

Protecting and empowering children since 1989



Acknowledgement

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Introduction

Dear friend,

Whether you are a child, young person or an adult, we are happy that you are holding this book. We want as many people to read and learn from this book.

The stories in this book are about sexual abuse of girls and boys, which is an issue normally difficult to talk about in our society. Sexual abuse of girls and boys is often hidden, because girls, boys and also the adults around them do not want to talk about it. It makes many people feel uncomfortable as it is considered a bad and shameful thing.

Girls and boys, who have been sexually abused, may feel disturbed throughout their lifetime. They may feel so humiliated and ashamed that they are not able to take any action against the person who has committed the abuse. This is because the girl or boy does not want to relive the incident or incidents again and again.

Sexual abuse of children and young people can be lessened if they are aware of their own body parts. It is important to know the difference between a 'safe' and 'an unsafe' touch. If children and young people are aware of how they can be harmed and how they can keep themselves safe in those situations, they can protect themselves better.

As you will read the stories, you will learn about different situations in which children and young people are abused. These are true cases that Butterflies has come across over the years. The stories will give you information on what to do if you or your friend is in a similar situation. Remember, no one has the right to say, show things or touch you in a way that violates your emotions and body.

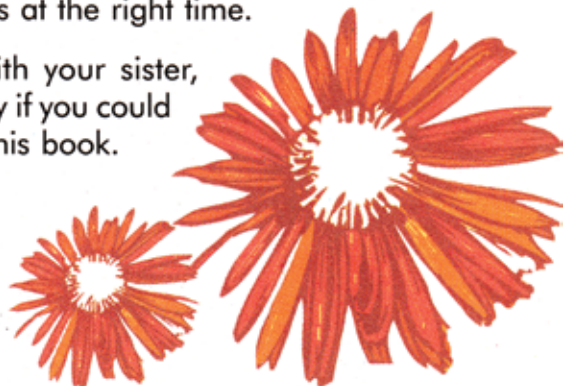
The stories also show adults how they can help children and young people through counselling and taking right actions at the right time.

You may also want to share this book with your sister, brother, cousin or friend. We would be happy if you could send us your comments and feedback on this book.

Best wishes,

Rita Panicker

Executive Director, Butterflies



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Radhika



Radhika loved to watch her mother dress for a party. Ma was so beautiful—tall, slim, dark, and with a smile that lit up her entire face. Ma was 33. And she, Radhika, was 13. Radhika looked a lot like her Ma. In fact, she was almost as tall as Ma. She reached Ma's nose. "Now I don't need to bend down to kiss your forehead, Sunshine," Ma would say. Radhika loved it when Ma called her all her special names...Twinkle Toes, Snowdrop, Hiku, Rad-rad, and whatever else Ma could think of.

The door opened and Uncle Vikram, her stepfather, walked in with his camera. Uncle Vikram was much older than Ma. He had lots of grey in his hair. Radhika thought he looked very handsome—straight thick hair that flopped over his forehead, a sharp nose and large eyes. Ma and Uncle Vikram looked very good together. She did not remember her own father. Ma had struggled alone to bring her up, and Radhika knew that, for almost ten years, Ma had worked very hard at three different jobs, to keep both of them and their house going. Ma was a very successful TV actress now, and life was much easier.



Uncle Vikram went over to Ma. "Are you ready, Ruks? Can I take pictures?"

Ma's name is Rukmini but Uncle Vikram always called her Ruks. And Rads is what he called Radhika.

Uncle Vikram was a photographer. He met Ma when she was shooting for a TV serial. Radhika was very happy for Ma. Uncle Vikram and her Ma had just been married three months.

"Bye, Sweetie. Don't forget to have your dinner by nine. It's in the microwave. And change into your nightie before sleeping. I'll be very late. Ask Uncle Vikram in case you need any help," Ma said.

"Don't you worry about us, Ruks," Uncle Vikram said putting an arm around Radhika, drawing her close. Of late, Uncle Vikram had been hugging Radhika quite often. She felt quite nice.



Uncle Vikram and Radhika watched cartoons on TV for some time. Actually, Radhika watched the cartoons while Uncle Vikram watched Radhika. After some time, Uncle Vikram said, "You have a very expressive face. You'll grow up as beautiful as your mother, Rads."

Radhika barely heard his comment; she was giggling and laughing and was so engrossed in the film. Vikram put his arm around her. After about five minutes, Radhika could feel Uncle Vikram's breath on her neck. It was uncomfortable. Somehow, something didn't feel right about Uncle Vikram's touch. His hands were sliding up and down her arm, sometimes feeling the side of her chest.

"Uncle Vikram, I think I'll eat now. I'm hungry," Radhika said, jumping out of the sofa and almost running into the dining area. She switched on the microwave and went into the kitchen for a plate. When she came back, Uncle Vikram was reading a magazine.

Radhika's head was in a whirl. Why was she so uncomfortable?

Why did she feel so conscious about herself? This was Uncle Vikram—soft-spoken, sophisticated, and cultured. Her Ma's friend and husband. 'What is wrong with you, Radhika?' she mentally scolded herself. She was imagining things. God! She must be crazy.

Soon it was bedtime for her. The next day was a Sunday. She would sleep late. "G'night, Uncle Vikram," she said from the doorway.

"What, no good night kiss for Uncle Vikram?" asked her stepfather standing up and looking at her directly.

"Yeah, sure..." Radhika came back into the room, feeling self-conscious. "G'night," she said giving him a little peck on his cheek. Before she could move away, Vikram hugged her, holding her close. Radhika pushed him away and hurriedly left the room.

She sat on her bed feeling very disturbed. Why was she feeling so bad? Wasn't it normal for dads to kiss their daughters and hug them? Why was



she feeling so...so...so 'not right'? She got up and took off her shirt. Her nightie was on her bed. She heard a sound behind her. She whirled around and there was Uncle Vikram inside her room.

"Come, let me help my little Rads put on her nightie," Uncle Vikram said, reaching for it. Radhika backed away but there was no escaping Uncle Vikram's hands. He asked her not to be afraid of him. He told her he loved her very much and that she was very special. He then touched her everywhere. "You're a lovely girl, Rads. Uncle Vikram loves you very much." Radhika couldn't move. She seemed to have turned to stone.

Finally, he pulled the nightie over her head. "This will be our little secret, okay Rads? We won't even tell Ma anything. Yes, sweetheart?"

He then told her playfully that if she did tell Ma, he would say that she was making it up. Her Ma would only get angry with her and would send her away from her. "Understood, my little Rads?" Uncle Vikram asked in a soft, silky voice.

It was Radhika's 14th birthday. She opened her eyes to Ma's hugs and voice. "Happy Birthday to you...my darling, my Twinkle Toes, my Not-so-chubby-cheeks." There were flowers and many gift packages, some small and some big. There was also Uncle Vikram standing behind Ma.

"Will my little Rads not give me a hug and a kiss also?" Uncle Vikram said as he came closer to her. Radhika flinched. It had been months since she had slept well. She often had nightmares about Uncle Vikram. Only sometimes they were not nightmares. Uncle Vikram would actually be in her room.

Ma had turned away to arrange the flowers in the room. "My real hugs and kisses and gifts you will get after your birthday party tonight," Uncle Vikram whispered in her ear. Ma did not hear him. Radhika became pale. Her eyes were large with fear.

"Betu, are you not feeling well?" Ma asked, looking concerned. "I think you are losing weight; you look so pale...maybe I should take you to a doctor. What do you think, Vikram?"

"Naah. These teenagers...they're all trying to stay slim and not put on any weight. It's just fashion. She doesn't look pale to me. Do you, my little Rads?"

"I'm not your little Rads!" Radhika hissed.

"Radhika!" Ma looked horrified. "How rude you are! What are you so angry about? You know, for Uncle Vikram, you will always remain his little Rads. He loves you so much. Apologise to him."

Radhika looked silently at her. Ma only called her Radhika when she was angry, really angry.

"Well...Radhika?" Ma looked at her.

"Sorry..." said Radhika looking at her own hands twisting the bed sheets.

Uncle Vikram smiled.



The party was over. It was close to 10 p.m. Ma had to go for a night shoot. She had left the room to get dressed. All through the evening Uncle Vikram was the perfect host, the perfect gentleman, the perfect stepfather. But Radhika had felt his eyes on her, when no one else noticed.

‘Ma...Ma...how do I tell you that Uncle Vikram is not what he seems? You love him so much. Will you blame me for what has happened? Have I failed you? Will I lose you? Ma, oh Ma, what do I do? How can I escape tonight?’

Ma came into the room, looking stunning. She held Radhika close and hugged her for a long time. “Okay, Bubblegum, I need to go now. You must be tired. Don’t bother about clearing up...the maid will come in the morning. Hope you had a nice evening. I love your friends. But most of all, I love you very much. Remember that. I love you more than anyone else in this whole world. You are the best.”

“Ma, don’t go today. Stay with me today. Please, Ma. Please,” Radhika begged, desperation in her voice.

“Hey! What’s up, baby? You’ll be asleep in five minutes. And when you wake up in the morning, I’ll be here. Come on, Momo, you’re growing up not growing ‘down’. You never used to fuss when you were younger. I’ll be back soon.”

“You go, Ruks. I’ll take care of her,” Radhika heard Uncle Vikram say.

Radhika’s shoulders slumped in defeat. A minute later she heard the door of their car open and shut. Before the driver could start the engine, Radhika turned and ran through the open door. “Ma, wait...I want to ask you a question.” Ma looked around impatiently. “Yes?”

“Ma, just answer one question. In Hindu mythology, whom did Krishna love?”

“Radhika, have you gone mad? It’s 10.30 p.m. and you have called me back to ask me such a crazy question. What is the matter with you? Who has been asking you these things?”





"Uncle Vikram. Ma, please just answer this question. Please."

"Radhika, go ask Vikram then for the answer. If he tells you stories, then he should know how to complete them. I am also very, very late. Now, don't stop me with any more ludicrous questions. Driver, chalo."

Radhika took a deep breath and squared her shoulders as she went into the house. Uncle Vikram was waiting for her. But this time she fought him...kicking, hitting, biting, stamping all the way. Things fell, chairs turned over, balloons burst, festoons got pulled down...but she would not give in. Suddenly, there was a louder crash. The front door had been flung open. Ma stood there, horrified. In one glance, she understood. Uncle Vikram tried to jump to his feet. She let out a cry of rage and lunged for him, hitting him with whatever she could find.

"How could you? How could you, Vikram? She's my daughter, my baby. Get out! I'll kill you otherwise. GET OUT!" Ma shouted.

Rukmini held her daughter in a tight embrace. She looked ashen, shocked to the core. Radhika rocked back and forth, sobbing and crying.

"Krishna's love? Rukmini and Radhika? Oh, my dear, he's the devil himself...what an evil man."

They wept. A short while later, Rukmini wiped her tears and sat up before saying, "I'm sorry. I should have noticed that you were hardly talking to Vikram. I should have paid attention to the fact that you were not your normal self. But I could not in my worst nightmare have imagined that Vikram would turn out to be so sick in the mind."

Rukmini could barely speak, so enraged and shocked and distressed and remorseful was she.

"Forgive me, betu. If I had noticed earlier, he would have been out of my house and life at that very instant. I feel I should have protected you. Nothing is more important to me as you and your well-being."

Radhika said softly, "I didn't know what to do. I was so scared that you would not believe me and that I would be telling you something horrible about someone you love. Ma, do you think I did something that made Uncle Vikram do what he did?"



"No, love, you were not to blame. No one who goes through what you went through can be blamed. Vikram, and no one but Vikram, is responsible."

"Ma, I liked Uncle Vikram. He was always such fun to be with. Maybe, if I were different in some way, this would not have happened."

