Witness

The Story of David Smith, Chief Prosecution Witness in the Moors Murders Case

David Smith with Carol Ann Lee

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Foreword

I have lived with the Moors Murders since I was ten years old. Although I was almost nine when my brother Keith disappeared on 16 June 1964, it was not until October 1965 that the people responsible for his death were arrested and the Moors Murders first hit the headlines around the world.

I was an average kid but could read and write from an early age, and liked to believe I could think for myself, and always asked questions if I wanted answers. Those questions would usually be put to the two people in whom I had complete faith and trust, and whom I loved dearly: my grandmother and Aunt Jean.

It wasn't long after Brady and Hindley had been charged with murder that I became aware that the adults in the family, and the police, strongly suspected that these two knew what had happened to my brother. *Why?* was my first question. It turned out that Brady's home on Westmoreland Street was not far from where we lived when Keith disappeared. I also learned that the body of a teenage boy had been found in the house Brady had more recently shared with Hindley and that the bodies of two children had been found in a place called Saddleworth Moor. Another question: how did the police know that Brady and Hindley had definitely murdered those children?

Because, I was told, someone had gone to the police after witnessing the murder of the teenage boy, which then led to the other children being found. Who went to the police? I asked.

A man called David Smith.

But even *before* I'd asked these questions, I'd 'seen' Brady and Hindley when the police called at Gran's home. I was sitting on a chair arm next to the door that led into the 'back room' when the knock came. Two men walked in – plainclothes detectives, I realised later – and as the second man entered, I noticed he was carrying a clipboard that protruded above his forearm and rested against his side. As he passed me, the clipboard came level with my eyes and I saw, in extreme close-up, the now infamous mugshots of Brady and Hindley. Their faces seemed to leap out at me and I dropped heavily back into the chair. This was no fall or slip; I actually felt as if I had been physically pushed away from the stark images, even though there was no one near me, apart from the detective holding the clipboard. I'd felt an invisible shove on the right side of my body, which had sent me backwards into the chair. I glanced at Gran, who wore a look of genuine surprise, and then I heard one of the detectives asking, 'Are you all right, son?' I let my gaze travel to the two men, who were watching me, mystified, then looked towards the door, expecting to see who it was that had pushed me. Nobody was there.

I felt an intensely strange feeling and was gripped by a fear that I didn't understand; I had to leave the

room and get away from the two men and the photographs they carried.

From then on, Brady and Hindley haunted my childhood, and whenever I thought of them or saw or heard anything about them, I felt deeply frightened. Some time after the detectives visited Gran, I came to believe that it was Keith who had been responsible for pushing me away that day; he was trying to protect me in some way from the people whose faces were on the clipboard. Later, this belief grew stronger. It wasn't something I invented – it was how it was and has been with me ever since.

As the months wore on, 'David Smith' became an increasingly familiar name too, but by then there were other words attached whenever someone mentioned him: he was 'a bad 'un' who 'knows more than he's saying', who had acted 'to save his own neck' and was 'as bad as those two'. Young as I was, I remember wondering how the man who had informed the police about a murder was spoken of as if he, too, was a murderer. If that was the case, then why had he not been sent to jail with the other two? I tried to work it out, asking more questions and reading everything I could find about him. After much thinking, I could only come up with another question: Who's right? Were the police wrong for letting him get away with murder or were the people who believed he was guilty at fault?

I knew enough to try and make some sense of it all, but I found it hard to talk to anyone. Gone was the chattering, carefree, playful child; in his place was a young boy with only questions, endless questions,

and so much confusion and sadness. But eventually I came to the conclusion that the people in the wrong were those whom I had no choice but to listen to, day after day. I believed that David Smith had put a stop to the murders and prevented others from taking place. Even at such a young age the things I saw and heard about David Smith made no sense to me.

By then, countless people had been to our house, asking probing questions of their own. They seemed to waft in from the street and out again in a jumbled mass of notebooks, cameras, lights, cables, fancy cars, large vans, motorbikes, bicycles, walkers, polite people, rude people, quiet people, loud people, foreign people and some very strange people. A curious thing happened: the more questions our visitors asked, the more the answers began to fit in with whatever they wanted to hear. Things changed suddenly and unmistakeably from the pain and distress that needed to be overcome somehow in order to answer the questions to the standard answers and furious outbursts that made for good headlines.

