

PROLOGUE

‘YES,’ SAID BETH.

She tried to look surprised, but wasn’t all that convincing as she had already decided that they were going to be married when they were at secondary school. However, she was amazed when Danny fell on one knee in the middle of the crowded restaurant.

‘Yes,’ Beth repeated, hoping he’d stand up before everyone in the room stopped eating and turned to stare at them. But he didn’t budge. Danny remained on one knee, and like a conjurer, produced a tiny box from nowhere. He opened it to reveal a simple gold band boasting a single diamond that was far larger than Beth had expected – although her brother had already told her that Danny had spent two months’ wages on the ring.

When Danny finally got off his knee, he took her by surprise again. He immediately began to tap a number on his mobile. Beth knew only too well who would be on the other end of the line.

‘She said yes!’ Danny announced triumphantly. Beth smiled as she held the diamond under the light and took a closer look. ‘Why don’t you join us?’ Danny added before she could stop him. ‘Great, let’s meet at that wine bar off the Fulham Road – the one we went to after the Chelsea game last year. See you there, mate.’

Beth didn’t protest; after all, Bernie was not only her brother, but Danny’s oldest friend, and he’d probably already asked him to be his best man.

Danny turned off his phone and asked a passing waiter for the bill. The maitre d’ bustled across.

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'It's on the house,' he said, giving them a warm smile.
It was to be a night of surprises.



When Beth and Danny strolled into the Dunlop Arms, they found Bernie seated at a corner table with a bottle of champagne and three glasses by his side.

'Fantastic news,' he said even before they had sat down.

'Thanks, mate,' said Danny, shaking hands with his friend.

'I've already phoned Mum and Dad,' said Bernie as he popped the cork and filled the three champagne glasses. 'They didn't seem all that surprised, but then it was the worst-kept secret in Bow.'

'Don't tell me they'll be joining us as well,' said Beth.

'Not a chance,' said Bernie raising his glass, 'you've only got me this time. To long life and West Ham winning the cup.'

'Well, at least one of those is possible,' said Danny.

'I think you'd marry West Ham if you could,' said Beth, smiling at her brother.

'Could do worse,' said Bernie.

Danny laughed. 'I'll be married to both for the rest of my life.'

'Except on Saturday afternoons,' Bernie reminded him.

'And you might even have to sacrifice a few of those once you take over from Dad,' said Beth.

Danny frowned. He had been to see Beth's father during his lunch break and had asked for permission to marry his daughter – some traditions die hard in the East End. Mr Wilson couldn't have been more enthusiastic about Danny becoming his son-in-law, but went on to tell him that he had changed his mind about something Danny thought they'd already agreed on.

'And if you think I'm gonna call you guv when you take over from my old man,' said Bernie, breaking into his thoughts, 'you can forget it.' Danny didn't comment.

'Is that who I think it is?' said Beth.

Danny took a closer look at the four men standing by the bar. 'It certainly looks like 'im.'

'Looks like who?' asked Bernie.

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‘That actor what plays Dr Beresford in *The Prescription*.’

‘Lawrence Davenport,’ whispered Beth.

‘I could always go and ask him for his autograph,’ said Bernie.

‘Certainly not,’ said Beth. ‘Although Mum never misses an episode.’

‘I think you fancy him,’ said Bernie as he topped up their glasses.

‘No, I don’t,’ said Beth a little too loudly, causing one of the men at the bar to turn round. ‘And in any case,’ she added smiling at her fiancé, ‘Danny’s far better looking than Lawrence Davenport.’

‘Dream on,’ said Bernie. ‘Just because Danny boy’s shaved and washed his hair for a change, don’t think he’s gonna make a habit of it, sis. No chance. Just remember that your future ’usband works in the East End, not the City.’

‘Danny could be anything he wanted to be,’ said Beth, taking his hand.

‘What’ve you got in mind, sis? Tycoon or tosser?’ said Bernie, thumping Danny on the arm.

‘Danny’s got plans for the garage that will make you—’

‘Shh,’ said Danny, as he refilled his friend’s glass.

