

**David Kowalczyk / 4 Poems**

**Psychopomp**

Except for a long gray ponytail,  
this word is completely bald.

This word has silver skin  
and the sparkling eyes of a mink.

Its voice is a dulcet baritone.

It has a spectacularly soothing smile.

It was born in Clare Day, Wyoming  
to Peter Pan and Queen Victoria during the  
Time of the Forlorn Iguanas.

## **Unthirlable**

This thick-lipped word  
was born in Hog Jaw, Alabama  
to Paracelsus and Hyapatia of Alexandria.

It has the soul of a buzzard  
and the brains of a platypus.  
It has the eyes of an elf  
and the smile of a jack rabbit.

This good-looking word  
is somewhat of an enigma.  
It spends its mornings  
playing canasta with ghosts.

This word has a wobbly heart. . .

## **Whimling**

This word pours Glenfiddich scotch

over its breakfast cereal.

Its brain is made of grits and jowls.

This word believes the moon

is a fat, dumb angel.

This word's face is made of green cheese.

This word was born during the

Year of the Ostentatious Nephrologists

in Magazine, Arkansas to

William Randolph Hearst and Judy Garland.

## Ylem

This word is as clear  
and cold as Minnesota in March.

It has the liver of a saint, and  
the heart of a mermaid.

This word is a wild blue rose.  
Its voice is rich and resonant.  
Its heart holds no room for  
neither hope nor fear.  
Its face is free as the dawn

This word makes only simple promises.  
It always tells people, "Living is my hobby."

*David Kowalczyk lives and writes in Oakfield, New York. His poetry and fiction have appeared in seven anthologies and numerous journals and magazines, including Maryland Review, California Journal, Taj Mahal Review, and Istanbul Literary Journal. He has taught English at Arizona State University and in South Korea and Mexico. He was founding editor of the late Gentle Strength Journal.*

## **Every Man, an Island**

### **Mahendra Waghela**

The man who was going to kill himself stayed in the same cottage as mine.

He was at least ten years older, shorter and fatter than me. I had never seen him standing up, but he could barely be five and a half feet tall. I saw him every morning before I went jogging along the seashore. The man was some sight for my young and earnest eyes. He looked like a comic book character with his bare, flabby stomach the size of a loose potato sack spilling over his scarred leather belt and shapeless corduroy trousers. His faded pullover hanging on the armrest had seen better, cleaner, less smelly days.

Irrespective of the time of the day, he was always slouched in the rattan porch chair, right under the tacky paper lantern, with a glass of beer fixed in his swollen hand. The bloodthirsty mosquitoes of the island didn't seem to bother him much. He looked like a bitter, middle aged tourist catching up with his quota of drinks and boredom. Someone not too rich, someone not too happy with the drudgery of the daily grind we call life. I would never take a liking to a downslide character like him. His eyes - those drooping eyes had bothered me for some reason. They were gray, blank, almost lifeless eyes of a dying frog. I had seen him crying that morning, and he didn't seem bothered by my steady stare.

What was keeping me there in the island so small that most maps do not acknowledge it? I wouldn't be caught dead in a dreadful place like that, but I was stuck. Korucha is a tiny island about three hundred miles south from Bombay, on the Konkan coast. At some point of time, probably in the later part of the 18th century, it was considered a strategic location for the Royal Navy. After a decade or two, it was the ideal place to lock up the anti-empire nationalists and hardened criminals awaiting their end. This tiny, desolate ghost of a place boasts an abandoned and crumbling jail from the mighty British era. There is a small but functioning port with huge warehousing facilities, and a dozen sea facing cottages originally built for British naval officers. Now the cottages serve as a hotel for weird tourists like him, and trapped import executives like me.

I was stayed put there because the custom inspectors in Bombay had seized a phenomenally expensive CNC (Computerized Numerical Control) tooling machine my company had legally imported. They had transferred the metal container from the ship and locked it here in the island's warehouse. The officials had followed some strange government procedure to prove a point. The stuffy bureaucrats had a field day about this particular consignment because the import documents were in German. Despite our repeated pleas, our counterparts in Frankfurt weren't forthcoming with any more documents or verifications. The German Ministry of Commerce couldn't care less either. The machine had left Germany and reached India, that shining fact was good enough for them to sleep without worrying. Until and unless the local port authorities and stuffy custom duty officers were fully convinced (and sufficiently bribed), they wouldn't let us take the delivery of the precious machine.

By the time we got around to comprehending the situation at our company HQ in New Delhi, our production schedule had gone haywire. The marketing managers who had committed the orders were yelling their lungs off. Some of them had developed ulcers. Not to count the daily demurrage, the port authorities were charging a premium for keeping our precious cargo in their warehouse.

