

Phobias & Fortitude

By Kanika G

A couple of short stories

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Princess Lemon & Her Yellow Shoes

Illustrated by Mishti Shah

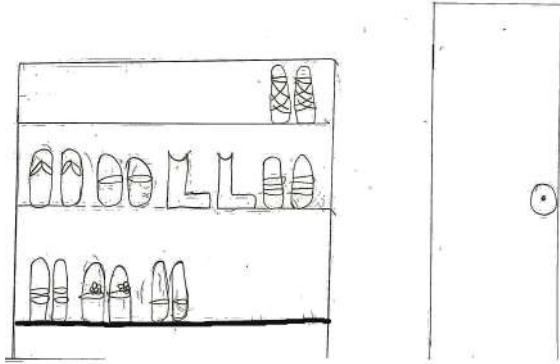
Scared Out of her Wits

Illustrated By Kanika G

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Princess Lemon & Her Yellow Shoes

Kate had lots and lots of shoes. She had pink slip-on shoes, brown floaters, purple boots, black school shoes, white sports shoes, red party shoes and silver ballet shoes.



She also had another pair of shoes. But, she did not like to talk about them. She did not want any one to see them. She hid them at the far back corner of her shoe rack.

Aunt Tina had given Kate a pair of yellow, open toed, strappy sandals for Diwali. Kate was very angry when she saw them. She wanted Mama to throw them away.

Mama was surprised. "I thought you love shoes. In fact, you have been demanding exactly these kind of sandals for the last year. You said, that the red party shoes are not sandals and you wanted party sandals. Well these are gorgeous party sandals. So what's the problem?"

Kate told mama why she did not like the sandals.

Mama thought her reason was silly, but she hoped that Kate would change her mind eventually. So she said, "I see. But you shouldn't throw them away. Keep them in the shoe rack."

When Kate was back from Mama's room, the new yellow sandals were excited, thinking she was finally going to try them on. Instead, she stuffed them in to a dark corner, at the back of the shoe rack.

The yellow sandals were sad. Every night, in the shoe rack, the shoes would tell amazing stories of the adventures they had been on. The school shoes told funny stories about the tricks and games the children played. The ballet shoes talked about age old stories and lovely music they heard at ballet class.

The sports shoes described exciting tennis and volley ball matches. The party shoes shared glamorous tales of glitter, balloons, cakes and clowns. The boots talked about adventurous riding lessons and horses jumping over hurdles.

Even the simple canvas, pink, slip-on shoes had stories to tell from evening bike rides and time spent at the park. But the poor yellow sandals had nothing to say. Nothing at all! *Because they had never been any where!* The only life they had known, was the miserable dark corner of the shoe rack.

After a couple of months, the other shoes felt really sorry for

the yellow sandals. "May be she has forgotten about you, because you are in the corner and difficult to see." The ballet shoes suggested.

The pink canvas shoes had an idea. "We can move you to the front of the shoe rack. She can wear you to the party tomorrow. Red, you wouldn't mind, would you?"

"Of course not." The red party shoes replied. "I went to the wedding last week. I could use a break."

"Thank you so much." The yellow sandals were thrilled to have such wonderful friends.

So, the next morning, the yellow sandals stood hopefully, right in front on the middle shelf of the shoe rack. But Kate's reaction when she saw the shoes was baffling.

She stamped her feet in rage. Then she ran to the kitchen, got a strong black garbage bag, wrapped up the shoes in it, tied a firm knot and stuffed it back in the corner. "I hate yellow!" She snarled and stomped away.

The yellow sandals sobbed all day. The other shoes tried to say comforting things, but nothing helped. Then, the purple boots had an idea. "You know, we can help you escape, if you would like that."

The yellow sandals stooped sobbing. "How?" They asked. "Is it possible? Please tell me if it is possible."

The brown floaters were very practical. "The balcony door is always open. You can slip out when the maid opens the shoe rack, while cleaning the house. But how do we get you out of the bag?"

"I know how we can open the bag." The red party shoes giggled, as the rest looked at them curiously. "Benji can do it. He has sharp teeth. He can chew open the bag."

"That is a splendid idea." The brown floaters were impressed. Clearly they had underestimated the party shoes. "Benji mouse visits almost every night after he is done searching for bits of food. I am sure he will help."

