

**Always Eat When  
You Are Hungry**

HOLIDAY  
CAISTER  
SAND

LEONARD JOHN

Always Eat When  
You Are Hungry



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# Act 1

# Chapter 1

## *The Stranger*

The stranger's arrival at Caister Holiday Park was as unexpected as the storm that lashed the Norfolk coast that morning. Francesca Lopresti wrestled the wonkey-wheeled, cast iron trolley between the dining tables mindful that on each one was a water-filled glass vase of flowers freshly picked that morning by the children of the kitchen staff. Picking flowers for the tables was a sought after job and only those children deemed to have been 'good' were awarded the task. Some of the arrangements were so bizarre they made her smile. One arrangement in particular deserved closer inspection. *Surely that's a weed not a flower?* Anyway, it matters not she concluded, breakfast was in less than 30 minutes and she had work to do. She could see the usual early-bird holidaymakers gathering outside the main door of the dining hall, shivering, peering through the salty, sand-encrusted glass hoping for an early breakfast. The weather had not been kind to the campers this morning, nor to the flower pickers, but this was Norfolk not Italy and anyway, everybody here was either

on annual holiday or was working for the Caister management team so sunshine and rain were tolerated in equal measure.

Despite the trolley's attempts to sabotage her work, and a few minor collisions, Francesca set out the final table settings at the sea view end of the hall. Making sure all the flower vases, cutlery placements and table number plaques were correctly in place she undid the ties of her apron, pulled the halter over her head and folding it neatly, stowed it away on the trolley's lower shelf where it stayed until the lunchtime shift. When she straightened up she was confronted by the face of a tall, long-haired stranger, hands cupped around his forehead, peering through the glass, smiling at her.

'Can ye open up an' let us in child? It's feekin' freezing out here.' Francesca instinctively raised her hand to her face, startled by the sudden appearance of this stranger. His long, dark hair was plastered to his face, dripping with rainwater that trickled down his cheeks and onto his collar. She hesitated for a moment, unsure whether to comply with his request or wait for her supervisor's approval. Francesca pointed to the wall clock. 'Non, non signore, too soon, too soon. You come back eight thirty. Breakfast ready then.'

'I'm not here for a feed child, I have messages to conduct. Open the door please. This is not a social call.'

'Non, non signore. No key, no key.'

'Well go and get the key then child. I'm getting feekin' blown away out here, aye.'

Francesca backed away from the window pointing to the kitchen doors. 'I get boss.'

'You do that child.'

The stranger made his way around to the main door, turning his collar against the North Sea tempest. As he approached a key rattled in the lock and the door swung open.

The keyholder eyed the stranger with suspicion. 'Si signore. What can I do for you?'

'You can let me in out of this feekin' weather for starters.' The stranger shoved the keyholder aside and tore off his overcoat shaking it with a fury. He threw it on a dining table knocking a flower vase to the floor, smashing it to pieces.

'Che palle!' cried the keyholder hands held above his head. 'Look signore, look what you do.'

The stranger grabbed the keyholder by his lapel and frog-marched him to the centre of the dining room, away from the prying eyes of the early-birds. 'Never mind the feekin' vase. I'm here for one thing only. I'm going to ask yeez a simple question. How the rest of your day pans out will depend on the answer ye give. D'youse understand me boyo?'

The keyholder nodded. 'Si signore.'

The stranger reached into his pocket and produced a crumpled photograph, holding it in front of the keyholder's face. 'Ok then. Where do I find Tommy Baker?'

The stranger's eyes glinted with a cold determination that



made the keyholder's blood run cold. He realized, with a sinking feeling, that Tommy's continued good health hung on his next words.

## Chapter 2

### *Easter Sunday*

If you had taken a stroll down Tooley Street on that warm Easter Sunday afternoon of April 18th, 1954, you would have found that the street, usually echoing with the rumble of trucks and the shouts of dockworkers, was instead filled with the gentle buzz of celebration. At the St. John's Tavern on the corner of Weaver's Lane, its doors thrown open wide to welcome the spring air, a hive of activity spilled out onto the sun-bathed pavement. A group of men stood with their pints in hand, ties loosened and jackets draped over their arms, basking in the unseasonable warmth, the clink of glasses and the occasional roar of collective laughter punctuating the constant murmur of voices. Work at the docks was a good two days away and, seeing as none of the patrons had any intention of attending Holy Communion, the St. John's Tavern seemed the more fitting place to gather.

So it happened on this sunny afternoon that Police Constable 'Uncle' George Turner from the Tower Bridge Police Station rode his standard police bicycle along Tooley Street until he reached

the sanctuary of Potters Fields Park where he left his bike leaning against what remained of the cast iron railings. Removing his police helmet, he took out his handkerchief to dry the damp, leather headband and took a seat on the park bench, pausing from his duties for a moment, taking in the sights and sounds of a resting community. At the edge of the park stood Antonio with his ice cream cart, cranking the handle of his barrel organ, its tinkling, nostalgic melody drifting across the scene, capturing the very essence of this perfect spring day, its notes dancing on the warm breeze and mixing with the rustling leaves of the park's trees.

George retrieved his pocketbook and pencil. He inserted the pencil's tip into the binding, and a cigarette appeared from the other side. Shifting on the bench, he rummaged in his trouser pocket for his Ronson. After a quick glance to see if anyone was watching, he lit the cigarette. Two young women in summer dresses waved hello. With his usual polite manners, George tipped his finger to his forehead while cradling his Woodbine in his other hand, now held low and out of sight.

'You be careful now Uncle,' shrieked one of the girls, loud enough so anyone within a five-mile radius could hear. 'Them fags ain't good for your 'ealth!'

George glanced around hoping nobody heard the cheeky little mare, then laughing out loud, spluttered an immense plume of white smoke high into the air, his cover blown. The girls, checking to see if George was intent on pursuit, made their escape skipping and giggling along Queen Elizabeth Street. The

Woodbine resumed its rightful place and taking a final drag George rubbed out the hot tip with his fingers and stuffed the remainder into his lapel pocket along with his pencil and notebook.

‘Right,’ he said to himself, and standing to brush the flecks of cigarette ash from his trousers, he donned his helmet in preparation for police business. ‘Let’s go and see what those gentlemen in the St John’s Tavern are up to’. And so with the grace and poise of an old head looking forward to some unchallenging, adolescent banter, with one hand on the saddle, the other checking his police whistle was close to hand, George ushered his bicycle towards the merriment.

As George approached one or two of the younger-looking members of the entourage glanced apprehensively at each other before shuffling back inside the bar. George clanked his bicycle handlebars against the frosted glass window and removing his helmet he entered the arena.

‘Oy, Oy! Cunsternoon Afterble!’ The place erupted with cheers and laughter.

George glared at Frankie Miller. ‘Shah-tup you cheeky little git! Does your mother know you’re on the piss again?’

‘Oooohhhhh!’ declared the revellers.

‘Please don’t nick me George,’ Frankie cried. ‘I ain’t had no dinner yet!’

More uproar.

‘I wouldn’t waste the lead in my pencil on you, you tedious

little tit'. The room erupted once more. Smiling from ear to ear George made his way to the bar. 'What's the occasion?'

Ken the Landlord threw his towel over his shoulder. 'A new born George! Lizzie's given birth. A little boy. Called 'im James so I gather.'

'Ah yeah, Lizzie Butler. Is she OK?'

'She's fine by all account. Joyce went up to Guys on the No. 47 this morning to see her. Apparently he's a beautiful little thing, full head of black hair an' all!'

'Obviously not one of mine then.' George raised his hand thespian style to scratch his bald head.

'Waaaay!' More cheering.

'It's just a shame Tommy couldn't be here to see his little lad. Any news of Tommy's release date George?'

'Yeah, I believe he's out on parole this week. Jack's already rearranged their wedding at St. Mary Magdalene's for midsummer's day.'

'Ah that's good. Jack's been a good dad to Tommy over the years.' To a man the bar nodded approval; together they toasted the news.

'What time you intend closing this afternoon Ken?'

'Two o'clock of course Uncle. Jesus, what a question to ask your favourite landlord! Wouldn't want to break the law now would I? Not on this holy day!'

'Good. Just make sure the door is locked tight and everyone is

round the back in the snug. And for God's sake knock that sodding racket on the head will ya? You won't want any of my lot sniffing around once they pile out the Antigallican.'

The '*sodding racket*' referred to was coming from a beat-up upright piano standing in the corner of the bar. Everyone pretty much agreed that it classified as a musical instrument, but the cacophony emanating from this contraption was unbelievable. The upright had made it through two world wars without ever being tuned - or so it seemed. George, having gone to St. Olaves grammar school and taken violin lessons from a young age, knew without question that this piano was in dire need of tuning, and the sooner the better.

'Alright George, I'm ringing last orders in twenty minutes anyway so I'm on it.'

'Good lad. Now...' whispered George behind the back of his hand '... chuck us a quick half of brown will ya? I'm bloody parched.' A half-pint mug of brown was slid into George's awaiting fist. After a quick look around the bar, seeing everybody was engaged with whatever tune was being cruelly beaten from the upright, George raised the mug to his lips, its contents magically disappearing, long before anyone could claim witnesses to the event.

'K-ahhhh ... cheers Ken. On the house then? Nice touch me ol' son, much appreciated. Be good now, must get going. No peace for the wicked.'

'Right-Oh Uncle! Take it steady old'n.'

George strolled out from the boozy smoke into the fresh air of a fine Sunday afternoon, the warm sun on his face, the melody of the barrel organ in his ears. Replacing his police helmet he took hold of the handlebars of his bike, kicked the pedal with his left foot and, with a push and a pump on the handle bars, he was mobile once more, his right leg hovering above the saddle until, after what seemed an age, he regained his balance, his right foot landing squarely on the other pedal and with the distant laughter from the pub fading into the distance, away wobbled Uncle George.

‘Despite all we’ve had to deal with these last few years,’ he mused. ‘This ain’t such a bad place is it?’

## Chapter 3

### *Tower Bridge Magistrates Court and Police Station*

Tower Bridge Magistrates Court was an imposing construction, built from red brick and pale limestone. To the left of the magistrates court sat the police station, its blue lamp suspended over Tooley Street. The locale was dominated by Tower Bridge which lurked in the background, its iconic twin towers and grey-blue steel and stonework puncturing the London skyline. The surrounding streets bustled with red, double-decker buses and a constant stream of trucks and delivery vans carrying goods to and from the nearby docks and warehouses. The River Thames was a constant presence, with its distinctive smell, a mixture of saline water and industrial activity. There was an acrid tang in the air, mixed with the scent of coal smoke and diesel from passing ships. The distant sound of marine horns and engines echoed in the distance, blending with the rumble of the traffic.

Upon entering the police station your admiration of grandeur architecture and timeless heritage would swiftly end.



