

MI LI5E

JODY MEDLAND



## PROLOGUE

DANIEL STAGGERED UP THE STAIRCASE of the plush new apartments that overlooked the Thames. He paused to check he had the right tools in his oversized jacket. Picking locks was the first thing he'd learnt under the guidance of the Ministry and now he could do it faultlessly, even with his eyes closed. But on this day, his mind was far from clear and his hands were unsteady.

He arrived at his victim's door wishing he wasn't bound to comply with orders, orders he had followed blindly and without question, until he met Lauren. Only then did he begin to question the morals behind the Ministry's decisions. Now she was gone, taken by those who raised him as a punishment for his doubt. It was a cruel move, one that made Daniel feel he no longer owed his masters anything.

The door clicked open, Daniel stepped inside, closing it silently behind. He scanned his surroundings. No movement, but the sounds of a running bath. He reached into his jacket and pulled out a jellified transparent mask. He pulled it routinely over his face, stretching it tightly, manoeuvring the perfect fit. The effect was harrowing to anyone who saw it, and there was a certain tragedy in the fact this was the last thing they ever saw.

Daniel glided through the apartment, led by the soft, unsuspecting movement of a woman who hummed gently as she walked from the bathroom to her bedroom. She wore a silk kimono and sat at her dresser as she filed her toenails. Behind her, Daniel inched forward with cat-like silence, his eyes watering as he monitored her. She seemed nice. What could she possibly have done to incur the wrath of his bosses?

Daniel opened his jacket and pulled out the weapon that his employers had requested. There really is something quite menacing about a hammer when it's used on anything other than metal and wood. The look of bewilderment soon turned to fear as the woman turned to face the stranger in her room. The only kindness he could afford was to get it over with quick, but this was made impossible when she screeched and threw things and clawed at him with more force than he'd been expecting.

*Blood all over my hands*, is all Daniel thought as he slayed his victim. *Senseless, mindless blood*. Volleys of claret squirted violently across his expressionless mask as he struck her one last time. She lay alive but helpless, gasping for air. He tossed the hammer to one side and diverted all his energy to his hands as he squeezed the last breaths from her lips.

It was never usually this messy, even when he took down men of great stature, but she'd put up a respectable fight considering she was armed with nothing but a nail file and the feminine items that lay on her dresser. It could have been because she was fierce, it could have been because he underestimated the task, but more likely it was because he hadn't been able to concentrate, not like usual.

As the woman's heart failed, Daniel's grew stronger and beat faster. What remained of her face peered up at him like a broken porcelain doll, and suddenly he was overwhelmed with emotion. Never again would this woman fall in love with a stranger. Never again would she experience feelings of excitement, happiness or joy. All outstanding hopes and dreams would remain unlive. She was nothing now but a mere statistic, another victim attacked in their home, another person who'd died too young.

Once again, the Ministry had won.

# CHAPTER ONE

## The Beginning of the End

The low purring of an engine sounded faint against the heavy rain and the scraping of windscreen wipers. Inside his jet black Jaguar Daniel wore a forlorn expression. His unbranded mobile phone, slick and subtle in design, lay vibrating in the passenger's seat. An unrecognised number illuminated the screen, but Daniel didn't flinch. The phone stopped, revealing this was the eighteenth missed call.

Daniel looked tired, carrying sadness in his shoulders and anger in his eyes. His full name was Daniel Jacobs – at least, that's who he'd become. After years of loyal service to the Ministry his childhood was a blur. Only vague reminiscent memories shed any light on where he came from.

He often experienced vivid thoughts that were triggered by the strangest things: a word, a colour, a smell, usually when he least expected it, but he could never determine whether they were flashbacks or random thoughts. This kept him in a mental state of limbo, and not being able to tell the difference between a memory and a daydream made friendships hard to come by, let alone keep.

The vibrations returned. Still Daniel didn't bother to answer. He didn't even care to glance in the handset's direction. Instead, his gaze was locked forward, staring pensively through the speckled windscreen towards a monstrously tall brick wall that stood across the deserted street. It was early afternoon, but the dark grey clouds had already gathered on what was a wonderfully gloomy day. Daniel revved the engine and breathed heavily as he considered his suicide.

The phone stopped, allowing Daniel to collect his thoughts. His anxieties quietened and he became unexpectedly calm as he embraced a moment of clarity. He was ready. He put one hand on the steering wheel and clutched the leather tight. Only now did he appreciate how pleasant it was to touch. His other hand dropped to the handbrake and hovered like a retracted spring ready to thrust itself into action. He puffed out his cheeks and closed his eyes. It was time.

He opened his eyes with determination, leaned forward, tested the accelerator once more, released handbrake. Then the phone rang, and the clarity Daniel briefly enjoyed had vanished. He grabbed the handset angrily. Another victory for the Ministry.

‘What?’ he barked. ‘What do you want?’

‘You are fifty-two minutes behind schedule,’ a female voice replied, free from all emotion. ‘You must carry out your duty immediately.’

