

The Guest





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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For permission requests, please contact

Smile Train:

Plot No 3

LSC, Sector C,

Pocket 6/7, Vasant Kunj,

New Delhi 110070

Website: www.smiletrainindia.org

Written by Mamta Nainy

Illustrations by Aishwarya Tandon

Design & Layout by Vikram Kumar

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The Guest



Written by Mamta Nainy
Illustrated by Aishwarya Tandon

There's a guest . . .
living in my head.
Unwanted. Unseen.
But always there.



At first, she was just a visitor.

One day, out of nowhere,
she showed up.




No knock. No polite

“Hello!”

She just barged in and
made herself at home.

BANG!!!





She started
small, taking just
a corner of my head.

But then she unpacked, one
whisper at a time.

Everyone's
staring at you!

Your smile is
broken!

What's that
big scar?

The more I listened,
the more she spread out.

Before I knew it, she was everywhere.

At the park . . .

During the class photograph . . .



They'll think you're strange!

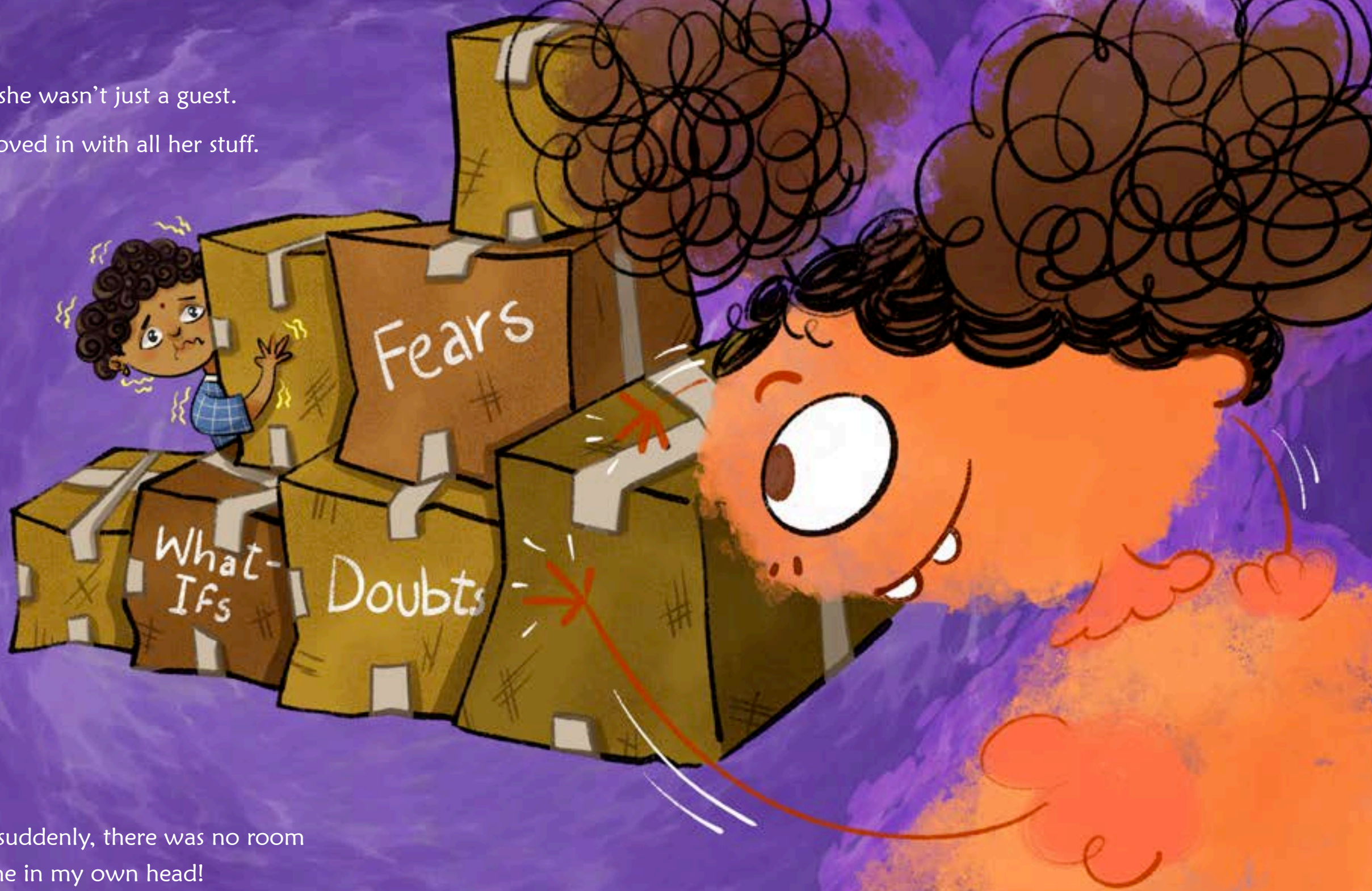
Hide your smile—it's not like theirs.

