



Vol. 12, No. 3
CLRI Aug 2025

Page 159-195

The week end in Goa

Saranyan BV

*You cannot connect the dots looking forward;
you can only connect them looking backwards*

-- Steve jobs

I decided on having my hair done while in Panjim at Goa that salubrious Sunday morning. Rain had washed the city the whole of the previous night, the crisp of new-born freshness

spread over provided the city with a over-powering cheer and goodwill. Rain always does.

We tried drinking Cashew Fenny sitting on the balcony of my suit. Fenny had that typical pungent aroma which did not permit drinking inside the room. Normally we drink White Bacardi.

We fitted our limbs within the space of the narrow balcony, it had a beautiful view of river Mondavi while we drank to each other's health. We found it difficult when the first round was being served, but we got used to it by the time we held the second peg in our hands.

We enjoyed the fragrance of nature listening to the soothing hum of the river as we plunged into nostalgia of our happy past. Nostalgia has that mollifying effect. It was two o'clock past midnight when my friends left. They lived in Vasco, the drive to Vasco would have taken them one and a half hours if not more. I was aware the visibility was harrowingly poor, less than twenty feet off the windshield, the torrent was hard hitting.

I went off to sleep the moment they left. I did not need to burn my conscience in the fluffed up pillow. Louis does not drink, I had the confidence that he would reach them safely my head in their home. The pillow sunk the moment I slept for in the morning I woke with shooting pain in the neck. I wanted to call my friends and find out if they had reached. They would still be sleeping. The wives would not take it kindly if they heard my voice. They are loving, pretty wives, they expect the husbands to take them along for the weekend parties, they do not approve of stag parties.

The Sunday morning was clear like pomegranate juice, the sky looked translucent red over the horizon. The hills of Goa too had the extra ruddiness.

Sunday is the only day I have to get my hair chopped without hassles, I do not remember when I did my hair last, it had

grown too long, the locks fell over my brows blocking my vision, it tickled my eyes. Normally on weekdays I scamper in the morning. Sunday is the best day for it, though I was feeling reluctant.

I waddled out after finishing breakfast, the complimentary buffet was served in the spacey verandah on the ground floor. The krotons and peace lily leaves were wet. A band was playing on the otherside the previous night, the musicians had cleared out in the late hours, I guess. The floor had traces of the previous night's reverly, muddy footprints, crumbs and spills and crumpled napkins. Stale smell of cheese rented the air.

Hardly any waiters around that morning, food was neatly arranged, the array of the chefer dishes looked cleaner compared to the place. Not many patrons of Hotel Mondovi were present. Except for a family of six hogging all the way.

They were the architypical Goan tourists, dressed for the beach, back-pack bags hung from their shoulders while they helped themselves moving from dish to dish. Typical and boisterous Mumbaikar crowd entitled for share of fun and relaxation. Most of them were speaking in Marati. The tall, lanky kid had forgotten to wipe his mouth, tiny particles of bread crumbs were sticking under his lips. His mom kept offering him the napkin and he kept refusing until he himself finally rubbed it off with the back of his hand. Another one was busy with a tooth-pick, he was trying to extract the meat fiber from his molars. Nothing much was in offer except poha, bread toast and a variety of sausages which didn't look appetizing at all, they must have been from the previous night. There were cut fruits which had released water and looked like about to rot.

Within a hundred meters after stepping out, I noticed the Barber shop, it was located in an inconspicuous by-lane adjoining the Panjim fish market facing the main road. The

river Mondovi ran parallel to the main road and I was not sure if the smell came from the fish market or from the river.

The morning was indeed picturesque, but the view made me sad. The river was nearing its end emptying itself into the uninviting expanse of the Arabian Sea.

The river would soon lose its individuality.

The bank was lined with tall trees under which wrought iron chairs were placed at intermittent intervals. I was certain one of the trees were the country almond, for the green fruits littered the ground along with its herbaceous vegetation. There were also the gulmohur and its yellow flowers, but there were more varieties than one could fathom. Every time I stayed in the hotel, I vowed to google the names of those trees, but ended up drinking.

A cruise boat was anchored next to the bridge, its deck designed to host parties. It was a major attraction for the tourists. The skeletal members of its crew were busy loading crates of beer into the cellar. Hardly any other activity at 9 o'clock in Panjim, being weekend. Goa never sleeps, but on Sunday mornings the sweet little town makes an exception.

In contrast to the general apathy and languor, the fish market was buzzing with Government employees in weekend mode along with the procurers for the hotels bargaining for price. Most of them were chattering in Konkani demanding the fresh catch be brought out of the Therma-cool boxes under the table behind the chopping board. This shrewdness was expected on the part of the fishing community. To hive off the previous day's catch before setting new arrivals on display. Unlike the fish markets in other towns and cities, there were no ice blocks. Some of the fishes were still trying to breathe, the gills were opening up and closing.

I didn't want to lose family time in Kolkotta attending to the mundane, recurring inevitabilities such as styling of hair. Wives do not appreciate husbands spending weekends in

barber shops. Hence I thought today would be fine, I'd rather get it done while the hangover gets cleared. The check-out time at the hotel was 12 noon. I have ample time for a leisurely bath before setting out.

I promanaded into the empty lane. The shop was open, the barber was a burly man, he was shifting cosmetics from one end of the shelf to the other. It looked like he was dusting the shelves with hog-grunt. I stood watching him wipe the shelves, rearranging back in neat order.

I leaned on the lamp-post which restrained free passage of cars inside that narrow lane. The day was bright, I could not see clearly beyond my own reflection on the full-length window panes. In the feeble light inside, the barber was struggling to stand in one place. His eyes were puffed up and was bleary, he had thick eyebrows which lent him beef appearance. His jowls were ridden with three day old white stubbles. Ugly grey hair showed over the chest under the unbuttoned plaid linen shirt he had on. It looked like he had slept with the shirt on. I was disappointed, I like my barbers clean.

My visit to Goa was a marketing assignment, my flight from the Manohar international airport was scheduled to take-off only at 2.30 noon. Being a man from Kolkotta and used to waking up early, I had got up as early as 5.00 am, the wait had become inevitable.

Panjim is expected to come alive and reverberate only by the afternoon.

Louis was scheduled to arrive not before 11.30 am. Louis is my regular cabbie, he usually picked me up at the airport, carted me around on my business calls, wherever I wanted to go, before depositing me at the airport. The barber noticed me standing outside indecisively, it might have attracted his attention.

He came out eager to ambush a prospective client. He called out in a loud voice, “Bom dia meu amigo”. His tone was friendly. But I couldn’t figure what he meant, it was enough to know it was a form of greeting in Portuguese.

I lied cordially, “Waiting for the fish to be cleaned.” I pointed in the direction of the fish market with my thumb.

