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Alankarage Victor Suraweera is Professor of Sinhala and Chairman of the Department of Sinhala, Sri Jayawardenepura University, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

Suraweera was born on October 2, 1930. He was the son of a rural family and grew up near the interior town of Gampaha, about twenty-five miles from Sri Lanka's capital city, Colombo.

Suraweera attended the Government English School in Gampaha; he later graduated from Royal College, Colombo, one of the most prestigious boys high schools in Sri Lanka. In 1954 he graduated from the University of Peradeniya. In 1957 he was awarded a Master’s Degree, and in 1964 a Ph.D., by the same university.

Suraweera has published many scholarly books and articles on Sri Lankan culture and literature. In 1959 his book on the culture of the Anurhadapura Period won a State Award. In 1968 his critical edition of the Rajavaliya, a Sinhala classic, won another State Award.

In the 1970s Suraweera received an Asia Foundation Grant and for one year participated in the creative writing program at the University of Iowa. In the late 1970s he spent a year at the University of Kent, Canterbury, U. K., where, on a Commonwealth Fellowship, he did research on the sociology of
literature.

Suraweera’s creative works include five novels and four volumes of short stories. In 1980 his last novel *Sada Melesa Pura Derane* (Thus the City Was Built on Earth) won a State Award, as did two of his collections of short stories, one of which was a prescribed textbook for Sinhala in the G. C. E. Advanced Level. He has also published three books of stories for children. He has translated Aristotle’s *Poetics* into Sinhala.


This introduction continues with the initial publication here of the early sections of Suraweera’s college novel of 1977, *Atta Bindeyi Paya Burulen* (Tread Softly, Lest the Branch Break) translated from the original Sinhala by Vijita Fernando and edited by the present writer.

In “An Interview with A.V. Suraweera on Aspects of Culture in Sri Lanka” (June 1984), Suraweera says that his story deals with the life of a university campus that is in turmoil. “The powers of the university’s President are limited; he is not able to take a decision of his own. The Deans, Professors, Lecturers, Student Counsellors, Marshalls—all are puppets,

more or less. Students are distracted by their leaders, who, in turn, are controlled by various political parties from outside the campus. . . . On the whole, the academic atmosphere expected of a university is lacking. There is a general deterioration of discipline. Certain members of the faculty are involved in politics or personal rivalries. . . . Life in the university goes on amidst all this tension. The best way of survival is to tread softly; otherwise the whole thing would tumble down”.

Dr. Wimal Dissanayake, presently Professor of Mass Communication and Associate Director for Asian Studies, East-West Center, Hawaii, reviewed Atta Bindeyi Paya Burulen in the Ceylon Observer, September 11, 1977. He says that the novel “recreates the true nature of campus life with a remarkable degree of understanding and discernment.” He says, “The university president is hemmed in by politicians, higher authorities, students, minor staff, his own colleagues. He struggles against great odds to discharge his duties impartially and responsibly.” Dissanayake describes some of the professors in the novel. One is “shrewd, scheming and perfidious.” Another is “ostenious and status-seeking”. A third is “a sincere teacher with an honest compunction”.

Until the implementation of the University of Ceylon Act No. 1 (1972) there were four public universities in Sri Lanka: the University of Peradeniya, the University of Colombo, Vidyalanka University, and Vidyodaya University, the setting of Atta Bindeyi Paya Burulen. 2)

2) Vidyodaya University is now Sri Jayawardenapura University.
The University of Ceylon Act of 1972 created one university, the four above-named universities becoming branches of this one university. (In 1978 each campus became an independent university again.)

The Minister of Education was responsible for the administration of this university. The head of the university was the Vice Chancellor, who controlled all four campuses. The head of each campus was the President.

* * * * *

Today, today too, like every other day, Dr. Getamanna \(^3\) climbed the spiral staircase to the fourth floor. Today too, like every other day, young as he was, he was tired.

Dr. Getamanna felt tired climbing to the fourth floor, the top floor, of the Sumangala Building, \(^4\) but the tiredness he felt brought him a certain amount of satisfaction. He needed this daily exercise. He knew his body was better for such exertion. Dr. Getamanna mused: "... must propose this staff room be moved downstairs... to the ground floor..."

Dr. Getamanna entered the Senior Common Room. As usual he was the first teacher to come to the staff room. He wiped the sweat off his brow. He sat down in an easy chair. He stretched his legs out in front of him. He leaned against the arm of the chair. Raising his arms with some effort, he breathed

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3) *Geta* = knot, trap. *Manna* = pride. *Getamanna* = clever in making traps. (All information herein regarding the Sinhala language was supplied by A.V. Suraweera. L.R.)

