

Prologue

2011

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Matthew 5:7

Eilish wondered why the fuck she bothered with any of it, but she knew that the feeling wouldn't last. It never did.

Sometimes it was brought home to her that the businesses were all she really had now – and this outcome was something she couldn't have done anything to avoid. Life certainly seemed to throw her more than her fair share of shit-storms, and she could do nothing but sort them out as best she knew how.

She looked down at the photographs. It didn't seem possible that she was here, in her flat, looking at the smiling faces of the people she loved and wondering how – or even if – she should address the catastrophe that had befallen them.

It had all happened so fast, and with such precise planning and foresight, she couldn't help but be impressed. One thing she had been taught in her family was to respect anyone who had a bit of nous about them. You might not like them – and you might want to kill them – but you had to admire their acumen. It was only fair and honest to give credit where it was due.

She poured herself another large Scotch and took a deep gulp. She glanced at one of the photos scattered around her on her bed; it was of her and her brothers as kids. They looked so happy and carefree. But that was another lie, this time for the camera. She wondered how many other families had the same

snapshots in their albums – of gap-toothed, smiling kids with their expensive clothes, playing against beautiful backdrops – when in reality they were slowly dying inside.

She was the youngest, the only girl, and they'd treated her as such.

She couldn't get the earlier phone call with her mother out of her head – it was like a worm eating away at her.

She rubbed her belly and wondered if she had really done the right thing, but she had to believe that she had. She had kept her pregnancy secret from everyone around her – and that was all to the good now. As her mother had said, the children in this family were cursed, brought into the world with pain and without mercy.

That was something the Davis family were good at, as anyone would tell you. There was no mercy for anyone – least of all their own flesh and blood.

Finally, she cried.

Book One

1980

Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good.

Charlotte Whitton (1896–1975)

Chapter One

‘For fuck’s sake, Mum, anyone would think I was a fucking moron the way you carry on.’

Diana Davis sighed and held on to her temper as best she could under the circumstances. She loved this boy of hers, but she was well aware that he had a lot to learn where the game was concerned. Angus thought that the sword was mightier than the pen. What he needed to understand was that anyone could pick a fight and earn a reputation for violence – that was the easy part. A knife, a hammer or a gun would quickly make a body known to those who didn’t matter! The real deal was making sure you got a rep with people who actually *did* matter.

‘Well, Angus, you *are* a fucking moron on occasion, that’s the bottom line.’ She lit herself a cigarette, taking a deep pull on it to calm her anger, as she said candidly, ‘You do *not* take anything on yourself until you run it by me. That’s the law! For your information, son, you picked a fight with the one man I am currently relying on to bring serious money into my business. *My* business, not yours, incidentally!’ She shook her head in frustration. ‘Like I need this in my life! I’m fighting against men all the time. I don’t want to be fighting you too, son. And if you don’t wind your neck in then I will.’

Angus Davis knew that his mother spoke the truth. At nineteen,

he was still too young to be taken seriously, and sometimes he was fool enough to try and interfere with things that were, frankly, way over his head. But he did these things for the right reasons – he was trying to look out for his mum. Not that Diana Davis needed looking out for. She could piss all over most of the men she dealt with. And she dealt with a lot of men. Hard men. Men who respected his mother and were more than willing to work with her and for her.

He recognised he had inadvertently undermined her here. It was food for thought. But what bothered him was that the men on their payroll saw him as an extension of her and not as a man in his own right.

‘And it doesn’t help that you and his son aren’t exactly bosom fucking buddies, does it?’

Angus knew when to shut up, and this was one of those times. He had royally clumped Danny Cave while they were both incarcerated in a young offenders’ prison awaiting their bail hearings. No one questioned his mother’s morals, especially not a piece of shite like Danny Cave. Angus guessed that his mother knew exactly what had been said and why the incident had occurred – after all, there was fuck-all that escaped her attention. His dad used to say she was always up before everyone else had set their alarm clocks!

Unlike his mother, Angus didn’t have it in him to turn the other cheek. One of Diana’s great strengths was the ability to ignore whatever interfered with her ultimate goals. She could swallow anything if circumstances played to her favour, plus she knew the people involved were usually relieved that they had been given a swerve and that was something to file away for later. He knew that she was right, that often the best way was the hard way; wipe your mouth and keep your eye on the big picture.

Angus didn't work that way. Diana expected it from him, but her son had what she referred to as a 'loser's temperament', meaning his temper would be his downfall. As she pointed out frequently though, not on her fucking dime. His lack of control was something she couldn't afford, and his reaction to Danny Cave had really yanked her chain.

He could see that, on one level, he had been out of order. But deep inside he still felt he had done the right thing. After all, she was his *mother*. It wasn't like he had had a tear-up over nothing. It didn't matter that she could more than look after herself. This was different. It was family. It was about blood. And Danny Cave had been out of fucking order – even his old man had agreed with that. Clumped his son in the visiting room, in full view of everyone. He was making a point, and Angus understood that: Danny Cave the elder was telling Diana Davis that he had it all under control. He wasn't going to let his son get away with being a lairy ponce.

Not that Diana Davis gave a flying fuck what people said. She never had. As she had told Angus repeatedly, 'You can't educate haddock.' It was only ignorant fuckers who cared about what other people thought. You had to rise above it, as she had. Who gave a shit in the grand scheme of things? You had to ignore the no-marks, or the fact you were bothered showed you were no better than them.

Diana inspired loyalty in those around her and that was because she would move heaven and earth to help a friend in need. That was why people were so enamoured of her. She would also always listen to reason – provided that reasoning was in her favour. If it went against her interests in any way, it never augured well for those on the other side of the bargaining table. If you crossed her she would hunt you down like a rabid dog.

Angus had a lot of his mum in him, but also a good dose of his father. Big Angus had been a renowned bank robber – he was remembered as the main man. He had been huge, well mannered and a prime mover throughout his illustrious career. Most importantly, he could have a row when the need arose. He was excellent at his chosen profession, and that was because he had a reputation for knowing how to plan, how to recruit and how to execute the perfect blag.

People had travelled far and wide for his opinion and for his take on a rob. And he would give his honest opinion – for a price, of course. He could get in and out in nanoseconds, and always made sure that no one was harmed and no one was too frightened during the event. His calm voice was enough to make the people involved do as he requested. The sawn-off shotgun helped too. But, as his mum always said, it was a prop, nothing more.

His father was a hard man but never towards civilians, and that was very important for his son to know. You never harmed anyone who wasn't in the game, and you never brought in anyone who you couldn't trust implicitly.

His mum was a good teacher, and he appreciated that, but Angus was getting older and he was champing at the bit to get himself fully immersed in the world in which he had been brought up. As young as he was, he believed he was destined for great things – that was a given, considering his parentage – but he felt like it was taking too long to get anywhere.

Angus wanted everything immediately. He wanted to be straight in at the top, not still learning the trade like a fucking plumber or a gas fitter. But he was also aware that his mum, as lovely as she was, would take him out without a second's thought if he pushed her too hard. She would not countenance what she

saw as insubordination. She was hard, as hard as fucking nails, when she needed to be.

His granddad had once described her as the only woman he had ever met who not only thought like a man, but could fight like one too. Angus knew the truth of that statement, as did many people who had tried to thwart her over the years. She had fought hammer and tongs to get where she was today. She was at the top of her game, in a predominantly man's world, and that took guts. It also took brains and, more importantly, it took respect. And that was something she had earned in spades.

Unlike his mother, he didn't have her knack for patience, or indeed her knack for thinking things through. That was something that was going to be proved to him very soon.

It would change his life for ever.