

2019

Revisoning the Devī Māhātmya: A Creative Approach to Ecofeminism

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Luthi, Meret A., "Revisoning the Devī Māhātmya: A Creative Approach to Ecofeminism" (2019). *Master of Arts in Humanities*. 3.

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2019.HUM.01>

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**Revising the Devī Māhātmya:
A Creative Approach to Ecofeminism**

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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in Humanities

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2019

Abstract

This creative project consists of two parts and revises the 6th century puranic Goddess myth Devī Māhātmya through a critical ecofeminist lens. The first part serves as an introduction into mythology, ecofeminism, and the historical and contextual aspects of the Devī Māhātmya. This academic essay investigates how myths provide humanity with a sense of meaning and belonging. The second part of this project is a creative writing piece and a contemporary revision of the Devī Māhātmya. The aim of this approach is to demonstrate the extent to which myths continue to inform and shape us, with particular regard to the impact such narratives have on women and the natural world. Moreover, this creative project is a call to revisit old stories and find new, more empowering narratives which affirm the intrinsic value of women and the natural world.

Acknowledgments

To all my teachers in their every form. I bow to you in sincere gratitude for your guidance. Particularly, I wish to express my indebtedness to Gay Lynch, Joan Baranow, and Carlos Rodriguez. Lastly, I also would like to thank the entire faculty and student body of the Department of Humanities at Dominican University for always being a source of inspiration, love, and support.

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Introduction

Exegesis

The sun is grinning and roaring, her fierce energy warming the earth: -- sisterly incest. Is reproduction possible? No more than light can generate in mud. The sun must be male. The earth must be woman. These are the principles. Look at the gashed and fissured earth. Look at the fierce and light-giving sun. When earth is sundered, every man suffers, everyone groans. Man is at the centre. There are no human women.

--Suniti Namjoshi

Often trivialized as mere fictitious stories, myths, a complex of traditional tales, still shape us in significant ways. Myths inform human cultures and serve as a root mode for coming to terms with reality. Here, the word “root” is deliberately chosen, not only to emphasize the weight of sanctity but, moreover, its mediating sense of foundational belonging. Myths root us in our origins and thus, catalyze in us – across time and space – a deep understanding of the human condition. Such myths might be dismissed by science, history, and technology. However, on a subtler level, the stories we tell, nevertheless, have a profound impact on how we perceive each other, the natural world, and ourselves.

This thesis consists of two parts: an introductory essay and a creative writing project. The first section serves as an introduction into mythology, ecofeminism, and the historical and contextual aspects of the *Devī Māhātmya*. The *Devī Māhātmya* or “Glory of the Goddess,” hereafter referred to as DM, is a 6th century C.E. puranic text which remains one of the most influential scriptures of the living Hindu Goddess tradition. The introductory essay investigates mythology from an erudite scholarly perspective and shows how humanity is rooted in myth. An understanding of the extent to which myths shape us will justify the argument that old myths

need to be revisited and new narratives have to be told for a more productive and empowering communal life.

The second section, which accounts for the main body of this project, is my creative revision of the DM. It summarizes the three *caritas* (chapters) of the DM in contemporary language without straying too far from the original text or context. Some variations and modifications are certainly part of this revision; however, with regards to cultural appropriation, it is vital to maintain the original integrity of this beautiful myth.

Joseph Campbell reminds us that myths meet our needs to tell and understand our stories. They reveal what all humans have in common; they provide us with meaning, significance, and clues which help us feel the experience of being alive (Campbell 4-5). Campbell further notes that the stages of human development have remained the same throughout the ages. Even though the way we live may have changed over time, we still go through birth, childhood, young adulthood, and maturity, and eventually, we all die. As myths are reflections of our development and search for meaning, those ancient stories live in us and guide us on that journey (Campbell 87).

For Wendy Doniger, Indologist, author, and professor of the History of Religion, myths are not even limited to written, or ancient texts alone. For her, myths can be “written, oral, ancient, or contemporary” (1). Very briefly, for her, a myth “*is* a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people which find their most important meaning in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past, or more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered; it is a story that is part of a larger group of stories” (2).

As we can see, a common function of myth is that they provide humanity with a sense of meaning and belonging. However, this meaning might depend on who interprets them and when. The meaning of a myth might substantially differ for each individual or group, and most certainly across various cultures. Moreover, myths and their meaning necessarily change and evolve.

Revisionist Mythmaking

Wendy Doniger refers to myths as a “gun for hire” (81). What she means by this is that myths can be told, interpreted, retold and reinterpreted, and hence different or new meanings can be found in any myth. By using the example of the Book of Genesis, Doniger explains how by changing the values we bring to the different aspects of a myth, such as characters and symbolism, a myth changes and hence provides the possibility of a different reading.

The hypothesis of an unmarked, neutral experience involving a woman, a man, a garden, a tree, a fruit, a serpent, and knowledge allows us to understand how the dominant reading of the Hebrew Bible could tell that story as it does (a subtle serpent, forbidden fruit, evil woman, disobedient and destructive knowledge), while other tellings of that myth cast it differently (a benevolent Goddess in her form of live-giving serpent and tree, giving the blessing of the fruit of useful knowledge that makes human life possible). This alternative reading of Genesis implies not a Fall but a progression from the Garden of Eden (a place of ignorance and constriction) to the wider world, a place of open possibility, of freedom and knowledge (not to mention the pleasure of sex), the gift of the seductive woman or the subtle serpent. (82)

Doniger remarks that it is true that men have written many of our ancient texts which continue to influence us to this day. She also acknowledges that women’s voices have been

silenced, suppressed and distorted, but she also claims that women's voices have not been completely extinguished. Instead, she argues that we can retrieve them even from patriarchal texts (110). Doniger also states that it is time to stop asking who wrote those texts and move beyond either/or, and instead ask what those voices are saying about women or nature (110). The solution, she argues, should be to imagine a human subject instead of a male or female subject (111). In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell beautifully stated, "I and you, this and that, true and untrue - every one of them has its opposite. But mythology suggests that behind that duality there is a singularity over which this plays like a shadow game" (57).

In *If Women Rose Rooted*, psychologist, writer, and mythologist, Dr. Sharon Blackie, argues that Western women have long ago lost control over their stories. From a personal perspective, she describes how the defining and instructional stories she was given as a child accorded little significance to women (5). This is a fact that many women, and certainly I, can relate to. Rather, many of us were told a story in which,

...woman was an afterthought, created from a man's body for the sole purpose of pleasing him. In this story, the first woman was the cause of all humanity's sufferings: she brought death to the world, not life. She had the audacity to talk to a serpent. Wanting the knowledge and wisdom which had been denied her by a jealous father-god, she dared to eat the fruit of a tree. Even worse, she shared the fruit of knowledge and wisdom with her man. So that angry and implacable god cast her and her male companion from paradise, and decreed that women should be subordinate to men for ever [*sic*] afterwards. (5-6)

As we can see, those stories which we tell about our origins, the natural world and women's association with them define us in a most profound matter across time and space. They shape how we perceive ourselves, how we regard and behave towards others, particularly

women, and the natural world. Hence it is no surprise that with such myths at the root of Western society that women and nature are regarded as inferior, dangerous and even evil in such a manner that they cannot be trusted. The source of mistrust may lie in the problematic of the dualistic worldview which is deeply embedded in the Western culture and which makes us believe that women are associated with nature, men with culture and humans separate from and above nature (Blackie 33).

Dualism in Mythology

If myths, consciously or unconsciously, continue to have meaning to us, if they inform us and if they genuinely root us in our origins, we must admit that the stories we tell profoundly influence how we see ourselves, each other, and the natural world. Religious or not, conservative or modern, history tells us that the West is influenced by Greek and biblical myths, and as such, we are rooted in a patriarchal society. By no means am I arguing that the stories found in those traditions are not full of beauty or meaning; nevertheless, when we critically look at those stories, especially from an ecofeminist perspective, we begin to notice a pattern of dualism and domination of women and the natural world.

Devdutt Pattanaik, Indian mythologist and author of *7 Secrets of the Goddess*, is just one among many, who brings to our awareness the nature/ human and male/female dualism in mythology when he states that “a patriarchal society links women to nature and men with culture” (27). With regards to how nature is perceived as inferior or even evil in such a society, we also begin to understand that being linked to nature is not necessarily desirable.

As Joseph Campbell notes, in a socially-oriented culture, nature is subject to separation, control, and domination.

Now, the biblical tradition is a socially orientated mythology. Nature is condemned. In the nineteenth century, scholars thought of mythology and ritual as an attempt to control nature. But that is magic, not mythology or religion. Nature religions are not contempt to control nature but to help you put yourself in accord with it. But when nature is thought of as evil, you don't put yourself in accord with it, you control it, or try to, and hence the tension, the anxiety, the cutting down of forests, the annihilation of native people. And the accent here separates us from nature. (Campbell 29)

Even more in-depth than Sharon Blackie, the Australian philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood extensively analyzes the history and philosophy of dualism in great scholarly detail. Besides criticizing the philosophy of dualism and classical logic, Plumwood also critically explains the opposing theories of dualism and their failure to replace dualism. In accordance with Plumwood, I agree that we need to be more critical in our approaches and that dualism is not merely about men versus women or human versus nature. The problem lies not in our differences, as differences attribute to the rich diversity of the world as a whole, rather the problem lies in how we treat those differences.

