



TWELVE LITTLE ADVENTURES!

A series of short stories
penned by BYJUites

 **BYJU'S**
Education for All



Dear Reader,

We hope you cherish this book as much as we
loved compiling it for you!

Love, BUJLites!



Adventure I

CHRONICLES OF VAZHOOR: MANI'S PETS

By Ambica Suresh

A true story, Chronicles of Vazhoor tells of the bygone era when man, animals, and nature co-existed and benefited from each other. A perfect ecosystem can be reclaimed again only with an environmentally sensitive lifestyle.

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Mani strolled down the forest with his friends. Being in Vazhoor meant the verdant forest of Sabarimala was a stone's throw away. As the gang walked deep into the woods, they knew the unwritten code - every creature belonged there, and they had no right to take anything from its home. Snakes were respected, bird calls were attended to, and a herd of deer was always observed.

The gang suddenly hit a large clearing. Soft beams of sunlight touched the ground, and everything was bathed in ambient light for a moment.

"Observe the log boys," said Anil Chetan (meaning 'brother' in Malayalam), the trek leader. The teens saw a rotten piece of a log. From afar, the fallen tree trunk appeared to be breathing. On closer inspection, they realised it was a swarm of butterflies. Huge Blue Mormon, Dark Blue Tiger, and Striped Tiger butterflies seemed to feast on the log. "Butterfly!"

screamed Dilip and ran forward, much to everyone's surprise. Everyone cursed him simultaneously!

And then the most extraordinary thing happened. Clouds of butterflies rose rapidly and swirled around each of them. Mani felt their lightest feathery touch and forced his mind to imprint this beautiful event permanently.

Trek being done, Mani walked back home. It was still the 1980s in Vazhoor, and only a few houses were equipped with electricity. What his house lacked in amenities, it compensated with its many pets. There were cows and bull in the cowshed, goats in the goat shed, roosters, chickens, cats, dogs, squirrels, a dozen or so murrel fish in the well, and a couple of friendly garden snakes who visited them occasionally.

Now an adult, Mani could not recall many of his pets' names. There were a few, of course, which were blessed with extraordinary character. Komban, the rooster, was one of them. Komban was named after his large distinctive comb. Easily a foot taller than his counterpart, he was unique in the neighbourhood and seemed to know it.

Bravery flowed through his blood, and he displayed a possessiveness over the hens. Komban's fame grew wide in the village when he started chasing dogs away. Under his cover, the hens wandered into the garden, pecking away stolen titbits on the ground. And it was he who held the fort at night when his flock slept soundly. Everything in the garden belonged to Komban, and other stray animals never dared to step in his area!

Once a wandering Namboodiri stepped foot on Mani's property to pick some Brahmi leaves. Lost in thought, the Namboodri did not notice Komban following him. Clad in mundu or dhoti, he bent his waist down to take his choicest pick. While the man still bent, Komban targeted a soft spot in his private part and gave one hard peck with his beak!

The Namboodiri jumped! And for a few seconds, he was airborne! He ran away in pain, cussing Komban in Malayalam.

Vazhoor experienced torrential rain yet again. Monsoon in the 1980s arrived like clockwork and meant weeks of a downpour without a break. One such rainy night, Mani was sleeping soundly in his handmade home. His humble abode comprised three small basic bedrooms and one kitchen. Mani and his

mother slept in adjacent rooms just an arm's length from each other. Suddenly a sound alerted them both. "Hisss..." followed by "thump" the sounds kept coming in succession... from proximity.

"Koche" (Malayalam for a child) called out Mani's mother, Radhamma. They both sat upright together, all alert. "Light up the hurricane lamp. Looks like something is there in the kitchen".

They stepped inside the dim kitchen, and the strangest of sights beheld them. The hurricane lamp cast light on a silvery long wounded king cobra with its hood upright with its opponent, their house cat, Minnie! Their cat was striking every time the snake raised its hood.

The snake, now wounded, was desperate to escape Minnie's clutches! It was ridiculousness on another level! The wounded cobra was now struggling to raise its hood while Minnie stood with her fur upright, eyes sharply focused on the cobra waiting to strike again. To be vindictive like a cat would be a phrase Mani would come to use later in his life again and again.

Radhamma felt sorry for the cold-blooded reptile. To empathise with a snake will happen only when the value of every life is felt in your blood. Wasn't every living

being, whether a cold-blooded reptile or a fur-tailed mammal, necessary in the larger scheme?

"Minnie! Stop it!" called out Mani. Minnie grunted in disgust! To let go when the kill was so close by! Mani's grandfather had also roused up by now. He took a wooden stick, raised the cobra, and deposited the wounded reptile in a gunny bag. The rains had finally given respite. Grandfather lowered the gunny bag into his garden, and the cobra slithered into the inky darkness.

While Mani loved animals in general, his grandfather Rama Kurup heard the primordial heartbeat of the land. The breath of the wind, the beat of animal hooves, and the slither of the reptiles were heard by him. He sought to understand the intrinsic chemistry between animals and him. Hence, no wild animals harmed him, be it in the heart of the jungle or the winding roads of Vazhoor.

Thwack, the axe hit the tree repeatedly; Rama Kurup was breaking down dried wood to collect firewood for his family. It was hard labour, but he enjoyed it; the sweat and grind gave him an envious

torso with well-defined abdominal muscles.

