

**QUARANTINE
TALES 2020**

A photograph of a concrete barrier in a courtyard. The barrier is made of rough, weathered concrete and runs along the side of a wall. The wall is a light orange or terracotta color. In the background, there is a blue plastic stool and some other items. The ground is concrete and appears to be a courtyard or a narrow alleyway.

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TALES 2020**

**STORY 1
'LOCKED DURING A LOCKDOWN'**

‘LOCKED DURING A LOCKDOWN’

After finishing his tasks for the day at home, ‘Krishna’ a young 25-year-old Chartered Accountant student, sat on the stairs of his terrace and recalled his efforts of “Being Atmanirbar”, when he was partially locked in a hostel for 25 days in Hyderabad, due to the courtesy of the hostel owners who had left for their village without warning him and few other boys. And he knew it was only the beginning of his struggles.

He had stayed back in the hostel due to the “nearing examination date” and that time “I didn’t take the lockdown strictly”, without any intimation news about the postponement of the exam by the examination board, and by the time it did reach him it was already late, the travelling restrictions were in place, which unwilling forced him to stay indoors.

He recollects the boys and he had to break the kitchen lock so that they can at least attempt to cook themselves something. There were limited supplies and some near spoiling vegetables and, none of them knew how to cook properly.

In the beginning, he says, everyone was hands-on, taking responsibilities and decisions like “you wash the vessels and I will cut vegetables”. But “Living with eight boys can be frustrating!”, the fountain of cordial energy and responsibilities vanished by the fourth day, and everybody was lazing around and bored. Everyone trying to run away from their responsibilities and time table we had arranged only a few days ago.

Food was a sparse luxury at this point, no one willing to cook, breakfast was generally avoided until one of them gave up and cooked something for themselves at least during the lunchtime and in collateral for the rest as well. Dinner was a far reach and was made the next day about 1 or 2 am.

Krishna during this unwilling indoor stay thought he could study well and get over the situation but unfortunately, others didn't have the same idea. The isolation and forced grouped testosterone paved the way to the ruckus, "internal wards", building frustration, empty stomachs, aggression, alcohol and cigarette withdrawal, physical frustration, shaky nerves and exhausted phone data.

"I lost motivation to study" because of the postponement of exams and the even others were going through the same. Those exercising in the early mornings were now sleeping away, those calm and collected were losing it!

He personally didn't have close friends at the hostel, they were all acquaintances, and the lack of close people made him miss his family and friends dearly, "I felt lonely and exhausted", he said.

"I went looking for other hostels nearby so I could cut myself a food deal with the owners", but after about two hostels later he realised even the owners were trying to flip him off during these desperate times; offering lower quality and watered-down food for a raised price.

“When I heard of a relative who was returning to my native town due to his wife’s pregnancy, I took the chance and called them up. I pleaded for them to take me along and that I would pay half the travelling expenses but thankfully they haven’t asked for the money yet and touch wood they don’t”.

“Honestly I had planned this returning back home plan for four whole days, hoping to surprise my parents”, but when he reached home “my father had a 180-degree reaction, he asked me “Why did you come?! And I was so mad I almost walked out of home!”.

“So family wise nothing much has changed on the larger view but if even small changes are counted, then we group together more because no one can really go out now”, his father, younger brother and he only step out of the home to help out in the family mutton shop which legally has the permission to stay open. Business-wise there is 70 per cent fall in the customers. “We are also closing the business earlier in the day, initially, we used to close it around 2:30/3 pm but now we are closing it at 12 pm” but financially we are okay at this point.

“So, we have been engaging in some activities like cooking or watching serials together on T.V”. He and his family had already had a system and routine in place in terms of television schedule, so everyone sticks to that. But, otherwise, his father who normally doesn’t cook had taken to it and “completely failed” he says.

He also realised that frustrations are building high at home as well and, his father bursts into abuses on smallest of issues. His younger brother had gotten into a rather violent argument with his father and now it's been a week since they spoke.

"I'm presently happy that I'm at home, safe and with my family but it has its own small issues" and he mentioned "I don't know!" what will happen after this but, " I hope to shift towards the northern states from Hyderabad for my further work opportunities like Bangalore or Pune".

-Meghana Injeti

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STORY 2
'THE REFORMED BUSINESSMAN'

‘THE REFORMED BUSINESSMAN’

“Namaste Govind Seth, how’s your business going on, everything all good?” is a usual conversational question thrown towards Govind Seth and, his usual reply would be “Yes, sir everything is first class!”.

The man is known for his achievements and, everyone has great respect for him in their eyes. His journey has been nothing short of inspirational, he went from transferring loads on his back as a labourer for the MIDC Industry to the point where he had his own real estate business and an amazing family with whom he cherishes his success.

He would step into his office and start his day by greeting each person around him and then continue on with the day’s work. He would work for the whole day, attend multiple meetings but would still always make it a point to pick his daughter up from school, drop her home, serve her food, see to it that she finishes everything on her plate and, then would go back to his work again.

Mr. Govind on the other hand, also ran a minor food joint serving ‘Mumbai ka Desi Khana’. This food joint was born out of his perspective to open a small, affordable food joint. “When I used to be young, I used to have just one vada pav a day and used to survive on that”, he said. Being a Mumbai person almost everyone knows the importance of a vada pav.

A day came into his life when he had to sit at home like every other person did, that is when the news of the lockdown came into the picture. When the news broke out, he was more worried about his daughter, who lived oceans apart from him, though she somehow managed to come back to India just before the lockdown started. But Mr. Govind was still infection fearing and the situation around the world wasn't really helping.

He no longer had work to go to and had too much free time on his hands. This reminds us of a saying 'empty head is an invitation for evil thoughts'. After watching the news for long hours, with his elder daughter being in the isolation centre after her arrival to India, he would keep thinking about the worst-case scenarios and the negative thoughts won't stop entering his head and this led him to be extremely paranoid and extremely protective towards his family.

