The Runt Tree

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I saved you again today from being dug up and discarded,
Magnolia with stunted limbs and scraggly leaves struggling to unfold,
so dear to me. You were one of nine healthy and flourishing trees,
planted in an imposing row against the gleaming backyard fence.

All your relatives are resplendent of foliage, the burnt umber underside
of their leaves contrasting sharply against their shiny sap green fronts
pagoda like seed pods bursting with potential life
swaying and chanting a hushed song in the summer breeze.

Your leaves chatter and shiver. Your slim trunk shudders
as if a gale were buffeting your very existence.
Shorter than your companions, you paint an uneven skyline,
marring the carefully planned symmetry of the garden.
Not a tonic of Vitamin B, nor an extra dose of cool, life giving water
makes a difference, your shy diffident spirit hidden and
almost forgotten, eclipsed between the vigor of the others.

I am aware of you, inexplicably, your difference a magnet.
I sense how valiantly you try, your continued existence an anomaly.

I too had young students who attended a school I worked in,
neglected at home, living in the midst of unpredictability. No kiss
ushered them to school in the morning, hidden in a pocket
a Fravashi,* a good spirit to guide them through the day.
One young student’s brother was shot and killed as they
rode their bicycles, close to home. One’s father was in prison,
another’s just…missing. One young man was being reared by a great grand mother. They adored each other. She would attend all parent trainings, falling gently to sleep slumped against my shoulder as the discussion unfolded.

Some came to visit us after graduating, sensing that behind our smiles was a silent prayer, as is mine for you, Magnolia.

-Deenaz P. Coachbuilder

*Zoroastrians believe that every being has a Fravashi, a guardian angel that guides one along the right path.

Deenaz P. Coachbuilder, Ph.D., is a writer, an artist who paints with oils, educator, environmental advocate, wife, mother and grandmother. In the U.S. she lives in Riverside, California, and Seattle, Washington, and in India, Mumbai. Her writings have appeared in literary journals, blogs, newspapers and other platforms internationally, and her recent book of poems, Imperfect Fragments, has been received with critical acclaim on several continents.