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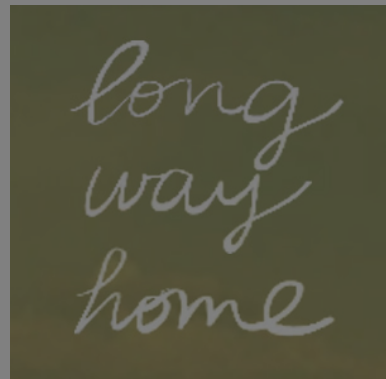
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Rajith Savanadasa's short story received 477 votes. Rajith Savanadasa's short story received 477 votes. This image was captured 1 September 2013 at 11:59 pm (Singapore SGT).[/caption]



In My Own Country

A short story by Rajith Savanadasa, Australia

Yes, I know you want to help. You are kind. But what can you do?

What do I want?

Nothing. No. I do not want things. I do not want your big cars, your mobile phones and your thick leather jackets... if thick leather jackets are warmer than this woollen one, then maybe. I do not want the denim pants you wear so tight. I am fine in these cotton trousers. Sometimes, when it is cold I keep my pyjamas on; wear my normal clothes on top. And yes, these shoes are a little worn but at least I have shoes.

In the village where I come from, people never wore shoes. Not even sandals. We walked on bare feet. On the rockiest roads, the muddiest paths and thorniest hills. I had lots of friends. We travelled in packs like goats, leaping around, playing tricks on each other and picking berries from nettled bushes. There were tourists who came from the city with backpacks and bottles with teats from which you could suck out water. They had shoes like this. One of them

told me they were running shoes. Makes you run faster, he said. Since then, I have always wanted a pair. I wanted to beat my best friend in a race. He was always faster. I raced him every day on the way home from school. I always lost. In the end, as fast as he was, running did not save him. It was slower, older me who escaped. It was scared and shameful me that left everyone behind. Now I have these shoes but it's too late. I have no one to race against.

Eat something, you say?

But I cannot. I cannot eat your pasta. I do not like it. I do not want to go to your big restaurants with their dim lights and finely cut morsels set in the middle of wide plates balanced by smartly dressed waiters. I just want a little rice, some vegetables or fish with gravy. Without gravy rice is too dry, like in the Chinese restaurants where they give you fried squid with rice. Where is the gravy? I ask. Use the sauce, they say. But soy sauce is black seawater. It makes everything salty. I have had enough saltiness for a lifetime. I need gravy. I need spice.

I am sorry but I cannot bring myself to eat your meat pies. Your steaks. Your burgers. It is all meat. I cannot get the smell out of my head – the smell of burning flesh, the smell of something that was once alive being bled. How can I eat it after seeing all the things I have seen?

Do I watch the television?

Sometimes. I try to learn your language by watching, but it is hard work. I do not want to watch your English films with your robots and super strong supermen. I cannot understand what anybody is saying. Things happen so fast. Always starting with a bang and ending with a bigger bang. It is good when heroes always somehow narrowly escape bullets, explosions and ten-foot monsters. But I worry – was there someone left behind? Did the flames burn a child? Did the hundreds of bullets tear a mother's flesh? Did a brother lose a limb? I cannot stand it – it is too much. Makes me want to run away again.

Do I like travel? Not so much. I have travelled enough. Even coming here was hard. I do not want to go to New York, see London or Paris. The pyramids, waterways and palaces are not for me. I cannot leave here. You know that, no?

But maybe one day I will see all of that. You see, in my country, we believe we are three things – water, earth and air. We were made from a mixture of the three. And when we are finished, again, we are liquid, sand and breath. One day I will go to pieces. And when I become sand, I will drift past all your tall buildings where office workers sit in front of computers all night, past the McDonalds full of burnt meat smells, past the pubs and nightclubs where girls dress like there is a cloth shortage and boys drink and vomit in the laneways, past the grounds where giants play your football, the neat rows of houses with lawns watered by your sprinklers. I will become that water. Lie on the grass and run into the drains. Spill into your rivers, through your mountains and out to the sea. Become air and fly, over the oceans and find my country. Look down and there's my father. Smiling. Mother's hand on my cheek. Sister and brother singing songs. I am everything. Everywhere.

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Read [@RajithSHS](#)'s ace short story which made the worldwide top 10 - share it to send him to Ubud Writers' Festival: <http://t.co/iiDuBqs5bx>

— Melanie Joosten (@melaniejoosten) [August 20, 2013](#)


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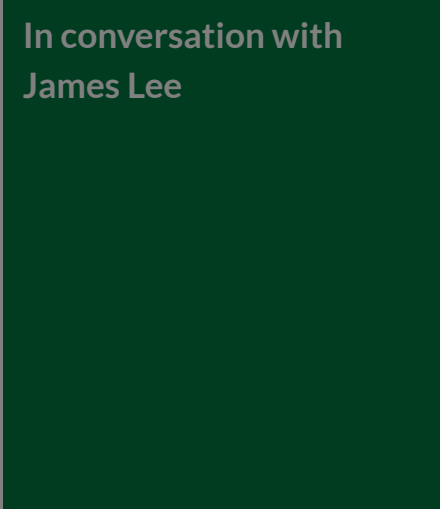
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