



We Do Not Make Love Here

A NOVEL

Nisha
Mehraj



“One can’t help but feel emotionally connected to the characters in Nisha Mehraj’s *We Do Not Make Love Here*. Each of them is a narrator in this complex family saga, sharing intimate details of their lives, seeking validation, or even justification, for their actions...as if they have never been heard, or seen. For the people closest to them are those whom they push away most.”

—HARESH SHARMA, RESIDENT PLAYWRIGHT FOR THE NECESSARY STAGE

“A tightly focused story with an intense spotlight on the deep subjectivities of seemingly everyday ordinary people. The ebb and flow of the narrative, moving back and forth spatially and temporally, is sustained by the psychologies, psychoses, frustrations and anxieties that are so often the very atoms that make up the humanities within which all of us reside. Over it all is the mantle of time and how it flies: impervious, inexorable, indifferent and disinterested, peppered by love and hate, desires and disgust, attacks and retreats and, always, the implacable dissonance of experience. And found throughout is a strong, visceral presence of women—as daughters, wives, mothers, girlfriends and workers—which serves to knit the story together. Profound.”

—T. SASITHARAN, CULTURAL COMMENTATOR,

CULTURAL MEDALLION WINNER AND EBFP 2022 JUDGE

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Published in Singapore by Epigram Books
www.epigram.sg

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National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Name(s): Mehraj, Nisha, 1985–
Title: We do not make love here : a novel / Nisha Mehraj.
Description: Singapore : Epigram Books, 2022.
Identifier: ISBN 978-981-49-8469-0 (paperback)
ISBN 978-981-49-8470-6 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Arranged marriage—Singapore—Fiction. |
Man-woman relationships—Singapore—Fiction.
Classification: DDC S823—dc23

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

First edition, August 2022.