"No, betu. Vikram would have to be a different person for it not to have happened. Believe me, he would have behaved like this with any child."

Radhika was silent, absorbing her mother's words.

"But remember one thing always..." said Rukmini. "I will never leave you."

"Now what will happen, Ma? You are both married. What will happen if Vikram comes back or if I meet him somewhere? I feel bad that because of me Vikram has to go away," said Radhika uncertainly.

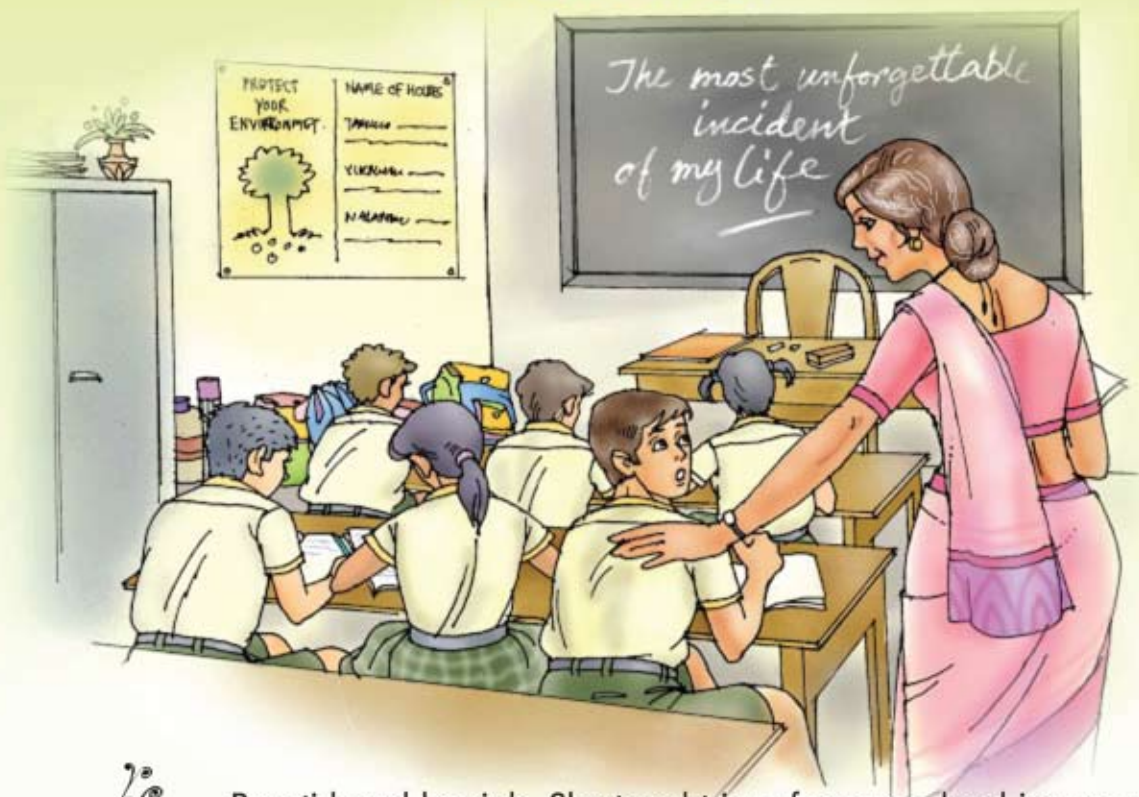
Rukmini put her arms around Radhika. "Vikram has left because of his behaviour and not because of you. How can I remain married to a man who behaves so despicably? I can't tell you right away what I will do about him. I need to talk to people who can help me out here... maybe lawyers, maybe psychologists and maybe even Mr. Dhar, who is a police officer."

"Aren't you afraid Ma of what they will say?"

"A little. But sometimes we need to go ahead and take certain steps even if we feel fear. What is important to me now is to protect you from any danger from Vikram. And that is what I will definitely do."

Radhika yawned and put her head in Rukmini's lap. "Ma, I'm so tired. Can we sleep now? It's a long time since I slept."

Nikhil



Revati loved her job. She taught in a famous school in a very busy area of the capital. There was never a dull moment at school. And even though she had been teaching for more than 18 years, she was never tired of it.

Her favourite was Class VIII C, of which she was the class teacher. Children at 13 were full of energy; they were also full of innocence and laughter. She had just given her class an essay to write—'The Most Unforgettable Incident of My Life'. As usual, she would have no time to correct the essays in school, and would have to take them home.

There was silence in class. The children were busy putting down their thoughts. "Remember, to maintain a flow in your writing. One sentence must lead into the next and the paragraphs must flow from one into the

other. One way of doing this is to read what you have written over and over again, even while you are writing the essay.” Revati reminded the class.

Just as she was about to sit at her desk, Revati noticed that Nikhil was staring vacantly into space. She walked across to him and placed her hand on his shoulder. ‘What’s the matter?’ she gestured. ‘Begin.’

Nikhil whispered his question, “Ma’am, can I tell the truth?”

Revati nodded, “Of course. Only the truth.”

“I won’t be punished, will I?” asked Nikhil, his eyes clouding over with uncertainty.

“Punished? Why?” Revati was puzzled. “Just start writing now.”

May I come in, Ma’am?” asked a voice hesitantly.

Revati looked up. “Yes, Nikhil. Come in.”

Nikhil approached Revati in the staff room rather hesitantly. He looked around to see if anyone was listening. All the other teachers were busy.

“Ma’am, the essay that I wrote...” Nikhil’s voice trailed off.

“Yes, Nikhil, what about it?” Revati asked.

“Ma’am, you won’t show it to anybody, will you?”

“That’s a strange question to ask me, Nikhil. I don’t normally show essays to anybody,” said the teacher.

Revati looked at Nikhil carefully, “Nikhil, what’s the matter? Why don’t you tell me that, and maybe I can help.”



"Nothing, Ma'am. I don't want you to show the essay to anyone. I wrote it but now I don't even want you to read it. Could you give it back to me, please? I promise I'll write the essay again and give it to you first thing in the morning tomorrow."

"Don't worry, Nikhil," said Revati. "Only I will read your essay. No one else will read it. That's the most I can promise. Go home now. The last bell has just rung."

Revati walked back to the school bus with Santosh, the school counsellor. "These children will never stop surprising me. Each year I come across something new. What do you think of Nikhil of my class, Santosh?"

"Nikhil is a bright boy," answered Santosh. "But after the winter vacations, I found him rather quiet. He seemed stressed, as if something was bothering him a lot. I did ask him if anything was the matter. He said he was fine."

"Anyway, I'm probably making a mountain out of a molehill," said Revati.

It was well past seven by the time Revati sat down in her room at home to begin her corrections. She wanted to begin with Nikhil's essay, but she resisted the urge to pick it up first. She worked steadily, sometimes smiling at what she read, sometimes raising an eyebrow, and once or twice bursting out into laughter. To Revati, each child was special. She knew that as an English teacher, she more than anyone else in school had access to each child's feelings and emotions.

One more essay to go! Nikhil Dattatreya's at last! Was it chance that Nikhil's was the last in the pile? For a moment she remembered Nikhil's worried look when he left her that afternoon. 'Well, Nikhil, what have you revealed? Did someone give you a Valentine, or did you score a winning goal, or did you get butted in your back by a bull? What is your unforgettable incident?' Revati mused as she turned to the essay:

The Most Unforgettable Incident of My Life

It happened last winter. Karan and Salman—the head boy and the sports captain of my school—were very friendly with me. I felt proud and happy. After all, I was only in Class VII and they were in Class XII. They would ask me to spend time with them after school, and I knew that my classmates used to envy my luck.

Often, they used to talk about very adult things. Sometimes it would embarrass me but I would pretend that it was very normal. When they spoke of girlfriends, they would watch my reactions. I liked to pretend that I was as old as them. I didn't want them to feel I was a sissy and that I really would rather talk of cricket and cars. I didn't want to lose their friendship.

I have a fairly large house and a room to myself on the ground floor. Dinesh Kaku, our cook, has been with my family for as long as I can remember. Dad is a businessman and is very busy. Mom also works and is out of town many a time.

Karan and Salman liked to spend time in my house. They would watch TV and ask Dinesh Kaku for whatever they wanted to drink. "Mast hai, yaar. You have a nice house, Nikhil," both of them would often say.

I was pleased.

Last winter, Mom and Dad went out of town. Dinesh Kaku had to leave suddenly the next day for his village because his son had had an accident. When Karan and Salman came to know of this, they said, "Don't worry, yaar! We'll come and spend three-four days in your house."

"But, Dinesh Kaku is not there. There is a substitute cook but he comes only for a few hours in the day," I told them.

"That's no problem. Hey, Nikhil, we'll do some really adult things. Watch movies and all that," Karan said, winking at Salman, whose eyes gleamed in anticipation.

That evening, both of them came over to stay for a few days.



"Look what I've got," said Karan, pulling out a few packets of cigarettes and some video cassettes.

"And I have some booze," said Salman, taking out two bottles from his bag. "Papa will never miss these."

I felt very uncomfortable but how could I protest. About three hours passed. Both of them became more and more noisy. Finally, they put on the video to watch what I thought was a film. But it was not. It was an adult film about men and women.

I got up to leave the room and that is when the nightmare really began. Karan pulled me down on the sofa and Salman took off his clothes.

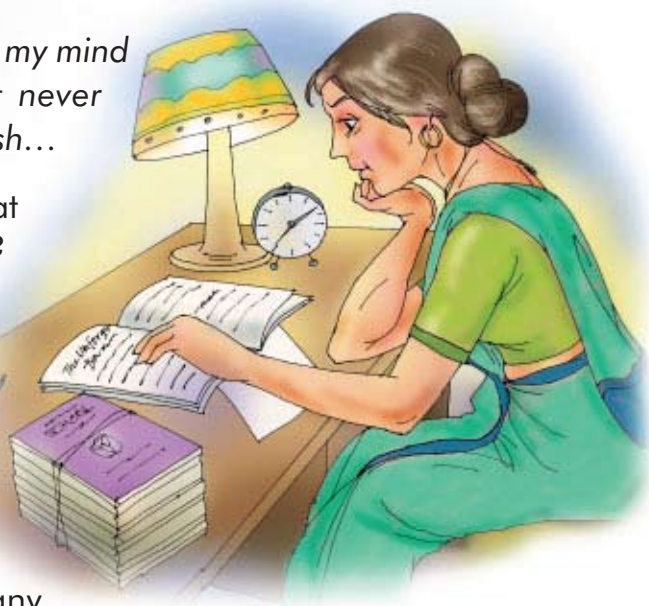
I begged them to let me go but they didn't seem to hear me. Whatever was happening in the film, they made me do with them. It was the worst thing that had happened to me. I was in such pain that I cried out, but that seemed to only egg the two on. And then I fainted...

When I got up, it was morning, and I was in my bed. Karan and Salman were gone. I met them later and they behaved in the most normal way. Karan told me that I better not complain to anybody. And that if I did, they would get other people to do it to me also.

I hate them. Today they are no longer in school. They have passed out of school. And yet, I feel such rage and shame when I think of them. I also feel so guilty. And I hate myself for being such a weakling. Who will believe me? I feel I am different from all the children of my class.

I wish I could erase this incident from my mind forever and carry on as though it never happened. I wish I could forget. I wish...

Revati sat stunned. 'Dear God! What is happening in these students' lives? How could two children of the school have behaved like this? What a burden Nikhil has been carrying—the trauma, the guilt, the shame of it all! Karan and Salman—the head boy and the sports captain. How could the school have chosen them? How will Nikhil ever trust any friend?' she mused.



