

IMRAN MAHMOOD



'Searing and
heart-breaking'
Ruth Ware

You

'Impressively
original'
The Times

don't

**AS
SEEN ON
NETFLIX**

'A daring concept
executed to
perfection'
Lee Child

know

'Dazzling'
**Gillian
McAllister**

'Bold
and original'
Tim Weaver

me

'Bold
and original'
Tim Weaver

'It's the voice
that does it'
Tana French

**Only one
question matters: did he do it?**

PENGUIN BOOKS

You Don't Know Me

'Startlingly original, grabs from the very first sentence, utterly compelling throughout.
A stunning idea superbly executed'

Daily Mail

'Searing and heart-breaking, genre-bending . . . triumphantly reconfigures the traditional whodunnit into something remarkable'

Ruth Ware

'*You Don't Know Me* is a brave debut by a barrister . . . an impressively original courtroom drama'

The Times

'It's the voice that does it: edgy, conflicted, desperately urgent. A startlingly confident and deft debut'

Tana French

'Exciting, highly original, cleverly plotted and convincingly written'

Literary Review

'A dazzling debut – authentic, funny, sad, sympathetic. I was utterly gripped. Rich in understanding of human nature, acerbic on the rights and wrongs of the justice system'

Gillian McAllister

'Timely, tense and original . . . Written with gritty authenticity, this is compelling and important'

Heat

‘A daring concept executed to perfection, a hypnotic and authentic voice, and questions for us to answer as readers and people’

Lee Child

‘A startlingly original courtroom drama . . . perfectly executed, gripping the reader from the first sentence with the defendant’s unique voice and not letting go until a surprising twist at the end. Mahmood is most definitely one to watch * * * * *’

Daily Express

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Tim Weaver

‘A must read for fans of *Making a Murderer*, *Serial* and those who like their crime fiction . . . edgy and provocative’

Book Riot

‘Riveting . . . the defendant’s narrative voice is so beguiling – eloquent, cocky, philosophical and vulnerable’

Jake Kerridge, *Daily Express*

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I Know What I Saw

All I Said Was True

You Don't Know Me

IMRAN MAHMOOD



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To Shahida who gave me life

To Sadia who changed my life

To Zoha who made my life

To all my brothers and sisters at the Criminal Bar,
who make the real speeches and fight the hard cases
every day, for such little recognition or reward

Before: HIS HONOUR JUDGE SALMON QC

Closing Speeches:

Trial: Day 29

Tuesday 4th July 2017

APPEARANCES

For the Prosecution: Mr C. Salfred QC

For the Defendant: In person

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I

10:05

DEFENDANT:

“In 1850, Henry John Temple, Third Viscount Palmerston, made a speech to Parliament that lasted five hours. A Portuguese Jew called Don Pacifico who was living in Greece but who was born in Gibraltar had been attacked by a racist mob. He had been beaten. His home had been vandalized. His possessions had been stolen. The Greek police had watched all of this happen but had done nothing. Don Pacifico asked for compensation from the Greek government. The Greek government refused to give him anything. So he appealed to the British.

“What did Palmerston do? Palmerston considered this Gibraltar Jew to be a British subject. So he sent a whole squadron of Royal Navy ships to Athens to block its port. After eight weeks the Greek government paid up. It was when he was challenged by a hostile crowd in Parliament that Palmerston made his five-hour speech. In it he said, ‘A British subject ought everywhere to be protected by the strong arm of the British government against injustice and wrong.’

“That is what it meant to be British then. In them days. Sorry, in those days, I’m a bit nervous. In those days if you were a British citizen, it did not matter if you were a Jew or Portuguese or a Gibraltan or whatever else. It was enough that you were a British subject. It was enough that wherever you were in the world, if harm came to you, you could count on the full might of all of England to come to your aid. This Palmerston, he sent a fleet of ships for one man!

“That is what England would do for just one of its men – even if he was a nobody Jew like Don Pacifico – the whole of England for one man. One hundred and sixty years later and this black Englishman can count on none of England. None of it. I can count on none of it except this tiny bit of it here in this room. For me, this is all of England right here. You are all of England and I need you now. I need the strong arm of your protection against injustice and wrong. I need you. I need you. I need you. And you need me. You need me so that you can be all of England.”

Basically that is as far as I got up to. Then I thought to myself, ‘What is the point?’ I ain’t no Lord Palmerston and no five-hour speech from me is going to start you cheering my corner. I ain’t stupid. I know that no speech is going to get me out of this. But you know what? It was worth reading that bit out just to see your faces. I don’t mean it as joke ting, but like as a thing to shake you up. You never knew that I could speak like a professor is it? But I just wanted you to know that there’s more than just

that one side to me that you lot saw when I was giving evidence. I wanted to maybe, I don't know, surprise you. And let me tell you there's some surprises coming your way.

