



RANGEELA FINDS A HOME

by

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Robber was staring at the ground and taking small, mincing steps. Navjyot guessed he had spotted a bird or a mouse.

“Stop! Stay! Robber, you naughty cat!” he yelled and ran out of the house.

Crouched low, with his tail up in the air, Robber fixed green blazing eyes on Navjyot and let out an angry meow.

“Scoot! Ask Nimi to feed you!” Navjyot shooed Robber away and picked up the bundle of green feathers. The parrot was alive but its eyes were shut and it did not move. It was burning up with fever. Its feet were tied with a thin wire and there was a string around its neck. One wing was injured.

Navjyot took the parrot into his room and placed it on the table. He sprinkled some water over it. The parrot did not stir. But for the tiny movement of the chest, it looked dead.

Navjyot sprinkled some more water and started fanning the parrot with a cardboard sheet. The parrot opened its eyes and shut them again. Navjyot held a saucer with water to its beak and patiently waited for it to take a few sips. He cut away the string and removed the wire. He also applied antiseptic cream on the cuts left by the wire.

“What do you have here?” Nimi asked, making Navjyot jump. He hadn’t heard her come in. She was holding Robber in her arms and he was wriggling.

“Take your cat out!” Navjyot hissed, picking up the parrot.

“Is that a parrot? May I hold him?” Nimi asked.

“No. Now leave.”

“Navjyot, don’t be mean! All I want is to hold the parrot. Does it speak?”

When Navjyot refused to give her the parrot, she stuck out her tongue at him and threatened, “I’ll tell Grandpa!”

Navjyot got rid of her and locked the door. He fed the parrot some more water and some nuts. He remembered parrots loved guavas. He would get one from the kitchen. When he opened the door, Robber was sitting on the doormat. “You monster cat, stay away from my parrot,” he warned.

The parrot did not eat the fruit. It did not get up on its feet either. Navjyot took the parrot to a vet. The vet was hopeful. “He’s young and strong. He’ll live.” For the next five days, Navjyot gave the parrot medicines, handfed him and guarded him from Robber.

Robber continued to try to get into Navjyot’s room. He almost succeeded getting in through the window except that the parrot gave a loud squawk.

Robber’s behavior led to many a quarrel between Nimi and Navjyot. Navjyot wanted Nimi to mind Robber and keep him away from the parrot. Nimi said he was being mean to her.

“Robber is always outside my door. Someday I’ll step on him!” Navjyot threatened.

Nimi ran to Grandpa. “Navjyot says he will murder Robber! Tell him he is not to even look at Robber.”

Navjyot was fed up of playing hide and seek with Robber. He had an idea. “Grandpa, may I move into the room outside?”

The room was actually a long verandah with a sloping roof, enclosed with a trellis set in a two foot high wall, with a door at the centre. Navjyot knew his father had used it as a boy.

Grandpa agreed. "History is repeating itself. The verandah was converted into a room because your father and his sister, Nimi's mother, were always squabbling. He said she did not let him work on his science projects and she complained he was being selfish and mean, and excluding her."

The room was filled with old furniture and junk. Grandpa told Bond to make it ready for Navjyot to move in.

Bond did all the work in the house. He cooked, cleaned, did the gardening, marketing, and anything else that came up. Grandpa had given him shelter and employment when he was homeless and looking for work.

Bond cleared out the room. Grandpa told him to keep the furniture Navjyot could use and remove everything else to the junkyard. Navjyot selected a bunk bed, a bookshelf, a cupboard, a table, and a chair. The cupboard and the table were a little damaged but Bond was handy with tools. He repaired them and also patched up the roof.

Navjyot found a bird cage in the pile of junk. It was twisted and the door did not shut properly. Bond straightened it out with a pair of strong pliers and a hammer. Navjyot painted it red. Nimi found a tennis racket she liked and Bond promised to repair it.

"That bird cage belonged to your mother," Grandpa told Nimi.

"Navjyot! Give me the cage. It's mine!" Nimi demanded.

But when Grandpa told her that the tennis racket had belonged to Navjyot's father, she agreed to let him have the bird cage.

Navjyot took the cage into his room. The parrot was pecking at the bowl of grain. He cocked his head to one side and watched Navjyot come closer. Navjyot placed the cage on the table and propped open the door.

He said, "I don't like to keep you in a cage because birds are meant to fly. But Robber is always lurking around you. He will snap you up at the first chance he gets. Please get inside the cage. You will be safe. When you are strong enough to fly, I'll set you free."

