he replied, "I'm from the village of Chengudi." Sadly, the person told him, "Thambi (boy), no one will be able to connect with you until you reach your village. Everyone left from the area before you."

As night fell, he felt a deep sense of fear and loneliness. One of the people walking with him asked, "Have you informed your father?" He whispered, "He only cares for others, not me." Despite his father's neglect, he couldn't bring himself to blame him. His father's dependence on alcohol had caused him much misery. For the first time, he truly felt his solitude.

Some of the people walking with him were also from Chengudi, but he knew their parents would come to pick them up. He realized that no one was coming for him. Even his relatives had turned their backs, offering help to others instead. At that moment, he understood that in society, money and personal benefits often determine who receives help. He thought, "The disability isn't in my mother; it's in people's hearts."

Despite his hardships, he didn't let fear stop him. The darkness didn't frighten him; it was the dark thoughts of people that troubled him. The bus breakdown wasn't just a mechanical failure; it symbolized a breakdown in humanity. Perhaps there were still good people in society. A stranger offered him a bicycle to help him reach home. With this act of kindness, He saw that even in a broken world, there are those who care.

Finally, he reached home and hugged his mother, sharing the entire

story with her. He knew he would soon have to face the complications that would arise when his father returned. Nonetheless, he and his mother were grateful to the stranger. He made a vow to expect nothing from anyone, not even his parents. He believed that education could change everything one day. He decided to start his journey alone, without relying on anyone's support. This breakdown had shattered his mental weaknesses.

My name is **Mr. R. Iyyappan**, working as an Assistant Professor, Department of English at St. Joseph's College (Arts & Science), Kovur, Chennai. My area of specialization is American Literature & Indian literature. I have 2 years of experience in teaching and published articles in various journals, presented papers in national and international conferences. I cracked 3 times UGC- National Eligibility Test.

A WALK WITH TRIPOD!

Today is my 14th birthday and my dad has gifted me something really special: a dog with 3 legs. Dad has also brought an artificial leg along. I have named the dog... 'Tripod'. It sure looks weird but the three-legged look makes it unique. Soon as the worst part of day concludes – finishing off the homework – the best part begins: a walk with my one & only... Tripod.

First, I wield the leash in my hand & we embark on our adventurous journey. He goes whirling & whirling. I think he feels excited during these moments. One thing of note: Tripod LOVES sniffing. He sniffs everything that dares come his way. I think he is on a mission to find something. His tail is in a constant wagging motion; the soft, gentle thing strikes my legs and makes me feel happy.

I adore his little attempts at barking; he barks, again, at everything that he encounters. Sometime she is too loud but that is fine. When we begin our return journey, he is often tired... and so there is a rare moment of peace. We sit on a very specific bench in the park, taking in the beauty of the glamorous flowers.

As we return home, his energy meters are replenished at the sight of my dad. He runs barking towards him while my mum showers him with all the deserved treats. Tripod teaches me, and my family to find happiness joy under the most challenging circumstances. I think we all can & must find a Tripod within us...

Sorathiya Dhruvil is a 7th grader at Saraswati Schooling System in Rajkot. He is passionate about academics as well as co-curricular activities—including but not limited to sports and drama. He is a travel enthusiast who loves to eat local cuisines and try out new adventures. Additionally, he likes to socialize and make new connections. With a goal of becoming a scientist in mind, he gives his best to whatever task taken in hand and excels at them as well.

LOST IN THE MALL, FOUND IN KINDNESS

My heart started beating faster and my situation turned into panic. The mall suddenly felt ten times bigger, and everyone around me looked like strangers. No one was helping me despite seeing my situation.

My mom always told me: “If you are lost, stay in one place and ask for help.” – I followed this note and found myself a bit relaxed. I spotted a security guard standing near an information desk. Nervous and scared, I walked up to him and explained that I could not find my family. He smiled kindly and asked for my parents' names. Then, he made an announcement – calling for my parents – over the mall speakers. No movement was seen even though it was a severe situation.

While I was waiting, something unexpected happened. I noticed a woman nearby looking very distressed. She kept searching for her ₹2000 frantically and looked like she was about to cry. Curious, I walked over and asked if she needed help. She told me she had lost ₹2000 and did not know where it had gone.

Coincidentally, my eyes had landed on ₹2000 lying on the floor a few minutes earlier near the toy section. I asked a few basic questions to verify her as the right person for the money. Then I also asked: “Is this yours?”. Her eyes lit up, and she nodded, almost in tears. “Yes! Thank you so much! I don’t have words to thank you,” she said. Seeing her relief made me feel really happy inside and I forgot my sorrow.

A few minutes later, I saw my mom and dad rushing toward me. Relief washed over me as my mom hugged me tight. “We were so worried!” she said. I told them everything that had happened, and my dad smiled proudly. That day, I learned two important lessons: First, don’t wander off without telling someone. Second, even in scary situations, we can still help others and make a difference.

Jevin Tanna is a curious and enthusiastic student who loves learning

new things. He enjoys reading adventure stories, solving puzzles, and exploring science. In his free time, he likes playing outdoor games and spending time with family and friends. He believes in kindness and always try.

JUST UNSHAKEN DREAMS

The classroom was always a war zone. Words came to me, dancing around, yet they made no sense. The language I was to learn was English, yet it felt miles away-an unopened door. Some laughed at my plight, some ignored the agony, but I never ignored myself.

With every failed attempt, I would whisper, "I will learn." When there were financial challenges choking my family, I choked my dreams even harder. "Someday, I will stand tall." The dream was beyond being a mere student. To become a professor who ignites minds. To become an entrepreneur with a vision. To become the best version of myself.

Failure came crashing down like unpredictable waves, but I learned how to swim through them. Failure did not scare me; I learned from it. Each setback was a lesson; each lesson became a strength. I told myself, "This is my time to learn, not to waste."

I love myself, I love my struggles, and I love my journey. I love the art of storytelling, the tune of English literature, the thrill of business. Life may knock me down, but I respect its lessons. I respect people, their emotions, their dignity, just as I respect my own.

One day my words will be alive on paper, my stories will inspire, and my life will be a testament to prove that nothing is impossible. Until then, I keep walking-strong, determined, unshaken

WHO IS IT?

Description ~

On a stormy day, Noah's ring slips off his finger and rolls away! He bends down to pick it up, but soon did he realise that he had discovered something shiny and unusual - a mysterious piece that's not just an ordinary find. What secrets could it hold? Join Noah on this exciting and spine-tingling adventure and turn the page to uncover the surprises, and immerse yourself in this enigmatic tale.

One spectacular morning, Noah was taking a walk in the fresh fragrance of the park. He thought to sit down for a while on a bench nearby. Suddenly, it started to rain cats and dogs, so Noah started to hurry as he did not carry an umbrella. On the way home, his ring accidentally drops out of his finger, so he quickly picks it up and scurries home. When he arrives at his home, his eyes widen and he starts to tense as he realised that he had picked up a mysterious looking shiny object. It was a silver locket with an emerald stone. "It is raining heavily now; I will return it to the police tomorrow," Noah thought to himself, and placed it on the bedside table and went to sleep.

It was past midnight, when Noah suddenly woke up. Terrified, he heard someone whistling. He widens his eyes and shrieks. "Hey my dear Noah," says a massive blue-color creature which had popped out of the silver locket. "Who are you?" asks Noah terrifyingly. "Oh! Hi my name is Liam," said the gigantic creature. "Hi Liam," says Noah suspiciously. "What do you wish for?" Liam asks Noah the question. With a face filled with fear, suspiciousness, tense and confusion, "Am I supposed to wish for something now?" asks Noah shakily. "Yes!" said the blue creature. Scared, Noah did not respond but thought to himself, "I will ask for a bungalow, no, I will ask for a feast and three cars!" As he was thinking deeply, Liam decides to take Noah on an adventure so he makes him fall asleep using a sleeping mist.

As soon as Noah wakes up, his vision is hazy, so he gently rubs his eyes and looks around, realizing that nobody is around. Noah feels petrified and terror-struck as all he could see was light half a mile away from him. He was too terrified to even stand up and walk. Just then a lady notices him and lends out her hand and says, “Do you need some help?” Looking at the lady, Noah tears up immediately and starts to cry as the lady was Noah's mom, who had gone missing when he was 3 years old.

She was indeed happy as she had met her son after a quite long time and then hugged him. Liam, who was watching all of this take place by standing behind a tall and bushy tree, understands that he had done a great job and then he vanishes...

They lived happily ever after...

Chethana Sri Ramshetti, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

I am a regular 12 year old, year 7 student at Pallavi Model School, Alwal. I am a poet and apart from academics, I love to spend my time singing, drawing, reading novels and many more... I express a love towards reading! I am a person who loves to travel and make memories. I am known for my extroverted, fun and unique nature!

PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN (INDIAN LADY FARMER)

No one replaces the role of man in the family. No one replaces a role of father in the family. But here it happened, in this story. Woman can do anything if she will. Here an illiterate woman became the head of the family before and after her marriage . To know how it is we have to read the this story. Basically anyone need respect from others Any woman expect respect respect from her life partner. But in this Main character didn't get respect from her husband.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION:

1. Eswari: Protagonist of the story, self-respect person. she is well known for her patience and hardworking style. She is the second daughter to her parents. She is very emotional person in family relationships.
2. Narayana: He is the father of Eswari and well known for hardworking nature and he is down to earth person. He is supportive and have helping nature towards others.
3. Nagalakshamma: Eswari's mother, she is good at cooking and hospitality in her family. She is very calm, sensitive and emotional person.
4. Nagaraju: Eswari's husband. He doesn't listen words who is youngest to him. He didn't listen to his wife words at the time of auction membership. He have membership in Auction, someone betrayed him by his insecure activities.

A girl named Eswari was born in rural area of southern India. She was the second child to her parents. She had an elder sister & younger brother. Her sister got married at the age of 15. From her childhood she faced a lot of problems. She stopped her schooling as

she was afraid of punishments due to shortage of attendance.

Eswari went to fields along with her parents. As the days passed she became matured and learnt how to drive a bullock cart and how to milk the buffaloes and cows. She being a very strong girl physically & mentally She used to lift 30-50 kgs of groundnut bags, paddy bags at the age of 16 after their field harvesting. Literally she became the 2nd father of the house. She used to take care of her sister's babies and also her brother's studies. On the other hand she became the backbone to her parents in field works. So many nights she slept fasting due to restless ness, and changed her family status from poverty to middle class.

She also take care of her cattle. She offered good and hygiene fodder to her cattle even in Summer times. Moneylenders in village come to their home and buy the grains packets in a respectful manner. Actually moneylenders never go to low range farmers house. Narayanas's family always maintain near and cleanliness after harvesting crops. After two years she got married with Nagaraju, his village is 30-40km from Eswari's village. Narayana completed all the formalities in her marriage including dowry. Nagaraju's family have lands in near the banks of river. It came out only in summer times. Every summer they harvest crops in that fields. After marriage Nagaraju joined in Tender department.

After her marriage she went to fields as how she was in her mother's place. Her husband was betrayed by someone in Auction's scheme (tender department). At that time she had a daughter and a son. At that very time she thought of leaving that village permanently because of her husband's loan and health issues.

But regained her confidence and cleared all the loans by doing agriculture. She sent her children to school and cured her husband's

health. None of her family helped her Eswari's parents tried a lot to help her but couldn't because they were non local . Her husband got rid of all problems only because of her. She could save her family only with agriculture. She worked as a agricultural labourer during her bad times. As the old saying goes "behind every successful man there is a woman". In this story the woman is Eswari . It is proved that a woman can do anything if she has the will. Generally any person expect respect from others.Nobody live without respect anywhere. Money will come and go in future but respect once it comes it will be forever in life.In any woman's life there are some situations that they may face disrespectness situations,at workplace,at husband's home,at their own home after her marriage.

Even it happened they can't break the family bonds. In this story also Eswari faced so many disrespectness situations. After she resolved all the problems in her husband's family. She got respect. This story related to Slice of Life how it means everyone got respect in their life at

any situation. Once respect come it never go from us.Life is filled with smiles, sniffles and sobs.But Respect is standard in everyone's life.Especially in woman's life it is important and it plays key role in family success. If we can make our mother smile it leads to our entire family smile.

BLURRY BUT BOLD

Since I was young, I struggled with my eyesight. Everything around me was blurry, making school difficult. My classmates often mocked me, calling me “four-eyes” and “slowpoke” because I couldn’t keep up. At home, my relatives were no better. I clearly remember when one of them said, “You’ll never make it far with those eyes.” Their cruel words hurt deeply, and I often felt ashamed and defeated.

Despite the teasing and negativity, I refused to give up. Every night, I prayed, asking God for strength. One day, as I was reading my Bible, a verse stood out to me: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Those words filled me with hope. I realized that even though my vision wasn’t perfect, God was with me, guiding me through every challenge.

I worked harder than ever, using magnifiers and audio tools to help with my studies. My faith in God grew stronger each day. Eventually, I became a teacher and motivational speaker, using my story to inspire others.

Now, I teach students who face struggles like mine. I encourage them to never give up, no matter the challenges they face. My journey taught me that it wasn’t about having perfect eyesight, but about trusting God and believing in my own strength. With faith and perseverance, I learned that nothing is impossible.

Linetjebakumari Stephen is a M.A. student of V.V.V College, Virudhunagar. She is in the journey of becoming a Teacher. She wants to spread the glory of God through her writings. She is an Interpreter in her church. She loves singing.

WAITING ROOM

The nursing home was quiet. I walked into the lounge, where the old woman sat as usual, waiting by the entrance. I gently approached her, asking if she was comfortable or if she needed anything. It was part of my routine, but there was always a sadness in her eyes, as if she was waiting for someone—someone who never seemed to arrive.

“You’re here again? Didn’t you just eat?” I asked.

The old woman looked up. “I need to go.”

“Where to?”

“To my son. He must be waiting for me.”

I knew the truth. The woman had dementia. She often spoke about her son, who she raised alone after her husband passed away. “He’s so handsome,” she’d say proudly. Her son hadn’t visited in months, but she waited daily, her hopeful smile fading.

One day, I wore a suit and called out, “Mother, I’m here!”

Her face lit up. “My son!” she cried, hugging me tightly. For a moment, she was happy.

Next day, in my uniform, I said, “I heard your son visited.”

She smiled softly. “It wasn’t him.” But it felt real for a moment.

A few days later, her chair by the entrance was empty. She had passed away. Her son came, crying by her bedside.

Even now, the nursing home remains the same. Faces stare out the windows or sit by the entrance, waiting. Waiting for a child, a sibling, or anyone who might come.

I hope something brings them joy today.

My name is **Shree Jai Supriya**, a third year literature student at Mar Gregorios College of Arts and Science, Chennai. I am passionate about writing stories that explore human emotions. Some of my works have been published in my college magazines. I aim to develop my writing and contribute to the literary world.

VEIN GUARD

To Birja Devi

I sat there in the dark, bound and beaten, a captive of the local thug. I had pushed too far, and now I was paying for it. My body ached, but my mind ached more. I longed to see my family, and my thoughts wandered home, to the house where things were never easy. Bhabhi was always quiet, always troubled by the tension. My brother's silent tyranny weighed on everyone, especially the women. But nobody spoke of it or questioned it, not even the women. Such was life in my village.

Days passed. Then weeks. In near stupor, I imagined my brother and my friends, perhaps with the police, coming to get me. But there was no sign of anyone.

But, I waited for my brother. He was an imposing man of few words. He carried a presence that made people nervous. At home, Bhabhi lived under that shadow, never raising her voice. I saw her endure it, year after year, but I couldn't speak up. It wasn't done. Everyone knew their place. But, now, I yearned to rest my head in her lap.

Then, one morning, the goons grew restless. I heard murmurs. A figure appeared in the doorway, a shadow stretching across the light. It was her.

Bhabhi.

She came toward me, and the goon untied me without a word. She looked at me, then said softly, "Come, let's go home."

Speechless, I followed.

I did not know how she had done it. I didn't need to.

Dr Sanjana Kundaliya is a PhD holder in English Literature. Her focus is mystery fiction and phenomenology. She explores existential themes in her writing. She mixes knowledge with creativity. Her stories aim to provoke thought.

MS. & MR. COFFEE

மிதமான மாலை நேரம், ஒரு பிரபலமான கஃபே, டேபிள் No.10-இல் ஆவி பறக்க 2-டு காபிகள் மௌனமாக ஆறிப்போக...

அது செப்டம்பர் 14th . வழக்கம்போல பரபரப்பாக தொடங்கிய என்னுடைய நாளில், ஏனோ இதயம் கொஞ்சம் படபடப்பானது. வீட்டு அருகில் இருக்கும் ஒரு கல்லூரியில் உதவி பேராசிரியராக இருக்கிறேன். அன்றைக்கு கல்லூரியில் நடக்கும் ஒரு அரசு தேர்வுக்கு கண்காணிப்பாளர் பணிக்காக கொஞ்சம் சீக்கிரமாகவே சென்றேன்.

கண்காணிப்பாளர்கள் 8 மணிக்குள் மீட்டிங் ஹாலுக்கு வரணும்னு சொல்லிட்டு 8.30 மணிக்குதான் மீட்டிங் ஸ்டார்ட் பண்ணாங்க. எல்லாம் டியூட்டி பார்க்கிறது முதல் முறையா இல்லன்னாலும் கொடுக்கிற இன்ஸ்ட்ரக்ஷன்களை கேட்டு தேர்வர்களவிட நாங்க தான் பயந்தோம். தேர்வு அதிகாரி முன்னிலையில் தான் வினாத்தாள்களை கண்காணிப்பாளர்களிடம் ஒப்படைப்பாங்க. அதனால் எங்கே அந்த அதிகாரி என்று முதல்வர் கேட்ட அவசர அவசரமாக மீட்டிங் ஹாலுக்குல் வந்தார். நான் கொஞ்சம் சோர்வா இருந்தேன், உடம்பு சரியில்லையானு என் Colleagues கேட்க அவங்க கூட பேசிட்டே அவர நான் சரியா பாக்கல.

