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Garage Sale

Editor

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High Hopes by Aditi Bhattacharjee

Yesterday I went to the garage sale
just across the street
a few kids were goofing around with a Kodak camera,
holding out polaroids as if they were a prize
earned for liking something pre-historic.

High-waist jeans are also back in fashion.
So are polka dots, flared pants and winged eyelids.
Pink Floyd too (well they never really went out in the first place)
Tickets for a drive-in theatre were going at a thousand bucks a seat
for a "vintage" experience and on the way back from watching
Mary and Max on the big screen, my friends wondered
why no one write letters anymore?

"Because the postal system died when no one was looking"
I wanted to say,
"emails and WhatsApp killed it in cold blood"
But I was too busy thinking about the
love note you put in my history book,
back in school and the mixed tape you made,
for my 15th birthday of my "secret" favourite songs.

Now that history is making a comeback,
I have been nurturing high hopes.
Maybe you and I -
We stand a chance.

Maybe.

After all life,
it runs in circles.

ABOUT THE POET

Aditi Bhattacharjee is a sales specialist by profession and a poet by passion. When not in her day job, she is found cooking love poems in her head, most of them happen in Bombay, where she lives with her partner, cat and a second-hand book family. She is always wondering about things that no one finds worth wondering about like who invented the pillow and why even? or how much time is enough time? Did the ventilator come first or the window? Her work has appeared in the September 2020 Issue of Ayaskala Magazine and the Fall 2020 Issue of The Remington Review and is upcoming in The Banyan Review, The Alipore Post & elsewhere. Say hi @beingadtastic on Instagram.

'full price' by Alvin Kathembe

I want to wake up each morning
choosing you
and feeling like you're
choosing me.

In a free-market world
full of different models
with different features and add-ons and customizable content
and a new one out every month:

I am
second- or third-hand—
'pre-loved', as salespeople say
when they're describing a particularly battered piece of merchandise—
and they were rough and careless hands.

I am
missing a few parts;
cracked in some places
(some reassembly may be required);
held together by
bits of poems
and an unlikely, possibly unfounded optimism.

To top it all off, I am
expensive
and the price is non-negotiable, please,
be it Black Friday or Cyber Monday or Christmas Eve.

I want to wake up every morning
choosing you
and feeling like you're choosing me:
each of us paying
full price.

ABOUT THE POET

Alvin Kathembe is a writer from Nairobi, Kenya. His poetry has been featured in Dust Poetry Magazine, The Short Story Foundation Journal, Poetry Potion and other publications. His short stories have been published in Omenana, Brittlepaper and Digital Bedbugs, available on Kindle. Find him on Twitter @SofaPhilosopher

North Star by Frances Boyle

Yes, dear, I know my closets are full of clutter.
I know there won't be room in the new apartment,
know I may never even wear the darn thing;
it doesn't suit my complexion, doesn't suit my age.

It belonged to your grandmother so it is going with me.
Here, pack these shoes and dresses for the sale. Stick
bargain prices on the luggage, those mismatched mugs,
Christmas lights, two cardboard boxes of Tupperware.

But I'm keeping this cap, odd as it is: crest of a long-defunct
hockey team-Minnesota North Stars-proud on the crown.
God knows where Grandma got it, maybe your cousins' cast-off.
It shielded her head as she worked her garden, loosening soil
that prairie heat had baked till it cracked into cakes.

Let's stop a minute. Those stairs never used to bother me.
but this box of stuff is heavy. You've started paging
through old albums just like when you were tiny. Now
you are two years older than my mother was when I was born.

Oh, here's her wedding photo. See the little hat she wore?
A juliet cap they called it. Seafoam green, but you can't tell
in black and white. She kept it tissue-wrapped, high on a shelf.

I used to imagine you'd wear it for your wedding, your prom
or even those back-yard theatrics you kids used to do.
Along the way, maybe in another sale, it simply disappeared.

ABOUT THE POET

Frances Boyle is the author of two poetry books, most recently *This White Nest* (Quattro Books, 2019), as well as *Seeking Shade*, a short story collection (*The Porcupine's Quill*, 2020) and *Tower*, a Rapunzel-infused novella (Fish Gotta Swim Editions, 2018). She is a Best of the Net nominated Canadian writer whose poems and short stories have been published throughout North America and in the U.K., with recent and forthcoming work in *Best Canadian Poetry 2020*, *Blackbird*, *Dreich*, *Floodlight*, *Parentheses Journal*, *Mookychick*, *Ice Floe* and *Floodlight* among others. Raised on the Canadian prairies, Frances lives in Ottawa. Visit www.francesboyle.com and follow @francesboyle19 on Twitter and Instagram.

The Attic: Tomb of Time by Jason de Koff

I don't remember when I moved to the attic,
it started as a grand adventure,
that soon became an endless rotation,
of black, to gray, to black mosaics.

The days that passed,
were difficult to count,
though it could be determined,
by the thickening film that obscured my vision.

Then there was light,
great movement and noises,
and my exhumation,
flaring all of my senses.

Coming downstairs,
I saw the world had changed,
fewer people, older faces,
different energy than before.

Primped and polished,
I was placed in a window,
the one that used to frame,
school bus comings and goings.

I delighted in this end,
of the top-floor monotony,
to see smiling children's faces again,
passing by, and pointing, and excited.

This was the life,
my golden years,
my great awakening,
to enjoy the rest of my days.

Then I was plopped,
back up in a box,
cardboard sarcophagus from before,
alone with my teddy bear dreams.

