

## PROLOGUE

*Three weeks ago, Saturday 3 November*

She steps into a corridor. She is behind Peter Miller and Suzie Lui who are chatting excitedly, seemingly oblivious of any danger, but Stella takes one look at the four men and knows things have gone terribly wrong.

She is already bending forward, reaching to grab the case from Suzie, planting her weight on her right foot to spin round, make a run for it, but the men are fast. Much faster than her. She has barely moved and they've drawn their guns. A Glock, an Uzi and two MAC-10 auto sub-machine pistols which are immediately trained on her. The Uzi is on Peter, the Glock on Suzie. The men's hands are steady, their eyes hard and cold. They've done this before. They're pros.

Suzie gives a little scream. Peter goes as white as chalk and makes a soft whimpering sound.

There are places Stella will remember all her life – a shabby house in the East End, the hospital room where she gave birth to her daughter, a serene Mayfair street with rows of glossy black railings – but there will be nothing branded more deeply in her memory than this moment.

*How had Cedric found out?*

Nobody knew about this. Not even Bernard.

Had Peter or Suzie let something slip?

She suddenly sees how stupid she's been. She thinks she's so *clever*, but he's always been one step ahead. Was it the arrogance of age? The fact she thought she'd had a lifetime's experience? She's due to retire next year – perhaps she thought she'd go out in a spectacular shower of success but instead she's facing monumental dishonour and disgrace. Something that the office will whisper about in decades to come. How Stella Reavey, one of the so-called best, brought not just ignominy and humiliation to their front door, but how she risked their families, their friends, and their country. All through hubris.

The man with the Glock moves to take the case from Suzie. The young woman recoils.

'No!' she protests violently. '*No!*'

In one smooth movement the man raises his pistol, aims it between the young woman's eyes and pulls the trigger.

The bullet enters Suzie's skull, leaving a neat hole the size of a pebble in her forehead, but the back of her head is a mess of blood and bone, brain matter.

The woman's body drops into a soft crumple of slender limbs and cloth.

Peter is trembling from head to toe. A keening sound comes involuntarily from his throat.

'You didn't need to kill her,' Stella says. She is glad her tone is authoritative and doesn't reveal her fear.

The man doesn't answer. He grabs the case.

The weapons remain trained on her and Peter as the man steps backwards down the corridor. He vanishes through the door. She watches his men leave. The instant they are out of view she races after them but the door is locked. She spins round and tears to the other end of the corridor to find that door is locked too. By the time she summons help, it is too late. The men and the case are gone.

It is after midnight and Stella stands quietly and alone, wondering how to salvage the situation. She needs something from left field that can't implicate her, something unpredictable, something *random*, as her daughter might say. When an idea comes to her, she closes her eyes and wonders whether her conscience will ever forgive her for entering Dan's life again.

## CHAPTER ONE

*Thursday 22 November, 10.04 a.m.*

Dan Forrester was in aisle five of his local Tesco supermarket, struggling to decide whether Jenny wanted a well-known branded packet of noodles or the cheaper generic version, blissfully unaware that in the next few minutes his life would be ripped to pieces.

It wouldn't be the first time.

He already knew how fragile life could be. That the wall between sanity and insanity, life and death, was paper-thin. One moment, life was mundane and ordinary, even boring, the next it tilted on its axis and plunged into chaos. Dan had survived the chaos before and was now in a place of harmony where the most stressful thing he had to think about was which type of noodles to buy.

'Daddydaddydaddy!'

Aimee tore down the aisle towards him like a sparkling Catherine wheel, a blur of white-blond hair and pink tinsel yelling at the top of her voice.

'I found it, foundit foundit!'

She narrowly missed his trolley and smacked into his shins, triumphantly waving a packet of chicken stock cubes in one hand while grabbing a fold in his jeans to stop herself from falling over with the other. Her face was flung back, her beaming smile like a laser straight to his heart.

‘Well done, pumpkin.’

‘I’m *not* a pumpkin. Pumpkins are *fat*.’

‘OK. Well done, carrot.’

‘Carrot?!’ Her screech of indignation made several shoppers nearby flinch and give him stares of disapproval, but he was too old to be bothered by what other people thought. He was forty in two weeks’ time. What was that all about? He’d been sixteen when his father turned forty – *ancient* – but here he was with flecks of grey growing through his hair just like Dad.

‘OK,’ he said. ‘Celery.’

‘Daddy, I’m not a *vegetable*.’

‘Really?’ He affected surprise. ‘Not even an avocado? I love avocados.’

Aimee did a twirl, arms outstretched. ‘Avocado, avocado, avocado,’ she sang. ‘I’m an avocaaado.’

