

## CHAPTER ONE

# Death to the King

The news came one Saturday morning from a young woman who sounded very upset and spoke with a strong foreign accent.

"Yes, hello, police? You must come. He is dead! His skin is cold and there is blood all over the floor. You must come here as soon as possible, please!"

Detective Inspector Evans had just arrived at the office and was listening to a recording of the telephone call. There was always a lot of crime in London on a Friday night, but he was not prepared for what he was about to hear.

The operator was very calm and asked for the woman's name and location. She was calling from a mobile phone.

"My name is Helena Kowalska. I have just come to work... I am the cleaner at a nightclub called 'Lust' in Charing Cross. I am sorry, but my English is not very good. When will you be here?"

"We'll send someone over as soon as we can, Mrs Kowalska," the operator replied. "Please stay where you are and let me take some more information. Do you know who the dead person is?"

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "It is the big boss. He has shot himself. The gun is still in his hand."

Inspector Evans could not believe his ears.

"The big boss?" he repeated after the recording had ended. "Does that mean what I think it means?"

Some people were nodding their heads in answer; others shrugged. Could Stanley Cooper really be dead?

Stanley Cooper was not only the owner of Lust, but a notorious crime lord who ran a large chain of bars and nightclubs in London's West End. He also owned a dog track in Walthamstow. The Metropolitan Police called him the "King of the Underworld" because they believed that he and his gangsters were responsible for much of the violence in the area. Unfortunately for them, they had no solid proof.

"The call came in less than twenty minutes ago," said a deep female voice. "The forensics team are already on their way to examine the crime scene. Evans, you should go and join them. Something tells me that Cooper didn't kill himself, and if I'm right, this is going to be your case."

It was Superintendent Fisher, the officer in charge of the station. She was a very powerful woman, and everything she said sounded like an order. "Yes, ma'am," replied Inspector Evans. "I'll take Sandra with me, if that's okay. We've both been working on cases involving Cooper's gang lately."

"That was going to be my next suggestion, Evans," the superintendent growled. "I want you to treat this death as suspicious from the start. Don't leave any stone unturned when you're down there."

"Of course not, ma'am."

"Where is Checchino, anyway? It's not like her to be late. Find her and get going!"

"Right away, ma'am," the inspector said and left the room. Detective Inspector Sandra Checchino was sitting in the staff kitchen when Inspector Evans burst into the room.

"Ah, Sandra, there you are!"

She looked up from her large cup of coffee in surprise.

"Oh, it looks like someone had a long night last night!" Evans said in a friendly tone.

Inspector Checchino smiled weakly. "Yes, you could say that, Gary. I just haven't had time to put on any make-up."

"Never mind, you look no worse without it," he joked. "Anyway, you've just missed some important news. You'll never believe what happened last night!"

Inspector Checchino waited for him to continue.

"We've got to go and see our friend Stanley Cooper!" he said.

"Oh, no, not again!" she groaned and looked back down at her coffee. "That man never cooperates. He won't tell us anything. What have he and his thugs done this time?"

"That's what we have to find out," DI Evans replied mysteriously. "But you are right about one thing: Cooper definitely won't be telling us anything today, that's for sure. He's been found dead in his office at Lust. It looks like suicide."

Inspector Checchino opened her eyes wide.

"Mamma mia!" she said in a parody of her Italian relatives. "Stanley Cooper's dead? We should get going right away." She quickly drank what was left of her coffee, which was still rather hot, and walked out of the kitchen with Inspector Evans.

The nightclub looked like a small building from the outside. The entrance was between two bars on a narrow side street of Charing Cross Road. Large, colourful posters on the door advertised which disc jockeys were playing on which nights, and red neon lights above the door spelt out in elaborate letters the word "Lust".

"This would be a nice place for a first date," Inspector Evans said, smiling at Inspector Checchino. "Look, we missed DJs Mad Daddy and Divine Lickz last night!"

"You and your jokes," she replied flatly. "I think we're both a bit too old for places like these, don't you?"

"I certainly am, but you're still young, free and single, Sandra. You'd quickly find yourself a date in a place like this."

"Don't make me laugh. I'm thirty-five next month. And we meet enough thugs at work - I don't want to date one as well."

"Lust is very exclusive," said Inspector Evans. "Well, it is if you compare it to Cooper's other bars, at least..."

The uniformed policeman who was guarding the entrance smiled and let the pair inside. They walked down

the stairs, past the cloakroom and into the bar area. The air was heavy with the smell of alcohol, and the floor was littered with empty bottles and cigarette stubs. It was quite sticky underfoot.

The large, pink leather sofas against the walls looked very out of place in the daylight that shone through the tall windows. "Nice decor," Inspector Checchino whispered sarcastically.

A young woman wearing jeans and a jumper was sitting on one of the silver and red bar stools. She did not notice the two police officers entering the room, because she was busy talking on her mobile phone in a loud voice.