தேர்வு ஆரம்பிச்சு சரியா 10 நிமிஷத்துல எல்லாம் சரியா இருக்கான்னு பிரின்சிபால் பார்வையிட்டாங்க, அடுத்த 10 நிமிஷத்துல அந்த தேர்வு அதிகாரியும் ரவுண்ட்ஸ்க்கு வந்தாரு. அதிகாரி அதிகாரினு சொல்றதுனால் வயசானவரனு நெனச்சிடாதீங்க. Trimmed Beard, Formalsனு 6-று அடி ஹேண்ட்சம்மா, ஸ்மார்ட் லுக்கிங்க இருந்தாரு. அங்கும் இங்கும் நின்று என்னை தான் பார்க்கிறாரோ என்று ஏனோ எனக்கு தோன்ற, அவர் பார்வையில் தென்படாமல் இருக்க நினைத்தேன், மறு கணமே முன் வந்து நின்றார். ரீங்காரம் எல்லாம் கேட்கவில்லை, ஃபேன் சுற்றும் சத்தம் மட்டுமே நிறைந்திருந்த தேர்வு அறைக்குள் என் இதய சத்தம் எனக்கே கேட்டது.

பொதுவாக பசங்க பொண்ணுங்க கிட்ட பேச பயன்படுத்துற வழக்கமான டயலாக் "உங்கள் எங்கேயோ பார்த்த மாதிரி இருக்கே" -னு

ஃபார்மலாகவும் இல்லாமல கேஷுவலாகவும் இல்லாமல ஒரு உரையாடல் தொடங்க.,தேர்வு முடிந்தது.

அவர் கேட்ட தயங்கி நன் குடுக்கத் தவறிய என் மொபைல் எண்ணிற்கு அவர் முகம் பதித்த எண்ணில் இருந்து அன்று மதியமே ஒரு குறுஞ்செய்தி வந்தது . எப்படி என் நம்பர் என்றேன்? கண்காணிப்பாளர் படிவத்திலிருந்தது சுட்டுட்டாராம்.ஏன் என்றேன்?... Coffee என்றார்?...

Mr.Coffee சேமித்துக்கொண்டேன் அவர் எண்ணை ,என் எண்ணில் எப்பொழுதும் இல்ல, எப்பொழுதாவது பேசிக்கொள்வோம்.அன்று வாங்க பொங்கவேனா தொடங்கி இன்று போ டா போ டி யாக ...காபிக்குப்பிறகு

கதை எழுதவே நினைத்தேன் கவிதையானது அவனால்...

We enjoying every sip of coffee without knowing where the coffee takes Us to the slice of life ...

I'm MS SUMITHA KRISHNAN HA currently working as an Assistant Professor Of English undunder the College of Madras University at Kanchipuram.

"தமிழை நேசிக்கும் ஆங்கில ஆசிரியர்" நேசிப்பதையெல்லாம் கவிதைகளாக கிறுக்குகிறேன் என் கிறுக்கல்களையெல்லாம் கவிதைகதைகளாக இதோ உங்களிடம் ...

UNCUFFED

I'm going to publish my book. "Stop, you can't even produce a baby, how can you produce a book either?" shouted my husband. "Why not? You are relating irrelevant things" protested I. He left the house, and I came to the garden, where I saw a butterfly which was in its final stage of metamorphosis, trying to come out of its cocoon.

Finally it came out and sat on my hands, and asked me, "I came out, now it's your turn" the butterfly said. "I didn't get you, What's my turn" stammered me. "Can you see my wings?" it asked. "Yes I do" I replied. Initially it's difficult to get off my glued cocoon, but if I remain idle, I would die. I can't stay there even though it gave me shelter and protection. Because I have to unlock my new version, I hope you'll get the point. 'I can see your wings, but it's cuffed'. "The ball is in your court". It flew away, two things made sense

"No kids, so no need of that golden cuff".

"Cuff is a cuff, no matter what it is made of".

"I may not be a daily blossoming flower, but I can be a kurinji or bamboo flower, which blossoms rarely but definitely one day. Here after no more cuffs! I uncuffed myself, and you?"

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TWO LINES

It was a rainy day . She was tidying up the space. Suddenly, a tiny box that had been hidden for a while tumbled out of the cupboard. When she saw that, a lightning strike went through her heart. She took that and opened it with trembling hands. Two red lines were still visible and tears began to pour.

She closed her eyes, letting the memory unfold like a frayed piece of film. She had been alone in the sterile hospital room, the hum of machines filling the silence. The doctor's words were soft, almost apologetic. No heartbeat.

The days that followed had been grief and hollow condolences. Friends and family tried to comfort her with platitudes about timing and fate, but nothing could touch the void left behind. She never named the baby, but in her dreams, she called him "Little Star," a light that flickered too briefly in her life. Her hand caressed the letter she had written to the child she would never hold.

"I remember you," she whispered to the rain, her voice trembling. "Always."

The tears came then, not as a storm but as a gentle drizzle, mingling with the rain outside. And for the first time in years, She felt the faintest glimmer of peace, a fragile light shining through the clouds of her sorrow. Again she stared at the bloody two lines.

THE VACATION

Nara, an introvert woman in her early twenties finds socializing troublesome. Once a year she goes on vacation to her hometown Kumari.

As she settles in the train, she notices a small hut with a bench outside. As the train moved slowly the zephyr blew her hair and lightened up her spirit in ways inexplicable. As time passed, the scenery shifted from city buildings to farms and rooftop houses situated amidst fields. While nearing Kumari station Nara had a familiar feeling. Although there were subtle changes, the essence of Kumari with its touch of nature remained unchanged.

Fresh green grasses and gently waving trees welcomed Nara as she entered the front yard of her ancestral house. The sound of birds chirping and squirrel squeaking, felt like mellifluous song of greetings. She walked inside and lay down in the bed near a window, admiring the shadow of trees dancing through the walls and ceiling.

Every morning dawned with the scent of burning firewood. The warmth of the scent blanketed her soul. Her strolls were accompanied by nature and vibrant flowers brimming with life. She dipped her legs in the cold running stream. Her days were enthralled by nature and solitude. Every sip of tea in the porch tasted like joy.

Her vacations were a part of her that longed for solitude in tandem with nature. While returning from her vacation she became sentimental and thought "Isn't life all about these little things that goes unnoticed in the busy life?"

Asifa Gracy C, I reside in Chennai. I'm pursuing MA English in Patrician College of Arts and Science. I also write articles in The Forecast Front Magazine.

A CUP OF TEA

The sun rose over the sleepy neighbourhood, bathing the narrow streets in a golden glow. Ramesh, the local tea vendor, prepared his stall as he did every morning. His small wooden cart bore a sign painted with a steady hand: “Chai for Everyone.”

One by one, his customers arrived—labourers, students, and office-goers—all seeking the warmth of a hot cup of tea and a few kind words. Among them was Aditi, a schoolgirl who stopped by every morning with a ten-rupee coin. But this time, her coin slipped through the cracks in the cart.

“It’s okay, uncle. I’ll pay tomorrow,” she said with a sheepish smile. Ramesh handed her the cup without hesitation. “No need to wait till tomorrow, beta. A smile is payment enough.”

That day, Ramesh overheard a heated argument between two men near his stall. Instead of involving himself, he offered each of them a cup of tea, saying, “Sit and sip. Problems solve better with patience.”

The men reluctantly accepted, and after a while, the tension between them eased.

By nightfall, Ramesh closed his stall with the usual hum of satisfaction. He knew he didn’t make much money, but he had something more valuable—a small yet meaningful role in people’s lives.

Life wasn’t about grand gestures, he believed. It was about small kindnesses. And as he walked home, he smiled to himself, hoping others would see the power of compassion in their own small acts.

Dr. Noorkhanam Pathan, Guest Faculty, Anjuman Degree College Dharwad, Karnataka, India.

THE UNYIELDING SPIRIT OF SAM

Sam, an average student but an exceptional athlete, grew up as a strong-willed girl. Excelling as the captain of her throwball team, she pursued engineering while commuting between two colleges in her hometown. Amidst this, her heart was captured by her maternal cousin. Despite familial objections, Sam's steadfast love led her to persuade her father to accept their marriage. Her father agreed, funding the grand wedding entirely. However, married life became a nightmare. Her in-laws demanded excessive dowry, subjected her to verbal and physical abuse, and her husband turned into a heavy drinker. Despite enduring immense pain, Sam prioritized her husband's health when he suffered from alcohol-induced illnesses, even when his own family abandoned him. Hoping for a better future, Sam dreamed of building a life together. But her husband's demands for the property she invested in shattered her hopes. Accusations and toxic behaviour worsened, leading to fraudulent cases against her. Despite Sam's efforts to reconcile, her husband's refusal to change and continued manipulation broke her spirit. With her father's support, Sam mustered the courage to seek divorce. Though the separation dragged for years, Sam redirected her energy toward her career and began pursuing her doctorate. She learned to value herself, understanding that resilience was her greatest strength. Today, Sam stands as a symbol of determination, striving to rebuild her life with no regrets, believing that true love and happiness might still await her. Through her challenges, she proves that life's battles can forge an unyielding spirit.

