

**Volume 02**  
**Issue 04**  
**December 2020**

**ISSN: 2582-6352**

# The UNiverse Journal

**A Quarterly Refereed  
Open-Access Multidisciplinary  
e-journal of Humanities.**



**Editor-in-chief:**  
**C.P.Pathakk**

**Indexed Journal**  
**Peer-reviewed**

<https://www.theuniversejournal.com/index.php>  
<https://www.theuniversejournal.com/edboard.php>  
[https://www.theuniversejournal.com/current\\_issue.php](https://www.theuniversejournal.com/current_issue.php)  
[https://www.theuniversejournal.com/join\\_us.php](https://www.theuniversejournal.com/join_us.php)



**" Hard Days"**

Shouvik Banerjee

Indian

banerjee.shouvik@gmail.com

After a frustrating quest across the neighbourhood, Lalu finally reached the rendezvous spot where he and his fellow cats feasted. To his utter dismay, he realized someone had already commenced the search that was his to make. Since morning, his hunt for fish bones, scales, half-eaten junk foods, and even dirty sewer mice had only led to disappointing ends. He returned in the hopes of finding fresh garbage and instead stumbled upon a black and white bottle-brush tail that swung in the air like a pirate's flag.

He jumped on the big green dustbin with a clamour. The tail was quickly replaced with a dirty head. Bullet was one of the many strays in Lalu's neighbourhood and a regular at the green dustbin. For a moment, his olive eyes rested on Lalu. He quickly returned to his search which did not last long. As he sniffed at and tore through piles of variously coloured plastic bags, a few pieces of bone – undiscovered, untouched – suddenly came tumbling out and landed at his feet. Without wasting another moment, Bullet hastily began his feast.

Bullet's grand success had not escaped Lalu's longing eyes. He saw the bones and noticed the little pieces of meat that still temptingly stuck to them.

"Care to share...my friend?" he requested but not before putting on a sad face.

Bullet's face twisted into disgust and without looking up replied, "Forget it. Founders eaters!" He pulled the rest of his plunder towards himself.

"Oh, come now Bullet! I've been such a good friend to you. Remember when we raided Dadi's kitchen? Ah! Those were the days. Never did we go to bed on an empty stomach. But now..." Lalu got down and paced back and forth. "Forget about having a decent meal; it's hard enough to find bones these days. Am I right or not? Huh, Bullet? Please, please, let me have just one bite for old time's sake, huh?"

Bullet's twisted face was suddenly marred with belligerence. He snapped. "Rascal! I was the one who showed you Dadi's place! And besides, criminals don't have any code of honour. We are strays. We either beg or we steal. These are hard days and every cat to himself. Now shoo before I print my paws all over your face!"

Bullet was scrawny and Lalu could have easily taken him out, but it was too much work even for a few pieces of bone. The situation would have been different if it had been a piece of meat or fish. Then he would have battled him till his dying breath.

Leaving Bullet to his newfound love Lalu walked towards the end of the Alley where Ganpat lived. He was a kind man and sometimes fed stray cats and dogs. But he was poor and could not always afford to do so. When the dogs came, the cats had to take refuge above treetops and rooftops. Ganpat, however, always found a way to feed them.

Lalu decided to try his luck today. Upon reaching he found it was on his side. Bad luck, that is. Not only was there no sign of Ganpat or any food, but his house looked deserted as well. To make matters worse, Raja and his groupies had already occupied most of the place.

"Aye *chikne!* What are you searching?" said Raja grumpily. He was a big fat cat, who picked up fights now and then. His body was filled with battle scars and that had earned him many female fans; Rambo Raja they called him. Lalu knew he was just a bully, and like all bullies, no one wanted to start a fight with him.

"Umm...nothing Raja. I...was...just...leaving."

“You better scram or else I’ll hang you by that tail of yours!”

Without looking back Lalu ran as fast as he could from Ganpat’s alley. With a sullen face and a complaining belly, he went and sat on the tree across old Nanny’s house. From his vantage point, he could see the kitchen when the window was open. It was a safe scouting spot. He stretched on the branch and heaved a huge sigh. It had been weeks since he last stole any food from her. Security had been tight these days with her children and grand-children patrolling the perimeter of the house. It was an impossible task to sneak under the kids’ nose. They were a nightmare. Once caught the prisoners were subjected to stroking, petting and cuddling like those pet cats in some of the homes. Although they were entitled to certain privileges like a cozy home, a warm blanket and tasty food, it also meant being trapped. They always wore a collar around their neck. They were also injected with something in hospitals, the thought of which sends a shiver down his spine. The worst of all was the occasional baths. Everything was acceptable to him except baths.

*But perhaps privileged slavery was better than burdened freedom,* thought Lalu. At times, even he wished he had been born in a house like that. It wouldn’t be too bad to have a family.

