

The Venkatesh Suite

By Nitin Jagdish

I. Excerpts from Instructions for Home Pregnancy Test

It is essential you thoroughly read and reread these directions. The accuracy of the test results depends on how well you follow them. If you have any questions, please call our toll-free number.

Be careful when handling the test kit. Check the expiration date. If you have been storing the test for a while, especially in an area where it gets warm or moist (such as the bathroom), inspect the test to make sure it has not deteriorated. If indeed it has deteriorated, throw the test away. Buy a new one.

It is important to catch a "midstream sample." Let out a little bit of urine first, and then use the rest of your urine for the test. Place the absorbent tip side of the test stick in your urine stream with the "result window" facing up. Urinate on it for 10 seconds.

Place the testing stick on a flat, dry surface with the "result window" facing up. Wait 5 minutes. Check the results. A blue line, no matter how faint, indicates a positive test result.

If you receive a positive test result, it is essential that you schedule a medical appointment to confirm it.

II. A List of Possible Baby Names

Girls

Aaliyah

Althea

Arianna

Brunhilde

Boys

Alistair

Arvo

Charles

Günter

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| Camille | Henryk |
| Cassandra | Hermann |
| Constance | Iannis |
| Elizabeth | Jamal |
| Gita | Jayaprakash |
| Jill | Johan |
| LaTonya | Junichiro |
| Laxmi | Kwame |
| Maya | Lamarck |
| Medea | Suresh |
| Usha | Venkatesh |

III. Handout Received at 13th Week Checkup

If you are reading this, you have had a missed miscarriage. This is when embryonic death has occurred but the body has not expelled the embryo. We are truly sorry for your loss. Please do not blame yourself for the miscarriage. Most miscarriages occur due to a chromosomal defect in the embryo. **It is not your fault.**

You have 3 treatment options.

1. *Wait to expel the embryo naturally.* Some women prefer to let nature take its course. This is the simplest method.

2. *Dilation and Curettage (D&C).* D&C is a surgical procedure. The cervix is dilated and the embryonic tissue is scooped. It is a simple procedure. You would be discharged from the hospital on the same day. Most women choose this method.

3. *Medication.* Your doctor can prescribe pitocin. This drug will cause the uterus to contract and expel the embryo. Some women prefer this option because it speeds up the process but does not require a hospital visit.

Your doctor will explain these options to you in much more detail. Our greatest priority is your well-being and comfort. Whichever option you choose, we will work to provide the best care possible.

We can also help you cope with your loss. We offer grief counseling and host several support groups. If you are interested, your nurse can make the necessary arrangements, or you can call us later.

IV. Excerpts from Discharge Instructions

Primary Discharge Diagnosis: S/P dilation and curettage

Call your physician if you have any of these symptoms: abdominal pain and fever (greater than 100.4); heavy vaginal bleeding; problems with urination; or incisional redness, tenderness, or drainage.

You may experience some bleeding or discharge from your vagina for several weeks.

You may have a small amount of blood in your urine for a few days.

Do NOT make important personal or business decisions for 24 hours.

No tub baths, no douching, no tampons for 4 weeks.

No sexual activity for 4 weeks.

All patients must be seen in the office for a post-operative exam. Call the office for an appointment for 3 weeks after your surgery, for your post-op follow-up.

V. Magazine Article, 25 Years from Now in an Alternate Reality

Every month, The Catalyst asks a notable figure to answer the Proust Questionnaire. This month we learn, among other things, why counter-terrorism specialist and celebrity mutant Venkatesh Jagdish carries a grudge against the Army.

Q: Your most marked characteristic?

I would like to think it's my unfettered zest for new experiences, but I know it's the mouth on my forehead.

Q: The quality you most like in a man?

That he laughs with me, not at me.

Q: The quality you most like in a woman?

That she laughs with me, not at me. I was laughed at a lot.

Q: What do you most value in your friends?

Their ability to profit from my fame – I'm glad I can repay their kindness.

Q: What is your principal defect?

Not sure. Impatience or bossiness. Maybe it's my reluctance to forgive slights.

Q: What is your favorite occupation?

I'm not much of a military history student, but the German occupation of France during WWII has always fascinated me.

It would've been cool to work in of those old-timey highway tollbooths.

Q: What is your dream of happiness?

Oh, that's easy: to live in a perpetual state of wonder. And like all dreams of happiness, an impossibility. I swear to God I'm not this melodramatic in real life.