Ecofeminism and Reclaiming Our Stories

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood postulates very clearly and thoroughly the problematic of dualism in Western culture. According to her, the West fails to recognize the human dependency on women and nature. Moreover, she suggests that feminism and ecology share a number of problems with the domination of those who the West has defined as “inferior others,” and can be extended to integrate theories of gender, race, class, and nature. Our survival, she states, depends on our ability to solve our problem with dualism. Therefore, Plumwood argues that we need to create a more democratic and ecological culture beyond

dualism. This, according to her, requires the critical “subversion, resistance and replacement” (30) of the dualistic narratives of the Western world.

According to Plumwood, the assumption of some feminist thinkers that women are naturally closely related to nature falls prey to that exact dualistic thinking. Furthermore, assuming that women naturally have an ecological awareness is simply not true. Also, arguing that women are superior to men, or seeing men as the enemy, is a mere reversal of dualistic thinking and hence also no solution. Women are similarly rooted in the longstanding dualistic worldview as men. Women too, are dominators and colonizers and therefore not exempt from being part of the master model simply because they are women (9-10). Women also must learn to “throw off their master identity” (67). Plumwood reminds us that there are more empowering and less dualistic stories to be told. For example, some of those which are not part of the master model, or those that come from cultures which we have previously regarded as beyond reason. “If we are to survive into a liveable future, we must take into our own hands the power to create, restore and explore different stories, with new main characters, better plots, and at least the possibility of some happy endings” (196).

From Sharon Blackie, Val Plumwood, and Wendy Doniger we learn that we not only can but must reclaim our voices and move beyond the dualistic stories of patriarchy.

By revisioning the puranic Goddess myth *Devī Māhātmya* through a critical ecofeminist lens in the creative portion of my thesis, I aim to demonstrate the impact narratives have on women and the natural world hence highlighting the problematic nature of hierarchical dualism. Moreover, my revision is a call to find new, more empowering narratives.

Revisioing the Devī Māhātmya

At the time I began to consider this project, my aim was it to write my own, new myth. But like many writers, I am naturally inspired by what I am exposed to. Hence it is no surprise that I have been profoundly influenced by the ancient Indian myths, which I had been reading for some years. While I began to look deeper into the vast, rich, colorful, and philosophical world of Hindu mythology for my research, I came across the Devī Māhātmya and was immediately fascinated by it. At this time, I still aimed to write my own myth, which, would be loosely based on the DM. However, the more I learned about the DM, I began to doubt my approach to write something new that would be loosely based on this living Goddess tradition.

The Hindu Goddess has already, and widely been appropriated and taken out of her historical, and cultural context and even made unrecognizable; and to me, such an approach would have defeated the purpose of this project, because the original text is empowering as it is. My aim was it to write a myth that would move beyond dualism and be empowering for women and the natural world, and the DM has it all. It affirms the intrinsic value to women and nature. The DM is not about the superiority of humans over nature, or men over women; rather, men and women fight alongside against evil and for the protection of the natural world. Differences are emphasized but not ranked, and hence in the DM, we find that in those exact differences lies the beauty and richness of all in existence. Or as Campbell mentions singularity behind duality (Campbell 57).

Ultimately, in lieu of writing my own new myth, I decided to revise the Devī Māhātmya instead. I will not deny that I analyzed and wrote from a Western perspective; however, my goal was it to remain as close as possible to, and maintain the integrity of, the original text while making the Goddess more empowering and approachable for the Western reader.

The Devī Māhātmya in Context

The *Devī Māhātmya* is part of a larger text named *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*. There is a large mass of *purānic* texts but the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* and seventeen others are considered the Great *Purānas* and are widely accepted across India. As a distinct genre of literature, the *Purānas* share specific characteristics; they were all written in Sanskrit, “of mediocre quality” in a *śloka* or *triśtubh* meter or sometimes in prose. Mostly they are composed in question and answer form, and they tell the stories of a particular Hindu god or goddess, supernatural beings, people, and sages. Today, the *Purānas* are considered stratified literature without an exact date of composition or author (Dimmit and van. Buitenen 5).

Being part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*, the DM was also written in Sanskrit and in a typical puranic style. However, as one of the foremost contemporary translators and Religious scholar Thomas B. Coburn notes in his translation of the DM,

Unlike most Purānic texts, the *Devī-Māhātmya* has a high degree of textual integrity: the additional verses and variant readings that are so characteristic of the Purānas are far fewer in our text. The *Devī-Māhātmya* has also had a tremendously vital independent life, apart from its appearance in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*. While there are several dozen manuscripts of the entire Purāna, those of the *Devī-Māhātmya* as an autonomous text are virtually innumerable. (Coburn 8)

Moreover, what sets the DM further apart from other Hindu texts is that the Goddess is acknowledged as the ultimate reality.

"The *Devī- Māhātmya* is not the earliest literary fragment attesting to the existence of devotion to a goddess figure, but it is surely the earliest in which the object of worship is conceptualized as Goddess, with a capital G" (Coburn 16).

According to Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl, the DM, despite worshipping the Goddess as ultimate reality, cannot be regarded as a feminist scripture per se. For many Western women, and most certainly for myself, the DM may indeed serve as empowerment, but as it appears, the same is not generally true for Indian women (Hiltebeitel and Erndl 11). This may very well be because, in Hinduism, the ultimate reality is neither female nor male, but beyond distinction. Rather the sacred manifests and reveals itself in many forms.

According to Kathleen M. Erndl, Hinduism has had one of the richest and most compelling living Goddess tradition for many centuries, and hence the concept of a female divinity is a different one than that in the West.

“The statement ‘God is a woman’ simply would not have the shock value for Hindus that it would for Christians, Jews, or Muslims. I suspect that the reason for this is that Hindu conceptions of both the divine and femaleness are radically different from those in the West” (Erndl 6-7).

In terms of structure, the *Devī Māhātmya* is divided into three chapters called *caritas*. All three of them are framed and connected within one overarching story exalting the greatness of the Goddess. Each of the *caritas* is, however, also explicit and a finite myth in its own right.

For my revisioning of the DM, I relied on two contemporary translations; the first being that of Thomas B. Coburn *Encountering The Goddess A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*, and *Devīmāhātmyam: in Praise of the Goddess: The Devīmahātmya and Its Meaning* by author and lecturer Devadatta Kālī.

Synopsis and Approach

Lastly, it seems essential to provide a short synopsis of the DM and my revision of it.

The frame story begins with a narrator called *Mārkaṇḍeya* who tells the story of the birth of Savarni Manu, a future ruler of a coming cosmic cycle. What this frame story does is linking the DM to the rest of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* of which the DM is part of. In the original story, this future ruler is currently a male King who at some point in the future is going to reincarnate as the cosmic ruler Savarni Manu. At this point in the story, the King has been deprived of his sovereignty and is wandering in the woods where he meets a merchant named Samadhi. Samadhi has been cast out by his family and was robbed of his riches. Together they come across a sage who tells them about the glory of the Goddess. In this first section, the Goddess is referred to as *Māhāmaya* (great illusion), and hence the sage also explains how she deludes the world, and how she is responsible for the creation and ultimately for granting liberation from illusion.

Excited about what the sage has to say, the King and the merchant demand to hear more about the Goddess and so the sage explains how she manifested at a time before the current creation to save the gods Vishnu and Brahma from two demons. The Goddess eventually defeats the demons by deluding them into thinking that they can outsmart the ultimate reality. As such, this section is concerned with creation and cosmogony, trickery and illusion and ultimately liberation from illusion.

In my revision, the future ruler is going to be a female Queen by the name of Asmi. At this point in the story, however, Asmi is incarnated as male King, and hence I intentionally messed with gender pronouns in this first section. I also renamed the merchant Samadhi “Sam,” and called the sage “the old *one*” for further gender ambiguity and mockery of dualism.

The second *carita* is about the preservation of the universe. The gods are once again in trouble, as the Buffalo Demon called Mahiṣa had cast them out of their heavenly realm. Unable to kill the demon themselves the gods seek help from Vishnu and Shiva. Upon hearing what

happened, they get so angry that they emit a great brilliance (*tejas*), which eventually forms into the Goddess. Each part of the Goddess emerges from the radiance of all the gods.

Angry about what the demon had done to the gods, the Goddess goes into a bloody war with him. Once the demon is defeated the gods praise the Goddess as the supreme protector and boon-giver, who saves and sustains the universe. The Goddess promises to return whenever she is needed and vanishes from sight again.

This second *carita* is also one of the Goddess' most famous stories. In this myth, she is usually referred to as goddess Durgā. This manifestation is further interesting in terms of ecofeminism, as Durgā is closely linked to nature as we learn from David Kinsley, Professor of Religious Studies and author of several books about the Hindu Goddess.

“It also seems clear that Durgā has, or at least at some point in her history had, a close connection with the crops or with fertility of vegetation. Her festival, which is held at harvest time, associates her with plants, and she also receives blood offerings, which may suggest the renourishment of her powers of fertility” (Kinsley *Hindu Goddess* 95).

Despite being identified as *prkṛti* (primordial matter), there is yet a further aspect that links Durgā to the natural world and ecofeminism. Madhu Khanna, Indian historian of religion and Tantric scholar further emphasizes Durgā's particularly close connection to nature, plants and the cycles. In her essay, *The Ritual Capsule of Durgā Pūjā: An Ecological Perspective*, Khanna explores the subtle connection between ritual and nature. More precisely, how *Nabapatrikā Pūjā*, is seminal to goddess *Durgā's* identity, and a principal mean of ecological sustainability (Tucker and Chapple. *Hinduism and Ecology* 469-491).

