



Chhyanbale

Chhyanbale is a kind, curious boy who cannot walk. Chhyanbale struggles to navigate life at school. How can his protector, Sparrow, help?



Chhyanbale
Tirtha Gurung

Let's Read



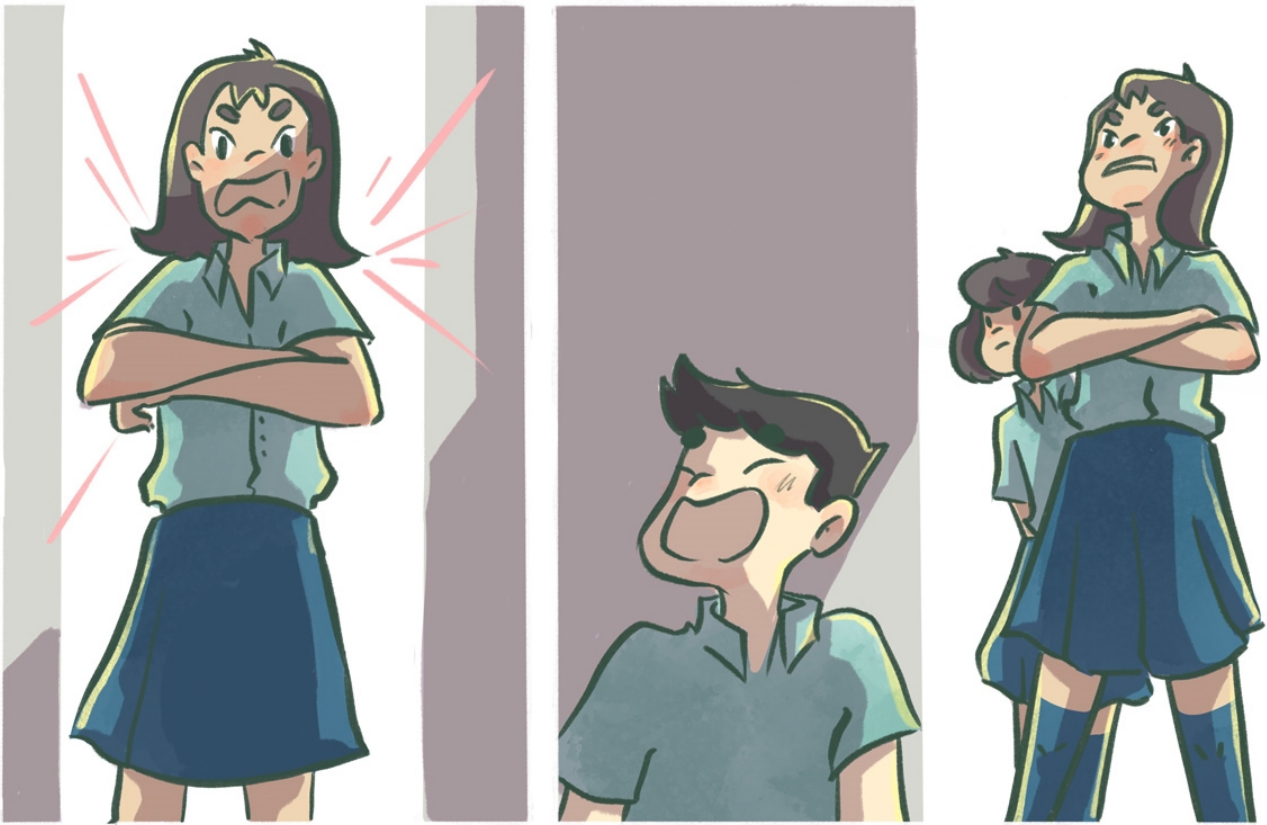
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"Lulé!" yells the bully.



"Didn't you hear me call your name?! Aww... nobody came to get you today?" the bully taunts. "If I couldn't walk, maybe someone would carry me, too! Hahaha!"



"Hey! I'm going to get you! Don't you dare tease Chhyanbale again!"
Nani shouts.