Stuck inside the dark suffocating garbage bag, the yellow sandals thought about the future. They would soon be free to explore the whole wide world. But that night Benji did not come, and the yellow sandals began to lose hope.

In the mean time, Kate was really excited about the school Christmas play. She was finally in the 1st standard and old enough to participate in it. Kate loved acting and was hoping for the lead role. Would she get it?

Kate did get the lead role. She was thrilled, until she found out that the lead character was Princess Lemon and had to be dressed in yellow all the time.

Kate would have refused the part, if she did not desperately

want to be in the play. She asked Miss John, the drama teacher, if she could have a different role. Miss John told her, that all the other roles had already been cast. So Kate would either have to play Princess Lemon, or drop out of the play. Kate was very upset.

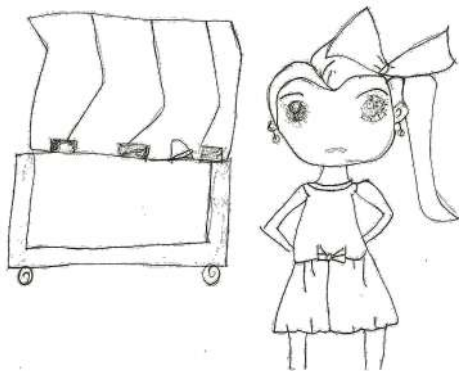
That evening, at dinner, Kate told mama her problem.

Mama was puzzled "Why do you hate yellow so much?"

"Because it is an ugly colour." Kate retorted. "It is the colour of poop and pee, smelly egg yolks and other yucky things. How can they want a princess to dress in that horrible colour? It is a sick colour. I hate it."

"But Kate, I don't understand. Yellow is also the colour of sunshine and lemons and butter. And you were happy to have yellow balloons at your birthday party a year ago. So what changed?"

"Yellow is the colour of sickness." Kate sobbed inconsolably and went to her room.



Mama finally understood what the problem was. But she wanted to give Kate a chance to calm down. She put the dinner things away. As a final display of rage, Kate opened the shoe rack, took the garbage bag containing the yellow sandals, marched out of the door, and flung it in to the dumpster.

That night, the other shoes were really worried. They had to do something to help the poor yellow sandals. If they did not act soon, the yellow sandals may end up in a bonfire or a trash compacter. "But what can we possibly do?" The silver ballet shoes voiced all their thoughts.

"Hello shoes. How are you all?" squeaked a cheery voice startling all the preoccupied shoes.

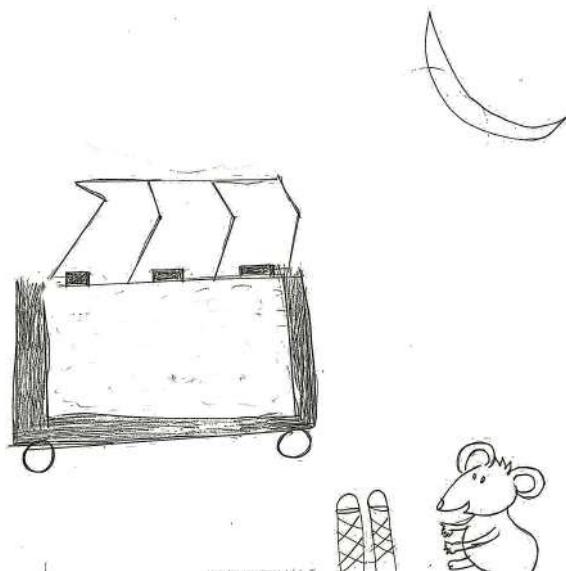
"Oh! Hello Benji. Where have you been?" The red party shoes asked.

"I was hanging out with a friend at the next house, where he managed to access their cheese. Yum! But that's over now, so I am back. Did you miss me Red?" Benji winked.

"Benji we need your help." The floaters said gravely.

The shoes took turns at telling Benji the whole story and begged him to free the yellow sandals in the dumpster. Benji was very sorry for the yellow sandals, who had suffered so much cruelty, for no fault of their own. He went to free

them.



The yellow sandals were grateful for Benji's help. But they had never set shoe out in the world before. So they asked Benji for some tips.

Benji had some useful advice to offer. "Look around and explore. Enjoy your freedom. But be careful about cars. See, that is a car." Benji said pointing at a car in a nearby garage. "When they move, they can run you over and squash you to pulp."

