



**SPREAD  
THE WORD**



2017 Longlisted:  
*The Knob Head Question*  
by  
Sara Jafari

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'Why do you always date knob heads?'

Although not elegantly put, my friend had asked a very valid question. A psychologist would inwardly smirk and say that I developed a need to prove my self worth by dating men similar to my high school bullies. That's usually the case when people were obese as a teen; you reach adulthood and realise you never had the school experiences you wish you'd had. Since my school days I've lost five stone, taken too much of an interest in clothes and have worn masses of eyeliner. And I've dated, and continue to date, knob heads.

One may also ask: 'what makes them a knob head?' Another valid question.

**Knob head** /nɒb hɛd/ n [C]

1 Sport enthusiasts of, typically, rugby and football who pursue women as a manner of sport. They tend to be attractive, with a cruel sense of humour (note: they would call this 'banter').

2 British offensive slang term used as a variant of "Dick head" to describe an obnoxious person or someone who has acted in a peculiar and/or ludicrous manner.

*"You fucking knob-head! Why did you do that?!"<sup>1</sup>*

3 A vulgar British slang describing a stupid person. They have a penis instead of a head; they may act solely with their sexual desires and not with logic.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Fletcher, *Knob-Head* (2004)  
<<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Knob-Head&defid=881246>> [accessed 13 February 2014].

Though they tend to be a mix of the three, I'm more specifically discussing the first definition of a knob head. The problem with the first one is that once they've got you they get uninterested and escape. My ex-boyfriend is a knob head, the only 'jock' on my English Literature course, and a constant reminder of my disorder. I'm currently talking to a ginger knob head (they come in all shapes and sizes).

There are two events in my teens that I feel contributed to my attraction to knob heads.

First, there was Soulsby. Soulsby was the first of my crushes that paid me any attention. For everyone, that first kind of crush is the most special. There's no need to fantasise about talking to them because you already talk, *regularly*. Soulsby, paid me attention, allowed me to touch his afro and gave me hope that I was more than a 'fat paki'. I still remember the feel of his hair; it was surprisingly soft and bouncy, like a slinky made of the finest silk.

Bear in mind that at the age of fifteen I got no male attention. And I mean none. Not even the weird person everyone makes fun of at school who seems to like everyone in turn. No, not even *that* person. I wouldn't even have my first kiss for another four years.

It is imperative to mention my Muslim, Iranian, family. If you don't live in Iran this is a rare combination. As soon as Iranians get on an aeroplane to leave they fantasize about the *haram* whiskey and vodka they can drink in the infamous 'discos' they've heard about, and the women are quick to remove their hijabs. If you're a practising Muslim in Iran it isn't likely you'll want to move to England.

My family is divided; my mum is a devout Muslim and my dad is quite the opposite. My dad is a red faced take-away 'entrepreneur', who takes opium on the side, and talks a mixture of English and Farsi despite living in England for twenty-six years. My mum *worked* night shifts as a midwife, and when I was younger people would look at us funnily because she was the only parent at my school who wore a hijab. It was a constant reminder that the Soltani family were different. My sister, Rabehah, is eleven years my senior, and ran off to London when she was nineteen to become a fashion designer. She never looked back, and changed her name. Lastly, we have my brother, Reza. He was a known name in Hull. He's the reason my bullying wasn't as bad as it could have been. He was sent to a young offenders institute for three months because he fought too much. Reza is infamous for saying on the TV show *Traffic Cops*: 'Brap, brap! I run this city.' Humorous: yes. True: yes.

Reza was more like a dad than a brother; the dad that cheats on his wife and all the while is accusing her of doing the same. Whilst my brother had multiple short-term girlfriends, and got expelled from school, I was forced into being both a normal British teenager and a Muslim. My family didn't force me to wear a hijab but I couldn't drink alcohol, sleep over at my friends' houses, and most importantly I wasn't allowed to speak to boys. In any capacity. And I mean any.

The year was 2007 and school had started again. The air was fresh in a way it only is at the beginning of autumn. The breeze was comforting following a hot summer. Round the corner from my school was a sports centre, and next to it a park. Everyone in my year met up at the park after school and hung out. Soulsby was sometimes there. One evening after we

had our dinner my friend, Molly, and I went there. Although I knew Soulsby was taken (a minor detail at the time) I still fantasised he would like me back. I told my mum we were going for a walk, and didn't even process that it was a lie until it was too late.

The walk from my house to the park took about forty minutes; all around us were high trees and cars speeding by to the right of us. My insides felt like a car crash. What if he flat-out rejected talking to me? What if he wasn't even there? What if *she* was there? I rubbed my perspiring hands against my jeans. In between the walk was a Tesco and we stopped for a snack. With a packet of McCoy's cheese and onion crisps and a KitKat Chunky down me, I felt prepared.

