

## ONE

and I yank open the buckled driver's door, look down. Just below her hotpants there's the waxy nub of her splintered femur sticking through the flesh of her right thigh. She's screaming, screaming and looking at me, pointlessly pushing at the engine block that's come through the dashboard after she decided to smash her Clio into a wall on her way home from whatever pub or after-work office party she's been to. Yet another one thinking she was clever enough to drive regardless of however many vodka and Red Bulls she's had. I know she's pissed because I can smell it on her breath, her skin, her sweat as she shudders. People are stupid and they never learn, but I say nothing. Now isn't the time.

I kneel on the wet tarmac, take her hands in mine, smile and calmly tell her everything's going to be okay. *Shhh, everything's going to be okay, it's all right, more help is on its way.*

But it isn't going to be okay because I've seen this so many times before and I know this woman, *girl* really, about the same age as Frank's daughter, just a few years older than my Naomi, she could slip away from me any moment now. Here in the dark, in the rain on this shitty side street while her family carry on their New Year preparations, oblivious that it'll be the last they ever plan because this is the evening their nineteen-year-old never comes home from work. And nothing will ever be the same again.

The girl's shivering, moaning, and I can't make out what she's saying, but I know she's gone into shock. The splintered end of her thigh bone is grinding against the metal jammed

up to her midriff and I'm getting her blood on my hands trying to shove the damn thing a centimetre away from the wound. Got to maintain the facade though. Her head has lolled backwards and to one side, her terrified eyes on mine, and I nod to reassure her regardless of what I'm thinking. I turn to Frankie, see the blue strobes of our firearms truck reflected in his glasses, mouth to him, *Paramedics?*

And he shrugs, shakes his head. This is ridiculous, so Frank gets back on the radio, tells ops room to ring the bloody ambulance control again, get an ETA. They tell us it's two minutes away, which isn't good enough. Not nearly.

I kneel again, holding the cold and trembling hands of this young lady, this girl I've never seen before who's becoming quieter by the second, who knows nothing about me. I wonder if I'll be the last person she ever sees. And I wonder if she'll be disappointed.

I keep talking, squeeze her hands, heft my shoulder against the dirty metal of the engine to release some of the pressure on her thighs and pelvis. I hear the sector pandas screech to a stop somewhere in the background, see the Trumptions' wagon reflected in a charity-shop window as it pulls alongside the Clio. The hose monkeys scurry out and start lugging power tools towards us.

When the ambulance arrives I have to prise her fingers from my hands. She sobs, breathes crimson froth, and I know this means her guts are mangled, but still I tell her *it's going to be okay, everything's going to be fine, these people are here to help you now*. I'm lying. I see the faces of the paramedics as I stand to let them at the girl, and know they're treating her just for the sake of treating her. Delaying the inevitable. Going through the motions. Showing willing, like we always do. I walk over to Frank who's stopping traffic in the murk, surrounded by pulsating blue lights. I look at him but don't

have to say anything. He swallows and closes his eyes for a second.

'You tried, Jake,' he says.

'Yeah,' I say, and wish we hadn't been just around the corner when the call came out. Wish we weren't the first at scene. I wish we'd never been here at all.

I'm waiting and watching while the water fairies cut the roof from the car and lift the engine block with their pneumatic toys. The medics hunch over the girl while she's freed from the ruined shell, then they draw her out onto a gurney. Still I see the thigh bone poking upwards like a jagged candle. There's something wrong with her left leg, something I couldn't see from the driver's side door earlier. It takes me a moment to realise the foot is missing, probably still wedged underneath the clutch. I think of it lying there. I hold my hands up, my fingers dark and sticky with her blood.

And I hear a drunken voice call from the pavement, some guy shouting that all coppers are bastards and we never do anything right and if we'd got here quicker we could've saved her. I turn and see him looking right at me. This hundred-yard hero, this skinny little fuckstick in his tracky bots and hoodie, a pondlife brawler from some sink estate with his forearms inked full of prison tats, his fingers loaded with Elizabeth Duke sovereign rings straight from the Argos catalogue. He's leering at me, wobbling his shaved head, so I walk towards him and he flaps his fingers and says *come on, come on then*.

