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Bitter Sweet London

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I dedicate this book to

Anju

Acknowledgements

A number of people have directly and indirectly played prominent role in the creation of this memoir. The book spans fifteen years and I have come across many individuals in the course of my personal, personal, political and academic life. While most of them have left imprints in my heart and mind, this book is impacted by a few significant people and I would like to name a few of them here.

The nature of the book precludes me from naming everyone who has been my inspiration and who has contributed towards building of the characters. I have deliberately written this memoir in the third person in order to keep the identities of the real life characters a secret.

The people I would like to acknowledge in no particular order are Baldev Barra, Hugh Gulland, Satnam Singh, Parvinder Singh Bhumber, Harcourt Allyene, Errol Arthur, Nayesh Radia, and Dr Mohammad Ahemedullha. I have deliberately omitted naming any of the females.

I must name Sergeant Sully and Sergeant Reid who were two of several Metropolitan Police officers who stood by my side when I faced acute racism in the Met Police.

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You all have contributed in some ways for re-living my fifteen-year life in London from the day I landed there one cold November winter in 1980 till the day I left exactly 15 years later to live in Australia.

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Chapter 1

Shocking news in East London

Sanjay parked his car in the garage and walked around to the letter box. A strange excitement ran through his heart when he noticed a large envelope in his letter box. He was expecting a letter from his university since he had already received already received an email from his supervisor. It had made a decision about his Doctorate thesis that had recently submitted. He was quietly confident to get a positive result, but he had to see it in writing before he could believe that he had been finally awarded a Doctorate degree.

His heart began to pound a little louder as he walked up stairs of his one bedroom south west Sydney flat with the letter in his hand. He recalled a similar letter he had received at his London office back in nineteen ninety three, some eighteen years ago. On that occasion he had been waiting for result of his MA thesis. After successfully completing his BA degree in nineteen ninety one he was fortunate to get the support of his employer to complete a MA degree in Social Policy and Administration at the University of London. At that time he was working as a Principal Race Equality Officer for a east London borough council. Sanjay had successfully completed all his coursework over previous two years and just a pass mark for his thesis would have secured him a MA degree. He had already secured a supervisor for a PhD candidature which he wished to commence the following year from the same university. He felt really proud that a very well-know

academic and a respected Black anti-racist writer had agreed to supervise his PhD candidature.

Sanjay recalled his excitement as he walked up the stairs of his London office with the all-important letter from the university that would shape the future course of his life for nearly two decades. He expectantly ripped open the letter and hurriedly read through the content. It was unbelievable. He saw the word FAIL staring at him. His heart skipped several beats. The shock that appeared on was obviously visible. His Admin Assistant, who was looking at him from the top of her large glasses, looked very concerned. She must have sensed something was wrong.

Are you alright Sanjay? she inquired

Yes, Shirley, yes, everything is fine! Sanjay stared blankly, not knowing what to say.

It's the result from your uni, *innit?*' *Did you get it?* She persisted

Yes, it is, Sanjay offered sheepishly. His mind was blank, unable to believe what was communicated to him in the letter.

Shirley did not look very convinced. Sanjay never was a good liar. He had never faced a similar situation in his academic life. He was proud of the fact that he had always passed all the tests and examinations he had taken in his life. In fact in his first thirteen years of primary and secondary exams he had always come first. He remembered being upset when he came second (with ninety three percent marks) in his final examination at the Metropolitan Police Academy in London a few years ago.

Sanjay did not know how to handle this news. He got up and put on his jacket. Shirley was still looking at him.

They gave me appalling marks! I never expected that kind of mark from the university. Damn it! Sanjay mumbled. I am going to my supervisor at the Uni. Got to sort this out; otherwise I will not get to start my PhD.

He walked down to his car and got inside. He had a few meetings to attend to but was in no mood to talk to anyone at that moment. He called his Personal Assistant (located at the Newham council offices) and asked her to rearrange the meeting times. He drove through the Blackwall tunnel and parked his car near Greenwich Park. He had a particular attachment to it this vast park.

When he migrated to England in 1980 with his (Fiji-born) British wife, Greenwich Park was one of the first places he had visited. Fiji being his birthplace and a home for more than two decades of his life, he felt very lonely when he had first arrived in London on a cold winter day, (leaving behind the warm Fiji sun and even warmer Fiji people). Standing on the line that marked the Greenwich Mean Time on top of the Greenwich Park a few weeks later, he had wondered if a tunnel was dug straight down from there, and whether it would take him to Fiji. He had always felt strange closeness to Fiji whenever he stood close to the Greenwich Mean Time line.

It was perhaps for that reason he would bring his two children to the Greenwich Park once he had settled down in London. Today, more than a decade after he had first visited Greenwich Park, he sought comfort in it once again. He was now divorced from his wife and spent time with his children

only during weekends. His former friends from the London Metropolitan Police had forsaken him after he had resigned as a police officer in 1987 and had joined the Anti-racist movement and the British Labour Party. In the recent months he was also at loggerheads with the local Labour Party over policy issues. His councillor colleagues did not support the stance he had taken against the Labour Party and tried to keep their distance from him whenever possible. He had developed new friends away from Greenwich in the borough of Newham where he worked as an Anti-racist professional. These friends were all at work at that time and he did not wish to trouble them during working hours.

The loneliness he felt was suffocating him. He felt persistent lump in his throat. He walked slowly towards his comfort line at the top of the Greenwich, occasionally steadying himself by holding the trees that were scattered in the park. His breath was laboured for a relatively young man; he was just thirty seven years old. Thirteen years after he first stood over the Greenwich Mean Time line reminiscing about Fiji, Sanjay found himself at the same spot once again. But today thought of Fiji did not bring him the same fondness and sense of belonging; the 1987 coups of Fiji had changed all that and more for him.

Chapter 2

London calling

For Sanjay leaving Fiji was both sad and an exciting moment. The choice he was presented with in mid 1970s was not an easy one. On one hand was the country he was born in and loved dearly. The country that was heralded as “a paradise and the way the world should be”. On the other hand was the woman he loved dearly, a woman of his dream who had come all the way from London and had decided to marry him. Kiran now needed his support, burdened with acute medical condition, as she struggled with her first pregnancy. A very petite and fragile woman, barely out of her teens when she got married on the opposite side of the world from where she had grown up, she had lost a lot of weight as her pregnancy progressed from weeks to months. Her several confinements at the Suva’s Colonial War Memorial hospital did not bring her much relief. Her condition was getting from bad to worse.

Sanjay was very troubled! He was happy with his life in Fiji. He had a good job and was completing a Bachelors degree from the University of South Pacific. He had all his friends in Fiji and his relatives were spread all over the country. Initially Kiran had returned to London after their wedding in order to pursue her career. The idea was for Sanjay to join her when his visa to migrate to United Kingdom came through. The two had kept in touch with each other through almost daily exchanges of letters. One day Kiran informed him that she was returning to Fiji to live there with him. Sanjay was overjoyed. She arrived in Fiji soon after that, giving up her career in nursing. Both were happy living in a nice flat in Suva. Life was good.

Kiran was settling well in Fiji until her pregnancy began troubling her. At first there was not much to worry about; her problems were put down to symptoms of any first pregnancy. But as time went by she was plagued by dehydration problems, which began to worsen as time went by. Even the doctors could not diagnose the real reason for her declining health. She became so weak that she could not perform many of her daily activities on her own; Sanjay had to help her. When her parents became aware of her worsening condition they insisted that Kiran return to London immediately. She now spent a lot of her time crying and pining for her parents, especially after talking to her mother on telephone. But she did not want to leave Fiji without Sanjay.

So the young couple made a pact: they would go to England for up to five years and return to Fiji. This will give Kiran enough time to recover from her medical issues and also to complete her studies if she wished. Sanjay would work hard for five years in London and the two would try to save as money much as possible. The idea was to return to Fiji with Kiran fit and fighting, plus some additional money for a comfortable life back in Fiji. The plan was good and Sanjay agreed to temporarily migrate to England. In fact he began to look forward to going to London. After all London had the Buckingham palace, the home of the Queen of England. It also housed the Scotland Yard, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, arguably the most respected police service in the world. But he was mostly looking forward to the birth of their first child, who travelled with them to London in Kiran’s tummy. That child was born as a beautiful baby girl in the Westmead hospital, located not far from Greenwich.

Chapter 3

White men working

It was getting dark in Greenwich Park. The year was coming to end and days were getting cold and shorter. Sanjay felt a need to have a hot cup of tea to warm him up. He began walking towards a tea kiosk located near one of the entrances to the park. He hadn't realised that chill had suddenly engulfed the park. He got a scarf from inside the jacket and placed it around his neck. After putting on his gloves he drew the jacket collars around his neck. He felt warmer.

He could never forget the November chills of London. It was in November that he had first flown from the warm Fiji weather in Nadi and two days later landed at the cold Heathrow airport in London. In the hurried departure Kiran had forgotten to inform Sanjay that he would be met in London by the chilly English weather. Otherwise he would have arrived at Heathrow in his warm Fiji clothes.

It was late November afternoon that Sanjay stepped out from the Heathrow airport, with all his possession pack tightly in a yellow suitcase. Kiran still had her English winter clothing, which she pulled out from her suitcase. She looked alarmingly at Sanjay as he was smacked across the face by the cold blast of London chill. She apologised profusely for not buying him winter jacket in Fiji. She suggested they to go inside and buy one for him before he developed a cold.

But as they turned to go back into the terminal, Kiran's parents appeared before them. Sanjay had met her mother in Fiji so recognised her immediately. He guessed that the handsome middle aged man walking beside her must be her father. Sanjay recalled that Kiran had many striking features of her father, including, by Indian standard, his light skin colour. The skinny young teenager walking beside them was Kiran's elder brother. He shyly shook Sanjay's hands and took the trolley from Kiran.

Kiran's mum, after a brief greeting to Sanjay, hugged Kiran and the two, unable to control their emotions, began to cry. Her dad was carrying a large furry jacket in his arms, which he handed to Sanjay. 'I brought this along, in case you did not have one' He said as Sanjay gladly struggled into the coat. He had never ever worn a coat this big before. 'You are a big man, no?' he added looking at Sanjay from top to bottom. Sanjay smiled politely as he walked beside them towards the car park. From the side of his eyes he saw him glancing at Sanjay from time to time. He had only seen Sanjay in photos till then. He was not supportive of Kiran getting married in Fiji, but had to give in when Kiran and Sanjay insisted on getting married in Fiji. He must have trusted his daughter's judgement in choosing a descent husband for herself half the world away from London. Now meeting Sanjay for the first time, the look on his face suggested that his trust in his daughter was vindicated.

They got into the old Ford Capri owned by Kiran's skinny brother Ajay and headed towards their home on the other side of London. Kiran had told Sanjay that their house was located some fifty kilometres from Heathrow airport and approximately thirty kilometres from the centre of London city, across the legendary river Thames. Sanjay settled back in the back seat with his wife snuggled next to

him, eager to take in all he could of the city he had heard of since his childhood.

Fiji used to be a former British colony and Sanjay had spent most of his life till then under the British administration. In 1970, the British had handed over Fiji to local administration. He recalled a large picture of the British family taken against the background of the Buckingham Palace hung on one of the walls of his parent's home in his primary and secondary school days. He used to sing the British National anthem each Friday during the primary school days. His early days were very much shaped by the British administration and the history lessons that he had taken during the secondary school days.

Even as a primary school student Sanjay was aware of the political changes occurring in Fiji which eventually led to Fiji's independence. London was very much the focus of news in the local media which reported the conferences held in London prior to the events in 1970. When the independence finally came to Fiji on 10th October 1970, it was not a big event for Sanjay as he was too young to think about it. He was happy to participate in the festivities and enjoy refreshments sparingly dished out at the school. Little did he know at that time that within ten years he would be travelling through streets of central London with a British wife and his in-laws.

Will we see the Buckingham Palace on our way? Sanjay leaned forward and asked Ajay.

No, I have taken another route today. He said in heavy English accent that appeared strange to Sanjay. *That route will be chuck-a-block at this hour,* he explained. Sanjay looked inquiringly at Kiran, not getting what Ajay had just said. Kiran smiled.

He means there will be too much traffic on that route now, she whispered in his ear. *You will get to understand his Cockney accent soon enough.*

Oh shit! I can't believe this, gasped Sanjay. *Oh I'm so sorry, but was that a white man pushing that rubbish bin?* Asked Sanjay; turning around to have another look at a man pushing a rubbish bin, with a rake in his hand.

Yes, he is a road cleaner, Ajay stated, looking through his rear view mirror at the man collecting rubbish from the road and putting it in the bin in front of him.

Sanjay sank back into his seat and remained silent for a little while. Ajay looked at him in his rear view mirror and shook his head slightly, perhaps trying to work out what the big deal was. For Sanjay it was a momentous occasion; for till then he had not seen a white man working, let alone collecting rubbish from a street. As far as he knew the white men back in Fiji lived charmed and privileged lives. He rarely saw them on the streets, aside from the rich-looking tourists who appeared to be always buying duty free stuff or enjoying themselves in classy hotels. The local whites lived in large houses built in residential areas which appeared to be exclusive to them.

Oh I am sorry, it just that I've never seen a white person working back in Fiji, Sanjay broke the silence in the car. *A white man working as a street cleaner; this is unbelievable!*

There are millions of buggers like them here, doing all sorts of shitty jobs, Sanjay's father in law stated without mincing his words. The buggers fooled everyone in Fiji and colonies.

Ajay looked at Sanjay in his rear view mirror and smiled again. He appeared to be enjoying himself. He was not able to handle his sister getting married so young to a man living in a tiny island thousands of miles from their home in London. He had probably decided not to make Sanjay's life any easier in London.

By this time the old Ford Capri had crossed London Bridge and moved steadily along what Sanjay later found out to be the Old Kent Road, which wound its way from the outskirts of the city to past where Kiran's home was. Rows of terraced houses, interrupted by tall tower blocks endlessly lined the road as Sanjay desperately looked out for the farm on which he believed Kiran's home would be. Climbing to the top of Blackheath revealed welcome greenery and Sanjay thought farmland would follow soon. Then they entered Charlton and the endless rows of terraced house lined the road again. After about twenty minutes drive they travelled through a vast concrete jungle called Thamesmead. Sanjay was still hopeful of seeing a farmhouse when the car stopped outside a terraced house and Ajay announced that they had reached home.

Sanjay's jaws dropped as he stared at the two storied house flanked by a row of similar old terraced house. His mind went back to their farmhouse in Fiji. A row of six homes placed on a ten acre farm, with a river running a few hundred meters from the lawns of the homes. He had expected a farmhouse at least as large as his homestead back in Fiji. He naturally assumed that people in a country ruled by the queen of England usually lived on larger farms than in Fiji. The fifty kilometre journey from Heathrow airport to

the outskirts of London had taught Sanjay an important lesson; to expect the unexpected!

Kiran nudged him to get out of the car and he followed her into the house. The inside of the house was unexpectedly spacious and well decorated. Kiran asked him to accompany her upstairs that led into a room that acted as their bedroom for next few months. After dumping their luggage in the room Sanjay went outside to explore the gardens. He felt claustrophobic and wanted to get some fresh air. The back yard was not much bigger than the front. It looked smaller because of wooden garden shed that stood in one corner. He went inside again and grabbed a chair. Ajay saw him walking towards the front door with the chair.

Hey dude, what are you doing? He wanted to know.

Just going to sit in the front garden for a while, replied Sanjay.

Man, we don't do things like that here, not in the winter anyway, Ajay said laughingly. *Come into the kitchen, mum has prepared tea for you. You must be hungry after your flight.*

Sanjay wasn't. But he had nothing better to do; so he followed him into the kitchen. He realised he had much to learn in England.

Meanwhile in the Greenwich Park he finished his warm cup of tea. It was after five and getting dark in the park. He got into his blue Mercedes and drove back through the Blackwall tunnel and headed to wards Newham in east London. He was meeting a friend in a pub before joining the curry club members for dinner in a nearby restaurant. He

was in mood to drink tonight. Unable to tell anyone his disappointment he was going to drown his sorrows in drinks. He wound his way slowly towards the pub in Newham.

Chapter 4

Destiny with the Met

As a police officer in Fiji for some three years, one of Sanjay's dreams was to get a scholarship to get police training at the Scotland Yard, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police Service of London. He was an avid reader and had read a number of books written by British writers. One of his best characters was Sherlock Holmes, who had a lot of dealings with the Scotland Yard. In his mind the Scotland Yard was the most famous and the best police service in the world. When he met and married Kiran he was pleased that he could at least be able to visit the most famous police headquarters in the world.

A few days after arriving in London he had started looking for work. His father in law casually suggested that as he was a police officer in Fiji and had studied at tertiary level, he should make inquiries to join the Met Police in London. Ajay added that Met police were now actively recruiting people from ethnic minority groups in London and Sanjay stood a good chance to get selected. Sanjay got excited with this information. He did not contemplate before this that he would ever even consider applying for a position in the Met Police. He knew it was a long shot and he should not get too excited at that moment.

Ajay drove him to the local police station and they obtained an application form for Met Police. The station officer informed that Sanjay should send in his application; which would be processed in due course. He also told him that even if he got selected for an interview, Sanjay would

have to wait at least one year before he would be called for an interview. First he would need to get his permanent residence status in the United Kingdom, which would only be given to him after qualifying residency period of one year. Sanjay did not mind waiting for one year; but what bothered him more was what to do in this one year. He did not want to remain unemployed in during this period but also did not wish to invest too much time and effort in getting a job which he may have to give up within twelve months. He knew he was bit too optimistic about his prospects to get selected into the Met Police, but he was quietly confident about his prospects.

Why don't you join the security business here for one year? Ajay asked. You will have no problem getting in. You will be in a similar line of work and can leave the job anytime you want.

This idea suited Sanjay. Ajay then drove him to a security firm in Greenwich and he was offered the job same day after a brief interview. After two week's fully paid training, Sanjay began working as a security officer for Alliance Security. He had been in London for only six days and was still on annual leave from Fiji Police Service. His first visit to central London was to work as a security officer at a London factory that he had to locate by himself.

For a few weeks he had to travel on trains, London underground system and double decker buses to various sites in London. Fortunately he was soon posted as a day security officer at the St James underground railway station. This location was not far from the railway station that the train from Belvedere brought him in the morning. He got off from his train at the Charing Cross British Rai station and strolled down the Whitehall; turning right at the famous

Westminster House to arrive at his place of work. As a new arrival in London he enjoyed this opportunity to discover some of the historical sites in central London as a part of his work routine. His favourite was to sit in the St James Park and eat his lunch. Afterwards he would stroll in the park and sometimes walk up to the Buckingham palace, to observe tourists capturing the images of the majestic palace to take with them back to their homes.

Pleased with his work the Alliance Security firm posted Sanjay as a security commissionaire at a tertiary College; not far from the London Bridge. Now he got off the train at the London Bridge and strolled down some back alleys to the college. It had some two hundred students, who were taught by teachers who preferred teaching in a university. The students also preferred to play games and indulge in taking soft drugs rather than learn. Sanjay loved his job and got involved with students more than just a commissionaire. He organised a chess tournament and soon many students, as well as some staff, joined in and the tournament went on for several months. A teacher from the Indian sub-continent eventually won the tournament. With some persuasion the principal let Sanjay organise a prize giving ceremony; he even agreed to donate some money towards buying prizes for the winners.

A few days before the ceremony, Sanjay received a letter from the Metropolitan Police Service for him to attend an interview and two days later he arrived at the Paddington Police Station for the interview. There were approximately fifty other young men and women, all white, who were milling in and around the station for their chance to get in for an interview. Many of them discussed with whomever they could to find their possibilities of getting selected for police training. Many of them looked very concerned about their prospects of making the cut.

Sanjay sat quietly, listening to opinions thrown around liberally about people's chances of getting selected. He was glad that he did not have long to wait because he was getting nervous listening to some of the self-appointed experts about chances of getting into the Met Police. It was with mixed feeling that Sanjay faced three senior police officers for his interview. However, all his apprehensions disappeared soon after the interview started. They were immediately impressed with Sanjay's height and built. They informed him that they had found it difficult to recruit people of Indian sub-continent background mainly because of lack of the required minimum height of five feet eight inches. Sanjay stood at six feet tall with a frame that easily carried weight of eighty kilograms, just the ideal built for a police man. They were also impressed with his academic qualifications and at the conclusion of his interview they confirmed his selection. They also informed him that he has been selected as part of a special intake and instead of training at Met Police's regular training school at Hendon, he would report for training at Met Police's special training centre at Wanstead in North East London.

Sanjay thanked the three interviewers before walking out of the interview room, well pleased with his accomplishment. He found several interviewees standing outside the interview room. They asked him in a chorus of voices how he had done. They were shocked when Sanjay told them that he has been selected for training at Wanstead. Before they could react in any way, he left the interview area hurriedly and went to the recruitment office to collect his official appointment documents. He smiled internally as he walked to the underground train station. He was finally a part of London's Metropolitan Police Service. He felt good.

The chess tournament prize giving ceremony at the college now also included a farewell party for Sanjay. His farewell was organised by his fellow security commissioner Errol. Errol, a tall and sinewy young man originally from

the island of Martinique in the West Indies. He had joined the college a few months after Sanjay had started working there. The two, perhaps because of their island backgrounds, had become good friends. Errol gathered most of the students and staff for the combined prize giving and farewell ceremony. After handing out chess tournament prizes to the winners the Principal gave a stirring farewell speech for Sanjay. A few of the students and staff became emotional during the speech. Many of them gave Sanjay small gifts as token of their appreciation for the work he had done at the college. Some of the girls preferred to give him his presents in a local pub, accompanied with hugs and kisses. Errol was the last one to say goodbye to him. For the first time Sanjay saw Errol show any kind of emotion. It was with a mixed feeling that Sanjay bid farewell to his first genuine friend in London. He had grown used to working at the college. Along with Errol he had become friendly to a few more staff and students as well. On the other hand a dream career in the Met Police was beckoning. He walked back from the suburb of Southwark to London Bridge for the last time. He took the train from London Bridge to Belvedere for the last time as a security commissioner.

Chapter 5

The Curry Club

Sanjay parked his car near a pub in Romford Road and went inside; where his friend Gary was already enjoying a cool pint of lager. Sanjay had met Gary in his first year of undergraduate degree course in Greenwich. Although Gary was a decade younger than him, Sanjay grew to like him and they maintained friendship even after both of them had graduated a few years ago.

Gary had already ordered a pint of his favourite beer. He noticed Sanjay entering the pub and ordered a pint of cold lager for him as well. Sanjay had decided not to reveal to Gary the mental and emotional trauma he was going through since receiving the morning news that was threatening the progress of his academic career in England. Over the last few hours he had convinced himself that the situation was not too bad as he would be able to resubmit his dissertation the following year and continue with his PhD program a year later than planned. Therefore he decided not to share his disappointment with anyone else. He put on a brave face and a broad smile and greeted Gary warmly.

Hello Spunker! Gary greeted back. You are looking well old boy. For some reason Gary had nicknamed Sanjay *Spunker* a few years back and the name stuck, just between the two of them.

We have a great night ahead of us Spunker! Sanjay informed him. The curry club get-

together was planned in an Indian restaurant just across this pub.

This is the first curry club function I have been invited to, Gary replied. A sudden concern appeared on his face. *I hope they won't mind me coming with you! I have not even met any of them yet.*

Sanjay realised that he had not met many of the curry club members as well. He was invited by one of the original members of the curry club, which consisted of several staff of the London borough of Newham with Indian sub-continent background. When Sanjay had started to work at the Newham council he met Harinder Singh, an affable person who loved organising Indian social events for colleagues and friends. Sanjay had met Harinder, Harry for many, in the council staff restaurant soon after joining its anti-racist team as a Principal Anti-racist Officer, tasked to set up a volunteer taskforce to provide support to victims of racially motivated attacks and harassments in the borough. At that time, although Greenwich was labelled as the racist capital of Europe, it was Newham that had recorded the highest number of racially motivated crimes and harassment in whole of United Kingdom for a number of years. Newham Council had teamed up with the Newham Police and Victim Support Newham in a project to provide support to the victims. Sanjay was appointed to head this project.

Sanjay had mostly lived and worked on the other side of the River Thames since arriving in London ten years ago. After joining the Met police he was posted to Woolwich Police Station, where he worked for four years. In the final year of his employment he worked at Brockly Police station, which was located some fifteen kilometres from Woolwich. After retiring from Met Police after five years of service, he spent the next three years studying in

Woolwich. After graduating with a BA Honours degree and three years of voluntary service in an anti-racist organisation in Woolwich, Sanjay was ready to enter the workforce once again. He had applied for the position in Newham and was happy to receive an invitation to attend an interview. He took the Woolwich ferry that connected Woolwich to North Woolwich across river Thames and drove a few kilometres to the Newham council offices. The interview ran very well and he was offered the job the next day. He felt that his work experience in the Met Police, a Sociology degree, and anti-racist work in Greenwich were main factors that had secured him the job. The fact that he was an elected councillor in the neighbouring borough must have had an impact as well.

When he arrived at Newham Council offices to start his job he did not know anyone. However he had met Harry at a few anti-racist demonstrations and parties across the Thames, but had never known him well. It was a great relief for Sanjay when Harry approached him in the Newham Council staff canteen. The two hit off well together and after a few days Harry introduced him to two other curry club members; Inder Singh and Parminder Singh. Parminder was a slightly-built happy going guy who made an effort to fit in with the crowd. On the other hand, Inder was a few years older with a lot of experience in youth and anti-racist work in north of river Thames, especially in Newham.

When Harry introduced Inder to Sanjay he realised that he had already met Inder several years ago. Soon after Sanjay had joined the Met Police, London began experiencing a lot of anti-police riots and demonstrations. These demonstrations were mainly against the way police treated the African Caribbean and Asian people in Britain, especially in large cities such as London, Birmingham and Bradford. In Britain the term Asian was generally used to

describe people of the Indian-subcontinent, comprising mainly of people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Inder was a good-natured and community spirited person but who occasionally liked to rub some people up the wrong way. Sanjay had noticed this from the first meeting with Inder who seemed to have some issues with him. It took many years for Sanjay to find out that Inder thought himself as a bit of ladies' man and arrival of Sanjay perhaps made him jealous. One such lady was Shabnum, whom Sanjay got to meet at the curry club dinner that night.

Sanjay and Gary were more than tipsy when they left the pub and made their way across the road to join the curry club dinner. The curry club members and guests were already seated at a large table that took up most of the space in the small restaurant. Two small tables took up rest of the space in the restaurant. A quick search by Sanjay revealed Harry, Parminder and Inder were already seated at the table. The rest of the seats on the large table were taken and Harry indicated to Sanjay and Gary to sit at one of the smaller tables. Sanjay quickly scanned the large table for any familiar face but did not see anyone. However, he did notice a petite pretty woman talking to another woman at the far end of the table. She took of her eyes very briefly from the other woman to give Sanjay and Gary a glance before continuing with her conversation. Sanjay did not know at that stage that this woman would play a significant role in his life in a few months' time.

Sanjay and Gary sat down at one of the smaller tables and ordered two beers. Others on the larger table were also drinking. Harry came over to their table and informed them that they had about thirty minutes away from dinner so had time for a few more beers.

Hey Harry, who's that pretty woman sitting there? Sanjay asked Harry.

Which one? Harry wanted to know. *Number of beers I have had tonight, all these women look pretty to me, except my wife of course.* Sanjay smiled at him. Harry had a petite pretty wife.

Hey yaar, that fair-skinned one talking to the dusky one over there! Sanjay replied, pointing towards the two women. *Come on, you can't be that drunk not to see that see is the prettiest by far on the table!* Harry turned around and looked where Sanjay was pointing

Oh that one! She is Shabnum, one of our staff. Harry replied. *She is one of the regular curry club members.* Sanjay was glad that she was also staff of the same council.

If I had known about her I would have joined the curry club sooner. Sanjay stated. *Hope you will introduce her to us soon.* Sanjay said. *She looks very interesting.*

You'll get to meet her sooner or later my friend, Harry said getting up. *Need to mingle with the rest now. Have fun!* Harry left the table and joined the rest at the large table.

Sanjay and Gary continued their drinking until the dinner was served. It was good and both enjoyed the hot and spicy food after a good beer binge. The dinner was followed by serving of delicious Indian sweets which provided

occasion for the diners to mingle with others. Sanjay noticed Shabnum slowly heading towards their table. He was confused.

Hey Gary, the pretty one is heading towards our table, Sanjay informed Gary. *I think she is coming for you.*

Really? Gary said innocently.

She could be heading for you! She looks a bit young for me Spunker! Sanjay reasoned. *She may be closer to your age.*

Shabnum was standing at their table. Sanjay indicated to her to sit down and she sat opposite him.

