

RAHIM'S STORY

- Muksood Shaikh

Every morning at 8.45 from Monday to Friday, Rahim would be looking out of Buygrave Centre's reception window. Day after day, week after week. When I looked out of the window, I could not make out what he was looking out for. I could see young people coming out of the estate and on their way to the different schools in Tower Hamlets. Some would arrive a few minutes before him and I'd look out to see what I may or may not have missed, but I could not find any clues.

When I could not suss, I pulled him and asked.

"I'm waiting for my mate."

"What, all dressed up and smelly like you had a bath in aftershave?"

He did look the part, but then Rahim could look the part if he was wearing a greasy pair of mechanic's overalls. That was thing about Rahim, he could be naked and have style; that's what made him stand out from his peers. All the girls, well, nearly all, were attracted to him. He was the boy they never took the piss out of. The only thing they could get out of Rahim was the clothes.

They would borrow his shirts, jeans, hat, jumpers everything but his underpants. In return, at every Christmas, birthday, and Valentine's Day, Rahim was given presents of clothes, aftershave, gold bracelets, chains and cards. Peers took the piss to hide their envy.

"The dog must want you bad Rahim."

Rahim would stare at the joker with silent, mean, street looks. The joker would know that was the time to stop.

Rahim was not one of these guys that you wanted to push for answers. He was too soft, and I had a hidden admiration for him. He stood out from the rest of the young people, the things he would do, like help old people or young children cross Post Road. It did not matter what their colour was. He'd hold up the traffic on both sides, and when the traffic had stopped, Rahim would wave the children across the road.

In the winter, when the snow was hard and slippery it was him who would volunteer to take the pensioners from the old people's home across the road from Buygrave Centre. I remember them, slow and careful steps as he guided, the advice he gave and took.

"You got wrap up with a few layers, or the cold starts eating into you."

"You studying hard boy? You get yourself a good education. Don't mess about boy."

"Ah, ain't he sweet."

His peers saw this as so wacky that some people thought he was doing it for kicks. I must admit, I too thought the same sometimes. He was doing things that middle class nurses do. Job satisfaction, you know, that Salvation Army stuff, but without the ego, without the religion, without the reward, without the cause.

One morning I see Rahim ducking under the reception window, I make out I don't notice him and run into my office and look out of the window. I see Abdul talking to his cousin, Amira, I think now I suss. It must have been one heavy-duty thunderbolt that hit Rahim. The routine of Rahim looking out of the window, waiting for Amira to go by, then Rahim's smile bouncing about in the reception. It went on and on for months and months.

Then, one morning, I see Rahim booted and suited in a black suit and smelling like he must have soaked himself and his clothes in about dozen or so different brands of aftershave. This is got to be it; he's finally cracked it. I run into to my office, look out of the window and see Amira. She's not on the other side of the road. She's on the Buygrave Centre side. She stops right at the window looks around, then she faces the window, smiles and flicks her hair like she was at home looking at her reflection in the mirror. She looks around again, drops a handkerchief and walks on.

Rahim walks out of Buygrave Centre looks up at the sky for a weather check, then looks, sees the handkerchief, looks right and left, and then picks up the handkerchief and walks in the opposite direction to Amira. That ain't the way to play it, Rahim, I say to myself. She's given him the trail to follow. I wanna tell him, but I ain't supposed to know. I wonder what he's gonna do with that handkerchief. Just as Rahim is about to turn the corner, I see Belinda and Sharon run up to Rahim. They look like they are arguing with Rahim, the girls are pointing in the direction of Amira. Rahim backs up to the wall. They move forward. He flicks his wrist and his hand moves in a feminine way, like one of those camp comedians. Belinda grabs Rahim, the front of his shirt collar, and starts to pull forward, Sharon tries to pull his arm and Rahim is still trying to flick his hand at Belinda.

"Alright Azim. Listen bro, would you do a me favour," Rahim says.

"Yeah, man," I reply.

"You promise you won't tell Abdul."

"If it ain't anything hooky, sure I will."

"Give this note to Sharon."

"You ain't going out with her?"

"No way, bro. Listen, Azim, you promise you won't tell Abdul."

"Hey fuck, take your note back."

"Be cool, Azim."

"Yeah, cool and things. I'm heading off to Cheer House," I say.

"You going anywhere near Rainbow Girls' School?"

"Yeah. Don't tell me you finally found a girl that don't frighten you."

We jump in and head towards Millmoney Road.

"So who's the girl you're going to meet? You got a raincoat for when it pours."
"What you on about, Azim. It ain't gonna rain."
"Condoms, bro, is what I'm talking about."
"Azim, you got a real dirty mind. You've been hanging around with the wrong kind of people, bro."
"You is going to meet a bird right? So therefore you must be shagging her, right?"
"Oh my Lord, you one nasty gezza, Azim."
"Ain't nothing wrong in having sex, bro, so as long as you're both protected."
"Bro, I ain't doing them things til I'm married."
"Yeah, yeah. Who's the girl you meeting?"
"If I tell you, promise you won't tell Abdul."
"What the fuck you worried about him for? You can beat the shit out of him with one arm tied behind your back."
"Abdul is like my older brother. His family have been good to me. They took me in when my older brother threw me out onto the streets."
"Don't tell me it's Abdul's cousin, Amira."
"Hey bro, keep it to yourself. Just you and Sharon know."
"So how long you been going out with her? And how come Abdul don't know? You been best of mates since primary school."
"I told Abdul a month ago. He's been blanking me ever since. Him and his uncle and cousins even threatened to beat me up if I go anywhere near Amira."
"Man, you two taking some chances seeing each other."
"I ain't want her to get into trouble with her family. All I do is look at her from a distance. If we're seen together they'll lock her up indoors."
"Is that who's the note's for?"
"Yeah, Sharon will pass it on to Amira, and hopefully Amira will send a note for me."
"Sharon still going out with Vijay?"
"Vijay finished with her. He got what he was after."
"What's that?"
"You know."

We reach the old people's home right opposite the school. Rahim looks around, he ain't too sure what to do.

"What you doing gezz," I say.

"I don't want anyone to see me. If it gets back to Abdul she'd really be in trouble."

"Fuck him. He ain't a virgin."

"Please, Azim, don't tell anyone about me and Amira."

"Don't worry bro. I ain't saying jack."

There are young Asian men right on the gate or outside waiting for their Sridevi, Pooja Butt, or whoever to come out of the school gates. Then they will make Hindi movies together. Rahim steps out and crouches down, sidesteps along the pavement, finds his spot between a van and car and stands behind the van.

I press the lift button for the fifth floor. Instead of finding my way to the meeting, I look out of the window to get up to date with Rahim's date. I watch Rahim staring at the

school gates on the opposite side of the road. Large and small groups of girls walk out, hair being flicked or pushed back, eyes popping this way and that way. Bags taken from one side of the shoulder to the next. Conversations turn into slugging matches, taps on backs, heads, shoulders, showing their mates who's outside the gates. They spot their hero and follow the scent. The groups of young women coming out of the school get thinner, and the young men have floated off. Amira walks out with three young women and Rahim ducks this time behind the car's wing mirror. All four stand outside the gates, then Amira waves them goodbye and starts to walk down along Millmoney Road. Rahim looks over the bonnet of the car, looks right and left, stands up, another look all round, and walks in her direction on the opposite side of the road.

A few minutes later Amira crosses over as if she knows where and when they're gonna meet. Rahim checks her move and speeds up his pace. Amira turns her head and watches Rahim cross over. He catches the full view of her face. His shoulders spring up and his heart pumps out a smile. His forehead wrinkles up, creases of worries, soon they unfold like his feelings, just as sails of a boat move on a calm sea. She stops and watches Rahim cross over. When his feet touch the pavement, she knows he's touched the shore. She turns her head and gives a look to Rahim. They stand five or six feet apart, the distance of respect.

She says words. Rahim's shoulders and head drop. She walks towards him. She, reaching into her bag, takes out a handkerchief, and with the other hand lifts his chin up then wipes away the long line of tears, from his eyes to his chin.