ABOUT THE POET

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 40 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals this year. Jason can be found on Twitter at @JasonPdK3

Reprioritising by Kevin McGowan

Step right up to our oh-so-wondrous bazaar:

A Ralph Lauren sweater
red worn twice at most

here, the star item, this
limited edition unopened
gaming console of yore

CD job lot, a few cracked
spines, but classic tunes
all for the cost of peanuts

Bargain, isn't it?

costs only

get it now

come on

coffee and cake
with an old friend

or book a flight
and tread the sand
of a forgotten beach

alternatively catch
a bus with your dog
take him somewhere new

ABOUT THE POET

Kevin McGowan is a writer based in Stirling, Scotland. He has been published via numerous outlets, including Dreich, Bandit Fiction, and Poetry Lab Shanghai. His short story, 'God's Shoulder', was awarded Stirling University's 2017 Research-Based Learning Prize, while his poetry collection, 'Eastern Thistles', won 1st place in Dreich's 2020 chapbook competition and became his first published print chapbook. Kevin also holds an MLitt in Creative Writing and volunteers as Submissions Manager for Ringwood Publishing.

The Exhibition of Sadness by Priyanka Srivastava

The door is open.
walk in.
search in the exhibit
pick what you want
but don't ask the seller
about the memories.

today's garage sale
is to buy the medicines
for the sick child.

don't ask the mother
who is scraping the pot
for leftover rice.
don't ask the father
who is counting money
to pay the bill.

don't ask about the child
whose paintings are there everywhere
because he is in the hospital
waiting for peace.

the door is open.
walk in
and pay what you want.
for that painting of a rainbow
hidden behind the clouds.

ABOUT THE POET

Priyanka Srivastava is a writer based in Singapore, her poems are often about her life in India and Singapore. When she is not lost in words, she loves to read especially non-fiction books. She also loves to play with colours. Instagram and Twitter: @notyet100

Last meal by Ragini Gupta

trigger warning: mention of suicide

unlit porch steps

deep breath

reluctant, foggy air

saliva gin hungry lips

tobacco smoke tastebuds

wrinkled lungs — deep breath

heavy, smoggy air

bathroom mirror

tearless bloodshot eyes

tight chest barren brain

deep, determined breath

wet comforter

blood thinner

gin half-litre

human meat

ninety pounds

inside-out

wood wick candle flame, bedside table —

scheduled emails, landlord's check,

handwritten letters,

obsidian knife.

V-OIC-CRA-CKLE by Ragini Gupta

trigger warning: mention of suicide

1-800-273-/MOURN

twigsnap truck rumble

overcast chill

wiremesh wind rustle

skinworn body

grudgingly awakens

1-800-273-/TALK

dustfuzz settled windowpane

portions being

into a new phase

of preparing again

to leave less trace

1-800-/BRE-ATHE

can lungs crumble

from fractured gasps

marking each trip

over oneself

into another day

1-8/LA-STM-EALS

shreds of shredded wheat

too dehydrated to unthirst

by foam drops of almond milk

cheese-slice torn, heap of bits

on mostly crusted bread, softened

by steamed mini scrap broccoli heads

1-800-/GOO-DBYE

between the crackles
of weak internet connection
a weary breath weighs the worth
of groceries — a commitment to
seven more days fill the gaps
a mother's muted concern

1-8/NE-VER-MIND

another monthly supply of oatmeal unboxed,
fresh loaf of sliced bread in the fridge,
13 servings shredded wheat —
damp paper towel wipes dust off the windowpane

ABOUT THE POET

Ragini Gupta is a poet and journalist in the process of weaving themselves into being. Their work explores mental health and gender and has appeared or is forthcoming in Stone of Madness Press, Bricolage and The Remnant Archive. They're working at Pixstory, a social media platform committed to the truth. Connect with them: @RaginiGupta__.

Distant memories of childhood monsoons by Zarnab Tufail

our governmental residence in the suburbs of Gujranwala
had a giant balcony where summer nights held the moon all night
at nine, life was nostalgic as if I were already living memories within brick walls
the gloom, denser than air, sat heavily on my still-growing shoulders
was it our tired luggage sighing after our fifth move or my parents' relationship - I couldn't
decide
a picture dictionary I dreamt through had garage sales on page 67,
old books for \$2 - used clothes for \$4 - unwanted suitcases for \$1
americans would sell their dead parents' photos if they could, my mother would always
remind us
while she ironed the pink kameez she wore to her college graduation
& I rearranged my first-grade workbooks again & my brother emptied the raged suitcases
the houses we lived in had more memories of those suitcases than the family that dreamt of
a future
home
lived like nomads until they had a home & they didn't know what to do with it.

ABOUT THE POET

Zarnab Tufail is a 19-year-old WoC from Lahore, Pakistan. She is the co-founder of The Walled City Journal and a poetry reader for Random Sample Review. Her work has been published in Coven Edition, In Parentheses, and elsewhere. More of her work can be found at zarnabtufail.wordpress.com

The Strophic Arrangement in Personal Properties by Mandira Pattnaik

Oxymoron is a Garage Sale. Like preposterous (with the hinder part before), or ass-backwards, or sopho-more (wise-foolish). Beginning with where you park, and ending with what you let go, discard, bundle out. Like boyfriend's past. Like shadows of fervent dreams, stores of mind memory caches. If you prefer, it is your first bicycle, yellow resin-moulded body, reflectorized pedals; or set of hairbands, good as new, pink and purple, cream and blue; Agatha Christie-s, yellowing pages, little pencilled notes; the hand-painted vase --- everything must go. If you ask me, liquidated before the day ends, stuff you've parked in spite of yourself, over the years, like sorrows and sunshine, decidedly non-digital. Everything must end up on the other side of the fence.

