

Lynda
La
Plante
DARK
ROOMS

ZAFFRE

*For Noel Fitzpatrick and his wonderful team at Fitzpatrick
Referrals, who helped save Hugo, you have mine and
Hugo's sincere thanks and gratitude.*

CHAPTER ONE

‘Detective Inspector Jane Tennison.’ Jane had repeated it out loud four times, looking at herself in the mirror. She couldn’t help admiring her reflection, enjoying the reality of her new promotion. It hadn’t been easy to get to where she was.

She hadn’t shared the news with her family yet, deciding that she would go and see them, taking a bottle of celebratory champagne. Her parents had been somewhat confused by the fact that Jane had had to spend almost a year in uniform as part of the promotion process. Although she had tried to explain the reasons, her mother seemed to think she had been demoted, so Jane felt that the less said about it the better.

Due to her work schedule, she had spent very little time at her new home recently. Moving into the two-bedroom terraced house had been a major step up for her on the property ladder, but the responsibility attached to owning a much larger property was only just beginning to dawn on her. There were a lot of repairs that needed doing, including a persistent electrical fault in the kitchen. She decided that she would make a list of what needed doing. Until she was given the location of the station that she would be working from, she could spend more time focusing on redecorating and organising her new home. She had already made two purchases for the kitchen, a new fridge freezer and a washing machine. After passing the exams, she had been back on shift work and busy running a uniform team. Now, with her promotion and on a higher wage, she was determined to get all the home improvements necessary.

Jane glanced in the bathroom mirror again before leaving for her parents’. ‘Good evening, I am Detective Inspector Jane Tennison.’ She was secretly bursting with pride and was eager to impart the news.

Although Jane had a front door key to her parents' flat in Maida Vale, she rarely used it as she didn't like to invade their privacy. Before tonight, she'd always called her mother to arrange a visit and had never just turned up. She rang the doorbell and her father pulled open the front door, looking at his daughter with delight.

'This is a surprise!' He ushered Jane into the hall.

Through the sitting-room door, Jane could see her parents' neighbours sitting on the sofa. On the coffee table in front of them was a tray of sherry glasses and neatly cut sandwiches, while the radio had the volume turned up loud.

'Guess who's here?' her father called out.

Rather embarrassed, Jane held up the bottle of Moët & Chandon. Her mother clapped her hands.

'This is wonderful, darling! You know Mr and Mrs Murphy, from the flat above? And the Silvermans from the basement flat are going to be joining us any minute. Why didn't you call and tell me you were coming over? It's going to be the most fantastic evening.'

Jane was feeling distinctly nonplussed. She hadn't expected her mother to be hosting a gathering. It was clearly neither the time nor the place to announce her promotion.

'Good God!' her father said as he took the bottle out of Jane's hand. 'This is very expensive. I'll put it in the fridge.'

'Actually, Dad, it's really for a celebration . . .'

'I quite agree. I've never known your mother so enthusiastic about hosting, but she seems to be enjoying herself. Pam and Tony are coming along with the grandchildren as well. Come into the kitchen.'

As her mother returned to her guests, Jane followed her father into the kitchen as he put her champagne bottle into the fridge.

'Is everything all right, Jane?' he asked.

'Yes, everything's fine. I was just stopping by for a few minutes to tell you the good news. I've been promoted. I'm now Detective Inspector. I wanted to tell you both personally . . .'

She hesitated,

then lied. 'But I was actually just on my way to meet a friend for dinner.'

'Well, that *is* good news,' he said, rather unconvincingly.

'I'm waiting to find out which station I'll be working from. I just wanted you and Mum to know. But I won't take up any more of your time.'

'Are you sure? You know we have the Silvermans coming up soon? They have a lovely daughter, although I believe their son is in a bit of trouble. Why don't you just stay for a glass of sherry?'

'No, Dad, I'll just slip off. I don't want to intrude any further.'

He gave a resigned smile. 'I understand. I think your mother is getting her second wind in life! How is everything at the new house?'