Navjyot liked talking to the parrot. The parrot always had a listening appearance and fixed an eye on Navjyot when he spoke. It did not matter that he did not understand a word.

"Step into the cage whenever you feel comfortable with the idea," Navjyot said. The parrot immediately hopped inside the cage. Navjyot was delighted. Now he could carry the parrot with him instead of confining him to the room. He did not have to worry about Robber either.

Navjyot's new room was ready in three days. Though Bond helped, Navjyot did most of the work. The room and the furniture had a fresh coat of paint and Grandpa ordered new mattresses for the bunk bed.

The parrot had also helped. Navjyot had shown him the color chart and asked him to pick the colors for the room. He had touched green and yellow with his beak!

Nimi insisted Grandpa should get her room painted in black because Robber put his paw on black in the color chart. When Grandpa refused, she sulked until he promised to buy her a new cat bed if she did some chores for him.

Navjyot hung the parrot cage from a wooden rafter in the ceiling. He also put up a sign on the door, "CATS and complaining GIRLS NOT ALLOWED."

Nimi rushed to Grandpa. He pointed out, "You're allowed if you stop complaining."

Navjyot was fond of cycling and since he'd come to live with Grandpa, he often cycled to different places. Now he placed the bird cage in the basket and took the parrot along with him. He often rode to the backwaters of the river, where it was always cool and green. There were birds too.

One afternoon, Navjyot took the parrot out of the cage and said, "Fly away if you want to."

The parrot hopped right back into the cage.

"Don't you want to leave?"

The parrot shook his head. Navjyot was delighted, "Can you understand me?" he asked again and again. The parrot closed his eyes and slept.

"Stupid of me," Navjyot murmured. The parrot opened his eyes and nodded.

Navjyot burst out laughing. He hadn't laughed like this since he'd come to live with Grandpa. He told the parrot, "I am going to talk to you. You're a good listener. I can't even speak to Nimi. She's either making me play with her dolls or running to Grandpa with complaints.

"My parents are in South Africa. That's very far away. You will love it there. Or maybe not. African parrots are bigger. They may bully you."

The parrot cocked his head. He looked attentive. Navjyot laughed. "Looks like you're listening. Grandpa asked my parents to send me here. Nimi's parents are also abroad. They're in America and Nimi's been with Grandpa for eight months. Grandpa thought we would be good company to each other. She's eight and I'm ten. But I think he got tired of her complaints."

The parrot softly squawked in sympathy.

Navjyot was delighted. "You know Bond? Bond makes the best *parathas*."

(paratha: flatbread made out of wheat dough)

The parrot squawked loudly.

"You agree! Now, let me tell you about the dog. You've seen the dog outside the kitchen. Bond had been trying to name him for years. But that dog doesn't respond to any name. So he's only called Dog. He eats and sleeps. Funny isn't it?"

The parrot nodded.

"I would like to teach you to speak. I don't know what type of parrot you are. I've read some parrots can learn to speak very well. We'll try a few words but I don't want to force you."

The parrot fluffed his feathers and flapped his wings. When he settled down, Navjyot said, "I did not want to name you because I wanted to let you go. But it looks like you are staying for a while. What should I name you? You're so colorful. Bright green feathers with a streak of blue in them, orange-gold on your chest and a magnificent red beak. You're a beautiful bird. I should name you..."

"Rangeela."

"Rangeela is a good name! Rangeela means colourful. You are Rangeela!"

Navjyot suddenly realized that the parrot had spoken.

"You spoke?"

“Yes. I did.”

“But...”

“You’re a good looking boy. Your hair is dark and soft and your eyes are grey. They are ringed with black. You have long eyelashes. Your skin is light brown. You are a good looking boy.”

Navjyot stared. The parrot was talking but what was he saying? Why was he describing him?

“It is polite to return praise though foolish to praise the color of the feathers or the skin. We are born with them.”

“What?”

Rangeela winked, or rather blinked with one eye. “My opinion. I have opinions. I think about things.”

Was it a dream? Was someone playing a trick? Parrots could talk but not like this. In fact, Navjyot did not know of any human being either who said such things.

“Tell me about Nimi. Why is she so cross?” Rangeela asked.

“Her parents were away from home for long spells. She grew up with nannies and babysitters who allowed her to have her way all the time. Grandpa says she has not learnt how to share. Her parents sent her to Grandpa because though he is loving, he is strict. Nimi did not want to come. She is also mad because Grandpa will not listen to her.”

“Why did your parents send you? You do not look like trouble.”

