

Characters

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PILLOW FIGHT

NARRATORS

MAKE 'N' MEND

NARRATORS

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DAUGHTER

BOY

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MRS JONES

NOT A GIRL

NARRATORS

NASIMA / NASIM

MUM

DAD

SHOREDITCH GIRLS

DRUNK

MY SILENT SISTER

NARRATORS

OUTRO

NARRATORS

Intro

A montage of whispered secrets.

Recorded:

When my mum finally died, I said 'thank you'

Automatic doors make me feel special

I touched this guy's bum on the bus

I'm scared to laugh in case I piss

I am a descendant of the Ancient Egyptians

I have a split personality

I saw a dead body

I feel sorry for atheists

I steal things off the back of lorries

I'm scared of teddy bears

When someone hurts me mentally I hurt myself physically

I feel like my family hold me hostage in my own house

I'm having an affair with a married man

I found a lump on my breast and haven't told anyone

I'm Muslim, he's Catholic

I spit in my uncle's tea

I pretend to be someone else online

I have dreams about all the streets disappearing

I'm scared of the red button on our TV

I killed my brother's pet hamster

The doctors say my mum is going to die

I'm scared of almost everything

My cousin's gay

I fantasise about killing my sisters

Live:

Secretsssssss

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh (Everyone)

Sad secrets

Silly secrets

Sorry secrets

Shameful secrets

Shocking

Sinful

Silent

True

Hidden

Private

Screened from view

They live in the heart

But swim in the brain

Tiny, but sharp

Like darts of pain

Secrets shouldn't be confused with lies

Or gossip

Or silly rumours

Those things are nasty

Like little tumours

Secrets are real

Secrets are true

Sharp like a razor

They'll cut you in two

Top secret

Like government files

Leak it

And you'll meet it at night in your dreams

Speak it

And it'll build like a deafening scream

You gotta conceal it

The secret

Bury it in cold deep earth

Or fling it in the sea
Lock it in your heart of hearts
And throw away the key
You can try all this
Do your best
But sometimes
Sometimes
You get up in the morning
After a restless night
Check the box
Sealed tight
Lock blocked up with glue
And it isn't there
It's gone
It's flown
It's stolen away from you

East London
Our ends
Is built on secrets
Ancient secrets

Teenage secrets

Foreign secrets

Wartime secrets

They hide in tower-block stairwells

Under stains on the carpet

In hoods

Gutters

Drops of rain

Between lines of faded newsprint

Or trickling out the drains

Sometimes the whispering gets so loud

It hangs there like a thundercloud.

The sound of distant thunder.

Wanna hear the first one?

Alright, but you gotta promise this goes no further...

Pillow Fight

There's a tower block just near our school
With a broken lift and faded walls.
On the highest floor, scraping the clouds
A family of nine live upside down.
Crammed into a flat that's meant for two
The daughters spill outside onto the roof.
Because the lift has never been repaired,
They can't be bothered going down the stairs,
So out here on the roof is where they go,
The veins of London throbbing far below.
This is the place they play, and eat, and dream,
But in families nothing's ever as it seems.

Seven sisters all alike in looks,
But one likes clothes and one prefers her books,
One's religious, one likes R'n'B,
One likes skiving school till half past three.
One likes babies and wants to be a mum,
Another's clever but pretends she's dumb.

The youngest is the one that holds the secret

If we tell you what it is you'd better keep it.

First thing in the morning once it's light,

And also before bed last thing at night,

All seven sisters head up to the roof

And like to have this massive pillow fight.

Whack! In the back as London wakes

Whack! In the face as the sunrise breaks

Whack! In the head as the moonlight shines

Whack! As the youngest loses her mind.

Cos all she can think of is how much they hurt her

Her head boiling over with thoughts of murder

Her pillow goes from white to red

As each of her sisters falls down dead.

'I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!' She screams

And can no longer tell what's real or a dream

Rocks fill her pillow

As hate fills her heart

Imagining ripping her sisters apart

Taking their bodies, and in one single throw

Watching them fall to the tarmac below.

