

A Holy Energy

A short story by Clementine Poggi

Walking towards the wagon, she was holding the hand of her little brother. The young girl's heart was beating quicker than the second hand of the dirty railway station's clock. She tightly squeezed the small fingers between her own and felt her body dispelling sadness and fear as her tears crawled out. French voices were announcing departures and arrivals, new trains and old ones were coming in and out, she could not speak French. At this moment of despair, her eyes met with those of her mother, strong and reassuring. She remembered the Goddess Lakshmi, the golden temple shining on a bright day.

The sun was rising up, spreading its rays on Amita's dark skin. She was finding her way in between the small colourful houses of her village, through the wandering cows and chickens. It was a special morning, a warm and tropical one. Dressed with her most beautiful sari, the girl was walking to the temple to pray the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. Amita needed the strength of a higher power before she could leave for the city. She was confident though. Although everyone was calling her "Ami", because it sounded more European, her full name, Amita, meant "without limits".

Though, now that she was going to say goodbye to her people, her name did not really make sense. Letting the hand of her brother go, touching the cold floor – once, twice - resisting the urge to hold her father in her arms in order to get some courage, she swiped the pearls of water rolling from her eyes on her cheeks. As she climbed into the train, a deep sensation passed over her body, from her head to her toes – it was the spirits spreading their love. The positive energy took her back to that sunny day.

Humming a French song which contained lyrics she could not understand, she walked passed the grand banana trees next to the river. The girl grew up in this place and nothing seemed to have changed, although the paint of the buildings was now washed-out a little bit. The inhabitants' beliefs had faded as well; the temples were slowly being neglected, because people did not have time to provide offerings to the Gods anymore. They were too busy travelling from the village to town, from town to the village, in order to feed their family. Others were even using crosses now instead of incense, imploring a dead man. However, Amita still strongly believed in the power of the Gods she grew up with.

In town, a couple were arranging a bed and tidying a guest room. "I wonder if your sister pushed our guest to pray at the temple before she starts her journey to the city," said the white man tanned by the Indian sun, "what a waste of time, I bet she cannot even speak French."

"Can I remind you that you are talking about my family, not an uneducated savage? Please show some respect," a beautiful woman retorted while putting her dark hair into a bun. As she opened the window to let the sea breeze come in, she admired the contrasting view that was offered by the newly-built Victorian houses and the beach front where women were washing their clothes. She thought about her village, about Lakshmi and the other Gods, she remembered sunny days when she, Ami and their mother would pick up bananas next to the river. She could picture the temple perfumed by the jasmine and the hot cakes given to the divinities. It seemed so far away, so disconnected to her reality of today.

Amita was looking at the landscape scrolling in front of her. Green palm trees, red fields, temples. Abandoned villages, empty rivers, temples. Suddenly, she realised someone was talking to her. She took in the smell of the newly designed bench under her; its colour was clashing with the pink of her sari. The voice became more insistent. When the girl realised that a young

man was holding a ticket machine, shouting something she could not understand, she took out the coupon she has been saving for and presented it to the very modern appliance. The sound it made, when the device accepted her name, reminded the girl about the belt.

Amita arrived in front of the golden doors, it was not the first time that she came to the temple, but that day it looked even more impressive. It felt like the Spirits knew what was going on in the girl's mind. There was a stream of energy arising from the tall edifice. Overwhelmed by its impetus aura, the girl felt a bit lightheaded. She inhaled the spicy air of the surrounding and she took off her glittery shoes. Her mother had plaited the girl's long and dark hair with argan oil and clipped some small white flowers in. Amita rang the bell with her soft hands painted with henna and entered into the spiritual centre. The sound resonated into the edifice making the dimmed light more supernatural. Amita felt the spirit around her. The echoing music guided the girl into a mindful meditation. She dropped the piece of soft cashmere received from her sister on the ground and knelted on it.

The girl opened her eyes and found herself sitting back on the ugly seats of the train. The landscape was changing quickly. There was less green, and more grey. The temples made space for buildings. She tried to remember the feeling she got when she was praying to Lakshmi. She knew the Goddess would always be on her side, watching her, giving her strength. She was going to honour her family "without limits", allow her baby brother to study, find a decent job, pay a dowry, and have a happy life – a better life. Her parents would be able to have comfortable old days. The Gods would be proud, and yet... Amita was already missing home; the unfamiliar sceneries were stealing her away. Would Lakshmi follow the girl until town? During her meditation, she felt that the divinity was always going to be in her heart, but now she was doubtful.

All the way, pass the green palm trees, red fields, temples. Further than the abandoned villages, empty rivers, temples.

Where there was less green, and more grey. On the other side of the rails, the beautiful woman was waiting. Wearing a white long pair of pants and a cotton shirt, showing a small cross around her neck. She was standing under the sun, but her dark skin was accustomed to the warm rays. She could not remember the last time she saw Amita and smelled the mix of spices and incense on her skin. She could not remember it, because she was living in a world of washing powder and roasted chicken “à la française” now. The moment she left the country side for brighter scenery, she felt an emptiness filling up her soul, the light escaping out of her body. Although she was living a fulfilled and prosperous existence in her double storage house with a newly tanned husband, something was missing.

Amita felt the train slowing down, the décor standing still. She readjusted the jasmine in her hair, touched the red dot painted in between her eyebrows and implored the Gods one last time. Then, through the windows, she saw her, the woman with whom she picked bananas next to the river under the protective eyes of their mother. Excitement, happiness and a wave of positive energy exploded into her soul when she walked out and took those hands which held her so often in her youth.

The beautiful woman saw Amita stepping out of the brand new train. Cloves, paprika, nutmeg and curry spread, like the energy stemming out of her little sister. A holy aura, an aura of love, of Gods. She felt the spirit filling up her veins through the painted hands she was holding. A delicious blast which lasted only until the French accented voice of her husband resonated behind her back “Ladies, shall we go? On yva?”