

Season 6 Episode 7: Haunted and Constipated with Sonalee Rashatwar

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Kelsey

Hello and welcome to Normal Gossip. I'm Kelsey McKinney, and in each episode of this podcast, we're going to bring you an anonymous morsel of gossip from the real world. I am so excited to have with me Sonalee Rashatwar. Sonalee is an award-winning clinical social worker, sex therapist, adjunct lecturer, and grassroots organizer. Based in Philly, they are a superfat queer bisexual non-binary therapist and co-owner of Radical Therapy Center, specialized in treating sexual trauma, diet trauma, racial or immigrant trauma, and South Asian family abuse, while offering fat positive sexual healthcare. Sonalee, welcome!

Sonalee

Thank you so much for having me. Longtime listener, first time caller.

Kelsey

I'm so happy to have you calling. have you here. It's so exciting for me. First off, we're both in Philadelphia. Do you think that there's anything specific about Philly gossip?

Sonalee

I do. I think that it's meaner. And I like it that way.

Kelsey

Say more. What do you mean meaner?

Sonalee

I think that we on the East Coast. I think as part of East Coast culture. We are direct, we are more willing to share our honest, unfiltered opinion. And we're more willing to double down on it if someone disagrees.

Kelsey

Yeah, I think that's true. And I don't think that that has always mean, is my take. Like, recently I had a house party. And I was like, You know what a good house party needs is a hoagie platter. Right? So I went to the little hoagie place by my house. And I was like, hello, I'm having a party. Can I have a small hoagie platter? And the guy that hoagie place was like, What is nobody coming to your party? Oh, and I was like, Ah, he was like, he was like, Well, how many people are coming? And I was like, I don't know. Like, 30 like, I got a keg and he was like, you want a large hoagie platter. You don't want a small and I was like, Oh

Sonalee

He checked you.

Kelsey

He checked me. But you know what? He was right. I did want the larger hoagie platter. Sonalee, do you want to start me off with the classic? First question, tell me what your relationship with gossip is?

Sonalee

Oh, I've been thinking about this. I come from an Indian family. And I come from a family of matriarchs, and so gossip is really valuable in a family of women. It's like currency, and it is information gathering, for safety purposes, for storytelling purposes. Desis, we are known for telling tall tales. We don't call it lying.

Kelsey

Oh, I don't call that lying either.

Sonalee

It's called having texture and color in a story.

Kelsey

Yeah. It's called understanding storytelling.

Sonalee

Thank you. There's a little surrealism, was that a lie? We don't know. But it was worth the laugh. And it was worth being captivated for a couple of moments together. Sometimes it's like late night gossip sessions with my cousins. And we're talking about which relatives are doing *insane* things in our Indian families, and when I say insane, I mean like, digging up bones in cemeteries and doing weird ceremonies with them.

Kelsey

Why??

Sonalee

I mean cousins who are marrying their ex wives sister.

Kelsey

No!

Sonalee

Truly bad choices, seeing people live boldly and proudly making their wild choices and standing beside them.

Kelsey

Yeah, I, you know, it is to my benefit that a lot of other people make bad choices like that. I love that for me, because I'm like, thank you so much. I would love to discuss with my cousins what

you're doing with the bones. We've talked about family gossip, but you do—you are a therapist, and also you do activism. How does gossip function in both of those communities?

Sonalee

Gossip is so important in activism, because it lets us know, you know, which restaurants to be boycotting, because they're not treating their Palestinian workers well.

Kelsey: Correct!

Sonalee: Gossip is really important in movement spaces, because then we also learn about which organizations to be wary of supporting because they don't warn their members before they do an action that's arrestable. And then people who shouldn't be arrested, get arrested.

Kelsey

What about in therapy?

Sonalee

Oh, therapy is a harder one. Because I encountered this phenomenon of forbidden gossip.

Kelsey: Explain.

Sonalee: Forbidden gossip are all of the things and details that therapists learn about people's lives that they can't share.

Kelsey

That's, I'm saying all sorts of shit in therapy. So like—

Sonalee: You and me both

Kelsey: Often I'm like, hello to my therapist. I'm like, I know that we have difficult things to deal with regarding my depression, but I learned a celebrity gossip that I can't tell anyone. So like, here you go, babe.

Sonalee

Literally, that's exactly what I mean. It's those things that I can't tell anyone else. But I can talk to other therapists about those secrets. Because we have a collegial agreement that they cannot leave the therapist circle of trust

Kelsey

I love that. I also this is I love forbidden gossip as a substitute for just HIPAA. Right? Like, like, sure, HIPAA exists. But like, that's not a sexy thing to say, forbidden gossip is so sexy. I'm glad to hear though that therapists are talking to each other. Because I do think it would be very hard, even if it's not gossip, and it's just like hard things that you're hearing from people. I think it would be hard to just hold those things by yourself.

Sonalee

It is. Yeah, it's really helpful, especially in this moment of no amount of therapy school could have ever prepared us for how to be a therapist during a climate apocalypse and witnessing multiple genocides in the world. Yeah.

Kelsey

Yeah. So it's good to have an outlet there. So I'm just curious about the logistics of this, like, do you go to therapy with other therapists and you talk about this? Or like, is there a group chat? Like how, how share gossip with other therapists?

Sonalee

Well, we have to minimize, like the kind of evidence it would leave behind.

Kelsey

I'm always saying that! To minimize the evidence.

Sonalee

And I know you for always saying that, actually. It's one of your taglines on this show, in fact.

Kelsey

Don't text your mess. Please.

Sonalee

Think about the evidence

Kelsey

All of that is discoverable in the court of law. I heard though, that you brought a gossip for me. Is that true?

Sonalee

I did. I did. This gossip comes from a friend of a friend from one of these gatherings with my therapist colleagues—

Kelsey

The forbidden gossip?!

Sonalee

It's a little morsel of forbidden gossip.

Kelsey

Huge. This is huge for us.

