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Lynda LaPlante



TENNISON

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Lynda
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TENNISON



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CHAPTER ONE

It was Monday afternoon and Jane was sitting in her usual seat at the rear of the top deck of the 253 bus, as it travelled up Mare Street in Hackney. Popping the single plastic ear- phone into her ear, she turned on her prized Zephyr pocket radio, which she had treated herself to after her first month's wages in the training college. She tuned into Radio Caroline on Medium Wave, and although she knew it was a pirate radio station, it didn't bother her as she was a huge fan of the rock music they played. The DJ, Spangles Muldoon, announced that the next song was the Janis Joplin hit 'Piece Of My Heart'. Jane was a big Joplin fan, and often reminisced about how lucky she had been to see her in concert at the Royal Albert Hall for her eighteenth birthday. Although she had been sitting in the gods it had been an electrifying and unforgettable experience, watching Joplin strutting and dancing, all the time holding the audience spell-bound through the power and emotion of her amazingly soulful voice. As the song began Jane turned up the volume.

*And each time I tell myself that I, well I think I've had enough,
But I'm gonna, gonna show you, baby, that a woman can be
tough.*

*I want you to come on, come on, come on, come on and take it,
Take it!*

Take another little piece of my heart now, baby!

Oh, oh, break it!

*Break another little bit of my heart now, darling, yeah, yeah,
yeah yeah.*

Oh, oh, have a

Have another little piece of my heart now, baby . . .

You know you got it, if it makes you feel good . . .

Jane was singing along to herself when the bus suddenly jerked to a halt, causing her to lurch forward and nearly drop her radio. She peered from the window and sighed – it was still raining. The light drizzle when she got on the bus had now turned to a dark-skied downpour. She wished she'd worn her uniform cape, but she always kept it at the station in her locker. When Jane had first arrived at Hackney Police Station as a probationer her reporting sergeant had advised her not to stand out on public transport wearing 'half-blues'. You didn't want to be recognized as a copper, he'd said, and have an egg chucked at you, or be forced by a bus conductor to step into a trivial situation that might escalate because you were 'Old Bill'. Instead she wore a buttoned-up black trench coat to hide her police uniform, and was carrying her police hat in a plastic carrier bag. Jane looked at her watch and saw that it was twenty to two. She was due on parade at two o'clock for a late shift until 10 p.m. She glanced at the mirror by the stairs and saw an elderly man being helped on board by the conductor. She had three more stops before she had to get off at the station in Lower Clapton Road.

It often amused her to think of the time years ago when she had been driven to Hackney by her father, who had some business to attend to. He had gestured to the run-down housing estates and shaken his head in disgust, saying it was a part of London he detested. Jane, aged fourteen, couldn't help but agree with him. Compared to Maida Vale, where they lived, it looked like a dump and seemed a very grey and unfriendly part of London. She recalled being horrified reading newspaper articles about the trial of the notorious East End brothers, Ronnie and Reggie Kray, and how they had lured Jack 'the Hat' McVitie to a party in Hackney where Reggie stabbed him repeatedly in the neck and body with a carving knife.

Jane smiled to herself at the irony. Little could she have imagined back then that her first posting as a probationary WPC, aged twenty-two, after sixteen weeks at the Metropolitan Police Force's training college in Hendon, would be in the very area she considered a dump!

She suddenly sprang up, realizing that in her day-dreaming she had missed her stop. Clattering down the stairs, she shouted to the conductor.

'I've gone too far – I need to get off.'

'Not a lot I can do about it, love – you should pay more attention. I'm not allowed to ring the bell in between stops, so you'll have to—'

Jane couldn't wait and as soon as the bus slowed down at the traffic lights she swung her job-issue black-leather handbag over her shoulder and jumped off. The grinning conductor wagged his finger disapprovingly. Jane had no option but to run the quarter of a mile back down the road to the station; she knew she would be drenched by the time she got there. Pulling up the collar of her trench coat she put her head down and set off. Seconds later, she bumped straight into a woman, which sent her reeling backwards and knocking the woman's umbrella into the road. Her brown paper carrier bag of groceries split open, spilling tins of soup, apples, bananas, potatoes and a loaf of bread onto the wet pavement.

