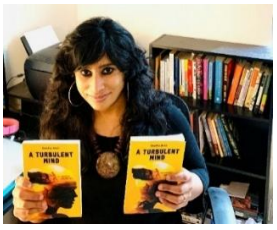
10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES

John Coville



Swetha Amit

Pam Ebel

Roy Dorman

Zaenab Dare

Hugh Behm-Steinberg

Toby Tucker Hecht

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Joe Couture

Sushma Doshi

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Welcome to Issue 44 with some great stories that fit into the holiday spirit: a revenge murder, a "ghost", an ocean fairy tale, the return of ..., and additional stories from Spain, Nigeria, Maryland and Connecticut. Every story carries an impact and brings you great entertainment. So pull a cozy chair, grab a cold (or warm) drink and enjoy these most enjoyable stories.

Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA former Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published poems, flash fiction and short stories. He edits *10 By 10 Flash Fiction,* is a four-time poetry Pushcart Prize nominee and a flash fiction Pushcart nominee. His recent poetry book is *New & Selected Poetry*. Flash fiction books include *Secret Behind The Gate, Wheels* and *40 Stories, (*coauthored with Paul Beckman). Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.

John Coville is a practicing attorney in New York. Prior to law school he worked as an editor for trade publications. He graduated from Fordham University (B.A.) and DePaul University (J.D.). In the early 1960s his mixed-race parents moved to an all-white neighborhood in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. He is writing a novel based on their experience. His short stories have appeared in *Adelaide Literary Magazine* and *Literary Yard*. He has a flash fiction piece forthcoming in *Bewildering Stories* and *Glass Knuckles Press*.

Walking on Water

I'm in Katz's Deli eating a stacked pastrami on rye when my friend tells me that Jesus has returned and doing stand-up comedy in the West Village.

"Who's Jesus and where's he been?" I ask.

"He's the Messiah, he was dead, but now he's back. Can I have your pickle?"

"Wait, the son of God is alive and he's a comedian?"

"Yep, and get this, he's like us, Puerto Rican, and really named Jesus, it's not a stage name. He's funny as hell too…no pun intended."

"You're asking me to believe Christ has risen, and he's a Boricua?"

"Not asking, bro. I'm telling you. I saw him last weekend at the Comedy Cellar, down on MacDougal Street. The place was packed."

"Maybe it's just a bit, claiming to be Him to get some buzz."

"No, I thought of that, but here's the thing, not only is he funny, he performs miracles."

"You mean magic tricks, rabbit out of a hat stuff? Or like that Gallagher guy?"

"No, no, miracles, such as walking on water. People have seen it."

"What people? Crack heads?"

"You're not getting it, are you?"

"No, I'm not. Okay, what's he look like?"

“Little guy, bushy hair tied back in a ponytail. Looks a little like Alvarado on the Knicks.”

“Jesus resembles Grand Theft Alvarado from the New York Knicks?”

“Kinda, yeah. You gonna eat that cole slaw?”

“Listen, answer me this, why would God send his only son back to Earth just to tell jokes?”

“That’s the point. He says because no one laughs anymore. We’ve all lost our sense of humor. Get it?”

“So, Jesus Christ is wandering the West Village trying to get a chuckle out of humanity.”

“Finally, yes, you understand. Thank you.”

“Honestly bro, no comprendo.”

“Oh my god. Doubt me if you want. I gotta go. Can you get the check?”

I walk down Houston Street to the East River to burn off all that meat I ate. I plop down on a bench, light up and watch the boats float by.

At the fence along the river, I see a little guy with bushy hair pulled back in a ponytail. He climbs over and jumps.

“Holy shit,” I yell. I run over and look down.

I see the guy on the river, actually *on* the river, strolling atop the rippling surface toward the Brooklyn side.

“Hey Papi, where you going?”

He stops and looks at me.

“Brooklyn, maybe grab a slice at L&B, or calamari at Randazzo’s.”

“Damn, they got that good red sauce there,” I say to myself.

“Anyone tell you, you look like Jose Alvarado?”

“All the time. Wish I had his money.”

I laugh.

“After I eat, I’m going on tour. Want to come?”

I take a drag, studying this guy standing on the East River who knows the good eat spots.

“What the hell,” I say.

I toss away my smoke and stamp it out. I follow.

“Will I sink?”

“Nah, I got you bro.”

