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NO PARENT  
SHOULD EVER  
HAVE TO BURY  
THEIR CHILD...

The  
**Wronged**  
Kimberley  
**CHAMBERS**

Kimberley Chambers

**The Wronged: No parent should  
ever have to bury their child...**

«HarperCollins»

## **Chambers K.**

The Wronged: No parent should ever have to bury their child... /  
K. Chambers — «HarperCollins»,

With family like this, who needs enemies... There are some families that welcome newcomers with open arms, then there are the Butlers. An East End family no good girl wants to marry into... Jo fell for Vinny Butler's good looks, but she's stood at one graveside too many and now she's buried her heart as well. Michael Butler was always the nice one, until he started running the family business. Nancy is desperate to leave, and though she would never turn her back on her children, every step they take in their father's footsteps destroys her a little more. As the old saying goes – you keep your friends close, and your enemies closer... But you keep your family right where you can see them. Book three in the Butler family saga. Read the whole series in order: 1. The Trap 2. Payback 3. The Wronged 4. Tainted Love

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**The  
Wronged  
Kimberley  
CHAMBERS**

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## Dedication

In memory of my dear friend Pat's husband.

Harry Fletcher

1946–2014

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## PART ONE

The first duty to children is to make them happy. If you have not made them so, you have wronged them. No other good they may get can make up for that.

Charles Buxton

## PROLOGUE

### **Christmas Eve 1985**

‘We drive you from us, whoever you may be, unclean spirits, all satanic powers, all infernal invaders, all wicked legions, assemblies and sects. I demand you leave Queenie and Vivian alone. Allow them to live in peace and happiness. In the name and by virtue of our Lord, Jesus Christ, Amen.’

‘Amen,’ Queenie and Vivian said, glancing at one another. Both were thinking the same thing. Father Patrick was pissed.

‘May you be snatched away and driven from the Church of our God and from the souls made in the likeness of God, and redeemed by the precious blood of the divine lamb. Most cunning serpent ...’

‘I think that’s enough now, Father,’ Vivian said, stopping the man in his tracks. She’d never been one for religious jargon and her and Queenie weren’t even Catholic.

‘But I haven’t finished the exorcism yet,’ Father Patrick bellowed, spraying both women with his precious holy water.

‘Me nerves are jangled, Father. Let’s all have a brandy, eh? You can finish the exorcism after I’ve told you my story. You don’t even know what’s happened to my family yet,’ Queenie said. It had been Fat Beryl’s idea to invite Father Patrick round. She swore by the man’s power to ward off evil spirits, and after the terrible time Queenie’d had of late, she was game to give anything a go.

Grinning when Vivian handed him a very large glass of brandy, Father Patrick encouraged Queenie to open up to him. Queenie didn’t need much prompting. She quite liked spilling her guts to a man of the cloth, even if he was a Catholic pisshead.

Father Patrick listened with a sympathetic ear as Queenie told him about Roy, Lenny and Molly’s demise. ‘That’s very tragic, Queenie. Let’s say a prayer for the three of them.’

Queenie squeezed the man’s arm. ‘No. You haven’t heard the half of it yet. This year has been a real bad ’un, hasn’t it, Viv? Three members of the family we’ve lost. Gone in a puff of smoke one after the other. One of ’em even got chopped into pieces, God rest his soul. Loved that boy, I did.’

His complexion whitening, Father Patrick urged Queenie not to gabble, and to start from the very beginning,

‘Well, I’ve already told you about Roy, Lenny and Molly. Molly was the last of those to die. Murdered in 1980 she was, bless her. Now I’ll tell you the story of everything that’s happened since ...’

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Autumn 1980**

Whitechapel was a close-knit community, especially amongst the old school who had been born and bred there, and the brutal murder of the three-year-old child had left a bitter taste in everybody's mouths.

Thankfully, the police had caught the killer. But with the murder still fresh in people's minds, parents were much more vigilant than they had been, and many a child was not allowed to roam the streets as freely as they had before Molly Butler's death.

Little Molly had been no ordinary child. She was the daughter of the infamous Vinny Butler. With Ronnie and Reggie Kray banged up, Vinny and his brothers now stood at the top of the East End's criminal ladder, along with the Mitchells from Canning Town. On the day of the funeral service, the grounds around the church were mobbed with people who had come from far and wide to pay their respects. Most of the local English shopkeepers had shut down their businesses for the day, and even though villains from across the river usually steered well clear of the Butlers' turf, Vinny recognized many faces from South London as the black limousine drove slowly through the crowds.

Molly's final journey was a mournful yet stunning sight. Two white horses pulled a glass coach through the streets of Whitechapel, past the club that the Butler brothers owned, then on to the church. As the family filed in, bystanders bowed their heads and murmured their condolences to Vinny's mother, Queenie, and her sister Viv, showing them the kind of reverence that had once been reserved for Violet and Rose Kray.

The service was extremely moving. There was barely a dry eye in the church when the pianist began to play the golden oldie, 'You Are My Sunshine'. Shortly before her untimely death, little Molly had performed the song in a talent competition at a holiday camp in Eastbourne. With her angelic looks, blonde curls and bubbly personality she had received a standing ovation from the crowd and taken first prize.

The most poignant moment of the day though, was when fourteen-year-old Vinny Butler bravely stood at the front of the church and read out a poem he had written for his little sister.

'I miss you more than words can say,  
and blame myself every single day.  
As your big brother I should have protected you more,  
But I fell asleep and you walked out the door.  
'I hope that God will take good care of you,  
and love you as much as your family do.  
Life will never be the same without you, Molly,  
and I hope you are playing in heaven with your favourite dolly.  
'That wicked boy who took you away,  
will pay for his evil sins one day.  
Until that time I want you to know,  
that me, Dad, Nanny, Auntie Viv and Uncle Michael all loved you so.  
'Rest in peace my beautiful little sister, from your big brother, Vinny.'

When the emotional teenager returned to the pew to sit alongside his family members, not a single member of the congregation sensed anything was amiss. Why would they?

The only person inside that church who knew the police had arrested the wrong boy, leaving Molly's killer still at large, was young Vinny Butler.

How did he know?

Because he was the one who had put his hands around his little sister's neck and cold-bloodedly throttled the life out of her.

## CHAPTER TWO

Queenie Butler poured herself a large sherry and sat on the pouffe in front of the fire. Her sons kept offering to buy her one of those gas fires that were now all the rage, but Queenie was totally opposed to the idea. There was nothing as homely as the sight and smell of a proper coal fire.

‘Bleedin’ nuisance,’ Queenie mumbled when her doorbell was pressed repeatedly. It couldn’t be Vivian. She only lived next-door-but-one, had her own key, and had just popped out to get some fish and chips.

‘You OK, Queen? I must say, that was a lovely send-off for your Molly, God rest her soul. Those beautiful white horses and the glass coach must have cost a fortune,’ Nosy Hilda pried.

‘Hilda, I’m not in the best of moods, love, and I certainly don’t wanna talk about the funeral. The amount of tragic deaths my family have suffered, it would’ve been cheaper for us to open up our own poxy parlour. Now is there anything else I can help you with?’

‘Well, the reason I knocked is, I just popped in the Grave Maurice. You know I like me odd glass of Guinness.’

‘Can you cut to the chase, please,’ Queenie snapped. She had never been one to suffer small talk with the neighbours. It bored the arse off her.

‘Your Brenda’s inebriated in the Maurice with some bloke, and Tara and Tommy are sat outside with a guy.’

‘Guy! What guy?’

‘A stuffed Guy, as in Fawkes. They’re being a bit rude, Queen, so I thought you should know. They aren’t asking for a penny for the Guy, they want a pound. Then when people won’t give them the money, they’re threatening to set your Vinny on to them. Well, Tara is anyway. I heard her say it to Mr Patel and old Mr Arthur.’

To say Queenie was livid was putting it mildly. She had always classed such behaviour as begging and had given her boys such a clump when she’d caught them sitting outside the train station doing the same when they were nippers.

Queenie grabbed her coat and front-door keys. Brenda was her only daughter; twenty-six years old now, but still the bane of Queenie’s life. The girl was an embarrassment, especially when she had alcohol inside her. She must have inherited an alcoholic gene from her father. That useless old bastard had spent more hours pissed in his lifetime than sober.

‘What you gonna do? You won’t tell Brenda it was me who told you, will ya? ’Cos I don’t want no trouble, Queen. I only knocked because I was worried about those kiddies.’

‘I’ll bastard well swing for her, Hilda, that’s what I’ll do,’ Queenie spat as she marched off down the road.

‘Oh, and before I forget, Queen, Lil got taken away in an ambulance earlier. Had a stroke, by all accounts. Big Stan told me she looked dead as they wheeled her out.’

‘Any more fucking joyful news?’ Queenie mumbled under her breath. Lil was in her nineties now, lived in the house between hers and Viv’s, and both had been dreading the old girl croaking it because they didn’t want new neighbours. Talk about it never rains but it pours.

Vinny Butler took off his tie and suit jacket and stared at his reflection in the mirror. With his six-foot-two frame, piercing green eyes and jet-black hair, Vinny had always been a striking-looking man. But since Molly had been so cruelly taken from him, he’d lost weight, and felt far older than his thirty-five years.

Vinny sat on his bed, put his head in his hands and wept. Apart from during the actual service, he had kept his emotions pent up all day. Molly’s send-off – unusually for anything involving his family – had gone without a hitch. The wake had been held at Nick’s, the restaurant that Vinny part-owned in Stratford. Even with all the tables and chairs removed, there hadn’t been enough

room to accommodate the mourners. The club would have been a far more appropriate venue had circumstances been different and Molly had not been snatched from there.

No parent expected to outlive their kids, especially when they were as young as Molly had been. Her death would haunt Vinny forever. With her curly blonde hair, big green eyes and infectious personality, Molly had been the light of Vinny's life. He'd loved that child more than he had ever loved anybody. On the day he'd found out she was dead, part of him had died with her.

'You OK, Dad? I've just been crying as well. I will always blame and hate myself for what happened. I know I never played with her much, but I did love her and I really do miss her,' Little Vinny lied.

Vinny patted the bed and when his son sat next to him, he put an arm around his shoulders. With his dark hair, bright green eyes and tall build, Little Vinny was most certainly a chip off the old block. 'No point keep beating yourself up, boy. Not gonna bring Molly back, is it? I was proud of you today when you stood up and read that poem. Not an easy thing to do in a packed church.'

'So, you don't blame me no more then?'

On the day Molly went missing there had been a flood in the club cellar. Vinny had left his son in charge of Molly while he went downstairs to sort it out, but the boy had fallen asleep. The main door of the club had accidentally been left open and it still wasn't known if Molly had wandered outside or her killer had entered the club to abduct her.

'No. I don't blame you. There's only one person to blame and that's Jamie cunting Preston. He'll pay for what he did one day. As soon as he's released, I'll be there waiting for him. An eye for an eye, son. Always remember that.'

'I'll help you kill him, Dad. I'll be old enough then.' Little Vinny shook his head. 'I still can't believe it. I mean, Jamie is your half-brother. I suppose that makes him my uncle, doesn't it?'

Vinny's relationship with his father Albie had always been strained, and there would certainly never be any bridges built now. Jamie Preston was the result of an affair his father had indulged in many moons ago, and none of his family had even known the evil little shit existed until he had been arrested for Molly's murder. To say Vinny had been shocked was an understatement. He'd thought an old enemy of his was the culprit, and had beaten Bobby Jackson so badly that he was still in hospital, unable to communicate with anybody. 'Let's go downstairs and get a drink, eh, boy?'

'Can I have a cider, Dad?'

'Yeah. Course you can.'

Little Vinny could not help but smirk as he followed his father down the stairs. Life was so much better now his dad's bird Joanna and Molly were no longer around. It was like it used to be when he was younger. Just him and his old man.

Molly's mother, Joanna Preston, was back at her parents' place in Tiptree. She'd left the moment the funeral was over, unable to face the prospect of the wake, not with the Butlers lording it as if they were royalty, surrounded by all their gangster pals. Her only friend in that family was Michael's wife, Nancy, who'd accompanied her home. Michael was nowhere as bad as his brother, but even so Nancy had had a lot to put up with and the two women had supported one another when the Butlers closed ranks. Both of them had been livid when Little Vinny had been allowed to stand up in church and read that poem, and even more angry when he had failed to mention them.

'Thanks for seeing me home, Nance. I couldn't have got through today if it wasn't for you. Seeing Vinny again made me physically sick. I can't believe I was ever in love with the bastard. I bet he told that horror of a son of his not to mention us in that poem. I know the way his evil mind works. And did you see his face when I asked him for Molly's doll? The way he was smirking when he said I couldn't have it because he'd put it in her coffin. I don't believe him. He didn't even have the guts to identify his own daughter's body, so why would he have gone anywhere near her coffin? I bet he has the doll indoors. The police told me they gave it back to him last week.'

‘Vinny’s hateful, Jo. He always has been.’ Nancy wrapped an arm round her friend’s shoulders and gave her a hug. ‘I don’t mean this to sound horrible, but I reckon your dad was right: Vinny targeted you purposely because he knew you were Johnny Preston’s kid. I mean, if he loved you even a tiny bit he would never have treated you the way he has since Molly died. He has been a total and utter pig. If you ask me, you’re well rid of him.’ Seeing that Joanna was about to start crying again, she added softly: ‘I’ll have a word with Michael about the doll. He might be able to find out where it is.’

The doll in question had been Molly’s pride and joy. Vinny had bought it for his daughter and named it after her. The little girl had taken Molly Dolly everywhere with her, wouldn’t go to sleep unless the doll was tucked in beside her of a night. The bedraggled, rain-soaked doll had been found a quarter of a mile away from where Molly’s tiny body was located. The police reckoned Molly had dropped it as her killer led her to her death.

‘How you getting on with Michael now?’ Joanna asked, making an effort to take her mind off Molly and the funeral.

‘He’s been fine since I moved back in. Been very attentive towards me and the boys and we’ve had some nice family days out. We even went to the zoo last week. Sorry. I’m being thoughtless now, aren’t I?’

Joanna squeezed Nancy’s hand. ‘Don’t be daft! Even though Molly isn’t here any more, I still want to hear about those boys of yours. Actually, I’ve got some news for you, some good news for once, but you must swear that, if I tell you, you won’t breathe a word to a living soul. My mum and dad didn’t want me to tell you – I think that’s why my dad was a bit offish with you earlier. He thinks that if I tell you, you’ll tell Michael.’

‘As if! Spit it out, I’m dying to know. Have you met a new man?’

Joanna shook her head. ‘That day I saw Molly in the mortuary was officially the worst day of my life. I thought today was going to be even worse, until this morning.’ She gave a teary smile, swiping away the tears that were running down her cheeks. ‘Talk about every cloud has a silver lining, Nance.’

‘What you going on about, Jo? You’ve lost me.’

‘I’m having another baby.’

Rather than choke, Nancy spat her mouthful of wine back into her glass.

Feeling ever so weary, Queenie Butler put on her nightdress and slippers and went back downstairs. It had taken her ages to settle Tara and Tommy down, but both were now thankfully asleep.

‘They OK, Queen?’ Vivian asked.

Queenie nodded. ‘Took ’em a while to get off to sleep after I told them about the kids who got stabbed outside Bethnal Green station after asking the wrong geezer to give ’em a penny for the Guy. I think I might’ve frightened ’em.’

‘What you on about? I don’t remember any kids getting stabbed outside Bethnal Green station.’

‘Neither do I.’ Queenie managed a wicked grin. ‘But I had to come up with something that’d put them off begging, didn’t I?’ She sank into her chair with a sigh. ‘You wait until Brenda rears her drunken head tomorrow. You should have seen the state of her. Had her tongue stuck down that bloke’s throat in front of everybody in the pub, and he was a lot older than her. Talk about embarrass the family. Vinny and Michael won’t be too pleased when they find out. Bound to hear about it, even if I don’t tell ’em.’

Vivian tutted disapprovingly. ‘Who was he?’

‘No bloody idea. Knowing Bren, she probably picked him up at the wake. Acting like a whore, she was. I tell ya, Viv, I’m disgusted with her. She’s her father’s daughter all right. As for them poor little mites upstairs, I hate to think what’s gonna become of them with her as a mother.’

Vivian pursed her lips. ‘Tara and Tommy will turn out OK. It’s Little Vinny you should be worried about. His poem and crocodile tears did not fool me one little bit. Molly would still be alive if it wasn’t for him. A clone of his father if I ever did see one.’

After being totally lost for words, Nancy Butler had now composed herself and was trying to think of a polite way to burst her friend's bubble.

'You don't seem very happy for me, Nance. I thought you of all people would be thrilled. I can't believe my mum and dad advised me to have an abortion after everything I've been through. As much as I love my parents, I need to get my own place. I feel smothered, living with them.'

Nancy leaned across the table and held Joanna's hand. 'Please don't take this the wrong way, Jo, but your mum and dad do have a point. If you keep the baby, Vinny is bound to find out at some stage. I can fully understand why you are so desperate for another child. I would feel exactly the same. But do you really want or need the aggravation of looking over your shoulder to protect that child for the rest of your life?'

Joanna snatched her hand away and glared at Nancy. 'So, what exactly are you trying to say? That I should get rid of it?'

'I don't know what I'm trying to say, Jo. All I know is, if you keep the baby, Vinny is bound to find out about it.'

'No, he won't! Apart from you, my parents and my brother, nobody will ever know where I live or that the baby even exists. Unless you tell Michael.'

'Oh, Jo, I would never betray your trust, you know that. I love you like a sister. I'm just worried you'll never be rid of Vinny, that's all. I am happy for you, honest I am.'

'I should hope so too! No child will ever replace Molly, Nance, she was a one-off. But at least I have something to look forward to now, a future. As for Vinny, my dad reckons he'll be put in prison for a very long time after what he did to Bobby Jackson. Dad said the police have been desperate to lock Vinny up for years and they won't be lenient with him.'

Nancy forced a smile and tried to pretend she was happy for her friend, but inside she was worried sick. The police could lock Vinny up and throw away the key, but it still wouldn't stop him claiming Joanna's baby. But after everything the poor girl had gone through, how could she destroy her hopes of happiness by telling her that?

Back in Whitechapel, Vinny and Michael Butler were having a heart-to-heart about the future of their business. As a mark of respect, the club had not reopened since Molly's death over a month ago, but Michael expected that to change after the funeral. However, Vinny had different ideas and had just dropped the bombshell that he wanted to sell up as soon as possible.

Michael knocked back his Scotch. He had to be diplomatic due to the circumstances, but wasn't about to be walked all over. After all, he was joint owner of the club. 'Look, Vin, I can fully understand why you don't want to open up again, but I need the dosh. You've got other income from whatever you get up to with Ahmed, but I bloody well ain't. I've got the boys to think of and Nancy.'

