

Child of the Nightingale

BY SHANTI KUMAR

Nothing is impossible...

When Satya was born, there was a great disappointment in the family. She was the first daughter after a line of strong and healthy sons who had proved victorious in many great deeds. The name, Satya, meant light and truth, but her life was full of darkness and lies. Her mother, Chitree, doubted she would ever become a great doctor, scholar, philosopher, or any such noble occupation as her seven older brothers had. When she was just an infant, her father, Krishan, had sworn upon his grave to never forgive himself for allowing his wife to bear a daughter, for girls were not often appreciated in their old fashioned town of India, Kalarabi. They were said to be ungrateful pigs that devoured food and never earned a single rupee for the family. It was a great relief when the family was rid of the disgrace and sent the girl away to be married to some rich merchant with other five wives. Chitree's sister, Narayani, would often come and help care for Satya when she was still a small child. Narayani was probably the only one who saw her as a wonderful girl with soft breath of flowers and eyes like sunrise, wide black beads with sparkles of light shining like fire. To Narayani, Satya's name was Khubi, which meant my beautiful one, and to Satya, Narayani was not just her Aunt, but her mother.

One morning about eight years later, Satya awoke with a start as she rolled off the cot and onto the hard floor. Satya let out a wail and clutched

her head in her hands trying to stop the throbbing pain. Narayani, who shared the cot with her, shook herself awake and pulled the child up and onto her lap.

“Khubi, Khubi, my dear Khubi,” she cooed melodically, “Let me massage your head.” As Narayani ran her fingers through Satya’s thick dark hair, the child listened to a bird chirping outside the cottage.

“Thigi, is it the nightingale singing?” She inquired, turning excitedly to her Aunt.

“It is indeed, child.” Narayani smiled. Satya’s eyes grew wide with delight.

“May we go and see?” She begged, “He is a beautiful bird.”

“Does your head feel better?”

“Yes.” Satya lied a little.

“Then you may go, but be careful not to scare him off. He is a very proud creature, and bow before him. He will know you are a friend.” Narayani watched as Satya excitedly jump up and run out the door and into the daylight, as happy and gay as the new morning song.

Just a little ways down a dirt path lined by stones and shrubs there resided a grand fruit garden and in the center stood a tall blossoming pear tree in which the grand bird was perched. In summer time, the tree would

bear hundreds of pears, and Satya's older brother, Manu, would climb the tree and pick out two luscious pears for them to enjoy. He would then take his pocketknife and cut the fruit into little squares the size of a rupee. Satya would pop them into her mouth as the fresh taste melted across her tongue.

“Namaste.” Satya curtsied in front of the nightingale. “You sing beautifully. What is your name?” The nightingale looked down into Satya's eyes and turned his head peculiarly to the side. His royal feathers were sprinkled with gold and his eyes alive with the intense essence of purity and hope. Satya beamed.

“You are a beautiful bird. Please, come down and I will give you some grain to eat. It is very good grain, and it is leftover prasad from last night's prayers. I wasn't allowed to go though, because I'm a girl.” The nightingale didn't move, but he stared steadily down at her with that flame in his eyes, piercing into her heart every time she looked at him. But she felt he understood her, something that not even Narayani could truly do.

For a long while Satya sat at the stump of the tree and listened to him sing. Each time he inhaled a breath followed by a long, harmonious note his golden breast would heave up and down like a rhythmic pulse flowing throughout his body. As she listened, the sky grew lighter and the dying

moon slid behind the rooftops as the awakening sun rose over the small village of Kalarabi.

“SATYA!” she heard Chitree cry angrily, “Where are you! Come help me to cook breakfast for Thougi, he will be arriving soon from Agra!” The beautiful song had been ruined by Chitree’s shouts, who used her daughter as a mere tool and treated her as an annoying pigeon pecking at nothing but dirty, raw, wet rice off the pavement. Satya groaned as she looked longingly up at the nightingale, wondering why it would not come down even when she had held fresh, sweet grains in front of him. At any moment he could fly away.

Don’t leave, she thought desperately, please, I’ll be back, my mother wants me. Don’t go. I will come back for you. The nightingale looked surprised. As she turned to the path leading back to the cottage, she heard a soft yet firm voice like timeless mountains whisper, *Where do you think I’d go?* Satya spun around as swiftly as she had before and stared up at the nightingale. *Well come now, don’t be afraid. I won’t hurt you.* The voice was mighty and bold yet covered in layers of warmth and kindness, yet as she heard the words, the nightingale’s silver beak did not move, nor did he utter a single note.

