

Letting go of Ganapathy

A short story by Guruprasad Nagarajan



Copyright

This ebook is licensed for your personal use only. This ebook may not be re-sold, given away to other people. This work is the property of the author, thank you for respecting the hard work of the author. No part of this ebook may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author.

Copyright© 2013 Guruprasad Nagarajan. All rights reserved.

Dedication

This short story is dedicated to Lord Ganapathy.

The cool breeze still carried with it the memory of the recent monsoon. The sky was bright and the sun didn't seem to be going to work today. Wisps of grey and white clouds sailed slowly across the sky which every now and then would darken suddenly, without warning, only to cry a few drizzles of farewell before the sun came out from its rain-shelter and sent people scurrying off for cover.

Strange, he thought, that people ran for cover from the sun. People ran for cover from the rain. Sometimes, on dreary summer months when it didn't rain for a long time, they held prayers at the nearby temple to appease the gods. And whether by the prayers or the natural cycle, when it did rain, even then people ran for cover. These grownups were always running away from things.

This morning however, they were running around to get ready to bring Ganapathy home. He loved this festival. Deepavali was another favourite but no gods he knew came home on Deepavali. But he looked forward to it all the same. He was already pestering his mother to ask his father for the long firecracker, like the one his friend living in the opposite house lit the previous year, waking up the whole neighbourhood. Mani, the mongrel who ate from all the households but guarded none, nearly got his nose blasted because he went sniffing the firecracker, which was almost extinguished. But suddenly it caught fire again and started to burst in all directions for what seemed like an hour.

He was waiting outside the house, watching the rest of the street wake up to the beautiful day. It was beautiful mostly because his school was closed for four days. There, in the puddle in front of the house, he could see the paper boat he had floated yesterday evening, which he and his friend made from the daily sheet calendar. Now some ants were trying to pull it with a dead beetle in it. After a while the ants would give up or the boat would capsize and be flooded along or the milkman would ride his cycle on it and crush it.

His father came out now and he ran along, wondering why his father always walked so fast. He had to take two steps running for every one of his father's steps. The market was alive. The air was filled with the fragrance of fresh flowers, herbs, fruits and incense sticks. The sounds of devotional songs blaring from shopkeepers' transistor radios and the bargain hunters' high-pitched arguments added to the pleasant chaos.

He wasn't interested in this part so he didn't pay much attention to what his father was buying. Soon they came to where clay statues of Lord Ganapathy were sold. Rows and rows of them. Some were colourfully painted, some just the colour of clay. He didn't like the painted ones somehow. Some had long faces and on some the mouse on which Ganapathy rode had a sad face. Why did an elephant god ride on a mouse he never understood. But he thought that was cute. The mouse has special powers, his grandmother had told him, that made him forget about the plight of the carrier. His father was very particular about the statue he took home. His house had the best Ganapathy every year, he thought. Even when he went to his friends' houses for a quick snack, he always felt that their fathers didn't pay much attention. One of them even had a plastic idol!

Finally his father, after arguing with the shopkeeper and telling him how he never sold the kind of idols he used to sell a few years ago, bought one. Beautiful, he thought. Oh! But this one didn't have an umbrella. Mother had specifically told him to remind his father about the umbrella. The same shop sold different colourful

umbrellas, made of paper with a wooden stick that went into the hollow of the idol's paunch and right hand. After some more shopping they returned home, with him carrying the bag of flowers and incense and his father carrying the Ganapathy. Later he would be allowed to hold the statue in his hands, admire its details, and decorate it with flowers, but not now, because 'he would drop it', he was told.

By the time they returned home, there was already a delicious aroma wafting from the kitchen. The house always smelled so different on these days, the fragrance of incense blended so beautifully with the aroma of delightful delicacies from the pots on the stove. There was laughter, happiness and friends visiting, and in this entire ruckus no body asked him to do homework. He had homework to do because the stupid teachers would never let you enjoy a four-day holiday.

But presently his mind turned to things at hand. He bathed quickly, entered the kitchen, part of which was occupied by the various deities. He could remember more of them gracing the walls, but in a fit of anger, when things were not going his way, his father had wrapped up a lot of gods' photos in a newspaper and put them away in the attic. The remaining survived thanks to mother's insistence. Puja was already in progress, with Ganapathy under the protective shade of the umbrella, sitting majestically in the centre. He was going to tell mother how father had almost forgotten to buy the umbrella but thought better of it as he knew his father was not very tolerant of anyone interrupting him when he was doing puja. So they all gathered around, prostrated in front of Ganapathy while father threw flowers and rice stained with vermilion on their heads, blessing them. Since the puja always took longer than it did in anyone else's house, they were always starving by the time it got over. His friend Viji's father finished everything so quickly, in fact Viji was already at his door asking him when he would be ready to play. They had a cricket match the next day and they had to practise. Soon, food was served and he ate so much (especially the modaks, both sweet and savoury) he seriously doubted he would be able to practise; maybe he would stand in one of those distant positions like long-on or third man, as nobody hit the ball that far.

But the practice session never came about as the boy who had the bat had a fight with one of the team members and was now refusing to loan it. The only other bat was broken which was normally used by the non-striker. It seemed the match was out of the question as well.

Two days passed so quickly. Today was the day they would take the Ganapathy statue and drop it in the well nearby. His cousin in Bombay said they dropped their idol in the sea. Since his town didn't have a sea they used a well that was a ten-minute walk away. It was a sad day for him. He hated to see Ganapathy go, because in that short period, he had become part of the temple, almost part of the family. Soon there would be a void where Ganapathy was sitting so majestically, surrounded by fragrant flowers and fruit platters and lamps. The emptiness in the temple room was somehow reflected in his heart as well.

Presently his father called out to him. It was time to go. He had asked his mother many times why they couldn't let Ganapathy stay. He looked so nice, he added. But the answer was always the same. 'You wouldn't want to be taken away from your family, right?' his mother would ask. He would say an emphatic no. Then mother would say, 'Just like you, Ganapathy wouldn't want to be taken away from his mother and father either. He came for a visit and now he must go. But you don't have to worry, he will come again next year.' 'But we are dropping him in the well!' he

would protest. And his mother would say that water was Ganga who resided on Lord Shiva's head, and when Ganapathy touched the water he would be taken to his home.

Not entirely convinced, he would accompany his father as he was doing now. His job was to carry a small bell and ring it all the way to the well while his father carried the Ganapathy delicately in both arms. His brother came along carrying a basket of flowers to be thrown along with the idol.

Soon they reached the well. After a short prayer, his father dropped the Ganapathy in the well. He could hear the faint splash as the idol hit the water below. His brother threw the flowers and he stopped ringing the bell. Suddenly, the way back seemed much longer.

The End

About the author



Guru has been peddling assorted products and services in the name of advertising for the last 20 years. He was born in Coimbatore, a small town surrounded by hills in Tamil Nadu, India. He lives in Singapore where he is currently adding more books to his repertoire. He swims, practises yoga and attempts to play the guitar. He loves to travel with his wife.

Also by the same author

'Ten Twisted Tales - A collection of short stories, each with an unexpected ending.

Boogadooga Series – A chronicle of adventures for children set in a magical forest.