

LIMITLESS

TWENTY-ONE INSPIRED WRITERS



CLUB
Q.5
writers

Dedicated to the memory of
(Late) Mrs Seema Agarwal, Founder
Little Angels School, Pilibhit



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TWENTY-ONE INSPIRED WRITERS



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To Our Mother

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

These powerful words of Nelson Mandela were the inspiration for our mother, Seema Agarwal, when she started Little Angels. She wanted the school to be a catalyst to help each student manifest her own passion and give it life. This went beyond academics and extended to music, sports, art—everything.

Limitless is true to that vision, packing the brilliance and writing talent of our students. The writers have stepped outside their comfort zones to grow as individuals.

There couldn't be a better tribute to our mother's legacy, and we are sure she is very proud of this achievement. It also perfectly marks a special milestone for Little Angels, as we celebrate its 25th anniversary.

We congratulate the authors, the fantastic staff of the school and, of course, Quill Club Writers, for bringing this engaging book to life. This grand literary accomplishment adds to the school's grandeur, and we sincerely hope it makes you as proud as we are today.

Hope the stories inspire you and you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

Siddhanth, Aanchal and Ujval

Foreword

On the 25th anniversary of Little Angels, it was only befitting to bring all of you something that not only highlights the talent of our prodigious students, but also reflects their maturity as individuals who are carving out their own thoughts and paths.

Limitless is an endeavour from us to build an institution that goes beyond academics, a place that gives children the ground to fly and the freedom to think. When I read the stories, it gave me assurance that we are moving in the right direction, and I am amazed by the depth of our students' perceptions and horizons that reflect in each story.

They worked hard to bring this to fruition. I personally witnessed the mentoring sessions which helped the students find their own path for their stories and make it compelling for all the readers. I'd like to thank the Quill Club Writers for bringing out the best in our students and for carving a product that finds a permanent place in our school's history.

My heartfelt congratulations to all the young authors, as well as the staff for all their efforts. This idea was an inception and a dream of our founder, Mrs Seema Agarwal, and I am extremely proud that we were able to turn it into a reality.

I'd also like to extend my gratitude to our supporters, the parents, on our milestone anniversary. Your faith in Little Angels has more power than you know, and we cannot thank you enough for it.

Presenting *Limitless!*

Dr Sanjeev Agarwal

Director, Little Angels School



Dr Sanjeev Agarwal

CONTENTS



RUNNING FOR YOUR LIFE | BY AADHYA KUMAR ... 15

Illustrated by Manya Rathore, VIII Orioles

THE SURPRISE SAVIOUR | BY ADDYA SWAROOP ... 23

Illustrated by the author

PASSION FOR PERFECTION | BY ADHYA AGARWAL ... 35

Illustrated by Rashi Niimrani, X Woodpeckers

THE MYSTERIOUS WOMEN | BY ADITI GANGWAR ... 45

Illustrated by Rashi Niimrani, X Woodpeckers

A HELPING HAND | BY ANYA SINGH ... 57

Illustrated by Varshika Kashyap, XI Humanities

A SPLENDID DAWN | BY ARYAN GUPTA... 65

Illustrated by the author

THE TROUBLED MAN | BY DARSH GARG ... 77

Illustrated by Akshat Kumar

THE OVER THINKER | BY HRITIK SAXENA ... 85

Illustrated by Sanskaar Tiwari, IX Orioles

FUN AT WHOSE COST? | BY KAWANGUNN CHAWLA ... 91

Illustrated by Shruti Verma, VIII Woodpeckers

DEADLY WINGS | BY MAYANK GANGWAR ... 101

Illustrated by Varshika Kashyap, XI Humanities

THE UNDEFINED SHADOW | BY MAYANK HARSH VERMA ... 113

Illustrated by Girija Singh, VII Orioles

LURKING DANGER | BY NANDANI GUPTA ... 121

Illustrated by Bushra Khan, XI PCB

THE LITTLE GIRL | BY NISHTHA RATHORE ... 131

Illustrated by Vaishnavi Agarwal, IX Orioles

THE PRODIGAL SON | BY PRIYANSHU KUMAR ... 139

Illustrated by Vanshika Rathi, X Orioles



THE TROUBLESOME TENANTS | BY SAMRIDDI GANGWAR ... 151

Illustrated by Shubhakanshi, VII Woodpeckers

THE TREE IN QUESTION | BY SHRESHTH PRADHAN ... 159

Illustrated by the author

THE STORM OF LIFE | BY SHREYASI VERMA ... 165

Illustrated by Yogyata Singh, IX Woodpeckers

SUCH ELABORATE PLANS | BY SHUBHI SAXENA ... 173

Illustrated by Bushra Khan, XI PCB

DEAD MEN DON'T OWN LAND | BY UDIT PATHAK ... 191

Illustrated by Tanvir Chandra, VII Hoppoes

GRIEF AND GUNPOWDER | BY VIRAJ AGARWAL ... 201

Illustrated by Medhawin Tiwari, XI PCM

MY FIRST FRIEND | BY YASHITA MISHRA ... 209

Illustrated by Bhanu Pratap Singh Dev, XI PCM



RUNNING FOR YOUR LIFE

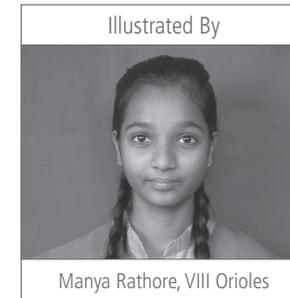
By Aadhya Kumar





I was born on August 6, 2011 in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh. I love desserts, especially, cakes and brownies. I like to sing and dance to English and Punjabi music. And I enjoy reading autobiographies and about ancient India. I aspire to become a doctor when I grow up and not only that, I want to ace the exam and study at AIIMS. My father is a businessman and my mother is a teacher. I feel most happy when I am cozy, the weather is pleasant and there is light around me. I feel people think I am self-centered but I am the opposite inside. I like to

think I am friendly and kind, and if I had to describe myself in one word it would be humble. The two movies that left a mark on me are *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* and *The Lion King*. I love calligraphy and can write for hours. My parents are my world and my sister is my left hand. I love my family and I am grateful for them.



Illustrated By

Manya Rathore, VIII Orioles

The man had everything in life. He had achieved everything a person could want. Success, money, a loving family and a colossal house. And he hadn't only achieve it, he'd earned it. He was a good father, a good son and a good husband. He believed in charity and bringing gifts to the children at the orphanage. The man and his family never forgot to thank God for everything, so they visited the church regularly.

He also enjoyed hunting. He had been doing it for a long time and often hunted animals, not just birds. On the contrary, his wife did not like his hobby and neither did his children. But he wouldn't listen to them, and went on his hunting trips. He would usually kill a wild deer or a goat.

Sometimes, he killed wild animals like a bison. Though not a professional hunter, he still knew all the tricks. He knew how to slyly hide behind the trees and aim his shot. His wife did not like to cook the meat of the animal he had shot down, but she

had no choice in the matter. He didn't just enjoy the game himself but would distribute the meat to his neighbours and his friends. They enjoyed every bite of it.

He also had a habit of keeping the lasting remarks of the animal, whether big or small. He kept it as a trophy of sorts. To sit, and look at it and reminisce the thrill of the hunt.

His wife disagreed. She would fight with him about keeping the head or the neck of that animal as a trophy but he didn't listen and kept doing it. He enjoyed this routine. First, the hunt. Second, the meal. Third, sharing it with others and then looking at the parts of the carcass as a trophy.

One day, he went to the forest, and like always he hid behind a tree and slowly aimed at a deer. But the deer wasn't alone. He was with his baby, a fawn. He aimed and pulled the trigger; but not the deer, his aim was set at the fawn. And he did it just for his enjoyment. Just for the hunt. The poor deer was jumping frantically around her poor child. And the man didn't even pity her, he was just happy his aim was perfect.

Then suddenly, out of nowhere, a woman appeared. She was standing next to the fawn. The man was taken aback. He was shocked, to say the least.

The woman had an even bigger weapon than the man. Her hair was pulled back yet flowing in the breeze and



her dress didn't have any dirt on it. She was clean. Her eyes full of tears, were fixed on the struggling fawn. She walked to the man.

"Why did you do that? Why did you shoot her child?"

"I am fond of hunting. It is my favourite hobby." Eyeing her weapons he said, "By the way, are you a hunter too?"

"I'll answer that question later; but you killed it just for your enjoyment? Don't you care about the fawn's pain or his mother's sadness?"

"Why should I? Do you ever think before killing an animal? I killed it for fun."

He knew this woman wasn't ordinary but didn't know what she really was; had no idea what she could do to him.

She looked at him for a while and said, "Now I'll answer your question. Am I a hunter? No. I am the hunted and this fawn was my child. But now, I am a hunter, because of you. Now, you run. Run and save yourself. Run and save your two children who are waiting for you at cabin. Go, tell them to lock it because I am coming for them."

His face became the image of an animal who knew he was going to lose his life. In the moment, he knew it in his bones who the woman was. Though terrified, he didn't think she would kill him or his children. But he couldn't say for sure, he was scared.

"Run. I don't want to kill you when you're just standing there like that. I want to hunt you, like you are the deer and I am the hunter. And not just you. Your children too. I am coming there."

All doubts vanished, she will kill him and his children. He was as scared as a man buried alive. As if his limbs were possessed, he started to run. He ran and screamed for his life, for his children's lives. He ran as fast as he could for the sake of his children.

She was gliding behind him. Her face dripping with anger. The man reached the cabin and ran to his children, screaming like a wounded animal the whole time.

The woman stopped in front of the cabin. She just stood there. She wasn't going to harm his children; she just wanted him to know what it felt like.

The man begged for forgiveness.

"I made a mistake, please forgive me. I will never hunt any animal. I killed them just for fun and didn't think about their family. I am a horrible person but I will change. I am sorry. Please forgive me. Please, you can kill me but don't kill my children. I love them a lot."

"It's good that you realized your mistake," said the woman. "Don't ever hunt any animal. You must think about its pain and its family."

He thanked the woman for forgiving him and promised her that he would never do such a thing.

The woman turned around and walked into the jungle. She was crying for her poor fawn.



REFLECTIONS

Honestly, I never thought that I'll be able to write a story and be a part of a published book. This was a golden opportunity for each one of us and I am lucky to be a part of this program. It's not easy to pen down your thoughts in the form of a story. I almost lost myself when I heard that I have been selected and started day dreaming of my workshop. Overall, I loved to be a part of it and if I ever get this opportunity again, I would love to take part in it—*Aadhya*

THE SURPRISE SAVIOUR

By Addya Swaroop





I was born on November 21, 2006, in beautiful Pilibhit. My parents are both in business. Singing, painting and listening to music of artists like Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo and Korean pop music are my favourite things to do when I have the time for them. People think of me as a shy and quiet girl who does not talk to anyone. Maybe I am that kind, but I am also a polite and friendly person with a vibrant imaginative mind. I am kind and loyal to those who are close to me. I am a selenophile, I feel most comfortable at night. If I were

to describe myself in one word, it would probably be optimistic. I love to travel and have been to many places. But one of my favourites is Kedarnath. It is heavenly, not only because of its scenic beauty but also because of the peace of mind it gives. I love my hometown, but if I ever get a chance to live in any other place forever, it would surely be in the alluring valleys of northern India. The movies I have loved are *Gunjan Saxena* and *Milkha Singh*. I am hungry most of the time and always crave Indian spicy food.

Somewhere in small village, lived a young and pretty girl named Riona. Eighteen years of a rough life had made Riona tough like a fighter. She came from a poor household. Her parents loved her, but could not spend much time with her. She did not receive the love and affection needed by a child. Despite being a girl with a rather stouthearted, she was also a sweet and kind girl.

She sought what she missed at home in the forests, among wildlife.

Once on a sunny afternoon, Riona sat under a large tree enjoying the beauty of nature. The cool breeze was playing with her silky, sunset orange hair. She suddenly heard a baby's voice calling out to her, "Hi, Riona!"

She was amazed to see the voice come from a little magical turtle. Well, it certainly was not a normal one.

A yellow doe eyed turtle with green spots had appeared out of nowhere. It was surrounded by sparkles. Riona found it beautiful and while she was busy admiring it, she did not know what was happened. The world around her completely changed. She was in a whole new world covered with ground plants creating a fluffy mat to walk on. The skies turned grey and were filled with dark clouds. But, there were no houses, no people, just weird looking, very friendly creatures surrounding her. The turtle who brought her there disappeared and when she started to search for it, she heard a singsong voice saying, "Here I am."

A short, blue, long-eared fellow who wore loose dark clothes, stood there, smiling broadly.

"I am Dodo. I was the turtle and I brought you here."

"But why?" Riona asked.

"Well, we need you and we think you are fit for this job."

Riona was perplexed about the situation she was in. Her mind was in a dilemma. Dodo told Riona that she was brought there to save their beloved prince who was locked inside a cell of a dilapidated castle for many years. He was under a spell that only she could break.

"What spell?" She asked.

"Don't be in such a hurry, I will tell you everything. First take a look at our kingdom. I'll tell you everything,"

said Dodo. Dodo gave her a dress to change into when she went into battle.

Riona adored being there so much. She made up her mind to fight for them. She asked Dodo excitedly, "What was the spell by the way?"

Dodo explained, "We have not seen our prince Erix for the last 15 years. Erix was put in the cage of difficulties by his cruel stepmother Morana. She wanted to rule this world and be the queen. She planned to dethrone our king to fulfil her wish. She did all sorts of wrongs to secretly defeat him. Her misdeeds resulted in the king's death. Everyone declared her the murderer and said that she was a curse for the kingdom. It was decided that she should be thrown away from the world to save the little prince. She could not bear this suffering and put a spell upon our world as well as on the prince. She hated him. She decided to lock him in a room in the castle which is guarded by a large and long tailed white dragon. The dragon is fierce and won't let anyone enter there. We have sent many great warriors of your world to fight him but unfortunately none of them survived."

He continued, "The one who casts a spell also provides a way to break it. So did Morana. This spell can break only if a human brave enough to fight the dragon, tries to set our prince free."

“Wait a minute, so you want me to fight a dragon who has even eaten people?? Have you gone crazy? Why would I risk my life for someone who I don’t even know? Please spare me little master and send me back to my world.”

“Oh please don’t say that, you are our last hope. If Erix can’t come out after 16 years, he will be locked there forever.” said Dodo.

Riona felt bad for the prince and other creatures and decided to stay there and fight for them. She did not know how to fight a dragon, but was fearless and determined. She dressed herself up like a warrior in the dress Dodo gave her. He also provided her a big sword and a stunning black horse with a long mane, a big, strong body, with large feathered wings for endless flights. All her fantasies were coming to life. The three now began to move towards the palace. While they were on their way, Riona asked Dodo that why did he choose her among all the greatest fighters.

“I’ve been searching for people to save us but all the things we needed are present in you. You are kind, brave, fearless and pure just as your name. You were born to be our saviour,” replied Dodo.

“Oh god, you speak so well, did you go to school?” asked Riona.

Now they were ready to take off. The horse spread its wings and the next second, they were between the clouds.



She could not imagine a more fascinating view. All other creatures were praying for them. She had to protect them. A blurred outline of the castle was now visible from the misty sky. They landed next to the castle so that they could secretly enter it without catching the dragon's attention.

For the first time in her life, she did not want to be noticed by anyone. The huge, white with a long tail and large wings was asleep.

She looked at Dodo and they thought it was a golden chance for them to enter and rescue the prince. But nothing can be perfect for long.

There was complete silence, but then, her sword struck the wall of the entrance producing a clink. The dragon suddenly woke up from his sleep, he was up on his feet, his green eyes glaring at Riona. With a great roar, he lunged at her, she climbed the wall with a high jump. He almost smashed into the wall. He shook his wings out and creating a huge wave of wind that made Riona lose her balance. Riona fell over a rock, where half eaten parts of bodies were strewn around. It smelt awful.

She picked a piece which had meat left on it and threw it at the back of the dragon. He turned around for the meat, she took this chance and climbed up the balcony of the first floor carrying another piece of meat. When the dragon turned to the other side, she jumped and landed on his neck.

That was the most heroic task ever done by someone. Dodo was watching all this happen with his mouth open. He was so amazed to see her power. He knew that she was the one for them. She slipped down the neck of the dragon, but immediately grabbed the spikes that went all the way down from his head to his tail. He was confused when he felt something moving on his back, he started to shake himself to shake her off, but Riona held tight and climbed up close to his head and ears. She squeezed his ears to get a grip and noticed a piece of cloth tied on her waist. It was a superhero cape. She tore it off and carefully, all the while gripping his neck with her legs. Then she covered his eyes with the cloth. She loved animals and knew how to calm them down when they got aggressive. The dragon was also an animal, even though from a different universe. He stopped his furious movement and calmed down.

“What am I seeing? What did I just...” exclaimed Dodo.

The dragon turned into a softie. “I won't harm you, if my eyes remain closed. Don't remove this cloth from my eyes,” said the dragon. “I was under a spell, too. I used to be Erix's best friend when we were kids. His stepmother put me under a spell and turned me into this evil dragon who ate countless innocent creatures. Thank you for saving me.”

“Where is your prince and how can I reach him?”

The dragon suggested Riona should find him herself, with her amber coloured eyes.

Riona searched every corner of that massive, abandoned palace of 1000 rooms, different floors and gardens. She thought that it was impossible to find the prince. So, she started to walk out. But her eyes fell on a small gateway in the far corner of the ground floor. She found it suspicious. When she peeped inside, there were stairs leading to what seemed like a basement. She followed them and reached a long and thin hallway that had many cells in a row.

She called out loudly, “Prince Erix, are you here?”

There was no reply. She walked ahead to search for him. All of a sudden, she noticed a huge gate for a single cell. It was no less than a room, not luxurious, but with a lot of space to take a walk. It had a bed, a small shelf of books and a small well for water. No doubt it was Erix’s.

“Who are you? Who sent you here? Morana?” a voice said.

“No, I am here to take you out of this cell,” she replied.

He came close to the bars. A tall, handsome, broad shouldered man with long, blonde hair and ocean blue eyes stood there like a mountain. “Just pick up the key there and unlock it,” he said in a deep voice.

“If it was that easy why didn’t you do it yourself?”

“It was easy for you, not for us.”

Strong winds blew suddenly. Plants and trees bent over.

“Morana has come back,” he said. “Run.”

They ran like wind through the hallway and back to the door. They escaped through the door. Just then, a large rock blocked the gate to the narrow stairs. They got out of the castle and her horse came to pick them up. They jumped up on it and picked Dodo who was waiting anxiously.

“You did it, I am so proud of you,” said Dodo.

Suddenly, there stood a woman with black hair and a gown with embellishments. “You cannot escape till I am here,” said Morana, a hollow echo in her voice.

Riona raised her sword and marked a slight cut on Morana’s arm. Morana screamed in pain. She wore body armour but her arms were exposed.

“Stab her in the heart; the only way to kill her,” said Erix.

Riona trotted in circles around Morana. But she could not be stabbed through the armour. But Erix slashed the string that tied the armour. She plunged her sword into Morana’s heart and everything was blown away.

A dark spirit came out of Morana’s unconscious body and vanished into air.

Dodo went close to Morana and she woke up in pain. Her wound started to heal within seconds.

“Where am I?”

She was now transformed into the nice and pleasant lady that she had been before the evil spirit captured her.

It was magical. Everything started to brighten up, the clouds faded away, the sky was pretty blue again, sunlight sparkled everywhere, dead flowers started to bloom again.

The gloom lifted and the edge of the land became crystal clear.

The castle renewed itself in the blink of an eye. Erix was ready to be the king. Everyone was happy again. Riona had become their saviour.

They all said in one voice, “Long live our saviour Riona.”



REFLECTIONS

It was a great experience working on this book. Writing a story is hard as one has to think from everyone’s perspective. But, with focus, it can be done. Working with my mates was a once in a lifetime’s opportunity to learn and improve my skills. It’s been my wish to write my own story and this chance was a blessing for me. And I wrote with all my might— *Riona*

PASSION FOR PERFECTION

By Adhya Agarwal





I am a teenage girl who is optimistic, and enjoys her life to the fullest. I was born on October 26, 2007. Doodling and singing is something I am passionate about. My father is a businessman and my mother is a homemaker. I like listening to Punjabi and pop music, and the classic 90s music really soothes me. I love reading books which are funny and give moral values, like *Ratatouille* and the stories of Akbar and Birbal. Movies that promote women's empowerment, like *Dangal* and *Neerja*, really attract me. Travel is something I enjoy



This story is about a teenaged boy, Paxton, who wanted to be perfect. He had a sickly physique and a nerdy personality. He usually remained quite in school and had no friends because of his looks and personality. Paxton tried his best to be the man of everyone's dream, to be an all rounder and do a splendid job of everything. He was good at studies, but his social skills were zero.

It was a breezy autumn day. Near the artificial intelligence (AI) bureau in Japan, there was a bright ally with many houses, in one of which lived Paxton. His mom asked him to clean the porch and remove the dry leaves falling from the trees. The AI building faced Paxton's porch. Just outside was a trash bin where all the junk, spare parts, used instruments and old robots were dumped.

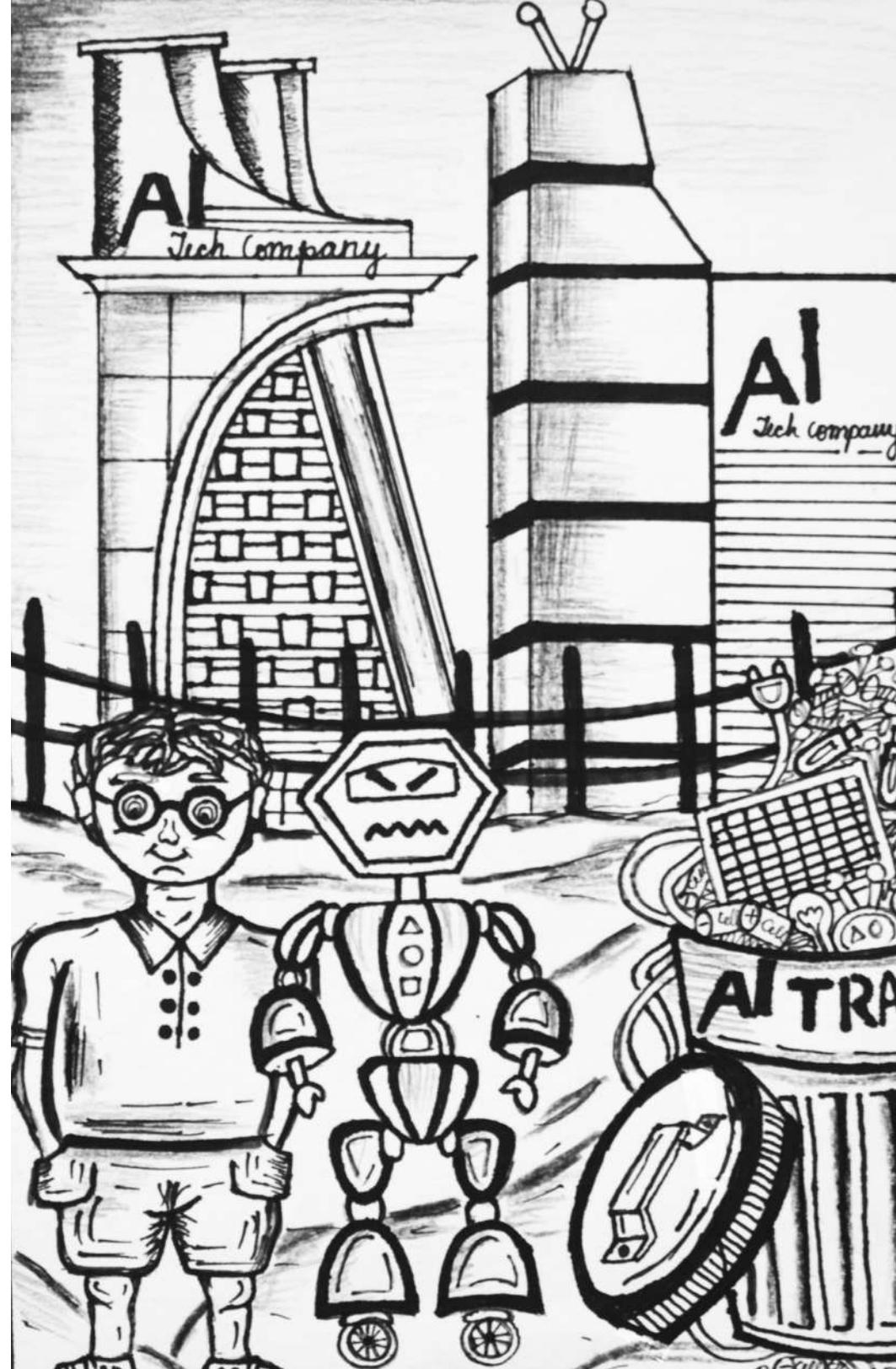
While cleaning the porch, Paxton looked at the trash bin and saw a robot lying there. It really fascinated him—it had a

dumbbell-shaped body in black and white, and had short legs with wheels fixed on them. With detailing of red lights and neon green buttons, the robot's face was hexagonal in shape and looked really cunning. He had long hands, with red lights embellished on them. The robot drew the attention of Paxton, who was attracted towards it.