Found poetry is a Garage Sale. For Dave Gorman. Let's say, for fancy aspirants to poets and writers. A collage of collectables. Found and reframed. Two or three three-dimensional art created from used, ordinary items. Let's say Garage Sale is an appropriation. Exciting combinations like an ivory comb with strands of silver hair; a beige-velvet sofa pockmarked with stains and little souvenir slips; a Pashmina shawl with yesterday's odours; the ornate mirror of granny's vintage. Let's say they'll find their way into free-form styles, ready to let new dust memories settle on them.

Set your date, gather your moods, brace yourself for a carnival. May you notice, in your yard, the souls of origami birds meet the ghosts of lovers!

ABOUT THE POET

Mandira Pattnaik's writing has appeared most recently in Passages North, Amsterdam Quarterly, ToastedCheese, Bending Genres, Citron Review, Spelk, EllipsisZine, and Heavy Feather Review, among other places. She was also in Ayaskala's July Issue. She is a BOTN 2020 Nominee for fiction. Tweets are @MandiraPattnaik

Three Separate Piles by Chris Talbot-Heindl

trigger warning: mention of anxiety, a white supremacist, and anti-trans rhetoric

I don't see it, but I've been told that I'm hard to shop for. Not because I'm picky or some sort of enigma, but because I live such a minimalist lifestyle, people can't imagine what in the world I would want.

That must be why I have a healthy collection of quirky imprinted mugs and screen-printed tees. Everything is cat-themed, with my they/them pronouns, displaying Indigenous pride, as well as a host of different roller derby team logos from the Denver area and teams that I've skated with.

Periodically, the amount of tees overwhelms the heavy-duty shelving unit I use to store my clothes and begins spilling over no matter how nicely I fold them.

Then it's time to make three separate piles:

1. For the neighbourhood garage sale - hardly any items go here since I'm far too introverted to know my neighbours and far too self-conscious to believe anyone will want my discarded clothing. I say this pile is going to the neighbourhood garage sale, but truthfully, this pile contains items I will place in the closet, find after I've had time to miss them, and eventually end up back on the shelving unit.
2. For the donation drop box outside of Steve's Snappin' Dogs - some items end up here, dumped in the donation drop box, and forgotten.
3. For scraps - my tendency to love things until they are stained, threadbare, and falling apart means that most items end up on this pile. These become rags, or in our current predicament, turned into face masks.

Marsha, my therapist, has taken on the Sisyphean task of interrupting my negative self-talk and general outlook. I admire her dedication and often feel guilty that in two years, I haven't made much progress worth noting. I only have brief moments to share with her as examples of the results of her tireless work.

I have habits that are hard to break for me; I have systems that have become automated in my brain, for how to deal with or view occasions.

My brain's filing system makes three separate piles:

1. All moments of harm enacted by a person add up to...something - likely that said person secretly hates me and is currently only putting up with me for reasons. No bad moment is forgotten, but is stored somewhere in my brain. Every new incident brings the entire pile back to the forefront of my mind before it gets added.
2. All moments of joy induced by a person are enjoyed, treasured, and then forgotten. In order to remember the moment later, I need to really concentrate on it; a stark contrast to how easily moments of harm are automatically recalled.
3. All neutral moments evoked by a person pass by unnoticed entirely. Obviously I have them, and most moments would be in this category. But like utilitarian items, they create a background tapestry that is never really brought to mind.

Although inanimate, and through no fault of theirs, sometimes my brain's filing system also piles items that hark back to the people who have elicited feelings. These items get buried in the recesses of my living space - tucked in closets, under the futon, or at the bottom of a folded stack on the heavy-duty shelving unit. It saves me from having to think about them until it's time to make piles.

The first tee I pull from the stack sports the logo of my first roller derby team. The same team that exposed me to a white supremacist without my knowledge and then reacted horribly when I had the audacity to ask why.

I want to throw this shirt in the scrap pile - I definitely don't want to see someone in Denver sporting it. The sight of it still triggers me, so the garage sale and the donation box are definitely out. But maybe there needs to be a fourth pile for the donation box in that city. I'm sure the shirt would make one of the white skaters or someone who knows nothing about what happened very happy.

I decide that the fourth pile is the suitcase I'll use the next time I visit family in Wisconsin. I'll drop it off at the Goodwill drive-thru and be done with it.

The second tee I pull from the stack sports the logo from my last roller derby team. The same team that exposed me to a trans-exclusionary "radical feminist" and a host of anti-trans rhetoric, both unconscious and blatant.

Honestly, it wasn't the team's fault, and I had a lovely conversation with one of the trainers about it when I indicated it was a problem for me. When you are a voluntary host of a voluntary recreational league, what control do you have? When you are a cisgender leader,

how much do you see of what your transgender skaters experience? What do you say to your volunteer referee when he makes anti-trans comments? I had hoped for something, but it's also not something I can expect. And I can't reconcile spending my family's money on league dues to experience it.

But...

There are dozens of people on that team and only three who have harmed me at a level beyond the normal cisgender-ignorance-of-trans-affirmation zone.

On that team, I was asked my pronouns unprompted; I was properly gendered hundreds of times by people I truly love and who, I have no doubt, truly love me.

I place the tee shirt back on the shelving unit; I'm going to keep it. I make a mental note to tell Marsha about this brainstorm. I don't envy her task, so I always like to share my successes, no matter how minor - and considering I noticed the moments of joy and the neutral moments on my own, maybe it's not so minor.

