

ASH and BONES

Mike Thomas was born in Wales in 1971. For more than two decades he served in the police, working some of Cardiff's busiest neighbourhoods. He left the force in 2015 to write full-time.

Mike has previously had two novels published, was longlisted for the Wales Book of the Year and was on the list of Waterstones 'New Voices'. His second novel, *Ugly Bus*, is currently in development for a six-part series with the BBC.

He lives in the wilds of Portugal with his wife, children and a senile dog who enjoys eating furniture.

Also by Mike Thomas

Pocket Notebook

Ugly Bus

MIKE
THOMAS
ASH
and
BONES

ZAFFRE

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For Ma 'n' Pa
And for Monk and our monkeys

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

Looms but the Horror of the shade

Invictus, William Ernest Henley

Part 1

Clusterfuck

Ebute-Metta district, Lagos, Nigeria

Dusk fell as the old yellow taxi rattled off the Third Mainland Bridge. From the rear seat, Chike watched the sun caress the ragged skyline of duplexes and dilapidated colonial buildings, its fading light turning the wooden shacks at the shoreline the colour of rust. Like the lagoon that fell away behind him, he was restless, and in a darkened mood.

He was thinking about the orphanage. And the papers.

And beyond that, food. Chike was hungry, the trip having taken longer than expected, the tailback on the bridge a good one today. A crash just south of Olusosun, the overturned refuse lorry adding to the usual chaos as commuters fled the business district for their homes. His stomach griped, loud and bubbling, audible over the rumble of the taxi's engine. Once things were done he would get the driver to travel along Herbert Macauley Road. Pick up some pomo and sweet potato pottage from his favourite street vendor. Remember his childhood as he scooped it to his lips.

The thought made him glance out of the half-open window, down at the sprawling shanty town beneath the interchange. The smoke pyres, the shadowy figures hustling and bustling in the dying embers of daylight. Scavenging. Bartering. Arguing over scrap metal and broken transistor radios and soiled clothing.

Not for him, that life. Not anymore.

The taxi dropped down from the flyover, the driver humming to himself as they chugged through the traffic on Clinic Road, skirted left into Okobaba Street, then the crowded heart of Ebute-Metta. The roar of diesel engines. Music. Voices. People everywhere. The stench of the sawmill drifting on humid evening air. The September rains would be here soon. Chike could feel it in his bones.

He closed the taxi window. Another smell hit him, and he looked down at the boy sitting beside him. His filthy clothes. His deep black eyes darting about, terrified.

'All will be fine now,' Chike said, making sure he spoke in Yoruba. The boy had no grasp of Brokin, never mind English, and there was a simple, innocent air about him; Chike wondered how on earth the kid had survived for so long working and living at the dump.

The boy looked up at him, those eyes glittering in the darkness.

Chike slipped his thick fingers around the boy's hand.

Squeezed.

A hand-painted sign, faded from Harmattan desert winds, hung lopsidedly from one pillar:

Baobab Tree House

Chike nodded to himself, pleased he'd found the place before the side streets – devoid of lighting – were swamped by the night; the useless taxi driver didn't possess a Sat Nav, and had relied on the directions Chike had memorised. He thrust a hundred-naira note into the driver's palm and asked him to wait. Was climbing out of the taxi when the orphanage gates swung open, hinges protesting.

He beckoned to the boy. Smiling. 'Wásúnmôdödé.'

Come.

The boy, silent, remained where he was sitting.

Chike glanced over a shoulder at the open gates. Saw the silhouette. The flare of a match in the twilight. Cupped hands lifting it to lips that gripped a cigarillo. The face of a white man, dark hair cropped and spiked. Eyes on Chike and the boy.

'Come,' said Chike, taking the boy by the arm.

The boy shook his head. 'Rará. Rará.'

No.

Chike pulled, harder this time. He was ravenous now. Sweating, in the heat. Wanted this over with. Wanted the finest street food his money could buy.

The boy, still protesting, flopped out of the taxi, dust puffing outwards where his knees hit the floor. Chike eased him up, placed a meaty arm around his bony shoulders, guided him through the open gates and into a small courtyard. The boy whimpered as the gates squealed closed electronically.

From one murky corner, the white man watched them over the glow of his cigarillo.

'So you found us.'

The pastor was an overweight man in an expensive-looking suit, the coffee-coloured skin of his neck straining at the collar of his shirt. His face was bulbous and slick with sweat, despite the air conditioning in the office, which Chike sensed had been turned up to maximum, and which was now making him shiver. Behind the pastor sat a woman who was of similar build, her pendulous breasts resting on the edge of a desk. She peered at a sheaf of papers, hair curled and greying and shimmering under the fluorescent light affixed to the ceiling. Music played from somewhere,

faint yet melodic; Chike recognised it from his youth, from Sunday mornings spent in the village chapel.

He tried not to look at the miniature spare tyre beneath the pastor's chin as they spoke, using English so the boy would not be spooked further. 'I am sorry we are so late, but the taxi dri—'

'You are here and that is good,' the pastor smiled, cutting him off. He looked down at the boy, huddled against the arm of Chike's tatty shirt. 'So who is this fine young man?'