Vinny sneered. 'Playing happy families with Nancy again, are you? When you gonna clock on that she's a psycho, drags you down and you'd be far better off without her?'

'Probably the same time you clock on Ahmed's a wrong 'un. Look, bruv, I don't want a war of words with you, but now is not the right time for us to sell the club.'

'Yes, it is. We could start afresh, invest our money in a new venture. Bill Evans opened one of them posh wine bars up town last year. Raking it in, he is. I saw him the other week in a brand spanking new Rolls-Royce. It's had it round here now, Michael, and we aren't ever going to get all the custom back we've lost. I watched the news last night: unemployment at an all-time high. We need to go where the money is.'

'Have you forgotten that you're looking at a long stretch inside?' Michael asked. Vinny had been charged with GBH with intent for the attack on Bobby Jackson and had been told by his brief to expect a lengthy custodial sentence.

'Course I haven't forgot. That's why I want to set the ball rolling now. We can be long up and running before my trial starts, then you can be earning fortunes for us while I'm away. No way I'm

ever gonna work here again, Michael. I'm sure the place is fucking cursed. First the fire, then the shooting and now Molly. Whitechapel's finished for us. There's nothing here for us any more.'

As Vinny topped their glasses up, Michael mulled over his brother's words. Vinny did have a point, but selling up was still a big ask. 'I'm going to open up again this weekend. You don't have to be here. Let's see if we've lost any more custom and we'll go from there.'

'Have you not listened to a word I've said, bruv? I told you I wanna get rid. Never forget if it wasn't for my business brain you would currently be earning a oneer a week fixing poxy cars. I set this place up with Roy's help, not yours. So what I say fucking goes, understand?'

The sound of the buzzer stopped it turning into a full-scale argument. Vinny stood up, strolled towards the entrance and gave his brother one last warning as he did so: 'If you refuse to sell, best you have the readies to buy me out, Michael. I'm sure Ahmed would jump at the chance of becoming my new business partner if you're too dense to think ahead.'

Fully expecting to see his mum, his son or Ahmed, Vinny's smug expression was soon wiped off his face when he saw six Old Bill on the doorstep. 'What do you mob want?'

DI Smithers stared Vinny in the eyes. 'Vinny Butler, you are being arrested on suspicion of murdering Bobby Kenneth Jackson. You are not obliged to say anything unless you wish to do so, but whatever you do say will be taken down in writing and may be given in evidence ...'

'Bruv, ring my brief,' Vinny yelled. 'I have just buried my daughter, you unfeeling bunch of cunts,' he spat, smashing his fist against the wall.

Hearing the commotion, Michael ran to his brother's side. 'What the hell's going on? Vin ain't done nothing wrong. We've been at Molly's funeral, and only just got back from the wake.'

While Vinny struggled and cursed as he was handcuffed then slung in the back of the meat wagon, DS Townsend took Michael to one side. 'Unfortunately for your brother, Bobby Jackson passed away earlier this evening.'

Michael sank to his haunches in shock. This change of circumstance was bound to mean that his brother would have to await his trial in prison.

'I am sorry for your family that this happened today of all days. I can only imagine how tough Molly's funeral must have been for you all,' Townsend said. Vinny aside, the DS felt no hatred towards the Butler clan. During the investigation into Molly's death he'd got to know the family a bit better, and Michael in particular struck him as a decent bloke.

When Townsend walked away, Michael went back inside the club. He rang Vinny's brief, left a message on his answerphone, then poured himself another large Scotch. No way did he want to see his brother behind bars, but at least now Vinny was in no position to force the sale of the business. He was going to be the one calling the shots for a change.

Growing up as Vinny and Roy's younger brother had not been easy for Michael Butler, but with Vinny liable to be banged up for the foreseeable and poor Roy brown bread, this truly was his time to prove all the doubters wrong, Vinny included. And prove them wrong he most certainly would.

## CHAPTER THREE

Little Vinny sat up and put his head in his hands. He had an awful hangover and an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. His best pal Ben Bloggs should have been at his side today, but he'd not been coping as well as he had since Molly's death, spending all his time holed up in his bedroom. Every time Little Vinny had tried to persuade Ben to go out somewhere he'd made excuses, saying he didn't feel well, and he'd rather stay in that squalid pit he called home. But when Little Vinny called at the Bloggs' place this morning so they could go to the funeral together, Ben's junkie mother told him he'd gone out last night and hadn't come back. Now Vinny was worried. He'd thought he could handle Ben, slip him a few quid, keep him in glue and cider, make sure he understood that if he went to the police and told them he'd looked on while Little Vinny strangled his baby sister to death, they would both be in big trouble. After all, Ben was the one who'd taken her from the club, even if he only did it because Little Vinny told him they were going to make her disappear for a few hours to teach his dad a lesson. Surely Ben wouldn't have the guts to grass him up ... would he?

'Vin, we need to talk,' Michael said, barging into the bedroom.

'Whatsa matter?' Little Vinny asked, alarmed. He could tell by his uncle's face that something was terribly wrong, and his first thought was that Ben must have blabbed. If he had, then Little Vinny would have no option but to turn the tables and tell the Old Bill that Ben was the one who'd abducted and killed Molly. If need be, he'd tell them his pal had always shown an unhealthy interest in his little sister.

Little Vinny cleverly managed to hide the surge of relief he felt when his uncle explained the situation. 'When will me dad be allowed home?'

'I'm not sure. Your dad only got bail in the first place because Jackson was still alive. Now he's dead, it might change things.'

Face etched with fury, Little Vinny leapt up and kicked the door. The whole point of getting rid of Jo and Molly had been so he could have his dad all to himself again, and now he'd been taken away. 'If my dad gets banged up, who am I gonna live with? Can I live with you? I promise I'll be good.'

Having just got things back on track with Nancy, Michael knew there was no way he could let Little Vinny move in with them. His wife had made it perfectly clear that she was no fan of the wayward teenager; she even blamed him for what had happened to Molly. 'I'm not sure there's room at mine for you with the boys, Vin. But, let's not jump the gun, eh? Your dad has a good brief and might even get bail yet for all we know. Now I want you to do me a favour. Get yourself washed and dressed so we can go and tell your nan and Auntie Viv the news. Then, later, I want you to help me get the club ready to reopen. If your dad don't get bail, I am really gonna need you to be my right-hand man. Do you think you can step up to the mark?'

'Will I get paid more money?'

'Yeah, but only if you work really hard.'

Little Vinny managed a grin. 'You got yourself a deal, Uncle Michael.'

Having had an awful night's sleep, Vivian got up before the larks and took a stroll down to the newsagent. It wasn't even daylight yet, but Viv knew the papers would be left outside the Patels' shop.

About to pass Fat Beryl's house, Vivian froze as she heard the words, 'Please don't. I really don't want to. I'm not that type of girl. You're hurting me. Stop it.'

'You've let me buy you drinks all night and you've been shoving them big titties of yours in my face. I know you want it,' a male voice hissed, trying to force his rock-hard todger down the back of her throat. The more they knocked him back, the more it turned him on.

Whitechapel had changed over the years. Many residents were afraid to walk the streets at certain times, but not Vivian. Nobody messed with her family, which was why she marched fearlessly down the alleyway.

‘Get off her, you dirty bastard,’ she bellowed, smashing her handbag over the back of the man’s head.

The man leapt up. Had it been light, he would have recognized Vivian, but unfortunately for him it was dark. ‘Jealous are ya? Want some an’ all?’ he taunted, waving his hard-on in his hand.

Trying to whack his cock with her handbag, Vivian screamed, ‘I’ll have you shot, you dirty cunt.’ Realizing the woman was scary and old, the man expertly tucked his penis inside his trousers and bolted.

‘Heard of the Butlers, have ya? You disgusting nonce. I’m Vinny and Michael’s aunt. Watch your back. Your days are numbered,’ Vivian shouted, but to no avail. The man was already out of earshot.

The poor girl was trembling, so Vivian crouched next to her and switched on her emergency handbag torch. She hadn’t got a good look at the man’s face, but could guess what the dirty bastard had been doing. She was actually shaken up herself. That was the first dingle-dangle she’d had waved at her in donkey’s years.

‘I can’t go home. My dad will kill me,’ the girl sobbed.

‘You’re Billy Higgins’s granddaughter, aren’t you, pet?’ Vivian asked. She’d once courted Billy in her younger years and had often kicked herself for ending the relationship. Billy was still handsome, with a full head of hair. He was also a very wealthy, well-respected villain. A far better man than the arsehole she’d ended up marrying.

‘Yes, I’m Janey. You can’t tell my granddad though.’

‘Why don’t you come home with me, Janey? I’ll make you a nice sweet cup of tea and we’ll call the police. This man needs to be caught.’

‘No! My parents will kill me. I lied to them, you see. I told them I was going out with a friend. My dad says I’m too young to have boyfriends.’

‘OK. No police. But please come home with me. You can tell me what happened there, then we’ll work out what to do next. You can’t stay here, lovey. I know your granddad very well. A lovely man. I’d never forgive myself if I left you here all alone.’

‘OK.’

Nosy Hilda could barely contain her excitement as she knocked at Queenie’s front door.

‘What the hell do you want this early in the morning? Oh, don’t tell me, I think I can guess. Has Lil died?’ Queenie asked in the most sarcastic tone she could muster.

‘No. I saw her niece as she was going to work and it looks like Lil might pull through,’ said Hilda, oblivious to the sarcasm. ‘I just wanted to say how sorry I was about your Vinny. Must have been a terrible shock for you that Bobby died. I mean, who’d have thought he’d croak it, after all this time.’

‘Vinny! Bobby! What do you mean?’ Queenie asked, the colour draining from her face as the realization started to kick in.

‘Bobby Jackson. He died yesterday. They arrested your Vinny for murder last night and carted him off in a police wagon. Didn’t you know?’

‘No, I bastard well didn’t,’ Queenie hissed, slamming the door in Hilda’s face.

It was in Hilda’s nature to have the last word. ‘Sorry to be the bearer of bad news,’ she trilled through the letterbox. ‘I’ll be off now then.’

As soon as Janey said her attacker’s name was Pat and described what had actually happened, Vivian knew who the culprit was. One Eyed Harry had told her only last week that he’d been released.

Tall, dark and handsome, Pat Campbell was the local sex-pest, playing on his looks to entice young girls to go out with him. He had a foul reputation for not taking no for an answer. He’d been getting away with it for years before one of his victims finally went to the police, and even then all he got was a slap on the wrist, a measly eighteen-month stretch.

‘Thank you so much for your kindness, Vivian. I don’t know what I’d have done otherwise. And thanks for allowing me to use your phone to ring my friend and my mum.’

Urging the seventeen-year-old to sit next to her on the sofa, Vivian squeezed Janey's hands. The girl had been adamant about not involving the police, and Vivian had reluctantly gone along with it, not wanting to see the poor kid forced to relive the whole thing in court and probably end up being branded a slag for having gone out on a date with the bugger in the first place.

'Are you sure that he never actually did you-know-what to you?' asked Viv when she'd finished helping the girl clean herself up.

'I'm positive,' said Janey, pulling on the fresh pair of tights Viv had given her. 'I've told you everything, honest. It was disgusting when he tried to put his thingy in my mouth. You won't call the police after I leave, will you? I'm afraid they'll say I led him on, that I've only myself to blame.'

'I've given you my word, sweetheart. Old Bill are useless anyway. They should have banged him up for a lot longer than eighteen months, filthy bastard. They call him Pervy Pat round 'ere – one young lady he attacked said he got so excited his dingle-dangle felt like a gun rubbing against her.' Seeing Janey shudder at the image, she quickly changed tack: 'What goes around comes around, luv. I can assure you that you did sod-all wrong and that dirty bastard will get his comeuppance. I'll make sure of it – that's another promise.'

Ahmed Zane popped the cork and grinned like a Cheshire cat as he did so. He'd been totally gobsmacked when he had rung the club earlier and spoken to Michael. His initial shock had soon turned to elation though. This was karma at its very best.

'Do not keep me in suspense any longer, Ahmed. Tell me, what has happened?' Burak demanded.

Ahmed handed his cousin a glass of champagne and held his own aloft. 'To Vinny Butler, who has now been arrested on a murder charge.'

'What!' Burak exclaimed.

Laughing like a hyena, Ahmed chinked glasses with his cousin. 'Bobby Jackson died yesterday. It couldn't have happened at a better time either, what with Carl on the loose, eh?'

Burak agreed. Carl Thompson had been the guy Ahmed had hired to help set Vinny up, but that plan had gone pear-shaped. Carl knew too much and needed to be found and silenced.

Ahmed topped up his and Burak's drinks. 'Can you imagine how difficult it will be for Vinny to cope in prison? I think he will go insane, especially so soon after Molly's death. I must ask for a visiting order so I can experience his misery in the flesh.'

Burak smirked. 'Wouldn't it be funny if Butler ended up in Broadmoor?'

Ahmed laughed. 'Now that would be hilarious.'

Mary Walker knew her daughter well enough to know she had something on her mind. 'Why did you go back to Tiptree after Molly's funeral? Not been rowing with Michael again, have you?' Mary pried.

Nancy sighed. She had promised Joanna that she would not tell a soul about her pregnancy, but she was so worried about her friend, she had to tell somebody. 'Boys, go and play in the garden for five minutes,' Nancy ordered.

Adam and Lee immediately stood up, but Daniel didn't. He stared at his mother and in an insolent tone said, 'No. I'm watching *Rainbow*.'

'I beg your pardon! Do as your mum says now,' Mary insisted.

Daniel glared defiantly at this grandma. 'No. It's cold outside.'

Fuming at the way her eight-year-old son had been behaving of late, Nancy yanked him up by the arm and dragged him into the hallway. 'Now put your coat on and get in that garden.'

Knowing when she spoke through gritted teeth his mother was at her angriest, Daniel grinned, 'Make me.'

With his jet-black hair and bright green eyes, Daniel had certainly inherited his looks from his father's side of the family. So had Adam. In fact only Lee looked anything like Nancy, yet he was Michael's son from another relationship.

'I am sick and tired of your cheekiness and I will not put up with it any more,' Nancy said, punctuating her words while slapping her son repeatedly across his backside and legs.

Realizing he had pushed his mother too far, Daniel mumbled 'Mad bitch' before scarpering into the back garden.

'I told you that me and your dad had noticed a change in Daniel's behaviour, didn't I? Good job your father isn't here. I'm not going to tell him or your brother this latest episode,' Mary said.

Nancy was trembling with a mixture of rage and fear. At times like this her son reminded her so much of Little Vinny, it truly scared her. 'I'll kill him, Mum, if he carries on like that. You'd think the telling off I gave him after he beat up that boy at school would have taught him a lesson, but he's becoming more of a handful every day. Adam's fine and so is Lee, so why does Daniel feel the need to play me up? I am going to tell Michael to reprimand him when I get home. Perhaps being forced to go to bed early, or not being able to watch TV for a week might teach the little sod some manners.'

'Was that what you wanted to speak to me about – Daniel?'

'No. It's Jo. Mum, if I tell you something, you must swear to me you will never repeat what I say to another living soul.'

'Of course not! I'm your mother. If you can't trust me, who can you trust?'

'Jo's pregnant again and she says she's keeping the baby. Her parents have tried to talk her out of it and so have I, but she won't listen. That bastard Vinny is bound to find out somewhere along the line, then it will all end in tears for poor Jo. I just know it will.'

Queenie Butler was thoroughly annoyed. Not only had Michael not had the decency to inform her the previous evening of Bobby Jackson's death and Vinny's arrest, he now had the cheek to tell her that, if the worst happened, it was her duty to look after Little Vinny!

'My duty! Why is it my duty exactly, Michael?'

'Because you're his gran. Who else can he live with if Vinny don't get bail? Nancy hates him, so he can't stop with me. I guarantee he'll behave himself. I'm gonna keep a proper close eye on him from now on, and he'll be working with me full-time at the club. He's a good—'

'I'll stop you right there, Michael, before you waste any more breath. I got lumbered with Little Vinny once before, remember? And look how that turned out. He ruined my bleedin' conservatory, robbed the Patels' shop and constantly ran rings around me. Never again, boy. I'll be fifty-four next month and I really don't need the stress, thank you very much.'

Shocked by his mother's coldness, Michael tried one more time to make her change her mind. 'Mum, this is Vinny's son, your first-born grandkid we're talking about, not some stranger. Where the hell will he live if Vinny gets banged up, eh? Do you want him living round the Bloggses' house?'

'I couldn't give a shit where he lives, and even if he was Prince Charles's son, I wouldn't change my mind. No way is that little bastard ever living with me again, Michael, and that's final!'

Little Vinny knocked on the Bloggses' front door. 'Any news yet?' he asked Ben's dishevelled-looking whore of a mother.

Alison Bloggs shook her head and then burst into tears. 'I don't reckon he's coming back. He nicked my money and puff, and he's never stolen off me before. I'm clucking. I've got no readies to score with, and I can't go out to work of a night 'cause Ben's not here to look after the little 'uns. I'm gonna go to the police to report him missing. Will you keep an eye on the kids for me for half an hour?'

Immediately alarmed at the mention of the police, Little Vinny took some money out of his pocket and handed it to Alison. 'Don't bother going to the Old Bill yet. They ain't bothered about lads like Ben, and I'm gonna search for him again later. If anyone can find him, it'll be me.'

'What's the money for?'

'So you can score and straighten yourself out.' Vinny handed Alison another tenner. 'Get a couple of bottles of cider as well, eh? I'll keep you company for a bit. Between us we can make a list of where Ben might be. The filth are mugs, they won't find him.'

Staring at the money in her hand all Alison could think about was her next hit. She kissed Little Vinny on the cheek. 'You're a good boy, you are. I'll be back in twenty minutes.'

Little Vinny breathed a sigh of relief. He had to find Ben before the police did, that was for sure. His pal was obviously not in a sound state of mind and the chances were if the Old Bill got to him first, Ben would be capable of blurting out anything.

No way was Little Vinny going down for Molly's murder, and if that meant spending a couple of hours with Ben's horrid mother to ensure she was too out of her nut to call in the Old Bill, then so be it.

Nancy Butler looked at her husband in annoyance. She had just spent the past ten minutes telling him how worried she was about Daniel's behaviour, and although Michael had promised to have a chat with their son, he seemed far more concerned about his other family – as per usual.

'I don't want you to just have a chat with Daniel, Michael. I want you to punish him and set some boundaries for the future. He is going to go off the rails if you don't sort him out, and I will not have him ending up like Little Vinny. Daniel reminded me so much of him when he was insolent earlier, it really did frighten me.'

