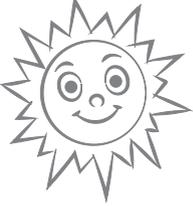


A puncture in the Fairy Tale

Defeating Bullies, Igniting Hope

ENTERING A NEW WORLD



Everyday, mister sun rises up and spreads its rays across the sky. Here, on earth, the flowers rise up in their flowerpots and bloom to greet mister sun. There's magic in the sky and down here on earth as well. Did you know, that the sun and the moon are not all alone up there? My mother says, 'Just like how you, me and everyone in our family live here on Earth, the sun and the moon live with the stars, planets and constellations in the sky. Just like we have our world down here, on earth, a different world exists up there, in space.' I can understand all this a little bit. But, to tell you the truth, most of it goes over my head. So I just listen. But you know what I really like? Talking!



You see? Even now, I was so excited, talking about the sun and the flowers, that I completely forgot to introduce myself! My name is Shanaya. But all that can wait. Because there is something very special about today. Today is my first day at school. Isn't it exciting when everything is new? My school bag, my water bottle, my lunch box, my shoes and socks – everything is sparkling new! I don't understand why some children

make a fuss and cry about going to school. My mother always says, 'if you cry first thing in the morning, you'll spend the whole day crying.' I made sure I got onto the school bus with a big, wide smile.



The bus took off...vroooooom!! I just kept looking out of the window for a while as we began driving down the road, moving past the buildings, the houses and the shops. *Was the bus moving or the world outside?* I couldn't tell. I could see the canna and bougainvillea plants from my garden spilling onto the ledge of the road. *Can I take them along with me too?* I wondered. But they got left behind before I could complete that thought. I lifted my gaze towards the sky. The clouds were running along swiftly. It looked like they were coming with us. A little while later the school building appeared. The clouds continued moving ahead. But I had to get off there.



When I entered the school...oh my! You should have seen it. Balloons here, balloons there, balloons everywhere. The classrooms too had colourful tables, all kinds of games and toys and pictures of our favourite cartoon characters. The teacher, very kindly, helped each of us find our places. Two more children sat down next to me. I suddenly



realised that both of them had been on the bus with me too! I couldn't wait to ask them both their names. One was Aarav and the other one was Yesha. The rest of the day was so much fun. We really enjoyed ourselves. Can I call Yesha and Aarav my friends now? Anyway, the three of us had decided one thing amongst ourselves. We would come to school everyday! ■



WINDOW SEAT

The last bell rang and school had ended for the day. The teacher made us stand in a straight line as we got ready for the bus ride back home. By the time I boarded the bus, only one window seat was left empty. Yesha, Aarav and I looked at each other. There were three of us. And just one window seat! What now? I really wanted to sit by the window. But will I get that last seat? Suddenly, I felt a very heavy push. It was so forceful that I fell down. I was lying on the floor of the bus, trying to make sense of what had just happened. *Did I just get knocked down by an elephant? Who allowed it to get onto the bus?* When I turned around, I saw a very large boy standing above me. My first reaction was, *thank god, it was just a push. What if this big, fat, elephant-boy had fallen on top of me?*

Aarav and Yesha helped me up. I was waiting for elephant *bhaiya*¹ to apologise. But guess what? He didn't look even slightly sorry. Instead, he just stood there, holding his stomach and laughing. Then, all of a sudden,

1 Literally meaning older brother, it is colloquially used for any adult male.





he stopped laughing and announced loudly, “this entire seat is mine, Fenil’s. No one else is allowed to sit here. Understand?”

Rimi *didi*², who was right behind me, spoke up. “Oy, Fenil! Stop bullying small kids. At least let one of them sit next to you.”

“*Surprise, surprise! It’s Rimi four-eyes! You stay out of this, little kitten.*”

“Don’t tell me what to do, you elephant! I don’t want to talk to you either. Who would want to talk to a bully like you, anyway?” Rimi *didi* sat down and angrily looked away.