I began to stand back, watching with as much distance as I could, and that’s where I stayed and remain to this day. I was never alone, but the person standing by me couldn’t be seen, although he was there, always there. I talked to him at night when I was alone in the room we used to share, and he came back to life for me, both then and whenever I talked to Gran and Aunt Jean. He was unseen but ever-present.

The years passed. Argument followed argument about who did what, who was to blame, and what could and should be done. I refused to have any part in what was happening all around me. I saw rage and frustration becoming the norm, but I found my voice and formed my own opinions based on fact, rather than headlines and what people wanted to believe or use as a vent for useless anger – and even more useless ‘exclusive’ publicity.

I’ve spent many years searching Saddleworth Moor in the hope of bringing Keith home. I’ve met and spoken to countless people whom I hoped might be able to help me and have written hundreds of letters for the same reason.

The one person whom I have never tried to contact is David Smith. I thought about it often. I’ve even written to him, but the letters remained unposted. Whenever I gave the matter serious consideration, as I often did, I was stilled by recalling the stories of violence and abuse he and his family had suffered ever since he did the right thing and reported the murder of Edward Evans to the police. He sparked off the Moors Murders investigation, brought the horror of it all to an end, and very probably saved the lives of other children who might have gone on to become victims of Brady and Hindley. I knew that he had been to the moor with the two killers, had spent many hours in their company and was married to Hindley’s sister, Maureen. Surely, he might know of something that could be of use to me, so why *not* contact him? But I still couldn’t get the belief that he’d suffered

enough out of my head. The beatings he had taken over the years, and which were of great amusement to others around me, were undeserved in my eyes, as was the constant hounding I knew he and his wife endured. I was also aware that he'd spent weeks being questioned by police, who had taken him to the moor to see if he could recall any landmarks that might have aided their search for the bodies Brady had boasted to him about burying there. Admittedly, I was troubled by the knowledge that he'd 'sold out' to a newspaper during the trial, and had had a financial interest in the end result, but I'd seen so many others doing deals of one kind or another with the press that it began to bother me less and less. And the people who used that particular stick with which to beat him had sticks of their own stored safely and quietly in the offices of certain newspapers.

It seemed obvious to me that the lies Brady and Hindley told about him, and which people were so quick to believe, were designed to cast doubt on him in revenge for his 'betraying' them to the police. It worked very well; they spent many years in the happy knowledge that their whistleblower was never free from public hatred. Other thoughts disturbed me and prevented me from posting my letters to him; foremost of these was that I could never begin to imagine the horror brought before his eyes when Brady and Hindley finally decided to show him what they truly were. A lad of his own age, brutally axed to death before him, the terrible sights and sounds that accompanied the killing, were all part of a 'test' to find out if he was capable of the same monstrosities.

Thankfully, he was not. He did go to the police to ‘save his own neck’ but not in the manner that so many came to believe; he feared for his own life, and in doing the right thing he brought horrors he knew nothing about to a disbelieving and sickened world.

So, as the years went by, the possibility of having any form of contact with David Smith grew smaller and smaller. Then, whilst working on her book *One of Your Own: The Life and Death of Myra Hindley*, Carol Ann Lee wrote to ask if I would be willing to speak to her, mainly about my role in the search for Keith. She assured me that she’d done extensive research and that it was of the utmost importance to her to get the facts about the Moors Murders correct at last. At that time, I was trying to overcome my disillusionment about a previous publication on the case, whose author I had spoken to only on the understanding that his book would be mainly about the search for Keith. I had been deeply disappointed by the outcome and cast aside Carol Ann’s request as coming from just another author whose work would turn out in the same way as all the rest – feelings I now know I shared with David Smith when she approached him.

Nonetheless, I read *One of Your Own* when it was published and to my utter surprise discovered that it was completely different from anything else I had read about the case, or about Brady and Hindley individually. Although it was then too late to be part of something that had greatly impressed me, I contacted Carol Ann to congratulate her on the book. She invited me to her home to discuss what she had

learned during her research and to look at the notes she had made, which she believed – correctly – might be of interest to me.