Plus, I love when she tells me that she's proud of my progress.

ABOUT THE POET

Chris Talbot-Heindl (they/them) is a queer, trans nonbinary, mixed-race creator in Denver, Colorado. They are the co-creator and editor of 'The Bitchin' Kitsch and creator of 'The Story of Them' graphic novel and 'Chrissplains Nonbinary Advocacy to Cisgender People' edu-comic. When they aren't creating, they can be found at their day job, protecting wildlife and wild lands in the southern Rocky Mountains, or quad skating in the park, at the rink, or in roller derby. Follow Chris on their website at www.talbot-heindl.com, or on Twitter and Instagram @talbot_heindl.

The Beekeeper's House by Gunnar Lundberg

The grass squirmed beneath my feet as I made my way to the abandoned beekeeper's house- the green unkempt guards fighting each of my steps. They did not want me there, but I didn't care- because like so many other daring fools before me, I had to know. I unhooked the painted red latch barring out the world, and took one last breath of the pollen-laden air; with a firm tug, I began an unsponsored excavation of the past.

It was dark, and some unsourced dampness crept in through the door behind me. As a child, this place had seemed almost comically frightening, with its low ceiling and cracked concrete floor. The walls had been left to rot, and the small remnants of puffy insulation wilted to the ground. But most feared of all was the large spinning stone, powered hesitantly so many years ago by the peddling of our little feet. I walked to its corner and used what little effort my then large foot required to spin it once again. I extended my hand to rest upon the rotating surface, my palm and fingers bouncing on its tread like a ballerina on pointe. That stone was used to spin the honeycomb, separating the gooey liquid from the waxy maze entrapping it. As the stone sped up my skin winced with the continuing light touches. I removed my foot from the pedal and watched the machine fizzle back to lifelessness.

I knew that the answer hid there, somewhere amongst the beekeeper's old possessions and the accumulated junk not sold at any of the previous garage sales: a baseball bat, newspapers, letters, empty condom wrappers, bottle caps, beer cans. I remembered my own delinquent nights there- her and I snuggling together on the tattered couch after our first time. We weren't the only ones who used it. Its privacy and grime warded off adults, but invited curious teens to explore more than just its contents.

I sifted through the scattered papers in the beekeeper's house, shuffling them about and moving them as delicately as possible into the present. Nothing there was useful, it was all pamphlets, leaflets, sheet music and magazine clippings.

I never knew the beekeeper personally- only as the mythical pseudo-chemist that enchanted our small town with his work. He died when I was just starting elementary school, but his reputation lived on. They said he had honey for every season, and more importantly for any ailment. Heartburn, headaches, haemorrhoids, and heartbreak- all easily cured by his gold-sticky medicine. He sold these bottled miracles on a stand by the side of the road, and on the weekends he travelled to markets all around the county, usually selling out his stock. Not

everyone believed his claims at first, but my grandpa told me that when he and the beekeeper were young, they both loved the same girl. Both were trying to win her hand in marriage, but the beekeeper pestered the girl endlessly until it looked like she and my grandpa were bound to be. But the beekeeper shut himself away for a few days, and when he emerged he had concocted a honey so sweet that it made her fall in love with him- no one doubted him after that. My grandpa swore that hypnotic honey was the only reason he had to settle for my grandma.

I needed that honey. A nectar so sweet that it would quell any bitterness of the past. I knew that the beekeeper had been dead for decades, but any hope of finding a recipe rested in that dark shack- possibly within an inch of my sweeping hands.

The omens of the place crept out of my peripherals and began to hamper my search: a creak here, a drop of something there, and a puzzling lack of sunlight. I had come to the end of my mental wick, and so I retreated once more to the unwelcoming grass, latching the heavy door behind me. But my left foot never touched the ground. No, when it plopped down in procession with the right I came to notice a piece of paper stuck to its bottom. I bent over to read it: "This notice serves as a third attempt to reach you for the purpose of impending divorce proceedings."

My lips tensed, the paper must have fallen out of my own pocket when I was searching the beekeeper's house. People always said as childhood sweethearts we'd never last. But what had stuck it to my shoe? I lifted the paper for inspection and noticed the smallest drop of gold, no larger than the back of a thumb tack. Something bewitched me, and I raised it to my tongue to taste it- honey.

The grass quieted around my feet, and a low mechanical hum filled the air. I paused to listen and the sound became more distinct. With my neck craned and my forearm raised to block the sun, the tiny silhouettes of bees emerged. I licked the honey again, and after letting it settle I concluded that it wasn't that sweet. I exhaled; there was no recipe, and I had no experience, but evidently, there was still a hive, so surely there was still hope- and eventually there would be a honey sweet enough to win her back.

ABOUT THE POET

Gunnar Lundberg is a recent graduate with a BA in English Literature. He enjoys Ina Garten memes, hiking, and reading in hammocks. He has previously been published in Global Hobo, and Xene. He is currently living out in the woods of Northern Wisconsin in a log cabin. Follow him on twitter @ghostbbgunnar

Everything, Everywhere by Juilee

trigger warning: mentions of death

The bed was the first to go. We disassembled it and piled the six-part frame for the movers to take to the truck. After that, everything seemed simpler, and quicker. From my room to our yard, Mom and Dad were helping me carry an entire room of our home into bags and boxes. Mom said this is how things start, clean slates and changing towns.

Back in the room, the carpet dented at four points allowed me some faith. The impressions meant that in the future, a bed would fit back in this room in just the right way.