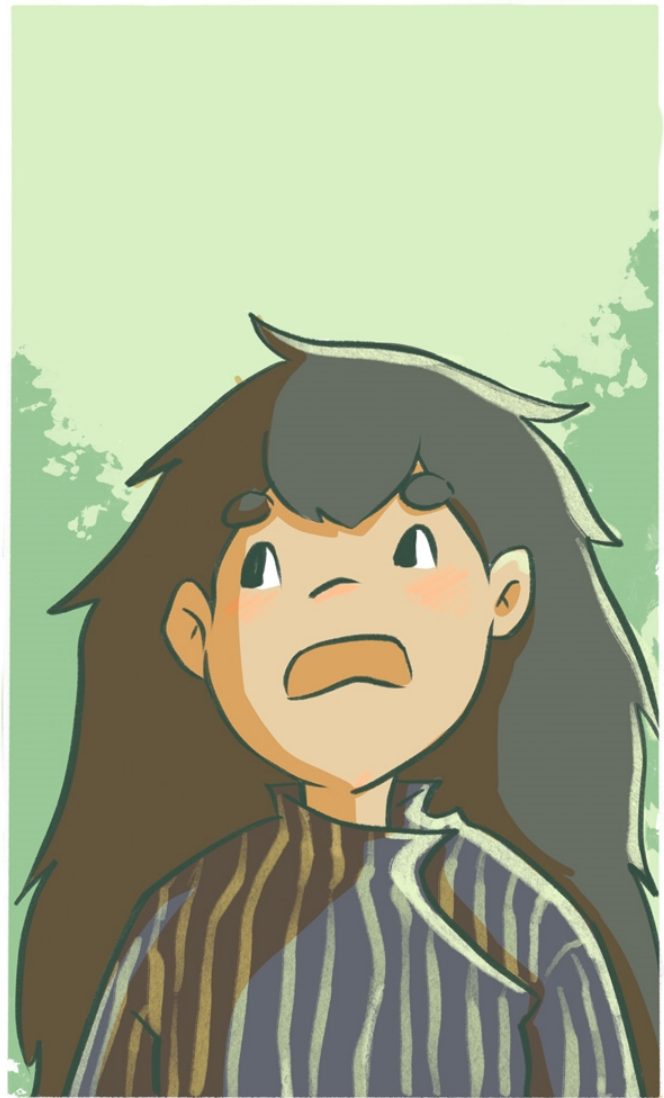


"If I can't call a cripple lulé, then what can I call him? Superwoman?" the bully sneers. As Nani carries Chhyanbale home, Swallow flies near them. Swallow keeps watch over Chhyanbale wherever he goes. She and many of her kind love Chhyanbale. At home, Chhyanbale is full of life and smiles a lot. But at school he changes. It's as though someone steals his joy. For now, Swallow must collect fodder for her little ones and fly home.