I was even more impressed after our initial meeting and now looked on her as a major authority on the case. We became very close friends and I found myself talking to her openly, even searching deep within myself and dragging out thoughts and feelings I thought would remain locked away for ever. I had never expected to share those memories and emotions with anyone again after the deaths of Gran and Aunt Jean, not outside the family. After Carol Ann and I got to know each other better, she told me that she had spoken at great length to David Smith and his wife Mary. Then she mentioned the possibility of writing a book with David about his life. She saw it as a story that needed to be told but was acutely aware of how David Smith was regarded by certain members of the victims' families.

She asked me what I thought. I had no such reservations and advised her to go ahead because it was time – in fact, long overdue – that David Smith had his say. We talked about the reactions such a book might provoke. I felt that it would, hopefully, enlighten many people and even help erase certain long-held fears for many others. It would be wrong to let such an invaluable opportunity slip away.

Carol Ann told David Smith what I thought. I was deeply moved by his response, especially that he wanted to thank me for my positive reaction to his wish to tell his story . . . me, a member of one of the victims' families. Was I supposed to detest the man

who brought the murders to an end? Or bury my head in the sand and have no opinion about the events that have been an abiding dark cloud in my life? I could only give my support and encouragement to Carol Ann and, through her, to David Smith and his wife.

I am glad this book has been written, for several reasons. Foremost for me personally is that through David Smith's dogged recall of painful memories certain areas and landmarks of potential interest in the search for Keith have come to light. I have to add, with great sorrow in my heart, that this information was never allowed to come to the fore at the time of the original investigation in the 1960s, and the subsequent search in the 1980s, because of the hard-headedness and mishandling of David Smith by some senior detectives. Of course, there were exceptions, Joe Mounsey in particular, but the damage was done and the man who was the chief prosecution witness in 'the Trial of the Century' was reduced to a suspect too many times, and a bruised and battered man for decades.

My hope now is that this book and the truths within it will enable the public to understand that Brady and Hindley's lies brought intense pain and distress not only to the victims and their families, but also to many others. Years into her imprisonment, Hindley admitted that she had lied about David Smith and that she was sorry for it. She repeated the same thing to me personally when I visited her in Durham and then Highpoint prison to talk about the search for Keith and what she might do to help. Brady, however,

will never admit the truth. Indeed, he invents new lies to replace the old ones when they lose their ‘exclusive’ media status.

A number of officers from the original investigation admitted they could and should have listened more closely to David Smith and treated him as a witness rather than a suspect. I suppose the errors can be explained to some extent by old-style policing methods, but it still doesn’t alter the fact that chances were lost, that the chief witness was never able to tell the truth without fear and duress, and that he was forced to withdraw into himself in the belief that no one was listening.

We can only hope that those people whose lack of thought and darkness of soul caused David Smith and his family such suffering over the years never have to endure the same in order to make them finally realise the damage they can do.

Alan Bennett
Manchester, 2011

Preface

‘What is your opinion about David Smith?’

The question comes from a quiet-looking man in his mid-20s, sitting in the back row. Immediately, there is a frisson in the room, as the audience turn first to peer at the enquirer, then at the woman seated directly to my right, who made a small noise of disgust in her throat at the mention of the name, and finally at me.

I hesitate before replying, aware that I need to choose my words carefully. This is the first talk I’ve given about my book, *One of Your Own: The Life and Death of Myra Hindley*, and it’s being held in a room on the upper floor of the Deansgate branch of Waterstone’s in Manchester. For the past 45 minutes, people have expressed their views with an intensity that few other murder cases can provoke. Whether it’s Hindley’s avowed remorse or how to persuade Ian Brady to reveal the location of Keith Bennett’s grave, those who speak are resolute in their judgements. Feelings run feverishly high; someone suggests slowly stabbing Brady with knives until he confesses and the idea is met with clamorous approval and applause by three-quarters of the crowd. ‘They should have let *us* deal with the murdering bastards before they put them away,’ someone else calls above the noise, and the clapping breaks out afresh.

David Smith has already been mentioned, and a murmur of deep-rooted disgust passed then among the audience. Now they wait for my response to the question raised by the young man on the back row. The woman seated to my right is Keith Bennett's mother, Winnie Johnson, and I'm aware from my previous meetings with her that she regards David Smith with much the same loathing as she does her son's killers.

