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**Opening Extract from...**

# Payback

Written by Kimberley Chambers

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# Payback

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CHAMBERS



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## Prologue

Whistling ‘Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah’, Trevor Thomas felt as happy as a pig in shit as he walked the mile-long journey from the pub to his mother’s house.

As a lad, Trevor had never truly appreciated the sights, smells, atmosphere, or community spirit of the East End of London. But after years of living in Yorkshire, he sure did now. Had it not been for his good fortune on the football pools, Trevor would probably still be stuck in a loveless marriage in Leeds. Twenty-four thousand pounds was a hell of a lot of money and there was no way that miserable, greedy, nasty bitch he had got saddled with was going to get her mucky paws on his windfall. Leaving his four kids behind was a small price to pay if it meant him keeping all the money to himself. Only his mum knew about it. She had hidden it under her floorboards to keep it away from prying eyes.

What Trevor did not realize as he stopped to chat to an old pal before continuing his journey was that his run of good luck was about to come to a very abrupt and gory end.

Vinny and Michael Butler were sitting in a white Ford Transit van. Michael was in the back, Vinny in the passenger

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seat as though he were waiting for the driver of the vehicle to return. Both were wearing dark hooded tracksuits to hide their identities, and seeing as they only ever wore the finest designer suits and drove top-of-the-range cars, Vinny doubted even their own mother would recognize them.

‘This could be him now, bruv. Nope. Hold your horses, it isn’t.’

‘I hope he fucking hurries up, Vin, because our alibi will be blown sky high if he doesn’t.’

‘Stop panicking. We’ve got stacks of time. Like I told you, you’ve no need to get your hands dirty at all, Michael. Hold up! Speak of the devil and it appears.’

Still whistling the song he could not get out of his head, Trevor spotted the two tall men in hooded tracksuits leap out of the van. Apart from wondering if they were boxers who had been training at the gym, he thought little of it until they grabbed him from behind.

Before Trevor could shout for help, tape was placed over his mouth and he was chucked into the back of the van like a roll of old carpet. As one man expertly tied him up, the other leapt into the front and drove the van away.

Eyes wide with a mixture of fear and shock, Trevor now wished he had listened to his mother’s words of wisdom. ‘As much as I love and miss you, it’s not safe for you to be living back in the East End, son. That Vinny Butler is a real force to be reckoned with now, and he won’t have forgotten what you did to him. He isn’t the type of man to let bygones be bygones.’

As the van trundled along, Trevor shuddered as his abductor took his hood down. Vinny had been fifteen, Trevor nineteen, when he had eloped to Leeds with Yvonne. But even at such a young age, Vinny had already carved out a fearsome reputation back then. That was why Yvonne

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had insisted they left the area. How Trevor now wished he had never clapped eyes on Yvonne Summers.

‘Not the greatest choice of song for you to be whistling, was it, Trevor? Because, my oh my, your day is going to be anything but fucking wonderful,’ Vinny chuckled as he ripped the tape from his victim’s mouth.

It was quite dark inside the back of the van and it wasn’t until Vinny switched on a big static torch like the ones workmen used that Trevor could properly see the man whose girlfriend he had stolen all those years ago. With his mop of thick black hair Brylcreemed back, and his menacing eyes that were a piercing shade of bright green, Vinny looked even scarier in the light than the dark.

‘What you gonna do to me? Please don’t hurt me, Vinny, I beg you. I know what I did was wrong and I am very sorry, but I swear if you let me out of this van, I’ll do anything you say. I’ll even move away again, if that’s what you want. On my mother’s life, I will.’

Vinny could not help but grin. He had waited years for this moment, and intended to enjoy every second of it. Trevor had lost all of his hair, had yellow teeth, and reminded Vinny of a fly stuck to one of those sticky tape traps his mum had in her conservatory that was desperately trying to untangle itself. ‘If I was a forgiving man, I would let you jump out of this van right now. Unfortunately for you, Trevor, I am not.’

‘Please, Vinny, I’m beggin’ you not to hurt me. It will be the end of my mum if you do. She has a lot of respect for your mum and aunt, you know. She was gutted over Roy and Lenny’s deaths – she’s ordered some lovely flowers for their funerals. And I remember your dad well. I used to buy my cigarettes and booze off him once upon a time,’ Trevor gabbled.

