

The Two Named Boy and Other Stories



The Two Named Boy

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Illustration
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Smells and Stenches

Sara Joseph

Illustration
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Shaija's Space

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The Two Named Boy

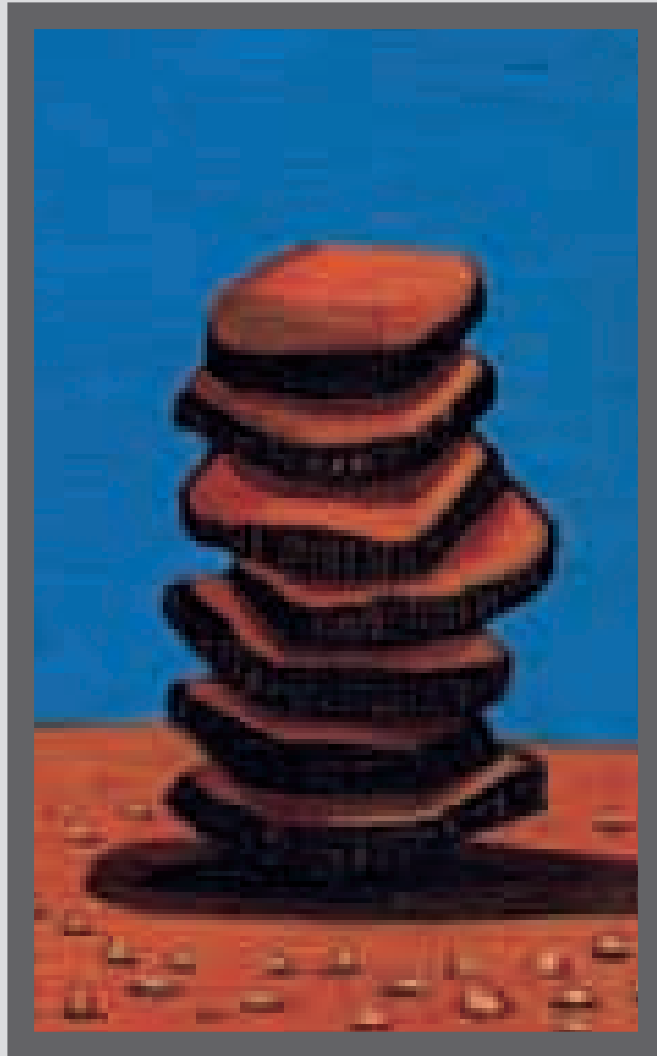
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Series Editor
Deepa Sreenivas





The Seventh Standard exams were finally over. Summer holidays had begun. Balachandran was out playing dodgeball with his friends. The main road was not too far from this playground. You could see the crowded buses crawling by while the other vehicles sped past.

Father Chinnappan stepped off the bus and walked along the side of the playground. Seeing the boys playing there he asked, "Can you show me the way to Yohannan's house? You know, the Yohannan who passed away recently?"

The boys stopped playing. There was a moment of silence.

One of them stepped forward and said, "Look there! That is his house. I am his son." Saying this he fell into step with the Father to show him the way. While they walked, the priest asked, "What is your name?"

"Balachandran," he replied, looking up at the Father's face for his reaction.

Father Chinnappan was a short light-skinned man. His hair was neatly combed back and he wore a long robe. Balachandran wondered why the priest had come.

They reached the house. Balachandran called out to his mother and she opened the door with the greeting:

"Praise the Lord."

"Now and evermore," the priest responded.

He pulled up a chair and sat down. Balachandran's brother and sister came into the room. The priest enquired about each of them.

"Your father and I were classmates," he told them. "We are also related."

Maybe that was why he felt he had to help.

"Have you thought of sending Balachandran to the Seminary?" he asked the mother.

"If it is the Lord's call . . ." was all she said.



“What is the name he was given in Church?” the Father asked.

“Freetus,” Amma said.

“Good. You can’t use ‘Balachandran’ in the Seminary. He needs the name he was given in Church.”

Balachandran’s face fell.

“It’s getting late,” Chinnappan said, rising and walking out towards the bus stop.

The family began talking about Balachandran going to the Seminary and learning to become a priest. Balachandran did not want to lose his name.

“It’s Rocky Kochaiah who gave you the name Freetus,” his sister chided. “She is my godmother as well as yours.”