At the end she is crying and no one knows why

She clutches her pillow and looks at the sky

Sends up a question to the heavens above

Asking God why she hates those she should love.

But God never answers her strange little prayer

So they gather their pillows and go back downstairs.

Make 'n' Mend

NARRATORS: Turn right down Pedley Street

Past the boarded-up Shoreditch Tube

Past the weeds

And the litter

Raked up like a snowdrift against the disused railway tracks

Watch as the terraces seem to get smaller

Is it your imagination?

Or a trick of the light?

Keep walking

Don't be scared

Cos down there's our next secret.

Soon you'll come to a little cul-de-sac

Can't go no further

This is it

Weaver Street

Where the houses are so small

It's like they was built for... I dunno

Oompa-Loompas

Yeah!

Pixies

Or something not quite human.

Anyway, down there

At the far end of Weaver Street

Where you can't go no further

There's a little shop

Make 'n' Mend

The K is like a pair of scissors

And the Ms are made of needles

On the blue-and-white sign above the door.

They open the door.

Go on

In you go

We'll wait out here for you

They know our faces, innit

They know we know their secret.

Inside the shop, MOTHER and DAUGHTER sit repairing a pile of clothes with a needle and thread.

~~Inside, it is so small~~

~~A low flying ceiling~~

~~And walls that come up to your face like they want a fight~~

~~It's dark~~

~~And musty~~

~~The smell of second hand clothes~~

~~Stagnant lives~~

~~And withered dreams~~

~~Like fruit left to rot on the tree.~~

MOTHER. I want that pile finished by the time we close. Understand?

DAUGHTER. Yes, Mum.

NARRATORS. *But only a hundred yards away*

The delights of Brick Lane

Roasting meat

Shisha pipes

The tinkle of laughter

And the sweet scent of freedom

Waft across the summer air

And tug at the Daughter's heart.

DAUGHTER. Mum?

MOTHER. What?

DAUGHTER. If I finish early –

MOTHER. You won't.

DAUGHTER. But if I do –

MOTHER. The answer's no. Get on with your work.

NARRATORS. *Of course, what the daughter really wants to say is:*

DAUGHTER. You know what my greatest fear is? Turning into a lonely, bitter, ugly old woman. Just. Like. YOU!

NARRATORS. The ball of longing inside her

Wants to grab her mother and shout:

DAUGHTER. I am not your prisoner! Not your slave!

NARRATORS. But of course she never does

Instead, she dreams

Dreams of the boy who will come to whisk her away

Tall

Dark

Spiky hair

Chiselled jaw

Romantic stare

Early twenties

Or even late teens

Decent car

Moschino jeans.

MOTHER. What are you daydreaming about?

DAUGHTER. Nothing.

MOTHER. Less shirking, more working.

DAUGHTER. Yes, Mum.

MOTHER. Gormless child.

NARRATORS. Then one day like God was listening

With rain outside and tarmac glistening

Through the puddles struts this guy

And her heart becomes a butterfly

He goes past the weeds and the railway tracks

And right to the end of the cul-de-sac

Then opens the door and into the shop

And her heart is bangin like it ain't gonna stop

Burstin at the seams

Unravelling like loose thread

Heaving

Hurting

And she wishes she'd said:

DAUGHTER. Oh my God! You are so BUFF!

NARRATORS. *But this poor girl's just too uptight*

Instead she nods and goes:

DAUGHTER. Alright.

BOY. Alright. I got this shirt, innit. Pocket come off in a fight. Can you fix it?

NARRATORS. *But she can't even speak*

Can't hardly move

Just gives him his slip

And watches him go.

MOTHER. Who was that?

DAUGHTER. Just some guy.

MOTHER. A regular?

DAUGHTER. No.

MOTHER. Hm. New business. Good. Nice shirt. Quality.

DAUGHTER. The pocket's come off.

MOTHER. A five-minute job. Get to it.

NARRATORS. *And she does*

Though she makes it last

Each stitch like a loving stroke

Binding her heart to his

A cotton pocket to hold her dreams.