Lastly, with her unruly and unbound hair, Durgā is clearly undomesticated and hence might be considered especially empowering to women as she mocks social standard and violates

the model of women. She is not naked or as wild as Kali, whom we will encounter in the next *carita*, but she is also not fully domesticated. She is definitely not submissive, and she excels in such tasks which are typically associated with masculinity, such as warfare (Kinsley *Hindu Goddesses* 96-97).

The third and last *carita* is the longest and most complex, as it is comprised of several short episodes. Similar to the previous *caritas*, the gods are once more in trouble; this time they need the help of the Goddess to fight the demon brothers Shumba and Nishumba. In their misery, the Gods remember the Goddess' promise to return and help them when needed, and hence they gather in the Himalayas to praise her. While they praise her lavishly, a beautiful young woman appears and bathes in the nearby river. Surprised, the gods look at her as she turns into the great goddess; this time referred to as Ambika (great mother).

This particular manifestation of the Goddess is so exceptionally beautiful that the two servants of the demon brothers quickly notice her whereupon they advise their demon boss to catch and possess her. Shumba eagerly agrees, but unfortunately for him, things do not turn out as he expected. A monstrous war between his armies and the Goddess breaks out. There are some critical moments in which the Goddess multiplies herself and manifests in several of her different forms or avatars. Most noticeable among them is the fearsome goddess Kali.

According to Kinsley, Kali is the prototype of what he calls the antimodel in his book *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās*.

In many ways, the goddess Kali, who is almost always named as the first of the Mahāvidyās, is the prototype of the group in terms of being what I have termed an antimodel. She haunts cremation grounds. She wears a garland of severed human heads, which are often gushing blood that smears her body. She holds a freshly severed head in

one of her hands. She receives blood sacrifice at her temples. She rides a ghost or a corpse as her vehicle. She is almost always naked. She is aggressive and is often standing on her male consort. She is sexually powerful and is shown having sex astride her consort (who sometimes lies on a funeral pyre). Her companions are ghosts, jackals, and female furies. Her hair is wild and unbound. Her tongue lolls out grotesquely, rudely, suggesting an insatiable, indiscriminate hunger and thirst. Kali insults, subverts, and mocks the social status quo, particularly as it defines proper behavior for women. (Kinsley *Tantric Visions* 7)

Despite being grotesque and fearsome, Kali mocks dualism and symbolizes just one aspect of the ultimate reality. She is raw but honest and cuts through illusions with her sword. “Kālī reveals that ultimately all creature are her children and also her food and that no social role or identity can remove the individual from this sacrificial give and take” (Kinsley *Hindu Goddesses* 130).

Eventually, the goddess is victorious once more, but before she kills the demons, she reunites all her manifestation into one and reveals herself as a benevolent mother, creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe. Concluding the DM, the gods praise the Goddess and she, in turn, promises to return whenever needed. As the Goddess also predicts future manifestations, I was further inspired by this unique opportunity to reclaim our voices.

Despite not part of the original text, I eventually added an epilogue to my revision of the DM. By imagining one of those future manifestations of the Goddess, I am further reclaiming the mythological voice of women, this time not in the form of revision, but as a new narrative. I did this because I was inspired by one particular prediction of the Goddess in which she promises to return and save the world in a time when it had not rained in a hundred years. This scenario

spoke to me because it reminded me of our contemporary environmental crisis and further linked my revision of the DM to ecofeminism.

Concluding Thoughts

Across time and space, the stories we tell matter. I hope that within this thesis I have been able to establish how profoundly we are shaped and informed by our myths; how myths root us in our origins, and how rootless we are without them. Unfortunately, as numerous thinkers have demonstrated, many of the narratives of the Western world are highly dualistic, judgmental, and fatal with regards to women and the natural world. My hope is it that if we can come to realize the importance of stories and acknowledge the singularity behind duality that we might change that which is yet to come for the better. Hence this project is intended as an inspiration to revisit old stories and come up with new and more empowering narratives that affirm the intrinsic value of women, the natural world, and the exact differences that make this universe so rich. If we want to live in a world of balance and harmony, we all need to change. We need to change how we see ourselves, each other and nature; and among other things, we need to change the stories we tell.

Om Aim

Nobody knows whether this is true, but it's been said that a long time ago there lived a King who was destined to become the ruler of a cosmic cycle in one of his future lives. When exactly this is going to happen is also unknown. The only thing that can be said for sure is that the King could only become the ruler of a cosmic cycle after hearing the glory of the Goddess.

So, hear now about the birth of Asmi, and how by the help of Mahamaya, the King has come to become the lady of an age.

A while ago, in some other time and some other place, she was a great King, and indeed, she was a just man and ruled righteous over the whole world. She cared for all her subjects as if they were her own children. But illusion deluded many. In greed and arrogance, they envied her power and thus became her enemies. Corrupted they attacked her, challenged her, and ultimately took over her kingdom.

Plagued with sadness about the misery, the King packed a few things, hopped in her fancy car and drove off as fast as she could. She didn't stop until she was sure that she was safe; only then she dared to stop for gas and a quick bathroom break. The King had just filled up her car when she realized that she didn't have any money to pay for the gas. She searched and padded all her pockets, but she couldn't find a dime.

Oh my, oh my... What should I do... What should I do?

The King had never been in such a situation before, and so she went inside the shop pretending to use the ATM and the bathroom, hoping that she would come up with a plan by then. The King felt terrible, she didn't want to steal or cause more misery, and so she decided to tell the cashier the truth. Cautiously, the King turned the doorknob, pulled the heavy bathroom door and peeked out.

“What the?” mumbled the King in disbelief.

The cashier was gone. But it wasn't just the cashier that had disappeared; as a matter of fact, the whole shop was gone. Indeed, nothing was there anymore. Not even the bathroom.

The King couldn't believe her eyes, desperately she shook her head and rubbed her eyes, but the reality was gone, and the King found herself in a deep forest instead. It was such a strange sight - not just because what had happened was weird, but also because the King couldn't remember the last time she had been in a forest.

Have I ever been in a forest? The last time must have been as a child.

“Hahahahaha!”

The King began to laugh, and just as she thought that she had completely lost her mind, the forest laughed back at her.

“Hahahahaaaaa!”

At first, the King was scared stiff by the echo, but then she began to laugh even louder. This went on for a little while longer until the King realized that this must be another reality.

Well then, I'll better find myself something to eat and a place to sleep, after all, I haven't come that far just to give up now.

What the King found was more than just something to eat and a place to sleep. After several hours of wandering through the dense but surprisingly pleasant forest, she found a small dwelling where she was accorded to a hearty welcome by some old guy. Well, maybe it was just an ugly woman, but nobody really knows that so precisely. The point is that the King, in her misery was very lucky, because she had just found one of the happiest places one can imagine. Things were actually quite good, the place was beautiful and serene, there was a clear well nearby, it wasn't too hot nor too cold, and even the food wasn't too bad either. The old *one* was

cordial, and even the animals were all tame. Tigers and deer were playing together like puppies, snakes and mice played hide and seek, and even foxes and rabbits affectionally licked each other's furry snouts. There wasn't much left one could wish for. In terms of the quality of living, the King hadn't felt that good in, well, a long time. Of course, the bed wasn't quite a memory foam mattress, neither were the appliances up to date with the current design trends, but there wasn't really anything to complain about.

But no matter how hard the King tried to enjoy herself and all the natural beauty around her, she just couldn't help but feel anxious. Sad at times, angry and envious at others but mostly worried.

Are those new lords just? Do they treat my kingdom rightly? Have they already used up all the resources to the last drop? she worried solicitously.

On one of those days when her anxiety level was super high, the King went for a stroll in the forest. It was a beautiful day, the birds were serenading, the flowers were blooming, the air was sweet-smelling, and here and there even some sunbeams made it through the tangly green ambiance. The King's mood was just about to lift a bit, when all of a sudden, she heard a rustle behind her.

"Hello! Anyone there?"

"Good morning gracious King, my name is Sam." answered a voice from the bushes.

"Oh my! Now even the plants can talk," mumbled the King, but then the silhouette of an actual person emerged, and the King sighed in relief.

"I too, bid you good morning. What brings you here on this fine day? And why do you look so sad?"

"O venerable King, I wouldn't want to bother you with my concerns."

“Speak up; don’t be shy.”

Sam broke out in tears and began to recount. “I have been born to a wealthy family; my life was more than simply pleasurable. It was actually good. I was trusted with my family’s estate, had a family of my own and even many close friends. But then something changed, and they all turned against me and cast me out.”

“Continue,” commanded the King.

“I have been betrayed and forsaken even by the next of my kin, they have embezzled all my money to the last shirt. They took my house and even my car. Still, my heart aches for them. After all they did to me, why do I still care if my parents are well or if my kids are happy?”

“What? Are you crazy? Obviously, they have treated you like dirt. Family or not, why do you still care for those horrible people,” asked the King.

“I know, I know, I also don’t understand why I still care or why I am so sad. They certainly have proven unworthy. I should be angry, or even better, I should assume indifference, yet all that I feel is pain, I just, I just can’t change how I feel.”