Michael sighed. Like most women, Nancy could make a crisis out of the smallest of dramas. 'Look, I've said I'll talk to Daniel, OK? Give me a break, Nance, for Christ's sake. I've just told you that Vinny's been re-arrested and is up on a murder charge, and all you can do is moan about Dan wanting to watch *Rainbow* rather than play in the fucking garden. As if I haven't got enough on my plate right now, what with trying to sort out somewhere for Little Vinny to live and getting the club reopened this weekend. Money is running low and we can't live on shirt buttons.'

'Little Vinny is not living here, so don't even bother asking me that one. As for you reopening the club, if Vinny ends up in prison, does that mean you will be working all hours? I barely see you as it is and the boys need their father around more now they're getting older.'

'Nance, I have not even been in twenty minutes and you have done my swede in already. Nag, nag, nag. You should record yourself and listen to it sometime. You might teach yourself a thing or two.'

When Nancy started to cry, scream and shout, Michael stormed out of the house.

Back in Whitechapel, Queenie and Viv were discussing Pervy Pat. Both were in agreement that he needed to be dealt with.

'There you go. Drink it in one,' Queenie ordered, handing her ashen-faced sister a brandy. 'I wish I knew where that dirty bastard lived now. I'd go straight round there with me meat knife and chop that diseased todger of his off. Bad enough he assaulted that poor girl, but fancy offering you a portion of helmet pie an' all. He'll rue the day he ever uttered those words, we'll make sure of that. Vinny'll sort it if he gets bail and if he don't, Michael can do the honours. Did you actually see his, you know?'

'It was dark down that alley, but I did sort of see it. Big and slippery like a fucking snake. I feel sick even thinking about it. I don't wanna talk about it no more today. I need time to get over the shock. Tell me about Bren.'

Brenda had only just turned up to pick up her children and Queenie had given her daughter a right earful.

'I can't believe she reckons this geezer is the one, Viv. Got to be something mentally wrong with her. She only met him yesterday.'

'She's always been one to dive in head first, hasn't she? I wonder if he's a looker?'

Queenie shook her head in despair. 'He's in his forties if he's a day, Viv. I saw him. Looked a proper pisshead, he did – reminded me of Albie. Why the silly cow would want to take up with someone like her useless father, I do not know. I'll have to get Michael to find out who he is and have a quiet word in his ear. The silly little mare was even talking about moving in with him. Reckons he's got a big house. Probably a poxy old bedsit somewhere by the looks of him. I swear, pound signs is all my Brenda sees these days.'

‘Did he look bedraggled?’

‘No. He was suited and booted, but I know a plastic gangster when I see one,’ Queenie replied, snatching at the phone on the very first ring. ‘OK, Michael. Yep, I’ll be there, don’t you worry. All right, pick me up at nine. What did the brief say about his chances of getting bail again?’

Vivian hated one-way conversations. ‘Well?’ she asked impatiently, the second her sister ended the call.

‘Vinny’s been charged with Bobby’s murder. He’ll be appearing at Bow Street Magistrates’ Court in the morning. His brief reckons his chances of getting bail again are practically non-existent.’

Margo and Anthony Warwick had two major passions in life. One was mountain climbing, the other rambling, and today they were thoroughly enjoying their first-ever trip to Hainault Forest.

Decked out in hiking boots and carrying a big stick, Anthony crouched down to examine something that had caught his eye. ‘Look, Margo, it’s a vole. Such tiny creatures, but so adorable, aren’t they? Look at its little heart, beating fast. It’s scared.’

Margo was about to bend down for a closer look when something in the trees caught her eye. Her heart started beating faster than the vole’s. Unable to stop herself, Margo let out a deafening scream.

It was then Anthony looked up to see the dead boy hanging from a tree.

Little Vinny was out of his nut. Alcohol, puff and glue were all he usually indulged in, but Ben’s mum had just encouraged him to have a go at what she called ‘Chasing the dragon’.

Because he was only smoking something brown on a bit of foil, Little Vinny had not expected it to knock him for six like it had, but he felt wonderful, as if he was floating on air.

‘Don’t bother searching for Ben now, Vin. It’s dark. Stay here with me for a bit. I’ve enjoyed your company today. You can search for Ben again in the morning,’ Alison said, putting a hand on Little Vinny’s thigh.

Little Vinny nodded. He usually despised Alison, but that stuff he had smoked had made him feel so happy, he now thought she was OK.

‘Can I ask you a personal question, Vin?’

Unable to speak properly, Little Vinny nodded.

‘You ever had a blow-job?’

Little Vinny shook his head, then grinned when Alison put her hand inside his tracksuit bottoms. When she bent her head and put his erect penis in her mouth, Little Vinny shut his eyes. The heroin, combined with having his cock sucked for the very first time, felt like he had literally died and gone to heaven.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Michael Butler was awoken in his marital bed by his wife kissing him gently on the lips. 'It's half six, Michael, and you said you wanted to be up at the crack of dawn. I'm going downstairs to make you a decent breakfast. You're going to need it with the day you've got ahead. And if you want me to come to court with you, the offer's still there. My mum can take the boys to school.'

'Nah, you're all right, babe. I've got to find Little Vinny, then pick my mum up by nine. I appreciate you offering though. Means a lot.'

Nancy smiled. After their argument yesterday, she had been ready to pack some stuff and take the boys back to her parents' house once again. But a good talking to from her mum had made her change her mind.

'Nance, you know you're always welcome here, but you can't keep uprooting them boys every time you and Michael have a cross word. All couples argue. That's life, and what you've just told me isn't even that bad. As much as we all dislike Vinny, Michael must have a lot on his mind if his brother is facing prison. He's got that club to run and all sorts. You should be supporting your husband, not rowing with him. Please don't think I'm having a dig at you, love, but I do think you need to grow up a bit for the sake of your sons. That's probably why Daniel has been playing up so much, truth be known. Poor little sod needs stability, not you moving out every other month. If you're that unhappy with Michael, then get a bloody divorce. You can't keep changing your mind every five minutes. Either make a go of your marriage, or make a clean break.'

Some home truths were exactly what Nancy had needed to hear, and after a few tears, she'd immediately rung Michael at the club to apologize and beg him to come home. Michael had accepted her apology, but had told Nancy he would have to stay at the club as there was nobody else to look after his nephew. However, when Little Vinny had failed to show his face by ten, Michael had surprised her by coming home. They'd then made love.

'Your breakfast is ready, Michael. Boys, time to get up now,' Nancy shouted up the stairs.

Michael walked into the kitchen accompanied by their eldest son. 'Go on then. What you got to say to your mum?'

Daniel stared at his feet. 'I'm sorry I was rude to you yesterday. I promise I'll be good from now on. I will also ring Nanny Mary and say sorry to her.'

Nancy smiled as she bent down and hugged Daniel to her chest. Her mum was right. The boys needed a settled environment and they needed their father.

Vinny Butler sat down opposite his brief. Being locked up was making him feel insane. Molly was on his mind constantly. When he was awake, all he could think about was how scared she must have been and how he had let her down. And when he was asleep, she was still alive in his mind and he could see her pretty face as if she was right there beside him. He could even hear her talking to him. When he woke up and remembered that his daughter was dead, it was mental torture at its very worst.

'Colin, you have to get me bail. I know I'm gonna do bird over Jackson, but I can't do it right now. It's too soon after Molly. I need to get my nut straight and prepare myself. I'll go off my head if they put me in prison while I'm not strong enough to cope.'

Colin Harvey sighed. He was the most sought-after brief among the London gangland fraternity, which was why Vinny had requested his services. 'Vinny, I will do my very best for you. But I cannot make you any promises. The police opposed your original bail, and they have even more of an argument now Jackson is dead. There is one thing I can assure you though: if the decision does not go in our favour today, I will take your appeal to the Old Bailey. With everything you have been through, nothing is impossible.'

Vinny put his head in his hands. He wasn't stupid, and knew by the way his brief had tried to dress his words up that he was doomed.

Little Vinny rested his chin on the edge of the lavatory seat. He hadn't stopped spewing since he'd arrived back at the club in the early hours of this morning, and he had no idea whether it was the heroin he'd smoked that was making him so ill or the thought of that disgusting toothless whore sucking his penis.

'Vin, you upstairs, boy?' Michael shouted.

'Yeah. I'm ill. I think I've got a bug.'

Michael ran up the stairs, took one look at the state of his nephew hugging the toilet and jumped to his own conclusion. He could smell the alcohol fumes and Little Vinny's eyes looked glazed. 'You been puffing and drinking, boy?'

'Yeah. I'm sorry. It won't happen again,' Little Vinny promised. Anything was better than admitting he had chased the dragon with Alison Bloggs, then allowed her to suck his John Thomas and spunked in her mouth.

'Where did you go? I waited here until ten for you. Was you with Ben?'

Little Vinny's eyes filled with tears. 'No. I was on my own. Ben's still missing, Dad's going to prison. Nobody wants me to live with them, and I still keep thinking about Molly. It's all my fault she's dead.'

Michael rubbed his nephew's back as he retched again. His heart went out to the boy. 'You got to stop blaming yourself for your sister's death, Vin. You'll drive yourself doolally if you don't. That little cunt Jamie Preston is the one who snuffed Molly's life out, not you. Your mate Ben is bound to turn up soon. Probably wanted a break from that monster of a mother of his. As for your dad, what will be will be. But you'll never be homeless, I can promise you that. Us Butlers stick together. You know the score.'

'But who am I gonna live with?'

'I don't know yet. We'll worry about that once we know your dad's fate. He's up in court today and I know he would want you to be there. Why don't you jump in the bath while I pop round the cafe and get you something to eat? A couple of greasy egg and bacon rolls will sort that hangover of yours right out.'

'I don't think I'm well enough to go to court, and I really don't feel hungry.'

'You'll be fine, trust me. Put your smart suit on. Gonna look well bad if you don't show your face. Don't worry if you feel sick on the way, I'll tell your nan and Auntie Viv you've had a bug, OK?'

Little Vinny sighed. Why should he go to court? His family were always banging on about sticking together, yet no one wanted him. About to argue his point, Little Vinny decided against it. If his Dad was going to prison, he needed to keep on the right side of his Uncle Michael. 'OK. I'll put me suit on.'

After trying on five different outfits, Queenie Butler decided to wear her smart apple-green skirt suit. The colour suited her bleached blonde hair and bright red lipstick.

Deciding to add her big gold cross for luck so she could hold it and silently pray while waiting for the verdict, Queenie studied herself in the full-length mirror. 'Not bad for nearly fifty-four, if I say so meself,' she mumbled.

Having recovered from her shock at seeing a rock-hard todger the previous day, Vivian put her key in the lock.

'Cooey, Queen. I'm ready. Shall I make us a cuppa or would you prefer a sherry to settle your nerves?' she shouted out. She was only going to the court hearing to support her sister. As far as she was concerned, Vinny could rot in prison after what he'd put her through.

Queenie picked up her handbag and marched down the stairs. 'I'll have a cuppa, but put a large brandy in it. How you feeling today?'

'Fine. I saw Lil's niece when I went round for my paper this morning. She reckons Lil might be home next week and said she's gonna move in to care for her full-time. Nice of her, ain't it? And it saves us the worry of being lumbered with new neighbours.'

Queenie pursed her lips. She didn't much care for Lil's niece. 'Well, she's no bloody beauty queen, is she? Her arse looks like the back of a bus and as for the face ... Never gonna get a husband that one, so she might as well move in and look after her poor aunt. At least it will give her a purpose in life.'

'Aw, Queen, you are awful,' Vivian chuckled.

'Well, no point beating about the bush, is there? Best to say it as it is, that's my motto. 'Ere, that's Michael just pulled up outside. I'll drink me cuppa, then we'll make a move.'

Ahmed and Burak were standing outside Bow Street Magistrates' Court smoking.

'Did you tell Michael that we would be here today?' Burak asked.

'No. I thought it would be a nice surprise for him and his witch of a mother.'

Burak chuckled. 'Mumma's broomstick has just arrived by the looks of it.'

After a terrible journey, with Michael having to stop three times because her grandson felt sick, Queenie Butler was not amused to spot Ahmed. 'What's he bastard-well doing here? I don't want him in the courtroom. It should be family only.'

'Ahmed's all right, Nan. He's dad's best mate, so he's gonna want to show his support,' Little Vinny said.

Queenie glared at her grandson. 'You keep your opinions to yourself, you. Stomach bug, my arse. Pissed last night, more like.'

'Mum, please don't kick off. We're all here for Vinny and that's all that matters,' Michael hissed.

'I'm not. I'm here for your mother's sake,' Vivian mumbled.

Ahmed nodded. 'Good day to you all. Burak and I felt it only right to show our faces. Vinny has been through so much and he needs his friends at a time like this. I just hope he is freed.'

Ignoring Ahmed, Queenie grabbed her sister's arm and marched straight into the court. She had never liked that Turk from day one and in her opinion he'd been a bad influence on her son. It might have been Vinny driving the car on the night Lenny died, but if it hadn't been for Ahmed encouraging him to take drugs in the first place, Viv's son would most probably still be alive. Queenie had always worn rose-tinted spectacles when it came to her eldest, and this new theory she'd come up with suited her. Anything was better than hating and blaming her own flesh and blood.

Nancy and Joanna had been on the phone for the past half an hour. Joanna seemed in pretty good spirits overall, and Nancy suspected this was entirely due to her pregnancy.

'So have your mum and dad said any more about the baby, Jo?'

'No. It's as though they are trying to pretend I'm not pregnant. Perhaps they are hoping I will miscarry or change my mind about an abortion.'

'I doubt your mum and dad would wish a miscarriage on you, mate. They're obviously just worried in case Vinny finds out. Have you thought about where you are going to move to yet?'

'I shouldn't have to move far at all if Vinny gets sent down today. Our child will more than likely be a teenager by the time that bastard is let out. I am never going to tell my baby who his or her father is. Imagine having to tell your own kid their father is a murderer! It's too awful for words. You haven't told anyone, have you?'

'No. Of course not,' Nancy replied. Jo would be angry with her if she admitted she had told her mother.

'Good. I'd better go now. My mum's calling out that lunch is ready. I never skip a meal now I'm eating for two again. Promise me you'll ring me as soon as you hear the verdict, Nance. I so hope the authorities lock him up and throw away the key. Vinny is scum and I cannot believe I ever fell for him or his bullshit in the first place.'

The magistrate was a woman and when she bellowed the words 'Bail application rejected,' Vinny went ballistic.

'You fucking witch! I hope you've got kids and one of them gets murdered, you old cunt,' he screamed, thrashing about and trying to smash up the court.

‘Do something, Michael. He’s gonna get himself into even more trouble,’ Queenie cried.

Visibly upset as his father was wrestled to the ground and then handcuffed, Little Vinny bolted from the court.

Ahmed and Burak kept straight faces but were secretly elated. The police had urged the magistrate to remand Vinny in custody until his trial. Their argument was, now that Vinny had been charged with murder they had serious concerns that he could and probably would abscond, given the chance. They had even hinted that he might disappear abroad.

Overwhelmed with the urge to howl with laughter when Queenie began to batter a policeman with her handbag, Ahmed knew it was time to leave. He grabbed Burak’s arm then shouted, ‘Stay strong, Vinny. Keep your chin up and I will visit you very soon, my friend.’

After dropping his mum and aunt home, Michael headed straight back to the club with Little Vinny. He had a bit of a dilemma on his hands now. His nephew had to be found a place to stay where he would be safe and someone would keep an eye on him. Michael could think of only one solution: his father. But whether Albie would consider moving back to Whitechapel was another matter.

‘So where am I sleeping tonight? Ahmed said he will look after me if I have nowhere else to go.’

Michael looked at his nephew in horror. Over his dead body was he letting Ahmed take care of the boy. The buzzer stopped Michael from replying. ‘Go and answer the door, Vin. And unless it’s Paul, Pete or family, do not let anybody in.’

Little Vinny opened the main club door and was horrified when a tearful Alison Bloggs lunged towards him.

‘Get off of me, you slag. Touch me again and I’ll kill you.’

‘It’s Ben! He’s gone. My Ben has gone, Vin,’ Alison screamed.

Little Vinny felt the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. ‘Gone! Whaddya mean gone?’

Michael stormed into the foyer. ‘I’ve had enough poxy drama for one day. What’s with all the shouting, eh?’

Alison Bloggs let out a racking sob and sank to her knees. ‘He’s dead. My Ben’s dead. He hanged himself from a tree in Hainault Forest. Why did he do it, Vin? Why?’

Feeling sick, light-headed, shocked and at the same time shit-scared, Little Vinny turned on his heel and ran.

Over in North London, Vinny Butler was struggling to cope with his new surroundings. After being literally dragged from the court he had been driven to Pentonville Prison – or the Ville, as it was known in the circles Vinny mixed in – and forced to undergo a strip search.

It had been the most humiliating experience of Vinny’s life and, after kicking off big style during it, he’d been put on suicide watch and slung in a cell on his own, on what he could only imagine was the ‘nut-nut wing’. It had to be as he seemed to be surrounded by a load of loonies who were continuously screaming and shouting.

Hearing the Glaswegian in the cell next door yelling for methadone yet again, Vinny leapt off his bunk, ran to the door and began kicking and punching it in frustration. ‘I swear to you, if you don’t shut the fuck up, you Scottish shitcunt, I will cut your tongue out that big mouth of yours and ram it straight down the back of your throat.’

The Glaswegian chuckled. ‘I’d like to see you try, you cockney prick.’

Absolutely seething at being defied and laughed at, yet unable to do anything about it, Vinny crouched in the corner of his cell, put his hands over his ears and rocked to and fro. He had promised himself on the way here that he would allow himself to think of anything or anyone other than Molly. That was the only way to stop himself going totally insane and he knew it. As an image of his daughter’s beautiful face flashed through his mind, Vinny turned his attention back to the Glaswegian and tried to build a picture in his brain of what the tosser would look like. He then made a vow to himself. Whoever the Jock was – and he would make it his mission to find out – he would carry out his threat and mutilate the fucktard.

Little Vinny was drunk, distraught, tired and cold. Ben Bloggs had been the only true friend he'd ever had and now he was dead. Why was it that everybody important in his life was taken away from him? First his mum, dying of an overdose when he was only five. Now, on the same day his dad had been sent to prison for Christ knows how long, Ben had been found hanging from a tree.

As he crawled into what he and Ben had always referred to as their 'special place', Little Vinny had tears rolling down his cheeks. He wasn't stupid. He knew Ben's death was partly his fault. His pal had been a shadow of his former self ever since Molly's demise, but having inherited his father's genes, Little Vinny preferred to blame others rather than himself.

'I'm gonna miss you so much, Ben. We had so many laughs together, didn't we? Who am I gonna ride up and down on the District Line with now? I blame your whore of a mother. If you hadn't had such a shit upbringing and home life, you would still be alive. I'll make sure that slag pays for the way she treated you. That's the least I owe you, pal.'

