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 Jaishree Misra, United Kingdom Jaishree Misra, United Kingdom[/caption]

When Mother Went to Vienna

A short story by Jaishree Misra

Whenever Mother came to visit me from India, a jaunt to somewhere in Europe had become de rigueur. Not that it was compulsory or anything. Quite the reverse, in fact, as it was real warm-glow stuff, lavishing a bit of attention on my mother whom I only saw once a year. Besides, I never forgot how Mother had battled Father when I had wanted to go to abroad for university and I reckoned this was the sort of reward that would have made that fight worthwhile to her, especially now that I had a good job and poor Father was dead.

Anyway, Mother was due to come, as she did every other year, so she could escape Delhi as the June temperatures climbed into the forties.

Our customary phone conversation took place:

‘So Mother, where to this time?’

‘Oho, beti, you don’t need to take me anywhere. I am actually quite happy to sit in your flat in London.’

‘But you said you’ve done everything in London and are bored with it now.’

‘Hanh, now that is true. Lion King and London Eye and the Towers and all ... I am so lucky to have seen everything there. But I am happy to be in your flat. Really.’

‘Nonsense, Mother. Why should you come all the way here just to sit at home while I’m at work? C’mon, choose a destination and I’ll book the hotel and tickets this weekend.’

‘What a nice daughter I have really. Your father would be *so* proud of you, looking after your mother and taking her all over these Europe places he never got to see ...’ Mother paused at this point and I wondered if her chin was crumpling as it often did at mention of my father’s early demise. Then, typically, she cheered up. ‘Destination ... let’s see now ... hanh, I know, beti. I was just thinking the other day that I have never seen Vienna. I would love to see Vienna. Is that a very expensive place? If it is very expensive, then I don’t want to go, okay?’

‘Don’t worry about expense, Mother. I’ll find us a nice, modest hotel in town.’

Vienna seemed a curious choice, especially for a staunch vegetarian like my mother, but I recalled that we had watched the dvd of ‘Amadeus’ the last time she was in England. Mother had got inordinately interested in Mozart after that, playing my Mozart Collection endlessly for a few days. Perhaps that explained this interest in Vienna.

I did the bookings well in advance of Mother’s arrival in London. As I ran off the tickets on my office printer, I felt a small frisson of excitement as I too had never visited Austria before and knew very little about it. A Google search revealed that a world food fair would be on in July too; apparently, the only time to be a vegetarian in Vienna. I breathed a sigh of relief. Finding Indian food was always the hardest part of travelling around Europe with Mother, although locating toilets on the hour and teaching her to use those coin-operated ones came pretty close.

Europe was, however, clearly growing on Mother. Last year I had taken her for a weekend in Paris on Eurostar and, the year before that, to Zurich

when I had a work assignment and both times – despite knowing next to nothing about the local languages or culture – my mother had taken on these foreign cities without a trace of nervousness, talking loudly to the locals in a mish-mash of Hindi and English and preening like a model if anyone admired her sari.

Well, if she had taken on the French and the Swiss with such verve, we would hopefully manage on this occasion too. I pictured my irrepressible mother cheerily bumbling her way through Teutonic discipline and correctness and hastily pushed the images that materialised to the back of my mind. She had not even bothered to glance at the Rough Guide to Vienna that I had found in the library, by now almost cocky about her ability to charm her way around a strange city.

We would *manage*, I repeated in my head like a mantra.

Vienna was glowing with soft sunshine when we landed. From the window of our taxi, Mother gazed in satisfaction at the grand baroque architecture that looked like intricate stage sets. Then she turned to me, her eyes shining.

‘You know, beti, I have always, *always* wanted to come to Vienna. It has been a dream, ever since Meenu told me about how beautiful the canals are, and how handsome the men who row those boats ... what do you call them here in Italy ... hahn, gondolas, na?’

Loved the twist at the end! And don't forget Austria is not Australia ;)
<http://t.co/Xcec97yDrN> via @culture360_asef #shortstory

– Pinch (@iampinch) *August 19, 2013*

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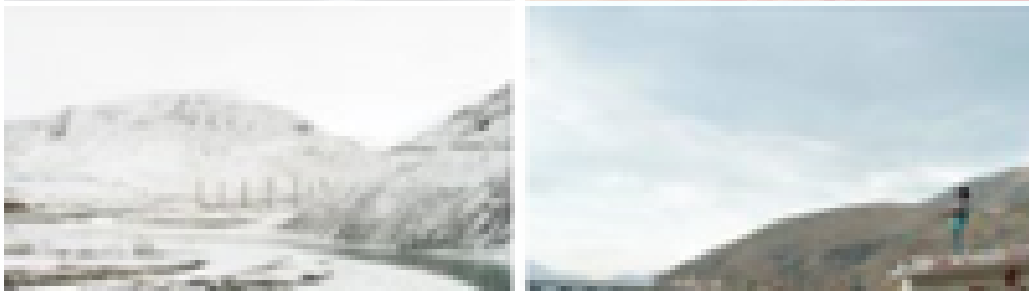
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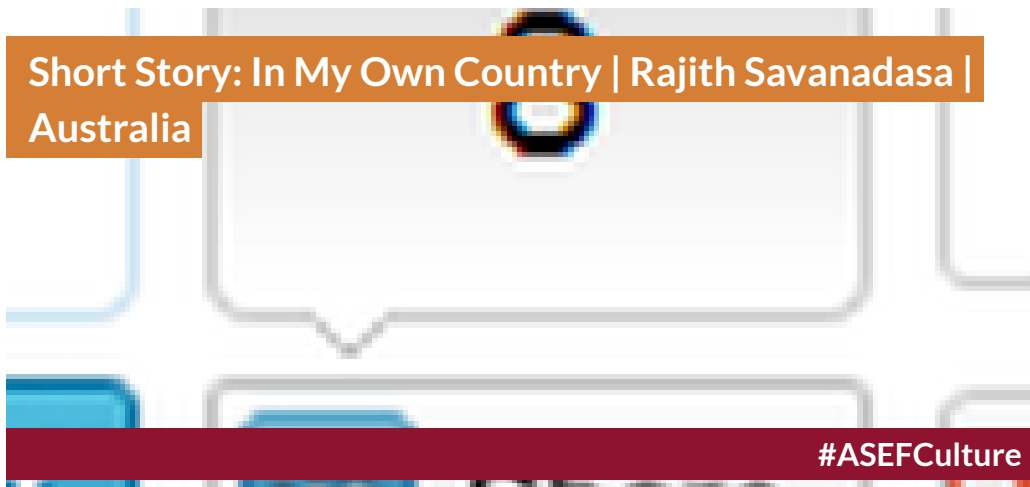
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