"Kraaw! Krakow," the sharp, unpleasant cry could come only from the most beautiful bird, the peacock. The bird was close by and was walking on the ground. What was strange was the bird kept walking into trees and bumping itself.

Rama observed the bird and realised it needed food. And most importantly, something inhibited its vision. He left some fish for the bird and walked away. The bird pecked the pieces of fresh fish hungrily. The peacock waited at a distance and moved forward only after his grandfather left.

Soon, the peacock looked forward to Rama's presence. Time passed, and the peacock became bolder. Rama Kurup also discovered he was blind in one eye. The peacock started accompanying Rama during his walks and walked beside him like a pet dog. They made an unusual company. The bald man with his well-defined torso and a one-eyed peacock dragging his lush feathery tail behind. When Rama settled to do a chore, the peacock perched on a tree branch and screeched ominously if anyone dared to touch him!



Adventure II

PRIDE AND ESTEEM

By Chirag Kumar Vegad

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"Life is never going to be the same from now. "Enough embarrassment already," I muttered under my breath.

Life's unfair, as I would understand that day as a 12-year-old. I've had it with the anguish of my mother scolding me for scoring low marks in Chemistry. Chemistry! What about English? I had scored decently in English. But no! It was always going to be Chemistry. And for reasons unknown to me, I had two marks deducted for writing "Bond. Covalent Bond."

Also, I hadn't even failed in the subject. It was a borderline-pass case. However, that didn't come in the way of being subjected to my mom's references to that classmate who scored 95/100.

I decided that I would have to do something about it. What about my pride and esteem?

"This is it. I'm leaving town."

And while I was at it, I also wanted to check if my friend shared the same sentiment. I mean, 32 in Geography? Anyone could have scored more than that with an hour's study.

I knocked on his door. Out came Binay with a tear rolling down his cheek. "Biology?" I asked. He nodded his head.

"Listen, I have a plan. It will teach our moms a lesson never to scold us again. Come with me."

Walking down the road to the railway tracks, we decided to hop onto a goods train and bid goodbye to the misery that was school. We'd see where it took us and then decide how to start the remainder of our lives.

We were in luck. A goods train had never halted at the crossings any other day. Today, we had our sign. We climbed the guard's cabin expecting to be welcomed on our ride of a lifetime. Instead, there was no one—quite a bummer.

It was 5 in the afternoon. A cool shade has started taking shape in the canopy overhead. A pleasant mood is not what I had planned to be in that day. I had to keep the motivation going on for the both of us till the train started.

"You know, my mom hid the TV remote somewhere. So frustrating! She doesn't want me to watch Duck Tales!"

"That's bad. My mom hid my video game. As if the video game was responsible for my Biology marks."

Every time he said Biology, his eyes would well up. Poor thing. After an hour of emotionally charged whining, it suddenly dawned on me that my father would be home from his office by dinner. He had not heard about my marks...yet. Not until my mom and I sat at the dinner table across from him.

No way I was going back home now.

And so, I had to try harder to convince Binay to run away from his home than be treated like this. I still felt he was sitting on the fence.

"Your mom is never giving you your video game back. I know it."

"Don't say that! I love my video game."

"Yeah... but, Biology sucks! You think you'll ever score 90 for your mother to return your video game?"

There was a brief pause. He contorted his face. It was anxiety mixed with a sense of resignation.

"Do I have to score 90? I can negotiate it to 50. 50 seems good."

"Hahaha! In your dreams! Forget Super Mario forever." "Once this train starts, and I move far from home, I will start working like my dad, earn lots of money, and buy not one, but 3 video games. I could play it all day if I wanted to. Unlike you."

The time was now half-past 6. I had exhausted every trick in the book to persuade him to be a part of my ambitious voyage. But the train hadn't moved an inch!

Darkness had begun to set in. More than the villains in my story, the mosquitoes were a more significant threat to our future. A dog howled nearby. Was that a rustling in the bushes?

"I want to go home. I'm hungry", said Binay.

"Are you sure? 32 in Biology. Are you stupid?"

"Whatever. I am not giving up my evening cornflakes because of you."

"But what about my... our pride and esteem?!"

"You will find it once the train starts. Good luck."

One hopscotch later, he landed on the ground and started walking away.

"Hey! How can you do this to me...!"

Wait. Was that a mongoose in the bush?

Suddenly, the train jolted. The loud cranking noise took me aback. A whistle! Before I could realise a thing, Binay shouted, "You idiot, the train is starting!" There were no second thoughts. I leapt

onto the ground from the guard's cabin, took a tumble, and dashed towards Binay as if my life depended on it.

"Let's go home before anyone finds out about this!", he said.

"Yes, let's go back. I will make a better plan next time."

Binay put his hand on my shoulder and, with a smile, said, "Sure. By the way, what time does your dad come back from the office today? You must be looking forward to that."



Adventure III

JUST ONE WISH

By Adithya Ligory

"Who's the one who wants to wish?" asked Mirat, a panther whose family lived near the beautiful garden. Mirat had found something colourful, bright, and with a hundred petals. Anyone walking by the garden would indeed have recognised it.

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Mirat was relatively young, only a cub, when his mother, the beautiful and majestic black panther Carmina, had told him about the Brinky Bush. All the animals around the garden knew about the Brinky Bush, and the old and wise jackfruit tree in the garden had often told stories about how the Brinky Bush, once in bloom, had a few secrets of its own.