To avoid looking at the bare bones of my room, Dad said he wanted to call on the spirits of all the things that I wasn't taking with me. Placing himself cross-legged on the floor, he made Mom and I sit on either side. We held hands to form something between a circle and a triangle.

He grumbled a wordless mantra and invoked the spirits of the cushions from my room that were travelling to an aunt's. My yellowed primary school journals and worse for wear bed-sheets were in a better place now, he giggled, losing his shaman's stance. Remembering the better place was the garbage bin behind the house.

Dad announced that my departed stuff understood that not everything could be brought along. He said not all journeys take you home.

*

The end of the moving weekend meant sharing my roommate's bed until we were un-lazy enough to unpack. The movers had placed everything where I asked them to. But there is only so much others can do. Mom said putting things out there and appropriately is your job. Which I was going to do tomorrow, trust me.

When tomorrow became a six-hour orientation, a campus tour and a party, we fell onto her second-hand, big-savings, surprisingly undamaged bed when we got home. Which I had two of. The one where I had grown up so far, where my parents lived. The place I go back to when I messed my life up, where everything was always the way it should be.

This one was different. It had two people living in it instead of three, and more visited this one in a single day than that one in a whole year. It demanded that I do things well, do them right. I had to be careful about everything I'd bought with me, and where to put it all.

When we lost the screws for the bed, I moved into her room. A few days later we unpacked everything together. The house was full of us. Explaining the cause of buying, remembering who gave it to us, answering "What were you thinking" and wearing pots for hats and dancing on the kitchen counter while we decorated took a whole mid-semester night.

For every one of my birthday gifts, she had fought a cousin for something. For my mom's choice, her brother had gotten it for her as a joke. For all my people, she had hers. For all my things, she had hers.

*

Mom, dad, and I watched my things disappear around us. Things that weren't mine. But for the years that I couldn't speak, couldn't pick, couldn't exchange money for, sometimes didn't need, didn't want, someone decided that I should have them. For children should always remember they have family.

Mom and dad recounted blankets and socks from many birthdays, the new grandparent-couriered book bag, the desk my aunt got me in the third grade, the set of three stainless steel water bottles dad bought solely because they looked like penguins. This was love fit into boxes and cars and post-offices. With a card or chocolate or cash attached to it. Now, luggage and legacy.

There outside, I asked Dad why he had started the homemade sances tradition.

He told me it was so I could remember my grandparents after they died. Or our old cat who moved houses without telling us when I was twelve. Then more people, friends, neighbours that we lost over the years.

He said it's important that I remembered people instead of saying I haven't forgotten them.

And to do that you have to walk through their lobbies and porches and front doors and go into the back through their kitchens. You have to call them and write to them. You have to bring them food. You have to help them clean up. You have to meet the ghosts that live with them and assure them you'll love the people they love.

He said like I was made of him and mom, we are made of everyone we meet. That families are made out of families. That homes are made out of homes.

*

Near the end of the year my roommate's mom got sick. We cried on the way over so we didn't worry her.

While my roommate said her goodbye, outside I answered kind questions about our class schedules and eating habits and the size of student housing. She collected me from the living room to introduce me to her mom, to tell her we're taking the stuff she'd promised my roommate for us.

I stayed back with some neighbours while her family went to the funeral. We sat more visitors in the living room. In the kitchen, we shared a laugh as we ran out of tea cups. We ran showers for everyone on their return.

In bed my roommate showed me things that her mom had bestowed upon us and our home. There was a hot plate, a fringed lamp, books, crystal jewellery, some scarves. There was a sheep shaped night-light.

She held my hand under the covers as she prayed. Opening her eyes she laughed a laughter that only an epiphany in the middle of a prayer warrants. She said I'd always have to sleep in her room so we could share the nightlight. We'd have to share everything. In our home, we could put everything everywhere.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Juilee is a Master's student and lover of reading books and eating on public transport. She writes short stories and poetry. Follow her on Instagram @juilee_k

Farmers Don't Like Garage Sales by Nachi Keta

trigger warning: suicide as incidents

Netrapal is a farmer. But he works in a motor garage. He is bathing under a public tap near his house- a one-room apartment in a Delhi slum. A nice place, if you don't mind the fragrance of a nala nearby, flowing like a sage: timid and serene. And continuous tunnelling of one's ears by the shriek of machines. Really Nice. Nice and cheap.

He pours the last mug of water over his head and stands up. His thighs glisten. His eyes drip with water. He is not crying, even though he misses his village. He can't. He is a man. But he can miss. So he does the nahar where he used to bathe in flower-infested air, under a warm sun. Mustard fields where birds chirped and midnights looked like a blackened syrup of desires. And the courtyard- where under Neem, they would have dinner together, fighting with mosquitoes.

He finds his wife working on a table. A stove over it, and under it a gas cylinder. A rolling pin in her hands. The room smells of cumin. She is mute- throwing tantrums for a little slap. Not that he has no love; he can kill for her; it's just- he expects respect. He is a man, and she a woman. Just as his father was a farmer. And the man in the black coat- a lawyer.

He remembers his face- flabby. And his car- black and big and beaming. He remembers even his father. Muscular and tall, with a thick brown moustache, and always in Kurta, with a Dhoti around his waist.

Netrapal has a towel. "Where's the uniform?" he asks, expecting no reply. His words echo, even though the room isn't so big. He finds the uniform grey with the name of the garage on it. Now breakfast.

He was having breakfast when the lawyer came. For the garage sale. In some places they call it a yard sale. Some- auction. But words don't matter. They don't care about farmers.

