

## Chapter Six

I knew that my dad wasn't an angel. I also knew he sailed very close to the wind at times. Hell, I had seen it for myself but as always I tried to see the best in him, hoping he would see the best in me. What I didn't realise though, were the kind of people he had upset, and that he would leave me alone to very much face the serious consequences of his actions. It was one thing falling foul of the average man in the street but I was about to find out he had also upset some heavy, heavy people.

Having already suffered filthy, anonymous letters and foul-mouthed abusive rants down the phone, to say nothing of the people who led a full scale protest outside the factory over dealings they had had with my dad just weeks after I took over, I realised I was going to have to grow a thick skin and grow it quickly. I didn't realise I might also have to grow a bulletproof vest.

One typical day, as I sat at my desk longing for the day to end so I could go home and relax with the ever increasing glass of wine, I answered the phone to a gruff voice from the City of Liverpool. It was ironic really. As a kid and as I was growing up, my father would drill into me how 'hard' people from Liverpool were. He made every Liverpudlian, from the cradle to the grave, sound like a baby eating, brick breaking, shotgun wielding monster. I think subconsciously it instilled in me a belief that all 'scousers' had to be immensely feared and that they would rain hot coals of hell on anyone who looked at them sideways. There did not seem to be any middle ground or compromise amongst the people, at least according to my dad. Of course he was wrong. The City certainly had its share of hard men but its people also had a warmth and humor about them that was very endearing. I however, was about to meet the hard side of the City and it was like every story my dad had told was to unfold before my very eyes. It was like his deluded, sweeping opinion was about to come true and bite him on his ass.

The Scouser on the other end of the phone, Patrick O'Docherty, truly had me on my back foot when he very politely asked me when he would receive the goods he had paid my father for, just weeks earlier. I was truly ignorant to his plight and let him know this.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what you are talking about. What goods do you mean as I have heard nothing about them?" I asked honestly. Apparently, you shouldn't expect to be seen as 'trying it on' with these people, even though I wasn't. For a second the phone went quiet as if the speaker was trying to compose himself, as if he was trying to take in my words and apparent 'cheek'.

Then he exploded, "What do you fucking mean, you don't know what I'm talking about?! Where are the goods I paid your old fella for?" It wasn't really a question, more a sudden and unexpected rage of a statement. His voice was suddenly full of menace and anger, as if he had expected my response.

"Hold on," I said trying to pacify things somewhat, but I got the feeling there would be no pacification.

"Don't fucking tell me to hold on! We gave your dad ten grand in cash a month ago. When are we getting our stuff and don't fuck about?!" he demanded.

"I'm trying to tell you that I have not long taken over the business and I don't know what you are on about. I'll need to call my dad and see what he says about this," I told him.

"Tell you what lad, don't bother. We do things like this face to face. We'll be over to see you in an hour. Your dad thinks he's a bit of a boy because he knows the Callaghan brothers (an alleged Liverpool crime family). We fucking own them lad, so tell your dad that there is fuck all they can do. We don't give a fuck if he knows them or not!"

The phone line went dead and a pit in my stomach opened. I knew these were heavy people, not people you owe money to but I had to call my dad and see what his position was. I had no idea whether he had taken their money or not but I could make a pretty good guess. He had obviously not told me of his dealings and just waited for me to find out in due course.

Not really expecting anything good to come from the phone call to him, I quickly realised that, as usual, I was on my own on this one, as his reply to my relaying of the phone call was pretty typical. He listened without interrupting and when I finished the tale you could have cut the silence with a knife.

"Well I did have some money from them but they were buying goods off us. I just thought that you could make up the money. I don't know why he is shouting now."

I resigned myself to more bullshit. "He is shouting now because you took his money and never told me about it. He now expects me to make ten thousand pounds worth of goods, probably by the end of the week. We just look like crooks now because I told him I hadn't got a clue what he was talking about."

"Well what did you tell him that for?" he asked. I couldn't believe it. I was not sure if he was in genuine denial or just stalling for time, although what he would do with that time was anyone's guess.

"What was I supposed to tell him? I don't know where you think I am getting the money to complete his order," I said. His complete refusal to see he had done anything wrong in taking people's money and leaving the responsibility of the debt for me to deal with was exasperating. I was starting to feel ill.

"Well what's happening now? Is he going to call back or what?" he asked, timidly.

"No dad. He is not going to call back. He is coming to see me. In fact his final words were 'We will be out in about an hour'."

