

My name is V. Arun. I am seven years old.

My father's name is Venkatesh. He is very good. He never gets mad at me. He takes me to malls, where we play a lot of games. He buys me a lot of toys and chocolates. He got me this nice toy for my birthday. We watch movies and sports together. He teaches me cricket and car racing.

I love my father.

# Me

That's the most I have bluffed in a day.

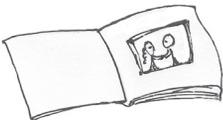
The thing is, I have never met my dad. I have never seen him except in the wedding album that Mom had shown me. He left us as soon as I was born.

It's like that story Paati told me the other day of how man started facing a lot of problems after he betrayed god in that garden. Maybe Mom or I bit a forbidden fruit or something, so Saturn or god decided to teach us a lesson, and we ended up this way.

Whenever my teacher or someone asks me, 'What does your father do?', I bluff and say that my father is in the US, working as an engineer.

I hate that question or any questions about him.

The moment I came home I tore the paper to bits. I hate the moral science period. I hate my dad. I hate him!



# My Father

When I was much smaller, I believed Mom when she told me that my dad was away on work and that he would be back with loads and loads of chocolates and toys.

Every night at bedtime, I used to ask Mom to tell me stories about Dad working really hard in a faraway land and making lots of money and buying me lots and lots of stuff.

‘Will he buy me a toy scooter?’

‘Yes.’

‘Will he buy me a mini car?’

‘Yes.’

‘Will he buy me Nike shoes?’

‘Yes.’

I would keep on and on asking, and the next thing I knew, it would be morning, because both of us had fallen asleep.

I used to dream of Dad visiting me with all the goodies.

I kept asking Mom, ‘When will he come back?’



‘During your summer vacation.’

And during the vacation—‘Oh, your father is busy. He will come next year ...’

LKG, UKG, first grade, second grade, Dad didn’t turn up.

For Christmas and Diwali, Mom gave me gifts and said that Dad had given them through Santa.

‘My dad, he’s busiest man in the world,’ I thought.

And then Mama was crying one day. She told me, ‘Dad won’t come back to us. He is gone, forever!’

I didn’t understand what it meant and kept asking questions.

‘Why, is he angry with us?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Why?’

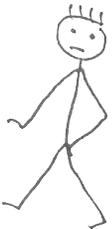
‘Because he doesn’t like us.’

‘Why?’

‘Because he wants to live away from us.’

‘Why?’

I kept asking why, again and again, but I didn’t even listen to Mom’s answers.



All I had in my mind was ‘Why, why, why?’

The toy cars and chocolates were melting away like ice cream.

At first, I thought Mom was playing some kind of April-fool joke, but she cried a lot and I sort of understood it was for real.

Mom told me not to talk about it at school, and to tell my friends that my dad’s working in America as a computer engineer. And to this day, that’s what I tell my friends and teachers.

‘Is lying not wrong, Ma? Won’t god punish me?’

‘Yes, it’s wrong, Arun. But I think god will understand.’

