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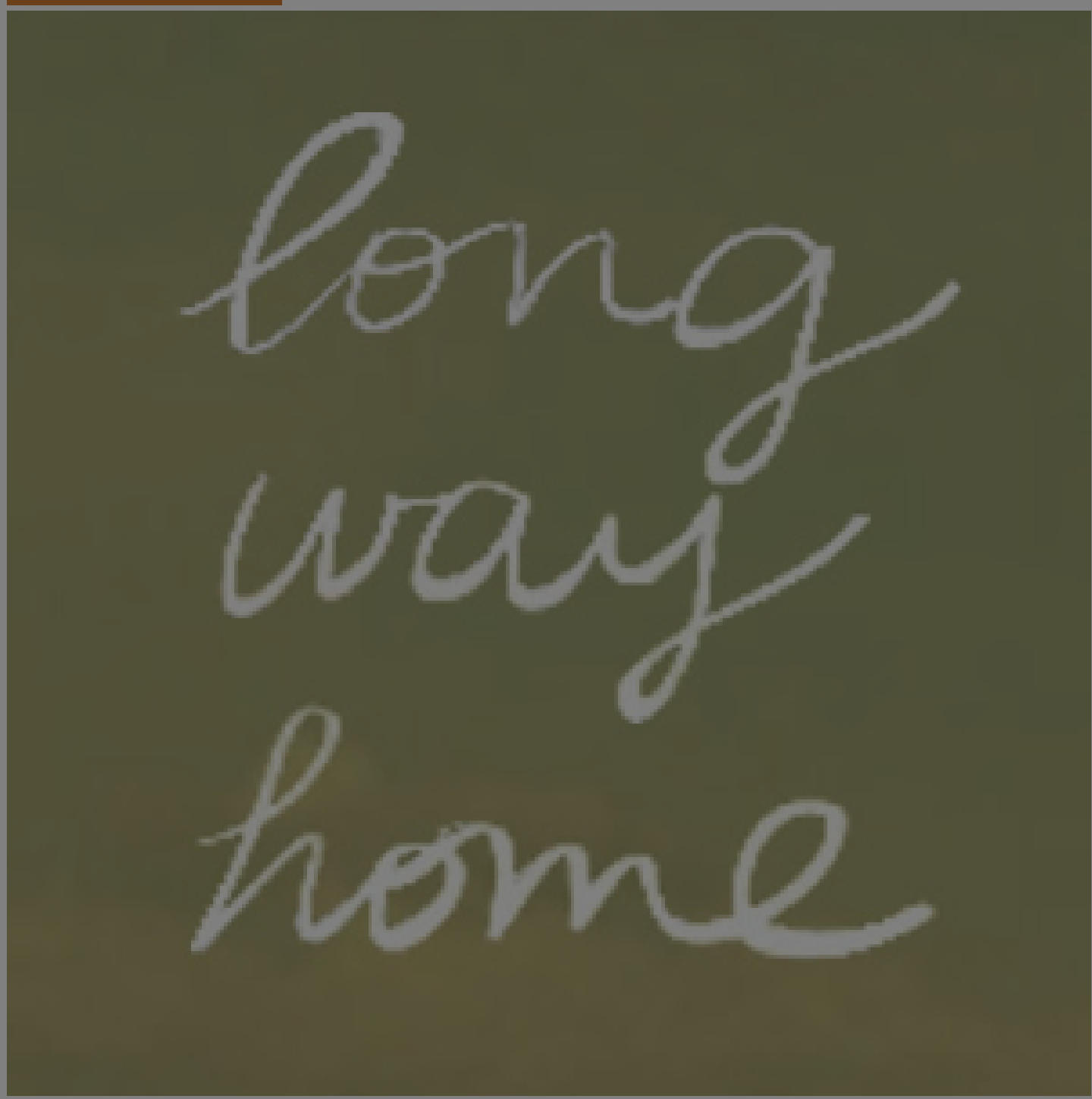
an Radichkov | Bulgaria



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Yordan Radichkov's short story received 2,860 votes.

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Long Way Home | Asia-Europe Short Story Contest

Container
A short story by Yordan Radichkov, Bulgaria

We were unaware of when the iron shutters had closed except that now we were immersed in darkness together with a few hundred poor souls, shivering in the chillness of winter. We could hear the dull pounding of the waves against the sides of the ship which to our ears sounded even duller and made us drowsy.