Chike gave the boy a gentle nudge. 'This is Bepeh. He is twelve.'

'Bepeh,' said the pastor, extending a hand. In Yoruba: 'Very pleased to meet you, Bepeh.'

The boy lowered his head, hands staying at his sides.

The pastor chuckled, and the fat woman at the desk chuckled, so Chike chuckled too.

'He'll be fine,' said the pastor, switching back to English. 'We have so many like this when they first come to us. But all will be well. What is your relationship with the boy?'

Chike stopped chuckling. 'I am his . . . uncle?' He hadn't thought of this.

The pastor sighed. 'And does Bepeh have another name?'

'Another name?'

'A family name. You are his uncle, yes?'

'Oh, yes. His parents, they are both gone, pastor. The virus.'

'The virus.'

'Yes. It was terrible. Very bad. Very bad for the boy. His heart is broken. My own heart, it is cracked and I fear it will never mend.'

'A tragedy, I am sure,' said the pastor. 'And what of his papers?'

Chike had been dreading this moment. 'He . . . he has none, I am afraid.'

The pastor swapped glances with the woman at the desk. 'Do not worry. We will make sure everything runs smoothly.'

After a moment the woman pushed the chair backwards, the linoleum floor squeaking, and eased her tubby backside off the seat. Walked over to the boy, a soft smile on her mouth, in her eyes. Raised a hand to his face, and as he drew away gently brushed her fingertips along his jaw line.

'Bepeh,' she said in Yoruba, squatting down to look him in the eyes. 'My boy. You must come with me now.' Her fingers worked their way into the knots of his hair. 'You shall eat, and bathe, and sleep in a fine bed, yes?'

The boy's chest rose and fell, his eyes downcast. A minute passed, then he looked up at the woman, then at Chike. Back to the woman. Slowly, he laid his head on her shoulder, collapsing into her embrace.

Chike watched as she led him through a door, and out of sight.

The sticky night air was a welcome relief from the icy temperature of the office. Chike heard jùjú drumming and hip-hop beats, smelled the street vendors' foods. His stomach lurched. From his elevated position atop the orphanage steps he could just make out the driver's feet sticking out of the taxi window. The man had fallen asleep in his seat.

'You have done a great and useful thing,' said the pastor.

Chike paused. Turned to him. 'I just hope it helps in some way.'

The pastor placed a hand on Chike's upper arm. 'It always helps.'

Chike nodded. Waited.

'And so,' said the pastor, exhaling. He reached into a jacket pocket.

Withdrew an envelope.

Handed it to Chike.

Chike took it, checked the contents. Stared at the pastor.

'I was told it would be one hundred and fifty thousand naira.' The pastor smiled patiently. 'It is one hundred thousand.'

'I would get more for selling a cow at the cattle market,' Chike barked, tapping the envelope with the nails of his free hand.

'If you want to try your luck at Olewonashana, then do so,' said the pastor. 'But the slaughter slabs are not for the faint of heart.'

Chike shook his head. 'The deal is for one hundred and fifty.'

'One hundred and fifty with papers,' the pastor smiled. 'He has no papers. This makes things difficult for us.'

'So give me one twenty.'

The pastor looked out into the darkness of the courtyard, impassive. 'You can always discuss it with my business associate, if you believe it will help your cause.'

Chike followed his gaze. Saw the red dot in the gloom. The glow of the cigarillo in the shadows. The white man.

Thought about Baobab Tree House. What he'd heard. The rumours.

He looked at the envelope he held in his hands.

Felt the hollowness in his stomach. Soon to be filled, thankfully, with food.

Chike looked up at the pastor. 'One hundred is fine.'

The pastor grinned, lips wet and shiny. 'God smiles on you, my child.'

'For this,' Chike said, 'I doubt he's smiling on either of us.'

1

Light on.

Garratt held the phone for a moment, blinking at it, his face illuminated in the darkness by the glow from the tiny screen.

Finally.

‘Good news?’ asked Masters.

He looked up and smirked. ‘Somebody’s home.’

Masters slapped him on the upper arm. ‘Then let’s go.’

Barclay, a disembodied voice from the gloom to his left: ‘Fuckin’ right. Let’s do him.’

He gave another nod, grinning now despite the tiredness. Eyed the text message again. Shoved the phone into his pocket, plunging them into grey half-light. Stretched, the five hours not going away easily, his bones clicking and popping in wrists and elbows and knees. His mouth dirty with stale air. A knot in the pit of his belly at the thought of more hours stretching ahead if this went right.

Through the one-way glass of the window: Butetown. The estate was washed in muted orange: a hive of concrete walkways and dank, moss-swamped alleys, of drab maisonettes, of council money pissed away on regeneration after regeneration for people

who, as far as he was concerned, deserved none of it. Graffiti on shop shutters, shatterproof bus stop glass shattered and glittering in gutters. The tired rectangular monolith of Loudoun House. Beyond its glassy flanks, the Millennium Stadium's spires scraped the early-morning sky.