'Oh no! I am so sorry,' Jane said.

The woman shook her head as she looked down at her groceries and the ruined carrier bag.

'Oh my God, you bleedin' well ran into me – now what am I gonna do?' she exclaimed in a strong Cockney accent.

Apologizing profusely, and feeling somewhat embarrassed, Jane surreptitiously took her police hat out of the plastic bag and stuffed it in her handbag. She bent down and started picking up the groceries, placing them inside the empty bag.

‘I’ll get me broolly.’ The woman stepped off the pavement without looking.

‘Mind the traffic!’ Jane called out anxiously and stood up.

She gently grabbed the woman by the arm before instinctively holding her hand up to stop the traffic and retrieving the umbrella herself.

‘Is it still working?’ the woman demanded.

‘There’s no damage,’ Jane said, opening and closing the umbrella to check the spokes. ‘Here, you use it so you don’t get soaked.’

It took a while for Jane to pick up the potatoes as they, along with the now bruised apples, had rolled into the gutter. Her hands were soon cold and muddy, and she had to wipe her face which was wet from the torrential rain.

Holding up her umbrella the woman gestured impatiently. ‘Just put the cans of soup in, never mind the vegetables . . . Oh, don’t tell me, the bread’s split open as well.’

‘I’m really very sorry. I’ll pay for everything that’s damaged.’

Far from being disgruntled, the woman gave a wan smile. ‘No need. Besides, all this new decimal stuff confuses me. It was much easier when everything was in shillin’s.’

‘Are you sure? I don’t want to see you go short.’

‘Don’t look so worried, luv. I do office cleaning and the bread was only to make a sandwich for work.’

Eager to be on her way, Jane stepped a few paces back and, clutching her now wet and bulging handbag, wondered what state her police hat would be in.

‘I have to go – I am so sorry.’

The woman suddenly started gasping and heaving for breath.

‘Are you all right?’ Jane asked with concern. ‘No, gimme a minute . . . it’s . . . me asthma.’

‘Do you live nearby?’

‘Ashburn House.’

‘That’s off Homerton Road on the Pembridge Estate, isn’t it?’

The woman nodded and took more deep breaths. ‘It’s the shock . . . you runnin’ into me.’

‘Long way to walk, you sure you’ll be all right?’

‘Let me . . . get me . . . breath back first.’

‘I’ll help you home.’

The Pembridge was a notorious council estate built in the 1930s. Jane had been to it a few times on incident calls. It consisted of eight five-storey blocks of grimy brick and contained a thousand flats. The residents were of different ethnic backgrounds, but predominantly white. Families of six lived in two-bedroom flats. Drug dealing, fights, vandalism and graffiti were part of daily life, and the stairwells served as urinals for drunks.

Jane carried the groceries over one arm as the woman leaned heavily on the other, constantly stopping to catch her breath. By the time they had walked up to the third floor of Ashburn House and along the landing leading to Flat 44, the woman was breathing so heavily that Jane thought she was going to faint.

On entering the flat she helped the woman out of her mac and gave it a couple of swishes outside to get rid of some of the water before hanging it over the folded wheel- chair that was leaning against the wall in the hallway. Jane asked where the kitchen was. The woman pointed to the room on the right.

‘You go and sit down and rest and I’ll pop these groceries in the kitchen for you,’ Jane told her with a warm smile.

‘Would you be a luv and make me a cuppa tea with milk and three sugars?’

‘No problem,’ Jane said, although she was desperate to get a move on as she was already late for work. She hooked her handbag over the wheelchair.

Entering the kitchen Jane was surprised by the amount of expensive modern equipment. In one corner there was a Hotpoint front-load washing machine with a matching tumbler-drier on top of it. Next to that stood a dishwasher and an upright fridge with a separate freezer compartment. The room itself was spotlessly clean with a Formica- topped table and four matching chairs to one side.