"That must be the cleaner," said Inspector Evans, who spoke a few words of Polish. "We'll talk to her later. Come on, let's go and see our man."

Although she was an experienced investigator, Inspector Checchino always felt a sense of dread before seeing dead bodies, and today was no exception. Her colleague, on the other hand, seemed to be nothing but happy about Stanley Cooper's death.

The forensics team were busy taking photographs when Inspectors Evans and Checchino entered the office.

"It's really true, then, the King has snuffed it?" Inspector Evans asked.

Near the back of the office, a man's head appeared from behind the desk and grinned.

"A single shot to the brain," he said as he stood up.

It was Vash Singh, one of the forensics experts. His thick glasses made his eyes look as large as saucers.

"There's no sign of a struggle at all," he said. "Just look around this room; you can see for yourselves how tidy it is."

The office looked completely normal - apart from the two legs that were sticking out from behind the desk. Inspector Evans walked up to look at the rest of the body.

"Hmm, it's certainly less tidy at this end of the room, that's for sure," he said solemnly. Stanley Cooper's body was lying face up in a pool of blood. His mouth was open, and his arms were resting on either side of his fat chest.

The inspector's eyes moved directly to the gun in the man's left hand.

"So, what do you think, Vash? Is it really possible that he shot himself?"

"I'd say so, Gary," he replied. "It does look like suicide, but we still can't rule out murder. There'll have to be a full ballistic analysis. We can only guess the facts until then."

"Does it look like the body's been moved at all?"

Vash shook his head. "There's a lot of blood here, but it's all in one place," he said.

Inspector Checchino walked over from the doorway and looked at the body. The dead man had short, grey hair and a big moustache that sat above his top lip like a lazy caterpillar.

Even dead, he still has the same arrogant expression on his face, she thought.

"Do you have any idea when this happened?" she asked.

Vash pushed his glasses up his nose and explained that the body had already been a little stiff when they had arrived just after ten o'clock. They had also measured the temperature. "I'd say he died between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.," he concluded.

"And you've found nothing unusual at all?" she continued.

Vash shrugged.

"I wouldn't expect his arms to be in that position if he shot himself," he said, "but on the other hand, it's not impossible."

"Well, you've been trying to bring this man to justice for a long time, Sandra," said Inspector Evans. "It looks to me like someone may have helped you out."

"Maybe," she said quietly, staring at the dead man's arms. Then one of the other forensics experts said that there was something interesting about Cooper's shirt: she had noticed a small amount of lipstick on the collar when she was taking photographs of the body.

Inspector Checchino was examining a computer monitor in the corner of the office. It showed sixteen small pictures of the main rooms in the nightclub from different

angles, including the office they were standing in. It also showed two more pictures of the street outside.

"There should be a lot of evidence on this, Gary," she said, pointing at the security camera footage.

Inspector Evans looked at the screen and scratched his head. "Hmm," he replied slowly. "There might have been if someone hadn't switched it off. Look, it's not recording."



## CHAPTER TWO

# Find the Woman

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mrs Kowalska," Inspector Evans began. "Could you begin by telling us what the nightclub was like when you came to work this morning?"

"Everything looked normal," she replied, looking him in the eye. "The doors were locked, and the lights were off. The sign outside was still turned on, but that happens quite often."

"Is there an alarm system fitted here?" he asked.

Inspector Checchino was noting down the information and looked up at the cleaner when she did not reply.

"Do you have an alarm?" Evans repeated.

"Yes. Sorry, I do not understand everything you say," Helena said. "The alarm was turned off when I arrived. I thought that the big boss was here, or the manager. They sometimes stay in the office and play poker until the morning."

"I see. Can you tell me the manager's name, please?"

"Omar Omari," the cleaner smiled. "He is such a charming man, Inspector. He is always very friendly to me."

"How many other people work here at the club?"

"I'm not sure. I do not know most of them personally," Helena replied slowly. "There is a list of names and

telephone numbers on the notice board. I can give you a copy."

"That would be very helpful, thank you," he said. "It would also help us a great deal if you could answer a few more questions."

The cleaner sighed a little and looked at her watch.

"I must do some work," she complained. "I have two more places to go to this morning."

"I'll try to be brief, Mrs Kowalska. Have you heard of any arguments involving Stanley Cooper recently?"

The young lady shook her head. "I do not see the big boss often. And when I do, he does not tell me anything like that."

"I see, but maybe you've heard other people talking about him?"

"You should talk to Omar," she replied. "He knows much more about his private life. In fact, he sometimes complains that he is too - hmm, what is the word? - too involved in it." Inspector Evans paused and looked across at his colleague.

"I didn't necessarily mean his private life, Mrs Kowalska. Do you know anything about any business deals, for example? Or have you heard any rumours involving other gangs?"

"Gangs?" she repeated, shocked. "Oh no! I am sorry, I really have nothing to do with any of that. I'm just the cleaner here."

