



stories for my children

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THE MEHMI PRESS

london: 2024

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Author's Preface

When I was a small boy with my grandfather, I would beg him incessantly for the stories. The old man - Hari Dev ('He Who Values the Love of God') would know stories from all across the world. He taught me about our culture, our history, our values, our life. And he taught me the knowledge and the ways to be a human being, to live.

It was through the paths of the story that I arrived at the meaning of this world and of my life. I am named after the stories, I live through the stories. So do we all.

What my grandfather gave me, I can never repay. But I can try and bring some of that forward to the next generation. To give them the stories, a path through the maze of life.

All of our life's experience, we put into our stories. We are all storytellers. And this small offering, the first of more to come, will put that experience and that knowledge that comes from it into words.

On this day of the New Year, I wish that your story gives you the ending that makes you happiest, that allows you to make the greatest contribution, that fulfils your destiny in this world.



Train Journey

11.08.15

Sakura lived on the Island. There weren't many people there, so there weren't many people in her life. In fact, there were so very little people on the Island that when she was old enough for the big school, her parents were going to send her to the Mainland to live there with some relatives.

When she wasn't in school, Sakura spent her time on the Island playing on the beautiful beaches. She would throw stones onto the sea, trying to skim them three or four times on the surface of the blue water. She would play with the crabs and tortoises crawling across the hot sand. Her dad was a fisherman and sometimes she would go out onto the sea on his little, wooden boat.

Besides playing on the beach, Sakura loved drawing pictures. She would draw all the animals and plants she could see and she dreamed of being a famous artist when she grew up.

One day, Sakura's parents decided she was old enough to go to big school and the Mainland. They told her to pack up all her belongings in an old trunk. There wasn't much to put in

besides her clothes and her drawings and her drawing things. Sakura was very sad that she was leaving the Island and her family and her old life behind her, but she was also excited. On the Mainland, her mother had told her, they had things like cinemas and art galleries which they didn't have on the Island. There were also so many people there walking on the streets that it seemed as if there wasn't any room for another person. It was a whole new world out there.

Her parents took Sakura to the train station which would take her to the Mainland. They waited until the train rolled up the tracks then said goodbye with many tears in their eyes and left her all alone. Sakura looked at the train. It was red and green and spouted clouds and clouds of steam. While it sat there, it hissed loudly. Sakura climbed inside, clutching her train ticket in her hand and pulling her trunk behind her. The carriage was completely empty.

Sakura put the trunk next to the seat and sat down. She stared out of the window at all the green trees surrounding the train tracks and occasionally, she saw a monkey or a brightly coloured parrot. After a while, she got tired of looking at the moving scenes and pulled out her drawing things. She had decided to make a picture of the beach she loved so much, with all her favourite places on it. There was going to be the little rock pool on one side and the place

where she skimmed her flat and smooth stones on the surface of the sea.

Sakura was busy with her drawing for a long time. But when she looked up out of the window, the green trees were still rushing past. They were still on the Island, it seemed. Sakura felt a little tired, so she fell asleep. She dreamed of the Mainland. She was sitting in a cinema with an ice cream, along with a few other pleasant looking girls. Everyone was laughing.

Sakura woke up. She rubbed her eyes and looked out of the window. She was still in the midst of all the trees! Sakura was very surprised. She looked at her watch. She had slept for a very long time. She watched the hands moving around on the watch for a while. After an hour, they were still in the trees. Sakura got up from her seat and decided to explore the rest of the train. Every carriage that she looked into was completely empty. But when she looked in the food carriage, there was a note on one of the tables with her name on it and freshly cooked food, still steaming. Sakura ate it quickly, because she suddenly realised she was very hungry and then she wandered back to her carriage.

The scenery outside was the same as it had been before.

Sakura did some adding up in her head. It seemed that she had been travelling for about a whole day. Her mother had told her that the Mainland wasn't very far away. What could be happening? She sat there wondering what was happening. She decided to go for another long walk on the train and there were no signs of life again. She went back to the food carriage and there was a beautiful dessert left there for her, next to the note with her name on it.

The next day and the next, the train was always in the midst of the trees. Sakura's food was always waiting for her when she went into the food carriage. She spent her time in long walks on the train or in drawing her pictures of the life she remembered in the Island before she had left it. When she ran out of paper, she thought about all the things she had seen before she had got onto the train. She never saw anyone else on the train.



The Watchmaker

09.08.15

In the jewellery district of Luddenford, there was a small and cramped watchmaker's shop. It was full of the insides of watches, cogs and wheels, tiny screws and other bits and bobs made out of metal. The owner of the shop was a fine workman. He would spend hours and hours on each of his special creations and loved them like his very own children.

One time, the watchmaker had made a golden watch with a white face on which he had painstakingly drawn a beautiful bird for a rich, old woman in town. It was her most treasured possession. Another time, he had set a thousand tiny diamonds in the face of a splendid watch for a fashionable young gentleman. It had shone so brilliantly that people had called it 'the sun on earth'.

Because of his wonderful artistry, the watchmaker was known all throughout the land. The wealthiest of people would travel to his shop to demand special works of art to be made for them. But the watchmaker would only take on a job if his heart and his love of beauty and the craft told him to.

One winter's night, when the wind was like a thousand knives slashing away in anger, the watchmaker heard a knocking at his door. He opened it and there stood a tall and bony stranger covered over from head to toe in a black cloak. His skin was deathly pale and he had a wasted look to his face.

The stranger spoke in a curious, passionless voice. He wanted a watch that had the face of a grinning skull and which was crafted out of bone. He wanted it to be set with obsidian stones and finished with the black leather of some creature that the watchmaker had never seen. He would supply the watchmaker with all the necessary materials. On hearing the stranger's words, the watchmaker felt two things at once. First, there was the shiver of excitement in creating something that had never seen the light of day before. But there was also a measure of distaste at the unusual and macabre nature of the work. The watchmaker wrestled with himself for a moment and then decided to craft the piece for his unusual customer, because of the special challenge ahead of him in making the thing. The stranger told him that he would be back in three days for the watch and that he would pay the man handsomely for his trouble.

On the first day, the watchmaker looked over his materials. There was the glistening bone and the shimmering stones of obsidian to be cut and finished. The black leather also shone.

The watchmaker began his task with his tiny chisel and hammer, hacking and hewing at his materials. He organised the machinery which would operate the watch and fitted it to the face. By the second day, he was ready to set the stones into the grinning skull, to place the hands onto the dial and apply the finishing touches to the construction. On the third day, there was only the leather strap to be composed and fitted to the watch.