"Mirat," said Carmina to Mirat one evening when they were strolling in the beautiful garden. Do you know about the Brinky Bush?"

"Mother, you have to tell me what a Brinky Bush is!" said Mirat; his ears were now stiff and perked up, ready to listen to his mother.

"You are still a cub, Mirat, and my mother told me this about the Brinky Bush. Once you grow older, you will understand the secrets of the Brinky Bush in bloom."

"Yes, mother, I will grow older and wiser, just like the old and wise jackfruit tree in the garden, but tell me more about the Brinky Bush!" said Mirat. He had walked a bit further than his mother, and he stopped and looked back, wanting her to reveal the secrets of the Brinky Bush.

"It was a time before this garden, when the old and wise jackfruit tree was young and strong, when Impus, the wasp, brought with her a seed from another land. Now Impus was very adventurous and travelled constantly. Impus had just one job, to make the garden beautiful by bringing seeds of different plants from different places."

"Is this how the garden is filled with beautiful and colourful flowers?" asked Mirat, now sitting next to his mother as both of them had decided to rest under the shade of a large oak tree that was part of the beautiful garden.

"Yes, Mirat, Impus ensured the garden was always filled with flowers. The flowers were red, yellow, and blue. Flowers that had a sweet scent and flowers that followed the sun! Oh, I had trouble counting the number of flowers, Mirat, there were so many of them! I still remember the day

Impus had just arrived after travelling. Impus had got a seed of a plant that had a few secrets when it bloomed!"

"Please tell me the secrets, mother; I have waited for too long now!" said Mirat with a naughty frown.

"This is the secret of the Brinky Bush in bloom... it will make your wishes come true!"

"Oh, that's right, Carmina!" said Bubby the boar, who heard Carmina speak as he passed. "Mirat, my child, the secret of the Brinky Bush has been revealed to you, but listen to what I did when I got to know this secret. I wished I would grow up as the strongest and the tallest boar on this jungle side. Within three days, everyone in the jungle was surprised because here I was, one day, short and stout, and in three days, I was the tallest and strongest boar on this side of the jungle! That made me very happy!"

Mirat was speechless. He had a confused look on his face. Carmina knew what her son was thinking and said, "The jackfruit tree in the garden wished that he would also like to be strong and the fruit from his tree would be the sweetest in these parts of the jungle. It happened in three days. Edos the cricket wanted his songs to be the most harmonious, and so did

Rengit the cuckoo. Many birds, animals, and plants got their wishes to come true with help from the Brinky Bush."

"Oh, I have got to be running along," said Bubby, speaking to Mirat and Carmina, " But before I go, let me tell you one more secret you need to know about the Brinky Bush. Would you like to know about that, Mirat?"

"Yes, I would like to know! " said Mirat, now jumping around his mother happily. He had learned something new and was prepared to learn other new things.

"Once any plant or animal makes a wish, a seed must be taken from the Brinky Bush and planted anywhere else in the jungle. Remember, if you don't plant the seed, your wish will not come true!"

"Thank you for letting Mirat know about the second secret about the Brinky Bush, Bubby!" said Carmina. But Bubby was on his way and was making his way into the jungle, away from the beautiful garden.

Carmina and Mirat got up and started to walk towards the beautiful garden when Carmina said, "One last secret, Mirat!"

"Mother, why do I have to wait to listen to the secrets of the Brinky Bush? Why

don't you tell them to me all at once?" said Mirat, now playing with a butterfly flying close to the ground.

"That is how I learned it from my mother, Mirat. It was not only my mother who told me the secrets but other plants and animals who had their wishes granted by the Brinky Bush. The third secret is that the Brinky Bush blooms only once in its lifetime! That is why whoever makes a wish needs to plant a seed in another part of the jungle, to help other plants

and animals live their lives happily and with full energy!"

This was how Mirat knew about the secrets of the Brinky Bush, but aren't you curious to know what Mirat had wished for?

He had wished that you would be reading his story, and in case you came across a Brinky Bush, make a wish, but remember to plant its seed elsewhere to make all the animals and plants live happily!



Adventure IV

SAANVI

By Poorva Tiwari

The morning was what Devesh had expected it to be. After playing cricket, he sat on the bench, gasping for air. It was a bit warmer today, with few dew drops on the leaves, birds chirping on the wide peepal tree, and squirrels jumping and running around on the barks and stems. There were clouds all over, but it wasn't going to rain for another three or four hours

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"Dada, since when are you sitting here, and where were you last night? What happened to the papers? Are they meeting today?" and before Sooraj could show his stable face, he bombarded Devesh with all these questions.

Sooraj was Devesh's younger brother. Although they grew up in the same household, they were poles apart. Where Devesh would look at rain as the skies tired and crying, Sooraj would get drenched, dance, and be told it's a blessing.

Devesh would have all the homemade meals thinking that many people don't get a meal at all, and people could find Sooraj junking around in the streets with random strangers.

It's just that Devesh had a different way of looking at things, a complex one, while on the other hand, Sooraj was simple.

"Will he even like me?" Devesh asked Sooraj while looking directly into his eyes. Although it seemed like a simple question, the path that led to it was congested with similar-looking doubts and wore a thick jacket of judgment.

