

# 1

The sleek black Range Rover slowed in the humming evening traffic and the tailgate eased open. A tightly wrapped cloth bundle was pushed from the rear of the 4×4 and slammed unceremoniously onto the black tarmac. As it hit the road it rolled into the path of a dirty white van. The driver of the van saw the bundle drop and braked hard, but the gap was too short and the van skidded over the cloth bundle, snagging it and dragging it along the road. The Range Rover tailgate closed, the suspension dipped and it accelerated away, disappearing into the mass of cars.

Ice-cold pins of rain spiked DI Lomas Baxter's face as he walked from his car, his shadow dancing on the shiny road under the glow of

the street lights. He dug his hands deeper into the pockets of his peacoat, pulling it tightly around his body. A team of uniformed officers was keeping back a growing crowd of onlookers as Lomas headed towards the scruffy white van. DC Drew Taylor had got there before him and was talking to the driver of the van. Lomas nodded a greeting to Taylor. She raised a hand briefly then turned her attention back to the interviewee.

‘So, Sherlock, what’ve we got?’

The forensic pathologist turned to face Lomas, maintaining his crouched position. ‘Asian male, approximately thirty-five to forty years old, visible head trauma and some other injuries. I’ll know more when I get him back.’

‘Was he dead when he was thrown out of the car?’

‘Yes. Initial checks indicate that he died six to ten hours ago.’

‘OK, thanks. Can I have a look?’

‘Be my guest. I’m leaving the sacking around him until we get him back, but I’ve opened it up as far as his shoulders. It looks like he’s taken quite a battering, but again...’

‘Yeah, I know, you’ll know more when you get him back.’

Lomas crouched down by the wrapped body to have a closer look. He recognised the dead man as local businessman and suspected drug dealer, Inzamam Khan.

‘How did you end up on the road, Mr Khan?’ He stood up and turned away from the corpse, taking in the scene around him. ‘Thanks, Sherlock. Keep me in the loop, will you please?’

He moved in the direction of his car. The air smelled fresh, renewed by the recent rain, untarnished by the death that marred the street.

Drew made her way over towards Baxter as the icy rain began to ease.

‘I’ve finished talking to the driver of the van. Malcolm Thomas, a forty-seven-year-old driver for a small office-supplies company. He was driving home after his last drop of the day. He says the traffic was medium to heavy. A black Range Rover slowed in front of him. He eased off a little but was probably still a bit close, then the tailgate opened and the wrapped body was dropped out of the back of the vehicle before it took off through the traffic. He’s shaken up – says he tried to brake, but couldn’t stop in time and heard the body hit the underside of his van. He keeps apologising for being too close to the Range Rover, saying if he’d left more space he wouldn’t have hit the body.’

‘OK, nice work. Did he get a look at anyone in the back of the Range Rover? Or the registration number?’

‘No, he said the back flipped open and the body dropped out pretty much straight away. He panicked and slammed on the brakes, his attention was on the bundle in the road, not the car.’

‘That’s a shame. When you get back, pull all the local CCTV feeds, please. I want to see what they captured.’

‘He did say that he thought it might have been a Range Rover Overfinch, with privacy glass, but it might have just been a look-a-like body kit. He’s a bit of a petrol-head. He also added that the way it shot off into the traffic, it was a quick one.’

‘OK – there won’t be many of those around. Get him to sit down with someone back at the station and work through the events slowly. He might remember more than he knows.’

‘Will do. Is there anything else you want me to do here? I thought I’d coordinate some of the uniformed officers to interview the other drivers, see if anyone saw anything else.’

‘Sounds like a good idea. Keep me up to date, please. I’m going to head back and give the DCI an update.’ Lomas watched Drew turn and head back towards the crowd of people standing under a makeshift rain shelter the scenes of crime team had put up.

Lomas stood for a while and looked around at the scene. He had a panoramic view of the road and pavements, which were lined with shops displaying their wares in glossy, rain-sprinkled windows. The shop fronts were interspersed with stoic grey buildings, one of which was a bank. At each end of the building hung a small black camera.

