

ADITYA GOES TO OFFICE

Aditya started going to office when he was only four months old.

He was just a tiny baby, and as all babies will be,
He could not walk, and he could not talk like you and me.
He had not been to school and he had not been to college,
And yet Aditya went to office.

He went with his mother who worked on a hill;
Many many trees grew on that hill,
Green green grass covered the slopes of the hill,
Flowers of many colours bloomed on the hill.

On Aditya's first day at office, the hill said
"Greetings and welcome to you, I am so glad
So many friends await you, my little one
We will all together have so much fun!"

And Aditya, bright-eyed and eager, smiled a dimpled toothless grin.

Hazel was the first friend he met on the hill;
Just like him she was a tiny baby still.
And waiting for them was the smiling Ina
In the little room that would be their home now.

Ina smiled and settled them in
She said: "I will look after you while your mothers are at work
The three of us will sing, dance and play
Together we will explore this hill, day after day."

Soon Aditya and Hazel learned to sit. Now they could see everything around them.

Stretching out a branch, the big neem tree
Said "come children, hang a swing on me."

The swing in the wind would gently sway
The children on it could see the world so busy and gay.

The crows shared the branches with a caw caw caw,
The mynas would scold and chatter away,
The sparrows with their wings would go flap flap flap
In the water that dripped from the garden tap.

The squirrels would jump and scamper around,
Sometimes up the tree and sometimes on the ground.
Seeing them, Aditya would get quite dizzy
He would lean back in his seat on the tree.

Above him he would see leaves, leaves and leaves
Swaying gently in the breeze.
Some looked dark and some looked bright
Changing with the shadows and sunlight.

Aditya's eyes would slowly close, and he would sleep,
Dreaming of mountains so high and rivers so deep.

Hazel and Aditya began to crawl,
Now they could go far, they could see all.
Ina would take them to the great big lawn
Where they would tumble and topple up and down!

Chasing the yellow butterflies, they would sigh
"What fun it would be to be able to fly!"
The fluffy clouds were magical too, a fish that swam in the sky
Or a rabbit that hopped ever so high!

The kites that soared up, up so high
The tops of the trees seemed to touch the sky.
And the jungle of tall grass that rustled to and fro
Was it the home of an elephant, tiger or hippo?!

Back in their room Ina would give them their treats
And the big black ants would join the feast.
The children tried to catch them, but Ina said No
“Let them go home or their mothers will say
Where have our little ants gone today?”

On the ceiling above, hanging upside down
Gecko would watch them with a beady eye.
Hazel would wonder “why does it does not fall down!”
Aditya would think “it must be stuck, I wonder why?”

Then one day after they tried and tried,
Aditya and Hazel could really walk!
They could not only walk, they could even talk!
Soon they were running, leaving Ina behind.

There was much to explore and much to discover,
Every new step was a brand new adventure.
Now they could go wherever, and join in the games
Laughing and calling their friends by their names.

Their frisky friends the squirrels would gather,
The babblers would scold and patter and chatter.
The children would give them grain to eat
Scatter it under the neem tree as a treat.

Soon they made friends with the peacocks too
The peahens were grey, but their mates were blue.
With their shining necks and trailing tail
They would make all the other birds look pale.

When they saw them the children would say
“Let us dance like the peacock today!”
They would spread their arms and sway to and fro;

The peahen would think "Why these ones still have feathers to grow!"

Then the clouds would gather and begin to grow dark;
They would rumble and thunder, and lightning would spark.
The peacocks would call, shrieking and loud
The koels would koo koo at every new cloud.

The children would jump and skip and hop,
Waiting and waiting for the first drop.
One day the rain began with a plop plop plop,
Then fell like a shower that just would not stop.

They ran right out to dance in the rain
Calling out to their friends again and again.
Singing and splashing and jumping with joy
Soon they were a very wet little girl and boy!

From puddles everywhere frogs began to call.
Plants and insects, animals big and small
The rain washed them all fresh and clean
Giving them the water they needed to grow and green.

When the rains were over, it grew a bit colder
Aditya and Hazel too were a little bit older.
They still found new friends each day
When they were indoors or went out to play.

Mamma mongoose with her babies in tow
Would sniff the air, always alert to go.
When Aditya and his mother ate lunch on the lawn
Sometimes a jackal would dart across and be gone.

In the tall grass lived the big black snake,
But Ina told them, "Don't be afraid,
It will eat small creatures and many rats too;

But if you don't bother it, it will not bite you."

*Then came the friends the children liked best
A gang of black-faced, long-tailed guests.
Whooping and hooping, leaping from tree to tree
Thumping over the roof, so bold and free.*

*They would sit on the high branches of old friend the neem
Gobbling up all the leaves, flowers and fruits to be seen.
The children inside would whoop and call
"Hey monkeys, let's see who can make the funniest faces of all!"*

*The children would wait for the ripe badams to fall,
When they did, they found the squirrels had gnawed almost all.
They would try all the fruits and berries they came across on the way
Thinking that if squirrels could eat them, why couldn't they?*

*In the winter they would play outside all day,
Digging the earth and shaping the clay.
Squirrels and babblers, babies and toddlers played together
They were all friends, not afraid of each other.*

*Now Aditya and Hazel had found a favourite Champa tree
They would climb it like a squirrel, and swing like a monkey.
It would be their rickshaw, train, bus or aeroplane tree
When they pretended to go on a trip for free!*

*Aditya's baby sister has just joined the fun;
Revu is a tiny baby, like they were once.
Hazel and Aditya just wait for the day
When she will talk and run and join in their play.*

*Soon Aditya and Hazel will go to school
Make new friends, and follow new rules.
They will learn reading and writing, ABC and 1-2-3*

Read books about animals and birds and cloud and trees.

*They will tell their new friends about birds and trees on the hill,
About squirrels and peacocks that wait for them still,
About the favourite branch on the champa tree
And their many many friends, so happy and free!*

--Mamata

Circa 1990