bserved every year on October 8, World Octopus Day honours the mysterious and highly intelligent octopus, a creature known for its remarkable problem-solving skills, colour-changing abilities, and unique three-heart circulatory system. The day highlights the importance of marine conservation and the need to protect delicate ocean ecosystems where these fascinating animals thrive. From their incredible camouflage techniques to their ability to squeeze through tiny spaces, octopuses showcase nature's creativity and adaptability. World Octopus Day encourages people to learn more about

ocean life, reduce plastic waste, and support sustainable seafood practices to safeguard marine biodiversity for future generations.

राष्ट्रदुत

**#SERVICES** 

## These Are Yours On The Indian Train

**Essential Services Offered** by Indian Railways



ndian Railways and form, IRCTC, offer a variety of servicdesigned to throughout their journey.

tions to emergency medica assistance and compensation for delays, knowing these services can make your travexperience much smoother. Here's a comprehensive guide to some of the key services available to train travelers in India.

rooms, on the other hand.

offer private spaces suitable

for families or travelers seek-

ing more comfort and privacy

ly up to 30 days at affordable

fees. Secure lockers are avail-

able at select stations for valu-

ables. Passengers should

charges, and maximum stor-

age duration at their respec-

the availability.

#### Comfortable Stay Options: Dormitories and Retiring Rooms

or passengers with long layovers or who need a rest between connecting trains, Indian Railways provides dormitories and retiring rooms at many major stations. Dormitories are budget-friendly shared accommodations with basic bedding and amenities, perfect for solo travelers or those on a tight schedule. Retiring

Booking can be done online through the IRCTC website or app, or directly at the station counters. These rooms are available at nominal charges, choice for resting during Secure Your Belongings: Locker and Cloakroom Facilities

### luggage for durations typical-

t many stations, Indian A Railways offers locker and cloakroom services for temporary baggage storage. This is especially handy if you have a long wait at the station or want to explore without carrying heavy luggage.

Medical emergencies can occur anytime during uations, they coordinate with medical professionals onboard or arrange for hospital care at travel, and Indian Railways ensures passengers have the next station. Passengers access to prompt medical aid. can also call the Railway

Train staff are trained in basic helpline (139) or seek help first aid and can assist passenfrom the Railway Protection gers who fall ill. In serious sit-Force (RPF) for emergencies. Travel with Peace of Mind: Free Travel Insurance

W hen booking tickets through the IRCTC platform, passengers can opt for travel insurance that provides coverage against accidental injury or death during the journey. This insurance is

available for confirmed and

RAC (Reservation Against Cancellation) ticket holders, usually at no extra cost or a nominal fee. However, it does not cover waitlisted tickets. The insurance offers a valuable safety net and peace of mind for travelers.

### **Food During Delays: Complimentary Meals**

ndian Railways understands the inconvenience caused by train delays. For trains Rajdhani, Shatabdi, and Duronto, if the train is delayed by more than two hours, passengers are entitled to free meals onboard. IRCTC staff distribute meals that typically include staples like rice, pulses, pickles, tea, and coffee. This service helps alle viate hunger during unforeseen delays and ensures passengers remain comfortable.

and elderly passengers.

Knowing about these free and

paid services from Indian

Railways and IRCTC empow

ers vou to travel smarter and

### ation for Delays: Refund Policies

In the event that your train more, you have the right to cancel your ticket and claim a full refund. Passengers can file a Ticket Deposit Receipt (TDR) online via the IRCTC

website or app. This policy encourages accountability and offers financial protection to travelers affected by significant delays. For delays shorter than three hours, refunds are generally not available.

### **Additional Passenger Benefits**

p eyond the above, Indian Railways provides several other helpful amenities. Waiting Rooms: Access to waiting rooms with seating and sometimes air-condition ing is provided for ticket holders at many stations.

Complaint Redressal: Passengers can report grievances via helpline 139, online portals, or station complaint

Wheelchair Assistance: Available at most major stations to aid differently-abled

more comfortably. Whether vou need a place to rest, a secure spot for your bags emergency medical help, or compensation for delays Indian Railways has systems in place to support you Always check the specific amenities available at your boarding and transit stations to plan your journey better.