Dan went back to his inspection of noodles satisfied he’d distracted her nicely from the subject of *fat*, which her best friend Tara had introduced her to at the weekend. Before her sleepover Aimee had had no idea what a calorie was, but now she was picking up cereal boxes trying to read the sides, determined to find out how many calories were in a Cheerio, whether she was having too many and if she should go on a diet. Apparently Tara’s mother was obsessed with her weight and Aimee wanted

to know if she should be too. Jenny had had to restrain Dan from marching over the road and jamming Tara's mother's head inside a cereal packet.

'What else can I get, Daddy?' She was still twirling.

He pretended to think. 'Hmm. Well, one thing we really need is a reindeer for the hall table. I don't know which sort, though. They come in all colours. Gold, pink, silver or just plain brown.'

Her eyes brightened. 'You mean a *chocolate* reindeer?'

'Do you think you'll be able to find one?'

Aimee scampered away, heading for the aisle-end display of Christmas chocolates. He could keep an eye on her there. Without consciously making a decision, he put the cheaper noodles in his trolley and began to head for the spice rack further down. His mind was on nothing but ground ginger and dried chillies when he felt a familiar tell-tale prickle at the back of his neck.

Someone was watching him.

He didn't swing round to see who it might be, but maintained his inspection of condiments. After ten seconds or so, he turned to his trolley and dropped in a small bottle of ground ginger. At the same time, he took in the woman out of the corner of his eye. She was still watching him. This time, a small smile curved on her lips, as though she knew he was observing her.

Late fifties, she had glossy waves of dark hair threaded with silver. Strong jaw, cut glass cheekbones. Slender, wiry body. Understated trouser suit. Still smiling, expression warm, she stepped towards him.

'Dan,' she said.

Something hitched in his chest at the sound of her voice.

'I'm sorry?' he said. He didn't recognise her.

She came to stand in front of him. Her eyes were clear and candid, the colour of burnt hazelnuts. She carried no shopping. A plain leather satchel hung from her shoulder.

'You don't remember me.' She stated it as a fact.

Her clothes weren't cheap, but they weren't expensive either. Middle of the road. Bland. The same couldn't be said for her shoes, however, which were sleek high-heeled black leather with a patent finish. Smart and sexy. She could be a secretary or a barrister.

'I'm Stella. Stella Reavey.'

As she said her name, he felt a lightness enter him. Perhaps he *did* know her after all. She put out her hand. It seemed churlish not to take it. Her skin was warm and smooth, her grip strong.

'We used to work together,' she said.

'Er . . .' He wished Jenny was here instead of getting her hair cut across the road. After his breakdown five years ago he struggled to remember a lot of things. Some were small, like not remembering a favourite café or meeting an old friend for a pub lunch one Sunday, but others were huge, like not remembering anything about the office job he'd had before Luke and Aimee were born.

'Interesting how some things have stayed with you,' she told him, moving briefly to give some space to a blowsy woman walking past with her toddler in the trolley child seat. 'You knew I was watching you but you didn't give anything away. I guess it shows that our training sticks with us even if we don't realise it.'

She'd used the word *training*. He said, 'Are you a driving instructor too?'

For a moment she looked as though she was unsure how to react, whether to laugh or cry. 'No.' She cleared her throat. Glanced over her shoulder, then back. 'I'm something entirely different. So are you, although you don't know it.'

His patience thinned the moment she began talking in riddles. Some people thought it amusing to play games with an amnesiac but joking around with someone who had suffered memory loss due to a colossal personal trauma was insupportable as far as he was concerned. His psychiatrist, Dr Orvis Fatik, told him people played tricks on him because they enjoyed the sense of control they wielded, especially if, before his memory was damaged, he had been the more dominant in the relationship. But, whatever the explanation, Dan rarely forgave them for making him feel stupid.

'I knew this wasn't going to be easy,' she continued, 'but I couldn't see any other way.' Her eyes were on his, frank and sincere. 'We're out of options. We need your help, Dan . . .'

He flicked a glance past Stella Reavey and down the aisle to see Aimee waving at him. She was holding a toy, an oversized white puppy, complete with red matching collar and lead. Her expression was pleading. He shook his head at her, making a pair of antlers with his fingers. *Reindeer*, he mouthed. She pouted in return but nodded.

'We need to find someone called Cedric. It isn't his real name, but a code name. CEDRIC.'

She was looking at him expectantly, as though he might suddenly clap his hands to his head and shout, 'Cedric! Of course!' but instead, Dan looked pointedly around the supermarket. 'Is there a hidden camera here somewhere?' he asked. His tone was biting. 'Did Matt put you up to this? Are he and his buddies cracking up in the car park?'

