

Varsha Seshan's Creative Writing Programme

W O R D S

Issue 6 | January 2025

by writers
aged 9-14



Poetry

Nonfiction

Puzzles

Stories



PODCASTING 101
FOR CHILDREN

**PODLAB
WITH
MENA
RAMAN**










THE ART OF LAUGHTER


with Arundhati Venkatesh

Guest Sessions



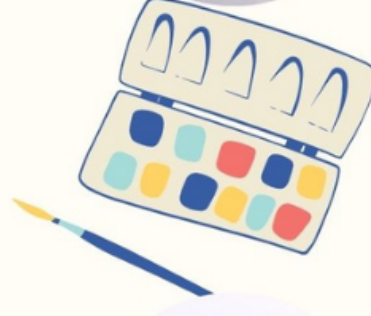




VARSHA SESHAN'S ONLINE CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAMME: GUEST SESSION #25

ILLUSTRATING PICTURE BOOKS



with *Ashok Rajagopalan*

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Hello!

It's hard to believe that this is issue 6 of WORDS! From October to December 2024, eight young writers were hard at work, writing poems, articles and stories. They received feedback both from me and from their peers, and they edited, rewrote, and then edited some more before I selected the best pieces for this issue of WORDS. All the writers who have contributed to this e-magazine are between the ages of nine and fourteen. I am constantly amazed at how talented they are, but more, how much they are willing to work on their craft. I hope you enjoy reading this selection as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you!

Varsha Seshan

children's book writer
creative writing trainer

Meet the Writers

Aarav's atop a tree,
Reading a book with glee.
From day to night,
His smile is bright,
From a book he never shall flee.

Aarush loves to eat limes,
And he loves to read about crimes,
He reads them with glee,
He is a child who is free!
He enjoys making up rhymes.



WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

Limericks are fun to read, but they aren't very easy to write! Find out about the quirks of our eight young writers through the limericks they wrote about themselves!

Aarya can swim, not fly.
Unlike a bird or a fly,
As her dreams take flight,
She flies out of sight,
Watch as she waves goodbye.

Nirai is a collector of refills
Not pencils, not papers, nor quills;
They're scattered around
On the table and ground
And now one's stuck on the sill.

Sunandini loves the colour black,
Musical skill she doesn't lack,
If she faints in her rage
At a dog-eared page,
A sniff of a book brings her back.

a **janvi** creeps round in the wild
in an outfit that's strangely styled
the crack of a joke
and a can of coke
can keep her tamed and mild

Ronikaa stays up at night,
Making bookmarks, both dark and light,
With colours and flair,
She crafts with care,
Adding creativity to pages with delight.

Young **Zaheer**, a bookish delight,
Loves stories both morning and night.
For chips, he yearns,
And snacks, his heart burns,
"Math's useless!" he cries with all his might.



Subject Number 23

Sunandini Sen

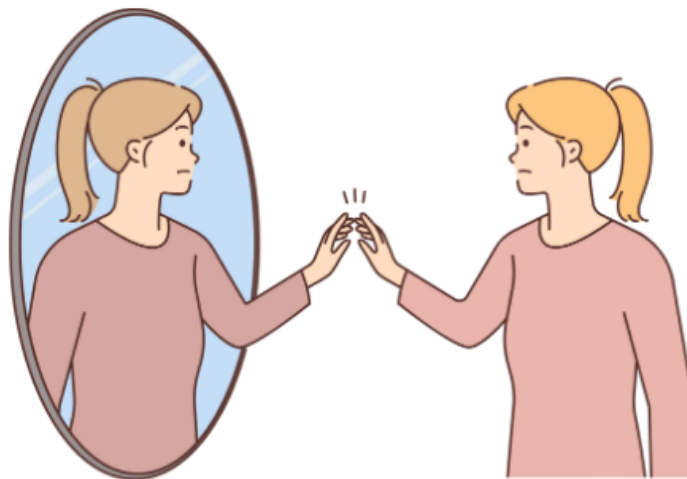
I wake up in a plush bed, my back sinking into the mattress. Confused, I look around. Where am I?

As I step on to the wooden floor, I see a group of people standing, staring at me. "Who are you all?" I ask, uncomfortable. "Where am I?"

"Subject seems to be awake," a woman in a white coat says, speaking into a strange device. "Implantation has been successful."

I walk around the room, observing my surroundings. A comfortable bed, and a small table and chair greet my eyes.

When I come to a mirror, I gasp in surprise. The person in the mirror--



It isn't me.

I touch my face in horror. My eyes widen. "My hair," I whisper. "My skin."

"What is this?" I ask myself, tears streaming down my cheeks.

"Subject seems to have discovered their changed appearance," the woman says.

As rage boils up inside of me, I lunge towards her, my arms outstretched.

"What have you done to me?" I scream. My fists collide with a smooth glass barrier as the woman smiles serenely.

"I am Dr Emeri," she says. "You are Subject Number 23."

"No, I'm not!" I screech. "My name is--" Here, I stop.

What is my name?

The feeling of dread grows and grows as I struggle to remember.

What is my name?

She cuts me off. "Your name is Subject Number 23."

As the people disperse, whispering amongst themselves, I sink to the ground. What have they done to me? Who am I?

Tired, I sink into a dreamless sleep.

When I wake up again, I am greeted by the sight of a tray of food in front of me. I stuff everything into my mouth, ravenous. Then, I remember my changed appearance, and feel the urge to vomit. Still I force the food down, and it is actually delicious, unlike anything I've ever eaten before.

This is so unlike Father's cooking--wait, who is my father? What did he look like?

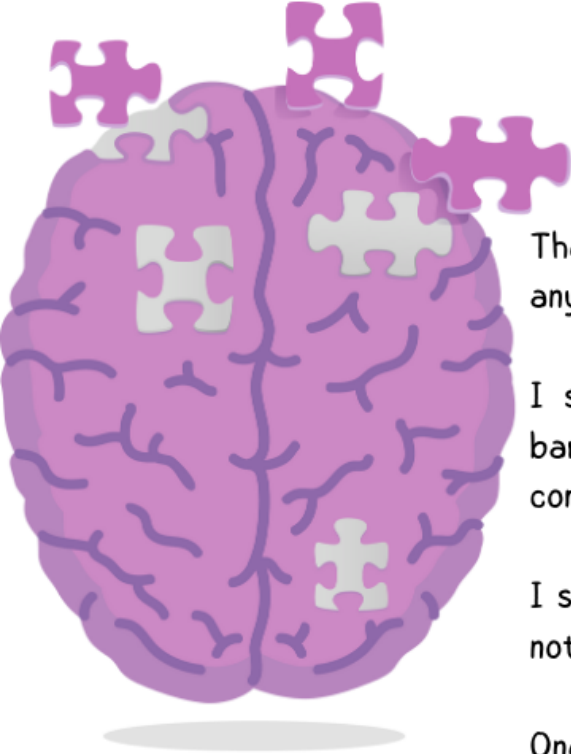
As I scramble through my memories, I find no trace of him. Who was he? Did he ever exist?

But I can't recollect anything about him. What have they done to me?

As the days pass by, I start forgetting more and more things. Fleeting images of my family, my home and my friends fill my mind. Before I have the chance to even recognise them, they simply disappear.

Every time I pass the mirror, I look at my reflection and cringe. That hair, those eyes and legs all look ... so different.





They're different, that I know, but I don't know how. Not anymore.

I spend my free time pounding my fists against the glass barrier. Sometimes, the woman in the white coat, Dr Emeri, comes to watch me.

I scream at her, but she never responds, scribbling away in a notebook. Soon enough, I stop screaming. There's no point.

One day, I forget my hobbies.

Then, I forget my favourite colour.

I forget what I used to look like.

I sink into despair, holding my head in my hands. There is nothing I can do. This person I see in the mirror is somebody completely different.

My original self is gone.

I wake up with memories of a happy, utopian world. I can tell these memories are not mine. I can tell they don't belong to me. I can tell someone's put them into my brain. But I don't know how.

I don't know anything anymore.

After what feels like years, an explosion occurs while I am in the room. By that time, I have accepted my fate.

I stopped keeping track of time long ago. What was the point anyway? I was going to be stuck in there for eternity, anyway.

Now, the explosion is sudden, throwing me off my feet and colouring the room in shades of red, orange and gold. It's almost beautiful, until smoke fills the air. I choke, my lungs filling with toxic gases. A few unknown people drag me out, holding me up by my arms.

"Who are you all?" I ask, to no answer. I let them carry me along like a weak rag doll.

When I lie on the pavement, I see a grey thing above me. "What's that?" I struggle to find my words.

"It's the sky, my dear," a man says to me, gently. He was one of the people who dragged me out. "Do you know where you are?"

I shake my head, scrunching my eyebrows in confusion. Wait, am I outside?

I nearly cry tears of relief as I sit up, taking in the sight of the barren trees, a sight I'd never thought I'd be happy to see. Wait, where have I seen that before?

I turn to the man, who speaks to me, "You were being used as an experiment by the government," he explains.

"They performed a surgery on you, to change your entire appearance. If the implantation was successful, they would start performing it on other people, specifically the rich," he continues.

I stare at him in horror. I was no more than a guinea pig, used for inhuman experiments. That's why I felt like my entire body had been changed, that it was unlike my old self.

"But, how do I know you're telling the truth?" I question him, suspicious. "Who are you all?"

"We are part of the Free Ones," the man says, smiling. "We're a group working to liberate the people and help the poor, to free them from the inequality of society. We planned this explosion, to free you and other people who were being used for experiments by the government."

"Huh?" I ask, confused. "There are other people like me?"



Story

The man nods, his eyes filling with tears as he looks at me. "You remember me, don't you?" I shake my head, as my eyes get watery for some reason.

"You're my daughter," he says, softly. "I know it must be you."

"Huh?" I ask again.

"Yes," he continues. "After you were taken away by officials, we got information about the people being used for experiments, and which rooms they were being kept in. Your room was 23, so it must be you."

"No, you're lying," I shrink away from him. "I'm Subject Number 23. I don't have any parents. You're not my father."

"You have her voice," he replies, sadly. "You have her expressions. Although you look different, you must be her. No, no, please believe me!" He tries to hug me, as I move farther away from him. "They've messed with your head, they must've erased all your memories!" he cries. "I'm your father, remember?"

As hard as I try, I can't remember anything. "No, you're not. Thank you for saving me, but you're not my father," I say, coldly, wiping my tears. Why am I crying?

He opens his mouth to say something when another explosion blasts through the ground. I am thrown back, yet again, into a pile of rocks and grit.





As I struggle to make my way out of the debris upon me, I see the man who called himself my father lying on the road. I run towards him and clutch his hand.

Suddenly, some of it comes back to me, in bits and fragments.

Afternoons playing in front of my house with my siblings.

Massaging my mother's tired hands, exhausted from sewing drapes and curtains for her rich employers.

Father telling us stories to distract us, as hunger gnawed at us after another day of no rations.

"Papa?" I whisper, stroking his arm. "It's--" Here, I don't know what to say. I still can't remember my name!

A single tear falls onto his face, covered in blood and dust.

I shake him, almost violently. "Wake up," I say to him. "Wake up, I can remember now."

No response.

My voice becomes more frantic. "Papa, I need you. I need to know. Tell me, what's my name? Who am I?"

"Who am I?" I ask, more urgently this time.

I realise he's not coming back.

I shout, a desperate tone in my voice, "Who am I?"

Honestly, who am I?

List Poetry

Upside-Down Right-Side-Up

Nirai Iniyar

I come from a land where
Living ghosts drink tea on Tuesdays
Emerald owls swim through fire
And the sky is my canvas, for I paint it every day.

I come from a land where
Kindness is the most precious thing
Venus flytraps fail rock climbing
And mirrors don't like their reflections.

I come from a land where
Leprechauns control time
The rain smells like cotton candy
And trees dance every night.

I come from a land where
Peanuts are sacred
It is customary to be funny
And everyone is always late.



Gemmatopia

Janvi Barman

I come from a land where
the sky is white and clouds are blue
kittens that never grow up run wild
and no matter how much I talk, I can't be interrupted

I come from a land where
there are thirty hours in every day
fuchsia flowers flutter in the wind
and friendly ghosts man cash registers

I come from a land where
little baby dragons are the average house pet –
they smell like vanilla and roasted marshmallows
and love being walked on vast beaches

I come from a land where
grass feels like a soft winter blanket
everyone is always on time
and love is the driving factor for every little thing we do



The Land in My Head

Ronikaa Vijan

I come from a land where
Fire cools your throat,
Lavender cats float calmly in the water,
You can travel anywhere with the snap of your fingers.

I come from a land where
Everyone loves the magic of books,
Whispering winds weave wistful whispers,
The trees argue about the latest soap opera.

I come from a land where
Every dog's favourite toy is a ruby,
I wake up to the aroma of lilies and petrichor,
Trees sway gently with the breeze.

I come from a land where
Chocolate syrup is the only medicine,
Everyone can scale trees with ease,
Reading is a graded subject.



The Land of Contentment

Sunandini Sen

I come from a land where
The day is always dark
Azure eagles swim in the sea
I can make words float off pages

I come from a land where
People store their blessings in banks
Hundreds of herbivores happily hug each other
Butter is hung on the washing lines.

I come from a land where
Centaur's paint their nails blue
Pianos smell like flowers and spring
Waterfalls sound like tinkling bells.

I come from a land where
Ramyon is the national dish
Everyone can do cartwheels
The grass is the greenest everywhere.



Swiftly Vanished



“Long live all the magic we made!” the crowd yelled as they exited the stadium, their hearts filled with joy and precious memories that none would forget.

Sehnoor Kaur, a young detective inspector in the bustling city of Alaksea, adored Taylor Swift. Her dream had finally come true—she had seen her favourite artiste live and even made eye contact with her for three seconds. As she walked out of the stadium with the crowd, she sang the songs at the top of her lungs, wearing merchandise, and wrapping her cardigan tightly around herself. Content, she walked down the street, trying to hail a cab.

There, she spotted the teenager who’d gotten the ‘22’ hat from the corner of her eye. She held the hat tight with a wide grin and a bright twinkle in her eye. Beside her, was a girl who stood out from the crowd. Wearing a sparkly diamond outfit, with stunning green eyes, singing ‘A Perfectly Good Heart’ from Taylor’s first album.

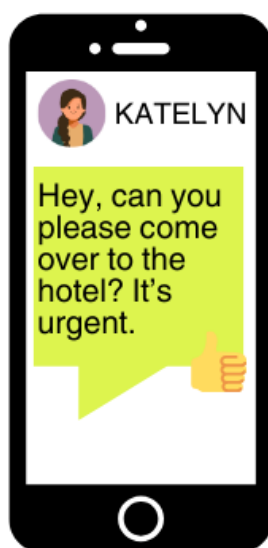
Sehnoor smiled and sat in the cab she’d hailed.

She dozed off and woke up an hour later to the taxi entering her neighbourhood. As she stepped inside the apartment, she kicked off her shoes, fell on to the couch, procrastinated the walk to her bedroom and fell asleep again.

Sehnoor was awakened in the morning by a loud notification on her phone.

Alaksea hosted Taylor Swift on every tour of hers. There was a particular stadium she liked and adjacent to that stadium was The Enchanted Rose Hotel. It was a seven-star hotel, famous for hosting Swifties worldwide, and sometimes, even Taylor herself. The manager of the hotel was Katelyn, a good friend of Sehnoor's from college.

Sehnoor's fingers danced on the screen as she hurriedly typed in the password to open her phone to a text from Katelyn.



Sehnoor's curiosity was piqued and she replied with a quick thumbs-up. She got dressed and almost immediately drove to the hotel.

Sehnoor entered the sleek hotel lobby, vibrant with Taylor Swift-themed decor and memorabilia.

Katelyn stood anxiously near the reception. As soon as she spotted Sehnoor, she ran and pulled her friend into a hug.

Sehnoor asked, "What's the matter?"

"Well, you see, many of the guests who came for the concert have left. The hotel is almost empty, except for a few guests, and one of them is the girl who got the '22' hat," she began.

"Oh wow, how wonderful!" Sehnoor remarked.

Story

"And that got stolen last night," Katelyn continued. "That's why I called you."

"Oh my," Sehnor breathed. She snapped out of her thoughts and took out her little notepad and pen from her overcoat. "Take me to this girl."

Katelyn nodded and led the detective inspector further inside, to the lounge. There, a girl sat on one of the lilac sofas with daisies painted on it. Her head was on her knees and there was a box of tissues placed beside her.

"Emily?" Katelyn called, her voice gentle.

Emily looked up and saw Sehnor. The poor girl's eyes were red and puffy, and her hair was bunched up in a claw clip. She tilted her head a little as if she could see Sehnor better that way.

"You're ...?" she asked, her voice shaky.

"Sehnor Kaur, the detective inspector, hon," Sehnor replied, trying to make her voice soft.

"Oh yes, sit, please," she said. Emily sat up straight and shifted to let the detective inspector sit.

Sehnor sat down and opened her notepad, hurriedly scribbling down all the details she knew. "Yes, so, Emily, tell me everything from the start."



Emily explained to Sehnor how she'd come from a town a few hours away from Alaksea to see Taylor Swift. She had pre-booked a deluxe suite in the hotel. She'd arrived at 3 pm the previous day and was in the queue by 5. The concert ended by 10:45 pm, after which she'd got back to the hotel by 11:15. She'd gone to the cafe at 11:30 pm, and when she returned, the hat was missing.

"Do you remember where you'd kept the hat?" Sehnor asked.

"On my dresser, I think. I changed and rushed out real quick so that I could grab something to eat. I was super hungry."

"You came back to your room by midnight, I suppose?"

Emily nodded.

"And in between that period of half an hour, who all were present at the hotel?"

Katelyn replied, "Mr and Mrs Jordan, Alexandria Diaz, and Victoria Langley."

"Have you talked to any, Emily?" Sehnor asked, closing her notepad and lightly massaging her head with her fingers.

"Yes. The couple: they're influencers, quite big. And Victoria is also really nice, she's a newbie Swiftie. Alexandria is a little rude but was interested in my memorabilia that night."

"Ok, thank you, dear." Sehnor turned to her friend. "Can you please call all of these people here?"

Katelyn quickly rushed to the reception and called them down to the lounge.

First, a couple came down from the grand staircase by the reception, dressed stylishly. Katelyn led them to the lounge and they sat on the sofa opposite Sehnor.

"Good morning, Mr and Mrs Jordan. Thanks for your time," Sehnor said with a smile.

