

Chapter One: The Brother



tall, heavy-set man with dark eyes and fine, blonde hair picked up an apple and crushed it in his hand.

Juice oozed from the fruit's squashed flesh.

With a flourish, the man flung the mashed pieces against a wall.

'Bandits!' he shouted, before removing a white silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and using it to wipe his hand.

'You were a fool to send this ... this ... imbecile after them. A fool!'

The man pointed his index finger in the direction of Dorian.

'Did you want this mission to fail, Jago? Did you want The Stump Smasher to slip through our fingers?'

Jago sat in silence.

On his lap was a strange-looking fox with large, oversized ears, dark black eyes, and short, coarse fur that was almost golden in colour.

He stroked the fox.
But he did not speak.



The name of the block of flats in which Frank Meadows and D.K. Chatterjee lived was Cavendish Place.

Frank occupied a bedsit on the top floor, with approximately enough space to swing a very small, very obedient cat.*

D.K. Chatterjee, on the other hand, owned the entire floor below. As well as the world-famous Chatterjee's Bats.

His mansion flat was big enough to swing an elephant or two in, if the elephants in question agreed to play along.

It was in this flat that he, Frank, and Mr Chatterjee's nephew, Viv, found themselves in discussion.

Two cups of peppermint tea rested on the large desk D.K. used to conduct his business.

Both cups were half-full, though their contents had turned cold.

* The old saying goes 'Enough room to swing a cat'. Quite why anyone would want to swing a cat is unclear. Over the years, many cats have protested against the phrase. And a few humans have suffered terrible injuries after attempting to use a cat to measure the size of a room. In general, it is best to let cats do whatever they want, because that is what they will do anyway, whether you like it or not.

‘A brother?’ asked Frank.

‘I’m afraid so’, said D.K. ‘I had my suspicions as soon as you told me about The League of the Stuffed Shirts, but I needed confirmation.’

‘And you’ve found it?’ asked Viv. ‘You’ve found evidence that Number Two is Jago’s brother?’

D.K. sank down into his leather swivel chair. He nodded his head.

Frank watched as Mr Chatterjee searched through the many documents scattered across his desk.

‘The light in here is not good at this time of day’, he said, squinting at first one piece of paper and then another.

‘Let me fetch my desk lamp’, said Viv. ‘You can borrow it.’

‘Thank you, nephew’, said D.K. ‘That would be most helpful.’

The extra light made Mr Chatterjee’s search easier.

It wasn’t long before he pulled a set of stapled photocopies from the middle of a pile of documents.

As he held them in front of his face, Frank could see D.K.’s eyes flick from side-to-side.

His brow furrowed and he tugged at his moustache.

Frank wondered what thoughts were running through the older man's mind.

'Here', he said, waving the document in Frank's direction.

Frank walked over to the desk and took the pieces of paper from D.K.

'What do they say?' asked Viv.

'Give me a second', said Frank, as he started to read.

His brain worked on two levels at once.

He was trying to make sense of the words. And he was also trying to connect them to Jago and The League of the Stuffed Shirts.

Life had been a rollercoaster since he first set foot in the Larwood Suite at The Ancient Assembly of Cricket.

It was there that he had witnessed the meeting of The League of the Stuffed Shirts.

It was there that the twelve members of that shadowy organization had signed a contract agreeing their plan to take control of world cricket.

It was there that Jago had made his one mistake.

And it was there that Frank had taken the biggest risk of his life.

'Well?' asked Viv, rocking back on his heels. 'What does it say?'

Frank flicked the first page over, scanned the second, then glanced at D.K.

Viv looked from his uncle to his friend and back again.

‘Come on guys’, he said. ‘Don’t keep me waiting. What does it say?’

Frank ran a hand through his hair.

He was a slim, athletic young man.

His hair was brown, and his eyes were blue.

When he walked, he moved gracefully. When he spoke, his face became animated.

‘It says’, he began, ‘that Jago Lilywhite Grace has a younger brother.’

‘He left England many years ago, under a cloud. There was a scandal. Money went missing. A lot of money.’

Frank turned back to the first page of the document and started to read it aloud.

‘The family had to spend a great deal to hush things up.’

‘They called in favours and lost a lot of respect in the process.’

‘It cost them dearly.’

‘Pushed them away from the people they knew. Turned them into exiles. Outsiders. When they had lived their whole lives being insiders and deciding who was and who wasn’t allowed to join them.’

‘No one knew where the brother went.’

‘Then, about a year ago, reports surfaced that he was living in South Africa, running an academy for young cricketers.’

‘One of the national newspapers sent a reporter out there, undercover, to see what they could discover.’

‘This reporter infiltrated the academy. She pretended to be a representative of an IPL team, scouring the globe for new talent.’*

‘She discovered the brother was running a genuine cricket academy. He was training young players. Helping them hone their skills and then getting them signed by franchises around the world.’

‘At first, the reporter figured the brother had changed. That he was trying to be a better person. She was all set to write up a story explaining how everybody deserves a second chance and that maybe the brother should be forgiven for what he did.’

