LIFE WITH GRANDFATHER

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LIFE WITH GRANDFATHER

Everybody called me “Raja”. It is not my real name but I liked being called “Raja”. I lived with my Grandfather and Grandmother. They were my guardians. My mother died when I was young. My father left me with my grandparents, who brought me up.

We lived in a large house. But we were a small family. There were Grandfather, Grandmother, Uncle and I. We had many relations but they lived in their own houses.

Grandfather was a tall, strong man. He always spoke in a loud voice. He knew everyone in our village. People respected him. They came to him for advice and help.

Grandmother was kind and gentle. She took good care of me. She would follow me like a shadow, saying, “Drink this milk” or “Eat your food” or “Have your bath” or “Go to bed”. I did not like this, but still I loved her very much.
My Uncle was young and very clever. He helped my Grandfather in looking after our fields and gardens. People liked him and I too liked him very much. Whenever I was in trouble, Uncle would come to my help.

At home I did not have any friend to play with. Grandfather did not like my going out to play with other children. He believed that I would be spoiled if I did so. Other children did not like to come to our house because they were afraid of Grandfather.

Yet life with Grandfather was not dull. I liked my home and the very large garden all round it. There were many trees in the garden: coconut trees, mango trees, and other kinds of trees. There were
birds, butterflies and honey-bees. There were many tanks, with plenty of fish in them. Kingfishers, storks and other waterbirds came to the tanks to catch the fish.

In a corner of the compound was a grove, where trees, shrubs and creepers grew wild. Jackals, mongooses, wild cats and owls lived in the grove.

We had many cows, bulls and bullocks. Little calves played and ran about in our garden.

I liked to play with the calves and I liked to watch the birds in the garden. I looked for jackals coming out of the grove. I ran after mongooses and I caught butterflies and reptiles.
SNAKE-BITE

One day I saw a small snake in the compound. It was crawling along slowly but when it saw me, it moved away quickly and hid itself in a coconut shell. I quietly went near and closed the mouth of the coconut shell with a stone. Then I took the shell and ran to Grandmother.

"Look, Grandma," I cried, "I have caught a snake".

"Snake?" asked Grandmother in alarm. She was shocked. She cried for help. Grandfather came running. When he learnt that I had a snake in the shell, he snatched the shell and threw it away. It crawled away and disappeared behind some bushes. Grandfather
warned me never to go near a snake, because snakes were very dangerous.

Later in the evening, I tried to catch a bee and it stung me on my finger. I felt a sharp pain. I ran to Grandmother and told her that I had been bitten and I wanted her to do something to stop the pain. Grandmother thought that I had been bitten by a snake. She called out to Grandfather to come quickly and see me.

Grandfather came at once. He looked at my finger and there was a blue mark. Without a word he took me in his arms and started running. He ran across the garden and through the paddy fields. He ran and ran and did not stop until he reached a small house quite some distance away from our home. Then he shouted for the man who lived there.

An old, grey-haired man came out of the house. He knew the
cure for snake-bite. Grandfather asked him to cure me. The old man took me inside. He looked at my finger and then asked me to sit down and not to move. I sat on Grandfather's lap. The old man
then took some water in a small brass vessel, sat in front of us and started reciting some verses.

I wanted to tell him that it was a bee and not a snake that had bitten me. But Grandfather held me tight and did not allow me to talk. Grandmother too had arrived by then and some other people with her. They looked sad and stood silently watching me.

By this time the pain in my finger had stopped. But still I had to sit there to get cured of the “snake-bite”.

After a few minutes, the old man got up, washed my finger and gave me some water to drink. He asked me to keep quiet for some more time. Then he turned to Grandfather and said: “Thank God, you brought him in time. He is out of danger now. It was indeed a poisonous snake that bit him”.

Grandfather, Grandmother and all others thanked the old man for the magic cure. On returning home, Grandfather sent him gifts.
RAIN-MAKING

It was evening after a heavy rain. Grandfather was picking flowers from the jasmine bush under a sandalwood tree. The leaves of the tree were full of raindrops. I knew I could make rain if I shook the
tree, and Grandfather and I would get a good shower. I liked bathing in the rain. Grandfather might not like it. But it would be great fun.

So I quietly went near the sandalwood tree and shook it with all my strength. There was a heavy shower and both Grandfather and I were soaked. I loved it. But Grandfather did not. He turned on me with an angry look. I was sure he would catch me and beat me. So I ran. He ran after me. I ran fast. But he ran faster. He had almost caught me when he stumbled and fell. I ran away to the paddy fields and hid myself there. I heard Grandfather shout that he would teach me a lesson when I came back home.