And how she dreams

About him fighting

Face hardened

Fists clenched

Blows raining down on his rival

Two boys, locked into battle

Fighting over HER.

He'd win of course

Easily

Then tomorrow

Tomorrow

Tomorrow?

He'll come back in

And tell her the news

He'd won

And she was his prize

He was here to claim her.

DAUGHTER. We'll fly to America and get married and live in this massive apartment overlooking Central Park and eat hotdogs and ice creams on horse-drawn carriages and kiss on park benches as the sun goes down and Mum would never ever know where I'd gone!

MOTHER. What are you daydreaming about?

DAUGHTER. Nothing.

NARRATORS. Except it wasn't how she dreamed at all. Instead, he came back in.

BOY. Alright.

DAUGHTER. Alright.

NARRATORS. And though the shirt was ready

Her heart screamed at the thought of never seeing him again And it made her
tell a lie:

DAUGHTER. Ain't ready yet.

BOY. Oh.

DAUGHTER. Sorry.

BOY. S'alright.

DAUGHTER. Tomorrow, innit.

BOY. Seen.

NARRATORS. And that was that

Barely ten words exchanged

But those words echoed round her heart all night.

DAUGHTER. 'S'alright.' 'Seen.' 'S'alright.' 'Seen.' He must've seen that I'm alright.

And he's coming back for me. Tomorrow!

NARRATORS. And she takes his shirt

Imagines him in it

Holding her

Dancing with her

Spinning her round in a New York sunset

Hearts on fire

Hands on his back

Breathing him in

Dancing her away from here

Away from the weeds and the litter and the railway tracks

And the too-small house

And the cul-de-sac.

MOTHER. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

DAUGHTER. Nothing!

MOTHER. Give that to me!

MOTHER tries to grab the shirt. DAUGHTER hangs onto it.

They struggle.

DAUGHTER. No!

MOTHER. I knew there was something going on!

DAUGHTER. Stop it!

MOTHER. You stupid little girl! Do you really think a boy like that would even notice a girl like you?

In the struggle the pocket gets torn off the shirt again.

DAUGHTER. No!

MOTHER. Now look what you've done.

MOTHER takes the shirt.

DAUGHTER takes the pocket and clutches it to her.

Give that to me.

DAUGHTER cries and shakes her head.

I won't ask you again.

DAUGHTER stuffs the pocket into her mouth.

MOTHER slaps DAUGHTER.

Stupid child! Where did I go wrong with you?! You will stay in here, and you will get on with your work until I say you can come out.

MOTHER locks DAUGHTER into the back room.

DAUGHTER takes the pocket out of her mouth.

She takes out a needle to begin work on the huge pile of clothes.

NARRATORS. *And that was that*

Or so we thought

Locked into the back room for the whole of the next day

So that when the boy came back, it was Mum on the front counter

And the girl was nowhere to be seen.

MOTHER. It was not possible to save the pocket. I am sorry. You may have a discount.

NARRATORS. *And he paid*

And he went

But then

Then

Then

Mum went into the back room

To tell her daughter it was over

But oh my God

What she found there

No word of a lie

What she saw will stay with her till the day that she dies.

Her daughter had taken a needle and thread

And sewn the boy's pocket to her own naked flesh

Each stitch like a loving stroke

Through the soft skin and down to the bone

The blood flowed thick as she held in her screams

As thick as the pocket that held in her dreams

A permanent seal to sew up her heart

So no other man could tear it apart.

Mum held her down as she cleaned up the wound

Unpicked the stitches by the light of the moon

Held back the tears with practised control

And breathed not a word to one single soul.

Make.

Make.

Make.

And mend.

Mrs Jones

NARRATORS. A bit further east, yeah, down past the gasworks

Where the A1205 hacks its way

Like a traffic-jam boundary between Tower Hamlets and Newham

You've got Mile End Park

Long

Thin

Running north to south

Like a green sticking plaster on an old old wound.

See them flats backing onto it?