So maybe this is the first surprise. Why am I standing here doing this speech instead of my barrister? Why did I decide to stand before you all and tell it in my words? Don't get me wrong, I wasn't upset with him or nothing like that. It was more that we had a difference of opinions on certain subjects and I've got certain like extra information that he don't know.

Like I'll give you an example. You remember when I gave my evidence a couple of days back? Well that was one of them things we had opinions about. He wanted me to tell you what he called a 'plausible story'. 'Give them what they need to hear,' he goes to me. So I go to him, 'Nah bruv, I want to give them what they don't want to hear from me, the truth.' But he didn't like that too much. 'It's too rich for them,' he was saying, 'it's too rich for their blood.'

He was good, my QC, don't get me wrong. But I thought, he's not me. He don't know what I know. The problem for me was that although I know what I know, I don't know what he knows. Do I let him speak to you in your language but telling only half the story, or do I do it myself and tell the full story with the risk that you won't understand none of it? Can I even tell you the whole story? Would you believe it? I don't know man. I don't know. But what I do know is that I

ain't going to be risking my life for this murder and not tell you what is true. Even if my barrister don't want me to do that.

So here's my confession. I gave you evidence on oath before. On the Holy Bible. But God knows what I told you in the witness box wasn't exactly the whole truth. It had some truths, don't get me wrong, a lot of truths, but it also had some maybe not truths. But that is the way he wanted it, my brief. 'It's not about the truth,' he says to me, 'it's about what they can believe.'

This upset me, I mean how can I swear to you to say the truth and then like tell you lies? So last night when I was trying to sleep I thought about it. A lot. And when I woke up I weren't happy, trust me. So this morning I said to him, 'Bruv, I need to start telling it like it is. This speech, my closing speech, it's my last chance.' And he goes, 'Well that's it.' He can't act for me no more for *ethical* reasons. Ethical reasons? I thought ethical was about truth, but apparently, it ain't. It's all about *impressions*. 'What impression do you think you are giving if you go into court now and tell them a different story? What do you think it's going to look like if you tell them *this new piece of information*?' 'Well maybe,' I says to him, 'I don't need to tell them *that thing*' – and truth be told I ain't even sure if I can tell you that thing. Coz if I do tell you that thing I'm not sure I would even survive it, you get me?

Don't get me wrong, I want to tell you but I'm just not sure if I can right now. I don't know what you'd think

about me if you heard that. Maybe you need to get to know me a bit first. The real me.

Right now you think, looking at me, that I'm just some foolish kid who go around shooting up people for no reason. I know you think that because I ain't stupid and you ain't stupid. I know my evidence, what I said to you from the witness box, weren't all that good. I know that. I know it was shady. So I know what you think is that I just shoot up that kid but that ain't it. That's just what they want you to believe. They want you to think that I'm a no-brain lazy kid who go into some random street and shoot a next man up for nothing. Don't be fooled though. They are good at that – fooling you. That's what this guy, Mr Prosecutor, does for a living. He does this day in, day out, and by the time he's finished with you, you're seeing white as black and black as white. I take my hat off to him. He is good. He's sneaky, but he is good. But you have to see past all this smoke he's been creating here and see what's behind it. Trust me you'll be surprised. You don't have to do it for me. Just do it as one of them things, just as an experiment. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong, and you do what you have to do. But if I'm right . . .

Start with the evidences. Okay the evidences don't look good for me but there aren't that many of them really. But before I go into all of that I just want to say this. Ignore what all I said or didn't say in my statement when I got up there in the box the other day. That don't matter

really, does it, if there's no real evidence to tie to me to this murder? If the evidence is shit, what does it matter what I did or didn't tell you?

Okay so here it is. This is how I wrote them down:

1. A boy got shot who is from the same area I live in.
2. Three months before he got shot someone saw me apparently walking past him and saying to him, 'You're waste man.'
3. A couple of months before he was shot a witness saw Jamil, the dead boy, having an argument with a black boy about my age wearing a black hoodie with white Chinese-style writing on the back.
4. Cell-site evidence. The phone expert said that my phone was in the same cell-site as the deceased at the exact moment of the shooting. My phone was also in the same cell-site as his on the day that I was supposed to be arguing with the boy. And it was also in the same cell-site as his phone on the day that I was supposed to be saying, 'You're waste man.' All within one cell-site area. What did that expert say? Fifty or sixty metres?
5. The search of my flat. The police arrested me because they heard a rumour that I was involved in the shooting. They searched my flat and found a Baikal handgun. They found a black hoodie with white Chinese-style writing

on the back. They found my phone, which matched the cell-site evidences. They found my passport. They found an e-ticket for a flight to Spain. They found cash, thirty thousand pounds in my rucksack. They found the firearms discharge residue that the prosecution has been going on about, in my car and on the hoodie. They found me.

