

Three Short Pieces To Reframe Your Day

by Pavithra K. Mehta

The Post Office

I have an incurable love for lines at the post office. This is a luxurious indulgence, I know. The kind important people can ill-afford. But I am comfortably insignificant. Nothing catastrophic happens to the world when I am made to wait for indefinite periods of time, so I am at liberty to love these lines and the speed of molasses at which they move. They give me opportunity to admire the cheerful competence of our postal workers. How brisk and good-natured they are. Even the curmudgeons among them, the ones who speak sharply, criticizing sloppy packaging, pointing out missing zip codes, seem ultimately kind at heart. Before you leave they will inquire gruffly whether you need any stamps. Like the stern grand-aunt who delivers sharp lectures then tries to slip money into your pocket. I love too, the long patience of the people who wait in post-office lines, one behind the other, the way we used to wait everywhere when we were children. My favorites are the ones who wait the old fashioned way, without any digital assistance. The ones who stand clutching parcels and packages of every size and description, their eyes full of dreams and dinner menus. I even love the shelves of empty boxes and envelopes that line the walls waiting to be filled with a sliver of someone's story. I love the ledges bearing piles of unaddressed labels and I love the tethered ballpoint pens that don't always work. How many beloved names of people I have never met and will never meet have been recorded in this very spot! How many missives have been launched here. Expressing gratitude and love, conveying longing and regret, singing joy and comfort, sorrow and surprise and every glorious state, and every inglorious state in between! In the long lines of the post office I am slowed down enough to see the smudged and shining face of humanity. And I learn again how much I love being alive in this world. A beating heart amidst many beating hearts.

On Friday a man ahead of me in line shuffled to the counter. The air crackled around his white hair. He was dressed in an old, dark sweatshirt, wrinkled pants and displeasure. "I don't want this," he said. The words hit the air like pebble on glass. Nothing shattered, but my attention was successfully riveted. He pushed a wide blue and white envelope across the counter. It looked blameless. "This is addressed to you?" the woman at the counter asks. She has long hair and a wide face, calm as a lake. "Yes," says the man, "It came for me, and I Don't Want It." His voice is emphatic, strained at the edges, daring the world to stand in his way. "You haven't opened it." the woman observes, her voice bright and party pleasant. "No," says the man. "But WHY?" I want to cry out from my place in the line. I am lit with amazement and dismay. Packages that come to you in the mail are infinitely irresistible. What tragedy or bitterness has bit so deeply into this man's soul that it has overpowered his curiosity? Or does he already know the contents? And if so — who is this package from and what is it they have sent that he cannot tolerate holding it in his possession? My questions flutter unspoken in the air eager and timid as butterflies. A part of me wishes to invite this stooped old man and his storms to tea. "Let's talk this over, shall we?" I would say gently. Then I'd crush cardamom pods into steaming teacups, and all sad stories and unreasonable grudges would be wafted away on a cloud of fragrance.

"So you are refusing the package?" confirms the woman dispersing my spice-scented-daydream.

"Yes," says the man. A stamp is applied to the troublesome package. And it is tossed out of sight.

But three days later it still lingers in my mind. I relate this story to my husband, wondering why I feel so invested in this stranger and his unopened package, so implicated in their fate. "Odd to feel like this when technically it's none of my business," I muse.

"Only technically?" smiles my husband.

"Yes, only technically," I reply, "because the truth is we are all connected."

It is a Monday afternoon and now as I sit listening to the church bells spilling across the hills, the real reason for wanting to invite the disgruntled old man at the post office to tea begins to ring inside me. I think I wanted to tell him something I needed to hear: that life is a package and while we breathe on this earth no part of it can be successfully refused. No part can be returned to sender. What is sent away un-lived will always come back. The shore has not learned this yet. Even after all this time it tries to banish waves back to the ocean. But what we attempt to banish will always find us again with the unerring instinct of waves and other wild things that have never required zip codes.

I wanted to say these things to that stranger. So that I might hear them myself. We both would have smiled then, and sipped our tea with freshly unclouded hearts. Filled with a new readiness to stand on the shore of our lives and welcome the waves.

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Time-Sensitive

Footsteps in the hall and the familiar sound of a key turning in its lock. My husband is home. He drops his lunch bag by the door like a schoolboy. Hurry, he says, there's something time-sensitive you need to see. I am pulled to my feet by curiosity and the urgency in his voice. We hustle into the cool, dark arms of a January night.

"There," he says, pointing.

And I see it. Low in an ink black sky, a glowing vowel. The incandescent moon. Floating in the valley like a delinquent bauble, barely skimming the tip of an ancient pine.

I want to stretch my hands out to it like a child. How many millennia old is that impulse? How old is the relationship between mortals and the moon?

Time-sensitive...

Like falling leaf the phrase flutters and gleams in the moonlight. I consider its truth and poetry for the first time, unsettled by awe.

Hurry (whoever-whenever-whensoever you are). There's something time-sensitive you need to see.

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Reckless Abandon

This morning I looked out of the window just in time to see a dive bombing blue jay. The sight impressed me greatly. The way he dropped from a high tree branch, streaking like a small comet or a superhero. Swooping upward only at the very last possible second.

Because he did not appear to have one, I gave him a name. I called him: Reckless Abandon. It suits him well. This daring, winged creature.

I believe he is destined to be famous in my world. For he showed me how flying can look alarmingly like falling. He showed me too, how too full of reck I am. How reluctant to abandon anything.

Why? he demanded to know. This blue strident bird.

I had no answer. But one day, old, time-wizened, happy, I will look out the window.

Ready to leave my perch. I will remember the flight of Reckless Abandon. And how it changed everything.

These pieces were excerpted from Pavithra's blog