Having filled the kettle Jane put it on the gas cooker which, like the other appliances, looked fairly new. She got the teapot, sugar, cup and saucer from the cupboards, then took the milk from the fridge and placed everything on the kitchen table. She noticed that there was a council rent book in the name of Mrs Irene Bentley on

the table. Under it there was a Green Shield Stamps Gift Collection catalogue, along with some other magazines. Jane picked up the gift catalogue and flicking through it saw that it was filled with the latest kitchen appliances, televisions, entertainment systems, sports goods and clothes. It struck Jane that it would take more than a few Green Shield Stamps books to purchase any of the electrical goods on offer.

The sudden whistling of the kettle made her jump. Replacing the catalogue she noticed that there was a brochure for Wolf power tools, and another for Hilti power tools, which made her suspect that the woman's family were in the building trade.

'Oh ta, luv, just what I need after me ordeal . . . a nice cup of Rosie.' The woman was lying down on the large sofa and she sat up as Jane handed her the tea.

'You're looking a lot better, Irene.'

The woman laughed and a drop of tea dribbled from her mouth. 'Cor blimey, I haven't been called that in years. Been known as Renee ever since I was a nipper.'

'Sorry, I saw your rent book and just assumed.'

'Did you now? Bit nosy of yer, and never assume, luv, always ask.' She slurped at her tea.

The lounge was modern and comfortably furnished. The thick fitted carpet was a maroon colour with swirling yellow rings, and there was a wing chair that matched the sofa. Against the wall on one side of the room there was a large teak storage cabinet, and a matching dining table and four chairs.

'You have a very nice flat.'

'Me boys look after me.'

Jane heard the front door being opened, then slammed shut, followed by a few seconds' silence and then the sound of heavy footsteps.

'Ma? Eh, Ma? Where you at?' a man's voice bellowed.

Jane turned and saw a tough-looking dark-haired man in his thirties swaggering towards the living room with his hands deep in the pockets of his black donkey jacket. He stopped abruptly just inside the door and looked at Jane. She could see from the way he filled the doorframe that he was big and muscular. His nose resembled a boxer's and he had a square-set, unshaven jaw.

'What's going on, Mum?' he asked, looking Jane up and down with disdain. She noticed his eyes were dark and penetrating.

Renee was sipping her tea so Jane took the opportunity to explain her presence.

'I bumped into your mother and she had a bit of a shock, so I helped her home. My name is Jane Tennison.' She put her hand out politely for him to shake.

He didn't reciprocate, but gave her a cold arrogant glare and asked his mother brusquely if she was all right.

'I had one of me asthma attacks, John,' Renee said, a nervous tremble in her voice as if she was afraid of him.

Jane picked up on the uneasy atmosphere and tried to break the tension. 'I made a pot of tea, would you like a cup?'

'Really . . . moving in now, are you?' he replied, and coming closer gripped Jane by her elbow.

‘Go on, get out . . . get the fuck OUT! Move it, PISS OFF NOW,’ he snapped, and virtually frogmarched her out of the room.

Pushing her hard in the small of her back he propelled her onto the communal landing, barely giving her time to grab her bag before he slammed the door behind her. Tempted to ring the doorbell to give him a piece of her mind, Jane then thought better of it. It wasn’t so much that he was large and intimidating, but she was already late for work and if things got out of hand she had no means of calling for backup.

John went into the lounge, pulled off his jacket and threw it onto the wing chair. He clenched his fist at his mother.

‘What you think you’re fuckin’ doing, you stupid old cow? I could slap you so hard right now.’

Renee cringed away from him looking terrified. ‘I’ll put the kettle back on and make a fresh cuppa . . .’

He poked his finger at her. ‘I’d like to pour the boiling water over your stupid head. Don’t you know a bloody rozzer when you see one?’

Renee shook her head in fear.

‘Her fuckin’ handbag was in the hallway. I had a quick look and there was a police hat in it, you stupid bitch. She was wearing black tights and shiny black shoes – it all sticks out like a sore thumb. What in Christ’s name do ya think you were doin’?’

‘I’m sorry, son, I—’

‘She’s bloody snoopin’ around, that’s what she’s doing.’

‘I didn’t know, I swear before God I didn’t know! She almost knocked me off me feet in the street.’