When we arrived at the park it was grey out, the clouds forming a hug in the sky, overlapping each other and providing a curtain of intimacy. I looked around; he wasn't there. I needed a moment to catch my breath after the walk, and so continued looking around so no one would notice the sweat dripping from my forehead. Molly was talking to a few skater boys and once I gathered myself I joined in. I could distinctly smell cigarette smoke; the immediate after smell that was pleasant before it turned stale. We sat down on the concrete floor by the skate ramp.

'So, Matt was in the air, and did a 360. Look here's the picture!' We looked and I feigned amazement.

I rubbed my hands against the jagged floor, wanting and hoping to feel something other than boredom. I looked at my hand and the floor had created patterns on my palm; I focused on that while Molly giggled every ten seconds. 'But then, he did his footing wrong and fell. You should have seen the way he

fell, oh man, it was sick.' I looked up and saw him grinning. I narrowed my eyes. *Is sick a good or bad thing?* Molly laughed, a second later I laughed and then we all were laughing. It's been eight years and I still don't understand why we laughed.

Molly was blonde, slim and all the boys at school fancied her. She was in the process of going out with one of the skaters. We're all familiar with the process; the boy's friends have told the girl's friends that he likes her. The girl's friends then confirm the feeling to be mutual. They don't actually tell each other directly that they like each other but the gossiping around them has given them the green light to approach each other. I was just a filler; a friend to be there so she could talk to him and his friends without it being too obvious she was interested in him (even though everyone knew).

Whenever they hung out I seemed to be stuck with them. I was the front wheel to their tricycle. The saddest part about being a third wheel is that the couple always attempt to set you up with their also hopeless friend. It's like they think everyone should be in a couple just because they kind of are. And then even though you don't like their friend, when you find out he/she doesn't like you it's a massive sting.

Shortly after our pointless laughing, I saw a group of boys walk towards us. I could see an afro bopping. My heart stopped. I *tried* so hard to play it cool. I even pretended I didn't see him, whilst simultaneously pushing my fringe out of my face and pulling my t-shirt down. In the corner of my eye I could see him approaching me.

'Hiiiiii!' I said in my northern drawl. I needed to tone it down. It was an internal struggle.

'Hey, how's it going?' Soulsby's white teeth shone, and his eyes glittered as though his smile was especially for me. I could smell his musky aftershave and I had an intense urge to lean closer to him.

'I'm good!' I forgot to ask him how he was, and this has forever since plagued me. He looked so cool; he had his green Adidas hoody on and matching shoes.

'I like your earrings,' he said. I blushed further and giggled. I was wearing large, Pat Butcher style, daisy earrings.

'Thanks!' My tone was suddenly high pitched on the *ank*. We looked at each other, silently acknowledging that I was too keen, but he smiled broadly and dispelled the embarrassment I was feeling.

Then, Molly asked me a question and I turned. When I looked back he had gone.

It started to get so dark out that I could barely see anyone beyond a few feet of me. The cigarette smoke had morphed into a distinct cannabis smell. I wrinkled my nose; I always thought cannabis smelt like teenage boy. I moved away from Mille and the guys, and sat rocking on a swing. I could feel the cold breeze go down my back every time I swung upwards. My mobile phone rang; it was my mum.

'Hello?'

'Where are you?'

'I'm just walking.'

'Don't lie to me. I can see you.'



I turned around and looked towards the car park. I could faintly see the navy blue Honda. All the mutterings and chatter around me seemed to mute. All I could see was the car.

'I'm coming.'

Once I got there I noticed my dad was driving and my mum was in the passenger seat. I opened the door slowly. I sat down and shut the door quickly, whilst I wanted to prolong the moment in fear, I also realised I didn't want people in the park to see what would happen next. I vividly remember how dark it was in the car.

'Hi,' I murmured.

'You fucking slut!' My dad roared in his broken English. He turned and was glaring at me. The slight light from the car park somehow shone on his face perfectly. His face was all I could see. He was bright red, his eyes popping out of his eye sockets. He resembled a pit-bull terrier with drool running down its mouth. All of a sudden a hand pounded down on my leg and he spat on me. I was shaking, and couldn't form words. The car went rapidly into reverse.

'Jendeh chikar mikoni?' He roared.

'I wasn't doing anything.'

'Reza's friend rang your mum, he told us he saw you talking to boys. I'm telling Reza, he will fucking kill you.'

'I wasn't doing anything though, I only spoke to them-'

'Don't fucking lie to me! Fucking Jendeh. Mikoshamet!'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Farsi for: 'Whore. I will kill you'.