From the dimly-lit reception area several corridors extended away into the distance, to who knows where, which clang and clatter with other-worldly admin activity echoing along the walls. The smell of highly polished floors permeated the underlying aroma of tea and sweat combined with the hint of a working canteen somewhere in the distance. Coupled with the sound of hobnailed boots and jangling keys you would want your visit to last no longer than necessary. The atmosphere along Tooley Street, with its mixed aroma of salty air, stinking mudflats, coal and diesel fumes would be infinitely preferable.

Detective Sergeant Snell stood before Police Sergeant Alan Baines thumbing through a ledger of charge sheets.

‘When’s this wrong’n getting out Desk?’

Sergeant Baines did not care for DS Snell’s manner. Nor did he care to being referred to as ‘Desk’ - *what am I your bloody personal assistant?*

‘Wrong’n Snell?’

‘Yeah, you know who. Tommy bloody Baker.’

‘I understand Tommy is out on parole tomorrow Snell.’

‘Tommy’ now is it?’

‘That’s his name Snell’.

DS Snell lifted his eyes from the charge sheets and glared at Sergeant Alan Baines.

‘May I remind you Desk that I am a detective sergeant so I would appreciate some respect when you address me. Try Detective Sergeant.’

Baines raised his eyes from his paperwork. ‘I’m not sure you outrank me Snell. I suppose this why you call me Desk? How about from now on you address me as Sergeant Baines?’

‘I’m a Detective Sergeant Desk not a fucking wooden-top. I outrank a Desk Sergeant any day of the week. Got it?’

*‘No you fucking don’t!’* boomed a voice from behind a frosted glass window across the hall baring the name ‘Detective Inspector R. Bellinger’.

*‘In here Snell, now!’*

Snell tossed the charge sheets onto Baines’ desk and, with a grimace, stormed into DI Bellinger’s office. Snell dragged a chair across the parquet floor, plopped down, and crossed his arms.

Bellinger remained focused on his paperwork. ‘Did I ask you to sit down Snell?’

‘Err, no. No Sir you didn’t.’

‘No I don’t believe I did. Anyway, now you’ve made yourself nice and comfortable, go and close the door will you, there’s a good chap.’

Snell hunched his shoulders, raising his hands at the snub. He rose noisily from his seat and grabbed the door handle.

‘Don’t slam it Snell, just close it’.

Snell silently closed the door and ambled back to his chair.

‘Don’t sit down. I’ve got a job for you, for which I would appreciate your immediate consideration’. Bellinger took his pen and endorsing the page he was working on, closed the manila folder, rose from his chair and offered it to Snell, giving him the look. ‘Take this back to your desk and give it a good going over please. I’ve marked it urgent so there should be no confusion as to when I want this done and dusted. Shall we say by the end of the week?’

‘Yes Sir’.

‘Good. And one more thing Snell - what’s your beef with Baines? Did he upset you in a previous life or something?’

‘I can’t get on with him Sir; he’s so bloody high-and-mighty the way he carries on. As if he was my guvnor or something. I’m a detective sergeant, I outrank him. He should show me more respect.’

‘You can only command respect Snell, not demand it. And I don’t see much commanding going on right now.’

Snell’s face hardened.

‘And no, he doesn’t outrank you. You are both sergeants, and if I may remind you, you’re both playing for the same fucking side so why all the attitude?’

‘It’s personal Sir’.

‘Go on’.

‘I’d rather not say Sir’.

‘Listen Snell, I don’t care if he’s your ex-boyfriend. Tell me

what your problem is, unless you want me to conduct a disciplinary, at which point you'll be obliged to tell me AND everyone else who happens to be in the room'.

'He's big mates with Tommy Baker Sir, and I don't trust the pair of them.'

'Tommy who?'

Snell smiled. 'Tommy Baker Sir. I nicked him back in December. Put him Wandsworth for six.'

'How do you know they're mates?'

'They've known each other since junior school. They went to Fair Street together.'

'And this is a reason to disrespect a fellow police officer? Because he went to school twenty-odd years ago with a convicted criminal?'

'Don't suppose Sir'.

'What did you nick Tommy ... whatever his name is ... for?'

'Tommy Baker Sir. I nicked him for petty larceny.'

'Nicking stuff! Are fucking kidding me! Half the people living around here are on the scrounge somewhere. Jesus, if we collared every wanker stealing we'd be up to our arseholes in paperwork. What was so special about Tommy bloody Baker?'

'I'd rather not say Sir.'

'Snell! Just go back to your desk and get on with that folder in your hands. And try not to screw it into a complete ball.'

'Yes Sir'.

Snell spun on his heels and headed towards the door. He paused.

‘Sir?’

‘Yes... Snell?’

‘I was wondering how my transfer request is proceeding Sir.’

‘Your transfer request Snell?’

‘Yes Sir, my request for a transfer to the Met?’

‘Your request for a transfer to the Metropolitan Police Force? The cream-de-la-fucking-cream of all the entire London police forces?’

‘Yes Sir’.

‘Do you really think the Met wants you Snell? You can’t even play nice with your own team mates. What makes you think you can cope with a rumble on a violent criminal?’

Snell dropped his head and stared at the floor. ‘Sir, does this mean...’

‘Snell, get out of my office. And ask Baines to pop in will you’.

‘Baines Sir? But he’s not a detective ...’

‘Just fucking do it will you!’

‘Yes Sir’.

Snell stormed from Bellinger's office, banging the door shut as he exited and, with a grimace, gazed skyward, immediately remorseful of his behaviour. He strode by Baines' workstation. ‘Bellinger wants to see you,’ he mumbled.

Baines looked up in surprise. ‘Me?’

Snell stopped in his tracks, glaring at Baines. ‘Yes you, you prick’.

Baines put down his pen and called over to an officer standing front-of-house. ‘Constable Jordan, be kind enough to man this desk for me for a moment please. Inspector Bellinger wants to have a little chat.’ Baines smiled at Snell as he clomped down the corridor.

‘Certainly Sarge,’ complied Jordan.

Down the passageway a door slammed loudly, echoing along the pale green walls.

Baines grinned. ‘I guess Snell made it back to his office OK then?’ Constable Jordan raised his eyebrows, smiled and shook his head. Baines crossed the hall and tapped on Bellinger’s door.

‘Come on in Baines.’ Baines opened the door and stood at the entrance. ‘Come in, take a seat, there’s a good chap. There’s something on my mind that I hope perhaps you can help me with.’

Sergeant Baines closed the door as gently as he could and took the seat offered him.

# Chapter 4

*Jonathan Albert Baker*

Vine Lane Buildings was nestled near the banks of the River Thames, between Tooley Street and Mark Brown's Wharf. The aroma of coffee, grains, spices and tea just about overpowered the distinct scent of the river, a concoction of salty water mingled with the earthy smell of mudflats exposed at low tide. From the washing lines on the flat roof of Vine Lane Buildings could be seen Tower Bridge and the balletic progression of ships' funnels and masts against the skyline. The air was filled with the sound of shouted orders, the clanking of chains, and the steady thud of crates being moved. The walkways echoed with the voices of children playing hopscotch or chasing a ball around. Mothers chatted with neighbours, keeping an eye on their little ones while exchanging gossip or sharing news about rationing and the latest fashions. The residents knew each other well, and there is was strong sense of community. People looked out for one another, sharing what little they have and supporting each other through difficult times. The area was close-knit, with a network of

relationships built on shared experiences and mutual assistance.

Jonathan 'Jack' Albert Baker, a street bookmaker with a long list of loyal customers, stepped out of his flat into the bright April sunshine. Always dressed smartly, in his double-breasted, grey pin-striped suit and crisp, white shirt, Jack lived up to his nickname '*The Hollywood Docker*'. With his swept back silver hair, blue eyes and infectious smile Jack's overall appearance and general demeanour commanded admiration from those with whom he engaged.

Jack's wife Harriet had taken the day off her cleaning jobs and had got the bus up to the Time and Talents in Bermondsey Street to meet her lady friends so Jack knew he had the day pretty much to himself until tea time. He walked the length of Vine Lane Buildings nodding to familiar faces along the way until he reached the wall that separated the grounds from Mark Brown's Wharf. Turning the corner, checking there was nobody around to monitor his progress, he strolled around the back of the buildings where the communal wash house was situated. Fumbling for a key in his waistcoat pocket he unlocked the door that led to the room that held the copper washing boilers. Satisfied there was nobody else around he locked the door behind him and headed out back to the drying area. Here an old cast iron fireplace was set into the brickwork, long since out of use since the bombings during the 1940s smashed the structure of the chimney stack. Reaching up inside the flue Jack removed a brick that seemed not



quite to fit the original coursework. Laying the brick on the floor Jack produced from deep within the brickwork a marbled diary and a black and red cash box with a brass handle. Checking once more, for sounds of anyone in the vicinity, Jack unlocked and opened the red and black box. He counted out a sum of grubby, white five pound notes and carefully folded and slipped them into a leather bus conductor's cash satchel that he always wore beneath his Crombie overcoat. He relocked the red and black box, replaced it back in the flue along with the diary, repositioned the wayward brick with care being careful not to disturb the years of dirt and filth that caked the fireplace, so as not to alert any enquiring eyes there had been any disturbance.

Exiting the wash house and locking the door behind him Jack re-walked the length of Vine Lane Buildings until he reached Tooley Street whereupon, turning right in the general direction of London Bridge, he crossed the road to Shand Street. Jack took another moment to look around and take in the scene. Satisfied there were no onlookers he walked along Shand Street until he reached the dimly lit cover of the tunnel under the railway lines from London Bridge Station amidst the familiar smell of the grain warehouses that populated the tunnel space. Peering into the darkness of the tunnel he checked his ex-army H. Samuel 'ACME LEVER' pocket watch and waited.

At 12.20 pm a black Austin 12 saloon car pulled up at the entrance to Shand Street from the Crucifix Lane end. The driver

stepped out of the vehicle and after lighting up a cigarette and taking a good look around got back into the driver's seat and swung the car into the entrance to the tunnel. The headlamps flickered into life as the car bounced over the wooden cobblestones. The driver suddenly braked and stalled the car as a train from London Bridge Railway Station trundled and thundered above the tunnel roof obliterating all other sound.

'Jesus, what a fucking place,' muttered the driver. After a couple of attempts the driver restarted the car and continued his journey. As the car emerged from the gloom of the tunnel the driver's attention was drawn to a well-appointed, elderly gentleman attired in a pin-stripped grey suit beneath a knee-length Crombie overcoat standing at the junction of Hollyrood Street. The driver wound down the window.

'Jack Baker?' demanded the driver, his voice gruff and impatient.

'Who wants to know?' Jack replied, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

'Are you Jack Baker, yes or no!' the driver barked, his fingers tapping the steering wheel.

'What do you want with Jack Baker, mister? Who are you anyway?' Jack countered, taking a step back from the car.

