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My Mam Shirley

Written by Julie Shaw

Published by HarperElement

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JULIE SHAW
MY MAM
SHIRLEY

**THE TRUE STORY OF YORKSHIRE'S
NOTORIOUS CRIMINAL FAMILY**

H A R P E R
element

Some names and identities have been changed in this memoir, to protect both the living and the children of those who have died. Some changes have been made to historical facts for the same reason.

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Echoes of My Past

*A wall full of faces smile down on me,
And my heart begins to swell,
Past fuses with present so seamlessly,
Oh the stories these pictures could tell.*

*Old black and white memories are dancing,
Side by side with the colour of youth,
Hidden heartache temporarily halted,
By smiles that are clouding the truth.*

*Such happy times, such sad times,
Each inextricably linked to the last,
With spaces left for the future,
Amid these echoes of my past.*

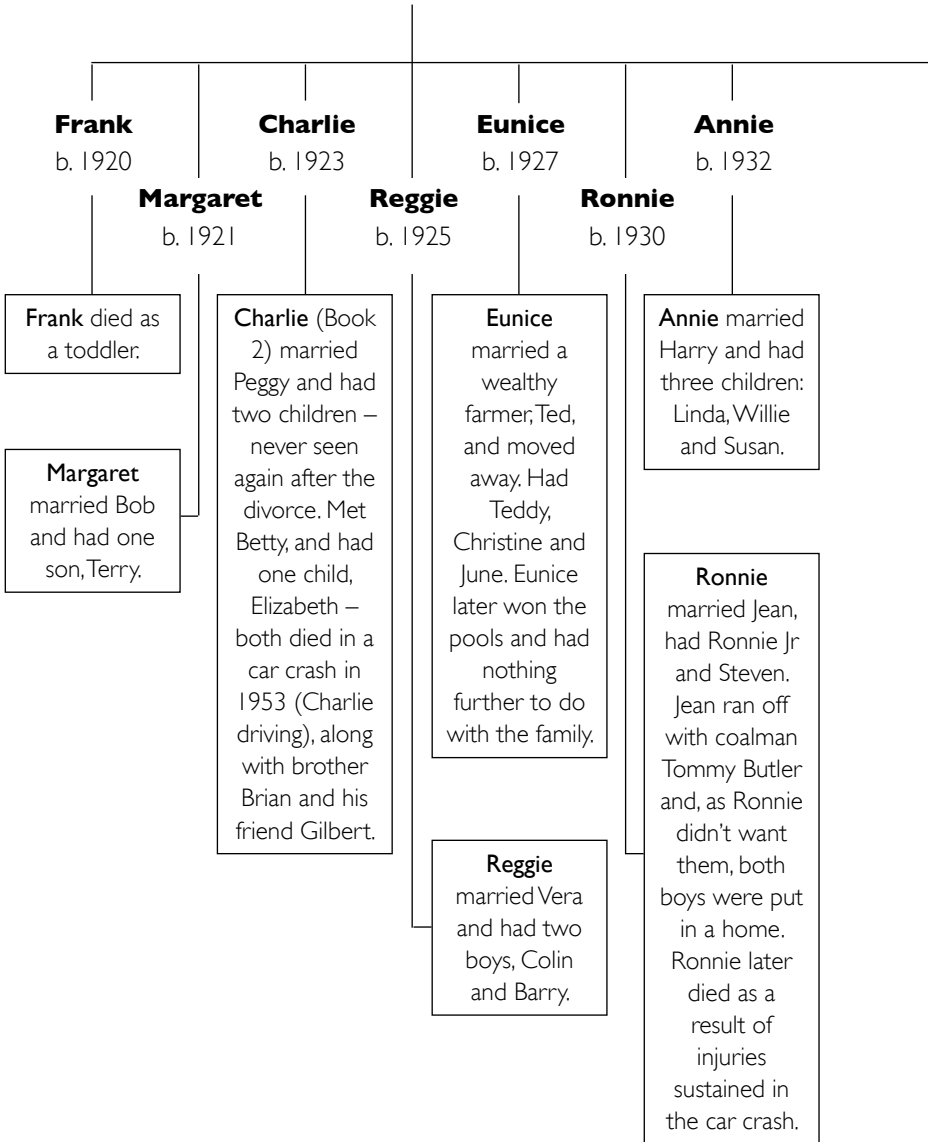
Note by the Author

My name is Julie Shaw, and my father, Keith, is the only surviving member of the 13 Hudson siblings, born to Annie and Reggie Hudson on the infamous Canterbury Estate in Bradford. We were and are a very close family, even though there were so many of us, and those of us who are left always will be.

I wanted to write these stories as a tribute to my parents and family. The stories are all based on the truth but, as I'm sure you'll understand, I've had to disguise some identities and facts to protect the innocent. Those of you who still live on the Canterbury Estate will appreciate the folklore that we all grew up with: the stories of our predecessors, good and bad, and the names that can still strike fear or respect into our hearts – the stories of the Canterbury Warriors.

ANNIE AND REGGIE HUDSON

Married 1919



Hudson Family Tree

June
b. 1933

Keith
b. 1937

Joe
b. 1943

Brian
b. 1935

Malcolm
b. 1940

David
b. 1946

June married Jock and had three children: Lyndsey, Vinnie (Book 1) and Josie.

Keith married Shirley (Book 3) and had three children: Julie (the author), Glenn and Paula.

