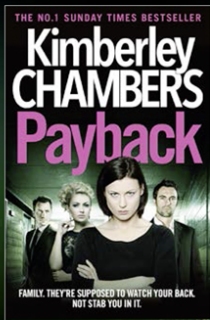
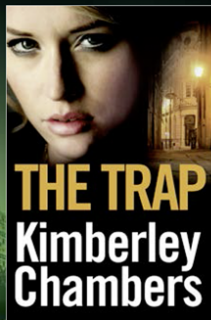
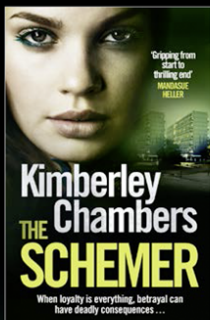


# Kimberley CHAMBERS

NUMBER ONE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER



**Kimberley Chambers**  
**Kimberley Chambers 3-**  
**Book Collection: The**  
**Schemer, The Trap, Payback**

**Аннотация**

\*The books included in this collection have been previously published\*Three thrilling novels from #1 Sunday Times bestselling author Kimberley ChambersThe SchemerThe TrapPaybackTHE SCHEMERIt's 1983 and Stephanie Crouch is desperate to escape the council house she shares with her overbearing family, but at fourteen years old she has nowhere to go.When Stephanie meets East End wide-boy Barry, his cockney charm and quick tongue soon have her head over heels in love. But too young to control their fate, Stephanie and Barry are torn apart, and Barry is heartbroken Stephanie falls for his best mate, still left in London...Ten years later, Barry returns to England, and within a month Stephanie's happy world is turned upside down.Is Barry to blame? Or should Stephanie look elsewhere to find the schemer who has ruined her life?THE TRAPThe heir to Martina Cole's crown with a story of murder, the underworld, violence and treachery. When it comes to family they look after business and make their mother proud. Nothing and no one can bring the Butler's down.But Vinny seems to have crossed the wrong person and his cards

are marked. And with the brothers joined at the hip, Roy may just be in the firing line too... Will the Butlers emerge stronger than ever, or is the East End code of honour as good as dead? **PAYBACK** The Butlers are back in this gripping, compulsive sequel to **THE TRAP**. The Butler brothers are the Kings of the East End, and their motto is 'what goes around, comes around'. In their world, family counts; so when the truth about Vinny's cousin's death comes to light, it rocks the Butlers to the core. One by one, Vinny's friends and family are turning against him... Then, the unimaginable happens – Vinny's little daughter Molly goes missing. She's the one chink of light in all their lives, and the one they'd commit murders to bring back. But is it already too late for that? Perfect for fans of Martina Cole.

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**KIMBERLEY CHAMBERS**  
**3-BOOK COLLECTION**  
*The Schemer The Trap Payback*  
**Kimberley Chambers**



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'Gripping from  
start to  
thrilling end'

MANDASUE  
HELLER

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**THE**  
**SCHMER**

When loyalty is everything, betrayal can



**KIMBERLEY CHAMBERS**

*The Schemer*

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# Dedication

*In loving memory of*

*Helena Ann Lewis*

*1970–2011*

‘Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another ...’

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’

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# Prologue

The woman sat on the deck sipping a glass of vintage champagne. The weather was glorious and the heavenly smell of the ocean always had a calming effect on her. As the man reappeared, the woman smiled at him lovingly. Usually when they sailed their boat, they brought friends along with them, but today the man had insisted they sail alone. ‘I wanted it to be just the two of us for once; that’s why I never told you we were going out on the boat until this morning. I wanted to surprise you and spoil you rotten.’

And surprised and spoiled rotten the woman had been. Mussels in garlic butter, salmon en croûte, strawberries and cream were all prepared and served up for her by her wonderful man. She had a surprise for him also and, as soon as he sat back down, she would tell him what she had been dying to tell him for weeks.

‘Come over ’ere, babe, and look at this,’ the man said, gesticulating for the woman to join him.

The woman walked over to the right-hand side of the boat and put her arms around the man’s toned, suntanned waist. ‘I can’t see nothing. What am I meant to be looking at?’ she asked, rather bemused.

