

LOVE ON SIGHT



ASLI JENSEN

Chicken
House

2 PALMER STREET, FROME,
SOMERSET BA11 1DS

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To teenage dreams

CHAPTER 1

JALAAAL

I cycle through the ends and down on to the high street at a fast speed. No helmet. No lights. Just me. And the will of Allah. Not gonna lie though, I don't think about God very much, only when I'm alone with my thoughts. And I don't do that often, cos I don't like thinking about the person that I am right now. I focus on what's important. The pharmacy is closing soon and Habo Hani needs her medication. The pain in her knee has made it impossible for her to leave the yard today.

A strong cockney accent wakes me from my thoughts, 'Oi mate, get off your bike!'

I quickly turn my head back to the two feds pacing up behind me. I don't think I have anything on me, so I press my brakes and stop. Bun going back to them, I'll wait here for them to come to me.

'Right.' The fatter one breathes in my face, his chest rising and falling quickly. 'You know it's an offence to cycle on the pavement?'

I stare at him and say nothing. He ain't serious.

'Please get your hands out of your pockets,' the skinnier, red-faced fed says.

I have one hand placed on my bicycle seat and the other one in my pocket, gripping my aunt's prescription.

'Why? Are you detaining me?' I bite my tongue.

They both stare at me in silence as if I'm stupid.

'I said, are you detaining me?' I lower my voice despite the heat rising within me.

'Right, mate. Calm down, you're being searched under Section Twenty-three of the Misuse of Drugs Act . . .' His voice fades as the fat one grabs my left hand and pulls the right one out of my pocket, securely locking handcuffs on my wrists behind my back. They're tight.

My body tenses as they start digging into my pocket. Everything is happening in slow motion and when I finally process what's going on, my nostrils flare and my muscles contract.

'Wait. What the fuck is going on? I haven't got anything on me.'

Silence.

I try to move, my body slightly twitching. The fat one firms his grip on me, and my body begins to jolt. I hate this feeling.

'Fam, why are you searching me? What have I done?'

They ignore me, speaking among themselves and listing the items in my pocket. Prescription, Oyster card, twenty-pound notes, iPhone. Thank Allah I left the burner phone at home.

'Officer, speak to me!' I shout at them.

Before I know it, I'm on the floor, my back rubbing against the coarse gravel, and palms pinched against the sharp floor. The red-faced officer is up in my face shouting at me, 'JUST CALM THE FUCK DOWN MATE.'

Subhanallah.

There's not many people on the high street but I clock the barbers peering through their windows, old people at the bus stop watching us closely and a few people recording us from across the road. I better not end up on some meme page on Instagram, it's so

fucking embarrassing.

'He's clean. Nothing on him,' the fat one finally says. The red one loosens his grip on me and I'm able to fully breathe again, the hard gravel slowly detaching itself from my body.

I exhale as they uncuff me.

'It's your lucky day mate.' The fat one squares up to me. 'Don't worry Jalaal Abdi, we know exactly what you and your mates are up to. Don't get too comfortable, you'll see us real soon,' he mutters quickly before jumping back into his whip, leaving me there bruised and battered like some dickhead.

When I get to the pharmacy, Uncle looks at me sideways. He's known me since I was a young kid and my mum used to bring me here to collect my banana-flavoured amoxicillin. That was a lifetime ago. I wonder if he remembers what Hooyo looked like. I'm slowly starting to forget.

As soon as I enter the doorway and the bell chimes, Uncle runs up to me.

'Jalaal, what happened to you?' He holds my head firmly in his hands, inspecting.

'What do you mean? Nothing has happened to me.' I avoid eye contact and back away from him.

'Come here son, you've got a cut on your eyebrow, let me quickly clean it up for you and give you a plaster.'

A cut. Fucking pigs.

I mumble in agreement. It's not right for me to be rude to Uncle, but I'm angry fam.

He comes back out with his personalized *King's Pharmacy First Aid Kit*. It's bare cringe, but I rate him still. He tells me to sit on the

stool and presses the antiseptic wipe against my cut. I wince even though I try hard to suppress any pain.

'There, there, there.' He finishes it off with a plaster. 'All done.'

'Thank you, Uncle.' I force a smile.

'No worries, Jalaal. Let me go get the prescription for your aunt. How is she feeling today?'

'I can't lie, she wasn't doing too good, but I think the meds will help her knee ease up.'

'*Inshallah*, I will make *dua* for her too.' This guy is so blessed.

'Thank you, man, it means a lot.' I take the paper prescription bag from him and walk out the pharmacy.

'And Jalaal . . .' he shouts from the back of the shop. I pause at the doorway and turn back to him.

'Yeah?'

'Whatever happened for you to get that cut, I know you're better than that. It's not my business but I know your mum would have wanted the best for you,' he responds. Hooyo? I can't take this. It's too much for one day.

'You're right, it's not your business!' I slam the door, leaving the bell to chime before he can reply.

