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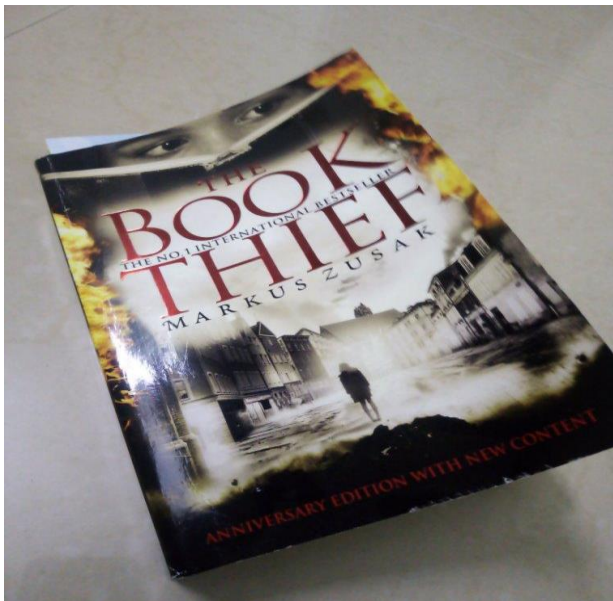
This is to you and me , who , despite being Home to each other , couldn't walk back home together!

This is to you and me , who are condemned to be homesick for the eternity!!

PS: "We were together. I forget the rest"- Walt Whitman

Love from Mumbai!!

With three days to go for my birthday, today I received a surprise gift. Although I was expecting a "surprise gift" from a friend of mine, this one was truly a "surprise" surprise gift. And it was a book – "The Book Thief" by Markus Zusak!! I searched the parcel insideout... Ransacked each and every page of the book. But the sender remained anonymous. Several of my friends know my birthday. But who knows my home address??



The initial surprise slowly gave way to suspicion. "Who would that be?" I started to overthink about what my parents would think about the anonymous sender. With no options left, I sent Whatsapp messages to some of my friends whom i have "blacklisted" Oops!!.. Shortlisted. Most of them teased me and some quizzed me about the "secret fan". Although the idea of a secret fan excited me, my curiosity was about to kill the cat. Wait.. What? A cat.. A Caaaaattt!! I got you girl – Aniboo,

the Catwoman. Also Ani Radhesh, the Central Government Officer in Mumbai, in a parallel universe!

Aniboo was my roommate back in Trivandrum. She was perhaps one of the first people I have befriended from outside my school/college. Sharing a room with her was my privilege. Daughter to an Air Force officer, even her books in the cupboard were disciplined, neatly arranged as if they were on a march past! I had

“inherited” a super neat room from her and I have handed over the same to my successor. OCD was our thing! She was hardly some three years elder to me but I looked up to her as if she was my Fairy Godmother. Everything she did was so cool. Sometimes she reminded me of my elder sister who is the most kickass lady I have ever seen!

Aniboo is a voracious reader – a bookdragon indeed. A diehard Agatha Christie fan. I loved her more when she spoke about the books she read for I myself have read only a couple of books. Her love for cats was known to everyone at the hostel. She spoke of Whoopie, her cat as her kid . And it is her love for cats which helped me find the anonymous one! How did she manage to overcome the loss of Whoopie? I still remember a teary eyed Aniboo, narrating the death of Chandhu, her dear departed dog.

She was my ‘go – to – everything – person’ at the hostel. Somedays she packed me food for the morning class when Tamizhan Chettan messed up my breakfast with food that would not resemble a Dosa even in another hundred years. And some nights we talked endlessly about “Where is the country heading to?” like any responsible Indian citizen. Exam season was the best. We would fling questions at each other, only to fail better! However she was one among the firsts of us to land on a Central Government job and eversince became an inspiration for all of us. I still dont know how much I cried the day she vacated the hostel.

And today, some two since we last met, on receiving the gift all the way from Mumbai, I wish everyone had a roomie like her. An all-weather-friend!

She is one of a kind!