Sonalee

This is a friend of mine that I've known through these therapy circles. They're in my therapy community. And this therapist has been working with a client who is exploring non monogamy with her boyfriend.

Kelsey

That's a great thing to have a therapist for, in my opinion

Sonalee

We really need someone else to like, check us when we're being really out of pocket.

Kelsey

Yeah. I mean, I don't know everyone's familial history. But I feel like most people are not from families that are non monogamous. And so creating models for that, it's good to have someone who knows what they're talking about to help you. Okay, so this, this client is learning about non monogamy. It's a brand new, brave new world out there.

Sonalee

She's new to it. Her boyfriend is excited about it. They've been in a relationship for a number of years. They're really sweet to each other. They're opening up. Boyfriend has met this boy in art community spaces.

Kelsey

Oh, I love that. Okay.

Sonalee

Right? So cute. And my my friend, my therapist friend is horrified to realize after several sessions of connecting dots—

Kelsey

Oh no

Sonalee

—that this new boyfriend—

Kelsey

Uh huh. The artspace boyfriend?

Sonalee

The artspace boyfriend. Is her best friend's work enemy.

Kelsey

No! No!!

Sonalee

Single-handedly responsible for derailing really important meetings, wasting like large portions of their like, gorgeous, limited nonprofit budget

Kelsey

Of course. Perfect. This is so bad because I was recently telling someone that like, do I know what my friends do with their jobs? Not really. Do I know every single detail about all of my friends work enemies? Yes. I've like I know all of those people's names. I know all their behaviors. I'm getting text updates that are like you won't believe what bleep sound said in this meeting. And I'm like, I will, I bet. Tell me. So the idea of not only realizing that like, you know this person which seems bad enough as a therapist, but like, you know them through one of the most biased forms of knowing someone that exists is like a nightmare.

Sonalee

You know things about this person, the most ugly twisted broken pieces of themselves

Kelsey

What did your friend do?

Sonalee

My friend had to sit patiently with her client, as she was reeling from really normal feelings of jealousy and insecurity about this art world boyfriend. And the therapist was so struggling, my therapist friend was so struggling with not being able to just reassure this client and tell her: don't even worry, this, this is not gonna last because he is a trash person.

Kelsey

The thing about this art boyfriend is that he's a nightmare. So actually, you don't need to be jealous of him because he sucks.

Sonalee

And you're doing all this beautiful internal work really for yourself. Decenter this man.

Kelsey

Honestly, a good lesson in general: decenter this man.

Sonalee

No, actually, someone should write that down.

Sonalee

Learn this skill for yourself. Not for anyone else.

Kelsey

I love that. Wow, thank you for bringing me this story. I loved it so much.

Sonalee

You're welcome

Kelsey: Do you want to hear the gossip that I have prepared for you?

Kelsey

Our friend of a friend today, we're going to call her Mina.

Sonalee

Mina

Kelsey

Mina. She's in her late, mid 20s. She's giving like romcom hero at the beginning of the movie, right? Like she's working all the time. She's always like, on the phone doing business stuff, right? She's like Emily in Paris, but good at work. And she lives in London.

Sonalee

She's hip. She's cool. She's fresh.

Kelsey

Yeah, she's hustling and bustling. One day, she's like, you know, imagine glass office building. She's like, blazing through the glass office building and she gets a call from her mom. She's literally walking into a meeting. Do you answer the phone call?

Sonalee

Absolutely not. There is nothing that my mother could tell me before this meeting that's going to make this meeting easier for me.

Kelsey

And so you're rejecting the call?

Sonalee

Absolutely.

Kelsey

Mina, better person than you and I, because Mina always answers her mom.

Sonalee

Oh, God bless her heart.

Kelsey

I know. And that is because Mina has like a deep internal conflict between wanting a big independent life, the apartment, the solo behavior, the like bar dinners reading a book, and feeling a very strong obligation to be a good daughter.

Sonalee

She sounds like an Indian girl.

Kelsey

Yeah. Does this resonate with you? This like, desire to be a good daughter?

Sonalee

Yeah. As as a 36 year old they/them eldest daughter, the battle persists. I have yet to win.

Kelsey

So she has decided that one way she can win at this game is by simply answering her phone all the time.

Sonalee

No, we don't win this way. Mina. We don't win—we lose this way.

Kelsey

She and her mom live in the same city. And they see each other a fair amount. So most of the time when her mom calls, in her history, it's just been like, can you pick this up? Can you do this thing? Whatever.

Sonalee

Okay, mom lives in the UK too

Kelsey

Exactly but recently she's been answering very quickly because her mom's mom is sick.

Sonalee: Oh, no.

Kelsey: And her mom's mom has had a really good long life. But like that means there are updates and so she answers the phone. She's like, Hello, mom. I'm on my way into a meeting like what's up? Sonalee, is your mom able to give you bad news in a normal way?

Sonalee

Of course not.

Kelsey

Which format of bad news bearer is your mother?

Sonalee

Oh my god. She'll send me text messages on the family chat, giving details as if she were the attending physician on call.

Kelsey

Oh! She's like we're pushing eight grams of whatever

Sonalee

cc's and this test was inconclusive.

Kelsey

You're googling like "MRI scans good"

Sonalee

What does Alkaline mean?

Kelsey

Mina answers the phone. Without saying hello, her mom is like, we have to go back. It is time for my mother to die.

Sonalee

Oh my god.

Kelsey

Mina's like, like in her head. She's like, why are you delivering this news like you're like a witch on an ABC television show, right? Like, what, why?

Sonalee

And I just told you, I'm heading into a meeting. Maybe you should save that for later

Kelsey

Yes. Mina is like, oh my god mom like why and her mom is like, I'm sorry, that was dramatic, but it is true.

Sonalee

Oh my god

Kelsey

Mina's like, I'm sorry. Like, I'm so sorry, mom. But she's like, not close with her mom's mom. She's like, barely seen her in her life. Right? Like very few occasions that they interacted but she like feels bad for her mom. So she's like, What do you need for me?

Sonalee

Okay, helpful. Sweet.