Hello Councillor Singh, Shabnum extended her hand towards Sanjay. *I wanted to meet you since I heard that you've joined Newham.* Sanjay took her soft little hand in his big palm and shook it firmly. She looked very pretty and her broad smile was very appealing to him.

I didn't realise that too many people here in Newham know that I'm a councillor across the river, Sanjay replied.

I work in Newham but live across the river in Charlton replied Shabnum with her beautiful smile. *So you are one of my councillors!*

By this time it was clear to both Sanjay and Gary that Shabnum wanted to speak with Sanjay. Gary excused

himself and left Sanjay and Shabnum alone. Sanjay found Shabnum very easy and pleasant to talk with. She told him about her work in Newham and plans to start her own business in Greenwich. Sanjay found out that she was never married and she did not have any current love interests. Time flew by and the curry club members began leaving one by one.

Will you have lunch with me sometime next week? Shabnum asked. *It's my shout.* Sanjay could not believe the turn of events that evening.

Yeah, OK. He replied. He gave her one of his cards. *You can call me when you have the date fixed.* Shabnum took the card and with a flash of her lovely smile, she left the restaurant with her friend.

Inder strolled over to Sanjay. He didn't look too happy.

So you finally met Shabnum? He said with a glint of jealousy.

Chapter 6

The Woolwich Connection

Sanjay drove from his Ilford home to the historic Woolwich ferry; which had been ferrying vehicles and people across the river Thames for many decades now. Deep down under the wide river lay a tunnel which people used daily to cross to and from North Woolwich to South Woolwich. Sanjay had crossed the tunnel on foot many times when he visited his friends who lived in North Woolwich, not far from the ferry. On these occasions he would run down the steps on south Woolwich side and run up the stairs on the north side. He congratulated himself each time he ran up all the steps, of which there are many. However on his way back, he would barely manage to walk down and up the stairs after heavy boozing with his friends most of the night.

Today Sanjay chose to travel by car to south Woolwich. Shabnum had called him up earlier that morning and invited him for the lunch that she had promised to him. He was looking forward to meeting up with her; today's lunch could lead to something special with her. He had recently broken up with his girlfriend and was feeling lonely. He needed to share his life with a woman and as soon as he had seen Shabnum he knew that she was the right one.

The ferry docked and the ferrymen opened up the gates to let out the vehicles. The entry gate was still locked as the vehicles behind Sanjay's car waited impatiently to get on ferry. Finally the last car on the ferry drove off in front of Sanjay's car and the ferryman signalled to him to drive in.

Sanjay drove the car onto the ferry and another ferryman signalled to him where to park his car. He then locked his car and went to the side of the ferry to stretch his legs and look at the beautiful sight of the borough of Greenwich that lay in front of him.

He looked down the river Thames and saw the borders of Greenwich on his right. He panned his eyes left and saw Charlton, the home of Charlton football club. Closer to him lay Woolwich Dockyard and a few kilometres to its left was located Woolwich Arsenal. These two places are known in British history as sites for transportation of convicts to the colonies, especially to Australia. Looking further down to his left Sanjay had a panoramic view of what is locally known as the concrete jungle. Thamesmead a few years ago was the largest public housing estate in Europe, home for some of the poorest in Greenwich. At the border of Thamesmead with Kent was Belvedere, where Kiran's parents still lived with her younger brother.

The thuds and clunks that announced the ferry's arrival at the Woolwich end of the river brought Sanjay out of his reflections. He got into his car and drove off the ferry to the road where the Downstairs restaurant was located. He was well acquainted with this restaurant. It belonged to one of his friends Kamal Singh, who also owned the Upstairs club located above the restaurant. He also owned more than half the property in this road and many more in the area. Kamal was one of the richest Indians living in Greenwich. Sanjay first met him when he had started his political life in Greenwich after resigning from the Met Police back in 1987. Since then the two shared many happy and not so happy moments.

Sanjay locked his car and walked down the stairs and entered the dimly lit restaurant. He looked around and saw Shabnum waving at him. Her wide eyes and even wider

smile was very inviting. She got up as Sanjay approached her and gave him a hug. Her petite frame disappeared as he wrapped her in his long arms and held her close to him for a short while longer than a usual hug between two relative strangers. For some reason Sanjay felt very close to her; maybe because of her open and friendly demeanour.

Both sat down and Shabnum ordered some food and a pint of lager for him. She already had a cup of tea for herself. On Sanjay's request she told him a bit more about herself. She lived with her widower father and a younger brother at their home in Charlton. She was the sole breadwinner for the family because her father was now retired and her brother was still studying. She also had a married sister who lived with her family up in the midlands.

Sanjay felt a great sense of admiration for this young lady. Although she was very pretty and well educated and had a relatively high position at the London Borough of Newham council, she did not show any air of superiority that one finds in many individuals with half her attributes. Shabnum suddenly stopped talking about herself and looked intently at Sanjay. He noticed her look and looked back at her inquiringly. She hesitated briefly, as if trying to find right words to address him. Finally she smiled slightly and looking straight into his eyes said

Sanjay, are you thinking of having a romantic relationship with me? Sanjay was taken aback slightly, not at the question but the timing of it and in the manner it was brought up. He was indeed contemplating a romantic relationship with her; most of the men his age indeed would.

Sanjay had been single now for several months. He was not the kind to be without a woman in his life for too

long. Indeed, until he had met his last girlfriend, he was used to having multiple girlfriends since he had separated from his wife Kiran way back in nineteen ninety five. But some three years ago he had met Payal through her sister Sheetal. She worked for an NGO in Woolwich and had become friendly with Sanjay when he joined the anti-racist struggle in the borough after resigning from the Met Police. Sheetal often talked about Payal and described her as the brown Marilyn Monroe. She promised to introduce her to Sanjay. Sanjay initially got rather inquisitive to meet this 'brown Marilyn Monroe' but this was short-lived when Sheetal told him that Payal was married.

When one day he finally did meet her he realised why Sheetal described her as brown Marilyn Monroe; she was petite and attractive, with large expressive eyes; but her main attraction were her luscious lips and generous breasts that Payal found hard to hide behind the tight dress she wore. When he stole glances on his rear-view mirror during their drive to watch a play in West London, he found Payal looking shyly back at him. During the play she sat next to him and Sanjay casually asked her if she would like to have a cup of coffee with him some day. She looked back at him and Sanjay could sense the battle that was going inside her mind and heart.

Look, you don't really have to, I just felt that we can perhaps meet up and have a little....
Before he could finish his sentence Payal flashed him a beautiful smile and cut him short.

*I would love to have a cup of coffee with you.
I can meet you after work one evening in Woolwich.*

The two met soon after that night and the coffee meeting eventually resulted into a torrid affair. After several months her husband came to know about their relationship and the two decided to separate; Payal moving back to live with her parents in Woolwich. After that Sanjay and Payal's relationship got stronger and Sanjay began to search for a house to buy for the two of them. However, Payal's father died unexpectedly and she decided that she would stay with her mother. The relationship became very strained and eventually ended. Sanjay decided to move to East London to be near his workplace and the distance from Payal's home would also help him to cope with the unexpected breakup.

Although he had met several women after this breakup, Sanjay was not keen to have long term relationship with any of them. Memories of his time with Payal still haunted him and he tried to look for the qualities of Payal in these women. But since meeting Shabnum he did not think of Payal for even one moment. Looking at her now in the restaurant, he was convinced that Shabnum would be a good person to share his life with. But he struggled internally to answer her unexpectedly open and forward question. He was not sure whether he should reveal to her his feelings towards her; he felt it was too soon. He wanted to romance her for a longer period and would prefer to ask the question to her first.

But she had unexpectedly turned the table and Sanjay decided that the best thing for him to do was to tell her the truth.

Yes, I was hoping that eventually we will have a relationship, even a romantic one, he finally blurted out. She lowered her eyes for a second and when she looked at him again; her eyes were soft but resolute.

Look Sanjay, I wish to make it clear from the beginning that there would not be romantic relationship between the two of us. I thought it was best to get this cleared before we proceeded any further.

Sanjay was not expecting this response from Shabnum. He did not know how to respond. He made an excuse and walked into the washroom to collect his thoughts. He felt silly for putting himself in such a situation; a situation he found himself for the first time. He did not handle failure and rejection well.

After recomposing himself he walked back to the table. Shabnum must have sensed his discomfort.

I'm sorry Sanjay, but I still want us to be friends, she said. After all you are still my councillor. This was of little consolation to Sanjay. He still felt angry with her for trapping him in this awkward and embarrassing situation.

I don't know about being a friend; we hardly know each other. He retorted. Of course I will help you as a councillor. You did not have to resort to all these to get my service as a councillor. You are welcome to come to my office at any time.

Shabnum could sense the anger in Sanjay's voice and felt that his anger was a bit misplaced. She just wanted to set personal and professional boundaries from the beginning. She had been warned by some of the Curry

Club members about Sanjay's ways with pretty women. She just wanted to protect herself.

Look Sanjay, why don't I tell you about my business plan and discuss how you can assist me in realising my dream. Shabnum said, trying to move away from the impasse.

Sanjay was glad that Shabnum had changed the subject. Always eager to assist his constituents he listened patiently to her as she outlined her plans to open a high quality restaurant in a dilapidated property near the Waterfront Leisure Centre in Woolwich. He was impressed by her decision to leave her well-paid job to pursue a dream. There were not many Asian businesswomen in Woolwich and Sanjay welcomed her attempt to take on this project. By the time they finished discussing her project, their earlier awkward moments were well forgotten and the two parted on good terms. Shabnum said she would call him as soon as she had any further information.

It was late afternoon by the time Sanjay walked out of the restaurant. He decided it was too late to get back to his office in Newham and instead walked up to his office at the Greenwich Council offices. He walked up the stairs to his office. On the way he met one of the admin staff and she offered to bring him a cup of tea in his office. Once comfortably seated in his office he called Kiran.

Hey, I wonder if I can pick up the kids this evening. I will bring them back tomorrow then. He said.

Since their separation in 1985 and subsequent divorce in 1991, Sanjay had the custody of their two children each weekend. He usually picked them up on a

Saturday and brought them back to Kiran on a Sunday. But whenever he was in Woolwich on a Friday afternoon he requested Kiran to pick the kids up that evening, saving him a trip across the river. The initial bitterness of the traumatic separation was well past between the two of them and Kiran was very accommodative now in respect to children's visitation rights.

No problem, she replied. I'll have them ready by 6pm. Is that OK?

That will be just fine, Sanjay replied.

Why don't you stay for dinner tonight? She asked. It will save you cooking or taking the kids out for their dinner! I have already cooked their dinner.

Sounds great! Sanjay said. He always enjoyed Kiran's cooking.

In this case I'll take them out for dinner tomorrow night and bring them back on Sunday, if that's OK with. Sanjay offered.

That's OK. I'll see you later then." Kiran hung up.

Sanjay put back the phone and stretched out in his chair. He had a few hours to kill before he drove up to Welling to pick up his kids.

His staff brought in a cup of tea and some of his favourite mixed fruit cakes; left over from one of the council meetings. She placed them on the coffee table and left the room. Sanjay walked over and slumped into an

armchair. He was a bit tired by now and a cup of tea always relaxed him. He relaxed and tucked into the tea and cakes. He finished his refreshment and decided to have a power nap before attending to some of his council paperwork. He closed his eyes and his mind floated back to the first time he had visited Woolwich; way back in 1980.

The day after he had arrived at Kiran's parents' home in Belvedere in the chilly November winter in 1980, his father-in-law had invited Sanjay to accompany him to Woolwich. It was customary for his father-in-law to shop in Woolwich each Saturday and cook his favourite dish, a chicken or lamb stew, for Sunday lunch. On that Sunday he had offered to buy some winter clothes for Sanjay because he had arrived in London without anything warm. The two travelled by train from Belvedere and after passing through Abbey Wood and Plumstead railway stations, they got off at Woolwich. This was the Sanjay's first train journey and he excitedly looked through the glass windows, his vision impaired by graffiti in places, at the sights that passed as the train sped through until it came to a halt at the next station.

They got off at Woolwich station and walked up a set of steps to get out. Sanjay's first impression of Woolwich was not very good. A row of dilapidated shops lined a narrow street on the left. Ahead on their left was a block of old shops and straight ahead was the bus terminus through which they walked in order to get to Powis Street, the main shopping street of Woolwich. At the bottom end was the market of Woolwich; a tour of which revealed to Sanjay many fruits and vegetable for the first time. Before that his father-in-law had taken him to Marks & Spencers and bought him some winter clothes. In a few hours he had toured most of the Woolwich town centre and noted that this town was much smaller than Suva and Lautoka, the two cities of Fiji he had lived in, before migrating to England. At that time Sanjay did not know that this little town located

in the out fringe of outer Southeast London Woolwich would be his workplace and home for nearly fifteen years.

The arrival of another councillor in the office stirred Sanjay out of his reverie. He looked at his watch and realised it was nearly time to head towards Welling to pick up his kids. He went to Powis Street and bought little gifts for his daughter Ria and son Raman. He bought a bottle of white wine, one of Kiran's favourite and a desert for dinner. He drove along now familiar route through Woolwich and upper Plumstead and turned right into Wickham Street that ran almost on the border of greater London and Kent. Half way up this street he turned left, leaving behind the terraced houses and tower blocks that were the main features of the lower part of Greenwich; and into the well-kept street of Welling and Kent. The streets were lined with beautiful semi-detached double storied building which had so captivated Sanjay's imagination when Kiran's brother Ajay had taken him on the tour of the area in 1980.

They had driven through the concrete jungle of Thamesmead housing estate and old and dilapidating terraced house of lower Abbeywood and Plumstead. These houses were far a cry from many of the houses in Suva, especially in the area where Kiran and Sanjay had lived for more than a year prior to coming to London. Sanjay had expected much better housing in the country that had ruled over most of the world only a few decades ago. He was disappointed in this respect since he had arrived. One of the few things that did impress him was the housing and general environment of Welling. During the induction drive with Ajay, Sanjay had made an announcement that one day soon he would buy a house in that area.

Oh yeah? Ajay had sarcastically. Dream-on mate!

Kiran looked at him but did not say anything. Sanjay looked outside the car at the houses but said nothing back to Ajay. Two years later he had bought a house just around the corner from where the conversation had taken place.

Sanjay got off that road and turned into the road where his family home was located. He parked his car on the street and Ria and Raman came running down the steps to him. They all hugged passionately and after getting their little gifts, the kids disappeared inside the house. Kiran was waiting for him at the door. He handed her the desert.

Something sweet for afters, He said.

She took the desert and the two walked into the dining hall. Kiran placed the desert on the table; dinner was already served. Sanjay placed the wine bottle on the table.

We haven't had any wine for some time now. Kiran smiled and walked into the kitchen and returned with two wine glasses.

Ria, Raman, come and have your dinner, she called out. She turned to Sanjay. Sanjay had opened the wine bottle. He poured wine into the glasses. He handed one to her and raised his glass.

Cheers! He said. Kiran sipped her wine.

Good wine, as usual. She said with a smile. The kids were seated at the table by now. *Now let's have dinner.* Everybody sat down and had dinner.

Chapter 7

The Second Attempt

Sanjay parked his car in the Goldsmiths College car park in Lewisham and walked across the road to meet Professor Annie Henderson. Earlier in the week he had contacted his college and complained about being marked down for his MA dissertation. Sanjay had shown his dissertation to a few of his friends and all of them felt that it deserved at least a pass, if not more. In fact his entire dissertation was based on his original work conducted over five years of research in the borough of Greenwich.

The college official informed him that he had to resubmit his dissertation now that a decision had been made by the examination board about his dissertation. The official informed him that the dissertation could not be reassessed but the university had provision for one more submission. A few days later he was informed that Professor Henderson was appointed by the college as his supervisor to guide him through his dissertation. An appointment was made for him to meet his supervisor for an initial discussion.

The meeting with his new supervisor went well. She informed him that overall his dissertation was good and the fact it was based on original research was a plus point. However, she pointed out that it lacked somewhat in technical aspects and pointed out the areas where he needed to work on to bring it up to a pass. As submission of the dissertation was not due till the end of the year, she felt that

the work could be easily completed in that period. Sanjay pointed out to her that he had a feeling that he was penalised because his dissertation was based on real events in Greenwich and offered to work on entirely new dissertation. But Professor Henderson believed that that was not the case and Sanjay should go ahead and work on his present dissertation. Sanjay was still not entirely convinced about resubmitting the same dissertation but any doubts he had disappeared when Professor Henderson fully supported his existing work.

Driving back to Newham he was comforted by the fact that he had nearly one year to resubmit his work to the University. The amount of work outlined by his supervisor was not much and with regular work in the evenings he would be able to easily complete it. He had lost a year but felt good that by this time next year he would be able to embark on his PhD candidature. Stuck in the peak time traffic between Lewisham and Greenwich tunnel, he refreshed in his mind the events leading to his MA research.

Sanjay had not realized at that time that his social research had begun just a few months after he was posted to the Woolwich police station. He was extremely excited the first day he arrived at the Met Police's Wanstead training centre. Ajay had generously offered to drop him from Belvedere, across river Thames, to the training centre, located among thick forest not far from the Leytonstone train station. He was joined by some one hundred new recruits as part of a special intake for training because Hendon Training Centre could not cater for increasing demands for extra police officers that London required at that point of time due to increase in race related social tension not only in London but several other areas in the United Kingdom.

Perhaps because of the increase in racial tensions, which had resulted in racial riots and murders in some of parts of London, the Met Police was keen to recruit more police officers from ethnic minority communities. However looking at the new recruits gathered for the first parade at the Wanstead training centre Sanjay noticed only two other ethnic recruits standing in five classes with twenty recruits in each. He was the only recruit from representing the ethnic community in his class; the rest were English, Welsh, Irish or Scott. In between his study Sanjay learnt a bit about how England had become United Kingdom. By the time the four month training was complete he had also learnt that there was little love lost between the Scots, Irish and English; the Welsh recruits were silent in this regard. The training was also an education for Sanjay in the way the white people behaved; this was the first time in his life he had shared time and space with them.

Kiran came with baby Ria for the passing out parade held at the Wanstead training centre. It was a happy occasion for everyone. Sanjay's only regret was that despite getting nearly ninety per cent overall marks in his final exams, he had failed to get the baton for the best graduate, he was pipped to the honour by a local Bachelor's degree graduate. But being the second best was not going to spoil the day for Sanjay. He thoroughly enjoyed the day with his little family and newly found friends and when the festivities finally finished they took trains back to Belvedere as a constable of the Met Police.

The following Monday he started his Met Police career at the Woolwich Police Station. He had specifically requested to be posted in one of the police stations in Greenwich so that he could be near his and Kiran's parent's home. By this time he had rented a little flat in lower Belvedere; walking distance from Kiran's parent's home. He was glad two of his friends from training; Adam and

John were also posted to Woolwich Police Station and the three were put on the same shift. The first few weeks were good but soon some ground realities of working in the Met Police began to surface. These realities were far from the image Sanjay and conjured up from the London police movies he had seen and detective books he had read back in Fiji. Even the police training he had received at Wanstead did not prepare him well for what slowly unfolded before him.

Greenwich Police division had a number of police stations scattered throughout the borough and approximately four hundred police officers policed the area. Sanjay was the lone ethnic police officer in the borough. Being relatively new in London and newer in the police service he was unaware of the extent of racism, overt and covert, that existed in the police service as well as in the community. In the beginning he saw little signs of any personal racism towards him; even if there were any he doubted if he had any skills to detect them. *Kafir* began to be used by some of his colleagues in his presence after a few months. In the beginning Sanjay had no knowledge of what the word meant and ignored it. But from the laughs it generated from some others whenever the word was used signalled to him that it was said in an offensive and derogatory manner towards him. His colleagues who did not find the word amusing would steal glances at Sanjay for some kind of response.

Lack of response seemed to annoy those who used them and after a few months *Black Bastard* began to be used in his presence. In the beginning the words were used in passing but Sanjay decided not to respond. The laughs would continue and soon they began to address him directly with the words. *Hey Kafir, can you get that*, or *Hey Black Bastard, can you look after the phone*. Not really knowing what the meaning of the word *Kafir* was or how it was

meant to be offensive towards him, Sanjay never responded to it. But whenever *Black Bastard* was used towards him, he responded with:

Brown Bastard-can't you see that I'm brown?

Sanjay would smile back at them and walk away.

The Woolwich Police Station canteen was often a hive of activities during shift changes and lunches. It was also the place for police officers to have tea or coffee and catch up with mates or to write up traffic or crime reports. By six months at the station Sanjay was used to being racially abused by some of his colleagues. Encouraged by some others, the racists now openly talked derogatively about the presence of ethnic minorities, especially the African Caribbean and Asian communities, in Britain and how these communities were *taking over* Britain. They also talked about poverty, lack of education, crime other social evils that 'plagued' the Asian, African and Caribbean countries.

These negative talks about the recent immigrants to Britain, especially those from the African, Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent; commonly known as Asians, were result of simmering racial tension in many major cities in Britain, especially in London, Liverpool and Birmingham. The immigrants mainly lived in the poorer areas of these cities and suffered from higher unemployment, bad housing and lack of educational opportunities. It was common perception in these communities that police were especially targeting these communities, especially the youth, who were highly represented among unemployed in these communities. On the other hand the overtly racist organisation, the National Front, was openly active in many of these areas. It was not uncommon for some members from these communities, supported by some anti-racist

organisations, to campaign against National Front whenever they made public appearance.

During one such event in Southall, London, a New Zealand born teacher was killed in 1979, apparently by a policeman. Several days of demonstration attended by approximately ten thousand people took place in Southall following the murder. Police tried desperately to defend its police officers for many years following this incident but a lot of damage was already done in respect to the relationship between the police and minority communities of Britain.

Racial tension continued to brew in London. This was fueled by a house fire in New Cross in January nineteen eight one which had killed a number of black youths. Once again police were under fire for inadequate investigation. A march was organized by Black activists as a protest against police inadequacy; and several thousand people turned up in support.

Meanwhile tension was brewing in the London borough of Lambeth, London, an area heavily populated by African-Caribbean people. In April 1981 an incident involving local police and a stabbed black man named Michael Bailey increased the tension between police and the local Black community. It did not help the situation when allegations surfaced in the community that the injured youth had died as a result of police brutality. Trouble escalated when two police officers stopped and searched a mini cab in the area. Brixton High Street was soon filled with angry people and police cars were attacked with bricks. Police reinforcement was called and a battle between police and community ensued during which a police van was set on fire. Following that full scale race riot between mainly white police officers and mainly Black people erupted. Properties were destroyed and both parties sustained injuries.

The London riots were followed by a riot in Toxteth, an inner city of Liverpool, beginning 4 July. The relationship between local police and the Black community had deteriorated because of the new *stop and search* powers; commonly known as the *sus* law, brought in during the Brixton riots a few months earlier. The Toxteth riot began because of the heavy-handed arrest of a black man named Leroy Cooper. The incident was watched by an angry crowd which retaliated. During the ensuing riots many buildings were burnt and more than seven hundred police officers were injured. On 10 July, there was fresh rioting in Brixton and it was not until the end of July that year that the disturbances began to subside

Sanjay reflected that the race riots in Britain had roughly coincided with his arrival in Britain and began to wonder if he would have joined the Met Police had he known the extent of racism not only in the Met Police but in many other police services throughout Britain. In the beginning he did not understand racism, a social phenomenon that was alien to him. Growing up in Fiji back in seventies he did not have to deal with any aspect of racism, even if it existed there then. As a teenager and young adult his life was consumed by many other interesting things like study, sports and girls. When he arrived in Britain racism was not a part of his vocabulary.

This began to change after he arrived in Woolwich as a police constable. In the beginning racial remarks made by some of his colleagues against him were ignored by him. He was heartened by the fact that not all his colleagues were racists. Some of them just ignored what was going on but there were some who spoke against the practice whenever it happened in their presence. One such person was Sergeant Mike Reid. He was in his late-forties and was looking forward to an early retirement from the Met Police. He was an easy going man who loved to play chess. When he found

out that Sanjay also liked it he brought in his chess set and invited Sanjay for a game; maybe just to try him out. He was surprised when Sanjay beat him in the first game and this started a series of chess games between the two for nearly two years. Whenever possible the two would sit in one corner of Woolwich Police canteen during lunch hour and engage in a chess battle. The two were evenly matched and that made the battle much more interesting.

During one such chess battle in the canteen one lunch time a group of police officers entered the canteen. The group comprised some of the racists who often meted out racist remarks to Sanjay. The group ordered their meal and approached table near Sanjay and Sergeant Reid. One of them turned to Sanjay and remarked:

Hey Kafir, I didn't know you monkeys could learn to play a sophisticated English game like chess in the banana land! He grinned. *Serge; we hear you are not able to beat this bloody Fijian too often.* Sergeant Reid remained quiet for a little while. Sanjay could see his normally cool face turning red with rage. He stood up and addressed the racist police, his voice seething with controlled rage.

If I hear you utter these kinds of words ever again, you wouldn't know what has hit you! He said, looking into his eyes. The racist, who was not much younger than Sergeant Reid, tried to lock eyes with Sergeant Reid but after a while lowered his eyes.

He picked up his meal and walked out of the canteen, followed by other racist police officers. Others,

after recovering from the sudden outburst from soft spoken senior officer, continued with their lunch. Sergeant Reid sat down, smiled at Sanjay and looked at his chess pieces.

My move, wasn't it Sanjay? He finally asked.

Yes Serge. Sanjay replied. *Serge, thanks.* Sergeant Reid smiled at him and said:.

I should have done that much earlier. Hope the idiot has learnt a lesson.'

The 'idiot' and his friends did stop their racist banter in public but continued them whenever one or more of them found Sanjay alone. He continued to ignore them as other events became more important to him. In 1983 his son Raman was born which took up more of his time. His two year probationary period was going to end and he was keen to do well in the final examinations. He began to spend more of his spare time on studies during working hours. He began spending lesser time in the police canteen; instead the chess games between Sergeant Reid and him was shifted to Sergeant's office.

However, another event that helped to ease his racial tension occurred many miles away from Woolwich. This came to in the form of British miners' strike, which also helped him to salvage his mortgaged house as well.

The strike started in early March 1984, when Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher attempted to close down many of the coal pits in the country. In 1983 she had appointed Ian Macgregor as the head of the National Coal Board and, because of his hard line approach, job losses in the mines was expected. The threat and uncertainty

lead to confrontations between Macgregor and Arthur Scargill, the leader of the miners.

On 6 March 1984 an announcement was made by the National Coal Board that in order to rationalize government subsidization of industry they intended to close 20 coal mines. Twenty thousand jobs would be lost in the north of England, Scotland and Wales and many other jobs dependent on the mines would also be lost. Thousands of miners began to come out on strike but on 12 March 1984, Arthur Scargill, called all of the NUM members from various coal fields to go on a national strike.

For Sanjay, initially, news on TV and newspapers about the battle relating to impending mine closures, threat of job losses and even announcement of miners' strike were of general interest only. He did not know at that time that he would become a part of the circus for nearly twelve months, until the strike ended on 3 March 1985.

Soon after the miners' strike commenced a notice appeared in the Woolwich Police Station calling for volunteers to go to various places in the North of England to monitor the miners' strike. Sanjay went up to the duty sergeant to get further information. He was informed that a team from Woolwich Police Station would be sent every week to the North. Volunteers could apply again for repeat tours because he anticipated the strike to go on for several months. Apart from free accommodation, transport and food, generous overtime payment was on offer.

The decision to join the Woolwich team was not difficult for Sanjay. His relationship with his wife Kiran had deteriorated recently. Left on their own the two could not deal with their matrimonial problems. This was aggravated by financial issues; mortgage payment, children's expenses, car maintenance together with other living expenses on one income. It was taking its strain on their relationship. At that

time Sanjay did not know about issues such as post-natal depression and burden of bringing up two young children on a young mother. Even a few sessions with a marriage counselor in Greenwich, which Sanjay had reluctantly agreed to attend, did not help ease the situation. The situation had regressed to a level the two were quarreling over petty issues and this was affecting the kids. Sanjay rationalized that volunteering for strike duties would not only help to solve their financial issues but some time away from each other may help to ease their personal issues as well.

The first tour of peacekeeping duties during the miners' strike started within a few weeks of the call for volunteers. All the volunteers selected by the duty sergeant; thankfully none of the racists had volunteered, gathered on a Sunday morning and then travelled in a police bus to the Hendon Police Training Centre; which acted as the collection point for several hundred police officers from all over the Met Police districts. The Woolwich team arrived early and as they waited for others to arrive, they were offered much needed breakfast. It was well into the mid-morning when all the special tour groups had gathered; and after everyone were well fed, the convoy of hired coaches departed for various receiving centers in the north. The atmosphere at Hendon and on the coach was that of carnival rather than police officers going for serious duty of policing the miners' strike. Almost all the police officers travelling with Sanjay were looking forward to a week away from home and of course a larger pay packet next the pay day.

