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If of interest the complete book is available for purchase on Kindle.

One

Stuart Casewell ate the last of his doughnut and licked the sugar frosting off his fingertips. He looked down at his uniform and brushed away a few stray grains of sugar then drained the last of the Costa coffee from his takeaway cup. At the start of his shift at 8 a.m. he had wolfed down a bacon McMuffin but now three hours later he'd felt in need of a snack. Not that the rest of the people in the garage forecourt seemed to agree. As he stood by the open door of his patrol car and looked across the busy forecourt, he noted the furtive glances in his direction.

His presence usually attracted one of two reactions. There were pointed stares from those who seemed to assume he was skiving, as if a police officer was never entitled to a coffee break. Others looked away as soon as they spotted him, as though they were guilty of something. However, he had also noted the odd admiring glance. Standing at just shy of six feet tall and weighing a trim eleven stone, with hazel eyes and dark brown hair, he was used to regular shouts of "Arrest me please, officer!" from the hordes of young women stumbling around the taxi ranks when he landed a late-night duty managing the clubbers on Bradford Road.

"Yes, sir, it's a police officer," Casewell muttered to himself as he caught yet another suspicious look cast in his direction. He often reflected that he was preventing crime just by parking on the edge of the garage forecourt. Shoplifting rates were known to drop when shopkeepers installed full-size cardboard cut-outs of police officers near their entrances. So, on balance, he thought he shouldn't feel too guilty about getting a free coffee and a doughnut

once or twice a week from Ahmed, the manager of the garage's Spar 7–11.

Casewell slackened his utility belt to ease the pressure on his hip. At twenty-five, he didn't need to worry about weight gain yet; five-a-side Tuesday nights and aikido on Thursday nights helped to keep it in check.

The large garage with its Spar shop was a favourite stop off, not just for its supply of coffee and doughnuts. The garage was located in Batley in West Yorkshire and was a good central location for covering his regular patrol area of the urban triangle between Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield.

Casewell dropped his empty coffee cup into a bin, climbed back into his patrol car and watched the traffic crawling along the main Bradford Road. It was permanently bumper to bumper at this point, courtesy of two sets of traffic lights only 500 metres apart.

"Oscar Two receiving?" Casewell recognised the familiar voice of Linda Sherwood at the West Yorkshire control room in Leeds bursting out from the dash mounted speaker.

Casewell keyed his lapel microphone and replied, "Go ahead, Central."

"Oscar Two, texting details to your screen of an emergency call. The caller, a Mr Eddie Fisher, a window cleaner, has reported two householders found dead."

"Oscar Two free to respond," replied Casewell.

"48 Duke Street," he muttered to himself as he studied the address that popped up on his dashboard display screen. He couldn't place it but according to the satnav it was only 1.8 miles away, somewhere in the Carlinghow district of Batley.

Casewell started the engine, fastened his seatbelt and rolled across the garage forecourt towards the exit. As he

nosed the car bonnet out onto the road, he flicked on his blue emergency lights and siren and waited for the traffic to pause and allow him to join the traffic flow. He turned right, straddled the centre line and increased his speed as the cars in front pulled to the left and opened up a clear corridor down the centre of the road. The 2.0 litre turbo BMW 3 was capable of 150 mph and unmissable with its garish livery of chequer-board blue and yellow.

Within minutes he had cleared the double traffic-light junction and flashed past the large Tesco superstore on his left. Fewer than five minutes after leaving the garage, Casewell turned into Duke Street and killed his siren. There was no need to search for number 48 because halfway up the street a middle-aged man, dressed in jeans and a padded green gilet, was frantically waving him over.

Casewell pulled into the kerb behind a black Ford Focus with two ladders on the roof and climbed out.

“They’re dead.”

Casewell ignored the man’s shouted comment and questioned, “Mr Fisher?”

“Yeah, Eddie Fisher. I clean their windows.”

“You made the 999 call?”

“On my mobile,” replied Fisher, holding-up his mobile by way of confirmation. “They’re dead,” he repeated. “There’s blood everywhere.”

Casewell studied the man in front of him. He was about fifty, with a local accent, and he looked fairly fit and active. Casewell glanced at his hands and clothes. Fisher wasn’t holding any weapons, nor were there any signs of injuries or blood on his hands or his clothes. It was not unknown for someone to phone 999 after attacking or even killing a family member and then claiming they had found the victims. “People lie all the time.” Casewell could hear the voice of his training instructor, David Munro, in his head as

he examined the man's face. Fisher was clearly agitated and rocking slightly on his feet. His cheeks and forehead were flushed, the redness made more noticeable by his otherwise pale complexion and short fair hair.

"Check, check and check again," Casewell could hear Munro saying in his head.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"No, that's my car." Fisher replied pointing to the Ford Focus parked at the kerbside. "I'm their window cleaner."

Casewell considered calling in the registration of the Focus to get a firm ID but that could wait. "OK, can you show me what you found?"

"Down here," replied Fisher as he set off at a trot down the side of the small end-of-terrace house.

