

# Lilu's Bright Diwali



Diwali is pronounced **di-WALL-ee**. Just sayin'!

**L**ILU'S HOUSE WAS bustling. It was Diwali, the Indian New Year and Festival of Lights, and her family was throwing a big party.

Lilu wanted to help. But she wasn't sure how. She wondered what her cousins far away in India did. Maybe they just ask, she thought.

So Lilu looked for someone to ask. She found Grandma Nanima sitting on the den floor in a sea of marigold flowers.

Nanima was making garlands to dress the doorways. The garland she was working on draped over her legs and snaked across the floor.

Lilu sat next to her and picked up a marigold. "Can I help?"

Smiling, Nanima took the marigold. "You can keep me company," she said, poking her needle and string through the marigold. She gently slid the flower down the string.

"Why do you always use marigolds? Why not . . ."—Lilu searched her mind—"daisies?"

You mean there are  
TWO of you?



Yeah, but we are  
nothing alike.



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“Marigolds grow all over India,” Nanima answered. “And orange and yellow bring joy and good fortune. They invite Lakshmi, the Goddess of Good Luck. She searches for homes to bless on Diwali.”

Lilu started to hand Nanima another marigold. But Nanima had already plucked one from the pile.

Later, while Nanima checked the garland’s length, a grinding noise came from the kitchen. She and Lilu looked toward it. “I wonder if your mom needs help,” Nanima said.

“I’ll check.” Lilu went to the kitchen.

Mom was grinding almonds in the blender to make punch.

When she turned it off, Lilu asked, “Can I help?”

Mom smiled. “You can keep me company.” She added milk, fizzy water, sugar, and spices to the blender. After a *whir* and a *zap-zap*, she poured everything into a punch bowl.

Next, she opened some boxes on the counter.

Lilu’s tummy rumbled when she peered inside. Sweet yellow lentil balls! Deep-fried sweet dough balls! Cashew fudge topped with silver foil!

Mom dropped a pinch of each dessert onto a saucer. She set it aside. “One for Lakshmi,” she said. Later,

Then there’s hope!.....



What happened between you and your sister?



.....We had a huge fight, she called me a horrible name, and I told her I never wanted to see her again.

Nanima would leave the sweets for the goddess and lead a prayer.

“And one for you.” Mom fed Lilu a lentil ball.

As Mom arranged the other sweets on a tray, a rustling noise came from the garage. Lilu and Mom looked toward it. “I wonder if your dad needs help,” Mom said.

“I’ll check.” Lilu went to the garage.

Dad was digging through a box.

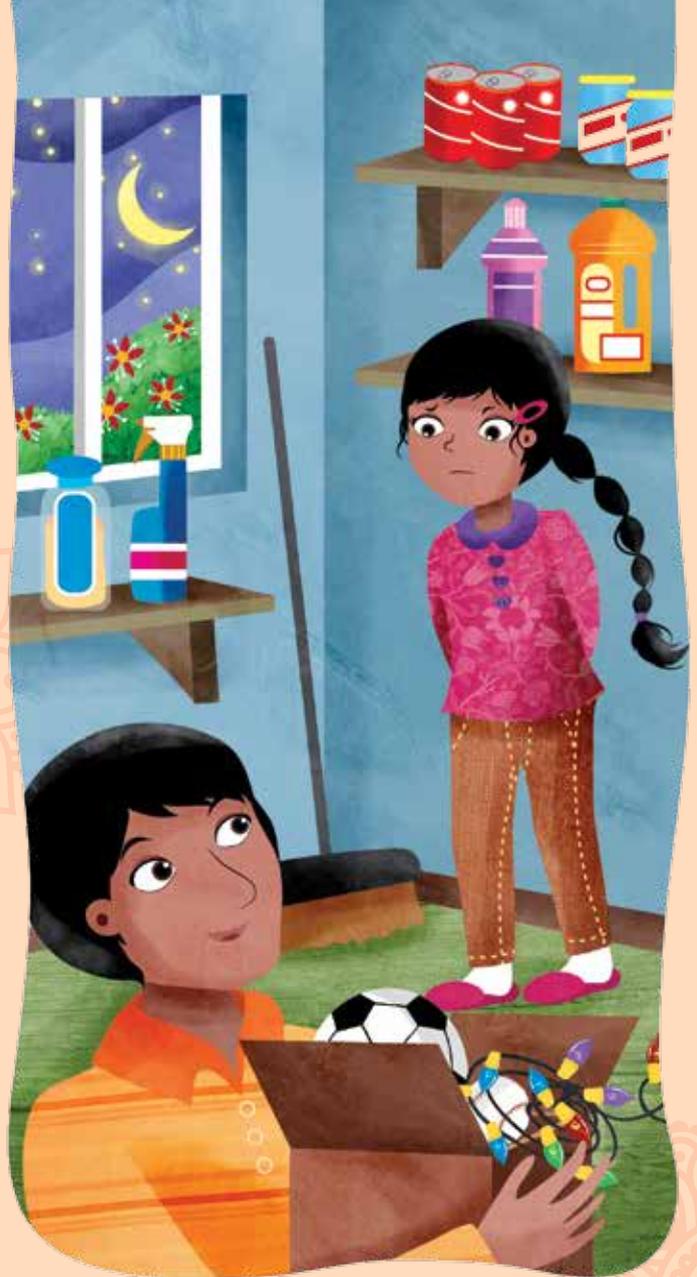
“Can I help?” Lilu asked.

