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## A HORRIBLE EVENING

**T**ikira started to eat even without having a change after coming back home from the paddy field. It was a busy day and he couldn't ignore his father's orders all day. He worked with his father in the paddy field thinking that it was better if he studied properly at school, without playing truant with friends.

Learning was the hardest thing for such a lazy boy. But now he feels that working in the paddy field is a bigger curse than learning.

Because he was so tired, he hadn't an appetite to eat. As his mother was in the kitchen he couldn't throw away the food on his plate. If he did, there would be an annoying lecture from his mother. The lecture would include stuff like how hard it was to grow a single plant, how the farmers worked hard to make rice and another wonderful story about the consequences of wasting food. That story went like this; one day, a woman saw a rice grain fallen on the ground and she didn't care to pick it up and keep it in a proper place. As a punishment for not doing so, she became a cow in the next birth and had to do hard work, ploughing in the fields. Not only that, but also after her death, the cow's bones were used to make a scarecrow to scare away the birds who were coming to the paddy field. Even the bones were punished for the sin that was done by the woman.

"If a single rice grain could bring such a disaster, what would happen if I threw away the whole plate? No no. That can't happen," Tikira thought and went to the place where mother put rice for the birds and squirrels. "Nothing will happen if I put this for the squirrels. That will reduce the wastage." That feeling made him relieved. Always there are little birds and squirrels looking for some foods. There were also some crows. But Tikira's mother chased away the crows and she didn't let them eat the food. Tikira was so surprised about her unkindness towards crows.

After having his meal Tikira went looking for his mother. Mother was talking with a villager.

"Oh really! I also heard about it but I never believed it," *Tikira* heard his mother's voice.

"It's true, the whole village is talking about that incident. *Selesthina* has seen it with her own eyes. Now they are going to have an exorcism." The other person said excitedly.

What are they talking about? Tikira was so curious about the gossip. So he went closer to them to listen to it clearly.

"Now, tell me clearly, what has happened? How has she escaped?" Tikira was interested in by his mother's question because he was eager to listen to the story from the beginning.

"*Selesthina* has gone to the temple for the evening "Bodhi Puja" and she was on her way home. The time was about seven o'clock. You know that she has to come through the jungle when she comes back home. So she came with her daughter. Suddenly she could feel that there was someone behind her. Also she had heard the sound of footsteps. She was sure it was a devil. She had run until she found her home. The daughter says it could have been a wild boar. But *Selesthina* says that she was sure that was a devil."

The story gave goosebumps to Tikira. Is there a devil in the village? What a terrible incident was that?

"I'm not going to go anywhere after six again." He promised himself.

After his mother came inside, he went to her and asked "Mother, is there a devil in the village? Do devils really exist?"

"I don't think so. *Selestina* may have been scared of something else. You don't worry about it. Now go and have a change," She said without caring much about the look of disbelief in his face.

In the evening Tikira was lighting the lamps. At the same time father came back home from the paddy field, but he looked so tired and weak.

"Father are you all right?" Tikira came close to his father and asked.

"I'm not feeling well today. I'm struggling with my wheeze. Tikira go to *veda seeya* and bring the *ayurvedic* oil that he gives. I think my medicine is over."

All the villagers went to "veda seeya" to get the medicines. Tikira had to

go before father's condition gets worse. But there was a problem. The time was six in the evening and to meet "veda seeya" he should pass the cemetery. He shivered when he remembered the story that he heard in the evening. But he had no choice because of father's condition.

Anyhow he gathered all his courage and started to go to "weda seeya's" place.

While he was going he imagined the devil who followed *Selestina* following him. Not only that but all the other stories that he heard about "mohini", "kalukumaraya", "mahasona" and many other terrible experiences shared by his friends came to his mind one by one.

When he was passing the cemetery, he ran past it as if someone was chasing him. Even he didn't know himself that he could run that fast. Anyhow he arrived at "veda seeya's" home and collected the medicine for his father.

He was so relaxed. "I even passed the cemetery alone. If there was a devil he could easily catch me. There are no devils. All the stories are myths. I'm an intelligent person. I must not believe such stupid stories. Everyone should know I'm a brave person" He was talking with himself so proudly. But suddenly after passing the cemetery, he could feel that there was someone coming behind him.

"Oh my god! The devil has heard what I said and he is there to prove to me that there are devils. Now what should I do?" he shivered with fear and murmured. He tried to imagine the face of the devil. "He should be ugly and horrible. He may have a wide mouth and long teeth. He is coming behind me to eat my flesh and drink my blood. May be he had already killed someone. What will happen to my mother after my death? I'm the only child. I can imagine how she would embrace my body and cry" those fearful thoughts were in a turmoil in his mind. He started to walk faster and he felt that the devil also was moving behind him at the same pace as he was. He was scared to look behind.

He started to recite a Buddhist *gatha* loudly. He had heard that the devils can be expelled with such gathas. So he recited them as loud as he could. But it was useless. Still that thing was coming behind him.

At the same time something came to his mind. Once an old man who came to work in their paddy field told that, if you scold a devil in bad words he would stop coming behind you. So Tikira thought to try that as well to escape from this ordeal.

Then he started to blame the devil with every single bad word that he knew. Those words were more obsessive than the devil. Gradually the sound of the footsteps became fainter. Finally it worked! We always can't ignore the myths. Sometimes they are true. Finally he came back home safely. As soon as he came, he told the mysterious incident that he faced on his way home.

"Did you see someone?" his mother asked Tikira while gazing at him keenly.

"He had a big mouth and the mouth was full of fangs. Blood was everywhere on his body. He tried to catch me but I was brave enough to escape from that. I knew the method to escape." He talked so proudly about his victory.

"What was the trick that you used?" Father asked Tikira with a sarcastic voice because he knew his son better than anyone else. "I blamed it with the worst words that I knew. He was scared and ran away. Now I'm the bravest person in this village. I fought with a devil and I could escape. You both should be proud of your son." Tikira was boasting. Suddenly someone knocked on the door.

Tikira's father looked at mother as if to ask who is there at this moment. Mother went and opened the door. Chief Monk of the temple and the 'abiththaya' were standing in front of their door. Mother hurried to the room and brought a white cloth to welcome the monk.

“Tikira, are you drunk?” the supporter of the monk asked from Tikira with a strange tone.

“Why did you ask that kind of a question as soon as you entered the house?” Tikira's father wondered with that question and asked from the *abiththaya*.

“I guessed it. Hamuduruwo and I came behind him a few minutes ago. He didn't give us a chance to talk to him and he was so fast. But when we got closer he started to blame us with terrible words and ran so fast.” The reply of the supporter made everyone look at Tikira. There was a stupid smile on his face just as he did whenever he did something foolish.