'Don't forget the Big Red Key,' he said.

'Yeah,' Masters grunted with the effort, his shoulders working as he hoisted it to his chest. 'Game faces on.'

Barclay pushed himself up from the wooden bench, his gangly shape appearing next to Masters. 'Fuckin' right,' he repeated. 'Let's do him.'

Garratt looked from Masters to Barclay, their faces slick from the trapped-in-a-tin-can heat, their eyes wide and bright from the adrenaline. 'Hard and fast, remember?' he urged.

'Hard and fast,' they replied in unison.

His fist slammed down on the handle and he kicked open the transit van doors. Cool September breeze pinched his cheeks and just for a second, standing there on the metal lip of the doorway, he revelled in it, glad to be out of there at last, to be doing something.

He felt a nudge in his back, heard Barclay in his ear: 'Get a fuckin' move on, Bob.'

His trainers scuffed on tarmac as he jumped down. Sprinted, his fists punching air, eyes quick-panning back and forth: no shapes lurking in doorways, no curtains twitching. Above the thump of his own heart he heard Masters and Barclay behind him, their breaths ragged, their heavy footfalls slapping on concrete cobbles as they made it to the pavement.

The Hodges Square maisonettes hunkered ahead of them, a complex of pebbledash and drab orange brickwork, of fenced-off weeds masquerading as gardens. There was a light on in one ground-floor window. It had taken them ten seconds, tops, to cross the courtyard from the back of the van to the front door.

‘Just shitty R ’n’ B,’ Barclay said, ear placed to white UPVC.

‘I’ll cover the back,’ Garratt said, nodding to the alleyway.

Masters and Barclay swapped glances.

He shrugged. ‘You’ll be fine. Remember the layout. Kitchen’s on this side . . .’

‘Yeah,’ Masters said. ‘Damn back-to-front flats.’

He gestured to the Big Red Key in Masters’ hands. ‘So do it.’

He bolted into the alleyway, was halfway down when he heard the bang.

Wakey wakey, everyone.

The rear garden was as shitty as he’d expected: overgrown, uneven lawn liberally peppered with debris and split bin bags. A solitary car tyre. Wood fencing, rotten and faded. A pathetic six-slab patio swamped with nettle and bindweed.

He snuck across it. Edged nearer the French doors.

Waited. Listened. Heard raised yet muffled voices. A gamble, going it alone like this. Always was. But it always worked. He smiled as he pictured it: front door fucked, Masters and Barclay barrelling in there, Leon King shitting himself, pleading, trying to run for it, making for the back of the maisonette, bursting through the French doors.

Straight into his arms. *Sweet.*

And then he heard the noise. Another bang, the timbre different to when they put the door in. Louder. Duller.

He swallowed. Reached for his mobile phone, his fingertips brushing the casing as he weighed up the odds. Call it in, just in case the wheel had come off inside? Or wait it out for a few minutes, let Masters and Barclay do their thing, then take the glory?

He peered through the French doors, could only see a few feet into the darkened room. 'Come on, guys,' he breathed. 'Come o—'

A third bang. Like a firework.

Like a gunshot.

There was a scream from inside the maisonette.

He pulled the phone from his pocket, fingers heavy and fumbling. Saw movement, a figure advancing towards the French doors. Towards him. He backed away, couldn't see if it was Masters, if it was Barclay. He jabbed at the keypad, speed-dialled Hooper.

'You got him?' Hooper's voice in his ear.

'I think we might have a problem,' he breathed, turning away. Eyes wide, searching for some place to hide. For cover. For an exit. So he could think. Take stock. Work out what just happened.

There was a hiss of static down the line, Hooper's voice crackling: 'What sort of prob—'

Then: a ringing in his skull. A metallic stink in his nostrils.

His only thought: *I'm in trouble here.*

He pictured his wife. His daughter.

Saw the open French doors. The pistol muzzle, smoking.

Felt the patio stone, cold and hard against his cheek.

2

He felt the pillow, hot and uncomfortable against his cheek.

MacReady shifted onto his back. The quilt, twisted and heavy with his night sweats; he pushed it down and away from his neck, his chest, relished the cool morning air that settled around his torso. The plantation shutters leaked bright light into the lounge and he squinted, looking around.

He'd never had – needed – a so-called Man Cave, but the room was slowly morphing into one. Settee for a bed. Used cups and half-read books and items of his clothing. DVDs and empty takeaway cartons and a ten-year-old washbag, pitiful with its fudged bar of soap and lone stick of deodorant, perched on a shelf above a television he'd forgotten to turn off before falling asleep the night before. Twenty-four-hour BBC News on the screen, sound muted, tickertape scrolling its breaking story about yet another murder in the city. It was just gone six thirty in the morning; he'd set the alarm on his phone for six forty-five, knowing as he'd swiped and tapped the screen he would wake before it sounded.

