

FICTION

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TROUBLES

No one is even listening to Mr Ali. Mr Ali is such a nice man. He almost wept and said to me, "Sarkar Sahib, tell me what to do?"

The wife said, 'When you are helping him, why tell me? Is it so easy to uproot tenants? Won't they go to court?'

'No, because already people are throwing pieces of bricks and stones at the house. These missiles will drive them away. Honestly, the unsocial couple have become exhausted with the ghostly visits every night. And now this scandal. Ali Sahib will try tomorrow for the last time. If they do not agree to go, then

Ali Sahib will probably go for litigation. But, before that, they will probably leave. The neighbours say they are packing their belongings.'

Suddenly, the wife realised the tenants' daily routine was not being followed today. Unlike other days, they were not sitting close together or playing with their children. A still sense of foreboding

enveloped the house, yet they were busy. Unlike on other days, their affectionate squabbles were not visible to her eyes, and that is why she did not have to look away. Perhaps she was thinking of them. What had changed them? Looking at them, hope and belief filled her heart. There was still love and trouble-free happiness in this world. She decided she must carry the burden of their happiness. She would not let others break up the nest of one loving couple.

Next day, everyone heard in amazement the way Sarkar Sahib's wife had gone over to the couple's house and scolded them openly. 'I may be your distant aunt, shameless girl. I cannot look after all my relatives. But I was there at the wedding. Maybe my present was not so nice. Is that any reason not to look up your aunt?'

'Auntie', the girl burst into tears.

'Never mind, dear, your uncle was abroad, and your husband would not know me after seeing me for only one day, but would I throw you out? There is nothing to fear. Let us see what anybody comes to say now.'

On returning home, Sarkar Sahib said, 'You should have told me earlier. I feel so foolish.'

His wife said, 'I did not feel the need. I can hardly bear all my troubles, how can I bear the troubles of my nephews and nieces?'

'But you have, haven't you?'

'When the need arises, one has to do it. You don't have any idea how many gossip-mongers and trouble-makers there are who cannot tolerate the happiness of others.'

Sarkar Sahib said, 'Tell me truly, are they related to you? Do you know them? Or are you doing something irreligious?'

'Irreligious? Don't scare me with your religion. Black-marketing, profiteering, usury, breaking up someone's daughter's marriage, or making someone lose a job, not recognizing merit, denying people their true rights, where is religion in these activities? Let Allah judge. As a social worker, can you not be open-minded?'

Ashamed, Sarkar Sahib left. In his heart, however, he could not help praising his wife. He himself had been

uneasy at the breaking up of a household and had wanted to stop this great misfortune from happening in the couple's life. As he was leaving, he heard his wife say, 'No one can light the lamp of peace in a house, but everyone wants to blow it out. I know, I felt it when the plates broke early in the morning that some people were trying to break up the peace of the world. Do you hear me? From now on, that girl is not only my niece, she is my adopted daughter. Tell everybody to ask me if they want to feast at their wedding, but no one should try to create any more trouble.'

Sarkar Sahib stopped in his tracks. He realised that his poorly educated, absent-minded, superstitious wife had a beautiful affectionate heart. He wondered why other mothers, other daughters didn't have a heart like hers.

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LA BOCA & SAN TELMO

We carefully navigated our path towards El Caminito, walking past some of the most stunning murals and tongue-in-cheek graffiti. The narrow alleyways leading out of the main artery were lined with derelict housing. We approached El Caminito from the rear. The cobblestone strip was lined with sun-speckled, brightly hued buildings, mostly made of corrugated tin. Dozens of artists had their artwork on display, making it feel much like an open-air art gallery. As we turned the corner towards the main strip, we were met simultaneously by throngs of camera-toting tourists, a dance troupe just finishing off their tango routine and kitschy souvenir shops and mediocre cafes. As much as I was delighted in

