**Alien of Arkwright Mill**

Villiers Street, past the Emmanuel Church to Havelock Street, Hammond Street, Barlow Street, with a shop on the corner called Rumbelows which rented or sold televisions on easy terns, Ellen Street, Aqueduct Street, a wider, busier road, with an empty aqueduct because the canal had been stopped and partially drained just before that point. Cross over Brook Street at the corner of Murray Street.

Until then the walk from where Yas was living was just like the beat she walked in Sheffield as a Constable of the South Yorkshire Police. She memorised the near identical terraced streets in their back-to-back grid pattern. It was a way of compartmentalising the journey into manageable lengths that all beat officers had used since the job of police officer began.

But now she was at her destination. Arkwright Mill was a five-storey edifice built in 1854 of dull red brick with forbiddingly dark rectangular windows in regimented rows on each floor. Before half past eight even on a summer morning the mill cast a cold, dark shadow over Brook Street and made Yas feel she was literally stepping back in time to an actual Victorian factory.

“Well,” she thought wryly as she entered through the works entrance on the still cobbled Hawkins Street. “This is certainly a comedown from being a beauty queen.”

She took her timecard and punched in to show that she was there on time, ready for her day’s work. Next was the cloakroom where the mostly female machine workers changed out of their outdoor coats and donned brown cotton aprons or overalls and had a chance to talk to each other for a minute or two before the shift started.

Not that Yas talked to many people. She was new, for a start, and didn’t know anyone. Then, of course, she was automatically socially separated from the more or less half of the workforce who were white and nominally Christian whether they went to a church or not, and closed ranks against anyone noticeably not ‘one of them’. Racist words were technically against factory rules, but it was obvious that nothing would be done even if such incidents were reported.

To make things worse, Yas’s family were from the Punjab on the border between Pakistan and India. Most of the non-white half of the staff were from the country still known as East Pakistan until it became Bangladesh in another ten years. That transition, as Yas knew as historical fact, only happened after a thoroughly nasty war\* in which the Bengali civilians, particularly women, suffered horrific war crimes. Even in this decade, relationships between the two countries were strained and in addition to a kind of racial guilt for what still hadn’t happened yet, Yas felt the political, cultural and language differences keenly.

Especially the language. Even when speaking English the accents were all different to hers. Mostly among themselves the women spoke their first language of Bengali. Yas was brought up speaking Urdu as her second language after English. Of course, thanks to the TARDIS’s peculiar effects she understood Bengali, but revealing that would have caused even more social problems.

Her English accent was south Yorkshire, of course. She stood out in this Lancashire town whichever way she looked. She didn’t fit into any part of the gossip and camaraderie of the factory, which was a problem if she was going to learn anything except how to be a semi-skilled worker.

The job was simple enough. The looms on the third floor that wove the cotton spun on the fourth floor were driven by electricity these days and unless there were breaks in the threads they could keep going for hours at a time with minimal human interference.

Which made it an unremittingly dull job and a long shift from eight-thirty to twelve-thirty, then one o’clock until four-thirty before the day was over.

That half hour lunch was another instance of social distance between the white women with soup in a vacuum flask and sandwiches of corned beef or brawn with perhaps a hard-boiled egg in tin foil for variety. The Bangali ladies brought curries kept hot in traditional clay pots and home-made bhaji and chapatti to accompany them. They ate separately because there had been some unpleasant scenes a few months ago when some of the white women complained that the smell of foreign food was making them sick.

This was 1963. Curry houses and kebab shops hadn’t yet appeared on the street corners of Preston, frequented by white people who had nearly forgotten that vindaloo was not a traditional English food. Fish and chips were the take-out food of choice in this decade. But it wasn’t something eaten after a Friday night out. Yas had noticed that many of the housewives of Villiers Street went around the corner about six o’clock with a dinner plate, returning with it well wrapped up in newspaper. The ‘plate supper’ regularly fed the husbands who arrived home from their work in the heavier industries of the town.