He rubbed at his eyes and stretched. Heard his wife move about upstairs, Megan's light footsteps padding from bathroom

to bedroom and back again: her routine, the one he used to look forward to when he came off night shifts, where he'd lie in their bed, tired eyes watching her slink from room to room, getting ready for a day where he'd sleep while she worked.

MacReady closed his eyes.

Thought: *when did it come to this?*

Opened his eyes. Glanced around the lounge again.

Said: 'How did it come to this, Will?'

He knew the answer, though. He recalled the previous night. Trying again, both of them. Just as they had been for months. Couple of glasses of white, a nice meal, an effort to paper over cracks. An exercise in denial. The tension there and growing more unbearable as the evening wore on. He'd known what was coming. What she wanted. Where the drink would lead. So they'd fumbled around and he'd gone with it and then he couldn't and she'd cooed and whispered in his ear and said and done the right things. But it hadn't been enough. And he'd rolled away, ashamed. And nothing she'd said had made it better. And then the conversation had once again turned to doctors, to more costly treatment, to adoption, even to sperm donors, and at that point – seeing how far she was willing to go, her desperation for a family – he'd gone numb, tuned her out. Slipped out of their bed and walked away, feeling her eyes on him as he went.

Returned to the lounge – his room, now – and lay there, unable to sleep, hating himself. Hating how he couldn't perform at home. Worrying if it would be the same in the morning at work with a crowd of new, demanding faces.

His first day on CID.

MacReady heard Megan's footsteps on the stairs. Spun onto his side. Pulled the quilt up to his chin. Closed his eyes as the lounge door opened. Slowed his breathing.

Heard Megan's slow breaths from the doorway. Wondered what she was thinking. Wondered if she would speak. If she would try again to make it better. Or if she had finally had enough.

Then the door closed quietly and she was gone.

You gutless coward. Pretending to be asleep just so you didn't have to face her.

MacReady opened his eyes.

On the tickertape: breaking news.

The murder victim.

It was a police officer.

MacReady threw back the quilt. Checked his mobile. Saw the text:

We need you in work immediately.

'Shit,' he croaked, and climbed off the settee.

So this was the Bob Garratt he'd heard so much about.

Seven years' service and a high flyer. Already a stripey on the divisional Volume Crime Team, where they were putting in doors across the capital on an almost daily basis. Already being groomed for greater things. Garratt was job pissed and mad for it, even if it was locking someone up for an eighth of 'nabis and bald tyres on their motor. *Proactive*, or so it went, the copper's euphemism: a busy boy who got results whereby the ends justified the means. Where the bosses turned a blind

eye as long as he brought in the bodies. And if there were no bodies, then at least two dozen boiler burglary TICs sucked up by an already-over-the-wall lag in exchange for a bag of burn during a prison visit. As long as Detective Sergeant Robert Garratt cleared up those pesky crime figures. As long as he met those precious Home Office targets.

It was the first time MacReady had met Garratt, and Garratt was dead.

The flap of the CSI tent wafted lazily on the morning breeze, and MacReady kept catching glimpses of Garratt: on his back, head tilted towards MacReady, his fingers clamped around a mobile phone. There was a half-centimetre hole in the skin above his right eye. The right side of his grey face was frozen in a confused expression; the lower portion of the other side was distended and deformed around the cheek and jaw, an ugly sight, the bullet doing its worst as it rattled around inside.

Harrison clucked his tongue. Said, 'What a bloody mess, mun.' Comical in his sandals and bright white socks, a fifty-something Valleys couldn't-give-a-fuck who stank of fag ash and fried food.

MacReady said nothing. Nodded and checked his watch. It was nine thirty, the sun hanging low and bright, the NPAS chopper a buzzing silhouette on the horizon. Ambo and fire trucks with wheels on pavements. Police vans blocking police cars blocking civvy vehicles on their hardstands. MOPs gawking from windows, from the cordon tape, camera phones aloft. The *meeja* with their satellite trucks and microphones, their hungry eyes and vicious mouths. Frustrated firearms crews with nothing

to aim their Hecklers at. Top brass everywhere, more pips and shoulder spaghetti than he'd ever seen in one place before. They milled around in their uniforms, clueless, pointless, sucking on fresh air for the first time in an age.

'Inside?' MacReady asked.

'Same.' Harrison wiped at his lips with thumb and forefinger. His breakfast rushed, coffee and sandwiches wolfed down after the phone calls to get them into work soonest, the remnants in the jowly corners of his mouth. He'd moaned about it all the way over here; it was the first time they'd met and he was already getting on MacReady's nerves.

Techies drifted in and out of the garden, all suitcases, boxes, booties and coveralls. One of them dusted for latents on the glass of the French doors. A row of crawling uniforms PolSA searched the wild lawn, a line of rubberised soles and upturned arseholes in long, knotted grass. A German Shepherd barked and snapped, going batshit crazy. Its handler wrestled with a lead of frayed rope and linked metal, cursing under her breath. MacReady knew her from old, and nodded an acknowledgement.

