

## The Gift

Mira was very happy. She had been to visit her grandparents' house in Therrayur village. She had lots of fun playing with her cousins, playing in the attic, climbing trees, grinding coffee beans, listening to stories from her grandparents every night. She was quite sad to leave her Thatha, Paati but her face lit up when she was gifted a beautiful purse by her Paati.

Every time, before they left for their respective homes, Mira and her cousins would prostrate before Thatha and Paati. Every time, they were given silver coins. But this time, it was different. Mira simply loved the handcrafted rainbow hued purse, which had a silver coin inside.

She was traveling back by train, with her cousins.

Mira was admiring the scenery outside, which seemed to change swiftly as the train moved fast. The thrill of watching the engine turn as she peeped out of the window was great. She was thinking of home, about Amma and Appa. It was Oct 14 today-it had been three weeks since she left her home. There was still an hour left for her to reach the station.

Mira suddenly realized that she was reaching home on Amma's birthday and that she had not made anything for her. Usually, Mira made handcrafted bookmarks, cards, files, coasters and even a friendship band. Her mind began to race fast. Mira had to gift her Amma something special. Suddenly, she had an idea.

Mira reached home and ran inside. She hugged Amma and asked her to close her eyes. Mira quickly took out the same purse she adored and thrust it into her mother's hands and sang 'Happy birthday'.

Her mother was pleasantly surprised to see the beautiful gift. She asked Mira to quickly refresh and to come down to the dining room.

Mira came down and in the dining room, her brother who was working in Singapore, was waiting for her. He had come on a vacation. Nobody had informed Mira about his arrival. What a feast they all had, sitting and savoring Amma's delicacies. Mira's brother had bought story books and a small, beautiful ----- (you guessed it right!) Purse with her name embossed on it. It was yet another memorable day to record in Mira's diary.

### An outing

Mira was swinging in the verandah. Her cousins had gone to the river for a swim.

Mira never enjoyed getting wet in the water.

"Mira, Mira shall we visit Kakku Paati tomorrow?" called out her granny.

"Yes, Paati" replied Mira.

Kakku Patti lived in the adjacent Meyyavur village and was her granny's sister. Mira always looked forward to this outing.

Dayaa would come in his bullock cart at 8.30 a.m. Mira and her cousins would take turns in sitting next to Dayaa and enjoy pretending to take charge of the bullocks.

All of them would sing, with their Granny joining them.

Next day, Mira and her cousins needed no wake up calls. They were ready by 8.00 a.m.

"How excited these kids are" thought Granny. "Peria Amma, Peria Amma are you all ready?" called out Dayaa. "Yes, thumbi" called back Granny.

"Here, have some coffee. Feel refreshed and take us carefully now to Meyyur." "Yes, Peria Amma. I know how precious your grand children are to you".

The kids scrambled into the cart. Mira sat with Dayaa in front. "Do you all see the hills over there? I have climbed each one of them. Can you see that one there with the nose shaped peak? The view from there is simply great!" Dayaa rambled on.

After about three hours, Mira sighted her Kakku Paati's house. Kakku Paati was waiting for them in the veranda. "Welcome. How was the ride? You must be thirsty. Let me get you *lassi*", she offered. "This one is for

Dayaa” she said as she gave one tall glass of sweet *lassi*. After half an hour of relaxing in the veranda, Dayaa left. “I shall come tomorrow” he called.

A garden in the backyard was another welcome feature. The children marked their spots, tied hammocks if they were lucky to have two trees in their chosen spots.

”Hey, come here, Mira” shouted Lakshmi. Lakshmi had found a rock to sit on. There was a beautiful patch.” See the pink flowers. It looks as if someone has painted the strokes on the petals.” showed Lakshmi, pointing to pink flowers.”Ramanna works hard to make every patch lovely” said Mira.” Look, here’s a bright red flower. It smells good too” pointed out Mira.

”Wash your hands and legs. Come and help me arrange for lunch” called out their Granny.

After lunch, Kakku Paati and their Granny had their young audience enraptured in stories even as they were preparing the puja room for reciting shlokas in the evening. Paati cleaned the brass vessels with tamarind juice till they shone. Granny cleaned copper plates with lime juice and salt. Children were given silver ware to clean.