"What's all this about?" Mrs Jordan asked.

"The Taylor Swift concert was last night, and a hat given to a girl was stolen. I have a few questions."

"Are we suspects?" Mr Jordan raised an eyebrow.

"Just checking—were you around Emily's room last night?"

"We were asleep by 11:30," Mr Jordan replied.

"By any chance, did you see anyone loitering around Emily's room?"



Story



"Not that I remember."

"Did you see anything unusual?"

"I find the duo of teenagers quite odd," Mrs Jordan said.

"What makes you say that?" Sehnoor pressed.

"I don't know, but Alex, if that's her name, she seemed too interested in Emily's business."

"And I hear you're in some kind of debt?" Sehnoor questioned.

"A Gucci ensemble and Levi's jeans, darling, what do you expect?"

"Thanks again for your time, I may need to call you back for further questioning as the investigation proceeds," Sehnoor concluded. She caught a glimpse of relief on Mrs Jordan's face but ignored it as two teenagers came down the stairs.

One, with extremely pretty green eyes, was dressed in a floral summer dress. The other was in baggy jeans and a brown top. The two quietly made their way towards the lounge area. The teen in the flower summer dress sat down beside Emily. The other took a seat on a powder blue chair, expression inscrutable. The Jordans quickly got up and left. Sehnoor prepared herself for another interesting interview. She noticed that as calm and composed as the one in the baggy jeans and brown top was, the other girl was sweating, and her left hand was trembling. She was fidgeting with her hand, and there was a slight mark on her middle finger.

In the background, there was a Taylor Swift song playing, which had a nice tune, but Sehnoor couldn't exactly tell which one it was.

"Nice song," Sehnoor said.

"Isn't it? It's 'A Perfectly Good Heart' from her first album. It's so underrated," the girl in the summer dress replied.

"Why have I been called?" asked the calm one.

"Before that, can I know who's who?" Sehnoor asked.

"I'm Victoria and she's Alex," said the girl beside Emily.

"Great. To answer your question, Alex, you've been called to be interrogated. You're a suspect in a theft case," Sehnoor replied.

"Seriously? Go on, then."

"Do you know who received the '22' hat last night?"

"Yes, of course. Emily," Alex replied.

"And I'm supposing that you both came back to the hotel after the concert at almost the same time?"

Victoria nodded.

"Where were you between 11:30 pm and midnight?"

"In my room," both of them answered in unison.

"Anything you saw that felt suspicious?"

Alex raised her hand and said, "The couple. I researched about them. They're in huge debt. I don't like them, their behaviour, body language ... it's like they're hiding something."

Victoria agreed.

"Okay. Is there anything else you wanna share?" Sehnoor asked, closing her notepad and massaging her forehead with her fingers once more.

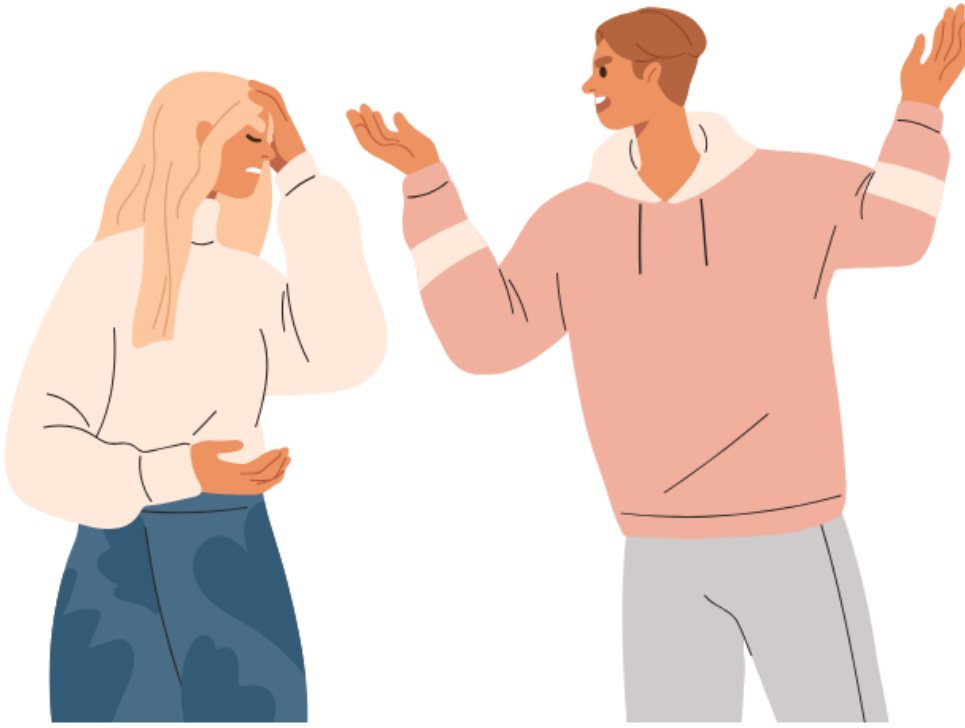
"I do," Emily said, sniffing. "Mrs Jordan. I saw her with some lady in the cafe when I came down. She left almost as soon as I placed my order."

Victoria added, "I also heard them fighting. It felt weird to be around, so I just caught a few words like 'hat', 'debt', 'money'."

"When?" Sehnoor raised her eyebrow.



Story



"I went to get water," Victoria replied.

"Great. Thank you for your precious time. I may call you again for further questioning, so please stick around." Sehnor turned to Emily. "Darling, if you don't mind, can I search your room?"

Emily nodded. Katelyn started leading the detective inspector to Emily's room, but a few new guests arrived just as the two women got to the reception. "Second floor, room 210," she said instead, handing the spare room key to Sehnor. "Go ahead; I'll try to join you in a bit."

Sehnor nodded and walked ahead, thoughts swirling in her mind. The couple seemed odd. Just as she was about to turn left, she stopped. Room 213. Voices. Familiar voices. The Jordans.

Mrs Jordan yelled, "The dealer said that the hat would be worth millions, you idiot! We could have covered all our debts! What the hell do you mean by it was not there?"

"Somebody got there before us! Not my fault!"

Sehnor walked ahead, some pieces in her head clicking together. Even though they'd tried to steal the hat, someone had got there before them. That meant it had to be one of the teenagers.

Sehnor opened Emily's room with the spare key. It was a deluxe suite, clean and organised. The bags were neatly placed near the door, the bed was made and the room smelt slightly of vanilla. She scanned the drawers and cupboards. She searched the bathroom, the room, and

even under the mattress, but she just couldn't find anything. Just as she was about to leave, something caught her eye, glinting near the bed. Sehnor bent down and picked it up. It was a ring, with a pink heart and something printed on the heart in white, scrawly handwriting. 'Lover', it said. She grabbed a tissue, wrapped the ring and carefully kept it in her pocket.

Sehnor immediately went down and found Emily, now sipping coffee. She pulled out the ring from her pocket and showed it to Emily, but she said it didn't belong to her.



"It was released with the 'Lover' album as exclusive merch but it didn't run well, so there are only a few hundred of these in the world, I think. Victoria is a newbie Swiftie, it can't belong to her."

"So, you mean to say, it could belong to Alex?" Sehnor questioned. Emily nodded.

That instant, Katelyn came running towards the lounge area. "I got the CCTV footage. It shows Mr Jordan going inside Emily's room, but then, for about an hour, the screen's blank,; there's nothing. Same for a while before Mr Jordan went in. There's a small clip showing Alex exiting the room as well," Katelyn blurted out, panting.

Before Sehnor could respond, Victoria came downstairs.

"Your hotel's TVs are horrible! It broke down for the third time this morning!" Victoria cried, her hands trembling as she fidgeted with her fingers. "Thank goodness Alex offered to take a look and fix it. I don't know what I would have done otherwise." Sehnor again noticed the faint mark on her finger.



Bingo.

It all came to her.

She asked Katelyn to call everybody to the lounge area. This time, she chose the powder blue chair, allowing the others to occupy the sofas.

"Keeping everything in mind, all that you have told me, I know that each one of you has tried to steal her hat, but only one succeeded, right?" Sehnor started.

Mrs Jordan spoke first. "Oh rubbish!"

Story

"Let me--" Sehnor started but was cut by Victoria.

"Exactly! I--"

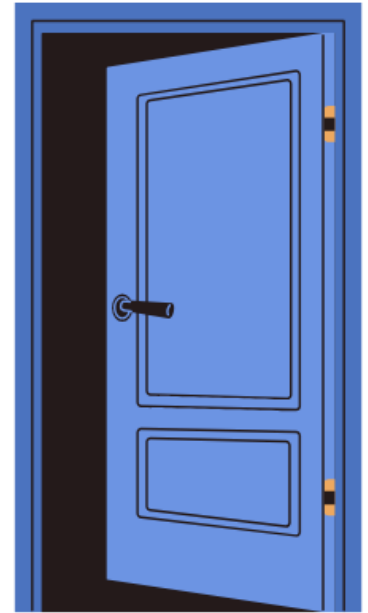
Katelyn whistled loudly and said, her voice controlling and strong, "LET HER EXPLAIN."

Sehnor gave a grateful nod to her friend and began. "Emily received the hat at the concert. It was signed and original, meaning if anyone tried to sell it, it would be worth millions of dollars. She left at approximately 11 pm from the stadium and reached here by 11:15 pm. 11:30, she went down to the cafe. Emily didn't notice, but there's this problem with her room door, that it won't close fully. It is always left partially ajar. This meant the perfect opportunity for the thief to steal the hat," she explained.

There was a moment of tense silence as she sipped some water and then shifted a bit to face Alex, who was crouched in the corner of the lilac sofa. "Yes, you. Listening to Taylor Swift since a child, haven't you? Which makes you a die-hard fan. And you went to the concert with the hope of maybe, getting the '22' hat? And when you found out that Emily got it, you went up to her room and saw it for yourself, and this is my theory, but you really, really wanted that hat. So, you planned to steal it and saw a golden opportunity when Emily left for the cafe. You hacked into the CCTV system and disrupted it. When I heard Victoria say that you 'fixed her TV' and Katelyn told me that the CCTV wasn't working right, it just clicked. You disrupted it and were about to leave the room, but the cameras started glitching so you stopped. Ten minutes later, after trying your best, the cameras unfortunately started which captured"--Sehnor turned to the Jordans--"you going in, Mr Jordan. Both of you have been in a lot of debt, as your one-way income, influencing, stopped and your followers reduced. The hat, which would have sold for millions, would have covered all your debts. But when you got there, the hat was already gone. Right? And later when Alex went, she couldn't find it either. That's why the footage shows her exiting empty-handed. But now, I come to something I found in Emily's room." Sehnor paused and pulled out the ring.



"A lover ring, which can only belong to an old Swiftie, which again points to Alex. But then again, I spotted a girl with green eyes in the crowd after the concert, singing an old Taylor song." Sehnor turned to Victoria, crossing her legs. "Green eyes, just like yours. Even though you claim to be a 'newbie Swiftie'. And the constant fidgeting of fingers, the restlessness and trembling and the imprint of the ring on your middle finger. Before Mr Jordan could



go into the room, you did. Didn't you, honey?"

Victoria scowled. "I wanted that hat so bad. I went for the concert intending to get that hat and when"--she turned to Emily--"this house of stupidity got it instead, it was like someone had put a dagger through my heart. Taylor saw me, but she chose her instead. I wanted to be the one." She glared and masked behind all that anger was pain.

"But your anger and pain don't justify you stealing someone's happiness. Of stealing someone else's property. Call them in Kate," Sehnor replied.

At that moment, the doors of the hotel opened and in walked three police inspectors, two of them female. One inspector walked down the grand staircase, a black hat in his hand. Emily squealed in joy and rushed and snatched the hat out of the inspector's hand and hugged it tight. Victoria glared at the squealing girl as she was dragged away. She mouthed to Sehnor,
I'll get back at you.

Sehnor smiled and mouthed back,
I'll be waiting, love.

As Sehnor stepped out of the hotel, head held high, she smiled at the memory of the entire case. She wrapped her coat around her tightly, proud to think about those magical two words again. Case closed.

Who Am I?

Aarav Khandelia

Wedge, but I'm not used to plough
Full of holes, but I don't need repair
Slice me up, and I become better
Melted or straight, I work both ways
Hard, but you mould me
Cold, but I can burn you
Unhealthy, but I can make you strong
Roman, but I conquered the world in my own way

Who am I?



Aarush Bajaj

I'm like diamonds flowing
When I'm small, play with me
When I'm big, run away
When it rains, I'm born
You find me on a mountain
or on a slope, never in the plains,
You might see me as a slide

Who am I?



Aarya Jain Baldawa

I'm healing and sweet-smelling, like a balm,
I can smell like aloe vera, or coconut palms,
I'm shiny and soft, comforting you
Not sticky or icky, unlike glue.
Places without me are cracked or dry,
Most people think that I am fly,
Well, guess,

Who am I?



Answers: cheese, Vaseline, waterfall

Family Business

Nirai Iniyan

"I am," muttered Detective Zeke Archer, "so sleep deprived."

"Drink your coffee then," retorted his fellow detective, Andy Barmer, absentmindedly.

"You're not going to get anywhere, boring holes into our murder board," pointed out Damon Frost, the last of the trio.

"Frost, what have we got so far?" Andy asked Damon, ignoring his advice.

He sighed. "Our victims belong to the same development firm," said Damon. "Family business; all three of them are brothers. Have been identified as Miles, Parrish and Oliver Finch. All also happen to be dead."

"Archer? What have you got?"

"Same M.O. The killing takes place within two weeks of the last one," yawned Zeke. "He--"

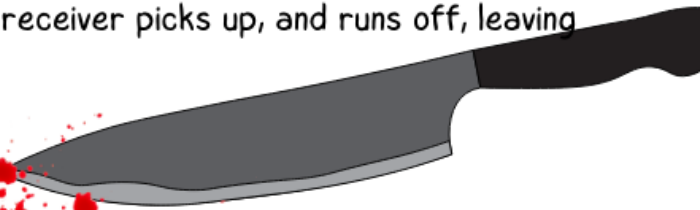
"Or she!" yelled a woman from outside the briefing room.

"Yes, thank you Penelope!" he snapped at their secretary, Penelope Drews. "Or she takes the victim out into an abandoned back alley and slashes their throat before leaving the victim to die. The killer then calls 911, doesn't answer when the receiver picks up, and runs off, leaving no traces."

"What about the murder weapon?" asked Andy.

"A knife – never the same one though," informed Zeke. "Steals it from a nearby restaurant and leaves it at the scene; only problem is we can't identify the prints because there are too many of them."

"What about the men we have in holding? The ones we found running away from the last crime scene?" asked Andy. "Have you got anywhere with them?"





"Have to get to that," admitted Damon.

Andy finally turned around. "Well, what are you waiting for?" she demanded. "Get it done!"

The detective trudged off, before pausing to swipe Zeke's coffee. "Oi!" Detective Archer squawked, but it didn't matter. His latte was gone.

The briefing room door opened. It was Penelope again. "There's a woman here to see you," she said.

Andy stared at her. "And this is relevant how?"

"Um ..." The woman stuck her tongue out. "She said she was a witness? To the last Windon Firm Murder. That's your case, isn't it?"

Andy's eyes widened. Zeke sat upright, now wide awake. "Where is she?" Andy urgently asked.

"By your desk--" Andy pushed past Penelope before she even finished. There was a sharp click to her steps as she walked a determined stride.

By her desk, there was a woman in a woollen jumper wearing sunglasses. A border collie sat by her, barking at Andy as she neared.

"Good afternoon," greeted the detective. "I'm Detective Barmer. I'm in charge of the Windon Firm Murder Case."

"Oh, hello," greeted the woman, reaching out to shake Andy's outstretched hand. "Kate Hillary."

"Ms Hillary," said Andy, letting a little excitement creep into her voice, "is it right when I state that you are a witness to the last of this string of murders?"

"That's right."

"Well, then," said Andy, pleased, "I'd like to take your statement. Could you start by describing the killer?"

"Beg your pardon?" asked Kate, a little strangely.

"The killer," prompted Andy. "I was hoping for a description; we could get our sketch artist to it."

"Did the woman not tell you?" asked Kate. "Your secretary?"

Andy felt a sense of dread. And suddenly, everything felt horrible again.

"Detective Barmer," said Kate, taking off her sunglasses, "I'm blind."



"You're joking!" said Damon.

"I wish," scoffed Zeke. "The one witness we have."

"Well, killer's clever," sighed Damon, pacing. "Must've known she was blind; probably the only reason she's still alive."

"Doesn't do us a lot of good though, does it?" Zeke pointed out, slumping over the table. He reminded Damon of a rather sad golden retriever.

He decided to shift his attention elsewhere. "You've been awfully quiet," he told Andy. She'd been sitting against the wall, throwing a rubber ball across the room for the past half hour.

"The last murder was three days ago," whispered Andy, "yet she shows up at the exact time we've got suspects?"

Damon shrugged. "She's someone who's already at a disadvantage," he reminded her. "Add on being the only witness to a major serial killer, and it isn't exactly something that's begging you to get out of the house. She must have been terrified."

Andy threw the ball again. "Maybe. Did you run a background check?"

"She's a potter, part of a small indigenous community--"

"A potter?" questioned Zeke. "Like a--" and here he made a motion with his hands.

"What is that supposed to be?" asked Damon.



Story

"A pot."

"That's not a pot."

"Yes, it is."

Andy interrupted, "Zeke, get her to one of the mirror rooms. I want to see if she can identify any suspects."

He got up. "Yes sir," he joked.

"Don't take them to the room yet though," she ordered. "I have something to do before that."

"Something to do?" questioned Damon.

"I have a hunch," admitted the detective. "Frost, I want you with me."

He nodded.

"And dress up, you're going to a photoshoot." This made the other two look at Andy, now completely baffled. "I'll explain later. For now, let's catch ourselves a serial killer."



"Alright Ms Hillary," greeted Zeke, "we're getting our suspects from holdup right now. If you would just bear with us for a momen--"

A sharp knock sounded on the door. Before anyone could speak, Andy opened it, walking in. "Hello Kate," she said. "Detective Archer. Came to drop off these files for you--it's on the guys in our custody."

