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STIMULUS

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ATTRACTION

Words by *Christina Lovin*

Retina scans, lenses retract,
then fan like moon
flowers at midnight.
Blink twice.
Glance down,
up, again down.

Somewhere beneath
the sternum, elevator
cables fray, release.
Viscera plunge the shaft,
then rise. Inhale, exhale.

Blood static crackles
pulse points. Leaning
tower crashes. Just there
my flaming knees
buckle and burn.

LOVE BITE

Words by *Christina Lovin*

A pinch, she claims. Then, glances down to where
two stigma, like an exclamation point,
have spread their shame into the shoulder
flesh, so tender where the arm and torso join.
She shifts the straps of bag and bra apart
as if to prove mechanics of the injury:
the perjured witness of that biting smart
of teeth: sweet suck between the lips of sigh
and moan, and blood that stains like when the moon
has pulled the salt sea higher inch by inch
then slips away to leave the shorelines strewn
with evidence. She swears, It's just a pinch,
(that pervading proof of passion's purple art)
and lays her hand across her liar's heart.

APHORISMS

Words by *Fred Lee*

The fixation on stimulation often leads to the stimulation of growth.

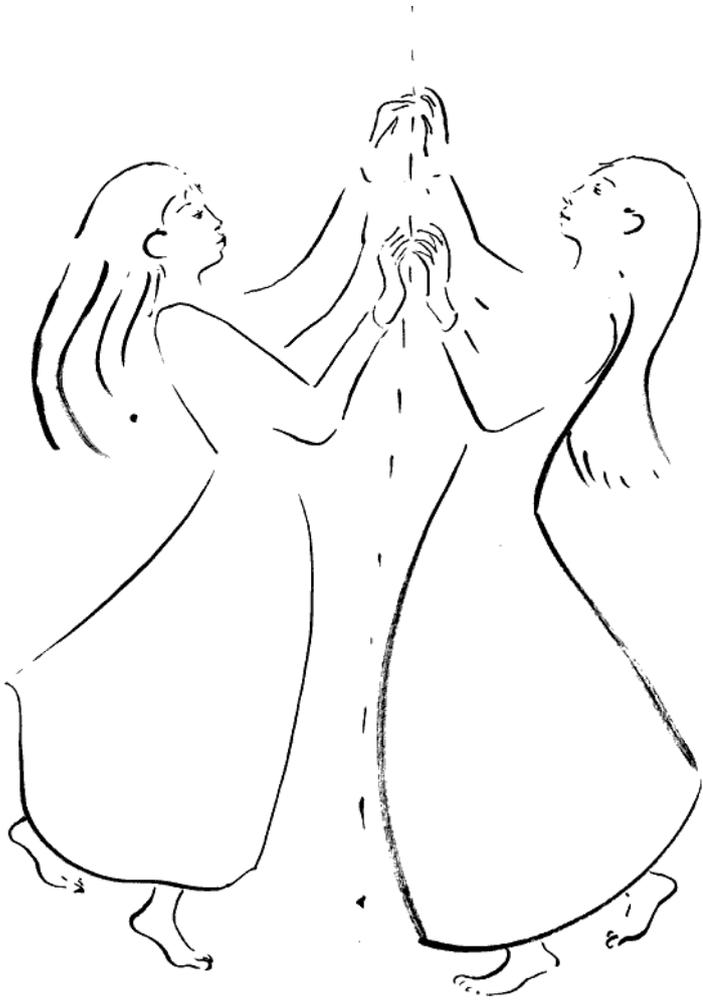
Stimulus is a physiological concept with psychological implications. Economically packaged, stimulus has an anti-political meaning.

Does freedom arise in the gap between stimulus and response? Perhaps freedom of the will does. But that freedom is paltry if it emerges at all.

Freedom resides in our responses; it resides in our stimuli, too.



Image by *Edith Bergfors*



Freedom resides in our responses; it resides in our stimuli, too.



Illustrations by *Estella Mare*





A stimulating effect is the aim of many a simulated affect.
Illustration by *Evipidis Sabatis*

B F SKINNER

Words by *Edward Alport*

<https://studylib.net/doc/9486639/b.f.-skinner>

This is Burrhus Frederick Skinner,
B. F. to his friends who never thought
BF could also stand for Bloody Fool.
Here we see him in his aspect as
Praying Mantis, breaking all of human thought,
All that we have ever cherished and adored
Into bite-sized chunks of Stimulus and Reward.

B. F. is an old, old friend of mine.
We first met in the heyday of his fame,
When every thought we had led back to Skinner,
Clutching his rational standard in its fist.
A Skinner Box was found in every lab
(Or twenty of them, one between the two of us)
A token of forward thinkingness.

It looks so tawdry and archaic now.
Did we really give those rats electric shocks?
But, Sir! Wasn't it barbaric? I mean!
Electric shocks! On those little pink rat feet!?
OK, you have to test it first, I say. Touch it.
The shock should startle it, not hurt. And they subside
Quiet now, but barely satisfied.

So much we didn't question, in the day.
Novel and Exciting is revealed
As Incomplete and Facile.
All I knew is now not only wrong
But makes me wrong as well because I knew it.
And all that cutting edge is a Bronze Age sword
Buried in a textbook tumulus.





On

Walking

*ELLEN
SAMPSON*



Author's note

The film *Things Floating in the Hudson: 11th July 2019* – a lo-fi mediation on the river that bounds the west side of New York – was developed as a psychogeography: an exploration of my embodied experience at a particular place and time. I am an artist who makes work with and about walking, using it to make performances, narratives, and objects. I walk across urban spaces and fields and occasionally trespass on other's land. Watching the film, I cannot help but think about the hours I spent running along its banks last year, the solitary pleasure of body, pavement and air, and of the ease with which I moved through space.

The Hudson is 315 miles long, but this little stretch of it was briefly mine. Made nine months into a fellowship in New York, I walked and ran this paved stretch of shore almost daily-looking at old boats, considering but never playing mini golf, wandering to pier 45 to watch the milonga on Sundays. The river interested me, the way it carves and bisects the land – the tension between the urban and wild, the ways the tides both signify and embody change. In many ways it is unlovely, cleared of the boat yards and dilapidated warehouses where Alvin Balthrop once photographed trysts. Instead it is a municipal space of leisure – the detritus not of industry but instead of play – balls, water bottles, protective clothing.

And yet there was often the sudden joy of the unexpected: a jolt of pleasure at meeting an object out of place.



On

Walking

I have always been struck by the phrase ‘a path well trodden’. A path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground ‘being trodden’ upon. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made out of footprints – traces of feet that ‘tread’ and that in ‘treading’ create a line on the ground ... A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. (Ahmed 2006: xix–xx)

Walking holds a particular place in our culture; not only are our movements learned, but they are socially and culturally specific: the way we walk is indicative of both who we are and who we would like to be. Walking is an intersection of the social, the bodily and the personal; it is learned, enacted and performed. More than almost any other activity, walking, renders us social beings. De Certeau famously commences *The Practice of Everyday Life* with a passage describing walking from the heights of the World Trade Center down into the streets of New York. The marks mapped out by our footsteps are, for de Certeau, cartographies of social structures; they are material and temporal manifestations of our social networks:

Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these ‘real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.’ They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize. (de Certeau 1984: 97)

The pathways we take are our routes through the world, our negotiations with the multiple forces and agencies at play. The paths we take produce and confirm our identities in an iterative cycle of repetitions and performances. As Ahmed so beautifully describes of paths and the orientations of the body: ‘Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created’ (Ahmed 2006: xix–xx). These lines might be physical, such as those De Certeau writes of, or social, the ways we navigate familiar and unfamiliar cultural terrains, separate from the road and an indication of desired trajectories (Van Wolputte 2018).

In crossing space we are in dialogue with multiple agencies beyond our own. These encounters, the meetings of both human and non-human affecting bodies, are individual, and bodily: cumulative and iterative. These meetings of agencies are the spatial, material and social networks that locate us within the world. We are produced by the spaces we inhabit and, in turn, negotiate those same socially and materially imposed identities by crossing and re-crossing space.

Walking is a confluence of agencies: as we cross space we negotiate the social structures which contain us, veering off track or toeing the line. Though the forces we negotiate may be social or political, it is our material culture which enacts these structures upon us. The things we meet in the world affect us. The shapes of our environments afford us certain movements just as our garments do. In moving our body through the world, we are in an entangled and complex negotiation of the body amongst the agencies which surround it. Meyer's description of how landscape shapes and reframes human experience, so that the spaces we have built shape not only our movements but also our conceptualizations of space and time, illustrates this particularly well:

The steps themselves represent a local time; the minutes required to climb up. In Venice, the steps of the stairway rhythmize the walk through the city. ... The city walker experiences the transition from the rhythm of the steps to another rhythm, clear, yet unknown, still to be discovered. (Meyer 2008: 158)

These groupings of bodies and things are the construction of the self in the world, so that 'bodily schema' (Schilder 1935) extends beyond the surfaces of the body into both the things which surround it and the environments (landscapes, bodies, screens) it inhabits. The spaces we move through act upon us just as do the agencies (material and other) in the things we wear, so that we are in a constant position of being affected, whilst at the same time affecting. Walking is an immersion in a cycle of affects: of meeting bodies that affect us. Walking is 'being in the world' – and in this 'being in' we are also becoming – changed and transformed by the meeting of agencies other than our own. The transformative nature of our encounters with the world is recorded both in the body-self – we are changed both physically and psychically in these meetings – and in our material culture. Ruggerone terms these transformations 'becomings':

The living corporeality of our practices, the fleshy experience of life we sense but cannot fully describe, like the feeling of walking through the city (De Certeau 1984), or sinking into a warm bath or wearing our favorite dress, all these are examples of perpetual becomings, events in which our bodies transform as a result of encounters with other bodies (human and non-human). (Ruggerone 2016: 8)

This text is an edited extract from Ellen Sampson's new book *Worn*, which will be published by Bloomsbury Academic in December 2020. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/worn-9781350087187/>

The short film *Things Floating in the Hudson: 11th July 2019* can be viewed at <http://www.ellensampson.com/things-floating-in-the-hudson>

Things Floating in the Hudson: 11th July 2019

1. Burger wrapper
2. Tennis ball
3. Glove
4. Footballs
5. Kneepad
6. Bottle
7. Tennis ball
8. Pank
9. Bike helmet
10. Leaf
11. Bottles
12. Ring

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FOUR 'VILLAIN'-ELLES

Words by *Christina Lovin*

The Female Praying Mantis Eats Her Mate

You do your yoga while I meditate
on our love life and entomology:
the female praying mantis eats her mate

post coitus when he won't capitulate
to her urges. From pop criminology—
go do your yoga—let me meditate

on Bobbitt's spouse who was led to castrate.
Personally, I cull tautology:
The female praying mantis eats her mate

or she doesn't. Don't underestimate
my whetted interest in phrenology—
yes, I do yoga and I meditate—

but give me your head, I'll gladly dictate
your name on a page in martyrology.
The female praying mantis eats her mate,

but first she takes time to decapitate—
Orpheus's lost head ain't just mythology.
So you do your yoga. I'll premeditate
how the female praying mantis eats her mate.

Mites Are Having Sex on Your Face Right Now

Mites are having sex on your face right now!
Though their carnal capers may not be perceived
they're boffing right under your nose anyhow.

Sometimes I hear Marvin Gay singing real low
"Let's Get It On" in my ear, and believe
mites are having sex on my face right now.

Then I catch Barry White crooning somehow
"Oh Baby, Baby!" he rumbles and heaves.
There's boinking right under my nose. And how

should I feel with this erotic luau
ensuing right on me? Should I be peeved
with mites having sex on my face right now?

How much wild copulation should you allow?
They're humping and hunching until they're bug-eyed
while bonking right under your nose anyhow.

Should we encourage them, bug Herr and Frau?
We are the earth on which they're conceived.

Mites are having sex on your face right now—
they're boning right under your nose anyhow.

Dung Beetles Find Home by Searching the Stars

Dung beetles find home by searching the stars:
their shitty lives brightened by astral bliss
lost on fools and wanderers alike. Ours

were the sun and moon: five houses, more cars,
your kids, mine. A morning fuck. A goodnight kiss.
Dung beetles find home by searching! The stars

do not move. We did. Cornfields to sea to Mars
it seemed. The road not taken always missed,
lost as fools and wanderers alike. Hours

apart for years now, I push grief backwards,
tumbling this turd of pain like Sisyphus.
Dung beetles find home by searching the stars,

looking behind. Such power—avatars
of love misguided, divorces, and splits—
lost on fools and wanderers alike. Our

sparring aside, we might have healed those scars,
but here's another way of saying this:
dung beetles find home by searching those stars
lost on fools and wanderings like ours.