I did not want to go home because I feared Grandfather would beat me. I stayed on in the fields. It was getting dark. I was afraid to stay there alone in the darkness. I remembered all the ghost stories I had heard. I stood up, looked around and then ran towards home.
I was still afraid to face Grandfather. So I did not go into the house. I went to the cowshed and took shelter in the loft. From there I could see Grandfather sitting on the verandah saying his prayers.

Grandmother was waiting for me. When I did not turn up she looked for me everywhere in the house. Then she came out and called aloud for me, thinking that I was somewhere in the garden. She could not get any answer. Then she went to Grandfather and asked where I was. "You look for him in the house," Grandfather said. "He is hiding somewhere".

"He is not in the house," Grandmother said. "I looked for him everywhere".

Then Grandfather stood up and went outside and called aloud "Come, Raja, come. I won't beat you."

But I did not answer him, for I thought that he would beat me.

Grandmother was angry and said, "He won't come. You drove him away. I heard you say that you would beat him if he came home. Poor child, he is afraid of you and has run away."

Grandfather called the servants and asked them to go out and look for me. They went out but after a while returned to say that they could not find me. Grandmother started weeping. Grandfather started walking up and down the courtyard.

The news that I was missing spread. Our neighbours came first, then our relatives and then others who had heard the bad news. Many came to offer their sympathies to Grandmother.

Grandfather did not like this. He shouted, "Nothing has happened to the boy. He is hiding somewhere. Can't some of you go out and find him instead of wasting your time here?"

Some of them went out to search for me.

More and more people came and soon there was a crowd. By now Grandmother had lost all hope of seeing me again. She started telling the people what a good boy I was.

The search parties returned without finding me. Grandmother
started weeping loudly. The women in the crowd also wept. The servants of the house joined in the wailing. They all acted as if I were dead.

I felt very sorry for Grandmother. I wanted to come out.

Grandfather was a man of strong will. But I knew that he too felt very sad. He did not, however, lose hope. He stood up, turned in the direction of our family temple and prayed:
“Help me God” he said. “Give me my child. I want him now. I cannot wait.” He then stood silent in prayer.

At that moment Uncle returned. He learnt what was happening at home. He looked around and guessed where I was. He came to the cowshed and asked me to come down. I came down. Uncle took me into the house.

Grandfather had just finished his prayer. As he opened his eyes he saw me standing before him. He took me up in his arms in joy, hugged me and said, “God heard my prayers and has given you back to us.”
GIFT FROM GOD

Grandfather was a very pious man. He said his prayers several times a day. He visited temples and made offerings to Gods. He often went on pilgrimages to sacred places in the country.

There were many temples in our village and places around it. Grandfather arranged “pooja” in several of these for the good and prosperity of our family. Every Friday he arranged a special “pooja”
in one of the big temples for my benefit. So I had to go with him that day to the temple to pray.

I liked to visit the temple. There were many nice things to see there. The building was beautiful and different from all other buildings. There were hundreds of oil lamps, all lit in the evening. There were flowers and flower garlands. There was music. There was blowing of
conches and ringing of bells. And there was the image of God with a lovely dress and beautiful ornaments.

The special pooja was late in the evening. When it was time to say our prayers we went in and waited at the closed door of the inner shrine. Soon the bells rang, conches blew and the temple door opened. This was the time for us to pray. Grandfather bowed in all humility and reverence. He prayed God to give all his blessings to his grandson—that was me.

I also said my prayers. But I did not ask God to give me anything big. I asked Him only for some small things which I liked to have at that time. But I did not get any of the things I prayed for. Sometimes I prayed for some pocket money and once I thought God gave me that.

One evening Grandfather and I were going to the temple. On our
way we had our bath in the temple tank. While leaving the tank I noticed something bright lying in the sand. I picked it up. It was a silver rupee. I was happy. I thought that it was a gift from God.

I told Grandfather about the gift when we reached the temple. He asked me where I got it from and I told him that God had left it for me in the sand. Grandfather did not say anything more.

We went inside the temple and said our prayers. When the prayer was over, Grandfather turned to me and asked for the rupee. I did not want to give it to him. Then he ordered me to give it and I had to part with God’s gift. He took the rupee and gave it to the temple priest.

I felt rather angry with Grandfather. I did not speak to him till we reached home. At home he turned to me and said: "What is the matter with you? You look sad. Is it because of the rupee?"

