



ILLUS



pleasantries, she charged straight to the point. The onslaught was sharp.

"Where is the sheet?"

Drawing a blank from me, she pretended she was shocked to see my feign ignorance.

"Where have you hidden away my child's drawings?" Continued her pointed verbal deluge.

"The What?"

"You know our children are going to participate in the drawing competition. I had given my son something to practice for it. And now you've hidden it away somewhere. I know you, you want your son to win."

It then dawned on me. Receiver still in my hand, my mind flitted across square feet of space-zones, and settled in on the nearly brimming bath tub with four paper boats lying in various stages of disintegration! It had been one of those rare days when the children had pitched camp at my place. 'Aunty' had embarked on a shopping expedition that day. Their painting session over, we had decided to play boat boat, and paper boats materialised from the few sheets of scribbled creativity lying on the floor! By the time her son returned home, the tutored piece of 'extempore' art (for that's precisely what the contest was meant to have been, and extempore!) had finished a nearly round-the-world spin twice over in my bath.

I knew she was not the one to take it lying down. Better sense prevailed,

and I muttered a quick apology. I tried to placate my seething neighbour by telling her that having sat with the two kids after a long time, I could see that my child was no match for hers, and there was no way he would win the first prize there.

I'm sure my words meant nothing. For a while after that episode, it so appeared, that the son was barred from coming to my house, and my son suddenly ceased being 'like her son'. Having sensed a sudden coolness, my son at long last acknowledged that his natural mother was not so useless, after all. The flip side was that my afternoon siesta became a thing of the past.

And then the contest happened last evening, where the artist son did manage the first prize. My son went there too, scribbled his name at three different places on the drawing sheet, gulped down his pack of juice and wafers provided to the contestants, and walked back beaming. He too, in his own way, did conquer the world.

This morning, the neighbour called to politely enquire if my son was free to hop across to her's in the afternoon. I did an impromptu jig right there. Even before she had hung up, my fingers had started calling my parlour for an afternoon appointment!

All's well that ends with me on the massage table, my son back at his favourite haunt, and the neighbour wearing the Pied Piper mantle all over again!

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