

RUN!

RAYAAN IBTESHAM CHOWDHURY

"Don't you think it's funny" - Old Nan McGinty said while lighting what must have been his fifteenth of the day - "That the day with the most sunshine has to have the biggest shadows?". Having been busy watching the kids run around the bonfire, I hadn't really noticed. The benches that lined the football field were full with people filling their mugs for the night that lay ahead. This was the first time I was spending Summer Solstice, or *Midsummer* as they called it, here in the village. It was certainly different. By now they knew not to offer me a drink. Nice people.

When I drove twenty five miles south of London on an impulse, I didn't quite know what I was doing. Chalfont St. Giles was where John Milton had chosen to go as a refuge from the plague sweeping across London. I didn't really have a plague to run from but I could use some running anyway. The people here didn't ask too many questions. I was a certified doctor and they could use more doctors. "Less questions asked the better," they must have thought.

You wouldn't have trouble spotting me in the large park benches. I was the quiet, brown man who wasn't nearing his third mug. In fact I didn't even have a mug. But Old Nan McGinty, the nice couple from the Post Office and Major Erwin (ret'd) didn't have a problem about any of that. Although the major did often ask for my opinion on Afghanistan, to which I'd just return a smile and pretend I didn't know too much.

My father thought the British Isles would be a better place for me to grow up in. To an extent he was right. There wasn't any formalin here. No, even the things you got from food coupons were very fresh. I went through school as the *Paki*, although I was from Bangladesh, a place that had a particular history about not being a Paki, but that didn't matter much here. The problems didn't really start till my mother began complaining about missing home. You couldn't blame her. My father argued that she was being selfish. I guess you couldn't blame him either. He kept repeating how this would help my future. A fifteen year old me didn't like being the justification to my mother's troubles. So that night I put up an ad for the guitar I had bought a few days ago and went with my books. Just like I went with everything else my father asked me to go with. It was the least I could do in return for their sacrifices, I guess.

I wonder how McGinty would react if I told him about the sacrifice business. He wasn't very bright and his knack for drinking was a bit scary. I remember his wife asking me to look after him and his habits. Although I am pretty sure I remember him not drinking more than a couple of pints when she was around. He'd probably also ask me what went wrong if I showed him a picture of Nicole. She was the one time I had been selfish and gone against my parents. And I kept thinking it was karma at work when she left me about six months into our marriage. But I guess my voluntary double shifts, and the frequent weekend duties I walked into, had something to do with it. That prospective house my father had been using to convince my mother for over a decade had to be bought. Nicole refused to understand.

I don't know if the awful plumbing was the cause of my disillusionment but the house didn't seem to make my mother happy either. Or maybe she was too old to appreciate the Victorian wallpaper, I don't know. This house embodied what we had been running after ever since we bribed a middle man for our visas. But my parents didn't seem to get much relief from it. They hadn't said much in their time here. The local Imam had even noted how my father looked sort of crouched as he lay there. All those days of lifting boxes for DHL had to leave a mark, I guess. I realized then, that I needed more life even if life didn't really need me.

Something I discovered here in Chalfont St. Giles, was the evening walk. It was a strangely pleasant experience. The adults were done drinking. The kids lay exhausted around the bonfire. Enough running, eh? Go home, kids.



Adventures of a 16 Year Old Girl: Episode one

ANISHTA KHAN

In many families adolescence is reached when the girl first gets her period, or gets her first cellphone, or is given permission to go out with friends without an alert parent tagging along. In my household, we become women when we get our first handbag. Don't worry, this isn't some tradition. I just noticed this little unplanned occurrence for a while now.

Don't get me wrong either, this handbag purchase is serious business. My sisters and I tend to be a little picky. After all, my oldest cousin once told me that like men are judged by the shoes they wear, women represent their personality with the bag they carry.

I don't know if I fully believe this, but my parents have come to a conclusion that I'm ready to carry my own bag now. Old enough to keep all my belongings - the Chap stick, my iPod, my self-confidence and courage, the phone, my hesitating voice and the little poetry book, with me.

We have been looking for the right handbag for me for quite some time now, but nothing seems to be it. Either too big, or too pink, not colourful enough, doesn't hold enough contents. My things are spilling over from back pockets, shirt pockets. I'm carrying my personality on my sleeve. I am representing myself with a big toothed smile and curious eyes.

Nothing to worry about, I'm still searching for the perfect fit.