M. Samhitha is a gold medallist in her Master of Engineering graduate and a passionate researcher. She is now pursuing her doctorate.

Aiming to make a mark in her field and currently working as Assistant Professor in a Engineering college.

MY SECRET HIDEOUT

I reminisce the days with my paternal grandmother who was always at my back. She was a person who stood by her principles. Many a times, I was ignorant in understanding her ideologies. The weirdest of them all, was she never allowed me to play with my companion Jenn. But that did not stop me from getting close with Jenn. We devised

a plan to move to a secret play area in order to escape my grandmother's reprimands. The secret play area was an under constructed building in my neighbourhood. We fixed it as our perfect hiding spot and stayed there for more than three hours. It was only when we heard the distant voices of our family members, we realized the seriousness of our blunder. The voices grew noisier and more frenzied. We watched everything with the sense of dread. My mother looked completely lost and my father's expression gives me jitters even now. Nowhere in our dreams we meant to hurt them. Instead, we just did it to quench the thirst of our adventurous spirit. And when I heard the term 'police station' in their discourse, I was literally flabbergasted and we immediately came down the stairs.

With our voices trembling and bodies shaking, we embraced our family members filled with guilt. My mom burst into tears and my dad who had started his motorcycle to the police station, halted it. Years may pass but this audacious memory is always a favourite slice of my life.

M. Maria Merline, I'm a Professor with a passion for nurturing diverse perspectives, cultural exchange and lifelong learning. I firmly believe in the transformative power of literature and its ability to inspire empathy and understanding. Through my teaching and writing, I aim to motivate others to explore new ideas, challenge their notions and develop a deeper appreciation for the variety of human experience. My short stories are a reflection of my own experiences and the lessons learnt throughout my life.

ON THE FABULOUS 14

It was a day, which literally demonstrated a jackfruit. That day was actually thorny but the core was pretty stupendous. It all started with a charming dawn as the head of the solar system peeped out in the east like a golden plate with a reddish blue aurora. The rays kissed me through the window and I slowly woke up and realized its time to break my laziness. At the next moment I got up from my bed and got ready to school. My mind was wandering at the school expecting the day to be normally good. The next second I stepped into the kitchen and asked my mom to plait my hair, I turned on the mixer grinder which was near me. The juice from the pomegranate kernels which my mom already had in the mixer jar splashed over my face and all around the walls of the kitchen. I appeared like a bloodshed warrior and our kitchen seemed to be a place of celebrating “La- pomegranatina”. I eventually felt that day was the weirdest of all. It was already 8, I changed my clothes and was in a dread about the closing of school gates and then I remembered Ms. Maria instructing and informing about the marking of absence for the pupils who are arriving late. I was at the school gate by 9. My ears heard the buzzing of the last bell. I ran to the classroom as the dry leaves crackled. I got caught by Ms. Maria as she pulled my backpack. I was made to stand in front of her room for 2 hours for not wearing the uniform shoes. My legs went numb. I apologized to Ms. Maria, she warned me and allowed me to get inside my classroom. As soon as I entered my classroom my classmates were already in punishment. Even I was supposed to accept it. After a few minutes, a girl came running by the corridor and came inside our classroom. She informed my class teacher Ms. Stella about Ms. Esther’s call for me. I was shocked and my palms were wet. I recalled all the quarrels and the fights which happened all through my school days. I thought, “What would be the issue and for which quarrel is this call for?” I was anxious, it was regretful. I continued walking towards the

classroom where Ms.Esther was,my mind went in a to and fro motion like a pendulum.There was a massive percussion concert in my fist sized heart and the one and only audience was me.As I entered Ms.Esther's room,she confirmed me with my name and identity,she informed me that I was the third ranker in the English Talent Contest which was conducted a month before.I was pretty excited and strolled to my classroom as if I accompanied a convoy. As soon as I set foot in my classroom Ms.Stella was very furious.I narrated everything about the English Contest and every bit of her fury was wiped out.She beamed with pleasure and most importantly relieved all my classmates from the punishment. All the fifty pairs of palms started to pat and ended up with a huge round of applause. I thanked everyone with grin and was proud of myself. On that day, I learnt a beautiful lesson that for every struggle there is a fruit which is the sweetest of all. All I felt that day was regret, sadness,anxiety,failure,etc..But this Trophy made every worries vanish within a second .I understood that everyday in our life may not be good but there is atleast one good act in everyday.I learnt a lot of things like,I should not turn on the mixer grinder when the jar is filled with stuffs. I must not be late to school, I must be in a complete uniform and most importantly no more fights and arguments in school. The analysis of our life depends upon our perspective. When it is positive and good, it is like the butter in a hot pan.

Abirami S, Krishnasamy College of Science Arts and Management for Women, Cuddalore,I M.A. English. My Hobby is Calligraphy

THE UNFINISHED CIRCUIT

Arjun stared at the half-soldered circuit board on his desk. His first-year engineering coursework had been overwhelming, but this personal project—a simple LED blinker—was supposed to be easy.

Yet, no matter how many times he rechecked the wiring, the LED refused to glow. Frustrated, he leaned back, rubbing his temples. His roommate, Kiran, walked in, saw the mess of wires, and smirked.

"Still fighting with that thing?" Kiran teased.

Arjun sighed. "Yeah. I don't get it.

Everything seems right."

Kiran peered closer. "Did you check the ground connection?"

Arjun blinked. "Ground connection?"

Kiran nodded. "Yeah. Without it, the circuit won't complete."

Arjun quickly adjusted the wiring and powered it on. The LED blinked. His face lit up brighter than the tiny light.

"Wow," he murmured.

Kiran chuckled. "Welcome to engineering, buddy. Sometimes, it's the smallest things that make the biggest difference."

Arjun grinned. Maybe he wasn't an expert yet, but at least he was learning—one circuit at a time.

Myself **Rudhransh Purohit** From the Department of Electrical & Electronics Engineering pursuing my Degree at the Vels University

THE STRANGER'S LAST CHAPTER

In the bustling city of Chennai, an author sat reading a book at home when his phone buzzed with a notification:

"Sir, your story must be submitted this week. If not, kindly find another publisher."

A chill ran down his spine. The publisher was the best in Chennai and this was his golden chance. He couldn't afford to lose it.

Desperate for inspiration, he wandered through peaceful hill stations, listened to the crashing waves at the seashore and roamed Chennai's crowded streets but nothing worked.

Tired and defeated, he sat on a stone bench by the roadside. On the other end lay a man asleep in tattered clothes, hugging a bundle of papers. The man's face, though weathered, held a strange calmness. Curiosity sparked in the author's mind as he noticed ink stains on the man's fingers, he wasn't just any wanderer.

Moments later, the man stirred and the author asked, "Sir, what's in those papers?"

The man smiled. "My incomplete story."

"Why didn't you finish it?"

"I'm still searching for the perfect ending," the man replied.

The author chuckled. "I'm searching for my story's ending too."

They introduced themselves as Anirudh and Chakravarthy, spent hours talking about books, life and unfinished dreams.

Later, Anirudh stood. "I'm glad we met. Time to message my publisher. See you soon!"

A month later, Anirudh received a parcel. Inside was a book titled A Slice of Life by Chakravarthy. Smiling, Anirudh realized that their meeting had inspired the ending of the story.

R.S. Dhanyasri, an 8th grade student at Velammal Bodhi Campus, Trichy, is a young author with a big imagination. Her debut novella,

Master of Death Returns: The Beginning, dives into a world of magic, mystery and endless possibilities. Fuelled by curiosity and creativity, she brings unique stories to life. Writing isn't just a hobby for her but it's a passion. With this first step, Dhanyasri is ready to craft many more adventures ahead.

THE SPECTACLE PARADOX

Last week, I walked into a café wearing my new glasses. The aroma of coffee greeted me as I joined my friend Hema at our usual table. She beamed, “Wow, you look so intellectual!” I laughed, adjusting the unfamiliar frames.

As we chatted, a polite tap on my shoulder interrupted us. An older gentleman at the next table asked, “Could you pass the sugar?” Leaning forward to help, my elbow accidentally tipped over his coffee. “Oh dear!” he exclaimed, more amused than annoyed. “Your ears aren’t as sharp as your glasses, eh?”

Laughter rippled through the café. Hema added, “Priyanka, pair those glasses with a hearing aid—you’d be the wise, all-seeing sage!” I smiled. “I’ll add a walking stick and become the Oracle of Café!”