Again, the silence was deafening but then he outdid himself with his next remark. "You haven't told them where I live, have you?" he asked sounding petrified.

"Of course I haven't told them where you live."

"Only he is a nasty little shit that one," he said, rather too richly for my liking. "I am on my way out for the day but I'll phone him and try and speak to him."

I didn't really know if this was a good thing or a bad thing but thought he should try anyway. Within a minute he was back on the phone to me. "Si, he is hysterical. He kept ranting on at me saying the Callaghan brothers won't help us. I don't really know the Callaghan brothers, why is he bringing them into it?" Real panic was starting to creep into his voice, but what was I supposed to say?

"He is bringing them into it dad, because you can't help but brag that you know 'the right people'. I told you it would all end up back in your face one day."

"Well he said they are on their way over now. Look, there is no point me being there, it will probably just make things worse. Plus, I'm visiting my dad's grave today, so it's a bit awkward. Give me a ring when they have been and tell me what has been said."

It was on the tip of my tongue to shout, "And you could be visiting your son's fucking grave next week, you dickhead!"

However, as usual, I didn't as I knew I was the only one level-headed enough to sort this mess out and if I'm honest, also the only one brave enough to meet these guys face to face. I would stand in front of a moving train for my children; this did not seem to be the case with my dad. So this is what he meant when he said he was bringing out the boys from Liverpool!

I sat quietly in my office, alone and then remembered that two of the guys from the factory had spoken to these guys when they were over at our factory to see my dad a few weeks previously. Of course, that is when the penny dropped and I realised that this is when the money had changed hands.

I went to see the two members of staff to ask their opinion on these guys, although in my heart I knew what they had to say wasn't going to be good.

"Dave, you dealt with Patrick O'Docherty and his mate last week didn't you?" I asked a member of staff.

"What, the dodgy Scousers?" He said with a smile on his face. His smile disappeared quickly when I relayed what had happened that morning. He turned to his work mate. "Vic, I think you better get Tony."

I searched his face for answers but he wouldn't meet my eyes. "What is it Dave?"

"Well Tony walked out with them and your dad to take some stuff to the car. He said your dad was all bragging and showing off in front of them as he if were a big shot. Then he said he nearly shit himself when they opened the car boot. Apparently it was full of weapons."

"What, baseball bats and stuff?" I asked, bracing myself for the truth.

"No." He said quietly. "Guns..."

Again, my stomach flipped. Years of training in Martial Arts and Fear Control threatened to disappear but I had to bash down the coward in me. I couldn't run, they would be back day after day for their money. They were an hour away, not the other side of the moon. I had to deal with this head on and it had to be today. In fact, looking down at my watch I realised it had to be in about thirty minutes.

Tony arrived on the scene and his face said it all as he nodded grimly. "Yes Si, they had guns in the boot of the car. Sawn-off shotguns and a couple of revolvers. Your dad was laughing and that but they looked like nasty bastards." He looked at me with pity in his eyes and shook his head. "Will you be okay Si?" he asked, genuinely concerned.

Trying to put a brave face on it, I smiled and simply said, "We'll find out in about a half an hour won't we?"

I went back to the office and made the decision to send home the ladies who worked there. It wasn't their problem, why should they be drawn into this? I doubted very much if these guys would drag them into it, but as they were the nearest staff to the front door it stood to reason that they would be the first sight on entry. This was my problem so I wanted to make sure I was the first person they saw just in case it was heavy from the start. In fact if I could help it, I actually wanted to make sure I was the only person they saw. Just because the majority of staff were male, I didn't see it as a problem they needed to be, or should be, involved in and so I moved all the factory staff into the very back of the building, away from where any skulduggery might take place. Telling them I had visitors coming to see me and I didn't want any noise disturbing our meeting seemed to satisfy their growing curiosity at the obvious events that seemed to be taking place. They moved their work without fuss and the day carried on as normal.

However, as I sat on my own the two guys I had spoken to, which led to me finding out about the guns, knocked on my door. When they came in I could see the worried look on their faces and braced myself as I waited for them to ask to go home as well. They were entitled to ask, after all they knew what was happening and it could be them caught up in something that wasn't theirs. Instead of asking me could they leave, they surprised me and gained my respect with their request.