Knowing it was now or never, the man forcefully grabbed the woman by the shoulders, and swung her around so that her back was positioned against the gunwale. ‘I’m sorry, but me and

you are over. I don't love you any more and I'm going back to England.'

'Stop mucking about. You're not funny,' the woman said, with a hint of panic in her voice.

'I ain't fucking mucking about,' the man replied, as he put one hand around the woman's throat and used his other to lift her up by the crotch.

'Please God no! Why would you want to do this to me? Why?' the woman screamed, as her feet left the safety of the deck.

'Because you know too much about me,' the man replied, his face devoid of emotion. With one last movement, he threw her to the mercy of the sharks. The last words he heard her scream were, 'I'm pregnant.' Putting his hands over his ears so he didn't have to listen to anything else she might yell out, the man then calmly returned to the helm.

# CHAPTER ONE

1983

Stephanie Crouch's stomach was full of butterflies as she marched up Dagenham Heathway hill towards the train station. It had taken her ages to decide what to wear, but she was happy with her choice of denim pedal-pushers, a *Flashdance*-inspired ripped grey sweatshirt and gold pump ballet shoes. Not only did she look trendy, but felt comfortable as well.

'Hurry up, Tam. You're walking as fast as a tortoise,' Stephanie complained to her best friend.

Tammy Andrews stopped dead in her tracks. The stereo system she was carrying on her shoulder had all but broken her back. 'Sod you, Steph. You can carry it the rest of the way yourself. I ain't one of them donkeys, you know.'

Laughing, Steph handed her pal the carrier bag of goodies they'd purchased earlier and relieved her of her burden.

'Why did you drag us up 'ere so early anyway? You know he don't get back till about six and it's only half four. We should have drank our cider in the park and then come up 'ere. My mum will kill me if anyone she knows catches me drinking and smoking.'

Ignoring her friend's concerns, Stephanie stood outside the station and planned her next move. She knew that Wayne Jackman went to every West Ham home game and she knew he arrived back at Dagenham Heathway at approximately six

o'clock. 'I don't want him to think we're waiting for him, so I think we should sit opposite the station. He lives in Digby Gardens, so he's bound to cross the road,' Steph said, confidently.

Unlike Stephanie, Tammy was no fan of Wayne Jackman, the school heart-throb. Wayne, who was usually referred to as Jacko, was in the year above them at Dagenham Priory. Although Tammy had never spoken to him on a one-to-one basis, she'd seen and heard enough about him to know that he was bad news. He might be breathtakingly good looking with his blond hair and piercing blue eyes, but he was also flash, blatantly loved himself and had a reputation of being a bit of a bully.

Holding the stereo system between them, the girls strolled across the pedestrian crossing, sat down on the pavement outside a shop and delved into their bag of goodies. Neither came from wealthy families, so the three pounds they both received as pocket money every week was pooled together at the weekend to ensure they had a good time. Strongbow cider, twenty Embassy Number One, two packets of Hubba Bubba bubble gum, chips and magazines was all they ever treated themselves to.

Stephanie pressed the play button on the stereo and ignored the disapproving looks of passers-by as the music blared out of the speakers.

'I hate this shit music,' Tammy complained.

Stephanie laughed. Whereas she was deemed very attractive, Tammy was classed as the opposite. Fairly plump with reddish-gingery hair, most of the lads at school took the piss out

of Tammy. Her nickname was Tampax or ginger minge, but Stephanie adored her best friend. In Steph's eyes, she was beautiful, loving and extremely funny.

Singing at the top of her voice to New Edition's 'Candy Girl' Steph handed her friend the fags and matches while she opened a bottle of cider.

'I bought a tape with me with "Baby Jane" on it. Can't we put that on, Steph?'

Stephanie shook her head vehemently. Wayne Jackman was a casual and was always dressed in designer tracksuits. He even owned a real Burberry jacket and he certainly wouldn't be impressed if he walked out of the station and heard the dulcet tones of Rod Stewart blaring out.

'You can put "Baby Jane" on when he's gone. Casuals like soul music, Tam, and I don't wanna put him off me.'

