



# Friends Under the Summer Sun

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Level 4





Nimmi peered out of the window and yowled like a cat. Down in the park, her friends were busy playing. She turned to Ma, big saucer-like eyes misting over with tears, and moaned miserably. But Ma wasn't having any of that.





“Go see if Momo’s clothes have finished drying, Nimmi,” she said, cradling Momo to sleep.

“No!” Nimmi crossed her arms.

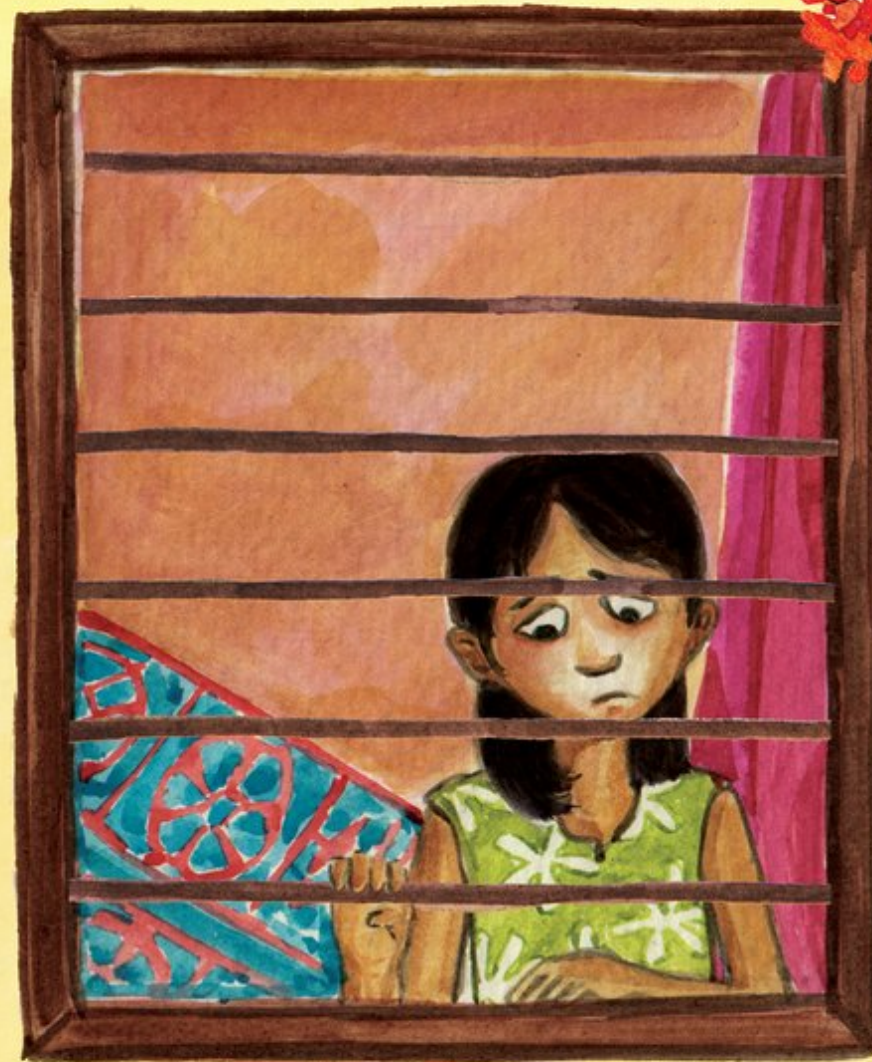
But Ma smiled and said “Please!” the way she always did, making Nimmi’s heart melt.





It had only been a month since her brother Momo had come into this world. Poor Ma was working all the time – looking after the household, feeding everyone, and tending to Momo. Nimmi had to help her out. After all, she was the big girl of the house now.

But still, here she was, trapped in her house while her friends were having fun. And summer was already ending.








“But summer is already ending!” Nimmi shouted desperately.