Rocky Kochaiah’s children also had other names—Mani was Stanley and Sarojam was Mary.

They were still discussing names when Balachandran returned to the playground. The game was over but some of his friends had stayed back and were waiting for him. They wanted to know why the priest had come. Balachandran told them that he was to be sent to the Seminary to become a priest.

“You are lucky to get this chance to study at St. Joseph’s High School,” Ramesh said.

“Do they play marbles and dodgeball at the Seminary?” asked Xavier Julian.

“St. Joseph is not like our school. I don’t think you get to eat upma for lunch there. And perhaps you won’t be able to get fresh coconut and jaggery to eat with it,” Shahul said sympathetically.

Balachandran couldn’t answer all their questions. But when he thought about the chance he would get to study at St. Joseph’s School in the city, his worries about his name began to disappear.

The Bishop's residence was in the city. There Balachandran had to take exams in English and Maths. Then a doctor gave him a check-up. After all those tests, he was chosen for the Seminary. His godmother, Rocky Kochaiah was delighted when she heard the news. "He is such a smart fellow, I knew he would get it," she said proudly.

It was a Sunday. He would have to leave for the Seminary the next day. Balachandran went to Mass in the Church. There was an all-girl choir. Balachandran listened to their moving hymns and the Latin prayers that Moosk chanted with a new attention. The parish priest blessed him in the name of Christ.

That night Balachandran could not sleep. An image of himself wearing a long-sleeved white cassock filled his mind. He tossed and turned until morning. He checked through his trunk in the morning again. All three sets of newly stitched clothes were in place.

After lunch, he set out for the Seminary with his mother and elder brother. When they reached the city of Thiruvananthapuram, they went to a studio and had a family photo taken.

Around four in the evening they reached the Seminary. He was received with a small ceremony. Balachandran became Brother Freetus. When it was time for his mother and brother to leave, tears welled up in Brother Freetus's eyes. His mother also wiped away her tears.

It was his first day in St. Joseph's School. As in his old school, his name read 'Balachandran' in this school register too. When the Class Teacher called attendance, he stood up and said 'present' to this name. During the recess his Seminary classmates surrounded him.

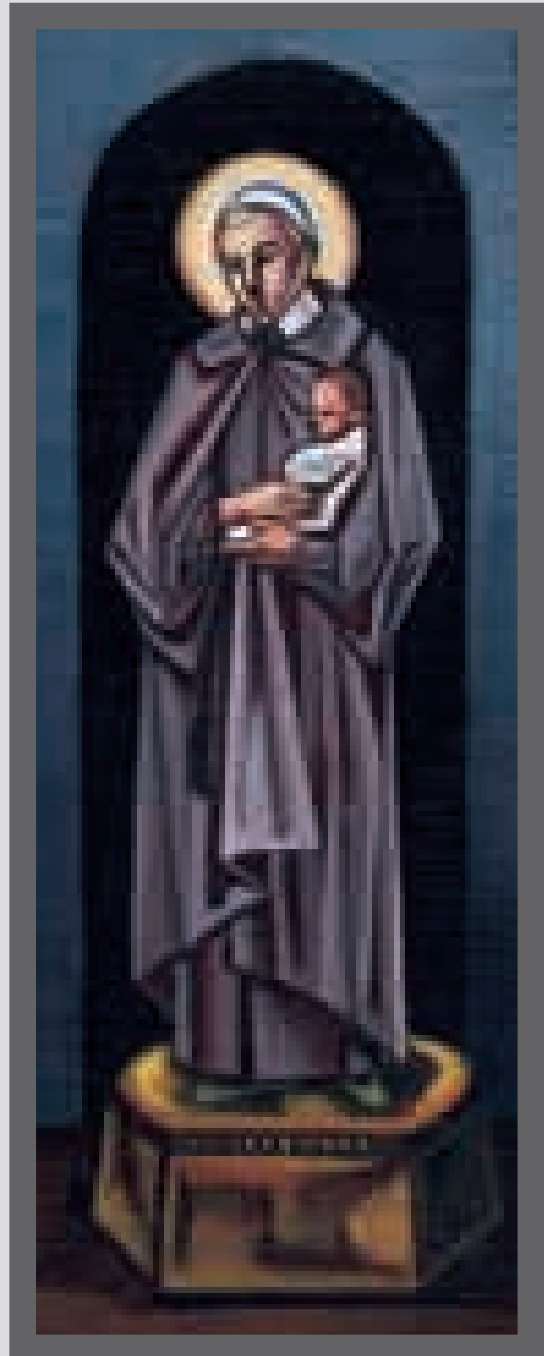
"Why do you have a name like that?" one of them asked him.