4) This administration building at Sri Jayawardenapura University is named after Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thero, a well-known Orientalist.
deeply. He thought he felt new vigor flowing through his body. He continued sitting.

A bundle of the day's newspapers was on the table next to the easy chair. As usual, without getting out of the easy chair, Dr. Getamanna opened the bundle of newspapers. June 28, 1975.

Opening the bundle and reading the crisp pages fresh from the press brought him a peculiar sense of happiness. The smell of the fresh printer's ink was to him no second to the sweet fragrance of a young girl's cheek fresh with a slight dusting of powder. Dr. Getamanna breathed in deeply. Today too, June 28th, he enjoyed this customary satisfaction.

Dr. Getamanna glanced towards the blank wall opposite him. A painting on that wall would look rather nice. A Sigiri painting? Would a painting of lovers by George Keyt be better? The Senior Common Room should have something worthy of the place. The painting on that wall should be a symbol of the artistic sensibilities of the academics of the university.

Dr. Getamanna decided to propose to the President that they buy a Keyt painting at once. He felt happy that his proposal could not be approved at once. It would give him a chance to show up the President to the rest of the faculty. They would appreciate his letting them have a chance to criticize the President.

Dr. Getamanna was glad he had had such a bright idea so early in the morning. He came to the Senior Common Room by

5) The Sigiri Frescoes date from the 5th century.
6) George Keyt is the most well-known modernist painter in Sri Lanka.
eight every morning. He woke up and got ready early every morning and walked from his bachelor’s quarters inside the campus. By eight he was here, stroking his beard, sipping the delicious cup of tea made for him by Karunasena, the waiter, and turning over the sweet smelling pages of the daily newspapers.

As usual, Dr. Getamanna walked out to the balcony and breathed deeply of the fresh morning air. As usual, he lit himself a cigarette and through the haze of smoke watched the green of the tree tops and the horizon through a tracery of green.

Dr. Getamanna watched the clouds skimming across the sky. He pulled his beard. He watched the youthful sun momentarily go behind a cloud and struggle to emerge. He cursed the cloud for depriving him even for a moment of the life-giving rays of the morning sun. “Looks like a wretched day... looks like rain... I don’t mind any amount of sunshine, but I can’t stand the dampness”.

Dr. Getamanna gazed across the campus and saw a seemingly never ending stretch of green, the hills and trees merging into this vastness.

Dr. Getamanna looked at the high wall surrounding the campus, shutting it in. He felt he was a lucky man to be within the confines of that high wall, to be in this serene environment, away from the trials and tribulations of the world outside. What was there so sweet as independence? The autonomy of the university. Here Dr. Getamanna enjoyed independence. Those who lived within the university enjoyed an independence unknown to anyone who lived anywhere in the outside world. The university was free from oppressive social problems. The university was a kingdom where with the correct
use of one’s brains one could rise higher. Higher. In the Ivory Tower.

Dr. Getamanna watched a pair of yellow butterflies dip their wings and fly downwards to the edge of the roof below. He felt a strange elation. A sense of calmness.

Dr. Getamanna had another idea. “Must get the students together and do a play”. He lived within the campus, so this would be easy to do. The students would like such an idea, especially the girls. There was the chance that he would find talent among the students. He would organize and guide them. A play producer. What a nice idea!

He reflected: “I can make use of this. That’s how Sarachchandra became so popular. I too must try. If I succeed, what a chance! Who doesn’t know Sarachchandra today?”

Dr. Getamanna thought: “The thing is to select a good script. But that will not be so hard to do. I could even write a play myself. Or I can translate one, Easier. A Japanese play? He could find one in English. Somewhere. One of Beckett’s. I must speak to Wanasinghe: Here, Wane, have a cigarette... shall we get together and stage a play, Wane? Right, sir, we’ll be with you, sir, anything you say, sir, your majesty”.

Dr. Getamanna remembered that Wanasinghe, the Secretary of the Student Union, had not been pulling together with its President, Janadasa, though they both belonged to the

7) Ediriweera Sarachchandra is Sri Lanka’s foremost dramatist.
8) Wana = forest. Sinha = lion.
9) Jana = masses. Dasa = servant.
same political party. Most students were partial to Janadasa, but the few with Wanasinghe had proved to be able to get most things done in the campus.

Dr. Getamanna argued with himself: Janadasa and some well disciplined bhikkhus, followers of Professor Paranawadiya, could be a threat to his plans. Everyone obeyed Wanasinghe’s loud mouth and his thuggery.

Dr. Getamanna decided it would be wise to seek Wanasinghe’s help. “I will give Wanasinghe the role of a king, a hero’s part.”

