

# The Fixer

## Season 1, Episode 1

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**WARNING:** The Fixer is for mature audiences. It contains strong language and violence. If it was a movie, it would be rated R. If it was on TV, it would be on cable. If it was an album it'd have a Parental... you get the picture.

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# Chapter 1

## Mr. Rothstein

JC Bannister sat comfortably on the worn leather bench in a booth in the back corner of the bar. He was close enough to see the exit through the back storage room but not close enough to smell the bathroom. The tables around him were lightly populated with the Tuesday evening after work crowd. Lawyers, lobbyists, aides to politicians. Bannister hated D.C.

The man across from him had introduced himself as Mr. Rothstein. Expensive, well tailored, three-piece suit, probably Saville Row in London. Nice shoes to match, likely Italian. Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso watch that easily cost as much as the suit and shoes combined. It all added up to serious money.

Good for Bannister.

The man was near six feet tall, about the same height as Bannister. Similar swimmer's build but Rothstein was much softer. More slender. Calluses on his hands from the weights at the gym, but lacking the toughness of real work. Which meant neither military nor law enforcement.

Good for Bannister as well.

There was also a discrete and almost imperceptible earwig in Mr. Rothstein's ear, positioned just poorly enough to permit it being seen.

This was bad for Bannister.

JC's team was in place. Joan was positioned near the bar, about twenty-five feet away from the booth Mr. Rothstein and Bannister were at. She had snapped a picture of the client as she returned from her well-timed bathroom trip. Then uploaded it to Duke, who was waiting at the coffee shop around the corner. He had in turn uploaded the program to his own computer network, remotely run facial recognition software on the image and was now reporting back to Joan and Bannister who could hear them through their perfectly positioned and totally invisible earwigs. Gorman, the fourth member of their team, had been shot and killed two days ago in Indonesia.

"Guys, this is not Rothstein. That was his mother's maiden name. Allow me to introduce Mr. Daniel Meier. Power player in D.C. and currently working for the law firm of Blah Blah Meier and Blah. His daddy's firm, it's based in Los Angeles with offices in New York, Miami, Chicago and D.C., which is run by our new friend here. He's thirty-two, unmarried and although wealthy enough to be sitting at this table, holding this meeting, nothing suggests he would be able or even willing to swim in water this deep."

At 5'7" Joan didn't have Bannister's height advantage to look over the crowd. She strolled around the bar scanning for who might be with Mr. Meier. The bar wasn't busy. It took all of a minute before she returned to her previous position. "Nobody sticks out here. Only one eyeing you guys is me."

JC took this all in through his earwig as he continued his conversation with the prospective client.

He took a deep breath.

He was about to begin his hard sell.

He leaned forward, elbows and forearms on the table, hands clasped loosely.

"Listen, Mr. Rothstein," JC said, using the pseudonym for now, "we both know why you called me. You're in way over your head. You have a problem that you don't know how to solve. That's why you're here, talking to me. You see, I am a kind of...fixer. That is the easiest way to describe what I do. People seek me out when they have problems that need to be fixed. Often the solution is someone getting themselves dead."

"So, you're really just a hitman? An assassin? A killer?"

"Well, that's an oversimplification. It's inaccurate and frankly a bit inelegant. I prefer to call myself a solutionist. Sometimes the solution to a person's problem is a dead body. Sometimes dead bodies occur on the path to said solution. But killing is rarely the goal. Solving the problem is."

"So how did you come to be a ... solutionist?" Mr. Meier said.

"Through the course of service to my country, I was taught how to kill. I became quite good at it. A specialist, if you will. I don't enjoy killing, but it is a marketable skill, is it not?"

"Well..." Mr. Meier started.

"If it wasn't, we wouldn't be sitting here, having this conversation on a Tuesday night, would we?"

"True." Meier sipped his Scotch. The first time he had done so since the drink was served.

"I do not kill indiscriminately. There are lines that I will not cross. I know my limitations. I work with a loose team of other specialists whose skills compliment my own. Where I have deficiencies, they have strengths, and vice versa."

Duke snorted in JC's earwig. "Loose team, my ass. When was the last time you worked without us, JC? Bolivia? How'd that turn out?"

"Yeah, we're going to have to talk about these imaginary 'deficiencies' one of these days, Bannister," Joan said.

"Regardless" JC continued to both his team and Mr. Meier. "The service my team provides is world class. We have never had an unsatisfied client in the past seven years."

JC had finished his sell. Truthfully, it wasn't that hard of a sell. People who came to him were already looking to buy. Desperation. Fear. Hatred. Those were the big three. Revenge sometimes. Occasionally power. Rarely hope. Rarely.