"I remember I once switched Dad's coffee with a cup of hot tea," Sunil confessed, his voice a conspiratorial whisper. "He just took a sip and said, 'Huh, this coffee tastes a bit weak today,' and then just drank the whole thing." The others stared at him in disbelief. "You did that?" Anjali exclaimed, a mix of horror and amusement on her face. "And he never found out?" Sunil shook his head, a smug smile on his lips. "Never. He thought it was just

a bad batch of coffee."

Dr. Goutam Sen

he ancestral home,

Sansar Villa, was built

on an elevated area in

the middle of the giant

plot gifted to the Dewan

of Jaipur in the late

19th century. Many gen-

erations have lived in

this place which con-

sisted of two buildings.

The big central one surrounded by

garden and vegetable patches was

the residential building. It was

enlarged as the family grew larger.

The other smaller building in the

front on one side was called the

'Baitakhana.' It was there from the

beginning. This was the place

where formal meetings of visitors

and hosting of grand dinners were

conducted. At times, distinguished

visitors even resided there. As chil-

dren, we often peeped behind the

large doors to see the elegantly

dressed Indians and White men who

came to dine. As a family, it was not

This time, it was decided that

when the family gathered for Durga

Puja, we would make an exception

and have a really formal meal there.

The one with the best crockery and

cutlery! The menu was regal, well

thought out and cooked over many

days. A whole troop of cooks fol-

lowed mother's instruction to serve

a meal gargantuan in proportion

with all kinds of meats and

favourite vegetables for each child

followed by various Bengali sweets,

Gokul Pithe, Sandesh and Pati

Shapta were on the list. Caramel

gusto not commonly seen. The din-

silent witness to countless gatherings, groaned under the weight of

empty plates and forgotten crumbs

The last remnants of a feast, a half-

eaten roti, a lone dal bowl and a scat-

tered array of pickle jars, lay like a

ner lasted long in to the night!

We began early and ate with a

The mahogany dining table, a

pudding was an oddity.

our practice to dine there

CTVS Surgeon



# Sobremesa





Mahishadal Rajbari at Mahishadal Town under Purba Medinipur district in West Bengal.

## **#FAMILY**



Laughter filled the room, a warm, melodic sound that seemed time, we tried to climb onto the roof to get the cricket ball?" Rohan remito chase away the years of separation. They had grown up within nisced, a wide grin spreading across his face. "Priya, you were so scared, you almost cried.

these very walls, their lives a tapestry woven with shared memories, triumphs and heartbreaks. The house itself felt alive, each creaking floorboard and faded wallpaper a testament to their history. The mar ble mantlepiece, with giant white marble flower vases on both sides of the large brass framed picture of Sansar Chandra Sen looking down, benignly gave an additional glow to the room. The two large sideboards

battlefield after a truce. The sweets

remained to be savoured at a slower

pace. The formal dinner was long

over, but the family remained, a con-

stellation of four siblings and their

spouses, held in orbit by a force more

started to recede, leaned back in his

chair, a contented sigh escaping his

lips. "I swear, Mom's aloo sabzi

cessful architect with a sharp mind

and an even sharper wit, scoffed

food for the past ten years, bhai.

Nobody seems to cook in your

household." She cared little at the

lifted eyebrows of her elder Bhabhi!

and single Rohan, chuckled as he

reached for another helping of the

leftover mango pickle. "Don't listen

to her. Sunil. She's just jealous as

"And you, Rohan,"

she can't cook like Mom.'

all the pickle."

The third sibling, the ever-jovial

ungest sister, Priya, chimed in. a

mischievous glint in her eyes,

'You're just trying to distract us

from the fact that you've finished off

good-naturedly.

His younger sister, Aniali, a suc-

"That's because you've been eat-

bland, overpriced restaurant

tastes better now than it ever did.'

