

Bling / Stretch Point

Shahireh Sharif

'Well, son!' my dad said the moment that I set foot in the kitchen.

'Well, what?' I put the tray next to the dishwasher. I wanted to be left alone to get on with washing the glasses.

Dad grinned. 'What do you think he has that you haven't?'

'That arrogant jerk! You think he's worthy, don't you?'

'It's nothing to do with what I think. Did you see his suit and the gold chain round his neck? You could never afford anything like that even if you sell all that you own – including that junk car of yours which you are so proud of.'

I took off my apron and threw it on the floor, leaving through the back door in such a hurry that I almost walked into Jeremiah. I left without saying anything to him or anyone else.

I didn't want to go back. I especially didn't want to serve that nasty piece of shit who thinks he's someone because of his money. I hated his guts. Using his fancy jewellery and brand-name clothes to impress Veronica. Putting prawns in Veronica's mouth with his gold-ringed fingers. Veronica should be smiling at me.

I turned my mobile off and stayed in my car for a few hours, alone. My hatred keeping me company. *Who would wear a gold chain on top of a tie*

anyway? I dreamt about hitting the jerk again. How much time would I have to serve if I beat him to death? His long and unsymmetrical jaw was so much more inviting than Jimmy's Boxing Club speed ball. I punched the palm of my left hand with my right fist as I thought of my dad praising his suit and his chain. *A straitjacket in chains was the only thing he deserved!* I rolled up a cigarette.

Finally, the crowd started coming out. Nearly all of them had parked in the venue's carpark which was visible from my rear-view mirror. I had to focus to make sure I didn't miss the jerk every time a crowd walked out together, though his white suit would make him easy to spot. Finally, I saw him. He came out of the building alone. There were a few cars pretentious enough to be his, but he walked past them all. To my surprise he walked out of the carpark and continued walking along the road.

I waited till he was far enough, then switched the engine on and followed him. He turned into the main road and stopped at a nearby bus stop. A bus came and he jumped on it. He got off the bus about an hour later and walked towards a council estate. I parked my car and walked after him, maintaining a distance. I wasn't sure why I was following him. Was I just curious to find out what he wanted on this estate?

He seemed to have arrived at his destination. I slowed down too. I had a long look at the chain round his neck. He looked back at me. Maybe he recognised me from the gallery. I carried on walking. A few minutes down the road I turned back and got into my car. I rolled up another cigarette and, after inhaling a few deep puffs, rested my head on the headrest and closed my eyes. Suddenly it clicked. He was turning the chain round his finger. The chain looked too light and stretchy to be gold. I could have afforded his chain even without selling my car. I smiled, rolling up another cigarette.

Shahireh Sharif

Shahireh Sharif is a multidisciplinary artist interested in exploring identity, race and gender. She has published two books in Persian, and a number of short fictions in various anthologies in English. She has written plays, performed solo shows and exhibited work in spaces such as Three Minute Theatre, Manchester Art Gallery, Whitworth Art Gallery, HOME and Z arts. Shahireh has completed a PhD in Pharmacy and has the experience of working as a teaching assistant in the University of Manchester for three years. Shahireh has worked with cultural partners such as Commonword, Journeys Festival and Community Arts Network. She is currently working on her debut novel in English. More information on **jarofwords.com**

A recording of this talk can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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