Casewell followed a few steps behind and took in a small, well-tended front garden. It was largely laid to gravel but dotted with potted plants, wild grasses and a cotoneaster with large clusters of bright red berries spreading along the side boundary fence. The stone-built house looked well maintained, with double glazing and a modern white double-glazed front door. Otherwise it was identical to thousands of other small-terraced homes, all built in the early 1900s to house workers employed in the shoddy and mungo textile trades.

The trade had put Batley on the map but it was a filthy industry with a low life expectancy. Shoddy was made by mixing shredded waste wool with a small quantity of virgin wool to create a heavy cloth for the manufacture of blankets, coats and uniforms. A similar process had created the softer mungo cloth by shredding tailors' remnants. The shredding machines had filled the mills with clouds of micro fibres, the workers' lungs and ultimately the cemeteries. The industry had died away in the 1970s

as artificial fibres, a trend for duvets rather than blankets and cheap labour in China sucked away the market.

Casewell noted that all the curtains were drawn which was unusual for mid-morning but otherwise nothing looked amiss.

“Round here,” shouted Fisher, as he disappeared out of sight around the back of the house. “In there, poor sods.”

Casewell turned the corner and found himself in a small cobbled yard with a raised rockery bed bounded by a high brick wall. Fisher was pointing through the open back door. Shards of wood from the shattered door frame were scattered across the floor and ground.

“Wait here,” commanded Casewell. He pulled on his gloves and stepped over the debris into a small kitchen. The room was dark; the window blind was fully drawn but as his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he could see the bodies of a man and woman lying on the kitchen floor partially hidden under a kitchen table.

He carefully sidestepped a pool of congealed blood and knelt down. He had listened to more than enough briefings from Crime Scene Investigators (CSI) to know not to disturb or touch anything and especially not to leave footprints or fingerprints that would waste the CSI's time to isolate. However, he had a duty to perform and he took off his glove, reached out, lifted the man's hand and felt for a pulse. It was a pointless exercise. The young Asian man was very cold to the touch and had a neat hole in his forehead and, as Casewell straightened up, he could see bloody pieces of bone and brain matter splattered across the bench top and up the front of the kitchen cabinets. Someone had clearly put a gun against the poor guy's forehead while he was still seated at the table and pulled the trigger.

Sprawled alongside him on the floor was the body of a young woman who, from the bloodstains across her front, appeared to have been shot in the chest. Casewell checked her pulse but she too was clearly long dead.

Casewell stood up again and suppressed a rising sense of nausea. CSI would never forgive him if he threw up. He had seen dead bodies before, his grandfather at home, several in the morgue and a junkie lying dead in a squat, but never anything like this. The town of Batley was on the edge of the massive Leeds/Bradford conurbation but violent crime was rare and murder virtually unknown. The worst tended to be the drunks knocking lumps out of each other after stumbling out of the nightclubs and curry houses along Bradford Road every weekend.

“Well?”

Casewell whirled around to face the kitchen door and found Fisher standing on the doorstep, “Don’t come in.”

Eddie Fisher retreated back into the yard, “They’re dead, aren’t they?”

“I’m afraid they are,” confirmed Casewell, as he stepped back out of the kitchen and faced Fisher into the yard. “Do you know them?”

“It’s Adeem Amir and his wife, Bisma. A lovely young couple. I know they’re Muslims and all that but they always give me a Christmas tip. Couldn’t get a nicer couple. Why the heck would anyone want to kill them?”

Casewell ignored the question and asked “Are you OK?” as he touched Fisher’s arm and studied his face. The last thing he wanted was for him to collapse from delayed shock.

Fisher nodded his head and speculated, “Probably some druggies off their heads tried to rob them.”

That possibility was also going through Casewell’s head. There was an easy supply of heroin and cocaine just

up the road in Bradford, and street crime for cash was on the rise, but burglary and a double murder to fund a fix was perhaps a jump too far, even for the most desperate of junkies.

"So you were here to clean the windows, is that right?" enquired Casewell.

"Yeah, I always do their windows on a Tuesday morning."

"Same time?"

"More or less around 11a.m."

"So how did you know something was wrong?"

"I always do the fanlight," replied Fisher, pointing to the small window above the kitchen door. "Some window cleaners wouldn't bother with that but I like to do a proper job."

Casewell looked up at the fanlight and the short ladder propped against the wall, "Your ladder?"

Fisher nodded. Casewell placed the ladder under the window, climbed up to the half-moon fanlight above the kitchen door and peered into the kitchen. It was dark but he could clearly see Mr Amir's feet protruding from below the edge of the kitchen table.

"I could just see his feet," said Fisher, reading Casewell's mind. "When I saw no movement I thought he must have collapsed, had a heart attack or something."

"How about Mrs Amir?" asked Casewell as he descended the ladder.

"Not until I got into the kitchen."

"So how did you get in?"

"Well, I knocked and knocked and got no answer. I thought of phoning for an ambulance and then I thought he might be dead before an ambulance gets here, so I'd better do something."

"And?" prompted Casewell.

"I lifted one of those rocks" replied Fisher, pointing to the small rockery, "and I smashed the lock and broke the door open and found them."

"So the door wasn't damaged when you arrived?"

