Then What Happened?

MATCHBOX
by usawa

Stories, poems and pictures to read wherever you are.

ILLUSTRATION A little girl looking amazed at the book shelf by Rajiv Eipe, for *A Book for Puchku* written by Deepanjana Pal, published by Pratham Books (© Pratham Books, 2017) under a CC BY 4.0 license on StoryWeaver. Read, create and translate stories for free on www.storyweaver.org.in

GUEST EDITOR

Anagha Gopal

A CHILDREN'S LITERATURE SPECIAL
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Then What Happened?

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you'd find yourself on a search for plum cake.

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Every good story begins with a question.

Dear Young Reader,

Have you ever been so caught up in a story that you couldn't stop until you knew what happened next?

That's where the title of this issue comes from.

Inside these pages, you'll find stories, poems, pictures, adventures, questions, surprises, and perhaps even a few new friends. Some might make you laugh. Some might make you wonder. Some might stay with you long after you've turned the last page.

We hope you read these stories under a blanket, on a bus, in a library, at your desk, or curled up in your favourite corner. Most of all, we hope they leave you curious.

After all, every good story begins with a question.

And every reader knows the most important one:

Then what happened?

Thank you, Anagha Gopal, for curating this very special issue of Matchbox by Usawa.

Happy reading,

Smita Sahay
Editor-in-Chief, Matchbox by Usawa

PICTURE STORY

Paper Boat

A paper boat, a ship of wonder,

sailing through a sea of endless dreams.

ILLUSTRATION *Art & words · Ogin Nayam*

Ogin Nayam

A picture book maker from Arunachal Pradesh who believes his day job is to daydream. His practice drifts between observation and imagination, guided by a quiet sensitivity to mood and memory. Drawn to the subtle patterns of everyday, he gathers the familiar and renders it with a sense of whimsy.

Believes his day job is to daydream.

STORY

What's Summer Without a Plum Cake?

BY VARSHA VARGHESE

I tap-TAP on the glass display and whisper, "Uncle, can I buy a plum cake?"

Bakery Uncle does not hear me. Amma's clear and confident voice could always tear Bakery Uncle away from his beloved newspaper. Not that we come here often. Only on birthdays, festivals and when I score a goal in the inter-house football match. But Amma isn't here. Anu, my best friend, reaches only up to my shoulder and has an even smaller chance of getting his attention.

I ask again. This time louder.

"You are Rachel's little one, aren't you?" he asks, peering down through the spectacles perched on his nose.

I stand on my tiptoes and place the money on the counter to show that I mean business. Coins from the Vishu Kani, leftover money from the school trip to the zoological gardens that I 'forgot' to return and a hundred rupee note that Appachan pushed into my palms on Christmas, even after Amma refused twice.

"Moley, plum cakes are made only for Christmas. It is summer now. Can I interest you in some creamy custard cake?"

"Nuh-uh."

"Crunchy chocolate cookies?"

"Nope..."

"Uncle, she really needs a plum cake," says Anu.

"Well, that is simply not possible. How about a chewy coconut chakkappam instead?"

"no No NO." In my head, it was a scream. But only a whimper came out.

Uncle is sympathetic. He helpfully suggests, "You can try Chacko's down the road."

We hurry to Chacko Uncle's bakery. A blast of cold air hits us as soon as the automatic doors open. It is the kind of place Amma avoids, saying they charge more, not because the items are better quality but because everything looks pretty. There are breads of all kinds, not just white bread, brown bread and buns. I read the labels in cursive: Foccacia, Sourdough, Baguette, Ciabatta...

"If the money isn't enough, I will lend you my Eidhi," says Anu, sensing my worry.

A young man dressed in a full-sleeve shirt and a tie asks us, "How can I help you? We are a world-class Boulangerie and Patisserie. We can meet all your baking needs."

"You have a plum cake?"

"The one with candied fruits, nuts and spices?"

I nod happily.

"We don't have those. But we have cakes for all occasions —Japanese Cheesecakes, Tres Leches, Black Forest Gateaux..."

Anu mouths a thank you and whispers, "We should hurry home."

I let her lead me out, but I am angry. I am even a bit angry with Anu. She is more concerned about her Ummachi finding out that we went beyond our street. But how would Anu understand why the plum cake is so important? Her Uppa is always there with her.

Anu tries to cheer me up. She tells me that Malu, the injured baby squirrel she looked after, eats cashew nuts from her palm. She thinks she can train Malu to do tricks, even though her Ummachi says she'll one day run off to start her own squirrel family.

We reach home. Before I open the gate, Irshad and Samson kick their football towards me. I stare at it glumly.

Click—CLANG—CLICK. Amma yells over the sewing machine in the verandah, "Anu, come in. Your Ummachi went to the market."

Maybe Amma could help? Maybe she can take me to a faraway bakery with plum cake. But before I ask, she says, "You girls find something to do. I have these blouses to stitch for Paru chechi's wedding guests. And a long list of things to do before your Papa arrives."

We run to the kitchen. "Let's bake a plum cake!" we yell together. Best friends do think alike.

We look at the oven door hanging onto its dear life on one hinge.

"We don't need it. We can make the cake in a pressure cooker. My Ummachi does that," says Anu. I take the pressure cooker out of the bottom cabinet. I show Anu three steel containers, and she picks one that is the perfect size for a cake.

Amma's phone is on charge on the kitchen counter. I type the password 1234. We search for recipes and zero in on one that claims "Easiest Plum Cake Recipe—Step by Step Pictures."

Eggs. Check.

Flour. Check.

Butter. Check.

Raisins soaked in orange juice for a week minimum. WHAT.

"It's okay, it's okay. We can think of another idea," consoles Anu.

All I can think of is sharing the last slice of plum cake with Papa on the verandah. Papa had quickly scooped up the crumbs lest Amma shout at us for attracting ants and pests into the house. He had said, "This is the perfect Christmas."

One week after that, Papa lost his job. Then, for a while, Amma and Papa fought over small things. Then came the rules. "Only a tiffin box for lunch, no loose change for a treat." "We will wait for the movies to come on television." "We take the bus, not the auto." Then one day, Papa said he had a new job. In a country called Kuwait, separated by an ocean.

It's been two Christmases, two Onams and two Birthdays! Papa had missed it all because the flight from Kuwait was too expensive.

"Please don't cry. I will share Malu with you. I will teach you how to make her eat nuts off your palm."

The tears roll down faster.

Anu calls Amma to intervene. They ask me what is wrong. I don't know how to explain why everything feels so heavy.

Amma sighs and opens her WhatsApp to make a call. "Why does my status say that I am urgently looking for uneaten plum cakes from Christmas?!"

The mention of plum cakes brings another wave of tears.

Beep—Beep—Beep. "I don't know why she is crying. George, you talk," tells Amma to Papa on the phone.

There are packed suitcases in the background. Seeing Papa's face makes it easier to share. Everything flows out.

"Moley, did you really think the cake was what made that Christmas perfect?"

I nod.

"You silly thing!" says Papa, making the heart with his thumb and index finger the way I taught him.

"What made me happy was being with you. I don't need the perfect homecoming. You, me and Amma together. That is home for me. You make my heart full."

"Papa, you will surely come this time, right?"

"Yes, I will be there to wake you up tomorrow. With a gigantic bag of chocolate-covered dates."

That sounded delicious, but I still feel bad about the plum cake. Like Anu, Papa can read my mind. He laughs and says, "I am there for a whole month. That is plenty of time to soak the raisins in orange juice. We will eat the best plum cake, the one we make together."

What made me happy was being with you. You make my heart full.

Varsha Varghese

Varsha won the Scholastic Asian Book Award 2023 for her middle-grade novel *Dear Author, You are Wrong*. She has two children's nonfiction books forthcoming with Juggernaut as part of their 'History Nobody Told You' series and a children's historical fiction novel forthcoming with Puffin. Varsha's fondest childhood memories include reading one book a day during summer vacations, attending book fairs, and visiting bookstores with her mom and dad. She recommends diverse Indian children's literature on Substack.

Award: Scholastic Asian Book Award 2023.

Dancing Frogs & Other Creatures

POEMS BY **ZAI WHITAKER**

Do Not the Beetle Berate

When we consider pollination
A WOWEE wonder of creation
We think of sunbirds, and honey bees
Sipping nectar on flowery trees
But spare a thought for the humble beetle,
Often unsung, being drab and leetle
For it carries pollen, many tons—
And even creates our Easter buns:
For sugar and nutmeg mostly grow
Thanks to beetles, who help to sow
These vital seeds, and many mow!
How do they do it? Hold your nose,
'Cos this isn't about nectar and rose!
It's slightly awkward, but I must tell you
That beetles pollinate through their poo!
On a flower of a certain kind
They do their thing, and leave behind
Their precious dung, to pollinate:
So let's not, ever, the beetle berate.