On top of it the cases were increasing in numbers, near his locality a new COVID-19 case had popped up and it had been just 6-8 days since the lockdown began. The irritability and frustration levels were frequenting his visits to the doctor, he had gone to the doctor twice in the span of 15 days because he was extremely scared and paranoid about his health, "thinking if anything happens to me then what will happen to my family".

When his elder daughter was discharged out of the isolation centre after 17 days and 5 check-ups, he was little relieved but then he started to think about his business and the scary position it was in, drowned in thoughts about how he is going to manage the workers and pay them their wages plus the added fear and his inability to overcome his fear of coronavirus.

One fine day, his family made him sit down and talked to him to relax a bit, asked him not to watch the news and to avoid letting the negative thoughts enter in his head.

Eventually, then he started managing his time by cooking delicious food for his family and showed off his cooking skills as he always did. Instead of watching the news, he started watching cookery channels so that he can surprise his loved once with new recipes every day. As time was passing and the lockdown was extended, he understood that his business of Real Estate had gone back to ground zero and it was going to take him almost 2-3 years to get back on track.

But his sharp brain had a plan, the food business/joint that he had started a while ago, born out of his passion was going to help him out, to survive until the time everything comes back to track. After the fourth lockdown was announced, along knocked good news at his door, the permission to open his food joint within a week.

The problem was he didn't have the staff, because they had gone back to their home towns, he made up his mind and decided to cook himself along with his wife and his younger daughter, who were instantly onboard and eager to help him out. With the help of social media, he spread his story and the news of his reformed food venture. He made posters and online messages for the comeback of "Mumbai ka Desi Khana". On 25th May 2020 he opened his food joint and by god's grace he got a wonderful response even during this pandemic period.

Mr. Govind Suppaya says, "Just keep faith in yourself and everything is going to fall in place. Being a businessman, I have faced lots of ups and downs in my life, this time is the toughest of all but yes never lose hope and never hesitate to do any work".

-Sayali Govind



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**STORY 3
'CHEERS TO DIGITAL DATING'**

'CHEERS TO DIGITAL DATING'

"This lock-down has been two-sided for me", says Radhika, a young 24-year-old woman staying with her parents in Mumbai, who previously worked in a PR (public relations) agency. "So, the lockdown is a strange situation for me as a young woman who loves to explore the city on the weekends spontaneously".

In her experience staying home with her parents whom she describes as "overachievers" is not very different from prior the lockdown, though both her parents are staying at home, "they keep working the whole day on their laptops, and thank goodness our house help stays with us". The house help has helped massively with the household, while everyone else is busy, he takes care of the daily chores so we are privileged, she says.

"I recently resigned from my job which I wanted to for a while now, so there's a bit of a familial pressure to find a new job by my parents and I know it comes from a place of concern but I've told them to give me time since no one is even offering jobs at this moment and the future feels a little uncertain right now"

She claims her family and her to be financially good in this intense situation since both her parents work and earn well enough to satisfy their needs and more even though she's not contributing at present.

She also got talking about another person who had recently become an important part of her life “Varun”.

Varun is a weird humoured human working as a trade media journalist, who stays with his parents and currently works from home. Varun’s routine prior to lockdown was mostly going to work, and now that he doesn’t have to go to the office, he likes it better. “Office is strict, 10am to 7pm, so from work from home nobody is looking over my shoulders, so after 3pm I pretty much do time pass”. Unlike countless people who would say work gives them a sense of motivation in this unfortunate situation, he doesn’t feel the same, he'd rather prefer catering to his hobbies which are video games and playing sports.

“We are a working middle class family and we are financially fine. There are no cases around my apartments, if I hadn’t been watching the news, I’d think everything is normal, except when the watchmen tells me to put some sanitiser onto my hands while coming from the stores or when he tells me I’m not allowed to be neeche”.

Nothing much has changed around home, he says, “both my parents are working and have to login at a certain time in the morning and no one disturbs each other but we make sure to have hot lunch together.

Apart from the fact that I'm expected to help a bit with the house chores nothing much has changed. My mom tells me what needs to be done and I do what I can. Otherwise I'm even mentally and emotionally fine. But yeah, my Instagram usage has spiked since the lockdown; I liked more posts, shared more stories and posted a few pictures."

Though they have known each other for quite a while, only two months before the lockdown had begun Radhika and Varun started dating and had met only five times before they quarantined themselves in their homes. "I had recently begun dating and, Varun and I have date nights where we watch movies online together and discuss things online, basically all those things that happen face to face are now happening online. He and I are a communicative couple and talk to each other every morning and then at night since we work during the mid-day, so there's a routine. We have our own minor fights and arguments but we make up fast. So honestly there's a certain sense of physical frustration with being apart, but we sext, I mean it's digital but we make it work", she says.

"So online dating (usage of internet to communicate) is not weird for me because our relationship started from texting (in the earlier days), so we text, voice call and video call whenever we can. We watch movies together and talk late at night. So the online (internet) is a major contributor in our relationship", he says.

Talking over each other, Radhika and Varun listed their plans of exploring the city after the lockdown. Though Varun claims, “she’s the one who makes plans and I just say yeah yeah, she’s the planner”, Radhika chided him and said “we plan together so don’t listen to him” and giggled.

-Meghana Injeti

STORY 3
'GRIEVING DURING THE LOCKDOWN'



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‘GRIEVING DURING THE LOCKDOWN ’

It was a pleasant Tuesday evening; children playing around the compound, evening birds chirping, cars honking and, people coming back home from work, to a building, and then there was an astounding elderly couple descending the stairs of the building.

The husband was wearing a shirt and a trouser along with a pair of leather sandals, holding a wooden stick in his left hand, while holding his wife’s hand in the other, who was in her night gown. The wrinkly skin and intense smile lines on their faces were enough illustrate their life experiences. While they descend the obstacle called stairs, they wish every person passing by with a “Jai Shree Krishna”.