‘Drew!’ Lomas called after the young red-headed officer. She spun around to face him.

‘Boss?’

‘The bank – could you make sure you include their CCTV footage?’ He pointed at the bank and the cameras.

‘Will do.’

## 2

DCI Marie Carlton stood with her arms folded, looking out of the window at the rain hammering down. Lomas knocked on the door. Carlton turned away from the window, her steely blue eyes catching the light as she turned to face him.

‘Hi Lomas, what have we got this time?’

‘Asian male, mid to late thirties, no official identification yet, but I had a look and I’m pretty sure it’s Inzamam Khan. He was dropped from the back of a moving Range Rover, in traffic. Possibly not linked to the nightclub killings but I’m not ruling anything out yet, given his acquaintances. Sherlock’s initial exam shows some injuries consistent with violence. I’ll have more detail later when he’s finished checking him over.’

‘Witnesses?’ she asked.

‘Uniform are interviewing everyone who was at the scene. Luckily most of them stopped when Khan was dropped onto the road. A poor bugger in a van immediately behind him didn’t stop in time and ran over the body.’

‘Ouch.’ She winced, imagining the van rolling over the dead man. She and Lomas had worked on many cases together over their years of service and, although Marie liked to be kept informed of progress on all the cases under her charge, she knew Lomas would cover every aspect of the investigation. He was a solid, dependable and vastly knowledgeable detective who had brought some of the south coast’s deadliest criminals to justice.

# 3

## **Seven days earlier**

Inzamam Khan slammed his iPhone onto the white tablecloth and shouted at the top of his voice. ‘Fucking sons of infidels! They have less sense than they were born with. Do I have to do everything myself? Is there no one around here with an ounce of initiative?’

‘What is it, boss?’ A smart-looking, bearded, Indian man scurried forward. In the background a pair of scruffy white men in their early twenties leaned against the doorway that led to the kitchen of Inzamam’s restaurant. Khan looked over at the loitering pair with disdain. They were a necessary evil, a means to an end. He tolerated their presence, humoured their feeble attempts at wit and paid them handsomely for their endeavours. They, on the other hand, thought

that they were in with 'the man'. He knew that this was how they referred to him when they were at a safe distance from him, but when they were in his presence they hung back until he called for them. He knew they were afraid of him and what they had seen him do to others who had displeased him.

Seeing the two youths reminded Khan of a recent incident. Another youth had challenged Khan over the size of his cut. Inzamam had not reacted to the young man's verbal taunts, nor to the tirade of predictable racial abuse that had accompanied his attempt at increasing his payment.

'Come on, you fuckin' thick Paki, I'm due more than that. I'd get more than that in tips waiting in this fuckin' shit-hole of a restaurant!' he had yelled across the kitchen.

Inzamam had stopped checking the takings. He'd turned and walked calmly across to the three youths without uttering a word or changing his expression. As he had got within arm's length of the gobby one, his hand had shot out and grabbed the youth by his throat. The loiterers had eased backwards, leaving their accomplice alone in Khan's clutches. Gobby tried to struggle, but Inzamam grabbed a fistful of his hair. As he did so, he simultaneously released the lad's throat and slammed his face down onto the stainless-steel worktop. He did this three times, then a large silver pot had fallen off the end of the worktop, clattering to the floor. With the third strike the youth's body had gone limp. Inzamam had released his grip on the youth's hair, letting him drop to the floor. His legs spasmed as he hit the ground. Khan had then turned his attention to the other two, who both turned to run.

‘Stay there, gentlemen,’ he had said quietly. The pair had frozen to the spot as the restaurateur walked around them slowly until he was standing before them, staring intently at them. They’d glanced over their shoulders at their acquaintance, who was sprawled motionless on the floor. With fear filling their eyes, they turned back to face Khan.

‘Are either of you unhappy with your level of remuneration?’ They’d looked at each other briefly and silently shook their heads.

‘Good,’ he continued. ‘Then this conversation will not need to be repeated, will it?’ Again both shook their heads, neither uttering a sound.

