



DISPLACED

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Allison & Busby Limited
12 Fitzroy Mews
London W1T 6DW
allisonandbusby.com

First published in Great Britain by Allison & Busby in 2018.

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

First Edition

HB ISBN 978-0-7490-2242-6
TPB ISBN 978-0-7490-2238-9

Typeset in 11.5/16.5 pt Sabon by
Allison & Busby Ltd.

The paper used for this Allison & Busby publication
has been produced from trees that have been legally sourced
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Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

PROLOGUE

The things people do for money . . .

There were four freaks, as they called them back then: the Ugliest Woman in the World, the Fattest Woman in the World, a Tattooed Man and the Ling Twins. The first three I could take or leave. Even as a seven-year-old child, I think I knew that there was nothing really that extraordinary about being ugly or fat. Not that the Ugliest Woman in the World was actually that ugly. She had a lot of warts on her face and she smelt, but so what?

It was the Ling Twins that held my attention. Siamese or conjoined twins, or so it seemed: a boy called Ping and a girl called Pong. Names that made me laugh at the time. Heavily made-up, no doubt so they'd look 'oriental', it's unlikely they'd ever seen Brighton, much less Bangkok. And yet at the time I believed they were real with a totality I've never experienced since. I think it was probably because Miriam had not long been born. I was finding it

hard to adjust to no longer being an only child and so I resented her. Siblings present one with a dilemma. One feels one has to love them and indeed one will do all sorts of things to protect them. But no one can make you like them. Ping and Pong, I believe, made me wonder what it would be like to have never been alone. It was a terrible thought and I clearly remember crying at the time. I also recall being comforted by the Tattooed Man who, by today's standards, was not very tattooed at all. But he was kind and I appreciated his attention. My mother wasn't there. She, as I remember it, was screaming outside the freak show tent.

'My baby! My baby! Someone's taken my baby!'

ONE

Lee fucking hated modern Cockney rhyming slang. Things like ‘Ronan Keating – central heating’ and ‘Jodie Marsh – harsh’. Daft rhymes bigging up stupid celebrities and other horrible modern obsessions like mobile phones and plastic surgery. But, that said, when he thought about his own current situation he could only say that it had all gone ‘Pete Tong’. It had all gone wrong. Well not everything . . .

He had money, for once, and he hadn’t had a dream about fighting in Iraq for over a week, so it wasn’t all bad. But it had all gone Pete Tong with Mumtaz and that was the part of his life he cared about most. How could he have been so fucking stupid?

He looked at the small, pale man sitting in front of him and he forced a smile.

‘So, Mr Levy,’ he said, ‘what can I do for you?’

Irving Levy, his potential client, was a small, pale man who

could have been anything from fifty to seventy. An Orthodox Jew, he was dressed in a thick black coat and a Homburg hat, although he didn't have the side-locks characteristic of the ultra-orthodox Haredi sect, which was a mercy. Once, long ago, Lee had been employed to find the errant daughter of one of those and it had been a nightmare. What he could and couldn't do and when had proved difficult to say the least. But he'd found the girl. Shacked up with a Rastafarian in Brighton. The parents had cried and then declared her dead. Interracial relationships weren't always easy even in the twenty-first century. He feared this man might have come to him with yet another one.

'Mr Levy?'

He cleared his throat. 'You won't remember this, Mr Arnold,' he said, 'I barely remember it myself . . .'

'Remember what?'

'It was 1962. I was seven,' he said. 'Which is why I say I barely remember it myself. As you may or may not know, every year there is a fair in Barking Park.'

'I've been a few times, yes,' Lee said.

The last time he'd gone he'd taken Mumtaz and her stepdaughter, Shazia. They'd all eaten too much candyfloss . . .

'My mother took me,' Levy said. 'And my sister, Miriam. She was only a baby, one year old. I went on little rides for small children. A carousel, a small railway, as I recall. Then I pestered to see the freak show. One doesn't find such things these days, they are distasteful. Even then, my mother didn't approve, but to a child the prospect of seeing the world's ugliest woman is just too tempting. So she paid for me to go. And I saw the ugly woman, I saw a tattooed man and, to my horror, at the time, I saw Ping and Pong the Siamese Twins. Now of course they were not real – neither twins nor Thai – but they frightened me and I screamed. At almost the same moment my

mother, who was outside the tent, screamed too. But for a different reason. She screamed because, having, as she said, turned away from Miriam for a moment, when she looked in her pram the next time, my sister had gone. And, in spite of an extensive police search at the time and in the months that followed, that was the last time anyone in my family saw Miriam. I have cuttings from local papers my parents collected at the time and I've written down what I recall about the incident myself.'

