

Mithu' s Treasure

Mithu, the little bird, loved to do many things:

To peck at pebbles, dried up leaves, and juicy berries in the spring;
To chase grasshoppers and crickets, and to flap its tiny wings so fast, making a huge, smoky cloud of dust that made everyone cough and sneeze;
To listen to the sound of water in the nearby river, or to trace the dark tree-trunks where soft, pillowy mushrooms grow; To sing while watching the dewdrops sparkling in the morning sun and the murky, blue hills beyond the woods fading away into the evening sky.

Mithu lived in a warm and cozy nest, nicely balanced on an old maple tree. The nest was built piece by piece by collecting sticks, grasses, cattails, and feathers and putting them in the perfect order. Inside the nest were Mithu's treasures, from glowing bugs to fluffy feathers to smooth rocks, even a pack of nuts for emergencies; they were hidden under the velvety mushroom that calmed Mithu into sleep in the night.

The maple tree was next to the breezy and sparkling river that ran through the forest. It was full of leaves that hid and protected Mithu and the nest from the hot sun of the summer and the cold wind of the fall. In the spring, the leaves sprouted, waxy, light green, and all new. As the fall came, they changed into shades of yellow, red, and brown. Mithu loved to borrow a few of the finest maple leaves to decorate its own nest. But what Mithu loved the most was the sweet maple syrup; when mixed with fresh snow, the syrup made the juiciest and sweetest icicles. That meant that in the height of the cold winter, when all fresh fruits and nuts had gone to long winter sleep, Mithu could enjoy homemade ice pops!

But, one stormy day in the fall changed everything.

Mithu woke up that morning to the sound of thunder and lightning. There was heavy rain coming down like an explosion. Mithu could hear the maple tree's

painful wailing against the crippling wind: “squeeeeaak, squeeeeaak.” The wind swayed the tree in every direction, twisting and whirling the branches like helpless straws, pulling and tearing the leaves.

Mithu looked around the nest, searching for cover. The bouncy mushroom that lulled Mithu to sleep every night had fallen upside down. The smooth rocks were scattered all over the nest’s floor. The bottle of glowing bugs and the bundle of fluffy feathers had come undone and were flying around.

Outside the nest, the wind kept on blowing, and the rain kept on pouring; the maple tree kept on squeaking, and Mithu’s nest kept on shaking. Before long, Mithu saw the wind snatching the first stick out of its nest. After that, it was only a matter of time before the whole nest would break into pieces. Mithu had to let go. It flew up into a small hole in the trunk of the maple tree. From there, Mithu watched the nest crumbling down in pieces onto the ground below.

The storm stopped the following day, but the nest was gone. The only sign that it had ever been there was a light patch on the branch. For Mithu, it was not just a nest; it was home. Mithu built it with great care and treasured it too. It was the place where Mithu ate, slept, and sang. It was where Mithu felt safe and happy.

Overwhelmed by everything that had happened, Mithu just sat on a branch next to the hole; it felt too upset, too hungry, and too wet to do anything. That is when Ms. Nightingale, the school teacher, paid a visit to Mithu.

“There you are! How are you doing? Are you OK?” asked Ms. Nightingale as she perched on the branch next to Mithu.

“I am OK, Ms. Nightingale. I held on to the tree, and nothing happened to me,” Mithu said, trying not to cry.

“Hmm... you say nothing happened to you. But you are sad. That means something did happen. What happened?” asked Ms. Nightingale.

Mithu flew down to where the nest had been and pecked on the bark: “this is where my nest was,” it said.

“Oh, Mithu, your nest is gone,” Ms. Nightingale exclaimed, flying down to sit next to Mithu once again.

“Yes, it is gone, and I could not save it. I tried to hold on to it, to my bed and my treasures. But I could not. I was not strong enough. I left and flew away. I should have stayed and tried harder,” Mithu said.

“Are you blaming yourself for what happened to the nest?” Ms. Nightingale asked. She sounded concerned.

“I wish I stayed and tried harder. I wish I could save my nest. But I did not stay,” Mithu said, sounding defeated.

Ms. Nightingale kept silent. Together, they looked down at the broken branches and leaves on the ground, and the muddy patches on the maple tree, listened to the roaring sound of the overflowing river.

‘Have you seen that sometimes the flowers of this maple tree struggle to bloom, sometimes the petals are twisted or torn, or some buds take longer to bloom?’ Ms. Nightingale asked.

Mithu could not understand what Ms. Nightingale was trying to say. But, Mithu knew Ms. Nightingale was trying to help; thus, Mithu responded anyway: ‘Yes, I have Ms. Nightingale. I have seen that some of the buds do not bloom like others, some take more time, some do not bloom fully.’

‘When a flower struggles to bloom, there is no point in blaming the flower’ Ms. Nightingale sounded thoughtful.

'Every flower wants to bloom. No flower will risk it if the flower can help it. So, instead of blaming the flower, how about it if we look around to find what disturbed the flower and then see if we can change things so that the flower can bloom the best way it can?' she suggested.

'So, it is not the flower's fault that it fails to bloom?' this time, it was Mithu who sounded thoughtful.

'Well, what do you think?' Ms. Nightingale returned the question to Mithu, with a warm glance.

After some time sitting quietly together, Ms. Nightingale turned to Mithu and probed: "May I ask what broke your nest? What made it so hard for you to save it?"

"The wind. More than the rain, it was the wind. Even the maple tree lost so many branches to it" Mithu replied.

"Aha!" said Ms. Nightingale. "Even a big maple tree could not fight back? That means it indeed was an intense wind."

"Yes, it was. It broke the tree's branches like dried straw!" Mithu answered.

"Really?" exclaimed Ms. Nightingale. "If that was the case, can you really blame yourself for losing your nest?"

"I guess not," Mithu said reflectively. "But I lost everything, Ms. Nightingale. I could not save anything!"

"Hmm... I do not think that is true. I think you did save something really, really precious," Ms. Nightingale said, with a serious look on her face.

"I did? What? What did I save?" Mithu asked.

"You saved yourself. A nest can be re-made. Treasures can be re-collected. But you are not replaceable," said Ms. Nightingale and gave Mithu a warm hug.

Let' s be creative and reflect. . .

1. In the story Mithu has a lot of treasures like glowing bugs, fluffy feathers and colorful leaves. But Ms Nightingale has a different idea about Mithu's real treasure. Would you agree with Ms Nightingale? Can you describe why you would agree, or disagree with her?

2. The story tells us of the damage the storm causes. Moreover, the process of recovery and rebuilding the forest after the storm has not started yet. What do you think Mithu needs right away to begin healing?

3. Imagine that Mithu is one of your best friends and that you meet Mithu soon after the storm. What do you imagine the two of you doing together?

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