After he had finished his labours, the watchmaker sat in his chair looking over the watch in his hand, waiting for the stranger. He looked at the grinning skull and the grinning skull looked back at him. It was a quiet and still day and there were no voices outside on the street. The hands on the watch moved very slowly. The watchmaker was feeling the accomplishment of having made something that had never had any reality before he had put his hand to it. He was wondering how much the stranger would give him. Maybe he would have enough to make himself the watch he had always dreamed of, a watch that would be the most brilliant and beautiful design the world had ever seen, a watch that was the queen of its kind. The watchmaker had often thought of this glorious timepiece, had whittled his drawings of it time and time again, had reconsidered each of the materials that he would use, each tiny detail in the overall scheme.

As these pleasant thoughts milled in his head, the watchmaker's heart grew warm. At first, there was the tiny sensation of warmth. But then, the warmth grew bolder and bolder. It travelled from his heart to his stomach, then his legs and arms. And now, the warmth grew uncomfortable. It became searing hot. And now, the warmth was all fire. The watchmaker gasped and choked. The last vision before his eyes was the face of the stranger, reaching for him and his watch.

Death had come to claim his prize.



The Twitching Leaf

18.08.15

Gyasi was taking a long walk through the woods one day. He spent a great deal of time in the woods looking at the patterns of light and shade that the trees made or breathing in the healthy smells and searching for animals like squirrels or foxes. Sometimes he would climb up into the trees and sit there for hours, feeling a great sense of freedom. He had even explored the woods at night, when the owls screeched.

As he walked, Gyasi was wondering about all the things that he couldn't see. He knew that each tree was different, special in its own way, but from a distance and without careful examination, all of them looked the same. They all said 'tree' to him. He knew that there were many insects on the ground but that he could not see them unless he bent down to explore. He knew that microscopes and x-ray machines would let him see even more things that were invisible to him at the moment. Gyasi wondered how much of what could be seen was forever barred from his sight. He imagined the thousands of paintings and photographs in the world from the beginning of man that would take many lifetimes to go over in detail and begin to understand. Truly, he thought,

all the people in the world were trapped in their own particular blindness.

But then, coming out of the grip of his thoughts, Gyasi suddenly did see something. It struck him forcefully. It was a purplish green leaf lying on the ground in front of him all by itself. It was springtime, so there were no other leaves about. He picked it up and looked at it more carefully. It was so glossy that it caught the light like a puddle of petrol, with a swirl of different colours printed onto it. He ran his fingers across it.

Gyasi stood for a while, just examining the leaf. He wondered where it had fallen from. It was so unlike the green ones up in the trees. Gyasi sometimes took things from the woods into his home, so that he could always look at a little piece of his favourite place outside when he wanted to. Sometimes it was a gnarled piece of bark and other times the broken egg shell of a newly hatched bird. He decided to take the leaf and add it to his collection.

When he got home in the evening, he was just in time for dinner. He washed his hands and sat down to his meal of plantain and rice and peas which he washed down with a glass of water. Everyone in his family was joking and laughing.

Gyasi spent some time listening to his little sister tell him about a book she was reading and which she had enjoyed. It was about a little girl whose teddy bear had been stolen and who had become a detective to bring it back home. Gyasi's sister told him that the girl had bright and curly red hair and big, round, green eyes. She was called Maisie and had tons of freckles and she liked eating raspberry jam. Every morning she did a hundred press-ups.

After dinner was over, Gyasi went up to his bedroom wondering why his little sister read books like those about Maisie and how she could remember everything in them. Gyasi liked reading books about animals and plants or about exciting worlds where unexpected things happened. Then, Gyasi corrected himself. Who was he to question what books people read? Everyone should be free to read what they please, he thought to himself. After all, books were there to be enjoyed and people were interested in different things.

Gyasi brushed his teeth, then began to undress himself. As he pulled off his jeans and went to throw them over the back of a chair, the leaf fluttered to the ground. He stood there in his underwear and looked down at it. Suddenly, it twitched.

Gyasi was astonished. His eyes must be playing tricks on him. He stared at the leaf, trying hard not to blink. There it was again! Yes, there was no mistaking it. There was the twitch again! He picked up the leaf and put it on his desk. For a while, nothing happened. Then there was the tiny movement, as if the leaf had been quickly breathing in and out.

Gyasi's surprise and excitement grew and grew. A twitching leaf! What would science make of it? Was the leaf alive? He prodded it with his finger. Nothing happened. Was it, in fact, a leaf? It certainly looked like one, even if it wasn't. Gyasi promised himself that in the morning he would rush down to the famous Science University in the nearest town with his little treasure and ask them to put the leaf through some tests. He could imagine the surprised looks on the faces of the scientists when they saw the leaf pulse with life and movement.

Gyasi lay down on his bed. The secrets of the twitching leaf kept him awake for a long time and when he finally fell asleep, he had a wonderful dream. He was surrounded by penguins in a scorching hot desert and they were slipping about on the sand and rolling down the dunes. He took part in a contest with them and rolled down to the bottom of the dune, but then found himself on the top of Mount Everest.

The penguin that had rolled down before him had turned into a cheetah who was telling him 'You have crossed my mouth'. He woke up.

Gyasi tumbled out of bed and rushed over to the desk. The twitching leaf was gone! It wasn't on the floor underneath the desk. The window wasn't open, so it couldn't have blown out. Gyasi felt sick. He never told anyone about the twitching leaf and he never found another one in the woods. The twitching leaf remained a secret that nobody knew about.



01.06.2018 - The Rainforest Ring

At times, the wizard Galfadlr seemed to be a grumpy and callous old man. He was exceptionally strict with his children, short with his wife and often told unwanted and hurtful truths to all those around him. However, Galfadlr loved his friends and family more than life itself and, most of all, he loved his wife, Esmeralda. Esmeralda was a redheaded woman with green eyes that loved nature. She would spend hours wondering what the squirrels in the garden were thinking about or puzzling over the incredible patterns and shapes that she saw in the animal and the plant kingdoms.

On the occasion of his wedding anniversary, Galfadlr made his wife a ring. To the naked eye, the ring seemed to be a quite ordinary one of gold. There was a pattern of leaves and animals circling it which led to a large emerald. The ring nowhere spoke of magic. However, alongside the ring, there came a small magnifying glass. It was when one looked at the emerald in the ring with the magnifying glass that the stunning result of the sorcery of Galfadlr was made apparent. For the emerald was an entire, living and breathing rainforest in miniature.