Taking slow and steady steps they manage to reach until the security cabin, the guard being used to their routine arranged two chairs for the couple. They sat there in the open near the society gate, watching each and every person pass by keenly. They would manage to sit and spend about 4-5 hours, timely taking a walk and greeting the guard or other society members. But they would not, even for a second, leave each other’s hand.

When the pandemic hit, they were asked to stay indoors because of their elderly age. As the days passed Mr. and Mrs. Patel's life changed with everyone else's. They would manage to pass their time by talking to each other, since their son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren wouldn't interact with them much. They started missing going downstairs, sitting out in the fresh outdoors, observing little things that happening around them and walking along the corridor.

A drastic turn came into dadi's (grandma) life, it was during the afternoon time, that dada (grandpa) was lying down on the bed and as usual dadi went to wake him up for lunch, but soon she sensed that he was not responding so she rushed to her son, Mr. Kamlesh. The son went and tried to wake him up and checked dada's pulse but soon he understood that his father was no more. For a sake of last hope, he called the doctor, the doctor upon coming checked him and gave his final words "I am sorry Mr. Patel, he is no more". The family had to pass through a difficult time.

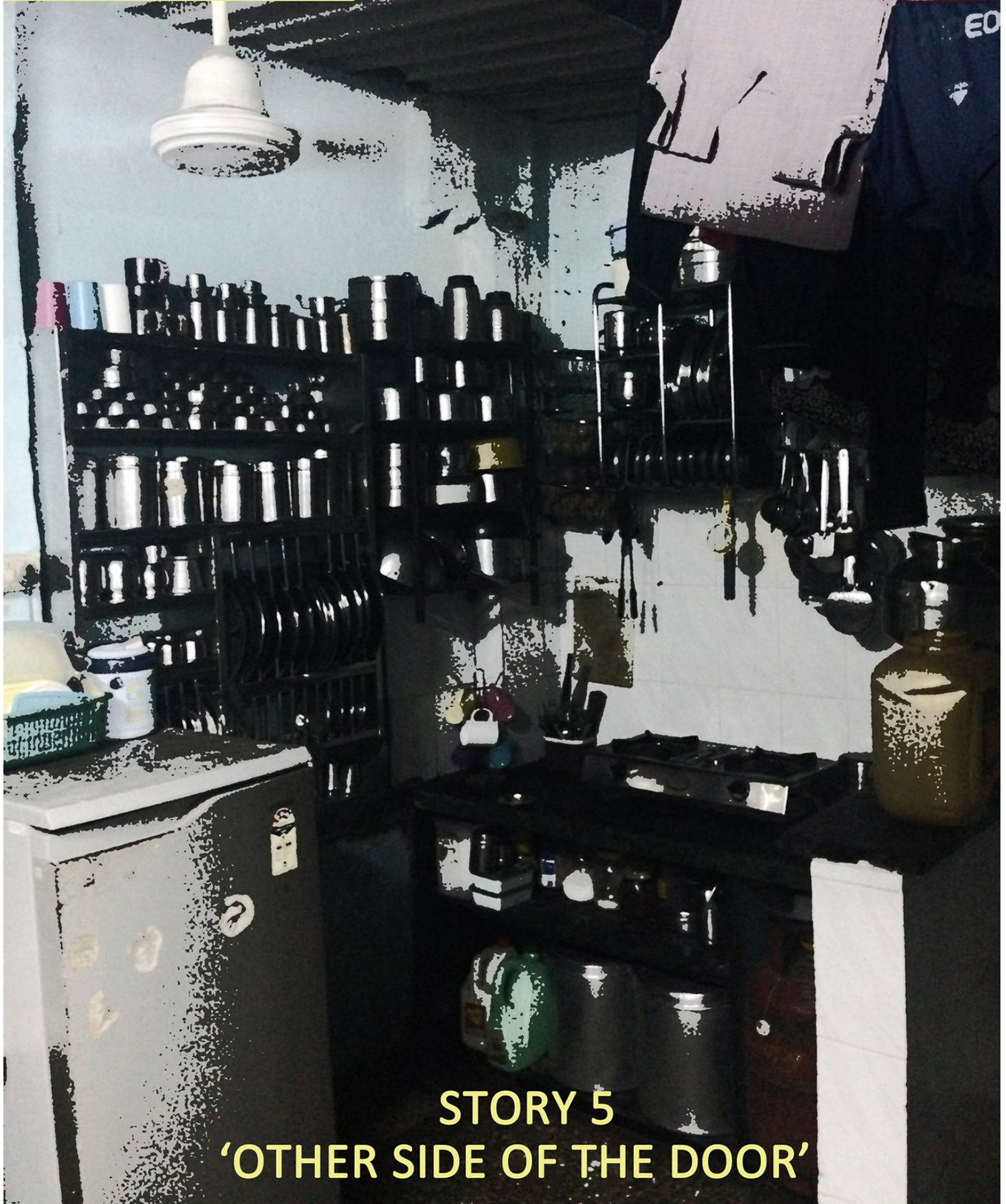
Daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Patel couldn't manage to attend the last rights of her father due to the lockdown. Mrs. Patel lost her everything, she was broken from head to toe. She still could not believe that her support system and, her one and only reason to live and smile was no more.

This lockdown made things so different and ugly that the happiness and togetherness of this couple stayed no longer. With all this happening, the couple's narrative ended when dadi, the other half passed away on 25th April 2020.

“Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.” — John Lennon.

-Sayali Govind

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**STORY 5
'OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR'**

‘THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR’

Recalling the hustle-bustle of her chawl area, Latha (changed name) sits cross-legged, leaning against a bright blue wall peeping out of an ajar door, waiting for the occasional breeze to come inside the house during the summer season.

“We haven’t stepped out at all”, says Latha, a loud and chatty woman over the age of 50, who works as a housemaid. “I get bored sitting inside for so many days but I can’t do much about it. I work as a bai (housemaid) so I’m always going from one house to another, but now I’m just staying at home with my family of eight”.