The police had been knocking for five minutes when Omar Omari finally opened the front door to his apartment in North London. His wild, curly hair was hanging over his eyes, and he was only half dressed. He did not seem at all surprised by the news of his boss's death.

"So the dirty old swine is dead?" he laughed. "He had that coming."

"Please take this seriously, Mr Omari," Inspector Checchino said sternly. "We're talking about a man's life - and possibly a very serious crime."

"What do you mean by 'possibly'?" he asked.

"We're still trying to find out exactly what happened last night," she said calmly. "May we come inside?"

"Why, of course. Do come on in, Officers," the man said with exaggerated politeness. "Take a seat in the lounge and I'll be right with you."

The pair sat down on an old, blue futon that was covered in large stains.

Omar came back a minute later wearing a white T-shirt. He was also carrying a rolled-up pair of socks which he put on as the police began their interview.

"Could you begin by telling us when you left work last night, Mr Omari?" Inspector Checchino asked in a tolerant voice. "Yes, it was a really busy night and I stayed until the end. We had some great DJs playing - Mad Daddy was there, you know - so it was an important event for us all. It went really well." He brushed his hair away from his eyes and

looked at the two inspectors, who both seemed to be expecting him to say more. "Oh, I was there until about 4:30, I suppose," he finally answered.

Inspector Checchino wrote down the information.

"Did anybody see you leave?" she asked.

"At that time in the morning? No. At least, nobody I know. I got the night bus back up here."

"Hmm. Well, what can you tell us about Stanley Cooper - was he alone when you left the club?"

"No. A man called Bruno Tartufo was in the office with him all night," he explained. "He's the boss's right-hand man. They're almost always together, and he was still there when I left."

"And apart from yourself, Mr Omari, how many people have access to Mr Cooper's office?" Inspector Checchino asked.

Omar did not flinch.

"I only go in there when I'm invited. Normally I work in my own office across the hall, but I know some people who don't have to wait for an invitation, if you know what I mean."

The young man grinned at the two inspectors with perfect white teeth. They looked back at him expressionlessly, not understanding what was so amusing.

"Well, it's what they always say at the start of a police investigation, isn't it? *Cherchez la femme!* And I can tell you

right away that Cooper had a young lady friend: a Miss Kim Watt. She had him wrapped around her little finger"

"Kim Watt?" repeated Inspector Checchino.

"Yes, Kim Watt the Kumquat, I call her - a fruity little thing. She manages Cooper's dog track in Walthamstow. But I've seen her in Lust quite a lot lately, too. She always comes to the bar as soon as she arrives and pours herself a gin and tonic, the little madam."

"Did you see her at the club last night?"

Omar shook his head and brushed back his hair again.

"Who else would Mr Cooper let into his office?" asked the inspector, who suddenly felt there was something strangely attractive about the club manager.

"Just his idiot henchmen, I guess. They do everything for Cooper, and they have keys to all of his bars and clubs. Faithful as dogs, they are - and just as stupid."

Inspector Evans laughed a little and took down the men's names.

"Now then," he continued, "has anything happened lately that could have made Stanley Cooper someone's enemy?"

"Lots!" Omar exclaimed. "And you're asking the right person, let me tell you! He tried to get me involved in some of his 'business activities' outside the nightclub, but I didn't want to have anything to do with it."

"Is that what Helena Kowalska meant when she said that you knew about his private life?" Inspector Checchino wondered aloud.

"Ah, Helena," sighed Omar, "She doesn't know the half of it. But yes, I've told her some things in private. The boss wanted me to 'take a message to a client' in Walthamstow. I'm not paid to go on dangerous missions like that, though!"

"One last thing, Mr Omari," said Inspector Evans towards the end of the interview. "Do you know how to operate the security camera system at Lust?"

"Of course," he replied. "I'm the manager there, aren't I? Actually, I don't have to do very much at all. It runs automatically, you see. The cameras are connected to a computer that saves the videos for a month, and then they're deleted."

"Someone stopped the computer from recording last night," the inspector explained. "Have you any idea who that might have been?"

Omar blinked at him. "No. But it seems like a sensible thing to do if you're going to commit a crime, doesn't it?" he said dryly.

"Is it possible that there's another copy of the videos somewhere?" Inspector Evans continued. "For example, is the footage sent to another company, or to Mr Cooper's home computer?"

"Nope," said Omar simply. "His house is the one place that is totally secure. Bad Manor Park. I've heard that it's like Fort Knox there!"

"Bruno Tartufo!" repeated Inspector Evans after they left the apartment. "This isn't the first time we've heard that name lately."

The Metropolitan Police were trying to fight the sale of cocaine in and around the West End, and several unimportant members of a drugs ring had mentioned Tartufo.

"Another fine Italian citizen in the city of London," said Inspector Checchino ironically. "We're not related, before you say anything."

Inspector Evans was more interested in finding Tartufo than making jokes. He radioed the station.