Silverfish Mating is Lengthy and Slow

Silverfish mating is lengthy and slow:
three phases like stages can sure be a bore.
When one wants vivace, the other largo,

it's better to find a common tempo.
These bugs take their time to establish rapport.
Silverfish mating is lengthy and slow:

First, touchy-feely. Back off. Say Hello.
Then she chases him for a senseless encore.
Which one wants vivace, which wants largo?

At long last, there's bug sex larghissimo—
absolutely no rushing this insect l'amour.
Silverfish mating is lengthy and slow,

so whether your lover's a belle or a beau—
it's best to keep pace with your sweet paramour,
if one wants vivace, the other largo.

Perhaps Verlaine would have not shot Rimbaud
had making sweet music been less a chore
like silverfish mating, lengthy and slow,
when one wants vivace, the other largo.

AN ENCOUNTER, OR "HOW I BECAME A PHILOSOPHER"

Words by *Max Leyf*

"Demonic birds," I burst out as I heaved myself from my desk and lumbered across the room. A band of magpies had perched askance along the balcony outside, guided by an instinctual strategy to cry havoc with the greatest acoustic advantage. I closed the window with a thud, knowing it was more of a token than a resolution, for the double-pane of glass remained as transparent to their insolent and incessant squawking as it was to the sunlight streaming through it. Returning to my chair, I took my book in hand. The book had remained open to the 80th page. "Monadology" was printed topmost, and immediately subordinate was the heading "Section 16." I began to read:

Furthermore, one must concede that perception, and all that depends upon it, are inexplicable on purely mechanical grounds; that is to say, by means of figures and motions.

The magpies persisted in their strident cries. I redoubled my efforts of concentration, intent on preparing myself for the following day, when I planned to vanquish Professor Francis on the field of argument:

Suppose there were a machine, so manufactured as to think, feel, and have perception: it might be imaginatively increased in size (while maintaining the same proportions) so that one might enter into it even as into a mill. That being so, we should, on examining its interior, find only parts which work one upon another, and never anything by which to explain a perception.

There must be something wrong with this analogy since it is an obvious fact that the brain produces thoughts just like the mill produces flour. That was it: there is no mention of flour in *Monadology*. The argument held no weighting for the train while I can't

Immanuel from Prussia that borders Russia and Tchaikovsky's swans

the mighty birds and yet so soft does music

On my mind alight, so soft,

why does it alight so soft?...

I raise my eyelids, which I did not know had fallen. The room is full of light that seems to have no single source. My gaze catches an empty glass on the table near the window. Like a prism, it showers the table with a thousand subtle rays of colour. My head swims and one of the refractions penetrates my eye, filling my mind with momentaneous light. At once I notice a faint and lilting music, as though of voices singing even as they speak. Along the balcony I see a retinue of beings in their trim, arrayed in piebald iridescent cloaks whose faces shine with a strange and inward beauty. I raise myself expecting a sense of heaviness that would ordinarily accompany this deed. To my surprise, elation floods my limbs and they spring to action. With an excellence that nearly outstrips the speed of thought, they hasten to my spirit's bidding and bear me across the room as a cloud on a sprightly wind. I unlatch the door and the visitors address me in seeming unison: "Hail fellow, from heralds of the vernal goddess, know that Zephyrus bears our Lady hither, your reception she requesting."

Imagining myself to be taken aback by the unexpected announcement, and nevertheless the words proceed as naturally as the rustle of leaves follows the touch of a breeze in spring: "With reverence do I respect her arrival," I responded, each word seeming backwardly to shape the thought that was its cause.

Before my wondering eyes appears a figure with flowing hair like the grain of birch-wood, and eyes like new leaves. "Sophia," I whisper. I continue, suddenly proud: "These seven years I have made myself your disciple, and I am not the worse for it. My mind has been whetted through trial and through study. Today it glitters like a brand as I skewer my opponents in the ring of disputation."

"Dear boy," she says, with words that laugh like light on rippling streams, "remove the bandages from your eyes; the fool alone thinketh himself wise."

I am filled with a rush of shame at my petty conceits. She looks upon me, and from her gaze I feel a swell of pity. "Forgive me," I exclaim, "I have abused your name with literal-mindedness and profaned your altar with idols of dialectic."

“Your repentance is your entry into the shrine of knowledge. The only heart who can look on Wisdom’s feature is the one who sees through the eyes with love. By this light alone can mortals read in the Book of Nature.”

“Lady I think I am besotted; a swell of happiness gives shape to airy nothings. But still I believe, and have heard it said, ‘Love is reason’s blindness.’”

“Silly boy, before you never heard nor looked upon the world at all.

Love gives light to your dark unkindness.

Without love’s sight, can reason only grope in blindness.”

“How then can I know my thoughts do not deceive,
When all I’ve learned, would counsel disbelieve?”

“Ask not ‘How can I know?’” but ‘How to love.’

For you cannot love what is false, nor what you cannot conceive.

Wisdom lights the way for love’s feathery warmth to land,

And love takes lovely Wisdom by the loving hand.”

I reach out my hand and at once I am swept up on a billow of euphoria. Her voice rings through my mind as sunlight through a crystal. She continues:

“Lo! The green grass waxes towards the sun, and the crocus reaches its tender petals for the sky. But truth will pass you by if you attend no further. The grass is the countenance of higher beings, and the blossom is the face of the spirit’s mystery. You must not only look on these outsides, but learn to listen inwardly. When you attend with care and reverence, a world of secret music will announce itself. The whole living world will at once resound in sacramental song.

“A tiger-lilly, triumphant, upward-opening and cupped, sounds the joyful blast of trumpets.

The angels play on tulips as on flutes. Violets ring like tiny triangles. Poppies sound in soft and plangent keys.

But as you listen deeper you will see that these instruments do not sound of their own accord, but attune themselves to celestial harmonies. Their music is an echo of the stars above, And angelic hierarchies that sing in choirs of love,

The love that moves the sun and other stars.

“Behold the birch; its whole form resounds

With intervals measured by the music of the spheres.

The tonic rumbles, stern and muffled, in its solid trunk.

The second sounds about its first furcation where the bulk divides and ramifies.

The third emerges with the branch and rounds off its major in the bud.

The fourth sends its keynote through all that’s green.

And the fifth achieves its glory in the shining blossom.

The sixth opens not from in the tree, but in being seen

By other beings from without, in parity and complement;

A bee alighting on the tender-opened couch

Within the sanctum of the blossom’s bower

Sounds the sixth for a brief ambrosial hour

The seventh sings of longing and departure, autumn’s key

The octave echoes in the seed, the birth to be.

“Behold the sylphs that teach the colours to mingle
And weave the elements with air and light
Behold the undines that with the ebb and flow
Of sap, meander in devoted rhythmic tides
Behold the gnomes, like miners shrewd and quick of wit
They lay the roots like briny tracks of life
And lo! Let your glance graze but do not tarry
On the fleeting forms of streaming fire
That wend about the withering blossoms
Reaping warmth from flowers as they fade
And the shining summer spirits upward bearing
To where light patiently waits to receive her own.
Queen of the Elements: now you know the quinta-essentia.

“Before this day, as skies made dark by stormclouds,
So your eyes were hid by scales of lovelessness
Let them fall and swift depart
For the eye that clear is portal to the heart
Which is love’s exaltation and his throne
As heaven’s vaulted ceiling to the sun and stars
That dispel the earth her gloomy shroud
So Nature’s book is closed up tight
To the one whose eyes convey no light
You see by the same light you consent give
In which you think and feel and also live.
I take my leave, adieu, adieu
For if my form does not depart from you
My sun will never fill your inner sky
My light will never stream forth from your eye.”

Her words seemed to coruscate and flutter in the spring air. I gasped. At once I began to weep. May my tears cleanse and wash away my sin and idiocy, and baptise me into the church of Wisdom and of truth! During the entire encounter, I had failed to notice that she had been peopling the meadow with flowers with the substance of her speech. As though in intimated recollection, I beheld every word as it descended with a flutter to perch as a blossom, like a thousand butterflies that bind themselves to the green earth. I had failed to see that with the play of expression over her features as she spoke, she had been colouring the landscape in infinite gradients of light and shadow. Each creature was a unique prayer to Wisdom, and I only had to allow my heart to be instructed in this exultation.

I stood on the balcony and looked out on the vibrant field below. The troupe of magpies had retired to the roof where they now held conference in a forgotten tongue. Nature was a speech, a symphony, whose every moment had already transformed into the one to follow. I recalled a line from one of Rilke’s letters: “how all things are in migration.” What remained? I could neither match nor capture abundance of creation. All that remained was to sing praises to the world’s glory in my own poor tongue; to add my small voice to the chorus of gladness. I was buzzing inwardly with a fluent euphoria as I returned to the open book on my desk. I chuckled faintly. Perhaps the reader will not be taken aback if I remark at the childishness with which “the hard problem

of consciousness” now appeared to me. One might as well quibble over how mere syntax could give rise to a formulation of the problem in the first place. I returned to the balcony, book in hand, and seated myself against the south-facing wall. I took up a pen and did not set it down again until I had scribbled out the following modest lines, which I have transcribed from the margin of my copy of Leibniz’s *Monadology*:

Before the world was made I knew her
Her joy was my completion and delight
She was my only muse and inspiration
By her breath the days were numbered
The seasons were her days and nights
For her the depths and heights were sundered
The axis of the world became her spine
To join the Earth and Sky in life divine
On her hair I patterned plays of sunlight
Which sparks and dances on Elysian streams
Her eyes became the sunbeams
Blithe, the world’s joy and lumination
For her form, the rolling Earth did I design
And all the trees and grasses fine
Her smile made me think of flowers
And for her soft repose, I made the bowers
And about her heart demarked the sacred garden
That stretches four full chambers wide
Therein the life of creatures to reside
And flowing thence in rivers out of Arden
Wherein our spirit-selves abide.

Movies Mystery Magic <-> A simulation-stimulation

Bengali Original by *Buddhadev Bhattacharya*

Translation by *Sourav Roy*

Illustration by *Ansuman Chakraborty*

(1)

Darkened screen, clammed up theatre, the air achingly curious, and the mandatory whispered voiceover (baritone):

“Where the night streets are lonely; and the light from neither row of lamposts can reach the darkness in the middle; there, in that hypergeometric strip; the stray dogs come to do their nightly aaa-ooo-eee-iii-s. All reason topple over tongue-tied at that inauspicious territory. Legend has it that unsated spirits rain down there.”

Fade in, 'suspicious' music plays

The first shot of the film – a street at the dead of the night – no sign of life to be seen – shutters are down in all shops. The houses are encrusted with dreams – muddy gold in hue. The cold neon filter has washed all the flowing life off the streets. It has also made the night sky irrelevant. The camera waits, then looks around silently, obediently. Suddenly from the right side of the screen a pack of stray dogs go – bow wow

wow oooooooooooooo – their shrill cry takes over the entire screen, so our eyes finds an alley to escape – on the left side of the screen, between two rows of houses – barely a few feet wide – it waits with some blood-curdling secret, hesitant to join the main road. The dogs stop their ruckus but wait for something to spill out of the alley with a menacing grrrrrrrrrr. Then that too goes away, full silence returns. A nasty ice-cold mute-moment –

suddenly the surround sound of utensils shattering on a kitchen floor – our eyes pick up the panic of our ears and we see – we see a chunky bald man with a tight paunch – wearing gold-framed glasses – bursting on to the screen and running for his life; chased by something or someone. His bottom-heavy body in motion almost topples over by gravity; but he saves himself, swerves, corrects course and turns right. The dogs have already started making a noisy nuisance around him. The camera goes dab smack onto his face - sweat is dripping, clothes soaked through. Keeping the sweating man in low angle, the camera starts hurtling noisily ahead of the character. The

background score huffs, puffs and pants while the lens breaks the fall of fat, oily drops of sweat – The man seems like a dripping sticker on our visual consciousness. But the viewers stay in the dark about who or whether anybody was chasing him.

Gunshot! The lens gets a few blood splatters but which body part gets it? We don't know. The man falters and tries to run again. Another gunshot! His ugly mug stumbles over the camera lens.

Cut. The camera goes into the flashback mode, half an hour back. The location is a local market – cramped, muddy, stuffy – open drains are filled with the detritus of vegetables, blood too. When walking through, people like us pinch our noses; a wide variety of dead flesh is being carved. If you don't want to see the heads and ribs and other body parts being sized up to turn live animals into dead meat, you better keep your eyes shut for a few seconds.