Feeling a sense of thrill, Paxton went to the trash bin and picked up the robot. Immediately, the robot showed a slight movement due to the touch sensors present in it. Paxton was excited, and decided that he would make the robot work. He took the robot into his study and placed it on his table. Paxton took out a toolbox from the almirah and started to fix the robot.

After he saw the interior of the robot, he realised that he would need a few more electrical appliances. He took some money from his wallet and went to the neighbourhood store that sold all kinds of electrical gadgets and spare parts. Paxton bought the necessary parts and after paying the bill, he went back to his home and started assembling the robot. Little did he know that it wasn't a normal robot; it was a wicked one created by an evil scientist, who was kicked out of the artificial intelligence bureau for this act. The robot started functioning properly after a little repairing, and Paxton was thrilled with his work.

The robot asked Paxton, "How may I help you?"



Paxton replied, “I want to be a perfect person. Can you help me become one?”

The robot displayed all its lights and said with an evil smirk, “Yes, definitely.” It took a microchip from its body and handed it to Paxton.

Paxton was confused, and asked, “How can this chip help me?”

The robot replied, “Just keep this chip with you wherever you go. It will help me connect with you and I will help you fulfil all your wishes.”

Paxton happily thanked the robot.

Next, the robot said that there were some terms and conditions for the chip, and if Paxton agreed to them, only then would the robot help him.

When Paxton asked what those conditions were, the robot replied, “I won’t tell them to you now, but when the right time comes.”

Without thinking much, Paxton instantly agreed to all the terms and conditions.

He took the chip from the robot and kept it in his front pocket. The day was over, and excited at this new discovery, Paxton went to his bed and drifted off to sleep after the excitement wore off and exhaustion took over. The robot made space for itself in the storeroom.

The following day, Monday, Paxton woke up and got dressed for his school. But as soon as he saw himself in the mirror, he was shocked. Paxton couldn’t believe that it was him. He looked like a totally new person—broad chest, well-built shoulders and six-pack abs. His face looked sharp and charming, rather than his old nerdy look.

He went to his mom asking for breakfast. When she saw him, she couldn’t recognise him, and was confused and worried. Eventually, when Paxton told her everything, she was relieved but also concerned about the terms and conditions.

After breakfast, Paxton went to school. As soon as he entered the building, everyone was shocked. They could not believe it was the same Paxton, the guy whom they used to bully and tease. The first period was PT, and it was Paxton’s worst nightmare because he was not good at it; because of this, his classmates used to make fun of him. But the PT period was different this time. Paxton tried rope climbing, and he aced it. His classmates were shocked after watching this totally different person. Paxton was no more a nerd and dumb child. He had all the attributes to be called an all rounder. He turned into a true definition of ‘perfect’. Everyone admired him and wanted to be friends with him. Paxton had good looks, perfect physique, active brain and a sporty personality. He turned into a person everyone dreamt of being.

His days were going well, with people loving and valuing him. Paxton became one of the most desired students in school. He grew proud of himself, and soon his attitude and ego developed into over-confidence.

Paxton was selected to represent his school at the inter-school sports competition. He worked really hard for the competition, and won most of the events. The school authorities were very happy, and they made him attend more such competitions. This success made Paxton rude. People didn't like his behaviour, and they didn't want to talk to him anymore. He thought of himself as being superior to everyone else; he believed that nobody could be better than him. Paxton had also forgotten all about the terms and conditions of the robot.

One day, when he returned home after school, the robot appeared in front of him. It looked evil, with all its red lights turned on. Its eyes were looking scary as it reminded Paxton about the terms and conditions. It said, "You need to give me half of your success."

Shocked, Paxton was fuming with anger.

He shouted at the robot. "How dare you say this to me? It is my hard work behind all my success. How can you simply ask for half of my success?"

The robot replied, "I already told you that you needed to agree to my terms and conditions in order to get what you want."

Paxton was stressed, and started wondering about how could he simply skip the terms and conditions and live a happy life. He even tried to dismantle the robot, but failed miserably. The robot got angry and started beeping due to which the temperature of the robot rose and it blasted with a loud sound. A huge mess was created, and the chip turned to ashes.

When Paxton's mom heard the loud sound, she came running to his room and was shocked at watching the whole scene. What was even more shocking to her was when she saw Paxton changing back into his old self—the nerdy, sickly child. His intelligence also deteriorated.

Paxton was disheartened, and he regretted his egoistic behaviour with the others. He realised his mistake, and also realised that nobody is born perfect. Everyone has to work through their weaknesses and learn to achieve success.



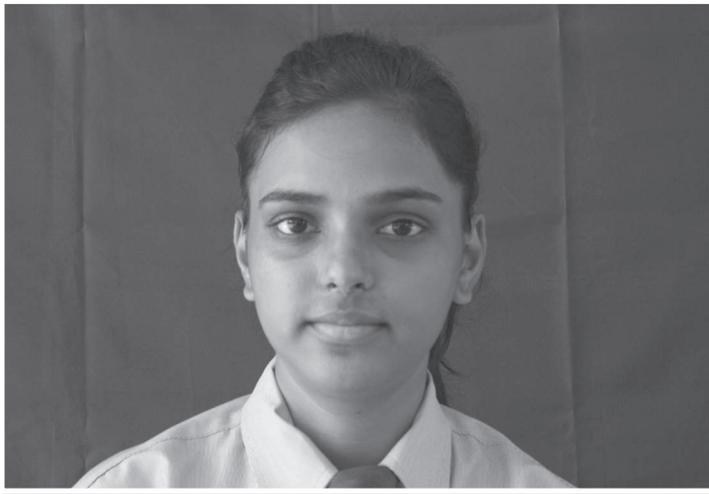
REFLECTIONS

I was stunned when I got to know that I had been selected for this writing programme. I hadn't expected it. I am thankful to my class teacher who persuaded me to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. People think that writing a story is an easy task, but I realised that it needs a lot of patience and hard work. This opportunity also made me realise my passion for writing. Expressing all my emotions in a story was quite relieving. I would like to thank my school for such an amazing writing programme. I am grateful that I got to be a part of it—*Adhya*

THE MYSTERIOUS WOMEN

By Aditi Gangwar





I am a sixteen-year-old girl, who is a complete introvert. I never played with dolls when I was a child; but I have always loved movies. I enjoy genres like mystery, thriller, and science fiction. My favourite films are *Interstellar*, *Insidious* and *Inception*. I like to write poetry. I am someone who dances instead of walking. Coming from Pilibhit, also known as Bansuri Nagar, I love music. My earphones are like my ear rings, I wear them everywhere. My favorite singers are Alec Benjamin, Clinton Kane and Canon Gray. My favorite bands are

OneRepublic, The Beatles, Coldplay and One Direction. I am also an overthinker and I pour it all out in my journal, sounds cliché, I know. North Indian food turns my mouth into a swimming pool. I am mostly calm and do not get angry but I do get hangry sometimes. So, if I am hungry, I may be angry, too. My father is a village development officer and my mother is a senior bank manager. They work hard for my future and I wish to make them proud one day. I love to travel and France has always fascinated me; I wish to settle there one day.



I was going back home to my village after a long time. A medical student doesn't get days off. So, it was after a long time I got to visit home. I went to a local school in the city, my parents selected it based on how close it was. And now I am so far from my village, studying to be a doctor at AIIMS, Delhi.

When I returned, I expected my family to be happy. They all looked happy but I could feel the tension in the air, and sometimes, on their foreheads. As I walked inside my house, I heard everyone shout, "Welcome home, Aakash."

My mother cooked my favourite food, Rajma Chawal. I missed the deliciousness of it everyday. While I was having my dinner, my father pulled out a book from behind his back, a book I've wanted for a long time. I thanked him and went back to stuffing my face with dessert.

After dinner, we all gathered in our living room to talk about my studies and exchange anecdotes and jokes. Sitting here with them was just the same, many stories and many laughs. But something was different, and I couldn't put my finger on it. I paid attention to how they laughed and that was it. Something was missing there. I had to ask.

“Is everything fine?”

My father hesitated.

“Everything is fine. You don't need to worry about anything.”

Everyone dispersed to their rooms, and I slowly walked back to my room, deep in thoughts. As I was walking past my parent's bedroom, I heard my father talking about some secret meeting with the villagers. I peeped inside and saw the worried look on his face. In that moment, I knew something was going on and it wasn't good because I've never seen my father like that. I made up my mind and decided to attend the meeting too, secretly.

The next morning, I followed my father to the meeting. When we reached the place, I was surprised to see that nervous look on everyone's face. They were discussing about something, or someone. I hid behind a tree, close to them and heard them mention a woman. This mysterious woman was haunting them. She could transform herself to look like anyone she wanted. All of them feared her.

I couldn't stop myself and burst out laughing.

I was caught in a matter of seconds. My father's stern face asked me, “What are you doing here?”

“I just wanted to find out what was troubling you. I thought this was something serious. But... this is funny.”

I looked around at the other villagers and said, “I am sure you all don't believe in this? You shouldn't. This is the twenty first century. It's the age of science. And what you're talking about makes no sense.”

All the villagers had one thing in common apart from their expressions, they all disagreed with me. And they wanted to scold me too. But there was one girl, she was around my age who agreed with me. I was happy to know someone was using their head.

The villagers screamed about what happened with them and then one of my aunts, Sudha, shared her incident.

She went out for a night-walk with her sister. They shared gossip like always and when it was time to go back home, her sister didn't react, she just stood there. And suddenly, she ran to a farm that was across the street. My aunt was scared, she screamed after her sister, “Don't go in there, it's not safe!”

But her sister ignored her. She waited for her outside the farm for a long time but she didn't come back. Worried, she ran back to her house to call her parents for help. And when

she flung the doors open, her jaw dropped to the floor. Her sister was sitting with their mother, talking normally. My aunt was furious. She thought she had played a prank on her.

“Why did you come back home without informing me?”

Confused, her sister replied, “What are you talking about? I never went out with you. I have been at home since the morning. I never stepped out.”

Sudha, my aunt, was scared out of her mind. If her sister was at home, who did she go on that walk with?

When my aunt finished telling her incident, and I didn’t know what to make of it. It was hard to believe. Another villager jumped in front of me and told me his story.

He told me he was a hardworking farmer. Because of the harvest the next day, he had to go in the night before to work at his farm. It was about 12’o clock at night, when he saw a woman walk towards him. She was wearing a red dress and her face was covered with a veil. It was as if she was strolling there. But slowly heading his way. And since he had a lot of work, he ignored her and continued. When he looked up a few seconds later, the woman was standing next to him.

She whispered, “This night will lead you to another night.”

He still ignored her. He wondered if she was right in the head. But she said the same thing a few more times.



He finished his work in about two hours. When he reached home, his family looked concerned. His brother stepped forward.

“Where were you?”

“I’ve been working at the farm for the harvest tomorrow. Been there for almost three hours.”

“No, you were not. We’ve been looking for you since last night. I went to your farm an hour ago. You weren’t there.”

I was perplexed after listening to all of these incidents. Though confused myself, I tried to give an explanation to the villagers.

“Maybe this farmer here is right, maybe, she is not right in the head and is just troubling you all.”

No one was convinced. After the meeting was over, I decided to meet the girl who agreed with me. When I walked to her with my hand stretched out, she smiled and shook my hand.

“My name is Riya. I am your neighbour’s daughter.”

“Oh, you’re Harish Uncle’s daughter?”

We spoke about this mystery woman. She told me that even her family was terrified and she had been trying to convince them otherwise. We both agreed that we had to find a way out of this for our family’s sake. Talking about it, I realized something. I noticed that whenever this woman

appeared, something weird happened, but she never harmed anyone.

We made a plan. We decided to go out at night and hopefully, run into this mystery woman. Riya hesitated, she didn’t want her parents to find out she was going out at night.

“Sneaking out when your parents are asleep would be easy and they’ll never find out. We’ll be back in no time. We’re not going to fight the woman, just spy on her. We’ll be safe.”

She agreed. We settled on meeting outside my house at midnight.

After setting our plan in place, I left for my house. I wanted to vanish into my room, as quickly as possible. I knew if they saw my face, they’ll know I am up to something. I had dinner in my room and avoided any conversation with my family. Then I heard a knock, it was my father.

“Hey, kid, you don’t have to worry about all this. Just enjoy your vacation.”

But how could I enjoy myself when my family is worried.

I packed whatever I could find, a torch was first.

At midnight, I crept out of my house. So far, so good. No one woke up. I found Riya outside, waiting for me. After

discussing our strategy, we decided the best place to start would be the places the incidents had occurred.

As the light breeze tingled my face, I could sense the strangeness. Everything felt... unusual. We walked to my aunt's house first. We wanted to investigate the street where it happened. We reached in a few minutes and looked around. We didn't know exactly what we were looking for but we still searched. We were still hoping the woman would just show up. After an hour of searching, we found nothing. Not the woman or any evidence that she was there.

Next stop was the farm, where the farmer had met the woman in a red dress. The farmer was Riya's uncle so she knew where we were going. I just followed her. On our way, we spoke about our families, my college, and her ambition in life. We were crossing a forest when Riya suddenly stopped.

"Did you hear that, Aakash?"

"What are you talking about?"

She told me she heard someone, a voice from somewhere in the forest. Since we were already on this path, we decided on checking it. It might have been related to the woman. We walked in for a few minutes and found nothing. Just the eerie silence of the forest. We turned around to go back to the road.

But that's when fear started to make a home in my heart. The sound of dry leaves beneath my feet was the scariest

sound I ever heard in my life. As time passed, the fear in my heart grew. But I wasn't going to give in this quick.

Walking in silence now, we both heard it. Someone running behind us.

We turned around immediately but there was no one there. Just darkness. This was too much for the both of us. I looked down and saw my arms and legs shake. I looked at Riya's pale face, she was trembling too. In the month of December, we were sweating, as if it was June. Riya looked like she was about to pass out and I tried to calm her down.

"It was an animal, maybe. Let's go back home... Let's run back home."

I don't know how I managed to say it without puking my guts out. Riya looked at me and we ran. We ran as fast as we could.

My house never looked better. I quickly ran to my room. My feet shaking and body covered in sweat. I tried to calm my heart and prayed sleep found me.

The next morning, I woke up in the afternoon as I hadn't slept the whole night. I couldn't stop thinking about last night. I was also worried about Riya. She was frightened too. I wanted to check on her.

I went to her house and rang the bell. Riya's father, Harish Uncle, came out.

“Hello, uncle. Where is Riya?”

Harish uncle scrunched up his eyebrows and said,
“Who? I don’t know any Riya.”

“She... your daughter, Uncle.”

“I don’t have a daughter. I have two sons.”

It was as if someone had pulled the floor from beneath my feet. I couldn’t speak or move for a moment. I was afraid of even admitting it to myself.

Who was she?



REFLECTIONS

Reading has been an important part of my life but in these last few days I found myself to be an author. These were some of the best days of my life. I’d never thought that I could ever write a story of my own and become a writer but with the guidance of my mentor I could write my own story. It’s a beautiful feeling to see yourself journey from a reader to an author. It has transformed me into a person who now has learned time management, gained confidence, and learned to accept rejection. Overall, the journey was amazing—*Aditi*

A HELPING HAND

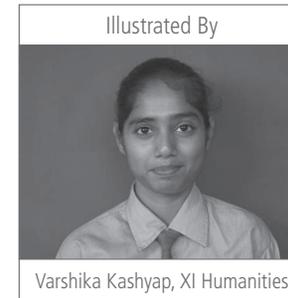
By Anya Singh





Before you delve into my world of imagination, here is some information about me that will help you understand my inherent personality. I was born on March 25, 2006. My roots are in Sitapur, a city in Uttar Pradesh. My father, my constant support, is an assistant professor of maths, and my mother, a most caring and loving person, is a homemaker. I am more of an eccentric—mixed up or a vexed personality, as claimed by others. However, I feel that my habit of getting worried over trivial issues may be a sign of my maturity. My areas

of interest include solving problems related to reasoning, listening to evergreen songs, and cooking. Besides cooking, I am a foodie, too, and love eating anything that is delicious. I would like to sum up myself as a determined, hard working and ambitious one, aspiring to realise many unfulfilled dreams.



Once, there was a girl named Samaira. She was kind, modest and content. Even though she was only ten, she was quite mature for her age, a virtue that other children her age lacked. Samaira was intelligent, too—the class topper. Everybody loved her and praised her.

One day, she was returning from school in her car. Samaira was very happy that day as her summer vacations were going to start soon. It was around 2 pm in the afternoon, and the sun was blazing hot; there was not a single cloud in the sky. There was heavy traffic on the road and all the vehicles were still, with no sign of movement. Samaira was looking out of the window when she saw a poor boy in shabby clothes, with a pale face and rheumy eyes. He was sitting by the roadside under a lamppost on a dusty paved track. He seemed intensely despondent. Samaira felt something was wrong. She told the driver to wait, and stepped out of the car.

She asked the boy, “What’s your name? Where are you from? Why are you sitting here?”

Startled, the boy replied after some hesitation, “I am Ashutosh, and I live in the nearby slum with my mother and two younger siblings. I am so helpless an...and...” He stammered and started weeping.

Samaira consoled him and gave him water to drink.

He continued, “I work at a cycle-repair shop in the main market and earn just rupees three hundred a month. My brother is suffering from high fever and I am so helpless that I can’t even get him diagnosed by a doctor and get him the medicines he needs. I am praying to God to either have mercy on me and my family or call me to Him.”

Samaira didn’t know how to react. She asked, “But why are you here instead of being with your brother?”

The boy said, “I promised my poor mother that I will bring home a doctor. I went first to my workplace to ask for some money from my boss, but he refused and kicked me out. Next, I went to a local doctor, and his assistant saw my state and refused to let me enter the clinic. The attendant at the medical shop that I went to, to buy some basic medicines, did not even care to listen to me.”

Samaira comforted him, and promised to help him. By this time, the traffic was beginning to move. She and

Ashutosh got into the car and Samaira asked the driver to go to the boy’s house.

It was a dilapidated house, with the paint chipped and the bricks visible. The surroundings around the house were too dirty. The smell inside was musty, and everything seemed in a state of disrepair. There was a lady seated beside a child lying on the cot, whose forehead was covered with a wet cloth.

Samaira requested her driver to go and bring her personal doctor to check the child. The doctor arrived within ten minutes, and after inspecting the health of the sick child, he declared that it was just a viral fever. He prescribed some medicines accordingly.

Samaira had a five-hundred-rupee note in her pocket which was given to her by her mother to buy essential things for herself. Without giving it any thought, she immediately gave the note to her driver, requesting him to settle the doctor’s fee, drop him back and pick up the medicines on the way.

All the glum faces brightened up with relief and gratitude.

Ashutosh said to Samaira, “Thank you so much, little lady. I owe you one. How can I pay this debt off?”

Samaira smiled and said, “The only way you can pay this debt off is by helping anyone you find in the hour of need; that will be the best return to me.”

Ashutosh was profoundly impacted by Samaira's kindness, and promised he would do the same. Samaira bade everyone goodbye, and when she reached home, her mother asked, "Where were you, dear? What took you so long?"

Samaira told her mother the whole story. Her mother's eyes were full of tears. She hugged Samaira tightly, and said to her, "I am so proud of you. You are a blessing for me and your father. Well done, Samaira."

Years passed. Ashutosh became an established and successful doctor with his hard work and sheer determination. He was a kind and amicable man, with a pleasant demeanour.

Once, a woman was admitted to his hospital. She was badly injured in an accident. Dr Ashutosh was on duty. He worked hard on the patient for several days, and she was finally out of danger. After a long battle, the war was won.

When he was checking the patient's details in the form, he was struck by the name *Samaira*. He had a sudden flashback of the kind girl who had helped him in his childhood, but he was not sure whether it was the same Samaira.

When he went into the patient's room, the woman said, "Thank you so much, doctor. Had it not been for you, I would have died."



The doctor smiled and said, “Please don’t embarrass me; I only did my duty. I’m a doctor and it’s my job to save the lives of my patients. Also, one kind little lady showed me many years ago that we should help anyone in need.”

The doctor and the patient realised who the other was...

Samaira asked in a heavy voice, “Are you the Ashutosh I met by the roadside in my childhood?”

The doctor replied in the affirmative.

Samaira said, “Today you have paid off your debt, and now you are free of it.”

Both of them laughed and cried at the same time.



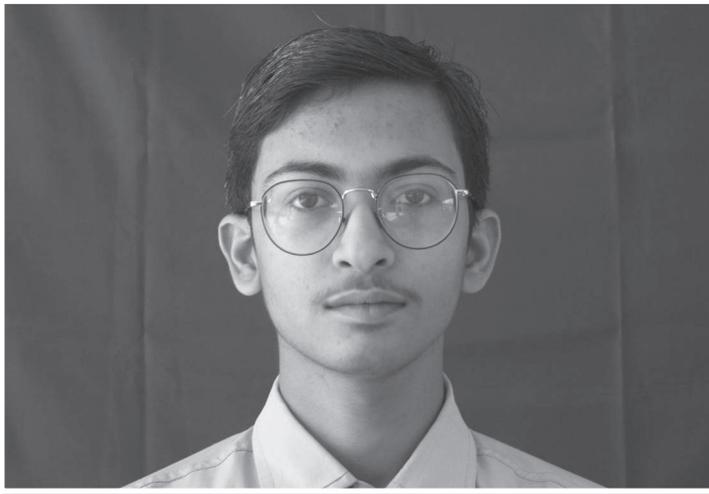
REFLECTIONS

I feel elated to have been a part of this wonderful programme. There were times when I was vexed, with no ideas for a story, but with guidance from our mentor, it became possible. My heartfelt gratitude to my school and to Quill Club Writers for this unique experience that will forever remain etched on my heart—*Anya*

A SPLENDID DAWN

By Aryan Gupta





I was born in Pilibhit, also known as the Flute city, on January 8, 2008. I am told I came into this world with a big cry but that made others smile. I was an introvert but gradually came into my own. My hobbies are drawing and reading books. Munshi Premchand's book of stories was the first time I fell in love with reading. Especially, the story *Namak ka Daroga*, it is my favourite. Many books have influenced me, like- biographies of Bhagat Singh, Swami Vivekananda and Gautam Buddha. I enjoy watching movies as well,

the movies I like the most are *Interstellar*, *Inception* and *Gravity*; I often urge people to watch them. A perfect day for me would be listening to my favourite song *Jeena isi ka naam hai*, with a cup of tea, while sitting on the terrace of my house, imagining a life in Coorg. People mistake my manners to be a part of my serious personality but I am a jolly person. For the ones who know me, I am like an open book. The one word that would describe me is all-rounder, I enjoy everything and I am good at them too.

Rukh was an adorable ten-year-old boy, who more than anything loved his mother. But unfortunately, he lost her to cancer a month back. He missed her too much. He didn't want to share his grief with his father, because he knew he missed her too. The little boy was carrying a burden too heavy for his shoulders and his father saw it. His father knew Rukh missed his mother. So, Rukh's father decided to marry again, just for the sake of his son.

One day when Rukh came back from school, he did what he always did, he kept his bag on the sofa and called out to Bhola chacha to give him some water. But to his surprise, instead of Bhola chacha his father came out of the kitchen with glass of water in his hands.

Rukh said, "Hi, dad. Did you take a leave from work?"

"Yes, son," said his father smiling sheepishly.

“Why?”

“Oh, don’t think about it, dear boy. Just come with me, I have a surprise waiting for you in the kitchen.”

His father covered his eyes with his hand and placed the other on his back to guide him to the kitchen. Rukh was excited. His father slowly removed his hand as they stepped into the kitchen. There was a lady standing in front of him. A confused Rukh turned around to look at his father.

His father picked him up and sat him on his lap.

“She is your new mother.”

Rukh wasn’t happy about it. He jumped out of his father’s lap and ran to his room. When he heard his father’s footsteps behind him, he quickly locked it. Rukh could hear his father’s sigh from outside the door.

“Why did you run away like that? That wasn’t nice.”

“I love my mother. And no one can take her place. I don’t want a new mom,” Rukh replied sobbing.

