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The season for a gift



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Malavika Nataraj's first book is a charming tale of a little girl with a vivid imagination and a love for writing

Ever wondered what would happen if the little stories you dreamed up as a kid came true? Malavika Nataraj did, and that led her to write her first book, *Suraya's Gift*.

The story follows nine-and-a-half-year-old Suraya, a little girl with a vivid imagination and a love for writing. When her Aunt Lila gifts her an ancient notebook called the Story Catcher – whatever you write in the book, good or bad, comes true – Suraya learns to be responsible with her stories and intentions.

“The idea came to me when I was making up a bedtime story for my two daughters,” she says, in a chat after her book launch at Starmark in Express Avenue. “There was a dreamcatcher hanging in their window, and I adapted that into the Story Catcher,” she smiles, as her children try to get her attention.

Malavika has been writing for over two decades, having started quite young herself. She became a freelance writer in 2007, and in 2008, won an award at the Wimbledon Book Fest (U.K.) for her short story *Waiting*. Since then, she has been writing full-

children younger than that, and engaging enough that adults can enjoy it too. “It’s not a difficult book, and it can be understood on so many levels, by different age groups,” she explains.

One of the things that irks Malavika is that simply because the protagonist is a girl, it is slotted as a book for girls. “I’d like to clarify that it is a book for everyone, for all genders to read and enjoy,” she says. A quick read through of the book – it’s all of 60 pages – reveals enough suspense, action and drama to entertain anyone. One of the nicest things about the book is that it is very relatable to Indian kids, from the language (Suraya calls her parents Amma and Appa) to the illustrations by New Delhi-based 211 Studio, which are typical of any household across the country.

Malavika hopes to make it a series, as it says on the cover, *The Story Catcher Children*. “This book took me only a week to write, but a lot longer to get it ready for publishing. I’m still figuring out how to take it forward, but there will be more stories,” she says.

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