'Cadaver trained.' Harrison tilted his head at the dog. 'Can smell Garratt.'

'Right,' said MacReady, and watched a man duck under police tape; it took a moment to recognise him from other scenes, when MacReady had been in uniform and freezing on a rainswept cordon. The Home Office pathologist. Bespectacled, reed thin. An old smoothy, sixty-something and blasé to the point of ignorance. MacReady couldn't recall his name but had already learned not to care. 'Garratt's people?'

‘You can interview one of them.’

‘Are they in any fit state?’

Harrison shrugged. *Job to do.*

A gust of wind and the tent flap fell closed. MacReady said a silent farewell to Garratt and followed Harrison up the alleyway.

More techies were in the process of opening up a Forensic Response Vehicle in the courtyard: a mobile smorgasbord of evidence bags and tents and babygros, of drawers and cupboards full of potions and powders MacReady couldn’t begin to understand. Across the tarmac Garratt’s men huddled together at the side of their decrepit surveillance van, a clutch of pale faces, their low voices drowned by the generator belching at the back of the FRV. Like everybody on scene their shock was yet to give way to raw fury. One of them rubbed at his eyes, chest hitching, struggling to keep it in. His colleagues placed reassuring hands on his shoulders. MacReady saw the bright red enforcer ram on the concrete between the man’s feet.

Trumpton had placed screens around the maisonette entrance. For prying eyes, MacReady knew, but it blocked their way. Harrison shoved one aside, created a gap for them to slip through.

‘They’re there for a reason,’ one of the water fairies pouted. ‘For God’s sake.’

Harrison moved it another foot or so. Smiled. Humourless. Said: ‘God created police officers so firefighters could have heroes too.’

MacReady gnawed at his bottom lip.

The maisonette’s front door was ruined, a mess of buckled UPVC, the handle hanging by a lone screw, the hallway beyond

littered with pieces of white plastic. A uniform stood at the open doorway, crime scene log gripped in one gloved hand. Thin-lipped, angry at the loss of one of his own.

Harrison paused in front of the plod. 'DI in there?'

'Who's asking?'

Harrison bristled. 'I'm asking.'

MacReady between them. 'We're all on the same side here, guys.'

'Fucking woollies,' muttered Harrison.

'DC Warren Harrison, DC Will MacReady,' said MacReady.

'*Trainee* Detective Constable MacReady,' Harrison said.

The uniform sniffed. Scribbled on the log. Waited a beat, just because. 'Fine.'

Harrison ignored him. To MacReady: 'After you, boy.'

The kitchen was poky and grim, the muted sunlight from a small window bolstered marginally by a foot-long strip light flickering above an Ikea pine table. Cheap wood-effect cupboards lined the far wall with a filthy four-burner range cooker sat beneath them. The sink festered with food-stained dishes, its water the colour of ash, the air around MacReady and Harrison thick with grease and cannabis and the bitter tang of iron.

To MacReady's left, another door leading to the rest of the maisonette. Through it he could see more CSI working the lounge: a chorus of digital camera clicks, video arc lights throwing shapes onto walls, clear plastic bags tagged and filled with stolen electrical equipment, with paperwork, with DVDs and CD cases and a typically tiny lump of personal blow.

Towels and gauze pads were spread across the linoleum floor, left behind by the paramedics. Sopping and red and not enough

to soak up the blood swiped and streaked everywhere – crimson dots and impact spatter speckled worktops, cupboard doors, the shabby net curtain diffusing light at the window.

Harrison belched. ‘Should’ve skipped the sausage sandwich this morning.’

Food again. Always seemed to be food with Harrison. MacReady glanced at him, found him staring at the table. Looked. Saw forensic numerical markers next to a pub ashtray with its thick, half-smoked doobie and new paint job.

‘Lots of blood there,’ MacReady said.

A voice from the lounge doorway: ‘One shot took his finger and thumb off.’

MacReady turned, saw the figure in a black trench coat, tie loose, top button undone. Buzzcut brushing the frame of the lounge doorway. Olive-skinned face bloated, as if he was hung over, or just exhausted before the day had even begun.

MacReady looked back at the ashtray. ‘Leon King?’

The man’s eyes narrowed. ‘Unless one of Garratt’s people has lost a coupla pinkies and not noticed it yet.’

‘Jesus.’

‘That bastard won’t help us, son.’ The man turned to Harrison. ‘You rounded up the witnesses yet, Wazza?’

‘Just about to,’ Harrison said. ‘Showing the newbie around first. This is Will MacReady. Our new beck and call boy. Willy, this is Detective Inspector Danny Fletcher.’

MacReady proffered a hand.

Fletcher eyed him as he shook. ‘Want to be CID, right? Solve all dem big crimes and get your name in the papers?’

‘Just want to learn, sir,’ MacReady replied. He smiled as he said it, but felt unnerved by Fletcher’s dead eyes on him, and the rough hand that pumped away at his.