When Emeraldalda looked into the magnifying glass, she saw swathes of trees and vines, chattering monkeys, gloriously coloured parrots and flowers shaped like peacock feathers. As she focused and unfocused the lens, she could see incredible detail and even through objects. She was able to gaze on the armies of ants fighting over territory in the undergrowth, the woodlice that burrowed into the decaying corpses of trees on the ground and the caterpillars feasting on greenery that would one day become the most beautiful of butterflies.

The wonder of the magnifying glass did not stop there. Galfadlr's magic was the result of years of studying and experience and was truly a bravura performance. Galfadlr had given the magnifying glass an enchanted ear. It could hear, understand and translate everything in the rainforest. Everything. The lens could hear and tell what the orangutan's mother spoke to the baby in her arms, or what one warrior ant spoke to the other as they surged forwards against their enemy. The lens could hear and tell what the frog thought about his food of flies and what the jaguar brooded on in the shadows. The whisper of the wind, the mumbling of the trees, the song of the birds – the lens could hear and tell all.

The first time that Emeraldalda gazed upon the ring through the lens, she found a tribe of people living in the rainforest. They

wore red paint on their faces and necklaces made out of teeth and wandered naked through the trees. Emeraldalda could hear them speak to one another and understand their words through the magic of the lens. A young man was telling his son a story. Once, the powerful jaguar had wandered lonely through the lands. All of a sudden, he had leapt up into the sky. He roared and his voice was broken into a million shining stars. Such had been the beginning of the stars.

At times, the wizard Galfadlr seemed to be a grumpy and callous old man. But Galfadlr knew magic well. And the greatest magic of all which he understood more than anyone was the magic of love.



The Old Book

05.08.15

John loved reading books and he loved buying books. He was a great book collector. In the written words, he travelled to far off and magical places. He made new friends and new enemies. He learned new and beautiful words and to fall in love with mysterious women.

One summer's day, when the sky was floating with light and there were no clouds at all to be seen, John went for a walk after school by himself. He wandered into town and noticed a little side street which he had never noticed before. He was a lively, curious boy, so he decided to explore this strange, new area. So down the street he went. It was a dark place with shops that seemed ancient. They were selling things like candles and old-fashioned clothes. At the end of the street he came at last and he saw an exciting thing. It was a book shop. Through the window he could see an endless row of shelves and fading, leather-bound books.

John rushed into the shop, breathless with anticipation. Here, he would meet a new friend, a new book for his collection. He went from shelf to shelf, looking over the titles. There was

‘The History and Art of Bee-Keeping’ and ‘Mr. Simpkins and the Wedding Photograph’. There was ‘Light and the Power of Illusion’ and ‘The Magic of Art’. Suddenly, a book leapt out from the shelves at him. It had no title at all.

John pulled the book down from the shelf and turned it over, so that he could look at the front cover. There was no title here, either. The book was bound in mottled, green leather and had a golden lock on it, so he couldn’t open the pages and have a look inside. There was no key. There was a big picture carved into the leather which looked like a sort of flower, although he didn’t know what type it was.

John was quite taken with the book. Holding it to his chest with both hands, he walked to the counter of the bookshop. Sitting there, looking very serious, was a terribly old lady with tortoise-shell spectacles. She didn’t look at John, only at the book and she said the price, which was very reasonable for such a mysterious treasure. John asked her about the key and she told him there wasn’t any. After paying and thanking the old lady, John rushed all the way home to his bedroom.

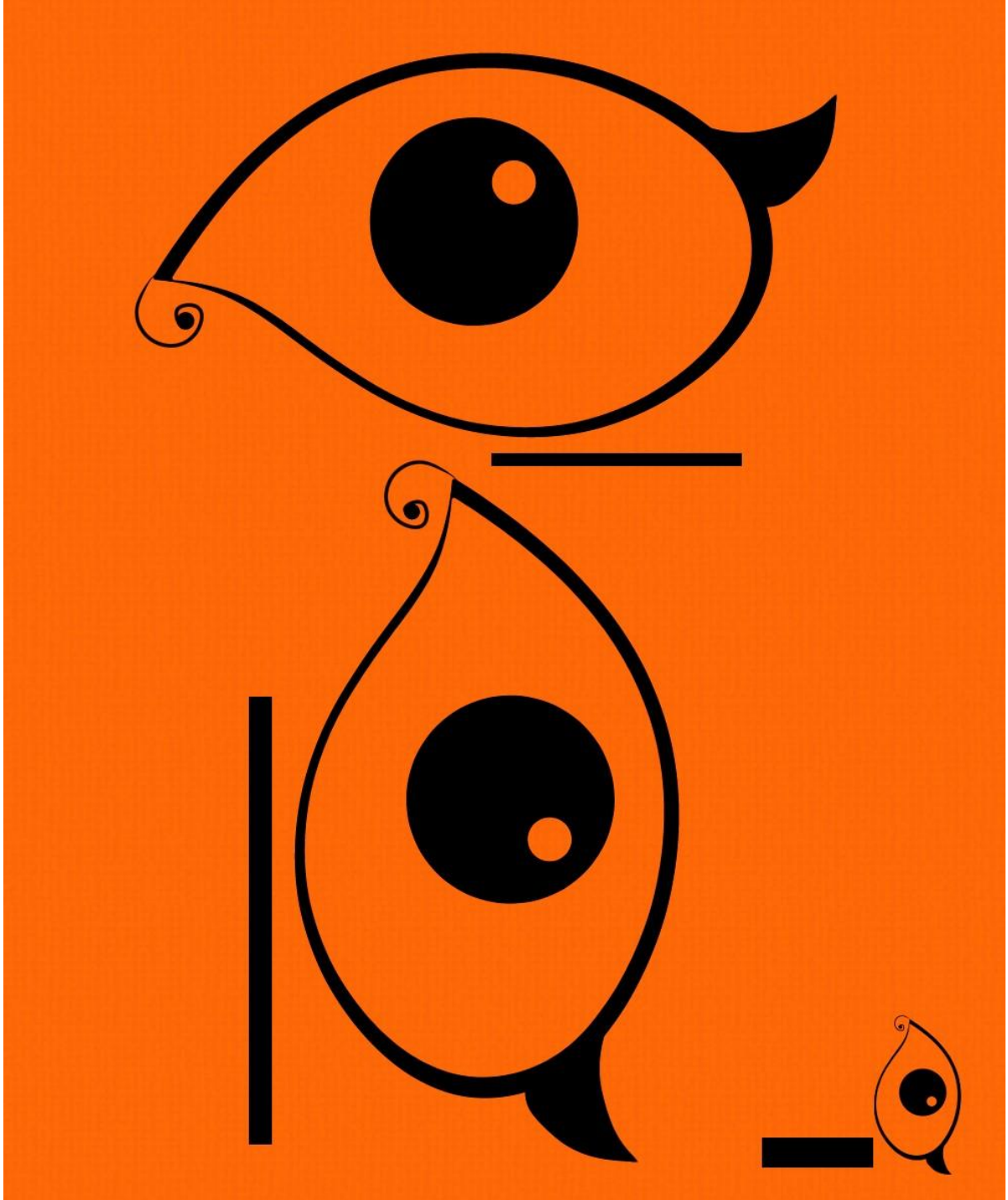
He put the book on his bed and went over to his desk where he picked up an old paperclip. He twisted the metal so that it was no longer a paperclip, but a piece of wire and then sat

