



English

## CHAPTER III

### Swami's Grandmother

IN THE ill-ventilated dark passage between the front hall and the dining-room, Swaminathan's grandmother lived with all her belongings, which consisted of an elaborate bed made of five carpets, three bed sheets, and five pillows, a square box made of jute fibre, and a small wooden box containing copper coins, cardamoms, cloves, and areca-nut. After the night meal, with his head on his granny's lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves. 'Oh, granny!' he cried ecstatically, 'you don't know what a great fellow Rajam is.' He told her the story of the first enmity between Rajam and Mani and the subsequent friendship. 'You know, he has a real police dress,' said Swaminathan. 'Is it? What does he want a police dress for?' asked granny. 'His father is the Police Superintendent. He is the master of every policeman here.' Granny was impressed. She said that it must be a tremendous office indeed. She then recounted the days when her husband, Swaminathan's grandfather, was a powerful Sub-Magistrate, in which office he made the police force tremble before him, and the fiercest dacoits of the place flee. Swaminathan waited impatiently for her to finish the story. But she went on, rambled, confused, mixed up various incidents that took place at different times. 'That will do, granny,' he said ungraciously. 'Let me tell you something about Rajam. Do you know how many marks he gets in Arithmetic?' 'He gets all the marks, does he, child?' asked granny. 'No, silly. He gets ninety marks out of one hundred.' 'Good. But you must also try and get marks like him. . . You know, Swami, your grandfather used to frighten the examiners with his answers sometimes. When he answered a question, he did it in a tenth of the time that others took to do it. And then, his answers would be so powerful that his teachers would give him two hundred marks sometimes. . . . When he passed his F. A. he got such a big medal! I wore it as a pendant for years till--When did I remove it? Yes, when your aunt was born.... No, it wasn't your aunt.... It was when your father was born.... I remember on the tenth day of confinement.... No, no. I was right. It was when your aunt was born. Where is that medal now? I gave it away to your aunt--and she melted it and made four bangles out of it. The fool! And such flimsy bangles too! I have always maintained that she is the worst fool in our family....' 'Oh, enough, granny! You go on bothering about old unnecessary stories. Won't you listen to Rajam?' 'Yes, dear, yes.' 'Granny, when Rajam was a small boy, he killed a tiger.' 'Indeed! The brave little boy!' 'You are saying it just to please me. You don't believe

it.' Swaminathan started the story enthusiastically: Rajam's father was camping in a forest. He had his son with him. Two tigers came upon them suddenly, one knocking down the father from behind. The other began chasing Rajam, who took shelter behind a bush and shot it dead with his gun. 'Granny, are you asleep?' Swaminathan asked at the end of the story. 'No, dear, I am listening.' 'Let me see. How many tigers came upon how many?' 'About two tigers on Rajam,' said granny. Swaminathan became indignant at his grandmother's inaccuracy. 'Here I am going hoarse telling you important things and you fall asleep and imagine all sorts of nonsense. I am not going to tell you anything more. I know why you are so indifferent. You hate Rajam.' 'No, no, he is a lovely little boy,' granny said with conviction, though she had never seen Rajam. Swaminathan was pleased. Next moment a new doubt assailed him. 'Granny, probably you don't believe the tiger incident.' 'Oh, I believe every word of it,' granny said soothingly. Swaminathan was pleased, but added as a warning: 'He would shoot anyone that called him a liar.' Granny expressed her approval of this attitude and then begged leave to start the story of Harischandra, who, just to be true to his word, lost his throne, wife, and child, and got them all back in the end. She was half-way through it when Swaminathan's rhythmic snoring punctuated her narration, and she lay down to sleep. Saturday afternoon. Since Saturday and Sunday came so rarely, to Swaminathan it seemed absurd to waste at home, gossiping with granny and mother or doing sums. It was his father's definite orders that Swaminathan should not start loafing in the afternoon and that he should stay at home and do school work. But this order was seldom obeyed. Swami Nathan sat impatiently in his 'study', trying to wrest the meaning out of a poem in his English Reader. His father stood before the mirror, winding a turban round his head. He had put on his silk coat. Now only his spectacles remained. Swaminathan watched his progress keenly. Even the spectacles were on. All that now remained was the watch. Swaminathan felt glad. This was the last item and after that father would leave for the Court. Mother came in with a tumbler of water in one hand and a plate of betel leaves and nuts in the other. Frank drank the water and held out his hand. She gave him a little areca-nut and half a dozen neatly rolled betel leaves. He put them all into his mouth, chewing them with great contentment. Swaminathan read at the top of his voice the poem about a woolly sheep. His father fussed about a little for his tiny silver snuff-box and the spotted kerchief, which was the most unwashed thing in that house. He hooked his umbrella on his arm. This was really the last signal for starting. Swaminathan had almost closed the book and risen. His father had almost gone out of the room. But--Swaminathan stamped his foot under the table. Mother stopped father and said: 'By