The Catfish-Carp-*Hilsa*-Minions-fish cleavers are

glistening under the naked light bulb; the sprightly camera slithers, pans and captures a meat shop – the small TV is playing an overspiced Bhojpuri film, over that we hear the voice of the owner, a dark fatso - “Sirji, we don't soak the goat, no cheating with our meat, the weight is very correct...” He bares his stained teeth, almost black, in feigned friendliness. After showing us this, the camera goes to a single storey house behind this shop. The doors are locked. A door opens, and a man comes out. It's a gambling den, mostly cards. The long, narrow room looks even more congested in the narrow screen. The benches are arranged in two rows – with just enough space for one person to walk, crab-wise. Everybody is deep into trying out their luck, bodies bent forward in attention, with a glass of hooch close at hand – erases the pain of loss, for wash-rinse-repeat. The counter for cash and hooch are hidden deeper inside the maw of this den - the chunky bald man with a tight paunch comes from there – walks to the camera via the narrow gap - his phone starts ringing in his breast pocket – he stumbles on a gambler's stretched feet – after getting

a nasty look, the gambler smiles sheepishly and fixes his pose. We know why the gambler goes sheepish – our man looks like a six feet tall big brown bear wearing delicate golden framed glasses and a balding pate – his round face as snarly as a dog's. He hisses and grunts on the phone, incomprehensible. His lower lip is curled outwards, pressing the juice out of the tobacco stuffed close to the gum. His hisses and grunts, translated - “ Wait up, you prick! Dumping the stuff ...coming in half hour – that kid of the MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) ...buggering me raw with missed calls!” He steps out and spits a big, black blob on the lens and on our face, and disappears.

While he walks down the road, missed calls keep pouring in. His face drips with irritation. His right hand holds a small oblong handbag, the strap is held around his wrist, but the shine of a thick gold bracelet peeps through. Our man walks with a busy gait. This whole flashback is happening in a reddish semi-lit world – with some brutal stock music – the kind one calls 'deadly' in Bengali.

In almost-pitch darkness, a bare building under construction. The camera captures the ghostly building – the black pond next – the slice of blackish field next to it – as an eye from the sky. Then it suddenly zooms in and alights on the terrace. It turns around, gingerly checks out the semi-darkness and then races down the stairs. It is too dark to see much. The camera descends three floors and barges into a room. The entire screen snuffs itself with magical blue light. Three or four male bodies are strewn around on the rough cement floor. Only one man is standing up dialling his mobile phone non-stop. Is he the last man standing? Are the rest quick or dead? The blue light turns a shade more sickening. The camera keeps throwing its strobe-like gaze on the floored guys.

Suddenly a paunched man climbs up the dark flight of stairs and stands in the blue light. This is that baldie with the handbag. The flashlight in his mobile is lit and he starts growling before he is done climbing the stairs, “You dickheads will take stuff only from me and can't wait for a second? I fucking gave you extra stock yesterday, thought you won't need today....but what pricks you dickheads are...” After vomiting out

his grudge, he takes a big breath and stands on the landing. Before we could guess anything , a bullet whistles past his left ear – his paunch starts running ahead of him, for dear life...

Cut. And the camera has escaped from the flashback sequence. The place is now the open foyer of the High Court. The public prosecutor is mobbed suitably by TV channel cameras. His white shirtfront is shining through the V of his black coat. Some clueless bystanders are also around. The mob and the reporters are making their due share of white noise in the background. The prosecutor speaks with rehearsed respectability: “ You must be aware of this ghastly crime story. Still, I want to reiterate the demands I want to present to the honourable members of the court.” He takes out a paper and holds it, “you might already know, that among the four young lives extinguished by this unknown assassin was a poisoning with a drug overdose, was the son of our respected MLA. And another innocent bystander was murdered because he was a witness to this crime. Can you imagine how perverted this assassin is...” His voice trails off. Camera leaves the court premises. The scene vanishes.

**

I've no idea how I ended up in this Cinema Hall. And how I've been turned into a shareholder of this ghastly entertainment scheme. I am sitting in the luxury row, with a tray of fragrant steaming lunch on my lap, but I don't feel entertained. I can see rows of dark heads gaping at the megascreen. Are they thinking at all? Or overthinking? Maybe their afterthoughts are about the complex visual politics of lens-based art forms...or not.

Before we can think any more, the film restarts. I just realised it was not an intermission, but someone pressed pause...

Wan light of the silver screen in the hall

A lonesome night. Busyness has downed its shutter for the day at a mofussil and retired. A girl clad in white salwar kameez is almost running on the pitched, dark road – her body is soaked in desolation. We see her from the back vigorously moving in the narrow screen - faceless. A long braid snakes down her spine and the strap of her bag is constantly slipping off her left shoulder thanks to the agitated pace of walking. She keeps adjusting it. When the camera zooms out a little, we see two men are following her, from the right side. They are tall, their body lingo loafer-like, wearing track suit pants and loose wife-beaters. Their hands are roving across their own torsos unmindfully. A strain of psychadelic music is slowly looming larger across the screen, overcoming the darkness -

The camera hones its gaze rightwards and toggles between the movement of the heavy breast of the girl, the self-carressing hands of the men and the dark street. The right breast, the right halves of the torso. If these close-ups were taken from the left side, would the sequence have been perfectly mirrored? The director doesn't mention. Anyway, in this sequence, the three close-ups start periodically rotating amongst themselves. The cuts become faster and faster, as if moving towards an escape velocity. Soon the cuts get too close to tell them apart, suddenly the camera stops. The woman's right hand now enters her handbag – there's a glimmer of cold metal – the two men turn around and run for their lives – the close-up of the woman's face: hardened jaws, stern gaze -

The camera starts a backstroke. It reaches out and captures the frame of an autorickshaw rushing through the darkness of a midnight road – with the same deftness of the nightvision of an owl. The trumpeting of popular Bollywood music floats on the night air. The auto rends through the street, through empty fields, through ghostly ponds -

A girl was sitting in the auto, that woman we just met. The frame was lit with green so her formal shirt and tight jeans were looking darker. She was sandwiched between two blokes – the camera is the

invisible fourth, sidling up to them. The blokes have large sweat stains spreading around their armpits, the girl's face's dotted with perspiration, and Hindi music is loud. If you could add the dimesion of smell to the whole movie screen, the whole audience would have been stuffed inside a gigantic, sweaty armpit. The girl was egging the driver on to drive faster, faster, and the rickshaw was flying, almost...

The driver set his side mirror to fit the girl's body in. With an eye on that mirror, he cuts off the sound system - “Why so hurry, darling?! Will you do sssssusssuuu...” then he starts whistling through his teeth, ssssss -

Suddenly the twos starts getting into a queue to become fours and the air gets heavier with fear. The bloke on her right side grabs the hint and mimics in a girly voice, “Stop the auto on one side, dickhead! We will all sssuuussuuu together. Only one thing, we will all pee standing.” He puts stress on the 's'-s and then grins like a straggly tomcat appreciating his own joke - The girl has tears in her eyes. In a choked-up voice, he says, “Brother, please drive faster. My folks are all stressed - ”

“Oh ok, if you have problem peeing standing will all sit and pee...”

“Stop fucking around and stop the auto on that side!” the gym-boy sitting on her right hollers.

The auto stops next to a dead pond. Bushy undergrowth all around – the stubborn girl acts difficult, they all have to work hard to drag her down. Her body is thrashed around into the maw of a loose bush. The theatre fills with deafening sounds of the cricket, the girl's muffled screams – the naked dance of the crazy rapists -

A parallel frame appears on the screen – deep inside a tropical jungle, tribal men are eating a girl up, someone chopping up her breast with a knife, someone tearing out her lower lip with teeth. Enough cannibalism to make even horror movie pros shit bricks. But it all looks overwrought – some trick of the director or the camera guy, may be...

Both the frames are paused at the same time. From there the original frame of rape gets uploaded to a website.



Title: Hot Movie Scene; Category: Entertainment; Notice: Age-restricted Video;

From that website the old rape scene restarts. Below the video there are options for 'Like' 'Dislike' and 'Comments' section. Then the cursor double clicks itself on 'Related Videos' and they start playing relentlessly. The video clips are rape scenes from popular films, mostly gang rape scenes; the sly foxy eyes of the villain, his crooked smile -the pleadings of the victim - dragging herself away on the ground – trickling blood; after watching five odd clips – my senses go numb, my head feels empty...

After watching rape after rape when I was getting comfortably numb, ignoring the screamed demands on even my inner organs to get erections – the browser page vanishes, the rape continues in full screen mode.

The audio and the visual both get more hellish. Suddenly among all these manly bodyplay a gunshot! One of three got it right in the forehead, before the blood can come out of the bullet hole, he falls face down on the girl. The other two get it below the belt, in the next second. Their trousers soaked in blood, they join the chorus of groaning with the girl. Two more gunshots till total silence! The raped, and three flaccid rapists around her. The next frame gives cover to the girl, she sits up – without her left breast – and hollering; the silhouette of the gunman reloads her gun and gives it to the girl; after he leaves the girl touches the muzzle to her forehead and falls off like a sack -

Back to the foyer of the High Court, the prosecutor continues “...there are evidences against the assassin to hand over loaded firearms to civilians, we are collecting more conclusive evidences for our honourable judges. Imagine, if things go on like this, will there be any law in the land?...”

The location shifts again to the multi-meat, crowded bazaar. It is still early in the evening, but the market is thronged by early bird shoppers, impatient to go home on their way back from work. The giant fish heads are rolling one after another with the rapid handiwork at the cleavers.

On the other side there's the gambling den, smelling widely of hooch, people bent down on tables to look for their lucky break. There's something moving swaying at the far end of the den. Could be a woman, this could be a sex den, too...the reddish light doesn't help much –

We've been in this meat shop before. That lungi-clad fatty is sitting on his haunches, the hamhands are lolling below his knees. There's a long queue at the shop today. The TV is playing a raunchy Bhojpuri film song. The gentlemen shoppers are stealing a glance or two at that, then it's back to the meat...

Close to the shop, beyond the gambling den, there's a space where the lights of the naked bulbs don't reach, the moonlight and the darkness have gathered in a pool there. A man's silhouette bends down, puts something there, startles himself by his own act and starts screaming “Bomb! Bomb!” The bomb scare gets booming across the bazaar in seconds. There's a split-second of lull - decision taking happens. Then everything goes pell mell, the muddy streets gets muddier – the den empties in seconds, the benches overturn, the people push each other over, a few necks are thrown right at the giant blade of the cleaver, the blade does its job as well as a desi guillotine – dead men, scared men, dead fish, man head, fish head – all in all a cutthroat cadaverous cacophony.

The bomb squad finally arrives with sniffing dogs. When those police dogs are done sniffing, their stray cousins start theirs. White letters appear on the screen - *N.B: all dogs can sniff out bombs as well as ghosts.*

After a lot of combing, hemming and hawing, the bag is picked up and found to be stuffed with drugs. The cops lay them out on a table to show how much and how many kinds – then the camera cuts-

Next morning. Lots of newspapers on a lot of tea tables, with the same headline, “Bomb Blast, Many

Dead” with grisly pictures of the dead. One of the headlines, “Four Killed in Bomb Scare” being read by the chest of a headless man (his head is out of the frame). Headline – front page photo – two heads – four bodies – a bag of drugs in the inset.

The prosecutor's open session is back on camera, “... the accused raised a false bomb scare and got four people killed. Although they were not innocent...they had pending criminal cases against them for running an illegal gambling and sex shop in that market. They were antisocials, yes, but no one can be allowed to take the law in their own hands... We are presenting all these cases with adequate evidences and arguments to the honourable judge. Hopefully by the next hearing we will know his verdict...” Before he could finish camera gives a long, loud beep and we see 'no signal' sign on the screen.

The famous newschannel's breaking news appears on the screen : “*The Mysterious Assassin is Unmasked!*” The scrolling advertisement below reads: BURN FACT LOSE WEIGHT UP TO...

The calmly young girl reads the text from the teleprompter, “At last, thanks to the exclusive research from our newschannel the identity of the mysterious assassin lies exposed. According to the team report, this man, now in his mid thirties lost his parents very early. Then this orphan boy gets recruited in a band of beggars in this city. After almost a decade of life in the mean streets, he joins the infamous antisocial Cut-eye Bachchu. Slowly he becomes Bachchu's right hand man. We have spoken to the other gang members. They said they noticed an aloofness in the assassin for the last few months. Probably he was bored with run of the mill crimes. He has become a pro in all of them. After everybody slept off at night, often he looked at his hands with tears in his eyes. That must have been a symptom of his mental breakdown, his close acquaintances in the gang, say. The experts all agree on his full mental derangement, currently...” A few 'artist's impression' animations are shown. The anchor girl resurfaces on the screen: “Let's see what the people in the street have to say.” The camera shows us a few incoherent bytes and sheepish smiles of pedestrians. Clearly they have been caught unawares....

The camera leaves for the court. This set of court interior is pretty dated, complete with the blind justice statue. On the right the accused is standing at the docks next to a few cops in uniform and plain clothes. Some portraits of great men out of focus, the moving pendulum of the clock...The judge is writing with deep concentration, the hammer lies next to him...a few feet away the writing clerk waits.