The walls of the container were pressing down on us and the air was stale and fetid. It was difficult to breathe and we gasped in fitful draughts. Many of us were ill and the coughing, spilling out in surges, rebounded against the walls and gushed back in our faces.

“I haven’t been home for twenty years,” he said. “I don’t know whether I’d be able to find my family.”

I felt for him. He was a native of one of the small and distant Asian islands from where years ago he had fled, leaving his whole life behind. The place he called home was so obscure to me I thought that even if we survived the journey and made it there alive I would never be able to fully understand it.

It was our second day of the voyage but we were not allowed out of the container. Not for anything in the world. It was all so illicit. No one was to know that on this ship hundreds of people of different backgrounds and origin were to be smuggled illegally into the country.

I had only heard of the containers packed with refugees. I had seen pictures, but never had I imagined that a day would come when I would be in one of those containers. That I would be amongst those people of no belonging and no background and together with them I would be heading for a country which I knew nothing about.

And then he began to speak of his family as of something sacred. At first I could not understand him, because it was all so unfamiliar to one like me who had never known a mother’s gentle touch.

The family to him was his whole life. As he spoke the words illuminated every corner of the container and darkness gave way to light. Everyone listened without a sound so as not to interrupt his tale.

Our thoughts were carried away with his tales of the native country and we forgot about the cold and the hunger. For a brief moment the journey seemed almost bearable. His burning words of love for his family gave us warmth and his tenacity and determination gave us strength. With every second we were drawing closer to our final destination.

We thought that all would be fine. We felt the ship had come to a halt. The time spent in the container had made us grow so used to the place that now it seemed as though we no longer wanted to leave it.

When they opened the iron shutters we saw that many of us had died. The face of death breathed into mine with the repulsive staleness of aging. The expressions of the dead were like Chinese masks.

He was triumphant and cried with the ebullient joy of a free man. As soon as he set foot on dry land he fell to his knees and kissed the ground beneath him. I stood there in disbelief of how he could rejoice in so much death, in his own doom and in his lack of freedom.

He turned to me and said: “We never got to understand each other truly. I know that the language is difficult, and you morn for all those dead souls. But you should know that each one’s death is a moveable feast for the soul. The soul has been liberated. It has paid its dues along its earthly journey and now it has headed for the place where the eternal energies merge into the miracle of being.”

His words reached me in a chain of broken sounds which lost their meaning within the walls of the container, within the darkness and the new found land and within death, which was all around us. I shall remain in my existence unenlightened, drawn neither close to nor away from a force supreme.

The future was ahead, shining bright and blinding us, but we nevertheless walked on, unseeingly towards it. Years after that journey his words still resounded in my mind that the deaths of those who had not made it home would be rejoiced. But it was only with the twilight that it dawned on me that amongst us all the dead alone had made it home.

> *it is a good story Short Story: Container | Yordan Radichkov | Bulgaria http://t.co/BFz2lE5xjJ via @sharethis*
>
> *— Fannie (@alfredia) August 21, 2013*

> *The shortlisted stories have been selected by a panel of judges appointed by the Ubud Writers& Readers Festival. The views expressed in the shortlisted stories are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). The copyright of this story remains with the author.*

RETURN TO SHORT STORY CONTEST HOMEPAGE

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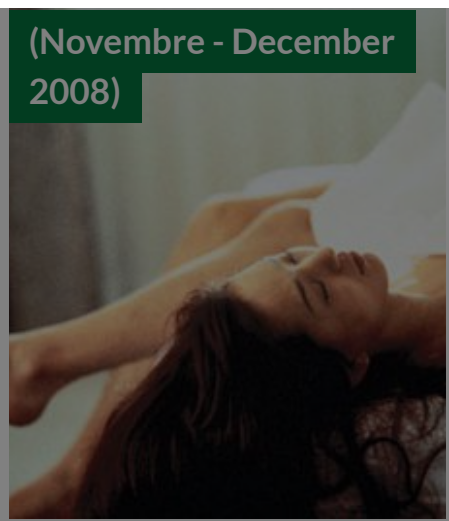

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