Last Christmas Matt had hired a stripper to approach Dan in a pub, pretending she was his ex-girlfriend. It had been embarrassing and humiliating and, although Dan had laughed it off, inside he had been seething. This time, however, he wasn't going to roll over and play nice and he changed his body language to exude aggression. To his surprise, Stella didn't back down. She lifted her chin and held his gaze, showing she wasn't easily intimidated.

'Matt?' she queried.

'An old school friend. He's renowned for his sick sense of humour.'

'God, no.' She looked shocked. 'It's not like that at *all*. Please believe me, Dan. Just listen to me for a moment.'

There was something so urgent about her, so intense – as though she longed to plunge her arms inside him and touch his inner core and connect with him – that he briefly overrode his instinct to turn his back on her.

'Thank you,' she breathed. 'Look, I'm sorry to drop in Cedric's name like that, but a professor of neurology at a brain research institute told me recently that sometimes memories can break through, even in the toughest cases of dissociative amnesia.'

It all depends on whether the biochemical pathways allow a particular memory to be recalled. Obviously Cedric has been blocked or disrupted . . .' She ran a hand distractedly through her hair. 'I know this is difficult, but you need to know we used to work together before your breakdown. For the government, where –'

'In the Immigration Department?' he cut in, his interest piqued. He'd been told this was where he used to work when he and Jenny had lived in London. Perhaps he *did* know her.

Stella blinked. 'Not exactly.'

'Where was the office?' he asked, deciding to test her.

'Westminster.'

*Correct.*

'Who was my boss?' he asked.

'I was. But the person we reported to . . . I'm afraid I can't tell you who he is. Not yet.'

*Wrong answer.* His boss hadn't been a woman but a tall man with spectacles and untidy red hair. Jenny had shown him a photograph of him taken at an office Christmas party eight years ago.

Stella nibbled her lip. 'It's maddening that I'm not authorised to tell you much, but you have to trust me when I say a situation has arisen that is extremely urgent. It's a security issue, hence the need for discretion but –'

'I think you ought to stop right now,' Dan said stiffly. He should have ignored her from the start and he was angry at himself for not trusting his instincts. It had to be another prank of Matt's. He couldn't think what else she was doing here. His

attention flashed to check on Aimee and when he couldn't see her his blood pressure spiked only to fall a second later when she suddenly reappeared.

'Dan. Listen, *please*.' Stella's tone was earnest. 'We used to work closely together, OK? And when I say closely, I don't mean sharing an office, although we did do that too. I mean we depended on each other, *really* depended . . .' She paused as though struggling to find the right words.

To his relief, Aimee began walking down the aisle towards them. The quicker they got out of here the better, but Aimee was taking it slowly, her tongue pressed against her lower lip as she concentrated on not dropping the large gold-foil wrapped reindeer.

Stella's gaze clicked straight to Aimee and then straight back to him. His heart went cold. She knew Aimee?

'We depended upon each other in the field,' Stella went on, her words coming faster. 'We were a team. I saved your life once. You saved mine too.'

He stared at her. *What?*

'Look . . .' She turned her neck and pulled down her jacket collar. 'See this?'

He stared. The scar was the length of his thumb and crawled like a grey worm across her neck muscles, puckering at each end.

'You know the scar on your abdomen?' Stella said. 'You got it in the same firefight.'

No way. He'd had enough of this. He was out of here. He didn't care if Matt was involved or not. She was creeping him out big time.

'Daddy . . .' Aimee was standing expectantly in front of him, holding out the golden reindeer, waiting for him to take it and put it in the trolley.

'Hi, Aimee,' Stella said.

'Hi.'

Dan didn't hesitate. He whipped round to Stella. Gripped her upper arm and swung her around so they faced away from Aimee. 'How the fuck do you know my daughter's name?' he hissed.

'Hey, steady on, Dan.' She looked alarmed. 'You're hurting me.'

He didn't relax his grip. He pushed his face close to hers. His tone was ice-cold. 'You say another word to my daughter, and I will kill you.'

Stella fixed him with a clear gaze but as he stared her down he saw a flicker of uncertainty.

'Christ,' she murmured. 'You're bloody scary when you want to be. No wonder Bernard warned me to be careful, but I honestly thought that when you saw me something in your memory might –'

'Stop,' he hissed. 'Not another word. My daughter and I are leaving now. I don't want to see you again. Got it?'

He turned to Aimee and put her reindeer in the trolley. 'Time to go, sweet pea.' Holding Aimee's hand in his, he started to wheel the trolley towards the exit.

'Daddy, slow down!'

'Sorry, sweetie, but I'm in a hurry.'

He glanced over his shoulder but Stella seemed to have vanished. Grabbing his phone he rang his old school buddy.

'Yo, Dan the Man,' Matt answered. 'What can I do you for?'

‘Have you just sent a woman called Stella Reavey to wind me up?’

‘What? Stella *who*?’

