



***I'll Go and Come Back***

Written by Rajani LaRocca

Illustrated by Sara Palacios

Candlewick Press, 2022, 36 pp (unpaged)

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*I'll Go and Come Back* portrays a love between a grandmother and child as they overcome language, cultural and distance barriers.

This story is told through the eyes of Jyoti, a young girl with Indian heritage, as she leaves the United States for India for the first time since she was a baby. Confident and

with a sense of belonging, she leaves the U.S. to see her Sita Pati, grandmother, only to arrive in India uncertain and homesick. Readers can notice how Sita Pati and Jyoti use play, food and shopping to overcome language and cultural barriers, deepening their relationship. By the time the visit is over, Jyoti is sad to leave. She remembers that in Tamil, the native language of her Sita Pati, no one just says “goodbye.” The Tamil phrase, “Poitu varen,” is used instead. Jyoti’s heart is reassured by this vow of “I’ll go and come back.”

As promised, the next summer Sita Pati flies from India to the U.S. “She seemed smaller than I remembered,” observes Jyoti. Sita Pati is likely experiencing the same feelings of uncertainty as Jyoti did. This is a gentle reminder that it is often frightening to travel to an unfamiliar place, even when family is waiting to welcome the arrival, especially when the language and cultural norms are different. Just as Sita Pati did for Jyoti, it’s now Jyoti’s turn to make her grandmother feel comfortable with games, food, and shopping. It is significant that we see the comforting actions of Sita Pati being reciprocated by her young granddaughter. This story of intergenerational relationships shows how important it is that youth are taught the language and customs of their heritage to keep them alive. The book also highlights the significance of both generations learning from each other.

In a September 2021 interview by Candlewick Press, Rajani shared that the book came to her as a “visual metaphor.” She thought of how the patterns and colors in the border of a sari can be reflected in the body of the sari and how the patterns in the body of the sari can be reflected in the border. Like the beautiful saris in the endpapers, the quality of the illustrations is evident straightaway with the cover depicting the unconditional love between a granddaughter and her grandmother. The character’s facial expressions reveal emotion and set the tone for the story, complimenting the text being read. Several whole page spreads indicate key moments that keep readers present in that particular part of the book until the page is turned. The illustrations were done in gouache and acrylic and assembled digitally by Sara Palacios.

*I'll Go and Come Back* portrays strong grandparent-grandchild connections in a Tamil family so this story might pair well with a picturebook by LaRocca titled *Where Three Oceans Meet* (2021). Illustrated by Archana Srenivasan, this story shows three generations of Tamil women, Sejal, Mommy and Pati, who travel through South India from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. During their trip, they share food, clothes, and ideas that reflect their personalities, but also generational and

cultural differences. A second pair is *Ammachi's Amazing Machines*, written and illustrated by Rajiv Eipe (2021). This story is about young Sooraj and his grandma who love inventing. Readers follow the two in their adventure using simple machines to make coconut barfi. Young Sooraj wants to learn from his Ammachi how to make coconut barfi and Ammachi is pleased that the knowledge is being passed down. Just like *I'll Go and Come Back* (2022), *Ammachi's Amazing Machines* (2021) depicts an intergenerational relationship and the bond that is strengthened from time being spent together.

Rajani LaRocca is an award-winning author of children's novels and picturebooks. She was born in Bangalore, India, but her family moved to the U.S. when she was a baby so she grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. LaRocca graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Medical School and lives in eastern Massachusetts where she works as a primary care physician. Her middle grade novel, *Red, White, and Whole*, won a 2022 Newbery Honor, the 2022 Walter Dean Myers Award, the 2022 Golden Kite Award, and the 2021 New England Book Award. Rajani's other novels and picturebooks include *Much Ado About Baseball* (2021), *Seven Golden Rings* (2020), *Where Three Oceans Meet* (2021), and *Bracelets for Bina's Brothers* (2021). She also co-hosts the STEM Women in KidLit Podcast. Her work can be explored on her website (<https://www.rajanilarocca.com/>).

Sara Palacios is a native of Mexico and the recipient of a Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor for *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (2011). Sara is also the illustrator of other picturebooks, including *A Song of Frutas* (2021), *Hello, Friend* (2020), *A Way With Wild Things* (2020), and *The Flying Girl* (2018). Sara earned a degree in graphic design along with BFA and MFA degrees in illustration from the Academy of Art in San Francisco, where she lives. Visit her website (<https://www.sarapalaciosillustrations.com/>) to see more of her work.

## References

LaRocca, R. (2021, September 8). Rajani LaRocca discusses I'll Go and Come Back. Vimeo. [vimeo.com/600386789](https://vimeo.com/600386789)

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