'Well, if you are Jack Baker, the Dennetts sent me to pick you up,' the driver said, his tone softening slightly.

Jack's jaw tightened. 'I'm not waiting for anyone called Dennett. I'm meeting a business associate.'

'Yeah, I know who you're waiting for. He told me,' the driver said with a smirk.

'Who told you? Who told you what?' Jack demanded, his hand instinctively moving to the satchel inside his jacket.

'Your business associate,' the driver replied, emphasizing the words mockingly. 'He told me.'

'Why isn't he here himself?' Jack asked, his eyes darting around the street.

'Ah, well he's had a bit of trouble at work. A bit of an accident, you might say,' the driver explained his voice low. 'Here, get in the car. I'm here to take you to see the Dennetts'

'Go fuck yourself,' Jack spat. 'I'm not going anywhere with you. Tell me what the hell's going on.'

The driver's patience was wearing thin. 'Jack, just get in the fucking car, please. I'm not here for conversation. I've got an errand to run, and you're it.'

Jack's eyes narrowed further. 'Are you the filth? You look like a bloody copper, driving a copper's car an' all.'

'I'm not a copper, Jack,' the driver insisted, exasperation creeping into his voice. 'I'm your driver for today. Now get in the car and stop fucking about.'

'Where're we going?' Jack asked, still hesitant.

'We're going back to Vine Lane Buildings where you came from,' the driver replied matter-of-factly.

Jack's eyebrows shot up in surprise. 'How do you know I ....'

The driver cut him off, his voice laced with impatience. 'Jack, don't be silly. I can get there a lot quicker without you on board, and you'll miss all the fun by the time you get back on foot.'

Jack scratched his head in frustration, momentarily exposing his leather bus conductor's satchel, suddenly mindful of the cash he was carrying. The driver appeared not to notice.

'I'm sitting in the back, right behind you, in case you start any funny business,' ordered Jack. 'I'm tooled up so you better behave yourself.' Jack checked his pocket for the familiar feel of his door key.

'Alright, get in the back then. I don't give a fuck so long as I don't have to hang around this shit hole of a place any longer than I need to.'

The driver reached over his seat and pulled the leather strap releasing the catch on the rear door. Jack opened the door and peered inside; nothing but the smell of old leather and cigarettes. Jack climbed into the rear of the car and upon taking his seat took his heavy iron door key out of his pocket.

'Come on then,' demanded Jack pulling the rear door shut. 'Let's get on with it, and like I said no funny business.' Jack raised the key and jabbed it into the back of the driver's neck.

'What the fuck is that Jack?'

'Like I said, I'm tooled up so your choice. Be nice or be dead.'

'You haven't got the balls Jack.'

'Yeah? Well you never went to Ypres did you, you flash ponce.'

Seen plenty of claret out there ol' son, more than anyone would ever want to see ever again. This little beauty is army issue and I know how to use it. So don't think I won't. Now just drive the fucking car and for God's sake get on with it, your fucking after shave's making me sick to my stomach.'

The driver, checking out the situation from the single rear-view mirror that the Austin Motor Company offered its customers, could see none of Jack's deception and so decided getting Jack to his destination as fast as possible was better than the alternative Jack was offering.

'OK Jack, sit back. I'm no hero and I don't intend to prove otherwise.'

'Very wise,' smiled Jack. 'Now stop fucking about and lets get on with it.'

Leaving Shand Street the driver turned the car right onto Tooley Street then immediately left into Vine Lane. Passing Brewster's General Store and Ironmongery the car pulled into the gates of the Vine Lane buildings.

'You can pull over here,' called out Jack.

'Jack I need to take you to the Dennetts. They're expecting you.'

'Don't care what you need. Stop the car and let me out here.'

'Jack I can't ...'

‘Just do it you wanker! If you take me into the building’s square you’ll start tongues wagging and I’ll be a marked man turning up in what they will think is a copper’s car. Just stop here and let me out. If anyone sees me here they’ll assume I’ve been collared and let off with a caution.’

‘Jack I ....’

Jack stabbed the iron key into the driver’s neck once more. ‘Listen you asshole. You can drive out of here in this car or be driven out of here in a fucking ambulance. So if I were you I’d turn this car around, let me out and fuck off. You choose.’

The driver sighed and turned the car around to face the gates.

‘Stop here, put the handbrake on, kill the engine and pass me the keys.’

‘Take it easy Jack. Like I said I’m just the driver.’ The driver handed Jack the keys over his shoulder. Jack stepped out of the car and threw the keys over the bonnet into the centre of the concourse.

‘See those keys on the floor over there?’

‘Yeah, so what?’

‘Those keys need to stay there until you see me turn the corner into the grounds. If I see you leave the car before I turn the corner you’ll hear a loud bang at which point you will hit the floor in a lot of pain. Do you understand?’

The driver nodded.

‘So, say you understand.’

‘Jack I get it, now for God’s sake get lost will yer?’

Jack turned on his heels and walking backwards as quickly as he could shuffled to the corner of Vine Lane buildings hiding the ‘lethal’ door key behind his back. With one final look around and deciding that the situation was in his favour Jack Baker disappeared into the catacomb of passages and walkways of Vine Lane buildings. As he wound his way to a safe spot Jack heard the starter motor of an Austin 12 fire up the engine and listened as the black saloon rumbled away back down Vine Lane and off into the distance.

Jack’s heart thundered as he turned the key to his flat slamming the door behind him. Who the hell were the Dennetts and what did they want with him? He still had the stack of fivers in his satchel which he could not risk hiding in the two-roomed flat as there was no real place to hide it. And anyway, Harriet would no doubt find it and if she knew he was packing so much cash all hell would break loose. The options were limited. One would be to stay in the flat and lay low but take the risk that the Dennetts, who ever they were, would no doubt find him courtesy of the grapevine at which point he would risk loosing the cash. Another would be to stash the cash back in the wash house fireplace and take the consequences from whoever had an interest in his business. At least that way the cash would be safe even if he may not be.

Jack stepped out in the sunlight locking the door behind him, checked the square for strangers and decided the coast was clear. As he pondered his next move an elderly woman burdened with a

large sack of washing turned the corner. Louie Allen took in washing for others when their work commitments or their kids demanded their time. As Louie approached she recognised Jack and called out.

‘Alright Jack! No work today sweetheart?’

‘No Louie, not today. But ‘ere you shouldn’t be lugging that bloody great sack around at your age. Here, give it here, I’m doing bugger all else anyway.’

‘Aww Jack. That’s so kind of you my lovely.’

‘I know’ winked Jack ‘not many of us gentlemen left around here no more.’

‘So bleeding true Jack.’

Jack took the bag of washing from Louie’s arms and threw it over his shoulder, his legs buckling under the effort.

‘Stone me, what you got in here me love. Anvils?’

‘Yeah feels like it don’t it!’ laughed Louie.

As the pair turned the corner to the communal wash house the hairs on Jack’s neck stood on end. The door was ajar.

‘Err ... Louie, you got any more washing to do today?’

‘Yeah Jack’ said Louie ‘I got another bag to get but nowhere near as big as this one.’

Jack thought for a moment then dropping the sack to the floor turned to face Louie.

‘Tell you what Lou, I’ll drop this one in, you nip back and get the other one, an’ I’ll wait for you ‘til you get back.’ At least this



would get Louie out of harms way if there was trouble ahead.

‘Aww Jack, you sure?’

‘Yeah, course I am. Go on, you get back and I’ll take care of things this end.’

Louie Allen marched off waving to Jack and disappeared around the corner. Jack picked up the wash bag and holding it before him pushed the door open with it. The door swung open and crashed into the wall. The smell of wash salts and bicarbonate hit Jack’s nose. Someone had been here recently doing some washing. One of the copper boilers was gurgling away while a pile of wet washing was dripping from the lines in the drying room. Everything appeared normal, just another washing day. Jack dumped the sack in the corner by the boilers, closed the main door and locked it. With haste Jack knelt before the fireplace and reached up inside the flue groping for the brick. Having located it and placing it on the floor beside him he noticed that the usual coating of dirt and grime had been disturbed.

‘*That’s fucking odd,*’ thought Jack. He then reached up again for the cash box but the void was empty. Jack bounded back in disbelief. Once again he checked the flue, this time less cautiously, scrambling around the bricks inside the flue in case for some reason he had got the wrong brick.

Fuck me! Where’s the fucking cash box? Panicking, Jack searched the drying room and the wash house for any evidence of a red and black cash box but none he found.

Gone!

Not knowing what to do next Jack tried to gather his thoughts but all he could hear was his pulse thumping loud and clear inside his head. Watch out Jack! Hold fast! It then occurred to Jack that Louie was on her way back with another bag of washing so he had to get the situation back under control fast. He replaced the brick and swept back the disturbed soot and dirt with the wash house yard brush. Slapping the dirt and grime from his trousers Jack checked his hair, straightened the seams of his suit trousers, unlocked the wash house door and stepped out into the sunlight.

Before him stood two strangers, one of them holding a marbled diary, the other holding a black and red cash box with a brass handle.

'Hello Jack, how have you been?' The man's voice was smooth as silk, but there was an underlying edge to it that set Jack's teeth on edge.

'And you are?' asked Jack, his eyes narrowing as he studied the two strangers before him.

'Me Jack? My name is Liam Dennett and you, if I'm not mistaken, are Jack Baker.' The man's lips curled into a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

'What can I do for you?' Jack's tone was cautious, his hand instinctively moving to his satchel.

'Well Jack, for a start you can tell me why you and your associate were so keen to place a bet with us at The Woodstock

Junction Horse Trot meeting at Kingston next Monday?' Liam's voice dripped with false friendliness.

'Were we?' Jack feigned ignorance, his mind racing to figure out how much these men knew.

'Yes Jack, you were. And what's more, your associate was keen not to let us know that between the pair of you, you'd managed to pay off one of the teams to throw the race. Might even be a bit of horse doping involved as well.' Liam's eyes glittered dangerously.

'He told you all that? That's not like any associate of mine,' smiled Jack, trying to maintain his composure. 'They wouldn't be so fucking stupid.'

'Oh, he didn't want to tell us at first but, like you Jack, we have very persuasive ways of getting the facts if they're required. Bit like the way you persuaded our driver.' Liam's smile widened, revealing teeth that seemed way too large.

The smile left Jack's face, a cold dread settling in his stomach. 'What have you done to Harry? Where is he? He was supposed to meet me earlier.'

'Unfortunately Jack, your obnoxious little friend has cancelled all appointments for today and is unavailable for comment as he is unconscious.' Liam's casual tone belied the threat in his words.

Jack tried to swallow but his throat had dried, his heart pounding in his chest. 'What have you done with Harry? He wouldn't hurt a fly. He's in his late 60s for God's sake.'