Mr & Mrs Scorpion

Miss Scorpion on a starfull night
Met a Mister and, out of sight
Of other creatures danced away
A lively arachnid ballet
For that's what scorpions do,
In case you never knew.
Arm in arm and claw in claw
Such perfect love you never saw
Before the dawn light hit the sky
They were married, my oh my
For that's how scorpions wed,
In case you've never read.
The babies they are white not black
And ride on Mummy, piggy-back
Moulting skins they quickly grow
The baby load does make mum slow
For that's how scorpions grow,
In case you didn't know.

At last the kids become too large
To ride on this maternal barge
It's time to leave, because if not
Mum might gobble up her lot
For that is scorpion lore,
In case you never saw.
Now each of them must get to work
And make a burrow where to lurk
And wait for food to saunter by
Gobble it up before it can fly

For that's how scorpions sup,
In case this passed you up.
Now they rule the underground
Hunt their prey without a sound
Kill it with a tiny drop
Of toxin from the red tail-top
For that's how scorpions hunt,
In case you never learnt.

The Chameleon's Magic

Now I see him now I don't,
He simply isn't there—
He's done his disappearing act,
Vanished into air.

Oh there he is, bold magician,
Who likes to come and go—
By changing costumes rapidly
So that he doesn't show.
Now he's turned into a twig,
Now a leafy bunch—
He's an MSc in camouflage,
At least that is my hunch.
Each eye is independent and
Rotates on its own—
Alert for prey or predator,
In its treetop zone.
A traffic helmet on his head,
A very bony bum—
A thin and curly whirly tail,
Tongue like bubble gum.

A flash of pink. The tongue shoots out,
To catch a passerby—
A beetle? Cricket? Grasshopper?
Or just a plain old fly.
The tongue tip has a sticky glue,
With which it hunts with ease—
A sticky insect on your tongue?
Not for me thanks, please.

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Zai Whitaker
Founder and managing trustee of the Madras Crocodile Bank, a conservation centre for reptiles. She writes on environmental issues, mostly for children, and her books include *Andamans Boy*, *Kali and the Rat Snake*, and *Cobra in my Kitchen*. Her 22 books include poems, collections, novels, essays and travelogues. Her other interest is education and she has been a teacher and principal in several schools.

Founded: the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust.

PICTURE STORY

New Term, New Friends, New Discoveries

ART & WORDS BY **RIYA NAGENDRA**

Thiru hates people borrowing his stuff, while Joli comes to school with one notebook, a pen, and hope in his heart. He always returns Thiru's stuff though, and Thiru will notice this and they will eventually become friends, secretly hoping to be in the same group for project day. Meanwhile, Monisha is discovering a passion for football, and PT Sir is discovering that maybe there is a chance for the primary football team to win at least third place in the upcoming tournament. Godspeed to them both!

ILLUSTRATION *Art & words · Riya Nagendra*

Riya Nagendra

The creature known as Riya is a professional artist and unprofessional life-enjoyer. It illustrates books, creates warm, whimsical comics and, on the rare occasions it leaves its house, conducts fun workshops for adults and kids alike. Resembling a cat from some angles, Riya has been described as 'self-doubt in a bag', but is working on becoming unstoppably confident.

Current obsession: becoming unstoppably confident.

STORY

Cats and Dogs

BY **LUBAINA BANDUKWALA**

The dog first appeared on Monday, when the boy felt the weight of the world even more than usual. It was hard to go back to school after the weekend. He shrugged his backpack on his shoulders, mumbled a "Bye Mom," and stepped out of the gate. And there under the sprays of white and magenta bougainvillea she sat. Not quite a puppy, not quite a dog. She tilted her head, whined a small hello, and wagged her tail hesitantly.

The boy glanced at her sideways and hurried to the bus stop. He did not like animals. He did not like the bus he was going to climb into. He did not like standard 3B, his class. He did not like the people who were in class with him. He did not like a lot of things. Actually, it's not that he did not like these things. He was just scared of all of the above and more—interacting with the world around him was very worrisome!

All he wanted, when he set out every morning, was the day to finish so he could get back into the safety of his home—where he could let loose his happy smile and penchant for mischief.

So, that morning, when he walked to the bus stop with his head bowed as usual, he heard the clip-clip sound of paws behind him. He stole a glance back and saw that the dog was following him. The boy could feel the worry start to tingle up his toes. He bent down and found a stick. He picked it up and waved it in front of the dog. The dog stopped, but her tail continued to wag. Her tongue hung out of her mouth, making her look like she was giving the world a big happy smile. *What? Don't you want to be friends with me?* she seemed to say. However, she stopped following him.

He walked faster just in case she still decided to follow him. As he quickened his pace, he passed the new house that had come up on his street. Glancing up, he saw the new girl standing on the verandah, like she had since the past week. But this time, she was not looking down on the street, she was feeding a sleek black cat a dish of milk.

The boy quickly looked away, lest she looked at him and caught his eye. He got to the bus stop just as the bus turned around a corner and came to a halt at his stop. Whew, at least he made it to the bus. Now he only had the rest of the school day to deal with.

* * *

The cat had appeared on the verandah two days ago. It had sprung silently down from the balcony and purred as she arched against the girl's legs.

The girl's mother was not happy. "God knows where this creature has come from, go away!" she shooed the cat away.

"No, no, please let her be?" the girl said, scratching the cat's head as it closed its eyes and stretched, purring like it was being pampered at a beauty spa.

Mamma looked at the girl's eager face and said, "Ok, but she stays in the garden."

The cat stayed. And played. And was a great listener. She didn't seem to mind the girl's stammer. "I will be joining a new school," she told the cat as she scratched her belly, "I love school. But will the school love me back?"

The cat looked at her inquiringly as the girl stopped scratching her tummy. "You don't think they will find it funny when I say, He he hello?" She smiled as she said it, but her eyes were sad. The cat yawned and lay back, as if to say, *really, why do you worry about silly things*. The girl laughed and resumed her scratching.

That evening as she sat on the verandah steps, the cat draped herself on her feet. The girl watched the neighbourhood kids play on the street outside, chattering loudly, and sighed. The cat got up, started to wash itself and stared calmly at the girl.

"I know I know," said the girl. "I should go and play with them. I know. But they might laugh. Who would want to be friends with someone who can't even speak properly?"

* * *

The dog now sat outside his gate every morning. She squatted on her haunches, her mouth wide open and tongue hanging out, tail sweeping the ground happily, sending up puffs of dust. Now, however, she had begun to follow the boy. She would prance around happily at a distance and, every time the boy would stop, so would she. She kept her distance — but from the corner of his eye, he could always see her skipping around, sniffing the ground, uttering challenging yelps at other dogs.

And on the way back, the dog would wait for him at the bus stop. "Shall I tell you what happened in school today?" asked the boy. And somehow, without realizing it, he found himself chattering away in a most unusual way to the dog, every evening on his way back from school.

"Why does a dog hang its tongue out?" the teacher asked in class one day. The boy thought of the dog with her happy smile every morning and instinctively raised his hand. The teacher was surprised and delighted that the boy was finally participating in class. But, as the class turned its attention towards him, the words stuck in his throat. "I forgot," he whispered and sat down to the laughter of his classmates. "Oh why did I even try," fumed the boy as he ate his snack by himself during break.

* * *

The cat had made itself at home on the verandah. Leaping at imaginary enemies, daintily washing its paws, and waiting in quite a regal way for the girl to step out. When she did, the cat padded up to the girl and wordlessly asked for her back to be caressed and ears to be scratched. "Ok, you really are getting pampered, aren't you?" she told the cat with hardly a trace of the stammer in her voice. Suddenly a ball flew over the wall and landed at her feet. The cat pounced on it and held it in between her paws even as a head came over the gate and said, "So sorry, Ahmed here hit a six, can we have the ball back?" The girl's heart was pounding. Here was a perfect opportunity to join the group of children playing outside. The cat too looked at her expectantly. But, the words that came out so easily to the cat stayed in her throat, fearful of their effect on the listener. She silently picked the ball and gave it to the boy, whose head disappeared with a loud "Thank you!" in its wake. "Don't look at me like that," the girl told the cat, "I just couldn't do it!" Her voice was wobbly as if she was about to cry.