”Let me churn butter, please Paati” Mira asked. She knew she would get a small amount of the delicious butter as a reward for her efforts.

In the evening, Kakku Paati closed all the doors except the door at the entrance.

She lit lamps and fragrant incense sticks. It was time to recite shlokas. Paati started with Vishnu Sahsrnama and Mira joined her.

After sometime, Mira and her cousins played *Palanguzhi*, a traditional game. Both their Grannies joined with gusto.

In the morning, Kakku Paati always woke up early. Mira loved to join her Paati in making kolams outside the Krishna temple". "Paati, do you do this everyday?"

Even as she replied, Mira was thinking how different the urban lifestyle was as compared to Paati's. It seemed a different world.

After a sumptuous lunch, Mira and her cousins bid good bye. Kakku Paati gave few seeds to each of them and asked them to plant after they reached their homes. Mira was delighted.

The moment she reached Therayyur, she packed the seed carefully and kept it in her bag. She would plant it in the balcony outside her room. She would have a small patch of greenery and place white pebbles, a cute doll house that she no longer played with and a make a pathway. Her Granny was surprised to see her talking to herself." Let's leave her to paint her canvass of imagination" she told the others.

Soon, it was time for them to bid farewell. Mira reached home and the very next day, planted the seed in a pot. Her mother also chipped in to help her.

After few weeks, her father who had gone on a long tour, came back home. He looked at their efforts at landscaping the balcony and said," This will soon be our favourite spot to have our evening tea or to relax. Isn't it, Mira?" Mira nodded happily.

## Celebration

Mira was reading a book. "I want to do something else" she thought.

Mira suddenly had an idea. She ran to her balcony. The seed that her Kakku Patti had given had now grown into a plant." These 5 tiny buds will bloom in two days' time. Let me do a different landscaping around this pot." She opened the pouch in which she had collected white pebbles. She placed the pebbles making it look like a pathway. The doorbell rang.

"Mira, your friends have come to play" her mother called. "Ask them to come to my room, Amma" Mira called back.

"What are you doing?" Varsha asked." I am trying my hand at landscaping.

"Why don't we all do this together instead of playing outside in this wet weather?" Mira told her friends.

Mira and her friends excitedly started arranging leftover tiles, marble pieces, small earthen pots, few animal dolls that Mira had. The pattern they finally created looked great! "Mira, why don't we paint these pots with silver and gold paint? I have some bottles and brushes at home" Sadhana suggested. She came back in few minutes. Each one of them picked up a small pot and painted beautiful designs, adding decorative borders.

"Amma, Amma can I please take the wooden mantap that we have kept in the showcase?" Mira asked her mother. "Take the small one made of stone if you are planning to keep it in the balcony" her mother replied.

Mira picked up the stone temple mantap carefully and wiped it clean. She placed the mantap on an elevated platform, a little above the potted plant. She had an idol of Krishna which she adored. She told her mother she wanted that idol too. Her mother was now curious. She came to see what they were all up to. "Hmm! Good job! It is really nice and I wish your mothers could see this too!" Mira's mother told the beaming girls.

"You might all turn out to be good interior designers"

"Mira, why don't we plan for an inauguration ceremony? We can invite our mothers too" Mayura asked.

"Of course! The buds will flower in two days. We can plan to celebrate on that day" Mira said excitedly.

Quickly, they wrote down their plan. Varsha and her mother were good at reciting the Bhagavad-Gita. They could sing a prayer and recite 2-3 stanzas from the Gita. Mira and others would stage a skit. They even put up a nice *dupatta* as a screen for their creative garden as they called it.

On the day of their mini celebration, Mira and her friends were very happy to see the lovely flowers. In the evening, Mira cleared her room. Her friends came in one by one, dressed in traditional attire.

"Shall I put the *payee* here?" Suman shouted. "No, place it here where everyone can see the balcony" Mira said.

There was a lot of hustle bustle. Their friends' mothers arrived on time. Mira's mother greeted them warmly. The melodious notes of Varsha and her mother's prayer filled the room. Mira's mother was requested by Mira and her friends to open the screen.

