

CHILDHOOD REGAINED

STORIES OF HOPE FOR ASIAN CHILD WORKERS



COMPILED AND EDITED BY
JODIE RENNER

Childhood Regained

Stories of Hope for Asian Child Workers

Excerpts from the stories

Compiled & Edited

by Jodie Renner

Contributors:

**D. Ansing, Della Barrett, Hazel Bennett, Edward Branley,
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EARLY PRAISE FOR CHILDHOOD REGAINED

“The central theme of the *Childhood Regained* anthology concerns one of our world’s darkest yet most deeply hidden problems. These are tales that demand to be widely read, written by authors who deserve the widest possible audience. You can’t read these stories and remain passive about the current state of child labor in Asia, or anywhere, really. Strongly recommended.”

~ Joe Hartlaub, Bookreporter.com

“The *Childhood Regained* writers are heroes among us. Their stories shine a haunting light on the plight of too many children. And yet, alongside the terror and grief in these stories are the inklings of hope – because in reading them it is all but certain that our collective call to action on behalf of these children will be ignited. Read, read, read this book – you, and let’s hope the world, will never be the same for it.”

~ Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych., bestselling author of *Discipline without Damage: How to get your kids to behave without messing them up*. www.drvanessalapointe.com

“Kudos to Jodie Renner and the authors of *Childhood Regained* for shedding light on the human trafficking crisis that continues to plague our world. This book is packed with compelling stories that reflect the horrific realities of modern day slavery, while demonstrating that people who care can, and are, bringing change and hope.”

~ Susan Miura, author, reviewer for *The Book Report*, public relations coordinator for a Chicago suburban library, presenter of “Modern Day Slavery,” and Vice President of the ACFW Chicago Chapter
www.susanmiura.com

“*Childhood Regained* reveals the plight of Asian child workers, tempered by end-notes of hope. Filtered through a lens of short stories, the anthology narrates the lives of children who struggle under circumstances darker and more desperate than any Grimm’s fairy tale. Facing mountainous odds, the child in each story undertakes an arduous journey in search of a hopeful future. The stories in *Childhood Regained* are

inspired by the struggles of actual Asian child workers. Important reading for everyone.”

~ Kathryn Lilley, author and founder of *The Kill Zone* blog

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CHILDHOOD REGAINED
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Please leave a review later on Amazon!

We hope you will take a few minutes in May or June to leave a brief review of this anthology on one of the Amazon sites. That will increase the visibility of this book, raise awareness of this important issue, and help reduce the exploitation of disadvantaged children in developing countries.

Thank you in advance for that.

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FOREWORD

To paraphrase someone who was an expert at exploitation, Josef Stalin, “One exploited child is a tragedy; one million is a statistic.”

And, in fact, one of the problems many people have in understanding fully the horror of child exploitation in the 21st century is the sheer blunt force of the numbers. I know of no nation, industrialized or pre-industrial, democratic or autocratic, religious or secular, in which children—the most vulnerable members of the human race—aren't exploited in some way. The stories in this collection are set in Asia, but no one anywhere should read them comfortably, thinking that the exploitation they describe, the violation of the traditional trust between adult and child, is “foreign.”

I've personally lived in third-world areas of Asia, where I've seen firsthand, one betrayed child at a time, some of the millions of kids worldwide who are denied their childhood by being worked straight into, and through adolescence. And I know, at a slight remove, of children being sold into a loveless marriage or a potentially brutal apprenticeship; or being transformed into unwilling sexual partners for everyone from their own family members and the relatively wealthy people of the child's own country, to the global sexpat who flies in wearing fancy clothes assembled by child labor in garment mills in other countries.

Although it's less conspicuous in America, there are children in the Land of the Free who are anything but free. They work in our fields, including those that grow tobacco, where they're exposed to carcinogens all day long. They're forced to participate in carrying and selling illegal drugs. They're prostituted in every city in the nation. They're made the subject of pornographic films. They're sexualized in mass media. And, of course, America, like every first-world nation, exploits children indirectly when we patronize manufacturers abroad who depend on child labor.

But even the most sympathetic reader, going through paragraphs like the ones above, can develop blurred vision: it's just a catalog of facts; the children aren't individuals. That's why I think a collection of stories like this one is so valuable. These kids are here, one at a time, in their milieu, being betrayed on an intimate level. One of the biggest problems with statistics is that the big numbers mask the intimacy of the betrayal.

There are many groups that help these kids, personally or politically, and I hope these wonderful, sad stories inspire you to join them. If they do, I know the organizer and editor, Jodie Renner, and the authors who have given the gift of their creativity to *Childhood Regained*, and who are donating their royalties to charity, will all feel that their work has been rewarded.

~ **Timothy Hallinan**, award-winning author of three fiction series, including the Poke Rafferty novels, set in Bangkok

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INTRODUCTION

Jodie Renner

One day almost a year ago, I was doing a Google search when I came upon the true story of a young Pakistani slave worker who was murdered for daring to protest the inhumane conditions of Asian child laborers.

In 1986, when Iqbal Masih was four years old, his father sold him to a carpet weaver for \$12. Iqbal became a slave, a bonded worker who could never make enough money to buy his freedom. In that carpet factory in Pakistan, this very young boy, like hundreds of thousands of children in other carpet factories in Pakistan, India, and Nepal, was constantly beaten and verbally abused while weaving carpets for more than twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

Six years later, at the age of ten, Iqbal managed to escape, and he began to speak out against child labor. Around the world, people began to take notice. In 1994, Iqbal went to North America, where he talked to adults and children about the realities of child labor in Pakistan and India.

A few months after returning to Pakistan, while riding his bicycle with his friends, Iqbal was shot and killed. He was twelve years old.

At the time of his death, Iqbal was enrolled in a school for freed bonded children, where he was a bright and energetic student. His dream

for the future was to become a lawyer, so he could continue to fight for freedom on behalf of Pakistan's seven and a half million illegally enslaved children.

Even though Iqbal's story is over two decades old, conditions haven't changed much for children in third-world countries since then. Even today, throughout Asia, children as young as four or five are routinely forced to work seven days a week, for twelve to sixteen hours each day, in factories, quarries, rice mills, plantations, and other situations, many of them hazardous, often with only two small meals a day. Most are not allowed out, and they often sleep right where they work. When inspectors come, the children are quickly hidden or told to lie about their age.

Not only are these children denied a childhood and schooling, so most are illiterate, but they very often end up with crippling injuries, respiratory disorders, and chronic pain. According to Walk Free (2013), "Because these children are often left illiterate and plagued with health problems, they are—in a cruel twist of fate—less likely to find employment once they reach adulthood. This continued enslavement of children traps generations of Indians in a vicious cycle of slavery, illiteracy and poverty." (<http://www.walkfree.org/end-the-enslavement-of-millions-of-indian-children>)

Even though laws have been enacted and advances have been made, child labor is unfortunately still rampant all over Asia, especially in carpet factories, where, due to the size of their hands and fingers, they can tie smaller, less obtrusive knots than adults.

According to *Mirror Image*, "There are an estimated 20 million bonded laborers in Pakistan today; at least 7.5 million of these bonded laborers are children. More than 500,000 children work in the carpet industry. Because carpet factory owners, usually rich and influential men in their communities, are often under the protection of the local police, laws against enslaving children are seldom enforced."

(<http://www.mirrorimage.com/iqbal>)

My research led me to Goodweave.org, a highly respected an organization that is doing wonderful work with children from carpet factories, rescuing them and providing them with housing, food, education, and the tools for a much better life. According to their website, "GoodWeave has freed nearly 3,600 children from weaving looms. Rescued and at-risk children are offered rehabilitation, daycare, literacy programs, formal schooling and vocational training."

Here are a few quick statistics from my research on child labor in South Asia:

Almost 34 percent of Nepal's population are working children aged 5 to 14. That's over two million child laborers in Nepal, many working long hours in hazardous conditions, for little or no pay.

An estimated 12 percent of children in India ages 5 to 14 are engaged in child labor activities, including carpet production (UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 2010*).

SOS Children's Villages Canada reports:

"According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), up to 10 million children are estimated to be working in Pakistan.

"Child labour occurs not only in the garment industry, but also in very dangerous sectors like glass bangle manufacturing, cleaning of oil tankers, poultry farms, motor workshops, brick kilns and working as domestics in small hotels.

"Children are very often forced into a situation of bonded labour by poverty, and there are also reports that millions of children suffer under the bonded labour system in brick kilns, carpet industries, agriculture, fisheries, stone/brick crushing, shoe-making, power looms, refuse sorting." (<http://www.soschildrensvillages.ca>)

Even though it's has been against the law for some time in India, children are still "employed" undercover in hazardous situations, such as mines and chemical plants.

This anthology aims to bring to life some of the situations children in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh still face today, in 2016. The captivating, touching stories, which depict situations for children and young teenagers in carpet factories, garment factories, stone quarries, brickyards, jewelry factories, farms, mines, welding, the service industry, hotels, street vending, ragpicking, and more, while based on true-life situations, are fictional, meant to give a face and a name to the statistics. All of these wonderful stories have been researched and written specifically for this anthology, and haven't been published elsewhere.

All net proceeds from sales of this anthology will go to support a respected charity that helps impoverished and disadvantaged children in developing countries.

For other nonprofit relief agencies that are making a difference in the lives of Asian child laborers and need our help, go to Appendix ... by clicking here: [“But what can I do?” – How You Can Help](#)

Please spread the word about this anthology for charity and help increase awareness about the inhumane conditions under which so many children are living. There are so many ways we can work together to help disadvantaged children regain their childhood and gain the tools to create a better future for themselves.

Thank you.

~ Jodie Renner, organizer and editor, February 2016

BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STORIES

SANJAY'S MOUNTAIN by Steve Hooley

Nine-year-old Sanjay lives at the foot of Chomolungma, the mother of the world, Mt. Everest, in Nepal. When his father, a Sherpa guide on the mountain, is killed in an avalanche, his family begins to unravel. His mother leaves the family for a new husband. His sister is sold into the sex trade. And Sanjay is sold to the owner of a carpet shack in Kathmandu, where he works long hours tying the tiny carpet knots, hands bleeding. After much soul searching, Sanjay finds the courage to escape and begins the path to higher education and his own mountain to conquer.

WHEN THE RAINS COME by Caroline Sciriha

Nine-year-old Sita works with her father in a stone quarry in India. Her mother is ill and the family cannot pay for the medical help she so desperately needs. The only solution is to ask the quarry owner for a loan, but this means Sita's brother will also have to drop out of school to work in order to make ends meet and repay the loan.

When Sita averts a tragic accident at the quarry, she breaks her arm and will not be able to work for a while. How will the family survive?

THE GHOST BAZAAR by Barbara Hawley

Small and swift eleven-year-old Anha sells fruit in an illegal hawking zone near the train station of Mumbai, India. If the police conduct a surprise raid, Anha can bundle up her tarp and flee.

Anha's desperate family depends on the wages she earns selling fruit from the hot pavement. One fateful day, the vendors' wares are ruined during a raid. A golden ring dropped on Anha's tarp sends her on a hasty pursuit, and she gets the ride of her life.

In a city ruled by corruption and greed, a young girl's honesty wins out, changing her family's entire future.

SEEDS OF SLAVERY by Eileen Hopkins

Ten-year-old Daksha runs home from her school and finds her mother in tears, sitting alone on her sleeping mat. Mama takes her in her arms and tells Daksha that her father has left them. Daksha sees her father's empty alcohol lying on its side on the floor. It is as if a whirlwind of dust blowing in from the cottonseed fields has crashed through her home, destroying her hopes like a tornado might destroy a house. Daksha must travel to a big farm where she works alongside many other children sprinkling pollen on the silky white flowers of the cottonseed plants—pollen that is like magical fairy dust that turns the flowers into valuable cottonseeds. It does not feel like magic to Daksha.

MY NAME IS RAJ by Lori Duffy Foster

For years, twelve-year-old Sanjana has worked at a hotel in Mumbai, India, preparing food for rich people while her own body wastes away. She is not allowed to leave the building and she doesn't dare try to escape. The city streets frighten her and she has nowhere to go. Her father and stepmother sold her into slavery, and they were the only family she had left. Still, the long hours, the cruel treatment, and the isolation were bearable until a few months ago when her best friend, a boy one year older, became sick. The cook deemed him useless and ordered him dumped on the streets, where Sanjana is sure he died. To protect herself, she vows never to love anyone again. And Sanjana keeps that vow until a small boy comes into the sweltering kitchen and into her life.

LIFE STUDY IN CHARCOAL by E.M. Eastick

Thirteen-year-old Sanjeev is smart and spirited. His twelve-year-old brother, Rajit, speaks only through pictures, but his fascination for drawing distracts him from working. If Sanjeev can't motivate his brother to work, they risk falling behind in their shared job of "distressing" jeans with chemicals in the basement of a Dhaka garment factory. And if they fall behind, the factory owner will beat them and maybe throw them out on the street.

When a fire starts in the factory, Sanjeev bravely helps other factory workers escape the blaze, but when he can't find Rajit, Sanjeev is distraught and overcome with the guilt of believing that he and his brother are responsible for the fire. It's only when Sanjeev learns the truth about

the fire and his brother's fate that he can let go of the past and look to the future.