“Isn’t that a lie, Sir? I am sure you are in need of hair-cut. Why don’t you just step in?” He spoke unaccented English, his bow was unforced and courteous. His eyes seemed astute under the wrinkled lids.

“No customers this morning? People don’t get up early, do they?” I countered.

“Your hair is a bit long Sir, you look like a high-ranking official”, he goaded me to avail his services.

“You are right, but your shop doesn’t look ready either. Busy tidying up eh!”

“I make the shop spic and span when I get a chance, usually I am busy you see. That’s what I do amigo.” He lifted his checkered cleaning cloth to illustrate.

“That’s good, getting the shop spruced up on the weekend!” I said. “No harm in pleasing the barber.

“The boy who helps me is not regular. I have to depend on my own hands.” The barber lifted his hands and showed the fat fingers. I noticed one extra finger jutting out of the little finger. He saw I’d noticed.

“Well”, I said. “The folks cannot be trusted to come for work in time, Goa is known for the culture of Sossegado. If I stay long enough in Goa, I too would turn out like Goans.” I chuckled expecting encouragement from the burly barber. He was not forthcoming. “In Sealdah, I can’t dream of walking at this hour without hurting my toes against the heels of the man in front.”

I tend to boast about my hometown although there was nothing to boast about Sealdah. I was messing myself into an unwanted conversation with an unknown stranger whose service I had not decided to avail. Not yet.

I wanted to head back instead, disappear from his sight. The front set of his upper teeth was large. Can't say it was protruding, but monstrous that it looked like it could crush the bone of a goat if put in front of him on a plate.

The man shook his head sideways, staggered a bit before going inside as though he had forgotten something. He was throwing his hand sideways in disgust. I was relieved that I am no longer under obligation to engage in his services. I might, if he returns after wiping his face with a clean cloth.

The by-lane, lined mostly with two-storied buildings on either side, made the lane appear narrow, the architecture was fashioned after Portuguese cities. I happened to study paintings of an obscure Portuguese artist I had admired in the streets of Lisbon. The buildings looked ancient, Goa was a Portuguese colony until 1964.

I looked up without straining my neck, for a while removing from memory the unclean barber with a large set of teeth. The sky looked like a blue dupatta between the crenelated building tops. The house on my left was painted pale yellow, dark brown and the green stains of rain ran down its fluted columns.

A young woman was leaning out over the window opposite from the second floor, she spoke cheerfully but in whispers. Her tresses tumbled down joyfully, she had apparently applied streaks of auburn. In the sunshine, it looked like it was on fire.

The young man on the opposite window kept responding to her in cacophonous giggles, obviously in appreciation of whatever she said from across the lane. The narrow lane made it possible. The young man's building too was yellow but not pale, recently done up perhaps, no streaks of stains tracking

down to the entrance of the barber shop. The barber's shop was at the bottom like the hoof of a horse.

I could easily decipher it was some kind of love talk though I could not listen to the exact contents, probably the language employed between them was Portuguese or Konkani or both. It was not Hindi or Marathi or Kannada. The young man stood like Samson of Samson and Delila story, his hands on the sidebars of the window frame. His hairless chest was visible, the six packs were on display, perhaps more clearly for the girl's benefit. In the morning sun, which fell directly on him, the chest gleamed.

From where I stood fascinated by the couple, he appeared naked. The couple was too preoccupied, to be troubled by this invasion of privacy, they continued with the exchange of short sentences followed by giggles. That's what is most exciting about youth, one gets carried away over nothing. The couple were not young, but young enough to laugh without valid reason.

Goa is a conglomeration of villages which lends it its native charm, you can avail simple luxuries in Goa like hiring motorbike taxis. They lug customers from one picturesque hamlet to another, or from one beach to the other for the cost of nothing. Every beach in Goa looks different, water sports and activities the beaches offered varied, it depended on the rock formations and aggressiveness of the sea in that spot. A motor-biker taxi was taking out his bike from the interior gully, the engine exploded disturbing the quietitude. The bike made noise that could wake the entire neighbourhood.

The bike-operators morning clients generally would be foreigners out on trips for fishing. The biker wasn't wearing a helmet, though two helmets were fastened to the rear fender like tender coconuts. The helmets knocked against each other as he vroomed past. For unknown reason he looked keenly at my face as he passed, it was a Bullet 350 Classic with an

impressive looking fuel tank. Plenty of macho stickers stuck on it.

I looked up again after he turned left, the enthusiasm above went on unabated, the couple was unmindful of the thud thud the bike created, they were continuing with the cooing as before.

I felt awkward eaves-dropping, I shuffled my feet, and stepped into the barber shop quietly. The inside of the shop was dark since I'd walked in from bright sunlight. I found frightening images of myself from numerous angles, which was unsettling, fancy mirrors at freak angles made me appear so. I was still groggy from the previous night's booze, I sensed my limbs trembling, I held the back-rest of one of the two barber's chairs to steady myself. Ran my eyes around searching for my probable hair-stylist, I expected the burly man to be there.

I wanted his services now despite my own reservation about the state of his hygiene. He had disappeared somewhere inside the shop, the vacant shop was even more traumatizing than the one with his presence. Legs trembled, which made me sit on the chair revolving it in my direction, the backrest looking away from the mirror. The back-rest slid back smoothly and slanted as I put my weight on it. I rested my head and closed my eyes. I do not know what came of me, I think I must have dozed.

When I came awake, the clock showed 9.45 am, there was another clock on the side wall which showed 7.15 am. It might have shown the time in Riyadh or Sharjah. I could smell rain outside. I craned my neck to see, my inference was correct. I blew out air from my mouth expecting the bad breath to vanish. A large rectangular mirror affixed above to the ceiling showed my own image from the top, in the reflection my cheeks appeared sagged and ghastly. I never realised there were so many folds on my neck and the warts were beginning

to show. I wanted to get back in Kolkotta at once. Even better lie on my mattress and close my eyes.

One of the mirrors on the wall was not aligned properly, it seemed to hang out of place. The image of me in this mirror looked horrible. I wondered if the mirror might come off from whatever it was secured with and crash on the floor. Instinctively I stepped out of the chair and bent in its direction. The mirror moved towards me suddenly and swung away, so did my reflection, I absconded for a moment before I discovered the reason.

Flourish the barber! He was wiping his hands with a small handtowel as he moved towards me like an EMU. Image of myself and the barber swung back and forth until the door reached the original position, I suspect probably a door-closer was attached to it. The door gave access to what I presumed was his house for the awesome aroma of Fish Vindaloo wafted from within.

