**Coir Rope: A Recipe and Further Instructions**

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*Allapuzha, Kerala, India, 1944*

1. *How to Make Coir Rope*

Seek out the remains of coconut husks, ones you have not eaten. Ones left behind, devoid, having left other bellies full. Husks are the discard, the inverse, they occupy an empty space. They are the waste that others have no need to repurpose but that they leave behind for the sake of those less fortunate. You see, that way, nothing is thrown out. In the ecosystem of our village, everything is recycled.

It will require all the children to gather enough husks. But now with my sister gone, married and settling in Muhamma, hands are short and work is longer. We collect more. Carry more. The task is made more arduous in all of her absence. I miss her and that cannot be accounted for in this recipe. It remains in that negative space.

Keep the coconut husk submerged in water. This may take some time. It is not easy for the husk desires to float. The pulp will eventually emerge in a good soaking. Beat it. Thrash it. Here you express your angers and frustration, and no one will know exactly why. They won’t ask you and you won’t ask them. Here it is alright to rage at the condition of things, including that you are making coir rope from other people’s nothings. Why? So your family can eat. So you have something of value to sell. So that, at least there is tapioca for the stomach, for the journey, to offer as gifts to your sister and her family when you go to visit and check on her.

Extract the fibers. Careful here, they are spindly and stick. Even that pain, however, helps. It metes a retribution of sorts. *Stick me*, you may taunt the fibers. They are a messy bunch and extracting them requires a type of precision. So here you must breathe and dig and find patience in the pain.

Dry them first in a stolid sun. Let the heat wrangle them quietly of any water or moisture to prepare them for a metamorphosis. Think of it more like what is required of a body through chrysalis. It must melt and transform to become anew.

Don’t braid a rope with sadness. Not this rope. Be grateful that it will provide. So now, prepare to roll it. It is a prayer. This rope holds promise of seeing your sister again, of sustaining your family. It’s not like she’s locked away somewhere. No, that’s not it. It’s that you must have a reason to visit her and her in-laws and you must offer something. This arrangement of family, the tree of life that connects across our riverways likeblood but not exactly blood means you need something of value to offer for the connection to be established. You are not enough. So pray that this rope is.

Your mother’s hands are getting old and knotted, the kind of way where she can still roll but it pains you to watch her. She sometimes employs her feet to steady the dried fibers. And you sit there, and you roll with her. You take pride in coiling the coir, creating a neat circle, unending like the promise of life and birth between you. (*Was it like this that the umbilical cord connected us, Amma*, you wonder? Such questions are never asked aloud. You’ve seen babies born and you’ve seen them die. Once your cousin birthed a girl whose head was caught in that cord like a noose. Wasn’t it supposed to bring life?)

Have an awe and a respect for this coir rope you’ve made.

Now may it do you justice.

1. *How to Sell A Coir Rope*

The merchant requires an early morning journey by foot to Amballapuzha. He stands a hawkish man, but fair, we surmise, in his price. After all, we all know each other here. In the maze of how we are related and connected to this place. Everyone knows someone who knows you even if you are separated by days of travel, even if your house is made of mud and theirs of stone. And sometimes that which connects you binds you by blood down the ancient trajectory of lineage. So be careful how you treat each other. The ancestors are watching.

To his shop you arrive, the coir bundled neatly, wrapped around itself. You’ve become an expert at knots, having practiced on this homemade rope for so long. You can tie just about anything so it is secure and in one pull of the rope, a skilled pull that requires a forceful tug, it can come apart simply. This impresses the merchant.

*Smart* he says, eyeing you, still a small but growing boy.

*Where is your mother*? He asks.

*Home,* you say. You wonder if he will honor that fair price now.

A lucky day. The market is quiet. Rope is always needed and there are few selling what you’ve brought. Tomorrow may be busy. Wares may need to be affixed to carts. Mathew and Paul, the half-Anglo brothers, live nearby. This is their community and they can afford the vegetables and grain that regularly bring their households to this market. Rope will be needed to wrap their packages, their sustenance that will keep them prosperous and well prepared for the famines to come.

*Yes*, the merchant says, *your rope is good*.

See you can sell this rope because your product is well-made. Durable. Meant to last and withstand. Never mind your mother broke her back to make it. Never mind that she nor your father are here to haggle. Never mind that you never ate the coconut to begin with that was the genesis of this rope. Never mind it began as the refuse of others.

You exchange for a mix of tapioca and money. Coins, really. But it is a fair exchange. You leave with what you came for. It was a good day.