DREAMS OF ARSENAL by Edward Branley

Kunal is a thirteen-year-old boy from Chennai in South India. Sold by his parents to child-labor trafficker at age eleven, he was sent to Hyderabad, in central India, and forced to work in a tiny sweatshop, where children make cheap brass costume jewelry. His life goes from that of a farm boy to a slave, trapped in two rooms, with inadequate food, little exercise, almost no contact with the outside world. But there is hope for Kunal. He “escapes” from his situation by retreating into his mind while he works, dreaming of the soccer matches from England he listened to on the radio before he was sold into slavery. His dreams, along with listening to conversations on the street next to the sweatshop, help him cope. Kunal struggles to “fit in” with the other child-slaves, but always returns to his dreams, waiting for the chance to break away.

THE TORN CARPET by Caroline Sciriha

Thirteen-year-old Hari works as a carpet weaver in a factory in Nepal. Life is hard. He invents and narrates a fairy tale in order to raise the spirits of two other child workers—little Maiya and Laila, who is unwell.

The fairy tale involves a cantankerous genie and Ali, who needs to repair a magic carpet. The genie and Ali fly to Nepal to find the carpet weaver who can mend the torn carpet. Fairy tale and reality mesh when an inspector calls at the factory.

RIVER OF LIFE by Steve Hooley

When twelve-year-old Joran's parents both drown in a boating accident on the Ganges River, near Varanasi, India, he is sold to Gari, the junkyard man, and doomed to a life of welding broken auto parts. Joran descends into depression and considers throwing himself into the Ganges, but fellow indentured servants give him hope as they use their resources and wits to devise a vehicle of escape, right beneath the nose of Gari.

RAJESH'S GARDEN by Della Barrett and Jodie Renner

Ten-year-old Anjali is eaten up by guilt for taking longer to fetch the water from far-away the stream the day her brother got thirsty and drank

stagnant pond water instead. The contaminated water caused him to fall ill and die. The family lost their only son. Anjali, in a state of depression, ignores her chores and her beloved garden and drinks the pond water too. As she lies weakened and ill, a volunteer group from Canada that has adopted the village arrives to dig a well and build hand-washing stations and latrines. Two of them visit Anjali with other gifts that restore her will to live.

TREASURE OF THE MIND by D. Ansing

Thirteen-year-old Diya lives in rural India where she and her mother earn money doing mehndi—drawing henna tattoos on hands and feet for special occasions. When her mother falls ill, Diya agrees to work for a salon owner in the city, believing it is her chance to become a premier mehndi artist and send money home.

In the salon owner's home, Diya is no more than a domestic slave. She endures grueling labor and demeaning abuse, is made to sleep in a tiny windowless closet, and given only table scraps to eat. Diya asks to return home and is crushed when told she is the salon owner's property, sold by her mother in a bonded labor agreement. Soon after, the salon owners depart for vacation, leaving Diya locked inside their house. Food runs out and she attempts to escape.

FLOWERS by Hazel Bennett

Ria, a twelve-year-old girl, works in a quarry in India, where she is friendless and in permanent discomfort and unhappiness because the child slaves are overworked, underfed, and severely punished. They are powerless to rebel and fearful to escape. Finally, the children are rescued by police, who take them to a boarding school where Ria sees flowers for the first time. Elated by their beauty, she is encouraged to pick up the pieces of her life and find happiness, and gradually she learns to trust and reach out to others.

NAMASTE, a poem by Fern G.Z. Carr

This poem is the poignant tale of Sandeep, a young boy kidnapped by traffickers and forced to work in the Meghalaya coal mines. While Sandeep yearns to be faithful to the teachings of his father, lessons of thankfulness and respect, his life is in turmoil. How can Sandeep be

grateful while facing hardships that no child should ever be forced to face? How can he be optimistic in his subterranean world as he is forced to crawl through rat holes fourteen hours a day?

The story of his exploitation would be a bleak one indeed, if not for the efforts of an aid worker who ultimately comes to his rescue. Thanks to her, Sandeep can now resume his childhood and finally give himself permission to honour his father's memory.

SOME NIGHTS, I WAKE UP CRYING by Patricia Anne Elford

Laila's mother sends her, with their last coins, to the market for some fruit, lentils and rice. When a man bumps into her, her coins roll into the dust. Street boys grab them and run. Laila weeps. An apparently kind woman asks what is wrong. She suggests Laila do a little job to regain the lost money, then takes her to one of several crumbling buildings. Inside it is a carpet factory. A rough man sets her to work, among rows of children, knotting to make rugs. With only two brief breaks to eat and drink water, the children work 16-hour days. Twice, all the children have to go down quickly through a trapdoor and huddle together, silently hiding in a horrible room under the floor, staying statue-like until the bosses call them back up. Laila worries. "Will I ever see Mama again? Will I be trapped here forever?"

DREAMS ARE FOR SLEEP by Tom Combs

Several hundred thousand people survive as ragpickers in the dumps of India's cities. More than a third are under the age of fourteen.

Meena is a nine-year-old girl who has never known any life other than squalor and scavenging to survive. Her sister disappeared two years earlier, and Meena's mother has said it is best to forget her. Her sister's memory and a story from the pages of a found book occupy Meena's thoughts on a sweltering day amidst the vast garbage fields of Mumbai.

BRICK BY BRICK by Kym McNabney

Anika, a twelve-year-old girl from India, is devastated when her alcoholic father pawns her off like some kind of animal to a broker. If her mother had survived Anika's birth, perhaps her father would not have handed her over to a man she never met. Mr. Kumar, the broker, takes her to his brick-making yard where she is forced to live in a cramped dormitory with

others. Anika befriends Prisha, a worker in Mr. Kumar's brick company. Anika works from sunup to sundown, never forgetting her brother's vow to one day rescue her.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK by Rayne Kaa Hedberg

Dhaval is an eleven-year-old boy living in India with his mother and younger sisters in the slums. Their compromised situation takes a grim turn when his baby sister becomes ill. With Dhaval and his mother being the only sources of income, they can't afford to take her to the doctor. Dhaval is faced with a difficult choice. Either he has to give up his relatively safe employment at the factory for a better-paying but hazardous job at the mine, or his sister could die without a doctor's care. Being the eldest, Dhaval sees it as his responsibility to take care of the family in the father's absence, so he reluctantly decides to work at the mine with his friend. But what will happen once the mine starts to rumble?

INVISIBLE by Sarah Hausman

Nine-year-old Sumeet leaves his home in a small village to go to work in a carpet factory in Kathmandu, Nepal. Hoping to help his family, Sumeet enters into a life of long work hours, hunger, and bullying from an older boy, Nirav. Alone and afraid, Sumeet meets twelve-year-old Ashna, who becomes his closest friend. Together, Sumeet and Ashna find ways to survive the factory life. But when Ashna falls ill, Sumeet isn't sure he can make it alone.

INTAHARI: CONFESSIONS OF A SUICIDE BOMBER by Peter Eichstaedt

Abdul, a young Afghan boy of fourteen, is distraught when the Taliban closes the government-run school in his village. It's the latest in a series of blows Abdul has suffered in his short life. His aunt was accused of promiscuity and stoned. His mother later died of heartbreak at the loss of her sister. His older brother was judged by the Taliban to be a spy and was executed. When Abdul is falsely accused of theft, the Taliban gives him a choice: Lose a hand and live a life of shame; or become a suicide bomber and die a glorious death. Out of this dangerous dilemma, Abdul forms a plan save himself and find the justice he craves.

FROZEN TEARS by Steve Hooley

Pramita, a ten-year-old Nepalese girl, is sold into the sex trade by her uncle, after her father dies and her mother leaves with a new husband. In her new home in New Delhi, all hope and emotion is lost. When she is transferred to a sewing factory by her owner to entertain the inspector and keep a crumbling building open, life becomes even worse as she fears for her life. Her brother Sanjay, whom she has not seen for eleven years and who is now a medical student, re-enters her life with a plan for her escape. A daring attempt at switched identity and disappearance is interrupted by the collapse of Pramita's factory and a fight for her life.

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Excerpt from
RIVER OF LIFE
Steve Hooley

On the way to the orphanage, the social worker unexpectedly turned left and took Joran to the junkyard.

Joran sat in the back seat. His eyes widened. What was this man doing? The route was familiar. Joran and his father had traveled this way hundreds of time. His father had a welder at home and repaired parts for Gari, the car man. He had helped his father weld many broken car parts and return them to Gari.

They pulled up in front of the office. Joran looked around for the dog. He did not want to be bitten again.

“Come on. Get out.” The social worker opened the door.

Joran cautiously climbed out, ready to dive back into the car if the dog approached. “I thought we were going to the orphanage.”

“I found a home for you, Joran.” The elderly man forced a smile.

Joran looked around. *Here?* He didn’t want to live here. Dirt and fences and junked cars stacked high—and a junkyard dog. This was no place to live. Did Gari actually live here?

Gari came out of the office. “Hello, Joran. I’m so sorry to hear that you have lost your parents. Your father was an excellent welder. I will miss his work.” Gari stood beside the social worker. “Vikreta tells me that the court was going to put you in the orphanage. But why should you stay there when you could have a home here instead?”

Joran remained silent. He could hear the dog barking in the office. The urge to run came over him. He had seen Gari deal with his father, the quick temper, the hard bargains.

“You are twelve years old now, yes?” Gari looked at Joran, but handed a thick envelope to Vikreta.

“Yes, sir,” Joran whispered, his head down. His heart pounded.

“You have finished elementary school. It is time for you to learn a trade.” He reached for Joran’s hand.

Joran withdrew. Gari grabbed his shoulder and pulled him forward. “Come. I will show you your room. Your father bragged about how well you welded. Now you will weld for me.”

Gari nodded at the social worker, who turned and left. And Joran was left in the clutches of the car man.

They walked past the office. Joran watched for the dog. There was the house, hidden behind the front office. He turned toward the front door. Gari gripped his shoulder and pulled him straight ahead.

They opened the tall chain-link gate to the junk yard and went in. The yard man was busy with his torch and noisy air tools, cutting apart the junked cars. Joran could see where the dog had worn a path running around the perimeter. A few piles of goat bones showed that Gari was eating Jhatka meat and giving the bones to the dog. He knew that Gari wasn't a devout Hindu. Why didn't he at least hide it?

At the back of the lot another gate opened into a smaller enclosure with two shops.

Gari guided Joran to the one on the right. "This is your weld shop. Your room is the loft above the shop. Your meals will be brought to you two times a day." Gari turned and walked away.

Joran looked around his new "home." The grimy building was hidden behind the junkyard. A dirty muddy space on the first floor was covered with broken car frames and miscellaneous parts that needed repair. The smell of dirt and weld smoke permeated the entire building.

Apparently the previous welder had quit or was fired. Work was stacked up. And the repairs that had been made were done poorly.

Joran looked out to the east. The Ganges River was visible only a hundred meters away. A dry stream bed meandered through the junkyard and down the hill to the river.

He wiped a tear from his cheek. Ganga, they called her, was the sacred river. But she had stolen his parents. Varanasi, the Great Cremation Grounds, was a magnet for all of the Hindu faith. Boats filled the river during the religious holidays, as people celebrated the holy water. But an overcrowded boat had capsized. Why had his parents been so foolish? They didn't even know how to swim. Joran turned away.

He picked up his small bag of clothing and climbed the ladder to the loft above. It provided just enough room for a mattress. He stood at the edge of the loft and looked down on the work space. His heart sank as he realized this was the pit into which he would descend every day for the rest of his life. . . .

For the rest of this story, see Childhood Regained.

Excerpt from

WHEN THE RAINS COME

Caroline Sciriha

Sita pounded the rock with all her strength, using both hands to grip the hammer. Out of the corner of her eye, she kept an eye on her father talking to the boss. Mr Singh—or Mr Stingy as many called him behind his back—had brought his son, Pavan, with him today. The boy held on to his father’s trouser leg. Pavan was still young—about four years old, Sita reckoned—but probably his father thought it was never too early to begin teaching him the business.

Sweat pooled on Sita’s forehead, in the hollow below her neck, and in her armpits, and caked the rock dust to her hair, her dress, her skin. She didn’t stop her up-down, up-down hammer movement, not even to wipe the trickle of sweat stinging her eyes. The hammer was heavy but it was best not to stop the rhythm. It only felt heavier when starting again, and she wanted Mr Singh to notice that she was a good worker. Her father was still talking. At least Stingy was listening. It paid him to, after all. He would gain, and Appa and the family would lose the only thing they still had—their freedom to leave.

Clink clink clink. All around her, children and men and women were breaking up the rock. Stone chips sprayed around them, some nicking exposed skin. Today she wore the blue dress Maa had made her just before she became too ill to sew. Sita hated to see it so filthy. When she finished her work, she would wash it in the pond with the rest of the dirty laundry. The water in the pond outside the quarry was murky, but it was better than nothing. At least it would remove some of the stains and dirt.

Next to her, her friend Chandi gasped as a largish shard nicked her knee. Blood trickled and mixed with the dust and sweat on her leg. Chandi looked up and met Sita’s concerned gaze.

“Is your father going to ask for a loan?” She glanced at Mr Singh and Sita’s father standing a few metres away.

Sita grimaced. “Maa doesn’t want him to. It would mean that my brother would have to work too, to pay off the loan, and we wouldn’t be able to return to our village.”