Dr. Getamanna felt himself an actor. He played his role as he walked about the balcony enjoying the soft breeze. The play would be a good one. Would put Sinhabahu in the shade. After all, weren’t the teachers and students here players, acting various roles? The university is an abode of permanent actors. No make up required in the campus. Always wearing masks.

As Dr. Getamanna looked down from the right side of the

10) Sri Lankan Student Unions are similar to those in English universities. Political parties are not officially recognized in Student Union elections, but student candidates for Union offices are allied with political parties. The three parties referred to in this novel are the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party. In 1975 almost all students at the then Vidyodaya University belonged to one of these parties.
11) Buddhist monks (bhikkhu) may be students in Sri Lankan universities.
12) Parana = old, out of date. Wadiya = abode, resting place.
13) A play by Ediriweera Sarachchandra.
balcony, he could see the statue of Reverend Soratha. How fond he had been of the Reverend Soratha. He felt as if he could see all that the *bhikkhu* had said and done. All his valuable advice... study well, get a first class, and you will get a place in the university... Soratha was a great man; he had always encouraged students with words like these. Soratha had said them to him many times.

With Soratha’s blessings, Getamanna had got a lower second, and he had obtained a place in the university, though some with first classes had not. Thanks to Soratha, he had gone abroad on a scholarship. He had expected to go to England, but Dean Caldera had tricked him on that. But maybe it was a good thing that he didn’t go to London. There he would have only got an M.A. Because he had gone to New Delhi, he was able to get his Ph. D. Everybody had gossiped. Doing his post-graduate studies in New Delhi, Getamanna, then *Dhammasiddhi*, a *bhikkhu*, had said goodbye to the priesthood. Soratha—today there were no good people like the Reverend Soratha—had not approved of that particular step. If the Reverend Soratha had been alive when Getamanna gave up his robes, he might not have allowed him to continue as a lecturer. But Getamanna had no regrets. Of course, he should live up to the first blessings he received from the illustrious founder.

Things had changed. The respected teacher was a person of the past. Had Getamanna returned while Soratha was still

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14) Founder and first Vice Chancellor of Vidyodaya University (now Sri Jayawardenepura U.), Welivitiye Soratha Nayaka Thero, D. Litt., author of a Sinhalese Dictionary.
living, would there have been a chance? Since his death, things had taken a different twist. They should have given Getamanna at least a Grade One lectureship. But not even that. The fellows who presently held the reins knew no gratitude. They had forgotten how the university was built. Ingrates.

“Upgrading has been deferred due to lack of research work”!! Dr. Getamanna decided: “Must write a couple of articles”. But it’s easier to produce a play than sweat over research articles. A social drama. Yes, that’s what he should do. Then, reviews in the papers. Favorable ones. In English and Sinhala. Yes. Good reviews. He could write one himself, send it in under someone else’s signature. This great drama which unfolds the hidden meaning of modern society, analyzing in depth . . .

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Dr. Getamanna drew deeply on his cigarette. He exhaled a curl of smoke through pursed lips. He watched a column of black smoke curling towards the sky from a distant chimney. Lightheartedly, he whistled a tune. He tried to pretend to be unaware of the waiter Karunasena.

“Sir, please excuse me for troubling you . . . but who else can I tell? How can I go on in this way, Sir?” Karunasena’s tone was properly humble.

Dr. Getamanna lied: “Yes, I have already spoken to the President about it. It will be all right. Have no fears. They can’t say no to me. But you also, just tell them, and we’ll see. But now, don’t let them know that I told you, right?”

15) Karuna = kindness, Sena = army.
Karunasena, with his seven credits in the Senior Examination, wanted an appointment to the clerical grade. He had placed his trust in Getamanna, who as an official of the Teacher’s Union had considerable influence.

Getamanna promised to see into the matter and thus got Karunasena to do many services for him. But he did nothing; he had not spoken to the President.

Karunasena spoke confidentially, secretively. “Sir, things don’t look too good these days. There is sure to be some crisis”.

“What? What?”

“The elections, sir. Some of these students do nothing but politics, sir. They have no thought of studying. They are either going about shouting slogans or getting involved in love affairs. Just last night they were painting banners and posters. If the Marshals try to stop them, they will get together and assault the Marshalls.”

Karunasena came closer. “Sir, don’t say that I told you ... but the story is that even the lecturers won’t be spared if they try to prevent the students from doing what they want. It seems that their political party will save them whatever happens. So better be careful”.

Dr. Getamanna said: “What nonsense, Karunasena. Whatever the students do to anyone else, they will never harm me. They listen to me. They know what I am like”.

