

Caller: So we pull up outside her house and then she says she's got no brass. She's skint like. So I says, what the fuck you gonna do about fare? I'm last white taxi driver as it is; I'm not a bleeding charity, am I?

John Shark: You're a dying breed.

Caller: Aye. So what does she do? She spreads 'em right wide, one on each of seats, and gives me a right eyeful of meat pie. Then she says, take it out of here. Couldn't fucking believe it.

John Shark: Steady on, Don. So what did you do?

Caller: What you think I bloody did? I whipped it out and give her one, didn't I? Right there in back of cab. Good one and all. Best she'd had in a while, she reckoned.

John Shark: Women, eh? Can't live with them, can't kill 'em. 'Cept round Chapeltown.

*The John Shark Show
Radio Leeds
Sunday 29th May 1977*

Chapter 1

Leeds.

Sunday 29 May 1977.

It's happening again:

When the two sevens clash . . .

Burning unmarked rubber through another hot dawn to another ancient park with her secret dead, from Potter's Field to Soldier's Field, parks giving up their ghosts, it's happening all over again.

Sunday morning, windows open, and *it's going to be another scorcher*, red postbox sweating, dogs barking at a rising sun.

Radio on: alive with death.

Stereo: car and walkie-talkie both:

Proceeding to Soldier's Field.

Noble's voice from another car.

Ellis turns to me, a look like we should be going faster.

'She's dead,' I say, but knowing what he should be thinking:

Sunday morning – giving HIM a day's start, a day on us, another life on us. Nothing but the bloody Jubilee in every paper till tomorrow morning, no-one remembering another Saturday night in Chapeltown.

Chapeltown – my town for two years; leafy streets filled with grand old houses carved into shabby little flats filled full of single women selling sex to fill their bastard kids, their bastard men, and their bastard habits.

Chapeltown – my deal: MURDER SQUAD.

The deals we make, the lies they buy, the secrets we keep, the silence they get.

I switch on the siren, a sledgehammer through all their Sunday mornings, a clarion call for the dead.

And Ellis says, 'That'll wake the fucking nig-nogs up.'

But a mile up ahead I know she'll not flinch upon her damp dew bed.

And Ellis smiles, like this is what it's all about; like this was what he'd signed up for all along.

But he doesn't know what's lying on the grass at Soldier's Field.

I do.

I know.

I've been here before.

And now, now it's happening again.

'Where the fuck's Maurice?'

I'm walking towards her, across the grass, across Soldier's Field. I say, 'He'll be here.'

Detective Chief Superintendent Peter Noble, George's boy, out from behind his fat new Millgarth desk, between me and her.

I know what he's hiding: *there'll be a raincoat over her, boots or shoes placed on her thighs, a pair of panties left on one leg, a bra pushed up, her stomach and breasts hollowed out with a screwdriver, her skull caved in with a hammer.*

Noble looks at his watch and says, 'Well, anyroad, I'm taking this one.'

There's a bloke in a tracksuit by a tall oak, throwing up. I look at my watch. It's seven and there's a fine steam coming off the grass all across the park.

Eventually I say, 'It him?'

Noble moves out of the way. 'See for yourself.'

'Fuck,' says Ellis.

The man in the tracksuit looks up, spittle all down him, and I think about my son and my stomach knots.

Back on the road, more cars are arriving, people gathering.

Detective Chief Superintendent Noble says, 'The fuck you put that sodding siren on for? World and his wife'll be out here now.'

'Possible witnesses,' I smile and finally look at her:

There's a tan raincoat draped over her, white feet and hands protruding. There are dark stains on the coat.

'Have a bloody look,' Noble says to Ellis.

'Go on,' I add.

Detective Constable Ellis slowly puts on two white plastic gloves and then squats down on the grass beside her.

He lifts up the coat, swallows and looks up at me. 'It's him,' he says.

I just stand there, nodding, looking off at some crocuses or something.

Ellis lowers the coat.

Noble says, 'He found her.'

I look back over at the man in the tracksuit, at the man with the sick on him, grateful. 'Got a statement?'

'If it's not too much trouble,' smiles Noble.

Ellis stands up. 'What a fucking way to go,' he says.