Their village was so far away. Sita missed her school friends. She missed going to school too, but most of all she missed her grandparents. The drought had been hard on them all. Their crops had not grown, and Appa had brought the family here.

“Even if you work fourteen hours a day, they say it’s impossible to pay back a loan. The owners are too greedy.”

Sita nodded. And if we don’t, Maa will die.

Last night, as Sita lay on the thin mattress on the floor of their one-room shack, she had heard her mother and father arguing about it. Maa was crying. Sita didn’t know if it was because of the pain or because she didn’t want Appa to ask one of the owners for a loan. Sita’s gaze had fallen on her brother, lying next to her. He too was awake and their eyes met. Sita moved her hand to grip his. Of the two, Appa’s decision would affect Kavi most. Sita was already working at the quarry, but Kavi still attended school. Her mother and father wanted him to continue his studies to give him more opportunities in the future. Kavi hoped to become a doctor, and all his teachers, even those back home in their village, said he was bright and could do well. So, when their mother had become too ill to work at the quarry, and either Sita or Kavi had to stop going to school to work there too, Sita had understood their decision to choose her, even though ten-year-old Kavi was a year older.

A truck roared past, and Sita looked up. Appa was still talking to the owner. Sita bit her lip. If only there was some other way. But Maa needed medicine—expensive medicine—which they couldn’t afford with what she and Appa brought home.

Sita filled a wicker basket with the rocks she had broken. She stood up, stretched her aching back, heaved the basket up onto her head, and took it to the truck. When she returned to her place, Pavan had left his father’s side. He stood at the edge of the incline, looking down. It was a long way down.

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For the rest of this story, see [Childhood Regained](#).

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Excerpt from
SEEDS OF SLAVERY
Eileen Hopkins

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Daksha awoke at dawn, splashed cold water on her face, and squinted out into the darkness. The sky was growing lighter in the east as she stepped over the threshold of the old farmhouse. The past two months had been so hard. Uncle had finally found her a cot beside Kalami and some of the other girls a few weeks ago. Kalami had reached across the tiny space between their cots that first night and squeezed her hand. Daksha squeezed back, happy to have someone she knew close by. Daksha was relieved she no longer had to sleep in the tent with some of the adults. Many of the men snored loudly and sometimes she was worried about being so alone. Uncle was not always at the farm. Those were the worst times. She hurried through the dust and took her place near the cooking fires already burning brightly. She quickly made some tea and sat by the fire with Kalami and some of the other children getting ready to move out into the cottonseed fields. *I am glad Sarla doesn't have to work in the fields like Kalami.*

The sun was just peeking over the horizon when Daksha reached the field. It was a big farm. She could not see the end of it—just rows upon rows of cotton plants. Some came as high as her shoulders. Daksha squatted in the dust with her basket at her feet. She reached out to grab the first flower of the day. Carefully choosing only the male flowers, she moved down the row, bending, picking, bending, picking just like her uncle's chickens scratching in his yard. Daksha never chatted with any of the other girls. She was too tired to even smile anymore. She knew she would have to walk around this field two or three times today. The early morning was the easiest, when the hot sun was not scorching her shoulders so much. Her stomach rumbled as she bent to pick a flower low to the ground, hiding under some of the sharp dry branches. A stem pricked her finger. The blood dripped from her hand on to the white flower. She dropped it quickly into the basket before anyone would notice.

Daksha's back began to ache and her finger was hurting. She stood tall to stretch a little and was relieved to see the other girls walking towards the farmhouse for their mid-morning breakfast dosa. She could imagine the little pancake filled with all kinds of delicious treats when her Papa was happy. He used to pick her and Sarla up at the same time and

swing them around and around until they giggled so hard Daksha was afraid she would not be able to even stand by herself. She and Rashaabi would tease their Papa with little bites of their dosa, never quite letting him get a nibble. Mama was happy then too, smiling from her bed while she fed little Ramesh. A dark shadow passed through Daksha's mind as she stood with her empty dosa in her hand. *No filling and no Papa.*

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THE GHOST BAZAAR

Barbara Hawley

“Anha, it’s a raid!”

Anha turned to see her friend Amit staggering along the street under a bulging burlap sack that billowed over his head. Only a jag of hair coated with brown dust poked out. The whites of his eyes and teeth were two stars and half a moon in his sooty face. He reached her, panting. “They’re already at the overpass!”

The words were still on Amit’s dirt-crust-ed lips when the whoop of a siren punctured the afternoon heat of the teeming city of Mumbai, India. Anha snatched up the corners of her blue tarp. Several tiny limes fell out, but she let them roll away. She flung the bundle of fruit onto her shoulder and fled.

Other vendors had caught the siren’s warning. Sri Tambe, who sold plastic dishes, scrambled off without stopping for two pink cups that bounced into the street. A rack of baby dresses went whizzing past, its owner invisible except for a flash of brown legs. Carts and bicycles clattered away.

Anha’s scarf slid loose, and the straps of her flip-flops burned between her toes as she darted through the mob that milled around Dadar Railway station. *Whoop! Whoop!* A white police truck rounded the corner, its bullhorn booming over the siren.

“By order of the BMC, any vendor without a license will have goods confiscated and face fines and imprisonment. Vendors must be registered ...”

Anha knew this recording by heart. It blasted whenever the police raided the places where she sold fruit. Heart hammering, she edged behind a tea stall, then ducked into one of the hundreds of little alleys that threaded through Mumbai.

Anha dropped the heavy bundle, flattened herself against a rough cinder block wall, and peeked out. The open-top police truck pulled into the street. Three officers in tan uniforms leaped out of the back, brandishing long canes at the vendors, who scuttled away.

A cart heaped with coconuts and bananas trundled across the pavers near the alley where Anha hid. “HALT!” blared a voice through the

bullhorn. The cart stopped. A man backed away from it, arms raised over his head to ward off the blows that fell.

Not Hari. Anha clapped her hands over her mouth. Hari, her friend, who traded sweet finger-sized bananas for her ugly chikoos. Hari, who had two babies and a wife to feed, and who hadn't paid his bribes to the police.

An officer shoved Hari down. Another grasped the wooden handles of the cart, lifting it to roll down the street. It would be confiscated until Hari paid the fines to get it back. By then his bananas would be rotten, his coconuts dried of milk.

In the alley, Anha waited. More shouting. Threats. More blows. Vendors pleading as carts were taken.

Steam from the tea seller's kettle wafted through gaps of corrugated tin, carrying the smell of chai and ginger. The old woman who sold tea owned a license. She'd painted her stall salmon-pink, and *she* never had to run.

Anha shifted her stance. Strewn garbage, buzzing with flies, lay thick underfoot. The stench hit her nostrils. On a balcony above, someone had left their clothing to air in the sun. Anha lifted her gaze to the burst of color: a fuchsia sari flecked with gold, a sash as yellow as turmeric powder, and a pair of turquoise slippers, gems twinkling.

Someday she'd have a sari like that. Her sash would be purple, and her slippers would be garnished with real rubies and diamonds.

But that wouldn't happen as long as she was a street vendor selling chikoos, guavas, and calamansis, unable to go to school. Not as long as Papa couldn't afford his own cart and was forced to sell for Bhim Chopra, the proprietor.

The sound of the bullhorn faded away. The raid was over. Anha rewrapped her scarf close to her mouth and eyes. She must scurry to the train station to hawk fruit to the commuters leaving the city.

But the good spots on the pavement would be taken. Her fruit would be bruised, so that even the kind Mistar with his gold and emerald ring might not buy a single piece.

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Excerpt from

SANJAY'S MOUNTAIN

Steve Hooley

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...After the funeral, my mother withdrew into the dark of our hut and would not eat. I tried to be strong for her. I could hear my father saying, "Be strong like the mountain." But no matter what I said, she would not stop rocking and moaning.

Pramita and I tended the garden and took food to her. Still she did not eat. And she was getting thinner every day.

She stopped talking.

The money ran out.

We didn't know what to do.

In desperation I turned to Uncle Shaan. He lived in a neighboring village. I knew the way, because I had walked there with my father many times. As I traveled the rutted dirt road, I looked up at the mighty mountain. Why would she allow my father to die? He was so young. We needed him. The solitude hid my weakness, and I cried for the first time. As the tears flowed out, helplessness flowed in. We were lost.

Uncle Shaan took charge. He was my mother's brother. We would move in with him. I was only nine years old, but I had failed as the head of our family. And something worried me. Uncle Shaan's hut was small. Uncle had a wife and three children. Where would we sleep? How would he help my mother? This would not end well.

Uncle Shaan and I rode back to our hut in his cart. We put our few belongings in the cart and convinced mother to come with us. I saw fear in Pramita's eyes. She did not trust Uncle. But what else could we do? I put my arm around Mother's shoulders and felt a bony ghost beneath the blanket. I think she wanted to be with father. Hopefully Uncle and Auntie could convince her to eat.

My cousins watched from the shadows as we moved in. They must have been wondering where Uncle would find food to feed all of us. And where would we sleep?

I helped Uncle move my mother's few possessions into his hut. He found space for my sister with his daughter. But he grabbed a dirty blanket and ushered me out to the donkey shed. I would sleep in the loft. I looked

around for heat to warm me during the cold nights. I saw nothing. I realized that I had delivered my mother and our possessions to my uncle, but I was now an outsider.

Uncle and Auntie did convince mother to eat. She stopped rocking and moaning, but tears kept her cheeks moist.

Uncle Shaan put me to work in the small field with his two sons. They were older and stronger. I could never keep up or please Uncle. No wonder my cousins were so skinny.

Pramita watched that I got my share of the food. And Uncle let me eat in the hut with the family. But otherwise I didn't feel welcome.

At night I lay wrapped in my blanket, looking out a window of the shed. There, bathed in moonlight, I could gaze at the mighty mountain. She always loomed over the horizon, watching all and knowing all. What did my future hold? I couldn't remain here.

An old friend of my mother's began visiting. He had grown up in the same village. His wife had died. Mother began to smile again. She ate more. What did this mean for Pramita and me? I was happy for my mother, but my stomach squeezed.

One morning I awoke to Pramita crying. What was she doing in the donkey shed?

"Sanjay, wake up!"

"What is wrong?" I rolled out of the blanket and sat beside her.

She wiped her tears. "Mother has disappeared."

I paused to take it in. I scramble out of the loft and raced into the hut.

I confronted my uncle. "Where is my mother?"

He didn't look up from his food. "She left with Deepak. He will take care of her."

My heart pounded in my chest. A mixture of fear and anger rattled in my voice. "Why didn't he take Pramita and me with them?"

My uncle looked up and stared through me. "He doesn't have room for you. But we will find a place for you and your sister."

One week later, I watched as Uncle Shaan handed off my sister to a man I had never seen. Pramita cried and ran to me. She hugged me.

"We shall find each other again. Promise me." Tears streamed down her face.

"I promise." I hugged her back.

What was happening?

I saw money exchange hands, and my uncle turned his back.

My sister was led to a Land Rover and placed in the back seat. I watched as her eyes clung to mine, wide with fear. The tag on the car read “New Delhi.”

The rope had unraveled. I had nothing. Would I ever see my sister again? Should I run away? As I stared at the mighty mountain that night, I found no answers. A dark cloud moved across the sky, blocking my view.

The next morning I entered my uncle’s hut with fear. What had he planned for me? There was little food on my plate. He was packed for a journey.

“Eat quickly. We are going to Kathmandu.” He left the hut to harness the donkey. Supplies were stacked by the door. Auntie gave me a nervous smile, but did not talk. Cousins hid in the shadows. The gloom reminded me of my father’s funeral. I had no appetite.

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For the rest of this story, see [Childhood Regained](#)

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THE TORN CARPET

Caroline Sciriha

Hari pushed the shuttle through the warp. His swollen fingers ached, but pain had become his constant companion. It was best ignored. Little Maiya, seated in front of him, loom to loom, sniffed as her nose dripped. She would have been pretty if she wasn't so dirty and dishevelled, but he was sure he looked just as grubby. They all did.

Laila, sitting on his left, coughed and wheezed as she fought for breath. She caught his look of concern and smiled slightly before looking down at her loom to string a line of knots. Her fingers trembled as she wound the yarn around the iron rod. She was probably running a fever but she knew better than to stop working. The boss would notice if they didn't weave the expected amount of carpet, and it would earn them a beating.

Laila coughed again. The paroxysm shook the hard wooden bench they were sitting on. She gasped for air.

"Hari," she whispered when she got her breath back, "tell us a story, a good story." She pointed with her chin at eight-year-old Maiya, who was crying and licking the blood on her cut fingers.

A good story. He knew what Laila meant. A story about good people, a story about a better place, a story that would help them ignore the gnawing ache in their empty stomach, the hurt fingers and aching back. A good story. He was good at making up stories, but sometimes it was hard to imagine a better place and good people. His mother used to tell him stories. He remembered a few of them, and he was good at recounting them and giving them a new coat, but it still hurt to think of his dead mother.

He coughed to ease the irritation in his throat and looped yarn around the rod. He was working on an easy section, which didn't involve frequent changes in yarn. By the end of the day, he would finish the carpet. Who would buy it? Would its owner care about the person who had worked on it hour after long aching hour?