But Yas was staying with Mrs Aadya Begum, a widow whose son and daughter were both now at university, much to her pride and honour amongst her community. She had a room to rent to a respectable Muslim girl and had advertised the fact in the Plungington Road newsagent’s window.

Yas had wondered at the underlying racism of the advert. But in a time when lodgings with vacancies could hang up signs saying ‘no dogs, no coloured, no Irish’ without breaking any laws it was probably fair enough.

In any case, to fit in, to be able to investigate the alien anomaly The Doctor had detected, she needed a place to stay, and she needed her own lunch, wrapped carefully by Mrs Begum, which today consisted of bhaat rice, aloo bhaja, dal and crisp chapati, all of which looked and tasted much better than corned beef sandwiches.

Everyone ate in the ‘canteen’ on the second floor where tea was available in the ubiquitous English style - hot, sweet and milky and the one thing all the workers, coloured and white, women on the shop floors and men in the packing and despatch on the ground floor, had in common.

“May we sit with you?” asked a voice in English with a Bengali lilt. Three girls of her own age stood near the table. She invited them to join her. “We thought you looked lonely. Do you know anybody here at all?”

“No,” Yas admitted and gave her cover story of coming to Preston from Sheffield for work. It was a thin story that really didn’t bear close examination. There was no shortage of this kind of work in the Yorkshire towns, and it looked strange to other Muslim women that she should have come alone, without an uncle or aunt from an extended family to stay with.

“Did you come here to avoid getting married?” asked Mayal, the girl who had first spoken to her.

Yas’s surprise at the question must have been interpreted as guilt.

“It’s all right. Karina and I are happy to be engaged, but Veena refused to be married to the man her parents arranged for her. They were angry, but this is England, and it is the nineteen-sixties. They had to accept her decision.”

Veena looked away, perhaps embarrassed, perhaps ashamed, perhaps just wishing her more talkative friend would let her get a word in.

“I didn’t think much of the man my father wanted to introduce,” Yas said, improvising furiously. “But I’m not against getting married. Are any of the men working here single?”

The three girls giggled as if that was a very daring thing to say. Perhaps it was. Women of their background checking out the male talent was hardly done even if it WAS England in the nineteen-sixties.

“Very few,” Karina admitted. “We thought Devesh Choudhary was getting sweet on Veena for a while, but then he got promoted from section foreman to head foreman – with his own office on the top floor, and he got to believe his own name.”

Yas understood the joke and laughed with the other three. The Bengali name Devesh meant ‘the chief of the gods’. A head foreman of a small factory was not exactly a ‘god’ but an ambitious man could make something of the limited power the position afforded. Yas could imagine him losing interest in Veena if he thought he might do ‘better’.

That wasn’t the sort of man who would interest her even if she WAS looking for romance, but she glanced at him surreptitiously, sitting at the middle management table that formed yet another canteen faction. Somebody in this factory was hiding a powerful secret, and Devesh Choudhary could well be the one.

Or it could have been one of the others.

Or none of them.

That was the trouble with this undercover assignment. This was the Tuesday of her second week, and she had no idea what or who she ought to be watching.

“Anyway,” Veena said, much to everyone’s surprise. “I AM seeing somebody.” The word ‘who’ formed on the lips of her two friends, but she pre-empted them. “Jon Azim.”

“Him?” Mayal and Karina were very surprised. Yas wondered why.

“He is the despatch clerk,” Karina explained. “A desk job, in his own office, but down on the ground floor. Nearly management all the same. Good money. But her parents won’t be pleased. His mother is English, and nobody has ever seen him at mosque. Not a good husband for a Bengali girl.”

Veena made a face at her friends and insisted that he was nice, and she was introducing him to her parents tonight. It was nothing to do with anyone else.

Yas thought it was going to lead to a lot of trouble. Even in her own time, marriage was still a thorny issue. In this decade, when most of the women around her were newly emigrated and the traditions of the old country were still strong, Veena’s future problems might yet prove insurmountable.