Tammy sighed. Ever since Wayne Jackman had last week wolf-whistled at Stephanie in the alleyway that led from the upper to the lower school, Steph had spoken of little else. 'Why don't you just ask him out? I'll do it for you if you like,' Tammy suggested.

Stephanie immediately shook her head. 'No! I'm gonna wait for him to ask me out.'

'Hide that cider, quick. One of my mum's mates is crossing the road,' Tammy hissed.

Stephanie put the cider back in the carrier bag, turned around and checked her hair in the reflection of the shop window. She'd

recently grown her hair long and had begged her mum to let her have one of the shaggy perms that were currently all the rage. ‘No. We can’t afford it and you’re far too young to be putting silly substances on your hair. Don’t wanna go bald before you’re twenty, do you?’ her mum had told her yet again this morning.

Annoyed at not being allowed to have the perm she craved, Stephanie had created her own shaggy look. Instead of blow-drying her hair straight like she usually did, Steph had towel-dried it so it looked as if as if she’d just got out of bed, then plastered it with lacquer to make it stand on end.

‘I hope Wayne likes my hair like this. Do you reckon he’ll like it? Or do you think he’ll prefer it the other way?’

Turning her head so that her mum’s friend wouldn’t stop for a chat, Tammy glared at her friend. ‘You’re really doing my head in now, Steph. Light me a snout and give me a bottle of that cider. If I don’t chill out, I’m gonna scream.’

Pamela Crouch picked up the cloth, squeezed the excess water back into the bucket, then proudly set to work on cleaning her front door. Unlike some of her frowsy neighbours, Pam had been born and bred in the East End of London, where pride in the cleanliness of one’s abode was of the utmost importance. Dagenham was different. People’s standards here were lower than in good old Mile End.

Thinking of her dear old mum’s strict values, Pam smiled sadly. It would be a year next week since the cancer had so cruelly taken her wonderful mother away from her, and Pam still thought

about her each and every day.

‘Pam, the old slapper’s on her way home. Got a big black man with her today she has.’

Pam dropped her cloth and ran over to the garden fence to greet her next-door neighbour, Cathy. Like herself, Cathy was originally from the East End and, over the ten years they’d been neighbours, their friendship had grown from strength to strength. ‘I can’t see her,’ she said, looking from left to right.

‘She was in Sainsbury’s. You should of seen the trolley-load of drink she had. The black man was definitely with her, I saw him put his hand on her arse. She must be on her way home with the booze. Where else would she take it?’

Pam shook her head in disgust. Ever since the old slapper had recently moved into the house opposite, she had been her and Cath’s main topic of conversation. Marlene was her name, and the only other bit of information they could find out about her was that she’d lived in Bethnal Green before moving to Dagenham. It wasn’t just the number of men Pam and Cath had seen visit the house that had earned Marlene her nickname. It was the over-the-top way she dressed, her snooty, up-her-own-arse attitude, her pregnant fifteen-year-old daughter, and the fact that she had old bits of sheet hanging in her windows rather than proper curtains.

‘Ere she comes, look. I can’t believe she’s got the front to walk about dressed like a film star, yet she’s got rotten old sheets for curtains. Talk about all fur coat and no knickers,’ Cathy said,

bluntly.

Pam surreptitiously glanced at Marlene and the black man. 'I bet he's a Ford worker. Probably got some poor unsuspecting wife tucked away somewhere,' she whispered.

Cathy's lip curled up. Her old man had got one of the barmaids in East Ham Working Man's Club pregnant, hence their messy divorce. Clocking the hatred towards Marlene on Cathy's face, Pam linked arms with her. 'Come on, let's go indoors and have a nice cuppa, shall we? I've got some cream cakes if you fancy one?'

'Let me pop in mine and sort my Michael's dinner out first. I'll give you a knock in about a half-hour or so,' Cath replied.