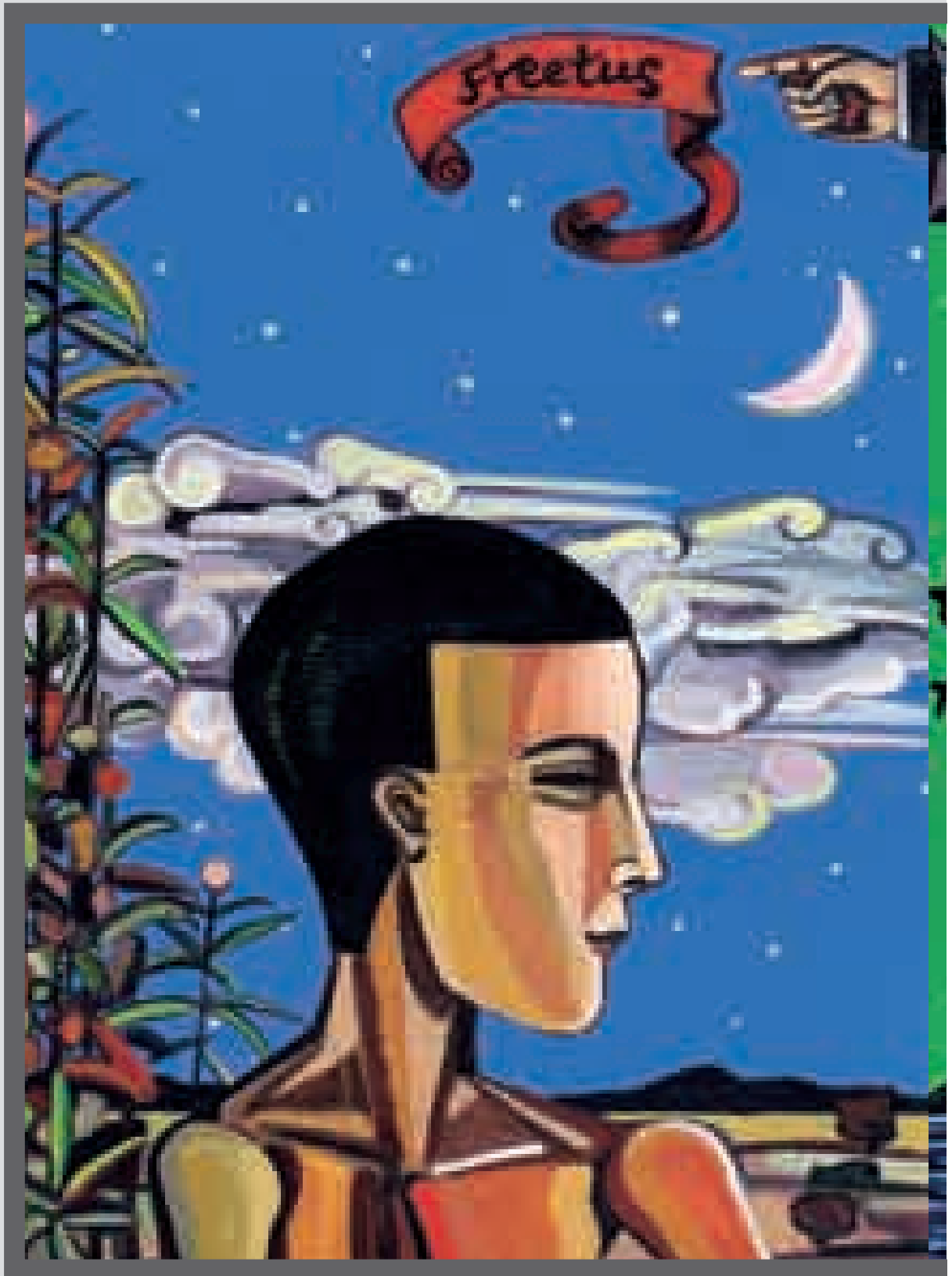
"Are you a convert?" enquired another.