“Looks like you had a good sleep boss?” he said, placing his palms on my shoulders affectionately as if we were good old friends, his fingers began to massage my shoulders passively as if taken over by conditioned reflex. The massage sprung me back to alertness. He silently unhooked the barber’s apron, it was hanging on the wall below the clock which showed time in gulf, he slid it over his bulk with studied methodicity before turning to me. The apron was made from faded jeans, it had multiple pockets stitched all over.

The man was whistling the tune of some Konkanese folk song. He pulled out the tackles brusquely from the shelf in front of my chair and started inserting the tackles into the pockets provided for each. He tapped the pair of scissors on the comb, he was about to commence the haircut. He didn’t wait for a nod. I removed my specs and placed it carefully on the desk in front, I am generally wary about leaving my specs there or anywhere. I slid my hand into my hip-pocket to check if my

wallet was in place. I was under obligation to make payment at the end of the show.

He understood what I was doing, He said in a huff, “Don’t bother brother. Sit quietly, if you haven’t brought your wallet, I can pick my charges later the next time you visit.” Then he took several steps backwards to the extent the limited space would allow. Two large cushioned sofas were behind, placed close to the wall, it was meant for the customers waiting their turn on a busy day. On the side table were newspapers and old magazines. Pictures of skimpily clad actresses were on the covers. Someone had made an effort to hide the cleavage of one of the pretty models with markings from his felt-pen.

I ran my palms upwards through my nape while he was still continuing to ponder how best to improve my head. The reflections of the burly man performed everywhere the same things he did.

Finally when he approached he was like a raging bull, he inserted his fingers into my locks in front, combed it backward using his fingers. He spared the trouble of asking what style I wanted, usually all barbers ask that cursory question. He didn’t even ask whether I wanted it short or long or medium. He simply went ahead, starting at the back above the nape, moving to the right. Then to the left.

The scissors were like a cow grazing in a meadow, it went everywhere along the sides until it was done. The hair at the top which needed attention remained untouched. He carried the bottle with a spray nozzle and studied the level of water it contained. Finding it inadequate, he opened the lid and went to the corner where the faucet was. He let the water collect until it was half full. He put the lid back and sprayed water on my head until the hair at the top became wet and pliable. He held the spray close to his chest and stepped back. Then uttered more to himself, “I am a good barber, this is a noble

profession.” He lifted the comb and scissors to emphasize what he meant.

“I am glad you got to like your job, people who don’t love their profession do not excel in life.” I said.

“Sir, it’s a very broad statement. It doesn’t work all the time. Like you said, I had a chance to migrate to the Gulf.” He gave a long pause to see if I had anything to contradict.

Then he said, “If there was anything I ever wanted, I wanted to be a barber in those Gulf countries, there barbers earn a lot by only trimming beards, the barbers who manage to migrate are the lucky ones.”

My brows knit at that point, I worried about getting to the airport on time. Looked at my wristwatch discreetly without meaning to hurt his feelings. He was not hurt, he asked what I do for a living.

“I market steel. Steel products. Special steel”, I explained.

He was not impressed, he waited for me to complete and reached out for the brush. He silently combed my hair backwards. I continued, assuming he did not understand the significance, “Special steel, the steel which is used in manufacturing of the scissors, the like in your hand. Ordinary steel wouldn’t chop, get rusted easily.”, I said. He was amazed. He looked at the scissors he was holding in his hand as if it was a piece of marvel, he ran his fore-finger gently over the inner edges.

“This is very good”, he sounded convinced. Then he looked at the finger if it had made a cut.

I told him, “I have a flight to catch at 2.30 pm. My driver would be waiting outside the hotel to take me to the airport. The driver’s name is Louis, he drives a Maruti Omni. He too loves his profession, you know, he likes to drive a BMW. But he settled for the Maruti Omni.” The barber seemed lost in thought for a moment.

“But he thinks that his car is a BMW”, I said, ensuring no hint of sarcasm. To end the conversation on a pleasant note is always a good thing.

The Barber reciprocated by putting out his hand for a handshake. Said, “My name is Jamie. I could have migrated to Dubai, where you earn ten times more for the same job I do.” He lifted the pair of scissors and hacked the air for emphasis. “I had to forget my dreams for the sake of my son.” He pointed his finger up with a sense of disillusionment. ” His eyebrows were raised as he said. His hands went up again.

“I like it shorter”, I said pointing to the hair falling on my forehead, even though after he made the first cut it was continuing to block my vision and I said it blocks my vision. He worked on it with the seriousness of a surgeon. There might be a time when robots style hair in saloons, the day is not far off. Jamie would just switch on the button and lean back.

Jamie had no idea what was going on in my mind. Jamie did not speak anything, nor did I probe further. Didn't want to get involved anymore with his life. In Goa teen-age boys get into all sorts of trouble, drugs, booze and the like, they get carried away. Often, we hear news of boys getting washed ashore in unconscious condition, boys from Goa, boys from other places like from Mumbai, Bangalore, foreigners from Africa, from the Scandinavian countries, from US, everywhere from the world over. No steps are being taken to curb drug trafficking, to arrest the drug lords, things happen in India. There was general apathy towards controlling narcotics or maybe plenty of money was involved in the racket. Everybody knew it, everybody kept silent.

I remembered Grace de Souza in Mumbai. I came across her first at the bus-stop in front of Tata Institute of Social Science in Chembur, she had forgotten to bring her wallet along in the dainty handbag she was holding, which she was digging into.

She saw me watching her with sympathetic and kind eyes, she didn't hesitate to ask me to lend her 500 bucks.

She said her sister was unwell, she had to rush.

I didn't know her name then, she did not look like a person having wants in life. Grace De Souza was very elderly, perhaps eighty plus, wrinkles in her skin smoothed over by sufficient mascara and other cosmetic creams. She wore lipstick appropriately though it was gaudy, her costumes suggested that she is from upper echelons of the Chembur society. Mumbai has all types of population.

She seemed in a real hurry, her eyes seemed troubled, I was in no mood to refuse. I trusted her to be telling the truth. I handed over the money considering her age. She loaded my mobile number in her instrument assuring that the money would be returned. She left when the taxi stopped by to pick her up.

I forgot all about it, till one day towards the end of December I received a call two days prior to Christmas. The caller was Grace, the elderly lady. She said she had messaged me her address on my Whatsapp, also mentioned that she has invited me for Christmas-eve if I was favourably disposed.

She requested me not to disappoint her.

I did not know her well to warrant such an invitation. I was curious and wanted to meet her. All she owed me was 500 bucks.

The message said, "7.00 PM, for sweets and fruit juice". The address seemed like the gated community I knew. My wife had gone home to Kolkotta, Kolkottans love visiting Park Street during Christmas and the New Year. I was alone, held up in Mumbai due to work exigencies. Otherwise I would have followed her suit. I used to work for an industry which makes fragrant perfume used for the manufacture of medicines. Particularly Syrups.