Hari coughed again, ignored the hollow in his empty stomach, ignored the ache in his fingers, and began a story.

"My story is about a man called...Ali." Hari stopped and looked around. The boss was at the other end of the long dim room. He could

continue, for the moment. “Most of the stories about Ali’s ancestors begin with the words *Once upon a time*. Ali was not a king, but he did inherit a magic carpet and a magic lamp.”

Hari glanced at little Maiya. He was pleased to see that she had stopped crying and was listening to his tale while tying knots. She had only been with them a couple of weeks and had never heard any of his stories. Perhaps Laila was right, it would help her. It would help all of them. With his story, he would try to carry them out of this cold room and transport them into another world.

“When Ali’s father died and the lamp came to him, the genie of the lamp granted Ali a wish. Being the foolish young man he was then, he asked for riches, a palace, and a beautiful bride. But the genie that came out of the lamp was old and wizened. His head was bald, but his white beard was long and flowing. It flowed all the way down to his floor. I don’t know how it didn’t trip him up.”

Hari was glad to see little Maiya smile at that.

“And like all old men, he wasn’t too pleased to be disturbed. ‘Do I look like I have the strength to build you a palace and find you a treasure and a bride? You can ask for one thing. And then if you want anything else, you can ask me again in nine years’ time! So think carefully before you make a wish. Good day!’ With that he hopped back into the lamp.

“Ali thought and thought. Then he rubbed the lamp again, and when the genie reappeared he asked for riches.

“A huge pile of gold coins appeared at Ali’s feet.”

Maiya’s gaze was fixed on him. Her lips were parted and her eyes shone. Hari hoped the boss wouldn’t notice from across the room that she had stopped working.

“What did he do with all that gold?” Laila asked.

“With the gold Ali built his own house. Not a palace of course, but a good-sized house with a garden, and a few years later he found a bride. Ali and his wife were happy together, but now there was something Ali really, really wanted. Do you know what it was?”

Hari looked at Maiya, whose big dark eyes were round with wonder. She shook her head. He looked at Laila, who smiled and whispered, “Tell us, Hari.”

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

MY NAME IS RAJ

By Lori Duffy Foster

The air outside was hot and humid, but still pleasant compared to the prep kitchen, where Sanjana worked night and day. She disposed of the garbage bag quickly, knowing the cook would scold her if she was gone too long. But a group of boys distracted her. They were running through the alley, laughing and leaping puddles left behind by an early afternoon storm. Their clothes were worn and stained, but they had shoes on their feet and they looked well-fed. They were probably her age, about twelve or so. One boy waved and another gave him a playful shove. She longed to run after them, to escape this place, but the crowded city streets were unfamiliar and they terrified her.

The boys, their laughter, reminded her of Aswini, and she forced herself back to reality. She could not think of her friend, who had been gone for two months now, taken away in his sickly state by two kitchen workers who were ordered to leave him on the streets. She needed to focus. There was much work to be done. She turned away from the boys and stepped inside, closing the door behind her.

For such an awful place, the prep kitchen had so many delicious aromas. The scents of various curries mingled with chicken and lamb and potatoes, and fresh naan bread cooked on the fire. Her mouth watered, her body tingled and her stomach growled. But the food was for the wealthy tourists and businessmen here in the city's center, not for Sanjana and the new boy. Sanjana leaned against the door, closed her eyes, and breathed deeply. Sometimes, just inhaling the aromas made her feel satisfied. But her imagined meal was cut short. A sound, growing in volume over the din from the main kitchen, forced her to open her eyes. There was the boy, standing at the counter across the room with his back to her. He was supposed to be chopping onions, but his shoulders only shook with sobs. He was close to the main kitchen, where the cook might hear him.

"Why are you crying?" she asked, trying to conceal her panic.

He did not answer or turn to face her.

Sanjana's eyes darted to the dough she was supposed to be kneading. She had stalled too long already. The cook would be in soon to check on their progress and she would be angry to find the boy in tears. Sanjana had not suffered a whipping in more than a week and she wasn't about to risk

another one for this boy, not with her skin still raw in places from the last one.

Like him, Sanjana had been sensitive and ignorant when she first arrived three years ago, but she had quickly learned to swallow her feelings. She was only nine then, but she understood feelings were dangerous and could even be fatal. There could be no exceptions. She had made one for Aswini, growing fond of him in the year they worked together, and that was a mistake. Her sorrow and loneliness upon losing him was a distraction, one that got her in trouble several times. It was easier to harden her heart. She had told the boy this many times and still he cried.

“The cook is coming. You must stop,” she said, working her way around bags of rice, crates of vegetables, and sacks of potatoes toward him.

But the sobs only grew in volume, and she could see by his shoulders he was no longer lifting his knife and slicing through onions. When finally she reached him, she saw he was holding his right hand by his wrist. The blisters had opened up again and his sores were oozing. How could he work like that? He would get them both in trouble. His eyes were red and his tears had wet the counter.

“It hurts, Sanjana. I cannot hold the knife. What will I do?”

With another glance at the dough, Sanjana took the boy’s knife and slashed the bottom edge of her oversized T-shirt. She ripped off a strip, grabbed a bottle of sesame oil, and reached for the boy. Without a word, she smeared the oil on his hand and wrapped the wounds with the rag. He looked up at her and smiled weakly through his tears.

“Now shush and get back to work,” she whispered.

His eyes still moist, the boy picked up the knife and resumed chopping while she rushed back to her bowl of dough. Not a moment too soon. The cook stepped into the kitchen just as Sanjana had returned to her earlier rhythm. She eyed them both suspiciously and muttered curses as she walked past to fetch a tray of appetizers they had prepared, but that was normal. The cook did not know they had taken a break. They were safe for now.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

Excerpt from

LIFE STUDY IN CHARCOAL

E. M. Eastick

Above us, the sewing machines hammer and buzz like cicadas in the summer, but even through the clatter, I can hear Rajit's pencil working furiously. He sits in the corner, his eyes drilling into whatever creation grows in the miniature drawing pad our father gave him for his twelfth birthday. Even though the stool faces the stairs, my little brother is clearly focused on his scribble and not worried about another beating should Hasan catch him not working.

"A little help here?" I flap the denim, but Rajit is not to be distracted. I hold the sprayer like a microphone. "This is your brother, Sanjeev, speaking. Hello?" Still, Rajit appears to ignore me.

Shaking my head, I hang the jeans on the hanger, slip my mask on, and spray the bleaching chemicals down each leg. Even with my mouth and nose covered, I extend my arms to full length to avoid the spray reaching my cheeks.

The chemical blots a wet patch down the front of the jeans where it will eat at the fabric, bleaching the denim white and thinning it to a fashionable "distressed" look. Why people in America want jeans already worn and old-looking, I'll never know. It's ridiculous to me, but as long as Hasan pays me and my brother for our long hours in the basement, who cares what those crazy Americans want?

I turn the jeans, spray the back, and leave them to dry while I hang another pair. Rajit should be hanging the jeans to speed up production.

Hasan constantly complains that we're not working fast enough. "There are plenty of other Bengali boys looking for work," he says in that gravelly, smoker's voice of his. "You should be grateful you have work here."

It's true that the two-story factory hires mainly women and girls, their nimble hands feeding the hungry sewing machines from dawn till dusk, and that only a handful of boys work in the building, loading trolleys, helping with the dyeing machines, or finishing garments with the chemicals in the basement. And, of course, my parents and I know that it

would be difficult for Rajit to get another job. It was only through a family connection and my assurance that the work would get done that Hasan had agreed to employ us both.

My stomach cramps at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Panicked, I pull off my mask and throw the sprayer and jeans on the bench as I rush to Rajit, but the person who appears on the stairs is not Hasan. It's the middle-aged woman who delivers the untreated jeans to the basement and collects the finished garments perhaps ten times a day. Her black hair is wound tightly in a bun, and her mouth is covered by a dusty mask. Under her disapproving scowl, I shift the pile of untouched garments to make room for more, and help her with her new small load of finished jeans. She sneers at my smile and disappears up the stairs without a word.

"I don't think she likes me," I say to Rajit, hoping to lure him from his dreaminess. "Do you think it was that coin I discovered in her ear last week that did it?" The woman had rejected my charm with a grunt, but Rajit had smiled at the trick. He smiles again at the memory, but continues to draw.

My brother's simple, quiet manner lends a calmness to the mania of production, a timeout from the ache of muscles and burn of chemicals, but when I turn back to the mountain of jeans on the bench and the threat of Hasan's wrath, a familiar fear rises in my stomach.

"You need to pull your weight, Rajit," I say sternly. "I'm serious." In my frustration, I rip the drawing pad from Rajit's hands and note the angry black streak of my actions, a harsh pencil line bisecting an exquisite sketch of a butterfly resting on a flower.

Rajit's teary eyes look up at me, but what can I do? The pile of jeans looms over us like a tiger. If we fall behind, Hasan will whip us both, or refuse to pay us, or haul us into the street, or if he gets really angry, all three. I know it is pointless trying to explain this to Rajit. Hasan's beatings do nothing but make my brother retreat more and work less, and my pleas always fall to earth unheeded.

Heavier footsteps on the stairs cement my fears. Like a typhoon, Hasan storms into the basement, his belt already wound into his fist, and he lashes at Rajit's shoulders and arms as my brother curls into a protective shell. I guess the woman must have blamed Rajit for the lack of finished jeans.

"I will not tolerate laziness," roars Hasan. His blows stop long enough for him to look at me, his eyes red and wild, his forehead slick with sweat.

“Your brother is useless, Sanjeev. I want you both out.” His arm jerks toward the stairs as if the way out were ever in doubt.

With a pounding heart, I look Hasan in the eye and plead, “Just one more chance. Please. I promise the work will be done.”

When Hasan turns back to Rajit and raises his hand, I rush in between the two, forcing my body so close to Hasan that my shoulder brushes his chest. The stale stink of his breath touches my face, and I close my eyes, ready for the blow, but instead of hitting me, Hasan steps back and pokes a finger into my chest. “Only for your father, Sanjeev. One more chance, do you hear?” His lip curls and a growl forms in his throat as he gives Rajit a final clip behind his ear and then stomps back up the stairs.

The monotonous drum of the sewing machines is a comfort after Hasan’s tirade, and somehow makes my brother’s silence less frightening. “You okay?” I want to leave my brother in the safety of his shell, to let him heal from the latest blow to his spirit, but I can’t finish the work on my own.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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Excerpt from
DREAMS OF ARSENAL

Edward Branley

Sounds of cheering outside the factory's single window roused Kunal from a deep sleep. *Yes!* He nudged his friend, asleep on a pallet beside him. "Anish, wake up. Arsenal won again," he whispered, then coughed.

"Huh? What makes you say that?" Anish mumbled, half-asleep.

"The men outside, walking home from the pub down the street are singing. Listen! The football game is over and our team won!" Kunal said.

"Go to sleep, Kunal! They will beat us again if we slow down our work!"

Kunal rarely had problems going to sleep, but his coughing often woke him up in the middle of the night. After he recovered, he would listen intently to the voices out in the street to find out what was going on in the English Premier League. He never could figure out why the football fans called it the "BPL" when they were walking past the small jewelry-making factory where he was kept, along with twelve other kids. At twelve, Kunal was one of the oldest, and one of only three boys. All of them were from other parts of India, some from Utter Pradesh, some from Delhi. Kunal and one other girl were from Chennai.

Kunal turned on the thin pallet he called a bed. He always slept in between the same two children, a girl, Priyal, on his left, and Anish, on his right. It must be about three o'clock in the morning. He needed to sleep more, before one of the women who ran the three-room sweatshop that was their world came in right at six to wake them up. It would probably be Shree today. *Yes, it's already today.* Shree was so much meaner than Panna. She must work for Panna, because Shree was always so angry when she talked about Panna.

Kunal closed his eyes again, blocking Shree from his mind as he drifted back to sleep.

"UP!" A loud voice roused him.

He rubbed his eyes and looked around. Shree was glaring at them, hands on hips. The clock on the wall said six o'clock.

Several of the girls were already awake, washing themselves with water drawn from the single bathroom the thirteen of them shared. It was just a toilet and a sink, no tub or shower. None of them were wearing many clothes, because of the heat in the room. The boys and girls were

used to each other's bodies. Most of them had worked there for longer than Kunal. He had been a slave for about two years. Occasionally, a pretty girl would arrive, but those girls were often taken away within days. When he asked where one particular girl went, since she only was with them two days, he was told flatly by one of the older girls:

"You don't want to know. Don't ask."

Kunal put the memory out of his mind, grabbed his washing bowl, and went to get water. He pulled on a pair of linen pants and a shirt.

Shree returned, pushing a cart with food into the room. Kunal's stomach began growling as soon as the cart appeared. It was the same thing every day—roti, rice, some beans. The bowls were already laid out, and there were no leftovers or seconds. They could also pick a piece or two of overripe fruit that was very close to spoiling. They got tea to drink. Kunal didn't like the tea very much, but it was strong and got his body moving. It also helped his cough. He wasn't sure if it was the warmth of the tea or something in it.

They were grateful for the food, even though it was never enough for growing kids who worked all day long. One time, he remembered, one of the boys tried to snatch a girl's breakfast. Kunal and one of the other boys held him down, while two of the other girls kicked him over and over. He never tried to steal food again.