'Harry will be fine, I'm sure. Nedser here can be a bit of a

brute when he doesn't get his own way, but Harry was extremely cooperative in the end. Didn't take too much persuasion, did it Neds?' Liam glanced at his companion.

Nedser laughed. 'He was very informative. Even cried like a baby in the end. Must have been all that tension leaving him once he owned up.'

Liam continued, his voice hardening. 'So as we see it, you pair of slags had rigged a trot race with the intention of betting a large sum against the book - our book.'

'What d'you mean, your book?' Jack's fingers twitched, itching to reach for the weapon he kept hidden.

'We run the streets now Jack, from Dockhead and Jamaica Road all the way up to Tooley Street.' Liam's voice was filled with smug satisfaction.

'I run Tooley Street pal, not you,' Jack growled, his blue eyes flashing with anger.

'Ah, well this is why we wanted to talk to you earlier, but you weren't keen to cooperate. Maybe you are now?' Liam's tone was light, but the threat was clear.

'You reckon?' Jack's voice was low, dangerous.

'Yes Jack, we do. Today, old son, is your last day conducting business on Tooley Street. Either you hand over your book and walk away, or you will be carried away.' Liam's words hung in the air like a death sentence, the tension between the men thick enough to cut with a knife.

Jack grabbed the lapel of his waistcoat and pointed to his war medal. 'You see this? This is for bravery in the face of the enemy. You don't get these by listening to Irish cunts like you!' Jack lunged forward and with speed punched a left and right fist into Liam's face knocking him to the ground. The marbled diary span from Liam's hand and slid to Nedser's feet.

Liam rose to his feet wiping his bleeding lip. 'That wasn't very nice Jack. Could have ended badly.'

'Not bad enough you pikey bastard.'

Liam raised his fists boxer style, circling around Jack as a cat might entrap a vole. 'Now we let the games begin'.

As Liam prepared to charge a crashing head blow from behind felled Jack like a rag doll. The last thing Jack recalled was to feel the boots being driving into to him as he lost consciousness.

Louie Allen lifted the sack of washing from behind her neighbour's dustbin and headed off to the communal wash house. From within a kitchen along her walk she could smell a dinner being cooked as the steam from the stove billowed out from the open kitchen window. She could hear '*Oh, Oh Antonio*' coming from the Light Programme. 'Wow', she thought, 'that Florrie Forde couldn't half belt it out! Pity she never turned up at the St. John's, that'd shut those plonkers up for sure'. Louie laughed at the thought of the door creaking open and Florrie Forde walking

into the saloon bar and the whole pub stunned to silence.

She walked the length of Vine Lane Buildings singing her heart out '*Oh, Oh Antonio, He's Gorn Awaaaay ...*' smiling all the while until she reached Mark Brown's Wharf whereupon she turned the corner and froze, dropping the washing sack with a thump. There, lying face down on the ground outside the door of the communal wash house, lay Jack Baker in a pool of blood. Beside his still body lay an empty leather bus conductor's cash satchel. Two men, who were crouched by Jack's side searching his pockets, stood bolt upright when they heard the thump of the wash sack. Louie raised her hands to her head and for all she was worth cried out in anguish.

The two stared at each other until with a flick of the head from Liam, Nedser turned and strode towards Louie.

'Leave it!' called Liam pointing upwards. Windows were opening above them and several heads were poking out gasping in horror at what they were witnessing.

The Dennetts ran for it.

# Chapter 5

## *Tower Bridge Police Station*

‘Sergeant Baines, there’s something I want you to help me with’.

Baines looked quizzically at Bellinger. ‘Me Sir? What can I do to help you? Don’t you have your own boots on the ground?’

‘Yes Sergeant I do but I want to keep this one out of the limelight. In particular I don’t want Snell anywhere near this. He’ll just fuck it up again. I want you to arrange for two of your men to pick up Tommy Baker from Wandsworth nick tomorrow at 13.00 hours. There’ll be a car assigned to them for the day. This is sensitive. Am I clear?’

‘Yeah, crystal Sir. Is there anything you can share with me? Why Tommy Baker, he’s hardly Dick Turpin. He was done for petty larceny not a gold bullion job.’

‘Yes there is something I can share with you. Tommy’s dad, Jack Baker, you know him?’

‘Yes Sir, I’ve known him since my school days with Tommy. A street bookie now I believe, not uncommon around here. Nothing

too serious to warrant constant vigilance. Bit of a war hero if I recall.'

'That's the bloke alright. This latest incident was brought to my attention by Constable George Turner. Jack was given a bloody good kicking two days ago and he's currently in the ICU at Guy's hospital. An eye witness who matched their descriptions to photos we received from The Home Office. It looks like it was the Dennett brothers that gave him a good going over.'

'Bastards!'

'Bastards indeed. And the very same bastards we've been wanting to collar for a long time.'

'So why haven't we?'

'Not our call I'm afraid. They're under surveillance from the Counter Terrorism Branch, Security Service. MI5 are after the big fish not these scumbags. The Dennett brothers are too far down the food chain. If we step in now, apparently we'll scare the big fish away. Then the big fish go into hiding for while and it all starts over again with another bunch of lowlife morons doing the footwork.'

'So why are we giving Tommy Baker a lift home?'

'You're not giving him a lift home. You are to bring him here to me. He doesn't know yet that his dad's been beaten up. Warden Rossi doesn't allow visitors in the last week before a release. Gets them all jittery apparently, so nobody will have been to see Tommy to give him the bad news. Probably a good job. I reckon if he knew he'd tear the place up and ruin his parole.'



‘So you want to tell him yourself, is that it?’

‘Sort of, but it’s more than that. I can’t let this anywhere near Snell, he’ll have a field day with it. I need Tommy as bait to lure the Dennett brothers. Once he finds out what they did to his dad he’ll go after them. The thing is I want him to go after them BUT with our support. The Dennetts will be expecting him but they won’t be expecting us. They’re bound to be packing so if we can get them in mid flow we’ll nail the fuckers on our own terms and bring them in. Got it?’

‘Got it Sir. Are we involved or is it just CID?’

‘Everybody if needs be. We’ll work out the details later. The first thing we need to do is get Tommy back here and safe, maybe keep him here for a bit while he calms down. Without him we’ll have no reason to get involved with the Dennetts. I believe he’ll be cooperative until he gets the news at which point I also believe the shit will hit the fan which is why I need two of your best men.’

‘OK Sir, I get it.’

‘Good. Now, who do you trust? Who are you going to send for Tommy who won’t go shouting their mouth off?’

‘Well, there’s Constable Jordan, he’s on the desk right now.’

‘Yeah, Jordan, he’ll do. Who else?’

‘For this job? There’s only one other person I’d trust with this. George Turner.’

‘Ah yeah. Uncle George! Good shout Sergeant. Where is he right now?’

‘Right now I reckon he’s getting ready to finish his beat and head on back to the station.’

‘Good, have him come and see me the moment he clocks off.’

‘It’s done Sir. But, what about Snell? Won’t he get wind of it?’

‘Don’t you worry about Snell. He’s destined for greater things. I’ve just signed off his transfer to the Met!’

Baine's face lit up. ‘Fuck me! Do they know what they’re letting themselves in for!’

‘Who cares? They might be the finest police unit in the whole of London but they’re fucking shit at character assessment!’

Out on the desk Constable Jordan paused from his ledger and peered at the frosted glass of DI Bellinger's office. He was sure he could hear laughter.

# Chapter 6

*Ignazio Rossi*

Prison officer Williams unlocked the door to Tommy's cell and, folding his arms, leaned against the door frame with a weary sigh. His eyes scanned the small, dingy space before settling on Tommy.

'Tommy.'

'Yeah,' came the curt reply from the young man seated on the narrow bunk.

'Warden wants a chat,' Williams said, his tone neutral but tinged with a hint of urgency.

Tommy sat up, suspicion etched across his face. 'What about?'

Williams shrugged, his uniform creasing with the movement. 'Why would he tell me? He just wants a word before you go. Standard procedure, I reckon.'

'Not interested. Sorry, I'm going home,' Tommy retorted, his jaw set stubbornly.

'Tommy, you need to talk to Rossi,' Williams pressed, a note

of exasperation creeping into his voice.

Tommy's eyes flashed with anger. 'Fuck Rossi, what's he want with me? I'm out of here.'

'Tommy....' Williams began, but was cut off.

'What does he want?' Tommy demanded, his hands grabbing the edge of the bunk.

'Better ask him?' Williams suggested, raising an eyebrow.

'Fuck this, I'm out,' Tommy growled, standing to confront the officer.

'Tommy....' Williams said again, this time more forcefully.

'What?' Tommy snapped.

'This might be a good idea?' Williams offered, his tone softening.

'Why?' Tommy asked, curiosity finally overcoming his defiance.

'C'mon son, it's alright. Just a chat, nothing more,' Williams coaxed, his face showing a hint of sympathy.

Tommy hesitated, then asked warily, 'Am I gonna be arrested on my way out?'

'I doubt it. It happens sometimes - but not today. Anyway, that's not what this is about and I know it's not what Rossi wants to talk to you about. So come on, you daft bugger, follow me. And for God's sake sit on your fucking hands when you're in his office. This is your chance, kiddo,' Williams explained, his voice a mix of exasperation and encouragement.

'I don't understand...' Tommy mumbled, confusion evident in his furrowed brow.

'You will. Trust me,' Williams assured him, gesturing for Tommy to follow.

'Trust you?' Tommy repeated, skepticism clear in his voice.

'Yeah. Trust me, and believe it,' Williams insisted, his eyes meeting Tommy's with a look of sincerity that finally seemed to break through the young man's resistance.

'Please, sit yourself down Tommy'.

Ignazio Rossi cut an impressive figure, with the bearing of an individual who'd overcome numerous hurdles and emerged victorious. He sat at his desk while Tommy took his place opposite. Either side of Tommy stood two prison officers, McEwan and Williams, both exceptionally good at their job.

Rossi, seemingly content with form filling, dipping his pen into the ink pot, shaking the spill onto the blotting pad, raised his head and looked around the room, firstly at Tommy then at McEwan and Williams.

'Err.. gentlemen, will you excuse us please?'

McEwan and Williams, hands clasped before them as if in prayer, stared at each other with raised eyebrows.

'Sir?' asked McEwan.

'Gentlemen, I would like you to leave the room please'.

'But Sir...'

Rossi raised his eyes from his paperwork and offered a glance that convinced both officers this was not the time to say another word.

'Thank you gentlemen, attend to your duties please.'

'Sir, yes Sir.'

As the echoes of footsteps diminished down the corridor, Rossi set aside his pen. He reclined in his seat, interlocking his fingers behind his head, and fixed his stare on Tommy. He remained silent. Tommy looked around the room, back at Rossi then finally lowered his eyes to his feet and shuffled in his seat.

'So, Tommy,' said Rossi, breaking the silence. 'You're out today.'