The camera finally locks on to the face of the accused. He has a pleasant, fair face with a bit of bad boy smile. Slowly his vampirically fair face gets fairer, the white stripes in his jailbird costume grow wider than the black stripes, the brightness is turned up so high that it hurts our eyes...

Pin drop silence in the court; the verdict is about to

be announced. The faces in the advocate bench are dripping with eagerness. A tension hangs lightly in the air. Suddenly I start doubting whether I am going blind, every time the camera captures the accused, I feel like a pile of almost identical images of his face are being badly superimposed on each other – with added sound effect of electric sparks; but I am reassured by the rest of the frame, everything else in the court is in HD clarity, maybe the director is doing some VFX with the accused, some illusion -

The judge is ready to pronounce his verdict, all eyes are on him, including the camera's-

Suddenly we hear the subdued noise of an explosion, the camera shakily turns to the left. The accused is not there at the dock any more, there are millions of red ants instead. And these red ants attack the audience who were slobbering for a fresh kill...the ants get in everywhere under their clothes...drives them crazy... somehow they run out of the court room helter-skelter – but thousands of red ants leave the court premises in a disciplined, army-like row – camera cuts again, an explosion – the accused explodes into a mountain of red ants – cut – director's name appears – the high-frequency music is ear-splitting...

The End

S-T-I-M-U-L-U-S

STIMULUS SLIT SILT SMUTMIST LIST SUIT SLUT LIST LUST MUST SIT

brown-study works

STIMULUS

SCENE # 1

EXT. NIGHT. OPEN FIELD

Is this how we are going to begin?

-Yes, why not?

Do beginnings really matter?

-Yes.

More than the endings?

-No?

Every story begins the same way.

The way we know. Each might end differently though.

-What's more important then?

*For all the stories to begin the same way,
or for every story to end differently?*

If all the stories do not begin the same way,
can they end differently?

*-If all the stories ended similarly,
will each beginning be different?*

SLIT

At first it tasted of sumac, and then iron. I didn't want to play the guessing game, it might as well have been just about anything. The colour had continued changing for days now. Night after night I kept waking up,

frightened I had slept on it, rubbed it into the fabric, that it had disappeared, that it had grown, that it came from between my legs. I dreamt one night that it was being scrubbed, scrubbed torturously and in vain but if I didn't stop him it would eventually fade. Then yesterday I spilled some hot sauce. Now there were two spots. One a bright red, the other a deep dark brown slowly turning purple, like blood clotting. So then I took out bottles and tubs, and soft fruit from the fridge and laid them out on the bed. Each one would leak, would fall, would get squished. All by mistake of course, I wouldn't do it purposely. It would look like the recreation of the scene of crime. I decided to take a nap, I wouldn't be able to help what happened when I wasn't conscious. But I sat up after no more than twenty minutes or perhaps two; I couldn't will myself to sleep, that would be cheating.

I wish it wasn't satin. It was an experiment, there would be wine and music and sex. Satin would look good. Nothing happened that night, no one came home, no one played music and the wine did not spill on the white satin bed sheet. But the next afternoon the stain was there. It was fresh that day, there was only a small window of time so the culprit was obvious. But what was the crime?

SILT

There is a process to exfoliation. A roommate once brought back snake skin. My mother said the snake would smell it and come with its family. Why though? You abandoned it, to be picked up by strangers. Unless it was all a scheme, and the point was to be able to trace it back to the picker. So they could be murdered. Murder by snake skin.

Snakes exfoliate regularly. My mother does too. I don't. They say that in a space station, the detritus- dead skin- simply floats in clouds, without gravity. Invisible dust on earth becomes snake skin in space stations without good ventilation.

But that's natural exfoliation. My mother uses a coir scrub and chickpea powder everyday to reveal smooth skin. You can also use acid peels that remove the dry scaly cells from the epidermis. Raw, slightly reddened skin exposed to sunlight. Imagine the skin of the whole body peeled in its entirety. Baby soft, soaked in donkey milk, kept out of sunlight for days. Snakes could have a similar process instead of the otherwise irresponsible disposal. My mother collects fallen hair strands, which are then sold to wig-makers. A 100 hair strands a day. It's acute waste management of human shedding. In ground and in space.

SMUT

The word sha-ri-ri-ka which means bodi-ly
has so much friction in it that it can burn
the best of ideas to ashes
The ri and ri sit too dangerously
close to each other - they'll start quarrelling
anytime now -

The sweetness of sha, the softness of tongue
licking the hard palette in such stark contrast
with ka - it's coarse cousin
that leaps out of throat

If you have ever lived outside your body,
you know what it means to live with this
friction

Two eerily similar incompatible cells
Or sounds or organs or breaths

Or two divided stresses locked
In a battle somewhere
in a pulled muscle or a tired shoulder
Both claiming to be the original
Occupant and the other an alien
Inhabitant

The skin that covers it all
Like letters over language
And words over meaning
Can neither be too taut
Or too saggy
Agile like a reptile
It must glide over this nuisance
Like grass grows unrepentant
On mountains.

MIST

Excerpts from "The Inner ear"

"I didn't quite realise when the sounds stopped. You don't hear with your ear as a veshakaran, you create the sound. Inside the body is the reverberation of the chenda. This starts from the heat under the feet that rises slowly to meet with the heat burning down. Both meet in the middle where the heat is contained. It is not one long canal you see, it is two that move in different directions and then get contained to sustain rhythm. This vibration is not like white noise, as one would imagine. Not the same reverberation left in your ears after the performance. How you hear is through the ear. The outer ear captures the sound, the middle ear has three tiny bones that are set in motion, this motion then causes flux in the fluid contained in the cochlea. Linearity. Not simultaneity. So the reverberation in your ear, is not trapped in the centre of the body but in the brain. There is clarity in this sonar impulse. They play the chenda** to my feet, my feet persist because of this sound and this sound is the sound of the chenda. The ear has no function here. That is not how I learned to hear. Now, I have a bionic ear."*

*Veshakaran- Malayalam, performer.

**Chenda- Malayalam, percussion instrument

LIT

The night was stormy - lightning, thunder, and then a downpour. I was inside the house, looking out of the window, at an open drain and its dark waters, which shimmered under the flashes of lightning and trembled at the touch of rain. My eyes were looking out, but my ears were stuck to the door, waiting for his footsteps to pass by as he climbed up the stairs. These days, a part of me lives outside of myself. Like an obsessive listener, it traces every moment of his footsteps and picks up all the little noises he makes in the room above. It clings to the ceiling and bolts, here and there, chasing him from the kitchen to the bathroom, resting with him as he sleeps on his bed, but awake to the possibility of creaks and moans when he turns in his sleep.

I have seen him only in bits and pieces - stealthy glances, a door ajar, an angular gaze from the window - a partial view, him checking his mailbox, scratching the slight stubble on his cheek, his red tie, his brown leather shoes. But the sounds of his being have filled my body to the brim. A river rages in my gut, to the rhythm of his steps on stairs, my heart sinks and rises when he walks on my roof, barefoot, carefully as if keeping a beat.

He is late today, perhaps because of the rain. Or have I missed him, in the wake of all this thunder and rain? Is it possible that he passed by, unnoticed? No. Today, I will see him. I will follow him and wait as he climbs the last flight of his stairs, wait till he reaches the faint circle of light outside his door, and then - from the darkness

below, I will call him, and wait for him to turn and reveal himself to my wanting eyes.

Sparks fly out of the transformer, and all the lights die out. The rain comes to a screeching halt, and in that sudden silence, three quick knocks on my door - it is him, his knuckles tapping against the teak door. My startled ears leap back into me, and I walk towards his shifting feet outside the door. I turn the knob, I open the door. He is in front of me, but I cannot see him still. Lightning strikes, and once again, a partial view - his neck and a portion of his jaw damp with droplets. I look down - another strike of light - his tie tonight is dark blue in colour, and embroidered on it, is a deep red rose.

SUIT

At a bar this one time, I had an argument with a potential lover. Does Zizek's attire correspond to his politics? He was of the opinion that a scruffy, shabby, sniffling communist will prevent communism from being taken seriously. I was of the opinion that he shouldn't dress like the enemy, he should look like he doesn't buy into the common consumerist logic. Why would I take him seriously if he didn't live his politics? Foucault called it the Art of Living. The Romans believed that you must look like an ethical being, the politics must be apparent. He agreed with me, but insisted that meant that Zizek must wear a suit. "Have you ever seen a picture of Karl Marx?" Yeah. "And what is he wearing?" I didn't go home with him that night. But I did a week later.

SLUT

The thing that bored me most was the fat on the arms. There were other things too, hair in places hair should not be. Hips that seemed to have widened over night. They weren't girlish anymore; but 'womanly' could afford to be a little slimmer. This was bordering on the offensive. None of the curves were smooth, they spilled instead or at least threatened to. The face was alright I suppose. It had retained some of the fat but age had come with a severity that left a slightly unpleasant but desirable look. The kind that would keep the wrong kind of people at arm's length and the right kind intrigued at the very least. Not bad, not too bad. Slightly fuzzy eyes at a certain distance would still mistake me for an attractive woman. But without a slight squint, just boring.

All the things I think of when I write has to begin with vanity, an excess of it. It seems like the right way to begin, almost like a ritual. Like the opening of a vanity case with all kinds of jewels, rubies and emeralds for their colour and richness. Maybe fabric, velvet or lace even satin would be appropriate. Colours for the cheek and lips, deep hues of red and purple. All dark, nothing demure. The vanity that does not accurately bring up any kind of beauty but the sensation of it. A faint ache of something that simultaneously wants from fulfilment but is pleasurable from the lack of it. A touch of melancholia perhaps. Such things vanity can do while trying to skirt around the word 'beauty' or the even more terrifying 'love.'

LIST

i loved many people as a child
the next door neighbour
the new actor on television
the new priest for the new house
the young teacher who wore too much makeup
the classmate too pretty to be a friend
'i love you' to all of them, written in scribbles in many public notes
discovered, sometimes in stealth, sometimes carelessly strewn on the study table

when i was a child, i love you was the beginning

you said it, and then you were together forever
or they said they didn't love you and you were alone forever -

a letter stained on both sides with red sketch pen
a phone call, even in hushed whispers leaked desire
a friendship band, pulled from a back pocket on a private bicycle ride
a red rose, thought about, spoken about, grown in the garden -

when i was a child, it was deeply embarrassing to accept or give an object of love.

LUST

I waited on the banks of the Nila, but my lover was late. At night they say there are poisonous snakes in the fields waiting to find a careless foot. She insists on being barefoot. Last summer I had gifted her a pair of white and blue slippers. Blue was her favourite colour. But she refused to wear them for fear of her love being discovered. Sometimes she carries the slippers with her. She is easily amused when I turn around in fear, hearing the dull pressure of sand behind me. What amuses me though is that satisfied with having given me a scare, she then removes the slippers and carries them in her hands once more. I smile now, alone in these little moments that we save for the river bank at night.

Sometimes I bring her flowers. She asks for the white, it has a distinct fragrance. But the jasmine, or the white as she calls it reminds me of others. So now I bring yellow marigolds. After a night of lovemaking the petals fall apart, sticking to parts of her body. Each petal becomes a discovery of her. Another evidence she leaves behind of her love. I smile again, in conspiracy with water and a small trace of the moon. I am worried now, and then I am not. Even in faint moonlight, she'll find her way and the snakes won't. She will play a prank and laugh loudly and cover her mouth in fright to stifle the ringing of laughter.

Tonight there is a drizzle.

MUST

Shall I begin from the beginning? In the beginning there was a river. Or perhaps not. In the beginning there was the writing about the river, the river itself took three seasons to appear. And promptly left a season after. As if one has disappeared and left their clothes hanging in the air. If there is no water subsuming the sand, is the empty land still a river? Or must we wait three more seasons for the river to return?

What happens to the writing in the three seasons the river disappears? So I must simply write about the clothes hanging in the air then? It's brown in colour, stretches as far as the eye can see, people frequently walk over it as if walking on water. Nothing poetic about it. No beautiful descriptions of the bending and curving of the river, its lasting affair with the moon and its incessant need to make a poignant affair of sunrise and sunsets. It leaves no words with the writer, as if the ink has run dry. The abandoned writer filled with air bubbles and cliches, rhetoric and little else.

SIT

SCENE # 47

INT. DAY. BEDROOM.

(On the other side of the window is a woman wrestling with a curtain. She engages in a seemingly ridiculous task. She wishes to keep the windows open but the curtains drawn. The curtains will not let her have it her way, after all there is a binding logic to fabric

thin and translucent : that they are amenable to the moods of the winds. Yet she continues pointlessly arguing against the existential basis of the curtains. Frustrated, she drapes the curtains around her body and stands by the window, fully covered peering through the translucent fabric; suddenly serene.)

[No Dialogue]

THE END.