Matt’s bafflement sounded genuine but Dan pushed on.

‘Some woman in the supermarket is claiming to be from my past.’

‘Is she attractive?’ Matt brightened. ‘If she is, hang on to her until I get there, OK? You’re married, remember?’

‘She wasn’t picking me up, you idiot. She . . .’ – he paused briefly to amend what he’d been about to say – ‘. . . obviously made a mistake.’

He hung up, wondering if Stella Reavey was some kind of stalker. She looked so *normal* – sounded sane too – but she’d been way off the wall. Had he overreacted? Not as far as protecting Aimee was concerned. The woman knew enough about him to get him interested but then things had started to unravel. Him, caught in a firefight? His scar was from an accident in his workshop when he’d been repairing the back door of their old home and the chisel slipped. Jenny had rushed him to hospital where he’d had six stitches. Apparently the blood stain on the workshop floor had still been there when they’d sold the house a year later.

Was the woman on drugs? He drove cars for a living for Chrissakes. He didn’t get involved in gun battles. He used to be a civil servant, a paper pusher, and the closest he would have got to any weaponry was watching a cop show on TV. The most excitement he got in life was when the lawnmower refused to start. Well, that wasn’t quite true, considering yesterday one of his clients had decided to overtake when specifically asked

not to do so, narrowly escaping a head-on collision. What was it with some men that they wouldn't listen? They had to show they knew better, he guessed, especially when behind the wheel of a Porsche 911. Dan far preferred teaching women high performance driving because they didn't have the same type of ego and tended to brake when he told them to.

He made his way past a short queue of people at the 'cash only' checkout, wondering whether he should report Stella to the police. Ditching the trolley at the far end of the supermarket he headed for the exit. Aimee glanced up at him then back at the trolley. 'Daddy, you've forgotten the shopping.'

'I've got to make a phone call,' he told her. 'We'll get another reindeer when I'm through.'

'But we won't have anything to eat tonight.'

'We'll eat out.'

Her expression lifted. 'Can we go to Candy's?'

Candy's was her favourite café, which was currently decked out in carpets of fake snow and sleigh bells. The staff wore elves' outfits.

'Candy's it is.'

'Yay!' Aimee was leaping with excitement as they walked outside into a light drizzle. He helped put Aimee's hood up, and at the same time he heard Stella's voice, soft but insistent as she fell into step with them. Gritting his teeth, he tried to ignore her.

'Haven't you ever wondered why you're so secretive?' she asked. 'Why you have a great memory for faces? Why you can listen to three conversations at once without appearing to do so? Tell me, Dan, why do you always look for the exits when

you enter a room? Why do you hate sitting with your back to the window? And what about your job? Why do you think you chose performance driving? Not for the money, I'm sure. My guess is because it's the most exciting thing you could find to do.'

She glanced across at him but he refused to look at her. 'Tell me if I'm wrong,' she said. 'You like the flexibility of doing free-lance work. You like not knowing what next week might bring. You also like being in demand and although you don't earn huge amounts of money, you don't earn peanuts either. But still. My bet would be that after five years of doing pretty much the same thing, you're bored rigid but daren't admit it. Least of all to your wife.'

Dan was gritting his teeth so hard he wondered why they didn't shatter. Keeping himself between Stella and Aimee, he said to his daughter, 'Keep hold of my hand, no matter what.'

'Yes, Daddy.' Aimee was staring across at Stella, wide-eyed.

'But should anything happen,' he continued, 'you run to Mummy at the hairdressers. You know where it is?'

'Yes.'

Reaching into his fleece pocket he brought out his mobile phone. Dialed 999.

'Which service do you require?' A woman answered promptly.

'Police,' Dan said.

'Putting you through.'

There was a click, then another woman said, 'Police. What is your emergency?'

'I have a woman here who is threatening me and my daughter, and I believe she is dangerous. I need the police immediately.'

‘Where are you?’

Dan gave the dispatcher the details. Stella had fallen silent, but she was still walking alongside. Christ, he thought. She is definitely a hamper short of a picnic. He thought she’d vanish the second he called the police.

The dispatcher continued to ask questions.

‘Has she hurt either of you?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Is she armed?’

‘I think I saw a knife,’ Dan said.

He hadn’t seen anything of the sort but he wasn’t going to mess around with Aimee here. He knew the police would prioritise his call now.

‘I’m sending a car to you immediately. Please stay on the line.’

Dan strode out, wanting to get to Jenny, who would keep Aimee safe while he dealt with Stella.

‘I know you want me out of here, Dan,’ Stella said, ‘but I can’t leave. I’m sorry. This is bigger than both of us.’

Keeping the phone against his ear, Dan took a route through the car park that didn’t go past his car. He didn’t want Aimee to pick it out, show it to Stella.