Kelsey

And her mom is like, I need you to go with me. Back to where my mom lives.

Sonalee

Oh, God.

Kelsey

Why you're panicking. I can I can see in your face that you're like there's a panic rising.

Sonalee

It's morphing into the form of emotional support eldest daughter. It's, yeah, it's like being a seeing eye dog. Like that's not a trip you're gonna enjoy.

Kelsey

No. But Mina is like, she's kind of like known this is coming right? She's already told her work. Like I'm gonna have to take bereavement leave at some point pretty soon, like, expect this and they're like, Okay, so she on the phone is like, Okay, I'll go with you. Like, when do we need to leave? And her mom is like, we're gonna leave tonight. I'll get your ticket. Just like meet me at the airport.

Sonalee

What! No?

Kelsey

Why?

Sonalee

No. Oh, my God. I'm just wondering what's happening in this meeting is are there deadlines that she's going to have to push

Kelsey

Mina's like I do not have time to like, prepare for this trip. And her mom's like, no problem. You finish your day. I'll meet you at the airport tonight. And Mina is like, Okay, fine. So she like goes to her meeting. She does her little presentation. Everything goes well. She does all her emails. She takes like a cab directly from work to the airport.

Sonalee

That means her mom packed her bag for her.

Kelsey

Ding ding ding

Sonalee

Oh no.

Kelsey

She assumed her mom would use the hide-a-key by her apartment and go to her apartment and get some stuff. Instead, she arrives at the airport and her mom has packed a bag full of just like things of Mina's that were at her mom's house.

Sonalee

Oh, no. As a fat person, no no no no no no. The clothes that are still sitting in my closet at my parents' home do not fit me anymore. And also, I'm a they/them now. I don't wear she/her clothes anymore. Oh, no.

Kelsey

Uh huh. Would you trust your mother to pack a bag for you?

Sonalee

Never in one million years.

Kelsey

Mina's like, cool. So I'm here at the airport with my passport because we're about to fly across an ocean to the East Asian country where our family is from. And the only thing I have is like this bag of weird stuff from my mom's house.

Sonalee: Oh God!

Kelsey: So this whole trip I want you to imagine Mina wearing like, slacks from an internship she had five years ago that are like two sizes too small.

Sonalee

[laughs] I am shriveling like a tootsie roll inside. Because your family back home is so judgmental—

Kelsey: yes!

Sonalee: —already. You're already inadequate in their eyes because you live in the diaspora. Oh my god.

Kelsey

Mina is like rifling through this bag as she waits for the plane to board and it's like, you know, her mom has packed like a sensible scarf. Oh God. And like one of those bras that's like very embroidered. So you like can't wear it under anything really? No. And like underwear that shows right? Like there's just like, it's so bad. And there's also no pajamas, right? So it's just like, Mina's like, all of these clothes are like from a me that doesn't exist anymore. So this is like already things are going poorly. She gets on the plane. They fly half a day and like one plane transfer. They arrive in the afternoon. In this culture, people want to die at home. So her grandmother has been transferred from the hospitals into her own bed. Which seems great, honestly. I would love to be in my own bed if I'm feeling bad.

Sonalee

Same. I would love to die at home.

Kelsey

Yeah, she's in her bed. She's like fading but when they arrive, she's like happy to see them right and able to like still chat a little bit.

Sonalee

Okay, nice.

Kelsey: And her grandmother is immediately like, I love you even though you don't have a husband.

Sonalee

Oh my god. Just right off the bat? Oh god

Kelsey

Mina is like, Thank you, Grandma. She's like this woman is dying. And then the grandma is like, I used to be wild in my youth too.

Sonalee

I don't believe it for a minute.

Kelsey

The grandma's telling her tales about like, being in Germany in her youth and like being very rebellious and smoking lots of cigarettes and kissing so many boys and the grandma is like, everyone loved me. And Mina's like I bet they did. Well, when her mom's mom falls asleep, Mina is looking around and she notices that like all of the jewelry that her mom's mom has, has been like pulled out of its secret hiding spaces from around the house and set on the vanity. So that when she dies, it can be handed out according to her will.

Sonalee

Oh, she's preparing.

Kelsey

She's preparing. This woman is organized. Mina is looking and she immediately notices these like two long, golden hairpins. They're engraved. They have like little charms that hang off the end. And Mina like doesn't speak the language of her family well, and it's something she feels weird about because she's like, not hugely involved in the culture. But she's like, I can place these hairpins, like she's like, these are beautiful. I love these. And her mom is like they really are beautiful. Like I love these too.

Sonalee

Oh my god, Mina, go ask for them. Mina, please ask for the thing you want. It's the only thing you may get out of this whole trip.

Kelsey

Besides judgment, which there's lots of

Sonalee

And an inferiority complex.

Kelsey

The whole day and the next are like this. There's like people coming in and out of the house. Everyone in the neighborhood is coming to say goodbye. It's like all the extended family. All the food is incredible.

Sonalee: Oh, this is so beautiful

Kelsey: All of the food is rice. Rice cake, rice noodle, rice wine, rice bowl, regular rice, rice dessert drink, rice everything. And Mina is wearing pants that are five years old and so small. So she is so bloated.

Sonalee

Oh, Mina, I'm so sorry.

Kelsey

It's so hard. And she's like, I understand that I'm so bloated and so full. But also I want all these rice things and I have to eat them because they're delicious.

Sonalee

Obviously.

Kelsey

Is this relatable to you?

Sonalee

This is so relatable to me. I can't stand being uncomfortable in my clothes. I would have to go and get some kind of like dress that is a sack

Kelsey

A tent. Tent dress.

Sonalee

Yes. I live in it now.

Kelsey

This is my home, this tent made of one giant piece of linen.

Sonalee

I live here. No borders, no seams.

Kelsey

This is, this is like when I found out that they make pants that look like dress pants. But they have stretchy in the back. Like it's elastic. And I was like, oh, things are about to change for me.

Sonalee

Oh, we're going places.

