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“Wanted”, “Hopscotch”Layla Mascarenhas

Wanted

It was a warm evening. A strangely familiar figure was winding her way up my stairs. She stood at the open door and said, “Son, may I come in?” I loved the temerity of the lady. She called me “Son” after 40 long years! Where was she all this while?

She coughed and shuffled at the door. “Of course, please come in.” I couldn’t bear to say, “Mother.” Offering her a chair, I stood politely, waiting for the reason of her arrival. She exchanged some pleasantries and inquired whether I lived alone. “Yes, I live alone. I’ve lived alone for a long time.” She avoided my gaze as she dug her heels into the old rug. There was silence.

“I need some money,” she blurted out, “For my son’s kidney transplant.” I love the way she used the word “son” so easily, so interchangeably. No question about how I had survived, no niceties. She had somehow tracked me down and was asking me for money to save her beloved son.

The hospital nurse came out beaming, “Yes, they match. The tissue types match perfectly.” The boy who had been nurtured and cared for all these years was going to get more than my money; he was going to receive my kidney. I love the fairness of Life! And here was the woman who had thrown me into the garbage dump, smiling ear to ear.

“Mother, how did you know I was alive?”

“I watched the milkman rescue you that day....and I’ve seen you grow. I found out where you lived after the old man died.”

The old man had told me the truth.

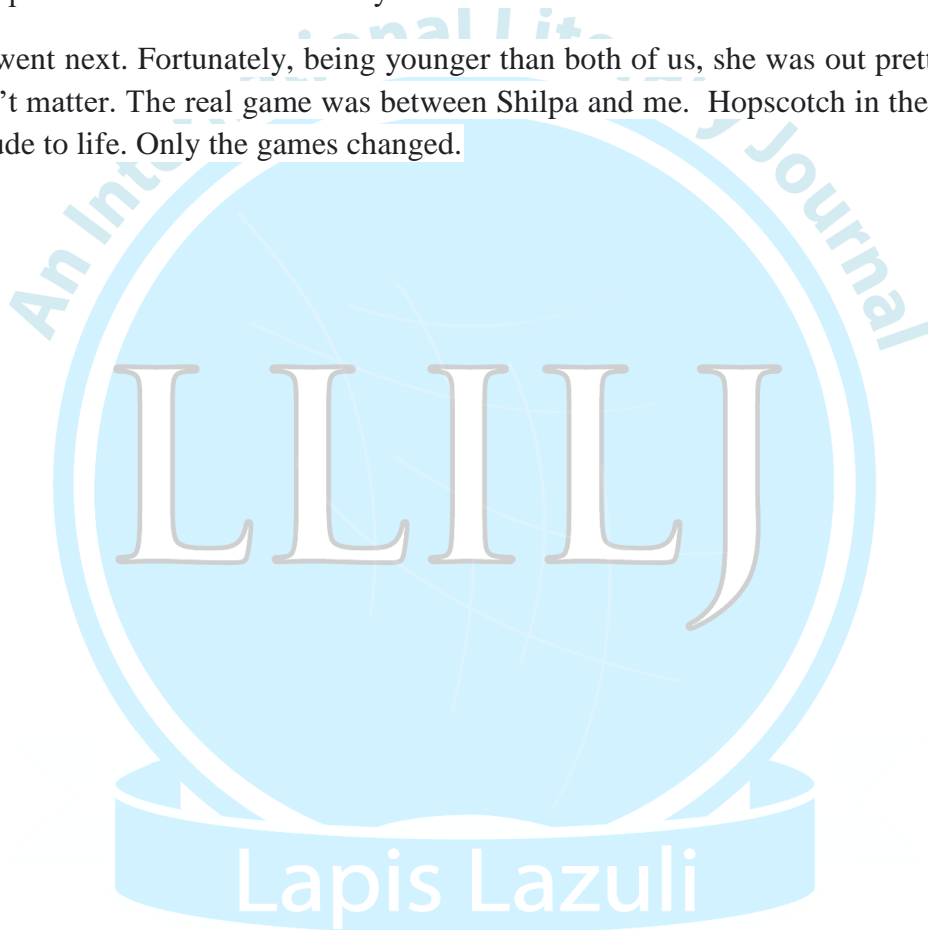
“Don’t worry, mum, at least one of us will survive,” said the young brat. “You will have at least one son!”

Hopscotch

The best time about afternoons was that our parents were sleeping. School and lunch were over; we had more than an hour before homework started. Climbing over the wall, I slipped into their noisy verandah. There was a feeling of unsupervised freedom that made afternoon games so much fun.

Shilpa was the cleverest of the three of us, she always won. Her younger sister was less skillful than us, which was a consolation. We carefully guarded our “tipperies,” those small, colored pieces of smooth broken bathroom tiles, or flattened pieces of stone. Each one owned her own tippery. Shilpa went first, hopping through the 10 squares with agility and confidence. It was my turn next, and invariably the tile would narrowly cross a line as I kicked it over the last few squares. There was a triumphant chorus of “Out!” as my tile settled on one of the lines.

Her sister went next. Fortunately, being younger than both of us, she was out pretty fast too. She really didn’t matter. The real game was between Shilpa and me. Hopscotch in the hot afternoons was a prelude to life. Only the games changed.



BIO-NOTE

Layla Mascarenhas has worn many hats: daughter, student, wife, mother, college lecturer, daughter-in-law, musician, and researcher. Her doctoral research was on Children’s Literature, and she continues researching and writing. She writes short fiction and poetry. She lives in Goa.

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