Grace de Souza was perhaps living alone, the way she showed herself to be tense and uncertain the day she borrowed from me, I felt like cheering her up.

What harm would it be if I pay her the visit, it would be nice though I waited for twentyfour hours before sending her reply in the affirmative. I had a party planned out later in the night at Parel, I could always catch up later. Our parties would go on till 4 am, therefore it was alright if I spent some time with Grace and later caught up with my friends.

On Christmas Eve I visited Grace De Souza with a bottle of Vodka as I didn't want to give her anything that would be of no use to her. A person on the threshold of heaven does not need anything other than your ears and your affection. But Vodka would be fine I assumed.

Grace was a complete stranger to me as I was to her. I had my own trepidation. I had informed my wife about the invitation and my intention to pay Grace a visit. She laughed at the idea and ragged me stating I was going on a date. She reminded me to kiss the lady's cheeks before taking leave as that was the English custom.

Grace seemed assured of my arrival, expecting me eagerly, though she belonged to small section of beautiful women in the world that no one could refuse an invitation. She perhaps was aware of that, but received me with modesty and her courteousness made me comfortable at once.

She was pleasantly taken aback when I presented her with the Vodka. She was in fact delighted, and appreciated it saying it's a thoughtful gift, and that she didn't expect such a nice gift. I breathed ease, for that was the first time I was in the company of high-brow women. She took it in her hand and held it to her chest as if it were a child.

She said chirpily, "Okay then, let me offer you a drink too as promised. I had kept a bottle of Sprite, but you brought me Vodka, so let me host you with something better. She ran up

the stairs like a child. The stair was constructed with lumber, the stairs led to the attic kind of floor which looked more like a cavern. Her footsteps made thud as she ran up.

In the meantime I made a cursory inspection of the ground floor. It had kind of palatial living room blending into the dining space which led to the kitchen and the service area and the backyard. Clusters of pink Hydrangias showed up over the backyard windows and over the blossoms violet streaks of evening clouds.

I heard from upstairs the cranking sound of the metal wardrobe being pulled open and shut in random. The action was repeated, I did not know to what purpose. Maybe the wardrobe had more doors than one.

I went around the room like a cat without raising suspicion. It would be a breach of privacy if I stepped out of the room where I was made to sit in. On the mantle were pictures of her and her family and next to it a bouquet of assorted flowers arranged in vases. The first photo on the left was Grace in her teens, I cannot be mistaken. She looked beautiful and dreamy in that picture. The next one was from her marriage album. She was standing next to the groom at the church altar, the couple facing each other eagerly before the priest said “You may kiss the bride.” In the background was Jesus on the cross, he looked sad. In the next picture Grace was carrying a baby wrapped in a towel, I could not figure out how many months old the baby was, she was holding it tenderly. Then the next one with her complete family was quite winsome, taken in an airport, in the background were aircrafts, all looking in the same direction. The vertical stabilizers of the aircrafts stood up, they were of Indian and overseas airlines, I could make out it was taken in one of the Indian Airports. She was standing next to her husband and grown-up son.

The husband was wearing crisp white full arm shirt with straps on the shoulders exhibiting three golden pilot epaulets. I said, “My” and moved on.

At the end of the row was her husband resting his chin on a golf stick. The stick was plant on the grass and he was seated on a cemented bench painted green. The caddy boy stood behind carrying on his shoulder a tubby golf bag with several gold sticks. The boy too smiled as if he was the one posing for the snap.

By the time Grace De Souza came down, which didn't take much time really, I was back in my seat. I was waiting for her, she rushed down the stairs propping up a bottle of whisky as if it was a trophy though the brand was an unfamiliar one. She was panting, said in a huff, “No, no I want to offer you something better, this is not for you.” She didn't wait for my consent or otherwise, she ran upstairs again. I could notice her legs were weak and they trembled.

I felt sorry, an old woman in a frock, made to run up and down like a flustered chick which could not find its mother in the barn. I rushed to the bottom of the stairs. My palm on the blob over the newal piller, I pleaded her to return, I am good. She didn't respond. My voice echoed against the narrow walls.

I called her again, I could hear opening and closing the doors again wherever she stored her things. When she came down minutes later, she was carrying an unopened half bottle of Chivas regal. She said she knew it was up there, she apologised that it took time to locate.

“You must be given the best drink“, she said apologetically leaving the bottle on the centre table. She ran into the kitchen and brought a single crystal cut whisky glass. Maybe Yera brand, I donot know the other top brands, i could not distinguish if there was. I was more puzzled that she had brought just one glass from the cupboard next to the kitchen. There were beautiful ceramic plates stacked next to glasses.

She said, “You must finish it before the end of the day. Okay?”

I could not figure if it was a challenge or mere affection in the tone. I looked at her face and at the solitary glass now next to the half a bottle and at her.

She said, “I drink only rum. I don’t have my Old Monk, so forget it, I can’t give you company. Enjoy your drink.”

It was incredible. She poured herself the sprite into an ordinary glass which was already there.

“Why not Whisky?” I asked.

“I don’t drink whisky any longer, only rum.” she answered politely with definite tone.

“Why hoard bottles of whisky then?” I asked. I do not know what other drinks she had up in the attic.

“My sister likes whisky. She died last month, remember I borrowed money at the bus stop. She was very unwell, she died in my arms the very same day.”

“Sorry Grace, I didn’t know.” I genuinely felt sad. I have no sisters but I know that sister’s fondness for each other beats sibling rivalry.

“Now onwards this old goat has to go it alone. Till I get the call from God myself. Thank you for coming, else it would have been a terribly lonely Christmas. A very lonely Christmas.”, she said without rancour or bitterness. In face she was smiling when she said.

“What about your friends, neighbours, members of your Parish? Don’t they keep you company? You have been here for years?”

“I don’t like to go to anybody’s house. They think I bring bad luck” she said, gesturing to me to help myself to the drink. My friends were waiting at a bar in Parel. One drink with Grace

would not spoil my evening. Or two perhaps. But I didn't want to drink alone, it would be a pity.

I said, "Rubbish. I can't drink alone on a Christmas evening with you watching me. Are you sure you won't drink Chivas Regal?"

"Sorry, only Old Monk for me. I have diabetes." she spread her hands and shrugged.

"Will be back in a minute, please wait, won't you?", I said. I knew a liquor shop near the Govandi Railway station, not far away. I headed out and brought her the Old monk before she had a chance to restrain. It would have been a sin to drink without her joining.

The liquor shop was over-crowded, the usual Christmas crowd. I had to squeeze through to approach the counter. Young girls, hardly past eighteen, were waiting ahead of me in the crowd closer to the counter. One of the girls volunteered, "I will get it for you uncle, you won't make it otherwise." The other girls laughed. "Tell me what do you want?" She put out her hand for the money.

