

4Ever

The estate agent insisted: the blockwork garage had to go. Shruti came round to help.

“I need to bash something with a sledgehammer, Dad,” she said “you’ll be doing me a favour.”

“Dada built that garage—”

“I know, before he even had a car.”

I’d steal samosas from the kitchen and squeeze into the space behind the garage to eat them. The silvery trunk of the sycamore grew too close for my chunky brothers to get through. My sisters were afraid of spiders. It was my place. Mine and yours.

Shruti swung the sledgehammer again and again. Dust and chips of concrete exploded everywhere.

The tree is massive now and its bark isn’t smooth and strokable any more. It’s pitted and crusty, and presses up against the garage, bulging over the top like Dada’s belly over his belt. Like mine now.

Shruti struck again. The wall fell. Part of the trunk which had been against the blocks was revealed, naked, flat. Where it had kissed the cold concrete, there was a carved heart, clumsy but beautiful. A4K4Ever.

I put my hand over it, surprised, reminded of another belly, naked and flat.

“Did you bring your girlfriends behind the garage, Dad? You old dog!” Shruti laughed. “It says ‘4Ever’. You should call. You need someone to cook for you. But take her somewhere nicer than this, OK?”

So here I am. Messaging you.

“Hello Andrew, my name is Kamal. I think we were at school together.”