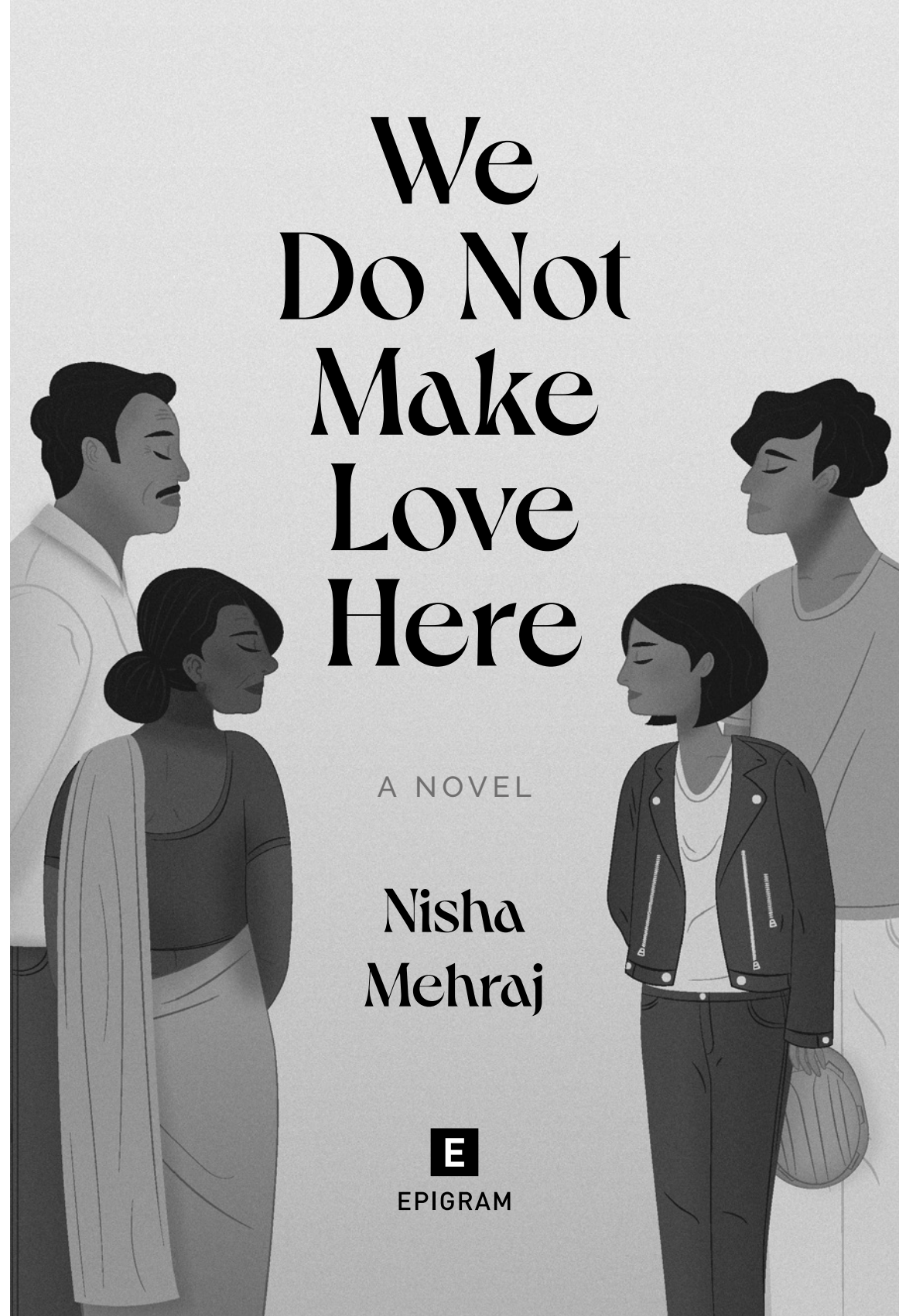
We Do Not Make Love Here

A NOVEL

Nisha
Mehraj



EPIGRAM



for bumblebee

I miss you more every day

Chapter 1

Malli

What's good for me is only good for me.

I parked my Mazda, got out and checked my watch, even though I had looked at the clock on the dashboard a few seconds ago. I stood in the car park, counting the number of vehicles. The restaurant had opened for dinner just a while ago. I knew I was late. I had got lost. I was not familiar with the roads yet. I unfastened the second button of my shirt, wanting to look casual but realised it revealed more, and I was not about to hint that I was relaxed enough to allow more. Before leaving the office, I had made sure my fringe wasn't greasy, flopping limply on my forehead like overcooked vegetables. But after looking at my reflection in the wing mirror, I decided to pin it up instead. I took deep breaths to steady my nerves, biding my time as I climbed the steps.

The restaurant, Bread and Butter, was part of Hotel Edwina, named after Lord Mountbatten's wife. The hotel was a six-storey refurbished colonial bungalow that was tucked away in the deep end of the ECP highway. It was close to the beach but far away from all other amenities. When I had looked up the restaurant's name, the search had listed the hotel as a six-star accommodation, and

Bread and Butter was featured as one of the go-to places in quite a few articles. It was described as a quiet spot to have a relaxing time. Sure. I could relax. A few nods and smiles could be arranged even if the conversation was beyond stale. A final wave of goodbye could mark its expiry. “Relaxing” could be arranged.

I stopped in front of the entrance and considered my reflection. Before long, a waiter opened one of the glass doors. He smiled and spoke with a thick Indian accent that I was still getting used to. I sighed instead of returning his smile and immediately regretted it. I hadn’t meant to be rude. I tried to apologise, but he was already greeting the next party. He could simply file me away as an ignorant tourist, I told myself before spotting Siddharth and his companion at the far corner, already having started on their appetisers. He smiled and waved at me.

I sighed.

That was meant for him.

It was officially my fourth month in Chennai. I had postponed this meeting till I had the office set up and running. I didn’t want to seem flustered when I finally saw him.

It had roughly been six months since Siddharth and I had shared the same space. Ever since Mum and Mummy had properly retired, they had often been invited to go with him wherever his assignments took him, with most of these trips lasting at least a month. As a nature photographer, Siddharth had been based in Kyoto the longest. After spending eight years in Japan, he was now in India. Come August, he would have completed two years here. He came back home to visit the family every three months or so, yet Mum and Mummy had especially arranged for him to surprise Uncle Chandru on his seventy-third birthday. Although I always thought

of Uncle Chandru as more of a father to me than to him, everyone thought it would be nice if their only child graced the occasion.

Aunty Meera acted the least shocked while Uncle Chandru was observed to rub his chest now and then, causing the rest of us to worry the entire evening. Even on a healthy diet that did not permit rice more than thrice a week, it was still difficult to get Uncle Chandru to lose beyond the eight kilos he had already lost over the past year. Of course, the family knew where he had his midnight snack with my daughter, but no one had the heart to stop the two of them. Even Aunty Meera, the disciplinarian, whose altered goal in life was to get my baby into Harvard, closed one eye and kept her comments to herself when Uncle Chandru made his less-than-quiet entrances back into their room.