“My father is an engineer. The company he works for posted him to South Africa for two years. My mother and I went with him but I did not like it there. When Grandpa asked my parents if they could send me to live with him, I insisted on coming.”

“Why does Nimi keep a cat? I don’t like people who love cats.”

Navjyot could see Rangeela’s point of view. He changed the topic.

“Rangeela, why did you not speak all these days?”

“I didn’t trust you. Now I do.”

“You do?”

“Yes. You are not like the bad men I was with. You will not hurt me.”

“What happened to you?”

“I was born in a forest. I was an inquisitive bird. I wanted to see what lay beyond the forest. I flew into a village and saw people living in houses. They were very different from the birds and animals of the forest. Alas, I soon learnt how different they were! They trapped foolish birds like me and sold them.

“The man who bought me trained me to speak. A talking parrot sells for a higher price than an ordinary parrot. He was cruel. He starved me unless I repeated the words. I would have practiced more if he was gentle because I enjoyed trying out new words. But he did not know how to be kind. I think he enjoyed hurting me.

“I learnt to speak and to understand speech. I was sold five times, each time for a higher price. One man dyed me in a different color and sold me. My eyes stung and my skin burnt. These men bought and sold birds and when they transported us in big cages over long distances, we went without food, water, and sunlight. Some of us died.

“The last buyer was a magician. He performed tricks on stage. He taught me to ride a small bicycle and to pick a lock. He had designed a fire trick. He would throw a bird into fire and it would magically reappear.

“When he bought me, he also had another parrot, Sheena. He wanted to train me to perform jointly with Sheena. Sheena was doing the fire trick. During practice one afternoon, the escape door got stuck and Sheena burnt to death. I saw it happen.

“The fire trick was very popular and the magician tried to train me for it but I was terrified. I refused to leave the cage. He decided to starve me. It did not work. Then he brought a candle to my cage. He meant to frighten me into obeying him but it scared me out of my mind. I started throwing myself against the cage and flapping my wings. When I hurt my wing, he removed me from the cage. I was limp with exhaustion. I was also ill. But not too ill to try to escape.

“He bound my feet with a thin wire and tied a thick string around my neck, with its other end knotted to the window bar. It was a mistake to use the string but I’m glad he made it. I bit through the string. I saw a covered van under the window. I squeezed through the narrow bars of the window and landed on the roof of the van.

“The van stopped near your house. It was scorching hot on the roof. I was thirsty and ill, and faint with hunger. I saw the guava tree in your garden and tried to fly to it but fell down. I think I fainted. Did Robber find me?”

“Yes.”

“He would have eaten me to my tail feathers! You saved my life.”

Navjyot did not speak for some minutes. Then he said, “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For what people have done to you. Shall I help you in returning to your birth-forest?”

“I don’t know. I’ll stay with you for some time. You must promise not to tell anyone I can speak.”

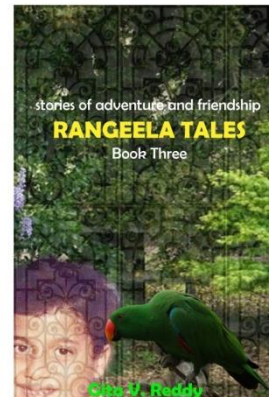
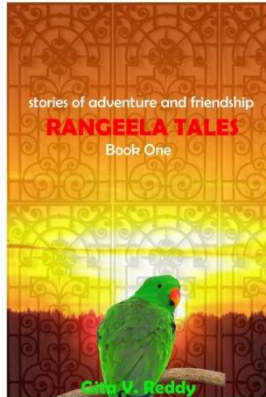
“I promise!” Navjyot said.

He understood why Rangeela did not want anyone to know. His experiences had made him fearful.

Navjyot kept his promise and Rangeela stayed with him for a long time. They became the best of friends and had many wonderful adventures together.

ABOUT RANGEELA TALES

Did you like meeting Navjyot and Rangeela? You can share in more of their adventures by reading Rangeela Tales –Book 1, Rangeela Tales – book 2, and Rangeela Tales – Book 3.



Amazon links:

Book 1 (99 cents/Free with Kindle Unlimited)

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The stories are also compiled in a single book.



Rangeela Tales – Complete Collection

Available as ebook and in Paperback.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gita V. Reddy writes for children of all ages. She has written three novels and six short story collections for children in the age group 9-14. Her Short Chapter Book Series is aimed at young readers of ages 8-10. She has also written six picture books for kids 3-7. Two of the picture books are illustrated by her.

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To know more about her and her books, please visit her website www.gitavreddy.com

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