Detective Chief Superintendent Noble lights up and exhales. 'Silly slag,' he hisses.

'I'm Detective Sergeant Fraser and this is Detective Constable Ellis. We'd like to take a statement and then you can get off home.'

'Statement.' He pales again. 'You don't think I had anything . . .'

'No, sir. Just a statement detailing how you came to be here and report this.'

'I see.'

'Let's sit in the car.'

We walk over to the road and get in the back. Ellis sits in the front and switches off the radio.

It's hotter than I thought it would be. I take out my notebook and pen. He reeks. The car was a bad idea.

'Let's start with your name and address.'

'Derek Poole, with an *e.* 4 Strickland Avenue, Shadwell.'

Ellis turns round. 'Off Wetherby Road?'

Mr Poole says, 'Yes.'

'That's quite a jog,' I say.

'No, no. I drove here. I just jog round the park.'

'Every day?'

'No. Just Sundays.'

'What time did you get here?'

He pauses and then says, 'About sixish.'

'Where'd you park?'

'About a hundred yards up there,' he says, nodding up the Roundhay Road.

He's got secrets has Derek Poole and I'm laying odds with myself:

2-1 affair.

3-1 prostitutes.

4-1 puff.

Sex, whatever.

He's a lonely man is Derek Poole, often bored. But this isn't what he had in mind for today.

He's looking at me. Ellis turns round again.

I ask, 'Are you married?'

'Yes, I am,' he replies, like he's lying.

I write down *married*.

He says, 'Why?'

'What do you mean, why?'

He shifts in his tracksuit. 'I mean, why do you ask?'

'Same reason I'm going to ask how old you are.'

'I see. Just routine?'

I don't like Derek Poole, his infidelities and his arrogance, so I say, 'Mr Poole, there's nothing routine about a young woman having her stomach slashed open and her skull smashed in.'

Derek Poole looks at the floor of the car. He's got sick on his trainers and I'm worried he'll puke again and we'll have the stink for a week.

'Let's just get this over with,' I mutter, knowing I've gone too far.

DC Ellis opens the door for Mr Poole and we're all back out in the sun.

There are so many fucking coppers now, and I'm looking at them thinking, *too many chiefs*:

There's my gaffer Detective Inspector Rudkin, Detective Superintendent Prentice, DS Alderman, the old head of Leeds

CID Detective Chief Superintendent Maurice Jobson, the new head Noble and, in the centre of the scrum, the man himself: Assistant Chief Constable George Oldman.

Over by the body Professor Farley, the Head of the Department of Forensic Medicine at Leeds University, and his assistants are preparing to take her away from all this.

Detective Superintendent Alderman has a handbag in his hands, he's taking a WPC and a uniform off with him.

They've got a name, an address.

Prentice is marshalling the uniforms, going door to door, corraling the gawpers.

The cabal turns our way.

Detective Inspector Rudkin, as hungover as fuck, shouts, 'Murder Room, thirty minutes.'

The Murder Room.

Millgarth Street, Leeds.

One hundred men stuffed into the second-floor room. No windows, only smoke, white lights, and the faces of the dead.

In comes George and the rest of his boys, back from the park. There are pats on the back, handshakes here, winks there, *like some fucking reunion.*

I stare across the desks and the phones, the sweating shirt backs and the stains, at the walls behind the Assistant Chief Constable, at the two faces I've seen so many, many times, every day, every night, when I wake, when I dream, when I fuck my wife, when I kiss my son:

Theresa Campbell.

Joan Richards.

Familiarity breeds contempt.

Noble speaks:

'Gentlemen, he's back.'

The dramatic pause, the knowing smiles.

'The following memorandum has been sent to all Divisions and surrounding areas:

'At 0650 this morning, the body of Mrs Marie Watts born 7.2.45, of 3 Francis Street, Leeds 7, was found on Soldier's Field,

Roundhay, near West Avenue, Leeds 8. The body was found to have extensive head injuries, a cut throat, and stab wounds to the abdomen.

'This woman had been living in the Leeds area since October 1976, when she came up from London. It is believed she worked in hotels in London. She was reported missing by her husband from Blackpool in November 1975.