Staring at the spot where he had brutally throttled the life out of his three-year-old sister, Little Vinny began to cry. 'I am sorry, Molly. I blame your mum and our dad for making me do what I did. When you was born, nobody wanted to know me any more, and I hated you for that. I suppose I was jealous.'

Full of self-pity, Little Vinny wiped the tears from his eyes and clambered to his feet. Taking one last look around, he made a vow to himself that this would be the last time he'd ever visit this spot.

## CHAPTER FIVE

'You're late,' Queenie informed her youngest son.

'Give me a break, Mum. I've been running around like a blue-arsed fly since Vinny got bird. Why have you summoned me round at this time of the morning anyway? I've only had four hours' sleep.'

'We'll get to that in a minute. How d'ya think Vinny's coping? He sounded very stressed when he rung me yesterday. I'm ever so worried about him, Michael. Why didn't he want me to come with you today?'

'Probably because prison's no place for a lady. And it's no good asking me how he's coping because I won't know until I visit him, Mum. You're the one he's been phoning, not me,' Michael hissed. It was a week to the day since Vinny had been refused bail. To say Michael was miffed that his brother had not bothered to contact him once in that time was putting it mildly.

'Why you so ratty?'

'Because I've got a lot on me plate.'

'Like what?' Queenie enquired.

'Like the club's takings are in freefall, plus I've got my wife on my case the whole time because I'm having to sleep at the club to keep an eye on my nephew because no other bastard will do it.'

Knowing Michael's words were a dig at her for refusing to take on the responsibility of minding Little Vinny, Queenie quickly changed the subject. 'Still won't talk about what happened, your Auntie Viv. Traumatized she is, I can tell. I mean, having a big dingle-dangle waved at her at her time of life could've killed her, Michael. What a shock for the poor woman,' she elaborated.

'Bang out of order, Mum. And as I promised, I'll pay Pervy Pat a visit. I haven't forgotten, just haven't had time yet.'

'Best you make time and pay him a bit more than a quick visit now, boy. Janey came clean to her family and Billy Higgins keeled over with a heart attack. Had angina for years, the poor bastard. Been rushed to hospital and is in intensive care. Your Auntie Viv's in pieces, as you can well imagine. She's always held a torch for Billy. Pervy Pat needs to be dealt with, Michael, before he gets the chance to pounce again. Shame Vinny's not around. He'd have sorted it in no time. Don't want people taking liberties while he's at Her Majesty's pleasure.'

'Vinny ain't the only person round 'ere that's capable of dealing with stuff, Mother. I do happen to be a Butler as well, you know. I'll sort it ASAP, all right?'

Queenie nodded. 'That'll be great comfort to Auntie Viv, boy. She's very depressed today and we don't want her going down that road again, do we?'

Little Vinny felt physically sick as he approached the Bloggses' abode. Letting that toothless junkie suck his cock haunted him nearly as much as throttling Molly.

Awoken from her drug-induced sleep, Alison Bloggs began screaming obscenities at the top of her voice. She stopped the moment she stuck her head out of her bedroom window and got a glimpse of her visitor. 'Oh, it's you, Vin. Wanna come in? Got any booze or puff on ya?'

Little Vinny stared up at the whore with hatred. 'No I don't, and no I ain't. I wanna give Ben a good send-off. My Uncle Michael's gonna pay for it.'

'Bit late. Ben was buried yesterday, I think.'

'Whaddya mean, you *think*!'

Alison Bloggs shrugged. 'Some geezer turned up 'ere the other day and said they were burying him.'

'Didn't you even go to the funeral?' Little Vinny asked in astonishment.

'I weren't well. They took all me other kids away, Vin. Suicide is a selfish way out. Ben left me right in the shit. Come in, boy. Makes me feel better, your company.'

Pausing only to retch his guts up all over the pavement, Little Vinny ran off as fast as his legs would carry him.

‘How’s it going, bruv?’ Michael asked diplomatically. His mother had made him promise to tread on egg shells during the visit as she didn’t want her number-one son any more upset than he already was.

‘I’m having a wonderful time, Michael. It reminds me of being back at Kings Holiday Park.’

About to order his brother to drop the sarcasm, Michael bit his tongue instead, leaned forward and, using a code they’d worked out over the years for when there were eavesdroppers in the vicinity, told him what Pervy Pat had been up to. Since the day Queenie had told him about Viv’s ordeal, Michael had been having him watched. It turned out the nonce was a creature of habit: every night, regular as clockwork, he frequented the same two boozers. He was working up to telling Vinny how he planned to deal with the bastard when his brother cut him off.

‘How dare that cunt behave in such a way to Auntie Viv! I take that as a personal insult, don’t you? So what ya gonna do about it, little bruv? Only, it weren’t that long ago you nearly shit yourself over a cow mooing the night we sorted Clever Trevor,’ Vinny taunted. Since a very early age it had fallen to him to solve any problem his mother or family might encounter, and he hated the fact that he was helpless in the Ville while scum like Pervy Pat roamed his turf. His little brother had always been a reluctant participant in any heavy violence and he didn’t trust him to take over the reins in his absence – not that he had any choice in the matter.

‘I ain’t no mug, Vin, so please don’t treat me like one. I’ll look after the family, and put it this way, I’m the only fucking guardian your son has at the moment. I’ll sort Pervy Pat, don’t you worry. And while I’m at it I’ll restore our club to its former glory days. We’re losing money hand over fist at the moment, but I have a plan.’

‘What you on about?’ Vinny sneered.

Sick of being treated like a lackey, Michael forgot all about his mother’s earlier warning and came right out with it: ‘I’m thinking of turning the club into a disco. Times have changed over the years and we need to move with ’em. Nobody wants to see live singers these days. I just know I can earn us a fortune by changing things. Trust me on this one.’

The only thing that kept Vinny from reaching across the table and punching his brother was the thought of ending up in solitary confinement. Instead he leaned across the table and hissed, ‘You listen to me, Billy Big Bollocks. That club is my baby, always has been and always will be. Therefore, I decide what’s what. You get my drift? Defy me, Michael, and I swear on my life I will make sure you live to regret it. Now, do we fucking understand one another?’

In the depths of Hainault Forest, Little Vinny was stoned, drunk and extremely morose. He had no idea of the exact spot where Ben had hung himself, but just being there made him feel close to his mate.

Annoyed with himself for doubting Ben’s loyalty, Little Vinny felt he needed to get a few things off his chest. ‘I loved you, pal,’ he shouted into the trees. ‘I weren’t really gonna tell the Old Bill that you had an unhealthy interest in Molly. I did think about saying it, but only because I thought you might’ve grassed. I should’ve known better. You were a top lad. No way would you ever snitch on me.’

Wishing more than anything else in the world that Ben was still alive to reply to him, Little Vinny put his head in his hands and wept. He’d been helping out his Uncle Michael at the club, but he couldn’t really move on with his life just yet. Too much had happened in a short space of time and his head was a complete mess.

Crouching down as if in prayer, Little Vinny made a vow to his pal: ‘I’m gonna get revenge for you, Ben. I know how much you loved your brothers and sisters, and I’ll make sure they don’t suffer like you did. You deserved so much more in life than the shitty cards you were dealt. I know you never killed yourself because of Molly. It was your junkie slag of a mother that drove you to it. Well, I’m gonna sort her out for ya. It’s the least I can do after everything you did for me.’

Pete and Paul had been friends with Roy Butler at school. Back in the sixties when Roy and Vinny had first opened the club, both men had jumped at the chance to work for the Butlers and had remained loyal ever since.

Officially, they were bouncers, but Pete and Paul had always been willing to help out in an unofficial capacity if need be. Even so, they were both gobsmacked when Michael Butler summoned them in for an afternoon meeting and demanded that they kidnap Pervy Pat that very night.

‘It’s a bit rushed, isn’t it, Michael? We’ll need time to sort out an alibi and prepare properly,’ Pete warned.

Though neither of them said it, it wasn’t the suddenness that worried them or even the order itself, it was the fact that Michael was the one issuing it. Although he’d been part of the set-up for years, Vinny had always been the one in charge of dealing with that side of things.

Desperate to make an impression, Michael Butler stood firm. ‘I’ve already sorted out our alibi plus a van, and we already know Pervy Pat’s movements. Billy Higgins is one of our own and that nonce-case needs to be stopped once and for all,’ Michael insisted. He didn’t mention his aunt’s ordeal, as his mother had ordered him not to tell anyone, other than Vinny. ‘Nosy bastards round ’ere will have a field day if they find out Viv got offered a portion of helmet pie,’ she had spluttered. Seeing the doubt in his employees’ eyes annoyed Michael. ‘Not being funny, lads, but Roy is dead, Vinny is banged up for the foreseeable, so I’m your boss now. You in or out?’

Paul and Pete exchanged glances. ‘We’re in, boss,’ Paul confirmed.

Queenie Butler was not in the most patient of moods. She’d done her utmost to cheer her sister up, but Vivian was still as miserable as sin. Viv had got over having a todger waved in her direction. They’d both roared with laughter over that last night. But she’d now gone into meltdown over Billy bloody Higgins. A man she’d barely spoken to for years.

‘I should’ve gone with my instinct and called the police, Queen. If I’d accompanied Janey to the station, she’d have had no need to blurt it out to her family. She didn’t want to tell ’em, but obviously they guessed something was wrong. It’s my fault Billy’s fighting for his life.’

Queenie gritted her teeth. If her memory served her correctly, Vivian hadn’t shed this many tears over poor Molly. ‘For Christ’s sake, snap out of it, Viv. It’s terrible what happened to Janey, but no real harm was done – he only tickled her with his stick, and she’s barely family to us, is she? As for Billy, he’s been living in Rainham for donkey’s years with a heart condition. Been in and out of hospital many a time.’

Shocked by her sister’s outburst, Vivian retaliated: ‘You can be a very cold-hearted person at times, Queenie. Has anybody ever told you that?’

‘You need to get a grip, love, or you’ll end up in that loony bin again if you’re not careful. I spoke to Michael earlier and he’s promised to deal with the matter sooner rather than later, OK?’

Vivian nodded. Ensuring Pervy Pat got his comeuppance was the least she could do for Janey and Billy.

Having waited until it was dark, Little Vinny put the hood up on his jacket and checked nobody was about as he tapped on Alison Bloggs’ front door.

‘I’m so glad you’re here, Vin. I’ve been feeling really depressed.’

Ushering the ugly whore into the hallway, Little Vinny handed her the bottle of vodka he’d stolen from the club. ‘Get that down your neck. It’ll make you feel better,’ he urged.

‘D’ya want me to suck you off again?’ Alison volunteered hopefully. She wasn’t used to gifts unless she gave something in return.

‘Maybe later,’ Little Vinny lied. ‘First I want you to drink that and tell me everything that’s happened.’

Alison began to greedily slurp the neat vodka while describing how Social Services had turned up earlier in the week and taken all her children into care.

‘They’re stopping me child allowance, Vin. How am I gonna manage financially?’ Alison whined, clearly far more concerned about losing the money than having her kids taken away.

Little Vinny sipped his cider and smirked as Alison’s eyelids began to droop. He’d bought a score’s worth of Temazepam off a local dealer and emptied the liquid from the capsules in the vodka bottle.

Putting on an identical pair of Marigold gloves to the ones he’d throttled his sister with, Little Vinny waited until Alison had drunk most of the vodka before plonking himself next to her on the stinking threadbare sofa.

‘That you, Vin? What you doing?’ a sleepy Alison slurred.

‘I’m doing what I should’ve done a long time ago. Snuffing out your miserable existence, you waste of fucking space.’

‘What?’ Alison mumbled, eyelids drooping.

Little Vinny took the razor blade out of his pocket. ‘Rot in hell, slag,’ he hissed, as he slashed first Alison’s right wrist, then her left. He then took great pleasure in watching the blood and life seep out of her body.

Patrick Campbell aka Pervy Pat was not a stupid man. He’d experienced more in his twenty-five years than most blokes had in a lifetime.

Left in a public toilet as a newborn baby, Pat had no idea who his actual birth mother was. He’d then been shunted from one children’s home to another before being fostered by Lena and John at the age of ten.

John had been a nice man, had encouraged him to take up sport. Lena, however, was a bitch. When John had a heart attack and passed away, Pat had been led a dog’s life, both physically and mentally, thanks to Lena. Well aware that he was now notorious among the locals, since his release from prison Pat had taken to going further afield in search of prey. Pretending he was some big shot usually got him what he wanted these days without a struggle.

Rubbing his hand up and down his latest victim’s back, Pat was rather pissed off when she informed him that she had no intention of leaving with him, no matter how much he flashed the cash and promised her a good time.

‘Your loss, sweetheart. There’s plenty more fish in the sea,’ he said, turning away.

What Pervy Pat didn’t realize as he sipped the last of his brandy and sang along to Black Slate’s ‘Amigo’ was that outside the Fanshawe Tavern a rather unpleasant surprise was waiting for him.

Parked up behind Patrick Campbell’s car, Michael Butler was becoming rather impatient at being kept waiting. ‘I thought you said he always left this boozier before ten.’

‘He did the other nights, Michael, but we’ve only followed him a few times, remember,’ Pete reminded his boss.

‘Give us that torch. It’s as black as Newgate’s knocker out there,’ Michael ordered.

All three men were sitting in the back of the van while keeping a watchful eye out the front window. ‘Don’t start shining torches. We don’t want to bring unwanted attention to ourselves. No way can we miss him parked ’ere,’ Paul warned.

‘So what’s occurring exactly, Michael? We need to know our alibi,’ Pete said.

‘Our alibi is a game of poker at the club. Us three, plus Nick, the Kelly brothers and Jimmy Elliot. The others are all back at the club as we speak. I’ve told ’em to answer the phone and say I’m in the middle of a card game if anyone buzzes or rings. I’ve also told Nick to make two outgoing phone calls to my mum and dad, just in case the phone records are checked. I’ll wise my parents up on what time I supposedly called when I get back.’

Seeing Pete and Paul glance worriedly at one another, Michael grinned. ‘Like two rabbits caught in the headlights, you pair remind me of. Chill, for fuck’s sake. I know you’re thinking I shouldn’t have involved Nick ’cause he has Old Bill in the family. But that makes for an even better alibi, if you get my drift. Anyway, we’re not committing murder, just gonna teach Pat what happens to perverts.’

Pete stood up and leaned over the passenger seat. 'Speak of the devil.'

Pat Campbell's pride and joy was his Jaguar XJS, so his first thought when he was grabbed from behind by two men in balaclavas was that they were after stealing his car. 'Get off me, you shitbags,' he yelled, desperately trying to break free from their grasp.

Seconds later, Pervy Pat was smashed over the head with a hammer by a third man, then dragged into the back of a van.

Little Vinny was in high spirits as he strolled back towards the club. Today had been a good day. Visiting Hainault to pay his respects to Ben had made him feel much better about himself, and killing Alison was the icing on the cake. If Ben was looking down from heaven, Little Vinny knew he'd be relieved that his brothers and sisters would no longer have to suffer the hardship he had. At least in care the poor little bastards would be bathed, fed and clothed properly.

The spring in his step left Little Vinny the moment he put his hand in his pocket. His keys were missing.

Patrick Campbell had no idea where he was being driven to, or who'd abducted him. The bang on the head had left him dazed and confused, and he couldn't see a thing because a sack of some kind had been placed over his head and tied up around his neck.

'Where am I? What's going on?'

Michael Butler grinned at Pete as he supplied the answer: 'You need a little operation, me old mucker. Did you know that poor young Janey was a pal of mine's granddaughter?'

'Operation! But I'm not ill. And who the hell is Janey?' Pat mumbled through the sack.

Pulling the sharp carving knife out of the bag of goodies he'd brought with him, Michael ordered Pete to tie their prey's arms up.

'What you gonna do to him?' Pete asked, alarmed. He and Paul had been under the impression they were just going to teach the nonce a valuable lesson.

Michael Butler had never been as cold-blooded or sadistic as Vinny. Even Roy had got off on violence more than he had. However, now that he had been left in sole charge of the Butler empire, Michael knew he had no choice other than to do what he was about to.

The man's screams were horrendous when Michael unzipped his trousers and began hacking wildly at his penis.

'Jesus wept! He's gonna die and we're all gonna be up for murder now,' Pete hissed.

Chuckling the severed penis out of the window as though it were no more than an unwanted pork sausage, Michael ordered Pete to shut the fuck up and told Paul to take the next turn off and stop the van as soon as the coast was clear.

Ten minutes later, the cockless, unconscious pervert who'd wronged Auntie Viv was lying on a grass verge in Aveley, while Michael and his henchmen were on their way back up the A13 towards London.

Little Vinny was in a complete panic. It wasn't just his old house keys on the keyring, the bunch his uncle had entrusted him with for the club were on there too.

He'd had them when he went into Alison Bloggs' place, so they must have fallen out of his tracksuit bottoms while he was sitting on her shabby sofa. In his stoned, drunken stupor he'd been so elated at killing her that he'd forgotten the most important thing of all: covering his tracks.

Not knowing how to dig himself out of the hole he'd got himself into, he tried to get hold of his uncle and then Ahmed. When that failed he was at a loss. Having made his way back to the club he decided his best option would be to hide in a doorway opposite the club and wait for Michael to show up.

'Got any drink or money, Sonny Jim?'

Little Vinny startled at the sight of the dishevelled old tramp peering in at him. It occurred to him that this doorway was probably the vagrant's spot, and the last thing he needed was the guy

kicking off and drawing attention to him. He held out his bottle of cider. 'Here, have this.' Then he reached into his pocket for his last fiver and handed him that too.

'Bless you, my boy. May God take good care of you,' the tramp said, before walking away with his gifts.

Slumped in the doorway with his head in his hands, Little Vinny decided he had nothing to lose by putting his own faith in the big man above. 'Please, God, I swear, if you help me out of this situation, I will never drink, take drugs or do anything else bad ever again,' he mumbled.

When his Uncle Michael suddenly appeared, as if materializing out of nowhere, for the first time ever Little Vinny truly believed that it paid to be nice to people.

## PART TWO

Just as you cannot understand the path of the wind or the mystery of a tiny baby growing in its mother's womb, so you cannot understand the activity of God, who does all things.

Ecclesiastes 11:5

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Summer 1984**

Queenie and Vivian had always been creatures of habit, and for the past few years they had fallen into a regular Saturday routine. First they would travel down to Plaistow Cemetery to tend to the graves of Roy, Lenny and Molly. Then they would visit their dear old mum's plot in Bow before popping home, getting dolled up and heading off to the Roman.

Roman Road market was most certainly the place to be these days, especially on a Saturday. The trendy stalls and shops attracted women done up to the nines, not just from London but Essex and the surrounding counties as well.