Car brakes are slammed and a blue ford Grenada rocks to a halt. It's Abdul. His cousin, Zakir, and two African-Caribbean blokes step out of the car. Zakir rushes up to Amira, grabs her by the hair and pushes her into the passenger's seat. He slams the door and shouts to her through the open window. "Stay there, slag." Zakir then pulls a blade from his jacket and stands next to Abdul. The other two blokes are on each side of Rahim's shoulders, Abdul gives Rahim long hard stares, then says some words. Rahim holds out the palms like he was saying "I got no weapons." No, it's not that. Rahim raises the hands to each of his ears and holds each ear lobe with thumb and index finger. I remember kids doing that back home when they were saying sorry to the parent, teacher, Mullah, or some elder. Rahim shakes his head. Abdul slaps his face. Rahim tilts his head forward and down. Abdul, Zakir, and the two blokes get back into the car and drive away.

I run out to the pavement, "Rahim, bro, what's all that about?"

He stares at me with burning red eyes, tears purr. The silence says if there was no storm, I would have found the shore. The light in his eyes has been blown out. Winter's cold chills his tears, the colours of hope fade and decay in front of my eyes.

"Zakir is bad. Why? She is pure. She is his family. Why, Azim? Why bro?"

"He'll cool down."

"Azim, you got to stop him from hurting Amira. Tell them I'll doing anything, honest bro. Anything."

"Come back to the office, and I'll have a word with Abdul."

"No, no Abdul told me to stay away from the estate or I'm dead. He'll take it out on Amira."

"Come let's move from here."

"No, Azim. I got be on my own."

"So you don't want me to say anything to Abdul?"

"No, Azim, don't say a word."

Abdul has always said good things about Rahim. He was the only one that Abdul never put down. Some people say Abdul helped Rahim when he was living on the streets, took him in for a while.

I thought I knew Abdul Din Nero when it came to young people having relationships. He's always been the first to criticise Bangladeshi elders for holding back their children in developing relationships. But he also took the piss out of what he preached. He liked to put it about; you know, dip his stick. Abdul was fuck-wise. In his times, as he would say, the Asian birds would give up so easily so you had to hype 'em up a bit. Talk about engagement rings and shit. Next thing you know, the salwars would drop easy. After a while, it was just a fucking game. And all the time he'd be pretending to his prey it was something else.

Abdul always took time out to explain about his role getting Rahim off the streets. It was Abdul that got Rahim to go home, and look after his mother who had been suffering from a metal breakdown ever since her husband walked out for another woman. Sometimes her mood would get so bad that she'd beat up Rahim who used to spend most of his time on the streets til the early hours of the morning, because it hurt him seeing his mum slip away from the world. His two older brothers had moved out to Dewsbury. They left it up to Rahim and the Social Services to look after their mum.

Abdul took him in as a friend about two years ago. Rahim put on weight, had a permanent smile on his face. He even enrolled at the local college and spent more time with his mum. But all this was down the gutter, because Abdul and his family had plans for Amira.

The next day I go out to find Abdul before he gets in the office. I figure it would be better to talk outside than at work. This time of morning he'll be in the John Bull cafe knocking down his favourite eggs and chips. Just as I'm about to go in, Abdul and Zakir come round the corner and we greet each other. We know something is up by the coded looks.

Abdul orders his usual, and me a cup of tea. We leave Zakir to order his and bring over the order.

"What was that stuff about with Rahim yesterday?"

"I had to make it clear that if Rahim goes anywhere near Amira, or even thinks about her, our family will destroy him," Abdul says.

"What's wrong with Rahim? Has he done something to offend someone?"

"He's offended us, our family. It's not about Amira. It's about our respect. Her parents will decide who and when she marries."

"Rahim would make a good husband."

"Look, Azim, me and you is friends, but this is outside our friendship. These matters are for my uncle."

"Yeah, but look back on Rahim, when has he ever messed around with girls? You and your mates go around pretending not to be Bangladeshi just so you stand better chance of pulling a non-Asian bird. Rahim was saying and singing it loud. You told me yourself about Rahim's wanting to stay a virgin til he was married. You told me how much you respected him for that. He's roots, man, while you and your peers play nothing but western and Hindi music, Rahim be playing tapes of bowla (folk music). Shit, he still can't sing the tune to western music."

No smile. No let up. This is a serious matter; check his face.

"Look, Azim, this a family matter. It's what my uncle wants, and what he says goes."

"Your uncle told you to take a few heavies? Why did you have to slap him up, when he was giving you respect?"

"I had to. He was out of order. He's been seeing my cousin for last six months. Why the fuck did he not say anything to me?"

"Probably he was scared, confused. And, anyway, yesterday was the first time he spoke with her."

"How do you know?"

"'Cos I trust Rahim to tell me the truth. And you trust your cousin to say the same."

"Trust got nothing to do with it now. Amira will not be allowed to go to school or college. There's no way she and Rahim will see each other."

Zakir comes over with the food. He hands Abdul his egg and chips. Abdul goes for the brown sauce. He lets the sauce drip onto his plate in wide thick lines. Abdul passes the bottle to Zakir. Zakir lifts up the top half of his roll. "Shit, a bacon roll," I say to myself.

"Your cousin Zakir taking the piss, eating that pig meat shit."

Zakir carries on munching into his bacon roll like I ain't said nothing.

I wonder what his father would say, being the chair of the Mosque Committee.

"Listen up, Abdul, Rahim is suffering. You and Zakir mean family to him. Man, promise you'll let come him back to Dockwell. Don't do him no harm, he's helped you out a lot in the past."

"What's it to you, what we do," says Zakir to me.

"Shut up, Zakir," says Abdul.

"Alright he can hang around, but nowhere near my flats. And he stays away from her."

Before Abdul got into youth work, when he was into thieving, he used Rahim to take all the risks, and it was Abdul who took the largest slice of the booty. Even during the start of Abdul's youth career, he got Rahim to sort out the youths who were doing crime or drugs. And now Abdul still wants to hog Rahim's life.

Sharon and Belinda walk into the office.

"Alright, Azim," says Sharon.

"All depends where your mum is," I reply.

"Ho, you still on about mum," kiss of teeth. "Don't take no notice of that silly bitch," says Sharon.

Sharon's parents are getting up my nose, last week Sharon's mum bullied her way past Tracy, Buygrave Centre's receptionist, and into my office.

"Where's my baby? 'Ere you that Azim," she says to me with hands on her hip and chest poking out like a pigeon.

"Azim, that's my name. What's your problem," I say in my best cockney accent, but that ain't enough. From when my words start till they finish, I eyeball her. I know her, I say to myself. Yeah, I remember her from the old clubbing days. It's Joan, and she knows I know. But we pretend we don't recognise each other.

"It's not right! Why should our daughters mix with Asian boys? Why can't the girls have their own sessions?"

"I think you wanna take it easy, Joan, or come back some other time," I say with my eyes still on hers.

She looks at me like she just sussed she's got shit on the sole of her shoes. Shit stains on her brand new carpet. Now she knows I know her.

"Look, the Paki boys have got their own youth clubs. Why ain't the white kids have their own?"

"You better ask the youth office, or Buygrave Centre MC," I say.

"Listen, you, if you let my Sharon into this club, it won't be the youth office that'll be sorting you out. It will be my husband and his mates, and their sons and mates. And they talk with their fists."

"Tell your husband him and his mates they're welcome to see me anytime, anyplace. Now just piss off."

Her sons and their BNP mates were responsible for the attack on Harun. They cut him up bad.

"Alright old man Azim. How you doing babe," says Belinda.

"Make your mind up Belinda, calling me old man, then babe," I say.

"Yeah, well, what's wrong with that? Old people can be babes, alright babe?"

Belinda looks at me with a smirk in her smile. She does what she usually does when she wins a argument, takes the tip of her chewing gum half way out of her mouth and stretches it out into a long thread with her fingers, then she lets go of the remainder of the gum and starts to spin the thread of gum around her index finger.

"How's Jake getting on with his detox at the clinic," I ask Belinda.

Belinda's 17-year-old brother has been using heroin for the last year-and-a-half. The drugs agency tried to convince the parents he was not ready and needed time before detox. Time enough for Jake to be a junkie. They prescribed methadone and that further

institutionalised him into addiction. I wonder how he's getting on out here, with so much heroin and crack being pushed on the estate.