His stomach agreed. Nowadays, even the mice had become smart. They had a new leader, and he was the smartest mouse any cat had ever seen. He outfoxed each one of them and it was rumoured that he had united all the mice in the neighbourhood to stand up in rebellion against the cat community. Bullet was right, these are hard days indeed. There is strength in unity and only the strong survive. That is the law of the jungle.

Lalu’s heart sank into a pool of misery. He soon dozed off, his tail hanging flimsily from the tree branch.

A few minutes later, the sound of a car engine woke him. From the corner of his eye, Lalu saw a car leave Dadi’s house. Without care, he went back to complete his nap, only to be woken again, not by any sound but by smell. A distinct and familiar aroma came floating through the air and attacked his olfactory nerves. He sniffed the air. His sharp memory instantly transported him to the days when he was prepared to do anything for that smell.

*Chicken roast!*

Lalu almost slipped off the branch due to excitement. Instinctively, he squinted towards the window and to his joy found it slightly ajar. *Someone forgot to close the window properly.* It didn’t look wide enough from where he sat but he decided to take his chances. His stomach began playing a drumbeat to match the excitement in his heart. Nimble, he climbed down from the tree and made his way towards the window. It was evening but there was hardly any activity going around in the neighbourhood. Therefore, it was cake-walk to reach the window without arousing anyone’s suspicion.

The gap was quite small but wide enough for Lalu to squeeze through. The last few weeks of unwanted diet had made him shockingly thin. He waited for a few seconds and strained his ears for any noise. Nothing, he recoiled and jumped like a spring. His nails dug deep into the wood and with some effort, he lifted himself on the ledge. Lalu glanced inside. It was empty. He stretched his body into an arc and shoved the pile of bones inside the kitchen. Success!

The sight was a familiar one. Except for the irresistible aroma nothing had changed in the last couple of weeks. His nose guided him to what he was looking for. He looked towards the oven and there it was, his prize, sitting prettily on a tray beside the oven! His stomach would have sprinted if it had legs; it used him instead. But from the moment he had entered the kitchen, there was another smell which was quite known to him. Something which he loved very much, something which made all his six senses dance to its intoxicating smell. And then like a flash of lightning it hit him as he realized what it was.

*Oh my God! It’s fish!*

Like a drug addict on cold turkey looking for cocaine, Lalu floated through the air, the sweet aroma carrying him in its arms and finally throwing him into its lap. It brought tears to his eyes when he looked at it – a nice, juicy, big fat Tuna on a plate. It felt surreal at first but then the growling in his stomach made Lalu realize it wasn’t a dream.

## The UNiverse Journal

(A Quarterly Refereed Open Access Multidisciplinary e-Journal)

But in his excitement, Lalu forgot to notice the slippery surface due to the oil that had been wrapped over the fish for baking. The moment he put my paws on the edge, he slipped and all three – the Tuna, the dish and Lalu – came crashing down. The sound of broken china roared through the silence of the house like a cannon. An eerie silence followed that felt like a funeral home.

Lalu gathered his thoughts. But he had barely moved a muscle when he heard a sound that kept getting louder by the second. And before he could make a move, a dark shadow formed over his head. Horrified, he looked up and found himself facing a fearsome warrior in the form of Dadi's seven-year-old granddaughter. Her Ember eyes rained fireballs. In one hand she yielded a mop and with the other, she shook a fist. Her voice boomed through the kitchen.

“How dare you touch our dinner you filthy cat!”

Lalu shuddered. The very next second, the mop came down crashing over his head like a bolt of lightning. He moved just in time to avoid the catastrophe. He lurched forward and managed to slip between his executioner's legs. He scurried without a sense of direction, like a trapped mouse looking for an exit, and escaped into the hallway.

*“Right, left, or forward?”*

In the few seconds that he wasted debating the ember eyes found him, promising to scorch his soul to a crisp. He was backed into a corner, and momentarily, he felt the grim reapers scythe on his neck. Suddenly, the image of that open window flashed before his eyes and he felt a rush of blood into his head.

Lalu took his chances and ran towards his enemy. As soon as she struck a blow, he jumped sideways onto an empty chair and leapt forward to distance himself from the attacker. The minute his foot landed on the floor, he darted towards the kitchen like a bullet. Behind him, a spiteful voice roared, “Oh! no, you don't.”

Without looking back, Lalu ran past the kitchen floor with every ounce of strength in his legs. And as he ran, his eyes drifted towards the broken dishware where his hope lay – cold and dead. He somehow squeezed himself out of the window but not before getting spanked in the buttock. He ran towards the tree and turned around. His attacker sported a victorious smile.

Later that day, as Lalu made his way past the green dustbin, he saw Bullet and the others gnaw greedily at a discarded roast chicken. The smell still lingered on his nose but weirdly his belly had gone awfully quiet.