down with it on the bed with the book in front of him. Then, he pushed the wire into the golden lock and twisted it one way and another. Nothing happened.

John kept on trying to unlock the book. On the first day, he tried for about two hours. The next day, he tried for three hours. Every day, he spent more and more time trying to unlock the book. Suddenly, the book was the only thing that he thought about. Soon, he wasn't sleeping at night. He would just spend hour after hour wondering what was inside. He stopped reading. He stopped eating. The closed book consumed him more and more.

It took John's mother a few days to realise what was happening, but when she did, she acted at once. She waited until John had rushed into his room one afternoon after school and peeped through the keyhole. She immediately caught on to what he was doing and the evil of the closed book, so she opened the door and snatched it from the bed. Then she ran down to the kitchen and threw the book onto the gas fire. The book caught alight instantly. There was a foul stench in the air and waves and waves of purple smoke. And suddenly, the book just vanished.

Afterwards, they tried to find the bookshop but it had disappeared. John never got better after he had had the closed book. He dreamt about it every night and he would always be trying to open the golden lock with his little piece of wire. He grew thin and he could never enjoy reading again in the same way. But his mother had saved his life and he grew to be a very old man.



The Gift of the Mirror

10.08.15

Krishan's auntie almost never came to visit. Even though he didn't know her that well, Krishan could see that she wasn't her usual self. She had a pinched look to her face and black circles under her eyes and after a few minutes, she would shake her head quickly, as though she were stopping herself from falling asleep, as if she were trying to keep herself alert for some reason.

After the family meal was over in the night, she called Krishan over. This was a little surprising, because she had never shown much interest in her nephew before. He stood there while she rooted around in her big, green leather bag for something. Whatever it was glistened in her hand for a moment, so that it blinded him. It was a hand mirror. She gave it over to him and he wondered why she had thought it a suitable gift for a boy. It was a mirror with a silvery tint to it and which had a highly artistic frame which was of a jungle full of animals, some of which he couldn't recognise. His auntie made him read what was written on the handle out loud twice, as though it had some sort of special interest. The words were "Bear in Silence and Give as you have Received". When he had spoken the words the second time round, his

auntie gave him a curious and inexplicably sympathetic look. Then, after a few minutes, while he was still holding the thing, she made her excuses and left.

Shortly afterwards, Krishan went up to his bedroom and left the mirror on the desk. He was still wondering about his auntie's odd behaviour as he brushed his teeth and put his night clothes on. Then he crept into bed. He was telling himself a bedtime story in his head like he always did, now that his parents said that he was too old for one from them. The story was about a man who had made a house out of meat and bones because he loved eating animals. The problem was that the meat began to rot and then the flies came to eat all the meat and lay their eggs into what was left. The man was left stranded in the house since no one nearby could bear the smell.

That night, Krishan had a nightmare. He was running through a narrow corridor from something that he couldn't see, but which was absolutely dreadful, and every door he tried along the way to escape into wouldn't open. Krishan woke up sweating and then he couldn't sleep the rest of the night.

It was a strange happening, but the next night was the same. After only a few minutes of lying in bed and falling asleep,

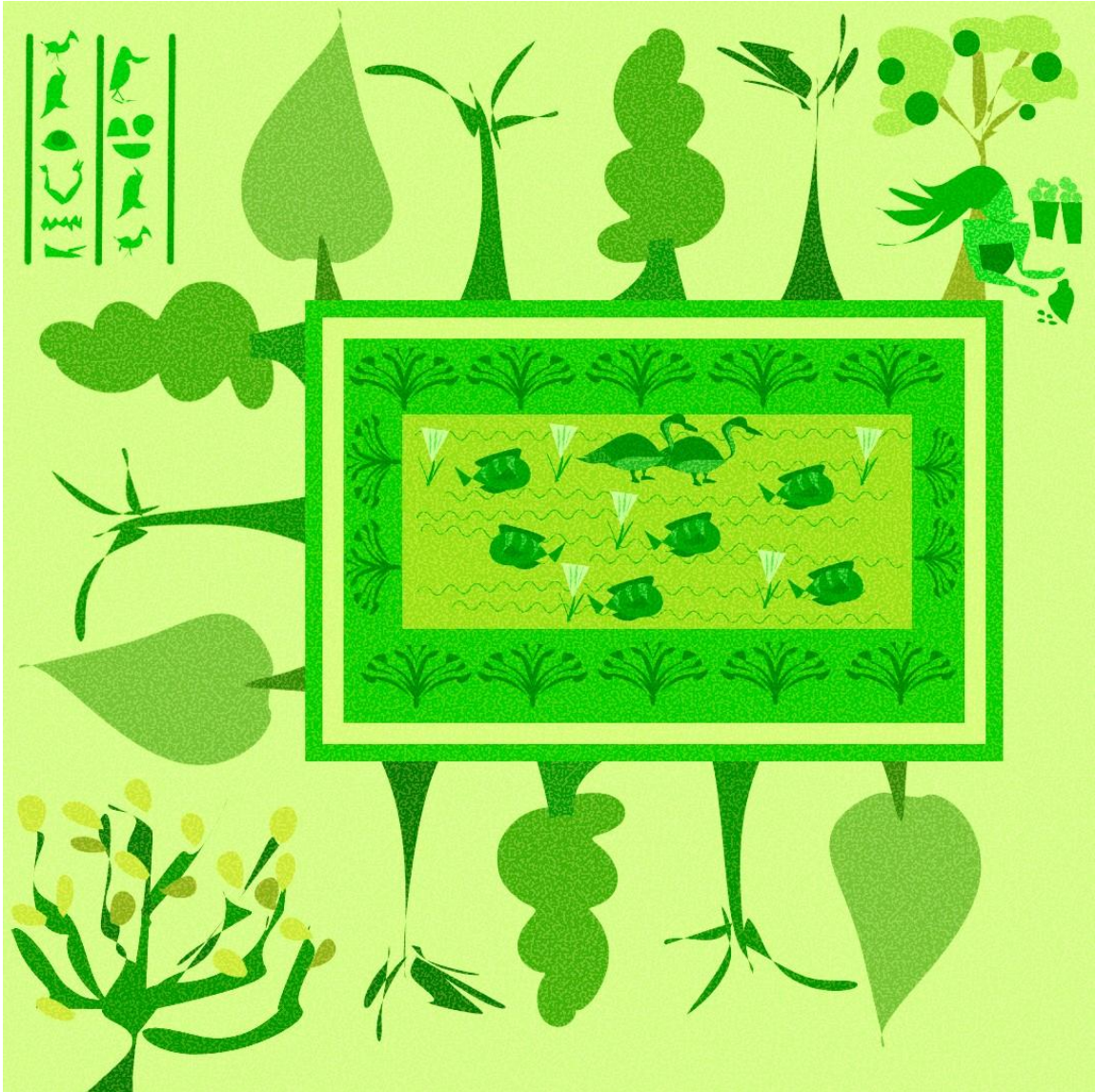
the nightmare came again, exactly the same as the night before. The same narrow corridor, the same mysterious creature pursuing him and the same closed doors. And afterwards, he couldn't get back to sleep.