Joe married Sandra and had Ricky, Michael, Beverley and Scott, who died as a toddler. Married Patsy and had Joe and Amanda. Married Sharon and had Kelly and Karl.

Brian died in a car crash in 1953 (brother Charlie at the wheel).

Malcolm married Valerie and had three kids: Stephen, Donna and Tracie. Was a fighter and loved to drink and cause trouble.

David married Pauline and had Brian and Paul. Then married Susan and had David, Lee and Paula.

Prologue

Listerhills, Bradford, 1946

Shirley glared at the man who was sitting across the table from her; sitting, moreover, in her mam's chair. He was old and very tall and he was staring at her.

He leaned forward. 'You'll sit there all day, madam, if that's what it takes,' he said. 'But you *will* eat those sprouts and that's an end to it.' Then he sat back in her mam's chair and lit a cigarette. Shirley looked down at the disgusting green balls on her plate. No way was she eating them. Her mam wouldn't have made her eat them. Her mam had gone to work – she worked on the trolley buses and had left hours and hours ago – and if Shirley had to sit there till she came home, then she would.

Shirley couldn't quite believe her mam had gone and left her with this strange man in the first place. Normally when she went to work she'd leave her with her Granny Wiggins or her Auntie Edna, but then the man had turned up last night and they'd both sat Shirley down, with serious looks on their faces. 'This is your dad,' her mum had explained. 'He's come home from the war.'

Shirley didn't remember much about the war, but she knew she had a daddy and that he'd been in it, far across the sea, somewhere hot. He was called Raymond and her mam said he was going to be in charge now, which apparently included

cooking all the meals when her mum was out at work and forcing her to eat things she hated.

Well, trying to. 'But I hate sprouts!' she protested again, hoping that he might get fed up of listening to her and allow her to leave the table so she could go and do something else. She still had to make her favourite dolly some new clothes.

'And I don't care,' he said, blowing smoke out of his mouth in a cloud that wafted across to her and made her nose wrinkle. 'Good food is hard to come by,' he added, 'and sprouts are very good for you. So you're not going to waste them. I'm your father and that's that.'

Shirley scowled at him. Two could play at that game. She folded her arms, started to swing her feet under her chair and counted sheep going over a wall in her head. She could count to a hundred now – her mam had taught her how to do it when she couldn't get to sleep at nights, and now it would help pass the time until she got back home from work.

As Shirley counted she stole glances at the man across the table. He had shiny stuff on his hair and the tops of some of his fingers were all yellow, and she decided she didn't like him one bit. She'd wanted him to be an uncle so she knew he'd go away again, or, if he wasn't, at least be nice like they always were. Her mam had brought home several uncles, all of them vastly preferable to the miserable-looking man in front of her, so if she *did* have to have one move in with her and her mam, why couldn't it have been one of them instead?

Not that she'd ever tell anyone. Her mam had warned her that she must never, ever mention the uncles, and because Shirley was a good girl she would do as she was told.

But she wasn't going to be a good girl when it came to eating sprouts. Her mam didn't make her eat them and this dad man wasn't going to either. So she was still sitting at the table when

the sky grew dark outside and her mam finally got home from work.

With her back hurting and her bottom numb, Shirley was upset enough as it was when she saw her, but it was the parcel of chips her mother held in her hand that hit her hardest. She jumped down from the chair and immediately burst into tears.

‘What’s going on here?’ her mother asked, immediately rushing across to scoop her up and embrace her.

‘He’s saying I have to eat these sprouts, Mam, and I won’t! Tell him I don’t like them!’

The man she was supposed to call ‘Dad’ was now squatting in front of the fire, a pair of wet socks dangling from his hands. He’d washed them in the sink earlier – her mam’s stockings, too – while Shirley sat and glared at his back, and he had been in front of the fire drying them ever since. ‘You rotten sod!’ Shirley’s mum snapped at him now, which made her feel better immediately. ‘Don’t you *dare* start laying the law down already, Raymond Read, or I’ll have your guts for garters, you hear me? Your daughter doesn’t like sprouts and she doesn’t have to bloody well eat them!’

He stood up suddenly, making Shirley jump, and pointed at her mam. And Shirley knew it was very rude to point, as well. Not that he seemed to care. ‘And don’t *you* bloody undermine me, Mary!’ he snapped, in his horrible deep voice. ‘She’s going to have to get used to me and we might as well start as we mean to go on. It’s a bloody crime to waste food. There’s people starving, in case you hadn’t noticed, and this little madam chooses what she’ll eat? Not on my watch.’

Shirley’s mam let her back down to the floor again. ‘Go on, love,’ she said, patting her back. ‘Go upstairs and get your nightie on. I’ll put you some chips out, eh? Don’t forget to wash your face, lovey. And behind your ears.’

Shirley scooted off as fast as she could, leaving her mam and dad shouting at each other. She'd still been in her mam's belly when her daddy had gone to be in the war, but she'd always told her he was a lovely, handsome soldier. Except he wasn't. He wasn't lovely at all, Shirley thought. She ran all the way up the stairs, clapping her hands over her ears to drown out the arguing. She didn't like that she'd have to 'get used to him', as he put it. She didn't like that he was set on making her eat things she didn't like.