“Everyone was going back to their gaanv when Corona became serious, but my family and I said no going anywhere because we have children below the age of 10, it scares me. Many people offered us rides but I said no, I will die staying indoors but won’t die of Corona”.

Recollecting the prior routines of chawl, she says “for us, washrooms are outside home so usually we have long queues for using the toilet every day but now due to the current situation I hardly see people forming lines or anything, people hardly come out of their houses”. She and her family have taken fair precautions before, while and after using the toilet in their area, they had bought bottles of sanitiser, wash their hands frequently and distributed separate soaps to each family member.

“Poor people go through a lot and a lot of fear. I know of people who couldn’t pay their rent during this period and were made to vacate the house and we all tried to help them but it wasn’t enough so it was sad to see them leave. From a neighbouring family the husband works as a watchman in a building and his wife went once a week to meet him since he couldn’t come back to the chawl due to chawl rules. So, when the husband contracted the virus from a building lady who tried to help him by sharing some food, the police came and took the whole family to the hospital and then sanitised the area. Police comes a few times to our area and tell us to be safe and take precautions.”

All this is scary, she says, “though our area has no cases as such, there are many other problems right now, we are not able to pay house rents, we had bought a washing machine last Holi and haven’t been able to pay the instalments from past 3 months, the electricity bill is very high since everybody is at home and using fans and phone charging. Few people have been kind and told us to pay the money when the lockdown is over”. The entertainment possibilities for her and her family have been very bleak because her television had broken down right before the lockdown and without any possibility to get it fixed right now and her grandchildren can’t go to school either, so they all are jumping around at home.

She has her own problems with food, for a family of eight, “How long can we eat only free ration rice, we have to also buy other amenities like oil, salt, dal to eat but we try to avoid going to bazaar as much as possible. The ration lines are long and I have to often wait for 45 minutes - 1hour, maintaining 2 metres distance”.

Very candidly she spoke about her memsahibs helping her with food needs and also depositing some money into her account knowing the situation. For her people's help now matters the most, it says a lot about loyalty and humanness, and she promised she will always be thankful for those people who helped her at the time of need. "Now I work for people from middle class so I can't expect much from them because even they have to look after their families but my clients have helped me and have promised to find or give me work after the lockdown". She also spoke about death and how bad she feels for them whose family members have died but they can't touch these bodies due to the fear of the virus.

Finally, she also discloses few virus contractions cases she has heard of and, she thanks her star and wipes a sweat of her brow knowing she's safe. She has no idea what will happen after this lockdown but wishes the best for everyone and hopes to find work soon.

-Meghana Injeti

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**STORY 6
A TEACHER'S NEW ROUTINE**

'A Teacher's New Routine'

On a usual Monday morning, when everyone is in their own hotchpotch time table, to get to their work spaces and schools, among them is a lady who had done with her regular morning household chores has also left on her Activa scooter to her workstation.

Having reached her workplace, the security guard rose up and wished her "good morning teacher". Swapnali, a teacher by profession has been teaching in a municipality school for years now. She was running late and quickly walked towards the principal's cabin to give in her biometric thumbprint.

Having entered the class, she's greeted with a "good morning" and she says it back to them. Failing to notice the teacher's presence in the room, few kids were still playing their silly games and the first Bencher kids were engrossed in studying. Swapnali takes her place at her seat and bangs a duster on the table, until everyone's heads were turned in shock, simultaneously greeting her.

She starts with her teaching, soon period by period time goes by and then the bell rings for the lunch break, 12pm in the afternoon. Everyone rushes to the dining area, where kichadi is being served to the children but only after the teachers taste it first.

Then, 12 teachers sit together in the staffroom to have their lunch, the mealtime includes a few regular gossips and laughs and after which they would wind up and get back to their classes to continue teaching until 3 pm in the afternoon.

Finally, the bell rings for the final time in the day and everyone gets up excited to go back home and take some rest. As Swapnali was leaving, her friend called her from behind "Swapnali wait!" and she turns with a tired smile on her face, and her friend asks her "can you please drop me till the nakka?". She said, "yes why not, come and sit" on her scooter. Having dropped her friend and reaching her building, she parked her vehicle and took the lift upstairs and, entered her house. Her tuition students were already waiting for her. She quickly kept her belonging on the table and got fresh and sat on the sofa, drank a glass of water and started teaching her students for a stretch of 2 hours until 6 pm after which she winded up everything and then started preparing the food for dinner time.

Her daughter while entering the house asks her, "Hi Mumma what's there for dinner". She replied with her usual patience and calm, "Today we have roti, sabzi, dal and rice".

After an hour her husband enters the house, while her daughter sets up the table and gets the chairs assembled for the family dinner. It was the time when all the members of the family sat together and had the final meal of the day. Once everyone finishes the meal, Swapnali cleans the kitchen platform and seats down for leisure, scrolling through the WhatsApp messages and, eventually goes to bed for good night sleep. We all have gone through experiences this lockdown and so has Mrs Swapnali Suppaya.

The above was the routine for Mrs Swapnali till the day the lockdown was announced.

In the beginning, she felt very relaxed and, was enjoying her own time and pace, which had only happened after more than 25 years of the teaching profession.

This unexpected vacation had seemed to be quite happy, relaxing for most of us and, similarly it was for her as well. First three-four days it was easy for her to pass time but, as the number of days increased, she started getting anxious and was unable to understand what to do and what not to do with her time.

She caught up with a trend called the 20 days workout challenge, which she tried to initiate her time into and started enjoying the workout sessions as well. But soon she started missing her teaching job, which was an all-time job, but which she also used to love doing. Eventually, she started to miss her teaching routine even more, when her students called her and pleaded her, "Teacher when are we going to start again?!". Online classes were not possible for municipal school students, due to the below poverty line background of the students who could not afford smart phones or the internet.

Swapnali started watching YouTube videos for hours, just to see what different varieties she could cook and from these videos came an idea of growing a kitchen garden at home, this was something she always wanted to do for a while.

Eventually, she started setting up and fixing herself into a new schedule for the lockdown phase of her life, in which she realized the importance of investing time for herself and to be fit and happy.