This was just the beginning of Krishan's troubles. Every night he began to have the nightmares, after only catching a few minutes of sleep. And afterwards he couldn't sleep. And soon, he began to be afraid of falling asleep, because he didn't want to experience the fear of fleeing the unknown thing that was after him.

One day, Krishan was sleeplessly pacing in his room after his usual nightmare and his eye fell on the mirror, which gleamed at him. He picked it up and caught his face in the glass. He had black circles under his eyes. He glanced again at the words on the handle. The words looked up at him: "Bear in Silence and Give as you have Received". Krishan considered them for a moment. They sounded to him like a churchy kind of phrase. But then, suddenly, a new thought sprang on him. He thought back to the day that his auntie had given him the mirror. That was the first day of the nightmares. And his auntie had been showing all the signs of sleeplessness and the fear of going to sleep. Her face had looked very much like his face in the glass. Surely the two things must be connected? He looked again at the words on

the handle of the mirror very carefully. His auntie had given him that strange look of sympathy after she had made him read the words out loud because she couldn't tell him that the mirror was cursed! And she had given him the mirror because someone had given it to her to free themselves of the curse! Krishan sat thinking about what to do.

The very next day, Krishan gave the mirror to his best friend's sister at school who he didn't know very well as a gift. She was very surprised at the unexpected present, especially when he made her read out the letters on the handle carefully, twice.



The Garden of Delights

13.08.15

Vijay was exploring his grandfather's house one wintry day by himself because it was raining outside and he was tired of playing with the other children. He wandered through the rooms downstairs, looking over his grandfather's things. There were lots of smiling faces in photographs with silver frames. Some of them were in black and white and from the old days. In one room, he looked over an old favourite of his. It was a snake in a glass dome with its mouth open wide and its fangs gleaming in the light. He picked up his grandfather's walking stick in another room and ran his finger across the polished wood, then slashed it through the air like a sword.

When he had finished exploring downstairs, he walked up the creaking stairs. In his grandfather's room, he looked through the suits in the wardrobe. There was a brown one, a navy blue one with broad, white stripes and then a black one and one made out of Harris tweed. Vijay tried this last one on and looked back at himself in the mirror. It was much too large for him. He put it back onto the coat hanger. Then he sighed. There was nowhere else to explore.

He walked out onto the landing and a fly landed on his nose. He waved it away with his hand and watched it zoom off. Suddenly, he noticed a door on the ceiling. The attic must be up there, he thought to himself. And as soon as this thought occurred to him, he decided straight away to go up there. He rushed outside to grab the ladder and then brought it up the stairs and put it up underneath the door in the ceiling. Then he climbed up, opened the door and pulled himself up.

He spent a bit of time fumbling about in the dark attic before he found the light and when he put it on, he saw that everything was very neat and tidy. There were quite a few boxes and some old suitcases to look through. He opened the boxes and found some old vinyl records and newspapers, which he wasn't very interested in. There were old clothes and junk which he didn't find very exciting either. Then, he opened up one of the suitcases. It had a rectangular object wrapped up in some red cloth which he undid. It was an old book bound in black leather.

Vijay opened it up and began to read it.

Once, the magician Asoka set his heart upon a garden. The garden was to be like the gardens of the poets, beautiful and colourful and mysterious. The magician Asoka bought a great

plot of land in the desert and called the clouds to rain down. Whatever he imagined came to pass. Grass as green as emeralds grew on the ground. Flowers as red as blood or as blue as the clear sky began to bloom everywhere. Great trees reaching up into the clouds that showered down upon them sprung from nothing, making woods and forests. Sparkling fountains of white marble with statues in their middle spouting jets of water appeared. There were great boulders and hills to climb upon, ponds and lakes, rockeries and waterfalls. The garden was filled with nightingales, parrots, peacocks, monkeys and squirrels, all the animals that give pleasure to the eyes and ears. The sounds of birdsong in the garden exceeded the glory of any human musician. The scents of the garden were exquisite and the design of it was charming and majestic. It was as though a great and beautiful painting by a great artist had come to life.

From the beginning, people flocked to the garden which had once been the desert. They savoured the freshness that it gave to the eyes, nose and ears. Young men and women walked for hours in the garden, hand in hand, whispering sweet nothings to each other. Old men and women came to the garden because they believed that it would grant them good health. Children ran about in the garden, chasing after the peacocks and the squirrels. The fame of the garden grew and grew. Soon, people from far away in the country would

come to see it and enjoy it. Then, people from other countries began to come in swarms. The garden became known as Paradise.

Paradise was so beautiful that everyone wanted it for themselves. First, they asked the magician Asoka to sell it to them. They offered him treasures beyond price such as palaces and countless coins of gold and silver. But Paradise was close to the magician Asoka's heart and he would not exchange it for anything. Then, the rich and powerful men of the countries of the world decided that they would take the garden by force if they could not have it any other way. They sent armies against the magician Asoka. But the magician was cunning with his magic and none in the world could stand against him. The armies were defeated time and time again.