Aunty Meera had made it clear to all of us that she intended to stick around until my daughter’s graduation. She said she’d know when to call upon death. Having survived her cold stares all my life, I was pretty sure she would have her way even in death. It was usually Uncle Chandru who’d get all teary-eyed in those moments. He would skip his snacks altogether and add thirty more minutes to his morning walk around the estate for the next week or two, informing us that he was preparing to be around well into my daughter’s marriage.

“Your mother has escaped. No way I’m letting you do the same. There’s only this one thing I asked of your mother. One thing. Does anyone respect me in this family?” he’d tell my daughter and to whoever stood around listening, before forcing them all to follow him on one of his walks.



Bread and Butter was not crowded, with only five tables occupied. I was glad they had started on their food. I didn't want to eat in front of them. I thought that might make me appear vulnerable. Or maybe not eating would make me seem that way. I couldn't be sure. I was not hungry anyway. I wasn't going to lie if they asked.

"Hungry?" Siddharth asked.

"No. Actually, I could use a drink."

I waited to sit down beside his friend. She smiled sheepishly and touched her fringe, and I wondered if the way mine looked had triggered her action. Her soup spoon clattered onto the plate as soon as she realised I was eyeing the seat. She covered her mouth with one hand as she lifted her red bag from the chair with the other. She looked a little lost, turning her head from left to right, considering an alternate spot for her bag. Her square-shaped, patterned wooden bangles knocked against one another, while her dupatta, draped across her chest, kept sliding off her shoulders, her ample breasts a distraction even to me. It was all so exaggerated.

"Thanks," I muttered to the waiter who pulled up a chair for her bag.

I stared at Siddharth as he went on drinking from his large serving plate of soup. He slurped noisily, making a pig of himself. He dunked his garlic bread into the remaining broth, swirling it while he swallowed, and then proceeded to take a bite. The crumbs fell back into the dark puddle, light brown flakes floating on murky liquid. I imagined dandruff. I looked away, suddenly itchy, and caught her eyeballing me. She couldn't have been more than twenty-five years of age. She was a child.

"I am Sashi?" she said and grinned.

She sounded like she was just remembering this piece of information. I tried to be polite. I nodded and waved, although extending a hand would have seemed more professional. I didn't want to have to touch anybody at the table.

She seemed offended by my gesture, her grin becoming a scowl as she returned to her soup. She continued studying it closely, her spoon carelessly scooping the contents from it and letting them fall back in.

"Wine?" Siddharth offered.

"Could I see your cocktail menu please?" I replied to the waiter instead.

"Classy," he commented after hearing my order.

"Please," I said and leant back, supporting my elbows on the armrests and lacing my fingers together in front of me. "So," I continued.

"Sashi can take you around if you like. She can introduce you to some of the better stores. You could shop for clothes that'll make you blend in."

"What's wrong with what I'm wearing?"

"They're grossly manly. A collared shirt tucked into jeans? Where do you think you are?"

"I didn't know I had to choose my location to dress a certain way. These look decent."

"A *certain* way. I rest my case," he said and cleaned the plate with what remained of his already soaked bread.

I hated it when he listened so intently, yet made it all seem so casual. I was feeling hot around my neck. I tried to decide if it was just him or if it was because Sashi was around. I decided to go with the weather. It was fucking humid outside, easily reaching thirty-

eight degrees. The fact that we were in an air-conditioned place did little to change my mind.

“That’s very kind of you, Sashi, with your busy schedule and all. But I am fine.”

“I love shopping. It is how we met.”

I was not interested in their love story. I couldn’t give two hoots about how these fuckers met. I couldn’t care less if she told me he fucked her in the fitting room. I didn’t know why I was swearing so much. I told myself to recalibrate my thinking. I wanted to be an adult. *The adult in this scenario.*

“Maybe you’ll give me a call if you’d like me to arrange something. One of the Sundays? Or take a weekday.”

“Thank you. It is very nice of you.”

He laughed, a deep, throaty one that made me self-conscious. *I did not crack a joke, you asshole.*

“When do I get to see her?” asked Siddharth.

“She just started school. She is getting used to things. I am taking it slow.”

“You have been here twelve weeks?” asked Sashi.

