

PROLOGUE

It was one of those fucking awful grey, damp and bitterly cold days in June that England was so good at. Angus Lovejoy didn't want to be here. Obviously. Who'd choose to be at a funeral for someone you'd never known - personally, that is? Of course, he knew who Danny Deedes had been. He'd been the Deedes of *Gordon Deedes Rutter*, the ad agency he now found himself working at. Well, the word 'working' may have been pushing it a tad. He'd been here for a month now and still hadn't received a sodding creative brief. Not that he was complaining.

If truth be known, he'd been a bitter disappointment to his parents. They had had high hopes for him. They had set their sights on the Foreign Office. But it all started going horribly wrong when he'd been sent down from Charterhouse for shagging the Chancellor's daughter in the cricket pavilion.

Still, as far as he was concerned, he envisaged a reasonably bright future for himself in the advertising game. GDR was, after all, one of London's most creative hot shops and its Creative Director Magnus O'Shea had loved his portfolio of TV scripts and press ads.

The agency had been informed of Danny Deedes's premature demise no more than a week ago. It was Dick his chauffeur who had broken the news. Dick was a lovely man who had been affectionately known by one and all as 'Danny's Dick'. Danny, needless to say, had been gay, flamboyant and about as promiscuous as it was possible to be. He'd made his name in the 50s as a TV producer when commercial television was just starting out and had single-handedly set up one of London's first commercial production companies. On the back of this early success, he'd then gone on to set up his own advertising agency and was eventually bought out on very amicable and favourable terms by the current partners. In fact, he had even retained an office in the building from which he apparently wrote TV commercials for his own client, some large partwork magazine publisher. The strange thing was that Danny Deedes may have been a clever sod with a certain charm and twinkle in the eye, but according to everyone who knew him, he didn't possess a single creative bone in his body, and the commercials he penned for his client were something of an embarrassment to the agency. Indeed, the management never knowingly advertised the fact.

The vicar had finished his short address and had now gesticulated to an old boy in a mourning suit and tails who stumbled forward to the dais and coughed and spluttered into the microphone.

'Today is a very sad day... My name is Bernard Smythe-Rodney, and I knew Danny way back in the 50s when we worked together producing TV commercials for the likes of Players Cigarettes and Johnny Walker... Those were the days... What a lovely man he was... Salt of the earth... They just don't make them like that anymore...'

Angus was sitting next to a man in a trench coat that he'd spoken to earlier. He'd been the agency's first Creative Director, and now the man was discreetly leaning forward and whispering into Angus's ear.

'Funny that... I always thought he was a bit of a shit.'

CHAPTER ONE

The office on the corner of Great Pulteney Street, Soho was a terrific location for any self-respecting creative advertising agency that prided itself on producing innovative, award-winning campaigns.

Soho was a seething hotbed of creativity. Between the seedy sex shops and massage parlours, ad agencies rubbed shoulders with production companies, recording studios, illustration studios, editing suites, and publishing houses. And after working hours, the bars and bistros were full to the gunwales with creative types and celebrities from the world of showbiz.

It was clearly the place to be seen.

Unfortunately for Gordon Deedes Rutter, Paddy O'Leary and Sean Flaherty also thought it was a good place to park themselves. And the precise location in Soho that they favoured was the large red-tiled doorstep on the corner of Pulteney Street with its fancy glass doors.

Soho had its fair share of vagrants and door sleepers and Paddy and Sean were very much part of that community.

When Magnus had parked his BMW in the NCP car park, he made his way to the office and could almost smell Paddy and Sean before feasting his eyes on the pair. They were perched on the doorstep with a bottle of cheap Frascati with a plastic basket moulded to the glass. Through bleary eyes, Paddy waved the bottle at Magnus. 'Top of the mornin' to yer.'

Magnus tried hard not to retch. 'Look, fellas. I know you like this spot, but how would you like to earn yourselves 50 quid?'

The pair looked at him with incredulity as Magnus pulled five crisp ten-pound notes from his wallet. 'All I'm asking is that you go down the road and sit on the doorstep of the other corner building at the end of the street. You can't miss it. There's a big logo on the door that reads *RHB*. I can vouch for them. They are extremely nice people. And to be honest, they have a much nicer entrance than we do.'

Paddy snatched the notes and the two reluctantly rose from the step and swayed down the road to their new home.

RHB was, of course, an arch-rival of Gordon Deedes Rutter's, and was irritatingly doing rather well, having picked up a long succession of impressive clients in recent months including a relatively new German car manufacturer and the world's largest manufacturer of jeans.

Magnus smiled to himself as he stepped into the lobby and was greeted by Nicola, the agency's new receptionist. He had a busy morning and was in need of a strong black coffee. The previous day's funeral in Highgate had been a pretty surreal affair. And seeing all those characters from the past was a bit like going to an old school reunion. Everyone still had the same voices and mannerisms but in most cases were barely recognisable.

Part of him still felt the odd pang of guilt over buying Danny out of his own agency. But to be fair, they had behaved honourably. They'd left his name on the door and his office on the first floor remained his. And they had turned a blind eye to the shit he produced for Marshall Cavendish. For Christ's sake, they had even kept Danny's Dick on the payroll.

He switched on the TV to look at the news headlines. It was part of his daily routine. He didn't know why. The news was always so bloody depressing.