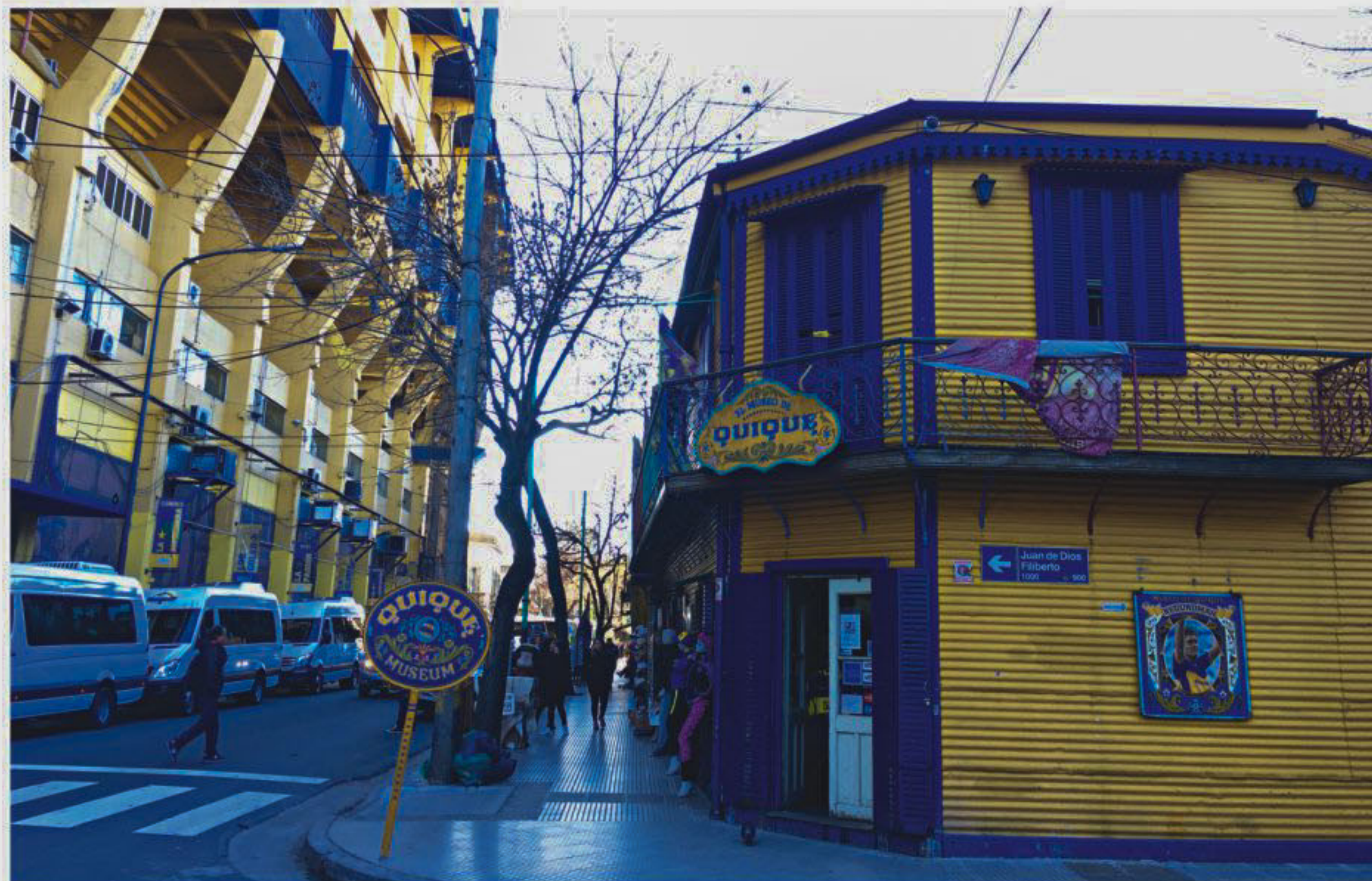


Streetside tango in San Telmo

trying to capture the vibrant scenes before me, it couldn't have been further from the real Boca—homes built of rusty corrugated tin, the paint peeling and window panes broken.

San Telmo

Think cobble-stoned streets and opulent facades, albeit faded and peeling. San Telmo is the tango capital of Latin America, with *milongas* (tango venues) around every corner. On Sundays the



La Bombonera and surrounds - awash in blue and gold



San Telmo Sunday Market

narrow streets are taken over by a street market which promises a heady mix of artisanal wares, cheap, colourful souvenirs, crafts and vintage clothes. We spent our first weekend exploring the endless lines of stalls, some of which were no more than a sheet spread on the ground upon which all manners of crafts and pre-loved knickknacks were displayed. We strolled past immaculately dressed tango dancers on street corners, their moves sensual and almost, spiritual.

Overcome by the smell of freshly barbecued meat, we followed the smoke to find several nondescript carparks converted into open-air *parilladas* (barbecue joints), complete with live bands and plastic chairs upon which locals sat wolfing down fat choripans slathered with generous helpings of tangy *chimichurri* (herb sauce). We wound our way over some of the most treacherous terrain—cratered footpaths which in certain segments had given way completely to piles of rubble—an impossible feat for our stroller. But with the help of locals, we prevailed. Mustachioed shopkeepers and buxom grandmothers alike were only too happy to help us lift and carry the stroller over obstructed sections. My son, on the other hand, wasn't too pleased.

San Telmo was certainly not all about the weekend market, a fact that was driven home when we stayed in the area for a few days. Quaint little *empanada* (stuffed pastry) shops and hidden second-hand bookstores made for fascinating discoveries. The



Stumbling upon

neighbourhood is also home to some of the best Argentinian fare in the city. We became quick fans of the *choripan* and *bife de lomo* (tenderloin steak) at Desnivel, a no-frills local *parilla* which we'd frequent.

It was easy to get lost in the antiques market, stocked top to bottom with every kind of paraphernalia imaginable and more. The two/three-storey buildings were some of the first ones to be built in Buenos Aires. Some of the buildings had shabby exteriors, while others, in contrast, were covered in some of the most remarkable graffiti, and housed funky souvenir shops. But the *barrio* had managed to retain its old-world charm.

Next stop: Colonia Del Sacramento, Uruguay!

Samai Haider is a writer, traveller, artist and... economist. If her rather odd amalgamation of interests isn't dotty enough, she is currently travelling around South America - with her pack and toddler strapped to her back. Read about the fables of her foibles here at The Daily Star. You can see more of her work at: <http://samaihaider.com/>

TRAVEL