

The scene takes place in an Asian family living in the suburbs of London in the 1970s. The narrator, who is half-Indian, half-British, is a relative who has been invited there with Helen, his British-born girlfriend.

It was hell on earth at first, the party, with everyone awkward and self-conscious. In the silence, uncle Anwar, Oscar Wilde himself, made three attempts to jump-start the conversation, all attempts stalling. I examined the threadbare carpet. Even Helen, who looked around at everything with great sympathetic curiosity and could usually be relied upon for cheer and irritating opinion, said nothing but 'yum-yum' twice and looked out of the window.

Changez and Jamila sat apart, and although I tried to catch them looking at each other, I can guarantee that not a single surreptitious glance was exchanged by the future bed-mates. What would Changez make of his wife when he finally looked at her? The days of tight tops and mini-skirts for women were gone. Jamila was wearing what looked like several sacks: long skirts, perhaps three, one over the other and a long smock in faded green beneath which the flat arcs of her braless breasts were visible to the slightly interested. She had on her usual pair of National Health glasses, and on her feet a rather unrelenting pair of Dr Martens in brown, which gave the impression that she was about to take up hill-walking. She was crazy about these clothes, delighted to have found an outfit she could wear every day, wanting, like a Chinese peasant, never to have to think about what to put on. A simple idea like this, so typical of Jamila, who had little physical vanity, did seem eccentric to other people, and certainly made me laugh. The one person it didn't seem eccentric to, because he didn't notice it, was her father. He really knew little about Jamila. If someone had asked him who she voted for, what the names of her women friends were, what she liked in life, he couldn't have answered. It was as if, in some strange way, it was beneath his dignity to take an interest in her. He didn't see her. They were just certain ways in which this woman who was his daughter had to behave.

Eventually for relatives of Anwar's turned up with more drink and food, and gifts of clothes and pots. One of the men gave Jamila a wig; there was a sandalwood garland for Changez. Soon the room was noisy and busy and animated.

Anwar was getting to know Changez. He didn't seem in the least displeased with him, and smiled and nodded and touched him constantly. Some time passed before Anwar noticed that his much anticipated son-in-law wasn't the rippling physical specimen he'd expected. They weren't speaking English, so I didn't know exactly what was said, but Anwar, after a glance, followed by a concerned closer study, followed by a little step to one side for a better angle, pointed anxiously at Changez's arm.

Changez wiggled the hand a bit and laughed without self-consciousness; Anwar tried to laugh too. Changez's left arm was withered in some way, and stuck on the end of the attenuated limb was a lump of hard flesh the size of a golf ball, a small fist, with only a tiny thumb projecting from the solid mass where there should have been nimble, shop-painting, box-carrying fingers. It looked as if Changez had stuck his hand into a fire and had had flesh,

bone and sinew melted together. Though I knew a remarkable plumber with only a stump
for a hand who worked for Uncle Ted, I couldn't see Changez decorating Anwar's shop with
40 one arm. In fact, had he four Mohammed Ali arms I doubted if he'd know what to do with a
paintbrush, or with a toothbrush for that matter.

If Anwar now perhaps had reason for entertaining minor reservations about Changez
(though Changez seemed delighted by Anwar and laughed at everything he said even when
it was serious), this could be nothing compared to Jamila's antipathy. Did Changez have any
45 idea of the reluctance with which his bride-to-be, now moving across to her bookshelf,
picking up a book by Kate Millett, staring into it for a few minutes and replacing it after a
reproachful and pitying glance from her mother, would be exchanging vows with him?

Jamila had phoned me the day after Helen and I fucked in Anerley Park to tell me of her
decision. That morning I was so ecstatic about my triumph in seducing the dog-owner's
50 daughter that I'd completely forgotten about Jamila's big decision. She sounded distant and
cold as she told me she would marry the man her father had selected from millions, and that
was the end of it. She would survive, she said. Not one more word on the subject would she
tolerate.

The Buddha of Suburbia, Hanif Kureishi, 1990. Part I: *In the Suburbs*, chapter 6.