'Fine, thanks. There are a few electrical problems, and I'm having some new kitchen appliances fitted, but I'm just going to take it one step at a time.'

He nodded. 'That's sensible. Just make sure you get a proper professional to do the electrics. Don't just go for the cheapest. We've had a problem with a light switch in the hall for six months. When one of the light bulbs pops, it trips all the lights in the hall. We've had two "more than my job's worth" electricians in organised by the caretaker but neither of them could fix it.'

'I'll take your good advice, Dad,' Jane replied, eager to leave.

By the time she reached her car, she felt a bit foolish for not staying. But the truth was her parents' friends interrogating her about her work had always made her feel uncomfortable. At least her parents hadn't asked if she was seeing anyone, as they usually did. The fact was that she had been focusing all her attention on getting promoted and hadn't had time for a relationship. She was now looking forward to finding out which station she would be attached to and what she'd be working on. As a detective inspector, she was really hoping that she might be assigned to an important case.

Mrs Tennison couldn't believe that Jane had left without saying goodbye. Even her husband telling her that she'd only popped round to tell them that she had been promoted didn't satisfy her.

'I mean, how long has it been since we had one evening with her? I know she's been very busy, and all this going back into uniform doesn't really seem to make sense if she's supposed to have been promoted now.'

'I think she was on her way out to a celebration dinner. She just wanted us to be the first to know her good news,' Mr Tennison said, trying to appease her.

He was saved from any further discussion by the doorbell, heralding the arrival of the Silvermans.

* * *

When Jane returned home, she felt depressed. It was a Saturday night, and there were no friends eager to go for a celebratory drink with her. She had been so intent on her work, she had not kept up the friendship with her next-door neighbours, Gerry and Vi, even though to begin with Gerry had been very helpful, offering to do any small jobs she needed. Actually, she had felt he was a bit too nosy. She knew his dog (who had liked to use her gate post to urinate on) had died a few months ago, and she was a bit relieved that this meant his day and evening walks past her house were no longer so frequent. As for the young couple in the house on the other side, she hadn't met them yet as they appeared to leave very early in the morning and return before she had got home.

She walked into her kitchen where the new fridge freezer was still in its wrapping, next to the washing machine. She had purchased it so that she would no longer have to go to the launderette, but had no notion of how to plumb it in.

She put the kettle on the hob and, feeling peckish, decided she'd make some cheese on toast. But the bread was mouldy, and

the sliced cheese looked unappetising. She would have to go to Bickley's Best, the small local corner shop a five-minute walk away.

Jane was already on good terms with the Caribbean owner who ran the shop with his wife and nephews. Winston greeted her warmly as she entered.

'Good evening, Jane.'

She gathered a sliced loaf, a block of cheddar cheese and a tin of baked beans and put them down on the checkout counter.

'Having a party, are we?' he said, with a mischievous grin. Jane turned and took down a bottle of vodka from the shelf next to her.

'I wasn't, but I will now. Do you have any tonic water?'

'It's on the opposite side, with the soft drinks.'

As she picked up a large bottle of Indian tonic water, she noticed the board with advertisements for flats to rent, along with numerous cards for interior decorators and plumbers, including one very professional-looking flyer for Fraser & Son.

She turned to Winston. 'These electricians . . . can you recommend them?'

He nodded enthusiastically. 'I most certainly can. They fixed up my nephew's garage with strip lights. He also had a lot of problems with his garage doors, but they sorted it really good. And if you want any decorating done, Dwight – the card next to theirs – is very professional.'

Jane jotted the number down. She paid for her groceries and by the time she got home, felt in need of a vodka and tonic, only to discover the ice box in the old fridge would need a hammer and chisel to get any ice out.

Although it was now early evening, she put in a call to Fraser & Son, noting that their address was local, in Bromley. The answer-phone clicked on and she listened to the message.

'You have called Fraser & Son electrical engineers. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please leave your

name and number and we will return your call as soon as possible. Let us know if you need urgent assistance.'

