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Jeremy Cameron spent several years working in hostels for the homeless and twenty years living and working in Walthamstow. During this period he wrote five novels set in Walthamstow and featuring Nicky Burkett.

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SAMPLE



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Chapter One

DEAD GEEZER WAS waiting on my stairs.
'Evening geezer,' I went.

He never answered.

There I was, got the tea to cook. Needed to get out and buy an eighth off Jimmy Foley before Noreen came home. Fucking dead geezer reckoned he'd be waiting for me. It was inconsiderate.

I kicked him. He still never answered.

Wasn't used to clocking dead geezers. Excepting the two I wasted by accident I never clocked anyone who got the big one.

Never ought to get past the outside door only the fucking people downstairs kept on losing their keys so they left the Chubb off and came in the Yale with their cash card. Same way the geezer did probably.

'Jesus,' I turned round and said. 'As if I ain't got troubles enough.'

Went in our door and put the groceries down. Switched the kettle on and checked the time. Five o'clock. George my warrant officer ought to be home by now. I belled him. 'George mate,' I turned round and said.

‘Oh my good Gawd,’ he went.

‘Good to chat to you George,’ I goes. ‘Always good to check you out you knows that.’

‘Nicky,’ he goes, ‘can’t you ring the bleeding office like anyone else does? How did you get my home number when I just changed it again? S’pose you’re bringing me nothing but grief?’

‘Grief never comes handy George,’ I goes philosophical. ‘Grief waits for no geezer. What it is George see, I comes home minding no one’s business except my own and what do I find? Only a dead geezer. Dead geezer croaked on my stairs is all.’

‘Dead geezer? You got a dead geezer on your stairs?’

‘I believe that’s what I just turned round and said George.’

‘Jesus Nicky it follows you around, don’t it? You kill him?’

‘Fuck’s sake George! Told you he was sat here waiting! Waiting dead.’

‘You know who he is?’

‘I ain’t got no fuckin’ idea. Definitely a geezer. Ain’t no bird. Cuts it down.’

‘You sure he’s dead? You tested his pulse?’

‘No George I ain’t tested his pulse. I ain’t given him no mouth-to-mouth job neither.’

‘Nicky you test his pulse then you ring the hospital straight away, you get me? Tell them if he’s alive or dead before they start out.’

‘No George I ain’t doing that.’

‘Why not Nicky for God’s sake?’

‘Well George there ain’t generally no call for checking a geezer’s pulse when he got the back of his bonce smashed up and then, just in case you got any doubt, it looks like they strangled him in the bargain, being as how he got his tongue down his chin and he got a rope round his neck.’

‘Jesus.’

‘Then they shot him in the back George, part of the package.’

‘God Nicky.’

‘They never liked him George.’

‘It don’t sound like it.’

‘They never wanted him borrowing no more fivers till giro day.’

‘Nicky you got to get on the blower right off. 999, police, ambulance, the lot.’

‘Fire brigade?’

‘No never mind the fire brigade only you ring the police now—’

‘George I got you for my warrant officer so I rings you when I got a problem. You knows how they mess with you when you got a bit of form. Never fancy getting a kicking round them cells just on account of some geezer got brown bread on my stairs. Want you there George please mate like a witness you reckon seeing as how you’re Old Bill. Look after my interests like.’

‘Jesus Nicky, you ain’t heard they privatised us? I ain’t in the bleeding police force any more, I’m a bleeding civilian. They gave me the choice Nicky, be a civilian or go back on the beat. You ain’t heard?’

‘Heard all right. George gave me the news about a million times over. One unhappy geezer. Made my heart bleed.’

‘Yeah George only once Old Bill always Old Bill innit? Maybe no one told them up Chingford anyway.’

‘And Nicky you reckon I’m your warrant officer but you’re forgetting you’re straight these days, ain’t that right? No more fines? Only thing you did the last couple of years was kill someone and they never did fine people for that.’

‘It was an accident George and anyway you may have forgot the stress and tribulation on me like my brief turned round

and said. Like I never will recover from that stress. Truth George they ought to give me compensation dosh for all that, not start the other way round innit?’

George he made a rude noise.

‘Knew you’d help me out George, so I sit here and wait while you come round with Old Bill.’

‘Jesus Nicky ...’

So I cut him then belled Noreen, got her just before she left work, told her go by her mum till I checked her there. Gave her the bones, give her the rest later. Told her it was never down to me some geezer came round dead.

Noreen sounded like she never gave it much cred. Even you told the truth your woman never believed it. Fact was she sounded upset. Get on my case about dead geezers coming round her place. Maybe give her a spot of emotion later bring her round. Bit of sobbing always helped with birds.

I took a close-up on the back of his bonce.

Bits oozing out. You reckon inside some geezer’s Judge Dread they got to have a load of gravy. Not this geezer’s. White bits, brown bits, black bits all mash up. Like pebble dash and my mum’s rice pudding mixed together, melt him down for bonemeal and put him on your garden. Only a bit of hot sauce lying on top.

One other point you got to mention before Old Bill came round. He was wearing a suit. And shiny shoes. So he never came up Howard Road brassick. And like as not he was carrying pennies. I put on Noreen’s gardening gloves. Four pot plants and she bought state-of-the-fucking-monte gardening gloves. I lifted his wallet. Never checked his cards or his bleeding family photos or whatnot. Only borrowed a century. Left another two still there. No problem.