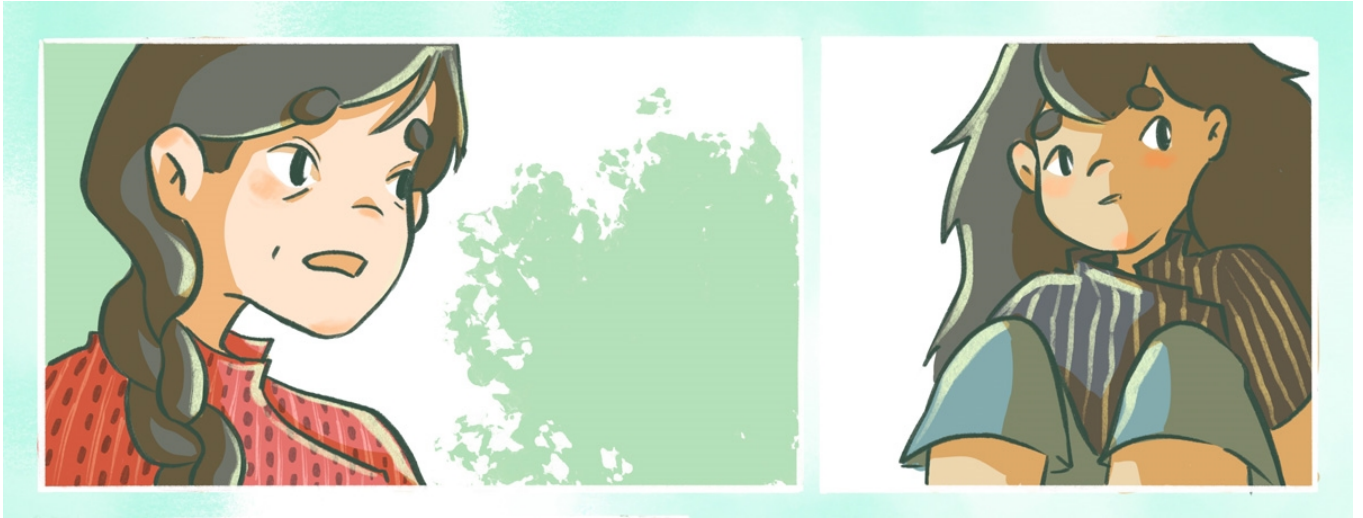




The next day, Mother tells Grandfather Baa, "I'm off, Baba!" "Off you go! Don't stay out too late," Baa replies. "My son, I've popped some corn for you," Mother tells Chhyanbale. "Later, our Baa will cut some sugarcane for you."



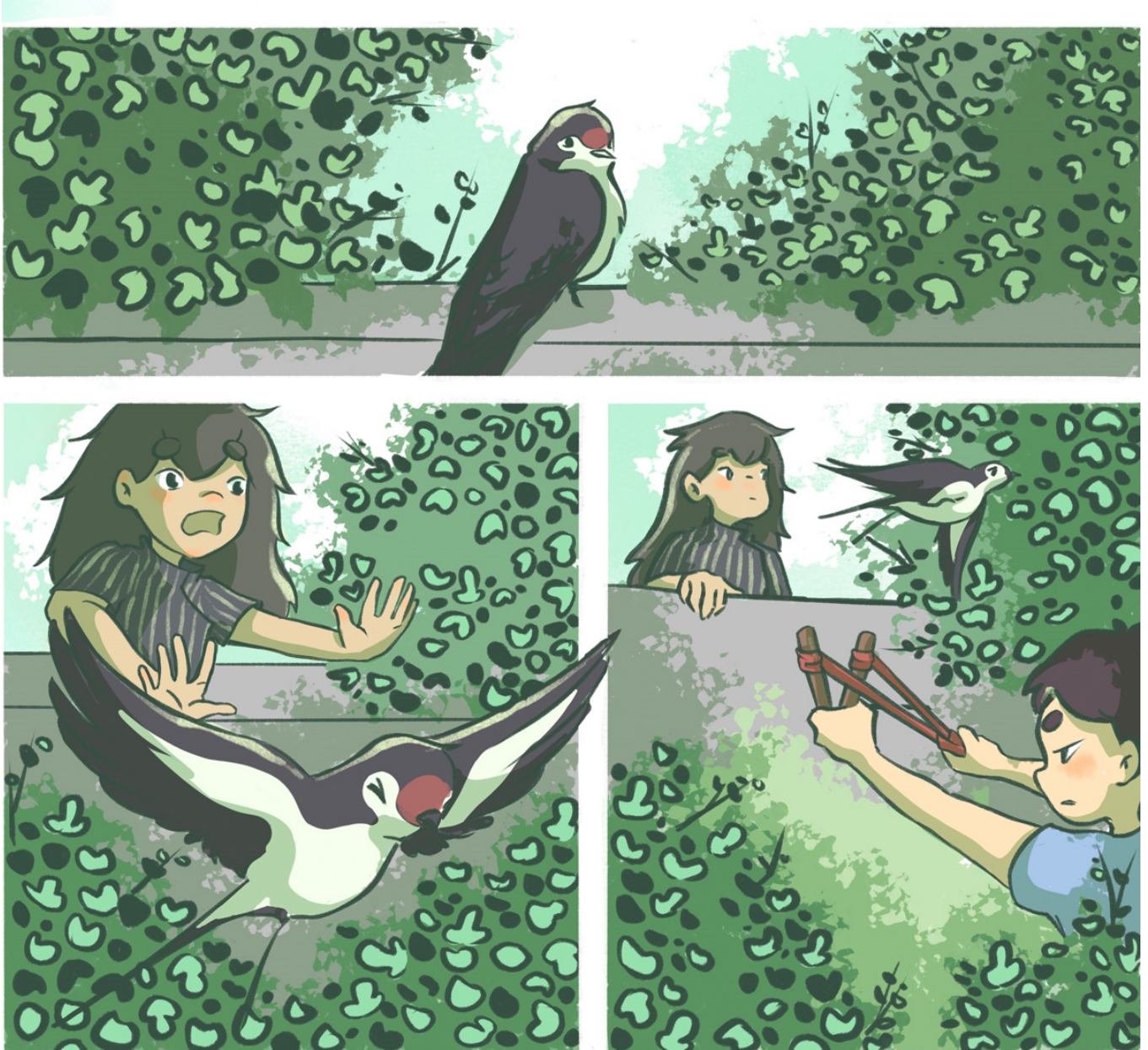
Grandfather coughs as he weaves a bamboo mat. "I don't want to go to school today!" Chhyanbale tells him.