Belinda has tried to keep many youths away from heroin and crack. She uses her brother's downfall as an example. Thing was, lately Belinda had taken to drinking every weekend, and now it's becoming a habit most evenings.

Belinda and Sharon and about four or six other girls hang around with Asian boys around their own age on the Estate. They regularly got into trouble with their parents about it. They got warnings, beatings, when that failed, they even played nicey-nicey with them. Many times, they got verbal abuse for being seen by their white brothers, and in some cases, even their older sisters. Then there was the Catholic schools they went to, and their classmates. "Oi, Paki-lover! fucking prostitute." That shit made Belinda and some of her mates rebel even more.

The Asian parents did they same. But they had the option of deporting their kids if they was getting out of line. That shit never worked either, except for a few.

"Er, old man I made you a bracelet. It might help you pull a babe," says Belinda handing me a multi-coloured bead bracelet. She was always making bracelets and necklaces. She wears dozen of 'em around her neck and wrists. To be given one of these bead things was like a membership card into her club. Belinda was careful and proud as to who was allowed to join, and if any of her members back-stabbed her, they was out and Belinda wasn't shy about taking her beads back.

"Yeah, thanks. I'll wear it down the Bingo Hall. There's an Age Concern party down there tonight. You reckon I'll pull?" I say to Belinda.

"Yeah course you will. Don't forget, play safe, and make sure she not after your Pension Book," replies Belinda.

"Leave him alone. He ain't old," says Sharon.

"Shut up you Ready-Brek bitch," says Belinda.

"What's it with the breakfast cereal names," I say to Belinda.

"Well look at Sharon. She got billions of freckles on her face, and her face is so off-white and blotchy it looks like a bowl of porridge. I'm sure she's the little girl on the Ready Brek box," says Belinda.

"Yeah well look at the size of your eyes, you fucking look like a frog, bitch," says Sharon.

"Yeah, and you look like an earthworm, titless and assless," says Belinda.

"Hold up, this ain't the playground. And speaking of playground, why ain't you at school," I say.

"We only got a few months left. We don't give a fuck now," says Sharon.

"We saw Rahim last night," says Belinda.

"Yeah? How is he? I ain't seen him for a few weeks," I say.

"He's out of his head on booze and draw all the time now."

"Rahim don't use drugs or alcohol. He's always been anti-drugs and drink," I don't ask why or how. It's just how it is around here, everyone is into painkilling.

"Tell Rahim I wanna see him."

"No, Azim. He's staying away from the area."

"No one will pull him. I've had a word."

"Look Azim, it takes more than these bastards round here to mess with Rahim," says Belinda.

"I heard. Tell Rahim from me no one will stop him from hanging around in Dockwell, so long as he stays away from Abdul's flats and his cousin Amira," I say.

"Yeah, well that's what cracking him up. Rahim and Amira had so many plans and now that ponce Abdul has fucked it all for them," says Sharon.

"Why don't Abdul stop his cousin Zakir from going out with girls? I suppose it's alright from him to shag girls," says Belinda.

"'Cos Zakir ain't a girl," says Sharon.

"Where's Rahim staying," I say.

"With Sajeev in some private posh block of flats in Dockwell," says Belinda.

"Sajeev's got flats and houses in Dockwell, and up the West End," says Sharon.

"Yeah, well, he can afford to with all that money he earns from heroin and crack. He's raking it in," says Belinda.

"That little shit is poisoning the kids around here," says Sharon.

"Well, he ain't the only one on the estate. Zakir and his mates, too. Everyone's at it," says Belinda.

"You're only saying that 'cos you fancy him," says Belinda. "You come and watch on the estate tonight, then you tell me who's serving up and who ain't."

"Zakir wouldn't have the guts to serve up, 'cos he knows Abdul will find out," says Sharon, "Abdul and Zakir always been in competition with Sajeev or anyone making money. They always fought each other to control the gangs and the money that goes with it," says Sharon.

"Abdul is not into all that crime and gangs. He stepped out of that a long time ago. He's earning money as youth worker. He's got good career in front of him. He wouldn't mess it up by letting Zakir serve up," I say.

"Well you're a fool, Azim," says Belinda.

"Listen, if you see Rahim tell him to phone me," I say.

"When you see Abdul, tell him Rahim says he can keep his half of the Renault car. All £500 as a sorry to him," says Belinda.

I hope Rahim doesn't stay with Sajeev too long. That piece of shit is one bad influence. Sajeev was eighteen. He was now one of the main dealers on the estate and maybe in the area. He started off selling £10 bags to kids, not to support his own habit, no, because Sajeev don't take any drugs. That's the worst kind of pusher; it's strictly money and more money with that kind of pusher. He made it quickly up the ladder. So fast that within year or so he was selling kilos of heroin. Wholesaler and retailer, and his network spread from East End to West End. Then there was the restaurant workers nationwide. Some say he had the protection from crime families in South London. Maybe.

The conflict that Abdul had with Rahim over his cousin got around. Zakir made sure it did. Don't-mess-with-us crap, he would give it to his pals. The big dealers, like Sajeev and Karim saw this conflict as a chance to swamp the estate with more crack and heroin, their targets becoming younger youths, or maybe it was a sign of the times.

Another rave and another message to the youths in Tower Hamlets. This rave been organised by the ANL, the message was smash the BNP, and come out and vote for Labour in May local elections. Fucking hype.

Tonight I was concerned about the politricks of the wannabe politicians. I was worried that there might be some trouble with Asian youths beating each other. The violence between gangs was getting out of hand. The last few months, youths have ended up in hospital, mentally and physically messed up for life.

I'm taking a big, stupid risk by being here at the rave tonight. If a fight breaks out between the gangs, things will get out of hand. The security at the door is like Mothercare's. The Stone Lane posse are out in full. They've got all the other gangs on their side, all except the Dockwell.

There must at least be 150 to 200 of 'em here. There are even some YMOs (Young Muslim Organisation) hiding their faces behind the smoke machine.

I need a smoke screen too, for when I need to have a spliff. I have to use the VIP (Very Important Pakis) room, my car, that's parked up downstairs and around the corner.

Abdul has blanked the rave. Tonight he's with Johnny B, Pig, Del-oy Slagg, and Omar Ballshit. They are planning another coup, or counter-coup, making and breaking promises to some wannabe.

Hell, shit, this music is driving me nuts! It's banging down in my brain. The repetitious beat is making me wanna go and punch the DJ's lights out.

Rahim and Keith walk into the rave. Rahim's grown a beard, and shaved his head. The short leather and sheepskin jacket he wears is torn at the top of the shoulder. Bits of sheep hang out of the tear like an open wound. Chino trousers are rolled up at the legs, and up to the knees. His trainers are so ripped up they look like sandals.

Keith was dressed as if he had just stripped down a C&A dummy: wax jacket and thick black cords, but seems like he picked the wrong dummy size.

Fuck, check Rahim's walk. He lays his chin back like he's almost balancing a broomstick on it. The chin and the neck turn left and right. His eyes point and pin down people that are staring at him. Rahim folds in his bottom lip and kisses his teeth, like he was spitting at them. Rahim and Keith park up their bodies against the wall. Keith

places his arms and hands behind his back like some old style Bill. Rahim brings his chin down and starts to rock his shoulders, up and down, his eyes closed. He bends his knees a little, the knees move forward and back again. His hands on each side of his waist. Rahim is dancing like he ain't got energy to waste. Even though the bass is thumping away at 1000 beats a second. Young Asian women walk up to him, some introducing their friends. Rahim nods his head as he tries to catch a smile or a look that might mean there's a chance.

The Stone Lane posse ain't getting much out of looking at the young women. They had rep as low-life. They were sometimes known as the STD posse. On top of that, most of the young women's boyfriends had been beaten up by Stone Lane gang members because of a relationship.