Grief-stricken, even on this most beautiful day, the King invited Sam to return to the dwelling with her. Back in their new home, they consulted the old *one* about their sorrows. After a somewhat formal introduction, Sam addressed the old *one*.

“Respected Sage, we do realize that you have lived longer than we have, and you sure have seen a thing or two more than we have. Please share your wisdom with us. Why is it that beyond the control of our thoughts, our minds and hearts are coming to such grief?”

“Yes!” said the King, “why do I still worry about my lost kingdom as if I had just gotten the news. And why, despite having been humiliated by friends and family, does Sam still feel such affection for them? We are both freaked out and attached to things of the past, even though

we both know that what happened to us wasn't our fault! How can this be? We are both smart and educated human beings, I graduated *Summa Cum Laude*, for goodness sake. We should know better than this. We are so deluded as if we were high!"

"Well," responded the old *one*, "even if you were high, through your senses you'd still have knowledge of the manifest world. Sober or not, there are many ways in which objects reveal themselves. You know how some animals, for example, see better at night, while others better during the day right? Of course, there are also those lucky ones, which see equally well by day and night. Anyhow, we humans are very blessed to possess such powerful perception and mental capacities, but we aren't the only ones. Birds, dogs, and yes, even your cat, despite hard to believe, have perception also. Picture that, even that withering orchid on your kitchen windowsill perceives. Those things, as you call them, are maybe very different from us, but at the same time, they are also very similar. Let me give you another example. You know how birds can feel hunger right? Knowing might be the wrong word, but you can at least imagine?"

"Yes," said Sam.

"I guess so," replied the King.

"Well then," continued the old *one*, "you might then also imagine how hard it must be for them to feed their grizzling little poopers first, while they themselves could use a Martini! But they do it anyways. Of course, this is not to say that humans don't sacrifice too for their snotty brats, but why do they bother going through all that trouble in the first place?"

"To feel something," said Sam, "to love, and be loved."

"To make life worth living, to have an heir and continue one's legacy," said the King.

"That's a good point, offspring have, for the longest time, been a great retirement plan, but nowadays, of course, one can't count on that anymore. But still, as you can see, humans

rarely do anything without expectations or hopes for some sort of a payoff in return,” continued the old *one*.

“Get it? People are whirled in attachment and delusion by the power of the great Mahamaya, who makes this transitory world go round. But don’t be fooled, it is also the same Mahamaya who is the sleep of Vishnu. By her, everything, and everyone is deluded. She’s the blessed Goddess, who veils the minds of even the foolhardiest among us in delusion. She creates the universes and all the things in them, be it made out of flesh or stone, and it is also her who grants liberation. She’s the supreme knowledge, the eternal cause of liberation. And even though it is her, who is the cause of all bondage, she’s still the supreme commander in chief.”

“Tell us more, who is this powerful Goddess; I bet she is a badass. How was she born, what does she do?” asked the King excitedly.

“Alright then,” said the old *one*. “You see, she’s eternal, and she also has the world as her form. She infuses everything in the universes; hence she has many more forms than just the world. You see, sometimes when she materializes to fix what others can’t, or messed up, she is born into the world. Let me explain.”

“Yeah, bring it on,” said the two.

And so, the old *one* began to recount.

Some eons ago, in a time after it had ended but not yet started, in one of those precious moments between the cycles, her sabbatical was disturbed – again! Vishnu just took a little break from preserving and surfed on his couch. It wasn’t just any ordinary couch; it was one heck of a couch. I’ll tell you that much. Oh man, it was beautiful, and it even had this exciting new car smell to it. But it also wasn’t a car, it had the shape of a serpent, and even a name, and a story of its own, but that story, I’ll save for another time.

Anyhow, Vishnu was chilling on his couch like a villain, when he suddenly fell into a very deep sleep. While he was out like a lamp, his earwax began to heat up and bubble, and stream out of his ears like yolk out of a broken egg. But the gooey juice didn't end up like fried egg or scramble. Suddenly it began to harden and form a figure like a lump of clay. Brahma, who was seated on his fancy lotus swivel chair right next to Vishnu, couldn't believe his six eyes when he saw how the lump began to divide like a cell and take on the form of two horribly looking and stinking demons. Before he even knew it, they began to attack Brahma in an attempt to kill him. Desperately, he tried to wake up Vishnu, but Vishnu was completely out.

Luckily, Brahma knew exactly what to do. At once he realized that the only thing that can cause such sleep must be her - the great Mahamaya.

Why does she always have to do that, Brahma thought and pushed the panic button on his smartwatch.

“Mhm” harrumphed a loud woman's voice from apparently nowhere. As a matter of fact, it was so loud that everything began to vibrate. Even the primordial ocean on which Brahma and Vishnu were floating on their fancy vessels began to churn.

“Mom, I'm so sorry to disturb you, I'm aware you are on sabbatical, but we have a little bit of a situation here, and you are still the ruler of the universes. The imperishable, eternal, and transcendent one.” Knowing exactly how to please and win over his mother, Brahma continued to extoll her.

“Supreme mother, not just of me, but of all the gods, you are inseparable, inexpressible, the eternal source of all becoming, the source of all purity and protection. By you alone, this universe is supported, by you this world is born and protected until you consume it at the end of time. You are the creative force behind everything; you are the great knowledge and the great

illusion. You are the primordial matter, differentiating into qualities of everything. Truly, you are all that and so much more. Please Mom, who is the most pleasant of everything that is beautiful, but who also inspires dread if you must. Please, Mom, help us! Please wake Vishnu up from his sleep that is you, so that we may help ourselves.”

Indeed, pleased by the praise and respect from Brahma, the great Mahamaya released Vishnu from his slumber. As he woke up, the two courageous demons, determined to kill Brahma, turned red from anger and began to fight Vishnu instead. The longer the demons stood up to Vishnu, the bigger the arrogance, the great Goddess had bestowed on them, grew. After about five thousand years of fighting, they became so convinced of themselves that they offered Vishnu a boon.

Great, thought Vishnu and said, “well, since you are so kind, I will ask that I will kill both of you now.”

Blinded by the illusion of power and ingenious, but well aware of the fact that this world consisted solely of the primordial ocean, the demons had one last wish. And so, in return for their boon, and sure to be on the safe side, they requested to be slain where water does not flood the earth.

“So be it!” said Vishnu, grabbed the two demons by their feet and tossed them on his serpent couch where he cut off their heads.

And so, you see, my dear Sam and honorable King, when praised by Brahma, did the great Mahamaya appear. But let me tell you more about her glory in these next two stories.

Om Hrim

The old *one* took a sip of his flask, cleared his throat, and continued to tell the King and Sam about the second story of the glory of the Goddess.

A long time ago, in another age, when the universes had already been established for a little while, there lived a mighty Demon. You see, he was very evil and sneaky, and so it's no surprise that he soon made it all the way up the demon career ladder and became the chief of all the wicked ones. Nobody thought this would be possible, but it did indeed happen. Greedy for even greater power, the Demon went into war with the gods. The war was heinous and lasted for a hundred years, until the Demon, and his wicked armies defeated the army of the gods and claimed dominion of the heavens.

The defeated gods were cast out from their heavenly realm and wandered on earth like withering mortals. In their desperation, they arranged a summit conference to address their situation. Led by Brahma, they skyped Shiva and Vishnu, who were just preoccupied with a very serious matter. But once they had heard what had happened, Vishnu and Shiva immediately postponed their game of golf and arranged to meet the others in a secret grove somewhere. They had hardly arrived there when the gods began to bring forth their misery. Upon hearing the nasty details about how the gods had lost their realm to the Demon and his wicked armies, Shiva and Vishnu were overcome with rage. They both began to frown, their eyelids contracted, their lips began to tremble in anger, and their faces turned grimmer and grimmer. The veins in their temples pulsated, and just when it seemed as if their heads were about to explode, something marvelous happened. A beam of radiant rainbow glitter poured out from between their eyebrows as if there was no tomorrow.

It seemed like the most amazing advertisement for *Glossier's Glitter Gelée*. But what happened next wasn't the appearance of *My Little Pony* or some random unicorn; it was much better than that because this was the real deal.

As the beam of radiance was projected out of Shiva and Vishnu's foreheads, the same kind of light emerged from the foreheads of the other gods as well. At first, a bit shaky, as some of the gods had a hard time reconnecting with their feminine sides. Well, some also struggled with a mother complex, but that's yet another story. Anyhow, the more they allowed to let themselves go, and accepted that they were all part of her, the steadier and bigger the beam of radiance grew. Like one of those huge spotlights, they sometimes put outside of convention centers - but just much, much bigger - the light shone forth higher and higher into the sky. At first, it was as if a mountain of radiance had formed, but then the mountain erupted, and like lava, a female figure appeared.

From every god's brilliance developed a part of her body. From Shiva's light came forth her beautiful face, from Vishnu, her strong arms, and Brahma's radiance formed into her steady feet. Other gods provided her with lustrous hair, with three eyes, nose, full pink lips and sharp teeth, with moon like breasts, an elegant waist, and real-woman hips, with gleaming legs, skillful fingers, and tippy toes.

