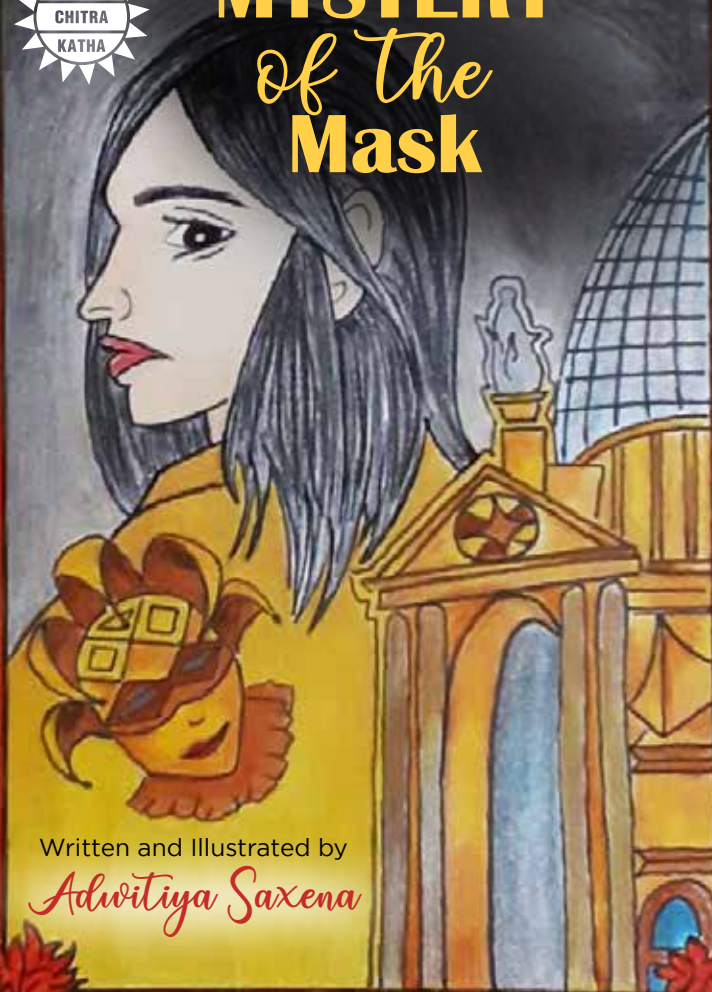


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MYSTERY of The Mask



Written and Illustrated by

Adwitiya Saxena

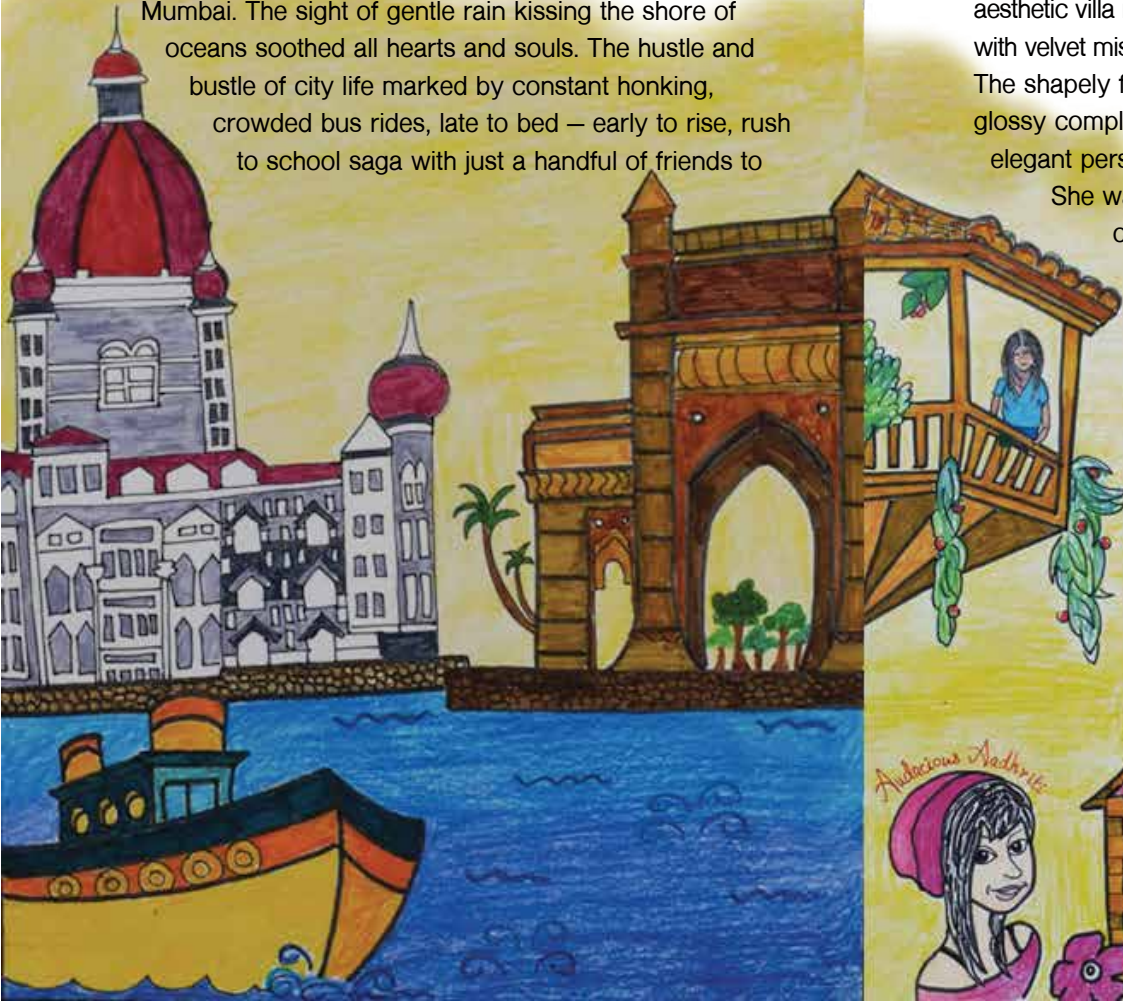
MYSTERY of The Mask



Written and Illustrated by
Advitiya Saxena

"I always wondered, why people are fastening themselves to fame and money, abandoning their felicitous lives!"

The onset of monsoon had gradually begun to cast its spell over the romantic ocean and the vibrant scenic city of Mumbai. The sight of gentle rain kissing the shore of oceans soothed all hearts and souls. The hustle and bustle of city life marked by constant honking, crowded bus rides, late to bed – early to rise, rush to school saga with just a handful of friends to



count on, made every person miss his own lovely and joyous life.

Keeping herself cut-off from the over-embellished urban life; the eighteen year old Aadhriti dwelled peacefully in an aesthetic villa residing beside the lush green valleys embraced with velvet mist and majestic trees.

The shapely figured little sleuth Aadhriti carried a slim body, glossy complexion with honey beige hues and a gracious elegant personality and was self-sufficient in every way.

She was magnificent, her pencil thin eyebrows and curvy eyelashes eased down gently on her broad charcoal gray eyes. Her midnight black, straight hair often plunged around her photogenic face and her calamine pink lips sparkled like rose petals. The distinctive heart-shaped birthmark which lay on her fist truly reflected Aadhriti's warm-heartedness. Her manners impressed all with the fullest belief of her benevolent, her conceit and her intellectual vanity.





It was the most exciting evening of the year, 31st of December 1999 when almost two – hundred celebrity guests from all across the world had gathered at 9, Malabar Hills, Mumbai. This was the address of one of the oldest Art Galleries of the city named Shirley's. The owner was the beautiful, charming and ambitious Shirley Khambata.