Jane left a message saying that she could wait until Monday. Hopefully by then she would know which station she was going to be working from.

At half past seven, having consumed two large vodka and tonics, Jane got a call back from the electrician to arrange an appointment for nine o'clock on Sunday morning. Mr Fraser said that he would give her an estimate for checking her wiring and suggested that the washing machine might require a plumber, but his son would be able to recommend someone.

Jane thought about getting a second estimate from another electrician but decided to wait until she had met Mr Fraser. In the meantime, she began re-organising the kitchen to make room for the new appliances.

* * *

At half past six on Sunday morning the foreman, John Bishop, was the first to arrive at the building site in Stockwell. The site was surrounded by high corrugated-iron fences and Bishop began removing the chains from the corrugated gate. He was expecting three skips to be delivered for clearing the large garden of the five-storey house that was being demolished, after a series of delays caused by the council.

It still amazed him that the huge Victorian house, with its neglected half-acre garden, was still standing in the middle of this redeveloped area. It was going to take considerable time to clear the dense overgrowth and ancient trees, as well as the large rotting greenhouse which was only being held up by the overgrown plants and weeds growing inside. If there had ever been a path from the back of the house, it could no longer be seen. Also on his schedule was the demolition of an old air-raid shelter situated,

according to the council plans, almost in the centre of the large overgrown garden.

The demolition team began arriving at seven, and the large digging equipment to clear the garden was due to be arriving on a heavy loading lorry at eight. It was an exceedingly costly project, and they were under pressure to get the land cleared as soon as possible so the new owners could begin building a block of flats on the site.

Bishop had given the men orders that as soon as the skips were full, they were to be taken away immediately and replaced with empty ones, knowing it would take several loads to clear that volume of debris. But if they could complete the garden clearance by the afternoon, then use the same team to demolish the air-raid shelter, they should be on schedule. When he had been overseeing the demolition of the house itself, he had been astonished at the size of the basement which, according to the council, had been off-limits to the tenants, along with the garden. No wonder it was such a jungle, he thought.

* * *

As soon as Edward Fraser, the son in the electrical firm Fraser & Son, walked into Jane's kitchen he had told her that she would require a plumber, as her new washing machine would need to be plumbed in by drilling through the wall to connect the water pipe to the mains. On the other hand, connecting her new fridge freezer was a very simple matter. His main concern, though, was that the kitchen's electrical circuits had probably been installed when the house had been built in the 1930s.

Jane stood in the kitchen doorway. 'Are you saying I can't just plug it in?'

'Usually you can do that, but I think with your electrics you might have some major problems. I need more time to check all the wiring. I noticed that there was a dimmer switch in your hallway.'

Jane nodded. 'Yes. It doesn't work, though. How long would it take to rewire everything in the kitchen?'

Edward Fraser had never come across anyone quite like Jane Tennison. She seemed to be absolutely clueless, and when he showed her some of the damaged wires she became quite agitated.

‘I haven’t been living here very long. Are you saying that I could have been electrocuted?’

He smiled reassuringly. ‘No, I’m just saying that it would be wise for you to have your kitchen rewired. I need to take up the floorboards and check underneath, but you’ve got considerable damp around your sink unit. If you’re going to have a washing machine installed you really need to check the existing plumbing too.’

Jane was beginning to get annoyed. She knew she had got the house at a very good price, even though she had been told by her solicitor that the property needed some renovation. Now she was in a quandary as to how much trust she could put in this electrician, Edward Fraser, or whether should she get a second opinion.

‘Can you give me an estimate for the works?’ she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘What estimate do you want? For rewiring? For checking the damp as well? And as I said, I think you should get a professional plumber in for the washing machine.’

‘Do you think you could give me an estimate for the whole thing, and if you know a good plumber then perhaps he could come to the house to quote. At the moment I have a kitchen that I’m rather afraid to use.’

Edward looked pointedly at his watch and said that he had another job to go to, but he would be able to fax her his estimate and would make inquiries with a friend of his who was a professional plumber.