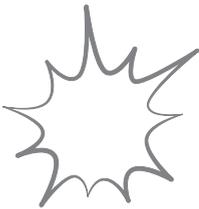
The bus took off. I just stood there looking at the bus conductor-uncle, as he scrambled to get all the children into their seats. As he passed by me, I heard him mumble under his breath, “Fenil and his nonsense. Everyday it’s something new. One of these days I am going to lose my patience. Then he’s had it.” But no one really did anything. What kind of cruelty was this? And no matter what the reason may be; who would be okay with this kind of behaviour, over and over again? At least, not me. I’d rather not get out of my house at all, no?



The only thing that I was clear about right

2 Like *bhaiya*, it is used colloquially to address any older female.

then was the fact that the last window seat was gone. And there was nothing anyone could do about it. The three of us dejectedly walked towards the back of the bus and plonked ourselves onto the last bench seat. We could see all the windows from there. But we couldn't catch a single glimpse of what was outside them. The roads, the buildings, the houses and the shops; I could feel that extra distance between me and the world outside the window. The canna and the bougainvillaea were nowhere in sight. Fenil *bhaiya* was sticking his tongue out at me in odd, funny ways and laughing. Right then, there was a flash of light. The kind of flash that you see when someone clicks a photograph. ■



FENIL-O-PHOBIA

Today mummy had to come into my room three times to wake me up. But I kept my eyes closed. I did not want to go to school. What was the point? I would just end up spending the entire day worrying about Fenil *bhaiya*'s bullying. But Mummy didn't know these things. And so she kept trying to get me out of bed. Mummy, of course, has her own ways of getting things done. I don't know how, but in the end she found a way to get me ready for school. I got so late that I had to skip breakfast to be on time for the bus.



I managed to catch the bus in the nick of time. And when I got on ... taaa-daaa! The window seat was empty and Fenil *bhaiya* was nowhere around. I hurried over to the seat and quickly sat down. Mummy had packed my breakfast in a box so I could eat it on the way. I took out the box and began enjoying my snack by the window. The bus halted at the next stop and Fenil *bhaiya* got on. I closed my eyes and began trembling with fear. Suddenly, I heard a loud thump. I opened my eyes and looked around. He was sitting right next to me. Before I could say or



do anything, he snatched the box out of my hand and gobbled down all the snacks in it.

I like mornings. I am always happy during mornings. This was the first time in my life that I was sad, first thing in the morning. I was almost down to tears. I didn't enjoy class as much as I did everyday. Nothing made me happy. And more than anything else, I was feeling very hungry. Mummy says that an empty stomach is a playground for mice. I pressed my hand against my tummy to see if the mice had come out to play. *Phew*. I was relieved. No mice yet. And even if I found any, I would let them loose on top of Fenil *bhaiya's* head. Even when Yesha and Aarav called me to play with them, I didn't feel like it. I felt like pushing down anyone who came near me.



Just around then, the teacher entered the classroom. She said, "Kids! Today we are going to learn something very important. So listen carefully. First, tell me this. Have you ever felt bad about the way someone has behaved with you?"

"Yeea...ssss...teacher!!"

"Okay. Now tell me, what would you do if someone snatched something from you?"

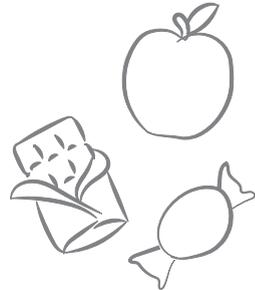


My eyes went wide. I began to wonder, *does teacher know about Fenil bhaiya snatching my snack box this morning?*

“Ma’am. Dhiyaan snatched my colours from me yesterday,” Sara stood up and said.

And even though Sara was complaining about her colours, I could only think about the snacks in my snack box. The red colour on the colour chart reminded me of apples. I kept imagining a big nice apple tree, full of fresh, red apples all over it. My brown coloured desk reminded me of a bar of chocolate. The chalk in the teacher’s hand reminded me of mint candies. Sara could at least get her colours back. But my snacks? It had been chewed up and swallowed, and was probably spinning around in Fenil *bhaiya*’s stomach. How do I get that back?

“Shanaya!” I turned towards the teacher as I heard my name being called. ■



HANDS THAT HIT, HURT...

The teacher's words trickled into my ears. "Children. There are so many wonderful things we can do with our hands. Eating yummy food, making beautiful drawings, playing with toys, exchanging presents, expressing affection... I can go on and on. So, then, why use these wonderful tools to hit someone? To cause pain and hurt?..."