But it was nothing to do with Yas’s undercover assignment and she wasn’t at all sure she was going to find out anything useful while she was stuck in this mind-bogglingly boring job.

She told The Doctor that when she was on her way ‘home’ to Mrs Begum’s at the end of the day. The TARDIS was parked in an inconspicuous corner behind the Emmanuel church, a stone’s throw from her lodgings. First, she went to the TARDIS bathroom. Mrs Begum, along with most of the residents of Villiers Street had an indoor toilet. The other streets in the grid still had outdoor facilities. But there was only a washbasin, no bath or shower. Yas drew a firm line under her personal hygiene.

She returned to the console room where a futuristic ‘food dispenser’ that even The Doctor disdained with its artificially flavoured bars of nutrition actually served as a pretty decent coffee machine. She drank its version of a cappuccino - something else along with the job title of ‘barista’ that had not yet arrived in Preston - and updated The Doctor on her progress or lack of it.

“Look,” she said, handing The Doctor the pocket-sized device she had been carrying every day. “There hasn’t been a glimmer of anyone alien in the place. Everyone is human and normal – for a nineteen-sixties value of normal – racist, sexist and tactless – even the nice ones.”

“Something is wrong, though,” The Doctor insisted. “There are low level Psi-Tonic particles saturating that whole building. At the very least I’d expect the workers to be hypnotised into being drones obedient to some alien despot.”

“Hypnotised drones?” Yas countered. “That job is so boring, people are ALREADY drones from clock-in to clock-out.”

“What are the managers like?” The Doctor asked. “Not the foremen, but the ones who actually own the business.”

“No idea,” Yas admitted. “I’ve never seen them. The general manager just showed me where the canteen and toilets were and passed me on to the foreman for the weaving floor. Somebody in Manchester actually owns it all. Did you know the raw cotton comes from India? Its spun and woven into fabric, then exported to Bengali sweatshops to be made into clothes at a penny an hour and imported back here to be sold in expensive shops. Alien entities couldn’t treat people much worse.”

The Doctor nodded. She understood the unfairness at every stage of the garment industry. But it really wasn’t in her remit to mend this purely human social injustice.

“Has there been much turnover in the workforce?” The Doctor asked, still trying to work out what might be happening. “New people coming in, replacing others?”

Not really,” Yasmin answered. “I replaced a girl who got married. Bengali women don’t tend to work outside the home after marriage. The white women do. They always have, really, ever since the Victorian age when whole families, kids included, were in the mills. It always bugged me at school, doing social history. All the post-war middle class women demanding careers, financial independence from their husbands, while the working classes never stopped working.”

There was a whole post-graduate dissertation in Yas’s observation, but it was another dead end for The Doctor’s investigation.

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “What about… is there an area where workers don’t go… a basement or… something.”

“The basement is storage and the electricals. There’s a whole substation down there to keep the machines running. But that’s all normal. There’s the old steam turbines and the chimney, and the water tower, but they’re bricked up. No, there’s nothing like that. And, Doctor, look, this can’t go on. I’m going bananas in there. I did A’levels so I wouldn’t ever have to do the kind of job my gran did when she came to Sheffield, and this is THAT Job. I don’t even know how long I can keep up pretending I’m so stupid that this is the best I can do.”

Even as she said it, she knew that was wrong. The girls she was working with weren’t stupid. Her gran hadn’t been stupid. For reasons largely to do with family and class as well as narrow expectations of what girls should do with their lives, none of them had the opportunity to take A’levels and choose a career. The chance of any of the Bengali girls getting HER career choice in this time were about nil, anyway.

“I’ll try to find time to snoop around a bit tomorrow,” she promised. “But if I don’t come up with something, soon, we HAVE to do something else. Like… I don’t know… YOU get a job there.”

“Till the end of this week, I promise.” The Doctor assured her. “On Saturday, Preston North End are at home to Charlton Athletic. We could go.”