Smiling, Dad glanced up. “You can keep me company. I’m going to set up the fireworks, then light the *diyas*—when I find them.”

Diyas are clay oil lamps. Every Diwali, Dad fills them with oil and a wick and lights them. The lights welcome the Good Luck Goddess into their home.

Dad closed the box and heaved it up onto a shelf. He pulled down another box and started searching it. “Do you know how Diwali started?”

Lilu nodded. “A good prince was banished to a forest. Then he



squashed a bad king and got to go home.”

Dad nodded. “That night, everyone lit diyas to guide Lord Rama home. Tonight our diyas will honor him, too, and celebrate good defeating evil.”





They kept looking but couldn't find the diyas. Dad shook his head. "I'll take a break and work on the firecrackers. Maybe your mom needs help? Or Nanima?"

"I already asked them." Frowning, Lilu went back inside as Dad lugged boxes of firecrackers outside for the night's celebration finale. Nanima had once told her firecrackers scare away evil spirits.

Lilu wandered to her room and poked through her toys. She set her stuffed animals on chairs around the kitchen table. Then she brought some clay over.

"Let's make garlands." Lilu pressed flower shapes out of the clay.

"Would you like a sweet?" Lilu put clay balls in front of each doll.

"It's time for sparklers!" She handed out thin logs of clay. She swirled hers in the air.

Later, the garage door opened. Dad walked in, scratching his head. "Where could the diyas be?"

"Maybe Ma moved them?" Mom said. "Ma!" she called.

Nanima walked in. "Yes?"

"We can't find the diyas," Dad said.

It was crazy! She exploded! She said all I did was nitpick, run her down, find fault—and she couldn't take it anymore.



Nooo...



Someone said THAT... about you?



Now that's not hard to swallow.



Nanima frowned. Then her eyes grew wide. “Didn’t we loan them to the Guptas a while back?” She called them—no answer.

“Maybe we can still buy some.” Dad called the only Indian store in town—sold out.

Diwali without diyas? It was like Christmas without a tree. How would the Good Luck Goddess bless Lilo’s family? How would they honor Lord Rama? Diyas guarded the lights that cut the darkness. They brought hope over misfortune.

Lilo stared at her clay flowers, sweets, and sparklers. Weren’t diyas made out of clay, too? She could make some!

Lilo gathered all her clay. She rolled, pressed, and pinched it into small bowls. She decorated them with green, red, and purple beads from her art supplies.

Mom came over to look. “They’re perfect!” she said.

“Better than the old ones,” Dad agreed.



Nanima nodded. “After they dry, we’ll set them out for everyone to see.”

But as the diyas dried, they started to crack.

Then she called me that awful name. Why she wants to see me, I don’t know.



Zoot, but look, eet eez already dark. And your sister still has not come.



I hope she hasn’t met with some misfortune—bad luck!



Lilu fought back tears. “We can’t pour oil into these. They’ll leak!”

“But we *can* put candles in them. Lots of people do that in America.” Dad opened a drawer and lifted out candles and a lighter.

Lilu helped him put a candle in each diya. They set the diyas in the front foyer and windows. Dad lit each one. Flames flickered up out of them, and shadows danced along the walls.

Later that evening, the dancing shadows greeted guests. Everyone admired the diyas.

“Lilu made them,” Mom bragged. “Thanks to Lilu, Lakshmi will surely find us,” Nanima said.

Dad raised his cup of punch. “To Lilu. Because of her help, we’ll have a happy New Year.”

“To Lilu!” everyone repeated. She grinned.

When the last firecracker fizzled out, Lilu’s diyas still lit up the night. And just like those flames dancing freely, she felt like dancing, too. The New Year was off to a bright start. 🐛

What name did she call you?



She... called me... the Ice Queen. (sob)



H'm. Wouldn't be my first choice, but...

