

– The Clover Street Trio

Jen, Linda and Kate lived in Clover Street. They were always together. Because there were three of them, everyone called them the Clover Street Trio. Some days they hunted in the clover that grew along the street. “My grandmother says that if you find a four-leaf clover, you will have good luck,” Jen said.

“We don’t need a four-leaf clover,” Kate said, “because we have good luck now. We live in Clover Street.” “If we want to skate, our pavement is just right,” said Jen. “It’s good for skipping too,” said Kate. “And there is no better place to sit in the sun and talk to your friends.”

One morning there was a new girl in school. Mrs Hunter said, “This is Trudy, I hope all of you will make her feel at home.” “I’ll show her where to put her coat,” Johnny said. “I’ll show her where we keep our lunches,” said Bob.

That afternoon, the Clover Street Trio saw Trudy going into the block of flats across the street from where they lived. “Look!” said Jen. “It’s the new girl, Trudy.” “I wonder if she moved into the flats,” Kate said. “Should we ask her if she wants to join us?” No one answered.

The Clover Street Trio skated up and down the block. Trudy watched them but they didn’t look at her. After a while she turned around and went inside. The three girls sat on the steps.

“Imagine how horrid it would be if you two and Trudy were the Clover Street Trio and I had to stand and watch you have fun,” Linda said softly. “Do you think we would have more fun if we asked Trudy to play?” Jen asked. “Maybe four would be better than three,” Linda said.

The next morning Kate, Jen and Linda waited for Trudy. “Do you want to walk with us?” they said. “Do you like skating?” Linda asked. Trudy nodded. “Do you like skipping?” Jen asked. Trudy nodded again. “What have you got in your lunch bag?” Kate asked.

When they reached the school, they all went inside together. “Here comes the Clover Street Trio,” said Bob. “We have a new name now,” Kate said. “We’re the Four-Leaf Clovers.”

– The Story of Oliver Twist

One night, a long time ago, a boy called Oliver Twist was born. His mother died very soon afterwards and, for the first years of his life, Oliver lived with a woman who looked after orphans.

When he was nine he went to a workhouse to learn a trade with other boys of his age. There was never enough food at the workhouse and the boys were always hungry. Day after day the boys ate a thin soup called gruel.

One night, Oliver went up to the master of the workhouse. “Please, sir, he asked. “Can I have some more?” nobody had ever asked for more before. The master was very angry. He hit Oliver on the head and locked him up in a dark little room for weeks. When Oliver got out, he went to work for Ms Sowerberry who made coffins and got dead bodies ready for burial.

After a fight with Ms Sowerberry’s assistant, Oliver ran away to London. It was a long journey and when he got there he was weak with hunger and his feet were bleeding. As he sat shivering in a doorway, a boy came up to him. “Do you want something to eat? Do you want somewhere to stay?” he asked. “I know an old man who’ll give you a free place to stay.”

“My name’s Jack but people call me the Artful Dodger,” said the boy as Oliver followed him home. There was a big group of boys living with the old man called Fagin. He gave Oliver a mattress to sleep on and a job to do, and Oliver was very grateful.

Every day Oliver had to sort out the things that the boys brought home. He did not know that Fagin and the boys were thieves and the things he sorted out were stolen goods!

One day Oliver was walking in the street with Jack and another boy. Outside a bookshop Jack put his hand into a man’s pocket. He pulled out a silk handkerchief and the boys ran away. Oliver did not know what to do, so he ran away too. The man shouted, “stop thief!”

Oliver did not run fast enough. He was caught and taken to the nearest magistrate, who wanted to send him to jail. Luckily for Oliver, the bookseller had seen the thieves. “This boy is innocent,” he told the magistrate.

Oliver was thrown into the street. There Mr Brownlow found him. Mr Brownlow was the man whose handkerchief had been stolen. “You look ill, my boy,” he said. “Come home with me.” Oliver stayed at Mr Brownlow’s house until he was better.

Meanwhile Fagin was very angry. “We must find Oliver Twist,” he said. “He knows too much. He’ll tell the police about us.” Fagin sent for Nancy, another one of his thieves. “Go to the police station,” He said. “Pretend to be Oliver’s sister and find out where he went.”

At the police station, Nancy cried and cried. A policeman felt sorry for her and told her where Mr Brownlow’s house was. Fagin and his gang waited outside the house. When Oliver walked down the street, they dragged him back to Fagin’s den of thieves.

Fagin decided to turn Oliver into a thief. He sent Oliver out with Bill Sikes and another man to rob a big house outside London. Bill Sikes held a gun to Oliver’s head. “Climb through that window. Then open the door and let us in,” he said.