It happened in the courtyard- bigger than his apartment. His family's belongings strewn around. Three charpoys, two buffaloes, an ox, two calves, a big old iron box, another box, a heap of utensils. And bags. Bags and bags- made of cloth. The sun was up. The birds were chirping, the temples and mosques were hooting, and the fields were dry. He remembers everything. How it looked like a party. And how the head of his father was in between his hands.

If Netrapal knew how to write, he might have written a long essay on mental health of farmers. How painful it is for one to lose his field. This issue is of a different kind. No one talks about it. They only say poverty. And Government. And a number - of farmers committing suicide. It is a topic of Macroeconomics. Of Politics. Of numbers. Not Psychology. Only one line in psychology- farmers are unhappy because farming is a dying art. Machines have taken over farmers. Evolution of species. Nothing to worry about. Everything important. But farmers come last.

My fields are everything to me, his father used to say. No. Netrapal is not a farmer. He never was. He would go to the fields, but his father was the real deal. And the uncle- who couldn't take the pressure of being one and made a brilliant knot around his neck. Yes. Netrapal is an expert. He has seen enough, felt enough. He can write an entire book on mental health of farmers. Sadly, for him, this topic is not in vogue in universities.

Despite being pissed, his wife places food before him. Puris and Kheer- the traditional food eaten on death anniversaries of pitr - fathers in Hinduism. He finishes it slowly, thinking about his father.

On the day of garage-sale, he had butter-curd, Gur and a thick slab of chapati with hot milk in breakfast. The lawyer came in when he was eating. With a bunch of buyers from nearby towns. And then things took a whirlwind. Shouting and screaming. And wailing and crying and hand claspings. People raising their hands. Rating buffalos and bags. Guessing their cost price.

Netrapal was only twenty. They were yet to share the problem with him. He was too busy with his new wife, anyway. He heard about it only through the lawyer - Marriage. Loan. Failed crop. Loan. No rains. Loan. Uncle's funeral loan. Failed crop. Loan and loan. And now- GARAGE SALE. Same old story.

Last night after he slapped his wife, because she won't shut up about something important, he had felt guilty. But he couldn't show it. What else could he do? His actions were beyond him. Just as the GARAGE-SALE was beyond the lawyer. And his uncle's knot was beyond him. But his father didn't look like one to tie knots.

Then why did he?

Netrapal gets dressed and comes out. He will walk to the garage. He rarely sleeps. He only has nightmares. About the garage sale- by whose end, there was nothing left in the courtyard. Even the Neem was cut. Someone paid five thousand cash, and every rupee counted.

And there are nightmares in which he meets his father, his uncle, his mother who had perished much before. About the many walks he took in his fields. And sugarcanes. And his father walking him to a village fair. He lives in continuous memories. Of that garage sale, when he lost everything. Of blood around his father.

ABOUT THE WRITER

A dropout of various colleges, Nachi Keta is a Kidney Transplant Recipient and a neurodiverse writer from New Delhi. His name is a combination of two terms: Nachi, which means 'death', and Keta, which means 'a creative force'. His work focuses on mental health, oppression and the absurd in social and personal. His words have found a home in various magazines like Perhappened, The daily drunk, The Bombay Review, The Howling Press and Sock Drawer, an updated list of which can be found here: nachi-keta.com.

Garage Sale by Zahirra

My aunt Yasmina was a hoarder of things, especially dolls. On the afternoon she made her death announcement, we were all crammed into her ground floor flat competing for space with her vast collection of porcelain dolls. That was just before my eleventh birthday. It was a family ritual for as far back as my memory could stretch to have a Sunday feast of roast chicken, coleslaw salad and home-made bread rolls with ice-cream and fruit salad for dessert at her place.

'It will be Friday next week, in the afternoon,' announced Yasmina matter-of-factly to her sisters who were engrossed in their assigned tasks in the kitchen. Yasmina ran her Sunday kitchen with militant efficiency. My mother was shredding the red cabbage, Sabeena was rewashing the cutlery that would be used for the meal; her fingertips shrivelled from the scalding hot water that Yasmina insisted she use. 'I want to see my face in those plates!' were her sharp instructions to her youngest sister.

'Did you hear me girls? Friday,' Yasmina continued calmly, wiping her flour dusted hands across her turmeric stained apron before she resumed pressing and pulling the doughy mass which yielded dutifully to her firm hold. 'What's so important about Friday Yas?' snapped Sabeena, her voice laced with thick irritation.

'That's when I'm going' was Yasmina's response.

'Going where for God's sake?!

'To my creator,' she replied unperturbed. 'You girls need to decide who's going to look after my babies?' she informed them, studying her sister's faces for the first sign of any emotion. By babies she meant Rani and Raja, her two mischievous but affectionate Siberian cats she had rescued from the SPCA.

While we ate, Yasmina proceeded to shout the details of her death including the precise time it would take place, across the room. Every available space was occupied by an adult or child with a plate precariously balanced on their laps and a drumstick or thigh in their right hand. I was squeezed in at the edge of the couch next to Rani who was enjoying her third afternoon nap; her dense shimmering coat splayed across the velvet couch. None of us were surprised by her grand revelation. In fact my mother, aunt and uncles were already preoccupied with thoughts of the necessary arrangements for the following week. Yasmina always made things easy and she was so organised, she had the decency to tell people in advance of her impending death.