‘Then, on the last night, she and the brother sat down for a meeting. To thrash out the details of any contracts that were going to be offered to players at the academy.’

* The IPL is the Indian Premier League, the biggest, most exciting T20 league in the world. Teams include the Rajasthan Royals, the Mumbai Indians, and the Chennai Super Kings, as well as the Kolkata Knight Riders, Sunrisers Hyderabad, and Royal Challengers Bangalore. Oh, and don’t forget the Punjab Kings, Delhi Capitals, Lucknow Super Giants and Gujarat Titans.

‘Of course, the brother didn’t know it was all fake. He thought he was negotiating with a representative from the IPL.’

‘He had no idea he was actually speaking to a reporter from *The Daily Foghorn*.’

‘They talked about a few of the players, some of whom were superb. Players with brilliant prospects.’

‘And they talked about the opportunities these players could have to play, not just in the IPL, but in leagues all over the world.’

‘It seemed like the brother was doing his best to help young cricketers fulfil their dreams.’

‘It seemed like he was using his energy and his knowledge to help them live the kind of life people dream about.’

‘Then they moved on to the topic of money.’

‘The brother explained to the reporter that he looked after everything on behalf of his players.’

‘He said it was because he cared so much about them.’

‘He said he didn’t trust anyone else to look after them. He said he was the only one who had their best interests at heart.’

‘He told the reporter he would sign any contracts on the players’ behalf. And that he would look after any money paid to them.’

‘He claimed he would pass it on to his players ... when the time was right.’

‘Or invest it for them.’

‘He said it was better that way. Because then his players could concentrate on their cricket.’

‘And they didn’t have to think about anything else.’

‘The reporter decided she would stay an extra night.’

‘It sounded strange. Odd. She had never heard of anybody working in this way. And she didn’t like it.’

‘So, the next night, she snuck out of her sleeping quarters and broke into the brother’s office.’

The atmosphere in D.K.’s study was tense. Viv was listening hard to everything Frank said, sometimes repeating words and phrases as if to confirm that they were truly what he had heard.

D.K., despite knowing how the story ended, was giving Frank his full attention. His whole body was angled towards him, and his eyes were fixed on Frank’s face.

Frank continued.

‘It was dark and quiet. Except for the noise of the wind whistling across the veld.’*

‘The reporter used a special key she owned.’

* Veld is a type of wide-open rural landscape in southern Africa.

‘A skeleton key.’

‘To unlock the door of the office.’

‘She crept inside, making as little noise as possible.’

‘There was almost no light in there, so she had to wait a while to let her eyes adjust.’

‘Every second she was wondering if she would be caught. And what would happen if she was.’

‘After a minute or so she could see more clearly.’

‘Her eyes could make out different shapes in the room. She could see different shades of darkness.’

‘She spotted a filing cabinet in the corner, bedside a big window fitted with bars and an iron grille.’

‘When she tried the top drawer, to her surprise it was open. Maybe, because the main door had been locked, the brother didn’t think it would matter.’

Viv drew a sharp breath.

‘What was inside?’ he asked, rocking on his feet, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

‘The reporter slowly pulled it open, trying not to make any noise.’

‘She waited a moment, letting her eyes adjust to the darkness.’

Viv's head bobbed up and down on his shoulders. He raised his eyebrows, urging Frank to tell him what was inside the drawer.

'It was filled with junk', Frank continued. 'Old cricket balls, empty drinks bottles, faded newspapers.'

Viv relaxed, let out a low whistle, then frowned.

Frank held up a finger, to signal there was more.

'Then she tried the next drawer down. This one was different. It was neat. Ordered. There were files. Lots of files. Labelled and arranged alphabetically.'

'Each file had a name on it.'

Viv leaned forward, the better to hear Frank's words.

'The reporter started looking through them. But it was too dark.'

'Too dark to read the names.'

'She took her phone from her pocket and used it as a torch. She held it in front of her body, trying to make sure no one from outside could see the light.'

'The first few names she didn't recognise.'

'Then she saw a name that was familiar. A name she knew.'

Viv moved his hand to his mouth and wedged a finger between his teeth.

‘It was one of the players at the academy. Someone she had interviewed a few days earlier.’

‘A sense of fear swelled up in her as she lifted the file from the drawer and started to read it.

‘Her instincts told her something was wrong.’

‘But it was her job to report the truth. To find it, to unearth it, and to share it.’

‘Inside the file, there was a contract between the player and the cricket academy. It said the player was allowed to live and train at the academy. It said the player would receive three meals a day, one day off a week, and free cricket kit.’

‘And then, on the next page, it said what the cost was.’

Frank paused. His throat felt dry. He reached for his cup of cold peppermint tea and took a swig.



He winced.

A bitter taste swam through his mouth.

‘What was the cost?’ asked Viv. ‘What did the cricketers have to pay?’

‘The cost’, said Frank, ‘was total control of their future.’