The next day, Revati noticed Nikhil looking at her anxiously in class. When she passed his desk, she ruffled his hair. He looked visibly relieved. She asked him quietly to meet her just after the second period in the meditation room.

When Nikhil entered the meditation room, he could see Revati seated on a low stone seat surrounded by jasmine plants in full bloom in the little garden outside.

Revati asked Nikhil to sit on the seat beside her. Nikhil sat down, uncertain about what would follow.

"Nikhil, I went through your essay and I now understand why you were so anxious yesterday. You've been through a terrible experience. It's very brave of you to have written about it," said Revati.

Revati watched as two drops of tears ran down Nikhil's face. She patted his hand and Nikhil broke down as if a dam had burst.

"Sorry, Ma'am," said Nikhil after a while. "I don't usually cry."

"That's okay, Nikhil," said Revati. "It's okay to cry. It helps."

"I want to forget what happened, Ma'am. But I can't. I just can't. I will never be the same again."

"Yes, Nikhil, I can understand how you feel. I would feel the same. I only want to say that what happened was not your fault. You are what you are—a good human being who loves and cares and shares. Nobody can take that away." Revati held Nikhil's hands tightly as though willing him to believe what she was saying.

Nikhil nodded mutely.

"Nikhil, what are you feeling now?" asked Revati.

"I feel awful about what happened, Ma'am..." said Nikhil, "but I'm also glad I told you. I feel lighter."

Revati nodded. "Yes, thank you for sharing it with me. You did right."

They spoke about the whole episode for some time. "Nikhil, who do you talk to more—your mother or your father?" she asked.

"I spend more time with my mother, though she comes home only by five in the evening," replied Nikhil. He went on to describe how they spent the weekdays and the weekends.

"If I were to suggest to you that you speak with your mother about this, how would you feel?" Revati asked gently.

He drew back. "I can't, Ma'am, I can't. I can't tell anyone. No one. They'll wonder what sort of friends I have. They'll hate me. I can't. I can't," he said in agitation.

"From what you have described to me, Nikhil, I would say that she loves you very much. Think about it. I'm not forcing you. It's just a suggestion. And if, at any time, you need me, I will be there. Maybe...you can show them this essay that you have written. Sometimes writing it down is easier...just as you did."

Nikhil was uncertain. "Maybe..."

Revati continued, "Or if you feel comfortable enough with Santosh Sir, maybe you could speak with him about this. He could tell you what to do next."

Nikhil's face reflected his confusion. He was silent. Revati let him be for a while. So much had happened and the boy needed time to absorb what she was suggesting. Finally, he straightened his shoulders and said, "I'll tell Mamma today, Ma'am. Somehow, now that I've told you, I feel I need to tell her."

"Good, Nikhil. If you need me in any way, just call me. Here's my telephone number," said Revati scribbling it on a piece of paper.

The next afternoon, Revati got a call from Nikhil's father, Mr. Dattatreya. He sounded very anxious and perturbed. He and his wife wanted to meet Revati. Would it be possible to meet her in the evening? Could they also meet the principal?

"Yes, Mr. Dattatreya. I'll speak with the principal, Mr. Ghosal. It is best that we meet in his presence," said Revati.

"Yes. Good. So shall I come over to the school? Nikhil also mentioned a Santosh Sir."

"Yes, he's the school counsellor. Let me speak with Mr. Ghosal and Santosh Sir and confirm the time. I'll call you back."

Mr. Dattatreya agreed.

It was four when the Dattatreyas entered the principal's office. Mr. Dattatreya began with introductions. "I am Anand and this is my wife, Sheila." Sheila looked as if she had been crying.

"Good evening. You may have met Revati, Nikhil's class teacher, before, and this is the school counsellor, Santosh," said Mr. Ghosal.

All of them sat down. "I don't know how to begin but when Nikhil told us, we were absolutely shocked," said Anand, clearing his throat. "And frankly, we are out of depth. We don't know what to do."

"Yes, the incident is shocking. Something like this should not have happened with students from our school," said Mr. Ghosal. "We're also very concerned about the effect it has had on Nikhil. Santosh, what do you have to say?"

"As a counsellor, I needed to have been more alert, Sir. I did think that Nikhil was subdued for a while but I needed to have persevered and found out. Thank goodness, Nikhil wrote the essay or we would have never known," said Santosh.

"Why did it have to happen to my Nikhil?" asked Sheila, her anguish and despair evident.

There was silence for some time.

"The small consolation is that with Nikhil, it was a single incident and it stopped there," said Santosh.



"What do we do now? How was Nikhil to know that the two seniors would do this to him? I feel so angry," said Sheila, her voice shaking.

"Mrs. Dattatreya, these two boys are no longer studying in the school. But that does not mean that the school plans to remain silent. I have their contact numbers with me and I want to assure you that I will be talking to their parents and them. I wanted to meet both of you before speaking to the two boys. The school takes on that responsibility. Meanwhile, let's see how we can help Nikhil."

The next 15 minutes were spent discussing what they could do.

"Mr. Dattatreya, we could ask Nikhil if he is willing to talk to Santosh Sir separately so that Sir can counsel him. I don't know what you feel about it. That could be the first step," suggested Mr. Ghosal.

Mr. Dattatreya looked at his wife. She gave a slight nod.

"Yes, that may be the right beginning. He knows you, Santosh Sir, and you too have interacted with him. Maybe, Nikhil is ok with the idea. We'll ask him," said Anand.

"Do let me know. It's important that Nikhil is comfortable with the suggestion."

"I guess, that's what we will do then, Mr. Ghosal," said Mr. Dattatreya.

"Revati, Nikhil's case has brought us face-to-face with such issues. We need to look at this problem seriously and build in systems that will enable us as teachers to recognise the signals of child abuse. We need to sensitise our staff as well as make children aware of this menace," said Mr. Ghosal.

"Yes, Sir. Santosh Sir and I discussed this today and we feel that all the teachers need to be made aware of their responsibilities," said Revati.

"Yes, I'll be calling an emergency staff meeting this Saturday. Let's meet and together chalk out some guidelines and precautions."

Simran



XC was a very agitated class. Selina, their class teacher, entered the classroom to pick some charts from the cupboard. She noticed the children had formed groups and some of them were crowded over a newspaper. Most of them looked upset.

"Good morning, class," she said. "What's so interesting in the newspaper?"

"G'morning, Ma'am," they said together and went to their places.

"Well, what is it?" she asked again.

"Ma'am, did you read the news in today's paper?" asked Rahul.

"Which news, Rahul?"

"About the girl who went to a clinic and was raped by the doctor," he answered.

"Yes, I did," said Selina. "It is quite an upsetting news item."

"Ma'am, the doctor lives in my colony. Ma'am I know him. I greet him almost every day," said Daksha in horror and disbelief.

"Ma'am how can a doctor who is supposed to cure people and heal them do something so awful?" said Vinaya, sounding absolutely disgusted.

"Yes, Ma'am, as it is when one goes to a doctor one is sick and weak. How can someone you trust do this?" said David.

"I hope the police really beat the living daylight out of him. Only then will he learn a lesson," added Saurabh.

"But lesson or not...the girl must feel awful. What fault was it of hers?"

"How can we trust anyone at this rate?"

Seeing that the class was so disturbed, Selina said, "Let's talk about this in the two periods immediately after the break. Santosh Sir, your counsellor, and I anyway wanted to talk to you about similar issues. For now, settle down and take out your books for the next period."

Just after the break when Selina and Santosh entered the class, they found the children seated in their places, rather quiet and pensive. The students stood up silently when they saw their teachers.

Santosh began speaking, "Selina Ma'am was telling me how disturbed you were by the incident in the papers today about the doctor raping his young patient. I'd like some of you to tell me what you felt when you read about this incident."

"Angry, Sir. She was a child, Sir. Barely 10," said Rahul.

"Betrayed, Sir. She trusted him. How can you do that to someone who has placed her trust in you," said Vinaya.

"Helpless, also. She could not even have fought him. She was, as it is, suffering from TB. How dare he?" said Tina in a high-pitched voice.

"Sir, they say that education makes you more civilised. But this man was a doctor. Then, how come he did it?" Praful spluttered.

"Isn't there a special relationship between a doctor and a patient?" Geetika asked. "How could he have broken that trust?"

"Disgust, Sir. I just feel sheer disgust. We should actually have the practice of 'an eye for an eye' in our country also. Then he would get what he deserved," said Neha.

"Well... I'm glad you are expressing your feelings—outrage, shock, despair, betrayal, disgust," said Selina.

"Yes. What Selina Ma'am and I want to focus on today is what you can do if you encounter similar unacceptable behaviour or abuse," said Santosh, sitting on the teacher's desk. "And we want to suggest to you some steps that you can perhaps use to help yourselves should such situations arise."

"What we also want to stress upon is that even if you are not able to use these suggestions...it's okay. Keep them in mind, use them if you can..." said Selina.

"I think most children come across some form of abuse or the other early in life. A touch here, a look there, crude comments galore," continued Santosh. "It can, at times, go much further than that...even up to rape."

There were several nods in the class.

"Actually, even a small child of two or three is able to distinguish between a 'safe' touch and an 'unsafe' touch. Of course, a small child may not be able to voice his or her feelings. But all of us know when we feel safe and comfortable and when we feel uncomfortable and 'not right' about someone's touch, look, words, or actions.

Selina said, "Often it is not strangers who commit such acts of abuse but people who know you—friends, servants, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandfathers, brothers, and even fathers. This is disturbing, unfortunate, and very difficult to accept. In today's case, it was the doctor.

"But whoever it is who abuses you, however close a relative it is and to whatever degree it may be, just be very clear in your head and heart that such behaviour is unacceptable."

Selina looked around, "Is that clear, children?"

Some nodded. Some whispered, "Yes, Ma'am."

"Whenever something is happening to you which makes you feel uncomfortable, you feel discomfort. That feeling is your INSTINCT. All of us are born with an instinct."

"Yes," said Santosh, "When your instinct warns you, tell yourself, 'I AM PRECIOUS. NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO ABUSE ME'."

"So, what is it you can do in such situations? What would you do if you were, say, in a bus?" asked Selina.

"My mother once told me, Ma'am, that if someone tries to act funny with me in a bus, I should scream. Just open my mouth, fill my lungs and SCREAM," said Anna.

"Yes, that is something you could think of doing. Most of these abusers are cowards. They have to maintain their 'images' in society," explained Selina. "Scream, even if you are frightened, to scare the offender. Loud and clear."

"But what if the abuse happens indoors?"

"Can't we scream even then, Ma'am?" asked Anna.

"Sometimes it may be possible for you to scream. Sometimes, it is possible for you to say loudly 'Don't touch me' and move away. Sometimes it is possible to kick and shout and create a huge ruckus," said Santosh.

"And in some cases, the situation is such that doing any of these will bring on more violence," said Selina looking at the children in the class. "At such times, silence can be the only way to survive. If that is so, it's all right."

"You may also find it difficult to scream because you may feel guilty or ashamed, and it is natural to feel so. But it is the incident that is shameful. Not you. I want to repeat what I have just said. The incident is shameful. Not you," Santosh emphasised.

"It's not easy to talk about abuse. Sometimes, you may be confused because the abuser is someone whom your family respects, or whom you like and love. What then? You may find yourself in turmoil, and it may be difficult to reveal to anyone that you are suffering. You may feel that somehow you are the one who caused the abuser to behave in a particular way with you.

"But you are not to blame for what has happened. What we would also like to suggest to you is that if there is someone you trust, then it may be helpful to speak to the person about what is happening in your life," Selina said.