Nice view

Yeah

Well there's a girl in there had a pretty weird experience

Oh yeeeeeah, I like this one

It's sad though, man

Shut up, you'll give it away.

There was this old lady lived on the ground floor

Mum said her name was Mrs Jones

But Sara and her friends used to call her the Witch

Cos she had this long hooked nose

With warts all down it

Eurgh

And she'd sit in her flat all day

With the curtains drawn

Just her and her black cat

(We made the cat up, but she probably had one)

Yeah, she probably made potions

And cast spells on all the neighbours

Stop it, you're giving me shivers

Anyway, one day, yeah, there was some building works going on

Outside the block

New sewers or cable TV or something like that

When all of a sudden there was this clang

As the digger hit something

Big

Solid

Metal

Buried deep

Like a secret

Or a memory of another time.

POLICEMEN 1 and 2 knock on a door. SARA answers it.

POLICEMAN 1. I'm sorry to bother you, my love, but we're evacuating the building.

SARA. Why?

POLICEMAN 2. There's been a bomb discovered in your backyard. If you wouldn't mind leaving the premises?

SARA. Mum! Bomb!

MUM appears.

MUM. Oh, not again.

NARRATORS. Happens around here all the time, dunnit cos of the war.

Downstairs it was chaos People everywhere

Blue lights and sirens

Plastic tape and radios

Army trucks all fully loaded

Anyone'd think the thing had already exploded.

The police, mind you, were lovin it.

POLICEMAN 1. This way, please!

POLICEMAN 2. Don't stop for a gossip, ladies, it might be the last one you ever have.

POLICEMAN 1. Bomb in the area!

POLICEMAN 2. It might be old but it's still dangerous!

POLICEMAN 1. Bit like some of you!

POLICEMAN 1 / 2. Hahahahaha!

NARRATORS. And everyone was laughing

And smiling

And drinkin sweet tea

The café was givin it away for free

And it was like that thing you sometimes hear about

East London at its finest

The Spirit of the Blitz

Had somehow slipped out of its grave

Out of that hole in our backyard

And wrapped itself around us all

Warm

Friendly

And kind.

MUM goes over to one of the POLICEMEN.

MUM. Excuse me. Did you check on Mrs Jones in Flat 1? She lives there on her own.

POLICEMAN. Nah, flat's empty, love.

NARRATORS. But chaos is an open door for mischief

And Sara had mischief in her soul

And nosiness on her mind

So when no one was looking

She stole back in

To see what she could find.

Last time they were evacuated

She snooped around Flat 2

And Oh My God you'll never guess what she found –

But this is about Flat 1

Yeah.

Back in the block it was quiet

Echoey

Echoey

Echoey

Stop it, this is serious

She snuck up to Flat 1

And slowly creaked open the door

This was her chance to finally find out what witchy things

Mrs Jones was up to in there.

Inside it was still

Like the air hadn't moved for years

Memories hanging heavy like old fag smoke

Yellow

Like faded lives.

She was surprised

It actually looked like quite a normal living room.

SARA. Mrs Jones?

NARRATORS. No sign of a cauldron

Or any bats or cats

Just a battered sofa covered in biscuit crumbs

A knackered old telly

And a set of ducks on the wall.

SARA. Mrs Jones?

NARRATORS. She checked the kitchen

No pumpkins

No voodoo dolls

No magic charms

Not even a broomstick

Just a lukewarm kettle on the stove

And a half-eaten microwave meal in the sink.

SARA. Mrs Jones?

NARRATORS. She checked the bathroom

Though what a witch's bathroom would look like she didn't really know

This one had pink loo roll

A fluffy toilet-seat lid

And one of those contraptions to help you out of the bath.

SARA. Mrs Jones?

NARRATORS. Then finally she checked the tiny old bedroom Peeling wallpaper

And yes! Cobwebs!

But nothing else

Not even a pointy hat

Just an unmade bed

And a weirdly massive wardrobe the size of a phone box.

SARA. Mrs Jones?

