

# The Mystery

- Aditi Kumar, Grade IV

Hi, my name is Lucy Walker and I am a detective. I am eight years old and have two younger brothers.

My dog's name is Lucky. My brothers' names are Max and William. William is the youngest. My mom is a teacher and my dad works at a pizzeria.

One day, Max came running up to me and said, "Lucy, come quick, someone took one of our puzzle pieces!" Let me explain. Max and I have been working on a 500 piece puzzle. "What!" I raced to the living room. What Max said was true, one piece was gone!

Clues!

"Let's look for clues." I suggested. We got on our knees and searched. Finally, I yelled, "Look smear marks!" "It looks like peanut butter," said Max, "But from where?" Suddenly, Lucky came running. He licked up the peanut butter! "Lucky, NO!" I yelled. "Back to the case" said Max grinning. We thought and thought. "Let's look for more clues" I said but couldn't find any. "Max," I said seriously, "From reading books I have learned that sometimes if you take a break and refresh your mind, you will look at things in a different way." "Thanks for the advice" said Max. "You're welcome" I replied.

It All Makes Sense Now!

When Max and I woke up it was time for breakfast. We went downstairs. Our mom was making her specialty, French Toast! "I bet William is eating peanut butter as usual" Max said. "Probably" I replied. "Good morning mom" we said in unison. "Good morning kiddos" she answered. "Why is William not eating French Toast" Max asked. "He felt like eating peanut butter and bread" said mom. Suddenly, I jumped up. "Max, don't you see," I shouted, "William is eating Peanut Butter!" "Oh yah, peanut butter was our clue!" realized Max. "Kids, what is this all about?" asked mom. "Someone took our puzzle piece. Our only clue was a peanut butter smear. William is eating peanut butter!" I said quickly. "William, did you take the puzzle piece?" mom asked sternly. William nodded his head. "Why William?" I asked softly. "I wanted to play a trick," he said, "I was bored." "Oh" was all I could say. "Please give it back" said Max. William ran upstairs and brought down the puzzle piece. "Thank you" Max said. William looked down. "What do you say William," said mom. "Sorry" he whispered. "Don't do it again" I said. I ran upstairs and placed the piece in its place. The case and the puzzle were done. ■

# Slender Man

- Sneha Kundu, Grade VIII

Slender Man is a mythical creature whose existence is not certain, but is definitely extremely terrifying. I don't want to personally scare anyone that may be reading this, but I thought this would be an interesting story to share. You might not even be able to sleep alone in the dark for a day or two after reading this. Slender Man is depicted to be about 2.5 meters tall, with extremely long arms and legs. His face is said to be completely white with no facial features such as a nose or eyes. He is said to always be wearing a suit and tie and dresses rather formally for someone whose job is to scare victims, make them feel paranoid and nauseous, and possibly even make them kill other human beings. He is said to mostly be spotted in dark and scary places such as forests. Legend says that if you see Slender Man, he will follow you back to your home, and then follow you everywhere else you go, and basically become an obsessed stalker. Once he starts following you around everywhere you go, you will notice him doing so, eventually making you feel paranoid and nauseous, hence ruining your life forever.

There have been lots of cases involving real human beings doing terrible things such as attempting to kill somebody, and then claiming that Slender Man told them to do so. Back in 2014, two 12-year-old girls dragged one of their classmates into a forest and stabbed her 19 times and then left her there.

The girl who got stabbed managed to make it out of the forest and was immediately taken to a hospital when noticed by someone walking by. Meanwhile, the two girls were spotted by cops with a knife in each pair of hands. When they were taken to court they claimed that Slender Man had ordered them to murder the classmate. Eventually, one girl was pleaded not guilty while the other girl was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Another case involved a 14-year-old girl setting her family's house on fire while her mother and 9-year-old brother were still in it. After lighting the house on fire she quickly escaped to a nearby park and slept in a bathroom. Luckily, her mother and brother managed to get out of the house unharmed. Minutes after the incident took place, she texted her mom asking if she was okay and if they had gotten hurt. When the police found the girl, she claimed that Slender Man told her to do so. We can now assume that Slender Man has a way to possess certain victims and make them do completely unethical things without them even realizing what they're doing.