“Who’s there?” Satya cried out, looking around frantically, expecting to see a mischievous village boy pop out of the apricot bushes and tease her some more, but there was no one in the silent fruit garden. *Satya, I’d prefer that you do not speak to me in that manner. Your language is made of physical vibrations, which are of course too simple for me to comprehend. It is confusing at first but please understand, for I have much to tell you.* The voice echoed into her mind. Satya screamed, her eyes wide with fright, “WHO IS IT!? I’ve had enough of this foolish play! Show yourself!”

Please, Satya, I have not meant to frighten you child. I am right here. Can’t you see me?

Satya fell to her knees sobbing. “RUKO! RUKO! STOP!” She cried.

Chitree, who had been waiting for Satya to come and help make the aloo paratas had heard her cries of terror and was rushing to the fruit garden, engulfed in a rage of fury. “I told you ten thousand times, you ragged girl, why don’t you listen!” She shouted as she pulled Satya up by her hair. Satya, who had completely forgotten about her mother’s earlier calls, immediately pulled herself away from Chitree and asked in a voice overwhelmed with a blinding terror, “Do you hear it? Do you hear the voice? The voice! Can’t you hear it?” Chitree was taken back. Her face

grew pale. “Satya, you are going mad! Oh God, first you bless me with a dirty ungrateful daughter and now she must be driven to insanity? Now no honorable Sahib will ever come near her, let alone marry her! We will be stuck with this disgrace for years to come! Oh God of mercy and love, what have I done so horrible for you to curse my soul in this unbearable manner – and right before the holy day!” Chitree wailed and folded her hands in prayer muttering a mantra as she scurried off, her long golden sari swishing at her heels.

Satya leaned against the pear tree clutching her heart. *My mother will kill me for sure! Oh, help me! What am I to do?* She thought, as she watched a tiny green spider crawl up her arm. She flicked it away and buried her face in her sweaty hands.

She will probably not kill you, surely not, yet you might receive a good beating finished off with a whip. I fear it might do you good to apologize. The voice again. Satya glanced about and her eyes fell upon the nightingale. *It is you!* She thought, and reached her hand out to stroke him.

Precisely my dear Satya. I did not mean to frighten you in any way or stir up any trouble between you and your mother, yet I have long wanted to speak to you – ever since the day you were born.

Me, someone has actually waited for years and years just to speak to me! Just me! Just little, dirty ungrateful Satya! The one who can't do anything right! Satya thought as she climbed up the pear tree and seated herself on a limb beside the nightingale. His sleek golden feathers were soft to the touch and shimmered with a radiant glow in the nearly risen sun.

The nightingale nodded solemnly and Satya beamed in awe and delight.

But why is it I am the only one that can hear you. My mother couldn't, she thought I was going mad! Satya inquired. It was then when she noticed that she hadn't uttered a single word, and she and the nightingale were communicating by thought! At this she became even more frightened, and began to try and make her way down the tree, but it was no use. She had forgotten how to come down in her fear and nearly slipped off the branch.

Child, there is no need to be frightened, come back up here. That puny branch you are residing on seems as if it is to give way at any moment. The bird hopped over to Satya as she struggled to keep her balance and with one swift motion led her over to a sturdier branch.

Now, to answer your question, for you to understand I must ask you a question. 'Said' the nightingale.

Sure. Satya replied.

Both thought and words send vibrations out into the universe, and both are very complex patterns, yet, which do you think are more complex – thought or words? The nightingale inquired.

Satya thought on it for a moment, wondering if the nightingale was sensing this too, and finally replied, *while words are often the only vibrations we realize, thought is processed in the mind much faster, and is much more complex. Also, some feelings that simply cannot be expressed in words are easily expressed in thought.*

Exactly Satya! Now, give me an example of when you couldn't explain your feelings, and you wished someone would venture into your mind and understand your thoughts and feelings. The nightingale said.

Satya did not have to think for a moment to give this question an answer, for there had been countless experiences in which she had wished someone would dive down deep into her thoughts and truly know how she felt, all of which revolving around the same matter – her being a girl.

When my family treated me as a rag or tool because of my gender. It was those times when it felt as if no one understood my pain or suffering.

The nightingale seemed to smile. He lifted his glowing wing and placed it on Satya's shoulder.

Why do they treat you this way Satya? There must be a reason. He asked.

I told you – I am a girl. I'll never be a great doctor, scholar, philosopher, or anything close to what my brothers have become. Manu is already studying at a fine school and will graduate in a year with an advanced medical degree. But I won't – I can't, and I never will. I'm a girl! The highlight of my life will probably be my marriage to a rich Sahib who already has other five wives and become nothing more than a slave in his household. I'd rather die! Satya moaned as the nightingale shook his head.