I didn’t respond to that. I just looked at her and then back at him. *Who counts things in weeks? Was she pregnant?* I quickly scanned her appearance, to see if I could spot a bulge. I was reminded instead of what lay hidden, beneath the dupatta, and wondered if they were of that size due to biological demands. How noble. She was transforming into a vessel—bringing a human into being.

I sipped on my drink; a cool, burning sensation travelled down my throat. I saw him watch me. Did he know I hated the cocktail?

It was Aunty Meera who had suggested that I meet him. During one of our weekly calls when I updated her about accounts and

consulted her about clients and workers, someone had opened the door of the study where she sat talking to me, and I had heard my daughter squealing and someone else’s loud laughter cut into our call. Like a scalpel, the giggles and chatter sliced through our conversation so neatly, I didn’t know I was bleeding until some time had passed.

“When does this get easier?” I had asked when Aunty Meera came back on the line after shutting the door. She had sighed, and we had remained in companionable silence. I woke up to her text the next morning.

Now, seated in front of him, I wasn’t sure why exactly I had taken her advice. Perhaps I was lonely or maybe I just missed the rush of blood to my head whenever I saw him. It was difficult to explain, even to myself, how it was easier to be mad. At this age, I thought it strange—how he still managed to have that effect on me.

Sashi sipped on what appeared to be black tea while listening to us talk. I couldn’t bring myself to start a conversation that would include her as I hadn’t planned on meeting her. When Siddharth texted to say he’d be bringing a friend along, I had replied, *Sure* :). The smiley face was an accessory. I wanted him to know I was settled enough to afford such commonplace bullshit.

Chapter 2

Siddharth

We were not friends like that.

A sudden thought came back to me as I saw her give Sashi the once-over. *She has never approved of the women I dated.* She would never admit to it, of course. What fun was there in being so bloody predictable? But she was an open book to me. It had taken me a while to get to this stage, but I have got the hang of it. Tell her no to something, and she'd want it even more badly. Say yes too soon, she'd change her mind about it; say it too late, she'd think of you as a pushover. So what do you do? You listen. You let her make the decision. Then you smile and say: *fine*. Simply. Endearingly. Like you have had that word in you from even before her story began. I'd seen her settle. She'd relax and look into the distance. Don't take your eyes off her because it would happen. She'd turn back at you, her eyes pleading—waiting to see if you'd say something more. Don't say a word. Let her start the new sentence. The day could not get any better than that.



I had been waiting for Malli at the benches by the field. She was late. I had football practice in the afternoon, one final session before we played against Montford Secondary the next day. This was the only break I had before Maths and training. I winced as I ran my hand through my hair, matted and dry from the heat and sweat. I had just finished PE, and my hair felt like hardened bristles in my hand. I rubbed the ends of my sticky fingers together while watching for the students from the Design and Technology workshop on the second level to emerge after their lesson. I saw some of Malli's classmates making their way down to the canteen, but she wasn't among them. I hated having to wait, especially when I knew there was going to be a confrontation. I finally saw her sashaying towards me, her face buried in a book. She was pretending. I knew she was too mad to read. I also knew she'd do everything possible to play it cool and appear indifferent.

When she finally looked up from her book, I was staring at her.

"I am not going to address the tardiness," I began when she reached me.

"Fuck you. You are skipping Maths for this."

"I am trying to be polite."

"And I am trying to be honest."

"Why did you have to rat on her like that?" I asked.

"I didn't. Is that what *it* said? I swear, if I fucking find *it*—"

"Why can't you be nice and civil to another human being?" I tried again.

"Civil? Why were you not civil about the whole thing? I helped you with your homework! Why are my answers now everyone's property?"

"It's one other person, Lili!"

“It’s not the person I chose, Sid! Those were *my* solutions. Now the teacher is going to think I sold *my* answers. I am going to have to suffer detention.”

“Listen to yourself! You were not caught. You were not sent to detention. And for god’s sake, it’s one lousy practice!” I said, frustrated.

“Oh, so it’s one lousy practice now. God, you fucking piece of shit. I swear, Sid, I swear, if we were outside, I would have slapped you.”

“You could do it now. Why don’t you try?”

I took my duffel bag and walked off. God, she infuriated me so. I didn’t know why I still bothered with her. We were sixteen! I thought we were past the age of petty quarrels. The boys were right. I couldn’t keep one girl by my side without Malli destroying the relationship. She was a motormouth. Acid tongue. She was convinced that the world could be wrapped around her little finger. *You only need to be confident*, she’d say. Screw her. I’d had enough.