“No, sir. Nothing will happen to you. I just mentioned it to you—what the students were saying”.

Dr. Getamanna asked: “Janadasa and them, and Bhikkhu

16) Marshalls are the equivalent of campus guards.
Vinitha? Are they also putting up posters? I doubt it.”

“No, sir. They weren’t anywhere near there. I heard several students say that Janadasa is against all this now. He is on another line now, sir.”

Dr. Getamanna leaned against the wall and reflected for a minute. Then he sent Karunasena on an errand.

Dr. Getamanna lit a cigarette out of a packet of Three Roses. Then he walked back to his quarters. He locked the door of his room. He lay on the bed. He found it almost impossible to collect his thoughts.

Dr. Getamanna looked at his desk. He saw the envelope from the Examinations Division. He had to finish a question paper by noon. Caldera, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, was always waiting for a chance to involve him in some trouble.

Whatever he did, it seemed that nothing was going his way. Caldera was always waiting to stand in his way. Caldera was against his promotion to Grade One. Hadn’t published enough research papers, Caldera had said. But the university did not have facilities for research. There was no climate for research on the campus. How could one do any work? And on the other hand some who had not ever written even a short article were being made professors. Caldera himself had never done any research. What research had Baladasa done? And he was now President of the campus. Caldera said it was due to President Baladasa’s negligence that he was not promoted. The President says that Caldera objected. Each one blames the other. Dr. Getamanna was caught in the cross fire.

17) From calderama = a large tank for storing arrack; it always smells.
18) Bala = strength, power. Dasa = servant, slave.
Dr. Getamanna knew that for a number of years Caldera had been plotting to get the President’s Chair. Caldera never lost a chance to do anything to make the President lose favor.

What Dr. Getamanna had to do was win the students’ confidence and get the Student Union to demand that he be given a promotion. Only then would the administration open their eyes. He must discuss this with Wanasinghe. Everything depended on the strength and influence of the students—for good or bad.

The students had been making banners all night, Karunasena had said. He should inform the President and Professor Paranawadiya, the Senior Student Counsellor. All right, suppose he informed them? What would happen then is that it would boomerang back again on him. Hello, good morning, sir. Looks as if there is going to be some trouble today. Yes, then there would be some cross examination. He would have to have answers. Yes, he would be told, yes, do whatever you think is best. Yes, yes, the students will listen to you. Yes, tell them to settle these things, that we are favorable to any peaceful settlement. Yes, carefully, please.

Yes, then the whole affair would come back to his lap to discuss and solve and settle. No, I won’t tell anyone. They all know my worth now. Why should I? I will tread softly, Dr. Getamanna said to himself. Tread softly.

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Ratnayake telephoned Student Union Secretary Wanasinghe in anger. “I say, machang, Old Marshall Peiris

20) Slang used by young students to address equals.
is lecturing again. Must give him the works. Otherwise we can’t do this. The old man is a hell of a nuisance”.

“What’s the matter, man?” Wanasinghe said. “You know him, don’t you? Why take notice of him? That’s his usual tune, no?”

“No. He says not to put up banners. That it is an order from the top. How can we electioneer without banners? All these rules are only this year, it looks like”.

“Tell Old Peiris to go sleep, man”, Wanasinghe said. “We should have finished this sooner. You lazy fellows couldn’t get it done in time.”

As Wanasinghe arrived at the university gate, students flocked around him. They were restless. “Where did you go in all this rush”, someone asked him, “to see your bit?” Someone else said: “Have you also become psycho like Janadasa?”

Wanasinghe said: “Just shut up, men, instead of shooting off your mouth because you have one. I had to go to the Party office. There is a lot of work. Anyway, let’s get down to work and talk later? Where is our President, Janadasa? Is he cutting today too? He is useless. He became President of the Student’s Union thanks to us. Now he’s become a big shot and is trying to preach to us. Today in the Party office I told them of his line. He has gone there and criticized me!”

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For the past few months there had been many disagreements between Wanasinghe and Janadasa. Wanasinghe and his crowd wanted to bring about some problem, imagined or real,

21) “Bit” is slang for girl friend.
create conflict between the students and the administration, then act so that they appeared heroes in the eyes of the students. Janadasa did not approve of such methods. On the other hand, Janadasa was not ready to act on Party officials’ instructions without carefully considering them first. He often argued that student officers were not puppets to be manipulated by outside political parties and that they should act more independently. Wanasinghe and his cronies did not accept this. They were trying to edge Janadasa out. Wanasinghe began a campaign to make it seem that Janadasa’s modus operandi was not acceptable to the students. Gradually Janadasa began to distance himself from Student Union activities. The Party had secretly advised Wanasinghe to create some sort of disturbance in the campus before the Student Union elections. This would assure his popularity with students. Victory would be certain. If Wanasinghe could have shaken off responsibility for one incident that had darkened his name, he would already have been able to get rid of Janadasa. But because of that incident he needed Janadasa’s assistance.