"Oh! o--o--okay" The yellow sandals were trembling. "Will they chase us?"

"No. Just stay out of their way. That's all. Stay away from dogs too. You know what they are, right? They are like Kate's cat, but a lot bigger. Good luck!"

The little yellow sandals wandered out in to the bright moon lit night to explore the world.

In the morning when Kate woke up, Mama approached her. "Good morning Kate. Did you sleep well, sweetheart?"

"Not too well." Kate replied unenthusiastically.

"Kate, is your illness the reason you hate yellow?" Mama asked getting straight to the point.

Kate nodded, but did not trust herself to speak. The memory still upset her. It had been less than half a year ago. She had been sick with jaundice for two weeks.

Her skin and eyes were a disgusting, sickly yellow colour. She even puked yellow slimy stuff several times. She had high fever, and had never before been sick for so long. The yellow tinge on her skin stayed for days and horrified her. Would she ever look normal again?

"Kate, it was just an infection. You are fine now. The medicines took care of it. Your skin and eyes are fine now, back to their normal colour."

Kate broke down. "I was so scared Mama. I was sick for so long. I thought I'd never get better. My skin looked horrible. Even my eyes were yellow. I was afraid of looking in the

mirror."

"I know Honey. Being sick can be very scary. But look, you are fine now. You don't have to be scared any more. Your strong body fought off the sickness. And don't let one miserable two week period of your life make you hate the colour yellow. It is silly to generalize that way. Just because you don't like some things that are yellow, doesn't mean all things yellow are bad. And by avoiding everything yellow, you may miss out on so many wonderful things like having a lead part in the play."

"But I don't like spicy food, so I don't eat anything that is spicy. Isn't that smart? Otherwise each time I tried something spicy, my eyes would water and my mouth would burn. This way I don't have to suffer over and over again."

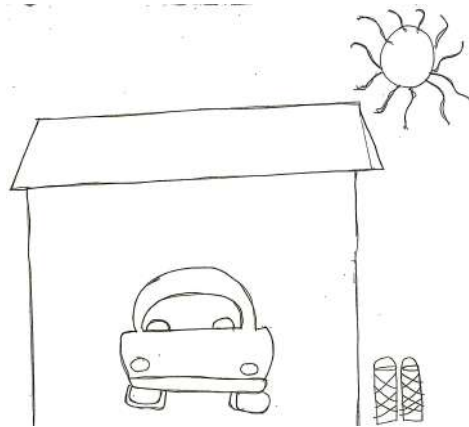
"Well yes. But suppose someone put sugar in your pizza. You would hate the taste. But that doesn't make sugar bad. You still like it in cakes and milkshakes. Also, with the spicy food, I wish you would consider trying mildly spicy food. You may actually like it."

"Okay Mama. I'll try it your way. I'll wear the princess costume and see what it looks like in the mirror. Oh wait! I'd better go get my yellow sandals back before the garbage man arrives."

Kate ran down the stairs to find the sandals, but when she got to the dumpster, she saw the empty chewed up garbage bag with no sandals in it.

Oh no! Kate thought. Now what do I do? Those sandals would be perfect with the yellow princess costume. I need to find them. She walked around the housing society desperately looking for the sandals. *I should not have thrown them away. May be someone took them.* She thought sadly.

Kate almost gave up the search for the yellow sandals, when she suddenly noticed something glinting in the sunlight at the corner of a parking garage.



"Oh my shoes!" Kate ran up to them and gave them a hug. She said, "I know you are just shoes, and it is silly talking to you, but I feel like I need to apologise. I have been very mean to you, for no fault of yours. I really am sorry and I wont treat you badly again."

The shoes were in pristine condition, in spite of their moonlight adventure. *However did they get to the garage?* Kate wondered as she climbed the steps back home. She placed the yellow sandals gently in the shoe rack. *They are*

really beautiful once you got over the yellow aspect of them,
she thought.

The other shoes were thrilled to have their yellow friends back. "Whatever happened? Do tell us. We are dying to know." The purple boots asked. They never could contain their curiosity.

"Oh thanks so much, shoes, for sending Benji over. You are the best friends a pair of shoes could have. He let us out and told us to watch out for cars."

"We had a few hours of fun checking out the swimming pool and the slide. The slide was the best. We must have gone up and down it at least 40 times. Whee! we would slide down so fast once we got the hang of it, and even bump in to each other." The yellow sandals clapped their heels.