I did not say anything.

Then he said: "The rupee you found was no gift from God. Someone had lost it. God does not give away gifts like that. If you work hard He will help you to earn many rupees. You should not touch money that you have not earned."
CHIRUTHA'S LOVE

Chirutha and her husband lived in a small house, not far from ours. They were poor people. They were called Harijans. They were not allowed to touch us or enter our house. But Chirutha was part of our household. She was of great help to Grandmother. She went to market every day and bought whatever Grandmother needed at home. She sold rice and coconuts that Grandmother had saved in her management of the house.

Chirutha was dark but she was clean and good-looking. She always wore white clothes.

Chirutha was unhappy. She had no children. She longed for a son.

Chirutha was very fond of me. I also liked her very much. She called me by many pet names. She used to tell me that some day she
would take me in her arms and kiss me. I wondered why she did not.

One day, when I was in the garden, Chirutha happened to pass by. As soon as she saw me, she stopped and looked around. There was nobody nearby. She came up to me, took me in her arms, hugged me and kissed me on my cheek.

Suddenly we heard a shout. It was Grandfather’s voice. Chirutha was scared. She dropped me on the ground and ran. I saw Grandfather running after her with a big stick. He beat her once or twice before she could escape.

Grandfather came back shouting all sorts of things in anger.

Grandmother came out and said, “What is all this shouting for?”

“You,” roared Grandfather, “you are the one who did this. You allowed that woman Chirutha to come here. See what she has done now. She took Raja in her arms. You get out of this house. If you like Chirutha go and stay with her. I shall look after the child myself.”

“What is there to shout about!” asked Grandmother. “If Chirutha touched Raja, ask him to take a bath and there the matter ends.”

Grandfather then came to me, caught hold of me by the hand and dragged me to the tank. We both had a dip in the water. The “sin” of having been touched by a Harijan was thus washed away.

I was sorry for poor Chirutha. She had done nothing wrong. I was happy when she took me and kissed me. Her love for me was that of a mother. Everybody in the house loved me, but I felt Chirutha loved me more than anybody else.

The next morning I told Uncle what had happened to Chirutha. I wanted to know how she was after the beating she got from Grandfather. Uncle asked me not to worry. He said that such bad things remained in the world, but the world was changing fast. I could not understand what he meant.

A little later Uncle came to me and asked me whether I would like
to go out for a walk. I was happy to go and we went out. We visited some people and, while returning, passed by Chirutha’s house.

Chirutha was inside. Uncle called out to her and said, “Raja is here. He is coming in to meet you.”

“No, no,” Chirutha cried to me. “Please don’t come in. I will again be in trouble if you do so.”

“Raja asked me to take him to you,” said Uncle. “It is now for you to deal with him.”

“Please don’t come in, you little darling,” Chirutha begged me. “Go away before anyone sees you here.” Then she started crying.

“You go in, Raja,” said Uncle. “Chirutha is unhappy. You alone
can make her happy."

"No, don't come in," cried Chirutha. "I am an untouchable. It is a sin to enter my house."

"Don't weep, Chirutha," said Uncle. "Raja wants you to kiss him again." He pushed me inside.

"Oh, no! I won't do it. Never again. Please go away. Big Master will see you here and he will kill me."

I went in. Chirutha was still crying. I could not bear to see her crying. I was also in tears.

Chirutha saw me crying. She quickly wiped her tears, looked at Uncle and then at me. She then picked me up, held me tightly to her bosom and kissed me again and again. I felt my mother was kissing me.

I was with Chirutha only for a short time. For, she said, "Go my golden calf, go home before Big Master knows you are here."

We returned home. I did not go to Chirutha's hut again. But I used to see her almost every day. Whenever she saw me she had that loving look in her eyes for me.

I loved to see her and talk to her. I always wondered why she was an untouchable.
THE BIG GUEST

Once we had a big guest at home. It was Lakshmi, the young cow elephant. She belonged to one of our rich relatives. He wanted us to keep her at our place for some days. Grandfather did not like the idea very much. It was costly to feed an elephant, even a young elephant. But Grandfather could not refuse the request of a relative.

I was excited when I heard Lakshmi was coming. I asked people how I should welcome her. Grandmother told me that elephants loved sugarcane and that I should keep some for Lakshmi.

One evening Lakshmi arrived with her mahout, Kittu. Everybody in the house came out to welcome her. She was a beautiful, young elephant.