Sanjay had little idea where he was travelling to as he had never ventured outside London before this tour of duty. He enjoyed the country side as the coach whizzed past various towns but sometime during the journey he dozed off. He was brought back to life when someone shouted

Hey, this is Maggie's town! The Iron lady was born here. Someone stated.

The coach had just gone past a signage signaling the approach of the town of Grantham, the town Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher lived before moving to London. The coach drove through it and someone pointed out the shop that belonged to her father. They travelled up a hill and the coach turned into an army barrack not too far from the town centre. Sanjay didn't know that the army barrack would be his home for many weeks to come and that he would walk down and up the hill with some of his friends almost every evening for the duration of his stay in Grantham.

After disembarking the group was escorted to an open plan bedroom comprising some twenty beds. Once everyone had disposed off their luggage in lockers, they were shown the washrooms and then escorted to the dining hall for a late lunch. Hundreds of police officers from various Met Police stations shared a welcoming dinner and most of them went back to the barracks for a well-earned rest. After a few hours' rest the police officers were refreshed and ready for some action in Grantham. When the idea of having fun in Grantham city was first mentioned a roar of laughter greeted it. No one could contemplate that the Iron Lady's town and action went hand in hand. But several pubs were noticed on the way up to the barracks and many were looking forward to a good drinking session that evening before the first tour of duty early the next morning.

Sanjay was glad when a few of his colleagues invited him to join him to check out the pubs in Grantham. Two were from his shift at Woolwich but some were from other shifts and a few from other police stations in the area. He had been with these officers throughout the day and was

glad that no racist remarks were made in his presence. All of them were 'happy go lucky' type of guys and were glad for the opportunity to be away from their mundane police duties at the police stations. The married ones, perhaps like Sanjay, were glad to be away from the restrictions placed on them by their family duties at homes as well. Being many miles away from their homes and work place they were free to embark in unbridled pleasure of mind and body.

For Sanjay this adventure was taking him into an unknown territory. Since arriving in London roughly four years, he had not ventured out beyond north London. His group activities since the police training were restricted to shield training activities organized by Met Police at a unused warehouse in Greenwich or occasional peace keeping activities at public events in London. None of these activities required sleepover away from home. This tour of duty heralded a sense of excitement as well with some reservations as to how the week with so many strangers away from his comfort zone would turn out.

After about a fifteen minute walk down the hill from the army barracks Sanjay and his new friends reached Grantham town. It was a Sunday evening but the town was filled with hundreds of excited policemen and as many women. Sanjay learnt later that hundreds of women from all ages descended upon the town each evening in order to seek company of the touring policemen. The strike had been in progress for a few weeks by the time Sanjay made his first tour and by that time word had already spread around that several hundred policemen from around the country were barracked in Grantham town. Most of the policemen, with promise of good overtime payments, were keen to spend some of their money in Grantham, especially on drinks. They were not averse to sharing their windfall on one or more of the females who arrived in Grantham in bus loads as sunset fell each day in the otherwise sleepy the town.

Grantham town was not that big and Sanjay's group completed a tour of all the pubs in a short time. The idea was to check out the pub which had the best combination of good beer and migrant women. Sanjay was half drunk by the time the group settled on one of the pubs. He was not too interested to know why this particular pub was selected; he was just glad that he could finally sit down and enjoy his drinks instead of trotting along the streets of Grantham, even though he enjoyed the sights of pretty young women dashing from one pub to the other in search of a willing policemen to share their time and money with them. The pub he was enjoying a pint of lager was also nearly full with eager policemen and cunning women trying to trap one of them into a night of good time. Sanjay enjoyed watching the drama of the unions between the touring policemen and women from the mining districts that surrounded the town of the British Prime Minister. Several of his group members got hooked up with women and a few of them disappeared from the pub one by one as time passed on.

Sanjay was left with a few friends who had decided not to get too much into the action. Some of them were married but others were those unlucky ones who were not able to attract any of the women that evening. Sanjay had decided that he would not get involved with the action that had gripped the town since the miners' strike had started. He had other priorities in life at that time. His overtime money would help him with his mortgage and supporting his family. It did not mean that he was not tempted with the parade of pretty women that he saw in the town. A few of them had approached him at his table but he politely refused their advances. Although his relationship with Kiran was not good, he felt that he had to remain faithful to her in order to salvage his marriage. He was optimistic that the overtime that he was due for the miners' tour of duty would

ease the financial problems at home and that in turn would ease his marital problems.

Sanjay and his friends would walk down to Grantham each evening for rest of the week. Their tour of duty started at three in the morning. Everyone would get up at two and after putting on their uniforms they would walk up to the canteen for an early morning breakfast before getting on their buses for a trip to one of the collieries in the district. There they would be on standby; waiting patiently for a callout to any of the collieries should there be a need. For lunch they were driven to one of the feeding centers. There were always sufficient snacks, mainly sandwiches and porkpies available to anyone who felt hungry before lunch or end of duty at three in the afternoon. They would then return to the barracks for a nap for a few hours and then get ready for another evening of good time in Grantham.

This routine continued for a week and by the time Sanjay had completed his first tour of duty at Grantham, he was totally exhausted; not from work, but from daily excursions into the town each evening. However this did not prevent him from re-applying for another tour of duty to Grantham as soon as a volunteer notice appeared on the notice board at Woolwich Police Station. In the following six months he went back to Grantham for six more tours of duty. The first week routine continued and he had developed good network of friends who did not give him any hassle because of his race or religion. He was becoming popular with some of the women who returned many times to Grantham to seek pleasure and some extra money from the police officers. Sanjay would buy a few of them drinks but did not take up their offers for anything more. The overtime payment that he was now receiving had helped to ease his financial problems and Kiran's behavior was changing

positively. He did not wish to do anything to harm their improving relationship.

However the racial taunts at his Woolwich Police Station in between his tours of duty were getting worse. The racists were jealous that he was getting so many tours of duty and began floating lies that he was getting preferential treatment only because he was black. The fact was that every police officer at the station had equal opportunity to put up their names on the volunteer sheets each week and many of these racist police officers never or rarely did that. The increase in frequency of racial taunts motivated Sanjay to put his name on the volunteer list each week and he would have gone away on the tour every week if given a chance. He was glad when his probation period finished and after his successful final exams he was posted to Plumstead Police Station.

Deep in his thoughts Sanjay did not realize that he had arrived at his Gants Hill home; a three bedroom semi-detached house which he shared with a person he had met a few months ago. He parked his car outside the house and went inside. Tired and hungry, all Sanjay wanted was eat to and go to bed. He was glad his house mate was not in.

Chapter 8

The End of a Dream

Sanjay had slept well the previous night; he didn't even need his regular night-cap to fall asleep. He was glad his house mate had gone to visit his family the previous night and did not return until late. He was in no mood to discuss the play both of them were working on. Sanjay wanted to make a video film of the anti-racist training he provided to his volunteers. He had now conducted several week-long training sessions to the volunteers he recruited to provide support to the victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment in the London Borough of Newham, where he was employed by the local borough council to develop a volunteer-based support service to victims of racism. Newham had registered the highest number of racially motivated crimes and harassment in Britain the previous year. A multi-agency project, supported by the Newham Borough Council, local Met Police and Newham Victim Support Service, was set up to provide support to the victims. Sanjay was appointed as the head of this project and his job included recruitment and training of volunteers from the local community to provide this service.

The training sessions he conducted (for the volunteers) consisted of important sessions on development of Euro-centric racial ideology, exploitation of the Black and Asian peoples during slavery and Indian indenture system that followed slavery, presence of Black and Asian people in Britain and rise of racism against them in Britain and Europe post World War II. Sanjay had developed a good training package for the volunteers but after several

training sessions, he found the sessions repetitive and boring for him to deliver. He was aware of the arrival of video cameras and editing facilities on the market which made film and video production much easier and accessible to ordinary people. He now wanted to make video films of his training package to make his training sessions interesting and easier to deliver.

A few months earlier he had gone to watch a stage play in Stratford, in East London which featured his nephew Rajeev. After the play ended Rajeev introduced a fellow actor Rajesh to him. He was a few years younger than Sanjay but was a very interesting person. He was very creative, having taken acting and directing classes in order to carve out a career in creative field for himself. His choice of a career in creativity had put Rajesh at odds with his conservative family members; who were in business activities and had hoped that Rajesh would also follow the family business after finishing his studies. But Rajesh was convinced that his future lay in creativity and this insistence on his part was creating some tension in his family.

When Sanjay had mentioned to Rajeev about his idea of making an anti-racist video film, he had suggested that he discuss the idea with Rajesh as he lived in the same area in East London. Sanjay met up with Rajesh for a cup of tea after work one day in East Ham and the two hit off straight away. The play in which he was acting had finished its tour and Rajesh was keen to get involved in a new creative project. He found Sanjay's idea interesting and was happy to assist. The two met several times after that in Sanjay's office at Newham Council and two discussed the idea further.

During these discussions Sanjay learnt that Rajesh was not entirely happy living at his family home. At that time Sanjay was looking to move into a bigger place and

was thinking of a house that belonged to Harry, his colleague at Newham Council. Rajesh was interested to move away from his family home and after viewing the house in Gants Hill, he was keen to share it with Sanjay. Sanjay was happy to share the large house and rental costs with Rajesh. More importantly the two could work together on the film project. This was going to be the first creative project for Sanjay and he could do with all the help he could get to get the project off the ground.

This proved to be a much more difficult task for the two than what they had originally anticipated. The main problem was that while Sanjay had all the facts about the content of the video film, he had little knowledge of writing a film script. On the other hand, while Rajesh had training in scriptwriting, he had little knowledge of history of Eurocentric racism and anti-racist struggles in Britain and Europe. This led to several hot discussions between the two (in front of their computer) in their Gants Hills home. Even after several weeks nothing was written on the computer as Rajesh was not able to grasp fully what Sanjay wanted to include in the film. On the other hand Sanjay had little knowledge how to format the vast amount of knowledge he had in his mind into a film script.

The impasse between the two on how to turn Sanjay's anti-racist theoretical knowledge into a film script began to affect their newly established friendship. One of Sanjay's colleagues at the Newham Council suggested that perhaps he should write a novel on the subject first, before the two attempted to write the film script. Once the book was written, Rajesh would have a good idea about what Sanjay wanted in the script and the scriptwriting process would become much easier. Sanjay saw a lot of sense in this and later in the day discussed the idea with Rajesh. He also saw writing a book as a great way out of the impasse and it was thus decided that Sanjay would first write a book before the two would work together on the script.

Sanjay had attempted to write a novel soon after arriving in Britain in nineteen eighty. He was very homesick; missing mainly his University friends in Suva. He had moved away from his hometown five years prior to migrating to Britain and had learnt to cope with living away from his family members and high school friends. He had developed a set of very good friends at the University of South Pacific and had maintained a close relationship with all of them. They met regularly at the university or at parties during the weekends. His sudden departure from Fiji to Britain had brought this cozy relationship to an abrupt halt for him. After living for a few months in Britain, the memories of his friendship back in Suva was tearing him apart. As a way of dealing with the pain of separation he started to write a story about his time at the University. In the beginning his wife supported him in his first writing endeavor. Initially she would read a few chapters of the manuscript and give him her feedback. But after a few months she stopped reading it, but Sanjay continued to write whenever he had time from his work and Met Police training. By the time he finished his training he had almost completed nearly two hundred pages of the manuscript; containing details his university life. After graduating from the police training school he stopped writing as he was busy with settling at his posting at Woolwich Police Station and buying their home in Welling. After a few months he was ready to put final touches to the manuscript before trying to get it published. He looked everywhere in their new home for the manuscript but could not find it. Finally he asked Kiran about it. She told him that she had burnt it! She told him that she had read the manuscript in full and didn't like the parts where he had written about his relationships with his many girlfriends in the university. She had got angry and decided to burn the manuscript. Sanjay was shocked beyond comprehension. His nearly two years' work was put to flame by a jealous woman. They were living in London and

the chances were that Sanjay would never see any of those girls ever again in his life. Many of them had grown into women and had married, engrossed in their own lives, just like him. Kiran stated that the manuscript had served its purpose; writing it had made him forget the pains of separation from Fiji. This was true and despite the error Kiran had made in burning the manuscript, Sanjay forgave her. Nearly ten years after this incident, Sanjay embarked upon writing another manuscript and hoped this one would get published one day.

Since arriving in Britain Sanjay had accumulated a lot of information about racism in Britain, initially through his experiences in the Met Police. By November 1984 Sanjay had completed his probationary police training at the Woolwich Police Station and passed his final examination with flying colors. By this time he had gone to Grantham six times as a part of Woolwich Police Station weekly contingent to the miners' strike. The miners' strike was showing no sign of ending and most of the policemen assigned to the duties in the North were happy for the opportunity to earn extra money in overtime payments while getting opportunities to indulge in some fun away from home and family restrictions.

Soon after graduating from being a probationary police officer and once confirmed as a police constable of the Met police, Sanjay got an opportunity to become a part of a selected group of constables in the Greenwich command area to participate in a unique program for accelerated promotion to position of a sergeant after one year. The Superintendent of Woolwich Police Station invited applications from all the constables under his command to apply to participate in this competitive program, which consisted of one year of regular part-time study and a final examination at the end of the study year. All the constables who passed the examination would be eligible

for promotion to the rank of a sergeant in the Met Police. Encouraged by a good result in his probationary examinations, Sanjay applied for this program of study. But he knew that he had a long shot at getting selected for the accelerated program; with so many more experienced constables applying for only a few places. Soon after putting in his application he went on another tour of duties to the miners' strike and by the time he returned he had forgotten about the application. The news that he had been selected for the accelerated program came as a shock to Sanjay when it came to him after a few weeks. It was towards the end of the year and for Sanjay it was an early Christmas present.

Although the extra money that he now regularly earned because of the monthly tour of duties up North to the miners' strike, Kiran's demands for a good lifestyle meant that he was struggling financially each month to make ends meet. On top of that Kiran now wanted a second family car because she found it very difficult to ferry their two little kids in public transport when Sanjay was not around. One of the main reasons why he had applied for this program was that he knew that once he got appointed to the rank of a sergeant, his salary level would well be above a new constable's salary. He was convinced that he had the ability to successfully complete the course and become of the first black person in the Met Police to be appointed a sergeant. It would open up opportunity for him for accelerated promotion to the rank of an inspector and beyond in the Met Police or back in Fiji Police. He knew in his heart that within a few years his family would be financially very secure in London or back in Fiji; when they decided to settle back there.

Sanjay felt very happy that day at work. He had not informed Kiran about this program because he was not very sure that he would be selected and he did not want her to get too worried during the processing period of the application.

But now, having been formally accepted into the program, he was eager to inform Kiran the good news. He wanted to tell her that soon all their financial worries would be over and they would be able to provide well for their two children. After work he stopped at an off-license liquor shop and bought a bottle of good wine. The news certainly called for a little bit of celebration, Sanjay justified to himself.

Sanjay parked his car on the street outside their Welling home and walked up to the front door. Despite their strained relationship, out of habit, Kiran would wait for his arrival home from either the upstairs bedroom window or the downstairs living room window, depending upon the morning, afternoon or the night shift he did at the police station. Today he had a morning shift and had arrived home about two thirty in the afternoon. Kiran had set a routine for the family according to his shifts. During the morning shift Sanjay had to take the children to park for an hour each day after work. During this time she would get a break from looking after the children and took this opportunity to cook dinner. During the night shift he would take the children for their regular stroll in the park after his morning sleep and before dinner. He was glad that he got a break from park visits during his afternoon shifts.

Kiran met Sanjay at the door and Sanjay hugged her. Recently their hugs had become a matter of routine, deplete of the passion of earlier times. But today Sanjay was feeling good and hugged Kiran rather passionately and also kissed her beautiful lips, noticing the surprise in her large black eyes. The once passionate and loving couple had not shared many passionate moments in recent times. Sanjay was very busy with his work, police related study and monthly overtime duties for last few months. Kiran was committed to looking after their two children and their home. She was a good mother and a conscientious homemaker. In the beginning Sanjay marveled at these qualities. He did not

mind her affection slowly shift from him towards the children and the house. But when after birth of Raman, their once thrilling sex life began to lose its magic, Sanjay began to feel neglected. He begun to feel that her success at being a good mother and homemaker was adversely affecting her role of being a good wife to him. Today, he hoped that the good news with help of a bottle of good wine should reignite the passion in their personal life; and happiness in their home would return once again.

Kiran responded Sanjay's strong hug and passionate kiss with cautious welcome. She too had missed their passionate relationship which was very restrained for a few years now. She took the bottle of wine from him with a knowing smile and put it on the dining table. She prepared two cups of tea and served some warm and buttered scones by the time Sanjay came down after changing out of his police uniform. He enjoyed his tea and warm scones and dressed up the kids. He was glad to get out of the house with them. Kiran had the habit of talking to Sanjay almost non-stop as soon as Sanjay stepped in the house. On most occasions talking was the last thing Sanjay wanted to do when he returned home after a hard day at work. He wished for some time on his own when he returned home; to contemplate on work and spend time with kids quietly. He loved to talk to Kiran, but he wanted to do that when they were alone, after kids had gone to bed and they were alone relaxing in the living room or bedroom. Although he did not enjoy almost daily excursions with the kids in the park, he actually preferred listening to them rather than Kiran's daily account of what she did whole day in the house.

Sanjay returned home at dusk and Kiran had the dinner served. He gave a quick wash to the kids in the washroom upstairs and the three joined Kiran on the dinner table. As she served dinner to all of them Sanjay poured

wine into the wine glasses. He handed one to Kiran and raised his glass to her.

We haven't done it for a while now Sanjay, Kiran said, her wine glasses not yet touching her lips. So what's the big occasion?

Sanjay's big occasion for the recent times had finally arrived. He took a sip of his wine and took Kiran's hand into his own. Ria, who was approaching three years of age, grinned broadly on seeing her dad's display of affection towards her mum after a long time. More often than not, she had witnessed her mum and dad quarrelling when they were together. She did not like them quarrelling.

Honey, today is a big day for our family! He finally said. Today I received confirmation that I have been selected on the new accelerated program initiated by our Superintendent. All our worries will be over in one year's time dear. Kiran looked surprised. She put down her wine glass.

What are you talking about? She asked. What accelerated program?

I applied to participate in a new training program my dear. It is a year-long program of study and if I pass the final exam at the end of it, I'll be promoted to rank of a sergeant. Sanjay explained. *I didn't tell you because I wanted surprise you sweetheart. Isn't this great news?*

Kiran pushed her chair back and got up. Sanjay could not understand why she suddenly appeared to be upset.

Kiran had the same look in her eyes which suddenly appeared in them whenever she was about to get into a fight with Sanjay. Recently this had happened a lot more often. Sanjay hated these quarrels happening before the children. Although Kiran was a great mother to the children, somehow whenever she got into a quarrel with Sanjay, she would forget about the welfare of the children. Sanjay was aware that constant quarrels would eventually have negative impact on the children. He looked across towards the kids. Raman, not even a year old then, was oblivious to what was happening and continued eating his food. Ria however, sensing what was about to happen, had stopped eating and looked very apprehensive; her beautiful smile suddenly disappearing.

Sanjay you've really surprised me this time, Kiran shouted. *You could have discussed this stupid idea with me before applying for it.* Sanjay was confused at Kiran's outburst.

This is a stupid idea? How can you say such an opportunity a stupid idea Kiran? Sanjay wanted to know. *I have done this for you Kiran; for our family.* Kiran did not appear convinced.

Sanjay you've done this for yourself only. She accused. *Since arriving in London you've always done what was best for you. Becoming a policeman in London was not good enough for you. Now you want to become a sergeant. The first black police sergeant in London! And then after a few years you'll become the first black police inspector in Britain! And I'll be stuck inside,*

cleaning the house and looking after your kids! Kiran fumed.

Sanjay was very confused by Kiran's reaction to his news. He could not understand why Kiran did not appreciate how difficult it was for him to work and study at the same time. He had been doing that for two years and was prepared to study harder for another year so that his family could have a good life.

Kiran, I'm not looking forward to spending another year studying on top of my work and overtime up North. But I'll do it because we need extra money for the lifestyle that you want for us. Sanjay explained. *I really don't understand what your problem is. I'm the one who will take on the study on top of my work! Why don't you appreciate that Kiran?* She picked up the wine and drank half of a glass before answering Sanjay.

And why can't you appreciate the work I do? I know you people from Fiji don't value looking after children and doing housework as work; but here in Britain these are regarded as very important work. Kiran explained. *I've done this work for last three years while you were in police training. But now that your training is finished, I expected you to help me. But no, you had to go ahead and take up another training program so that you can look good as a sergeant in front of your friends. So that you can boast to your relatives back home how wonderfully well you're are doing in London!*

The evening was not turning out the way Sanjay had expected. Even Raman could feel the tension and Ria had begun to cry. Kiran was now going down the familiar road. She knew very well that the reason Sanjay had agreed to migrate to Britain was that Kiran wanted him to accompany him. But recently she had begun to accuse Sanjay of using her to migrate to Britain to pursue his own dream. The accusation became more frequent after Sanjay was accepted by the Met Police and she became aware that he was doing well in his profession. Sanjay failed to understand why she was making this kind of accusation against him when she knew well how reluctantly he had agreed to migrate to Britain, and then only for a fixed period of five years. She would have known five years would be up in a year's time and it would be time for them to head back to Fiji. The rank of sergeant in the Met Police in his resume should mean a lot back in Fiji. Another year's sacrifice would mean so much for the family back home; 'why doesn't Kiran realize that?' But Sanjay had come to realize by now that Kiran had conveniently forgotten much of what had transpired in Fiji; even the fact that they had to return to Fiji the following year. He also knew that he had to stop this conversation now; before it turned even nastier. He picked up Raman from his high chair and indicated to Ria to follow him. Ria was glad to get away from the argument and followed Sanjay to living room. He closed the door (of the living room) and settled the kids in front of the television set. Ria had stopped crying by now and Sanjay settled her in his lap and wiped away her tears.

The peace in the living room was short-lived; an angry Kiran burst into the room and stood over Sanjay, seething with anger.

Yes, walk away as usual! She shouted. *That's your answer every time.* Sanjay placed Ria on the sofa and stood up.

Ria darling, look after your brother for a little while. I'll be back soon. He took Kiran by her hand and led her into the dining room.

I have asked you load of times not to fight with me in front of the kids. Why you can't understand that, Sanjay asked. *It is bad enough us fighting all the time; but why do you want the kids to hear all this?*

Because I want the kids to know what kind of father they have got, Kiran fired back. *They should know from now how selfish you are.*

Sanjay was starting to get angry now. He did not wish to lose his temper completely in case the argument turned nastier. He knew he had to end this. Kiran was ready for a big argument and he knew she was not going to stop in a hurry.

Look here Kiran, I have made my decision to pursue my study, Sanjay stated. *You can't think properly now but I know you'll appreciate it when it is all over.* Sanjay turned around and started to walk towards the kids in the living room. Kiran took him by his hand and Sanjay turned around to face her.

If you take on the study then I can tell you that it will be all over for us, Kiran announced. *If you don't want to spend time with us then it is no point having you around.*

Kiran looked defiantly at Sanjay's shocked face. He could not believe how easily Kiran had said the unsayable. He could not comprehend why she would say a thing like that when all he was trying to do is to do his best for their family. He decided to explain that to her once more.

Look here Kiran, I'm asking for only one year's time to help our family. Just one short year and then it's going to be over, He explained. *After that we'll have all the time together. After all I'm doing this for our family.* Kiran will not have any of this.

I know you well by now Sanjay. All you're interested in is your promotion, she replied. *I've made my mind up; you give up your study and give us more time or I promise you it is going to be over for us.* With that Kiran stormed out of the room and walked up the stairs towards the bedroom.

And don't bother coming up to the bedroom if you don't change your mind about studying, She announced before disappearing inside.

Chapter 9

Broken family, broken heart, broken destiny

Sanjay was alone again in their Gants Hill home. Rajesh had gone out after breakfast and Sanjay was writing his novel which he had named *Silent Cries-A Journey through Four Continents*. The novel he was writing touched on the Eurocentric racism against people of color which had greatly impacted these people in Africa, Americas and Asia, and eventually in England, thus a journey of characters across four continents. He was drawing upon many years of his academic research, working with the Met Police and thousands of victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment to write the book.

The story for the novel contained a story about the appropriation of Americas by the Europeans, the African slave trade and their trade in Indian indentured laborers which had replaced the African slave trade when it was abolished in eighteen thirties. These would form the first part of the novel; the second part would deal with racism and racially motivated crimes and harassment that Sanjay had witnessed and endured personally. The most destructive racism that he had personally felt was when he was in the midst of his personal tragedy.

Sanjay had decided to take up the sergeant's study that was offered to him, despite strong objection from Kiran. After the intense quarrel the night he had proudly announced to Kiran the unique opportunity he had been

offered out of thousands of applicants, Sanjay had thought about her objections long and hard. In the end he could not come up with any justifiable reason for not taking up the offer. He had worked very hard both in academic side as well as working overtime to ensure that their family had a comfortable life. Despite that, Kiran was always hinting at buying better stuff for the house and the family. He loved Kiran and his family and at that moment he felt that one year's further study would result in his promotion to the rank of sergeant and their financial problems would be taken care of. He could give his family the lifestyle that Kiran wanted and his prospects for further promotions in the Met police would also open up. The one year's sacrifice was worth it and he was determined to work hard and pass his exam at the end of the study.

Sanjay started his studies while still stationed at the Shooters Hill police station, which was located midway to the top of the highest point in London. Sanjay was told that Shooters Hill was infamous for exploits of highwaymen and executions of felons. It may just be a co-incidence that the demise of Sanjay's dreams also started at the Shooters Hill police station, where many men and their dreams had been executed well before him.

Sanjay was well into his studies by the time the unbelievable happened to him. Kiran had said little about his studies all these months. However relationship between the two was tense and quarrels were frequent. Less than a month remained now for Sanjay to sit for the exam. He believed it would end all the causes of the issues that had come between him and Kiran. So he decided to keep his head down and concentrate on his study and work.

Sanjay had learnt to play snooker during his time in police and during his lunch or dinner breaks he would play it with his colleagues. A civilian staff Harry had joined the Shooters Hill police station and when the two were free at

the same time, they played the game on a well maintained snooker table placed in a second floor room overlooking Shooters Hill road. It was a crispy day when their game was interrupted by a message sent to Sanjay on his police radio. The message simply stated that he had a visitor in the front office.

Sanjay made his way down to the front office where he was met by a large suited man. He indicated to Sanjay to follow him outside where he handed him an official looking letter. He simply stated to Sanjay that he was a court official and that he had just served him a court order on behalf of his wife. The man walked off as Sanjay stared at the letter. This little but dramatic experience left him stuck to the ground as he looked at the man drive away. He made his way slowly to a vacant office and slumped into a chair. Sensing that the letter contained bad news he was nervous to open and read it. When he finally summoned up enough courage to open it, he was totally unprepared for what he was reading! The content of the letter was brief; it simply stated that he had to vacate his home immediately. So official, so final, so incomprehensible! Tears rolled down as Sanjay tried to make sense of what he had just read.

Harry barged in unceremoniously and wanted to know what was keeping Sanjay away.

Hey yaar, lunch time is nearly over! Let's finish the game Harry stated before it dawned on him that something was wrong with Sanjay. *'What's wrong mate?* Harry asked, sitting himself down opposite Sanjay.

Sanjay remained silent but handed the dreadful letter to Harry. Harry read the letter in silence until he realized its implications on Sanjay. The message was so sudden and its

implications so huge and Harry was unable to find words of comfort for his younger friend. He was aware of Sanjay's background and how committed he was to his small family. He was also aware that Sanjay did not have much support in or outside the police service. The Fijian community in the area was almost non-existent and Sanjay was unable to form any friendship in the wider Indian community because of his police job. Inside the police service both he and Sanjay had suffered racial abuses and it was very difficult to make genuine friendships with the police officers they worked with.

Hey Sanjay, I have a spare room in my house, you can move in it, Harry offered. *The house is bit old as you know, but quite livable.* Sanjay looked up at Harry. He was moved by this unexpected gesture from his friend. He stood up and hugged his friend.

Thanks Harry, I am so grateful. I really didn't have a clue where I was going to live. Sanjay stated weakly. *I don't think I can play snooker any more now. Hope you don't mind.* Harry put his hand on Sanjay's shoulders and guided him out of the little office.

Don't you worry about that now, He stated. *Go and pick your stuff from home and I'll meet you at my home. And I'll square things off with the station officer regarding taking rest of the shift off.* Sanjay smiled at Harry and walked out of the office towards his car.