He knew there would be a couple questions and then the big silence. Usually he would simply let the potential client wait it out, getting over their fear on their own. He never wanted to push a person to contract for his services. It had to be their choice. Their free will to go down this path. So he waited.

"How do you know I'm not a cop?" Mr. Meier asked.

"Three reasons. First, your hands. Too soft for law enforcement."

"Could be FBI. CIA? Military?"

"Hardly. Hands are still too soft. Body too. You exercise. You're fit for an office worker, but neither fit enough nor rough enough to be police or any of those agencies you mentioned."

"What's the second reason?"

"Your clothing. Too expensive. With clothes, shoes, and watch combined, I imagine we're talking almost 20,000 dollars. No agency would put up that kind of money. Maybe Mr. Bond's might." JC smiled as Mr. Meier chuckled. "But you're not 007, are you, Mr. Rothstein?"

"No, no I'm not."

"So I'm guessing executive of some kind. Maybe a politician's aide. Lawyer, perhaps."

Meier's eyes widened ever so slightly. JC knew he could easily beat him at a game of poker.

"And the third?"

"You don't feel like one. You don't have the law enforcement persona."

"Really? What persona do I have, Mr. Bannister?"

It was time to flatter.

JC brought his left hand up to his face, rested his chin on his thumb and let his fingers curl over his upper lip. Pretended to contemplate. All an act.

"Power."

"Power? What power do I have?"

"Hard to say. A lot of power flows around D.C. But you're accustomed to it. Being around it, serving it, dispensing it."

Mr. Meier became quiet and sipped his drink again, enjoying the compliment.

JC would usually let the client continue to stew in their thoughts at this point. But this was not a typical meeting. Mr. Meier's poorly concealed listening device saw to that. It was time to press.

"But this evening, Mr. Rothstein, you're not the one wielding the power, are you?"

"Excuse me?"

"You're not the one in control here, tonight, are you? You are not the decision maker.

You do not hold the power of this decision."

"What are you talking about?" said Mr. Meier.

"Say it," Duke whispered.

JC indicated towards Mr. Meier's ear and the barely visible earwig. "Whoever put that in didn't do a good enough job," JC said.

"You're an errand boy, sent by grocery clerks, to collect a bill," Duke whispered one of his favorite movie lines.

"Tells me you have either enough disposable funds to buy some nice toys," JC continued, "or the powerful friends who borrowed it for you didn't listen very well when they were told how to use it."

"Duke, I'm going to beat you when this is done," Joan said.

JC said nothing. He knew Duke's penchant for quoting movie dialogue and his love of *Apocalypse Now*. And although he would need to scold the younger man later, right now he was more interested in one thing.

Who was the one pulling Meier's strings?



Mr. Meier's face hardened. He had failed in his subterfuge and been exposed by the ones he had been trying to fool. An unusual position in his life. An uncomfortable one. He touched the earwig, pushing it slightly into his ear more. Looked down at the table. Nodded his head. Said, "OK." Then looked back up at Bannister.

"Tomorrow night. Central Library in Arlington on North Quincy. Be there at 6:30. In the north parking lot."

"Tell your boss we will be there, Mr. Meier." JC smiled slightly as he dropped Meier's pseudonym, twisting the knife just a bit.

Mr. Meier froze, eyes flaring. He then slid out of the booth. Stood. Adjusted his 7,000 dollar suit. Checked his 9,000 dollar watch. Looked at JC with poorly concealed irritation and frustration.

"Don't forget to bring your girlfriend at the bar."

JC's smile disappeared.

"Or your friend at the coffee shop next door."

Mr. Meier turned on his heel and left.

## **Chapter 2**

### **We Go**

Duke was pissed. Raging.

"How could he know? How the fuck could he know?"

"Duke, we've been working together for three years. With Meier's money and power, I don't imagine it's too hard," Joan said

"I know, Mac, but come on. That guy? We got found out by that guy?"

Joan shrugged. "Tell you what, though. You call me Mac again, I'm going to stab you in the neck."

"Calm down you two," JC said. He knew Joan didn't really like the team's nickname for her. But Duke was glaring at her, ready to start an argument over nothing. Now was no time for infighting.

Duke threw up his hands and stalked around the playground. It was their pre-arranged rendezvous point if anything were to happen during the meeting and just a swift ten minute walk from the bar. They had all left separately after Meier revealed they were under surveillance. It took Duke about twenty minutes to arrive, Joan and Bannister about thirty. They had all been over cautious.