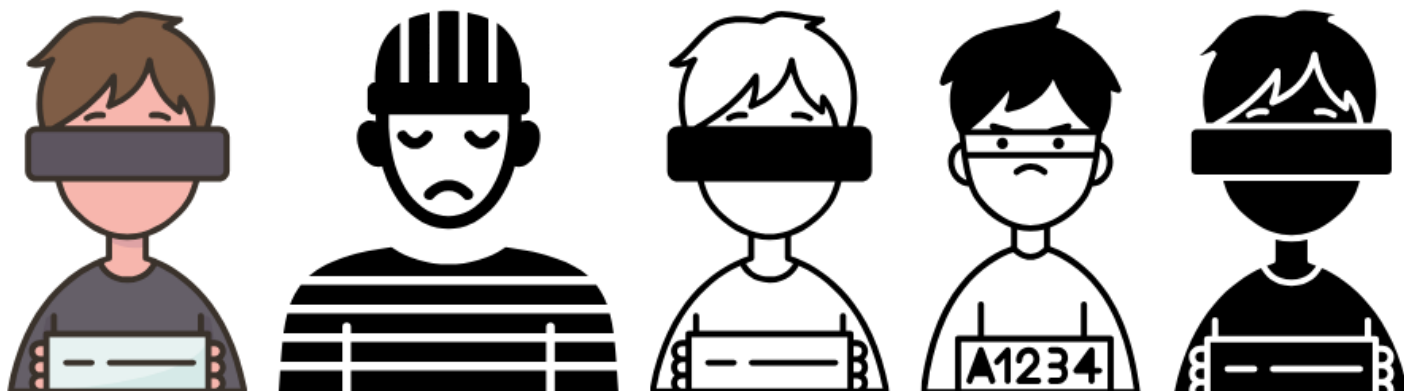
"Right," beamed Zeke.

Andy walked off, before turning around at the last moment. "Oh, I almost forgot. Penelope needs you downstairs."

Instantly, Zeke scowled. "What does she want?" he grumbled, storming off. Andy smirked, shutting the door behind her.

A little while later, Zeke walked in alone. He was still scowling, muttering something under his breath.





"Right then," he said into the mike, "bring them in, Barmer."

Five men shuffled into the room, each standing against the wall. In another moment, Andy walked into the other room.

"Is there anything that denotes the killer to you, Ms Hillary?" she questioned. "A piece of clothing, a perfume?"

"Maybe they could sing 'I Want It That Way'," suggested Zeke. His partner rolled her eyes.

"I am not reenacting that 'Brooklyn 99' scene for you," she said, making him pout.

Kate's lips twitched, before her smile faded. "The killer said something before he murdered the man," she told them. "Something like, 'You did this to yourself'?"

"Thank you Ms Hillary," smiled Detective Barmer. She then turned to the mike, "Number 1, can you please say the sentence, 'You did this to yourself'?"

"You did this to yourself," repeated the first man.

"Thank you. Now, number 2."

"You did this to yourself."

And it went on to 3, 4 and finally 5 before Andy turned back to Kate. "Did any of them sound familiar to you?"

Kate nodded with conviction. "It was number 4."

Andy turned back to the mike, a smirk on her face. "Detective Damon Frost, could you please join us?"

Story

Number 4 stepped out of line, walking into the mirror room. "Hello," grinned Damon.

"I don't understand," said Kate, confused.

"Detective Frost is the third detective on this case," smiled Andy. "He was also the man you identified as the killer in the lineup."

"Oh," stammered Kate. "We-well, I'm terribly sorry, I must have made a mistake."

Andy flashed her another smile. "Ms Hillary, would you mind taking a seat?"

Zeke guided her to one of the spare chairs in the room. Andy grabbed another one, sitting to face her. "Let me start us off," she said. "You're not a witness to this case. You are perfectly capable of seeing me at this very moment. And finally, you're our killer."

There was a stunned silence in the room. Then finally, Kate took off her glasses with a small smile. Behind them, bright brown orbs blinked, clearly focused on Andy. "You got me," she admitted. "How?"

"I was suspicious," said Andy. "A witness who shows up three days after the murder? Something's not right."

"I already had your murder weapon – three knives which you took from three different restaurants based on where you killed your victims. I didn't need to place you at the crime

scene because you yourself had done it. The only missing piece was the motive--what would you gain from killing the rising stars of a development firm? So I did a little digging around; turns out your community's land is being threatened by Windon Firm with some hotel plans. And who other than the Finch brothers would be laying such plans?

"So naturally, murder was in order. And you'd have gotten away with it if you didn't make one slip up--your accomplice got sloppy, was caught



on camera. Which, of course, led to us arresting him.”

“My cousin,” Kate smiled. “Jaymes Evergreen.”

“Number 2,” nodded Zeke.

“And you couldn’t possibly leave him to rot in prison,” grinned Andy. “So you came in, claiming to be a witness. Your plan was to leave a little red herring, say, that none of the men did it. But you got tempted by the case files Detective Archer left behind; so while I took him outside to explain my plan, you snuck a nice, long look at them. Who else should the first case file show but Robbie Morag, a notorious drug dealer and a perfect cover for Detective Frost?”

“You figured he was a horrible man who was going to end up in prison anyway, so why not speed up the process? Now, you could’ve gotten away with it; that’s the main reason you pretended to be blind. We wouldn’t have been able to blame the witness because we never had much hope in the first place.”

“But you knew I wasn’t actually blind,” said Kate. She leaned forward, intrigued. “How?”

Andy smirked. This was clearly the question she had been waiting for. “When we first met, I offered my hand out to you.”

Realisation dawned on the woman’s face. “And I shook it.” She laughed.

“You shook it like a fool,” agreed Andy.

Damon however, was frowning. “Ms Hillary, you don’t seem very disheartened.”

“You were always going to catch me.” The woman shrugged, smiling. “I just had to get the job done before it, and I did. Because it doesn’t matter if I go to jail for the rest of my life--I still killed them.”

There was a moment of silence. Then Andy spoke. “Ms Kate Hillary, you’re under arrest for the murders of brothers, Miles, Parrish and Oliver Finch.”



Reviews



Packed with Adventure, Yet Heartwarming

Ronikaa Vijan

'Pura Vida means ... Being thankful for what we have.'

From the bestselling author of 'The Last Bear' comes 'Turtle Moon', a glorious adventure set in the Amazon forest, with nature and wilderness at its heart. Hannah Gold's new bestseller is an eco-fiction

adventure perfect for readers aged eight and above. It tells the story of an 11-year-old girl, Silver, whose dad is invited to paint at a rescue centre in Costa Rica. There, when some rare leatherback turtle eggs are stolen, she ventures into the Amazon rainforest with some new friends, on an adventure of a lifetime, into the heart of the jungle.

I loved the vivid descriptions of this book, and the stunning illustrations by Levi Pinfold added to the reading experience. Silver's thoughts gave depth to the book. A few parts dragged on slightly, but overall, the pace kept me engaged. Silver's character was quite well-developed, which made me root for her. She had her flaws and her character avoided any clichés. I adore how Hannah Gold smoothly weaves in details about the endangered turtle species, and how poachers are stealing turtle eggs to sell them in the black market. The connection between Hannah's protagonists and animals is so magical. 'Turtle Moon' is more than just an adventure story; it is a celebration of nature, friendship, and the importance of being stewards of the earth.

If you enjoyed 'The Last Bear' or books that blend adventure with important environmental themes, you will find 'Turtle Moon' to be equally captivating. I would rate it ★★★★★☆ (4/5 stars) for its enchanting storytelling and the valuable lessons intertwined within the narrative. While a few sections could have been more concise, the overall experience was heartfelt and inspiring.

Hannah Gold has crafted a tale that will undoubtedly resonate with young readers and remind us all of our connection to the world around us. I highly recommend this book for anyone looking to spark a love of nature and adventure in young minds.

A Perfect Read for Animal Lovers

Aarya Jain Baldawa

The book 'The Lost Whale' by Hannah Gold is a memorable read, which makes you feel as if you are Rio, travelling on a boat in search of a whale.

Hannah Gold's vivid description of Rio and White Beak's story is perfect for anybody over eight looking for a good, realistic fiction read. Her exciting plot takes you through highs, lows, ups and downs with Rio.

Personally, when White Beak and Rio meet for the first time, I was so excited because of the connection between them.

'The Lost Whale' is similar to another of Hannah Gold's books, 'The Last Bear'.

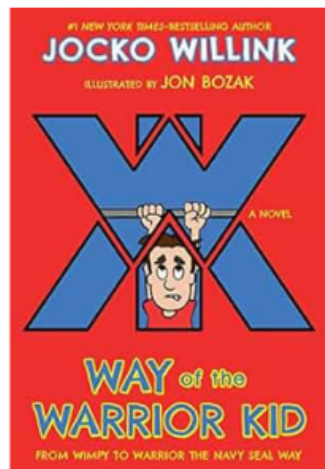
If I could, I would make sure many more people would read the story of Rio, and feel the same joy and sadness I felt through the pages.



Inspirational Story for Young Readers

Aarav Khandelia

Jocko Willink's book, 'Way of the Warrior Kid' is a work of realistic fiction about a fifth grade boy named Marc who doesn't believe he can be a warrior. But when his uncle comes back from being a navy seal to attend college he teaches Marc what it means to be a warrior.



A couple of my favourite parts are when Marc reaches his goals and when he finally stands up to a bully who has been bullying everybody in his grade. Uncle Jake teaches Marc that to be a warrior you don't have to be a fighter but someone who stands up for what he feels is right, and lives by rigours and disciplined rules. The way that Marc's uncle keeps pushing him to go forward kept me hooked by making me wonder if Marc is going to succeed in his goals.

I am sure that 'Way of the Warrior Kid' will spark confidence within young readers just as it did in me.



The Isle of Contentment

Sunandini Sen

"What's this?" I rummage under the floorboard, anxiously peeking over my shoulder.

Aha! I lift up a dusty, old--book?

I roll my eyes. People call Kiros, our island, the 'Isle of Contentment'. 'Isle of Contentment' indeed. More like 'Isle of Boredom', where the only hidden things you find are boring ones.

I struggle to read the cover: 'The Encyclopaedia of the World'. I frown. I've never heard of it. My heart races as I realise it must be an illegal book, one that's not been regulated by the Elders.

Now, as I hold it in my hands, I spot something strange. Inside, on the first page, written in scrawly handwriting--"To my dearest daughter, Ilina."

Wait, that's Mother's name. Did Grandfather gift a book to her? An illegal one?

I start flipping the pages of the book. It talks about many different things, like the Sun and the Moon as well as something called 'planets' which all revolve around the Sun, but our Moon revolves around our world? I've never heard of this before!

"Whatever are these continents? And, what do they mean by the 'galaxy'?" I say to myself.

As the days pass, I get more and more absorbed in the book. I tell no one about it, as I know only too well that if Mother got to know I was reading something illegal, it would result in another scolding.

Of course, I could confront Mother about the book and why she kept it hidden from me. But I hesitate. If she takes it away, how will I ever know whether what I've read in the book is true?

One day, as I lie in bed, I think about what I should do next. That's when the idea strikes me. Maybe I should find some proof about the truth, before I confront Mother! All around Kiros is just open sea. According to the book I've been reading, there may be lands beyond. What if I just left Kiros, in a small boat? I could get to a different place, stay there for some time and get some more information to back myself up!

When I've made my decision, I pack my bags.

I leave in the dead of night. I don't leave behind a note. I don't want to worry Mother, after all.

Stealing one of the small boats belonging to a fisherman of Kiros, I set sail. When I was younger, Grandpa taught me the basics of sailing. We were and still are only allowed to sail up till a certain distance away from our island.

Grandpa would huff and complain, "Those idiot Elders! Always imposing restrictions and rules!"

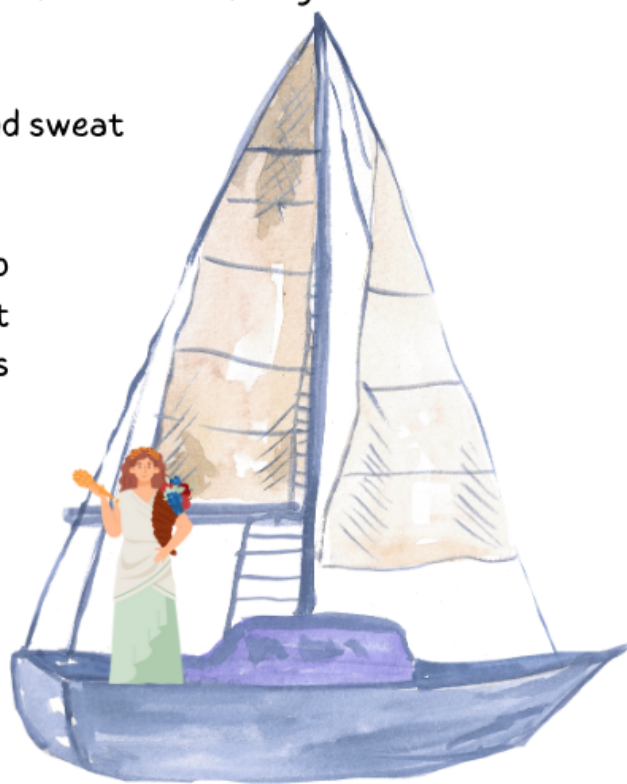
I couldn't really learn much from him, though, as he passed away when I was only eight.

Soon enough, I'm off. As the boat glides on to the smooth, dark waves, I sigh in the silence of the sea. It's peaceful. I feel myself drifting off.

When I wake up in the morning, the wind has stopped, and sweat trickles down my forehead.

The Sun shines brightly overhead. As I struggle to decipher the maps, I realise this was a terrible idea. But now, I'm in the middle of the sea, in the middle of gods know where.

The three days that follow are absolutely terrible. I can't read the maps more than half the time; the wind stops and starts abruptly; my supplies run low.



Story

At the end of the third day, as I am looking out into the water while the Sun casts its last fiery glow on to the sky, in the distance, I see something black.

"What is that?" I say, standing up. As I get closer to the black thing, it just gets bigger and bigger. I start seeing certain shapes on it. Could it be land?

In my excitement, I pick up the oars immediately and begin to row myself. As I get closer and closer I wonder about the sort of people that'll be there.

Unfortunately, people do stare at me as I walk across the pathways on the island. Embarrassed at their strange looks as they whisper amongst themselves, I feel my face going a bit pink. Lowering my head, I walk on. Having tied my boat to a rock in a lonely cave, I'm now free to go anywhere.

As I look around curiously, I'm met with a yelp from a person.

"Watch where you're going!" they say, irritated.

"Oh, sorry," I respond. I must've bumped into them while walking. "What's your name?"

"Why should I tell you?" the person mumbles, their head covered with a cap.

"Well, I'm Arina," I reply. "I'm new here, and I don't know anybody. Could you tell me a place to get some food?"

"Do you have money?" the person asks.

"Huh?" I answer, confused. "What's that?"

This time, the person looks me straight in the eye. Their face is full of freckles and their orange hair is short and jagged, as if they cut it themselves. "You seriously don't know what money is?" the orange-haired person asks, in disbelief. I nod.

"Okay, we need to have a little chat," the person says and guides me to a bench.

I'm a bit wary at first, since they're a stranger, but it's not like I have another option. I don't know if anybody else here will even try to talk to me.

"I'm Corrie," the person says, removing their cap and leaning on the arm of the bench. "So, where're you from?"

"From Kiros," I respond, a bit shy.

"Kiros? Where's that?" she asks. "Never heard of it."

"It's the land of the chosen people," I say, proudly.

"Pah, chosen people," she scoffs. "You're probably from a really distant island with nobody on it."

"That's not true, we have a large population," I say, defending my homeland. "I didn't even know there were other people in the world!"

"What?" Corrie splutters. "That's crazy. What kind of brainwashed island do you live on?"

"We're not brainwashed," I mumble.

"Really?" Corrie deadpans. "Tell me about your island."

Although I feel a bit uncomfortable around her, soon enough, I ease up and the entire story tumbles out. How I found the book, started doubting what I was being told, and how I ran away.

"So, you basically live in a theocracy with leaders who control your every action," Corrie states. "Wow, Kiros really sounds like a crazy place to live in."

"Are you, like, trying to show your superiority to me? Kiros is a great place, I'll have you know that. I didn't ask for your judgement," I say, angrily.

"Calm down." She throws her hands up in surrender. "I wasn't trying to lord my knowledge over you."



Story

"I'm sorry I got irritated," I mumble. "It's just that there's so much I don't know."

"Well, we can solve that problem easily," Corrie says and gets up, motioning for me to follow her. I walk behind her, as we pass houses and several strange structures I've never seen before. Corrie points each one out, explaining what they are.

Soon enough, we come to a place which Corrie says is called a 'library'. When I enter, I'm met by the sight of shelves upon shelves of books. I gape as I take it all in. I've never seen anything like this before.

Back on Kiros, the only books we had were the ones regulated by the Elders, for our school. It was never thought necessary to have any other books.

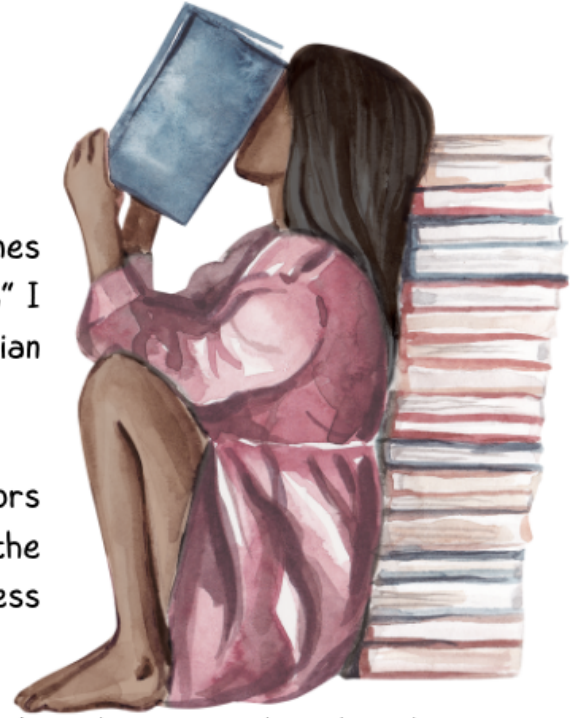
"Here, you'll find all the information you need," Corrie says simply and leaves me there. "You can stay here for as long as you like."

I spend what feels like an eternity in that huge library. I read and read, savouring the words on every page.

The librarians and some townspeople are kind enough to offer some food for doing menial work, like stacking books on shelves. At night, I sleep on a bench in the library. It's warm enough, and the librarians turn a blind eye to me staying there.

