

EDITOR'S  
NOTE

Brains melting. Tempers flaring. Fresh fruits diced and juiced. The dread of term exams. The anticipation of a new budget. Welcoming dark clouds with the promise of rain. Summer is a season that belies reason. Despite itself, one's mind slows down. We think of the possibilities of a 'love, again'. We indulge in the sweet agony of creation as recreation. We stand on rooftops, watching the 'divine comedy of mismatched threads' unravel. And then, much like in the cooling breeze of a summer night, we breathe again.

"We cannot stop the winter or the summer from coming. We cannot stop the spring or the fall or make them other than they are. They are gifts from the universe that we cannot refuse. But we can choose what we will contribute to life when each arrives." (Gary Zukav)

We hope today's SLR will be the start of a breathable, productive week ahead.

MUNIZE MANZUR

## LOVE, AGAIN

Abdullah Shibli

Ajanta has not seen her mother in ten years.

During her last visit to Dhaka, Amma had suggested that Ajanta should consider getting married again. Ajanta was not prepared for such a direct reference to her personal life from Amma, who she thought knew her well enough to reserve such judgments. After Ajanta came back to New York, she sometimes thought of letting Amma know of her true feelings on the issue and her interference in the matter, but never did.

Last month, Amma celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, and Ajanta, as she has done every year since she moved to the US some 20 years ago, called to wish her. Amma had indicated in many ways how much she looked forward to the early morning birthday calls. Because of the ten-hours time difference between New York and Bangladesh, Ajanta had to wait until 10:00 p.m. New York time to call Amma. But, even at this early hour, Amma would be in a cheery mood.

It was during last month's birthday call in October that Amma said, "Ma, I am getting older every year. I don't know how much longer Allah will keep me here. I have not seen you in ages. How I long to see you before I go..."

"Oh Amma, please stop!"

Ajanta knew where the conversation was going. She ended the call by promising to visit Dhaka within the next few months. She had already applied for three weeks' holiday during the Christmas break, and while she had other plans, she felt that mom's emotional state needed some accommodation on her part.

Ajanta felt greatly relieved after her decision to visit Amma. She had never consciously decided to not visit her, but the hurt from the last visit had stirred up many feelings that were pent up inside — loss of her University boyfriend, her failed marriage, and her single life in New York City.

Her marriage had lasted for more than eight years, but was almost over after five. Kader, her ex-husband, a doctor with a practice on Upper West Side of Manhattan, was a good person, but wanted children which she could not conceive. He spent more and more time at work and set up another office in New Jersey. Ajanta took courses in

Library Science after she came to the USA and found a job at NYU. Amma was surprised that she was able to finish her degree given that she was working full-time.

At Dhaka University, and in high school and college, she wasn't a good student but was active in the varsity cultural activities and various student events. She met Manzoor during one of the student demonstrations in the Arts Faculty building. He was in the Economics department and very active in student politics. Their friendship blossomed soon, and Ajanta spent her free time working on various causes

intimidate her, since she was used to boys trying to strike up a conversation at TSC or in front of the library. What made Manzoor's advances different were his honest style and the gusto with which he spoke.

"You don't know me, but I know you," he said enigmatically.

She felt a little flustered, when one of Manzoor's friends came to her rescue.

"Oh, Manzoor, what's new about that? You know every pretty girl on this campus, and soon you can claim the record of having met them all!"

Ajanta said, "Nice meeting you," and extricated herself from the group with

might like. She wonders what she should get for Amin, her brother. What would Amma like?

Ajanta rushes out from her apartment and catches the D train to work. As it rattles through the tunnel, from one station to the next, she wonders whether her broken relationship with Manzoor had cast any shadow over her marriage with Kader. She broke up with Manzoor after her parents decided to accept a marriage proposal from Kader's family. Kader had just come back from the USA and was looking for a suitable bride to take back with him to America.

and she was just starting a new job. Why bring in a child who would spend most of her time with a baby-sitter or in the day care? Kader's New Jersey practice had taken off, but they had discussed having a live-in nanny.

She wonders now whether a child would have rekindled their ebbing passion for each other.

The train reaches her station at NYU, and Ajanta welcomes the bright and sunny world outside the subway tunnel as she walks briskly towards the NYU campus. She feels good about her recent decisions. The past does not offer too many lessons, and sometimes ties one down. In the last year and a half, she made a few decisions to move away from the arc of her past.