Pam shut the front door, made a pot of tea and plonked herself down on the armchair to rest her tired legs. She was only thirty-five, but life hadn't been kind to her and she sometimes felt twenty years older. At five foot one, Pam had always had an enormous appetite and had never been the slimmest of women, but since her husband had died, she'd gorged day and night just for comfort. Bringing up two daughters alone wasn't easy, and even though she now had a job in a bakery, money was still scarce. David's death had been a terrible shock at the time. He'd only been working as a steel erector for a month, when the police had knocked on Pam's door and informed her of his accident. She'd dashed straight up the hospital, but after falling from thirty foot of scaffolding, David had never regained consciousness. Her daughters Stephanie and Angela had both adored their father,

and telling them the awful news was the most difficult thing Pam had ever had to do. Thankfully, at four and three years old respectively, the girls had been far too young to understand the enormity of what had happened and had just accepted the news of David's death as children that age tend to do.

Glancing at the picture of her mum on the mantelpiece, Pam sighed. Her wonderful mother, Ada, was the only person who had truly helped her cope after David's death. A matriarch East Ender, she had sort of taken over in her own way, and had been there for Pam and the kids whenever she'd been called upon. Losing her mum to cancer was horrendous for Pam. Her dad, Arnold, was still alive, but he was a simple man who had no idea how to cope with Linda's wants and needs. Linda was Pam's only sister and had sadly been born with dwarfism. Under the circumstances, Linda had led life to the full. She had attended mainstream schools, had always worked, and had much more of a social life than Pam had herself. However, her mum had always worried about Linda's welfare and had made Pam promise that if anything happened to her, she would look after her younger sister. A woman of her word, Pam had stuck to her promise. She had turfed Angela out of her bedroom and made her share with Steph, then Linda had moved into Angela's old room. Her daughters weren't happy about the sharing situation. They'd always got on fairly well as young children, but now they argued like cat and dog.

Pam was jolted back to reality by the arrival of her youngest

daughter.

‘Where’s my shiny black leggings, Mum? Did you get ’em dry for me?’

Pam felt awful as she leapt out of the armchair. She had totally forgotten to wash the leggings and, unlike Steph who was little trouble at all, Angie was a demanding little cow at times. ‘Oh, I’m so sorry, love. I’ve been so busy all day, it slipped my mind. Shall I rinse ’em through now for you?’

Angela Crouch looked at her mother in complete and utter disbelief. One thing she had asked her to do, one small thing, and she couldn’t even manage that. ‘Don’t bother! I’ll have to wear them dirty. I bet if Steph had asked you to wash her leggings, you wouldn’t have forgotten, would you?’

‘Yes, I would have! Why don’t you wear your white ones I bought you down the Sunday market?’ Pam asked, with an apologetic tone to her voice.

‘Because they ain’t black and they ain’t shiny Lycra. This is the most important night of my life, Mum, and thanks to you it’s ruined now.’ Angela stomped out the room. In her eyes, her Miss Goody Two Shoes of a sister was the apple of her mother’s eye. Steph was the well-behaved, clever one who got great school reports. For years Angie had had to listen to her mum bigging Steph up to anyone who would care to listen, while the only mention she ever got was for underachieving or misbehaving.

Feeling second best did not suit Angela one little bit and it had made her harbour a secret hatred for her sister. She longed for

Steph to slip up and dash her mother's dreams of grandeur. That would be hilarious.

Slamming her bedroom door, Angela walked over to her sister's bed. Unlike Angela, who had posters of her favourite popstars on the wall that her headboard rested against, Stephanie had a photo of herself and their deceased father. Angie stared at it, then casually took her nail scissors out of her make-up bag. She snipped the string and smiled as she heard the sound of breaking glass.

Stephanie Crouch felt her body shaking with pure lust as Wayne Jackman stood outside Dagenham Heathway Station chatting to some pals. Dressed in a striking blue Fila tracksuit and white Adidas trainers, Wayne looked the absolute nuts, and Steph was aware of the glances he was attracting from other girls.

'Don't his hair look cool? I think he's got Brylcreem or something on it today. It don't look as blond as it does in school, does it? Do you reckon he's dyed it? Or, do you reckon it's the product he's used that's making it look darker?'

Bored shitless, and positive that Wayne didn't bathe and his hair was just greasy, Tammy Andrews ignored her friend's stupid questions and turned the volume on the stereo up.