The creative garden won a lot of appreciation from their mothers.

Mira and her friends staged the skit and the audience enjoyed the humorous skit immensely. Mira's mother had made *pakodas*, *kesari bath* which was served by Mira. Her friends had lemon juice and their mothers had good filter coffee. Mira waved her friends' good bye and promised to get each one of them seeds of the lovely flowering plant. "Thank you, Amma. We really had a nice time today." And thank you, Kakku Patti. What you have given me is more than a seed. It has given me so many happy moments!"

### **A Pleasant Day**

Mira looked out of her window. She loved to see the early morning sky with its different hues of blue, orange and yellow, the outline of the banyan tree having a perfect background.

After savouring the scene for a few minutes more till the sun rose in all its splendour, Mira debated whether to sleep for just a little while more or to get up. Her eyes fell on a jute board that was not there earlier in her room. There was a picture of Mickey and Minnie mouse which she had drawn when she was five years old. "By Mira, dated 20 May 2002" was written in her mother's neat handwriting. She quickly refreshed and gave her mother a hug.

After bathing, saying prayers and having her breakfast, she ran to play with her friends.

"You know, my mother gave me a pleasant surprise this morning. There was a beautiful jute board with a drawing of mine". "My mother too gave

me a surprise this morning. There was a sticker name plate with my brother's and my name on the door" Sadhana said.

"My mother gave me a pillow case embroidered with my name" Suman said. Well, all of them had little surprises that morning.

"Could it be that our mothers planned for this together?" asked Mira.

"If so, why don't we plan for a secret gift for them too?"

Mayura was thoughtful. Suddenly, she said "I know what we can give our mothers. My father had bought lot of dry fruits from Dubai last week. We can pack them in small baskets –I can make paper baskets. We can gift this to our mothers".

"Good idea. We can sew their initials onto hand kerchiefs too!" Varsha said.

"We can do both" Suman said.

Soon, Mira and her friends got whatever colour paper, decorative items they could lay their hands on and gathered at Varsha's house.

"It's no use. I can't even stitch one letter" Suman said.

"Hey, Suman! You can use fabric paint instead" Mira told her friend.

Soon, their hands completed their work and each one suggested on how they could make their kerchief design and lettering more beautiful. It was good team work.

Once the kerchiefs were ready, they put them on mats to dry.

The girls sat down to pack the dry fruits. Mayura showed them how to make

paper baskets. She carefully placed a thick cardboard piece at the bottom to make it sturdy. With jute threads, they made the handles.

Each girl painted her mother's initials on the basket. In the evening, they dressed up smartly and put their gifts in small paper covers.

All of them went to each house and gave the gifts that they had lovingly prepared to their mothers. It was their mothers' turn to get surprised!

Mira's mother hugged her and said, "How wonderful it is to have a daughter like you!"

"I am sure her friends' mothers will feel the same" Mira's mother thought.

### **An Exciting day**

"It's so boring!" thought Mira. But she dares not open her mouth lest her Thatha should hear her. "Do you know the meaning of the word 'boring'? Come, let's look it up in the dictionary. See, 'nothing to do' is one of the meanings. Is that what you meant? Do you really have nothing worthwhile to do? At your age, I..." he would go on, making the person feel miserable for having uttered the word 'boring' inadvertently.

"How does Thatha manage to do so much?" she thought. Everyday, Thatha used to get up by 5.30 am and after his coffee, he would take a stroll. Once he was back, he would wash the area outside the washrooms else it would become slippery because of the moss.

After ensuring that the ground was not slippery especially for his grand children, he would soak all his clothes-white dhoti, kurta, towels et al in warm water with a spoonful of washing soda. After a thorough wash, he would dry them-sparkling white clothes, which could easily compete with any of the Soap powder advertisements that we see today. |

"Quite a dull routine", Mira thought. "Let me see if Patti allows me to climb up the attic -that should be fun". Mira ran to her Patti. "Patti, all

my cousins have gone to the riverside. I want to climb up the attic-can I?" she asked. But the permission to climb up did not come so easily. Finally, Patti had to yield.