"Of course, he will, dada! This is how adoption works, right? People come to see you, talk to you, listen to your stories and choose if they want to parent you, and once you agree, they take you along" - Sooraj tried to calm Devesh with the most straightforward answer that could have been.

"But this is not what I'm worried about, Sooraj, it's just that...it's... it's something else. You... you won't understand. Leave it !!" Devesh abruptly put a full stop to their conversation and stood up from the bench.

"But tell me, dada, what troubles you so much that you aren't even coming to the dinner with all of us? Have we said something that hurt you? Why do you keep ignoring us all?" Sooraj threw the question trail again, and now with a sigh, Devesh stroked his hair and spoke, "Chotu, you're my little brother; you won't understand how this world treats the adopted kids. I've heard that after adoption, many parents leave their children at some temple and run away. I am scared of this. So scared. But elder brothers are not allowed to show their fears, right? That's why I don't join you all for the meals. I feel ashamed of being the coward in the crowd. It makes me think, do I even deserve this? Will he even like me? I've never been good in studies, I don't have dining etiquette, I can't even draw or play or dance, I'm just a little loser who's thinking of such a giant term ADOPTION" and saying this, his lower lip began to tremble and dry. Sooraj could see how hard his dada was trying to fight back the tears. He could do nothing but stand there with his brother.

"Do things change after adoption?"

"Hasn't it been normalised in this rapidly growing world?"

"Why is everyone behaving as if it is something wrong or unnatural?"

And with this, all rhetoric questions started messing up Sooraj's head. For the first time in his life, he faced a condition with no definitions to understand and no facts to state. He kept wandering around with the questions in his head, replaying the words spoken by dada again and again, and dozed off with all of them unanswered.

The afternoon passed peacefully. Devesh took his bike for a ride around the park. With every passing minute, he would feel the anxiety kicking in, the blood in his veins speeding up, his body getting heated up, his mouth drying, and he losing every sense. Another forty minutes and his life would entirely change. Different people, different reactions, and different behaviours all around. He could feel every single emotion at that time, the thrill, the fear, the numbness.

Somehow those forty minutes passed, and Devesh drove to the adoption centre along with Sooraj. Standing at the entrance for the first time, Sooraj saw his dada clenching tightly to his palm. Just like he would feel before the board exams or when they announced the last cricket team of the school. He knew now that this was the result time. Just then, a thought ran through his mind.

"Dada, you told me that some families don't treat the adopted children well and even abandon them, leaving them in temples."

"Yes, it is the truth, Sooraj," Devesh answered in one sentence, fighting a battle of emotions in his heart and mind.

"But dada, being your younger brother, I know that you would never even think of doing this to the child for whom you are spiralling for months. You won't even raise your voice at it, let alone abandoning. Today when I was listening to you, it felt like I was talking to a fourteen-year-old kid who is so scared to disappoint others even when trying to do the best thing. Being around you, not even a single time, I thought of you giving up on me. This is not you, dada. My dada is always certain about what he wants. Deciding to adopt a child single-handedly is not a decision that everyone can make, and I know that this fear of yours will only make you stronger! I will never hesitate if I ever get a chance to tell people your story. I want

the world to know that adopting a child needs preparation, not only for the kid but also for the parents. What all fears do the parents face, the emotional swings you have been through, and the societal pressure and judgment you must go through? And even after all of this, you prepare to fight a battle alone. Dada, although I'm your younger brother, I understand how it is to be guided by you and be with you. You will be an amazing father, a father that every kid deserves to have, a father that you always wanted to have"

"Devesh Sarkar?" a strange voice startled them.

"Which of you is Devesh Sarkar?" the voice spoke again. Devesh stood up so hurriedly that the papers fell from his lap and flew in the entire corridor. He started picking them up with dwelling eyes and trembling hands. After collecting, he stood up and wrapped Sooraj in his arms. Tears rolling down from cheeks was enough for Saanvi to understand that she was about to get the most incredible father.



Adventure V

A COCOON'S JOURNEY

By Deepali Rai

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A Cocoon's Journey

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A boy found the cocoons of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had got as far as it could and could go no further. So the boy decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining cocoon. The butterfly then emerged quickly. But it had swollen and tiny shrivelled wings.

The boy continued to watch the butterfly because he expected the wings to enlarge

and expand to support the body at any moment. Neither happened! The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shrivelled wings. It never was able to fly. This unconscious act by the little boy restricted the natural birth of the butterfly.

Sometimes struggles are what we need in our life. If we were allowed to go through our life without any obstacles, it could cripple us. We would not be vital as we could have been. And we could never fly.



Adventure VI

IGAL CHIDDAL

(A Somalian Folk Tale)

Compiled by Lakshmi Subramaniyan

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There are many folk tales about a man named Igal Chiddal, a coward who is famous in Somalia.

Igal belongs to a Nomad community and rears goats and cows for his living. The life of a nomad was quite tricky in those days. They used to split into two groups and fight a war often. Since Igal was a coward, he didn't like war and battles.

One day, While Igal was asleep in his tent, his wife heard that the enemies from a neighbouring town had entered the village and had started attacking the people, capturing them and killing them for their wealth. The wife quickly woke her husband to tell him the horrible news. But, Igal was careless and said she told stories to frighten him.