'Quick, he's coming. Rewind it to Shalamar "A Night to Remember" while I light the snout up,' Steph said, with a hint of panic in her voice. She needed Wayne to see her drinking and smoking, otherwise he might just see her as some silly schoolgirl.

Tammy watched in amazement as Wayne and his two mates

crossed the road and sauntered past her and Angela as though they didn't exist. 'Well, say something then. He ain't gonna notice you if you sit there like a tailor's dummy, is he?' she spat at Steph.

Overcome by nerves, Steph had all but lost her voice. 'I can't think of nothing to say,' she croaked, her mind completely blank.

Furious that they'd wasted hours dossing about up the Heathway when they could have been having a laugh with the lads over the park, Tammy stood up. 'Oi, Jacko,' she shouted out.

'Stop it! What you doing?' Steph squirmed, pulling at her friend's sleeve.

'Whaddya want?' Wayne asked, as he casually approached Tammy with his hands dug deep in his tracksuit pockets. His best pals, Mark Potter and Chris Cook, stood beside Wayne like two bodyguards.

'We wondered if you wanted to meet us over the park tonight. There's a party over there and loads of us are going. We're all gonna get smashed, ain't we, Steph?' Tammy said, trying to sound cool.

'It all depends if you're gonna let us have a feel around that ginger minge of yours,' Mark Potter said, chuckling.

'You don't wanna feel round there. They don't call her Tampax for nothing, you know,' Chris Cook chipped in.

'You're such a wanker, Cooksie,' Wayne said, laughing. None of the lads called one another by their first names. Jacko, Potter and Cooksie sounded far more hip than Wayne, Mark and Chris.

When Wayne knelt down beside her, Stephanie's face

reddened to a similar colour as Tammy's hair.

'Gonna offer me some of that cider, sexy?' he asked.

Hands shaking, Steph passed him the bottle she was holding.

'Gissa fag. Potter will have one an' all,' Cooksie said to Tammy.

Annoyed at the way the boys had taken the piss out of her, Tammy shook her head. 'We've only got six left and they've gotta last us all night,' she replied, haughtily.

'We've only got six left and they've got to last us all night,' Cooksie chanted, mimicking Tammy's voice.

Ignoring his pal's laughter, Wayne winked at Steph. He could tell how much she fancied him. He had the same effect on most girls, and he loved playing on his attractiveness and winding them up. 'So, why did you really call us over here? Did you wanna ask me something?' Wayne asked, staring at Steph intently with his piercing blue eyes.

Feeling as though she was about to faint, Steph shook her head frantically. Letting Wayne know that she fancied him was totally out of the question, so she had no option other than to lie. 'Tammy wanted to call you over. She fancies Potter,' Steph blurted out.

'You lying cow! I heard that and I do not fancy Potter. The reason we called you over is because Steph's got the hots for you, Jacko. Been doing my head in ever since you whistled at her in the alley. All I hear is Wayne this and Wayne that, so on Steph's behalf, will you go out with her?'

When Potter and Cooksie burst out laughing, Stephanie hung her head in shame. She'd experienced some embarrassing times in her life, none more so than when she'd fallen off the stage dressed as Rizzo out of *Grease* during her school play, but this beat that cringeworthy moment hands down.

Wayne chuckled. He could sense Stephanie's humiliation and was rather enjoying the enormous effect he was having on her. 'So, you wanna go out with me?' he asked, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes.

Stephanie shrugged. 'Yeah, I suppose so,' she replied, in almost a whisper.

Wayne grinned at Potter and Cooksie, then turned his attention back to Steph. 'Ask me properly and I'll see what I can do for you.'

Stephanie glanced at Tammy. This was all her bloody fault. 'Will you go out with me?' she mumbled, unable to look Wayne in the eye.

'Sorry, still can't hear you properly,' he replied, cockily.

Knowing it was shit-or-bust time, Steph decided to stand up and brave it. Wayne must fancy her as much as she fancied him, else why would he want her to ask him out in the first place? 'Will you go out with me, Jacko?' she asked, boldly.

