

Cellotape – Sri, Year 11, NSW

They had punched me in the face this time. My glasses were knocked off. Last time they had kicked me. It was certainly an improvement. I dropped to my knees onto the wet grass. Blobs of colour splattered my vision, the school football field was reduced to a thick whirl of colours. The sky was gray with large towers of cumulonimbus clouds clearing, the storm was over and it was the calamity after the storm that everyone was anxious about. My hands frantically searched for the glasses, my fingernails caked with dirt as I ruffled through mounds and mounds of grass.

The whole world had suddenly disappeared. It was just me and the dirt. The color of my skin had appalled them. Amma would describe it as the sweet jaggedness that was sprinkled on her plain appam, the dark melting sweetness of joy that waltzed into her life. They thought I was the same colour as dirt, something that could repeatedly be trampled on. Something so insignificant yet disgusting that no one would notice it was trampled on.

Everyone else had watched. The students and teachers alike. My eyes secretly pleaded with the teachers on the field. No one had batted an eye. When they viciously stamped on the thick frames of my glasses, when I had laid on the ground, my tiny body curled in a ball as I waited for it all to be over. Again.

It was the glasses that Appa had bought for me. We could afford either the glasses or a new pair of shoes for Appa. I went to school with a new pair of thick shiny frames. Appa had gone to work with tattered shoes. The glasses were the very ones I picked out excitedly, trying every single frame, secretly hoping for a new beginning. The beginning where I wasn't the only brown kid in school.

They had pointed out the differences: The accent. The food. The colour. The scrambled English that often amalgamated with the Tamil every time I had opened my mouth. I was black. They weren't. It was the epitome of contrast.

After all, it had only been seven years since the White Australia Policy was abolished.

I could hear the footsteps becoming louder and stronger as they spilled onto the wet grass. The once gravel gray sky was murky and overcast, the dark hues of the sky collided with the tiny stars that lit the sky. School is long over now. They couldn't be waiting for me. Yet my heartbeat still grew frantic as I stopped myself from curling up. I didn't want it to happen again. I couldn't let it happen again.

Instead I felt a firm hand on my shoulders. The warmth of the touch was radiating, forcing me to look. The familiar brown loafers came into view before coming face to face with Appa's face.

His eyes scanned my entire body, the worry twisting and turning as he stared at the fresh pinkish scar that spanned my entire cheek. He knew I would be here. I knew he was going to reprimand me for losing my glasses. Except he didn't say a word.

Instead he crouched, as Appas's hand stretched out to my shoulders as he attempted to lift me up. I attempted to stand up, the movement convulsing my entire body into pain. The dirt fused with my white sports shirts as the colours whirled to create a musty fusion. My chin had started to tremble, the guilt tearing viciously, stabbing and shredding my heart into tiny fragments. Appa had still not said a word. He had just started. He knew we were outsiders and he accepted that with the same resignation, his eyes void of hope. Appa's eyes had become void when he realized that we would never be enough. Enough to avoid the brutal insults and the mockery that tormented us constantly, tailing us everywhere, every nook and cranny.

I stared at him. Appa had walked across the oval, his steps slow as he scanned the grass, searching for the glint of silver he knew would make his son smile again. Appa had vanished into the darkness, his shadow following him. The only source of comfort for me was the flickering streetlight. I stood there as I waited for him.

He came. Eventually. His hands were closed and fisted as he walked over to me. His face was blank. Appa's hands reached out to me, dropping the remnants of my glasses into my hand. The ends of the glasses were separated.

I felt the guttural heave of relief purge the tears that were squeezing my throat. The spectacles were everything to me. He knew what it was like. To both live and endure torture at the same time.

Appa's gravelly voice spoke, his words both daunting and despairing: "*Itha sellotape aala fix punalam.*"

The glasses were in my hand. The sellotape was going to fix everything.

I felt the bone-crushing squeeze as I felt Appa's warm skin encircling mine. His head on top of mine. Just the way it would always be. It would be us against the world. Always.

Translations:

Appam - a type of Sri Lankan cuisine

Amma - Mother

Appa - father

"Itha sellotape aala fix punalam" - We can fix the glasses with Sellotape