

Let us enjoy listening to this one of the Modern Stories of **The Magic Potion**.

Radha knew she had to try one more time. It may be futile, but then, she was so fond of school that the very thought of not being able to go to school and learn all those wonderful things that they teach at school, made her very sad. She pleaded with her father once again, "But father, I have been taking care of Gauri for the last two years and going to school also. I can do all the household work as well, whenever I am not at school."

Gauri was her cow which was tied at the cowshed and she was an important part of the family, as she provided milk not only for the family members but also enough milk to sell to the village folk. This added to the family income, which was very limited.

Radha's family consisted of her father Krishna, step-mother Satyavati and brother Shyam who was 3 years old. Her mother Rukmini had died when she was only four years old and her father remarried, so that she would have a mother to take care of her.

But like most step-mothers, Satya, as Satyavati was known as, was a terror. She troubled Radha constantly by giving her a lot of work to do in the house and also on the field. She was always cross with Radha and hit her frequently as it did not take much to cross Satya. Satya would always shout at and abuse Radha for no reason at all. Radha, in fact, was never called by her name by her step-mother. She was always referred to as 'You little twerp', 'You slimy pig', 'You lazy brat', 'You sniffing toad' or other such names.

Initially, Radha's father Krishna tried to interfere. But then even he got a taste of Satya's tongue and after some time he stopped interfering for fear of Satya's foul temper. Radha was tormented no end by Satya and her only solace was her cow, Gauri.

Gauri was a beautiful Jersey cow with a nice round and plump body, white all over with black spots splattered evenly on her body. Radha used to cry before Gauri and confide everything to her. "Oh Gauri! Today mother beat me with a stick and see the welts I got over my hand. It is all red", said Radha to Gauri one day.

Gauri saw the bruises on Radha's hand as Radha held it up for her and gave her a nice lick on the bruise with her long tongue. The next day Radha was amazed to see that her wounds had healed completely. Radha would pour her heart out to Gauri everyday and Gauri would listen to Radha as if she understood everything that Radha said and sometimes even nod her head.

In fact, Radha was convinced that Gauri could understand her completely. Gauri was the only silver lining in her life which was otherwise drab and lonely and full of hardships. Gauri was Radha's best friend on the earth.

All her sorrows would melt away in Gauri's presence and Radha would become ready to face another day of taunts and barbs. The other good thing about her life was the village school. The teacher at the school taught such wonderful subjects and talked about such beautiful places and people that Radha would be transported to a magical world where all her miseries had ended and she was living with her father and mother Rukmini happily.

But that was unfortunately not to be. Rukmini was long dead and gone. And her schooling was about to be stopped. Her father had just informed her that from the next day she would not go to school. He had told her, "Radha, with your brother Shyam being very small and requiring a whole lot of attention, your mother is complaining that she is not able to do the housework and also help me in the field. So, from tomorrow I am stopping your school, dear. You can help your mother in the house and take care of Gauri and also help me in the field a bit. I can always make use of an extra hand."

"But father! I will do all work required of me during the time I am not at school. Please father, let me go to school", pleaded Radha.

"What time will you have, if you go to school? Even if you have you will be with that dumb cow, Gauri" shouted Satya from the kitchen.

"Radha, please understand. Other than the housework, you know that our crops have failed for the last couple of years and we don't have much money left. If you go to school, agreed that we don't have to pay for your fees, but you require books, shoes, dress etc. for which we can't spare the money. So this year don't go to school and we will see next year." Radha could not say anything. She merely nodded her head and walked away with tears flowing down her face.

Krishna was very sad himself as he saw his forlorn daughter. But then he knew he couldn't help it. Things were bad with the crops, as it is. Satya has been after him, pestering him to keep Radha at home to help her. Finally, to keep the peace at home, in desperation, he had to take this decision, even if he was not happy with the same.

Radha, in deep sorrow, went straight to Gauri and told her everything.

"I know Gauri, it is all my mother's doing. She hates me so much that she does not want me to enjoy even those few hours at school. Oh! Why does she hate me so? How I miss my mother, Rukmini. How could God be so cruel, Gauri? The worst part is the abuse that flows from her mouth. She has never said a kind word to me till now. Oh! If only she stopped abusing me and shouting at me."

So saying, Radha broke afresh into louder sobs. She put her head on her bent knees and sitting on the ground, she kept on crying.

She suddenly heard a voice, "Radha, don't cry please."

Radha looked up, surprised. She looked around her, but could see no one.

She was perplexed.

"Don't cry now" said the voice and in surprise she saw that the sound came from Gauri, the cow.

"Is it you, Gauri? She asked surprised. "Yes Radha, it is me." Spoke Gauri. "I can actually speak and understand the language of the humans. My earlier master was the magician, Matoo and he had taught me to speak and understand the human languages. I could therefore follow everything that you spoke. I did not speak to you before, as I thought that you would become afraid of me- A talking Cow."