Wayne ran his hand through his trendy wedge haircut and smirked at his pals. 'I can't I'm afraid, darling. I've already got a bird and I've gotta dash now as I'm gonna be late meeting her. See you around, Steph.'

When Potter and Cooksie burst out laughing, Steph's eyes filled up with tears. Wayne Jackman had made her look a complete and utter idiot and she knew she'd be a laughing stock at school on Monday morning.

As the lads walked away in high spirits, Tammy tried to hug her best friend. 'Jacko's an arsehole, you're worth a hundred of him, Steph,' she said, truthfully.

Feeling both furious and degraded, Steph violently pushed Tammy away. 'This is all your fault. If you hadn't opened your big mouth, none of this would have happened. I hate you Tammy Andrews, and I never want to see you again.'

Bursting into a flood of uncontrollable tears, Stephanie picked up her purse and ran off as fast as she could.

With little money left every week out of their wages, Pam and Cathy did virtually all their socializing indoors. Neither women were big drinkers, but most Saturday nights they liked to share a bottle of Liebfraumilch between them. Sunday was the only day that neither woman worked, so it was nice to let their hair down a bit.

'How's the café been this week? Busy?' Pam asked her friend. 'Yeah, not bad. We keep attracting a crowd of school-kids though. The little sods are bunking off from the Priory, I think. Bleedin' nuisance they are.'

Pam chuckled. Cathy worked in a café in Broad Street Market, which was only a spit's throw from their homes in Manning Road. 'What about you? How's the eating-in idea working out?' Cath

asked, as she opened the bottle of wine.

Pam worked in a bakery in Dagenham East that had recently expanded and started an eating-in service.

'It's really begun to take off now. We've even started selling cooked breakfasts and jacket potatoes,' Pam said, excitedly. She was hoping the extra business would give her a much-needed pay rise.

'Quick, come 'ere. There's a blue van just pulled up outside the old slapper's with an old boy and a young fella in it,' Cath exclaimed.

'Someone's moving in by the looks of that mattress. I saw the black man leave about half an hour ago. Surely she ain't got another victim already?' Pam said, laughing.

'Well, it can't be the young one, he's younger than my Michael. She's gotta be moving the old boy in, surely?' Cath said, bemused.

'How is your Michael? I ain't seen him for ages. Still loved-up, is he?'

Unable to take her eyes away from the window in case she missed anything worth noting, Cath nodded her head. Her eldest son, Pete, had recently got married, and now it looked as though her youngest was about to fly the nest too.

'Only comes home to bring his washing back and stuff his face now. She's a nice girl, that Jane he's with, but I wish she didn't already have a kid. I reckon he'll move in with her soon, but I do worry about him, Pam. I mean, taking on another man's child

ain't ideal, is it? And I've just found out the father of the kid is in prison. It's times like this I rue the day I moved to Dagenham, mate. If I had put me foot down with that philandering bastard of a husband of mine and insisted on staying in Poplar, my Michael wouldn't have even met this bleedin' bird.'

Pam nodded understandingly. Both her and Cathy's husbands had been born and bred in Barking, which was why they had ended up with council houses under Barking and Dagenham council. In Pam's case, her David had insisted Dagenham was a nicer area to raise children than the East End, but Pam had never been truly happy living there. She missed the old estate she had lived on and her frequent trips to Roman Road market. The pie-and-mash shops in Dagenham were rotten, in Pam's opinion, and not a patch on Kelly's up the Roman.

'Your Steph's home, looks upset she does,' Cathy warned her friend.

Pam ran out into the hallway to greet her eldest daughter. It was very unusual for Steph to arrive home before her weekend ten o'clock curfew, so she knew something must be wrong. 'Whatever's the matter?' she asked, clocking her daughter's tear-stained face.

'Nothing. Leave me alone,' Steph replied, trying to duck past her mother so she could run up the stairs.

Petrified that her daughter had been attacked, or even worse, Pam grabbed hold of Stephanie's shoulders. 'You ain't going nowhere, young lady, until you tell me what's happened. Has

someone touched you?’

Collapsing into Pam’s arms, Steph cried more tears than she’d ever cried before.