As a young recruit in charge of imports, I was immediately dispatched by the chief of production to facilitate the delivery. My boss' instructions were clear--"Do whatever it takes but don't come back without the CNC machine mounted on an express delivery ferry." This was my chance to look good, and rise a step higher on the company's corporate ladder.

I tried to find out who could be pushed, who could be greased, and which rules could be bent. I met one custom authority after the other with a new set of papers, and started to bang my head on various tables. It took me one more week, endless arguments and phone calls, thirteen faxes, and as many emails, but I did it. To make things easy for the government fatties, I got the documents translated, and photocopied them at my company's expense. I fed the sluggish clerks. The warehouse manager earned more than triple of my salary in a day. That was for shifting my machine for a convenient and safe loading. I still had to wait until their superior came back from his vacation, and signed the necessary papers.

So I was stuck in this dingy cottage hotel, watching my beer belly neighbor everyday. Apart from jogging, there was nothing on the island I could occupy myself with. I had to wait it out most of the time at my DDT smelling cottage. It was depressing enough to see the man drinking the whole day. By the look of him our man was probably drinking through the nights too.

That morning, I walked out to hang my towel on the porch railing, and saw him crying silently. A grown man sitting rigid in his chair, with tears rolling down his creased cheeks is no material to make a joke of. Not even for me. I am super-glib by nature and training. I can talk my way out of a cannibals' crowd, but the sight of his streaked gray face made me tongue-tied. I couldn't think of a thing to say to him. He looked so neck deep in his private misery.

I didn't feel any better after talking to my fire-breathing boss in Delhi. I drank my sugarless coffee, and again left for the port office in the afternoon. The senior officer in charge was already behind his battered, felt-covered table. My papers and consignment miraculously got through the same evening. The middle aged lizard stamped and scrawled his signature on the yellowed government papers, removed carbon copies for his records, and finally handed me the illegible but prized gate pass. After two weeks of spirited haggling, a ferry loaded with my machine left the port, and I walked out from the custom authorities' ramshackle gate.

I returned tired but buoyant. I sent an all-okay fax to HQ, and collected the keys from the hotel's reception

counter. On the way to my cottage, I met the old waiter who told me about my neighbor's sudden, senseless death.

“Used that leather belt of his for a noose, and hung himself from the ceiling fan. The rotting beam has nearly come off because of the body weight. No after-note, no blood, but you should have come earlier.” The waiter paused for dramatic effect. “You should have seen those popped out, white eyes. The island police took away the body for autopsy, just twenty minutes before you walked in,” he said. It was an exciting day for him.

I felt too stunned to react, and didn't want to hear any more of this death business. You see a man drinking, day in day out, you come back in the evening after a bitch of a day, and the next thing you know, the man has killed himself for no apparent reason. I felt baffled, and disoriented by the waiter's attitude.

For the first time in my life, I ordered a triple whiskey. I sat down in my porch facing the now-empty porch of my neighbor. It was already cold and dark. The seasonal wind had subsided as if compressed by the heavy weight of the winter sky. The waves sounded tired because the sea had retreated a good half a kilometer. I drank till I felt myself floating on a smooth, endlessly warm plateau of untouchable loneliness. I repeated the order for drinks.

It was the middle of the week, so most of the cottages were empty. There was no traffic whatsoever on this part of the island. The lack of waiters' bustle and resultant quiet soothed my frayed, over-stretched nerves. Not counting the chugging of an occasional motorboat in the distance, I had the little world entirely to myself. Despite the kind of day I had, I didn't feel hungry, and swallowed some more drinks. Half way through the next round of whiskey, and I was seeing shapes in the surrounding darkness; fluid shapes in the empty chair where my neighbor had sat, and drank with quiet determination.

I lost the sense of time and place. Grainy, irrational images from my distant past floated in and filled my head. The rainy afternoon when I had bruised my knees, and the subsequent visit to the family doctor. The nasty firing I took from my mother for playing out in the rain. My ever-right, ever-bright big brother who migrated to the U.S.A. and never returned. I remembered the bleak day I trudged back from the school with less than respectable results for my tenth standard exam. The heavy pallor in the family about my lack of future. The steady berating I received from my retired old man for doing things exactly the way he did, all the spittle for habits I had inherited from him. The sense of guilty relief I felt when he finally died after a prolonged hospitalization. The awful smell of disinfectant in the hospital...

It was probably whiskey and nothing else but as the night progressed, I thought more and more about my dead neighbor whose name I didn't know. I knew practically nothing about him; what he did for a living, or what made him choose a seedy place like this for a holiday. Maybe he was ditched by his family. Maybe he was a victim of a sour marriage, or some slow and sure disease. Or maybe he had deliberately planned the whole tragic act, right down to the cottage booking and all. Just drink desperately for a week or two, and die violently to make a strange personal statement. I saw him hunched, right there in his rattan

chair under the lazy, swinging lantern; his dead frog eyes finally shining with a gleam of satisfaction, and his head resting on the headrest. Through a comforting wall of thick, misty fog, he waved his fat white palm at me. Like some old buddy wishing a final farewell, and taking a polite leave.

