

THE SHELF

If characters from different books went on a date

AGNILA ROY

Sometimes it sneaks up in ways you do not expect, like in the quiet chaos of a city street where rain drips off umbrellas, and the smell of frying snacks mingles with wet asphalt. You step around puddles, scuff your shoes and wonder if anyone notices. Somewhere a dog barks insistently, a rickshaw wobbles past, and someone laughs at a joke you did not hear. This reminds us that love is all around. And what better way to imagine it than picturing characters from different books meeting for a date in an alternate universe while the rest of us are still figuring out how to send a perfectly timed text.

Anindya Pakrashi from *Chowringhee* (1962) by Sankar and Rupa from *Mayurakkhi* (1990) by Humayun Ahmed

They do not speak much at first. Anindya has learnt the art of listening from hotel corridors and half-lit rooms where people confess things they never intend to fix. Rupa has learnt silence from years of watching life move ahead without asking her permission.

They walk slowly through a park that smells of dust, rain, and fried peyaju. Anindya points out a bookshop he likes, one that keeps its older titles in the back where the pages smell faintly of mildew. Rupa smiles because she understands this kind of affection for small things

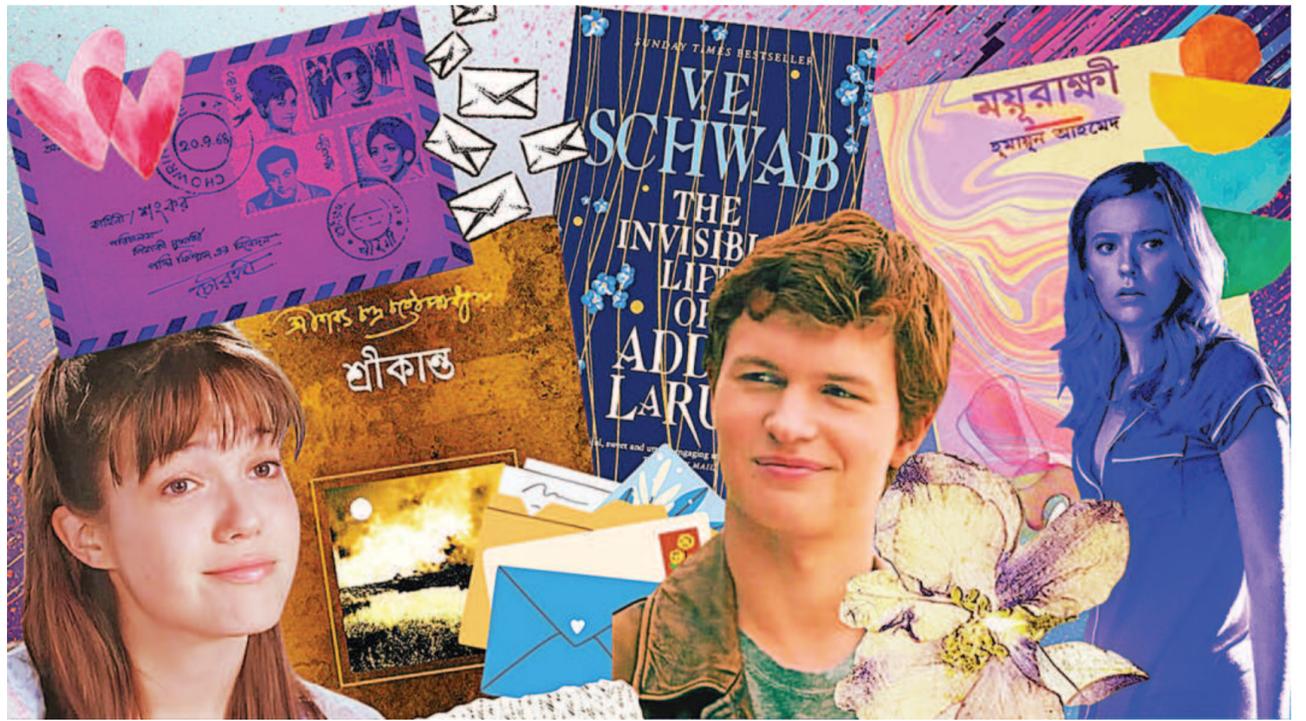


ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

They had both expected this to be a disaster. However, by the time they step outside into the late afternoon sun, the awkwardness has melted into something unexpected. They do not need grand gestures or dramatic confessions. Frances feels finally seen in a way she rarely has. Sam feels understood without having to perform genius or charm.

that endure. At a roadside tea stall, they speak of how evenings stretch longer than mornings. Of how some places offer comfort without offering escape. Anindya senses the connection between them is like the monsoon wind that arrives unnoticed and then stays. He looks at Rupa, framed in the blue of her saree, and realises she is a poem he is not allowed to memorise. When they stroll around in a hooded rickshaw, there is no urgency. Only the sense that they have finally met someone who understands the weight of restraint.