The infamous Shooters Hill appeared to be steeper to Sanjay as he drove his old car towards what was his home until a few legal words written on the dreadful letter he had

just read in the police station informed him it was no longer his home. The hill which saw many innocent men and women brutally murdered by greedy highwaymen, just witnessed Sanjay's dreams murdered by someone who he had loved so much. The pain in his bleeding heart was almost unbearable as he drove along the known road automatically as his mind grappled with so many things past and present.

Although Sanjay had contemplated a divorce on several occasions to get out of the worsening marital situation, he refrained from doing so on the firm belief that that after passing his sergeant's exam the situation would improve and he would have a happy family once again. This event was only two short weeks away and he was not able to comprehend why Kiran had decided to end their relationship so near to what could have solved almost all of their problems.

Sanjay has also thought on many occasions what he would do should he lose his family because of such event and each time he resolved the best way would be to end his life. From the time he began thinking about a family he knew he would do everything within his power to give his best. Until he had met Kiran he always believed that he would build a beautiful home for his family and provide everything he could to make his family comfortable and happy. He had lived in a large extended family and had witnessed his father and uncles and later his brothers and cousins work hard which ensured that the extended families enjoyed a beautiful life. Even living away from his family home, Sanjay always felt that he was an integral part of the this amazing family living in an amazing country.

He was so glad that initially Kiran had decided to live in Fiji with her; however, after a while she began to insist that they should live in United Kingdom, a country on

the other side of the world where he knew no one. The only reason he agreed to leave Fiji and his big circle of family members, relatives and friends and literally travelled from one end of the world to the other was that he was totally in love with Kiran. Once he arrived in England he worked very hard and had built a nice home for his beautiful family. Now, after living in London for nearly five years and was on the verge of securing a dream life for his family, everything he had worked so hard had been shattered.

He drove through Welling town and as always glanced at a furniture shop which he thought signified his enduring love for Kiran. After moving into their home in Welling in 1982 Welling had become their local town for shopping and occasional evenings out. During regular Saturday shopping Kiran would stop at this shop and admire a golden sofa set; whispering softly how much she would like to have it in our new home. They knew that they were not in a position to buy the sofa set at that moment but Sanjay was troubled that he was not able to give Kiran something she desired so much. Then one day a solution dawned on him. He decided to give up smoking and instead buy Kiran the sofa set from the money he would thus save. He secured the sofa on hire purchase scheme and gifted it to Kiran. Just the surprise on Kiran's face upon the delivery of the set was worth the sacrifice. The bonus was the he would never smoke a cigarette ever again.

Sanjay drove on, deep in thoughts. His world was falling apart and he did not know how to deal with it. The simplest way out would be to commit suicide and he thought about it for a while. He was not afraid of dying; he knew from his early religious instructions that everyone had to die one day. Thinking about his young days turned his attention to his loved ones back in Fiji. There were so many back home who had so much expectations from him. They were unaware what was going on in his life on the other side

of the world and they would be deeply traumatized if he committed suicide. His thoughts also turned to his two beautiful children and thoughts of taking his life as an option began to disappear. He could still be a father to them from a distance. Life would be very difficult without them, but at least he would be there for them. Once they were older then he could think about himself again. Now he must keep his cool and try to handle the situation calmly and he pushed aside all the wild thoughts that were struggling to come out and vent out in violent forms against him, Kiran and the property he was going to walk out for good in a few moments.

He parked his car outside the house and went quietly inside. Kiran was standing near the front door with a triumphant smirk on her face which looked so wicked at that moment. Sanjay did not look at her. He gave a quick glance towards his children who were having afternoon snacks, unaware of what was transpiring between their parents. He walked upstairs and silently packed his uniforms and personal items in the dark yellow suitcase; the only item that he had brought with him to England from Fiji some five years ago. Today he was leaving his beautiful home to an unknown future with just that.

Sanjay placed the suitcase near the front door and went inside the dining room where his children were still eating. He hugged both of them briefly and said good bye to them. They did not see anything unusual in this and continued with their eating. They had seen him leaving home with his suitcase for duties up north for miner's strike duties. Sanjay went back to the front door and picked up his suitcase. Kiran had reappeared at the door and looked disappointed that Sanjay did not react to this episode more emotionally. She looked intently at Sanjay for any parting explosion of emotion but he did not say anything.

No woman will have you now, Kiran stated as Sanjay stepped out.

Sanjay was baffled by this nonsensical statement from Kiran. He paused briefly, smiled internally and proceeded to his car and with a last look at his former home, drove off. *No woman will have you now* was still buzzing in his head as he drove to his new flat a few kilometers away. For Sanjay other women were not cause of their problems, far from it. Since arriving in London, Sanjay had many offers from women for extramarital affairs. As a police officer who stood out as a tall, dark and handsome person, he had to resist on many occasions advances from his female colleagues as well as many female members of the public. For a large part of his marriage he did not have any extramarital affairs until he had finally succumbed during the free for all state of affairs during the miners' strike, by which time his marriage was almost beyond repair. Bringing this mute subject at that moment proved to Sanjay that Kiran's mental process in assessing what was going on their life was very different from his.

Sanjay settled in his new flat with little difficulty; having Harry and his family for support during this trying times. Apart from trying to run his former home and new home on his single salary, he had to deal with a few other issues as a fall out from his expulsion from his own home. He engaged a legal firm to handle his legal affairs; foremost in this was to get visiting access to his children. He was glad that they were able to secure weekly visiting rights to his children. He had to learn to cook his daily meals and do household chores in between his police duties and weekly devotion to his children. Within two weeks he had learnt to cope with his new way of life. During the weekends he drove to his former home and picked up his children who stayed with him during the weekends. On Sunday

afternoons he would drop them off outside their home and drive off without speaking with Kiran.

One morning the duty sergeant told Sanjay that he had to go to the Woolwich Police Station for a meeting with the shift inspector. He did not say anything more but drove Sanjay to the police station. Sanjay went into the inspector's office and he was asked to sit down. No one else was present in the room. After a brief preliminary conversation, the inspector informed Sanjay that he was asked by Kiran to visit her and he had a conversation with her a few days ago. He informed Sanjay that after speaking with her he had concluded that because of his marital difficulties he was of the opinion that Sanjay was not ready to take on responsibilities of a sergeant at that moment. Taking this into consideration he believed that Sanjay was not fit for the sergeant's exams which he was to sit in two weeks. He dismissed Sanjay and walked out of the office, leaving a shocked Sanjay contemplating this huge twist in his fate which was unfolded to him in such unceremonious manner.

Sanjay walked out of the office dazed and unable to comprehend what had just happened and why. Not satisfied with what Kiran had done, she had even manipulated the police inspector to deprive him of what he had worked so hard over the last year. She had ensured that he would not become a police sergeant, something which she had objected from the first day. Even from a distance she had managed to drive the final nail into his hope of a great career in the Met Police Service.

The latest tragedy in Sanjay's life hit him hard. He was deprived of the opportunity that he believed would have solved many of his problems. He believed that once he was qualified as a sergeant he could go back to Kiran and try to salvage his marriage and family. He could not see this happening any more. His mind was going blank and he was

unable to comprehend his plight. He felt sick with a sinking feeling which he was unable to deal at that moment. He walked into the Woolwich police station staff canteen in a daze. Everything appeared familiar but he felt he was not a part of it any more. Some of his friends greeted him as he walked up to where his sergeant was sitting. Sanjay could see that he was aware of what had transpired in the inspector's office. He offered Sanjay a cup of tea and he drank it silently. The sergeant was awkwardly silent as he drove Sanjay back to Shooters Hill station.

Chapter 10

The healing: Wine, Women and the rest....

By middle of 1994 Sanjay had finished his manuscript and was ready to get his novel published. During this period he had reworked on his MA thesis and was ready to submit it for assessment. He worked with Rajesh and completed a stage play from the manuscript and called it *Silent Cries-a journey through four continents*. Sanjay and Rajesh began work on staging the play in London while Sanjay tried very hard to find publishers to publish his manuscript. However he found it a very difficult task and was about to give up getting the novel published when he read somewhere about *vanity publishing* and also that even Salman Rushdie had vanity published his first novel. He decided to publish his manuscript himself and completed all the necessary paperwork to self-publish. After extensive searches he decided to get the novel printed in India. Printing the novel in India would also provide him an opportunity to start search for his ancestral roots and identity in India. After the 1987 coups in Fiji he had felt alienated from his country of birth and going to the land of his ancestors occupied his mind a lot.

During this period he has secured a small grant from the local council for staging the play. Rajesh took the lead in getting together actors and an experienced director to direct it. Sanjay assumed the role of the producer and together they began to put together a team to stage the play in 1995. Sanjay was beginning to feel good and his health was

improving as well. He was in a full time job which he loved, had a play to produce and was looking forward to getting his first novel published in India.

However this good feeling did not last long; a simple letter from the University of London informed him that he had failed his MA thesis the second time and thus he could not be awarded his degree. Furthermore, according to the university rules he could not re-submit the thesis again; his pursuit for a MA degree was now over. After working on his 10,000 thesis for one whole year, under guidance of a new supervisor, he was given 45 marks for his efforts and failed. The fact that he had passed all other course work counted for a naught! Sanjay had already secured a good academic to supervise his PhD candidature at the Goldsmiths College, University of London. That was not going to happen now. Once again in his life he faced a situation where people had conspired to deny him the success he deserved. In the first instance it was his wife and duty inspector and in this instance there were some members of the London Borough of Greenwich who conspired to deny him his MA degree. The reason was very clear to Sanjay; his MA thesis was based on his research on corruption in some of the Asian funded organizations, with full knowledge of the local council, the prime donor of grants to these organizations. It was a symbiotic relationship between the politicians and the corrupt individuals working or managing these organizations; the politicians received political mileages from them and the organizations received millions of dollars in grants from the politicians. Sanjay's MA thesis exposed this relationship and once it got approval from the University, London Borough of Greenwich Council stood to lose a lot. It was easy for them to fail Sanjay's MA thesis; one of the London Borough of Greenwich councilors was the course coordinator. Sanjay was convinced that this councilor misused his position at the University and sealed Sanjay's fate.

Sanjay was still very young and politically naïve to believe that elected politicians would do the right things. Denial of his MA degree and hence pursuit of his PhD weighed very heavily on his heart and mind. Just ten years ago he had to deal with his marital breakdown and denial of becoming a police sergeant. The dual blow was almost deadly and it took a huge amount of resilience and sacrifices for him to dig himself out of the huge pit he found himself pushed into, especially at a time when he was just about to realize a dream life for himself and his family in London. Ten years on, he had built a new career and political and creative platforms which could propel him to great heights in one or all of these areas. But once again he found himself in a pit somewhat deeper than the previous and his resilience level much lower than ten years earlier.

Ten years ago when he was forced to leave his home his now ex-wife had stated that *No woman will have you now* as he had stepped out of the house. However women played a big role in his life as he tried to lift himself from the pit Kiran had pushed him. The first of the many women entered in his life, just a few weeks after he had moved to live in Harry's home in Herbert Road, not far from the Shooters Hill police station where he was still posted.

In their wisdom the Woolwich Police had posted him to Shooters Hill police station as a home beat police officer, a posting generally reserved for much older and experienced officer. Maybe they had taken into consideration his time served in Fiji as a police officer in making this decision. Sanjay in fact quite liked this job. It provided him an opportunity to interact with the residents of his beat area, which included the improvised and dreaded Barnfield housing estate, as well as more affluent areas on the hill, in more personal and humane manner. With Sanjay's leaning towards sociology; he often read sociology

books in the police station, he was already called a social worker rather than a police officer by his colleagues, and not in a positive way. He didn't mind that as he believed that a caring attitude towards those who were involved in criminal activities would have more impact on reforming them rather than hard-fisted way in which they were generally treated. On the other hand some of his seniors and colleagues expected him to gain trust of the community members in his beat area, obtain information on criminals and criminal activities and pass on this information to relevant police officers. While Sanjay saw that merit in doing police work as an integral part of his police duty, he did not believe in spying on those who trusted him and then betraying their trust. He believed in empowering these people to go directly to the police station and reporting any criminal activities they were aware of rather than being a spy and lose the trust he was building in the community.

It was during this period of his police life that he quite accidentally got acquainted to Karen, a bubbly young Irish nurse who lived only a few doors away from where he was flatting in Harry's house.

One cold December morning, Sanjay, warmly wrapped up in his police overcoat, scarf and hand gloves, was on his regular patrol along Herbert Road towards the dreaded Barnfield gardens. Previously he had noticed two cars parked outside one of the houses not far from his own flat without road tax license displayed in the windscreen. When he first joined Woolwich police station, after graduating from the police academy, booking tax evaders was his bread and butter work to please his superiors. Along with a few new graduate recruits he would engage in regular vehicle stops for this purpose as well as for other vehicle defects. He got introduced to what came to be known as *nigger stops* in which all the vehicles driven by people of African descent were stopped indiscriminately on the assumption that they were more likely to commit more than

one traffic offence. Sometimes, as a bonus, we could find them committing criminal offences such as possessing drugs, stolen items or offensive weapons.

Since being appointed a home beat or community police officer, Sanjay was relieved that he no longer had to get engaged in the racist and abhorrent *nigger stops* activities. However he was still expected to do some *police work* like booking people for traffic offences; booking people for road tax evasions was the easiest one.

On this morning Sanjay decided to have another look at the two vehicles and walked around them for clues of the owners of the apparently abandoned vehicle. He decided that it was about time that he took down their number plates and call in the police control for a PNC check for their owners.

Snooping around again I see, Sanjay heard a sweet voice with strong Irish accent reach him from behind him.

He was not in the country long enough to make out all the different accents spoken there, but enough to work out an Irish accent. He turned around and looked at where the voice had originated. He saw a small framed pretty woman of about twenty standing in a blue gown in a doorway directly opposite the cars, smiling mischievously at him. She had striking blue pair of eyes contrasting sharply with her milky white skin. Her unkempt black hair suggested that she must have just woken up.

Do you know who owns these cars? Sanjay asked as she walked a few short steps to the pavement where he was standing.

You must be freezing out here. Come inside for a coffee, she offered, her deep eyes looking into his, almost daring him, her smile was inviting.

Since he had been working as a police officer, Sanjay had many offers from women of all ages, races, marital status and motives inviting him in their homes. Most he had rejected but a few he had accepted after first getting acquainted with them. He would have tea with some and dinners with others, mostly during cold winter nights to get out of cold for a little while during his patrols. Almost all of them would stop inviting him in when they realized that their relationship with Sanjay would not get any further than teas and dinners, even when he had problems with Kiran. Sanjay did not feel right to let things get any further, even when he felt that he wanted to. He had felt that it was both morally and professionally right thing to do. This invitation was the first one since he was made to leave his home just a few short weeks ago.

I have something to do now in Barnfield. I will return for that coffee in ten minutes, if this is OK with you. Sanjay stated, with a tinge of excitement stirring inside him.

I will put the kettle on in five minute; she walked back to her doorway and turned around, smiling mischievously. *See ya then!* She called out and she disappeared inside.

When Sanjay returned she was standing at the door in her blue gown.

Finally there is one copper who does what he says, she called out, waving to him

to get inside. *You will freeze to death in this cold weather.*

Sanjay was still trying to get used to her broad Irish accent. She moved slightly to allow him to brush past her to get inside. Sanjay decided that it was the time for him to be a bit bold and give her something in return for being bold. He paused at the doorway, their bodies pressed together. He looked down into her dark blue eyes and waited for her to move away from him. However, she stood still, looking daringly back at him.

So I take it the coffee is ready. Sanjay stated, examining her beautiful little face closely for the first time. He liked what he saw and suddenly he felt a warm feeling running from his foot to the head. *I am dying for one.* Sanjay said with a smile.

So am I, she replied with her sexy smile. She turned slightly towards the inside, her hip pressed sharply in his groin. *Are you coming in or shall I bring the coffee out here?* She stated with tilted head, looking at him from corner of her eyes.

Sanjay resisted a great desire to pick up the little teasing woman and crush her into his arms. He wanted to seal her ample red lips with a kiss she will not forget for a long time. Instead, he placed his huge hand on her back and gently followed her inside. There is time and place for all this later. He was a police officer on duty. Having a coffee with a woman on duty was one thing; anything more on duty was still out of bounds for him. However he was no longer with his wife any more and so nothing should prevented him now to explore any suitable leads, on duty or

otherwise. Anyway, he decided to cool the situation a bit, as he entered the lounge, with the heater on full blast. The room was warm and she signaled him to take off his jacket as she disappeared out of the room. Sanjay did as he was asked and then examined the sparsely filled room. Prominent in one corner was a cassette player and a Dolly Parton and Don Williamson country and western song was playing softly. This was the first time he was listening to a country and western song and the first time he could make out the lyrics of any of the non-Hindi songs that he had heard. His ears just could not figure out what was being sung; unfamiliarity with lyrics, fast pace and loud music could be the reasons. This song he could understand and in fact liked a great deal. He was surprised that Dolly Parton could sing so well; he was thus far only familiar with her acting abilities and the world-renowned assets she carried off so well. He picked up the cassette and looked at her pictures, just to make sure that it was Dolly Parton. Her beautiful face and assets stared back at him.

Do you like country and western? Sanjay heard her voice behind him. He quickly put down the cassette holder and turned to face her, wondering if she saw him looking at Dolly's picture.

This is the first time I am listening to one. I think I like it. He stated as she signaled him to sit down.

All men like Dolly, she stated without giving anything away.

She sat across from him, now dressed up in some warm clothing, well covered up to her neck. She was calmer now, almost shy. The brief encounter at the door must have

shocked her into sense. She probably did not bargain for things to get hot between the two so suddenly and now, faced with a stranger in her lounge, she probably realized that she should calm things down slightly.

I am Karen Cassidy, she said still seated.

I am constable Singh, your local bobby.
Sanjay decided to keep it official.

Does constable Singh have a first name or shall I call you constable Singh when I meet you next? Sanjay noticed a hint of displeasure in her voice.

He sipped his warm coffee and looked into her eyes to see any signals that she wanted to take further the brief encounter at the door. She was being shy, but he could see that there were some expectations in her eyes. She was not afraid that he was in her room. However, she was afraid that perhaps things had gone a bit too far for the first encounter and she blamed herself for it. She did not want to give him an impression that she was an easy woman. Sanjay finished his coffee and did not wish to prolong her discomfort.

So I take it there will be a next time, maybe another coffee on another cold winter day.
Sanjay said putting on his jacket. Karen was still sitting. *My first name is Sanjay, by the way.* Karen got to her feet and moved close to him.

Maybe we can meet for a drink one afternoon. I finish late shift at ten in Greenwich and we can meet at a pub near the hospital. She offered.

OK, but why in Greenwich, I mean, why near the hospital? We can meet here at the Lord Herbert, only a few meters from here. It made sense to have a drink at the local pub because they would not have to drive then.

I work at the hospital silly. By the time I make my way back here it will be nearly closing time. Sanjay looked at a white dress hanging in on corner of the room. It was a nurse's dress.

I am off at three on Friday and Saturday is my off day. Shall we meet Friday night? Karen looked happy. Once again her deep blue eyes sparkled.

Love to *Seng*? Sanjay smiled as he walked out of the flat. Nobody had called him *Seng* before in England.

The two met on Friday at a pub in Greenwich near the Greenwich hospital, not far from where his two children were born. He drove from Woolwich and waited for Karen in the warmth of the pub with a pint of chilled lager. Soon Karen arrived dressed in her body hugging uniform and wearing a broad smile. She appeared pleased to see Sanjay and the two shared some time together talking. For Sanjay this experience was difficult as he had not done anything like this since he had been married and had never expected to do so ever again. The age difference between the two plus his ethnic background also played on his mind as he went with Karen on what was their first date; his first for many years. This experience was very different from the wild one night sexual rendezvous he had experienced during his stints in the north of England during the miners' strike. He felt that this was not going to be a one night stand, but something which may last a bit longer, now that he was

single again. He needed a bit of love and affection and wondered if Karen was the person who could give them to him. After a couple of drinks Sanjay drove back alone as Karen rode her little moped back to her flat a few meters away from Sanjay's flat. They promised to meet again but because of both of their shift work they were not able to make any firm arrangements.

Sanjay did not wish to push the issue so he did not call her. When she did not call him for a few days he began to think that his fear on their first date was perhaps true and Karen may not contact him again. Just when he was going to put away the experience with Karen as a good memory she called. Sanjay's skipped a beat or two when he finally heard her voice. She told her that she had gone back to work at Bexley hospital and asked him if he wanted to meet her there that evening. Bexley was some fifteen kilometres away from where Sanjay lived and he did not see that as a problem.

They met that evening and shared a meal together in the hospital canteen. After that Sanjay drove her back to near where they lived and Karen requested him to stop in a secluded parking area on top of a hill some distance away from her home. She wanted to spend some time with him before she went home. As Sanjay had a free morning the following day he looked forward to a few extra minutes with Karen. He was growing quite fond of the pretty little nurse and hoped that their relationship would take a leap forward as the evening turned into night. The little chats were interrupted by casual touches, which grew more intimate as the minutes turned into hours. Then Karen took matters into her hand and kissed Sanjay passionately. The kiss was sufficient signal to Sanjay and how and when dawn lights began to shine on them neither of them could tell. Karen reluctantly left the car and walked a few meters to her flat. Sanjay watched her walk away, pleasantly exhausted

because of the night long love session that had followed Karen's first kiss. He drove the short distance to his flat and fell into his bed. After a long, time he felt loved again.

The relationship between Sanjay and Karen began to flourish and the two began to meet in the local pubs and in Sanjay's flat on regular basis. Sanjay's life was settling back on some sort of track after his recent misfortunes. He now devoted his time between work, children and Karen. These days the work had become just a job for him, without passion or much commitment after the way his seniors had treated him. Personal racial taunts against him were on increase and he began to notice a lot more racial harassment and racial discrimination and assaults on the Black people by his colleagues. Being just one Black police officer among some four hundred officers in his command area, Sanjay felt voiceless and stifled because he could not say or do anything about what was happening to him and around him. On the other hand, his weekly weekend visits to his former home to pick up his two children and spending one or two days with them in his small flat worked a relief for him. He could forget his professional worries during this period and immersed himself with his children. Before meeting Karen he dreaded driving his children to their homes in Welling and returning to his empty flat to prepare for another week at work. But now that emptiness and vacuum was filled by the delightful company of Karen. The time between their work schedules was filled with drinking sessions at their favourite pub, which continued with bottles of Hock and Lambrusco wines coupled with passionate lovemaking.

Life was getting to be good for Sanjay once again. Despite all the issues at his work place Sanjay was beginning to appreciate his work again and began to work with several individuals on the despised and despicable Barnfield housing estates where its inhabitants were looked

upon by the police as less than humans. Despite facing huge financial problems because of his sole effort to maintain two homes on a single wage, Sanjay felt that the weight of this burden was bearable because of his relationship with Karen.

However it appears that fate decided to deal another blow to Sanjay to snatch back the little bit of happiness he managed to secure after his recent dreadful incidences and send his life in turmoil once again. One spring morning Sergeant Sanders, still his duty sergeant at the Shooters Hill police station, asked Sanjay to accompany him to the Woolwich police station, the administrative centre of the area. At best of times Sergeant Sanders was person of less talk, but that day he was exceptionally quiet. Even when Sanjay tried to find out from him why he was summoned to Woolwich, Sergeant Sanders kept quiet, only saying that something personal needed to be discussed and he should not be too worried.

On reaching Woolwich Police Station Sergeant Sanders escorted him into the Superintendent's office. Sanjay walked behind him and was faced with a stern looking otherwise friendly face of the Superintendent. He pointed to a chair at the back of the room and indicated Sanjay to sit. Sanjay turned around and stopped, his heart skipped a beat when he saw Karen already seated beside Sergeant Sanders. Karen slowly lifted her sad face and looked at Sanjay. Her blue eyes were red and filled with tears. Sanjay could not comprehend what she was doing there. He looked at Sergeant Sanders but as usual he did not say anything.

Do you know this young woman Constable Singh? Sanjay heard the Superintendent say behind him.

His voice jolted Sanjay out of his disbelief and he sat down beside Karen. He nodded to the Superintendent looking at Karen for an explanation. She kept quiet. Sanjay knew well that because of her Irish experiences she was extremely afraid of British police and she must be trembling inside sitting inside a police station in front of a very senior police officer.

Were you out with this lady last night? The Superintendent wanted to know. Sanjay was shocked at this question.

What has his private life got to do with the police service? He wondered as he nodded his head.

Did she spend last night with you in your flat? The Superintendent persisted.

Yes, we spend a few nights together in my flat. What's wrong with that? Sanjay was getting confused and angry at the same time. He recalled how the police service had interfered in his personal life before.

Do you know she has a baby? Superintendent asked.

This question jolted Sanjay! He had known Karen for a few months now and she had never ever mentioned any baby to him. Sanjay shook his head; his emotions running high. He wondered why Karen had not mentioned the baby to him and what the baby had to do with him. Karen looked apologetically at Sanjay, tears rolling down her pale cheeks. She looked broken and vulnerable. He wanted to reach out to her but stopped himself.

No I didn't know Karen had a baby, the subject never came up, Sanjay stated blankly.

The Superintendent looked at Sanjay for a little while. Convinced that Sanjay did not know about the baby he continued.

Constable Singh, Karen left her disabled baby in her flat and spent the whole night with you. He stated. Her neighbour called us when Karen had not returned home. They were worried about her.

Sanjay was shocked as his confused brain tried to make sense of what he had just heard from the Superintendent. Why didn't Karen tell him about her baby? Why did she leave her disabled baby alone all night? How many times has she done this before? What is going to happen to her now? Will she be charged? How does this reflect on him as a police officer?

We have accepted Karen's explanation. Her usual babysitter did not turn up to pick the baby from her neighbour. The Superintendent stated.

We have checked with the neighbour and we know now that this is the first time Karen has left her baby alone. Sergeant Sanders added.

Karen has assured her that she will not let this happen again. So we will not take any action against her this time. The Superintendent continued. Karen you can go home now.

Sanjay watched Karen stand up. She stole a brief apologetic smile at him. Her eyes were begging him for understanding and forgiveness. She smiled briefly at the Superintendent and Sergeant Sanders and walked out of the office. Sanjay sat silently stealing glances at the Superintendent and Sergeant Sanders. He was relieved that no action was to be taken against Karen. He was also glad that not much negative impact would fall on him in the whole sad episode.

Constable Singh, you are a good police officer, he heard the Superintendent saying. I am aware of your marital troubles as well. Just be a bit more careful next time. Sergeant you can take Constable Singh back to your station now.

Sanjay stood up and faced the Superintendent. He has always been good to him and Sanjay had a lot of respect for him.

Thank you Sir. Sanjay stated. I will be careful in future. He saluted to Superintendent, turned around and walked out of the door held open by Sergeant Sanders.

He stopped after a few steps and turned around. He could not believe that Karen would ever put him in this sort of situation. Kiran had already ensured that his promotion in the police service was indefinitely stalled and now Karen's actions have placed an indelible black mark on his integrity in the police career.

What's wrong with these women Serge?
Sanjay fumed. *Why are they hell-bent of spoiling my career?*

Sergeant Sanders smiled wryly at Sanjay. He was aware of Sanjay's journey in the police service since he had arrived at Woolwich police station. Sanjay was the only ethnic minority police officer he had worked with and respected his courage to join the Met Police at a time when racism against the Black and Asian community was very high. He was also aware that he had migrated to UK half way across the world and was still trying to find his place in the new country. He saw him crumble as a person after separation from his wife. A lot of people would have given up and taken to drinks or drugs. He knew he was happy with Karen and she had positive impact him after his separation. And that day Sanjay was at another low point in his life. The crutch that was propping him up just slipped away from him.

Hey Sanjay, let's have a cuppa before we head back to Shooters Hill. Sergeant Sanders stated, guiding Sanjay towards the cafeteria.

Why did she have to tell the police that she was with me? Sanjay asked, toying with his cup of tea.

She didn't, not for a long time, Sergeant Sanders answered. *But she gave in the end when the interviewing officer kept insisting that she knew that Karen was with a police officer.* Sanjay was puzzled.

Who would know that Karen was with me? I haven't told anyone! Sergeant Sanders smiled at Sanjay.

You sure you have not let it slipped to Kate?
Sanjay sighed.

Kate was a pretty Spanish origin fellow police officer. She was a bit older than her and at times the two went on patrol together and shared tea and refreshments in the canteen.