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‘So, where is the slag now? Did you marry the manipulative deceitful whore?’ Vinny spat. Yvonne Summers had been his first and only true love. Two years older than him she was, but even at fifteen, Vinny had known how to earn a bob or two and had treated that girl like a princess. Jewellery, clothes, hats, shoes – he had lavished Yvonne with expensive gifts. And how had she repaid him? By running off with the skinny little weasel of a man who was currently snivelling while resembling a trussed-up turkey.

Tears of pure fright streaming down his cheeks, Trevor nodded. ‘Yeah, we got married and had four kids. Yvonne is still in Leeds, I think. I can give you the address if you want?’

‘So, what you doing back here?’

‘We split up and I had nowhere else to go. If you want Yvonne back, you can have her, Vinny. I don’t mind, honest.’

‘Want her back! You having a laugh at my expense, Trevor? Wrong words, mate, wrong words,’ Vinny spat. He opened the tool bag next to him and pulled out a pair of pliers.

‘No, please God, no,’ Trevor screamed, wetting himself with fear as Vinny inserted the pliers into his mouth.

Vinny was no qualified dentist and as Trevor’s screams echoed around the van, Michael winced and turned the volume of the radio up.

By the time the Butlers reached their destination, a narrow rural lane that led to nothing but a metal gate in East Hanningfield, Vinny was splashed with blood, and after passing out Trevor was now untied, awake again and rolling about the floor in obvious agony.

‘Stop crying, you fucking wuss. Man up,’ Vinny ordered, giving his now toothless victim a sharp kick in the head.

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Michael parked up next to the Datsun Cherry they'd left there that morning. Even the full volume of the radio had not been able to drown out Trevor's howls.

'Let's just get the job finished, Vinny. The quicker we get away from here and back to Whitechapel, the better.'

Vinny took the small axe out of the tool bag. 'You better go for a walk for five minutes, Michael. I doubt you have the stomach to watch what I am about to do.'

'Don't be insinuating I'm some pussy, Vinny. If I was, I wouldn't be here with you. Just do what you've got to do, and get your skates on.'

Trevor was in too much pain to scream when Vinny dragged him out of the van by the legs. Instead, he whimpered like an injured dog and curled up in a foetal position, covering his head with his hands. He now knew how animals must feel when they were being led inside the slaughterhouse, and he just wanted death to come quickly so the pain would go away.

Vinny Butler had a different plan. In some countries it was classed as normal to chop the hands off thieves. 'Be a good boy now, Trevor. Hold your right hand out for Uncle Vinny.'

Sobbing his heart out, Trevor did as he was told. His mother and his winnings flashed through his mind. He was never going to get the chance to spend that now, was he? And he would never see his kids again.

'Sure you wanna watch this, David?' Vinny joked. Michael bore a strong resemblance to the popstar David Essex. Even had the same cheeky grin. Vinny had thought it hilarious when his brother got chased down Petticoat Lane market by a crowd of screaming tourists the previous Sunday.

Michael did not want to watch what Vinny was about to do, but there was no way he was going to admit that.



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‘Just fucking hurry up, will you? And if you ever call me David again, I’ll be pulling *your* teeth out with pliers.’

Trevor let out a blood-curdling scream as the axe tore into his wrist, then seemed to lose consciousness.

‘Those thieving hands of yours had to come off, didn’t they, Trevor? Won’t be stealing anybody’s girlfriend now, will you? Nobody messes with me, and I mean nobody,’ Vinny hissed, his face spattered with his victim’s blood.

Trying not to throw up, Michael felt a shiver travel down his spine as he heard the rustling of nearby leaves. ‘Did you hear that noise, Vin? I heard something coming from the bushes.’

‘Probably a hedgehog or a fox. This axe is shit. It’s blunt,’ Vinny complained, as he continued to hack away at Trevor’s flesh.

Averting his eyes from what reminded him of a scene out of a horror film, Michael heard another noise, turned around and nearly shit himself as two pairs of eyes met his. ‘Jesus fucking wept! I nearly had a heart attack then. There’s cows watching us, Vinny.’

‘Well, I doubt they’ll be ringing the Old Bill to give a statement,’ Vinny replied, laughing at his own wit.

