

Outwitted I

We were all very excited. This holiday was to be spent in Dindigul where Grandpa had decided to settle down, because the climate there was good for people with weak lungs. His doctor had said that the damp sea air of Madras would not suit Grandpa any more.

Dindigul is near a hill station called Kodaikanal, from where fruits and vegetables came to market every day by lorry and cart. In Dindigul itself one could get excellent bananas and grapes, as well as many varieties of vegetables and milk too. So, in every way it was an ideal place for Grandpa, who had been advised to eat lots of vegetables and drink plenty of milk.

The house was an old fashioned one with many rooms, a large garden, a cowshed, and a well. Granny, who had lived in a village, had decided to keep a cow, and said she would show us how to draw water from the well.

"I will teach you how to milk a cow, too," she said and laughed.

Our neighbours told us to be very careful at night, to lock all our doors and windows, because

a gang of burglars had been on the prowl for some time. The police had not been able to catch them, though they had tried ever so hard.

The doors in our house had heavy iron bolts and the windows had bars. In one room, there was an iron safe built into the wall, and the family jewels and money were kept in this.

"How can any burglar break open this safe?" Grandpa asked.

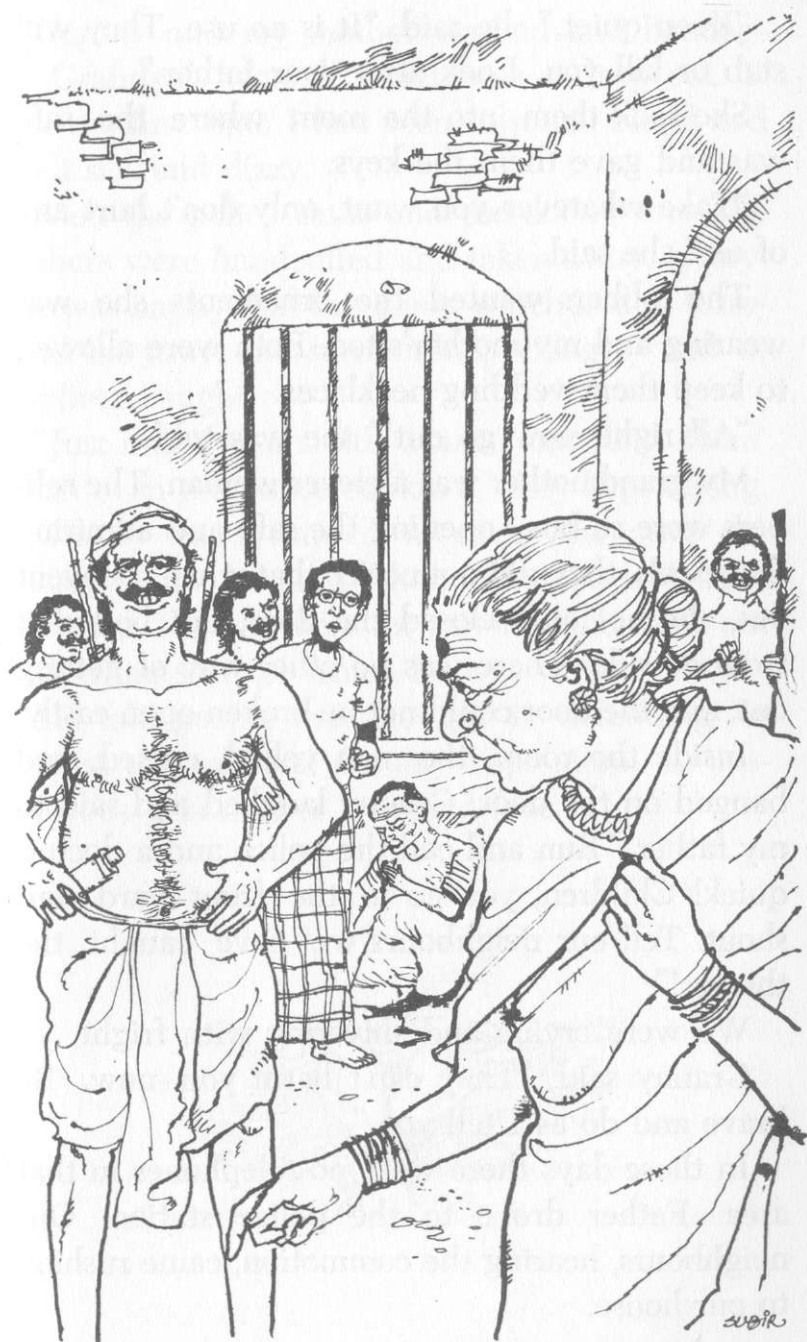
One night, when we were fast asleep, the burglars came! They were not ordinary thieves. They came armed with knives and clubs. They did not try to open the doors or windows. Instead, they made a big hole in the wall and entered the house through it.

Though our neighbours had told us to close all the doors and windows leading to each room and not to sleep in the outer rooms, Grandpa had not followed their advice. So the burglars were able to go straight into his room.

The leader, a huge dark man, with long black hair, pulled Grandpa out of bed and asked him where the jewellery and money were kept. Grandpa refused to answer. One of the men stabbed him and he fell to the ground, bleeding.

"Come, I'll show you where it is," said Granny coolly.

My father came in just then and tried to grab one of the thieves. Granny pushed him away.



"Keep quiet," she said. "It is no use. They will stab or kill you. Look after your father."

She took them into the room where the safe was and gave them the keys.

"Take whatever you want, only don't hurt any of us," she said.

The robbers wanted the ornaments she was wearing and my mother's too. Both were allowed to keep their wedding necklaces.

"All right, now go out!" she was told.

My grandmother was a clever woman. The robbers were so busy opening the safe and admiring the jewels, they did not notice that when she went out, she not only closed the door, but bolted it from outside! There was no other way of getting out, and the door could not be broken open easily.

Inside the room, the men yelled, cursed, and banged on the door. Granny laughed and said to my father, "Run and call the police and a doctor, quick! Children, you go to the front yard and shout. Tell our neighbours we have caught the thieves!"

We were crying and shivering with fright.

Granny said, "They can't harm you now. Be brave and do as I tell you."

In those days there were no telephones in that area. Father drove to the police station. Our neighbours, hearing the commotion, came rushing to our house.

Granny and my mother washed and bandaged Grandpa's wound, which was a deep cut. It was the first time I had seen so much blood and I felt sick and dizzy.

Soon the police came and the doctor too. The robbers were handcuffed and taken away. Everyone was happy that this gang, which had so terrorised the town and surrounding villages, had at last been caught.

"Just imagine an old woman catching them when even the police couldn't!" they kept saying.

Granny was rewarded in cash. She gave the money to the hospital where Grandpa had been admitted. He was there for a month and came out with a big scar, of which he was very proud.

He told people that he got it defending us against the robbers! Granny kept mum, a mischievous grin on her wrinkled face.