Slender Man may be the scariest myth to ever exist, for he does not instantly kill victims, he makes them suffer until they do crazy things, such as murder people, and then rot in jail. So everyone who is reading this, make sure to watch your back, because you might be Slender Man's next victim. ■

# The Missing Library Book

- Arnab Karmokar, Grade IV

I, Donald Jacobson, was reading a book about Mr. Locker Docker, the most famous book in America. When I was about to finish chapter 3, over the loudspeaker came a voice. "Donald Jacobson, Donald Jacobson, please report to the principal's office this second. Thank you."

The whole class 'ooooohed'

"I can't believe it. It's the third time this week. SUCKAAAAA!" Said my worst enemy, Thomas Grouchers. "Oh. Yeah. You just shut your mouth this second." I said, staring right at his dummy face and opened the door. I was all ready for this.



Characters (L to R): *Donald, Daniel and Dumb Thomas.*

Just about 30 minutes of yelling, screaming, and screeched by the dumbest principal in the whole world and in history, Principal Christian, it was already time for lunch at the 'The Cafeteria of chicken and fish of Everybody's International School in Denver, Colorado.' It is now called this because of Mr. Twithead, who only makes food with chicken and fish.

I went to my side of the Cafeteria where everybody was waiting for me. "So what happened today, Dumbhead!" Asked Dumb Grouchers (hey, maybe that is a great name for him). "None of your beeswax!" I said him back. "Stop fighting" said my BFF (stands for Best Friend Forever), Daniel Jones.

I secretly told Dan about what happened. "SUCKAAAAA!" Said the Dummy. I hate it when that happens.

After I ate lunch, I went back to class. I saw something that was supposed to be there but was not there. I remembered. It was the Mr. Locker Docker book. "Mrs. Lovely, do you know where is my library book?" I asked my homeroom teacher. She said that it wasn't there on my desk.

I got worried. The book costs about a \$100.

When I got home I told mom that my library book went missing. But even before talking about the situation, she just went up to me and yelled at me for about an hour because...

I'm sure you get it!

Whatever, the next day, I searched my locker, backpack and my classroom. It took about an hour. And guess what ... I've got to go to the detention room this whole week! Can you imagine? Just because I got late for my first class, now I have to go to the detention room everyday this week.

When library was about to start, over the loudspeaker came a voice, "There is a book called 'Mr. Locker Docker's Mystery and the chicken wings attacking in New Spapers islands', and if the library book is yours, please report to the principal's office to receive your book. Thank you."

I yelled "WOOHOO" so loud that the window glass was broken into pieces.

It's really shocking when you have to pay for the money for breaking school properties. Plus it also hurts when you don't get your allowance.

But I am really glad I didn't have to pay for the book which costed a \$100.

I hope I get my allowance next month. ■

# Lost inside a shoe

- Akanksha Mukherjee, Grade VI

I usually get lost in various places like streets, shopping malls, airports, stations ... but the strangest place that I ever got lost was inside a SHOE!!! This has been my greatest adventure so far – and let me share it with you.

One afternoon, a friend told me a secret. If you go to a dark room (where nobody sees you) holding a pair of your shoes and whisper “shoe” two times, then you will automatically get inside a shoe. And in order to return back, you need to find your own shoes and do the trick again. Of course I didn’t believe that and I thought my friend was joking. So I decided to try it. I went to a dark room holding my shoes and I whispered “shoe” twice. In all of a sudden I shrunk to the size of a mouse and fell into the hole. And I kept falling and falling, which made me dizzy and I closed my eyes.