‘He’d better have, ’cause gettin’ spliced don’t come cheap,’ said Bernie. ‘To start with, where you goin’ to live?’

‘There’s a basement flat just round the corner that’s up for sale,’ said Danny.

‘But have you got enough readies?’ demanded Bernie. ‘’Cause basement flats don’t come cheap, even in the East End.’

‘We’ve saved enough between us to put down a deposit,’ said Beth, ‘and when Danny takes over from Dad—’

‘Let’s drink to that,’ said Bernie, only to find that the bottle was empty. ‘I’d better order another.’

‘No,’ said Beth firmly. ‘I’ve got to be on time for work tomorrow morning, even if you haven’t.’

‘To hell with that,’ said Bernie. ‘It’s not every day that my little sister gets engaged to my best mate. Another bottle!’ he shouted.

The barman smiled as he removed a second bottle of champagne

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from the fridge below the counter. One of the men standing at the bar checked the label. 'Pol Roger,' he said, before adding in a voice that carried: 'Wasted on them.'

Bernie jumped up from his place, but Danny immediately pulled him back down.

'Ignore them,' he said, 'they're not worth the space.'

The barman walked quickly across to their table. 'Don't let's be havin' any trouble, lads,' he said as he removed the cork. 'One of them's celebratin' his birthday, and frankly they've had a bit too much to drink.'

Beth took a closer look at the four men while the barman refilled their glasses. One of them was staring at her. He winked, opened his mouth and ran his tongue around his lips. Beth quickly turned back, relieved to find that Danny and her brother were chatting.

'So where you two goin' on honeymoon?'

'Saint Tropez,' said Danny.

'That'll set you back a bob or two.'

'And you're not coming along this time,' said Beth.

'The slut's quite presentable until she opens her mouth,' said a voice from the bar.

Bernie leapt to his feet again, to find two of them staring defiantly at him.

'They're drunk,' said Beth. 'Just ignore them.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said the other man. 'There are times when I quite like a slut's mouth to be open.'

Bernie grabbed the empty bottle, and it took all of Danny's strength to hold him down.

'I want to leave,' said Beth firmly. 'I don't need a bunch of public-school snobs ruining my engagement party.'

Danny immediately jumped up, but Bernie just sat there, drinking his champagne. 'Come on, Bernie, let's get out of here before we do something we regret,' said Danny. Bernie reluctantly stood up and followed his friend, but he never once took his eyes off the four men at the bar. Beth was pleased to see that they had turned their backs on them, and appeared to be deep in conversation.

But the moment Danny opened the back door, one of them swung round. 'Leaving, are we?' he said. He then took out his

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wallet and added, 'When you've finished with her, my friends and I have just enough left over for a gang bang.'

'You're full of shit,' said Bernie.

'Then why don't we go outside and sort it out?'

'Be my guest, Dickhead,' said Bernie as Danny shoved him through the door and out into the alley before he had the chance to say anything else. Beth slammed the door behind them and began walking down the alley. Danny gripped Bernie by the elbow, but they had only gone a couple of paces before he shook him off. 'Let's go back and sort them.'

'Not tonight,' said Danny, not letting go of Bernie's arm as he continued to lead his friend on down the alley.

When Beth reached the main road she saw the man Bernie described as Dickhead standing there, one hand behind his back. He leered at her and began licking his lips again, just as his friend came rushing round the corner, slightly out of breath. Beth turned to see her brother, legs apart, standing his ground. He was smiling.

'Let's go back inside,' Beth shouted at Danny, only to see that the other two men from the bar were now standing by the door, blocking the path.

'Fuck 'em,' said Bernie. 'It's time to teach the bastards a lesson.'

'No, no,' pleaded Beth as one of the men came charging up the alley towards them.

'You take Dickhead,' said Bernie, 'and I'll deal with the other three.'

Beth looked on in horror as Dickhead threw a punch that caught Danny on the side of the chin and sent him reeling back. He recovered in time to block the next punch, feint, and then land one that took Dickhead by surprise. He fell on one knee, but was quickly back on his feet before taking another swing at Danny.