“Like always, you say you won’t go. But once your cousins come get you, you’ll go with them, right?” Mama says.



Later, when Swallow flies in with fodder, Chhyanbale excitedly looks up at her. Baa stops weaving the mat and starts making baby bamboo pens instead. These are gifts for his grandchildren. Nani and Chyona are on their way to pick up Chhyanbale.



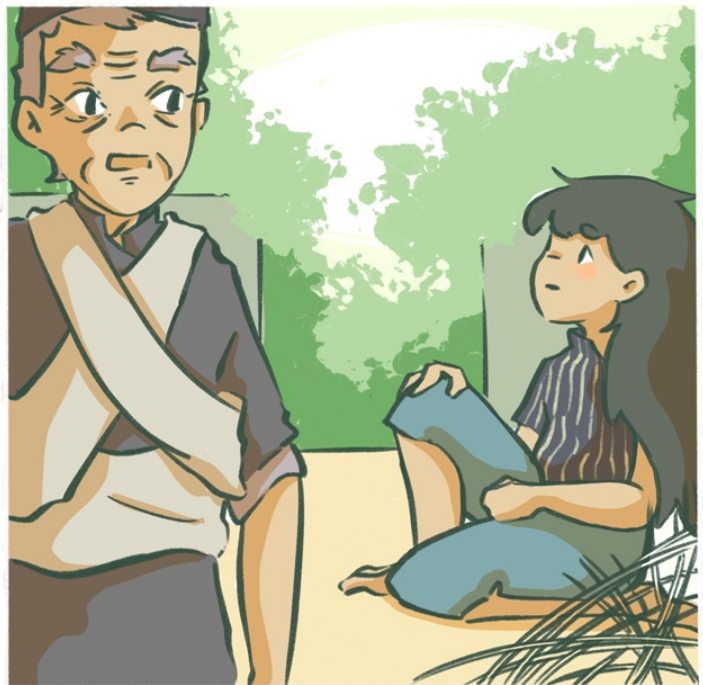
The swallow is perched on the garden wall watching Baa when suddenly Chhyanbale leaps towards her. Chhyanbale flails his arms in the air and screams, "Shoo! Shoo!"



“Why did you chase the bird away, lulé?” says a boy as he emerges from the bushes. “Our Baa says we mustn’t kill swallows,” Chhyanbale tells him.



“Why can we kill other birds but not swallows?”



Baa appears. "What happened?" he asks Chhyanbale. "Nothing," Chhyanbale replies. "Okay, come on now. I'll fry some leftover rice for you," Baa says.



“Can I fry the rice, Baa?” Chyona asks. “As long as you put in a good amount of butter, maasyo!” he teases.



“Hey, Baa. Can you play the sarangi for us?” asks Chhyanbale. “Yeah sure. It’s not like I have anything else to do, other than play sarangi for you...” he teases.



Baa reaches for the sarangi that hangs above the doorway, under Swallow's nest. He takes it down and clears his throat, letting out a deep cough. Then he looks at Chhyanbale and sings: "It doesn't matter if you can't walk right now Not being able to run never hurt anyone Study hard, my son Be kind, sharpen your mind Sharpen your mind..." Baa's coughing stops the song so Chhyanbale picks up the sarangi's sad tune and sings. The sun sets.



Baaje goes in to cook the evening's meal. Chhyanbale looks at our nest with longing. Just then his mother returns from the fields. Suddenly his face brightens; he remembers tomorrow is a special day.