Once the gods realized how the Goddess manifested as part of themselves, they bowed to her, cheered, and praised her. As a token of their appreciation, even though, she probably wouldn't have needed it anyways, the gods quickly ordered duplicates of their weapons for her. Shiva bestowed upon her a trident, Vishnu a discus, and Brahma gave her prayer beads and a water pot. Other gods offered a conch, a spear, a bow and countless arrows, a thunderbolt and a bell, a staff of death, a noose, and many other weapons like axes, swords, and armors. Other

shone rays of sunlight onto her skin, and yet other gave her jewelry like pearl necklaces, a celestial crest jewel and ornament, earrings and bracelets, arm- and anklets, and rings for each of her fingers - and those were many, how else would she have carried all that stuff anyways.

She was also given some flower power, some lotus garlands for her head and her chest, and one really pretty one for her palm. But the gifts, which she was particularly fond of, were the ever-new garments, the golden lion to ride on, the ever-brimming wine cup, and the garlands of snakes from *Sesa*, lord of serpents, who next to supporting this earth also serves as Vishnu's fancy serpent couch.

Things were clearly going quite alright for the Goddess, and so she sassily began to laugh out loud – just because she could.

Her thunderous laughter roared and echoed through the entire sky, and all the worlds began to tremble. The earth quaked, the oceans churned, and the mountains wobbled as if they were made of *Jello*.

“Victory!”

“Victory to the mother!”

“Victory to the lion-mounted Goddess!” exclaimed the gods, bowed, and praised her.

“What the!” yelled the Demon when he saw the worlds in turmoil.

Quickly the Demon assembled his wicked forces and hurried to the sound. Luckily for him, his army was versed in audio-navigation as the sound seemed to come from absolutely everywhere. Once he had located the source, the Demon couldn't believe his eyes; *a woman!* But there she was in all her glory, the great Goddess as large as life. Penetrating every direction with her thousand arms, Devi, the Goddess, pervading all the worlds with her radiance, just stood

there bending the earth under her feet. Her diadem scraped at the sky as if it were some old poster that has to come off.

The Goddess looked at the Demon in warning, but this one didn't show the slightest sign of rationale, and so she drew her bow, by which the battle between the Goddess and the enemies of the gods started.

After the launch of her first arrow, the worlds shook once more in the resonance of her mighty bowstring. In terror, the wicked armies headed out in thousands and millions. The air was filled with tension, fires were blazing, war drums pounded, and the piercing sound of sirens vibrated deep into the backbones of everything that exists. With her mighty bell, the Goddess further numbed those who dared to come too close to her. Those who actually made it to the frontline shot burning arrows at her, others fought her with swords, lances, and spears. Some came with axes, others with rifles, and yet others tried to trap her by building walls and pits around her. Yet the Goddess remained serene as if in play.

Magnificent, she rode high on her mighty lion which gleamed like solid gold in the sun. In a fury, her lion shook his mane and cut through the enemy line like wildfire rages through a forest. Slaying, stabbing, and beheading every enemy in her way, she slashed thousands at once.

Drawing from her mighty power, each and every one of her sighs turned into multiples of her own legions, all fighting at her side. Together, they killed even more of those wicked demon soldiers. Heads were rolling everywhere; some demons were pierced by sharp spears and riddled with holes they vomited blood. Others were crushed like fallen leaves under her feet, and their bones ground into demon flour. Some were ripped apart into countless shreds like *A Girl with Balloon*. Even others, gushing blood from their necks, wandered the earth without heads. In all directions, a steady stream of thunderbolts, arrows, and bullets, like showers of dazzling rain,

adorned the sky - Wades of smoke obscured the rest. The wounded ones, and those yet to be, whimpered, cried, and screamed in terror.

“Stop! Stop! Please stop!” they begged.

The earth was covered in ashes from fallen demons and their fleets of tactical crafts; Chariots, tanks, jet fighters, Humvees, and all sorts of other demon-creature-vessels big and small, were all wiped out by her fiery rage. Rivers of blood emerged from where previously not even water had flown anymore and penetrated deep into the burnt-up earth. Roaring, her golden lion shook his mane again, and began to claw, and bite out every last breath of those who were still alive.

Meanwhile, the gods cheered from the heavens and showered down flowers onto the Goddess, while the demon general in complete disbelief unleashed countless arrows like rain onto her. The Goddess though, just swooshed them out of her way as if to say *Whatevaaah* and slashed even more of those wicked deniers with their own weapons. As if they didn't have enough, even more demons came rushing to the scene. Some aimed at her lion, and the demon general even shot the Goddess in her arm, but as soon as the bullet touched her skin, the bullet, the rifle, and the shooter himself all turned to dust.

The next in the chain of command took over quick and began to fight her lion once more. This time the lion was forced to the ground, but promptly gained upper paw again. The lion leaped and took the wicked bastard down while up there, high in the air. Then the remaining demon force appeared for one last final bang before they all went down like lead balloons.

While this was happening, the wicked Demon himself terrorized and destroyed her legions in his buffalo form. But upon hearing how his whole force had been taken out by her, he came galloping, aiming directly at her lion. At that, she totally lost her temper, but he seemed

unstoppable. In his fury, he struck the earth with his hooves so hard, that a gigantic mushroom cloud emerged. The mountains flung into the sky by the sheer force of his mighty horns. The earth fissured, and by the stroke of his tail, the oceans devoured the remaining lands. The mountains, still hovering in the air, now in rocks and ashes, came raining down at once. After an initial all-blinding flash, everything turned dark.

With her three eyes and her keen scent, it didn't take her long to track down the Demon who stank like a scorched, wet dog. Eager to finish him she threw her noose at him, but as he too was restless to kill her, he shapeshifted into a demonic lion as soon as the snare touched the tip of his horn. Hastily, but skillfully, she grabbed the Demon by his mane and slit his throat. As her sharp blade swayed over his hammering aorta, the Demon ran through the Goddess' hand like sand and molded into the form of a man. Quickly, she cut the man, and his weapons into pieces, but from the stinking, goeey blob emerged yet another demonic form. Once the Goddess cut off this creature's numerous trunks, the Demon appeared as buffalo once more.

Somewhat bored by his relentless fervor, she patted her robe and reached deep into one of her pockets for the ever-brimming cup of divine potion. Thoughtfully, the Goddess beheld the delicate chalice in all its magical pomp, before taking the first sip. Slowly, she savored the noble drink, smacked her full lips and began to laugh. While drunk with his own might and boldness, the Demon yelled like a defiant kid and propelled the remaining rocks at her, but the Goddess just reduced them to sparkling stardust and laughed even louder.

“Blare as much as you want you wicked demon! As soon as I finish this drink, I will put an end to you for once and all. And in place of you, the gods will be cheering and triumphing in this very spot you are standing now.”

Said and done – Once the ever-brimming cup was emptied, which of course could only ever have been done by her - she leaped onto him, pinned down his neck with her foot, and pierced through his demonic heart with her spear. Screaming in agony, he was trapped under her power; his blood sprayed everywhere, the demon emerged halfway in his true form. Thus, half revealed, but still fighting she cut off his head for good. Still cursing the Demon's head or whatever one wants to call it, rolled a few feet before it came to a stop and turned into a stone.

Those few of his soldiers, who were left to witness how the Demon met his horrendous end, fled blindly with fear.

The gods at once began to cheer and triumph her victory. The music was cranked up, and everyone danced to *A Girl Like You*.

“...and I've never known a girl like you before. Never, never, never, never. Never known a girl like you before...” they sang along to the music.

Peace and freedom had been restored, and everyone was happy. The gods praised the unequalled Goddess, her might and splendor, and the fact that no one, not even the gods themselves could compete with her. They danced around her and bowed in front of her, knowing that she, the cause of it all, would always protect the universe when in need.

“You are truly one a heck of a Goddess, without imperfection, and so unfathomable even to us.” they said.

“You are supreme, the entire manifold of the world, the primordial matter, the cause of liberation. You alone are the destroyer of the pain of all the worlds.” said others.

“Indeed, by you alone, the universes attain happiness when you slay and annihilate its

foes. I wonder why your mere glance doesn't reduce the wicked ones to dust, as your victory purifies even those. O Mother, even towards them, you are gracious and compassionate. Truly, you have saved us and the worlds." they all bowed and praised her.

Of course, there were more flowers showered onto her and even more gifts as petals on them. Pleased by their praise, the Goddess offered to fulfill their any desire, but after saving them from the demons, the gods couldn't think of anything else that could be done for them. They had but one wish.

"If you wish to give us the blessing of your help and protection whenever we praise you, be it with your gentle forms as we perceive them everywhere in the worlds or be it with your most terrible ones if you must, gracious Mother, we'll choose that," they all agreed.

"So be it." said the Goddess and vanished from her manifestation.

And this, said the old *one* to Sam and the King, is how it's said that she manifested again out of her own creation and ensured the wellbeing of the worlds. But wait, there is more, hear now the last story of the Goddess' glory and how she returns whenever she is praised.

Om Klim

Another time, in yet another age, some new evil demons, named Shumba and Nishumba, terrorized the gods again and finagled themselves into the heavenly realm once more. They took all the god's powers and the dominion of all the worlds. They also took the rule of the sun, of the moon, of all wealth, the wind, the fire, the oceans, and even death. Robbed of all their goods, the gods were once again kicked out of the heavens, but this time they remembered how the Goddess vowed to return and help them in time of distress.

So, the gods went to Himalaya, the lord of the mountains, and on top of the highest peak, standing knee-deep in snow, they praised her there.