* * *

On Saturday, the boy found himself in (one of) his worst nightmares. His mother gave him some money and a cloth bag and said, "I want you to walk carefully to the Andawala and bring me back six eggs."

"But Ma!" The boy looked at her pleadingly. He would actually have to talk to the shopkeeper and ask for eggs! But Ma had decided to ignore his appeal. The shop was in a lane of stalls just a step away from their house.

The boy stepped out. "Oh good, you are here." He said to the dog waiting outside the gate. "I just have to ask for six eggs, it's not such a big deal, no?" he asked her. She tilted her head and cocked her ear, like she always did, making him feel like she was truly listening to what he said. She gave a small bark and pranced around him in circles. The boy laughed, "Yes, I think it should be ok."

As they passed the new house, a small black sleek blur leapt from the wall right in front of the dog. The black cat landed in front of the dog and hissed. The dog stopped in her tracks momentarily and then pounced with a volley of barks on the cat, who slipped away with ease. The boy stood paralysed even as the gate flew open and the new girl flew out. "Cccat! Oh no!"

In a flash, the cat ran into the bazaar with the dog following her, around the banana cart, and past the coconut seller. And hot on their heels was the girl.

"Bbbad Dog! Leave my cat alone."

And just a step behind was the boy, panting as he tried to catch up.

They followed the animals into the park and stood trying to catch their breath.

"Your stupid cat attacked my dog!"

"Rrubbish! How can such a small creature attack a dog!"

"We were just minding our own business when your cat appeared out of nowhere..."

They crossed the swings and slides, and there, under the tree, they stopped short. Before them sat dog grinning happily as always with cat leaning against her, calmly washing herself, like they had been besties forever.

"I can't believe this," the boy said.

"I thought your dog was going to kill cat."

"I thought cat was going to kill dog, she just appeared out of nowhere..."

Both of them laughed in relief. And realized that they were both so angry that the boy forgot to be scared and the girl didn't care about her stammer.

"I'm starting school tomorrow," the girl said, "can I come with you to the bus stop?"

"Yes, but for now, can you come with me to buy eggs?"

And just like that they chattered like old friends and even forgot to see if the animals were following behind them.

On Monday, the boy felt the weight of the world lighten a little—he would have a friend to board the bus with. He stepped outside, but there was no dog. "Hmm, maybe he's gone off to play in the park."

"My cat didn't show up this morning," said the girl as she joined him on the walk to the bus stop.

As the days went by, the two became fast friends—but dog and cat had vanished, never to appear again.

He forgot to be scared and she didn't care about her stammer.

Lubaina Bandukwala

Trained as a journalist but followed her heart into children's literature as a writer and curator of kid lit festivals. She founded her own festival, Peek A Book, which has now expanded to school book fairs and library curation. She is also the awards director for the Binod Kanoria Children's Book Awards.

Founded: Peek A Book, India's beloved children's lit festival.

POEM

Messi

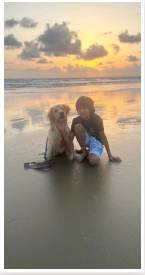
BY **KABIR JAIN, AGE 12**

when Messi steps upon the silent field,
the crowd goes still as time begins to wait
his gentle touch makes hidden wonders yield
and turns the game from force to something great.

the ball stays close, like thoughts he does not say,
it follows him as stars obey the night;
defenders run, yet watch him slip away,
for calm outruns their speed and raw delight.

they call him small, yet giants lose their place,
for size means less than heart dares to stay
with simple turns, he bends the shape of space,
and shows how skill can light the darkest day.

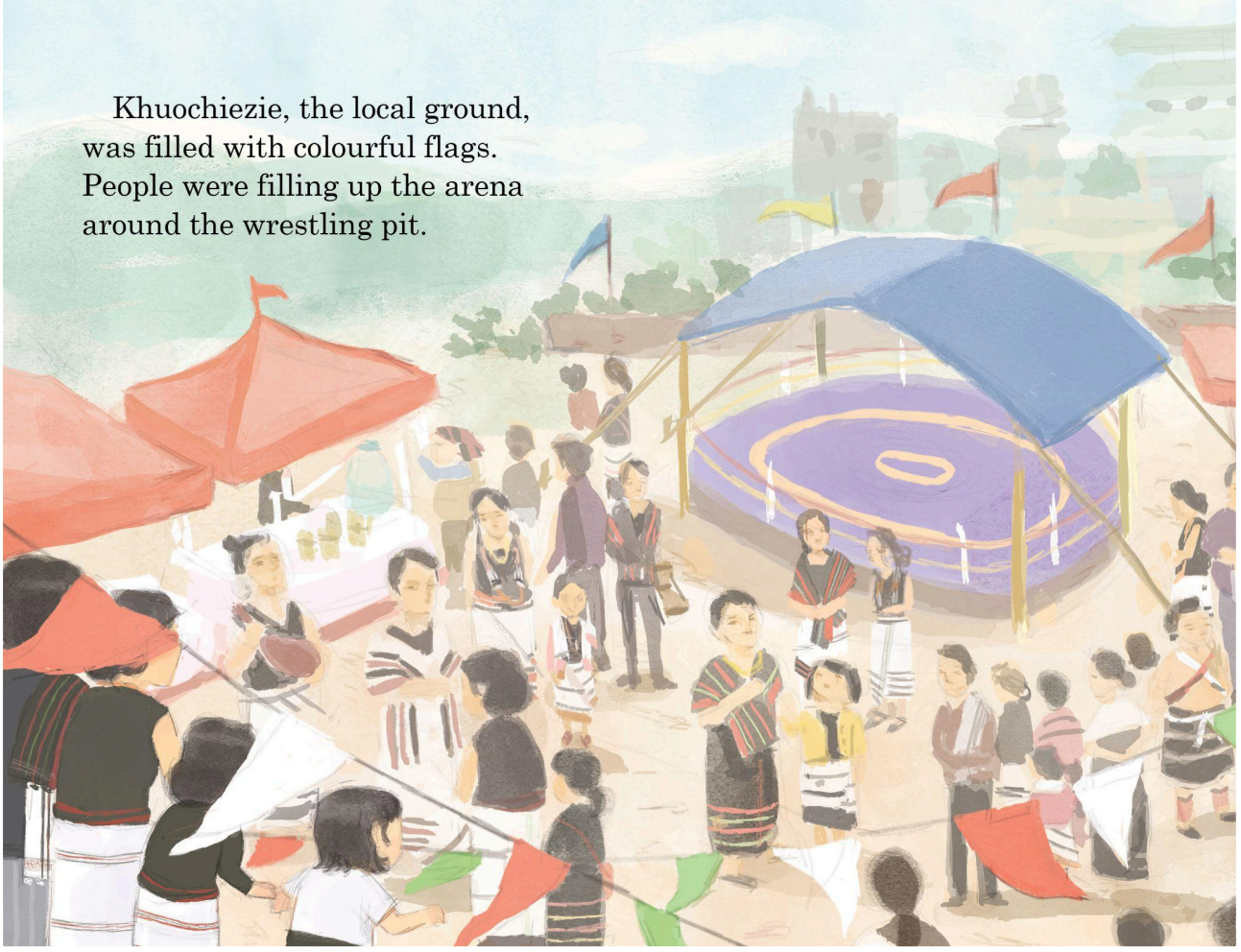
he leaves behind more hope than scores can show,
and teaches dreams to move, not just to know.



Kabir Jain, age 12

I'm Kabir, 12 years old, and football is my world. If you ever need to find me, just go to your nearest football pitch and I'll probably be there. I'm a fan of Barcelona and Liverpool (I know, tough choice, right?), but if I had to pick my current best heroes, it's gotta be Lamine Yamal and Mohamed Salah, but now that Salah is soon to leave, I'm going with Florian Wirtz, the midfield maestro. And let's not forget the GOAT, Lionel Messi. No one's even come close to matching his magic on the field. Messi's the reason I fell in love with football in the first place! But football's not my only love. When I'm not on the pitch, I'm with my golden retriever, Coco. She's not just a dog, she's my sidekick, my partner-in-crime. Whether we're playing fetch or just chilling, she's always there to make my day better. Of course, the rest of my family is also a huge part of my life. We're a squad, always looking out for each other, and we know how to have a good time together.

His GOAT: Lionel Messi. Sidekick: Coco the golden retriever.



PICTURE STORY

Wrestling Day

BY **T. KEDITSU** · ILLUSTRATIONS BY **RISHITA LOITONGBAM**

Wrestling Day celebrates the sounds and sights of the street and the wrestling day events in Kohima, Nagaland.

