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Tainted Love

Written by Kimberley Chambers

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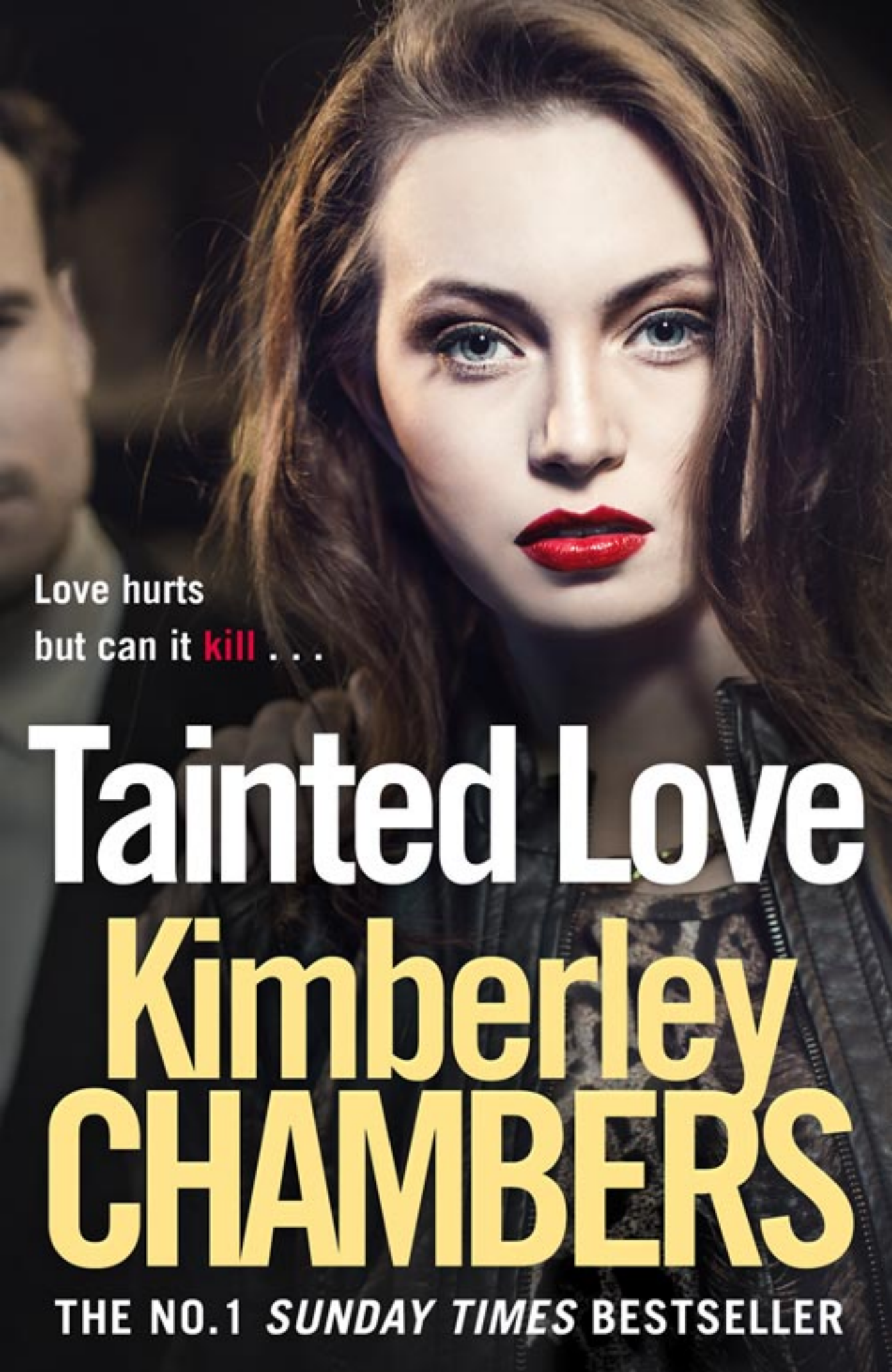
Love hurts
but can it kill . . .
Tainted Love
Kimberley
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Tainted Love

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PROLOGUE

Autumn 2001

Queenie Butler slung another of her ornaments in the box marked 'RUBBISH' and momentarily felt comforted by the sound of it shattering into tiny pieces. That's how her heart felt right now: broken and beyond repair.