Swetha Amit holds an MFA from the University of San Francisco and is an active member of the Writers Grotto, where she chairs the Literary Salon series. She has authored a memoir and three chapbooks. Her stories have appeared in *Bending Genres, Ghost Parachute, McNeese Boudin, Gone Lawn*, and others. Her works have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, Best Microfiction, and Best Small Fiction. A rooted and written fellow 2024, her work has been supported by *Tin House, Kenyon Review Writers' Workshop, Community of Writers, Vona Voices, Lit Camp, Bending Genres, and Writers Grotto.*

The Ocean Took Her

After Pa succumbed to cancer last month, Mom began swimming at Cowell Beach. Most mornings, I woke up and found her gone. From our house on West Cliff Drive, I could see the ghostly white fog almost swallowing the pier. When Mom came back home, shivering in her purple one-piece, she smelled of salt and seaweed. Her long black hair dripped down her back. Sand clung to her bare feet.

"You're going to get hypothermia," I said.

"Cold water helps heal my mind," she said, smiling.

It was the first time I had seen her smile since Pa died. Day after day, she disappeared in the mornings while I stayed home to make breakfast and fill out college applications. At first, she was gone for an hour. Then two. Then three. Sometimes she came home quiet, with a dreamy look in her brown eyes. Sometimes, she told me about the moods of the tides—how the waves were flat as gray blankets, or how they rose like walls and broke over her head. Her voice was soft, almost like a murmur.

A few weeks later, I noticed a flash of silver at her feet while she stood at the kitchen sink.

"What's that?"

"Probably sand," she shrugged.

But the next week, dozens appeared, scattered across her ankles and glinting in the sunlight. At night, they disappeared beneath her skin. When she walked through the house, something scraped softly against the floor behind her. I began waking before dawn, listening for her as she left for the beach.

One Sunday morning, I followed her. She dove beneath a large gray wave, surfaced minutes later, then disappeared again. When she didn't come up for a long time, I ran into the water. A cold wave slapped my legs. Salt stung my eyes.

Minutes later, she surfaced near the white buoy. Silver scales shimmered from her waist, narrowing into a graceful tail that sliced through the water like a blade of moonlight. Her dark hair streamed behind her as she glided toward me. Her eyes were steely blue, not the warm brown eyes that had watched me take my first steps, lose my first tooth, bleed for the first time, and survive my first heartbreak. She opened her mouth, but a wave rose between us, and she was gone.

I waded back to shore and waited for her to surface. The clouds parted, revealing a pale blue sky. Gulls soared over the water. Surfers paddled beyond the pier. Families built sandcastles and decorated them with shells.

The waves rose higher as the day slipped by. By sunset, the ocean had darkened beneath a violet sky. Moonlight pooled on the water in fractured, tarnished silver. I stood at the water's edge, waiting. The tide crept toward my feet. Near the buoy, something flashed. I watched it drift through the foam before it came to rest at my feet. It was a single silver scale.

Pamela Ebel's short stories, appear, in *Yellow Mama Ezine*, *Shot Gun Honey, Kings River Life Magazine*, and various anthologies. Her poetry is in the *Delta Poetry Review* and *The Five – Two Poetry Crime weekly*. Her Novella, *Four Pieces of Evidence*, is a Judges' Top Pick in the Supernatural Category at the 2025 Killer Nashville Conference. Pam teaches courses on how to write and market short fiction. She lives in New Orleans with her husband and their two cats, Jake and Elwood, The Blues Brothers.

Sleeping with the Fish!

"Get five hundred."

Cliff shoved the checkbook into Carla's hand. She reached for the car door as he grabbed her arm.

"I forgot you're not on this account. I'll run in."

"I don't understand. This isn't our bank."

"I settled a case in this building while you were traveling. I wanted the money secured."

"Okay, I'll go in now and add my name."

"The guys are waiting for me at the yacht club. Do it next week."

As her husband entered the bank she called their law office.

"Carla, I'm glad your back and hope you're coming in today. The paper wants an interview on the Lucas settlement and how you figured out the cause of the blow out and secured two million dollars. Didn't Cliff tell you?'

"I have to take Cliff to the yacht club now. Fishing Rodeo weekend. I'll call later."

She listened as he got in the car talking on his phone.

"I'm almost there. Just a small glitch here but taken care of. See you soon."

"Anything going on at the office I should know about?"

"No. Take the weekend off to get caught at the house. I'll see you on Sunday."

After dropping him off she drove to the Harbor Bar and watched Cliff pass piloting a yacht, hugging the blond yacht saleswoman close.