When I woke up – I was stunned! I was barefooted and it was so dark that I couldn’t see anything. “Hello,” I called out. “Is there anybody there?” But there was no response. I was starting to feel a bit scared and wished that I hadn’t done the trick. After an hour of desperately searching, I noticed a ray of light in a distant corner. As I went closer I noticed that it was a torch! Using the torch, I looked around and eventually found a door that said ‘EXIT’.

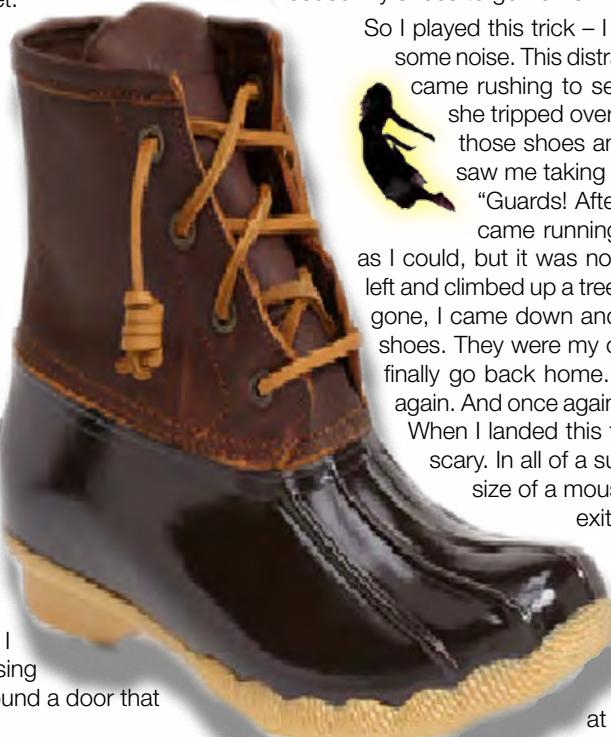
When I opened the door, I saw the most beautiful garden! It was just as colorful as a rainbow. Far ahead I saw a huge castle where the king and queen lived. As I wandered around, I heard people approaching. It was the king and queen coming

with a lot of guards. Feeling a bit nervous, I immediately hid behind the bushes. As they were passing by – I heard the queen saying to the king, “Look at these pretty shoes! I found them in the garden over here.” Those shoes were just like mine! And I needed my shoes to go home.

So I played this trick – I threw a stone to create some noise. This distracted the queen and she came rushing to see what happened, and she tripped over the rock. I quickly took those shoes and ran away. The queen saw me taking the shoes and shouted, “Guards! After her!” Then the guards came running after me. I ran as fast

as I could, but it was no use. So I turned to my left and climbed up a tree. When the guards were gone, I came down and looked carefully at the shoes. They were my own shoes! Now I could finally go back home. So I repeated the trick again. And once again I fell down into the hole.

When I landed this time, it wasn’t dark, nor scary. In all of a sudden, I turned from the size of a mouse to a human. I saw an exit sign nearby so I went and opened it. It was my own room with my shoes in front of me! I was finally back home. But however, the time did not change at all. “It was such a fun adventure,” I thought. And no one can ever imagine how much fun it can be inside a shoe! ■



# Haiku Poems

- Ananya Sharma, Grade VI

**Haiku** poems date from 9th century to the present day. Haiku is more than a type of poem, it is a way of looking at a physical world and seeing something deeper, like the existence of nature.

## History and Structure of Haiku Poems

A Haiku poems consist of 3 lines, with the first and last having 5 moras, and the middle line having 7. A mora is a sound unit much like a syllable, but it is not identical to it. Since the moras do not translate well into English, it has been adapted and syllables are used as moras.

Haiku started out as a popular activity during the 9th to 12th centuries in Japan. It was a progressive poem, where one person would write the first three lines with the 5-7-5 structure, and the next person would add to the section with a 7-7 structure. The chain would continue in this fashion.