As the other two men standing by the back door didn't seem to want to join in, Beth assumed the fight would be over fairly quickly. She could only watch as her brother landed an uppercut on the other man, the force of which almost knocked him out. As Bernie waited for him to get back on his feet, he shouted to Beth,

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‘Do us a favour, sis, grab a cab. This ain’t gonna last much longer, and then we need to be out of ’ere.’

Beth turned her attention to Danny to make sure he was getting the better of Dickhead. Dickhead was lying spread-eagled on the ground with Danny on top of him, clearly in control. She gave them both one last look before reluctantly obeying her brother. She ran off down the alley and once she reached the main road, began searching for a taxi. She only had to wait a couple of minutes before she spotted a familiar yellow *FOR HIRE* sign.

Beth flagged down the cabbie as the man Bernie had felled staggered past her and disappeared into the night.

‘Where to, luv?’ asked the cabbie.

‘Bacon Road, Bow,’ said Beth. ‘And two of my friends will be along in a moment,’ she added as she opened the back door.

The cabbie glanced over her shoulder and down the alley. ‘I don’t think it’s a taxi they’ll be needing, luv,’ he said. ‘If they were my friends, I’d be phoning for an ambulance.’

BOOK ONE

THE TRIAL

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1

‘NOT GUILTY.’

Danny Cartwright could feel his legs trembling as they sometimes did before the first round of a boxing match he knew he was going to lose. The associate recorded the plea on the indictment and, looking up at Danny, said, ‘You can sit down.’

Danny collapsed on to the little chair in the centre of the dock, relieved that the first round was over. He looked up at the referee, who was seated on the far side of the courtroom in a high-backed green leather chair that had the appearance of a throne. In front of him was a long oak bench littered with case papers in ring binders, and a notebook opened at a blank page. Mr Justice Sackville looked across at Danny, his expression revealing neither approval nor disapproval. He removed a pair of half-moon spectacles from the end of his nose and said in an authoritative voice, ‘Bring in the jury.’

While they all waited for the twelve men and women to appear, Danny tried to take in the unfamiliar sights and sounds of court number four at the Old Bailey. He looked across at the two men who were seated at either end of what he’d been told was counsel’s bench. His young advocate, Alex Redmayne, looked up and gave him a friendly smile, but the older man at the other end of the bench, whom Mr Redmayne always referred to as prosecution counsel, never once glanced in his direction.

Danny transferred his gaze up into the public gallery. His parents were seated in the front row. His father’s burly tattooed arms were resting on the balcony railing, while his mother’s head

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remained bowed. She raised her eyes occasionally to glance down at her only son.

It had taken several months for the case of *The Crown versus Daniel Arthur Cartwright* finally to reach the Old Bailey. It seemed to Danny that once the law became involved, everything happened in slow motion. And then suddenly, without warning, the door in the far corner of the courtroom opened and the usher reappeared. He was followed by seven men and five women who had been chosen to decide his fate. They filed into the jury box and sat in their unallocated places – six in the front row, six behind them; strangers with nothing more in common than the lottery of selection.

Once they had settled, the associate rose from his place to address them. ‘Members of the jury,’ he began, ‘the defendant, Daniel Arthur Cartwright, stands before you charged on one count of murder. To that count he has pleaded not guilty. Your charge therefore is to listen to the evidence and decide whether he be guilty or no.’

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MR JUSTICE SACKVILLE glanced down at the bench below him. ‘Mr Pearson, you may open the case for the Crown.’

A short, rotund man rose slowly from the counsel’s bench. Mr Arnold Pearson QC opened the thick file that rested on a lectern in front of him. He touched his well-worn wig, almost as if he were checking to make sure he’d remembered to put it on, then tugged on the lapels of his gown; a routine that hadn’t changed for the past thirty years.

‘If it please your lordship,’ he began in a slow, ponderous manner, ‘I appear for the Crown in this case, while my learned friend’ – he glanced to check the name on the sheet of paper in front of him – ‘Mr Alex Redmayne, appears for the defence. The case before your lordship is one of murder. The cold-blooded and calculated murder of Mr Bernard Henry Wilson.’