6. The police say that the bullet which killed the boy, Jamil, must have come from my gun. Ballistics. You remember the guy who came with all his charts and whatever. That bullet came from that gun he says.
7. They found a tiny particle of the dead boy's blood under my nails.
8. They found a few of my hairs in his car.

Open and shut innit? Enough said. You can go home now thank you very much for your attention. And if you did convict me on that you would probably go home and sleep all nice at night. I know that. But you have been sitting here for four weeks doing this case. What I was hoping was that you wanted to make them weeks count for something. But then I thought, I ain't so sure.

Maybe to you lot, this is just a thing to do innit? A nice break from your lives. You can get up every day and put on a clean shirt and come into this place and look at papers or whatever and nod or shake your heads. You can listen to him, the prosecution. You can listen to this

Judge here and feel like you are doing something. You can be all respectable. And when you leave here, after this case is done, you can go back to your lives to do whatever it is you do. But I don't disappear, you know, when you lot go home. I'm still here. I'm still a person innit? When your little boy who is maybe four or five years old right now and just starting school grows up, I'll still be in a prison cell. When he gets to like ten and starts his first day at big school, I'll still be doing my time. When he leaves and gets a job or goes to uni: I will still be here. Doing my life sentence. Because you didn't look hard enough. Because you didn't do your job. That's all I'm asking. Just listen to my story – I am innocent. I promise you, if you look hard enough you'll see it for yourself.

Just look at the evidence. That will tell you all you need to know. And trust me there is enough there to make you see what I am saying is real.

Break: 11:15

11.28

Before I was arrested for this murder I had a job. Well not a real job with pay as you earn and all that, but I had something that I did to bring in the dollars. I weren't no gangster either – what my thing was, was selling wheels. Cars. I love them. There's nothing you or anyone else can teach me about cars. I like the old ones. I like the new ones. I like the V8s, I like the naturally aspirated ones, I like the turbo-charged ones.

Anyway, what I realized was that most people don't always know what they got when they selling their cars. This one girl was selling what she thought was an old Vauxhall Carlton that used to belong to her boyfriend. But what she didn't know was that it wasn't just any old Carlton that was maybe worth about three hundred quid. This was a Lotus Carlton. A three point six litre twin-turbo three hundred and seventy-seven horsepower Carlton. Nought to sixty in five seconds. Top end, one hundred and seventy-six miles per hour. Twenty grand of anybody's money even though it's twenty years old. See I check my shit before I buy. And I tell you what else, most of the people when they buy from me, they

check their shit too. You can't be selling no bangers to the people round where I live. They want to go over the thing with a magnifying glass. Every dent's a discount. Every bit of optional extra is extra, you get me?

So this has to be the same thing here innit? Are you just going to take what the prosecution say on their say-so or are you going to look at it carefully and check under the bonnet? Is it proper quality what the prosecution is selling you? Or is it just some made in Taiwan rubbish?

So look at the first piece of evidence. The dead boy was shot in the same area I live in. What I say about that is, so what? He was shot in the same area that all the people who live in that area live in. This is just a nothing argument and it's a nothing evidence. Do I even need to go on about this any more?

If he was shot in your areas would that mean that you shot him? No man. That is just stupidity. But Mr Prosecutor thinks it does and makes a big thing out of it. But that's just a thing he's got over me innit. He can say anything and it sounds proper bad. But when you look at it, it's just bollocks. Sorry Your Honour, it just slipped out. What I mean is if I could say it like the way he can say it, the prosecution, you would be saying 'this is just a rubbish evidence'. What, I was living there and so was the dead boy? Is that an actual evidence that means something? That don't mean shit. Come on, yeah?

Then look at the second evidence. I was seen walking

past the victim and that I said to him, ‘You’re waste man’. To the prosecution, and to everyone else that’s been watching too many movies, that is supposed to be evidence. That is supposed to be me saying that the victim is a dead man. Like I’m some Mafia guy in an American film. Ha! Sorry, jury. Sorry if you knew what I knew and you grew up where I grew up you’d be laughing too. On the streets in London that means something else. Mr Prosecutor wouldn’t know that because he’s not from the streets. Not the real streets, the kind of streets I know, the kind of streets where people shoot each other. Actually maybe that’s a bad example but you know what I mean. He’s on a different level. I’m not saying that as a bad thing. It’s just the truth. If I was going to one of his shooting parties or whatever, I wouldn’t know what their words mean. When I hear the word ‘estate’ I think of a car with a long boot or maybe a council block. He probably thinks of a house in the country, you get me? We are from different worlds, me and him. I don’t wish I lived in his world but I wish he spent a day in mine. Waste man!