The first verse was called "hokku" and set the mood for the rest of the verses. In 19th century, the "hokku" became popular and was written and read as an individual poem.

The three masters of "hokku" from the 17th century were

Basho, Issa, and Buson. Their work is still the model of haiku writing today. They were poets who wandered the countryside, experiencing life and observing nature, and spent years perfecting their work.

## Haiku Poems From the Masters

A review of a haiku poems is an excellent way to become familiar with this form of poetry. As I had mentioned the moras won't be the same as syllables. In the Japanese poem, there are 5 moras in the first and the three line, and 7 in the second line, following the 5-7-5 structure of haiku. One of my favorite haiku by the famous Yosa Buson from the late 1700s are

A summer river being crossed  
how pleasing  
With sandals in my hand!  
Light of the moon  
Moves west, flowers' shadows  
Creep eastward.  
In the moonlight  
The color and scent of wisteria  
Seems far away.

I was inspired to write a haiku and I have written about the four seasons, describing them, and the beauty of nature around us.



## Summer

The fresh ocean breeze  
With people leaving footprints  
In a sunny day



## Spring

The crisp morning  
with colorful cherry blossoms  
How pleasing!



## Winter

The cold freezing breeze  
Snowflakes falling gently  
on the cold ground



## Fall

Red, orange, yellow  
Leaves everywhere you go  
Making sounds as you step

# The Battle at Viareggio

- Anirudh Kumar, Grade VIII

This poem is based on World War II which we learned about in class. Its foundation is on the experiences of Vernon Baker, a man who was one of the first black soldiers to join the conflict, and about the battle he won during World War II. This earned him the Medal of Honor. The purpose of my poem is to give the reader a perspective on the horrors of war and to show how everyone is important in war, no matter what their race or background is.

A Medal of Honor I have,  
For acts of bravery in the Second World War,  
In June of 1941 I joined the infantry,  
The 370th regiment,  
The first black unit to see battle,  
In World War Two.  
On April 5th of 1945,  
Our unit was sent  
To capture Castle Aginoffi  
A German fort,  
In the blue and white mountains of Viareggio,  
A death trap for the Allies.  
Over three hills we went,  
To reach the fort,  
Walking carefully,  
To avoid landmines  
“Who wants to scout the area?” hisses Commander  
Runion,  
“I do.” a voice says,  
Was that me?  
Why did I say that?  
I walk down the muddy path,  
As if in a dream.  
I see the entrance,  
Our way into the fort,  
The way to win the battle.  
I throw a grenade at the sentries,  
In their crisp brown uniforms,  
I taste blood, my first kill.  
This is not me.  
What am I doing?  
I return slowly,

And smell trouble,  
The Nazi's have discovered us.  
The sound of guns fill the air,  
Hurting my ears,  
Grey smoke blots out the sun,  
My lungs are filled with it.  
This is war.  
Death.  
Confusion.  
Blood.  
Oh, god.  
What do we do?  
We retreat.  
What else can we do?  
Will this ever end?  
The next day,  
Something inside me snaps,  
I lead our unit,  
I don't know why.  
I don't know how.  
We capture the castle.  
I captured the castle.  
The taste of victory.  
The Distinguished Services Award is mine.  
In January of 1997,  
The golden Medal of Honor is mine.  
“Thank you.” President Clinton smiles.  
The only black soldier from World War II to win this  
I feel proud, I've done my job.

# **Hotaru no Yube (Evening lit by Fireflies) at Hachioji, Kamiongatamachi**

- Manasvi Kapoor, Grade VIII

The grounds were full with clusters of people,  
Groups of families relaxed on their mats, eating snacks,  
While their children made the atmosphere lively with their shrieking and screaming, playing to their content on the lush green grass....

They seemed to enjoy themselves, yet eagerly waited for dusk to arrive, for the park to get lit up by the magnificent fireflies!