He sighed as he went to the kitchen and got himself a can of beer from the fridge. Taking a large swig, he began to calm down. Maybe it was just his paranoia kicking in, but seeing the police hat had really infuriated him. His hand was shaking as he swigged down the rest of the can, crushed it and threw it into the bin. Feeling more relaxed he made a fresh mug of tea and took it through to his mother.

‘Here you go, I’ve sugared it. I’m sorry I kicked off, Ma, but I’m upset about your cleaning job and I don’t want you doing it no more. Besides, you’re getting your state pension now so ya don’t need to work anyway.’

‘But I like working and I got friends there—’

‘No buts, Ma, just do as I say. You stay put and no more visitors. You got everything you need and more right here.’

She cupped the mug in her hands and sipped. ‘I get lonely, John, and with you not working why can’t I carry on doing what I’ve done for most of your life?’

‘Listen to me. I’m not going to be staying here for much longer, and when I leave you can do what you like, but for now you do as I tell you. And if you see that bitch rozzer around here again, you tell me.’

By the time Jane arrived at the station she was an hour late. Her hair was bedraggled and dripping wet, the uniform under her coat was damp and her shoes were soaked through as well. She knew she would have to report to the duty sergeant, but wanted to

smarten herself up a bit before the inevitable dressing down for being late and missing parade.

She stood outside the front of the imposing four-storey redbrick-and-white-stone building and realized that she'd have to pass the front counter and duty sergeant's desk if she went in via the main entrance. She decided to go through the rear gates, so she could sneak down the stairs to the ladies' locker room to tidy herself up. To her relief there was no one in the yard as she scuttled across it: the Vauxhall Viva panda cars must have all been out on patrol.

'Tennison! Stop right there!' a voice bellowed from the canteen window on the third floor.

Recognizing the voice of Sergeant Bill Harris, Jane froze on the spot.

'What bloody time do you call this?'

Jane looked up slowly. 'I'm really sorry, Sergeant, but I—'

'No excuses. You've got two minutes to be in front of my desk in full uniform for inspection.'

Jane wished she had access to a hairdryer, but she didn't have time to do anything with her hair. She tied it in a ponytail with a thin black band and pushed the sides up under her hat before running upstairs to the front office to present herself. Sergeant Harris, he of 'thirty years' experience', as he constantly liked to remind everyone, was a hardened old-school copper who thought the recent amalgamation of the women's police force with the men's was 'an outrageous bloody disgrace!'

Jane was certain that he would, as usual, find some tedious job for her. More often than not she found herself in the

communications room processing calls and dispatching the patrol officers to incidents over the radio. Even when she got to go on patrol, if anything of interest came up she was bypassed, or worse ignored, thanks to Sergeant Harris's hold and influence over the junior male constables below his rank.

As she stood to attention in the front office Harris walked around her shaking his head in disapproval.

'Have you been using your hat as a cushion? You look like a drowned rat, you've got a filthy face, and what's that all over your hands?'

'Mud, Sergeant, from picking up potatoes.'

He leaned forward, his face close to hers. 'Don't be funny with me, Tennison.'

'I was helping an elderly lady and—'

'I don't want to hear it. I've got officers helping the CID with a dead body, one who's gone sick and I've had to post someone else to your beat. And to top it all, I'm havin' to answer the duty desk phone and deal with the public at the front counter myself. I should be directing, not doing, Tennison.'

'Sorry, Sergeant. Can I still go on patrol?'

'No, you missed your chance by being late. I expect better, Tennison, and this incident won't go unnoticed on your next probationer's report. Now, get your backside into the comms room and help Morgan out. All the incoming message forms from the weekend and this morning need to be filed away.'

Jane scurried into the small stuffy communications room where WPC Kathleen Morgan was on the phone speaking to a member of

the public, recording the details on an incident message pad. She smiled, gave a wave and mouthed 'Hello' to Jane, who waved back.

Kathleen, or Kath as she was commonly known, was a curvaceous brunette with hazel eyes and thick, unruly, curly hair. She had a habit of wearing too much make-up, contrary to police regulations that stated it should be 'subtle and discreet', but she didn't care and was more than capable of coping with her male colleagues' flippant or derogatory remarks. She would stand firm, hands on her hips, ready for any of the macho banter:

'You've got too much lipstick on, Morgan.'

