

Featured Poems

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How to Spell Home **Rian**

i cannot spell home
the letters don't fit right and the syllables feel clumsy when I speak
but I know it all the same
my mother never let us go hungry
of all the curses she folded into blessings
it sat not among the them
clucking for our attention
instead it drifted as a phantom
a faint pressure against a page
that could become a gaping wound in throbbing skin
as a child stood against the cliffs edge
imagining his body dashed against the sea
we held hunger in one palm
while the other pushed up and helped swallow
i cannot spell home
the letters don't fit right and the syllables feel clumsy when I speak
but I can feel it all the same
hissing garlic as it hits the oil

orange spices bolder than the sun

mouths too full to speak yet they

echo so loudly nonetheless

Rian is an aspiring young writer/poet who loves the use of imagery and prose to bring out emotions and experiences that otherwise feel indescribable.

The Hungry Banyan

Madhu Mehrotra

The once tall, over three-hundred-year-old banyan was really hungry.

It was so weak that it could not even be angry.

The sky was illuminated by the scorching sun, but the banyan could absorb no light the water was not for its roots.

The banyan had sheltered the weary travelers for ever so many years.

As its strength was diminishing, the scenes of the past became clear.

When it first sprouted, two tiny leaves, two beautiful young women decked in red saris and gold jewelry, except for the feet, came singing songs. They held a lit lamp and the turmeric sindoor dyed thread. Completing the ritual, they placed the oil lamp on the ground and tied the thread around my young supple, shoots and leaves.

"We must look after this plant. It is sacred. It was under this plant that Siddharth became the Budh."

"Sister you are confused, not this but the peepal."

"Dear, you are confused. It is this. You can ask Punditji."

"Punditji? Why will Punditji know about Budh. He has a lot more divine beings to worry about."

"Any way, this is the 'buad' of Savitri Satyvaan. A powerful and wise woman."

"Grow big, grow strong, shelter the good, dispel the wrong." sang the two women, folded their hands and went away, as the silver bells of their anklets sounded a gentle music.

A few days later, a fakir dressed in an ochre gown, followed by a black dog came to rest near me. Its paws and tail tip were white. I shared my shade with him or rather them.

"Killu, we will live here this winter. In summer we will go to Mansarover. Will you come with me?"

The dog whimpered " vvoow, kkkooinn, oooiiee."

"What? you won't. Lazy tuuum. You went with Yudhistra but can't go with me. Leave it, we'll see when summer comes."

The fakir unfolded his check designed blanket of black, green and red wool. Stretched himself on his hay mattress and began to snore. The animal snuggled close to the blanket, like a little circle to keep warm.

Both of them spent the winter, along with the many other creatures living in my boughs, bark, trunk or visiting the foliage.

Hundreds of birds, lizards, snakes, snails, earthworms, monkeys and squirrels found food in my branches and near my roots. The woodpecker pecked at the little beings, the tiny six-legged creatures that could fly, but chose to fall prey and die, so that a bird wouldn't remain hungry and cry. None remained hungry. The man and dog remained calm, while the kindhearted gave them alms. Sometimes the fakir would give a 'mantra' in return to take care of the spiritual hunger settling the restlessness as the headache vanishes with oil balm.

With the winter phasing out spring came along. The parrots, pigeons, mynahs, crows, tailor birds, flew in and out. Bringing bits of grass, thread, twigs to build their nests. The cunning cuckoo laid its eggs among those of the crows. The woodpecker lived deep in the hollow.

In a matter of weeks, a hundred or so little fledglings, hatchlings saw the play of darkness and light.

Sometimes for space they would fight, as they grew, the nest became a little tight. Soon they learnt to fly with all their might, an empty nest was left for the night.

The passersby began to express their fright, when a band of vagabonds took it upon themselves to hide among my dense leaves and aerial roots.

"This is a safe hiding place. We can rest in the day and make hay while the weary traveler rests. They would pick up the travel bundles of the travelers, rummage, take anything of worth, throw the rest away or let it down from the branches.

"O see, from where did this tumbler fall? Ah, here comes a pair of tongs with a doll."