‘For what? What’s the purpose here? What are we actually achieving?’

‘Don’t ask questions. Your subject is due to leave the premises in thirty-seven minutes. He must be eliminated. No exceptions.’

‘What you gonna do?’ goaded Daniel, sadly. ‘Kill me, too?’

‘Focus! You’re an officer. Do your duty.’

The line went dead. Daniel frowned, considered his options, revved the engine loudly once more and looked back to the wall. He yelled as though in pain and threw his phone across the car in frustration, releasing the handbrake and veering past the wall at speed as he made his way to the destination.

With each manic turn of the wheel and every stomp of the pedals, Daniel showed his disapproval. A fresh and prominent scowl made his turmoil abundantly clear. He was lost, like a child in the wilderness with absolutely no sense of direction.

The rain beating off the windscreen evoked short, hazy memories of a warm and cosy retro kitchen. He imagined himself as a child sitting at a breakfast table. A nearby window presented the back garden. The sky was similarly gloomy with sinister looking clouds

watering the countryside. Young Daniel's head lay on the table, his eyes observing the raindrops as they raced down the glass via their own unpredictable route.

The concentration displayed by the youngster was typical of his personality, for he never got bored of seemingly mundane occurrences. Instead, he would always sit calmly trying to figure out *why* things happened the way they did. Never did he take things for granted or take a person's word as gospel, which antagonised those around him. Many people were not accustomed to being challenged, least of all by a child.

Daniel's eyes examined the glass as he sought clues for what made the rain move the way it did before his mother entered. She was a beautiful woman with a gentle, caring nature. She usually exuded calmness and confidence but in this particular memory there was an unmistakable level of trepidation in her voice.

'Okay. I've finished my make up,' she announced.

Daniel, still distracted and only half listening, replied lazily. 'M-m, h-m.'

She stood immediately behind her son, staring at him. Unaware that he could see her reflection in the window, her eyes began to well up. Daniel turned around and scrutinised her tears, which moved in a similar manner to the rain. Flustered, she wiped them away, looked down, fidgeted with her handbag, but try as she may, she couldn't hide her unrest from Daniel.

'Where's Dad?' he inquired.

'He's already in the car waiting for us.'

'Oh, okay.'

She stood before him and forced a smile, but it didn't hide her sadness. He could tell she might burst at any moment, like an overly heavy water balloon spilling out from all sides. It was also abundantly clear that she wanted to hug him, but for some reason she was showed remarkable restraint.

'Come on, Jacob. Time to go,' she said, with regret in her voice.

*Jacob?*

It had happened again. What he felt sure was a genuine memory had relegated itself as nothing more than a random thought. His name was Daniel. Of that, he was certain.

The screeching of wet tyres was followed by the loud honking of a horn, snapping Daniel into reality. In front of him, a bald, tubby cabbie showed his disapproval to an elderly man who'd almost stepped in front of him. The pedestrian acknowledged his mistake before the cabbie pulled away in outrage.

Daniel was surrounded by the high-rise buildings of Liverpool Street. Scores of suits and briefcases crisscrossed on the pavement, each locked in its own routine, too busy to exchange niceties, or even looks, with passers-by.

*London. What a dive*, though Daniel in a loathsome manner that surprised even him. He'd been content in the city until very recently.

He shifted focus to a particular building and monitored the reception area. Enormous panes of glass made everything conveniently visible as he sat silently in his car, observing people as they reported to the front desk on their way in and out.

His phone rang again. This time, he answered immediately, greeted by the same monotone voice.

'You have only twelve minutes before your subject leaves the building.'

'Why do we do this, Jane?' asked Daniel in a far calmer tone. 'I mean, what good are we doing anybody?'

'I must ask you again to stop calling me that.'

'Well I have to call you something. You're the closest thing I have to a friend.'

'Eleven minutes, forty-seven seconds.'

The line went dead once more.

Daniel chewed his lip as he placed the phone in his jacket, his eyes falling back to the reception area.

Daniel pushed the glass with his gloved hands, rotating the doors as he entered the building. He made confident strides across the glistening marble floor and approached an attractive receptionist on the desk. He wore a smile that was warm and disarming.

‘Hello,’ he began.

‘Good afternoon, sir. How can I help you?’

‘I’m here to see Mister Dunne.’

‘Okay . . .’ she checked her papers. ‘Can I ask what company you’re from?’

‘Sure. I’m Daniel Jacobs from the Ministry of Defence.’

Daniel stood with a deadpan expression as the lift pinged at every level it passed. He wondered how his life had come to this. He truly believed that after all the years of loyal service he’d given to the Ministry, they’d feel obliged to grant his only request. What he learned was that he was a prisoner, perhaps too good at what he did, too valuable to lose. Therefore, his innocent request was met with anger, and perhaps even fear, by the elusive beings who ran the Ministry. Now the woman he loved was dead, and he faced the very real possibility of spending his entire life following orders, pursuing conquests and finalising deals. This was what drove him to the brink of suicide, something he felt sure he’d revisit.