I may have mentioned to her how I met an Irish nurse during my beat patrol. Sanjay stated. *But I didn't ever tell her that I was seeing her.*

Kate just put two and two together and worked out that she was with you. Sergeant Sanders said. *Karen is Irish, a nurse, and lives in Herbert Road.*

Sanjay wanted to kick himself for telling Kate about that incident. He wanted to share that momentous moment with someone and Kate was a friend. She did not expect her to use the information to satisfy her desire to make an arrest for her record.

Why would Kate do a nasty thing like that against a colleague? Sanjay asked. *I thought we look after our own.* Sergeant Sanders smiled at Sanjay.

I feel the reason Kate did what she did was because she was exacting revenge on you! He informed Sanjay. He was shocked to hear this.

Why would Kate want to exact revenge on me? Sanjay asked.

Well maybe she felt rejected by you. Sergeant Sanders explained. *She may have felt that after your separation from your wife you will be with her. Instead you chose Karen.*

Sanjay shook his head. He had also secretly liked Kate over many months when he was still married. The events of his separation and meeting with Karen happened so fast that he had no time to explore his feeling for Kate since his separation.

What can I say? All she could do was to ask me. Sanjay stated. *She knows what I am going through and instead of helping me out; she decides to add to my problems just because she could not handle me with another woman.*

Sergeant Sanders stood and Sanjay followed the suit.

Well what has been done cannot be undone, he stated. *Let's go back now.*

Sanjay had momentarily forgotten about Karen and how much trouble he can be with the police service because of her actions last night.

One thing I know for sure. I will not see Karen ever again. He stated.

Sergeant Sanders paused briefly.

Don't make any decision in a hurry, he stated as they begin to walk to the police car. *Karen has sacrificed a lot to be with you. She is very vulnerable and needs you to be with her now. Just think about it.*

Sanjay looked at Sergeant Sanders as he got inside the police car. He was very surprised that he had advised him to keep seeing Karen. He was sure that he would ask him to stop seeing her and concentrate on his job. The hard man was a softy inside! Sanjay looked at the man who has just told him to support the woman whose actions have dragged him up to his Superintendent in a shameful circumstance. Sergeant Sanders smiled back at him and started driving. Sanjay was left alone to deal with his confused mind.

It took Sanjay several days to convince him to call Karen. He drove past her flat several times each day and few times a week he jogged past her flat for his regular jogging sessions. It was difficult not to think about her on these occasions and he would steal glances just in case she was out in the front of the flat. He was still angry with her for putting him in a very awkward situation. But he was also reminded of what Sergeant Sanders had told him to consider. Sitting in the Lord Herbert pub he would endlessly ponder on what to do. His heart wanted to call her but his mind convinced him that not to do so. One day he was so engrossed when he noticed Karen walk into the pub. He had half expected her to come there. Each evening he was there because before the fateful incident, they were regulars at the pub.

Karen was walking towards the spot where Sanjay was sitting, their regular spot in the pub. She stopped when she noticed Sanjay and turned around to walk out.

Karen! Sanjay called out.

She looked back at Sanjay, her eyes conveying her mixed feelings. Sanjay nodded to her and she slowly walked up to him. He indicated to her to sit beside him and she quietly sat down, looking at him for some clues as to what was going his mind. The barman saw Karen and came up too them.

Shall I get the usual for Karen? He asked Sanjay. Sanjay nodded and turned to Karen.

How are you Karen, he finally said. *I was expecting your call.* She took a long sip of her lager and looked into his eyes.

Your phone must have stopped working, she finally stated. *But you could have come to my flat. It's only a few hundred meters from yours.*

She looked so vulnerable in her small frame. Her blue eye had stared to fill with tears again. She was breathing heavily now and Sanjay could feel her warm breath on his face. He reached foreword and embraced her tightly in his strong arms. He lifted her quivering rosy lips and kissed her for a long time.

The drinks are on the house for you love birds, the barman stated as he placed two pints of larger in front of them. Sanjay and Karen separated themselves from each other and turned to their drinks.

Wow, I need this now, Karen smiled. *I thought you didn't care about me any more.* Sanjay placed his drink back on the table.

What do you think now? He asked. Karen just smiled.

Come on let's get some drinks and head back home. A mischievous smile spread across her face.

Yours home or mine? She asked. Sanjay hugged her tightly.

Where I won't get into trouble again, he stated. She grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the door.

No need to get any drinks, she said. *I have something special for your tonight.* The two walked out of the pub after saying good bye to the barman.

So you knew I was going to be here tonight? Sanjay asked as they walked towards Karen's flat a short distance away.

I know you're here every night when you are not working, she smiled. *Tonight I'll introduce you to my baby.* Sanjay hugged her.

That will be nice, he said. The two walked on.

The relationship between Sanjay and Karen flourished after that and her baby Tracey became an integral

part of their lives. Sanjay filled in as a father figure for Tracey and she in turn filled in as his daughter during the weekdays when his own children were not with him physically.

However problems in other areas of his life continued to create problems for Sanjay. On one hand his continued and happy relationship with Karen upset some of his racist colleagues in the Metropolitan Police Service. On the other hand his emotional and financial crises in relation to his home and wife precipitated. Sanjay was still paying mortgage and other loans on his former residence. He also paid for the flat he was renting for himself. His constable's salary was proving to be inadequate to cover all these expenses and with his advancement in the police service placed on halt now, he found himself troubled by this everyday. His wife was also making it difficult for him to access his children but he was glad he managed to have weekly custody of them on regular basis. The quality time he spent with his children Ria and Raman acted as soothing balm on deep pain inflicted on his heart and mind because of the actions of their mother. At that time Sanjay was not aware that the issues he was dealing with all alone (far from his country of birth) was slowly destroying him internally.

His troubles escalated when several of his racist colleagues took it upon themselves to teach him a lesson for continuing his relationship with Karen. These were the same racist police officers who had been racially abusing him since he was posted at Woolwich Police Station in mid 1982. Some of them were essentially racists and others racist behaviour towards him may have been knee-jerk reaction emanating from the increasing militancy from the Black and Asian people, especially towards the Met Police. Sanjay regularly accompanied hundreds of his colleagues from his police station and other police stations in the area on policing duties involving Black and Asian

demonstrations, carnivals and public meetings. During these occasions the racists views of some of the police officers would surface and racially abusive words and slogans were liberally used even by some of the senior officers. On these occasions they would pay attention to the fact that a police officer from the Black and Asian community was sitting among them on the busses and canteens or standing shoulder to shoulder with them along the line of control. On occasions some of the racial abuses were discreetly directed towards Sanjay as well; on other occasions the racial venoms directed towards him were not so discreet.

A few years later these racist police officers found new target to spew their racist venom. Karen was from Southern Ireland and which was at war with Britain at that time. The Sinn Fein, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), Gerry Adams and others prominent Irish activists in the news, and Irish people generally were also brunt of racist abuse by the English. Most of the Irish people living in England had deep resentment towards the police who reminded them of the racist police back home. From his own experience he had come to know that many of his colleagues harboured resentment towards Irish people living in the area. These resentments against the Irish people combined with their racism against Sanjay came to fore when Sanjay and Karen's relationship spread among the police personnel in the area. Some of the police officers began to attack Sanjay verbally about his relationship with Karen and suggested that he should stop the relationship with the enemy. Others began to follow Sanjay and Karen around to scare them.

A few months later Sanjay met Karen at the Lord Herbert pub after finishing a late shift. As only a few minutes were left to closing time, Sanjay parked his car in the Lord Herbert car park and dashed in for a few pints of lager. Once inside and as regulars at this pub they were

allowed to stay back for a sometime after the close. After finishing their drinks the two got inside the car and Sanjay began driving towards Karen's flat only few hundred meters away from the pub. Soon Sanjay heard the police siren behind him. By the time he stopped the car they were outside Karen's flat. One of the racist police sergeants strode up to him with a breathalyser kit and commanded him to breath into the tube. Sanjay did as he was asked and waited for the test result. He knew he had couple of pints of lager and the test may be positive. However, the expression on the face of this racist police sergeant indicated that the test was negative.

You may go now constable, the sergeant stated. But you may not be as lucky next time.

By this time Karen and walked across the road and into her front doors. From there she began to abuse the sergeant at top of her voice.

Go and control your Irish bitch, the sergeant said to Sanjay. If she continues I'll arrest her. Sanjay smiled at him.

What for? He asked. *Why don't you go and arrest someone who is actually committing a crime?* Sanjay walked up to Karen and escorted her inside the flat.

This incidence contributed towards Sanjay's transfer away from his police to another one some distances away, perhaps a pathetic attempt by the racists to keep him away from Karen. However he was still living in his old flat and his relationship continued for sometime. Eventfully cracks began to appear in the relationship and went from bad to worse when Karen's estranged husband decided to return on

the scene. This added to the existing multi-fold tensions that he was grappling with. The dual incidences of Sanjay's transfer away form the area he lived with Karen and her husband returning to the scene contributed towards seeking solace elsewhere. He began to frequent the only nightclub in the area. This nightclub did not allow many Black and Asian people to enjoy its facility. They made rare exception to Sanjay because he was a local police officer. Sanjay became popular with some of the woman in the weekly nightclub sessions. Soon he started to date a few other girls.

It was Sergeant Sanders who had informed him about his transfer to Brockley Police Station some 10kms away. As usual he was sympathetic towards Sanjay's predicaments but he felt that a transfer away from the area and from those who were racially targeting him would be good for him in the long run. Before dropping Sanjay off at the Shooters Hill Police Station Sergeant Sanders said something to him which surprised him. Sanjay had earlier mentioned to him about the financial difficulties he had been experiencing in maintaining two homes since his separation from his wife. Sergeant Sanders suggested to him that he should consider resigning from the police service and perhaps take up the Sociology degree course that he had mentioned to him on several occasions previously. He asked Sanjay to apply for a scholarship and consider taking it up should a scholarship be offered to him. He also explained to him how his financial and emotional burdens would be substantially reduced if he took up the study program and move away from the unnecessary issues he was facing in the police service.

For a few months after his transfer Sanjay had little time to give any serious thoughts to Sergeant Sanders's unusual suggestions. He was very busy getting adjusted at the new police station and with developing issues with Karen and the multiple women he had was now dating.

These went of for a few months and beyond the beginning of 1987. While dating multiple women at the same time kept him occupied, his financial woes were getting worse, he was now not enjoying his police work as well. The word about his relationship with Karen had spread to his new police station and he began to snide remarks from his colleagues there as well.

Sanjay began to think about what Sergeant Sanders had said to him a few months back and began exploring scholarship opportunities to take up an undergraduate course of study. He did not have to look far; there was an office of Thames Polytechnic down the road from Woolwich Police Station which offered Sociology. Sanjay applied for a scholarship and in a few weeks he was informed that he was eligible for it.

Sanjay was now faced with a difficult task to make a decision to leave Metropolitan Police Service and take study that he had to terminate when he left Fiji to migrate to UK. In the beginning his journey in the Metropolitan Police Service was exciting and exhilarating. It was financially rewarding as well and he had made some valuable friends. He was looking forward to spending the rest of his working career with the Met Police. He was working very hard with his job as well as his studies so that he could take advantage of the advancement opportunities that came his way. For the first three years he was living a dream life in the job as well at home. But all these began to crumble because of the actions of his wife. His professional and personal life had skydived from its pinnacle to deep abyss within two years. Sanjay needed to take some drastic actions and try to extract himself from this abyss. He submitted his resignation to the Metropolitan Police Service and a few months later left the job he loved so much. The little rays of light in his life at that time were his young children and the impending undergraduate studies.

Chapter 11

Scaling life's abyss...

The *Silent Cries* stage play was ready by mid 1994 and Sanjay had managed to secure a small grant from the Newham Council and he began to work with Rajesh to put the play on the stage. The first task was to get a director on board. Even though Rajesh had some experience of writing and directing short plays both Sanjay and Rajesh agreed that a more experienced director was needed to direct this long and complicated play. Rajesh also wanted to concentrate on acting as he was playing the male lead in the play. Staging a play was new to the people of Indian and Afro-Caribbean origin and it was difficult to find a director and even actors to be part of the stage play. However, finding the director for *Silent Cries* proved to easier than it appeared in the beginning.

Sanjay was having lunch in the Newham Council staff canteen with his colleague Harry when an elderly Indian man walked in. Sanjay had seen him around the building and knew he was working as translator and interpreter for the council. After the man had collected his lunch Harry called the man over to their table and asked him to join them. Harry introduced the man as Imamudin Saheb and Sanjay liked this affable man from the start. When Harry told Imam about Sanjay's play, Imam revealed that he was a play director and had been in the industry in Bollywood for some thirty years before migrating to UK. Sanjay was very impressed with Imam's huge experience in the art of theatre and invited him to a meeting with Rajesh. It did not take long for Rajesh to agree that Imam should

direct *Silent Cries* and a big task was thus accomplished. The task to get the cast proved more difficult and complicated.

Sanjay and Rajesh discussed at length about cast of the play and how the casting process should proceed. One thing both agreed on was that that they could not afford to pay anyone to act in the play. The most they can do was to pay for their meals during the four week rehearsals and during the staging of the play. Secondly they agreed that some of the actors must do multiple roles because the play had a lot of characters and it would be impossible for them to cast and manage so many actors. On the positive side Rajesh had many actors and potential actors as his friends in the acting and Asian comedy circle. The casting process started with ads placed in several casting magazines. Rajesh also sent out messages to his friends and the response was very good from both these sources. Within a fortnight most of the cast was finalised and Harry had secured a venue free of charge for rehearsals. Director Imam had taken a month off from his work and a nearby theatre in Stratford was booked for the first performance a week after the end of rehearsals.

Sanjay was concerned about just one casting, that of the female lead. She was to play three demanding roles and he believed that placing that kind of burden was not going to be good for the play and the actress. Rajesh informed him that Seema was an experienced actress and if she worked hard she would do very well. Seema lived only a short distance from their home and Sanjay had met her a few times since her audition. Seema was a stunning Punjabi woman and spoke her mind. She told him that she could do all the three roles and promised to do justice to all of them. Being new to theatre Sanjay was not entirely convinced that she could do it.

Rajesh told him about a friend who worked with him on comedy skits that they performed at the monthly Asian Comedy Show held in Hounslow. Sanjay had been to some of these shows and two of the actors who were cast in the play were from this group. Rajesh informed him that Rita was his new partner and Sanjay had not seen her perform yet. Rita lived with her parents and a brother in East Ham, not far from their home and Rajesh arranged an informal audition at their home one evening.

Rita was a short, petite and dark skinned twenty five year old beauty. She was studying to become a lawyer but loved doing comedy skits. As Sanjay was explaining to her about the play Seema unexpectedly arrived to the house. She was not happy to see Rita being auditioned for one of her roles and made that clear to all three of them. The two women were about the same age and knew of each other. It was becoming clear that her outrage was not just professional. She had been getting close to Rajesh but Rajesh had indicated that he was seeing Rita. Rita solved the impending crises by stating that she would not act in the play. But she wanted to help in the production and stay as a part of the team. Seema agreed to that but taking Sanjay aside she warned him to be careful of her. Sanjay laughed it off because he felt no threat from her. Rita was Rajesh's girlfriend and he was in no mood for any sexual relationship after his recent break up with Payal and his unresolved love hate relationship with Shabnum.

When Sanjay resigned from the Met Police in mid 1987 and took up undergraduate study at Woolwich campus of Thames Polytechnic, he decided to make a fresh start in his life. His relationship with Karen had taken a turn for worse a few months prior to his resignation from the Met Police. Her estranged husband was back at her home and a disgruntled Sanjay had sought solace in local night club which had driven him into arms of several women. One day

she caught Sanjay with one of these girls when she arrived unexpectedly at a friend's home. The friend, who was jealous of Sanjay's multiple girlfriends, let Karen in without informing Sanjay. When Karen entered the lounge she found one of these girls sitting in Sanjay's lap. She strode out of the room without a word and that was the beginning of the end of their relationship. Karen stopped seeing him and would not take her calls; he could not go to her flat because her husband was living there. It was only then Sanjay realised that he had developed a deep feeling for her and life without her had created a huge vacuum inside him. This vacuum could not be filled by any of his girlfriends, even when he tried. Slowly Sanjay let go of all these girls and moved away from the area and rented a place near the Greenwich Park.

This was a very difficult time for Sanjay. Karen had provided him a great deal of support after his separation from his wife. Her timely support had acted as a great soothing balm on the raw pain that the unbearable break had unleashed on him. The loss of love from the woman he loved was filled by a woman in an unexpected manner. Over the two year period unknowingly the love he had for her wife was replaced by his love for Karen. They had a lot of fun time together; but there were a few incidences that had tested their relationship as well. However, after the police incident when he was pulled up and breathalysed by a senior police colleague, their relationship began to go downhill.

It was now time for Sanjay to make some critical decision for his future. Soon he would not have a regular job. He had already lost his home and family and he had lost the love of the woman who had become very dear to him. The multiple girlfriends could not fill the void in his life with their promises of love and support. On the other hand, he had one chance to escape the downhill slide and use it as a

ladder to lift him out of the pit he had slid into over the last two years. Cut away from his own who lived half the world away in Fiji, he had to make the decision on his own. Thames Polytechnic had offered him a scholarship to complete a tertiary education. This was the second time he was offered a scholarship to complete his tertiary education. The first scholarship offered to him was by the Fijian government for a medical course. Two years through this course he had discovered that medicine was not for him and terminated his course. A year later, whilst working for the Royal Fiji Police, he had taken up a part-time BA Sociology degree course at the University of South Pacific. He did not know precisely why he had decided to take up that course; but something had driven him to learn more about the world that he lived in. He had to terminate that course as well when he migrated to UK. Now he was given another chance to complete a degree which he hoped would provide some tools to understand the world and people which inhibit it. He decided that he would give it his best shot, despite multiple issues he was dealing with. He knew that there were a few issues that were beyond his control and that he will have to deal with them over a long period. But there were a few issues that he could deal with immediately. He decided to move on from Karen and move away from his girlfriends. He decided that in order to make fresh start in his life, he would have to give up some of the things and people that would prevent him from moving forward.

Leaving police service and stepping into education environment unexpectedly opened up new avenues for him. The core part of his Sociology degree course was the subject of race and racism. Years of experiencing personal racism and witnessing racism dished out by some of his colleagues to the Black and Asian people encouraged him to study race and racism in order to understand the root causes of this abhorrent issue that was affecting so many lives in London and UK generally.

As a police officer experiencing internal racism he had done some research into what kind of support was being provided to the victims of racism and racial harassment. He had discovered the existence of Greenwich Council for Racial Equality in Woolwich and had discussed his issues with Mohan Singh, the head of this organisation. Now out of the police service and keen to know more about race issues in the borough Sanjay met up with this person again. He was directed by Mohan to go to a local anti-racist organization and meet up with Karam Singh, the person who was running this organisation with couple of volunteers. Mohan mentioned that Karam needed more volunteers in his team and that Sanjay would get an opportunity to work directly with victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment.

Sanjay met Karam in his office which was situated up a hill, half way between Woolwich Town centre and his home at the foothills of Shooters Hill. After starting his undergraduate studies Sanjay had returned to the area to be close to the Woolwich campus. On good days he would easily walk down to Woolwich; the walk up the hill was more trying. Karam was an affable man in his mid 30s, and Sanjay liked him as soon as he met him. During the next few weeks Karam explained to Sanjay what the Anti-racist project did and its aims and objectives were. Sanjay also learnt from Karam that he had started anti-racist work as a teenager in Birmingham. Later he came down to London and continued his anti-racist work with some of the key anti-racist workers in East London and in the Southall area. The eighties saw the rise of the far right wing and racist National Front and racism in London area increased. Various London boroughs with substantial ethnic minority communities began establishing Race Relations Units in the councils and anti-racist and racial attacks and harassment monitoring projects. A central Race Equality Council and

several borough level Race Equality Councils were also established. When London Borough of Greenwich established its Anti-Racist Project, Karam was appointed its only paid worker. For several years Karam had been working very hard with limited resources with one or two volunteers to provide support to the victims of racial attacks and harassment as best as possible.

Sanjay and Karam began to spend a lot of time together. Karam lived across the river Thames in North Woolwich. It took Sanjay about fifteen minutes to walk through the tunnel running below the Woolwich ferry to get to his home. When he was lazy he would get on the ferry to go to his home. Both Sanjay and Karam loved their drinks and it was not wise for Sanjay to take his car to his home. Karam was a Panjabi to the core and he introduced Sanjay to Bhangra and Panjabi language.

Once Karam got to know Sanjay a bit better, one night he opened up to him about his small and eventual in Sanjay's resignation from the Met Police. He reminded him about the Newham 7 anti-racist campaign and one particular demonstration where Sanjay was on duty as a police officer. He reminded him that a group of young Asian girls had approached him and were nice to him in the beginning. But soon they began to abuse him as a traitor to his community for being a police officer. They shouted *Judas* and traitor at him until he was whisked away from the scene by some of his colleagues. He informed him that these girls were sent to him not only to taunt him but also to make him think of whose side he was in the battle against racism.

Sanjay remembered that incident very vividly despite it happening about three years ago. It later became a very significant incident in his life because for the first time his role as a police officer in the Met Police that he was publicly challenged by the Asian people. It also made him

question himself as a person. Since arriving in UK he had very little contact with the Asian community. His work commitments first as a security commissioner and then as a police officer were mainly with Anglo Saxons and African Caribbean peoples. There were only a few Fijian families in the area and he did not get to meet many Asians on personal level. He had bought a house in what was labelled as a white area of greater London and lived a secluded life. In order to 'prove' himself as a committed police officer to his colleagues he had to become 'whiter' than them. That meant that he had to keep himself away from his community and at times denounce them in front of his colleagues.

The verbal abuse and the challenges thrown at him by the Asian girls had brought him out of the comfort zone he had consciously or unconsciously created for himself. At first he was disgusted at the way these girls had demeaned him in front of his colleagues and the hundreds of people who were gathered around them. He had been called a traitor and a *Judas* at several other anti-racist demonstrations. But on these occasions the people attacking him did so from a distance and only momentarily and they had little impact on him. But the attack on him by these girls during the Newham 7 demonstration did have some lasting impact on him. At that time he was debating internally about the extent of racism in the Met Police. He was witnessing an increase in racial abuse by his colleagues on the mainly African-Caribbean youth and racially derogatory remarks made by them about the Black and Asian communities in Britain. At a personal level racial abuse by his colleagues was increasing as well.

For the first time he was compelled to think hard about his role in the Met Police. While he was generally happy with his work environment and the majority of his colleagues were good to him, the abuses of the minority were getting to him. What concerned him further was the

fact that those around him, including his senior officers, did not challenge the actions of the racially abusive officers. He was left to fight a very lonely battle in the environment which believed that *...if it gets too hot for you, leave the kitchen!* At that time Sanjay was doing well in his police career. He was studying for his accelerated promotion course and the money he earned was good. He believed that when he was promoted to senior ranks he would be able to contribute towards some positive changes in the Met Police. The incident however, did make Sanjay think a lot about racism in the Met Police and racism around him generally.

Aree yaar, don't get upset, Karam stated when he saw Sanjay deep in thought. Drink and be merry. It happened a long time ago.

Sanjay looked at Karam and smiled. He wondered if Karam realised what he was thinking at that moment.

Ram, Karam has shortened his name to Ram, tonight I would like to express my gratitude to you for sending those girls to me, Sanjay stated as he walked slowly to him. In some ways those girls changed my life smiled Sanjay. Maybe not the way I had hoped when I saw those beauties walking up to me!

Ram laughed as he filled Sanjay's empty glass. He was relaxed now. Since the moment Sanjay walked into his office he had felt guilty that he had subjected him to shame that day. He had found Sanjay to be a descent man and since talking to him for a day, he came to know that he had worked under a lot of distress and mental anguish as a police officer.

Let's celebrate today Sanjay. Ram clicked his glass with Sanjay's glass. I'm glad you have decided to cross over to the right side. Here we can make a difference in our community!

I hope we can Ram, Sanjay said getting serious. The racial problem is growing and from what I have researched so far, I believe we have a lot of work to do.

One of the positive takeaways for Sanjay from his eight year police work was that clear written directions were required for the successful execution and completion of any issue. The two sets of police trainings in Fiji and London respectively had drummed into Sanjay the value of rules and regulations to executive his duties effectively. This was how he had learnt to work since he started working some ten years ago. When he investigated existence of any such document at the Anti-racist project Ram informed him that none ever existed. He was too busy with the multiple case work had no time to look into that respect and come up with any written policies and procedures to guide him and his team to effectively perform their duties.

Sanjay, now you're here, please help us out, Ram stated. You're doing Race studies as a part of your Sociology degree. Maybe you can do this as part of your degree.

Sanjay could see that what Ram was suggesting was a good idea; killing two birds with one stone. Sanjay had found a focus for his first degree course. This would combine his previous experiences of racism, his study program and future researches he plans to conduct into

racism and racial harassment issues in Greenwich, nationally and internationally.

Sounds good to me; in fact I look forward to doing this. Sanjay stated. But now let's have a few more drinks and the delicious Panjabi food our friend has cooked for us.

Sanjay started in earnest his research on race issues in between his studies. He would walk up to Ram's office up the hill and spend many hours with him and volunteers who would attend the office from time to time. As there was no written document a policy and procedures for the Project, Sanjay looked at the Project's funding guidelines for clues and had multiple discussions with Ram at practical level of working with the victims of racial attacks and the stakeholders he worked with to provide victims practical and emotional support. It did not take Sanjay long to write a policy and procedure manual for the anti-racist organization. He presented the bound document to Ram. He looked at it for a little while, flicking through the pages.

Hey Sanjay do you expect me to read all this? Ram exclaimed. I have never read so many pages!

You don't have to read all at once, Sanjay said smiling. He knew Ram was not very keen on reading and paperwork. Just look at the pages as and when needed. In the meantime I will take you through the key points if you buy me a drink.

Ram drove them downtown to one of their favorite pubs and Sanjay explained to Ram the key points of the

policy and procedure document he had prepared. Sanjay noticed that Ram was getting increasingly concerned as he explained the document to him.

Hey Ram, what's wrong? Sanjay asked when he noticed Ram was not able to relate to the document. *You look concerned.*

This document is great and the first of its kind I have seen in this country, stated Ram. *But you know that is the reason for concern as well.*

Why? Sanjay was confused. *Now we have a document which we all can use to provide the services needed. This should make our work much easier.*

Look Sanjay, we have to work with a lot of stakeholders to provide services to our clients, including the local council and the police. Ram explained. *You have yourself written all this in this document in detail.*

Yes, that's true, Sanjay agreed. *In fact they are the ones who must provide most of the services to our clients. We are mostly an advocacy agency. So what's the problem here?*

The problem my friend is that none of these agencies have any written or even a clear policy and procedure to provide support to our clients. Ram informed Sanjay. *And as you, the police are as problematic for us as the racists who carry out the attacks on our people.*

What? You mean to say that in all these years the councils and police have not come up with any written policy and procedure documents to tackle this important issue in our community. Sanjay was genuinely surprised. *What is the Race Equality Council and local Racial Equality Councils doing? How can one start to address this issue without a clear road map?*

Who cares when they can sit in their air-conditioned offices and get fat salaries? Ram stated sarcastically. *Hardly any of them go out and deal with the victims on the streets and in their homes. It is left to us and our friends at NMP and Southhall.*

Over the next few hours Sanjay and Ram discussed this issue at length. By the end of it Sanjay was clear in his mind that the document he had prepared would not work unless similar documents were developed by the Local councils, particularly by its Housing and Social Services departments. The local police needs also to take a different approach and start working proactively with the local council and anti-racist groups for the benefit of the victims of racism. He was well aware that the local police had little regard and time for the local council. Sanjay was faced with a massive task ahead of him if he wanted to make any inroads into this huge problem faced by the local black and Asian communities.

While still a policeman in the Shooters Hill area Sanjay had come across two residents there who were existing members of the London Borough of Greenwich Council. He had come across Ankita Desai during one of his regular patrols up one of the roads in the area. A car

pulled up beside him and a middle aged woman got out of the car and had a little conversation with him after introducing herself as a local councilor. It became a sort of mutual admiration session; Sanjay had not come across an Asian councilor before and Ankita had not met an Asian police officer ever before. Being not a political person at all Sanjay was impressed to learn that an Asian woman was an elected politician in London since early eighties. He was also informed by Ankita that she was the Chairperson of the Race Equality committee of the local council. Sanjay wondered what the reasons for the existence of that committee were but did not take up the issue any further at that time.