Some days, there was only rice or only roti, then Shree's cane, moving them from the living area to the work room. If they were lucky, they would get tea, too. If not, it was right into the other room and the gas-jet burners and tools they used to make cheap jewelry.

"IN!" Shree would yell, as they filed into the room, smacking them randomly as they moved.

Kunal was good at bangle-making, which was helpful for his survival. He was small for his age—when he arrived at the sweatshop at the age of ten, he only weighed sixty pounds. Now, two years later, he looked and felt as if he'd shrunk from that sixty pounds. Kunal did his best to get a rhythm going while making bangles. He tried to tune out everything around him, focusing on the heat of the torch he used to soften the metal and plastic raw materials, turning them into the bracelets women and girls wore, sometimes ten or more at a time. If he didn't produce his quota of bangles daily, his owners would likely sell him to someone who would take him to a quarry, or worse, a mine. He wouldn't last more than a couple of months, laboring in a mine.

Kunal knew this and sighed. Two years in this factory had hardened him. He had tried to run away within days of his arrival in Hyderabad. Shree's men had caught him in less than an hour. One of the men held him down while Shree beat him with her cane. It was two weeks before he could stand up straight, but she still made him work. At least Panna let him sit with one of the older girls and learn how to make bangles. Two years later, he was still in the same two rooms, with the same crowded bathroom and the same food—when they had food at all.

Shree hit him with her cane as he walked through the doorway. He gasped but kept going. Some days he was lucky and made it past her without getting hit. Today wasn't one of them.

Kunal got into a rhythm with the brass, his mind transporting him away.

Ramsey ... to Giroud ... back to Ramsey ... he scores!

Kunal liked the look on Shree's face when he really got moving, making the bangles. She would never understand how his imagination worked. Just like when his father was in a foul mood. He had avoided the beatings his mother and sisters received by hiding in the barn of the family's small farm, listening to the football games on the old radio his father kept out there. He'd also played street football with other boys, even some of the men, on days when he went into the village with his father. They would always talk about the English teams. His favorite, of course, was Arsenal, and he learned who all the players were.

Wilshere sets the corner kick ... It swoops to the center ... Wolcott heads it into the net for the score!

Heat the brass ... twist ... heat to seal. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Ignore the growling in his stomach. Ignore the crying boy next to him. Ignore his coughing. Ignore the smells of dirty clothes, unwashed bodies, chemicals that kids should never be near. Kunal had learned to tune it all out, and that increased his bangle production to the point that Shree left him alone, focusing on the children who weren't as fast.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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Excerpt from

SOME NIGHTS, I WAKE UP CRYING – LAILA’S STORY

Patricia Anne Elford

Sometimes, in my sleep, I still move my fingers as if I’m tying knots. I cry out. My sister, Aanchal, wakes me up. “Laila! Laila!” It is very dark.

It was dim in the carpet factory, too. The windows were covered so no one would know we were there.

We had to work day and night. It was hard to know what day it was. It didn’t really matter after a while. We had to work fast and not make mistakes. I learn fast. I have slim, strong fingers. I made a mistake. I tied the first knots too quickly. After the bosses saw how fast I could work, they expected me to be that fast all the time. They would hit us or make us go without our piece of naan if we didn’t work fast enough. There was nobody to tell, nobody to help us. All of us children thought we would be there forever, until we died.

How did I get there? Here’s what happened:

I was eleven years old when Mama sent me to the market to get some rice and lentils for the week. She stayed at home with the baby. Papa had gone away after baby Kavin was born and hadn’t come back. We never had much money, so I held tight to the coins Mom gave me. I felt proud that she trusted me with them. I felt very grown up.

The market was very busy and people kept bumping into each other. A man bumped into me and my coins rolled across the hard soil. I tried to get them, but before I could, some street boys grabbed them and pushed me away. I started to cry. Now I couldn’t get the food we needed and we had no more money. A woman softly asked me what was wrong. I sobbed out my story.

“My mother gave me some coins to buy food, and I dropped them and some boys took them. Now I have no money or food for home! My poor mother has four children. What will she do?”

The woman gave me a biscuit. She said, “I have an idea. Would you like to earn some money so you can buy food for home?”

“Oh, yes. How could I do that? I don’t want to go anywhere with any man. My older sister, Elina, she’s twelve, told me not to do that. Our

cousin Sita started to get money that way, and she got a disease and then we never saw her again.”

“You don’t have to be with a man,” the woman said, smiling. “You just have to make beautiful things and you will earn money. Would you like to try it?”

I thought of Mama and the other children, waiting at home, waiting for me, waiting for food.

“Will it take long?”

“Not if you are a fast worker,” she replied as she led me away from the market.

We went to a part of the village that I’d never visited before. Most of the crumbling buildings looked as though there was nobody in them. We stopped at one and she led me to the back door and knocked. A man opened the door. She told him that I had come to work for a while. We went inside. It was very gloomy but I could see other children bent over, quietly working on something.

Hanging over to one side were some beautiful rugs. “Am I going to help to make those?” I asked. She nodded, held out her hand for something from the man, then slipped out the door. I never saw her again.

The man, who had red-stained teeth, led me to a bigger girl and told her to show me what to do.

All I had to do, she said, was tie knots. Could it be that easy? At first, I was a little bit awkward and I couldn’t see very well in the dim room, but I have strong, slim fingers and, as I said, I learn fast. The man came back to see how I was doing.

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RAJESH'S GARDEN

Della Barrett and Jodie Renner

Anjali ran and ran, under the scorching midday sun of northern India. She ran around her neighbors' huts, past children playing in the dust, through the village, and on to the low-lying bushes beyond. She ran farther from her village than she had in all of her ten years, her bare feet pounding away at the hard-packed dirt as if it was the images of her weeping mother and grief-stricken father. She stumbled, choking on her sobs, realizing she could never outrun the memory. It was burned into her mind forever.

Exhausted, Anjali crumpled to the ground. Tears streamed down her face, recalling the unspoken blame in the eyes of her parents and her sister. The pain of it pierced her heart. *No! It's not my fault! And I miss him just as much as you do!*

It wasn't her fault she had to go so far to get drinking water. And just because she was a bit late that day with the clean water, Rajesh should have known better than to drink the pond water. And why didn't the village have a doctor to help Rajesh as he lay in bed, dying?

After a long while, Anjali pushed herself up and trudged toward home. Unable to face her family, she crouched behind the neighbor's shed, trying to hide from the guilt. Why did she stop that day to help that young girl struggling to carry heavy jugs of water? Somebody else could have helped her. Then she would have been home earlier with the clean water and Rajesh would still be alive.

The funeral over, Anjali's whole family still wandered around in a daze. Papa plodded off to work at the quarry, shoulders drooping, face haunted. Mama sat listlessly on the stoop while the baby cried. "Anjali, Shriya, tend to the little one," she called.

Anjali ignored Mama's calls, creeping off to her secret spot to curl into a ball and rock back and forth, twisting her long dark hair for hours. *If only I could die—like my brother.*

Before Rajesh got sick, while he was in school, Anjali and Shriya had spent their days helping at home. They would prepare food, gather wood for the fire, look after the baby, and, the hardest job, take turns fetching water from the stream outside the village, balancing the jugs on their head or shoulders. Since the fresh water was over an hour's walk each way,

their trek took most of the morning. That meant they rarely got to go to school, which let out at noon.

When the girls rallied their courage and asked their father if Rajesh could sometimes fetch the water so they, too, could go to school, he frowned. “No. Rajesh must go to school every day. He needs to learn to read, write, and do numbers so when he is a man, he can earn a good living for his family. You girls don’t need that. You must learn to cook. And anyway, Mama needs you here to help.”

Anjali would calm herself by tending to her small garden of beans and onions. The lady next door had brought over the bright yellow marigolds for around the vegetables, saying they help keep away insects.

But now, not even the garden could heal Anjali’s broken heart. She ignored her little vegetable patch beside their hut. The plants wilted in the tiny plot she had fenced with broken bits of wood and tin to protect it from wind and footsteps and animals.

All she could think of was Rajesh. Why couldn’t he wait for the clean water that afternoon?

Now when Anjali and Shriya took turns fetching clean water, Shriya walked quickly, with new purpose. She was determined that no one else in her family would die of contaminated water. But not Anjali. She didn’t care anymore. Rajesh was gone. The grief clung to her bones like cold bits of meat. All she wanted was to join her brother, wherever he might be.

So she drank from the same stagnant water that he had—the water they hauled from the pond for cleaning and for watering the garden. And she too became sick. When she wasn’t rushing out behind the house to clear her system of its poison, she lay on her pallet, writhing in pain. ...

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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TREASURE OF THE MIND

D. Ansing

I walk into the salon, colorful with sequined saris worn by ladies with glossy hair and made-up faces. They glance up at me, see that I'm only a servant, and go back to their chatter.

Before I can take five steps, Auntie grabs my elbow, almost spilling the tray of henna cones I carry. "Diya. There you are. This is the biggest mehndi party of the year. These ladies expect the best henna designs to complete their wedding outfits." She points across the room to Amma. "Your mother is almost finished decorating the bride's feet, and I told her the bride wants her groom's initials hidden within the design of her right hand. You start with the bride's sister, Aditi."

Nausea slides into my gut at the sight of Aditi, spread over the chair next to Amma and the bride, her finger twisting inside her nose.

I trudge over in step with the music thrumming from a box somewhere. "Namaste, Aditi. I'm here to do your mehndi."

She frowns. "Wash your hands first. You've been handling dirty feet."

I steady my voice. "You are my first sitting of the night. Here, would you like to look through my designs?" I offer her my sample sheets.

She rolls her eyes, pushing her hand out. "How boring. I want a butterfly, with fancy wings."

Under the bright electric lights, I prepare her skin for the henna, rubbing my hand over dark knuckles and pudgy fingers. And think of a black scaly snake, bloated from swallowing a mouse. "Okay. But I am the artist." I flinch and clear my throat, hoping to cover what I didn't mean to say out loud.

She nods down at me. "What will become of you, Diya?" She sighs. "Practically an orphan at thirteen."

The application cone quivers in my hand. I shut my eyes. The snake spits up its dinner—a furry cocoon, stretched and bulging. I open my eyes and release the butterfly from its dark world as a golden green line of henna flies onto her hand and takes shape.

"I'm so happy to be living in the city now, away from this backward village," she says. "When Father moved the paper factory, he said common workers like your father were easily replaced. I don't know why

my sister chose to come back here for her mehndi party.” Her spittle hits the side of my face.

It’s getting warm, and my skin itches as if a snake slithers inside my tunic, but I force my head down and concentrate on the design.

A sharp *smack* turns our heads.

Amma is on the floor, her stool toppled over on the tile.

The bride examines the mehndi on her hand.

My legs unfold as my eyes search out the design. I breathe relief—it has not been ruined. I plan to go finish the bride’s blessing, before they whisper she is cursed.

But Amma hops back up on her stool with a nervous laugh.

Aditi grunts, picking at flakes of henna on her fingers. “You’ve messed it up.”

“It’s fine,” I say, tempted to wipe the sweat trickling down the back of my neck. I brush my hair to one side and watch Amma from the edge of my vision.

“They say there’s something wrong with your mother. I know what it is—toddy. She’s drinking, isn’t she? It would be sad if it wasn’t so funny—” She blurts an ugly laugh. “Who wants a mehndi woman who can’t balance her bottom on a stool?”

Amma gathers her tools. I expect she will decorate the bride’s attendants next. Instead, she shuffles across the room, pauses to lean against the doorway, and leaves.

My chest tightens. *How can she leave with so many guests undone?*

I clench my throbbing jaw and wrap the henna on Aditi’s hand with plastic to set the stain. Before moving to the next guest, I stand over her, capture her beady eyes crawling like beetles inside her fat cheeks, and say, “The bride chose to have her party here because my mother is the best mehndi artist this village, or any other, has ever seen.”

Guests bother me to serve drinks and clear food between sittings. After working late into the night, I walk home, heavy with disappointment—no one commented on my designs.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*

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FUNNY DANCE

Sanjay Deshmukh

I kept one eye on my task and the other on our supervisor, Akka, wondering when she'd head out for her smoke break. Finally, she walked out the door and bolted it from the outside. I watched from my workstation near the grime-coated window as she strode over the dry, gravelly lane that connected the property to the main road two hundred steps away. Even as the dry heat of the midday sun roasted her and the dust and smoke from an occasional speeding mini-truck blew into her face, she picked a dried tobacco leaf from her pouch, rolled it into a *beedi*, and lit it.

Her first puff signaled me to begin my five-minute routine. I stood up, placed my thumb and index finger under my tongue, and blew a sharp whistle. The faces of the twenty children working in the room brightened—they knew what was coming.

“Apdi podé, podé, podé,” I broke into a song whose meaning eluded me but sounded funny to my ears. My hips wiggled, my arms swayed, my legs swung from left to right to left, my head rocked forward and backward—deliberately exaggerated movements. The children roared with laughter, then jumped up and joined me in my crazy dance. As I reached the end of the song, I glanced at Akka, far away on the road, finishing her *beedi* and returning to the house. I whistled again and we returned to our work.