He nodded. Everyone sniggered.

Balachandran felt humiliated. He fought back his tears. He couldn't concentrate in class. Balachandran—Freetus—Convert—Milk-powder-Christian; everything kept turning in his mind. Even when he got back to the Seminary in the evening, he could not get rid of these confusing thoughts. It was only when the chapel bell rang that he realized how late it was. By the time Brother Freetus closed his eyes and began his prayers, others had already begun on their rosary.

As he prayed fervently to Mother Mary, he began to feel a little comforted. That night as he was lying on Bed Number 22 and slipping into sleep, there was a soft drizzle outside. In his dream he was soaked in the rain, and playing dodgeball with his friends. And then a gentle wave washed up the beach, bathed his feet and fell back. At some point he fell into a deep sleep.







In the village school, Balachandran was known to be a clever boy. Here, in the city, try as he would, he could never be as smart. All the same, he managed to pass his Eighth Class exams.

That summer, he went home for the holidays. It was the first time he was going home since he joined the Seminary. He had brought with him sunflower seeds from there. Along with lilies and dahlias that he had also brought, he planted them in their garden, and with his mother's help, tended them carefully.

For three or four days, he did not move out of the house at all. He was not simply 'Balachandran' anymore; he was a 'Brother' or 'the young priest.' He felt embarrassed to meet his friends. But when he did meet them, all his fears melted away.

The holidays sped past. It was almost time for him to go back to the school now. Balachandran shared his concerns about his name with his mother. She smiled and responded, "Son, look at the plants you brought from the Seminary! They've all bloomed. Each one has a different name—lily, sunflower, jasmine. In other languages, they would have different names. But they are the same flowers, aren't they? How does a name matter?"



The holidays were over. It was time for Balachandran to go back to the Seminary.

As he was leaving the house, his mother pointed to the smiling sunflower and said, "Son, this moonflower is calling you."

"Isn't it sunflower?" he asked, puzzled.

Everyone laughed. He thought for a moment and then joined their laughter. The sunflowers also fell into line and laughed.

Smells and Stenches

Sara Joseph

Illustration
Koonal Duggal

Translation from Malayalam
Liji Varghese

Series Editor
Deepa Sreenivas

“Kokanchira! Kokanchira!”

Anni’s heart boiled! Kokanchira! How dare they! Is she the daughter of a corpse to be called that? Calling live children corpses, and human beings *kokan* and then slapping or caning them—that is what teachers do.

“Sick and tired of punishing these rotters!” Annamma Teacher mutters.

Then she orders her to move away and stand apart from the others. Anni puts her dictation slate down on the table and waits obediently at a distance. Annamma Teacher marks the ticks and crosses without letting her fingers even touch it—as if the slate itself was a stinking thing. There is only anger and disgust on her face. What would it cost her to smile a little? Anni wonders.

“Take it and push off,” Teacher says pointing to her slate. Even if the right answers were marked wrong, Anni would not have the guts to complain. Why only Anni; no one from Kokanchira would dare to do that.

“Rotters! They never bathe; never brush their teeth!” Ammini Teacher complains.

“Who knows if they even clean their bottoms after taking a shit!” That one is from Saraswathy Teacher! When she hears that, Anni coils up in shame. “Am I mad or what, to come to school, without washing?” fumes Anni.







Anni bathes, brushes her teeth and cleans her bottom carefully every day. If she doesn't wash her hands with soap after going to the toilet, Kuttipappan scolds her.

When Anni goes to the toilet, she announces to everyone in the house, "I am going to take a shit."

"Just go, girl!" Amma gets annoyed.

"Have you washed yourself?" Kuttipappan asks her when she returns.

"Hm."

"Did you wash your hands with soap?"

And Anni would show her hands.

No teacher has any right to fault Anni on cleanliness. Every morning, she and Kuttipappan both brush their teeth. First with powdery black *umikkari*. After that with a rolled up mango leaf. Next—and this, Anni doesn't like at all—with a twig from the neem tree. The bitter taste fills her mouth! And finally, Kuttipappan strips the mid-rib of a coconut leaf, breaks it into two and gives her one half to use as her tongue cleaner.