This made Ma laugh, and even as Nimmi stormed away to check on the washing, Ma called out, “And when you come back, I have another job for you!”

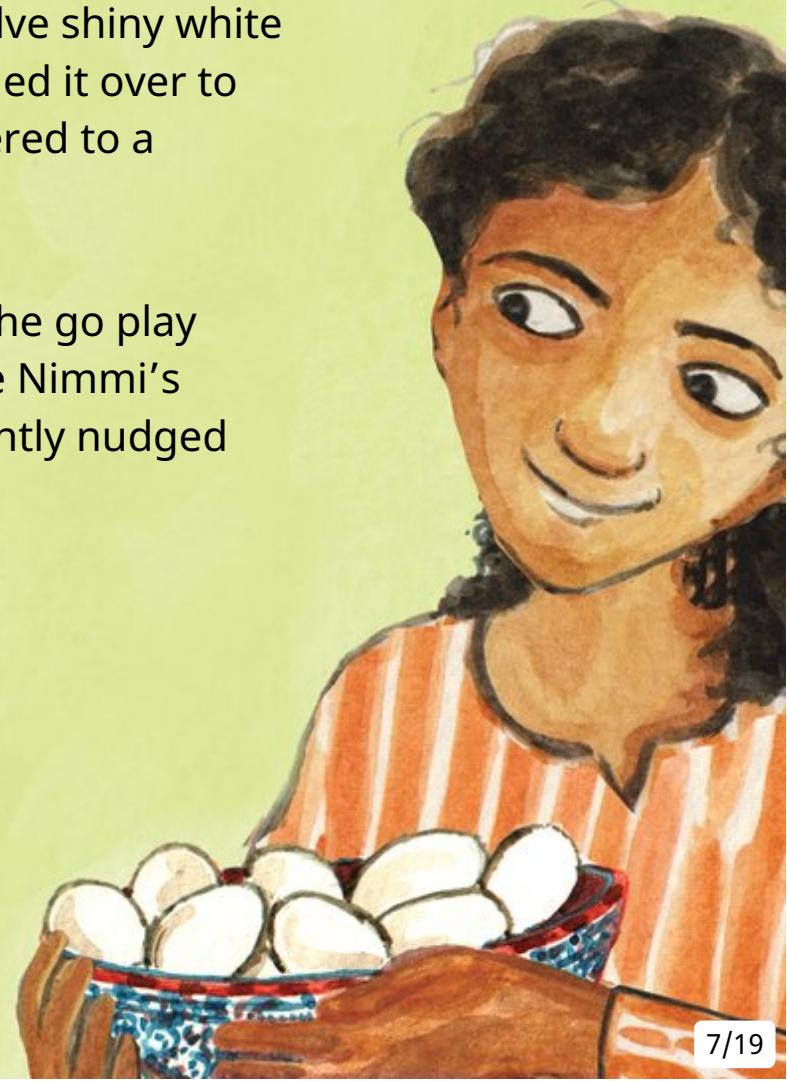
Nimmi sulked. But as she folded up Momo’s clothes, she smiled. Momo was so very tiny and beautiful.





Later, Ma carefully placed twelve shiny white eggs into a big bowl and handed it over to Nimmi. They were to be delivered to a neighbour.

Why eggs? To whom? Could she go play afterwards? Ma brushed aside Nimmi's questions with a smile and gently nudged her out of the door.





Nimmi made her way up, balancing her fragile load. A hand-carved sign on the door read – Welcome to Akka’s Cakes and Bakes.

A cake! Nimmi’s heart leapfrogged with joy as she rang the bell. But who for? All birthdays were past or too far away, and it wasn’t Ma and Pa’s anniversary either. Maybe she would ask Akka herself.



But the door wasn’t opened by a white-haired grandma Akka, as Nimmi had expected.





Instead, there stood a slender tall boy, about as old as her mom. His rich black hair fell down to his shoulders, framing a friendly face.