My reply is cautiously phrased but unequivocal: 'Well, I've no wish to upset Winnie or anyone else, but David Smith *is* the man who put an end to the Moors Murders. Not only that, but he also enabled those children who were missing to be found – apart from Keith – and his actions prevented more children from becoming victims of Brady and Hindley.'

There is an intense silence in the room. I realise that the majority of the audience are appalled at my response, including Winnie Johnson. Two people start to mutter angrily, until the young man from the back row asks in a loud voice, 'What do *you* think, Winnie?'

Instantly, the room falls silent again. We all look at Winnie, who after a moment of contemplation declares: 'I think David Smith is as rotten and guilty as them two swines. He did what he did to save his own neck. And I know that I'm not the only one to think that. Ask anyone and they'll tell you the same thing.'

'He *did* go to the police, though,' a smartly dressed man on the end of one row ventures.

'Yes, to save his own neck,' Mrs Johnson repeats. She looks out at the audience: 'I'm right, aren't I?'

The crowd nod in almost perfect unison; and David Smith's reputation remains unchanged from 45 years earlier, when his position as chief prosecution witness at the Moors trial brought him nothing but hatred and public vilification.

Months before the Waterstone's event, I'd written to David Smith asking if he would be willing to be interviewed for the book I was working on about Myra Hindley. I knew that he had never spoken in depth about the past and although my primary aim for contacting him was to discuss Hindley (and, to a lesser extent, Brady), I was also very interested in his life before, during and after his marriage to Myra Hindley's sister, Maureen.

His reaction was swift but disappointing, and clearly meant to dissuade me. But I wrote again, this time ending with a quote from one of his two great heroes, Bob Dylan (the other is John Lennon). His second email arrived a few days later, slightly less abrasive, but still intended as a rebuff. I doubted then that he would respond to further communication.

To my surprise, however, I got a call from his second wife, Mary, to whom he has been married for 35 years. We talked at length, both on that occasion and during other phone calls. She told me of her hope that one day her husband would finally have the chance to tell his story in full. 'Not to try and alter anyone's perceptions of him necessarily,' she explained. 'But I think it's time to tell the truth in as much detail as possible. For our grandchildren, if nothing else.'

Although I was only really familiar with those aspects of David's life that were relevant to a study of Myra Hindley, I understood why Mary was so firm in her belief that his story was worthy of a book of its own. The idea hovered between us as we made arrangements for me to visit them in Ireland, ostensibly for an informal exchange about David's memories of Hindley and Brady, although he made it clear that he did not want to be directly quoted in the book I was writing. 'It always ends up as the same old garbage,' he said bluntly on the telephone. 'No matter how honest your intentions might be, you'll turn out like the rest of them. That's just how it goes.'

My first visit to them lasted three days. I went with my son, River, who was then nine years old. Mary was welcoming from the start; David was belligerent, guarded and, at times, rude. Within a few hours of our arrival, we were in his local pub, where he had called on his 'mafia' (his sons, their families, and friends) as support against what he thought would be another intrusive and pointless encounter with a journalist. I told him I wasn't a journalist and never had been; he gave a snort of derision. 'Well, no. You don't even look old enough to hold a pen, to me.' I didn't let him put me off for several reasons: I trusted Mary; I knew that his attitude was a test to find out whether I would give in and leave, perhaps following up my visit with an unpleasant article in the press; I wanted to hear what he would say, once his guard was down; and because he was so good with River, as he is with his own grandchildren.

By the afternoon of the following day, everything was different. David was calm, relaxed and ready to talk. Together with Mary, we spoke at length about his memories of that particular time in the ’60s. It was more obvious than it had ever been that his story deserved to be told on its own merits, rather than as an adjunct to a book about the Moors case. When I left Ireland, the three of us knew that we had work to do.