Her face fell when she heard me. A bottle of Old monk. But she bought it anyway along with crate of the requirements of her gang, which was mostly beer and the breezer. The crate got passed on overhead and came out. The boy who looked like her boyfriend was hugging two bottles of Black label as he elbowed his way back. He muttered "Shit, can't let the bottles break in this hungama." He wondered for whom the Old monk was for he looked around where the rum went.

I collected my Old monk with gratitude. I too had to hug the bottle as people were jostling from behind. The girl didn't have change to pay me the balance, she expressed disappointment.

I told the girl, “Next time.” She giggled. Said, “Uncle is generous.” All of them giggled. Even her boyfriend.

I greeted them cheerfully, “Merry Christmas! Have fun!”

“Merry Christmas, have a Single malt uncle. Don’t be stuck with The Old monk, not on christmas” She hollered. I didn’t bother, I hurried back.

By the time I returned, Grace had moved the things to the dining table, had neatly arranged everything, the munches in a bowl, water and a bucket of ice with tongs among other things like napkin, coaster and a hand towels. Intuitive lady. Next to the crystal cut whisky glass stood the typical Old Monk quirky glass shaped like the man on the bottle labels.

She saw what I had brought with admiration. Said, “Nice of you to get me the Monk. The good old man. I forgot I had run of stock.”

I told her the shop was mobbed. She said, “That was expected on Christmas eve. Usually a friend of mine from the defense takes care of my supplies. His wife passed away last month, poor girl. She was suffering from accute colitis. I didn’t have the heart to trouble him.”

“Oh! ? How sad”, without really feeling sad.

“ I assumed that you may not come, let me confess. Now I am here ready for the go!”, she said full of enthusiasm, ironing out the skirt below her ribs with her palm.

She looked prettier than the first day I saw her at the bus stop, her eyes seemed to gleam, eyeballs were deep blue like royalty. I noticed she has changed her attire as well in the meantime, the skirt was deep maroon in an attractive way with little pink flowers scattered over. The sleeves had frills and the laces near the neckline made of silvery thread. She wore a slender gold neck chain at the bottom of which was a diamond pendant. Perhaps a Solitaire. She opened both the bottles one by one with expectation, the act made her clear her throat.

There was a single 500 rupee bill under one of the coasters, she pulled the bill and handed it to me with deference. I accepted it out of politeness. Told her, “Thank you Grace. It was not required.”

We drank that Christmas trying to recall and explore into each other’s past, mostly hers. She was quite frank like the way frankness ought to be.

A heart to heart conversation ensued bordering on kinship, not that of friends but one of aunt and nephew. I got to know many things including the history of the community of East Indians, I thought initially they are equivalent to the Anglo-Indian community one comes across elsewhere. She was an East Indian herself, she said. She noticed my ignorance about the existence of such a community and went on to clarify that East Indians are an ethno-religious Christian community that originated in the Seven Islands of Bombay and the present Mumbai Metropolitan Area. They are also known as East Indian Catholics and speak a Marathi dialect with Portuguese words interspersed. They claim to be the original inhabitants of Bombay, Thane, and Vasai. She didn’t mention anything about racial mix based on conjugality of Indian blood with portughese or English which is what the case with that of the Anglo Indians.

The East Indians of Mumbai were primarily Agriculturists or fishermen and celebrated Christmas by baking cakes and cooking Marizpans. The community, she said is 6 lakh strong as of now, descendents of the Marathi rural population who converted to Christianity way back in the 2 nd Century after St.Barthalmew landed in India and went about spreading the form of Christianity as understood then.

She refuted the theory that East Indians had anything to do with the advent of Portughese and that the Portughese religious officialdom benefited by the presence of Christianity as it helped them to widen the ambit during 15th century

after Vasco da Gama set his foot on the Indian soil and the settlers established the colony.

The East Indians subsequently adopted themselves to English ways when the seven islands that is now Mumbai was given away as dowry to the British. Their dresses and customs had gradually transformed accordingly, but they remained ethnically Indians, particularly Marathis. Grace was fair and I thought she had white blood which she dismissed instantaneously.

I enquired about Grace's husband, whom I quickly inferred was no more. I showed a glum face as I helped myself to a spoon of namkeens in one of the three dishes in front of me.

She explained at length how he died, it was vivid and detailed, she displayed no bitterness. He died in the air crash in 1978. Air India passenger Flight 855 Mumbai to Dubai, Boeing 747 plunged within minutes of take-off into the Arabian Sea, 3 Kilometres off Bandra. ”

She said it was New Year's Eve that day, when her husband died, he was flying for a business visit to Gulf country.

“I thought he was a pilot”, I said pointing to the photograph on the mantle.

“Pilot, he was. He was grounded because of his excessive drinking. It was then he started the factory and made big money. I didn't expect him to succeed with his waywardness. But he succeeded, this house was bought after he turned a businessman.”

I let the information seep, when she admitted shyly “When he was a pilot, I used to be an airhostess. I used to fly with him sometimes, that's how we met.”

“Was he an East Indian too?” I questioned.

She put my doubt to rest saying he was. Many East Indians were pilots she said.

A framed picture of Jesus Christ with the sacred heart hung above the window through which the pink hydrangeas showed their pretty faces. Jesus in the picture looked benign and compassionate. I prefer pictures of happy Gods to angry or sad pictures. I told her so. Grace waved me aside, carefully poured me another peg. She had what the neurologists call the elementary tremor, her hand was shivering, but she managed to fill the peg without spilling. I took the rum and poured one for her.

She smiled, said, “I am now too old to be drinking more than one peg.” But she did not object when I finished pouring. She said, “You have to finish the Chivas Regal before you leave. Okay?”

We were drinking exactly one week before her husband’s death anniversary. Would she invite me on the anniversary date I wondered, she was so lonely and wanting someone to keep her company. My friends were waiting for me at Parel, somehow the urge to join their party was gradually receding. I decided to ring them up and tell them I would be late. They could go ahead without me. May be I could join them later by midnight. In fact I was tempted to inform them that I won’t be able to join in the festivities. I felt it was more important to give company to the old lady who was perhaps continuing to grieve.

I vaguely remembered reading about the crash in the newspapers and the court cases that followed in India as well as in the US, the relatives suing the Boeing Company stating that the equipment malfunction has led to the aircrash. It was a long drawn court battle.

The fritters and nourishments to the drinks that Grace kept offering were more or less equivalent to a full-fledged dinner in terms of calorific value. French toast, Pasta and the like. I wanted to divert the topic from the sad incident. I wanted to cheer her up, so I started to talk about her son.

