

At The Partq

"I won't, I won't, I won't. He's a greedy glutton and I won't take him to the party," said *Leeladidi** stamping her feet as she stormed out of the room. But she didn't forget to hit me hard on the head with her knuckles when she swept past me.

I screamed and began to cry. *Amma*** came out of the kitchen.

"Leela, come here!" she shouted. *Leeladidi* didn't stop. "Did you hear me? Come back!" *Amma* commanded in a louder voice.

heeladidi turned unwillingly and slowly walked towards *Amma*. I stopped wailing and watched them anxiously. *Amma* started scolding *Leeladidi*, but she kept denying she had done anything. She argued, she pleaded, but it didn't work. *Amma* gave her an ultimatum. "Leela," she said sternly, "either you take Sudhir to the party or you too don't go."

Leeladidi agreed reluctantly, "All right, but if he behaves like a greedy worm, I'll never, never take him with me. No, never again in my life."

"Elder sister.

"Mother.

I was happy I had won. I was about to smile when *Amma* turned her angry gaze on me.

"And you, mind you, if you don't behave properly I'll give you a nice thrashing, understand?"

I just lowered my eyes and nodded. "You will not touch any cakes or biscuits or chocolates without my permission! Promise?" *Leeladidi* wanted to be absolutely sure I'd behave. I hesitated.

"Promise?" *Didi* asked again.

I knew she was trying to trap me. "And. . . and supposing you don't permit me at all?" I asked.

"Oh, I will."

"But suppose you don't then?" I persisted.

"I will, stupid," *Leeladidi* was getting impatient.

"But supposing you aren't near me or you are talking to someone, then?"

"Then?.... then you just remember that whenever someone offers you something, you mustn't grab a handful. You should say 'no thank you' at least twice or thrice, understand?"

I was still doubtful, but I promised.

"Come on, let's get you ready and dressed for the party," *Didi* said and dragged me away. She pulled me and pushed me and deliberately held my arm so tight that it hurt. She pushed and pinched even when she helped me put on my shirt and shoes. I suffered all this in silence. But when she pressed both my cheeks with her left

hand and ran the comb hard through my hair, it became unbearable and I let out a loud whine.

"Do you want to come with me or not?" she threatened and asked me to shut up. At last after dabbing a little powder over my face, she finished.

When we left the house, she once again made me promise I would behave and would not take anything before refusing it three times. She nagged all the way and stopped only when we entered the nicely decorated hall where the party was being held. There she met her friend Shyama and immediately started telling her a lengthy secret. I knew it was about me because every now and then, they kept looking at me.

After a few minutes Shyamadidi came to me and whispered in my ear, "Sudhir, remember your promise and behave yourself, okay?"

They made me sit on a chair and vanished into the crowd. A lot of boys and girls had gathered now. They were laughing and talking. All round, there were balloons and streamers. I alone was unhappy. For I was supposed to sit quietly in a corner.

At one end of the room was a large table with all the eatables arranged nicely on it. In the centre was a huge cake. It had pretty pink marzipan flowers on the icing and plenty of small silver sugar beads all round. A single red candle stood



in the centre waiting to be lit. It was beautiful. I kept gazing at it and soon my mouth started watering. Then, suddenly, everybody was getting ready to watch the cutting of the cake.

It was wonderful. First there was one cut. Then a whole piece was sliced off, then another and another, as they were quickly passed round. Soon a girl in a green *sari* held a plate piled high with slices of cake before me. I looked up. Standing beside her was Shyamadidi who was glaring at

me. I was uneasy. I remembered the promise. I had to behave. I had to be a good boy! I looked round for Leela *didi*. She was nowhere to be seen.

"Yes, have some cake," the girl in green said sweetly. I gazed at the slices of cake and my mouth watered, but. . .but I must refuse three times. Yet, if I kept refusing and the girl went away, what then? An idea flashed through my mind and I blurted out in one breath, "No, no, no." Then I grabbed the biggest slice of cake and started munching.

Standing close to me Shyamarfidi burst out laughing. The girl in the green *sari* too began to laugh, and I helped myself to another slice.

Taking a big bite, I gaped at them. Then I spotted Leela *didi* coming towards me and my heart sank. She gave me a dirty look. I overheard Shyamadidi telling her what I had done and she too burst out laughing. So I knew I was safe.

The girl in the green *sari* offered me some more cake and I gladly took yet another slice.