Though dusk seemed a bit far away, I sure did not have any scope for boredom!  
It sure was a scenic park, with all the abundant greenery filled by the trees,  
And at the centre, water came regenerating from the huge wheel of the classy wooden spring mill, forming a small stream.

There were spots at which huge bunches of Hydrangea flowers- violet, magenta, rose; all spectacular shades, bloomed with all their glory.

They spread subtle rays of happiness to the people around,  
Making their visit even more enchanting!

In the left corner, there were food stalls, selling delicious festival snacks, must in a typical Japanese festival!  
Though the immense crowd, people just seemed to savour on this lazy Sunday evening...

While we were taking a look around,  
we came across a bunch of people gathered together,  
admiring the adorable actions of this huge, I suppose, a squirrel; costume worn by someone  
Even though originally meant for little children,  
I saw people of all ages taking pictures and playing around with the figure, genuinely enjoying themselves!  
It was as though their child-like innocence, curiosity, and spirited nature had come back!  
It made me realize, after observing the Japanese, how these little things can make us truly happy...  
It was surely a very energetic atmosphere yet with these positive and meaningful feelings!

I looked up at the blue, rather cloudy sky, to get an even more peaceful feeling  
There were abundant stratus clouds, their thin layers all spread across the sky,  
giving a sleepy, yet soothing feeling.  
The rows of green pine trees on the mountain slope below, seemed like they were part of a dense wood farther away, contrasted with the blue sky.

But as I brought back my eyes down slowly,  
I started seeing distant small heads, turning gradually into emerging figures of all those people in the huge clearing, relishing the aspects of mother nature!

Time passed by quickly, as one would expect,  
It was already 7:30 in the evening  
Yet, no signs of fireflies....  
Of course, not losing hope easily,  
We waited for it to become pitch dark,  
which took quite time, as expected in the summer days!

Soon, once we were convinced that it had become pretty dark,  
yet the fireflies were nowhere to be seen, we with the others actually started "looking" out for them...  
The crowd had become rather quiet, which I guessed was because of the exhausting evening before, but of course also for the fireflies to appear!

We looked everywhere in the clearing that we stood-through the bushes, over the lake, and through the dense green trees which now appeared matt black,  
All in hope to spot small bright yellow dots!

Yet, there were none!!  
I could only see the twinkling stars,  
and though they were plenty and not to be easily seen in Tokyo,  
Those couldn't quite able to fulfill our desire to view the much awaited fireflies..

In the end, we decided to go deeper into the park, where we expected it to be darker.

We made the decision to go to the centre of the park,

where the dense pine trees covered the area around the deep stream.

As we arrived, we were amused!

There was a huge crowd here, standing on the elevated ground along the stream,

And looking down, screaming "Sugoi!"

Now I was certain that we had found the fireflies!

As few people moved ahead, we took up their place.

I looked down, and around the dense trees and the stream,

Until I found a small glowing yellow dot vibrating and slowly moving across thin air,

Spreading the joy of light and brightness through nature!

I was fascinated!!!

I tried to focus my eyes on every single corner of the view that stood ahead of me,

And in no time I spotted quite a few of them wandering across the sky- some above,

some down below the stream, some on the right or on the left.

I could hear whispers of the calm Japanese, some asking "Dare?" (Where), with energetic replies like "Soko!!" (Over there!!)

And of course, as we passed by people, on our way down near the stream,

words like "Kirei" and "Sugoi" ruled the atmosphere!

When we reached near the stream, I figured out it was a good idea...

Once I patiently looked around, I could see even more twinkling, moving spots,

Not stars but fireflies!!

It felt like an expedition of finding fireflies....

As someone spotted one, he/she pointed at it

And then all the faces went over to the pointed side,

until the firefly would be out of view.

It somehow felt like those swinging rides in amusement parks,

Going from one side to the other,

but with people's curious faces, rather than the big thrilling carts!

Not having enough of them yet, we kept making our way through the darkness,

Sometimes switching on the flashlight when too dark....