'Yes Warden, I hope so, I so really hope so,' Tommy replied, a glimmer of anticipation in his eyes.

'Have you enjoyed your stay here Tommy?' Rossi's tone was deceptively casual.

Tommy looked up and glared at Rossi. 'Are you fucking kidding me?'

'Now, now Tommy, no need for cursing,' Rossi chided. 'I'm asking you a simple question and I expect a civil answer. Have you enjoyed your stay?'

Tommy swallowed hard, trying to rein in his frustration. 'It was no holiday Guvner,' he muttered.

'Then maybe it's a holiday you need then Tommy,' Rossi

mused, a cryptic smile playing on his lips.

Confusion flickered across Tommy's face. 'I'm not with you Guv, sorry?'

'That's OK Tommy, just saying. When was the last time you had a holiday? I mean, you know, seaside fun, wife and kids, all that sort of stuff?' Rossi's eyes bore into Tommy, searching.

Tommy shifted uncomfortably in his seat. 'I don't have a wife, I only have a girlfriend and a baby right now. A baby I haven't seen yet,' he said, a note of pain in his voice.

'I understand. That can't be nice,' Rossi replied, his sympathy feeling hollow.

Frustration bubbled up in Tommy's chest. 'Guv, I need to leave here and go see my litt'n. I don't even know how Lizzie is. What's the point of this Guv? Why aren't I walking out of here already?'

Rossi slid the leather chair from underneath him with a soft creak and, raising his hand, beckoned Tommy. 'Come on you, we have business to attend to. There's something I want you to do for me,' he said, his tone suddenly businesslike.

Tommy's brow furrowed with suspicion. 'Where are we going?'

'Just follow me,' Rossi commanded, already striding towards the door, 'before we lose you to the street again.' The implied threat hung in the air between them as Tommy reluctantly rose to follow.

Rossi opened his office door and beckoned Tommy to follow. The pair walked out of the administration square and across the entrance court past the chapel. Adjacent to the chapel entrance Rossi unlocked a door that led to a flight of steps at which point Rossi invited Tommy to enter.

‘Go on in Tommy, you first. Keep going up until you reach the balcony. See it up there?’

Tommy peered into the darkened staircase. ‘Yeah I see it alright. Why am I going all the way up there remind me?’

‘Because we have something we want to show you Tommy,’ echoed a voice from above. Tommy looked up again to see a man of small stature leaning on the balcony, legs crossed, smiling.

‘I’m gonna get a kicking ain’t I,’ shouted Tommy.

‘Do I look like I’m the sort of bloke that enjoys giving young offenders a kicking Tommy? Look at me, I’m in a suit for God sake and it’s just come out of the cleaners. Now get your arse up here now before I change my mind.’

Tommy looked back at Rossi. Rossi smiled. ‘Go on Tommy, it’s all OK. Commander Brem-Wilson is from the Home Office. They don’t beat people up. That’s our job!’

In anticipation of a rumble Tommy sprinted up the staircase to the balcony. When he got there he found himself staring down the barrel of a handgun. ‘Enfield 80/200 in case you were wondering Tommy. Just a precaution I can assure you. Warden



Rossi would you care to join us please?’

‘Coming right up, chief,’ Rossi called out as he bounded up the steps, taking them two at once. After ascending the stairs, Rossi fumbled for a keyring and chose a well-worn key to unlock the entrance to a stark room containing only a solitary table and four seats. ‘This used to be a private interrogation room along time ago Tommy. We don’t use it anymore, we’re not allowed to. The Victorians used to love it though, you know, out of the way kind of place, away from prying eyes and all that.’

‘So why am I here?’ asked Tommy, his eyes darting nervously around the stark room.

Rossi spoke, his voice echoing slightly in the bare space. ‘You’re here Tommy because we want you to show you some pictures we’ve taken. Kinda off the record sort of stuff. Isn’t that right Commander?’ He glanced over at Brem-Wilson, a hint of uncertainty in his tone.

Brem-Wilson strode purposefully across the room, his shoes clicking against the cold concrete floor. He approached the table that dominated the centre of the sparse interrogation chamber. ‘So, sit yourself down Tommy and take a good, long look at these,’ Brem-Wilson instructed, his voice carrying an air of authority. With practiced ease, he unlatched a well-worn leather valise, its surface cracked and scuffed from years of use. From within, he extracted a stack of large format photographs, spreading them out methodically on the table before Tommy. The glossy black and white images gleamed dully under the harsh overhead light.

'You see these men, Tommy? Take your time now. Do you recognize any of them?' Brem-Wilson's eyes bored into Tommy, searching for any flicker of recognition.

Tommy leaned forward, his brow furrowed in concentration as he examined the photographs. Two men featured prominently in most of the images, their faces captured with startling clarity. Each photograph seemed to depict a different location - a bustling street corner, a dimly lit pub, a nondescript warehouse. Tommy's eyes darted from one image to the next, a bead of sweat forming on his upper lip as the weight of the situation pressed down upon him.

'Nah. Never seen these blokes before.'

'Tommy, I want you to consider your next answer very carefully. I'm going to ask you nicely one more time. Sadly there won't be a third. Do you recognise either of these two men?'

'I told you already. I ain't never seen them two before and that's the God's honest truth.'

Brem-Wilson looked up at Rossi with raised eyebrows. 'What d'you reckon Warden. Is he telling the truth?'

Rossi put his hand on Tommy's shoulder. 'Are you Tommy?'

'I swear Guv, I've never laid eyes on 'em.'

Rossi and Brem-Wilson shared a glance. Rossi nodded and shrugged his shoulders. Brem-Wilson looked back at Tommy, produced a leather wallet from his inside jacket pocket and slid it over to Tommy.

‘Take a look inside Tommy. It won’t bite I can assure you’.

Tommy took the wallet and opened the clasp. Inside was Brem-Wilson’s Home Office ID:

*Commander Phillip Brem-Wilson  
Counter Terrorism Branch  
Security Service (MI5)*

Tommy stared back at Brem-Wilson then at Rossi. ‘What’s all this got to do with me Guv? I ain’t no terrorist. I was banged up for thieving food from the docks. I ain’t no spy. I just wanna go home. I wanna see Lizzie and my baby. I haven’t seen my baby yet. I wanna go home.’

Seeing Tommy was getting upset, Brem-Wilson took Tommy by the arm. ‘Tommy, I think it’s time we told you. But we had to be sure you’re not an associate of these blokes. These gentlemen go by the names of Liam and Nedser Dennett and are brothers. The Dennett family are from Enniskillen in County Fermanagh and were responsible for organising and deploying IRA attack raids on British army barracks in both Northern Ireland and the South of England. The purpose of the attacks was to acquire ordinance – guns, ammunition, explosives and other armaments. They’re gun runners and IRA fund raisers Tommy and we at the Secret Service want to put them away. And we believe you might be able to help us.’

Rossi cleared his throat and spoke in a firm but not unkind

tone. 'So it's nearly noon, Tommy. Let's get you ready for release. Don't forget you're on parole, so behave yourself and listen to your head, not your gut. You won't want to be back in here ever again, not now you've got a family waiting for you. C'mon, let's get the paperwork done, and you can be on your way. I'm sure you're eager to breathe some fresh air and see your loved ones.'

Tommy furrowed his brow, confusion evident in his eyes. 'I don't get it, Guv. I just don't. What's all this got to do with me? Why are you telling me about these Dennett blokes?'

Rossi's expression remained neutral, but there was a hint of something unreadable in his gaze. 'You'll find out soon enough, Tommy. Soon enough. Just keep your wits about you when you're out there. The world's not always what it seems, especially for a man fresh out of prison.'

# Chapter 7

## *They Called for Uncle*

'You want me to do what?'

Constable George Turner gawped at Detective Inspector Bellinger as if he had just asked for his hand in marriage. His jaw hung slack, eyes wide with disbelief. 'You want me to go and fetch Tommy Baker from Wandsworth and bring him here? Are you serious, sir?'

'That's exactly what I want you to do, George. I want you and Constable Jordan to take a marked police car from the pool and be outside Wandsworth nick when the gates open at 13.00 hours sharp. Warden Rossi will have primed Tommy that you'll be waiting for him, so there should be no surprises. I want the two of you there in case he kicks off or tries anything funny.'

'I get that, Sir, but why in blazes would we...'

'Constable, are you disobeying a senior officer's direct order?' Bellinger's tone sharpened, his eyes narrowing.

'No, Sir. Sorry, Sir, and all that, but none of this don't sound right to me. It's all a bit dodgy if you ask me.'

'Don't worry, it will make sense soon enough, but I can't explain it all now. Time is of the essence. Take Jordan, go get Tommy, and bring him here to me. And, he is to be treated nice, understood? No rough stuff.'

'Got it, Sir. Treat him with kid gloves, right.'

'Now get going. The Chief has signed off a car for you. No need for bells and whistles, I don't want any fuss. Just go get him and bring him here quietly. Oh, and George...'

'Yes, Sir?'

'He doesn't know his dad's in hospital, and he's not to know until I see him, understood? Not a peep about it.'

'Bugger me, I don't want to be a fly on the wall when that hits the fan. It'll be like lighting a powder keg.'

'Now d'you get it?'

'Yes Sir, I get it.'

'Alright, now go and grab Jordan and report to Sergeant Baines. He has the car keys and some paperwork for you to sign.'

## Chapter 8

### *At the Gates of HMP Wandsworth*

They say once you're outside the gates of HMP Wandsworth the first thing that hits you is the sweetness of the air. It doesn't matter how long your stay was you never forget the smell inside Wandsworth. If you were lucky enough to have your own cell, the dimensions were so restrictive you could just about touch both opposing walls from a standing position. You had your own toilet and sink but rarely any hot water and if you were lucky, the toilet bowl wasn't cracked or broken. The only saving grace was that time spent at HMP Wandsworth was not long-term. Most of the inmates were only there for a while. The rats however never leave the place and ironically, neither do the screws.

The first thing that caught Tommy's eye as he walked through the gatehouse was how green and lush the trees were in the park opposite Heathfield Road. In December, when he went in, there was nothing but bare branches and slushy streets. The second

thing that caught his eye was a black police car with two officers eyeballing him.

‘Okay, here we fucking go again,’ thought Tommy. ‘A nice welcome committee I’m sure.’ Tommy tucked his string-wrapped, paper parcel under his arm and walked towards the road, at which point the police car doors opened and both officers stepped out putting on their helmets.

‘Tommy!’ called one of the officers.

Tommy tried not to look. ‘I’m busy mate, got a bus to catch.’

‘Tommy, come over here you tosser!’ insisted one of the officers.

Tommy jerked his head towards the pair. ‘What do you two want? I ain’t done nothing, I’ve been in there for four sodding months. I’m going home.’

‘Tommy, come here lad I want a word with you. We’ve come to take you home.’