"I need addresses for Bruno Tartufo and Kim Watt," he said. "And make sure that the family liaison officer reaches Stanley Cooper's daughter before the Polish cleaner starts to gossip!"

Later that day, towards the midafternoon, the two detectives drove to an elegant town house in Chelsea. It was the address of the third and last Kim Watt in central London. The first two had said that they did not know anything about anyone called Stanley Cooper,

The pair had also tried to speak to Bruno Tartufo, but there was nobody home, Inspector Evans walked up the three white marble steps leading to the large, black front door, rang the bell and waited.

The voice that eventually came through the intercom was as sweet as honey.

"Hello?" she asked, her voice almost seductive, "Who's there?"

"Police, ma'am," replied the inspector with a small smile, "Please open up!"

The first thing the police saw on the other side of the door was a tall redhead with a surprised expression on her face. Her lips were painted bright red, Moments later; a short man with a thin moustache entered the hallway and stood next to her. He looked at the police and put his arm around the woman, "Miss Watt?" Inspector Evans began, "Yes?"

"We've come to talk to you about Stanley Cooper, May we come inside for a moment?"

"Hah! You've caught him at last, have you?" joked the small man in an unmistakably Italian accent.

"Bruno, be quiet!" Kim hissed,

"Ah, and you must be Mr Tartufo!" the inspector smiled, "We have a lot to discuss."



## CHAPTER THREE

# A Headless Organization

After over an hour of interviews, Inspectors Evans and Checchino left Kim Watt's house in Chelsea and set off back to the station. They talked about their impressions on the way.

"I never thought the notorious Bruno Tartufo would be such a short man!" began Inspector Evans. "Even you're taller than him, Sandra!"

She gave a little laugh, but kept her eyes fixed on the road. "Don't be fooled," she said, "small people can be dangerous."

"I didn't like the way he was staring at Kim whenever she spoke," her colleague continued. "He was intimidating her. Do you think she was telling the truth?"

"People like her are never honest about everything, Gary," she replied, "but she did take the news about Cooper very badly."

"For a few moments, maybe, then she was perfectly normal again. I know she says she was at the dog track in Walthamstow all evening, but that closed just after midnight, and she has no alibi for the time of the shooting."

"Not many people will have an alibi that they can prove, Gary. After all, it was between five and six o'clock in the morning. I'm sure that you and I were asleep like most

other people in London, but nobody can prove that either, can they?"

Inspector Evans turned to his colleague and grinned.

"Only because you've turned me down so often, Sandra. I know better than to ask you out on a Friday night now." Inspector Checchino laughed in amusement.

"Oh, come off it! You're a good friend, but we tried that once, if you remember. It would never work."

"I know, I know," he said.

"You can't blame me for trying, though."

There was a short pause in the conversation.

"What about Bruno?" he asked.

Inspector Checchino frowned.

"Hmm, yes, what about him?" she agreed. "He didn't appear at all shocked by the news. And I find it very suspicious that he says he left the nightclub at exactly 5 a.m., don't you?"

The car came to a halt at some red traffic lights, and she looked Inspector Evans in the eye. "Moments before Cooper was killed," he agreed, scratching his chin. "But Bruno says that his boss was expecting a visitor and that he wanted to be alone when that person arrived. That's why he left the club at that time."

"So he says, yes," sighed Inspector Checchino. "I don't believe that story for a second. It's very convenient for Bruno, isn't it?"

Inspector Evans nodded slowly. "It is, yes. But it could be convenient for us that we found him at Kim Watt's house today. According to Omar, she was going out with Cooper, wasn't she? So, what do you think she was doing with Bruno on a Saturday afternoon?"

Back at the police station, the two detectives met Superintendent Fisher to discuss their findings. She listened to everything they had to say, but she was not interested in the smaller details: her favourite football club Arsenal was playing at 5:30 p.m., and she was planning to watch the game from start to finish.

"Let's be realistic," she said. "Although it's very likely, we still don't have any solid proof that Cooper didn't kill himself. And it won't be hard to find a lot of people who had a good reason to want that man dead. I'm sure even you two are pleased that he's gone."

"You're right, ma'am," said Inspector Evans. "And although we've collected some statements from the people nearest to him today, it will take a few days to compare what they've said against whatever evidence there is."

"Right," she said. "So let's call it a day and enjoy what's left of the weekend."

Inspector Checchino remained quiet and followed Inspector Evans out of the superintendent's office.

On Monday morning, Inspector Checchino arrived at work a good hour before Inspector Evans. She had not been able to sleep well, and she wanted to see what developments had taken place over the weekend. An incident room had

been set up at the station to collect all the information related to Stanley Cooper's death. The inspector was in there reading through the reports when her colleague finally turned up.

"So, have you heard?" she asked her colleague, her face red with anger.

"Good morning, Sandra! Nice to see you, too," he said ironically. "It's not like you to be here before me on a Monday."

"Sorry. Good morning, Gary," she smiled. "Well, have you?"

"Obviously not. What have you got for me?"