The countries of the world decided that they must group together to take the garden away from the magician Asoka. They put together a vast army and poured all their money into their weapons. The marching of their feet was like thunder.

The magician Asoka heard the soldiers coming and came to the realisation that the people of the world would never stop

troubling him unless he took drastic measures. He spoke the words of magic and the garden known as Paradise began to shrink. Soon it was a small and red glowing ball which he picked up and swallowed. Then the magician Asoka made it so that only the children, and not the troublesome adults, could visit the garden in their dreams, if they wandered and found the golden door that he had made as the entrance to the garden. Finally, the magician Asoka disappeared. When the army arrived they could find neither Paradise nor the magician.

Vijay put the book back and went back downstairs. He thought of the story all day and when he was driving back home to his own house in the car. When he went to sleep at night, he wandered around looking for the golden door to Paradise. Every night he wandered and looked for the entrance to the garden. He looked last night and will look again tomorrow night and he will keep on looking until he finds it or he is no longer a child.



The Cloud Sparrow (Suffering and Being)

Vishnu, the great and blue-skinned god, was floating in the sky. He was contemplating the universe which he had created. His keen and far sight beheld the young falling in love, the old that suffered alone, the babies that looked upon all things with wonder. It is not given to man to pry into the mind of a god, so I cannot tell you whether he was coldly dispassionate over the work of his hand, pleased or sorrowful. Vishnu's reflection was broken by a tumult of voices from Rajasthan. They were all crying for him and demanding a boon from him. Vishnu listened intently.

The villagers were united in a great thirst. Their crops needed water and they had nothing to drink. Their dreams were filled with visions of water: great waterfalls, placid lakes, raging rains. The wish of all was to be doused in the miraculous and life-giving liquid.

Vishnu decided to give some assistance. He took a cloud that was by him and rolled it up into a ball in his hands. He kneaded it with his fingers then pulled it this way and that. Before too long, he had a little cloud sparrow in his hands, with feathers made of mist and eyes of fog. Vishnu spoke the words of enchantment upon the bird and then she was startled into life. He blew upon her, binding her to the chain of breath, and she flew to the villagers.

The cloud sparrow was pleased exceedingly to be alive in the glorious sunshine and the free air. She chirruped and danced.

But, because she was so joyously existent, she could not do the thing that it was made for. She could not cry.

Whether Vishnu wanted the creatures of his mind to savour being or whether the cloud sparrow was reaping the reward of a good past life, the god let the bird caper and cavort for a while, as the villagers suffered and thirsted. But then, he sent Shakti, the celestial mortal, to the bird.

Shakti spoke to the bird, for now she had been bound to the chains of breath and could comprehend his speech. He said, Oh Cloud Sparrow. Why do you not cry? The villagers need to drink your tears. They have been waiting for months for your pain.

She told the god that she was in the bliss of experience. How could she cry now or ever?

Shakti was silent. Then, a thought occurred to him. He started telling the bird a story. Once, there was a young girl. She lived in happiness for her parents loved her truly. One day they all went to a forest. A single arrow flew into the air and ended all their comfort and peace of mind. For it passed through the bodies of both the father and the mother. The young girl was sent to be looked after her uncle, who beat her, worked her until she was exhausted and fed her scraps from the table that were not enough for her. One day, the girl looked into the mirror. She was no longer a girl. She was a woman with white in her hair and wrinkles upon her skin. In the mirror, she saw the intimation of death. And in that

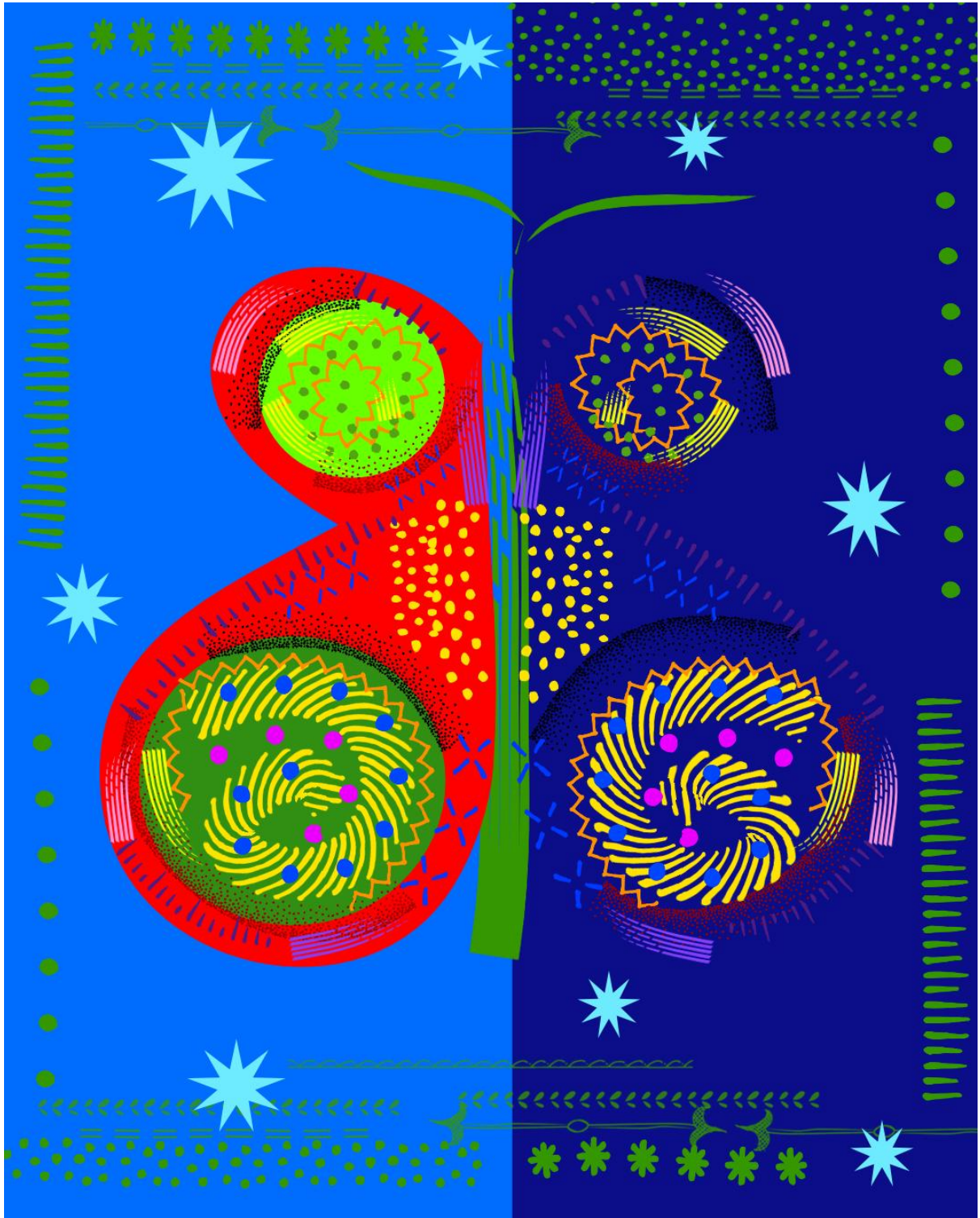
moment of complete sorrow, she remembered the happiness that had once been hers and a tear rolled down her cheek, wiping away the dirtiness of the world.