We looked at a number of spots, in all of them experiencing the happiness and amazement spread by the fireflies.

They were actually of different sizes and brightness once you observed them carefully- some were quite tiny yet with a bright light, whereas some others big and dim....

Finally, after taking a good look around, and watching the magnificent fireflies to our heart's content, we started making our way to the exit of the park.

The exit, not being quite close, arose temptations in between,

And so we made some stops cherishing our last moments with the glorious fireflies.

Once, we saw a firefly sitting in a branch at one place, as if meditating...

We spent quite a lot of time, at first trying to touch the firefly and make it fly,

in hopes of chasing it around!

At last, we "successfully" made our way through the exit.

As we walked to the parking slot,

I reminded myself of how spectacular the evening had been,

And all the waiting and eagerness felt worthwhile and we made beautiful memories afterall!

We sat down in the car, and yes, we were tired

after our, what I call "expedition" yet, when dad asked how was "all of it?"

I replied with a big smile, "Breathtaking!!" ■

# Behind the Scenes of Tagore

- Arunansu Patra, Grade XI

Rabindranath Tagore, born on 7 May 1861, was a Bengali polymath, a man of many expertise, and has revolutionized Bengali music, literature and philosophy. The legacies he has left behind are innumerable. He was the first Asian Nobel laureate for the Nobel Prize of Literature 1913, for *Gitanjali*, his collection of poems. Not only had he written the national anthems of India and Bangladesh, and heavily influenced the lyrics of the Sri Lankan anthem, but he had also founded Visva Bharati University (Santiniketan), which later inspired the foundation of the Darlington Hall School in England, both being highly prestigious. He was eventually knighted by King George V in 1915, which he had renounced 4 years later, due to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre led by the British Indian Army that took place in Amritsar. His legacies were also prominent in Japan. It is well known that he had spent some time in Sankeien Garden, and it is claimed that Tagore had influenced author Yasunari Kawabata, who became a Nobel Laureate in 1968 for his outstanding literary works [1].

However, not everything was triumphant in his life, and his works were not always appreciated everywhere he went. This resulted in controversial statements being made about his works. Although these do not limit his legacy, it is important that his struggles, and somewhat untold stories, are told to further appreciate the works and dedication of Rabindranath Tagore.

## CHINA

His first visit to China was not so welcoming, which was unanticipated because there is a history of large amount of intellectual and cultural exchanges between India and China, including that of the Buddhism. On 12 April, 1924, Tagore reached Shanghai on an invitation from Liang Qichau, one of the most famous Chinese intellectuals at the time. Many people on the streets shouted slurs like "Go back, slave from a lost country" within several days of his arrival. India was a British colony at that time, and prior to that, India as a whole or in parts had been ruled by the Mughals during 1526-1858. Due to this, the Chinese probably believed that India had suffered moral and psychological degradation, and also thought that their culture was endangered due to the minimal accessibility of the traditional Sanskrit texts to the vast majority of Indians. In addition, the British imperialists had used Indian soldiers, against the Chinese, during the First Opium War in 1841. Qichau and his fellow intellectuals had sensed that China was emerging with a sense of national solidarity, which would advance towards adapting the Western basis of power and prosperity. Tagore had argued that these ways of the Western civilization would not suit the Asians, and had urged them to sustain their traditional culture. Pankaj Mishra in his book mentioned that Mao Dun had said "We are determined not to welcome Tagore who loudly sings the praise of the eastern civilization. Oppressed as we are by the militarists from within the country and by the imperialists from without, this is no time for dreaming" [2].