"To begin with, there was an arson attack at Lust late last night. The fire brigade think that someone broke a window and set fire to a can of petrol. You saw all the soft furniture in there: it went up like a match. The fire's destroyed everything inside."

"What?! How did that happen? Didn't we have an officer guarding the club all weekend?"

"Only until the club manager locked up after the forensics team had finished investigating the scene," Inspector Checchino explained. "That was on Saturday evening."

"I see," Inspector Evans said.

"And do you have any idea why someone might want to burn down one of Cooper's clubs?"

"Well, it was too late to destroy the evidence. My first thought was that Omar Omari might have had something to do with it, but then I read these."

She passed Inspector Evans a pile of paper.

"Three people in the north of the city have reported the theft of their greyhounds. Altogether we have six expensive racing dogs to find."

"Why should we care about some kidnapped dogs?" he asked. Then he remembered. "I suppose I don't need to ask what connects these animals to Stanley Cooper, should I?"

"Probably not, no," said Inspector Checchino. "The owners race them at Cooper's track in Walthamstow. And, as we learnt on Saturday, Kim Watt is the manager there."

"What do we know about the owners - are they friends?"

"One of them is Kim's brother. The other two were close friends of Cooper's. And when I say 'friends', I mean that both were in his gang."

"Ah. But why would someone target the dogs and not the people?" asked DI Evans.

"Well, for a start, each greyhound is worth at least 40,000 pound's. And all six are meant to be racing at an event tonight, so it will be very bad for business if they aren't there."

"Sorry if I'm being a bit slow," he replied, "but what do these dogs have to do with the fire at Lust? What's the connection?"

Inspector Checchino took the papers back and put them on the desk.

"I think it was a symbolic act," she said. "It's typical for gangs. Just think about it: Lust was Cooper's most prestigious nightclub, and it's where all the best DJs went to play. Whoever the killer was, he didn't only want to kill the king, he wanted to destroy his palace, too. Kidnapping the dogs adds insult to injury for Cooper's gang. If we find the dogs, we will probably find our killer,"

"You may have a good point there, Sandra. But I need to wake up properly with a coffee before looking at this more closely. Can I get you one, too?"

Nobody knew exactly how many security cameras there were in the city of London, but there were a lot. There were cameras on every main road and in every underground station; they were also installed on every bus to fight vandalism, terrorism and other crimes.

A team of junior officers were watching the camera footage from all of the night buses that left Trafalgar Square for Finchley in North London early on Saturday morning. It was a boring job, but it was the only way to find out if Omar Omari was telling the truth: he had told the police that he could not remember exactly which bus he had taken, but that he normally got on the 134 or the N13.

Meanwhile, Inspectors Evans and Checchino were reviewing the videos from Lust. There was a lot of footage on the hard disk from Friday night.

Finally, they saw Bruno Tartufo leave the building just before 5 a.m. The recording was turned off five minutes later.

"I don't believe it!" cried Inspector Evans. "He really did leave the club before Cooper was shot!"

"Hmm...", his colleague said quietly, "but did he return?"

They repeated the last ten minutes of footage in Cooper's office. It was a strange feeling to watch the monitor.

Inspector Checchino thought it was as if one of the dead had come back to life and was walking around the room.

The two detectives watched Cooper point to the door, at which point the short Italian man turned and left the room. Cooper then took out his mobile phone and made a call that lasted only a few seconds. He was smiling. After he put his phone back into his pocket, he waddled up to the computer in the corner, looked up at the camera, and the screen went black.

"He turned off the recording himself!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Why would he do that?"

"I'd say it's fairly obvious that he was about to do something that he wanted to keep secret," replied Inspector Evans dryly. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it could have been anything. A secret business deal, a meeting with an important drug trafficker... maybe even a meeting with a mystery lady friend?"

Inspector Checchino laughed.

"A mystery woman? Do you really think that someone as unattractive and disgusting as Stanley Cooper could manage two women?"

He was about to reply when one of the junior officers shouted across the room: "I've found him!"

She had identified the bus that Omar Omari got onto after work on Saturday morning. The club manager had been correct that it was the 134 to Finchley, but he had got the time wrong. According to the clock on the screen, it was already 5:30 a.m. when he left Trafalgar Square.

"A whole hour later?" Inspector Checchino thought aloud. "A lot can happen in sixty minutes..."



## CHAPTER FOUR

# A Smoking Gun

Inspector Checchino was more patient than Inspector Evans. She told him that it would be a bad idea to rush to visit Omar Omari again. They should wait until there was some solid proof that he had returned to the scene, she said.

"Why do you and Fisher always talk about waiting?" he complained. "We should bring him in for questioning before he disappears!"

In the end, the pair spent most of Monday interviewing the other people who worked at Lust, but it proved to be pointless. Everyone had gone home before the manager left, and nobody could remember anything unusual.