"Oh no, I did that. I had to. The door was locked. That's OK, isn't it?" he added, looking at Casewell for reassurance.

"Yes," replied Casewell, "You've done absolutely the right thing." After a pause he added, "I'm going to radio this in so can you please wait at the side of the house? Don't go anywhere. Other officers are going to want to talk to you."

Fisher nodded his agreement and seemed to visibly relax having passed on the burden of his discovery.

Casewell was on the point of raising his microphone when he hesitated as he looked back into the kitchen and his eye caught the open door into the living room. He remembered all too well how the French police had looked like bumbling idiots when they failed to notice a young girl hiding beneath the skirts of her dead mother at a murder scene. He decided to do a quick walk through to ensure no one else was lying either dead or injured in the house.

He stepped through the kitchen into the living room at the front of the house. The room was dominated by a navy-and-white striped settee and matching armchair facing a large flat-screen Samsung TV. "Any junkie would have had that," Casewell thought. His eye roved around the room, taking in a small sideboard, a gas fire, a tall stone mantelpiece and a carriage clock. He quickly checked behind all the furniture and the floor-length tightly drawn blue curtains. There was nothing suspicious and nothing appeared to have been disturbed.

He stepped into the small hallway and climbed the staircase. Family photographs marched up the wall with

the Amirs looking happy and smiling in a restaurant, a garden, at a wedding celebration and standing in front of the sculpture of a giant hare which Casewell recognised from the grounds of the West Yorkshire Sculpture Park just down the M1. It reminded him of the need to check for next of kin. Given the close nature of the local Muslim community, it was possible that parents or relatives lived nearby. Casewell speeded up. The last thing he needed was for a family member to step into the kitchen below and discover their son or daughter or relatives lying dead.

Upstairs the space above the hallway had been converted into a bathroom. To the front there was a double bedroom and a small single bedroom at the back. He looked into the bathroom but, apart from his own face in the mirror, there was nothing to see. He stepped into the front bedroom and flicked on the light. The double bed was neatly made. A yellow duvet with white daisies added a splash of colour in an otherwise plainly decorated room and laid out on top were two sets of clothes which looked ready to step into. Other than that, the room was just big enough to accommodate a bedside table and a wardrobe. Casewell quickly looked under the bed, behind the curtains and in the wardrobe then did a similar search in the small back bedroom. There was nothing to see and nothing suspicious.

Satisfied that the house was empty, Casewell quickly retraced his steps and re-entered the kitchen. He paused to take in the scene. The table was undisturbed, with flat bread stacked on a plate, a bowl of what looked like yogurt and half-drunk cups of tea. The couple had clearly just started breakfast and were still dressed in their night clothes. Whatever had happened, they had been overpowered quickly. Casewell resisted the temptation to

check the temperature of the tea and food for fear of contaminating the scene.

He briefly pondered the possibility of a murder followed by a suicide but, with no sign of a gun, he felt safe to conclude murder. Ultimately, however, that would be for others to decide. The 'others' would come from Leeds. Batley police station wasn't even staffed full-time: there was just a single inspector, a sergeant and two other officers patrolling the whole of the Calder Valley.

Casewell looked at his watch. It was 11.25, only twenty-five minutes since he had been tasked to respond to the emergency call. "Central from Oscar Two," he announced into his lapel mike.

"Receiving, Oscar Two," replied the calm, neutral voice of Linda Sherwood.

"Looks like we've got a double murder. Both victims have been shot dead."

"Received, Oscar Two. Please secure the scene and stand by. Central out."

Casewell had no need to act further. The central control room in Leeds would already be directing the nearest uniformed support to him, which would mean Batley followed by Dewsbury and Morley. In addition, the divisional inspector and a whole Homicide and Major Enquiry Team (HMET) would soon be hammering down the M621 from the headquarters of the West Yorkshire police on Elland Road in Leeds.

Casewell knew that every police officer, paramedic, community support officer and traffic warden in the area would soon find an excuse to come along and take a look. Double murders might be common in London, and sometimes occur in Manchester or Leeds, but they were unknown in Batley. All Casewell could do was to act as instructed, secure the scene and wait.

He made his way back around the side of the house to the front. A small group of onlookers had already gathered, attracted by the flashing blue lights on top of his patrol car. Eddie Fisher, the window cleaner, was clearly over his shock and was standing by the garden gate, telling all. Casewell cursed himself for leaving the man free to roam. He ignored questions from the concerned neighbours as he approached and waved everyone back up the pavement and away from the garden gate. Next he stowed Fisher in the back seat of his car and lifted a roll of blue-and-white chequered crime scene tape with the legend "*Police line do not cross*" out of his car boot. Casewell attached the tape to a fence post by the garden gate, stretched the tape across the pavement onto the road and wrapped it around Fisher's Ford Focus and his own car and back across the pavement to a fence post at the far edge of the property to create a large semi-circular exclusion zone.

His actions only served to increase interest from the swelling crowd of local residents and a rising number of shouted questions. He ignored them and adopted a sentry position alongside the garden gate with his hands clasped in front of him.

"Is it true they've been shot dead?"

