

For a Horseshoe Nail

by Amara Bavani Dev

(Adapted story. Intermediate level)

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost,

For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.

For want of a horse, the rider was lost,

For want of a rider, the battle was lost,

For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost, And all for
the want of a horseshoe nail.

Sometimes a small mistake can have terrible results. Raju needs money, but he has no house to sell, no bags of rice, no field of sheep. So what can he sell?

The sun was hot on my face as I put my head out of the red bus moving up the hilly road. I closed my eyes for a moment. The brightness of the colours was hurting them - the rich green rice fields, the bright blue sky and the black road with the heat coming off it in waves.

'Aandipatti,' shouted the bus driver, and I got up. My heart lifted proudly as I touched the thick packet of notes I was carrying at my waist.

Thirty thousand rupees! A fortune for a farmworker like me.

I got off the bus and walked to the public toilet, trying not to breathe in the bad smell. I swallowed several times, and hoped I wouldn't be sick again. It was because of the

strong medicines I was taking - no doubt about that. It was nothing that a day's rest wouldn't put right.

I bought pink and green halwa from the sweet stall and some beautiful jasmine flowers for my Valli. With the packets of halwa under my arm and the sweet smell of the jasmine in my nose, I walked slowly back home.

At first I had not liked the idea, when that lying dog, Velu, suggested giving a kidney.

'Come on, Raju,' he said, 'everyone is doing it now. Why don't you give your kidney? I'll get you thirty-five thousand for it. And you can give me five thousand for arranging it. I will take you to big hospital in Bangalore - they're doing the operation all the time there. It seems they are even taking kidneys from newborn babies and sending them to foreign countries. It is very good business, believe me.'

I did not need any more persuading. Thirty thousand rupees! And so I had gone to Bangalore with Velu, along with five other men from our village, Aandipatti.

'You too are from Aandipatti?' the doctor had joked. 'I think we will soon call it Kidneypatti!'

I hadn't laughed - I was frightened by the huge hospital and its smells, and anxious about the operation. But the whole thing had gone well. They had put me in a small room to get better after the operation. And a week later, here I was, back home, without one of my kidneys. I hadn't felt any pain when I urinated a few minutes ago. Velu had told me that the doctors were all very good ones,

who had studied in America and London, and knew what they were doing.

Thirty thousand rupees made a lot of difference to me. I was planning to buy six used bicycles and start a bicycle shop. I could earn fifty rupees a day at least. Then I would take the old woman, keznavi - that's what I always called my mother - to the big hospital in Vellore and get her eyes operated on. She was quite blind now. And I would give her a thousand rupees to spend on herself. The old woman liked a drop of whisky in the nights - now she could drink as much as she liked. I would buy some clothes for my boys - they sometimes ran around without anything on. The rest I would give to Valli.

She came running out as I got near to the hut. 'Oh, you have come then! I was so worried!'

I felt proud, like a brave soldier returning from war. 'Why worry? You know that I am strong.'

'I know. But Muthu, who went with you to give one of his kidneys, died yesterday in Bangalore. Velu has brought his body back.'

I shrugged. 'I am here, isn't it? Come here.'

I put the jasmine flowers in her hair, and held her close to me. 'You look beautiful, Valli.'

She laughed and escaped from my arms. 'Later,' she said.

I followed her with a smile.

Tonight, I thought.

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I took a deep breath. Maybe not. I felt exhausted.
Tomorrow.
Surely tomorrow.

- THE END -

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