

[The following section is from Part One, which follows Samia growing up in a Copenhagen suburb, and focuses on the escalating conflict between her and her father]

Darkness was falling as Samia ran onto the floodlit playing field. She had twisted her hair up into a bun, was wearing shorts and the club jersey, ready for football practice, mixed teams, boys and girls.

Her father had not been happy with the idea of her playing football, but she had told him it was a school thing, which made everything more acceptable.

Jogging across the synthetic grass, she glanced towards the touchline where a small group of supporters had congregated. She stopped in her tracks. Among the figures standing in the dusk, she recognised her father. He was silently watching her movements on the pitch. Samia froze. She could hardly breathe, her thoughts racing.

What was going on in her father's mind at the sight of his young teenage daughter running around in the dark, bare-headed and bare-legged, right in front of all these young men.

And, just as bad, if he could turn up unannounced at her match, did that mean he might also turn up at the library or anywhere else, and find out she was lying about where she went? Was he keeping her under surveillance?

The ongoing conflict between Samia and her father had been escalating over the past year or so. She had started to answer back when he told her off. If he raised his voice, she did too. Increasingly she came to her mother's defence. If she saw her father hit her mother, she would push him away and yell that he should stop. And so now he slapped Samia around too. Sometimes she went to school with a bruised face, which she tried to disguise with make-up.

Samia had started talking about applying for Danish citizenship, which caused even more arguments at home. She saw herself as being Danish and she didn't understand why she should have a Pakistani passport. Her class had been planning a daytrip to Germany, so the teacher asked if they were all Danish citizens. She and a boy were the only ones who said they weren't. It turned out they could go on the trip anyway, because their Danish residence permits allowed them free movement in the Schengen area. But she had found it all very humiliating.

Her father was shocked that she would even think of Danish citizenship. It was an outrage against her family and culture, he fumed, and he absolutely would not allow it.

They also quarrelled when Samia's father spotted her wearing clothes he considered less than modest. Refusing to comply with his demand that she wear a headscarf was bad enough. In his world, that in itself was unacceptable. But now she had started to dress like a Dane, he sneered.

When she was caught out for looking 'too Danish', she never knew if her father had actually seen her somewhere during the day, or if an acquaintance from the Pakistani community had phoned him to tell on her. He had a devious way of controlling her, hinting that he knew about everything she did.

Samia started to duck out of view when she spotted a woman wearing a headscarf or saw a Pakistani man walking along the street.

This double-life had seeped into every aspect of her existence. As the jigsaw gradually widened, she found it increasingly difficult to keep track of all the pieces.

She had occasionally tried to break down the barriers between the two lives. When she proudly told her father that she'd got a job in a shop, for example, which had made him so furious that he had ordered her mother not to cook dinner for her any more. Attend to her schoolwork and help out in the home – those were her duties.

Despite her father's anger, Samia took the job and kept it for some weeks – during which she had to make her own dinner. But she eventually handed in her notice. She couldn't bear her father's fits of rage about the job and her mother's constant attempts to make her leave it.

She was in an impossible situation, stretched between two sets of norms that were so far apart she was in danger of breaking in half.

Samia and Leila often went home to Nadia's after school. They made pancakes and danced to MTV. Anything of that sort was banned in Samia's home. Nadia had a Moroccan background and lived with her mother, who was divorced and even went to work. Samia had tried asking her mother why she didn't push back against her husband – to which her mother usually replied that it was her parents who had decided she should marry him, and that they knew better than she did.

Samia generally stayed away from her own home for as many hours of the day as possible. She spent an improbable amount of time 'at the library'. While making her

parents believe she had her nose buried in a book, she was actually shopping in town with Leila and Nadia, or in the park drinking beer and smoking cigarettes.

The minute Samia got home, the day was over. She changed into Pakistani national dress, *shalwar kameez*, loose-fitting trousers and a tunic, with a long scarf, a *dupatta*, thrown over her shoulder. And then she just waited until it was time to go to bed.

When she talked with her friends, Samia only ever referred to her father as 'the idiot'. But he wasn't stupid. He could easily work out that she hadn't been at the library until 6 o'clock if the library closed at 5 o'clock. Every time he caught her out in a lie, there was trouble.

He would assemble the entire family and spend hours on end haranguing them about how unfortunate it was that he was saddled with such disobedient children and a wife who had no idea how to bring them up.