NARRATORS. Then

A tiny noise

Short

High-pitched

Like opening a can of Coke

Psht!

Man, I swear that was a sneeze!

Comin from the wardrobe!

SARA. Mrs Jones!

NARRATORS. And there she was

Clinging to the blouses and pleated skirts

Not cackling

Not evil

Just scared

Mrs Jones like a bag of bones.

MRS JONES. Why are you in my house?

NARRATORS. *And Sara felt suddenly ashamed.*

SARA. Th-th-there's a bomb outside. You have to leave. Hang on. What are you doing in the wardrobe?

NARRATORS. *And Mrs Jones told her.*

MRS JONES. You young uns don't know what it's like

To be alone every single night

For sixty years it's been the same

And every year I thought the pain

Would ease. But it doesn't.

My David died in '45

Shot down in some foreign sky

And since then I've had only this

A private war of loneliness.

This wardrobe was his

It still has his smell

In here it's like he's holding me

A piece of heaven in the midst of hell.

Please, leave me be. Won't do any harm.

Let this bomb take me back to my David's arms.

SARA. We – we thought you were a witch.

NARRATORS. **And as soon as the words were out of her mouth Sara felt the hot flush of regret.**

MRS JONES. No. I'm Mrs Jones. Now please leave me be.

NARRATORS. **And as she closed the wardrobe door**

A splinter of Mrs Jones's pain lodged itself in Sara's heart.

Soon the police said the bomb team had made it safe

Took the bomb on a truck to some secret place

Sixty years in the ground had caused this corrosion

So there weren't gonna be no massive explosion

So they went back inside and Mum put on the kettle

But Sara was finding it harder to settle

Just thinking about being lonely

Cold

And old.

Then later that night came a tap at the door

Tiny really, like three drops of rain

And there was Mrs Jones, with her walking frame

She'd struggled alone up the stairs just to say.

MRS JONES. This is our secret, let's keep it that way.

SARA. And handed me a tin of mushy green peas.

I said: 'Don't worry. It's safe with me.'

NARRATORS. From that day on

When Sara's friends would laugh at the lady in Flat 1

Who sat at home in the dark all day

And call her a witch or an evil old crone

Sara would always stop them and say:

SARA. No, she isn't. Her name's Mrs Jones.

Not a Girl

NARRATORS. There's this girl lives down Limehouse way

Near where the canal meets Bartlett Park

Nasima

Nice enough

So long as you stay on her good side

This girl can handle herself, innit.

NASIMA. What you sayin?

NARRATORS. Nuttin

Chill, man

There's boys scared of this chick, narmsayin.

NASIMA. What you chattin?

NARRATORS. Allow it, man.

She's nineteen, yeah

So a year out of college

But unemployed the whole time

But not cos she ain't clever or nuttin

No way, this girl is smart

Wanted to go university

But to study Engineering

And that's where it all fell apart.

MUM. Why can't you study teaching or nursing like a normal girl?

NASIMA. I am normal. I just wanna do engineering, innit.

DAD. No daughter of mine will be doing this.

NASIMA. Why not?

DAD. I will not pay for such a perversion!

NASIMA. Why not?

MUM. Are you a boy or a girl?

NASIMA. Girl, I spose.

DAD. Well start acting like it then!

NARRATORS. Nasima's always been a tomboy, yeah

Everyone always says it

And she feels it herself.

NASIMA is sorting through some dresses and saris.

NASIMA. Yuk. Yuk. Eurgh. No way. Gimme jeans and trainers any day.

NARRATORS. So that's what she wears

All through college anyway

Then sometimes her mum would say:

MUM. Nasima! How will you ever get a husband dressed like that?

NASIMA. Maybe I don't want a husband.

MUM. Nonsense! Every girl wants a husband.

NASIMA. Well, maybe I ain't a girl!

NARRATORS. Only she doesn't say that last bit

Not out loud anyway

But every time a gang of boys go strutting up the road

The longing in her heart makes her think she might explode.

NASIMA (to herself). I'm not a girl. Not a girl. Not. A girl.