“Hello, I am Shri! You have the twelve eggs?”

“Twelve and heavy!” said Nimmi, as she stepped in.

“Quick then, bring them in, my cake is burning!” With that, Shri spun on his heel and ran into the kitchen.



Nimmi placed her heavy bowl onto a table and took her shoes off. She placed her slippers carefully next to a big collection of shoes. Some shoes were mens', made of fine leather, while others were colorful sandals with heels on them.





The kitchen was in chaos. Stacks of pans and pots littered the counter. Breadcrumbs, pieces of cake and gooey batter everywhere, and the smell of burnt cake filled the air.

“Oh what a terrible day! Won’t you stay back and help me with the cakes?” asked Shri, holding out a baking tray with a black-brown thing that used to be a cake.

“Me?” said Nimmi. “But I don’t know how to bake.”

“Oh it’s easy. You take something you love, and give it a shape.”

“But I love summer, and it’s going away!” Nimmi pointed to the window. “How can that become a cake?”

At that, Shri’s eyes twinkled.





“The things you love, never go away,” he explained.  
“Just close your eyes and remember the smell, the  
touch, the colors and the taste. That way, summer  
will forever stay!”





“The summer smells of mangoes and peaches, lemons and grass. It’s blue and green and golden. Look, like the colours on your nails.” Nimmi pointed to Shri’s hands, his carefully shaped fingernails were painted playful shades of sky blue and lemon green.





Then she led Shri to the big window in the living room, and opened it. The soft curtains embossed with branches and leaves billowed with the wind, and caressed them as they danced in circles. “What a delightful summer!” said Shri.





And that is what they made.

A heart-shaped cake, covered with golden green icing. Little blades of green grass were lined evenly along the sides. On top, a bunch of bright lilies and petunias nestled amongst golden brown leaves.





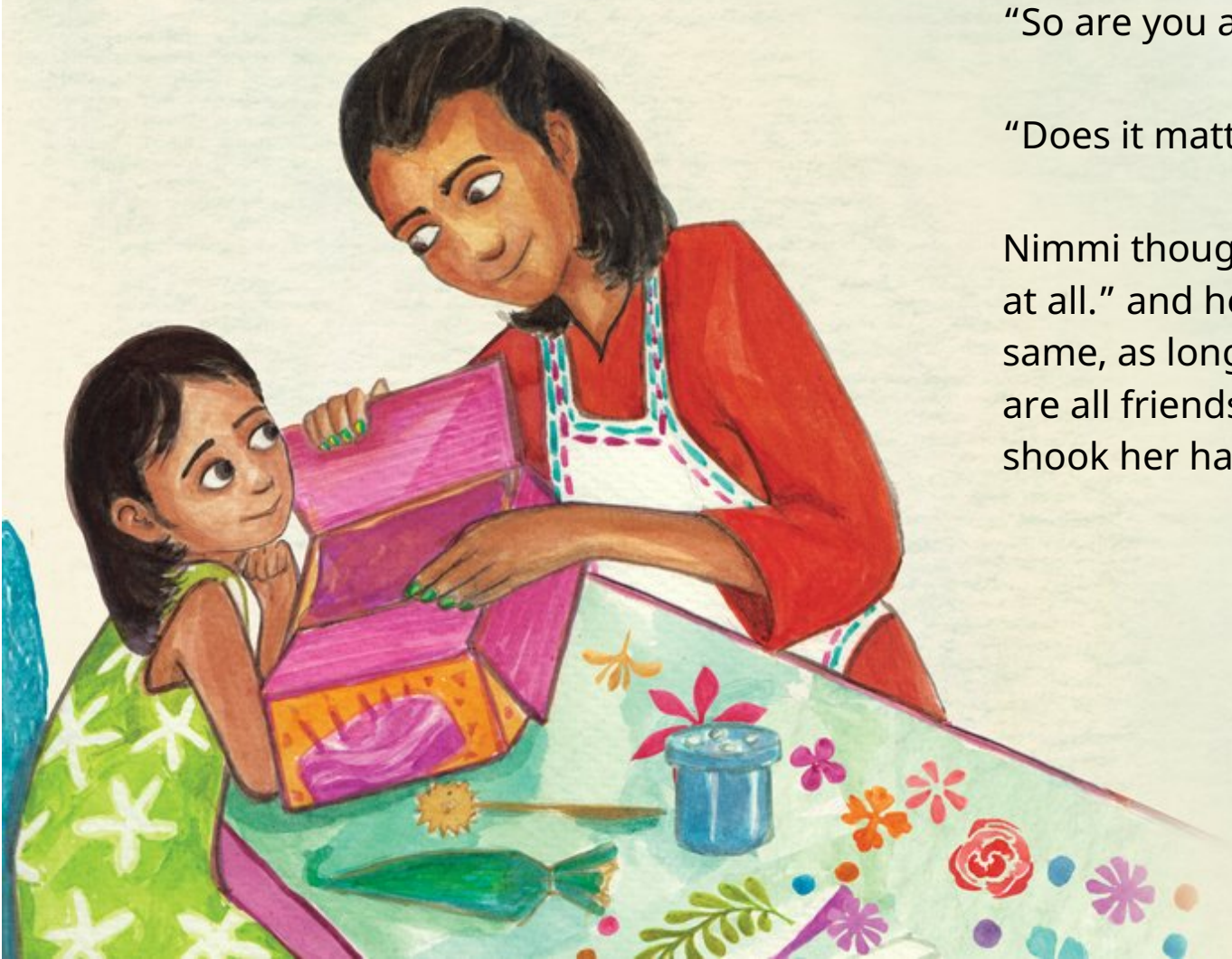
Later, as she watched Shri pack the cake into a box, Nimmi couldn't help but ask, "Shri, who is Akka, the name on your door?"