While I was writing *One of Your Own*, I met Ian Fairley, who attended the arrest of Ian Brady on the morning after the last murder. He was very keen to talk about David Smith: ‘He was a bit of a rum customer, but if it hadn’t been for Smith, more children would have been killed. People were so vicious about that poor lad after it all came out, but he saved lives *and* he enabled us to bring home those children who had already been murdered so that their parents could give them proper funerals. Without him, we would never have known where to start. Smith was the one man more than anyone who brought the whole thing to justice. Albeit unknowingly in parts, but he did it and it wasn’t an easy thing to do. Because if he hadn’t come to us, Evans [*Brady and Hindley’s last victim, 17-year-old Edward Evans*] would have ended up on the moor and we would never have been any the wiser. The men who mattered on that inquiry – Jock Carr and Joe Mounsey – they believed in David Smith completely. Unfortunately, mud sticks and he ended up an outcast. But it’s about time people started realising he’s a hero, not a villain.’

Ian Fairley's view, and that of Joe Mounsey and Jock Carr, quickly became lost in the media furore that surrounded the Moors case. It's a curious and unhappy fact that despite their hatred of Brady and Hindley, a large section of the public chose to believe the two killers' insinuations against David Smith. The stories that abounded during the original investigation and trial had their source in the statements Brady and Hindley made about him, though it is also true that the revelations about David's juvenile convictions and his 1966 deal with the *News of the World* did him no favours. By the mid-1980s, when Hindley finally exonerated him of any part in their crimes, it was already too late. The old untruths are still doing the rounds, supplemented by new and often bizarre fictions. *Witness* tells the facts. It is not, as someone has already claimed, an 'apology' for David Smith, or even an attempt to 'rehabilitate' him in the eyes of the public. It is simply his story.

In 2003, Granada Television approached David with a view to producing a dramatisation of his life during his marriage to Maureen Hindley. When David and Mary agreed to the idea on the understanding that it wouldn't focus on Brady and Hindley, work began on *The Ballad of David Smith*. Following a meeting with Granada bosses, the script was shelved in favour of a dramatisation of the Moors case, which aired in May 2006 as *See No Evil: The Story of the Moors Murders*. During the many months of work on *The Ballad*, David had begun to write down his memories in lengthy but isolated fragments; these became the

foundation stone of the present book. He started writing again after our initial meeting, and these reminiscences, together with our interviews and my research, form what is hopefully a coherent narrative of his life.

On that very first day in Ireland, Mary drove us through the village where she and David have lived for the past 15 years. He asked her to make a slight detour; although wary, he was determined that I should visit a particular place with him.

We drove past a modern housing estate to an overgrown field surrounded by rough limestone walls. At one end were the ruins of a long, low building with a collapsed orange roof. Near the wall was a wooden notice, beautifully rendered and inscribed. It told the history of the place: the ruin was all that remained of the local workhouse built in 1852 to accommodate 600 inmates and razed to the ground in the 1920s. The field in front of us, with its long grass and wild flowers, was the site of the graveyard, where many workhouse children had been buried anonymously, without coffins.

David became agitated as he explained that the sign was his creation, carved in his workshop. ‘No one should lie in an unmarked grave,’ he told us. ‘Do you understand what I’m saying . . . no child should be without a headstone when they die, the very least you can give them is that – somewhere for their family to visit. A stretch of bleak field with no one knowing they’re there . . . it isn’t right.’ He shook his head and bit his lip. ‘I think you understand. I *hope*

you do.’ He gave Mary a nod and we drove slowly away.

All Brady and Hindley’s victims have been found except Keith Bennett, who disappeared on 16 June 1964. His body lies somewhere on Saddleworth Moor, despite more recent efforts by Greater Manchester Police to locate his grave. Last year, I began corresponding with Alan Bennett, Keith’s younger brother. As our friendship developed, I worried about how he might react to the book I was writing with David Smith. When I confided in him, his reaction was overwhelmingly positive and he has continued to be staunchly supportive of the book ever since. He has provided the Foreword here, and I owe him a huge debt of thanks not only for that, but also for his encouragement, courage and strength. I hope that others might share his clear-sightedness in reading this book.

*

Only a handful of people knew that this book was in progress. I must first of all thank my mother, as always, for taking care of River whenever I needed to work outside school hours. I’m grateful to my brother John and his wife Sally for their support, and to my friend Tricia, who accompanied River and me on our first visit to Ireland.