The playful exchange lightened the moment, though I felt a tinge of embarrassment. Walking home, Chennai’s familiar chaos comforted me, but my thoughts lingered on the incident. To Hema, my glasses were a sign of intellect. To the older gentleman, they brought humor. For me, they were simply a tool to see clearly.

Life, I realized, often wraps the ordinary in unexpected connections. In these small exchanges, clarity comes—not through lenses, but through perspectives.

By the time I reached home, the earlier sting had softened into warmth. The next time I step into the café, I’ll be ready for whatever surprises the day brings.

THE PHOENIX

What does it feel like to live in the murk?

I gripped the bars of the bus tightly, sweat beads forming on my forehead. Thousands of devilish, hungry eyes crawled on my skin. I was all alone, and scared. Hundreds of hands reached places that made me want to tear myself apart. Soon, blinding darkness consumed the bus and I fell on my knees.

I jolted up from my nightmare, screaming. My body was drenched in sweat and I was shaking. I still felt the brushes on my body, making bile rise to my throat. My eyes scanned where I was and saw the vast city down below. My breath steadied as I realised I was in my skyscraper building as the president of my company. I held power and protection that one cannot cross by. No one dared to look me in the eyes, let alone look at me with a disgusting gaze. No one dared to ever touch me. Those events have gone by.

Yet their scars, the years of darkness stay like a dull ache in my soul. They hurt me, haunt me, but they always serve as a reminder

A reminder not of my suffering, but of the resilience of my heart, once made of glass. That shattered many times. The one that made me rise from my ashes, from the pyre of my almost incinerated soul, just like a Phoenix reborn.

I would never let the darkness consume me again.

Saanvi Pundhir, a 15 year old girl who loves to express herself and her powerful imagination through her pieces of writing- poetry and stories. I am a science student in 11th grade, Nehru World School preparing for JEE. And along with that my passion lies in literature, novels, poetry. I hope this story is loved by all, and girls who read this feel empowered to lead the life of their dreams, as the strong, independent and resilient women they are!

THE HOOPOE LOSES (again)

“Our letters came back to us from our letters.”

The midday sun shone brightly, yet its warmth was gentle rather than oppressive. A soft breeze carried the scent of freshly cut grass intertwined with the delicate fragrance of sandalwood. The floral aroma entwined itself in her hair, wrapping her in its embrace. It was the kind of afternoon where the golden light of the sun bathed the world in a serene glow.

The cacophony of the bustling city faded the moment she stepped inside the flat. A newfound buoyancy accompanied her movements as she entered, her presence altering the atmosphere. Her carefully arranged waves cascaded over her shoulders, the playful red highlights adding a touch of vivacity to her aura. A quiet confidence now emanated from her, and an undercurrent of self-assurance began to nurture fragile hopes within her. Humming the tune of "Golden," she approached the kitchen counter as the rich aroma of freshly ground coffee beans filled the air.

The room mirrored a chaotic symphony—clothes haphazardly strewn across the floor, a shirt draped over the armchair, and a precarious pile of newspapers threatening to collapse.

“Do we see from afar what we fail to notice up close?”

She turned, pausing briefly by the door, her gaze alight with a mischievous spark.

“See?” she proclaimed, her tone both teasing and assertive. “Don’t I look remarkable?”

His eyes met hers—steady, longing, and unyielding. She had hoped for a kind word, a soft acknowledgment of her efforts. Yet his silence mirrored the ache in her heart. Tears welled, but their gaze remained unbroken.

How could he respond?

Framed photographs do not answer questions.

“Our letters came back to us from our letters, but you didn’t”

Jina Kundu is a master’s student in English under University of Calcutta where she delves deep into literature. A passionate reader and writer, she uses words to outsmart her fears – because therapy is expensive. When not reading, she’s probably convincing herself that coffee counts as a meal or playing with her pets.

THE GREATEST FOOL

Once there was a king. The king meant the purpose of life only enjoyment. One day, he organized a unique and bizarre competition to find out the greatest fool in his kingdom. Odd and strange fools would come and show their foolish actions. The king's ministers used to test them.

Finally, such a man came; there was no one more foolish than him throughout the kingdom. He was made to appear before the king. The king took off his necklace of gold and put it around the fool's neck. The days passed by. The king fell seriously ill. When the fool came to know, he wished to see him. The fool asked him about his health. The king said; "Now I am going to leave this world". The fool was unaware of the fact that one has to die as well because he was a fool after all.

The fool now asked; "Your Highness! I see that you have a palace, heaps of gold and a plenty of wealth, so have you built a house where you are going?" The king replied, "I have neither built a house nor performed any righteous deed to please the God. My sinful life will lead me to Hell."

The fool did something excellent now by taking off the necklace and putting it around the king's neck and said, "Your Highness! Then you are a greater fool than me. What would you do there? "

The king began to tremble with divine fear, wailing and lying flat on the throne. He then realized the purpose of life.

I, **Mohammed Ramzan**, am currently posted as a Computer Instructor at Govt. Senior Secondary School, Jodhiyasi in Nagaur (Rajasthan). My graduation qualification is B.Tech (ECE). Last year I completed M.A. (English) to upgrade my teaching skills as an Assistant Professor. I have also qualified for admission to PhD. through UGC-NET. I see English a new language so that the world will be a new world.

THE CONQUEROR

In a lively forest, birds played joyfully, jumping from tree to tree. One day, they noticed a friend looking weary. Concerned, they approached and found out she was about to give birth. Kindly, they gathered food and took care of her.

A few days later, she gave birth, and the mother bird was overjoyed. As time went on, her baby bird attempted to walk but struggled. The mother felt sad, realizing her baby might never walk or fly like other birds. With dedication, she continued to find food for her baby.

One day, while searching for food, the mother bird was suddenly attacked by an eagle. The eagle's sharp talons pierced her wings, leaving her gravely injured. Despite the pain, she summoned all her strength to return to the nest. Her only thought was reaching her baby to make it realize that there would be no one to take care of it after her. The journey back was excruciating, but love and duty propelled her forward. When she finally reached the nest, she lay down, knowing her end was near. In her final moments, she hoped her baby would understand the importance of fending for itself.

The baby bird, unaware of her passing, played beside her, thinking she was asleep. After some time, the baby bird realized its mother was gone. Understanding that it had to fend for itself, the young bird found courage. Spreading its wings, it flew for the first time, embracing its newfound independence.

Moral Of The Story:

"Unforeseen events fortify life's resilience and valour."

Hello all, I'm **Evangeline Getsie**. I'm a visually challenged student pursuing My BA in English Literature at DRBCCC Hindu College, Pattabiram. "The Conqueror" is my first story. I wrote this story to share an important lesson that I believe everyone encounters in their life. I consider it as "a slice of life."

THE BROKEN MEDAL

The gold medal hung down around Mira's neck as she stood on the podium. Camera flashes and applause from the audience faded into the distance. But she could only look at her father's face. His face was as blank as ever as he clapped while sitting in the back.

Her father had never been one for emotional displays. "If you want to succeed, you've got to put in the work," he'd often tell her. His praise was a rare thing, and when it came, it was soft and understated, like his love—a love she always had to search for.

On the flight back home, Mira sat beside him, clutching her medal in her lap. "You did good," he said, glancing out of the window as the plane soared above the clouds. She longed to ask, Are you proud of me? The words, however, never came.

Mira was left to reflect on her own after her father died unexpectedly many months later, and she began to question everything. Had she ever fully met his expectations? Was he ever truly proud of her?

One day she discovered his worn-out wallet while organizing his belongings. She hesitated before opening it, a sense of tightness forming in her chest. A small, crumpled piece of paper was nestled inside, hidden in a corner. Her hands shook as she unfolded it, and her heart raced.

It was a drawing she had made as a child—a messy sketch of a gold medal with the words scribbled on it: "For Papa, when I grow up, I'll win this for you."

He had preserved it all these years. A simple piece of art. A silent symbol of pride. He had always felt proud, just never knew how to express it.

Miss Neha Roshni Yooshing is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Integral University. With a passion for academia, she has authored the book

"Performance Anxiety Management," contributed to several book chapters and research papers, and delivered guest lectures. Currently pursuing a PhD, her expertise spans both teaching and research. Beyond academics, she is fond of creative writing, blending her scholarly pursuits with a love for literary expression.