In the public gallery, the parents of the victim sat in the far corner of the back row. Mr Wilson looked down at Danny, unable to mask the disappointment in his eyes. Mrs Wilson stared blankly in front of her, white-faced, not unlike a mourner attending a funeral. Although the tragic events surrounding the death of Bernie Wilson had irrevocably changed the lives of two East End families who had been close friends for several generations, it had hardly caused a ripple beyond a dozen streets surrounding Bacon Road in Bow.

‘During the course of this trial, you will learn how the defendant’ – continued Pearson, waving a hand in the direction of the dock without bothering even to glance at Danny – ‘lured Mr Wilson to a public house in Chelsea on the night of Saturday,

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September eighteenth 1999, where he carried out this brutal and premeditated murder. He had earlier taken Mr Wilson's sister' – once again he checked the file in front of him – 'Elizabeth, to Lucio's restaurant in Fulham Road. The court will learn that Cartwright made a proposal of marriage to Miss Wilson after she had revealed that she was pregnant. He then called her brother Mr Bernard Wilson on his mobile phone and invited him to join them at the Dunlop Arms, a public house at the back of Hambleton Terrace, Chelsea, so that they could all celebrate.'

'Miss Wilson has already made a written statement that she had never visited this public house before, although Cartwright clearly knew it well, which the Crown will suggest was because he had selected it for one purpose and one purpose only: its back door opens on to a quiet alleyway, an ideal location for someone with murderous intent; a murder that Cartwright would later blame on a complete stranger who just happened to be a customer at the Dunlop Arms that night.'

Danny stared down at Mr Pearson. How could he possibly know what had happened that night when he wasn't even there? But Danny wasn't too worried. After all, Mr Redmayne had assured him that his side of the story would be presented during the trial and he mustn't be too anxious if everything appeared bleak while the Crown was presenting its case. Despite his barrister's repeated assurances, two things did worry Danny: Alex Redmayne wasn't much older than he was, and had also warned him that this was only his second case as leader.

'But unfortunately for Cartwright,' continued Pearson, 'the other four customers who were in the Dunlop Arms that night tell a different story, a story which has not only proved consistent, but which has also been corroborated by the barman on duty at the time. The Crown will present all five as witnesses, and they will tell you that they overheard a dispute between the two men, who were later seen to leave by the rear entrance of the bar after Cartwright had said, "Then why don't we go outside and sort it out?" All five of them saw Cartwright leave by the back door, followed by Bernard Wilson and his sister Elizabeth, who was clearly in an agitated state. Moments later, a scream was heard.'

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Mr Spencer Craig, one of the customers, left his companions and ran out into the alley, where he found Cartwright holding Mr Wilson by the throat, while repeatedly thrusting a knife into his chest.

‘Mr Craig immediately dialled 999 on his mobile phone. The time of that call, m’lord, and the conversation that took place were logged and recorded at Belgravia police station. A few minutes later, two police officers arrived on the scene and found Cartwright kneeling over Mr Wilson’s body, with the knife in his hand – a knife that he must have picked up from the bar, because *Dunlop Arms* is engraved on the handle.’

Alex Redmayne wrote down Pearson’s words.

‘Members of the jury,’ continued Pearson, once again tugging at his lapels, ‘every murderer has to have a motive, and in this case we need look no further than the first recorded slaying, of Abel by Cain, to establish that motive: envy, greed and ambition were the sordid ingredients that, when combined, provoked Cartwright to remove the one rival who stood in his path.’

‘Members of the jury, both Cartwright and Mr Wilson worked at Wilson’s garage in Mile End Road. The garage is owned and managed by Mr George Wilson, the deceased’s father, who had planned to retire at the end of the year, when he intended to hand over the business to his only son, Bernard. Mr George Wilson has made a written statement to this effect, which has been agreed by the defence, so we shall not be calling him as a witness.’

‘Members of the jury, you will discover during this trial that the two young men had a long history of rivalry and antagonism which stretched back to their schooldays. But with Bernard Wilson out of the way, Cartwright planned to marry the boss’s daughter and take over the thriving business himself.’

