



# LUTHER THE CALLING

NEIL CROSS



London · New York · Sydney · Toronto · New Delhi

A CBS COMPANY





First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd  
A CBS COMPANY

Copyright © Neil Cross, 2011

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.  
No reproduction without permission.  
All rights reserved.

The right of Neil Cross to be identified as the author of this work  
has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and  
78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd  
1st Floor  
222 Gray's Inn Road  
London  
WC1X 8HB

[www.simonandschuster.co.uk](http://www.simonandschuster.co.uk)

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney

Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

A CIP catalogue copy for this book  
is available from the British Library.

Hardback ISBN: 978-0-85720-336-6  
E-book ISBN: 978-0-85720-338-0

Typeset by M Rules  
Printed in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD





This book is dedicated to the memory  
of Gwen Kooznetzoff.



## CHAPTER 1

John Luther, a big man with a big walk, crosses the hospital car park, glistening with night rain. He strides through sliding doors into Accident and Emergency, approaches the desk and badges the Filipino triage nurse.

‘I’m looking for Ian Reed?’

‘That’s the police officer?’ She glances at her monitor. ‘He’s in cubicle eighteen. Over on the far side.’

Luther marches through the waiting area, weaves through nurses in rubber clogs. He ignores the moans of the binge drinkers, the beaten women, the self-mutilators, the overdosers.

He sweeps aside the heavy curtain to cubicle 18 and there’s Ian Reed, sitting tieless on the edge of the bed.

Reed is blond and lean, tense by nature. The blood on his white shirt has dried in patches. He’s wearing a soft surgical collar.

‘Blimey,’ Luther says, shutting the curtains.

‘Yeah. It’s not as bad as it looks.’

Reed’s got a couple of stitches in his scalp, a torn ligament, bruised ribs. Bruised kidneys too; he’ll be pissing blood for a week or two.

Luther pulls up a plastic chair. ‘What about the neck?’

‘Sprained. They had me in a headlock. Dragged me out the car.’

NEIL CROSS

'Who did?'

'Lee Kidman. Barry Tonga.'

Luther knows Lee Kidman; he's a bodybuilder, a doorman, a debt collector. Does a bit of porn. He's not familiar with the second name.

'Barry Tonga,' Reed says. 'Samoan bloke. Shaved head, tattoos everywhere. Size of a truck. Does a bit of cage fighting.'

Luther lowers his voice to a murmur. 'So why'd they do it?'

'You know Julian Crouch? Property developer. Used to run a few club nights - House of Vinyl, Betamax, Intersect. And a recording studio down in Camden. But he's on the downslide.'

'Aren't they all?'

Reed explains that Crouch owns half a terrace in Shoreditch; six houses. He's got a buyer lined up, some Russian who wants to develop the site, turn it into a gym in time for the Olympics.

Crouch is servicing massive debts. And he's divorcing. He needs a buyer; but only five of the six terraced houses are available to sell.

'So,' says Luther. 'Who lives in house number six?'

'Bloke called Bill Tanner. Old sailor.'

Luther groans because Reed is sentimental about old servicemen. It's landed him in grief before.

'And what?' Luther says. 'This bloke Crouch is trying to force him out?'

'Yeah.'

'So why doesn't he just move?'

'Because it's his *home*, mate. He's rented it since 1972. His wife died in that house, for fuck's sake.'

Luther holds up his hands. Okay, okay.

Reed outlines a campaign of intimidation; threatening phone calls, hoodies shoving dog shit through the old man's letterbox,

**LUTHER: THE CALLING**

smashing his windows. Breaking in, covering the living room in graffiti.

‘He call the police?’

‘Thing about Bill Tanner,’ Reed says, ‘he’s a game old bastard. He’s got heart.’ This is Reed’s highest compliment. ‘He takes photos of these hoodies, hands them in as evidence. He’s shit scared, he’s an old man living by himself, being harassed every night. So uniform goes round, picks up the hoodies. They don’t mention Crouch. And they’re out before the sun’s up. Next day, maybe the day after that, Bill gets a proper visit. Two heavies.’