'Oh really? Well, kiss it off then – that is if your belly can even let you get that close.'

Kath was twenty-six and had joined the police aged nineteen. She was a London girl from Canning Town and was used to the chauvinistic ways of many of her male counterparts. She took no stick from anyone. She was the only other woman on 'B Relief' with Jane, and had shown her the ropes from day one.

The teleprinter in the corner was clicking away and rolling off messages from Scotland Yard and other stations. Beside two wooden desks, facing each other, was a small telephone switchbox with a radio communications set. On the desk where Kath was sitting was the latest piece of technology, a visual display unit computer, or VDU as it was commonly known. It allowed fast access to centrally held records at Scotland Yard, including information on stolen or suspect vehicles, wanted or missing persons and registered-vehicle owners. The wall adjacent to the desks was covered with collator's cards showing pictures and details of local wanted criminals and those

suspected of habitual and recent crimes. Next to these were a number of missing persons appeal leaflets.

‘Jane, can you check the teleprinter for any urgent messages while I put this call out to one of the panda cars?’ Kathleen asked and Jane nodded.

‘Panda Five Two, can you attend the scene of a suspect’s disturbed break-in at 22 Wick Lane . . . Golf Hotel, over.’

‘Five Two received and on way,’ the reply came over the loudspeaker.

‘I’m sorry I was late, Kath.’

‘No problem, darlin’ – what kept you?’

Jane started to give a condensed version of the earlier events, causing Kath to laugh out loud when she told her about the apples and potatoes rolling into the road.

‘I dunno, Jane, it always happens to you, don’t it?’

‘I thought she was going to faint, so I ended up taking her home to Ashburn House on—’

Kath raised her eyebrows and interjected. ‘The Pembridge Estate, another of Hackney’s delightful areas.’

‘Actually her flat was surprisingly well furnished and the kitchen had some really new appliances. She must’ve got the stuff from the Green Shield Stamps catalogue.’

Kath looked bemused. ‘What sort of stuff?’

‘A front-load washer, tumbler-drier, dishwasher, cooker—’

Kath laughed at Jane's naivety. 'The stamps are a rip-off. It would take years, not to mention spending a fortune, to get the thousands and thousands of stamps needed to buy that lot. More than likely the stuff was nicked off the back of a lorry, or taken from a warehouse break-in and then sold around the estate. You'd be surprised how many villains live on estates like the Pembridge. What was her name?'

'Irene Bentley – although she asked me to call her Renee – and her son was called John. He was an aggressive sod, not even so much as a thank-you for helping his mum. He didn't want me in the flat so frogmarched me out.'

'Villains can smell the Old Bill a mile off. You need to be careful, Jane. Never go on the rough estates without backup.'

'It was a lesson learned, Kath. Anyway, what's this about a dead body? Sergeant Harris mentioned something.'

Kath said that she didn't know too much, but handed Jane a copy of the teleprinter message sent to the Yard.

'Poor thing was—' Kath began before breaking off to answer the phone.

Jane sat down behind the desk and started to read the message. The body was found early morning on the recently built Hackney Marshes Adventure Playground, close to the Kingsmead Estate. The victim was an unknown white girl with blonde hair, believed to be fifteen to eighteen years old, wearing hot pants, a white blouse and blue platform boots.

Kath finished dealing with the phone call. 'You read it? Poor kid, just awful, so young.'

‘It doesn’t say how she died,’ Jane noticed.

‘They’re waiting for the post-mortem, but I heard it was pretty obvious . . . the bastard used the girl’s own bra to strangle her to death.’

‘How horrible.’

‘From the way she was dressed, and the junkie tracks on her arms, they think she was on the game and may have been turning a trick at the playground. They’re setting up the crime squad office as the incident room for the murder.’

The door to the comms room opened and Sergeant Harris stuck his head in. ‘DCI Bradfield wants to see me in his office about the murder and he’d like a cup of tea, Tennison, milk and two sugars with some digestive biscuits. Same for me as well, and when you’ve done that take over from me on the duty desk and cover the front counter as well.’ He left, banging the door shut behind him.