He pushed a brown folder across Lee's desk.

'Keep them. Look – at the time, the case of my sister's disappearance was famous. Now it's just history, but not for me. If Miriam is alive, Mr Arnold, then I want you to find her. And soon. Soon would be best.'

The woman was young and beautiful, but her eyes were ringed with dark circles and she had bitten her nails down to the quick.

'You will be safe here, Shirin,' Mumtaz said. 'I know it's a bit . . .'

Her voice trailed off. It had taken the group, known as the Asian Refuge Sisters, a couple of years and a lot of heartache to get hold of this shabby house in Forest Gate. Keeping its location a secret from men who wished to harm the women who lived inside was even harder. But Mumtaz Hakim, private investigator, knew the group well and she trusted them. She'd directed several abused women to their door. But none of them had been from families like that of Shirin Shah.

She looked around the communal living room at the small, covered daughters of Bangladeshi bus drivers and battered Pakistani wives who spoke no English – Shirin stood out like a sore thumb. Tall, slim and wearing very fashionable Western clothes, Shirin came from Holland Park where she had lived with her Harley Street consultant husband in an apartment that

was worth millions. Shirin had employed a housekeeper and a chauffeur, and had an account at Liberty in Regent Street. Unfortunately for her, what she didn't and couldn't have was children. This had upset her husband who had beaten her mercilessly because of her 'failure' to reproduce. Now he wanted to 'marry' a second wife who would and could have children. Shirin had refused to accede to this and so he had tried to kill her. But she wouldn't go to the police, and she wouldn't tell her parents, and so it was the refuge or nothing.

Mumtaz smiled. 'Everyone's very nice here,' she said.

Shirin looked down at the floor. 'I can't share a room. I can't!'

Mumtaz sat down beside her.

'Shirin,' she said, 'when Muna told me about you, she said you needed somewhere to stay and I've found you somewhere.'

Desperate and isolated, Shirin had finally opened up to her hairdresser, Muna, a woman from Manor Park. It had been Muna who had approached Mumtaz for help. The London Borough of Newham had its disadvantages, being one of the poorest districts of the capital was a big one, but it had a sense of community. And everyone in the borough, particularly its women, knew about Mumtaz Hakim, Newham's only Asian female private investigator.

'Being here will give you time to think about what you'd like to do next,' Mumtaz continued. 'Now you're no longer under threat from your husband, you can consider maybe who amongst your friends and relatives might help you.'

'None of them!'

'You think that now, but you may be surprised,' Mumtaz said. She held Shirin's hand. 'I kept the abuse I suffered at the hands of my husband a secret because I was both ashamed and frightened about what my family might think. But, actually, they were on my

side and when my marriage did end, they were devastated that I hadn't told them.'

'You have nice parents.'

'I do. But I'm not alone. There are lots of wonderful parents.'

'Not mine.'

Mumtaz felt for her. Like her, Shirin was a Muslim and, also like her, her parents were devout. But if they were anything like Mumtaz's mother and father they were also kind, compassionate and loving. Mumtaz's husband, Ahmet, had died before she'd admitted his abuse to her father. The old man had cried. 'If only you had told me,' he'd said, 'I could have helped you.'

'We will see.'

Mumtaz stood.

'In the meantime, settle in here,' she said. 'And I will come and see you again tomorrow.'

'Thank you.'

The refuge was only minutes from her flat and so Mumtaz decided she'd go home and get a sandwich before returning to work. But then she saw a familiar figure let herself into the flat and she changed her mind. Shazia still wasn't speaking to her and so it was probably best to leave her alone. She was off to university in Manchester in less than a month, she'd obviously come back to gather more stuff.

Mumtaz wanted to cry, but she pulled herself together and got into her car.

'I was diagnosed back in January. But I'd not felt well for at least a year.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' Lee said.

