PUTKI
ON HER WAY TO CHINA
Sigrun Srivastava
Putki on her way to China won first prize in the category of Read-aloud Books in the Competition for Writers of Children's Books organised by the Children's Book Trust.

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PUTKI
ON HER WAY TO CHINA

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Illustrated by Mickey Patel

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That night Putki decided to run away because everybody scolded her.

"Putki," her mother glared at her with big, angry eyes, "I have told you a thousand times to wash your hands before dinner. I will send you to bed without food, if I see you at the dinner table with dirty hands once again."
"And I," said her father with a deep frown, "I will give you a bath with cleaning powder and a scrubbing brush."

Putki looked at her father and her mother with tears in her eyes. 'Nobody loves me,' she thought, 'not really,' and rose to wash her face and scrub her hands. She even brushed her teeth. Then she sat down and ate her food quietly. And all the while she thought, "I am going to run away. Yes, I will."
Back in her room, Putki packed her bag. She put in her birthday frock, a new pair of socks, her favourite doll and her water-bottle because she did not go anywhere without it.
Then she sat down on her bed and cried. After she had shed all her tears and could cry no more, she blew her nose. Yes, tonight she would run away. She would go all the way to China.

At night when everybody was asleep, she tiptoed to the window. It was pitch dark outside. A few stars twinkled in the sky. The moon peeped out from behind dark clouds and scowled at her. No, night was not the best time to run away even if the stars twinkled. She would wait till morning.
Next day, Putki rose with the first rays of the sun. She crept to the window and peeped out from behind the curtain. It was a wonderful, sunny day. Just the right day to walk all the way to China.
She picked up her bag with her birthday frock, a new pair of socks, her favourite doll and her water-bottle because she did not go anywhere without it. She walked out of the house and down the garden path, out of the gate. She was finally on her way to China. She skipped and hopped and sang and danced and when she came to the fence she jumped right over it. That was fun!
Then she hopped, skipped and danced some more and when she came to another fence she went down flat on her stomach and crawled under it. That was difficult.

She wriggled and wriggled. She pushed and pulled and finally she was out from under it. She clapped her hands and danced with joy. And off she ran, as fast as the wind, faster than the wind. She ran so fast, she did not see the ditch and fell right into it. She landed on her little behind.
Oh, how her head spun! How her back ached! But Putki got back onto her feet, and crawled out of the ditch.

She dusted her hands and brushed her shirt and picked up her bag with her birthday frock, a new pair of socks, her favourite doll and her water-bottle because she did not go anywhere without it. And once again she was on her way to China.
When she came to a little hillock, she climbed up very slowly. She huffed and puffed and when she finally stood on its top she could see far and wide, as far as China. And that is where she wanted to go. She hopped and danced on top of the hillock and sang a jolly song. Then she whizzed down as fast as she could, ran over the fields till she came to the first trees of China.
There she met a small boy and a big boy.
“Hi,” asked Putki, “are these the first trees of China?”
“No,” answered the boy, “these trees belong to farmer Taran Chand. We are here to guard them.”
“Guard them?” asked Putki. “Why?”
“The birds come and pick the fruit. We are here to scare them away. Get ready, here they come!”
And there they came. Many sparrows and a few crows.

“Brr. Chut, chut, put,” shouted the boys fiercely and whistled and screeched and frowned and growled. They rolled their eyes and flashed their teeth and flapped their arms and clapped their hands.

Putki put down her bag and frowned and growled and shouted and shrieked and hooted and shooed and made an awful lot of noise and a terrible scary face. She liked that.
But the birds did not.
They shrieked and screeched and crackled and cawed and rose helter-skelter into the air. They settled on a thin tree and a thick tree and never returned.

The big boy and the small boy were overjoyed. "Thank you so much," they said, you have been a great help. Would you like some mangoes?"

"Oh, goody," cried Putki, "I love mangoes. Thank you!" And she began plucking them. She kept them in the bag with her birthday frock, a new pair of socks, her favourite doll, and her water-bottle because she did not go anywhere without it. And happily walked all the way back home.
“Good morning, Putki,” greeted her mother, “where have you been so early in the morning?”

“Well,” said Putki truthfully, “actually I wanted to go all the way to China. But I did not get as far as that. I helped two boys scare the birds off fruit trees. See, I got so many mangoes in return. I thought we could have them for breakfast.”

“That is a wonderful idea,” her mother gave her a big hug and a kiss. “Come in, breakfast is ready.”

Putki went and washed her face and scrubbed her hands, she brushed her teeth till they sparkled like pearls. Then she sat down and looked at all the good things at the table.

She knew nowhere in the whole wide world would there be a better place than home, not even in China!