Sanjay came cross the second elected member of the London Borough of Greenwich when he was called to a large haunting house at the bottom of Shooters Hill. It was a case of domestic issues and an elderly person of African origin opened the door. Kenny Desmond was skinny elderly good natured man of unusual agility and sense of humor. Over a cup of hot tea in a cold winter morning Kenny informed Sanjay about the issues he was having with his wife and children. They had left him in the unusually large house. After that he had joined the local politics and he was elected to the council in the last election. It had appeared to Sanjay as Kenny took him around his crumbling castle that he had joined politics mainly for socializing and to keep him occupied as he coped with his personal tragedies. Sanjay had a lot of sympathy with Kenny, a person who had come from an African nation several decades ago and set up a home for himself with a local woman; only to see it crumble slowly around him. Sanjay met both Ankita and Kenny socially on several occasions since the original meetings but he never pursued any political aspirations with either of them.

Now faced with the scenario that Ram had created for him after his discussion with him on his policy and procedures document for the antiracist organization they were both part of, he felt that he needed to discuss it further with the two councilors. He met up with Ankita one day on the footsteps of the Woolwich town hall. She invited him for a cup of tea in the nearby cafeteria and Sanjay explained to her about the problems Ram and he faced in regards to the policy document he had produced. Ankita, who was head of a small funded ethnic organization in the borough, kept silent for all the time Sanjay talked. It soon became clear to Sanjay that she had little idea of what he was telling her. He was not therefore surprised to learn that she had not heard of the concept of policy and procedures in context of providing services to council and funded organization customers. Sanjay then met up wit Kenny Desmond at his house and repeated the same conversation with Ankita Desai. It became clear to him that Kenny knew even less about this issue than Ankita. Sanjay was surprised that both these councilors from supposedly ethnic minorities in the borough had little knowledge of how to go about serving the interests of their communities.

Sanjay decided to go to the borough's Race Equality Unit located in the main street of Woolwich. He met up with Des Haynes, head of the Unit whose role was to coordinate the service deliveries of the council and liaise with the voluntary sector. Des listened to Sanjay patiently throughout and at the end of it he invited him to for a cup of tea. He was an amiable middle aged man who had a long experience as a council officer.

Sanjay, this is a great document, Des stated after both had settled with cups of tea. You have put a lot of thought and work into it.

But the problem is that it is almost impossible to put it into practice without similar documents coming out of the local council departments. Sanjay stated. What I can't understand why despite escalating racism in the borough, the council has not developed any antiracist policies and why the Race Unit has not put pressures on them to do so.

Our hands are tied and it is a pity that our own councilors are not able to articulate anything substantial towards race equality policies in the borough. Des lamented. We need someone like you to get in the council and support us.

Sanjay and Des finished their tea and parted company. As Sanjay walked up the hill towards his home he pledged to himself that he would ensure the local council and the police would have effective anti-racist policies so that the victims of racism in the area will get appropriate services. He realized that he would have to enter local politics in order to bring about these changes. He knew he had a massive task ahead of him. Discussions with Ankita and Kenny, the two of the ethnic minority councilors on the London Borough of Greenwich Council revealed to him that getting elected to the councilor was a big task. Many people dream of becoming councilors but do not ever become one. He was a recent arrival in the country and he knew that as a former police officer, his entry in the left dominated Labour Party would prove to be even more difficult. On the other hand he was also aware that the racist National Front (NF) was very active in the area and the new British National Party (BNP) was emerging as a new racist threat in the area. It appeared to him that the BNP was better organized and

operated from what was know as its bunker in Welling, some ten kilometers from the Woolwich Town Hall. It appeared they were well resourced and a much more sophisticated response was needed by the anti-racists to counter their racist-fascist activities in the borough and beyond. The present ad-hoc method adopted by various organizations in the borough would not do.

Sanjay met Ankita in Woolwich one day and told her about his intention to join the Labour Party and asked for her guidance. He was surprised by her lack of enthusiasm as she tried to persuade him not to get involved in politics. She suggested that he should concentrate on his study and try to get a good job after that. He found that very odd as she previously told him that the borough needed more elected members from the ethnic minority communities. Perhaps at that time she did not envisage Sanjay to enter the political arena because he was still a police officer. The situation had changed since then and as Sanjay lived in the same ward as Ankita; her advice might have been motivated more by self preservation rather than the good of the community.

As a police officer entrusted with coordinating the Neighborhood Watch campaign in the area, Sanjay had come across Brian Smith, the chairperson of the local constituency Labour Party. He was a kind and friendly man and had organized several Neighborhood Watch meetings at his home at the top of Shooters Hill. His wife Sarah was equally nice and had always treated Sanjay well. A die-hard Labour Party activist Brian had talked to Sanjay about the Labour Party whenever he went to his home. At that time Sanjay had little interest in what Brian was saying to him; he had no interest in politics at all. He had listened to Brian and Sarah patiently and demonstrated sufficient interest in what they were saying so as to not offend them.

As he walked up to their door Sanjay felt that he should have shown more interest in what they were saying to him. He hoped that they hadn't picked up on his disinterest in politics because now he needed their support to get inside Labour Party and try his luck in becoming a councilor in next the few years. Brian and Sarah welcomed him and were not surprised when Sanjay told them he was no longer a Met police officer. They listened to Sanjay telling them about his degree study and his work as an anti-racist volunteer. Brian and Sarah were anti-racists and believed in what Sanjay was trying to do.

To tell you the truth, both Sarah and I felt that you were wasting your time in the police. Brian finally stated. We felt you cared too much about the people and would do better in another job. I think you are on the right path now.

Coming to the point, will love to have you as a member of our party. Sarah added. You can sign up now if you want.

Sanjay was thrilled and signed up to become a member of the British Labour Party. Before leaving their home they provided him some basic information on the workings of the party and gave him a handful of written material to extend his knowledge. He walked leisurely down to his flat, pleased that he had overcome the first hurdle in his attempt to become an elected politician without much difficulty. He was however, aware that he had still to overcome many more and much tougher hurdles before he achieved his final goal, which in the final analysis meant getting comprehensive anti-racist policy and procedure document for all the stakeholders in the borough. He walked past Councilor Ankita Desai's home and saw her car parked outside it. He was tempted to go inside and inform her but

decided against it. She would soon find out in the next ward meeting. He had more important things to do. He had assignments to write, work on the anti-racist policy and procedure document he was preparing and read the Labour Party information just given to him. And some serious partying to do with the new friends he had found at the Thames Poly!

Chapter 12

Dawn after a long and dark London night

It was around autumn of 1994 and the rehearsal for Sanjay and Rajesh's play had begun with earnest after all the cast was finalized. A small group of the production team and the Curry Club members began to meet regularly for late night curries and Chinese meals in the area. Both Seema and Rita would join the rest for these night outs. After the meals Sanjay would hand over keys of his Mercedes to Rajesh for him to drop off Rita who lived in the opposite direction to where the rest of the group lived. One of the group members dropped Seema and Sanjay to their homes. Sometimes Seema came to Sanjay's home to wait for Rajesh. It was becoming clear that she wanted to get close to Rajesh and complained about Rajesh dropping off Rita. She knew that as long as Rita was around Rajesh, she had little chance to get Rajesh's attention in the way she wanted.

The situation was murky but it became unexpectedly murkier one night. As usual the Silent Cries production team, some of the Curry Club members, Seema and Rita had gathered for post rehearsal dinner at the popular Madras cafe in East Ham. That night Rita sat next to Sanjay and from the start behaved oddly. She started by feeding Sanjay from her plate and sharing the same spoon. Sanjay found it to be very odd and looked at Rajesh for any clue. Rajesh just shrugged his shoulders and continued to chat with

Seema sitting beside him. The rest of the group showed little interest in what Rita was doing. After the dinner Sanjay gave the car keys to Rajesh to drop off Rita. But Rita came in between Sanjay and Rajesh and took hold of the keys.

Sanjay I want you to take me home today, Rita stated handing the car keys to him. I want to talk to you about something.

Look we can have a chat when we meet next, Sanjay protested. I also had a couple of drinks too much to drink.

It's only a short distance from here and a good strong cup of coffee will set you right to drive back, Rita stated. Besides I am sure Seema will love to spend some quality time with Rajesh tonight.

Come on Rajesh, let's go. Seema stated pulling him away. This girl is weird!

Rajesh shrugged his shoulders and walked off with Seema. Sanjay felt sorry for Sanjay at that moment. Both Seema and Rita were slightly dominating women and Sanjay was caught between the aspirations of the two. Sanjay felt that Seema maybe trying to get close to Rajesh because he was the lead actor, co-writer and assistant director of *Silent Cries*. She tried to get close to him as well but he kept her at a distance whenever she was alone with him. Sanjay knew Rajesh had feelings for Rita and he felt she was exerting her domination over him with little regards to his feelings. Sanjay found himself in an awkward situation and wished Rita did not behave the way she did throughout the night.

Rita grabbed him by his hand and pulled him towards his car before he could act on his feelings. Sanjay reluctantly followed her and drove her to her home. He wanted to get back to his home as soon as possible so that Rajesh would know that nothing had happened between Rita and him. Sanjay had been in awkward relationships enough times over the years to know that even slightest of suspicion could lead to unwanted complications and heartaches. But Rita had something else on her mind. She came around, opened Sanjay's door and took out the car keys. She helped him out of the car and led him inside her home. Her parents were watching television and greeted Sanjay warmly. Then they made excuses and disappeared upstairs to the bedroom. Her brother was already in his bedroom.

Oh Finally I get you to myself, Rita exclaimed. I have so much to say to you. But let's have some drink first.

No drinks for me, Sanjay protested. I'll have to drive back soon.

Come on Sanjay, Rita said as she prepared drinks for them. Chill yaar!

Sanjay felt it was useless to protest to Rita. She handed him his drink and placed her own on the coffee table. She went behind Sanjay and began gently messaging his shoulders. Sanjay felt uncomfortable because her parents were sleeping upstairs. He also tried to understand why suddenly Rita had changed her attitude and behavior towards him. She was a much younger woman and her father was also an Indo-Fijian. Sanjay did not get much opportunity to be with people from Fiji and he enjoyed her company and that of her family for that reason. She was a

chirpy little woman and buoyed up Sanjay whenever she was around. At no stage since meeting Rita did he see her other than as another Fijian to socialize. The sudden change in Rita confused him. He grabbed Rita's arm and guided her to the front of the sofa. She drank from her glass and smiled at him.

Relax Sanjay, she said. You're too tensed. You're working so hard to put on this play but this is your chance to wind down and enjoy yourself.

This doesn't feel right Rita, Sanjay stated as Rita set beside him and take his hand in her little hand. Your family is upstairs and more importantly you are Rajesh's girlfriend. This doesn't feel right to me!

Forget about Rajesh yaar, she stated as she picked herself up and glided into his lap. I have been in love with you since I was thirteen!

What? Sanjay asked. We've met only a few months ago. I don't remember seeing you ever before!

I know you don't remember me Sanjay, Rita said looking into his eyes. You were a big and handsome man with a beautiful light skinned wife. Why would you even look at a little dark skinned girl?

I don't remember you at all, Sanjay stated, trying to recall hard. When was this?

It was early eighties and you were the secretary of the Fiji Club then. Rita informed. You attended a Fiji Day event held in Osterley Park. I was one of the girls who performed at that event.

Yes, I recall that event now, Sanjay stated. But I do not recall you at all.

But I remember it well. I saw you walk in with your lovely wife and little kid. Rita said still sitting comfortably in his lap. After our dance you came to us and I garlanded you and then you presented all of us small gifts.

Yes, I remember that scene vaguely now, Sanjay stated. But I still do not remember you.

And why should you? Rita said smiling. At that time you had eyes only for your pretty little wife. But now you are all mine!

Rita then pulled Sanjay's head down and kissed him. Sanjay was surprised by her action but at the same time her kiss felt good. The cocktail of drink, nostalgia and the pretty little frame of Rita overwhelmed Sanjay. He kissed her back passionately, forgetting her parents sleeping upstairs and that she was supposed to be Rajesh's girlfriend. From there on the night flew by quickly for both of them and the rays of dawn sunshine streaming inside through the gaps in the curtains finally broke them apart.

Sanjay drove home and explained to Rajesh what had happened. Rajesh reaction was unexpectedly calm and understanding. Recently he had become aware that Rita was

trying to get close to Sanjay. At the same time Seema was trying to get close to him. Rajesh explained that he was getting confused and now Rita's actions have released him to allow Seema into his life.

Sanjay was relieved that the awkward situation passed without any issues; rather it worked out well for all the four friends. Work on *Silent Cries* progressed well and Sanjay had also worked on his novel by the same name and was ready to get it published. After unsuccessfully trying for several weeks to get a publisher, he decided on novelty publishing. He searched for local and overseas printers and finally decided to get the novel printed in Delhi, India. He wanted to launch the book at the premier performance of the play scheduled for February 1995. He booked his flight to India in the second week of January 1995 and in the meantime concentrated on the play.

Rita had taken an important place in his life. She was pretty, chirpy and above all she had a Fijian ancestry. Since his separation and divorce from his wife and severance of ties with the Fiji Club, he hardly met any Fijians in London. He longed to talk about Fiji and Rita's father, an Indo-Fijian, was always willing to talk about Fiji. With a small grant from the local council, Sanjay and Rajesh were also organizing a month long *Positive Images '95* event to promote positive images of the Black and Asian communities of London. The event consisted of two plays, including *Silent Cries*, public addresses and public exhibitions. Rita's dad had offered them a part of his office in East Ham as a central venue to organize this event. Rita began to accompany Sanjay to social events and during the weekends they were joined by his children. They also liked Rita and the four were comfortable with one another. Then one evening during a romantic meal Rita suggested that they should get married. This suggestion stumped Sanjay. He made an excuse and went outside to clear his mind.

His mind went back to late nineties when he was trying to complete his Sociology degree, write a comprehensive antiracist policy for London Borough of Greenwich and work as an anti-racist volunteer worker. Since joining the British Labour Party Sanjay had become a committed worker for the local constituency. The personal and professional turmoil he had encountered for a few years since his separation from his wife back in 1985, was slowly fading away. He had resolved that he would not get entangled with women again so that he could concentrate on his study and rebuilding his shattered life. But when he started attending classes he was faced with challenges that he found hard to resist.

The change in environment from a police station to a university campus had brought new faces into his life. Most of them were almost ten years younger than him, full of life and in search of new lives and opportunities away from their homes far and near. Sanjay had gone through a similar process at the University of South Pacific a decade ago. This time around he was much more aware of what went behind the scenes at university campuses and the flats and homes the young students shared. Evening drinking at the university bars, pubs and at the homes of students were plentiful. Weekend partying was the norm for the young students who liked to party as much as they would study during the day. Soon small groups formed but as a mature student Sanjay would get invites to a few of these groups. Many offers for short term and more permanent relationships with both young and mature female students came Sanjay's way. These offers were very tempting and at times Sanjay succumbed to it, especially to offers that did not involved long term complicated relationship. However a long term relationship did emerge unexpectedly not from the university but in form of Payal, sister of a friend who worked at a voluntary sector organization in the area.

While studying and partying hard in and around Woolwich, Sanjay was also doing a lot of work as an antiracist volunteer worker and as a Labour Party worker. He attended all the ward and constituency meetings and was rewarded for his hard work. He was selected as one of the delegates to the British Labour Party annual general meeting held in Brighton from 1–6 October 1989. The selection process for the 1990 May 3rd Greenwich Council election to elect members of Greenwich London Borough Council in London, England was also hotting up. Sanjay had joined the Black Section of the Labour Party and had joined the campaign to get more Black and Asian candidates selected and elected to local and national governments. At the same time he was working hard with Ram and a small number of local volunteers to provide support to the victims of racially motivated attacks and harassment. In 1989 the British National Party (BNP) had established a bookstore which guised as its headquarters in Welling, which was located in the fringe of London Borough of Greenwich but only 2 kms from Sanjay's former Welling home. Racial attacks and harassments were on the increase not only in Greenwich but also in many parts of London and UK generally. Sanjay and Ram began to attend meetings and events organised across the river Thames in Newham and also in Southall. Locally both organised public meetings and campaigns on behalf of the racial victims and spent many nights at homes and business premises of Asian under racist attacks.

The most frustrating aspect of providing support to the victims was a lack of any written policy and procedures at any of the stakeholders. Without any such document the council departments, police and the voluntary sector were could abdicate their responsibilities towards preventing racism and racial attacks and providing constructive support to the victims. On a positive note Sanjay had made some

inroads into the Council's Housing, Social Welfare and Education departments towards acknowledging the anti-racist policy and procedure document he was working on. With help from Des at the Race Unit, he managed to get support from the heads of these departments and by 1989 he had completed the first draft of the document. The fact that Sanjay was becoming an important new member of the local Labour Party constituency may have also helped in getting cooperation from the heads of these departments.

By the time the 1989 Labour Party national convention, the selection process from the May 1990 Greenwich Council election was well under way. Both Ankita and Kenny were preselected in their wards. Both had requested Sanjay not to contest pre-selection in their wards and he had agreed. The Local Black Section had managed to get a few more local Black and Asian to enter the race for pre-selection process and vacancies were fast filling up. Sanjay was happy to represent the party at the national conference and was not seriously hunting for pre-selection. In the end an invite to a pre-selection process to contest election in a ward as Labour candidate came to Sanjay unexpectedly at an unexpected venue.

Apart from occasionally going to the Polytechnic bar and home parties, Sanjay frequented the *Earl of Chatham* pub for no special reason other than that it was located across the street from the building where most of his lectures were taking place. At first he would go there with his Poly friends but soon he became friendly with many of the regulars of the pub. Sanjay took his Sociology degree very seriously; he had opted for Sociology over medicine back in Fiji. Sociology introduced him to the teachings of the founding fathers of Sociology as well as Karl Marx. This experience was in stark contrast from that of Met Police experience, who he began to see as coercive government forces used by the state to control the working

class. Over the last two years his thoughts had dramatically shifted towards socialist, Marxist and Communist theories. He would often discuss these theories with some of his Sociology friends at the pub, unknowing for a long time that a group of socialists and Marxists regulars were listening on these conversations. After a while some members from this group would join in Sanjay's student group and add their perspectives to their conversations. Sanjay and the students felt good that other people were paying attention to what they had to say. Slowly a bond of comradeship developed between the two groups. The one evening one of the other group members approached Sanjay and requested him to join his group.

I'll come the point straight away, said the man placing a pint of lager in front of Sanjay. *You know that pre-selection process is going on for our council election.*

Yes, I know, Sanjay replied. *Some of my friends are also scrambling for a ward.*

We here represent the Glyndon ward, the man continued. *We were wondering if you will consider going through our pre-selection.*

Me? Why? Sanjay was confused. *I'm so new to local politics. I'm also a former policeman; do you think Glyndon ward voters will vote for a former policeman?*

Look, first let me tell you that Glyndon is a marginal seat, he informed. *But we have done our homework and we believe you may be able to swing the seat for us. If not then*

this could be a good experience for the next election. What do you say?

Sounds good to me, Sanjay stated after quickly weighing his options. When is the pre-selection and what do I have to do now?

The pre-selection is next Friday, he stated. All you have to do is turn up and answer a few questions.

There is a little problem here, Sanjay stated. You know I have to be in Brighton for the Labour Party national conference.

We know that, he said. But I think you should come back and participate in this process.

Do you really think I should travel all the way from Brighton to here and then travel back there? Sanjay asked and looked at their faces or any clues. It will be a long hard journey back and forth!

All I can say is that we believe you should come back for the interview, the man stated smiling. The rest we can discuss over drinks.

Sanjay had gone to Brighton with rest of the delegates but took a train back to Woolwich for the pre-selection. During the journey he went over the possible interview questions and felt confident that he would do well. However he was not very confident that he will get selected. He knew that up to ten others were competing for the two Glyndon seats. He wondered if he had made the right decision to travel back to Woolwich, leaving behind

convention dinner and networking with new and senior party members. But the words of the Glyndon ward members in the pub kept spinning in his mind and reassured him that at least he would get a fair hearing. However, when Sanjay reached the interview venue he was confronted with an unexpected issue. It was an unwritten rule of the local Black Section of the Labour Party that no member will compete for pre-selection against another member of the Black Section in any of the ward. Sanjay was very surprised to find another member of the Black Sections present for Glyndon Ward pre-selection. After the initial shock of seeing a fellow Black Section member present there, Sanjay concentrated on own interview. His Black Section colleague made a feeble attempt to explain why she was there and then avoided him. Sanjay gave his interview and took a late train back to Brighton and joined the Labour Party national conference. For the next few days he was tempted to call his mates from the pub to ask how the interviews went but decided against it. He concentrated on learning as much about the workings of the Labour Party and waited for the ward leaders to contact him whenever they were ready.

Sanjay did not have to wait for long. When he met the leaders in the pub a few days after his return to Woolwich, he was informed that he had been selected as one of the two candidates to contest the election from Glyndon ward. Sanjay was pleasantly surprised because he knew that party members had waited for many years to get an opportunity to contest an election at this level. He had been a Labour Party member for just two years and he had been given this opportunity of lifetime. He was aware that Glyndon ward was a marginal one but he was prepared to work hard in the next six months to win the ward for his party. This was going to be a new experience for him for him and he was prepared to learn from those who had placed trust in him. He knew the Glyndon ward well as police officer and now he would walk the area as a political

candidate. He had gained trust of many as a police officer and he hoped they will give him and his running mate both their trust and votes.

Campaigning for the election had put additional pressure on him. His study was progressing well, along with his anti-racist work and writing an anti-racist policy and procedure document. The final phase of his degree course had to be negotiated and assignments and thesis had to be written and submitted on time. Slowly some of the local Black and Asian political activists and business people were getting close to him. At the forefront of this group was Kamal Singh, one of the leading businessmen of the area. He owned a number of businesses but was also a community leader. Sanjay had come close to him as a police officer and he was glad that Sanjay had become a politician. He had brought together a number of Asian businessmen and community leaders under Asian Congress on Local Affairs (ACOLA) and requested Sanjay to lead it. Sanjay saw that as a good platform and after discussion with his girlfriend Payal; he accepted the offer and became ACOLA's first Chairperson.

By now Payal had become an important part of Sanjay's life. She had come into her life when he was not looking for a relationship; he was quite content to have short term flings so that he could concentrate on his work, research and study. But a chance and unexpected meeting with Payal proved to be enduring. At first the two met discreetly but as the relationship flourished the two began meeting openly and frequently. Sanjay introduced Payal to his children and they began to like her a lot as well. Payal provided serenity to the hectic life Sanjay was pursuing at that period of his life. After a long time in his life he had a relationship that was much more than physical. Payal was accepted by his friends and colleagues and she accompanied him to various private and public events with Sanjay. The

stability provided by Payal was a great factor in Sanjay's successes in his academic, voluntary and political life.

The 1990 election in Greenwich was held on May 3rd and Sanjay and his running mate ward colleagues met in the pub before going to the Woolwich town hall for the counting of votes. This was Sanjay's first experience in participating in vote counting and the atmosphere was overwhelming to him. After observing the counts for some time he sat quietly in a corner of the hectic foyer of the town hall. Observers walked over to him to update the count in progress. As the hours went by it was becoming slowly clear that the Labour Party was inching ahead. Sanjay relaxed a bit and began to think what he would do should he win the election. He was caught in these thoughts when the presiding officer declared that for Glyndon ward both Sanjay and his running mate had won the election and they would represent the ward in the next London Borough of Greenwich Council. His ward members were overjoyed and invited both the new members to their regular pub for celebration. The celebration went on till late in the night as the publican decided to serve them behind the closed door as long as they wanted. He was aware that an improbable story that had begun in his pub had turned into a success. Sanjay and the group were joined by many of the Labour Party members and he felt good to be in the company of many of the long term politicians in the area. He was also joined by some of the old and newly elected members of the local Black Section, including Ankita and Kenny. The lady who went to compete against in the Glyndon ward had managed to get nomination from another ward and was a winner that night as well. The Labour party had been returned with a larger majority and the local Black Section of the Labour Party had also increased from three to nine elected members. It was a night for celebrating and the celebration went on till late in the night.

It was not until a few days later that Sanjay was physically fit to ponder about the impact of his success in the May 3rd local election. For him his entry into politics was a means to an end. His main reason to get into politics was to get the local government develop and implement a comprehensive anti-racist policy and procedures document. He had worked hard with Des from the Race Unit and several departmental heads to finalise a document and his election to the council was timely to get the document to be formally adopted by the council. With help from these council officers and elected members, the London Borough of Greenwich Council became the first council in UK to formally adopt written anti-racist policy and procedure as drafted by Sanjay. With this important task quietly achieved Sanjay must now quickly learn many other aspects of his duties of a councillor. He was comparatively a young councillor and had much to learn.

By July 1990 Sanjay had succeeded in obtaining a Diploma in Sociology and was heading into his final year to complete his degree. His anti-racist work continued with the victims of racism as well as the growing campaigns against the British National Party and other racist and fascist forces in London and rest of the country. Racial attacks and harassment were growing in the area and Ram and Sanjay had encountered many roadblocks from the police in taking actions against the perpetrators as well as to provide safety to the Black and Asian communities in the areas where racially motivated crimes were prevalent. Before becoming an elected member of the council Sanjay had supported Ram in aggressive campaigns and demonstrations against the local police to force them to take necessary actions in race related crimes. But he decided to change his tactics once he was appointed the police spokesperson for the London Borough of Greenwich.

After his success in getting the London Borough of Greenwich to formally adopt his anti-racist policy and procedure document, Sanjay decided to do similar work with the local police. In order to achieve this seemingly unachievable task, Sanjay first had to do a lot of ground work. He knew the local Met police officer had little regard or respect for the local government which they regarded as loony left dominated do-gooders. The last few years had demonstrated to him that there was no love lost between the local council officers and elected members and local police. There were hardly any official dialogues between the two main service delivery institutions. Over a number of years the local council had refused to participate in police sponsored Police Community Consultative Committee (PCCG).

After his appointment to the position of Council's Police Spokesperson, Sanjay persuaded his colleagues to allow him to start attending the PCCG. That was an important breakthrough for Sanjay in his attempt to get these two main service delivers to come together and deliver mutually acceptable services not only to the victims of racially motivated crimes and discrimination, but also to the whole community. He took time during the PCCG meetings to sound out with senior police officers his proposal to form a joint Council, Police and Community Committee to address important policing issues faced by the local community. He impressed on them that in many cases both the police and the council had to collaborate to deliver services and to the victims and to identify and take actions against the perpetrators. As long as these two organisations act on their own with proper consultation and common policy document, service delivery will be incomplete and disjointed. Sanjay discussed with his senior colleagues along the same line and after considerable persuasion it was decided that a joint Council, Police and Community Committee (CPCC) be formed. This committee was to be

run by the council and a dedicated officer was to be appointed. Sanjay was appointed as its Chairperson and later on his suggestion the local Police Superintendent was coopted as a Co-Chairperson. The whole committee comprised heads of council departments, senior police officers and community representatives. It met regularly and began to work in earnest towards developing comprehensive documents to address policing issues.

By this time a year had gone and Sanjay had become a BA (Hons) Degree in Sociology graduate. By sheer coincidence his divorce was finalised and he was free to involve himself more seriously with Payal. He applied for a position of Principal Race Equality officer in the London Borough of Newham Council across the river Thames and was selected for an interview. This job combined almost everything he had been doing as an anti-racist volunteer and as an elected councillor in Greenwich. The job entailed liaising with the Newham Council, Victim Support-Newham, Newham Police and the local voluntary sector and development of a volunteer based Project to provide support to victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment. He was therefore not surprised when the job was offered to him. After more four years, Sanjay was once again in a full time job. This job was close to his heart and also paid a lot better than his police job.

Mr Kamal Singh organised a dinner at his club for Sanjay for getting his degree and a good job. He invited several members of Asian Council on Local Affairs, Sanjay's friends as well as his children and Payal. Food and drinks flowed freely interrupted by impromptu congratulatory speeches. Payal was dressed in a beautiful Indian garment and looked very beautiful. She looked very happy and spent a lot of time with Sanjay's children. Kamal Singh took Sanjay to a quiet corner and asked the bartender to bring over two drinks. By now Sanjay had begun to

regard Kamal Singh as his mentor and had developed a lot of respect for him. He had been providing him good advice in his political, community and personal life and Sanjay always took this advice seriously.

Sanjay, I think you've had enough fun in your life, Kamal said. You should do the right thing now.

Yes, I know I have had a bit of fun since my separation, Sanjay admitted. But I don't understand. What is the right thing that I should do? I am going steady with Payal now.

That is who I am referring to, Kamal Singh explained. Payal is a good girl and your children get on well with her. I think it is time for you to do the honourable thing and marry the young lady.

Wow, that thought has never occurred to me, Sanjay stated taken aback a bit with Kamal Singh's suggestion. I thought I will never marry ever again, not after what has happened to me with Kiran.

Look here Sanjay, Kamal Singh continued. I have known both you and Kiran from before you separated and eventually got divorced. I share all the pains you have endured. But now things have changed and you're in charge of your life again. And I believe that it is the time for you to have a good woman back into your life. That's my two penny's worth advice. Just promise me that you'll think about it. Now let's enjoy the party.