She wriggled out of her dress and into her nightie and then went to wash her face and hands, as she'd been told. She knew she should try to look on the bright side her mam had told her about. She'd said her dad coming back might at least mean she'd get some brothers and sisters, and Shirley wanted brothers and sisters more than anything in the world.

So she could only hope that her mam had been telling her the truth. He definitely wasn't worth having on his own.

Chapter I

June 1958

Shirley and Anita burst through the front doors of St George's Hall into the warmth of the early evening air. Shirley couldn't remember the last time she'd felt so ecstatic. It was almost as if there was electricity running through her. She could certainly still feel the music throbbing away in her chest. But what she mostly couldn't believe was that she'd actually seen Cliff Richard in the flesh. She knew she'd never forget it ever – not as long as she lived.

'Oh, my good *God*, Shirl,' Anita cried, linking arms with her as they spilled out onto the pavement. 'I love him *so* much. Did you see how he danced? Did you *see*? God, them *hips*!'

'Trust you to be looking at his bloody hips, Anita!' Shirley scolded. 'What about his *voice*?' She sighed happily as they began to walk. 'I was far too busy singing along with him.'

He *was* sexy though. She had to admit that, even if it was only to herself.

'You bloody liar!' Anita huffed, reading her mind the way she always did. 'Far too busy, my eye!' She stopped on the pavement, then, allowing the throng of girls to stream around them. 'You know,' she said, freeing her arm and grabbing Shirley by both her shoulders suddenly. 'It's still really early, Shirl. It won't be dark for *hours* yet. *Please* say we don't have to go home just

yet, eh? The Lister's is only a ten-minute walk away, after all. Let's go have a drink, eh? You're a single girl again now, don't forget.'

Yes, she was that, and she was determined to enjoy the freedom. Well, as much as she could; no, she didn't have a boyfriend stopping her from going out and having fun, but there was still her dad constantly on about her every frigging move – where she went, who she went with, when she was home.

It was all right for Anita. Her mam and dad were different. With two older brothers and a younger sister, she could get away with so much more, not least of which was the freedom to go out with who she wanted. And she did, too – she seemed to have a different boyfriend every week. But mostly Shirley envied her the freedom to *stay* out till she wanted, or at least a lot later than ten frigging p.m. How lovely it would be not to have your every move scrutinised. To be free.

Well, she *was* free in one way, at least. Free to daydream again. About marrying Cliff Richard and having a big house and lots of babies with him, even. She smiled to herself. You never knew, did you? And she was sure he'd caught her eye once or twice. No, she definitely wasn't ready to go home. She felt much more like dancing. Like Anita said, it wasn't even dark yet. The night, as they always said, was young.

She nodded. 'You're right. Why not? After all, I *am* single, aren't I?'

'*Exactly*. So you can do what you like,' Anita said, grabbing her hand and almost tugging her along the street.

'Well, sort of,' Shirley cautioned. 'Though we can't stay too long, Neet. You know what my bloody dad's like. He'll be on that doorstep, winding the clock up and threatening to bloody strangle me if I'm so much as a minute late.'

‘Don’t worry. I promise,’ Anita said. ‘We’ll have you home on time, Cinderella. Can’t have your dad turning into a pumpkin, can we?’

Shirley wasn’t so sure that wouldn’t be the best thing for him. He could certainly do with softening up.

For all that she railed against him being so ridiculously over-protective, Shirley had never really been one to disobey her father. Disgruntled as she’d been when he’d suddenly appeared in her young life, with all his funny ways and his rules and regulations, she’d soon realised home was a much more agreeable place if she came round to his way of thinking. She’d done this at first simply because she didn’t want to get in his bad books but as time went on and she’d matured a bit, it was because she’d grown to love him. Yes, he was strict and orderly, and yes, he did have this idealistic image of her that she was always going to struggle to live up to, but he adored her and would go to the ends of the earth for her if she asked him to, and she loved that. In fact, sometimes, though she’d never have confessed it to anyone, she thought she loved him even more than her mam.

Not that Shirley didn’t love her mam too, but Mary could be scary. She had a temper on her that was legendary both with the family *and* the neighbours. And once the family had been reunited, it soon became clear that, whatever went on before Shirley’s dad went off to war, theirs was not the happiest of marriages. Her dad, it turned out, though always strong and determined, really wanted nothing more than a quiet life. But he didn’t often get one, because Mary was not only very fiery, she was also insanely jealous. Shirley had never really understood why (and still didn’t – particularly now she was older, and understood more about all those ‘uncles’) but it was as if

her mam was constantly on guard against her dad being lured away by another woman.

Raymond wasn't even safe at work, it seemed. Once demobbed he'd got a job as a boiler firer at a big factory in Listerhills, but it seemed there was no peace for him there either. A regular occurrence in Shirley's childhood had been her mam constantly spying on him – she'd often turn up at the factory unannounced (Shirley herself sometimes in tow) to check if there were any women anywhere near making eyes at him. And if she got it into her head that he *might* have set his sights on someone, she'd think nothing of setting about him physically – either with her fists or anything else she could lay her hands on.

Shirley had spent much of her childhood not really understanding how it worked being a grown-up. As far as she'd been able to tell, her dad only loved two girls in the world: her and her mam. And her mam, in return, was always so horrible to him. How did that work? How could you love someone and be so horrible to them at the same time? Perhaps you couldn't, she'd come to realise, because, as the years went by, there were never any of the brothers and sisters they'd promised her when she was smaller – the one thing she'd always wanted more than anything in the world.