-Sayali Govind

A photograph of a woman with dark curly hair, smiling broadly. She is wearing a black saree with a white floral pattern and a blue halter neck. She is standing in a classroom with blue desks and white walls. In the background, another woman in a green and gold saree is visible. A Minion sticker is on the wall to the right.

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**STORY 7
THE RESTLESS OPTIMIST**

‘A RESTLESS OPTIMIST’

“Y’all better revise or I’ll come to your house to take an assessment!” says Shobha Ma’am to her “dear children” who are sitting on the other side of the webcams and, these words you will often hear from her as a scare tactic.

Shobha D’Souza an extremely optimistic and restless human, over the age of 50 but with the heart of a 10-year-old. She has for the longest time been an active-independent individual, and the present situation doesn’t exactly stop her from being herself and she puts it out there that “I’m a mother first”, and then a teacher, a mentor, and a social worker.

“When the COVID, the lockdown was declared for me it was like no panic buttons were pressed as such. The only thing worrying me, was that I won’t be able to move out of the house as frequently as I would and in my time and all. And I was more worried about my children. The special children (young special needs students) said in a span of say 15 days would have been on a holiday and my pre-schoolers were going to have their graduation, which was supposed to be a big event for us, so that is the one thing I feel very bad but we will do it later”.

“I said doesn’t matter, lockdown- no lockdown, I started on foot”. With the help of a Rajesh Sham, a rickshaw driver who drove her to-and-fro the NGO center and helped with her social work efforts.

During this time people would think they have can't contribute, but she is "very busy" even during this uncalled situation! "I have associated myself with two organizations, one being 'Serva Seva Sangh (SSS)' which helps provide food for the needy on the roadsides, bastis, and gullies and the other 'The Food Army' which helps the senior citizens' avail information regarding where they can get their groceries and other supplies and, each person from each area was appointed (for this job) and I had gotten Andheri" and she also takes an independent effort to help police officers and their needs as well. "So, one thing this COVID hasn't done is stopped me from going out and helping people, cause I've still gone out and done my two-bit or three bits."

She's constantly driven under precaution, to make it work and keep marching on with her efforts. Her son who's a chef in a renowned hotel was called a few days before the lockdown into work and has been stuck there since "I miss my son a lot! And he can't come back home yet".As she already travels a lot due to her social work efforts, she finds a way to meet him at least once a week.

"I'm very very busy, I have a keeda to keep doing things", she says it as she adjusts herself, and proudly talks about the five online courses and the basic learnings of Indian Sign Language (ISL) she's done so far with the hopes of preparing for an inclusive education system.

She's a wonderful motivator and educator, as a special needs child educator, she does everything in her might and gives them her best even without physically being present among them via online classes because "school time is school time".

Using the internet to her advantage she has figured out and cracked down ways for keeping her students engaged, stimulated, and active by throwing challenges and tasks in the realm of academia and soft skills their way which the students thoroughly enjoy!

She agrees that she's financially a little under at present because her job as a social worker work and an educator is pro bono, but she's "very thankful to father" of SSS organization for depositing money into her account for the welfare of her and the other teachers during this tough situation, but content that "among the family of five, everyone helps out each other". "I'm mentally coping very well with this situation and I also take counseling for those who need help", she has thrown herself into work and Extra-curricular. She has also figured out a way to digitally connect with her social groups and personally feels that they speak much more now.

She presently has only one message for people, especially to the youngsters, "youngsters make most of this time to enhance the other skills and gather knowledge because we never know where it can be useful".

-Meghana Injeti

Then he would have wound up in bed after a long tiring day.

But this was before the lockdown came into place. Things have changed since the lockdown.

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no work is getting done and not usually but I do miss the train journey and other things that I used to do”, says Nayan.

Nayan has enrolled himself in as a volunteer and is turning to be a responsible citizen. His volunteer work in donating and distributing food for the needy is a motivation.

Prior to the lockdown he was planning to start his own sports academy for children. While in a video-call meeting, he realised the potential that could be there for his sports academy. He was in a session which would be instead of just sitting in a room for 2-3 days and doing nothing.



STORY 8
THE INCEPTION OF AN
ONLINE SPORTS PLATFORM

‘THE INCEPTION OF AN ONLINE SPORTS PLATFORM’

On any usual winter day, most people would still be sleeping at 6’oclock in the morning, cosy in their blankets.

But at the same time, entering the open gates of Sacred Heart School would be a 26-year-old young lad. A person seemingly quite tall, dressed in basketball jersey and sports shoes, waiting for his students to join him on the basketball ground.

As soon as a group of 15 students gathered from the age group of 10-15-year old, he would start with a few warm-up exercises and then start with basketball coaching for next one and a half hour. After the coaching ends, he would rush back home take a hustling bath, get into his formal attire, and grab a rolled thepla in his hand. Rushing towards the local railway station hoping not to miss his direct train to Andheri, where his next job awaits.

The crowded local train which is a major part of most Mumbaikars life, takes him about one and a half hour to reach the station and from where he would take an auto rickshaw to reach Sportz Village Academy, his workplace. Entering the building's lift, he would find his colleagues asking him, “Hey Nayan how are you? It seems you have been very busy these days?”, to which Nayan gives a smile and would have replied “No man just the usual stuff”.

When the lift door opens, he would enter his office, sit in his cubical and, work for about five hours at a stretch with a 20-minutes break in between. As soon as his shift ends, he would rush back home freshen up and get into his sports attire and go off to the Agnel School ground to train his Nationals Under-19 basketball team.

Then he would have wound up in bed after a long tiring day.

But this was before the lockdown came into place. Things have changed since the lockdown.

‘Sitting at home with no work is getting difficult and not usually but I do miss the train journey and other travel activities that I used to do’, says Nayan.

Nayan has enrolled himself in as volunteer in a NGO and is turning to be a responsible citizen. His volunteering work in donating and distributing food for the needy is a massive inspiration.