NARRATORS. Sometimes

When everyone's out

She sneaks into her brother's room

And tries on his clothes

It started with his baseball cap

She looked good.

NASIMA. Innit.

NARRATORS. Then she slipped on a shirt

Even better.

NASIMA. I know.

NARRATORS. Then she got scared in case anyone noticed Put it all back in a hurry.

NASIMA. I can't explain it. I just feel wrong. Nasima is wrong. D'ya get me?

NARRATORS. So she started to collect her own secret wardrobe Some of it was her brother's

The odd pair of socks or bit of bling.

BROTHER. Naz, have you seen my gold chain?

NASIMA. Nah, sorry bro.

NARRATORS. Some of it was lost property she'd find on the train

A man's pair of gloves

Or a Ben Sherman scarf.

NASIMA. Lookin bless.

NARRATORS. Some of it was from charity shops

T-shirts

Trainers

Jackets.

NASIMA. Lookin big.

NARRATORS. Then one night

She realised she had the lot

A full outfit

So

Quietly

Stealthily

Secretly

She locked her bedroom door and tried it all on

Flattened her chest with a tight-fitting vest

And hid her hair under a cap

Holding her breath as she put on the rest

Her nerves about ready to snap

Then, when it was done, she finally allowed herself to look in the mirror.

NASIMA. Woah!

NARRATORS. This was different

This was real

This was her.

NASIMA. Him!

NARRATORS. Yeah, I spose.

NASIMA. Nasim.

NARRATORS. So she practised the walk.

NASIMA walks up and down like a boy.

Bigger swagger

Purse your lips

Everything's gotta be slower

More shoulders

Less hips

Trousers a little lower.

NASIMA. A'ight, man, I'm doing my best, innit!

NARRATORS. Then, she practised the voice.

NASIMA. Swear down, man.

NARRATORS. Deeper.

NASIMA. Swear down, man.

NARRATORS. Better.

NASIMA. You wanna step to me?

NARRATORS. Harder.

NASIMA. You wanna step to me?

NARRATORS. Harder!

NASIMA. Yo, you wanna step to me? Finkin you a bad man? Are you dizzy? You stepped to da wrong bredrin today!

Dat's how tings are now. I'm da baddest Bengi in dis hood now. Me! Nasim!

No one else!

NARRATORS. Alright!

That's what we're talking about!

And like that – Nasim was born!

Ain't no way he was gonna sleep tonight

So he opened her window

And nimble as a cat

A tomcat that is

Dropped down to the street below.

But what now?

NASIMA. Gotta do suttin. Use this. See the world.

NARRATORS. It was then he noticed Dad's minicab

Parked up outside the house

And could that be – ?

NASIMA. No way! The key's still in the ignition!

NARRATORS. Unlocking the door

Seat still warm

And on the horizon a gathering storm

Adjusted the mirror

Adjusted the seat

Made sure his smaller feet could reach

Put on some music

Something suitably hectic

Checked the baseball bat was where Dad kept it.

NASIMA takes a baseball bat from under the seat.

NASIMA. Wicked.

NARRATORS. Then turned the key

And held on tight

And started driving through the night.

First fare was an old boy coming out of the pub after last orders

Barely able to slur out a street name.

NASIMA. Fiver, mate. Easy money, innit.

NARRATORS. Next was some Shoreditch party girls out on the town. Couldn't be bothered walking from one nightclub to the next.

SHOREDITCH GIRLS. We are fa-mi-ly! I got all my sisters with me!

NASIMA. Tenner please, ladies.

NARRATORS. Couple of hours later he was fifty quid up.

NASIMA. Man, this boy ting is easy. Don't have to look nice. Don't hardly have to speak. Just sit there and frown. It was made for me.

NARRATORS. So he stopped off at a twenty-four-hour. Buy some ciggies.

NASIMA. Complete the look, innit, all boys smoke.

NARRATORS. Struttin up to the counter

Past the queue of drunks

Clinging for dear life to a samosa or a can of Coke.

NASIMA. Ten Marlboros, cheers, mate.