He usually smoked three or four cigarettes while he was sorting out the running order. Then he would begin by, for example, asking Samia what she had been doing on the town square in the middle of the school day. The unfolding of the scenario was agonising. Layer by layer he revealed just how much he knew, while Samia frantically tried to recall the episode so she could prepare her defence. What had she been wearing? Who had she been with? Had there been any boys?

Her father told long stories about children who had moved away from their roots, had become too Danish and had ended up in utter misery. He told them about other Pakistani children, so well-behaved that they would let their parents sell them, if so required, without any protest. Why couldn't his children be like that?

He could go on for hour after hour, often late into the night.

Samia was worn down by all the sleepless nights – which sometimes ended with her father hitting her, and even more often hitting her mother. Her mother begged Samia to ask her father 'for forgiveness', but Samia just couldn't accept she had done anything that was so very wrong.

Everything was mixed together, and arguments from way back were suddenly dragged up to substantiate her father's case about how bad it all was. He also accused her of leading her younger siblings into ruin.

He threatened to drive Samia and one of her younger sisters to the central station and leave them out the back, along with the prostitutes they dressed like anyway. He never carried out his threat. But his rage infested every corner of the apartment. Samia and the rest of her family only dared breathe normally when he wasn't home.

On the floodlit football pitch, with her father standing on the touchline, Samia got through the match practically without moving. When the game was over, she went home with her father. To her surprise, he didn't mention her shorts, but then again he didn't have to. She knew the outfit would absolutely not be to his liking.

She had been taken aback when he turned up at the match. The two compartments of her double-life couldn't be kept apart. No matter where she was, she couldn't escape her father's gaze.

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One morning shortly before her exams, 17-year-old Samia stumbled bleary-eyed into the classroom. It was a Sunday, but Søren had arranged a film day for the pupils to re-watch films they had seen in their English lessons over the past year.

When Samia came in, some of the class thought she must have been drinking. Her shoulders drooped and she was swaying unsteadily.

A couple of her closest friends took her by the arms and helped her out to the corridor. Had she really turned up drunk to the film day? No, she told them. She had done something far worse.

In the middle of the school year, Samia had started opening up to Søren. She had told him about the enormous amount of pressure she was under at home, and the physical symptoms: she had a weight on her chest, felt washed-out and suffered hallucinations and panic attacks. He had said it sounded to him as if she was having some kind of depression, and she ought to visit the doctor.

Samia had found this oddly comforting. Maybe there was a name for what she was feeling. Maybe she wasn't so abnormal after all. She just had a sickness that could be cured. She had gone to the doctor and been prescribed benzodiazepines for anxiety and depression. The pills had put her in a drowsy state, which she liked.

Her father was now even more likely to give her a beating if she stood up for her mother and yelled at him, asking if he really could not understand that he was driving them all mad.

Although she came to her mother's defence, Samia was also arguing with *her* more. She felt as though she was fighting for them both, and was disappointed that her mother continued to humour her husband rather than support her daughter. And her mother tormented her by saying that they would soon be marrying her off so they could be shot of her.

Samia had lost her appetite and her hair had started falling out, and she wondered what was the point in anything if all her dreams were wrong in her parents' eyes. She just wanted to be far away, but she wasn't able to reach out for help.

Early in the morning of film day, it had all become too much for her. Samia didn't necessarily want to die, just fall into a long sleep and sort of disappear.

She had got up, swallowed five anxiety-relief pills and then gone back to bed.

She had tried something similar a few days earlier, swallowing three pills and washing them down with a vodka drink she had bought in a local convenience store. But the mixture had simply made her very tired.

The pills were having the same result this time, as she realised when she found herself being shaken awake by her mother. Samia's mother had wept in helplessness, unable to understand what was wrong with her semi-conscious daughter.

Samia had struggled out of bed and then out of the apartment. She couldn't cope with comforting her mother – it was, after all, Samia who had just taken an overdose of pills.

Samia's schoolfriends now dragged her back into the classroom, her arms draped limply over their shoulders. They got hold of Søren and explained what had happened. He glanced at Samia, who was sitting slumped over a table hardly able to keep her eyes open.

Søren instantly realised she needed to go to the hospital. He quickly rang her father, who soon arrived in his car, and they left together with Samia. Not a word was spoken throughout the entire drive.

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How many obstacles can a young person handle?