Her voice started whining abruptly, “He was a nice boy, studious, getting ready to take over the factory from papa, he was in Goa to complete the program in Chemical engineering. BITS, Goa, you know its a reputed organization, it was not easy to get admission there, but he did.”

“Where’s he now?” I inquired.

She looked at the back of her hands. The blue veins crisscrossed under her wrinkled skin. Then she let a deep sigh out. “We did not hear about him until four days later. He usually rings me every night before sleep. There were no calls, he was to return home for Christmas. Two years after his father died in the crash, it was not the same Christmas, but Christmas all the same two years after my husband died.. I was worried.”

I corrected my throat to say something assuaging, no words came out of my mind or mouth.

She continued, “I was agitated, so I had to lodge a FIR with the police in Goa. I did it through a friend living there on the fourth day. I was preparing to fly to Goa. I had friends in Calva who would take me around.”

I looked at the clock, the sky outside the window was hazy and gold filled out by the illumination from the sodium vapour street lamps. The time was nearing about eleven, my belly almost full. I felt kind of lazy and sleepy. Frankly I was inebriated but in a pleasant way. I made a decision not to go to Parel, I was through with my drinking.

The security guard knocked on the door to wish her happy Christmas. He had the same ingratiating smile as he had in the evening when he let me into the gated community.

Grace slid into the kitchen area and pattered around, gave him a piece of vanilla cake on a paper plate and some cash. He peeped inside to see if I was a threat to the old lady and surmised I was not. I was so grateful to him for that.

He went away.

“The cops called me from Goa, you know they speak in a funny accent. The cop said, they have found a body of young boy washed ashore in the Calangute beach. The description of the corpse mentioned by the cops seemed to match the description of my kid. To me it was clear the son had gone in search of the father into the Arabian Sea.” Grace pulled out a small white handkerchief from the frock pocket and wiped her eyes. “I could not attribute any other justification for his presence there in that condition”, she said blowing her nose into the hanky.

Grace got up at that point and trotted up the stairs, I thought she was trying to hide her emotions. I felt like following behind Grace de Souza in order to console. But I stayed behind out of discretion, I remembered the face of the security guard who viewed me with suspicion before giving me the benefit of doubt. Grace owned and lived in a property that was worth several crores.

What was in her tiny world upstairs I could not visualize. The pair of sucker-mouth catfishes in the aquarium swam to the top surface, they were trying to suck air directly.

I must credit Grace for her mental strength and resolve. She came down in five minutes and took a deep gulp from her glass, then she poured herself another stiff drink and held it in her hand. She found my glass was empty, she said, “Come on, have another peg. You have to finish the bottle before you leave.”

My glass was a little less than half- full. I had not been sipping from the moment she commenced narrating the part of her tragic story relating to her son going missing. My apartment was more than half a kilometre from her pretty villa, it was located in the main road where revellries would start, it was already on from what i could hear, bursting of crackers, loud

music and things like that. The revellers would soon be speeding recklessly in two-wheelers.

Grace read my thoughts, said “You can sleep here on this settee, leave tomorrow morning. I will have to go for the mass by 7 in the morning, I no longer attend the midnight mass. I will keep coffee for you in a flask and duplicate key of the main door. I promise you that. Make sure you put the flask and the cup in the sink and lock the door before you go.”

I nodded my head in agreement and looked for blanket with my bleary eyes. I was sure she provide, another one of her run upstairs to fetch me one would do.

I sent a message to my friends that I won't be joining them tonight. There were half a dozen missed calls and few dozen abuses.

“What about the key? Where do I leave the key?” I asked.

Grace looked at me with equal measure of adornment and affection which made me assume the gory tales she narrated were untrue. Spin of yarn to keep the evening going, I thought. I leaned across the table towards her, held her by the hand as I could not say anything sober to suit the context. In the process my act toppled the large jam bottle kept on one side of the table, it was kissan, nothing spilled. If it was honey, it might have. My mind too was coagulated. I took my glass and drank it bottoms up.

She looked at me appreciatively but got her hands released. She brought some vanilla cakes, she pointed to it and stated plainly “This is what I baked for this year’s Christmas. I didn’t do the icing, usually Edward does it.” I could not deduce who Edward was. The husband or son. Most probably the husband, the pilot who turned businessman.

Nothing mattered, we drank again. We drank a couple of drinks more.

The door with the mirror loosely hanging burst open like a cork popping out of a Champagne bottle, I thought I heard clearly the fizz following the pop. The woman's entry was unannounced and was perhaps meant to be so. A plump lady with grey hair appeared from behind the door like a dam burst open, it was not just the texture of the grey hair of the women that startled me, it was its coarseness, wiry and ugly like the strands of a discarded scrubber used in cleaning kitchen vessels. The strands speared out behind almost pointing up, the ones in front were relatively tamed and concealed her wrinkled forehead.

She dissected me with sharp, disdainful, untrusting eyes, then she sneered at him, "Oh, you really have a customer after all, Jamie. I didn't believe it, not at this hour."

James chuckled, he was holding my forehead with a firm grip using his left hand, he inserted the scissors between the hair falling on my forehead and the skin. I prayed he does not let the blade touch my skin.

I lifted my eyebrows, thinking I must tell James at the end of the hair cut to chop off the lone grey strand on my right eyebrow. It's something I am unable to do without causing hurt to myself.

I liked the smell of the metal, I always liked it, the smell of steel. I closed my eyes, inhaled the over-powering fragrance of Eau-de-cologne. Apparently emanating from his chin, although he had not completed his shaving. The pepper and salt stubs were there as a reminder of his unhygeine, and the warts. I wondered where they came from, the warts.

My dad too had warts, plenty of them. Whenever I used to mock their presence around his neck, he would say I too would acquire them in due time as if it was a goal to be achieved in life.

The woman with a repugnant shock of hair receded back through the mirrored door in the same manner in which she

had approached. Shockingly the odour receded too. Gosh! Was she the one using Eau-de-cologne, the question incarcerated in my mind and stayed put.

Jamie, overcome by the stress caused by the woman, patted the comb on my head with gentle affection and said “Ok brother, that’s my wife, if you could not guess, that is. She thinks I drink throughout the day, she thinks I am using this chamber for my secret excesses. She complains I don’t screw her properly because of drinking. At sixty-five how can a man screw?” I considered the statement sympathetically, even if he was ten years younger it was impossible to fuck a woman like that.

I did not want to say anything discouraging. A shelf reserved exclusively for the cosmetics for ameliorating the texture of hair, and of the health of the skin, and even of the finger of nails was present in a corner. There was even an ointment for warts. I tried reading and memorising the name in case I may need it later in life. Why is James not using portions of these items on his woman, his life could’ve turned out better. If his fuck was good, she wouldn’t be complaining so much about his drinking.