Oliver climbed into the house. But he decided to warn the people in the house about the robbery. Suddenly there was major confusion. A man in the house shot Oliver in the arm. The thieves had to run away. Bill grabbed Oliver and dragged him out of the house. He left Oliver in a ditch to die. When morning came Oliver crawled out of the ditch. He stumbled slowly along a road until he came to a house. It was the house that the thieves had tried to rob. A man came out. “There’s the thief! I shot him,” he said.

Just then a young woman called Rose, came out. She called a doctor and then she looked after Oliver until his arm was better. She went with him to see Mr Brownlow. She told Mr Brownlow that Nancy had come to see her. Nancy liked Oliver, and she was sorry that she had helped Fagin to catch him again. She told Rose about one of Fagin’s friends called Monks who wanted to kill Oliver. Monk’s father had left some of his money for Oliver and Monks did not want to share.

Rose and Mr Brownlow met Nancy near London Bridge and she told them where to find Monks. Poor Nancy lost her life for her good deed. When Bill Sikes heard what she had done, he shot her.

Mr Brownlow found Monks. “I know all about you,” he said. “I have a document here for you to sign, giving Oliver his share of your father’s money. If you don’t sign it, I’ll tell the police about you. I know you have lived a bad life.” Monks knew that he would be hanged if the police caught him, so he signed the document.

Oliver went to live with Mr Brownlow in the countryside, where his life was happy and his future bright.

And what happened to Fagin? The police caught him and broke up his gang. Bill Sikes was killed trying to escape. Oliver was safe from them forever.

– On The Way To The Sun

He had journeyed a long way, and was very tired. It seemed like a dream when he stood up after a sleep in the field, and looked over the wall, and saw the garden, and the flowers, and the children playing all about. He looked at the long road behind him, at the dark wood and the barren hills; it was the world to which he belonged. He looked at the garden before him, at the big house, and the terrace, and the steps that led down to the smooth lawn, it was the world which belonged to the children.

"Poor boy," said the elder child, "I will get you something to eat."

"But where did he come from?" the gardener asked.

"We do not know," the child answered; "but he is very hungry, and mother says we may give him some food."

"I will take him some milk," said the little one; in one hand she carried a mug and with the other she pulled along her little broken cart.

"But what is he called?" asked the gardener.

"We do not know," the little one answered; "but he is very thirsty, and mother says we may give him some milk."

"Where is he going?" asked the gardener.

"We do not know," the children said; "but he is very tired."

When the boy had rested well, he got up saying, "I must not stay any longer," and turned to go on his way.

"What have you to do?" the children asked.

"I am one of the crew, and must help to make the world go round," he answered.

"Why do we not help too?"

"You are the passengers."

"How far have you to go?" they asked.

"Oh, a long way!" he answered. "On and on until I can touch the sun."

"Will you really touch it?" they said, awestruck.

"I dare say I shall tire long before I get there," he answered sadly. "Perhaps without knowing it, though, I shall reach it in my sleep," he added. But they hardly heard the last words, for he was already far off.

"Why did you talk to him?" the gardener said. "He is just a working boy."

"And we do nothing! It was very good of him to notice us," they said, humbly.

"Good!" said the gardener in despair. "Why, between you and him there is a great difference."

"There was only a wall," they answered. "Who set it up?" they asked curiously.

"Why, the builders, of course. Men set it up."

"And who will pull it down?"

"It will not want any pulling down," the man answered grimly. "Time will do that."

As the children went back to their play, they looked up at the light towards which the boy was journeying.

– The Hole In The Wall

Long, long ago people lived next to a lagoon at the mouth of a river. They were cattle owners but they also hunted wild animals and caught fish in the lagoon. The lagoon was made by a wall of rocks that stopped the river from flowing straight into the sea. The people were happy where they lived. The only thing they feared was the wild sea on the other side of the rocks. They were frightened of the big waves and the sharp rocks. They were frightened of the strong tides and the water that could sweep people away. They warned their children not to go past the wall of rocks near the sea. They told their children stories about the sea, people who would rise up from the sea and steal human beings off the land. The children were terrified. They obeyed their elders and stayed away from the sea.

But there was one maiden who did not obey. She loved the sea. She loved to sit on the wall of rocks and look out across the water as the great waves crashed and splashed beneath her. She loved the colours of the sea, the way it changed from green to blue to grey as the weather changed. She even went down to the sea at night to watch the waves in the moonlight. One night as she was sitting at the edge of the sea, she saw someone walking out of the waves. He was as tall as she was. His eyes were the colour of the sea. His long hair wrapped like seaweed around his shoulders. Although she had never seen anyone like him before, she was not afraid.

