

Map of my Childhood

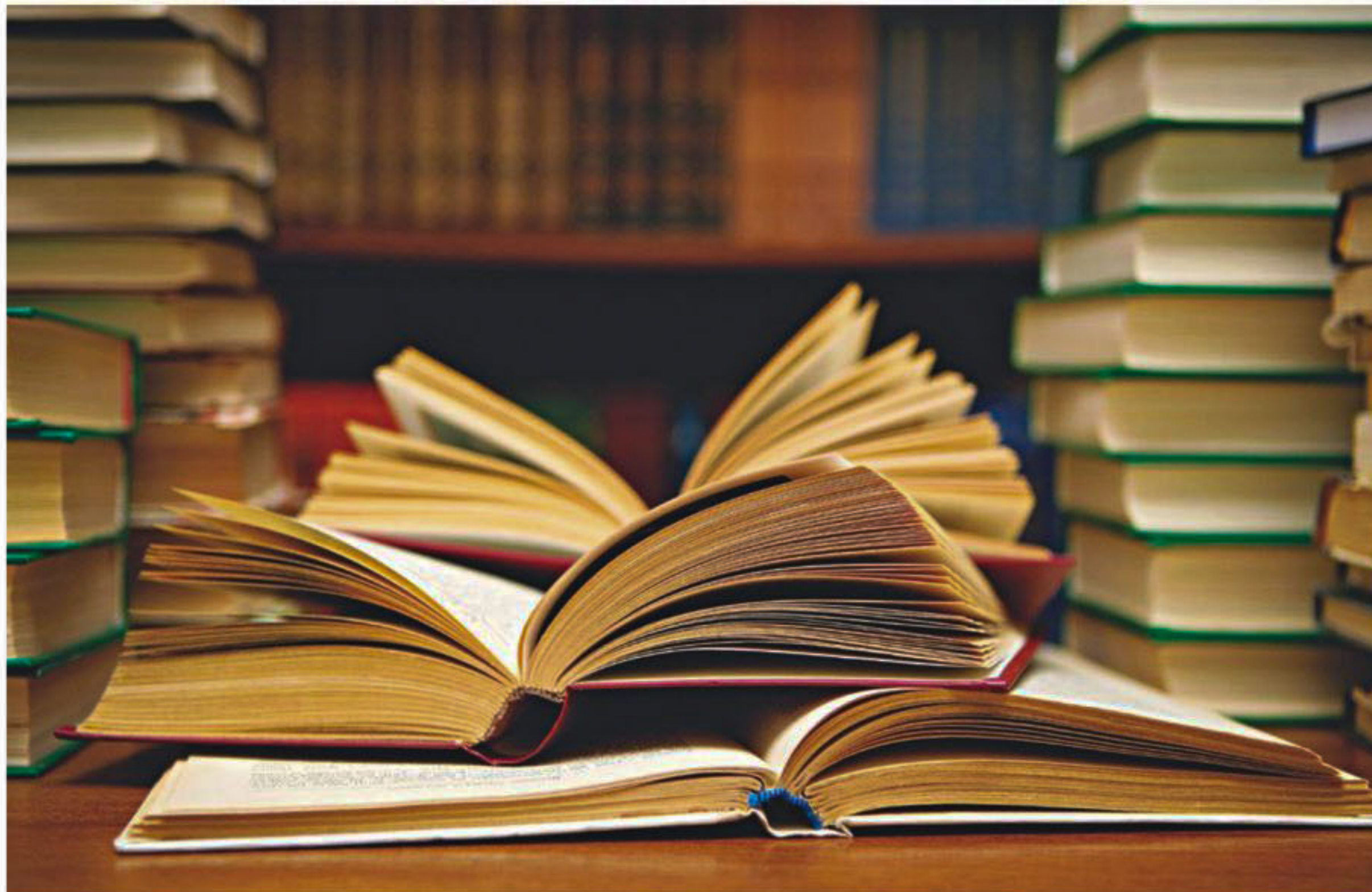
SHAMAEL MORTUZA

Right here on these shelves is a map of my childhood.

While I was a toddler, I would admiringly flip through the pages of my fairy tales and picture books. Glass slippers would fit, dragons would get slain, sleeping princesses would wake up with a kiss, mermaids would fall in love with man, and genies would pop out of lamps and so on. Of course I couldn't read at that time. But I would look through the colourful illustrations in my books everyday in awe.