Let me tell you about waste man. When I was about eleven I went to a new school. It wasn’t the local state school, it was some next school a mile away because they didn’t have room in my nearest one. It was one of them old seventies boxes that they must have thought looked cool at one time but by the time I got there it just looked like a falling-down block of flats. It had green panels, I remember that, with big square windows

in between them. There was a yard that went all the way around where all us kids used to play at break time, with a railing round the outside to stop the kids spilling out into the road. That was it. Basically, it was like the most space they could make with the least money and wide open like a desert so there was nowhere anyone could hide.

There was this one place though. It was this fire escape kind of thing which ran down the side of the building in square spirals and under the last run of steps there was a like a well, you could call it. If you followed it all the way down it led to a locked metal door into some basement thing where the caretaker probably wanked himself off or whatever. That place, that was what we called 'the Spit'. It was one place you did not ever want to be.

Anyway you move ends and it's like moving into a different country. I moved and it was like I was in some war zone. In my first school it was maybe fifty per cent black. This place though, rah, it was like I had moved into BNP central. There was only like eight or nine non-whites in the whole school. It was like my eyes had suddenly gone from colour to black and white. And the kids, man! There was some proper racist shit going down there, trust me. Sorry Judge, I know what you said before about the swearing but it was, 'Nigger this, coon that, black bastard that.' Whatever though. That was just what it was. Some shit you got to just live with.

I learned to tune it out as much as I could. But I won't lie to you, there was times when I had to bust a few

faces. There's only a certain amount a person can take before he snaps. I didn't like to fight back all that much. Because apart from anything else it made me feel like every black dude who ever fought Rocky in them films. Everyone was always hoping that I would get my head kicked in. Mainly I just styled my way through as much of the shit as I could. If I could avoid a front-up, I would. You got to remember I was prettier than most of them boys so I had more to lose innit! Eventually though, after a few fights where I did a bit of damage, most people knew to leave me alone. People don't just want to pick fights that they can win. They want to pick fights that they can win easily. And if that's your thing then it ain't me you're looking for.

Anyway there was this one boy, Curt, one of the only other black boys at the school. He was this big fat dopey kind of kid. He was like a type of boy you could say anything to and he would just give you this drooly grin. Didn't matter what you said to him and it didn't matter that the boy even at that age was the size of a house, he would just smile straight at you. And I don't mean you could say just anything to him like call him a fat c—, sorry Judge.

I mean you could say that his mum did tricks for a quid and he would still just let it go. He was just one of them peaceful type of guys. But that was the problem. You let someone take the piss a bit then you may as well let him take a piss all over you.

Anyway these are just the lessons. It's kind of like

being in prison I guess. If you show even a bit of weakness, you will get taken apart. So you can imagine the shit Curt had to deal with.

To me it looked like bad luck was going to follow Curt round for life. He wasn't just over-sized and over-friendly, he was also a bit mixed up. His mum was a drug addict or an alcoholic or something and although we didn't know it at the time, she probably was hooking on the quiet. There were days when Curt would come into school with bruises on his face. You couldn't really see them that easy on him because he was so dark. But I could see them. I could always see them. On them days he wouldn't smile as much. He would just have this look like he was guilty of something. He wouldn't want to talk so much. He got a look on his face that even if you were a bit of an idiot you wouldn't want to take the piss out of him too much on them days – it was too harsh to dark him like that.

But those boys at our school didn't care about a kid's home life. I'm not saying they didn't have their own shit to deal with. No doubt they did. But that somehow didn't exactly make them go any easier on him. I used to watch them when they went for him. Some little stick-boy half his size would walk up to him and call him a nigger and Curt would just put his head down. Then the kid might jump up and slap him across the face. Still Curt would do nothing. There'd be all these kids laughing at him and jeering at him and I would be standing there thinking, 'C'mon man, you're twice the size of these

fools. Fuck them up proper.’ But he never did. He just let it slide.

It seemed like to me they were just trying to get him to react. Like they knew deep down that he could kill them in a second if he was pushed hard enough but it was like they just couldn’t help themselves. They wanted to see the Hulk breaking out of him. Anyway, they tried everything. They swore at him. They threw shit at him. They robbed him. Fucking whatever you could think of to do to a boy they did to him. Once they even chucked him into the Spit and tore all his clothes off him. Then when he was there crying in his pants, a hundred boys stood at the top of the well and spat fat green gobs down all over him. Some kid even tried pissing on him but couldn’t get much on him. Eventually when the teachers came, Curt just wiped himself down, put his clothes back on and carried on like nothing had happened. Yeah, he was crying a bit and whatever but he basically did nothing.