I heard Rahim was back on the estate. Some people were saying Rahim had ripped off Sajeev out of £90,000, but somehow I can't see that happening. Sajeev is too tricky to be had over. Keith let Rahim stay at his flat on the Everest Estate, both were doing small time burglary and robbing small, independent pushers. Both were using heroin and crack. Every now and then they would sell a bit of the stuff, but they would smoke up the profit. That was their downfall. What's that saying they use in the dope movies, never get high on your own supply?

Sajeev, Karim, and, Zakir also were busy trying to outdo each other in who could earn the most money out of the street outlets. These three were now using younger and younger kids to sell their dope. These kids attracted less attention from the police, they were also more likely to get off. Over-16s were likely to get longer sentences, and likely to grass. The competition among the big three was turning into hate and paranoia. This created conflicts that still go on til this day.

Stone Lane posse was weighing up Rahim and Keith, some throwing cusses over, others were creating war masks with their faces, and walking up and down doing the war dance. They want Rahim, when and where, inside or outside? Maybe there are too many young women talking to him. Maybe it was because Rahim was out of Dockwell. Or is it the occasion, dark lights, music, drugs, alcohol, women, king of the castle crap...

Yeah, I smell and feel it: it's gonna kick off. I walk over to Rahim and Keith who are acting like they ain't seen me, or don't recognise me.

"Listen up Rahim," Rahim breaks me off.

"Yeah, I know Azim. Let 'em try to do their stuff. Fucking cockroaches," Rahim says. Abdulla and Majid come up to Rahim.

"You think you big man," says Majid

"Yeah, he rich. He turn over Sajeev for £90,000. How about my share," says Abdulla.

"Yeah, he thinks he's Jack the Lad, hardcore. I bet you're like a soft fat pussy," says Majid.

Rahim opens his mouth. The words purring slow, like a fairy telling off one of the ugly sisters. Rahim's head ticks from side to side as he starts each word. When he finishes the word, he leans the other way.

"I'm big, I'm bad, and, no, I'm not Jack the Lad, but I'm Jack the Pak," says Rahim.

"You wanna some beatings, tramp," says Majid.

"I don't wanna mess up the rave. People are partying; it fucks up the vibes. So fuck off, and try to rob or rape someone else," says Rahim.

"Easy. Let's not fuck up the rave. This problem can be sorted one to one. No-one needs to know," I say that 'cos Song Lane have never been know to have a fair fight.

"You think you can have a row without your cockroaches backing you up? Ah you fucking tramp," says Keith.

"The white Paki can talk. Can you fight," says Abdulla to Keith.

"I'll piss you, shithead," replies Keith.

"Me and you Abdulla, let's not get others involved," says Rahim.

"Take Azim, Rahim. That way he can make sure no one stabs you in the back," says Keith.

"The only way do that is if all five of us slip out together without saying anything to anyone, that way we can keep things to ourselves," I say.

We get to the exit of the hall. There's a long flight of the stairs which lead to the street. I hold back Keith and Majid and let Abdulla and Rahim go down first. The two get half-way down and Abdulla pulls a six-inch blade out of his jacket. Rahim is two steps above Abdulla and sees Abdulla move and steps back another stair. He leans back and holds the banister with his left hand. Then he lifts his knee up and flicks out his right foot and kicks the blade out of Abdulla's hand. The blade lands at the bottom of the stairs. Rahim's right foot comes down, but his knee stays up. Another flick of the foot into Abdulla's face. Rahim's knee comes down and his foot touches the ground.

Abdulla is holding his nose and moving his head back and forth. Must be seeing bright lights. Bang, bang! Two right hand upper-cut punches hit Abdulla on the front and side of the chin. Bubbles of blood and snot come out of Abdulla's nose. Rahim lands another two punches in Abdulla's ribs. Abdulla goes rolling down the stairs. Rahim jumps over Abdulla's rolling body and grabs the blade. Majid sees the move and tries to run up the stairs and into the hall. Keith grabs him by the neck and knees him in the nuts and pushes Majid down the stairs. Majid's feet just about keep him from hitting the bottom of the stairs. Majid sees Rahim and runs back up. Rahim shouts out, "I'm gonna have your ass," and runs up the stairs while laughing to himself. Majid takes a tumble and lands with his face to the stairs. Rahim's laughing his head off as he catches up to Majid. Stab, stab, two stabs on Majid's ass one on each cheek. Slice, slice two slices right across both checks, Rahim still laughing.

"I told you. Your ass is well fucked up," Rahim tries to cut off Majid's ponytail, but the blade ain't cutting.

"We got a blunt blade here, boys," Rahim shouts.

"Slice the cunt's face up like chicken tikka," says Keith.

Rahim pulls Majid head round and put the blade to Majid's face.

"Please Rahim don't cut me, please, bro," says Majid.

"I don't know about chicken tikka. More like chicken shit," says Rahim.

"No Rahim, don't be doing that. Put the blade away. You proved you the man. Please,

bro, don't let it get out of hand.”

Rahim puts the knife in his jacket pocket.

"Come on move, get the fuck out my face," says Rahim pushing Majid down the few remaining stairs.

I get pushed out of the way by scores of Stone Lane youths.

"Run Rahim, make a move. They're on us," says Keith.

Rahim watches Keith run down the stairs, Rahim takes the blade out, he looks at Abdulla who's about half way up.

"No bro please, run for it," I shout out.

Rahim and Keith meet up at the bottom of the stairs and run.

"Your mother is a prostitute, a dirty slag, slag! I know you can hear me, cunt. Mother fucker," shouts out Abdulla to Rahim and Keith.

"I'll be back," shouts Rahim and steps on to a number 35 bus as if it was just waiting for them at the traffic light.

Somehow an ambulance manages to arrive with in minutes. Fuck knows who called it and how the fuck it arrives so quick. Abdulla and Majid get in and are taken away to hospital.

At the hospital with Abdulla and two members of Stone Lane, Majid is in one of the cubicles getting X-rayed. Abdulla is still cussing Rahim and what he's gonna do when he gets hold of him.

"Yeah man, Abdulla called Rahim's mother a slag, and Rahim run off, what a pussy. You guys wait and see what we do to that cunt. We gonna burn his house down with his family in it. I just wanna catch that dirty cunt tonight. I'm gonna kill him," says Abdulla.

"We'll find that slag tonight," says a Stone Lane member.

"Yeah we got six cars full of our lot looking for him and any other cunt out of Dockwell," says another Stone Lane.

After the row with Abdulla and Majid, Stone Lane began to attack Dockwell youths. They were attacked at schools, colleges, workplaces, and the attacks were all carried outside of Dockwell patch. Stone Lane just did not have the bottle to enter Dockwell.

Things had to be sorted. Me and Abdul met with Rahim and other youths in Dockwell. They too wanted a piece of peace and the violence to cease. Rahim told us, "Go on and tell 'em to leave the innocent alone. They want me, tell them anytime, anyplace, any amount of 'em can try it on with me."

Me and Abdul Din Nero meet with the older gang members who pull the strings of the younger gang members in Abdulla and Majid's crew.

"The only way this war ceases is when we get Rahim," said Miah. Miah is just a plain old thug. He's also connected to local politics.

"You tell Rahim, he can take his pick: get ripped apart by the younger members, or he can fight one of us, one to one, no weapons. Win or lose, that's the end of it," says Miah.

"We will bring four of our best fighters. You tell Rahim to pick."

"Where and when," says Abdul.

"Tonight. 10.30. Outside Pebble Park," says Miah.

"We get a chance to search you for weapons, so I feel at ease," I say.

"Yea, but if Rahim has anything on him, we come looking for you," says Miah.

"No, Miah, you come looking for me not Azim. He's a youth worker," says Abdul.

"He was there when Abdulla and Majid got done by Rahim," says Miah.

"Yeah, so what? It's your fucking boys that lost, fair and square, one on to one, and your crew still can't take it. You wanna come looking for me, anytime."

Abdul butts in: "Please Miah, brother, Azim ain't got fuck-all to do with this shit. Ask Abdulla and Majid, if he wasn't there Rahim would have done much worse," says Abdul.

"OK, Abdul. We know Azim is not a gang member," says Helal.

"He's with me trying to sort this out," says Abdul.

"We just got to make sure we won't get ambushed by Dockwell boys," says Helal.