Tommy stopped in his tracks and took a long look at the pair. ‘Is that you George?’ asked Tommy squinting.

‘Yes Tommy. Now get in the car please. Don’t be a prat.’

Tommy sat in the back of the police car with his paper-wrapped parcel on his knees. George sat beside him while up front, Jordan drove. The car sped through Clapham Common and along Clapham Road heading towards The Elephant and Castle, from



there down the New Kent Road and along to Tower Bridge Road. As the car approached the junction at Tooley Street Jordan indicated right.

'That's the wrong way, mate,' declared Tommy, his voice tinged with frustration. 'I live at Vine Lane Buildings. You want a left here, not a right.'

'All in good time, Tommy,' George replied calmly. 'There's somebody wants a word with you at the station. We're popping in there first, just a quick detour.'

'You've gotta be fucking joking!' Tommy exploded, his face reddening. 'I need to get home and go see Lizzie and my kid. I haven't set eyes on him yet. Christ, I've been locked up for months!'

'Lizzie's fine, Tommy,' offered George, trying to soothe Tommy's agitation. 'Joyce from the pub went to see her over Easter. Your boy is fit and healthy, and Lizzie's made good her recovery. Now for gawd's sake, listen to me. We're taking you to see Detective Inspector Bellinger. He wants a word, that's all.'

'No way!' Tommy shook his head vehemently. 'Is that ponce Snell involved in this? I bet this is all his doing. He's had it in for me from the start.'

'No, Tommy,' confided George, his voice low and reassuring. 'Snell's got nothing to do with this. I promise you that.'

'That's bollocks,' Tommy spat, unconvinced. 'Snell wants me back in, I know it. He wants me to violate my parole and get banged up for the full term. I ain't having it, George. I ain't

having none of it. You can't do this to me, not now!

As the car pulled into Tower Bridge Police Station yard Constable Jordan spoke for the first time.

‘Tommy, I need you to calm down please. You’re not being nicked and you’re not being held. What you are being asked to do is spend an hour with Detective Inspector Bellinger. He has some news you need to hear and some advice to give. Believe me Tommy the last thing you want to do right now is to cause a fuss in there. Everyone’s on alert, and they’re all a bit on edge right now. So please, no fuss and bother. George and I were specifically chosen for this little taxi run. Bellinger didn’t want anyone else from the force involved. You OK with that?’

Tommy slumped back into the seat. ‘I suppose so, but what’s it all about?’

‘Bellinger has all the details Tommy’ assured George. ‘Come on, he’s waiting for you in his office.’

‘Come on in Tommy, take a seat please.’ Bellinger gestured towards the chair in front of him. ‘Please accept my apologies for asking you here at such short and unexpected notice.’

‘What’s this about?’ asked Tommy. ‘You nicking me again for something I didn’t do?’

‘No Tommy, you’re not being nicked, you’re here because we need your assistance in a police matter.’

‘You gotta be kidding me. Why would I want to help the filth.’

George Turner flinched. ‘Watch your mouth Tommy you’re not in Wandsworth now. Don’t use that kind of language in here please, we don’t appreciate it.’

Tommy turned to face up to George, saw the look on Jordan’s face and thought better of it. Bellinger took control once again.

‘Thank you Constable Turner. Tommy, sit down now please, I will not let this interview get out of hand. Trust me.’

‘Here we go again,’ laughed Tommy. ‘Why does every copper and screw want me to trust them, after they’ve banged me up?’

‘I’ll explain. I personally requested that Constables Turner and Jordan pick you up from Wandsworth for two reasons. The first reason is that I can trust these two to keep their bloody mouths shut. Isn’t that right gentlemen?’ George and Jordan nodded. ‘The second reason is that I have some grave news for you.’

Tommy snapped to attention. ‘It’s Lizzie right?’

‘No Tommy it’s not Lizzie, it’s your dad’.

Tommy face froze. He grabbed the arms of the chair and tensed up rising to his feet. Both constables were ready for him and grabbed his shoulders forcing him back in the chair. ‘Ah fuck me don’t tell you’ve nicked my dad. This is Snell again yeah?’

‘No Tommy,’ replied Bellinger. ‘He’s not been nicked, he’s been badly beaten up.’

This time Tommy lunged forwards towards Bellinger beyond the reach of the constables, hands on Bellinger’s desk. ‘You

bastards have you done him in? What has he ever done to piss you lot off? He's only...'

Jordan grabbed Tommy by his arm and wrenched it up the middle of his back causing Tommy to yelp in pain. Bellinger stepped in. 'Sit down Tommy and get that anger out of your system. George, you go outside and if anyone wants to know what the row's all about you tell them we've got it under control here. Jordan you stay here with me for a while. You don't know Constable Jordan do you Tommy.'

'I guess not, should I?'

'Not directly but Constable Jordan comes to us on loan from Special Branch. His 'speciality' is dealing with violent criminals. Isn't that right Constable Jordan.'

'All true Sir,' smiled Jordan looking down at Tommy.

'Now Tommy,' pleaded Bellinger, 'we can do this in one of two ways. We can do this nice or we can do it Constable Jordan's way. What d'you reckon, nice sounds better?'

'Nice sounds better,' agreed Tommy.

'Okey-dokey then. Constable, would you mind leaving us for a moment. Just wait outside with George for me please. I'll handle this from here,' Bellinger said, his tone softening as he addressed Jordan. He could sense the tension in the room dissipating.

'You sure Sir?' Jordan asked, his hand hovering near the doorknob, a hint of concern in his voice.

'Yes Jordan, I can tell Tommy's worked it out. We didn't beat

your dad up Tommy but we know who did and I want you to help us nail the bastards. Deal?' Bellinger leaned forward, his eyes fixed on Tommy's face, searching for any sign of hesitation.

Tommy paused for a moment, weighing his options. He knew he was in a tight spot, but something about Bellinger's demeanour made him want to trust the man. 'Deal,' he agreed, his voice barely above a whisper.

'Right then,' said Bellinger, a hint of satisfaction in his voice. He turned back to Jordan, who was lingering by the door. 'Constable, I tell you what. While you're out there can you rustle up four mugs of tea and bring them in here please. Make sure they're good and strong – we've got a lot to discuss.'

Jordan nodded. 'Consider it done Sir,' he replied. Jordan left Bellinger's office gently closing the door behind him. After a brief, muffled conversation with George Tommy could hear his footsteps echoing down the hall.

'OK, here we go,' said Bellinger, leaning forward in his chair. 'Here's what happened. Do you know the Dennett brothers?'

Tommy furrowed his brow, trying to recall. 'The Dennett brothers? I've heard of them but I don't know them personally. What about them?'

'What do you know about them?' Bellinger pressed, his eyes fixed on Tommy's face.

Tommy shrugged, his frustration evident. 'I didn't know anything about them until this morning. Some geezer from the Security Service cornered me, telling me he needs my help.'

They're gun-runners or something to do with the IRA, apparently. Apart from that I ain't got a clue. Nor do I care, to be honest.'

Bellinger nodded, his expression grave. 'Well, we have an eye witness who is prepared to testify in front of a judge and jury that it was Liam and Nedser Dennett who took your dad out of action. We're not entirely sure why yet, but it all happened at the back of the washhouse at Vine Lane Buildings. The Dennetts run a book up by Dockhead on the Dickens Estate. We suspect they thought someone had bet against them and rigged a race in their favour. The Dennetts wouldn't have liked that one bit. They want all the juice for themselves to fund their friends over in Ireland, so if they'd lost a nice packet of cash courtesy of foul play, the big fish would not have been at all happy. One of the ladies who use the washhouse bumped into the Dennetts, but they scarpered once they saw her. Looking at his wounds, it appears one of them may have whacked your dad from behind, then the two of them probably took turns beating on him while he was defenceless on the floor.'

Tommy's face paled, his hands clenching into fists. 'Where is dad now?' he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Bellinger's expression softened slightly. 'He's at Guy's Hospital, in the Intensive Care Unit. The doctors are doing everything they can for him.'

Tommy flinched baring his teeth. 'I'll fucking kill 'em!'

'Not so fast,' commanded Bellinger. 'We're going to help you

get your own back but, like I said, you have to trust us.'

'Why should I trust you? It was your mongrel Snell that banged me up. And all for what, nicking a couple of boxes of tinned stuff from New Fresh Wharf? Bloody 'ell everybody on the docks does that so why pick on me?'

'Tommy, do you know why I specifically requested George and Jordan to step in and help out? Why I didn't use my own men?'

'Can't say I do.'

'It's because of Snell. I didn't want him involved. If Snell got wind of this and knows you're here with me the whole operation I have in mind to nail those Irish bastards will go pear-shaped. He'll turn the whole thing into his personal vendetta against you.'

'Well he's gonna find out soon enough anyway. He's your sergeant ain't he?'

Bellinger smiled. 'Funny you should say that Tommy. Actually ... he's not any more. I've signed off his transfer to another force. At this moment in time he's probably having his induction training with the Met. So Tommy, from this moment onwards Snell is no longer your, nor my, fucking problem.'

A rap on the glass pane announced the arrival of tea.

'Yep, come in Jordan. Bring George with you please. Let's all sit down over here.' The four moved over to Bellinger's meeting table and took a seat.

'Now Tommy, drink your tea. I'm out of here in five minutes. I

have a meeting with the Chief Inspector. He wants me write a report about all this. All about you Tommy! Fame at last eh! How does that make you feel?’

‘Not sure Guv, only ever seen one police report and that ended me up in Wandsworth.’

‘Ah OK, yeah I get that,’ continued Bellinger. ‘But after you’ve drunk your tea Constables Turner and Jordan will accompany you on your forward journey.’

‘Where we going?’ asked Tommy.

‘Guy’s Hospital you sippy bastard! Your getting a VIP, chauffer-driven ride to see Lizzie and baby James.’

Tommy slapped his hand to his face, unable to restrain his emotions.

‘C’mon Billy-big-bollocks, drink up, let’s go and see your baby,’ offered George ruffling Tommy’s hair. ‘And ... I’m told ... he’s got a full Barnet of black hair just like you!’



# Chapter 9

## *Tea and Ice Cream*

A gentle breeze rustled through the budding leaves of the London plane trees that dominated Potters Fields Park. The sun cast a warm glow over everything, making it a perfect day to be outdoors. The paths were lined with blooming daffodils and tulips, adding splashes of yellow, red, and pink to the landscape. A few families sat across the grassy area, spread out on picnic blankets. Mothers and fathers sat with their children, unpacking their simple lunches wrapped in wax paper: sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, and apples all shared among the family members, while flasks of tea were poured into enamel mugs. The children's playground was a hive of activity, filled with laughter and the screams of youthful energy. The young ones took turns on the swings, flying high into the air with joyous abandon, while others raced each other down the metal slides, landing with a thump and a triumphant grin. Another group of children crowded around a merry-go-round, pushing it faster and faster as their excited squeals fill the air. Nearby, pairs of children laughed out

loud as they balance each other on see-saws, enjoying the simple thrill of the rise and fall.