At fifty-seven, Queenie was three years older than her sister. Both women wore their hair straight, shoulder-length and bleached blonde, and they had often been mistaken for twins. Neither lacked confidence. The heavy foundation they applied helped cover up their wrinkles, the bright red lipstick thickened their naturally thin lips, and the high heels they wore made them look much taller. Queenie was only five foot two, Vivian five three, but in their eyes they looked far more glamorous than all the younger dolly birds the Roman seemed to attract.

Vivian nudged her sister. 'Look at the bleedin' state of that! Talk about mutton done up as lamb.'

Queenie craned her neck to see who her sister was referring to. 'Gordon Bennett! She's got to be in her fifties. That ain't a skirt, it's more like a wide belt. If you look close enough, you can see what the old trollop had for breakfast this morning. Fancy walking about showing your muff at her age! Got no class these women, have they?'

About to reply, Vivian unfortunately caught her heel in a hole in the pavement and fell flat on her face.

Queenie crouched down. 'You all right, Vivvy?'

Within seconds, Vivian was surrounded by concerned shoppers and stallholders. Steve, who sold fruit and veg, gathered up Viv's shopping bags. 'You OK? Let me help you up, darling.'

Being the aunt of such notorious nephews often had its advantages, but right now Viv wished she was anybody but herself. The story of her stacking it would be all round Whitechapel by this evening and her nosy neighbours would probably dine out on it for months. 'Poxy bastard shoes. Me heel snapped off. Show's over, people,' Vivian spat, as she scrambled to her feet.

'Have you hurt yourself?' Queenie asked, her face full of concern.

Hobbling towards her sister with one shoe on and one off, Vivian grabbed Queenie's arm and hissed, 'I'm fine. Let's go to the pub.'

Michael Butler grinned as he finished counting the previous evening's takings. His brilliant business brain had proved all the doubters wrong. He was literally raking it in.

When Vinny had first got banged up, Michael had gone along with his wishes and kept their club as it was by sticking with the singers, comedians, live bands, etc. But when the takings had dipped even more, he'd had no choice but to move with the times. His mother and Vinny had been appalled. But Michael had stuck by his guns, and his disco idea had taken off almost immediately.

The club now opened four nights a week. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights were aimed at the youngsters, and on Monday evenings Michael had come up with an over-thirties' night. He and his staff privately referred to it as 'grab-a-granny night', but it had proved a massive success. The only thing from the past that Michael hadn't got rid of was the strippers on Sunday lunchtimes. They attracted perverts from all over and perverts spent good money.

His two old stalwarts Pete and Paul remained as invaluable as ever, but it had been Little Vinny who had proved to be the biggest asset to Michael at the club. His nephew was now eighteen and

unrecognizable as the scruffy skinhead delinquent he'd once been. The lad worked like a Trojan, had a great business brain, and as a result Michael had added a commission-based bonus on top of his wage.

To say Michael had been surprised by the change in Little Vinny was an understatement. He'd been convinced his nephew was a liability, especially after the night when he'd returned to the club after chopping Patrick Campbell's cock off to find out the stupid kid had killed Alison Bloggs and left his keys in her house.

Doing what any decent uncle would have, Michael had broken into the property in the middle of the night to rectify Little Vinny's mistake. Thankfully, he'd found the keys within seconds and made a speedy exit, leaving Alison's body where it was.

Both he and Little Vinny had got away with their crimes. The police had concluded Alison's death was an open-and-shut case of suicide. As for Pervy Pat, he'd survived his 'operation' and after a spell when his story was on the front page of all the national papers as well as the London press – it wasn't every day a geezer had his manhood chopped off on the A13 – he'd slunk off, disappearing without trace.

Michael had just finished locking the takings in the safe when the phone rang. The minute he heard his drama queen of a wife ranting at him hysterically down the line, his good mood evaporated. His sons were a handful, especially Daniel. But boys would be boys and, as per usual, Nancy was making a mountain out of a molehill. So what if they'd had a ruck with some lads from the opposing team while playing football? That's what lads did, and Michael was glad his boys had inherited his genes and stuck up for one another and themselves. 'Nance, I really can't be dealing with this right now. I'll have a word with the boys tomorrow, OK?'

'No, Michael. It's not OK. I told all three of them to go to their room and stay there, but the only one who made a move to obey me was Lee. Daniel just laughed in my face, then dragged Lee and Adam out the door with him. I have no idea where they are now, so you really need to take a break from that bloody club of yours, and put your family first for once.'

'It's three in the afternoon, not the morning, Nance. Lee's twelve, Dan's eleven and Adam is nine. They're hardly toddlers, are they?'

'No, more's the pity. Definitely got your family's genes though. I despair for their futures, Michael.'

Feeling his hackles rise, Michael took a deep breath. No way would he still be with Nancy if it weren't for the fact the boys needed a mother. 'You need to take a reality check, Nance. The only one of my sons who has never brought the police to our door is Lee – and Denise gave birth to him, not you. If you're searching for bad genes, why don't you take a butcher's at your own side of the family, eh? Your mum's top drawer, bless her. But your father and brother are two of the biggest arseholes God ever put breath in.'

Little Vinny parked up in Cardigan Road, closed the roof of his white Ford Cabriolet, and sauntered towards the market. His life was pretty decent these days, apart from the odd flashback that disturbed his sleep now and then.

The July sun was scorching, so Little Vinny took off his T-shirt and slung it casually over his right shoulder. Checking out his reflection to ensure he had not messed up his carefully gelled hair, he was aware of a few admiring glances from younger and older females as he continued his journey.

Sammi-Lou Allen grinned as she spotted her boyfriend from afar. He was so handsome and at six foot tall he stood out even in a market full of people. With his jet-black hair, piercing green eyes and cute turned-up button nose, it really had been a case of love at first sight for Sammi-Lou. The fact he ran a nightclub and was Vinny Butler's son was just an added bonus.

Putting his arms around his girlfriend's waist, Little Vinny treated her to a short but passionate kiss. Sammi-Lou was the seventeen-year-old daughter of multi-millionaire Gary Allen, who owned Allen's Construction. Five foot five, with beautiful blonde hair, a voluptuous figure and big chocolate-coloured eyes, it had been a case of love at first sight for Little Vinny too. Before Sammi he had

played the field. The club turning into a disco and him being classed as management had enabled him to take full advantage of the young birds who flocked there in their scantily dressed droves – and take advantage he most certainly had.

‘What do you want to do first? Shop or eat?’ Sammi asked excitedly. Unlike her ex-boyfriend, Little Vinny was as passionate about shopping and fashion as she was.

‘Let’s grab a bite to eat. Not sure I’ll have time to shop today. My nan rung me as I left home. My aunt took a tumble earlier and she’s twisted her ankle. They’re in a boozier along the road here and I said I’d pick ’em up at four.’

‘Aww. I hope your aunt is OK. Her and your nan make me laugh so much. My dad’s organizing a big party at our house for my mum’s fortieth. All your family are invited. My mum can’t wait to meet Viv and Queenie. I’ve told her so much about them.’

Little Vinny felt a shiver run down his spine. He had been with Sammi just over six months now and had met her parents twice. Both times Sammi’s little sister had been present, and it had really freaked him out. The child was seven, had blonde curly hair and reminded him of how Molly might look now. Worse still, her name was Millie. ‘I won’t be able to get time off work, babe, if the party is at a weekend. I have a club to run, you know that.’

‘But it’s only one night, Vin, and I want you there with me. Surely you can take one Saturday off?’

Desperate to change the subject, Little Vinny clasped his girlfriend’s hand and smiled. ‘I’ll do my best. Speaking of parties, you looking forward to Charlene’s tonight?’

Sammi grinned. ‘Yep, but I’m only staying a couple of hours. I’ll be at the club with you by eleven.’

Little Vinny grimaced. As much as he thought the world of Sammi-Lou, ever since she had passed her driving test and her dad had bought her a brand-new Mini, she had taken to showing up at the club every single Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. ‘Sam, it’s your best mate’s eighteenth. You can’t sod off after a couple of hours. It’s not right.’

‘But I like spending Saturday evenings with you, and waking up with you on a Sunday morning.’

‘Yeah, I know you do, and I like it too. But because I thought you weren’t coming to the club tonight, I invited some old school pals of mine down. We’re gonna have a game of cards with Uncle Michael and a couple of his mates once we lock up. I can’t cancel now, it’s too late,’ Little Vinny lied. He didn’t even have any old school friends. The only pal he’d ever had in those days was Ben.

‘OK. If you don’t want me there, I won’t come,’ Sammi said, her eyes brimming with tears.

Suddenly feeling as suffocated as a Doberman locked in a two-foot cage, Little Vinny took his girlfriend’s hand and steered her into Beau Baggage. He knew it was one of her favourite shops. ‘Let’s not argue. Pick out whatever you want and I’ll buy it for ya.’

Vinny Butler finished his hundred press-ups and decided to have a rest before starting his sit-ups. At least six times a day he exercised vigorously. In prison you needed something to focus the mind on.

Thanks to his smart-arse brief and brilliant Queen’s Counsel, Vinny had literally gotten away with murder. The prosecution had tried to portray him as some kind of monster, but the jury had clearly been touched by Molly’s untimely death, and all he’d ended up with was an eight-year stretch for manslaughter. Bobby Jackson’s family and friends had gone apeshit when the murder verdict was read out as ‘not guilty’. Jackson’s lunatic of a mother had even lunged at Queenie and then been dragged from the court kicking and screaming.

Having already spent over a year on remand before his trial, Vinny should have been up for parole soon. It was usual to serve only half your sentence if your behaviour was good. Unfortunately for Vinny, he’d had a few altercations with other lags over the years, and as a result the authorities had argued he should not be released yet. His brief, however, was on the ball and had told Vinny that, providing he stayed out of trouble, he was sure he could get him parole in the next year.

Lying on his bunk, Vinny stared at the ceiling. He was by far the most respected inmate in the Ville now, and so he bloody-well should be – after all, he was *the* Vinny Butler. It hadn't been easy, getting his head back together after Molly's death, but once he'd made his vow not to think or speak about his daughter, he'd started to get back to his old self. It had been tough, and even now he couldn't stop Molly appearing in his dreams, but he refused to shed a tear. Only weak men cried, and if prison had taught Vinny anything, it was how to be mentally strong.

He checked the time; his brother would be here soon. It was a prospect that gave him no pleasure. Relations between himself and Michael had become somewhat strained ever since he'd been banged up. Right at the start they'd had a bust-up over Little Vinny's living arrangements that kept them from speaking to each other for nine months. Vinny had expected his son to move in with Michael, and had gone ballistic when his brother had instead rented a house opposite his own and allowed Little Vinny to live in it with their arsehole of a father. In Vinny's eyes, Molly would still be alive if his old man hadn't fathered an illegitimate child with that slag Judy Preston.

When Michael disobeyed his wishes and turned the club into a disco, it had led to even more friction. It grated on Vinny that his brother had been right and he'd been wrong. Even though it was earning him big bucks, he'd rather the disco had failed. Anything would have been better than having to eat humble pie.

In Vinny's opinion, the success of the venture had gone to Michael's head. According to Ahmed, he was now swanning around Whitechapel in a brand-new red Porsche convertible like he owned the fucking area. He'd gotten far too big for his boots, and Vinny would have liked nothing better than to bring him down a peg or two.

Resisting the urge to punch the wall, Vinny took a deep breath and did his sit-ups instead. He had no idea why Michael had insisted on visiting him today, but he'd be glad when the visit was over.

Standing in the queue to be searched, Michael Butler smiled politely at a blonde who seemed unable to take her eyes off him. He was used to lots of female attention. His boyish good looks and charm attracted all types.

The blonde walked over to him. 'Hi, I'm Wendy – I've seen you in the Blind Beggar. I'd just like to thank you for getting rid of you-know-who. He attacked me many moons ago and I'm so glad I never have to bump into him any more.'

Rumour had spread around the East End that Michael was responsible for Pervy Pat's little accident and subsequent disappearance. Billy Higgins had recovered from his heart attack, then died of another six months later, and Janey had since moved away from the area. Far too wise to ever admit his involvement, Michael nevertheless enjoyed the notoriety. Even law-abiding members of the community looked upon nonces as vermin, and he was now seen as some kind of local hero.

After politely telling the blonde she must have mistaken him for somebody else, Michael allowed the screw to search him, then sauntered into the visiting area.

Vinny faked a smile as his brother approached. 'What the fuck's that?' he asked, pointing at Michael's new ring.

'What's it look like, Vin?'

'Something you nicked out of a bender's jewellery box.'

Knowing Vinny was being his usual facetious self, Michael decided two could play at that game. 'Treated meself up at Hatton Garden, bruv. Look at the quality of that diamond. It's flawless. Bought this Gucci watch an' all. Thank God I had the foresight to turn our business around, eh? Would never have been able to afford such luxuries otherwise. If we'd stuck with those live singers like you wanted us to, I'd have been wearing a Swatch by now,' Michael chuckled.

'You have what is referred to in medical terms as short-term memory loss, Michael. Have you forgotten how you cried and threw all your toys out the pram when I marched in that shitty garage and told your old boss you couldn't be his tea boy no more? You'd still be working there if it wasn't for me taking the initiative.'

Smirking, Michael laughed out loud. 'I doubt that very much. Got more of a business brain than you'll ever have, that's for sure. What I've done to the club speaks for itself. The proof is in the pudding, brother dearest.'

Vinny was not amused. 'If you've come 'ere just to give it the big 'un, bruv, you might as well fuck off now. I really ain't in the mood after the morning I've had.'

Sarcastic tone immediately changing to one of concern, Michael asked what had happened.

'Jay Boy's brother's been killed, and I heard some Jock cunt laughing about it earlier. He's so gonna get it. It's the same mouthy prick who gave me stick when I first arrived. He's only been back in 'ere a week. I'm gonna shut him up for good this time,' Vinny hissed, before glancing around to check nobody was earwigging.

'Sorry to hear that. I know how close you are to Jay Boy. Be careful though. You don't wanna get more time added on your sentence.'

'I'm gonna have a word with Jay later. He'll be out before me and he needs something to look forward to. I'm gonna offer him a job at the club.'

'Erm, aren't you forgetting something? We're partners, remember?'

'Don't start larging it again, Michael. The mood I'm in, I'll smash you right across this room in a minute.'

Michael stood up. Vinny would never change. He was a regular Jekyll and Hyde. 'I'm gonna tell Mum we had a pleasant visit and you're sending me another VO real soon. Best you say the same if you don't wanna upset her. Oh, and I'm happy to trust your faith in Jay Boy and employ him. Perhaps in future though you should ask me rather than tell me. It's much more polite and professional.'

'See you, you flash cunt. I've got people keeping an eye on you. So watch your back, big man,' Vinny bellowed.

Michael held his hands out and pretended they were shaking. 'I'm terrified, bruv. Honest I am.'

Losing it completely, Vinny leapt up to punch Michael's lights out and was quickly restrained by the screws.

Having spent the afternoon drinking brandies in the Rose of Denmark, Vivian could now see the funny side of her little tumble. 'Trust me, Queen, never gonna live down the shame, am I?'

Queenie chuckled. The sight of Vivian cursing, while hobbling down the Roman with one shoe on and the other in her hand had been comical and attracted some weird looks from passers-by. 'I felt sorry for that nice lady who works in Ashby's. She only asked if you were OK and you told her to mind her own fucking business. How we meant to queue up in there for our meat and salt-beef sandwiches in future, eh?'

Vivian roared with laughter. 'I'll go in and apologize to her next week. Silly question to ask though. If I was OK, I would hardly be limping along the road like a lame dog with one shoe in me sodding hand, would I?'

'Oh, Viv, you are a case. How's your ankle now? It's definitely swollen. We'll get a bag of frozen peas on that when we get home.'

'Can't feel no pain – the alcohol must have numbed it. It's more painful looking at these poxy slip-ons you bought me. That's the last time I'm sending you shoe-shopping. I look like silly-girl-got-none. Hope we don't see anyone we know as we walk to the car.' She checked her watch. 'What time did you say Little Vinny was picking us up? Ring him and ask if he can bring a balaclava with him so I can't be recognized in me new shoes.'

Her sides aching from laughter, Queenie urged her sister to behave herself.

Little Vinny was horrified when he arrived at the pub to find both his nan and aunt inebriated and giggling like two silly schoolgirls. He was clean as a whistle these days. Did not drink, smoke or take drugs.

'What the bleedin' hell do you look like? And why you got your jeans rolled up and those silly dark glasses on? Not sunny in here, is it? It's a pub,' Queenie tutted.

‘And he’s topless. I think me and you should walk in a boozier one day baring our top halves, don’t you, Queen? I mean, if you’ve got it, why not flaunt it? And if that skinny bag of bones has it, then so have we.’

Even though he knew full well he looked a cool dude in his rolled-up faded Levis, white Lacoste trainers and Porsche sunglasses, Little Vinny felt his face go red as he caught a couple of birds and a geezer looking his way and laughing. His nan and aunt had loud enough voices when sober, let alone when drunk. ‘Yous two wouldn’t understand fashion. Come on, we’re going.’

‘Don’t be so rude. You’ve not even bought me and Viv a drink yet. Put your top on and get up the bar. We’ll both have a brandy and lemonade,’ Queenie ordered.

‘Aw my gawd, Queen! He’s wearing pink. Take the T-shirt back off again, Vin. You look like a poof!’ Vivian guffawed.

Noticing the two birds and bloke on the next table laugh at him again, Little Vinny saw red. He ran towards the male, grabbed him by the neck and slammed his head against the wall. ‘You wanna be careful who you take the piss out of, you sappy-looking prick. I am Little Vinny Butler, son of *the* Vinny Butler, and I can easily arrange your funeral.’

Aware that his cellmate was trying to stifle his sobs, Vinny Butler walked over to his pal’s bunk and rubbed his back. He’d calmed down now, although Michael had pissed him off immensely. ‘Let it all out, Jay. Far better out than in – trust me, I know.’

‘I feel such a fucking dick crying, Vin, but I loved my bro so much,’ Jay wept in his broad Scouse accent.

Jay Boy Gerrard was an up-and-coming boxer who had only just turned pro when he’d ventured down to London for a pal’s stag night. Undefeated as an amateur, the future looked bright for Jay Boy until he’d got involved in a drunken brawl. One punch was all it had taken Jay to kill his victim. It hadn’t been his intention, but unfortunately the lad had fallen backwards, smashed his head against the edge of a kerb and died instantly.

Jay had been given a five-year sentence, and was looking forward to his imminent release. He and his brother had planned to set up their own boxing gym, but that dream was over now. His brother had been stabbed outside a boozier in Kirby last night and was dead. ‘I don’t know what I’m going to do, Vin. My bro’s a legend in Liverpool. I don’t want to go back there now. If I do, I’ll be reminded of his death everywhere I turn. I can’t believe he’s gone and I’m never going to see him again. It doesn’t seem real.’