‘Well, your first lesson,’ Fletcher said, and dropped MacReady’s hand, ‘is that you’re trampling through here and contaminating my fucking crime scene. So be gone, both of you.’

Harrison hesitated. ‘Anything?’

Fletcher exhaled. ‘Shooter fired from here,’ pointing out from the doorway, ‘when the Volume Crime boys came in to lift King. Two shots. One through King’s hand, one into his chest. Then he gave it toes and bumped into that idiot in the garden. Put one in his swede before legging it into the jungle.’

MacReady closed his eyes. Pictured Garratt. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘You don’t understand because you don’t know anything,’ Harrison grunted.

‘Why no ARV, though? Why no support?’ MacReady turned to Fletcher.

‘Thought he was untouchable,’ said Fletcher. ‘Cobbling together these low-level jobs all over Cardiff.’

Harrison shook his head. ‘Glory boy.’

‘Everybody’s luck runs out in the end,’ Fletcher said quietly.

MacReady stared at the streaks on the floor. ‘What about King?’

Harrison nudged him with an elbow. ‘You SIO now? What’s with all the questions?’

‘Armed guard while they work on him at hospital,’ said Fletcher. ‘Sewing his bits back on so he can hold his reefers

properly. Garratt's lot tried to stem the blood flow,' he gestured to the towels, 'to keep him with us.'

'Least they got something right this morning,' Harrison said.

'So he could tell us about the gunman?' MacReady asked. 'If he wakes up, that is.'

Fletcher nodded. 'You should be a detective.' To Harrison: 'You done with the tourist trip?'

'We're done,' said Harrison.

'I'm very happy for you,' said Fletcher. 'Because Major Crime are on their way to stand around making us all feel unimportant. So please piss off and do some work.'

3

Harrison and MacReady took DC David Masters, the officer they'd seen crying outside the maisonette. *He hid in the hallway after the first shot so saw fuck all, really.*

The easier job, then. MacReady knew: less likelihood of him taking a duff statement that could cause problems further down the line. The three of them plotted up in a small office next to the parade room at Cardiff Bay. Chipped desk, two swivel chairs, frosted window of safety wire glass affording the fuzzy vista of overgrown bushes and council recycling bins. On the sill, an unplugged beige telephone that looked like a late-nineties relic. Myriad forms scattered on the floor. A grimy desktop computer terminal for MacReady to type on.

'I could write this thing myself,' Masters complained. His hands folded and unfolded a Neighbourhood PACT leaflet. He looked forlorn in his paper zoot suit; Major Crime had ordered CSI to seize his clothes for forensics.

MacReady nodded. 'But you're a significant witness. We don't want to miss anything.'

Masters' head recoiled. He looked at Harrison, back to MacReady. 'You cheeky little . . . I've been banging statements

out for over twenty years. Don't sit there in your cheap polyester suit giving it large, all right?'

'That's not what I meant.'

'So what did you mean?'

MacReady studied Masters: dog-tired. Awake for over twenty-six hours. Face pallid, jaw a rash of silver bristles, pale blue eyes watery and cracked with red. 'I can't begin to comprehend what you've just gone through,' he said. 'And I know you could do a proper job here, but . . . what with your DS . . . well, we thought we could do some of the heavy lifting for you.'

After a moment Masters sank into the chair. Sighed. Waved a hand in the air.

Whatever.

Exhausted Masters may have been, MacReady and Harrison still took their time with the man. Couple of open questions to warm him up, then just listened to Masters' first account. No notes. Limited prodding. Just worked through the PEACE Model for interviews and let him get it out. MacReady nodded as Masters went off on tangents, rambling and shaking his head before reeling himself back in. He sensed Masters needed to do it.

What they got: Leon King had been on the radar of various authorities – and *known to police* – since he was eleven years of age, his mother struggling to control him after his old man fucked off. From there it was the same old same old. Damage, antisocial behaviour, thefts from vehicles, smirking in and out of custody suites, the cautions and reprimands stacking up and then the final warning he paid no heed to. By the time his fifteenth birthday

rolled around he'd graduated to street robberies and his mother to a cocktail of antidepressants, rendering her unfit to attend custody suites to act as appropriate adult to her son.

When he went over the wall for the first time, she cut all ties with him. When he came out: credit card fraud after more robberies, creeper burglaries, handling. It was the distraction burglaries that gripped everyone's shit, though. Naively trusting pensioners were King's prime targets and he was stealing to fund a coke habit that would make a supermodel blush. King had been ripping apart OAP complexes for the better part of a year and a half, until the wheel came off for him six weeks ago. The son of a frail eighty-two-year-old lady came home to find his dear old mum *discussing a new gas meter* with King. Son freaked. King upped the ante by bludgeoning him with a cosh, then – as was the depressing norm nowadays – bludgeoned him some more. Then he ran – not forgetting to leave a healthy amount of dabs and DNA behind to ID him – after scooping up the screaming octogenarian's handbag while her boy leaked onto the lounge carpet.

