

# Prologue

*October 2015*

At first he thinks it's fireworks, a quiet popping in the distance. Daniel is heading into the city, sweating slightly as he walks up the hill, the harbour at his back. He could have taken an Uber but he needs the exercise – too much time hunched over his laptop and sewing machine, too many long lunches like this one will be, God willing – and it's a glorious day, why wouldn't he walk? It was only twenty minutes. Morgan had laughed when she saw him setting out, told him he was crazy, but then Morgan never walked anywhere. Couldn't, in those stilettos. He'd suggested once that she wear sneakers to work, even Ugg boots if she wanted to – there was nobody at the studio to appreciate her Manolos – but she'd winced as if he'd slapped her and told him to have her committed if he ever saw her wearing Uggs.

It is spring. The dappled sunlight through the plane trees is warm on his shoulders, and he stops to remove his jacket, folding it carefully across his arm. He'll put it on again before he enters the restaurant, and he doesn't want it creased. That would hardly give the right impression. Daniel checks his watch and sets off again. Plenty of time. It really is a lovely day, the sky a blue dome above

him. He's booked his usual table at Sake, but maybe they could sit outside, on the deck. If the pitch goes well, he might even linger, make an afternoon of it looking out over the water with a beer and a smoke. How long has it been since he's done that? He should have told Morgan he might be back late, or not at all. She wouldn't be impressed, but who gave a shit? All work and no play, right? It'd been ages since he'd had a lunch of no return, and the last collection had really taken it out of him.

Daniel rolls his shoulders reflexively, feels their aching, endless tension. His own fault for still insisting he make everything by hand, both the samples and the actual garments they sent down the runway to be applauded and ordered, but how else did you *know*? All these years in the business, all those sketches, everything he'd produced, and he still couldn't tell if, or even how, something would hang together unless he sat down and stitched it himself. It drove him nuts. It drove Morgan nuts too, no doubt about that; she'd sigh and roll her eyes whenever he pulled his stool up to the Singer, bitching that they could hire a graduate for that, that his job was to design. He agreed with her in theory, but it felt like cheating, somehow, to dream something into being, then hand it over to an underling to figure out how to make it up. That's what creativity really was, wasn't it? Not just the dream, but the execution too. The vision, then the work. And Daniel isn't a shirker.

His phone pings and he reaches for it without breaking stride. There is a text from Joel: *Good luck Danny boy. You've got this!* Daniel smiles, but he pushes the mobile back into his pocket without replying. Joel could wait. He always waited.

A teenage girl lurches past wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the name of Bridie's film. Bridie's big film, the one that made her an overnight success after fifteen years of graft. Seeing it gives him a

kick like it always does, a gratifying hit of dopamine. He wants to stop the girl, with her mauve hair and wobbly eyeliner, and tell her, 'Hey, that's my sister! She made that!' A few years ago he would've snapped a photo, with or without permission, and sent it to Bridie, or told her the next time he saw her. The last time he'd done that, though, she'd just shrugged and said that those t-shirts were everywhere, probably made in China, nothing she could do. It had astonished him. She was no longer elated that her film was, if not quite yet a cultural touchstone, still well-known enough to rip off and flog to the masses. She wasn't even annoyed that that t-shirt had been bootlegged somewhere and she was losing the merchandising revenue. She was simply resigned. Worse, she was blasé. Blasé! That level of push-through, and Bridie had only shrugged. Maybe it was because she's older, forty-two to his thirty-five, but still. Daniel can't imagine a time when seeing something of his in the street wouldn't make his breath catch, his spine straighten. Can't imagine ever wanting less than everyone in the world to be wearing his clothes, truth be told.