I need to get back to yard.

When I reach yard, I go to give Habo Hani her prescription. She's on the phone but immediately hangs up when she clocks the plaster on my face.

'What happened?' She speaks quickly in Somali.

'Habo, it's fine.'

She struggles to get up.

'Sit down, your knee.' I switch to our mother tongue.

'Did somebody do this to you?'

'No, no. Relax, I fell off my bike.' If I tell her that it was the feds, she'll know that I'm back on road. And I'm not tryna stress her.

'I should really get a helmet like you keep saying,' I add.

'You need to be careful, *waryaa*.' She melts back into the sofa.

'I know, I'm bare tired so Ima go sleep for a bit. Do you need anything else?' I hope she says no.

'No, no, it's OK.' She ushers me off. 'You better get that helmet soon.'

I nod before leaving her.

The heat wakes me up.

We're all being cooked alive in our own homes. Twenty-nine degrees is too much for the ends. The sweat patches on my basic white T-shirt have turned yellow. It's the one time in my life when I'm fully annoyed at the council for installing some shit windows in our block that don't even open properly. I swear that's how the Grenfell fire started, the council using cheap material. I bet all those new-build flats for the rich dons who live down the road don't have that problem.

My phone buzzes. A text from Shaah.

Yo Jalaal, party nearby, I need to do a drop off, u on it?

Yh bro, come thru. I notice how big my fingers look against the Nokia keypad.

Kl.

'Habo Hani,' I shout down the stairs at my aunt. 'Shaah is coming over.'

She hates it when people come to our yard unannounced.

'I can't hear you Jalaal-o.' She elongates my name. 'If you want to

tell me something, you need to come downstairs,' she shouts back in Somali.

I groan and go downstairs. She's calmly sitting on the sofa, tapping her phone screen with her eyes squinted.

'Habo Hani,' I sigh. 'Shaah is coming over in a bit and we gonna go out.'

Her neck snaps in my direction. 'Going where?' Her eyes don't even blink.

'Just chill innit, probably get munch too,' I try to convince her.

'Don't you have exams to be revising for?' She raises her eyebrows. 'Just because Shaah isn't in school doesn't mean you can be a *dib jir* too.'

She knows I hate it when she cusses me out in Somali and, according to her, I'm a lowlife today.

'Yeah, but I did most of it already and I just need to relax for a bit.' I lie through my teeth.

'I don't ever see you studying.'

'Why are you on my case though?' I snap.

'Don't you dare raise your voice at me!'

'Just let me live my life then.' I suck my teeth together.

'Have you forgotten that you come from a good Muslim family?' She shakes her head. 'Do as you please then . . . as long as you don't end up dead or in prison.'

I hate to think that she's starting to give up on me. I stare at her blankly for a few seconds before returning upstairs.

I don't want to be seen shotting weed at some dead party, but ever since I got kicked out of college last year, I feel like this is all I do. Back when I was at W&A college, things were kind of easier and I wasn't this pressed. Even though some of my teachers were

dickheads and used to violate me all the time by removing me from the classroom and picking on me for no reason, I did enjoy a bit of school, like graphic design and media. I even started to design my own T-shirts and hoodies. I bet if I carried on then I'd have my own clothing brand by now. Probably would have had good-quality T-shirts that don't stain yellow with sweat either.

I'm gassed Shaah has come through with a motive at least. He's been my boy for God knows how long. We met at the park on our estate when we were five years old. I remember the day so well. I was sitting on the swing, trying to go as high as I could to get that adrenaline rush. Shaah was playing football with the other kids, and he saw me. His ashy knees came running over and he showed me how standing on the swing would help me go higher. Ever since then, we've been boys.

I quickly get up to close my bedroom door. I don't want my little brother Ibrahim knowing where I hide my drugs. He's only eight years old, he shouldn't even know what drugs are. I dismantle the hairbrush that I hide my weed in. You'll never believe the shit you can find on Amazon. I've sealed it in multiple bags and some cling film, so the yard doesn't smell. Ever since I got bagged last year and the feds raided my room, I've been bare paranoid. When the police did buss down my door, they only found the weed in my shoebox, which they said was *just* enough for personal usage. Then the dickheads made me go YOT, the youth offending team, and it meant I had to do some cannabis awareness classes. Shaah also got the same visit from the feds and had to go YOT, too.

Alhamdulillah, God has my back and I just got a Youth Caution. I never deeped the fact that I could go prison for what I do until that day. And not gonna lie, it shook me. My aunt was mad about the

whole thing, *wallahi* she did not speak to me for nearly a whole month. It was peak. I promised her that I would pattern up and I tried for a bit. After college kicked me out, I was going to PRU for a while, trying to do some courses and not staying out late. After a while, I don't know what happened, but I fell off. Habo still thinks I'm at college, but most time, I'm on road or wasting time.

Twenty minutes later, the doorbell rings.