Kittu said: “She is young. She is hardly eight years old. She is intelligent and learns things quickly. She is very loving and likes to play with people.” Kittu said so many good things about Lakshmi that I thought Lakshmi was his own daughter.

I had a piece of sugarcane with me and I wanted to give it to Lakshmi. But I was afraid to go near her. Kittu saw me holding the sugarcane and he took me near Lakshmi, saying: “She loves children.” I offered the sugarcane to Lakshmi and she took it and ate it.

At night Lakshmi was chained to a tree in our courtyard. I sat there for a long time watching her. I would have remained there longer but for Grandmother who came out and said, “Now Raja you go to bed. You can watch the elephant in the morning.”

I woke up early next morning and came out. Lakshmi saw me and she waved her trunk as if welcoming me. I was still afraid to go
near the elephant. Lakshmi tried to come to me but she could not as she was chained to the tree.

Kittu came in the morning. He took Lakshmi out for a bath. I had never seen an elephant bathing. So I followed them to the tank. Lakshmi first went into the water alone. She played in the water. She took water in her trunk and poured it over her body several times. Then Kittu went in and asked her to sit down. She filled her trunk again with water and looked at Kittu. Kittu said, "Don't, don't do it." But Lakshmi would not listen. She spouted all the water on Kittu. Kittu did not get angry. He again asked Lakshmi to sit. But Lakshmi again filled her trunk with water. Now Kittu showed her his stick and warned her not to repeat the mischief. This time Lakshmi did not pour water on him but threw
Kittu had told me that Lakshmi liked ripe bananas better than sugarcane. We had plenty of bananas in the house. But ripe bananas were kept in a cellar. Only Grandfather could take them out and distribute them. I waited for an opportunity and as soon as Grandfather was out I quietly went to the cellar and took half of a huge bunch of ripe bananas. I took the bananas to Lakshmi. She ate them with great relish.

Later Grandfather noticed that some of the bananas were

it backward with force. I was standing just behind and the water fell all over me. It was great fun. Lakshmi was only playing.

Kittu pulled Lakshmi by the ear and ordered her to sit. She obeyed. He then scrubbed her with a piece of stone and cleaned her all over.

On our way back Kittu gave me a ride on Lakshmi. I was thrilled. When we reached home, Grandfather, Grandmother and all others were waiting outside to see me riding an elephant.
missing. He asked everyone about it and found out that I had taken the bananas. Grandfather did not like anybody taking anything without his permission. He took a long cane and called me. I knew he wanted to beat me. I ran. And Grandfather ran after me.

Lakshmi was not chained to the tree at that time. She saw me running and Grandfather chasing me. She immediately came to my help. She rushed towards Grandfather with a wild cry. Grandfather
was very frightened. He turned back, ran into the house and bolted the door. I went to Lakshmi and patted her.

After a while Grandfather came out, holding in his hand the other half of the banana bunch. He asked me to take it and give it to the elephant. I did so and both Grandfather and Lakshmi were happy.

Lakshmi was with us only for fifteen days. I felt very sad when she left.
TEARS FOR CROCODILE

There was once a huge crocodile in one of our tanks. It came during the monsoon and stayed there till summer.

Crocodiles go about in search of food and stay at places where they can get food easily. We had plenty of fish in our tanks. This crocodile came there because of the fish.

I often saw the crocodile on the shore of the tank basking in the sun with its mouth wide open. I did not mind the crocodile staying in our tank. But I did not want it to eat our fish. So I wanted the crocodile to go away. As it would not go by itself, I tried to drive it out.

I collected stones and bricks and tip-toed to the tank. The crocodile was on the bank. I stood behind a tree and threw a brick at the crocodile with all my strength. But before the brick could hit it, the crocodile slipped into the water and disappeared. I waited for it to come out, but it did not re-appear.

I went home and came back after a few hours. The crocodile was there again. Again I tried to hit it with a stone. But again it escaped without being hit. For many days I tried to hit the crocodile but I always missed. Then I thought I must find other ways to deal with the creature.

I had once seen a stray dog caught in a noose. I thought I could use a noose and catch the crocodile. The crocodile stayed in one tank during the day. At night it went from tank to tank to catch fish, and in doing so it left on the ground a track of its movements. I followed the track and found that the crocodile had made an opening in the hedge enclosing one of the tanks. I thought that was the ideal spot to set up the noose. The crocodile was sure to go that way and would be caught in the noose. All I wanted now was a long strong rope.
I looked for a long, strong rope. The cows and bulls in the cowshed were tethered with long ropes. But I could not take one from there easily, for Grandfather would not allow it. So I had to wait till Grandfather was away from the house.