My days become a routine of reading and learning, sleeping when tired, and eating.





I learn and learn. Soon enough, I learn about autocratic regimes and dictatorships of the past. "It kind of sounds like Kiro's," I say to myself, as I read about yet another authoritarian dictator.

The way the lives of the people were controlled by dictators of the past sounds similar to the way Elder Darizin and the other Elders control us. Regulated reading material, no access to the outside world, mandatory ceremonies and more.

Corrie comes to visit me nearly every day. "Getting on well?" she asks, sitting down beside me one sunny morning.

"Uh-huh," I nod, in the midst of a particularly interesting chapter.

"So, are you never going to go back?" she asks, out of the blue. Suddenly, an idea strikes me.

"Now that I know about so many new things, I think it's time to go back and help my people," I say. "The way the Elders control us, it's not right. I could convince them to fight for themselves!"

"That's a great idea," Corrie says. "The people of Kiro's could see it from your point of view!"

I start packing once more. Only, this time, I'm armed with the knowledge of books and encouragement from Corrie and the librarians.

When I finally reach Kiro's, I see Mother on the sands, surrounded by several people.

Puzzled, I get out of the boat and run to her. "What happened?" I shout.

That's when two Elders suddenly clamp down heavy iron shackles on my hands. "Get off me!" I screech, trying to push them away. "What're you doing?"

"Arina, you're under arrest for blasphemy and plotting against Kiro's." Elder Darizin enters the scene, a smirk on his cruel features. "We all know of your escape and how you were reading non-Elder-regulated material!" He shouts the last part, turning to the huge crowd of people assembled on the beach.

Story

"Please, listen to me." I struggle against my bonds. "I did escape and I was reading non-regulated material, that's true, but after I set sail, I discovered a new land with other people!"

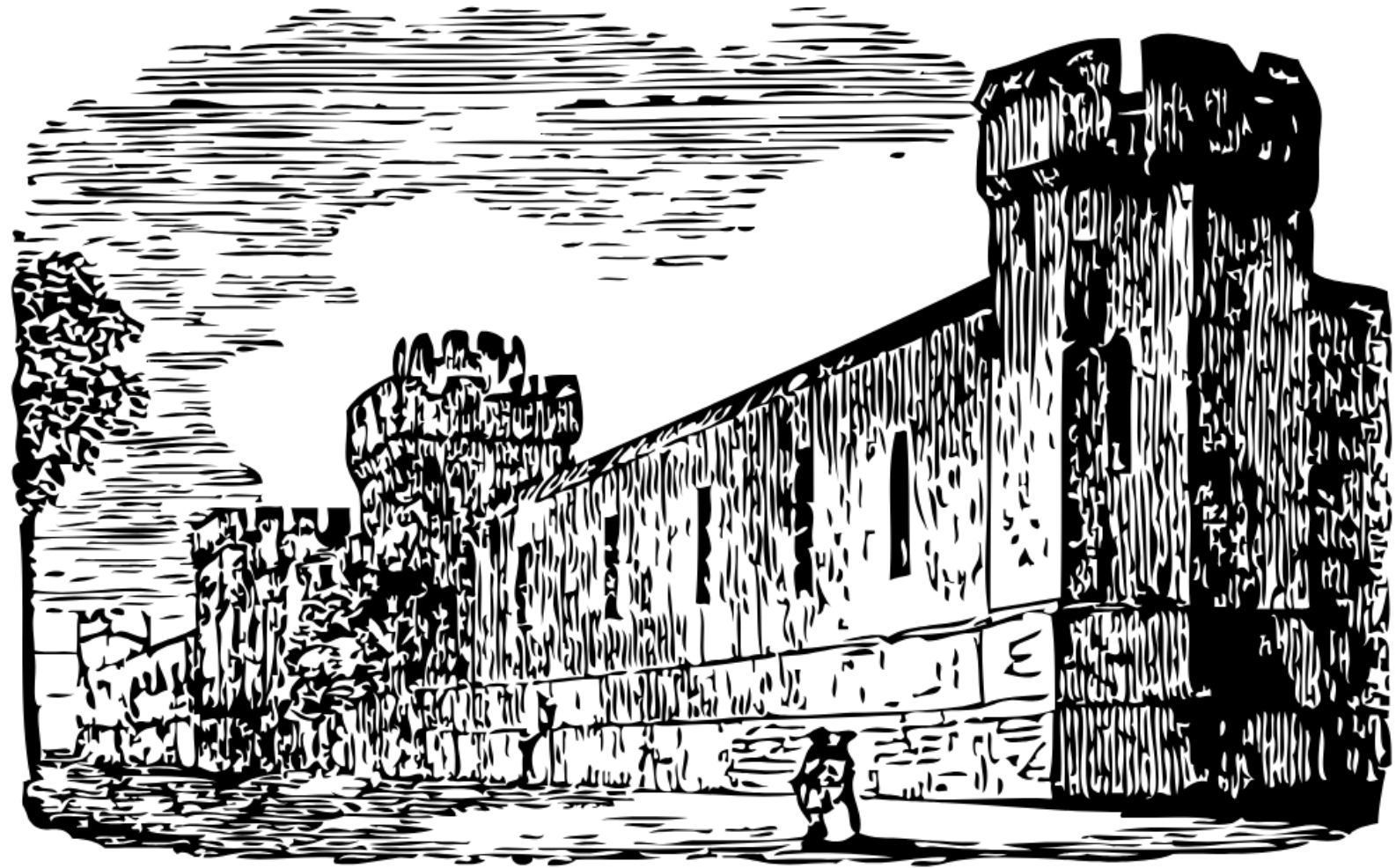
The people in the crowd start murmuring amongst themselves, casting doubtful looks in my direction.

"Silence!" Elder Darizin screams, his face an ugly shade of red. "What are we, some godless people who speak lies? This girl is a blasphemer! There are no lands beyond Kiros. Or, do you not believe in the word of the Gods, written in our Holy Book? Are we not the chosen ones?"

The people slowly start nodding. My hopes sink. There's no way the people will listen to me.

Elder Darizin whispers something to another Elder, who nods and drags Mother away. She looks forlornly at me, her eyes full of tears.

Now, Elder Darizin comes closer to me, his hands clasped behind his back. His expression is serene, but his eyes show me the truth. Full of an endless sea of rage, he looks down upon me.



However, he turns away from me, as I am dragged away by several Elders, who throw me into a dim and dark prison cell. I grasp the heavy iron bars, which seem immovable. I try to make one of them budge, but to no avail. I look around to see nobody else here. After all, the bars are too strong to break. I doubt they'd need guards anyway.

"Arina," a voice croaks from the cell next to mine.

"Mother?" I whisper, going closer to the bars.

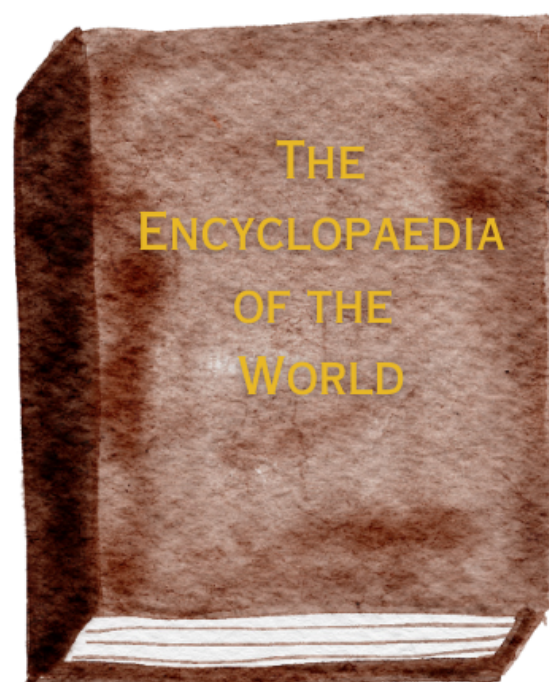
Mother nods from the other side, as a single tear falls from her eye. "I'm sorry if I ever was a bad mother," she apologises.

"No, I'm sorry I ran away," I mumble, wiping a few tears of my own. "Why are you here? What happened? How--"

"When it was discovered that you escaped, the Elders conducted a search of our house and found the book you were reading," she says.

I gasp. "The-the--"

"The Encyclopaedia of the World'," Mother finishes. "It belonged to your grandfather, who gave it to me. He never came round to the preachings of the Elders. He believed in science, and when such books were banned, he refused to throw them away and accept the Gods. It led to many arguments with me." Here, she pauses and sighs in sadness. "I accepted our new life. He did not. I could never bring myself to throw his Encyclopaedia away; it was the only memory I had left of him."



"Then I discovered the book," I reply. "And you were arrested when the Elders found it."

She nods. "Since childhood, I was taught that the word of the Elders was like the word of the Gods," Mother says to me. "But, I've been thinking about this for a while." Her eyes twinkle as she produces a hairpin out of her pocket. I gasp, as she reaches out to me through the bars, handing it to me. "I'm quite useful with some things too," she says, smiling.



After several attempts, the rusty old lock finally falls open, and I go to free Mother too.

"No," she says, holding up a hand to stop me. "You do whatever you have to. I'll distract anyone who comes here."

I hesitate, but Mother urges me to go. I hear footsteps coming closer and closer. I slip away into the darkness, unnoticed. As I try to remember the way I was brought in, groping along the walls, I find the handle of a door, turning it. Lucky for me, it opens into a dirty alleyway, and I promptly dash away.

The alley opens into the main square, a scene of festivities. Oh, I almost forgot. Today's the Day of Elders, which celebrates, you guessed it, the Elders. Attendance is compulsory, and so is giving donations of food, cloth or anything else you have. Not offering anything can lead to years in prison, or even more.

As the people clap, Elder Darizin takes centerstage. I clench my knuckles. This is the man who imprisoned me and Mother, who took away Grandpa's book, who is using fear of the Gods as a weapon to exercise control.

He begins kindly, with a smile hiding the corruptness of his soul. "Today is Elders' Day, when we celebrate our Elders who do so much for us," he says. "I hope you all have offered donations, for if you do not, you shall fall under a terrible curse. According to our Holy Book, disrespecting the Elders is like disrespecting the Gods."

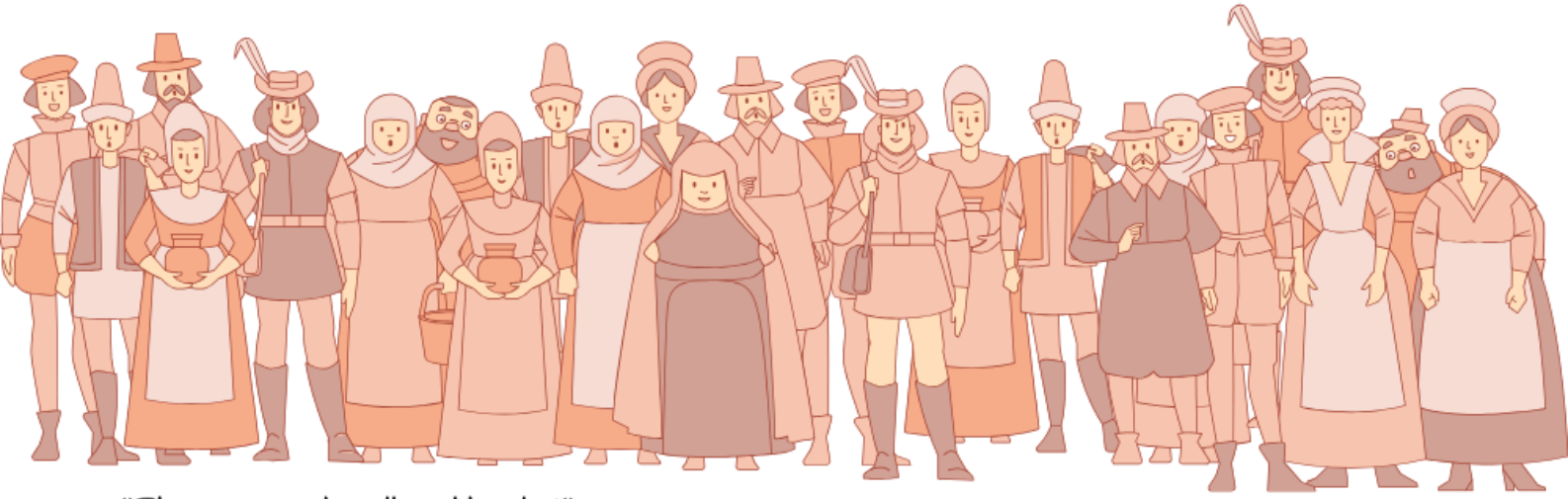
"I'm sure you've heard about Arina," he continues, as a murmur breaks out among the crowd.

He reassures the people, "She has been locked away by our Elders, and will soon be executed. That shall be an end to her lies and evil. Parents, I beseech you to keep a check on your children to stop them from taking the path of faithlessness--"

I can't keep quiet any longer. I seize my chance.

"I object!" I say, raising my hand as the entire crowd turns to look at me.

"Hey, isn't that the girl who escaped? Arina?"



"The one reading illegal books!"

Elder Darizin's eyes widen. He clenches his hands, his face almost turning purple with rage.

"How did you escape?" he hisses.

"Let me speak for myself!" I shout. "I'll explain why I'm right and you're wrong!"

One person in the crowd shouts, "Hey, let's hear what she has to say!"

Two others join in, clamouring for me to be given a chance to speak. "How do we know that what she says is false and what you say is true?" a person questions, standing up.

"Calm down, my dear citizens." Elder Darizin almost looks worried. "You have no reason to believe her words. But"--here he gives a forced smile--"since you want to listen to what she has to say, let's hear her. After her silly speech, I'll explain how she's wrong and a traitor."

I climb up on to the stage. I take a deep breath. I begin.

"People of Kiros," I say. "To this day, most of you have never questioned the things we've been taught by these Elders. Faith is good, but when it's used to exercise control over people just to fulfil the demands of leaders, it's called an autocracy. The Elders know knowledge is power, so they guard it viciously and feed us lies! We're not the only chosen ones; there's a whole world out there. In fact, how do we even know the Gods were born on Kiros and not someplace else?"

The whispers and mutters grow louder. Someone begins to shout, "Down with the Elders!" Elder Darizin tries to speak over the people, but is promptly silenced by their voices. His features twist into a vicious scowl. Instantly, guards surround us, and I know any revolt will be quelled. How can we resist armed guards, after all?

That's when the entire population of Corrie's town bursts into the square, with Corrie at the head.

Story

What follows is not a violent revolt. The people, finally rebelling, throw rocks at the Elders' residence and all the Elders, overwhelmed by the people, surrender and are promptly tied with ropes.

"Thank goodness you got here in time," I say to Corrie.

"I had a hunch something was not right," Corrie says, hugging me.

Soon enough, I see Mother. "Mother!" I shout, making my way to her. She sweeps me up in her arms, like she did when I was little and sighs in happiness. "Arina," she simply says. "I missed you."

"Me, too," I reply, hugging her back, sniffing. "I miss Grandpa so much."

She nods in return.

A few weeks later:

I walk along the beach, sand slipping in between my toes.

So much has changed, yet so many things will always be the same. It won't be easy, creating a new future for Kiros, but I'm sure we'll be able to do it.

Together.



More List Poetry

The Land I Come From

Zaheer Vakeel

I come from a land where
Hot things for others feel cold to us.
Gats with gold teeth and leather jackets rule us all.
I can shape shift into anything I want.

I come from a land where
There has been world peace since eternity.
The bees go buzz in your ears at bedtime.
There are wheelchairs with bicycle pedals.

I come from a land where
There are three headed dogs.
Petrol fumes fill the air.
Dew-kissed leaves glisten in the morning light.

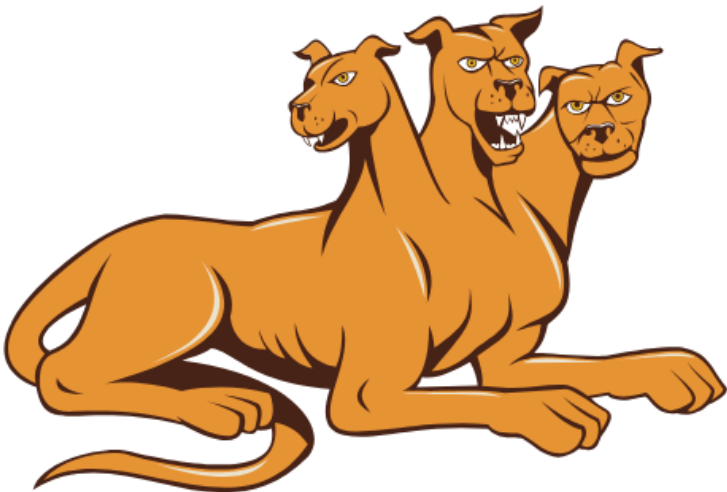
I come from a land where
Everyone has fish and chips for breakfast every day.
I can sabotage any electronics I want.
Unlimited mineral resources lie beneath our feet.

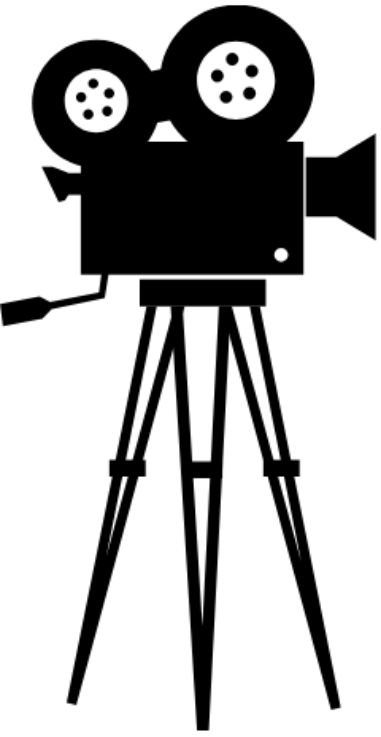


A Fridge Full of Food

Aarav Khandelia

When I pull open my fridge,
my eyes begin to twitch.
There is tomato, pizza, cheese,
asparagus, trout, peas,
flaming hot Cheetos
Twix, pickle, Doritos,
potatoes, macaroni,
alfredo, rigatoni,
sushi, ravioli,
chips, guacamole,
I don't mean to be rude,
But I can't take any more food!
My body's dehydrated
Without water I'll be dissipated.





The Last One: A Documentary by Ranaki Gosh

Nirai Iniyar

"Death Count," Dad read off the newspaper, "53 last night and in the early hours of morning."