*Why not t-shirts then?* The idea crackles like electricity, as the best ideas do. Daniel has always eschewed t-shirts – too sloppy, and his is not a sloppy brand – but he could do something tailored, maybe, with the discreet DOS logo over one breast. His main game is suits, impeccably constructed, effortlessly stylish without ever being flashy, but the market for suits is shrinking. T-shirts though . . . who doesn't wear those? A fitted t-shirt, bucking the trend – none of that oversized stuff – and definitely not cotton. Something luxe, something you wouldn't expect, but would long to touch. Tencel? Could he get away with velvet? Velour? His fingers are itching to sketch.

He pulls out his phone again to make a few quick notes, automatically checking his hair in the camera app before turning it off.

Perfect. He has good hair. He has *great* hair, actually; it has its own Instagram account. Bridie had been the one to alert him to it and they'd laughed together at a family lunch. Allison hadn't got it; she didn't know what Instagram even was, never mind why anyone would want to dedicate an account to her kid brother's hair. Bridie had tried to explain but neither of them could stop laughing at the absurdity of it, and Allison had thought they were laughing at her and made a show of picking up her wine and turning to talk to Emma instead.

*Poppopppop*. There's the noise again, like champagne corks, only louder. It can't be fireworks though, Daniel finally computes. It's the middle of the day. Now he hears a siren, but there are always sirens in the city, most of them false alarms. He is hungry and pays it no heed. What entrée would he order, the kingfish or the popcorn shrimp? It was good manners to let the client – *potential* client – select the main, but the entrées were his. Maybe he'd suggest both.

The pops are closer now, strident. Daniel turns a corner and confronts a scene of carnage. There is a figure on the ground, others sheltering behind benches and advertising boards set out on the footpath . . . over there, a woman on her back, lying still, one arm thrown up as if to shield her eyes from the sun. A splash of crimson pools beneath her . . . Is it her jacket? Blood?

A bang now rather than a pop, a sharp sound that he has only heard in the movies. Daniel wheels around, startled and staring. Is that what is happening? Is someone making a film? There should be lights and a boom mike, a catering truck somewhere subtle but not too distant. He knows this from visiting Bridie on set, and searches for it earnestly. A catering truck will make it all okay. But instead there is a second bang, and this time he sees, actually sees, another woman fold in two like a wallet and slump to the ground.

A movie, right? It has to be a movie. Daniel's heart is racing, so loud in his ears it silences anything else. People are running towards him and he freezes, a leopard caught in a stampede of wildebeest. He has never been one to follow the herd.

And that is what does for him. A masked figure with a gun advances – a real gun, not a prop; he knows this in his bones. Face covered, clad all in black. Daniel notices these things. The buttons on the shirt are mother of pearl. A nice touch against the dark material. He must remember that, but the figure is facing him now and raising his arm . . . The world erupts and then contracts once more, caving in around him. He thinks of Bridie again, then Allison, Clare, Emma, all his sisters; he hears his mother's voice and his father singing; he sees the quadrangle at Central St Martins and realises he won't be having the kingfish after all, not today, and the sun has gone behind a cloud; that's what must have happened because the light is waning, the bright green leaves of the plane trees leaching into olive, into the colour of mud, the pavement surprisingly warm against his cheek. Shoes, he sees shoes. Why do people wear such cheap shoes? Velcro fastenings on sneakers have always offended him. They signify indolence, giving up. What was so difficult about laces?

Daniel closes his eyes in disgust and can't seem to open them again. There's something wet in his hair, his hair that has its own Instagram account. The thought makes him want to laugh even now. Should he post a shot to it, or was that uncool, to acknowledge you even knew about it or were, God forbid, actually following yourself? Pain now, sudden and chilling, like a bucket of water thrown over him. The ice bucket challenge for charity that Joel had talked him into, to use his profile for good instead of simply selling shirts. 'Come on, Danny boy,' he'd cajoled. 'Surely you'd want to support this?'

Daniel's teeth are chattering. Joel. He reaches for his phone but he can't feel his fingers, his body distant, absent, missing somehow. He's cold now, so cold, and for the first time afraid. He wishes, as he dies, that he'd replied to Joel's text.