Whispers afterwards. King flopping at different houses and bedsits, using different cars. People protecting him, assisting him. Bar a fleeting glimpse in a city centre all-you-can-eatery two weeks earlier – where he was immediately on his toes, leaving an overweight PCSO dry heaving after the effort of a half-mile foot chase – it was as if King had emigrated.

'He's a piece of work,' said MacReady.

Masters screwed up his face. 'You think?'

‘So how did you locate him?’ asked Harrison. He’d slipped low in his chair, had hoisted one sandalled foot up to a knee.

‘Crimestoppers, would you believe.’

‘Anon?’

Masters was nodding. ‘Female caller reporting DV. Said she worked with King’s girlfriend. No idea where. Just said that King’s other half had come into work covered in bruises, clearly roughed up, and was refusing to make a formal complaint about it. Refusing to speak about it at all. So the friend called, and it came down the pipe to us.’

MacReady leaned back in his chair. ‘She gave you King.’

Another nod from Masters. ‘We made contact. She gave us the Hodges Square address he was dossing in.’

‘Any idea who the caller was?’

‘Nope. No trace on the mobile number. Unregistered pay as you go.’

‘Any idea who the girlfriend is?’

‘None whatsoever. Didn’t even give it a second thought, to be honest. We just wanted King.’

‘Did you feed any of this back to the Intel Officers?’

‘Bob wanted us to run with it. Keep it in-house. We were planning on farming out the intel after King was in the bin.’

‘So nobody else knew?’ MacReady’s voice was almost incredulous. Harrison glanced at him and narrowed his eyes.

Masters threw the leaflet onto the desktop. ‘Look, you had to know Garratt to understand what made him work. He was one of those hundred-miles-an-hour guys, y’know? Hated villains.

Despised them. Anything to lock them up. Anything to put them away. And sometimes he'd . . . keep things fluid.'

'Take risks to get a result, you mean.'

Masters glared at MacReady. Looked to the floor. 'Yeah.'

Harrison finished picking at a loose thread on his sock. Stood, wandered over to the door and rested his backside against it. 'So what happened at the maisonette?'

'The usual, at first. Bob was all smiles and winks. Hooper drove us in to Butetown, parked the surveillance van next to the old Paddle Steamer building, then got out and walked to the unmarked car on Hannah Street. For comms.'

MacReady checked his notebook. 'Thought you didn't use radios for this raid?'

'When I say comms I mean mobile phones,' Masters said. 'Bob was paranoid about radio encryption failing. These sorts of jobs, the . . . easy ones, we just kept to our own phones. Just in case.'

'So nobody knew you were down there and you had no job radios to call for backup.'

Masters eyed him. 'Hindsight's a wonderful thing, isn't it?'

'And then you waited,' Harrison said.

'Five hours. Maybe six. Three of us in the back of the van. Waiting for King to come back to the maisonette. We knew he'd probably be out and about. He still kept his hand in with the robberies. Y'know, waiting for pissed punters to come out of the city centre clubs. Easier to turn them over when they can't walk in a straight line.'

'When did he arrive home?'

‘About quarter to six this morning. Hooper clocked him from the unmarked car. Saw the light go on in the kitchen. Sent Bob a text.’

‘And?’

‘We went in. Bob took the rear. Me and Pete, we did the door and went in front.’

MacReady glanced at his notebook again. Pete. DC Peter Barclay. The Major Crime DS already statementing him in a room down the corridor.

‘Was King alone?’

‘We go into the kitchen shouting and bawling like usual. Leon was standing near the table, white as a sheet. Had his hands up, begging us. We laughed at him. Can you believe it? Laughed at him shitting himself. Then we realised he wasn’t shitting himself about us being there.’

MacReady urged him on with a nod.

‘King was looking towards the door that leads into the lounge,’ said Masters, swallowing. ‘Really pleading. Crying, y’know? So Pete looks and his mouth kind of hangs open and I take a look and there it is. Poking through a gap in the doorway.’

‘A pistol.’

‘Silver muzzle. I couldn’t . . . I couldn’t understand it. It didn’t compute, you know? After all these years, my first firearm. And then the wheel came off.’

‘The shots.’

Masters, head hanging on his shoulders. Hunched over. ‘King went down. Like somebody cut his legs from underneath him. His fucking hand, it just . . . exploded. The bullet . . .’

‘Thumb and forefinger,’ grunted Harrison. ‘We know.’

‘All I can remember,’ Masters said, talking at the carpet. ‘All I can remember is diving back into the hallway and looking into the kitchen and seeing King’s sovereign ring spinning on the filthy lino. Spinning and spinning like it was never going to stop. Right next to Pete’s head. He was under the table. Curled up and screaming, like a frigging toddler. And that’s when I knew I had to get the fuck out of Dodge.’

MacReady let out a breath. ‘Fight or flight syndrome.’

‘Yeah,’ Masters said. He looked up. ‘Something like that.’

‘Did you see anything else?’

