

# DEVI



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AS USUAL THIS IS A FIRST DRAFT THAT WILL NEVER BE EDITED OR PROOFREAD. PLEASE FORGIVE ANY MISTAKES, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE PATIENCE TO DO THE BORING STUFF.

## Dedication

I want to dedicate this story to Adele, the reincarnation of the Devi in this story. The first time I saw her in this life, I identified her as the Devi that I knew 600-800 years earlier. It is very frustrating, though, that she has no memories of her past lives.



1

i remember when you  
step out from the forest  
and into the deep green  
grass of the meadow  
your bare feet tingling  
in the fresh dew.

you stretch your arms,  
long  
taut, like an archers bow  
and relax to allow  
the sleep to drain out  
of your body,  
and yawn the night  
out of your head.

only the sound of small birds  
singing to you  
and the crackle of a twig  
from inside the forest  
the delicate footstep  
of a doe deer,  
nature welcomes you again  
to a new day.

a distant chop chopping  
of a woodman  
sculpting nature  
as you turn away  
back in to the forest,  
a breakfast of fresh  
dew berries, and stream water  
that will run down  
the features of your face.

2

and do you remember  
the first time  
a mother in law came  
searching the edge of the forest  
looking for you?

you were just concentrating  
on a little purple wildflower  
growing two inches from the  
forest floor,  
and being surprised  
again and again  
by the wonder of nature.

and when she saw you and  
you saw her  
and no one needed  
to speak.  
the daughter in law veiled,  
just stood like a spirit  
in a long cloak  
alongside the trunk of a tree.

you stood then and  
sank your deep  
deep brown eyes into hers.  
the forest became quiet  
as you touched her stomach  
and put the possibility of life  
into her body.

then  
they went on their way.  
the purple flower looked even more  
beautiful than before

as you sat again and breathed your  
mantra on its upturned face.

a prism of light spread out across  
the floor of the forest,  
an ant scurried across it  
and went on its way.  
the flower shivered at  
the disappearing sun.

3

it was time, you knew  
to go deeper into the forest  
away from the villagers  
who came like a shower of rain  
whenever.

i remember you wandered along the path  
for sixty-two steps before  
you came to the tree  
next to which  
you had been born.  
as always you put your  
palms to your temples  
and then bent down and touched  
the two big roots  
that descended into the earth  
on this side.  
the two arms that had  
formed your cradle when you  
were born.

then another twenty steps to  
the hollow tree  
you had found when  
you were three or four.  
even your mother never knew

where you disappeared to  
for hours when you  
just crept inside  
and sat, legs spread and  
feet planted on the roots.

an imaginary world just  
made for you  
where anything was possible.

4  
like a spooked deer  
i remember when you stopped dead  
just short of the edge of  
the forest.  
eyes big, listening,  
nostrils flaring to sense the change.  
you really are a satyr  
of the forest.

slowly, edging along  
until you see a white stone plinth  
raised on small legs  
standing just where the first mother  
had come to see you.

you walk around it again and again  
not touching  
stretching your neck this way  
and that  
trying to understand.

on the plinth a brass cup  
a bowl of rice  
flowers, red  
and a wrapped up sari  
purple.

it was almost night before you  
decided to touch the cloth  
of the sari.

you are a devi now the birds sang.

5

you hid in the hollow tree for days  
until the spinning stopped  
and then you smiled and  
decided that the appropriate day  
would be budhvar (wednesday)  
the most auspicious of all days.

you went dutifully then  
on budhvar mid morning and sat  
next to the plinth.  
women came, only two  
and then four the next budhvar.

then they knew that was when  
you would appear to them  
and it was a day of flowers and rice  
sweets and perfumes.

6

after 1492 days  
a girl was born  
with a defect.  
six digits on her left hand.  
left hand,  
the hand of the devil and six digits,  
the sign of the devil.

the fat priest called a special service



and said that the people  
of the village were being rewarded  
for their ignorance.  
they did know that the djinn  
lived in the forest  
they did know that yakshini anura  
had fled to the djinn in the forest  
many years ago,  
and now the devi,  
the progeny of them both  
was descending upon them.

the villagers were frightened  
and banned their women folk  
from leaving the village perimeter.

7

i remember that you  
loved the tiny purple flowers  
that grew on the forest floor  
and was constantly amazed  
that they were so exuberant  
even next to trees that were  
so tall.

the song in your heart was constant  
and you hardly noticed the women  
who did not come.  
the edge of the forest  
was once again  
just like it used to be.

you brought water in a bowl  
to the plinth every day  
and the birds came to drink  
and bathe  
and sit with you.

the trees whispered to you  
and the grass swished in the breeze.