‘It ain’t funny, Vin. Giving me the heebies, this place is. Let’s set fire to the van and get out of here.’

Vinny glanced at Michael, a manic glint in his eyes. ‘Not until I’ve finished chopping the thieving cunt’s hands off. He needs to be taught a lesson, taking other people’s possessions.’

‘But he’s already dead by the looks of it. He isn’t going to know whether you chop his other hand off, is he? I tell you what, give me the poxy axe and I’ll do the honours. You sort out the fire – and whatever you do, don’t leave anything lying about.’

Unlike his brother, Michael had never murdered anyone

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and the bile rose in his throat as he heard a whimper come out of Trevor's mouth then saw his eyes flicker open. 'Oh Jesus,' he mumbled, dropping the axe in horror. He then took a deep breath, reluctantly picked the axe back up and started to chop at the man's left wrist. Vinny would never let him live it down otherwise.

Flesh and bone was harder to chop through than Michael had thought possible. But by the time Vinny had tidied up after them and doused the van in petrol, both hands had been severed and Trevor looked as dead as a dodo.

'Put them teeth on the front seat, Michael, then clean yourself up and get changed. Just chuck everything in the back of the van,' Vinny ordered.

As strong as an ox, Vinny lifted Trevor's body into the back of the van by himself. He then chucked the hands and tools in, before joining his brother in getting cleaned up. They had come well prepared; the Datsun's boot held soap, water, towels and a change of clothes.

'Trevor's still alive, you know. Amazing how people die from slitting their wrists, yet you can chop their hands off and they don't die immediately,' Vinny said.

'Well, he won't be alive for much longer. I'm gonna throw all this clobber in the back. Where's your gloves? Check all round, bruv, make sure we haven't left anything lying about.'

For the first time in his life, Vinny Butler wondered whether Michael might actually be in the same league as him. He'd always been closer to Roy, who'd been a great sibling and sound business partner, but had never really possessed that killer instinct – until it came to putting a bullet in his own brain. Today, however, Michael had surprised and impressed Vinny immensely.

Before Vinny lit the kingsize match, he gave a little

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sermon. 'Bye bye, Trevor. I hope the slag was worth it. May your soul rot in hell, you pilfering worthless wanker.'

The explosion was clearly audible as Michael drove at top speed down the narrow lane. He glanced at his brother in the passenger seat. 'What you gonna do with the teeth?'

Vinny grinned. 'Flick them out the window along the A13. One by one, of course. Be a bit like when we used to flick pebbles at people as kids.'

It was twenty minutes before closing time when Vinny and Michael casually walked into the Blind Beggar. Both men were suited and booted and reeked of expensive aftershave as always.

'Vinny, Michael, let me get you both a drink. Me and the missus were so upset to hear about your Roy and Lenny. Great lads, the pair of them, and they will be sorely missed,' Big Stan said in a sombre tone.

Vinny and Michael rarely ventured into the Blind Beggar. As they had hoped, the pub was fairly busy and already they were the centre of attention with all eyes on their grand entrance. 'I'll get the drinks, Stan. Ask around and see who else wants one,' Vinny said.

'Who shall I ask?'

'Everybody. Just tell 'em I'm buying.'

When Stan toddled off to obey orders, more well-wishers came over to speak to Vinny and Michael, including the landlord. 'Afters isn't a problem, lads. You just say the word if you fancy a late drink.'

'Actually, that is very much appreciated. Been stuck in that club all day, me and Michael have, and after everything that's happened, we're currently sick of the sight of the place.'

It was a good ten minutes or so before Big Stan wandered back to inform Vinny that the round had come to eighty-seven quid. 'It would have been cheaper, but Bobby

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Jackson ordered a pint for himself and his pal, plus a large chaser each,' Stan added.

Seeing his brother's eyes glint dangerously as he turned to see where Jackson was, Michael grabbed hold of him. 'Not tonight, Vin. We've had enough drama for one day,' he whispered.

'Big Stan should never have asked him. It's common knowledge that I hate the cunt.'

'But you did say ask everyone, so you can't blame Stan. It's only a poxy drink.'

'I'd like to go over there and ram that glass straight down the back of his throat,' Vinny hissed.

