

# YESTERDAY

## 11.42 p.m.

Sim stares at his laptop screen. He can't quite believe what he's watching. It's definitely Mr Johnson. And him. That man. With the angry voice. Unmistakeable. Sim can't focus on the words he's shouting at Mr Johnson, he's too surprised to see the man there. The blows to Mr Johnson's face, his chest, sound painful. Sim winces. He wants to look away but he can't.

He feels tears froth in his eyes.

He rubs at his newly shorn head and feels the bristles against his fingertips. He lets the tears come. How could that man do this to his mentor? That man from NextGen Properties was beating on Mr Johnson. Then, into frame comes another face Sim recognises. A copper. Inspector Blakemore.

Sim looks around the top deck of the bus that's taking him back to his neighbourhood. No one is there. Not at this time of night. Sim's head is all over the place.

*This NextGen guy's supposed to be a businessman, Sim thinks. This violence. It's just . . . it's too much.*

But it proves Mr Johnson is innocent.

Sim feels an angry burn in his chest as the bus nears his stop. He ejects the USB stick containing the video files and buries it in the pocket of his long puffa coat. He stands up, steadying himself on the back of the seat in front of him. His knees feel weak.

*NextGen, Sim thinks.*

He steps off the bus and looks over at Firestone House, his home since the day he was born. He hears the low murmur of people across the road. He nods when he sees it's CJ and one of his guys. Sim walks towards Firestone House, unsteady, trying to process what he's just seen. The video. He was surprised enough to hear from the sender, but never in a million years did he expect this. What does it mean? And how did the sender come across it in the first place?

And what in god's name should he do next? He has to confront Patterson, surely. Give the man an opportunity to come clean before he's exposed. Get Mr Johnson free.

Sim approaches the entrance to his tower block, looks up the fourteen floors to the top and blows a kiss, like he always does when he comes home.

'You're late,' he hears.

He spots Taran, in the shadows, leaning against a wall. She smiles and readjusts the cap on her head. She walks up to him, arms outstretched for a hug.

Sim accepts the hug, linking his fingers around Taran's back. As she rests her cheek on his chest, he stares at the ground over her shoulder, unsure what to do now, knowing that what he has just seen on the screen of his laptop is going to change everything.

# DAY 1

## 5.54 p.m.

Taran jumps as the fire door bangs open and Hari and Jamal spill out on to the roof, out of breath, unable to talk.

Jamal is gasping, short grunting breaths, his asthma playing up. Hari looks pale. Jamal flops on to his front, breaking the fall with his knuckles, wincing as the coarse concrete cuts into his skin. He grimaces. Drool trails down from his mouth to the floor, a long sticky trail.

Anna rushes over and hands him the spare inhaler she keeps in her bag. He breathes in the medicine, trying to slow his panicked breaths.

‘Jamal, you OK?’ Taran asks. ‘Where you been? We thought you were saving us space at Rage.’

‘No time,’ Hari barks.

‘Are you in trouble?’ Anna asks.

Jamal flashes her a look that seems to say, *Please don’t get on my case now.*

He slowly stands up. He takes in a deep breath as if to calm himself.

‘Bro, what’s the matter?’ Taran asks.

Hari looks at his sister. ‘We came . . . back for you . . . man. We g-gotta go,’ he stammers.

‘Yeah, to the park – we know, we’ve been waiting long enough,’ Taran says.

‘No, no. We need to run.’

‘What?’

Hari looks directly at his twin. ‘Because they’re coming for us,’ he says.

‘Who?’ Anna asks.

‘We have to go,’ Jamal pleads.

‘We’re not going anywhere till you tell us what’s—’ Anna stops as Hari grabs her hand. He shakes his head.

‘Now,’ Hari says. ‘Now.’

Taran squares up to him. He’s taller than her but she’s hencher. Their dad’s weights ended up in her room.

‘What’s going on?’ she says. ‘We’re not moving. What’s this drama?’

‘Please, T. We ain’t got time. We’ve gotta go.’

A siren bursts out in the distance, startling Hari.

'Why?' Taran says, as the siren fades away into the distance.

'You know Sim Francis? He's been killed.'

Taran flinches, stumbles back. She suddenly feels like she's floating. The rest of the conversation is happening in front of her body. But she's not there. She's somewhere else, lost, behind a wall of ice, screaming.

Jamal and Hari look at her like they're thinking, *What? Since when did she care about Sim?*

'Two people killed him. Police. He was unarmed,' pants Hari. 'Unarmed, and this five-oh just kicked him to death, like a dog, in the street. They both kept kicking and kicking until . . .'

Hari stops talking, as if lost in the horrific memory of what he saw.

Anna steps in closer to Taran, looking like she's seen a ghost. She's trembling.

'How do you know?' Anna says, her mouth dry. She flashes Taran a look.

'We saw it,' Jamal says. 'We have to go,' he says, urgently.

Anna pulls Taran towards the door. Taran's body is on autopilot. She feels like she's having an out-of-body experience, watching the whole thing. Hari pulls the door open.

They run.