The man came closer. Then he spoke to her. He had a soft gentle voice. He said that he had seen her often at the water's edge and he thought she was beautiful. He wanted to marry her. The maiden liked his gentle voice and his kind eyes. She thought he was handsome. She agreed to marry him/ she hurried back to her family to ask her father. But her father was angry. He said that he could not allow her to marry one of the sea people. He said he would not pay lobola to the sea people and give them his cattle. He told her never go near the sea again. But the maiden did not obey her father. She went down to the sea that night and she told the young man what her father had said. The young man was sad. But after a while he said that he had a plan. He told the girl to wait for him the next night. She was to wait on the top of the wall of rocks, not at the edge of the sea.

The next night the maiden sat waiting on the rocks. She saw a great shape coming out of the water. It was an enormous sea snake. There were rows and rows of people on its back. They were shouting at the sea snake and telling it to move forward. As she listened to them, the maiden heard the sound of her own people behind her. They were calling her to come back. But she did not go back. She ran forward.

Then she saw what the sea people were doing. They were using the serpent to break the wall of rock that kept the sea from the lagoon. They charged at the wall again and again. Each time a little more of the wall broke away. A hole began to form in the middle. As the hole got bigger, the sea rushed in. Soon the lagoon was not separate from the sea any more.

When the hole was big enough, a great wave washed the serpent and the sea people into the lagoon. Just behind the serpent's head stood the handsome young man. The maiden ran into his arms. As he lifted her up, the serpent turned and they all disappeared under the sea. The land people were sad and they cried and looked all over for the girl. But she did not come back. For many days after she was gone, the girl's family dreamt about her every night. In their dreams she was happy because the sea people were kind to her.

And the hole in the wall? It is still there. You can see it if you go to a place on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape called esiKhaleni. The sea rushes and roars through it. Each year it gets a little bigger. And people say that at night when the tide is high, you can still hear the voices of the sea people.

– Maya Wins The Day

“But Ammah,” I heard my sister Maya crying, “why? Why can’t I?” “Because it’s not right. You’re a girl. And girls must stay at home and help around the house. Who is going to help me with Seema and Anand and Meena if you go to school? The ayah has gone back to her village and I need help.” I heard Maya give mother a long loud wail and then I heard the crashing of pots and pans in the kitchen.

My sister Maya is twelve years old and I am just ten. Oh, I forgot to tell you, my name is Raju, and we live in a small village on the east coast of India. Maya has been going to school with me for the last four years. She loves school, much more than I do. I would rather be playing cricket or climbing trees or fishing with my friends in the river. But every time you look for Maya, she is with her books. She says she is going to be a teacher one day. But Ammah just laughs at that. “Who is going to take a girl for a teacher?” she asks. “You’ve got big ideas.”

Maya’s favourite place is the big tamarind tree and every afternoon after she has helped Ammah with the cooking and cleaning, you can find her reading under the tree. In fact, every spare moment she gets, you can find her under the tree. This drives Ammah mad.

“Maya! Maya!” you can hear Ammah calling every afternoon. “Where is Seema? Where is Anand? And where is Meena? Bring them in for their baths.” And I would hear Maya close her book with a bang, give a long sigh and get up to look for the younger children. Soon I would hear the sound of water splashing in the bath and the children’s sound of delight. And Maya’s gentle voice scolding them to be careful not to slip.

My sister Maya is very special. She is one of the few girls in our village that goes to school. Most parents in our village don’t believe that girls should go to school. Boys, yes! Girls, No! But Maya begged and pleaded and cried at my father’s feet for days. And Maya is his favourite child. He tries not to show it but we know. So finally, after much crying and begging, he gave in. We heard him talking with Ammah long into the night. And the next morning Maya was sitting at the breakfast table with a clean dress on, her long hair neatly braided and her face shining. She was ready to go to school with me.

But now what was the matter? I listened to Ammah and Appah talking that night. I heard Ammah say that Maya was now ready to be married and this school nonsense must stop. I heard Appah try to argue but Ammah silenced him. And Maya got thinner and thinner with unhappiness. She put her books away. She no longer sat under the tamarind tree. And she no longer laughed when she bathed the little ones. I tried to talk to her but she would just look away, her eyes full of tears. Our house was full of unhappiness.

I don’t know what would have happened if Mrs Bimal had not visited our village. She was the sister of our village priest and lived in a village further down the coast. Mrs Bimal was not in our village two days when she heard about Maya. She came to visit Ammah one hot afternoon. I saw them talking and I heard Maya’s name mentioned.