"Any abuse can be, and is, quite frightening. Don't speak about it to just about anybody. If you have a parent or relative or sister or brother or friend, or even somebody not connected with your family, who you feel safe and comfortable with, try and speak with the person," advised Santosh.

The discussion went on for two periods. Selina told the children that in every city there are childlines 1098 or helplines for children who find it difficult to talk about their abuse to their parents or guardians. Santosh wrote down the phone numbers of these childlines on the board and told the children that they could ring up the given numbers at any time—day or night to get guidance and support.

"They will advise you. So trust them and follow their instructions," said Santosh.

"We also want to tell you that if any of you want to talk about abuse of any kind, happening to you or anyone you know of, you may also talk to either of us.

"Yes, I'll put our telephone numbers on the board," said Santosh.



More than two weeks went by. Selina Ma'am was home one Friday when the doorbell rang. Selina opened the door. It was Simran, a student from her class. She smiled and welcomed her in.

Simran went in looking a bit nervous.

"Hello, Simran. It's good to see you," said Selina trying to put the child at ease.

Simran bit her lip nervously. "Thank you for agreeing to meet me, Ma'am. Actually, after I called you, I was filled with doubts as to whether I should have disturbed you."

Selina nodded, "I was just getting tired of my own company. It's all right to have second thoughts. Why don't you tell me about yourself instead? And we'll take it from there. I know you live near the cantonment. Who all are there in your house?"

"Oh, there's Ma and Dadda and Janu bi, my ayah. But I didn't come to talk about myself. I want to talk about my friend, Neelima."

"That's good of you, Simran," Selina said encouragingly. "Tell me about Neelima."

Selina had seen Simran's progress from the nursery onwards. Simran was a bright girl from a wealthy family—always ready to participate in school functions and sports. She was of average height with thick black hair, a pleasant face and dancing eyes.

"Ma'am, Neelima lives close to my house. She's my age. In fact, she's very like me," began Simran.

"Is she now? And what about her?" asked Selina, looking attentively at Simran.

"Actually, Ma'am, I don't even know if I should be talking about her," said Simran, suddenly uncertain.

"Actually, Simran," said Selina in exactly the same tone as Simran, "since you have come this far, you must feel it is important. Why don't you talk to me about Neelima, and then if it is nothing at all, we'll forget about it. At least it'll be nice to have spent some time together."

Simran looked reassured. "Well, Ma'am, Neelima has been my friend since we were very small. Her papa works for the government and her mother works for an NGO that deals with children."

"Brothers and sisters?" Selina asked.

"No brothers and sisters. Just like me," said Simran.

Selina looked steadily at Simran, "Yes, I forgot. She's just like you. Okay. Go on."

"Sometime back, Neelima told me that the conductor of her school bus paid her a lot of attention. And though he looks at her very strangely, Ma'am, Neelima felt that he liked her quite a bit. He even started reserving a place by his side in the bus for her."

Selina prompted, "And?"

"Once when Neelima was about to sit down, he brushed against her. But he smiled very nicely at her."

Selina did not say anything.

"Then Neelima said that he began touching her more often. She didn't know what to do. He would laugh and joke with her and she was confused. She was the last to get off the bus. It was good to have someone to laugh and talk with but she didn't know how to stop the touching. Sometimes he would squeeze her shoulder, sometimes he would keep his hand on her thigh, and sometimes he would brush against the front of her blouse or skirt.

"But Neelima was very lucky. The drivers and the conductors of all the buses were changed, and she has not seen him after that. But she did miss him at times during the long drives home."

Selina was quiet for sometime. She observed Simran give her a quick look as if to guess her teacher's thoughts. "Was there no teacher in the bus?"

Simran shook her head to indicate that there wasn't.

"Actually, Ma'am, this is nothing compared to what Neelima told me about Kishore," said Simran.

"Kishore?"

"Yeah, her driver," the words came tumbling out of Simran. "Once, about five-six years back, her mother sent her to her naani's place in their car. Neelima was really excited.



She loved naani. She was naani's little sparrow. Kishore, the driver, asked her to sit in the front with him and tell him the directions to naani's house. She chattered on and on about naani with Kishore.

"Somewhere during the journey, Kishore lifted her frock and put his hand on her leg and started feeling her up and down. She tried to push his hand away but could not. Then he put his hand inside her knickers and felt her all over. She stopped talking. She was so scared.

"But Kishore would not stop. He went on and on. Then when he reached a lonely part of the road, he stopped the car and kissed her."

Simran's voice had dropped to a whisper. Her face was pinched and pale. She stared at the ground and continued talking as though there was no stopping.

"After that Kishore started buying her chocolates and little gifts. He always had time for her. Very gently he told her that she should not talk about what happened to anyone, since that was their special secret. Ever since that day, whenever Kishore took her out alone, he would behave in the same way with her.



"Now Neelima is more frightened than ever. Last week, Kishore was driving her back at night, when he stopped near a park. Nobody was around. Kishore tried to force himself on her. But luckily someone passed by. Then yesterday Kishore told her that he would take her to a house where they would not be disturbed. What is she to do, Ma'am? What is she to do?" The question came as a cry...a desperate cry.

Selina's face was as pale as Simran's. She held Simran who was quite unaware that she was rocking back and forth as she spoke.

"Is Neelima's other name Simran, my child?" Selina asked.

Simran let out a long wail. "Oh, Ma'am, how did you guess? How did you guess? Ma'am I'm not a bad girl. I don't like it when Kishore does those things to me. But I can't stop it. I can't stop it. He's so loving and kind every time he takes me out. Ma will never believe me. She'll shout and ask me why I kept quiet for so many years. She'll beat me. Kishore has been with us for so many years. She hates it when servants leave and she has to manage without them. Dad will also stop talking to me. But I'm really scared now. I don't want to go with Kishore to any house."

Selina took Simran's face in her hands. "Simran, how have you come here today? Have you come in your car? Is Kishore driving you?"

Simran nodded mutely. Selina sat and thought for a while with an arm around Simran.

"Ma'am, I'm not a bad girl. I'm so scared about what will happen if Kishore takes me to a house."

"Simran, I believe you. Let me tell you what I plan to do. You go and sit in the bedroom. I'm going to call Kishore and tell him that he can go home and that I will be dropping you home. How does that sound to you?" asked Selina.

"Ma'am, I'm scared," said Simran as they walked to the bedroom.

"Yes, I know. But since you have come to me, let me help you," Selina said.



Selina then came back into the living room and opened the front door. She beckoned to the driver sitting in the car parked outside. She watched as Kishore walked towards her. So this was Kishore—about fifty-five years old and looking as if he would not harm an insect.

When Selina told Kishore that Simran would not be going home that day and that he should go back without her, there was disbelief on the driver's face. But seeing Selina's authoritative and direct manner, he turned away and walked to the car.

Selina closed the door and went into the bedroom. She sat close to Simran.

"Simran, you have taken the first step to free yourself," continued Selina. "You are not to blame for what happened. You were small. You are small. You did what was told to you because you did not know what else to do. You survived. But the moment you found a way to tell someone what has been happening, you chose to talk about it. That's not easy.

"Simran, now that you have told me, let me think what we should do."

"What will happen to me, Ma'am? Won't people talk about me and hate me?"

"I will never hate you, Simran. And there is no need to tell all your friends about this." They sat for some more time in silence. Selina continued, "But first things first. Simran, I cannot dismiss your driver. And as long as Kishore is working for you, you are in grave danger. Do you understand what I am saying?"

Simran nodded.

"Then, do you also understand that I need to speak with your parents? They need to know about this. What do you feel about my talking to them now?"

"Ma'am, I feel scared. Will you tell Mamma?"

"Yes, I will, Simran. If you want to, you can be in the bedroom while I talk

to her. Does that sound all right to you? When the time comes, I'll call you. Okay?"

Simran wrote down her mother's telephone number.

"You are a brave girl, Simran."

Simran nodded and burst into tears once again.

Mrs. Seshadri (Simran's mother)—a little perplexed, a little tense—arrived soon after she got the phone call asking her to come and pick up Simran from Selina's house. She was a commanding lady, used to giving orders and being obeyed.

When Mrs. Seshadri walked in, Selina was alone in the room.

"Where's Simran, Ma'am? And what has she been doing that you have called me here? Be very firm with her, Ma'am. I will not tolerate any indiscipline or slackness in my daughter," said Mrs. Seshadri.

Selina looked at the imperious and forbidding expression on Mrs. Seshadri's face. She wondered if Simran's mother was always so unapproachable.

"Sit down, Mrs. Seshadri. I have something to tell you. And no, Simran has not been slack or indisciplined. I've never had any trouble with her."

"Then what is it, Ma'am? And why isn't she here with you?" said Mrs. Seshadri in a loud voice.

"What I want to tell you is not easy. I wanted you to come here today because time is a very important factor in this situation. And I could not take a chance and wait for even one more day," said Selina gravely.

"Why? What could be so urgent?" Mrs. Seshadri asked puzzled.

"Mrs. Seshadri, you have a driver called Kishore..." began Selina.

"Yes, I do. He's been with me for years. I rely on him a lot to drive Simran around. But why are you mentioning him?" queried Mrs. Seshadri.

"Because this Kishore you have so much faith and trust in, Mrs. Seshadri, has been abusing Simran sexually—and not just on one or two occasions, but over a period of almost six years now. Simran is 15...and the abuse began when she was about 9, Mrs. Seshadri," said Selina knowing that she was being almost brutal in her revelation. There could be no other way.

Mrs. Seshadri's face became ashen. Everything inside her seemed to crumple. "What are you saying...Kishore?"

Selina jumped out of the chair. She thought Mrs. Seshadri would faint of shock.

"Mrs. Seshadri, are you all right? Here, please have some water."

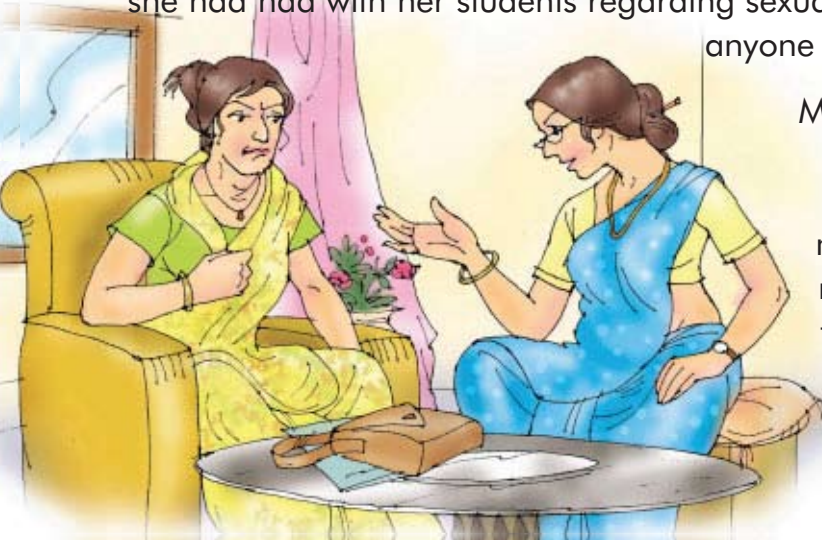
When Mrs. Seshadri seemed a bit better, Selina narrated all that Simran had told her. About the first ride to naani, the regular episodes of sexual abuse after that, the latest incident in the park and the threat to take Simran to a house.

Mrs. Seshadri cried, both in anger and in sorrow, for all that her daughter had been through.

"Why didn't she come to me, Ma'am? I'm her mother after all," asked Mrs. Seshadri. "Why did she talk to you instead of me?"

Selina kept quiet for a while. She let Mrs. Seshadri think about the answer to that question. Then she told Simran's mother about the discussion that she had had with her students regarding sexual abuse and not allowing anyone to abuse them.

