

The Blue Umbrella

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What is it that you value the most? Is it a toy, a photograph, a piece of clothing or something else? Write a couple of lines about your prized possession and state why it is your favourite.



Let us read about Binya's adventure to save her prized blue umbrella.

Binya belonged to the part of the Himalayas known as Garhwal. One day she chanced upon a group of picnickers, one of whom gave her a pretty blue umbrella. Binya grew very fond of it.



Binya seldom closed the blue umbrella. Even when she had it in the house, she left it lying open in a corner of the room.

Whenever Binya went out—whether it was to graze the cows, or fetch water from the spring, or carry milk to the little tea shop on the Tehri road—she took the umbrella with her. That patch of sky-blue silk could always be seen on the hillside.

The villagers used the Tehri road to go to the market-town. Some used the bus; a few rode on mules; most people walked. Today, everyone on the road turned their heads to stare at the girl with the bright blue umbrella.

Binya sat down in the shade of a pine tree. The umbrella, still open, lay beside her. She cradled her head in her arms and presently she dozed off. It was that kind of day, sleepily warm and summery.

What was the patch of sky-blue silk? Why could it always be seen on the hillside?



And while she slept, a wind sprang up.

It came quietly, swishing¹ gently through the trees, humming softly. Then it was joined by other random gusts, rushing over the tops of the mountains. The trees shook their heads and came to life. The wind fanned Binya's cheeks. The umbrella stirred on the grass.

¹swishing: moving with a hissing or rushing sound

The wind grew stronger, picking up dead leaves and sending them spinning and swirling through the air. It got into the umbrella and began to drag it over the grass. Suddenly it lifted the umbrella and carried it about six feet from the sleeping girl.

The sound woke Binya.

She was on her feet immediately and then she was leaping down the steep slope. But just as she was within reach of the umbrella, the wind picked it up again and carried it further downhill.

Binya set off in pursuit². The wind was in a wicked, playful mood. It would leave the umbrella alone for a few moments; but, as soon as Binya came near, it would pick up the umbrella again and send it bouncing, floating, dancing away from her.

The hill grew steeper. Binya knew that after twenty yards it would fall away in a precipice³. She ran faster. And the wind ran with her, ahead of her and the blue umbrella stayed up with the wind.

A fresh gust picked it up and carried it to the very edge of the cliff. There it balanced for a few seconds, before toppling over⁴, out of sight.



²set off in pursuit: (here) chased something over something

³precipice: a very steep rock face or cliff, especially a tall one.

⁴toppling over: falling

Berry ran to the edge of the cliff. Going down on her hands and knees, she peered down⁵ the cliff-face. About a hundred feet below, a small stream rushed between great boulders. Hardly anything grew on the cliff-face—just a few stunted bushes, and, halfway down, a wild cherry tree growing crookedly⁶ out of the rocks and hanging across the chasm. The umbrella had stuck in the cherry tree.

deep crack



peered down: looked with difficulty or concentration at someone or something

*crookedly: bent and twisted

Binya didn't hesitate. She may have been timid with strangers, but she was at home on a hillside. She stuck her bare leg over the edge of the cliff and began climbing down, she kept her face to the hillside, feeling her way with her feet, only changing her handhold when she knew her feet were secure. Sometimes she held on to the thorny bilberry⁷ bushes, but she did not trust the other plants, which came away very easily.

Loose stones rattled down the cliff. Once on their way, the stones did not stop until they reached the bottom of the hill; and they took other stones with them, so that there was soon a cascade⁸ of stones and Binya had to be very careful not to start a landslide.

What does the narrator mean when he says that Binya was at home on a hillside? How do we know this?

As agile⁹ as a mountain-goat, she did not take more than five minutes to reach the crooked cherry tree. But the most difficult task remained. She had to crawl along the trunk of the tree, which stood out at right angles from the cliff. Only by doing this could she reach the trapped umbrella.

Binya felt no fear when climbing trees. She was proud of the fact that she could climb them as well as Bijju, her brother. Gripping the rough cherry bark with her toes, and using her knees as leverage¹⁰, she crawled along the trunk of the projecting tree until she was almost within reach of the umbrella. She noticed with dismay that the blue cloth was torn in a couple of places. She looked down; and it was only then that she felt afraid. She was right over the chasm, balanced precariously about eighty feet above the boulder-strewn stream. Looking down, she felt quite dizzy. Her hands shook, and the tree shook too. If she slipped now, there was only one direction in which she could fall—down, down, into the depths of that dark and shadowy ravine¹¹.

There was only one thing to do; concentrate on the patch of blue just a couple of feet away from her.

She did not look down or up, but straight ahead; and willing herself forward, she managed to reach the umbrella.

She could not crawl back with it in her hands. So, after dislodging it from the forked branch in which it had stuck, she let it fall, still open, into the ravine below. Cushioned by the wind, the umbrella floated serenely downwards, landing in a thicket of nettles¹².

Binya crawled back along the trunk of the cherry tree.

Twenty minutes later she emerged from the nettle clump, her precious umbrella held aloft¹³. She had nettle stings all over her legs, but she was hardly aware of the smarting¹⁴.

⁷bilberry: a type of low-growing shrub bearing black berries ⁸cascade: (here) something that falls in stages down a steep rocky slope ⁹agile: able to move quickly and easily ¹⁰leverage: the application of force by means of a lever ¹¹ravine: a deep, narrow gorge with steep sides ¹²nettles: herbaceous plants which have jagged leaves covered with stinging hairs ¹³held aloft: held high in the air ¹⁴smarting: feeling of a sharp stinging pain in any part of the body