'I'm sure you'll have other opportunities to do that. For the time being, let's just forget about Jackson and chat nicely to the locals. That was the whole point of us coming in here, yeah? We need to act normal, you said. Well, that does not include ramming glasses down the customers' throats, does it?'

'Yeah, you're right,' Vinny replied. He then settled back to watch his brother charm the locals as though he did not have a care in the world.

After leaving East Hanningfield, they had dumped the Datsun not too far from Hackney Marshes, set fire to it, then jogged through Victoria Park in the second set of hooded tracksuits and trainers they had worn that day.

Nobody had seen them sneak into the back entrance of the club, and there was no way they could have been recognized while running through the park. They both had their hoods up the whole time and it was pitch-dark.

Sick of people rambling on about the funerals, Vinny led Michael over to a table. 'I just want you to know that I really appreciate what you did for me today and I won't forget it. You've got a cool head on you, bruv. We are definitely cut from the same cloth.'

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Michael shook his head. 'I'm not like you, Vin, and I never will be. You thoroughly enjoyed yourself today – I didn't. If you want the truth, I hated every second of it.'

'So why did you agree to help me then?'

'Because you're my brother, and with Ahmed in hospital, you had nobody else to ask. Nobody you could trust, at any rate. As Mum always drummed into us, once a Butler always a Butler.'

# CHAPTER ONE

Autumn 1976

Queenie Butler opened her front door and cursed the latest downpour. The hottest summer on record was now just a distant memory, but the weather was the least of Queenie's problems.

'Don't put that up in here. You always said it was unlucky to put a broolly up indoors,' Brenda reminded her mother.

Glaring at her daughter, Queenie ignored her wishes. 'As if we could be any more bastard well unlucky, Bren. Our family has had the heart ripped out of it already, so excuse me for not being overly superstitious these days.'

'Where you going?'

'To check on Vivvy again, and while I'm gone I want you to have a bath, young lady. You ain't seen soap or water for three days, you dirty little mare. I expect Roy and Lenny's send-off to be perfect tomorrow – which includes you making an effort to smarten yourself up.'

Umbrella in hand, Queenie made the short journey to her sister's house next-door-but-one. She let herself in with her own key. 'Cooey. Where are you, Viv?' Queenie fully expected her sister to be sitting in the lounge staring

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aimlessly out of the window as she had been for the past few days since hearing about the car crash that had killed her only son.

‘I’m up here.’

Queenie hurried up the stairs and found Vivian in Lenny’s room, sorting through his things. ‘What you doing?’

‘What does it look like I’m doing? I’m clearing Lenny’s room out. The dustmen come in the morning.’

Shaking her head in disbelief, Queenie sat down on the edge of Lenny’s bed. Her nephew’s nickname had been Champ and how very apt that had been. Starved of oxygen at birth, Lenny had overcome his disabilities and grown into a fine young man. His mental age might have been less than his years, but that hadn’t stopped Lenny being loved by everybody. He really had been a special lad. ‘Viv, please don’t chuck his stuff away, love. You’re not thinking rationally at the moment and I know you’re going to regret what you’re doing. Why don’t we go downstairs and have a nice cup of tea, eh?’

Ignoring her sister’s suggestion, Vivian yanked open a drawer and angrily tipped the contents onto the floor. Mumbling obscenities, she then began to put her son’s belongings into a dustbin liner.

Queenie’s eyes welled up. ‘Viv, I really need you to snap out of this silly behaviour. I’ve lost a son too, remember.’ Queenie had given birth to four children, and her middle son, Roy, was being laid to rest tomorrow after taking his own life. Wheelchair-bound since 1971 after a shooting outside the nightclub he owned, he’d suffered a miserable existence the last five years, finally ending it all by blasting himself in the head with a gun.

‘But you’ve got three other kids, and your grandchildren. Hardly the fucking same, is it?’ Vivian spat.

Queenie bowed her weary head. At forty-nine, she was

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three years older than Vivian. Both women were thin, had deep facial wrinkles due to their love of cigarettes and the sun, and with their dyed blonde hair and similar features, were often mistaken for twins rather than sisters. This past week, however, Queenie had felt as though she did not know her sister at all. Grief did strange things to people and Vivian was acting stranger than most.

