

'You don't already know this, girls? Your friend George was there,' Mrs Kowalski said with a smile, nodding at Nina.

'Yeah we heard,' Norva said. 'Nina, how was it? What happened?'

'Well, it was my first meeting, and probably my last...I'm a quiet person really. It was too much...'

Jane jumped in. 'Nina – I told you already – it's not normally like that, it was the annual fund-sharer. Everyone has different wants and needs...' Her voice trailed away.

Nina turned to Pap. 'I totally got where you were coming from Joe, trust me, but The Hub was so hot, and the language you used. Hugo looked sick. It was too much of a roasting. In every sense.'

Serena started to sniff. 'I miss him so much.' She reached for her basket. 'I should go, I'm no use to anyone like this.'

Serena went to stand; Nina reached for her hand.

'Don't go,' she said gently. 'Stay with us, have some food. You're in good company.'

Was she? I looked over at Norva. She was looking at Mark.

Serena smiled weakly and sat back down. She bit into a pakora and smiled appreciatively at Nina, who held onto her other hand.

'I didn't know Hugo was sick?' I asked Serena, quietly.

'Yah,' she said, her eyes welling up. 'He had allergies all week, and was a tad dehydrated from the heat too, I think.'

'The heat?' laughed Mrs Kowalski. 'Just heat and not gin too?'

'What are you trying to say?' said Pap looking angrily at Mrs Kowalski.

My body stiffened.

'Nothing, nothing at all,' said Mrs Kowalski, popping a pierogi in her mouth. 'Why are you sticking up for Hugo anyway? You told him to watch himself!'

Norva and I looked at each other. Pap told Hugo to 'watch himself' too? Nothing good happened after Pap told you to 'watch yourself.'

'Everyone, please!' begged Serena, her head in her hands.

'Just a difference of opinion,' Jane offered, placing her hand on Pap's arm.

Visibly irritated by the conversation, he removed Jane's hand from his arm. It flopped conspicuously onto the table.

I shook thoughts of Hugo's arm away. Again.

'Mrs K, I just want the best for The Tri,' Pap said quietly. 'You – in particular – know this very well.'

What does she know in particular?

'You want the best? You do enough? Everything broken. Long list. Everything stink.' She wafted her hand in front of her face.

Mark reached over and took another fistful of food. One pakora, two pakora, three pakora, more.

'You know, speaking of stink – if people did their jobs, these girls wouldn't find bodies,' Mrs K added.

I took a sharp intake of breath. Norva whispered 'wow' under her breath.

'Enough! ENOUGH!' Serena screamed. She slammed her fists on the table.

Food flew into the air. Juice flowed across the table and Mark quickly cradled his plate.

‘You are talking about my brother – my brother – as a body,’ she shouted. ‘We found him just today. Today! A few hours ago. Have you no compassion?’

Serena looked at Mrs K, who shrugged, and bit into a sandwich. She gagged, and spat it into her hand.

‘Joe is our friend. Let DCI Sharp and her team do their work,’ Serena continued, placing her hand on Pap’s shoulder. ‘I understood his reasoning at the meeting, and I stand by him.’ She stood up, choking back her tears. ‘Goodnight, everyone. Enjoy the Vitonicas.’

Serena paced down the hall, shutting the door quietly behind her. Those who were left at the table sat there in silence.

That was, until Mark awkwardly said ‘well’ and stood up from the table. He pocketed five sandwiches for his long journey home. An epic two doors down. Everyone else rose and shuffled out, keeping their eyes to the floor.

Norva held the door open. I’m certain she tried to sniff Mark’s t-shirt as he left.

Pap leaned in the doorway outside his room. ‘Girls, I’m done. I’ll see you in the morning. If you need to talk, you know where I am.’

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Norva shut our door and leaned against it. I immediately sat at our desk and shook the mouse, resuscitating the computer, opening our document. I looked at the to-dos.

‘Sis,’ she said in a low voice. ‘What the actual flip was that? I don’t even know where to begin.’

‘We’ll start here,’ I said. ‘Our first action was...’

I read it out to Norva.

To-do: Find out about the meeting

‘Well, what do we actually know about it?’ Norva wailed. ‘Not that much!’ She slid down the door and sat with her back against it. ‘We know from Barry’s star turn on the news that Pap and Hugo kicked off at the meeting and had a blazing row.’

I agreed. 'Yes, that's been corroborated by the suspects who were just here, in our kitchen. But I agree – we need more detail.'

Norva angled her hips to reach for her phone and then she sat back down. Stern-faced, she used both thumbs to spit out what looked like quite a demanding message.

'Texting George?' I asked.

'You're damn right I am,' she said, throwing her phone in front of her when her task was complete.

'Pap told Hugo to watch himself, Nik, he must have been really mad,' Norva said quietly.

'I know,' I replied. 'I'm actually frightened to find out the details.'

I looked back at the rest of our to-dos.