YOUR WELLIES

Words by *George Evans*

[00:24 – 00:37]

From the hill you could see the whole village. It was late October, the leaves were on the ground, and chimney-smoke was in the sky. Little dogs scurried around the base of the hill. Shooting glimpses of amber and white fur, weaving amongst the knotted bushes and trees. A man on a horse rode up alongside the dogs. His crimson coat stood out against all that was natural like a star which had fallen to earth. He drew a little brass horn from his coat and blew it—the sound was the pitch and rhythm of a fly buzzing around rubbish. A fox dashed across the wet grass into a barren field and a score of dogs burst from the undergrowth. The riders sat upon their horses, backs erect like scarecrows, faces gaunt and long, peering after the hunt.

The field with the fox's body was left empty and it became December. The days squeezed themselves between dusk and dawn. The sun only rose to eye level, as if to remind the villagers that it was still there, but that it was too tired to do anything in particular. Wispy silver clouds crept into the sky from over the hill as an antique souvenir to the world that existed beyond the winter; beyond the hill. The sound was that of wellies^a; the unmistakable flip flop of rubber on pavement. Rain fell steadily into the fabric of the earth: into the trees, the grass, the space between the natural and the manmade. The water pushed itself into the cracks of the road and stretched out the asphalt like a surgical retractor; potholes appeared as unstitched wounds on the lanes and highways.

It was the last week of March, and buds of wildflowers began to push from the mud and reach for the sun. Daffodils scattered sides of roads and lined gardens, their yellow heads were brighter than the sun in those first few days of spring. A little hedgehog woke up in the night. He was hungry from hibernation, and walked out from under Caroline and David's shed.

On the ground he found a few berries and a little bowl of water that Caroline had left for him when they found him all the way back in January. Next door, two boys sat out on deck chairs and smoked marijuana^b. The sound of their inhales was loud in the quiet of midnight. Beneath their breaths was the sound of grass growing, beneath that was a mole crunching on a worm, beneath that was hard, silent rock, and beneath that was the sound of yawning as the earth's igneous mantle moved at an imperceptible speed, but moved nonetheless so that, if you looked at it over a thousand years, you might think you were looking at treacle rather than solid rock.

The field at the foot of the hill grew a hairy top of maize. A pole was erected for May Day. Ribbons hung lifeless from its top like a ship's sail cut into a rainbow. The small gravel car park filled up. Then beyond—cars parked on grass and into the nearest road: a line of shimmering Subaru's that stretched as far as the eye could see. A pig was skewered. A fire was lit. Stalls were erected. A pattern began to form on the maypole. Tighter and tighter it wound; blue into red, red in yellow, yellow into green. Down the pole, wrapping itself to the sound of a fiddle.^c

[1:10 – 1:50]

The fiddle played into July and it was hot. The clouds were made of mottled rug and the ground was a hot water bottle. Grass turned brown, rabbits died, and crickets sailed a pitch of noise across the whole village. Only cider could touch the spot that the heat left. Heaps of ice were thrown over bowls of sweet fermented apple juice. Sitting out in the evening, shielded from the orange sun by a tree, you would swear that the whole world was made just for cider to be drunk in the summer.

Cumulus clouds appeared on the horizon. They cracked open and dropped rain. It was the kind of thunderstorm you remember. The kind that pushes

out any previous impression of thunderstorm you might have had and takes its place. It was terrifying to be under, and beautiful to be a part of. The whole village had butterflies in their tummies for the evening. Every time the sky flashed a thousand voices quietly counted out “one mississippi, two mississippi, three mississippi.”—boom—“it’s three miles away.”^d It was all drama, it was all life, in July when the year feels ripe and things are happening. The whole thing feels like a barbecue.

If July is a barbecue, September is a casserole. The people get out their jumpers and their jeans. They put away their tank-tops and throw on turtle necks. The whole village turns orangey brown. The sun arcs lower every day. It rains more often, but not as violently. More like a statement of fact that the summer is over and autumn has begun.

On a drizzly Saturday morning a mini-bus pulled up to the village’s field. 14 sleepy teenage girls got out. At either end of the field white goal posts went up. Blue jerseys got pulled on over bed-heads. The home team arrived and put on yellow shirts. A referee arrived in all black and blew a whistle. The players begin to play. Yellow and blue start off as neatly divided particles floating on a pitch of green. Then they mingle: the yellow into the blue, the blue into the yellow. Patterns form, take formation, shrink and expand. The white ball is catalyst, spread around by blue, tussled back by clumps of yellow. Blue press in the shape of diamonds and triangles into the yellow half like an experiment gone awry. A blue kicks the ball, half a pound of mud flies off the bottom of her boots, and the ball wraps itself into the net. It’s all over and they pack back into the minibus, soaked through and victorious.

A small fox eats blackberries and sniffs pathways. It lies down in bush. It huffs out a breath and falls asleep. It wakes up, late afternoon, to the sound of a snout. A loud obnoxious horn wakes it right up and it takes off, out of the bush, into a field. A woman is walking her dog and watches it happen. The fox twists and turns while the dogs chase it. The fox is faster and deserves to get away, but the dogs hunt in a hungry pack. The woman is focused, watching it happen,

watching the fox run like a gazelle. It’s better than a scene on the Serengeti, but she wishes for the fox to get away. It looks like it’s all over, the pack of dogs fan out around and trap the fox. The fox whips away and heads for the new building estate. It finds a trail between a fence and thick blackberry bushes, the dogs can’t all fit in and the fox is gone. She finally takes a breath and realizes her wellies have a hole in them again.

The End.

i

David threw two tea bags into two cups and turned on the kettle.

“My feet are soaked,” said Caroline as she placed down the baby monitor on the kitchen’s center isle.

“I told you to get a new pair this year.”

“Well yes, but I get a new pair every year and I feel awful about the plastic.”

“Just because Jenna has started an anti-plastic movement in the daffodil society, doesn’t mean you should have to go about with soaked feet every time we take the dog out”

“But I think so much of her. She talks so passionately about the need for each of us to do more. David, you should come to one of the meetings just to hear her talk about the environment. She’s ever so clear.

“You’ll end up using more plastic in duct tape than a new pair of wellies. I’m going into town tomorrow morning, I’ll pick you up a new pair,” said David

“Ok. Pick up some marmalade while you’re there.”

The kettle pinged and David picked it up. He felt the water jumping about in the kettle. He’d filled it too high and the water leapt from the spout before he’d got it over the teacups. It smacked the countertop and turned itself half into steam; the rest spread out over the surface like woodlice that had been revealed under

a fallen log. Caroline whipped up a tea towel and patted the surface dry.

“I just wish there were a way out of it all. There must be a way to get wellies that last more than a year,” said Caroline.

“I think you worry about it too much. I mean look at us, scraping out our jam jars and composting our bananas while BP spills another ton of oil into the Pacific. The way things are there’s not much hope to be had.”

“There’s no hope,” Caroline repeated.

“Well, I mean. There is, but I just think we’ve got to make the politicians do something about it.”

The baby monitor screeched and Caroline took her tea upstairs.

ii

“Do you think she loves me?”

“No.”

“Do you think I should tell her how I feel?”

“Yeah.”

There was an inhale, and another puff of smoke sent itself up into the heavens.

“So why should I tell her. If she doesn’t like me too.”

“Because it’s better to have it out in the open. Like a cut. You can put a bandage on it at first, but eventually you want it to breath or it’ll never heal.”

The orange tip made a dance in night, being passed from one hand to the other’s.

“That’s good advice.”

“It’s easy to think about, but it’s harder to do. That’s the problem with good advice. I couldn’t take it, either.”

“I’ll do it. I’ll tell her. I think I’m over her already.”

“That was fast.”

“Yeah. But I’m ok with it. Like you said, it’s better to have your wounds out in the fresh air so everybody can see them.”

“That’s not quite what I said.”

“I know. But it’s how it’ll be.”

“You’re thinking too much.”

“I’m finding it hard to think at all. I’ve been sitting here trying to figure out what love is while we’ve been talking.”

“I’m no help there. But take this,” the orange tip drifted across the night, “I’ll get something that ought to help.”

Deep inhale. And another. Heavy breathing though the nose like you do before you fall asleep.

“Here, I’m back. Put this on.”

“What is it?”

“Dressing gown. You always think better at night when you’re in your pajamas. It’s like your body knows that the practical hours are over, and it lets you relax enough to think a little. I’ve got one on too.”

“You’ve got two dressing gowns?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s nice. Where’d you get it from?”

“No idea.”

“What is life, then?”

“It’s a roundabout.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Probably. It’s a roundabout, and off the roundabout are exits you never take; they’re overgrown, dusty, full of blind corners, so you never take them. Then there’s one exit that leads to the most beautiful stretch of motorway you’ve ever seen. When you’re driving down this bit of motorway you see sheep grazing in fields, the weather is always just great, there’s not too much traffic, and it goes up a mountain side so you can look down on where you’ve been and say ‘wow’, because it is a really, really cool stretch of road. Only, the problem is you’ve been on this motorway too many times, and you don’t say ‘wow’ anymore. You look at it and say ‘yep, that’s where I’ve been.’. Then the road winds its way back down the mountain and past the sheep and you get on the roundabout again. You spend some time on the roundabout, then you decide to take the same exit again. That’s life.”

“You read more than is healthy.”

David went running while Caroline went to the village fair with the baby. The village had many old trails that led into woods and thickets just to disappear. He'd tried to find and run them all since they moved to the village a year ago and planned to recover a few of the best for other runners in the village.

There was one trail that started at the back of a new housing estate. It began between the estate's fence and overgrown bushes—evidently the parish allowed the building to squeeze in as much room for private property on either side of the legally protected, but practically abandoned trail. It took less than twenty steps for David to remember that he hated running. He had been running four times a week for two years, and still the only pleasurable moment was the very moment he stopped.

The trail weaved away from the housing estate. There were big, primordial feeling trees on this side of the hill, and the trail just kept going up; long switchbacks looped around and mere creases of light patterned the woodland floor. Last autumn's pine needles were crunchy on the ground, the mud was slightly slick and David lost his footing here and there like a lurching car.

David made it to the top of the hill and thought, "I hate this," and so he stopped to take in the view from the side of the hill he'd never ran on before. It was like being on the dark side of the moon. Beneath him was woodland and telephone poles. There was another hill off in the distance; somebody else's hill. He wondered if someone was on it, looking at him, also hating running.

There was a commotion below and to the left of David. Shrubbery was being jostled, a few twigs broke, someone coughing. There wasn't a trail going down that way, and so it was strange to hear people out on the wrong side of the hill while the village fair, that everybody was supposed to be at, was going on.

David slowly made his way towards the sound. He wasn't on the trail anymore and the pine needles were stacked up like logger piles in miniature. He

had to crouch to make sure he didn't lose his footing, eventually butt scooting as the angle became more and more dramatic. He was close, the sounds were louder. It was two people. They were just behind a blackberry bush. There was a moment where the thought he should just go. Not be curious, just not see what these people didn't want to be seen doing. Then there was another moment where he thought maybe he should call out "hello?" and try to reach the people on the other side of the bush with words.

Neither of these moments happened, instead David peered through the bush and saw Jenna with a man; both naked from the waist down. Their motion was frantic like a pair of stalling, lurching cars and David's face grew crimson. He ran away like a boy, and thought "how has this happened? Why has it happened to me? Do I need to tell Catherine?"

The morning after the storm. The last few drops of rain plopped from leaf to ground. The bees woke up and began working. The birds brought sounds back into the world.

One boy woke up next to another boy.

"Why do you think the morning feels so much better?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Mornings always hurt the most."

"Really?"

"Yeah it's like my brain is doing summersaults and my eyes are trying to look at stuff and my belly is all messed up."

"Wow. That's different. I feel all good."

They picked their noses.

"I guess it's good to not have to think about anything yet."

"Yeah, and you know you've got breakfast coming soon."

"We should go somewhere for a walk today."

"That sounds good. Where'd you want to go?"

[00:00 – 00:57]

ONE MAN QUEUE

One-act Play by Habib Mohana

ACT ONE

SCENE I

It is an icy morning in the city of the London; a plainly dressed young applicant stands before a closed white ornate window of a white elegant building. The filled-out application dangles from his hand as he stands on the yellow line drawn in front of the closed window. The window looks like a dealing window of an office. A single-track road passes before the white building and at the back of the applicant, about two hundred yards away passes a busy motorway. A green lawn stretches between the white building and the motorway. The motorway is partially visible. There is a dew-drenched cement bench and a hydrant a few yards from him. The applicant stands erect and alert, his puffy eyes locked on the white window. There is only a trickle of traffic on the motorway.

After a long and grueling wait, comes a janitor who is sweeping along the single-track road and whistling his favourite tune.

THE JANITOR: (Shoving the applicant rudely) Move aside, are you deaf? Move away from the yellow line, I've to sweep the place.