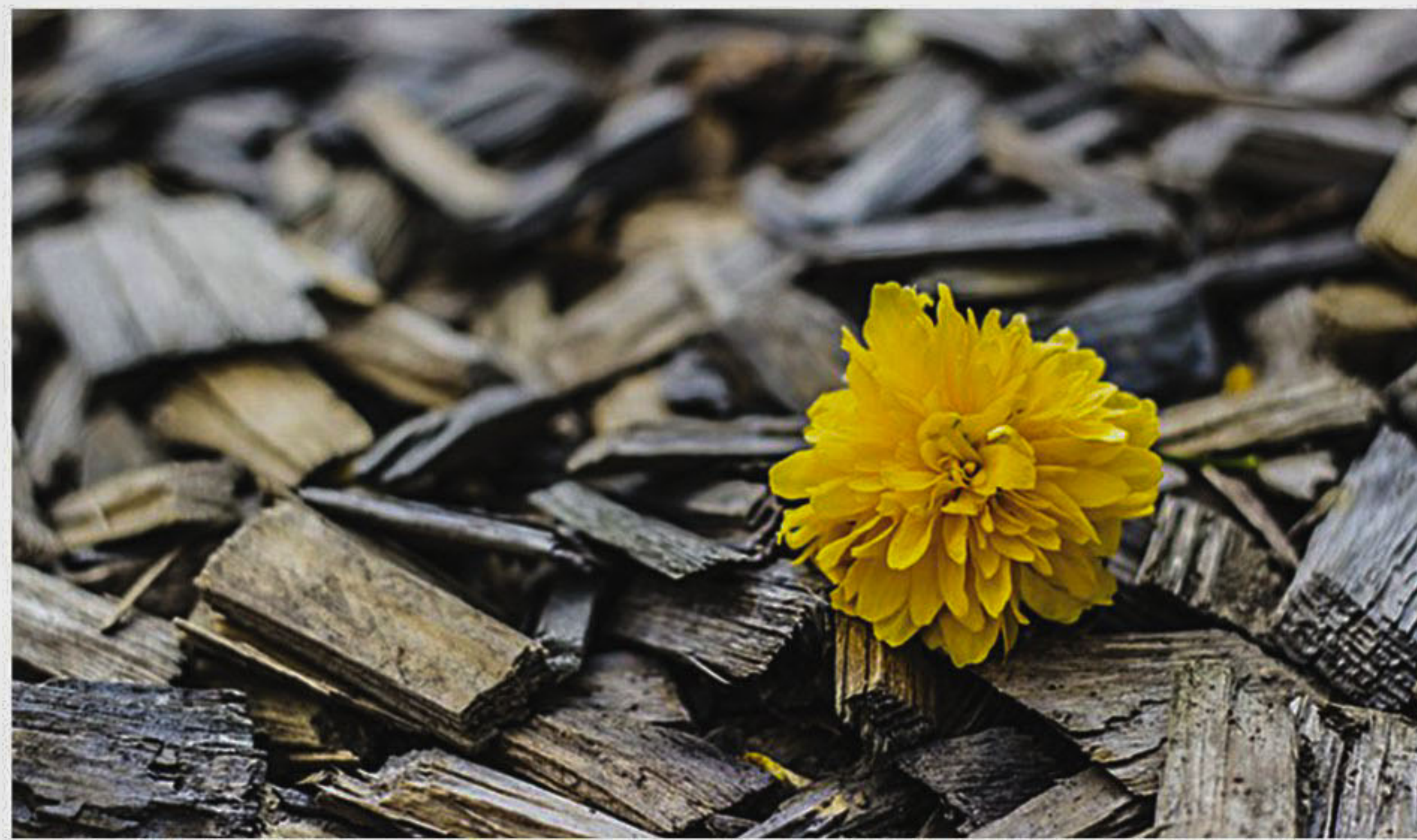
A few days ago, she went out on a date with Jeff, whom she met at the library. It was the first time she had taken an interest in anyone since she and Kader broke up. They had a good time, and she felt good about it later. She was hoping that Jeff would call back but it has been almost a month and he hasn't. Maybe he got busy. She thought of calling him too, but then decided against it.

"There's no rush," she said to herself.