But like every cake has a cherry and every story has a twist, so did this exhibition which had its star of the day hiding behind the curtains waiting eagerly to be unveiled at the stroke of midnight when everyone would be joining hands to



welcome the New Millennium.

It was not just another 'Mask', but was a one thousand year old artifact which the Hulla Hulla tribe of the Soloman Islands used to worship as their God.

The mask was worth 2.5 million pounds, roughly about 23.5 crore in Indian currency. The mask was surrounded by a three layer security that included

armed guards, 24 hour camera vigilance and a network of laser rays that were capable of melting even the hardest of the metals found on Earth's surface.

It seemed as if all the stars had descended on Shirley's, that was hosting an extravagant and unparalleled display of the most precious, glimmering, antique and stylish masks from 50 collectors all across the world. The list included Mr. Jeff Dawson who was not only the richest man in the city but also a fierce competitor of Shirley as he owned four art galleries in the city. Ms. Kitu Gidwani was also among the guests. She was the owner of every prized mask in the world,

except the one which was to be unveiled tonight. Mrs. Tulip Joshi was the head of security responsible for the entire evening. She had been successfully handling a number of high profile projects, even after the death of her parents.

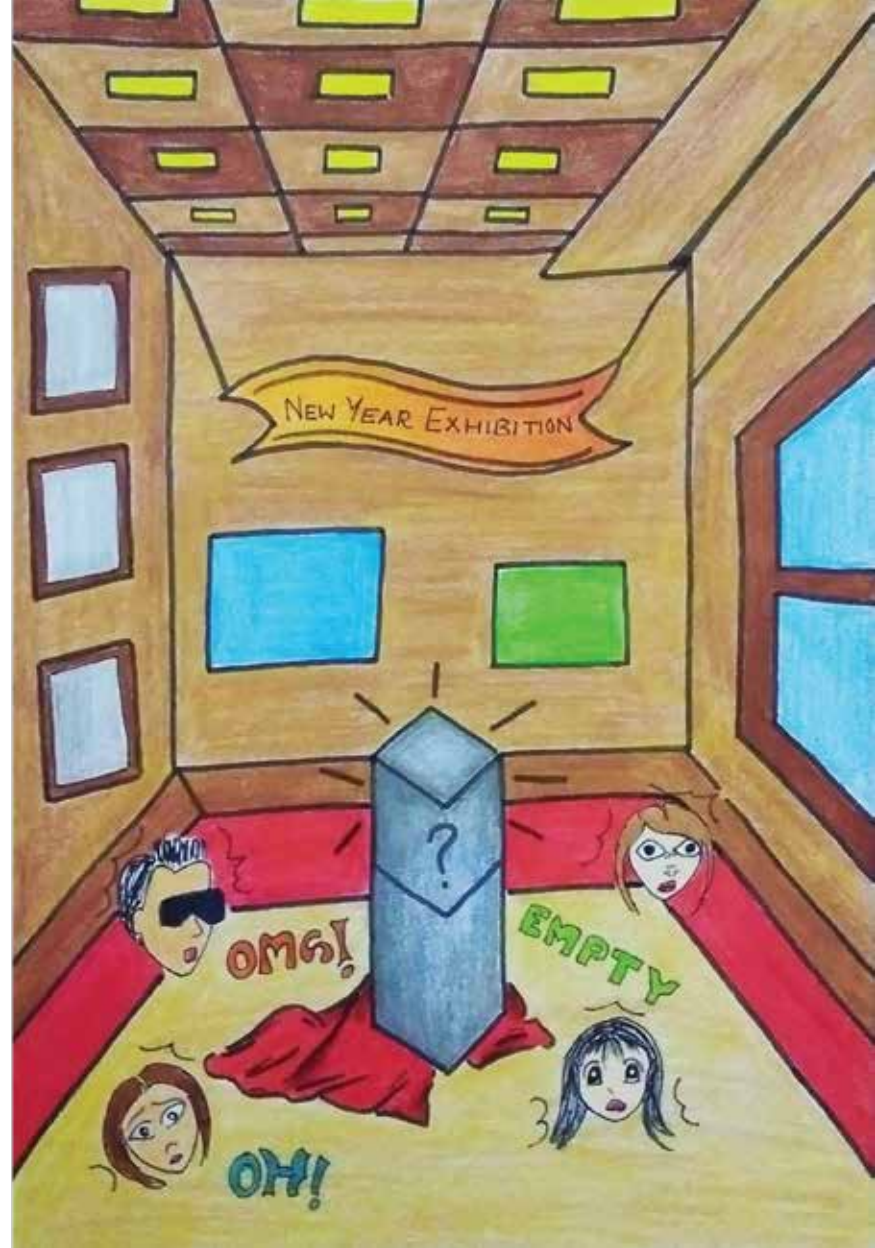


Aadhriti was feeling fortunate being Shirley's best friend and a special guest to the magnificent exhibition. She had never seen such a display of precious antiquities and had never been in the company of such elite people.

No one could have dared to imagine in the wildest of their dreams to steal the mask. But the unthinkable happened. As the clock struck 12 the sky was lit with fireworks but all the guests at Shirley's had their eyes glued to that one masterpiece which had waited all evening to be unveiled.

The curtains began to rise as everyone waited desperately with open eyes and pumped heartbeat.

The excitement turned into shock, horror and dismay as the scene that the 200 pairs of eyes witnessed left them terrified. The box was empty and the mask had vanished in thin air as if it never existed.

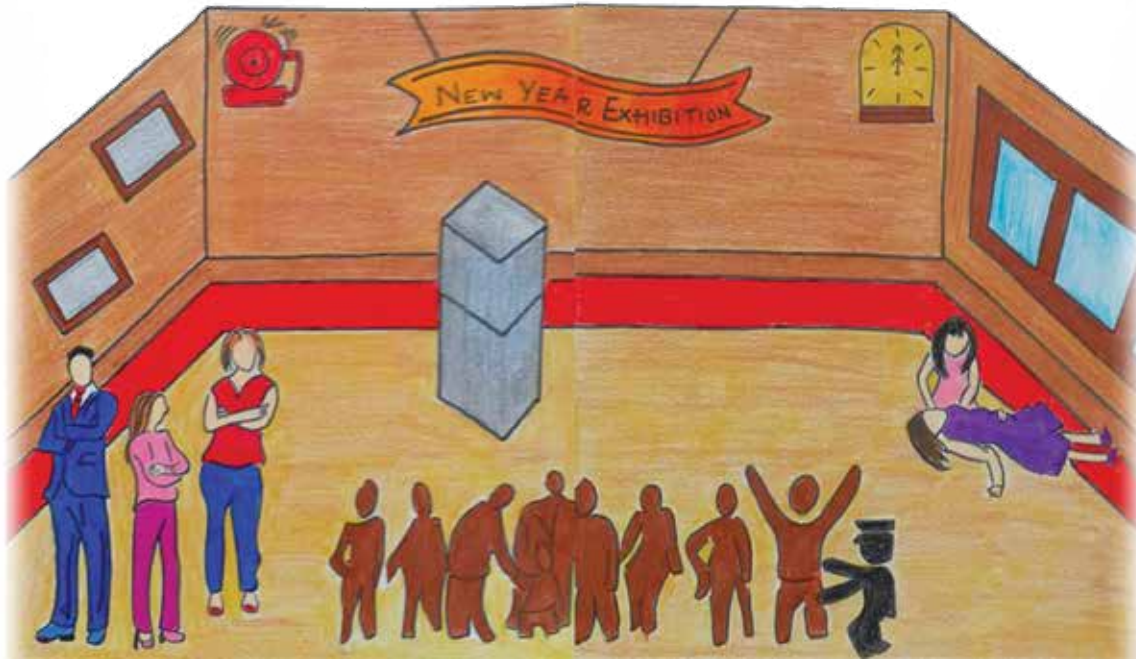


The alarms were sounded and security was on high alert, as if somebody had taken the fizz out of the Champagne. All the eyes which a few moments earlier were admiring each other's beautiful outfits had suddenly started scanning each other with suspicion.