There are many kids in Anni's class who don't cut their nails. You can see the dark line of dirt behind their uncut nails.

"Devils!" That's what Annamma Teacher calls those who don't cut their nails. Anni also does not like her nail-cutting sessions. Kuttipappan has hurt her many times while cutting her nails.

"Don't pull your hand away!" Kuttipappan orders.

That is the instant Anni would want to pull her hand away and she would do it, too! And that would hurt her finger. She would forgive Kuttipappan if no spots of blood appeared. If they did, she would whimper. She would refuse to be comforted, however much Kuttipappan tried. He would blow softly on her injured finger. But that was usually of no use. Anni would cry even louder.

Finally Grandmother would appear and give her a piece of fresh coconut or jaggery and scold Kuttipappan. That comforted Anni. Even then, on and off, she would look at that finger and sob. While she sobbed, she would stare at Kuttipappan accusingly.

"Haven't I told you many times that you should be careful when I cut your nails, and that you should not pull your hand away?" Kuttipappan would ask.

It was Kuttipappan who told Anni all about the diseases that children who don't cut their nails could get. It is only because of him that she has clean nails. And Anni, in turn, passes the advice on to her classmates. But they pay no attention. Some even make fun of her.



One day Annamma Teacher said that she would make those who don't cut their nails kneel down in the hot sun! But they still didn't cut their nails.

"Show me your hand." Annamma Teacher ordered.

Vasu extended his hands.

"Why haven't you cut your nails?"

"I don't know how to . . ."

"Doesn't your mother know?"

"She goes out to work."

"What about your father?"

Vasu stared silently at the teacher.

"Are you trying to scare me with your stare? Didn't you hear me—can't your father cut your nails?"

"I don't have a father." Vasu said.

"I will fry you in the sun, if you don't cut your nails by tomorrow," the teacher said. Anni felt bad for him. Vasu does not have a father. Anni has a father, but she does not know where he is. Mother would get angry, if she were to ask about him. She would say, "Be quiet, I have a hundred things to do."

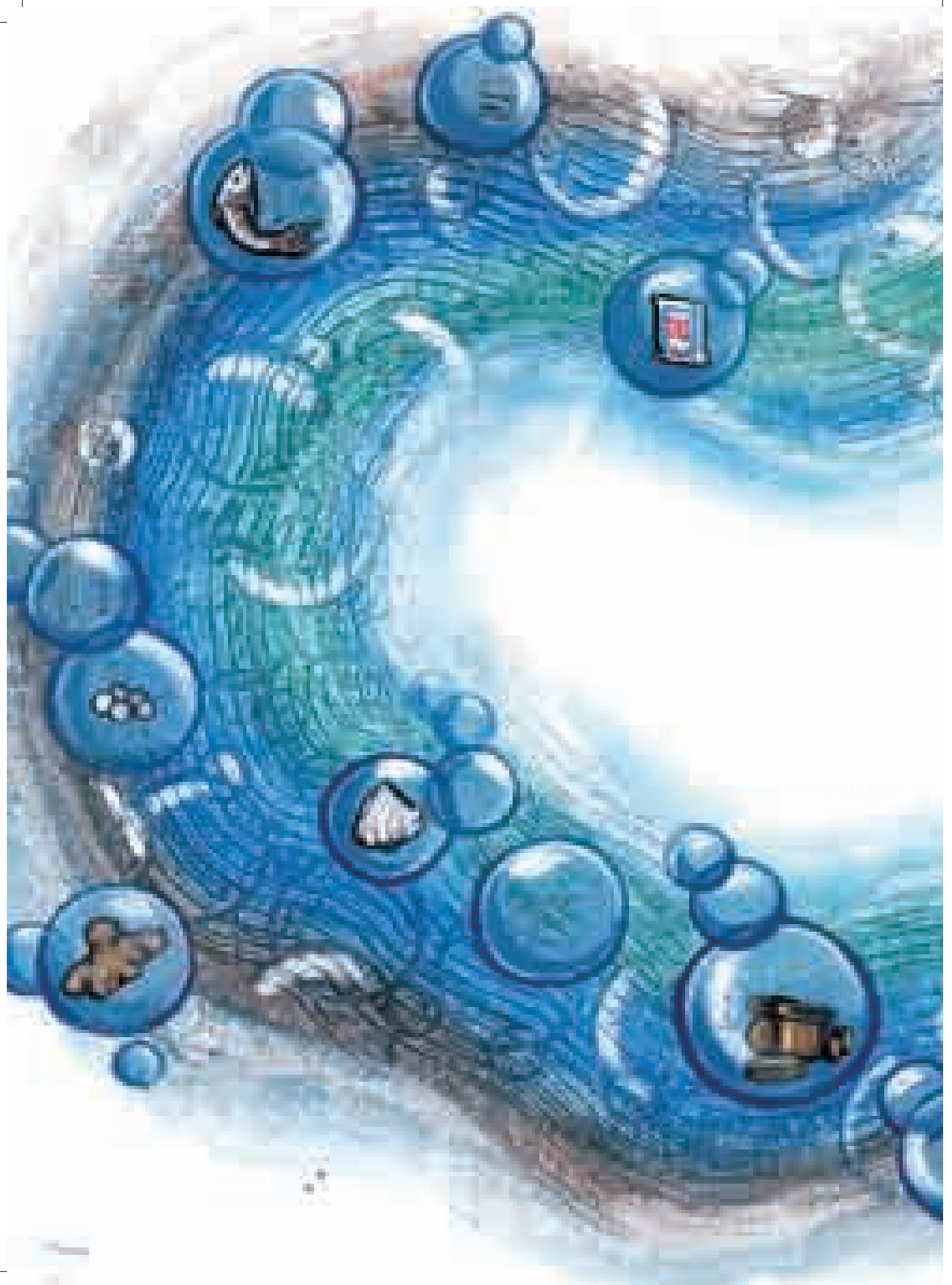
Kids who don't cut their nails get sores. Both Vasu's legs are full of sores. Sometimes you see him scratching himself so hard it looks as though he is angry! He scratches and scratches until it bleeds. It's a scary thing to see the blood running down his knees.

