

When Papa Scolded Me

"Baby, come for breakfast. Your milk is getting cold," called *Bhaiya*, my elder brother.

I quickly put on my slippers, picked up my favourite doll, Beeta, and rushed out into the verandah. It was a beautiful day. The morning air was most refreshing. "Ah, how lovely!" I said aloud, taking a deep breath. I ran across the verandah, with Beeta tucked under my arm. While I gulped down the milk, I heard Papa calling out to the driver.

"Papa is still here, *Bhaiya*. He hasn't gone to the clinic, today," I said overwhelmed with joy.

Being engrossed in a magazine, *Bhaiya* did not reply, but I could see Papa talking to someone in his room, which was opposite the dining hall facing the verandah.

"Papa! Papa! I don't have to go to school, it's a holiday. Do you have a holiday, too? Look, Beeta has got fever," I said, all in one breath.

"No, my dear child, I don't have a holiday today. You go and play while I talk to Mr. Singh. He is very ill. I'll ask the compounder to give your doll some medicine," Papa said lovingly.

It was quite unusual to find my father at home at that time. Normally he was in his clinic before I woke up. So I was very happy. My father wiped his spectacles with the kerchief as he listened to his patient carefully.

I was on the balcony when I heard, "Baby! Baby! Come here, see this." It was my brother from the verandah. He had spread himself on an easy chair and our dog, Tom, was dancing round on his hind legs. I burst out laughing.

"Papa will give medicine to Beeta," I said, showing off.

"And I'll ask Papa to give some medicine to his darling daughter, because. . . because she laughs and laughs," said *Bhaiya*, tickling me and sending me into fits of laughter. Being the youngest child in the family I received everyone's attention and affection. Papa of course, was the most affectionate.

I ran from one end of the verandah to the other and then onto the balcony, staying close to Papa's room to attract his attention while I played. I swung on the curtain, thumped on the door, tapped on the table, pulled and pushed the chair. "Look, *Bhaiya*, what a variety of sounds they make," I said, pulling the chair, then leaping up and rapping on the door, clapping my hands, jumping all the while.

"Don't," pleaded *Bhaiya*, not taking his eyes off

the book in his hand.

Racing back to the window of Papa's room, I saw him still busy with the patient. I loved to see him there before me, while I played. 'He must be liking it, too,' I thought, 'to see me play around in his room.'

I dragged a chair and climbed onto the table. This at last drew Papa's attention.

"Baby, be careful, you'll fall down," he said tenderly.

"Look, Papa, I am taller than everyone," I grinned from ear to ear making my eyes disappear. All one could see was a set of white teeth and chubby cheeks.

Both Mr. Singh and Papa smiled. Papa did not look convinced. So I said again raising my hands above my head. "Papa I'm a big girl, now."

He nodded with a smile and continued talking to the patient.

I touched all that I could reach with my hands till I got to the black switch. 'No, you should not touch it.' I was imagining what my mother would have said.

'If you touch it, you'll get hurt,' *Bhaiya* had told me once. This was a 'forbidden' article for me, but how attractive it looked — black against the light blue wall. Unable to resist the temptation to touch it, I pressed the switch and the light came on. I immediately switched it off. I was



scared, I looked at Papa with large anxious eyes, but he was busy writing. He did not see me. I looked at Papa again and then at the switch which begged my hands to touch it again.

'I'll do it just once more, okay?' I said softly to myself. I repeated the mischief once more and was unable to stop myself from doing it again and again. I seemed to have disturbed Papa who was

concentrating on the patient's problem. Without looking up from the book, he said in a serious voice, "Don't do that, you might get a shock."

The klick-klack of the switch and the glowing bulb fascinated me, "Baby, come here, let Papa do his work," called my brother.

I ignored everybody. This was the most fascinating game for me at the moment.

"How fantastic! I press — the light is on, I push — the light goes off", I muttered.

The patient, obviously, had some serious problem. My father sat with four books open in front of him. My running around had certainly disturbed him. Completely exasperated, he put down his pen and spectacles and shouted at me, "You're not listening to me. GET DOWN FROM THERE!"

His loud voice broke my trance. I gaped at him wide-eyed. He fixed his gaze on me, expecting to be obeyed instantly. I was shocked at being scolded so loudly by him — scolded by Papa. Papa, a very soft spoken person, who was known never to raise his voice, had SHOUTED in anger at his darling daughter. I was very angry with him.

I jumped down from the table with a loud thud and raced up and down the balcony. My breath quickened, my face went red with anger, and my eyes felt hot with unshed tears. Throwing my hands about, I raced up and down wanting to

destroy everything that came in my way.

Hearing the commotion *Bhaiya* came out. "What is it?" he asked. My fury found a ready victim and I ran towards him and pushed him. I felt like bursting into tears. I rushed and pulled at the curtain in Papa's room, which came down with the force. I saw Papa talking to the patient with his usual patience.

How unthoughtful of him! He is not a bit bothered about my being so angry with him. I was fuming all the more.

I went back into the room, stamping my feet noisily in anger. Standing close to Papa, I raged vehemently, "Why couldn't you say it softly? Why did you speak so loudly to me?"

The next moment I came out on the balcony and stood beside the money-plant pot. My eyes were now full of tears. I plucked a leaf and shredded it to pieces. The sound of a chair being pushed in Papa's room reached my ears and then I heard his footsteps coming closer to me. I tried to run away in annoyance, but Papa caught me. He pulled my face towards his and picked me up. Tears came rolling down my plump cheeks. He patted my head lovingly and wiped my tears.

"Oh, you big cat!" said Papa, ruffling my hair.

This affectionate gesture melted my wrath. A moment later I was once again happy playing round the house.