

## **Taking Names and Breaking Hearts in Splott**

### **Darren Floyd**

...Karen wiped the blood from her nose, got up onto her feet and checked where she was. She checked her Armani watch, and found herself looking at her bare wrist.

Oh yeah, right.

It was past eight cause it was nearly dark. There was a SET stationary store to her right and to her left was a set of shabby houses with net curtains which she could see – even in the half light – were grubby. Every second house had a poster in their windows which said “NOT In Grangetown!” in big, angry, red letters. “Underneath this was smaller lettering which she couldn’t make out.

Grangetown then. Strangetown.

It made sense. She was just over the bridge heading towards the back of Cardiff Central Station in part of Cardiff which was considered to be a no man’s land.

It could have been worse, it could have been *far* fucking worse.

“Piss.” She’d take the elbow out of her sleeve; the top was bastard new on Tuesday. Her skinned elbow glistened in the darkness. Karen dabbed her finger on the wound, and putting it on her tongue it tasted like copper. Still, it could have been worse, and if she didn’t find the money soon, it *would* be far fucking worse.

She was just on the outskirts of town where Adamstown ended and Grangetown began. A half hearted nothing part of town. Litter huddled around lamp posts and slept in drains. An Eddie Stobart truck had “It’s good to be THE KING!” written on the windshield and a battered, miserable teddy bear attached to it’s grill was parked up a Kwik-Fit, curtains were drawn around all its windows, and in a moment of spite Karen thought about running up and banging on the window to wake up its sleeping occupant. She’d done it before and it had made her laugh like a drain.

She pushed her hand against the wall to feel something concrete when she heard the rolling sound of rustling and thunder. Karen looked in the direction of the noise. In the distance were flickering lights and shapes bracketed by hazy figures who looked impossibly high up off the ground. Karen stood mesmerised as the shapes came closer. The wave of people hit her. They dragged her along with them, knocking the breath out of her, spinning and pitching her. Karen would have collapsed had the sheer crush of people not been so packed. When she became aware of her surroundings again as the back Central Station Train Station in the distance came into view. A red dragon sign reared over next to the smoke stack of the Brains brewery. The back entrance to Cardiff Central was a level below the train platforms. The platforms were deserted, weak orange lights spotlighted nothing. The back was essentially a car park, at this time of night sparsely populated with cars waiting for their owners to return, unused barriers tinged with street light, hiding sights unknown in its Halloween black tunnels and nooks. Karen had walked past, and through it hundreds of times and had never picked up on its whispered promise of violence.

She was in back in Porthcawl, in Trecho Bay again, her scrote of a brother had distracted her, she'd turned around and had been winded by a wave of light brown water - shouldn't it have been blue - with such unexpected ferocity that it was like a giant had flicked her with his thumb and forefinger. She'd been knocked tumbling, her legs over her head and for one heart stopping, pin prick sharp moment she'd breathed in salt water. Finally after what felt like an age her feet found sand she was able to stand, reborn, spluttering with snot and sea water erupting out of her nose. Her vision a clearing patch of red, her brother's sharp laughter ringing in her ears. Both of them had got a belting from her father for that. It was so fucking unfair that it still made her teeth grind now to remember it. Karen wished she could go back in time and tell herself to not to buy out of the catalogue, and to avoid the men who thought with their cock and talked with their fists.

"Wha the fuck is 'appening!" her experience honed battle cry which always stopped time, but here no one listened, heard or cared. There was a mood of grim humour amongst the crowd, who

seemed resigned to whatever their fate was. Karen looked at her fellow travellers and tried to find a connection between them, to find a clue as to why they were being herded by a police escort. Most were laughing, some were drunk, some wore baseball caps. The men outnumbered the women. She noticed that one, two, three Bristol City tops? Was that it? The connections and associations were an instant relief to her, but she couldn't hear any obvious Bristol accents.

"Wha the fuck is 'appening!" she shrieked.

Nothing.

"I'm from Splott! I'm not supposed to be 'ere!"

Still nothing.

"What the fuck is 'appening?" she screamed so hard that she could feel the nose bleed coming back.

"I'm fucked if I know love!" a weasel thin man with sunken cheeks who was pushed next to her said, to laughs from around them. Her first instinct was to attack for being laughed at, but she was relieved to finally have a response.

"I's got to get out! I'm not supposed to be here!"

A policeman on a horse glared down at her.

"I's not supposed to be here!" she yelled.

"Do you think any of us are?" someone in the crowd said flavoured with disgust and punctuated with jostling. The yawning maw of Cardiff Central Train station beckoned. She could see the first few feet before it plunged into darkness.

Karen was powerless to pull out of the crowd, like being sucked down a plug hole. She pushed in every way she could, but all her energy and strength seemed to get soaked up and left her no better.

"I...I...!"

There was a sudden cold sweat, skin shrinking hush and people seemed to be waiting to hear what she was going to say next, it was like telling a punch line to a joke in the pub. She always fucked it up.

"I...I's can't go to Bristol! I lives in Splott!"

"You..." The weasel thin man leaned towards Karen as though he hadn't heard her. He grabbed her shoulder with his arm and seemed to fall backwards. She never knew if he'd pulled her out by accident, but she span out to the side. She felt hands push and tug her, and in a breath she was spewed out of the crowd and span so close to a light brown police horse that she felt the hot, wet breath from its nostrils on her cheek.

Karen fell and lay slumped up against a billboard looking up at a gigantic picture of a Cadburys Whisper. Gradually the crowd reached the station, and the police ensured that every single one of them entered it. Like chips, each one was popped into the waiting mouth of the tunnel. The police horses trotted past her, her head turned as each of them went past. When every one of them had gone she got unsteadily to her feet and tottered off in the direction of her flat. Karen heard laughter and crying around her, but couldn't see where it was coming from. She wiped the tears from her face and pursed her mouth. 'Fuck 'um, let um stare.' she thought.

Karen found herself against the tall railings of Cumnock Place which kept this side of Splott from the railway tracks. She held onto the railings and looked down at trainers. She kicked the railings foundation. Broken glass glinted in the darkness like diamonds and unopened Yellow Pages curled in its shrink wrap coffin. After six kicks the thin plastic provided no protection for her toes. Karen ran her tongue along her gums and tasted blood, then came the sound of thunder. She looked up as the Inter City began to build up speed.

I wonder where it'll end up? She thought. I wonder where all those people are going and if they are going to feel disappointed when they get there? She saw a man in a suit walking through the carriage. He was talking on his mobile and laughing. Karen's face tightened as she spat out "Twat."