That being said, however, there was one exception to the distaste towards the Indians. Kang Youwei, mentor of Liang Qichau, had admired Indian philosophy and literature [3]. However, he was pilloried by his students, even those younger than him, who had even participated in the May 4th movement in 1919. This was a protest against the Treaty of Versailles, issued after World War I, in which one of the articles constitute

that the Shandong Islands goes to Japan and not China. The Chinese locals heavily disagreed, leading China to be the only country to not sign the treaty. Youwei's students were more interested in economic and geographic power than debating on philosophical values. Even a Buddhist scholar, Zhang Taiyan, had criticized Youwei of his interests in Indian philosophy and literature. He had the idea that the Indians were not concerned about China's loss of national territory or whether their race declined, as opposed to the Chinese, who were strongly determined. This led him to believe that the accomplishments of the Chinese would surpass those of the Indians. The anti-Tagore members distributed unflattering leaflets of Tagore in the lecture halls where Tagore had spoken [3].

In spite of all this, Tagore had also been admired by many in China, and his works such as *The Crescent Moon* and *Chitra* were translated in Chinese. Coincidentally, he had even spent his 64th birthday in Peiping (present Beijing).

## DEPRESSION

What is probably least known about Tagore is that there were signs of him having suffered from depression [4]. He wrote about his depressions to C. F. Andrews, whom he trusted as a friend. The letters he had written to him had later been published in "Letters from a Friend", a book written by Tagore himself.

In Tagore's childhood, his mother, Sarada Devi (not to be confused with the spouse of Shri Ramakrishna) had passed away leaving him to be taken care of by the servants. His father, Devendranath Tagore, was preoccupied in religious reform as a leading proponent of Brahmo Samaj. Despite being the youngest of thirteen surviving children of his parents, Rabindranath Tagore felt lonely. Some say that it was the death of his sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi, that left him lonely and depressed. Being only a few years older than Rabindranath, Kadambari Devi was a dear friend and a great influence to him.

Tagore's depression is said to have been in periodic attacks rather than a consistent condition. In January 29th, 1915, he had written to Andrews "I feel that I am on the brink of a breakdown. Therefore I must take flight to the solitude of the Padma. I need the rest and the nursing of the Nature". As per the letter, Tagore spent some time on a boat in the banks of the Padma River, and on February 1st, he wrote this in a letter to Andrews: "I had been suffering from a time of deep depression and weariness. But I am sane and sound again...". Throughout his literary career, he also felt as if not many people really appreciated his works, and arrived at a conclusion that people's celebrations were a "momentary excitement", when he won the Nobel Prize.

It is little known that the song *Ekla Chalo Re* (If They Answer Not To Thy Call, Walk Alone), one of the most memorable and iconic songs written by Tagore in 1905, was written for the times he had felt alone, isolated [5] or even in desperation to liberate his countrymen. This song is famous nationwide and is often portrayed as a song promoting justice and self-dependence which was practiced by Mahatma Gandhi.

The great success of Rabindranath Tagore is often taken for granted. The sheer struggle and failures are often not talked about, when knowing them would greatly enhance

the value of Tagore's achievements in life, and can be inspiring for younger minds to not expect everything to go well for them. There is still some controversy in Tagore's work to this day. Rajasthan's chief minister, Kalyan Singh, had pointed out that, in the Indian National Anthem, the word adhinayak in the lyric "Jan gan man adhinayak jai he" could be seen as praise to the British, specifically King George V. Singh suggests that the line

should be replaced with "jan gan man mangal gaye" [6,7]. That being said, the national anthem is sung by most of the Indian population, and is a song played on two of the most prideful Indian memorial days: Republic Day and Independence Day. It is safe to say that Tagore's efforts truly paid off and Indian literature, philosophy, let alone that of Bengal, would not have been the same without his immense contributions. ■

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# The Homecoming

- Utsa Bose, Grade XI

"I do believe in the power of story. I believe that stories have an important role to play in the formation of human beings, that they can stimulate, amaze and inspire their listeners."