‘You know where the door is. You may leave.’ They glanced round at their associate.

‘Oh, don’t worry about him. I’ll take care of him.’

Not needing to be told twice, the pair ran from the restaurant. No repeat performance had ever been required.

Inzamam snapped out of his recollection. ‘Get me a coffee, Raj, and none of that cheap filtered crap we serve up to the monkeys who come in here.’ He shot a glance at the Asian youngster.

Raj was well over six feet tall, with a thin beard and an athletic build. He was a regular visitor at the kitchen and a regular recipient of the verbal abuse Inzamam chose to dole out. He was Khan’s right-hand man. As well as being gifted with great technical knowledge, he spent his days working at the centre of Khan’s business, as well as covering for Inzamam when his wife, Husna, called. At these times Inzamam was invariably shut away in his office with one of the many young waitresses he employed. He usually hired women based on their looks, age and vulnerability, which – as he did with most

people in his life – he then exploited. As ever, Raj did what he was told, without complaint or argument.

Khan watched Raj as he made his way silently to the rear of the kitchen and set about brewing a fresh pot of expensive, rich-fragranced coffee in the meticulous way he always did. Khan smiled and moved his attention to the two youths who, upon noticing his shift in attention, shifted their weight off the doorframe and stood up straight.

‘So, what are you two doing here? Hopefully it’s good news. I’ve heard enough shit for one day.’

‘We ... we’ve run out, Boss,’ the skinnier of the pair stuttered, blinking furiously.

‘Run out? Really? What, of everything?’

‘Everythin’ except the green, boss. We had a really busy night in town.’

‘Yeah, the coke went really quick,’ his partner interrupted.

He was a mop-topped chav, dressed in a knock-off Adidas tracksuit and high-top Nike basketball boots. He had a round, chipmunk-like face with cratered skin from acne in his early teenage years. They were a useful, if not overly bright, pair. Inzamam had supplied them each with a free mobile phone so he could get hold of them day or night – a privilege he made frequent use of. He also knew they were using the phones to call premium-rate sex lines – at his expense. Inzamam viewed their perverted needs as a further example of infidel weakness, he considered the phone bills a small price to pay compared to the income the pair generated. Khan knew the two low-level thugs served their purpose, to him they epitomised the picture of an inferior race that Inzamam Khan had been

cultivating since his youth; one he had used to fuel his business empire.

As a boy Inzamam had spent much of his time in the company of his father, Malik, who he idolised and despised in equal measure. Malik Khan had been a middle-ranking commander who had helped set up and run an al-Qaeda training camp near Kandahar in Afghanistan. The elder Khan had oversight of training impressionable young recruits in the use of small arms, explosives and orientation, among other subjects. The syllabus was delivered within the framework of the Taliban's interpretation of sections of the Qur'an. The trainer's plans were underpinned by their belief that they were messengers of God's will and if they were successful, it was due to their actions being ordained at the highest level.

Whether the enemy was the Russians as it was in the 1980s, or later, the allied forces of the USA, UK and others, the locals who fought for the Taliban retained their belief that the infidels were weak, ruled by their greed and debauchery, and promiscuous in nature. From an early age Inzamam had questioned the logic of fighting these forces with bullets and bombs, convinced that the preaching of his father and his brethren was misguided, short-sighted and unambitious. While he agreed with the cause, he found it difficult to believe that they would ever truly overthrow these superpowers without first infiltrating their land and destroying them from the inside. It was then, as a teenager, that he had begun to formulate his plan: his contribution to the jihad.

Young Inzamam's epiphany came one day while he shared a meal of spiced goat and potatoes with some of the young trainees. They were descended from farming families. As the conversation

unfolded, Inzamam learned that their fathers had changed their crops almost without exception to the opium poppy. As an inquisitive child Inzamam had asked questions, keen to know more. The farmers' sons bragged about how their families had forged great business arrangements with district officials, warlords and drug traffickers who targeted greedy, weak Westerners with their high-quality opiates. Inzamam had a lightbulb moment that day, and since then he had developed a carefully crafted plan, the central part of which was to supply the finest Afghanistan product to people in the West. His main focus quickly became convincing his father to move the family to England: to his parents, he sold a heavily researched concept of a better life for his brothers and sisters. The pivotal part of his plan had been shared in a conversation one evening when he got the chance to speak to his father privately.