Kelsey

Sonalee, what happens to your gut when you travel?

Sonalee

Oh, I am very privileged and able-bodied in this way that I do not experience gut problems.

Kelsey

What?

Sonalee

I know, I know, it's really embarrassing.

Kelsey

That is embarrassing, to be, to have a gut that functions. What Mina's gut has done is left her ability to poop in London.

Sonalee

Oh! And now we're several days in and there are several days of rice. And, oh no, the noises that must be happening in her.

Kelsey

And her clothes are too small. So it is like so uncomfortable and so bloated. But otherwise, things are really beautiful and lovely.

Sonalee

Oh, just such a yin yang moment.

Kelsey

I know. The next day it is like clear that this is going to be the last day. And in this culture that time of death is like really important. And so a handkerchief, a cloth handkerchief, is placed under her mom's mom's nose so that they can see the breath and know like exactly when she dies. She dies at exactly 11:11

Sonalee

Oh, make a wish.

Kelsey

Make a wish and her mom's sister June is obsessed with this.

Sonalee

Why?

Kelsey

She's like the woowoo one.

Sonalee

Oh, we love the woowoo aunt

Kelsey

We love the woowoo aunt. so June is like 11:11 It's fortuitous. Things are gonna be great.

Sonalee

Angel numbers

Kelsey

What do you think about this the woowoo aunt, the time of death?

Sonalee

You know, I really aim to be the woowoo aunt. I aim to be the one who reminds us to see the beauty in all things.

Kelsey

Yeah. Yeah. The time of death is also important because this is like a traditional 3 day burial system that begins the minute of death where she like lays in the house until the third day and then she goes to be cremated. The grandmother wanted this process, everyone is sad that she is dead but everyone is like, she had this great long life. She was so old, she's getting to die the way she wanted to die. Like, we feel fulfilled and safe in this process.

Sonalee

This is beautiful, but I cannot help but think about the smells that will be permeating through this home over three days.

Kelsey

I think that there's a system for those, but I don't know what it is.

Sonalee

we okay, I'm imagining that there's a system.

Kelsey

Usually the eldest, or only son is like the chief mourner.

Sonalee

Booooo patriarchy.

Kelsey

And they're, they're in charge of like burial planning all of this stuff.

Sonalee

Oh, okay. Well, yeah, then do that.

Kelsey

But in this family, it is only Mina's mom, Vera, and her aunt June. And they are both single. So Mina's mom as eldest daughter is in charge.

Sonalee

I kind of love this, matriarchy for the win

Kelsey

Her aunt June was married once, but she and her husband got a divorce, because it turned out he was gay and then cheated on her with her boss.

Sonalee

That's a great reason to get divorced.

Kelsey

And this of course, because they live in like a community was a huge scandal.

Sonalee

Ah, that's the hard part. Yeah.

Kelsey

But hysterically this man still lives in the same neighborhood. And so everyone sees him all the time. And Aunt June is like, no one is allowed to talk to him. No one is allowed to like interact with him and she gets so mad whenever people like interact with him.

Sonalee

I'm so sorry. But I'm that gay person as well. Like my exes are—they're not your friends anymore. Leave them behind. I'm your friend.

Kelsey

Dead to me, dead to you.

Sonalee

Thank you. That's the least I can ask for

Kelsey

Yes, I love it that you're like identified but June so quickly. You're like, I agree. Woowoo good, angel numbers good. My ex? He's dead. Mina goes downstairs in her like mourning clothes, which are also too small. And her aunt June is there with her daughter, her cousin Angie. Mina and Angie have this kind of like, a relationship that I think is kind of common amongst cousins that are close where they are, like very intimate, but also, like, give each other shit all the time.

Sonalee

Oh, yeah, that's definitely me and my cousins.

Kelsey

Is it?

Sonalee

Yeah, we're currently in each other's shit right now. I don't wanna talk about it. [laughs]

Kelsey

[laughs] Are you the one who's being given shit? Is that why you don't wanna talk about it?

Sonalee

No, Kelsey! Maybe a little bit.

Kelsey

I'm sorry that's happening to you. Mina comes into the kitchen. Her aunt and her cousin are sitting there. Her aunt is spoon feeding Angie soup.

Sonalee

No, that's this. Something's wrong.

Kelsey

Angie is 23 years old. Well, Mina is like Hello, Angie. And Angie is like Hello, Mina. And then her aunt leaves and Mina's like I see that your mom is still spoon feeding you.

Sonalee

Okay, we're already getting into bullying.

Kelsey

Angie, she's like, Oh, I see that you're still wearing slacks from 2008.

Sonalee

Oh, she got you good, she got you Mina. Retreat!

Kelsey

And Mina's like how's med school by the way?

Sonalee

Oh, Mina.

Kelsey

And Angie's like, really good, thanks. How's girl-bossing?

Sonalee

oh my god, who's gonna win? This is a nail biter

Kelsey

And Mina it's like it's great. Thanks. But their bonding is cut off by the will reading. It is time.

Sonalee

Oh my god. It's time.

Kelsey

Oh, you sat up at attention. You're prepared.

Sonalee

I want her to get those hair clips.

Kelsey

Everyone gets something. This is like a pretty equitable will. Right? Like people are getting things based on their position in the family. But also they're just like, everyone's getting something. But Aunt June gets the hairpins. And so Mina is like oh man, like, I really loved those and I wanted them but like, I didn't ask for them. So I like can't really be that unhappy.

Sonalee

Okay, she's fair.

Kelsey

But that night, June comes downstairs and it's like, has anybody seen the golden hairpins that I inherited? Mina's like, oh, the ones like with the charms on the end of them? And June's like, yeah, yeah. The ones with the charms. They're like engraved. They're long. They're gold. And Mina's like, oh, yeah, I saw those yesterday on the dresser, right. Like, I saw them. They were there on the dresser with a bunch of other stuff. Aunt June is like great. She goes up there. They are not there.

Sonalee

Ah! Somebody stole them!