To-do: Find out where the suspects went after the meeting

To-do: Ask Pap about his conversation and limp

To-do: Test The Hugo/Chute hypothesis

To-do: Ask Pap about the paint/bags

To-do: Close the time of death window

'Norva, we're not doing too well on the other items on our list either,' I said. 'We need to move quickly – Sharp will be all over this pretty quickly and...'

Ding! Ding!

Norva crawled forward to grab her phone. 'Five minutes, George says. Then, we out.'

She looked over at me. 'And yeah, we have loads more things to find out, definitely. Urgently. A key one being, how the hell did Jane get into our flat? Because the door wasn't unlocked. As if!'

I span around in my chair.

'Right!?' I said. 'We would never.' I looked out of the window across the Tri and let out a small, bitter laugh. 'Any other time, that incident would have warranted an entire file for itself. Today, it's just a side mission of a bigger quest.'

Norva joined me at the window and used the telescope. Below us, the residents had gone home. May Burton and her ilk had packed their equipment away and begun to disperse. The Tri became yesterday's news, today.

Officer Burnett manned the cordon in Katie's place, the tape replaced.

'Do you think they'll have forgotten all about this in the morning?' I asked.

'Are you mad? No chance,' she snorted. 'The forensics haven't even arrived yet, by the looks of it. In

five days, maybe? Sure. But not tomorrow. The media and Lady Sharp are gonna be all up in our business for a while yet.'

Ding! Ding!

'He's ready. Let's bounce.'

'Wait, wait! Keys? Bundles? Dog?' I asked.

'Oh yeah! You do the bundles; I'll get the keys.'

I nodded and began to prepare. 'The bundles' were the piles of clothes we stuffed in our beds if we were ever out when we shouldn't be. We had used them successfully two point five times to date.

The trouble was, a lot of the bundling went into the body this afternoon, which now lay in the refuse area. I took my quilt and put it under Norva's duvet. I scrunched it and shaped it so it looked like two of us were in the same bed.

Norva returned with the keys.

'Always in the kitchen!' she said, holding them near my face. She looked at her bed; her hand flew to her mouth. 'Nik, you put us together? On a day like today? It really fits the narrative, I swear. Beautiful, honestly. We'll be roasting, but bundle-me really needs bundle-you right now.'

Norva looked genuinely moved. For a split second.

‘Alright, enough sap, let’s move,’ she said.

We crept past Pap’s door and she held Ringo under her left arm, her right hand around his mouth. I opened the front door, triple-checking I had locked it. We quickly and lightly ran to the lift.

Norva pressed the button to take us to the lobby. ‘I literally cannot believe George didn’t tell us about this immediately. Some friend he is!’ Norva whispered and hissed.

Hisspered.

I laughed internally at the new word I just created.

Norva continued, ‘Said he’s recorded the meeting, but couldn’t send it over. Umbongoed it.’

‘You mean embargoed it?’

‘Hell does that mean anyway?’

‘It means he didn’t want to send it out yet. He was waiting to release it.’

‘God, what is his problem?’

‘He’s just dedicated, I guess. You can’t be mad with him Norva; he literally just saved us, and Pap.’

Norva kissed her teeth. ‘I can be mad with who I like, when I like to be honest.’

The lift stopped on the floor below.

I held my breath. I knew who it should be, but what if it wasn't?

The doors opened.

'Alright?' Norva said sullenly.

'How do, NSquared?' George whispered.

He stepped into the lift, holding his phone high in the air.

'What the...,' Norva began, but George immediately shushed her.

'I'm sampling the sound for my new tune, 'Lift Up My Endz – open bracket – Corner Won – close bracket'. It's gonna be legit. Uploading it tonight. Watch me break the internet!'

We rode the lift in silence, while George sombrely felt at one with his soundscape.

I stifled laughs all the way down.

I turned on my phone's flashlight and shined it at George.

'I cannot wait to recreate this for you guys. I'm living!' He whispered, outside The Hub.

The doors were open, but no one was there.

'I thought Katie and her crew would be crawling all over this place, to be honest,' said George. 'Where they at? Where are those snowmen dusting for prints?'

'Too early for that, bro,' said Norva, stepping into the room. 'Plus, we heard they're super low on numbers, something happening up North. Just Katie, that Burnett guy and Scary Sharp. All eyes are on the scene. For now. We ahead of the game.' She tapped at her temple with her index finger.

'Yeah, you right!' said George. 'You smart, Norva.'

'I know this,' she replied.

I was over the compliments. 'Can we start please, George?'

'Aight, aight,' he said. He moved into the centre of the room. My torch tracked him.

'Context. It was 'Jane and the Tri-Angels dish-out-their-money night', yeah?'

'That's a hot band name, you know,' said Norva.

'I was sitting here.' He squatted on the spot. He ran to Barry's Burn. 'Jane was here.' Another squat. 'Your dad, Ole Joe was here.' He stepped left. A squat.

George ran to the middle of the room, coughed and hunched over. 'And Hugo was here.' He did a slow, feeble squat for effect.

