Fireflies are circling already. The storage facility has been broken into, telltale footprints zigzagging across the floor. The sawdust is also lightly drizzled with blood, nocturnal rangoli off the books. In the corner the nightwatchman is propped up against a wall, streaks of claret dried on his face where he has been bludgeoned. All that's missing are several large sacks of rice, and this, rather than the surprised look on the nightwatchman's face, is what leads the police inspector to conclude that the culprits are probably adolescents. No real conviction in the blunt-force trauma either, and the evidence pointing to an inability to lift more than a couple of sacks before fear, or a lack of strength, further exposed by the famine, must have kicked in. He hates the beggary on their faces, the pleading mixed in with all the lies. When he finds the culprit, child or no child, someone will plead. And someone else will hang.

After a reward is posted it doesn't take long before names are offered up. The rice is discovered under the floorboards of a local grain merchant's house, and the urchins are flogged and locked up, while the merchant finds himself twisting in the wind. The nightwatchman eventually recovers, but his memory of that night remains vague, and he is unable to recall the faces of the young boys who had attacked him. Their fate remains uncertain, but the jails, already brimming with would-be shahids, have no enthusiasm for these young thieves, and they are released before the genuine blunt-force trauma of Partition – the carving up of the borders, and shortly after that of the bodies. The older of the boys, just too young to hang, for years after occasionally wakes up in the night even when there are no mosquitoes. Two of his brothers, next to whom he sleeps on a park