Casewell whirled around to find a middle-aged woman leaning over the side boundary fence behind him, "Are you a neighbour?"

"Yes, Mrs Patel." She paused vividly distressed before continuing, "I've known Adeem and Bisma since they moved in three years ago. Is it true? Eddie said they've been shot. I can't believe someone would wish to harm them."

"I really sorry, I know it is a major shock but I can't say anything," replied Casewell "but as soon as more officers

arrive, they will want to speak to you about anything you may have seen or heard."

"I really can't believe it. I never heard a thing," she added shaking her head and wiping away a tear. "It's such a terrible thing to have happened and today of all days when they should well on their way to London."

"A holiday?" queried Casewell.

"No, they were going to meet the Prime Minister."

Casewell stared at her in disbelief. "I'm not following you why were they going to meet the Prime-Minster?"

"Just a thank you for community leaders. Adeem runs the Batley Youth Association and he and Bisma organised last year's Community Action Festival. They got an invitation to lunch at Number Ten to meet the Prime Minister along with other community organisers. One of those 'big society' things. They were really looking forward to having their photographs taken on the steps of Number Ten with the Prime Minister." She choked and reached for a tissue tucked in her sleeve as her tears flowed freely.

Casewell reached out and touched her arm as a gesture of support, "I know this is very difficult but did they say what time they were going to meet the Prime-Minster?"

"About twelve, I think," she said as she struggled to compose herself, "followed by a tour of Number Ten and lunch with the Home Secretary."

Casewell was no longer listening; his mind was turning cartwheels as he pondered the unexpected information. He ended the conversation and walked back down the side of the house as fast as he could without breaking into a run. He paused in the kitchen and glanced again at the dead couple, the closed window blind and the small skylight above the door.

"They were never expected to be found," Casewell concluded. He looked at his watch. It was already 11.40

a.m. He knew he would be bollocked for not following the chain of command but there was no time. He took a deep breath and raised his radio.

Two

Sajid Khan edged forward in the queue. He glanced behind him at Qadira and gave her a reassuring nod. They were very close and he didn't want her to lose her nerve. He had contacted her via What's App after she had defended and mourned the defeat of the Islamic State online. He had cautiously initiated contact with her over several months without revealing too much about himself in case she wasn't what she had seemed. The security services were becoming too good at infiltrating the online jihadi networks. She'd checked out. A loyal brother had tracked her down to her home in Southwark and confirmed that she was who she said she was an A-Level student studying English, French and Arabic. Over an almond croissant and an orange juice in Costa, she had agreed to pose as his wife and join him in Downing Street to confront the Prime Minister on the increasing levels of Islamophobia in Britain. She didn't need to know anything else. Up ahead the police officer controlling admittance to Downing Street through the side visitor gate waved another person through and the queue shuffled forward a further two paces. Sajid studied the throng of tourists jostling for photographs next to the tall security gates and wondered if any plain clothes officers were mixing with the crowd. It was an added danger but not a major one.

As his eyes roved over the crowd, Sajid spotted Amjid, iPhone in hand, busy taking photographs through the Downing Street railings, no different to all the tourists around him. There was no sign of Javid. He resisted the

temptation to crane his neck and look around too much. It was vital that he didn't attract any attention.

A flash of green caught his eye and, as a young Japanese couple moved away from the railings, he spotted Javid wearing a black beanie hat with a green rucksack on his back standing in front of the gates. Javid was just 5' 5' feet tall and easily lost in the crowd but his role in what was to come was vital. In contrast, the tall figure of Mohammed Bismillah standing across Whitehall on the pavement outside the Ministry of Defence was plainly visible, as were Imtiaz and Ayyub standing in the centre of Whitehall beside the Cenotaph. Sajid met their eyes for a second, no more than that. Too many video cameras monitored Whitehall and, unseen on the roof of the Ministry of Defence, a permanent coterie of Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Specialist Firearm Officers (CT-SFO) snipers monitored the approaches to Downing Street. Sajid knew that the hidden watchers must not notice any signs of communication between them before they were ready to strike. He touched his clean-shaven face and smoothed his tie. He had adopted the camouflage clothing of the city and wore a dark blue suit and white shirt with an abstract block-patterned tie and black brogues. His appearance was as far removed as possible from the thick black beard and *throbe* he had adopted while living in Raqqa. His face bore no outward appearance of conflict but his fingers reached down to his right thigh and involuntary traced the line of the raised shrapnel scar stretching from his knee to his hip.

