

# Smash all the Windows

## CHAPTER ONE

GINA, 2016

As the court steward opens the door, Gina's scalp prickles. It's as if an electrical charge has entered the air. She gives the framed photograph of her son – her Ollie – one final look. Her hope has been that, held upright in her lap throughout the second inquest, it would remind both witnesses and jury that her son was a person with a life every bit as vivid and complex as theirs – just how complex, she'd had little appreciation of. But it has become more. Something to sing her silent lullaby to when she could no longer bear listening to the witness testimonies. *Hush Ollie, hush Ollie, hush Ollie.* When, at last, she was forced to confront the moment of his death. *Hush Ollie.* Now, Gina is jolted by stark realisation: *had he lived, he would turn twenty-nine next Thursday.*

It seems impossible.

A second jolt. Her forearm is grabbed. "Mum!" Tamsin's breath brushes her cheek. "It's time."

*Not impossible,* she reminds herself as she squeezes her daughter's hand. Two years and three months separated Ollie and Tamsin. Unbridgeable then, now the gap would seem insignificant. Tamsin might even have gained the upper hand.

Gina rallies because she must. She slots the photograph inside her handbag, which she stows under her seat.

Just in time.

Here they come. The members of the jury. Feet shuffling. Eyes purposefully downcast. Expressions impenetrable. Not a glance towards the families. Acutely aware that Tamsin is looking to her for reassurance, Gina reaches again for her daughter's hand.

*Damn you, Bill! You should be here.*

Though her ex-husband began the drawn-out process of leaving on the day Ollie died, he's still Tamsin's father. But Bill wanted nothing to do with the second inquest. The failure of the class action finished it for him.

*"Even if we finally get to the bottom of what went wrong, unless someone's brought to task, it won't change a bloody thing."*

Gina couldn't allow herself to believe that.

*Get over yourself, Bill. You can't continue to hide behind Jackie and the baby.* Even now, at this defining moment, bloody Jackie is in their midst. The last person Gina wants to think about. She pushes her aside, reminding herself why they're here: to erase injustices, to clear the names of their loved ones, please God. The point isn't blame. It's the reverse.

With a scrape of chair legs, the jury sits. A second hush falls, deeper than the first. As Gina inhales, doubt fills her lungs. For over thirteen years the search for truth – for the undoing of injustice – has eaten up everything. Marriage, friendships, family, health, career, finances. Now she isn't sure she can bear to listen to the jury's interpretation of how hundreds of almost indistinguishable elements collided and went tumbling, tumbling, down. She's afraid of what comes next; afraid of what Tamsin is about to hear. Already, images will be imprinted on her retinae that no sister should ever have to see. But Gina can't waver, not now. Everything she was, she has invested in this.

She risks a sideways glance at the Chapples. A combination of determination and vulnerability, Maggie Chapple has made the journey each excruciating day of the eighteen-month inquest. At the start, her curls were sleek chestnut, and soft. Now her hair is wire wool.

*“Look, there she is, all on her own.”*

*“Who?”*

Gina had given a slow, measured nod in the direction of the woman wearing the smart suit. *“I’ll just go over and pay my respects.”*

*“Why the hell would you do that?”* How quick Bill was to write Maggie off.

*“Because she’s lost a child, like us –”*

*“She’s nothing like us! She’s got a bloody nerve showing her face!”*

This version of her husband was a stranger, his anger new and startling, but Bill wasn’t alone in his thinking. When Maggie took a seat that first day in the row reserved for family members, resistance was tangible. Maggie must have felt it, must have been wounded. At times, given the revelations about Ollie, Gina has wondered if anyone else would want to sit next to *her*. It was Maggie who made sure she never had to find out. Gina draws strength from this unlikely friendship of theirs.

The way Maggie’s face moves suggests she’s chewing the soft inside of her cheek. She’s gripping the hand of her husband, Alan – a quiet man who radiates quiet strength in a way Bill never could. She’s holding on for dear life. Gina reaches for her right hand and feels a twitch of surprise before Maggie glances up. In a moment’s eye contact, Gina offers her a silent promise. To see this through together.

As Gina turns back towards her daughter, Donovan acknowledges her with a nod. *You aren’t the only one without a partner here to support you.* In all this time, she has never met Donovan’s wife. Quite why is never spoken of, but the fact that it’s not a subject for discussion is an understanding of sorts. Donovan raises the hand in which he has Tamsin’s right hand. *I’ve got her.* A swell of gratitude washes through Gina. She hopes something of it is transmitted through the chain they’ve formed. The rows of bereaved, devastated, wrecked family members.

Movement. All eyes turn as the spokesperson for the jury stands. Nobody dares breathe.

The Coroner clears his throat before addressing her: *“I’m going to go through each of the fourteen questions in turn, and you will answer with a simple yes or no. Do you understand?”*

The poor woman wets her lips, nods. It isn’t a role Gina would wish on anybody.

*“Do you agree with the following statement, intended to summarise the basic facts of the incident? On 22 August 2003, following the admission of a large number of passengers, fifty-eight people died in the disaster at St Botolph and Old Billingsgate stations after falling on or from the escalators.”*

The spokesperson’s voice quivers. *“Yes.”*

Though Gina’s limbs are perfectly still, her blood is restless.

*“Was there any error or omission on the part of station management or staff, for any reason whatsoever, on 22 August 2003, which caused or contributed to the dangerous situation that developed?”*

*“Yes.”*

Several rows behind Gina, someone is already weeping. Whatever Gina has to endure, it will be ten times worse for the Chapples. Whatever Ollie was or was not, unlike Rosie Chapple, he wasn’t supposed to have been in charge.

Around her, an eruption of wonder, joy, tears. As the spontaneous applause directed at the jurors peters out, the families turn to one another. *“We did it!”* they repeat in disbelieving voices, and, *“Finally.”* Words spool without registering. *The crowd was not responsible!* Gina repeats this to herself, clasp one hand to her mouth. She’d always hoped, of course she had, but this is a moment she has barely allowed herself to imagine.

*“What just happened?”* Beside her, Tamsin sits back down and grips the edge of her seat as if she risks falling off. Her head drops forward and hair curtains her face.

Gina squeezes her daughter's shoulder but struggles to remember anything after the Coroner's third question. The isolated phrase *unwiped truth* swims towards her, unmoored from its context. "We won," she says with a swirling eddy of emotions. "I can't quite believe it." But a shadow passes through Gina as Ollie looks up from somewhere deep within Tamsin's dark eyes. He shouldn't have been one of the fifty-eight. *Why, oh why, did you have to try and be a hero?* "Take all the time you need," she manages.

It's not just Gina who has received what others will call good news. Behind her, Alan is murmuring to Maggie. *I should say something.* But Gina must wait for Alan to release his wife from his embrace. He gives the slightest nod over Maggie's shoulder and steers her around.

Disorientated, Maggie reaches out her arms. "Gina. My God. I never thought I'd be so glad to hear Rosie called a victim... This is..." Her unlikely friend falters.

The victims have been referred to as the fifty-eight for so long, it will be tough for Gina to adjust her thinking. The corners of her mouth twitch into a lopsided smile. At a loss for something appropriate to say, the idea that anyone would want this... She goes to hug Maggie, who claims the words for the first time.

"Rosemary Chapple. Victim fifty-nine."