When Ammah said goodbye to Mrs Bimal that afternoon, she was smiling for the first time in weeks. Mrs Bimal came to visit every afternoon after that. The talks with Appah continued at night, but the tone was different, lighter and happier. When Mrs Bimal left for her village, Ammah looked quite sad to see her go.

And when school started again, Maya was ready in her brand new school uniform. “What did Mrs Bimal say to Ammah?” I asked Maya. “Never mind now, Raju,” she said to me. “I’m just so happy to be going to school. I’ll tell you later.”

– Animal Rhymes

Funny birds

We are the birds
Who just can't fly!
With wings so small
We can't get high.

If you think about it
It's just not fair!
Look at the other birds
Up in the air!

But we don't care
What other birds do!
We like being different!
How about you?

Zebra in fashion

Funky Zebra,
Could not decide
On only one colour
For his hide!
So this Zebra,
Splendid horse, chose black and white stripes,
Of course!

The tadpole

A teeny, tiny tadpole
Swam around the garden pool.
The tadpole was so skinny,
The water green and cool.

First he grew his back legs.
Then he grew his front.
He swished his tail around.
He liked to dive and hunt.

Each day his tail grew smaller,
His legs grew long and lean.
He was the finest green frog,
The world has ever seen.

Grasshopper

With a jump, and a jump
And a jumpity jump,
The grasshopper lands
With a bumpity bump!

With a whirr of his wings
He can fly so high,
From the brown, brown earth
To the blue, blue sky!

With a bite and a crunch
And a munchity munch,
The grasshopper eats
His lunch, lunch, lunch!

A blade of grass
Or a leaf he will bite,
You have never seen
Such an appetite!

– Lucas' Journey

Before you read this story, there are two things you should know about Lucas. The first thing is he is very, very afraid of the dark. The second thing is that he loves adventures and journeys very, very much. What are you afraid of? What do you love doing?

Every night when Lucas went to sleep his Mama read him a nice story. He loved stories about monsters, caves and fantastic journeys. Mostly, after his Mama finished the story, Lucas went to sleep. He dreamt of great adventures and journeys. He saw monsters, he went into caves, he fought with dragons. All in his dreams.

But sometimes Lucas could not sleep. Then he would lie in bed. It would get darker and darker and Lucas would get more and more afraid. And he would crawl under the blankets. He would hide at the bottom of his bed. When he felt too hot and sleepy he would come out and try to fall asleep.

One day Mama read Lucas his story, said goodnight and switched off the light. But Lucas could not sleep. And Lucas got scared. He dived to the bottom of his bed and covered his head with the blanket.

But there was something down there. At the bottom of the bed there was a big, black hole. Lucas was very, very frightened. But he was also curious. He decided to be brave. He wanted an adventure. He would climb down the hole and find out what was there. Thud!

He came to a door. There were three buttons and a sign that said: Press one button. If you press the wrong one Lucas looked at the silver and gold button. He pressed the silver button. The door opened. He walked into a magical night. He saw silver dragons singing. Fairies and angels were laughing and playing. All sorts of amazing creatures were happily having fun.

“Lucas, this is what happens when it’s dark,” said a silver dragon and tickled him. “No need to be afraid again,” said a purple fairy.

Lucas spent hours playing in the magical night. When he was tired, he went back into the tunnel. He climbed through the hole. He was never afraid of the dark again!

– Masha And The Mushrooms

Two little sisters were walking home from gathering mushrooms when they came to a railway track. They climbed over a fence and were crossing the rail when, from out of nowhere, a great locomotive whistled shrilly. The two little girls were scared out of their wits. The elder sister dashed forward to the middle of the track. “Masha, Masha!” cried the older sister. “Go on, go on. Cross the track quickly.”

But the train was making such a loud noise that Masha could not hear properly. As she turned towards her sister, the poor girl stumbled and fell. Mushrooms from her basket scattered all over the railway track. Masha tried to gather them. The train was getting closer and closer. The driver shouted and pulled the whistle for all he was worth. Masha’s sister was screaming frantically to her: “Leave the mushrooms, Masha! Oh, let them be!” All Masha heard was “the mushrooms” and so she went crawling along the track on hands and knees, picking them up. There was nothing anyone could do.

Masha’s sister could not bear to look as the train sped past. She hid her head in her hands in horror. The passengers stared from the windows, their faces white with shock. The guard peered back along the track to see what had become of the poor girl. There she was, face pressed to the ground, lying motionless between the rails. And then as the train rumbled on its way, Masha lifted her head, picked up the rest of her mushrooms, and ran off, unharmed, to her sister.