“O auspicious Devi, gracious mother, primordial cause. With all our hearts, we bow to you, who is wonderful and terrible, who is fortune and misfortune. We bow to you and your many forms and manifestations, we praise you, who creates, sustains and destroys all there is. Who has the form of the moon, is the moonlight - blissful and beautiful. Who helps us in difficulties, whose essence indwells in all that is bright as sunlight or dark as its shadow. You, who is the gentlest and the fiercest, who abides in all beings in the form of knowledge and delusion, awareness and sleep, hunger and thirst, power and modesty. Who presides over the elements and senses, and pervades the earth consciousness.”

Racked by the two evil demons, the gods bowed to the Goddess who destroys all afflictions, praised her and begged her for the destruction of their enemies.

At once and seemingly out of nowhere, the gods noticed a beautiful young woman bathing in the nearby river.

“Hey guys,” she greeted them, “who is it that you are praising?”

Surprised, the startled gods looked at the beautiful woman, when suddenly the auspicious Goddess aroused from her body.

“Clearly, this hymn must be in my honor,” the stunning Goddess said.

Regardless of the fact that some of the gods had more eyes than any mortal can imagine, they couldn’t believe their eyes. The Goddess who appeared in front of them was even more beautiful than the young woman from whom she emerged. Her splendor also didn’t slip the attention of the two servants of the demons who were gathering medicinal mountain goat poop there.

“Dude look how gorgeous she is,” said one of them.

“Yeah, what a sight, I bet the boss would totally go for her. Let’s tell him.” said the other.

The two servants immediately jumped onto their souped-up demon vessel, whipped it good a few times and skid-marked their way home to their boss as soon as they could.

“Yo boss, you won’t believe what we just saw in the Himalayas” splurged the first.

“What is it now,” asked the demon Shumba obviously bugged.

“Oh man, a chick like no other!” busted the second servant.

“Get out of here! All that fuss just because of a woman. Don’t you see that I am busy?”

“No, no Sir, I am afraid you don’t understand, this one is really one of a kind. I myself have never seen such a beauty before. And believe me, I have seen them all.” joked the smarter of the two servants.

“Continue,” commanded Shumba.

“I mean, boss, you clearly have already acquired everything of beauty and value there is in the worlds, you have all the gods’ fancy vessels, all the jewelry of the worlds, and all the

riches, lush gardens, rain and rivers of gold and stuff, but I am sorry to say, that woman really isn't like any of your others."

"You better watch out what you are saying!" warned Shumba.

"I...I..., I really didn't mean to offend you boss, your females are all...well, they are cute, hot and furry and stuff, but this woman we just saw, she is beyond beautiful. She is the jewel of all females. You should totally possess her. Such a trophy by your side will totally add to your status as the greatest boss of all the worlds." assured the servant.

"Well, you sure got a point there. Go, go, get me my messenger, quick, and hurry, I am feeling the love already."

In no time, the evil demon Shumba had commanded his messenger to find this beautiful woman.

"Tell her how amazingly rich and powerful I am, how even the gods do what I say. I know as soon as she hears about me, she will come running here in no time."

The messenger was just about to mount his demon donkey convertible when Shumba came running after him with golden reins.

"Here, here, take my chopper and bring me that woman ASAP."

The messenger appeared in front of the Goddess a little later, and spoke, "Ignoring your womanly handicap for a moment, you seem relatively reasonable, so don't be a fool and listen to the message I have for you. In your best interest, I am here to tell you about the great Shumba and his brother Nishumba. Indeed, they are the greatest rulers the worlds have ever seen; even the gods are inferior to them. They alone have acquired all the power of the gods and all the wealth of the worlds. They have mansions, luxurious vessels, and mountains of gold; they owe fucking everything a woman like you could possibly wish for! They find pleasure only in the

finest things of all, and they want you. So, don't be stupid and accept this great honor and privilege they are offering you and come with me quick."

The Goddess gave the messenger a charming smile as he continued.

"You can even pick either of the two brothers as your husband, that's how generous they are. Either way, you will gain power, status, and dominion beyond your limited imagination. Come on woman, let's go."

Obviously charmed by his speech, the Goddess smiled heartily. "Truly, what you are saying is nothing but the truth. The powerful Shumba and his brother are clearly the rulers of the worlds, but the thing is, you see, a long time ago I made a vow, and I am afraid I can't go with you now."

"What, are you deaf or just that stupid?" exclaimed the messenger.

"Return to your masters, and let them decide what they believe is right, but as for me, I can only accept the companionship of one who equals my strength, and who can defeat me in battle."

"You crooked woman. Who do you think can surpass either one of them? It sure ain't you. No man or god can stand up to their might, and you are but one woman! You better get going now, or else!"

"Then so be it. I am aware how mighty and heroic they are, but a vow is a vow. So, go now and tell them what I said. They will know best what to do."

Uncomprehending of the absurdity of such radical emancipation, the messenger returned to his boss and told him what that nasty woman had said. Upon hearing the news, Shumba threw a bit of a temper tantrum and requested to see his general immediately.

“Grab that woman, even by the hair if you must and bring her here at once! And if anyone tries to save her, even those amateurs of gods, slaughter them like the pigs they are!”

As ordered by Shumba, the general quickly deployed with an army of 60,000 heads. When the general and his army reached the foothills of the Himalayas, they already spotted the beautiful Goddess high up on the snowy mountains.

“Come here now you silly woman - let’s go, or do I have to make you go?” yelled the general.

“I hear you just fine, no need to yell. I understand the might of your masters and the strength of you and your men. If you have to take me, what can I do?”

Upon hearing her words, the demon general reached for her and grabbed her by the hair, but the instant his claws touched the first split end of her untamed hair, the general vaporized into thin air. Astonished at first, his army quickly began to attack the Goddess. They fired spears and lances at her; they threw discuses and knives. The whole shebang, you name it. But her mighty lion just shook his mane as if for a pet shampoo ad and bit their heads off with his gleaming teeth. With his jaw he ground their bones big and small, he trampled them with his paws and scratched their eyes out with his claws. He tore off their arms, their wings, tentacles, and their legs, and lapped the blood gushing out from their guts. Having killed them all, the lion roared and proudly tossed his golden mane once again.

As Shumba heard of the death of his general and his army, he smashed all the objects on his desk in rage. His face turned red, and his eyes almost popped out of their sockets. He clenched his teeth, and his lower lip began to quiver. After this first outburst, Shumba commanded the great warrior demons, Chanda and Munda, to go and get that “bitch,” - his words not mine.

“And if you cowards are afraid of her, or doubt your own strengths, then take my whole armies with you and kill that beast of a lion, wound her if you must and bring her here once and for all!” Shumba ordered.

The two warrior demons did as they were told. They gathered all the available forces and weapons and set off to find her. Ready to fight, and heavily armed they saw her, riding on her mighty lion on top of the highest peak. The sun was rising behind her, and her untamed hair flattered and shimmered in the wind like golden flags. As they began to shower their spears and lances at her, the great Goddess got really angry. She frowned, her eyes turned red from rage, and her face turned as black as a raven. Suddenly, from in between her pinched eyebrows emerged first a hand, and then another, then an arm, then two, a bare breast, and a second, until a dark goddess was pressed out in her naked entirety. Her bare blue-black skin gleamed in the morning sun, her red eyes glowed in the dawn, and her untamed black hair flapped violently in the wind. Her mouth was gaping and her tongue lolling, and here and there her sharp teeth gleamed under her saliva.

The black goddess, Kali, with her necklace of skulls filled the entire sky with roars, her devilish screams, and her sardonic laughter. The demon armies were terrified, but it was too late, Kali had already begun to slaughter them with her sword. She flung ear-shattering bells at them, bit off their heads and limbs, lapped their blood with her lolling tongue, and tossed others in her gaping mouth in their entirety. She devoured them like candy, crushed their skulls and brains with her gnashing teeth, and slammed yet others against her bare chest, or trampled them to a gooey pulp. All resistance was in vain. She caught all their missiles with her mouth and beat the life out of the soldiers with her skull adorned staff.

As the great warrior demon Chanda saw all this, he rushed at her and engulfed her with his countless arms and legs, while the others fired at her. Skillful, with her tongue and her wide mouth, she caught the rain of spears and lances and crushed them with her jaw. Kali laughed and howled in fury, while demon blood was dripping from her gleaming teeth and her ghastly mouth.

Meanwhile, Devi, the great Goddess, high up on her mighty lion, ran towards Chanda and cut off his head. Munda attacked her in an attempt to save Chanda, but Devi slew him too. Their remaining soldiers, watching the gruesome scene, fled in terror, while Kali cleaned up the battlefield with her tongue. Lapping, licking, and gulping, she devoured all the severed body parts - except for the heads of Chanda and Munda. Humbly she grabbed the blood smudged heads by the hair and brought them to Devi as offering for the battle.

“You yourself, O Devi, shall now kill the wicked Shumba and Nishumba,” said Kali.

Like a rabid animal, the seething Shumba watched the live-broadcast in his office, shattered his drink against the screen, and pushed the huge, but loosely secured red button on his desk. Earsplitting sirens began to howl, and all of his forces deployed at once. All the great warrior clans with their armies gathered and went to war with the Goddess at his command.

Vindictively, the despotic Shumba rode among his forces, which were bigger than the worlds had ever seen before. Seeing Shumba and his mighty army approaching, the Goddess drew her bow and filled the entire space with the ear-shattering ringing of her bells and deafening sirens of her conch. The resonance of her bowstring caused the worlds to tremble once more. Her lion roared dauntingly amidst, but even louder and terrifying than all this, Kali howled and screamed horribly.