I walked into the general office and requested to see Mr Ng, my football teacher. I asked him if I could be excused from training. I coughed, rubbed my eyes and stooped a little to make it all seem authentic.

“You are not sick, you idiot. I just saw you finish your run.”

I threatened to visit the doctor. He sighed in exasperation, knowing an MC might mean I skip the game against Montfort. I promised to be back tomorrow. Before turning to leave, I confessed that I was not feeling it that day. He shook his head and complained about how a sportsman should not let his emotions affect him.

The loser thought he was Morgan Freeman from the movie *Se7en*, lecturing the hothead rookie Brad Pitt. I stood there listening, trying hard not to tell him that I had already seen the film.

At home later that day, I took a long shower before explaining to my dad that my training had been cancelled due to my coach calling in sick. I said not to tell Mum, who was upstairs taking a nap. He looked at me sternly and told me not to use the opportunity to watch porn, as it was still too early in the afternoon. He then burst out laughing at his own joke.

Ever since my sixteenth birthday, my dad had been acting weird. He had started using words and phrases like “stupid shit”, “porn” and “fuck” when my mum was not nearby. He would then smile or wink at me as though we were sharing a secret. I preferred it when he was so busy that he was hardly home. He used to talk to me only to check if I needed more pocket money. Those were the times. He was now more relaxed and spent a weekend or two working from home. And I had to put up with these strange interactions.

I walked out of the flat and saw Amma’s main door partially open. I could hear the radio in her kitchen blasting some Hindi number.

I found Amma in the living room, watching some serial on Sun TV. The women were in a temple, their faces shiny with tears. Sentimental music was playing in the background, interjected by a chorus of women breaking into a sudden descant so painfully melodramatic that you’d rather hear the women scream; it could have at least added a touch of realism to the scene.

“These women are always crying,” I said aloud before plonking myself on the sofa closest to the TV set. I stretched out, crossed

my ankles and folded my arms over my chest. I felt more at home here at my neighbours' than at my parents' place. I was practically raised by Amma, along with Malli. If someone mentioned home, it would be this.

A maisonette in the East, brick-walled and big. One could mistake the flat for a library upon entry. The room on the first floor was converted into a study hall. That's where Amma conducted her tuition classes. A wall was torn down and French doors were fixed to separate the study from the living room and kitchen. Two large, heavy oak tables were placed in the study, with a long blackboard running the length of the wall behind it. Ceiling-to-floor bookshelves were built against the adjacent wall, and the windows were draped with full-length lace curtains gifted to Amma by her mum years ago. The grey parquet floor with the dark wooden tables, the white shelves and the blackboard reminded me of an American farmhouse.

Amma majored in American literature in university. She lived with her two daughters and Malli. Both her daughters, Anita and Anuja, were unmarried. Malli called them Mum and Mummy. And Amma was Amma. To all of us.

My childhood was spent here in this household, while my parents worked long hours trying to build their business. My parents told me some time back that Amma had stopped taking money from them for babysitting me when I turned four. *He is one of us. And no one takes money for caring for one's own.*

Amma's TV was now showing a close-up of one of the women, probably the protagonist: a stereotypical, repressed housewife who struggles in silence. Bullied by her family, she soldiers on, treating everyone around her, especially her detractors, with benevolence.

It was all so fucking predictable. I hated these shows.

I reached for a piece of jackfruit from the bowl Amma held close to her tummy. "I hate your granddaughter," I said, biting into the yellow flesh harder than necessary.

"That makes two of us. Now shush. I want to finish this scene."

"It's almost five. They'll zoom in and out on the woman's face and end it. What brand of make-up do these women use? All that weeping and she still looks like a cake!"

"It's a show. Escapism. Don't overthink it," she said.

"Can't you at least turn off the radio? It's playing Hindi songs. And your TV is blaring!"

"I need to get up to do that." But she muted the TV's audio, took a mouthful of jackfruit and turned to me.

I gave an exasperated sigh and got to my feet. I switched off the radio in the kitchen, threw the jackfruit seed into the bin and returned to the sofa. I stretched out again while Amma remained seated in her armchair, chewing on her fruit.

"You skipped training because you both quarrelled? She has won, you know. You just allowed her to win."

"I don't care, man. This is not a competition. I was just so pissed. I would have done anything to get her to shut up. I know she is your granddaughter and all, but seriously, today was just the last straw for me."