On the wooden seat beneath the trees sheltering Antonio's ice cream trolley reclined Lizzie, James in her arms. She smiled as she watched the squabbling pigeons pilfering the broken ice cream cornets that spilled from Antonio's trolley. Around her were the ladies of Weaver's Lane. The spring weather had remained kind since the Easter weekend offering Tommy and Lizzie plenty of opportunity to take the air and promenade James in his black, ironclad Royale pram.

From the door of the St. John's Tavern, Ken the landlord appeared carrying a tray piled high with tea cups and saucers followed by Joyce with a huge pot of sugared, milky tea.

'Ere, are girls. Get yer laughing gear around this lot!'

'Aww bless you Ken,' whispered Lizzie. 'But I ain't got the cash to pay you for this lot.'

'Wouldn't dream of taking it Liz,' confided Ken. 'Anyway this was all Joyce's idea. If it was me I'd have gone for a tray of light ales.'

'Ken, you nightmare!' exclaimed Joyce turning, glaring at him. 'Go back inside and get on with some bloody cleaning or something will ya? We're busy cuddling babies here.'

'All right, all right. Stone me, keep yer hair on sweetheart.' Ken winked at Lizzie, and set the tray of cups and saucers on the

bench next to her. ‘Drink up and enjoy ladies. Ice cream next, on the house! Ain’t that so Antonio?’

‘Si, Kennie. Ice-a-cream for the beautiful ladies. Vanilla, strawberry, and choc-o-late. On-na di ‘ouse! ‘

The ladies burst in to a round of applause before settling on the lawn to enjoy the cool of the shade. James, now fast asleep, was being passed around from one lady to another with the care one might take handing fine porcelain. Lizzie watched the ice cream trickle down the sides of her cornet, catching each rivulet with a timely lick. She stretched her arms and tossed her head back to watch the white clouds dancing between the tall branches away up high as the warm breeze caressed her face. Oh, what a difference from Guys Victoria Ward. Too stuffy, too smelly, never an open window to blow away the clouds of smoke coming from the chattering husbands in the waiting room. And never mind the stink of booze that came from them! My God, how they even managed to stand on their own two feet was a complete mystery.

Joyce went round collecting the cups and saucers. Once done she rested the tray on the grass and sat down next to Lizzie. ‘Look over there Lizzie. Who’s this dodgy looking geezer coming toward us?’ Lizzie raised her head and looked around. Free-wheeling down Queen Elizabeth Street Lizzie watched the figure of a stout gentleman dressed in police uniform on a bicycle, his legs outstretched like the stabilisers on a child’s Tri-ang. Slowing to avoid a truck, with a squeal of worn-out brake pads, the mysterious rider picked up speed, pedalling towards the gathering, his police helmet raised above his head in salutation.

‘Greetings dear ladies!’ announced the messenger.

Lizzie sprang up, smiling, waving her arms, her melting ice cream splashing the side of her face.

‘Uncle George! Uncle! It’s me Lizzie!’

‘Jezz woman what’s got into you!’ Joyce jumped up giggling uncontrollably, licking her handkerchief, wiping the ice cream from Lizzies’ face. ‘It’s George not bloody Gary Cooper!’

‘I know, I know,’ protested Lizzie. ‘But I ain’t really seen George since after Tommy was banged up.’

With the grace of an elderly, black swan struggling against a neap tide, George manoeuvred all his weight onto one pedal in an attempt to side-saddle into a landing space for his chariot. Realising gravity was not working in his favour on this occasion he abandoned his trickery with a clatter and threw the damn thing on the grass, staggering to maintain his balance.

Regaining his poise and readjusting his waistcoat and black tie George, complete with cycle clips on both ankles holding the hem of each trouser leg at half mast, swaggered up to Lizzie and put his arms around her giving her a big bear hug.

‘Lizzie my darling! You look fabulous! Radiant!’

‘Oy, put her down you dirty ol’ bugger,’ cried one of the ladies. ‘She’s only just left ’ospital.’

‘I know that you sappy mare, that’s why it’s only a tiny, little hug!’

The ladies burst into giggles as Lizzie swung on George’s neck,

nearly throttling him. ‘Hold up girl, steady on. I’m not as young as I used to be you know.’

‘Uncle, it’s so nice to see you. How have you been?’

‘I’ve been very well my dear. And I assume this is James? God he’s beautiful,’ exclaimed George gazing down at one of the ladies cradling the sleeping cherub.

‘I know,’ Lizzie confessed. ‘Obviously gets his good looks from his mother.’

More giggles.

George took Lizzie by her hand and nestled it in his arm. ‘Lizzie, step over here with me for a moment please. I need to have a word, you know, in private please?’ Lizzie glanced back at the ladies, now silent in expectation.

The lady holding James piped up. ‘Go on Liz, we’ll look after little’n. He’s sound-o.’

‘What’s this about George?’

‘I’m here on police business Lizzie. Sorry and all that but it’s important. Where can I get hold of Tommy please?’

Lizzie’s smile disappeared. ‘Oh gawd, what’s he done now?’

‘He ain’t done nothing wrong at all my lovely. I just want a word that’s all.’

‘He’s in there,’ nodded Lizzie towards the door of the St John’s Tavern. ‘He’s having a beer with Frankie Miller.’

George moved closer to Lizzie, lowering his voice so only she could hear. ‘You couldn’t do us a favour girl could you?’

‘What’s up George?’

‘Just go in there and get Tommy for me. Get him out here. I don’t want to cause a fuss by marching in there in uniform in front of that gobby bugger Frankie Miller. I just want a word. Tell him quietly I have a message for him from Detective Inspector Bellinger. He’ll know what it’s all about. It’s fine, nothing to worry about.’

‘You sure George? This ain’t another set up is it?’

George, sensing Lizzie was getting uncomfortable, took her in his arms again. ‘Come on you, it’s only police business. We all want you and Tommy to be happy together. God knows you’ve been through it lately. Believe it or not we’re on his side this time. Snell’s been transferred out of division so this has nothing to do with him.’

‘Good riddance to that,’ spat Lizzie. ‘He’s just a bad news bastard.’ Lizzie hesitated. ‘If you’re sure George, I’ll go and get him.’

‘Go on then me dear, go get him for me. I’ll make my way around the back by the barrels, so nobody will see us talking. Tell him I’ll see him there in a minute.’

With that, Lizzie turned, strolled past Antonio and his ice cream trolley, crossed Weaver's Lane, opened the door and strode into the smoke of the St. John's Tavern.

‘Come on then Uncle, what’s Bellinger want this time?’ asked

Tommy.

George took a cautionary look around checking for onlookers. 'He wants you to come and talk with him tomorrow. He's put the word around on the street that you want to meet the Dennetts. They've got back through the grapevine that they'll be in The Swan and Sugarloaf on Parkers Row tomorrow dinner time. D'you know it?'

'Yeah I know it. Piss-hole of a place right opposite the Catholic church.'

'They'll be expecting trouble Tommy, you know that yeah?'

'Yeah, and they'll get it.'

'Hold your horses son, there's a plan of attack here. Bellinger wants you to go the Tower Bridge Station at 10.00 am tomorrow morning and ask for him at the desk. Constable Jordan will be hanging around the custody suite so he'll take over once you get there. You'll be led into the interview room so it will look like you're in for routine questioning if anyone gets inquisitive. Bellinger will be called for once you're there. Just don't be late. And please don't turn up smelling of booze. Everything will be explained once you get there. And one more thing, tell nobody. And I mean nobody, not even Lizzie.'

'So what do I tell Lizzie then?'

'Tell her there are certain conditions of parole to be upheld and this is just a routine check up to make sure they're all in place. She'll be OK with that. Tell her I'll be there as well and you'll be in my custody through the meeting until the afternoon,

by which time we'll have you back in time for the pub to open.'

'Sounds fine to me Uncle but what about once I'm in the Sugarloaf. I'll be on my own won't I?'

'Ahhh, well ... that's exactly what Bellinger wants to talk to you about me lad!'



# Chapter 10

## *The Setup*

Constable Jordan raised his hand as Tommy walked through the main doors of Tower Bridge Police Station. ‘Good mooring Tommy, how’s Lizzie and the baby?’

‘They’re doing very well. They’re back home now and loving the weather. I’m told I need to speak to Mr. Bellinger.’

Jordan put his hand on Tommy’s shoulder and pointed to the interrogation room. ‘You take a look inside there please Tommy, I’ll let Detective Inspector Bellinger know you’re here.’

Jordan led Tommy to the interrogation room and opened the door for him. ‘There you go lad, there’s someone in there waiting for you.’

Tommy entered the room to be met by a smiling Constable George Turner.

‘Uncle! You said you’d be here.’

‘Always a man of my word Tommy. Come in, come in. Take a seat,’ offered George closing the door behind him. ‘The others will

be here shortly.'

Within minutes the door reopened and in bustled Bellinger followed by Jordan. Bellinger, full of benevolent smiles, slapped his manila folder on the table and rubbed his hands in anticipation.

'Right then, everybody take a seat. Constable Jordan if you wouldn't mind keeping an eye on the corridor outside, I don't want anyone hanging around ear-wigging.'

Jordan offered his customary, informal salute and, closing the door behind him, took up vigil outside.

'Right then Tommy, here's the situation. At 12.30 pm, two and half hours from now, you will walk into the Swan and Sugarloaf pub in Dockhead and buy yourself a pint. Don't look around just go straight to the counter and only talk to the barman. While he's serving you, tell him you're there to meet somebody called Dennett, pay for the drink and take a seat against the wall somewhere in the middle of the bar, in full view. You got that?'

'Yeah, I got that.'

'As far as the Dennetts are concerned you have never seen their faces before and it's important that you maintain this pretence. If they know you've been primed they're gonna want to know how and who primed you. We don't want to raise their suspicions. Clear?'

'Clear.'

'Right then. Now please be aware, four of Constable Jordan's

colleagues from special branch will already be in the pub. They'll be in plain clothes, you'll neither know who they are nor what they do. Just be assured they're on your side and if it kicks off these guys are trained to act fast.'

'I'm with you boss, but what happens when the Dennetts turn up? What am I expected to do?'

'They will no doubt want to know why you asked to see them. They're not daft so I'm guessing they'll be packing. They'll also expect you to be doing the same. Let them search you if they want to. As you'll be escorted directly from this office you'll be searched by us first to make sure you're clean. Trust me, neither us or you will want this to go wrong.'

'Yeah, yeah, but what do I say? How does this pan out?'

'The Dennetts know you're Jack Baker's boy and they'll assume you're out for revenge. My guess is that they'll take a beat on you right from the very start and threaten you if you play up. Don't react! Just keep shtum. Let them take the lead.'