Kelsey

She's like, they're missing. Somebody took them. She's like, they're also gold. So they're worth a lot of money. And also, they're beautiful.

Sonalee

Well, yeah, they're beautiful.

Kelsey

She's like, whoever stole them. She's looking directly at Mina. And she's like, whoever stole them needs to give them back.

Sonalee

Don't accuse my client before you have any evidence. Mina is innocent.

Kelsey

Mina is innocent. Like she's like, I have no idea where these hairpins are. She's like, why are you looking at me? And June's like you're the one who knew where they were, so like, where are they now?

Sonalee

Oh no, don't accuse her. You have no evidence to accuse her.

Kelsey

Mina's like I don't know where they are. But Aunt June does not believe her. The next day there are still no hairpins. June is turning the house upside down. While like Mina's mom is planning everything for the funeral. Mina is like helping look but like to no avail. Like no hairpins. They're looking all day. And then at like twilight, her aunt—you know, would like someone in your family notices something wrong in your appearance. And they kind of like stop.

Sonalee

You're like, oh my god, what is it?

Kelsey

Yeah. Yes. June is like walking around looking for these hairpins and she like passes Mina in the hall. And she like kind of like stops and it's like, balking a little at her appearance.

Sonalee

Oh no

Kelsey

Mina's like, what? Like, what she's like, I know my clothes look weird, but like, what is it? And June is like, there's a spirit in you. You're haunted.

Sonalee

Oh my God. That's the worst possible thing someone could have said to me, because I believe that shit. I am at a, I'm about a 10 level scared.

Kelsey

Okay, you're terrified

Sonalee

because I obviously believe her. She's already woowoo. Yeah.

Kelsey

And June like is going away. Right? She's still like looking for hairpins. So Mina does not have time to ask her questions. She goes directly to her cousin. And she's like, your mom is joking, right? Like, I'm not haunted, right? And Angie is like, I don't know, dude, she doesn't really joke about things like that

Sonalee

Dang, Angie is really trying to get to her

Kelsey

And Mina's like, but it's not like real right? Like, I'm not haunted. Like that's not real? And Angie is like, I don't know, man. Like it might be real. What, what do you do?

Sonalee

I mean, I because I believe in that stuff. I you know, I light incense and I try to keep my shit clear. We're, I don't want to bring anything around with me.

Kelsey

No, she also has a problem where she's like, I'm not really familiar with the culture. Right? So she's like, true. Her first question is like, could haunting be good?

Sonalee

And you're right, because Muslims believe that djinns, they're all kinds. There are like mischievous ones. And like, they're not all evil demonic

Kelsey

Right. So she's like, could the ghosts in this culture be good, actually, and maybe I'm blessed. Who knows. So she goes to her Aunt June and she's like, Aunt June, quick question, is being haunted bad, or is the ghost like friendly?

Sonalee

Casper?

Kelsey

And June is like, it is very bad.

Sonalee

Okay, no, I don't, I don't know if I believe June.

Kelsey

She's like, I don't think that it's good. And I think that you should not be haunted.

Sonalee

Okay, so I'm worried that June is going to be selling her a remedy.

Kelsey

And Mina's like, what do I do? And June's like, I'm very busy right now. Like, I'm trying to find these hairpins but like, I can help you before you leave. And Mina's like, okay, but at night, it's like, worse, right? Like any creak she's jumping at.

Sonalee

Of course, poor thing is scared.

Kelsey

She's scared. She like won't take the dog out at night because she's like, I don't want to go out there. Breezes are like giving her goosebumps. She's walking up the stairs to go to bed that night. And she hears like, a whispering voice.

Sonalee

Me: level 10 scared.

Kelsey

She like tries to focus. And it's like saying something but because she's like, never learned the language and only has like a few words, she's like, rice bathroom, like what? She like can't she cannot decipher and she's like, now I'm scared. And I'm demoralized. Like the ghost is like making fun of me. I'm being haunted by a bully. Right? Like

Sonalee

it's the worst case scenario.

Kelsey

She gets into her bed and you know how your bed is safe? You're like, if I'm in my bed, I'm safe, actually?

Sonalee

Obviously! Under the covers is the safest.

Kelsey

Yeah, so she gets in the bed and she's like, Thank God I'm here under the covers. I'm safe. And then her body is like [gurgling noise]

Sonalee

Oh no. Hungry or bloating?

Kelsey

Maybe... she could poop.

Sonalee

Oh, oh

Kelsey

she's not sure this but she is scared because she's like, Okay, I have been bloated for days. It would be a huge relief to be able to poop. But also I'm pretty sure the ghost said bathroom.

Sonalee

Oh! Ghost did say bathroom. And rice.

Kelsey

And rice. What do you do?

Sonalee

Well, I'm going to be lighting every light, turning on every light that I can on the route from here to the bathroom. And also playing a little music.

Kelsey

Oh! What is the, what's the music going to do?

Sonalee

You know it it hopefully will muffle any future ghostly whispers

Kelsey

okay, I love that plan. Mina like turns on all the lights her room

Sonalee

Correct. Safest.

Kelsey

She's like, but I have to go down the hallway to get to the bathroom and like there are people sleeping, like I can't turn all the lights on in the hallway. That's rude.

Sonalee

Sure, very considerate of her.

Kelsey

She's like going very quickly to the bathroom when she feels like something on the back of her neck.

Sonalee

I am terrified. What is it a spider? Is it? Is it a ghost? Is it the haunted spirit? Is it her own hair?

Kelsey

I liked that when I said this, you leaned back.

Sonalee

What if it's in front of me? It's so scary.

Kelsey

Mina gets into the bathroom. She turns on all the lights

Sonalee

smart. brilliant.

Kelsey

She locks the door behind her. Who knows if that will help but safety first. She's in there for many minutes. She does not poop. She's like all of this has been awful.

Sonalee

Oh, I feel so bad. All of this for nothing.

Kelsey

Now she must face the scary hallway again.

Sonalee

Oh no.

Kelsey

She opens the door. It's so dark. She's like, I'm just gonna go really fast.