NARRATORS. But under the strip lights

The harsh reality of an East London 2 a.m.

The gaps in her disguise began to show.

DRUNK. Oi, ladyboy!

NARRATORS. Ignore it, Naz, just get out of here.

DRUNK. I said Oi!

NARRATORS. Buy the fags and go!

Good

Now walk to the car

Keep walking

Nice and slow.

DRUNK. Hey, freak! You deaf?

NARRATORS. Ignore it.

DRUNK. Are you a boy or a girl? It's hard to tell.

NARRATORS. Ignore it, Naz.

NASIMA. No, you know what? A boy wouldn't ignore it, so neither will I.

NARRATORS. Naz, no!

NASIMA. Yo, who you callin a girl, big man?

DRUNK. I'm talking to you, boy-girl-man ting.

NARRATORS. Naz, leave it!

DRUNK. Give us a kiss then.

NASIMA. Man, you're sick.

DRUNK. You're the freak.

NARRATORS. Walk away!

DRUNK. Woah, you drivin a cab?

NASIMA. So what if I am?

DRUNK. Check dis one out, boys!

NASIMA. Get away from me.

DRUNK. It's a kiss, or your takings. Choose.

NASIMA. Yeah? I choose this.

NARRATORS. And without hardly thinking

She's opening up the door

Diving under the seat

Grabbing it from the floor.

NASIMA takes out the baseball bat.

Bam! One to the leg and he's down

Bam! Back of the head on crown

Bam! One to small of the back

Bam! One to the cheek with a crack.

And it's like all of the pain and all of the rage

The frustration of years being stuck in the cage

Of being a girl, not seeing the world

Has suddenly found its stage.

NASIMA. Yo, you wanna step to me? Finkin you a bad man?

Are you dizzy? You stepped to da wrong bredrin today!

Dat's how tings are now. I'm da baddest Bengi in dis hood now. Me! Nasim! No
one else!

NARRATORS. Standing

Shaking

Out of breath

Blood on the bat

The echo of death

Then back in the car

Driving she don't even know where

Heart pounding

Tears streaming

Brain screaming.

NASIMA. I'm not a girl! Not a girl! Not! A girl!

NARRATORS. Back at the house

Parks up in the gloom

Back through the window

And into her room

The clothes come off

And with them her dreams

Of being a boy

Of being Nasim

Looking at the flecks of blood with a shudder

Then into her nightie and under the covers.

Next day, from round the way

Police come knocking at the door

Someone got Dad's number plate, outside the all-night shop

Nearly beat some man to death, nearly didn't stop.

And Nasima in her nightie

Is sliding down her bedroom door

Doubled up with pain and guilt

Trembling on the floor.

NASIMA. Dad... Dad... No... No...

NARRATORS. Mum crying in the hall

Brother shouting and punching the wall

Dad staying calm as he's taken away

Nasima upstairs doesn't know what to say.

Tell them

Don't

Tell them

Don't.

So what did she do? We never found out

Just kept the door locked and didn't go out

The secret inside burning like a hot coal

For a secret like that, could burn up your soul.

Not a girl

Not a girl

Not

A girl.

My Silent Sister

My sister was born unable to speak
Something went wrong, we assume
She came out too small, all scrawny and weak
So at home she got her own room.

Me and the others had to sleep in the hall
Or the kitchen or bathroom upstairs
We didn't sleep much so we played up in school
But Mum didn't seem to care.

As my sister got older we'd try to include her
In the games that we'd all go and play
Mum said she was special and not to exclude her
But she mostly just got in the way.

We'd run and we'd scream and we'd laugh and we'd shout
We'd key all the cars and we'd leg it about
We'd rob dinner money by threatening violence
But our sister'd sit there in silence.

Then one day this boy in Year 10 come over
And asked if I'd get him a plaster
He'd grazed up his leg playing football he said
And my heart beat a little bit faster.

So I went to the nurse and got what he asked
And my legs went a little bit weak
Cos back at the playground he put on the plaster
Then gave me a peck on the cheek.

