

Living

NORTH EAST

SEPTEMBER 2020 • HOMES & INTERIORS • PEOPLE & PLACES • FASHION & BEAUTY • FOOD & DRINK • COMPLIMENTARY

CREATIVE VISION

The art-filled interiors of a holiday home at Saltburn

BEAUTY & THE BEACH

Whitby jeweller takes inspiration from our coast

Saints trails

New paths for pilgrims with Durham Cathedral at their heart

Win!
A 2-NIGHT
STAY AT
WEST
LAYTON
MANOR

KIA ABDULLAH

MY JOURNEY FROM TOWER HAMLETS TO THE DALES

NORTH EAST LIVING

CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 2020

FOOD & DRINK

64 **A LITTLE FISHY...**
How home cooks have been benefiting from the North Sea catch

ANTIQUES

73 **ALL THINGS BRIGHT**
Hand-made pieces by Whitefriars Glass will bring colour to your home

ARTS & CULTURE

74 **KIA ABDULLAH**
The author shares her journey from Tower Hamlets to Richmond

TRAVEL

82 **E-EASY RIDER**
An eBike makes short work of hills in the Dales

COMPETITION

86 **BREAK FROM HOME**
Win a stay at West Layton Manor, near Richmond

MY NORTH

98 **LOUISE HARRINGTON**
The Durham Heritage Coast officer on lockdown and litter louts

WINNER

Artisan Drink Co – G Gaunt, Stokesley



74

PICTURE BY INDIA HOBSON



64



82



PICTURE BY EVELINA STECHINI

ON THE COVER
Kia Abdullah



'I made what I consider the biggest mistake of my life. I bowed to societal pressure and agreed to an arranged marriage'

PICTURE EWELINA STECHNI

My journey from Tower Hamlets to the Dales

Author Kia Abdullah charts her rise from a working-class childhood in London to a career as a successful writer, now happily based in the historic market town of Richmond

London has a reputation as one of the greatest cities of the world. The verve and vigour of the capital is such that people from all over the globe flock to its crowded streets in the hopes of fulfilling a dream. The city teems with possibility; one serendipitous meeting might place you in the path of the love of your life, or secure a coveted job and furnish you with fortune beyond your wildest hope.

People are surprised, then, when I say that my childhood in London actually felt quite small. My daily orbit ran from home to school to home, with occasional trips to the 'adventure park' down the road – really just a shabby square of sand, dotted by a dozen rope swings. Tower Hamlets wasn't the London of postcards, but a sprawling stretch of high-rise flats with very few patches of green. Those we did have were steadily culled in the Nineties to make space for extensive housing.

My life could so easily have stayed that size were it not for one simple fact: I was a voracious reader and collected books by the armful from Limehouse Library on Commercial Road. I cut my teeth on fairytales and graduated to Judy Blume and Sue Townsend. One of the books that affected me most was *Anne of Green Gables* by LM Montgomery. This novel about a wayward orphan called Anne Shirley taught me that young girls didn't have to be quiet and docile; we could be brash and brave and troublesome, just like our male counterparts.

This caused some friction with my parents. As immigrants from Bangladesh, they held onto the conservative values that governed their own childhoods. While this taught me a number of valuable things – a respect for my elders, an aversion to debt and a strong duty to charity – it hindered me in other ways. For example, I wasn't encouraged to pursue education with the same zeal as my brothers.

Thankfully, as a reader, I learnt that my reach should exceed my grasp. As a result, I became the only one of eight siblings to graduate from university. I wanted to be a writer, but I chose a more practical subject, Computer Science, for its promise of financial security.

I secured a job in tech and worked there happily for the next three years. Then, at



INDIA HOBSON/HARKON

the age of 24, I made what I consider the biggest mistake of my life. I bowed to societal pressure and agreed to an arranged marriage, as is custom in the Bangladeshi community. Over the course of several months, I was presented with a dozen suitors and eventually agreed to marry one. It may not come as a surprise that the marriage did not last. I – who grew up on a diet of *Anne Shirley* and *Jo March* – could not play the part of a dutiful wife.

This was a significant turning point in my life. I was done trying to make others happy and following the path of the good immigrant child. I quit a lucrative job to follow my dream

of becoming a writer – taking a 50 per cent pay cut in the process. I joined *Asian Woman* magazine and soon after met my partner, Peter, a teacher, photographer and keen traveller. Much to my mother's dismay, we did not choose to marry, but are still together a decade later.

It took a few years, but I carved out a rewarding career as a writer. I worked at Penguin Random House and was published in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. Most recently, I signed a two-book deal with HarperCollins, one of the biggest publishers in the world. My novel, a courtroom drama called *Take It Back*, was named ➔

Tower Hamlets



one of the best thrillers of 2019 by The Guardian and The Telegraph. The follow-up, *Truth Be Told*, is out this month.

Before the book deal, Peter and I spent a year saving for a trip around the world. We visited far-flung countries like Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji and Samoa and when we returned to London, I realised that I no longer wanted to settle in the city. I was tired of cramped spaces and stressed commutes, of concrete blocks and flashes of hostility. Thankfully, Peter and I had set up a travel blog to chart our trip – *atlasandboots.com* – which rapidly gained popularity. Our readership of 250,000 people a month meant we could work on the website full time and were no longer tied to jobs in London.

We began to search for a new home with better access to nature. We initially looked inside the Yorkshire Dales National Park and nearly settled in Reeth. It was by pure luck that we discovered Richmond. Our estate agent mentioned in passing that she lived in this charming town and we decided to take a look. The castle looming above the Swale, the expansive views from Westfields, the cobbled streets and listed buildings felt quintessentially English and we knew that this was where we wanted to be.

We moved to Richmond in September 2018 and set a new orbit: Duncans Tearoom, the Angel's Share Bakery, Castle Hill Bookshop and Mocha café, with frequent trips into the Dales. Peter is aiming to climb the 'Dales 30', a collection of peaks inside the park, and is currently at number 26. I, meanwhile, am writing my next novel.

I do miss my friends and family in London – often fiercely – but I remind myself of the things I have gained. There is space, fresh air, fresh food and a calmer pace of life here. When I have a deadline looming and I glance through my skylight to see Richmond Castle lit up against the evening sky, I feel a sense of peace I did not have in childhood. Life, it seems, isn't so small after all.



'It was by pure luck that we discovered Richmond... The cobbled streets and listed buildings felt quintessentially English and we knew that this was where we wanted to be'



Truth Be Told by Kia Abdullah (HarperCollins, £12.99) is out 3rd September. kiaabdullah.com

Richmond