Akka walked in and surveyed the room. Her eyes narrowed. “How dare you!” she yelled. A mess of paper surrounded eight-year-old Padma. She had accidentally danced on a batch of two-inch paper rolls she had prepared for filling with the gunpowder mixture. Ten-year-old Venkat had smeared his face and shirt with a silver-coloured chemical that he filled in two-inch cones called flowerpots that ignited into bright roaring fountains of sparkles during the festival of Diwali.

My heart sank as I realized what was in store for my two young coworkers. Akka returned with a cane from her makeshift office and lashed Padma's back twice. She cried out. Venkat received his share of two lashes. As both howled with pain, she walked over to my seat in the corner of the room. I sat with my back touching the wall, so she spared me the lashes on my back. “Show me your hands, Vijay,” she shouted.

“But Akka, why me? My workplace is clean,” I pleaded.

I had always ensured my crazy dance routine would not disturb my workspace. My job involved mixing chemicals in the right proportion to prepare gunpowder suitable for the flowerpots and firecrackers that Akka's Compound made. A spill would have been hazardous. I had no choice, so I stretched my hands before Akka. In quick succession, she hit the cane twice on each of my palms. I winced.

"You cannot allow this mess, Vijay. As the oldest boy here, I expect you to watch over these children. One day, I will make you a supervisor," she said.

She turned and faced the large, dingy room. "I force no one to work here. Your parents are grateful that I give you work and money, since none of the factories will employ you. Go ahead and run away if you wish. With your little feet, you will need a day to reach the nearest town. Who will give you food and water on the way? What will you do if a jackal or a wild boar attacks you in the forest? Maybe you will hitch a ride on one of the trucks speeding on the highway. Want to know how the driver will abuse you?"

She regaled us with stories of what happened to runaway children, how crooks kidnapped and sold them, forced them to do terrible jobs, and subjected them to abuse. We were used to hearing this scare speech at least once a month. Outside the window, I could see patches of barren land mixed with farms stretching to the horizon. Was there really a forest out there? What would a jackal look like? None of us knew, but the way Akka presented the scene, it scared us.

I was the oldest in the room, but I was only twelve. I had arrived two years ago, and the other kids had come later. Before coming here, I was enjoying school life, where friendly classmates played cricket with me and doting teachers made sure I understood the lessons. My father would often say over dinner how he wished I could go to college and then hold an important position in the government.

A few days after I finished fourth grade with good marks, a van drove up to our house and my father stepped out, pain creasing his face, both hands bandaged. Appa had been working at a large factory, mixing chemicals for firecrackers. In a careless moment, with his bare hands he had picked up a steel utensil containing a mixture, not realizing it was hot.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

Excerpt from

FLOWERS

Hazel Bennett

“Hurry up with that stone, or you’ll feel my whip, you lazy thing!” Dhruv’s sharp voice makes me jump, loosening my grip. The stone hits my foot, its jagged edge cutting into my skin. I yelp as the pain stabs all the way up my leg.

“Stupid girl!” He raises his whip yet again. My heart thumps. Dhruv is the cruellest of the whip men. The tip of the whip bites at my leg and blood trickles down it, along my foot and off the end of my sandal to mix with the dirt of the quarry.

I cry and look around. I wish one of the other children would comfort me, but they know better. Dhruv would only attack them. They look the other way and get on with wrenching stones out of the ground and carrying them to the truck.

I struggle to carry the stone, limping to the truck. The ground is rocky, poking through the holes in my sandals, hurting my feet. The quarry is grey. There are no colors anywhere.

We spend all day pulling stones out of the ground. We have to carry them to large trucks to be taken away. My back aches when I carry a heavy one. Some stones have sharp edges and they cut us and bruise us. The dry soil scratches at our raw hands, grounding into them. Our fingernails are broken, and our fingers often bleed.

We don’t talk much to each other. There is nothing to say because all we know is working in the quarry. Anyway, if we stop to chat, one of the men will whip us.

Sometimes, I see the truck drivers giving money to the whip men. I wonder what it looks like. I try to get close enough to see it, but they always turn their backs to child laborers.

While walking from the quarry to our hut, I ask Shaye, one of the older boys, “How did I get here?”

“You were brought here a few years ago when you were this big.” He holds his hand level with my waist. “A woman brought you here. I saw Dhruv give her money.”

“How did you get here?” I ask Pooja, who is bigger than me.

“I came before you. My parents died and I had nowhere to live. Two of the whip men grabbed me and brought me here. There was no one to stop them.”

“My hands and my back hurt all the time— and my arms and legs from the beatings. I wish we could run away.”

“There’s no point in wishing, Ria. I keep telling you we can’t. Even if we got past the guards, where would we go? How could we get food?”

“Can you remember what it is like, away from the quarry? I cannot remember anything.”

“I can remember fields with things growing.”

I want to ask about the things growing but Dhruv stomps our way, to lock us in. We go into the hut where we all sleep. It is hot and dark and the walls are rough. I wish they would let us sleep outside in the dry season, but they don’t want us to run away in the night.

I clamber over Shaye’s mattress to get to my own. We are all crushed together on the floor of the hut and we shuffle against each other to get comfortable. I lie on the mattress and look up at the hole in the roof, wondering why no one has ever fixed it. No one cares. Will I have to slave away here all my life? We are so exhausted. Soon we fall asleep.

Water on my face and arms wakes me. It is raining. Drops fall down through the roof, soaking our mattresses. We jump up and pull them to the end of the hut and wait for morning. We know they will dry out in tomorrow’s heat, but now we are wet, itchy and cold, and it is hard to get back to sleep.

A whip man comes into our hut and wakes us with a growl. “Get up, you lot!” I am too tired to get up quickly so he kicks my mattress. I pull myself up, but am slow and he kicks me on my leg where it is still tender from yesterday. I cry but no one takes notice.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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Excerpt from

NAMASTE

Fern G.Z. Carr

I am Sandeep. *Namaste*.
Namaste is a greeting
Papa taught me –

*Bow your head,
press your hands together,
fingers upward, Sandeep.
Now say Namaste.*

But I didn't want to say *Namaste*
after Papa died. Ma cried
when the traffickers
came to our farm
and dragged me off
to the Meghalaya mines.

How could I say *Namaste*
to the mean men
when they forced me
down slippery ladders
to the middle of the earth
in the middle of the night;

how could I say *Namaste*
when they sent me down
to the bottom of a black pit
to crawl through rat-holes –
trapping me in tunnels
that squished my body

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For the rest of this poem, see *Childhood Regained*.

Excerpt from

DREAMS ARE FOR SLEEP

Tom Combs

The orange-tinged glow of first light showed over the mountains of trash. The earliest of the gulls circled and swooped in silhouette, their shrieks heralding sunrise in the fetid world of the Mumbai dump. The night's cool had dampened the rank odors and gave no hint of the smothering heat sure to visit them later on this August day.

“See, Meena, it is as I said. No one to stop or steal from us. We will have a good day, daughter.” Meena's mother climbed the unstable pile of refuse, her collection bag dragging behind.

“Remember, child. Rise before dawn and get to the dump early. We avoid the thieves that way.” Mother shared her warnings often—just as she had when Reisha still collected alongside them.

The thieves were an affliction. The men demanded money to allow ragpickers entry to the vast fields of trash. When the pickers tried to leave at the end of the day, the thieves would steal the best of the finds or otherwise take payment.

Meena's mother had not always been a ragpicker. She'd worked in the mines and before that done things of which she did not speak. Meena had heard other women call her mother “whore.”

The sprawling Mumbai garbage fields, hunger, and scavenging were the only life Meena remembered. Her mother had borne five children. None of them had fathers, and all but Meena were gone. Three had died. Reisha had disappeared. Meena had been seven years old when twelve-year-old Reisha was taken. Mother said it would be a kindness if Reisha slipped from their memory.

It had been two years, and Meena had not forgotten her sister. She would never forget.

“Where trucks have dumped most recently is best. But if we race in like the gulls, the others will steal from us,” Mother said. “Start before the sun and work late. The thieves are lazy. They rise after dawn and prey on those who come later. They leave early so they can get drunk and do the things that such men do. You, Meena, must be smart. We are Dalit—others will never forget we are an untouchable caste, and you must not

either. The world is a hard place and you will suffer. Heed my words and you may suffer less.”

In the slum and on the mountains of trash, others listened to Meena’s mother. They said she had lived long in few years, and sorrow brings wisdom. Her mother had no schooling but had learned to read. No other of the pickers could. They sometimes found magazines, and a year earlier another picker had discovered a beautiful book among the garbage. Mother had traded screw-top plastic bottles, aluminum, and other valuables for the wondrous find.

Mother read from the book to Meena. The words brought her to another world. The book was their greatest treasure.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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Excerpt from

BRICK BY BRICK

Kym McNabney

Anika cleared the dishes from their midday meal, listening intently to what was being said just outside the door of their tiny home. *What?* The tin cup in her hand slipped and tumbled to the ground. What little she had eaten for lunch forced its way into her throat. Hand shaking, she picked up the cup, rinsed it off, and placed it on the table.

It was early afternoon, and her father was drunk—again. That was no surprise. He often started well before the sun went down, even though the doctor had told him his health was poor. *Who is this man in deep conversation with father?* Her muscles tightened. *Could he be a broker?* She had never met one, but had heard of such men who loaned people money in exchange for labor in factories in the city. Anika prayed she was wrong, but the longer the conversation went on, the more her dread grew.

“Anika, come here.” Her father’s loud slurred words sent a shiver up her spine. She froze.

“Anika! Now. Don’t make me come and get you.”

She gathered her strength, then adjusted her shirt and made her way to where her father stood just outside the front door. Beside him, stood a man with gray and white hair and a haughty expression. His piercing eyes inspected her, making her squirm.

She looked from him to her father. “Yes, Father?”

Her father moved towards her, tripped over his own foot stumbling forward, and righted himself just before falling—something she’d seen him do many times before. Anika glanced toward her brother Darsh, standing several feet away. Posture rigid, his hands clamped a jug of water, as he watched with concern.

Her father cleared the phlegm from his voice. “I want you to meet Mr... ah...”

“Mr. Kumar,” the man said.

“Go, go.” Her father motioned for her to move closer to Mr. Kumar.

The man placed a hand free of calluses and cuts on her shoulder.

“Nice to meet you, Anika.”

She forced a smile.

“Your father has agreed to let you come live with me and my family.”

Anika felt those words as a rude shove. She shrank away from the man, freeing herself from his heavy hand.

“Lissen ta Mr. Kumar.” Her father’s words ran together in one long word.

“Your father is right. No need to be afraid. I have much to offer.”

Darsh set the jug on the ground, and rubbed his palms along his thighs.

“I have offered to help your father out, Anika. He will have money to pay off his debts, and enough to get by for some time. You will have a place to live, be able to attend school, and learn a trade that will be most helpful to you and your family.”

Pulse racing, Anika looked to her brother, desperately hoping for his defence. Darsh’s back straightened, and he worried his lip, but kept his feet planted. Why would her father offer her, and not his eldest, Darsh? Even as the thought crossed her mind, she knew the answer. Darsh had always been her father’s favourite. It wasn’t Anika’s fault her mother had died giving birth to her, the reason her father started drinking and couldn’t look her in the eye. At least that is what her auntie told her.

Anika glimpsed at her father. His glassy eyes and slack jaw told her he wouldn’t even remember this little transaction by this time tomorrow. “Go pack a bag, Anika,” he ordered. “No need to make the man wait.”

Her heart felt hollow as she stared at her father in disbelief, then at Mr. Kumar. She could see the evil behind his smirk, even if her drunken father could not.

Fighting off panic, she went inside and gathered the few items of clothing she owned and stuffed them into the canvas bag her mother’s sister had given her on her fifth birthday. Once white, it was now a dingy grey and worn.

Anika sat for a moment, remembering the argument Auntie had with her father when she turned nine. She told him it wasn’t right the way he treated Anika. Of course he didn’t listen, but only made Auntie leave. And that was the last time she saw her. If her auntie were here, she would stop her father from sending Anika away. She was sure of it.

What else? She surveyed the room until her gaze landed on her rag doll. A gift her mother bought for her before she was born, believing she would have a little girl. Anika wished she’d had a chance to know her mother. Anika grabbed the doll and pushed it to the bottom of the bag. She

would take it with her, not caring if anyone made fun of a twelve-year-old who kept a doll.

Before leaving the only home she'd ever known, Anika took a deep breath to push down the tears welling up from within her.

Outside, her brother stood beside her father, lean and tall, a worried look in his eyes.

“Come. It’s time to go.” Mr. Kumar took her father’s hand and placed a wad of bills in it. Anika closed her eyes. She was being sold like an animal.

“Father, don’t do this. Send me instead,” Darsh pleaded.

“Ah,” her father waved his hand in the air at Darsh, dismissing his request.

For her brother’s sake, she would not put up a fight. If it weren’t for Darsh, Anika might have given up on life years ago.

Mr. Kumar placed his hand on her back and guided her away from her father. Anika looked over her shoulder, fear filling her gut. *Where is he taking me?* As he nudged her forward, she stole one last glance, her heart brimming with pain—her father was already inside. She was now, gone from his life, no longer his problem. Tears spilled over her cheeks. Even in the distance, she saw the sadness in Darsh’s eyes.

“I’ll find you and bring you home, Anika. I promise,” Darsh called out to her as Mr. Kumar led the way.