"Si, can us two move our workload back into the front factory?" The front factory was directly outside my office door in full view of anyone sitting in my office and vice

versa. Although the rest of the staff had bought my story, the two guys stood in front of me knew better and one of them, Vic, continued. "There is no reason why you have to be alone with this. It's your old fella that ripped them off, not you."

"I appreciate that, I really do, but these are heavy. You know what they carry and I can assure you, they are furious."

"It doesn't matter Si. Don't sit here on your own. Look, we are not saying we can match them, but at least we can give it a go should it go off."

I was genuinely touched by this and gave them the nod. I then told them I would make one last attempt at arbitration via phone call but when I made that call, the lads from Liverpool would have none of it.

"Look, we are already through the tunnel and on our way so whatever you have to say, you can say it face to face. This is how we do things." He had calmed down somewhat but I don't think he was coming out to see the seaside. He still meant business.

As I put the phone down it immediately rang again and it was my dad. "Are they there yet?" he asked with trepidation in his voice.

"No," I told him. "Not yet."

"Well, give me a call when they have been and gone. I should be home by then." That was it, that was all he had to offer. No fatherly advice or words of support. No plans to come to the office and take part in the face to face. Just a kind of 'take it on the chin Simon, like you always do, I'll be in the safety of my home.' How I wished that I was. I longed to be sitting in my front room, large Brandy in my hand away from this nonsense and madness.

But I wasn't and nothing was going to change that as I hung up the phone and waited for what seemed to be like the longest hour. I had already heard the stories of how they handled people who had upset them, and I had seen them previously in the factory, when they displayed a demeanor that simply told you they weren't to be fucked with or you would be the one getting fucked. There was also this pretty obvious, pretty ethical issue; despite their screaming and threats, they were owed the money or the goods. Pretty simple really. The fact that the debt had been kept from me until the last minute, or the fact that I was to receive not one penny of any money paid by them, but was expected to repay the debt, really didn't matter. They had given my dad a huge amount of cash and now they quite rightly wanted a return on their money. How they got it or more to the point who they got it from didn't really concern them.

My dad could hide all he wanted but someone had to stand in front of them and sort this out; that someone was me. I tried to form a plan in my mind and my thoughts drifted to my fight experience.

Once I had overcome being a timid, bullied and frightened person, I now had, at this time, many years in the fight world, in one shape or another. With an extensive background in Karate, I moved onto Kick-Boxing, then Western Boxing before being encouraged to grapple and then formally qualifying as a Wrestling Coach. I have been hit hard and I have learnt to hit hard myself. I found that I developed a taste for the nasty, 'in fighting' that is Close Quarter Combat, utilizing knees, elbows, the head...anything that would have an effect really.

In all those years I have only ever been knocked out once but have knocked out many who stood before me and won pretty much most of my fights...sometimes scoring multiple knockouts in one night. Hell, I fractured a guy's skull in a particularly nasty brawl so bad he never fought again. He decided to go low and try for a takedown by sweeping my knees away from me; my knees and I had other plans for him, and the sound of bony knee to bony forehead was sickening; more so was the sound of his scream as he hit the floor.

Even when I was rendered unconscious by a beautiful, spiteful left hook by an All Out Fighting European Champion, I came around and got up to start fighting again, achieving what I set out to achieve that day.

I don't claim to have had all the street fights in the world. Indeed, I spent most of my life trying to avoid them, but once I learnt to defend myself, should someone take a chance with me, well I usually came away the better out of the two of us; ask the guy who's nose was split in half when he decided he would get up in my face, nice and aggressive for no reason other than a spilt drink. Or the guy who spent the night in hospital after upsetting my girlfriend with vile and offensive suggestions and then an even more offensive act, all in front of a young child.

Sadly there have been others who have tried to be clever with me but more often than not, I had a quiet word and the situation was resolved. I have never used violence gratuitously and I have no wish to become involved in violent delights, but I was developing a talent that was keeping me safe from harm.

So I hope you will agree that, despite my quiet nature, it is fair to say I can 'row' somewhat. That said, I do try my best to avoid conflict but on this occasion, it wasn't my choice and it wasn't avoidable. These men were coming to see me for a reason and I didn't give them that reason. Still, I was the one that had to deal with it.

I am a thinker when it comes to conflict and my thoughts this time were simple as I told myself, "Your right hook and powerful elbow strike may keep you out of trouble here. If you have to use them try and be first, and try and be quick, and just hope the two factory guys do the same and get in sharpish. But above all try and use your head. This is a situation that can be resolved without any blood being spilled." I knew I had to be fair but firm and sincerely hoped I could resolve it amicably as I honestly got the feeling that the said blood would probably be mine. I thought it best to phone Julie because, well, because you never know...