Knowing exactly what his mate was going through, Vinny gave the lad a hug. Jay was fourteen years his junior. They had been sharing a cell for the past two years and Vinny cared for the bloke like a brother or a son. Jay had most certainly brightened up his time inside, which was why Vinny wanted to repay the favour. ‘Listen, mate, why don’t you stay in London and work with me? You can work at the club. I’ll see to it you get treated with respect and paid good dosh. Then, when I get released, you can be my main man.’

‘Really! But what about your bro?’ Jay asked. He was well aware of the friction between Vinny and Michael as his cellmate often spoke about it.

‘Don’t be worrying about Michael. He will do exactly as I tell him. Whether he likes it or not, I’m the boss. Always have been and always fucking will be.’

The man apprehensively entered the plush office. His boss could be a real tyrant at times and he hoped he wasn’t in any trouble. His last task had proved anything but fruitful.

‘Sit down.’

‘Sorry I had a wasted trip, boss. I tried my hardest to track him down, honest I did.’

‘I know. Which is why I’m putting my faith in you again. I have an address of a nightclub in the East End of London. There you will find a man called Michael Butler. I want photos, movements; dig up as much as you can on him. I even want to know when he takes a shit. Understand me?’

‘Clearly, boss.’

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Joanna Preston clapped as the rendition of ‘Happy Birthday’ ended. She bent down next to her daughter. ‘Make a wish, darling, then blow out the candles.’

‘What’s a wish, Mummy?’

‘It means think about something you want. Why don’t you wish for that little fluffy white kitten you saw last week, eh?’

Ava did as she was told, then squealed with delight seconds later when her granddad handed her a small cardboard box with the kitten inside. ‘Can I call it Bagpuss?’ Ava asked. She loved to watch TV and the videos her nan and granddad brought her, and *Bagpuss* was her current favourite.

Deborah Preston picked up the kitten and chuckled. ‘Seeing as she’s a pretty little girl, just like you, I think we can come up with a nicer name than Bagpuss. Why don’t we make a list of names, then you can choose which one you like the best?’

Standing with her hands on her little hips, Ava Preston shook her head in defiance. ‘No, Nanny. I want to call her Bagpuss.’

‘She’s a case, isn’t she? Talk about three going on thirteen,’ Nancy Butler joked. Ava was nothing like Molly in any way, shape or form, and Nancy still couldn’t decide whether that was a good omen or bad. With her mop of curly blonde hair and sweet nature, Molly had been a replica of her lovely mum. Ava was far more of a little diva, and with her jet-black hair there was a definite resemblance to her father.

‘Stroke her, Nancy,’ Ava demanded.

Nancy smiled as Ava climbed on to her lap. She wondered if the reason she’d not bonded with her as much as Molly was because she saw Ava far less frequently. Since Joanna had moved deeper into Essex to a small village called Tillingham, they only met up once a month at most. It was difficult to speak on the phone regularly too. To prevent Ava’s existence from becoming known to the Butler clan, Joanna insisted that Nancy only ever call her from a phone box.

‘Why don’t you ring your mum, Nance, and ask if the boys can stay with her tonight? It’s been ages since we’ve had a proper catch-up, and my mum and dad are staying over anyway, so they’ll look after Ava. There’s a nightclub not too far from here that the locals call the “Four Views” which has a good disco on a Saturday night. Please say yes – we’ll have such a giggle.’

Nancy sighed. She hated asking her parents to have the boys overnight these days. Her father was always so bloody critical of their behaviour, especially Daniel’s, and she was sick of having to defend her sons, especially when she knew the criticism was justified. ‘Oh, I dunno, Jo. I promised my mum I’d pick the boys up by nine.’

Joanna squeezed her pal’s hand. Even from their infrequent conversations, she knew that Nancy had been down lately and could do with having some fun. ‘Don’t be so boring. It will be a laugh. When was the last time you let your hair down, eh?’

Nancy could not remember the last time she’d even had the chance to let her hair down. Michael might refer to the club as work, but at least he was still out socializing. She wasn’t. She was stuck indoors being a mother to three boys, one of whom didn’t even belong to her.

‘Sod it!’ she said, the decision made. ‘Pass me your phone, Jo.’

Ahmed Zane was living his dream. Having used a massive chunk of the money he’d earned through drug importation to build a fine hotel in Turkey, he had just enjoyed a luxurious stay in his homeland and flown back first-class. On arrival, he headed straight for the restaurant he co-owned with his cousin in Tottenham.

Burak was both surprised and pleased to see Ahmed. ‘What are you doing back so early? I thought your flight was not until Wednesday.’

Ahmed led his cousin into the office. 'I heard some very interesting news, Burak. Hence my early return.'

'What? About who?'

'I think I have learned something that will fuck Vinny's head up big time. In fact, it will probably explode when he hears!'

'Tell me,' Burak demanded, his tone overloaded with impatience.

Ahmed smirked. He and Vinny Butler had once been the closest of friends, but the car crash that killed poor Lenny had put an end to that. Ahmed could have forgiven Vinny for crashing the car. What he could not forgive was that his so-called best pal had dragged his unconscious body from the passenger seat and belted him into the driver's seat, leaving him for fucking dead and framing him in the process.

Vinny's excuse was that he'd thought Ahmed was already dead and panicked, but Ahmed was too cute to fall for that old chestnut. Vinny's actions had been callous and calculating. A panicking man would have just legged it without stopping to move bodies and see to it that someone else took the rap.

Burak slammed a glass of Scotch on the table. 'Why do you always do this, Ahmed? You half tell a story and then you fucking stop.'

Ahmed chuckled. 'Chill, Burak, chill. Tarkan Smith rang me at the hotel. He had some exciting information regarding Johnny Preston. Apparently, Preston is working at a car lot in Wickford for somebody that Tarkan knows well. It also turns out that Preston has a young granddaughter who he is very cagey about. He never even mentioned the child's existence until he was seen out with her. Now why would Johnny be trying to keep her a secret, eh?'

'You think the kid could be Vinny's?'

Ahmed grinned. 'It looks that way. When Preston saw his boss in the restaurant, he said the child was not related to him, but then she called him "Granddad". Apparently the mystery child has jet-black hair and green eyes. Sound like anybody you know?'

'Sure does. Vinny will go mental if he finds out Joanna had another kid by him and kept it a secret. He'll be climbing the walls in his prison cell.'

Ahmed had been surprised and annoyed by how well Vinny had coped with being incarcerated. He'd had a few altercations with fellow prisoners and had seemed very depressed when he first got banged up, but since then he'd taken it all in his stride. Obviously Vinny had no idea how much Ahmed loathed him. He still thought they were pals – the mug.

'Exactly, Burak. Which is why, first thing tomorrow, I shall be hiring the best private detective money can buy.'

Over at the Walker household, Donald was becoming more embarrassed and angry by the second. Out of all of the days to play up, his grandsons had chosen to do so in front of Christopher and Olivia.

'Stop acting stupid. Eat your dinner before it gets cold,' Mary ordered.

Aware of her discomfort, Daniel giggled and flicked a pea at Lee, who in turn flicked one back that missed Daniel and hit Mary instead.

'Right, that's it! If they can't eat like normal human beings, put their dinners in the bin,' Donald bellowed.

'Not hungry anyway,' Daniel replied, defiantly pushing his plate away.

'I'm not hungry either,' Lee said, copying his brother as he always did.

When his nan took their plates away, Daniel leaned towards Adam. 'I dare you to knock Olivia's drink all over her.'

'Nah, Dan. We'll get in trouble.'

'I'll give you a pound if you do it,' Daniel urged.

Seconds later, Adam stood up, pretended to stumble and did as he'd been asked.

‘You stupid clumsy child! Go and ask your nan for a cloth. I am so sorry, Olivia,’ Donald said in a mortified tone.

Christopher leapt up. ‘It’s OK, Dad. Most of the drink went on the carpet anyway. I’ll clean it up.’

Nudging Lee with a silly grin on his face, Daniel decided to go one better. ‘Why is your nose so big, Uncle Christopher?’ he asked innocently.

‘Mary! Get these children out of my sight before I do something I truly regret,’ Donald screamed.

Back in Whitechapel, Queenie and Vivian were discussing Little Vinny’s violent outburst.

After threatening the poor bloke on the next table, Little Vinny had tipped over a table, thrown a chair at some people who were standing at the bar, then stormed out of the pub.

‘Never felt so embarrassed since that time we got barred from Kings,’ Queenie said. Kings was the holiday park in Eastbourne where Vinny and Michael had once owned bungalows.

‘Got no sense of bloody humour, that boy,’ Viv tutted. ‘I mean, we were only ribbing him. And I’ll tell you something for nothing, no way am I ever getting in a car with him again. Drove like a bleedin’ lunatic. I felt right sick by the time he dropped us at the chippy.’

Queenie nodded in agreement. Little Vinny had hung around for her and Viv opposite the pub, but refused to speak to them all the way home. ‘I’m gonna have a word with Michael about him. I thought meeting that pretty girl had sorted him out, didn’t you? Living with Albie obviously hasn’t done him any favours at all.’

When Queenie had been officially married to Albie, Vivian had hated the sight of the man. She no longer loathed him though. ‘Albie isn’t a violent man, Queen, so you can’t be blaming him. Got your rose-tinted specs on again, aintcha? Well, let me take them off for you. There’s only one person Little Vinny takes after and that’s his bloody father.’

‘I suppose you’re right. Both got a bleedin’ temper on ’em, that’s for sure,’ Queenie admitted begrudgingly.

Pleased that her sister had agreed with her verdict, Vivian happily changed the subject. ‘How’s your Bren? You heard from her recently?’

Queenie pursed her lips. Since her daughter had moved to Dagenham to live with a bloke fourteen years her senior, contact had dwindled between herself and Brenda. ‘Nope. No matter what time of day I ring up, she’s never in. Out on the piss all the time with that tosser, if you ask me. It’s Tara and Tommy I feel sorry for. Must be raising themselves – and probably running riot, poor little mites. Do you think me and you should pay Bren another visit? Just to check the kids are being looked after properly.’

Vivian shrugged. Tara was twelve now, Tommy seven, and the last time Queenie had dragged her over to Dagenham for an unexpected visit, both kids had been happy enough and looked well-fed and dressed. Brenda and Dave had seemed content enough as well. ‘If you want my honest opinion, I don’t see what you’re gonna gain by us keep poking our trunks in. Even if you think the kids are unhappy, you ain’t gonna want custody of ’em, are you? Brenda and Dave are both pissheads, so they’re well suited. And at least Dave takes Bren out, Queen, unlike my Bill and your Albie did with us. Kitchen-sink women me and you were.’

Hearing the chugging of what sounded like a clapped-out vehicle outside accompanied by loud voices, Queenie ran over to the window. ‘Aw my dear Lord! Please don’t tell me this is our new neighbours.’

Vivian hobbled over to the window. Their old neighbour, Lil, had croaked it a few weeks back. They’d seen the council popping in and out a few times since, and had been expecting new neighbours to arrive any day now. Not at nine o’clock at night though, in a poxy old Transit tipper truck. There were two women, a man and a couple of boys.

‘Blimey, Queen. D’ya reckon they’re gypsies?’

'No idea what they are, but I don't like the bleedin' look of 'em.'

'We did say we'd be happy to get anyone other than Indians,' Vivian reminded her sister.

Seeing the youngest lad, who looked about twelve, stick two fingers up at her, Queenie did the same back, then shut the curtains. 'I'd prefer Indians any day of the week to that motley-looking crew. Trust our luck, Vivvy. I reckon God must bastard-well hate us at times, I really do.'

When 'Relax' by Frankie Goes to Hollywood began to blare out of the speakers, Joanna grabbed Nancy's hand and dragged her off the dance floor. 'Let's get another Malibu and pineapple. My feet are killing me in these shoes.'

'That bloke is still staring at you, Jo. He's ever so handsome, don't you think?'

'I'm really not interested, Nance. Vinny's put me off men for life. I'm quite content being a single mum, thanks very much.'

'You can't allow Vinny to ruin your life, Jo. You are stunning, you've got a heart of gold, and you deserve to find true love. Oh my God! I think he's coming over. Please don't be nasty to him. He just might be Mr Right.'

Little Vinny was not in the best of moods. He'd had a row with his girlfriend earlier, which was probably the cause of him kicking off in the Rose of Denmark. Now his uncle had just informed him that his father's cellmate would be working at the club in the near future. 'Why didn't you say no? What's he gonna be doing here? We don't need any more staff.'

'Jay's brother has been murdered, and the lad is in bits. He can't face going back to Liverpool by all accounts. I dunno what he'll be doing yet, but to be honest Jay can only be an asset to the business. He's a good-looking bloke and the birds will love him.'

Little Vinny hated Jay Boy Gerrard. He'd seen him when visiting his dad and thought he looked a flash bastard. His father was always banging on about what a great lad Jay was and that pissed Little Vinny off immensely. He got the distinct impression that his old man would have preferred Jay as a son. That was why he hadn't bothered visiting the prison for the past six weeks. 'I don't wanna work with Jay, Michael. There's something about him I don't like. You better tell my dad it's either him or me.'

'Don't talk wet. You're my right-hand man. Jay will either work as a bouncer or behind the bar, that's all. He isn't going to have a position of importance.'

'He will if my fucking old man has anything to do with it.'

'Vin, I half own this club. Your dad might think he's still the overall boss, but he ain't any more. It was me that turned this gaff into a disco and made a huge success of it. Therefore, I can promise you that Jay will just have an average job, OK?'

When the DJ put on Wham's 'Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go' Little Vinny stormed into the office. Sammi-Lou was a massive Wham fan and she loved this song.

Staring at his uncle's bottle of Scotch, Little Vinny undid the lid. He had not touched a drop of alcohol since that drunken, drug-fuelled night when he'd thought his dead sister had paid him a visit. Molly had been wearing a white gown and her eyes were bulging with terror in the same way they'd looked as he'd throttled the life out of her. He still wasn't sure if he had seen her ghost, but he preferred to think that his mind was playing tricks on him.

Neither his father nor Michael had any idea that Little Vinny had visited brothels and snorted cocaine with Ahmed in the past. The Turk had been a massive support for him since his dad had been banged up and, even though they'd seen far less of each other recently, Little Vinny knew that if he ever had a problem Ahmed was the man to turn to.

Little Vinny took a sip of Scotch but immediately spat it on to the carpet. He might have had a bad day today, but he quite liked the new him. Alcohol was evil. All it did was remind him of bad things.

He picked up the phone and dialled, and to his relief it was his girlfriend who answered. The last time they'd had a row, her dad had picked up the blower and all but threatened him.

‘You OK?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you go to your mate’s birthday bash?’

Not wanting to admit that she’d been crying periodically ever since they’d parted in Roman Road earlier, Sammi pretended she was just getting ready to go out.

‘Well, I’m missing ya. So if you fancy coming to the club later, we can cuddle up in bed,’ Little Vinny suggested.

When Sammi-Lou told him she’d be there by midnight, Little Vinny smirked. He had his pretty girlfriend firmly in the palm of his hand and he liked that very much.

Over in Pentonville, Vinny tipped the wink for the fun to begin. He’d arranged for Andy Tucker and three of his cronies to be paid a bullseye each for kicking off at the appointed hour.

‘You can fuck off,’ Tucker bellowed. ‘We ain’t going back to the cell. We should be allowed to watch *Match of the Day*.’

One of Tucker’s pals threw a chair across the room and a moment later all hell broke loose as other inmates joined in.

‘Let’s do it,’ Vinny urged Jay Boy.

Jock McIntyre was in shock as Vinny dragged him out the TV room. Nobody heard his cries for help though. The screws were too busy trying to stop a full-blown riot getting under way and the prisoners were busy arguing and fighting amongst themselves.

‘Check nobody’s coming, Jay,’ Vinny ordered, before clumping Jock repeatedly in the stomach. Jock, who weighed less than ten stone, doubled up and fell to the floor groaning in agony.

‘All clear,’ Jay said, after checking both ends of the corridor.

‘Quick, hold the cunt’s arms down,’ Vinny urged.

‘Get off me. I’m sorry if I’ve upset you, OK?’ Jock cried.

‘Not larging it now, are ya?’ Vinny spat. He would’ve loved to cut Jock’s tongue out, but didn’t have time. He pulled the razor blade he’d melted into a toothbrush handle from his sock and as quick as a flash, slashed a reasonably straight line across the Scotsman’s mouth.

As Jock screamed in agony and fright, Vinny muttered, ‘Grass, and I swear on my dear old mum’s life, next time it’ll be your throat.’

Thirty seconds later Vinny re-entered the TV room. With a quick nod to old Frank, the screw guarding the door, he rejoined the fracas.

Enticing a screw into his pocket had been a smart move on Vinny’s part. He’d always known it would come in handy at some stage.

Queenie and Viv were happily gushing over how radiant a heavily pregnant Princess Diana looked when they were disturbed by the doorbell ringing.

Queenie pursed her lips. ‘This better be my Michael, or he’ll have some explaining to do.’ Her son had not been in touch since the prison visit and Queenie was not amused.

‘There you are! Been ringing your bleedin’ club all evening. Why didn’t you pop in earlier, like you promised?’

Michael Butler gave his mother a kiss on the cheek. ‘I’m sorry. I’ve just had a manic day. Little Vinny said Auntie Viv had an accident. Is she OK?’

‘I’ll live,’ Viv shouted from the living room.

‘Don’t keep me in suspense then. How did the visit go?’

‘Good. Vinny was in high spirits,’ Michael lied.

‘Did you build bridges, like I told you to? And don’t lie to me, ’cause I’ll find out the truth.’

‘We didn’t need to build bridges, Mum. We’re brothers at the end of the day.’

Beaming from ear to ear, Queenie hugged her youngest son. ‘That’s what I like to hear. Us Butlers stick together through thick and thin, always. Well, apart from me and your father, of course,’ Queenie chuckled.

‘I’d better get back to the club, Mum. I left Little Vinny in charge.’

‘I want a word with you about him.’

‘Not now. It was busy when I left.’

‘OK. But I need to ask you a favour, boy.’

Not another one, thought Michael, but as his mother pursued him down the path he had no option but to nod.

‘I’m worried about Tara and Tommy. Dave isn’t a good influence on our Brenda, you know. I think you should pay him a little visit.’

‘And do or say what?’ Michael asked.

‘Well, I don’t know, do I? You and your brother are the men of this family. Just do or say what you did to Pervy Pat that time. I was so proud of you when he scarpered. So was Vivvy.’