His father tried to convince him but he did not want to listen him. Rukh couldn’t stop crying and said, “No one can take my mother’s place.”

His father knew this would be difficult. He understood his feelings. He asked Ananya, his new wife to give Rukh some time to adjust. Ananya nodded, she understood too.

As days and weeks went by, the dynamic of the house changed. Gradually, Ananya was able to win Rukh’s trust and love. He didn’t think of her as his new mother but a friend. Rukh’s father was happy. Everyone was happy.

One Year Later

Things weren’t what they were before. One day, while coming back from the office Rukh’s father met with an accident, the doctors couldn’t save his life. The house changed after Rukh’s father died. Even Ananya changed after his death. She started to mistreat Rukh. She fired the help around the house and made Rukh perform all the chores. She also beat him from time to time. Rukh was like a zombie now.

One night, with gloomy eyes, Rukh went to have his dinner. He crossed Ananya’s room on his way to the kitchen when he heard her talking to someone on the phone.

“This hurdle has been removed. Our way to the property is almost clear. Just one more hurdle remains, the boy. But don’t worry, he will be gone in a few days too.”

Rukh was shocked. He bolted out of the house without thinking. Ananya had killed his father. And she was going to kill him too. He ran as far as he could and decided to never stop. He was going to leave the city.

He reached the railway station at midnight. He walked in the railway station and saw the train in front of him was about to depart. He jumped inside a cabin which was full of boxes and hid himself behind a big one and sat down, crying. He felt the train jerk and move. He was going far away from his father's killer. Hugging himself, Rukh rocked back and forth, sobbing loudly. He didn't realize when sleep found him.

When he woke up, he saw someone he couldn't believe was there. His parents. They stood in front of him, smiling, with numerous toys in their arms and around their legs. The train jerked and he woke up. He screamed for his parents to come back, but they were gone. He was still in the train, behind a big box, still crying.

He got down at the next station. He didn't want to risk anyone finding him. He had no idea where he was. He was tired and hungry. He spotted a stall and with a rumbling stomach, he walked towards it.

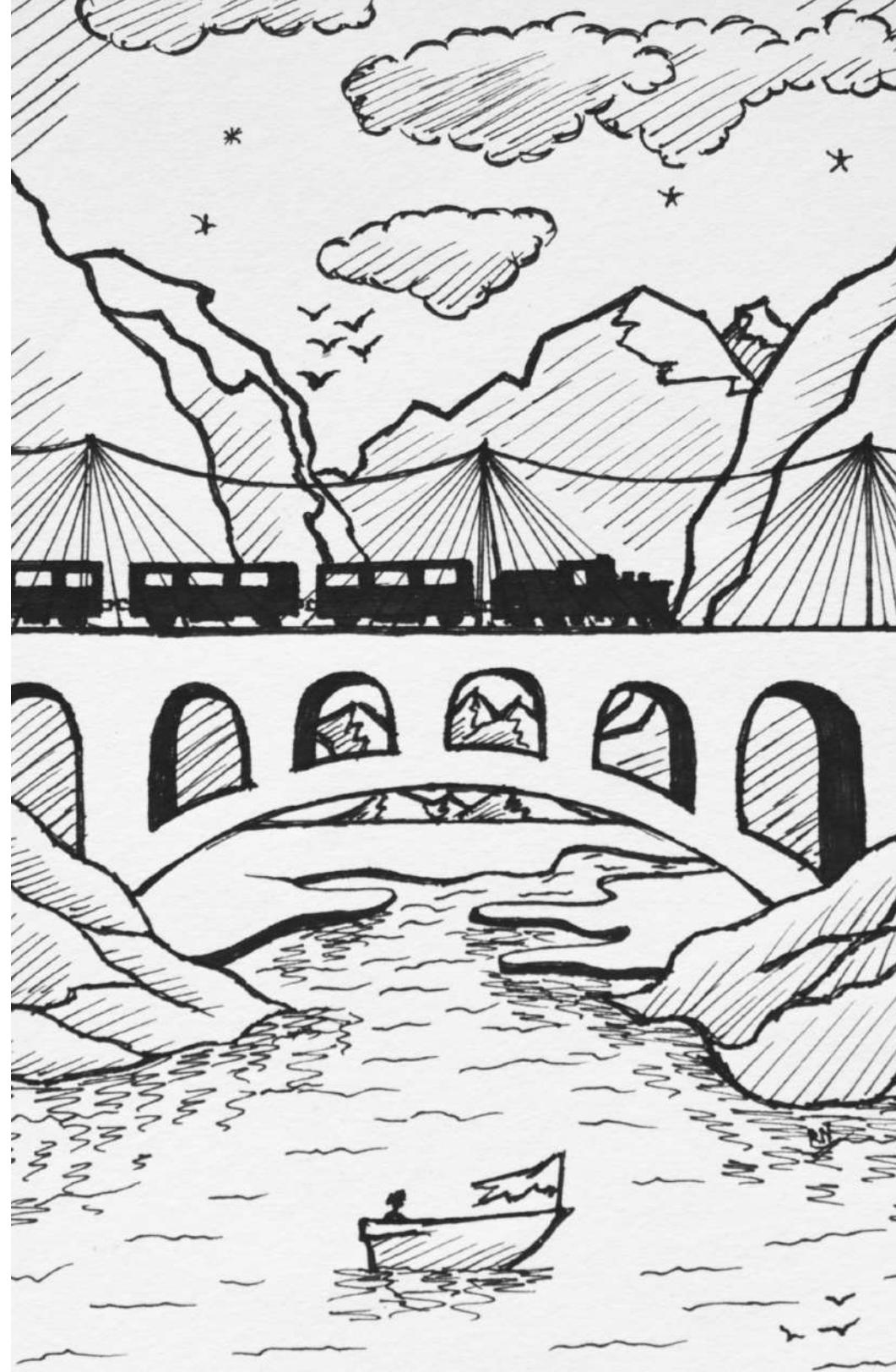
"Sir, I am hungry, can you give me some food?"

The owner of the stall looked at him, up and down and then again. "Do you have money to pay for it?"

"No, sir."

"Then get lost," said the man, dismissively.

Rukh ran out of the stall and the railway station. For the whole day, he roamed around the streets of the city.



He begged for food or money. Some people pitied the poor boy and gave him something to eat. He even asked for work but no one wanted to employ a little boy.

As the sky grew darker, he walked to a park and slumped down on a bench. He couldn't stop sobbing. He missed his parents. He missed his mother who would feed him his favorite meals with her hands. He missed his father who would always bring him snacks from the market.

Someone tapped him on his back—a boy his age. He wore a checked T-shirt and a pair of worn-out shorts. The boy asked Rukh why he was crying. Rukh told him everything. The boy felt sorry for Rukh. Wiping his tears on the back of his hand, Rukh asked the about the boy. The boy's name was Munna and he was an orphan. He roamed the city, begging. He offered to take Rukh to his own place.

They walked for a few minutes when they reached a temple. "This is where I stay at night. Gopal ji, the priest allowed me to. You can ask him."

Rukh went to see Gopal ji, a tall, lanky man. He and asked Rukh why he wasn't with his parents and where he had come from. Rukh told him everything.

Gopal ji was a kind man. His eyes welled up and with a kind smile, he allowed Rukh to stay at the temple. He even gave him fruits and promised him he wouldn't go hungry as long as he was there. For the first time in a long time, Rukh

felt relief. He thanked Gopal ji and joined Munna with arms full of juicy fruits. As they enjoyed the fresh oranges, they decided to go begging together the next day.

The boys were busy since that day. They would go out to beg in the morning and help clean the temple at night, among other menial tasks around the temple. And it so happened, that since Rukh started accompanying Munna, Munna didn't earn anything. But Rukh was never greedy. He shared whatever he got with Munna.

It was just another day when Prakash Shankar, the Station House Officer of the city came to the temple with his wife. They didn't have a child and visited numerous temples to pray for one. As he was walking out, his wallet fell out of his pocket. Munna saw it and told Rukh to pick it up before anyone else did and return it to Prakash. Rukh went running, and handed the wallet back to him. Prakash smiled at the little child and thanked him. Feeling good, Rukh went back to Munna.

Prakash and his wife observed Rukh. They could see the boy had to beg for food, they called Gopal ji over to where they were standing and asked about him. Gopal ji told him what he knew. Prakash looked at his wife and could see the tears shining in her eyes, his heart was heavy too. His wife turned to look at him and their eyes met, without even saying a word, they understood each other. They wanted to adopt Rukh.

Gopal ji was over the moon. He knew Prakash and his wife were kind people and would give Rukh a safe home to grow up in. Gopal ji hurried to Rukh and spoke to him.

But Gopal ji's happiness was short lived when Rukh refused.

"Don't say no, dear boy. They are good people. You'll have a better life with them."

"But what about Munna, I can't leave him."

Gopal ji was puzzled. "Who? Who is Munna?"

Rukh raised an eyebrow in confusion. He repeated Munna's name as if that would clear up this confusion.

"The boy who lives here. He has been living here for a long time now. There, he is sitting behind me."

Rukh could swear Munna was there a second ago. He got to his feet and started to look around. Worried, Gopal ji said, "You are the only one who lives here."

Gopal ji thought of all the times he heard Rukh talking to himself.

Rukh wasn't scared when he realised that Munna was a figment of his imagination. There was no Munna.

Prakash sir was watching the commotion from his car. He couldn't wait anymore. He walked to Rukh and ran his hand across the boy's head.

"What do you think, Rukh? Would you like to come home with me and my wife?"

Gopal ji's eyes met Rukh's eyes and he nodded slowly. He hoped Rukh would understand how better his life would be if he went with them.

Rukh looked down at his feet for a minute and when he looked up, he was not looking at Prakash sir, the station house officer but at Prakash, his father. Rukh agreed to go with him.

He wanted to tell his new family about his parents. Prakash knew the boy would never be happy until his father gets justice. He promised Rukh his father's killers will get what they deserve. Rukh went home, with a light heart.

Prakash's wife made Rukh's favourite dishes and fed him with her hands. And Prakash got him snacks every chance he got. Exactly what he missed. They loved him dearly.

Prakash came back home one day and told Rukh about Ananya's arrest.

Rukh was finally at peace. He was finally happy.



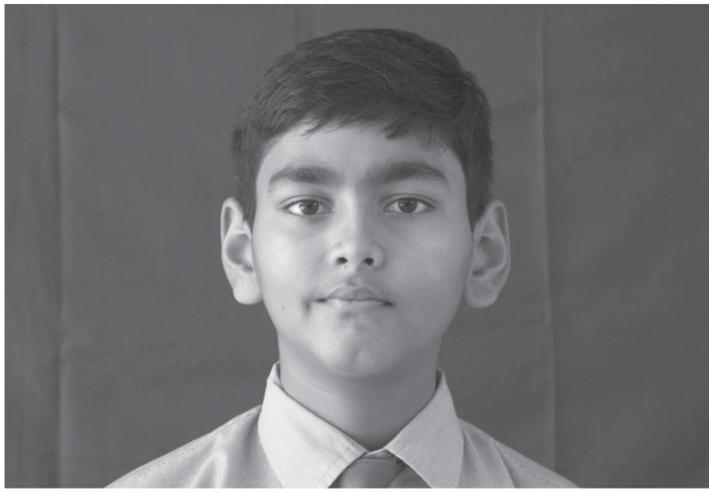
REFLECTIONS

It was a fabulous experience writing a story for this book. Earlier I had never been interested in doing something like this. The first time I was told about this I thought it would be just like any other writing activity. It turned out to be quite something else. Under the guidance of our mentor, I learnt several things and it was an enriching experience working with him. I used to think that people just wrote stories and never came down to pursuing writing as a career. But now I think that writing is an awesome career. I, for one, would like to become an author. This experience had changed me a lot—*Aryan*

THE TROUBLED MAN

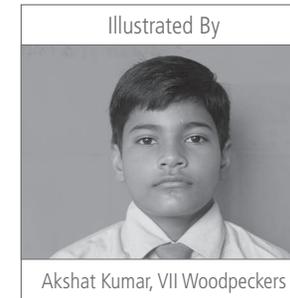
By Darsh Garg





My father is a businessman and my mother is a homemaker. I enjoy matching flags to their respective countries, and learning about the geography and culture of each country. I enjoy listening to music and there are many kinds of songs and musicians and groups that I call my favourite. But I particularly like listening to Ed Sheeran and Billie Eilish. In food, I am fond of Italian dishes because they are truly tasty and amazing. The entire range: from pizza to pasta to calzones and the many soft and delicious, olive-oil infused

*bread from Italy. Interlaken is a place in Switzerland that I have visited, and I can never forget it. I dream of living in the hills of Switzerland. I read *Ikigai For Teens* and found the book to be truly fascinating. *Passionate* is the one word that describes me the best. I am usually a quiet sort of person and don't really open up easily to people I do not know well. But once I am comfortable, I will talk easily.*



There was a man named Chris. He lived in the beautiful city of Toronto, Canada. Chris was intelligent and well educated, but also a frustrated man who was full of agony.

He kept long hours at office, due to which his company was pleased with his work and promoted him. This meant that Chris had to spend even more time at work. He got so busy that he was not able to take out enough time from his job to spend with his family. Even during the weekends and holidays, he would remain busy, spending most of his time either on his laptop at home or in his office.

With more work came more money, of course, but Chris' family valued his time more than money. As he was not able to take any time away from his job, fights started erupting between Chris and his wife. These became a regular occurrence, and the children started getting affected too.

It finally came to a point that Chris and his wife decided to take a break from each other; they separated.

Chris became lonelier because he did not have any friends, and now he didn't have a family either. After two months of solitude, he started sinking into depression.

One day, he visited his favourite river where he used to go with his family occasionally. He sat by the river and thought of how his life had been. He realised that he had been too occupied with his work to give any value to anything else, most importantly his family. He was in deep thought, and blamed himself for his predicament.

A man named Oliver had been observing Chris from a distance. After some time, he approached Chris and asked him why he was so troubled. At first, Chris ignored him but when Oliver insisted on knowing the reason behind his sadness, Chris opened up to him.

“I was unable to take out any time from my job, either for family or for friends. So first my wife and kids left me, and then all my friends drifted away,” he said.

Oliver asked, “Then why don't you just leave your job and go back to your family?”

“No, that will not solve my problem. And more importantly, if I leave my job, how will I be able to feed myself and my family. Also, I am the manager of the company; this job makes sure that my team also gets paid well.”



“Take a break from your job and do something else for a while. For example, do some good for Mother Nature and for unknown people. It will surely make you feel better.”

Chris kept pondering over this. Oliver’s voice kept ringing in his ears. He wasn’t convinced that helping strangers or doing something good for nature would help him. But he decided to give it a try anyway.

First, he applied for two months of leave from his workplace. Next, he bought about 100 yards of land, and planted some vegetable seeds there. After about two weeks of being immersed in this work, Chris felt lighter. Next, he decided to get involved with the local community. He bought an old shed, renovated it, and opened an informal school where he started teaching children whose parents could not afford to send them to formal schools.

After a month, with the support of the community, he bought more land, started farming along with the members of the community, and expanded his school. He started enjoying the work so much that he decided to quit his job.

As time passed, his farm became bigger, with cattle and other birds and animals. It now started producing revenue for the community. Chris became popular because of his unconventional work, and was able to raise more money through a fund-raiser.

He used the money to open more educational and healthcare centres for a larger community.

Eventually, Chris’ wife heard about his good work, and came to meet him. After some time, she and the kids decided to reunite with Chris.

One fine day, Chris remembered Oliver, and realised that he would not have been able to do any of this had it not been for his advice and support. Through his contacts, he found out about Oliver’s whereabouts. He was able to meet his family who informed him that Oliver has passed away in a car accident.

Chris was devastated. He broke down into tears.

Later, in honour of Oliver, he built a bronze statue of him and placed it in the middle of his farmhouse.



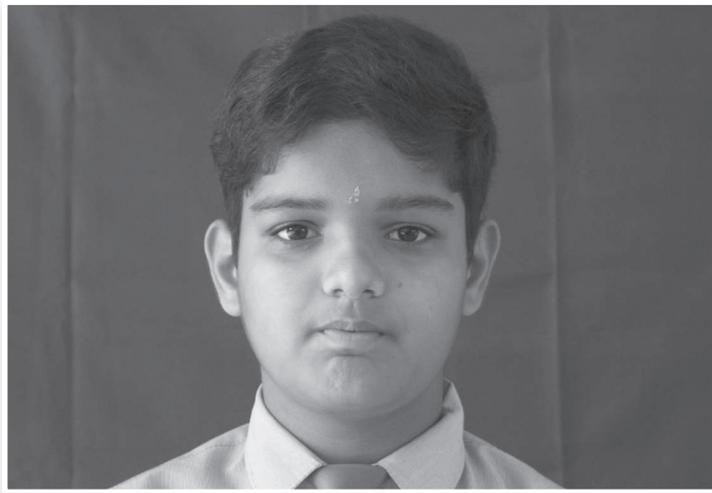
REFLECTIONS

When I was told that I had been selected for the writing programme, on the one hand I was glad but on the other, I also thought that it would be a boring exercise. However, when I started writing the story, which was tough, the whole process was a lot of fun. Sometimes you get better than what you deserve. This programme has been one such thing, and it is decidedly one of the most beautiful experiences that I have been through, with many brilliant writers and an awesome mentor. When I look back, I find that there were times when I faced problems. But in the end, it all turned out well—*Darsh*

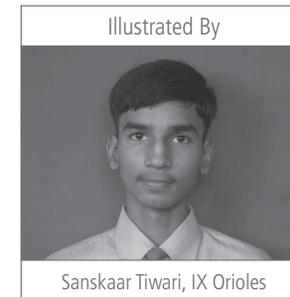
THE OVER THINKER

By Hritik Saxena





I am a teenager who was born on February 7, 2009. Both my parents are teachers. My hobbies are playing cricket and writing stories. I like to eat gol gappas and other spicy street foods. My favourite song is *Pasoori*. I want to be a number of things in my life, but most importantly I want to help the needy and the poor. People think of me as an innocent child, but I can be very mischievous.



Illustrated By

Sanskaar Tiwari, IX Orioles

There lived in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, a woman named Shanaya. She was very honest and kind. Since Shanaya didn't have a mother or a father, or a family of her own, she lived alone in an old house. She was a teacher at the Sacred Hearts School in Bareilly. All her students loved her because she was very attentive and considerate towards them; she was their favourite amongst all the teachers at school.

Shanaya led a simple life. She woke up early in the morning. Before going to school, she cooked her breakfast and lunch, and later, cooked her dinner, too. At bedtime, she read about great and inspiring people so that she could talk about them to her students the following day.

On the way back from school, she liked to eat an ice-cream. It was a daily ritual for her. On the way, if she met people who were poor or needy, she helped them.

Once, after a regular day at home and school, Shanaya finished her chores and went to bed. She saw a dream in which she was going to work by a rickshaw, and when she reached the school, she was surprised because the campus had changed into an artificial building.

When Shanaya woke up in the morning, she finished her cooking, packed her lunch, and left for work. When she arrived, she was shocked as the campus had indeed turned into exactly the building she had seen in her dream.

The next day, she dreamt that she had been appointed vice principal of the Sacred Hearts School. When Shanaya woke up, she forgot about the dream. As usual, she went to school and then saw the notice board:

We welcome our new vice principal, Ms Shanaya.

Shanaya was amazed because it was the second time her dream had turned into reality.

In the next dream, Shanaya saw herself becoming the principal of the school. And in the next, she had acquired a lot of wealth and riches.

As her dreams kept becoming reality, her behaviour changed. From a kind-hearted person, Shanaya changed into a greedy, evil person. She bought lottery tickets to gain even more wealth.

Eventually, Shanaya left her job because she felt she did not need to work to earn money as she was very rich.



She also stopped helping those in need, as she felt it was a waste of her money. Instead, she built herself a fancy house. Shanaya was also no longer cooking her meals because she started going to 5 star hotels to eat. The only habit that remained from the past was her fondness for eating ice-cream every day.

One day, Shanaya had an unusual dream. She saw that bulldozers came and demolished her new bungalow. In another dream, robbers came and stole everything from the house, including all her money.

When she woke up, fearing the worst, she saw that everything was in its place, and nothing was either broken or stolen. But these two dreams had shaken up Shanaya. She realised that she had become an insensitive and greedy person, and promised herself that she would change back to her usual, good self.



REFLECTIONS

When I was told that I had been selected for the writing programme, I was almost shocked. But I found it interesting because of the fun activities we did. After struggling a little, I finally had a story that everyone liked and then I started writing my story. It was enjoyable being a part of this programme— *Hritik*

FUN AT WHOSE COST?

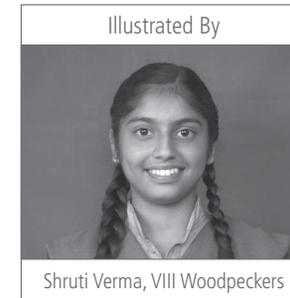
By Kawangunn Chawla





I was born on May 14, 2009. I am an introvert around people I don't know very well, but a complete extrovert around people I am comfortable with. I love doing arts: doodling, painting, sketching and digital art. My father is a businessman and my mother is a homemaker. I am a very emotional person. Recently, I watched the movie *A Thursday*, and it left a mark on me. I believe in seeing the positive side of things and continuing my life with a smile. I am a person who enjoys being in nature; I also enjoy eating. I do things that

give me peace, like exploring my own self and deciding on my final goal in life. I want to own my name, Kawangunn, which means one with numerous qualities.



Illustrated By

Shruti Verma, VIII Woodpeckers

It was the year 2000. At St James International, a beautiful school in Nainital, children from different backgrounds studied together. It was a lovely residential school.

In class 9, there was a gang of three bullies. They belonged to rich families, and came from a place of privilege as their parents were very well known. In the same class, there was a group of three girls who were very close to each other. The bullies troubled them a lot. The worst part was that nobody was able to do anything about it as everyone was aware of the bullies' families' status. The girls tried to ignore the rude behaviour of the bullies, but were constantly on the lookout to teach them a lesson.

Time passed, and the conflict remained. Years went by and the girls and the bullies eventually passed out of their school and continued with their respective lives.

The three friends—Anya, Rajni and Radha—joined the same institute of mass communications for their further studies. Anya graduated and joined a TV channel and became a news reporter. Rajni began as a newspaper reporter and later went on to becoming a television reporter and joined another channel. Radha spoke to her uncle who owned the second most popular news channel, and after seeing her brilliant educational record, he appointed her as a news anchor.

They kept in touch with each other, and met very often, especially at press conferences.

On a pleasant Sunday, they decided to go out together. They all talked, had food and coffee, and chatted for hours.

Rajni randomly mentioned the bullies. “Hey, do you guys remember those bullies?”

The other two girls said, “Yeah, who can forget.”

After having a great time together, they left for their respective homes.

After reaching home, Anya lay on her bed and thought about the bullies. While scrolling through her phone, she decided to do a google search for the boys. She typed the name *Nishantrai*. When the search results came up, she started checking all the profiles. Suddenly, a social media account popped up and the pictures were a close resemblance to Anya’s former classmate. After doing a

thorough research, she was clear that it was him, one of the bullies. He had become a social worker, and his YouTube channel had thousands of followers.

The next day, she told Radha and Rajni about it. They, too, were shocked. The girls hatched a plan... They had always wanted the boys to apologise to them, and it seemed possible now.

“Hey, why don’t we call each one of them and interview them?” said Anya.

“Seems interesting, but how?” Rajni asked.

“Let’s call those three on our respective channels by saying it is a normal interview, and then disclose their past,” Anya replied with confidence.

“I am getting what you mean, but we don’t know anything about the other two,” said Radha.

“I have a plan for that, too; just leave it to me,” said Anya.

She texted Nishant on his social media account and had a conversation where she introduced her channel. She said that she wanted to interview him, and believing her, he immediately agreed for the meeting.

Next day, they met at the appointed spot. Anya was waiting for Nishant and she saw him getting out of his car.

“Hello, sir,” greeted Anya.

“Hello,” replied Nishant.

“It will be a great opportunity for our channel to have your interview. Thank you for agreeing to it,” Anya was sugar-coating her motive.

“Thank you. Let’s start, then,” Nishant said.

“Sure, I’ll begin now. Can you please tell us about your schooling and friends, your childhood?”

“I completed my schooling from St James International School, Nainital. It was a wonderful experience overall. I had two friends, and we were really close. I am still very much in touch with them.”

“Tell us their names, and what they do.”

