

A Smile full of Stories





This book belongs to

.....



What are cleft lips and palates?

Some babies are born with a cleft—a gap in their lip and/or the roof of their mouth (palate). In India, 35,000+ children are born with a cleft every year.

How do clefts affect children?

Without treatment, children with clefts may have problems in eating, breathing, speaking, and hearing. Sometimes other children tease them, and they often live in isolation.

Can it be treated?

Yes! With surgery and associated care, clefts can be treated and children can live healthy and full lives.

For free cleft treatment, please call:
1800 103 8301



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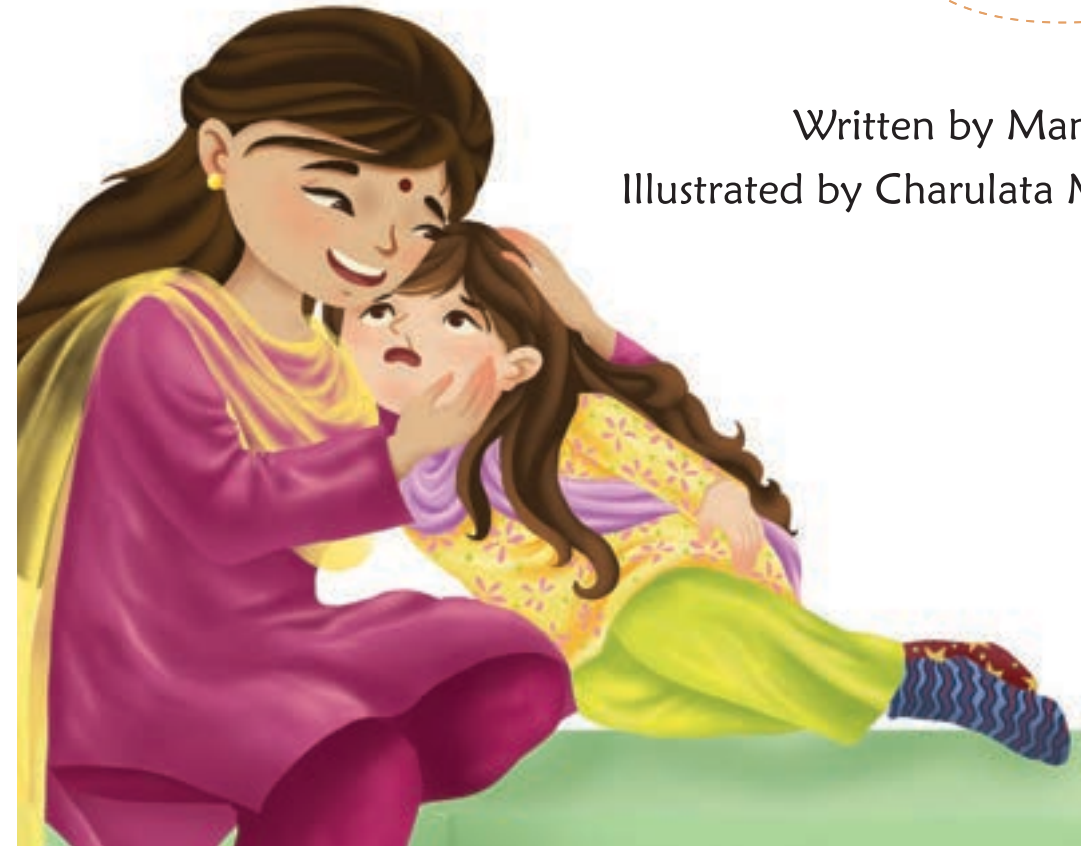
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A Smile full of Stories



Written by Mamta Nainy
Illustrated by Charulata Mukherjee






Maya loved a lot of things.

Collecting treasures . . .

drawing creatures . . .

and building wonders.



There were some things that
Maya didn't care for.

Brushing her hair
(too many tangles!).
And matching socks
(what's the point?).



But there was one thing that Maya absolutely HATED—pictures.

Just the thought of them made her scrunch her nose.

The endless “Smile, please!” or “Say cheese!”, the bright flashes and, worst of all, seeing her own smile—a smile that didn’t look like everyone else’s.

“Different is beautiful,” Ma always said.

“Different is weird,” Maya muttered.





One morning, as Maya walked into school, she froze in front of the notice board.

“A day of cameras and stares? No way. NOT IN A MILLION YEARS,” Maya thought.



Just then, her best friend Rima squealed, “It’s the same day as my birthday! Double the fun!”

Maya’s heart sank. She’d been so excited for Rima’s birthday, but the thought of picture day made her want to crawl under her bed and never come out.

At home, Maya tried to come up with an excuse.

“Ma, I think I’m getting sick,” she coughed.

“You’ll be fine by next week,” Ma replied.

“What if I’m allergic to cameras?” Maya tried again.

“Nice try.” Ma raised an eyebrow.

Then, cupping Maya’s chin, Ma asked, “Don’t you want to celebrate Rima’s birthday?”