I looked around with a little more curiosity than cursory. To my right as well as my surprise I discovered stacked were row of liquor bottles among other barber shop things, unopened, partially opened, half consumed or almost empty except for a residual portion which could not qualify to be a peg. Not the expensive variety though, but those that passed for my taste. I had not taken note of their presence earlier although I had been there for over half an hour.

“Are these for the sake of customers or meant for your consumption?” I couldn’t help chuckling. In Goa one can expect the unexpected. Jamie put his tackles back into the pockets of his apron with what appeared like an elaborate drill. He proceeded to the liquor cabinet like a cat, his hands

half lifted reaching out. Thereupon he examined my face for compliance. It was a Signature Gold, the green hexagonal bottle with gold colored label pasted on one side.

I tossed Jamie an inescapable amiable smile to which he responded quickly by producing o two plastic glasses from behind the row of bottles, he had a stack of the same carefully stashed.

Jamie was adept like any good bartender, the drink looked inviting, it glimmered under the ceiling lamp. He poured a normal peg for me and one for himself more than a large, and looked at me with suspicion.

“Can I pour a Patiala peg for you too?” He nodded his head encouragingly, his chin propping up. “You know by now, I am under compulsion to gulp it down, wife won’t come in another hour”, he said clucking. He tried to thrust the drink into my hand under the polyester cape I was made to wear before initiated the haircut. I brought my hand outside the cape and accepted, lifting the glass I mumbled a whisperous “Saude!” which is Portuguese version of cheers, these are the things one is tempted to learn quickly.

He returned the cheers.

We took the sip at the same time looking into each other’s eyes, we both seemed to exercise caution out of understanding, the fear of the re-entry of his abominable wife seemed to lurk in our mind. The previous night’s liquor churned in my stomach.

Jamie downed his whisky in one go, ran the tongue over his lips like a hungry lion satiated by the taste of blood. Then he studied his glass for traces of the golden yellow. He noticed some drops were left, lifted the glass again until the last of the drops emptied into his mouth. He crushed the glass with disdain and threw it into the garbage bin.

The bin was filled with chopped hair, torn razor wraps, even white lather sticking to napkins and other rejects that you usually see in barber's saloon. He shook the bin and tapped it with his leg until the plastic glass got buried under the previous day's rubbish.

He turned to me and said, "Actually the last drop tastes better." His eyes were watery as he pulled out the comb and scissors from the apron pockets. I was reluctant to give my head, felt stupid sitting in a barber's chair in Panjim sipping whisky in plastic glasses on a Sunday forenoon, giving my head to the drunken Jamie to finish off what he had set out to do with a clear head.

Jamie patted my shoulder blade with the scissors, "Enjoy it brother, a drink in the morning is good for health." I measured the level in my glass every time I sipped, it felt good to learn liquor was still left in the glass.

I didn't want to give Jamie an opportunity to pour me another peg. There was still time to get back to the hotel, it was quite closeby, just a few hops. Take a shower, get dressed, settle the check with the hotel and board Louis' car.

Louis always brought me cooked prawns to take home with me to Kolkotta, dry fried with onions and tomato. My wife loves it. He would pack it in a disposable plastic container and hand over to me before I walked into the airport. As additional precaution he would have the container wrapped in a polythene bag so that contents do not spill. It was his habit, though I keep refusing but accepting nevertheless.

He never charged me for the dish, but he would expect a big tip. That way the tip would be his and the efforts of his wife would go unrewarded, a secret he shared. He was frank under the wicked grin. I had considered doing away with Louis's services, hire another cabbie, but never had the heart. Louis is a chatter-box, he made quick friends wherever we went, with the hotel employees, with the airport security, even with the

sanitary staff of every customer I visited. I had no idea how he managed, but he did it as if it was his duty.

Jamie cleaned up the place once he was done, he snapped the cape untying and pulling it off my shoulder. He swung it wildly. Strands of hair flew around before settling on the floor, it caused me to sneeze. Then he turned towards me and asked, “Do you know I sell hair Sir?”

I didn't know, I conceded my ignorance. “There are all collection agents for the hair, it seems they manufacture protein from the hair. My son mentioned it to me. The collection agent does not know what happens to the hair, he just moves from barber shops to barber shops, collects it and sends it to Pondicherry where the factory is located.”

I knew the plant in Pondicherry, they produce amino acid from the hair.

The place had become warm by then, the sun shone bright outside. His wife appeared again and interrogated him with her eyes. Her eyes were everywhere, she was less intimidating this time. She sniffed around, held James by the shirt and questioned him, “Did you drink Jamie, swear on Jesus.”

I pulled out the money from my wallet. Jamie was businesslike, said two hundred bucks.

I inquired, “What about the charges for the liquor you served me Jamie?” I looked at the woman, I wanted to imply I was the one who drank, sort of deflecting from the target of her interrogation. Jamie shrugged, said, “Booze is always complimentary Sir. That's why I keep,” he pointed at those bottles. “Customers visit my shop if they feel like it, even if they do not feel the need for a haircut. They come for a head massage which of course is chargeable,

have the drink and exit. See you next time when you are in Goa.”

I paid James a generous tip, patting his back. The payment was in smaller denominations, it looked like a wad. He kissed the bills, plucked a part of the payment as if it were a loaf of bread, and handed it to her. The woman with the coarse hair took it. If there was any interogation from her side, I didn't want to be a part of it.

I pulled the door shut behind upon coming out. Didn't want any more to be part of anyone's family drama. In an involuntary volition I looked up, and the lad was still chatting with the damsel. He was rubbing his chest with his hand. He resembled Jamie or the wife both.

Once I reached the main road, I could hear River Mondovi murmur, though the current was mild. I found Louis's red Maruthi Omni standing by the curb on the opposite side of the hotel entrance. The slide door on the rear was open, Louis was standing on the pedestal and cleaning the hood with a wet piece of cloth.

Louis is short to the point of being noticed, no more than four feet seven inches, he made it up with immaculate dressing sense. He was in white full arm shirt with starched, buttoned up sleeves neatly tucked inside the dark brown pinstripe trousers. All that was missing were the suspenders. The shoes were polished black, it gave the impression he was a company executive of some standing. His shiny hair had been creamed and combed backwards like in the pictures of Spanish matadors, his mushtache dyed brown in contrast to the black mane.

He jumped off once he saw me, greeting me cordially and said, “The receptionist at the hotel said you had been out since morning. Clara was worried.”

Then he noticed my head, “Wow, Sir has had a hair-cut!” I was happy to find someone getting excited about his customer getting his hair done in Goa. “Which barber shop?”, he asked as if it were a matter of concern.

“Out there, inside the lane after the fish-market.”

“Oh my! I see you have been to Jamie’s shop.” He noticed I was groggy and standing with one hand on the Omni’s door knob.