Sunil, the eldest, whose hair had

ootent than gravity: sobremesa.

like a lazy river, drifting from the mundane to the profound. They talked about their childhood, a time when the world was a simpler place. where their biggest concern was whose turn it was to close all the

very private and intimate moment. The conversation meandered

stacked with tureens of various dishes gave a homely atmosphere. The waiting staff had long disappeared, as if aware that this was a

Priya's eyes widened in mock ndignation. "I did not! I just said I didn't want to get velled at by Dad.' "And then you slipped and land-

right in Mom's rose bushes,' Anjali added, her laughter echoing in the quiet room. "She was furious, but Dad just pretended he didn't see anything." A collective wave of nostalgia washed over them. They remembered building forts out of pedsheets and pillows, turning the living room into a magical kingdom. They remembered late-night study sessions fueled by mathri and endless cups of chai. They remembered the hushed conversations they had on the terrace, their dreams and fears whispered into the cool night air. The topic shifted to mischief they thought their parents never knew about

"I remember I once switched Dad's coffee with a cup of hot tea," Sunil confessed, his voice a conspiratorial whisper. "He just took a sip and said, 'Huh, this coffee tastes a bit weak today,' and then just drank the whole thing."

The others stared at him in disbelief. "You did that?" Anjali exclaimed, a mix of horror and amusement on her face. "And he never found out?"

Sunil shook his head, a smug smile on his lips. "Never. He thought it was just a bad batch of coffee. Rohan, not to be outdone, told the story of the time he and Sunil secretly hosted a party in the house when their parents were away for

rom college, the conversation naturally transitioned to their careers. Sunil, now a respected engineer, spoke of the challenges and rewards of his work. Aniali, a renowned architect, shared her passion for creating spaces that were both beautiful and functional. Rohan, who had started his own business, talked about the joys and heartbreaks of entrepreneurship.

just going to have a couple of friends over for a study group," he said, winking at Sunil. "It was more like a college frat party. We had to use buckets of water and towels to clean up the mess before they came back. We even did the laundry our selves. The help was tipped generously with strict instructions that the parents were not to be told anything." The empty bottles of beer and liquor were disposed in the neighbour's compound.

Priya, who was just a child at the time, listened in wide-eyed wonder. "And I thought I was a master of mischief for sneaking a few cookies out of the jar! "Oh, you were," Anjali said, pat-

ting her sister's hand "But they were a whole other level of sneaky!" The conversation moved on to their college days, a time of newfound freedom and responsibility Sunil talked about his all-nighters in the library, his struggle to balance his engineering studies with his passion for photography. Anjali recounted the grueling hours she spent in the studio, her sketches and models slowly evolving into master pieces. Rohan, ever the social buterfly, regaled them with tales of his fraternity life, the endless parties and the friendships he forged that lasted a lifetime. Priya, the baby of the family, spoke of her own college experience, a mix of nervousness and excitement as she navigated a

new city and new friendships. From college, the conversation naturally transitioned to their careers. Sunil, now a respected engineer, spoke of the challenges and rewards of his work. Anjali, a renowned architect, shared her passion for creating spaces that were both beautiful and functional Rohan, who had started his own business, talked about the joys and heartbreaks of entrepreneurship And Priva, a budding journalist spoke of her dreams of telling stories that mattered.

They talked about the choices they made, the paths they took, and the 'what ifs' that lingered in the back of their minds. "I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had pursued photography full time," Sunil mused, a faraway look "You'd probably be a starving

artist," Anjali quipped, her voice soft. "But you'd be a happy one." The laughter returned, gentle and comforting! They were no longer the children they once were but the core of who they were remained unchanged. They were still siblings, bound by an unbreak able bond that transcended time and

Then, inevitably, the conversation turned to the grand, all-encompassing topic of life and marriage Sunil, the first to get married, spoke of the compromises and joys of building a life with someone. Anjali, who had chosen to focus on her career, defended her decision to not marry with a quiet confidence. Rohan, still single, joked about his pachelor for life' status, but a hint of longing in his eyes gave him away. Priya, the last to get married, spoke of the beautiful and messy ourney of finding your soulmate.