But, his wife cried, "No, I am not telling a story; It's true. All men in the village are ready for the attack. You must go and face the enemies; You are a Man!"

While they were talking, the enemies arrived in the neighbourhood. Igal

Chiddal said to his wife, "We can't escape now. The enemy will kill us. I am going to sleep in front of our house. Roll me in a rug, and cry, 'Oh, my husband is dead.'"

Igal Chiddal's wife wrapped him in a rug, and she cried and cried. Igal didn't trust her enough. So, he told her, "Cry louder! Cry until tears come from your eyes."

While she was crying, the enemy came. They asked her when her husband had died. Before she could answer, Igal Chiddal said from inside the rug, "Say that he died yesterday," His wife repeated the same.

The enemy was shocked to hear Igal Chiddal speak. They said, "He is not only foolish but also a coward. A man like him is equivalent to a dead man, even if alive. Let's go!"

Moral of the story:

A Coward who cannot save his wife and children when a situation arises does not have any value even if he lives. One must know where he has to resist and should have the courage to save his family.



Adventure VII

PAYAL - A GOD'S CHILD

By Hazel Paul

She was slow to walk, lisped over words, and stood like a talisman to ward off the evil eye that could befall her more intelligent, brilliant, and handsome siblings. Initially, what she thought was love and care shown to her by her relatives, neighbours, and the gossipy friends of her mother, were sympathy and indistinguishable pity towards an ugly and not up-to-the-mark child.

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To begin with, Payal was a pre-matured baby who the local doctor dismissed as something left to fate and time. Fate, however, restored the barely audible pulse and time gave Payal a poor complexion, a less-than-ordinary look, and a brain that took time to learn or understand.

Still, what Fate and Time gave Payal, was a heart of gold, compassion, and wisdom. Payal could never stand up to her siblings. Her brother Irra and Mane hardly knew how to handle her as she was the youngest and the most delicate. Apart from that, there was a pronounced age difference between the brothers and her. She was a surprise to the family. During family functions and festivities, her parents, especially her mother, tried to hide her and did not allow many people to see her.

Her father was always indifferent to her as he did not know what to love in a plain child who stood insignificant before his sterling male heirs. Mother followed suit and felt inefficient in not producing a healthy, intelligent, and beautiful girl who might have fetched them a worthy son-in-law. Education was considered a waste; still, upon the local authorities' insistence, the parents reluctantly enrolled her in a nearby school.

One week after Payal joined the school, the teacher gave the class an assignment requiring them to write and present a self-introduction. They were given three days to prepare. On the third day, Payal read her assignment- "My father works as a clerk in the post office, and my mother is a housewife. My brothers- Irra and Mane, study in a private school. They are brilliant, and everyone loves them. My elder brother is very good at sports and loves to read books whereas my other brother is good at dance, reading....." Nothing much was said about her. The teacher, Ms Pringle, noted this and decided to chat with her.

'Payal, come, let's sit in the garden for a while- she said as she took Payal's hand and led her. The garden was well

maintained, yet could not claim to nurture exotic flowers or ferns. There were carefully spaced stone benches beneath large shady trees. The teacher-led Payal to sit under one and sat beside her. Ms Pringle spoke softly and seemed as if she was trying to choose her words—" Payal, I loved how you spoke so highly about your brothers. You are proud of them, but I was looking forward to hearing from you. Why did you leave that out?"

"There is nothing much to talk about me, well, you know how I am, nothing worth mentioning,"-said Payal, as she looked down at her folded hands in her lap. "I am dark, ugly, not like my brothers, and slow in everything that I do."-said Payal as if it was matter-of-fact.

"But, you belong to such a prestigious family, and they love you, Payal, " said Ms Pringle, suggesting that she needed to look further than her shortcomings and find positive things in life.

" No, Ms Pringle and the worst part is... even God does not love me !"
As Payal uttered these words, Ms Pringle felt that Payal choked towards the end of her sentence.

Ms Pringle struggled to arrange a confession from a page in her life story. Ms Pringle instantly felt an emotional

attachment toward Payal when she set her eyes on her. For every reason, Payal was Ms Pringle eighteen years ago. She was extra kind to Payal and talked to her very gently, as she noticed that the loud noise frightened Payal, and her response turned poor if she was scolded or sensed something had upset the teacher. Just over two weeks, Ms Pringle found a special place in Payal's heart.

Ms Pringle asked, " How can you say that even God does not love you?" Reluctantly, Payal replied- " Promise not to tell anyone, and I will tell you." "I promise,"- said Ms Pringle.

"Some of the mother's friends came home the other day. I heard them talking", and they said, "God must hate this child so much that he has not given her anything for the world to thank Him for creating her.....see.....even God hates me."

Ms Pringle was profoundly touched and speechless.

A moment later, Pringle asked Payal- "What do you think of me?... am I beautiful? " Payal's dull face lightened up with a hundred lamps and said- "Yes.... very beautiful" Why do you say that?

...because I love you ...and you are so good to me, it's because of you that I am doing

so well in class even though I missed a whole month. You made all the children in class talk to me; now they are helping me with the assignments too. In no time, I will return their favours too... all because of all that you did for me.. You are beautiful and so intelligent, you know everything.. Little one...I am dark, just like you, and if you think that you are not attractive, then I am not beautiful, neither am I intelligent...do you know why?"

