

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'a' and 'b' in a white, cursive script font, positioned on a solid black rectangular background. A thin white horizontal line is drawn beneath the letters.

asb

**MURDER AT
LORD'S STATION**

JIM ELDRIDGE

As always, for Lynne.

CHAPTER ONE

London, Saturday 8th March 1941

Outside in the streets in and around Leicester Square, the bombs fell, bringing their nightly destruction to London. Inside the Café de Paris, deep beneath a cinema in Leicester Square, Rosa Coburg did her best to ignore the noise and vibrations as she played the closing number of her set at the club's piano. She was glad she'd chosen a loud, raucous song, 'When the Saints Go Marching In', because one of her favoured gentler, slower numbers, such as Hoagy Carmichael's 'Georgia on My Mind' or 'Stardust', would have been all but drowned by the bombing. With 'Saints', the sound of the bombing almost gave a deep bass musical counterpoint to the rhythm.

Rosa ended with a rousing change of chords, and then stood and responded with smiles and bows to the thunderous applause from the packed audience.

Martin Paulson, the genial compere, stepped forward into the spotlight, gesturing towards Rosa. 'Ladies and gentlemen, let's hear it once again for the fabulous Rosa Weeks!'

At this, the audience rose to their feet, applauding. Rosa bowed again, then moved out of the light to join her husband, DCI Edgar Coburg, at his table.

‘Wonderful.’ Coburg beamed. ‘You slayed them.’

In the spotlight, Paulson was addressing the audience. ‘Ladies and gentlemen, there will be a short break while we reassemble the band on stage for their next set. Mainly because we’ve got to find them.’

There was genial laughter at this, then Paulson continued, ‘But do, please, order your drinks now, and shortly you’ll be listening once again to the magic sound of the brilliant Ken Snakehips Johnson and his West Indian Dance Orchestra.’

With that, Paulson moved out of the spotlight and joined Rosa and Coburg at their table.

‘That was superb,’ he enthused. ‘Rosa, you are a star! Are you sure you can’t stay and do another number with Ken and the boys?’

‘I’d love to,’ said Rosa apologetically, ‘but I’ve got to be up early tomorrow morning. I’m on the early shift for St John Ambulance.’ She stopped as another bomb struck somewhere not far away, then said, ‘After tonight’s raid I’ve got an idea we’re going to be busy. But I promise that tomorrow night we’ll come back, as punters, and I’d love it if I could do something with the boys.’

‘Me and the boys would love it, too,’ said the smooth voice of Snakehips as he appeared at their table. ‘Gal, you are smokin’!’

Rosa gave the tall, slim man a hug. ‘You, too, Ken. We’d love to stay on tonight, but seriously . . .’

‘I know,’ said Snakehips ruefully. ‘It’s your wartime duty.’ He turned to Coburg and held out his hand. ‘Edgar, my man, you are one lucky dude, and I thank you both for tonight.’

Edgar shook the young man’s hand. ‘We’ll see you tomorrow, Ken. Have a good night tonight.’

‘I hope so,’ said Snakehips. He looked at the bandstand and saw that most of his musicians had returned. ‘Hey, look at that, they’re here!’ he chuckled. ‘And that’s because they were hanging around listening to your set, Rosa, instead of heading to the john for a poker game like they usually do.’

As Snakehips joined his band on the stage, Paulson asked Coburg and Rosa, ‘How are you getting home? It’s not that safe out there.’

‘The same way we came, on foot,’ said Rosa. ‘We’ll be safe enough. It’s not far to our flat in Piccadilly, and we can always dodge in and out of doorways. After all this time, we’re getting used to it.’

‘I don’t think I can ever get used to it,’ said Paulson with a shudder. ‘Take care, and God willing I’ll see you tomorrow night.’

He shook their hands and they made their way to the cloakroom, collected their coats, then climbed the stairs to the exit to the street.

‘I think it might have died down a little,’ said Rosa.

There was the sound of an explosion followed by what sounded like a building collapsing.

‘It doesn’t sound like it to me,’ observed Coburg.

‘That was some distance away,’ said Rosa.

‘Yes, you could be right.’ Coburg nodded. ‘Alright, let’s go.’

They stepped out of the shelter of the club entrance, then moved along Coventry Street.

‘Maybe we should have brought the car,’ said Rosa.

‘This way’s safer,’ said Coburg. ‘We can keep moving and dodging.’

They were at the end of Coventry Street when there was a colossal explosion behind them, the force of it sending them

stumbling, and then falling to the pavement. They got up and looked in the direction of the explosion.

‘The club’s been hit!’ exclaimed Coburg.

Sure enough, thick smoke was belching out of the entrance to the Café de Paris. Immediately, Coburg began running towards the club.

‘Watch out!’ warned Rosa.

‘There may be people in there who need our help,’ said Coburg, and kept running.

As he got close, some people spilt out of the club onto the pavement, coughing and choking and falling to the ground. Rosa ran to one and started checking for injuries.

‘I’m alright,’ said the man in between coughs. ‘At least, I think I am. But it’s carnage in the club. Bodies everywhere.’

Coburg made for the entrance and tried to find the stairs, but the smoke was so thick it was impenetrable. He took his handkerchief from his pocket and tied it behind his head so it covered his nose and his mouth, but his attempts to get down the stairs were hampered by the thick, acrid, black smoke, which completely blinded him.

He stumbled back out into the street.

‘It’s no good,’ he told Rosa in between bouts of coughing. ‘The smoke’s so thick in there you can’t see anything.’

‘But people could be alive in there!’ burst out Rosa.

‘The emergency services will have breathing apparatus and torches,’ said Coburg.

‘But when will they be here?’ she begged, nearly beside herself with agonised frustration.

Just then men appeared in fire brigade uniforms, hauling a hose.

‘Stand aside!’ shouted one. He pulled on his breathing helmet and made for the smoke-filled entrance, shining his powerful torch.

The men vanished into the thick, dense smoke. Coburg and Rosa attempted to follow them but were stopped by another fireman.

‘We have friends in there!’ Rosa appealed to him.

‘That may be, but it’s too dangerous,’ the man said.

‘I’m a volunteer for St John Ambulance,’ protested Rosa. ‘I might be able to help.’

‘You might also be killed. There’s no way of knowing what damage there’s been. The roof might be about to collapse. In fact, the whole building above it could fall down.’

‘But you’re going in,’ protested Rosa.

‘Only in as far as we can, and we’ve got breathing apparatus,’ said the man. ‘Now, move back. There could be another bomb in there, primed to go off. We need the entrance clear.’

Coburg took Rosa’s arm and gently pulled her back.

‘We can’t do anything,’ he said. ‘We’d only be a hindrance, in the way. If there is anyone alive, they’ll find them. We won’t be able to.’

‘In that case I want to wait here,’ she said. ‘I want to find out who’s survived, and who hasn’t. I need to know what’s happened to them.’

‘We can’t,’ said Coburg.

‘These are my friends,’ Rosa appealed. ‘People I’ve played with for years. People I care for.’

‘It’s too dangerous out in the street,’ said Coburg. ‘The bombing’s still going on.’

‘But I want to *know!*’ she stressed.

‘And I’ll find out,’ Coburg promised her. ‘But nothing’s going to be known for hours. They won’t even be able to *see* in there. I promise you, I’ll come back when it’s daylight. I’ll find out what’s happened.’

‘What do we do till then?’ she asked, looking desperately at the smoke that still billowed out of the club entrance.

‘We go home,’ said Coburg sadly.

She hesitated, then nodded, took his hand and walked with him along Coventry Street towards Piccadilly.