Bannister was sitting on top of the jungle gym. Duke planted himself on the ladder to a small slide. Joan went and sat in a swing, waiting. She wasn't the boss. It was Bannister's next move.

"We go."

"What?" Duke exclaimed.

"We go."

"Come on, man! They know us. They know who we are. You've got no idea what we could be walking into!"

"Duke, the only thing we're sure they know is that you guys were with me tonight. That's it. All that means is maybe they had the bar under surveillance longer than we knew about."

"Or maybe we're finally done!"

"Or maybe we expected the wrong thing tonight. We went in there expecting a rich guy who needed us to fix a problem for him. That was our level of preparedness. We didn't expect a team with surveillance and multiple assets. We got outplayed. We didn't get found out by that guy. We got found out by his boss."

Duke was shaking his head. JC paused. He had put Duke in charge of surveillance. He had been asking for more responsibilities, for more duties. JC knew he was looking to the future, looking towards running his own team someday. As upset as he was at Duke for dropping the ball, he knew it didn't come close to how badly Duke was kicking himself. They had gotten lucky tonight - lucky that getting found out was all that had happened to them. Bannister knew Joan would support his play. She always did. But he needed to make sure Duke was going to back his play as well. Needed him to be with the team, ready to go forward, not looking back.

"Duke, it wasn't that guy who found us out. It was his boss and their team."

Duke stopped, beginning to understand JC's decision now.

"Don't you want to find out who's behind this guy?"

Duke and Joan both nodded curtly.

"Because I sure as hell want to find out whose hand is up this sock puppet's ass."

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Daniel Meier returned to his office. The team that performed the surveillance this evening was not his team but provided security for his boss. He did not meet them after leaving the bar. They had other places to be and truthfully, Meier had no desire to see them.

He had planned to get a late dinner but the meeting with Bannister had set him on edge. Going back to his office was the one place he felt he could go and relax.

"Hold my calls," he told his secretary as he passed by without looking at her.

"Of course, Mr. Meier," she said. Then, to his closed door, she said, "It's 10:30, who the hell is going to call you now?"

Meier sat at his desk. Turned around to the bookshelf behind him. Turned on his high-end audio system. Put on his equally high-end Grado headphones and started up Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*. Maybe not his best or his most famous, but it was the one Meier liked best and that is what mattered to him.

He couldn't listen to it. Couldn't stop thinking about Bannister. Ridiculous waste of time for him to go to the meeting. His boss knew his feelings about the military and soldiers, both current and former. Knew he considered them a necessary evil. Contemptible but useful at times. But his father had secured the position for him, in addition to him running the DC offices for the firm, so he did what his boss requested. But tonight good old Miles was losing out to the irritating Bannister, so he turned off the audio equipment and went home.

It was almost midnight when he arrived at his two story townhouse in Georgetown. His girlfriend's shoes were just inside the front door. She apparently had come over. Lights were all off. No TV sounds from upstairs in the bedroom. Probably fell asleep. Dinner was still on the table. Meier didn't touch it. He couldn't stand her cooking and avoided eating it whenever possible. Sat down on the sofa. Sent a text to his father. "Meeting went well. Call me tomorrow for details." It was 9:00 pm in L.A. and his father wouldn't be asleep for another four hours. But he knew his father was conscientious about time zones, having lived in both New York and Los Angeles. He would wait until tomorrow to call.

Meier wanted to go upstairs and sleep in his bed. But that meant waking up his girlfriend. And the mood he was in he really didn't want to deal with her tonight. It had been four months already and he was tiring of her.

"Scratch that," he said out loud, "tired of her."

Worried that she might hear and wake up, he decided to sleep on the sofa. Leave early, before she got up. Skip the gym. Just go back to the office. Meier decided to call his girlfriend in the afternoon and break up with her over the phone. Made a mental note to call the security firm and have them come by around lunch time to change the locks and the alarm code.

*What had Bannister called me? Soft? Son of a bitch.*

## Chapter 3

## **Shot in the Back**

Bannister checked out of his hotel room that night only a few hours after he checked in. The plan had been to stay in DC and prepare for the meeting the next day. But lying down in the deluxe suite at The Jefferson he couldn't get comfortable. He thought it was simply because he wasn't at home. No matter how nice the hotel he never slept as well as he did when he was in his own bed. But his discomfort continued. It was just past midnight when he remembered what was contributing to his sleeplessness; a rental truck full of guns parked in long term parking at Logan International Airport. His name on the rental agreement. His face on the closed circuit video inside the airport parking lot. His fingerprints all over the van.