It is a Hook Book! Hook Books are set in different places across India and show us the local clothes, food, languages, and customs from these places.

Published by Duckbill (an imprint of Penguin Random House India). Published with permission from Penguin Random House India.

STORY

A Short List

BY **APARNA KAPUR**

Something is missing from my room. It's a small room, so it wasn't hard to notice when my cloud alarm clock vanished yesterday. Maybe there were things that had already gone by then, and I'll never be able to remember now. But I don't want to forget about any more of them so I'm making a list. I share my room with Dadiji but all of her things are intact.

1. One cloud-shaped alarm clock that plays stormy thunder noises to wake people. I got this when Didi went to college. She loves rain but I'm afraid of storms so I ask Mummy to wake me up instead.
2. My glitter hairclip. I had two like it but I lost one of them on Sports Day. I didn't know what to do with just one glitter clip so I had kept it on my table.
3. My thesaurus! Dutta ma'am told us to use the thesaurus to expand our vocabulary. I couldn't buy Spider-Man in July because my book money was spent on the thesaurus. I tried using it once to find another word for walking but there were too many options so I closed the book.

3.5. The bookmark Vinay gave me. We became best friends in third standard when he joined because his birthday is the day after mine. On the bookmark, he had drawn a picture of a giraffe eating a pink and yellow flower because Champa ma'am had sent me out of the class for talking. Vinay is in the other section now and his best friend is Ravi whose birthday isn't even *in* December.

4. The calculator that Dadiji gave me, saying every student should have one. She said it was a special calculator because it didn't need batteries, it only needed the sun. It is very cool but now the new building has come up next to ours and the sun doesn't visit my room long enough to charge it.
5. My scrunchie!!! The one that looks like Mummy's scrunchie.

It's now been a week—almost! I keep looking for my things but they are nowhere to be found. I even asked Mummy for help and everyone knows that if my mother can't find something, it is only because it no longer exists.

6. The invitation card Shalini gave me right before she told me that I shouldn't go to her birthday party and she was only giving me the card because her mother said to invite everyone in class. It was sky blue with yellow balloons. Joke's on the thief because I didn't even want it.
7. A pebble I picked up from the street on my way back from school. It was grey but from some angles it looked golden.
8. Niki, my doll. She was made by Lata didi who lives across from us, using an old sari of hers. Niki has been with me since I was four. I don't play with her as much now, but she still sat on my bed and sometimes I would tie her black wool hair into a bun.

What a long list of things missing! Should I hide my other things? I don't know who could be taking them.

"HULLO! GREETINGS! GOOD DAY!" I was woken up by a loud musical voice on Saturday and when I opened my eyes, I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

Floating down from the ceiling, with a bunch of yellow balloons in her hand, was Niki. Except she was bigger—as big as my arm—and was wearing a skirt that looked like my scrunchie and her hair was in a bun with a glittery clip in it. I turned to see if Dadiji had seen her too, but she had gone for her morning walk.

"I am tired, exhausted, weary, fatigued, worn out." She landed on my bed with a soft thump. "But I am happy to see my pal, companion, buddy, confidant, ally, mate, friend." She smiled. "You."

I smiled back at my friend. "Hi Niki," I said.

* * *

Nothing else went missing from my room after that. Ultimately I decided that it was a pretty short list of things that had vanished, after all.

"I enjoy walking, strolling, wandering, sauntering with you," Niki said. We were out for a walk on the terrace of the building. From here, I could see the tops of many other houses, with clothes drying, uncles drinking chai, raw mangoes pickling. Terraces were special. I liked how they were both inside the house and outside.

"I wonder if our house is closer to the terrace or to the ground floor," I said looking over the railing.

"Hmm," Niki frowned. "The building is 23 metres tall, and your house is 14 metres from the ground, which means it's closer to the terrace!"

Niki's only flaw is that she doesn't eat. She is funny, she is good with numbers, she talks so well, and that's not even the best part. The best part is that I am no longer afraid of storms because her farts sound like thunder.

"I am tired, exhausted, weary, fatigued, worn out. But I am happy to see my friend. You."

Aparna Kapur

Talks fast but writes slowly. Her most recent novel is called *An Absence of Squirrels*. As a child, she wanted to eat ice cream for all three meals. (She still does.)

Childhood wish: ice cream for all three meals. Still working on it.

POEM

Three Poems

BY VARSHA SESHAN

I'd Rather

I'd rather compose a speech for a preacher,
Or draw up a military plan,
Or copy out notes from my Geography teacher,
Or dash off a treatise on Man.

I'd rather set down a legal contract,
Or write out a thesis on crime,
I'd rather do all of these things, in fact,
Than think up an eight-line rhyme.

Ulti Khopdi

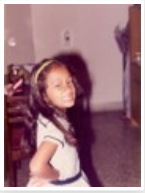
Ulti Khopdi is a strange young child.
A little tame, a little wild.
She sleeps all day and wakes at night,
If she wants to read, she turns off the light.
She writes with her feet and walks on her nose,
She has rings on her body and clothes on her toes,
She wears woollen coats when the weather's mild,
Ulti Khopdi is a strange young child!

Find more at varshaseshan.com

Poetic Justice

I'm a terrible writer.
I laugh when you say
I will be successful.
Those who mean well tell me
I'll never make it.
It's absurd that to believe
I have talent.
Every day, I think:
I should quit.
Don't keep telling me
I should work on my craft.
I know what's best for me.

(now read from the bottom to the top)



Varsha Seshan
Varsha Seshan is a writer of lists, emails, detailed notes to self, and children's books. She wrote her first stories in a five-line notebook—as handwriting practice! Her childhood dream was to drive a roadroller, which she did once, gaining great respect for those who park these machines without knocking walls down. She is a dreamer who loves windy, rainy days, full of magic. Find out more at varshaseshan.com

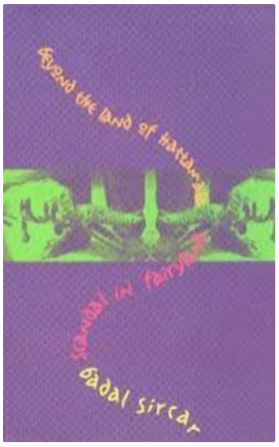
Childhood dream: to drive a roadroller. She did, once.

BOOKSHELF

Philosophical Children's Literature

BY **RHEA KUTHOORE**

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY



Beyond the Land of Hattamala, Badal Sircar, Seagull Books, 1992

What if there is a world in which there is no concept such as money?

The short play "Beyond the Land of Hattamala" tells the story of two thieves, Kena and Becha, who run from authorities and jump into a river. They soon wash up in a new and strange land where money does not exist. Read on to find out if they can still carry out their thieving plans in this new world! What makes this a fun book to read-aloud with your friends is the dialogue and humour in the story.

This book involves a thought experiment. Thought experiments ask us 'what if' questions such as — 'what if I was invisible for a day, what would I do?' and 'what if there was a fortune-teller who could know your future, would you want to know?' Such questions make us think again about our concepts and re-imagine reality. They are called 'counterfactual situations'.

In this case, the story asks us to consider: What if there were a world without money? In a world without money, will the two thieves still be considered criminals? The story explores various characteristics of such a world.

Before reading the story, try to imagine a world without money. What do you think would be different about this world?

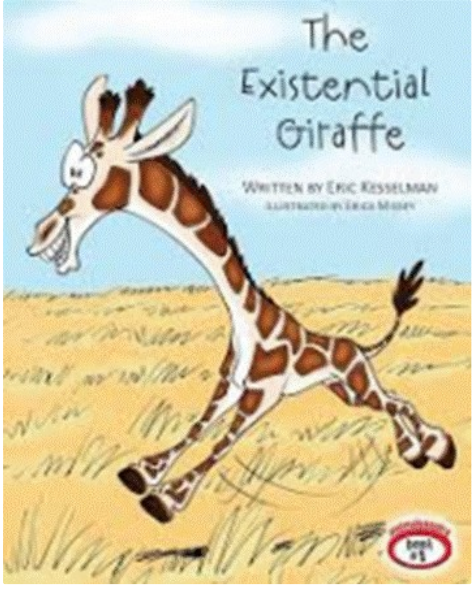
1. Would everyone be rich or poor?
2. Would people cooperate or fight?
3. Would there be more stealing or less?
4. Would there be more items in the world or fewer?
5. Would people use resources more carefully or less?
6. Would people continue to work, or would they become unemployed?

After making a note of your answers, go on to read the play with your friends. You can also act it out with them and even suggest the play to your teacher for an act out at school!