'So the idea is that eventually it kicks off and Jordan's boys take over?'

'Pretty much, although I don't expect too much heat. They're not on their own turf so they'll want to be in and out with no fuss. Once they leave the pub they'll be met by reinforcements waiting outside. As soon as they get up to leave you make yourself scarce. Your job's then over, Jordan's boys'll do the rest.'

The black, unmarked saloon slowed on Tooley Street passing Shad Thames and the River Neckinger. The car turned left into Mill Street and crawled along at walking pace. The three occupants travelled in silence, alert but calm. As the vehicle approached the junction with Wolseley Street it came to a halt, the hand brake cranked up into its locked position and the engine was shut off.

Constable Jordan shifted in his seat and looked over his shoulder at Tommy. 'D'you know where you are now?'

'Yeah, I think so. If go right here along here it comes out at the fire station yeah?'

'That's right son,' answered Bellinger. 'Turn right again and you're in Parkers Row. The pub's on the corner on the right. We'll wait here for ten minutes if it's alright with you. Once we're sure the coast is clear you can get going.'

Tommy nodded. 'Got it.'

The next ten minutes ticked by. As if on queue rain spots appeared on the windscreen, slowly at first then more persistent. Jordan turned on the wipers but without the engine running they just jumped and scraped around churning the rain and dust into a grey and brown paste making vision impossible.

'This is fucking typical,' declared Bellinger. 'We need eyes Jim. Get out and clean that shit off will you please?'

'Yep, will do Sir.'

‘Hold it there’s someone coming.’

All three occupants fixed their eyes on an elderly gentleman dressed in tweed and trilby, strolling along on the pavement to their left.

‘Let this geezer go by first before anyone leaves this car.’

Jordan agreed. ‘Understood Guv.’

The elderly gentleman passed the car, onwards into the rain until he turned right and disappeared from view. A few minutes later Jordan turned to Tommy.

‘Show time Tommy,’ declare Jordan. ‘Over to you ol’ son. Break a leg!’

Tommy stared back at the pair as he opened the car door. ‘Fucking cheers, much appreciated,’ he grinned.

Jordan chuckled, shaking his head in amusement. ‘Get on with it and good luck, son. Don’t forget my boys are already in there, so you’ve got backup at all times. Just keep your wits about you.’ Tommy nodded, a mixture of nervousness and determination etched on his face. He closed the car door with a solid thunk, the sound muffled by the persistent drizzle.

As Tommy took his first steps toward his destination, Jordan smoothly reversed the sleek black saloon back up Mill Street. The tyres splashed through shallow puddles, sending up small sprays of water. Upon reaching Dockhead, Jordan swung the car around, its engine purring to life as he accelerated. The vehicle sped away into the misty London drizzle, leaving Tommy to face his task alone – or so it seemed.

The Swan and Sugarloaf was uncommonly busy for a lunchtime. The pub was decked out with dark wooden panelling and stained glass windows that cast colourful patterns on the worn carpet. The imposing bar was made from polished oak, lined with brass railings and populated with beer pumps. The walls were adorned with an eclectic mix of memorabilia - black and white photographs of old Bermondsey, a dartboard, and advertisements for various ales and cigarettes.

A group of men in suits, some with their jackets draped over the backs of their chairs, ties slightly loosened, chatted about the latest football results. In the corner by the dartboard, a group of factory workers clad in overalls discussed their morning shift, faces flushed from the warmth of the pub and the effects of a few drinks. At the bar a solitary, elderly gentleman dressed in tweed nursed his half-pint of mild, his trilby tipped back on his head, his pipe clenched between his teeth emitting a thin stream of smoke that curled up through the haze towards the nicotine stained ceiling. On the bar in front of him lay a crumpled copy of the Daily Express. As he turned the pages he glanced up to observe the bustling room with a seasoned eye.

The door to the saloon bar swung open as a young stranger walked in from the squall turning down his jacket collar. He approached the counter and ordered a pint. The barman looked him up and down as he cranked the beer pump.

‘Summer’s arrived then by the look of it, aye,’ declared the

barman from behind a handlebar moustache that bounced up and down as he spoke.

‘Yeah,’ replied the young stranger. ‘Probably just a shower that’s all.’

‘Hope you’re right sonny,’ replied the moustache. ‘That’s one and tuppence, sure.’

Tommy turned over his change picked out the required sum and handed it to the barman. ‘Tell me something. I’m here to meet a geezer by the name of Dennett. D’you know him?’

The barman counted the change then looked back at Tommy.

‘Mr. Dennett you say? And what would youse be wanting with Mr. Dennett young man?’

‘Ah well, that’s for me to know ain’t it.’

The barman punched in the keys of the till, threw the change in the drawer and shoved it closed with a tinkle and a clang.

‘Well now, seeing as ye’ve asked so politely I’ll be sure to inform Mr Dennett of your arrival ... should I see him that is.’

‘Good idea. Cheers. I’ll be sitting over there.’ Tommy turned and walked over to a table adjacent to the door, resisting the temptation to look around. Moving the chairs around he sat with his back to wall, put his pint down on the table and taking a deep breath raised his head to take in the scenery.

The hands on the wall clock clunked away the passing minutes until the pub door opened once more and two thick-set men entered. Tommy watched as they ordered their drinks from

the barman who, upon handing them their change, pointed over to Tommy. The two men took a brief glance his way then turned their attention back to the barman. Assuming these two gentlemen were the Dennetts, Tommy took the opportunity to take a good look around the bar. As his gaze wandered from table to table his attention was drawn to a few individuals who raised their glasses to him in acknowledgement.

*‘Must be Jordan’s men then. Thank God for that.’*

Tommy took a sup from his pint as the two men at the bar turned to face him. They approached Tommy’s table grabbing two chairs in the process, set them either side of the table in front of him taking up residence.

‘Now then sonny, I hear you want to talk to me?’

Tommy put his glass on the table not breaking eye contact with speaker. ‘Mr. Dennett is it?’

‘Aye sonny, Liam Dennett at your service. The gentleman to my left is my brother Nedser. Nedser’s not much for talking.’

‘I’m Tommy Baker,’ declared Tommy. ‘I’m the son of the man you nearly topped last week.’

‘How is the awl fella? Making a sound recovery?’

‘Not really mate. He’s in a bad way to be honest. They don’t reckon he’ll be out of Guys for a while. But not to worry, he’s got a loyal and loving family around him so I reckon things will be back to normal pretty soon and he’ll be out on the street doing business again. It’s just a pity he seems to have lost his working cash. I was thinking you might know something about that.’



‘You think?’

‘Yeah, all the time. You should try it.’

Nedser raised his finger to Tommy’s face shaking his head.

‘Is that thing loaded mate?’

‘Aye it is,’ replied Nedser.

‘Well why don’t you shove it up your arse and blow your fucking brains away.’

Liam grabbed Nedser’s arm. ‘Now, now gentlemen. Let’s play fair, we’re all guests here and the landlady’s a friend of Mrs. Dennett. Keep it sweet.’

Nedser intervened. ‘You keep you’re fekkin’ gob shut or I’ll shut it for ye!’

‘Well if I did that you won’t hear what I’ve come here to tell you will ya?’

‘And what exactly is that?’ asked Liam.

‘I’ve come here to explain to you what is going to happen next. I’ll say it slowly so it’ll have time to sink in to your thick, fucking skulls.’

Liam smiled. ‘This oughta be good. Let’s have it.’

‘There was a witness, a good friend of the family actually. This witness is prepared to stand up in court and testify it was you two that kicked the shit out of my dad and robbed him of his cash.’

‘So?’ questioned Liam. ‘We’re not afraid of some old biddy mouthing off. We can soon shut her up.’ The Dennetts looked at each other and nodded in agreement.

‘Ah yeah, the old school way,’ chipped in Tommy. ‘I wouldn’t try that if I were you.’

‘Why the fuck not,’ demanded Liam.

‘IF you do you’ll have me and the rest of the family to deal with.’

‘Oh fuck! Help!’ chuckled Liam. ‘Jesus save us!’

Amidst the lunchtime crowd, Tommy noticed a couple of women in smart skirts and blouses, probably office workers sharing a quick drink and a laugh with colleagues before heading back to work. Sensing tension at Tommy’s table they quickly finished their drinks, gathered up their belongings and headed out the door.

‘Nedser, show young Tommy here what happens if our Holy work is interrupted in some way.’ Nedser pulled back the left-hand flap of his jacket revealing a hand gun in a shoulder holster.

‘Now here’s how I see it. If I hear any more shit like this we will take this to the next level. You wouldn’t want to put your lovely girlfriend’s and your bastard son’s lives at risk would you?’

Tommy’s face hardened holding eye contact with Liam. ‘*Say that again you cunt!*’ he shouted standing up knocking his pint to the floor with a crash. Everybody in the bar froze, staring at Tommy’s table. Then from the back of the bar a scream rang out that took Tommy’s attention. Nedser was standing next to him, his arm outstretched, his firearm in his hand pointing at Tommy’s head.

‘Put that fekkin’ thing away you eejit!’ bellowed Liam. ‘You’ll

get us both knicked!

The room turned to uproar as customers clambered to leave the bar. Liam grabbed Nedser's wrist, not fast enough to prevent a round being fired into the pub wall.

'Come on you oonchook, let's get the fuck out of here!' screamed Liam pulling Nedser towards the door.

As the pair fled Jordan's men sprang to their feet. 'Freeze! Don't move!'

A man dressed in overalls shoved Tommy to the floor as the remainder of Jordan's men sprang into action rushing to the door in pursuit.

Outside the pub Liam and Nedser Dennett panicked. 'Come on Nedser, scam. Those bastards are coppers for sure. It's a set up!'

As they ran past the fire station the doors of the pub burst opened and Jordan's men emerged and took chase. With that a black saloon skidded around the corner and screeched to a halt in front of the Dennetts. A shot rang out and Nedser fell to the floor. Jordan's men froze looking around them and seeing the barrel of a shotgun sticking out from the rear window of the black saloon.

Liam stared down at his brother lying in a pool of blood. 'Nedser, what have they done to ye?' cried out Liam, dropping to his knees. He clutched Nedser's jacket and flipped him over on his back. The hole in Nedser's chest confirmed what Liam was dreading. There was no way Nedser could have survived.

The driver of the black saloon crunched the car into gear and

lurched up to the door of the pub as Tommy emerged. The rear door was flung open and a voice bellowed from within.

‘Tommy, get in the car.’

Tommy was rooted to the spot, dazed at the bloodshed.

‘Tommy, get in the fucking car now.’

Liam rose to his feet in time to see Tommy staring at him across the roof of the vehicle before he was bundled into the back and the black saloon roared away.

*The End (for now)*

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A woman with dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a black lace headscarf and a black lace necklace with a large black teardrop pendant. She has a black forehead ornament with a teardrop pendant. The background is dark and textured.

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