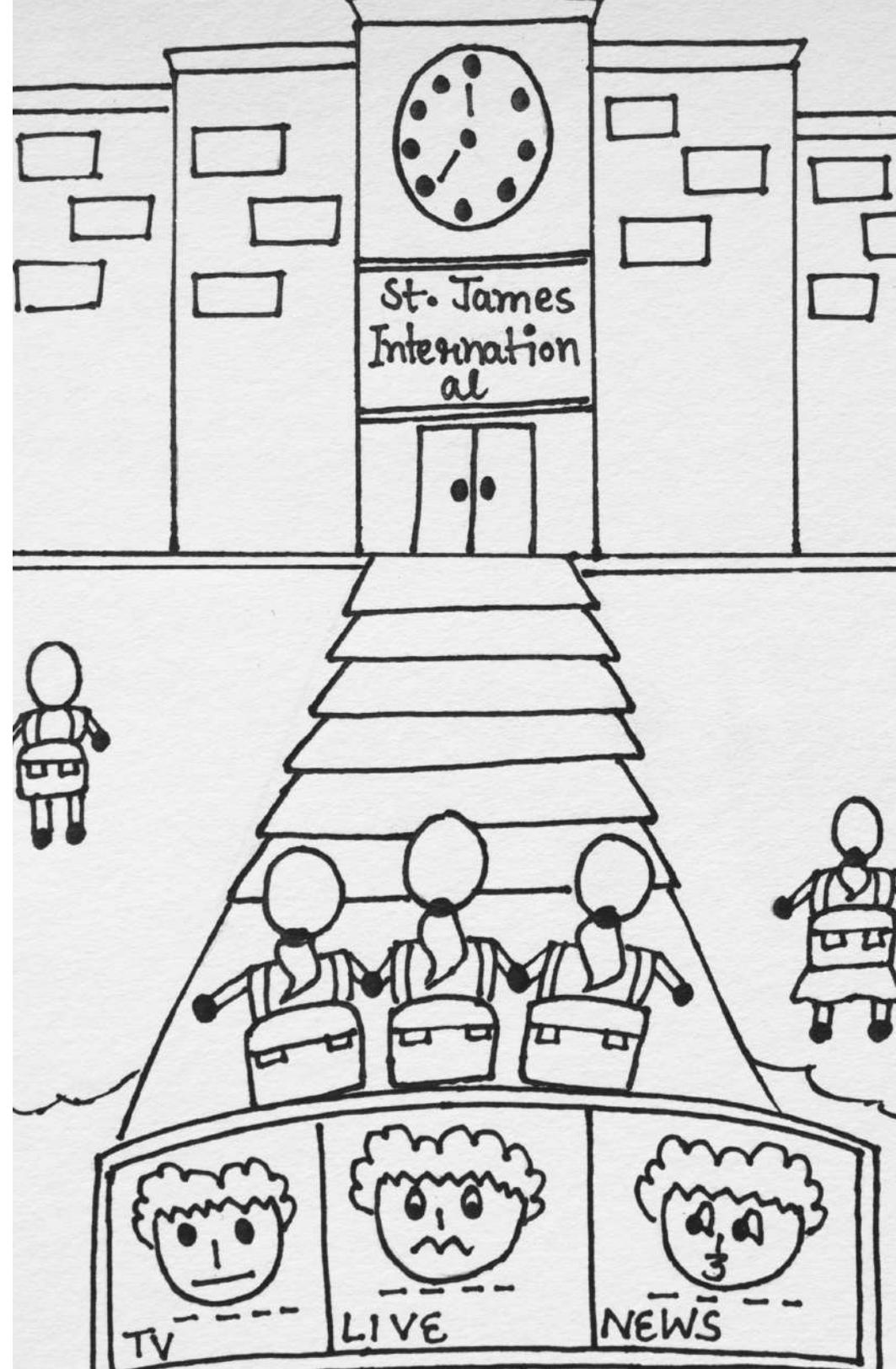
Nishant was only too eager, “Yes, one is a CEO of a big company, Vivek Chandra. And the other is a successful businessman, Sumit Nagar.”

“If you don’t mind, can you please give me their numbers? I would like to interview them in the future.”

“Yes, of course. Here, please write it down.”

After talking for a few more minutes, Nishant left and Anya was happy that she had succeeded in getting information.

She gave those numbers to Radha and Rajni, and asked them to call them for a meeting. Rajni and Radha were successful in convincing them.



Days passed, and it was finally the day when the three journalists would be interviewing each of the bullies separately for their respective channels. Anya was interviewing Nishant, Rajni was interviewing Vivek and Radha was interviewing Sumit. It was decided that they would ask the same questions and put them in a rough spot.

Finally, it was time to begin their interview. The cameras were set, the lights were on spot. Nishant sat facing Anya.

“3, 2, 1, start,” said the editor behind the camera.

“Welcome to your channel Hindustan TV, with your anchor Anya Garg. Today. We have a social media star with a YouTube channel with thousands of followers. He is a social worker who runs many organisations like Women Forward, and others. Yes, you guessed it correct. It is Mr Nishant. Your work not easy, correct?”

“My experience has been superb. Meeting people, interacting with them, supporting the ones in need... it is a delightful feeling,” replied Nishant.

After some more questions about his field, Anya changed tack and asked about his schooling and his family.

“I went to St James International, a residential school in Nainital. I am married, and have two daughters- eight and fourteen. The elder daughter is at St James International and my younger daughter is with us.”

“Is elder daughter happy at St James International?”

“Of course, it is a great school.”

“Lately we have been hearing about bullying becoming a problem at the school. Were you ever a part of it?”

“No. In fact, I don’t feel such things happen there,” said Nishant.

“Really? Think again.”

“Excuse me, what do you mean?” said a flustered Nishant..

“Do you remember your classmates Anya, Rajni and Radha?”

“Yes, they were my classmates. But what...?”

“Sure. Did you not bully them?”

“How... How do you know?” Nishant was losing his cool.

Anya said, “Did you ever think about how it would disturb them? Making fun of them every time, and heckling and bullying them. How would you feel if your child suffered similarly? Probably angry, and then you would complain about it, because you have the power of money and fame to help you. Those poor girls got no support because you had rich parents and they did not.”

The talk turned serious.

Turning red with embarrassment, Nishant said, “I apologise for that. I am really very sorry.”

“I am the Anya you used to bully at school.”

“I am so sorry; I am really feeling guilty,” said Nishant.

“You always made fun of us and never said sorry. But today you are apologising on national television just because we made a plan. And the other members two of your gang, Vivek and Sumit, are being interviewed live on other channels, by Rajni and Radha, the other two girls you bullied. As we speak, your friends are facing similar questions,” said Anya, her expression grave and bordering on angry.

“I am so sorry...”

“I don’t want to insult you; but you must apologise and tell this generation that bullying isn’t cool. Nobody’s children should be bullied. It affects them. Do you understand?”

He nodded but words failed him.



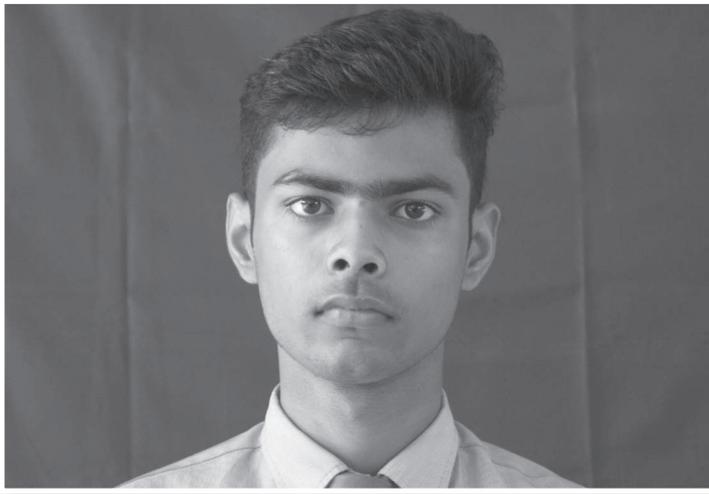
REFLECTIONS

To be honest, I was nervous as I’d never been a part of such a programme. But after having attended it, I felt so lucky to have got the chance to be a part of it. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Thanks to this programme, I feel that my writing has matured—*Kavangunn*

DEADLY WINGS

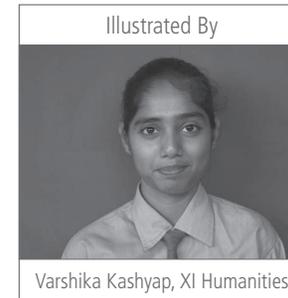
By Mayank Gangwar





I was born in the year 2006. I believe consistency is the key to success. I am an optimistic boy who is always ready to face every situation. Mostly, people find me busy doing the things I love: reading poetry (and writing it), listening to speeches by legends and learning new skills. *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* by Dr Joseph Murphy was a life-changing book for me. Things seem to be going quite well after reading and applying it in real life. In literature, I have been attracted to the great works of Jaun Elia, who was an Urdu poet and

philosopher famous for his unconventional ways and paradoxical writings. At times, I become outgoing; at other times, I become introverted. I always welcome a critical analysis of my writings and try to improve. I strongly believe that all art is a kind of confession. And I believe that art has the potential to change the world without the use of physical force. It is capable of melting a devil's heart and making him a pure soul.



Illustrated By

Varshika Kashyap, XI Humanities

It was a full moon night in San Francisco, California. The clocks were striking 1. Michael was at his study table, busy working. He was a brilliant scientist, working for the American espionage agency CIA, as a researcher.

All of a sudden, a message popped up on his computer screen. It was from his senior officer. “Young man, time for a short meeting at our place,” it stated.

Michael packed up his stuff and reached the head office in no time.

“Gentleman, seeing your expertise in entomology, research on insects, we have decided to send you to our secret research centre. You have to report to Officer Hudson, in Austin, Texas, by this morning,” the senior officer said to Michael. He continued, “A helicopter is waiting right outside. You may proceed now. Best of luck, man.”

It was a 3-hour long journey, and Michael took a short nap. The chopper finally landed in Austin. From there, Hudson accompanied Michael, and together they drove into the woods and reached the very middle of the forest.

“When are we reaching the centre?” Michael asked out of curiosity.

Hudson answered with a smile, “Have patience, mister. Good things take time.”

They reached their destination in a next few minutes.

A fully functional high-tech research centre located underground was full of mystery for Michael. There were swarms of locusts everywhere, kept inside special, highly protected and reinforced enclosures. At the centre, breeding was encouraged on a large scale for research purposes.

“Is it the *Melanoplus Spretus*, the Rocky Mountain locust, which is extinct now? How could it be here?” Michael questioned George, another entomologist working there.

“You’re right. These are extinct in the eyes of the world, but we always possessed them in huge numbers,” George answered with pride.

“But why are we hiding them from the outer world?” Michael had lots of questions to ask.

“I don’t know, but we have been ordered to maintain swarms of locusts and make them stronger,” George replied.

“But...”

“Michael, you will be briefed on your role soon. Be mindful of the fact that you are here to work, not to question it. The agency has certain secrets which are revealed only if necessary,” Hudson interrupted Michael.

Michael wasn’t satisfied at all, but he couldn’t do anything about it. Soon, he was given his task of fusing two locust species—Rocky Mountain locust and *Locusta Migratoria*.

After a few months of struggle, he finally succeeded.

“Well done, Michael. We’re proud to have an excellent scientist like you at our centre,” Hudson appreciated his work.

“Thank you, sir. I am always ready to use my knowledge for the welfare of the nation.”

Michael was very happy with his achievement, but this happiness didn’t last for long. One day, while reading the news, Michael found an article about a locust attack in China. No preventive measures worked on those locusts, and scientists were unable to determine the species.

Surprisingly, in the swarm that attacked China, there were no female locusts, only males, which died within two weeks.

Upon examination, Michael found that it was the same species he had created by fusion.

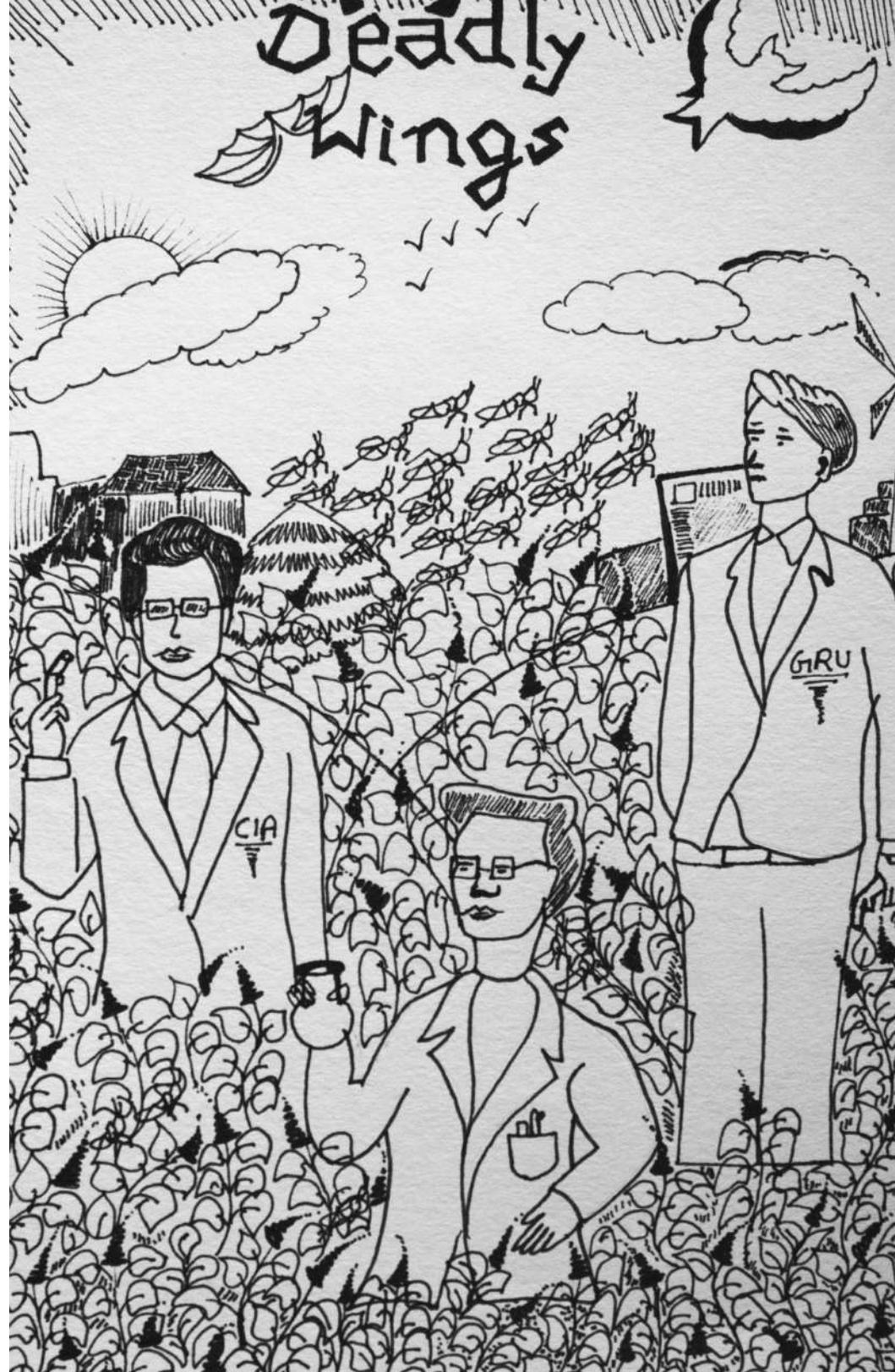
Michael's mind was buzzing with questions, and he needed answers to them all. He called Hudson. "Hey officer, I am unable to understand this. The fusion species that I had created... that is exactly the kind that has been found to attack China. How could that be possible?"

"Oh man, calm down. It's the CIA doing this on the orders of the White House. Those Chinese are our rivals, and this is our revenge on them." Hudson ended the call without saying anything further.

It was all clear to Michael now. It was the CIA that was conducting these locust attacks to take revenge against America's rival countries. Its main aim was to disrupt the enemy's economy. They weren't sending any female locusts because that would result in a never-ending disaster as they would reproduce endless locusts by breeding. Sending only males was effective, as they would die in a few weeks, after causing the intended damage to crops.

Michael tried to contact the White House but got no answer in return. He was warned by Hudson to keep his mouth shut. "Sir, a locust attack will result in food shortage, causing the deaths of thousands of innocent people," Michael argued logically.

"Oh please, we are capable of taking decisions on our own. Your advice isn't required," Hudson was no longer interested in listening to Michael.



It was a tough for Michael. He had to choose to either stay loyal to the government and his agency which he had served for many years, or rebel and protect innocent people from dying. He chose the latter path and decided to stop this.

He started working on making an antidote secretly, which would kill the hybrid species that he had created. Meanwhile, the Americans continued to launch locust attacks across enemy territory.

Michael sped up his research and eventually, the antidote was ready. The work wasn't quite complete yet; he needed to reach out to the outer world to make effective use of the antidote. He planned an escape from the research centre. At the time of his research in the lab, he intentionally mixed a few chemicals to produce smoke.

"Where is this smoke coming from?" asked George.

"It seems there is a fire in the lab. Let's get out of here at the earliest possible," replied Michael. He pressed the fire alarm, and the emergency exits of the research centre were opened for all. Michael took the benefit of the smoke and escaped from there, taking along his antidote.

He his in a ship, escaped the US and arrived in Tampico, Mexico. Samuel Ruiz, a friend of his, lived in Tampico. Michael took shelter in his home and told him everything.

"Hey, mate, don't worry. You made a good choice by coming here. We'll fight this together," Samuel told Michael.

"I am not sure whom I should ask for help," Michael asked Samuel for advice.

"The Russians, of course," said Samuel.

"Why would the Russians believe a CIA man?"

"Is there another option?"

"But whom to reach?"

"Yes, I have good contacts with the Russian ambassador. We shall go and talk to him," said Samuel.

The ambassador was shocked to know about the details of the locust attack. He saw a few proofs and passed them on to the GRU, the Russian secret agency. He got a call from them after some time, and told Michael, "Reach the Kremlin. We will decide later what to do next."

Michael agreed and set forth on a secret voyage, accompanied by Russian agents.

The Russian commander-in-chief, Viktor, interrogated Michael. "Are you sure that the CIA is operating a secret research centre in Austin?"

"Yes, it is right there in the middle of the woods. It is inside an underground tunnel," Michael answered.

"Is it still operational after the smoke incident?"

"It should work, as that smoke caused no harm."

After hours of interrogation, it was confirmed that the White House was responsible for all the locust attacks.

While all this was happening, the Americans tried to send a swarm of locusts into Russia. This time, they sent males and females together, unaware that Michael had already made the antidote.

The antidote killed the locusts before any destruction could take place. Russia filed a case in the International Court of Justice; the US government and its secret agencies were found guilty. The US had to pay nearly a trillion dollars in damages to the countries that had suffered from the locust attacks.

Michael became a hero in the eyes of the world, and was showered with awards. People called him a messiah and treated him as a real-life hero.

At the time of an interview given to TVCI, a Russian TV news channel, Michael said, “God never differentiates amongst us. He doesn’t divide countries or make borders and weapons. It is us human and our never-ending desires that lead to destruction of our own kind. It is painful to see that one human is killing another. Science is meant for the welfare of the world, not for destruction.”

His interview went viral all over the world. Everyone was left speechless after hearing his words. They made the whole world stop and listen to him.

He later continued, “We can be good competitors; there’s nothing wrong with that. But destroying each other for the sake of revenge is something that brings shame to the human race. Now it depends on us what we want our upcoming generations to inherit from us: A world full of blood, hatred, anger and jealousy, or a world full of love, brotherhood and peace. The choice is all yours.”

This speech of Michael had a huge impact on listeners all over the world. His aim of changing the world and making it a better place to live in, was finally achieved after lots of struggle.



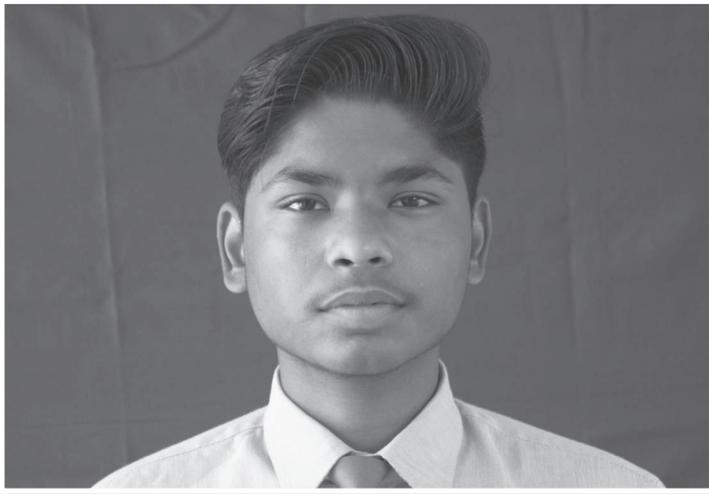
REFLECTIONS

The most important thing I learnt in the writing programme was to connect with the reader. Writing is the best way to learn, and to deliver your thoughts, as it lets you imagine and believe at the same time. To me, writing is simply thinking through my hands and writing my story here made that possible—*Mayank Gangwar*

THE UNDEFINED SHADOW

By Mayank Harsh Verma





I was born on January 27, 2006, in Pilibhit. My father is a businessman and my mother teaches at a government school. I am not much of a talker, but when I'm with friends, I talk nineteen to the dozen. I love reading books in my leisure time. I also love music, especially instrumental music. The two kinds of movies I like are science fiction and period drama. My aim in life is to be a successful actor. I love typical spicy Indian food. I am always eager to travel and exploring new places. One place I recently visited is

Vaishnodevi and I just can't get over its beauty. I want that people should have a positive image of mine in their mind. One place where I would like to live forever is on the banks of river Yamuna, facing the Taj Mahal.



Illustrated By

Girija Singh, VII Orioles

In beautiful Manali, there lived a boy named Satyavrat. His tiny home was on a crowded street. The boy simple and had no big dreams. He was fond of reading and was really good at writing, particularly poetry and short stories. He found refuge from his problems in reading, and even though there were problems, he was happy with his routine and the kind of life he was living.

However, life started testing Satyavrat; he failed in mathematics and was removed from the school cricket team and his best friend left the school and shifted to another city.

Little by little, it all got to him. He would wake up with stress and go to sleep stressed. Nothing made sense anymore and he missed his friend very much.

Still, Satyavrat did not lose hope and decided he would do the one thing he was really good at; he would write.

He did not have friends and he was shy and an introvert. So the best recourse was to write. And write he did, as he always said to himself, “Paper has more patience than people.”

Well, he wrote- mostly about what was happening to him. He wrote so much and with so much attention and focus that he was completely immersed in his writing. And then, he started imagining himself in inside the fictional world that he had created. In that fictional world, there was an undefined shadow.

One day, he wrote...

Tall and well built, he is forced to shop in big stores with tall doors and high ceilings. And he always buys long coats, heavy jeans and high-ankle work boots. Like a shadow, he seems dark, a mere silhouette. His face is always bidden, not by a hood. It is just that it is nearly impossible to see his face. I have ever seen his eyes or any part of his face. I imagine that his face is not a face, but rather simply plain, smooth skin, devoid of facial features. Still, he can somehow see, smell, whisper, laugh, breathe, taste and feel.

He is possessed of darkness and exudes a sense of fear. I feel negative vibes and it seems he is with me all the time.

I cannot get a restraining order against the man. I cannot run from him. I cannot barricade myself behind a locked door, for he simply a manifestation of darkness which lives inside me, a black



shadow so deep that it sucks the light and the warmth out of my surroundings.

He is me, mostly walking behind me; always within reach, but does not interfere in anything. These are the moments that I can almost be normal, but his presence alone affects everything I do or say. I can escape water by either breaking the surface or by swimming, but I cannot escape the shadow. Because it is none other than my own self.

But finally, I pull out of the shadow. I scream as loud as I can. I see the bright sky, the warm sun, the colourful flowers, my parents, my friends, my teachers. I startle the shadow with light, and it retreats. But after a few days, it returns to pace behind me, saying, 'You cannot escape yourself.'

The shadow isolated me but inculcating and nurturing good habits and making new friends has brought in new light; happiness. The most important thing is I believe in myself, and have faith in God.

The moment Satyavrat finished his writing, all his sadness and feeling of isolation ended. The shadow now faded and disappeared.

Satyavrat wrote, "Life isn't only about how hard you can punch, it's also about how many punches you can take, remain standing and fight back effectively." Satyavrat felt fine now; he had taught himself how to deal with difficulties.

On a beautiful Sunny day, while he was going to school, his diary fell from his bag right outside a book store.

