



# Bravo Burli!

**Author:** Nabanita Deshmukh

**Illustrator:** Rohit Bhasi



An old woman sat in the veranda of her thatched hut with her granddaughter by her side.

"Please tell me a story," pleaded the little girl tugging at the old woman's arms.

"A story?" exclaimed the lady. "Hmmm... let me see. Would you like to hear the story of a brave little girl?" The little girl nodded enthusiastically.

"Then listen," said the grandmother. "Deep inside a jungle..."

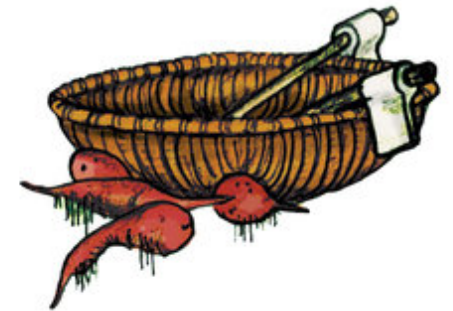




Deep inside a jungle was a small village. Deep inside the village was a cluster of low huts. Inside the hut lived a family of Kondh tribals who knew the jungle like the back of their hands. Each zigzag path, each large sal and mohua tree, each pug mark of the mongoose and the tiger, oh yes! They knew it all and much, much more!

Burlimundi was a little tribal girl who woke up early every morning. She took her bath in the stream close to her hut and helped her mother cook mandya jau, a porridge made of ragi and rice. Yummy! Burlimundi would lick her bowl clean and then help her mother wash the dishes in the stream.





The doors would then be bolted and all the women would gather and climb up a hill near the jungle to collect firewood, roots and fruits for their supper. The path was steep and long but Burlimundi was a strong girl, agile as a monkey and swift as a hare. Meanwhile, a few young men of the village along with Burlimundi's father and two elder brothers would go into the jungle to hunt. The others would make their way to the fields to plough.





'When will I have my nose and ears pierced like yours and apply black paint on my face?' Burlimundi asked her mother one day, staring at her tattoos and her ornaments made of beads. 'Oh, Burli,' sighed her mother, 'it's a long way off. You'll wear ornaments when you are much older, not before that! And I will not let you pierce your face with needles to make black lines on your cheeks!' Burlimundi sulked. Growing up seemed very far away but now it was time to play.



Little Burli looked around. It was summer. The streams were drying up but the mango trees were heavy with fruits – green, yellowish-orange and red. The little girl climbed up a tree and quickly hid herself in the foliage.



'Aya, guess where I am?' she cried out to her mother. Premasila Majhi, Burlimundi's mother pretended to look for her daughter and shouted, 'Oh no! I cannot find my daughter. Maybe a tree spirit has carried her away. I'll have to call Jani, the medicine man to get her back!' Spirits who whisked children away and spread misfortune were feared by all adivasis.

'Here I am, Aya!' cried Burlimundi nervously and she quickly jumped down from the tree with a mango in her hand. The women laughed.

'Oh Burli, go pluck some more mangoes, we were just trying to scare you,' said Premasila.





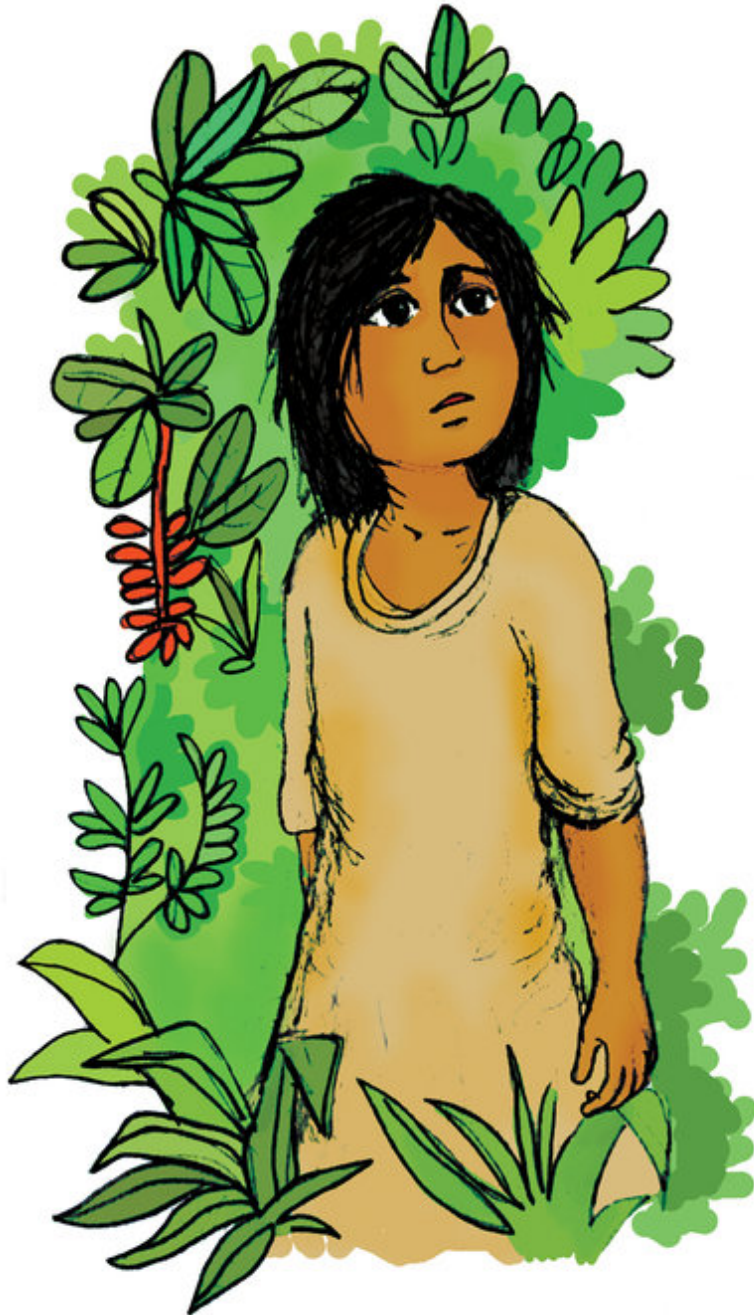
Burli was angry. She ran deeper into the forest and decided to stay far away from her mother.

