

BAD FOR GOOD





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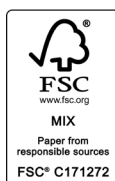
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*For Julie, Conall, Niamh and Deaglan.
You make all my dreams come true xxx*

I always tell authors that the story and characters must come first. With that in mind, this is a work of fiction, hence some structures, titles, locations, even some police procedures, have been modified to serve the story and the characters for your enjoyment.

Part One



1

8.30 a.m., Friday 27th April

As the steel baton shattered his right kneecap, Wayne Tanner wished he had broken his golden rule and driven away from trouble this time.

‘What the fuck?’ he cried, as he concertinaed into the dirt. Writhing and screaming in agony, he barely registered the second swing as it disintegrated his left shoulder.

He’d had ample opportunity to lose the black Audi tailing him out of Brighton city centre, but that was not in his nature. Now, trapped in the remote Ditchling Beacon car park and hemmed in by four truncheon-wielding thugs, there was no way out.

His reluctant yet desperate attempts to clamber away only resulted in his flaccid leg shooting fiery pains through him with every drag. He’d only managed a couple of yards before another flurry of strikes rained down, crippling his other knee and left forearm.

‘You’re fucking killing me!’ he yelled, as he heard his white van cough into life. ‘Whatever it is, you’ve got the wrong bloke.’

‘Oh, I don’t think so, Wayne,’ came the reply from the impassive spectator who then raised his hand, which immediately stopped the beating.

‘Who the fuck are you?’ Wayne cried.

‘Friends of Susie’s. Or rather, her dad.’ Wayne detected a northern accent but couldn’t place it.

‘Reg?’

‘See, we are on the same wavelength.’

‘What are you on about and where’s he going with that?’ he shouted, as his van disappeared onto the Beacon Road.

‘We’ll take good care of your motor. Can’t say the same for you though,’ the man said as he pile-drove his boot on Wayne’s shattered leg.

A flock of gulls screeched into flight.

‘See, Reg never liked you. Couldn’t see what Susie saw in you. So when you put her in hospital, well he wasn’t best pleased.’

‘But I got nicked for that. I’m on bail and I can’t go near her again.’

‘Yet even if it gets to court, you’ll get a small fine and a smack on the wrist. Reg didn’t think that was enough, so asked us to help.’

‘But . . .’ Tanner pleaded.

The man turned to the others, their batons at the ready. ‘Get him in the car.’

Wayne’s howls went unheeded as they dragged his crumpled body to the Audi. Pausing to plasticuff his wrists together, they shoved him into the back seat.

As the door slammed behind him, one of his attackers slid in the other side and shoved Wayne’s head forward into his lap.

‘Where are you taking me?’ he groaned, as the car wheel-span out of the car park.

The man fiddled with the satnav, then turned and said, ‘Let’s just say, you’ll soon wish you’d never met Susie Parker.’

2

8.00 a.m., Monday 30th April

Detective Superintendent Joanne Howe had worked harder than most to get where she was. Some kinder souls, unaware of her professional and personal struggles, described her as lucky. Her more vicious rivals attributed her holding the most coveted of detective jobs to positive discrimination.

Her status was the last thing on her mind though, as she scurried between her sleek new kitchen and the bomb site of a lounge where her boys – Ciaran, four, and Liam, three – were spooning Weetabix everywhere but in their mouths while glued to an eternal loop of *SpongeBob SquarePants* on Nickelodeon.

At forty, children and her dream job, the Head of Major Crime, had come late in life and now, as those two frenetic worlds collided, she wondered why on earth she had craved them for so long. Her husband, Darren, was her rock – when he was around. As an investigative journalist for the *Daily Journal*, his habit of zipping off to far-flung cities for days on end was beginning to grate; even if that was how they'd met. At least now that she was in charge, she could work her turn as the duty Senior Investigating Officer – SIO – around his absences. In theory.

The familiar chirp of her work mobile phone snapped her from her domestic chaos.

Eventually locating it nestled under the sheaf of Major Crime Unit performance reports she had been fretting over last night, she tapped ‘accept’.

‘Jo Howe, can I help you?’

‘Morning ma’am, it’s the duty inspector at Brighton here. Have you got a moment?’

Jo scurried into the lounge, grabbed the cereal bowls and mouthed, ‘Brush your teeth,’ to the boys.

‘Yes, go ahead.’

‘Are you duty SIO today?’

‘No, but you’ve got me now, so what is it?’ she replied, battling to keep the irritation out of her voice.

‘Oh sorry, I was looking at the wrong on-call sheet. Well, if you’re sure. We’ve had a misper reported. Bloke called Wayne Tanner. He’s been missing since Friday morning. I wouldn’t normally bother you, but he was last seen when we bailed him from custody for a domestic assault.’

‘Woah. Rewind a second. Why are you worried about him? I’m taking it he had a bust-up with his partner?’

‘Yes ma’am, he punched his girlfriend. It’s just odd. There’s no trace of his van, he’s not turned up at his usual haunts, no trace of his phone and no activity on his bank. And he only had £3.50 when he was released from custody.’