"Why?" asked Payal, confused yet, listening very intently.

".... because Payal, even though I was just like you, I had all the problems you are having right now, but God's love changed it all."

"...no, you don't understand...God does not love ugly people,"-said Payal, almost defending her words.

"Listen to me, child; let me explain." Ms Pringle tried to simplify her words to fit a seven-year-old. She went on to say, " God is the creator of all. God cannot commit a mistake. Therefore all that He created is perfect and beautiful. We are His creations; who are we to criticise the creation of our creator?... Do you dare question God, Payal?"

"No,"-replied Payal.

"If so, you must understand that everything God created is not only beautiful in His eyes, but He loves them, cares for them, and even provides for them. God has a purpose for you." "Really?" asked a wide-eyed Payal, who was hearing such words for the first time. "Absolutely," replied Ms Pringle. "Payal, do you know that there are so many different types of beauty? You said I was beautiful because of all the wonderful things I did for you. God does not see what you are on the outside; He sees your heart. If your heart is pure, then that is the beauty that He is looking for."

"...Ahhhh, that means that God does not love people with bad hearts!!!! , so he will not love Ninu aunty, Reeka daadi also because they always hurt me with their words!"- Payal exclaimed. Ms Pringle laughed out loud at the innocent and logical deduction that Payal made. "Actually, Payal, God loves Ninu aunty and Reeka daadi because they are also God's creation. Our God is filled with so much love that He loves all his creation. Even the ones that have turned out bad."

Nearly ten long minutes passed before Payal finally spoke.

"I thought only my family, friends, and mom's friends were the ones I had to know. Hearing and knowing God, who is bigger than all these people, makes me feel big, good, important, and LOVED. Ms Pringle...I am going to change as you change. I feel Loved. 'Really?" asked an excited and expectant Ms Pringle.

"Yes. Now on, I will say- I am dark, yet I am Lovely".

Suddenly, Payal stood up from where she was seated and started running around the garden with her hands spread out

like wings, shouting- " I am dark, yet I am lovely! God loves me; I am beautiful; I am dark yet lovely! I am dark, yet I am adorable! God loves me. I am dark, yet I am lovely! I am dark, yet I am lovable! I am dark, yet I am beautiful!

Ms Pringle watched in wonder as she reminisced about this day around eighteen years back when her great-grandmother called her to her bedside and whispered the exact magic words in her ears, which set her free from the shackles of artificial beauty and ugliness...



Adventure VIII

GHOST OR ILLUSION?

By Namit Gupta

In the city of Ludhiana around the 1960s, there lived a Pandit Family who used to perform the wedding rituals of local people.

Ghost or Illusion?

By Namit Gupta

In the city of Ludhiana around the 1960s, there lived a Pandit Family who used to perform the wedding rituals of local people.

One Night, a couple came to the Pandit's house for their wedding purpose. It was midnight. There was something strange about that couple; they were dwarfs, not little kids.

They asked the Pandit to come with them as their marriage was going on at a nearby place. The couple was in a hurry.

Pandit was initially reluctant to go because the couple had not informed him earlier about their marriage. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the couple was asking him to come to perform marriage rituals for them. Their dwarf appearance was also suspicious.

Then the Pandit asked them about their families and their background. The couple told him that they were orphans and in love with each other. They also told him they were grown adults and fit for marriage. They want to live their life together after the wedding.

The couple told Pandit they had organised a small function for their marriage nearby, to which they invited a few people. They also told the Pandit they would give him good honour and Dakshina after their successful marriage.

Pandit got convinced and went with them to their marriage place with his wife (Wife of Pandit). The couple took him to a nearby ground, where they organised a function for their marriage. A well-lit place with all kinds of decorations, eatables, and sweets was available. But the surprising fact for Pandit was that all the guests present there were also dwarfs.

Pandit and his wife performed all the wedding rituals for them, and their marriage was successful.