On June 28th Janadasa did not join in putting up banners and posters. The excitement and the confusion was heightened by Janadasa’s absence. By eight thirty that morning there was a considerable stir within the campus as banners and posters went up.

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As he saw the confusion Chief Marshall Peiris became disturbed. He wanted to maintain peace inside the campus at all times. The slightest stir made him uneasy. From the day he assumed his position it had been impossible for him to
execute his duties as he wished. He spent his time in disgust. Remorseful. Impatient.

Any reports that he presented regarding student indiscipline never came to light. Sometimes the President of the campus was indifferent, sometimes the President had to act according to instructions from above. Even if the campus was turned upside down, nothing happened. All that happened was that Old Peiris lost his voice, and his old shoes were wasted a little more as he ran up and down trying to calm the students. He would often say: “Whatever it is, we marshalls have to do our duty. Whether they take action or not is their job”.

This morning he objected strongly when a banner with the slogan “Victory to the Progressive Student Union” was hoisted.

“I say”, Peiris said, “This is not good. Why should educated young people like you need banners to seek election? Let us act like civilized, educated people. Let us explain our principles. Then we will get votes. Are university students fools?”

“Whose rules are those, man? Just get along, man, without your preachings. Why hold elections at all? These are our rights . . .”

“But listen to what I have to say,” Peiris said. “You have come here to learn, not to conduct elections. Go, go to the library, you girls, study and use your brains . . .”

Peiris’s insistent words were drowned in the hooting and the jeering: “Brains! Keep your civilization to yourself, and if you can’t do that, stick it up”.

Peiris was quite used to these insults. He couldn’t do his duty if he weren’t impervious to them. There was no end to
the students’ frowns and growls at his advice and preachings.

This year Peiris had no instructions whether to allow banners or not. A few years ago there had been instructions banning them. But he knew very well that during any single election nothing had happened according to rules and regulations.

After last year’s elections he had presented a report on the abuses and how best to conduct student elections. He had expected to see his proposals acted on this time. He had spent hours arguing, discussing, and harassing his brain to prepare that document. He had expected it to be approved and distributed to other campuses too. Nothing had happened.

Now, even the female students joined in the hooting.

Peiris’s whole body was drenched with sweat. He looked around to see if any of his assistants were around. No.

A faction of students belonging to another political party arrived. They joined in the hooting and jeering.

Peiris could see that gradually the confusion was getting worse. He wended his way towards the Chief Marshall’s Office amid that familiar but unnerving din of hooting and jeering.

There was no one in the office. Peiris tried to telephone the President of the campus but there was no reply. He banged down the receiver. He ran toward the gate where the students were flocking around. Peiris was a man disturbed.

"Here, here", Peiris said. "Wanasinghe! Wijesekera! Silva! Children, children! Please listen to me."

"Get away from here, man, and get out of the way and leave us in peace, for God’s sake."

The red banner floated about in the breeze. It made its own rhythm. Its shadow danced about Peiris’s feet. Peiris glared
at the red flag. He ground his teeth. He turned to go back. There was another bout of hooting and jeering.

As Chief Marshall Peiris paced up and down in his office, one of the Assistant Marshalls came in. As usual, he was chewing betel and grinning.

Peiris asked: "Where were you, Fonseka? When there is trouble you quietly disappear, don't you? How can we allow these things to go on? They are hooting as if they are at a circus. Jeering. I don't know what else will happen".

Fonseka peered out of the window. He leaned out. He shot out a stream of red betel spit on the green grass. He did not say a word.

In a few minutes there were two blue banners aloft. A green one too! Then another red one. There was confusion all over. As Fonseka looked out of the window he could see a mass of students flocking toward one point. The green banner was torn down. There was a free exchange of blows.

Peiris looked too.

Fonseka said: "What can we do, Mr. Peiris? If we are ready to be assaulted, we can go into that melee. Otherwise, what can we do?" Fonseka went to the other window and shot another stream of betel spit outside.

Peiris laid his head on the desk. He thought. "Yes, Fonseka", he said, "What you say is right. What can the two of us do? We can't possibly unravel these tangles".