THE APPLICANT: I can't move away from the line as I don't want to lose the first place on the line.

THE JANITOR: But there is no one here other than you.

THE APPLICANT: Doesn't matter.

THE JANITOR: But I've to sweep the place.

THE APPLICANT: OK. (He lifts his one foot and then the other and the janitor sweep the place under his feet.)
What time is it?

THE JANITOR: I don't keep a watch. By the way does time matter?

THE APPLICANT: Yes.

THE JANITOR: For me time has no value. I start my work in the morning and stop in the evening. I measure time with the length of the road I sweep. I think people of the ancient times were so damned right. In their life big landmarks of time like morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night mattered not the small units of time.

THE APPLICANT: When does this office open?

THE JANITOR: Which office?

THE APPLICANT: This office. (He points his finger to the white closed window. Instead of answering the question, the janitor smirks and walks ahead sweeping the road.) I've an application to submit here. (He waves the application but the janitor moves ahead without answering the question.)

After a long time comes a gangly, scruffy and old guard. The guard plops down on the cement bench near the closed window. He pulls out an ancient pistol from the worn leather holster and starts cleaning it with the rag. Then with the same rag he cleans his shoes and then his face.

THE GUARD: (He suddenly springs to his feet and yells at the applicant) Applicant, stand on the line!

THE APPLICANT: (Apologetic) I'm standing on the line.

THE GUARD: (Angry) No, your feet are not exactly on the yellow line that's drawn on the ground. (The guard strikes him on the back with the grip of his pistol.)

THE APPLICANT: Ok, sir. (He looks down at his feet and instantly complies with the orders.)

THE GUARD: Look straight, focus on the window otherwise they'll think you're half -interested in the thing and you'll lose the chance.

THE APPLICANT: How will they see me through the closed window?

THE GUARD: I don't know, but I've a gut feeling that they can see us through the closed window. (Hooting, an ambulance whizzes past along the motorway, the applicant rubbernecks at the ambulance, the guard shouts at him.) Don't look backwards. Get closer to the window. Move ahead a little.

THE APPLICANT: Why? There's no need of moving ahead!

THE GUARD: Shortly, other applicants will be joining you, make room for them.

THE APPLICANT: But let them come first and then I can move forward.

THE GUARD: No, you've to move ahead, you've to follow the rule. (The applicant shuffles forward a few inches, grumbling.) Not too close, not too close, young man! Don't jump the queue. (He says angrily and the applicant moves a little backwards.) Good, that's fine. No matter where you are, always form a neat, orderly queue. Those who don't form neat orderly lines can't succeed in life.

The guard sits down on the bench and scribbles something in his soiled notebook for some time. He then thrusts it in the pocket in his trousers, strides to the applicant, and walks around him staring at him closely. He straightens

the saggy collar of the applicant's faded shirt, and smooths the shirt at his back. He takes out a half-burnt cigarette from his pocket, lights it, and takes a few drags. Then he spits it out, collects the butt and shoves it into his pocket.

THE APPLICANT: When would the window open?

THE GUARD: I don't know.

THE APPLICANT: I think I came early; can I go and have breakfast?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Can I drink water from the hydrant?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Can I pee against that wall?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: I'll be back in a minute.

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Then where should I pee?

THE GUARD: What?

THE APPLICANT: How should I get rid of pee that has collected in my bladder?

THE GUARD: None of my business!

THE APPLICANT: How am I supposed to stand on this line with the pressure of urine building in my bladder?

THE GUARD: I'm only a guard, I'm not a doctor.

THE APPLICANT: My bladder is so full of urine that I can feel the taste of urine in my mouth.

THE GUARD: Well...How does it taste?

THE APPLICANT: Salty and pungent and bitter.

THE GUARD: Keep enjoying it.

THE APPLICANT: You think it's something to be enjoyed?

THE GUARD: Yes, when you've nothing else to do, then you can enjoy the taste of pee in your mouth.

THE APPLICANT: Can I pee standing on this line?

THE GUARD: No, it's so rude of you to say that, you've no respect for the law?

THE APPLICANT: I'll pee in a way that not one single tiny drop will fall on the line.

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: I'll move away a bit from the line and pee.

THE GUARD: No, once you've stepped on the line, you can't move away from it. Once you've joined the queue you can't leave it.

THE APPLICANT: But there's no queue.

THE GUARD: You're the queue.

THE APPLICANT: I'm only one man in the queue, if I break the queue, there's no one here to raise an objection.

THE GUARD: I'll object to it. Do you think I'm no one?

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry.

THE GUARD: what should I do?

THE APPLICANT: Permit me to go and buy myself something to eat.

THE GUARD: You can't leave the line.

THE APPLICANT: Then you fetch me something to eat.

THE GUARD: I'm only a guard, I can't abandon my duty.

THE APPLICANT: Please get me something to eat, or I'll die.

THE GUARD: Death does not come so easily.

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry.

THE GUARD: Stop thinking about hunger and soon hunger will not disturb you.

SCENE II

The sun is high up in the sky but the window stands closed. The guard strides away from the building to urinate. He returns to the applicant and thunders at him.

THE GUARD: Applicant! Stand on the line.

THE APPLICANT: I'm standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Your right boot is a little off the yellow line. Half an inch, I guess.

THE APPLICANT: Does it matter?

THE GUARD: Yes, a lot.

THE APPLICANT: Half an inch's measurement matters?

THE GUARD: Why not, accidents happen within half an inch's measurement. Half an inch can save you from a sure death; half an inch can kill you. Accidents happen due to the wrong measurements.

THE APPLICANT: No, accidents happen due to the wrong food people eat.

THE GUARD: A rule is rule. No rule is small or big, a rule is important and thus respectable.

THE APPLICANT: Even a defunct one?

THE GUARD: Yes, even a defunct rule is respectable. I sentence you to ponder about the importance of rule for one hour while I will sit on the bench and smoke a cigarette. And remember don't budge an inch from the line

and if you've an itch don't scratch otherwise you'll be showing irreverence to the law.

The guard spends some time smoking the cigarette, and then returns to the applicant.

THE APPLICANT: I think the clerk is not coming to the office today, therefore I should go. (He looks up at the sun.)

THE GUARD: Don't make lame excuses. You can't go.

THE APPLICANT: The clerk is not coming.

THE GUARD: You should not say that. You can't predict thing, can you? You must not talk, simply concentrate on the window and don't let your eyes stray from it. It can open any minute. Don't let wayward thoughts enter your mind. This is against the law.

THE APPLICANT: Who made this law?

THE GUARD: Young man, don't ask questions. Only rude people ask questions. It's not my duty to answer these questions. My duty is to get the applicants stand in a neat orderly queue. I love a neat orderly queue; there is nothing more beautiful, respectable and adorable in the world than a neat orderly queue. Your sense of beauty, I suppose, is in a nascent stage otherwise you'd have been enjoying the beauty of the simple orderly queue as I have been doing.

THE APPLICANT: I must go and buy myself something to eat. Would you please submit this application on my behalf?

THE GUARD: You've an application? Beautiful! Let me have a peek at it. (He grabs the application from him and keeps staring at it for a long time.) What language is this?

THE APPLICANT: I don't know.

THE GUARD: Who wrote this application?

THE APPLICANT: A blind man.

THE GUARD: Why didn't you consult a sighted man?

THE APPLICANT: I did that but the sighted man would not understand my view point.

THE GUARD: What the application is about?

THE APPLICANT: What?

THE GUARD: What sort of help you want from the clerk when he opens the window?

THE APPLICANT: I'll ask him to allow me to stand on this line. (He stamps on the yellow line.)

THE GUARD: This is ludicrous! You're already standing on the line. Would the clerk's permission make any difference?

THE APPLICANT: I don't care.

THE GUARD: If you don't care, then you shouldn't have come here. You should have stayed at home.

THE APPLICANT: I was getting bored at home.

THE GUARD: You think now you're not getting bored?

THE APPLICANT: I'm getting bored.

THE GUARD: Then you should have stayed at home.

THE APPLICANT: But there is a difference between getting bored at your home and getting bored before a closed window.

THE GUARD: Which option is better?

THE APPLICANT: This boredom is better than the boredom of the house.

THE GUARD: Why?

THE APPLICANT: At my home no one could see me getting bored.

THE GUARD: But here, no one is interested in you, no one is interested in watching you getting bored.

THE APPLICANT: At least you are.

THE GUARD: Huh? Yes, no, no. I'm not. I'm only performing my duty. Who says I am interested in watching you?

THE APPLICANT: You're interested in watching me otherwise you'd not have been talking to me.

THE GUARD: I talk to you not because I'm interested in you but because it's my duty to get you stand in a neat orderly queue.

The sun had set, the road before the window is dimly lit while the motorway lights are shining brightly.

THE APPLICANT: Now the working hours are over, I think I should go home and come back tomorrow.

THE GUARD: No, you should not move from your place. When the clerk will be coming, you can't tell.

THE APPLICANT: I'll return tomorrow.

THE GUARD: No, leave your place and another applicant will move in and then it'll take weeks, months for you to reach this place where now you're standing.

THE APPLICANT: I'll come early.

THE GUARD: You're standing on the most prestigious and sought-after place, you're lucky that you found this place for free and without being nudged and shoved by anyone.

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry.

THE GUARD: Young man, don't spurn this golden opportunity. This yellow line is the best line in the world and yellow is the best colour in the world. You're the luckiest man on the planet earth that you've been given the opportunity of standing on this line while other people are straying from this line. They don't know where they're heading.

THE APPLICANT: I need to pee.

THE GUARD: Standing on a line means order and movement means chaos.

THE APPLICANT: I need to rest.

THE GUARD: You're safe and in one piece due to this yellow line. There is peace and order on this line. . .Don't ever think of becoming part of that chaotic world which is replete with accidents and deaths and broken bones. (He gestures to the motorway that is thick with traffic. The sudden traffic noise enters the applicant's head, he becomes startled.)

THE APPLICANT: The traffic is getting so noisy.

THE GUARD: The traffic noise? It is in your head, you can listen to it if you want to and you can tune it out if you want to. Better to tune the traffic noise out, it's distracting for those who are born to achieve great things in their life. Don't look sideways and backwards.

THE APPLICANT: I'll not look sideways and backwards.

THE GUARD: Simply concentrate on the work in hand.

THE APPLICANT: I'm concentrating.

THE GUARD: Concentration is what you need, what we all need. You're facing the most beautiful window in the world. And you're the luckiest man in the world that you're standing on this line before this window. One day some big good is coming out of this window. You're standing on the most beautiful line before the most beautiful window in the entire world.

THE APPLICANT: You're right.

THE GUARD: There's no other line like this in the entire world.

THE APPLICANT: You're right.

The night has deepened and the traffic has thinned on the motorway.

THE GUARD: I'm going home but you don't go, or you'll lose your best spot in the queue. Maybe tomorrow the queue will be so long that it'll stretch across the road and I may have to block the road. Come tomorrow and you'll be unable to find a place in the queue. (He walks a few steps and then looks over the shoulder.) Remember, young man, they can see you through the closed window.

THE APPLICANT: Don't worry; I'll keep standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Great!

SCENE III

The next morning the janitor comes sweeping the road and singing his favourite tune, he pokes at the applicant

with the butt of his broom.

THE JANITOR: Make way for the janitor; I'm the king of all the janitors because I sweep the most prestigious road of the city.

THE APPLICANT: Why you hit me? I broke no rule!

THE JANITOR: You're breaking the rule when you deter a janitor from sweeping a road.

THE APPLICANT: But stepping away from the yellow line is also against the rule!

THE JANITOR: Who gave you this rule?

THE APPLICANT: The old guard.

THE JANITOR: But at this very moment you are living in the reign of this janitor, me.

THE APPLICANT: When would this window open?

THE JANITOR: This window? It's not my duty to tell you that.

THE APPLICANT: What is the time?

THE JANITOR: Forget about the time, time is not important. For me time is either day or night. Day means work and night means rest. (Sweeping the road he moves ahead and disappears.)

A little later, the guard reports for duty, he does not acknowledge the presence of the applicant. The guard sits down on the bench and goes through the ritual of cleaning the pistol, boots and face with the rag. Then he stands up and barks at the applicant.

THE GUARD: Applicant, stand on the line!

THE APPLICANT: I'm standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Stand erect, chest and shoulders up. It's your second day and still you haven't learnt how to stand on the line. Face the window, don't look sideways or backwards. Move a little forward, and make room for other applicants.

THE APPLICANT: Ok, sir. (He scratches his face.)

THE GUARD: Don't scratch your face. Standing on the line has some rules. You're not allowed to scratch, shuffle or fidget.

THE APPLICANT: Ok sir. When will the clerk be coming? (He shuffles the application.)

THE GUARD: I've no idea.

THE APPLICANT: Would this window ever open?