Mrs. Seshadri nodded. "You know, Ma'am, if my daughter did not come to me for help, it obviously means that she does not feel free enough for some reason to approach me.



I need to accept that." She shook her head repeatedly, "And to think, Ma'am, that I work for an NGO that works with children. I am concerned about the country's children, while my own child does not feel free to talk to me."

Again, Selina made no comment.

Mrs. Seshadri then asked, "Ma'am, where is Simran? I must see her now."

Selina nodded and went to the other room and came back with Simran.

Simran walked a step or two behind Selina...hesitant, unsure, scared. She looked at her mother. Mrs. Seshadri stood up and just opened her arms wide. Simran ran into her mother's arms, and the two of them hugged each other and cried.

"Mamma, I'm sorry. I'm not bad, Mamma. I didn't do anything," Simran sobbed.

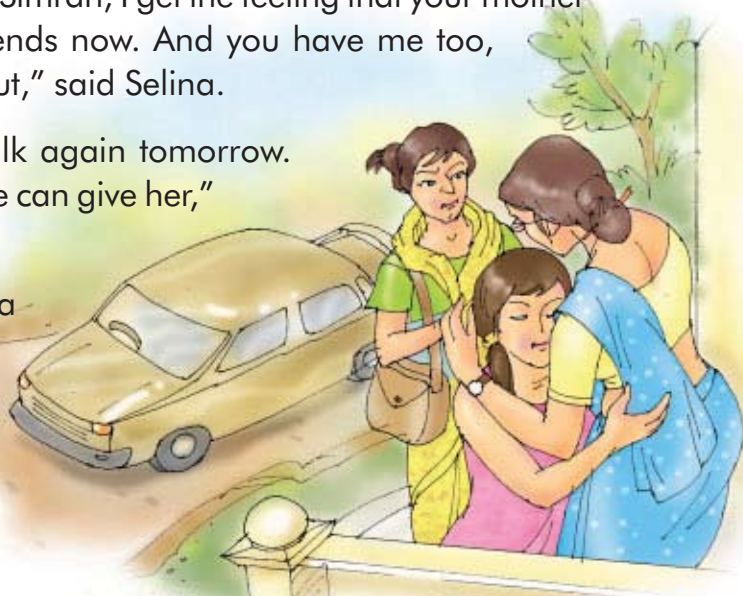
"Oh, Simu, don't ever think you are bad or that you are at fault or even that I will stop loving you or think badly of you. I am sorry that you did not feel free to confide in me. As a mother, I should have been alert to what was happening to you.

"Selina Ma'am was correct in sending away Kishore today. I will discuss what has to be done to him with your father." She clutched Simran to herself.

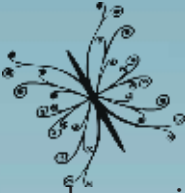
"Go home now, Mrs. Seshadri. Simran, I get the feeling that your mother will be one of your closest friends now. And you have me too, whenever you want to reach out," said Selina.

"Mrs. Seshadri, please let's talk again tomorrow. Simran needs all the support we can give her," said Selina.

Mrs. Seshadri nodded. Selina hugged Simran and watched mother and daughter walk away to their car.



Maya



Maya was always in a rage. So her parents said. So *Daadi* said. And so her friends and teachers said.

Maya was nine years old. She had a younger brother, Manav, who was just three years old. Her mummy, Madhavi, her daddy, Makarand, and *Daadi* doted on him. Sometimes that irritated her. But most times she felt Manav was really cute. It was hard not to dote on Manav.

And then there was *chachu*. Gyan *chachu*. He was 18 years old. Maya and Gyan *chachu* quarrelled most of the time they were in the house. Mummy was most exasperated.

"Maya, don't forget that he is your *chachu* and not your equal. You need to show him respect," Mummy often said.



"I won't. I won't," Maya replied mutinously. "Why does he keep on poking and prodding me? Tell him, Mummy, that he cannot do it. I'll hit him next time. I will. I will."

"Hey, *Bhagwan*, what a wild one you are! Maya, for the hundredth time, he's your *chachu*, your daddy's brother. Will you behave yourself when you are with him? He only does it because he's fond of you."

"No thanks. I don't want his affection. Mummy, you better tell him that he is not to trouble me or touch me. I don't like him coming to my room."

Mummy shook her head and sighed. Nothing she said seemed to get across to Maya. Things were becoming so difficult that every evening as she returned from work, she would wonder what problems Maya would have for her. Madhavi tried to tell Gyan that he should stay away from Maya, but she knew that she could not chastise him because *Daadi* would be very upset with her.

Daadi ruled the house with an iron hand. She made most of the decisions in the house. Madhavi never dared to interfere because she went to work with Makarand in their family computer business. She left Maya and Manav in *Daadi's* care every day. Gyan had been with them ever since she had married Makarand. He was like the first child of the family—spoilt, headstrong and self-centred. But Madhavi had learnt very early on not to try to guide or correct him.

One afternoon, Maya returned from school to find Gyan *chachu* having his lunch. She lingered in her own room for a while, wanting to avoid having lunch with Gyan *chachu* but hunger drove her to the dining room.

Daadi too was at the table watching her son eat. "Why do you take so long to freshen up and come for lunch?" *Daadi* asked when she saw Maya.

Maya didn't say anything.

"Get me a glass of water," said Gyan *chachu*, looking at Maya.

"Get it yourself, *chachu*. I'm hungry," snapped Maya.

"What? Such impertinence?" shouted *Daadi*. "Is that how you speak to your elders? And you, that too a girl? Do you know when you get married, you will have to do all the chores in the house. Now, go get *chachu* a glass of water."

"First of all, *Daadi*, when I get married, I don't intend to do all the chores in the house alone. Everyone will have to help. As for now, *Daadi*, I'm really hungry. *Chachu* has finished eating. He can help himself to some water. It's not so difficult," said Maya, her chin quivering in anger.

"Wait till your father comes home, you disobedient child. I'm going to talk to him. Nobody has dared to speak to me like this ever," said *Daadi*, her eyes flashing fury.

Suddenly the energy to fight left Maya. She went and got *Gyan chachu* a glass of water. *Gyan chachu* stuck out his thumb at her indicating that he had won. Maya just ignored him. *Daadi* kept muttering about the "*kaliyug*" that had descended upon the world.

After lunch, Maya played for a little while with Manav. Then she went to her room and lay down to read a storybook. Five minutes later *Gyan* threw open the door and walked into the room.



"What are you doing and why do you have to close the door?"

"Gyan *chachu*, please don't disturb me. I want to read," said Maya.

"I want to read..." mimicked Gyan. "Miss Hoity Toity. Miss Upper Class, will you look down at us menials, here, and talk to us..." Gyan *chachu* tried to pull her pigtails while he sat on the bed.

Maya lost her temper completely. "Don't sit on my bed!" she shrieked. "I don't want you in my room. I don't want to talk to you. Go away. Get out! Get out!"

Gyan *chachu* jumped to his feet and backed off and out of the room. He was completely taken aback by the force of Maya's screams. He would have to teach the uppity miss a lesson. And soon.

Maya sat trembling on her bed. She breathed in short, quick gasps. She hated Gyan *chachu*. She hated it when he came into her room. She was six years old when he would regularly walk into the bathroom while she was bathing. She didn't like it at all. He would take the soap from her tiny hands and soap her all over. She didn't like the way he poked and prodded and felt her. She told Mummy the very first time it occurred. Mummy told her that she must be mistaken because Gyan *chachu* was her *chachu* and that she should feel grateful that he was helping her bathe.

"But, Mummy, I don't like it," Maya said.

But Madhavi was too scared to discuss the matter with Gyan or *Daadi* or even with Makarand. Maya became more and more aggressive and threw tantrums, sometimes for no apparent reason. Maya realised that if she gave vent to her anger, people generally took note of her. Another thing she realised. She had to protect herself. This much her young intelligence told her.

At about five that evening, Maya went for her bath. She was still too tiny to reach the bolt of the bathroom door. Anyway *Daadi* believed that it was safer if she did not bolt the door from inside. Suppose Maya slipped and

fell? As she grew older, Maya devised new ways of seeing that the door remained shut. She placed two spare buckets against the door. At least when she felt that someone...meaning *Gyan chachu*...tried to come in, it would make a racket and she could scream.

Not that day. *Gyan chachu* was determined to teach her a lesson.

Barely five minutes after she had gone in for a bath, the door was flung open. The two buckets went flying, making a huge clatter. Maya was stunned. *Gyan chachu* walked in, his face in a rage.

"Shout at me, will you? Who do you think you are? Today, I will teach you a lesson you will never forget," said *Gyan chachu* menacingly.

Maya reached for the towel and tried to cover herself.

"*Gyan chachu*, you cannot come in when I am bathing. Please go away or else I'll scream."

"Threatening me, are you? Scream, then. No one will come to help you," said *Gyan*, advancing on Maya.

Maya was very frightened. She backed off from *Gyan's* outstretched hands till she felt the wall behind her. *Gyan* laughed cruelly.



"Daadi, Daadi, please help me. See *chachu* is troubling me. Daadi, Daadi..."

Maya screamed at the top of her voice.

Gyan jumped forward and caught Maya. Screaming in terror, Maya struggled to free herself. She kicked and clawed and finally bit his hand and managed to slip out of his grasp and run out through

the door. She ran with just the towel flapping behind her to where *Daadi* was resting.

"*Daadi*, stop *chachu*. *Daadi*, please tell *chachu* to stop..."

But *Daadi* turned away and pretended to rest. Gyan laughed aloud and pulled Maya towards him and picked her up. He went into his room and kicked the door shut behind him. In his room, he forced himself on her and Maya could no longer fight him. He was much bigger and stronger.

It was 8.30 in the night. Madhavi was busy in the kitchen. Atul, Makarand's elder brother, and family were coming over for dinner. Madhavi had returned from work at 6.30 and had straightaway been instructed by *Daadi* that she needed to supervise in the kitchen. She had managed to give Manav a hug and then had hurried to look into Maya's room. Maya was lying face down on her bed. When she patted her head, Maya looked up.

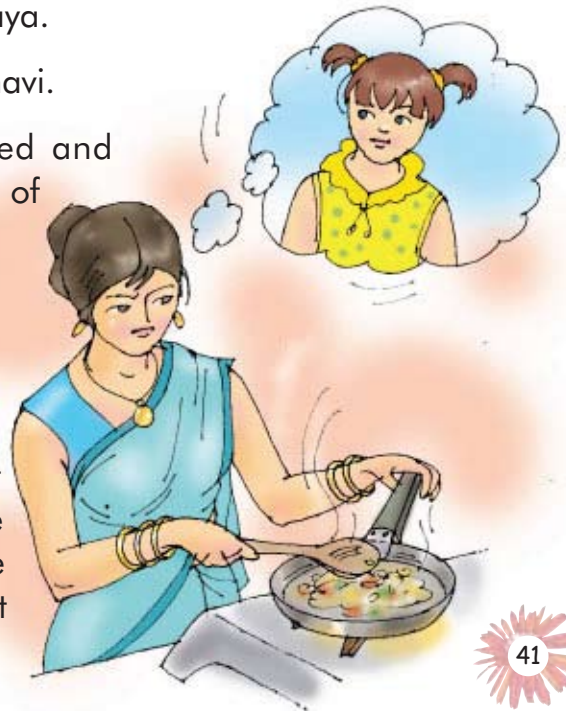
"Atul *taayaji*, Anita *taayiji*, Gokul *bhaiyya* and Renu *jiji* are coming for dinner. Get up and get dressed and come to help me," said Madhavi.

"Mummy, I want to talk to you," said Maya.

