



“Mummy I’m so very bored”, whines Ajay. He left his home in London a week ago and is visiting his *Daada* (grandfather) and *Daadi* (grandmother) during his summer break. “I am missing my room, my toys, all my buddies and all I’ve done for a week is play with my DS”, he continues. Ajay’s mother sees other kids playing cricket in the apartment parking lot down stairs and encourages Ajay to join the kids and make new friends. Grudgingly Ajay finds his way to the parking lot.

Amongst a big group of boys, a 12 year old girl, still in her school uniform, approaches Ajay. “Hello, I am Asha. I live across in the slums but my mother works as a *bai* (domestic helper) in these flats. Would you like to join us?” says the little girl. Cricket is Ajay’s favorite game, so he joins in. Asha quickly introduces Ajay to all the other boys. Ajay enjoys playing with his new friends from Mumbai and looks forward to meeting Asha every evening.

One such evening Asha asks Ajay “would you like to come across and see my *kholi* (hut)?”. Ajay is not very sure but decides to go along with Asha. He is particularly excited because Asha promises to take him to hers’ on the big red bus. “Namaste” says Ajay to the bus conductor who is also Asha’s father.

Onboard the big red double-decker bus, Ajay is amazed at how busy the Mumbai streets are and all the traffic he sees. “Hey, this is just like London”, he thinks to himself. Asha keeps chatting away and tells Ajay about how much she likes reading and sports and that she wants to become a teacher when she grows up. Ajay pauses for a moment to think “What should he become?”. When Asha asks him, he responds “I don’t know what I want to become”.

Making their way, now on foot, through the narrow streets, Ajay is appalled by how dirty everything looks. They are finally at Asha’s hut. Ajay thinks to himself “this is even smaller than our car in London”. He is quickly distracted. “Look, this is my favorite book [Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone](#). My teacher let me borrow that book since I did so well in my reading homework” says a very proud Asha. Ajay is very amused and impressed that both of them like the same books.

Ajay and Asha become the best of friends during the next couple of weeks. They meet each evening to play cricket. Ajay sometimes helps Asha with her math homework that she does, sitting in the apartment parking lot, while waiting for her mother to finish work.

It is time for Ajay to go back to London. He is very excited to get back home but is also sad to leave Mumbai and his new friend Asha. “Bye Asha. I leave early tomorrow morning. I want you to have two of these Harry Potter books that I’ve read and loved,” says Ajay sadly. At first Asha is a bit hesitant and almost too proud to accept a gift from Ajay. “I will take

your books but will share this with other kids in my school. Thank you Ajay”, says an equally sad Asha.

On the long flight back to London, Ajay thinks a lot about Asha, her love for reading and cricket, her tiny home, how sure she was about wanting to become a teacher, her happy face. He then remembers that he still needs to think about what he wants to become when he is older and vows to write to Asha and tell her as soon as he decides!