"Good lord," my mother said as she served breakfast in our apartment. "The numbers really have been rising these days."

"Be grateful the Death Count is there to handle them," Dad said. I tossed around that one subji lump in the corner of my plate. "Imagine a world without them."

I rolled my eyes, opting to look out of the window and ignore this heavily repeated conversation. Geeta Aunty's dupatta was flying in the wind, unfastened as always. It was sure to fall down again and cause yet another traffic jam.

Unless the Death Count took care of that as well.

It had started a few years ago. A programme, the government said. It would keep us safe and happy--and would take care of the rest.

At first, no one believed them. Not until the killings started. Suddenly your neighbour was found dead. Then your class teacher after that. Maybe even some kid from school. Nobody knew what happened and nobody knew who did it.

"These people did wrong," the officials would say. "They are a risk to our future, our society, our lives."

"I'm going," I declared, getting up from the table. "I need to be early to school."

"This early?" Mom frowned.

"Ma," I grinned, grabbing my camera. "Have you seen Mumbai traffic?"



"Oii!" yelled Akash, standing on top of a bench and waving his arms like a maniac. "Oii!"

"Are you trying to talk to someone in Australia?" asked Akshara.

Akash scowled, taking off his shoe and whacking his sister. In return, she took her school bag and repeatedly hit him over the head with it.

I jumped off my bike, making it lean against the wall and then furiously punched my open palm. "Fight, fight, fight, fight, fight!" I joked.

Akshara flicked my forehead in response, grabbing her bag and slinging it over her shoulder with a huff. Akash followed her, still hopping about in one shoe.

"Come on, don't be like that!" he teased. "After all Dadiji Akshara, you'll get lost on your way to class with your Alzheimer's!"

"I'll give you Alzheimer's!" she snarled back, making us howl with laughter.

Then I suddenly stopped, jumping up. "Hold it!" I hissed to a still wheezing Akash.

It was a pretty blue bird. Its beady black eyes stared back at me, camera in hand and ready to immortalise it. The sight was absolutely mesmerising, like something reserved for the both of us.



Akash stepped on a twig, making it shriek and fly off. I turned to him, scowling.

"Sorry," he grinned apologetically. "Next time?"

"Should've just let your sister beat you up," I grumbled.

Story

He smiled sheepishly. "I thought you were doing water."

"Maybe I'm more interested in birds," I snarked, before sighing. "I don't know! It's my first proper documentary--I haven't got a clue what I'm doing."

"Oh relax," said Akash. "You always know what you're doing."



I set up my camera on the sidewalk, determined to capture the scene in front of my house. Another teenage boy on a bike rode on the pavement, making me hiss and pull back my camera.

When he turned around the corner, I sighed. Finally.

I turned my camera stand, fiddling with the components. I put it back on the ground, ready for the shot of a lifetime.

Then a bright red sari flew into my face.

"Ranaki!" cried Geeta Aunty from the floor above. "You caught my sari!"

"That's one word for it," I muttered as she lumbered down to get it. But I just nodded, forcing a smile on to my face.

"Oh, you also have your little camera out!"

Oh god, please, not a conversation.

"What are you taking a video of?" she beamed.

"I'm documenting," I said, still forcing a smile. I could swear that my eyeballs had popped out and started twitching, like in the cartoons.

"It's for an assignment."

"Oh, you should really look into the Death Count!" she exclaimed. Then she paused, taking a look at the buzzing street before coming closer. "Now I don't want to say things like this but it is rather... strange."



I hummed, not convinced. As if to agree with me, a fly buzzed on my shoulder.

"Well, at least try it!" she beamed. "What harm can it do?"

I hummed once more, watching her walk back into the car parking before I finally relaxed. And now, to my cinematography.



53 in yesterday's Death Count, same as before. I skimmed the list, choking on my tea when I came across it.

Geeta Ambedkar, 42 years old.



"Geeta Aunty?" asked Akshara. "Who on earth would want to kill Geeta Aunty?"

"The government, apparently." I shrugged my bag off my shoulders and swatted off a nearby fly as we talked in hushed tones and waited for our Biology teacher. Akash, as usual, was not with us by the seventh period, having managed to somehow end up in the infirmary.

"And she was telling you that the Death Count would make for a good documentary?" asked Akshara.

"I don't know what she was saying," I grumbled. "I never do."

This time, Akshara shrugged. "Maybe that's why they killed her."

I snorted. "You're kidding."

"What?" the girl defended. "My grandmother, she tells us stories about before the Death Count. The government is brutal."

"Well, my dad says they've changed." The fly went into my ear, making my hiss.

"Why?" she mocked. "Because they gave us bright, shiny roads and cheaper petrol? You think they'll suddenly be all nice for nothing?"

Story

It was at this moment that Sonu Ma'am entered and we both went mum.

We didn't talk about it after.



I rang the bell for the third time.

Akshara hadn't been answering my texts. I'd given up at this point, just putting on a jacket and racing my cycle through the puddles from the rains.

My foot tapped impatiently on the ground. I rang once more.

Akash swung the door open. I let out a small huff, "Look, I know your sister doesn't want to talk to me but--"

"Akshara can't come," Akash snapped. His voice was nasally and harsh. It took me a moment to notice his puffed up eyes and clenched jaw.

"Akash?" I asked. "Are you alright?"

He scoffed. "Don't even try."

"What--"

"Akshara told me," he cut me off. "She said that she made a mistake. That she said something she wasn't supposed to say to you."

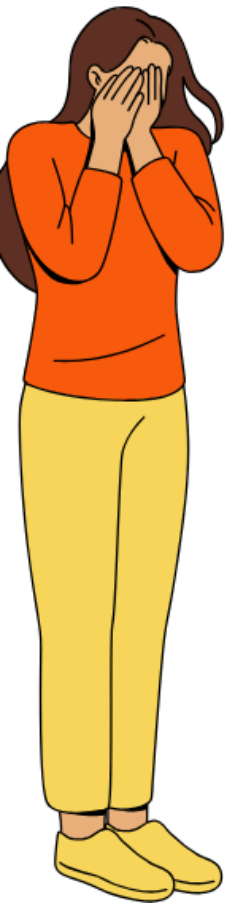
"Akash look," I decided to try again. "If you just let me talk to her--"

"She's dead!" he screamed.

His words hit me like a train. Suddenly, everything broke into a thousand pieces; nothing made sense in this world, like a mist over glass.

"What?" I whispered.

"The Death Count came for her." He laughed--there was nothing happy about it. "They killed her last night; and it's all your fault."



I stood there, stunned. In this blurry world, I heard a distant door shut and my own fumbling steps tripping the way home.



"That's two deaths," I told my camera, doing my best not to focus on my unsteady breathing. "And it was right after they spoke to me about the Count."

She said something she wasn't supposed to say.
She's dead.
And it's all your fault.

"The real question," I continued, anxious breaths escaping me, "is how they're doing it."

She said something she wasn't supposed to say.
She's dead.
And it's all your fault.

A fly landed on my camera, still as a statue. I stared at it, rocking back and forth anxiously.

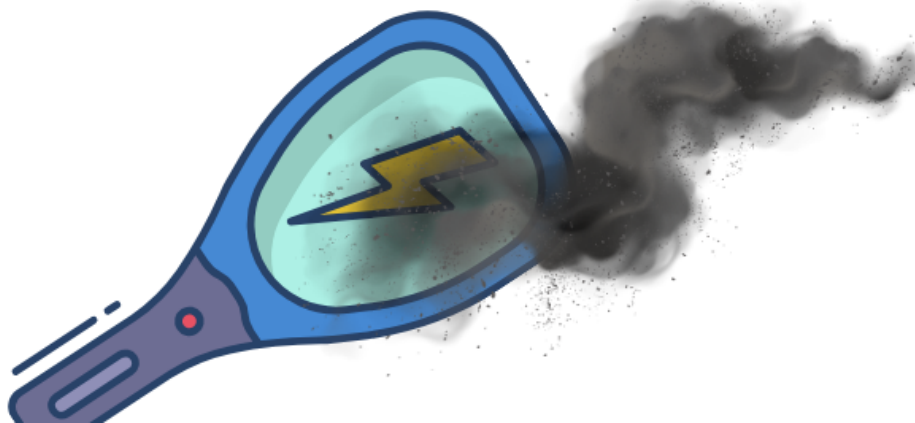
She said something she wasn't supposed to say.
She's dead
And it's all your fault.

I snapped, grabbing my mosquito bat to strike the insect.

"Let it do something," I prayed, feeling so small and stupid as I reached out to hit it. "Let it do anything."

Apparently, the higher powers took 'anything' a little too literally.

The moment I swung at it, a bright blue electric wave ran through my bat, making me instantly pull back and scream. The bat dropped to the floor, crackling like lightning before fizzing out, just as quickly.



Story

I stared at the--now smoking--mosquito bat, watching the dead body of a fly weakly flop around.

No mosquito bat did that.



After a good five minutes, I reached for the plastic handle, raising it to my eye-level. The fly did another weak flop.

I flipped over the bat, letting the insect drop to the floor.

Small sparks were emitted from the corpse. Cautiously, I peered, my limbs shivering harshly and my brow dropping a cold sweat.

That wasn't a fly. We'd just drawn one for our practical record last week. I remember cribbing to Akshara about it as Akash kept pipping that it wasn't that bad.

The memory produced a tight feeling in my chest, which I hastily ignored in order to examine this not-fly creature. Its limbs were separated into five parts, which I was sure was not anything like a fly's. The wings were cold and glass-like, even reflecting the sun rays that reached my room. And the eyes, finally, the eyes were porous and letting loose strange clicks.

'The Death Count' its thorax read in the Arial font.

And suddenly, it clicked. Flies were everywhere, every time. Nothing about them was suspicious, making them perfect harbingers of the Death Count. Not assassins, not employed secret service agents, just flies.



And they had been after me.

The realisation hit like an ice cold bucket of water. In my head, Akshara's words echoed over and over again, making me collapse to the ground.

I was going to die.

But then I took a look at my camera.

That was my way to live.

Free Verse



Lego

Sunandini Sen

A small lego brick
Light blue
4x4,
the door to
Endless possibilities.
A brick
in an enchanted pool.
A brick
in the back of a dragon.
A brick
in a chest of treasure.

A piece of lego,
adapting to
New builds
New base plates
New situations.

A piece of lego
under one's feet
a shriek
"Who left this here?"
A piece of lego
the last piece in a
long-awaited build.
The cause of
Indescribable annoyance
but also
Something beautiful.



A building block
Creating magic
Reminding me
Of the importance of
being part of a whole.

My friend,
Sanika.

Two of a Kind

Janvi Barman

lying on her bed,
or rooted to a spot,
or wandering,
exploring

smooth in some places,
rough in others
an angry red streak,
narrow but noticeable
a million different buttons,
one wrong press?
I'm done for

appears sturdy,
but must be handled with care
sees things

in ways no one else can,
both this indecipherable girl,
and her Nikon D500





The Mystery of the Stolen Watch

Aarav Khandelia

Mr Coral, a rich man, was visiting The Jadisson Hotel in Tokyo, and he just so happened to bring his favourite watch along. But on the night of November 7, it was stolen with the thief leaving no trace at all. Mr Coral's eyes were filled with heavy tears as he sobbed to the news reporter, "That was my grandfather's watch, and now it's gone!"

Soon, the police stormed into the Jadisson and called out to Mr Coral, "Sir, do you know if anyone saw the theft while it was being committed?"

Mr Brown, who was cleaning the window, piped up, "I was cleaning Mr Coral's window when I saw a man with blue eyes and wearing a posh brown suit steal the watch. Unfortunately, I couldn't see any other features of the culprit."

After a long discussion, the police stated to Mr Coral, "There are three possible suspects: Mr Green, the hotel owner; Mr Red, the room cleaner, and you yourself, Mr Coral."



"How could you think I would commit the crime?" thundered Mr Coral. "It was my grandfather's watch! What would I gain from pretending to steal it?"

"Sorry sir, but you fit the description," replied the police politely. "But what we were just saying is that we don't have enough proof to arrest anyone."

"How can you do this?" yelled Mr Coral. "I want an answer!" He looked around, his face getting redder and redder. "Nobody cares! I'll hire a private detective!" He stomped out of the room.

Immediately, Mr Coral hired a detective, who came to investigate the crime scene. His name was Detective Coffee Cup.

Detective Coffee Cup took a look around. He saw the room key, not a single ounce of dust, but most importantly, a finger print near the watch case. The police had missed that!

Detective Coffee Cup examined the fingerprints of each of the suspects, but the print didn't match that of any of the suspects the police had listed. This surprised Detective Coffee Cup, but he thought a little more and got the answer.

To the police, he stated, "Mr Brown told you that he saw a man with a brown suit and blue eyes, but it was him all along. He must have entered the room through the window, stolen the watch and gone back to his job."

Mr Brown started to protest, but Detective Coffee Cup held up his hand to stop him. "I will prove it to you. Mr Brown, could you give me your thumbprint, please?"

Mr Brown tried to get away, but the police stopped him. They examined his thumbprint and sure enough, it matched the one near the watch case. Mr Brown had stolen the watch!

Everyone turned to Mr Brown, who slumped into his chair in the hotel lobby and looked away.

But the court did not go easy on him. He had to return the watch and live for three years in prison.

After that, Mr Coral never carried valuable items with him on holiday!



THE NEWS

Children's Day Celebrations in Full Swing at Bengaluru School

Nirai Iniyar

The 2024 annual mela at Sishu Griha in Bangalore was reported as, by far, the most successful of them all. The mela was held on the school campus and was open to all of its students. It took place on November 14 after almost a month of planning.

"It's nice to see everyone enjoying themselves from the view in my office," said Principal Sujata Mohandas. "Not just the students, but the teachers too."

Food and tattoo stalls were set up, along with game stalls conducted by the teachers, some of the more notable being Faceless, Pick a Penny and Egg Carton Marble Toss. It is reported that most, if not all, stalls recycled and reused materials around the school.

"It's great fun," reported a 9th grade student. "Even if you don't win!"

The celebrations were wrapped up in time for lunch after a quick speech from the principal. An email was sent an hour later, informing the students that regular classes would take place the next day.



Fight Breaks Out Over Mirage

Aarya Jain Baldawa

On 12 November 2024, two girls broke into a fight over a nonexistent bed in a classroom, leading to a few minor injuries.

"Well, I couldn't help but imagine a soft bed on the table and I just had to sleep on it," says one of the girls (permission to use name declined). She then jumped on the table which gave her bruises.

"I saw her on the table and I tried to find my own, but the other tables were all too messy," the other girl said. "So, I pushed her off and jumped on."

The one who was pushed off dropped an iPad on the other's back, temporarily hurting her.

"The reason behind this was probably lack of sleep," another child said, pointing out that the girls were fighting over a mirage.

The girls eventually apologised and laughed it off together.



Trump vs Harris Leads to Heated Debate in Mumbai School

Aarav Khandelia

On 6 November 2024, the entire fifth grade of Oberoi International School in Mumbai went on an American election frenzy.

The fifth grade started forming strong, opinionated views on an election that was going on 12800 km away. Such views almost caused a civil war between Trump and Harris supporters. These opinions consisted of ideas like, “I don’t care if Trump gets assassinated,” or “Even if Harris becomes president she’ll get assassinated immediately!”

Some of the pupils decided that this was an illogical argument that could cause people to lose friendships. “Come on guys, you’re not 18 or American citizens, what difference does it make if either Trump or Harris wins?” said a student. By the end of their school day, the entire grade stopped talking about this irrelevant topic and started focusing on their studies again. By the next day, the Trump and Harris riots had stopped.

DPS Newtown Brings Home Trophy from Inter-School Fest

Janvi Barman

Among twelve Kolkata schools, DPS Newtown has won the prize for ‘Best School’ at the Viva Science Fest held by Pratt Memorial School on 19 September.

The students participating performed well in all the events, including Extempore, Codenite, Science Play and more. Eighth grade student and winner of the third prize in the ‘Just a Minute!’ event, Sunandini Sen, says, “I’ve never participated in an inter-school competition before, so I was definitely really nervous when my teacher asked me to participate. But I was equally overjoyed to win third prize. I’m very proud of all my classmates who participated and did so well too.”

We reached out to Principal Sonali Sen but she was not available to make a statement.



History Teacher Accused of Leaking Board Exam Information

Ronikaa Vijan

A history teacher teaching class 9E at a Pune school, Miss Reet Randhawa, has allegedly been giving notes and tips from previous years' textbooks, telling students what is most important and likely to come in the exam. The students and parents of other classes got upset at this since Miss Randhawa has close ties with the ICSE board and they believed that she was leaking what would be asked in the board exam.

"I think it's unfair that some students get told exactly what will come in the exam while others have to study the entire portion. If this is the case, the portion should just be cut for everyone," said a student from another 9th-grade class.

A group of students took their complaint to the principal, who then confronted Miss Randhawa. Here's what she said:

"I would never compromise the integrity of the board. I merely want to share the experience I have gained over the past ten years of my teaching to make sure my students excel."

The case has been closed, as, upon further investigation, none of the information shared with the students contains any board exam-related information.



Online Launch of Issue 5 of WORDS

Sunandini Sen

Issue 5 of 'Words', an E-Zine, was successfully launched on 19 July 2024 by Varsha Seshan. At 118 pages long, this issue consists of 50 pieces of poetry, drama and prose, which are all authored by the members of Ms Seshan's summer writing programme, which was held from April to June 2024.

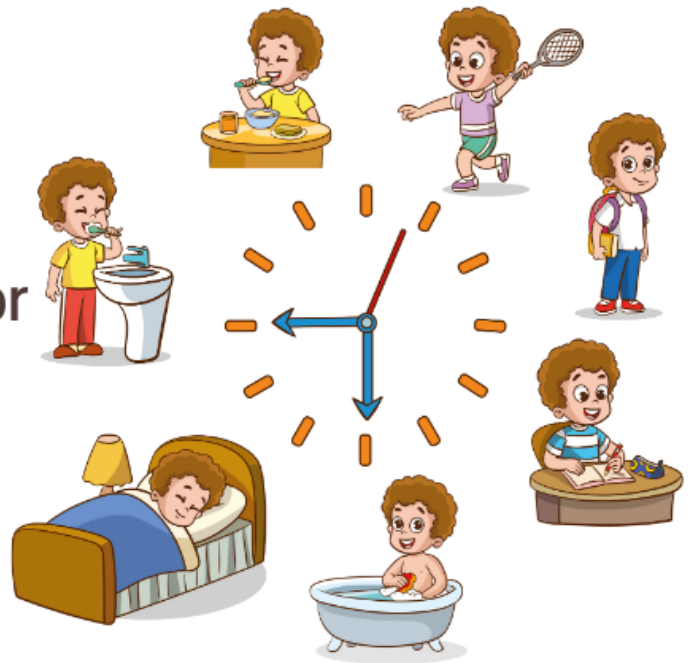
This zine launch took place at an online Zoom meeting, from 5:30 to 6:30 pm. Ms Seshan and the writers, as well as their friends and family, were in attendance. During the meeting, each of the authors read either a piece or an excerpt from a piece that they had written.