Soon I had my chance. Grandfather went out of our village for a couple of days on some business.
In the evening I went to the cowshed and removed a long rope from one of the cows. I took the rope to the hedge where the crocodile had made the opening. I made a noose at one end of the rope and fixed it in the opening and tied the other end to a big tree. The trap was thus ready and I went home hoping that the crocodile would come and be caught in the noose.

I woke up early next morning and ran out to the hedge. There it was, the huge crocodile, with the noose tight round his neck. He had struggled hard to get away. The ground around the tree was churned up by his struggle.

The crocodile saw me and suddenly it rushed at me with its mouth open, letting off a sharp sound. But the strong rope held it back.

I ran home and woke up Uncle and told him of my big catch. At first he would not believe me. Then he came out with me and saw that what I said was true. I wanted to take the crocodile away from there and bring it near our house. Uncle helped me. He brought another rope, made a noose at one end, and, using a pole, tied the second rope around the body of the crocodile. Then we dragged the huge creature along. I was pulling in front and Uncle holding it from behind. We brought it quite near the house and tied it securely to two trees.

People had by now heard of my big catch and many came to see it. Grandmother was the first to come out and then our servants and our neighbours.

The news spread. More and more people started gathering.

I did not want to go to school that day. I sent a letter to my teacher asking for leave and also informing him of the huge crocodile I had caught.

One of our servants took the letter to the school. When he returned my teacher and the whole class of over thirty children came to see my crocodile.

I felt I was a hero at least among my class-mates. I told them about the crocodile and how I caught it. The teacher also spoke to
us, telling us more about the crocodile than we knew.

The crowd grew bigger. Some of them wanted to hurt the crocodile. They hurled stones and sticks at it. I did not like this. I told them that it was my crocodile and they had no right to do any harm to it. But they did not listen to me.

Soon the crowd grew still bigger. More people threw stones at the crocodile. I even heard some of them talk of killing it. I appealed to them not to hurt the crocodile. Finally, I told them that I was going to set the crocodile free.

Many were angry with me. It was dangerous to set a wild crocodile free, they said. The crocodile had already done much harm, said some and therefore it should be destroyed. One man came forward and said that the crocodile had killed his dog and eaten it up. Another said that it had attacked his cow. A woman cried: "This is the crocodile which followed me one night to kill me."

The crowd was angry and impatient. Many were armed with big sticks or knives and some had axes. They all wanted to kill my crocodile. I was alone and helpless. I called out for Uncle. But he was not to be seen anywhere. Perhaps he was also in the crowd. I called out for my Grandmother and she came. But she had heard what the people said. She told me that it would be better to kill the crocodile. I lost hope.

Then suddenly Grandfather returned. I knew he was the only man who could save the life of my crocodile. I ran up to him and told him what had happened. I pleaded with him to save the life of the crocodile.

Grandfather came with me to the place where the crocodile lay tied to the trees. He looked at the huge prisoner and then looked at the crowd. In a loud voice he told them that the crocodile would be set free. Nobody should do any harm to it.

I jumped with joy. But the crowd did not seem to like Grandfather's decision. Some of them tried to argue with him. But Grandfather was not one who allowed arguments. He shouted at them and told them to leave the place. The crowd melted away.
Grandfather then turned to me and said, "Set free the crocodile immediately." The life of the crocodile was saved. Suddenly I had a fear. How could I set the crocodile free?

Uncle arrived just then. He offered to help me. There was a large temple tank some distance away from our home. There were many crocodiles in that tank. We could take our crocodile there and set it free, Uncle said.
He arranged a long ladder to be brought to the tank. We then led the crocodile to the tank. Grandfather came along with us to see that nobody did any harm to it.

At the tank we held the crocodile near the water and placed the ladder over its body. Eight people pressed down the ladder at both ends so that the crocodile could not move. Then Uncle went forward and cut the ropes around the crocodile with a knife. When he moved back, the ladder was lifted and the crocodile jumped into the tank and disappeared. We returned home with a feeling of relief.

A few days later I saw my crocodile basking in the sun on the shore of our tank where it had been living before I caught it.
The headmaster of our school was a fat man. He was also short. He was so fat and so short that he looked like a rolling ball whenever he moved about. We, students, made fun of him behind his back. But before him we were all like little rats in front of a cat. He was always grave and never smiled in the school. He wanted strict discipline among the students. For this he used his cane as often as he could.