Shakti looked at the cloud sparrow. Great big tears like shining mirrors had welled up in her foggy eyes. This was her first sorrow. As the tears grow bigger and fell, like stars from the heaven tumbling towards the earth, the bird diminished.

Finally, there was no more cloud sparrow.

Now it was the turn of the villagers to be joyous. They collected the tears of the cloud sparrow, drank them and poured them upon their crops. They thanked Vishnu.

Vishnu, the great and blue-skinned god, was floating in the sky. He was contemplating the universe which he had created. His keen and far sight beheld the young falling in love, the old that suffered alone, the babies that looked upon all things with wonder. It is not given to man to pry into the mind of a god, so I cannot tell you whether he was coldly dispassionate over the work of his hand, pleased or sorrowful. Shakti, the celestial mortal, went home with a heavy heart.



05.06.18 – The Butterfly Rider

Old Japan was a wondrous and beautiful place. Dragons with shining scales roamed the land, in search of gold. Elegant swords which could cut the particles of the air were composed by master swordsmiths. The blades were like music. Master calligraphers abounded and people spoke in poetry. The women and the art were the most beautiful in the world and the warriors the most ferocious and skilled.

In this country of fable and legend, there lived a butterfly farmer called Kanji. Kanji was one of the little folk that lived in the wild and untamed forests of Old Japan. Even today, the unexplored and unknown world of the natural Japanese forest hosts these beings. Kanji had all types of gloriously coloured butterflies. There were tiger butterflies, leopard butterflies, stallion butterflies. Kanji not only fed and looked after these heavenly creatures, but also captured them. It was a practice which took skill and daring, for the butterflies were powerful and savage at heart. Kanji would collect wisps of spider's webs and then plait them together into a rope. Then he would tie a loop at the end of the rope and cast it into the air when the swarms of butterflies floated in the air. Sometimes, he would also hunt for cocoons and collect these, but he would never snare the caterpillars. This was because he was a kind man at heart and wanted to give the creatures

as much freedom as they could have before they were his. It would have been much easier to trap the sluggish caterpillars and bring them up, of course, but Kanji was a man of principle and was easily able to sacrifice convenience for his ideals.

Kanji had a son called Nehan who was the best butterfly-rider in all of Old Japan and perhaps even in the world. Nehan was a lovely boy with golden skin and hair which was purple and red. Nehan loved butterflies and the sensation of riding them. He could turn somersaults in the air with ease and had many other such tricks up his sleeve. He had been riding ever since he could remember. His mother had taught him. She had been a famous butterfly rider herself.

One day, Nehan was riding a tiger butterfly. It was a hot day and the sun sent arrows into everything below. Nehan was enjoying himself so much that he forgot about everything else. The butterfly was tired, thirsty and irritated. A shaft of sunlight blinded it for a moment and then it went berserk. It shook Nehan off and he fell all the way down to the ground. It was a great distance. It was a stroke of luck that they were both still over the forest, for Nehan came crashing down into the trees, which broke his fall. However, he landed hard and hurt himself very badly.

After that, Nehan kept away from his beloved butterflies. He was scared beyond his wits. Whenever he thought of butterflies, a fear and trembling would creep into his bones. At night, he would break into a sweat when he dreamed about riding, for he would always fall and fall and fall.

It was some months after this that Nehan was wandering in the forest that he saw his father hunting the butterflies with his gossamer threads. Nehan was up a tree and Kanji had come just below him so Nehan could see everything that he was doing. Kanji was clearly struggling. He was jerking the string to and thro to no avail. Suddenly, his feet lifted off the ground and he was flying upwards! It had happened so quickly that he was flying past Nehan's tree. Quick as a flash, and without thinking about it, Nehan jumped and caught his father's feet. He pulled himself up the rope and then climbed onto the butterfly's back. It was a dragon butterfly. Nehan had never seen one before. It was a vicious beast and ducked and dived into the air, trying to throw Kanji off, who was trying to climb up the rope too.

Nehan had to break the beast. He kicked at its sides with his heels and forced it to do his bidding. It was a violent and protracted struggle, but a successful one. One will slowly

became two, and two eyes slowly became four. After all, Nehan had learnt what he had to know from his mother, the best of teachers. Finally, the beast was tamed and Nehan helped Kanji onto its back. Then they both headed home.

Nehan was never scared of riding a butterfly again, even though he had many accidents and injuries. He wore his scars proudly. He rode because riding was the memory of his mother and because he had the heart of his mother, the big and strong heart of the women of Old Japan.



The Butterfly Bed

Spoken, impromptu bedtime story for two boys under ten years old, 28.02.18

The most beautiful woman of all in China was the Empress's daughter. She slept on a bed of exquisitely coloured butterflies which swayed gently side to side to send the beauty to sleep and hummed harmonious melodies which induced dreams of sublime bliss.

One day, a servant girl entered the bedchamber of the empress's daughter and let loose a horrible bird from a cage which pounced on the butterflies. The butterflies sped away and the empress's daughter fell to the ground and wouldn't wake up.

The empress called all the physicians in the land to cure her daughter who she loved most dearly. One came, a grizzled old man with a bald head and moustaches that dropped down to his knees. He said that the remedy was the liver of the bird. But the bird had flown off into the enchanted jungle. The empress went to the jungle and listened to the sounds of the birds. All seemed sweetness but when she heard the sour note she let fly her arrow and it went straight through the heart of the bird.