'Aya always scares me with stories of spirits,' she muttered to herself with a frown. The jungle was dark and dense. The chirping of birds and the screech of monkeys echoed all around. Burli walked bravely alone.



This is where my Abba comes everyday to hunt, she thought, But why does he tell me that a jungle is not a playground for little girls? Suddenly the jungle resounded with eerie sounds. Birds nervously twittered when a fearful breeze blew through the mohua leaves. Squirrels squeaked in fright and monkeys chattered and hid themselves in the hollows of trees.





'What's the matter?' asked Burli turning around in bewilderment.

A rumble sounded and the little girl looked up at the sky thinking it to be thunder. But it was not! What can it be? thought the girl and then she heard a growl. There was no mistaking it this time. It was loud and clear like the grunt of the devil and even the sal trees trembled. Burlimundi froze, her legs became numb for she realized that it was none other than a tiger on the prowl!



'What am I going to do?' whispered Burlimundi. She was all alone and felt very scared. The bushes rustled and suddenly without any noise, a black-and-yellow striped coat glistened behind the trees, and then a large beast with flaming eyes and pointed teeth snarled and appeared before Burlimundi. His whiskers twitched and he gnashed his teeth noisily as if he were sharpening knives on a stone. Burlimundi was about to scream when her Abba's voice seemed to echo through the jungle.





'When you see a tiger do not run, Burli. Tigers sense fear and they pounce on you. If you have fire, wave it around. Tigers hate flames.'

Burlimundi did not move. She was a brave little girl and stood rooted to the soil like a little sal tree. She suddenly remembered she had slipped in a matchbox into her pocket while her mother cooked this morning. Why had she done that? She was not sure. But now she knew. It was destiny. The matchbox would save her life!

The tiger stared at her and their eyes met, flaming yellow with jet black. Burli did not budge. She was a brave girl and her mother's favourite child. Quick as lightning, she dug in her palms into her pockets, took out the matchbox and with one swift strike lit a matchstick. The tiger's gaze wavered for a moment and that was enough for Burli to pick up a dry branch and light it. The fire caught on instantaneously like yellow flaming tongues of a monster and the tiger leapt back in fear.





He glanced at the little girl holding the flame. Should I eat her up? he seemed to think, and then realised he was not hungry. Maybe he had devoured a monkey just a while back and his stomach felt queasy?

Why risk my life and eat a skinny girl? he thought and then with one swipe of his tail and a grunt, he nervously turned around and walked away.

That was close! Burli heaved a sigh and ran as fast as she could to where her mother was.





'Oh Aya, I just met a tiger and he did not eat me up!' panted the little girl. The women looked at one another and burst out laughing. 'You are such a sweet little girl, Burli. Why would a tiger not eat you up?' one of them jokingly remarked. Burli scratched her head. 'I don't know...' she murmured, 'maybe because I knew how to light a fire?'



'Light a fire?' chorused the woman.

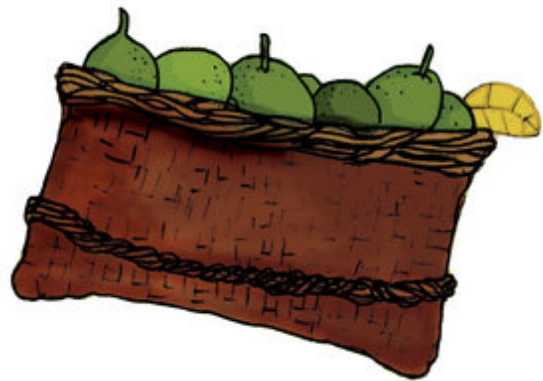
'That's not possible!'

'But I did!' protested Burlimundi with tears blinding her eyes and thankfully her mother stepped in.

'Hush. Don't you dare make fun of my daughter. She is a brave girl who can certainly scare a tiger away. I am so proud of her!' said Premsila and she hugged her Burli warmly. Burlimundi clasped her mother's hand and smiled.

Ooh! It was a radiant smile that lit up the dark summer night."





“Where is Burlimundi now?” asked the little girl after hearing her grandmother’s story. The old woman smiled and then chuckled, “Burlimundi is no other than your grandmother, my child, and she’s sitting right in front of you!”



The little girl's eyes lit up. "You are surely the bravest grandmother in the whole wide world and I want to be as strong as you!"  
said the little girl proudly, and putting her head gently on the old lady's lap, she gradually drifted into sleep.



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## **Bravo Burli!** (English)

The wise people of the Kondh tribe live close to the forest. They know each zigzag path, each large sal and mohua tree, each pug mark of the mongoose and the tiger, and so much more! Young Burli is beginning to read the signs of nature, but is she ready to face the most dangerous ordeal of her life?

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.



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