

The Open Window

Knowing me you would never think that I was naughty. How little do you know? At the age of only three, I lost my grandfather, Dadaji. A great man. He was well loved, he loved well. He used to take me to the shop to buy me lots of sweets. I was too young to understand that he was gone. I can't remember what they told me.

It is custom for a widowed wife to remain indoors for 4 months and 10 days without seeing the world or having interactions with men they are not related to. My grandmother, Dadima, had to go through this. Her sister, Kubra Massi, and her husband, Hussein Massa, had come from India and Massi helped my mum and dad around the house, with cooking, shopping and looking after me.

This day my mum had gone to work at our shop and my dad was at his garage. I think Massa was in Birmingham at my auntie's house. I was still too young for school so me, Dadima and Massi were home alone. They were cooking and I was playing alone in the front room that looked out on the front garden. The windows were big enough for me to get out of with ease.

The window was open.

I was confused and angry. I still didn't know where my Dadaji had gone and I knew he should be taking me to buy my sweets. The window wasn't too high so I jumped onto the window sill and I crawled out of the window. The shop was only a few minutes down the road and I knew the area.

I ran there with great speed, eager to find my Dadaji and get my sweets. I went into the shop. I heard the ever familiar ring. I saw the shop keeper. I found the newspapers but I couldn't find him anywhere!

I looked at all the sweets: Dip daps, Wham, Refreshers. They were all crisp and fresh. I remember all the different colours: red, orange, blue, green. All bright, all inviting. I looked at the crisp packets all shiny. I imagined opening a pack, the strong, tangy smell of cheese or the spicy, hot chilli. I thought about biting into one, crunching the Walkers or crushing the Monster Munches, even sucking on the Watsits. Yet somehow I felt more attracted to the sour sweets, the tingling in my mouth and the shivers I got at the first bite.

I'm told that I just stood there looking hopefully at people, as though I expected to just get given sweets. I didn't know that you needed money to get things. People usually just gave me things when I wanted them.

Of course at that age I just stayed where I was. I didn't really know about time so didn't think much of it. I wouldn't have realised what anyone else was thinking. I couldn't have comprehended how worried they were.

When they realised that I was gone, Dadima and Massi must have been dismayed. Dadima couldn't leave the house to find me. Massi was from India so she didn't know the area and she couldn't speak English. There was no one else at home. Dadima wasn't allowed to use the phone, plus neither of them had a number to call. Massi went to the neighbour, Margaret. She tried to explain what had happened, and Margaret contacted my parents. My parents came straight home. Everyone helped look for me.

Luckily somebody who knew me told them that they saw me in the shop. When they went there they found me, still standing there expecting to get sweets.

After that day the window was locked.