After reading the play, think:

Would a world without the concept of money be more fair? Why or why not? Given that we live in a world with the concept of money, what is one thing we could do to make it more fair?

EPISTEMOLOGY



The Existential Giraffe, Eric Kesselman & Erica Missey, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012

What can we know with certainty?

The Game of Certainty

Let's begin by playing a game called 'the game of certainty'. Review the following 'facts' and decide whether you know them for certain (you can answer yes or no). For every answer, write down your reasons—how do you know this fact for certain, or why don't you know it for certain? For example, if you think that ice is cold, your reason can be – 'because I touched it and it felt cold!'

1. 'The sky is blue.'
2. 'The sun is yellow.'
3. 'I exist.'
4. 'Fire is hot.'
5. 'I am not dreaming right now.'
6. '2 + 2 = 4.'
7. 'The sun will rise tomorrow.'

Did you find the game easy or tough?

About the book

"The Existential Giraffe" is a book about a giraffe, Sammy, who is troubled by such statements. Sammy struggles with an age-old philosophical problem: how can he be sure he is a giraffe? What if he does not exist at all and simply believes he does? How can he be certain that the sun is yellow and the sky is blue? Read on to discover how Sammy grapples with these big questions.

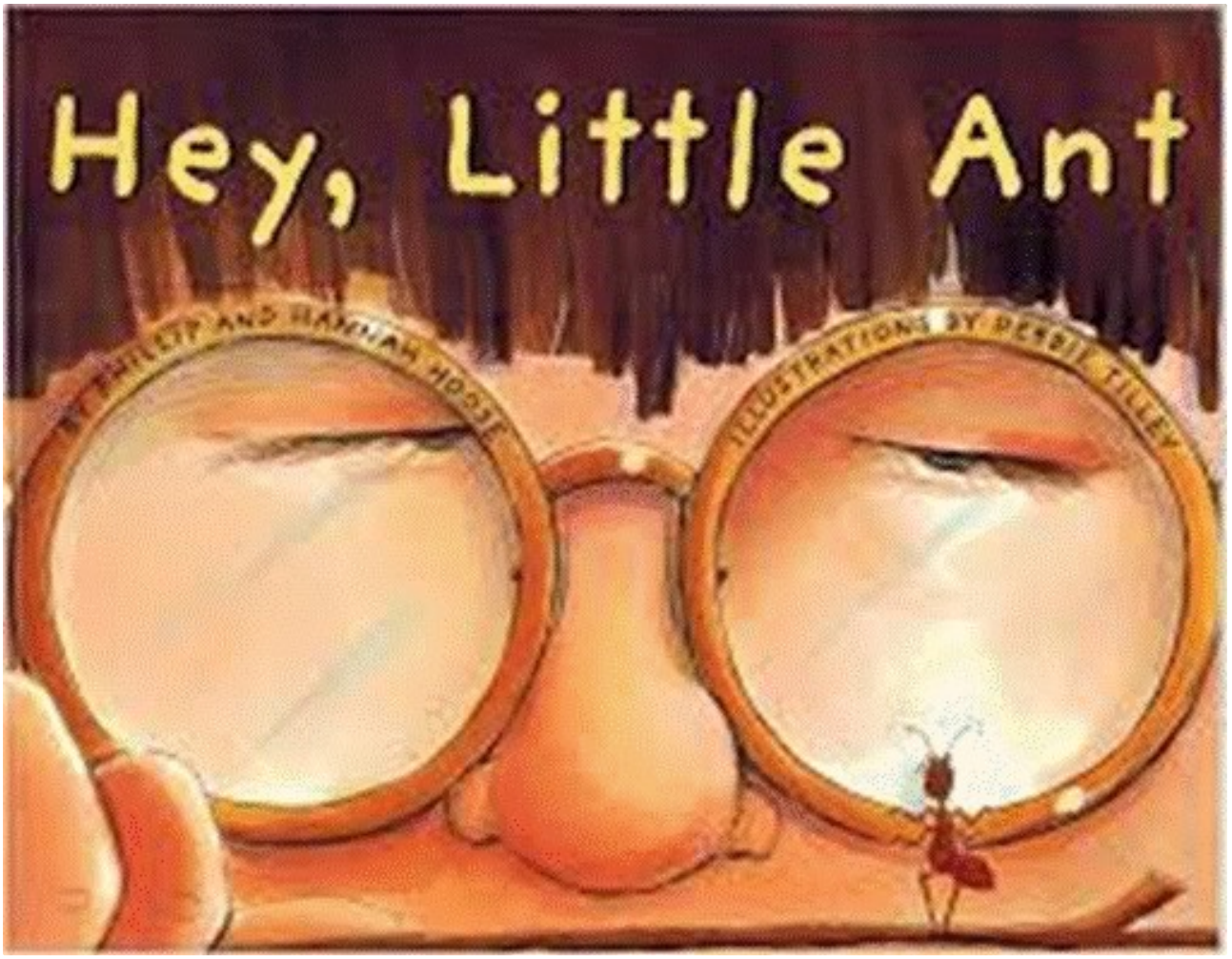
Sammy asks questions which we may not be able to answer with sureness or certainty, but he is open to hearing different perspectives and possibilities and enjoys coming up with new ideas. This is an important philosophical trait. Philosophy involves pondering the certainty of existence around us while not always having certain answers.

Now, look at the game and the reasons you initially noted down. Play the game with your parents, grandparents, or friends! Do they agree with your reasoning? Do you agree with theirs? How do you know the existence of something with certainty?

For example, you may know that the sky is blue because that's how it appears to you when you look up, or because so many poets and writers have described it as blue. However, you could also wonder — how can we know that everyone sees it as 'blue'? Do other species see it as 'blue'?

After reading the book, ponder:

- What do you think about how Sammy addressed his issue at the end? How would you respond if you were in Sammy's position?



Hey, Little Ant, Phillip Hoose and his daughter, Hannah Hoose, Debbie Tilley, Tricycle Press, 1998

ETHICS

Should the ant get squished?

We often accidentally step on ants while walking. Do you think it is wrong to purposefully step on an ant? Why or why not?

Imagine an ant begins to talk to you! "Hey, little ant" portrays a scary moment in the life of an ant — the moment when it is about to be squished by a young boy! But, guess what? The ant starts talking to the boy and they both share their perspectives on the question: should the ant get squished? This book won't tell you the answer. Instead, it will ask you: "What do you think the boy should do?"

As you read the story, pause at several points to reflect on the following questions.

Pause 1: After the boy says, "Anyone knows that ants can't feel"
Reflection question 1: If something does not have feelings, does that make it less wrong to kill it?
In other words, is it more wrong to kill something that can feel? Why or why not?

Pause 2: "I am so big and you are so small. I don't think it will hurt at all."
Reflection question 2: If something is smaller like an ant, is it less wrong to kill?
If something is bigger like a lion, is it more wrong to kill it? Why or why not?

Pause 3: "But my mum says ants are rude. They carry off our picnic food!"
Reflection question 3: If something or someone bothers you, is that reason enough to harm them? Why or why not?

Discuss these questions with your friends to hear their perspectives and reasons and to think again together.

Please join us at 'Room of children's philosophies' in Chennai to discover many such stories, and to engage in philosophising with each other!

Rhea Kuthoore
Has been advancing the practice of philosophising with children in India for several years. She believes all young people have an ethical self, an existential self and a philosophical self that ought to be recognised and nurtured. Over the last few years, she has worked with several schools and currently runs a 'room of children's philosophies' in Chennai and teaches educators online.

Visit: childrendoingphilosophy.org

MATCHBOX by usawa

POEM

Fighting Fear: A Sonnet

BY **ADITYA MAHESHWARY, AGE 12**

Upon the bow a lonely sailor stood,
While roaring waves, like mountains, crashed below.
The shark, a shadow circling for its food,
Glided through waters dark as coal's black glow.
Its jaws were iron traps of dread and death,
Its hunger burned like fire beneath the tide.
Yet still the sailor held his fearless breath,
As terror thundered wildly far and wide.
The ocean loomed, a beast with foaming jaws,
The predator surged forward through the spray.
It lunged like lightning without fear or pause,
And smashed the sailor's only home away.
Yet to the wreckage, still the man held on,
For fearless hearts fight hardest in the storm.