‘We just want to borrow you,’ Stella said. ‘For a day, maybe two. But no more, I promise. We simply want you to pretend your memory’s coming back. That’s all. I wish I could brief you properly, but I wasn’t allowed to. Not until you’re on board. All I can say is it’s a black file.’

A minnow of memory darted through his mind but it was so fast he failed to catch it.

‘Which means it’s top-secret as well as extremely urgent. I’m truly sorry for being so cryptic but we couldn’t think of another way. We’ll pay you, of course, but then you’re not particularly turned on by money, are you? And once we’ve completed the mission, you can go back to your normal life.’ He felt more than saw her gaze intensify. ‘But only if you want to, that is. You might find yourself tempted to do something a little more out of the ordinary afterwards.’

He led Aimee around the car park barrier. Jenny’s hairdresser’s was two hundred yards away, on the opposite side of the road. He didn’t like bringing Stella into Jenny’s proximity, but he didn’t see he had a choice. Aimee was his priority.

*Mr Forrester?*

It was the dispatcher.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Please tell the police to hurry.’

‘They will be with you in two minutes.’

At the same moment, he heard a siren in the distance. Stella did nothing to indicate she heard it.

‘Dan,’ she said. ‘You’re not giving me anything to work with here. You’re not giving me a chance. You’re blocking me off. I can’t let you do that.’

He kept his teeth gritted and didn’t respond.

‘You give me no choice.’ Frustration laced her voice. ‘I wasn’t going to tell you this because I didn’t want to destabilise you or cause you more pain. I was hoping you’d be intrigued enough to want to know more but it’s obviously not enough. I know you won’t believe what I’m going to say, but trust me, every word is true. It’s up to you what you do with it.’

He tightened his hold on Aimee's hand. He was sweating, his heart knocking. Thank God, the siren was closing in. The police couldn't get here fast enough as far as he was concerned.

'Your son,' she said. 'Luke. He didn't die in a hit-and-run. Yes, he died in your arms, but he didn't die on Brick Lane as you've been told.'

His heart stopped.

Liquid ice poured through his veins.

*She knew about Luke.*

'You're not who you think you are, Dan. Your identity, your past, is a lie. Your entire family has been lying to you.'

## CHAPTER TWO

‘Paperwork,’ said Grace, scrabbling in her handbag for her purse, ‘should be abolished.’

She was in her local deli, getting supplies to sustain her through the usual mountain of paperwork that blighted every GP’s life: a holiday cancellation form followed by a referral; a medical report for an insurance company; a fitness to work document. To complete even the simplest form she had to check the patient’s entire record. Carelessness or an inaccurate report could have serious consequences down the line, so she liked to make sure every ‘t’ was crossed, every ‘i’ dotted.

‘I’ll get a box of matches if you like. We can have a bonfire. Toast some marshmallows.’

Jamie gave a smile – genuinely warm and friendly and utterly uncomplicated – and, as usual, she couldn’t help but smile back.

Younger than her, with dreadlocks and a Celtic cross with feathered wings tattooed on the nape of his neck, Jamie had been the first person to welcome her into the village six months previously. Although Ross had helped her with the main move at a weekend, she’d still had a handful of items to shift, and on the Monday she’d been struggling to lift a pot plant from the back of her car when

Jamie had appeared and given her a hand. He'd helped unload the rest of the car, and when he'd seen the jars of honey she'd collected from Devon, Scotland and France, had asked if she was going to keep a beehive. Her garden was, apparently, perfect for bees and if she was interested he'd be happy to introduce her to the art of bee-keeping. Grace had been enchanted by the idea, especially when she learned he helped look after several beehives for people he did odd jobs for in the village, including the surgery. Today he was helping out at the deli, making sandwiches.

'That advice you gave me,' he said cheerfully as he handed her an egg mayo on granary. 'Fantastic.'

'What advice?' She was baffled.

'You encouraged me to start masturbating.'

'Jamie, I never said that,' she scolded, pretending she couldn't see the disconcerted glances of the other customers.

'You did! You told me that men who ejaculated more than five times each week in their twenties, thirties and forties, reduced their risk of getting prostate cancer by a third.'

He was right. They'd been sitting in her kitchen one evening when she'd told him about a report from the *British Journal of Urology* which said just that. She couldn't remember how their discussion had been initiated – he'd probably heard something about the subject on the radio – and although she couldn't remember discussing masturbation with him, she supposed it was the same thing. Ejaculating was ejaculating, after all.

'My mates and I were talking about it,' he went on. 'We thought we should take this information to a wider audience. Help advertise prostate cancer awareness. So we've started a

Twitter campaign and we're going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds.'

'Well done you,' she said.

