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Amal and the Money Tree

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Once upon a time, in a place that is further than you desire to go and closer than you wish to know, there lived the greediest man on Earth. His eyes saw nothing but value to be owned. For him, every river flowed with fortune and every rock could be sculpted into a profit.

Monetary power shaped his dreams and supreme ownership was the force which moved him from day to day. He was, however, a man after all. The days accumulated like clouds until they became so heavy with time that they shed themselves of their mortal burden. On a cold night one January, the greediest man in the world died.

He left his accumulated riches to no one. No will outlined the division of his estate. He had no family and no friends. Such things disrupted time, and time was profit, and profit was the man's one true love. The only instruction he left was for his slaves (he had no servants for servants must be paid a wage) to cremate his body along with all his possessions and riches. The remaining ashes were to be buried on Jayaram hill to the north of town that spring.

This location held no special place in the rich man's heart (there was no room left there due to the greed that inhabited it). But it was the one and only rocky spit on Earth which was not owned or valued and the greedy man had never found any way of making a commodity of it. It was a desolate, barren, and infertile protrusion of the landscape which, when mounted, offered no desirable view and so no one ever ventured to summit its crooked peak.

The servants performed their task as instructed. They always had and they always would. They did not hate the greedy man. He was never cruel or surly to them. Nor was he friendly or generous. His business and life were focussed on acquiring supreme ownership. All townspeople and citizens were possessions as much as food and gold and they acted as assigned, unaware that any other choices were possible.

As the April chill ran north and May invited the sun to

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stay longer, Jayaram hill sprouted its first signs of life. No one noticed for some time, but eventually the growing silhouette to the north could not be ignored. The city folk began to talk, to wonder. They decided to take the narrow 3-mile road to the top of Jayaram hill to see what strange wonder disrupted the light's path there. Indeed, a tree had begun to grow atop the very spot where the greediest man's ashes were buried. Its trunk was covered in a shining silver bark and the tips of its branches held little green buds just beginning to open. As the days progressed, the city folk would take their assigned hour of rest each day to go to Jayaram hill and watch the wondrous new tree advance its journey towards the sky. When the buds fully opened, the leaves were revealed to be fluttering rectangular sheets of paper. They were in fact dollar notes. Come the end of summer, the towering tree bore its first fruit: countless glistening clusters of ten cent coins.

As the seasons moved with the sun and time danced in uncatchable circles, things grew ill for the city folk far and wide. Since the death of the greediest man, there was no one appointed to assume his role. All citizens attempted to continue their lives as they always had but some grew wary of the reasons for their actions and whispers grew across the land. Questions that had not been asked for a long, long time began to surface in the streets and markets. It was in the fall two years after the death of the greediest man that Vivek decided to shirk his morning's duties and head up 3-mile road.

"With the man dead," Vivek thought "who will tell me if what I do is wrong or right?"

Vivek decided to go to Jayaram hill to harvest a few leaves and berries from the silver tree. He was the greediest man's most trusted slave and would attend to the most private needs of his master. Among these duties was counting and bundling money. Bills and coins were familiar to Vivek but he never entertained a query as to their function, or power. Now, Vivek would find out just what this money was capable of and why it seemed to be the center of the greediest man's life.

When Vivek reached the base of the great tree, the branch-





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es hung low with the weight of the glistening berries and they caught the sun, playing with its light and throwing it in patterns on the rocky ground. It was a stunning sight to behold.

A large cluster of coins dangled just in front of Vivek's face. He reached out and grasped one between his fingers and gently pulled. To his surprise, it did not come loose. He used his whole hand, and then both hands, hanging his entire weight upon the branch, but not one silver berry even budged. In anger and determination, Vivek ran down Jayaram hill to fetch a ladder and axe from the garden hut.

When he had made it back atop Jayaram hill with his tools, Vivek set to work chopping a branch from the tree. He swung and he swung, and each loud blow made such a sound that reverberated like a bell across the city and land. After the twelfth strike, Vivek collapsed from his ladder in exhaustion. He had not even made a small nick in the shining bark, yet his axe was chipped and dull. The racket of Vivek's chopping from the hill had gained much attention from the city folk. Many had gathered and begun to ascend the 3-mile road on a pilgrimage to satisfy their curiosity. When they found Vivek with the axe in his hand, much commotion ensued. Many saw that there must be some merit in Vivek's actions and also took up axes or climbed the tree's limbs and struggled to acquire some of the berries and leaves or a strip of bark. But nothing came free.

Although the citizens may have collaborated to pull the tree down or dig at its roots, none were willing to function together for each was compelled by their individual desire to covet the fruits of the tree. Eventually the entire tree was invisible behind the swarm of townfolk clawing desperately at what parts they could reach. None were successful, and anger grew until a great fight broke out atop Jayaram hill.

The violence lasted for days and nights. Everyone from far and wide traveled to Jayaram hill on a quest to gain but one piece of the great tree which was rumoured to offer opportunities of betterment and power. Men, women and children fought amongst the chaos. Their bodies began scattering the hilltop. The 3-mile road was near impassable for the corpses draped hither-thither. It was a

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ghastly and horrible sight. Those left living eventually died at the foot of the great tree, drunk on greed and blinded by despair. Though the cities, towns and fields were barren and lifeless after the great battle, the days still made their way with the sun. Time passed in silent and relentless determination. The great tree continued to bud and bloom and its bark shone as brightly as ever. The bodies lying all about its trunk, and indeed the whole of Jayaram hill, had given-in to the ways of time and a grim garden of white and weathered bones decorated the barren rock.

Late one fall on a cold and miserable night, a poor traveler came to the land of the great tree. His name was Amal and he was but a child when the people of his town abandoned their homes to travel to Jayaram hill in pursuit of riches and fortune. Now a young man of twenty five, Amal had been making his way through the empty land finding what he could to eat and drink and searching for another like him whom he may share company with. It had been such a long time since he had even spoken a word to anyone. The night was black when Amal made his way up the back side of Jayaram hill. The rain and sleet cut like a cold knife on his skin and blinded his vision. When he reached the summit, Amal was delighted to come across a great tree whose canopy dampened the driving rain. Some of the branches hung low about him. Amal desired so much to have but a small fire to dry and warm himself. With such a cold and damp he feared for his life on this frightful night.

Amal reached out to one of the lowest branches and snapped off a few small boughs. He blew the leaves dry in his cupped hands and used them as tinder. With flint and steel he sparked the kindling alight. It was a small and modest fire, but indeed the warmest Amal had felt. He soon grew comfortable and dry and aware of his pangs of hunger.

Unsure of what tree was giving him shelter, Amal endeavoured to discover if perhaps it possessed any edible fruit. He felt around the low branches and came upon a large collection of berries. Plucking one effortlessly, he placed it lightly in his mouth and bit softly into its flesh. It was the sweetest and juiciest berry Amal had ever tasted. He eagerly began eating more. It was only after five small fruits had been devoured that Amal was surprised to find his





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stomach full and satisfied. He lay down comfortably next to the small fire and fell deeply into sleep.

When Amal awoke, a bright sun greeted his eyes. He looked up at the great tree which had guarded, warmed, and fed him the previous night. Its leaves were enormous and deep green in colour. Its bark wrapped its way gracefully up the trunk like dark brown fingers, caressing a blue sky. Small red berries inhabited the canopy in rich abundance. Such a beautiful tree Amal had never seen. All about the hill and down a road on the south side grew lush bushes and shrubs with cloud-white stems (almost the shade of bone), which bore fruit and berries of all colours and sizes. Amal had never set eyes on such a fertile and delightful place.

Untitle
Maria M