Arrangement with Noreen was I never went out committing crimes or I was history. Not the case I reckoned I

never committed crimes that came by my door. Not even a crime you looked at it sensible. Feller never had the need any more. Wanted me to have it.

His neck was a state you had to reckon. Rope near as took his head off. Eyes popping. True as I stood here his tongue hung down his chin. Gravy came out his hooter and his lugs. Then more off his back where they plugged him. All over the fucking stairs and who cleaned it up? I got permanent aggravation off downstairs about who cleaned the fucking staircase. Landlord never wanted to know. I reckoned it got to be their responsibility downstairs. Fair enough I used the stairs for climbing up only they got them all day.

Geezer was smelling already. Maybe he smelled like that before he signed off. I went and brewed the tea.

Fucking hundreds of them and not one gave me any more cred than Noreen. Nor went for that emotion.

Old Bill never believed anyone, principle, only they extra never believed me. All on account of how I had a bit of bother way back with a chief superintendent.

They sat down in my gaff never asked.

‘Look fellers,’ I went. ‘Look fellers you all know me right, know how I was always helpful?’

Reckoned I heard some fucker spit somewhere.

‘You got DSTT Holdsworth on duty?’

‘TT’s on a course,’ they went. ‘Interpersonal skills.’

Then we all burst out cackling and it got a bit easier after that so I got the rum out. They still never believed me only they never arrested you after you got the rum out, count on it.

‘You know who he is?’ went that CID Inspector, name of Forrest. ‘This dead geezer on your stairs?’

‘He ain’t a well man, all I know. And he don’t smell too healthy. He one of yours?’

'MP for Chingford is all. You got a dead Member of Parliament on your door Nicky. What you make of that then?'

'Heard they was always the best ones dead ones.'

'Oliver Mannion.'

'Never clocked him. What the fuck he come round here for?'

'That's what we were hoping you could tell us. You got a dead fucking MP!'

'Do me a favour geezer. I ain't got no fuckin' notion.'

'Make you right on that one,' goes some nasty little fucker, DC something, Gillespie. 'Bet you never even heard of your own MP, leave alone Chingford.'

'Get your notes out you want to bet,' I goes.

'Pardon?'

'You reckon you want to bet, get your paper out.'

He went a bit pale only he never could reverse now. Put on his smug look instead, reckoned he'd call me and boost his rep. 'How much?' he goes. All the rest got interested now, even the scene-of-crime geezers stopped their dusting and wiping and pulled round.

'Score.'

'Er ...'

'Put it out.'

He got his wallet and they all checked him shuffling. Put a twenty on the table and I matched it. Old Bill never believed their little mince pies now.

'Alan Carmody,' I goes.

'Shit.'

'Had a pint with him Saturday down the Pig and Whistle.' I picked up the dosh.

'You fucking little bastard.'

'Come in handy a bit extra, ring my dealer later purchase some of that illegal cannabis. Giro never did go far enough.'

They had to hold him back. They all cackled in the bargain. 'Lucky he don't arrest you,' goes one of them. 'Just going off shift is Gillespie, likes to make a nicking just before he finishes so he has to stay on for the paperwork, three hours' overtime.' Then one of them stood there, big blonde bird name of Burns, and would you believe when she finished clocking me up and down she pulled out her visiting card and put it on the table. Big tits in the bargain. Problem I had with uniformed birds, always got this problem wondered what it was like their buttons got undone. No doubting she fancied it.

'And I never want you fitting me up neither on some piece of shit,' I turned round and said that Gillespie.

'Lot of witnesses here, George you be my witness innit? Malicious arrest he comes after me?'

'Hrmph,' goes George.

'Little fucker,' goes DC Gillespie.

'You fellers finished now you drunk all the rum?' I went. 'Or you want to start on that cannabis? I got some good skunk I put somewhere, you seen it any place?'

They all went home after that. Took their MP with them, experts finished sorting him out. You got to turn round and say pigs were strange geezers. One way they reckoned whacking your MP was crime of the century. Other way they reckoned it was a fucking good laugh.

And I belled Noreen told her come home.

'Got them Laura Ashley pies for your tea Noreen,' I turned round and said. 'Bit pricey only I knows you likes them.'

'Linda McCartney Nicky not Laura Ashley. Stop winding me up. Only I got my tea round Mum's. Put it in the freezer eh? I brought you some of my mum's gravy, go with your pie if you want.'

'Your mum's a little darling. Just like you course Noreen.'

‘Won’t get round me like that Nicky, best tell me what’s been going down. You know I warned you Nicky, more of them crimes and we’re finished you and me, you know that.’

‘Noreen be fair! You ain’t even heard the knockings yet!’

I was half cut after that boozing with the filth. Getting the sleepy stage, all I wanted was a little sit down and maybe a feel up my bird. Only Noreen was never even getting started. She was sniffing me up suspicious like I was a criminal type.

‘Do me a favour Noreen know what I mean?’

When she got mean that Noreen she got a nasty habit closing her little beadies up. Eyelash job. Make a geezer para just sitting there. When she sucked her teeth the same time you got big problems.

‘Noreen I only went out bought them Laura Ashley pies ...’

She whacked me.