‘How can you say such a thing, Vivvy? No matter how many kids or grandchildren I have, nothing takes the pain away of losing my Roy. I’m equally upset about Lenny, he was like a son to me too, but I watched my Roy suffer for years. At least your Lenny led a happy life.’

Her face contorted with anger, Vivian stood up and flew at her sister. ‘Get out! Go on, get out of my house.’

Being pushed and prodded was not something Queenie would usually allow, but she knew her sister didn’t mean it. It was the grief that was making her doolally. ‘Please let’s not argue. The funerals are tomorrow and our boys deserve the best send-off ever. If they’re looking down at me and you fighting, they’ll be devastated.’

‘Looking down! Looking fucking down! Don’t make me laugh, Queen. There is no bastard heaven. If God existed, why would he have taken my Lenny away from me, eh? It’s all a load of old bollocks.’

Desperate to give his brother and cousin the best send-off the East End had ever seen, Vinny Butler had spent the day preparing for the wake. The nightclub he part-owned with Michael had now been transformed into a shrine for their dearly departed.

Satisfied that his mum and aunt would approve of his handiwork, Vinny poured himself a drink and flopped onto one of the leather sofas. It had been three days since he and Michael had disposed of Trevor Thomas and there had



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not been any mention of a body being found or Trevor's disappearance in the news.

Vinny grinned as his brother appeared. After the car accident that had killed Lenny, relations had been strained between himself and Michael, but thankfully carrying out their plan to kill Trevor seemed to have papered over those cracks. 'You're looking particularly dapper today, bruv. That another new suit?'

'Yep. No flies on you, is there? This is the latest Savile Row addition to my ever-expanding wardrobe.'

Michael was five years Vinny's junior. Both brothers had inherited their father's jet-black hair, piercing green eyes and tall build. But they did not particularly look alike. Michael had a round face with a cheeky smile, whereas Vinny's features were thinner and more chiselled, his lips usually twisted in a sinister smirk. They wore their hair in different styles as well. Michael used far less brylcreem and had what his mum referred to as a 'short back and sides'. With their dark skin tone, both Vinny and Michael were often assumed to be of Italian or Irish descent, but as far as they knew, their ancestors had all been cockneys.

'Well? Notice anything different?' Vinny chuckled, indicating the numerous photos of Roy and Lenny that he'd had blown up to poster-size and displayed on the walls.

'I don't know, Vin. It's a bit much, perhaps? Do Mum and Auntie Viv know you've done all this?'

'No. I wanted it to be a surprise. Why shouldn't we have photos of Roy and Champ on show? It is their special day. The one in the middle – I'm gonna keep that up after the funeral too.'

Michael stared at the photo Vinny was pointing at. It showed the three Butler brothers, and it was the last photo taken before Roy had got shot. They all had dark suits on

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and were smiling broadly, their arms draped around one another's shoulders. It was a lovely photo, but it made Michael feel very sad. Feeling slightly lost for words, he was relieved when the phone started ringing, giving him an excuse to turn away. 'I'll get that,' he said.

'What's up?' Vinny asked, seconds later. He could tell by Michael's face that something was wrong.

'That was Ahmed. He's out of hospital and wants to see you. He said to meet him at three at his house.'

Vinny felt the colour drain from his cheeks. This was the first time he had heard from Ahmed since the fateful night of the crash. The state Ahmed was in, Vinny thought he'd be burying his best mate as well as his cousin. 'What exactly did he say?'

'Not much. I got the distinct impression he didn't really want to talk over the phone. I did tell him you were here, but he just said to meet him at three. What're you gonna say to him, Vin? I hope he isn't going to cause us grief. I've got Nancy and the boys to think of.'

'I know far too much about Ahmed for him to cause us any grief, Michael. Anyway, he's a mate and I'm sure once I explain things properly, he'll understand why I did what I did,' Vinny replied, sounding far more confident about the awkward situation than he actually felt.

Michael was worried. He was currently trying to win his wife back and another drama just might tip her over the edge. 'But say he don't understand, Vin?'

'Then we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.'

Mary Walker brushed her husband's lapels and gave him one final warning. Donald could be irritatingly cantankerous at times and, for Nancy's sake, Mary was determined that today must go smoothly.