‘Pleasant bugger, isn’t he?’ Kath said, giving Jane a smile.

‘Key to getting on his good side is to keep your head down and “Yes, Sarge, no, Sarge, three bags of grovel, Sarge.”’

The canteen was closed so Jane went to the small kitchen annexe instead. As usual it had been left in a mess and she was revolted by the state of it. Above the sink there was a water-splashed, hand-written notice taped to the wall: ‘Leave it as you’d expect to find it . . . TIDY & CLEAN!’ She shook her head in disgust. The sink was full of old tea bags, dirty mugs, cutlery, and plates caked with crusted HP and tomato sauce. She put the kettle on the gas cooker, rolled up her sleeves, picked out the used tea bags, tipped out the greasy cold water from the plastic bowl and filled it with hot water and washing up liquid. As she washed the dirty dishes a male officer walked in,

dropped three dirty mugs and plates in the sink, said, 'Thanks, love,' and walked out. Jane sighed, finished the washing up, dried the dishes and then stacked them on the open shelves.

Jane carried the two mugs of tea and the biscuits on a tray to the DCI's office and, balancing it on one knee, she tapped the door which immediately swung open, almost causing her to drop the tray. Cigarette smoke billowed from the room and the stench was repulsive.

'About bloody time, I thought you'd gone AWOL again.' Sergeant Harris grabbed the tray from her. 'Take these Polaroid photos of the murder scene back to the incident room next door and give them to Sally the indexer.'

Outside the DCI's office Jane had a quick look at the six small pictures Harris had given her. She hadn't yet been to a murder scene. She had attended a non-suspicious death of an eighty-year-old man with angina. He'd been found dead in his bed from a heart attack, but that was nothing compared with this. The pictures of the young female victim shocked her, particularly the close-up shot of the heroin-needle marks on the girl's arms. Worse was the close-up of the victim's face, with the bra wrapped round her neck. Her bulging eyes were dotted with red spots and her swollen tongue protruded from her mouth. Blood trickled down from where she must have bitten it whilst being strangled.

Jane felt queasy as she walked into the incident room, only to find it empty. She assumed that the detectives must be down at Hackney Marshes or out making enquiries near the scene. The medium-sized room looked cramped with eight old wooden desks and chairs taking up most of the floor space. There were two telephones and a large carousel on top of one of the desks, with a

pile of indexing cards next to it. On the wall a map of Hackney Police Division was dotted with different-coloured pins denoting where robberies, burglaries, assaults and other incidents had taken place in the last few months. Next to the map was a large sheet of white paper with a description of the victim, the location, date and time of the discovery of the body, and the name of the lab sergeant dealing with the forensics. A note pinned to the wall stated that the post-mortem would be at Hackney Mortuary.

Worried about leaving the Polaroids on the desk, Jane decided to take them downstairs to the front office and return them to the incident room later when Sally was there.

Sitting down at the duty desk she put the photographs face down. She noticed that one of the red lights on the phone console linked to the comms room was flashing and another was white, which meant Kath Morgan must be using that line.

‘Don’t stare at it, woman . . . answer it.’

Jane jumped and snatched up the phone. She hadn’t seen Sergeant Harris approach from the side. ‘Hackney Police Station, can I help you? Just one moment, please. I will need to take some details. Can you state your name?’

Aware Harris was watching over her shoulder she took a pen from her shirt pocket and drew the message pad towards her, writing down the caller’s name. At the same time she checked her watch to note exactly what time the call came in.

Jane listened as Harris breathed heavily beside her. She then placed her hand over the mouthpiece explaining that it was a Mrs Hardy reporting that her purse had been snatched outside a pub.

‘She sounds drunk,’ Jane said.

‘Give it here,’ Harris said, grabbing the phone.

He leaned his elbows on the desk. ‘Mrs Hardy, this is the duty sergeant. You will need to come to the station so WPC Tennison can take a full crime report. Good day,’ he said bluntly, and flicked the call button off. ‘There, job done. Let’s see if she can be as bothered when she’s sober.’