Hearing the bird's death cry, the butterflies flew back into the palace and the daughter of the empress awoke from her

slumber. She recovered and married the most handsome man in the empire, a poor scholar, and she became the empress in her turn, glorious and kind. Her mother's strength and good love had given her every blessing in this world.



Chocolate

14.08.15

On the way to school there was a delightful little shop which sold chocolate. It was Sophie's favourite place in the whole world. On cold afternoons, she would stop by there for some hot chocolate which trickled down her throat and warmed her stomach. When it was hot, she would buy chocolate ice cream from the shop. When she had saved up her pocket money, Sophie would treat herself to a box of fancy, hand-made chocolates from the shop. She especially liked the Chocolate Truffle and the Turkish Delight, but all the other ones were also excellent. She loved the strawberry flavoured one, the orange flavoured one, the one with the crunchy hazel nut inside. She couldn't get enough of them.

The shop was always bustling with happy customers just as excited as Sophie was to taste the goods. Inside, there were a number of animals carved out of chocolate. There was the snowy white rabbit made from white chocolate in one of the corners. Then there were chocolate deer grazing on chocolate grass and a chocolate tiger in a chocolate jungle. There were bears made out of chocolate and even a camel. Sophie would spend a great deal of time staring at all the

chocolate animals, choosing one that her parents would buy her for her birthday.

The old woman who carved all the animals out of chocolate was called Mrs. Spookes. She had a pair of steel framed glasses perched on the top of her nose and she always wore an old fashioned dress made out of navy blue, over which was a white apron. Sophie loved the pleasant Mrs. Spookes very much. Mrs. Spookes would always have a kind word for her when she was buying something and ask her about her school and her life. Sophie didn't have any real grandparents, but if she did, she would have wished them to be like Mrs. Spookes.

Mrs. Spookes had been to an art school when she was little, but when she had finished learning how to draw and paint there, she had become interested in making chocolate. What had changed her mind was that she had thought to herself that only the rich people could buy splendid paintings but that most people could afford chocolate to bring joy to their lives. Mrs. Spookes had travelled all the way to Paris and Belgium and Switzerland to learn the secrets of making fine chocolate. Then she had travelled the world to seek out the best cocoa beans from which chocolate is made. She would make her own chocolate from the cocoa beans which arrived in big, wooden boxes every month. Sophie knew that she was

very lucky to have Mrs. Spookes and her chocolate so nearby, since people came from all over the city to buy from her.

One day after school Sophie rushed to the shop thinking what she would buy with her pocket money. When she got there, she found that it was closed. This was very odd. She had never known Mrs. Spookes to close the shop. She went the next day and it was closed then too. It was the same thing every time she went to the shop. Then Sophie heard some terrible news. Mrs. Spookes was in hospital and she was very sick.

Sophie decided that she had to go and visit Mrs. Spookes in the hospital. She begged her parents until they said she could go. She was very upset. What if something happened to Mrs. Spookes? They went to the hospital in the evening. Her parents waited downstairs while Sophie went up to see the friendly, old lady. When she got up there, Mrs. Spookes was lying on the bed in a hospital gown and she looked exhausted. But as soon as she saw Sophie she flashed a brilliant smile and her eyes smiled as well.

Mrs. Spookes was very glad to see someone that she knew. She didn't have any family to come and visit her and her friends had all passed away some time ago so she had been

feeling very lonely in the hospital all by herself. Sophie and Mrs. Spookes got to talking and the old lady told her the story of how she had gotten her shop.

When Mrs. Spookes had been learning how to make chocolate, she had still kept up her painting and drawing. She had even had her work shown in a few galleries. One day, when there had been an evening given over to her in the gallery and the guests were drinking wine together, an energetic young man had dashed over to her and told her that her paintings were the most exciting things he had ever seen. He wanted to know everything about her and her ideas for her art. He asked her what she had meant the paintings to mean and why she had drawn them. He asked her about her life as a child. He asked her what books she liked to read and what she was interested in. Then, finally, he asked her how much she would take for all of the paintings.

Mrs. Spookes told the young man that she didn't want to sell her paintings. She wanted them to be for everybody and not just for the rich. The young man wouldn't listen. He begged her to let him have them. He promised her that he wouldn't keep them at home but in a big, famous art gallery where everybody could see them. Mrs. Spookes hadn't the heart to refuse him. Thinking of a way to put him off, she told him that if he could give her what her heart truly desired, then

she would let him have the paintings. At first, the young man looked thoughtful. He was clearly wondering how he could possibly learn what the young lady truly wanted. Then his face lit up and he said he would have to have an opportunity to get to know Mrs. Spookes.

After that, the young man invited Mrs. Spookes to the finest restaurants in Paris and to the fanciest parties. He was such a nice young man that Mrs. Spookes again found that she couldn't refuse him. The two young people would talk of all the things of the world together. They never stopped talking. Weeks turned into months and Mrs. Spookes and the young man began looking forward to the next time they would see each other and began thinking of each other all the time when they were apart. Then, one day, when Mrs. Spookes had learnt everything she could about chocolate in Paris, she found herself telling the young man that she was going back to London. The man looked at her silently. He didn't understand why she was leaving Paris. Mrs. Spookes, for some reason, had never told the young man about learning about chocolate and what it meant to her. They said goodbye and the next day, Mrs. Spookes left for England.

Mrs. Spookes began looking for work almost as soon as she arrived in London. She wanted to work for the big chocolate shops in London. But when she went to visit them, saw their

designs and tasted their chocolate, she wasn't very happy with them. They didn't seem to understand that chocolate was an art that needed a great deal of patience and skill. And they charged too much for what they were selling. Mrs. Spookes didn't want to work in a place like that. Unfortunately, she didn't have any real money of her own and the banks wouldn't give her any money to start up her own shop. Mrs. Spookes didn't know what she was going to do. She felt very sad and very lonely in London and often thought of going back to Paris.

One day, the doorbell rang and the nice young man was standing there with a big smile on his face. Before she could say anything, he whisked Mrs. Spookes out onto the street and through the streets. And then they were standing in front of an empty shop. The man gave her the key and explained that he had found out her heart's desire. It was her very own chocolate shop. Then, the young man demanded his paintings. And he also asked for something else.

Mrs. Spookes stared into space as she remembered the story of her shop and the nice young man who had learnt her heart's desire. There was a little tear in the corner of her eye. Sophie was silent for a few moments and then asked her what the nice young man's name had been, even though she was sure she knew the answer. Mrs. Spookes looked at her,

still smiling sweetly and told her that his name had been Richard. Richard Spookes.