Without delay, the demon forces encircled the three. A bit shorthanded in this situation, countless shaktis, the active female energies, emerged from the gods. Each Shakti, armed to the

teeth, with clones of the god's weapons, came to help. Some riding on animals, others in golden chariots drawn by swans, and yet others in the form of sacred animals. They swung their tridents, their gleaming swords, their maces, and bows, they wore serpent necklaces and bracelets and blew their conches. Others scattered whole constellations and thunderbolts, and some scared the demons with their thousands of eyes and arms.

Shiva at once stepped in front of the mothers and yelled, "Let's kill those bastards!"

Upon which the shakti of the Goddess herself manifested and filled the battlefield with her howls consisting of every sound that exists.

"Go speak to them Shiva," said the Goddess, "tell them to return and restore the power and dominion to the gods if they wish to live. But if in their ignorance and delusion, these arrogant demons want to try me, they shall come now, and I will rip them apart, and mash them like canned dog food!"

What kind of story would this be had they listened? Obviously deluded and beyond rationale the demons continued to rain arrows, spears, and lances at her. Like in a good tennis match, the Goddess moaned, and smashed them all back at them with her vibrating bow. Kali too groaned, roared, and roamed about, slashing demons everywhere. While the shaktis sapped the demons of their strength by sprinkling sacred water onto them. They also pierced their eyes with their tridents, scratched their faces with their claws, and slaughtered them with their axes. Others in the form of animals stabbed demons with their horns, trampled them to death with their hooves, and ground them between their molars. Some ripped off the demon soldiers' limbs and broke them in pieces as if they were toothpicks.

Roars, war drums, smoke, and screams filled the air and a stench of blood, burnet flesh and fur, was lingering over the battlefield. Penetrating all this, the shrill sound of Kali's ghastly

laughter killed even more demons as their heads exploded in response to that horrible sound. Others, she devoured in pieces or as a whole. The demons who were still alive and watching the enraged mother wiping out their whole clans fled as fast as they could.

Seeing the cowards taking off, the mighty demon Raktabija, who believed himself invincible, appeared at the scene of horror. Truly powerful, Raktabija had been given a boon that allowed him to reproduce himself with every drop of his blood that fell to the ground. Thus, convinced of his immortality, he began to attack the Goddess, who together with the mothers sharply retorted all of his attacks. In return, they pierced him with their spears, so that his blood sprayed out of every pore on his body. Yet unaware of the boon that was bestowed upon him, the mothers soon witnessed how from every tiniest droplet of his blood that fell to the ground, like seeds onto fertile soil, a clone, equal in his strength and power sprouted anew. In no time, the Goddess and the mothers were fenced in by thousands of Raktabija's seedlings, all attacking them at once. In vain they tried to ward them off, but more and more of his equals appeared with every one of them the mothers wounded.

Desperately the Goddess struck Raktabija in the head with a thunderbolt, but even that didn't put a halt to his insane reproduction. The whole earth was covered with his offshoots, the soil was drenched with his blood, and soon there was barely any more space to accommodate even more of his evil fruits. The mothers did the best they could and wounded many of them, but at no avail, as more and more clones arose. They slaughtered many of the mothers, and utter terror befell the gods, who watched the disaster. But the great Goddess only laughed as this was all just a game to her and called Kali to her side.

“Open wide your gaping mouth and quickly drink all his blood and eat all of his fruits as fast as you can.”

Of course, Kali did as she was told. She let out another ear-splitting scream and began to roam about as if in trance, licking and lapping every drop of his blood with her lolling tongue. Those of his clones still unwounded, she flung into her gaping mouth and devoured them without shedding more of his blood. Meanwhile, the Goddess perforated Raktabija with her lance, and Kali, like a bloodthirsty animal, drank all of his blood before it fell to the ground. Weakened, Raktabija fought back at the Goddess, but she didn't even feel any of his attacks. His blood left his body in rivers now, but Kali kept up, even with this heavy flow. Pale as a ghost and drained to the last drop of his blood, the powerful Raktabija withered like a flower in hot sand.

The gods and the band of mothers, intoxicated with blood, cheered and danced in joy. The mighty demons, Shumba and Nishumba, fumed with rage upon hearing how even the powerful Raktabija had been taken out by the Goddess. Nishumba still in his palace, now also gathered his top-notch warriors and rushed to the battlefield. Engulfed by thousands of his finest soldiers, he rode on his demon elephant millipede. With his lips compressed, and his evil eyes pinched, he was determined to put an end to that nasty woman. Shumba, who had personally witnessed most of her outrage, was even more hardboiled to kill her in revenge. Side by side, the two brothers fired every imaginable weapon at her, but the Goddess just turned them back around at them.

It didn't take long and Nishumba was struck in his leg, upon which he aimed at the Goddess' lion and hit him on his mighty head. Furious to see that, the Goddess shattered Nishumba's weapon into pieces like broken glass. Desperately he grabbed whatever weapons were nearby, but the Goddess shattered them all. Fearful he tried to run away, but the Goddess didn't stop and threw him to the ground. Seeing his brother laying there unconscious, Shumba advanced at her in a frenzy, savagely swinging his wicked tentacle arms.

Watching him approach on his hideous chariot, the Goddess sounded her conch and struck her bowstring once more, upon which the air and the earth began to vibrate even stronger. She rang her jarring bell, draining the strengths of the remaining demon soldiers by cracking their eardrums. Her lion also roared at that, but the loudest of them all, Kali banged and pounded on the earth with her bare hands. The demon soldiers of great warrior dynasties all fled like little girls.

“You fucking cowards! Nothing but a bunch of amateurs!” yelled Shumba after them.

The Goddess warned Shumba once more, while the gods all cheered from their heavenly balcony thrones. A bit slow on the uptake, Shumba lit his arrows on fire and roared as loud as he could, even though not nearly as loud as the Goddess’ thunderclaps. The sky was filled with deafening noise, smoke, spears, lances and fiery arrows flying in all directions. Finally, the Goddess pierced Shumba with her lance upon which the wounded demon fell unconscious to the ground.

His brother Nishumba, having regained consciousness in the meantime, was back in the game. He stretched out his arms and engulfed the Goddess with his countless tentacles. Thus provoked, the goddess Durgā, in her noble robe and untamed hair emerged and cut through his countless arms, as she cuts through all adversity and afflictions. In one last rush, Nishumba ran at her with sword and spear, but Durgā just impaled him on her lance like a marshmallow onto a stick.

Bleeding and gasping for air, yet another being emerged from Nishumba’s chest, begging her to stop all in vain. She cut off its head in one stroke. Kali and the lion and some others meanwhile cleaned up again. They lapped the blood and devoured every head and limb that

wasn't nailed down - except for some which were still attached and moving. Those who could, fled, others were still cut to pieces or else snuffed out.

Seeing his brother Nishumba, who was dear to him as life itself, dead on the ground, the wounded Shumba exclaimed, "Durgā, you crooked woman! You are nothing but corrupt with power. You are prideful and presumptuous. You can't even engage in a fair battle; you are a cheater who depends on the power of others!"

"I am alone here in the world, or do you see anyone else but me? Who else is there? Can't you see that those who you presume to see are but projections of my power, who now at once shall enter back into me" responded Devi.

So spoken, the worlds trembled and all the goddesses, the mothers, and the shaktis turned into a glittery and bubbling substance, as sparkly as a thousand galaxies, and flowed back into the great Goddess. A huge bang was heard, and all that remained was Ambika, the great Mother.

"I have now withdrawn my many forms inhabited in the worlds and projected by my power and stand here now in front of you all by myself. Come fight me if you dare!"

And so, the foolish Shumba began to fight the great Goddess now in union with her many forms, while the gods and a few remaining demons watched from a distance. Frightening all the worlds with their terrifying weapons and magical powers, the two fought each other without remorse. Playfully, the great Mother repelled all of Shumba's attacks with laughter and content cries. Cut to the quick, Shumba released thousands of fiery arrows at once, but the Goddess just knocked his bow out of his hand and shattered it into pieces. Hastily he picked up his spear, but she shattered that one too; then his swords and his axes until he had but his sword left. Shumba sighed, shouted out in rage and ran towards her, but as soon as the tip of his blade touched the first fiber of her robe, the sword pulverized into dust as well. Thus, stripped of every weapon,

Shumba upraised his fist and punched her in the heart. The great Mother, in turn, struck her palm on his chest so hard that he lost balance and fell to the ground.

Shumba shook his head, grabbed her by the arm and leaped into the sky where they battled relentlessly face to face with their bare hand like the worlds had never seen before.

“Hit him!”

“Beat him hard!”

“Knock him out!” cheered the gods.

The Goddess grabbed Shumba by his collar and flung him to the ground at rapid speed; the earth, the mountains and the oceans all shook. Shumba lost consciousness for a second, but then he got up again still wanting more. But the Goddess had already launched her lance and pierced him into his heart. And so, the evil demon screamed his head off as he took his last breath.

When Shumba was slain, the universe became calm again; the natural order was regained; the flames, the dust, and the smoke all disappeared, and the sky cleared. The temperature was restored, snow fell softly onto the mountain tops, wells and rivers returned and washed the blood crusted and fissured earth. All the noise disappeared, and everything was quiet again.