Two weeks ago, her good friend Alison suggested that Ajanta ought to check out an on-line social site, and that's where she met Orlando. He was a divorcee too. They decided to go out for dinner next week. Ajanta is not sure whether this friendship will develop into something more. But she is willing to try. She knows Amma would be happy to know that she is going out again.

During lunch hour, she goes online and buys the New York-Dhaka ticket via Dubai. She calls Amma and gives her the arrival date. Then she goes to the small park near Williamsburg Square, and sits down on a bench. Flashes of her past life shoot by: the breakup with Manzoor, her arranged marriage with Kader and the divorce, the last ten years in New York after her return from Dhaka with hurt feelings, and the sense of liberation from the ghosts of her past.

She knows she is ready to move on, finally. Ajanta feels like crying, but holds back the tears as she heads off for the Bobst Library.



that they both supported.

Ajanta sits, holding a cup of steaming tea in her hand before getting ready to go to work, remembering her first encounter with Manzoor in the Economics Common room.

She had been looking for her friend Kajol and gone into the Common room. Manzoor was there with his group, arguing about something.

As soon as Ajanta entered, Manzoor noticed her, and called out, "Aren't you Ajanta?"

"Yes I am," she replied, not sure what else to say or how a total stranger knew her name. But the brashness did not

an excuse about being late for class.

Ajanta takes another bite of the toast and looks at the clock on the microwave. She realizes that if she continues her ruminations any longer, she will be late for work. But, she lingers over her tea allowing her mind to drift off to the planned trip to Dhaka. How much Dhaka must have changed in the last ten years! She thinks of making a shopping list for her family and start on other details for the trip. There are lots of people for whom she needs to buy gifts. A boutique at the Village Square near campus stocks scarves and earrings her sister-in-law

Many thoughts go through her mind now. She knows that not having any children might have played a role, but that does not explain why she and Kader never had the intimate relationship that many childless couples manage to have. In fact, during the last year of their marriage, they often discussed the possibility of adoption. They even discussed going to Bangladesh to adopt a child and had asked her sister-in-law Zakia, Kader's youngest sister, to help out.

Ajanta dared not voice her nagging discomfort to Kader about adopting a child while he was busy with his work



## SOLACE

Samia Tamrin Ahmed

"Do you have any idea how much I missed you?"

She had, of course - in the form of a bad feeling a week before, at the very time he was going through a bad patch. Across the bay, miles away - she felt the clouded ghosts in her stomach, shocked in remembrance.

When she was back home he came round in July and made her sadder. She can never save him. Sometimes we are better off being invisible to others... for the ideal life will not happen. Stories of wrongs, tragedies, cannot be reversed and the divine comedy of mismatched threads are hard to accept.

A day later she was on the rooftop of a friend's place.

The drizzle came when she was standing alone and finally,

there was some solace from the gloom.

## The Journey Of A Novelist

Marzia Rahman

After wrapping up my second novel, I realized something; a truth of absolute importance -- that it takes more or less two years to write a novel. These two years are meaningful when the writer within me embarks on a journey both physical and psychological like Marlow, the narrative of Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". I experience a few naive emotions like dilemma, dissatisfaction, frustration, a strange and pathetic symptom called 'writers block' and much more.

The journey begins with conceiving an idea, along with which comes a big question. Like Hamlet, I am crushed with self inquiry: Do I or do I not? Is this idea good enough to turn into a story or is it like a hundred other mundane ideas that will soon fizzle out? Even if I do hold on the idea, putting it down is the second most daunting task. But, one fine morning, I do start typing. Slowly, gradually, a routine is set for the next two years.