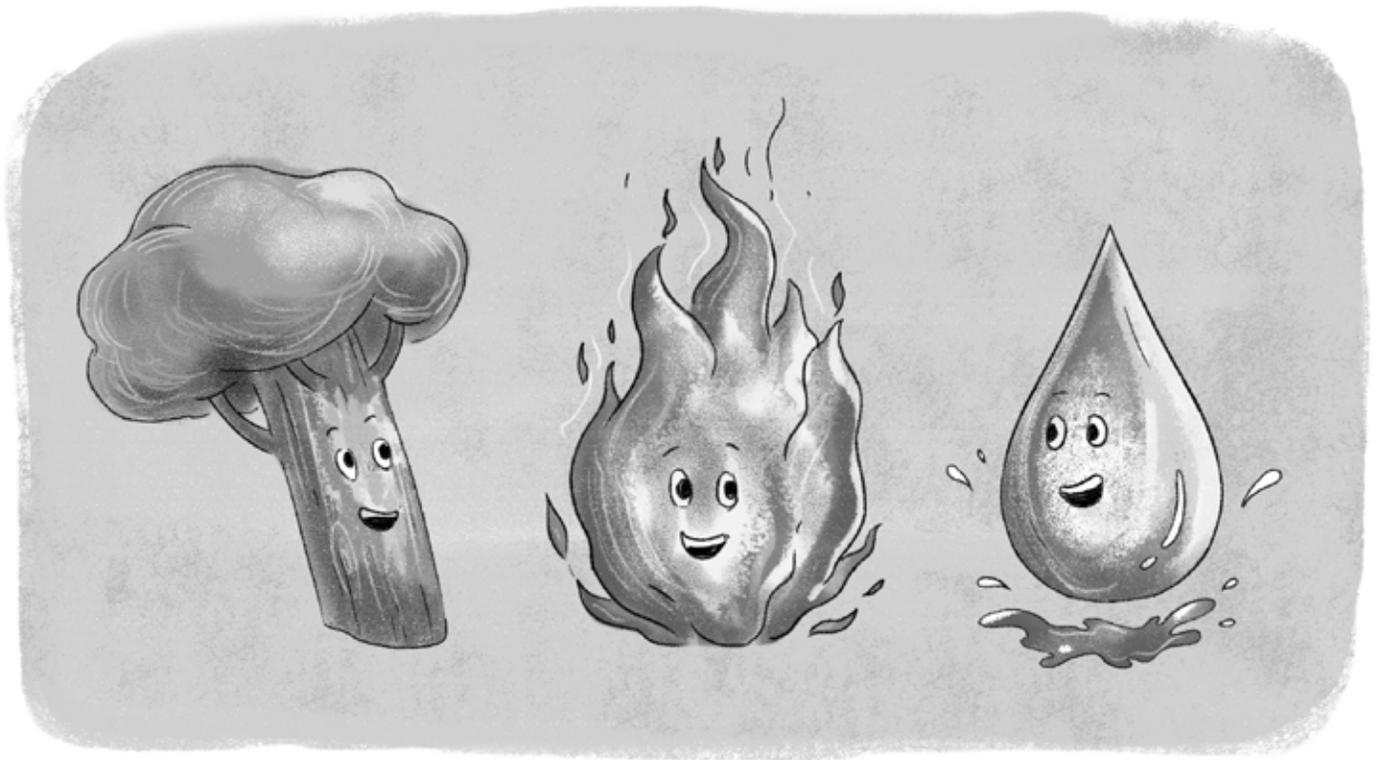
Everyone was happy there. Then, on Pandit's departure from that place, the couple thanked them and gave them many gifts. The couple gave them bags full of eatables, sweets, ornaments made of gold and silver, and much more. The Pandit Family was pleased and returned to their home early morning.

As soon as they returned to their house, they opened the bags out of curiosity and excitement. But to their surprise, all the bags were filled with sand & soil and nothing else. They were so shocked and couldn't believe their eyes.

The Pandit immediately rushed to the nearby place where the marriage was happening, and to his surprise, it was an empty ground with grass and bushes.

The Pandit couldn't believe his mind and eyes that what he saw and experienced a few hours back now didn't exist in this world. He couldn't think if this was his illusion or if this was linked to some ghost or spiritual thing. But this was not a dream, as Pandit and his wife were always conscious.

So, this was a real story narrated by my grandmother. The Pandit family was the immediate neighbors of my grandmother.



Adventure IX

I AM GREAT

By Nithin Dande

Wood, Fire, and Water are three good friends.

They used to play together, eat together and sleep together.

I am Great

By Nithin Dande

Wood, Fire, and Water are three good friends.

They used to play together, eat together and sleep together.

One day they were discussing who was great among those three.

Wood started saying that I am great as I am solid and heavy.

Fire laughed at WOOD and said, "I can eat you in 5 mins if you sit beside me". I can eat the forest using my flames, so I AM GREAT.

Water laughed at the fire, saying, "your flames are nothing if I fall on you." You will die immediately if I rain on you. I AM GREAT, as nothing can walk on, cut, or eat me.

Wood started laughing at the water, saying, "I can float on you, and everyone

uses me to save themselves from your rain, so I AM GREAT.

The significant Sky listens to this conversation and starts talking to these three.

Wood - Do you remember how you helped a couple build their home?

Fire - Do you remember the same day you helped that couple warm up at night?

Water - Do you remember that afternoon you helped that couple clear their thirst?

"All of you are Great on your grounds. No one is less important; you can support or destroy each other. Every living being on earth uses all of you with equal importance. Don't fight and be friends forever.

After listening to the Sky - WOOD, FIRE, and WATER, started living happily ever after.



Adventure X

A BIG FLOWER

By Manisha Om

There was once an exhibition organized in a king's court. The presentation was of different kinds of beautiful flowers and bouquets from other parts of the region.

A Big Flower

By Manisha Om

There was once an exhibition organized in a king's court. The presentation was of different kinds of beautiful flowers and bouquets from other parts of the region.

The king was going through all the flowers walking through the hall, and suddenly one flower grabbed his attention. This flower was natural but was immensely special. It was a huge flower equal to ten small in size. The king was astonished to see such a flower and instructed the court man to call the person who bought that, and to his surprise, the person was a very simple-looking gardener. When the king asked about the flower from the gardener, the gardener said that he had just used his wisdom in this case.

When the first two buds grew, he kept one bud growing and removed the other.

Similarly, four more buds grew; again, he held the one growing and pulled the others. In the end, he got one flower equal to the size of ten flowers because all the nutrients and water were used by only one flower instead of ten.

Similarly, if we all focus on one goal and concentrate all our energy on one goal, we will grow like that big flower. That one big flower for us includes all-round development – studies, co-curricular activities, and all that leads to our constructive personality development!