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the way, I want some change. The tailor is coming today. He has been pestering me for the last four days.' 'Ask him to come to-morrow,' father said. Mother was insistent. Father returned to his bureau, searched for the keys, opened it, took out a purse, and gave her the change. 'I don't know how I am going to manage things for the rest of the month,' he said peering into the purse. He locked the bureau, and adjusted his turban before the mirror. He took a heavy pinch of snuff, and wiping his nose with his kerchief, walked out. Swaminathan heaved a sigh of relief. 'Bolt the door,' came father's voice from the street door. Swaminathan heard the clicking of the bolts. He sat at the window, watched his father turn the corner, and then left his post. His mother was in the kitchen giving instructions to the cook about the afternoon coffee. Granny was sitting up in her bed. 'Come here, boy,' she cried as soon as she saw him. 'I can't. No time now.' 'Please. I will give you three pies,' she cried. Swaminathan ignored the offer and dashed away. 'Where are you going?' mother asked. 'hen I should not go.' He added bitterly: 'If I fail in the Drawing examination I think you will be pleased.' Swaminathan ran down Grove Street, turned to his right, threaded his way through Abu Lane, stood before a low roofed, dingy house, and gave a low whistle. He waited for a second and repeated it. The door chain clanked, the door opened a little, and Mani's head appeared and said: 'Fool! My aunt is here, don't come in. Go away and wait for me there.' Swaminathan moved away and waited under a tree. The sun was beating down fiercely. The street was almost deserted. A donkey was standing near a gutter, patiently watching its sharp shadow. A cow was munching a broad, green, plantain leaf. Presently Mani sneaked out of his house. Rajam's father lived in Lawley Extension (named after the mighty engineer Sir Frederick Lawley, who was at one time the Superintending Engineer for Malgudi Circle), which consisted of about fifty neat bungalows, mostly occupied by government officials. The Trunk Road to Trichinopoly passed a few yards in front of these houses. Swaminathan and Mani were nervously walking up the short drive leading to Rajam's house. A policeman in uniform cried to them to stop and came running towards them. Swaminathan felt like turning and fleeing. He appealed to Mani to speak to the policeman. The policeman asked what they were doing there. Mani said in a Swami and Friends 23 R. K. Narayan Dear Friends, this is a backup copy of the original works in my personal library. I had a bad luck in getting back the books I lend to my friends. I am trying to make the text in digital form to ensure that I am not going to loose any of them. As I have an original printed edition, its sure that the writer/publisher already got their share. As on my knowledge there is no legal issues in giving my library collections to my friends, those who loves to read. Kindly delete this file after reading and

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it would be taken as I got the book back. With Thanks and regards your friend Antony. mail me to antonyboban@gmail.com tone in which overdone carelessness was a trifle obvious: 'If Rajam is in the house, we are here to see him. He asked us to come.' The policeman at once became astonishingly amiable and took them along to Rajam's room. To Mani and Swaminathan the room looked large. There were chairs in it, actually chairs, and a good big table with Rajam's books arranged neatly on it. What impressed them most was a timepiece on the table. Such a young fellow to own a timepiece! His father seemed to be an extraordinary man. Presently Rajam entered. He had known that his friends were waiting for him, but he liked to keep them waiting for a few minutes, because he had seen his father doing it. So he stood for a few minutes in the adjoining room, biting his nails. When he could keep away no longer, he burst in upon his friends. 'Sit down, boys, sit down,' he cried when he saw them standing. In a few minutes they were chatting about odds and ends, discussing their teachers and school-mates, their parents, toys, and games. Rajam took them to a cupboard and threw it open. They beheld astounding things in it, miniature trains and motors, mechanical marvels, and a magic -lantern with slides, a good many large picture-books, and a hundred other things. What interested Mani most was a grim air-gun that stood in a corner. Rajam gave them permission to handle anything they pleased. In a short while Swaminathan was running an engine all over the room. Mani was shooting arrow after arrow from a bow, at the opposite wall. When he tired of it, he took up the gun and devastated the furniture around with lead balls. 'Are you fellows, any of you, hungry?' Rajam asked. 'No,' they said half-heartedly. 'Hey,' Rajam cried. A policeman entered. 'Go and ask the cook to bring some coffee and tiffin for three.' The ease and authority with which he addressed the policeman filled his friends with wonder and admiration. Swami and Friends 24 R. K. Narayan Dear Friends, this is a backup copy of the original works in my personal library. I had a bad luck in getting back the books I lend to my friends. I am trying to make the text in digital form to ensure that I am not going to loose any of them. As I have an original printed edition, its sure that the writer/publisher already got their share. As on my knowledge there is no legal issues in giving my library collections to my friends, those who loves to read. Kindly delete this file after reading and it would be taken as I got the book back. With Thanks and regards your friend Antony. The cook entered with a big plateful of eatables. He set down the plate on the table. Rajam felt that he must display his authority. 'Remove it from the table, you--' he roared at the cook. The cook removed it and placed it on a chair. 'You dirty ass, take it away, don't put it there.' 'Where am I to put it, Raju?' asked the cook.

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Rajam burst out: 'You rascal, you scoundrel, you talk back to me?' The cook made a wry face and muttered something. 'Put it on the table/ Rajam commanded. The cook obeyed, mumbling: 'If you are rude, I am going to tell your mother.' 'Go and tell her, I don't care,' Rajam retorted. He peered into a cup and cursed the cook for bringing it so dirty. The cook looked up for a moment, quietly lifted the plate, and saying, 'Come and eat in the kitchen if you want food,' went away with it.