"Go and wash, you dirty creature!" It is in Ammini Teacher's class that Vasu's scratching is at its worst. Ammini Teacher teaches them Maths. The moment she picks up a chalk to write on the board, Vasu starts scratching away! Finally, when the teacher asks him to go and wash his leg, he runs out like a deer!

The teachers smell of different things as they pass by. Sometimes of powder; sometimes of special soaps; and sometimes of perfumes.

They don't buy scented soaps in Anni's house. Anni bathes with bar soaps. Amma washes her hair with washing soda. After you wash your hair like that, it becomes as dry as coconut husk. It is when you bathe with soap, that your hair smells nice! Anni has never used powder or perfume. She doesn't like Annamma Teacher's eucalyptus smell. Teacher's nose is blocked everyday, that's why she uses eucalyptus. But Anni doesn't like that smell—it reminds her of houses where someone has died. Ammini Teacher smells of jasmine flowers. Friends say that it is because she uses jasmine-scented perfume. When she passes by, the kids from Kokanchira take a deeeeeeeep breath and the jasmine smell seeps into their bodies.







Anni's mother smells different at different times. Sometimes, of garlic. Sometimes, of washing soda. Sometimes of rusting metal. Sometimes of naphthalene balls. Of fish on the days that she cooks fish. One day Anni tried asking her to bathe with scented soap. Mother nearly slapped her for that: "There is not even enough money to buy rice! And she only wants scented soaps! What airs you have!"



Anni doesn't know why Martha Teacher slapped her this time. She accused Anni of creating chaos in the lunch line. Anni hadn't done anything. What had happened was that when there was a big push from the end of the line, Anni fell forward onto Martha Teacher. She didn't even have time to think "How good Teacher smells!" Before that, Teacher's big hand had struck across Anni's cheeks. She grabbed Anni's steel plate from her, flung it away and ordered her back to the end of the line. It was not the slap that had hurt Anni so much as the humiliation of the whole thing. She walked back quietly and stood at the end of the line. Her plate lay in the sun like a thrown-away moon. "I don't want lunch today," Anni decided.



Teachers say that the kids from Kokanchira are greedy. While the kids from Kokanchira, bearing all insults and with their heads down, were eating the gruel made of stinking rice from the ration-shop, Anni was running home with her plate held close to her chest.