“Jamie’s wife and my wife are step-sisters”, he volunteered without asking.

“Oh great”, I said and marched towards the hotel.

I could have a peaceful bath, peaceful bath is something all Bengalis enjoy. Change into travel clothes without having to hurry, time was adequate for all that. Clara was cordial at the desk, she announced the arrival of Louis. She accepted the settlement of the bill, the bellhop didn’t turn up despite her summoning several times. She apologized. I restrained her stating I am yet to have my bath and pack my things. She seemed relieved.

When it was over, I came down the stairs, I did not use the lift, and walked towards Louis dragging the suitcase behind. He came running and took it from me.

Louis was full of praise for Jamie, his wife’s brother-in-law. He praised Jamie’s patience and devoteness towards his family.

I always sit in the front seat of the omni, it has a bucket-seat and that way I could listen to Louis’s stories. He continued where he had disembarked “Jamie’s son Gregory is a bright lad for a barber’s son, he passed degree in engineering and works for the Washing machine manufacturing company in an industrial estate called Verna that I used to visit.” I knew the company well, it had a big brand name, they are my

customers. I didn't know Gergory worked there. In fact I didn't know Gregory till sometime ago.

Louis continued as he drove, "Gregory has been in love with a Hindu girl for seven years, almost seven years I think. She lives in the same neighbourhood. My sister-in-law is against Gregory marrying a Hindu. What is wrong Sir ji. What has religion got to do with marriage? Jamie loves Gregory, my nephew lives on the second floor where the barber shop is, Jamie would do anything for Gregory."

Louis got into melancholic mood immediately after giving out so much information. It was uncharacteristic of him to remain melancholic. We didn't talk much except about the new police commissioner being tech savvy and being able to book the drug runners based on tracking phone calls.

At the end of the journey we neared Manohar International airport, an Indigo was moving slowly and the sea was dark blue behind the runaway. Louis offered the box of prawn dish which he always did, he had kept it in the door side pocket. The container was tightly packed as usual, it was done properly to undertake the flight without causing stains on my clothes.

When he parked the car in front of the Manohar Parikar airport departure gate, a handsome looking CISF jawan smiled at Louis and instinctively stepped towards him. But the jawan withheld as the security personnel are not supposed to get friendly with the civilians. The jawan waved hesitantly.

Louis helped me put the contrainer with prawns inside the suitcase. The cops are required to be suspicious at airport premises, when you do something like that. Two jawans hovered over to inspect.

Manohar Parikar was the chief minister of Goa, known for his simplicity despite his education in Ivy League, a very simple man. One of the jawans greeted Louis, he checked with Loius

what it was he had given me. I was stooping to tie my shoelace, it had come off.

I overheard Louis explaining to the Jawan, “The saheb has a terrible wife, when he reaches Kolkotta he has to give her something she loves.” The jawan insisted on knowing what it was she loved. It didn’t make any sense, I heard Louis answering, “Saheb’s wife has terrible hair, it seems. She is a drunkard who wants him to take her hash everytime he comes down to Goa.”

Oh shit, I thought. Louis has gone overboard I thought. The jawans laughed as if it was a joke. I passed through the gate, the cop stepped back and saluted. He let me in without checking my id or the ticket. I could have been anybody, it could have been anything. I ambled through the group of fat women on the way to the counter to check in my baggage. They were laughing and seemed to belong to another world.

The airport was relatively less crowded. I noticed the jawan with Louis until I completed the check-in formalities and later disappeared from their sight through the security booth.

The weekend in Goa was incidental, not planned as I would like to believe. I got stuck up in Goa until the afternoon because the flights to Kolkotta were far and few, and the business meeting the previous day had got delayed till late in the evening the previous day, hence it had led to partying in Panjim.

Events led to events and I ended up in the morning at Jamie’s shop.

I wanted a break from my routine, my office routine and my domestic routine. I wanted to relax, all men want a break-away from all chores now and then and that's what I eventually ensured that weekend. In life such opportunities rarely occur, to do something out of the way. That is what I precisely tried doing including coming across Jamie the

barber and his wife the old live-wire. Jamie's son the bare-chested and his girlfriend, the giggly girl.

Life is not a linear progression as we are led to believe. It's a kaleidoscopic picture of changing images consisting of a myriad of stones and reflections. Of rewards and retribution, of succulent fruits and inedibles laid like pebbles along the path of destiny.

I like to think of the past with a dash of nostalgia, you can always make the past look different, the past never poses threat nor anxiety. Nostalgia is so subdueing. You have the option of recollecting it differently, the way you want it to be. The thoughts about the future offer no such cushion.

I always book the window seat whenever I fly. I sat in the Airbus A320, I was one of the first ones to board, the flight may take a while to take off. I looked out, the porters were loading the baggage, an emaciated porter was pulling out of the trolley what looked like my bag and pushing it on the loader. It went silently up and disappeared in the underbelly of the aircraft. My worldly possessions.

I requested the airhostess girl not to offer me refreshments during the flight, as I was proposing to take a nap. She appeared to be from the Northeast and had let her hair flow around the neck unlike the others among the cabincrew.

What would life have been like for Jamie's son, the engineer, had he married the Hindu girl? The two were blissfully happy over the little air space between the windows! What if Grace De Souza had gone to the beach in Goa and found the drowned boy was not her son? How nice it would have been had the commander of the Air India passenger Flight 855 detected the trouble in the Boeing 747 and safe-landed the aircraft in Santa Cruz in 1978.

What if the girl at the counter of Govandi liquor shop I met on the Christmas Eve, who helped me buy the Old Monk, had invited me as well to their party and I had accepted not

considering that I was not of their age? Nothing would have changed, I would have remained as old as I am, groggy and preparing to sleep through the flight, cooked prawns prepared by Louis's wife meant for my wife tucked away in the airtight container sheltered inside my baggage among baggage of other passengers in the underbelly of the flight about to take off, the stuff loaded by the emaciated porter about whose life I am yet to know!

You cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards.

Saranyan BV

Saranyan BV is Bangalore based poet and short-story writer. Many of his works are being published in Indian and Asian journals. He came to the realm of English by mistake and loves being there. He is a big fan of Raymond Carver and thinks that the genre short story is going to rule literature in the days to come, if the writers are ready to take up the challenge.

Get Your Book Reviewed

If you have got any book published and are looking for a book review, contact us. We provide book review writing service for a fee. We (1) write book review (2) publish review in CLRI (3) conduct an interview with the author (4) publish interview in CLRI. [Know more here](#).

Authors & Books

We publish book releases, Press Release about books and authors, book reviews, blurbs, author interviews, and any news related to authors and books for free. We welcomes authors, publishers, and literary agents to send their press releases. Visit our website <https://page.co/Vw17Q>.