At home Carla sipped champagne, made calls, learned Cliff spent $100,000 from the new account on a down payment on a condo and another $100,000 on the yacht purchase. A

memo from their personal bank said she needed to agree to Cliff's effort to close the account. An email from her attorney friend said Cliff was filing for divorce.

She loved him, had put them both through law school, paid most of the bills for ten years. She was stunned.

Monday morning, she watched Cliff finish his coffee.

"I'm going to the office and then I have business out of town. I'll be back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow's our anniversary Cliff. Let's go somewhere special."

"Can't. We've got to work."

As he drove away she phoned the office.

"I'm going to surprise Cliff by joining him for a short trip this afternoon. Keep it a secret."

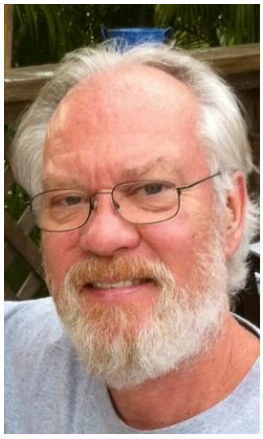
She continued making calls and within three hours eighty percent of their funds, including those in the new account sat offshore. One more call to a realtor then she drove to a hardware store.

The next day Carla sipped champagne on the patio of her new home in Charlestown on the island of Nevis watching the international news.

"Breaking Now! An explosion on a yacht at the Habor Club yesterday killed two people identified by their legal secretary as local attorneys Clifford and Carla Ford. Stay tuned for further information."

Carla stood up and look out at the blue water and raised her glass.

"Here's to you dear. Sleep well with the fish you loved so much."



Roy Dorman is retired from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Benefits Office and has been a voracious reader for over 70 years. At the prompting of an old high school friend, himself a retired English teacher, Roy is now a voracious writer. He has had flash fiction and poetry published *in 10 X 10, Black Petals, Bewildering Stories, One Sentence Poems, Yellow Mama, Drunk Monkeys, Literally Stories, Dark Dossier, The Rye Whiskey Review, Near To The Knuckle, Theme of Absence, Shotgun Honey, Punk Noir, The Yard*, and a number of other online and print journals.*Unweaving a Tangled Web*, published by Hekate Publishing, is his first novel.

Apartment 3C Payoff

Roger Feldman knocked on the building superintendent's door.

The super, Arnie Johnson, lived with his wife, Carol, in a basement apartment in the building he'd inherited from his mother ten years ago.

"I locked myself out," Roger said. "My keys are on the kitchen table instead of in my pants pocket where they should be."

He gave Arnie a tentative smile.

"I'm eatin' my dinner," Arnie said.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but I need to get into my apartment."

Arnie sighed. "Carol! Put my plate in the microwave so the dog don't get at it, will ya? I'll be right back."

Roger followed Arnie up the stairs to the third floor.

"3C's where my mother lived when she owned this place," Arnie said, a little out of breath. "She liked the view of the East River, but I think it was climbin' the stairs that killed her. Bad heart, ya know."

"It is a nice view," said Roger. "But your mother told me that it wasn't the stairs that killed her; y*ou* killed her. Said you put a pillow over her face until she suffocated, and then carried her out onto the stairs for the EMS people to deal with."

"What the hell you talkin' about?"

"Yer mother's ghost. We've been chatting."

Arnie had just put the master key into the 3C lock, but now stopped.

“You should probably find a new place to live by the end of the month.”

Roger took hold of Arnie’s hand and turned the key.

“Let’s go in and talk to Mom,” he said, pushing Arnie into the living room ahead of him.

Arnie looked around, not knowing what to expect.

“Nobody’s here,” he said with a nervous chuckle.

“Arnieee,” a woman’s voice wailed. “I seem to be lost. I need you help me find my way into the light.”

Arnie’s eyes rolled back into his head and he fainted. Carol came out of the bedroom with a pillow and pushed it into his face.

It was over in less than a minute.

Carol had used Roger’s key to get in. She’d left the basement apartment by the back stairs and had waited for Roger and Arnie to get to 3C.

She’d gone along with Arnie’s plan to get the apartment building from his mother, but after ten years of living in the basement, she wanted more out of life.

Roger and Carol would split the two hundred thousand dollars Arnie’s life insurance policy would pay out.

Any insurance investigators or police detectives who’d been around when Arnie’s mother had died on the third-floor were now probably either retired or had moved on.

Carol sold the building, took the proceeds and her hundred thousand, and moved to Florida where she invested in an orange grove.

Roger tried his luck in Vegas.