'Our opinion poll shows that the Tories are increasing their lead over Labour... there is no doubt that this is the Tories' election. We asked thousands of voters across the country what factor was putting the Conservatives ahead. Was it because of the experienced ministerial team; the policies; or Mrs Thatcher's leadership? Experienced ministers said 11%. Conservative policies said 31%. But a majority 46% said that it was down to Mrs Thatcher's leadership. Yesterday that leadership came under bitter attack from Dennis Healey who accused her of glorying in slaughter. The same day we asked whether the Falklands factor was helping or hindering the government's chances of winning. Making no difference said 37%. Hindering said 13%. But helping said 44%. And it's that majority that Labour is now trying to assault.'

He flicked the TV off with his remote. 'Of course, it's bloody helping her... There's nothing like a sodding war and a bit of flag-waving to get the electorate fired up. And that bitch knows it well enough...'

Penny, his creative secretary, entered with his coffee.

'Are you being rude about our Prime Minister?'

'Would I do such a thing...?' He wasn't expecting an answer. 'You're a star, hon... What would I do without you?'

'Make it yourself I s'pose.' She placed the mug on his desk and opened his ostentatious leather diary. 'You have a busy day, today.'

'Yeah. Talk me through it.'

'Well, in about five minutes you are interviewing an art director by the name of Brian Finkle to work with the lovely Angus. Then at ten, you have a meeting with Robert and Martin about the forthcoming pitch for Olivetti. At 2.00 you're reviewing all the new work for the Solid Fuel Advisory Service. At 4.00 Stella and Alistair have a meeting booked with you to go through the first round of creative work for the new fizzy drink Quatro. And then at 5.30, it's the speech to the nation and Kenneth wants you to give us all an update on the work front and what's going through production. Oh, and when you get a spare moment, which you probably won't, you need to check through all the entries for the Cannes Awards and sign all the entries. All the work has been mounted with all the right labels. I think poor Steve had a nervous breakdown putting it together last Friday. It's all got to go off by the end of this week otherwise we're going to miss the deadline.'

Magnus plonked himself on the big leather sofa and sipped at his coffee, while Penny busied herself by watering the newly installed cactus and Yucca plant by the window. As she did so, his phone rang. It was reception. Mr Finkle had arrived to see him.

'Thanks, Nicola. Do you want to send him up?'

Magnus cleared the detritus from the glass table and while chucking an empty Stella Artois bottle into his bin, there came a tapping on his open door.

'Ah, do come in. It's Brian, isn't it?'

'Yes... I'm a bit early... Hope that's alright.' Brian certainly looked the part. Lots of designer stubble, tortoiseshell framed glasses and a duffel coat. If he were auditioning for the part of an art director at an ad agency, he'd have bagged the part and the wardrobe department would have been out of a job.

'No, that's absolutely fine. It makes a refreshing change for anyone to be on time, let alone early, at this place. Come and take a seat. Can I get you a coffee?'

'Thanks. Black without sugar would be great.'

Magnus lifted his phone. 'Hi, Pen. Can I trouble you for a black coffee and no sugar, hon?'

'You didn't have to call. I sit outside your office, remember?'

Magnus smiled and put the receiver down. It was a fair point. But the thing was, he liked playing the part of Creative Director, and he liked Penny doing everything for him. She was bloody good at it, and in truth, she quite liked doing it. He made her laugh and she did stuff for him. It was a fair trade-off.

'Do you want to put your book on the table?'

Brian opened his portfolio. And Magnus remembered it instantly. He'd liked it when he first had it sent over by the headhunters. He didn't have to see it again. He'd already decided to hire him. He was the best art director he'd seen in a long while. He was a lot better than half the department in terms of the standard of design and the quality of his thinking. It was astonishing that nobody had already snapped him up.

'So remind me... Where were you before? And how many other agencies are you talking to?'

Brian smiled. 'Oh, I'm from St. Martins... the art college. And you are the first and only agency I've spoken to so far.'

Magnus nodded. *Shit... Fuck... Magnus old boy. This is your lucky fucking day. Just act cool... Hang on, no. Don't do that you twat. If you don't tell him you want him, he'll fuck off down the road and get hired by those tossers with the tramps in their doorway.*

'Look Brian. I'm going to be really honest with you... '

Brian's palms went all sweaty. *This guy hated his stuff. He could tell. He probably thought it was too off the wall. Amateurish. Badly art directed...*

'I think your work is... bloody amazing... I absolutely love it... Would you consider working here for us?'

There was a palpable silence. Brian couldn't believe it. He was sitting in one of the best creative agencies in town. It was top of his hit list. He'd have worked here for bloody nothing just to get his feet under a desk. He could hardly believe what he was hearing.

'Well... er...'

'Look, I tell you what. If you accept today, I can promise you an exceptional package... 18K, company car... private medical insurance, pension benefits... What do you say?'

'The only downside is that you'll be working with a bit of a wanker... No, I'm joking... He's a perfectly nice guy. But just don't tell him what you're earning, because it may go down like a shit sandwich... And creative teams are a bit like marriages... But look at it this way: in the fullness of time, if it all works out with you two, the agency will match his remuneration with yours. What do you say, Brian?'

18K? That was insane. 'Yeah... that sounds great. I'd love to accept your offer, Mr O'Shea.'

'Oh, just call me Magnus... We're very informal here... Some people just call me Dickhead... Look, while you're here, let me introduce you to Angus, your copywriter. He sits further down the corridor.'