'I have already promised you that I will be polite to the

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children, dear. But please do not expect me to welcome their criminal of a father into our home as well, because I just wasn't raised that way.

Sighing, Mary went to check on the buffet she had prepared. Her daughter's choice of husband had caused no end of problems in her relationship with Donald over the years, and it wasn't even poor Michael's fault. It was his brother Vinny's.

Back in 1965, Mary and Donald had fulfilled a lifelong ambition by opening up their own café, set in the heart of Whitechapel. Having spent every penny they had on purchasing and then refurbishing their dream, they worked hard to make a success of it. Business had been booming – until fate struck a terrible blow. Their son Christopher, who was only eight at the time, had witnessed a murder. The killing had been carried out by Vinny Butler, head of a local gangland family, and as soon as he realized that Christopher had witnessed the murder, he had threatened him and forced him to lie to the police.

Petrified for the safety of their children, Mary and Donald had fled Whitechapel one frosty Christmas Day. It had taken time to recover from the trauma of their ordeal, but they had thrown themselves into a new business venture, and moved on with their lives.

The past returned to haunt Mary and Donald in 1971. That was the summer when their beautiful daughter fell in love with Vinny's younger brother, Michael. The lovebirds' relationship had caused Mary nothing but grief ever since. Christopher was now a policeman, and he and Donald were dead against Nancy's choice of husband.

'How do I look, Mum? I feel ever so nervous, but I can't thank you and Dad enough for doing this for me today. I miss my boys so much.'

Mary told her daughter she looked great and held her

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close to her chest. Nancy had been ill recently and had ended up in hospital. Being alienated from her father and brother while trying to bring up two kids of her own was bad enough, but when Michael insisted on taking in the son he'd had by a previous girlfriend it had proved too much for her delicate brain to cope with. That was why it had been decided that Daniel and Adam would spend their birthday at Mary and Donald's home, where Nancy was currently recuperating.

'I hope Dad loves the boys as much as you do, Mum,' Nancy said, her voice full of hope.

Mary held her daughter's face in her hands, forcing Nancy to look at her, and she smiled. Whereas she'd had contact with her grandsons since day one, Donald had never met them before. 'Now, dry them eyes. Today is going to be a wonderful day, and if your father doesn't love them boys as much as I do, I'll eat my hat.'

Joanna Preston was feeling rather melancholy. The house that Vinny had bought was lovely, but its lack of furniture made it seem as cold and lonely as she felt. Tomorrow would be Joanna's eighteenth birthday and for the first time since the shit had hit the fan, she realized just how much she missed her family. Her mum always made a big fuss of her on her birthday, but tomorrow Joanna wouldn't be seeing or even speaking to her. Instead, she would be spending the day at a funeral for two men she didn't even know.

Sipping her cup of tea, she allowed her mind to wander back to the summer. She had been working as a cleaner at a holiday park in Eastbourne when Vinny had appeared in her life and literally swept her off her feet. It really had been a case of love at first sight, but what Joanna hadn't realized at the time was the bad blood between her family

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and Vinny's. Her father was currently serving a fifteen-year prison sentence for shooting Vinny's brother – the same brother who was being buried tomorrow. Jo had only been told the truth recently.

When her mother had learned of her romance, she'd hit the roof. Joanna had then been forced to make a decision. Her family or Vinny? She was so besotted, she'd chosen Vinny, and was now pregnant with their first child. Her mum had been devastated. She'd told Joanna that with her long blonde hair, slender body and beautiful blue eyes, she could get any lad she wanted. But Joanna did not want a lad. She wanted a man, and that man was Vinny.

Moving to Whitechapel had proved to be a bit of an eye-opener for Joanna. She had spent the early part of her life living in South London, but barely remembered that. Tiptree and Eastbourne were the only other two areas she had lived in, and Whitechapel was so very different. The air reeked, the pavements were littered with rubbish, there was graffiti everywhere you looked, and it was very multi-cultural.

'You OK? Hasn't that sofa come yet?' Vinny asked, snapping Joanna out of her daydream.

'No, it hasn't. Vinny, when can I start work at the club?'