‘Linda McCartney pies and special for you a bit of that Michael Jackson muesli and Whitney Houston pattie and dumplings ...’ She started giggling. ‘And Marley’s Black Forest Gateau and that Diana Ross chocolate pudding and chocolate sauce ...’

She jumped me on the settee, banged her little fists on my bonce and I felt her tits scrunching all round on me never failed on getting me going. She moved a leg up. Now was time for getting the words in before she turned nasty again.

‘Noreen straight up I never reckoned the geezer. Fuck knows what he was after. Could be he was a tief man come to roust us.’

‘Oh yeah Chingford MP after your giro money I suppose.’

‘Maybe he heard you got a personal computer Noreen.’

‘Yeah, never afford one himself, blah-di-blah.’

‘Maybe he got lost. Maybe he got that memory loss or he was after a bit of stuff, heard that Shelley Rosario got a gaff round the corner.’

‘And speaking of bits of stuff Nicky—’

‘Eh?’

‘Speaking of bits of stuff—’

‘Who was speaking of bits of stuff?’

‘When I came in the door I smelled woman.’

‘What!’

‘Woman smell, what I smelled. Woman smell. Who been coming up here then Nicky, eh?’

‘Jesus Noreen, which you rather, I killed someone or I had a bit of bird up here?’

‘Answer the question Nicky.’ She gave me that very nasty eyes-closed-teeth-suck.

I never helped it. ‘Jesus Noreen,’ I turned round and said, ‘maybe you want to bell Chingford nick ask what you smelled. One of them Old Bill was a bird. Big blonde bird name of Burns. Bit tits. I never smelled her close up never do that with pigs, only you got a better nose than me no problem Noreen ...’ Her little mince pies were opening up. ‘Right little raver that PC Burns, took me down the alley after and you never credit how she moved, and teeth – telling you I got love bites all over—’

She whacked me more and giggled and undid my shirt looking for love bites only then she started kissing me and giving little licks, she knew how she drove me careless that Noreen. Body like a fucking angel and little muscles straight out the gym, best bit of woman in Walthamstow. Got a brain too or so she kept telling me. Drive any geezer careless ...

‘Only just you remember Nicky ...’

‘Remember what Noreen? Remember your birthday? Remember buy the toilet paper?’

‘Remember you stray out of line and I cut it off man. Just one little sniff is all it takes.’

‘One little sniff? You gonna cut off my hooter Noreen?’

‘Not unless your hooter’s what you put up them women Nicky. You do that? You like to put your hooter up your women?’ She was starting up snorting with laughing, her own hooter job here.

‘Be surprised what some birds like Noreen. Specially Old Bill women so I heard, WPCs lot of them fancy a real good nose up ...’

She was rolling all over me now cackling like a donkey. ‘Well you just keep your little nose jobs for them others,’ she goes. ‘For me though, you can reserve your nice bit of elastic down there Nicky, do the trick just nicely.’

‘What you say lady.’

‘Now why you think that Chingford MP was coming round your flat?’

‘Fuck knows. You want to come to bed?’

‘All right. Don’t mind if I do.’

Never could tell with birds. Twelve months telling me how I was staying off crime. Then crime came sitting on my doorstep and she only got leery on some WPC. Never could tell.

Chapter Eleven

WHERE THEY REFURBISHED all up Priory Court Mum's block looked like fucking spaceship Mars Probe One now. We walked round from Howard Road Christmas dinnertime. We got traditions in our family. Tradition was at Christmas we gobbled our grub and gave the booze some welly and listened up Shithead eating sprouts and telling us things were never any good these days. Nighttime this year Noreen and me we were off round her mum and dad for a proper drink-up and some real nosh. Get the rum out for sure.

'So when was the last time you brought Noreen round then Nicky?' goes Mum. 'Don't hardly ever see you Noreen these days he never lets us together have a proper chat.'

'Nicky you give your mother all kinds of grief,' goes Shithead.

'Leave it out you jerk,' our Sharon turned round and said, giving her kid his grub.

'Hope he treats you better than he treated me Noreen,' Kelly put her oar in. 'Mind that Barry, now he treats a girl lovely and I won't hear different. Takes me up Charlie Chan's, bought me them slimming aids you name it.'

‘Big news in Germany them slimming aids,’ I went. ‘No one weighs more than twenty stone innit. Hope he don’t make you look like them Germans.’

‘Nicky just because Barry’s a German—’

‘Kelly you mustn’t rise to him,’ goes Noreen. ‘Nicky don’t care if Barry’s a German or an Eskimo, you know that. He’s only winding you up.’

‘Yeah, true words I suppose Noreen. He’s a bleeder innit that Nicky?’

‘Yeah he’s a bleeder,’ goes Noreen sitting next to me. Same time her little mitt creeping round my bum. ‘I got to treat him strict, discipline him every day and that you know?’

‘Nicky you want some more sprouts?’ goes Mum.

‘Dad you take me up Switzerland?’ goes Danny.

‘Too far Danny.’

‘Too far mate. Past your bedtime when we got there.’

‘Don’t know what the world’s coming to,’ Shithead turned round and said. ‘Never done an honest day’s work in his life, now he’s only going skiing up Switzerland. Some of us grafting away ...’

‘Nah Mrs Burkett,’ Rameez went desperate. ‘Tell you them sprouts was delicious only it against my religion to take seconds I’m telling you. And also Muslims we only supposed to be eating sprouts once a month maybe you never knew that?’