Despite his wavering anger and his inability to think straight, he believed, as he always did, that his actions were to serve the greater good. He knew he’d never fully understand the relevance of his work – who ever did? – but the Ministry had assured him on countless occasions that his contribution was “of vital importance,” and who was *he* to question *them*? When all was said and done, it was the Ministry who found him after he fell victim to his parents’ neglect. It was the Ministry that sheltered him, clothed him and fed him. They taught him the difference between right and wrong and protected him from the outside world. They had raised and nurtured him. Without them, he’d be nothing.



Like any loyal servant, he did feel resentment towards his owner from time to time, but deep down in his heart of hearts, he felt protected. What's more, he knew nothing else.

Finally, the lift stopped and the doors opened. Daniel felt for his mask, which lay hidden in its secret compartment under the seam of his jacket. The cold, creepy facial screen was essential for him to wear during a killing. It morphed him into someone else, and he grinned as its presence was confirmed. He was ready.

He stepped into a busy workspace as people manically talked on their phones and tapped at computers. Daniel surveyed the outskirts of the room as he walked unobtrusively around them. He soon saw a strong oak door with the words, *Robert Dunne, Managing Director*, etched onto it. He approached, twisted the handle, and stepped inside of the private office without breaking stride. The heavy door closed behind him.

Robert sat at his desk with his sleeves rolled up, his greying hair and bloodshot eyes revealed a man who had aged far beyond his forty years. He looked up and eyed Daniel with immediate anxiety.

'Can I help you?' he asked, fighting the trepidation in his voice.

'Mister Dunne?'

'Who, uhh . . .' he cleared his throat. 'Who's asking?'

'My name is Daniel Jacobs. I'm from the Ministry of Defence.'

Robert's blood ran cold and his skin flushed white. 'From the Minist--' He fell silent and his eyes watered as he let out a nervous chuckle. 'They told me you'd say that.' He sat back in disbelief. 'Whoa, this is really happening.'

'I'm afraid so.'

Robert looked around the room, searchingly. 'I have a family. Three kids: two girls and a boy. I don't know how my wife will cope without me.'

'People are resourceful. They'll find a way.'

The man looked pensive, then grunted as the feeling of worthlessness sank in. The ghost of a sad smile became visible.

'I guess you're right.' A million regrets seemed to cross his mind at once before he spoke softly. 'So, how's this done?'

'It can be done any number of ways. I personally prefer not to have any hassle. You're due to leave work any moment now. I recommend you leave with me, act as you would on any other day, and when we're outside, I'll give you your options.'

'Right.'

Robert considered the rather bleak advice and, with a forced smile, accepted it.

'I keep a bottle of whiskey in the drawer right here. Just for when I really need it. Do you mind?'

Daniel walked over to him, pointed to the top drawer of the desk. 'This drawer?' he asked, to which Robert nodded. 'You won't mind if I get it for you,' tested Daniel.

'No.'

Daniel pulled the drawer open. The whiskey bottle lay inside, about a quarter full. Daniel placed it on the desk.

'You got a glass?'

'Don't need one,' Robert shrugged, unscrewing the lid before taking a few large gulps. He gasped, satisfied. 'It's the simple things I'm gonna miss.'

'Are you ready?' hurried Daniel, who'd already been generous with his time.

'Not at all, but there's nothing I can do to change that now, is there?'

Robert looked up searchingly. Daniel's eyes shied away, lowering to the floor. Robert sighed as any shred of optimism was lost. He screwed the lid back onto the bottle and placed the whiskey back on the table, now knowing the remainder of the drink would outlive him.

'Okay, let's go,' pushed Daniel, assuming more of an authoritative tone.

Robert stood up and made his way to the door. Daniel watched him closely as he glanced at the family photos on his desk for what he realised would be the last time. He

stumbled as the gravity of the situation took hold of his knees. Nobody would know it, but inside, Daniel was also upset.

‘I am sorry, you know.’

Robert stopped, stared, and smiled in amusement. ‘Yeah. Me, too.’

He opened the door and absorbed the familiarity of his office one last time, flicked off the light, and left the building with his killer.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JODY MEDLAND is an award-winning screenwriter, author and playwright whose work is renowned for its strong characters and original concepts.

In 2013, Jody wrote his debut feature film *The Adored*, which went on to enjoy worldwide distribution, winning Best Film at the Durban Film Festival in South Africa as well as earning three official selections in Poland, Germany and the USA.

In 2015, he released his debut paperback novel *The Moors*, which was the first print book launched by publishing company, Pen Works Media.

Jody's interactive novel *The Somerton Man* is due for release in 2018, and he was recently commissioned to write a TV Pilot for an original political thriller, titled *Shadow Empire*.

Alongside this, Jody is currently developing four original plays, two of which are intended for their first run in London in 2018.

When not juggling his numerous projects, Jody can be found spending time with his daughter in Devon or people-watching in Crouch End whilst sipping on his Waitrose latte.