Occasionally, tenants of 3C would comment to the new building manager about hearing sounds of whispering.

“It’s an old building,” he would tell them. “Those are just old building sounds.”

Zaenab Dare is a Nigerian writer whose work explores crime, mystery, suspense, psychological intrigue, and the darker complexities of human nature. Her stories delve into the unexpected consequences of human choices, often blending elements of the supernatural and dark fantasy. Drawn to twists, unsettling revelations, and the mysteries hidden beneath ordinary life, she writes to explore the unpredictable sides of human behaviour. Beyond writing, she enjoys nature.

Crust

Remember the story of that guy who took his father's infidelity out on his mistresses by killing them, and was merely told "sweet dreams" by his mom who was very much aware of his atrocities? Well that was my first novel and it was given to me as a present on my 17th birthday by my mom; my mom who by the way was on the verge of getting divorced by my unrepentant cheat of a father, at the time. I wasn't sure about her intentions at a subsequent time, when she 'casually' drove me by Juliet's apartment while she muttered about how the "substandard Juliet" had managed to break up her marriage with my father. But she did bake me a giant pie right after we heard of Juliet's murder. Not that I told her that I had shot Juliet in the head by the way...

And the time came when Uncle Bernard started visiting us more frequently after my father's demise. My mom had gifted me a purple lighter, after we both 'happened to see' a movie where a group of vigilantes set a serial rapist on fire.

I wasn't sure my mom was aware that Uncle Bernard had been molesting my little sister, but she sure baked me another giant pie after my Uncle's house burned down with him in it. Not that I told her that I started the fire by the way ....

And before me stood this beautiful girl called Kate, years later. She frolicked as she placed this huge pie before me; it was just like the one my mom used to bake for me after the murders I committed; the murders which I eventually ascertained that she knew about all along, without being told by me. She in fact, wanted me to commit them.

When I met Kate, she had ranted on and on to me about how vile her ex-husband was to her. She had gone as far as showing me where he lived with his new girl on our supposed first date. And rather than go on an actual date with me the second time, she chose to bake me my mom's classic pie. Kate's gesture only meant these words to me: "I know you killed my evil ex-husband and here's a comforting giant pie for your troubles..." Not that I told her that I had killed her ex-husband by the way.

I really loved Kate but I thought that if I had married her, I'd be coming home often to a giant pie because I killed someone on her not-so-subtle request, just like I did for my

beloved mom. I thought I had to put her six feet under. I had cowardly fired a shot at the unwary Kate. Yet, the thought that Kate's giant pie might just be sheer giant pie still keeps me up at night.

Hugh Behm-Steinberg's writing can be found most recently in *X-Ray, Roi Fainéant, ergot, Heavy Feather Review* and *Denver Quarterly.* His short story "Taylor Swift" won the Barthelme Prize from *Gulf Coast*. A collection of prose poems and microfiction, *Animal Children,* was published by Nomadic/Black Lawrence Press. He lives in Barcelona.

Castellers

We've lived in the neighborhood long enough: we get recruited for the castelling team. "You're short," the president of our building tells my wife. "You'll make a perfect middle person for my granddaughter to climb on top of."

I haven't been little for a very long time; I'm not going to be climbing on top of anyone anytime soon. I'll be in the pinya, the base with all the other big-ass people, buttressing.

I feel sad about it. If only I had moved out here when I was a child, I could have known that feeling, of climbing carefully up the waists and backs and shoulders of my neighbors until I stood at the wobbling tippy top, to give a brief wave or a kiss to the thousands in the plaza around us, before climbing down again, past the older brothers and cousins of my schoolmates, my parents and oxenlike teachers holding up that tower of our bodies.

But tonight, just as I'm about to fall asleep, you climb on top of me. "Hold still," you say as you balance.

"What are you doing?" I say.

"I'm practicing."

"Oh," I say, and I try to hold steady.

"Breathe," you tell me. "You can't do this without breathing."

I breathe.

You hold still.

"Oh," you say.

"What?"

"I can see, out the window, over at our neighbors! Nuria, she's also on top of her husband. She just waved at me, I think."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castell

Toby Tucker Hecht is a writer and scientist who lives and works in Bethesda, Maryland. At least thirty of her stories have been published either in print or in online literary journals. A native New Yorker with a rather traditional life, she writes fiction to explore more exciting lives than her own. She is now working on a collection of short stories, and a series of linked short stories. Some of her previously published short stories and flash fiction can be found at https://tobythecht.substack.com.