‘Father, our move would enhance the progress of the holy war against the weak British fools. We could use our connections in Afghanistan and Pakistan to flood England with opiates: a flood that I could orchestrate by using the infidel’s own sons, to sell our products to the weak-minded, addicted non-believers. I have done lots of research Father and we should open a chain of high-quality restaurants, serving native Afghan dishes to the paying British public. This would give us a respectable business that would be our face to the outside world.’

His father has been impressed and this was the only aspect of his plan that he had altered once they reached English shores and discovered the nation’s hunger for spicy curries, generalised by the British as ‘Indian’ food. The Khan's restaurants served generic Indian food, fronted by the father-and-son duo of Malik and Inzamam. They

quickly became pillars of their local community, commended for their charitable giving and community spirit, while their restaurants became a well-managed front for what speedily became the largest drug trafficking and dealing business in the south of England.

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Inzamam called on his sidekick once more to restock the grubby-looking pair. ‘Raj, get these two sales machines some more nose candy, would you?’

The pair nodded at each other proudly, not understanding the back-handed nature of the compliment.

‘How about the smack? How’s that been going?’

‘I done most of mine,’ the bony one retorted quickly. Silently Khan shifted his stare to Chipmunk, who blushed and shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other.

‘I’ve not moved much, boss. Sorry, boss. I’ve tried, but the peeps, they just want the coke, innit.’ He wiped his nose on the shiny sleeve of his tracksuit top and sniffed in a lungful of curry-scented air. Inzamam Khan moved slowly to Chipmunk’s side. Chipmunk leaned away from him, towards his associate. Khan placed an arm around Chipmunk’s shoulders, gripping a fistful of tracksuit in his strong hand and feeling the youth tremble. He smiled a broad, menacing smile, his perfect straight white teeth glinting at Chipmunk.

‘Don’t worry. Raj will get you more coke and you can sell double the amount of nose candy to the clubbers, while your skinny friend here can wind some more smack into the junkies, can’t you, Darryl?’

Bony gulped. Khan knew he'd thought his speedy shifting of junk would keep Inzamam's attention on Chipmunk, rather than make their sales a joint effort.

'Yes, boss, course I can.'

'Good – a joint sales force. You boys are going to have more cash than you know what to do with soon, if you keep sales up at this rate.' Of course, Inzamam knew that they couldn't keep up their newly found momentum, because they were both too keen on sampling the product themselves, but this was an accepted consequence of using junkies as pushers. The payoff was worth the cost, and Inzamam was making plenty off the back of them.

Raj loaded a blue rucksack with enough of both drugs to keep the two going for a couple of days. As he passed it over to Bony, he took a crumpled Tesco bag full of cash out of Chipmunk's hand. Khan watched as Chipmunk made a token effort to resist letting go of the bag. Khan was pleased to see that Raj didn't even acknowledge it as he pulled the carrier from the chav's hand.

Inzamam observed as, with well-practised ease, Raj emptied the contents of the plastic bag onto a large silver tray and began to count it. He had an excellent brain for numbers, weights and amounts especially, and Khan knew that not only did Raj know the exact weight of the cocaine and heroin he had just handed out, but he also remembered perfectly the previous supply and what that should equate to in monetary terms. He didn't take long to count the £2,500, then he nodded at Inzamam and passed him £500.

Khan took the cash and divided it into two equal shares. 'Well done, boys, there's a two hundred and fifty quid bonus each.' Reaching into his own pocket, he pulled out two crisp £50 notes.

‘And here’s a little something extra as a thank you for turning it around so quickly and coming straight back in with the green.’

The two grinned at each other, then said in unison, ‘Cheers, boss, you da man!’