Jane sighed. ‘I don’t have a fax machine here.’ And she could have added that at the moment she didn’t even know where she would be working from.

They eventually agreed that he would come back later in the afternoon with his friend, and together they would give her the estimate to complete all the necessary work.

Eight skips had now been filled with the debris from the garden in Stockwell, but the work was continuing, with a digger trying to break down the roots that had once belonged to an enormous oak tree. The tree itself had taken considerable time to cut down, and Bishop had now assigned six men to the clearing process as he was concerned they were falling behind schedule – not to mention the numerous complaints about the traffic disruption the work was causing. The police had been called out every time the full skips had been removed because they blocked most of the main road.

His hard hat on, Bishop was now talking to the representative of the new owners of the property, who told him that many of the old Victorian bricks should be put in storage as they were quite valuable. Holding his clipboard in his left hand, Bishop said they would need scaffolding to be erected on the standing walls, but he could make sure the bricks were salvaged.

Bishop heard a shout and turned to see one of the men working on the gardens clearly in a distressed state. ‘There’s almost been a fatal accident,’ he explained breathlessly. Bishop, keen to end the conversation, followed his worker back to the garden.

The ten-foot-high corrugated fencing which had been erected around the half-acre site had been pulled down to allow the diggers to enter. Bishop stood in shock as he was told that a large crater had appeared in the ground, and the digger had almost tipped into it. When the machine backed away, it had clipped the side of the now partially visible air-raid shelter. Bishop made his way around the crater as the men gathered, all looking down. It appeared that at one time it had been some kind of tunnel as they could see part of a concrete wall. He instructed the men to stop working as he checked through the plans on his clipboard. He was surprised at the size of the air-raid shelter as the measurements didn’t correspond with his plans, and there was certainly no reference to any kind of tunnel.

Bishop was joined by Tom, the worker who had been overseeing the clearance of the garden, a huge man also wearing a hard hat. ‘I reckon we need to take a look inside the shelter,’ he told

Bishop. 'I'm worried more craters could appear, and my team can't work safely.'

The shelter had what looked like a heavy garden door, with iron studs and hinges, secured by a large chain. Another worker appeared with a jack to break open the chain and the three of them heaved open the door, releasing a dreadful stench of mould and sewage. Wincing, Bishop stepped gingerly into the first chamber and was again surprised at the size of it. There were old tables, chairs, cupboards storing tinned food, lamps and candles. Shining a powerful torch beam, Bishop made his way to an archway.

'None of this is on the bloody plans I've got,' he muttered, shaking his head. 'This place is twice the size that's indicated.'

There were four steps down to the second chamber where there was an array of old iron bedsteads stacked with blankets and pillows, all of them green with mildew. He shone the torch towards another door and could see the debris from where the digger had struck the outer corner. From the first chamber Tom called out that they needed to be careful that the shelter didn't collapse. Bishop moved cautiously further in and then almost dropped the torch in shock. There was a corpse lying on the mattress of a small cot bed.

He gasped. 'Jesus, God! Tom, you better get the police here. There's a bloody dead body. I'm coming out.'

Bishop had not stayed long enough to note that the grotesquely shrivelled victim was female, what remained of her long blonde hair spread like a halo around her skull. Nor did he notice the worst horror. The dead woman was chained to the bed.

Lynda La Plante was born in Liverpool. She trained for the stage at RADA and worked with the National Theatre and RSC before becoming a television actress. She then turned to writing and made her breakthrough with the phenomenally successful TV series *Widows*. She has written over thirty international novels, all of which have been bestsellers, and is the creator of the Anna Travis, Lorraine Page and *Trial and Retribution* series. Her original script for the much-acclaimed *Prime Suspect* won awards from BAFTA, Emmy, British Broadcasting and Royal Television Society, as well as the 1993 Edgar Allan Poe Award.

Lynda is one of only three screenwriters to have been made an honorary fellow of the British Film Institute and was awarded the BAFTA Dennis Potter Best Writer Award in 2000. In 2008, she was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to Literature, Drama and Charity.

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