The ache he still endured was a permanent reminder of the battle for Kobani and the final defeat of Islamic State by the Syrian Democratic Force (SDF). It was Javid who had saved his life by quickly using his trouser belt as a

tourniquet before they were dragged out of the rubble by the victorious SDF forces and incarcerated in the living hell of Hasakad prison in Northern Syria. A prison designed to hold 800 was crammed to bursting point with 1400 prisoners and so full that the guards rarely walked the corridors and kept their distance. The SDF tacitly accepted sharia rule within the prison and acquiesced to the weekly audiences held by Sheikh Umar after Friday prayers. Sajid was in awe. Like most Islamic fighters he only knew Sheikh Umar from You Tube with his many passionate calls for all Muslims to embrace their duty to establish the *Tawhid* or rule on Earth of the one true God against all unbelievers. Sajid was transfixed to sit at the feet of the small bespectacled, middle-aged man from Pakistan who spoke with such passion about God's will. Umar's words were compelling and Sajid remembered feeling ashamed he had doubted Allah's will in the aftermath of the defeat of Islamic State. He regularly prayed for Allah's forgiveness for his doubts because it was his personal weakness. The creation of Islamic State, as revealed by Sheikh Umar had never been part of Allah's plan. In a low commanding voice he had confided, "Allah has not forsaken us. The declaration of an Islamic State was never part of Allah's plan but the mistaken vanity of our martyred Caliph Abu Bahr al-Baghdadi. Islam does not aspire to have a border and passports. Allah sets no boundaries to Islam. It cannot be contained. By identifying Islam as a state and gathering all our best warriors together in one place our Caliph simply presented the unbelievers with an easy target for their warplanes. Allah's will is for an Islamic world not an Islamic State. We must learn from the victory of our Taliban brothers in Afghanistan and be as one with the people. We will live among and flow with the people and take the war to the unbelievers in Europe.

The queue shuffled forward another two paces Sajid stepped back to stand alongside Qadira to visually reinforce their presentation as a young non-threatening couple. He smiled at Qadira in what he hoped was a reassuring manner. She was dressed as he had requested modestly but smartly without a *niqab* over her face to avoid drawing unnecessary attention. Attention was the last thing he wanted. Her choice of a pale blue and yellow floral *shalwar kameez* and matching *hijab* was perfect. His compatriots also blended into the crowd in their universal tourist uniforms of anoraks, jeans, trainers and T-shirts.

Sajid looked at his watch. It was 11.45 a.m. The embossed invitation he held in his right-hand invited Mr and Mrs Amir to join the Prime Minister for a photo-call on the steps of Number Ten at twelve noon followed by a buffet lunch in the White Drawing Room with the Home Secretary. The accompanying letter described the event as a thank you for all the Youth Action leaders across Great Britain who had organised multi-faith festivals to promote cross-community respect and tolerance. Before joining Islamic State Sajid would have agreed with such sentiments but his eyes had been opened. He didn't know Mr and Mrs Amir but he had learned to despise Muslims like them and the tame imams who betrayed Islam with their promotion of different faiths as though all faiths were equal. Their sin as Muslims was greater than that of the *kuffars* or non-believers. According to Sheikh Umar they were guilty of *takfir* – those who would deny the existence of the one true God – and death was their only fit and just punishment.

He looked down Whitehall and reflected that just six stops on the District Line from Westminster would take him to Whitechapel where his parents still lived. He had contacted them from prison to let them know he was still

alive but he had not contacted them since. They did not understand. His past life as a waiter in the Karachi Star restaurant, doling out chicken tikka masala and garlic naans to the after-pub crowds, had been without purpose or honour but in Syria he had found both purpose and honour. Looking back, he recognised that Allah had been testing him to see if he would accept his duty to protect and assist his fellow Muslims. Night after night he had filled bins with uneaten food while on Al Jazeera and Sky television he watched starving Muslim men, women and children sitting in the refugee camps along the Turkish border with Syria, begging for something to eat. He had happily responded to a What's App jihad post and enrolled in the Kataa'ib the British Brigade and forged a deep and lasting bond with the many other British volunteers. Mohammed Bismillah and Amjid Abbas, were both from Birmingham and unemployed; Javid Bashir was a student from Luton; Imtiaz Patel was a taxi driver in Portsmouth, and Ayyub Ashraf was a waiter in Chelmsford. He was very proud of their willingness to join him and fulfil *fard kifaya* or the sacred duty of every Muslim to embrace jihad.

He watched as Javid moved slowly from his position in front of the Downing Street gates to lean against the low railing that separated those queuing to the pedestrian gate from the crowd of tourists. He never looked once in Sajid's direction. He was playing his part well.

Sheikh Umar had opened their eyes to the false history of their school classrooms. He had challenged them at one of his regular Friday audiences asking "What do you know of your history?" Before rebuking them for not knowing the significance of 1095. "The year 1095 was the year the Christian Pope Urban II declared holy war on Islam," he had explained. "And for two whole centuries, the Christian crusaders massacred hundreds of thousands of Muslims

and laid waste our cities. The city of Aleppo fell to the Crusaders on the twenty-fourth of January 1260 and the streets ran ankle deep with the blood of innocent Muslim men, women and children. So,” he had concluded, “your teachers taught you all about the Norman invasion 1066 and perhaps Henry the Eighth, but nothing about the Muslim Caliphates that once governed the whole of the Middle East, North Africa and even into Spain and Italy. You also know nothing about the division of the Middle East by the European colonial powers after World War One to control the oil fields and to enrich themselves, nor their hand in the collapse of the last Muslim Caliphate in 1924, which ended Muslim rule across the Middle East. Tell me, were your teachers all Christians, perhaps? Is their history your history? Do they still loudly sing “Jerusalem” and “Onward Christian Soldiers” in the school assemblies and boast of their Crusader wars? Open your eyes! Are you British or are you Muslims?” You are not British he had barked you are Muslims and part of a worldwide brotherhood that renders national borders meaningless. The memory of that discussion with Sheikh Umar was still vivid for Sajid. No one had spoken but when he had looked around at the faces of his companions he had felt a sense of shame at their ignorance of their own history. No one else appeared to have the courage to speak so Sajid heard himself shout out, “We are blessed to be Muslims and we will assist our Muslim brothers as best we can.”