We tell Rahim. He don't care who he has to fight, but Keith and the rest of the youths do.

"They never kept their word. They are fucking sly, slippery cunts," says Shahruk.

"I bet the fuckers will come down here with weapons and there will be hundreds of 'em," says Ramu.

"Look if anyone from Dockwell side butts in, we hand 'em over to the Stone Lane," says Abdul.

"So long as they play by the rules, no-one will get involved, but we ain't taking no chances. We'll be ready if they attack," says Keith.

Machetes, baseball bats, scaffolding poles, dustbin lids for shields for close combat are all hidden close to hand. Youths wait inside blocks of flats, in hallways, on staircases waiting for the action to begin.

10:45, a black Ford Sierra pulls up outside Pebble Park. Miah, Buzz, and Zeze step out of the car.

"Where this cunt Rahim," says Miah.

"You mother fucker, you better watch your language. This ain't your Stone Lane," says Shahruk to Miah.

"Hold up, this is bollocks, cussing each other," says Abdul.

"What's it all with the mouth, you want me? Here, take me. Who first," says Rahim.

"Let's search 'em first. You don't know with this lot," says Shahruk.

"No weapons. If someone does get weapons out, then we all fuck them up good," says Abdul to Rahim and Stone Lane.

"Come on, let's get started. I'm missing the football match on TV," says Rahim.

"What's the matter Rahim? You shitting yourself now? Wanna go home," says Zeze.

"Fucker going to hospital first," says Miah.

"All four of you, I take on," says Rahim.

"Don't be a fool," says Karim to Rahim.

"So take your pick out of any one of us," says Helal.

"Put your best boy forward, or, even better, your best two, and step into my arena," says

Rahim pointing at the patch of grass which is enclosed by a three-foot high fence.

Rahim's the first to jump over, then Miah and Buzz, me and Abdul see the move. I grab Buzz's shoulder, and Abdul puts a hand up to Miah. "Miah, brother, this is not what was agreed."

"It's that flash cunt Rahim. This is how he wants it," says Miah to Abdul.

"He should show us respect. I'mma bust his fucking head," says Buzz.

"This is my row. Leave the slags. Let 'em enter one, two, three, or four at a time," says Rahim.

Miah tucks his head down, puts his fist up to his face and moves forward on Rahim. Miah throws his right arm out. Rahim steps to the left and Miah's right fist misses Rahim's face. Rahim's right fist lands on Miah's nose. Miah shakes his head acting like he ain't hurt. Bang, bang! The right and left fist hit Miah's face again. Miah's legs wobble and his arms drop. Buzz runs in and swings out with a sloppy kick at Rahim. Rahim grabs Buzz's foot as it is about to go down. Rahim holds on to Buzz's foot with both hands and starts to rotate Buzz's body. Buzz loses his balance. Rahim lets go. Buzz goes down on the grass and Rahim follows in with two kicks on Buzz's face. Zeze jumps over the fence.

"Rahim watch it! There's another cunt on you," shouts Keith. Rahim jumps onto Buzz's ribs, then bounces off them and moves forward on Zeze.

"I'll have you, cunt. I'll have you," says Zeze. Zeze moves forward with fists and kicks at Rahim. Nothing connects. Rahim steps sideways of Zeze's no-hope punches and kicks. Rahim ducks down and lands two clean punches on Zeze kidney and ribs. Zeze folds up with pain and wobbles down on the deck.

Miah gets up, but is wobbly on his feet. He staggers over the fence.

"Eish-top, e-stop! Tell Rahim to stop fighting, Abdul," says Miah.

"Rahim, leave it. Come over here. Miah wants to talk. Come on, let's make peace with the brothers," shouts Abdul to Rahim.

"Tell them to leave the Dockwell youths alone," says Rahim.

"Come here Rahim," I say to Rahim.

"No, you do the talking. Me, I'm on my way. Can't miss the football," says Rahim.

I run over to Rahim and bring him over to Abdul.

"Come on, Rahim shake hands with them and finish it properly."

Rahim has been on the scene in Dockwell for over two months. Him and Keith are still trying to keep up with the habit which seems to be increasing by the day. Money through burglaries and robberies is harder to come by. Also, all the pushers have wised up to Rahim and Keith robbing them and their customers. Fines, community service, probation, nickings were slowly making them think twice as to which were high-risk and low-risk crimes. The only thing that got better was their friendship with each other.

Keith is almost fluent in his Sylheti, and Rahim can knock up a Sunday roast of lamb and apple crumble. Rahim had lost his trust and dumped his hope with the Asian peers.

Rahim avoided them as much as he could. He left out going to the Mosque or weddings.

Keith was a rare item for the whites and the Asians. His Sylheti was so good the Asian youths on the Estate had to stay stomp when they cussed white people down. Keith did not have any opinions or hang ups about religion, culture, colour, or what estate, street, or gang you belonged to. Like Rahim, Keith, too, formed his values and beliefs on the street; he had seen dope dons come and go. His way was to move low and sneaky, and you're bound to get your way. This did not mean back-stabbing people. Keith could not be bothered with all that shit. Keith could handle "snidey slags" like the Sajeevs, Karims and Zakirs, and the up-and-coming replacements. He had their card marked well before they made their mark as dope dons.

When it came to deciding who to and who not to give credit, Keith could smell a bad IOU by looking at the punter's eyes. Keith could smell the trail of pig shit (police) coming or leaving the estate. He would get a kick from uncovering the undercover police that patrolled the estate and the surrounding streets. All the villains, pushers, and users knew it took resources to ship in new faces that could blend in without being noticed. The quicker these plain-clothes were identified, the faster they were out of the area.

Rahim to my knowledge never saw or mentioned Amira and Abdul, and Zakir left him alone. Maybe they left him alone because Rahim was too dangerous to mess with on their own and everyone knew it.

You could see Rahim was still carrying the pain, memory, and, maybe, hope. Belinda was doing her best to get Rahim and Keith to come off the crack and heroin, but she wasn't getting anywhere. The dope scene was getting out of hand. In a space of two weeks, two heroin users had overdosed on the estate. The police had done their usual thing of arresting a few cannabis pushers and couple of heroin users. The community started to believe and talk openly about the police's attitude and the lack of action in taking out the pushers. Thing was the very people that were complaining had sons that where dealing or selling drugs.

Sajeev was still the dope don on the Estate. His empire was getting bigger, stronger and more organised. He had crack houses borough-wide. He had Asians, Caribbeans and whites working for him. His workforce was more multicultural than the local council. He was buying property in Dockwell, and Dhaka. His favourite was the farmhouse in Surrey. As a front for his dope trade he had an import and export business in the city that dealt in plant machinery.

The word was he was about to start growing opium in Bangladesh. His plan was to take the best and the most experienced experts to grow and refine it there. This would cut out the middleman, the Pakistanis who he hated so much. He hated the idea that they were getting rich on his money.

Karim was Sajeev's lieutenant. He would use Karim for testing the heroin, and this

meant a lot of trips to Pakistan, and a lot of pure, free heroin for Karim's over-the-top habit. Karim didn't just test and cut the product; some people say his main role was his relationship with the police. Some say it was this relationship that kept the police away from Sajeev. It was only few weeks ago that a newspaper had exposed police based in North London selling drugs to dealers in the area.

Karim was one the first to start using and selling heroin on the estate, and as time went on, Karim's habit grew and grew until he was not getting any hit. From there, Karim progressed from smoking to injecting. Karim had two nephews. They were also heroin users and sold to feed the habit. His wages from Sajeev were peanuts compared to what Sajeev was making. Sajeev treated Karim and his two nephews, also heroin users who stole to feed their habit, like shit on his shoes. It wasn't long before Karim decided to start up his own firm. Him and his nephews set up a wide distribution network. He also had contacts and ways of bringing it into the country, and, if it's true, that he had the protection of the police, then he was bound to go a long way.

Karim was soon on the dope map, and his poison was competing with Sajeev's poison. It was not long before Karim and Sajeev were stepping on each other's toes. Boundaries were broken. Pushers started to fight for street corners, estates, neighbourhoods, any space that they could call their own. The pushers set up other pushers to be robbed or grass them up to the police. Karim's firm was the only group that didn't get nicked.