8

the days of the great storms  
were never planned  
or expected  
but nature decided that the  
world needed a shake-up.

it made no difference to you  
and your life continued as before  
but nearby, destiny  
was deciding a path for you.

the rains went on for days  
and you just sat under the canopy  
of your trees and listened  
to the tune of tap tip tap  
the big blobs of water that  
eventually found their way  
to the forest floor.

on the other side of the village  
the hills finally had enough  
and the landslides  
crashed down carrying  
huge rocks, trees and soil.  
no-one in the village was injured  
and not a house collapsed  
but the land fall ended just yards  
from the village perimeter.

9

one day, the priest came  
for the very first time  
and sat near your plinth  
muttering something under his breath.  
and with him two women, elderly.

we've been thinking they said  
we are very lucky.  
perhaps it was a sign.  
tell us, was it a sign,  
a warning?

i remember how you looked  
none the wiser and had no idea  
what they were talking about.  
humans are funny  
you thought.

the trees still stood in your world  
the birds still sang.  
the tiny purple flowers still raised their heads  
claiming their bit of the world.  
you just smiled at them and they were nervous.

will you come and look?  
it was further than you had ever travelled  
but only half a mile in real terms.  
you agreed and then  
you followed them.

rocks had fallen in such a way  
that there was a roof, angled,  
and sort of walls  
and a space underneath  
enough for a few people to stand.

there were scattered petals

and offerings of rice  
and a collection of local villagers  
who had never seen you before,  
huddled together for protection.

i remember you walking around the place  
that then became your shrine  
and then the priest poured a little oil  
at the entrance and a woman  
touched your forehead with paste.

10  
every devi eventually  
is captured by the world  
and so were you.  
every budhvar you went to the shrine  
to meet the young women.  
it was like before  
but more reverential  
and no man dared come close.  
these then were the days of  
rice and petals,  
perfume and sweets.

the simple trust of the young women  
blessed by you,  
they were wide eyed in anticipation  
quivering and hoping at the same time.

and when you left  
no one tried to follow.  
you just walked away in measured steps  
and they all wondered about  
where you came from and where you went to.  
they whispered about the djinn  
in the forest

and yakshini anura, your mother  
never seen again  
once she had been called by  
the music of the forest  
all those years ago.

11

My story, (excerpt from *Chandi* written in 2004)

the story had been  
that he was half man  
and half some sort of animal.  
as usual the imagination of the villagers  
had got the better of them.

he was, in fact, a man.  
no-one knew when he'd  
arrived in the forest.  
the old men nodded sagely  
and said it had been a long time ago.

the story was that yakshini,  
a daughter of the village,  
had heard all sorts of music and songs,  
in her dreams.  
those dreams, they say, led her into the forest.

it was indeed folklore.  
the half man and yakshini  
created the devi  
who now visited the shrine  
and blessed the village women.

the local brahmin shook his head  
and entreated the women not to go,  
not to visit the devi.  
he said that he could give them mantras  
to help them conceive male heirs.

my job was to live in the wooden hut  
at the edge of the forest

near the shrine.

i was the custodian of the shrine  
and kept nature company.

my hut was about the size of a small bed.  
the furniture; a small bed.  
the features of my home;  
a door and some wooden walls.  
i even had a roof.

i awoke with the dawn  
and stretched the sleep out of my body.  
i waited for the day to get brighter  
and then swept the entrance of the shrine,  
and waited.

waiting is what people who  
live in villages are good at.  
except the new brides,  
who cant wait to be filled with a male heir  
to satisfy their in-laws.

all those eager eyed new women  
nervous of their neighbours,  
wanting to prove their womanhood  
by giving birth in less than a year  
of their marriages.

they all came up the hill  
from the village.  
they came regularly to the huge stone  
under which the shrine  
to their salvation lay.

no-one knew where the devi lived,  
just that she came out of the forest  
at the given time  
and blessed the women  
and showed them the future.

really, i had an easy life.  
sweeping a few yards of ground,  
looking into the darkness  
down through the entrance  
of the shrine.

i had been in the shrine, of course,  
under the pretence of cleaning.  
it was down three rough steep steps,  
two shrine rooms  
each about ten foot square.

both rooms lit by the magical rocks  
that glowed in the dark,  
the second room with a small pond of water  
and the wall behind, projecting images,  
but only when the devi opened her palm.

the devi never spoke.  
she was just like a young woman  
except when she gazed at someone.  
she wasn't a normal woman.  
she had magic in her eyes.

that was my life.  
no questions about truth.  
just the truth that was all around.  
just the barren women filled with males  
and brahmins shaking their heads.