Dhiyaan was an overenthusiastic ape. He would never let the teacher finish. He would constantly interrupt her to boast about himself. Before the teacher could finish her thought, he cut her off and said, "My punch can send a person flying into the sky." What nonsense! How is that possible?



Dhiyaan's comment completely threw me off from what the teacher was trying to say. I tuned him out of my mind and focused towards the teacher's voice. She was saying, "If someone has done something wrong, there are many ways to teach them a lesson. And when you find the right way, you'll realise that there was never any need for violence. Violence is never a good thing. So, tell me. Would the lovely children of my class ever hit anyone?" All of us replied loudly, together, "Noooooo...oooo."





I was really beginning to suspect that the teacher could hear the voice in my mind. Because my head was full of questions. *What if someone is constantly harassing you? What if they bother you so much that you feel like hitting them? What do you do then?* But before I could even ask, the teacher answered my question. “You hit someone because you want to hurt them. But always remember, hitting someone hurts just as much as getting hit. The harder you hit someone, the more your own hand will hurt. So what is the point of violence when everybody gets hurt?” And she didn’t stop with that. She also showed us how to tackle the urge to hit someone. “Whenever you feel like hitting someone, pause and take deep breaths. Wrap your hands across your chest tightly, like you are hugging yourself. If you are at home, go to your favourite spot and sit down.” Teacher was right, no doubt. But what if you are not at home? What do you do if you are on the bus? Especially if Fenil bhaiyya is around? Should I ask the teacher about that? What if she scolds me for asking stupid questions? I didn’t want to take a chance. So I just sat there quietly. ■



SOLUTION FOUND!

Even though I wanted to ask teacher that question, I didn't. But every time I saw Fenil *bhaiya* on the bus, I couldn't help wondering, doesn't anyone ever scold him? I had made up my mind that If I ever saw his mother, I would complain to her. Tell her how much he troubles everyone on the bus. At least his mother will tell him to stop troubling us, won't she? My mother reminds me everyday, "You shouldn't speak in a loud tone... you shouldn't hit anyone... you should always be nice to kids younger than you... you should help anyone in need," and many such things.



Fenil *bhaiya* seemed like a bad boy to me. Just like the wicked cat from that story, 'Who will bell the cat?'. Yes. That one. Mummy told me another story. It was called 'You reap as you sow.' And as soon as I thought of that story, I realised that I had found the answer to my problem. Hurrah! The next day, I was just waiting for Fenil *bhaiya* to get onto the bus so I could teach him a lesson. But there was a small surprise. A new boy boarded the bus that day before we picked up Fenil *bhaiya*. I asked him his name. 'Samay', he



shyly told me. 'I'm Shanaya.' A few minutes later, the bus stopped again and Fenil *bhaiya* stomped onto the bus. As soon as he laid his eyes on Samay, he barked at him, 'You, skinny boy...what is your name?'



'My name is Samay.'

'Samay? That's funny. Because it looks like your bad time has just begun.'

'Huh? I didn't understand...'

'Ha...ha...ha' he laughed loudly like a demon and said, 'If you are Samay, then why do you wear a watch? Shouldn't the time be displayed on your face?'



Rimi *didi* jumped in once more. 'Fenil. Let him go. He is small.'

'Oh look. It's the four-eyed kitten. Shut up and stay out of it,' Fenil snapped back immediately.

Rimi *didi's* face fell. I couldn't bear to see that. I went up to her and whispered my plan into her ear. She looked at me and smiled. And then, both of us turned to Fenil *bhaiya* together and said,

*'Fenil bhaiya, the fatty,
is a mean old baddy...'*



1 Samay literally means 'time' in Indian languages.

At first it was just the two of us, chanting quietly but firmly. But quickly everyone else joined the chorus. Every single person on the bus had been a victim of Fenil *bhaiya*'s nuisance one time or another. So why would anyone let go of this chance to get back at him? Everytime he tried to open his mouth, we silenced him by chanting louder,

'Fenil *bhaiya*, the fatty, is a mean old baddy..' Fenil *bhaiya* was left red faced, standing there all by himself. ■