A murmur of recognition reached Sajid’s ears as a woman with short brunette hair navigated a path through the crowd walking in the direction of the gate reserved for official pass holders. Her face was familiar but he struggled to remember who she was. He searched his memory of Government ministers but nothing came to mind.

“Looks like we will be on Sky said Qadira turning to face him, “that’s Beth Rigby going in.”

Of course, it was Sajid muttered to himself she regularly reported events from Downing Street for Sky News. With any luck, he thought, she would capture live the assassination of the British Prime-Minster and report it around the world. He was delighted to think that Sheikh Umar would be watching in real time and witness the call to jihad in Britain. It would repay Sheikh Umar for his trust and faith in them. This was their destiny. It was why Allah had spared him in Kobani and kept him safe until the prison gates had finally opened. The SDF had wearied of too many broken promises from European states to reclaim their nationals and released them but Sajid was sure it was Allah’s intervention. Didn’t they pray everyday to be allowed to continue to serve Allah’s will? They had followed Sheikh Umar into the mountains of Iraq as he gathered and rallied the scattered survivors of Islamic State. Umar had treated them all as brothers and equals and during long night of prayer and discussion they pledged their lives to the service of Allah. They broke their fast on the evening of the 27th day of Ramadan with a meal of lamb, goat, almonds and figs. The 27th marked the *Laylat al-Qadr* or “Night of Power” when God had first revealed to the Prophet the Holy Quran. Sajid remembered in a warm wave of emotion how Sheikh Umar had held each one of them in his gaze before confiding, “Allah is with us. Allah has appeared before me and honoured me as a *Nabi* or spiritual guide to unite all Muslims.” Sheikh Umar had stood up and unfurled a Black Banner of the Eagle with its white circle and bold Arabic inscription while he closely studied their faces, “in the West they call this flag the “Black Banner of Jihad”. I have no need to translate the words of the *Shahada* have I?”

Sajid remembered leaning forward and tracing his finger across the Arabic inscription on the banner and reading, "*There is no god but God. Muhammed is the messenger of God*".

"This is not a statement about God but a command from God," Umar had proclaimed. "Through me Allah has declared a *dar-al-harb*; a state of perpetual war against the unbeliever. Islam does not fight one battle but follows the path of the *dawla* – a centuries view of history. The scriptures inform us of a constant cycle of defeat and victory. The tide goes out but it also comes back in again and each time it returns the high tide advances a bit further. Nationality is nothing. Nationality is man-made lines on a map and not worthy of your loyalty. Our only loyalty is to Allah and to Allah alone and to the one true faith. "They think they have defeated us but they have only unleashed a more deadly *dar-al-harb*. Already the streets of Brussels, Paris and London have run with the blood of the infidels as many brave brothers armed with nothing more than knives embrace martyrdom. Your duty is done here. The world will not notice your martyrdom in Syria or Iraq but they will in London. I want you to raise this Banner in Downing Street the very heart of the Crusader capital and to summons every British Muslim to the Banner. Listen to your commander Abaas Masood because he will guide your actions and place you on the pathway to everlasting glory at the side of Allah.

Sajid remembered with pride how he had leapt to his feet and spontaneously exclaimed, "We would be honoured to be selected for *shahid* and to fight and die as martyrs." Umar had acknowledged his passion and replied, "the way of the warrior is not an easy one" but "I would like to pray with you."

"All invitations please."

Sajid looked up and was jerked out of his thoughts as the police officer guarding the visitor gate to Downing Street admitted the last couple in front of them. He instinctively gripped the hem of his suit jacket and felt the edge of the Black Banner he had carried concealed under the lining of his suit jacket the whole way from the hands of Sheikh Umar. He glanced again at the invitation in his hand and pushed it back into the A4 envelope. Inside No 10 the white middle classes would be waiting to greet them with a samosa in one hand and a glass of Prosecco in the other. They were so ignorant. They thought they could divide Islam with their talk of British Muslims but today the Black Banner of Jihad would say different. He had no illusions and nor had his companions. They all expected to die a martyr's death but they would die in the service of Allah. At the point of death with their duty done they knew they would be instantly raised from the world of men to sit at the feet of Allah in everlasting paradise. Sheikh Umar himself had assured them of this. At dawn they had prayed together for the last time, cleansed their bodies and congratulated and hugged one another.

Sajid stepped forward as the couple in front were admitted into Downing Street and beckoned Qadira to keep in step with him. Getting through the gate and into the Visitor Centre was all he needed assuming that Javid and the rest were ready to follow his lead. He looked towards the railings and met Javid's eyes. It was time. It was their high tide.