'Dr Grace . . .' He came round the side of the counter and lowered his voice, suddenly looking serious. 'Can I come and see you privately? I want to talk to you about something.' A sudden look of distress crossed his face, so intense, she felt a moment's alarm.

'What is it?' she asked.

He looked away. 'It's just that someone I know . . . well, I don't know her. Not really. I only met Bella once. But she was really nice. I just heard that she's gone missing and it's made me feel . . . I don't know . . .' His voice trailed off. He looked at her miserably.

'Oh, Jamie.' Her heart went out to him. 'That's really tough.'

'Yeah.'

'Look, I should finish work around seven or so. Do you want to come over and talk about it? And if you could check whether I've insulated the bees properly for winter I'd be eternally grateful.'

He bit his lip. 'I can't do tonight. I've got to meet some friends at the pub.'

'Tomorrow?'

Another smile, but this one was authentic and tinged with relief. 'Yeah, that would be great. I'll bring an entrance reducer for your hive too.'

Grace paid him for her sandwich and coffee, then headed to the surgery. As she stepped into her office, her phone rang – the landline – and she prayed it wasn't an emergency that she'd have

to leave the surgery for or she'd never complete her paperwork. But it wasn't an emergency; it was her mother.

Grace nearly fell over in surprise.

'Mum?' She couldn't remember a single time when her mother had rung her at work. She never rang Grace simply for a chat, either. The call always had a reason behind it – like plans for Christmas and birthdays – and she suddenly saw how very self-contained they both were.

'Darling, have you got a moment?' Her mother's voice was brisk.

'Of course.'

'I need some advice.'

Grace blinked. 'What about?'

Her mother didn't say anything for a moment. Grace heard a hollow *shhh* on the line, indicating her mother might be outside, and then she heard the faint sound of a siren coming through the receiver.

'Where are you?' Grace asked.

Her mother didn't answer. She said, 'I've just met an old friend.'

'Oh?' Grace was curious. 'Who's that?'

'Nobody you know. But the thing is, he doesn't remember me.'

'How come?'

Another silence, which was most unlike her mother. It was as though she was trying to work out what to say. Either she was being ultra-cautious or she was finding the conversation difficult.

Finally, her mother said, 'He's suffering from dissociative amnesia.'

‘Oh. I’m sorry.’

‘Is there *anything* I can do right now to jog his memory? It’s really . . . quite important. I have to talk to him, make him listen to me, but he refuses.’

Grace heard the frustration in her mother’s voice, but there was also something more – a tremor of emotional pain.

‘I’m not sure what to suggest,’ Grace said honestly. She didn’t know the person or their medical history or how he might react to her mother trying to jog his memory. ‘Have you tried his GP?’

‘No time.’

‘What’s the urgency?’

‘Later, Grace.’

Although she was surprised at the uncharacteristic call and the even more uncommon request, Grace trusted her mother and decided not to waste time demanding answers to the questions crowding her mind.

‘If he’s suffered a high-level, stress-induced trauma –’

‘Yes.’

‘It could take years before something triggers his recollection.’

‘I know that, darling,’ her mother said, and although her voice was even, Grace felt the reprimand and guessed her mother had already done her research. She probably knew as much if not more about her friend’s condition than Grace did. ‘But I hoped you might have had someone in your surgery . . . or heard about someone’s memory suddenly returning. Something that I might be able to use.’

Grace put her hand over her eyes to intensify her concentration. ‘The only case I know of personally was when a young

girl watched her father rape and kill her mother. She had no memory of it until twenty years later when she saw certain facial expressions of her son, which triggered her recollection. I know you want your friend to remember you now, but you can't rush these things. I'd suggest you simply be yourself. Don't be someone you're not by pushing him because he may not recognise that behaviour . . .'

Silence. Grace heard the siren growing louder.

'Mum?'

'I'm sorry,' her mother said. 'I shouldn't have bothered you. I just hoped you might . . . create a miracle.' She gave a soft bark of laughter but it wasn't humorous. It was the sound of despair.

'Mum, where are you?'

'Darling, I must go.'

'What's with the siren?' Grace asked. She felt a surge of alarm as she recognised it as a police siren, not an ambulance. 'Is everything OK?'

'Love you.'

Grace was about to say *love you too*, but the line went dead. Her mother had hung up.

## CHAPTER THREE

Dan watched a police car appear at the end of the street, fluorescent stripes gleaming through the rain.

He stepped out and beckoned urgently. His ears were ringing, his mouth dry.

Stella Reavey pocketed her mobile phone. He'd heard every word of her conversation to someone she'd called *darling* – her husband? her psychiatrist? – and didn't discount the likelihood she'd staged it for his benefit. As if one overheard conversation would convince him she wasn't lying.