Vinny crouched down next to the armchair and began to sweet-talk Joanna. When she had been working at the holiday camp, he had promised her a job as his secretary. That offer had merely been intended to entice her to London. He didn't love her; neither did he want her working for him. Their whole relationship was based on revenge. Vinny hated Joanna's father with a passion and would do anything to get even for what he'd done to Roy. Absolutely anything.

Michael Butler felt as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders as he drove towards Nancy's parents' house. Being the only one, bar Ahmed, who knew that Vinny was

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responsible for Lenny's death was preying on his mind. On top of that, his wife had temporarily left him, and he was currently trying to bring up his three sons alone. Trevor Thomas was another worry. Say he and Vinny had left some kind of evidence at the scene? A long prison sentence did not bear thinking about.

Thankfully, Lee was at school today. It was him moving into their family home that had tipped Nancy over the edge. Lee's mum and gran had died in a car crash a few months ago, so the poor little sod had had nowhere else to go.

'Dad, we want you to come to our birthday party with us, don't we, Adam?' Daniel said.

Michael bumped the car up on the kerb and switched the engine off. As fate would have it, both his sons were born on the very same day. Daniel was four today, Adam two, but there was no way Michael could join in the celebrations. Although they were yet to be properly introduced, Nancy's father hated him.

Michael locked the car door, grabbed his sons by their tiny hands, and led them up the pathway. It was Mary who answered the door, as he guessed it would be. 'Any chance I can have a quick word with Nance, Mary? I miss her so much.'

Mary squeezed her son-in-law's hand. She liked Michael, she really did, but it had taken all her strength to force Donald to allow their grandsons into the house. She couldn't push the issue any further by extending the invitation to Michael. 'Not today, love, but Nancy is on the mend. I can promise you that she'll be ready to see you again soon.'

Closing the door on Michael she led the boys through to the living room. Donald looked awkward as he came face to face with his grandsons for the very first time. Both were dressed in matching beige suits, had jet black hair, bright green eyes, and looked nothing like anybody in his family.

*Kimberley Chambers*

‘Are you our granddad? We’ve been wanting to meet you for ages. My name is Daniel and this is my brother Adam,’ Daniel said politely.

Donald Walker was not usually a man of emotion, but when his youngest grandson held his arm out in hope that his hand would be shook, Donald could not help but smile. He had always been a fan of impeccable manners. ‘Yes, I’m your granddad, and I’ve been looking forward to meeting you too.’

Watching the bonding session unfold before her, Mary shared a smug smile with her daughter. Daniel and Adam already had Donald eating out of the palms of their hands. Gone was her miserable-looking bolshy husband. In his place was a happy, loving grandfather.

Vinny Butler walked into the room and for the first time since the accident locked eyes with the best pal he had left for dead. Ahmed looked awful, wearing only pyjama bottoms his face and body was covered in cuts and bruises.

Ahmed glanced at Vinny, his face devoid of emotion, and then turned to his wife. ‘Make yourself scarce, Anna. Vinny and I have business to discuss.’

When Anna left the room, Vinny’s eyes welled up with pure guilt as he tried to explain his actions on that fateful night. ‘I am so fucking sorry, mate. No way would I have left you if I had thought you were still alive. I really thought you were a goner.’

‘Pour us both a Scotch, then I want you to tell me exactly what happened. I don’t remember anything about that evening at all,’ Ahmed lied. He could sense that Vinny was nervous and so the bastard should be. Making it awkward without being too nasty was exactly how Ahmed had planned this conversation.

## *Payback*

Vinny took a large gulp of his drink. ‘Do you remember going to the whorehouse in Dalston?’

‘Nope.’

‘Well, me and you were three sheets to the wind when we got there. We’d been boozing all night at the club. Champ overheard us saying where we were going and begged to come with us. Anyway, we had a great time and I offered to drive your car home. I’d sobered up a bit by then. But as I was driving, some van came towards me with its full beam on. I was momentarily blinded, which is why I lost control. We smashed into a building, but it was the left-hand side of the car that took all the impact. That’s where you and Champ were both sitting.’

‘Carry on,’ Ahmed urged.