Yes, she'd had her dollies, who she'd loved and cared for with a passion, pushing them along in their shiny pram and dressing them in clothes she'd stitched for them herself. She also had her friends – and she'd make clothes for their dollies too – but at the end of every day no dolly could make up for going home alone; for being an only child in an unhappy home.

That was all she wanted as a child – a special friend, someone to play with, someone to go with on adventures, but mostly someone to be with when she was at home, who was in the

same boat and could take her mind off the endless, endless arguing.

As it was, she'd spent her childhood stuck in the middle of a war that seemed almost as long and horrible as the one her dad had returned from. Every weekend, almost without fail, her parents, having gone out for a few drinks in the local, would come home and have the same old arguments: her mam accusing her dad of looking in the direction of another woman, and her dad telling her she needed her eyes testing. On and on it would go, usually till Raymond passed out drunk on the kitchen floor, at which point Mary would then yell for her from the bottom of the stairs.

'Shirley,' she'd screech up to her, loud enough to wake the dead, 'come down and help me get his head in the gas oven!'

Shirley never would, of course. She'd just cry and cry, and plead for her mam to leave her poor dad alone. 'That's it!' Mary would say then, dragging her coat round her shoulders. 'We're leaving home. And we're never coming back!'

Shirley remembered walking the streets with her mam for hours sometimes, however cold or wet it might be, and all she could hope was that when her mam finally sobered up enough to take her home, her dad would have taken himself to bed, so the whole cycle didn't start up again.

But at least it didn't last for ever. When Shirley was ten they'd moved to Clayton, on the outskirts of Bradford. It was the kind of village where everyone knew everyone else and looked out for one another as well, and Shirley soon became friendly with all the local children, as well as becoming popular with lots of young mums due to her love of helping out with their little ones.

But it was mainly better because she now had her Granny Wiggins living on the same street, and her Auntie Edna also

living just a few doors further along – both places that provided a much-needed means of escape from the chilly atmosphere at home.

It was escape of another kind that had begun to occupy Shirley's mind as she'd entered her teens, however. She was counting the days till she could escape into her own life, which was going to be so different from the way it was now. She'd have her own home, her own husband and lots and lots of children. She would make her own wedding gown, and would float along the aisle in it, and have a ring put on her finger by a wonderful, loving man – Pat Boone or Elvis, perhaps, or that dreamy Tab Hunter. Or even – she sighed inwardly now, as his voice filled her head again – of her latest crush, the beautiful Cliff Richard, who could serenade her as he swept her off her feet.

The Lister's Arms was at the bottom of Manchester Road, and was currently the place all the young people went. She'd been a few times with John, her ex, but she always felt a little out of place there. It could be a rough place; lots of the lads from the Canterbury estate went there, so when she did go – with John, and latterly with Anita – they always tended to keep themselves to themselves.

'You go to the bar, Neet,' Shirley whispered as they walked into the busy pub. She'd never even tried to get served when she went in there, because she didn't look old enough by a mile yet. It was different for Anita, because her mam and dad let her wear make-up, so she'd been able to buy drinks since she was only 15.

It was yet another reason why Shirley couldn't wait for her eighteenth birthday. Anita nodded. She knew the drill. 'You grab some seats then, okay? Half of bitter?'

Shirley cast about then, trying to spot a couple of seats free in one of the corners, though it was difficult to see through the throng of people. Many were just standing chatting, but a few were gyrating to the sounds coming from the throbbing juke-box, and Shirley felt the familiar tug to get on the impromptu dance-floor and move to the music as well.

But then she spotted an empty table and rushed to bag it before it was taken, content for the moment to take in the atmosphere and marvel at the couples jiving and jitterbugging nearby.

‘Guess who’s propping up the bar?’ Anita shouted above the din as she set down the two drinks on the table.

‘Who?’ Shirley asked, too far away to see over the crush of bodies.

‘That Tucker Hudson. Remember? One of those brothers from over Canterbury.’

Shirley nodded as she sipped the head off her beer. She didn’t really know the Hudson brothers, but she certainly knew *of* them. Knew they were best avoided, like pretty much everyone else did from her part of the world. She also knew the eldest one, Charlie, was back out of prison, and that he was the one you needed to avoid most of all, even if John had always talked about him like he was some sort of local hero.

She remembered that day she’d gone to court with John. It had seemed a strange thing to do then and it still felt strange now. All the cheering and chanting, and there being so many people, all to see someone sent down for doing something criminal – all there to *support* someone who her dad had said only got what he’d deserved. She’d never really understood that, even if John had tried to explain it to her. But then John had been friends with the Hudsons – one of the younger ones,

anyway. Keith, was it? Yes, she was sure that was his name. The cocky, good-looking one. Till he'd gone and joined the army, at any rate.

'Which one?' she asked Anita, feeling suddenly fretful that if he was here, John himself might be in tonight as well. Which wasn't a problem, exactly, but she still didn't want to see him. Not so soon after finishing with him, anyway.

'Keith,' Anita confirmed, sitting down and shrugging her bag off her shoulder. 'The short one. Remember? He's in here with his sister. You know. Annie? Annie Jagger?'

Shirley shook her head, because she didn't think she did. She wished she was more like Anita, who always seemed to know everyone. But then she would, wouldn't she? She had two older brothers to go out with, after all.