It is not because you are a girl Satya, not at all. The nightingale protested quietly.

But you saw what my mother did to me. She has never once treated any of my noble brothers in that manner. Satya said. The nightingale smiled thoughtfully and then turned away to face the rising sun.

What do you think of yourself as? He asked, a tingling curiosity and lovingness in his voice.

Satya rolled her eyes and sighed. *The girl who can't do anything right and is treated like a maid by her own family.* She replied gloomily.

Precisely my dear Satya! Now, remember when I told you that thought vibrations are much more complex than that of mere sound or word,

well, they are also much more powerful. The nightingale looked deep into her eyes as if he were trying to draw something out of her. A pain that had long been within her beating away at her true wonderful self.

How long have you been thinking yourself as this “rag” or “maid” that can’t do anything right? The nightingale carried on.

My whole life – nearly eight years. Satya answered in a depressed and ashamed tone. She didn’t want to be asked any more of the nightingale’s questions, but she could tell he was going to show her something that would change her life forever.

Don’t you see Satya? Your thoughts are so much more powerful than anything else is that they have the greatest impact on your life. What you think effects reality. You can make anything possible – with a single thought. Anyone can. It is as simple as it is said. Everyone has the ability, yet only few realize it and direct it towards great accomplishments. The nightingale looked Satya in the eye the deepest he ever had, and Satya nodded as she spoke. She understood the secret.

Because my whole life I have been sending thoughts out into the universe with the idea that I am nothing and the belief that I will never accomplish anything, that has become my reality. I have been living what I have least wanted just because of my thoughts! Satya gasped and turned to

the nightingale in a hopeful and pleading far beyond any emotion she had ever experienced before.

How can I change it! How! There must be a way! Teach me! Oh please do teach me! It will be a dream out of nothing that I could've ever imagined. My mother, father, even Thigi Narayani, they don't control my life! I control it! I can make anything happen! I just have to believe in it!

Satya picked up the nightingale and stroked him lovingly.

Satya, you already possess the gift. Just let me ask you one question before I must leave you to ensure that this amazing secret you have just been shown make miracles in your life. The nightingale said as Satya climbed down the tree and set him down on the ground.

Anything, ask me anything. I am eternally grateful to you. Satya beamed.

Who are you now?

Satya looked up onto the horizon and the fully risen sun, spreading light and hope over Kalarabi.

I am a miracle on this earth that will create miracles for myself, my family, and my fellow companions as we live side by side in eternal harmony. I am everything. I can accomplish anything. I am a beautiful wonder that no has seen yet but they will soon. A bud that is just about to

blossom into an amazing flower that will spread love and hope across the world. Nothing is impossible. Satya nodded down at the nightingale.

He smiled as he said, *cherish your life, possibilities are everything. Use the secret well, and pass this great magic on to others, so that one day we may all know this spectacular wonder stretching out into eternity...*

And with that, he flew off to the horizon and into the rising sun, singing his song that now meant so much more to Satya than it ever did before.

Don't forget me!

She thought she heard a voice on the wind say.

I won't. She whispered.

And with one last look at the beautiful bird flying off into the heaven and as his song slowly started to fade away, Satya heard a differed noise. It was her uncle's fancy automobile pulling into the driveway. "Thougi!" She cried as she ran down the path and onto the road to greet him.

"Satya! What a beautiful girl you have become! I have bought you a gift, my child." He beamed.

"Oh, please let me see it!" She begged. Thougi laughed as he removed a leathery case from his coat pocket. Satya took it graciously and undid the fine wrapping. Finally, she lifted a new, fresh, clean book out of

the package. Satya stared at the cover. A book. A real book with lines of words and elaborate pictures flowing with the story within. She could hardly squeak out a thank you – overwhelmed with joy.

“I thought it was time you ought to learn how to read, so one day you can become a famous poet or scholar and teach the world many things through your writing and published works.” Thougi beamed as Satya flipped through the pages trying to make out words. In the corner of her eye she saw Thougi lead Krishan, her father over to a corner and hand him a wad of paper money and a handful of rupees.

“For her schooling, my brother. If you didn’t do it I promised you I would. She will become a great person. She already is. I could tell from the way Narayani described her. Let her live the life she deserves.” With that, Chitree led him into the house for refreshments and it was once again quiet out on the streets of Kalarabi. Satya began to turn towards the house when she thought she saw a shimmer of golden feathers behind the trees. She smiled as she thought, *thank you nightingale. You have truly changed my life.* As she turned and opened the door she heard a voice on the breeze and a song of purity and light, *your welcome, my dear child Satya – and good luck. May this secret stay with you and transform you and your life forever...*