"But then we were crossing the road to find a cozy place to rest." The yellow sandals continued. "And a car came by with bright headlights blinding us. We were so scared of the massive thing, we froze. But, just in the nick of time, we moved to the nearest garage. Unfortunately that is where the car wanted to park. So we had to keep moving this way and that, till the car finished parking. We were so tired and terrified after that, we just hid in the corner of the garage for hours."

"We were wondering what to do next. What if another car

came by. It is quite difficult to walk without the help of humans. I hope it is easier when they have their foot in. Is it?" The yellow sandals asked tentatively.

"Yes, it is much easier." The pink canvas shoes assured them.

"Then Kate came and found us and said the nicest things. We don't know what changed her mind, ..." The yellow sandals looked confused.

"Oh we can fill you in on that." The red shoes interrupted. The shoes took turns at telling the yellow sandals the whole conversation between Kate and her mom.

"Oh poor girl! It must have been frightening to fall so sick, that her skin changed colour. I am glad that her mom convinced her, that not yellow things have to be bad, or we'd be totally doomed. We'll try to make her super comfortable."

"Yes we must start over, and let's make sure we start out on the right foot this time." The right yellow shoe winked, and the sports shoes stuck their tongues out at it.

A few words from the illustrator, Mishti Shah:

I am 8 years old. I love drawing and painting the most. I also enjoy swimming a lot. This is the first time I drew illustrations for a book. I thank all who made this possible.

Scared Out Of Her Wits

Shiv was intrigued. Why was his best friend, the typically level headed Kaira, draped over the lip of a dumpster, with her bum sticking out in to the air? Had she taken leave of her senses? He had to find out.



The stench was unbearable. Shiv supposed, that Mona had used the society dumpster to dispose off the half boiled egg her mother had given her for breakfast, again.

Holding his nose with one hand, Shiv gently tapped Kaira on her calf with the other. Shiv had hoped to draw Kaira's attention, but he hadn't expected her to jump, scream, and then fall on him. He managed to crawl out from under her,

only to see that she looked completely deranged. Her hair was a stinky, tangled mess with a banana peel hanging out of a half done plait. There was black goo on her nose. But none of this was as frightening as the look in her eyes.

She seemed to be trying to frantically scan the whole area at once, resulting in some rapid and bizarre eye ball movement, while her head jerked from side to side.



"What's wrong Kaira?" Shiv asked, not sure he wanted to

know the answer. He was alarmed by Kaira's behaviour. What could have happened to make her act this way, he could not imagine.

Just then, a butterfly fluttered by, and Kaira fainted. Shiv was astonished. He knew that Kaira was afraid of butterflies, but she had never fainted before, at the sight of one. Runaway shrieking, sure, but never fainted.

Shiv shouted out for help. Mona and Rohan came running. "You really need to find another way to get rid of your egg." Rohan told Mona as they walked over.

"Oh my! Is Kaira dead?" Mona screamed.

"Of course not you idiot. She has fainted. Can you two help me?" Shiv asked.

"I could get some of my mom's smelling salts." Mona offered.

"I think she is immune to smell after the stench from that dumpster." Rohan sneered as he left to fetch some water from the tap next to the swimming pool. The kids sprinkled the water on Kaira and managed to revive her.

"We will take you home." Shiv said kindly to Kaira, but a haunted expression clouded her face as she pleaded "Not home, not home. Please, not home."

Baffled and stumped, the kids looked at each other. Then

Shiv had an idea. "Kaira, you can come to my house." Shiv offered.

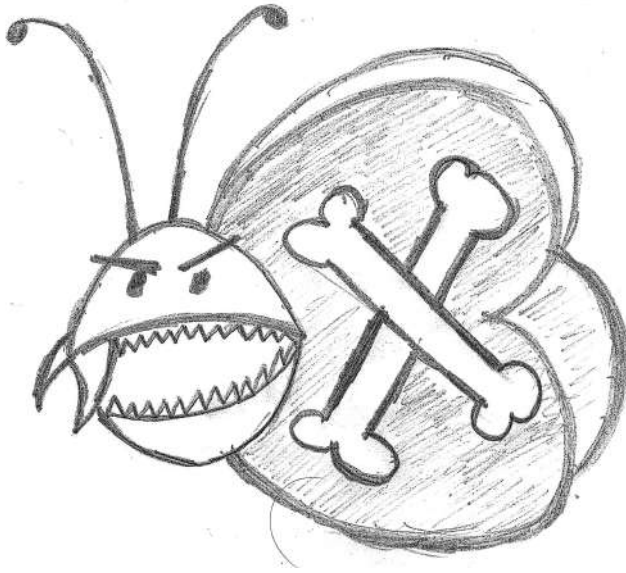
Kaira nodded and the kids were relieved. They helped her up the steps to Shiv's house. Shiv rang the doorbell. The cook opened the door and let them in. She was busy with dinner, and did not even notice the mess Kaira was in. Thank goodness, Shiv thought. His parents would not be home for another hour, so he had some time to sort this mess out.