‘Such a good boy that Rameez,’ goes Mum. ‘Good to his mum and dad, always polite, so religious ...’ Mum never been in a church since she got christened.

‘Nicky you been hearing on that deal round that cigarette load?’ Rameez asked quiet. ‘Driver in the deal, lift it there and then, whole container.’

Rameez I’m clean these days you remember that?’

‘Scuse me Nicky. ’Scuse my manners. I was forgetting.’

‘Anyone want some more of that Lambrusco?’ went Shithead. Then he stood up to lean over and pour.

Then he got shot.

Bleeding brilliant it was. That stage never knew who did it, never fucking cared. Maybe they aimed up Rameez only he just sat down. Maybe they reckoned Shithead was me, never a fucking compliment. Maybe Shithead got friends out there in the bargain, loved him like we loved him. Sitting in the block opposite in some empty flat it got to be some pro, never any kid with his airgun. Never a sawnoff neither, too accurate. Had to be a pro. Only trouble was they still never got him in the business area. Took him in the left shoulder.

All the same he dropped the Lambrusco out his right mitt, went flying back smacked against the wall. More mess on the carpet and then he started dripping blood on it.

‘Henry!’ cried Mum.

‘Danny get here!’ cried Kelly, not so stupid after all, got over him. Sharon dragged her kid under the table. Everyone knowing straight off what happening. He got shot.

Best fucking Christmas I ever had. Only wished I did it myself.

We were all down the floor by now and Shithead started the moaning. Whole lot of us dialling Old Bill on our mobiles, they got six 999 calls all the same time. Sharon got the lights off. Mum blubbing. Shithead still moaning. Better than TV it was, beat the Christmas movie any time. Shithead got shot up.

No time to enjoy it proper though. I dropped out the back window.

Nipped round and ran over the block opposite. Never clocked any special window for a shooting. And he was out of there by now for certain.

He got two choices, up South Countess Road or down North Countess Road. He got to have wheels. I went for South Countess nearer the main road.

And a geezer was walking up there smart in a suit.
And got a little suitcase like.

Only geezers wearing suits up Priory Court were fucking bailiffs. I never heard tell of bailiffs working Christmas Day.

I stepped up beside him. Working geezer he never learned his trade, had to be away quicker than that. I strolled up.

‘Happy days,’ I goes.

‘Excuse me?’ Only a fucking foreigner he was.

‘Nicky Burkett,’ I goes. ‘Pleased to meet you geezer.’

‘Pardon?’ He stopped one second.

‘You done me a favour mate. Best bit of laugh I ever got come Christmas. Plugged my fucking stepdad. Reckoned the least I could do was give you the thanking.’

He walked on a bit slow.

‘Course,’ I went, ‘always some chance you were never after Henry innit? Some chance you were after some other fucker up there?’

He clocked his case where the shooter was. All folded up neat now, screwed and bolted and put away, not very handy in a crisis. I never got too close on account of I heard hitmen could be a bit useful on other bits besides shooters. All the same he had to grant it I was holding the advantage here.

Mainly I got the advantage with Rameez catching up the action now and how he got a machete in his mitt about four yards long and he was swishing it.

So now I made his space. ‘You care to spill the words then geezer?’ I went. ‘Like on where you get the bit of work from then eh?’

‘Excuse me?’ he went.

‘Or my man here he chop your head off?’

'I'm sorry I don't understand,' he turned round and said. 'I have just been visiting my auntie for my Christmas dinner.'

'Drop the fucking case Ratzo,' goes Rameez.

'No.'

Rameez chopped a slice off his ear. I hoped we got it right. I hoped he never came up Priory Court for Christmas dinner with his auntie.

'Drop the fucking case.'

He dropped the case.

'Now you tell us who paid you the mullah,' went Rameez.

'I don't know. It was a man in a restaurant. I don't know his name.'

Rameez took a slice off his other ear. You got to hand it to Rameez he was delicate with that machete. Not an easy bleeding thing to do taking a slice off with a machete. He was clean as a whistle. Do the same with his satsumas later.

Geezer sobbed. Not much of a fucking hitman. Not supposed to sob.

'A man called Rupert.'

'Next I take off your nose,' goes Rameez. 'Or you give us the money.'

Geezer shook. 'All of it?' he goes. 'I do not have it here. I was paid only a deposit in advance you understand.'

'Wallet.'

He handed it. Rameez opened it out. Never wanted his cards. Never wanted his picture of his missis and kids. Took the folding. Gave it me for counting while he scratched the feller's cheek.

£987. He probably got some petrol and a bag of chips on the way down, accounted for the shortage. I put it in my pocket.

'You not too bad on the aim,' goes Rameez. 'But you too fuckin' slow for a shooter. You ought to be out of here long past.'

'I know,' went the geezer blubbing some more.

‘Since we got us some compensation now for the distress caused,’ Rameez turned round and said, ‘you better fuck off innit mate?’

He fucked off. Left a trail of gravy in the street and we heard an Audi start up and go.

We walked back up the Court. We left the case there laying in the road, never touched it. We left two slices of lug there beside it for Old Bill to do their thinking on. Put forensics in a happy mood last a week. We got back in the building just when the sirens started.

Old Bill came in six motors. Surprised they had six available Christmas Day. Ambulances behind, three of them. All screamed in the Court.