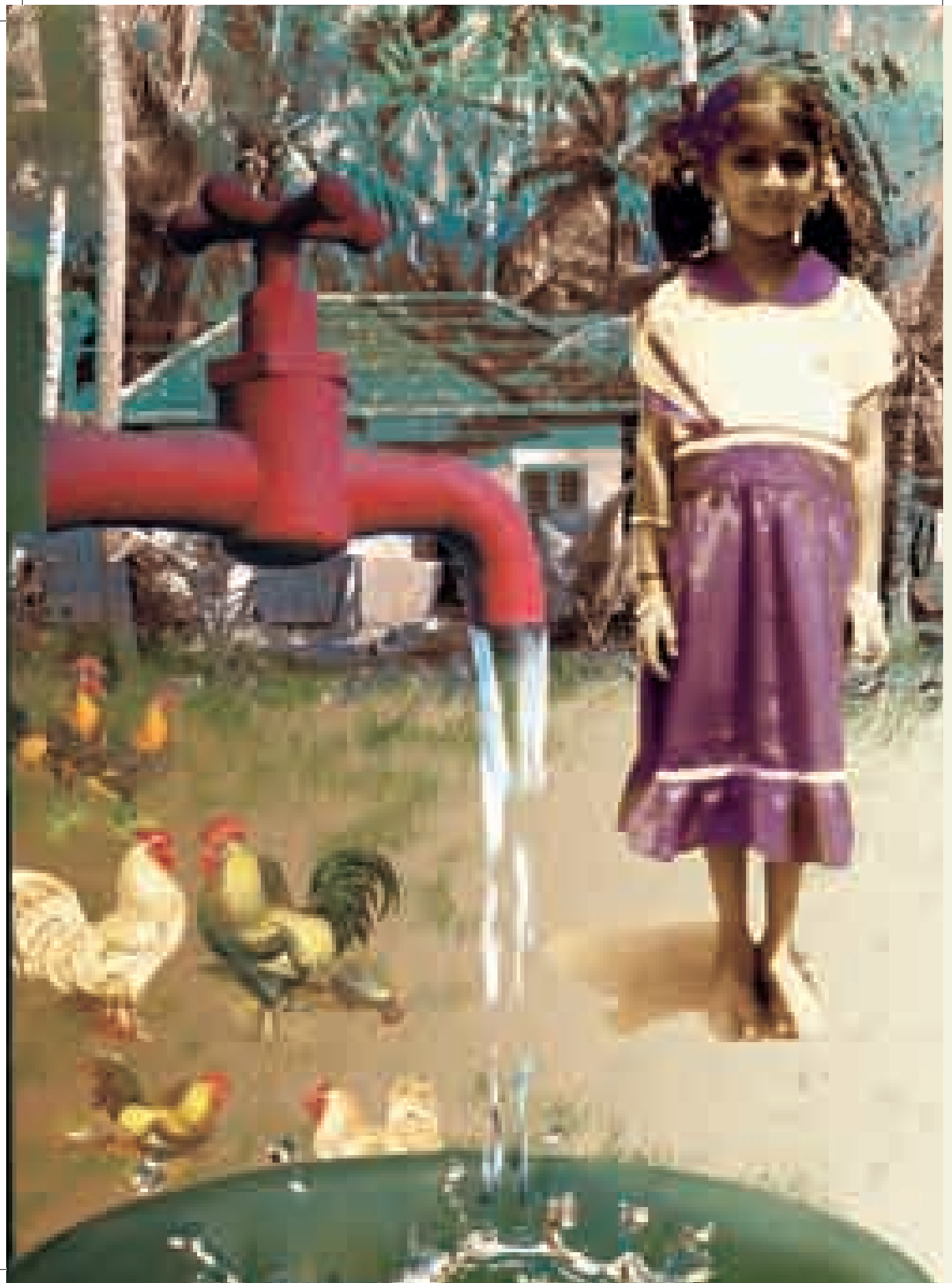
Shaija's Space

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Shaija looked at the water tap. Four buckets and one pot to go. After that it would be her turn. Every day after school, she did a quick tour of the neighborhood, played for a while, and then, by sunset, took her position in this long queue of pots and pans and buckets. It had become a regular habit. Without a bath in the evening, the rest of the day was no good—her mind blocked out the laws of Chemistry and the poetry of Kumaran Asan. Even her stomach closed its doors to rice and fish curry, and her eyes refused to let in sleep and dreams.