Khan smiled and turned away, returning to the table where he had slammed his phone down. The youths scurried out of the door, whispering to each other.

‘How much did you give them, Raj?’ ‘Fifty of each. Is that OK?’

‘OK? That is fucking genius, Raj. So what would that be at current prices?’ Before Khan could work out the value of the drugs, Raj answered. ‘Seven-grand.’

‘That’s sixty-three hundred quid profit, young Raj. Good work. You might even get a bit of a bonus if they turn that around quickly.’ Khan threw a small bundle of folded notes onto the table. ‘There’s your cut. Enjoy.’

Raj walked slowly over and picked up £250. His cut was the same as the dealers’.

Although Khan had promised him a pay rise if he carried on cutting the gear so the junkies kept buying, Khan didn’t want to give it to him too soon. He knew Raj was loyal and would carry on working towards the pay increase.

A few weeks earlier, three or four of the pushers had run into the back of the restaurant, panicking because six junkies had died of overdoses during the night after they had bought Inzamam’s gear. Instead of their employer joining them in panic, he celebrated and put his prices up, shouting that the junkies would pay more because they knew they were getting the best high. Although the pushers

thought he was mad, within two days they had all sold out of their usual four-day supply and had come back for more.

The evening in Khan's continued on as if nothing had happened in the rear of the restaurant. Inzamam was the perfect host: charming, smiley, accommodating, ensuring that the diners were all well catered for and happily parted with their money. Some were such regulars at the buzzing Southampton restaurant that they talked to Khan as if he were a member of their own family: laughing, joking and chatting.

Inzamam stood with his hand on the back of a chair after cracking a one-liner that made the table erupt in laughter. He surveyed his restaurant with a smile of satisfaction. He was truly master of all.

The pungent scent of spices filled the air, small candles made shadows dance playfully above elegantly dressed tables, glasses chinked and his customers ate and drank the night away, none of them in a rush to leave. Inzamam didn't run a 'turn them around quickly' place; he liked people to feel relaxed, and he was happy for them to stay and soak up the congenial atmosphere.

He moved to open the door for a professional-looking young couple who were leaving. He nodded at the man, who was in his early twenties, clad in a smart blue suit.

'Goodnight to you both,' Inzamam said, looking the young man's partner up and down. His gaze hovered first over her thighs, where her black pencil skirt clung, revealing an hourglass figure. He stole a glance inside her blouse as the opening door created a draught that ruffled her top. He was sure she saw him look, but she smiled politely and followed her companion quickly, reaching for his hand as they left.

‘Ah, young love,’ Inzamam muttered as he closed the door behind them. As he turned back towards the restaurant he caught a glimpse of Raj, peeking around the doorframe from the kitchen. Inzamam stalked over to his sidekick.

‘What is it, Raj?’

‘It’s Gonzo – he’s in a flap about some of the ... er ... customers,’ Raj stuttered, looking around to check that no one was in earshot.

Gonzo was one of the pushers – Khan nodded and ushered Raj through to the rear of the restaurant. They worked their way through three locked doors, each one of which had a different combination lock. Raj and Inzamam were the only people who knew how to get through from Khan’s to the centre of the drug operation; pushers came in through an overgrown, unmarked alleyway at the back of the property. They made their way hurriedly through the last door and into the familiar room. Before them stood a visibly shaken Gonzo, wearing an oversized Adidas hoodie that hung down to the middle of his thighs, at about the same level as his low-slung, grubby jeans. Pasty white skin and an acne-riddled complexion framed the nose that had earned him his nickname, and on his right cheek was a fresh red mark, already starting to darken. Gonzo had clearly been hit by someone – or something.

‘What is it, Gonzo?’ asked Inzamam.

The youth chewed nervously on his bottom lip. ‘It’s the Albanians, they jumped me and took my gear and my cash, and when I tried to stop them, one of them pulled a BFG and slapped me with it.’ Tears filled his eyes.

‘Fucking Albanians!’ Khan shrieked. Raj jumped and Gonzo stood frozen, like a rabbit caught in the glare of a car’s headlights.