Delving into a bag, tears stung Queenie's eyes as she came across the first suits she'd ever bought her beloved boys. Vinny had been about nine, Roy seven and Michael a mere toddler. So smart they'd looked at their nan's funeral. Everybody had commented on how fine they were turned out, but what was the point of keeping the bloody things? Wouldn't be needing them now, would they?

Huffing and puffing, Big Stan ambled down the stairs with yet another heavy load in his arms. 'That's the last of it, Queen. The loft's empty, love.'

'Thanks, Stan. Only remembered I had stuff up there this morning and didn't know who else to bloody ask. Thanks for always being there for me and mine over the years. I was never the perfect neighbour, I know that. Too wrapped up with me own, I suppose.'

'Don't be daft! You've always been the Queen of this

street and always bleedin' will be in my eyes. Ain't gonna be the same without you and Vivvy, that's for sure,' Big Stan replied, his voice tinged with genuine sadness.

Queenie handed her neighbour a photograph. 'Remember that night?'

Big Stan stared at it solemnly. Queenie and Vivian, so happy and vibrant-looking, done up to the nines in their expensive furs. Vinny and Roy, fresh-faced teenagers, suited and booted with a menacing edge even back then. Michael and Brenda, innocent schoolchildren with their whole lives ahead of them – or so you would've thought. And young Lenny Harris, poking his tongue out for the camera. 'Course I remember it. Early sixties, was taken at the opening of the Butlers' club. Brilliant night that was, the joint packed to the rafters. Teddy Drake the comedian and Dickie doobry – what was his name? The singer.'

'Parker. Dickie Parker. Those were the days, eh, Stan? The good ol' days. Look how happy we were. Breaks my heart to think the majority of us in that photo are now dead. None died from natural causes either. Murder and bleeding mayhem killed 'em all. What did my family ever do to deserve such tragedy, Stan? Perhaps we were wicked bastards in a past life, eh?'

Big Stan's eyes welled up. 'Bless your heart, Queen. Gonna miss you, ya know. Me and the missus moved 'ere in 1944 and you were the first neighbour we ever spoke to. You were pregnant with your Vinny and I offered to carry your shopping bags. Where have all those years gone?'

'In a puff of misery, that's where.'

Awkwardly hugging the distraught woman, Big Stan mumbled, 'I wish there was something I could say or do to make things right for you, lovey. I'm truly sorry for your loss and for what happened at the wedding. Me and the missus will be attending the funeral of course and . . . Well,

you've got our number if you need us for anything else in the meantime.'

'You're a diamond, Stan. What's the fucking racket outside? Because if it's that scum over the road again, mood I'm in, I'll march over there and take an 'ammer to 'em.'

Big Stan looked out the window. 'Yeah, it's them. I'll have a word. When did our wonderful Whitechapel go so downhill, Queen?'

Telling Stan to pour them both a large brandy, Queenie settled herself in her armchair and waited for him to take a seat on the sofa. 'I'll tell you exactly when things went from bad to bloody worse, shall I? Now cast your mind back to the spring of 1986 . . .'

PART ONE

Love me or hate me,
Both are in my favour.
If you love me,
I'll always be in your heart.
If you hate me,
I'll always be in your mind . . .

Anon

CHAPTER ONE

Spring 1986

'Sit yourselves down, boys,' Queenie Butler ordered. Vinny was forty now, Michael thirty-six, but both obeyed their mother as though they were still small children. Respect went a long way in their world.