The Old School

We learned about the impending destruction of the old elementary school in a banner headline in the local gazette with three excited exclamation points proclaiming the new school project. The town had scores of families with several generations that had attended the old school and so in commemoration of the fifty years of teaching first graders how to read, third graders how to do long division, and the many immigrant children who lived in the town how to be new Americans, the neighborhood decided to hold an appreciation breakfast on the schoolyard grounds, two hours before the wrecking ball was scheduled to arrive to knock the building into rubble.

It was a sunny July morning and although it was a workday, the turnout was large; kids rode their bikes or kicked soccer balls, while parents and grandparents sipped coffee, ate doughnuts, and discussed the upgrades they would expect in the new school: the media center with up-to-date information technology, the modernized lunchroom, and the hands-on laboratories even for kindergarten classes.

I stood in the yard and experienced a wave of nostalgia because although I had not attended the school, both my daughters had, and I believed that the teachers and the school both contributed in no small part to their success and self-esteem later in life. But as I imagined like everyone else there, I expected the new school to be magnificent. Then I saw a young man, perhaps thirty, dressed in a business suit, but with a toddler in his arms, walk around to the side of the building and plant a kiss on its rough brick exterior.

Marc Audet lives near New Haven, Connecticut, where he is self-employed as a web application developer. His short stories, creative nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in Across the Margin, Flash Fiction Magazine, Uppagus, Rappahannock Review, The Prose Poem, The Gilded Weathervane, Flash Boulevard, 10 By 10 Flash Fiction, and elsewhere.

Captain Ahab on the *Titanic*

The shrill hiss of steam from the boiler room wakes Ishmael from that nightmare of the whaling ship. The clock on his bunk shelf reads 3:13 in the morning.

The dream had come back to haunt him, Captain Ahab thrown back a century, chasing a white whale off the coast of Newfoundland. Ishmael begging him to stop. The old man refusing to listen. The great white beast swimming effortlessly on the port side off the bow.

Ishmael feels the sweat dripping from his forehead, his cabin steam-filled like a sauna. Better check the engine room. He puts on his boots, grabs his torch. The ship heaves as he lurches down the passageway. He feels the pistons pounding under his feet. Standing by the door, he feels the heat radiating from the boiler, reminding him of the forges in Portsmouth. Has the Captain gone mad?

He climbs up to the bridge, gripping the railings, pushing through a gathering of passengers unable to sleep. The hull creaks, its steel plates flexing as the ship pushes through the sea.

Captain Ahab stands alone on the bridge, focusing his field glasses on the hazy dim shape coming into view.

"Permission to speak, sir!"

"Speak!" roars the captain.

"The boiler is overheating! All the vents are blown wide open! The gauges are in the red! Sir!"

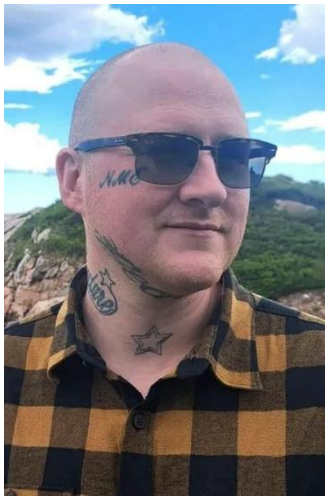
"They'll hold! Full speed ahead! We're going to catch the beast!"

The northern lights shimmer above the horizon, the ocean calm, and Ishmael sees a cold white gleaming massif approaching them.

"Captain! Iceberg dead ahead!"

"Noooo! A sign from God Almighty! At last, the beast is mine!"

Ishmael shudders, staring into oblivion.



Joe Couture lives in rural Nova Scotia. He is the author of work published in NYU's Washington Square Review, The Gorko Gazette, Dark Winter Lit, and elsewhere. His work has been nominated for Best Small Fictions 2027.

Pizza Night

Josh was sitting in traffic as he did every weekday afternoon, trapped between fellow motorists and endless responsibilities. He was waiting to advance a car's length as the screaming middle-schoolers in the pickup loop gradually accepted their rides. It was his off day.

Cassie started attending French-immersion in September. If she had gone to the English school, she would have continued bussing, as she had throughout elementary. Diane insisted that Cassie learn French; she didn't want her daughter to end up like them, working retail in her forties. Josh used to work dayshifts as a cashier but transferred to the overnight stocking team so he could chauffeur Cassie. Now, he worked eleven-to-seven and his off days changed weekly.