Inzamam walked over to Gonzo and cupped his head in his left hand. ‘You did the right thing coming straight back and telling me. Now, who are these lairy motherfuckers?’

‘I’ve seen one of ‘em about. But there was three of ‘em. I tried to stop ‘em, honest I did.’ Tears again filled the young pusher’s eyes.

‘It’s fine – we’ll sort it, don’t you worry about that. Raj, I want to know who these fuckers are, and I want to know by tomorrow morning. I don’t give a shit if we have to knock on the door of every junkie in this neighbourhood. No one does this to me, and no one pulls a Big Fucking Gun on one of my boys.’

‘Yes Boss, no problem,’ Raj replied.

‘Now, Gonzo, think carefully. Did they say anything?’

Gonzo gulped and shifted his weight from one foot to another. ‘Well?’

‘They did say one thing,’ Gonzo stuttered. ‘Well, come on then, what was it?’

‘I d-d-don’t really want—’

‘Oh, just fucking spit it out,’ demanded Khan.

‘They said “tell that pussy Khan we’re going to wipe him out”.’ As he finished the sentence, Gonzo flinched and took a step back.

At first Inzamam didn’t react. He could feel Gonzo and Raj watching him. His face held exactly the same expression for a few seconds, then he erupted in laughter.

Raj and Gonzo looked at each other, puzzled.

Inzamam Khan laughed louder and harder until tears rolled down his cheeks. He wiped them with the back of his hand and regained his composure. ‘Was that it? Was that the best those Eastern European fuckwits could come up with? Raj, get Gonzo some ice for

his face, then get to work finding out who these fuckers are so we can give them a little geography lesson.’

# 4

## **Six days earlier**

Raj Gadhi worked through the night speaking to everyone he could get hold of, using the descriptions that Gonzo had given him of the three assailants. It only took an hour to track down the name of the bald man with the tattooed neck who had hit Gonzo with the handgun. Kreshnik Tanush was well known for using this method of delivering messages to those he wished to intimidate, so finding out his name was easy. Identifying the two men he was with was harder, as it appeared that Tanush's crew was extensive and mostly made up of illegal immigrants, if rumours were to be believed.

Raj was relentless. Driven by the desire to please his employer and not wanting to anger him by failing to complete his task. The young man had witnessed the wrath of Inzamam Khan many times and it wasn't something Raj wished to experience.

'Paddy, it's Raj. Yeah, I'm good, thanks. Listen, did you hear about what happened to Gonzo? OK, good. I need to find out who did it. I'm pretty sure he got bitch-slapped by Kreshnik Tanush, but I need to know who was with him.

You saw Kreshnik yesterday? OK, who was he with, do you know? Oh, you don't know them. Can you tell me what they looked like?'

'Yeah,' Paddy replied. 'One was tall and skinny, in a long green parka jacket with the hood zipped round his face, and the other was short, fat and bald – and get this, he had gold-rimmed shades on. Looked like a proper dick, swaggering about like he was da man, innit.'

'OK, that's pretty much how Gonzo said they looked, so at least we've got that straight. Later.' Raj cut the call and dialled Inzamam's number.

'Raj, give me some good news.'

Raj relayed Tanush's name and the matching descriptions he'd had from Gonzo. 'You fucking genius, that's great. I'll be at the restaurant in an hour to pick you up. Have a go at finding out where this Albanian fucker hangs out.' Inzamam hung up.

Raj set about hunting down Kreshnik Tanush and his crew. He figured the best way to do that would be to head to where Gonzo had been attacked and buy some gear.

Raj grabbed an open-face crash helmet from the desk behind him and rushed out of the back door, down the alleyway to his scooter, the olive-green Vespa he rode everywhere. He loved it. It rasped into life. With a quick twist of the throttle Raj headed off across town towards Gonzo's patch. All of Inzamam's boys had very clearly defined areas they were allowed to trade from; Khan insisted on it.

