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POTATO STEW: A SHORT STORY

by Stephen Yan (c.2012)

On the sandy dunes of a distant yet familiar world lived Dhya, a timid fifteen-year old girl. She lived a quaint life with her overbearing parents. She never got to see the world as it really was beyond the vast brown plains that surrounded her home. She longed and longed to have friends but passed the days wallowing about her lonely sand hut.

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Phen, a young wanderer, had lost his way, now dying of thirst on the outskirts of Dhya's desolate hometown. Dhya was making potato stew for her weary parents. They had just returned from a hunt, and they had brought back nothing.

She whiffed then looked out the window and noticed a tiny speck. Seldom did she notice a change of scenery, and never had she even the prospect of a visitor. With sudden uplifted spirits, Dhya turned off the sand stove and dashed out the door escorted by a thinly-veiled excuse.

It was a sandmeter or two before Dhya realized that something was off; the speck wasn't moving. Gradually, she started running frantically towards it. Phen had fainted from dehydration, but luckily Dhya carried pocket elixirs in the event that her parents were out during the arid aftermath of a rainshower.

Dhya revived him successfully, and their eyes met inquisitively. Dhya's delighted to see another like her, and Phen's stirred at his unlikely savior.

"Who are you?" Dhya inquired.

Phen did not respond. He lacked the breath to even mutter coherent words.

Still wondrous and baffled, Dhya motioned him towards her home. But Phen gestured no. Instead, he motioned the very opposite direction - towards the high mountains that decorated a possibly wonderful place - beyond them glared a resplendent aurora at which Dhya ached and throbbed with curiosity.

Dhya thought about her parents for a moment and then thought about how long she had lived the same dull way in her sand hut. She meandered between the two prospects, but before she could even decide, Phen pulled her away.

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The journey itself was long and arduous, but for Dhya it was fleeting. All she could think about was what lay on the other side of those mountains. In no time, they were at the steppe and just across it was something wonderful.

But Dhya stopped in her tracks. Phen tried to push her along, but she did not budge. Her head hung low - she turned around, her shadow cast over Phen like a cloud.

Phen looked at her, but she shook her head. He looked at her more urgently, and she responded by taking one coy step away from him. It was at this moment that Dhya realized that she desperately yearned for her mother and father. She longed for the dry confines of her dune hut - the consistency and the promise of tomorrow and the potato stew she had made.

Phen understood, but it was not his prerogative to escort Dhya back. It was here that they parted.

Dhya feared the way back. She had not noticed the great silence and emptiness of the world. She overwhelmed herself with thoughts of her

parents, her golden hammock, and the taste of the potato stew.

She could see her hut on the horizon, and it calmed her frantic heart. She accelerated more and more as her anxiety crept over her lagging shadow. She dashed into her hut with the same enthusiasm she had initially dashed out. Her once usually listless parents, speechless and on the brink of tears, were there to embrace her.

She could not be happier.

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That night, she savored the taste of the leftover stew her parents kept warm for her and tucked herself into her sturdy hammock. Once more before she drifted off to the land of her dreams, she glanced outside the sand hut window and thought she saw Phen. She blinked - but he was already gone.

In her dream, she saw again that mystical glimmer of the city beyond the mountains.

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She woke up, relentlessly rubbing her eyes as if to remove the incredulity that stained her face. She dashed out in her nightwear, and in the breath of the hot morning air, next to her once lonely sand hut, she watched as Phen drank his morning stew in the beginnings of his own abode, smiling. She smiled too for she had a friend.

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