‘OK, I’ll have a look at it, but raise it at your own DMM too. Give me an hour, as I have to wait for my childcare to arrive.’

She detected a faint sigh from the other end of the line. She bet the blokes never got that reaction. That was the police for you. If she said she was at the football and would come out at half-time, no one would bat an eyelid. Say, God forbid, that you have kids that need looking after, then the chauvinists got all sniffy. But she always made that point, as part of her crusade to chip away at the stigma that came with being a working mum in the police.

* * *

Monday mornings after his duty weekend sparked Phil Cooke's mischievous side.

Having spent most of his thirty-five years' service at Brighton and Hove Division, at every rank from PC to chief superintendent, he knew at first-hand the carnage his officers would have endured since Friday.

Age had been kind to him. The wrong side of fifty, but his passion for the weekly five-a-side football tournament and a job where meals were a rare luxury stemmed any middle-age spread. His sandy close-cropped hair was holding its own against the creeping grey that afflicted so many of his peers. Only his ruddy complexion hinted that life – or the drink – was taking its toll.

As the divisional commander, he bore a huge responsibility to the City's quarter of a million residents, eight million visitors and the ever-thinning blue line of around four hundred cops. In awe of the brave young men and women who faced violence and misery on a daily basis, he conceded that they worked considerably harder than he and his erstwhile colleagues ever had.

The changing face of policing over the years meant that out of office hours, the fort was held by the response teams and CID. They ran themselves ragged racing from call to call, scraping up the detritus that went hand in hand with a city that never slept.

Come Monday morning, everyone else played furious catch-up, struggling to get their heads around the chaos of the last sixty hours. No one wanted to be exposed at the Daily Management Meeting, or DMM, as lacking grip.

Having kept up to speed over the weekend, what Phil didn't already know wasn't worth knowing. So, exploiting the deferential police culture, he loved to breeze into offices, distracting and stressing his industrious juniors with inane small talk.

Ambling across the ramshackle open-plan Divisional Intelligence Unit – DIU – he nodded to the dozen or so bustling detectives and analysts as he beelined towards his old friend, DI Bob Heaton, who was

beavering away in his glazed corner office. Bob's rumpled appearance, tatty red-and-white checked tie, already at half mast, and his creased and smudged striped shirt suggested, to those who didn't know him, that rather than having just arrived at work he'd spent the night traipsing through some gruesome crime scene.

'Morning Bob,' Phil chirped as he entered the poky room. 'How was your weekend?'

'Oh, hello sir. Yes, good thanks. Fairly Q here from what I can see,' replied a harassed Bob, observing the police superstition of never saying the word 'quiet' out loud.

'Really? Those chemist shop burglaries looked interesting. Still, save me the details until DMM.'

'Oh right. Yes, I, er, I haven't got to those yet.'

Phil took a seat, then inwardly smirked as he saw the DI crumble in the recognition he would never get the next ten – or maybe fifteen – minutes of his life back.

'Found yourself a new woman yet?' asked Phil, piling on the agony. They had been DSs together years ago and were a formidable team. Since Bob split from Janet ten years ago, his reclusive lifestyle bothered Phil.

'Ha! No, not yet. How's your lot?'

'Harry's being tipped for a professional contract at the Albion. Got all his footballing skills from me, you know,' he joked. 'Ruth's not so good though. That last lot of chemo completely wiped her out. She's tough but I'm not sure how much more she can take. They're even talking about hospices.'

'Kyle?'

'Oh, yes, he's OK. Still mucking about with his band or something.'

'That's good for the boys but I'm so sorry about Ruth, mate.'

'No worries, we'll get through. Look, I better let you get on. Don't forget about those chemist breaks, now will you?'

'As if,' replied Bob, spotting an unfamiliar sag in his boss's posture as he shuffled out of the door.

* * *

The 'Sussex by the Sea' ringtone blaring from Phil's phone drew flashes of irritation as he made his way out of the DIU.

The caller ID sent his mood plummeting to new depths. Every Monday morning his boss, ACC Stuart Acers, phoned each of the three divisional commanders on his drive to Sussex from his sprawling Surrey pad. Despite having a staff officer, he insisted on hearing any dramas direct from his chief superintendents.

'Morning Stuart,' said Phil, as he ambled up the stairs back to his own office, struggling to mask the contempt in his voice.

'Morning Phil. How's Brighton looking?'

'Fine thanks. Fairly Q weekend. Some chemist breaks that Bob Heaton is all over, the usual drug dealing on the estates, a couple of robberies and half a dozen mispers. One of them was in custody for domestic violence last week but I suspect he's just lying low.'

'Sorry, you broke up a bit there. Must have been driving through a dodgy area. Not as dodgy as your city though.'

Tosser, thought Phil. 'Do you want me to go through it again?'

'No. Don't forget, next week's Neighbourhood Policing Board is your last chance to come up with the twenty per cent efficiencies we need from your division before I find them for you.'