22) The red flag of either the Communist Party or the Socialist Party; Janadasa's party one of these, is not specified in the novel. Blue, the color of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Green, the color of the United National Party.
Peiris sat heavily at his desk. He knew that it would not do for him to stay in the office while the students hit each other. He felt that he was considered an official who never failed to face a situation, however serious. But just now there was nothing he could do amidst this throng of students. Fonseka was right.

Peiris took off his khaki coat and hat. He quietly slunk towards the lavatory. He locked himself in.

After twenty years in the Police Service he had been promoted to the rank of Sub Inspector. But nothing had given him satisfaction as he looked at the corruption everywhere. He had left the Police Service. He joined the university security staff, feeling that the academic atmosphere would give him the sense of satisfaction he was seeking.

But in a few days of his coming here he learned that things were no better within the portals of learning. He remembered the despair that he felt then. How many times he felt that he should kick his job in and get out. He rejected those momentary urges as unworthy of a mature intelligent man. He learnt to tread softly. He was getting older. He and his wife had five daughters. Had even one of his children had at least a small job, he might have resigned. How long was he to suffer in this way? Into his wretched thoughts burst the sound of the telephone. He came out of the lavatory.

Fonseka said, “Dr. Getamanna calling”, and handed him the receiver.

“Hullo? Good morning, sir”, said Peiris. “Yes, yes, sir, I just came from there. Yes, I told them not to. There is a regulation against putting up banners. But what can a lone man do, sir?”
Getamanna’s voice on the telephone echoed through the room: “Not regulations, man. Five students are injured. Get them to hospital at once.”

“Right, sir”.

Peiris should first report the incident to the President of the university or the Registrar. He should get their instructions and then obtain permission to use a vehicle to get the injured to hospital. Otherwise, the fault would be his. But the vehicle was out of order and had been in the garage for many months.

Some months ago he had used a vehicle without the necessary permission to take a student with chest pains to hospital after the student leaders had asked for a car. He felt that the patient was too sick and had not bothered with permits and things. The jeep came back after six hours. The President got information that the students had not used it to go to the hospital but to a meeting at the Kelaniya campus. The students admitted they lied to get the jeep. In the end the blame had rested on Peiris.

Now Dr. Getamanna was instructing him to take injured students to hospital, but he had no permission to take a vehicle out of the campus. In a moment the students would swarm into his office clamoring to take the injured ones to hospital. They would threaten him. There would be demonstrations. What a mess!

*****

Dr. Getamanna made some notes as topics came into his mind. None of them satisfied him as being suitable for the question paper he was setting. Some topics were too difficult, some
too easy. Some wording was not quite the thing. Some he rejected out of hand. He wanted to set a paper that Dean Caldera would not have to correct or redo in any way. But he could not do this in a rush.

Another professor had once remarked that setting a good question paper was more difficult than writing a book on the subject. He now realized the truth of that statement. Without peace of mind and a proper environment for work it was an impossible task to set a question paper. The best thing to do was go to the library and glance through past question papers.

He heard a commotion from the direction of the main gate. He got up and went to the side of the window, hiding, and listened. He could hear a stream of rough voices coming toward his room.

The signs were there earlier that the student elections were going to be tough. There was some truth in the predictions that the waiter Karunasena had made just a little while ago. But Dr. Getamanna did not expect things to come to a head so soon. Not one student had come to him for advice on how to set about things. He blamed the students for this.

He had had secret discussions with the student leaders of the three main political parties. He had convinced each one that he was sympathetic to that party. This enabled him to even learn some of their secrets. But he had not learned of the most recent events. This was a disadvantage.

During last term's student strike he had been able to reap many benefits. The students had get together then regardless of their political affiliations. At students' meetings he had convinced them that they were in the right. He promised to get them the support of the faculty. He even let the students know
some of the decisions taken by the administration at meetings that he attended as a student counsellor. He knew it was not the correct thing to do. On the other hand, he had earned the praise of the President of the campus by ratting on the students.

At that time he had phoned the President every hour. He had secret discussions with him. Time and again he met the President. With tea provided every time.

The students came too, in an endless stream, presenting their problems, asking questions, seeking advice.

"Sir, what are we to do about this?"

Dr. Getamanna answered: "This is the situation now... if the strike goes on till next week they are going to ban lectures... now, of course, this is a secret". Dr. Getamanna said: "The President wants to expel Wanasinghe and Ratnayake... this is a secret... and he is going to say that this is on instructions from high up".

"Is that true, sir? Are the instructions from the Vice Chancellor or someone else?" Dr. Getamanna said: "The President didn't say... but I feel that it is from the Minister. But there is one thing: this time he is going to be very hard. You people can find out for yourselves, but please don't involve me in any of this, right?"