The seventeen young authors of this zine range from the ages of nine to 14. Some of the notable pieces written by them include '7 a.m. regrets' by Janvi Barman, 'A Fairy Tale Heist' by Ronikaa Vijan and 'Loneliness' by Sunandini Sen.

"I'm so happy to have participated in this programme," said Janvi Barman. "Every time I join, it feels like my writing gets better and better."

Daily Life Is Being Taken for Granted

Aarya Jain Baldawa



Every day, we take many things for granted, from our houses to our showers. There was a time, only a decade or two ago, when our families, and others, struggled to save up for basic house repairs. Today, even with inflation, we can afford multiple devices, OTT subscriptions and more.

“Back in my day, we had a strict lifestyle, but still had time to spend with family and friends,” says Ms Shwetha Sulegai, a teacher at Oberoi International School. She informed us that her sibling and she used to listen to the radio and study for exams at home. She also said that they used to help out with their father’s work and spend time with the elderly in the house. If you compare that to the children of the new generations, then you would see that they spend hours daily on iPads and have barely any connection to their family or the elderly. After school, they are glued to the screen and get addicted easily.

One more thing that has evidently changed is how schoolwork makes an impact on children’s lives. Earlier, schools were structured and were strict about uniform. According to my mother, “Girls had to tie their hair in braids with only black ribbons.” Schools also had rote learning, a memorisation technique based on repetition, and if you forgot something, like your textbook, then you would be shamed and would get something called a remark, which was a way of getting punished. Today, our schools have no homework, fewer exams, and definitely not punishments. We have playtimes and school lunches which we rarely appreciate.

As times change, we complain about the minor faults in our lives and forget to think about how privileged this generation is compared to the others. We also ignore the fact that life is better than it was, and still seems to be taking a turn for the better.

A photograph showing the silhouettes of two children holding hands on a grassy cliff overlooking the ocean. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, and the water is a deep blue. The children are positioned in the middle ground, with the ocean extending to the horizon behind them.

A Strange Connection

Janvi Barman

There's a lot of love in the world. The loyal love of a friend, the nurturing love of a mentor, the intimate love of a partner. A little less commonly, the love a father feels for a barbecue, the love iron-deficient individuals have for chewing ice, even the Stockholm kind of love felt for one's kidnapper. But can any phenomenon be stranger than the love between siblings? Is love even the word for it?

God knows my sister and I fight—God and everyone else who's ever had the displeasure of living with us. I'd like to think we're better than we were at six and twelve, perhaps—we no longer hit each other and we apologise without needing motherly intervention. But we argue nonetheless. Usually over a borrowed highlighter palette, a pair of stolen socks, an obnoxious joke, an unnecessarily mean thing to say. One snaps; the other feels bad; both apologise; both move on.

Still, I'd consider her one of my best friends. But I don't argue with other people I hold close nearly as much as I do with her, not my friends, my mom, my dad or my cousins. So are all siblings this way? And what keeps us together through the endless feuds and fighting?

So I gathered some of my peers and had them answer a few questions about their sibling dynamic. How open were they with each other? How often did they fight? How did they resolve conflict?

My 'study' reaped interesting results. I initially expected siblings with a closer age gap to be less secretive, but this was not the case. Two participants with the same sibling age gap touched upon the topic in polar opposite ways. One said, "Quite open, honestly. I think I tell her quite a bit," whereas the other replied, "We do not feel like we can share much about our lives with each other."

The first participant is the same gender as her sibling and the second isn't. So I wondered if the gender of a sibling was a dominant factor in the sibling dynamic. But upon asking those with differently gendered siblings if they thought they would be closer if they were the same gender, I was met with a "Not really," a "Probably?" and a "Yes. 100%".

The question "Do you ever wish you were closer or farther in age?" was an interesting one as two people with siblings of the same age difference had opposing answers, and five people with sibling age gaps of 60 seconds, two years, three years, six years and eight years respectively all described their sibling relationship as having "the perfect age gap".

I did discover one recurring opinion. I asked the participants to describe their sibling relationship in three words. Several participants described their relationship with their sibling as one of 'love' and 'hate'. Others conveyed the same message with 'chaotic' and 'weird'. Another definitive pattern I found was that everyone argues, all the time, about the pettiest things. And an overwhelming majority of the time, siblings don't resolve trivial feuds, they just quietly, mutually agree to move on, with a murmured 'sorry' at the absolute most. There seems to be an unspoken, enigmatic acceptance of 'this doesn't really matter so let's move on' that exists between siblings fresh out of a fight that not even siblings themselves can fully explain. As one participant puts it, "It just does ... an automatic resolve." Another says, "Sometimes we talk, other times it just ... happens. I don't know."

I think there's a reason we silently agree to move on. No matter how many socks they steal, how much of your food they eat or how often they snag your phone charger, you're stuck with your sibling. It's redundant to hold a grudge against the person you fall back on, in whatever form. That's what sets a sibling bond apart from any other kind.

The sibling relationship is a complex and indecipherable thing, to me, at least, but I think many would agree with me when I say that there are very few things I would put before mine.



The Monkey Conflict

Zaheer Vakeel

Hootie fought against old haunting memories. Every night his dreams turned into a torture session. He would relive the nightmare: his dear brother taken during the Monkey Conflict.

Garnia had gone from peaceful to chaotic. The monkeys, wild animals, had gotten smarter due to some weird force. They figured out how to talk to each other, make plans, and turn nature into a weapon. What used to be quiet trees in the forest were now being thrown like spears, and the ground itself shook from their bomb blasts.

Hootie, scarred from war, lived in a village that took heavy hits from monkey raids. That lively place had turned into a hollow version of what it once was, spooked by dread and not sure what would come next. The townsfolk were tough, but tired of always fighting to keep going.

But Hootie stood out. A deep need to get even kept him moving. He would spend his days getting better at fighting and staying alive. Nighttime brought him bad dreams, yet they pushed him harder. He figured facing old ghosts was the only way he'd get any rest.





Kairo, a monkey strategist, led his troop on a raid into their town one day. The locals put up a fight, but sheer numbers and better monkey strategies outweighed their courage. Except for Hote; he stood tall. With an almost scary passion, each of his actions showed his rock-solid determination.

Hote fought hard in a wild brawl; he got hurt but wouldn't back down. In a last all-out push, he managed to beat Kairo, the big boss of the simian forces. Winning felt mixed for Hote. He'd gotten justice for his brother, yet the struggle was still on.

Hote wounded, grasped the idea that true peace wouldn't emerge from violence. He grasped the fact the monkeys, while off-track in their actions, were also harmed by a more significant force. With a fresh goal, he committed his existence to tracking down a nonviolent answer. He sought a method to close the gap between humans and monkeys.

The path Hote took was tough and filled with hardship. He ventured deep into the lands where the monkeys lived risking his safety .

He mastered their speech, got what scared them, and earned their respect. Humans and monkeys, who used to be fierce foes, formed a pact. They stood together to face a shared danger.

When the conflict came to a halt, it wasn't due to a last clash but because folks saw eye to eye. Hote previously driven by revenge, turned into a beacon of optimism and coming together. His story is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always a chance for peace.

Narrative Verse

Megara's Revenge

Sunandini Sen

You were the sun, the centre of it all,
I was a mere star, tiny and small.
Arrogant, you strolled into Father's hall.
I remember how you looked, rugged and tall.
I wanted children, to Hera I did pray,
I wanted to get married, but not this way,
Being a woman, I didn't have a say,
My Father's wish, I had to obey.
Of course, Father did not understand,
You agreed to kill the Minyans for my hand.
You drove them all out of our land,
Then, your rightful wife, you did demand.
I, Megara, was forced to wed,
Herakles, a good man, or so they said.
If only I'd known what lay ahead,
How me and my children would end up dead.
I didn't know that, I had to wait and see.
I'm sure you loved our children and me,
You were a good father, you tried to be,
We lived for some time, happily.
It was a normal dinner, a normal night,
With you telling stories of your might,
I never imagined the horrific sight
That I would see that fateful night.
Maybe it was anger, maybe it was wine,
Something I said, some words of mine.
Maybe a god's hand, something divine,
Driving you to the edge, it was their design.

Merciless, you went in for the kill,
Our children died, their blood did spill,
You threw me in the fire, to burn and grill,
After this slaughter, did you have your fill
Of murder? Traitor, slayer of your wife,
Killer of your family, taker of my life!
You made a choice as you picked up the knife
And brought upon yourself lifelong strife.
I cursed you as I died, many years ago,
That everyone you loved would soon go
Into Death's embrace, now you know
It was I, Megara, who cursed you so.



Justice

Aarya Jain Baldawa

Long ago, when magic was alive,
there was a little girl, all of age five.
She dreamt of a kingdom, for her to rule,
but everyone thought that she was a fool.
"A girl owning a kingdom, as if!"
So she pushed the king off a cliff.
"Now that the ancient king is dead,
I shall rule this kingdom," she blatantly said,
The citizens were angry, and started a war,
"A war, well, I ain't four!"
She charged and fell into a ravine
The people said, "Goodbye, Queen."

Where the Shoe Pinches

Nirai Iniyar

"Stupid God," muttered a ragged looking boy as He stomped out from behind an alleyway, "with Her stupid bet about ancient Rome and Her stupid smiling--"

A cat hissed at Him, baring its fangs. He raised an unimpressed eyebrow at it. Then, without warning, His face shifted into something horribly deformed and unfathomable like from the shadows of a nightmare and He snarled, making it screech and race off.

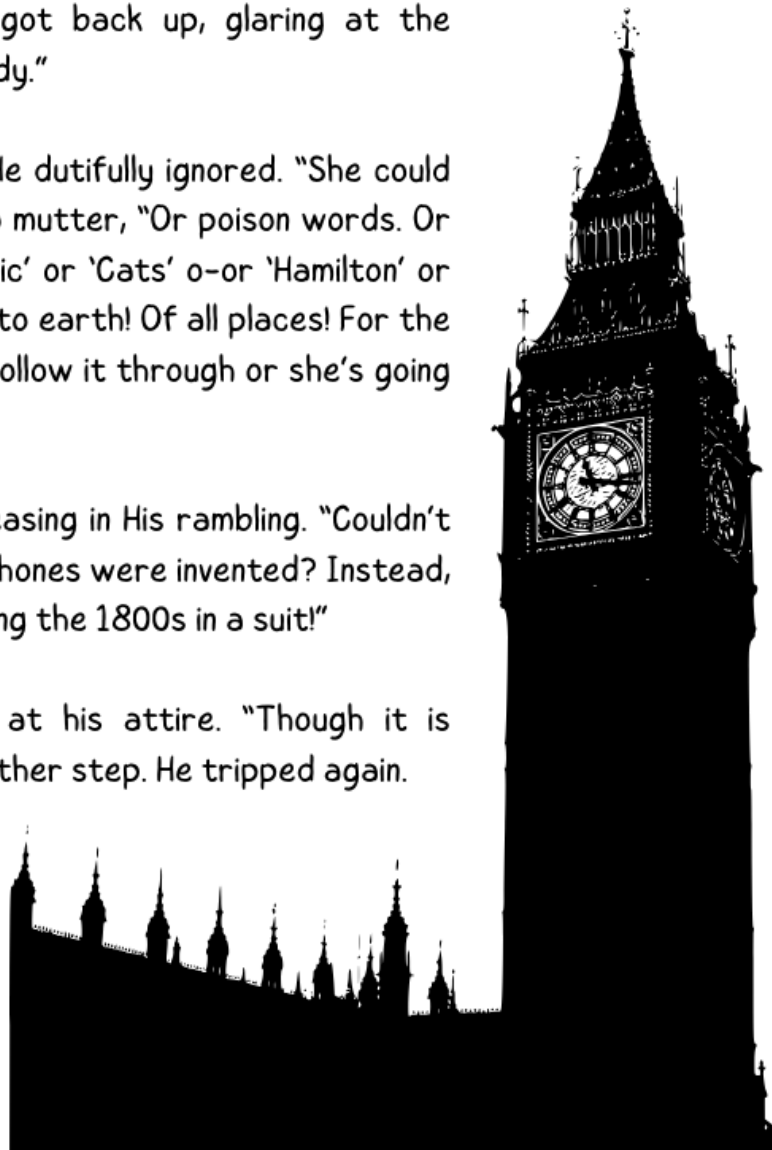
The boy smirked, His features returning to their previous state, and he took a step forward before tripping over a pipe. He got back up, glaring at the offending piece of metal. "Stupid corporal body."

A passerby gave Him a strange look, which He dutifully ignored. "She could have told me to bottle time." He continued to mutter, "Or poison words. Or even sing something from 'The Sound of Music' or 'Cats' o-or 'Hamilton' or whatever it is! But nooo, She had to send me to earth! Of all places! For the most unpredictable day ever! And I have to follow it through or she's going to leave me here!"

He kicked a rock off the pavement, never ceasing in His rambling. "Couldn't She have stranded me in a time after smartphones were invented? Instead, I'm stuck in the middle of Central London during the 1800s in a suit!"

Then He paused, giving a thoughtful look at his attire. "Though it is comfortable," He admitted before taking another step. He tripped again.

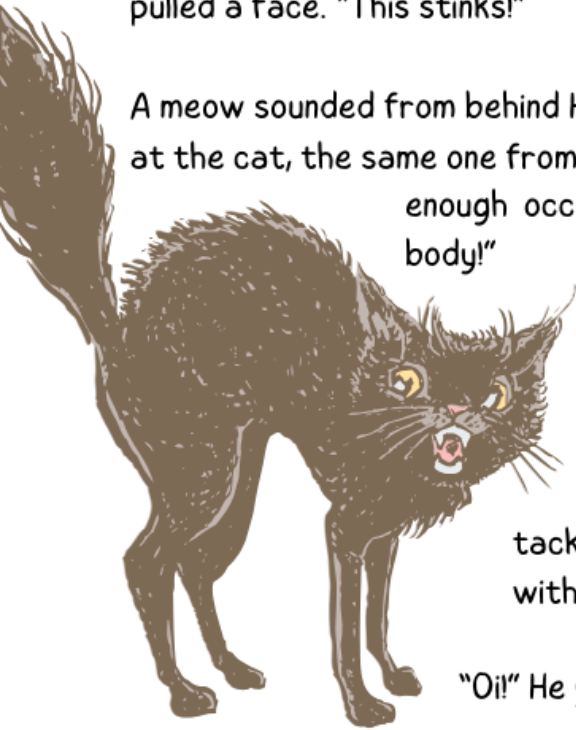
"Satan!" He swore, stumbling back up. With a huff, He shifted His tie, tightening it before turning His eyes to the ground.



Story

"Oh great." He winced, hastily taking off a soaked black shoe and staring at it. Then He pulled a face. "This stinks!"

A meow sounded from behind Him, making Him turn around, eyes narrowed. "No," He snapped at the cat, the same one from earlier. "Shoo! Shoo, shoo, go away! Bad kittie! I haven't got enough occult power in storage to chase you off--not in this stupid body!"



It scowled at Him, making the boy snort. "I can look grumpy too," He mumbled.

Apparently, this was the last straw for the cat, as it tackled Him to the ground and bit into His shoe, scurrying off with it hastily.

"Oii!" He yelled, chasing after it. "Come back here, you miserable cat!"

What a fabulous day this was turning out to be.



Michael Grem owned what he would have liked to believe was the most successful hat shop in London. Whether that was true or not is an entirely different story.

As usual, the London sky was dark despite it being lunchtime. Mrs Sommers had come in for another repair of her bonnet and had paid him rather handsomely. As for Mr Jenkins, he had got a lovely top hat and wished to come back next week for the new shipment.

All in all, it was shaping up to be a rather lovely day so far.

The bell chimed, signalling a new customer. Michael looked up from the counter, holding his glasses atop his nose bridge in one hand and his old measuring tape in the other.

He didn't get many young customers, certainly not ones that came alone and willingly to his hat shop. Every once in a while he might see the son of a duke or one of the landowners from down south unwillingly dragged in for a new hat, but that was about it.

This boy was certainly not the son of a duke. He wore a simple suit, and looked incredibly ruffled, bothered and out of place. He was half-limping, one of his feet covered by nothing but a dripping wet sock.

The strange boy snapped his fingers, and the door slammed shut with such force, the windows rattled. One of Michael's prized purple feather hats even dropped to the floor.

How strange! He didn't believe that the weather forecast had said anything about winds.

Michael fixed a smile onto his face. "How may I help you?" he beamed.

The boy gave him a fierce glare, startling the man. Before Michael could demand (in a polite fashion, mind you) what on earth the little hooligan was up to, he limped in, eyeing the shop with narrowed eyes.

"Hats," he muttered. "That's all you've got?"

"This is a hat shop," said Michael, a little miffed.

"Then tell me where the shoe shop is," the boy snapped back.

"You'll find one in the next street," he said. "Bloombergs."

"Brilliant," said the boy absentmindedly. He was already halfway out the door. "Great, thanks."

"It was a pleasure," said Michael kindly. "Have a good da--"

The boy snapped once more, and the door slammed again, rattling his little shop. The hatter frowned at this.

"How rude," Michael thought out loud, "and such a funny accent too! Why, he must be American!"



Story

The boy was not having a good day.

It was only three in the afternoon and it was safe to say He was having a terrible day. A horrible day. A horrendous day. A frightful day. A--

He tripped over another puddle.

"Oh, for Satan's sake!"

And Bloombergs was closed.



Elsa Silverstein hobbled her way to her apartment, walking stick in hand. She had just spent a lovely day with her grandson and was quite ready to return home to a nice cuppa. As she walked in the setting evening sun, she bumped into a rather extraordinary looking gentleman.

"Terribly sorry!" she squeaked out, because it was only polite to do so.

"Do you happen to know where the nearest shoe shop is?" he asked stiffly, shifting in the same place. It was only then Elsa noticed him hopping about on one foot, only a single muddy black shoe on one of his feet.