'Look, I've told you, you've already cut me to the bone. Most of my teams haven't had a complete set of rest days off for six months. Any more cuts and I might as well put up the "Closed" sign.'

'Sorry, you broke up again there. Anyway, good luck with those savings proposals.' The abrupt silence told Phil this was not up for debate.

'Knobhead,' Phil muttered as he reached the landing, oblivious to the red-faced young PC scurrying past.

*

No one dared call him Marcus nowadays.

Not even his despairing parents, who were now little more than his hoteliers on his rare trips back to London. Since he had 'gone country'

to run the north Brighton drugs supply line, he had no further need for them.

Marco, as he insisted on being called now, found 'food' – heroin and crack cocaine – a cinch to shift. Since the London markets had been flooded, the supply almost exceeding demand, exploiting what others quaintly labelled county lines was child's play. The kingpins in the capital sent up-and-coming gang members to rural towns and cities to open new markets and create new addicts.

All Marco had to do was shift the drugs and return the spoils up the line. He strutted like he owned the patch, which spanned from Preston Park to the city's boundary close to Waterhall, but still he remained vigilant.

His only real fear was if the police confiscated his stash. There were no excuses for that. His debt to the bosses could run into thousands and the consequences of default were brutal. A machete up the arse would render him shitting in a colostomy bag for life.

Soon after being recruited at the relatively late age of fourteen, he quickly worked out who to kowtow to, and who he could crush. He took risks, plugging drugs into orifices that, until then, he presumed had only biological functions, but he instinctively knew when to be cautious. His nous quickly impressed his London-based masters and within two years Marco was assigned his own line.

Too many of his peers had failed and paid the ultimate price, so he knew not to let his guard down, and never to show weakness. His ruthless and public destruction of anyone who showed him even the slightest disrespect or moved to usurp his precarious position was well known; beef with Marco and you'd get the pick of mobility scooters.

Tonight, as usual, he was touring his manor, checking up on his minions. He was beyond handling the food himself – far too risky – but he needed to show who was boss.

He ripped about the streets on a black Mongoose BMX bike – his ped. What it lacked in prestige it more than made up for in dexterity, always outrunning and outsmarting any overly inquisitive cops. It was especially useful after dark, its colour and stealth melting him into the gloom.

He whipped around the corner on to Ladies Mile Parade, jack-knifing the back wheel to a halt, smiling when he saw his runners all present and correct.

‘Hey Marco, what’s happening?’ said Junior, lurking in a charity shop doorway. Fifteen-year-old Junior’s career had ground to a halt last Christmas after his sluggish bulk enabled a rival gang member to chase him down. The hospital managed to fix the two stab wounds to his leg, but Marco was less than pleased with the hassle of having to firebomb the other gang leader’s grandmother’s house to teach respect.

‘S’good Junior. How’s t’ings?’

Junior flashed five fingers, indicating that he and the three younger hoodies, cowering two paces behind, had collected about £500.

‘Not bad. Any calls for me?’

‘Nah.’

Marco eyed an approaching, battered bottle-green Toyota Yaris. Sensing his apprehension Junior said, ‘He’s cool. A regular.’

Marco loathed being so close to a deal, but he knew to hide his unease from his lackeys. He watched intently from the shadows.

A flick of Junior’s head sent the smallest of his three acolytes forward. The boy swaggered to the parked car and darted his hand in and out of the open passenger window. Marco nodded. He made a mental note to find out the boy’s name. He’d seldom seen such a deft deal.

The Yaris sped away, business done.

‘Oi! I know what you’re up to,’ came a sudden shout from the direction of Patcham High School opposite.

A figure, dressed in a green sweatshirt and blue joggers – clearly thrown on in a hurry – marched from the school across the road.

‘I saw that. You just passed something into that car. I’ve called the police and they’re on their way.’

Marco pulled his black-and-red bandana up to cover his nose and mouth, tightened the cords of his blue hood around his face and stepped out to confront the man.

‘Eh, beat it Grandad,’ he hissed.

‘Says who? I’ve seen your sort before. You come here selling your muck, scaring decent people off the streets. I’m not having it.’

The caretaker was now squaring up to Marco, Junior standing at his boss’s shoulder. The three younger boys had dissolved into a doorway.

Marco stepped forward.

‘Fuck off back to your little wifey and leave the streets to the big boys.’

‘I used to eat scum like you for breakfast,’ he replied, puffing himself up to his full five foot seven inches.

Marco didn’t want a fight, but people couldn’t go round calling him scum; that was disrespectful. With the faintest flick of his neck, Marco’s headbutt floored the caretaker.

‘In there,’ Marco told Junior, pointing to a jet-black alleyway between the shops. Each grabbed an arm and pulled the dazed man out of sight.

When Marco and Junior emerged, blood splattered across their fists and white Nike trainers, they spotted the three youngsters huddled in the doorway. ‘Split,’ Marco ordered, then tutted when he saw the fresh vomit dribbling down the smallest one’s hoodie.

He knew none of them would sleep that night, but they had learnt a valuable lesson, and that made it sweet.