Before his words had time to sink in, Mr. Kumar had guided her to his vehicle, started it up, and driven away from the view of her brother and her childhood home.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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Excerpt from

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK

Rayne Kaa Hedberg

Coughing woke Dhaval from a sound sleep. His stomach twisted into a knot. *Oh no. Not again.* He turned to check on his baby sister, Kala. Mother was also awake, sitting on her mat next to Grandma Farida.

"Is she sick again?" Dhaval whispered, trying not to wake his younger sisters.

"Looks like it." Mother reached over, picked up the youngest of her children, and cradled her in her lap. "I was hoping the coughing would go away if she got to rest. It doesn't look like it helped much."

Dhaval rubbed his eyes. "Is there any medicine left from when she had the fever?"

"No, we used all of it." Mother placed a hand on Kala's forehead. "I think it might be worse than the fever this time. I'll have to take her to Doctor Pran so he can have a look at her."

"This is the third time this month she's been sick." Dhaval shifted to sit up straight. "Do we have enough money to see Doctor Pran again?"

Mother's brows furrowed. Dhaval instantly regretted his words.

Mother stroked Kala's cheek gently, as if she would crumble under her touch. Dhaval's chest tightened. Worry leapt up on him, as it did every night. Sometimes he would lie awake for hours, twisting and turning, thinking about things an eleven-year-old shouldn't have on his mind. Finally, sleep would come, but in the morning, the problems were still there, waiting for him.

"I don't know," Mother replied.

Dhaval gathered his courage and broke the thick silence. "Nanjeet says they're hiring at the mine. It pays way better than the factory. I can look for work there."

Mother's eyes widened with alarm. "No you won't. The mine is too dangerous. I will try to get more hours at work or find a second job.

"You can't," Dhaval protested. "You're already working so much you hardly sleep. Besides, Grandma Farida won't let you."

His grandmother often complained that Mother worked so much her children barely got to see her. She was right, but Dhaval knew, with Father gone, she had no choice. If she and Dhaval didn't work, there would be no

money for food or rent.

Mother shook her head. "I'll find another way. I don't want you getting hurt, Dhaval."

"I won't." He knew he couldn't really promise that. The reason they were hiring at the mine was that they were always losing workers due to lung problems or injuries. "Nanjeet will be with me, so we'll look after each other."

"I said no."

"Mother, we need the money. And if I don't, Kala will be the one in danger." His hands tightened into fists. *And Father said it's my responsibility to take care of the family.*

Dhaval waited patiently for Mother to decide. She glanced down at Kala who coughed in her embrace. After a long silence, she turned to Dhaval, her eyes damp. "Promise me you'll be careful."

He nodded. "I promise."

Kala fussed in Mother's arms. She gently rocked the baby, singing the tune she'd sung to all her children when they were little.

"The darkness might seem big, and you might feel like you're very small. But don't be afraid, little one. I'll be with you until morning comes. Yes, I'll be with you until morning comes."

In the morning, Mother made Dhaval lunch to take to the mine, and he left the house early, before his sisters woke. Mother hugged him so long he didn't think she would ever let him go.

With the sun peeking out over the horizon, Dhaval walked down the road to the place he usually met Nanjeet. They always went to the factory together.

His friend stood by the side of the road, next to the Buddha statue.

"There you are! What took you so long?"

"I'm not going to the factory." Although Dhaval's mind was already made up, it was a scary thing to actually go through with it. "I've decided to work at the mine, like you said."

Nanjeet looked surprised. "I thought you'd never say yes."

I didn't have much of a choice. "Can we just go?"

Nanjeet steered off towards the mine without asking what had changed his friend's mind. Dhaval followed, his feet heavy, hoping he'd made the right decision.

"It'll be a lot tougher than the factory," Nanjeet warned, "but we'll

earn more in the mine.”

“I’m scared,” Dhaval admitted. “What if I can’t make it? What if I’m not strong enough?”

“You worry too much.”

“But I’ve never worked in a mine before. All I know is how to make wallets, bags and clothes.”

“Maybe you were a miner in a past life.” Nanjeet smirked. “Come on, Dhav. You’re a man, aren’t you?”

“Sure I am.” Dhaval straightened his spine.

“So what is it?” Nanjeet glanced over.

“I don’t know... What if I’m not fast enough? What if my lungs get damaged and I can’t work anymore? What will I do then?”

“Tell you what. Nanjeet paused, putting a hand on his hip. “We won’t tell Mr. Desai we quit. We’ll both say we were sick. That way, if we don’t like working in the mine, he might take us back. Deal?””

Dhaval shrugged. Mr. Desai wasn’t known for being the kindest man and he was certainly not forgiving. *But what choice do I have?*

He kicked a pebble lying on the dusty road. “Are you sure they’ll even hire us?”

“They’re hiring because they need workers. We’ll lie about how old we are if they ask. Just make sure to stand straight. That way you’ll look taller.”

Dhaval sighed.

The site was farther away from home than the factory. They had to travel over half an hour longer to get there. As soon as they arrived, a man walked over to them. Black sunglasses hid his eyes, and he had a white construction helmet on his head. On his wrist he wore a big, golden watch, and a matching necklace hung around his neck.

Dhaval made sure he was standing up straight.

“You here for work?” the man asked.

“Yes,” the boys chimed.

The man’s gaze lingered on Dhaval, making him nervous. He tried not to let it show.

“Just make sure you know the mine isn’t a game where you can run around and play. If you’re not doing what you’re told, I’ll throw you out of here. You understand?”

Both boys gave a clear, “Yes, sir!”

“We’re mining for coal,” their new boss said. “That means we go

deep into the ground and work in tunnels, so if you're scared of the dark or narrow spaces, you can go home right now."

Dhaval swallowed. He had always been afraid of the dark. Now that he was older, he could usually keep it under control. But he'd never had to go underground. His hands were already getting clammy from sweat.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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INVISIBLE

Sarah Hausman

Sumeet sat on the floor at his cousin Hasan's house, staring at the flickering television as they watched an American movie about an invisible man. The picture was sometimes fuzzy, but they didn't care. They giggled when the invisible man removed his clothes and there was nothing underneath.

After the movie, they played outside and talked about what they would do if they were invisible. They conspired about the tricks they would play on Sumeet's little brothers and how they could hide from the adults if they got in trouble.

"Look, Sumeet." Hasan pointed at Sumeet's footprints in the dirt. "I can see where you walked, even if you were invisible."

Sumeet turned and looked. He would have to get better at being invisible. He practiced tiptoeing along, then tried walking on his heels.

Sumeet often played with his cousins and ate meals at their house. Since their families lived close together in the small village, Hasan's mother often cared for Sumeet and his younger brothers.

As Sumeet and Hasan walked along the dirt road between the two houses, Hasan peeled an orange, dropping the bright pieces of skin behind them.

“Look, Hasan,” Sumeet said. “Anyone could follow your trail, even if you were invisible.”

Hasan shrugged and broke the orange into pieces to share with Sumeet. As they ate the juicy segments, they noticed a dirty white car bumping down the road, hitting every pot hole. The driver sure didn’t know the road very well.

“They’re stopping at your house, Sumeet.”

“What! Who would be coming to our house in a car? I better go.” Sumeet ran toward the house, his feet pounding out a trail of bare footprints in the dust.

When he got there, he walked in the front door quietly. His father sat at the table talking to a tall man with a dark mustache. Both looked very serious. Sumeet listened. They were talking about the family’s bills and how Sumeet’s father would need to borrow money to pay them. If he didn’t, they would lose their home.

The man noticed Sumeet standing by the door. “How old is your boy?”

“He’s nine,” Father said.

The man looked Sumeet up and down. “He looks like a strong, healthy boy. Is he the oldest?”

“Yes,” Father replied. “His name is Sumeet.”

“I can get him a job in Kathmandu. There is a big demand for young carpet weavers, and it would teach him a good trade. I can make you a contract for him. His work will help you pay off your loans and keep your home.”

Mama was standing near the table where the men were talking. “But he’s just a little boy. How long will he be gone?”

“That depends on Sumeet here. Do you work hard, boy?” The man smiled at him like he was teasing, but it wasn’t a nice smile.

“He’s a good boy. He will do a good job,” Father said before Sumeet could answer.

“Good. I will just have you sign this contract for your son’s labor in exchange for the loan amount here.” The mustached man pointed at the paper that was laid out on the table. “Once that is paid in full, we will bring the boy home.”

Father picked up the paper and peered at it, looking confused. Sumeet knew Father could only read a few words. The man took the paper and read what it said out loud. Then he talked about Sumeet’s job training

and wages, and other things about the loan that Sumeet didn't understand. Father signed his name at the bottom.

"I'll be back in two days to pick up the boy. Pack a bag for him." The man stood up and said walked out.

Sumeet looked at his father and mother. Father looked away. Mama chewed at her lip and looked worried. Sumeet wanted to yell, "No! I want to stay home and play with Hasan! Don't you care what I want?" But he stayed silent. His father was the master of the house. Mama might not agree with him, but she had no say in big decisions. Sumeet had so many questions that he didn't know where to begin. But one thing was clear. The days of playing with his cousins would soon be over. He was going to work.

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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INTAHARI

Confessions of a Young Suicide Bomber

Inspired by a true story

Peter Eichstaedt

Abdul stood still, beads of moisture on his temples and his upper lip. His thick black hair was gone, his head scraped clean by a straight razor, covered now by a sparkling skullcap.

The suicide vest hung from his shoulders, heavy and hot. Perspiration trickled down the small of his back.

He watched as the motorcycle that had delivered him sped away, trailed by a thin cloud of chalky white dust. It faded into the haze that obscured the horizon. The silence of the southern Afghanistan desert was broken by the soft rush of gusting wind. Far to the north, the dark humps of the Hindu Kush mountains rose above the hovering haze.

Abdul hoisted his AK-47, slipping the leather strap over his shoulder. The fat banana clip that he had jammed full of bullets banged against his elbow. He was now an *intahari*, a suicide bomber. He was to kill as many of the foreigners as possible with his gun—the *kafirs*, the nonbelievers, infidel invaders. Only when the bullets were gone was he to detonate the wire-connected explosives inside his vest.

He drew a finger across his lip, brushing away the moisture. His stomach churned, not from hunger, but from fear. He gazed to the distance rise where a spindly tree rose out of the barren expanse of grit and rock.

He looked down at the worn sandals on his feet and the pant legs of his shalwar-kameez rolled above his ankles. The long tails of his thin cotton shirt fell to his thighs, peeking out from below the hem of his vest. The vest pockets sagged from the nails, screws, ball bearings, and bits of broken metal he and the others had loaded into them. The shrapnel would deliver death to the foreigners.

He looked at the two exposed wired clips that protruded from tiny slits cut into the vest. When he touched them together, there would be a massive explosion that would propel the shrapnel outward in a brutal radius of death. He would never experience pain, Mullah Jamal had said.

Allah would immediately lift him to heaven. He would live in paradise forever, and never again experience wants of any kind.

Abdul didn't believe it. He wasn't going to heaven. He was determined to escape. And then he was going to get revenge.

He walked along the flat expanse, then up a gentle rise with a shallow gully that cut into a sloping hillside. A cluster of spindly trees grew in it. As he walked, anger burned away his fear as he remembered the first day Mullah Jamal had called him into his office in the mosque.

Abdul was fourteen. He'd learned to read and write. He'd done well in school and liked being with his friends. He wanted more. But two years earlier, the local Taliban commander, Malik Fareed, had closed the school.

"Don't send your children to the school," Malik and his Taliban followers had warned the villagers. "It is run by the Afghan government, and the government is the pawn of the nonbelievers, the corrupters of the faithful. To side with the government is to abandon the Muslim faith. For that, you can be killed."

Most in the village ignored the warnings. But over time, the parents succumbed to their threats. The students were fewer and fewer.

Then the night letters came, the handwritten warnings nailed anonymously to the school's front door under the cover of darkness. Diatribes against the government and warnings that those who entered the school risked death. Everyone knew who'd written them. Mullah Jamal. Not wanting to frighten the students, the headmaster kept the letters from the students, but they all knew about them because the village had few secrets.

A month after the last night letter arrived, the headmaster was outside, watching as the first students arrived for the day's lessons, when a bomb exploded by the school's entrance. ...

For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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Excerpt from

FROZEN TEARS

Steve Hooley

Pramita looked out the back window of the car her brother Sanjay, standing there, helpless and alone, as the car pulled away from Uncle Shaan's house. What was happening? Why had Uncle Shaan done this? Where was this man taking her? What would happen to Sanjay?

At first she thought of trying to escape. But where could she go? She was only ten. Her father was dead. Her mother had left with a new husband. Her uncle had traded her for money. She had no one—except Sanjay, and he was just nine. What would Uncle Shaan do with him? Anger rose within her. But she was powerless to do anything. Finally utter hopelessness set in. She was trapped. She and Sanjay had promised to find each other...some day. But would that ever happen? With all the people in India?

The tears started. At first she dried them with her sleeve. But as the flow increased she gave up, hanging her head, allowing the steady stream to drip, forming a dark, wet splotch on the front of her dress.

The ride from Nepal to New Delhi was long and bumpy on the rutted dirt roads. The driver offered her food, but she couldn't eat. Worry tied her stomach into knots.