The door slammed; Josh jolted awake. Cassie often walked down the line of cars to meet him. She hadn't noticed he had dozed off again. Thankfully, his foot stayed on the brake. He must not have slept long, because no one behind him had honked.

Cassie pulled her door shut quickly as the car crawled forward. Josh crept out of the line to make a U-turn. Cassie started talking about something that had happened that day with a girl named Katie, whose name sounded vaguely familiar to him. He listened enough to give automated responses at the right time. Mostly, he thought about his left knee; it had been killing him lately. Some of the senior guys on the shift wore kneepads. They told him he could get a good pair for about fifty bucks. He would talk to Diane about it before payday.

There was a large bump.

"Dad!"

“Relax, Cass, I just clipped the curb.” She turned in her seat to look behind them as he continued, “So what’s the deal with Katie?” Then he repeated Cassie’s story as best he could, to spur her participation.

“Dad, you’ve got to stop!”

“Can’t do, Bucko. You’ve got band practice.”

Cassie saw a white-haired woman kneeling over a small body on the road. The woman was screaming. Beside her, an angry man was pointing at them.

“Turn around, Cass. If we get into an accident, you’ll break your back sitting like that.”

“Dad! We gotta go back; we hit someone!”

Josh refused to look in his mirrors and forced a chuckle. “It was *the curb!* C’mon, you think your old man would run a kid over and keep going?”

As they exited the school loop, the body and the people disappeared. Her dad regularly hit the curb—he wasn’t a very good driver. Even if there was an accident, he wouldn’t know, and even if he did, there was nothing he could do about it.

“Hey Cass, guess what?”

She looked up at him. He stopped chewing his inner lip to tell her, “Mom’s bringing pizza on her way home tonight—it’s a surprise.” Josh winked. Cassie smiled a little, ignored the sound of distant sirens, and talked about her upcoming practice.

Sushma R Doshi holds a PhD in International Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. A Pushcart nominee, she likes to write and dream. She enjoys being a stand up comedienne sometimes. She currently resides in India.

Don’t bother about it

I was an only child. A rarity those days. Most people in the neighborhood had three or more children. Lipi Vyas was the only child without any siblings. Most adults looked at me with sympathy.

“Don't you wish for a sibling? You must miss one?” They would probe. Discretion wasn't a quality people possessed.

I would just smile and shrug.

Their curiosity didn't stop there.

“Did Lipi’s parents not want any more children or was there any physical problem because of which they couldn't have any children?” They would whisper amongst themselves. My parents chose to ignore the murmurs.

However, psychological pressure is like the rain. Much as you wish not to notice it, you instinctively draw open an umbrella to protect yourself. My parents spent as much time as possible with me and bought me books to keep me company. To their dismay I became a bookworm. I devoured books. All kinds. I lived in a world of fairies and knights. Sometimes with murderers and spies. Most often in foreign lands, in snow-clad mountains and pristine beaches. So Ma tried to encourage me to play with the neighbours. The Mehras with their four children, three boys and a girl. They would often ask me to come over to play. I think Mrs Mehra felt their daughter, Simi, needed to play with girls. On Ma’s insistence, I accepted their offer.

Gradually, I started to spend time with the Mehras. I didn't play much. I would quietly sit in a corner with a colouring book and broken crayons. Simi would sit with me once in a while. But mostly she would be tumbling around with her brothers breaking stuff, getting screamed at. Mrs Mehra revelled in what she assumed was social service.

“Poor dear…she enjoys being with us,” she used to tell everyone.

Ma, of course, got to hear about it.

I knew she felt pangs of guilt at what appeared as my lonely existence. One day, as I was reading slumped on the couch and Ma was knitting, her needles going clack clack in the still atmosphere, she turned to gaze at me.

“I need to ask you something…,” she said.

“Yeah …,” I answered and looked at her quizzically.

“Do you wish that you were part of a family like the Mehras?”

“What ?” I asked. I was a trifle nonplussed.

“Well…you don't have anyone to play with…fight with… ”

I burst into laughter.

“Visiting the Mehras makes me appreciate my home more. I would never want a home like theirs.” I said.

Ma looked pleasantly surprised.

I didn't tell Ma that Mr Mehra was abusing his wife. His wife enjoyed stealing from other women’s purses. The sons picked on younger children. Simi had ganged up with her brothers to bully me. But I hadn't let them. I realised they were envious of me.

No. Ma didn't need to know, She would stop me from visiting them. Why deprive myself of entertainment?

“Don't worry about it,” I said.