Two other officers had spoken with the staff at Cooper's bars and his other clubs. Most of them had very little to say. They all respected their boss a great deal, it seemed - or they were still afraid of him, even though he was dead.

The only noteworthy report came from one of the women seen her boss smoking outside a bar in Soho at around 3:30 a.m. Kim had forgotten to mention this fact when the inspectors had visited her in Chelsea. According to her own statement, she had stayed at work until shortly after 1 a.m. and then driven back home.

"We should go and speak to her again right away!" Inspector Evans said when he heard the report.

"You wanted to do the same with Omar Omari a few hours ago, Gary," sighed Inspector Checchino. "We can't go around accusing everyone of lying to us."

"Well, one of them is hiding something," he growled. "At least one of them."

Their conversation was interrupted when the telephone on Inspector Evans' desk rang. It was Vash Singh calling from the forensics department. He said that he had some important news for the investigators.

The two detectives always enjoyed talking to Vash, who could explain things in a lively and interesting way. When they walked into his office this time, Vash was holding a plastic skull in one hand and a pencil in the other.

"You should have been an actor," said Inspector Evans. "You'd make a good Hamlet."

"Just take a seat and listen to what I have to tell you," he smiled. "First of all, we can definitely rule out suicide now. Look, the bullet must have gone in at this angle."

He was pointing the pencil at the left temple, but it was nowhere near square against the skull.

"How can you be sure it was murder?" asked Inspector Checchino.

"Stanley Cooper was left-handed, and the revolver in his hand was six inches long. Just look at the trajectory."

Inspector Evans put his hands in the position that Vash was describing.

"You're right," he agreed. "I wouldn't try to commit suicide like this. It's too difficult."

He turned to Inspector Checchino, who was staring at the skull.

"I'd either put the gun inside my mouth or hold it here, just above my ear, wouldn't you?"

Inspector Checchino sighed a little.

"I haven't really thought about how I would shoot myself, Gary, but you're both right, yes."

"So," Vash continued, "now you probably think that someone was standing in front of him, and not to his side?"

Inspectors Evans and Checchino both nodded.

"You're wrong!" Vash exclaimed. "Neither Cooper nor the killer were standing up. We found no traces of blood near head height in the room, and none on the desk either. But there is something very revealing about the few small spots on the back wall of the office."

He showed the inspectors a photograph of the bloodstains. "Take a look. The stains on this picture suggest that Cooper's head was about two feet above the ground when he was shot."

"So he was kneeling?" the inspector asked. "Someone made him beg for his life?"

"No, the blood is too low down for that as well," Vash explained. "I think he was lying down, which would also explain the position of the body."

Inspector Evans remembered seeing Cooper's body on the office floor in Lust. It was true that he did not appear to have fallen to the ground: both of his arms were resting on either side of his chest.

"Do you mean the killer was lying on top of him?" he asked.

"That would explain the lipstick on his shirt as well, don't you think?" Vash suggested. "Cherchez la femme!"

The inspectors exchanged looks.

"Did anyone ever find Cooper's mobile phone?" asked Inspector Checchino. "We know that he made a call shortly before he was shot, but we have no idea whose number he dialled. We asked his telephone company, and they said that it belongs to a pay-as-you-go phone that hasn't been registered."

Vash shook his head. "We didn't find anything else in the office that could help you," he explained. "Apart from one thing, that is. You haven't asked about the really important clue that we're quite excited about."

"What's that?" the two inspectors asked simultaneously.

"Whoever shot Stanley Cooper wanted it to look like a suicide, so they left the gun and the shell casing on the scene. Of course there is no licence for the gun, but the bullet was quite rare. The ballistics expert says that fewer than five percent of revolvers use this type. Interestingly, they're more popular in Eastern Europe. There's a large factory near Warsaw."

"He was killed by a Polish bullet?" asked Inspector Evans, surprised.

"Not necessarily, no. The same bullets are available in Britain as well, but they're not used very much."

"The cleaner is Polish," the inspector continued, ignoring what Vash was saying. "I bet she knows some people in Cooper's gangs, too. I thought it was strange that someone who visits a place like Lust so often knew so little about the people there." Inspector Checchino smiled at Vash and turned to her colleague with an irritated look.

"Will you stop accusing everyone, Gary!" she complained. "First it was Bruno, then Omar, then Kim, and now you want to accuse Helena Kowalska!"

"I want to speak to them all again," he replied stubbornly. "We should start with the women. After all, that lipstick on his collar must have come from somewhere."

"But it could have been there for days," Inspector Checchino said. "I don't think Stanley Cooper was the most hygienic man to walk this planet..."

Kim Watt was alone when the detectives arrived at her house early that evening. She opened the door with the same surprised look on her face that they had seen on their previous visit. "Do you mind if we ask you a few more questions about Friday night, Miss Watt?" asked Inspector Evans.

"Of course not! Please come in," she said.

She led them through the hall-way to the large kitchen at the back of the house and offered them a seat at the table.

