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Giving her the middle finger

I think I was 10 years old. We lived in Madras (now Chennai). When school closed for the summer my parents decided that I was old enough to be sent to Kerala to spend the holidays with my grandmother in our ancestral home in Kannur. I was delighted. We had a big house with a yard, a pond and hundreds of trees, and I lost no time making full use of all that life had to offer. I spent the whole day outside playing with my cousins and even learned to swim. As the sun went down, my aunt would usher us inside the house to wash up and say our prayers.

My Uncle Damu got married that summer. He was quite young and his blushing bride had just finished high school. Sometimes she joined us when we played hide and seek or hop and catch. One evening, after a really hot day, dark clouds began to roll across the horizon and there was the smell of rain in the air. A cool wind whipped up, and we heard the thudding of mangoes falling from the trees. With a whoop of joy we rushed to collect

as many as we could before the sky opened up and we got drenched in the downpour.

The next day the ground was still wet. My cousins were taking turns swinging from the low-lying branch of a mango tree. I found two planks of wood and used them to make a crude slide which I proceeded to climb gingerly. My acrobatic adventure came to a disastrous end when it gave way and collapsed, and my finger was crushed between the planks. I screamed out in pain. The tip of my middle finger was avulsed and a neat circular cap of skin along with my fingernail lay on the ground..The bare flesh was slowly beginning to well up with blood. The shock drowned out the pain. I think I was more afraid of how the grownups would react than about the injury itself. As I feared, my grandmother swooned as soon as she saw it. Uncle Damu scooped me up and jumped on his bicycle, and as I sat on the bar and held on for dear life with my one good hand he pedaled furiously towards the Missionary Hospital nearby.