Only thing was Karim was not getting rich. His downfall was his and his nephews' addiction to crack and heroin that ate away at the profits. They were like most pushers. They broke the golden rule of never get high on your own supply, unlike Sajeev and Zakir who did not use drugs, not even fags or alcohol. Zakir too was developing a rep. He was much greedier then the other dope dons.

Young unemployed people who never had any income, other than their dole money, started to see a way out of the poverty. It was not difficult to get to be pushers. Dope dons were bending over backwards to recruit fresh faces. Through pushing drugs some got rich and found that people started to look up to them. They valued them on the basis of the clothes, cars, women, and money; heroin and crack users treated them with more respect than they gave themselves.

Besides, with the in-fighting among the dope Dons, things were looking brighter for them. There were more users who were much younger and braver in getting hold of money, nor did they have any control over their use. Post Road, and the surrounding estates, were now busier than the Stone Lane curry houses on a Friday night.

With so many youths getting into the dope trade it caused an effect. Too many chiefs and not enough cowboys, and the crap about this town not being big enough to hold them all. The chiefs like Sajeev, Karim, and Zakir started to recruit enforcers and younger pushers into their fold. These chiefs started to aim their guns at each other, they started to hit each other's outlets, and pushers and enforcers were being

hospitalised. Gangs chasing each other with machetes, baseball bats, and scaffolding poles was an everyday thing on the estate and Post Road. The estate walls were sprayed with the latest score of who controlled which patch.

Sajeev's street outlets and crack houses were being carefully targeted. Masked robbers would know where and when to hit. The robbers would come away with large amounts of money and drugs. Sajeev could not put his finger on who was behind the robberies. Had Rahim and Keith gone freelance? They weren't looking any richer. Was it Karim? He knew some details about Sajeev's operation. He dismissed Karim as too weak, too much of a fuck-up junkie. Karim's supply line was not as good as Sajeev's, and every now then Karim was dependent on Sajeev for supply. Besides, they had just done a deal to rub out Zakir and strengthen their partnership. Still, you could never trust junkies, especially his two nephews.

On the quiet, Sajeev decided to hire Rahim and Keith. They look like they could do with bit of work. This way he could keep an eye on them. The raids on his outlets kept happening, so Sajeev marked the paper money and got Rahim and Keith to hit Karim's flat and outlets. A large amount of money and heroin was taken in the raids. The raiders wore masks and there was more than the usual two. Sajeev tried to make Rahim hand over the booty from the raids on Karim, but Rahim and Keith told Sajeev that the booty was theirs and no-one else had any right to it.

Karim was well vexed and was letting every one know that he was out for revenge. "They are dead meat." He was even hinting that he knew the identity of the raiders. Thing was, he asked Sajeev to help him sort out the two. Sajeev kept quiet about who pressed their buttons and pointed at Zakir as the person behind the raid.

Two weeks after the Karim raid, the cash till stopped ringing for Sajeev. He got nicked for five kilograms of heroin. The police also found £80,000 in cash in Sajeev's flat. The police had him banged to rights, Sajeev couldn't wriggle out of it. The courts sent him down for eight years. Sajeev knew he had been set up by Karim, only he knew the time and place when Sajeev was holding. In fact some of the heroin was going to be sold to Karim. This deal would have given him and his handlers the credit they were looking for.

Zakir recruited Rahim and Keith. Zakir would go for Sajeev's falling empire. Rahim had stopped using, and now was going to college two days a week to learn to read and write. Belinda had worked her magic and was smiling for Rahim.

A Bangladeshi man in his fifties walks into the office and introduces himself to me and Abdul as the father of the girl who Zakir is going out with.

"I'll be off, Abdul," I say.

"No, Azim, can you stay," Abdul replies. I see his eyes mean there is something up, so I stay.

"Why do you want the rest of the world to know my family business," says Wahida's father.

"My family's had enough of you harassing my family. If you get funny I have witnesses," replies Abdul.

"I have not harassed anyone in my life. Yes, I have tried to speak with your family, but they refused to see me. Your uncle told me that his son, Zakir, would not behave in such a distressing way. He refuses to believe his son is going out with my daughter. You must tell your uncle the truth," says Wahida's father.

Wahida's father is right; Zakir has been going out with her for over year, maybe even longer. I wonder why Abdul doesn't put it right.

"Zakir is attending Dockwell college. Your daughter goes to Crownway College; these places are very far from each other. How can they be seeing each other," says Abdul.

"I have seen your cousin Zakir with her. Now Wahida admits it herself. Why do you deny the truth? Tell your uncle your cousin must stop. He's ruining her career in medicine," says Wahida's father. And he walks out of the office.

I don't get into the ins and outs about what went down with Abdul. It's what they call a family affair, one-sided bullshit. Like Belinda says, it's alright to shag females so long it's not their family.

Abdul had recently dumped his old girlfriend, Sima, who he'd been going out with for over four years. She and her family were well respected on the estate, the ideal role model family. Sharon was the girl in his life. They had had a thing going for some time well before he stopped going with Sima.

Sharon was a strange choice knowing Abdul's views on white women, especially the ones that went out with Asian and Caribbean youths. Sharon also had a rep for going out with every group leader in Dockwell. Maybe Abdul was mellowing out. Some of his peers slagged him down for having double standards and Sharon also got stick from her mates. Not because Abdul was Asian, but because of what he had done to Rahim.

Sharon wanted all the trappings that Abdul used to give to Sima, movies, meals, clubbing. Most of all, she wanted to be seen with Abdul, but he kept their dates low key.

The well-off Asian families were moving out fast from the estate. The ones that could afford it had done so. Life on the estate was getting too risky. Burglaries, robberies, drugs were common, and the children were at risk from becoming addicts. Abdul's family moved out too. They bought a house in Angel, before leaving, Abdul managed to squeeze two council flats from Del-oy Slagg and Johnny B. Pig: one for him, one for his older cousin. Abdul and his cousin never did live in the flats. They were rented out to students from the university across the road. Soon after that, Abdul brought his dream car, a white 7 Series BMW. He was letting himself and others know that he had made it, not just financially but politically.

Abdul was angling to be the controller of vote banks, thanks to the advice, and the money, that Del-Boy Slagg, Johnny B. Pig, and Omar Ballshit had put up. Abdul was on the vote bank map and politicians knew it. People in power (Labour Party and Town Hall

officers) were now careful not to rub him up the wrong way. He was going places where no other young Asian had been before. He was attending Labour Party meetings, union conferences, civil rights campaigns.

At conferences, where there was a mainly white audience, Abdul would get into criticising Asian elders for criminalising politics. The white females would love it when Abdul put the elders down for holding back their daughters from further education. Soon, he too started to chase around for journalists and publicity. He began to distance himself from street work, or any youth work that was hands on.

Sunday morning and I'm in the Buygrave Centre with Abdul. We just finished one of our regular meetings that we've been having for the last six weeks with white gurus, Omar Ballshit, Del-oy Slagg, and Johnny B. Pig. Abdul is waiting for Sharon to turn up so they can use the office for their Sunday afternoon shag. Omar Ballshit wants to have a word with me about my behaviour towards Del- Boy Slagg and Johnny B. Pig. Omar Ballshit and Abdul Din Nero don't like the idea of me bringing up the Asian agenda. I know what Omar Ballshit is gonna say and what I'm gonna say back in my defence. Omar Ballshit will carefully keep his stance against me. But he don't wanna show himself up to me. We know the routine. He's tried to get me in line before. Sometimes it works, other times it don't.

I go into my VIP room and lock the door from inside. I light my spliff of skunk weed and remember the smokers back home. I wonder what they think of this new breed of weed. I look out of the window and watch the white Cadillac pull up into Highfields School. A young man is escorted out, video cameras are on the young man. More cars drive into the schoolyard for the wedding, or is it a hanging? This weed tastes like mangoes. I think I'll go down Green Street later and buy me a box Indian mangoes.

I hear footsteps out in the passage. Could be Sharon come for her servicing.
Knock, knock.

Who the fuck is that? Bullshit I ain't in.