"Me!" smiled Shri.

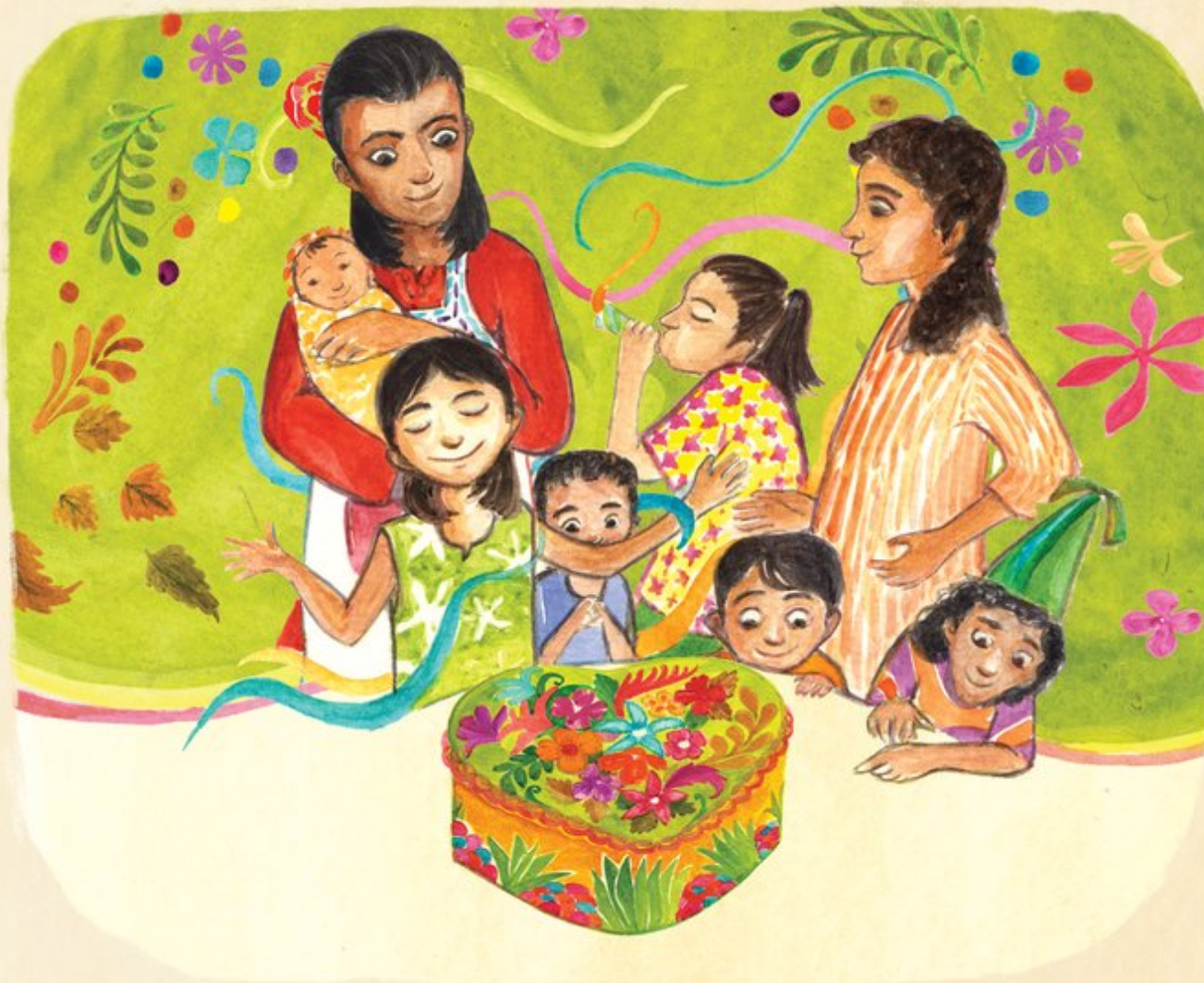
"So are you a girl or a boy?" asked Nimmi.

"Does it matter?" said Shri.

Nimmi thought about it and replied, "No, not at all." and held out her hand, "It's all the same, as long as I get more cake. Anyway, we are all friends under the summer sun." Shri shook her hand and grinned.







As Shri helped carry the big cake back to her house, Nimmi kept wondering who the cake was for. She rang the bell, and the door opened.

“SURPRISE! It’s your Un-Birthday!” All her friends crowded around and cooed with delight as Nimmi opened up the box of her Summer Cake.

Nimmi looked back and saw the love in her mother’s eyes, and a smile that was brighter than summer itself.

## A letter from the real Akka

As a child, I always felt like a girl, even though I had the body of a boy. My feminine behaviour attracted unwanted attention and I realised very early, that the world was not an easy place for me.

Thankfully, I felt safe at home because my parents never really harassed me for my feminineness – be it wearing makeup or women’s clothes. At school too, my teachers were loving and this is where I found other amazing friends who also identified themselves as girls. Such an inclusive atmosphere, free of discrimination and bullying gave me confidence to grow up freely, without any guilt or shame.

When I was growing up, it was almost impossible to come across a children's book that had a trans character in it. Times are changing. As an artist and filmmaker, I have always tried to bring the world of queer folks into the mainstream, through my work. And I'm thrilled to find that this book tries to do the same. The author has sensitively portrayed “Akka”, the trans character. And her interactions with Nimmi, the little girl, are both playful as well as informative for young readers.

**Pradipta Ray**

Mumbai, 2019







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'Friends Under the Summer Sun' has been published on StoryWeaver by Pratham Books. [www.prathambooks.org](http://www.prathambooks.org) | For Guddi of Nabha, my all-weather friend.

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# Friends Under the Summer Sun

(English)

Summer is almost over and Nimmi is stuck running errands for her mother. The latest – delivering eggs to Akka, her neighbour. But this dull task may turn out to be a great way to spend the day.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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