As they pulled into the outskirts of New Delhi, the driver turned and said, "Turn off those tears, little lady. You will soon see that you are going to live in a big beautiful house."

#

The driver opened the door and tugged at her arm. "Get out. It is time to meet Madam Abishta."

Pramita moved slowly. The driver pulled her along. She climbed the steps, her head down. The driver knocked on the expensive carved door.

The door opened, and a tall, beautiful woman, dressed in fancy clothes, greeted them with a stern, unsmiling face.

"Madam, this is Pramita." The driver handed her off to Madam Abishta.

"Young lady, stand up straight, hold your head up, and wipe those tears off your face." She pulled Pramita into the house and closed the door. "You will learn to turn off those tears. My clients want a pretty face, not red eyes."

Pramita looked around the large entryway to the house that was her new home and place of employment. Young girls her age peeked out from doorways in halls extending in both directions. This was a strange place. What were all these girls doing?

She looked down and asked Madam in a quiet voice, “What kind of work will I be doing?”

“Hold your head up and look at me when you are speaking.” Madam lifted her chin. “You will entertain my clients, men who like pretty girls.”

Pramita hesitated. “And what will I be doing?”

“Whatever they want you to do.”

As Pramita slowly realized what that meant, her heart became heavy. She could not imagine a worse fate. She shuddered.

Over the coming months she learned to turn off her tears. In fact, she learned to turn off all emotion, even as she smiled for a steady stream of men who paid Madam for Pramita's services. At first she felt dirty and ashamed of what she was doing. And then she felt nothing.

One day became the next. One month led to another. And year followed year until it had been eleven years and she was twenty-one. Recently, Inspector Andha had become a steady client. At first he came to visit weekly. Now it was almost every night. He would show up after midnight, his breath reeking of alcohol. His clothes smelled of perspiration. And he was rough. Madam Abishta seemed to be keeping the other men away. Why?

One night Pramita dressed quickly after the inspector left. She followed him out into the dark hallway. Loud voices came from Madam's office. She crept closer. It was Madam and Inspector.

“You can't put this off any longer,” the inspector said. “You must make major repairs or move your clothing factory.”

“I thought you agreed to not interfere if I reserved Pramita for you.” Madam's voice became louder as she talked.

“I can't wait forever.” His voice trailed off and Pramita moved closer. “That building is going to collapse. Is that what you want?”

“Give me two more months to make arrangements.”

“On one condition.” ...

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For the rest of this story, see *Childhood Regained*.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

D. ANSING is a writer of inspirational young adult fiction and a member of the American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW). She is passionate about children's rights and delights in corresponding with and encouraging at-risk children in Asia and Africa. She lives in California's Central Valley and plays in the High Sierras, hiking and cross-country skiing with her husband and golden doodle, Callie.

DELLA BARRETT has had a half-dozen short stories and numerous poems published in various anthologies, as well as articles in newspapers. She also had a mini-memoir published in a 2013 anthology called *The Times They were A-Changing*, by She Writes Press of Berkeley, California. One of Della's short stories won second place in an anthology called *Canadian Tales of the Heart*, by Red Tuque Books. Della grew up in British Columbia, Canada. After living in the Yukon, the NWT, and Alberta, Della has returned to Keremeos, BC, where she continues to enjoy writing short stories, memoirs and poems. Della also has a novelette in progress. Find Della on Facebook: Della Barrett.

After a career in teaching, **HAZEL BENNETT** now devotes her time to writing and traveling. She has published five books for teachers, including *The Trainee Teachers' Survival Guide*, *Class Assemblies for Primary Schools*, *The NQ Teachers' Survival Guide*, and *Teaching Children to Write Great Poetry*. Her children's books are *Henry the Explorer* and *Playscripts for Britain in the 40s*. About a hundred of her educational features and some short stories have been published in national magazines and newspapers. Hazel has also won prizes in writing competitions in the Writing Magazine, Writers' News and Tenerife News. She and her husband divide their time between Tenerife (off the coast of Morocco) and England.

EDWARD BRANLEY is a writer, teacher, historian, and computer nerd. He is the author of five Arcadia books on New Orleans history. Like the boys in his YA novel, *Dragon's Danger*, he attended Brother Martin High

School, in New Orleans' Gentilly neighborhood. Branley grew up reading sword-and-sorcery stories and a lot of "hard" science fiction.

Teaching is Branley's passion and vocation. He taught at a Catholic high school in New Orleans after graduation from UNO, then moved to computer consulting. Now he does corporate computer training. This work has enabled him to travel across the United States, as well as Asia, and extensively in Europe. His first urban fantasy novel, *Hidden Talents*, was published in October 2015. When he's wandering around any city, he's usually looking for places where Magickal duels were held.

FERN G. Z. CARR is the President of Project Literacy Kelowna Society, a lawyer, teacher and past President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. A Full Member of, and former Poet-in-Residence for the League of Canadian Poets, this Pushcart Prize nominee composes and translates poetry in six languages including Mandarin Chinese. Carr has been published extensively world-wide from Finland to Mauritius. Additionally, she has been cited as a contributor to the Prakalpana Literary Movement in India. Her poetry has been recognized by the Parliamentary Poet Laureate, set to music, featured online in *The Globe and Mail* (Canada's national newspaper) and has been taught at West Virginia University. Carr is thrilled to have one of her poems currently orbiting the planet Mars aboard NASA'S MAVEN spacecraft. www.ferngzcarr.com

TOM COMBS' twenty-five-year career as an award-winning emergency physician in level one trauma/acute care hospitals gives rise to his unforgettable characters and riveting plots. His emotional engagement arises from his experience with those facing illness, trauma and tragedy. Tom's debut medical thriller, *Nerve Damage*, has garnered more than 200 five-star reviews. He is at work on the second book in the series (once again collaborating with Jodie Renner as editor) with release anticipated for summer 2016. Tom lives with his artist wife on a lake in his beloved home state of Minnesota. www.tom-combs.com; tcombsauthor@gmail.com; Facebook: Tom Combs Physician-Author

SANJAY DESHMUKH lives in Mumbai, the commercial capital of India. Writing, he believes, is the thread of gold woven into his career of thirty-five years that began with writing computer code, moving to technical writing, and then settling on designing sales proposals, which he

thinks are just another genre of fiction. While he has worked with leading companies in India and the US and traveled around the world, his first novel, currently in editing stage, is a thriller based in rural India—a story that shows how people with lesser education and limited resources can also rise to challenges. Connect with Sanjay on Facebook:

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to me; I'll talk (memoir) Excerpts:

http://issuu.com/vst_calendar/docs/via_volume_1_no_1

LORI DUFFY FOSTER worked more than a decade covering crime, education, Native American affairs, local government, and the military for The (Syracuse, N.Y.) Post-Standard newspaper. She holds a master's degree in creative writing from Binghamton University, and earned her bachelor's degree in interpersonal communications and English/creative writing from SUNY-Oswego. Ms. Foster has completed four novels, which are under submission through her publishers through her agent. Her short fiction has appeared in *Aethlon*, a journal of sports literature, and in the 2011 Short Story America Anthology. She has written for several magazines, including *Healthy Living*, *Running Times*, *Literary Mama*, *Crimespree* and *Mountain Home*. A native of New York's Adirondack Mountains, she writes in the hills of Northern Pennsylvania, where she lives with her husband and four children.

SARAH HAUSMAN is a Navy wife and captain of a roller derby team, currently living in the Pacific Northwest while awaiting the next adventure. She has gone from writing reports as a parole officer to occasionally writing short fiction, which is a lot more fun. She also works very part time at a wig shop, which is the best thing she has ever been paid to do. She likes cats, maybe a little too much, but has so far successfully limited herself to one. Sarah's short stories have been published in several online and print magazines, and she is a Mash Stories competition winner. She posts updates on her writing on Facebook at Sarah Hausman Writes.

BARBARA A. HAWLEY grew up in the Philippines as the daughter of medical missionaries. She's traveled to over twenty countries, and hopes to visit many more—including those featured in this anthology. Based on her adventures, she's writing a mystery series for middle readers featuring a global teen who takes hijinks and hijacks in stride. Barbara has a degree in secondary education English. She contributes to *Among Worlds* magazine and various Christian publications and is a member of ACFW. Presently she's growing roots in central Pennsylvania. Connect with her on Twitter @AuthorBHawley and on Facebook as Barbara A. Hawley, where she posts vintage mission photos and writing news.

RAYNE KAA HEDBERG was born and raised in the windy town of Malmö, Sweden but currently lives and studies in Scotland. There he is part of the university's writing society and has previously been involved in his school's newspaper. Both human- and animal rights are topics he feels strongly for. Rayne is determined to publish one of the many novels he's working on before graduating, and will continue fighting for people's rights. Join Rayne Elias Kaa Hedberg on Facebook.

STEVE HOOLEY is a writer and a physician living in Logan County, Ohio, where he has practiced medicine for over thirty years. Steve has been published in *The Budget* (an international Amish weekly paper) and *Out of the Storm* (an anthology of winners from the 2014 "Storming the Short Story" contest). Two of his stories were finalists in the 2015 "Storming the Short Story" contest and are scheduled to be published in 2016. His first novel, *Mark of the Fire*, is due out in 2016, and he is busy working on his second. www.SteveHooleyWriter.com; Facebook: Hooley Steve

EILEEN HOPKINS retired from her post-secondary administrative career in Calgary and moved to Osoyoos, BC, to launch this new phase of her life in 2014. Eileen blogs about her own retirement experiences – from planning it to embracing it – with a growing audience of boomers from around the world and writes a monthly column for the Osoyoos Times called The New Old Age. She has authored several short stories and was recently published in two anthologies: *An Okanagan Tapestry* and *Voices from the Valleys*. Eileen is currently working on her first novel. You can read more at <http://boomerspotofgold.blogspot.ca/> or on her Facebook page at Boomer Pot of Gold.

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JODIE RENNER, an editor and award-winning author living in British Columbia, Canada, has published three writing guides in her series *An Editor's Guide to Writing Compelling Fiction: Captivate Your Readers, Fire up Your Fiction*, and *Writing a Killer Thriller*. She has also published two *Quick Clicks* clickable e-resources, *Spelling List* and *Word Usage*. This is the second anthology Jodie has organized and edited for charity. The first is called *Voices from the Valleys – Stories & Poems about Life in BC's Interior*, with proceeds to support Doctors Without Borders Canada (msf.ca). www.JodieRenner.com; Facebook: Jodie Renner Editor-Author

CAROLINE SCIRIHA lives in Malta, where she works as Head of the Department of English in a state secondary school. She writes fiction—especially fantasy—whenever her day job allows, and is currently working on a series of middle grade novels. Caroline loves writing about characters who show resilience or develop some hidden talent. Connect with Caroline on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/caroline.sciriha>

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

JODIE RENNER, a former middle-school teacher and teacher-librarian with a master's degree, is a sought-after fiction editor, writing workshop presenter, writing contest judge, blogger, and award-winning author of three craft of writing guides, [*Captivate Your Readers*](#), [*Fire up Your Fiction*](#), and [*Writing a Killer Thriller*](#). She has also published two handy, clickable e-resources for writers, editors, and students: [*Quick Clicks: Spelling List*](#) and [*Quick Clicks: Word Usage*](#). Jodie has also organized and edited two anthologies for charity: [*Voices from the Valleys – Stories & Poems about Life in BC's Interior*](#), published in November 2015, with proceeds to Doctors Without Borders Canada; and this one, [*Childhood Regained – Stories of Hope for Asian Child Workers*](#).

Although Jodie hasn't yet made it to South Asia, she did spend about a month in the Middle East many years ago, and has traveled extensively throughout Europe and North America. A Canadian, Jodie has moved across Canada several times, and is happy to have finally settled in beautiful British Columbia. Her editing clients are all over the world. www.JodieRenner.com; www.JodieRennerEditing.com; Jodie's blog, [Resources for Writers](#); [Jodie Renner's Amazon Author Page](#). Join Jodie Renner on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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The anthology also includes:

GLOSSARY

STUDY QUESTIONS

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

FACTUAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The print version includes an illustration for each story.

**CHILDHOOD REGAINED
PUBLICATION DATE: MAY 10, 2016**

Available now on Amazon for pre-order. Click on this link to order your copy, to be delivered to your Kindle or other e-reader on May 10:

Amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/Childhood-Regained-Stories-Asian-Workers-ebook/dp/B01BZ6QW0Y/>

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We hope you will take a few minutes in May or June to leave a brief review of this anthology on one of the Amazon sites. That will increase the visibility of this book, raise awareness of this important issue, and help reduce the exploitation of disadvantaged children in developing countries.

Thank you in advance for that.

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Childhood Regained – Stories of Hope for Asian Child Workers

ISBN: 978-0993700446

Editor: Jodie Renner

Authors: D. Ansing, Della Barrett, Hazel Bennett, Edward Branley, Fern G.Z. Carr, Tom Combs, Sanjay Deshmukh, E.M. Eastick, Peter Eichstaedt, Patricia Anne Elford, Lori Duffy Foster, Sarah Hausman, Barbara Hawley, Rayne Kaa Hedberg, Steve Hooley, Eileen Hopkins, Kym McNabney, Jodie Renner, Caroline Sciriha

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All net proceeds will go to benefit a respected charity that works to reduce the exploitation of Asian children for profit.

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