Sonalee

Okay, she's so brave.

Kelsey

She's so brave. She's darting to her room when she sees the door to Angie's room shutting, like very slowly and she's like, Angie!!

Sonalee

That little witch

Kelsey

So she goes in there and she's like ANGIE! and Angie is like giggling in her bed. Like she's having a real laugh. And Mina gets in there and she's like, god dammit. She's like, Angie stop pranking me. She's like I was really scared. And Angie's like, heeheeheehee, gotcha. And Mina's like that was really good. Like the whispering and Angie's like I liked the whispering, like I thought it was a nice touch.

Sonalee

I love a good prank

Kelsey

and Mina's like how did you do that? Like fingers on my neck? And Angie's like, the what?

Sonalee

[gasp]

Kelsey

and Mina is like I felt like a brush on my neck when I went to the bathroom. How did you do that? And she's like, I didn't do that.

Sonalee

Angie don't say this to me. Don't say this to me right now.

Kelsey

Mina's like, please, don't make me go back to my room. I don't want to go back in the hallway. And she's like, You don't have to go back to your room, stay in my bed with me. It's too scary out there. They sleep in their little bed bunked up

Sonalee

Oh, very cute

Kelsey

Today is the third day after the death. So it is like time for the cremation time for all of these events. Mina wakes up. She's exhausted. She got no sleep. Angie is also exhausted. She got no sleep. June comes in to wake up her daughter. And she's like, Mina, what are you doing in here? And Mina's, like, Oh, I just slept here last night, and June's like you're gonna rub your haunting off on my baby, like get out of the bed. And Mina's like, I did not know I could do that. That was not my intention.

Sonalee

Rub a little harder, Mina!

Kelsey

Yeah, at the same time, she's like, rubbing her shoulder against Angie like, I would never do that. The whole day is chaos. And it's like, it's chaos, the way all family gatherings are chaos, right? Like, it's more painful, because like the body is moving. And it's believed that on the third day, when it crosses the house threshold, it like enters the afterlife. So it's like mourning, but it's also celebratory. There's a spreading of ashes. There's like all of these family events. And there is like a kind of direness to any funeral. Right? That feels like really bleak. But also when you're with your family, everyone is behaving insanely. So it's also very funny. So like, they're on their way to the scattering and they wrote they passed June's ex on the street and he waves and like a few people in the funeral party wave back and she's like freaking out about it, right?

Sonalee

I have an aunt like this, and you just never know what she's gonna say. Especially at a funeral.

Kelsey

You never know. And Mina's mom is like, our mother is dead. Like, please focus. And June is like, I can't focus when there are members of this family that do not support me. They are crossing me. They're crossing me and my desires. And everyone in this family is like, Oh my god. After the scattering of ashes, they do this like kind of deranged thing in this family where all the things that aren't in the will can be like chosen one by one. So it's kind of a like, unhinged white elephant. Yeah, but all the things not in the will are like the weird things right? It's like her skis. Her like corn on the cob holders, right? Like her pillow right? It's like not things that you want.

Sonalee

I'm the kind of weirdo that's the kind of stuff that I want to say.

Kelsey

I'm like I do actually want that weird pillow that has like an embroidered saying on it. Give it to me.

Sonalee

I want the little towel rack. That's like 90s americana and says home yeah, home on it.

Kelsey

I want Yes. Oh, my grandparents have a wooden coat rack. I will take it. Thank you. Dibs. So this is what's going on. And the whole time at June is like, well, I should get to go more than once because I don't have my hair pins.

Sonalee

I do feel like that's fair.

Kelsey

Everyone is like you're being so annoying, like you're being insanely annoying. Like, all day you've been like, Don't wave at my ex. Don't talk to my ex, like, talk to me about why you talk to my ex. And now you're like, I get to go again. So they're all like, Fine, just go again, like no one cares. Let her go. So she's going doing all of her things. Mina cannot worry about this, because the whole day, Mina is cold. And she keeps turning to other people and being like, Are you cold? And everyone's like, No, we're not cold. She asks Angie, she's like, Angie, are you cold? I feel really cold. And Angie's like, Is it because you're wearing an express skirt suit from 2008?

Sonalee

Oh my God. The way Angie is reading her filth, it's in that way that a cousin can really only truly cut you down.

Kelsey

It's a talent and also a terror. Mina's like, No, I don't think it's because I'm wearing an express skirt suit from 2008. I think it's because I'm haunted.

Sonalee

Not 2008

Kelsey

The next day, they're supposed to leave like get back on the plane and go back to London. Okay, what do you do? You're maybe haunted. You're about to leave. Your mother has no idea what's going on about any of this and also her mom just died?

Sonalee

I am contacting whatever spiritual shaman I can in that town to get a little mini ceremony done. Get that shit out.

Kelsey

Do you tell your mom?

Sonalee

Yeah, definitely.

Kelsey

How do you tell her? What do you tell her?

Sonalee

Mom, your sister your kooky ass sister told me that I'm haunted and I need your help to take care of it.

Kelsey

Yeah, Mina is like, mom in the morning. She's like, Mom, I have some things to talk to you about. And her mom's like, Okay, what's up? And she's like, first off, I'm very, very constipated. Do you have anything for that? And her mom's like, Yes, I have many things for that. I will help you first. She's like, great. Okay, thank you for helping me solve that problem. Um, problem number two is that I may be haunted. And her mom is like, what? And Mina's like, yeah, I was like, really cold all day yesterday. And also I felt some fingers on me in the hallway. And her mom's like, What are you talking about? But her mom is like, also, you know, open to the idea of her being haunted, but she's like, where did you get this idea? Right? Like, where is this coming from? And she's like, well, you know, Aunt June stopped me in the hall and said that I was maybe haunted. And her mom is like UGHHHH, because all week her mom has been planning this whole funeral, while June looks for her hairpins. And now June has told her daughter that she's haunted.

Sonalee

When you put it like that, it's kind of mean.