Water was gushing into Jaya Chechi's bucket. When it was almost full Chechi moved it away and placed her pot under the tap. Ramlathumma and Girija Mami were engrossed in their chat as usual.

Shaija looked up at the sky. The stars were barely visible and there was no sign of the moon. She recalled how, during lunch break at school that day, no one could talk about anything but the idea of living in outer space.

What fun that would be!







She wondered if there would be more skies and stars beyond

It was so funny when Susmitha had wondered whether we'd be able to see our houses from space. Silly girl! Everyone had laughed at her. Even the Great Wall of China wouldn't be visible from there, they'd said.


Well—Susmitha's house was big. Two floors and yet another room on top of that. So it might just be possible to see it from space. Who knew? When Janardhanan Sir heard of our plans to go and live in space, he had laughed. "You'd better study hard and get to Class Seven first," he'd said. Everything was a big joke for him. There was always a smile hidden in that big bushy moustache of his.

The sky was a mixture of orange, red, blue and white. Shaija wondered if any of the astronauts traveling in space could see her, standing here near the water tap. Should she send a flying kiss upwards? She glanced at the tap—three more buckets to go.



Amma would have got on the bus by now. Shaija wanted to finish her bath quickly and have a cup of strong sweet tea ready for her by the time she got home. Amma worked in the tourist village on the outskirts of the town. A place where the lake met the sea. Shaija could never get enough of the golden beach between the green lake and the blue sea. She went there with Amma whenever she got a chance. On holidays it was really crowded with tourists from many places. Then the boats in the lake had no rest at all—just like Amma and Clara Chechi. No matter how hard the two of them worked, cleaning the lawns and paths, they immediately got strewn with discarded banana skins, cigarette butts and plastic cups. It saddened her to see Amma walking all around without a break, cleaning away all that rubbish. But she never let Shaija help. “You go and sit in the shade,” she’d say.





There were a lot of trees on the shore of the lake. Whenever she went to the tourist village, all three of them would have their lunch together. Sometimes, Clara Chechi would bring her something special—egg aviyal or meat curry. But Amma liked fish better—just one piece of fried fish to go with her meal and she didn't need anything else. Clara Chechi teased her saying that she must have been a cat in her previous birth. Amma blushed when she heard this. And then she would look just like a pretty little cat.

“I'll study well and grow up and take Amma with me to space,” Shaija thought. “And I'll build a big house, big enough to be seen even from the skies beyond space.” She wondered whether there would be rivers and seas there. If not how would Amma ever get to eat fish? “Maybe every morning we can come to Earth and buy a bag of fish,” Shaija couldn't stop smiling at the thought.

Ramlathumma was calling her, “Shaija child, it's your turn.” She moved her bucket under the tap with a smile and looked up at the sky. The twinkling forest of stars was slowly becoming visible. Amma would have got off the bus.

Anveshi

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List of Titles

English

Head Curry
Moon in the Pot
Mother
The Sackclothman
Spirits from History
Tataki Wins Again & Braveheart Badeyya
Untold School Stories
The Two Named Boy & Other Stories

Telugu

Talakaya Koorato Bale Talanoppaina
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Kaalam Pampina Atidhulu
Wadapillala Kadhalu
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Kotulu, Kalladdalu & Sinni

Malayalam

Thalakkari
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Priyappetta Virunnukar
Keezhala Kuttikal
Puthiya School Kathakal
Naattangalum Manangalum Mattu Kathakalum
Kuranganmaaram Koolingglassukalum
&
Poochakurinjiyaar

Are you two people when you have two names? A boy thinks his way through this dilemma...

The Two-Named Boy

Anni's mother always makes sure that she is spick and span when she goes to school. So then why do her teachers act as if she is disgusting?

Smells and Stenches

As she queues up to fill her bucket with water, Shaija goes on a voyage to space...

Shaija's Space




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Different Tales unearths stories from regional languages: stories that talk about the life – worlds of children in communities that one rarely reads about in children's books. Many of the stories draw on the writers' own childhoods to depict different ways of growing up in an often hostile world, finding new relationships with peers, parents and other adults. They take us on enticing journeys as they speak of delicious cuisines, ingenious little games, unexpected lessons at school and heartwarming friendships.