“No, thanks,” Yas answered with a wry expression. “I’ve had enough casual racism and sexism this week. What would it be like at a football match?”

“I had a friend who supported Charlton Athletic, long ago,” The Doctor noted apropos of nothing. Yas said she had to be going and headed off to Mrs Begum’s, which wasn’t so bad really, a lot like tea at her grans, but she was actually starting to wonder if one of those plate suppers from the chippy might make a nice change from curry every night.

The next day started much as all the other days had been. The only difference came at lunchtime when she noticed that Veena was very unhappy.

“It went badly last night,” Mayal explained as the girl gave vent to tears she had held back all morning at her loom.

“Her parents have forbidden her to see Jon Azim again. And if she doesn’t accept their decision, they will send her back to Dhaka.”

“Where I will be married to a man chosen by my grandfather,” Veena sobbed.

Yas was shocked, but not surprised. Forced marriage was still something that happened in her own time. A friend from sixth form had unexpectedly gone on ‘holiday’ to Pakistan and not come back. The college had brought in the police and social services, but nothing had come of it.

Funnily enough, reaction to Veena’s plight was split along completely new lines of demarcation. Most of the white women, especially the unmarried ones, were appalled by the idea of an arranged marriage in ‘this day and age’. A small number of them turned away with remarks like ‘what do you expect from that sort’ and worse.

Some of the Bengali girls were also sympathetic, but there was a faction of traditionalists who condemned her for going against her parents.

It made for a much noisier and busier canteen than usual with people coming to the table to talk to Veena and either commiserate or criticise, the latter causing rows to break out. In the midst of it all, Yas slipped out to the stairs up to the top floor.

This was where the managers and their secretaries had their offices. Yas had been there just once when she filled out her employment card and gave it to the wages clerk.

But she had been thinking. The Mill had a huge footprint. Each floor was the same size. Did the offices actually take up all of the top floor? Could something else be up there? Something producing those Psi-Tonic particles The Doctor was so interested in.

She was physically fit. The stairs didn’t bother her too much, but she did take a quick breather before stepping through the door.

That brought her into a corridor that ran the length of the floor. Either side were offices built from wood and plaster partitions. Doors had frosted glass marked with the names and job titles of the management. She noticed the relatively new lettering on the door of head foreman, Devesh Choudhary’s office. It wasn’t a very big office. He wasn’t ‘chief of the gods’ by a long shot.

Further along there was an ‘executive restroom’ – for Gentlemen – and a Ladies that, presumably, was not executive.

And beyond there, doors without frosted glass or names. She tried the handles and found most of them unlocked but empty and devoid of interest.

One wasn’t.

She stepped inside and reached for a light switch before realising she didn’t need one. The small room had no window and wasn’t lit by electric lights, but there was a glow from one wall, an unnatural yellow glow as if from within the plaster and brick.

She stepped closer and reached out tentatively….

“You… girl… what are you doing on this floor?” As Yas ran along the corridor without even thinking about being covert or even careful, Devesh Choudhary came from his office. He grasped her by the arm rather more firmly than seemed necessary.

“I… wasn’t doing anything,” Yas answered, more nervously than she expected of herself.

“You’re the new girl on the weaving floor, aren’t you?” he said, his hand still gripping her firmly.

“Yes,” she answered.

“That’s yes, sir,” he growled. “Unless you want to collect your cards.”

“You’re hurting me,” Yas responded, twisting away from him using self-defence moves she had learnt in police training. “I need to get back downstairs. The afternoon shift will be starting.”

“Wait a moment,” Choudhary said, his manner just a little less high-handed. “You’re not as dim as most of the girls, I think. You could get promoted quickly enough – we don’t have many female foremen, and not our colour, but you could be the first.”

“Oh, really?” There was something about the way Choudhary said that - something in his face as he said it, something just too predatory. “And what would I have to do to earn this promotion?”

