

# TICKING TRANSCENDENCE

Raghav looks up to his mother with gratitude holding the novel she just gave close to his chest. He reads the title written in Marathi out loud, "Lokmanya Tilak". This novel is dear to his mother; she chose to pass it down to him on his fifteenth year. The next morning, Raghav walks by the community pond to find a quiet place where he could read his novel peacefully.

Few days passed alongside the community pond and Raghav had read more than half of the novel under the shady oak tree and was eager to finish it. Raghav was jerked awake from his reverie by his friend who reported that he was required to reach home urgently. He hastily picked up his unfinished novel which made him drop a small book that he didn't recall seeing. His clumsy hands pick up the book as his legs obediently ran towards the direction of his home. During his run, he vaguely wondered how he missed this small book. A few thoughtful seconds later, he concluded that the book may hold an additional story of his current inspiration Lokmanya Tilak.

In the days that passed he completed the novel with great pride and joy. He then curiously picked up the small book and scanned through it. In his afterthoughts, he considered the small ordinary book to be a children's book. The book didn't seem to hold the truths of his time. In fact, the book didn't seem to be of his generation at all. The cover of the book was peculiar; it had a small clock drawn on it which seemed as realistic as he had rarely ever seen. He was mesmerized by the drawing. The closer he looked the more he felt as though he was falling deeper into its enchantments and suddenly he felt that the hands on the clock had begun to move and tick. He dropped the book in shock but his adrenaline pumped heart made him pick it up again. He began tossing and turning the book in his firm hands to uncover its tricks. His confusion led him to assume the book to be a toy or something that held magical properties.

He then began reading the book to acquire hints from the story written within. The story was about a sporty boy helping his friend find his lost 'watch'. He thus recognised the small clock to be called a 'watch'. He found the book to be interesting and easy to read as it had illustrations at brief intervals of the story. He had almost finished reading the book when something in the community pond water caught his eye. He looked in its direction to see what it was and waited. Before he could resume his reading the disturbance occurred again. It was his reflection in the water that began to glitch into a small girl. He rubbed his eyes in astonishment and looked at it again. He waited to see if the glitch would reappear, everything seemed normal when he saw his own reflection during his anticipated wait. He resumed his reading, confused and was about to turn the last page of the book. He saw something unusual which didn't match with the rest of the contents in the book. The end of the book had something written in white across its black cover. As soon as he saw it, the words disappeared but he caught the message in time. The bold white words read, 'Don't Dangle with the Future'. He slowly repeated the words out loud which made the book in his hands quiver. As soon as he spoke a bright beam of light tore through the centre of the book. The light began pulling him in limb by limb. He clawed the grass in a desperate attempt to escape but in vain. He blacked out while being pulled into the unknown.

His eyes flickered open. The flashy colours made him squint with discomfort. He felt as though he had shrunk for everything around him was tall, huge and new to him. He sensed the loss of power he thought he had earlier. Something intangible was irritating his eye. As he lifted his right hand to aid his eye he felt a weight on his left hand and realised that he was clutching his dearest treasure- the 'bunny rabbit'. One part of his mind regarded the soft toy to be insignificant but the other beamed innocent love towards it. He had to admit that it was very comforting to touch the soft white fur of the rabbit but he couldn't explain the rush of emotions he felt towards it. He felt that the lifeless bunny held all the solutions to his dilemma. Then it hit him.

He remembered the community pond and began searching for it as it was the most vivid memory he had at that time. He hopped towards the nearest building with childish delight. Again, he couldn't understand why he was hopping but he didn't mind. He stopped at the entrance of the building, the doors looked colourful and fancy. He looked up the building and admired its height. Suddenly, the word 'school' popped up in his head. School? He

wondered. He didn't recall any school that looked this advanced in his locality. He curiously walked in through the doors and continued walking; trusting his intuition that he will achieve what he was looking for.

He walked through the long corridors and reached a huge hall at the far end of the school. It had a huge pond encompassed by shimmering marbled walls. Upon its sight he squealed with joy and ran towards it. The shrillness in his voice surprised him. Part of his mind was extremely confused with the squealing and hopping and part of his mind was frustrated; his footsteps were daintier than his usual long leaps. He eventually reached up to the pond and was admiring the clear water and the pretty tiles beneath. He then looked into the unique water, mesmerized. He watched and felt his face turn ashen as his prior confusion cleared.

What he saw was a girl's reflection. She could be no older than eight years. He pinched his face and arms hopeful of waking up from his dream but the only results seen were his cheeks and arms turning deliciously pink. He peered into his reflection again, frightened and looked closely. He remembered he saw the same girl in his reflection at the community pond. But then he noticed something beyond his mental capacity.