‘You got the pudding Mum?’ I went.

Shithead still moaning.

‘Anyone want to pull a cracker?’ went Sharon.

‘Rameez you be a good boy and pull them curtains,’ Mum turned round and said. ‘Keep them bullets out eh?’

‘Rameez you got a blade for peeling them satumas?’ I goes. Knowing full well he threw it as far as he could down the gardens up Winns Avenue before the law arrived.

Everyone cackling now excepting Shithead, never did have a sense of humour. By the time Old Bill came in it was a right party.

Shithead went off to Whipps Cross and Christmas was never so bad after all.

Then before we set out we got to have one last talking. All a bit confusing so what it was, I got to have it sorted in my mind so we made a plan of action before the trip.

One last talking meant all the boys.

Jimmy Foley and Wayne and Dean and Rameez. Elvis and Paulette. Shelley Rosario. Sharon came over. Bridget Tansley off the paper. George my warrant make it respectable. Even Andy

my probation for the travel news. Noreen now. I was never pleased on Noreen being there preferred her safe at home, only Noreen got what Noreen wanted. Fucking TT Holdsworth made it his business being there. We met down Jimmy's caff on Markhouse Road, take in some Thai nosh on account of Jimmy's missis was Thai. Best cafe in Walthamstow no problem.

So we sat there eating our noodles and we got the facts out. We talked it round.

Me and Noreen were going up Switzerland. Diana wanting us there finding for sure who whacked her hub. And why.

Reckoned we already knew who whacked her hub. Bernard and Rupert and Caravella whacked her hub. Slip reckoned it and Slip was right.

Looked at from that point of view this investigation was kind of easy peasy. Take in a bit of skiing, spot of yodelling then tell Diana all the knockings. Collect the dosh. Only got to have a talking now for finding out everyone was the same thinking. And what about the complications, what they reckon on that?

And what we did if it turned awkward.

'Nicky you ain't got no problem!' goes Jimmy. 'You knows who did the whacking you takes the dosh!'

'Yeah!'

'You takes that bagful of exes!' goes Rameez. 'You gives the good news. You sort out the complications! Then you fucks off right quick innit!'

'Nicky,' goes Elvis, snappy thinker sees the problem. 'You always get the worries too much man. What you worrying now is why it all so easy, ain't that the truth?'

'Mention it Elvis yeah. Why it so easy? What the fuckin' problem here? And you be telling me one more thing, why it is them pigs never trouble arresting no fucker? You got the answers on that one?'

We all turned round and clocked TT. Been awful quiet since we got in there. One more serious thing I was wanting a talking for.

‘TT?’ goes George, been bothering him a while now in the bargain.

TT never turned round and said a dicky. He got him some more tea. ‘Jimmy!’ he called out.

Very confusing for Jimmy Foley got the same name like the guvnor of the gaff. He reckoned they got to be related. Now he just started up for getting TT his tea when he clocked the problem and sat down again.

‘TT?’ goes George again. Always the straight goer George, never liked a curved copper. He came round yours on the warrants did George, you paid a bit of your fines and he never nicked you. Never paid your fines at all he still got you another chance. Straight goer. Took his holidays up Clacton. Probably collected a few fines up there while he was stopping.

‘I am not available for comment,’ goes TT.

Everyone howled.

‘And pretty fucking obvious the reason he never available for comment innit?’ I turned round and said.

‘Yeah?’

‘It came clear to me just now and here, right? Sitting here clocking that TT it came clear to me. Like a fucking vision.’

‘Tell it Nicky!’ goes Elvis and Paulette.

‘How he never wanted that whacking solved, know what I mean?’

‘Nicky,’ goes George, ‘now you’re getting in serious water here mate—’

‘Tell it bro’! Right!’

‘Well, it got to be he took a dip innit?’

‘He took a dip? He got big pockets?’

‘He got a consideration?’

‘It got to be that. Either that or’ – I was thinking faster than I was gabbing, or the other way round – ‘either that or he got a PI in there giving him bigger news. One or the fucking other. Got a PI, never wanted to pull him out maybe.’

‘He got a grass!’

‘Either one of them two or ... or he got the fear of nicking the big boys ...’

‘Yeah them big boys up Parliament, he got the fear!’

‘Either one of them or ... or ...’ I went slow. ‘Or he wanting me to whack them, simple. Keep it on the hush, you hear what I’m saying?’

They all went quiet.

‘What I reckoned first time out when he sent that Oliver up my gaff. Got a consideration for sending him my way, sort out his problem. Now he never can get out the problem. In the bargain they never want a fuss round the big boys, never want any noise round them Members up Parliament. Then again maybe they reckon I wander in there provoke a bit of evidence like. Then what it is, maybe they got a PI. Ah fuck it, fucked if I know. TT, you want to tell it then fucker?’ I was more confused than when I wasn’t confused.

‘Nicky ...’ goes TT. It went real quiet again. Little Bridget scribbling scribbling. ‘Nicky ... I could never consider ... I could never consider getting you or anyone else to kill our suspects and solve all our political problems on the quiet ... without any public fuss ... surely you know that Nicky ... it would not be ethical or in the interests of justice ...’

Then he upped real slow and went out the door.

Then it stayed real quiet even longer. Till George reckoned he better turn round and say something important.

‘Well ...’ went George.

‘Well mate ...’