'I'll make us a cuppa. I don't know what this bleedin' world's coming to, I really don't,' Vivian mumbled miserably.

Vinny and Michael glanced at one another. Their mother rarely summoned them to her house at such short notice these days, and it was obvious that both she and Aunt Viv had their serious heads on.

'What's up?' Vinny asked.

'Mr Arthur, that's what. Poor old sod had his medals stolen. Inconsolable, he is. Wasn't that long ago he was mugged, was it? That old bag Sylvie Stanley's son was involved, by all accounts.'

'Delhi Duncan or Ginger Kevin?' Michael asked. All Sylvie Stanley's kids looked very different.

'Duncan. It was him and that loudmouth with the shaved head. The one who wears the gold chains and walks about with them two Alsatians.'

'What loudmouth?' Vinny asked.

'I know who Mum means. He's only appeared round 'ere in the last few months. I'm sure someone told me Duncan is knocking out drugs for him. The pair of 'em are hanging around the betting shop most days.'

'And the Grave Maurice. That's where they nicked the medals. Both were drunk and taking the piss out of Mr Arthur, asking him questions about the war. He didn't realize they were taking the mick. Knocking on now, ain't he? Bless him. And he's gone deaf in one ear. Anyway, they sits with him and asks to see his medals, so he took them off his jacket to show 'em. They gave him back four and pocketed the other two, the no-good bastards. Big Stan was stood at the bar, saw what was going on and confronted them. Obviously, they denied taking 'em, said Mr Arthur was senile and he'd only shown 'em four. When Stan demanded they empty their pockets, the big thug threatened him. Said he knew where Stan and his wife lived and unless he wanted a petrol-bomb through his window, he was to mind his own business.'

'He said fucking what!' Vinny exclaimed.

Vivian put the tray of teas on the table. 'Getting worse round 'ere by the day, it is. Something needs to be done about it.'

'And this family owes Mr Arthur big time. If it wasn't for him getting on that bus and following Jamie Preston home, we might never have got justice for Molly. Well, we haven't exactly got our justice yet, but you know what I mean.'

'Don't worry, Mum. We'll sort it,' Vinny promised.

'I want it sorted immediately. I think because neither of you live round 'ere any more, people have forgotten how to behave. They need reminding, and Mr Arthur needs those medals back, so yous two better get cracking.'

Michael took a gulp of his tea, then stood up. 'Come on, bruv. Let's go and teach some manners.'

Mr Arthur froze as he heard the hammering on his front door. Helen, his kind neighbour who often cooked him dinners and popped in for a chat would always phone him first, and he rarely had any other visitors these days.

Creeping into the hallway, Mr Arthur yelled, 'Who is it?' Since the mugging, he never answered the door without first knowing who it was.

'It's Vinny and Michael Butler. We heard what happened yesterday and wanna help ya get your medals back,' Vinny shouted.

Vinny's deep, gruff voice was unmistakable, so Mr Arthur twisted the key. 'Sorry, lads. I don't answer the door any more unless I know who it is. Been asking the council for ages to put one of them spyholes in my door, but they haven't got round to it yet.'

'Forget the council, they're useless. I'll sort the spyhole for you, Mr Arthur. You'll have it fitted by tomorrow at the latest,' promised Vinny. 'Now, in your own time, tell me and Michael exactly what happened yesterday in the Grave Maurice . . .'

When Vinny and Michael were growing up, a man would dress to impress of a Sunday. While the wives stayed at home to knock up the only decent meal most could afford all week, the men would gather in their local, all suited and booted.

Vinny and Michael were never seen in public in anything but a suave suit and expensive shoes. 'If you want to be taken seriously in life, you need to dress like you mean business. First impressions really do count,' their mother

had drummed into them from a young age. So Vinny was unimpressed by the sight that greeted them as they stepped out of Queenie's front door.

'State of those shitbags over the road. No self-respect whatsoever. Gotta be in their thirties. Don't they realize how ridiculous they look in those shell-suits?'

