

Youth club Excerpt from *A State of Mind* by Jason Iyasara

As Sindu drove the Range Rover past a gritty estate in North London, Jordel glanced at her from the passenger seat — grateful for the understanding she had given him, that shared sense of being caught between cultures.

A sudden chant burst above the traffic, prompting her to slow the vehicle.

“SAVE OUR YOUTH CLUB!” the kids lining the wall shouted. They ranged from nine to fifteen, boys and girls of varying races, voices uniting against the shutdown. Sindu braked outside the club, shaking her head. “This really disappoints me, Jord — the closing of youth clubs.”

“So can’t you use the one down the road?” Jordel asked a scrawny-faced white girl whose small arms strained to hold a blue placard with pink writing aloft.

“They’ve already bloody shut dat one!” she snapped.

Jordel and Sindu got out of the vehicle and joined the cluster of kids.

“What we meant to do when they shut this one, huh?” said a boy with braces. “They’re taking the piss, man. Don’t care ’bout us at all!”

Sindu turned to a black boy gripping a clipboard in one hand and a pen in the other. “Hi,” she said. “I’m Sindu.”

“Cool,” he replied flatly, unfazed. “You gonna sign our ’tition? Got fifty-seven signatures so far. Yours’ll make it, like, fifty-eight.”

“It’ll be a pleasure,” Sindu said, signing with elegant loops and flourishes before passing it to Jordel.

“Fifty-*nine!*” the boy beamed as Jordel — unused to signing

anything — simply jotted down his initials.

“Dunno why you’re getting all gassed for,” an older youth snarled, braking hard as his stolen bike skidded to a stop. His eyes burned with contempt as he sized up the clipboard kid.

“Even if you had ten thousand fuckin’ signatures, this place is still shutting, you little dickhead. You’re wastin’ your fuckin’ time. Government don’t give a shit ’bout kids like us. They just wanna save dough so they can splash it on themselves — flash cars, five-star hotels, prostitutes.

“They don’t see us as people. We’re nothin’ to ’em!” His voice cracked into a shout, spit flying. “I fuckin’ hate ’em so much. I’d love to ram a blade straight into one of their hearts, make ’em feel the pain they put on us every day!”

He shoved off on his pedals, but as the bike jolted forward, a large knife slipped from inside his jacket, clattering onto the tarmac. Swearing under his breath, his eyes darted wildly as if expecting a police car to appear from nowhere. Snatching it up, he stuffed it back under his clothes, yanked his hood low and pedalled hard, disappearing into the maze of the estate.

“Why don’t they care ’bout us?” the petition kid asked quietly, his eyes wet and clouded with worry. “We’re wasting our time, aren’t we?”

“Of course you’re not,” Sindu said gently. “There’s always hope. Keep up the good work. Keep fighting for what you believe in.”

“Okay.” He nodded, then lifted his voice again with the others. “SAVE OUR YOUTH CLUB!”

“Let’s go inside and take a look,” Sindu said, and Jordel followed her into the building.

Clive Dale Youth Club had served the community for thirty years. Its mission was simple: to give young people a safe

space to grow, learn and be heard.

As they toured the rooms, Jordel and Sindu saw kids bent over arts and crafts, others battling at the table tennis table, and a group listening to a Q&A about sexual health. Upstairs, a youth worker and a community police officer were running a session called *How to Avoid Getting Dragged Into Crime*.

“I’d say you two are slightly above the age bracket we try to attract,” said a black woman with cropped hair, greeting them as they came down the stairs.

“I suppose we are,” Sindu smiled, extending her hand. “I’m Sindu, this is my friend Jordel. We were just looking around. We support the campaign to keep the place open. Maybe we should’ve asked before snooping.”

“No, it’s fine,” the woman said. “We need all the support we can get. But as it stands, the place is doomed to shut in seven weeks.”

“And that’s due to funding?” Sindu asked.

“Yep.” The woman shook her head mournfully.

“You must be very disappointed,” Sindu said, glancing at her badge: *Karen Henry, Centre Manager*.

“Angry,” Karen said, gesturing for them to sit. “Quietly furious. The people who decided to slash our funding are the same people who probably enjoyed free university and free youth clubs themselves. And now basic youth-club access is being denied to the most vulnerable kids in this community. It’s scandalous.”

“Totally,” Sindu nodded, sympathetic.

“Our fundraising’s raised a paltry amount,” Karen continued, lowering her voice so the nearby kids couldn’t hear. “Local businesses can’t donate like they used to. The shekels from the general public — bless them — doesn’t add up to much. The truth is, this centre needs seventy-five thousand pounds by September third. Seven weeks away. And we’re nowhere near it.