‘This’ll be Kidman and Tonga?’

Reed nods.

Luther crosses his arms and stares up at the strip light, dotted inside with the desiccated carcasses of dead flies. ‘So what did you do?’

‘What do you think? I went to see Crouch. Told him to lay off Bill Tanner.’

Luther closes his eyes.

‘Oh, come on,’ says Reed. ‘It’s not like we haven’t done it before.’

Luther concedes with a shrug. ‘When was this?’

‘A couple of days ago. Then tonight I’m coming home, I’m about to park, when this Mondeo rear-ends me. Before I can get it together, two blokes get out, run round, drag me out my car and give me a right kicking.’

Luther glances at the neck brace. ‘And this is at your place? Your flat?’

‘On my own doorstep.’

‘It was definitely Kidman and Tonga?’

‘I know it was Tonga because he’s the biggest fucker I ever set eyes on. Plus the tattoos. And I know it’s Kidman because, well, I know Kidman. We’ve had dealings.’

## NEIL CROSS

'What kind of dealings?'

'He's just around. On the edge of things.'

'You reporting this?'

'Nope.'

'Why not?'

'Can't prove it was them. And even if I could - so what? Crouch rolls out another bunch of cunts to lean on poor old Bill Tanner. Bill won't move. They'll end up killing him, one way or another. He'll have a heart attack. A stroke. Whatever. Poor old sod.'

'But there are better ways to do this stuff,' Luther says.

'That old man served his country.' Reed is clenching and unclenching his jaw. 'He was there at D-Day. He's eighty-five fucking years old and he tried to do things the right way and his country let him down.'

'All right,' Luther says. 'Keep your hair on. What are you asking me to do?'

'Just pop in on him. Make sure he's all right. Take him some milk and a loaf of bread. A few tins of dog food. Not the cheap stuff. Meaty chunks in jelly. He loves his little dog.'

'What is this thing with old people?' Luther asks. 'They'd rather freeze to death than feed cheap food to their pets.'

Reed would shrug, if he could.

The killer walks the empty nocturnal streets: avenues lined with plane trees, Victorian terraces, concrete local-authority buildings, belts of local shops with darkened windows. Stone churches with faded, desperately jaunty signage: *Life is Fragile. Handle with Prayer!*

The killer is a compact and muscular man. Short hair, neatly parted. Dark pea coat. Jeans. A laptop backpack.

The backpack does not contain a laptop.

On Clayhill Street, a Smart car reverses into a small parking



## LUTHER: THE CALLING

space. The driver, a young Asian woman, gets out and hurries to her door clutching her handbag. She looks at the killer in passing, but doesn't really see him.

The killer walks on. He turns onto Bridgeman Road with a sense of magnitude.

He marches along the frost-buckled pavement until he comes to number 23.

Behind the rusty gate and the overgrown hedge, number 23 is a handsome, double-fronted Victorian house.

The killer opens the gate. It squeaks, but he doesn't mind: it must squeak every night and every day.

He stands in the front garden, which is a small paved area sheltered by high hedges. A green wheelie bin in one corner.

He lingers in the shadow of the house. It seems churchlike, pregnant with the future.

He thinks of standing underneath a great railway bridge as a locomotive shrieks overhead, the shocking power of it. That's what the killer feels inside him, now: the shriek and rattle and thunder of a great engine.

He snaps on the latex gloves he's kept rolled in one pocket of his pea coat. Then, from the other pocket, he removes a pair of needle-nosed pliers.

He walks to the side of the house. His legs are trembling. He follows the vertical line of the drainpipe until it meets the small, square drain around which grows sparse London grass.

He kneels to snip the telephone wire close to the ground. Then he pockets the pliers and returns to the front door.

From his pocket, he removes a set of house keys.

He grits his teeth. With great care, he inserts the Yale key into the lock and slowly turns it. The door snicks open as he leans a shoulder into it. Quietly, so quietly.

When the gap is wide enough, he slips through like smoke.