"Oh, you poor thing!" she exclaimed. "You lost a shoe? It's a terrible shame; would you like a cuppa?"

The young gentleman--quite young, now that she took notice--gave her a strange sort of smile. Why, it almost looked stiff! "No thank you."

"Oh please," waved off Elsa. "I insist. You must've been walking around for hours without one. Let me get you a cuppa; my apartment is right here."

"I don't drink tea," said the boy, a too-wide smile fixed on his face. "Now, about the neares--"



"Oh, but I must offer you a cuppa," continued Elsa. "And you're in London now! You must most positively try my tea. Are you from America, young man?"

"I'm not interested in tea," he hissed at her funnily.

She laughed. "Oh, you sweet thing! You will love my tea, I assure you. You'll give up all of that American nonsense about coffee once you taste it. Now come on, my apartment is this way and--"

Elsa turned around, astonished to no longer see the lovely young fellow. "Shame!" she said mournfully. "What a lovely young man he was, especially for an American!"



The boy vowed never to talk to grandmothers again.

"Too nice," He muttered unhappily, kicking a pebble with His one shoe. "Too insistent."

He skidded over muddy soil, falling flat on his back in a darkly lit corner.

"Never mind," He told Himself. "I should have gone for tea."

And He really did like tea. It was one of the nicer things that humans had invented.



"Oi, Sally!" called out Butch to his boss.

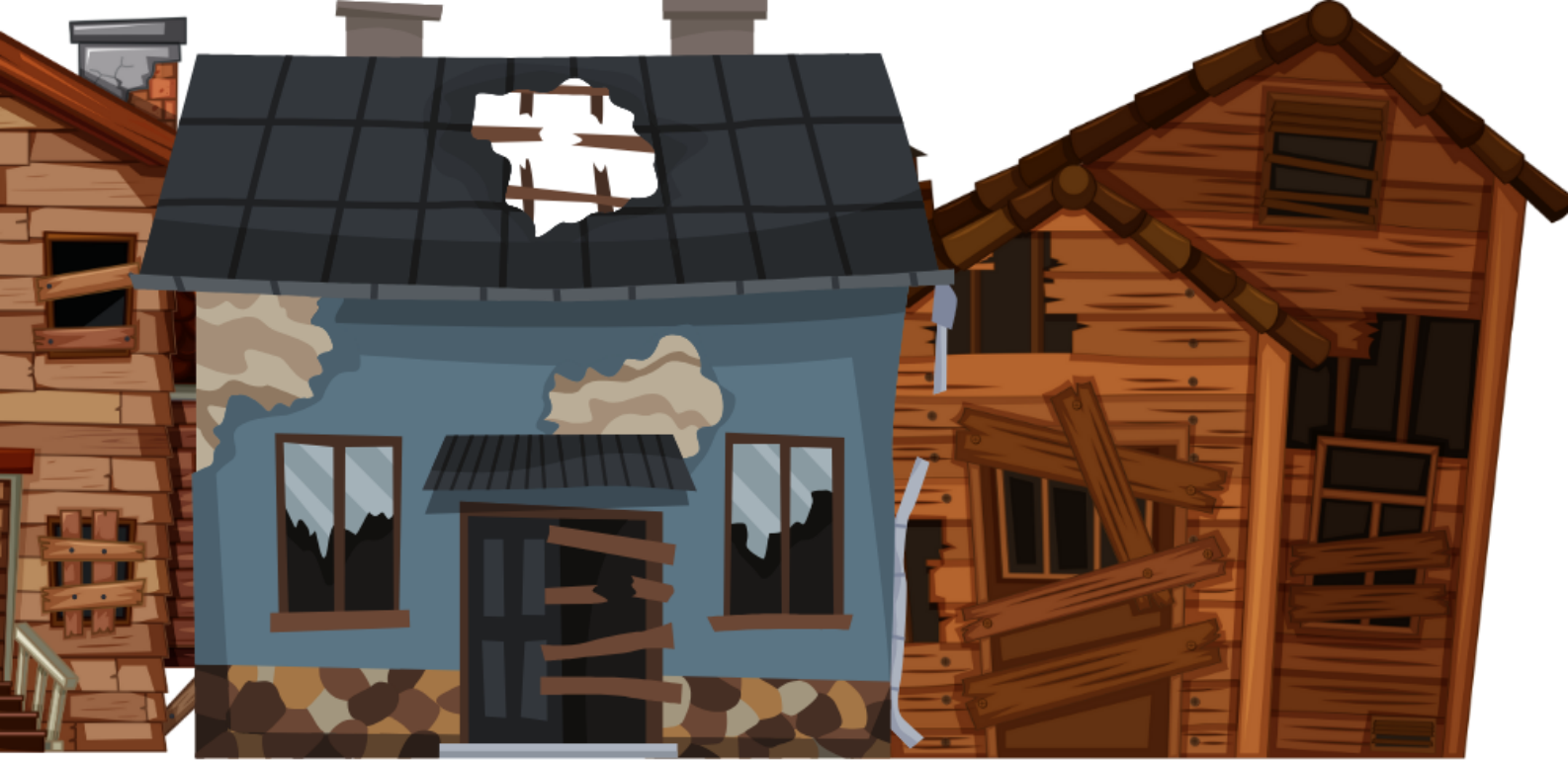
In response, she took a long drag from her pipe, blowing out a stormy grey cloud as she drawled, "Yeah?"

"We caught a rich one."

Sally's eyes snapped open at this. A crooked grin twisted alongside the scars on her face as she sat up, expression piqued with interest. "A rich one?" she smirked.

Butch--her ever so faithful first mate--gave a low whistle. "C'mon out boys!"





There were echoes of jeers and howls and whoops as they entered the street, each sound ringing off the rundown buildings in a poor quarter of London. This was her gang. These were her comrades.

And finally, they'd found something fun.

They were yanking a boy in; he couldn't have been older than her. An old sack was tied around his head and limbs--nothing but bones--grabbed by a boy each, holding him firmly in place as he hopped around.

Sally shrugged. "Toss 'im down."

They threw him to the ground, letting him scramble like a mouse hiding from a cat. Sally grinned, pulling the sack over his head. The girl peered at him, taking another long drag of her pipe. After she was done, she loaded her gun, a low click sounding as she put in a new cartridge.

"So," she asked calmly, "what brings you round here?"

Her gang howled, shadowing over the two of them menacingly.

The dishevelled boy raised his hands in surrender. "Look," he said, "I'm not in the mood to perform a miracle--especially since my sister will never let it go if I did, because you know, her domain--and I am certainly not in the mood to get jumped by half-witted gangster thugs."

"This half-witted gangster thug's got a gun," Sally reminded him.

"How fascinating!" snarked the boy, before his eyes landed on the ground. "I am absolutely trembling at the sight of--oh, thank Satan, you have good shoes!"

"What?"

"Well, there's no point in going through all the trouble of getting kidnapped if I don't get a shoe!"

"No fancy boy loses his shoe." Sally shot an accusing look at her second in command.

"Fancy boy?" the boy squawked.

Sally hefted him up, holding him by the collar as she held her gun to his head. "And now that I think about it, you don't look like any spoiled brat I've ever seen." She paused. "You American?"

"Why does everyone think that?" he groaned.

"What about money? Got any?" she demanded. "Valuables? Family heirlooms?"

"I look that rich?" asked the boy, baffled.

Sally glared, "Butch!" she warned. A figure on the side shuffled uncomfortably.

"You can let me go," offered the boy. "You know, since they're the incompetent ones." She gave him a thoughtful look, as if she were almost considering it.

Then she raised her hand, a single gunshot firing through the air. Her gang flinched.

Butch stepped forward hastily, apologies falling from his lips as he stammered out explanations. Sally didn't flinch as she shot him either.

"Fake-Eye," she called out to the trembling figure in the shadows, "you're my new second."



Story



"Inconveniently disincorporated then?" a girl asked the boy. Both of Them were sitting on the edge of nothing, staring out into blank space.

"No need to be smug about it," He pouted. "And in my defence, humans are mad! Absolutely unpredictable!" Now, on the edge of nothing, He looked everything but corporal.

"I will be smug about it," the girl promised. "And in my defence, I did say the most unpredictable day you've ever had."

"You could've done anything," the boy snapped grumpily, lying on His back, legs dangling over the edge. "But you had to send me to earth. To humans. Who are absolutely impossible."

"Because I could do anything," She grinned, mimicking his position. "We had a deal, didn't we?"

Lucifer rolled His eyes at His sister. "I'm never gambling with you again."

God's offended squawk echoed through the worlds.

The Magic Box

Aarya Jain Baldawa

I will put into the box
The surging sound of crashing waves,
Seven seashells from the southern seas
The pretty turquoise of the calm reef

I will put into the box
A neon blue Samezu shark,
Endless beach access
My floppy, precious bunny

I will put into the box,
The feel of soft sand, against my palms
That taste of my nani's dhokla
A dose of my dad's humility

I will put into the box
The handwritten books from the Inkworld,
The smell of a ripe mango, ready to be cut
And that one taste of acceptance



Aarav Khandelia

I will put into the box
The crashing of ocean waves on the golden sand
Cotton candy and cranky campers
The golden and pink of the horizon

I will put into the box
A knowledgeable sphinx staring sternly
Unlimited trips to Hawaii
My precious stuffed toys, Stitches 1 and Stitches 2

I will put into the box
Golden autumn leaves floating gently from the trees
The crisp golden crust from a warm pizza
My parent's personality which never minds a suggestion

I will put into the box
All my books about the fat and humorous cat Garfield
The sweet and fulfilling smell of bright red roses
Forever happiness and peace

WHAT'S THIS
ABOUT?

Inspired by "The
Magic Box" by Kit
Wright, we wrote
list poems of our
own!



A Secret Garden

Aarav Khandelia

A rumour was spreading speedily through the town of Breckenford that there was a secret garden not far from the North Marina. Kids were seen zooming towards the North Marina as their parents yelled, "Stop, you might get hurt."

But the kids didn't care; they continued running. After the kids returned from their adventure they excitedly yelled to the news reporter, "We swear that the garden can grant you one wish! All we had to do was pluck some pink coloured thing called Trunkleweed, no catches!" They showed their uncrossed fingers, toes, and the rest of their bodies. Regardless of all of these promises, it just seemed too good to be true, so I decided to hike to the secret garden. Little did I know, I was headed for the craziest seventy-two hours of my life ...



As I walked to the top of the hill I noticed all sorts of birds filled with billions of colours, their wings dark, and their bodies light. In addition, the roses of so many different colours brought a mystical feel to my heart. It was then that I realised how magical this garden would actually be. In the evening, I stopped to rest next to a nearby tree, but this was no ordinary

tree; I heard its branches softly and hypnotically whispering to each other. I sat and started to enjoy the tranquillity of this beautiful hill. As I took a bite of my warm banana bread, I noticed orange and purple hues beginning to appear over the distant horizon. I realised that I had been resting for far longer than I had expected and the sun was starting to set. I decided that I would be sleeping here tonight. I was just settling into a comfortable position when a bright yellow bird came and sat on my arm. It let out a cute little chirp and then snuggled up close to me. "Hey little guy," I said softly, "Are you hungry?"

It replied in the most adorable voice imaginable, one that filled my heart with confetti, "Yes, I have not eaten in days, because I was sheltering myself from the harsh storm which was raging through." So it cuddled up near me and I fed it my mac and cheese, which I had saved up for later. After eating for a while, we fell asleep under the starry night. "Tweet," the bright yellow bird said, "time to get up."



I groaned, "Five more minutes."

"Nopey dopey, if we want to reach the secret garden, we have to leave now," the bird squeaked.

I jolted awake. "How do you know I am going to the secret garden?"

"I can mind read!" It laughed. "Just kidding! I know because you mumble a lot in your sleep," it explained. So we set off on our journey. On the way the atmosphere kept getting more and more magical. For instance, we saw rainbow unicorns galloping across the wide open plains; we also saw a bright red phoenix flying high and proud above us. After we hiked for about another hour we reached the secret garden. The garden had roses of at least a hundred different colours and looked a bit like a rainbow hedge maze. As we entered, it became a whole new world. There was the coolest fountain ever, which sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow; there was a rope course so high in the sky I swear it was touching space! But the best part was the lush rainforest that was home to billions and billions of magical creatures. But remembering to stay on task, the bird and I navigated to the tree in the garden which could grant you one wish. But to our surprise, we saw a dragon guarding the tree.

"Who goes there? If you are here for the wish, you have to bring me some Trunkleweed, actually no, you two seem more capable than those children who came earlier, I challenge you to bring me a jick-jack jack pearl in under fourteen hours or else you will be my supper," the dragon thundered.

I turned around and asked my bird friend, "What in the world is a jick-jack pearl?"

"A jick-jack pearl can only be found at the bottom of the Aegean Sea." My friend glanced at the crystal clear water at the horizon. "The only way we will be able to find it is by eating some Trunkleweed so that we can breathe underwater, and with only fourteen hours remaining, there is little to no chance of finding the jick-jack pearl!"



Story

"We have to try," I said. "If we don't get the jick-jack pearl, we will be the dragon's supper!" So we decided to hike to the Aegean Sea. When we reached the beach, I noticed pink stems growing out of the sand.

"That, my friend, is Trunkleweed," my bird friend told me.

"We have to eat that? It looks disgusting!" I complained loudly.

"Don't worry, it tastes like strawberries," he smiled. So both of us picked up a weed and munched on it.

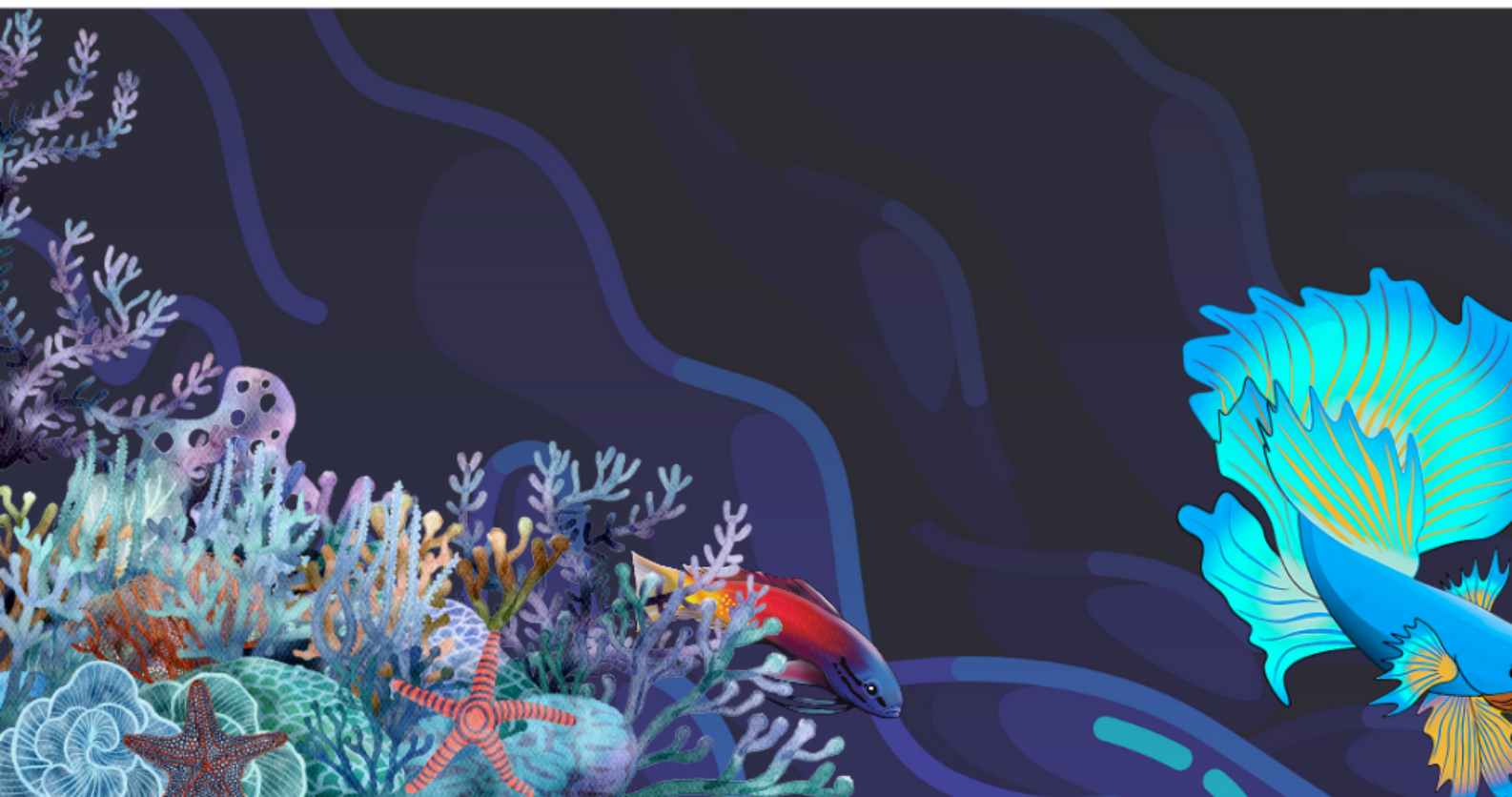
"This is delicious," I exclaimed.

"I told you!" My bird friend winked.

After we finished eating the weed, just as we were about to dive into the water, I asked my bird friend, "Wait, since we might be underwater for over ten hours, shouldn't we take something to eat?"

"Good point, remember the Mac 'n' Cheese you gave me the day we met? There's still a little bit left, we could take that," he suggested.

"That's a great idea, but how do we keep it from getting wet?" I wondered.



"I could keep it in my feathers. I do have a little magic in my body, so I have lots of room! Plus, my feathers are protected from the water because we ate the Trunkleweed." Without saying another word, my bird friend tucked the Mac 'n' Cheese into his feathers and we dove into the water.

Billions of fish surrounded me. I stared at them in awe. My friend nudged me, "We don't have much time." So we continued on our journey to find the jick-jack pearl. We swam deeper and deeper into the Aegean Sea and then I saw a glittering light. It was the magic pearl!

"I think I may have found it!" I stared at the pearl in awe. We didn't waste any more time. We swam to the pearl, but just as I was about to pick it up, a purple sea monster roared. "What in the world is that?" I screeched.

"Swim for your life; that's a Kraken," my bird friend wailed. So we swam as fast as our arms and legs could take us.