'Enquiries are requested of all persons coming into police custody for bloodstains on their clothing and also enquiries at dry cleaners for any clothing with blood on it. Any replies to Murder Room, Millgarth Street Police Station.

'Message ends.'

Detective Chief Superintendent Noble stands there with his piece of paper, waiting.

'Add to that,' he continues. 'Boyfriend, one Stephen Barton, 28, black, also of 3 Francis Street. Some form for burglary, GBH. Probably pimped the late Mrs Watts. Works the door at the International over in Bradford, sometimes Cosmos. Didn't show up at either place yesterday and hasn't been seen since about six o'clock last night when he left the Corals on Skinner Lane, where he'd just chucked away best part of fifty quid.'

The room's impressed. We've got a name, a history, and it's not yet two hours.

A chance at last.

Noble lowers his eyes, his tongue on the edge of his lips. Quietly he says, 'You lot, find him.'

The blood of one hundred men pumping hard and fast, hounds the lot of us, the stink of the hunt like bloody marks upon our brows.

Oldman stands up:

'It's going to break down like this:

'As you all know, this is number 3 at best. Then there's the other possible attacks. You've all worked one or more of them so, as of today, you're all now officially Prostitute Murder Squad, out of this Station, under Detective Chief Superintendent Noble here.'

PROSTITUTE MURDER SQUAD.

The room is humming, buzzing, singing: everyone getting what they wanted.

Me too –

Off post office robberies and *Help the fucking Aged*:

Sub-postmasters at gun-point, six-barrels in their faces, wives tied up with a smack and a punch in their nighties, only Scrooge won't give it up, so it's a cosh from the butt of the shotgun and welcome to heart attack city.

One dead.

'Murder Squad'll break down into four teams, headed up by Detective Superintendents Prentice and Alderman and Detective Inspectors Rudkin and Craven. DI Craven will also co-ordinate Admin. from here at Millgarth. Communications will be DS White, the Divisional Officer will be Detective Inspector Gaskins, and Community Affairs and Press will be DI Evans, all based in Wakefield.'

Oldman pauses. I scan the room for Craven, but he's nowhere.

'Myself and Detective Chief Superintendent Jobson will also be making ourselves available to the investigation.'

I swear there are sighs.

Oldman turns round and says, 'Pete?'

Detective Chief Superintendent Noble steps forward again:

'I want every wog under thirty who's not married leant on. I want names. Some smartarse said our man hates women – hold the fucking front page.'

Laughter.

'All right, so let's have every fucking puff in your book in here too. Same goes for the usuals – slags and their lads. I want names and I want them names in here by five. SPG'll round them up. Ladies can go to Queens, rest here.'

Silence.

'And I want Stephen Barton. Tonight.'

I'm biting my nails. I want out of here.

'So phone home, tell them you'll be out all night. BECAUSE THIS ENDS HERE TONIGHT.'

One thought – JANICE.

Through the melee and out the door and down the corridor, Ellis trapped back down the hall, calling my name.

Outside the canteen there's no answer and I slam down the phone just as Ellis catches up.

'Fuck you going off to?'

'Come on, we got to get started,' and I'm off again, down the stairs and out the door.

'I want to drive,' he whines behind.

'Fuck off.'

I've got my foot down, flying through the centre back to Chapel-town, police radio still crackling with the New Fire.

Ellis is rubbing his hands together, saying, 'See he has his good points; big-time overtime.'

'Unless they vote to continue ban,' I mutter, thinking *I've got to lose him*.

'More for them that wants it.'

I say, 'When we get there, we should split up.'

'Get where?'

'Spencer Place,' I say, like he's as dumb as he looks.

'Why?'

I want to throw on the fucking brakes and punch him but, instead, I smile and say, 'Try and nip some of the usual bullshit in the bud. Stop them all yapping.'

I turn right, back on to Roundhay Road.

'You're boss,' he says, like it's only a matter of fucking time.

'Yeah,' I say and keep my foot down.

'You take the right-hand side. Start with Yvonne and Jean in 5.'

We've parked up round the corner on Leopold Street.

'Fuck. I have to?'

'You heard Noble. *Names*, he wants fucking names.'

'What about you?'

'I'll do Janice and Denise in 2.'

