

THE STORY SO FAR:
SHRILOK SNATCHES
A SECURITY GUARD'S
REVOLVER AND FIRES AT
ROHAN, THREE TIMES...

"The next morning, Ali, the young taxi driver with a child-like face, came home to see me. We'd known each other since the Study in Toilet case, and Ali was always very loyal to Shrilok.

He was completely crestfallen and asked if what he had heard was true. I filled him in on the details.

"Shrilok *bhai* shot at you because he was angry? You're lucky the bullets were fake. Actually, I'm sure he knew they were fake," Ali tried to justify, his eyes widening.

"Of course he didn't know the bullets were fake! He tried to kill me! He's gone mad!"

"Rohan... Rohan! Calm down, *bhai*! I just know that Shrilok *bhai* believed in me when I was wrongly accused of a crime. He'd said, 'I know you're innocent, but even milk becomes brown when mixed with tea.' I believe he's innocent too."

SHRILOK HOMELESS: THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURES

BY PIKA NANI

After Ali left, I got thinking about everything that had happened. Why did Shrilok shoot at me? Did he know the bullets were pellets? Did he know I wouldn't die? Why didn't he confide in me? Then suddenly, I heard the news blaring from the hall and went out. Mom quickly tried to change the channel, but I stopped her. They were talking about the "mall shooting" and saying that the great detective had finally lost his mind and turned into a criminal himself. The news was all over the Internet and in every paper. Shrilok's career as a detective was over. He was a fugitive now, running from justice. The bullets had hurt him more than they had hurt me.

ACP Divya Lokhande flipped through a file marked "top secret" on her desk — Mr X had escaped from prison. His getaway had been made two days earlier in a laundry van that had come to collect the inmates' dirty clothes. All possibilities were being explored. Some of the prison guards could also be involved. Obviously, money had exchanged hands. The news of a terrorist at large would have sent the public into a tizzy, so it was decided to keep the whole

thing a secret. She slammed the file on her desk. The Anti-Terrorist Squad was trying to find the terrorist; till then she had to warn her friends. But Shrilok's

phone was switched off. She picked up the phone and dialed a number.

I had just stepped out of the fire temple, unable to pray or

quieten my restless mind, when Lokhande called. I couldn't believe my ears. Mr X was back! It was Shrilok's brilliant plan that had led to the capture of the dangerous terrorist in 2016. Now that he had escaped, he would no doubt come for revenge. With the police searching for him and the terrorist after him, Shrilok was in double the danger. At that moment, I made up my mind. I vowed to find Shrilok and warn him while there was still time.

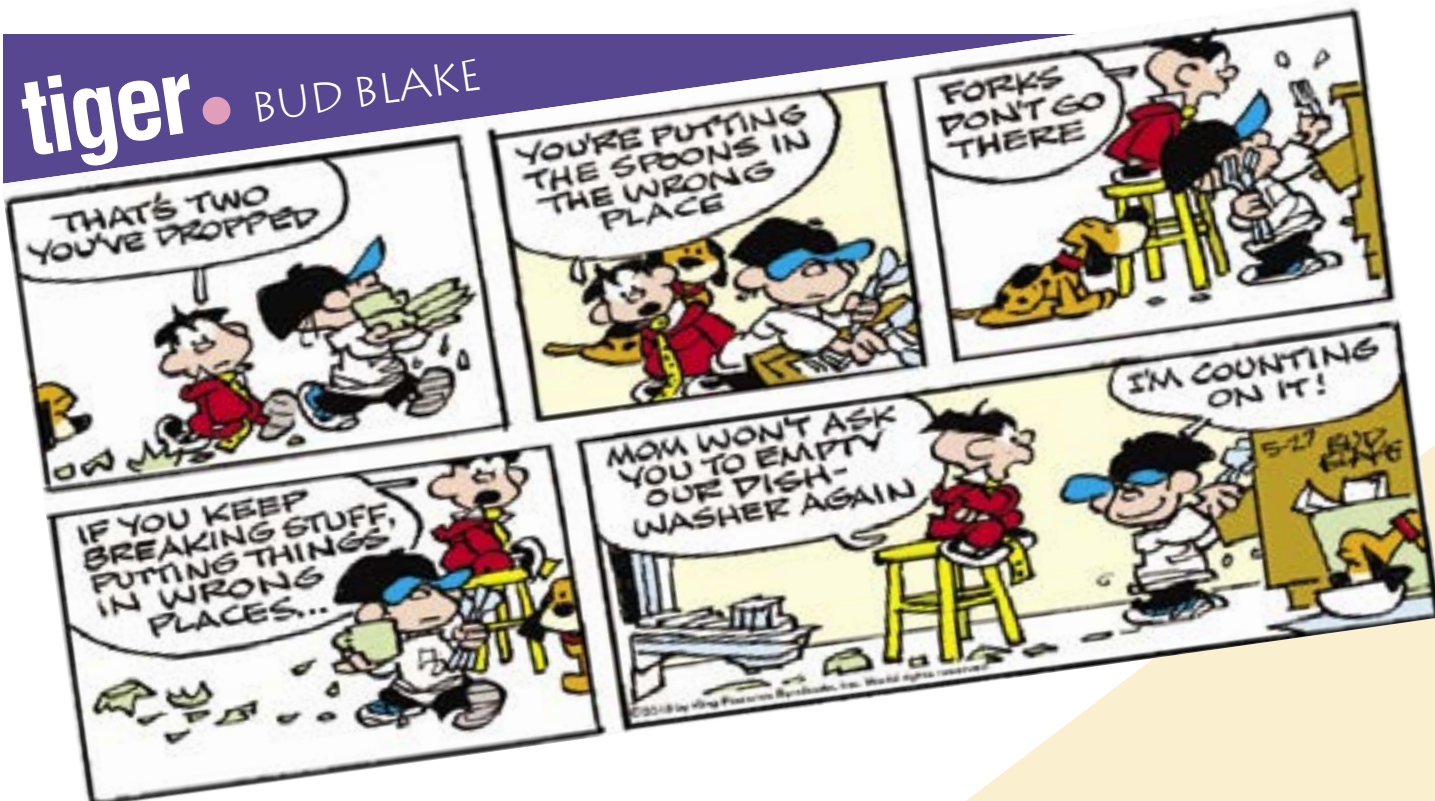
► **The end**

Excerpted from Shrilok Homeless: The Ultimate Adventures Volume 2 by Pika Nani; Published by Penguin

Illustration: Arka Paitandi



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BOOKWATCH



● This book is an absolute visual treat. It tells us the story of magnificent trees through various indigenous art forms — such as Gond, Warli, Madhubani, Kurumba and Bhil paintings. Every page in the book has a beautiful tree with birds, fruits and so on. What happens when you cut it down? The tree will give you the answer.

A TREE
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