The girl shared similar features with him; her eyes and nose seemed like his but her mouth formed a perfect cupid's bow. Her hair was tied up neatly into two ponytails which complimented her round chubby face. She looked quite adorable and he felt certain unconditional love towards this unknown entity. His mind raced with weird assumptions; he could've turned into a girl or the girl could be his illegitimate sister or he could've fallen into a state of coma trapping him in his innocent nightmare. He thus splashed and disrupted the still water in frustration with frail attempts to bring back his reflection and body. He sat back, his hopes receding, cradling his boggled light head and arms over his new thin knees trying to bring sense to this nonsense. He then realised that he had been carrying something over his shoulders all this while. He turned to pull back the weight he had been carrying. It looked like a cloth bag with zigzag minute lines at the top opening with a loop attached to it. As he looked closer, the word 'backpack' popped in his head. There was a name written in bold font at the handle of the backpack. He read it out loud – Nidhi. He assumed that it belonged to the host body. He instinctively opened the backpack using the zip line. He opened it wide, letting the light fall into the contents of the bag as though he was hoping to retrieve his sanity. To his horror, inside was the book that pulled him into this dilemma along with the watch that was drawn on its cover. He screamed and crawled away in fear.

His mind started brainstorming over all the unusual events and information he just acquired. How he recognised things he had never seen before like the backpack, school, and bunny rabbit. How he partly began to think with two heads, one being the anonymous entity which he could only assume to be the girl's mind. He inched closer to the bag extending a shivering hand towards it. He sharply pulled at the mouth of the bag; the contents tumbled to the ground, a small book and a watch, which was initially just a drawing on the book. He slowly lifted the book and a sudden rush of memories hit him. He remembered reading out, 'Don't dangle with the future'. At last all the scattered pieces joined to ring a loud bell in his ears as he shrieked, "Future!" He was about to have a breakdown but was disrupted by a boisterous chatter.

Two boys entered the room and spotted him. He looked away frightened. One of the boys called out to the little girl, "Hey girl beside the swimming pool, come here". Ah, she then remembered that the pond with the mesmerizing water was called a swimming pool. She timidly got up with her backpack but dropped something white. She walked towards them hiding her face with her backpack that were in her arms, only to peep through her eye lashes; she was too frightened to ponder over what she dropped beside the pool. At her approach the tall boy questioned her agitated, "Why are you here so late? This is way past the time for primary school students to lurk around in school". She stayed silent while looking down at the marbled tiles of the floor. The boy's voice softened, "Never mind. Go wait at the reception area till your guardians come to pick you". She nodded timidly and started walking away while the boys whispered briefly. He then called out to her again and she turned back. He asked, "My friend here has lost his watch. Did you come across it while you were here?" He began describing the watch and she recognised it to be the same watch in her backpack. She felt a sense of *Déjà vu*.

She looked at the boys closely. She began recognising the features of the boys with the character drawings in the

clock book. The tall boy was the one who spoke confidently and the boy beside him had spectacles and few freckles on his face. She could see lines of anxiety on the timid boy's face. The tall boy was smartly dressed in his uniform but the timid boy was fidgety and had patches of sweat on his shirt. Her eyes widened as she realized what she had walked into. The story that was written in the book was too similar to be a coincidence of what was happening in front of her. The illustrative image of the pool sprang up in her mind and she looked around, attentively inspecting her surroundings. Everything that she could remember from the book was exactly the same, how the boys looked, how their positions in the hall were, everything. The boys were whispering again, not paying attention to the girl. The timid boy then wailed, "I think my watch is stolen". To this she gasped, as she remembered reading the line in the book. She then screamed, "No I didn't steal...uh... See your watch". The tall boy responded briefly looking at her, "Ok girl, now be on your way". She turned to scurry away and hid behind the first wall she spotted in the corridor. She peeped from behind the wall to see the boys walking away in the opposite direction towards the changing room.

She followed them determined to follow the story that was written in the book as she couldn't change the future. The story ended with the timid boy finding his watch in his bag. Her only dilemma was that she had to find a way to return the watch without being spotted. For now she could only follow them and wait for the right moment.