Michael looked at his mother in disbelief. ‘Brenda’s a pisshead, Mum, and until she gives up boozing, she’ll always end up with one of the Daves of this world. Pat was a nonce. Big difference.’

Johnny Preston read the letter once more, then put it in his trouser pocket. He was dreading having this conversation with his wife. However, he had promised there would be no more secrets between them and he meant it. Since he’d got out of nick and married Deborah for the second time, their relationship had gone from strength to strength. There was no way he would jeopardize that by hiding things from her.

‘Can we talk, babe? Sit down a minute.’

‘Whatever’s the matter?’ Deborah asked, alarmed. She could tell by the look on her husband’s face that it wasn’t going to be good news.

‘It’s Jamie. My mum’s been visiting him in Feltham and she swears blind that he didn’t kill Molly. He wrote me this letter. Read it,’ Johnny urged.

Deborah’s eyes filled with tears. It was coming up to four years now since Molly had been brutally murdered, yet the memories of that torrid time were still very raw to her. Ava had filled the gap in her life to a certain extent, but she would never replace Molly. No child could. ‘I don’t want to read it, Johnny. Jamie must be guilty. The police aren’t bloody stupid. Please don’t tell me you are thinking of visiting that treacherous murdering scumbag?’

‘I have to, Deb. I need to find out the truth.’

Deborah shook her head in pure disbelief. ‘Joanna will go crazy when she finds out. And what is visiting that vermin going to solve? Not going to bring Molly back, is it?’

‘It will solve whether that little fucker is lying or not, Deb. And there is no need for Jo to know. If need be, I will tell her afterwards.’

‘And you don’t think he’s going to lie to you, Johnny? He lied to his nan and the fucking police.’

‘As soon as I look him in the eyes, Deb, I will know the truth. Trust me on that one.’

Mary Walker kissed her sleeping granddaughter on the forehead, then hugged her son and daughter-in-law. Christopher and Olivia had got married in 1981 and little Janine was now eighteen months old. ‘Keep safe at work, won’t you, son?’

Christopher raised his eyebrows. He was twenty-seven now. A detective sergeant in the drugs squad at Arbour Square. However, his mother still treated him as though he was some rookie. She never let a week go by without phoning him at least three times to make sure he was still alive and had not been harmed in the line of duty.

Donald followed his family into the hallway. ‘I do apologize once again for the behaviour of the boys. I shall punish them all personally in the morning; I can assure you of that.’

Rather than upset his mother, Christopher mumbled, ‘Boys will be boys.’ He was not at all surprised that Nancy’s sons had turned out such horrible little bastards. What else could you expect, with Butler blood running through their veins?

When he was a kid, Christopher had witnessed Vinny Butler stab a man to death outside his nightclub. Vinny had then threatened and blackmailed him into keeping his mouth shut. Once the police had got involved, Christopher, despite being absolutely terrified, had told his parents the truth. That very same evening they’d done a moonlight flit from their beloved café in Whitechapel.

‘Bye-bye. Drive safely.’ Mary stood on the pavement waving him off. She was dreading going back inside the house because she knew what was coming next.

Donald’s face was like thunder when she walked back through the door. ‘I don’t know about you, but I have never felt so humiliated in all my life. What must Olivia have thought? I do hope she doesn’t tell her parents. As for Christopher, he deserves a medal for holding his temper. Talk about show us up! Adam knocked that drink over Olivia on purpose – I saw him do it. And as for Daniel asking poor Christopher why his nose was so big ...’

Donald shook his head. ‘I truly wanted the ground to open up and swallow me. Even Lee played up, and he’s usually the best behaved out of the bloody three. I shall teach them all a lesson in the morning, Mary. That cane I keep in the shed will be put to good use. Words and threats are meaningless. Such behaviour warrants corporal punishment.’

‘Please don’t overreact, Donald. Yes, they were very naughty and I felt ashamed too. But you can’t be caning them. Nancy’ll go mad, and what do you think Michael will say? Anyway, it wasn’t Adam or Lee’s fault – Daniel was the bloody instigator. He’s forever egging the other two on. I overhead him dare Adam to knock that drink over Olivia, and he kept getting Lee to wake Janine up. I’ll have a word with Nancy tomorrow. She most certainly needs to chastise them more, especially Daniel.’

‘They will not be welcome back in this house, Mary. Not until they have learned some manners. If you want to see those boys in future, you can visit them at Nancy’s. After tonight’s debacle, I totally wash my hands of all three.’

Little Vinny grinned as his girlfriend took her dressing gown into the bathroom. For some strange reason, Sammi-Lou would never get undressed in front of him, and Little Vinny found her shyness quite a turn on.

Obviously it was Sammi’s natural beauty that had first attracted Little Vinny to her, but the fact she was no slag like most of the other girls he’d met had cemented their relationship. Sammi admitted that she’d slept with one lad before him, but it had been a serious relationship, not a one-night stand. It had taken Little Vinny six weeks to get her into bed.

When Sammi-Lou turned the light off and slipped under the quilt, Little Vinny kissed her then tried to ram his cock inside her as quickly as possible.

‘No. Not yet,’ Sammi whispered.

‘What’s up?’

Sammi-Lou said nothing as she began to kiss Little Vinny’s neck and chest. Her best pal Charlene was currently dating a twenty-five-year-old and their sex life sounded far more exciting than hers. As much as Sammi loved and fancied her boyfriend, he was a bit of a ‘Wham bam thank you, ma’am’ merchant. There was no foreplay like Sammi had been used to with her ex, and although she pretended otherwise to Charlene, since she’d been with Little Vinny, Sammi hadn’t had a single orgasm.

As his girlfriend’s lips moved down his stomach towards his penis, Little Vinny froze. That toothless slag Alison Bloggs had been the first bird to put her mouth round his todger and she would most definitely be the last.

Feeling suddenly nauseous, Little Vinny roughly shoved Sammi-Lou’s head away from her destination and leapt out of bed. He pointed a finger at her. ‘Don’t you ever fucking do anything like that again, understand?’

Sammi-Lou burst into tears. ‘I was only trying to make you happy. I’m sorry. I thought you’d like it.’

‘No, I don’t like it! Only whores do stuff like that,’ he hissed, a twisted expression on his face. He then stormed out of the room leaving Sammi-Lou sobbing her heart out on the bed.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The man breathed a sigh of relief as he laid eyes on Michael Butler. His boss would be pleased. At least this trip hadn't been a complete waste of time, like the last.

Clicking away with the specialized spy camera, the man wondered what this task was all about. Usually his boss was very open about such matters, but this time his lips were well and truly sealed.

As Michael Butler sauntered down the street like he owned it, the man smirked. Whatever plans his boss had in store for the cocksure-looking Michael, they wouldn't be pleasant, that was for sure.

Deborah Preston stared solemnly out of the car window. Just over a week had gone by since Johnny had told her he planned to visit Jamie in Feltham and she'd thought of little else since.

'Cheer up. Jo is gonna think something's wrong otherwise.'

Deciding to have one last attempt to make her husband change his mind, Deborah gave it her all. 'If you loved me as much as you say you do, Johnny, no way would you be putting me through such heartache. I've not slept or eaten properly all week. I just don't understand how you could even consider being in the same room as that animal. It doesn't make sense to me. Won't you feel the urge to stick a knife straight through his heart? Because I know I fucking well would.'

Realizing his wife was near to breaking point, Johnny parked up and took her in his arms. 'I need to visit Jamie for my own peace of mind. See what he's got to say for himself and watch him squirm. I owe it to Molly.'

Huffing and puffing, Albie Butler dragged another crate of mixers into the bar area.

'Dad, you look like you're gonna keel over. Sit down and I'll get you a drink. The bar staff can finish that off.'

At sixty-four, the years of heavy drinking and chain-smoking had begun to take their toll and nobody was more surprised he was still alive than Albie himself. 'No, boy. I like to earn my keep, you know I do.'

Not one to take no for an answer, Michael put an arm around his father's shoulders and made him sit down.

Albie grinned when Michael plonked a pint in front of him. He enjoyed pottering about at the club doing odd jobs five days a week. It made him feel useful, something he'd never felt in all the years he'd been married to Queenie.

As a young man, Albie had been handsome, full of life and could have had his pick of women. Queenie had done all the chasing and, after a whirlwind romance, Albie married her. Life was good until Queenie fell pregnant. From the moment Vinny was born, things had gone from bad to worse. Vivian was always at their house, and Albie was pushed to one side. No wonder he'd ended up a drunken womanizer. Queenie had only ever wanted sex to make babies, and Albie had spent more nights sleeping on the sofa than in their marital bed.

'What's up, Dad? You having a Dorothy moment?'

Albie sighed wistfully. He'd found love with a woman in later life. Dorothy was a wonderful lady who'd restored his faith in the female of the species. They'd been so happy living in Ipswich at his brother Bert's house, until she'd passed away suddenly. 'Sort of, boy. I wish I'd have married Dorothy instead of your mother. Then we could have spent many more happy years together.'

Michael sat down next to his father. He knew exactly how Albie felt. His own romance, with a model called Bella, had been short-lived but truly unforgettable. Michael had ended it for the sake of his boys, but he had never forgotten the stunning brunette who'd stolen his heart. He'd even tried to find her once, but had been told by the new tenants that Bella had moved to New York. Nancy had no knowledge of the affair. The only people who did were his dad and Vinny.

Hating to see his old man down, Michael playfully punched him on the arm. 'If you hadn't married me mother, then I would've never existed. Thanks very much, Dad.'

Albie smiled. Unlike Vinny, who'd once beaten him up so badly he'd ended up in hospital with broken legs and ribs, Michael had been a wonderful son. 'I'll never forget how kind you've been to me, boy. But I do worry what will happen when your brother gets out. He ain't gonna want me working here, is he?'

Michael gritted his teeth. He could foresee many problems on the horizon when Vinny got released, but was determined to stand his ground. 'You leave Vinny to me. Your job will be safe, I can assure you of that. I ain't Michael the kid brother any more. I am Michael the fucking adult and Vinny's going to have to accept that.'

Vivian was sitting on a deck chair in Queenie's back garden, reminiscing about the past. Kings Holiday Park in Eastbourne had been such a big part of their lives, until Vinny started a ruckus that got them barred from the clubhouse.

'Do you remember that time you got pissed and tried to snog Des O'Connor, Viv? And you used to have the hots for that Mick who ran the amusement arcade.'

Vivian laughed. 'Talk about pot calling kettle! You might come across all prim and proper, but I know you fancied Ray King. You used to act all silly every time he pulled up in his Rolls-Royce. And what about the time you embarrassed yourself outside the launderette?'

Queenie felt her cheeks blush. Ray King had been the owner of the holiday park, and even though she'd most definitely had the hots for him, she'd never admit it, not even to Viv. Hurriedly she changed the subject: 'Ere, look – it's that thing that killed the bird I found earlier. Look at its eyes. They're evil,' she said, pointing at the ginger-and-white moggy who was sitting on the fence staring at her.

About to remark that the cat's eyes reminded her of Vinny's, Vivian bit her tongue. 'It's called Chester. I heard her next door calling it yesterday for its grub,' she said. 'I bumped into Nosy Hilda round the shops this morning and she filled me in on the set-up. That ain't her old man living there, it's her brother. The other tart is his wife. Them boys are hers though. Little sods they are, by all accounts. Hilda said they took the right piss out of Mr Arthur the other day 'cause he was wearing his war medals. And they've already been caught stealing off the market. Her name's Shell. The boys are Kurt and Brad. I can't remember the others' names, although Hilda did tell me.'

'Shell! What, as in a bleedin' sea shell? That's all we need, two little tea-leaves living next door. What's the betting they try to burgle us while we're up the Roman one Saturday?'

'I think we should knock there, Queen. Let 'em know exactly who we are. They need to show a bit of respect. Their music system must be right next to my lounge wall. I couldn't even hear me *Brookside* properly last night. They were playing that black man's music again. I'm not putting up with that.'

'It's Bob Marley.'

'Oh, is that her brother's name? I could have sworn blind Hilda said it was something different.'

'No. It's Bob Marley records they keep playing, you daft bat.'

About to ask who the hell Bob Marley was, Vivian gasped as the cat leapt off the fence and grabbed a little robin by its throat. 'Oh, my giddy aunt! Do something, Queen.'

Queenie picked up her hoe. She loved birds and welcomed them into her garden with the lovely bird table that she hung food from on a daily basis. 'Get away, you ginger-and-white bastard,' she screamed.

As the hoe came towards him, Chester fled without his prey. Queenie bent down and saw the terrified bird take its last breath. 'We won't be lowering ourselves by knocking there, Viv. I need a brandy to calm my nerves, then we'll ring Michael. He can do the honours. I must bury this bird first though. Poor little mite.'

Ahmed and Burak were on their way to the Butlers' club. Sunday lunchtimes were when the strippers performed and Ahmed liked to pop in at least twice a month as he knew Michael did not like him.

‘Any more news on the kid?’ Burak asked.

‘I rang the private detective yesterday, but it went on to answerphone. If he does not get back to me in the next day or two, I will sack him and hire the guy that Tarkan recommended.’

‘Please say if you think I am speaking out of turn, Ahmed, but I am bemused why Tarkan suddenly wants to be your best buddy. He’s had no dealings with Vinny, so has no reason to hate him like we do. I find it slightly suspicious that he has found what is supposedly Vinny’s daughter, yet could not find that prick Carl Thompson when he turned out to be such a fucking liability to us.’

‘What are you trying to say? That Tarkan warned Thompson that I was trying to kill him? No way, Burak. I have known Tarkan for years and he wouldn’t dare cross me. Us Turks stick together.’

‘Tarkan’s half English,’ Burak reminded his cousin. ‘So, what is the point of our visit today? To wind that flash wanker Michael up again?’

‘No. Little Vinny rang me twice in the week. He seems extremely upset that his father’s cellmate will soon be working at the club, and I think he’s fallen out with his girlfriend as well. This is the perfect opportunity for us to entice him into our clutches again. Then on a drunken night out, I shall accidentally drop the bombshell that his daddy killed his mummy.’

Burak chuckled. He could never understand why his cousin hadn’t just killed Vinny off years ago instead of waiting to have his revenge. But Ahmed was a complex character at times, and loved nothing more than fucking people up mentally.

As Ahmed laughed and joked, he had no idea that his cousin had been spot on in his estimation of Tarkan Smith. He was not the loyal friend Ahmed thought he was at all.

Ye Olde White Harte in Burnham-on-Crouch overlooked the quay where the boats and yachts were moored. The late-July weather was glorious and Johnny was thankful that not only had his wife cheered up, his daughter seemed on top form as well.

‘Why you not eating your dinner, Ava?’ Johnny asked, stroking his granddaughter’s dark glossy hair.

Ava protruded her bottom lip as she often did when bored. ‘Don’t want it. Can I go and play?’ she asked, pointing at two children who were skipping nearby.

Joanna looked around. Ava was a very bright child for her age. Her elocution was good and she often asked unusually intelligent questions for a child so young. She could even tell the time, and recite the alphabet in twenty seconds flat. ‘Is it OK if my little girl plays with your children?’ Joanna asked the couple on the table behind.

When they agreed and Ava left the table, Joanna turned to her parents. ‘I’ve got something to tell you.’

Deborah grinned. She knew what was coming. Her daughter looked radiant. ‘You’ve met a new man, haven’t you?’

‘It’s early days, Mum, but he seems very nice. He’s totally different to Vinny.’

Johnny was not so delighted by the news. ‘Who is he? Where did ya meet him?’

‘I met him when I went out with Nancy last weekend. His name’s Darren, and he’s divorced with a four-year-old son. We’ve not been out on a proper date yet, but we’ve spoken on the phone a lot and I met him for a coffee yesterday. I aim to take things slowly, of course, but Darren does seem really genuine.’

‘You’re hardly a good judge of character when it comes to geezers, are you, Jo? Look at the last one you fell for,’ Johnny pointed out.

Annoyed that, having lectured her earlier about the need to lighten up, her husband now had a face on him like a smacked arse, Deborah ordered him to go to the bar to get some more drinks. ‘So what does Darren do for a living, love?’ she asked the moment he was gone.

‘He’s an estate agent, Mum, in Chelmsford. I never thought I would allow another man into my life, but we’ve spoken for hours every night on the phone this week and Darren’s really nice. It gives me something to look forward to when Ava goes to bed. He makes me laugh and he seems a loving

dad. I'm a bit nervous about going out with him alone, so do you think it would be a good idea to take the kids with us? Darren suggested we take them to Colchester Zoo next weekend.'

Johnny chuckled as he plonked the drinks on the table. He'd overheard the back-end of the conversation. 'You're so gullible. How do you know that Vinny hasn't tracked you down because he found out about Ava, eh? Darren could be working for him for all you know.'

Seeing her daughter's happy mood suddenly deflated, Deborah was livid. 'What the hell is wrong with you, Johnny? If anybody deserves to find happiness, it's our Jo. Do us a favour and go for a walk, will you? Ava wants an ice cream, so you can take her with you.'

Johnny grabbed Ava's hand. Perhaps he was a bit over-protective now. But he had every right to be after the Vinny debacle. Like any decent father, all Johnny wanted was the best in life for his daughter.

'Granddad, pick me up. I don't want to walk.'

Grinning at his cheeky granddaughter, Johnny did as she asked. What Johnny did not realize, as he held Ava above his head until she squealed, was that the private detective Ahmed had hired was snapping away behind him with his camera.

'It's hot and noisy in here. Let's go outside and have a chat,' Ahmed said, putting an arm around Little Vinny's shoulders. Burak was enjoying himself watching the strippers and Ahmed knew there was far more chance of the boy opening up to him if they spoke alone.

Eyes like a hawk, Michael followed his nephew. Approximately eighteen months ago, Little Vinny had gone off the rails for a while. He'd taken days off sick, looked like shit when he had turned up, and Michael was sure by his eyes he'd taken some kind of drug. Ahmed had been hanging around a lot at the time and even though Little Vinny had sworn blind that he'd not been spending time with Ahmed outside the club, Michael wasn't so sure. 'Where yous two going?' he asked, grabbing his nephew by the arm.

'Outside to cool down a bit. You really need to invest in some more of them fans that hang from the ceiling, Michael. It's like a sweatbox in here,' said Ahmed.

When Michael walked away looking none too happy, Ahmed smirked. Once outside in the fresh air, he began to sow his seed. 'What's all this about your father's cellmate starting work here then, Vin? You sounded well pissed off on the phone.'

Little Vinny explained the situation.

'Well, I can't say I blame you for having the hump. I bloody would too. There is a very close bond between your dad and Jay. Whenever I visit your old man or he writes to me, he is always praising the lad. I think your dad sees him as a second son. He must have big plans for him if he wants him to work at the club though.'