A NOTE ON SONNETS

Sonnets are one of my favourite writing technique builders. They teach structure, rhythm, rhyme and most importantly, meter, that much overlooked tool that makes a sentence 'pop'; it often turns the phrase, not just in poetry, but even in prose. Once you understand the power of the syllable, there's no going back. Shakespearean Sonnets often end in a couplet preceded by three quatrains all written in Iambic pentameter—a pattern of unstressed-stressed syllables, following the form: da Dum da Dum da Dum da Dum da Dum. Try it!

— Reshma K. Barshikar, children's author and founder of The Hidden Imagination Writers Academy

Aditya Maheshwary, age 12

Aditya is a bright 12-year-old student currently studying at Ascend International School. From a very young age, he has had a deep passion for reading which over the years has channelled his creativity especially writing poetry, with a particular flair for rap lyrics. An enthusiast of epic storytelling, Aditya is captivated by the fantasy genre and is a massive fan of the Star Wars and Avengers universes. Beyond fictional worlds, he finds immense inspiration in real-life narratives, regularly devouring biopics of famous personalities and powerful rags-to-riches stories that showcase resilience and triumph. His creative talents have been carefully nurtured over the last two years through dedicated creative writing sessions with Reshma, allowing him to sharpen his unique voice. He brings the same focus and rhythm to his extracurricular pursuits, showing a strong dedication to playing both tennis and the piano.

Plays: tennis and the piano. Writes: sonnets and rap lyrics.

PICTURE STORY

Our First Swimming Lessons BY SHREYA T S

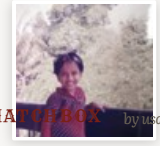
During our summer vacation, we would wake up every day thinking — what's something different we can do today? One morning, while we were quite bored at our grandparents' house, a small wish to swim in a pool crossed my mind and my brother was fully up for my wild idea! And — say no more — we decided to execute it.

I led the operation by filling buckets of water from the washroom and pouring it down the bedroom floor. My brother helped as much as he could by filling little mugs. We had not forgotten to close the door to make sure the water stayed. When the water level seemed perfect, we decided to dive into it and swim like explorers. My brother swam through under the bed, between the legs of the cot, and I followed him. No doubt about it — we were having an underwater adventure right in our bedroom!

Suddenly, we heard loud knocks and, before we could do anything, someone opened the door. It was my grandmother, who had come in to check on us, seeing water dripping down to the ground floor! As she opened the door, the ocean we had made gushed out of the room in waves. My brother hit his head in panic — I didn't know whether to console him or confront my grandmother. Hearing the commotion, my grandfather came up and he too gave us a piece of his mind. We were never left alone together again.

Even now, I carry a fear of water but my brother doesn't, and I feel proud. Because his first swimming lessons were the underwater adventures that I designed on a bedroom floor!

ILLUSTRATION *Illustration · Shreya T S*



Shreya T S

A graduate in Communication Design from the National Institute of Design. Currently working as an illustrator, she loves telling stories through visuals and has a keen interest in children's literature. She has worked on animations, comics, self-published picture books and zines. She also loves documenting life's moments through the medium of sketching.

Loves: documenting life's moments through sketching.

STORY

The Leftovers

BY **MAMTA NAINY**

'What are we cooking for Nani's birthday?' Mana asked.

Ma was peeling onions by the sink. Their papery skins gathered in a steel bowl beside her.

'You decide,' she said, wiping her eyes with the edge of her sleeves.

'Me?' Mana looked at Ma, surprised.

Usually, Ma was the one who decided everything for birthdays—the menu, the flowers, which mithai to order, even which plates to take out for guests. Nani always complained about 'too much tamasha' and then ask for second helpings of everything anyway.

But today Ma had left it to Mana to decide.

Mana looked around the kitchen. The jars of spices stood in neat rows on the shelves. The old wooden *doli* sat in its usual corner, its wire-mesh doors hiding round biscuit tins and bottles of Roohafza and khus sherbet.

Mana began to think. Maybe they should make *koki*. She imagined Nani's fingers kneading dough. The onions, coriander and spices disappearing into the flour like tiny secrets. Nani never measured spices. She pinched and scattered. And somehow the koki always turned out right.

Or *kadhi*? That smelled exactly like Nani's stories that often began in one place, wandered off somewhere else and somehow found their way home.

Or *dal pakwan*? The crackle of *pakwan*. The thick dal. The sharp onions and green chutney. 'Good food should surprise the tongue a little,' Nani always said. 'Otherwise, why bother eating?'

Mana smiled thinking about it now. 'But which dish belonged most to Nani?' she wondered. 'Which one was her favourite?'

Her eyes drifted to a plate of leftover rotis on the counter, folded like half-moons. And suddenly, she remembered something.

One summer afternoon, Mana had wandered into the kitchen while Nani cooked.

The table fan creaked. Sunlight slipped lazily across jars of spices. And Nani stood by the counter crushing garlic and ginger in an old stone mortar blackened with time.

'What are you making?' Mana asked.

'Seyal Maani.' Nani opened the faded doors of the *doli* and took out a plate of leftover rotis wrapped in cloth. The name itself sounded playful, like marbles knocking together.

'What's that?' Mana asked.

Nani smiled as she peeled and cut the onions. 'It's a special dish that my Baba, your great-grandfather, made from leftover rotis, tomatoes, onions... whatever was there.'

Mana looked suspiciously at the rotis. 'But aren't these rotis stale?' she asked, wrinkling her nose.

Nani clicked her tongue immediately. 'My Baba would have hated that word,' she said, unfolding the rotis carefully. 'Food that survives another day has already proven its character.'

'But how can leftovers be special food?'

Nani paused before answering. 'Because sometimes,' she said softly, 'what is left behind is all people have.'

The onions hissed as they touched the oil. And then the story began. Nani told stories exactly the way she folded her saris on the clothesline—slowly, carefully, smoothing every corner before moving to the next.

'In Naushahro,' she said, 'my Baba made Seyal Maani every evening.'

'Naushahro?' 'A town in Sindh. Where I was born.'

As Nani spoke, the kitchen seemed to change shape. The pressure cooker became a train. The spice jars became crowded bazaars. The steam rising from the pan turned into dusty evening roads of a town from another time.

'There were horse-drawn carriages,' Nani said. 'And fountains scented with rosewater.' Then she paused and smiled softly. 'Or maybe I've made them grander in my head over the years. Memory likes decorating things.'

Mana smiled too.

'But there really were fountains,' Nani continued firmly. 'And melas and shrines. And markets so crowded you could barely walk straight. Baba and I visited them often.'

'Really?'

Nani nodded. 'And every evening, after playing marbles with my friend Umaima, we came home hungry and sunburnt. Baba would tear leftover rotis into pieces and cook them with tomatoes and onions until the whole house smelled alive.'

She handed Mana a spoonful of the bubbling onion-tomato sauce. The taste startled Mana. 'It tastes a little like the red-sauce in the pasta Ma makes,' she said, licking the spoon.

Nani pretended to look offended. 'This pasta copied Seyal Maani, not the other way around.'

Mana giggled. 'And where is Umaima now?' she asked. The fan continued its slow turning as Nani sprinkled coriander over the pan without answering.

'You know,' she said finally, 'she always won at marbles. She kept all the shiny blue ones.' A smile shone briefly on Nani's lips. 'She stayed behind.'

Mana blinked. 'The country split,' Nani said, tearing a roti into tiny pieces. 'Like a roti torn in two.'

Mana imagined somebody's giant hands tearing the earth apart. 'But countries can't tear,' she protested.

'No,' said Nani. 'But people can.'

Nani stirred the pan. 'When Umaima and I came home one evening, Baba was stuffing utensils into gunny sacks while Amma stitched them shut. There was no Seyal Maani waiting for us that day.'

'Where were they going?' Mana asked. 'We all were,' Nani replied. 'To India.'

'But weren't you in India already?' Nani smiled sadly. 'That's what I thought too. For a while, the grown-ups had spoken in whispers. Neighbours gathered at doorways, discussing something in low voices. I didn't understand much of what they were saying, only that something was changing. Then, slowly, the whispers spilled onto the streets. People said a line had been drawn on a map. The place we called home was now in Pakistan. Suddenly, everything felt different. And in a matter of few days, people hurried past carrying bundles. Shop shutters slammed shut in the middle of the afternoon. The city sounded different somehow. Sindh was now in Pakistan. And we were told that we belonged somewhere else.'

'And Umaima?'

Nani closed her eyes. 'She belonged to that side. So she stayed.'

Mana imagined two girls standing on opposite sides of a line neither of them could see.

'I still remember her sticky tears on my shoulder,' Nani said.

'Then what happened?' Mana asked.