Well, that is until the gods cranked up the music once more. This time, they cheered, praised her, and danced to *You Don't Owe Me*. It turned into a huge party, and all the gods were happy. The sun was shining, a little breeze was going, waters and wine were flowing, and the sacred fires were glowing. Things were truly great again.

After the party was over, the gods with beaming faces praised the Goddess for granting their wish and upholding her vow to protect them and the universe in distress.

“You are truly the remover of suffering o gracious Mother of the earth. In you, we seek refuge, o protector and ruler of everything moving and unmoving. You are the sustaining power of the worlds who abides in the form of the earth. You in the form of water, air, sky, earth, soil, even plants, and animals, we perceive you in all that exists. You are boundless and mighty, the source of everything. You are the supreme Maya, by whom the universes are deluded, and you alone grant liberation. You are knowledge as well as error, darkness as well as light, reason and emotion alike. By you alone dear Mother, the universes are filled with everything there is; you are the unity of all forms. How can we praise you who is beyond praise? Who is the intelligence in the hearts of all beings, the cause of time and change? O auspicious one, all-knowing Mother, the power of creation sustenance and destruction. You are eternal, in all of your forms. Beautiful and terrifying, you exist in all and are the ruler of all. You alone possess all power. We bow to you. Please protect us, you, who when pleased destroys all affliction and when displeased eliminates all aspirations.”

Pleased by the god’s gratitude and praise Devi spoke,

“In another age, more demons like Shumba and Nishumba will cause distress again. Then, I shall be born into this world once more and destroy their evil wickedness, and my teeth shall be red with their blood. Again, when no rain has fallen for a hundred years, and there is no water on earth, then too, with a hundred eyes, I shall return but not by birth. With my tears, I will support the earth with life-sustaining vegetables brought forth from my own seed. Yet other demons and malevolent beings I’m going to slay in my most terrible forms, at even other times. At some point, I intend to take on the form of a swarm of countless bees. Thus, whenever danger arises, I will be there and bring about the destruction of your enemies. I will continue to return whenever you remember and praise me. I’m always present but especially so during harvest

season. I will always be near to those who honor me in my manifold forms, and protect them from evil and misfortune, from enemies, unjust rulers, fires, floods, hunger, and thirst.”

As soon as the Goddess had finished, she vanished from sight. The gods reclaimed their dominion and went back to their daily business. Until, well, who knows.

And that, dear Sam and venerable King, spoke the old *one*, is how the great Goddess manifests time and time again to protect the worlds. But don't be fooled when you can't see her as clear as crystal; she is still here residing in all that exists. She is the creator, the sustainer and when the time comes also the destroyer, only to be the creator once more. Truly, she is eternal.

That's the splendor and the glory of the great Mother by whom this earth is upheld. That's also how you venerable King, and your friend Sam here, are deluded by her. In the same way, in which she deludes all of us. So, my dear King, take refuge in her, because she alone grants happiness and liberation.

Upon hearing all this, Sam and the King bowed to the illustrious old *one* and began to practice spiritual austerities so that they too may attain a vision of the great Mother. They settled on a mossy, but sunny spot by the river and began to meditate and worship the Goddess in all her forms. For three whole years the two praised and honored her, until one day, the great Mother appeared in front of them.

“All which you desire, and the delight and love of your family, you shall receive from me,” spoke the Goddess.

The King didn't have to think long or hard. Immediately he chose an imperishable kingdom and to reclaim the lost one. Sam on the other hand, dispassionately chose to gain the knowledge which severs attachment from “I” and “mine.”

“Your wish shall be my gift to you, in a few days my dear King, you shall reclaim your kingdom, and once your days are over, you shall receive another birth and rule as queen over another realm. And you, my dear Sam, the knowledge which leads to final liberation shall be yours at once.”

After giving them their boons, the Goddess praised both of them and vanished jingling. Thus, having received this boon, the King will obtain a new birth one day and be known as Asmi, the lady of an age.

Epilogue

Much, much later, when the King, Sam, and the old *one*, among the world as we know it, were long gone, in an age yet to come, the sun was hitting the earth with its rays as keen as countless razors. It wasn't the sun's fault; neither did it intend to do so. You see, the problem was that the earth had lost its sword and its shield. Or maybe it was taken from it.

Asmi, the great queen of the age, fought very hard to keep the earth and her subjects safe. But no matter what she did, it all seemed in vain. She couldn't restore what those before her had destroyed and wasted. It hadn't rained for at least a hundred years. The earth was dried up and fissured as far as one could see. The fields, which for ages had no choice but to serve, and bring forth fruits, were now barren. All the animals were starving, the plants were dying of thirst, yes, even the highly sophisticated people, who for a while had outnumbered all the other beings combined, were now dying out. It was so terrible that even those who were still alive turned against each other and anything that got in their way. All their inventions and tricks to outsmart the natural order couldn't save them anymore.

Despite all the misery, Asmi was truly loved and had a lot of support. But no matter what they did to save her queendom, it was too late. And so, in the middle of her library, all by herself, Asmi began to cry. Her tears came thundering down in torrents when suddenly she remembered the old stories of the glorious Goddess.

Whenever Asmi heard those stories, there was this feeling in her heart, a warm sensation, a comfort, an intimacy, as if Asmi herself knew the great Goddess very well.

Hopelessly, Asmi began to eavesdrop to the old myths which still lived buried deep down in her heart. Of course, she knew that those were just silly old stories, beyond rationale or logic, but after trying everything else, these stories were all she had left.

“I have tried all that I could, and nothing seems to make things any better, everything around me is dying, and there is nothing I can do about it.”

Vehemently, Asmi cried and prayed to the great Goddess when suddenly, she heard the most beautiful sound. It wasn't music or a song, but more like a delicate chirping, a flutter or flapping. Teary-eyed, Asmi looked up, trying to locate the sound but there wasn't anything to be seen. She followed the sound throughout her whole empty palace, which previously was magnificently decorated and filled with people, laughter, and the most beautiful things. These days all the people were gone, and all her precious objects were covered in white sheets like ghosts to protect them from the sand and dust.

Asmi searched every room and corner of her palace, she even checked all the closets, but she couldn't find the origin of the sound. After searching her whole palace in vain twice, Asmi stood in front of one more door, one she hadn't open in years. It was the door which led to the palace gardens. While rain was still falling, her gardens were filled with blooming flowers in every imaginable color; there were even ponds and little streams as clear and bright as her flawless diamonds. There were beautiful trees, fruits, and vegetables of all sorts, and animals too, big and small, tigers, birds, and butterflies were all there.

“Oh, how beautiful it was back then,” sighed Asmi and put her ear against the dust-stained safety-glass door.

“But that can't be! How can such a celestial sound come from out there?”

Nobody had been in the gardens in years; or anywhere outside for that matter. It just wasn't safe anymore. The sun was too intense, the heat too dangerous, and who knows what else lurked there in the brightness. Despite all her fears and doubts, Asmi couldn't resist finding the origin of that sound.

“What the heck. What do I have to lose anyway?” Carefully Asmi put her hand on the hot doorknob and gently tried to open the door, but the door was stuck. It had been so long since it was last opened that sand and dust had settled around its frame like cement. A bit more courageous and eager to get out there, Asmi pulled as hard as she could.

“Agh, agh, come on! Open already you darn thing!”

After several tries and some more cursing, the door finally opened, and the overbearing sunlight rushed at her at once. The heat was so crushing that the blinded Asmi fell onto her knees. Even though Asmi couldn't see, she knew that the sound was very near. It was the most beautiful thing Asmi had ever heard. It sounded like a symphony of flapping butterfly wings made out of the thinnest celestial glass. Still squinting, Asmi tried to open her eyes.

“But that's not possible! That can't be real. There is no more natural water anywhere. Where? What? How can there still be a dragonfly?” Asmi whispered and reached for the delicate being. Ever so gently, the dragonfly landed in the middle of Asmi's palm and beheld her with its hundred eyes.

“Plant me,” whispered the dragonfly in a golden voice.

“I don't understand, you want me to bury you alive in the hot sand?” answered Asmi in disbelief, but the dragonfly was gone.

Startled, Asmi looked around into the empty desert before she noticed a tiny seed in her palm - right there where the dragonfly sat before. Large teardrops bulged from Asmi's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Quickly Asmi planted the seed into the ground, watered it with her tears and watched it sprout and take root. As the fragile seedling grew bigger and stronger into a gorgeous tree, Asmi felt a tickling sensation on her toes. She looked down at her feet and

couldn't believe what she saw. Tickling, tiny root tips emerged from her toes and began to grow and merge with the roots of the tree.

Suddenly everything around Asmi started to change and rise together firmly rooted. All the dried-up bones of the animals and people who had died there of thirst and heat turned into fertile soil. Grasses and mosses began to sprout and covered the desert wasteland in a lush green splendor. Colorful flowers popped up out of nowhere. Streams of live-giving water began to flow again, and even fruits and vegetables grew at once.

As Asmi watched all this, she felt something she hadn't felt in a long time, something one only feels when touching the soft fur of a beloved pet, or the gentle touch of those one loves the most. At first, Asmi didn't realize what had happened, but then she understood. As her toes began to take roots, so did the toes, paws, claws, and little tiny legs of everything else. Everything was connected and attached to the same roots. All the pain and all the love was shared at once. And from this day forward, when Asmi, with the help of old stories and the great Goddess, restored her queendom, everything, be it ever so different, rose together as a piece of one whole. OM Tat Sat OM

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