I swallowed my last gulp of amber liquid, and probably spilled half of it on my shirt. I probably dozed a little and cried in sleep. I woke up, and cried some more for no apparent reason, and let the dark cloud of dense night overwhelm me. I passed out with an ease of slithery mollusk--a young, worn out body slouched under the invisible weight of life and waiting, in a chair not unlike my dead neighbor's.

**Devashish Makhija / 2 Poems**

**Forest fire**

in the centre

of his world he

stood burning.

‘in the jungle,’ she said,

‘only the rhinoceros

runs towards

a fire to stamp it out.’

and she lowered

her horn

to charge him.

*Between the spider*

*(after M F Hussain)*

in the neighbourhood

of your breath

i have traveled close and far

our lips have moved

dunes, shifting

a bird across the sun

became my hand fluttering

painting a thin shadow over

your lips

under that shadow

your words were horses

naked, riding your breath

till their legs became a blur

we exhaled a spider

its web froze into

a star

in the neighbourhood of

your breath i have traveled

close and far.

*Devashish makhija spends his life bewildered by the world, driven to manic curiosity about little things (like why is the 'butter-fly' not called the more befitting 'flutter-by'). To distract himself from such insomnia-inducing questions, he makes films, does graphic-art, writes poetry, stands on his head each morning, and sings songs to the Bombay pigeons each night. His alter ego resides at [www.nakedindianfakir.com](http://www.nakedindianfakir.com)*

**Jennifer Hollie Bowles / 1 Poem**

**We hate their reality**

Its thick muscles fibered in pink  
slips and bureaucratic crowbars  
guised as social relief—  
everywhere canvas with -isms and ads

Days form within rote circles, people  
droning past all packed with eyes

Their concave shines bruise with blue insight

Sterile couples acquiescence  
to acrid chemicals, producing  
five pounds of trash a day  
in six-bedroom homes

It's all crabby chic and blind hindsight

We are alone but never alone

No silence or boon

We are the lucid insane  
who know faucet water breeds idiocy  
veteran bones freeze in boxes  
appliances contain tracking devices  
and child arms burn from glowing cherries

We can't stomach crack pipes  
cubicles  
and preachers

With their version of truth

manacled around our ankles

we scribble for mercy

*Jennifer Hollie Bowles is the editor of The Medulla Review, and her writing has been accepted for publication in many online and print journals, from The New York Quarterly to Gutter Eloquence Magazine. Jennifer avoids people who suffer from the lymphatic neurosis of sitcoms, and she doesn't own a TV, cell-phone, or watch.*

# PERFECT MIDNIGHT



State killed stolen terror

AS THREATS approaching

MULTIPLE EXTREME RIGHT EXTREME

transforms into uniforms at midnight powered by

Illusions that the mind's suicide found packed and charged



by the security of fear's scanners



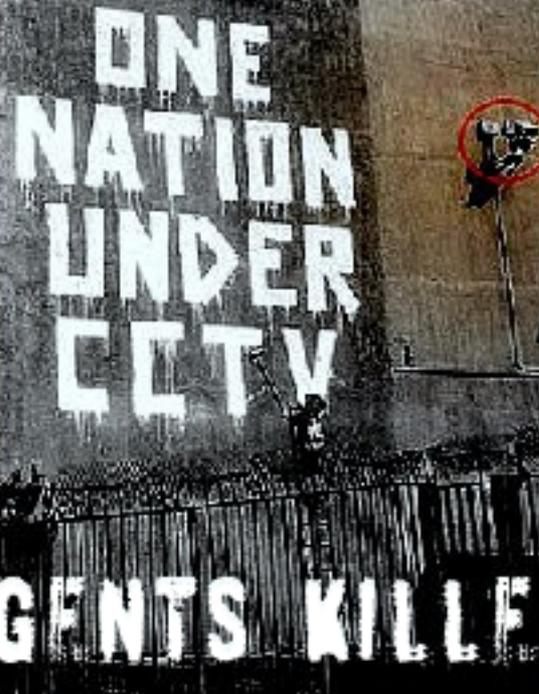
on this dead base of reality shows and broken teeth

watching shootings in shopping malls

check one check two

every day's news sure as hell ain't nothing new

Ma Salama, Ma Salama



Rahimahullah, Rahimahullah

The worst ain't over.

The empire has all the guns

No leaks or revelations

It's now approaching midnight