Kelsey

So her mom is like June is being very annoying. But June is also the mystical one. So like it's possible you are haunted. So she's like, Let's go talk to my sister. They go into the kitchen. June is spoon feeding her daughter again.

Sonalee

This is so weird

Kelsey

And Mina is like making baby face at her right like Ooh, baby. And her mom is like, June. Did you tell my daughter that she was cursed? And June is like, I did not say she was cursed. I said she was haunted.

Sonalee

Okay that's true. She did say haunted

Kelsey

and her mom's like, Oh my god. Okay. Did you tell my daughter that she's haunted and June's? Like, yes. Because she is. And her mom's like, okay, June. are you pitching a little fit for attention? Or is my daughter actually haunted?

Sonalee

Good question.

Kelsey

And June's like, I believe that she's haunted. Mina's mom is like, okay. We're leaving today. You are traumatizing my daughter. What are we supposed to do here? And June is like, I mean, I told her I would help her if she asked.

Sonalee

Gasp!

Kelsey

Do you ask your aunt June for help?

Sonalee

This is a tough one. Mina has to be open to it. Because how who else is going to help her find a shaman to get rid of it?

Kelsey

Yeah, exactly. Mina is like, on the one hand. Maybe my aunt would be less mad at me if I allowed her to help me. And also then maybe I would not be haunted forever. Right. Like there's a, that's the plus side to that. That seemed like Right. Yeah, that seems good. She's like the downsides are you know, maybe my aunt is making it up. Because she's mad about the hairpins and maybe I'm not haunted at all.

Sonalee

Very small possibility of that. I think the haunting is definitely real, I'm feeling

Kelsey

Mina is like yeah, June please. Will you help me and her aunt June is like, yes, come with me. And then she has all of these things that she has incense. She has little tools. She has all of this stuff. She's like walking around Mina, she's doing all of her little witchy aunt behaviors

Sonalee

Wow, decked out

Kelsey

Mina is like I've been in here for maybe two weeks, right? Like I've been in here for 1000s of years inside this little aura of aunt June trying to fix me. And then suddenly aunt June kneels in front of her, and is like, the spirit is leaving.

Sonalee

That's all it took? Now I'm suspicious.

Kelsey

Mina is also suspicious, but she's also like, Oh my God, thank God. She's like, thank you so much. I'm so grateful. I do not wish to be haunted anymore. And her aunt is like, okay, great.

The spirit is removed from you, but like, there are some things you need to do to keep the spirit away.

Sonalee

Interesting. Okay.

Kelsey

And you know, Mina's like, Okay, I will do whatever it is. Tell me. And June's like first thing is do not walk under any clotheslines

Sonalee

Interesting. I wonder how often that must happen in the UK

Kelsey

Mina is like I literally live in a big city. That is not going to be an issue. We have dryers. Thing number two, aunt June is like always check your reflection in the mirror to make sure that your reflection is blinking at the same speed as you.

Sonalee

That's creepy.

Kelsey

It's also hard to check, right? Because like when you're blinking, your eyes are closed.

Sonalee

Oh, wow. Yeah, that's real.

Kelsey

So for years, I want you to imagine that Mina is like taking videos on her iPhone of her blinking in the mirror and then checking them to make sure that the blinks are the same.

Sonalee

So a new phobia really has been planted, a new anxiety

Kelsey

and the new anxiety is so specific and also makes you look weird, because like, if you're at a bar and have three drinks, and then you're very close to the mirror blinking people are gonna be like, What's wrong with her?

Sonalee

We need to get her some help.

Kelsey

The other thing the last thing June tells her to do to keep the spirit away is to apply a serum to the bottom of her feet every night.

Sonalee

Wow, this is difficult regimen.

Kelsey

And Mina is like great. I'll do it. I hate being haunted. Where do I get the serum? And June's like, I have some. It's \$60

Sonalee

Oh, oh my god. There it is. I'm angry because this was all a ploy to sell some Mary Kay!

Kelsey

It's an MLM for Sarab

Sonalee

this is an Herbalife based on haunting

Kelsey

or it's not. That's the problem, right? Is it's like, the minute someone is like, I need money from you to help you with this, an alarm should go off in your head, right?

Sonalee

Absolutely

Kelsey

And the alarm goes off very quickly in Mina's mother's head and she is like, do not give my sister money. Do not put serums on your feet. Stop it. And Mina is like, but on the off chance that I was haunted. And maybe I still am haunted? Should I just get it like it's \$60? What do you think?

Sonalee

It's hard, because do I feed the beasts and buy the first bottle? And will it be a slippery slope to a second and third bottle?

Kelsey

Mina is like, how long will the serum last me? And her aunt's like oh, it should last you at least a year. And Mina's like oh, okay, well, if it's gonna last me a year, and it's only \$60 like on the off chance I am haunted, yes, I will take it. Thank you. And her mom is like, Oh my God.

Sonalee

It's really an investment in her spiritual safety.

Kelsey

Yeah. And you know what, sometimes we do rituals that are maybe not real because they make us feel good. Mina takes her serum, she packs it in her bag, they fly back home. She makes it home. Things are going well. She keeps checking her blinking in the mirror and the blinking is the same. So she's like, everything's fine. Also, she poops finally. She's like, this is great.

Sonalee

Amazing. We love this for her.

Kelsey

A couple of months later, she goes over to her mom's house for dinner. And she's like, I'm so happy to be here. She's eating her mom's food. It's really great. She's like, Oh, do you have this like thing that I need? And her mom's like, oh, yeah, it's in my room. So she goes into her mom's room and they're on the dresser are the gold hairpins.

Sonalee

I'm aghast!

Kelsey

What do you do?

Sonalee

I wonder if Vera very altruistically stole them for Mina. Because Mina did this big favor for her, which is very kind of her. But I'm definitely taking the hairpins downstairs and I'm confronting my mom.

Kelsey

You are

Sonalee

absolutely

Kelsey

How are you going to confront her? You're grabbing these little hair pins in your hand.