The headmaster was a friend of my Grandfather. He came to our house at times to meet Grandfather, and to report to him on my progress at school. The headmaster had never taken any special interest in me. But his report was that I was one of the best students and that a great future lay before me. Grandfather was happy to hear this report and he liked the headmaster repeating it. The headmaster was only too willing to do it.

One day, however, the headmaster told Grandfather that he was
afraid I was neglecting my studies and that Grandfather should pay a little more attention to me.

Grandfather did pay a little more attention to me the moment the headmaster left. He took a cane and appeared suddenly in my room. I was then painting a picture. He jumped on me like a lion, caught hold of me by my wrist and started beating me. I cried loudly and called out to Grandmother to come and save me. Grandmother rushed in and fell between me and Grandfather. "Stop," she cried. "What are you doing? You are killing the child."

Grandfather let me off, but turned to Grandmother and shouted, "You are spoiling him. He is not studying anything. He is only painting pictures."

He then looked around the room and saw many of my paintings and drawings on the walls. He was furious and tore down as many
pictures as he could. He then warned me not to waste my time painting pictures and left the room.

I was sorry that all my good paintings were destroyed. And I was afraid to paint any more pictures at home.

One day the headmaster came to our class to teach mathematics. Our teacher was on leave and the headmaster did not want us to miss any lesson.

We did not like the headmaster taking any class but we were helpless. We all stood up in silence as he entered. He looked around the class to make sure that everything was in order. He then waved his left hand ordering us to sit down. We obeyed.

He went to the black-board and wrote down five sums which he copied from a piece of paper he had with him. He then turned to us and said, "There are five sums here and I want all of you to do all the sums before the period is over."
Again he looked around to make sure that everyone of us understood what he said.

He then sat down in the chair. He took off his turban and put it on the table. He looked tired. He raised his legs and placed them on the table. He was taking a little rest. In a few moments he was fast asleep.

The sums were simple and almost all the students did them in a few minutes.

After finishing the sums, I looked at the headmaster. He looked so funny that I thought I would draw a picture of him. I tried and the picture turned out to be good. His round face, his bald head, his huge belly, his almost naked legs and the funny position in which he was sleeping were all in the picture. His likeness was so good that anybody could tell that it was our headmaster. I was excited and waited for the class to be over to show it to my friends.

The bell rang. the headmaster woke up. He got up, checked our sums, and went out.

I held out the picture to my friends. They roared with laughter. There was great excitement in the class when the teacher for the next
lesson arrived. He tried to bring about order but failed. He then came to me and snatched the drawing from my hand. He looked at it, smiled, then became grave and went out. He returned after a few minutes and ordered me to go and see the headmaster.

I went to the headmaster’s room. I saw my drawing on the table. The headmaster was angry and asked me, “Did you draw this picture?”

I said, “Yes.”
"You did this?" he roared and caught me by the hand and caned me twice. "You did this?" he again said. "You are not to enter the class for two weeks. Now get out."

I came out. I did not know what to do. I could not go home immediately and face Grandfather. So I waited outside the class till the noon interval.

The news that I was punished for drawing a picture of the headmaster spread throughout the school. In the interval, many of the boys rushed to me. Some expressed sympathy. Some wanted action to be taken against the headmaster. Someone suggested exploding a cracker under his chair. Another boy wanted to put an ink bottle over his door. Some even talked of a strike. But I had to go home for my lunch.

Grandmother was serving me food when the headmaster came home and met Grandfather. I hid behind the door to hear what they were talking. The headmaster told Grandfather that I was not doing well in the class and that I had wasted one whole period in drawing a picture of the headmaster. Then he gave Grandfather the drawing I had done. Grandfather looked at the drawing and burst into laughter.

"Did Raja do it?" he asked. "Yes," the headmaster said. Grandfather laughed again and called Grandmother and Uncle to see the picture.

"Do you think that Raja did any wrong in drawing this picture?" asked Grandfather.

"Of course he did," replied the headmaster "and he did it during the period I was taking a lesson."

"But I like the picture very much," said Grandfather. "I never thought the boy was so clever."

The headmaster waited for a few minutes and then laughed and said, "Of course he is clever. That is why I brought the picture to you."

I could not understand why the headmaster had changed his tone.
A GAME OF CHANCE

Every year there was a monsoon festival in one of our big temples. The main event of the festival was a mock battle. The battle was fought between two groups of people, those living on the west side of the temple and those living on the east. Hundreds of men, each armed with a sword and a shield, gathered on opposite sides of a large field. When a special signal was given, they marched towards each other and started fighting. Nobody was ever killed or wounded in these mock fights. People were trained to play this mock fight in memory of a real battle fought at that place between two kings hundreds of years ago.