There was a short silence and I realised I hadn't put my seatbelt on. I didn't dare move though, as though any little movement could ruin the balance in the car and provoke him more. I looked out of the window from the corner of my eye, still not daring to move. We were going too fast; it was a thirty zone but he was going at at least forty miles per hour. I could see his hands tightly gripping the steering wheel. His large hairy hands squeezing the wheel as though it were my neck.

'Who do you think you are? Embarrassing us like this? Lying and acting like a fucking slut.'

'I didn't do anything.'

'Fuck it, I'm telling Reza. I'm telling him! He's going to fuck you up!'

'I didn't do anything though!'

'I saw things in that park. Fucking and hashish.<sup>3</sup> You're a fucking slag! I disown you! You're nothing to do with me.'

'I'm not lying, I swear on mum's life I didn't actually do anything.'

'I don't fucking believe you. Felk mikhomi ma divoneh am?'<sup>4</sup>

I kept quiet. I still hadn't wiped the spit from my hair; it seemed pointless now.

My mum remained silent throughout the car journey. When I saw her in the house she told me to go upstairs. Once in my room I could hear my dad roaring mixtures of Farsi and English at her. I occasionally heard her feebly attempt to defend herself. Then, there was a crash, which I later discovered to be the coffee table thrown against the wall. From that point on my mum didn't

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<sup>3</sup> Farsi for: 'cannabis'.

<sup>4</sup> Farsi for: 'Do you think I'm stupid!'

do nightshifts at the hospital; apparently she wasn't keeping a good eye on me.

I cried for about an hour in my room. I remember I attempted to do my homework, in an effort to calm myself. Halfway through highlighting a hand-out, I started sobbing again and dropped the uncapped highlighter on my bed. The green stain soaked into the duvet. It is still there now and won't go.

A year later and I had another crush. This was with the dry humoured football player at school. He told everyone that I thought *he* fancied *me*. I obviously knew he was out of my league but he did this so he could confront me about it in front of a group of popular girls and make me look like the biggest idiot ever. I was having lunch with my friends when one of the popular mouthy girls came over to me and asked: 'do you think Johnny likes you?' That was the *last* thing I thought she would ask.

'No.'

'Well, apparently you're telling everyone that he does and you've already planned your wedding together. Like you've got a memory stick filled with hairstyles for the wedding.' Like the planned manoeuvre this was, Johnny came up behind her. I wanted to set myself alight with the Bunsen burner that was conveniently placed in the science room next to me.

'Yeah, you're telling everyone I love you.' He said *sheepishly*.

'No I'm not. None of that is true!'

'Yeah but do you think you can go out with him?' The girl chimed in, with special emphasis on 'him'. I felt the world crumble. I just wanted to get

away but couldn't. Instead I turned from them both and mentally exited the situation whilst the interrogations continued. Eventually they left.

It wasn't just a group of people that heard this rumour but it seemed everyone in the school knew. One German class, when the teacher left the room to get a DVD, a boy shouted: 'S loves Johnny!' Then, Johnny moved away from me in English and Science despite it being his assigned seat. Even my friend Maria believed the rumour that I was basically having a one sided relationship with Johnny Bellamy. There is a point when you realise you can't be made a fool of any longer and for me this event was that. Instead of being the undesirable one, the imprisoned one, I made a plan to be someone else.

I joined the local gym, ate little to nothing and told myself *I would be slim*. Worst of all was that for a year I was trying to be slim for *him*. Even though he was mean, I wanted his approval and I wanted him to want me.

In summary, contact with a nice guy was snatched away by my strict Muslim parents, and a knob head ridiculed me. As a consequence, the Soulsbys of the world don't hold the appeal they once did. They're tainted for me now. I'm still that teenage girl that wants the boys that laugh at her. I long for the affections of the knob heads of the world. I want them because to have one would prove that I've moved away from fifteen year old me. I've progressed from those years and I can finally be the girl that is desirable to the knob heads.

Everyone has his or her own version of a knob head. A knob head in a broader sense is a person who stunted you when you were younger by constantly pointing out your flaws. Undeniably they made you a better person for it because they made you work on yourself. The problem is that once

we're improved, and reach adulthood, we still care about their opinions and want the knob heads' approval. Even though they are knob heads.

## About the Author

**Sara Jafari** is a writer, and former Flight 1000 Associate with Spread The Word. She writes short stories, and has written one novel. Sara has been published in Syrup Magazine, Tales Magazine, Flight Journal, Spread The Word and in gal-dem magazine She also works as an Editorial Assistant at Harper Collins, and runs her own literary and arts magazine TOKEN Magazine. You can follow her on Twitter: [@sarajafari](https://twitter.com/sarajafari).