"This straw of yours must be made of stainless steel. You reuse it ever so often."

I remained silent. Malli had always found inventive ways to irk me. She was a year younger than me but because she was born in December, Amma had decided to start her early. And she proved to be smarter than a good many of us. That only made her even

more of a pompous pain in the ass.

“You spoil her, you know,” I finally said.

“Me? No way. I make her go to bed without dinner on some days.”

“She claims it was because she didn’t like the food that night. She doesn’t take your punishments seriously. Maybe because they are not punishments at all!”

“You know, you need to learn how to speak like a sixteen-year-old. Maybe that’s the problem.”

“She insulted my girl, in front of everyone in her class! Do you know how hot this girl is? She is like the smartest girl in school. She was so tired after netball... Amma, you should have seen her. She was just about ready to cry! It was just one lousy practice. And Malli made it known to everyone that her work was copied.”

“Who did this *hot* girl copy her work from and how did Lili get to know?”

“From me! And yes, so I copied from Lili. Still! Why make a show of it?”

“Maybe Lili secretly likes you. Maybe she has been nursing this crush, and whenever you’re with a girl, she gets jealous and then she does all this so you pay her more attention, and then boom, both of you are an item.”

I stared at Amma. This was not the first time she had suggested this narrative. At one point, I even considered it. I figured there must be some truth in the matter. I mean, look at all the movies that revolved around friends becoming lovers. *Pretty in Pink*, *When Harry Met Sally* and *You’ve Got Mail*... But the thing was, I had asked Malli. I had checked. I was ready to give it a go.

“We have known each other all our lives. How bad could it be?”

I had said after dinner one night.

Malli had laughed and called me an asshole for even suggesting it. She said I was more than a friend but could never make it to be her boyfriend. *You are too soft*. That’s how she put it.

Soft? Me? Fuck her.

“I think she might be trying to be a lesbian,” I suggested.

“Now ain’t that something,” said Amma. “Then again, she is not ready for such liberal experimentation. There is still too much anger in her.”

“And I get the bulk of it!”

As I followed Amma into the study, I noticed a tall stack of books arranged against one end of the wall. I picked one up from the pile. “Why have you brought down Lili’s books?”

“Leave them,” said Amma and continued wiping the blackboard clean of the mind map from yesterday’s argumentative essay. I placed the book on the table and flipped through the sheets of paper in the tray labelled *Marked* to see if my script was among them.

We both turned when we heard the sound from the television suddenly come back on, before going dead. Malli walked out of the living room, glanced in our direction for a split second before climbing the stairs up to her room.

“You don’t get the bulk of it. We live with her, remember,” said Amma, and she sat down on one of the stools after transferring the assessment books that were on it beside the *Unmarked* tray. “It’s not easy being her.”

“Well, it’s not easy being *with* her either,” I said, eyeing the blurb at the back of the book. I looked up at Amma before sliding the novel over to her. “Which Sec Four kid would read this lewd stuff? She puts herself through this. I’d even say willingly.”

“*Lolita* is not a lewd text.”

“It is not a text meant for a sixteen-year-old.”

“You’re right,” Amma said and smiled. She removed a folded sheet of paper pressed between two of her own books that she kept on one side of the table and waved it at me. “I told her she wasn’t ready for *Lolita* and if she still goes ahead with it, she would need to write an essay defending the protagonist’s actions.”

“So she wrote this?” I asked as I reached for the paper. As I read through its contents, I realised it wasn’t a formal essay but a letter, written from the perspective of who I assumed was the protagonist. “It’s brilliant, considering I know dog shit about the work.”

“She frightens me sometimes,” said Amma, looking out into the distance. From where we sat, we could see only the sky looking stretched and ironed out and the rooftop of the block adjacent to ours. Amma’s hand rested on the table, her index finger rising and falling, a soundless beat, like a metronome to her thoughts. I re-read the letter and then stared out into the cloudless blue of the sky that was so bright and almost white. It was not a pretty sight. It made my eyes water. “As much as I don’t want to read her like how I would a literary character... I don’t know,” said Amma more to herself than me, and sighed.



I looked at Malli now, seated across from me, sipping some fancy concoction from her martini glass that I knew she didn’t like. She blinked a few times to let the taste dissipate. She scratched the back of her neck and looked at Sashi with such loathing that I couldn’t help but smile. Malli still hadn’t seemed to realise that she didn’t

have to speak her thoughts. Her countenance was sufficient to get her point across.