'One night, we left home,' Nani said. 'Before leaving, Amma lit a small lamp outside our door. She said it would protect the house till we returned.' And then she sighed. 'Who knew there would be no returning?'

Mana stared at her.

'We walked for hours,' Nani continued. 'Past many homes that still looked lived in. Then we travelled by train to Karachi. Then came the ship. And then Bombay.'

The word Bombay sounded different in Nani's voice. As though it belonged to another life. 'We lived in a barrack in a refugee camp first and then in a rented room,' she said.

'What's a refugee camp?' asked Mana. Nani thought for a moment before answering. 'It's a place full of people waiting for life to begin again.'

'Were you scared?' Mana asked.

Nani stirred the Seyal Maani thoughtfully. 'Yes,' she said. 'And hungry.'

'Sometimes there were no vegetables, no lentils, very little money. But there were always rotis waiting inside the *doli*, one of the few possessions we'd managed to bring with us,' Nani said as she glanced at the old cupboard. 'Before the fridge, this is where we kept our food.'

'So your Baba made Seyal Maani again?'

Nani nodded. 'Again and again,' Nani said as the torn rotis softened slowly, drinking in flavour. 'See how these rotis get a second chance. Just like we did.'

Mana stared at the Seyal Maani that was not leftover rotis anymore. It was pieces of journeys, of homes packed into gunny sacks, of memories carried across a border because nothing else could be carried.

The whistle of the pressure cooker brought Mana back to the present. 'We will make Seyal Maani,' Mana finally told Ma. Ma nodded.

Together they tore the rotis into uneven pieces. The kitchen slowly filled with familiar smells. Garlic, onions, tomatoes... and memory.

That evening, they placed a bowl of Seyal Maani beside Nani's framed photograph.

The steam curled upwards as Mana looked closely at the picture. For the first time, she noticed that Nani's smile carried two places inside it. One she had left behind. And one she had spent the rest of her life rebuilding.

On the bowl beside the photograph lay leftover, torn rotis that had transformed into something warm and whole. As though even broken things remembered how to become home again.

Food that survives another day has already proven its character.

A NOTE

This story is as much about food as it is about memories. Not just beautiful memories, like the ones that my grandmother had of eating Seyal Maani as a child in her home in Sindh (now in Pakistan), but also difficult ones that are sometimes hard to share.

Growing up a Sindhi, I was regaled with tales by my grandmother of her good old days in Sindh—tales about her school and neighbourhood, friends and games, melas and langars. But her tales often soured with the scary, sad memories of Partition; of leaving behind all that she had known to be her own. Her life, like many other Sindhis, had been redrawn without her permission. And all she could do was adapt to it.

Just one of the by-products of the unimaginable hardship and loss that many Sindhi refugees faced is their frugal cooking. While the idea of not wasting leftover food is prevalent across India, for Sindhi refugees, cooking thriftily was a matter of survival. Rebuilding their lives from scratch in a new country required them to get by with the very little they had. So, whether it was stale bread or leftover chapatis or throwaway ingredients such as gourd peels and watermelon skin, my grandmother would whip up anything into a wholesome meal—a meal that evoked the flavours of a home that she had little hope of ever returning to. Her family had left everything behind. The only thing they brought with them were memories, especially of food. And it is through food that their identity—once blown apart by the trauma of conflict and displacement—still lives.

GLOSSARY

Koki — A traditional Sindhi flaky flatbread made from whole wheat flour.

Kadhi — A curry made using chickpea flour, vegetables and spices.

Dal-pakwan — One of the most popular Sindhi breakfasts: Bengal gram curry served with crispy flatbread.

Doli — A food cabinet with wire-mesh doors.

Seyal — A Sindhi cooking technique: cooking something in its own juices with very little or no water. Often made with ingredients high in water content such as tomatoes and onions. **Maani** means roti or chapati.

RECIPE — SEYAL MAANI

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 tomato, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 green chillies, chopped
- ¼ tsp ginger paste
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- ½ tsp coriander powder
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ¼ tsp red chilli powder
- Salt to taste
- Coriander to garnish
- Leftover rotis

METHOD

In a frying pan, heat some oil and add the cumin seeds. Sauté till the seeds start to splutter. Add chopped garlic and ginger and wait till their colour changes. Add tomatoes, onions, green chillies, salt, turmeric, coriander powder and red chilli powder. Add half a cup of water and as the mixture starts to bubble, tear the stale rotis and add them to the mixture. The stiffer your rotis, the more water you need to add. After mixing well, cover it and cook on low heat till the water dries up. Garnish with some coriander and squeeze some lime juice to add some zing.

Mamta Nainy

Mamta Nainy is a writer based in New Delhi. She has authored over thirty-five books for children, many of which have gone on to win national and international awards and recognition, including Neev Book Award 2025, Valley of Words Awards 2022, FICCI Publishing Awards 2022, Publishing Next Award 2022, The Hindu Young World-Goodbooks Award 2019 and Peek-a-Book Children's Choice Award 2019. Her books have featured on the USBBY and IBBY lists. She also works as a literary translator, translating from Hindi into English, and vice versa. She is inspired by the unfettered imagination of children and loves travelling but is too lazy to do it, so she mostly makes do with reading.

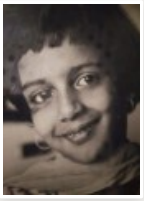
Has authored over 35 books for children.

POEM

Paati's Purple Socks

BY **SUCHI GOVINDARAJAN**

First the clothesline started to sway in the breeze,
Then Paati's purple sock flew right into the trees!
"Pleased to meet you!" called a Bulbul as it flew,
"Buzz off" said the bee as it nearly hit her too.
I don't think socks can just do as they please,
They should stay in cupboards or on ankles or knees.
I used my binoculars to search the full view,
I swear I scanned everything from grass to bamboo.
No luck, I told Paati, you have lost one of these,
You'd better buy more before your legs freeze!
And so Paati bought socks, some red and some blue,
But they weren't the right purple for her silver shoe.
One day much later, we were again watching birds,
Paati and I, matching their songs to our words,
When I spotted something at the top of one tree—
I turned my viewfinder to focus and see.
At the end of the branches, looking a bit like lace,
A big flower had bloomed with a purple face.
I looked at Paati and Paati looked at me,
We had just discovered a sock-eating tree!



Suchi Govindarajan

Suchi Govindarajan is a writer, poet and photographer. She is the author of three picture-books for children. Her work has appeared in many publications that she admires. After a long career as a technical writer, Suchi now enjoys taking people out on nature-walks and bird-watching tours. When Suchi was a child, she poured an entire bottle of Fanta into the home water-filter. She didn't think anyone would notice. (They did.) Suchi thinks that most of her current life-problems can be traced back to that incident. She hopes one day to become a grown-up.

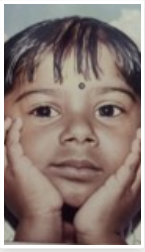
True story: poured Fanta into the water-filter. (They did notice.)

PICTURE STORY

Today's Special: Hot Piping Books

ART & WORDS BY **CHANDRIMA CHATTERJEE**

ILLUSTRATION *Art & words · Chandrima Chatterjee*



Chandrima Chatterjee

Chandrima is a picture book illustrator and artist based in New Delhi, India. She has a postgraduate degree in Sociology from the University of Delhi. Before beginning a full-fledged career as an illustrator, she worked as an editor at leading publishing houses such as Oxford University Press and Pearson. Her learnings from her discipline combined with her editorial experience have deeply influenced her illustration style and the way she approaches storytelling. While she loves using gouache, water colours, pencils and crayons to create bright and detailed artworks, she is also adept at digital illustrations. Chandrima has illustrated over 10 picture books, including *Sarayu's Museum Adventures*, *Amma's Magic Handbag*, and *Perfect the Way You Are*. She received the Best Picture Book Illustration Award at the Bangalore Literature Festival for her book *The Little Book of Indian Dogs* (HarperCollins India).

Award: Best Picture Book Illustration, Bangalore Literature Festival.

A Flutter Before the Storm

BY **RATI GIRISH**

For me, it has always been about that light flutter in my tummy. Do you know the one? It was there when I would insist my parents buy me a Tinkle Double Digest just before we boarded an overnight train to visit my grandparents. It continued to be there when I would devour my Malory Towers books with a small flashlight, way past my bedtime. All these years later, it is still present when a story I have been longing to read presents itself, and I get lost in it for hours.

The stories in the books we read have the power to be unendingly exciting. They push vexing piles of homework and imminent tests to the far corners of the mind. Nothing is bigger or more important than spending quality time exploring the book. And that light flutter? That only goes when you are done reading!

