

Borderline by Hanif Kureishi

Haroon, eighteen, London Asian.

Borderline examines the sense of belonging among the British Asian community of west London.

Haroon is talking to Amina, his now ex-girlfriend, in a dingy car park, where he has been finishing with her. Together for eighteen months, it has been a clandestine relationship – Amina is from a strict Pakistani family who expect her to have an arranged marriage. He is trying to explain who he is and what motivates him. His argument to this point has been that he has to get away, education is his ticket out and that he cannot change the racial bigotry that exists in their society without changing it from the inside and from a position of power. Change from the outside, separatism, cannot work. Haroon, who is also a budding novelist, will be leaving for university in a few months to study law, and rather than putting this separation off until then, he has terminated the relationship now in order to give them time to become friends again before he goes away. Well, that's what he would like.

Haroon You know, when we were kids, my brother and I were taken to people's houses. Dressed up and everything. Like being wrapped in brown paper. We just about creaked. In the houses we visit everything's on exhibition: furniture, their wife's hair, their kids, their kids' teeth. You've got to admire everything. They have to admire you, your teeth, hair, shoes. Everything seems to smell of perfume. You can't touch anything. My brother says he has to piss. He's in their hall. I know he's going through their pockets in the hall. I know he's opening their handbags. They're asking me how I'm doing at school. I'm saying I'm doing well. I can hear fivers settling in his pocket. I can hear my father saying, 'Answer them, Haroon, they're our friends.' I can hear myself saying, 'I'm good at English.' That Sunday he steals a car. It's a Jag. I'm lying on the backseat. We're on the bypass. We're doing sixty. We're doing ninety. We're going out to Greenford. I'm completely numb. They're in a house in Greenford. I'm outside. I can hear him and his friends moving across thick carpets, unplugging speakers, lifting down TV sets. I'm looking out. Soon I'm not looking out. In fact I'm running away. I'm away. They're walking down the drive with a spin-dryer. I'm not there. Two men are running towards them. They're arresting them. My father's cursing. My mother's hysterical. I'm locked in my room. I'm studying, I'm protected, I'm the special son, the hope, my brain's burning . . . *(Pause.)* Everyone round here's too busy serving kebabs and learning karate! No one round here knows fuck all about what you want to know about.

[**Amina** At least we protect each other here.]

Haroon We've got to engage in the political process. Not just put out fires when they start them.