She hid behind one of the locker doors of the changing room to spy on the boys. The timid boy began searching individual closets for his watch while the tall boy waited. She was then thinking of ways to distract them. She assumed that they wouldn't suspect a tiny girl entering the boys' changing room so she prepares for a distraction. She saw the tall boy was holding the bag, patiently tapping his foot waiting for his friend. She scurried towards the lockers located at the corner of the room. She spots the hamper filled with used towels and drops them, she then banged on the lockers as loud as she could. She runs back to her previous hiding spot through the longest route; the farthest aisle behind the lockers and to hide herself from the tall boy as he would inspect the commotion in his quickest time. She wished she could run faster. As she reached her previous post she spotted the tall boy drop the bag and run towards the source of the sound. She presumes that the timid boy was still searching the closets. By wishful luck, she spots the boy in one of the cubicles to the right who was now hysterically calling out to his tall friend. She knew she couldn't waste time and rushed to the bag dropped beside a washbasin. She hurriedly grabbed the watch from her backpack and dumped it in the open zip of the bag. She heard the tall boy's footsteps nearing her and rushed for the exit.

She was amazed that she was quick even at her slow pace. She was by the main entrance of the changing room when she hears the timid boy calling out his friend with joy. This meant that her plan was a success and that the boy found the watch in his bag. She knew she had to get out of school to avoid any suspicion at that moment. But she couldn't remember her way back home.

Whenever she tried recalling any memories of home, a mental picture of her bunny would come in her mind. She knew that her bunny would guide the way. She realised that she didn't have her white bunny with her, hysteria was building up again. She walked absent mindedly towards the direction of the swimming pool hall with hopes to find her bunny as she tried recalling where she lost it. She places her hand on the glass window of the hall beside her, halting to recollect faster. She waited thinking harder but she could feel her hopes receding. She sighed and looked towards her hand on the window but was momentarily distracted with something white beside the pool. She squints to recognise her bunny and runs towards it. As she picked up the bunny she recollects a memory wherein she received her treasured bunny from her beloved father. She opened her backpack to safely secure her bunny with her and takes out the clock book. She recites 'Don't dangle with future' to her bunny lovingly.

The book began fading away. She falls on the floor as a rush of memories hit her. She remembered her fifth birthday when her father had gifted the bunny; she remembered her school, her friends and her childish delight when she sneaked past her teacher after school to visit the pool with her friends. She slowly gets up on her feet recalling her memory of hugging her parents after she pronounces her name correctly, she lingers to see her father's face longer. Everything fades to black as he ponders the similarities between his face and hers.

Raghav opens his eyes to find himself under the tree beside the community pond. He recalls the episode of him

being in his daughter's body but wasn't sure if it was a dream or reality because it would be rather disconcerting if he had actually time travelled. He picked up the Lokmanya Tilak novel and walked home.

He called for his mother to serve him some food as he was very hungry. But his mother interjects reminding him that he went out of the house about ten minutes ago after eating a heavy breakfast. He countered telling her that he had finished the book and was asleep for hours, stating that he was expecting a sound scolding on reaching home as she might have been worried by his absence. His mother negates his statements. He walked back into his room baffled while his mom began asking after his health. He began to analyse whether he actually did time travel or whether everything was a dream because he couldn't find the clock book at the community pond or in the novel.

He rushed back to his mother to ask her if she had slipped in an additional book with the Lokmanya Tilak novel. She responded no and advised him to sleep as he seemed lost. He agreed to take her advice and walked to his room curiously inspecting the novel. He drifts off to sleep vaguely recalling a girl's name and face, knowing that he would meet her again in the future.

Many days had passed, neither did he see the girl in his dream or reflection nor did he see the clock book again. He concluded the events to be a dream.

Raghav was now a happy married adult. He named his daughter Nidhi. A week before his daughter's fifth birthday while he was strolling around the city he caught a glimpse of a bunny soft toy on the shelf of a fancy store. He immediately purchased it. On Nidhi's birthday, he gifts it to her strangely remembering this memory from his childhood. When Nidhi was fifteen, he decided that it was the right time to pass down the Lokmanya Tilak novel that had been his inspiration to succeed in life. He gave her the novel explaining her that it had been passed down to him from her grandmother. He suddenly recollects the clock book while handing the novel to her. He pauses briefly, hiding his anxiety. He responds to his daughter's concern that he felt alright and that he paused only to remember a significant memory. He advised her to approach him immediately if she found anything unusual with the novel. She was skeptical of her father's behaviour but accepted the novel happily.

Within a few days, Nidhi approached her father while he was busy reading the newspaper. She returned the novel to him asking him to keep it in his library. He kept his newspaper down and asks her enthusiastically whether she found anything unusual. She began explaining that she found Lokmanya Tilak very inspirational. But he interjects clarifying that was not what his question meant. She was curious why her father kept asking about finding something unusual. She asked if she missed something related to the novel. He then sighs and assures her that there wasn't anything extraordinary to find if it didn't appear on its own. He then took the book from her, kissing her forehead as he walked towards his library, responding to his daughter's confused face with a reassuring smile.