The shop owner, Bhanu Pratap, found the diary, and as he was a book lover, he was curious to know what had written it. He he read the first page and was was stunned by the writing and the depth of thoughts of the writer.

But, suddenly realising that his diary had fallen off, Satyavrat ran into the shop, angry and upset. He screamed at the shop owner, "That diary is mine; please give it to me."

Patiently, Bhanu replied, "It's such beautiful writing. Won't you like to publish it?"

But instead of feeling happy, Satyavrat was upset, even angry. "No," he said, categorically. Now his anger was rising at the man's insistence.

But Bhanu just asked Satyavrat to sit at a table in the café that was attached to the book shop.

No one said a single word for half-an-hour. Then Satyavrat said, rather contritely, "I am sorry uncle, I was afraid of losing it, I have no one except..."

Bhanu replied, smiling, "I can understand how you feel. Think about having your work published. The writing is superlative; the world needs to read it and learn from it."

Realising what Bhanu was saying, Satyavrat said, "God has given me this gift; it is something special. Why let it go waste. Fine, let us publish it."

For months, Bhanu wrote to publishers and waited for their responses. But he was determined. One day, he wrote to an old friend of his - an editor at a big publishing house. The editor read the manuscript and liked it very much.

Six months later, when the book, *The Undefined Shadow*, was published, it became an instant success; popular amongst teenagers. It won many prizes and generally earned a lot of praise. It was a huge success.

Satyavrat became a famous author; he had found his purpose in life.

One day, a journalist asked Satyavrat what had inspired him to write *The Undefined Shadow*, he said in quiet voice, “We all have an undefined shadow; we cannot escape it or get rid of it. We learn to live with it. Life will go on.”



REFLECTIONS

I can already see my friends giving me more importance and treating me like a celebrity. They keep asking, *Did you finish writing? When will we get to read it?* My reply is, *Yes, very soon...* This programme was a golden opportunity for me. It was tough, but not boring, and something I will remember for the rest of my life—*Mayank H Verma*

LURKING DANGER

By Nandani Gupta





I was born on April 6, 2007. If I could do one thing every day, it would be reading and writing. I come from a small town in Uttar Pradesh called Pilibhit, and it is beautiful, especially the night sky which is full of stars. I enjoy eating spicy street food and pastries. I was moved and inspired by reading *The Wings of Fire* and *The Story of a Young Girl: Anne Frank*. People think I am an innocent child, and I let them believe it. In India, the places I want to travel to are Mathura and Vrindavan. In this era, people around me enjoy listening to K-pop but I prefer

old songs. The one word that can describe me is explorer. I aim of becoming an IAS officer so I can accomplish my dream of helping the people who need it.



Six children lived in Mumbai. They were best friends. Some of them were fifteen, some eighteen and some, somewhere in the middle. Lisa, the oldest, was a kind girl with a big heart, and she was terrified of the dark. Devin was the bravest of them all. Rose was pretty but not just that, she was smart and brave. She was the definition of beauty with brains. Marco was naughty. He was always up to something but some say he is the most intelligent boy around. Sofia a sweet girl, was afraid of the dark, insects and of course, creepy monsters. And John, the youngest child of the group. He was fun and funny. People were always laughing around him.

It was during their summer vacation when they decided to go for a picnic. Rose had an idea.

“If we are going for a picnic. Wouldn’t it be great if we stay at the jungle for the night?”

They thought the plan was perfect. They planned their night in the jungle excitedly. They wanted to do everything, but mostly, roam around the jungle. For the picnic, they packed food and water, a medical kit, some equipment like sticks, chili spray and ropes, they wanted to be prepared for everything, including mosquitoes. One of them even got a mosquito repellent spray.

Jumping with excitement, they reached their meeting spot and saw a big car waiting for them. Their parents had booked it for them. They left by 9 AM and the adventures had already begun. The tire of the car was punctured. By the time they reached their picnic spot, it was already 11:30 AM. They thanked and waved at the driver as he drove away.

They explored the jungle for a while, when they finally found a spot to set up their tents. The girls started putting up the tents, while the boys went to gather some wood for the fire. When they returned, they were surprised. The girls had made the place special. Everything was set up, including their food and water. They sat down for lunch, laughing and talking.

After lunch, they decided to explore more. They saw birds with the sharpest beaks, birds with colours they couldn't even name. They had no words to describe the beauty of the jungle and the creatures that lived in it. They clicked a few pictures and didn't forget to set up marks, a cross sign, so they could find their way back to the tents.

They walked further and found a spot where the jungle ended. The edge of the jungle was also the edge of the sea. The beauty of it all overwhelmed them. They saw something else. One of them pointed at it and they all looked over, one by one. They couldn't figure out what they saw, it was floating in the water. And then its body turned and it was clear. It was a human carcass.

The youngest of the group let out a scream. All of them were filled with panic soon. They shouted at the sea and the jungle, "Is someone here? Please help us."

Sofia said, "I am scared. We should go back to our tent."

Devin replied, "No. We must find out who is behind this."

As he was saying it, he saw Rose's expression change. She pointed at the ground and they saw it too- footprints. They were going the opposite direction. She looked up and said, "We have to follow it."

This side of the jungle was dark. If they were in heaven in their tents, they were in hell now. The children were frightened. They walked a few steps the Sofia exclaimed, "I knew they were real."

And they saw the strangest creature they had ever seen. The best word to describe it was- monster. They were petrified when their eyes met him. Maybe because of an instinct or just the will to fight back, Devin threw his stick at it. And to their surprise, the monster was bothered.

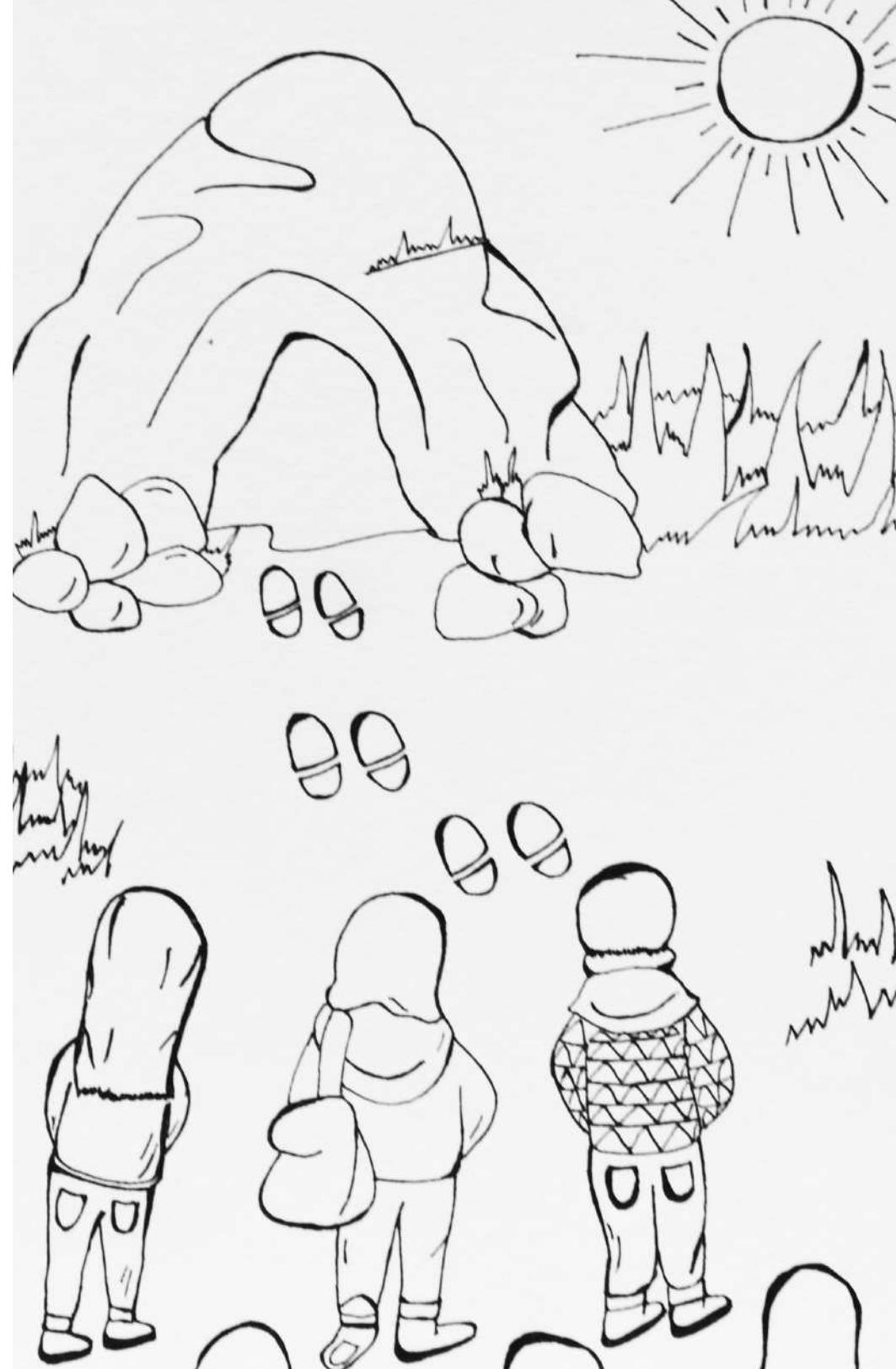
They followed Devin's lead and threw sticks and stones at it. And it crawled away.

They were shocked and happy. When all of a sudden, it looked like Lisa was being eaten up by the ground. It was a marshland. Before it was too late, Marco took out the rope and threw it at Lisa, who grabbed it. The other five started pulling her. And she was free. The children couldn't believe their luck. It was bad, yet, somehow, good.

The sun was setting quickly and they were tired. But they couldn't find a place to sleep. Most of their thoughts were on the comfortable tents and mattresses waiting for them. When John spotted a cave. They were about to walk in to take rest, when they saw it, again. The footprints. Not the presence of it but its absence. They were leading inside the cave.

They figured out the two entrances to the cave. But they were too tired to do anything or even to plan. They hid behind the trees and went to sleep. John and Devin offered to be on the lookout. They were awake for some time but soon, sleep came.

When Devin and John woke up the next morning, they were scared. They weren't supposed to sleep. But everything was fine.



Marco found a hole on a side of the cave and put his ear to it. When the stones at the gate rumbled, the two murderers came out of it. wordlessly, they just kept walking.

They all rushed into the cave to investigate, and John was on the lookout. They were quick. They memorised the whole cave and even made a small hole at the entrance. The hole was big enough for the children but small for the two tall and bulky men. As they were hiding the small hole, then men came back. And they weren't alone. There was another man with them and it looked like they were about to kill him. John alerted his friends and they all came out the hole. All of them in position to eavesdrop on the conversation.

“Achhoo,” Rose couldn't help it. She sneezed loudly and the men knew someone was there. It took them a minute to find all the children. They taped the children's mouths as they were speaking and tied their hands and feet. But Rose was an artist. She always carried her carving tool in her pocket. She cut her ties and passed the tool to the others. All cut themselves loose but acted like they were still tied.

Now all they had to do was wait. When the murderers, they ripped their and got to work. They assembled every sharp item they could find and positioned themselves near the entrance. As soon as the entrance opened and the men walked in, the children attacked them. They were furious and scared. Finally, the men passed out. The children grabbed the men all the way to the edge of the sea, where they

had found the body. They were tired and panting when one of the men woke up. He grabbed the child standing closest to him, it was Sophie. She screamed loudly and the second man woke up because of it. He grabbed Marco. They pulled out a knife from their waistband. The children had no way to save their friends. The men swung their knife. But *swish*.

A tall man, in a blue suit, who looked stronger than anyone they had ever seen, had pulled the two men away from the children. Sophie and Marco ran to Lisa. The man was wearing a cap with a star and his suit had medals on them. It was an officer of the navy. The children then noticed a cruise coming their way. The officer knew something was wrong and had come before his team did.

The children told the officer everything they had seen. They boarded the cruiser with the officer. They called their worried parents and told them everything, especially that they were now safe. The murderers were locked up.

When they reached Mumbai, they were greeted by hundreds of journalists. As soon as the vessel docked, the children ran to their parents. They were met with hugs, and kisses and tears.

The media had lost all control. They asked the children a million questions. They wanted to know everything about their investigation and the children obliged.

The news spread everywhere. Weeks later, the children were awarded a medal for their bravery.

In the ceremony for the medal, their group was given a name, the teenage detectives. The whole city knew them by this name. Everyone was happy. The children even decided to continue their adventures, they decided to become detectives when they grew up.

They were able to figure out who the man that had died was when the police called them in for questioning. He was a scientist, and the men wanted his research. But when he refused, they killed him. The police found nothing else. The children discussed it when they got home, they were worried about what the research was and if someone else was coming to get it. That night, they decided this will be their first case when they become detectives.



REFLECTIONS

I learned a lot of things during this programme. Our mentor made every day of this workshop interesting and gave us various helpful tips on writing. It was tiring writing and typing the story but it was interesting. I wish for more such programmes related to story writing. I thank my school for giving me this really rare opportunity—Nandani

THE LITTLE GIRL

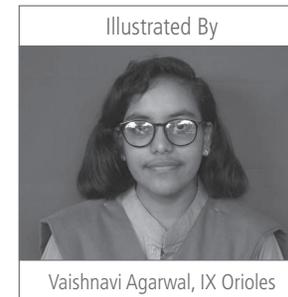
By Nishtha Rathore





I am a sixteen-year-old girl whose father is a businessman and mother, a homemaker. The two books that I have found to be wonderful are *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* and *The Mill On The Floss*. The film I have truly enjoyed watching is *Home Alone*. I also like the films in the *Sherlock Holmes* franchise. My favourite music is *Pasoori*, and I enjoy eating chowmein and momos. The one place that I cannot forget after visiting is Nainital; its immense beauty has taken my heart away. People think of me as an introvert, but that

is not who I am. I am a very talkative and naughty girl who loves doing mischievous things. The word that describes me best is *innocent*. My ambition is to become an IAS officer and serve my country.



Kiara, a sixteen-year-old girl, loved being in nature. She was a good student, and had many friends at school. Kiara was looking forward to her summer break so that she could go on a holiday with her parents and enjoy her time off from school.

On the last day of school, everyone gathered together and discussed their plans for the holidays. Many of her friends were going to different countries. One of her friends said, “I am going to Paris with my family”, and another said, “I am going to Disneyland, which is my dream place”.

Listening to all this, Kiara started wondering what her parents had planned for her vacation. She was aware that she came from a middle-class family, and her parents may not be able to take her abroad for a holiday.

She went home and asked her mother about it, and she replied, “Kiara, we are going to your grandmother’s house in our village. I am sure you will love the week that we will spend there with her.”

Kiara was a little sad upon hearing this, but she did not say anything to her mother. She also did not tell her about the grand plans that her friends at school had for their respective holidays.

On the day that she and her parents were to travel to go to her grandma’s, Kiara woke up and was very excited. She started packing her clothes, and later went to the market to buy a saree for her grandma. She was looking forward to meeting Grandma.

After half a day of travel on dusty roads, they reached the village. Kiara hugged her grandma and gave her the gift. Grandma immediately went and changed into her new saree, which made Kiara very happy.

Kiara was tired after the journey, and asked her grandmother for some food. When she went to the kitchen, she jumped with joy because Grandma had cooked all of Kiara’s favourite dishes, especially the gulab jamun, which she absolutely loved.

The ancestral house, even though it was very old, was like a treasure trove for Kiara. She loved spending her



afternoons in its cool basement, and during the evenings, went up to the roof and enjoyed the lovely breeze.

Kiara also had some friends in the village, as she had been visiting here since she was a baby.

Soon, a week was over, and it was time to go back to the city. Kiara was sad that her holiday was over. But she suddenly had an idea. She asked her parents if she could spend more time with her grandmother, and stay on in the village for the entire duration of the holidays.

Her parents thought about it. Since they both were working, and had no more leaves from their offices, they decided that they would go back to the city while Kiara could stay back with Grandma. They would later come and take her back home.

Kiara was delighted to know that she didn't have to end her holiday just yet.

She and Grandma had a lovely time together. They told each other stories, cooked, sang, went on long walks, and even sat by the river and read story books. Before long, a month was over, and soon Kiara's parents would come to the village to take her back.

On the day Kiara was to leave, she was very sad. She did not say anything to her grandma because she knew that would make her sad, too. Kiara held back her tears and waited for her parents.

As soon as they arrived, they excitedly told her, "Kiara, we both have taken a week off from our work, and we are taking you camping in the nearby forest."

Kiara was very happy, and all her sadness went away.

The next day, the three of them left for the forest after packing some yummy food that Grandma cooked for them, and some other essentials.

Kiara couldn't wait to return to school and tell her friends about her double holiday.



REFLECTIONS

I am really excited that my story has been published. I have been waiting for that moment when my name is called out as an author; when my friends treat me as a celebrity. Writing was not easy; it required hard work and dedication, especially because I have never written a story before. I would like to thank my mentor for helping me correct my mistakes. My coauthors also encouraged me a lot. I enjoyed being a part of this programme— *Nishtha*

STORY NOT EDITED

THE PRODIGAL SON

By Priyanshu Kumar





Rasmalai is something which I cannot share though I am a generous person. I was born in Simra a small village in Baheri on 20-JAN-2008. I came to Pilibhit when I was seven, I have seen both rural as well as urban lifestyle. Parents are my lifeline, my father is a Business man while my mother is a Homemaker. I really enjoy knowing about wildlife, specially birds, I even rescued a few. The Alchemist and the Power of your subconscious mind are two of mine favourite books so far. When it comes to music, I really enjoy soft

and slow music. My parents want me to be a doctor so do I, I like treating people but the way people treat me is not satisfying, they say I am egostic, well its not the truth its just that, my behavior varies depending on peoples behavior to me. They find me introvert and nurdy, well I am, its really difficult for me to muster up that courage to talk to a stranger, but if you find me with someone I know very well I just can't stop talking. I have a shy kind of personality. Moreover I really like dogs, they are much better than we humans are.

STORY NOT EDITED



Illustrated By

Vanshika Rathi, X Orioles

This story is about a man Dayaananda Charya who is unhappy with all the scimmages that life is throwing at him. So he decides to set off to a journey. Lets read and find out what happens in his journey.”

Long back, there lived a man named Dayaananda charya, in a small village of Panipat. Unfortunately he had no qualifications, was uneducated, had no extra ordinary talent, no connections and even no money in his pockets. He was bound to be dependent on the mercy of others, but he didn,t want that. he didn,t want to implore others for his survival. Such was his pride. He could not withstand that sympathy that others showed him.

Once there was a mela in his village. There he saw a old woman, wrinkles and scars on her face. She had some cards and was telling the future of the people. He stood there for the

whole day noticing how talented she was. In the evening, the woman called Dayaananda and asked – “I am observing you from the morning, you are standing here from a long time, why don’t you try your luck out here.” He said – “you are so talented, you can see what others can’t. How can you do this ?” The woman replied – “well its not the reality, I just fool people. Sometimes I do sense their luck but if its negative or bad, I try to be positive to them. He said – “unfortunately I don’t have any money with me, but I want to know my future, my talent too.” She thought for a moment and said- “alright, you’ve been waiting from morning, so I’ll try. She displayed the cards on the table and asked him to choose five cards from the stack randomly. She read the cards and said – “Hm you’re talented, but you are unaware of it. You’ll discover it in your journey of life. You really have a bright future.” Dayaananda had a hope now, so he decided to take off...where? he himself was unaware of it. People asked him – “what you will do ?” He said – “what am I doing here ?” “you’re helping around, you get food to eat, you have a roof over your head, what else you need “ – they said. At this he said – “and that is the problem, this way I’ll remain where I am, I’ll be unable to make a life on my own.....i don’t want to be dependent on others for my survival.....nothing will change for me here, I’ll remain the same thirty years later ...forty years later ...fifty years later and die in the same condition one day, I’ll only get older, useless and frustrated

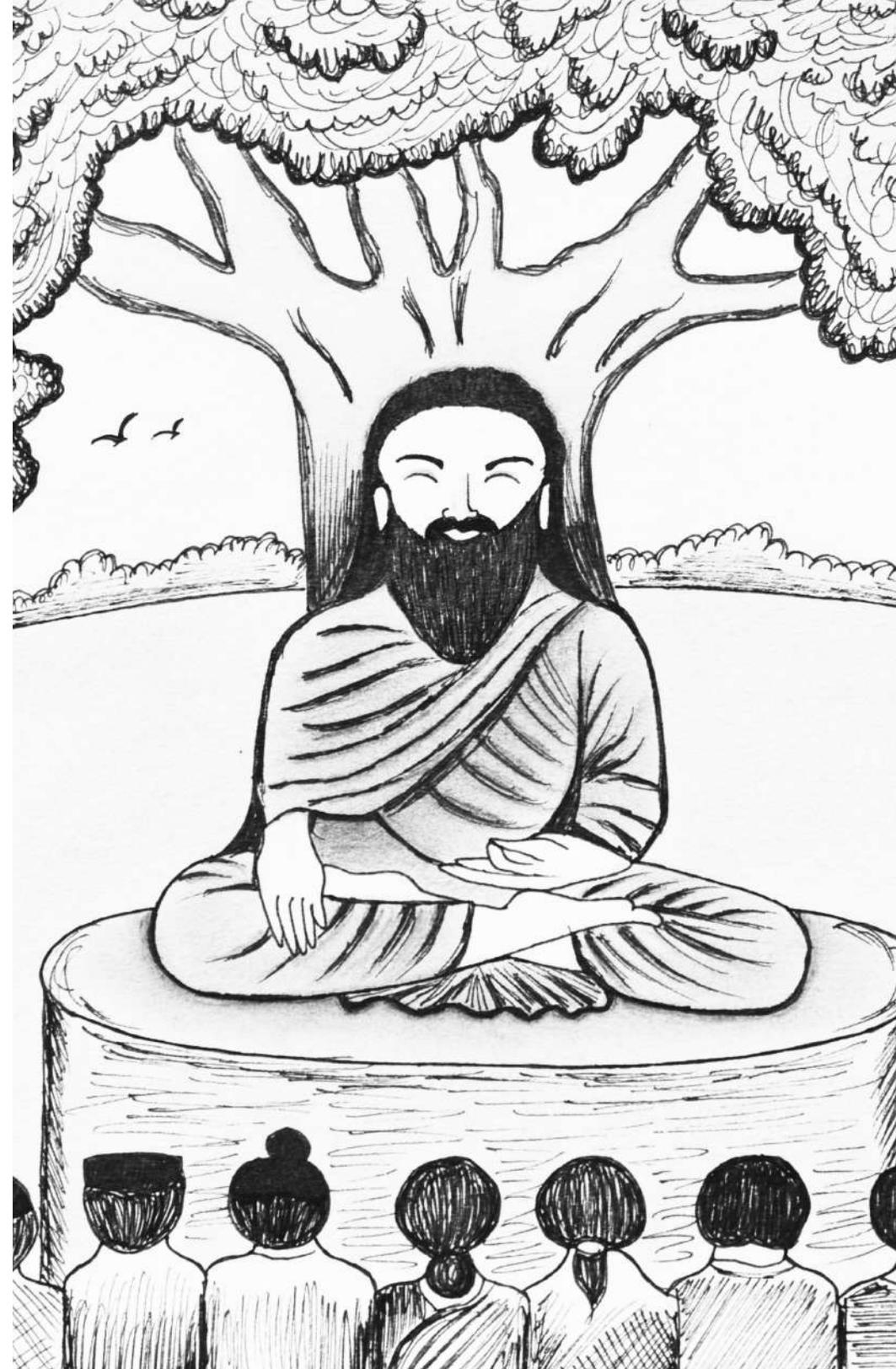
with myself.” So the people said – “such a uncertain world outside, you’ll be unable to make it up there...what you will do, you know nothing ?” – “that’s not the truth “ he said— “I am perfectly fine, I am capable of looking after myself....i am healthy, I have strong legs, a healthy mind...I can walk my way through...let me go. They asked- “where you will go.” – “wherever the destination takes me” He replied with satisfaction. He further added – “but before leaving let me make you very clear, I am leaving silently and without any celebration, but when I return whole village will celebrate my return and everyone will genuflect before me. Everyone started laughing madly at him.