Three

Chief Superintendent Karen Davies stood by the window of the central control room of New Scotland Yard and looked down at the usual gaggle of tourists who were having their photographs taken alongside the famous blue triangular rotating sign. Most had stumbled across it by accident while looking for Downing Street or simply wandering along the Embankment. There'd been talk of removing it to end the tiresome weaving between the regular groups of tourists as officers entered and exited the building. However, to the disappointment of most it was included in the relocation of New Scotland Yard from behind the Supreme Court to its new home on the banks of the Thames in the shadow of the Ministry of Defence. Like the largely redundant red telephone boxes it had become a must have photo on the tourist trail. It was a major blow to the Met's diehard smokers who had grown weary of fielding questions from curious tourists while trying to enjoy their fag break and endlessly pointing the way to Downing Street. Beyond the sign Davies had a perfect view over the Thames to the London Eye. It was a much sought after view on New Year's Eve when the spectacular fireworks display ushered in the New Year.

At age 38 Davies was young to be a Chief Superintendent and she knew that down in the Locker Room the chat would all be about the unfair fast track that existed for graduates like her and of course the sexist accusation of being the token woman within a largely male command structure. Davies had worked hard for her 2.1 in Psychology from Warwick University and she'd successfully outperformed her male rivals for each and

every promotion. She was in no doubt that she had been appointed on merit and barring any significant cock-ups there was no reason why she shouldn't be the Met's next female Commissioner in another ten years or so. Davies was five foot eight and had long since given up her long hair for a short largely maintenance free bob in glossy chestnut brown although the stylist at Toni and Guy probably had a more trendy name for it. Beyond that she was not too fussed about make-up and beauty regimes and especially not at work. Some foundation, a light touch of eye shadow to accentuate her green eyes and a gentle blusher were more than sufficient and especially given her standard issue navy uniform with its knee length skirt, tunic, white blouse and topped with a chequered cravat. It was a long way from glamour.

Davies removed her gold framed glasses and found a tissue in her pocket and gave them a quick polish as she turned away from the window and looked across the control room and squinted at the video wall. The multiple video screens cast a soft glow over the room.

The control room staff could select from hundreds of video feeds and there was scarcely a street or intersection in London that could not be watched live. No one could walk through London without being captured not only on police surveillance cameras but by the many more in-store cameras, transport, traffic, public building, and Royal Park security cameras. Beyond this the Metropolitan Police helicopter, drones and video vans could beam live video to the control room from any incident and on sensitive operations officers equipped with body-wore cams could broadcast to the control room exactly what the officers were seeing. The difficulty of sifting and viewing the thousands of video feeds was resolved by the parallel development and perfection of AI enabled facial

recognition and automatic car number plate recognition (ANPR) alerts. Any individual or car of interest could be automatically tracked across London with ease.

In front of the video wall a team of twelve control room staff monitored London twenty-four hours per day and acted under the direction of the Gold Commander. The role of Gold Commander was regularly rotated among the senior officers of the Metropolitan Police and was first introduced in 1985 in the wake of serious rioting in North London when competing commands and contradictory orders were deemed to have added to the chaos.

The control room was quiet. Sky News was running on the central screen but with the sound muted. The ticker tape highlighted any breaking news and this often alerted the control room to emerging incidents faster than normal communication channels. London was overall remarkably quiet and especially for a city of eight million people. A three-vehicle shunt in the outside lane of the North bound M.40 at Loudwater had backed up traffic to Gerrard's Cross. At Oxford Circus the London Fire Brigade and ambulance service were dealing with 'one under' on the Victoria Line. The less than euphemistic 'one under' was the standard alert for a commuter hit by a tube train. Whether suicide, accident or murder was yet to be determined but the control room was keeping an eye on developments and awaiting analysis of the video feed from the platform. The silence of the control room was broken by the soft purr of a telephone ringing on the central communications desk.

"Can you tell me what this is about?" The distinctive Liverpudlian cadence of Communications Officer Helen Atkins caused a few heads to look up.

After a few minutes Atkins turned in her chair towards Davies, "Ma'am I've got a Police Officer Casewell in

Batley, West Yorkshire on the telephone who says he must speak to the Gold Commander.”

Davies turned from her position at the window and in answer to her gestures Atkins shrugged her shoulders and indicated that she didn't know what it was about. Davies crossed the floor to the communications desk and donned the proffered headset. After a few moments listening she asked, “and why are raising this with me?”

Davies placed her hand over the boom mic and commanded in a voice that indicated some urgency, “No.10 guest list on screen now.” Two desks away hands moved over a keyboard and one of the video screens lit up with the guest list for No 10. Davies stared at the screen while she continued to listen. Davies waved her hand to get attention, “A Mr and Mrs Amir of Batley, West Yorkshire.” In response the list was scrolled up and stopped at the names Mr Adeem Amir and Mrs Bisma Amir. The checkbox was empty indicating that they had not yet entered Downing Street. Davies took her hand off her mic and ordered, “Casewell, look for invitations, they'll be white and postcard sized with an embossed portcullis,” she added.