'There,' Anita was saying now, as a record ended and the crowd parted briefly. 'See them now? She's the one with the platinum blonde hair.'

Shirley spotted them finally and then felt her face immediately flush; Keith Hudson was looking straight at her.

She lowered her gaze. *Now* she remembered him. And he'd hardly changed at all. Filled out a bit, even if he didn't look a great deal taller, and with the same arresting dark looks that she remember being so taken with before. John had noticed that too – she remembered that as well. He'd gone on about the two of them making eyes at each other – given her a pretty hard time about it, refusing to accept her denials. And now, having forgotten all about him these past two years, she realised those denials had been untrue. She risked raising her eyes again. He was still looking straight at her. Sizing her up. Almost willing her to hold his gaze.

'So?' she said to Anita, dropping her eyes again, feeling suddenly flustered. 'Why should I care who's in?'

‘I didn’t say you did care,’ Anita answered. ‘I was just saying, that was all. But now you mention it ...’ she added, glancing towards the bar and back again and grinning.

‘Are we having a dance then, or what?’ Shirley interrupted, twisting on the banquette so that she was facing more away from the bar now, feeling strangely uncomfortable under Keith Hudson’s continuing scrutiny and still worried that John might be somewhere roundabouts as well.

‘Hold your horses, Shirl!’ Anita said. ‘Let me have a slurp of this, at least. Ah, and don’t look now, but guess who’s coming over ...’

Shirley turned around, expecting to see Keith Hudson striding towards her. But it wasn’t. It was his sister, who looked like a mini Marilyn Monroe. It was a look lots of girls tried to emulate, but few managed to achieve. This one did, though. She was really very pretty.

But she also had the same sort of reputation her brothers had, if Anita was to be believed. ‘Watch her, Shirl,’ she whispered now. ‘She’s a bit of a wildcat.’

Not knowing quite what to make of that – what was she going to do? Attack them? – Shirley could only smile and make room on the banquette as the girl, who had that confident look of someone in her early twenties, marched up, said ‘shove up’ and plonked herself straight down between them.

She didn’t speak at first either, but instead delved immediately into a capacious patent leather handbag, plucked out a pack of cigarettes and pulled one out with her teeth. She looked as though she might offer them round, and Shirley hoped she would. The rest of the girls there looked so sophisticated with their cigarettes hanging from their manicured fingers. But no, they quickly disappeared back into Annie’s bag again.

She lit the cigarette using a shiny book of matches, and then took a long drag, carefully blowing out a series of smoke rings through her perfectly painted ruby lips.

Shirley watched in awe, wishing she could do something so clever. But, despite managing the odd secret practice, it was a skill that had so far eluded her. She would definitely have to pinch one of her dad's Capstans the next time she got a chance so she could practise some more.

Her entrance made, Annie Jagger turned towards her and smiled. Shirley smiled back nervously, wondering what exactly she'd come over for.

'My brother fancies you,' she said matter of factly, while tapping the end of her cigarette in the direction of the already over-flowing ashtray. She looked Shirley up and down then; not in a bitchy way, just as if she was working out whether she agreed with him.

'For some reason,' she then added, causing Shirley to revise her first interpretation. 'And he wants to take you out on a date.'

Shirley blinked at her. Fancy sending his bloody sister over to ask for him! So, for all his swagger, Keith Hudson was obviously not as brave as he liked to make out, then.

'Well, you can tell him no thank you,' she heard herself saying.

Annie Jagger drew on the cigarette again and blew some more smoke rings before answering. 'You still seeing *him*, then?' she asked finally. 'That John Arnold lad?'

'No,' Shirley began, shaking her head. 'We've split up.'

Annie Jagger nodded knowingly. 'I should think you would an' all, love! He's a wimp, he is, John Arnold. Why'd you want to go out with a wimp when you could be going out with a *proper* man?'

Shirley stared at her, bristling at the dismissive sneer on her face now. Bar pointing out that ‘proper’ men asked for their own dates, which she didn’t dare to, she wasn’t really sure how to respond to that. But it seemed she wasn’t required to.

‘A lad like our Keith,’ Annie added, sending another inch of ash in the general direction of the ashtray, but missing and showering it on the table and over Shirley’s skirt instead. ‘A *proper* man, one who was off doing his bit for his country. While John bleedin’ Arnold was hiding behind your flarey skirts, love!’

Now Shirley *really* didn’t know what to say, and neither, it seemed, did Anita. She’d picked up her glass and was hiding as well – behind her beer. But, even as Shirley blushed, she felt a sudden rush of annoyance. No, he might not have been a fighter, but he wasn’t hiding from anyone – not as far as she could tell, anyway – and at least he’d always behaved like a gentleman towards her. He’d always treated her like a lady, right from day one. Buying her flowers, buying her chocolates, holding doors open for her. So, yes, she might have grown a little bored with him, but that was *her* business, wasn’t it? It certainly wasn’t for anyone else to say. Wasn’t for anyone else to be rude about him, either. Especially not this tiny little full-of-herself mouth on legs.

‘I’ll tell you what you can do,’ Shirley said, pointedly brushing the ash off her skirt. It was her best one, and that annoyed her as well. ‘You can go and tell your brother that I wouldn’t go out on a date with him if he was the last man on earth.’