“I was right, not so dim at all. You caught on fast. What do you THINK you would have to do?”

Now he was positively leering. He reached towards her again, but not aiming for her arm. Yas quickly felled him with a few more moves meant to be used when a suspect needed controlling and her police baton was not available.

“It was sexual harassment,” Yas protested to the works manager’s secretary as she waited for her ‘cards’ and wages owed. “HE should be fired, not me. That creep should not have been given a promotion. He shouldn’t have been allowed a position of power over the women workers.”

The secretary said nothing. It was more than her job was worth. Yas sighed and waited, her hand idly picking up a biro and drawing on the back of a blank timesheet from a pile on the desk.

She didn’t even get to say goodbye to the few people who had been friendly to her. They were all back at work as she was escorted to the cloakroom and then out of the factory.

She walked, in something of a daze, back along the familiar route, past all the terraced streets named for men who had been in Parliament around about the time that the factory and houses had been built. She was sure something else had happened other than a disgraceful encounter with a nasty man and an even nastier work ethic where a woman from the shop floor couldn’t complain about a manager’s wandering hands and even more wandering thoughts.

She almost walked past the TARDIS before remembering what it was there for. She stepped inside still feeling that she had forgotten something important.

The Doctor thought so, too. While Yas drank replicated cappuccino she shone the blue light of the sonic screwdriver in her eyes. Yas blinked and complained but The Doctor continued her examination.

“There was a spike in the Psi-Tonic particles,” she said. “I think you stumbled across something… and it attacked your mind… killing off about ten minutes of your short-term memory.”

“Killing off….” Yas didn’t find the diagnosis in any way reassuring. “But… what did I see?”

“If you don’t know, I can’t tell you,” The Doctor answered with infuriating logic. “Killed is the word. Erased. Not just forgotten. There’s nothing I can do to help you remember. There’s no long-term damage. I can promise you that. But those ten minutes are gone for good.”

“But they are ten minutes that would explain what’s going on,” Yas noted. “I’d rather it was the time in the corridor with Mr Innuendo. As if I would ever….”

“What’s that?” The Doctor asked as Yas dropped her national insurance card, her wage packet for the two and a half days worked and a crumpled yellow sheet of paper. She picked up the paper and smoothed it out. “Perhaps the minutes weren’t completely erased, after all.”

Yas looked at the doodle on the back of the timesheet. It was a strange face, an alien face. The chin was tiny, with a thin line of a mouth just above it. The nose was a straight line with two slanted eyes either side, one covered by a sort of elliptically shaped monocle. A rounded head closed around the top of the earless face.

“Ming the Merciless,” Yas suggested. “Or something like that. But why did I draw that?”

“Because your subconscious was trying to get through the fog of your conscious mind, all full of shock and anger, outrage and confusion. This is what you saw on the top floor before being accosted by Devesh Choudhary.”

“It looks less unpleasant than him,” Yas remarked, though not really. Choudhary was an ordinary human monster. This was something far more sinister. “Do you know what it is?”

“Well, this portrait isn’t exactly from the school of realism,” The Doctor pointed out. “But those eyes and the rounded head, that mean little mouth – used just for breathing. Eating and talking would be by other means – nutritional osmosis and telepathy I’d guess. Which, along with the Psi-Tonic particle emissions puts our chum’s home world in tie Alpha Arietis sector. Most likely a Cyklorian.”

“Dangerous?”

“Mostly stupid,” The Doctor answered. “Not what I was expecting. They haven’t the brains to launch an invasion. They’re not shape-shifters or body-snatchers. I don’t get it. But, anyway, he has no business here on Earth in this time and place. We’ll have to deal. But not yet. After dark when there’s nobody but a night watchman to get past.”

Yas passed the time enjoying the sunshine in a green space called Moor Park that was at the top end of Villiers Street, appreciating the leisure that being fired from the factory afforded her. She returned to Mrs Begum’s house for tea at six o’clock and for a few hours watched nineteen-sixties television on a set bought from Rumbelows. Needless to say, none of the programming was aimed at people like herself or Mrs Begum. She went up to bed at nine and the landlady was only a little later.