Trying to put some humor into the episode and hopefully put her at ease I told her straight. "Ju, there is a pretty good chance I might not be home for tea tonight." I then told her the whole story and at first she was frightened, then angry at my father for putting me in this position and then defiant.

"I'll drop the kids at my mum's and come down to sit with you," she said, quite determined.

Not surprised by her bravery, loyalty and love but concerned that she may 'get in the way', I declined her offer. No matter how much I longed to be with her, this wasn't her place. After all, it wasn't her dad that had put me here. I assured her I would be alright.

"I'll call you when it's done...or not," I said teasing her.

"Don't say that love. You will be alright. Be careful Si. Don't do anything silly." I gave her my assurances that I wouldn't and hung up the phone. All I could do now was wait.

In the hour that I did wait, fear and I sat together again, and we looked back at the amount of times this kind of event had happened to me. And then I remembered the first time I had picked up a baseball bat with the sole intention of using it to protect myself and my family. I reminisced as I sat there, waiting;

I was seventeen years old and was becoming more and more aware of how my father's world worked. I wanted little part of it and was happy spending my days working and my nights drumming in a local band. On the evening in question, we had played a gig at a local nightclub and it had gone well.

It's fair to say I was happy arriving home late that night, a couple of pints inside me and the accolades of a small crowd ringing in my ears. The next set of ringing I heard would stop me dead in my tracks and send a cold shiver up my spine.

It was about 11pm and the house was quiet with my dad being away on business, and my mum in bed having left me some supper out. As I waited for it to reheat, the phone brought me from my daydream. Given the time of night, I was surprised to hear it ring and answered it with trepidation. After all, does a phone call at that time of night ever bring good news?

Immediately my instincts were proved right as a rough, aggressive voice barked down the receiver, "Is Peter Morrell there?"

"No I'm sorry. He's away." I realise now that this was bad information to give out, I should not have let anyone know who was and who wasn't in the house; but what did I know? I was a seventeen year old drummer in a rock 'n' roll band.

“Don’t fuck about son, we know he’s there and he’s about to get the hiding of his life. We’re in your town now, at a phone box near your street. Tell him to come outside to meet us.”

Sheer panic took hold as I tried to convince him that my dad was not around but they would have none of it.

“We’ll find out in a minute won’t we? Chicken shit he is. Ripping people off all the time. Well he has picked the wrong crowd this time.” With that the phone went dead and I became aware of my mum standing at the top of the stairs.

“What is it Si? What’s happened?” I just looked at her and it was as if she knew what had been said. She called the police and to be fair, it took them just minutes to get to us. After being told details of the call before they were dispatched to us, they had taken the time to check the local phone boxes and reassured us that there was no one around.

You could cut the tension with a knife and so it was no surprise that I nearly jumped out of my skin when the phone rang a second time. An officer motioned for my mum to answer it and then stood next to her so he could listen in. There wasn’t much he could do or say as he heard the caller tell my mum that my dad ‘wouldn’t be forgotten’ and that ‘things would happen soon.’ With that the phone went dead.

The officer could see we were terrified and tried to put our minds at ease. Turning to me he said, “Listen son, he sounded drunk to me. Given the time of night he’s probably had a few and will wake up in the morning with a sore head and a guilty conscious. We will be around all night so will drive past and keep an eye open, but try not to worry. Lock up the house and get some sleep. It’ll all be forgotten in the morning.”

I did as he said, but not before grabbing the baseball bat that was in the house and putting it by the side of my bed. I was taking no chances but prayed the policeman was right and that the guy was just drunk. Both my prayers went unanswered; the policeman wasn't right and the man on the phone hadn't been drunk...

The following morning as my mum and I tried to eat breakfast, the phone rang again and the same voice simply said, “If you think that was just a drunken phone call last night, think again. We are coming for your dad.”

I never found out how this issue was resolved, but I do remember the look on my father’s face when I told him of the matter. He tried to laugh it off but he caught my eye and we both knew the same thing; he was afraid.

And so, many years later, here I was in the office he used to occupy, with more bad men coming to see us. The only similarity here was that he had caused the problem; the only difference was that I was going to resolve it.

I was shaken from my reverie by a loud, hard bang on the door; they were here...