I told all of this to my sister, the eldest
But she laughed and just gave me a shove
Said 'Oh my God I can't wait to tell this!
My little sis is in love!'

And before long the whole school was laughing at me
Including the boy from Year 10
I couldn't believe it – the sister I trusted!
I swore never to trust her again.
After that day things were never the same
I'd never let no one persuade me

To tell them my secrets, instead I'd just keep it
I was too scared in case they betrayed me.

But as you get older the secrets amass
Like a weight that you have to confide
They press at your heart like a seething morass
And it's harder to keep them inside.

The boys that you like, the things that you've tried,
The places you've been, the times that you've lied,
Forbidden but fun, all the rules that you've broken,
The things that you've done that have never been spoken.

They pound in your head, marking time like a bell
And build up till your heart is encrusted
They have to come out but who can you tell
When your favourite sister's not trusted?

It was then that our youngest came into her own
Cos of course! She'd never let slip!
Talking to her is like being alone

A totally one-sided friendship.

And once I knew that, I never looked back

I'd just whisper my secrets all day

Some made her smile, some took her aback

While some made her blood drain away.

Secrets too dark to tell anyone else

Secrets so foul they're infested

Secrets so toxic they're bad for your health

Secrets to get me arrested.

But you know what I loved about telling her stuff?

It was the way that she'd smile and nudge me

Not only was everything safe with her

But she'd listen and not ever judge me.

Then one day my mother announced to us all

That there was this new operation

The doctors could open up our sister's skull

And make a small laceration.

And then they'd insert some gadget or other
Which'd sit inside her brain
And do something complicated and clever
Which'd mean she could speak again!

Imagine my horror as the family sat round
And smiled at this wonderful news
I sat there in silence and looked at the ground
Brain fizzing like a blown fuse.
She'd tell all my secrets! She'd spread all my dirt!
She'd dump me in truckloads of trouble!
She'd get me arrested! She'd get me hurt!
My life would collapse into rubble!

Once they'd all gone I paced up and down
And she smiled and showed me her brace
But all I could do was mutter and frown –
I wanted that smile off her face.

So I went in the kitchen and picked up some scissors
The biggest and sharpest ones

Then went back in the lounge and held her head down
And with one hand I yanked out her tongue.

I took quite a while to cut the tongue off
It was gristly and quite hard to hold
She struggled of course, and clenched up her jaws
But I had all the time in the world.

When it was done, I held up the tongue
It looked like an overripe fig
Or maybe a plum, all covered in scum,
You know tongues are surprisingly big.

But I threw it away and got her some water
Then stroked her hair and said sorry
I cleaned up her face, now my secrets were safe
Knowing there's no need to worry.

I know that I won't get away with all this
But if those secrets had been overflowing...
So whatever punishments Mum dishes out

Won't be half as bad as her knowing.

Outro

Come pretty much full circle now
From the tower blocks near school
We've been up past Brick Lane
Through the back streets of Globe Town
Past the gasworks to Mile End
Down to Limehouse
And now we're back where we started
It's been quite a journey, but it's time that we parted.

Thank you for sharing our burden
It's good to have handed it on
They say nothing weighs more than a secret
And secrets are measured in tonnes.

Most people think secrets are something to hide
Like rubbish that rots in your soul
But we know it's better to wash yourself clean
Cos that's how you stay in control.

Ain't sayin it's easy to pluck up the courage
To burst that bubble of fear
You're scared you'll be judged
Or even rejected
But if you stay true and sincere
You'll find that a secret comes out with a sigh
Not a scream or a gnashing of teeth
It draws people to you
Who see themselves through you
And you gasp as you share their relief.

This is the power of sharing a secret
It says: This is who I am
I'm real
I'm human
Flawed but true
Imperfect
Normal
Just like you.

And with the stitches removed, the wound has healed

The myth exploded, the truth revealed.

You see sharing the worst is what humans do best

It's how we build hope and unity

Learning to trust

Forgive

And accept

That's how we create a community.

The End.