By five or six, I started to read Roald Dahl. He wrote about ordinary characters who would often encounter extraordinary events. My heart went out to "Matilda," who was six years old just like I was at that time. We both shared a love for books. Of course, I was only reading ones written by her creator, Mr. Dahl, but she was reading at quite an advanced level - Charles Dickens. Other than that, she was also very lonely just like me. She was lucky to find a breathtakingly beautiful, kind-hearted class teacher who adopts her as her daughter at the end of the story. I would ache to meet a Miss Honey in real life.

During my preteens, I fell in love with another British author - Jacqueline Wilson. Her characters were usually adolescent girls, almost all of whom are



from broken or dysfunctional families. The psyches of these characters were astonishingly relatable. Wilson meticulously documents the thoughts of girls around that age group, dealing with issues like first love, first heartbreak, even first periods and body-changes. To me, Wilson's books became a go-to for all the private emotions I could not share out loud.

During my mid-teens, I discovered Nicholas Spark's work. His novels consisted of some of the most common

and clichéd themes of love stories. The star-crossed lovers were often from different backgrounds, there would be separation and there would be love letters. The setting will usually be a beach house or foreign location which ignites the readers' imagination with the theme of escape or adventure. The stories bring out hidden emotions in the reader which perhaps they didn't even know existed. Hence, I wonder why I have never been able to put down a Nicholas Sparks novel without tears streaming down my face.

What is it that I was reminded of? What is it that the novel had which I felt I was missing?

Finally at eighteen, I started university. Due to my love for reading, I decided to major in English. The only difference between what I used to read then and now is that I no longer get to choose what I read. It now depends on course outlines printed and predetermined by my course teachers. I would give anything to find the time to read for pleasure again. However, it's not that bad. I have fallen in love with Shakespeare, Keats, Browning, Frost and many more. Come to think of it, their poems, plays and novels deal with issues just as complex as the ones I have had exposure to through my books growing up. It's just the language that seemed a little intimidating at first. Very recently, Robert Frost became my favourite poet. Depression is a recurring theme in his poetry. Sometimes the very idea that somebody, somewhere, has lived to relate to my pain, becomes all the therapy I need.

So there you have it, a map of my childhood; a map I try to trace back to, only in memory.

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Post-travel melancholia

NUREN IFTEKHAR

There are various stages in a successful tour that we all remember fondly. Even the inconveniences that may have been there are seen in a warmer light. However, there is one part associated with traveling that is hardly talked about and certainly is its most painful derivative. I'm talking about the post-travel melancholia.

The significance of travel varies with each person, but everyone can agree that it is a form of escape. When one starts feeling suffocated by the monotony of daily life, traveling comes across as a saviour in the time of need. For few glorious moments, we can forget about all the worry and just let go. It's a memorable experience that earns credit for the sake of being different alone.

However, as good as travel gets, the bitter taste it leaves in your mouth afterward is still the same, if not more. While traveling is a momentary escape, one crashes back into the reality quite hard after it's done.

It starts immediately after the post-travel hibernation has ended. The warm memory of waking up to a day filled with discovery and wanderlust slowly fades away as you wake up in your ever-familiar room. The comfort of your bed might be more fulfilling than a hotel bed but it's still dabbled in the monotony of day-

to-day life. After you're done setting the morning nostalgia aside you hit the second metaphoric wall. You look at all the responsibilities piled up for you, in some cases, magnified by the fact that you didn't get any work done during the holidays. Cracks begin to show on your endurance system - even the simplest of tasks begin to tire you out. Looking at all the stuff that needs to be done instead of some serene view can be a disappointing feeling.

The next step is coping with the reality. When you get a breather you swipe across the photos from your trip with shaking hands. You calm your heart for a little while as you browse through the countless photos. Your body quietly pushes away the travel fatigue as your sighs get hollow and more audible.

The secret to getting out of the travel blues is to ease back into your daily life. Take the next day off. Sleep off the jetlag. The more important bit, however, is to appreciate the parts of your current situation that was not accessible during your travel. I mean that trip to Rangamati was amazing but I don't remember finding Naga Burgers

there. Or even the comfort of having a decent bathroom.

"It's still not the same," I hear you say. Well, of course it's not. That doesn't mean we can't pretend for a moment's peace. Dealing with the problems in our lives can be like playing charades with ourselves.

The final step in the road to recovery is to have something else to look forward to. Why not plan another trip? Start looking up on it to pass the time and more importantly to forget about the one that is long gone. Keep yourself busy so that the melancholy has no place to peek through.

With that being said I wish you the very best in recovering from your post-travel melancholia. Now excuse me while I weep while looking back at the photos from my Bhutan trip.

Nuren Iftekhar is your local stray cat in disguise; he interacts with people for food and hates bright light. He got Hufflepuff 3 times straight in Pottermore so no walking around that one. Send him obscure memes at n.iftekhara18@gmail.com