The student leaders then went right up to their political leaders outside. They were assured there were no such instructions. The students learned that the Cabinet of Ministers had discussed the student strike and decided that should no decision be reached they would close down the campus because it would be unjust to punish only some students. The students felt that closing down the campus would be a loss to their campaign.
The students wanted to prevent the closing down of the campus. They did not want to be punished. They wanted to continue the strike. The student leaders knew that without the support of the majority of students who were uninvolved, it would be impossible to continue the strike.

Dr. Getamanna had revealed all this to the President of the campus as secrets he learned from the students.

The strike had ended with student leaders and the administrators both being subject to some degree of disrepute and unpopularity.

Dr. Getamanna was the only victor. He became the only faculty member popular among the student body. It was his desire now to maintain this image of everyone's favorite without tarnishing it in any way.

While Mr. Peiris wavered this way and that about the injured students, Dr. Getamanna took out his own Austin car and took the students to hospital.

"Look at this," Dr. Getamanna said to the students. "What is the use of campus vehicles if they are not to be used in an emergency like this? Look at these people... even if a student dies, they don't care. Heartless devils!"

"That's the thing, sir," the students said. "Those vehicles are for them to take their women out on joy rides... their children to school. Just watch us, sir. Soon we will somehow destroy this capitalist structure. The students must have priority of place in the campus. Without students there wouldn't be a campus. Why should we need permission to take out a car when we need it?"

"Don't you know?" Dr. Getamanna said. "Once I proposed that there should be a special car for the Student Union. That's
why they are all angry with me. Because I always speak up for
the students.”

“What happened to that proposal, sir?” the students asked.
“Who objected to it? The President? The Finance Section?
Whoever is against, we shall have a vehicle for ourselves in
a couple of months!”

Dr. Getamanna made full use of this opportunity. “Why
should I tell you all these things and get into trouble? That’s
not proper,” he said. Then, with a triumphant glance at each
face turned towards Wanasinghe, Dr. Getamanna said: “That’s
why my promotion is being delayed . . . ”

“We know, sir,” said the students. “There are one or two
that need to be chased away. Otherwise there is no future to
this university or the student movement”.

Dr. Getamanna loved to listen to the students indulge in
this kind of talk.

“And another thing”, Dr. Getamanna said. “At a time like
this, surely it is the Warden or the President who should
come forward. They haven’t even sighted the place.”

“That’s why we call them frauds, sir”, said the students.
The students were disgusted with Wimalaratne, the Hostel
Warden. The Warden had never shown any affection for Dr.
Getamanna. Dr. Getamanna felt that he himself was the most
suitable man for the post of Hostel Warden. Besides, he could
have an additional two hundred and fifty rupees in salary. A
great consolation.

“That’s what I was thinking too,” said Dr. Getamanna to

23) Hostel Warden, manager of student dormitory; sometimes he is a
university lecturer who as Hostel Warden gets extra pay.
the students. "My principle is that if you undertake a job you must do it properly. How can Dr. Wimalaratne do his Warden’s job properly from outside the campus? The Warden should be someone living within the campus."

The students asked: "Would you like to be Warden from next month, sir? We can set it. It’s a simple thing".

"Oh, my God," said Dr. Getamanna. "I wasn’t talking of myself. What I meant was that it must be someone who can do the job properly."

Dr. Getamanna thought: what a wonderful opportunity it was to take the injured students to hospital. Another two hundred and fifty, rupees. Every month.

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Dr. Caldera, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, usually came into his office about ten in the morning. His duties as Dean freed him from teaching, but he liked to portray himself to the rest of the university as an extremely busy man. The members of the faculty were not enamored of him. Some said he gave the rest of the teachers a bad name. They said his actions spoilt the good name of the faculty.

Today, June 28th, he came into the typist’s room early. The question papers had to be ready for the diploma examination the next day. He had to give the final sanction before the papers were roneod. 24) He came into the room and found fault with everyone. As usual.

Dr. Caldera was accustomed to sleeping till the sun streaming through the window warmed his feet. He left his home

24) Mimeographed, copied.
early in the morning only when it was unavoidable. He could not avoid leaving the house early on June 28.

He had forgotten all about the question papers. Mr. Sirisena, the Assistant Secretary, had reminded him.

Dr. Caldera said: “These exam matters are not to be taken lightly, Mr. Sirisena. Why did you tell me at the last minute? Supposing I had had some other work and had been out?”

“Excuse me, sir, but we sent you two reminders about this”. As usual Sirisena spoke with humility.

“Reminders? What nonsense, I say. Then I should have got them, no? Why couldn’t you phone me up? Who has the time to be reading letters, I say? Now I had to leave all my research work and come running here”.