Their spouses, who had been listening with a mixture of amuse ment and fascination, now joined in, sharing their own perspectives and anecdotes. The circle grew wider, the conversation more inclu sive. They were no longer just a family of four, but a larger, more complex unit, bound not just by blood, but by love and shared experiences.

As the hours passed, the moon rose high in the night sky, casting a silver glow through the window. The candles on the table had guttered down to stubs, their flickering flames casting dancing shadows on the walls. No one wished to get up. The stories flowed, one tale after another, each one a thread in the rich tapestry of their lives.

Sunil confessed to a childhood mischief they all thought the parents never knew about: he once hid a stray puppy in the garden shed, feeding it scraps from the dinner table for a week before their father, a dog lover himself, found it and officially welcomed it into the family. The others were shocked and amused, their laughter a mix of surprise and fondness.

Rohan recalled a secret pact he and Anjali had made in their teenage years: if they were ever in trouble, they would lie for each other, no matter what. The pact was tested many times, and they always stood by it, their silent conspiracy a source of strength and comfort. Anjali's eyes welled up with tears as she recalled a time when Rohan took the blame for a broken vase. saving her from their mother's

Priya, the quietest of the bunch, surprised them all with a story of her own. In her college days, she had a secret part-time job as a barista to save up for a trip to Paris, a trip she never told her parents about. She revealed that she finally went last year, and it was a 'dream

Sunil tried to bake a cake for their mother's birthday and set off a small fire in the kitchen. At another time, Anjali and Rohan accidentally locked themselves out of the house and had to spend the night in the car; the time Priya wrote a love letter to her high school crush and had her sister, Anjali, deliver it for her.

The tales spilled out, a cascade

forgotten memories and buried

secrets. The little things: the time

The hours melted away, the night a blur of laughter, tears, and heartfelt confessions. They were no longer just siblings; they were friends, confidants and a source of strength for one another. The bonds that had been forged in childhood had only grown stronger with time, a testament to the enduring power As the night drew to a close, a

comfortable silence settled over the group. The last sips of coffee were taken, the final crumbs of dessert devoured. They sat there, a silent testament to the power of sobreme sa, that magic period of time after a meal where time seems to stand still, where the most meaningful conversations happen and where the bonds of family are renewed and strengthened.

Sunil finally pushed his chair back, a contented smile on his face. "Well, I guess it's time to call it a night. Or is it morning!"

The others groaned in protest but they knew he was right. They slowly rose from their chairs, their movements sluggish with a mix of fatigue and contentment. They hugged each other tightly, a silent promise to meet again soon, not just for a holiday or a special occasion, but for the simple joy of being As they walked out of the dining

room, they left behind a trail of memories, a legacy of a family that had grown up, grown apart and then, miraculously, found their way back to each other. The old mahogany table, a silent witness to it all, stood sentinel, waiting for the day they would all return, to feast, to talk, and to once again, lose themselves in the magic of sobremesa.

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## **#VITTORIA COLONNA**

## First woman poet of 16th century!

The book chronicles Colonna's development as a writer, her grief over the death of her husband, and her friendship with Michelangelo, with whom she carried on a long and moving correspondence

University, published a biog-

raphy of the poet:

'Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna.' The book

chronicles Colonna's develop

new book just published by Macmillan introduces readers to Vittoria Colonna 16th-century writer who was the first woman to publish a book of poems in Italy.

Little known and long neglected, she channelled her grief about her husband's death and profound religious yearnings into sonnets that inspired women writers for centuries. Earlier this year, Ramie Targoff, a professor of

ment as a writer, her grief over the death of her husband, and her friendship with Michelangelo, with whom she carried on a long and moving correspondence. The following is a sample of her writing, a poem titled 'Di così nobil fiamma Amor mi cinse (which Targoff translated): Love wrapped me in so noble a flame

English

That even once spent it continues to burn. Nor do I fear new fire, since the first Is so strong it extinguishes all others. So rich a bond ties me to that fine yoke, That my heart disdains all lesser chains. It feels no longer either hope or fear, Since one fire inflames it, one knot binds it tight. A single pungent arrow afflicts my breast So that it keeps alive the immortal wound, It shields all other love from entering. Love consumed the passion where once he lit it, He broke the bow with his enduring shot, melted all other knots in tying this one.