The meeting with Meier and his boss could not happen tomorrow night. He needed to take care of that van. Which meant a one day delay. He called Meier.

"Do you know what time it is?" Meier said.

"Listen, Meier, I have other pressing business tomorrow. All I need is to reschedule for the following evening."

"This is bullshit. Waking me up at one in the morning to cancel our meeting tomorrow."

"I'm not canceling. Rescheduling. And I apologize for the hour of the call. It couldn't be avoided."

"The hell it couldn't."

JC was exasperated. He tried being nice, being professional. Now he had to try it the other way. "You don't like it? I don't give a shit, Meier. You're not the decision maker.

You're barking like you have the power, but you don't. You and I both know it. Now shut the fuck up and relay the information to your boss. And if your boss doesn't like it, they can go to hell. Same as you."

JC hung up. One of the rules of business all over the world - you don't have to like the client. But when your client is an arrogant prick, it makes the work that much harder. He packed what little he had brought and called Joan from the lobby. Woke her up.

"Plans have changed. I'm going back to Boston tonight."

Joan said nothing. JC thought she hadn't heard him.

"Oh, shit. The truck, right?"

"Yep."

"Just let it stay there another day or two. It's not going anywhere. Nothing is going to happen to it," she said, then yawned.

"Needs to be done. I want to finish up with the Jakarta mess. I called Meier and postponed the meeting one day. You need to call Duke in the morning. Let him know you guys have the day off."

JC could hear her stretching over the phone. "Call him yourself, boss. If I call, he'll want to drag me to some damn film festival or something."

Joan was probably right, JC thought. Duke was the newest addition to the team and the youngest. He had been working with Bannister for three years. Although Joan fought with him it was more akin to sibling rivalry than anything else. He knew their argument after the meeting with Meier this evening was already forgotten by both of them.

"Alright. I'll tell him you went to Cincinnati early for a meeting but you'll be back late tomorrow night. Happy?"

"Thanks, boss." He could tell she was already drifting back to sleep. "When's Gorman's funeral?"

JC was quiet. He hoped she would fall asleep before he had to lie to her.

"Boss?"

"It'll be in a few days. Not sure if we're going to make it."

"We need to try." Joan yawned again.

Bannister said goodnight as he walked to his rental car. Got in, started it up and pulled out of the hotel parking lot.

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Gorman had already been buried. Shot in the back in Indonesia, the team had brought his body home on their chartered jet from Jakarta the day before. While Duke and Joan had gone to their homes in the Boston area, JC had driven to Cambridge. He left Gorman with a medical examiner who owed him more than a few favors. She promised Gorman would be taken care of and laid to rest in Mount Auburn Cemetery later that afternoon. He had felt it would be best if they did not attend his funeral. Told himself that Gorman would have agreed. The job in Jakarta had been all over the news. Their involvement was unknown by the authorities, as it should be, but any kind of attention or mistakes greatly increased their chances of scrutiny. And a funeral of a gunshot victim that required the granting of favors to be accomplished could possibly increase scrutiny. Which is what Bannister hoped to avoid.



He arrived at Logan Airport at around 8 in the morning. Turned in his rental car. Picked up his van, the one he had driven to Cambridge with Gorman's body. Only thing it held now were three bags full of guns, sourced and paid for by their client in Indonesia. Headed over to Newton Highlands, a suburb of Boston, and parked outside of his bike shop, Strong Arm Cyclery. A legitimate business front. Put a quarter in the meter. Twenty minutes. Walked inside. 9:30 am.

"Hey, boss," his two employees, Tommy Coletti and Vincent Mercier, called out in unison. They were both 5'10", both had close-cropped military-style haircuts, both had biceps the size of most men's legs. Many people thought they were brothers, if not twins.

"Hey, guys," was JC's half-hearted response. He tossed the keys to Mercier. "I'll need you to drive that over to Gorman's later. Keep money in the meter. The van's loaded."

"Sure thing, JC. Just tell me when." Mercier put the keys in his pocket.

"Uhh, boss?" Coletti said. "Where's Gorman? Doesn't he usually take care of that stuff?" While Coletti and Mercier were aware of JC's career as a fixer and most people who worked for him knew each other, Bannister kept the operations of his front businesses and his other work strictly separate.

JC dreaded the answer. The first time he would have to speak it out loud. "We lost him in Jakarta." It hurt more than he thought it would.

"Aww, hell," Coletti said.

"Shit, man. I'm sorry," Mercier said.

"What happened?"

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