"Would you like some tea, Officers?" she asked politely.

"Oh, that would be great, thank you!" said Inspector Evans happily.

Inspector Checchino was slightly irritated by the woman trying to be the perfect hostess and kicked her colleague's leg under the table.

"Miss Watt," she began, coming straight to the point, "we have received a report that you were in central London after 3 a.m. on the night that Stanley Cooper was shot. Is there a reason why you failed to tell us this on Saturday?"

Kim put down the kettle and turned to the two inspectors. She was biting her lip nervously and did not say a word.

"I've got nothing to hide," she said after a long pause.

"Please just tell us the truth," said Inspector Evans, who thought that the woman seemed much more natural than she did when they had first met.

"You have to understand that this is something I just couldn't tell you the other day. Not with Bruno right beside me..."

She stopped speaking and took a cigarette out of the box that was lying next to the sink.

"I did go into town after work, it's true. I was going to go to Lust, but Omar told me not to, because a lot of the people there know Bruno. And Bruno himself was there all night on Friday. So I went to a salsa bar that I like instead. It's only a few minutes away from Charing Cross, and I waited there until Omar finished work."

"Do you remember what time that was?" asked the inspector. "Oh, about 4 a.m.," Kim Watt replied.

There was another awkward pause in the conversation. Inspector Evans cleared his throat.

"We know that Mr Omari left Trafalgar Square at 5:30 a.m. on the 134 bus to Finchley, Miss Watt," he said. "Can you tell us where you and he were before that time?"

The woman began to blush. Her pale cheeks were soon almost as red as her flame-coloured hair.

"We... we visited a hotel where one of Omar's friends works as a night manager. There are always some empty rooms, and he lets us use one from time to time, It's just a bit of fun!"

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Fight for Justice

Superintendent Fisher entered the incident room on Tuesday after she walked past and saw that Inspectors Evans and Checchino were laughing inside.

"What's so funny, you two?" she asked impatiently. "It's been over three days now and you've found more questions than answers!"

The two detectives tried to look serious, but Inspector Evans burst out laughing again.

"Sorry ma'am," he said. "It's a private joke."

The superintendent noticed Inspector Checchino lifting her hand from Inspector Evans' shoulder.

"Never mind that," she answered. "You need to get to the bottom of this case before these gangs get out of control."

There had been more violence on Monday night. Bruno Tartufo had attacked two of Cooper's henchmen, and they were in hospital.

"We're doing our best, ma'am," said Inspector Checchino. "We found out today that both the bar manager and the woman that Cooper was seeing have a solid alibi. They were recorded entering and leaving a hotel."

"Who are your other suspects?" asked Superintendent Fisher.



"For a moment we thought the cleaner might have been involved," explained Inspector Evans, smiling slightly. "She has keys to the nightclub, and she's polish."

"Polish?"

"Well, like the bullets that Vash told us about," Inspector Evans continued, "But we looked into her background today, and it's true that she and her family have nothing to do with any gangsters as far as we can tell."

Inspector Checchino was trying to give the impression that they had more to work with.

"There's still a big question mark over Bruno Tartufo," she said, "He was the last person on the scene, and nobody can prove his alibi."

"And we are watching him very closely," added Inspector Evans, "He's going to be at Cooper's funeral with the rest of the gang at four o'clock today."

"Fine," the superintendent replied shortly, "Just make sure that nobody sees members of the police attending the funeral of one of London's biggest criminals!"

"Any news about the search warrant, ma'am?" asked Inspector Checchino, "Do we have permission to go to Bruno's house yet?"

"Yes, we should have it ready before the end of the afternoon." With that, Superintendent Fisher turned around and left the incident room.

Inspectors Evans and Checchino drove to the crematorium in an unmarked car and waited outside the

gates. They arrived half an hour early so that they could watch the crowd.

Some mourners were already there; many others soon turned up and formed a long line of black suits and overcoats outside the building.

"I don't like these places at all, Gary," said Inspector Checchino quietly when the hearse drove up to the door of the crematorium.

"Nobody likes funerals," he smiled. "But I think we can be pleased that Stanley Cooper has danced his last dance, don't you?"

"I suppose so," she said quietly.

"Come on, Sandra, just think about it. You always said he was a monster. Secretly we both know that he deserved whatever happened on Friday night. Remember all those drug-related killings last year? Only someone as evil as him could have ordered so many executions. Omari was right: he had it coming."

Inspector Checchino was silent and watched six fat men lift the coffin onto their shoulders.

"He was behind so many other crimes as well, and we all knew it. How many cases have we worked on over the past few years?"

"...And he always got away," she said, speaking over her colleague.

This conversation was practically a routine, but the tense was now new. Stanley Cooper was history.

"If we're lucky, his gang will be powerless soon," he continued.

"I..."

"I feel sick," she said suddenly, interrupting him.

Inspector Evans looked across at her in surprise as she opened the door and stepped out of the vehicle.