'I'll get it,' Ibrahim shouts as his feet race down the stairs.

'Hello big man, what you sayin'?' Shaah's deep voice booms up the stairs.

'Shaah,' Ibrahim chuckles. 'Isn't it too hot to be wearing a coat?'

I burst out laughing from upstairs. I bet that's what every sane person thinks when they see us lots wearing puffer jackets in the summer.

'Come upstairs, fam. And Ibrahim, you pagan, go do your homework.'

Ibrahim's feet run up the stairs again and he smacks open my door. He stares at me with his eyes wide open. 'Why'd you call me a pagan?'

Shaah comes up behind him and enters my room.

'Shut up Ibrahim, go do your homework,' I say. He pulls a face and turns to leave. 'And close my door.'

He slams my door shut.

'You've made big man vex,' Shaah says, his silver incisor glinting at me.

I shoot Shaah an unbothered look. He doesn't have any younger siblings as he's the youngest in his family. He has no one to protect. I don't want Ibrahim knowing anything about me being on road.

Ibrahim is innocent, enjoys school and plays football. He's an academic little yute so he's going to have to do the whole university thing.

He clocks the cut on my face and raises his eyebrows.

'Feds,' I sigh.

'Did they find anything?' His eyes widen.

'Nah, don't stress man.' I don't want to think about it, and I don't want to tell him about their little threat. 'So where is this party happening again?'

'It's at St Mary's.'

We leave the house and ride our pedal bikes to St Mary's Estate. It's the sister estate to mine, St George's. Two identical estates facing one another – so basically, it's two shitholes opposite each other.

As we arrive, I ask Shaah, 'Yo, this is Shanice's yard, ain't it?'

He smiles knowingly; no wonder he didn't tell me the specifics. He knows how I feel about trying to maintain a good image in the Somali community so that my aunt doesn't get suspicious. Even though Shanice is a true yardie girl, there better not be any Somalis at this party.

Shanice was in my English class in secondary school, and we used to bun weed together sometimes. As far as I know, she still chills with the same circles which means bare exposure for me. For fuck's sake. I need to be in and out as soon as possible.

The blocks here are grey, ugly and chunky. Too much concrete and not enough windows. The whole of Shanice's building is stained with green-turning-black sewage, and you can smell the rotting food from the communal bins. The heat isn't helping either. This is the hood, and the feds are always circling around her ends. The metal

entrance door to her block is secured with actual bars. No wonder everyone feels trapped. I notice the 'NO BALL GAMES' sign hanging at an angle off the wall. It's jokes because I'm the one who kicked a football at the sign when I was thirteen years old and angry at the world.

We walk up the alleyway adjacent to the block of flats and towards the communal back garden. We follow the blaring lyrics of Vybz Kartel's 'Summertime'. The scent of succulent jerk chicken drifts up my nose and my stomach rumbles. Obviously Somali food bangs and that's my favourite munch, but I swear, Caribbean food is also top tier. The beef-and-cheese patties are unmatched. These lot are always bare generous with their portions, they're blessed people *wallahi*.

A girl's voice shouts, 'Ayy, party's about to get live,' and faces turn our way.

I swallow my panic. Now it's bait that I'm some established drug dealer.

Shaah and I wait around awkwardly for whoever this drop-off is for. There are bare people at this party. The music is a vibe and everyone is having a good time. I'm not tryna be involved but it's low-key nice to watch people. I'm not the best dancer, though I've got rhythm. But I'm here for Shaah and here to make money. He's stood next to me, chest puffed out and eyes darting everywhere. I don't know why he's on edge, this is a calm barbecue. Like I said, I don't want to be caught slipping here but at the same time, I'm not ready to leave just yet.

I smile and wait.

Just as we are about to leave, I notice Shanice entering the garden with a sweet one. Fuck though, she's the lengest girl I've seen

in a long time. Her skin is glowing a beautiful brown. She's wearing a black bodycon dress that hugs her figure perfectly, accentuating her slim waist and curved bunda. I must look like a wasteman just staring at her, but I can't help myself. Even though she's at a distance, I notice the small freckles around her cheeks as she observes everyone in the garden with her wandering, wide brown eyes.

She paces slowly behind Shanice. She's shy. There's something bare alluring about her. It's like she's cautious and thoughtful at the same time. I can't help but feel drawn to her, Ima have to chat to her.

Out of nowhere, her eyes lock on to mine. She holds my gaze for a second before looking in the opposite direction. For that brief moment, something inside me shifts. As if there are suddenly bare possibilities. I don't know, maybe I'm bugging out.

I pat Shaah on the chest while staring at this beautiful girl. 'Who's the lengers next to Shanice?'

Shaah smirks. 'That's Sabrina fam, we all used to go college together . . . you probably don't 'membra her cos she's in the year above and she's a good girl. Just keeps to herself if you get what I mean.'

I zone out as I continue watching her. Sabrina.