THE GUARD: I don't know. My duty is to keep the applicants in a neat orderly queue. (The applicant starts picking his teeth.) Who gave you the toothpick?

THE APPLICANT: No one.

THE GUARD: What? How it reached your hands?

THE APPLICANT: I picked it from the road.

THE GUARD: You don't need to pick your teeth. You have not eaten anything....

THE APPLICANT: Picking teeth with the toothpick gives the feeling as if I have eaten food.

THE GUARD: You're not allowed to pick your teeth while standing on the line. When the queue is over, then you can use toothpick.

THE APPLICANT: But when will the queue be over? (He throws the toothpick down and crushes it with the toe of his boot.)

THE GUARD: Have no idea.

THE APPLICANT: Have you ever seen the clerk?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Did you ever see this widow open?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: How can you keep on doing your duty before this window and you've never seen the clerk or the window open?

THE GUARD: My duty is to keep the applicants in order and not to meddle in the affairs of the office.

THE APPLICANT: Have you ever been inside this office?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: How long have been serving here?

THE GUARD: Several years.

THE APPLICANT: How much do they pay you?

THE GUARD: Pay? They don't give me any salary.

THE APPLICANT: Then why you come here to perform your duty?

THE GUARD: I like the ambience of my office.

THE APPLICANT: What is so special about your office....err this place? This place is like other....

THE GUARD: No, every place is different. Every place has its own aura, smell and melody. There are no two places in the world that are exactly alike.

THE APPLICANT: If this window will never open then why I am standing here? (He turns around to move away.)

THE GUARD: No, don't go. It can open anytime.

THE APPLICANT: I'm wasting my time.

THE GUARD: Everybody is squandering their time. It's better to squander time in front of one of your favourite places than squandering it wandering about along other places.

THE APPLICANT: But waiting here will not pay us....

THE GUARD: I don't wait to be paid. I wait for the sake of waiting.

THE APPLICANT: Let's go and wait before some other office, some other window...

THE GUARD: Would it make any difference? What if the window you're talking about does not open either? I'm twice your age, throughout my long, dull life I've seen many windows and many lines. But I found out that this window and this line are better than other windows and lines.

THE APPLICANT: You can stay here, I'm going. (He lifts his right foot from the line to move)

THE GUARD: I warn you young man, one step from the line and I'll shoot you. (The guard trains his gun on him.)

THE APPLICANT: Why would you shoot me?

THE GUARD: Because it's my duty.

THE APPLICANT: Who assigned you this duty?

THE GUARD: No one.

THE APPLICANT: Please let me go. (He lifts his foot to move.)

THE GUARD: No, I can't.

THE APPLICANT: You've no right to curtail my freedom of movement.

THE GUARD: You came here of your own accord but you can't leave without my permission.

THE APPLICANT: Ok, I'll not go home but you go home.

THE GUARD: Why should I go home?

THE APPLICANT: Because you look tired.

THE GUARD: I'm not tired and I'll not go home. I'll sit on this bench and watch you so that you may not skedaddle.

THE APPLICANT: I'll not skedaddle. I promise.

THE GUARD: No. I don't trust you.

THE APPLICANT: This merciless cold will kill you.

THE GUARD: No, I'll sit here and watch you. (He sits down on the bench.)

THE APPLICANT: I'm tired, can I sit down, here on this line? (He points to the yellow line.)

THE GUARD: No, this is not allowed. Ever saw someone sitting on yellow lines that are drawn before offices?

THE APPLICANT: No.

THE GUARD: Then why do you ask for such stupid favours?

THE APPLICANT: I feel exhausted, I've cramps in my legs, what should I do?

THE GUARD: None of my business.

Tiredness is visible on the applicant's face and body. He bends a little and then he kneels and after some time he stumbles to the ground. The guard trains his pistol on him and orders him to stand up but to no avail. He puts his pistol in his pocket and pulls him up. But as soon he removes his support the applicant falls down again. He again pulls him up but he again stumbles to the ground. Then the guard pulls out wooden staves from around the lawn and pulls up the applicant, and puts the staves around him. The applicant stands, his shoulder hunched, looking like a scarecrow.

The night has fallen, the single-track road is dimly lit while the motorway is bathed in roadside lights and sometimes a car zip passes on it. The applicant stands on the yellow line while the guard is perching on the bench, his gun pointed on the applicant. Late into the night the freezing fog fills the road up and the guard dozes off.

THE APPLICANT: (Raising his head slowly and speaking weakly) Hello, Sir, Sir, you can go home and rest, I'm feeling better now.

THE GUARD: (The guard wakes up and points his guns on the applicant.) Huh, who is there?

THE APPLICANT: I'm no enemy, I'm the applicant.

THE GUARD: Which applicant?

THE APPLICANT: The applicant with the application standing on the yellow line in front of the window.

THE GUARD: Ya, yes, yes, the applicant, the line, don't move from the line, your left foot is not on the line. (He drowsily points his gun at the applicant's feet. The applicant drags his left foot back on the line.)

THE APPLICANT: Damn it! Who drew this blasted line?

THE GUARD: No one can tell, but a line is a line. Once a line has been drawn, it should not be violated. Be it a yellow line or red one, a small one or a long one, a straight one or a crooked one. There's beauty and honour in standing on a line.

THE APPLICANT: Bullshit, what's the benefit of respecting a line?

THE GUARD: What's the benefit of not respecting it?

THE APPLICANT: We'll not see the benefit until we've violated the line.

THE GUARD: Are you certain about it?

THE APPLICANT: who drew this line?

THE GUARD: I don't know but whoever drew it, was a great man.

THE APPLICANT: How do you know that he was a great man?

THE GUARD: Because only a great can draw a line. The great men draw the line, the common men follow the line, or stand on the line and strong men guard the line. I have the gun, I'm a strong man and I'll protect it.

THE APPLICANT: It means I'm a common man. I'm born to stand on the line.

THE GUARD: (Pointing to the people moving in cars, trucks and buses along the motorway.) Someone drew the line for them, I mean built a road and now they're bound to follow the line or the road. Roads are lines, air routes are lines, railway lines are lines, canals are lines, rivers are lines. There are lines and lines. Some great man has to do this thing for the people or they'll not be able to reach their destination. Otherwise they will go astray. (He stamps his foot on the yellow line.) By taking a quick peek at the straightness and color of the line you can tell that the maker of this line was a great man.

THE APPLICANT: What if I don't respect this line?

THE GUARD: Well, if you don't respect this line then you'll have to respect another line. There're lines and lines, you can't go out of the web of lines. There are legal lines, traffic lines, social lines, religious lines and familial lines. There's no place in this world that doesn't have lines. It's better to respect the line that is close to you, with which you are familiar than...

THE APPLICANT: I'm tired, when can I move away from this yellow line?

THE GUARD: Not until a new line has been drawn. We exchange one line with another line. We don't obliterate one line unless a new line has been drawn and painted. We need lines or we'll be lost in the wilderness of world. We're born to follow the lines, we are condemned to stand on the lines, follow the lines.

THE APPLICANT: I'm tired of this line. I want to move to another line, when will a new line be drawn?

THE GUARD: I don't know. Sometimes it takes a millennium, sometimes a century, sometimes a year, sometimes a month, sometimes a day and sometimes a minute. Every line, every ism, every system commenced with one man, and in the end they became popular movements. In the beginning every line, every ism, every system was like a grain of a fig or a spark, lying snug in the skull of a wise man and then they turned into doughty trees or roaring bonfires.

THE APPLICANT: Ok, I'll respect the sanctity of the line. I'll not budge away from this line. You're an old man and it's freezing cold out here. You can go home and rest.

THE GUARD: What if you fell down again?

THE APPLICANT: No. I'll not fall down again.

THE GUARD: Promise?

THE APPLICANT: Promise. These wooden staves will not allow me to collapse.

THE GUARD: What if you absconded?

THE APPLICANT: I'll not. I'll spend the night standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Why should I believe you?

THE APPLICANT: Well, because I'm a gentleman and all gentlemen honour their promises.

THE GUARD: (Takes off his overcoat and offers it to the applicant.) Take it; it'll save you from cold and rough weather.

THE APPLICANT: I don't need it.

THE GUARD: I don't need it either.

The guard puts the overcoat on the ground near the applicant. The guard leaves while the applicant stands on the yellow line. Late into the night the sleet hits the city and applicant stands on the line, shivering but braving the sleet, the overcoat at his feet.

SCENE IV

In the morning the guard reports back for duty, the applicant is standing on the same place. The guard cleans the pistol, boots and his face and nose with the soiled rag and then stuffs it in the pocket of the shirt. He walks around the applicant.

THE GUARD: How was your night?

THE APPLICANT: It was fantastic.

THE GUARD: I hope the cold did not trouble you.

THE APPLICANT: The cold does not trouble me.

THE GUARD: Move ahead a little, other people will be joining you, make room for them. (He pokes the pistol barrel in his back.)

THE APPLICANT: No one will join me. I'm sure, no one is foolish enough to join me.

THE GUARD: Only the fools will not join you. Had other people been wise enough then they would have joined you. Only the wise men respect the line.

THE APPLICANT: Only the fools respect the line.

THE GUARD: This is treasonous of you. I'll not tolerate such remarks in the future, I'm the guardian of this line, you say it again and you'll be a dead man. (He points the gun on the applicant. Uneasy silence ensues. The guard walks away, crooning a song.)

THE APPLICANT: You have a melodious voice. My father often sings this song.

THE GUARD: Only fools sing this song, your father must be a great fool. I don't know why I like you. I feel good in your company. I'm a bit harsh to you but still I like you.

THE APPLICANT: Please remove these staves, I don't need them.

THE GUARD: No, after some time you'll again feel weak and...

THE APPLICANT: I will not feel weak. I've told myself not to be weak.

THE GUARD: Good.

THE APPLICANT: I feel hungry, do you have something to eat?

THE GUARD: Let me check. (He fumbles in his pockets.) I've this cigarette butt.

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry, will this help? (He accepts the cigarette.)

THE GUARD: I don't know but give it a try. (He lights the cigarette for him and the applicant takes deep pulls at it.) How do you feel?

THE GUARD: I feel great.

THE GUARD: Good.

THE APPLICANT: I feel my hunger going. (He takes more puffs from the cigarette.) My hunger is gone.

THE GUARD: Cigarette is good for hunger! We've solved a global problem.

THE APPLICANT: I've solved it, not you.

THE GUARD: But I gave you the cigarette.

THE APPLICANT: Ok. This discovery of global importance will have our names, yours and mine.

THE GUARD: (He strides to the bench and sits down on it.) When will the night fall?

THE APPLICANT: Why?

THE GUARD: Because then I can sneak away.

THE APPLICANT: You can sneak away now.

THE GUARD: I can't do that during my duty hours.

THE APPLICANT: Did you not sleep at night at home?

THE GUARD: I didn't go home.

THE APPLICANT: What? Where did you go then?

THE GUARD: Nowhere.

THE APPLICANT: What?

THE GUARD: I was here, all the time. Standing at some distance I kept watching you.

THE APPLICANT: Why?

THE GUARD: I was scared that you might run away.

THE APPLICANT: But I had promised not to run away.

THE GUARD: But you could change your mind.

THE APPLICANT: It means that the night before the last night you did not home either.

THE GUARD: Yes, I stayed here, and watched you from a distance. I was scared that you might run away.

The night falls and single-track road is dimly lit while the motorway is aglow with the lights.

THE GUARD: I'm going home, have this thing. You'll need it. (He extends the butt-end of the gun towards him)

I'm going.

THE APPLICANT: I don't believe you. You'll hide and watch me from a safe distance.

THE GUARD: Have this gun, you'll need it.

THE APPLICANT: I'll need it for what?

THE GUARD: You'll need it to kill your enemy.

THE APPLICANT: I don't have enemies.

THE GUARD: Then you might need it to kill yourself.

THE APPLICANT: Why would I kill myself? I don't hate myself.

THE GUARD: Sometimes your own self becomes your enemy and you need to kill yourself.

THE APPLICANT: One doesn't need a pistol to kill oneself.

THE GUARD: But this is the easier, cleaner, gentler and faster way to kill oneself.

THE APPLICANT: There're scores of other ways that are far easier, cleaner, gentler and faster than killing oneself by a pistol.

THE GUARD: For example?

THE APPLICANT: I'll not disclose my ideas to you; you can steal them and use them on yourself.

THE GUARD: I promise I'll not use them on myself.

THE APPLICANT: You might use on other people?

THE APPLICANT: Yes, no, I'll not use them on other people.

THE APPLICANT: If you'll neither use them on yourself nor on other people then what's use of telling them to you?

THE GUARD: I want to know about them just out of curiosity.

THE APPLICANT: Curiosity is a dangerous thing. Curious persons lead a miserable life.

THE GUARD: Ok, this is a gift from me, take it. (He shoves the pistol towards him.)