He shrugged. 'It is what it is,' he said. 'I've had one cycle of chemotherapy, which appears to have worked and so I'm now in

what they call remission. May last a few months, years, or the leukaemia may be back tomorrow – nobody knows. But time is a factor, Mr Arnold. Not that I've been idle. In amongst all the other tests I've had, which have been legion, I've also volunteered for a few, which is part of the reason why I'm here today.'

'Oh?'

'I got myself a DNA test,' Levy said. 'When you're about to die you wonder who you are. It's one of those cruel ironies life throws at us.'

Lee knew that one. Before he'd gone to the Middle East to fight Saddam Hussein's troops in the First Iraq War, he'd never thought about mortality. When he came back, he'd been unable to think about very much else.

'And what I discovered shocked me.'

'In what way, Mr Levy?'

'Irving, please.'

'Irving.'

'You look at me and you see an Orthodox Jewish man,' Levy said. 'But, unknown to me until I had the DNA test, was that my mother was a Gentile. I knew she was German. The story I grew up with was that she was the daughter of a wealthy pharmacist called Dieter Austerlitz and that she was the only survivor from that family after the Holocaust. But now, of course, I wonder.'

'Of course.'

'My father's family were British Jews,' he continued. 'Diamond cutters. That is my trade too. But my mother . . .' He shrugged. 'I do have cousins, on my father's side, but that is all the family I possess.'

'You want to know more.'

'If that is possible, yes,' he said. 'But my main aim is to find Miriam. I know I have left it and left it, but life carries one along, don't you think? Suddenly one finds oneself an old man with no

time. Now my only wish, if it is indeed possible, is I would like to see her again before I die. I'd like that she inherit my estate, which is not inconsiderable. I live opposite Barking Park in a house that was recently valued at a million and a half pounds. Then there are my business interests. My cousins are people I barely know. They share only half my blood. Why should they get such a windfall?'

Lee leant back in his chair. 'Blimey.'

'A big ask?'

'I'll have to review any evidence about your sister's disappearance from over half a century ago,' Lee said. 'There may be leads and there may not be.'

'I accept that. I'm nothing if not a pragmatist. Dying does that to a person. But Mr . . .'

'Lee.'

'Lee, I have a notion that maybe Miriam's disappearance was connected to my mother's real identity. I have no evidence for this and, in fact, the only documents I have been able to find about my mother relate to a person called Rachel Austerlitz of Niederschönhausen district in what later became East Berlin. A Jewish woman and so not my mother.' He swallowed. 'My sister Miriam disappeared a few months after her first birthday. We went to the fair as a treat. My mother rarely did such things. Maybe I pestered her?'

'Did your father go with you?'

'No, he was working. He always worked, all the time. In the end it killed him,' Levy said. 'He died of a heart attack in 1979. My mother died in 2001. To my regret, I never spoke about Miriam to her. I don't ever remember her speaking about Miriam. My recollection is of my sister disappearing, of my mother crying at the time, and then we had police in our house. But I've no idea for how long. I've no idea what conclusions, if any, they came to about her.'

If you're worried about the cost, then don't be. I've never married, I have no children and I work in a very lucrative trade. My fear is not about penury but about ending my life without making an effort to find my sister. That is what keeps me awake. I know time is short and I often feel unwell. I'm not up to doing this on my own.'

Lee nodded. 'Do you know how thoroughly the police searched the park?'

'No.'

'Because what occurs to me immediately, I'm sorry to say, is the possibility of your sister's body still being in the ground, in the boating lake or even in what was the old lido,' Lee said. 'Of course, I can try and get access to whatever details remain of the investigation, but that doesn't mean your sister's body isn't in that park somewhere.'

'I understand,' he said. 'Sugar-coat nothing. But also, you understand, my budget for this is without limit. I can transfer ten thousand pounds into your account today. This is just to start the investigation.'

'You don't—'

'And I want you to go to Berlin. Hopefully I will be well enough to go too. But that I don't know. My condition differs from day to day. I want you to find out who my mother was. Find the house where her family lived,' Levy said. 'It's a big job, Lee. You have to find two people: my sister and my mother. In that file I have given you, you will find the story of how my parents met. I have done everything that I can to bring some sense to all this, but now I can go no further without help. I may be in remission, but I'm tired. I just can't do all this myself. Will you please take my case?'