"Beta, is it about *chachu*?" asked Madhavi.

When Maya nodded, Madhavi sighed and said, "*Betu*, not just now. I have loads of work. They will all be coming soon and I must get the food ready. After they leave, we'll talk."

Madhavi's thoughts went to her daughter as she was frying the *pappad*. Sometimes she wished they were not in a joint family...she would have had more time for Maya then. Maya was getting more and more difficult to deal with. She just



couldn't stand the sight of Gyan and until Gyan got a job and got married and decided to stay separately, there seemed to be no solution in sight.

Maya did not come to the kitchen. *Daadi* had already complained about her rudeness and kept muttering how children of today were so badly brought up. Madhavi became more and more troubled by *Daadi's* comments.

The doorbell rang. Makarand opened the door. Sounds of conversation and laughter drifted in. Madhavi could hear Gyan's and *Daadi's* voices.

Anita and Renu came into the kitchen and Madhavi greeted them. "Sorry, I didn't come out. Just frying the *pappad*. Renu *beti*, how is the eleventh class? Two more years and you'll be in college, isn't it?"

Anita said, "Yeah, I can't imagine my Renu in college. But I'm worried about how Gokul will do his boards this year. Have started him on coaching classes."

"Mom, you're such a worrier. You know, *chachi*, even if everything in Mom's life were going well, she'd worry that she has nothing to worry about! By the way, *chachi*, where's Maya?" Renu asked.

"In her room, *beta*. Go and speak with her," replied Madhavi.

"Yes, *chachi*," said Renu.



Maya was still lying face down on her bed in her room. Renu went in saying, "Arre! What's the matter? Are you unwell?" Renu was very very fond of her little cousin. She sat down by the pillow and reached out to Maya, touching her forehead.

"Mayamu, what's the matter? Did someone hurt you?"

Hearing the love and concern in Renu's voice, Maya burst out in tears. She put her head in Renu's lap and clung on to her. "Renu *jiji*, I want to die. Why can't I die?"

Renu was shocked. "Hush, Maya, why do you want to die? What happened?"

But Maya couldn't say anything more because she was racked by a paroxysm of sobs. After a while she quietened down and lay with her eyes closed in Renu's lap.

"Now tell me, what is the matter? I'm not moving from here till you tell me. Is it someone in our school?" Renu said.

"No, *jiji*, it's Gyan *chachu*. I hate him. I hate him. I feel one day I will kill him. And if I don't kill him, I'll kill myself," Maya said.

"Maya, don't be afraid. Tell me. What did he do to you?"

Maya told her. Everything. How for more than three years he had been tormenting her and troubling her and how neither Mummy nor *Daadi* would listen to her. And then she told her about what happened that afternoon.

Renu went white with anger. "Come with me, Maya. This has to be stopped now. You are not going to spend another day without the family getting to know about this."

Renu made Maya sit up. She wiped her tears.

"Renu *jiji*, I'm scared. Suppose no one believes me. They may think that Gyan *chachu* cannot do such things."

"We'll see what they say. Let's not imagine what they will say," said Renu with a determined glint in her eyes.

Just then Gokul came to their room and called them for dinner. "*Jiji*, Maya, *chachi* is calling both of you."

Renu put her arm around Maya's shoulders and together they walked into the living room. Everyone was seated at the dining table.

Atul and Anita smiled at Maya. "Hello, Maya, how are you feeling?" Anita asked.

"Namaste *taayaji*, *taayiji*," Maya said.

"Nothing is the matter with her," Gyan spoke up. "Here, Maya, come and sit next to me."

Maya shrank back in horror. Renu swiftly intervened and said, "*Chachu*, I will sit next to you and Maya will sit on my left."

She held Maya's hand tightly and drew her closer.

All through dinner Maya was quiet, barely eating, barely speaking. Renu too did not speak much and sat as close to Maya as possible.

"Makarand, is Maya unwell?" Atul asked his younger brother quietly, when they had finished dinner and were seated in the living room once again. "I would be very worried if Renu or Gokul looked so pale and had such a poor appetite."

Makarand looked at Maya closely, and took in her pale face and pinched look. "*Bhai*, I've been so busy these days, I hardly get any time to spend with her. Madhavi, why is she looking so pulled down?"

"Maya, come here, love. Come, sit with me," said Anita. "What is disturbing you? You are not your bubbly self today."



Maya went and sat down with Anita. Renu followed her.

"Tell them, Maya, what you told me," said Renu, holding her hand tightly.

"It's nothing," said *Daadi*. "She and Gyan are always quarrelling. She is a spitfire with him. Never shows respect. So what if he's only a boy. He's still her *chachu*, isn't he? I'm tired of their quarrels every day."

"Is that it, Maya? Have you fought with Gyan? You mustn't take him so seriously," said Anita. "And you, Gyan," she said more sternly, "you are much older. Can't you stop troubling Maya all the time. You should be protecting her; remember you are her uncle."

"Tell them, Maya, what happened today," said Renu again, taking both Maya's hands in her own and kneeling down in front of her.

"*Chachu* hurt me, *taayiji*. He came in when I was bathing and did bad things with me," Maya's voice was barely a whisper. And suddenly it rose to a loud wail, "Mummy, he hurt me. He pulled me to his room and jumped on me. He hurt me, *taayiji*. I want to die. I want to die." Madhavi went running to Maya and held her.

A shocked silence enveloped the room. Everyone looked at Maya in utter horror. They were frozen in their places. And slowly, their gaze shifted to the other side where Gyan sat.

Gyan jumped up. "She's lying. She's lying. I never did anything to her. *Amma*, you were here. Did anything like that happen?" he asked *Daadi*.

"I am an old woman. I was sleeping, I didn't hear anything," said *Daadi*.

"That's not true, *Daadi*," said Renu. "Maya told me that she came out screaming and naked from the bathroom, and ran to you first. But you just turned your back on her. That's when *chachu* dragged Maya to his room. How could you turn away, *Daadi*? How can you be so blind to your son's crimes? And you can still find fault with Maya's behaviour?"

"*Atul bhai*, *Makarand bhai*, will I ever do something like this? I am your brother after all. I admit, I fight with her but I never thought she would



become so vindictive and accuse me of...of doing bad things to her," said Gyan.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Renu. "Mom, Dad, Makarand *chachu* and *chachi*, today I want to tell you that Gyan *chachu* is quite capable of molesting anyone,

whether it is his brother's daughter or not. He has tried it with me when we were small. But I am almost as big as he is and he did not succeed. I never mentioned it to anyone because no harm was done. But I realise that I was wrong. I should have created a hue and cry then. Maya would not have had to suffer, if I had told you about him then."

"Just like I should have told you too," said Gokul.

Atul and Anita jumped up. "Told us what, Gokul?" they asked horrified.

"That Gyan *chachu* tried to force himself on me too. I hated it. But luckily for me, *chachu* never stayed with us and I avoided being with him when he came home. He's disgusting. He needs to be locked up."

"*Bhai*, forgive me, I never meant to hurt her," said Gyan falling at Makarand's feet. Makarand felt such a surge of rage in him that he lashed out at his younger brother and Gyan went flying across the carpet. Roaring in anger, both he and Atul lunged across and thrashed him over and over again. There was pandemonium. No one stopped the two brothers. No one believed that they should.

Ten minutes later, Gyan lay whimpering on the floor. Atul and Makarand were dishevelled, sweating and gasping for breath. Atul looked at Makarand as if to ask, "Now what do we do?"

Madhavi stood up and said, "Let's call the police. This is a matter for them."

Daadi stopped her, "Stop it, Madhavi. Do you want the whole world to know what is happening in our home? Maya is a girl. Who will marry her after they get to know this?"

"Ma, I failed to protect my child when she needed protection most. I can never forgive myself for that. The least I can do now is to see that justice is done. Gyan is a paedophile. He's tried it on Gokul and Renu too. He is dangerous. I have to complain to the police."

"Atul, Makarand, stop her. She is only thinking of her daughter," said Daadi.

"Just as you have never thought of anyone except your son. He had your support and so he carried on without any fear. Amma, your attitude makes me sick," said Makarand. "He cannot live here any more."

"I'll go away with him to our village home, Makarand," pleaded Daadi. "Don't call the police."

"Yes, you will have to go and stay in the village now. You cannot stay with me. Not after what has happened. But you are not going with Gyan. I will call the police. Whether he will be booked under the juvenile justice act or not, I do not know. Gyan is over 18 now. Let the law decide," said Makarand.

Daadi began to weep.

"I hope I have your support in this, Atul *bhai*?" asked Makarand.

"Yes, you do. Anita and I are with you. There are some acts, the consequences of which have to be borne. Gyan's is one such."

"So are Gokul and I with you. In school, we have had many discussions and lectures on child abuse and I'm clear that unless we are willing to fight it till we get justice there will always be Gyan *chachus* in every house."

"Yes, most of the abusers in society are people who are known to the victim is what they told us in school," said Gokul.

Makarand looked at Madhavi. She squared her shoulders and picked up the phone and dialled 100.

Rishang



The car gathered speed. The huge gates of the school clanged shut behind it. Rishang was going home to Imphal for his vacations. He sat in the front with his seat belt on, beside Danny, the driver. Danny was happy to see Rishang *ibungo*, the little master, who was growing up fast. This was the first time that Sir had sent Danny alone to pick up *ibungo*. Usually Sir or Madam accompanied him. Sir had said that *ibungo* is a big boy now, almost 12, and could travel alone. Madam had sent Danny with many instructions: don't stop anywhere unless absolutely necessary, drive carefully, call before starting, give *ibungo* the food she had packed for the journey, and so on...Sir had to ask her to stop worrying.

Danny kept on talking to *ibungo* while he drove. He told him of how Caesar and Sugar—their Dachshund and Great Dane—had spotted a

snake in the garden and had almost barked the roof off the house; of how Sundari and Sumukhi, *ibungo's* pet goats, now had two baby goats each; of how Madam had converted a portion of the garden into a herbal garden and of the many people who had come to see her bonsais; of how Kalu the cow was becoming fatter and fatter; and of how Athem *ibungo* would be arriving the next week.

Danny finally stopped talking. He got the feeling that Rishang *ibungo* was not really listening to him. He looked sideways at his little master. The boy was silent, lost in thought. Danny's brow furrowed. This was just not like *ibungo*. Usually, Rishang *ibungo* would be the one to ask a hundred questions about just about anything—Sugar, Caesar, Kalu, the weather, and what they would do in the holidays. He would be absolutely unstoppable...bubbling with excitement and spirit.

Danny pulled the car off the main road, stopped it and asked, "*Ibungo*, are you feeling all right? Is anything wrong?"

Rishang looked up startled. He shook his head; his eyes slid away from Danny and he said, "No, nothing's wrong. And I'm fine. Let's go home. And don't stop anywhere."

Danny looked at Rishang with concern for a long moment. He decided not to ask any more questions and to drive straight home.

The rest of the journey was spent in silence.

Rishang continued to be lost in thought. How different everything seemed. He didn't feel good about anything any more. He remembered how excited he used to be about going home. His cousin, Athem, would normally be waiting for him. Athem was 18 years old. Rishang and Athem got along very well. Neither of them had brothers or sisters, so there was a special bond between the cousins.

The last two vacations had been especially fun. Yaima Kipjeng, Athem's classmate and friend, had stayed over with them. Together, they had gone hiking and fishing. Yaima and Athem had taught him how to fly a kite, to

play the mouth organ and climb really tall trees. They had found a tall tree, just a little way up the hill. The trio decided that the tree would be their very own hideout. Many an afternoon was spent on the upper branches of the tree watching life from a height. And as the sun set in the distance, Yaima would play on his mouth organ. Those were the happiest days in Rishang's memory.