Parents are generally expected to support their children, give them love and recognition, and help them find their feet. But what if parents obstruct their children, control them and punish them, subject them to threats and duress in order to make them abandon their own wishes and ideals and become what their parents think they should be?

Samia had endured a great deal. She was caught in the middle between a liberal-minded Danish way of life and a patriarchal culture with roots in rural Pakistan. She wished with all her heart to be free to live just like other young people in Denmark,

but her father denied her that freedom and took full advantage of his power over her. And eventually she cracked.

Professionals in this field are well-aware that in many cases young people who are subjected to social control will react by starting to lead a double-life – if, that is, they choose not to comply or conversely break with their parents. Studies also show that young people who lead a double-life as a consequence of social control are in a high-risk group for stress. And that is hardly surprising.

Keeping track of various 'stories' in various contexts makes for relentless pressure. In a report on double-life among young people with honour-related issues, a psychologist explains:

'The stories told have to be consistent, and that is a constant strain. When the strain becomes too great, or when external actions compel the young person to relate to new circumstances, the problems typically become so intense that the individual has to take a position. The sum of the ongoing strain will sooner or later rise to the surface.'

It is typical for young people living under such pressure to develop stress – often accompanied by other disorders. They are in constant fear of being found out, and at the same time they are perhaps being subjected to coercion and deprived of tenderness – all this can build up internally as anxiety. And anxiety, along with the hopelessness and impotence many feel, can lead to depression.

Samia's trajectory thus proceeded by the book. But she knew nothing of that. For the schoolgirl in the midst of ongoing events, it was all one big, dark and total chaos.

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[The following section is from Part Two. Samia has arrived in Pakistan, where she is confined to her uncle's house.]

Samia leant against the railing and looked down. Her stomach clenched. Maybe it would work. It was only a two-or-three-metre drop to the ground. She glanced over her shoulder. Still alone. Adrenaline was pumping through her body. They had been carrying firewood up to the flat roof of the house, so it could dry in the sun. Her aunt had gone down to fetch the next bundle, but would be back at any moment.

Samia wavered. It was a long way to Islamabad and the Danish Embassy. But if she could just get out of the village, maybe she could find some way to get there.

She swung her legs over the railing and onto the stone ledge. Then she took a deep breath. This chance might not come along again. It was now or never. Samia bent at the knees and jumped.

The force as she landed made her sink to the ground. She stood up as fast as she could and took off along the narrow gravel road. Her heart was thumping. It was hard to run fast in her plastic flipflops. Her feet started hurting after just a few paces.

‘Help! She’s running away!’

A woman’s voice cut through the stillness of the morning. Samia looked back. Her aunt had come onto the roof and was shouting at the top of her voice. The door of the house to Samia’s left opened and a woman came out. A group of children on the other side of the road stopped in the middle of their game, and she could hear a woman’s voice calling from inside the house.

‘What’s happening?’

Samia’s left flipflop fell off. Her bare foot pounded the gravel.

‘Catch her!’ she heard her aunt shout.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. Men working the fields on both sides of the road threw down their tools and started running. They came hurtling from every direction. Closer and closer. Samia kicked off her other flipflop. Quickened her pace, pushed her body to the limit. Over there, on the other side of the fields, was the highway. Not so far now, just a few hundred metres.

‘Whore!’

A tug on her arm forced Samia to stop abruptly. The first fieldhand, a chunky man with a thick moustache, had caught up and was holding her firmly in his grip. She wriggled desperately to get free, but then the next four turned up. It was a lost cause.

After a few minutes of shoving and screaming, she was back at her uncle’s house. The men pushed her into the yard, making her fall to her knees in front of her aunt. Slaps rained down on her face, while the men stood around her shouting abuse.

And then her uncle arrived. He must have heard all the commotion. He marched across the yard without saying a word, straight up to Samia and slapped her hard.

She could vaguely sense him leaning over her, shouting in her face. She knew the refrain: she was dishonourable and brought shame upon her family. She could hear some of the men insisting he should kill her.

Two more blows and then Samia was dragged into a room and locked up. Through a barred window out to the yard, she heard her uncle shouting at her father on the telephone: now she had brought shame on the family in Pakistan too; the men working the fields would speak badly of the family; he had to find a way to silence them; he had no idea what to do with her.

Samia was fighting for air. She felt as if she couldn't breathe.