Now he sets off to his journey, a journey which will define his future. There were two roads in front of him, he randomly chose one. While walking Dayaananda accidentally hit the rock on the road causing his one of the slipper to break, he didn’t stop and started limping his way through. A man was sitting under a tree. He saw Dayaananda limping and commented – “why don’t you buy a another pair of slippers, I mean just look at your blisters.” Dayaananda said- “do you really think I am in condition to buy a new pair?” The man said – “yaa...but what happened are you alright?” Dayaananda asked – “I am extremely fine, but you look a bit depressed aren’t you?” The man said – “I am not depressed I am distraught.” Dayaananda said- “tell me, you will feel better.” The man said – “I have a land related issue, he

continued, I have a land behind that field [pointing towards the land], the problem is that, there is no irrigation facility in the field....i have to fetch water from miles down....i am thinking to buy a land close to a canal but that land is top far....i'll have to travel a really long distance in order to reach there....too much fuel will be required for this purpose." Dayaananda listened the whole matter and stolidly said - "alright, well its about to rain in a week or so..and let me tell you, "blessings can change into a curse any time"

And he moved ahead silently, leaving the man tangled in his words. And in the same week there was a very severe rainfall, causing the canal to break and the field which the man thought of buying was completely flooded with water. The man understood Dayaananda's words and immediately went to look for him.

Dayaananda was not too far. He was sitting under a broken roof of an abandoned house, caressing his painful blisters. The man saw him and immediately touched his feet, also offered him a pair of comfortable slippers. The man said- "I don't know how I can I thank you, you literally saved me Charya ji. He told everything to him. Dayaananda smiled and said - "do you see, how uncertain things are..". The man requested him to have lunch with him. Dayaananda said - "you have nothing with you neither you're in your village, what we will eat ?" The man said - "don't worry the sarpanch of the village is my friend, we'll have a good



lunch.”Dayaananda agreed and met the sarpanch. They had their lunch and the whole village came to know about him. Everyone seemed to be really impressed by him.”It was time to leave, people offered him all the necessary stuff he needed to sustain.He couldn’t deny them

One morning Dayaananda heard someone arguing in a serious tone. The argument was between a girl and her father. The girl -Kali wanted to marry Anshu, a young boy who had recently given the Railway examination, but her father Mohan Das wanted a wealthy, affluent and prosperous son-in-law so he forced her to marry Hari, the son of a very rich landowner. Dayaananda went ahead and asked them –“what happen, you seem little exasperated aren,t you ?” Mohan Das said –“well its our personal business, why to bother you....”Dayaananda replied –“I might help you if you tell me the reason of your vexation.”Kali told him the whole matter. At this he asserted, “Don’t always go for the gold that glitters, even if unpolished the diamond glows brighter....”

Mohan das interrupted him and said –“we are already too frustrated, there is no time for your nonsense kindly leave” So he left.Few days later Mohan das came to know that Hari was a characterless man and though Anshu failed in the railway examination but successfully cleared the District Magistrate’s examination that he had given a month ago. Mohan das perceived the meaning that Dayaanandaintended.He looked for him for several days

and finally found him. He was shivering under a tree in a bitterly cold evening. Mohan das saw him and straight away touched his feet.He was regretful and offered him a tent and a blanket too. Mohan das married her daughter to Anshu very happily and invited Dayaananda, this way everyone came to know about him and appreciated his wisdom.

Wherever he travelled, people became influenced by him. They offered him food, clothes, money, goldand what not. He became a well known face now, people started calling him Charya ji.

Once while Charya ji was passing by a big city, he noticed a man, sitting with wrinkling eyebrows on a platform. He went ahead and asked –“you look muddled I guess, aren’t you?” He replied angrily-“ its none of your business, kindly leave me alone ...” Charya ji said –“relax, you can share it with me,you’ll feel better.”So he started putting things off his chest and said –“I am confused, whether to sell my land to a property dealer and become a politician or continue with my family’s profession ie-farming.” Charya ji thought for a moment and insisted-“ amm..alright let me tell you one thing, “ambitions are no doubt good, but can prove to be destructive too...”

The man ignored him and decided that he’ll become a politician so he sold half of his land and went to Lucknow to become a politician. And within a month almost all his money was gone like anything.Politics is not easy you

know. One man came to him and said –“do you really think that people will vote for you, I mean you haven’t done anything for them so far.”He was really intimidated by his future.Ambition is good but can be destructive too ...Charyaji’s words flashed in his mind.He was very guilty to neglect his wisdom. Now he had only one option to go back to his remaining piece of land and continue farming. He searched for Charyaji, asked people if they saw a young man, with long beard and hair and with days of some efforts he finally found him.He right away was down to his knees and started shedding his tears. He said –“I ignored your words Charya ji and see where I am standing today.” Charya ji smiled and said –

“its alright, you can still make it.....it dosen’t matter how little you have, what matters is your dedication your hard work to make that little best.”

In the next ten years, he became a prominent face in the world. People used to come to him and get their problems solved in a minute. He travelled all over the world, became a messiah for the people. People were dying to meet him and even started worshipping him. He always gave the right and good advice. He used to motivate, inspire and persuade people to follow the right path. Hardly there were few who didn’t know him. Now he decided to go back from where it started, back to his village of Panipat. People of his village came to know about his arrival and they decorated the

whole village like a bride. People were really excited to meet him. As soon as he entered his village, all greeted him with garlands, shower of flowers. He straight away went to the people who at first underestimated him, laughed at him. They were unable to recognize him because of his completely different appearance, but then somebody told that Charya ji is that man only to whom you underrated... DayaanandaCharya. They all were open-mouthed and were down to their knees. Charya ji came and said to them –“you see, I told you before leaving that one day people will celebrate my returnI stood on my words.”They were speechless and were regretting meanwhile one man came and said –“namaste Charya ji, the village is organizing a mela on your auspicious return tomorrow....

Charya ji was very excited to meet that old woman who interpreted his future and congratulate her for her right predictions. He just couldn’t wait to tell her about his journey,a journey which had no terminus.



REFLECTIONS

I was on cloud nine when I came to know that I am selected for this amazing programme. Writing a story is easier said than done, I realized it now. No doubt it was very tedious job yet I loved it. I stepped in as a very diffident creature but came out with full confidence. Working with such extra-ordinary writers and a fantastic mentor was really wonderful. I now know my abilities and weaknesses better—Priyanshu

THE TROUBLESOME TENANTS

By Samriddhi Gangwar





I am ten years old. Both my parents are teachers. I take a lot of interest in travelling, reading and getting to know about history. I visited Jaipur's imposing Amer Fort last November and cannot forget it. I love the books *The Story of Ramakrishna* and *Secret Seven on the Trail*. Some songs that are very close to my heart are *Life goes on*, *Stay* and *It's not fine*. My favourite food is pasta in white sauce. *Shershah* and a Korean movie named *Train to Busan* have truly left a mark on me. I would love to live in a city named Lohaghat, in the hills of Uttarakhand, because

of its beauty. My ambition is to become an IAS officer and serve my country. My friends think that I am a good girl who studies hard. However, I would like to describe myself as a traveller.



It was a bright day. It was even brighter for Aldrin Francois as he had been promoted at work. He was now the manager of his company. But this meant that he would have to move from his city, Pelington, to Tallington.

Once he and his family reached the new city, they bought a house on 92nd Street. The previous owners, Allen and Leo, were only too happy to sell the house to Aldrin. He found it a little odd, but did not complain as it was a good deal.

After a week or so, when Aldrin and his family were well settled, his wife, Erica, said to him, "This is a huge house. We don't need all of it. What do you think about renting out the backside of the house. We can have some extra income that way."

Aldrin liked the idea, and put in an advertisement for tenants. Once he started receiving enquiries, he set up visits and meetings with prospective tenants.

A young duo came to see the house on Sunday afternoon. “Hello, sir. My name is Justin, and this is Kevin. We have a general store nearby, and we would love it if you allowed us to rent the backside of your house. It will be very practical and convenient for us. And we promise not to create any trouble for you.”

Both Erica and Aldrin liked them, and after a few questions, decided that they would rent out part of their house to them.

Kevin and Justin moved in the following week, and everything seemed to be fine. Until it was not.

They started coming home very late in the night. Even though they had a separate entrance to their part of the house, still, they made a lot of noise, and always carried big bags and disturbed Aldrin and his family. This went on for a few weeks.

Suddenly, Justin and Kevin started dressing in fancy clothes, wearing a lot of gold and diamonds, and moving around in fancy new cars.

All of this made Aldrin and Erica very suspicious. They wondered why the young boys were living on rent if they had so much money. They ignored this for some time, but when the nuisance became too much, they decided to investigate.



One night, when Aldrin heard Justin and Kevin come back late, he quietly followed them. They were carrying a heavy sack, and it seemed to be full of jewels. Aldrin immediately alerted the police who came to find out what the matter was. Detective Christopher was with them. Something was definitely very fishy.

It was decided that the police would go back, that Aldrin and Erica would act as normal, and Detective Christopher would keep any eye on Justin and Kevin, without letting them know, of course.

In the morning, once Justin and Kevin left for work, Detective Christopher went into their part of the house through Aldrin's entrance. He searched the whole house, and found literally nothing. This was quite disappointing, as everything about Justin and Kevin was suspicious and yet nothing could be found that could prove the same.

Still, Christopher decided to watch for a few more days.

One evening, while checking things in the garden, he stepped on some dry leaves but they made a noise as if there was something metallic underneath. Detective Christopher was immediately on alert. He did a thorough investigation and realised that the metallic thing was a doorway to an underground tunnel.

He alerted the police, who came over immediately. Together, the police and the detective uncovered a major

gang of smugglers who would carry out crimes across the city and then come and dump all their loot in the underground tunnel beneath Aldrin and Erica's home.

Upon further investigation, the police found out that the former owners of the house, Allen and Leo, were very much part of the smugglers' gang. They had agreed to provide shelter to the smugglers on their property, in exchange for some goodies.

Once the case was resolved, Detective Christopher was awarded a medal for his brilliant work. All the smugglers, including Allen and Leo, were sent to jail. The police were recognised for the swiftness of their actions. And Aldrin and Erica were moved to a new, safe home.



REFLECTIONS

I never imagined that I'd get this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Yet, I did. It was difficult yet amusing to think of an original idea and write a story about it. I thought of two ideas; one was rejected, and the other turned into this story. It was great to work with our mentor and we had a lot of fun together. We learnt many new things. I thought that writing would be easy, but I was wrong. Writing is not an exercise; it is an emotion— *Samriddhi*

THE TREE IN QUESTION

By Shreshth Pradhan





I was born on March 13, 2009. My father works with L&T Financial Limited, and is a part-time author, while my mother is a teacher. My hobbies are reading comics, especially the *Panchtantra* ones, making sketches and playing basketball. The films that have left a mark on me are *Shakuntala Devi* and *3 Idiots*. I love listening to music, and eating pizza, gol gappas, shahi tukra and sham savera. I visited the city of Ramnagar in Uttarakhand, and enjoyed it very much, particularly because of its tasty and spicy noodles! Some people think I

am rude, but that's not true. I would describe myself as *analytical*. I want to settle down in Mumbai, and want to be an actor while continuing to write stories, poems and articles.

In a small town lived a little boy, Prakash, with his elder brother and parents. Their home was in a neighbourhood where the men went about their work, the women looked after the household, and the children went to school and played hide and seek. Everyone was supportive of each other, and helped whoever was in need.

Prakash's bedroom was on the first floor of the house. His brother's room was adjacent to his, while their parents were on the ground floor.

From the balcony, Prakash had a view of a lovely old tree. It was his favourite pastime to sit for hours and observe the little birds, insects and small animals for whom the tree was their entire universe.

For the last few days, however, Prakash had been noticing a strange shadow on the tree. It was unusual, almost a little scary.

He tried to ignore it for a few days, but when the shadow kept growing in size every week, Prakash could contain the fear no more.

He spoke to Ramesh, his brother, about it. Ramesh came to the balcony, and along with Prakash, tried to find the source of the shadow. They did not succeed. Dismissing it as something irrelevant and not important, Ramesh ignored it.

Prakash hoped that since Ramesh did not think this was anything serious, the shadow would disappear on its own. But that was not to be. It only grew in size. And the odd thing about it was that the shadow also changed shape and direction every few hours.

Feeling petrified now, Prakash decided that it was time to speak to his father. When he did, his father immediately reassured him that he would have a look at the shadow as soon as he got back from office that evening.

Prakash and Ramesh went to school, and their father left for his office. In the evening, when everyone was together, Prakash requested his father to look into the matter of the scary shadow.

Prakash, Ramesh and both their parents went up to Prakash's room and on to the balcony. The shadow was there! Prakash's mother and father exchanged a knowing look, and started smiling.



Holding Prakash's hand, his father took him downstairs and out on to the road where the old tree firmly had its roots planted in the ground. Besides the huge tree was a tiny tree which seemed to be blossoming in the shadow of the big one.

Prakash's father explained to him that a seed from the big tree must have taken root and emerged out of the earth. And the sun's rays, and the ever-shifting position of the sun, would have cast the shadow of the smaller tree on to the bigger one. And as the small tree grew in size, the shadow also grew.

Prakash was relieved at the resolution of this scary, shadowy mystery. Everyone started laughing.

Prakash's mother lovingly held his hand and guided him into the house to enjoy the delicious dinner that she had prepared for everyone.



REFLECTIONS

Being part of this programme was a dream come true. I love to write poems, stories and articles, but they were never published. With this story, I am living my dream. Working with other bright writers was a pleasure; I have improved as a writer. I will always remember this experience with fondness. I am going to miss my mentor and my coauthors—*Shreshth*

STORY NOT EDITED

THE STORM OF LIFE

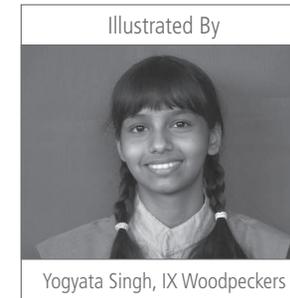
By Shreyasi Verma





I am 14. I was born on 6 August 2007. Those crowded cities with many huge buildings usually fascinates me. Im from a small city Pilibhit. Ive always found myself wandering around those narrow streets of Pilibhit. My recent visits to city like Dehli and some hill stations opened up a new world for me. I would love to visit these places again. Sketching, Calligraphy are few things I would love doing in my spare time. I find myself at peace while listening to slow melodious instrumental music. Those

STORY NOT EDITED

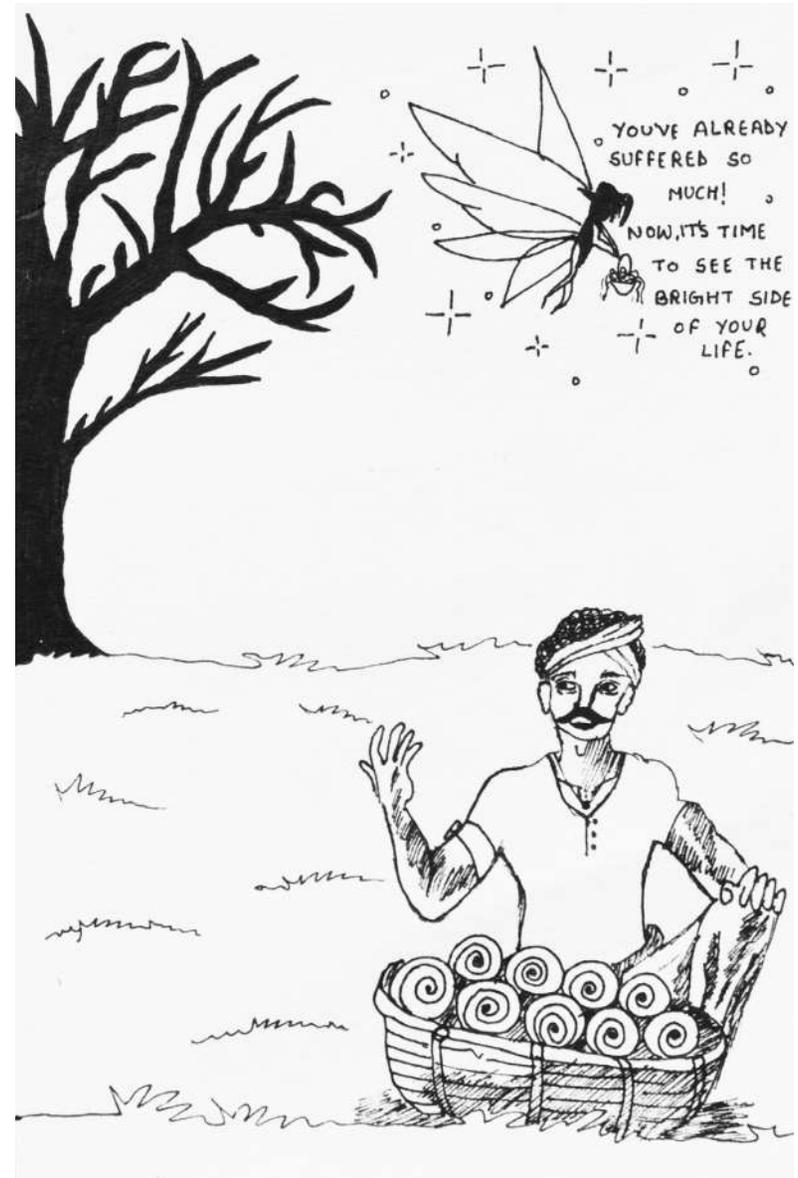


It was a sunny day! Cumulus clouds looked like fluffy, white, cotton balls. Bhargav was sitting in the open space before his house, totally unaffected by the problems he had due to his almighty wealth. He was a wise and pious man with lots of riches. He had a lavish, prodigious ancestral house which never failed to mesmerize people. Young mans great wealth sometimes prevented him from doing what his heart desires the most. He was busy in his own thoughts and imaginations, recollecting old memories of his wife, who passed away few years back.

Soon he heard his son Aandiraks voice from behind. He looked there and saw his son coming towards him. Aandirak came to his father and said-“ Father, a short heighted having a BIG paunch with a buddle of papers came to meet you.” Bhargav stood up and moved towards the man to meet him. He was a well known merchant of the city. Both of them hugged

each other and had some nice talks. After all this was done the merchant came closer to Bhargav with a huge grin on his face and said-“ I have a great deal for you today!” He replied-“Oh! well that’s great . I would like to know about it.” Then the merchant began explaining him about the deal. He said-“I have purchased mustard seeds in a whole sale to trade. But I don’t have enough space to store them. So, if possible... Can you store them in your in your godown?”. Bhargav stood silent. Merchant again insisted him and said-“Umm... in... in... return I would share half of the profit earned after selling them.” Finding the deal to be practical he agreed to it and said-“deal done! Ill be glad to work with you.” Merchant happily replied ill be transporting all those seeds to your godown by tomorrow morning. Next day, in the morning all the seeds were transported to Bhargavs godown to store them. All seeds were safely kept in the godown.

Unfortunately, This year the weather conditions were not so good. Heavy rainfall and hail was observed. Due to these poor weather conditions all those mustard seeds were spoiled. Hearing this the merchant arrived Bhargavs home the next day. This time merchant anxiously entered his house. He said-“Id purchased those seeds with my money that I had earned after lot of efforts”. Bhargav replied- “ Im sorry my friend, but its not my fault, What could I have been done?”Merchant with those teary eyes said-“ I don’t



know I want my money back .” All the lose was put on Bhargavs head. He had no option left with him. Conditions went worst, debts increased to such an extend his house was sold. He failed to decipher whatever little amount he had with him. He wasn’t able to recover the money. He had all all his wealth, property in order to pay the lose of those mustard seeds.

Now he had nothing left with him leaving a portrait of his wife and few coins of money. It was just him and his son . Those few coins which he had saved with him were now used to get some food for his son. He was totally empty by his pockets. Being tensed about his present condition he was sitting along the roadside. He had to do something to contrive to live. He closed his eyes and began thinking for some ways to earn something . He got5 up and began wandering here and there randomly. Suddenly his eyes went on a sickle laying next to his leg. A thought striked over his mind. He picked it up and went to a place where thick grass had grown. He used the sickle and started cutting grass from there and then he collected all that grass and went to some place to sell it. After selling this grass he was able to earn some money to survive. He used work from day to night daily and at the end he would earn some money and get some food for his child and him. Many a times there conditions would go even worst. Sometimes his grass was not sold or due to poor weather he was not able

to get grass to sell. In these conditions Bhargav would get some food for his son of whatever he had earned and tie a brick on his stomach so that he don’t feels hungry.

By selling those grass they managed to survive. Years passed by... Now Aandirak had grown up. He was now helping his father in his work. But he always wanted to do something on his own.

Later he started working as a salesperson at a grocery store. But he wasn’t allowed to take a leave of even a single day. One day his health went poor. He wasn’t able to walk even. Due to this he was not able to go to the shop and he lost his job. He was so discouraged by this incident. Bhargav came to his son and explained that it always rains the hardest on the people who deserves the sun. Don’t loose hopes. God will raise you from nothing to something , from grass to grace. Tough times occur but don’t last long, all the problems will be ended one day. Aandrik was still upset wuth thousands of questions in his mind. His father adviced him and said-“ Why don’t you start something on your own ? Uptill when will you work under someone ?Why don’t you fulfill your old desire of doing something on your own?”The son replied-“ From where will I get the money for that.” Father smiled and said-“Don’t worry I have some.”

He took that money and purchased some candies out of it. He had nothing else with him so he sat on the roadside

and started selling those candies. First day, not much profit was earned. But he kept selling those candies by moving from place to place. Time passed by.... He had now started selling the other items too.

Gradually because of his consistency and hardwork he had built his own goods manufacturing factory now. He was now amongst the most richest businessmen of the country. He had his own house, luxurious cars, name-fame, health-wealth and everything.

He had gone through the worst of times, poverty but he kept working for it. Nobody is born empty or poor everyone has a gift. It depends on us How we use it.

As Aandrik in this story has its own story of struggle. Every successful person on this planet has there own different stories. Some of them are heard, some aren't.



REFLECTIONS

At first I wasn't able to believe that I had been selected for this program. It was totally unexpected. Writing was not something to which I gave much importance. I had never even written a full story before this. But this program just changed my perspective, writing for me now is a way to express my thoughts and imagination through different words beautifully tied up together —*Shreyasi*

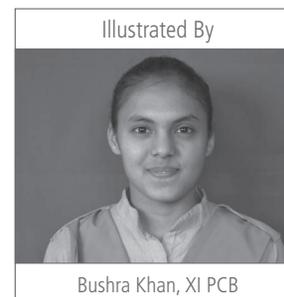
SUCH ELABORATE PLANS

By Shubhi Saxena





I am sixteen and I have always lived in Pilibhit. My father is a businessman and my mother is a teacher and part time author. Music has always been my friend and listening to it is my favourite pastime. I like artists such as Harry Styles and Taylor Swift. I have begun reading books only recently and I quite like them. The Harry Potter series took me to a new world, while Anne Frank's autobiography motivated me. People often think I am reserved, but once they get to know me they see how talkative I am. I think am an ambivert. I love doodling random things or writing down my thoughts whenever I get bored or need time to myself. Studying is tiring, we all agree. And when I'm tired, I'm hungry, more precisely *hangry*. I love eating spicy street food, and for your information, I can have south Indian food all my life. I am still exploring my career options, but I want to excel in mathematics. I also want to improve my English speaking skills. The word which describes me perfectly is weird, sounds funny but it is the truth and my friends can testify to it.



Illustrated By

Bushra Khan, XI PCB

“We’re going to enjoy ourselves today,” I exclaimed.

I am Max, 20 years old and studying medicine at the New York university. My roommates Olive and Robin and I, had just completed our assignments. We were exhausted and decided that we needed to go out and relax.

We invited Adam and Steve as well. Adam was funny and carefree. Steve was a nerd and his nose was always buried in a book. We were friends since joining university.

Adam bought us some surprisingly cheap tickets online, considering the tickets were to a cruise party. I'd never been to any other fancy parties. I was always busy studying. Robin was the only real friend I had back in school, I'd known her for as long as I could remember. We went to the same school and were now studying medicine together.

Olive joined our group when we became roommates. She was shy and but got along with us very well.

It was August 20, 2021, everything was planned. We dressed up and looked awesome.

“I hope everything goes well,” I prayed. But I guess God had other plans for us.

We drove to the location in Steve’s car, blasting music all the way. On reaching, we saw the yacht decorated with banners and lights.

We were led to the yacht by some bulky men who wore black from head to toe. To be honest they looked suspicious. They gave me bad vibes. I shrugged off this thought and focused on Robin. She was saying something, but I was lost in my thoughts so I couldn’t hear her. I asked her to recapitulate her words. She told me that the men looked suspicious. She had the same thought. I couldn’t be wrong but I ignored both our misgivings with a laugh and told her she was imagining things.

From the corner of my eye I could see the change in the expressions of Adam and Steve. We were being led to where the yacht was. Our surroundings were cold and quiet. There was no other person present there except us, and the men who were leading us. I asked one of the men why were we there? Specially, when we could see no one else. He told us to wait and that all our questions will be answered. The

men then left us on the pier alone. After some time we saw a man, all dressed up in a suit with perfectly styled hair coming towards us. He told us that he was the organiser of the event and we could ask him any questions we had.