‘However, everything did not go as Cartwright planned, and when he was arrested, he tried to place the blame on an innocent bystander, the same man who had run out into the alley to see what had caused Miss Wilson to scream. But unfortunately for Cartwright, it was not part of his plan that there would be four other people who were present throughout the entire episode.’ Pearson smiled at the jury. ‘Members of the jury, once you have

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heard their testimony, you will be left in no doubt that Daniel Cartwright is guilty of the heinous crime of murder.’ He turned to the judge. ‘That concludes the prosecution opening for the Crown, m’lord.’ He tugged his lapels once more before adding, ‘With your permission I shall call my first witness.’ Mr Justice Sackville nodded, and Pearson said in a firm voice, ‘I call Mr Spencer Craig.’

Danny Cartwright looked to his right and watched as an usher at the back of the courtroom opened a door, stepped out into the corridor and bellowed, ‘Mr Spencer Craig.’ A moment later, a tall man, not much older than Danny, dressed in a blue pinstriped suit, white shirt and mauve tie, entered the courtroom. How different he looked from when they’d first met.

Danny hadn’t seen Spencer Craig during the past six months, but not a day had passed when he hadn’t visualized him clearly. He stared at the man defiantly, but Craig didn’t even glance in Danny’s direction – it was as if he didn’t exist.

Craig walked across the courtroom like a man who knew exactly where he was going. When he stepped into the witness box, he immediately picked up the Bible and delivered the oath without once looking at the card the usher held up in front of him. Mr Pearson smiled at his principal witness, before glancing down at the questions he had spent the past month preparing.

‘Is your name Spencer Craig?’

‘Yes, sir,’ he replied.

‘And do you reside at forty-three Hambledon Terrace, London SW3?’

‘I do, sir.’

‘And what is your profession?’ asked Mr Pearson, as if he didn’t know.

‘I am a barrister at law.’

‘And your chosen field?’

‘Criminal justice.’

‘So you are well acquainted with the crime of murder?’

‘Unfortunately I am, sir.’

‘I should now like to take you back to the evening of September eighteenth, last year, when you and a group of friends were enjoying a drink at the Dunlop Arms in Hambledon Terrace.

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Perhaps you could take us through exactly what happened that night.'

'My friends and I were celebrating Gerald's thirtieth birthday—'

'Gerald?' interrupted Pearson.

'Gerald Payne,' said Craig. 'He's an old friend from my days at Cambridge. We were spending a convivial evening together, enjoying a bottle of wine.'

Alex Redmayne made a note – he needed to know how many bottles.

Danny wanted to ask what the word convivial meant.

'But sadly it didn't end up being a convivial evening,' prompted Pearson.

'Far from it,' replied Craig, still not even glancing in Danny's direction.

'Please tell the court what happened next,' said Pearson, looking down at his notes.

Craig turned to face the jury for the first time. 'We were, as I said, enjoying a glass of wine in celebration of Gerald's birthday, when I became aware of raised voices. I turned and saw a man, who was seated at a table in the far corner of the room with a young lady.'

'Do you see that man in the courtroom now?' asked Pearson.

'Yes,' replied Craig, pointing in the direction of the dock.

'What happened next?'

'He immediately jumped up,' continued Craig, 'and began shouting and jabbing his finger at another man, who remained seated. I heard one of them say: "If you think I'm gonna call you guv when you take over from my old man, you can forget it." The young lady was trying to calm him down. I was about to turn back to my friends – after all, the quarrel was nothing to do with me – when the defendant shouted, "Then why don't we go outside and sort it out?" I assumed they were joking, but then the man who had spoken the words grabbed a knife from the end of the bar—'

'Let me stop you there, Mr Craig. You saw the defendant pick up a knife from the bar?' asked Pearson.

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‘Yes, I did.’

‘And then what happened?’

‘He marched off in the direction of the back door, which surprised me.’

‘Why did it surprise you?’

‘Because the Dunlop Arms is my local, and I had never seen the man before.’

‘I’m not sure I’m following you, Mr Craig,’ said Pearson, who was following his every word.

‘The rear exit is out of sight if you’re sitting in that corner of the room, but he seemed to know exactly where he was going.’