A big fair was also held at the time of the festival. The fair lasted many days. Tradesmen from different parts of the country came
there with all kinds of goods to sell. Hundreds of shops were set up and many markets held. People waited for this fair to do their annual shopping. They could buy anything from a small pin to a big elephant.

I wanted to go to the fair to buy an umbrella. Grandfather had given me two rupees. I asked Uncle to take me to the fair.

"Going to the fair with just two rupees?" asked Uncle. "What will you do with two rupees? There are so many things there you would like to buy."

Grandmother heard him. She gave me two rupees more to buy anything I liked.

Uncle took me to the fair. Our servant Nanoo came with us.

There was a big crowd at the fair. Uncle was leading us through the crowd. Then he met a few of his friends. They wanted him to spend some time with them.

Uncle asked me whether I would like to look around the fair with the servant till he came back. I was happy to do that. Uncle warned me not to buy anything while he was away. I promised that I would wait for him.

Nanoo and I went from shop to shop. There were many things I would have liked to buy, but I waited for Uncle to return.

Then we came to what was called the "Lucky Shop". The shopkeeper seemed to be a good man. He wanted everybody to try his luck. He explained to us how one could be lucky. "It is simple," he said. "There are thirty-six prizes numbered from one to thirty-six. Similarly there are thirty-six discs with the numbers one to six. Each number appears on six discs. The discs are placed on the table with the numbers facing down. All you have to do is to pay half a rupee, pick up any six discs, add up the numbers on the discs and find the total. The article marked with that number is yours." He added: "Nobody will be disappointed. Everybody will get something. The value of each of these gifts is from a quarter of a rupee to fifty rupees. If you are lucky you will get something costly. It is a game of luck. Come and try your luck."
An old man paid eight annas (half a rupee) and selected six discs. He added up the numbers on them and found the total was nine. He was given the article marked nine. It was a beautiful clock. But the old man did not want a clock. The shopkeeper obliged him by buying it back for four rupees. The old man went away very pleased.

Then a boy, a little older than I, tried his luck. He paid half a rupee and took six discs. He added up the numbers. The total was fifteen. The article with that number was only a comb worth a quarter of a rupee. The shop-keeper was kind to the boy. He bought the comb from the boy for a quarter of a rupee. The boy tried his luck again. He now got a fountain-pen worth three rupees. Then he tried a third time and got a wrist-watch worth ten rupees. When he tried for the fourth time he got a table lamp costing more than forty rupees. The boy was happy and went away with a smile.

I wanted to try my luck too. I looked at Nanoo. He encourag-
ed me. I paid eight annas and took six discs. My luck was not too good. I got two pencils. The shop-keeper bought them from me for four annas. I tried again. This time I got a bottle of ink, also of little value. The shop-keeper bought that too for four annas. I took a chance for the third time. Still luck was not with me.

I had hopes of winning a big prize and continued to try my luck again and again, paying eight annas each time. But every time I got a trifle. At last, I was left with only four annas. Again the shop-keeper showed his kindness. He said I could play once more with four annas and settle the account after getting the prize. I played again and
the last four annas also disappeared.

People were looking at me. Some were laughing at my bad luck, but none showed any sympathy. Nanoo and I went to the place where Uncle had left us and waited for him to return.

Presently he came. He looked at me and asked: “Raja, you look upset. What is the matter?”

I did not say anything. Nanoo told him what had happened.

Uncle was angry at first, but then he smiled and patted me. He took me to a shop and bought me a beautiful umbrella, biscuits and sweets and some other little gifts. Then we returned home.

Back home, Uncle told me that the lucky shop man had made a fool of me.

“No Uncle,” I said, “it was just my bad luck.”

“No, my boy,” said Uncle, “there was nothing like luck or any such thing in this.”

“But, Uncle,” I said, “I saw an old man getting a clock and a boy getting two or three costly things.”

“You don’t know child,” Uncle said, “they were all friends of the shop-keeper. They were playing tricks to tempt you to try your luck. They wanted your money and they got it. Now forget about it, and don’t tell anybody of your bad luck or your foolishness.”
RANI IN DISTRESS

One day I was visiting my Aunt's house. Out in the garden, I saw a dog chasing a little squirrel. I ran and caught the squirrel before the dog could touch it. It was a tiny baby squirrel. It was trembling all over out of fear. I liked the baby squirrel and took it home.