Was the thief still there? Was the mask stolen? Or did the mask never exist in the box? The questions were many and no one had the answers.

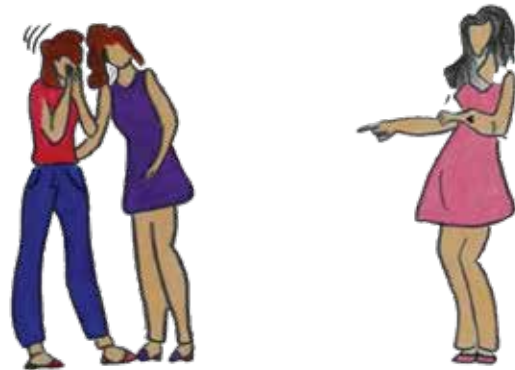
Shirley began to panic and fainted in the arms of her best friend Aadhriti. All the guests were asked to fall in line as

they were to be frisked before they could leave the gallery. Even after one hour and twenty minutes and searching, all the security cameras and frisking all the guests, the question that was still looming large was, "Where is the Mask?" Aadhriti now took charge. Her detective and inquisitive senses started smelling something fishy as she was not ready to believe that someone could have physically stolen the mask under such high security. Her prime suspects included Mr. Jeff Dawson, Ms. Kitu Gidwani and Mrs. Tulip Joshi and her best friend Shirley Khambata. Aadhriti was pretty sure that the Mask had not left the Gallery.





She demanded that all the security guards including Mrs. Tulip Joshi, the Head, should fall in line and must also be frisked. Everyone was left surprised because Aadhrithi was now pointing fingers towards those who were actually responsible for tonight's security. Mrs. Tulip became furious and resisted. Shirley also didn't like the idea.





However, when everyone present pressurized them to do so, they were left with no choice. Aadhriti began searching Mrs. Tulip. The very next second the Mask came out from under the beautiful blazer that Mrs. Tulip was wearing. She was immediately taken under arrest by the local police whom Aadhriti had informed in advance. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Tulip's company was not doing very well after the death of her parents and she was in debt.

But the drama didn't end here. Mrs. Tulip confessed that she was not the only culprit. She had done this in partnership with Shirley. The plan was that after selling the Mask Mrs. Tulip would get 1million pounds that would pay off her debt and Shirley would get the remaining 1.5 million pounds. In addition Shirley would also benefit from all the limelight and attention that her Art Gallery would get for the next few days. Aadhriti could not believe that people could stoop so low for fame and money. Her presence of mind and ability to reason helped her preserve a one thousand year old heritage and also taught her a lesson that life is not only about fame and money.



About the Author

Adwitiya Saxena loves reading books, playing tennis and eating lasagne. If she could have a super power, she would want the ability to control people's minds so that she could stop them from fighting with each other and establish world peace. Adwitiya aspires to become an Indian Foreign Service Officer. She would like to make the world a better place by removing poverty from the world.

Mentor

Poonam Dasilva
Dhanashri Ubhayakar

MYSTERY *of The* Mask

Aadhriti visits her best friend Shirley's Art Gallery to be a part of a memorable New Year's evening. Surrounded by two hundred elite guests and witnessing a display of rare artifacts, Aadhriti was feeling as the luckiest girl in town. Everyone was eagerly waiting for the rare jewel, 'The Mask' to be unveiled. The magical evening soon turned into a nightmare as the box was empty and the mask had vanished.

Where did 'The Mask' go? Who took it? Will Aadhriti be able to solve this mystery?

Read to unravel the biggest mystery of the millennium...Mystery of the Mask by Adwitiya Saxena.