

2024

Written by Subika Anwar-Khan. Performed by Lily Adams. (page one of two)

Time goes so fast. It felt like only yesterday that I'd go to Tesco with Mum and Nan. All of us together. I remember she'd do my hair all nice and put me in a dress. Mainly because we'd see our friends, after the weekly shop and meeting here was the perfect place.

During the summer holidays Mum, Nan and all their friends, with all their kids would meet upstairs for a coffee. And it felt like they'd hired the whole place or something... like they were having a private party with everyone invited. Their laughs echoing throughout the entire centre. I'm sure if you went downstairs you could still hear them! Even the security guards would come over for a quick chat!

I loved it because it meant I could play on the rides and Mum would give me coins to get sweets from the dispensers. On our own. Well... I had to go with my friend. I had to hold her hand but we felt so grown up, walking round the corner alone, taking ages to choose what we wanted and then running back. But it's... that kind of place where it's... you know. Safe like that.

We stopped meeting... well in that kind of way, when the food bank started. I kind of remember when we started to see a line of people queuing for the first time. Or maybe it was the first time I really noticed. It sort of just... happened. Overnight. We were coming out of Tesco one day and right in front of us was a huge queue of people. It obviously grew over time and we slowly also stopped meeting like the way we used to. When I asked what was going on Nan explained that they were queuing for food because they couldn't afford to buy any, as we were rolling our trolley load of the week's shop down the escalator. Going straight back home.

I didn't fully understand that, because all I remember feeling was resentment towards them. Like... 'you're ruining our private party. Just go to Tesco like everyone else.'

I feel really bad about that now... even though I was just a kid it was... still stupid. To feel that way. (Pause) I can't help but think that... a lot of people thought that though. Because the food bank has moved now? (Pause) It's... out of sight out of... (pause) Seeing that, makes the cost-of-living crisis... real for people.

I love this time of year because it means I can stock up on supplies for the new term. Mum drives in now because we've moved a bit further out, whilst giving me an earful about how she was learning to drive at my age. How she parked for the first time here at the centre. In this exact parking bay we stop at. Can't believe it's been open for that long.

We walk through Smiths, as I choose my colour theme for the year and look at all the free books in the Honesty Library whilst she catches up with a passerby. I watch all the lucky kids doing arts and crafts, having the best time. Not that I'm jealous, but... they never had that during our holidays.

Mum wants to check out the deli upstairs to satisfy her craving for something spicy, and ends up buying a few vegetable samosas and onion bhajis. I tell her that she and Dad better not eat them all before tomorrow, since I plan to load up on sweets from Wendy's today! Of course, Mum gives me the look before promising to save me some.

2024**written by Subika Anwar-Khan. Performed by Lily Adams. (page two of two)**

I ask if we can spend more time at Wendy's to take a good look at everything. She agrees, so we head over to stock up on sweets for the cinema later this afternoon, over at Lings Forum. I go for a mix of penny sweets and my favourite – the old-school toffee bonbons. They're special because here, they've still got the original toffee centre, which you can't find anymore. Wendy tells us that a man from London comes up regularly just to buy 25 of them, since you can't get them anywhere else. Feeling lucky, I ask Mum if I can get two more – mostly for Nan!

The best part is lunch. Even though we haven't been here for ages a jacket potato from Emm Café is still a right treat for Mum. It also means Nan can join us after finishing her shift at the food bank. I stare out the window watching families with pushchairs on their way in... just like we used to, whilst they catch up as if years have passed. Maybe they have.

Nan describes her day as 'a whirlpool mire'. She was a teacher! So I've learnt a lot of... fancy words. Today was filled with admin, new clients and referrals to their agency finance course.

I remember when we were buying my school uniform from Tesco one year and Nan ended up picking up a few extra clothes. She took me to the food bank to donate them because that's what they needed. A lady asked her to volunteer but Nan had a hip replacement so she couldn't stand and pack food, but the lady wanted her for the registration. Nan became a headteacher for a challenging school, the lady knew she had loads of experience diffusing tough situations.

Nan takes my hand as I tuck into my jacket potato and tells us about a woman she registered for the first time today. And how the woman cried. She was working up until a month ago and was struggling to find work again. I learn that 70 percent of the population is three months away from becoming homeless. That's... three pay checks. I finish everything on my plate that day.

I sit between Mum, crunching on a samosa whilst getting lost in the trailers, and Nan, us both savouring a toffee bonbon. I can't help but think about how I'm dreading the start of sixth form and wishing these holidays would never end. Yet, at the same time, I hope moments like this will continue for years to come. Nan leans in and whispers 'As I am, one day you'll be.'