“I do . . .” Maya whispered, “but pictures are **JUST THE WORST.**”

“Or are they?” Ma said with a knowing smile.



That evening, Ma sat beside Maya with a photo album in her hands.

“Let me show you something,” she said, flipping open the cover.

Ma turned the first page slowly, revealing a picture of Maya’s baby cousin.

“Look at his smile?” Ma asked.

“What do you see?”

Maya studied the photo. “His smile is all gummy and glowing—like a little ball of sunshine.”

“Exactly!” Ma said. “Like sunshine breaking through the clouds.”



With a gentle turn of the page, Ma revealed a photo of Nani, smiling with wrinkles deep as rivers.

“And what about this smile?” Ma asked.

Maya looked at the picture thoughtfully.

“Nani’s smile looks like a map.”

“Right,” Ma nodded. “A map of the life she’s lived.”

The next photo was of Maya’s favourite Chachu, his smile crooked from an accident.

“What do you see here?” Ma asked.

Maya stared at it. “Chachu’s smile looks like a crooked branch of a tree.”

“Hmmm,” Ma said. “A branch that bends but doesn’t break.”



Finally, Ma turned to a picture of herself when she was young.

“And this one? What do you think of my smile?” Ma asked, laughing a little.

“Your smile looks a bit funny, but also sparkly,” Maya giggled. “Like a row of stars . . .”

“Lighting up the deep, dark sky!” Ma chuckled.



Maya sat quietly, the album open on her lap. She studied all the smiles—each one different, each one beautiful. For the first time, she understood what Ma meant when she said different is beautiful.

She looked up at Ma, a question in her eyes.

“Every smile tells a story, Maya,” Ma said. “Yours does too.”

Maya hesitated for a moment longer, then slowly smiled. Maybe she could tell her own story with her smile.



On picture day, Maya packed Rima's gift and headed out the door.

When it was time for the class photo, Maya's hands felt sweaty.

The photographer adjusted the lights and said, "Big smile, everyone!"

Maya took a deep breath. She thought about the smiles of her baby cousin, Nani, Chachu and, most of all, Ma.

A smile twinkled on her lips. A smile full of stories.

A smile that was all her own.

The photographer counted down, "Three . . . two . . . one . . . and . . ."

CLICK!



Every Smile has a Story. What's Yours?

Flip through your own family photo album and find the smiles that make you curious. Stick them here and write (or draw!) the story you think they're telling.



Notes for Teachers and Parents

How to Explain a Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate to Children

1. **Start with Simple Terms:** Use easy language to explain a cleft lip and palate. For example: “Some babies are born with a cleft lip and/or a cleft palate. A cleft is a gap in the upper lip and/or the roof of the mouth.”
2. **Use Visual Aids:** Show pictures and diagrams of different types of clefts to help illustrate what you’re explaining.
3. **Explain the Challenges:** Describe the challenges children with clefts might face, such as difficulty eating, breathing, and speaking.
4. **Explain Surgery:** Describe how doctors can heal clefts with surgery. For example: “A cleft can be treated with surgery, which helps a person speak and eat more easily.”
5. **Emphasize Differences:** Help children understand everyone is unique. For example: “Some people wear glasses, some are tall, and some have clefts, but we are all special in our own ways!”
6. **Encourage Kindness:** Teach students to be supportive. For example: “If someone with a cleft has trouble speaking or eating, be patient and kind.”
7. **Interactive Discussion:** Let children ask questions such as, “Will the gap come back?” or “How do they treat it?” and answer them with reassurance.
8. **Promote Inclusivity:** Show that having a cleft doesn’t stop people from doing different activities. For example: “People with clefts can play, learn, and have fun just like everyone else!”
9. **Storytelling:** Inspire confidence by sharing stories of successful people with clefts or other differences.

Encourage kindness, respect, and understanding toward everyone, regardless of appearance.

Mamta Nainy is a writer based in New Delhi. She has authored over thirty-five books for children, many of which have gone on to win national and international awards, including the Valley of Words Awards 2022, FICCI Publishing Awards 2022, Publishing Next Award 2022, The Hindu Young World-Goodbooks Award 2019 and Peek-a-Book Children’s Choice Award 2019. Mamta is inspired by the unfettered imagination of children and is passionate about stories that are inclusive and empowering.

Charulata Mukherjee is an artist based in New Delhi. She loves illustrating for children, especially because she believes that children can see in her art what most adults can’t.



About Smile Train

Smile Train is the largest cleft charity in the world. Since 2000, they have been helping doctors and hospitals in India provide free cleft treatment to children in need. Smile Train works with more than 120 hospitals and has supported 750,000+ surgeries across India, helping children live healthy and full lives.

Maya hates pictures. Her smile doesn't look like the ones she sees around her. But when Ma shows her a photo album filled with all kinds of wild, wonderful, wonky smiles, Maya begins to see a story in every smile . . . Could her smile tell its own story, too?

