

Lakshmi and the Clever Washerwoman

Part two



The washerwoman carefully hid the pearl necklace at the bottom of her clothes basket and set off for home.

The washerwoman lived in a small hut in the poorest part of the city. It was a crowded, noisy place, where everyone knew everyone else. Keeping the necklace a secret wouldn't be easy.

As the washerwoman made her way to her door she could hear her neighbours gossiping.



'Have you heard?' said one. 'The Queen has lost a necklace made of pearls!'

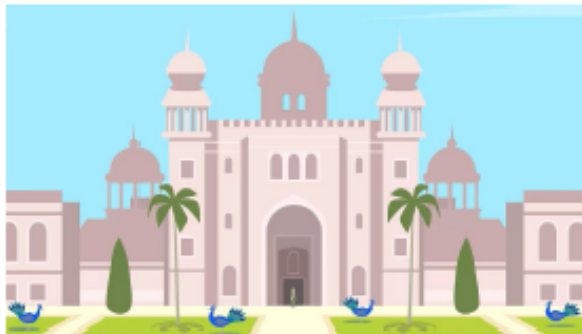
'She's so upset!' said another.

'The King has offered a huge reward to anyone who finds the necklace and returns it!' announced a third.



The washerwoman quietly slipped inside her home and shut the door. She didn't want her neighbours knowing she had the very same necklace in her basket!

But now she knew who the necklace belonged to and she knew what she had to do.



The washerwoman waited for her neighbours to go inside, then she slipped out and made her way to the palace.

How grand the palace was with its pink stone walls, swaying palms, peacocks and perfect lawns! She knocked on the door and it was opened by a servant, who frowned at the washerwoman and was about to close it on her again, when she showed him the necklace.

His eyes lit up. 'The necklace!'



Immediately the washerwoman was taken to see the King and Queen.

'You found my necklace!' cried the Queen, as the washerwoman bowed her head and offered it to her.

'And now for your reward!' said the King.



He clicked his fingers, and a servant entered with a pot full of gold coins. More money than the washerwoman had ever seen in her life!

But the washerwoman said simply: 'Forgive me, but I do not wish to accept your reward.'

The King looked surprised. 'Is the pot is not big enough? I will double the size - and the number of coins!'



'No, I don't want your gold coins.'

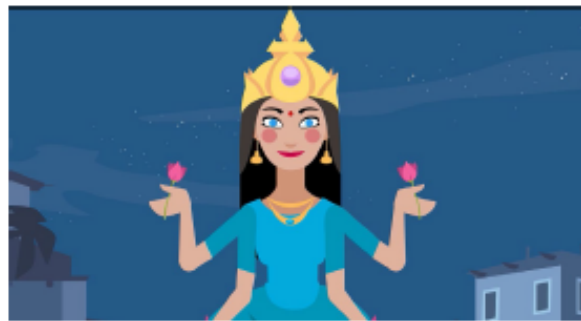
'Then what *do* you want?'

'Grant me a simple request. Tomorrow is Diwali. For my reward, issue an order: no-one in the entire city will be allowed to light a lamp in honour of Lakshmi, except me.'

The King looked surprised. What a strange request! But he said: 'Of course, I am happy to grant your wish. I shall issue the order straight away.'



That evening the washerwoman looked out of her window. The next day would be Diwali, but the entire city was in darkness. Just as she had asked, there wasn't a lamp or light to be seen, except one. The washerwoman lit a small candle, placed it on her door step - and waited.



When the goddess Lakshmi arrived in the city, all she could see was darkness. She felt shocked that her arrival had been ignored. 'Where are my people?' she wondered. 'I thought they'd welcome me tonight. Have they forgotten it's Diwali? Where are my lanterns? Where are my lights?'

Lakshmi was just about to leave when she spotted a single light shining in the poorest part of town.



Lakshmi went to the door and knocked.

The door slowly opened.

'Welcome, Lakshmi!' said the washerwoman.

'May I come in?' asked the goddess.

'You may, but only if you grant my family and I blessings for many years to come.'



Lakshmi looked at the washerwoman. In the entire city she was the only one to have lit a lamp in her honour.

'I shall grant you your wish,' she said with a smile.

Lakshmi was true to her word.



From that night onwards, the washerwoman and her family were blessed with good health, good luck and happiness for many years to come.