Knock knock.

Now whoever that fucker is they're knocking on Abdul's office. It can't be Sharon. She knows Abdul's office. Abdul opens the door. I hear Abdul's uncle shouting.

"You tell that Rahim to stay away from Amira. I don't care how you do it, or who you hire to do it. Our family will lose the respect that I have gained. People will say I am weak and corrupt, that I have no morals, letting my daughter be seen. That Rahim and his family are low-lives. They have no status here, or back home. They come from the gypsy community. They live in boats and steal for a living, just like the white trash around here. People tell me that bastard shares a flat with a white. He must be sharing the same food, pig meat, and cutlery - and bathroom habits - as the white heathen. Rahim will bring shame and dirty our family name, "

"I'll make phone call to some people and we will see Rahim. We'll make sure Rahim

stays away," says Abdul.

I wonder how the fuck he's gonna sort Rahim out.

"I'm taking Amira back to Sylhet with me. I also need to make sure the six shops that we are building get finished before the monsoon season."

Rahim and Amira must have found a way of seeing each other. How could it have happened? Amira was only allowed out with Abdul, Zakir and sometimes Abdul lets her go out with Sharon. Abdul's uncle pisses off out, and Abdul knocks on my door. I let him in.

"You hear all that," says Abdul.

"Couldn't stop myself, bro," I reply.

"What do I do about that cunt Rahim," Abdul says.

"Nothing. Rahim is already vex about your cousin ripping him off out some dope money. People on the streets say Zakir is lucky that Rahim ain't took any form of revenge," I say.

"You know people who will fuck up Rahim for a price. Can't you line it up for Rahim to go down? I'll pay cash up front," says Abdul.

"I don't mess with people like that, and, anyhow, it don't matter who I get to beat up Rahim. Rahim will know you and your family had something to do with him getting a beating. And you don't wanna upset Rahim unless you're ready to die," I say, hoping my words will frighten Abdul to leave Rahim alone.

"Hi Abdul, Azim," says Sharon as she walks in. I take my cue and spliff and say my good-byes to 'em both.

Within a few days of them finding out that Amira and Rahim were seeing each other, Abdul's uncle had taken Amira to Sylhet. When Rahim heard that Amira was taken to Sylhet, it only meant one thing. She was going to be married off. Rahim fell back on the crack and heroin. He took more and more and fucked off college and everything else except for Keith.

Zakir had ripped off Rahim and Keith for £40,000. Rahim did not bother taking revenge or getting his money back, he just ended the partnership. Now Zakir was the dope Don of Dockwell. Rahim was sinking deeper and deeper into the gutter of crack and heroin use. His peers avoided him.

Belinda came back to Dockwell. She tracked down Rahim and stayed with him and Keith. She made them reduce their crack and heroin intake. Within a few weeks Rahim and Keith were off the crack.

Rahim and Keith were now only wheeling and dealing small. They had used up all their credit and no big dealers were prepared to take a chance. Selling heroin and crack in Dockwell was more difficult. The area was under surveillance, and the pushers wised up and sent out even younger kids to sell drugs. The average age of pushers in Dockwell was now 12 to 14. They worked in larger gangs and knew every trick in the Old Bill's book. This made it more difficult to nick them.

Knock, knock.

Belinda walks in to the office with two cans of Coke.

"Alright old man, have a drink."

"Alright Belinda. Ain't seen you for ages. Where you been? Thanks."

I take the can of Coke and place it on the table. I can't drink this. It tastes like rusty water.

"I was living down South London with a fucking idiot of a boyfriend. I fucked him off. I'm back with me parents. Come on then, drink up," says Belinda.

"Truth is I can't drink this shit no more," I say.

"Don't tell me you started to drink all that herbal tea, veggie tea crap you old hippie. I bet you're even shagging some old socialist tart. Does she make you do the work? Do your shopping down the Buddhist Centre instead of Tesco," says Belinda.

"Yeah Belinda, you're taking the piss good. I'm going to lunch, wanna come," I say.

"No Azim, I got to get back to Rahim and Keith."

"What's happening with them two?"

"Keith's parents have sent him to Malta for a few weeks and Rahim's indoors wasting away."

"Not that Amira thing again."

"Yeah man. He can't get her out of his box."

"How did it come on top for them this time?"

"That fucking bitch Sharon grassed Rahim and Amira to Abdul's family. The slag only done it to take the spotlight off Abdul and her."

"You reckon she impressed him?"

"No she's still with Abdul, but very friendly with his cousin. She's always fucking Asian. Next the bitch'll be wearing a sari. Funny thing is, Azim, it was Sharon who started Rahim and Amira off again."

"Yeah, Abdul's uncle was here a few weeks ago. He was cussing Rahim. He was really angry. I think he wanted Abdul to give Rahim a beating."

"Ha, ha," Belinda butts in. "Abdul is too scared of Rahim now. Rahim's got too much on him and Zakir."

"Rahim might as well forget Amira. He's got no chance of her family agreeing," I say.

"Yeah, if he could get her out of his box, then he might get free from the heroin and shit."

"You reckon he will," I say.

"Rahim's on his way to Bangladesh in the morning. He's gonna try to meet her out there, see if she still wants to know."

Rahim reaches Sylhet and narrows down his search for Amira to some small village. The village is like every other village, everybody knows everyone's business, and Rahim knows it. He had a fool-proof plan, so he reckons, to get in to the village without being noticed.

Rahim saw his chance when he saw a bangle seller going in and out of people's homes. Rahim ran up to the old man and bought all the contents and the metal box in

which the stock was being carried.

Every morning Rahim dresses up in an old lungi, kafni, and he adds the final touch, a black skullcap. Rahim researches his role so good, that when he mingles in the bazaar women would ask to see his stock of bangles. He'll enter the village as a bangle seller by day and go back to the town in the night.

Rahim knew that Amira's father was in town overseeing the building work. Rahim would watch Amira's father leave early in the morning and come late at night. This gave him plenty of time and space to move around in the village. All over, vendors would shout out their goods and prices, but Rahim would lose his bottle and speech when he got to Amira's home. Maybe he was afraid someone would recognise him. In the afternoon, Rahim would sit outside the barbershop that was right opposite Amira's home and hope he'd catch her on her own.

Then, one afternoon, a woman in her 80s with a voice like a crow steps out of Amira's home, and shouts out at Rahim.

"Oh, oh."

Rahim panics and ducks his head down. "*I've been spotted.*" Rahim says to himself, and looks around for a rickshaw as a quick exit out of the village.

"Arra, oh boy, Bangle seller, come here," she shouts.

The whole village seems to be staring at Rahim.

"You better go over to there, or that old hag and her family will drag you over. You hear me boy," says the barber to Rahim.

"Yea, yeah I was asleep, today is too hot to being dealing with rich people and their tight ways," says Rahim to the barber.

"The sun has melted your brains boy. Are you sure you're a vendor," says the barber to Rahim.

"No, yes, I am," Says Rahim.

And walks over to the old hag, giving her his most humble look with his confidence crumbling.

"Sit over there boy."

Rahim squats down on the porch with the old hag in front of him.

"Are your bangles worth me losing my voice, boy," she says.

"Our family has made and sold bangles for many generations. I have many varieties, imported from India and Pakistan," says Rahim, he was gonna say 'if you can buy cheaper we will refund your money back', but that sounded like one of them ads you'd hear on the telly back in London.

The old hag pushes her face into a ball like a ripped up sea sponge and squeezes out a look on Rahim as if to say, "Watch your mouth boy. I'm the one that take the lead." Or was it, "You cheap peasant, stay in your place."

"Oh Amira, Amira oh, you are going deaf too. Oh Amira, come out and help me pick out some bangles for your cousin's wedding. I don't know what's in fashion nowadays."

Amira is already on the porch and the hag is still going through her words.

"There you are. You see, the moment you mention fashion," she looks at Amira for an

answer, "the young come alive and well."

Amira looks gagged and out of it. Maybe she's having a nightmare. She wants to go back in and come out again and things will clearer, realer.

"Sit here, sit, oh Amira, sit here. Is the afternoon asleep still in your head? Wake up girl and sit."