Rishang soon settled in to his home routine. His mother, Kim, was happy to have him back for the holidays. She bustled about getting the day's work and food organised. Sugar and Caesar followed Rishang wherever he went.

A couple of days after he came home, Rishang was sitting at the dining table. He had just had a sumptuous breakfast. Kim chattered away with him non-stop, occasionally giving him a hug or reaching out to pat him. Rishang put down the large empty mug and wiped the 'moustache' of milk from his face.

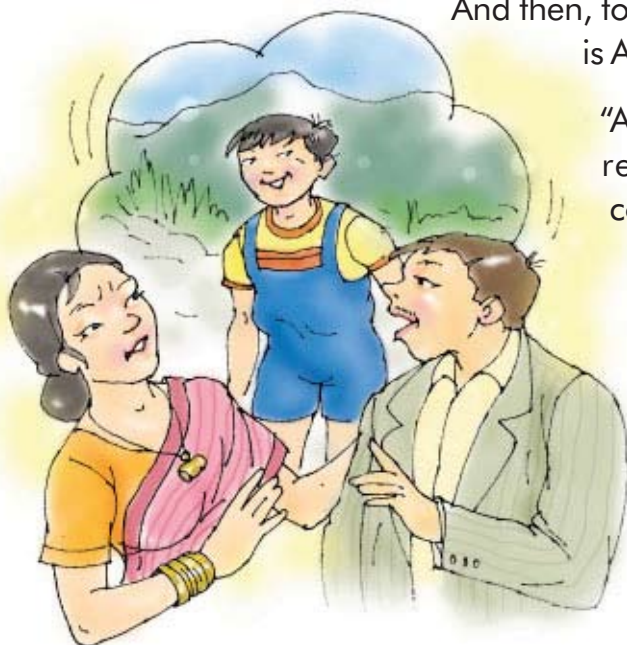
"Rishang, son..." said Kim. "Are you all right? You've been so quiet this time."

Rishang looked away avoiding her eyes. "I'm all right, Mamma," said Rishang. And then, to change the subject, he asked, "When is Athem coming?"

"Athem will be here next week, son," replied Mamma. "You'll soon have company. Did you call Yaima?"

"No, Mamma, I'll call him up." Rishang whistled for Sugar and Caesar.

Kim talked to her husband, Khanot, about Rishang's changed behaviour. "I don't know what it is, Khanot, but something is not right. Rishang's



changed so much. He's so quiet. Where's my bubbly, irrepressible son disappeared in these four months? I want my old Rishang back, Khanot."

"Kim, you're over-reacting," Khanot said. "Rishang is growing up. Let him be. These adolescent years are difficult ones for boys...and girls, I guess. Let him take his own time to adjust to all the changes he's experiencing. Your Rishang won't go anywhere."

"I hope you're right, Khanot," Kim said in an uncertain voice.

Despite her conversation with Khanot, Kim called up Yaima, Athem's friend, that evening.

"Hallo, Yaima. This is Rishang's mother, Kim Aunty."

"Hi, Kim Aunty. How are you?" Yaima replied.

"I'm well, son. Rishang is here for his vacations," said Kim.

"Yes, I thought he must have reached. In fact, I was planning to call him up. How is he?"

"Well, actually, son, I don't know...I called you up to talk about him. He's been very quiet ever since he came home. Uncle says that I shouldn't worry unnecessarily. And maybe I shouldn't. I just wondered if you could drop in some time and spend time with him," Kim asked hesitantly.

"Sure, I will, Aunty," said Yaima. "And Uncle is probably right. There's probably nothing to worry, Aunty."

"Thanks, Yaima," Kim said.

The next day, Rishang was in his room when Yaima walked in.

"Hey, Rishang!" said Yaima thumping him on the back.

"Yaima! Hi!" Rishang's face lit up in a smile.

"What? You've forgotten me, is it? No calls after you came from school, Rishang?"



"I planned to call you soon, Yaima. Honest," said Rishang.

"Aha! Just kidding, Rishang. I know you would have called me soon. It's good to see you."

Rishang looked relieved.

"Well, what are you doing today, Rishang?" Yaima asked.

Rishang shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he had no plans.

"Then come, let's go fishing. We'll hike up till Pedda Point and fish in the river."

Rishang nodded.

"Great! I'll go home and pick up the gear and then we'll head out."

Soon Yaima and Rishang were headed up the hill. Yaima carried the fishing gear while Rishang picked up his rucksack with some snacks and a bottle with some worms that he dug out from the earth.

It was a pleasant day. As they were half-way up the hill, the sun went into a huddle behind thick clouds and a brisk breeze tugged at the boys.

"Good weather, eh, Rishang? It's easier to climb when the sun is not in the sky."

"Yes, beautiful. I like it too."

They climbed on without much talk. Yaima did look at Rishang once or twice, though. Aunty was right. Rishang was much much quieter than before.

As they trudged on, they could hear the sound of the river flowing in the distance. There was a bend in the road before them. When the two boys took the turn, they almost stopped dead. A strange scene greeted them.

There, in front of them was a tea shop by the side of the path. It had a bench towards one side on which were seated three young men, probably in their early twenties. The owner of the tea shop was nowhere to be seen. The small boy who helped in the tea shop stood before the three men. He was standing on one leg, looking miserable, with two bags—possibly belonging to the men—on his head. A fourth man was standing beside him with a thin cane in one of his hands and a chocolate bar in the other.

Rishang and Yaima watched for a few minutes. Every time the little boy tried to put his raised foot down, the man hit him on his leg with the cane. The boy began to totter. The two bags on his head seemed to grow heavier



and heavier. He was grimacing. And the man kept thrusting the chocolate into his face while at the same time, caning him if he put his foot down.

Yaima took in all this in a minute. He sprinted across with a shout and reached the fourth man in no time. "Hey! Stop that!"

He first wrenched the cane from the man's hand and then turned to help the boy put down the bags from his head. The boy was almost in tears. He was about 15 years old and was trying hard not to show the pain and humiliation he was feeling. Yaima put an arm across his shoulders. He felt him trembling with exhaustion and fear.

Yaima was angry, very angry. "Just what is it you are trying to do?" he asked in a loud, stern voice, fixing his eyes on the fourth man. When the man did not answer, he looked at the other three men and said, "Don't you ever repeat what you were doing to this boy. You feel great, is it, to harm a boy who cannot fight back or refuse to do what you ask? You feel powerful, is it?"

There was such fury in Yaima's voice that even Rishang looked at him in surprise. The men mumbled that they were just giving the boy some chocolate.

"Giving him chocolate, my foot!" said Yaima to the men who were hurrying to get into their car.

"Are you all right?" Yaima asked the boy while making him sit at the bench.

The boy nodded. He got up almost immediately from the bench. "I'm all right. I have work to do. May I go, Sir?"

Yaima looked at him for a long moment and nodded. The boy disappeared into the tea shop. After a while Rishang and Yaima continued on their way.

Rishang thought of all that had happened. He felt proud of Yaima. "Weren't you scared? There were four men and you were alone," he asked Yaima.

"I didn't have the time to think, Rishang. I hate bullies. They frighten those who are weaker and smaller than themselves...but actually bullies themselves are frightened people, who cover up their fear by pretending to be powerful. If you confront them, most of them cannot face you."

Rishang pondered over what Yaima said. By this time they had fixed their fishing rods and tackle and were waiting for the fish to catch the bait. The silence allowed Rishang to absorb what Yaima said.

"Can I ask you something?" Rishang whispered to Yaima.

"Yes, anything." Yaima took his eyes off the rod in the water and looked at Rishang. "Anything."

"Do you think the boy in the tea shop is a coward?"

"No, Rishang. He's not. The boy is a worker. How could he stand up to these rich men from the town. After all, they were older and stronger and more powerful than he. If the owner of the shop were there, he probably would not have allowed it to happen. But I would never blame the boy for what happened. A child cannot always protect himself. We, as adults, need to protect them."

"Would you always?"

"Yes, I would. As much as it is in my capacity to do so."

Yaima sensed that it was important to Rishang that he answer these questions honestly and directly. He hoped that his answers would help Rishang.

They went on fishing in silence. Rishang seemed completely lost in thought. Occasionally, he would glance at Yaima...

The next day, Yaima again visited Rishang. Kim was happy. "Good you are here, son. I'm waiting for Athem to come too. He will be here tomorrow. At least Rishang will have both of you for company."

Yaima went in to Rishang's room. Rishang was sitting on his bed. His favourite book, one of the Fighting Fantasy series, was in his hands. Yaima knew how fascinated Rishang used to be with these books. But that day, Rishang showed no interest in his book. He was lost in his own world.

"Yo, dude! If you think any more, you may sprout roots in your bed," said Yaima placing a hand on Rishang's shoulder. Rishang sprang up startled. He gasped and Yaima noticed that there was fear in his little friend's eyes. The look changed to relief when he saw that it was Yaima.

"Sorry, sorry, Rishang!" said Yaima, throwing both his hands up in a gesture of surrender. "I should have knocked before I entered."

"No, it's okay, Yaima. I was just startled," replied Rishang.

'And very very frightened,' thought Yaima. 'What is it, Rishang? What has frightened you so much?'

"Come, let's go and climb our tree, Rishang. I haven't done that since you went back to school."

"Yes, let's. Have you brought your mouth organ, Yaima? I'd love to hear you play."

Yaima took it out of his pocket to show Rishang and the two of them left. The tree seemed to welcome them with its branches spread wide and open.

"Up you go, Rishang. I'll follow," said Yaima.

Rishang climbed up, first a little uncertain and out of practice...and then more sure-footed and with ease. A good 30 feet up and the branches were still thick and strong. Rishang sat comfortably on one of the branches while Yaima climbed on to a branch a little to Rishang's left.

"Rishang, I've bought you something," said Yaima, extending his hand out to Rishang.

"Bought me?" Rishang looked surprised. When he saw what it was, he

was filled with delight. "Oooh! A mouth organ! Thanks, Yaima, I was planning to buy one myself. Thanks a lot."

"You're welcome. Now let's hear you play it."

Rishang started off with a few notes and all the lessons he took the previous vacation from Yaima came back to him. He started off with the simple tune of 'Silent Night, Holy Night'. Yaima was surprised and pleased that Rishang remembered it so well. He took out his own mouth organ and accompanied Rishang.

When they finished, they let the music and the silence sink into them. The sun was beginning to set and the world around looked serene and beautiful. Rishang loved his land just as he knew that Yaima did too. And he was glad he was here with Yaima. They played a few more tunes, with Yaima guiding Rishang through the more difficult parts.

"This time when you go back to school, you can take the mouth organ with you. You'll be able to play so many songs for your friends. Once you learn an instrument, it never is the same again," said Yaima softly.

"No, it never is the same again. It never will be..." Rishang said. "I don't want to go back to school ever again. Never. Never."

The tranquil mood of the moment vanished with the vehemence in Rishang's words. Yaima was taken aback. With the anger, he also felt the fear rising in Rishang.

"Why? What's the matter, Rishang?"

"Nothing. I don't want to go back to school. And I can't tell you why. You will hate me. Mamma and *Paabung* [Daddy] will hate me. Athem will hate me. I hate myself. I hate myself," cried Rishang as he slid down the tree and ran away before Yaima could react.

"Rishang, wait. Wait for me," shouted Yaima as he climbed down the tree hastily.

Rishang ran all the way home as if the witches were after him. Yaima raced after him, totally stunned by the turn of events. No one was home when Rishang reached. He charged into his room and banged the door shut after him. Yaima followed, stopping briefly to knock at Rishang's door. No voice answered the knock. But Yaima turned the door handle and was relieved that it opened.