There was a heartbeat of silence, Anita looking on nervously, while Annie Jagger sat and glared at Shirley. She then scrunched out her half-smoked cigarette, raised her pencilled-in eyebrows and got to her feet. Shirley wondered if she should stand up as well, just to emphasise the difference in their

heights, but then realised Keith's sister was no longer scowling but smiling. Not that Shirley intended to return the compliment and smile back. Who did she think she bloody was?

Annie laughed then. 'Ooh!' she said, stepping delicately out and round to the other side of the table. 'Game on, then, it is, love? Well, let's see how long you can resist the Hudson charm, shall we?'

And with that, she sauntered back to her brother at the bar, hips wiggling suggestively as she picked her way through the dancers, soaking up the admiring glances that she was obviously used to gathering, like she was a magnet for every male eye in the room.

It came into Shirley's head then. The words John had used two years back. He'd got quite cross, too – the day after they'd been in court, it was. Said her and Keith Hudson's eyes had been just like a pair of magnets. And she'd had to say again and again and again just how ridiculous he was being. And then Keith Hudson had simply disappeared out of her life. And that had been that. Gone and forgotten.

But if that were so, why was she finding it so hard right now not to follow Annie Jagger's progress back to her brother, just for her eyes to land again, however fleetingly, on his?

'Jesus Christ, Shirley!' Anita was spluttering, dragging her attention back. 'It's a wonder she didn't clock you one! She's a nutcase, she is!'

'I don't bloody care,' Shirley said, picking up her glass and gulping a mouthful of beer down. Her fingers were trembling, which annoyed her even more. 'She's not laying down the law to me!' she huffed as she set it down. 'I have more than enough of that at home, thanks.' She then picked up the glass again and downed the rest of the beer in a couple of swallows, before banging it more heavily onto the table. She had no idea if she

was being watched but she bloody hoped so, just so she could press her point home and ignore them. ‘Come on, Anita,’ she said, all appetite for dancing now gone, not to mention the dreamy post-Cliff euphoria. ‘It’s getting late and I’m tired. We’re off home.’

‘But it’s only –’ Anita began protesting.

‘You stay if you like,’ Shirley said, leaving the table, ‘but I’m going home. I’m not staying here to be told who I should or shouldn’t be seeing. The cheek of her!’

Anita grabbed the cardigan she’d not long taken off and hurriedly shoved her arms into it as she followed Shirley out, via the far side of the dance-floor.

‘You all right?’ she asked Shirley. ‘Don’t let it get to you. Just take no notice.’

‘Oh, I will be. And I won’t! Who do those bloody Hudsons think they are?’

It was a thought she kept thinking for the entire 45-minute walk home, of necessity. As was their impromptu Cliff Richard and the Drifters sing-along – to quell the butterflies that were now dancing in her stomach.

Chapter 2

Shirley's dad was in a worse mood than she'd seen in a long time. 'One of those Hudson boys?' he snapped at her. 'Them from Little Horton? You're bloody well not going out with him, and that's that!'

It was nearly six o'clock and Shirley knew she'd have Keith knocking on the door any minute. And her mam hadn't even finished pinning up her hair yet. 'Mam, *tell* him!' she said indignantly. 'I'm 17 now *and* I'm working, so I should be allowed to go out with who I like!'

Though now she was wishing she hadn't even told them. Well, wishing she hadn't told her dad, at any rate. Her mam had been fine. But as for her dad ... well, that had been something of a revelation. She never imagined in a million years that her dad even knew who the Hudsons were – he hardly ever left Clayton except to go to work, after all. But as soon as she'd said the name and where they came from, he'd gone berserk. The family's reputation must have been even greater than she'd realised.

'What's wrong with being from Little Horton?' Shirley's mam tried on her behalf.

'Yes, *exactly*,' Shirley added. 'Dad, you're just being a snob.'

'Everything!' Raymond barked, all the veins in his neck bulging. 'It's that bloody Charlie Hudson's brother from Canterbury, that's who it is! How the bloody *hell* did you get mixed up with the likes of him?'

‘There’s nothing *wrong* with him!’ Shirley began, as her mam tried to finish her hair off. Not that easy when she was finding it almost impossible to keep still. ‘He’s –’

‘So *you* say,’ her father carried on, talking right over her. ‘Oh, *I* know how this has happened,’ he said suddenly, wagging a finger in her direction. ‘It’s that bloody Anita’s fault, isn’t it? It’s her got you mixed up with them, isn’t it? That friend of yours is never happy unless she’s gallivanting around the bloody town, that one!’

‘Why do you *always* blame Anita?’ Shirley shouted back, rising from the table. If there was one thing that annoyed her more than any other criticism, it was having it suggested that she didn’t make her own decisions. Actually, no – it was worse than that. What was really annoying was his suggestion that she let her best friend make them for her. The cheek! ‘It’s got *nothing* to do with Anita, Dad,’ she fumed. ‘I’m not a baby, you know! I make up my own mind. And I’ve made up my own mind about going out with Keith Hudson, so there!’

But he didn’t seem to be listening. ‘So *you* say,’ he huffed, marching back and forth across the front-room carpet, craning his neck every so often to look out into the street. ‘But she never liked that John of yours, did she? It’s all falling into place now. Is that why you’ve blown him out all of a sudden?’ He ran his hand through his hair, trying to haul the disobedient curls back into place. ‘And for one of them bleeding Hudson reprobates as well. Hell-*fire*, Shirley! You can do better than that.’