The next day it's Chhyanbale's Chhewar. His uncle, Nani and Chyona's father, cuts his long hair for the first time. Chhyanbale receives a new shirt. One-by-one, every family member comes up to him and puts some tika made of rice and yogurt on his forehead. They tie a yellow thread with nine knots around his neck. They give him many blessings.



“My dear nephew, today is like your wedding day. May you be able to walk soon! May you study hard. Syai, syai, syai,” says Uncle. “My grandson, may your heart be clear and your mind sharp. Syai, syai, I know you will walk very soon,” says Baa. “Syai, syai, my son. May you be the sweetness that lingers on everyone’s tongue,” says Mother.



Baa carries Chhyanbale to school the next day. Swallow's teaching her little ones to fly, so they follow him. At school, all the students stare at Chhyanbale's short hair. They begin to whisper and giggle.



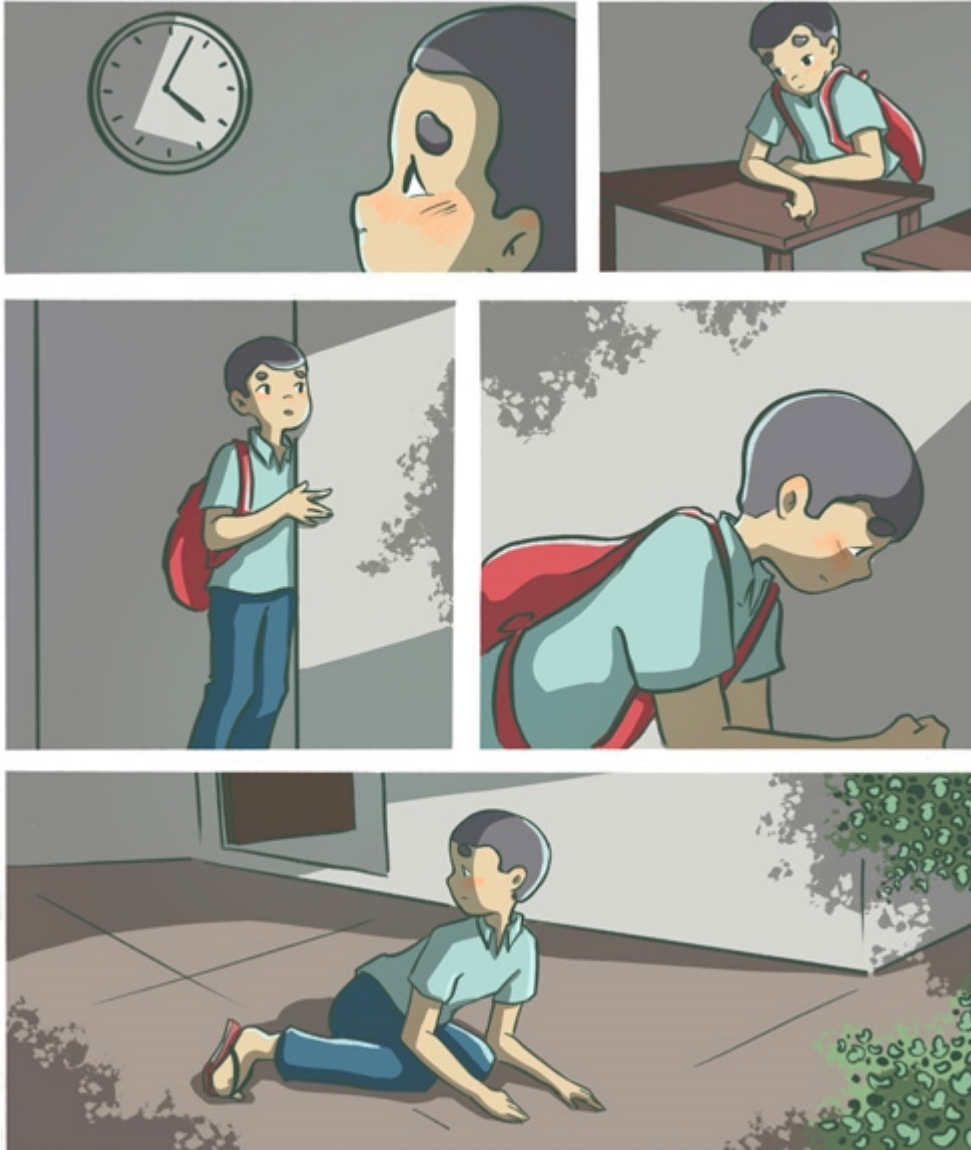
“Oh, Baa! You’re here today. Where’s Nani?” the principal asks.



