

Murder At St Marmaduke's
Chapter Six
Monday 4th November 1985: 15.30 – 16.15

Detective Constable Amita Chowdhary kept a wary eye on the door as she laid out pens and notebooks on the Incident Room desks.

She'd started in her own corner, noticeably remote from the rest, but doubted she'd be using the stationery. It was for the purpose of investigating the St Marmaduke's case, in which enquiry, she imagined, she'd take little or no part. So far, in the six months she'd been at Camtown Police Station, the most exciting thing she'd been assigned to investigate was the coffee machine; and that by everyone but the DI, whom she'd once overheard telling - actually *telling* - a sergeant that he suspected given half the chance she'd lace the coffee with curry powder.

Just her luck to have been landed with a boss who believed that because somebody wasn't the same shade of ghastly grey as him, he should treat them like something he'd scrape off his shoe.

She'd been on the verge several times of putting in an official complaint. She'd witnessed, however, exactly how that procedure worked at her previous station.

A WPC had complained about a sergeant who was giving her nothing but cell toilet-cleaning duties on the grounds that 'housework was all women were fit to do'. On receiving the complaint, the superintendent had called the sergeant into his office and given him what must have amounted to the mildest rebuke in the history of telling-offdom. After which, the sergeant had stormed back and proceeded to give the WPC such hell she'd resigned shortly after and become a traffic warden so she could have a less stressful life.

And now the door crashed open, and a stream of profanities thundered in. Even by the DI's standards it was impressive. Some of the words, she'd never heard before.

Instinctively, she ducked below the desk she was at and began fiddling with some telephone wires she'd begun to carry around with her for the purpose of looking gainfully employed while hiding.

'Bloody chief inspectors! Gives me a bollocking for not wasting my bloody time...' another stream of invective followed '...bloody obvious what the...' more swearing '...bloody...' another thirty seconds of expletive-deleteds '...take the bastard...'

At the end of the next round of ripe language, he added, 'Where's bloody Vindaloo Girl!'

Amita sighed. The default position whenever something upset the DI this much was for her to be given a rocket so huge it was all that would be needed for the town's Guy Fawkes celebrations the following evening. She ducked even lower, and prayed that none of her colleagues had noticed where she'd disappeared to.

Her prayer, however, fell on deaf ears. 'Here, boss,' a sergeant by the name of Stephens called, slinking over to where she was and pointing downward.

Grabbing some of the DI's choice phrases out of the air and throwing them silently in Stephens' direction, she hauled herself to her feet. 'You wanted me, boss?'

'Yes, I bloody did, and no, I bloody don't, but I'm stuck with you anyway, and I'd rather waste your bloody time than a proper detective's, so get yourself round to Jack the Ripper Court, Flat 4, name of Chafford, and ask them where they were when the St Marmite's party was kicking off.'

For a moment Amita didn't move, astonished that, apparently, the DI was giving her some real work to do.

'Still here, Vindaloo Girl?' he snapped. 'Sling your bloody hook and do as you're told!'

With alacrity, she made her way over to her desk and began to gather up her things. As she left, she heard the inspector saying, 'And now the rest of you get on with finding some evidence against that bloody Makumbo bloke. If necessary, make some up. I want him banged up by the end of the week!'

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Joseph sat in his one comfy chair in his small living room, trying to blank out the last few hours. The local newspaper - the *Camtown Herald* - was open on his lap, and every now and then he turned a page, as if trying to convince himself he'd read the previous one. The fact was, for all he'd taken in, he might have been reading the wall opposite.

He kept seeing the thrust of the pointy object again, kept hearing the screams and then the gurgle in Mabel Cartwright's throat. Then he'd replay the interview he'd had to endure with that terrible police inspector.

The inspector who'd looked somewhat peculiar. Glassy-eyed, as if he was wearing spectacles inside his eyelids.

He stood, allowing the paper to slide down his legs onto the floor. If only he hadn't telephoned work and asked for the day off. It would be so much better if he had something to do.

Perhaps reading the local newspaper would help. He had it here somewhere.

Glancing round, he located it on the floor in front of him. *That is strange*, he thought. *What can it be doing down there?*

He picked it up, tidied its pages, which appeared to have become disarrayed, sat in his comfy chair - which he was surprised to find directly behind him - and began to study the front page.

For all he took in, he might have been reading the wall opposite.

He saw the thrust of the pointy object again, heard the screams and then the gurgle in Mabel Cartwright's throat...