It was three years since Mira had climbed up the attic. There was a ladder and Mira quickly reached the attic. Her Patti too climbed up, to Mira's astonishment.

There was a small wooden mantap with an idol of Lord Krishna. "It's been a long time since I came to see Him" she said. "Whenever Thatha or his folks used to scold me, I used to run up this attic and pray to Him for long hours. It was Krishna who gave me the strength to face life". They both then quickly dusted the dirt smeared smiling face of Krishna." How lovely He looks!" Mira thought. There were few big brass vessels too. "We used to cook for over a hundred people whenever there was a wedding. Our relatives used to come a week ahead and each one of us had our own set of duties to perform-just like ants in a colony," Patti told Mira. "If amma were here, she would use these vessels as decorative pieces" Mira thought and smiled.

There was a big wooden trunk. Patti opened the trunk. It creaked as though grumbling about no one opening it before. Inside were silk pieces of cloth, old photographs and trinkets. Mira quickly sorted the photos and selected a few. "I am going to make a scrapbook about our family. But I need your help to write about these relatives of ours", Mira told Patti pointing to few of her relatives.

There were small dolls carefully packed with straw and wrapped with cloth. "This is for Golu"said Patti. Mira unwrapped each doll carefully and couldn't help wondering how nice they would look when displayed during the 9-day long festival called Golu. There was a little very cute Krishna idol too and Mira just could not put it down. Her Patti saw the

look in her eyes. “Well Mira, your mother also liked the idol. I had promised to give her this idol after the Golu was over, last year. You can probably take it home with you this time”.

“Oh, Patti! Really? Can I take Him home?” Mira shouted gleefully.

”Of course, my dear. I am sure He’ll be a good companion to you” replied Patti.

“What an exciting day it has been, Patti! I shall start making my scrapbook right away...” Mira ran to her room.

### **Favorite Spot**

Mira was dusting her seat carefully. She placed a few soft cushions and took her favourite book to read. As she sat in her special seat, facing the garden outside, time just seemed to fly.

After few hours, her father came back from the office. “Mira, didn’t you go out to play today?” he asked. “No, Appa.I was so busy reading “Tales of Hanuman” that I didn’t realise it was evening.” Mira replied. “Run along now. Play for half an hour”. Mira wanted to finish her book but her father always insisted that she play with her friends in the evening. Mira returned after sometime. She saw Appa and Amma talking seriously.

“If it’s something important, they will tell me” she thought. She again went back to her favourite seat. Her mother called the seat ‘hapse’ (happy seat-since Mira seemed happy just by sitting on it).

The next evening, Mira was looking out of the window from her hapse. She was trying to sketch the outside view. “No bird is willing to pose, Amma”she called out to her mother.

Her mother sat down beside her. "Mira, I want to talk to you" she said gently.

"Yes, Amma" Mira asked anxiously. "Appa has had a transfer. We might have to shift to a different place which is a little away from the city". Mira became thoughtful.

"Does it mean all of us have to leave this nice home, this...this nice hapse?" Mira had tears in her eyes." "It shall be for a year only. We shall come back to this home next year" her mother said.

The next few weeks went by swiftly. Mira packed her things carefully and kissed her hapse goodbye. They drove down to Mysore where her father had been posted. When they reached their new home, Mira ran inside and quickly looked at her room.

As they began unpacking, Mira had an idea. "Amma, can I please have the small *divan* in my room, against the window?" Mira asked. "Of course" her father replied. She quickly placed it against the wall near the window. She put a nice bedspread which had small, colourful printed flowers and placed the cushions. "Now that my hapse is ready, let me open the window". Mira opened the window and she could see *Chamundi* hills from her room! She shouted "Yipee!" and ran down to her parents in glee. "Amma, Appa, my hapse with a picture perfect view is ready. Do come and see" she told them happily.

## Grandma's Visit

"Listen! I don't think I can stay away for a month. I shall finish my work in a week's time", Anu, Mira's mother was telling her boss.