THE MELANCHOLIC PHASE:

At this point I'm in my lypopheric stage
I don't know where it hurts but it hurts deeply
Those cuts might be invisible
but the pain is not as it is the exposure to everyone
like I am a negative energy and I'm used to that.
It might sound stupid but you're allowed to hurt me
As you came into my-life, showed me a different world ,
gave me hopes and made me believe ,
gave me comfort and made my life better
And sweeter in short you gave me a new meaning
My to existence but when I tried to believe
that I deserved each and every single thing
All of that was shattered right in front of my eyes
Nothing is left other than the heart full memories
which turned out to be a melancholic past
I am still weeping here hoping that my lamentable phase
turns into a joyful one
But all I can do is think about the past and be disheartened !
Day goes by listening to melodious songs
just like the chill breeze in the winter morning
which brushes through my soul,
it kinda freezes me but still gives me comfort
in a way by assuring many things that it'll be alright
the nature seems to be so calming
and the view is something that can't be expressed in words
At this moment everything in this sounds like lullaby
which helps me to heal a part of me
and gives strength to overcome the struggles.
Is it a call of nature ?
which I feel like that assures me to stand by my side in all the situations

like an ardent and continues to keep my serenity.
As time passes I can feel the Apricity as it goes away from me
like a beautiful midnight summer dream.
As I walk by this path all alone with a wistful smile on my face
Fighting against all odds in my life ,
the iciness in the wind brushed through my body
and freezes my soul; questioning my existence
Do I ever deserve everything I have now?
as I don't know what to do at this moment,
like I'm caught up with this phase of my life.
Is it wrong to dream to be like others ,
Why don't I ever see a light ?
Why do I have to bear all this alone?
Am I the only one who suffers this hell!
my heart is heavy, eyes are teary, throat is dry
And there is nothing left, no one is left,
I have everything and everyone but still -
I'm suffering all alone.
With no one to comfort with these traumas of mine - finally I'm tired.
Yes I'm tired, I'm tired of each and every single thing
I can't go further anymore with this trembling body and the aching
smile.
As I'm trying my best but somehow fall under the words of others after
all this
I don't want anything other than a person to hold me tight and give me
a hug
which calms my soul and tell me I'm here for you,
I'll be with you till the very end and
will never leave you even at your worst from their heart.
And just like that everyday goes by yet I'm still weeping at my pain
Why is it so hard?, hard to bear, many years passed by
But the wound remains the same - no one can relate to it
I've never longed for anything but the little love & affection from my

loved ones is what I
want - am I expecting too much?
Finally I got to know that I don't deserve the love that I always longed
for !
Am I a cursed soul?

THAMIZH MULLAI

PIECES OF HOME

It was an unusual morning for Jane, her last day of holiday before leaving her hometown for work. She watched her mom pack snacks and food for the journey. “Where’s Dad?” she asked. “On the terrace, doing yoga,” her mom replied, before questioning, “Why are you driving? It’s risky.” Jane smiled. “I bought the car to enjoy my rides. I can’t do that in the city. I’ll drive slowly and safely, so don’t worry.” As the clock ticked closer to her departure, she heard her dad shouting, searching for his glasses. “It’s right next to you!” Jane teased. Concerned about his forgetfulness, she suggested a doctor’s visit. He chuckled, dismissing her worry. Meanwhile, her mom busily arranged her medications. Jane’s heart sank, thinking about their age and how they lived alone.

“Why don’t you both move in with me?” she asked. Her father shook his head with a warm smile. “Child, this is our home, our happiness. Don’t worry about us.” Her mom added, “We’ll visit next month for your birthday and stay a week.”

As Jane started her car, nostalgia swept over her. She passed her favorite spots—now bittersweet memories. The sight of her beloved milkshake shop, replaced by a mobile showroom, struck a chord. “Time changes,” she thought. “We have to move on.” At the edge of town, she read the sign: Thank you, visit again. She smiled through misty eyes. “Bye,” she whispered, carrying her hometown in her heart.

Anuf Shariat Vishal is a skilled SAS Developer with over 7 years of experience in data analysis, data quality management, and process validation. Currently working at Cognizant since August 2023, he has previously held roles at IQVIA and TCS, contributing to automation and efficiency improvements. Anuf holds a Master’s degree in Computer Applications from SRM Easwari Engineering College and a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics from Loyola College.

PROCRASTINATION

It will be a great day that's what I think usually when I am getting ready for school. One day, when I entered, I was really dumbstruck on seeing the entire class in dead silence, everyone was reading without deviation. I was curious to ask what's the matter behind such a surprise. I was speechless and out of my mind on knowing that the mathematics examination would be conducted in an hour. It was a preannounced, but I was careless. Suddenly I was called by my friend and told that we were belated for the examination.

Then the first bell rang at 9:10 am when we received our question paper. I was totally disturbed as I knew nothing. Then the second bell rang at 9:30am we started writing the test. Everyone were writing the exam except me. Then I heard my name was called by the teacher and instructed to start the exam as it was already half an hour over. Then I tried my best to secure the pass mark at least. After a week of time our test papers were distributed. I felt relief on seeing that I have somehow managed to get the pass mark in the exam.

Then I realized that it's not the think to be done we must read our topics regularly. As it is well said, 'Procrastination has been called a thief—the thief of time. I wish it were no worse than a thief'

I am **G.L. Jashwanthraaj**, who has attempted this story by a pseudonym as RAAJ, studying Eleventh Standard in Senthil Public School, Adhiyamankottai, Dharmapuri district. I am interested in drawing, writing story, reading books and enacting dramas and a Chess Player too. I along with my team mates have won the Second Prize in AD ZAP conducted by Sona College of Technology, Salem. I have also won medals with various capacity in Chess.

SHADES OF UNSPOKEN!!!

Screaming voice "No...!" breaks the door in the street of Santoor. Suddenly people gather in front of the home. Everyone looks tense and curious.

An anonymous boy exclaims, "The bright sunshine!" staring in awe with a mouth full of water. The murmuring voices "what's happening?" spread over the street.

A girl comes out of the house. "It's a green silk saree, how costly is this?" an elderly lady looks at her with a rumbling voice. Nobody recognises the girl and whispers randomly "Seenu's Lover?". Another voice encounters "No, maybe Kanmani's daughter has returned from West Bengal". Their speculation continued there with murmuring.

Kanmani's somber voice echoing inside the home while looking at her son Seenu photo on the wall. Ganapathi came out from the home and said, "It's out of your business! Please leave." in his unwelcoming trembling voice. He calls her and welcomes her inside the home and saying, "Everything will be fine, come inside Sreemathi, I'll console your mother". She hesitates, thinking of her mother, not the others. Yet, she steps inside.

Kanmani stops Sreemathi before the doorway, saying, "I feel ashamed of you. You're not the pride of our family. What happened to you, SEENU?"

Here I'm **NIJA DOSS**, pursuing MA English literature. An optimistic person who is always shown myself as an EGALITARIAN, goes on the flyover without any restrictions. I've already published 2 Articles in other journals and continuing my pen down with Poetry and Stories as a literary aspirant.

A PRISON WITHIN ME

I used to think the world was mine. Life was fantastic, and everything seemed to fall into place effortlessly. I was happy and carefree, and the world reflected that joy back at me. But one day, everything shifted. I realized I'd spent so much time dealing with the outside world that I'd completely ignored the world within me – a sort of prison I'd unknowingly created.

This inner prison was a much tougher challenge than anything I'd faced before. My mind, which used to be full of happy thoughts, became a difficult place. Each day was a struggle against the feeling of being trapped. I thought about people in real prisons and how hard it must be for them. I felt isolated, like I was stuck in a corner of my own mind. I became increasingly sad, and it felt like the walls of my inner prison were closing in on me. The world outside seemed less bright and even familiar people seemed strange. Happy memories from the past just made me feel nostalgic and sad.

I longed for the days when I felt free, like a bee buzzing around flowers or the wind blowing through the trees. Now, I felt stuck and unable to move forward. But as time went on, I started to adapt to this new reality. The negative feelings began to change, and I started to understand myself better. Being separated from the outside world actually helped me connect with myself in a way I never had before.

This inner prison became an unexpected teacher. It taught me how to stay calm even when things are really tough. It taught me to keep going, even when I felt like giving up and keep changing and adapting to whatever life throws my way. Now, I think of this inner prison as the best and safest place I know. It helped me become stronger and wiser than I ever imagined I could be. It showed me that even in the darkest of places; you can find strength and discover who you truly are.

Ashhar Saleem Ansari is an aspiring writer, pursuing Teacher training program, Bachelor of Education form Integral University, Lucknow. He has keen interest in poetry writing, short story and essays. He is also fond of translation and has translated “Urashima Taro- A Japanese Folktale” and “The Last leaf- O’ Henry.

THE MISSED MESSAGE

Aryan was always on his phone scrolling, texting, gaming. At home, at school, even during family meals, his eyes never left the screen. His mother, a widow, worked long hours to support him, but he barely noticed.

One evening, as he sat playing a game, his mother called from the kitchen, "Aryan, can you help me for a minute? I don't feel well" "Later, Ma," he mumbled, eyes glued to the screen.

A few minutes later, he heard a loud crash. Annoyed, he sighed and kept playing. "Ma?" he called absentmindedly, but there was no reply. When the level ended, he finally looked up. The house was silent. A strange feeling crept over him. He walked to the kitchen his mother lay motionless on the floor, her hand still clutching a broken plate. Her phone, beside her, had a half-typed message: "Aryan, I don't feel well..."

His heart pounded. He shook her, called her name but she didn't move. In a panic, he grabbed his own phone and called for help.

By the time the ambulance arrived, but it was too late.