She snuck back out at nearly eleven and met up with The Doctor. The two of them walked silently back towards the factory, aware that two women, especially two women of mixed ethnicity, needed to avoid attention from anyone heading home from the two pubs – the Cottage in one direction and the Hornby Castle in the other right beside the Arkwright Mill.

There were clangs of beer kegs being moved in the walled off yard of the Castle, but all was quiet and in shadow on Hawkins Street. The sonic making short work of the locked door seemed disturbingly loud before the unlikely burglars were inside. They tiptoed past the alcove where the night watchman was drinking tea from his flask and listening to the radio.

“I couldn’t bring the TARDIS in,” The Doctor explained as they headed up the stairs. “It would cause ripples in the Psi-Tonic particles and warn our friend.”

Yas accepted that reason, because it was better than thinking The Doctor just liked to do everything the hard way. They heard the night watchman starting one of his rounds as they reached the top floor. It would take him a while to get up here, and with luck they would be done by then.

Yas led the way past the offices, glaring at Choudhary’s door as if it was partly to blame for everything. She wasn’t sure, in the dark, which room the alien had been in, but The Doctor took a reading with the sonic.

“Here. The back wall is against the old water tank tower,” The Doctor said. “The sonic reads the extra thickness of wall. It’s not important, though. Just a bit of background info for the DVD extras, as it were.”

The door was locked this time, but again the sonic dealt with that and they stepped inside.

Again, in a windowless room there was light. The Doctor raised the sonic defensively as she approached the glowing outer wall, the one against the water tower. The light pulsed and increased a little.

The face appeared, the one Yas had drawn in biro. Now in full HD colour she could see that its face was white with the two eyes red and blue and the slit mouth pulsating yellow in a rhythm that might be a speech pattern. It projected from the wall like a strange, postmodernist relief sculpture, but remained just a head, no body emerging.

“Don't even try zapping my brain,” The Doctor said, facing the disembodied face squarely and adopting a stern tone. “I’ve got mental defences to give you the mother of all migraines. Sol, who are you and what are you doing here?”

The mouth lights moved rapidly. The Doctor could obviously understand it clearly. Yas heard it as if through cotton wool or water, or maybe both. And she obviously wasn’t psychic enough to reply to the alien the way The Doctor could.

“Hold on….” Yas demanded. “He – assuming it is as he – says he meant no harm. He killed off ten minutes of my memory. That’s HARM. It’s also a violation just as bad as being groped by the pervy foreman. There was plenty of harm.”

“I’m going to say ‘he’ because I don’t like ‘it’ as a pronoun and human languages have nothing better for gender neutral species,” The Doctor said. “He apologises for the violation, pleading that he panicked and acted rashly when he saw you. I have invoked intergalactic law and given him the equivalent of a police caution for a first-time offence – if that is good enough for you.”

“I suppose it is,” Yas conceded. “But… have I understood the psychic language right? He’s a STUDENT?”

“Sort of,” The Doctor answered. “Remember I said his lot were thick. They really are as stupid as they come. Their ability to travel in space and time is purely natural, like breathing. They don’t need to train pilots or navigators or anything like that to be out in the universe. But they don’t teach anything else, either. They travel to learn. Which is ok in itself. It’s what I’ve been doing for the best part of a millennia. But what this lot do is lurk in the walls of universities and academies and absorb the learning, like the dinner lady sneaking in the back of the lecture theatre to get free lessons. I knew somebody who did that.”

“But THIS is not a university,” Yas pointed out. “All he’ll learn here is advanced leering from Devesh Choudhary.”

“As I said, thick. He’s about fifty years and sixty metres short of his target. By your time the University of Central Lancashire’s campus will start just about at the bottom end of Brook Street. A well thrown cricket ball would land in one of its car parks. It’s not the Prydonian Academy, or even Oxbridge, but it’s as good a place as any to get an education. Right now, the polytechnic is quite a bit smaller and not offering as broad a range of subjects. And that’s assuming he meant to go to UCLAN and not UCL or UCLA, which is a lot further away.”

“Definitely thick,” Yas agreed. “Or should we possibly say intellectually challenged? There are enough casual insults chucked about this building all day. And what are we going to do about HIM? He can't stay here, surely?”

“He’s not. I'm giving him temporal-spatial directions to UCLAN’s Victoria Building in 2022, just down the road on Victoria Street. It’s an art gallery. He’ll have a great time.”

Sure enough, the alien face melted back into the wall and the light faded. They were left in the dark and quiet.

“Daftest alien invasion, yet,” Yas said, as they exited the building having avoided the nightwatchman again.

“Easy to deal with in the end,” The Doctor agreed. “Shall we leave, now? Our work is done.”

“Can we give it a couple of days? I’ve got a couple of loose ends to tie up. If you can help me out with one of them.”

On Friday morning, an hour after morning shift had begun, Yas and The Doctor came into the Arkwright Mill and walked up to the top floor. They identified themselves as factory inspectors and demanded to speak to all of the managers in turn.

By the time they got to Devesh Choudhary the gossip had reached him that Yas had been working undercover for the inspector. He was already panicking.

“According to the general manager, the incident involving my colleague was not the first,” The Doctor said. “Apparently, your general manager believes it is better to deal with complaints internally, which translates to the girls leaving the job and you getting away with it. Your general manager is wrong in his belief and will be changing that policy from now on. As for you….”

The Doctor looked him in the eyes and said nothing. On the very edge of her consciousness, Yas felt something passing between her and Choudhary without words being necessary. Choudhary’s face paled and he broke into a sweat.

“We understand each other,” The Doctor said out loud. She nodded to Yas as they left him in his office.

“What did you do to him?” Yas asked out of earshot.

“I projected into his mind some of the pain I could make him feel if he even looks at a woman in the wrong way in the future. I also gave him the impression that I would know, no matter where he is or when I am.”

“Would you?”

“No, but he thinks it, and that’s what matters. Now for your other loose end.”

The lunch half hour had begun. Yas noticed that there were two of the white women sitting with Veena, Karina and Mayal and there was a certain amount of cultural mobility around the room generally. Some of the white women were even sampling a very fragrant potato aloo at one table, though the Bengali lady who offered it wasn’t interested in trying their brawn sandwiches.

Yas brought Jon Azim to sit next to Veena as she gave the unhappy lovers a startling idea.

“I hope you don’t mind, Veena,” she said. “But I told Mrs Begum about you. She’s a devout Muslim lady, but she sent her daughter to university not to a husband. She is sympathetic and is happy to let you have my room since I’m moving out, and as many dal lunches as you can eat. She is happy to be chaperone if Jon visits you at her house, and she may even consider letting you both live with her when you’re married – until you can afford a place of your own. Meanwhile, if your parents see that you’re living under a good woman’s roof and behaving properly, they may yet come around to you.”

“We can hope,” Jon said on behalf of them both. “They are good people. They are wrong in only one thing – as are everyone else around here. I DO attend Mosque. But I go to the new one in Avenham, where my grandmother lives. I never corrected anyone because it was none of their business.”

“Quite right,” The Doctor told him. “Well, now we must be going. Perhaps we’ll come to the wedding, if you’d like us to be there, that is.”

“We’d love it,” Veena said. “But where will we send the invitation?”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Yas assured her. “It’ll get to us. Important things like that always do, somehow.”

* Note. ‘Nasty’ doesn’t begin to describe the 1971 atrocities in Bangladesh, sometimes described as attempted genocide. I tried to keep these stories in the pre-watershed style of the TV programme, so my description was circumspect, but as the Twelfth Doctor said ‘Google it’ to see just HOW nasty it was.