Sanjay promised to think about what he had quite unexpectedly said and both joined the party.

Sanjay took some time to think about his future with Payal. Kamal Singh's suggestion made him reconsider his views on a second marriage. His experience with Kiran had persuaded him not even think about ever getting married again. That is the main reason he had multiple affairs after his relationship with his wife had broken down. For him it was a coping mechanism and it had worked for him. He had managed to pick himself up and now he had a degree, a great job and was an elected member of a council. He even traded his old car with his dream Mercedes car. He found himself in a good situation economically, physically and emotionally once again after finding himself in a huge pit. He was not sure if he wanted to risk all these by getting into any long term relationship.

Sanjay decided to sound out this idea with his children over the weekend. He asked them what they thought of Payal and Raman immediately said that she was pretty. Raman's statement reminded of an incident that happened a few months back. The four were driving away from an Anup Jhalota show in Greenwich. Ria was a teenager by now and insisted that she always sat in the front with Sanjay. Payal was sitting in the back with Payal. He heard Payal giggling.

Give me a kiss, Sanjay heard little Raman say to Payal. Daddy is driving.

Behave Raman, Payal said smiling at Sanjay in the rear-view mirror. Your father can see everything.

OK, just a little one on your cheek, Raman insisted. Daddy won't mind.

OK, just a little one, Payal said and Raman planted a small kiss on Payal's cheek. You're a naughty little boy Raman, just like your father!

Sanjay knew that little Raman liked Payal and he would not have any issues with her. He was surprised when Ria also said that she liked Payal and that they should get on together. He expected more resistant because she was more possessive about him and Sanjay felt that she would resist any other female taking her place in her father's life. The approval of Payal from his children made Sanjay think seriously about proposing and marrying Payal. He finally decided to propose to Payal during a dinner at an Indian restaurant run by a Bangladeshi friend in Woolwich. Payal accepted his proposal and both of them decided to live together or a while before they got married. Now that Sanjay had a good job he decided to buy a home for them. They looked at many houses and finally decided on buying a beautiful semi-detached home in Eltham. But just then a tragedy struck in Payal's life that not only shattered their plans to buy a home but also shattered their relationship for ever. Payal's father suddenly died and Payal was shattered. Her sister had married and moved overseas with her husband. Now Payal refused to leave her mother alone and decided that she would not live with Sanjay. Sanjay offered to have her mother live with them but Payal would not agree with it. To Sanjay Payal was not making any sense and after being at her side he decided to end their relationship. The incident impacted him a lot and he finally decided to leave Woolwich and move across the river to live in Ilford. It was a hard decision but one he had to take in order to cope with the sudden emotional twist in his life. This twist may have been the last straw that finally broke Sanjay's spirit, health and faith in life.

Chapter 13

Icy London meltdown

Some three years after Sanjay's relationship had fatally broken down, he found himself faced with another marriage proposal. Sanjay's relationship with Payal had developed over a period of time and had ended suddenly. His relationship had developed over very short period and her marriage proposal to him was sudden and unexpected. Sanjay needed some time to think about this proposal. His life had taken a downturn since his intimate relationship with Payal had irretrievably broken down. He wanted to ensure that this relationship did not end in a similar manner and decided to defer a decision to a later date.

He concentrated on his play and spent a lot of time at the rehearsals. As he watched the rehearsals he began to see how much of his own experience was infused in the play, especially the second part which dealt with racism in London. He felt that one of the central characters could have been him in real life. The play distilled some of Sanjay's antiracist work in Greenwich, specially the racist murders that had taken place in the borough from 1991.

The British National Party was getting bolder since opening its book shop bunker in Welling and Ram and Sanjay organised public meetings and demonstrations to highlight their activities and to close their bunker. Sanjay recalled one such public meeting held in the first floor of Welling library, located only a short distance from the BNP

bunker. Some one hundred men women and children attended the meeting and after a short while one of the doors was flung open and about twenty BNP members in uniforms and boots burst into the room and lined up near the stage. The sight of these racists frightened the participants and people began to escape from the room. Older men, children and women scrambled down through the backstairs; some men jumped down the window. Sanjay, Ram and a fellow councillor, a former soldier, decided to stand their ground and face the BNP army, who started to move threateningly towards the three. Sanjay had no clue what he was going to do once they reached them. All he knew was that they had to keep the racists away from the escaping anti-racists. Sanjay decided to show some courage and looked directly at the BNP racists. He had undergone sufficient riot training as a police officer and knew that he could hold them for a while. His councillor colleague was a tall and well built man and his army training would be put to task at that moment. Ram was a street fighter and would not go down easily. And then some thing quite unexpected happened. Sanjay noticed a policeman from Bexley police station in the ranks of the BNP racist army. Sanjay was surprised to see him and returned his gaze back on the racist police officer, trying to place him better and to recognise him for later use. Their eyes met very briefly and the police officer shouted 'Lets Go'. Then, as suddenly as they had entered the library hall, the BNP racist army marched out.

Sanjay looked back and found most of the participants still sheltering on the stairs. Only those who had jumped from the window had managed to escape. Someone shouted that the back door was locked from outside. He told Ram about the police officer he saw but no further action could be taken against him because Sanjay could not place a name to his face. Sanjay did not know for sure that the police officer had called off the attack because of his presence. But he dreaded what would have happened

to three of them and the others after they were overcome had the BNP racists decided not to abandon their well planned attack.

This harrowing incident was followed by a brutal incident which tarnished Greenwich for ever. On 16th February 1991 Sanjay attended the antiracist Greenwich office after his lectures and found Ram in an agitated mood. Sanjay realised that something unusual had happened but was not prepared for what Ram told him.

They have got one of our boys Sanjay, Ram stated, his voice quivering. We knew this was going to happen one day but no one would listen to us, would they?

Calm down Ram, Sanjay said. Tell me what has happened?

Last night some racists killed a teenage black boy in Thamesmead, Ram said. The poor boy was walking back home from a youth club with his brother when the racists chased and stabbed him. Rolan Adams died but his brother is alright.

Wow, this is what we have worked so hard to avoid Ram, Sanjay lamented. But people just don't care, they just don't care!

As expected the local police at first did not classify this murder as a racist murder and Ram quickly organised a meeting with the local police to impress to them that it was indeed a racially motivated murder. Ram had already visited the youth club in Thamesmead and also had talked to Rolan Adam's family. By all accounts the murder was racially

motivated and the police should have treated it such from the beginning. But the practice current at that time in the police was not to treat any such murders and attacks on Black and Asian community as racially motivated. Sanjay knew this as an insider in the police service. Ram worked closely with Rolan Adam's family and with the youth club to provide support to them. The BNP and racists were creating a lot of problems for the family, relatives and those who were closely related to Rolan. They had to be protected and the safest way was to relocate them from the area. Sanjay and Ram worked closely with the Greenwich Council, the police and other stakeholders to relocate the affected people first to a council hall in Woolwich and then to a council hostel in Shooters Hill. By this time the Greenwich council had an anti-racist policy and procedure document in place which became useful in realising this unprecedented operation. Sanjay attended Rolan Adam's funeral with Ram, his friend Rachel and her son who knew Rolan well. The funeral was very emotional and tears flowed freely for the senseless murder of a teenager who was killed for not being white.

The murder of Rolan Adam was followed by murder of Orville Blair in May 1991. Ram requested him to be with his mother when he went to the Brook Hospital. Sanjay met the mother at the hospital and after a short while they were escorted by a hospital staff where the lifeless body of Orville Blair lay covered with a white sheet. The staff lifted the white sheet to reveal his face and his chest. Sanjay and the mother stared at his face for a while and their eyes moved to his bare chest. Sanjay knew that Orville Blair was stabbed to death and expected gaping wounds and plenty of blood. The blood had obviously been washed and he could see only one stab wound near his heart. The mother took a few steps and tenderly touched her son's motionless face, tears pouring from her tired eyes. Sanjay went up to her and placed his hand on her shoulders. She turned around her

tearful eyes looking at him, trying to understand why her son had to die in this manner. Sanjay had recently been to the funeral of Rolan Adams and was still very emotional. This desperate mother's tears made him cry as well. He hugged her and the two stood there for a while, both silent deep in their own thoughts, both trying to understand why two young Black youth had to die in this way. After a while Sanjay guided her outside and she left the hospital. Sanjay never saw her again but he used aspects of this encounter in his play *Silent Cries*.

By now Greenwich had got the label of the racist capital of Europe and there was a lot of local and international attention on what was happening there. In July 1992, Rohit Duggal was stabbed to death in Eltham, not far from where Sanjay was hoping to buy a house. Ram and Sanjay drove up to his home in Shooters Hill. As Ram parked his car outside the house a strange, loud and chilling shriek came out of the house. It pierced their ears and touched their hearts. Sanjay looked alarmingly at Ram. Ram

*That must be Rohit's mother, Ram explained.
The poor woman is deaf and dumb you know!*

*Oh my God, Sanjay responded. I have
attended this house as a policeman on a
domestic violence. I now remember Rohit. He
was so little then.*

*The poor woman, Ram said locking the door.
And now she has lost her son as well.*

After consoling the mother Sanjay and Ram went to attend a public meeting with local police officer Ram had arranged to discuss the murder of Rohit Duggal. Sanjay and Ram went to the meeting early to ensure that all the

provisions for the police and the public were made. They were already seated at the head table when the police superintendent and his colleagues entered the hall. A young Indian woman came with them and it took Sanjay a few seconds to place her. She was not one of the regular anti-racists and she was not a police woman, that much Sanjay knew. So what was she doing with the police officers at this meeting, Sanjay tried to comprehend. As she drew nearer Sanjay recognised her.

A few months ago Sanjay was walking down Herbert Road to Woolwich when he noticed Payal in a shoe shop run by an acquaintance. She used to help at the shop whenever required in the weekends. Sanjay went inside to say hello to her. He noticed two Indian women also standing behind the counter. They appeared to be Payal's friends. Sanjay was walking down to a meeting with Ram and others to plan a big anti-racist March in the borough. They have been canvassing people to join the march and support the antiracist cause. Sanjay was carrying a few flyers with him and he gave a few to Payal to distribute to customers in the shop. He explained to her what they were about and she agreed to assist. Sanjay looked at the two Indian women who looked disinterested. Sanjay decided to speak to them anyway as he was reaching out to anyone he could. He began speaking to them but he was interrupted by one of them.

*We heard you already, one of them blurted.
We're not interested!*

*You're not interested in fighting racism in the
area? Sanjay asked surprised and taken back
a bit. Do you know that Greenwich is now
called racist capital in Europe?*

Not really, she replied. We live in an area where we do not experience any racism.

Sanjay had spoken to enough people and had learnt that he could not win over all the people. He felt that these two women had already made up their minds and he was not going to waste any more of his time on them. He bid Payal goodbye and left.

The woman who had walked in with the police to attend a meeting to discuss issues after Rohit Duggal's murder was one of the two women who Sanjay had met with Payal in the shoe shop. As they approached the head table Sanjay quickly whispered in Ram's ear about his experience with the Indian woman and wondered what she was doing there. Before Ram could respond the group had arrived at the head table. They stood up and greeted the group. The Indian woman kept silent, head bowed.

Oh, this is Rohit's aunt, the Superintendent of police stated indicating the Indian woman. She has come to represent Rohit's family.

Oh, that's very nice, Ram stated. It's good that we have Rohit's family represented here. Everyone needs to know how and why racist attacks take place and that it can happen to anyone.

Ram winked at Sanjay as everyone sat down. Sanjay decided not to say anything and the meeting continued. Ram had arranged for some refreshment and the Indian woman went around asking everyone to support justice for Rohit Duggal. Sanjay watched her from a distance. He felt sorry for her. At the same time he wondered if people like her had joined the anti-racist campaigns earlier than maybe

Rohit would have been still alive. He noticed the woman glance at him a few times but he ignored her. She needed to know that he knew that she had made a mistake. He noticed her at a few anti-racist rallies after that, campaigning vigorously. Sanjay thought that it was a great pity that it took the murder of a nephew for her to realize the value of joining the anti-racist activities.

Soon after starting his job in Newham Sanjay applied to the Newham Council for a scholarship to complete a MA course in Social Policy and Public Administration at the Goldsmiths College, Lewisham; which was a part of University of London. His application was approved and he started the course in 1992. It was two year part time course and by mid 1993 he had passed all the course requirements, only a 10,000 word thesis was remaining for submission before being awarded his MA degree.

By 1993 Sanjay and Payal's relationship had broken and he was now sharing a flat in Ilford, some 5kms from his workplace in Newham. His broken relationship had affected him badly and he needed to move away from Woolwich to deal with his disappointment and grief. However, he was not disappointed in just his personal relationship. He was also getting disappointed in the way the local politics was shaping up especially in the way the local political expediencies were adversely affecting local council, the police and voluntary sectors addressing race related issues.

Sanjay had a habit to research deeply into any issue that he got involved in. At that stage in his life politics, antiracism and his studies were of prime importance. He had already worked with some of the local Black and Asian community members, a few senior council officers and some of his fellow councilors to get the Greenwich council

to adopt an anti-racist policy and procedure document. He was doing well in his studies and he had developed an effective volunteer based anti-racist project to provide support to the victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment. He had also developed a two day anti-racist training program for his volunteers. He conducted the training to the newly recruited volunteers monthly. He formed a group consisting of several Victim Support organizations in London and worked with them to adopt an anti-racist training course to train volunteers in respective Victim Supports.

Based on his experience and in consultation with the Newham Council staff, some voluntary sector organizations and Newham police, Sanjay wrote a paper on *Witness Protection Scheme*. This scheme was written to address the issue that many of the perpetrators of racially motivated crimes and harassment were not charged by the police because the witnesses were reluctant to come forward because of fear of retaliation and victimization. At the same time he was working hard as the Co-chairman of the Council, Police and Community anti-racist group in Greenwich to write an anti-racist policy document for Greenwich.

As the final phase of his MA course approached Sanjay began exploring his further study program. He wanted to do a PhD course in the field of race relations and anti-racist policies in UK. For his candidature supervisor he approached a prominent Black professor at the Goldsmiths College. He was impressed with Sanjay's proposal and agreed to his supervisor when he was ready. Sanjay was very happy after leaving the Professor's office and looked forward to starting his work in a few months. In the meantime he had to write and submit a 10,000 word thesis as the final part of his MA course.

Sanjay had a choice to write a thesis based of existing work or to write one based on his original work. Since working in Woolwich area as a police officer, anti-racist worker, community representative and as a politician, Sanjay had a lot of first hand information and knowledge at his disposal from which he could write an original thesis. He believed that an original thesis would not only give him good grades but his thesis would also contribute positively towards anti-racist work in Greenwich.

Since he started researching on anti-racism activities and organizations funded by tax payers to address racism and to provide services to victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment in Greenwich, Sanjay began to discover things that disturbed him. He decided to focus his research in this area of service delivery and began investigating the reasons why little efforts were made by the Greenwich council and the funded voluntary sector organizations to first develop anti-racist policies and procedures and then develop effective inter-agency action plan to address various types of race related issues in the borough. He discovered that during that period approximately five million pounds of local and central government funds were given to various race relations, anti-racist and ethnic groups to provide anti-racist and ethnic services in the area. Despite that Greenwich had become the race capital of Europe and a closer inspection was needed.

A close inspection of several publicly funded ethnic organizations showed that a small group of individuals, mainly males from the Indian subcontinent, were on the governing bodies of these organizations. The same people were employed in one of these organizations. None of these individuals possessed any academic qualifications in race relations or any higher education. A few of these salaried workers had difficulty in speaking English. Many of these individuals were associated with Indian Workers

Association and a few were brought in from other areas to work in Greenwich. This influential group was slowly using their symbiotic relationship with some of the local council members and officers to get their members appointed to influential council positions. As Sanjay went deeper into his research he discovered an unholy alliance between some of the Greenwich council members and this group which controlled the race industry in the borough.

During the same period Sanjay began to question the work practices of Greenwich council members, especially some members of his Labour Party. Through internal power struggle the amiable leader of the party was replaced by a younger and ambitious member. Sanjay did not see eye to eye with the new leader. But what concerned Sanjay more at that time was how decisions were made by the majority party under the concept of party whip and how the voices of people were killed even before their concerns were discussed at any public forum by the councilors. When any concerns were raised by members of the Greenwich public in writing to the council, these concerns were discussed by Labour party committee members in private. Based on the directions from the party leadership, a decision would be made and a whip would be placed on all the committee members to vote in the public committee meetings according to the whips decision. In such public meetings representatives of public were invited to make representations and pleadings on issues that were close to their hearts. Most of the Labour party members in the committee would listen to these pleas without any particular interest because a decision has already been made on the issues in the committee rooms.

Sanjay was getting frustrated by the way his party was negating genuine concerns of the residents of Greenwich and how democratic process was used as a sham in which residents made passionate please for support and

services when decisions had already been made in smoke filled rooms by a handful of councilors. It was 1993 and Greenwich was now preparing for the next local election. Labour Party councilors had gathered in the council chambers to discuss strategies for the coming election. Sanjay was listening to various contributions until the chairperson stated something that caught his attention.

We must now do everything to win the next election, he stated passionately. We must inject resources in the areas from where we will get maximum votes.

Sanjay was alarmed at this statement from a colleague who had much respect. He could not believe what he had just said. Sanjay put his hand up and the chairperson nodded at him to speak.

Shouldn't we spend tax payers' money where it is needed most, Sanjay asked. Why should we use public money to buy votes?

There was a pin-drop silence in the council chamber. Everyone looked at Sanjay as if he was demented. He felt that he was alone. The chairperson made some excuse that they had to be reelected so that they could continue to serve the public. Others supported him and the proposal was passed. That night Sanjay felt that maybe he was not in the right field to serve the community.

Sanjay conveyed his frustrations to his ward leaders and requested them to allow him to demonstrate his discontent to the way the Labour party was treating genuine concerns of the local people and how they were misusing taxpayers' money to win elections. Being a left group of people who believed in the welfare of the local people, they consented to Sanjay's request to go against the Labour Party.

You know that if I go against the party I may not last long there, Sanjay stated. My actions may lead to my expulsion from the party.

We are behind you if you wish to go down this road Sanjay, one of them said and others nodded in agreement. We trust you to do the right thing by our people.

Sanjay was glad that his ward leaders had given him a green light to challenge his party on the issues that disturbed him. He sat on the Planning and Social Services committees as well as the Race committee. He decided that whenever necessary he would challenge the labour party whip that silenced the voices of the people on the issues relevant to the welfare and advancement of their communities. In the meantime he completed his MA thesis and submitted it to the University. He submitted a report from the thesis to the Chief Executive of Greenwich council for appropriate action against the corrupt and nepotistic individuals who were misusing public money for their selfish benefits. He sent another copy to the local media. The Chief Executive was sympathetic towards his concerns but the new leader dismissed it without even discussing the issues with Sanjay. Sanjay came to know about his views when one of the journalists made him aware of a newspaper report in which the Greenwich leader of the council had refuted his argument with little data.

Sanjay wondered at that time why the leader would do such a thing when his own chief executive was investigating a complaint lodged by one of his colleagues. He concluded that his decision may have been influenced by politics rather than concerns for prudent accounting of tax payers money. The people who were exposed by Sanjay in

his research and subsequent thesis and report to Greenwich council had developed deep links in their ethnic communities and were instrumental in delivering votes to the Labour party. This cozy relationship between the party and the local Indian origin nepotistic group had dual negative effects on the local people. Firstly the money was being wasted on paying salaries of individuals who were not qualified in delivering services to their respective communities. Secondly and because of this, they were ill-equipped to effectively address the race issues in Greenwich and were thus partially responsible for propelling Greenwich as the race capital of Europe.

For Sanjay local politics in Greenwich was getting increasingly convoluted for him. He was further alarmed that the majority of his colleagues had little interest in dealing with these issues. They had gained their position through years of struggle and with many tradeoffs. Sanjay felt that they were not prepared to risk all that by questioning their leadership on these issues. He felt that that he was not going to get any support from their colleagues. For them the present status quo was the only option to remain in their position or to get elected in the next election.

Sanjay decided that he would not go down that road but challenge the existing status quo prevalent in Greenwich council. He decided that he would vote against the Labour whip whenever it went against the interests of the community. A few days later Sanjay received a letter from the Labour party Whip for him to attend a disciplinary meeting. Sanjay read the letter with interest and replied that he would meet the Party only when the questions he had outlined in his earlier response were addressed. Within a few days he received a letter back from the Whip restating his summon for a meeting but without any mention the questions he had raised. Sanjay responded by re-sending his original letter with a covering letter to say that he would not

attend any meeting unless his questions were addressed. The third letter from the Whip stated that a decision was made by the Labour party to terminate his membership from the Labour party. Sanjay was not surprised by this response from the Labour party. The seemingly democratic party was run as a dictatorship and did not welcome any dissent. In many ways Sanjay was relieved that he was no longer a part of the Labour party under the leadership of a self-styled dictator. He was happy with serving his constituency as an independent councilor and his ward leadership was happy with his actions.

By this time Sanjay was living away from Greenwich, a decision he took after his sudden split from Payal, the woman he had wanted to marry. Apart from driving through Greenwich to pick up his children in the weekends he now had little reason to be in Greenwich, apart from fulfilling some of his council duties. His home and work were in East London and he devoted much of his time and energy there. He decided to concentrate on his anti-racist job in Newham and forge new alliances in East London. He also decided to divert his attention from politics and work through creative arts to address issues that confronted the Black and Asian communities in London.

Despite his successes in academic, employment, political and community work, Sanjay was getting deeply frustrated with many things happening around him. The breakup with Payal hurt him deeply. He felt let down by some of his political colleagues and began to feel that politics was not for him. The corruption, nepotism and betrayal of the funded ethnic groups of the community they were supposed to serve were disturbing, as was the Greenwich council's decision to ignore this for political expediency. His involvement to provide support to the families of the three racially murders plus providing support to literally hundreds of victims of racism had left him

drained. Sanjay was aware that all these were impacting on his health. There were some tell-tale signs but he ignored them and pushed on with his work. His work and friends in Greenwich and the East London Curry Club were some of the good things that kept him going until he got the letter from his university that he had failed his thesis.

The unexpected news from his university acted as a catalyst to Sanjay's emotional, mental and physical meltdown. At that time he could not comprehend what was behind the assessor to fail a thesis that was based on real investigation and which had impressed the Chief Executive of London Borough of Greenwich. But when the thesis on which he had worked for one year had been unsuccessful again, a year later Sanjay was convinced that political forces in Greenwich had played a significant role to prevent his thesis for getting academic credentials. History was repeated to certain extent for Sanjay a decade later. In 1994 his advancement in the Metropolitan Police was curtailed when he was stopped from taking his sergeant's exam. Now he was unable to proceed with his further studies for PhD because he believed that the University of London had conspired with one or more of the Greenwich councilors to deny him a MA degree. Sanjay felt that his years of research and two years of writing and rewriting the 10,000 word thesis was sacrificed so that the Greenwich council did not get exposed for supporting a bunch of corrupt Indians in the borough who had been putting their interest ahead of the tax payers and the community they were funded to serve. Sanjay was as frustrated for himself as for the community in Greenwich who continued to be taken for a ride through combined disservice of the corrupt funded organization and the party that benefit from them. He felt that in the end the losers would be the tax payers and the victims of racism in the borough. Sanjay decided that his work in Greenwich had come to an end. He heard that the work he had started with Greenwich council, the local police and community

representative was appropriated by another councilor who was appointed as the police spokes person once he was unilaterally barred from the labour party. The policy and procedure document he started with so much difficulty was launched in Greenwich without any mention of Sanjay. He was not invited to the launch. That is what he expected from the Greenwich Council!

Chapter 14

London...the last hurrah!

Sanjay was ready to depart for his first ever trip to India. Until a few months ago Sanjay had not thought he would be heading for India so soon. Like many millions of descendants of the indentured Indian workers who were transported to the colonies by the British and Europeans, Sanjay had childhood dream to visit India one day. But even after living in Britain for many years, he had not realized his dream. But sudden twin need to trace his ancestral roots and to print his novel provided him an opportunity to realize his dream.

As Sanjay's departure for India approached, Rita began to spend more time with him. She was very loving towards him in her father's office where they were preparing for *Positive Images '95* showcase as well as when they were out enjoying themselves with friends. They would spend many hours alone together and Rita would try to persuade him to agree to marry her. In between she would discuss her big comedy show and wondered if he could lend her some money for the show. Sanjay was unsure on both these issues. He was still not ready to commit himself to marriage and he had been let down by others when he had lent money to them.

Rita and Sanjay went for dinner the night before his flight to the Delhi next day. The dinner finished early and Rita guided Sanjay to a car park next door to her home. They spent a few hours in the car and Rita managed to persuade him to give her the money she had requested. The next morning he gave her a cheque and her brother dropped

him to Heathrow airport. Sanjay felt that for the last few weeks Rita and her family had done a lot to make him a part of their family. As he settled in the aircraft, for the first time Sanjay began to think seriously about getting married to Rita.

Sanjay was fortunate that a chance telephone call to his brother in Fiji revealed that one of his cousins was studying in Delhi. Sanjay called him in Delhi. He was surprised when his cousin answered his call. He was at the Delhi airport to receive him when Sanjay emerged from the airport and set his foot on his ancestral land for the first time. His cousin took him to his home in the Haus Khas area of Delhi where he lived with his wife and two young daughters. For the next few days Sanjay was busy working with the printer in Delhi to get his novel printed. This was the first time he was vanity printing a novel and he devoted his time to this work. He was very fortunate to have guides like his cousin and his wife who made him aware of the intricacies of living in Delhi without being ripped off too much too easily. He was pleased when the work on printing his novel was done and he had a few days to venture out to seek his ancestral village in Uttar Pradesh area of India. After visiting his cousin's ancestral village in Ghaziabad, Sanjay boarded a train in search of his own ancestral village some six hundred and fifty kms from Delhi. He took an overnight train and had a lot of time to think on other issues than his novel. His mind drifted to Rita and for the first time he felt that he missed her. He thought about what his life with her would be like if he decided to marry her. He began to like the idea of getting married to her. For the next few days as he made unsuccessful attempt to find his ancestral roots in a land which appeared very exciting but strange to him, he thought about Rita frequently.

When he reached Delhi his book was printed and ready for him to take some copies with him back to London for its launch on the opening day of his play *Silent Cries*. By

the time Sanjay boarded the plane at Delhi airport after spending a delightful evening with his cousin and his family, he was ready to marry Rita. Once settled in the plane after the takeoff, he felt excited and looked forward to announcing to Rita that he would marry her. The complimentary drinks served on the flight tasted good.

On his return to London and after settling in, Sanjay went to office where the final preparations were being made for the *Positive Images 95* event. He decided that he would take Rita to their favorite restaurant and tell her how he felt about her and that he was ready to marry her. Rita did not come to the office for a few days and her father explained to Sanjay that she was working on her comedy show with Harish in the city. Harish was a young friend of Rajesh and he soon became friends with Sanjay soon after he met up with Rajesh. Harish and Rajesh worked on a play on gay rights and during this period the three spent a lot of time together. Rumors soon spread that Harish was gay but he neither acknowledged nor denied it. His sexual preference was not an issue with any of them.

Sanjay was excited when Rita arrived at the office one day and he excitedly approached her to invite her for lunch. She said she was very busy with her show for the moment and they would get together when she had some time. Soon Harish joined her and the two would work together for hours. Rita generally avoided her and when asked, Harish did not say much. Rajesh also did not say much when Sanjay asked him if something had happened between Rita and Harish when he was in India. He said that nothing could have happened between the two because he felt Harish was gay and the two could just be working hard on their project. As days passed by and Rita's attitude did change much, Sanjay confronted her one evening. She informed her that she had a two day comedy performance in Leicestershire and requested him to drive her there. She assured

him that away from her work commitments in London, she would have a lot of free time and the two could then discuss their relationship and future together. Sanjay was happy that finally they would spend some time together and he would have a chance to express his feelings towards her and propose to her. He had driven to Leicestershire before and looked forward to the journey and exclusive time with Rita.

The day of their journey to Leicestershire arrived and Sanjay was very excited. He packed up his suitcase and filled up his car for the journey. He then drove to Rita's home and picked her up. She looked beautiful and excited. Sanjay put on a romantic song and made his way along Romford Road towards his destination.