Days later, Aryan sat alone in the empty house. His phone buzzed with messages from friends, game notifications, and social media alerts but the one message he longed for, his mother's voice calling him, would never come again.

He scrolled through his past chats with her. Most were short replies, distracted answers. The last message she had sent was unread: "Are you busy?"

Tears blurred his vision as he typed a reply, knowing she would never see it.

"I'm sorry, Ma. I should have looked up."

With trembling hands, he placed his phone beside hers on the table, realizing too late that no game, no message, no screen was ever more

important than the moments he had lost forever.

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REMEMBER YOU HAVE A DAUGHTER

Sita went to her father's home for a summer vacation with her children. She talked to her mother a lot, but she didn't talk to her father. Her father, Mohan, had never spent much time with Sita, as she was a girl. He always spent time with his son, Ramu, because he thought only Ramu would take care of him in his old age.

After two days, Ramu said to his father, "Dad, my wife finds it difficult to take care of you and Mom. So, I have decided to put you both in an expensive old age home, where they will take care of you well."

Mohan was heartbroken. His eyes were filled with tears, and he couldn't even speak. Sita, who was listening to their conversation, interrupted and said, "Dad, you not only have a son, but also a daughter. Come with me, I will take care of you both."

Mohan said, "Your in-laws won't agree to it."

Sita replied, "No, Dad. They will support me because I'm not asking you to live with me. Let's rent a home nearby, and I will prepare food and pack it in a tiffin box so that either my husband or one of my children will hand it over to you."

Mohan stood still, with tears in his eyes. Sita understood his situation and said, "Dad, don't feel guilty. I am always there for you. And remember, you have a daughter."

Gokila Ganesh is a M.A. student of V.V.V College in Virudhunagar. She is in her journey of becoming a great teacher in the footsteps of her grandmother, Vasantha. She loves writing. She has published a book "Why did you love me". She loves teaching.

NATURE'S LULLABY

Isabella was thirteen today, it was her birthday, she usually celebrates her birthday with her parents but this year both her parents were away on work and Bella had to stay with her in aunt in the village. She hated being in the village, Bella always liked the city more and she loved the noise, traffic, the bright street at night and busy life everyone had. She felt like life was moving but her hometown made her feel lonely and slow. She woke up to a sunny day with birds creeping outside. It felt quite to her. Her aunt had prepared some breakfast for her which tastes delicious, she devoured her food and decided take a stroll. She walked a long way thinking about how the day would be with her friends. Suddenly she realized she lost her way. Bella in worry walked through the path, it felt breezy and damp she walked across the forest to see a magnificent sight, a beautiful valley with meadows on both sides filled with Daisies and a river flowing in between. Bella couldn't contain her joy and excitement; she has never experienced such a sight in her life. She felt alive for the first time. Bella ran around the meadow with Joy. She sat down to record her moments in her diary. She wrote " life is fleeting and moments of joy are precious irrespective of their kind, cherish them the most".

Varsha Balakrishnan MBA Graduate from Kerala.

I have always wanted to share a lot as a person, communicating through words could be called my best friend at times. I have had the urge to write something for a while and like to thank Ivarin publications for this opportunity.

YEARNING FOR HER EMBRACE

I am Tharunya, 23 years old, living in a rented apartment in Mumbai. My days are consumed by office work, and it has become a monotonous routine. Deep inside, I feel as though I'm living a mechanical life. One evening, after finishing work, I sat on the balcony, gazing at the stars. Memories of my mom flooded my mind. I will never forget when I was 10 and forgot my lunchbox. Without hesitation, my mom ran almost a mile to catch the bus and hand it to me, smiling despite her exhaustion.

My thoughts then shifted to the annual day at school. I had won a prize for scoring the highest marks, and my mom was overjoyed. Her eyes filled with tears as she watched me on stage, and she kept cherishing me with praise until I got down.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang, and I rushed to open it, hoping it was my mom, but it was only the milkman. After receiving the milk, I placed it in the fridge and saw the empty space where my mom used to keep my favorite chocolates.

A wave of longing washed over me, and I felt the emptiness in my heart. The fridge, once full of surprises, now stood cold and empty.

We spent so much time together—gossiping, shopping, and watching movies. I miss her so much that I often scroll through her pictures on my phone, cherishing each memory.

We talk for hours on the phone, but it never feels like enough. I want to return to her, but financial struggles keep me here. I need to earn more to fulfill her wishes and ensure she never has to suffer again.

I long to meet her, to spend time with her, but for now, I wait. Even in a crowd, I feel alone without her.

Every meal reminds me of her handmade food, which I never appreciated at the time. But now, I find myself yearning for it. I don't know when that day will come, but I am eagerly waiting for it.

I am confident that one day I will return to her, relive the beautiful moments we shared, and feel the warmth of her embrace once again.

Tharunya N, M.A, English Literature(1st year),Department of English and Foreign Languages,Bharathiar University,Coimbatore-641046

FORTUNE IS A DISCOUNT, BUT POVERTY IS A BONUS

A student from a below-middle-class family completed his schooling at the age of 18. He is a backward student in age compared to his friends. He is clever and intelligent, and he has a hardworking nature. Actually, he should (might) have completed his 10th standard at the age of 15, but due to shifting schools from government to private, he delayed in age. By the completion of intermediate, he is 19 years of age. Actually, his goal is to become a doctor. Due to the reservation system, he was disqualified 2 times in NEET after 2 years of coaching.

The third time got placement in B.Sc. Agriculture due to the reservation system. His aim is to become a doctor, but he got placement in B.Sc. Agriculture. He adjusted his goal, meaning he accepted that seat. By the completion of his special degree, he is at the age of 25. He couldn't get a job in the government sector at that time because he is an OBC candidate. He started online coaching for a master's [MBA] for special qualification. He gives his best, and he is very intelligent from past experiences.

He failed on the 1st attempt. He qualified on the second attempt, but he didn't get a seat due to reservation. In the 3rd attempt, he got placement outside the state in a B-grade private college, which is too far from his locality. Approximately it takes 40-45 lakhs to complete his master's in that college; this is not the story of one single candidate; it is similar to so many middle-class students. His parents can't pay that much of a fee.

If he got a seat in his state, it is better for them. Now he is 27 years old. He got an idea to complete his studies under an educational loan, but his family background is poor. They can't pay that much EMI every month. On the other hand, his parents are becoming weak due to their

labor works. Is Poverty his fate? Is success his boon? Is time (his age) his enemy? Now tell me, is he winning? Luckiness is absent in his life.

From the beginning (childhood), he adjusted everything. Adjustments are part of life. But in his life, it seems adjustments are life. Even one thing doesn't happen according to his plan in studies. Now tell me what he will do. Due to reservation systems, he lost his bright future. You may say, Let's take another route. If he takes light or another route, he will become like his father only, like a middle-class person.

He has knowledge, intelligence, foresight, etc. Is anything used for him? No .Nothing will be used. As a graduate student, he can choose the private sector, but in private, if he should start as an undergraduate, he stays middle class in his entire life. Through this we can conclude, "Let it be". Is this fair? Will you accept? Nobody will accept this. But we have to. Because this is a life.

THEME: Accept the situations whatever life gives you. Maybe today he fail, but some other day surely he win in other sector.

THE UNSPOKEN BURDEN

Kavya was the youngest daughter, adored yet sheltered. Growing up, her life revolved around studies, earning her accolades as the brightest student in college. She dreamt of exploring the world, laughing with friends, and tasting freedom. Yet, those dreams stayed locked away. Her brothers' stern gazes and her father's expectations kept her from stepping outside the narrow boundaries of tradition. When her marriage was arranged, she clung to hope this would be her chance to live. Her husband, Rohit, was kind and supportive. But life after marriage was far from what she imagined. The weight of household responsibilities fell solely on her. She was expected to cook, clean, and care for the family, despite having a demanding job. Then, her son arrived unplanned, too soon. Kavya's world shrank further. Days blended into sleepless nights of feeding, diapers, and work deadlines. She thought her siblings, whom she had once cared for selflessly, would lend a hand. But their lives had moved on, their silence louder than words.

Kavya often stared at the walls, torn between her ambitions and her child's needs. One day, as she cradled her baby, tears streaming down her face, she whispered, "Why didn't anyone tell me I needed to be strong, to be ready for this?"

She realized then: no one would come to rescue her. Strength had to come from within. Slowly, she began carving time for herself an hour to read, to plan, to dream. It wasn't easy, but she resolved to teach her child one thing: Independence is your greatest ally.

Her message to herself and society was clear: A girl is not born to sacrifice herself at every stage. Teach her to stand strong, to dream big, and to live for herself too.

Dr. Noorkhanam Pathan, Guest Faculty, Anjuman Degree College Dharwad, Karnataka, India.

THE WHEELCHAIR

Memories are like dreams...we have no control over which part we wish to remember. Memories come on little postcards from the past, remind us of a part of something and disappear.