'There's no sense in competing with yourself. Anyone who sells for me gets their own patch, and no one is to wander outside it. If anyone tries, they get cut off,' he had told Raj in his first week. After a month, Raj was the one marking up the map and showing the pushers where they were permitted to sell. He went to far greater lengths than Inzamam had ever done, making sure that the areas all had equal opportunity to maximise income for his employer. He researched the demographics of the local population, ensuring that there was either a densely populated housing estate nearby or a wealthy private school, college or university halls. All of these were guaranteed to generate income. In the two years since Raj had been coordinating the pushers, Inzamam's turnover had gone through the roof. Profits had soared again since Raj had been let in on the cutting.

Before he started working for Khan full time, Raj had been doing a Biomedical Science degree and had been on track to ace his course and walk into a job with one of the local teaching hospitals. He'd been introduced to Khan by a mutual friend after they'd eaten in Khan's restaurant and stayed on drinking into the night. Khan had been fascinated by what Raj was doing and asked him if he'd like to earn some money on the side. Within six months Raj had earned more, working part-time for Khan than he would have done in a

year, or more as a Biomedical Scientist and he'd gradually made the shift across to working with Khan full-time.

Raj met Gonzo outside a Tesco Express which took up the ground floor of a concrete high-rise.

'Gonzo.'

'Raj.'

'So, have you seen him?'

'Yeah, he was around the back of the flats about twenty minutes ago. I hid so he didn't see me – I didn't want any more grief.'

'No, course you didn't, mate. No worries. Do me a favour, sneak round and see if he's still knocking about, will you?'

'Will I fuck!'

'OK, let me put it to you another way. Get your fucking arse around there and see if he's still there, or I'm gonna cut your supply in half.'

'You fuckin' wouldn't.'

'Try me. Now get a fucking move on. I've got to get back to the boss.' Raj had learned a thing or two watching Inzamam intimidate the 'weak white infidels', as Khan referred to his pushers when no one but Raj was around. Raj was quietly pleased with himself for pushing Gonzo into doing his bidding; it felt good to be dishing it out for a change.

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As quietly as he could Gonzo sidled around the side of the tower block, his stomach churning like an old cement mixer. He could smell the acrid stench of piss as he crept past a metal wheelie bin,

keeping as close to the wall as he could in an attempt to remain undetected. As he drew closer to the corner of the building, he could hear heavy Eastern European accents and the smell of cigar smoke.

‘Kreshnik, I go for piss, then we move the rest. Yes?’

Gonzo stopped dead in his tracks as he heard the voice of the short, fat, bald man.

He took a couple of hasty steps backwards and his heel caught an empty beer bottle standing next to the wheelie bin. It wobbled for a second, then toppled over. It chinked as it hit the ground, then rolled under the bin. Gonzo froze, fear filling him. As he turned to run, a hand slammed down onto his bony shoulder.

‘You! What the fuck?’ The fat man’s voice was clear and close – so close. Gonzo wriggled out from under the hand but the short man was quick. He kicked the skinny pusher’s ankles out from under him, sending him crashing to the ground in front of the bin.

‘Did you not listen to our warning, small man?’ taunted the Albanian.

‘I dunno what you mean,’ stuttered Gonzo. The heavy-set man slammed a foot onto Gonzo’s shin as Gonzo desperately tried to pull himself away from the angry Eastern European.

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Rosen Kepi had spent the majority of his life in the Albanian underworld. He’d been brought to the UK by his bosses, who had promised him a better life and an endless supply of free money, courtesy of the British government. Kepi had fallen for it, had packed up his life into two holdalls, then hitched, scammed and

stowed away to get to the UK. Upon arriving in the promised land, he realised that not only did he have no way back to Albania, but he also had little choice but to do whatever his employers told him to do, regardless of how it sat with him. This only served to make him more angry – an anger that manifested itself in some of the most horrific beatings he had ever given out, earning him a fearsome reputation and ensuring that he was passed all the jobs that required his unique skills. Broken bones were not an unusual result of one of Kepi's beatings, although most of the injuries he inflicted were carried out in a red mist of fury – not with the person he was beating, but with himself for allowing him to end up in that situation.