'Bet you will.' He's looking at me sideways.

I let it go with a wink.

He reaches for the door. 'Then what?'

'Keep going. Meet you back here when you're done.'

He tuts and scratches his knackers as he gets out the car, his mind made up.

I think my heart's going to fucking burst.

I wait until Ellis is inside number 5, then I open the door and walk up the stairs.

The house is quiet and stinks of smoke and dope.

I tap on her door at the top of the stairs.

She comes to the door looking like a Red Indian, her dark hair and skin covered in a film of sweat, like she's just been fucking and fucking for real.

The nights I've dreamt about her.

'You can't come in. I'm working.'

'There's been another.'

'So?'

'You can't stay round here.'

'So how about your place?'

'Please,' I whisper.

'You going to make an honest woman of me, are you Mr Policeman?'

'I'm serious.'

'So am I. I need money.'

I pull out notes, screwing them up in her face.

'Yeah?'

'Yeah,' I nod.

'What about a ring, Prince Bobby?'

I sigh and start to speak.

'One like you gave your wife.'

I look at the carpet, the stupid flowers and birds woven together under my feet.

I look up and Janice slaps me once.

'Piss off, Bob.'

'Fucking give him up!'

'Piss off!'

Ellis pushes her head back, banging it against the wall.

'Fuck off!'

'Come on, Karen,' I say. 'Just tell us where he is and we're away.'

'I don't fucking know.' She's crying and I believe her.

We've been at this now for over six hours and DC Michael Ellis wouldn't know the fucking truth if it walked up and smacked him in the gob, so he walks up to Karen Burns, white, twenty-three, convicted prostitute, drug addict, mother of two, and smacks her in the gob instead.

'Easy Mike, easy,' I hiss.

She falls away against her wallpaper, sobbing and angry.

Ellis tugs at his balls. He's hot, fucked off, and bored and I know he wants to pull down her pants and give her one.

I say, 'Half-time Mike?'

He sniffs and rolls his eyes and walks back down the hall.

The window's open and the radio on. A hot Sunday in May and all you'd usually hear would be Bob fucking Marley, but not today. Just Jimmy Savile playing twenty-five years of Jubilee hits, as every cunt and his stash hide under their beds, waiting for the sirens to stop, the shit to end.

Karen lights a cig and looks up.

I say, 'You do know Steve Barton?'

'Yeah, unfortunately.'

'But you've no idea where he is?'

'If he's any bloody sense, he'll have legged it.'

'Has he any bloody sense?'

'Some.'

'So where'd he leg it to?'

'London. Bristol. I've no fucking idea.'

Karen's flat stinks and I wonder where the kids are. Probably been taken off her again.

I say, 'You reckon he did it?'

'No.'

'So give me a name and I'm out of here.'

'Or what?'

'Or I'll go and get some fucking lunch and let my mate out

there question you, and then I'll come back and we'll take you down Queens Street.'

She tuts, exhales, and says, 'Who do you want?'

'Anyone who likes a bit of strange. Anything odd.'

'Anything odd?' she laughs.

'Anything.'

She stubs out the cigarette on a plastic tray of chips and curry sauce and gets up and takes an address book out of the knife drawer. The room now stinks of burning plastic.

'Here,' she says, tossing the little book over to me.

I scan the names, the numbers, the licence plates, the lies.

'Give me someone.'

'Under D. Dave. Drives a white Ford Cortina.'

'What about him?'

'No rubber, likes to stick it up your arse.'

'So?'

'He doesn't say please.'

I take out my notebook, copy down the licence plate.

'Heard he don't always pay and all.'

'Anyone else?'

'There's a taxi driver who likes to bite.'

'We've heard.'

'That's your lot then.'

'Thanks,' I say and see myself out.

I drop the coins.

'Joseph?'

'Yeah?'

'Fraser.'

'Bobby the bobby. Just a matter of time I says, and see if it ain't so.'

I am in the phone box two down from the Azad Rank, watching a couple of Paki kids bowling at each other. Ellis is sleeping off his Sunday lunch in the car: two cans of bitter and a fat cheese sandwich. There's Sunday cricket on the radio, more heat forecast, birds singing, lilting bass and sax from a terrace.

It can't last.