Rishang was sitting on the wide seat by the bay window in his room. Yaima could see the streaks of tears that had been rubbed off. Rishang sat staring out of the window. Yaima sat down in front of him. Several minutes passed.

"Talk to me, Rishang. Tell me what's happened. Why don't you want to go to school?"

More time passed by. "Rishang, I'm not going till you tell me what's happened."

"You'll hate me. I know you will."

"No, I won't," said Yaima. "That's not what friends are like. Tell me why you are upset."

Slowly, Rishang began to tell Yaima what was troubling him. When Rishang came to the seventh standard, he was made monitor in charge of the boys in his hostel. The seventh standard hostellers stayed in a separate building. Rishang felt proud to be given the responsibility. And Hongray Sir was the warden. He was also their sports teacher. Whenever he had a problem, Hongray Sir was there to guide him. He was nice, kind and forever ready to help him. In fact, many a time Hongray Sir used to call Rishang to his quarters for a chat. He would allow Rishang to help him in his carpentry workshop that he had in the annexe of his house. And many a time Hongray Sir would say that he loved Rishang very much. Rishang felt very, very good.

And then, one day, after rigorous sports practice, Rishang had half-an-hour before he had to get back to the hostel. Hongray Sir told him that he

wanted to show Rishang something. Rishang went with him and Hongray Sir said that he could have a bath in his house and that there were fresh towels in the bathroom. Rishang felt shy but he went ahead anyway. It felt good. And when he came out of the bath, Hongray Sir insisted that he powder himself before he put on his clothes. Then Sir hugged him and told him that he smelt lovely.



Rishang's voice faltered and stopped. Yaima waited. After a while Rishang continued, his voice sometimes dropping to such a low whisper that Yaima had to strain to hear him.



"Sir hugged me and kissed me...it didn't feel bad...but I knew that it was not right. He said he loved me...if he loved me, why did he do what he did? I couldn't protest...I didn't protest. He is my teacher...and I couldn't say no to him. I did try to stop him...I did try to push him away but he hushed me and said that I'm a good boy and that he loves me a lot..."

Yaima listened in growing horror.

"That was the first time. Sir said that now we shared a special bond...that I was his favourite student. I felt awful...dirty...not right. Now, Sir calls me whenever he wants. I cannot say no. I don't like it. I hate myself. When I go back this time, I will be in the eighth standard. Sir will no longer be my class warden. He told me not to worry. I would always be special. And that even if he does love other boys, I would be more special than them..."

"Yaima...he is my teacher...how can he be bad...and why did he choose me...I must be very bad...and now to think that some other boys too will suffer in the same way...I detest myself for being so scared. And who will believe me, Yaima, who will believe me?"

"I believe you, Rishang. I believe you. I'm glad you found the courage to tell me," Yaima took Rishang's hands in his. "I want to tell you that I believe every word of what you have told me. I'm sorry you had to suffer like this. No one deserves this."

"But I don't dislike Hongray Sir. He's really nice otherwise...fun, jovial, with laughter in his eyes...he's all us kids' favourite teacher. Who will believe me?"

"I believe you, Rishang...You said you did not want to go back to school," said Yaima. "I can understand that. I too would feel the same. But for that to happen I need to speak with your parents about this. I need to. You understand that, don't you?"

Rishang looked really troubled. "They'll hate me. What will they think? I feel so ashamed of myself."

"It may seem like that to you, Rishang, but maybe they won't. They are your parents and from what I know of Kim Auntie and Khanot Uncle, they will never blame you for this. But we need to tell them, Rishang. I'll do it for you. Is that okay?"

Rishang nodded. Yaima decided to wait for Rishang's parents.

Rishang could hear Yaima talking to his parents in the next room. It was night. After a while, the door opened slowly. Kim walked in followed by Khanot and then Yaima. Kim's eyes were swollen as if she had cried a lot. Rishang stood up hesitantly, unwilling to meet his parents' eyes. Kim went to Rishang and hugged him. "Oh, my child, how you must have suffered." Her voice trembled and hearing her words, the floodgates broke.

"Mamma, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I couldn't do anything," wept Rishang.

"Hush," said Khanot, running his hand over Rishang's head. "Don't apologise. It was not your fault. You are not to blame. I wish this had not happened to you, but...I want you to know that your mamma and I will always love you," Khanot cleared his throat. He too was in a state of



shock. Rage, helplessness over what had happened and a measure of determination swept over him.

When Rishang stopped crying, the three of them sat on the bed. Both Kim and Khanot had an arm around Rishang. Yaima sat at the window. They spoke to each other for nearly an hour.

"What do we do now, Uncle?" Yaima asked finally.

"Yaima told us that you don't want to go back to school, Rishang. And you will not. Tomorrow, I'll go and meet your school principal. And also start the process of admissions in St. Michael's here," said Khanot.

"Will you tell Principal Sir about Hongray Sir?" asked Rishang in a scared voice.

"Rishang, sometimes we have to do things even if they are unpleasant or scary. I feel that I should talk to the principal about Hongray. After all, you are not the only boy in school. This must have happened to other boys before you and if we keep quiet, it will happen to more boys after you leave. I feel...I think we all feel that difficult though it is, we should talk to the principal, if only to see that in this school, Hongray is not allowed to abuse children. It's what I feel."

Rishang thought for a while, took a deep breath and said, "Yes, Paabung, as Mamma says, we need to do what we need to do."

Annexe One: For Children

Each Touch Speaks!

A touch is either a safe touch or an unsafe touch.

A safe touch makes you feel loved and cared for. It makes you feel protected and safe. An unsafe touch makes you feel confused, scared and unsafe and you know that it is not right. It makes you feel hurt, it causes pain, and because you may not want that touch it makes you feel angry, guilty and dirty. Even when you are very small, your mind knows a safe touch and an unsafe one.



Many times, unsafe touches are by people you know—your relatives, friends, neighbours, teachers and people you trust. Sometimes, it may be a stranger who may touch you. Sometimes, when a person touches our private areas when we do not want it or may not like it, that is also an unsafe touch.

What are our private areas? These are areas of our bodies, which we do not normally show people and which we always keep covered. Some persons may try to hide these actions through different ways. They may call it a 'special secret' or a special feeling that they share with you. They may give you lots of gifts and take you on outings. They may show that they care for you or your family. They may also be liked and respected by your family members. All this makes it difficult for you to understand what they want from you. You feel confused and unsure about your own experience with them.

And, sometimes, they may even threaten to hurt you or family, or to make things bad for them. And make you feel that you have invited the touch by your behaviour.



Remember

You are NOT responsible for the other person's behaviour.

You did NOT invite it and you are NOT to be blamed for it.

The adult, who touched you, is responsible

What Can You Do?

The best thing to do is to tell an older person whom you trust about what has happened. This person may be a parent, teacher, friend or even an older sister or brother. The adult who touches you may be someone you like or love. Even so, say, 'No', 'Don't' or 'Stop it' firmly or loudly. Push the person away hard.

Run away from the scene if you can. If you know self-defence methods, use them to escape.

SCREAM! So that others hear and the adult gets frightened.

Remember!

When a person touches you or behaves in a way that disturbs you, it is called sexual abuse.

If you are confused about somebody's behaviour and touch, talk about it to some adult you trust. Clear the doubt in your mind.

You are precious. And you are right to protect yourself. Trust your feelings. You can say 'No'. Even if you did not say 'No' to the adult who touches you, it's ok. It is still not your fault. Speak about it to someone you trust.

Annexe Two: For Adults

Be alert for any signs of abuse in a child. Tell the child that as their parent/teacher, it is their job to keep them safe and you want them to tell you if someone or something scares or worries her/him.

Give the child examples to help her/him understand what you mean. Tell her/him that there may be some bigger kids who bully them and make her/him do something s/he doesn't want to do or they may touch her/him in their private parts. This can be scary, worrying and shameful for the child. Encourage the child to speak to you about this. The person who does so may be someone known to you. Always tell the child to inform you not only about strangers, but of persons known to the child as well, such as neighbours, teachers, domestic workers and family members, including the extended family, friends of the family, as well as friends of older siblings.



Tell the child what is not all right. It is his/her body and nobody has a right to touch it.

Tell the child that no adult should:

- ◆ Put their hands up her skirt or down his pants.
- ◆ Touch their private parts, even through clothes.
- ◆ Ask him/her to touch the older person's private parts or ask him/her to remove the older person's clothes.
- ◆ Ask him/her to remove their clothes.
- ◆ Take off their clothes.
- ◆ Take pictures of them with their clothes off.
- ◆ Take off their clothes in front of them.

Be aware of who your child spends time with and be cautious if an adult wants to spend time with your child.

Monitor your child's internet use. Establish an environment in your family where the child can discuss her or his feelings and issues openly without being blamed or judged. This increases the chances of your child speaking with you fearlessly about any inappropriate behaviour.



Your Child Needs

Safety: Your child needs to know that you will be protective and that you will take steps to keep the abuser away.

Comfort: Your child needs to hear that you are sorry that he or she was abused and that you will help him or her feel better.

Validation: Your child needs to hear that he or she did the right thing and that you believe him/her and will protect and help him or her.

Don't

- ◆ Disbelieve the child or deny the problem.
- ◆ Blame, punish or shame the child.
- ◆ Ask questions with the answers built in.

Do

- ◆ Listen to the child.
- ◆ Respond to his or her feelings.
- ◆ Support the child, no matter who is the abuser.
- ◆ Reassure the child.
- ◆ Validate the child by telling him or her that he or she was right to approach you.
- ◆ Answer the child's questions in a way that he or she can understand.
- ◆ Take a break if you are overwhelmed by emotions but explain to your child that you are not angry with him or her but that you are upset with the abuser for hurting the child.
- ◆ Take the child out of the abusive situation immediately.
- ◆ Get the child medical attention, if needed.
- ◆ Seek the help of professionals to help your child address the trauma.
- ◆ Take legal recourse. Report the matter to the police immediately.



In India, under the POCSO Act, any person who has apprehension that an offence is likely to be committed or has knowledge that an offence has been committed, should bring the incident to the notice of the Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU) or the local police. The failure to report such an offence, is punishable with imprisonment of upto six months or fine or both. This penalty is, however, not applicable to a child less than 16 years of age. For easy reach, if one calls on the toll free Childline 1098, they will connect you to the police and Child Welfare Committee.





About Butterflies

Butterflies is registered voluntary organisation working with vulnerable children, especially street & working children in Delhi since 1989.

With a rights based, participatory, non-institutional approach the organisation endeavours to educate and impart life skills to vulnerable children so that they become self-reliant.

Over the years Butterflies has initiated a number of innovative interventions in the field and partnered with various government and non-government agencies to garner support for children. The main programmes are Education, Children's Development Khazana (life skills programme teaching financial management), Child Health Cooperative Children's Media (Butterflies Broadcasting Children), Resilience Centre & Childline (1098, 24 hour helpline for children in crisis), Night Shelters for homeless children, vocational training (Butterflies School of Culinary & Catering and Computer Education), Chakhle Dilli, Advocacy & Research Centre (ARC), Alliance Building, Right to Play and Child Social Protection Committee Programme.

Butterflies reaches out directly to over 2000 street and working children in Delhi, 6000 child survivors of tsunami in Andaman & Nicobar Islands and 1200 children living in remote areas of Uttarakhand. Through the Children's Cooperatives Programmes, we are present in eight countries (Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Madagascar and Ghana) and ten states & union territories of India (Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal, Kerala, Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Rajasthan, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Maharashtra).

Butterflies is also a member of Family for Every Child, a global alliance of local civil society organisations working together to improve the lives of vulnerable children around the world.



Protecting and empowering children since 1989

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