Books, of any kind, are magic, but Indian children's literature, in particular, is familiar and recognisable. We see our homes, schools, neighbourhoods, grandparents, and even our language reflected in these books! If you are looking to build your own personal bookshelf with Indian books, then here is a handy list.

I love to start with a jolly Nani and her walk to the park with her grandson, Venki. *Deepa Balsavar*'s **Nani's Walk to the Park** is a classic because it will change the way you look at your neighbourhood! Streets become magical, markets sell little treasures, and a mundane walk to the park is filled with adventure!

Continuing with grandparents, Thatha is excited to visit Oviyam's school, but will he come in his traditional veshti and shirt? In **Thatha at School** by *Richa Jha* and illustrated by *Gautham Benegal*, Oviyam wonders if her friends will make fun of her when they see her grandfather wearing clothes that are "not normal". This is a heartwarming book with emotions every one of us can relate to.

Priya Kuriyan's **Ammachi's Glasses** is a modern-day classic! In this story, Ammachi has lost her glasses, and her family watches in horror as she muddles her way through the day, refusing any help from the family. They finally find her glasses in the most unexpected place, but not before Priya Kuriyan takes the reader on a hilarious adventure perfect for the entire family!

If there is one thing we are familiar with in our cities, it is the cutting down of trees to make way for metros and bridges. In **When Ali Became Bajrangbali**, by *Devashish Makhija* and illustrated by *Priya Kuriyan*, we see a big tree getting ready to be cut down and dozens of birds and animals about to lose their home. Until a clever monkey hatches an ingenious plan to manipulate the humans.

What do we do when we are tormented by big emotions? In **The Monster Who Couldn't Climb A Tree**, by *Tanya Majmudar* and illustrated by *Rajiv Eipe*, Avi learns to deal with his anger by climbing a neighbourhood Borsali tree. His anger, which looks like a big, red monster, is afraid of climbing the tree, leaving him alone. But what happens when the neighbour decides to cut the tree down?

Get ready to cheer for Dugga, a stray dog, as we watch him live his best doggie life on the streets of a big city. But one day, tragedy strikes, and he is in an accident. A kind stranger nurses him back to health as he slowly needs to adjust to his new life. **Dugga**, written and illustrated by *Rajiv Eipe*, will teach you to look at animals in a whole new way. This is a book that will make you laugh and cry in equal measure.

Who Clicked That Pic?, written by *Nandita Da Cunha* and illustrated by *Priya Kuriyan*, is a book inspired by India's first woman photojournalist. In the book, Pari Mistry has 10 photos left in her camera reel. She needs to click a photo that will be worthy of being on the front page of the local newspaper. With time running out and the skies about to burst open, will she be able to capture the perfect picture? This book will keep the reader engaged and on the edge of their seat!

Moin and the Monster, written by *Anushka Ravishankar* and illustrated by *Anita Balachandran*, is hilarious and must be made compulsory reading for all children! Moin finds a monster hiding under his bed, and not just any monster, one that sings silly songs and loves eating bananas! Moin needs to keep this secret from his family, but will he be able to? Join in on this rib-tickling adventure!

Passionate about the environment and fancy yourself as an eco-warrior? This is a must-read! **A Cloud Called Bhura** by *Bijal Vachharajani* is a great introduction to climate fiction. Four friends wake up to the news of a huge brown cloud taking over their city. No one knows where the cloud came from, and the grownups are unable to do anything about it. It is time for the kids to take action! Hilarious, gritty, and relatable, this is a must-read.

Have you ever wondered what great achievers were like when they were young? Were they interested in the same things as we are, or were they wired differently? In the **Dreamer Series**, written and illustrated by *Lavanya Karthik*, a set of ten micro-biographies about inspiring Indians, the author traces an event from the protagonist's childhood that sets them on the path to achieve great things. A rabbit-hole of a series!

StORI or Stories of Rural India by various authors is a set of books featuring stories of children from communities that live on the edges of society and face challenges daily. Written by journalists and social workers, these stories will transport you to these communities as you read all about shocking and harrowing incidents that change the lives of children.

Every one of the books above has the special ability to find wonder and joy in everyday life. To stop time and whisk you away to another place. To make you laugh hysterically or move you to tears. To make you think about things a little differently, or to perhaps open your mind to certain things.

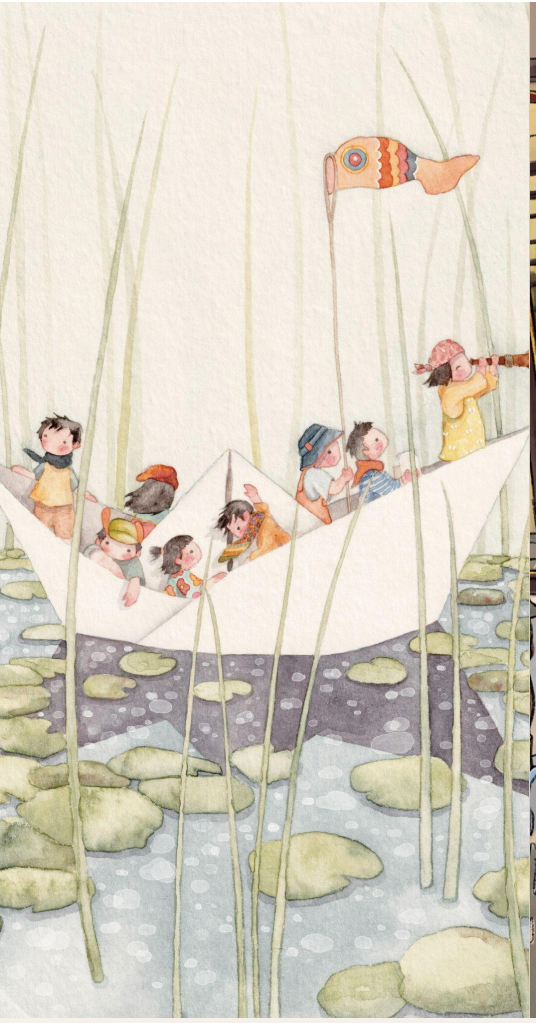
Whatever you would like to call it, these books, and so many others, cause a little flutter in your daily life, and it is that feeling that makes us fall in love with children's books.

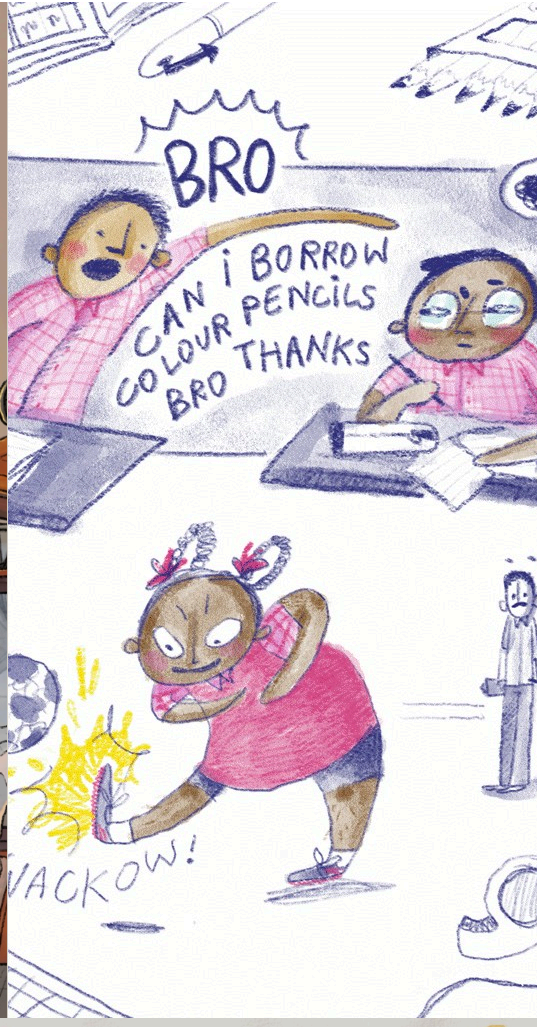
We see our homes, our grandparents, even our language — reflected in these books.

Rati Girish

Rati Girish is a children's books enthusiast and passionate advocate of Indian children's books. Through her venture, Mother of Readers, she reads, reviews and recommends books so that parents can raise ardent readers. She is a multidisciplinary content creator striving for a quiet existence in the bustling metropolis of Mumbai. She hopes to open a picture book library by the beach, someday but worries about what the humidity will do to the books.

Dream: to open a picture book library by the beach.





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