In Batley, Stuart Casewell turned on his heel and stepped back into the small kitchen of the terraced house and quickly scanned the benchtop, table and floor. Nothing. He returned to the living room and found three envelopes filed behind the clock on the mantelpiece. On quick inspection he found a Visa credit card bill, a statement for a M&S store card account and an electricity bill. His mind flashed back to the clothes laid out in the bedroom and the suitcase on the bedroom floor.

He sprinted up the stairs and lifted both sets of clothes off the bed and checked the pockets of the man's suit. Nothing. He was about to tip the contents of the suitcase

on the floor when his eye caught the handbag on the bedside table. Much more likely, he thought to himself and with disregard for any scenes of crime protocols he tipped the contents of the handbag out onto the bed. He snatched up a single white envelope and found two train tickets for the 6 30 a.m. service from Leeds to King's Cross but no invitations. He returned his attention to the suitcase and emptied it out onto the bedroom floor and raked through the contents. There wasn't much just more clothes, underwear, and shoes. Casewell straightened up and keyed his lapel mike, "I've found train tickets to King's Cross but no invitations."

"Thank you Officer Casewell. Keep looking. I'm passing you back to Officer Atkins for full details and come back immediately with anything further." Davies set the headset back down on the comms desk and walked towards the video screen.

"Downing Street please."

The central screen sprang to life and Davies found herself looking down Downing Street from the direction of Whitehall.

"All feeds."

A further seven of the surrounding video screens flickered to life and displayed Downing Street from different angles and viewpoints. Across the control room all eyes were on the video screens as everyone absorbed the tension and urgency of tone in Davies' voice. However, there was nothing to see all looked normal.

"Gate," commanded Davies.

The view of the main gates to Downing Street shifted from one of the side screens to the main central screen. The large imposing gates with raised crash barrier beyond had been installed on the direction of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the height of the IRA threat to

London in 1989 and were still routinely referred to as the 'Thatcher Gates.' They were ram proof for anything bar a tank.

Davies could see a queue of men and women at the pedestrian gate with an officer checking names and appointments. She stared at the queue steadily shuffling forward and looked over at the control room clock. It was 11.47 a.m. Davies pursed her lips. She could simply radio the heavily armed officers who constituted Blue Watch in Downing Street and order the detention of anyone using the names Mr and Mrs Amir for entry. The danger she pondered was if they were armed and denied access they might open fire or detonate suicide vests or start a running gun-battle across Whitehall.

Blue Watch could not leave Downing Street and pursue suspects. Gold Commanders were not selected for hesitation. Davies stepped rapidly to the comms desk and donned the headset.

"Gold Commander to all stations."

Davies paused to give all officers a split second to tune into her broadcast and repeated her words,

"Gold Commander to all stations, Citadel, Citadel, Citadel I repeat Citadel all stations acknowledge."

Davies set down the headset and in response to the stares and unspoken questions from the control room staff stated, "comms log the time and implement full Citadel protocols."

A buzz of activity swept across the control room. At the comms desk Hazel Atkins clicked on the Citadel icon on her desktop and quickly scrolled down the menu choices and clicked on the single word, "Activate." Within seconds an electronic communications tree lit up computer screens across the whole of Whitehall, MI5 headquarters alongside the Thames at Lambeth Bridge and further upstream the

headquarters of M16 alongside Vauxhall Bridge. An override command to the designated computer screens flashed one simple message, "Gold Commander has declared Citadel." However, it was more than a message it was a command with well-rehearsed reactions.

In response to Citadel every Government building across Whitehall, the Houses of Parliament, Portcullis House, No. 10, and Downing Street entered into immediate lock-down. Doorkeepers were authorised to seal all entrances to their buildings and to bar all movement in or out. The Metropolitan Police were tasked with closing all roads into Whitehall to isolate the Government quarter and teams of fully armed SCO19 officers were directed to guard each major intersection and to reinforce Blue Watch in Downing Street and Parliament. No vehicles or pedestrians were permitted to leave or enter Whitehall while Citadel was in force.

At the Horse Guards military barracks just a block above Downing Street the ceremonial guards mounted on horseback in full dress uniform received orders to dismount and their places were taken by fully armed soldiers in combat dress.

Davies looked around as the door to the control room of New Scotland yard opened and the familiar figures of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Sir Charles Brand and Commander Bob Collins of the Anti-Terrorism Branch stepped into the room. Davies acknowledged their presence and returned to studying the video images of Downing Street. One of the significant criticisms of the police operation at the time of the London bombings in 2005 had been the chaos in the control room with too many senior officers crowding in and too many voices offering opinions and questioning options. Davies was Gold Commander. It had fallen to her watch and everyone

from the Commissioner down would follow her lead. Consequently, Brand and Collins stood in silence at the back of the control room and restricted themselves to watching and listening.

Davies looked at the queue still shuffling forward, “has Blue Watch acknowledged?”

“They want to know whether they can admit the last six people invited to the Prime Minister’s reception and whether the ones outside No 10 can go in or not,” replied Atkins swivelling in her seat to face Davies.

“Jesus wept,” responded Davies snatching up the headset from the Comms Desk, “this is the Gold Commander, Citadel, I repeat Citadel. Seal Downing Street.”