‘Nope. Heard another shot. Then a third. By this point I was halfway across the estate and looking for Hooper in the unmarked car. When I got to him he was green, you know? Bob had just called him, panicking. Hooper said there was a loud bang on the line, and then dead air . . .’

Masters’ feet worked the swivel chair, eyes on something far away.

MacReady instinctively patted him on the arm.

‘We’ll get him for you.’

Masters stared at MacReady’s hand, then up into his face.

‘Not before Complaints do my legs over this,’ he grimaced.

MacReady didn’t know what to say, so said nothing. He looked at Harrison, saw him nod a *get on with it, then*, open the door and slip out of the room. Time for a smoke.

MacReady swivelled to the terminal. Logged in. Began typing.

‘Twenty-one pages? That why it took you so long?’

Harrison swigged from a mug of coffee and finished clicking through the MG11s MacReady had uploaded to the Niche system. There were pastry flakes on his tie and meat juice glistened on his cheek – the remnants of a lunch MacReady had missed. Harrison's gut hung over the waistband of his trousers, and he'd unbuckled his belt to ease some of the pressure.

MacReady looked around the Major Incident Room. Banks of computer terminals and LCD screens. At least a dozen support staff at the keyboards. Telephones – landline and mobile – chirruping. Suits and epaulettes and sour faces everywhere. The room buzzing. At one end, a large whiteboard. Next to it, a flat-screen television bigger than the one he had at home. He'd never been to the MIR before and nobody on the team had bothered to show him where it was this morning. After statementing Masters and adding the MG11s to the online case file he'd taken the stairs to the SMT's lair on the third floor – *the flight deck*, as it was known by the boots on the ground – and proceeded to get hopelessly lost. After half an hour wandering around Cardiff Bay Police Station's samey-same corridors he'd knocked on the cleaner's door for directions.

He nodded, choosing to omit the real reason for his lateness. 'Wanted to do it right.'

Harrison looked up at him from the desk, eyebrow arched. 'Didn't you just.'

'So did Peter Barclay come up with anything?'

'Apart from moaning about going home to change his underwear? Nothing.'

‘Did Major Crime ask him about the shooter?’

‘Oh no,’ said Harrison, shaking his head. ‘They didn’t think it was relevant. You muppet.’

‘Sorry. I just . . .’

‘You just what, Willy? Haven’t you been told to watch and learn? It’s your first day on the team, for fuck’s sake. You’re a trainee. You’re here for *experience*. So stop acting as if you’re going to crack the case in an hour like them pretend cops on the telly. It’ll piss people off.’

‘Piss you off, you mean.’

Harrison stared at him. ‘What you do doesn’t matter to me, boy.’

‘Well it matters to me,’ MacReady said. ‘I’m just keen to muck in –’

‘Well you can muck in with the Sarge when she’s back from her latest *women’s empowerment* jolly up at HQ. You’re cooking my swede already. Go and make yourself busy with some HOLMES indexing or something.’

More menial work. MacReady felt heat in his cheeks. Watched as Harrison logged out of Niche and walked off. Heard the profanities muttered into his mug. Harrison sidled up to the DI. Danny Fletcher listened as Harrison mouthed into his ear, then glanced across at MacReady. Held his gaze for a moment before turning back to the uniformed superintendent he’d been talking to.

With nothing to do, MacReady walked over to the whiteboard to distract himself from the rumble of his empty stomach.

Studied the neat jags of marker pen. Saw what they had at the moment: one cop murdered. One shit in intensive care, sucking on a ventilator. Somebody walking the city with a pistol they were unafraid to use. And nobody in the bin for any of it.

‘He’s a softy, really.’

MacReady turned to the voice, found Fletcher standing next to him, eyes on the whiteboard.

‘Harrison, I mean,’ said Fletcher, then faced MacReady. ‘It might surprise you, but you could learn a lot from him. Warren’s got the years in, got most of the T-shirts.’

‘He’s been a little . . . off.’

‘Old sweat,’ Fletcher smiled. ‘Doesn’t like change. You should have seen how upset he was when PACE was brought in and he couldn’t handcuff scrotes to the radiator anymore.’

MacReady checked across the room: Harrison, in a huddle of suits, laughing along at some joke, *yukyukyuking* and glancing at MacReady and Fletcher. ‘I was wondering if it was because of . . . y’know.’

A patient sigh from Fletcher. ‘Your family? Ah, you can’t choose them and all that.’

‘Harrison was involved, though, back in the day.’

The DI waved it away. ‘Good work with the statement. Plenty of meat there.’

MacReady hitched his eyebrows by way of a thank you.

‘You can shoot off whenever you’re ready, Will,’ Fletcher said, and checked his watch; MacReady saw it was nudging 4 p.m.

‘I’ll wait a while, maybe tag along to the presser,’ he replied, and looked at the images Blu-Tacked to the board. Bob Garratt’s

warrant card photograph. Leon King's mugshot. 'They're both smiling. It seems so weird.'

'The dead and the dying,' Fletcher said quietly.

MacReady nodded. Turned to the DI again.

Fletcher had walked away.