Adventure XI

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE EVERYONE

By Shivangi Anand

A father was going to market with his daughter to sell his donkey, so the father put his daughter on the donkey and says I can walk myself.

It is Impossible to Please Everyone

By Shivangi Anand

A father was going to market with his daughter to sell his donkey, so the father put his daughter on the donkey and says I can walk myself.

After walking some distance, people say how shameful the old father is walking, and the daughter is sitting like a queen.

So, the daughter says, "Papa, you sit on the donkey. I will walk." So now the father sits on the donkey, and the daughter walks.

After they walk some more, People say, "Look how shameful father is he, his little daughter is walking, and he is sitting like a Nawab."

So they both sit on the donkey.

After walking a little more, People say, "What kind of people are they? They both can walk, but they have put the entire load on the donkey".

So they give up, lift the donkey on their heads and walk.

After some time, people say, "Look how foolish they are; despite having a donkey, they walk with donkeys on their heads.



Adventure XII

THE BEST FRIEND

By Priyesh Kumar

Abhinav was returning from school with his friends. Everyone in the group was running and shouting on the streets as it was the last day of school and the inception of summer vacations.

The Best Friend

By Priyesh Kumar

Abhinav was returning from school with his friends. Everyone in the group was running and shouting on the streets as it was the last day of school and the inception of summer vacations. Aaditya asked Abhinav the reason for his silence, to which Abhinav passed a smile and assured his best friend Aaditya that he was alright. Aaditya didn't force Abhinav then, but he was sure that his friend was hiding something. The very thought of Abhinav kept Aaditya pondering about his friend continuously; Aaditya couldn't stop himself and went to Abhinav's house in the evening.

Abhinav was delighted to see his friend at his home and welcomed Aaditya with warmth and delight. Aaditya wished Abhinav's mother 'namaste', to which Aaditya's mother, Mrs Renu Mohan wished, backed Aaditya and blessed him with good fortune. Mrs Mohan asked them to enjoy and play in Abhinav's room; she brought them snacks. Both friends went to Abhinav's room, where Aaditya saw comic books, the latest video games, and fascinating stuff. Aaditya told Abhinav that he couldn't keep calm and wanted to start playing with Abhinav's video game. Abhinav also joined Aaditya; both friends were busy playing video games.

Mrs Mohan entered the room and said, "come on, kids, Samosa and tea are ready." Both of the friends paused the game and started enjoying the snacks. Aaditya asked Abhinav about the reason behind his constant worry and silence in school. Abhinav was quiet for a while and tried ignoring the matter, but Aaditya insisted and assured him of the non-disclosure of the matter to anyone. Abhinav told his friend Aaditya that he could not obtain good marks in his maths examination and was worried about his parents' reaction after learning his marks. Aaditya asked Abhinav what went wrong with him even after spending maximum time on his studies. Abhinav said he kept doing the questions all the time but got nervous in the exam and forgot the method to solve many questions. Aaditya counselled his friend and said he would help his friend strengthen his basics. Aaditya felt that Abhinav was mainly rote rehearsing everything, even mathematics.

Aaditya asked his friend Abhinav to come to his place the next day. Abhinav went to his friend Aaditya's home at the given time and started asking Aaditya to begin with the day's plan. Aaditya asked him to calm down and sit back, but Abhinav was in a hurry.

Aaditya told Abhinav that his problem lies inside him and that Abhinav has to eradicate this alone. Abhinav said that he was not getting anything that Aaditya was trying to tell him. Aaditya told Abhinav that he needed to work on his basics calmly and diligently. Abhinav asked him to elaborate, to which Aaditya replied in affirmative. Aaditya told Abhinav to go through the concepts and problems in depth, which will help him understand the areas of improvement and his weak zones. Abhinav asked Aaditya if he was sure of the process he just had told him. Aaditya said he had experimented with this on himself and got positive results. Abhinav said he would do the same unless he masters the topic. Aaditya told Abhinav not to lose hope as such moments would come when the situations would force him to give up.

Abhinav said he would keep all the suggestions and tips in mind. Abhinav went back to his home and started with an action plan sincerely. Abhinav started practising questions daily. Seldom he used to get tired and felt exhausted. Abhinav reported this issue to his friend Aaditya and said that he is rarely so exhausted that he can't concentrate

on the topics for hours. Aaditya told Abhinav to take a short break, listen to music and do whatever made him happy during that break. Abhinav asked his friend if it would work; Aaditya replied that he was pretty sure of this, as small breaks would recharge him and help him concentrate more efficiently. Abhinav started with the same, and fortunately, it worked for him. He was able to cover topics easily with planned breaks in between. After the vacations, exams came over; this time, Abhinav scored 96% in mathematics. Abhinav went straight to his friend Aaditya and hugged him with joy. Abhinav kept thanking him for his suggestions and help.

Aaditya asked Abhinav not to thank him as the labour and hard work were done by Abhinav. Only Abhinav said it was impossible without Aaditya's help, and he is so much obliged. Aaditya asked him not to thank them as they were friends and a good friend always shows the right path. Aaditya said Abhinav, although if he wants to thank him, he can treat him with samosas in the canteen. Both of them laughed, and both the friends headed towards the canteen.



Thank you for the reading this book.
Hope you enjoyed the stories

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