"I just need some fresh air," she said, looking back into the car. "The air conditioning in there is making me nauseous!"

The inspector watched her walk along the grass with one eye fixed on her long, slim legs. After a moment, he thought he saw two people in the crowd staring at Sandra, too. They looked as if they could have been Bruno Tartufo's brothers.

"I think you've got a couple of admirers here," Inspector Evans said when Inspector Checchino finally returned and got into the car.

"What are you talking about?"

"There were two men staring at you. Didn't you see?"

"Oh... no, not really. This place is full of criminals today, though, Gary. I'm sure we've met them all before at one time or another."

They sat and waited for the funeral to end. Inspector Evans wanted to see whether any fights would break out between the mourners, or whether any more gangsters would come to cause trouble.

After twenty minutes of near silence, a call came through on the radio. It was a sergeant at the station who had just made an arrest.

"We've caught the person who set fire to Lust, sir!" she said in excitement. "It was Bruno Tartufo's younger brother, Alessio. He says that Cooper's gang has divided into two groups: one led by Bruno and the other by a thug in Walthamstow. This second gang forced him to destroy the club in order to save his family. He's been very helpful so far because he wants us to protect him."

"Protect him? What do you mean, we should protect him?"

"From the other gang, sir, but from his brother, too. He says that lately Bruno has been a dangerous man to be around. He's also told us who kidnapped those dogs. Apparently Bruno is keeping them in his cellar as some kind of trophy, but he wants to either sell them or shoot them. He sees himself as the next big cheese!"

"Let's get going!" said Inspector Checchino. "We should go to Tartufo's house before he gets back from this funeral."

Bruno Tartufo owned a large house in Chelsea that was twice as large as Kim Watt's. The two detectives did not yet have a search warrant, but they had a good reason to believe that a crime was taking place in the cellar. It meant they could go inside.

The old Italian woman who let them in did not ask many questions. When she said that she did not have a key to

the cellar, Inspector Evans kicked open the door without thinking twice.

Immediately, six brown dogs ran up the stairs and jumped all over him. One even started to lick his face as if it were a giant ice cream.

During the chaos that followed, Inspector Checchino carefully stepped downstairs into the darkness of the cellar. It was her only chance, and she decided to take it.

She slowly pulled out a small box from her coat pocket and placed it on a table at the far end of the room. It contained around two dozen bullets that she had bought undercover on the black market.

As she turned around to leave the cellar, a hand came out of the shadows and landed on her shoulder.

"Sandra," said a concerned voice, "what the hell are you doing?!"

She looked up at Inspector Evans, who was shaking his head in disbelief. He had a bad feeling about what she was about to say.

"I was just taking a look at these bullets," she began.

"Don't lie to me! I saw you put them there."

Inspector Checchino paused and looked around the room. "Gary, we've been trying all year to bring Cooper to justice, but he always got away. You know how he operated. He always had a puppet in place to take the blame for what he did. And Bruno is no better - he would kill his own mother."

"I can't believe this!" he hissed. "That's not how justice works!"

"Justice? Let me tell you about justice, Gary. I'm sure you don't remember a young man who committed suicide in Camberwell twelve months ago," she began.

"No, I can't say that I do. There are a lot of suicides in London."

"You're right, there are. But this wasn't really a suicide. Everyone just assumed that it was..."

"How can you know that?" he asked. "Who are you talking about?"

"It was a university student," Inspector Checchino said flatly. "Matthew Puglisi." Inspector Evans looked her in the eye. He moved his hand down from her shoulder to her hand and squeezed it.

"He wasn't just a student, was he?" he asked calmly.

"No, Gary," she said and looked down at the floor, "He... he was my nephew. He was killed one year ago on Friday night." Inspector Checchino looked back up at Inspector Evans with tears in her eyes.

"He was my nephew, and he told me that he was in trouble with some drug dealers at a nightclub in Charing Cross. I think you can guess which one. He'd even received some death threats, but he was too afraid to talk to the police - apart from me, that is."

"Are you serious? You were behind the whole thing?"

She thought of the two men at the funeral. They were her cousins, and they had helped to arrange her meeting with Cooper. "Yes, Gary, just little old me. Cooper let me into the club because he thought he was going to get some information about his enemies... it was easy. A little charm and a little lipstick go a long way. And I thought it would be easy to blame Tartufo. You know it would."

"Sandra, you must realize that I can't let it go," he said.

"You can do whatever you want," she replied quietly.

She was now the one squeezing his hand.

Inspector Evans took a deep breath and sighed. Inspector Checchino was his friend, but a murder was a murder.

"We can't all go out there and take an eye for an eye!" he cried. "We have Alessio Tartufo now. He will tell us everything we need so that we can arrest his brother. As for you, what can I say?"

"I'm sure you'll do whatever you think is right, Gary."

He growled and went back upstairs, leaving Inspector Checchino in the dark.

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

Come back to <http://english-e-reader.net/> to find more fascinating and exciting stories!