Hey Sanjay, can we stop at Harish's place and pick him up? Rita asked a short distance from Harish's home. *I thought the three of us can be together.*

What? Sanjay was shocked. *I thought it will be just us two in Leicestershire. For us to finally spend some time together!*

Well, I don't see any harm in us all going, she said. *After all there is room in this car for all of us.*

Look, you could have told me this earlier, Sanjay complained. *If I knew Harish was coming I would have thought twice before coming between the two of you.*

What do you mean Sanjay? She asked. *You know he is just a friend. He is your friend as well.*

I am not blind Rita, Sanjay was angry now. You two have spent a lot of time alone together and now all you want from me is to drive you two to Leicester. I know what will happen once we are there.

Sanjay stopped outside Harish's home and sat silently for a while. He leaned across Rita and opened the door for her. She sat silently.

Look, as far as I'm concerned this is not on, Sanjay stated. *If you want to take Harish along with you then you two go, I will not take you two there to have fun together.*

OK then, if that's what you want. Rita stated getting out of the car. *I will go with Harish.*

Sanjay looked blankly at Rita walk away from him and up the stairs towards Harish's flat. He saw his love disappear in front his eyes and wondered he did the right thing by not taking Harish along with them. Harish was his friend and he could just be a friend with Rita. He was not angry with him; his anger was directed at Rita. She could have avoided this situation by informing him about Harish well before so that he was mentally prepared instead of having to deal with it at the last moment. He knew that heat of the moment decisions are not the best but he decided that he will not go after Rita. The decision was extremely painful but he wanted to put an end to a relationship that he felt was based on a deceit. He was not annoyed that she had asked Harish to come along with them, but that he was used by her. Over the last few days Sanjay was trying to understand Rita's dramatically changed attitude towards him. He felt she might have used him to extract money from him and now she could discard him and move on to her next prey. He felt that Harish may be her next victim but was

willing to give her a chance to explain her recent behavior when they were alone in Leicester. His suspicion was confirmed when she asked him to take Harish with them. He knew things could get very bad in Leicester and decided to put an end to his relationship with her.

The end to this relationship came at a very difficult time for Sanjay. The launch of his play and his book was just a few weeks away, which was followed by a month long *Positive Images '95* event which he was coordinating. His day job and the additional tasks became almost too much for him to cope with. He was glad Rajesh and his Curry Club members were around to give support to him and his projects in this trying period.

The day had arrived for the launch of Sanjay's play and his book at the Tom Allen Centre in Stratford in East London. Sanjay and Rajesh went to the Centre early in the morning for the final preparation of the event which also comprised the start of month long *Positive Images '95*. While Rajesh was working with his crew on the final touches to the stage set and work with the cast on final rehearsal, Sanjay put up the *Positive Images '95 Exhibition* in the Centre foyers. In the evening the guests and audience began to arrive. The chief guests were Des Haynes, the head London Borough of Greenwich's Race Equality Unit and Dr Ashraf Ahmed, a young talent who was recently appointed to a position in the same Unit. Between the two chief guests Sanjay's Book *Silent Cries-a Journey through Four Continents* was launched. It was followed by the launch of the play *Silent Cries*. Some of the Curry Club members, including Shabnum, Ram, Inder, Harry, Gary and Rachael were also present.

After the launches Sanjay walked up to the back row and set down in a seat from where he could observe the play as well as the reactions of the audience. He was surprised to

see the near two hundred seat theatre filled up to the capacity and the audience was multi-racial and consisted of men, women, young and old people. Just before the play began Sanjay saw Rita walk in and take a seat reserved for her by her family. The play opened among applause but soon there was pin-drop silence as the play took on a serious note. During the break after Act 1, the audience gathered in the foyer for some snacks and to look at the exhibition. Sanjay noticed that members of the audience took greater interest in the exhibition during the break. Several of them who knew who he was commented that they were unprepared for the play and were overwhelmed with what they had watched in the first Act. Rita watched him from a distance but made no attempt to approach him. Sanjay had not seen her for many weeks now but his feelings were still raw. He stopped himself from walking up to her and expressing how he felt.

The second act was set in London and the audience could identify with it. They laughed at the lighter parts and kept quiet on the serious ones. Towards the middle of this Act few scenes were on love, romance and betrayal. Sanjay saw Rita stand up and walk out of the theatre after the betrayal scene, thus convincing Sanjay that she had betrayed his trust. Towards the end the second Act became serious as it dwelled on aftermath of a racially motivated murder of the son of two of the key characters. Sanjay had compacted in these last few scenes the three murder scenes that had recently happened in Greenwich. All the audience was aware of these racist murders emotions were still very raw among many of the audience. Act one started off with murders of many Africans and enslavement and transportation to the Americas of the young ones. The young man who was murdered in the play was a direct descendant of one of those Africans, who was transported to Americas in early eighteen eighties, thus connecting the beginning of Act 1 with the end of Act 2. The play took the

audience through roll coaster of emotions and the final few scenes took them through a crescendo of tearful emotions. Sanjay saw some audience silently wiping away their tears, other were not so silent. The play finished and the actors took multiple bows and the curtain finally came down. A few members of the audience slowly filed out but many sat in their seats quietly. Sanjay sat at the back for some five minutes. Rajesh walked up and sat beside him and the two watched the audience sitting shell-shocked.

When I wrote the story I said to myself, if one person cried for our ancestors, I would be happy to have written it, Sanjay stated. Look at them sitting there Rajesh. I think we have done a good job.

Yes we have Sanjay, Rajesh said. It seems some of them will stay here for a while yet. But others are waiting for us outside. Let's go to them before they disperse.

Sanjay and Rajesh went outside and they were congratulated by all for a great and thought provoking play. Many pointed out to them that the play had for the first time explained to them the connections between the African slavery, the Indian indenture system, the importation of their descendants to Britain and the ensuing racism there. The chief guests were among the last that left the Centre. Sanjay and Rajesh were pleased when they heaped praises on the play. Around midnight Sanjay, Rajesh and Seema were finally ready to head home. Rajesh drove the car while Sanjay and Seema sat in the back of his car and shared a bottle of Captain Morgan rum. After a long day at work the rum tasted great.

Chapter 15

A second exile...

The launch of Sanjay's book and play was followed by his month long *Positive Images '95* event. By the time this momentous event finished Sanjay was exhausted. Sanjay's term as anti-racist professional in the joint London Borough of Greenwich, Victim Support-Newham and Newham Police project had ended and he decided not to apply for second 3 year tenure. His experience as an anti-racist professional had from being very optimistic had turned largely to disappointment. His experience informed him that the anti-racist struggle which had started as a volunteer based movement to assist victims of racism into an race industry where unqualified and unsavory group of selfish people were using racism and racial attacks for personal benefits. He had witnessed on many occasions some of these so called anti-racist professionals beamed with glee when racial attacks took place. They looked for an increase in racial attacks for it justified their existence in the first place and a reason to apply for more grants for the organizations. A racial murder of a Black or Asian person was a boon for these people. The anti-racist brigade in many part of the country would suddenly wake up and the bandwagon would make a bee-line for the area to start a campaign on behalf of the grieved family.

Sanjay had started his antiracist work as a volunteer and remained such for some five years, spending many hours providing basic assistance to the victims of racism in the area. His extensive work in Greenwich and Greenwich was based on providing the best support to victims of racial attacks and harassment. While he was doing just that with support from a very small group of dedicated individuals,

the vast majority the anti-racist brigade disguised as anti-racist or race relations professionals in the area were conspiring and colluding with some key people and originations to secure a long term employment for themselves and their family members, relatives and friends. Many of these pseudo anti-racists and professionals hardly ever provided any support to the victims but indulged in useless meetings, conferences and seminars which resulted in zero benefit to the victims and the Black and Asian community's safety and security at the ground level.

Sanjay did not want to fall into the trap of securing a job in the race industry where a lot of his time and effort would be utilized in ensuring that next round of funding for another term of employment for him. He did not wish to be a part of a group of anti-racist workers who celebrated a rise in racial attacks and secretly welcomed racially motivated murders because it went towards securing their jobs in the industry or became fodders for political ambitions. During his work in Newham he had developed *Witness Protection Scheme* as a means to securing more arrests, charging and convictions of racially motivated crimes. It was developed because his extensive research and personal experiences and a police officer and an anti-racist professional had revealed to him that majority of the witnesses in racially motivated crimes were reluctant to come forward as witness. Even majority of those who came out initially were not prepared to attend courts because of their grave fears of retaliations from the perpetrators, their near ones or other racists. This was one of the main reasons why the number of arrests, charges and convictions for racially motivated crimes remained paltry compared to the number of racially motivated crimes reported in Newham, in London and nationally. The *Witness Protection Scheme* was carefully designed to address all these issues and to provide sufficient protection to the witnesses for them to feel confident to come forward and attend courts to give evidence.

Despite developing a good scheme, he found it difficult to get it accepted and implemented by various stakeholders. His term was coming towards its end and Sanjay felt that even the authorities who were paid by the tax payers and entrusted to address these issues were only keen to provide lip services. He felt that he was swimming against the cozy flow and he would not be able to do much to change the status quo without causing irreparable damage to his already delicate emotional and physical issues. He decided to take a break from the race issues and anti-racist work, and take some time to recover and think about his future.

So he decided to move away from east London and into a house in Sidcup, not far from where his two children were attending a grammar school. Sidcup was a suburban district of south-east London, England, situated in the London Borough of Bexley; a small part of the Royal Borough of Greenwich. It was also some 4 kms from Welling, his former home and where his children still lived with their mother. Soon after moving to Sidcup, Sanjay applied to become a British citizen. He was thinking about making a new start for himself and for him becoming a citizen where he lived made sense. Most of the things around him had fallen flat and caused him a lot of pain. He wanted to build a new life around his children and do something which he really wanted to do. He had some time now before he felt he should get into a new employment. He thought a lot about what he wanted to do which did not involve trading his principles to achieve what he wanted. At the same time he wanted to do something to for the community without falling into a trap of putting job security first.

Since arriving in Sidcup Sanjay had begun walking a lot. He enjoyed walking because it provided him a lot of

time to think. He would walk to Woolwich located some 8 kms from Sidcup. He would spend the whole day reading in the library and walk back. He would walk up his in-laws home in Belvedere located some 7 kms and walk back. As a Sociology graduate he was drawn towards reading about historical development of human societies; from the time of hunters and gathers to the present day. He read about how the concept of religion and politics developed over the time and these two features of humanity impacted on human development and human lives. He would take great pleasure thinking about the almost daily readings as he walked back home after having a few pints with his friends in his regular pubs in Woolwich. As he did not have to drive back he could drink more than a few pints; the intoxicated state of mind made deliberating over his readings greater pleasure.

During this period he walked up to Thamesmead to attend Rachael's birthday party. He did not get to party with her much these days and looked forward to a good party that evening. Good music was played and alcohol flowed freely. He danced with Rachael a lot and for a first time in a long time he felt happy again. As evening proceeded Rachael introduced him to Michele, one of her friends he had not come across before. Michele was about Rachael's age, a slim and tall woman who was still attractive. He spent the rest of the party with her, dancing and chatting with her in between. She was a single mother and lived in Upper Belvedere area and worked in a local office. She was easy to talk with and appeared to be a caring person. Sanjay felt that she liked him and as the party progressed, Sanjay was also drawn towards her. They went back to the dance floor after one of their chats and Sanjay held her close to him. When she did not resist he lifted her face towards his and kissed her. She looked surprised at first but then responded passionately. Sanjay felt good and when the party finished Michele offered to drop him back to his home in Sidcup. He invited her in and the two spent rest of the night together.

She left early next morning, promising to see him again soon. She invited him for dinner the same evening and the two began spending a lot of time together.

Sanjay's new routine went on for a few months when he received a letter from his brother saying that he was visiting India with his wife to search for their ancestral roots. He requested Sanjay to join them in India. He was glad to receive the invitation because it provided him a few weeks to spend time with his brother and sister-in-law in the land of his ancestors. He met them in Delhi and visited several parts of India in the two weeks. However due to other priorities of an Indian priest that travelled with them from Fiji to India. Sanjay was pained by the selfish act of this priest but enjoyed the time he spent with his brother and sister-in-law. He said sad goodbyes to both of them at the Delhi airport and they flew to Sydney to spend some time with their elder brother and his family

Sanjay returned to London with an alternative view or his future. The time he had spent with his brother and sister-in-law reminded him of the eighteen years he shared with his close knit family of some fifty people on one homestead in Fiji. He had been missing that since he left Fiji fifteen years ago. For last several years he had been noticing majority of his close friends had their family and many relatives living with them or residing in the area. They enjoyed each others company and helped each other whenever they could. Sometimes he resented them for having the comfort of having near and dear around them. Fifteen years ago he had this comforts in the extended family system that had existed not only at his home, but it was spread over many parts of Fiji. Today he had none of this; not even his own children lived with him. The only consolation was that he had access to his children for two days a week; otherwise he lived in isolation that had been affecting him very badly for quite some time now. In the

last few years this isolation had added to the problems he had to deal with at work and in politics. He had not realised how deeply he had been affected until a few years ago when he was put on anti-depressants by his GP. He had kept his depression and anxiety issues to himself and even his close friends did not realise how deeply he was affected. The anti-depressants created havoc inside him, made worse by alcohol; he needed both to cope with his life. Now living alone and cut off from most of his friends in east London, he found himself getting extremely depressive and at times suicidal.

As Sanjay struggled with himself and the world around him, he found himself faced with dim prospects for his future in London. He had some saving he could rely on for some time but he knew that he would have to find employment sooner rather than later. He had established himself from nothing twice before in London. On the first occasion he had arrived as a young man with his family with him and his future in front of him. Later, after he had lost his family and good job with the Met police, he managed to dig himself out of the pit the circumstances had pushed him and secure a good life again. But now when he found himself heading towards midlife, disillusionment in professional and political life, his further education blocked through conspiracy against him and with worsening health issues, he felt that he did not have any strength mentally and physically to start search for work anytime soon. His further education in UK now came to a halt. He realised that he could not get into a new area of employment through further education. He had planned to join the academia after completing his doctoral candidature but this option was now closed to him. Sanjay thought long and hard about his employment prospects away from police and anti-racist community work; the two employment areas that had consumed his life thus far. He found it very difficult to find any other area of work that suited or interested him at that

moment. He knew he had to change career path dramatically to get into employment once again.

Since writing his novel, co-writing the play with Rajesh and producing the play, Sanjay had developed a taste for writing and creative work. He was particularly interested in articulating the voices of the Black and Asian community as he had tried to do through starting the *Black History Month* in Greenwich, his novel, the play and the *Positive Images '95* in east London. His heart and mind was telling him that providing a voice for those who do not find their voices in the mainstream media or whose voices have been historically presented in distorted or negative manner by the Eurocentric writers and the current media. Sanjay wanted to explore this career path for himself but realised that it would be a very hard work and would take a long time to achieve in London.

Faced with these issues Sanjay began to explore leaving London for a while to re-establish and rejuvenate himself. The two weeks he had spent with his brother and sister-in-law acted as a catalyst for him to start thinking for the first time in fifteen years about living closer to them. In the beginning this came as fleeting thoughts only because leaving his children behind in London was unthinkable. The sole reason for him to extract himself from a deep hole after prematurely retiring from the Met police was his children. Then they were very young and needed his utmost attention as they grappled with separation and then divorce of their parents. He was glad that ten years later both were studying in a grammar school and had turned out to be good children. He wanted to be by their side and share their growing up pains and achievements with them. But he felt that much had changed for worse for him during these ten years and today his own physical and emotional battles were had almost overwhelmed him. The equation for him today was to whether to travel down the fast suicidal road or to find a

way to stop his decline and get back his health, a normal life and a job.

During his walks and lonely drinking sessions in his home Sanjay thought a lot about these issues. Finally he decided to call his older brother in Sydney and discuss the issues. He welcomed his decision to migrate to Australia and offered to sponsor his visa application if he decided to migrate to Australia for a while to recuperate and get his health and life back. After his conversation with his brother he was left with a choice to make; stay back in England or leave and be closer to his siblings and other relatives living in Australia and New Zealand. He was aware that most of his siblings and close relatives had plans to leave Fiji in near future and hence going back to live in Fiji was not a option for him. The decision he had to make was whether to live in England or migrate to Australia, and the decision was not easy for him at all.

When they lived together Kiran used to mention to Sanjay that she would love to live in Australia. Recently they had got together and even went to social events together. When Sanjay mentioned moving to Australia she saw that as a way to finally leave the confinements and coldness of London and move to the new opportunities in open and warmer Sydney. Kiran's keenness over the years was one of the main reasons for Sanjay to finally decide to migrate to Australia. After establishing himself in Australia, he would remarry her and sponsor and the children to join him there. The added advantage would be that he would be able to finish his MA degree and eventually complete a PhD degree in Australia. Being near his brother, nephews, other relatives and old friends from his village and school days in Fiji would surely help him to settle in Australia and make a fresh start for himself and his family. He felt good with the decision he eventually made.

After making his decision he visited the Australian High Commission in London city and obtained all necessary information to migrate. His calculations regarding skill based visa showed that he had enough points to migrate to Australia; sponsorship letter from his brother in Sydney added to this. He completed the visa application form and submitted by hand to the High Commission. His regular long walks had positive impact on his physical health and his health report for visa was cleared and he received his skilled based migration from Australian High Commission in a few short months. By mid November he was ready to leave for his new home in Sydney, Australia. He sold his precious Mercedes and got rid of all his unwanted possessions and packed only the suitcase he had brought to England fifteen years ago. He had not told anyone about his migration to Australia and decided to inform Kiran first.

Sanjay walked down from his home to surprise Kiran with the news of him flying to Sydney the day after his birthday just five days away. In the morning he had sent invitations to many of his close friends to his birthday and departure party which fell a day before his flight from London Heathrow. It was around midday when he reached Kiran's home in Welling. The children were at school and that suited him because he wanted to inform Kiran of his departure first. Kiran was in a good mood and the two discussed about the children and their school holiday plans in a few weeks. She served lunch and when the two had finished lunch Sanjay decided to tell Kiran the surprise news.

Kiran, you always wanted to go and live in Australia, Sanjay started. Now you can do it, if you want.

Live in Australia? Kiran asked. What do you mean?

Well I am moving to Australia the day after my birthday, Sanjay stated. Once I'm settled there I will sponsor you all and you can join me there.

Suddenly Kiran's demeanour changed and she became angry. She picked up the plates and threw them in the kitchen sink. She returned to the dining room and faced Sanjay, hands on her hips.

Why you didn't ask me before you made such a big decision, she asked. You want us just to follow your whims?

What are you saying Kiran, Sanjay was surprised by her reaction. I thought you will be pleased. I thought you wanted to live in Australia.

I'm not going with you to Australia, she responded. And kids are not going anywhere with you from now. You want to sneak out of their lives and expect that nothing has changed. Everything has changed now because of you.

Look, I just wanted to surprise you, Sanjay stated. Now we can make a new start in a new country.

Well, now you can go to damn Australia and make a new start for your self, she said angrily. The kids and I will have nothing to do with you now. Goodbye Sanjay!

She stormed out of the room and ran up the stairs and locked herself in her bedroom. Sanjay sat there amazed at what had just happened. When Kiran did not come down again he walked out down the steps to the street. He turned around and looked up towards her bedroom window for a while to catch a glimpse of her. When he did not see her, he slowly walked away from his former home, towards the home he would leave in a few days.

Sanjay decided to return to Kiran's home two days later, hoping that she would have calmed down by then and they could have a more productive discussion. He knocked at the door but it remained shut. He looked down at the street and saw her car parked in the front. He knocked again and louder this time. Her door remained shut but the neighbour's door facing hers opened and the owner indicated to him that she was in the house. She was living there when they first moved in some thirteen years ago and was aware of ups and downs of their lives. She gave Sanjay a sympathetic smile and closed the door behind her. Sanjay stayed outside for five minutes and decided to leave. He looked up the window again and caught sight of Kiran through a slightly drawn curtain. He felt very sad as he walked away from the house; he knew this was the last time he would walk down the familiar road. He looked at the houses he and Kiran had visited when they had shared the house. He walked past the bus stop they used to wait for buses before he bought his car way back in 1982. He turned the corner and walked uphill, past the BNP bunker into Welling town centre, taking in all the familiar sights and occasions he shared first with Kiran and later with their two children.

Sanjay was aware that that was the last time he would walk those familiar streets and lanes. He then walked up to his children's school and requested the lady at the reception to see his children and explained the reason why

he had to see them. He was told to wait outside and a staff would bring them out. He went to a bench and waited. After a while a female staff approached him alone.

Mr Singh, I have talked to your daughter, she stated. But she told me that Raman and she cannot see you.

What did you say? Sanjay was shocked. Did you explain to her that I am migrating to Australia in two days?

She knows, the staff replied. I have also checked with the school principal. Your ex-wife has instructed her in writing not to let your children see you.

Wow, why would she do this? Sanjay's eyes filled up. I just want to explain to my children why I have to go away for a while and say good bye to them.

Mr Singh I understand your feelings, she stated. But we cannot act against the instructions of your children's mother.

Can I just have a look at them in their classrooms, Sanjay pleaded. I will not let them know I'm even there.

The school will not allow that, she replied. I've have to go back to my class now. I'm sorry Mr Singh. Have a safe journey.

Sanjay watched her walk away. He felt like walking up his children's classrooms and bring them out to speak

with them. But he decided against doing that, he did not know their classrooms and did not wish to embarrass them. He sat there for a little while in case the school changed its mind and bring out the children to him. Finally he walked away, disappointed and dismayed. He knew that Kiran had been cruel to him but he could not believe that she would use their children in such manner to punish him. She did not see fit to listen and understand why he had to make his decision to leave London and she did not give him an opportunity to his children to know either. Her action today crossed all the borders of decency, Sanjay felt as he walked back to his home. He felt helpless and depressed. The previous week he had spent some quality time with his children as usual in Sidcup; watching a film and then dinner at home. He wished he had talked with them about his moving to Sydney and explained to them why he had made this decision. He would have told them that he expected them to join him in a few years time should their mother decide to move to Australia. If that did not eventuate he would return to London once his health was better. He called Michelle and she invited him to spend the night with her.

Sanjay spent that night at Michelle's flat with her young son. He informed her what had happened that day and she was very sympathetic.

It's such a shame that a mother is doing this, she stated. Why don't you delay your travel to Australia and try to resolve this issue before going?

I've thought about it a lot, Sanjay replied. But I know Kiran well. She will not let me see my children now that she knows that I am going to live in Australia.

What I don't understand is why she would do that, she wanted to know. You said that she wanted to live in Australia and now she has an opportunity to do so. It's crazy!

Well, she has done some crazy things before, he stated. Basically she wants to control everything and she knows that she has lost that control on me now. So she will use the children to punish me now.

You can go to the court and try to see your children that way, she suggested.

Michele, you know how long the court processes takes, he responded. And there is no guarantee that I will get to see my children. She may just disappear with them. In the meantime I will get depressed and don't know what may happen to me. Let's just forget about this and let me get through my last two days here.

The next morning Michelle dropped Sanjay at his home and went to her work. She would return in the evening for his party. Sanjay went to bed to rest for a while because he had to prepare the food for the party. His friends loved his cooking and he had decided to cook for them one last meal before he left. He was awoken by knock on the door and was surprised to see Rachael at the door; it was just midday.

Well Sanjay, where is the champagne that you promised? She asked. We have double

reasons to celebrate today and I have a special present for you?

Don't worry about the champagne sweetie, Sanjay replied. I have six of them. But where is my present?

Well sweetheart, she said smiling. You're looking at it. Come on, let's go in and start the party Sanjay!

Sanjay was thrilled at the unexpected offer from Rachael, who had been a dear friend for a long time. He cracked open one of the champagne bottles and the party began. In between Sanjay prepared the dinner for some twenty guests who had confirmed attendance. By the time guests started to arrive Sanjay was high on champagne, and exhausted between preparing the meal and Rachael's delightful present. She had decided to stay the night because she could not drive back to her home. Michelle was the first one to arrive. She had offered to drive him to the airport the next morning and was going to stay at the house as well. She was then followed by Gary and rest of the Curry Club members. He was surprised to see some of his friends from the university days; Rachael had invited them for his special night. There was plenty of food and drinks for everyone and the night flew by drinking, eating and reminiscing about the good old days.

It was well past midnight when the last guest, a very young lady from the university days, left the party. He said goodbye to her and walked into Rachel's bedroom. He kissed her gently and she opened her eyes.

Go to Michelle Sanjay, she said, hugging him. Spend your last few hours with her.

Thanks for a great gift sweetheart, he stated getting up. I'll never forget it. I'll never forget you.

Sanjay kissed her and went to his bedroom. Michelle was fast asleep. She may have still been exhausted from the previous night. He slipped into the bed and held her petite body in his arms. He did not know when he fell asleep.

When Sanjay woke up a few hours later Michelle was not in the bedroom. He went to Rachael's bedroom and she was not in the room. He went downstairs and Michelle had prepared breakfast for them. She informed that Rachael had left early to go to her lectures. Michelle had cleaned up the party mess and soon they were ready to leave for the airport. Sanjay put his suitcase in the boot of Michelle's car and placed the house keys in the letterbox. He took one last look at his last home in London and got in the car.

Do you want to try the school once again Sanjay? Michelle asked as she started the car. The school may allow you to say good bye to your children.

I would love to, Sanjay replied. But I don't think it will happen. The school will not go against Kiran. They must know what she is like. I know I'll be disappointed and depressed again. Let's just go to the airport Michelle.

Michelle looked at him sympathetically and started the journey across the city of London towards the Heathrow airport. Both kept silent as the car negotiated the London roads, each deep in their thoughts. Sanjay thought about his

first car journey in London from Heathrow across the city of London to belvedere only few kilometres from Sidcup. That journey was filled with so much expectations, hope and enthusiasm. He had his wife sitting beside him carrying their yet to be born daughter. He was young and had a life to explore in a city which was the envy of millions across the world. He had just met his in-laws and looked forward to spend a lot of time with them. He was ready to explore the opportunities London had on offer and share them with his family.

Are you OK Sanjay? Michelle asked, handing him one of her tissues. I know it know is difficult for you now, but you must also think about your heath.

You're so sweet Michelle, Sanjay replied as he wiped his tears that had swelled in his eyes. Why didn't you come into my life sooner? Rachael should have brought us together much earlier.

Well love, you're busy with your life, Michelle smiled. And Rachael must have some reason not to introduce me to you any sooner.

Sanjay smiled back at Michelle, knowing well what she had meant. She was really a wonderful woman and he sincerely wished he had met her much sooner; he may not have taken a decision to leave England then. They had pulled in the car park of Heathrow airport. Sanjay collected his suitcase and walked towards the airport with Michelle beside him. He paused briefly at the spot where he had walked out just in his shirt in the cold late November morning exactly fifteen years ago. He was shivering but was

saved from the cold by his father-in-law, who had brought a warm jacket for him. Today he had a warm jacket, but not the warmth of his family and in-laws. Michelle nudged him and they walked on. Sanjay checked in at the counter and returned to Michelle. It was time for him to board and they walked slowly up to the entrance to the gate. He drew Michelle close to him and kissed her. She silently hugged him for a long time. When she let him go she had tears in her eyes. This was the first time since they had met that Sanjay had seen tears in her eyes. Both knew that was the last time the two would meet.

*I don't know what to say to you Michelle,
Sanjay said. How can I....?*

*Sanjay, don't say anything, Michelle said. I
enjoyed every moment I shared with you.
Don't look back. Now go to Australia and
make a new life for yourself.*

Michelle kissed Sanjay, turned around and walked away towards the exit. Sanjay watched her disappear through the door, knowing well he will never see her again. It was not a nice feeling. He negotiated through the airport immigration and boarded the aeroplane. He ordered a large whisky and settled into his seat. Many thoughts engulfed his thoughts. He was about to fly away from everything that he had worked so hard the last fifteen years. He was leaving behind his children, his friends and the familiar sights of London that he had grown to love despite many obstacles he had faced personally, professionally and politically. He requested another large whisky; by this time the generous hostess had given him several large whiskies. His mind drifted towards what lay ahead for him in Sydney. He carried only his personal items and his academic qualifications and fifteen years of skills and experiences that

he had acquired in London. Apart from his brother and a few relatives in Sydney, he knew nobody in Australia. Apart from the research he had done lately, Australia was practically alien to him. Fifteen years ago he had taken a flight from the familiar Fiji to an alien London. He was now flying from the familiar London to mainly alien Sydney. The flight to London had excited young Sanjay; this flight to Sydney now older Sydney frightened him.

Sanjay drifted into light sleep. A few years ago when his depression and anxiety Sanjay would frequently drift into an extra-body experience in which he could fly. He would fly off to many unknown and unearthly places and have experiences that mainly were pleasant. When he finally drifted back to earth, it took him a long time to realise that he was still alive. This was the first time he found himself in a dual flying experience. The aeroplane had taken him over the clouds and closer to his unknown new home. His extra-body flight was taking him into an extra-terrestrial world. He did not care which world he would find himself when he woke up.

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