Laila and the Slow Afternoon

A Quiet Picture Book About Slowing Down · Ferngleam

Laila and the Slow Afternoon

A Quiet Picture Book About Slowing Down

Ferngleam · First free edition, October 2026

This book is free. You are welcome to download, read, print and share it, unchanged and free of charge. Please don't sell it.

The story text, the illustrations and the audio narration were made with AI tools, then edited and checked for this edition.

Read by a computer voice: Piper text-to-speech, "Cori" voice (en_GB-cori-high) by Bryce Beattie, public domain.

Before You Read

This is a quiet story about a woman who rushes home, a mother who has already poured the chai, and what happens when ten minutes become an afternoon.

As you read, notice how the light changes once the phone is set down.

Laila hurried up the stairs of their small Lahore flat, bag digging into her shoulder, mind full of unfinished lists.

The afternoon sun already leaned gold through the stairwell window.

Inside, Ammi sat on the narrow balcony with two clay cups of chai, steam curling into the warm air.

A small jasmine pot sat on the table beside the cups, pale flowers open.

“I only have ten minutes,” Laila said, still standing, keys in her hand.

Ammi’s smile did not argue. She only slid the second cup a little closer.

Laila sat on the edge of the stool, half-turned toward the door.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket like a tiny restless bird.

She almost answered. Then she looked at Ammi’s hands — slower now, careful, wrapping the cup as if it were something precious.

The chai smelled of cardamom and old habit.

Laila set the phone face-down on the table between them.

For a moment the flat felt larger, as if a crowded room had emptied.

They drank without filling the quiet.

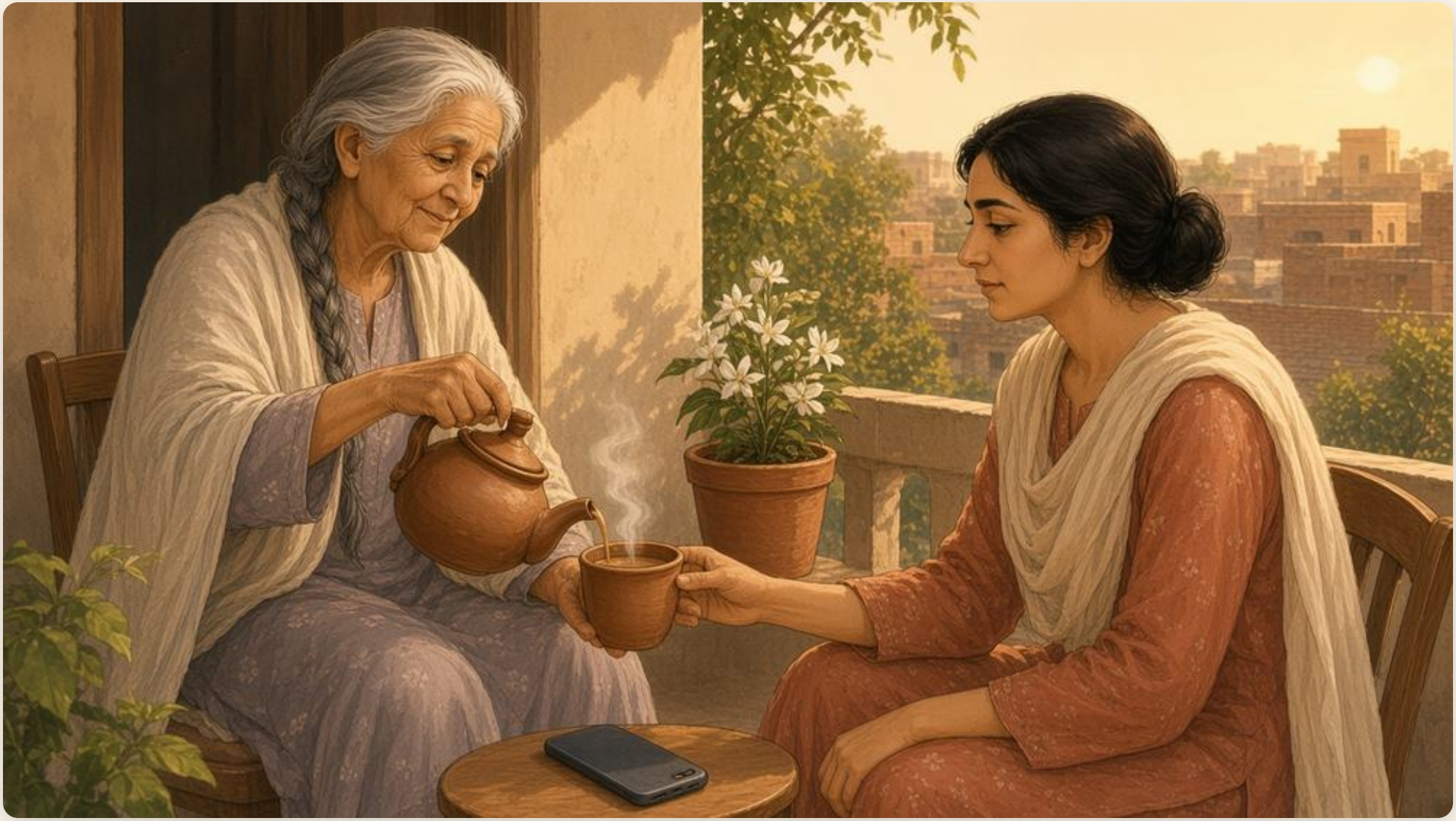
Below, a vendor called once and moved on; the jasmine scent rose each time the breeze turned.

Ammi opened a worn green notebook and turned to a pressed flower, thin as paper, still faintly yellow.

“From the courtyard when you were small,” she said. “You used to sit until the light finished.”

Laila remembered bare feet on warm brick, no clock, no list — only the long gold slide of afternoon.

Something tight in her shoulders loosened.



She stayed for a second cup. The sun climbed lower and painted the balcony tiles the colour of honey.

Ammi did not ask about work. She only poured.

When Laila finally rose, she left the phone where it was for one more breath.

“Same time next week?” she asked. Ammi’s eyes brightened like the first sip of tea.

Later, walking to the shop, Laila moved a little slower.

She noticed a stripe of late light on a neighbour’s wall — ordinary, golden, and enough.

The Lesson

Speed can make a life feel full while leaving the softest hours empty. A second cup of chai, a pressed flower, a shared silence — these do not shout for attention.

You do not have to abandon your work. You only have to choose, now and then, to arrive fully where you already are. The afternoon was waiting; it only needed you to stay.

Hurry steals the softest hours; when you put the phone down, ordinary light becomes enough.

Conclusion

Laila still keeps a free afternoon for Ammi's balcony and two clay cups.

What small hour will you refuse to rush through today?

The End