‘Well ...’ went George again.

‘George mister you reckon you got a bent copper there or what?’ went Rameez.

‘Not bent,’ went George. ‘Not bent not TT. I better not say anything. I will say though I think he might be under a bit of pressure somewhere. I think he just tried to tell you that.’

‘Ah,’ went Jimmy, still never understood it rightly. Trying though.

‘Ah Jimmy,’ went Elvis. And we all reckoned we got the basic knockings now. All we needed to know anyhow and fuck the rest.

‘Nicky,’ went Noreen, ‘only you got to remember one thing now. You never get a lot of support off the Old Bill you hear what I’m saying? You sort their problems out for them and they’re sweet. Things turn awkward though and you find you’re on your tod. And what is it you always start doing when it gets like that? You only start killing geezers innit? Always the same. And it ain’t allowed now.’

‘Noreen be fair!’

‘Nicky,’ goes Rameez, ‘you want any shafting done you just put out an advert mate. You done your bit. Put the word out and we come running no problem. Help you out.’

‘Not you nor none of your mates,’ goes Noreen. ‘None of that killing I’m telling you. Nor thieving nor robbing nor speeding nor ... nor any of them other things you used to do.’

‘Yeah course Noreen you got it.’ Proper embarrassing everyone clocking how your bird ran your life. Supposed to be private. Noreen you got to say was some cantankerous bird.

We sat there and gave it thinking.

What we did know, TT sent Oliver to my gaff. Then he got whacked, not part of the plan.

Best TT found out who whacked him. And Mission Diana meant one way or another we could solve their problem. Either they cleared up after or they never needed to.

So he was cooperating with us and we were cooperating with him.

Nice to be of assistance to the fucking pigs.

And going to be interesting up Switzerland.

SAMPLE

Chapter Fifteen

‘JESUS NOREEN,’ I went over my coffee, ‘ain’t it this I brown bread in Wengen’s something para? Take a loaf or two home for your mum and dad or what?’

‘Right Nicky. Coffee a bit special too.’

Then they brought the cheese.

‘Nah John,’ I went to the waiter. ‘Cheese for breakfast mate? I still got the gyp from last night believe it. No hard feelings geezer only you got any sugar puffs or what?’

‘It is normal here in Switzerland,’ he turns round and says. ‘It is the smorga for us. Of course you may have the jam and marmalade and muesli and eggs and fruit instead if you are preferring. It is not compulsory the cheese.’

‘Cheers mate,’ I went. ‘Glad to hear it.’

So we got the jam and marmalade and muesli and eggs and fruit. Muesli was crap, get better out of Food Giant. Rest was a result. We got about four pints of coffee in the bargain. Knew how to sort out a breakfast the Swiss.

Then John boy brought us the invites. First one came separate on a card. ‘The DHO requests the pleasure of your company,’ it went, ‘at the Hotel Falken at 6.30 on New Year’s Eve. Drinks.’

I passed it over Noreen.

‘You reckon drinks got to mean them cocktails?’ I went.

‘Like as not Nicky. I got two more of them invitations here in one envelope. One’s kind of a letter except nobody signed it. Wants you to take tea.’

‘What else it says?’

“Dear Mr Burkett, I wish to invite you to take tea on the terrace of the Hotel Edelweiss in Murren at four o’clock. You may learn something to your advantage.”

‘Shit. And that other one? Want me to take anything?’

“Dear Mr Burkett, I trust you and your lady will be able to join us for a private dinner party at Wengernalp at eight o’clock. If you yourself could stay behind afterwards I may explain matters. It is time to clear the air. Yours faithfully, Bernard Mannion.”

We let all that settle with the brown bread. ‘Be a busy day,’ I went.

‘You going to them?’ she went.

‘When you find out for me where they all bleeding are Noreen.’

‘I’m going skiing Nicky. And you got to have a lesson natural.’

‘We fit it in. So you find the places and that, why I brought you here innit?’

‘Nicky you notice how he put your lady on that letter? Notice how he never put your bird? You reckon you take notice of that? How some people maybe treat their women?’

‘Ach Noreen, bird, lady, same difference. Now we best get cracking eh? Where you reckon I go for my skiing lesson?’

‘I’ll show you.’ She started on giggling. ‘Now you make sure you go to the toilet first Nicky. Get in all that ski gear you never get out again and make it worse you could get a bit

nervous, make you want to wee like crazy. You take care of that or you want me to do your weeing for you as well?’

‘You just look after your own weeing Noreen then you show me where that shop is, you catch my drift? We passed it yesterday innit?’

We went upstairs and got into the snow bits. She was wanting me putting on all her fucking underwear, not bleeding likely. Put on a tracksuit. She got two pairs of tights and vest and shirt and top then some ski suit I never knew she had then her woolly hat and shades and big mittens she was Michelin woman. I put my jacket on over the tracksuit, hard man. Ray-Bans course, you went skiing you got to be cool. Fortunate I nicked them one time before Noreen put a blank on the nicking. Put my gloves on I got from the army surplus. I was oiled.

Out the hotel and it was round the corner you booked the ski lesson, just where it was before. They reckoned they still got a few places left in the beginners’. Then they told me two shops where I could hire the gear. One across the street.

‘Good morning sir.’ Some way they reckoned I spoke English before I even opened my gob.

