

READ ALOUD DAY





READING



Do you think only people in the same age group can become friends, or can a five-year-old child become friends with a man? Read this play based on Rabindranath Tagore's story *Kabuliwallah*, which is about friendship.

Characters

- **Narrator**
- **Mini:** a five-year-old girl
- **Father:** Mini's father, an author
- **Mother:** Mini's mother
- **Kabuliwallah:** Rahman, an Afghan dry fruit seller
- **Two Policemen**
- **Three boys**
- **Mini:** as a teenager

Scene I

Narrator: Five year old Mini cannot live without chattering. In all her life she has not wasted a minute in silence. One morning, Mini's father is busy at his desk writing a new novel. Suddenly Mini rushes in...

Mini: Father! Do you know Ramdayal, the door keeper, calls a crow *krow*. He doesn't know anything, does he? [*before Father could reply*] Bholu says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains! What do you think, Father?

Father: *[amused]* Mini, my dear, go and play with Bhola. I am busy.

Narrator: Mini goes to the window and sits there looking at the busy street outside. Suddenly, she shouts...

Mini: *Kabuliwallah! Kabuliwallah!*

Narrator: Her father peeps out to find a tall well-built man wearing loose untidy garments and a **turban** on his head. He is carrying a large bag on his shoulders. Hearing her call out, he comes to her house. Mini is scared and hides behind a door. Her father opens the door.



Father: I will buy some **raisins** and almonds. Where are you from?

Kabuliwallah: I am from Afghanistan. Every year, I come to Calcutta to sell dry fruits and **spices**. Where is the little one who called me?

Father: Mini, come out. It is rude not to meet someone after calling.

Mini: *[from behind the door]* What if he puts me in his bag and takes me away?

Father: *[laughing]* No! He will not.

Kabuliwallah: Come, little one, take some raisins. *[Mini comes and takes some raisins shyly. The Kabuliwallah leaves.]*

Scene II

Narrator: A few days later...

*[Both the Kabuliwallah and Mini are sitting on a bench just outside the door. They are **engrossed** in a conversation.]*

Mini: Tell me a story, *Kabuliwallah*.

Kabuliwallah: Yes, little one. Today I will tell you a story about my country, Afghanistan. *[Mini listens to him very attentively.]* By the way, when will you go to your father-in-law's house?



turban: a long piece of cloth wound around the head
raisins: dried grapes
spices: plant products with strong taste and smell used in cooking
engrossed: totally involved in something





Mini: Are you going there too?

Kabuliwallah: No! I will not. I will never go there.

Mini: Then I will not go either. *[The Kabuliwallah laughs. Mini continues.]*
Kabuliwallah, what do you have in your bag?

Kabuliwallah: I have an elephant in my bag. *[Both of them have a hearty laugh at the silly joke. Mini's father notices dry fruits in her pocket. He goes out to make the payment.]*

Father: Take this for the dry fruits. *[He gives the Kabuliwallah one **anna**.]*

Kabuliwallah: Thank you. *[The Kabuliwallah talks to Mini for a few more minutes and then leaves.]*

[Mini's mother notices a one-anna coin in Mini's hands.]

Mother: Who gave you the coin?

Mini: *Kabuliwallah!*



anna: an older currency unit used in India

Mother: *[shocked]* The *Kabuliwallah* gave it to you! Oh, Mini! How could you take it from him?

Mini: He is my friend. *[Saying that, she runs out of the room. Rama, Mini's mother, talks to her husband.]*

Mother: I wonder why you allow that stranger to come and spend time with Mini. Don't you see that he may cause harm to our daughter? What if he kidnaps her?

Father: Oh Rama, you worry too much. He is a harmless fellow. Mini really enjoys his company. They have become good friends.

Mother: You are too straightforward. I know you will not listen to me.

Scene III

Narrator: Many days pass. The *Kabuliwallah* has become a regular visitor. He listens to Mini's **banter** patiently and tells her stories about his country. Mini loves his company. One morning, Mini's father hears an **uproar** in the street. Looking out, he sees the *Kabuliwallah* being led away by two policemen, and a crowd of curious boys is following them.

Father: *[going out in the street to the policemen]* What happened? Why are you taking him away?