“Sir, Nani had to go to the fields today. So I came with Chhyanbale,” answers Baa. “Nani is a good student, Baa. I wish she didn’t miss school,” replies the principal.



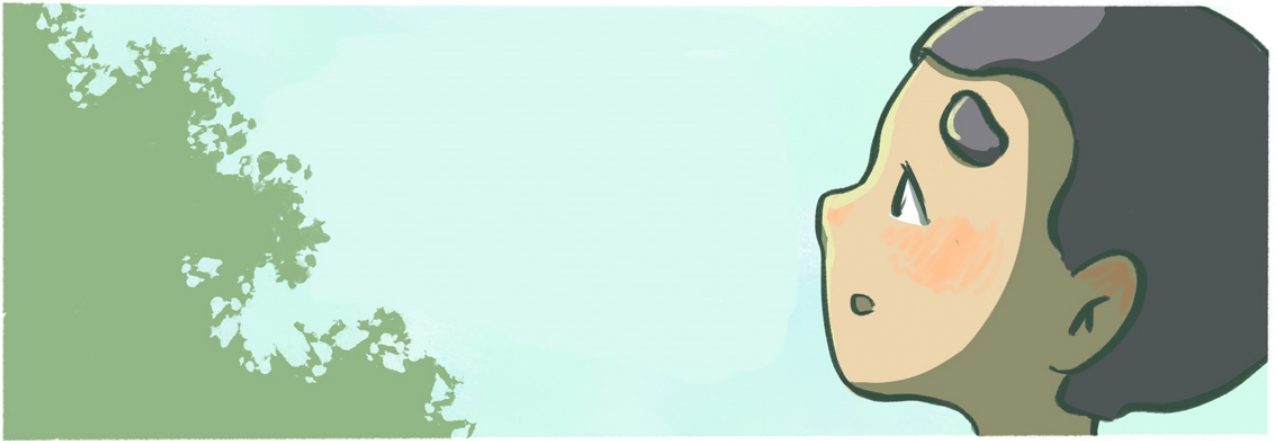
In this way, Chhyanbale goes to school, sometimes with Nani and sometimes with Baa.



One day, after the last bell, no one comes to get Chhyanbale. He waits, but it's getting too late, so he decides to go home on his own.



“Oy, lulé! Nobody came to get you again?” taunts the bully. “Why aren’t you saying anything, lulé?”



“My name is not lulé.”



“Huh!? If you’re not lulé then walk like we do. Why are you crawling like a baby?”



“Let it go, friends. Why make fun of this poor boy?” says a boy. “If you want to hang with us, you better keep your mouth shut!” says the bully.



"I'm going to complain to the principal tomorrow," says Chhyanbale. "If you tell anyone, I will break those hands you crawl with, lulé!" says the bully.



Chhyanbale feels helpless. He rubs his palms against his knees. Swallow sees him and calls all her friends, and in no time they gather. They fly in a big mass around the boys.



Seeing so many swallows, the boys run away.



Swallow and her friends use their beaks to lift Chhyanbale up by his shirt and bookbag. Together, they carry him up in the air.



“My name is not lulé... My name is Chhyanbale! My name means beautiful! I am beautiful! Ha ha ha!”



Swallow and his friends carry Chhyanbale all the way home. He's happy when he's flying with them. The boys and all the villagers stare at them with their mouths wide open. When they get home, Baa looks at them as though he had known this would happen all along. From that day on, no one bothers Chhyanbale at school. Slowly, he begins to like going to school.