Crying wasn't something Shazia Hakim did easily. But looking around her old bedroom made her tear up. The One Direction

posters on the walls, her old Blackberry on the bedside table, that stupid Chanel handbag her dad had bought her when she was fourteen . . .

She picked up the little framed picture Lee Arnold had taken of her and her mum at Barking Park Fair the previous year and she stroked it. What her stepmother had done was wrong, but could she really say she wouldn't have done the same?

Her dad had been a bad person. There was no getting around it. A gambler who risked his family consorting with gangsters, he'd been a drunk too, and then there had been the sex. When Shazia's mother had died, he'd turned to her to fulfil his 'needs'. Then when he'd married Mumtaz, he'd brutalised her. Of course, by that time it was all about money. In debt to a local crime family, the Sheikhs, he'd been out of his mind. Then they'd killed him. Stabbed, in front of Mumtaz, on Wanstead Flats in broad daylight. Only later had Shazia discovered that her beloved Mumtaz, her amma, had let her father bleed to death into the London clay before she even thought to call 999.

Even that she could forgive. But what had driven a wedge between the two women had been Mumtaz's failure to tell Shazia. This had led to her becoming a pawn in a game between her amma and the Sheikh family, which could have cost Shazia her life. How could Amma have done that? She'd said she'd had no choice and Lee, her amma's employer, had backed that story up. But Shazia couldn't and wouldn't accept it. She'd moved out and was now living with her amma's parents in Spitalfields. They still didn't know the truth, but they loved her and were good people. Her adopted grandfather, Baharat Huq, was even going to drive her to Manchester to take up her place there on her criminology degree course.

Shazia opened her wardrobe and took out her winter coat.

She'd arrive in Manchester late September, but it was going to be colder up there than it was in London and so she'd need her coat. She put it on the bed together with a couple of shirts and her hair wand. She looked in her jewellery box, but decided she'd only take a couple of pairs of earrings and a big silver filigree ring her friend Grace had given her on her sixteenth birthday. Maybe moving to Manchester would cause her to review her style? Who knew how she would react? Maybe at the end of her course she'd have changed her mind about joining the police?

But then no, that would never happen. Not after what she'd been through and seen. There was more than just a career at stake for Shazia. There was getting even.

She picked up the photograph of herself and her amma, and put it in her bag before she changed her mind.

'Hi.'

'Wotcha.'

They shared little except greetings and work stuff, things private investigators needed to share. Lee found it stressful. But how could he even open a conversation about what had happened when she never looked at him? Was she ashamed? He assumed she was, but he didn't know.

'How was your . . .'

'Fine,' Mumtaz said. 'Settled in. She won't find sharing with others easy, but hopefully she'll have time to think.'

'Good.'

'And you?'

The only way forward was to disappear into the work.

'Bit of a windfall,' he said. 'One job, two cases and a man with some very serious money.'

He told her everything that Levy had told him and then he

handed her the pages from the file he'd already examined.

'When we've both read everything he's given us – there's not much – we'll have a chat about where we go from there. It's not going to be easy,' Lee said. 'I'm just going out for a smoke.'

Mumtaz made herself a cup of tea. Lee would be outside smoking for at least twenty minutes, which would give her a good run at this Mr Levy's notes. But it wasn't easy for her to concentrate. She knew that Shazia still saw Lee from time to time because her parents had told her. They were friends and she wanted to tell him that it was okay, but she couldn't. It was ridiculous.

They'd made love. Once. She'd just told Shazia the truth about her father's death, the girl had stormed out and Lee had turned up to make sure she was alright. It had been passionate, tender and full of love. Only her subsequent guilt had ruined it. And it had – ruined it. He'd bared his soul, he'd told her he was in love with her, and what had she done in return?

She'd pushed him away. Because that was what decent Muslim widows did. Especially widows who had let their husbands die.

She opened Mr Levy's file.

Father met my mother in September 1945 in Berlin. He was with the British 131st Infantry Brigade and she was living in the cellar of her family's house in a district called Niederschönhausen. When I was old enough to know about the Holocaust, I asked her how she'd managed to survive when her family had not. All she would ever say was that it was because she was lucky. My father took her out of the ruins of her parents' house and her life began again. That was all I needed to know.