"How will we defeat the Kraken and get the pearl?" I yelled over the racket the Kraken was making.

"Krakens hate cheese; if you feed it cheese, it will go and sulk at the bottom of the ocean," he squeaked back.

"But where will we find cheese?" I yelled desperately.



Story



"Remember that Mac 'n' Cheese you gave me? It had tons of cheese; the Kraken will hate it," he chirped in glee.

"Genius," I murmured in awe.

"Stop staring, the Kraken will eat us," my bird friend screeched.

"Oh right, sorry," I blinked. He handed the Mac 'n' Cheese to me, and I threw it at the Kraken. It flew straight into his mouth.

"Blegh, blegh," the Kraken vomited. Then, slowly but surely, the Kraken started to sink.

"We did it, we defeated a Kraken! Nobody who's seen a Kraken has lived to tell the tale." My bird friend gaped.

"Come on, we need to swim, we need to get our wish! Please don't dawdle." My bird friend and I rushed back to the garden. We handed over the pearl to the dragon and sighed with pleasure.

"Well done! I didn't think you had it in you." The dragon sounded impressed. "Tell me. What's your wish?"

"I wish to become part of the fantastical world like my bird friend here, I want to live in this garden forever," I said.

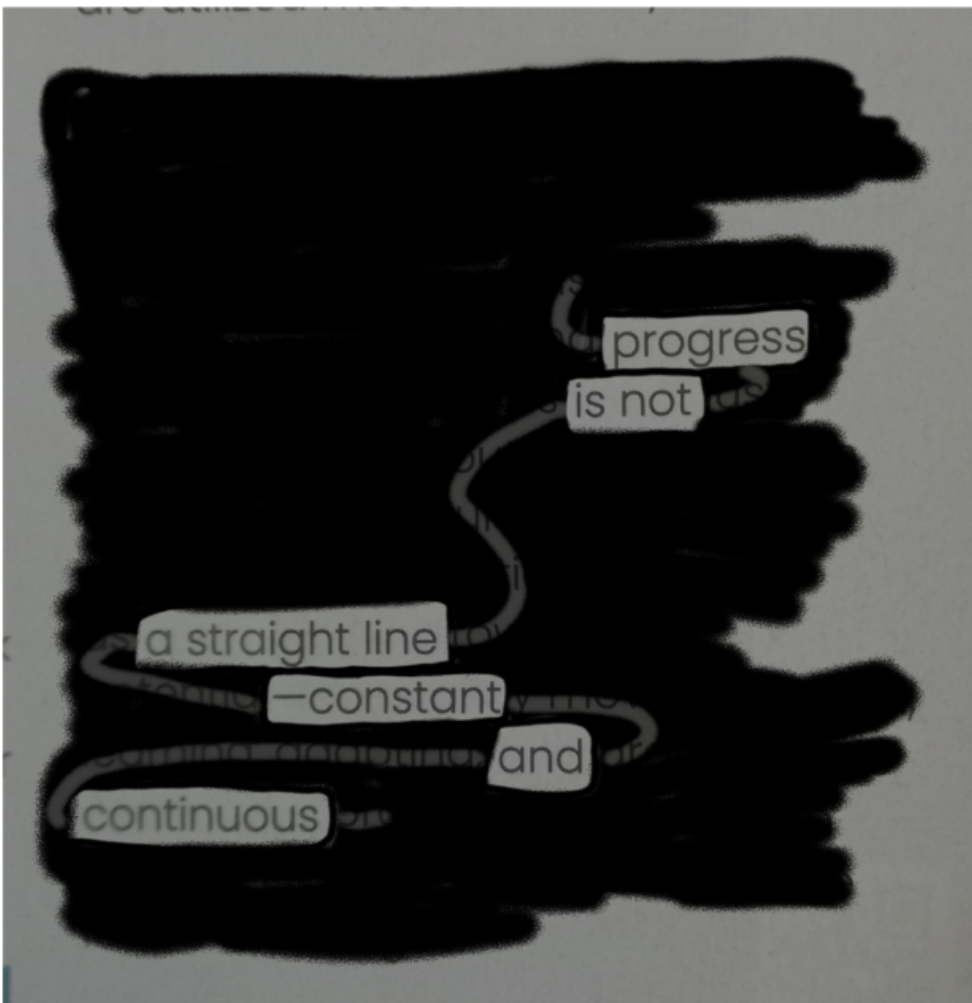
"Done," the dragon smiled.

So I lived with my bird friend happily ever after in the garden of infinite dreams and wishes.

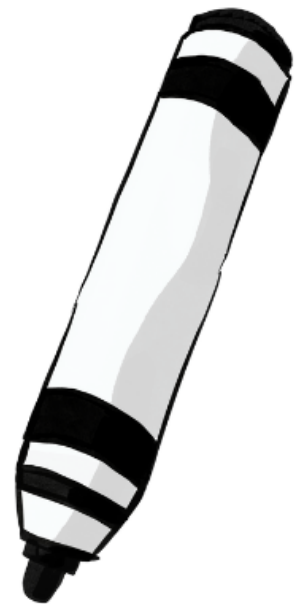
Blackout Poetry



Nirai Iniyon



Janvi Barman



WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

Blackout poetry allows you to create poetry without writing a single word. You merely black out words in an existing text to create something new!



The Hamster's Wealth

Aarya Jain Baldawa

Pecunia Dives was spoilt from the day she was born, and it showed. A hamster with diamond-studded shoes was not exactly a common sight, even in the all-rich town of Windsor.

One day, Ms Larvirue noticed a letter on the floor. "A letter, how peculiar! I thought it was all email nowadays," she muttered. "Anyhoo, is that the Guinness World Record stamp?" She suddenly gasped, "Oh my, Pecunia, you've won an award! Maid, book the 7-star hotel, we're going to LONDON."

Soon, they were packed, with gold bars, money and expensive clothes.

On the morning of the award ceremony, Pecunia and Ms Larvirue left for the records and forgot to lock Pecunia's hotel room. That day, one gold bar went missing. A witness from the next door suite, Ms Checkunia, said after they left, that only two people had entered the room: the cleaning person and a person with flyers in big tote bags.

"Either of them could have committed the crime because both of them have motives and both of them have space to keep the gold," said Chief Polygeron.

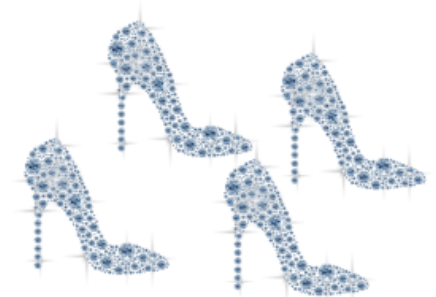
But as soon as the police entered, Ms Checkunia hurried to the checkout desk.

"As a precautionary measure, we'd like to check your bag. Could I open it?" an officer said.

Ms Checkunia bit her lip. "Uh, no,"

"OPEN IT," the officer demanded.

She hesitantly opened her bag and revealed a gold bar. Ms Larvirue gasped. "Thank you, dear police. I am glad my Pecunia's wealth has not fallen into another's hands."



Golden Shovel Poetry

We Climb (after "Under the Poet Tree" by Shel Silverstein)

Nirai Iniyar

Every day, I sit
By the old fire and
Watch it crackle till a dream
Curls around the logs and
Together, up to the stars, we climb.

Inspiration (after "Under the Poet Tree" by Shel Silverstein)

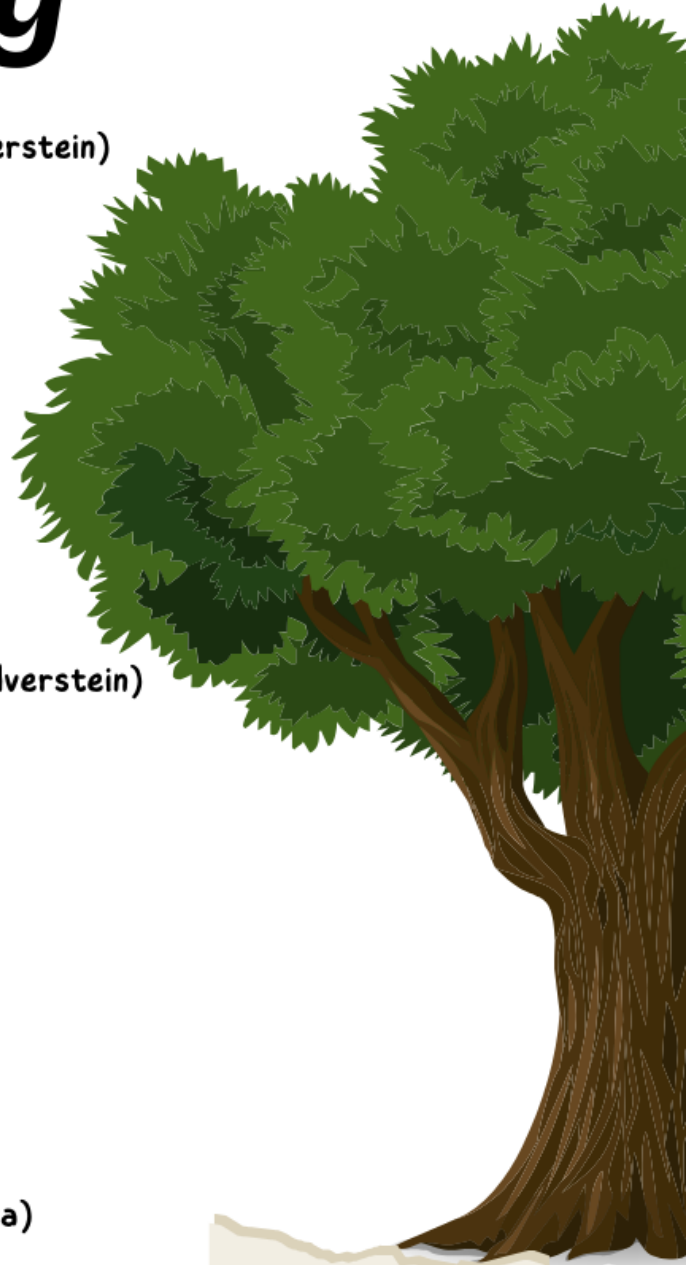
Ronikaa Vijan

With the gentle wind, the branches
swayed. The white puff of
the dandelion drifted away. The
weather? Ideal for a poet
As a page fluttered under the oak tree.

Music (after "Night Dance" by Devangshi Duttagupta)

Janvi Barman

late one night, my phone screen's glow
bestows upon me, a
new album to explore--soothing
vocals, explosive beats, a calming
melody, a foot-tapping tune



WHAT'S THIS
ABOUT?

Created by Terrance
Hayes, golden shovel
poetry takes a line from a
poem and uses each word
in the line as the end word
in consecutive lines of a
new poem.

More Reviews



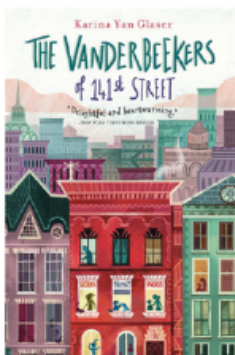
The Perfect Curl-Up-on-Your-Couch Read

Nirai Iniyan

Cosy, heartwarming and an absolute masterpiece, there has never been a better debut novel. In the world of 'The Vanderbeekers on 141st Street', author Karina Yan Glaser introduces us to a biracial family who have been evicted by their landlord and must leave all they have ever known--by the end of the month. Refusing to accept such a decision, the Vanderbeeker siblings make a plan to get their curmudgeonly landlord to like them. Filled with chaos, Christmas and the warmth only family can provide, this is a stunning piece of work.

Glaser immediately immerses you in the daily life of a street in Harlem. She highlights the different personalities and opinions of the five Vanderbeeker siblings, showcasing how important their neighbourhood is to them. Amongst the quirky and lovable group, you are sure to find someone relatable. The book shows us that while you may have the best intentions at heart, things don't always go right. It also delves into the theme that not everything is as it seems and sometimes, there are things we don't truly understand. While it can be hard to keep track of the characters, they are wonderful people who deserve a good look at.

This is, without a doubt, one of the most perfect holiday reads. It is a book that will make you go back again, delivering the same feeling of comfort and a desire to visit the brownstone house on 141st Street, Harlem over and over.





A Short Film that Keeps You on the Edge of Your Seat

Sunandini Sen

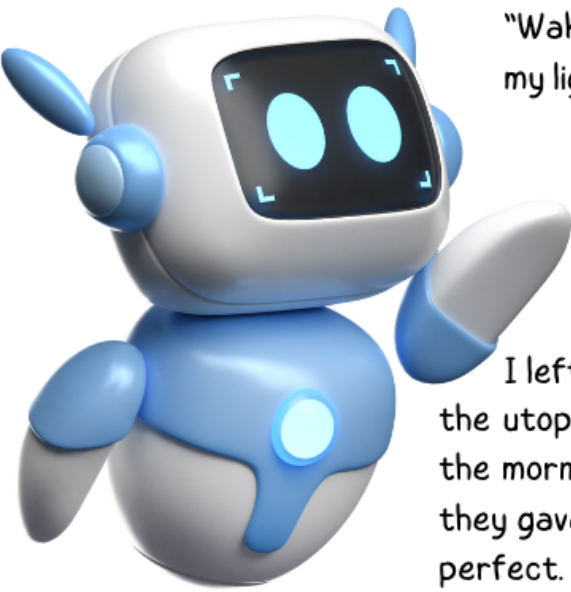
'Ignore it' is a multiple-award winning horror short film, written and directed by Sam Evenson. With a duration of a little less than seven minutes, this short film is about a family who must try to survive a demon in their house, with their own lives at risk. Justin and his older sister Emily, as well as their parents must all ignore it--'it' referring to the malevolent spirit haunting their house, which turns violent whenever its presence is acknowledged. Although it sounds very much like a typical horror movie, it makes for a thrilling watch and a nail-biting experience.

The cinematography is, of course, truly amazing. It's as if the camera angles are showing us the thoughts and emotions of all the characters. The expressions of the actors are well-portrayed, and the dialogues are minimal but precise. The idea for such a film itself is completely fresh and new, unlike anything I've ever seen before. In my opinion, this short film also stands in for a metaphor for mental illness, and we can ignore it for some time, but if we don't confront it soon, in the end, it will have a very negative effect, not only on us, but also on everyone around us.

As a certified horror short film fanatic, I give this short film a 4.5/5 star rating. Definitely worth a watch!

The Day I Created A Monster

Aarav Khandelia



"Wake up Frenrick, today's a very important day in the office," my light blue robot assistant reminded me.

"Thanks Ziran, it's DNA experimenting day today, I can't be late!" As Ziran handed me my cup of swofee, I pulled on my coat.

I left the house in a hurry and sat in my flying car. I glanced at the utopia around me. The shiny, multi-coloured buildings gleamed in the morning sunlight. I smiled. This utopia was because of the aliens; they gave us all this modern tech, and since then everything has been perfect.

After a few minutes I reached an orange coloured glass building which read, "OMICRONICS, WELCOME TO THE FUTURE!" I straightened my hair and walked in. "Morning Annihilate, destroy anything lately?" I grinned.

"Hey, I haven't destroyed anything in days, and the name's Greyback, for your information," Greyback complained loudly.

"I was just kidding, Greyback, are you excited about DNA testing?" I asked Greyback.

"Meh, what about you Frenrick?" Greyback asked me curiously.

"I'm super excited, I would love to see what new species of animals we can make," I replied with complete enthusiasm.

"Bye then," Greyback cheerfully waved. I walked to the brown paned glass door which read, "Biology Section." I closed my eyes and walked into the room.

"Morning Frenrick, ready to make some new animals?" my boss asked me enthusiastically.

"Yes sir, I am going to head over to the DNA plaza and get started," I replied in a formal manner. I walked over to the double helix shaped door and confidently strode in. I went to a cube which sort of looked like a grey telephone booth. As I stepped into it, a flourish of holographic animals surrounded me. "Hm, what should I choose? I know! Let's mix the DNA of a baby rhinoceros and that of an adult goose," I thought to myself. I clicked the charging rhinoceros hologram and chose the option 'baby', then I did the same with the goose, except that I selected the option 'adult' instead. Next, I had to choose the size of the creature. I was sliding the size bar to 'average' but my finger slipped and went to humongous. While this happened, my elbow pushed the button to create the creature! "Oh, no!" I whispered, my eyes widening. What had I done? "STOP!" I yelled uselessly. My shout was drowned out by screams from the lab. I stepped out of the booth.



Suddenly, the creature roared deafeningly and started to ram into every gadget it saw.

"Ahh!" Another round of screams rang around the room.

"Oh no, the Time Machine I invented," I heard one of my colleagues scream.

"Never mind about that," I yelled with panic, "we need to shrink it with a shrink ray!"

"I have a shrink ray," one of my colleagues yelled frantically, "but I won't be able to shoot the creature until it is standing in one place."

Story

"Frenrick, lock it up," said one of my junior co-workers while he dodged a rhino horn.

"How am I supposed to do that? The thing is about as big as a brachiosaurus," I complained softly. Then I remembered something, I had an inflatable steel cage in my pocket. I took it out and threw it at the creature. The creature was trapped in an instant.

"Thank god," all of us sighed in relief. Just as we were about to get the shrink ray to make the creature small, it burst out of the cage by ramming into it. It then jumped out of the building.

"Oh yes, it's gone, now let's have a party," all my colleagues cheered.

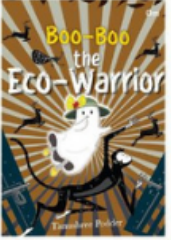
"No," I said firmly, "That thing is going to wreak havoc on the city."

"Oh, come on," they sighed. We all ran to FlashMobile with our shrink ray. We sat in the car and it took off at flash speed. After searching for about ten seconds we spotted the creature. I was about to take out my spare inflatable steel cage when a bag of chips fell out the window. The creature stopped in its tracks and started eating the chips.

"Well that's unexpected," one of my colleagues remarked.

"Well, what are you waiting for Frenrick? Shrink it," another one of my colleagues reminded me. After we shrunk it, the face of our little friend became the logo of OMICRONICS showing how far it has come!





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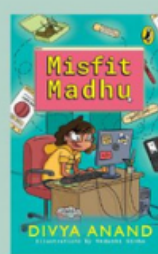
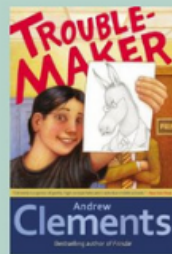
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