I kind of liked Curt, man. In fact, he later became my best friend. You could even say my only real friend. But back then I didn’t know him all that well. He didn’t even stay in that school long because one day his mum was moved up to someplace out in North London and he had to go with her. But what I remembered of him from those days was how calm he tried to be and how no matter how much he tried to find peace, war just followed him. The boy was a magnet for trouble.

*

Yeah. I know this sounds like I'm on a bus route diversion. But I am getting there I swear down. So, Curt. One of these days he was just sitting by himself as he usually did on the step waiting for break to be over so he could get back to the safety of lessons. I went over and decided to just chill with him for a while. Because I was so feisty, usually when people would see me and him together they left him alone. So as far as I saw it I was doing him a favour. I can't remember what we were chatting about. We weren't exactly tight and he weren't exactly my boy then but we did have some shit in common.

At first I didn't notice that anything was wrong. I don't think anyone did really. There was noise, sure, but there was always people shouting at break like they was in a prison. What I do remember though is seeing Mark Warner. You know those thirteen-year-old boys who were thirteen in years but had faces like twenty-year-old men? He was one of them guys. He had a face that looked like it had never seen one happy day. Thing about him, though, was that he was one evil fighter. Yeah he was thin as a rope, but he was so fast that when he was fighting you didn't see the hands even move. They just blurred right in front of the other boy's face until that boy's face was on the ground. It was a weird thing to watch because you hated him up for it but at the same time there was something about it that had you glued to it. You couldn't take your eyes off him.

So Warner was there with his big fists and his busted face. He was just walking past with this wide 'I own the

world' walk when he sees us and stops. 'Fucking black queers,' he goes or something. Now when shit like this happens to me these days, which if I am honest with you ain't too often, no one, I don't care who he is, gets away with it. You best be packing if you coming at me with that shit. Back then though, as I said, I only picked the fights I could win and trust me I weren't ever going to be in no mood to be dancing with Warner. So I look at the ground and just under my breath I goes, 'Fuck off,' and carry on talking to Curt.

I didn't even see it coming. All I know is that in the next second I'm on the deck and my face is beating like it's been hit by a baseball bat. I get up and my instincts take over. Before I have even had time to think about it I've taken a swing at Warner and then suddenly there is a crowd around us. I was like a hundred metres from connecting with my punch. My arm swings past his head and I almost go on the ground again. Warner though, he goes off like a machine. Punches coming at me like pistons. They are all so fast that it feels like I've just run into a brick wall. I go down immediately and then he is on me, his knees on my arms and his fists trying to ruin my face. I reckon another second or two and I would have been eating through a straw for life. I can't see nothing. All I can do is keep turning my head away and try and drown out the punches and the shouting crowd.

Anyway, just as I felt like I might go under, Warner just flies off me, backwards, his hands still moving but

hitting nothing but air. It takes me a minute to work out what has happened. It's Curt. He just pulled him off me like he was picking up an angry cat. Warner struggles free and then when he sees it's only Curt, he turns on him. 'C'mon you fat nigger,' he goes and starts beating away at him. Curt does nothing at first. He just kind of ducks and takes the punches like he has been doing all his life. But then Warner shouts out, 'Fucking waste man!' and something just snaps.

Curt's eyes suddenly come to life like someone just turned on the ignition. He blocks Warner's punches with one arm and then with the other arm he swings straight at his head. He doesn't use his fist. He uses his whole arm. And that boy went down. I mean he crashed. You could even hear the crack as his head hit the pavement. The crowd starts going mental. People are shouting out Warner's name and saying things like, 'Are you going to let that jungle bunny show you up?' and all this. Warner staggers back to his feet and somehow, I don't know where he gets the strength from, he takes another go at Curt. Curt don't even think this time round. He catches Warner's fist with one hand then twists it round until the boy is screaming out. Then he puts the other hand on the back of his elbow. Then just like that he snaps it.

A few weeks after that Curt left the school. Like I said, I think his mum for some reason had to move and he went. But for years after that I used to think back to that day. What made him do it? We weren't mates then.

I didn't even really talk to him that much. If anything I felt sorry for him because he was weak. So why did he do it? I am pretty sure I wouldn't have stepped up for him. In fact I know I wouldn't have. I never did before. But I think I know now what it was. He could take all the shit, the coon, the nigger and whatever. He could even take the beatings and the humiliations. But what he couldn't take was being called that. 'Waste.'