Whether Anindya will step out of the hooded rickshaw and leave the Pakrashi legacy behind, or return to the safety of his cage, remains unwritten. For now, they simply sit in the quiet—waiting to see who he decides to be.

Kishore Pasha from *Tin Goyenda* (1985) by Rakib Hasan and Nancy Drew from *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* (1930) by Carolyn Keene
Years have passed since their teenage detective days. Kishore, now quietly methodical, pores over an old case file when a familiar name catches his

eye. Somewhere across another time zone, Nancy pauses over her own notes, tracing a clue that leads her unexpectedly to him. The years have sharpened their instincts and deepened their understanding of how often truth hides behind ordinary faces.

They meet first through letters, then emails, then calls that stretch past midnight in two different time zones. They talk about cases and the strange thrill of finding a pattern where others see chaos. Kishore admires how confidently Nancy trusts her judgment. Nancy respects how patiently Kishore waits for evidence to settle.

On their virtual date, screens glow with shared documents and photographs. They argue gently over interpretations, laugh when both arrive at the same conclusion, and sit in silence when a case reminds them how fragile people can be. Distance does not weaken this bond. What matters is not the closeness of cities or hours, but the willingness to show up for each other, again and again, even when it is hard or inconvenient.

Banalata Sen from "Banalata Sen" (1942) by Jibanananda Das and Shrikanto from *Shrikanto* (1917) by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay
Shrikanto meets her when the light softens, and the road feels endless. He has walked for years through disappointment, devotion, and regret. His body is tired, but it is his heart that feels worn thin.

They sit beneath a fig tree that

trembles in the breath of evening wind. Shrikanto notices how her hair holds the faint quiet of night and how her presence drapes around him like a shawl against exhaustion. She does not ask him to explain himself. She does not interrupt. He speaks as one might speak to the earth after a long journey. How do you begin a date with someone who feels like a pause rather than a person?

Time slows. The road seems to fade. When he looks up again, she is gone, leaving behind a stillness that feels like shelter. Shrikanto continues walking, unsure if he imagined her, certain only that something within him has finally rested.

Gus Waters from *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) by John Green and Jamie Sullivan from *A Walk to Remember* (1999) by Nicholas Sparks
Some conversations begin already aware of their own fragility. While hospitals smell of disinfectant and coffee gone cold, two people find each other. Gus is the one who reaches the vending machine first, squinting at the spiral coils as if they have personally offended him. Jamie cannot help but laugh. They talk in fragments at first. About bad hospital food. About how waiting rooms distort time.

Gradually, they talk about fear without naming it directly and about hope in sentences that never say the word aloud but live in the cadence of their breath. Jamie reaches for his hand when the silence stretches too

long. Gus squeezes back, grateful for a moment where he does not have to perform strength. Their date is quiet, interrupted by nurses and announcements, but deeply present.

And for people who have learned early that life does not always deliver happily ever afters, that kind of companionship feels like grace.

Addie LaRue from *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* (2020) by V.E. Schwab and Henry from *The Time Traveller's Wife* (2003) by Audrey Niffenegger
For two souls who have never truly belonged in time, meetings are rare gifts. They find each other in a library where clocks have stopped, the faint scent of old paper and dust curling between them.

Addie knows what it means to be forgotten the moment someone turns away. Henry knows what it means to vanish without warning. And yet, for this one stolen evening, neither is alone. They do not plan a future. They do not mourn its impossibility. Every word, every laugh, every pause becomes more vivid because it cannot last. They know that when this meeting ends, it will vanish like smoke, yet the memory lingers like a heartbeat.

For the first time in years, they feel finally seen. When they see each other again, across years or lifetimes, they smile with recognition that needs no explanation.

Frances from *Conversations with Friends* (2017) by Sally Rooney and

Sam Masur from *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* (2022) by Gabrielle Zevin

Chairs scrape against the wooden floor every time a customer shifts, and the hum of conversation feels almost too loud for a first meeting. Frances stirs her tea nervously, watching the way the sunlight catches the edge of her notebook. Sam arrives carrying a sketchbook stuffed with ideas as if he has just stepped out of one of his studio sessions.