"Boy, open your case show us the best quality bangles, and don't think I was born yesterday."

Amira sits behind the old hag and winks at Rahim and blows him a kiss. They pick out bangles and chit-chat about the shapes and colours. Every time Amira chooses a set of bangles the hag is disagreeable saying,

"That colour won't suit your light complexion. It's alright for darkies like him. Your father won't like them. They are too cheap."

The old hag wants to do the choosing, and Amira just nods her head. When she has made up her mind, she lays and piles up the bangles she wants. She looks at Rahim, claps her hands and rubs them like she's warming up for the kill.

"These are the bangles we may have, but first we will hear your prices then decide."

"That is all my imported collection, you have good taste," says Rahim.

"I've dealt with your kind before. Talk straight with me none of this film stuff talk. We are a respectable family."

Amira winks and smiles at Rahim with watery eyes.

"You've got tell these merchants to keep their distance and know their place. Come boy, has someone cut out your tongue? Talk prices."

Rahim lists the prices.

"What? You think I'm a crazy old woman? You think I've lost it or something? I should be selling the bangles and you, boy, should be wearing them."

Amira laughs. "Quiet, Amira. We're dealing with a fool who thinks we are fools," she laughs taking her shoulders up and down with her.

"You are my first customer today. Let me be generous: you say a reasonable price," says Rahim.

The old hag jumps up and says, "Ah 650 takas."

"675," says Rahim.

"Wrap them up. We will take them. Wait here, Amira keep an eye on him while I get my purse," she says and walks into the house.

Amira watches the old hag disappear into the dark passage of the home, then turns around to face Rahim. Rahim and Amira read each other's thoughts.

"Why are you here? Why," Amira whispers to Rahim.

"Come, run away with me where no one can stop us from being, from living," says Rahim.

"Oh Rahim, you must forget us. This love that beats in our hearts, it cannot be. We must be free of that love. We must break the chains."

Rahim goes to speak, "I think of you night and..." Amira places her right hand over his lips.

"If memories rise up in your thoughts and walk in our direction, turn the other way. Say to yourself they don't live there any more," says Amira

"Our love, please don't crush it. Please, let me live. Let your love heal my life," says Rahim.

"Stop it Rahim, stop hurting, go and make a better life, stop killing yourself, get your mind away from me and drugs. Promise me, Rahim," says Amira.

"Oh Amira, how much did he say? 675 takas," says the old hag and counts off the notes to Rahim.

Amira's words kept rewinding. Rahim tries to veil her words with thoughts of her changing her mind, but he didn't want to see her go through the hurt anymore. She was the first. She had been in his heart, dreams, thoughts, plans, and she was his path to life. At least he had lived, loved, and now he must die, life, love and death only happen once.

Rahim looked up at the night sky. He saw part of a broken star. Those who fall for love die alone. Rahim thought he had learnt everything there was to know, yet in his heart had learnt nothing. He knew what was his and what was borrowed, how long could they hide? How long could he carry on stealing the love? He had to ask his heart about the beautiful dreams that carried him out of the darkness.

I'll try to paint your tears, bro.

From the day you was born and into your early teens you received nothing from your parents, or brothers. You kept wanting, dreaming what it meant to belong. Your mother cursed the day your father walked out, and she ain't stopped hurting, lost in her world of Jinns, potions, and superstitions. Elders had nothing better to do but banish and shackle your family for generations.

From childhood despair into the arms of Amira. She brought light and hope, took away the darkness, the spell. Your heart started to pump, you could see, live, feel without pain. You painted rainbows. Your song was loud and clear for all to hear, it gave us so much. Some of us started to search for the path. You locked her love in. You threw away the key, fearing someone may take it from you.

Why did you refuse to see the flames that were burning from all four corners? Yes they were at a distance then, but you saw the flames burning and destroying everything they torched. People warned you, but you refused to move.

Ah, the memories keep rewinding and winding. The song and its rainbow are no more. It is tinted blue; the sound of its echo is fading. Darkness descends on the streets, and the heart is without a home. You spin. You rip apart, the protection, and the light has gone. You bury the hope of ever loving again, and wait around for death.

I walk down Post Road, and bump into Keith.

"All right, bro," I say to Keith.

"Yeah, what's happening gezz," says Keith

"Where's your bro, Rahim," I say.

"Did you not hear? He's in hospital."

"Why, what's up? What is he in for," I ask

"Fucking pushers round here set us up to get robbed. The robbers broke down our door. All six fuckers were all balaclavaed up. They had a shotgun, baseball bats, machetes, and two American pitbulls, the cunts. They let the dogs loose on Rahim and put the shooter in his face. Told me not to move or the finger on the trigger gets squeezed. They cleared out all our gear and money. When the robbers left, Rahim was holding his ear in his hand."

"How's he doing? Alright to go up and see him?"

"He's doing well. Should out in few of days, but he don't want no one going up but me," says Keith.

"You think that'll put him off the dope trade?"

"Don't think so, Azim. He thinks we're doing well that's why people started to rob us. Rahim's in a fucking dream if he thinks we're making money. Even the Old Bill is onto us, watching us 24/7. These fucking grasses and dealers are working for Old Bill. It's all fucking getting on top. We've got to slow down, know what I mean," says Keith.

"You off the crack now, or what," I say.

"Yeah, Azim, the fucking thing is evil, know what I mean? Ain't like the smack, you know? The thing fucks with your head man, fucked me up bad. The fucking thing is totally different from other drugs, you know, bro? It's no good man. Ruins your life, you get me? It ruins your family, everything. The rocks, the fucking cravings drive you nuts. It's not just up there that's driving you insane, but deep down, you know? Down there right inside. You can't get away from it round here. When my mum found out I was on crack and heroin, she did not wanna know me. She knew what kind of tricks junkies get up to. She heard from her friends. She won't even let me in her flat 'cos she thinks I'm gonna rob her. It doesn't matter what I say," says Keith.

I walk down Post Road and see the same old routine: goods, money, wealth, profit, misery, and poverty, the young pushers move around like traders working in the stock exchange. New faces, new addicts, new pushers, same old destruction. Sajeev is doing seven. Zakir is doing five. Addicts give thanks to the police for letting Karim and his nephews rule is what the scoreboard should say.

Rahim is out of hospital, and him and Keith are back on the pavement wheeling, dealing and scraping for their next hit. I watch and listen to both of them with my back against the bus stop. Both look like they have walked a million miles without eating or resting. The bandage around Rahim's head is stained with wear, dirt, and dried-up blood.

A scruffy young woman who looks as though she just got out of bed gets out of a ex-GPO van and she straightens out her short, tight dress. The man in the van shouts, "Move, you fucking slag, and hurry about."

The woman looks around, she sees Rahim and Keith a few yards away and walks

towards them.

"Got two eighths mate," she asks Rahim.

Rahim kisses his teeth and turn his back on her.

"Please, please, please, mate! Serve us up," she says to Keith.

Rahim turns around and avoids looking at the woman.

"I got the cash, look. Please mate, or my boyfriend's going to beat the shit out of me. Please, I can't take my beats, please mate. Look what he done to my arms, please," she says.

"Hand over the money. Here's two eighths," says Rahim to the woman.

Hands exchange goods and money. Police run out of the dry cleaners, bakers, and post office, and out of a GPO van. Rahim and Keith's nightmare starts, or is it the beginning of the end.

Bail? No chance. Freedom? Don't even think about it. Not with four burglary charges, supplying, offensive weapons, breach of community service and breach of probation, and two failures to appear.

Keith laughs at the judge, "I can handle it man."

And Rahim acted like he wasn't even in court. He kept muttering, "angles for sale." Four years.

Four years later, I looked across Highfields Schoolyard and watched the white Cadillac pull up outside the school gates. I stamped out my spliff, put my hands in my jacket pockets to save them from the cold and watched the wedding guests walk into the school.

I get into my car. I wind down the window, and I hear the sound of glass bangles. I turn my head and see Rahim and Keith standing next to my car.

"Alright Azim. Who's the wedding reception for over there?"

"Abdul and Sharon got married. So did Amira and some bloke." They both walk away.