And tonight I've had enough of drunks and I'm completely out of compassion or understanding, so I go right up to him, warn him I'll arrest him for public order. He doesn't give a toss, this Stella monster, he couldn't care less and still the lairiness. Now all the other onlookers are starting to gather round to listen. These onlookers, on their way home from

work or last-minute stocking-up on beers for tonight, they're crowding me. These ordinarily passive members of the public, these respectable businessmen and shop workers and students, they've got that bloodlust now, their own adrenalin dump at this toe-to-toe developing in front of them and, what a surprise, they're turning on me, on this figure of authority, jostling me, curling their lips and asking where I was when their car was robbed, telling me they pay my wages, that I couldn't catch a fuckin' cold.

And I can't have this, can't lose face, so I take the drunk's arm, tell him he's nicked even though he probably doesn't care or understand. He starts fighting it like they all do, flailing his arms and growling that I ain't locking him up for New Year's fuckin' Eve, bra. He's gone as rigid as a toddler mid-tantrum and the performance carries on. We have to use some of the sector boys to restrain him in front of the crowd. So we cuff and stuff him, escort him to the back of the nearest divisional van where the cage door is open and ready, but his feet are on the footplate, pushing backwards to stop us getting him in there. Then his elbow smashes into my eyebrow and it's all I can do not to kill him.

I don't know how long I've been here or how I even got inside, but I'm in the back of the van with him, in the cage, pummelling the fucker, watching in a detached kind of way as my fists then the heels of my tactical boots land on his scalp and neck and torso. He's cowering under the metal bench and Frankie's dragging me out while someone else slams the cage door shut.

I walk away, feel Frank's eyes on me, feel others watching me silently.

I'm bent over, breathing hard, when one of the paramedics jumps from the back of the ambulance. I'm nodding already as he tells me the girl has gone into cardiac arrest, that his

colleague is working on her and they've got to go, though she'll be a Code Blue by the time she gets to Casualty and signed off as DOA by the worn-out junior doctor. Can the police tell the parents, please?

The paramedic walks back to his wagon. They weave through the emergency vehicles and the build-up of civvy traffic and the rubberneckers, then on come the blues and twos and they're gone. The girl's gone.

And it's another one I couldn't save.

placed him in the rear of the van. As I did so, COOPER lashed out with his right arm, his elbow connecting with my left eyebrow. I immediately felt a sharp pain in my eye, and COOPER then began flailing his arms around and resisting my attempts to restrain him. With the assistance of other officers present, he was placed in a Home Office-approved hold and handcuffed to the rear in the stacking method. The Kwik-Cuffs were locked to prevent him causing self-harm, or harm to any officers at scene. The van doors were closed but COOPER continued his violent behaviour. I could hear loud banging noises coming from the rear of the vehicle, and when I checked through the window could see him repeatedly hitting his head on the cage door and the side panels of the van itself. He was then conveyed to Trinity Street Custody Suite.

As a result of the DP's behaviour, I sustained a small cut to my left eyebrow and blurred vision for ten minutes after the incident.

✦ As if anyone will ever read this. Why do I fucking bother. Really?? ✦

- 1745 Code 30 Trinity Street (admin duties re. arrest of COOPER) ———  
 Handover package prepared for the Detained Person. ———  
 Full details of the DP. Dwayne Robert COOPER, 15/11/1986, home address 224 The Waterfront, Bayside BA2 8QE. CRO 133A564/014K. ———  
 PNCId 223/133A564. Matter recorded with Crime Stats Bureau ref. no. 33001024802. COOPER too intoxicated for charge. ———  
 Mght shift to deal ref. S.5 public order and assault police. ———
- 1910 Off duty. ———