Grandmother did not like to have a squirrel in the house. She wanted to let it go. "It is too young and sick and it will die soon," Grandmother said.

"Yes, it is young and sick," I replied. "It needs care. I shall keep the squirrel and look after it."

"Why do you want to keep the squirrel?" It was Grandfather's voice from behind. "Do you know that its father and mother are crying now because you have taken away their child?"

"But Grandfather," I said, "I saved the squirrel from a log at
Aunt's house. I could not leave it there, for the dog would have killed it.”

Grandfather looked at the squirrel and went away without saying more. I knew he had allowed me to keep the squirrel. Now Grandmother could not object. I patted the little squirrel and named her "Rani".

There was no place in the house to keep the squirrel. At night I put her in a paper box with holes made on its sides for air. The next day
Uncle bought me a bird's cage. I put Rani in the cage and hung the cage from the ceiling in my room. I made the cage a nice home for the squirrel. I made a small bed for her to sleep in. I placed a small plate and cups in the cage for food and water.

At first I had to feed the squirrel, but soon she started taking food by herself. I gave her milk, nuts, and fruit.

The squirrel grew bigger and could run about and play with me. When I called her by name she would run up to me. She followed me wherever I went.

One day I took Rani out into the garden. She was happy. She ran about among the plants and shrubs. Then she climbed up a tree and was lost among the leaves. But she came down when I called her.

As Rani grew older, I allowed her to move about as she liked. I always kept the door of the cage open so that she could go out and come in as she pleased.

Finally Rani started going out alone. In the morning she would come down for a while to play with me and then she would go out into the garden. She would climb trees, eat fruit, and spend the whole day playing about on the tree.

Rani was now fully grown up. She was free like any other squirrel, but still she had her home in our house. Every evening she came back to her cage to sleep.

As days passed, I saw less and less of Rani. Sometimes I would call her at night. She would immediately wake up and come running to me. Then I stopped calling her at night. I did not like to disturb Rani in her sleep.

For weeks I did not see Rani. Then one day, I saw her in the garden. She was not alone. She had another squirrel with her. I called Rani. She looked at me for a moment and then came to me. Her friend ran up a tree and watched us.

That night I wanted to find out whether Rani was in the house. I called her. She did not come. I looked into the cage. She was not there. Rani was gone!

I felt sad that Rani had left me. But I felt she was free to go
anywhere she liked. Perhaps she had her friend. Perhaps they liked to live together.

Months passed... I seldom saw Rani. I almost forgot her.

One morning I heard a squirrel’s repeated cries. Then I saw the squirrel running towards me. It was Rani. She ran up to me and then ran back towards the backyard of the house. She came running to me again. I knew that Rani was in trouble. She was asking for my help. So I ran after her to the backyard. There, to my horror, I found a squirrel caught by a snake. I cried out for help. Uncle ran up and he tried to save the squirrel. He took a long pole and pressed one end of it on the snake. The snake let go of the squirrel and crawled away when the pole was removed.

The squirrel lay on the ground quite still. I gently took it up. It was dead. I knew it was Rani’s friend. I was sorry I could not save his life. I laid the squirrel on the ground and stepped back. Rani was watching from a tree. She came down to her friend and remained near him for a few minutes sniffing all over the body. Then she knew her friend was dead and she went back to the tree.

Suddenly a kite swooped down and carried the dead squirrel away. Rani screamed. We stood there, feeling helpless.

Rani then quickly ran up the tree, crying all the way as if she
were more frightened than before. We saw her go up the tree and disappear into a nest at the top.

“That is Rani’s home,” said Uncle. “I am sure she has her baby...
there. She must have remembered her baby and has gone up to take care of it."

I was thinking of Rani the whole day and I felt very sorry for her.

In the evening as I sat alone in my room, I heard the sound of a squirrel. It was Rani. She was carrying her baby in her mouth. She came near me and placed the baby squirrel on the floor. I did not know why Rani had brought it to me. I did not know what to do.

I called Grandfather, Grandmother and Uncle. They came at once and were surprised to see that Rani had come to me with her child. Then Uncle said, "Rani is afraid of the snake and the eagle. She wants
you to protect her child till it is grown up."

I took out the old cage and hung it from the ceiling, as before. I placed the baby squirrel in the cage. As soon as Rani saw her young one in the cage, she ran up into the cage. Soon Rani started feeding her baby.

We stood there watching Rani. Grandfather was very much moved. He folded his hands in prayer. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He said, "It is all God's play. It is all God's love."