The following Sunday, we were gathered in her flat again but not for Sunday roast, it was to sort out all her things that were destined for either the charity collection box, poor relatives

pile or the garage sale for the more valuable items like her jewellery, antique grandfather clock and Persian rugs. She passed away in her sleep on the Friday afternoon sandwiched between Rania and Raja just as she had said she would. She had even remembered to wash and iron the laundry before she fell asleep because she was not one to leave unfinished business to inconvenience others, self-sufficient even in death she was.

Yasmina had taken care of her sisters like a surrogate mother since she was 14; my grandmother had died while giving birth to Aunt Sabeena. I had collected only whispered fragments of my grandfather from the conversations I overheard. As a lonely only-child, I was so skilled at hiding in the shadows and eavesdropping through half-open doorways and paper-thin walls that my family nickname was 'Big Ears'.

'Oooh here comes Big Ears, better shush because she picks up everything with those ears of hers,' my aunt Sabeena would say.

I gathered that my grandfather Omar had been a very stern man who disapproved of all his daughter's suitors, terrorising them until they left with downcast eyes. He also believed that long hair was a mark of femininity and forbade them to cut their hair. There were no photographs of him so when I thought of him I imagined a stern man who spent his time hiding scissors and other sharp instruments that might be used for cutting hair. Days after his death from a sudden heart attack, the three sisters went to the hairdresser down the street for the first time. Yasmina who had the longest hair, cut hers the shortest. They left behind a carpet of long silky black locks on the shop floor. Yasmina was also the oldest and most beautiful of my grandmother's children. She had hazel eyes framed by long thick eyelashes with high cheekbones and was so tall she towered over the men in the family. Everyone joked about how God had given her so much beauty there was very little left for her sisters. When relatives said I looked just like my aunt Yasmina, I felt like the luckiest girl. 'You're going to be a bombshell, just like Yasmina hey,' commented one uncle whose hand lingered for too long on my waist once, when I greeted him with the traditional hug and kiss reserved for male elders.

Yasmina's gifts didn't end with her distinguished beauty, she could see things that we couldn't: ghosts and unrested spirits. When my mother complained about hearing banging pots and pans from our kitchen, Yasmina visited and declared that a very unhappily married woman had died in that house. Her words had enough gravity to persuade my parents to sell the place.

While my aunts, uncles and cousins packed the porcelain dolls, folded bamboo fans, cat toys, fur coats, Persian rugs, cutlery and silk scarves into separate cardboard boxes marked, 'For Charity', 'Poor Relatives,' and 'Garage sale', I sneaked unseen into my aunt's bedroom. That's when I found the diary and letters imprisoned in rubber bands and released them.

Yasmina had been in love with a man named Ali who her father vehemently disapproved of. She had a child out of wedlock and my grandfather had forced her to give the baby girl to her married sister, my mother.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Zahirra is mama to a strong willed 11-year-old, Miss to her international students who she teaches conditionals, participle clauses and cohesive devices. She lives to write and is currently honing her skills by reading widely, carefully selecting her synonyms and then crossing her fingers after pressing submit. She is new to The Twittersphere and deeply grateful for all the writing opportunities it has presented. She can be found at @ZahirraD on Twitter.

The Tape Recorder by Harshita Mishra

He rides in his 80s beat-up truck; a rogue metallic brown, tries kicking up wet gravel every morning as he rounds up the corner of this neighbourhood. He walks with a pompous gait-but not any more pompous than the next trudging stranger-springy stride; sports a jacket over a sweater, has a bandana tied around his forehead, that old man. His hair, he would tell you, is intriguingly obnoxious. Thick and patchy. Grey and sparse. Curiously unruly and sporadically bald. The bandana is a paradoxical dig at his person. No one knows if he wears it to hide the wilderness on his head or rather, the absence of it.

But the point is not the old man or his hair. Because he is not the protagonist. Now the protagonist, the lead, the ultimate bread winner is ostensibly staying put in a house two kilometres down the road; probably whispering in strange baritones and well, sleeping. No, definitely sleeping. The protagonist is sleeping and perhaps would sleep when he is not sleeping because he doesn't leave the house; is too scared to leave the house, thinks he would die if he leaves the house. And because the protagonist is sleeping, the old man would resume his springy stride towards the lawn of the house of this family that's moving out in two days. They say they're leaving the country.

"You say you're leaving the country?" The old man grumbles to the woman in a fedora. "Why, yes. The place doesn't have anything left for us here." The woman in the fedora speaks and sort of shrinks into herself. The old man unwittingly scratches at his snowy whiskers and mumbles something unintelligible. "Aqua? You want aqua?" She asks him, steps down the patio and plucks a bottle from the last piece of furniture they've put out; on sale, the family in this neighbourhood.

A coffee table.

The old man definitely doesn't need aqua or water or anything resembling either of those but the woman in the fedora beckons to him and he relents. He relents because it is water and not wine; white wine, a slick bottle of Chardonnay or Blanc or the old man is a heavy drinker but he is trying to cut down, cut down not because he's an old man but because his wife and him have a row every which day over his heavy drinking so he drives around, because he can and she can't and the woman in the fedora has been having this garage sale for the last three days so he rides to her house and looks at the objects spread out for perusal. "How much is the coffee table?" He asks her and just then a boy of twenty ambles out of the front door; a crumpled book in his hand and a sharpened pencil tucked into the fold of his ear. He kicks out the legs of a plastic folded chair and slumps into it, the air around him

crackling with indifference.

"That would be twenty five, sir." The boy murmurs with his head shovelled into the book. The woman in the fedora nods at the old man, pats the boy-her son-on the cheek and disappears into the back where a few more people have started clumping together.