I have subsequently researched that period of

German history a little and have found that actually Niederschönhausen was not in the British but the Russian sector of the city after 1945. How my father came to be in such a place is therefore a mystery to me, as my understanding is that, although the Russians and the other Allied Forces met, control of the various sectors of Berlin was strictly regulated. But I may be wrong.

Through the good offices of the Wiesenthal Centre, I managed to trace some of my mother's family through both Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz concentration camps. Her mother, Miriam, for whom my sister was named, died in Auschwitz in 1943, along with her husband, Dieter, a pharmacist. My mother's brother, Kurt, died in Sachsenhausen in 1942. He was eleven years old. There are no records for Rachel Austerlitz, my mother. It seems to me that when her parents and her brother were taken by the Nazis, she disappeared. This fits in with her story such as it was. But how? By 1941 when the family were taken to Sachsenhausen, all Jews in Berlin had been rounded up. How did she evade that?

But here I am assuming that my mother was Jewish, which I now know she wasn't. Did my grandparents adopt her, maybe? She certainly took their name. The Nazis were nothing if not meticulous and her name is recorded with the other members of her family on a list of Jewish business people working in Berlin in 1937. So far I have been unable to find any other members of the Austerlitz family either living in Germany or Israel. Both my supposed grandfather's brothers and their families died in Auschwitz too. But my researches are far from extensive, mainly due to my illness. The furthest I have got is to establish that my grandmother

Miriam's original surname was Suskind. These were also business people, employed in the rag trade. The Suskinds in turn were related, through my grandmother's mother, to a family from Munich called Reichman and also to someone called Augustin Maria Baum. That isn't the most Gentile name I've ever heard, but it comes close. This means that the Suskinds could have had at least one Gentile relation.

A lot of people researched their ancestry via DNA testing. But in Mumtaz's experience, it often threw up mysteries people hadn't been expecting and didn't really want. She knew of two clients whose real fathers had turned out to be strangers from different communities. This had led to strained familial relationships, vicious accusations and bitter guilt.

She glanced at a few small newspaper cuttings about Miriam Levy from 1962, but the details contained in them were minimal. Not much more than a few fuzzy pictures of police officers searching Barking Park.

Lee came back into the office and sat down. He looked at her. 'Well?'

'I've only got as far as Mr Levy's own account of his researches and the newspaper cuttings,' she said. 'I've not looked at any of the documents.'

'They're mostly in German,' Lee said. 'Just go straight to his translations. But what do you think so far?'

She shrugged. 'I think it's a massive job. But, given that Mr Levy is so sick, I think we should maybe concentrate on finding his sister. I mean his family history is fascinating, but . . .'

'I agree. But Levy thinks that the disappearance of Miriam and his family history are connected.'

'Because one of his mother's ancestors may have been a Gentile?'

‘No,’ Lee said. ‘When I talked to him he didn’t bring that up. It’s more to do with the idea that his mother was a Gentile. That her existence was some sort of deception either perpetrated by her or by her parents.’

‘He mentions possible adoption . . .’

‘Which may have happened.’

‘But if so, then are there any documents to prove it?’

‘Anything where the Holocaust is involved can potentially be a problem, particularly when it comes to finding documents and living witnesses,’ Lee said. ‘The Nazis kept records but, at the end of the war, they destroyed a lot of them. Also, if Rachel was adopted, it may have been unofficial. People just took unwanted kids in back then. My Auntie Margaret was taken in by me gran. I only found that out long after old Auntie Mags had died.’

‘Yes, but this was a wealthy family, so I doubt whether that happened,’ Mumtaz said.

She was right. Where a possible inheritance was involved, people were less inclined to just take unknown children in as their own. It didn’t make sense. Unless . . .

‘Unless the Austerlitzes took in both kids . . .’

‘Because Miriam Austerlitz couldn’t have children?’ Mumtaz said. ‘Maybe. But why Gentile children – if indeed Kurt Austerlitz was also a Gentile?’

He shrugged.

She looked him in the eye for the first time in ages and, for a moment, Lee wondered if she might smile at him too. But then she said, ‘So where do we start?’