THE APPLICANT: I'll not take it.

THE GUARD: Why?

THE APPLICANT: Because the guns don't help in times of need. They don't kill. They misfire, they backfire, they explode, and they get jammed. They're not efficient tools for ending a life.

THE GUARD: But you need this thing until you have come up with something more efficient.

THE APPLICANT: No, I'll not take it. If ever I need to kill myself then I'll make my own weapon. I'll not rely on weapons that were invented by other peoples.

THE GUARD: Ok, I'm going, bye.

THE APPLICANT: I don't believe you. You'll hide and watch me from a safe distance.

THE GUARD: This time I'll go home. I'm not lying.

THE APPLICANT: Why should I believe you that you would go home this time round?

THE GUARD: Because I'm sure you'll not run away.

THE APPLICANT: How can you give this verdict about me?

THE GUARD: Because for two nights I watched you and you did not show any tendency of running away. (He tucks the pistol in the back pocket of the applicant's pant.) Young man you might need it. I'm going, Bye!
The guard disappears while the applicant stands on the line.

SCENE V

Next morning the applicant anxiously waits for the guard to show up but he does not.

THE APPLICANT: (Soliloquizing) Where the guard has gone? In this entire world, only he could understand me. He might be ill, he might have some work at his house. I'll respect the line as he had told me. (He dusts the yellow line with his cap, and then stands on the line.) This is a beautiful line. I'm hopeful the window will open today.

After a while a mechanical excavator approaches the building where the closed window is and the driver puts the toothed bucket of the excavator to the closed window.

THE APPLICANT: What are you doing, are you crazy?

THE DRIVER: I'm going to demolish the building.

THE APPLICANT: But I've to submit my application here, in this office.

THE DRIVER: Application?

THE APPLICANT: Yes, I've been standing here before this window, over the last several days.

THE DRIVER: Are you mad or what? This is no real window. (He jumps down from the driver's seat, scurries towards the window and taps on it.) A fake window, you see. No glass, the window is painted on. There is no actual office behind this dummy building.

THE APPLICANT: Who the heck are you to say so? You've no right to call a window real or fake. A window is a window.

THE DRIVER: Ok come and see it for yourself. It's only a facade. It was built about fifty years ago to conceal the derelict deserted houses.

THE APPLICANT: I don't need to, I can see it from here.

THE DRIVER: Ok, you'll see it in a minute, everything will become crystal clear. (He hops onto the driver's seat and aims the bucket of the mechanical excavator at the window.)

THE APPLICANT: Don't do it or I'll kill you. You can't touch it. (He pulls the pistol and aims it on the driver.)

THE DRIVER: I've the orders to do so. (He pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and pushes it towards the

applicant. The applicant reads it.)

THE APPLICANT: Ok, demolish the entire building but not the window.

THE DRIVER: This is ridiculous! The window will go with the building. The window is part of the building and it has to go with the building.

THE APPLICANT: Do whatever you want but you can't destroy the window.

THE DRIVER: This is an impossibility. Why you like this window so much?

THE APPLICANT: Because I've to submit the application at this window.

THE DRIVER: What's the application about?

THE APPLICANT: I'll not tell you.

THE DRIVER: Can I have a look at your application, mate?

THE APPLICANT: Sure, get down here.

(The driver hops down from the driver's seat and the applicant hands the application to him, the driver stares at it for a while.)

THE DRIVER: What language is this? I can't see a word on this paper.

THE APPLICANT: The words have been washed away by rain, snow and sleet.

THE DRIVER: How are they supposed to read it?

THE APPLICANT: It's their concern, not mine. I've only to submit it, here, through this window. (He points to the window.)

THE DRIVER: You will submit a blank paper at this fake window? This is absurd!

THE APPLICANT: Everything is absurd.

THE DRIVER: You're wasting my time by holding me back...

THE APPLICANT: Everybody is wasting their time.

THE DRIVER: Let me finish my work or I'll report to police.

THE APPLICANT: Report to the police and I'll shoot you. (He points the gun on the driver.)

THE DRIVER: You can't do it.

THE APPLICANT: Yes, I can do it, I'm serious.

THE DRIVER: Ok, I'll not demolish this building. I'm going back. (He puts the excavator in reverse gear.)

THE APPLICANT: You can't go back either.

THE DRIVER: What?

THE APPLICANT: You can't leave this place.

THE DRIVER: Why? Are you mad or what?

THE APPLICANT: You can't leave because I need someone to talk to me. I've not talked to anyone for many hours.

THE DRIVER: You can't hold me against my will.

THE APPLICANT: There's no such thing as will.

THE DRIVER: This is against my personal liberty.

THE APPLICANT: There's no such thing as personal liberty.

THE DRIVER: I think you've come from a wilderness. You have no idea about will or personal liberty.

THE APPLICANT: I've never seen wilderness. I've never stepped outside this concrete jungle.

THE DRIVER: I think you've escaped from an asylum.

THE APPLICANT: Yes, if by asylum you mean this city or this country.

THE DRIVER: Let me go or I'll scream.

THE APPLICANT: Do whatever you want to but no one will come to your rescue. Give it a try.

THE DRIVER: Help! help, hey people listen to me. This mad fellow, here, is holding me hostage! He threatens to kill me! (He screams but no one takes heed of him)

THE APPLICANT: Do it again if you don't believe me.

THE DRIVER: (He shouts again but no one comes to his rescue.) It means I'm at your mercy.

THE APPLICANT: Yes.

THE DRIVER: How long will you be holding me, for a day, or a month or a year?

THE APPLICANT: Have no idea.

They remain silent for some time.

THE DRIVER: Ok, I'll stay with you but tell me how will we kill our time?

THE APPLICANT: We'll not kill time, time will kill us.

THE DRIVER: How long we're to wait before we land on the fishing hook of death.

THE APPLICANT: Ask death because, it will be he that will do the fishing.

Disappointed, the driver places his head on the steering wheel of his machine, sighing sadly. After some time he pushes a button and a song starts playing from the tape recorder placed in the excavator. The applicant bursts into dancing.

THE DRIVER: You're a good dancer.

THE APPLICANT: Yes I'm, I was a lead dancer in my college days.

THE DRIVER: Keep dancing. I love your dance. (He gets down from the driver seat and tries to sneak away.)

THE APPLICANT: Don't ever try to run, or I'll kill you. (He trains the pistol on him)

THE DRIVER: My wife will be waiting for me.

THE APPLICANT: Soon she'll stop waiting for you. She'll soon get another man and the life will go on. You're not the last fertile man of this blue planet of ours.

THE DRIVER: You're so cruel.

THE APPLICANT: Everybody is cruel in his or her way. Every animal and bird is cruel in its own way.

THE DRIVER: Ok, don't shoot me, I'm not going.

THE APPLICANT: Great. (He puts the gun back in his pocket)

THE DRIVER: If I stay with you, what would I have to do?

THE APPLICANT: Nothing. You'll have to do nothing. The age of slavery has gone.

THE DRIVER: Ok, I'll stand with you, on the yellow line.

THE APPLICANT: No, you can't stand on this line, since I discovered this window and this line, only I have the right to stand on this line before this window. It's only my privilege to stand on this line. This line is my kingdom.

THE DRIVER: Ok, you get on my vehicle and sit with me. The seat is very comfortable.

THE APPLICANT: No, I'll not do it either. I'll never break the queue.

THE DRIVER: The Queue? Where is the queue?

THE APPLICANT: I am the queue.

THE DRIVER: You are a very stubborn man.

THE APPLICANT: Only stubborn men can discover new lines, new windows.

THE DRIVER: But your discovery will ruin you.

THE APPLICANT: One day everyone will face the ruination.

THE DRIVER: Ok ok, what's the benefit of standing before this window?

THE APPLICANT: Don't expect benefit from everything.

THE DRIVER: When would we end our vigil?

THE APPLICANT: We'll not end the vigil, the vigil will end us.

THE DRIVER: In the end what will happen to us?

THE APPLICANT: I don't know, no one knows.

THE DRIVER: What should I do with your dead body, if you die someday?

THE APPLICANT: Maybe you'll die before me.

THE DRIVER: You could also die before me.

THE APPLICANT: Bury me under this window, because I have discovered this window. I deserve to be buried under this window.

For several minutes the applicant stands on the line while the driver sits in the driver's seat and then without warning, the driver gets down from the seat and starts scrambling. The applicant aims the pistol at him, pulls the trigger while not moving one inch from the line. But there are no bullets in the magazine of the pistol and the

driver succeeds in escaping.

THE APPLICANT: (soliloquizing) He's so unlucky to escape the death. He has to die someday, it would have been better for him to be dead today. Who knows what will happen tomorrow? Maybe death is not available, tomorrow. One should not put hurdles in the way of death like that fool did.

SCENE VI

In the evening the guard returns, he plops down on the bench, cleans his boots and face with the rag and then he stumbles ahead towards the applicant.

THE APPLICANT: I thought you would not come. Where were you?

THE GUARD: I was at home but I got bored there. I missed you badly because only you can understand me. (He kicks the applicant at his shanks with the toe of his boot.) Stand on the line, focus on the window and don't look sideways or backwards.

THE APPLICANT: I too missed you. I met a driver, a moron, he wanted to demolish this beautiful window with this machine. (He points to the excavator.) I stopped him from doing so.

THE GUARD: Great, you are a brave man.

THE APPLICANT: I shot at him with this pistol but it was empty.

THE GUARD: Haha! Give the pistol back to me. (He takes the pistol from the applicant.) You have moved on the hierarchical rung, you've joined the list of the strong men, the guardian class, like me. You have improved. You have gone forth.

THE APPLICANT: I don't want to be part of the guardian class; I enjoy just being a queue-bystander.

THE GUARD: No, you've no choice but to be part of the guardian class.

THE APPLICANT: What if I don't want to?

THE GUARD: The consequences will be...

They hear a police car and a policeman appears on the scene.

THE POLICEMAN: I'm here to inform you that this place is to be demolished. (He points to the building and the window) Obey the orders or you'll be arrested and tried in the court.

THE GUARD: Ok, you can demolish them but give us another window, building and yellow line those should look exactly like these or...

THE POLICEMAN: Or what?

THE GUARD: We'll commit suicide.

THE POLICEMAN: This is preposterous! You want to lose your life for this fake window, this dummy building and this dirty faded line? (He stamps on the yellow line.)

THE GUARD: Yes, people have been losing their lives for buildings and windows and lines over the centuries.

THE POLICEMAN: How can I find you a building and a window and a yellow line like these ones? It's beyond my powers.

THE GUARD: But we love them. If you can't provide us with building, window and line like these ones then shift them to some other place and we'll move there.

THE POLICEMAN: Ok, we'll shift them to some other place but first you sit with me in that car. I promise your wish will be fulfilled.

THE GUARD: We'll not do it. Why should we trust you?

THE POLICEMAN: Because I represent constitution, state and rule of law.

THE GUARD: They can also lie.

THE POLICEMAN: You've a beautiful gun; can I have a look at it?

THE GUARD: No, this is a personal thing. What if you don't return it to me?

THE POLICEMAN: I promise that I'll return it to you.

THE GUARD: First you hand your gun to me then I'll give mine to you.

THE POLICEMAN: Ok, have it.

The policeman and the guard exchange their guns. The policeman sits down on the bench and stares at the pistol. Without warning the guard shoots the applicant dead.

THE POLICE MAN: Why you shot him dead?

THE GUARD: He was so lonely. Isn't this a good reason to kill someone?

THE POLICE MAN: Any reason can be a good reason for killing someone.

THE GUARD: Thank you for coming up with a logical reason or I'd have been condemning myself my entire life for murdering him.

THE POLICE MAN: Did you hate him?

THE GUARD: Not a bit, I liked him. He was a wonderful conversant.

THE POLICE MAN: Had you killed him out of hate or malice then I would have arrested you but now you can go.

THE GUARD: Where should I go?

THE POLICE MAN: Don't you have a home?

THE GUARD: I have but I feel bored there.

THE POLICE MAN: Did this young man also was feeling bored?

THE GUARD: Yes, he felt bored immensely. In this big world only I could understand him and I thought that

without me he would be lonely, so I took a merciful step and killed him.

THE POLICE MAN: Now give me my pistol.

THE GUARD: That I can't do.

THE POLICE MAN: Why?

THE GUARD: I like the crack of this pistol. It produces beautiful sound when it's fired.

THE POLICE MAN: Ok, but promise me one thing, you will not turn the gun on yourself.

THE GUARD: I'll not do it. Why would I turn the gun on myself?

THE POLICE MAN: Because you like the bang of the pistol firing. People, please go home, even though you feel bored there and don't even think about the pistol.

THE GUARD: Don't worry about me Mr. Policeman, I like only the crack of the pistol.

(They both walk away in different directions then a pistol shot rings and the policeman comes back running, passes before the closed window and is gone.)