During my school days we lived in a government setup of quarters and colonies. Going to, and coming back from the school, was like a ritual. Kids of the neighbourhood would go together. I too went with my neighbour whose elder sister Ragini Didi used to go on her wheelchair. I was utterly fascinated with the ‘thing’ as I assumed that Didi could do practically everything, on the wheelchair.

Due to the hilly terrain, roads to the school had slopes. We would hold the wheelchair to control it. During one of those rituals of coming back from the school we were abruptly stopped by Didi at the top of a slope. She muttered, “Leave me.” Before we could react, she repeated, “Leave the wheelchair.” We looked at each other, our eyes met and we knew it was coming. We loosened the grip on the wheelchair and it slowly started rolling down the slope. We laughed, shouted, clapped, and ran to catch up with the momentum of the wheelchair. After few seconds of free rolling, it slowed down.

In that commotion I somehow did not miss what Didi mumbled, that still shakes me to the core whenever this memory postcard comes back to me. With an emancipating smile she said, “I felt like a free bird.”

Dr. Lopamudra Banerjee is an Assistant Professor in English at Government College of Arts Science and Commerce, Khandola, Marcela-Goa, having more than 12 years of experience in the field of teaching and education. She is a storyteller with a passion for exploring human thoughts and experiences through fiction. Her work delves into the themes of identity and personal transformation, drawing inspiration from her own experiences.

SMALL GESTURES, BIG IMPACT

Madhurika never understood the true value of physical affection in parenting until her niece, Lakshitha, a twelve-year-old, hugged her during a visit to India. This simple act made her realize how important gestures like a kiss on the forehead or a hug after a long day – are much needed for making a child or an adult feel loved and valued.

One evening, sitting together in the living room with her daughter, Madhurika began, her voice trembling, “I’ve been reflecting a lot on how I raised you. I don’t think I was always the mother you needed me to be. I was so focused on doing things perfectly that I missed being fully present in your life. I’m sorry, dear.” She waited in silence, holding her breath.

After a long pause, Shreejha gently took her hand and said, “Mom, I always knew you loved me. I just needed more of your hugs, more of your time.” Madhurika, with newfound determination, promised, “I’ll be here now,” and meant it.

Madhurika felt a weight lift off her chest. There was no magic fix for the years lost. Though, she couldn’t change the past, her quiet apology and Shreejha’s forgiveness allowed them to begin a new chapter, building a more affectionate and connected relationship moving forward.

Parenting isn’t just about grand moments; it’s the small, tender gestures that truly shape a child’s emotional well-being. Even as children grow and become independent, those hugs and kisses continue to reassure them of their parents’ love.

Dr. P. Mathumathi is an Assistant Professor of English at Anna University Regional Campus - Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, South India. As a debut short story writer, she is eager to share her first literary work with readers. Her writing draws inspiration from personal experiences and aims to explore themes of connection, growth, and

self-reflection. Passionate about storytelling, she looks forward to delving deeper into the art of fiction. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, observing human nature, and finding new ways to nurture her creativity.

THE SHADOW OF RESILIENCE

After the rain had stopped, the city slowly awakened. The streets were covered with scattered leaves. As usual, Meera opened her small food stall. She lit the stove with a tiny matchstick and whispered a silent prayer—today had to be a good day for business.

Her stall was simple. It wasn't grand like the big restaurants, but the aroma of her food and the warmth of her soup made it a safe haven for those who had battled hunger for days. Her first customer arrived—a frail old man, walking slowly. He looked at her and softly asked for a dosa.

Meera smiled. "Appa, today I have strong faith in myself. Just a moment."

She quickly prepared a hot, crispy dosa and placed it in front of him. The old man took a bite, his eyes lighting up with appreciation. "Daughter, your cooking is as wonderful as your courage."

Those words felt like a wave of emotion washing over Meera. Life had never been easy for her. Losing her husband, raising a child alone—every day was a battle. But it wasn't just her food that nourished people; her smile had also become a source of warmth for her customers.

As the city fully came to life, Meera kept working. She knew—today was a new day. No matter what challenges lay ahead, she was ready to face them.

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FINDING WINGS

At a young age, Samar had to look for opportunities to work – washing car windows, waiting tables at eateries and peddling trifles. His dad was no more. Mom was left disabled due to an accident. Despite his academic achievement in teenage, his studies were interrupted.

Mother and son lived near an airport. The continual sight of numerous airplanes made him aspire to become a pilot. For the time being, he had to be content with working at a nearby hotel. That was where he came across a man who seemed to have found success in his chosen business.

He was engrossed in a book and did not notice that Samar was waiting to serve coffee. The latter read out ‘Think and Grow Rich’ in an audible voice. The man smiled. When Samar eagerly asked , “Do we get rich if we read this book?”, the man politely responded, “You can read any book and become wealthy. Reading is a treasure trove.”

They began talking and shared the facts of Samar’s impoverishment and the guest’s rise from rags to riches. The man also revealed that his late son resembled Samar. He took the youngster’s address and left after gifting the book.

The man appeared again to sponsor Samar’s education and meet mother’s medical expenses. The boy studied hard with the determination to give back to his benefactor one day, both in terms of filial love and money. He qualified for pilot training, completed the course and was recruited by a national airline company. Samar frequently flew to and fro the airport that observed in the early years. Books continued to keep him company.

Mohammad Roshan S.J. is a student of diploma in civil engineering. He wishes to hone his creative writing skills and perpetuate the blessed memory of his parents, Mr. Salahudeen and Mrs. Jubaila.

LONGING FOR MOTHER'S LOVE

There lived a man called Tom, loves his mother a lot. His only ambition is to make his mom happy and keep her always smile. Though she hates him much for years till now for no reason, he showers love on her, as she was worked hard to brought him up from his childhood. He knows her hard work, sufferings, pain and struggles. He has two sisters, and he takes care of them also with great love and care. But she loves her daughters only and she keeps complaining about him to the daughters and they too never understand him and his love, in spite of supporting, loving and caring him, they too advising and scolding him by supporting mom. The great tragedy is his sisters and his mom never understand his true love and sacrifice towards his family but the surprise is by looking at him for many years how much he loves, cares and takes pain for his family also they never understand and realize his deep love. His mom keeps whispering that, “he never gives her respect, care and love”, and that was her major complaints most of the time. No one understand him in his life better than Mrs.Tom, she supports and comforts him a lot. Her eyes filled with tears and felt heaviness in her heart, when he said, “I am poison to my mom, she hates me that much and no step mother also can treat their kid like this, that much she hates me”

ONCE A WHILE

On my way to airport, I asked driver to stop at that one lavender. field at quit early morning. I was Lost in past instead of enjoying the beauty of the scenic landscape.

Suddenly, my eyes landed on a figure so graceful yet overwhelming. It was Dan. He didn't notice me so I tried to escape fast but my fate had other plans.

I tried to escape and ignore him though he caught up with me and said "Hey! How are you?" I exclaimed "me?" he smirked and said "well, wasn't hoping to find you" I said, bit frustrated "me neither". while talking with him it didn't felt like we had fallen apart. Out of blue I asked "are you....? you know what I mean" c hanging his tone he answered "yah! I have a fiancée" with regret I said "you got what you wished for" after silence for while I asked, lost in thoughts, "are you happy?" he tentatively spoke "truly, no.... how about you?". At that moment I realized that may be I was never good enough for him, though I couldn't let him go. I should still forget him. I was lost in thoughts unable to notice surroundings.

Suddenly, Dan placed his hand on my cheek and gently said "let go of it". Hearing that I pulled myself up "well, you can't always win. It's okay to lose once in a while, right?" he heartwornly smiled and it just felt right.

My name **Swara P Rathod**. birth October 2010. Running age 15years. I am from saraswati schooling system. not much of a writer just an ordinary human who created few unofficial creations that reflects her own heartbroken, her own regrets and mistakes to be fixed till now.

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SWING

She saw the wooden plank with its two rugged ropes and got fascinated, as if she had never seen one. Whether it was the ruggedness of the swing or the ambience that took her captive, one couldn't say. Beyond the green fence and among the dense green trees it emerged refreshingly vintage.

She saw two girls coming out from the house, approaching the swing. The elder one, taller, wearing a white dress with blue frills, the younger chubby girl dressed in all pink. She herself had all the three colours in her pretty dress but envied them. What a pretty swing they had! She was lost in these thoughts when someone called her, "Come, it's getting late."

A few days later, walking on the same road she stopped again, to have one, just one look at the pretty swing. Oh! The girls caught her peeping, they smiled and waved at her, she blushing waved back. The elder one called to her, "Come, play with us". They insisted relentlessly, forcing her to cross the threshold. They decided to take turns, she requested to ride last.

It was her turn. She touched the rope softly, as if the rope would break if she held it tight. Slowly she began to sit on the wooden plank, she didn't want to haste. Immersing herself in the joy she began to ride the swing What just happened! the swing crashed.

Mansha Malik works as an Assistant Professor (English) in the Higher Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir. She has been teaching for more than eight years. She obtained her M.A and M.Phil. from the University of Kashmir. Her area of specialization is Ecocriticism.