To him, this went back to everything. It went back to his mum who was selling herself for a pipe. It went back to all the men that came and used her and left. It went back to his mum waking up with the shakes in her own sick and him having to clean her up and put her into bed. It went back to her telling him every fucking day that he was alive that she wished she had had him aborted. That he was a waste man. It went straight to his insides. I doubt even he knows why he reacted like that but I tell you something, if you called him 'waste' today he wouldn't stop at your arm.

I will say one thing though. That fucker deserved getting his arm broken. He had that shit coming to him and in my book it's not 'you get what you pay for', but 'you pay for what you do'. Every time.

Anyway when then this QC talks about 'You're waste man' as if it means you are about to be wasted, I have to laugh. It might be all just words to him but down on the ground this shit matters. It ain't just words, man.

I was going to start off by saying I never said those words to the dead boy anyway, but do you know what? I

admit it. I did say that to him. That was me. But it did not and does not mean what he, Mr QC, wants it to mean. I called him a waste man. And he *was* a waste man, no matter whether he is dead or not. Where I come from, he was a waste man: an idiot, a waste of space, whatever. If I was a Mafia made guy or something, maybe I would have meant he was a dead man. But I ain't so I didn't. Mr Prosecutor needs to stop watching TV and get real for a few minutes.

This is what I mean about these evidences. You need to be looking at this shit properly. Because he ain't doing the job properly. He could be. But he ain't. He's trying to, what did he call it, *pull the wool over your eyes*. Shit yeah. That is exactly what he is doing right there. He is getting a big blanket and putting it over your heads. You don't think he could have found out what 'waste man' means before making a murder case on it? Course he could have. He probably even did. Nah. But he don't want you to know that.

Luncheon adjournment: 13:01

14:05

So where are we now with these evidences? Number three? This is easier than I thought.

A couple of months before he was shot a witness saw the dead boy having an argument with a black boy about my age and about my height wearing a black hoodie with white Chinese-style writing on the back. Actually there's a bit of number five evidence there too. A black hoodie with Chinese writing on the back was found in my flat by the police.

You know what I'm going to say because you heard me say it to the prosecutor in this room. A black boy my height and age could be any one of the black boys in that area alone. How many twenty-two-year-old, five foot eleven black boys are there who are living in Camberwell right now? Hundreds? Thousands? More than thousands? It is a black area. What is it that most white people say? 'I don't even see colour.' Ha! Well I tell you now, if you went down there tonight, you'd see a lot of colour on a lot of twenty-two-year-old, five foot eleven boys. Of course none of them would be as pretty as me, but you see what I am saying?

Then as well, how many black boys would there be who are from a different area but who are just visiting that area for one reason or another on a Saturday? So what I am saying is, is that a proper evidence or is it just one of them things? If that was the only evidence maybe I wouldn't even be here. Maybe you would say to yourselves, this is just a piece of rubbish that ain't worth nothing. And if you did say that I would agree with you. So can we throw that one away?

It's the hoodie though innit? That's what's getting you. A black hoodie would be one thing but one with white Chinese writing on it – that's too much of a coincidence, innit?

But is it though? If you look at it, you will see a label on that hoodie. When you go into your retiring room or whatever, take it out of the bag and have a look at the label on it. Do you want to know what it says? I will tell you what it says because I have had a look at it. It says 'XXL' and then in small writing it says this: 'Made in Taiwan'. Now that might not seem to be a big deal but if you think about it, it could be a big deal – or a medium deal at least. I ain't an expert or nothing but I am guessing that when the sweatshop that made this hoodie made this hoodie, they didn't make just one. They made ten thousand maybe. 'So what?' you might say. But ain't no Taiwanese people buying them hoodies. They're made for here. You can tell that because the washing label, or whatever you call it, is in English.

So, ten thousand hoodies maybe. One for every one

of them thousand twenty-two-year-old black males walking around that area on that day and nine thousand spare. And so what if one of these hoodies got found in my flat? If you went into the flats of all them people who bought one of these hoodies, do you know what you would find? You would find one of these hoodies. And you might find most of them or half of them or maybe even only a tenth of them would be black males my age. Why? Because it's people my age who wear hoodies. He, Mr Prosecutor, don't wear a hoodie on a Saturday night, I guarantee that. He's wearing some tweed suit or whatever. It's young people wearing them. People like me. So that's a thousand people it could have been apart from me. And you only have to look at me. Do I look like I am XXL to you? And this is me after a year of going to the gym every day, a straight-up-and-down medium all day long. So what you like about this number three evidence then?