Sirisena was not at fault, but as usual he did not argue. He had heard several times Caldera was a man who did research only by talking about doing it. Sirisena placed the file containing the question papers in front of Caldera.

Reading through the question papers, Caldera began to write his signature in red ink on each one. Sometimes he meditated over one paper for a minute or two. Then he read a question aloud in a sing-song style. Then, as if overcome by its melody, he would close his eyes, nod his head, and read it aloud again and again.

Sirisena’s duty was to see that the question papers were kept secret. He sent the clerk out to ensure no students were outside who could hear Caldera’s song.

Caldera glanced at his watch off and on. He made a sour face. In a moment, as if he remembered something important, he dropped the file of papers. He rushed to the telephone. He dialled several numbers. “Hullo, hullo . . . Savithri . . . Professor
Cal... Tell the boss that I will be a little late... that I'll come for lunch... Yes, yes, to the Minister... Hullo... No, darling, believe me... Sure... Cheerio...” Then looking around glumly, he began to examine the papers again.

“Where is the Political Science paper?” Caldera asked. “Sure, Getamanna hasn’t given it. He is such a careless rascal. He hasn’t given it.”

Triumphantly, Caldera lit a match and held it to his pipe. He was talking, so he had to strike three or four matches before he could draw on it.

Sirisena said: “Dr. Getamanna said he will bring the Political Science paper at ten this morning, sir. I telephoned and reminded him”.

Dr. Caldera flung the whole file at Sirisena. “There, I told you. I can’t do anything with that man. Teh... If he gives it at ten how can I work on it? Where is the time? Am I to sleep here till the rascal brings his paper? Haven’t I got other work? I have my research. I have to go to the Planning Ministry at ten. I have a whole day’s Advisory Committee meeting there. That’s why the Minister has invited me to lunch. And this rascal...”

“Sir, he won’t be late”.

“Not late? Are you trying to teach me? Is this the way to do one’s duty? And this is not an ordinary exam. This is the diploma exam. That Getamanna fellow is like that. No dedication to his work. I have got so many complaints. When did he have to give this paper? You must have the records.

“Before June 10th, sir. A reminder was sent on the fifteenth.

“So. Today is the 28th. He is eighteen days late. The exam
starts tomorrow. This question paper is scheduled for the day after tomorrow. I must teach this fellow a good lesson. I shall report him to the Vice Chancellor. And you, Mr. Sirisena, you must give me a statement with all the dates. Right? He must take everything, in his greed, but he cannot do anything, and he never does what is necessary. Give me that statement. Right?"

Sirisena felt Caldera spoke with considerable anger. This was not the first time such a thing had been done by a faculty member. But other Dons had not acted in Caldera's way. But Sirisena had learned that in the university there was not a lot of goodwill and understanding among the teachers.

Sirisena said: "Sir, I am quite sure that Dr. Getamanna will bring the paper in a little while. He says his brother is in hospital, and he has had a difficult time these days." Sirisena tried to evoke sympathy for Getamanna.

Dr. Caldera said: "I say, isn't this much more important than his brother's illness? Duty first. How can we have a Political Science exam without the question paper? I reported that the rascal had cut a number of lectures recently. But he is also shutting his eyes to these important things. The President is scared of him. How can I carry on the work in the Faculty when people are like this? Even the President is not doing his duty. I don't like these things. I have never seen nonsense like this in any university in the world. I have worked in seven or eight top class universities, you know. I will teach that damned rascal Getamanna a good lesson."

Sirisena went back to his desk and engrossed himself in his work.

Again Dr. Caldera rushed to the telephone and dialled
again. He spoke very softly: “Good morning, sir. Caldera here. Dean Arts, Vidyodaya. I have a problem, sir. I have come to a state where I cannot work with one of my lecturers. This Dr. Getamanna. I have complained about him to you earlier, too, sir. The exam is tomorrow and he still hasn’t given the question paper. Neglect of duty. He is always like this. I have complained earlier, sir. Must have a full inquiry. No, sir, no use telling the President. President? No use, sir, I will send the report direct to you. Our President, no use, sir. All right, I’ll do it that way, sir, if you say so, sir. Sorry, sir. Thank you, sir. Please don’t misunderstand...”

Caldera put down the receiver. He thought for a minute. Then he looked around with a defeated air. He was comforted to see Sirisena still engrossed in his work.

Dr. Caldera placed his signature on the rest of the papers without even reading them.

He got up. He spoke in a commanding tone. “Mr. Sirisena, I will be in my office. Please send me a report with all those details, you understand?” He took his James Bond briefcase in his hand and left the room, in his mind filing all the charges he would make against Getamanna.

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