Prior to the lockdown he was planning on opening his own sports academy for children. While attending a Zoom video-call meeting, he realised the potential this digital platform could have for his sports academy. He wondered “why not start an online fitness session which would be effective during the present scenario, instead of just sitting idle at home, let’s start with it?”. Within 2-3 days he started developing on his academy and named it “Sportzee”. The sessions started with 5 children and gradually increased to 20 students within a week.

He finally said, “even if the lockdown ends parents won’t be comfortable to send their kids for a group session or for any other fitness activity yet”. Opening an online fitness academy changes the perspective of kids, parents and even the sports culture.

-Sayali Govind

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**STORY 9
THE LABEL BREAKER**



'THE LABEL BREAKER'

"Hey, can I send you my narrative by the EOD (end of the day)?" texts Karuna Sharma, a 23-year-old busy journalist. "Work has been a very big part of my life but I've recently found myself feeling dejected", she says.

She only started working from home a year and a half ago, stepping outside to attend work meetings, conferences, events, interviews, meeting her boyfriend, or occasionally meeting her friends. She wasn't the type that had a big social group so she wasn't majorly affected from the social angle during this lockdown, but she does miss being around her sister and her boyfriend.

"I would work from 10 am to 10 pm because I just loved what I did and would binge-watch Netflix in the night and on the weekends, I would meet my boyfriend. So, my life revolved around work. I did not mind it".

But recently her will to work was lost, her passion for writing had suddenly become hazy. The uncertainty of what would happen tomorrow only instilled in her worry in regard for food and survival.

"Now you would think that this transition to house arrest wouldn't have been really difficult for me because I have mastered working from home. But NO. Earlier, I made a choice of working from home. Now I am being forced. Even though I would step out twice a week, I still had the option. After the lockdown was announced, a lot of my friends texted me to ask for advice, considering I have been working from home. But I had nothing to offer because that was not even remotely similar to what it is now. I am always anxious. My parents are home, too, right? There is no sense of privacy. They keep barging in.

I am distracted, lost, dejected, anxious, and lonely. Thankfully, there have been no salary cuts for people in lower management. Although I have nightmares about getting fired or laid off”.

She candidly says that her anxiety hounds her and, with that surrounding her, it’s hard not to be scared, “there has always been a lot of responsibility on my shoulder and top that with unprocessed childhood trauma, which has made me a very anxious person”.

The big bully in her head as she calls it has always demotivated her and called her mean things but she knows one day she will crush that bully. A few days back she had a panic attack when she couldn’t find her earphones to attend a team video call from work, things spiralled out and got generalized to even more serious thoughts and, another attack happened when she read about Mumbai’s first COVID positive patient. “It feels as if my mind travels faster than light sometimes, it’s too much. It took a lot of processing to understand what happened. I started discussing it with people and found out that anxiety runs in my family. However, none of us can afford regular therapy. To top it off — they don't consider anxiety /depression a ‘real thing’.

When she lost the will to work and after some trial and error, she decided to follow up on her another passion, the theme of ‘equality’. She wanted to talk about women and their bodies, sizes, body image, and so much more! She started her Instagram page called the ‘label _breaker’, “this page, in a way, was for me to find myself again, use the extra time I had and help people like me who are struggling with their mental health and trying to uproot the misogyny out of their heads”.

Her first campaign was 'Body Hair', the topic was inspired by her own struggles with body hair embarrassments, currently having not shaved for the past three months though her mother is a beautician and can easily help her out. The quarantine has helped her introspect and reason against her conditioning to shave her natural body hair. "We are all locked in our houses with no access to salons, which is pushing us to keep it natural. I thought I can help women like me to accept their bodies in this lockdown. So, this whole 'leg hair, don't care' series was started to help women embrace their body as is".

She just hopes to make it alive along with her family, and she knows for sure things will change after the lockdown. "I never carried a sanitizer with me. Now I am going to lead my life the Sheldon-way". She wonders how she will ever take the local trains again where life is one shoulder push to another. "I just try to live in the present, deal with the problems that come in my way as and when they do".

-Meghana Injeti



**QUARANTINE
TALES 2020**

**STORY 10
48 STITCHES**

'48 STITCHES'

"My usual routine would entail me going for walks at least twice a day, followed with 2 hours of leg exercises. But now with my physician trapped in his house and me in mine, I felt as though my routine had morphed into an endless cycle of cooking, cleaning and reading." Neelima said, running a finger over plump stitches on her knees, now blending into her skin as soft reminders of her surgery. "When they first announced the lockdown, I felt as though it was for a week at most, but with time it just kept feeling more and more endless. In the very beginning I could go out for my morning walks in the society's garden, but then they sealed up everything, sprayed the whole society with some medicine as if the virus could be fogged away like mosquitos."

"It's not that I would travel every day," She said, " But the mere thought of being closed in, brought forth a surge of anxiety."