The smartly dressed person told us that there was nothing to worry about, we were the ones who had won the lucky draw and a private yacht for the five of us, with free food and music facilities. We were thrilled to know this and thought that nothing better could happen that night. We entered the yacht and a full tour was given to us. The rooms, the dining area, the decorations, everything was so fascinating.

After having some snacks and clicking some pictures, we lay down on the wooden floor of yacht. It was peaceful. Last week was stressful and nerve-wrecking but today it felt so good with the cool breeze on my skin, washing all the worries away.

We didn’t know when we slept on the floor. It was unusual for me to drift into dreamland so deeply.

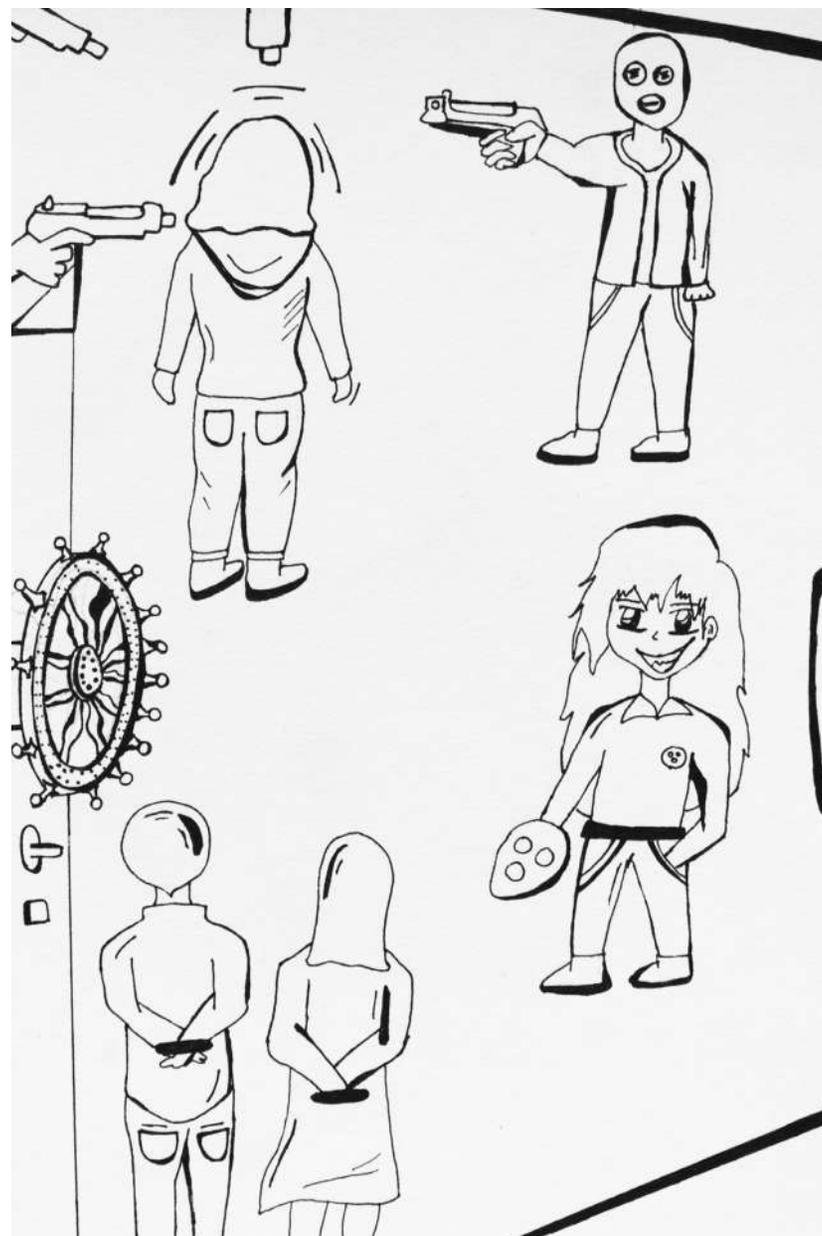
We arrived on the yacht at 4.30 pm and it was 6 pm now. When I woke up I saw all the others were sleeping except one. Olive. She was not there. I got up and searched for her in the rooms, washrooms, on the prow and in the kitchen. She was nowhere to be found. I went back to where everyone was sleeping. I tried waking them up, but it was difficult.

I started to shake everyone vigorously so they would wake up. After a hundred tries, they did. I told them that I couldn't find Olive anywhere. Robin answered in a sleepy voice that she could have gone to the washroom. I told her that I searched for Olive everywhere, but couldn't find her.

Olive was the quietest girl I'd ever known. She was so sensitive. That's why Robin and I never left her side. She'd been my friend for a long time now. Tears welled up in my eyes thinking of her. We started shouting her name at the top of our lungs, hoping she would respond to us but she didn't. We decided to split up and search for her and then meet after half an hour near the mast. Robin went to search for her in the dining room, I started checking every room on the yacht. Adam went towards the prow and Steve started searching for her in the corridors. It was already 7 pm, and the sun had settled down. It was dark and only the lights of the yacht were shining off the dark ocean.

Robin and I searched for her everywhere but she was nowhere to be found. We reached the mast and waited for Adam and Steve. It had been half an hour.

Adam returned after some time and looking at us, shook his head. Steve had still not returned. We waited and waited for him until our patience reached its peak...he did not return. At this point, I was terror-struck and panicking. I've been a scaredy cat since my childhood. Robin knew



this. She tried to calm me down, but nothing worked. Adam suggested that we search for Olive, as well as Steve.

“Let’s split up again and this time everyone be careful,” Adam said. I did not like the idea of going alone, so Adam asked me to accompany him.

I refused because I did not want to leave Robin alone. I resisted the idea of her going searching alone, but Adam and Robin convinced me that nothing would happen. I had to agree, but told Robin to scream if something happened to her and that we would all rush to her.

She told me, I needed to stop panicking. This time Robin went toward the bridge and Adam and I went to the kitchen. We thought that we could confront the workers and chefs in the kitchen, about Olive and Steve.

The kitchen was at the end of the corridor on the ground floor. When we reached the kitchen, we knocked on the door, but no one opened the door. We knocked again but there was no response. Adam opened the door and when we entered the kitchen it was silent, there was no one. No chefs preparing our dinner, no workers washing dishes and no smell of food. It was just a room filled with kitchen equipment.

What was happening? This was the only question in our minds. We now had an idea that someone who did not like us, was behind all this and wanted to harm us. But for as

long as I could remember, we had never had a conflict with our college mates or anyone else. God only knew what was happening.

We returned to the mast again and waited for Robin to return. We did not talk about the kitchen incident because our minds were puzzled. Robin never returned. 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes passed. That’s when I lost every bit of the patience that was left in me. I could feel beads of cold sweat running down my forehead and disappearing into the hair at the nape of my neck.

All sorts of bad scenarios instantly clouded my mind and I couldn’t help but feel terrified. I told Adam that we needed to go and look for Robin. Adam was at a loss for words, I guess he too was having a bad time understanding everything. He just nodded and we rushed towards the bridge. I searched for her twice on the bridge, screamed her name many times, but she wasn’t responding because she wasn’t there.

She was not there, the only thing I feared was happening. I wanted to change the moment when I convinced everyone that we should go out and have the best time of our lives together. I felt like it was my fault that Olive, Steve and Robin were missing and I felt so guilty and helpless.

My vision was blurred because of my tears. Everything was so overwhelming that I couldn’t control myself. Adam

was worried too. We were both silent, only my sobs could be heard. We went back near the mast. When we reached the deck, I saw something which was not there the last time we were there.

I said, "Adam, look, there's something near the mast."

"What?" He asked.

"The blue box, there," I answered.

I opened the box and found a slip. Just then we heard static – a disturbance, the sort associated with a microphone.

"Hello, my fellow heartbroken passengers."

There was an eerie silence for a short period. We were confused and in a dilemma. Adam told me to open the slip.

It said, "What question can never have *Yes* as an answer?"

"What is this," he asked.

"I can't figure it out," I said.

Just then we heard that voice again.

"My lovely passengers, I hope you are enjoying your outing. Just for your information, your friends are with me. I don't know if they are safe or not." The person behind the mic laughed and we gasped in shock.

"Who are you?" Adam shouted.

"Calm down boy, you don't want to end up like your friends, right?" The voice sounded ominous.

"What do you want from us?" I shouted with rage.

"Hmm...let's see, what do I want from you? I want you to fail in every aspect of your life, I want you to suffer like I did and I want everyone to look down on you. "

"This is insane," Adam whispered

"There is a little task for you, more like a game that you need to play to save your friends," the robotic voice said.

He continued, "You need to solve a few riddles that I have kept in store for you. Once you solve a riddle, you will automatically move on to the next level. And once you solve the last riddle of this game, then you can meet me as well as your friends. But only if you are lucky. You need to finish the game before midnight.

"What? It's already 10.45," Adam said furiously.

"I know Adam, time is running out. So go ahead and enjoy the game. See you at midnight."

And the voice disappeared.

It was silence again, we both were processing everything that happened a few moments ago.

"We need to pull ourselves together, let's end this game as soon as possible," Adam said to me calmly. I agreed with him.

"What?" we both said together.

“Do you think the answer is related to death? If we ask a dead body if he or she is dead then he or she can’t answer it.”

“You’re right but it just doesn’t make sense,” he said

“According to me, the answer is related to sleep. If we ask a person who is sleeping if he is sleeping or not, he won’t be able to answer it,” he explained

“Yes, sleeping is the answer and we sleep in rooms, so let’s search the rooms.”

We searched Adam’s room, my room, and Olive’s room, but found no clue. At last, we searched Steve’s room and found another small box with a slip in it. Adam read the riddle out loud.

“I have 13 hearts with no lungs or stomach, what am I?”

“I know this one,” I said instantly. “The answer is a deck of cards. But where can we find a deck of cards?”

“Come with me.” Adam dragged me to the dining area and pointed to a big framed artwork on the wall. It was of a ship made of cards.

“See here it is, let’s search here,” I started searching for the box. I found it behind the frame.

Adam opened the box and frowned.

“What is this?”

I saw the riddle, it was a series of dots and dashes.

“Morse code,” I told him. “Remember once sir told us about this code language - when he was reading a book.”

Adam asked, “Do you know how to solve it?”

“No, I don’t but I can try,” I assured him.

“God!” Adam said frustrated. “Listen Max, we can’t just believe some robotic voice and play these stupid childish games. We need to call for help, we can’t do this alone.”

“What do you mean?” I questioned

He sighs and continued, “I mean that there is something I’m going to do and you have to support me in my decision.”

“What is it?” I don’t have a good feeling about what he’s going to say.

“I’m going to the back of the yacht, there must be some lifeboats on the side rails. With the help of a lifeboat, I will try to reach the coast or find a patrolling coast guard and inform the police about this situation. I will come back to you along with the police. As you well know, our phones are not working here.”

As much as I wanted to disagree with his plan, I didn’t. I just nodded.

He walked towards me and hugged me tightly and said, “Till the time I return, I want you to crack the code, I know you can do it.”

We were both scared, and different what-ifs struck our minds. But, I let him go. He turned his back on me and walked away. I looked over to the big clock on the wall and gasped because only 30 minutes were left until midnight. I tried to recall all I knew about this code.

After an endless few minutes, I could only figure out a few letters;

K__H_N

Then I guessed one more letter.

K_TH_N

I keep looking at the code in front of me and recognised the word. Kitchen. I rushed to the kitchen and searched for a clue or the box but there was nothing there.

I was disappointed.

My eyes fell on the flooring of the kitchen. The colour of one tile was different from the other tiles. I tried to remove the tile and was surprised to find that it was not actually a tile. It was a box kind of thing. It had another slip inside it. The slip had no riddle on it but a statement.

“You’ve reached the end.”

Was it the end of the game?

Just then I heard that voice again. “I see you have completed the game, but I pity you a lot. Three of your

friends are missing and one of your friends ditched you and left you here...alone.”

“He did not ditch me,” I said furiously.

“Yes, I know what you must be feeling right now. But the truth is always bitter and the truth is that he escaped and saved himself leaving you all to die here.” The voice was relentless.

“That’s not the truth, he is going to save us all from you.”

“Let’s see what happens. Well now that you have completed the game, it’s time to meet your friends before you all die. But before that let me tell you that my men will lead you to the bridge. I want you to cooperate with my men and don’t try to be over smart.”

“What do you mean by last time and die? H-hey answer me.”

Just then some men approached me and held a gun at me. I was terrified. They led me to the bridge.

When I reached the bridge, they still kept me at gunpoint. A man told me that their boss would be there soon. The door opened and Robin and Steve walked in. They were tied up. Olive was not with them.

I mouthed to them, “Where’s Olive?”

Robin and Steve just looked at each other and then looked down. I frowned. Someone else entered through the door.

It was a girl. I could tell by her gait, but I couldn't see her face. It had a mask.

"Remove your mask, I want to see your face. Why are you doing this to us? What do you want from us?"

At this point, I was breaking down. She just laughed and began pulling off her mask. That laugh seemed familiar. When she removed her mask, I was dumbstruck. I couldn't believe my eyes.

"Olive."

It was Olive, standing in front of me with a twisted grin on her face.

"You were pranking me right, where is Adam then? If you planned to scare me then you must know where he is hiding. You know, I was so scared," I said laughing nervously. When I tried to reach for Olive, the men held me tightly.

Olive said, "It's not a prank, it's my revenge. I've wanted to do something like this for a long time. I know that you can't believe how a shy, innocent and quiet girl transformed into a bold and fearless one."

"Why are you doing this, we are your friends," I asked with tears in my eyes.

"You know Max, I've always hated you, you're just everywhere. Every person on campus talks about how much of an excellent person you are. Outside the campus

also, you're famous. You know, my parents? They always compare me to you. They want me to be like you, always on top. They never notice my efforts. Every person likes you and adores you and I hate every single second of the way you are appreciated."

I saw Robin and Steve had tears in their eyes and I was crying silently. I never knew that she had faked our friendship for such a long time.

"The moment you convinced everyone for an outing, I knew it was my only chance to end everything. I sent Adam the links to those sites about a party away from the city. I spent a big amount of money to arrange all this. And now finally I have you."

I felt so betrayed. From the beginning, money was never a problem for Olive. Her grandmother had left her a large amount of money when she passed away.

Olive walked towards me, placed her hands on my throat and squeezed tightly. I was choking. Then she suddenly let go and pointed a gun to my head.

"Olive, we will help you, you don't need to do this. This is not good, drop the gun. Where did you even get a gun from?" I asked.

Just then I heard a bullet and after that, I could not hear anything for a long time.

I closed my eyes and ears and ducked under something.

I saw Adam entering through the door. He strode to us and hugged us. A trail of policemen followed him.

The police arrested Olive and the men who worked for her. She was the mastermind of this horrid incident.

After everyone was arrested, it was our time to reunite.

We hugged each other, but tears streamed down our faces. We had mixed feelings. Happiness because we were reunited and that everything would be fine. And shock and sorrow to discover that our friend, whom we took to be the most trustworthy, was the villain of the story.



REFLECTIONS

For me, the journey of writing this story has been truly amazing. At first, I struggled to find a good story idea, but the mentors helped me a lot at every step. Being a part of this book as a coauthor matters a lot to me. I would like to thank all the teachers who encouraged me to write, my school that gave me this opportunity, the mentors who guided me at every step and my family for always being with me— *Shreyasi*

DEAD MEN DON'T OWN LAND

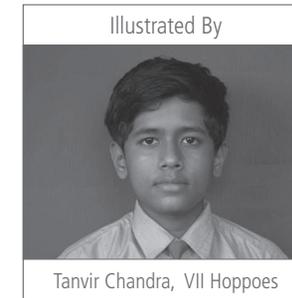
By Udit Pathak





I was born on August 24, 2008. I live in a nuclear family of four members. My mother is a teacher and my father, a businessman. I have an elder brother named Mudit Pathak who is an accidental author of the book *Khwaish*. My hobbies are writing and singing. The books that I find interesting are *The Jungle Book* and *The Famous Five*. The films that have left a mark on me are *Kesari* and *Gunjan Saxena*. People judge me by my height, which is short, but I would like to be judged by my talent. I love to spend time with my parents. My

ambition in life is to become a successful singer.



Not far from Pilibhit, there was a sprawling property hundreds of acres in size. Its owner, Jayvardhan Singh, was a friendly and good-looking man.

He had been a stock trader in his youth and made millions on the Bombay Stock Exchange in the seventies and eighties. After that, with a view to settling down, he came to Pilibhit and bought the fertile stretch of land, so that he could build a farmhouse, grow useful crops and live a life of peace. Hardworking and full of energy, Jayvardhan was always ready to help people in need.

In Pilibhit, however, there was a rich man named Anjani Singh Robert. Everyone called him Robert. Until the arrival of Jayvardhan, Robert had had the biggest property in the entire area. But with the purchase of the huge property, Jayvardhan Singh had unseated Robert from the position of Number One.

That made Robert jealous, unhappy and angry. And when Robert was angry, he would do something to harm the man who'd made him unhappy. That was the way things were. There wasn't much that anyone could do about it.

So, naturally, Robert had an eye on Jayvardhan's property – an evil eye. He decided that by hook or crook, he would own Jayvardhan's property. But, whatever he tried, he was unable to buy that property.

There were two reasons for that: first, the property was too large and was, therefore, too expensive and Robert didn't have the resources to buy it, even if he borrowed some money from here and there. Secondly, Jayvardhan was not willing to sell his property. Why would he? He had bought it to farm and live in peace. He had had enough of city life and wanted peace and calm.

So, Robert switched to his tried and tested criminal tactics: intimidate and terrorise Jayvardhan so much that he sells the property in distress and runs away from Pilibhit. When land is sold in distress, it is sold very cheap. And who would buy that property? Robert, of course.

But the intimidation did not work. Jayvardhan was not scared of Robert and his goons. His land was not for sale and that was that. Robert tried even harder, leaning more heavily on Jayvardhan, and now his threats were greater and more direct. But nothing worked.



Jayvardhan was resolute, “Get out of my property. It is not for sale and will never be.”

Frustrated, Robert decided it was time to get rid of Jayvardhan altogether. So, he sent for Sajjan Bhai, a man who was otherwise known as the owner of a provision store on the outskirts of Pilibhit. But that was just a cover. Sajjan’s actual profession was that of a contract killer. In the crime circles, he was known to be a slick, professional killer who never faltered and always delivered. His price was high but that was what you paid for a job well done. And once he accepted the job, his target could not escape.

“Sajjan Bhai,” said Robert, when they met a few days later. “There is a job for you.”

The job was simple; he had to kill Jayvardhan in such a way that it looked like an accident and not murder.

“But that land belongs to Jayvardhan Singh,” said Sajjan.

“That’s not your business to ask, Sajjan Bhai. Your business is to do what you are paid to do.”

“No, I mean, he owns the land; just buy his property. Why kill him?” said Sajjan, unafraid of Robert.

“Dead men don’t own land,” said Robert in a voice that was cold and murderous.

After much thinking, Sajjan agreed to do the job.

He always took the full payment in advance; a condition that never changed. Robert paid up grudgingly.

It took a few weeks of planning, scoping out the property, keeping careful notes of Jayvardhan’s activities, the flow of visitors in and out of his property and its security arrangements. Observation was Sajjan’s strength and he observed his quarry really well. In a few weeks, Sajjan was pretty sure that he was ready to put his plan into action.

Sajjan decided to carry out his plan on a new moon night, when the sky would be completely dark. That night, he went to the farm as planned and within thirty minutes, the job was done. He had a mental picture of the entire property and knew exactly to breach the security and reach Jayvardhan. As it had to look like an accident and not murder, Sajjan strangled Jayvardhan and then set the gas cylinder in the kitchen on fire, making sure the entire property burned to ashes, along with all the evidence.

When the police arrived the next morning, there was nothing to see or find. Only ashes. There was no evidence of any wrongdoing, hence the fire was reported as an accident.

Robert was satisfied. Now, he set his goons upon Jayvardhan’s only surviving relative—a 90-year-old aunt who lived in Pondicherry and had no energy to negotiate with people she did not know. Within months she sold the property to Robert at the price he quoted.

Robert was once again the man with the biggest property in the city. He was on cloud nine.

But no one knew that Jayvardhan Singh had not crossed over in the truest sense of the word. He was there, hovering around, angry at the evil injustice that had taken his vibrant life away. He would not rest in peace till he had had his revenge.

Some time went by. And then Jayvardhan, who spent his days hanging from trees, heard of another land shark in Lucknow. This man, Raju Chacha, was far bigger, more violent and powerful than Robert could ever dream of being. He had political connections right till the capital and he was brutal.

Jayvardhan manifested a human body for himself and went to visit Raju Chacha.

“You don’t know sir, Robert’s land holdings are set to go through the roof. The land he usurped from Jayvardhan is prime. It has a road running right before it. Can you imagine what the possibilities are?”

The very next day, a hugely interested Raju Chacha sent someone to pay Robert a visit. But, as was expected, Robert refused to deal with Raju Chacha or his goon. He had some idea of the deeds of Raju Chacha but he was that aware of the criminal’s might and reach.

The very same day, it fell on Sajjan Bhai to dispatch Robert the same way as he had finished off Jayvardhan.

“Do it, and do it well. You know I pay handsomely for a job well done, right?” said Raju to Sajjan and hung up.

Sajjan knew the complete layout of the property but he had to conduct a surveillance of Robert’s security arrangements. That took a week. On another new moon night, Sajjan entered the farmhouse the same way as he had entered it to kill Jayvardhan.

This time, he found Robert not in the bedroom, kitchen or store room, but in a tiny bathroom, cowering in a corner, weeping and begging for his life.

“Let me live; I’ll pay double of what the other man is paying,” said Robert as the contract killer levelled the deadly barrel of his silenced .38 automatic pistol.

“I don’t talk to my quarry,” said Sajjan seething. “But just this time, I’m breaking my own rule. *Dead men don’t own land.*”

Sajjan eased two quiet but lethal bullets into Robert. The man slumped over lifelessly. Sajjan left as quietly as he had entered the farmhouse.

Jayvardhan’s spirit, too, soon left the earthly confines and ascended to another world—satisfied.



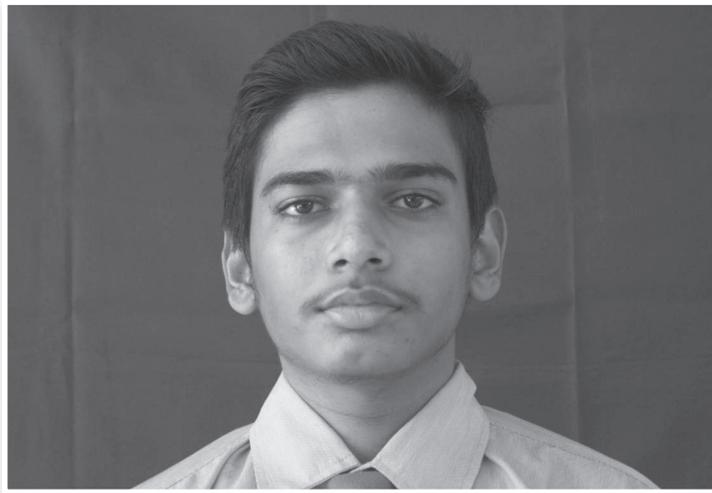
REFLECTIONS

In my experience, thinking of good story was not easy enough but writing it in such a way that readers don't get bored was the real task. Actually writing is not a task it is a enlivened emotion. I am grateful to my school for giving me such an opportunity. I am going to miss my mentor and my fellow writers a lot. I am looking forward to reading see my story in the book—*Udit*

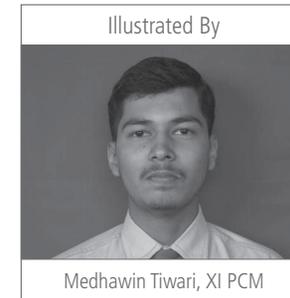
GRIEF AND GUNPOWDER

By Viraj Agarwal





I am a studious kind of a person; a master of my own words. I like to live my life freely. I was born on July 12, 2006 in Pilibhit the city of magnanimous people, a place where every corner has a story to tell. My favourite pastime is to get indulged in reading success stories of great men like APJ Abdul Kalam, Dr BR Ambedkar and Dhirubhai Ambani. I have travelled to many places but the place which took away my heart was Rishikesh. I was attracted by the beauty so much that I forgot about everything. I love to get more



This is the story of seven American friends and an old man: Johnson, a retired military man; Harry, a homemaker; Suzanne, a scientist; Mourad, a writer; Peterson, a travel agent; Richard, a businessman; Sofia, a researcher; and an old man of sixty years.