‘All right mate? You help me out here? I got a ski lesson only I ain’t got none of the gear. They reckon you fix me the works like no problem?’

‘No problem at all sir. We will equip you from top to bottom. Fit you up like a bloody champion.’

I clocked him up then we both cackled. ‘Right mate,’ I goes, ‘seems like you might be an all right geezer. Go to it Wilhelm, sort the bleeding business.’

He measured me up then he measured me round then he pushed and pulled and squeezed somehow giggling quiet all the while, asked me who I was and how I fancied their birds up there. Got me boots big enough and skis big enough and

poles big enough, poles like you clocked on all the photos. Shoved me in boots so tight I stopped feeling below the ankle, hoped they never dropped off. Clicked me into the skis wearing the boots. Clicked me out again, reckoned I wore the boots up the ski school only I got to carry the skis and poles. Fucking how was another question. Then I gave him so much dosh maybe I bought the whole shop some misunderstanding. Called for some little scam somewhere, emergency measures. Then he turned me toward the door, slapped me on the back and went, 'Go for it Lone Ranger!' Maybe they got some very old TV programmes out there.

'Thank you Tonto don't mind if I do,' I went.

Then I got out the door.

Then I fell arse over tit all over their snow.

Jesus.

How the fuck you were supposed to stand up in their boots? Time I got up the school I was likely needing four pints of lager and a massage. I got standing took about twenty minutes. Then bent down for picking up the skis and poles, fell over again. Hooter went straight in the snow like a badger. No one took notice. Picked myself up. Took another two steps. Leaned on the pole, what they were for leaning on. Took another two. Stopped. Leaned.

Ski school behind the ice rink they reckoned. Fifty yards, time I got there I was so knackered all my muscles quivered. Sweat pouring so I never clocked the world through the Ray-Bans. Took them off. Spotted a group maybe a dozen birds and geezers. Beginners got to be.

One of them fit though. Taller than I was. Blonde. Muscles rippled. Serious.

'Hello,' she turned round and said. 'Have you come for my beginners' group? Are you Nicholas?'

‘All right Heidi? Yeah only now I walked up here I got totalled already innit? You the boss then? Pleased to meet you and that, Jesus you’re some fit bird you hear what I’m saying?’ I was gabbling never even got my head straight. Wanted to lie down in their snow.

She started giggling in the bargain. ‘In fact,’ she went, ‘my name is Trudi.’

‘All right Trudi?’

‘I can see you and I we are going to get along just fine. You will give me a bit of a good laugh I am thinking. Did you get dressed up like so just now or are you coming from England like that?’ Then she started chortling again, never stopped all morning every time she clocked me. Bit of all right was that Trudi.

We started on some exercises.

Four English geezers there, pity two of them Scousers. Couple of Krauts got Frankfurt on their jackets, never made them hard. Four Swiss, one a geezer the rest old biddies. Fit old biddies. Ages added up to four hundred and fifty. Then there was me.

You swung your arms round. Even in her ski suit you could clock all Trudi’s bits move. Gave me a cold sweat. So we swung arms a bit more then we swung our legs. Not easy, all the Brits fell over. Then Trudi reckoned we put our skis on.

Fucking doss on the telly putting your skis on. Not so easy in real life.

Trudi came over knelt by my knee on account of my foot never got clicked in that ski.

‘Why is your leg shaking like that?’ she goes. ‘Are you suffering from hypothermia?’

‘Call it that Trudi. Comes over me whenever birds get kneeling round my pins. Kind of fever.’

‘Ah-ha you are so funny. Now that is your two skis.’ She raised her voicebox for the rest. ‘Now I want you all to follow me by walking over to that post.’

Few yards off no problem that post. I set off took a step forward. Then another and another and another. Fucking strange how I took all those steps forward only finished up ten yards further back.

Most of the party made it sort of halfway only a few got major aggravation. Trudi came skiing down cackling fit to bust, got hold of my mitt and hauled me over her snow up by that post. I hung on to it save disappearing downtown.

‘All right now. Sometimes it is more easy to walk up a hill by going sideways. Do this for me please. Let me see you all walk up to me now moving your legs sideways up the hill.’

Jesus H. Christ. And his mum. This skiing business got more to it than you reckoned. I took one step sideways up that mountain. Needed a fucking crane for it. Got the right ski there then lifted the other one. Shit. Whoops. Whoa ... I was going round in a fucking circle now, spinning down that mountain headed for fucking sea level.

Best entertainment that Trudi got in years, ought to charge admission. ‘Oh Nicholas,’ she cried when she caught up, ‘you are a case isn’t it? My baby is better at skiing than you are my dear ...’

‘So how old’s your baby then lady? Going on eighteen or what?’

‘Two months only Nicholas.’

Two months? Kind of a fit bird here?

‘Jesus Trudi. You interrupt the ski lesson for having that baby or you just whip it out quick on some slalom am I right?’

‘Nicholas you are not having the faintest clue what a slalom is. Is that so? You are taking the piss?’ She made with the

sweet smile. Knew she had the fucking whip over me any time she wanted. Ratbag.

‘All right everyone! Now that we all can stand up straight I am going to take you up to the top of this nursery slope. You give the kind man at the bottom one franc to use his mini-ski-lift. Then you are all going to ski down again, nice and gently I am thinking.’

Shit. Fucking nursery slope looked about a thousand feet high.