In the evening, she told Mira's father that she had to travel for a week to the U.S on an official trip. "Don't worry, Anu. I shall take care of Mira. I shall come home early every evening. Actually, next month, my workload will be less." said Mira's father.

"Mira, come here. I want to tell you something", Mira's mother called out to her.

"Coming Amma... Tell me" said Mira. "I need to go to the US for a week, Mira. Can you manage without me, for a week? Appa says he'll come home early every evening when you get back from school" said Mira's mother.

Mira was listening intently." Yes, Amma. If Appa is here, I guess it's alright."

Soon, it was time for Mira's mother to leave. Mira's father and Mira went to the airport to drop her. Mira swallowed hard to fight back tears. She had left her mother to go to her Grandparents' place but this was the first time, her mother was leaving her for one whole week. Her father saw her pensive face and said there was a surprise awaiting her the next morning.

Mira could hardly sleep. She tried pleading with her father to know what the surprise was. The next morning at around 6.00 am, Mira got up to hear a familiar voice.

"Patti! Yippee! I am so happy you're here!" cried Mira, hugging her Granny.

"Appa... So this was the surprise! Why didn't you tell me? I could've come to the station to pick up Paati" Mira said.

"Your Paati didn't want anyone to come to the station. She has come here with our neighbor, Gopu" her father replied.

It was fun having Paati at home. This visit was a welcome change for her and for Mira too.

Paati cooked cleaned and recited slokas in her mellifluous voice and narrated stories.

Mira would tell her Granny about her friends and every single bit that happened at school.

After four days, Mira said, "Paati I have holidays from Thursday to Sunday.

Appa says we shall go to Ooty together, Appa's friend stays in Coonoor and we can be back on Sunday morning, well in time to receive Amma at night".

Mira and her father knew Paati loved hills and was always appreciative of scenery and so they had planned this together.

On Wednesday night, all three of them left for Coonoor by bus. In the morning, they went to their hotel, which was booked by Mira's father's friend. There was a splendid view from their room. They quickly refreshed and had breakfast. All three of them preferred trekking.

"Walking is the best way to see a place once you're inside the city" remarked Paati, when she saw a dozen tourist jeeps going past.

After lunch, they went to SIM's park, one of the oldest parks in those parts. There was a Rudraksha tree and hawkers lost no time in telling visitors about the significance of each rudraksha and how it would where in good health and prosperity. Paati needed no preamble. She quickly sifted the rudraksha seeds and took whatever she needed.

The next morning, there was a toy train chugging from Coonoor to Ooty. Paati was as happy as Mira. They had fun sighting green meadows, well-fed cows. Mira's father rattled few botanical names of trees.

In Ooty, after breakfast, Mira and others went to a tranquil place called Picara Lake. The boat ride was wonderful. Mira's father shot plenty of the scenic piece. "It seems as though God has wielded his brush to paint this masterpiece out of sky. How serene the lake looks!" Paati exclaimed. After savoring the beauty around for some more time, they left towards pine forest.

On the way, there was an elevated flat platform of grass that looked inviting. Paati wanted to stretch her limbs on that soft green carpet. After relaxing, they went to the Pine forest, Mira collected pine cones and leaves. Paati and her father helped her.

Next day after shopping for Ooty home made chocolates for their neighbors and for Paati to take back some for distribution, they got into the bus. Sunday morning was sunny and Mira looked cheerful. "Amma will be here today, Paati. Please don't leave immediately" requested Mira. "I shall stay for few more days and leave the following weekend. Thatha would have lost weight waiting for me, you know" Paati jocularly said. Paati and Mira rearranged furniture, painted the cones, silver and arranged them neatly in a glass bowl and kept that at the

centre of the table. Mira's mother came late in the night. Her father had gone to pick her up from the airport. Mira was eager to go too, but she knew she had to go to school the next morning. She slept peacefully through the night.

In the morning her mother woke her up with a hug. Once she came back from school, her mother showed her an artist's apron, drawing board with stand, brushes, and paints - in short, everything a budding artist would want.

"Thank you Amma. I am going to practice painting everyday and Paati, whatever turns out well I shall gift it to you" said Mira.

It was a happy and excited family that went to dinner that night.