Shirley sat and fumed, cursing her honesty. She shouldn’t have told him. It was as simple as that. She should have lied, like so many other girls did, about where they were going, what they were doing and who they were doing it with – and for precisely the reason she was cursing herself now; because some fathers so obviously couldn’t see reason themselves. Who was

her dad to say what Keith Hudson was like? He'd never even met him! Just listened to gossip and taken it as gospel, that was what, and now she was stuck with the distressing possibility that Keith would turn up and immediately be sent packing.

The thought was mortifying and she wished she'd been altogether more crafty – sneaked out while he was looking the other way. As it was, he was very much *in* her way, seemingly determined to ruin everything, and she needed her mam to help her try to get him to see reason. Though if he didn't, she decided, she was going out with Keith Hudson anyway, hook or by crook, whether her dad liked it or not. He wouldn't wait around for ever, after all.

Up to now, it had to be said, Keith Hudson had been impressively patient. Well, perhaps persistent was the better word, Shirley decided, and she decided she liked that a lot. She had no idea what his sister had reported of their conversation at the Lister's a fortnight previously, but she had a hunch – given what Anita had told her about Annie – that she would have repeated it verbatim. Probably would have enjoyed doing so as well, Shirley reckoned, given the mischievous gleam she'd had in her eye.

But whatever the facts, two other facts had subsequently become clear – that she couldn't seem to get Keith Hudson out of her mind and that, even if she had, he'd have popped straight back in again, because he'd certainly been popping up in person. It felt like he'd been everywhere these past couple of weeks, showing up when least expected; he'd suddenly started going to Farmer Giles's coffee bar – where she and Anita often hung out when they were bored – and he'd turned up for the Saturday matinee at the picture house, too. He'd even been waiting outside the sewing factory Shirley worked

at. She'd come out after her shift on the previous Monday and there he'd been, large as life – well, actually, not so large in Keith's case – casually leaning against the bus stop, smoking a cigarette.

'You again?' she'd said, trying to come across as offhand but failing miserably, as the colour tracked up her cheeks and her stomach danced a jig. 'You're like a bloody bad penny, you are,' she added, 'always showing up. Haven't you got anything better to do?'

She waved off her work friends, who were all in danger of getting the giggles and embarrassing her even further. Then she stood in front of him, conscious of his lingering, up-and-down look.

He grinned. He had the nicest smile ever, she decided, with his beautifully straight white teeth and the slight dimple in his chin. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Can't blame a bloke for trying, can you? Anyway, you'll have to walk me home or you'll be responsible for me losing half a week's wages.'

Shirley shook her head in confusion. 'And how exactly do you work that out?'

'Well,' Keith explained, 'our Annie bet me a pound that you were too much of a snob to let a tyke like me take you out, and I really can't afford to lose a pound, Shirley.' He winked. 'So you'll have to take pity on me, won't you?'

She'd refused, though. Same as she'd refused on the Tuesday and Wednesday, but then on the Thursday night, when she'd gone out with Anita to the Ideal Dance-hall and he'd turned up there as well, she'd finally succumbed to the feeling in her tummy that, try as she might to ignore it, simply wouldn't go away.

'Yes, *okay* then!' she'd almost huffed at him, after his casual announcement that she really didn't know what she was

missing. Because that was the problem; she was beginning to think she *did* know. Or, at least, that she was very keen to find out, however much it galled her to know Annie blinking Hudson was obviously right about her falling for the legendary Hudson charm.

There was also the issue of the pound she'd owe her brother, which Shirley reckoned served her right. So they'd made arrangements for Keith to bring her back there on the Saturday night, when there was a band playing that she liked.

The intervening 48 hours had felt like the longest in Shirley's life, as if time had slowed down especially to annoy her. And now, at the eleventh hour, with him due to knock on the door at any minute, her blasted dad could go and ruin everything.

He was beyond angry now. She could tell. He'd just said 'bleeding' and he never said that word unless he was about to blow a fuse. And the thought of him blowing a fuse at Keith Hudson was unthinkable. He'd run a mile and probably never come back. Probably think she wasn't worth the trouble after all.

Shirley decided to change her tack. Perhaps taking him on wasn't the best way of going about things. 'Please, Dad,' she begged, softening both her voice and her expression. 'Keith's not like his brothers. Honestly, he isn't. He's really nice and he'll be here calling for me in ten minutes. *Please* don't show me up, Dad. I couldn't bear it.'

Shirley's mam had picked up a tin of lacquer and was now spraying the Tony Curtis quiff she'd created in Shirley's hair. 'Raymond, leave the lass alone,' she said, as the can hissed around her. 'I *mean* it. She does right playing the field for a bit instead of getting herself tied down to the first man she meets. How else is she going to meet mister right?'

There was a heavy emphasis on the 'right' bit, but Shirley's dad didn't seem to notice.

'Playing the field?' he said, leaping up from the chair he'd only just sat back down on. 'No daughter of *mine* is going to play the bloody field! Them Hudsons are trouble, do you hear me? That Charlie's just out from the clink for God knows what, and that younger one – Malcolm, is it? – he's another one. Locked up more often than he's out, as well! They're *all* bloody trouble, and everyone knows it! You're not going anywhere with a bleeding Hudson boy and that's an end to it!'