‘When you reach to the bottom of the slope you must stop at the ice rink. I will show you how to stop. It is like this with your skis. Please try to learn this or you will be practising your first ski jump right over the ice rink and into your hotel bedrooms I am thinking. Please pay attention Nicholas.’

‘Who me?’

‘When we get to the top of the slope you will remember two things please. When you lean to the right you turn to the left. Like so.’ She gave it the demo and we tried it out going to the geezer with his ski-lift. ‘And when you lean to the left you will turn to the right. Like so. Are you all understanding that? Thank you. The other point I am telling you again after that is how you stop with the skis. Like so. Good. We are all ready?’

Nobody daring giving her the no-no. We practised that stopping like no one’s business. Then we waddled over the geezer, gave him his dosh. He showed us where you stood for the lift. You got to grab it in one hand when it came past only hang on your poles in the other. Near as wrenched my shoulder out its socket, no problem.

Lift took us fifty yards up the slope. We all stood there together. All ready. Clocking around.

Course the fucking Krauts got to be going first. Probably score a fucking goal the same time. No arguing.

They went off nicely nicely, doing fine. Then one fucker crashed into the mountain halfway down, definite result so we all howled. Old Swiss biddies jumped up and down cackling, never liked the Krauts. So Fritz got up serious vex, blood on his boat race. We howled some more.

Swiss biddies went next, put on a straight viz, make sure no death on the slopes. They all got down the bottom nice and steady.

Brits made a fair shot like you expect. Scousers fell over straight off. Never knew they were upset or not on account of they kept talking Scouse language, no one understand it. Carried on made the bottom eventual.

Last came Walthamstow.

I set off crouching like they did on the news. Sure and steady I went off down that hill.

I leaned to the right, turned to the left no worries. Cracked it.

I leaned to the left ... only I still turned to the left. Fucking plan never worked, they sold me a pup. Kept leaning left, still turned left, no, wham! Straight in the bleeding mountain. Never mind eh. Up again, never let them spot your pain, give it some wellie here. Down that fucking nursery mountain.

No leaning left or right now, only get on down straight up. Straight for Trudi stood there in front that ice rink. Gently gently. One line straight in that snow.

How she said it was you stopped?

I turned in my toes how she did it. Turned them in so they fucking touched. How you did it. So what was the fucking problem here?

I was going quicker not stopping. One ski stuck over the other. Still quicker. Just then up came a little rise. Fucking skis total locked together now. Still pointed in though ought to be stopping. Never did.

Leaned right over stuck my hands out trying to stick the poles in for stopping. We went quicker and quicker. We hit that rise. Skis went straight down in that snow.

They made their skis special so you ejected when they stuck. I ejected. Fact was instead of ejecting up I ejected horizontal. Like a bullet. Over that rise I was a fucking human torpedo. I went through their air like I was turbo-charged.

Tried to yell only nothing came out. Trudi stood there looking up still chortling. Too late for her moving, too late she clocked what was happening here.

Like a flying pig I hit her straight in her belly with my hooter. Forty miles an hour, she went down like she got nuked.

I was lying on top of her. My Judge Dread on her chest. And she was never moving.

I killed her?

I moved my gob over her left tit. Dead she never minded made no difference. Felt pretty fucking ace even through her ski suit.

Then underneath me she started up shaking slightly. Then more of it. Then started out cackling out loud. Then she was hooting and hollering like it went out of style. Seemed like the best bit of laugh they got in Switzerland for years.

‘My dear dear Nicholas!’ she went. ‘Only my baby is allowed to put his mouth there! Oh my! You are such a champion skier you have invented a new style of skiing, it is the ski jump without skis! You will be the champion of the world!’

You got to say she was taking liberties here, me being a serious geezer due some respect. Still I had to howl along with her and we lay on our backs in their snow till tears ran out of our beadies made a health hazard, turned to ice all over their ski runs.

Concluded the lesson.

I headed back the shop for dumping the gear. I lifted up each leg like it was full of my mum's rice pudding. Faced up all the geezers on the High Street, make sure no one getting their rocks off mocking me.

Then who the fuck was it coming out the souvenir shop? Only Tweedledum and fucking Tweedledummer.

Got over their injuries then. Well, got over them so they were walking. Tweedledum got a flat nose, Tweedledummer got tape over where his ears went. They both looked like fortune turned them bitter against the world. They were never smiling.

Behind them Mickey Cousins. Camel hair coat ready for action, only camel hair coat in Wengen. Looked like a camel.

Fortunate I got disguised in my ski gear, hardly knew who I was myself. Heart went pumping. The fuck they doing here?

They went down the road away from the station, maybe heading some hotel not as nobby as Silberhorn, not got their own suite. I plodded up the ski shop. All my gear undamaged so I got enough dosh back for a deposit on a round the world trip. Coming out again without the clobber on felt like taking off. I limped back the hotel and lay down.

Mickey fucking Cousins and his boys.

I went asleep. Still only twelve o'clock only I skipped dinner. Had a nice snooze, woke up again two o'clock ready for nothing.

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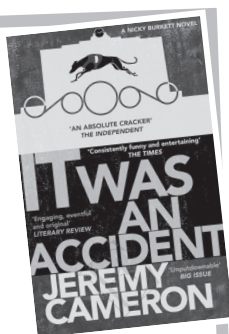
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