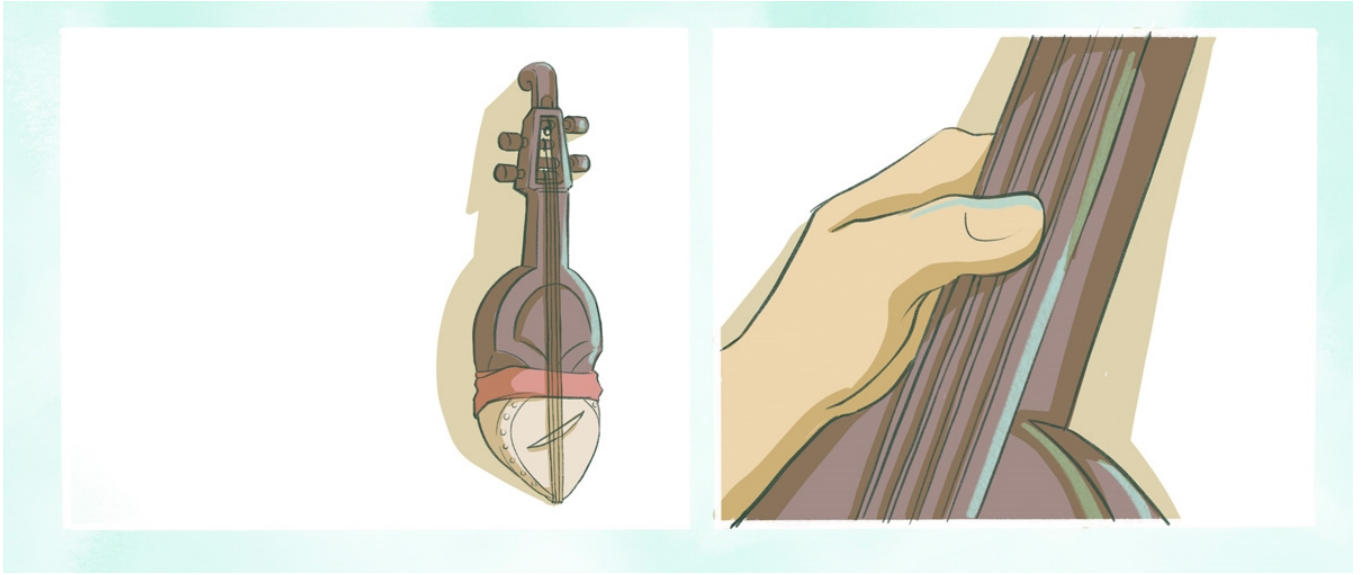
One moonlit night, Baa sits in front of the house wrapped in a bakkhu. His coughing has become worse. "Baa? There are two people on the moon, right? Like you and me," says Chhyanbale. "Where?" asks Baa. "Look," replies Chhyanbale, "The one that is sitting is you, and the other one standing and looking away is me. It looks like I am listening to a song." "Aah, yes, I see it now," says Baa. "I can't believe I have lived so many years and never noticed us on the moon before." Swallow flies outside to look at the moon. She doesn't know if she sees Chhyanbale and Baa on the moon, but she wants to believe they're there.



One day when Nani and Chhyanbale are returning home from school, they see a crowd gathered in the courtyard. Outside the house there's a tall bamboo pole wrapped in a white cloth. People have taken their hats off and black charcoal is smeared on their foreheads. Baa is lying on the ground, not moving. Chhyanbale crawls to his mother. She begins to cry. Watching tears roll down her cheeks, Chhyanbale cries too. Baa has died.