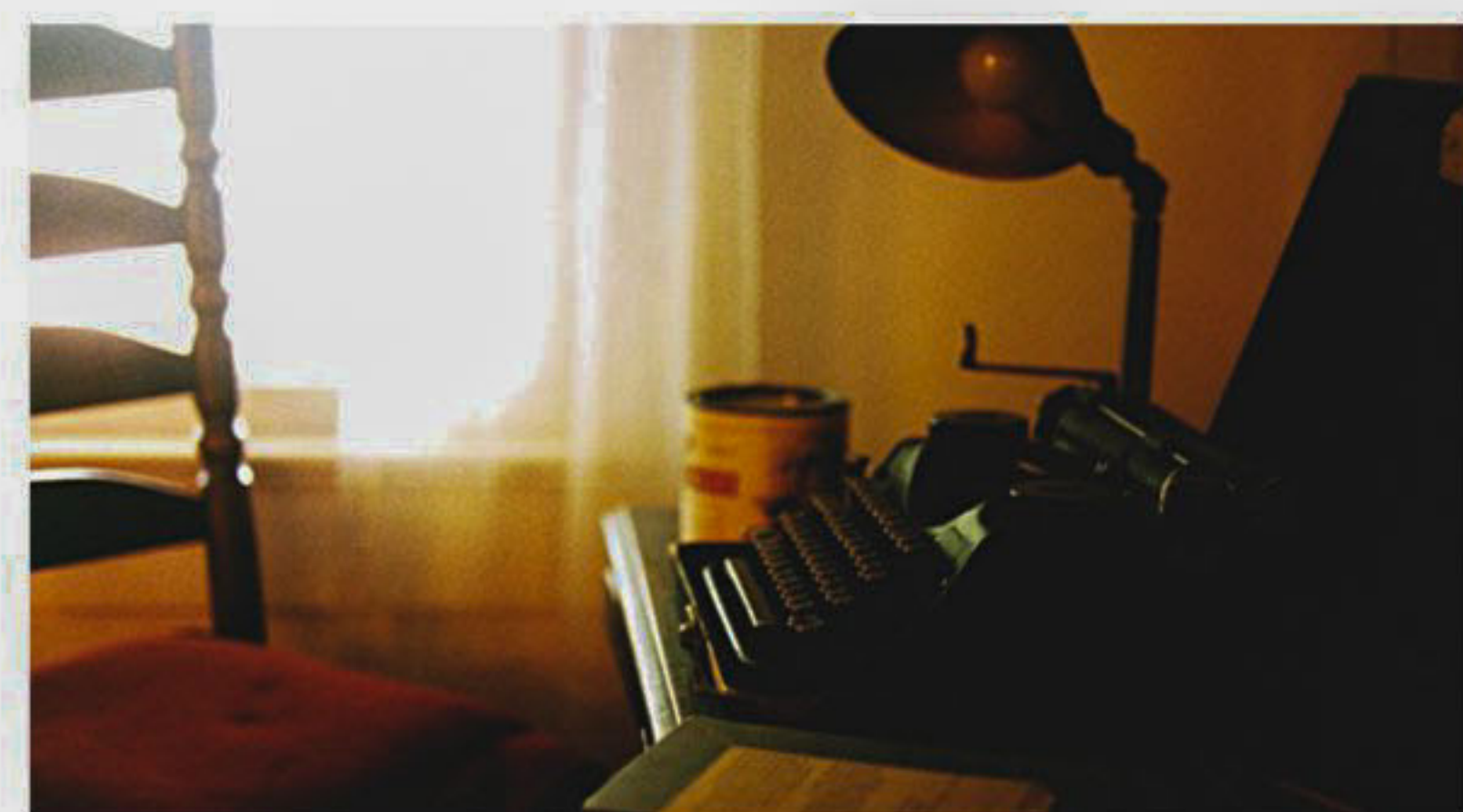
Typing, deleting, writing, rewriting, editing- it progresses somewhat like this. Some days, it moves fast, 10 to 12 pages. My creative zeal amazes me. The very next day, I am utterly shocked. I can't write. And it doesn't seem I can ever. Pas Problem! This phase also goes by. The season changes. I turn older, wiser, loner, read more books, learn some skills, adopt few techniques and ignore a few. And by now, though I don't

acknowledge it, I have become an unsocial person who dreads any sort of gatherings.

According to some, "One should never marry a writer. They are too occupied with their writings." I have come to the sad conclusion that it's true. When I am working on a novel, I think of its plot, characters, climax, anti climax while cooking, eating, taking a bath, taking care of the kids,

nearest waste-basket. Still, I console myself, the most important thing is finishing the novel, writing the last page, the last word. And I have achieved it! I have come to the end of my journey.

Then, I wake up with a start. Wait! I haven't edited it properly. It's simple. I just have to re-write it again, from the very first word to the last. In other words, the journey has



and sometimes even in my sleep. The only thing that matters is the progress of the novel. And yes, it will finish soon. But then I have a surprising second thought: 'Is it any good?'

Sometimes I feel what I have written has never been written before. Other times I have a horrific notion that the best place for this novel is the

just started. Don't grow! I am a writer. I can do it. So silently journeying Frost's poem, I begin the journey all over again:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

And miles to go before I sleep.