It is important to remember that the old man is not the protagonist. The protagonist stays put in a house a few miles down the street but oh, he is awake and fiddling with the remote of the TV. He sags into the couch, murmurs in strange baritones and stares unblinkingly at the screen; a dull black, white and grey conglomeration of figures scuttling about and buildings whipping past, a typical Charlie Chaplin classic. And because the protagonist is watching the television, the old man would resume paying for the coffee table he's promptly bought for his wife, in an attempt to placate her. He would present to her the coffee table and she would be folding and unfolding laundry and he'd go, look what I got and she'd go, a washing machine, why not a washing machine and he'd go, but this will go with the chairs and she'd go, 'but what about my hands' and before he can go, she'd go, 'hands, what about my hands' and he'd plop down into a chair with defeat, sip on his beer and the wife would fold and unfold the laundry.

"Vomit, you're voluntarily buying vomit!" The woman in the fedora has a daughter of fifteen with pink hair and pink clothes and a haphazardly drawn moustache above her lip. She peers at the old man and imitates a two finger down the throat gag reflex, sharpies flopping around in her pocket.

"Excuse me?"

"The house puked and the lawn is soaked with vomit. Vomit that you people are buying from us." The girl squeals and guffaws and trips and squeals again. The old man nonchalantly dismisses her and asks the boy of twenty, 'what are you reading' and he says, 'Jack London' and the old man says, 'oh' and he says, 'oh' and the old man says, 'read that short story when I was young' and he says, 'to build a fire?' and the old man says, 'to build a fire' and he says, 'uh huh' and the old man says, 'the lad was very much a fool' and he says, 'building a fire under a snow decked tree, he sure was'.

"We're almost completely sold out!" The woman in the fedora reappears from the garage and twirls on her feet, giggles surreptitiously. The boy of twenty gawks at her and the girl with the fake moustache joins the scene and the family rejoices; the grass is definitely greener on this side.

"Mom, did you manage to sell the recorder?"

"Ah blimey! No one wants their hands on that ancient piece of trash."

"What kind of recorder is it?" The old man intervenes and the three turn around to peer at

him.

"A cassette tape recorder?" The boy of twenty rumbles, flicks at his nose. The women saunter inside but only after the girl with pink hair fake gags at the old man; lips twisted in an ugly smirk.

"I'll take it."

"But you haven't even seen it."

"I'll take it."

"But you don't even know how much it costs."

"I'll-"

"Here you go." The boy dunks into a bag and peels out a tiny rectangular instrument with reels and wires and buttons, dropping it into the old man's hands with a clunk.

"That'd be sixty." The old man palms his bandana-clad forehead and kind of vibrates. Pulls out a wad of cash and tosses it into a toffee jar. Liquor, the money was for liquor but the old man is trying to cut down, or so he tells himself.

"Mind me asking what are you gonna do with it?" The boy of twenty questions him almost imperceptibly takes a swig from a bottle, the liquid reflecting a beautiful amber hue; not water, never water.

"Uhh the wind is loud these days and so is the city..." the old man trails off because his eyes are glued to the sloshing liquid which the boy of twenty is downing at a remarkable speed. The old man coughs and fiddles and composes himself.

"The city is...is loud and there's people, lot of people. My son, he likes sounds. The recorder might be of some use, you see because the wind is loud these days-

"Can't he just go out?" The boy of twenty stares at the old man.

"He doesn't...cannot leave the house. Thinks he will catch sick and die. Fears he'll run into someone and contract something, die. Get into an accident, die. Get shot or trampled, die."

"Sir, I'm sorry to hear that sir."

"Sounds...he likes sounds. He watches the television, sounds fascinate him."

"Well it's going to snow soon and I hope you can catch that."

The old man thanks the boy of twenty and starts to paddle back to his truck but the boy calls out to him.

"What's up with that bandana?"

The old man turns around, curls his fingers tightly around the tape recorder.

"Oh you see, my hair, I would tell you, is intriguingly obnoxious."

ABOUT THE WRITER

Harshita Mishra is a second year literature student at Delhi University. She works as an editor at All Ears. She perhaps likes reading more than she likes writing. Oh and she paints too because it aids her anxiety. She watches indie movies and listens to old obscure 80s bands well, because she can.

A garage sale ad I yell into an open window by Olivia Kingery

In our basement, there are bins of miscellaneous items deemed garage sale. The winter months passed softly with the promise of setting up in our front yard with lemonade and lawn chairs. We had big plans for garage sale season. But now, with spring and summer and fall passing quicker and lockdown gripping harder, my heart weeps for the trinkets we will never find and our trinkets which will never be found. I open the window and shout out, funnel my voice through cupped hands, clear my throat like my neighbours will pay attention, sit up straight in their living rooms and listen:

This Monday! starting when the sun spreads across the tops of trees: run your finger along the spine of a book you've never read, place your hand in the middle of a yellow glazed plate, hold against your body a dress you can't believe you haven't owned before, slide your foot into the perfect sized shoe, find an album you've been waiting for and can already hear rippling across the wood floors of your small apartment, as you wear a new broach you found sitting on a fold-out table, where you share a glass of lemonade with us while we talk about the way the lake laps at our doorsteps, something steady, something certain.

I keep the window open, just a little longer than I should, in hopes I hear a stir, a screen door propped wide. But I don't, so I shut the window, and think about revising the ad for next week.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Olivia Kingery grows plants and words in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She is an MFA candidate at Northern Michigan University, where she reads for Passages North. When not writing, she is in the woods with her Chihuahua and Great Pyrenees. You can find her work at oliviakingery.com