Just as Shirley was about to point out that they weren't *all* bloody trouble, there was a soft but clearly audible knock on the front door. 'Oh, Mam,' she cried, the injustice of it making tears prickle in her eyes now, 'look at him! You've got to go and stop him, Mam, please!' She desperately hoped that the closed front door was enough to contain the commotion that was going on inside.

Because it certainly looked as if he was going to need stopping. He was already rolling up his shirt sleeves as he stomped off to answer the door. What was he going to do? Punch poor Keith in the face just because of his surname? Shirley blanched at the thought. He wouldn't do that, surely? 'Mam!' she said again, panicked now, because she'd never seen her dad like this before. 'Hurry up. *Stop* him. He might *hit* him!'

Mary took a hankie from her pinny pocket and passed it to her, seemingly unruffled. 'Here, love, buck up – don't spoil your lovely make-up. You know your dad – his bark's always worse than his bite, and he's not going to do any such thing. He wouldn't dare, because he knows he'll have me to answer to, doesn't he? Come on, let's go and meet this young man of yours, shall we?'

Shirley sniffed and carefully dabbed the corners of her eyes before following her mam out into the hall, feeling slightly reassured. She could only just see Keith because he was half hidden beyond her dad, but she could see enough to catch the fact that he was smiling politely and had stuck out a hand ready for shaking.

‘Nice to meet you, Mr Read,’ he was saying. ‘I’ve heard a lot about you. And I also want to promise you that I’ll have your Shirley back early – I’ll walk her all the way back home myself.’

Shirley could tell, just from the back of him, what her dad’s expression would be. ‘I’d expect nothing less, lad,’ he answered. ‘But don’t get ahead of yourself. Unless I’m very much mistaken, I haven’t even said she can go yet, have I?’

Shirley’s heart sank as she watched her dad physically bristle. He wasn’t going to send him packing now, was he? She bristled herself. If he did she’d certainly let him know all about it – how he had comprehensively, *totally* ruined her entire life. But it seemed he was still busy giving his lecture. ‘Oh, I’ve heard a lot about *you*, as well, lad,’ he growled. ‘You *and* the rest of your family.’

This didn’t seem to faze Keith at all. ‘I can’t speak for the rest of the clan, obviously,’ he said, standing straight on the doorstep, as if to attention. ‘But I can assure you that I’ve never been in trouble with the law. In fact, sir, I’ve been in the army, just like you.’

Shirley cringed in anticipation of her dad’s likely response to this. The war had been years ago but that didn’t mean he was going to let anyone forget it, least of all the 21-year-old currently standing on his doorstep, who she knew, even though her dad still had his back to her, would now be at the end of a particularly stony glare. ‘Like *me*?’ he barked. ‘I wasn’t messing around “in the army”, as you put it. I was fighting for my

country, lad! Crawling through bloody ditches in Burma and getting stabbed by the bloody Japs! So you're wrong there, my son. You weren't *just* like me at all!

Keith nodded his acknowledgement and Shirley's mam, unseen by her dad, nudged her arm and rolled her eyes. 'No, you're right, sir,' Keith quickly corrected. 'Not the same thing at all. I just mentioned it because I'm honoured to meet a war hero, honest I am.' He cleared his throat and for the first time let his gaze rest momentarily on Shirley. 'I would also be honoured,' he went on, smiling at Shirley's mam as well now, 'if you'd give me a chance to prove that I'm a good man, Mr Read, and to allow me to court your daughter.'

Shirley felt a smile form on her lips as Keith looked at her. Her mam smiled as well. Then poked her dad in the kidneys with a very forceful finger, making it clear that, to her mind, Keith had done what he'd needed to – proved that he wasn't a reprobate at all.

Shirley held her breath. How could her father find any reason to turn him down? He was smart, he was polite and he couldn't be held responsible for his surname. On those grounds alone, it was only fair that her dad agreed. And it seemed he *did* agree. 'Right then,' he said finally, 'all right. She can go. *But* –' he added, raising an admonishing finger, 'I'm warning you, lad, I'll be at this front door at ten o'clock sharp, and if Shirley isn't walking through it, you are *bang* in trouble. Understand?'

Shirley was out of the house like a rocket.

'Phew,' she said as they rounded the corner onto Bradford Road. 'That was touch and go there for a minute, wasn't it? But you did *so* well.'

The night was young, the air was warm and she was going on a date with Keith Hudson. She felt such a surge of

excitement at being out with him finally that it was all she could do not to skip down the street.

He stuck out an elbow for Shirley to slip her arm into, and winked. ‘You don’t grow up in a family like mine without learning a few things,’ he said, grinning at her. ‘Like how to get yourself out of a sticky situation. And trust me, Shirl, your dad’s a pussycat compared to mine.’

A pussycat? Shirley smiled back at Keith as they walked, feeling a little shy all of a sudden, not to mention a bit bemused by what he’d said. Pussycat wasn’t the kind of word she’d have used to describe her dad – not when he was angry, at any rate. He was more like a frigging bull at a gate, in her book.

But not to Keith, obviously. What was *his* dad like, then? She’d have a chance to find out soon enough, she supposed, and in the meantime the thought that Keith wasn’t afraid of hers sent another thrill running through her. How nice to have a fearless man on her arm for a change. Even though she hadn’t realised it at the time, she’d obviously done right to break up with boring John Arnold. So that a proper man like Keith – home from the army, no less – could come back into her life and sweep her off her feet.

Whatever his surname happened to be.