I must also thank all David and Mary’s family, but especially their sons David and Paul. David provided the initial contact and Paul, together with his partner Gwen, often looked after River while I was working in Ireland. I have to thank Gwen’s son, Mikey, too, for

being such a good friend to River while we were there. And sincere thanks to Dave Lucey and his partner, Kath, for all their help; also to Ralf Beyerle, for providing the photographs of Dave and Mary by Hans-Jürgen Büsch.

Mary’s belief in this project from the very beginning has ensured its completion. It’s entirely due to her that David was able to set aside his reservations and dedicate himself to writing, talking and thinking more in depth about the past than ever before. Over the many months we’ve worked on the book I’ve come to value their friendship deeply. I want to thank them for that, and for their good humour, hospitality and many generosities. But most of all, I want to thank them for putting their trust in me.

Prologue

> ‘If anyone were making a journey from Underwood Court to Wardle Brook Avenue after 11.30 p.m., the road on which they would travel would, generally speaking, be in darkness.’
>
> – Leslie Wright, assistant street lighting superintendent for Hyde Corporation, evidence read at the Moors trial, April 1966

When the door clicks shut, he has to force himself not to run, moving steadily down the path and past the window where the light burns behind drawn floral curtains. Walking away from the house is the most terrifying thing he’s ever done; the impulse to keep looking over his shoulder is almost unbearable. One foot slowly in front of the other, again and again, until he reaches the cut-through. The street lights are out, plunging the housing estate into blackness as he breaks into the fastest sprint of his life, accompanied by the eternal static hum of the pylons towering over Hattersley.

The cut-through brings him out on the road where he lives. Underwood Court is one of seven blocks of high-rise flats in the neighbourhood; tonight the thirteen floors of its starkly lit stairwell are as welcome as a lighthouse beam. Gasping from the 300-yard run, he holds his index finger on the intercom button, listening acutely for the buzzer. The snap of the door release seems deafening in the still night air.

Inside the entrance hall, his breathing begins to regulate as he glances at Flat Number 1, occupied by Mr Page, the jobsworth caretaker. He waits for a moment, half-expecting the middle-aged man to haul open the door with another threat of eviction, but silence echoes about the building.

The lift is to his right. Ignoring the stink of urine and takeaways that plagues the steel cubicle around the clock, he steps in, pressing his back to the wall, and drags trembling hands through his hair. A cold sweat begins to permeate his skin. On the third floor he gets out, glancing down the corridor. There are four flats, and the door to his, with its tarnished ‘18’ above the spyhole, is slightly ajar.

The normality of the living room, where the collie stands wagging its tail, and the homely sound of his wife filling the kettle with water in the kitchen, confuses him. The reality of what he’s witnessed and escaped from suddenly hits home. Calling, ‘I’ll be with you in a minute,’ he dives into the bathroom and vomits until there is nothing left.

His wife appears at his side, kneeling in her nightdress, putting a concerned hand on his shoulders as he hunches over the toilet, spitting out long trails of bitter saliva. He hears her ask if he is all right, if he’s been drinking.

‘I haven’t had *any* drink.’

He turns his head and in the stark light of the bathroom the look in her eyes agitates him afresh; it’s as if she doesn’t recognise him. He staggers to his feet and turns on the blue-spotted tap, letting the water run ice-cold through his fingers before

splashing it up into his face. His wife stands apprehensively behind him. When he paces through to the sitting room, she follows.

‘Sit down,’ he tells her and they sit, knee to knee, on the settee. He puts out a chilled hand to the dog, who hunkers down at his feet. The cold sweat that began in the lift returns, but this time it pours from him like water.

Shivering uncontrollably, he blurts out in fits and starts what he’s seen.

Afterwards, he looks at his wife and realises that she hasn’t grasped any of it as he’d intended. She only keeps asking about her sister, wanting to know if she’s all right.

‘She’s all right, but *she*’s part of it. Didn’t you hear me, girl? Myra’s *part of it*.’

But it’s clear that she still doesn’t understand. Frustrated, he gets up to splash more water on his face, then sits heavily in the chair by the electric fire. When the heating is on, the fire smells of burning wool and gives off a sound like a muted version of the pylons over Hattersley. Now it’s lifeless, the bars grey. Without its glow and drone, the flat feels barren.