The car switched off its siren and came to a halt. Two officers climbed out. One was in his thirties, male, close-cropped dark hair, the other younger, female, with acne scars on her cheeks. Both had epaulettes embroidered with their names and collar numbers, a new initiative by the Gwent police to try to make their officers more approachable. Jim Parsons and Vicky Cross.

'Mr Forrester?' Jim Parsons asked.

'Yes. This is the woman who's been harassing us,' Dan pointed at Stella, who was standing there looking about as dangerous as a day-old kitten. 'If you wouldn't mind keeping her here, I'd like to take my daughter to my wife. She's having her hair cut.'

He indicated the Loose Ends salon across the road. 'I'll come back immediately.'

'Are you OK?' Vicky Cross ducked down to ask Aimee, who nodded. She'd put her thumb in her mouth and her eyes were as wide as dinner plates. 'Great,' said the PC. 'Let's get you to your mum, shall we?' She held out her hand but Aimee ducked behind Dan, clutching his knees. 'OK,' she said, glancing at Dan. 'Let's all go together. Jim can stay and talk with . . .' She looked pointedly at Stella.

'Stella Reavey,' said Stella and to Dan's disbelief, she reached into her bag, brought out a business card and handed it to Jim Parsons as though they were all networking at some high-flying corporate event.

'Let's go.' Dan's voice was brusque.

Vicky Cross walked with him and Aimee to the salon. When he opened the door, he saw Jenny at the far end with Stacey the hairdresser. The two women were chatting. Jenny was laughing, giving a funny little snort in the middle – almost a snigger – that meant they were talking about something personal, probably rude. Her hair was dampened flat against her neck, the colour of wet straw, but when it was dry it would lighten into pale yellow waves. Long limbed with blue eyes and a mischievous sense of humour, all she had to do was twitch her little finger and he came running. Jenny and Aimee. His two girls, the centre of his world. His *raison d'être*.

Jenny gave another snort but then her eyes went to the mirror and the reflected image of Dan, Aimee, and a uniformed officer. She froze for a moment, her face draining of colour. Then she

exploded from her chair. Stacey's scissors went flying and she stumbled backwards 'What the . . .'

'It's OK, sweetheart,' Dan told his wife, soothingly. 'Everything's fine. Aimee's fine. I promise.'

But Jenny was already on her knees and holding Aimee, checking her face, running her hands over her body. 'Honey, what happened?' Her voice was urgent. 'Are you OK? Please God, tell me you're OK. Tell me . . .'

Aimee's face began to crumple under her mother's panic.

'Jen, she's fine.' Dan squatted next to them. 'Aren't you, celery?' He gave Aimee a wink.

'Avocado,' Aimee managed to whisper.

'Not now, Dan.' Jenny rounded on him. 'Tell me what this policewoman's doing here.'

Dan rose to his feet. Jenny stayed with Aimee, stroking her head rhythmically, making crooning noises under her breath.

'A woman harassed us in the supermarket, that's all.' Dan automatically tried to downplay it. 'She wouldn't go away. So I called the police. I wanted to –'

'What woman?'

'She's with my colleague,' the PC said. 'Your husband thought it best that you look after Aimee while we talk to her and your husband about the incident.'

Jenny scrambled to her feet. One side of her hair had been cut and her fringe stuck up in an odd little quiff Dan hadn't seen before.

'Where is she?' Her eyes were wild. She seemed to have forgotten about Aimee and as she began to move to the window

Dan pulled her back and out of sight. She was trembling, her hands fluttering like birds.

‘I don’t want her to see you,’ he said. ‘I don’t want to give her any more ammunition before –’

‘Ammunition?’

‘She claimed to know me. But she doesn’t.’

‘Claimed?’ Her voice began to rise. ‘What does that mean?’

Aimee’s lips were wobbling. Tears starting to form. He said quietly, ‘You’re scaring Aimee.’

‘Christ.’ She put a hand briefly over her eyes. ‘Sorry. It’s just that you’re scaring the crap out of me.’

‘We’re fine,’ he said. ‘Honestly.’

She looked at him for a moment and then, before he could stop her, she was at the window, looking out. She went quite still. Dan sensed a heightening of tension, like an animal catching sight of a predator.

All the hairs rose along his forearms. ‘You recognise her?’

Jenny’s mouth opened but no sound came out.

‘Jenny?’ When he touched her arm she jumped as though electrified. ‘Do you know her?’

She swung her head to look at him. Worked her mouth before she spoke. ‘No.’ Her voice was steady. ‘I’ve never seen her before.’

‘Are you sure?’ He was frowning.

‘I’m sure.’ She moved away from the window, her movements slow, her gaze unfocused. ‘For a moment . . . I thought it was someone else . . . An old school friend. But it’s not. What does she want?’