While Kaira was cleaning up in Shiv's house, Rohan and Mona went to fetch her mother. But Kaira's mother wasn't home, so they returned with Kaira's sister, Padma.

Kaira stepped out of the bathroom looking slightly better with her hair combed and her face clean. But at the sight of Padma, she started trembling and sobbing. "I looked, Padma. I looked everywhere." Kaira wailed. "But I couldn't find it anywhere. I am so sorry I lost your bracelet. I promise I won't touch your stuff again. I promise. Please, please, just take away the butterflies. Please."

Shiv, Mona and Rohan looked at each other confused. What was Kaira talking about?.

Padma flushed bright red. "It's okay Kaira. You can come home now. The butterflies are gone. I took them out myself. I was really mad at you for losing my bracelet. So I locked you in the room with the butterflies for revenge."



"How could you be so cruel?" Shiv asked angry and aghast. Mona and Rohan looked at Padma in disbelief.

Padma quelled under their accusing gaze, but decided it was best to address Kaira.

"I would never have locked you in with the butterflies, if I knew that you would be this terrified. It is hard for me to understand your fear, but I see now, that it is quite real to you. I am very sorry." Padma bit her lip and took a deep breath.

Kaira sat down on the sofa exhausted, and Padma approached her slowly. Then Kaira buried her head in Padma's lap and Padma caressed her hair.

"You know, I was really worried about you, the way you ran

out of the house in fright, when I opened your door. I came running after you. But you had run off too fast, and I did not know which way you went. I thought you may have come to Shiv's house, so I called here, but no one answered the phone. Then I called Nisha and Vidhi but they had no idea where you were. I tried to spot you from the window but I couldn't see you. I was just about to call Mama, when Rohan and Mona showed up. "

"I am so glad, I have found you. I promise I won't frighten you like that again."

Kaira nodded and even managed a smile. Her friends all patted or hugged her. She felt almost normal again. Kaira's friends said nothing to Padma, but at least they had stopped frowning at her.

Padma took all the kids home and treated them to ice cream. Later, when all the kids had left, Padma followed Kaira to their room. Still apprehensive, Kaira stepped gingerly in to her room and checked for butterflies. When Padma turned the fan on, a piece of paper started fluttering around and Kaira jumped in fright. Padma gave her a hug and held her tight till she calmed down and her muscles relaxed.

"Kaira." Padma said. "You need not be ashamed of your fear of butterflies. We all have fears like that." She picked up her stuffed tiger. "You know Tiger Woods, right? Papa gave him to me when I was two. I was so scared of him."

"But you love Tiger Woods." Kaira was puzzled.

"Yes I do now. But initially, I was terrified of him. Eventually I got over my fear, but it took a year and Tiger Woods never did anything unpredictable like butterflies. When I got over my fear, I loved Tiger Woods mainly because he reminded me of that achievement. You may get over your fear of butterflies, or you may not. Every one has something that frightens them, that may seem silly to others. It's okay."

"You are not scared of anything any more though." Kaira pointed out.

"That's not true." Padma said. "I am no longer scared of Tiger woods and I have never been scared of butterflies, but I have an irrational fear of water and drowning. That is why it is taking me so long to learn to swim. All my friends are learning so much faster." Padma looked sad, so Kaira put her arm around Padma.

Heartened Padma continued, "I do my best to fight the fear but I haven't succeeded yet. You too can try to fight your fear, but if you don't succeed, that is okay too. I was wrong to take advantage of your fears. Will you forgive me?"

Kaira smiled. "Yes Padma, but only if you help me fight my fear of butterflies. Tell me how I should go about it."

"Deal!" Padma said and the sisters shook hands.

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