“I’m an optimist, but I’m also a realist. And the reality is, those kids outside, protesting with such belief, are going to be disappointed — heartbroken — when these doors close in their faces forever. And I’ll feel so guilty, because I keep encouraging them to believe we can stay open, even though I’ve exhausted every avenue. The closing date’s already set.”

“You’ve no reason to feel guilty,” Sindu said quietly. “I’m sure you’ve done your utmost.”

“I have,” Karen sighed, “but it hasn’t been enough. I’ve sat through meeting after meeting, spoken to MPs, appealed to the highest levels — all to no avail. The decision won’t be reversed. If I keep clinging to false hope, it’ll only make the end harder to face.

“What really hurts is the relationships we’ve built. Me and my staff — most of them volunteers — have worked so hard to earn the kids’ trust. That wasn’t easy. We’ve managed to instil some positivity, given them belief in a brighter future. And that matters, because so many come from broken homes, some have been abused, and they had no reason to expect anything good until they came here. We’ve become a family.

Closing this place will be like breaking that family apart. My fear is, once the doors shut, some of them will go off the rails.”

“Maybe they’ll be cool,” Jordel said, admiring her obvious care. “I mean, shit happens, innit.”

“Unfortunately, it does.” She smiled sadly. “I’ve given so much time and energy to this place. And I don’t even get paid for it.”

“You don’t?” Jordel frowned.

“No. I was offered a wage, but I turned it down. I’d rather that money went on projects and outings.”

“So how d’you live?”

“I teach part-time in a primary school. And my husband’s salary helps. I’m here three days a week and at least one weekend a month, because these kids need me.”

“You’ve probably made a real difference to their lives,” Jordel said. “That’s cool, man.”

“I’ve always wanted to make a difference — especially for vulnerable young people. Our future. I truly believe that if some of these kids hadn’t come here, they’d be addicts, in prison, or dead.”

Dead like my friends, Jordel thought, looking away and rubbing his head.

“You okay, Jord?” Sindu asked softly.

“Yeah, I’m good,” he muttered, eyes drawn to youngsters who

reminded him and his crew at their age.

“In a few years,” Karen said bitterly, “I can see this place bulldozed, replaced with flats.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Sindu agreed. “It’s prime location — near transport links, shops, everything.”

“This place is for the kids, though,” Jordel said, his face tightening. “It belongs to the community. It gives them hope, keeps ’em out of danger and something positive to do. It ain’t for selfish developers to make dough from. You shouldn’t be allowed to profit from kids’ sadness and disadvantage. Nah, man — that’s wrong.”

“I agree,” Karen said. “But life isn’t fair. We see that played out every day.”

“I hear you,” Jordel said. “Trust me, I do. Listen — is there an account where donations can be made?” As he spoke, his fingers brushed the thick wad of used banknotes in his pocket.

“Yes, we’ve got an online donations page.” She scribbled the address and handed it to him. “Got a rich friend who can save us?” she joked, managing a brief smile before it faded. “Any contribution will be appreciated. If nothing else, it’ll help fund a farewell trip once we’re shut down.”

“Okay.” Jordel nodded and rose. “It’s been nice meeting you.”

“Thank you both for coming by,” Karen said, shaking their hands and seeing them to the door.

“I didn’t even realise people like her existed,” Jordel said as Sindu drove away. “So unselfish, man. My mum’s a care

worker — she gets satisfaction from helping, yeah, but she gets a salary. That Karen lady does good for no cheddar at all — nothing.”

“A truly altruistic person,” Sindu said.

“Yeah,” Jordel nodded, thinking that word must mean someone who does good. “I wanna help them.”

“I thought you might,” Sindu said. “How?”

“There’s only one way, innit — with dough.”

“Some of the cash you left in the safe at your suite?”

“I was thinking ’bout grabbing some and giving it to her. But that wouldn’t make sense — they’ve got systems to flag money laundering, innit. Large cash deposits get seized till they prove where it came from. Even youth workers can’t stop banks alerting jakes. I’ll get cheddar to them another way, so there’s no issues.”

“I think a strong ethical argument could be made against funnelling ill-gotten proceeds from drug trafficking into saving a youth club.”

“Oh, whatever, Sindu,” Jordel sighed. “Loads of people been convicted for selling drugs, their assets get seized and sold, and the money ends up funding community projects. Same thing. Only I’m giving it willingly.”

“Okay,” she said at last. “I hear you.”