~Hayao Miyazaki

I came back to India from Japan in 2009. Back then, I was your average 9 year old, torn between cultures and time zones. A part of me was DEFINETELY happy to be home again, but a felt like an outsider inside my own room. There were days when I would walk into my room, saying "Tadaimai!", only to remember that my sleepy little house on the lap on Kamadai was a life I had said goodbye to. But it wasn't like I missed Japan, per se. For one thing, I needed to make new friends here, and renew relations with old ones. And that wasn't easy. I felt like I was out of place in school, and trust me, knowing Japanese isn't a credential in the playground or in the classroom. At that time, it seemed to me that embracing one way of life meant letting go of the other.

So I began this process of letting go of Japan. In all the ways I could. Of course, I couldn't wholly let go of my past, I could just keep running away from it. My parents wanted me to continue Japanese studies, therefore, I couldn't wholly forget my other life. But I snapped all other chords. I stopped learning Piano. I didn't reply to letters by friends from Japan, and this was a time when the use of social media wasn't that prevalent. So even though there was an effort on their part to maintain ties, I didn't talk back. And after some time, the letters stopped. The Yamaha keyboard just lay in the loft, gathering dust and remembering happier times. Life was just an unintended Haiku on permanent repeat.

And then one day, my sensei gave me a DVD and said, "This is a movie called 'The Castle of Cagliostro' by Hayao Miyazaki. Watch it, I'm sure you'll like it." It was anime, so that was a bonus. I was quite alien to this new filmmaker. So I went back home, one DVD heavier than I came. Not that it added any weight, but anyway. But it didn't perk my curiosity then, so as a result, it lay forgotten, like Japan itself.

But then one day, I found it while shuffling through old DVDs. I didn't know what made me want to watch it then, I just did. Now would be a nice time to tell you that until then, my only relations left with Japan were that of a very specific Anime. Pokemon. And my view of animation was limited to the fact that it was an artform primarily for children.

But then when I saw Ghibli's first movie, it reminded me so much of a life I had left behind. In its language, in its stories and in its characters' idiosyncrasies. The Castle Of Cagliostro wasn't in its essence very Nihon-ish, but I like to think that it set the ball rolling. Barely a few days later after watching the movie, I rushed to Sensei and asked him if he had other Ghibli movies. He smiled and said he did. And so began my tryst with Totoro, with Kiki, Ponyo, Mononoke

Hime and Chihiro. And in their little chronicles, I found a part of me which I had denied so far.

It was too late to talk to my friends, because they had moved to new, and hopefully happier places. But the city had lived on. And maybe it hadn't given up on me yet. At 16 years, I have had my share of goodbyes. But I've had the privilege of finding new friends too. And as a new friend pointed out :

"It's never goodbye if you truly love someone/something."

My friends can be a little preachy sometimes. But I love them still.

My point is, that you might grow up before you're eighteen. Don't get scared. Goodbyes happen, but so do hellos. I've lost many friends along the way, but I've also made new ones. It's okay to mess up once in a while, I guess. Maybe not. I don't know.

A week back, I found one of my old friends on Facebook. And we started talking. I got to know that he had moved to Tokyo. He also told me that some of my other friends had gone to Hokkaido. Some to Nara. I was scared to ask him whether he was angry at me because I had stopped writing. He said that he was a bit disappointed at first, but life had to go on. And he knew that if I had to, I would find him one day and we'd start over.

"Distance doesn't create distance," he said. "Silence creates it, I believe."

I couldn't believe I was having this conversation with a boy I had shared my desk with almost 9 years ago.

Had we grown up? Maybe.

I didn't want to be sure. I don't know why.

But I realized that sometimes, some relationships are worth reconstructing.

I am just about to wrap up, but I just remembered something else a friend once said.

"Friendships, relationships, these are like trees. And Totoro loves trees. They grow only if you fight for them, and you care for them"

Have I told you that my friends are a little preachy sometimes? I guess I have.

I go back to Japan for a week in October. And I hope the city is as I remember it was. But time changes things.

Be kind to me, Yokohama. You know I love you. ■