'Obviously not, bruv. And what is it with all that gobbing over the pavement with the other mob? Is it part of their religion or something?'

'Scum, Michael. I wish Mum and Auntie Viv would move. Worries me sick, them living round 'ere now – and I certainly want better for Ava. I've offered to buy 'em gaffs wherever they want, but neither will budge. See if you can talk some sense into 'em, will ya?'

'Hello, lads. Where you off to?' Nosy Hilda asked.

'Church.' Vinny grinned.

'I take it you heard what happened to Mr Arthur yesterday? Is that where you're going, the Maurice? They're in there, you know. Just popped in for my Guinness and saw 'em. Terrible state of affairs, isn't it?'

'You toddle off home, Hilda. There's a good girl,' Michael said, checking out his reflection in a shop window.

'Nosy old bat. No wonder Mum hates her,' Vinny remarked, when Hilda did a U-turn and walked back in the direction of the pub.

Michael handed his brother a cigarette. 'Right, how we gonna play this?'

Delhi Duncan wasn't actually from Delhi, but had been given the nickname at school because of his dark skin. He had no idea where his father was from or who he was. His mother was an old lush and a whore.

'What's up?' Russ Collins asked his latest gofer. Duncan had gone white.

'The Butler brothers have just walked in. I told you to give those fucking medals back, didn't I?'

'Chill, you prick. I'll deal with this.' Russ was from Luton, had only moved to Whitechapel recently and even though he'd heard some rumours about the Butler brothers, he wasn't scared of anybody.

Vinny Butler sneered at the big old lump with the shaved head and silly gold chains. He was also covered in tattoos. Vinny hated tattoos with a passion.

Not clocking the petrified expression on his pal's face or the smirks on the regulars', Russ decided to give it the big 'un as Vinny and Michael approached. 'Fuck me, Dunc, it's the Brylcreem Boys!' he chuckled. Vinny's thick jet-black hair was Brylcreemed backwards, Michael's parted and smoothed to the side.

'Shut it, will ya?' Duncan pleaded, before nervously holding out his right hand. 'Excuse my pal. He's new to the area. How you doing, lads? Long time no see.'

The locals were in their element as Vinny went to shake Duncan's hand, then twisted it so violently, the man screamed in agony. They were all aware of what had happened to Mr Arthur and thought it was disgusting.

When Russ threw a punch at Vinny, Michael kicked him so hard in the groin the big lump fell straight to the floor. Vinny then grabbed the massive chains around the idiot's neck and twisted them tightly. 'Walk,' he ordered.

Holding his throbbing groin and going purple in the face, Russ spluttered, 'Can't walk,' in a voice that bore a striking resemblance to a Dalek's.

'Fucking crawl then,' Michael spat, before grabbing hold of Duncan and marching him into the men's toilets.

'It wasn't my idea, I swear. I told him not to take the medals. Honest, I did,' Duncan begged.

Still clutching the man's gold chains, Vinny led him into

the toilet like a dog on all fours. Once inside, Vinny placed his foot on the back of Russ's head so his face was actually in the urinals. 'Where's the fucking medals?'

'I dunno what you're talking about. What medals?' Russ stammered.

Vinny stamped repeatedly on the liar's right hand.

'Me fingers – you've broken me fucking fingers!' Russ screamed. He was well out of his depth for once, and he knew it. What a shame he didn't have his Alsatians with him. Vicious bastards, were Ronnie and Reggie.

'The medals you stole off an old war hero . . .' Vinny lifted him off the floor by his neck chains in one swift movement, half choking him to death.

'In my flat. They're in my flat! It wasn't my fault. I swear on my life. He wanted to pawn 'em tomorrow,' Duncan cried, no longer in awe of Russ. Russ was a pussycat compared to the Butlers and Duncan could not believe how Michael had changed. They'd been in the same year at senior school and back then Michael had been a bit of a Jack-the-lad, and popular with the girls, but he wasn't violent. Now, however, his piercing green eyes were shining pure evil. Both he and his brother had the glare of murderers and Duncan had a nipper to think about, which was why he'd been working with Russ in the first place: to provide for his son.