Break: 14:30

4

14:40

So what I was trying to say was that this barrister for the prosecution, he likes to try and confuse you, but you can't let him do that. You have to clear away his smoke and look at the thing he's trying to say, properly. He likes smoke because when there's smoke your natural thing is to shut your eyes. Another thing he likes to do though is to add up all the tiny pieces of evidences and make a great big thing out of them. He takes a little piece here and another tiny piece here and says to you, 'Look at how big all these pieces are when you add them up.'

When I was a little kid we had this massive bucket at primary school with all these Lego pieces in it. This wasn't the racist school I was later put in. This was quite a nice place as I remember it. The walls were yellow. I remember that. And the chairs. I remember the little tiny chairs. Anyway Lego. I love Lego because, one, you can make anything out of it and two, it's indestructible. That's why all schools have them I reckon. That shit just doesn't break which means it's been there for ever. You probably all had a go at Lego. You probably all loved it.

You probably even wondering why you ever stopped playing with it. You probably can't even think of one bad thing to say about Lego. But I can.

The bad thing about maybe all Lego and definitely this Lego at my school was that there was never enough of the *right* Lego. There was never enough of the pieces you needed to make your thing, rocket-ship, house, car, whatever. You'd be making your house out of red Legos and then there'd be no red ones left because some snotty kid would have taken it. So then you'd move on to the blue pieces and when they ran out, the yellow ones. But even when you'd used all the normal Lego bricks there still wouldn't be enough. So then you'd have to use some next pieces, like those thin long pieces and even some of them flat grey triangle ones. Then finally when you were finished, your house or whatever would have all these crazy things on it like wheels instead of windows and random pointy bits in the walls. And you'd say, 'Miss, look at my house!' But it wasn't any house anybody had ever seen before. It was like some crazy nightmare house. And I knew, even then, when I was five or whatever, that when you put pieces together they have to be the *right* pieces. They have to fit or else it's not a real thing. It's an almost thing. Or a thing that nearly looks like the thing.

That's what he, this QC, likes to do. It's enough for him for the evidence to nearly look like a thing.

So anyway where was I? This is proper hard. It looks easy on the TV. You say a few words. You make the jury

believe you, you cry, the jury cry, the jury say ‘Not Guilty’. In my mind that was what it was going to be like. After I wrote out that bit at the beginning, Palmerston and all that shit and when I realized that I was in deeper than I thought, I wrote some ideas down of what I need to say. I reckoned I could just spit it out like some bad lyrics you get me? But this shit is hard. I got like fifty points I need to make but each one is taking long and I keep getting lost. So although it looks like I’m just chatting random shit but I’m not. It’s *all* important. I’m just like finding it hard to keep tracks of all these little things I know I have to say but that I don’t know how to say. And then there’s also this other thing . . . And the more I think about it, the more I think I definitely need you to know it – later though. It will make more sense, later.

Where was I? So yeah, this is what I wanted to say. The prosecutor is just doing all this mashing things together and making it into something that it ain’t. So he is saying that one day I am having an argument with the boy and I say something to him, and next minute he winds up being shot in the head. He says that I must have shot him because I had some beef with him, or whatever, but that there is just another one of his sneaky things he likes to come out with. You have to look at it though. You have to use your senses. What is the motive? Why was I supposed to have shot him? What, because of the waste man thing? No one shoots no one because of some random argument he’s had or there wouldn’t be any kids left in London.

The prosecution is saying that they don't really have to prove motive. Maybe that is right what he is saying. He knows the law innit? What I say though is even if they don't have to prove a motive, you should look for a motive. Because he was shot. If you try and find what the reason for his shooting was you might end up with something. Maybe that's why Mr QC don't want to go there. But that don't mean you shouldn't go there. So what's it all about? Who would have a reason to shoot him if it wasn't me?

What he didn't mention in his speech was that the deceased, Jamil, was a gang member. Yes, he was nineteen. Yes, this gang he was in was just a nuisance nothing gang at first, dealing in a bit of weed and doing little robberies or what have you. It weren't no big man's gang. It was a gang though and to those kids in that gang or in any gang, it was life. This is real.

They join these gangs when they're just little kids and then the life gets them. They start with knives and at first the one with the biggest knife is the main man. Then it's the one who actually uses the knife, he's the main man. Then it's the boy who kills someone with a knife, he's the leader. And this is what their days become, grabbing for the top spot, who can outdo who, who can be the bigger man.

To you, it maybe sounds stupid. Little kids stabbing each other up over a bit of grass or whatever, but this is life for them. It gets in their heads and when it's in it's hard to get it out again. It's like a disease that makes you

think that this thing is real, not that thing, and that killing a person is okay. It's not like they sit there thinking these things through. Nobody does. This is just their reality, like your reality is that it's okay to waste your life working till you're old and then to retire just in time to die. It's all stupidity. It's just that when you're in it, you can't see it.