He didn’t think he’d tell her that it was to find someone called Cedric. That would really freak her out. Keeping his voice low,

he said, 'The best thing for Aimee right now is that you get on with your day as usual. Finish getting your hair cut. I don't want this to get blown into anything it isn't, OK? Can you do that for her?' *And for you*, he wanted to add, but didn't.

Jenny looked at Dan, straight into his eyes, but he wasn't sure if she was seeing him. She said, 'Of course. Aimee comes first.' Her tone held no inflection.

Dan watched Jenny turn and give the policewoman a nod. 'Thank you.' She was stiffly polite. Then she ducked down to Aimee and said, 'Time to finish my haircut, don't you think?'

Aimee looked anxiously at Dan. He said, 'I'll be back soon, hunny bunny, then we'll go home, maybe watch a movie before we go to Candy's later. How does that sound?'

'Can we watch *How to Train Your Dragon*?'

Aimee's favourite movie of the moment.

'Yup.'

The anxiety vanished beneath a brilliant smile.

As Dan left the salon, Stacey settled Jenny back into her chair. Aimee was chatting brightly to Stacey. As he glanced back, Dan noticed how pale and quiet Jenny seemed. He put it down to the shock of seeing a police officer with Aimee. The last time she had received a personal visit from a PC was when she'd been informed of Luke's death. No wonder Jenny had reacted the way she had.

As he stepped outside, Dan's pulse rate increased. Stella Reavey was standing by the patrol car, but PC Jim Parsons wasn't with her, questioning her, or even looking at her. He was leaning his hip against the boot of his car, talking on his mobile and holding up what looked like Stella Reavey's business card.

He seemed to be reading from it. Dan walked quickly across the road, PC Cross thudding alongside. As he neared, Jim Parsons nodded a few times before putting his phone into his pocket. Walking to Stella, the police officer returned her business card. Dan swept the card from her fingers but she didn't protest.

*Stella Reavey. DCA & Co.*

Aside from a landline telephone number, that was all that the card showed. Nothing else. No address, no email, no website.

'Very minimal,' he remarked acidly. And pocketed it.

Again, Stella didn't protest. Instead, she reached into her handbag and brought out another card. 'I'd like you to have this one as well.'

It was an identical card but on the reverse side it showed a handwritten address and mobile number. The writing was small and neat, very precise.

'My home details,' she said.

Dan looked at Jim Parsons. 'I'd like to get a restraining order against this woman. Make sure she never comes near me or my family again.'

'You have my word that I won't,' Stella said.

'Shut up.' His voice was flat. 'I'm talking to the police.'

'And the police,' the PC said with a sigh, 'need a moment. Sorry, sir, if you don't mind . . .' Parsons took his colleague aside and started talking. Dan watched their body language. He saw the female PC's eyes widen slightly then flick to Stella Reavey with an expression of . . . what? Surprise? He couldn't be certain, but then she began to look interested, even intrigued. The policewoman's gaze swept over Stella Reavey, taking in

her apparel, her shoes, her bag, absorbing every detail of her appearance. Why?

PC Parsons brought out his phone and dialled. He spoke briefly before passing it to his colleague who didn't say much, mostly listened. All the while, her gaze remained on Stella Reavey. Finally, she hung up. Gave a nod to Jim Parsons. Both police officers came and stood with Dan.

Parsons cleared his throat and fixed his gaze on a space past Dan's shoulder, clearly uncomfortable. He said, 'I'm sorry, sir, but we have to return to the station.' To Stella Reavey, he said, 'I'd rather you didn't do this again.'

'Sorry for the inconvenience,' she said smoothly.

Both officers gave a nod and moved towards their patrol car.

'Hey! Wait!' Dan strode after them. 'This woman harassed me and my daughter. I want her dealt with. I want her *warned off*, and if you won't help me I won't be responsible for my actions . . .'

Jim Parsons glanced at Stella who shook her head briefly. Neither officer looked at Dan as they climbed inside their car, buckled up.

'What the hell is going on?!' Dan yelled.

Jim Parsons buzzed down his window. Jerked his chin at Stella. 'Ask her.'

With that, Parsons started the engine, shoved the stick into gear and drove away.

Dan felt a wave of anger and frustration so strong he felt sick.

'You . . .' He spun round to see Stella was walking away. He jogged after her.

She said, 'Dan, you've got to calm down.'

'Don't you dare tell me what to do.'

'Come and see me when you're calmer. I'll be at home all day tomorrow.'

She turned towards the road. It was only then that he took in the black Jaguar with darkened windows pulling up next to the pavement. Stella moved to the passenger door, her hand reaching for the handle.

'Hey,' he said.

She didn't respond. Opening the door, she slipped inside. The car was still moving.

'Wait!' he called.

But the door was already closed and the car was accelerating away. Dan stood in the street with her card in his hand, watching it go.