"Oh! Gauri. I could not be afraid of you, anytime. You are the only friend I have and you are my best friend. In fact, I am very glad that you spoke to me. Now, you know how miserable my life is. If only mother could be kind to me, at least once in a while."

"Don't worry. We will find some way to make things better. As I told you, I was with Matoo the magician before I came to your family. Tomorrow morning let us both go to Matoo. He stays in the next village. He will definitely help us. So wipe your tears, dear friend and let's do something to make your life better."

Hearing this, Radha's hopes arose and she broke into a smile and hugged the cow.

She then went home. Next morning she left for the neighboring village with Gauri.

They reached Matoo, the magician's imposing mansion by afternoon. Matoo was in his huge laboratory where he was engrossed in making various colorful potions. There were several jars and glass vials of red, green, blue and yellow liquids, all around the laboratory, neatly arranged in various shelves. Matoo was standing against a huge table at the centre of the laboratory with a beaker in his hand, which contained a green liquid.

He was sniffing the liquid in the beaker very carefully and thin white fumes were coming out of the beaker.

Gauri called out to him, "Matoo sir, how are you?"

Matoo looked at Gauri and stared for an instant. Immediately recognizing Gauri, he said, "Hello Gauri. How are you? You seem to have grown really big. And, who is this pretty young girl with you?"

"This is my friend, Radha. She is my friend and she is the one who takes care of all my needs. But sir, she is in deep distress and we have come to ask you for your help."

Gauri then told Matoo everything happening to Radha and how her stepmother was making her life miserable.

Matoo heard them patiently and then gave a huge grin and said, "Do not worry at all. In fact, you have come at the right moment. I have just developed this new magic potion."

So saying, he pointed to the beaker with the green liquid which he was holding in his hand.

"This potion will solve all your problems. Pour a little of it in your stepmother's food and see the fun."

He poured a small quantity of the green liquid into a small glass bottle and gave it to Radha.

Radha very timidly asked Matoo, "Sir, I don't want to harm my stepmother in any way. Is this anything poisonous?"

"No, young lady. I am not an evil magician. It is not harmful at all. Just give it to your step-mother and see how your life changes."

Hearing this Radha was assured and she and Gauri, after profusely thanking Matoo returned to her village.

At night, as instructed by Matoo, Radha silently slipped into the kitchen and poured the magic potion from the bottle into the food which Satya was to eat. Satya ate the food as usual without suspecting anything and later went to sleep.

The next morning, Satya got up and went towards Radha, who was sleeping in a corner of the room, all curled up. Giving her a push, "Get up, you lazy lump of butter. The cock has crowed long before and look at you still sleeping. Go and attend to your work."

Radha got up and rubbed her eyes. Sniffing here and there, she got a foul smell. "Mother, can you smell something bad?"

"Do not talk nonsense. There is no smell coming from anywhere. Do not waste my time, you little witch. Go and water the plants before I spank you."

Now Radha could feel the stench very strongly and it seemed to come from Satya's body. Now even Satya could sense the smell very strongly. It was a very bad odor, something like rotting garbage and it made her stingy. She realized that it was coming from her body. Radha ran out of the house and she saw that the smell was in the courtyard of the house also. It was a very overpowering smell and it was spreading over a large area.

Krishna also smelt it and told Satya to go and take a bath quickly. "But I have already taken a bath in the morning. I don't know how this stupid smell is coming from me. Anyway, let me take a bath again."

However, in spite of taking a bath again, the smell did not go from her body. During the day, anytime that Satya shouted or abused Radha, she found that the bad smell became stronger and spread more. Because she repeatedly abused Radha, by evening the smell was so bad that the entire village was affected by it. The villagers started avoiding Satya. She was driven away from the village well when she went to fetch water. Crying loudly she came home and sat in a corner of the house, wondering how the bad odor had come about and how in spite of repeated baths, she smelt like a skunk. She realized that the smell became stronger when she shouted at Radha. She thought that this was God's way of punishing her for ill-treating Radha.

She realized her mistake and decided to be kind to Radha.

She went to Radha and told her, "Radha, I am sorry that I have been bad to you. You were a good girl but I was still not understanding and kind. I have realized how bad I was to you. I will now be kind to you and I will tell your father to send you to school also. I know that you work very hard at home and also help me in my work. When you are at school, I will take care of Gauri and the work in the field with your father and you can help me after you come back from school."

No sooner had she said this, the foul smell disappeared from Satya's body and it was replaced by a pleasant smell like that of fresh jasmine flowers.

Hearing Satya's words, Radha was initially surprised. Soon she realized that the magic potion of Matoo, the magician, had worked and she hugged Satya.

Thanking her, she rushed out to meet Gauri and tell her how the magic potion of Matoo had worked and how her life had changed for the better.