His wife is crying very softly, feeling for the tissue tucked inside one of the short sleeves of her nightdress. He looks down at his T-shirt, at the dark, rust-coloured specks and smears, and his mouth thickens with bile.

Swallowing, he states quietly, ‘As soon as it’s light, we’ll call the police.’ When she doesn’t answer, he cracks his knuckles, one after the other, in a vain attempt to relieve the tension inside himself. ‘All

right, girl? We'll wait until there are other people moving about and then we'll go to the phone box.'

'And take Bob.' Her reply, spoken in a small voice, is that of a girl even younger than her 19 years. The dog, hearing his name, half-opens a bleary eye.

'Yeah, him too.'

He turns his head towards the glass door that leads to the balcony. Stiffly, he rises and crosses the carpet, then opens the door carefully so as not to make a noise. The air strikes his skin like a fist; the temperature seems to have dropped beyond reason. The sky over Hattersley is starless and unremittingly dark, but down there among the myriad houses, it's somehow possible to make out which row is Wardle Brook Avenue.

Minutes pass with painful sluggishness. He divides his time crouching in the chair beside the lifeless fire and leaning over the balcony screen to reassure himself that there's no one watching the flat – not from Wardle Brook Avenue nor from the car park below.

Because that's his deepest fear, in these last hours before daybreak. He feels safe as long as he and Maureen remain in the flat, but in his mind he pictures the two of them leaving Underwood Court and a car cruising up alongside, then a soft voice asking, 'And where do you think you're off to?' In the flat, he can just about cope with the knowledge of what's gone before, but if they leave and the nightmare scenario becomes reality, he will go to pieces, without a shadow of doubt; he will absolutely

go to pieces. So he keeps guard instead, and waits for the right moment to present itself.

And it does, a little after six o'clock, when a shard of light breaks over the estate. He's left the balcony door open and hears the familiar sound of the milkman arriving on his rounds: first the trundle of the float on the road, then the faint chink of dozens of bottles. He gets up from the fireside chair to watch the white-coated figure carrying a red crate along the nearest terrace. Lights are going on as people rise for the new day; no more than a handful dotted about the estate, but enough to convince him that the time has come.

He turns to Maureen and she stares back at him, wide-eyed.

Taking a deep breath, he keeps his voice as even as he can: 'Get dressed and fetch your coat.'

He waits until she's walked through to the bedroom before entering the kitchen and pulling open a drawer. He tucks the bread knife prudently inside the waistband of his jeans, then pulls open another drawer filled with useless things gathering dust – small keys to unknown locks, old bus ticket stubs, a broken plastic spoon – and rummages until his fingers light on an object at the back. He takes out the heavy screwdriver and pushes it into his waistband next to the knife.

His wife stands in the sitting room, awkward in her coat and impractical shoes.

With the dog at their heels, they head for the fetid lift. The clunking mechanism shudders into life, jerking them down to the ground floor. They step out

in unison, all three, and cross the hall with its prickly mat skew-whiff to the front door.

Maureen gazes at him. He opens the door slowly and takes a step outside, glancing in every direction. The roads are empty and the car park uninhabited. He looks back at his wife. Her black beehive is unkempt and her eyes, without their usual spit-slicked mascara and thick, pencilled contours, seem sunken and huge at the same time.

‘Ready?’

She nods, clutching the dog’s collar for comfort.

‘Let’s go for it, then.’

They refrain from running, but walk with adrenalin-induced speed to the long road bordering the estate. Fluorescent light spills from the newsagents’ shop, and outside the chippy crumpled paper bags flutter while discarded pop cans clatter in a gust of wind.

The public telephone stands on the corner of Hare Hill Road. All three of them squeeze inside the peeling scarlet box with its tart iron-filings smell. He lifts the receiver and dials 999, the burr and clicks of the connection reverberating in the cramped space.

His call is logged at 6.07 a.m. by Police Constable Edwards, the duty policeman at Hyde station.

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‘I asked for a car,’ David recalls quietly, 45 years later. He’s sitting on a pine chair he made himself, in the kitchen of his home in a remote and beautiful corner of Ireland. ‘I couldn’t think of anything to say. There wasn’t a story that I could give them over the phone. How could I sum up in a couple of sentences