The New Yorker called Targoff's book a 'richly realized biography.' A reviewer in the New York Times wrote, "Vittoria Colonna has always deserved to be better known. Ramie Targoff's fine book will surely make that happen." Here, Targoff answers questions about the book, her work, and Colonna

### What motivated you to write this book?

think this is a moment in which a lot of people are asking what role women played in our past. There are so many stories that haven't been told. My book allows you to glimpse history through a female lens. Colonna was quietly involved, but absolutely central, to all the things hap-

she's never mentioned in any of the textbooks. I think that's interesting by itself, but it also makes people won der what women were doing during different periods in history, women were always there and we just don't know about them.

ing as a therapeutic process.

Your book and Colonna's poet

with the public. Last year,

there was a big exhibition of

Michelangelo's drawings at

Manhattan, and they dedicat

her name, and she was fea-

tured in the New York Times

review of the show. I think

those things help. The book

read, meaning I didn't do a lot

of intense analysis of poetry.

Normally, when critics are

writing about poems, they do a

line by line reading, but there's

almost none of that in this

book. The book is a narrative

history, so, poems come along

to illustrate the material, but I

don't do poetic analysis. The

book reads fast, it's meant to

be enjoyed, not studied. It's

scholarly because so much

research went into it, but

wrote it in a very different

### Why do you find her poetry so engaging?

olonna wrote two books of ✓ sonnets, one mourning her husband after he passed away, ry have really struck a chord about dealing with her grief. She wrote another set of 103 poems. which she gave to Michelangelo. and those were spiritual sonthe Metropolitan Museum in nets about her relationship to her faith. Sometimes, they were ed a whole part of the gallery to his friendship with Vittoria written directly to God, sometimes to Mary, or to particular Colonna. A lot of people saw saints. They were about her reli-

In both cases, I see the sonnet as a kind of therapeutic, confessional form, a way to figure yourself out. I love the weird tension between the tightness of the form and how much you can express of your deepest self and also express changes of mood and temperament inside the poem. The poems are intimate

she never meant for them to be public. Someone collected all of them and published them to make some money. She was not happy about it. The first line of her first poem is "I write only to vent my inward pain." She says that she's writpening in this period. But

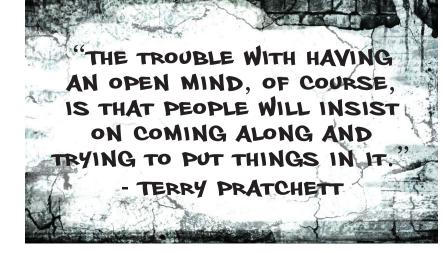
### What do you think she would have thought of your book?

T think she'd be delighted. My ■ book presents her in a very sympathetic way but also in a very complex way as a person who had real struggles. The idea that she was just a saint dimin ishes her. That's not all of who she was. At the same time, I didn't want to represent her as a person who was just struggling all the time. She was a very for midable person, who also had a lot of grief. This book represents many different facets of her life, with sympathy but also with objectivity.

#### What's your next project?

pecause of this work on D Vittoria Colonna, I started getting more interested in women's writing. I want to write a composite biography of three or four extraordinary women who wrote at the time of Shakespeare who we don't know about. If you asked someone who had taken a college English class on Shakespeare to name a woman from that time, they typically can only think of Queen Elizabeth or fictional characters in Shakespeare's plays. I want to change that.

### THE WALL



### **BABY BLUES**

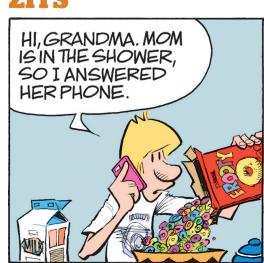


## I CAN ALPEADY TEU THAT I'M THE SMARTEST ONE IN THE CLASS.



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS







By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman