



## *Conversation of Home* by Rithwik Narla

### Bolton School Boys Division

Thick smog filled the sky for miles, as I got out of the factory. I thought back to my war-torn home that I was forced to flee from. Before the war, my life was everything I had hoped for: I had three beautiful children, an amazing wife, and I worked on my own farm, it was perfect. After the war I lost my wife and two of my children, and I had to move to the UK after my hometown was devastated. I ended up in Bolton, and the only job I could find was working in a dirty factory for just enough money to survive.

I hated the UK for many reasons: I missed my home, the food was awful, my job was monotonous and most of all, I felt like I didn't fit in. Everyone would go to the pub after work or watch football, but none of these things interested me, and because of this, I had no friends, I was lonely, and I hated it.

The next day, I began my walk to the factory. The closer I got to the factory, the stronger the smell of smoke became, and the harder it became to see as smoke filled the air, and the whirring of the machines became louder, this reminded me of the tiring day I had ahead of me. I entered the factory to my boss yelling "You're late! If this happens again, you lose a week of pay!" This felt incredibly harsh, as this was the first time I had ever been late to the factory. I went to the machine and turned it on, I was beginning to frequently get ringing in my ears, due to the dangerously loud machines I was constantly surrounded by. This job was the complete opposite of my job back home, where I would spend my time outside in the fresh air, planting vegetables and looking after sheep.

I got one break in my twelve-hour workday; I had twenty minutes to have my lunch, which always consisted of a bland piece of cheese between two slices of bread, the other people that worked in the factory called it a 'sandwich.' The others all sat together and spoke about politics and football, but I sat alone and thought about my old life and how it got taken away in the blink of an eye. I hated lunch time, because it reminded me of how lonely I was, and how I never managed to fit in with my colleagues.

I returned to work after my lunch, and I went about the rest of my day like normal. After lunch, one of the kids got their arm stuck in the machine, I used to get shocked by this, but recently I had become desensitised to it. This sort of thing happened every few weeks or so, a month ago, someone got their jacket caught in the machine and got pulled into it, there was blood everywhere and the man had to stay in hospital for a week, but all the boss said was "That's why

you don't wear jackets, follow the rules and you'll be fine!" This horrified me, and my hatred for my boss grew even stronger.

Later in the day, I began my walk home, but I was stopped by one of my colleagues. "What's your name?" He asked me. I was taken aback for a second, because I hadn't had a proper conversation with anyone at work since I had started. I eventually replied, "I am called Dev, what's your name?"

"I'm Matt, nice to meet you." He extended his hand, and I grasped it, and we shook hands. "Do you want to grab a drink?" His rough voice provided a strange sense of comfort.

"I don't drink, is there anything else we can do?" I replied.

"We can go to mine." He offered.

"Let's go" I answered. This was the first time I had felt a sense of belonging, since I had come to Bolton.

We arrived at Matt's house, and we sat down. He introduced me to his wife, and she offered to get us some drinks.

Matt asked me, "Where are you from?"

I looked down at the floor then answered, "I am from India, I moved here after the war."

I fidgeted with my hands, I felt nervous because I hadn't spoken about my life before the war with anyone since I had moved here.

"What was it like in India?" He asked, as his wife came back in with some drinks.

"It was perfect." I signed longingly. "I had a beautiful wife and three children, I worked on my own farm, and I lived with my whole family. Now I live alone and work in a dirty factory, I can barely afford food and I miss my family." I blinked away the tears and sipped my drink. "That sounds awful. I used to have a kid, but she died during the war. Life hasn't been the same since then." Matt wiped a tear from his face, silence filled the room, until his wife eventually spoke, "He was an amazing kid, he was funny and smart, everyone loved him."

I looked up from my cup and said, "I'm sorry." My voice broke as I said this, it was impossible to believe that a man who looked so happy at work, who went to the pub and watched football with his mates, felt the same sadness that I felt.

"I'm sorry for you, if you ever need someone to talk to, I'm always here." Matt offered.

"Thank you, same for you." I replied.

This conversation changed the way I felt since I moved to the UK; I had been scared to try and talk to people and to fit in, and I had been carrying a certain sadness with me all the time, but I felt a sense of relief, and even a bit of hope. Maybe I'll be okay.