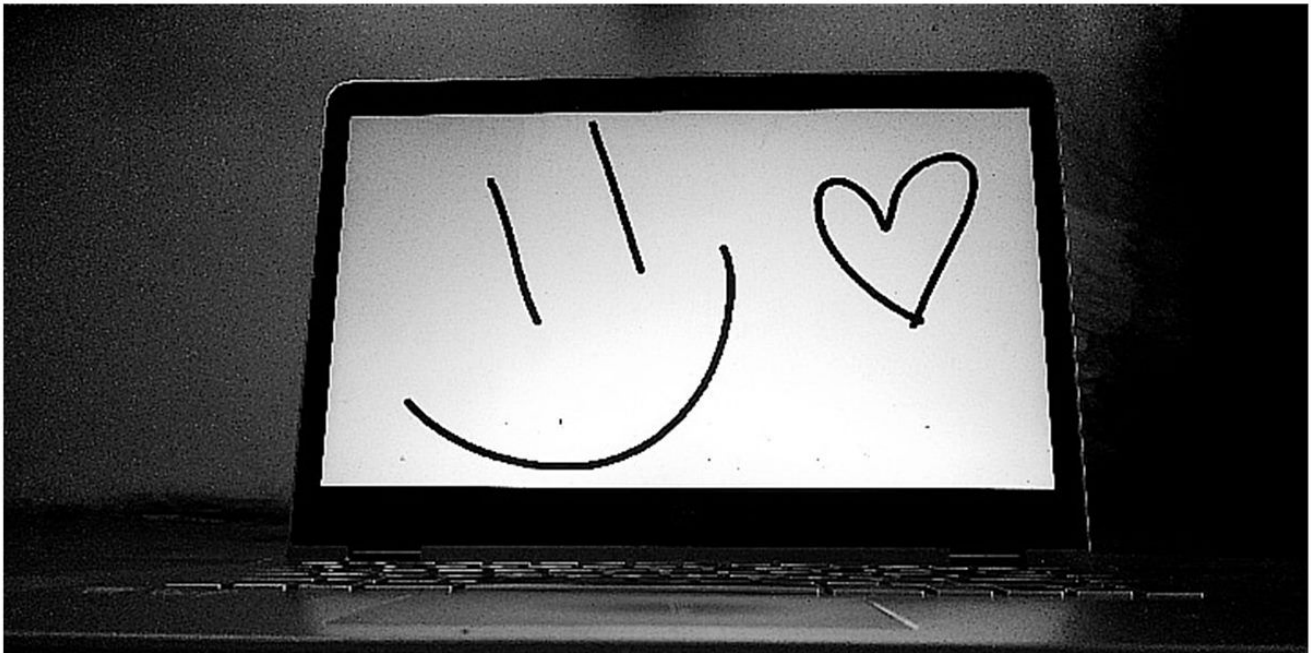
"It's a strange memory," She sounds distant, as if the memory had taken her far back in time. "but I felt as if this anxiety was almost familiar. Somehow I was reminded of the time when the struggle for Samyukta Maharashtra was going on, I was so little then, that I hardly remember much of it. But it was the same kind of fear. Fear of something unknown and invisible, the fear of the outside itself. As a child there was so much I couldn't understand then, and now again as an old lady I have to dip into my WhatsApp school of knowledge to find answers about this plague."

“People ask me about health quite often, they make impressed faces when I tell them my routine, and quote something cheesy. They glorify it so much, as if I am doing something incredible.” She gave a shrug of indifference, “I couldn’t risk overlooking my exercises, it would stiffen up my knees again. “What I could do was work around with the space I have. I tried to use the space of my own flat, doubled my walking time to make up for the lack of space. I count each step, to try and match up my hour long walks in the garden.”

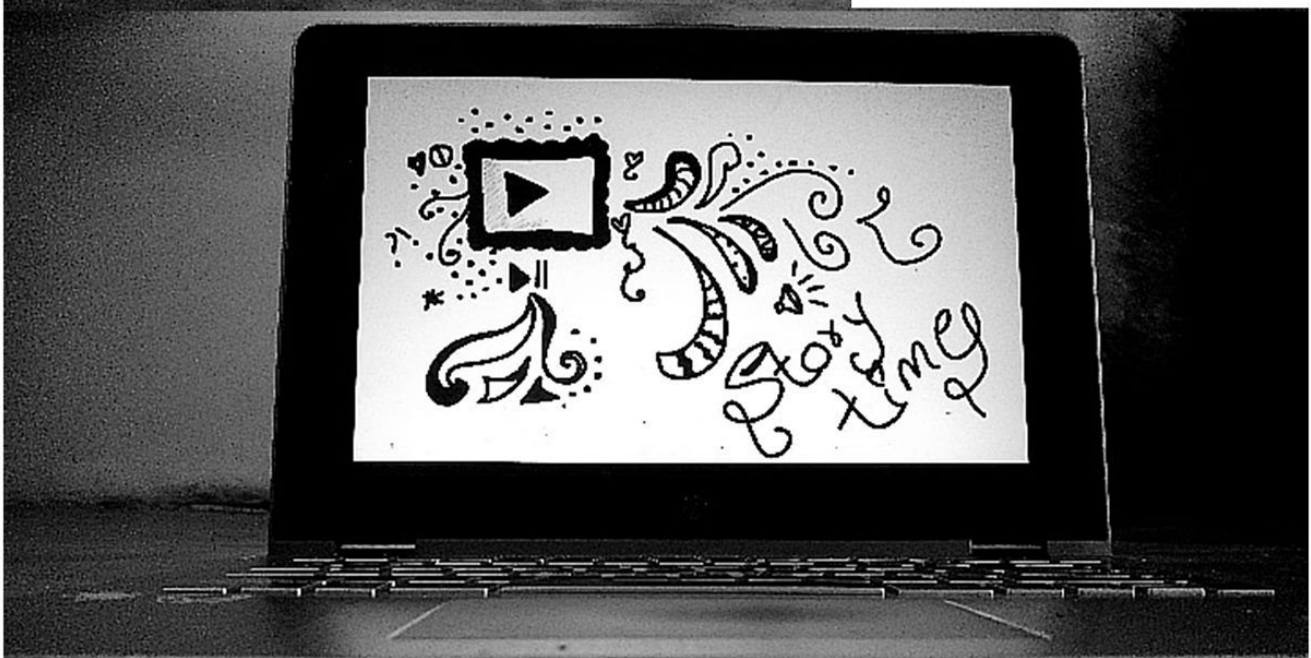
“‘Gosh Grandma!’ they tell me, ‘How do you manage to do all of this?’ they ask.” She said, “Sometimes I just want to tell them, ‘Listen. I am 71.’ ” she said with such suave, you could almost imagine her light a cigar.

“I don’t have the privilege to go around wondering if my body can manage it. At an age like that I already hold a certain preparedness, if it happens it happens.” She said, shaking her head. “You see, virus or no virus, I’m still going to be afraid of the outside, I’m still going to be afraid of the unknown, that one day on my morning walk, the synthetic things that make my knees work will creak and stop, making me immobile again. But I couldn’t stop walking because of that, because it would mean I had given up, I know my body won’t keep up if my mind gives in to such anxiety. At this strange age of 71, I still want to live more. So whether it’s the biblical plague or the apocalypse, I’m just going to repeat my 14 knee exercises.”