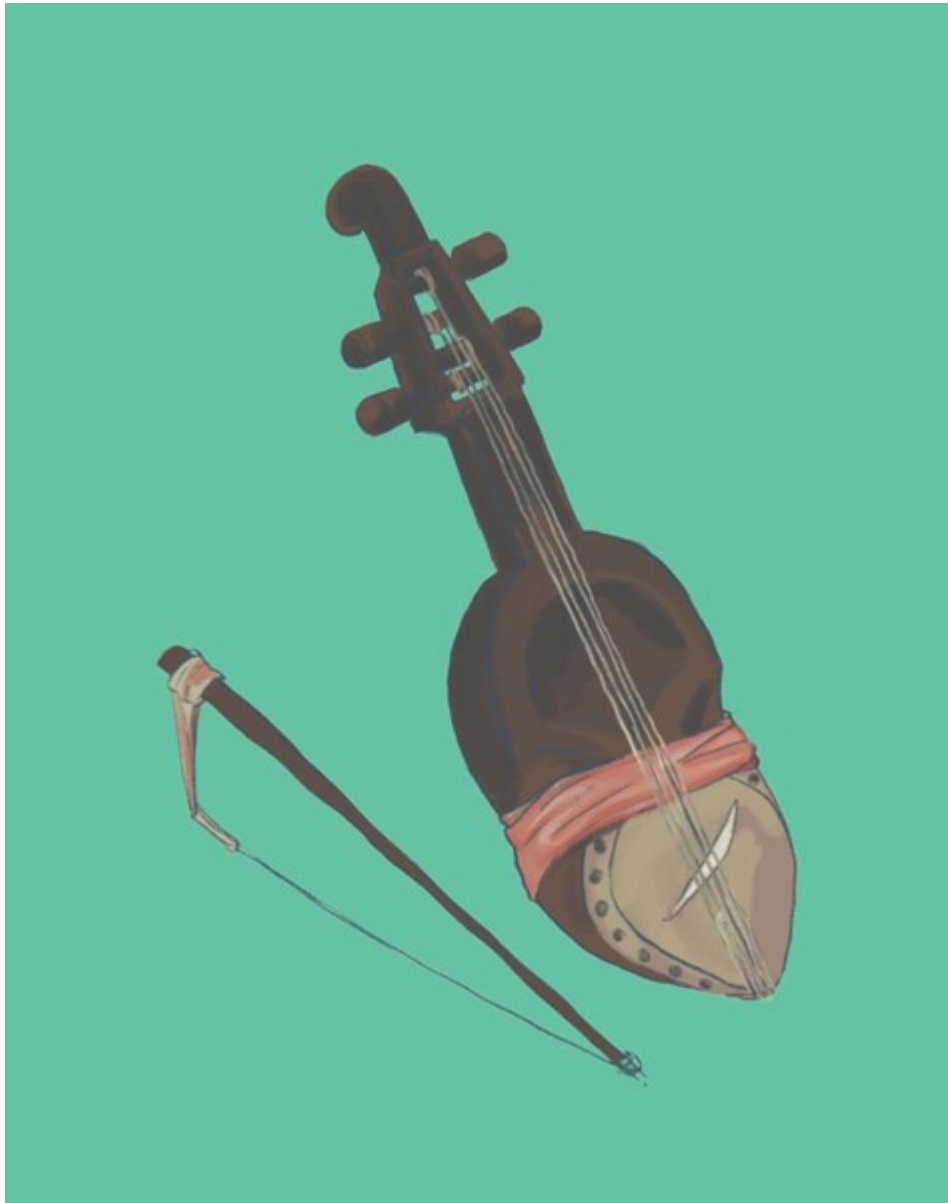
Swallow imagines Chhyanbale slipping out of his mother's arms and standing up on his own legs. She imagines Chhyanbale taking one step, and then another. But then Swallow thinks to herself, why I am being silly! Why do I have to imagine Chhyanbale walking? It doesn't matter that he can't walk, he is loved. His Baa knew that Chhyanbale is already complete.



Chhyanbale's Mother grabs the sarangi above the door and gives it to Chhyanbale.



Chhyanbale plays a sad tune on the sarangi and sings: "Even if my legs couldn't move, I have danced here Even in sadness, I have laughed here You told me to run, you told me to fly Okay, Baa, okay, to be the best me, I'll try"



Wonderful Words
lulé - A derogatory term for someone who is physically disabled
Nani - “girl” or oldest child in the Nepali language
Maasyo - An expression of love toward young girls; also said as “mrushyo” in some Gurung communities in Nepal which can also mean “queen.”
sarangi - A short-stringed musical instrument from South Asia
tika - a temporary mark put on the forehead, often during rituals, that represents faith and devotion
Chhewar - A ritual in some Gurung communities when a boy’s hair is cut the first time. It can also mark his entrance into a new stage of life. This ritual usually takes place on an odd-year birthday such as when the boy turns 3, 5, or 7.
Chyona - “youngest child” in the Gurung language
Syai Syai - A blessing in the Gurung language given during good and bad times. It is also an expression used to restore good energy to the soul and body.
bakkhu - A hand woven shawl or blanket

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