FLASH

Sing? You can't even speak right!

In the music class . . .

Soon, she wasn't just a guest.
She moved in with all her stuff.



And suddenly, there was no room
for me in my own head!

Ma said, "It's all in the mind."

I tried to kick her out,
but she wouldn't budge.



Of course, it was. I tried
ignoring the guest, but she
only got louder.

Papa said, "Lock her away;
shut her out."

One afternoon during recess, I sat alone on a bench.

Everyone else looked happy—laughing, playing, swapping tiffins.

Am I the only one with an unwanted guest?





On my way back to class,
I noticed a girl with cool
blue hearing aids.

Her friends waved her
over to play, but she
hesitated.

Why isn't
she joining
them?

And then I saw
her—her guest.

Don't go. How can you
play when you can't even
hear them properly?

The girl's head dropped,
and she turned away.

By the dance class, a boy lingered near the doorway, his feet tapping to the rhythm inside.



Have you seen any other boy in your class dance?

At the racetrack, a girl stood on the sidelines, staring at her round tummy.



You'll never win. Why even try?

For the first time, I noticed something.
Each of us had a guest.

And their voices? They sounded
just like mine.

Suddenly, my guest's chatter
softened and her presence shrunk.

Maybe, just like me, all she wanted
to know was that there were
others like her.

And that she wasn't
the only one.



Of course, my guest still lives
inside my head.



But now, we've struck a deal, she and I.

I've cleared a tiny corner for her, and she's
left enough space for me.



It's okay to have BIG feelings

We all have big feelings sometimes, like sadness, worry, or fear. They can show up suddenly, just like the guest in the story. And when they do, they can feel really heavy or loud. But here's something to remember: You're not the only one. Everyone has big feelings sometimes—and that's okay.

What Can You Do When You Feel Big Feelings?

1. Name your feeling

Say it out loud: "I feel sad." Or "I feel scared." Even if you don't know why, just saying it can help.

2. Take deep breaths

Try this: Breathe in like you're smelling a flower. Breathe out like you're blowing a balloon.

3. Be kind to yourself

Would you say something kind to a friend who's sad or worried? Say the same thing to yourself.

4. Think of good things

What makes you smile? A game? A friend? Your pet? A song? Think about it or draw it!

5. Talk to someone you trust

If your feeling feels too big or stays for a long time, talk to a grown-up you trust like a parent, teacher, or school counsellor.

My Guest!

1. What does your Guest look like?

Draw your big feeling as a character. Is it spiky? Cloudy? Loud? Small? Give it a face and a name!

2. Now draw yourself next to it.

What would you like to say to your guest?



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.

Aishwarya Tandon is an illustrator and cartoonist from Rajasthan, India. She is a digital artist who enjoys creating colourful, endearing illustrations with joyous, lighthearted themes. Aishwarya loves working on stories that allow readers to connect on a personal level and experience the joy of seeing themselves reflected in the art. When she’s not working, you can find her drawing in her sketchbook, drinking chai, catching up on shows and movies, watching football, or spending time with her loved ones. She has illustrated picture books, graphic novels, comics, games and more.



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.

There's an unexpected guest living in Mira's head—and she's not exactly welcome. The Guest whispers doubts, makes Mira shrink, and shows up at the worst times. But what if Mira is not the only one with a guest?

A warm and witty story about facing big feelings, finding your voice, and learning to live with the noisy little thoughts in your head.

