

Mothers in Darkness¹

Anitha Devi Pillai²
National Institute of Education, Singapore

Two mothers sit in darkness today
in two different rooms in this island.
Neither saw it coming.
How could they have?

They knew about the class tests and early dismissals –
the school sends out schedules for things like that.
They knew about the choir practices and sports meets –
mothers circle those sorts of things on calendars.

For all of us who leave our kids at the gates
at the ONE place we know our kids are safe,
We don't even text to find out how they are.
Texting is not allowed in schools, anyways.
But why should we?

Once we send them through those gates
We hurry off to get to our chores and tasks
until it's time –
time for the kids to return home.
It's all scheduled on the timetable!
That's how it's supposed to be!

But for two mothers, like you and me –
in two homes, two schedules –
that was not the case – not today.

One heard that her child had died.
The other that hers had killed someone.
Their children were not coming home today.

¹ This was written in response to an unfortunate and fatal incident that happened in a local high school in Singapore on 19 July 2021.

² **Anitha Devi Pillai** is an applied linguist, author, and poet. Many of her poems as well as short stories have made their way into the classrooms in Singapore, India, Australia, and the Philippines. Her work generally explores themes such as identity, heritage, and culture. Email: anitha.pillai@nie.edu.sg; website: <http://www.anithadevipillai.com>

They now sit in darkness.
No school bells to race towards,
nor school gates to drive away from.

I hope they know –
we sit in darkness with them too.
We sit in shock in this little island.

Next Time I See You: A Writer Reminisces

Anitha Devi Pillai

11 drafts later you arrived
fully formed in many ways
for my editor's red pen
to shape and coax you into the light.

I see she dressed you in a ball gown too,
You lucky gal!

The next time I see you
I will be able to pick you up
and hold you in my hands
Inhale the woodsy pulp scent
and trace my name on your cover.

The next time I see you
You will be real.

You were made
to live in other homes
be held by other hands –
to be loved and cherished by others.

I pray they be kind to you, my love.

I will think of you every day –
for you were carved out of my soul
and fashioned in my mind –
albeit for nameless others.