‘There is no point in you trying to escape, little man,’ Kepi calmly informed Gonzo.

He gave a menacing, toothy grin and, without breaking eye contact with Gonzo, he ground the heel of his boot into the youngster's shin, sending a shooting pain up Gonzo's leg. Gonzo screamed – then he saw Kreshnik Tanush come around the corner.

‘You again? You do not learn.’

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Gonzo watched as the two grinned at each other, then Kreshnik said, ‘Deal with him, and properly this time.’

Gonzo saw Kepi close his eyes for a moment. He was still pinning Gonzo to the ground by his leg. Then Kepi grabbed Gonzo's hoodie and hoisted him off the ground, up and off his feet, in one easy motion. He dangled for a moment, then felt himself being

dropped. As Kepi let go, he smashed Gonzo in the jaw with his right fist, sending him hurtling against the bin. Gonzo groaned, and air rushed from his lungs. Kepi grabbed the back of Gonzo's head and bounced his face off the top edge of the bin.

Gonzo slid to the ground. He felt a shoe slam into the side of his face. Then felt the cold concrete and then the short Albanian faded to black.

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Hidden in a dark corner, Raj had silently watched every part of the brutality and had texted Inzamam their location. He dare not venture out to help his colleague for fear of suffering the same fate: a decision he reassured himself was the right one, the more pain he saw inflicted on Gonzo.

To his left, out of the corner of his eye he saw the familiar shape of Khan's Range Rover. Moments later the headlights went off and it rolled silently to a stop. Raj watched Inzamam step out of the big, black 4×4 and carefully push the driver's door closed, hardly making a sound. The tailgate opened automatically as Khan walked to the rear of the car. Raj saw him retrieve a shotgun, which he held in latex-gloved hands. He walked towards Raj, holding his finger to his lips. Raj nodded and pointed towards Gonzo and the Albanians. Silently, Raj followed Inzamam, who walked with cat-like stealth holding the shotgun out of sight just behind his right leg. The pair stepped from the cover of the bins and confronted Gonzo's attackers.

'If it isn't our Albanian cousins,' Khan mocked, standing slightly turned away so as not to reveal the firearm.

‘What the fuck do you want, Paki?’ spat Kreshnik. Raj’s glance flicked between the two, from just behind Khan.

‘Isn’t it obvious? Your head, you dumb piece of shit!’ And with that brief retort, Inzamam Khan lifted the shotgun and blasted Kepi in the face. Before his corpse hit the ground, Khan had shifted target. Without a word, he fired into Tanush’s left shoulder. The force of the shot spun the Albanian’s whole body around and he collapsed to the ground, gripping his shoulder with his right hand. He didn’t scream, didn’t cry out in pain, just gritted his teeth and scrambled to his feet. Raj watched as the Albanian stood and looked Inzamam straight in the eye, blood oozing through his fingers.

‘Well come on you weak fuck, finish the job. Or have you not got the balls? Have you any idea—.’ The sentence was cut short as Khan unloaded the shotgun directly into Kreshnik Tanush’s chest, silencing the large Albanian. Tanush’s lifeless body slammed onto the hard concrete.

Raj watched in shock as Inzamam threw the untraceable shotgun onto the ground between the two dead drug dealers. Without saying a word to Raj, he carefully scooped up Gonzo into his arms and carried the young pusher to the rear of the Range Rover. He laid him carefully on a plastic sheet that covered the floor of the boot, pulled the load cover across to conceal him, and pressed the button to close the boot.

‘Come on, Raj, jump in.’

‘I’ve got my bike here,’ Raj stuttered.

‘OK, grab your bike and meet me back at the office.’

‘Will do.’

A million thoughts raced through Raj's mind. *What was Khan going to do with Gonzo? Why was he on a plastic sheet? Why had he left the shotgun? He fucking shot the Albanians!*

Raj pulled on his crash helmet. As he did, he heard the distant sound of sirens.

Time to go.