Sonalee

I'm dangling them in her face being like, What the fuck are these? When did you take them?

Kelsey

Mina does this. She grabs the hairpins. She goes downstairs. She's like, Mom, what are these? And her mom's like, Oh, those are your grandmother's gold hairpins. And Mina's like, yes, I've got that. But weren't these aunt June's in the will? And her mom's like, well, she clearly didn't value them that much, because it was so easy to steal them.

Sonalee

The mental gymnastics that sisters do to like justify our mean bad things that we do.

Kelsey

Yes. Mina is like, she's looking at her mom also, and her mom has like a sensible permed hair cut. She's like, you have short hair. Like why did you even steal these? You can't even use them. And her mom's like, I like them. I want to have them

Sonalee

Okay, that's deranged. That's haunted behavior. I'm sorry.

Kelsey

What do you do with this information? Anything?

Sonalee

I mean, Mina deserves to get to keep them because Mina, I imagine doesn't have short hair. And also really liked them. Yeah.

Kelsey

Do you tell your cousin?

Sonalee

Never I take that secret to my grave. Yeah.

Kelsey

Mina is like, Well, mom, like, What are you even gonna use these hairpins for? Like, I know that you say you like them, but like, I could use them.

Sonalee

Oh, Mm hm.

Kelsey

And her mom is like, you know, you could borrow them. And Mina's like, thank you. And so Mina takes the hairpins and she wears them to work and everyone loves them.

Sonalee

Yay. It's a happy ending for Mina.

Kelsey

We are at the end. How do you feel? Whose side are you on?

Sonalee

I'm on Mina's side. Mina really came out on top. She got to visit her homeland. She saw her matriarch of the family pass. She took part in all these rituals to spend time with her cousin. And

she came out with the thing that she really wanted the whole time, which was the hairpins. Now June was out of pocket lately, but I really respect her hustle. You respect that she was willing to lie, cheat and scam in order to sell \$60 serum.

Kelsey

Yeah. She lied, cheated and scammed and then Mina's mom stole all of them. Between the two of them. We have all of them.

Sonalee

You know we really got most of the sins covered.

Kelsey

Do you want to hear my final updates?

Sonalee

Oh, yeah.

Kelsey

Okay. So Mina is wearing the hairpins for months, right? She's going to work. They look so pretty. She loves them. Then like a whole year after her grandmother passes. Her aunt texts in group chat with Mina, Mina's mom and her cousin Angie. And she's like, Mina. I just wanted to say like, I'm so sorry for accusing you of stealing the hairpins. Like, that was wrong of me. I was really out of pocket. I forgot that like my mother had lent the hairpins to her sister. And then when I saw her sister recently, she brought them back to me. So now I have them and like I'm so sorry for accusing you. That was really wrong of me.

Sonalee

What? Okay, not only am I shocked that an elder has apologized to a child—

Kelsey

Like, never happens.

Sonalee

Hell has frozen over. it's the rarest pokemon you can get.

Kelsey

But also, Mina is like, I have these hairpins on my head.

Sonalee

I'm wearing them right now.

Kelsey

Uh huh. What do you what do you do here?

Sonalee

Again, I'm lying. And I'm taking those hairpins to my own casket.

Kelsey

Mina is like, oh my god, can we see them? Like send a picture?

Sonalee

Genius. Mina, always thinking two steps ahead.

Kelsey

And her aunt is like, of course, and she sends the hairpins and they do look different than the ones that Mina has, like, they look very different, actually. And Mina's like, Ha, that's weird. And now she's like, well, if those are the hair pins, what are these? Oh, so she's like, Oh, that's so weird. Like my mom actually found hairpins recently in a bag that she had taken on that trip and like, Do you know what these are? And she sends a photo of her hairpins into this group chat message.

Sonalee

Whoa, that's bold.

Kelsey

And they're all like, huh, those seem to be hairpins that are gold also. And like our mother also had those. That's strange. Sonalee.

Sonalee

Kelsey

Kelsey

Do you know what an ear spoon is?

Sonalee

No.

Kelsey

Okay. A ear spoon is a long stick that has a little at the end of it like a little concave cup.

Sonalee

No, there's not.

Kelsey

And you put that little concave cup into your ear—

Sonalee

no you don't!

Kelsey

—while you remove the earwax from it and what Mina has been wearing in her hair for years are two gold plated ear spoons.

Sonalee

I'm reeling. Horrifying. This is why we have to care to learn about our cultures and our cultural histories. Because how did no one tell me that that was.... What the hell... an ear spoon?

Kelsey

Ear spoons. How do you feel now?

Sonalee

There's a little bit of disappointment is what Mina has been wearing in her hair for months now. But also, okay, it's silly and quirky. And fun.

Kelsey

Yeah, Mina is kind of like, you know what? I still think they're beautiful. I still think that they look like hairpins. And no one can stop me from wearing them in my hair.

Sonalee

And she's right about that. Because it's it's Ariel with the fork, you know, no one.

Kelsey

Like, look at this stuff, isn't it neat? Wouldn't you say my collection's complete. The other updates I have for you is that since she has been using the foot serum and not walking under clotheslines and checking her blinking, Mina has had no more paranormal interactions.

Sonalee

That is very relieving to hear.

Kelsey

But she is still checking very carefully to make sure. Sonalee, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. It was a delight to have you!

Sonalee

Kelsey, the story was incredible. Thank you for having me.

Kelsey: This podcast was produced by Alex Sujong Laughlin and Ozzy Llinas Goodman. Justin Ellis is Defector's Projects Editor. Jasper Wang and Sean Kuhn are Defector's business guys. Tom Ley is our Editor in Chief. Jae Towle Vieira is our associate producer. Abigail Siegel is our intern. Dan McQuade runs our merch store, which you can find at normalgossip.store. Tara Jacoby designed our show art. Thank you to Jasper Wang, Kathryn Xu, Patrick Redford, Israel Daramola, Ray Ratto, Chris Thompson, David Roth, Dave McKenna, and Luis Paez Pumar for

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