Feeling extremely agitated, Little Vinny glared at Ahmed. 'Whaddya mean, big plans? Has my old man said something to you? Only I'm the one that's made a success of this club with Michael. He said it was taking peanuts when my fucking father was in charge.'

Ahmed put a comforting arm around Little Vinny's shoulders. 'No. Your dad has said nothing about his plans for Jay to me. I shall be going to visit Vinny soon, so will have a quiet word to see what I can find out. That's just between us though.'

'Of course. Cheers, Ahmed. I've worked my bollocks off for the sake of this business and if my old man gets out and puts that cunt Jay above me in the pecking order, I will tell him to shove his job where the sun doesn't shine.'

'When is Jay due to arrive?'

'Soon. He got released from nick a few days after his brother died and travelled up to Liverpool. I think the funeral was on Friday, so I dare say he'll turn up this coming week.'

'I'm always on the end of the phone if you need me. What I reckon you would benefit from is a bloody good night out. How about we go up West in the week? Burak and I have found this

great club. Everybody shags one another. You get some proper wild women in there, let me tell you,' Ahmed chuckled.

Little Vinny shook his head. 'I can't be going places like that now I'm with Sammi-Lou. She'd kill me if she ever found out.'

'How's it going with Sammi? From what you said the other day, I got the impression the two of you had had a falling out.'

Ever since the blow-job moment, things had been strained between himself and his girlfriend, and Little Vinny knew she had the hump with him as she'd spent the weekend in Clacton at her friend's parents' caravan. 'It's going OK. She's a bit full on at times, but I do love her, I think.'

Ahmed laughed. 'You're only eighteen. Far too young to know what true love is. You should be playing the field. You need to have many girlfriends to find the one. Then when you do, you marry her.'

Little Vinny respected Ahmed, but no way was he taking relationship advice from him. Ahmed had married an English lady called Anna who he had two children with. He was rarely at home though and fucked anything that breathed. 'You know you just mentioned a night out. Well, it's Sammi-Lou's mum's fortieth next Saturday. Her dad's got a massive gaff in Essex and they're having a big party. Sammi told me to invite all my family, but Michael said he can't leave the club and my nan and Auntie Viv won't go. Will you come with me? I've only met Sammi's parents briefly a couple of times, and her old man makes me feel a right div, to be honest – and I won't know any bastard there.'

Ahmed grinned. This party would be the perfect opportunity to get Little Vinny back on the booze and into his clutches. 'I would be honoured to accompany you, my friend.'

Queenie Butler was that fuming, she slammed the phone down on her youngest son. That was the difference between her Vinny and Michael. Instead of laughing at her like Michael just had, Vinny would've been round like a shot.

'Well?' Vivian asked.

'He told us to knock there ourselves. He said, "That'll be the day I get into an argument 'cause a cat killed a bird." He reckons it's nature.'

'Why didn't you tell him about the bloody music, Queen? I can hear it through the wall now. They're playing it again.'

'Let's have another brandy, then we'll knock there. Talk about if you want anything done, do it your bleedin' self. Eight bastard hours I was in labour with my Michael, and what thanks do I get, eh? None.'

Singing along to 'Three Little Birds', Shell Baker put the paintbrush down and cracked open a can of lager. She'd been arsehole lucky to get this house after her sons Kurt and Bradley had got her evicted from their previous property in East Ham. Thankfully for Shell, her mate Dawn worked for Tower Hamlets council and had managed to pull a few strings.

Family and friends meant everything to Shell, which was why she'd invited her brother Karl and his wife Melissa to move in with her. They'd been living in a poxy old bedsit that was full of mould and damp, and stood far more chance of getting their own place via Tower Hamlets council than Newham.

When somebody started ferociously hammering on her door, Shell's first thought was that it was the Old Bill again. Then she reminded herself that Kurt and Brad were currently upstairs painting their bedroom, so couldn't have got in any more trouble since yesterday.

She opened the door to find her new neighbour on her doorstep, lips pursed and hands on hips, glaring daggers at her.

'That ginger and white thing belong to you?'

'If you're talking about a cat, yeah, that's my Chester.'

'Best you stop your Chester coming into my garden and killing my birds then. Murdered one right in front of us this morning, didn't he, Viv?'

‘Yeah. Poor little robin was terrified,’ Vivian added.

Shell looked at the two women like they’d just arrived from another planet. ‘You are joking, right?’

‘Do I look like I’m bastard-well joking? I spend a fortune every week on seeds and nuts for them birds. Breaks my heart to see them getting ripped to pieces.’

Shell burst out laughing. ‘Karl, Mel, you gotta come and listen to this,’ she shouted. Her brother and sister-in-law were in the lounge.

‘Not going to hear you over that racket, are they? And that’s another thing we wanted to talk to you about. If you think we’re putting up with that shit blaring through our walls, you’ve got another think coming. Do you know who we are?’ Vivian asked indignantly.

Holding her crotch because she was chuckling so much she was afraid she might wet herself, Shell burst into the lounge and gestured for Karl and Mel to follow her into the hallway.

Queenie and Vivian were appalled. They weren’t accustomed to being laughed at. People were usually too scared to say a bad word to them, let alone take the piss.

‘Meet our neighbours,’ Shell guffawed. ‘They’ve asked me to tell Chester not to go in their garden and kill the birds. Now do you want to tell him, or shall I, Karl? I think there’s more chance of Chester listening to you. He understands you better than me.’

When the brother and sister-in-law also burst out laughing, a red-faced Queenie started to wag her forefinger. ‘You’ll be laughing on the other side of your faces once my family gets to hear about this, let me tell you.’

Hearing the commotion, Kurt and Bradley appeared. ‘Shut up, you mad old bat,’ Kurt told Queenie.

‘My grandson will deal with you, you little shit. As for the rest of yous, watch your backs. I am Queenie Butler. Mother of *the* Vinny and Michael Butler who run this fucking area.’

Still laughing, Shell replied, ‘And we’re *the* Bakers. Nice to meet you. Now piss off!’

When the door was slammed in her face, Queenie felt faint. ‘Hold me arm, Viv. Get me back indoors. I need another brandy.’

Feeling satisfied with his day’s work, the man dialled the all-important number.

‘Well?’

‘Found him boss. I took plenty of photos that are already on their way to you. I have an address of a house where I believe his wife and sons live. Do you want photos of them too?’

The boss slammed the paperweight against his mahogany desk. ‘Did you not understand my orders? I want photos of every fucking thing Michael Butler has contact with. Even his cuntin’ pet dog.’

The man apologized and ended the call. If he were a betting man, he’d put his house on Michael Butler being dead this time next week.

## CHAPTER NINE

Nancy Butler prodded her husband. 'Michael, wake up. That was my mum on the phone. Freda Smart is seriously ill, so I'm going to the hospital. Will you look after the boys today?'

Squinting at the radio/alarm clock, Michael was annoyed he'd been woken up so early. 'Freda Smart's a mad old bat and her fucking grandson dumped my sister while she was pregnant, in case you'd forgotten.'

'I know that, but Freda was really kind to me when I was ill in hospital, Michael. She hasn't got anybody else to visit her,' Nancy retorted.

'I've got to go to work today, so the boys will have to come with me.'

'I don't want them going to the club. Can't you have the day off and take them somewhere else?'

'No. I can't. Now stop rambling on and let me get some poxy kip.'

Mary Walker was unusually quiet throughout the journey to the hospital.

'You OK, Mum?' Nancy asked.

'I just hate going back to Whitechapel, love. Reminds me of our old café. Do you remember the interior, Nance? You probably don't, as you were still quite young. Beautiful, that café was. I was heartbroken when we had to walk away from it.'

'I remember the red tables and chairs and the jukebox,' said Nancy, patting her mum's arm. 'I don't like coming back here either. It reminds me of Molly.'

'I wonder who's living in Molly's old house now?'

Nancy shrugged. 'I think Michael sold it to an Indian family. Let's hope they have more luck there than poor Jo did.' Vinny had instructed Michael to sell the house via a phone call from prison.

'I hope poor Freda knows who we are. She must be in a pretty bad way for the hospital to ring me so early. Shame, isn't it, love. Must be awful, not having any family to call upon at a time like this.'

Watching her mother struggle to get out of the car, Nancy issued a warning. 'It'll be you in hospital next if you put on any more weight, Mum.'

Mary sighed. She only weighted eleven stone something, but looked bigger because of her five-foot frame. Donald was a whole foot taller than her and when they'd met she'd been ever so petite with a tiny little waist. 'Thanks for that, Nance. It's not easy to lose weight at my age. You're lucky 'cause you're taller than me and still young.'

'Mum, you're fifty-two not seventy. Your sweet tooth is the bloody problem, not your height or age.'

'Has Michael upset you this morning, dear?' Mary asked knowingly.

Nancy nodded. 'I asked him to take the boys out somewhere for the day, but he's taking them to work with him instead. It gives me the heebies, them going anywhere near that club after what happened to Molly. The place is jinxed.'

Mary linked arms with her daughter. 'Try not to worry too much. The boys are far more capable of looking after themselves than poor little Molly was. They'll most likely all be working there when they leave school anyway, Nance. So you might as well get used to it.'

Having prepared themselves for the worst, Mary and Nancy were surprised to see Freda propped up against a pillow reading the newspaper. She didn't look well though. Her skin and the whites of her eyes were the colour of egg yolks.

'Thanks for coming at such short notice. I really do appreciate it,' Freda said, before explaining her cancer was back and was now terminal.

Nancy squeezed the old lady's hand. 'Surely there must be something the doctors can do? Isn't there any treatment they can try?'

Freda shook her head. 'Riddled with the bastard disease, I am. Even spread to my liver now. Once it hits your vital organs, that's it – curtains.'

Mary had tears streaming down her face. She'd first met Freda back in 1965. Freda had barged into the café in Whitechapel one day to warn her and Donald how dangerous the Butler family were. At the time, Mary and Donald had dismissed her as some nutty local scaremonger. But Freda had been spot on. Over the years she'd become a valued friend and she would be sorely missed.

'Now stop all them tears. I'm no spring chicken, so I can't complain. I've had a decent innings. Open that drawer, Nancy. I wrote a list out last night. The doctor reckons I ain't got long left, so I need to get my affairs in order. You don't mind helping me, do you? I've no one else I can trust.'

Nancy forced a smile. 'Of course we'll help you.'

Michael Butler had just ordered himself and the boys some breakfast when his mother and Auntie Vivian marched into the café like two bulls in a china shop.

'There you are! I was ringing the club continuously last night and couldn't bloody get hold of you. I rung Nancy twice and she didn't know where you were. I wish some bastard would invent a phone you could carry around with you, else what's the point of having sons,' Queenie spat, completely ignoring her grandchildren.

Seeing a table full of workmen staring his way, Michael ordered his sons to stay put, then led his mum and aunt outside. 'I went out with me old mate Kev. I haven't seen him for yonks. What's the problem?'

When Queenie and Viv explained word for word about their altercation with the neighbours, Michael lit up a cigarette and inhaled deeply to calm his temper. Nobody around here dared disrespect his family. The locals were all too aware of what happened to those who did. Terry Smart, Trevor Thomas, Kenny and Bobby Jackson had all either disappeared or met a grizzly end after falling foul of the Butlers. No one else wanted to meet the same fate.

'Well? Don't just stand there like a stuffed dummy. What ya gonna do about it? Vinny would've been round there first time I asked. So would my Roy, God rest his soul.'

Michael dropped his cigarette, then stamped on it and twisted his foot as if he were snuffing out the life of a tarantula. 'Do you honestly still see me as your baby boy, Mum? Or that fresh-faced David Essex lookalike that birds used to chase down the road in the seventies? Or do you just see me as the weakest link of this family? Not up to Vinny's standards perhaps?'

'I didn't mean it like that. It was you who sorted Pervy Pat, so I know you're more than capable. I just meant that Vinny would've straightened them bastards out like a shot.'

Michael smirked. 'Well, thanks for the vote of confidence, but seeing as Vinny is currently being detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for his swift way of dealing with things, I shall sort out this problem in my own sweet time, Mum. It will be dealt with though, I can promise you that. Now, if you don't mind, I must excuse myself as my breakfast is getting cold.'

Queenie looked at Vivian in sheer amazement as Michael sauntered back into the café. 'Saucy bastard. Who the hell does he think he is, eh? I won't be insulted like that, Viv, not by one of me own.'

When her sister went to march back inside the café, Vivian grabbed her arm. 'Leave it, Queen. Michael does have a point and I trust him to deal with those bastards next door.'

'But he totally disrespected me.'

'You were very disrespectful to him. He proved himself good and proper when he chopped that pervert's dingle-dangle off. Believe me, that boy has more brains and integrity than you give him credit for. He's a better man than Vinny will ever be, and that's a fact.'

Johnny Preston felt as sick as a dog as he queued up inside Feltham Borstal. His mother had wanted to accompany him, but Johnny had refused. He needed to do this alone.

Once searched, Johnny was led away from the other visitors and taken down the corridor. Because of who he was he'd been allowed to speak to his nephew away from the prying eyes and listening ears of other inmates and their families.

'Here we are. There will be four prison officers in the room with you for security purposes.'

'I would much rather speak to Jamie alone.'

‘I’m afraid that won’t be possible. The guvnor’s orders, not mine. Jamie has been involved in numerous violent altercations while in our care, so the boss didn’t want to take any chances. He doesn’t allow many visits of this kind, so you’re lucky you’ve got one.’

Knowing it was now or never, Johnny took some deep breaths to try to calm himself. He couldn’t lose it in there, because if he did and got himself arrested, Deborah would probably divorce him.

‘You OK?’ the screw asked.

Johnny leaned against the wall and nodded. ‘Just give me a minute.’ The last time he could remember his heart beating at such a frantic pace was when he’d been plotted up outside that club waiting to shoot Vinny, and that hadn’t turned out too well. He’d drunk Scotch to calm his nerves and had accidentally shot Roy Butler instead. ‘I’m ready now.’

The first thing that struck Johnny as he entered the room was how different Jamie looked. He was eighteen now, full of muscle and had the body of a man rather than a teenager. His dark hair was cropped, and he had a big scar that ran diagonally from his right ear to the corner of his mouth.

‘Thanks for coming, Uncle Johnny. I had doubts you’d show up.’

Johnny was sure that, had he not been in prison when she was born, had he met his granddaughter, held her in his arms, read her bedtime stories and got to know her little personality, no way could he have stomached this visit. Perhaps the reason he was able to face Jamie was because the only memory he had of Molly was a couple of photographs.

Pulling the chair out from under the table, Johnny sat down opposite his nephew. Jamie had the same piercing green eyes as Vinny, which was no surprise seeing as it was now common knowledge they were half-brothers. ‘Cut the “Uncle Johnny” bollocks, and say what you gotta say. I don’t wanna be anywhere fucking near you, so the quicker you spill your guts and I can get out of here, the better.’

Jamie stared directly into his uncle’s eyes. ‘I asked Nan to speak to you because I wanted you to hear my side of the story. I’ve been framed, Johnny, and you are the only one who can help me. I am so sorry about what happened to Molly. You and your family must have been to hell and back, but I didn’t kill her. I swear to God, I never.’

‘Pull the other leg, it’s got fucking bells on,’ Johnny hissed.

‘What type of monster do you think I am, eh? I could never hurt a little kid. I promise you, if I’d been guilty of such a despicable act, I’d have killed myself by now. What type of cunt could live with themselves after murdering a three-year-old? Not me, that’s for fucking sure.’

If it hadn’t been for the four prison officers standing guard, Johnny would have lunged across the table and beaten his nephew black and blue. How dare he have the front to do what he’d done and then blatantly lie about it?

‘I want to speak to the police and urge them to re-open the case. Molly’s killer needs to be caught.’

Johnny looked at Jamie in disbelief. ‘As if the Old Bill are gonna do that. You were caught with a bedroom full of newspaper cuttings, you’d been ripping missing posters off walls and fucking lampposts, you even rung up the cunting police station and told them you had taken Molly. You were seen sat opposite the club on the day she went missing. Have you hit your head since you’ve been in here? The police got you bang to rights, boy, and you know it. Now why don’t you do me a favour and just admit it. It’s upsetting your nan the way you keep pleading your innocence. You’re making her ill.’

Eyes brimming with tears, Jamie shook his head furiously. ‘No way would I ever admit to something I didn’t do. It’s bad enough that the whole world sees me as a child-killer when I’m fucking innocent. I’ll hold my hands up to the newspaper cuttings, ripping the posters down and phone calls. That was wrong – bang out of order, in fact – and there isn’t a day goes by when I don’t regret it. But I was fourteen years old, for fuck’s sake. And I only did that shit because I hated Vinny so much. He tried to make my mother abort me – as you well know – and I blamed him for Mark’s death. That night we started the fire at Vinny’s club, Mark was climbing out the window when some evil cunt pulled him back in that storeroom. It had to be Vinny or a member of his staff. I can still hear Mark’s

screams now as he burned to death. I could even smell his flesh being cooked,' Jamie wept. Mark had been his older half-brother and they'd been so very close.

'So you killed Molly to get back at Vinny. Is that what you're trying to say?'

'How many more times have I got to tell you, Johnny? I didn't fucking touch Molly. I never even met her, let alone strangled her. The police found not one shred of evidence connecting me to Molly's body or the area where she was found. I'd never even heard of that place, let alone been there.'

'But you admitted you were sat opposite the club on the day she went missing.'

'Yeah, I was. It would have been Mark's eighteenth that day. I was upset, which is why I bought some cider and drowned my sorrows. If I had planned to snatch Molly you don't honestly think I would be sitting opposite the club so the whole world could see me, do you?'

Johnny shrugged. 'Well, you was silly enough to do all the other stuff, so why not? Hardly fucking Einstein, are you?'

'No. But I'm no Ian Brady either!' Jamie banged his fist on the table and all four prison guards instantly took a step forward. He raised his hands in apology, took a couple of deep breaths to bring his temper under control and then continued: 'Listen, I found out something recently which I want you to tell the Old Bill. They won't listen to me, but they might you.'

'What?'

Jamie put his elbows on the table and leaned towards his uncle. 'There's a lad from Whitechapel in here. Good pal of mine. Did you know that Little Vinny's best mate topped himself around the time of Molly's funeral?'

Johnny shook his head.

'Don't you find that odd? Why would a young lad with his whole life in front of him want to hang himself down Hainault forest for no reason, eh? Guilt maybe? Word is, he was a right oddball, into glue-sniffing and all sorts. Perhaps the little weirdo couldn't live with something bad he'd done? You get my drift?'

Johnny shrugged. He was feeling more uneasy by the second, truth be told. Jamie certainly did not have the demeanour of a guilty person. Quite the opposite, in fact.

'Do you mind if I tell you what it was like in here at the beginning for me, Johnny?'

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