Q: What to your mind would be the greatest of misfortunes?

Learning I'm a figment of someone's imagination.

Q: What would you like to be?

The first of my kind, and a guy who never holds a person's thoughts against her or him.

Q: In what country would you like to live?

One which provides surprises every day. One which doesn't ridicule sincerity and empathy. Otherwise, these United States o' America are fine by me, thank you very much.

Q: What is your favorite color?

Orange calms me down. I like being calm.

Q: What is your favorite flower?

Violets don't make me sneeze.

Q: What is your favorite bird?

The one that crapped all over my ex-girlfriend's new car. Bless you, my brother.

Q: Who are your favorite prose writers?

J.K. Rowling (in Chinese translation), Stanislaw Lem (in Spanish translation), Ursula K. LeGuin, Jack Kerouac, Mikhail Bulgakov (in Russian), Ryszard Kapuscinski (in Polish).

Q: Who are your favorite poets?

Shel Silverstein, Maya Angelou, Edgar Allen Poe (in French translation), Dr. Seuss, Gulzar (in Hindi).

Q: Who is your favorite hero of fiction?

Dean Moriarty. I bet a lot of people mention Holden Caulfield, but would cross the street to avoid someone like him. God bless fiction.

Q: Who are your favorite heroines of fiction?

Hester Prynne's my soulmate. *The Scarlet Letter* (in the original English, of course) is my all-time favorite novel.

(For obvious reasons, I'm very fond of the X-Men, too. As a kid, I'd dream of joining them. Obviously, it could never be.)

Q: Who are your favorite composers?

I don't like music. Reading people's minds makes life noisy enough.

Q: Who are your favorite painters?

Escher, Kincaid. Sorry, Mom.

Q: Who are your heroes in real life?

Dr. Smith, who taught me to channel my talents. Dr. Sugawa, who made sure I didn't give in to the temptation to kill some of my classmates, neighbors, family friends, and relatives. My childhood friends, who have always stood by me. My Yasmeen, who makes me feel almost normal.

Q: Who are your favorite heroines of history?

Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, Marie Curie, Harriet Tubman. Mother Theresa because she pisses off my Dad. Plus a few I can't mention due to national security concerns.

Q: What are your favorite names?

Yahoodles and McTeshers – Mom's nicknames for me. They're better than my actual name.

Q: What is it you most dislike?

High school reunions. Half my class snickered at me, but now they want to pretend they were always my friends. No thanks. To be fair, I'd have a very different attitude if I were single.

Oh, and the whole "Since you've two extra mouths, you should eat three times as much" joke is no longer funny or cute. Much like you, I've only one stomach. Got that?

Q: What historical figures do you most despise?

Mobutu, Ayatollah Khomeini, William the Conqueror, Nero, and Wendy Burrows (she knows why). Plus the usual suspects and several I can't name due to national security concerns.

Q: What event in military history do you most admire?

Let me tell you which event I least admire: the Army rejecting me. Why would they turn away a recruit who reads minds, learns languages (human and computer) within a day or two, breaks concrete with his fists, has two mouths that spray venom, and literally has an eye on the back of his head? I thought we fight to win. Maybe spraying our enemies with venom would've violated the international ban on biological weapons. I don't know.

Then again, Eisenhower was an Army man, and he oversaw the Normandy landing. That was an impressive event. William the Conqueror had nothing on him.

Q: What reform do you most admire?

The current overhaul of our educational system will guarantee America's greatness for at least a hundred more years. I've no scholarly basis for saying this.

Q: What natural gift would you most like to possess?

Serenity – anger can be tiresome.

Q: How would you like to die?

The same way I live, kicking and screaming.

Q: What is your present state of mind?

Remembering the Army rejection has stirred up the old resentments. You know, I could've made a lot of money as a criminal. I offered to serve my country instead, and the Army spat on me.

Q: To what faults do you feel most indulgent?

Those which are tied to great strengths.

Q: What is your motto?

I never went to elementary or middle school. Home schooled. Mom and my dad thought I should learn to function in the larger world. So they enrolled me at the local public high school. I was unready to move from a controlled, supportive and loving environment to a messy and hostile one. I sulked and whined for days.

Sick of hearing it from me, my dad said, “You know, by all rights you should not have been born.” I hated him for it.

He had a point, though. So my motto is, “By all rights, I should not have been born.”