Norva's eyes were bright as she followed him around the room. True friendship.

'It was absolutely roasting in here,' he continued, fanning his face. 'Some blonde kid was hanging out that window. The woman sitting here,' he pointed, 'had melted, basically. A puddle person.' He crumpled his body to the floor.

Norva roared with laughter and lay next to him. Impressive, yes, but not that funny. George was irritating. Norva was irritating. Together they were vexing.

'Please. George, Norva. Can we get to it? I understand you recorded the meeting, George?'

'Damn straight,' he said, reaching into his pockets for his phone. 'Glad I did too, because the internet is gonna LOVE this one – now I can share it.'

The video started. Slowly. It was mostly close-ups of George doing what he calls 'free styling'. I had Norva's support, for once.

'Scrub through it, George, god! Edit your content!'

Charity Jane sat at a table in front of Barry's Burn. Pap sat next to her. She spoke into the microphone. 'Yay, welcome to the 85th Tri-Angel meeting everyone!'

Screeching feedback.

Charity Jane leaned away from the microphone and applauded. 'Great to see so many new faces tonight. For those who don't know me, yet, I'm Jane Cooper, Chief Tri-Angel.'

George interjected, 'Yeah, she's a chief alright!'

Norva laughed. 'Innit, though.'

I shushed them.

'The Tri-Angels is a charity, run by and for me, I mean, us.' Jane laughed. 'It's for everyone on the estate. Together, we've raised thousands of pounds over the last five years to make improvements to our buildings and our

lives! Thank you, all of you, for your continued support. Before we get into tonight, a couple of community notes for you.'

'Firstly, I'm so very proud and pleased to announce that Kwame Kent from Corner Two has been scouted by Crystal Palace Football Club! He will be officially joining the youth squad from September.'

The crowd erupted into applause and cheers. George turned the camera to his face, and stuck out his tongue. Behind him, Jane continued. 'Yes, excellent news! Don't forget us, Kwame! Secondly: a big angelic thank you to Serena from Corner One for providing the drinks tonight, Veronicas.'

'It's "Vitonica", Jane,' Serena shouted off-camera.

'That's the one! Thank you, Serena,' Jane said, tersely. 'It's great to see a Tri-business doing well. You could say its tri-mendous.'

The three of us groaned, along with the other people in the video.

George's video panned over to Serena who stood up, took a cheeky bow and waved to the group.

'Generous queen,' Norva remarked.

The video focused back on Jane.

‘Now back to tonight – let’s decide how we’re going to spend the money we’ve raised over the last year. Five. Thousand. Pounds! Well done, all.’

George scrubbed through the video a bit more. ‘Let’s cut to the real. Where it gets *really* good.’

Hugo stood up, shakily. His skin was bright red. Heatstroke? Someone out of shot handed him a microphone.

‘The Triangle Estate is a seminal example of Brutalist architecture.’ There he goes. ‘A style that’s very much back in vogue, just in time for its 60th anniversary. The wider world, and the general public, are starting to understand just how brilliant and important these buildings are to us, our city and the world. The wider world and general public are starting to understand how well-made and beautiful they are.’

People laughed in the background. ‘Well-made, my buttcheeks!’ someone exclaimed. Others shushed him.

‘We must give our thanks to the progressive vision of architect Ellis Silvertöe – for our homes, our community and our lives.’

A confused silence swept across The Hub.

‘So what you saying, Hugo?’ someone slurred at the back. Barry.

Hugo coughed nervously. He held onto his chest before speaking.

‘What I’m saying is, I think we should use the money to erect a statue to commemorate the anniversary of The Tri. Celebrate the work Ellis Silvertöe and by extension other great architects and artists of the period, you know, Clockenstien – I adore Clockenstien – De Bouseier, Sir Pence, et cetera.’

Hugo slumped in his chair. Serena reached into a cool bag and handed him a juice. He leant on her appreciatively as he drank. He was immediately cooler and calmer.

The calm didn’t extend to the rest of the room, though. George’s camera spun around.

Someone at the back shouted, ‘Hugo. Hugo. Hugo! Put on your knickers before your coat, nameen? It’s a heatwave, bro. We out here suffocating, we need aircon – and you’re talking about a statue!? I’m perplexed!’

A voice at the front. ‘Hugo, you’re being an utter pleb, to be honest. We need better lifts, renovations, a new health centre, a nursery, double-glazing to sort out the noise. That’s just for starters.’

People cheered.

I spotted Mrs Kowalski nodding her head with closed eyes at this suggestion.

Someone off camera – George really needed to work on his camera skills – said: ‘You know what, though? A statue might be alright. Something positive and impactful. Five thousand isn’t going to scratch the surface of the work that needs doing. We need millions for that. So, why not get something, you know, that’s just *nice* for once?’

The crowd murmured at the possibility. George panned over them. There was Mark. Mouth agape. Eyes narrowed. Norva squealed.

Pap stood up and walked around the table. With ease.

‘No limp!’ I whispered.