The seven friends lived in Chicago, Illinois, USA. They used to spend all their time together, eating, discussing all their ups and downs, and hanging out with each other. Except for Richard, who liked to stay alone most of the time.

One day, while discussing their lives, they realised that no one was happy. They were all fed up of their jobs, so they decided to go for a small vacation to have some fun. They also wanted some peace in their lives. So they decided to go to a place where no one could disturb them.

A few days later, Johnson came up with an idea to go to a vacant island which was 100 km away from the coast of Washington state. After doing some research, the friends decided to go there for a week. Peterson, who was a travel agent, arranged a sail boat for their departure. All the friends were elated and excited. Their happiness could be clearly seen on their faces.

They enjoyed each and every moment of togetherness. They enjoyed the boat journey a lot. There were some problems, but all the friends acted like a closed fist and fought against the problems together; they were such good friends. However, they were unaware of the adventure waiting for them.

After three weeks of sailing, they finally reached their destination. It was a wonderful island with crystal clear water all around. There were many large and fascinating trees. The island attracted them so much that they wanted to stay there for the rest of their lives. No one wanted to go back. However, they did notice that the island was somewhat destroyed.

After enjoying the beauty of the island, they started discovering more and more about it. They made houses of mud, took sun baths and often sat down near the sea to simply feel the silence. They also looked at tiny creatures crawling about here and there. They enjoyed to the fullest as they were free from their daily tensions.

One fine day, out of nowhere, Harry got shot by an arrow, and fell unconscious. This incident changed their mood completely. The happiness and excitement of the vacation suddenly changed to sadness and fear. They were shocked and couldn't even react to what had happened. They got scared and gathered around Harry.

Peterson said, "What has happened to her? Who did this? What is going to happen now?"

But Johnson kept his calm and pulled out the arrow from Harry's body. He examined it and said that the arrow had a lot of gunpowder, which is why Harry was unconscious. Before he could say anything else, another arrow came from nowhere, and now Johnson fell unconscious.

The friends were even more scared now.

Suddenly, Robinson noticed an old man in the shadows of some trees. He indicated to the others to not make any noise, and very quietly, he sat on the beach and asked the others to do the same.

When the old man in the shadows realised that the group didn't mean any harm, he came out. The group of friends reassured him that they would cause him no harm. Then they gently asked him why he was on the island, and what he wanted from the group.

The old man then narrated his story. He told them that it was a very beautiful island, where twenty-eight inhabitants

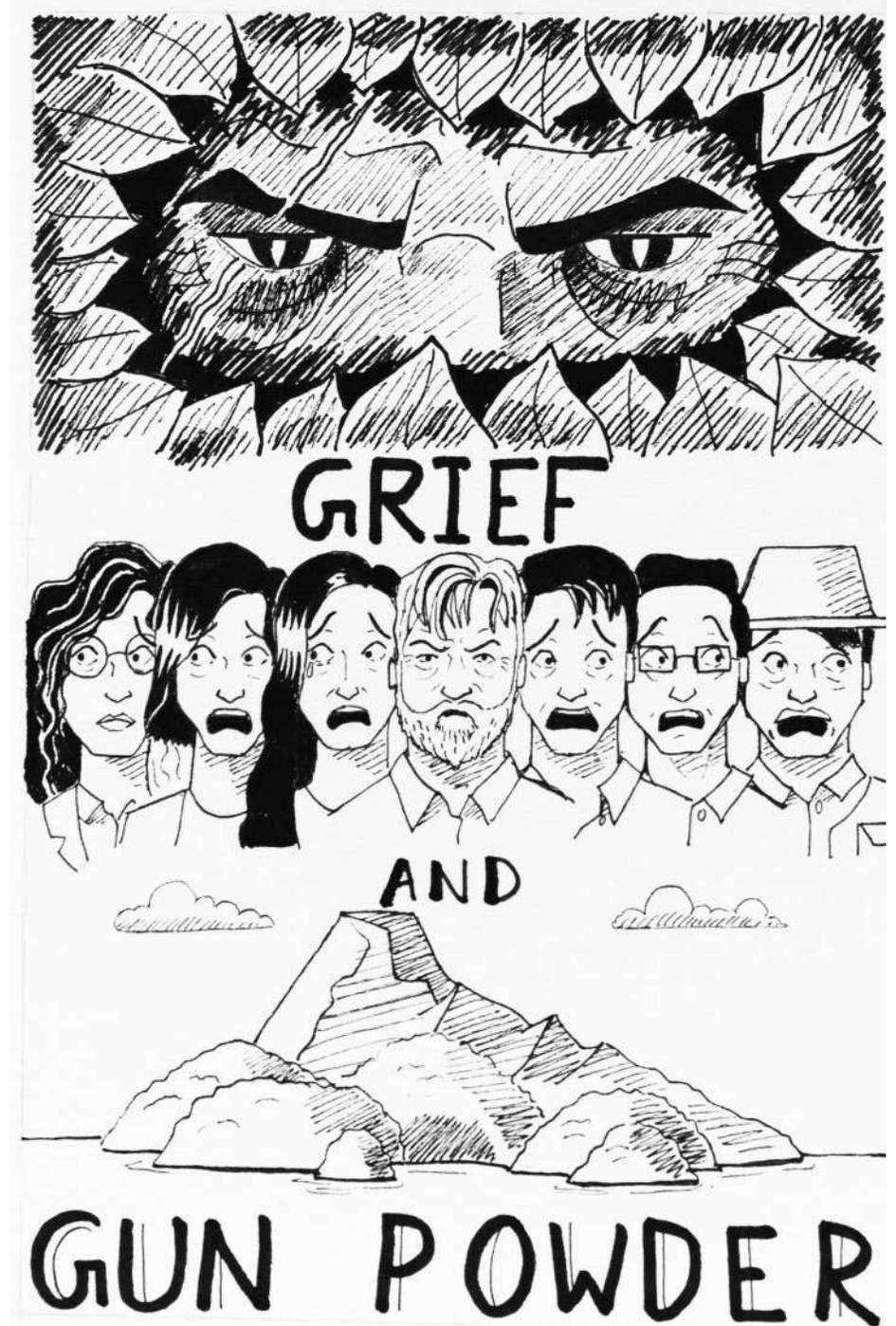
lived happily many years ago. They used to enjoy each and every moment together. The island was also popular with tourists who came here for brief holidays. But then came a sudden change in their lives when the island was hit by a major earthquake three years ago. This isolated them from the rest of the world. Nobody came here for vacations any more.

The old man said that he begged the government to send help, but nobody came forth. He was very angry that when the tourists wanted to have a good time, they all came and enjoyed themselves. The government also promoted the island as a holiday destination for tourists. But when the inhabitants of the island were in trouble, nobody came to offer them help.

So the old man was very angry, and he always shot at anybody who came. Which is why he had shot at Harry and Johnson, and they were unconscious.

The group of friends promised the old man that they would do everything possible to improve the situation on the island. They reassured him that they would quit their jobs and dedicate their lives to restoring the former glory of the island.

The old man felt that the friends were genuine, and so he offered them an antidote to the gunpowder to bring Harry and Johnson back to consciousness.



After returning to the mainland, as promised, the seven friends followed up with various government departments to bring help and support to the isolated island.

The government took various steps. After a lot of efforts, the island became as beautiful as it was in the past.

The old man was happy, and no longer troubled visiting tourists.

As for the seven friends, they had found new purpose in life.



REFLECTIONS

In my experience, writing is not such a difficult task if you have talent and determination to be a writer. But it could be possible only when you have a mentor to support and guidance you. A story needs too much editing; all this is tedious but it really beautifies the story. Writing is a passion but writing for your readers is living your passion— *Viraj*

MY FIRST FRIEND

By Yashita Mishra





I am sixteen and the central character in my own imaginary world—it helps me cope with the curve balls life's been throwing at me lately. I am a small town girl with mountain-like dreams. I know I have to be something that I have in my mind but just cannot pen it down. I've spent most of my early years in the Kunj galis of Vrindavan. What a memory it is, give me a chance to get there once again and you won't ever see me here. I love to gobble up aloo paranthas with sweet lassi and I enjoy it every atom there is in a single

bite. I cherish food as much as I do composing poems and learning about world historical and political events. I listen to music with high beats as it gives company to my muddled brain. I love AP Dhillon songs and cry my heart out on Mohit Chauhan's music. I've read many books (so many that I even tend to forget their names sometimes) but my absolute favourites are *Swami Vivekanand: The Icon of the Youth* and *The Wonders Within Us*.



The sea—a calm, blue place. Everything and everyone I know is here. Welcome to my life! Oh, and before I forget I am Doodle, a little fish in a vast blue sea. I know everything about humans. Yes, don't be shocked. I know what no one else here in the sea knows. I can understand human language and also talk to people. I don't know how, but I was born with this special ability.

I really don't know whether to celebrate this blessing or rue it, especially because of the situation it has put me in—I am an outcast. When my family came to know of my ability and disowned me, thinking I was a shame to the *fishcommunity* (the fish community). The fish think I've been sent down by the devil.

Oh, I forgot, didn't I, our town is called *Fishotopia*; I was thrown out of the city long ago. It is nothing to feel sad about yet I sometimes ponder what it is like to live with family and friends. I wasn't treated particularly well, either.

They made me feel bad about myself, taunted me, made me think I was not good enough to be a fish and never believed a word I said. They thought I was making stories up about life outside the sea and the human world, just to get attention. Sometimes, even I doubted myself but gosh, who knew and I had the knowledge they couldn't even imagine possessing. Tell you what? They were plain jealous.

Their taunting and heckling still troubles me.

But, the life I have been living since I was shunted to the outskirts of the city, is the ideal life, for the most part. I have all the freedom anyone can ever ask for. I can sleep all day long and stay up all night. I can swim to the deepest waters and touch the light that shines on the sea, yes, it is blinding.

But sometimes, just sometimes, I wish for someone who would care for me and love me. You thought I'd start weeping, didn't you? Ha! I won't ever cry; nope, not at all. I am certainly not a weepy fish. Don't you dare think I am a feeble fishie; I never was, nor will I ever be.

O my God! I forgot yet again that it's lunch time already. I have to go look for something to feast on. I am a fish with no family; I have to find food for myself every day; even on days I can barely swim. See you in a bit, human, or maybe you can come along and explore the sea while I look for food. I can eat sea grass, worms or smaller fish.

But I hate troubling the smaller fish and sea grass does not interest me, so I munch on little squishy worms, full of nutrition. Oh, look I found one, let me fetch it, and there goes another one. Two worms a day, not bad, Doodle, but I am still a little hungry I need more. I see a big worm waiting for a hungry little fish like me. It's up, right where the sky hugs the sea. Here I come, my dear worm.

However, when Doodle snapped up the worm, a metallic hook speared through her throat and she was trapped. It was a fishing hook attached to a rod. She was in excruciating pain. Chills went down her gills at the thought of becoming someone's meal. The fishing line was continuously pulling her up. She froze with fear. When she was pulled out of the water, she saw a girl who was delighted at the catch.

"Oh my god! I cannot breathe, water, water. I need water. Put me down, girl. Let me breathe."

The girl was too busy admiring her scales to pay any attention to Doodle's, cries for water. That was until her mother called her, "Mansi, put that fish in the tub and come, let's eat first."

Once in water, Doodle started thinking about how to save herself. "This tub isn't even a pinch of the sea, O goodness gracious, I feel so claustrophobic. Take me back to the sea now, girl, whatever your name. Wait, she will never understand my language, and if I dare speak to her in her language, they will certainly kill me, taking me for a

monster of some kind. No, I shall not do that. Let me just go with the flow, not water flow; there is almost no water here. Let me see what she plans to do; maybe she is just as lonely as I am and wants me as a companion.”

Mansi finished her lunch and ran back to Doodle. She was excited and was trying to calm Doodle down in a friendly tone.

“Hey little fish friend, I know you must be cursing me for taking you away from your family but trust me, I have no intentions of causing you any harm. I just want to keep you as my pet for some time and then I will put you back into the sea. Don’t you worry.”

Doodle wanted to tell Mansi that she was an outcast...she wanted to say it out so badly but she restrained herself.

“What do you want to be called?”

Doodle blurted out her name in half-human, half-fish. Surprisingly, Mansi understood what she was saying and named her Doodle. Shortly after that, Mansi left.

Doodle was touched, for the first she felt as if she could also be the reason for someone’s happiness. She felt reassured that she was not going to be cooked and served as a meal, it was a weight off her chest. The idea of being stabbed by a knife scared her the most. Wound...she had almost blotted out the fish-hook wound in her mouth. It was now hurting. “I need someone to dress this wound for me, I can barely open my mouth anymore it hurts dreadfully.”

She was about to cry when Mansi came with something in her hand that were covered in a white squishy cover; what was that cover? It caught Doodle’s attention. She wanted to ask Mansi what that was but her wound had all her consciousness taken away. As Mansi got closer, Doodle’s heart was raced; as if it was going to explode. Mansi reached into the tub and mixed something in the water. What did she do? Was it poison? Am I being killed? Did she trick me into believing that she wasn’t going to harm me? All kinds of thoughts raced through Doodle’s little brain but after a while, her wound started healing.

Mansi hurried back, leaving doodle all alone to swim and over think once again. “What was that? It is comforting and it is cooling me down moreover what were Mansi’s hands covered in? Her hands were white. Oh my god, what are these humans up to?” Before she could ponder any longer, Mansi came back carrying a fish tank that was bigger than the tub. Mansi gently poured Doodle along with the water from the tub into the tank. Doodle felt as if she was flying, she always wanted to; it was her slumbering desire. Although it was a little heart wrecking experience yet she felt fine once in the tank. Doodle was exhausted after apparently flying.

Mansi now sat in a chair, facing Doodle, separated only by the glass, and said, “I hope you’re feeling better. I didn’t get the chance to introduce myself. I’m Mansi; I am fifteen. I don’t know if you can get what I am saying but...”

Doodle reflexively nodded.

Mansi giggled. “I shall take that for a yes, then. I have always wanted a friend, one to stick by my side, no matter what, but ironically, all my friends are snakes....”

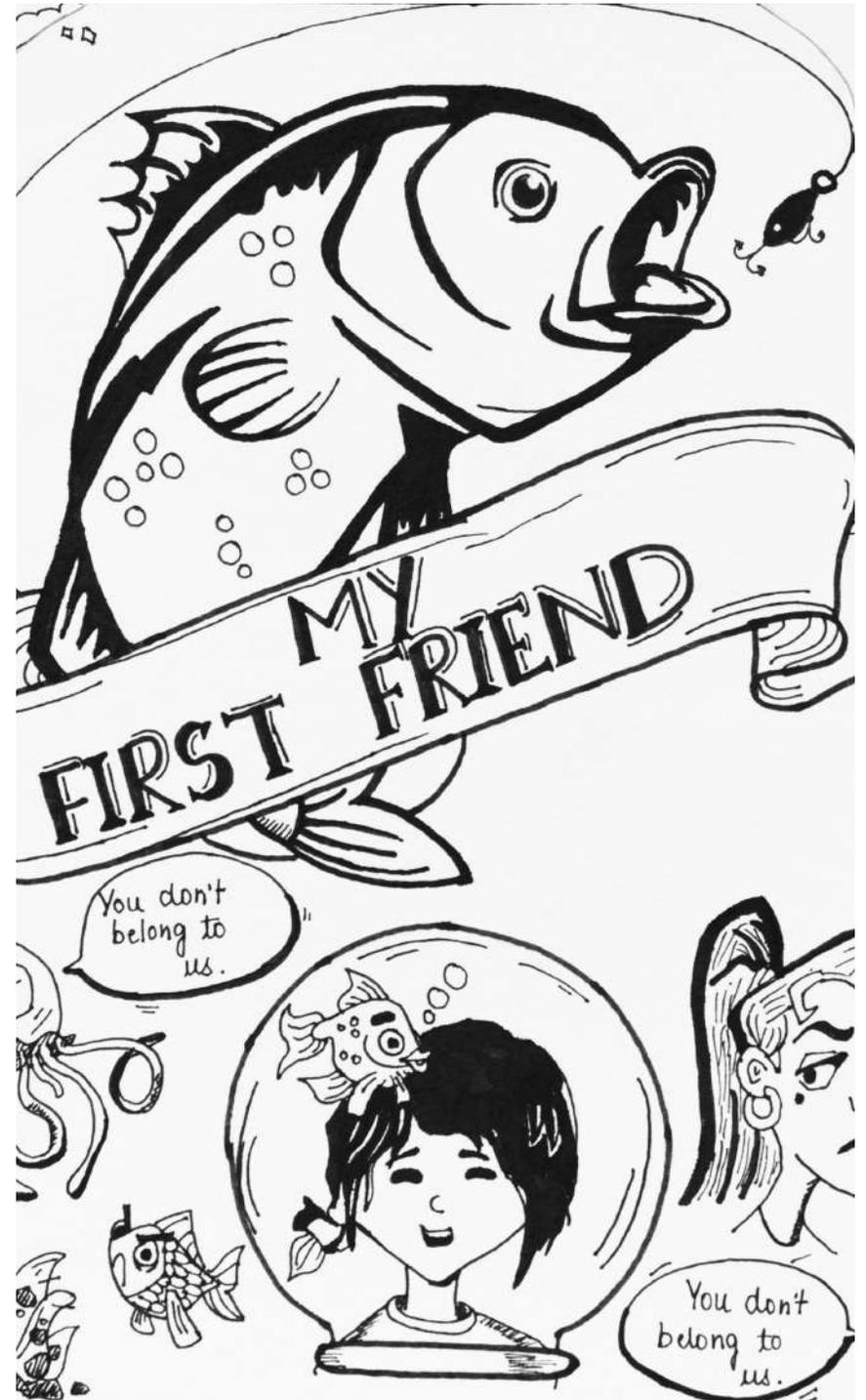
Mansi went inaudible to Doodle for a moment; all she could focus on were the words *all my friends are snakes*.

“How can someone befriend snakes? What kind of a person lives with them?” But Doodle’s focus shifted back to Mansi who was explaining her lifestyle now.

“...I have lived in this villa by the sea ever since I was born. Earlier, I thought that there was no world other than the villa, the sea and the beach. That was until I went to Shimla when I was six. Snow, snow everywhere. I went with Mumma, Papa and Manav—oh, he is my elder brother. He can be a little useless at times but at least he protects me from bullies at school. As I said, I don’t have any loyal friends; they are all snakes. They have always back-stabbed me, helping the bullies. I don’t trust any of them anymore, the only person I trust at school is Manav.” Doodle finally learnt the meaning of befriending a snake and thought that she had been living with them all her life.

Now, each day Mansi shared details of her life with Doodle. They were enjoying each other’s company.

Doodle exclaimed to herself, “Woah! I’ve finally made a friend – my first friend.”



At night, when Mansi was asleep, Doodle couldn't help but wonder what bullies were. "Mansi is confusing, up until now my knowledge of the human world has proved to be correct but some things just don't make sense. Earlier, I overheard Mansi's mother telling her and her brother that their room was a pig sty. Why would someone keep a pig at home and that, too, in their room. These people must be very fond of animals."

The next morning, as Mansi was getting ready for school, she dropped a few paper sheets and exclaimed, "I missed this assignment, the teacher is going to kill me." Her mother came out of the kitchen and hushed her out of the room, saying that was what she deserved for being so careless.

"Okay I know that people can be a little careless at times but do they deserve death sentence for this. Her mother seemed cruel and heartless." Doodle had nothing to do and no one to listen to, so she just swam in the fish tank taking four hundred and twenty-two rounds, not even a fraction of the distance she swam in the sea.

Back home in the afternoon and the first thing she did was mix some fish food into the tank water and admired Doodle eating it slowly. Doodle couldn't keep from shouting 'Yum' which Mansi took a notice of. Mansi was imaginative, she immediately sputtered out of excitement "You can talk, Doodle, I heard you, yes...yes you can talk. Speak Doodle; I won't harm you, talk to me, I am a friend."

Doodle spoke to her for the first time in human language. "Hey, Mansi, yes, I can talk. I know many things about your world and can tell you a lot about mine, that is if you'd wish to listen."

"Are you kidding? I'd love to know of your world, tell me."

"My town, *Fishtopia*, is small and chaotic. I've never lived with my family and I do not have any friends because they think I am a monster..."

"No you are not a monster, don't you say that, you are God's most beautiful creation."

Doodle was touched, she had tears of happiness rolling down her eyes for the first time. She felt precious. The only person who ever made her feel that way was Mansi.

She could never stay away from Mansi now, days went by, Doodle and Mansi became inseparable, except when Mansi went to school; she would rarely leave the aquarium otherwise. Doodle gave her every significant detail of her life in the sea and also about her days in the fish tank.

They were best friends. Mansi sat before the fish tank all day. They had a lot in common, both were chatterboxes. They were two neglected creatures who enjoyed each other's company. Both were *worryguts* who would constantly be in jitters about something or the other. They knew they just had to be with each other for life. Days, weeks and months passed by; their bond only became stronger.

That was until...life took a turn.

Mansi was at school, studying about the ecosystem of the waters around the world, her teacher told the class how pet fish have a shorter life span compared to the fish that live in their natural habitat. An aquarium was unfit for fish, it restrained their movement and affected their longevity. It struck Mansi that the same could happen to Doodle.

“I cannot let her live in such an enclosed space. I can never be this selfish,” Mansi thought.

She had made up her mind. Although letting Doodle go was the last thing she wanted to do, she decided to put her back where she belonged.

As usual, as soon as Mansi got home, she rushed to her little friend waiting for her in the aquarium. But with a heavy heart and a deep voice, mostly to hide her gloomy state, she said, “Doodle, listen carefully, I want you to go back to the sea, you are not created to live in such confined boxes. You need the sea and the sea needs you. I cannot be selfish and keep you here. I am sorry Doodle, be mad at me; you have the right to, but you need to go; you must go back to where you belong.”

Doodle was shocked. Was her only friend abandoning her? She wanted answers, what was wrong with Mansi? Why did she no longer wanted Doodle? The little fishie had her eyes filled up with tears; her heart was breaking.

“What happened? Did I say something to hurt you?”

“No, you did nothing, it’s...it’s just....okay, Doodle, you can never live in such an enclosed space, you need the sea, letting you go is the hardest thing for me to do to. It’s impossible for me to stay away from you but no matter what, I need to let you go for the sake of your life.”

“Fine, but give me a day. I was never happy with my life at the sea; I am happy with you. So give me a day to think; I will do as you say.”

Mansi cried all day and stayed up the entire night, refusing to go to school the next day.

After a day, Mansi went to Doodle to ask her about her decision but Doodle did not answer. Mansi thought she needed a little more time so she waited for a couple of days but Doodle never spoke. She stopped responding to Mansi, making the girl believe that she had lost her ability to speak. Thus, Mansi put her back into the sea, thinking it was for the best.

Doodle never lost her ability to understand Mansi, she just pretended not to, in order to make it easier for Mansi to bid her goodbye.

Now, practiced enough to act like a normal fish, Doodle started living her old miserable life on the outskirts of her city in the sea.

As time rolled by...

Their lives changed drastically. Mansi was unhappy, she would never leave her room, people at school were starting to forget what she looked like. She covered the corner of her table where the aquarium had sat. All she did was cry, lying in bed, hugging her pillow.

In the sea, Doodle was finally accepted back into the *fishcommunity* as rumours spread that she was a normal fish now. She began living life like any other fish but she saw Mansi's face in the clouds over the sea and her voice rendered in Doodle's mind which always made her tear up. She never shared it with anyone at the sea. She kept her sad life all bottled up.

Deep down, both Mansi and Doodle were suffering to help each other but neither was happy.

One day, Mansi was forced to get out of her room and go to the sea shore by her parents who couldn't bear to see how unhappy she was. She went along reluctantly but it reminded her of her best friend. Tears welled up in her eyes watching the waves go up and down representing the time she had spent with Doodle.

Suddenly, a languishing fish caught her attention, it looked just like Doodle. Mansi quickly ran to check...

It was indeed Doodle.

Her pink spots always made her stand out. Mansi quickly carried her to her room and put her into the same tub in her room.

Soon, Doodle said, "You know what, I can never stop talking and especially when you are the listener."

Mansi was too happy.

"Neither can I. Let's keep talking forever then."



REFLECTIONS

Now that I look back after completing my story, I have travelled a long journey. From writing poems in my small diary to becoming the first school-going published author of my city, I have come a long way ahead. This is a once in a lifetime moment for me I am living my dream of publishing my own story; a story that will be written under my name— *Yashita*