He threw the newspaper from his lap. This was silly thinking!

Mabel Cartwright. Surely the police were speaking to Hettie Number One, the woman who'd killed her?

He suspected not. He began to replay the interview he'd had with that terrible police inspector.

The police inspector who had taken an interminable length of time to reach the table in the interview room, pausing after every movement he made and, Joseph could swear, counting under his breath while he did so.

'So, Mr Makalumbo,' the inspector had opened with once he'd eventually seated himself, 'why did you murder the old woman in the church?'

The question - not to mention the mispronunciation of his name - had floored him metaphorically as much as the murder had done literally. 'I assure you, Mr Inspector...' he'd gasped.

But from then on, he'd hardly got another word in edgeways. The inspector had kept up a relentless battering of 'how did you kill the old woman?' and 'when did you commit the robbery?' not even stopping to listen to an answer if Joseph cared to give one.

It was only in the final few moments before the interview ended that he'd managed to explain exactly what had happened. At which point the inspector's eyes had unglazed and he'd merely looked extremely confused instead.

The final insult had been when he was escorted from the police station by the constable who had been at the church; the one Clarissa Rawlings had smiled at in such a friendly way.

That constable...

Perhaps that constable had sneaked into the church and set off the whole series of events! Perhaps he had been the mysterious voice that had spoken to him, Joseph! Perhaps he, the constable, had even committed the murder, making it *appear* as if Hettie Number One had done so! Perhaps he, the constable, had engineered everything so that he, Joseph, would be blamed and jailed; so that he, the constable, would have clear access to Clarissa Rawlings with he, Joseph, incarcerated for life!

And perhaps, to be completely sure that he, Joseph, would not be able to escape the clutches of supposed justice, he, the constable, had also sneaked back afterwards to commit the robbery too!

That constable...!

Do not be so silly, Joseph!

He shot to his feet again, heart pounding. 'I am sorry, Mother!'

He gazed around the room in confusion. 'Mother...?'

But of course, his mother was miles away in East Anglia.

Oh my goodness! Have I relied on her so much in my life that I must speak to myself as she would have spoken to me?

The thought appalled him.

Then, he realised something else. The newspaper was back in his hands.

He stared at it in horror. It was no longer recognisable as reading material. Instead, it had been torn and twisted into a tableau; a tableau depicting someone that looked like he, Joseph, strangling the life out of a gangling uniformed figure, with another person, so obviously female it sent hot flushes into his face, watching on admiringly.

He dropped the paper as if it had scalded him. What on earth was he becoming?

That did it! It was obvious that the police were doing nothing with regard to Hettie Number One. He would go and see her himself; try to force her to confess to the authorities.

But how? He had no idea of her address; or even of her surname.

Somebody would have, though.

Clarissa Rawlings sprang back to his mind. Of course! She would know!

He hurried into the hallway to collect his coat. The vicar's wife would surely help him.

And if not, she might at least bend over to pour him another cup of tea.

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Terrence Dawson opened the third drawer down in DCI Meredith's filing system, and heaved a huge sigh.

So far, he'd managed to find - and relocate - all the cases from 1970 onwards that had involved any villains having surnames beginning M to T inclusive. Now he was starting on profiles of those officers (initials U to Z) serving from 1376 to the present day; though he suspected that the start date was some secretary's typo rather than an interest in medieval policing on the DCI's part.

At the moment, he was rather missing Ernie Bulstrode demanding tea and caramel wafers.

He raked out the contents of the drawer, and began to leaf through them:

- Various murders, most of them of the domestic variety. Including one very interesting case of a woman drowning her husband in a bowl of rice pudding, he noticed;

- The closure of a brothel next door to a retirement home in Dunroamin Street. Oh, that was being run by two of the home's residents as 'something to stave off boredom while waiting for the cottage pie to be served at dinner time';

- A case of shopfitting... He grabbed a pen from the DCI's desk and amended that typo too;

- And... What was this?

A case of suspected abduction in '72. Involving...

His eyes widened as he saw the name.

Keeping a wary eye on the door in case the DCI should come back, he seated himself in the inspectorly chair and began to read the file.

It turned out that the 'abductee' had actually run away of her own accord. With - hmm. A Nigerian, was that?

Or... No - the Nigerian was proved to have nothing to do with it.

He turned over the final sheet.

And saw the name and rank of the person with whom the woman had actually run away.

There was a photocopier in the office adjoining the DCI's. It took Terrence less than five minutes to copy the entire document, then re-file it under 'H'.