What is real for these kids isn't ordinary day-to-day life, getting up, going to school, swearing at teachers. It's this fucked-up shit. This is what is real to them. I didn't really know that before. I mean I could see they were travelling down certain roads. But I didn't know why. I didn't know it weren't really a choice for a lot of them. These people you see on the news and politicians and what have you, they go on about this like it is a surprise to them that young boys in the life do this shit. But it ain't a surprise. If anything, it's a surprise anyone ever stops. These boys, their friends are like their brothers. They are the only ones they got, a lot of them, who even care they exist. Their mates are the people they go to when they're in the shit and it's their mates who get them out of it. And the gangs they're in are basically families to them. And that is obvious when you think about it. A boy will be ready to take a knife in the stomach if he has to for his gang bruv and what is that if it ain't family? I'm talking about a boy who's got no dad. Who's got a mum who can't control him but who thinks that all he needs is to go to church to fix him out. An actual family who don't give a shit about him. You take

a boy like that, and trust me, they are all boys like that, then you shouldn't be surprised he's in a gang. The shit's inevitable. But people don't like to hear that. Because they want to make you pay for what you do. And don't get me wrong, I'm all about people paying for making choices. But these kids. They ain't choosing shit.

At the local school, I knew kids who were like eleven years old who would have bigger kids come up to them and be all like, 'You should join our gang'. And if you didn't, then someone would start some beef with you. Get you shook. And if you weren't like strong in your head, eventually you would just go, 'Yeah I'm in'. A lot of kids don't want to be dealing with some next beef as well as all the other shit going on in their lives. And then there's other kids. They ain't got no head for maths or history or whatever, so then older boys would target them. 'Yo blood, you ain't going to be no CEO. What you going to do for paper when you leave? Clean the streets? You should come work with us. We give you paper right now. Just go do this little pick up for me . . .' and rah rah rah. So if you got that going on in your school, what you going to do? If you have got some skills and you can handle yourself, like I could, you might be okay. But what if you ain't? You got no choices. It's either take a beating or you join a gang and get paid and get respect. And then it just becomes part of your life. It becomes a normal thing for a kid to sell drugs in his school. It becomes a normal thing for a kid to stab up some next kid for no reason. And once it is normal for

you, you don't have any reasons to change it. It just becomes life. Your life.

And I only realized this recently while I was in prison waiting for my trial. I been waiting a year for my case to get on. Remand they call it. And when you're on remand that long inside four walls with nothing to do, you will do two things you might never have done before in your life. No matter who you are. Think about shit. And read about shit.

The prison library is crap generally but occasionally you find something that is like finding a tenner on the street. It is like God just dropped something right in your hands for just you. There is this book I found called *The Hammerman*. I picked it up because I thought it was like a horror story or something. You know like a proper made-up story but it ain't. This is one of them true-to-life books. It's about South Africa in the olden days. I read it and I couldn't stop thinking about these kids in these gangs. It's the same thing, let me tell you.

So, all this apartheid shit was happening. Like a few white people in charge of all the blacks. If you were lucky and you were black you might be like a servant to a white guy. But if you were in bad luck, you might even be killed just for saying some next thing to a white person. Brutal. And if I was being tried out there back then this whole case would have been over in a day. One day. And only one verdict. Guilty. Sentenced to life. Game over. But if you were white and you killed a black person – nothing.

Anyway this one year, the white people in South Africa suddenly started getting all jumpy about their blacks. One day everything was cool and the next day they were locking themselves up behind these high, electrified gates at night shitting themselves about what was happening. See, some huge black man was breaking into their houses and smashing their heads open with a hammer. The shit was all over the papers for weeks and weeks. Everyone was hunting this guy. People were scared. And it didn't make them less scared when people started to calling him the Hammerman. For the whites it was like a name you might give to a monster. But for black people it was a superhero name. And he was like a superhero. He was mysterious. He was uncatchable. And the rumours were saying all kinds about him. He was seven feet tall. He was built like a fucking house. He could run faster than a cheetah. He was invisible. He could fly. The crazier the rumours got the easier people were finding to believe them. They turned him into a legend.

But you know what people were scared of the most? They didn't know why he was doing it. And those people needed to know why so that they could maybe understand it. Understand him. Understand the monster. And then maybe the monster can become a person, and anyone can kill a person, innit. Everyone was scared – except black people. They weren't scared.

Black people loved it. To them it was like at last someone was getting their own back for them. One man *could*