-Shalki



**QUARANTINE
TALES 2020**



**STORY 11
'ITS ME, CLASS OF 2020'**

IT'S ME, THE CLASS OF 2020

Squeak, went the phone clamp as it balanced Neetu's phone. The mountain of designing books groaning weakly as she sat down right in front of it. She framed herself against a backdrop of a hanging tie-dye bedsheet and scattered fairy lights. She brushed a haywire strand of hair down, prepping herself, checking her frame for one last time before beginning to record.

"Hello Internet! Welcome back to my channel, I hope you all are safe and healthy in this quarantine, and today we are going to do another story time video" She began addressing her viewers directly, knowing that she wouldn't have to make up a clickbait-y title for this video at least. Her voice came out naturally, in a calm practiced manner. "You all know that this time has been a little crazy for everyone, but unfortunately this isn't going to be a typical Storytime video. I know that I haven't been uploading as much as I usually do and honestly just so many things have been happening because of this lockdown and I just want to talk it out with all of my lovely viewers."

"As you all already know I am a design student and this was supposed to be my last year. At my institute we have a 6 semester program. In our last semester we are expected to each present a design product as our final project, which should have taken place by December or early January.

lockdown just like everything else it got pushed forward, which means our final semester would end no later than July. And I know what you all are thinking, Hey, didn't you apply for the designing program in Germany already? And you are absolutely right! I did and now, because I don't even graduate before July, guess who can't get in!" She said and pointed finger guns at herself comically. "Even with an extension to submit the pending documents, I would not be passing out and getting my degree in time to begin the semester abroad. And this applies not only to Germany, but every other international university I had planned to "

"You can never really tell, you know" She continued, looking into her camera lens. " A few months ago it was all like moving you know? There was the application to the University, then the interview, then the language exams, then the blah and the bleh- What I mean is, everything around me was moving, all little puzzle pieces falling in places and there was a point where the future was so clear that I could see myself eating a Bratwurst in Berlin. And now... it's suddenly so stagnant." She paused. "Like I can't really apply anywhere else, because the applications end by January and, even if I do, what am I going to do without a passing certificate?" She gave out a bleak laugh as her voice cracked at the word 'certificate'

Taking a breath she shrugged lightly, “Yeah I know it totally sucks but like, you can’t really do anything about it.” She felt her own lips form a slight pout as she drank in her own situation once again. Trying to suppress an unkempt helplessness that kept re-surfacing every time she narrated her situation. She had already accepted the facts, but it still left a bitter taste in her mouth just like all those German lessons she had to take. She instantly knew she would have to edit out these long pauses and oddly timed sighs, maybe even put in a peppy background score so that the video doesn’t sound too sombre.

“So that’s it for today guys, let me know your stories of the lockdown in the comments down below and don’t forget to like and subscribe, Stay safe and stay healthy, good bye!” She said, blowing a kiss to her phone camera as she finally ended the recording, she felt her goodbye echo around in her empty room as she saw her own chirpy face grin at her through the recording. Unsmiling, yet feeling surprisingly lightweight she decided to call it a day.

-Shalki



**QUARANTINE
TALES 2020**

**STORY 12
'DISPARITY'**

'DISPARITY'

"Everything!" she said, twirling a strand of hair around her finger.

"Souffles, and little lemon tarts, small cakes with fondant flowers and some with a galaxy glaze, tiny pastel macaroons and meringues shaped like clouds. Deep fried Oreos in pancake batter and -, I mean, why not right?" Iti's excited voice trailed off as her sister rolled her eyes at her. Unable to keep the smile off her face, she tried to click off as many ingredients she could find on the bigbasket website.

Iti always had the thought of starting something at the back of her mind, but with college work something or the other kept coming up. But now, with the entire world on hold it was as if the quarantine was the moment to finally begin. It was harder to get ingredients, that was a shame. But there wasn't anything she couldn't substitute. The quarantine was weirdly exhausting, just the thought of not being able to go out weighed her spirits down. With the people off the streets, it was as if everything had gone silent (maybe except her phone because suddenly everyone was on Instagram). She could bring in a better time in her life, and a smile on someone's face with just a sprinkle of icing sugar. She wanted to combat this quarantine with positivity, she wanted to be productive instead of sitting around moping. Maybe this was it, this was her big break, these were harsh, lonely times, But with some effort she could make this situation feel like a dream.

Reshma tucked a few strands of her sweat soaked hair behind her ear, the concrete road felt emptier than usual. Her eyes wary of police vans more than that of customers interested in buying the bananas on her cart. It had been a few weeks into the lockdown, and the invisible germ had made itself quiet at home in the city. Her husband was a security guard at the same institute where she worked as a house-help at the hostels. But with the students gone, there wasn't much to secure but cement walls and empty classrooms. Her job had been her family's safety net, with that gone, they suddenly had nothing.

For the first month, they had been paid their salaries in half, so her 5000 rupees a month had gone down to 2500, that was a shame. Even though they had been working since May, coming up to the campus and scrubbing it clean, now ghoulish without a soul around, scraping the dirt from the steel framed windows and mopping the steps of the Amphitheatre. But from the next month both their salaries stopped completely. She started to scour for other places to work at once, at this point it could be anything. But the fear of the virus had eaten up her chances of working at someone's house. No one could risk letting a house help in, especially the kind that could wriggle in the same germ they were so actively trying to keep outside. She and her husband had to pull out whatever savings they had to pay off the loan for their room, and soon the rains would grace them, the tiled floor would leak again from god knows where... she had wanted to fix that up this year.

At times she had even thought of going back home, maybe stay at the village with her in-laws. But how? The world around her felt harsher and colder, but with some effort she could pull through this nightmare.

- Shalki