'You go with him and I'll wait 'ere with this prick,' Vinny urged Michael. 'And I'm telling ya now, if I don't get those medals back, you're both dead,' he vowed, treating Russ to a sharp kick in the side of his head.

When Michael marched out the pub with the visibly trembling Duncan, the guvnor and all the customers pretended not to notice anything amiss. Even Nosy Hilda looked the other way. Whatever happened to Duncan and his loudmouth pal, nobody would dare grass. The Butlers

would always stick up for one of their own, and that's why they were legends.

Mr Arthur could not hide his delight when the Victoria Cross was placed in the palm of his hand. It had been one of the proudest moments of his life when he'd been awarded that, and the other stolen medal meant just as much to him, as it had belonged to his brother who had never returned from the war.

'I dunno what to say. I can't thank you enough, lads.' Mr Arthur's eyes welled up with tears. 'I really didn't think I was going to see these again. The VC's worth a lot of money, I think.'

'A word of advice, Mr Arthur. It's up to you, but Whitechapel isn't the area it once was and if I was you I wouldn't wear the VC when you go out in future. Too many chancers about these days, unfortunately. If you want, I can lock it in my safe at the club for you?' Vinny offered.

'No. I might be wary answering my front door, but I'll never let the bastards get the better of me, Vinny. If I stop wearing it, they've won the battle. I won't let them defeat me.'

Michael and Vinny glanced at one another, full of admiration for the elderly gentleman.

'I've had a word with the carpenter pal of mine,' said Vinny. 'He'll be popping round tomorrow afternoon to sort that door out for you, Mr Arthur. I told him to leave it until after half three as I know you like your lunchtime pint.'

'Thank you so much. You really are kind. As for them other so-and-sos, they better not be in the pub when I get there tomorrow, else they'll get some of this,' Mr Arthur said, lifting up his walking stick.

Michael chuckled. 'You won't be getting any more grief

off them, trust me. They've both been sent packing with their little tails between their legs.'

Mr Arthur smiled. 'Good boys, yous two. Last of a dying breed.'

Vinny winked. 'You know our motto, Mr Arthur. Same as yours in the war: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

'Well? How did it go? Where's Michael?' Queenie Butler asked.

Vinny grinned. 'Pour us a Scotch and I'll tell you all about it.'

Queenie Butler clapped her hands with glee as Vinny related the day's events. 'That's my boys! Was the Maurice banged out?' she enquired.

'Fairly busy. Not like the old days though. About forty-odd in there, I'd say. Nosy Hilda was there though, so you can guarantee the whole of the East End will know by now.' Vinny laughed.

'Well, that'll give the tale-bearers something to dine out on for a while, eh? I am so chuffed you got Mr Arthur's medals back. I bet he was over the moon. What did he say to you?'

Vinny repeated the conversation. 'Touched me and Michael right 'ere, it did,' he said, patting the skin covering his heart. 'To think men like him and his brother laid their lives on the line and fought tooth and nail for this country, and for what? To be disrespected and end his days living in the dump Whitechapel has now become? Seriously, Mum, you have to move. Me and Michael walked along that High Road earlier and thought we were in a different fucking country. And this ain't just about the foreigners. The newer breed of English round 'ere now are scum. State of 'em – pure shitbags.'

'Don't start all that again, Vinny. Me and Vivvy are quite happy living 'ere, thank you very much.'

Vinny held his hands up. 'OK, I rest my case. But when it gets even worse in the next ten or twenty years and something bad happens, don't say I didn't warn you.'

When Queenie mocked her son and called him a 'worry-pot' she truly had no idea that one day his words would come back to haunt her, big time.