Unaware of the drama that was currently going on downstairs, Angela Crouch had got over her earlier sulk and was now thoroughly looking forward to her big night out. Unlike her sister, Steph, Angie had been into boys from a very young age. At ten, she’d had her very first French kiss and at twelve she had let Gary Ratcliffe tit her up, the Dagenham term for touching someone’s breasts. However, even though she’d had plenty of boyfriends, Angie had never been in love before, not until now, anyway.

Turning the music up to Kool and the Gang’s ‘Get Down On It’, Angela stood in front of the mirror singing into her hairbrush. Even though both she and her sister had always been called pretty, Angela knew she knocked spots off Steph in that department. Angie was twenty months younger than her sister and shorter in height, but knew she looked older. ‘Get down on it, suck my helmet,’ Angie sang, flicking her hair over her shoulders seductively. Her new boyfriend had taught her the rude lyrics to the song and Angie thought they were hilarious. Glancing at the Swatch watch her mum had recently bought her for her thirteenth birthday, Angie took the needle off the record. She’d arranged to meet her boyfriend at 7.30 outside the Princess Bowling Alley along the A13, and she didn’t want to be late.

‘What’s a matter with you?’ she asked, as her sister barged into the room and threw herself onto her bed face downwards.

‘Don’t ask! I ain’t going a school Monday. I’ve asked Mum to find me a new school ’cause I ain’t never going back to Priory again,’ Steph wept.

Whereas she herself could turn on the waterworks on a regular basis just to get her own way, Angie had rarely seen Steph as upset before. She sat on the bed next to her, hoping that something bad had happened. ‘What’s up? I dunno what happened to your photo by the way. I was doing my make-up and it fell on the floor. I reckon the string must have snapped.’

‘Sod the photo. I’ve fallen out with Tammy and I’ve made a complete fool of myself over a boy. I am such a fucking idiot, I hate myself.’

‘Why have you fallen out with Tam?’ Angie asked, surprised. She knew how close her sister and Tammy Andrews were, and she had never known them to argue in all the years they’d known one another.

Needing to get the whole episode off her chest, Stephanie began at the beginning of the story and told her sister everything that had happened.

‘But if you lied and said that Tammy fancied this boy’s mate, then you can’t blame her, Steph. It’s you that’s out of order. Who is the boy anyway? Why won’t you tell me his name?’

‘Because he goes to our school and I know what a big mouth you’ve got. Enough people are gonna find out what happened as it is, without you telling all your mates an’ all,’ Steph replied, truthfully.

‘I won’t say nothing, I promise. Tell me his name?’ Angie asked, nosily. She was thoroughly enjoying her sister’s despair and wanted to know more.

‘Swear on Mum’s life you won’t tell anyone,’ Steph said, solemnly.

When Angela crossed her heart with her right hand and repeated the oath, Steph sat up and squeezed her sister’s hand. ‘It was Wayne Jackman. He’s in the fifth year, do you know him?’

The look on Angela’s face immediately changed from a look of false concern to one of contorted rage. She snatched her hand away from her sister’s and stood up. ‘Wayne’s my boyfriend, you slag!’ she exclaimed.

Stephanie looked at her sister in pure amazement. Angela was only in the second year at Priory – she’d missed out on being in the year above because she had been born a week too late – so there was no way she could be dating Wayne, who was in the fifth year.

‘You gotta be joking, Ange. Jacko wouldn’t go out with a second-year girl. You sure you’ve got the right boy?’

With hatred in her bright green eyes, Angela glared at Stephanie. There was only one Wayne Jackman at Dagenham Priory, and not only was he gorgeous, but he belonged to her. ‘I’ve told him I’m fifteen. I’m meeting him tonight, he’s taking me to his mate’s party in Beam Avenue. I swear, Steph, if you mess this up for me by telling him my real age, I’ll never forgive you for it.’

‘I won’t say nothing, I promise, but he’s gonna find out your age, Ange. How can he not? You go to the same school, you div.’

Putting her trendy beads on, Angela picked up her silver purse and pointed her forefinger nastily in her sister’s face. ‘That’s for me to worry about, not you. I swear, Steph, if you ever say one word to him, I will fucking kill you.’

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