  
**NEIL CROSS**

Into the wall near the door is set a plastic keypad. A small red light flashes. The killer ignores it, and sharks through a haze of the Lamberts' scent: their clothes, their deodorants, their perfumes, their cleaning products, their bodies, their sex.

He enters the dark living room and sets down his backpack.

He shrugs off his pea coat, folds it and lays it on the sofa. He unzips the backpack and removes a pair of painter's bootees. He slips them over his shoes.

Then he wriggles into a pair of paper overalls. He pulls up the elasticated hood. He stands there in the white paper jumpsuit and the thin rubber gloves.

He reaches into the backpack and removes his tools: a taser, a silvery roll of duct tape (one corner folded over for easy access), a scalpel, a carpet knife.

At the bottom of the rucksack, rolled into a sausage, is a small polar fleece blanket with satinette edging.

He lays the blanket on the sofa. Looks down at it, a pallid rectangle.

The killer's spirit balloons and seems to leave his body. He hovers above himself.

He watches himself head upstairs: gently now, gently.

He avoids the fifth step, slips back into his body, and proceeds into darkness.

Luther kills time in the waiting area by flicking through a tatty old *Heat* magazine.

In the far corner, a tramp with ash-grey dreadlocks bellows at God, or perhaps that he is God. It's difficult to tell.

Reed limps out around 3.15 a.m. Luther takes his coat and helps him through the doors, through the main entrance, blazing bright.

They cross the wet car park to Luther's decayed old Volvo.

## LUTHER: THE CALLING

Luther drives Reed home – a top floor, one-bedroom rented apartment in Kentish Town.

The flat is bare and disorderly, as if it were temporary accommodation, which it is. All Reed's flats are temporary accommodation.

Reed yearns for a big house, a big garden with a trampoline in it, a horde of kids to bounce on it – his own kids, their friends, their cousins, their neighbours.

Reed dreams of community, of pub lunches on Sunday, of street parties, of wearing comedy aprons as he cooks sausages at well-attended barbecues. He dreams of being adored by his children, adoring them in return.

At thirty-eight, he's been married four times and is childless. He hands Luther a buff folder.

Luther leans against the wall and flicks through the file. Sees arrest sheets, mugshots, surveillance reports.

The top sheets detail the kids who were arrested, remanded and released for harassing Bill Tanner: dead-eyed ratboys, English white trash.

Beneath the arrest sheets are more detailed reports on Lee Kidman, Barry Tonga and their boss Julian Crouch.

Luther slips the folder into a carrier bag and checks his watch.

It's late. He thinks about going home. But what would be the point? He thinks about the dead and can't sleep. He lies there boiling like a star about to explode.

So he drives to Crouch's place, a townhouse overlooking Highbury Fields.

He parks and sits at the wheel. He wonders what he's going to do to Julian Crouch and how he's going to get away with it.

At length, he pops the boot, walks round the Volvo and pulls out a hickory wood pickaxe handle. He feels its satisfying weight.

**NEIL CROSS**

He marches across Highbury Fields and waits in darkness, the pickaxe handle clenched in his fist.

Shortly after 4.30 a.m., an immaculate, vintage Jaguar pulls up.

Julian Crouch gets out. He's got riotously curly hair, thinning on top. Suede coat, paisley shirt. White Adidas.

He opens his front door and hits the lights – but lingers on the threshold, backlit by the chandelier. He sniffs the air like prey at a waterhole. He knows someone's out there, watching him.

He frowns and shuts the door, squeaks across marble tiles.

Luther stares at the house, breathing.

Lights come on.

Crouch comes to his bedroom window. He looks down like a troubled king from his high castle, peering into blackness. Then he draws the curtains and turns off the light.

Luther stands sentinel. His heart is a furnace.

At length, a fox scurries down the centre of the empty road. Luther can hear the quick, prim click of its claws on tarmac.

He watches the fox until it disappears, and he heads back to his car.

He waits until the winter sun begins to rise and the first joggers pass by. Then he drives home.