Reliving the awful experience was something Vinny would rather not be put through, but what choice did he have? A thorough explanation was the very least he owed Ahmed. ‘Well, I hit my head against the steering wheel and it dazed me for a minute or so. When I came to and looked at you, there was a big piece of metal sticking out of your chest and a small piece in your head. There was blood everywhere. I checked for a pulse and couldn’t find one, then I got out the car to see if Champ was OK. The crash had almost fucking beheaded him. It was awful, the worst thing I have ever seen in my life. I checked you over once more before I left the scene, but I was positive you were dead. I would never have left you to die, you have to believe that, mate.’

Ahmed took a sip of his drink. He had nearly died and had only got out of hospital the previous day. ‘So, was you thinking straight when you legged it?’

‘My mind was all over the place. I was devastated, Ahmed, about you and Champ. It was like a bad fucking dream.’

‘What I cannot understand is how a devastated man



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would move his best pal's body into the driver's seat to avoid taking the rap himself. That is a callous, cowardly act in my eyes.'

'I just panicked. It weren't the Old Bill I was bothered about, it was my mum and aunt finding out I'd been driving the motor. If they thought it was me who'd killed Champ, they would both disown me. What did you say to the filth? I wouldn't blame you if you doxed me in it. It's no more than I deserve.'

Ahmed chuckled. 'I am not a grass, Vinny. It was my car that was written off and I was found behind the steering wheel, so you wasn't even a suspect.'

'Have you been charged with anything?'

'No. I had internal bleeding, therefore needed an emergency operation. I was questioned, but there was no proof I had been drinking because my blood test ended up on the missing list.'

'Well, I'll buy you a new car obviously, and thanks for not saying anything. My mum and aunt are absolutely broken-hearted as it is. Roy's dead as well. Shot himself in the head right in front of me. This past week has been the worst of my life.'

'It's not exactly been my best, Vinny.'

'I know it hasn't, mate. So, what happens now? I'll understand if you don't want to be my business partner any more,' Vinny said. Michael was his partner in the legit business, the nightclub, but Ahmed had been his partner in the drug trade. Thanks to their astute business brains the two of them had built up quite an empire over the past few years, and the bulk of heroin and cocaine currently available on the streets of London was their merchandise.

Ahmed forced a smile at the man he now hated so very much. 'I was not happy that you left me for dead but now

## *Payback*

you have explained yourself, I can understand why you did what you did. I am willing to let bygones be bygones.'

Relieved, Vinny hugged his pal. 'I will make it up to you, I swear.'

'I know you will. Now, if you don't mind, I'm very tired and could do with some sleep. When is Champ's funeral, by the way? Such a shame, he was a good kid.'

Vinny nodded, his face etched with grief. 'The funeral is tomorrow. We're having a joint one, burying Champ and Roy together.'

'What time and where?'

'The service is at St Leonard's at two. You can't come though, mate. You don't look well enough and my mum and aunt will go apeshit if they see you there. They think you were driving, remember?'

'And what about Michael?'

'He knows the truth. I told him it was me.'

'Well, that's OK then. I loved Champ, Vinny, and I am determined to pay my respects to him. I don't care if your mum and aunt hate my guts. I and God know that Lenny's death had sod all to do with me, remember?'

Aware that Ahmed was being sarcastic, Vinny shrugged. 'OK, but try and stay out of my mum and aunt's way. I'll smooth things over in time, but it's all too raw at the moment.'

When Vinny said goodbye and shut the door, Ahmed smirked. He had no intention of staying away from Queenie and Vivian. He intended to make life as difficult for Vinny as he possibly could from now on. As for the Judas cunt thinking he had been forgiven, there was more chance of hell freezing over than that ever happening.

Thanks to Vinny, he had endured internal bleeding, three broken ribs and forty-two stitches in his face and stomach. Scars would heal, but Vinny's betrayal wouldn't. Every time

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he looked at those scars, Ahmed would be reminded of what his so-called best friend and business partner had done to him.

When Ahmed had first woken up and learned what had happened, his head and heart felt weighed down with feelings of shock and disappointment. Not any more though. Over the past few days, those feelings had been replaced by fury and an urge to get even.

Vinny Butler had disrespected him in the worst possible way. Moving his body into the driver's seat, then leaving him for dead was an act of evil that Ahmed could never forgive or forget.

Ahmed grinned as he laid his head back on the pillow. The five most important things in Vinny's life were money, his liberty, reputation, mother and son. Now, what should Ahmed take away from him first? Decisions, decisions . . .