Policeman: Rahman has had a quarrel with a neighbour over an unpaid debt. Rahman lost his temper and struck the man. He is under arrest. *[Mini's father notices blood stains on Rahman's shirt.]*

Mini: *[peeping out from the window]* *Kabuliwallah! Kabuliwallah!* Are you going to your father-in-law's house?

Kabuliwallah: *[seeing Mini brings a smile on his face]* Yes, little one. I have to go to my father-in-law's place.

Narrator: The *Kabuliwallah* is sentenced to imprisonment for a few years. Time passes and Mini soon forgets him. He is never discussed in her house any more. Mini is now a young maiden.



banter: a funny conversation

uproar: a loud noise usually made by angry people



It is the day of her wedding. Her whole house is decorated with garlands and **festoons**. The sweet music of the shehnai is being played. There is a lot of **hustle and bustle** at her house since morning.

The *Kabuliwallah* appears at the door of Mini's house. At first, Mini's father can barely recognise him. He is no longer the tall robust man, but a thin greying old man.

Father: When did you come, Rahman?

Kabuliwallah: (*bowing respectfully*) I was released last night. May I see the little one?

Narrator: It was the *Kabuliwallah's* belief that Mini was still the same young girl!

Father: There are some **ceremonies** going on. I'm sorry I don't think you can meet her today.

[The Kabuliwallah turns away and begins to leave. Mini's father feels sorry for him. Kabuliwallah then turns around and comes back.]

Kabuliwallah: [*looking rather wistfully*] I've brought these for the little one. Can you please give these to her? [*He takes out some grapes and almonds from his pocket and gives them to Mini's father.*]

Father: [*taking out some money from his pocket and giving that to the man*] Please take this.

Kabuliwallah: You are very kind, sir. Please remember me. Do not offer me money. You have a little girl; I too have one like her. I think of her and bring fruits to your child, not to make a profit.

Narrator: Saying this, he puts his hand inside his big loose robe, and takes out a small and dirty piece of paper. He unfolds this with great care and smooths it out with both hands on a table. It bears the impression of a little hand. Not a photograph. Not a drawing.

The impression of an **ink-smear**ed hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of his own little daughter has been always in his heart since he came to Calcutta to sell his wares in the streets.



festoons: decorative chains of flowers and garlands
hustle and bustle: busy, noisy activity of a lot of people in one place
ceremonies: a series of formal or traditional actions or rituals
wistfully: sadly
ink-smeared: covered in ink

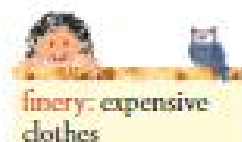
Father: Wait, Rahman; I will call Mini. [*Mini enters dressed as a bride in all her finery.*]

Narrator: The *Kabuliwallah* looked a little staggered. He realises that Mini is not the 'little one' any more.

Kabuliwallah: My little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house? [*Mini, now recognising her old friend, smiles shyly. She touches his feet as a mark of respect.*]

Father: [*With tears in his eyes and handing Rahman a few currency notes*] Go back to your own daughter, Rahman, in your own country. May the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!

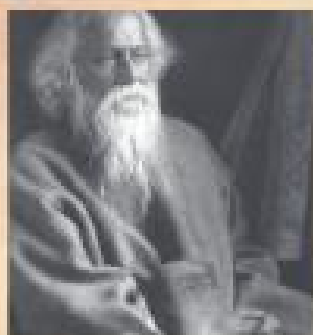
(Adapted into a play from Rabindranath Tagore's Kabuliwallah)



SUMMARY

Rahman the *Kabuliwallah* is a fruit-seller from Afghanistan. He befriends a young girl, Mini. They form a strong bond of friendship. Mini's father often purchases dry fruits from him. Mini too enjoys his company. However, Mini's mother does not approve of him. One day, the *Kabuliwallah* is put into prison over a fight with a neighbour. He returns after ten years of imprisonment to meet Mini. He is informed by Mini's father that it was Mini's wedding day. Rahman shares with Mini's father a piece of paper with an impression of a little hand - it was of his daughter back in Afghanistan. He tells him how Mini reminded him of her. Mini's father offers him money and advises him to go to his daughter in Afghanistan. Mini in all her bridal finery touches his feet and seeks his blessings.

About the Author



Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), fondly called Gurudev, was a great Indian poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, short story writer, music composer, and artist. His collection of poems *Gitanjali* won the Nobel Prize in Literature in the year 1913. He holds the unique distinction of having written national anthems of two countries—India's *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla*.