

The Promise of the World

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Tug. Tug. Tug. Tug. Subodh Mahato's hands, callused and strong, mechanically tugged the wiry rope. Flap. Flap. Flap. The rope flapped against the pankha: complete with grass bundles and aging red cloth. The air swirled down in a quaint flurry, a blessing in the sweltering 115 degree heat. The sweat clung to the postal workers bodies in the muggy air, the fan their only saving grace. An amber flame flickered in a nearby lamp, casting its light throughout the nearby shadows of the dank room, the floor speckled with spilled wax. The heat was stifling. He held the rope in his hand, the rope spun the fan, the fan cooled the post office staff. The power of a hand. The promise of a wage.

Upon arriving home after four, Subodh sat down on a wooden stool next to five-year-old Mowgli. "What did you learn in school today?" Subodh asked his son.

"Arithmetic! Five plus two is seven." Mowgli stated proudly. To show off even more, Mowgli drew " $5 + 2 = 7$ " into the grainy dirt floor of their hut with a nearby stick.

"Shabash! You have made your father very proud!" Subodh replied, arms stretched out, signaling a hug.

Mowgli ran and jumped into his arms, his miniature body engulfed by Subodh's larger one. Subodh's eyes misted over for a split second, before he blinked furiously to keep the salt water droplets at bay.

Later that night, Subodh carefully unraveled the damp, crumpled wad of seven dollars. He cupped his son's small, delicate hands in his own hefty, secure ones and placed the money inside. He laid a quick kiss atop the little boy's head.

The next morning, Mowgli walked outside onto the sandy, almond-colored road which stretched past various hay huts and colorful concrete buildings. He listened to a train sing its whistling tune as it whooshed by him on the rusty train tracks to his left. As he walked towards school, he listened to the birds chirping their morning melodies and watched them flutter in the sky. A man walked his donkey down the lane opposite of him. Little black dots hummed around the animal, adding to the morning's musical symphony.

Mowgli could hear his destination before he could see it. The stern voice of Mr. Haryana, the school's administrator, could be distinctly heard over the roar and ruckus of five and six-year-olds. "Line up! It is time to pay." Mr. Haryana ordered.

Mowgli took out the seven dollars, holding the promise of the world in his tiny, fragile hands.