She was not dressed to impress. She was wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, buttoned all the way except for the one close to the collar. She would have looked a little more relaxed with another one undone. She still looked uptight, with her hair in a loose bun and her fringe haphazardly pinned to the side. Fine, unruly tendrils came to a rest at her neck and forehead, which she kept touching every few minutes. She sighed, impatient for the small talk to be over.

“Sid says you two grew up together.”

“Yes, that was like ages ago.”

“Sid says you were quite a gangster in school. There were people who feared you.”

“This Sid seems to have a big mouth,” said Malli before upending her drink. “Fuck!” she finally managed after swallowing, her face looking pained and flushed.

Sashi chewed on her lips as she retreated deeper into her seat. Adjusting her dupatta, she glanced at me helplessly before toying with her bangles.

Sashi was there to provide the right amount of distraction for Malli while I pondered the consequences of this meeting. I knew it was immature of me to have waited till the eleventh hour to inform Malli that I would be bringing someone along, but I wasn’t ready to see her alone. The moments of awkwardness that had collected between us were starting to resemble a swamp, swimming with man-eating crocodiles. To be seen here with her, after twelve years of her careful avoidance, was not something I was particularly interested in indulging. To be honest, I would have been quite

satisfied if she had got up and left without a reason. It would have just been...easy.

Without being outrightly rude, Malli had made it clear that the friendship we once shared was over. She sat with my mother during meals, discussed the company's accounts when the rest of us played carom or would be in the study if she was not out visiting any of the worksites.

I chatted with my parents over Skype, arranged for the family to go on holidays through emails and group chats, and met them at the chosen locales—all in the absence of Malli. Auntie Anita and Auntie Anuja practically lived with me at one point when I was based in Kyoto. They backpacked around Japan, acted like undergrads and became fast friends with the other seniors living in my estate. They giggled over sake and even learnt Japanese from a retired primary school teacher who lived near Kiyomizu-dera.

Malli's travels were limited to the ones across the causeway. She straddled projects in Singapore and KL and stayed at my parents' condo at East Coast if she really had to. The company had morphed under her vision, and renovating landed properties had become its niche. Even though she had enough staff overseeing the projects, she still made it a point to visit the offices and the various worksites regularly. And now, to alleviate her boredom, she had picked Chennai to open another branch.

The waiter who was topping up our water glasses paused as the manager rushed over to our table. He gestured an apology and informed me that I had to move my car since a VIP was coming in soon and they needed the space. He shook his head and appeared to be in physical pain as he directed another waiter, who had come

up behind him and whispered something into his ear. Sashi looked about ready to leave the restaurant altogether while Malli's eyes darted to the men conversing and then back at me.

"It's no big deal," I said. "I'll move it. Is there another vacant space?"

"Yes, sir, of course. We could move it for you. We just need the key," said the manager, looking relieved.

"I'll go check?" Sashi said to me and got up. "I don't mind, I mean..." She glanced at Malli.

"No, please," replied Malli, dragging her chair closer to the table to make way.

"You sure you don't want some of my fries?" I asked when the party left.

"I might throw up," she said, peering down at her shirt. "I kind of feel... Should I leave?"

I ate some of my fries and picked at my salad. As I chewed, I paid attention to only what lay in front of me. I replaced my urge to reply with thoughts on what I should put into my mouth next.

"Why is it I feel so tired when I'm around you?" she asked and reached for a French fry. She broke it in half, swallowed a portion and looked up at me.

I wiped my mouth before pushing my plate towards her. "Eat," I said and watched as she obeyed.



About the Author

Nisha Mehraj left full-time teaching and became a private tutor so she could pursue writing. The only home she has ever known is Singapore, yet she lives vicariously through her characters and escapes into the safety of the worlds she creates. It was her grandmother's passion for life that fuelled her own ambitions. She'd like to think she made her proud. Her short story "Chai" was published in *Mascara Literary Review* in 2012. *We Do Not Make Love Here* is her first novel.



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Chandru, a third-generation Singaporean, realises his ambition through an arranged marriage. His wife, Meera, fights her fate by living a double life. Unhappily married, they make sense of their decisions through a study of their own past. Siddharth, their only son, is practically raised next door with their neighbour’s granddaughter Malli.

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FICTION

ISBN 978-981-49-8469-0



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