‘Ah, I understand,’ said Pearson. ‘Please continue.’

‘A moment later the other man got up and chased after the defendant, with the young lady following close behind. I wouldn’t have given the matter another thought, but moments later we all heard a scream.’

‘A scream?’ repeated Pearson. ‘What kind of scream?’

‘A high-pitched, woman’s scream,’ replied Craig.

‘And what did you do?’

‘I immediately left my friends and ran into the alley in case the woman was in any danger.’

‘And was she?’

‘No, sir. She was screaming at the defendant, begging him to stop.’

‘Stop what?’ asked Pearson.

‘Attacking the other man.’

‘They were fighting?’

‘Yes, sir. The man I’d earlier seen jabbing a finger and shouting now had the other chap pinned up against the wall, with his forearm pressed against his throat.’ Craig turned to the jury and raised his left arm to demonstrate the position.

‘And was Mr Wilson trying to defend himself?’ asked Pearson.

‘As best he could, but the defendant was thrusting a knife into the man’s chest, again and again.’

‘What did you do next?’ asked Pearson quietly.

‘I phoned the emergency services, and they assured me that they would send police and an ambulance immediately.’

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‘Did they say anything else?’ asked Pearson, looking down at his notes.

‘Yes,’ replied Craig. ‘They told me under no circumstances to approach the man with the knife, but to return to the bar and wait until the police arrived.’ He paused. ‘I carried out those instructions to the letter.’

‘How did your friends react when you went back into the bar and told them what you had seen?’

‘They wanted to go outside and see if they could help, but I told them what the police had advised and that I also thought it might be wise in the circumstances for them to go home.’

‘In the circumstances?’

‘I was the only person who had witnessed the whole incident and I didn’t want them to be in any danger should the man with the knife return to the bar.’

‘Very commendable,’ said Pearson.

The judge frowned at the prosecuting counsel. Alex Redmayne continued to take notes.

‘How long did you have to wait before the police arrived?’

‘It was only a matter of moments before I heard a siren, and a few minutes later a plain-clothes detective entered the bar through the back door. He produced his badge and introduced himself as Detective Sergeant Fuller. He informed me that the victim was on his way to the nearest hospital.’

‘What happened next?’

‘I made a full statement, and then DS Fuller told me I could go home.’

‘And did you?’

‘Yes, I returned to my house, which is only about a hundred yards from the Dunlop Arms, and went to bed, but I couldn’t sleep.’

Alex Redmayne wrote down the words: *about a hundred yards*.

‘Understandably,’ said Pearson.

The judge frowned a second time.

‘So I got up, went to my study and wrote down everything that had taken place earlier that evening.’

‘Why did you do that, Mr Craig, when you had already given a statement to the police?’

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‘My experience of standing where you are, Mr Pearson, has made me aware that evidence presented in the witness box is often patchy, even inaccurate, by the time a trial takes place several months after a crime has been committed.’

‘Quite so,’ said Pearson, turning another page of his file. ‘When did you learn that Daniel Cartwright had been charged with the murder of Bernard Wilson?’

‘I read the details in the *Evening Standard* the following Monday. It reported that Mr Wilson had died on his way to Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, and that Cartwright had been charged with his murder.’

‘And did you regard that as the end of the matter, as far as your personal involvement was concerned?’

‘Yes, although I knew that I would be called as a witness in any forthcoming trial, should Cartwright decide to plead not guilty.’

‘But then there was a twist that even you, with all your experience of hardened criminals, could not have anticipated.’

‘There certainly was,’ responded Craig. ‘Two police officers visited my chambers the following afternoon to conduct a second interview.’

‘But you had already given verbal and written statements to DS Fuller,’ said Pearson. ‘Why did they need to interview you again?’

‘Because Cartwright was now accusing *me* of killing Mr Wilson, and was even claiming that I had picked up the knife from the bar.’

‘Had you ever come across Mr Cartwright or Mr Wilson before that night?’

‘No, sir,’ replied Craig truthfully.

‘Thank you, Mr Craig.’

The two men smiled at each other before Pearson turned to the judge and said, ‘No more questions, m’lord.’