"The spirit of the past lives here. Beware. Don't scream, it will snatch your dream and throw you in the stream or hang you on a beam. Beware, beware."

"Climb up the tree, don't dare."

"I am not frightened, I don't care."

Only once did a little girl come up. Seeing the men in the tree she said

"Spirit of the past, when did you have a meal last? Are you hungry?"

Caught unaware, the men scrambled to the higher branches, jumped to the next tree, in a bid to flee. They thought others would follow, leaving their booty in the hollow.

The girl scaled down.

"I have chased them away, don't be scared, I pray. When in fright always say 'Boigli boo, who are you? If it is a spirit of the past, it will not a shadow cast. It will dissolve into thin air, without hurting a single hair. Just say Boigli boo, who are you?"

The men in the habit of stealing never came, perhaps they found better work to satisfy their hunger.

My circumference had widened. The gentle deer, peacocks, elephants and a tiger came to rest after a hearty meal. Hunger was not their word as the bountiful forest provided well.

Many, many years later a rich king passed this way. He was mightier than the mightiest they say. He had been hunting for long, tired, and he wanted to hear a song. His musician and his companions sat down to sing, while the cooks did many delicious dishes bring. The plates were gold, the tumblers silver, I am told.

Everyone ate to their heart's content, then went to sleep in the tent.

The mosquitoes were a nuisance, as the nearby river was in a flood. They sucked the blood. Their hunger was gone, but the men had a pain in the bone. The bodies itched, the king scratched, his face with red boils patched. They were ill, with their swords they tried the pest to kill. To no avail, as hundreds lived on the forest trail.

The king now understood the plight of his people, so he ordered a rest house to be built.

The travelers now could snore with stomachs full, after selling or purchasing a bull, their carts to pull.

The name and fame of the king grew, as blemishes he had few.

Hearing of his magnificence came a traveler named Luminecence.

He wrote in detail - "This is a kingdom rich. No one is hungry, no one is in the doldrum ditch.

People have silver and gold

The young respect the old.

They are polite

They fly a kite

Their eagles squabble

When in money they dabble

It's health better than other places

The masses have beautiful shining faces

A beautiful mausoleum was built for the queen, with whom the monarch had in love been. Of pure white marble it was. Designed to suit the cause.

The hunger came with a draught

The Badshah a kind man no doubt

Gave work to the bricklayer

To build a house of prayer

To the carpenter and mason

He gave stones by the ton

To keep the killing hunger at bay

The artisans worked day by day

Time passed; the days of kings were over

The merchant company took the power

People were becoming poorer by the hour

Their land was snatched

Conspiracy was hatched

The master became the slave

Till the gun was picked by the brave

The Crown took over the Company

Farmers were hungry and faint

Seeing their plight came forth a saint

He led them in peace

The Crown bid farewell

The people cried "Bye, Viceroy."

Slavery was replaced by days of joy

People chose their leader by vote

Travelled by plane instead of boat

The path was now, a road

Big, wide, smooth and broad

Children went to school

By bicycle, bus or car-pool

I saw

People were happy, they sipped Appy

Threw the tetra pack,

in their knapsack

That hung on their back,

To throw in the dustbin sack

As the vehicles grew

Walking people were few

A factory was built, to refine crude

An important commodity, dude

To avoid scolding for being late,

People purchased petrol at any rate

Hunger for the currency and coin grew

Trust, honesty and integrity they slew

Values of immortal time were blown

Discord among brothers was sown

For a few silver coins all was sold

Honour, bravery, courage of the bold

No one spoke, none came forth

The wind blew from the north

Black, grey, hot air or thick smoke

Belching out from the chimney poke

The greasy sticky pitch soot

Was on my root, on my shoot

My green turned dullish black

I couldn't breathe, it was a sack

A sack that left no space for light

I struggled, I had to fight

I was hungry, without the air

The greedy one was most unfair

Three hundred years down the line

For fresh clear air now I pine

I am hungry, I am crying

All along with me are dying

The baby, the bird, the bee

Sadly, the greedy won't see

I am covered in soot, I am hungry

With no strength to be angry

This, a loot that no one sees

If I am hungry what happens to the bees?