Their friends had insisted on this setup, promising it would be fun, and now they are here, awkwardly perched across from each other. Frances analyses every word before it leaves her mouth. Sam listens carefully, tilting his head like a cat, never rushing, never filling silence just to be charming.

They had both expected this to be a disaster. However, by the time they step outside into the late afternoon sun, the awkwardness has melted into something unexpected. They do not need grand gestures or dramatic confessions. Frances feels finally seen in a way she rarely has. Sam feels understood without having to perform genius or charm. For a few stolen hours, the world narrows to shared glances, quiet laughter, and the comfort of mutual recognition. And just for that evening, even the impossible feels possible.

Agnila Roy is planning to spend this week making literary couples go on dates so she can nap in peace.

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

Rediscovering the heroes we were never taught

Review of 'Heroes of the Islamic Golden Age' (Modina Printers & Publishers, 2025) by Chaman Rahim, PhD

MAHMUDA EMDAD

Because of colonialism and the westernisation of our education systems, many of us grow up learning history from a narrow angle not knowing about the scholars who shaped knowledge in other parts of the world. We often learn about modern science without learning where many of its ideas first came from. As a result, the lives and works of Muslim scholars from the past remain unfamiliar, even though their contributions helped build the world we live in today. *Heroes of the Islamic Golden Age* by Dr Chaman Rahim gently works against this forgetting. It introduces young readers to people who imagined, invented, and created during a time when learning flourished across the Muslim world.

The book tells the stories of eight remarkable figures who lived between the 8th and 13th centuries. Instead of presenting history as a list of dates, the book focuses on people. It shows how curiosity, creativity, and hard work shaped discoveries in science, medicine, music, and travel. The language is simple and warm,

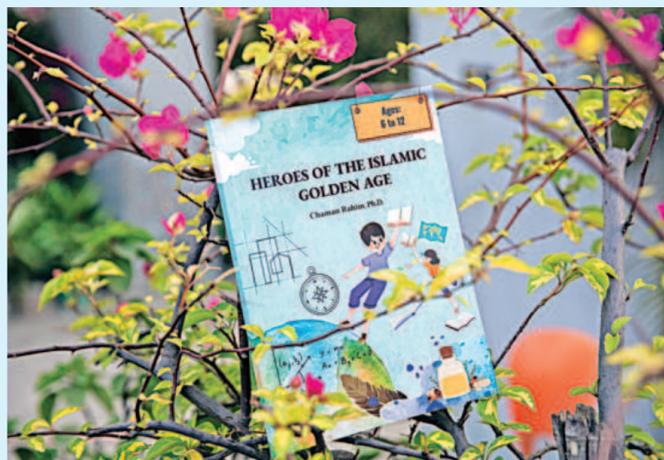


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

which makes complex ideas feel friendly and exciting to children, the book's primary target audience, rather than distant or

difficult. The journey begins with Mariam Al Astrulabi, one of the earliest known female

astronomers. The book explains how she worked with the astrolabe, an instrument used to study the sky and measure time and direction. Rather than overwhelming young readers, the explanation is clear and visual. Children learn what the astrolabe does, how it works, and why it matters in everyday life. Mariam's story also quietly challenges the idea that science has always been shaped by men. From there, the book introduces Muhammad Ibn Musa Al Khwarizmi, widely known as the father of algebra. His work in mathematics and astronomy is explained through examples that are easy to follow.

One of the most lively chapters is about Ziryab, a figure who seems larger than life. He was a musician, poet, fashion innovator, and cultural leader. The book talks about his contributions to music, the school he founded, and even how he influenced seasonal clothing and celebrations like the New Year. These details make history feel playful and human, especially for young readers.

The book also features Al-Kindi, a scholar who worked across philosophy, science, and music. Then comes the famous traveler Ibn Battuta, whose journeys across continents

are described alongside the creation of his travel account, *The Rehla*. Readers also meet Ibn Sina, whose medical writings shaped healthcare for centuries, and Al Jazari, known for his imaginative machines and mechanical designs.

A striking feature of the book is that most of these figures were not limited to one field. They were scientists and artists, thinkers and makers. This helps children see that learning does not have to stay inside one box. To keep the reading experience light and fun, the book includes illustrations, puzzles, quizzes, and visual games. These elements help children stay engaged and curious.

Heroes of the Islamic Golden Age is a wonderful starting point for young readers who want to understand history, civilisation, and the people behind everyday knowledge. It shows that the world we live in was built by many minds across many cultures, and it invites children to wonder, ask questions, and imagine themselves as future creators too.

Mahmuda Emdad is a sub-editor at Star Books & Literature.