Then Harris saw the crime scene pictures. ‘What are these doing here? I told you to take them to the incident room.’

‘I’m sorry, Sergeant, but there was no one there and I didn’t want to leave—’

‘I’ll bloody do it myself.’

Jane knew he was using it as an excuse to get away from the duty desk and that he probably wouldn’t come back for ages, which in some ways was a blessing.

An hour later it was five o’clock and, as Jane had suspected, Harris still hadn’t returned. She wondered if he was in the snooker room or playing a game of gin rummy for money in the canteen. She popped into the comms room to get her handbag and told Kath she’d been in the incident room but hadn’t been able to glean much more about the case than they already knew.

‘The crime scene pictures were horrible, Kath. How could someone do that to her?’

‘You’ll get used to it, Jane, you have to in this job. The proper large photographs will be developed by tomorrow and they’ll be even more graphic.’

Jane kept the comms-room door open so she could see the front counter in case anyone came in. She pulled out a form from her handbag.

‘What have you got there?’ Kath asked.

‘I decided to sign up for the Dr Harker lecture, the one you told me about,’ answered Jane.

Julian Harker was a renowned forensic scientist who would be discussing in detail a complicated murder inquiry he had been involved in. As a probationer Jane was allowed to attend lots of courses and she was keen to take advantage of any opportunities to learn more.

‘He’s a snazzy guy, quite attractive, which is a plus. He’s really clever and you’ll learn a lot.’

Kath leaned close to Jane – she wore a distinctive heavy perfume that Jane found rather overpowering – and whispered that it was always good to get one over the other plods. ‘You never know who’s watching and listening, love. The more you learn the better you’ll become at the job. You know what they say . . . knowledge is brains . . .’

‘I think you mean power, Kath.’

‘Whatever, I’ve been to two of his lectures, and believe me he knows his stuff.’

‘I have to give this form to Sergeant Harris first and I doubt he’ll recommend me. He hates the fact women are integrated now and can do the same jobs as the men.’

Kath snorted. ‘Integrated, my arse! The blokes still get paid more. Anyway, stuff Harris. Take it straight up to Bradfield now, he

can only say yes or no. I'll keep one eye on the counter and I'll tell Harris you nipped to the loo if he comes back.'

Jane was nervous of DCI Bradfield. His impatient manner was intimidating and although Kath insisted he had a kinder side, Jane was yet to see it. Looking towards his closed office door she wondered if perhaps her timing, due to the murder investigation, was not great. Suddenly the door swung open and Bradfield walked out. He was well over six foot tall, handsome and raw-boned, with red curly hair, and as usual had a cigarette dangling between his lips. He looked smart in his neatly pressed dark grey suit with shiny black polished brogues.

It was now or never, she thought to herself. 'Excuse me, sir.'

'What?' he snapped impatiently.

'Could I possibly have a word?'

'It'd better be quick because I'm starving and about to get a sandwich from the canteen,' he said, causing a lump of ash to fall from the cigarette still in his mouth.

Jane had a sudden thought. 'I'd be happy to get that if you're busy, sir. In the meantime I wonder if you could read and approve my application to attend Dr Harker's forensic science lecture.'

He clicked his fingers twice for her to hand the form over, which she did. He had just started to read it when one of his detectives, Constable Mike Hudson, came running up the stairs with a look of excitement on his face and his CID notebook in his hand.

'Got a possible, guv! Young girl aged seventeen, a patient at the Homerton Hospital Drug Dependency Unit – she matches the

description of our victim. Her details are in here, as well as her boyfriend's.'

Bradfield looked enthused as Hudson handed over his notebook. He had a quick look and handed it back. 'Good work, son. I want every available detective in the incident room for a meeting in ten minutes.'

Bradfield grabbed a pen from the detective's breast pocket and signed Jane's application without reading it any further and passed it to her with a smile.

'Pay attention at the lecture. Harker is the best scientist in the forensic labs.' He stubbed his cigarette out in the overflowing ashtray attached to the wall.

'Don't bother with the sandwich – I've got no time to eat it now.'

'Thank you, sir,' Jane said, as she looked at his signature on the application form with a beaming smile.