

**TASTE OF
BLOOD**

Also by Lynda La Plante

Jane Tennison series

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Good Friday
Murder Mile
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Blunt Force
Unholy Murder
Dark Rooms

DC Jack Warr series

Buried
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Pure Evil

Widows series

Widows
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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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For my readers

Chapter One

DI Jane Tennison arrived at her new station, hoping for a fresh start. She'd been transferred, at her own request, after she had investigated the case of the bodies found in an old air-raid shelter. She had been proud of the way she had handled the complex enquiry, but the DCI had given her little credit and she had found it impossible to continue working alongside him.

Jane had worked at three other stations, on a variety of cases, but none of them had really stretched her. After taking a month's long-overdue leave, she had been eager to find out where she would be posted. She had requested that it be closer to Bromley as the travel had been an issue on the last investigations she had worked on. One case in particular had been centred around Greenwich, which was a long drive from where she lived.

She had become rather disillusioned with her career and had even considered, albeit half-heartedly, quitting the Met. And when she had received the details of her new posting, it didn't immediately make her feel any more positive. Although it was closer to home, the station only had a very small CID section. However, on the plus side, Jane was interested in meeting her new boss, DCI Fiona Hutton. She had never worked alongside a high-ranking woman, and wondered if it would give her career the boost it needed.

Jane was now living with Eddie Myers and they were engaged to be married, although they had not yet agreed a date for the wedding, partly because they had been so focused on refurbishments to the house. Eddie's handiwork had already almost doubled the property's value, and he was now working on the front and back gardens, laying down paving and ordering trees and plants.

During her leave, Jane had enjoyed spending time with Eddie, helping him to put the finishing touches to the redecoration,

though at times she had found their lack of a shared interest beyond the house a little bit worrying. But he was so caring and good-natured that she put her doubts aside. And he certainly impressed her with his work ethic. He was becoming increasingly successful as a builder and renovator, and he and his team were working non-stop.

The drive to her new station only took fifteen minutes, and Jane arrived dressed in one of her smart suits, with a white shirt and Cuban-heeled shoes. She had recently had her hair cut shorter at her sister's salon, and Pam had encouraged her to have some more highlights. She was pleased to see there was a parking bay marked 'DI Jane Tennison' on a white plaque, and she was smiling as she made her way to the modern-looking, double-glass-fronted entrance.

Inside, the reception area was small, with a pine desk, typewriter and telephone, and a row of three hard-backed chairs against one wall. The access into the station offices was situated behind the desk and had a security keypad. The door was ajar and as Jane approached, a young, red-haired, uniformed officer walked out.

'Good morning. I'm DI Jane Tennison.'

He smiled. 'Good morning, ma'am, I am Constable Peter Thompson. If you go straight down the corridor, you will see the main double doors for the CID office. I will inform DCI Hutton that you have arrived.'

The young man stepped to one side to allow Jane to pass, holding the door open and then closing it behind her.

The strip-lighting on the ceiling gave the corridor a clinical feel, not unlike a hospital, and it seemed much less atmospheric than any of the stations Jane had previously worked at. Jane hesitated, then opened the door and walked in.

It was a spacious room with a double row of empty desks with typewriters and telephones, all with decent swivel office chairs. Placed along one wall facing the desks was a large whiteboard

with various scrawled felt-tipped messages. The office door to one side was closed and had a neat plaque saying 'DCI F. Hutton'. As Jane was taking in the empty room, the office door opened and a middle-aged woman in a tweed suit with a pink blouse came out carrying a thick file.

'You must be DI Jane Tennison. I'm Dora Phillips, head of the clerical staff. I think that desk by the window has been allocated to you. Right now, everyone is gathering for a briefing in the boardroom. Usually, we have a meeting on the first Monday of the month which always kicks off at eight thirty so everyone can have breakfast in the canteen. However, this morning there's a lecture taking place in about ten minutes. Now, if you would like to put your coat in the closet just by the double doors, and leave your briefcase on your desk, I can take you through.'

Jane deposited her coat and briefcase and followed Miss Phillips down the corridor to the boardroom.

Jane began to feel nervous as the door closed behind her. Seated around a large table were fifteen officers, some in uniform and others in street clothes. They all turned expectantly to look at Jane. Two of the officers half-rose out of their chairs.

'Good morning,' Jane said.

One of the officers, a big, burly, balding man, pushed his chair back and stood up.

'Detective Constable William Burrows . . . you must be Detective Inspector Tennison. Let me introduce you to everyone, and feel free to take the seat at the end of the table.'

Burrows went round the table making introductions and everyone smiled and raised their hands in acknowledgment. In all the years she had worked at the Met, Jane had never had an introduction like it and found the formality extraordinary. It was as if they were college students.

The double doors opened and DCI Hutton made her entrance. She was wearing an immaculate suit and high-heeled shoes that

accentuated her six-foot height. She had thick blonde hair, held by a tortoiseshell clip, and Jane thought she was quite a formidable presence as she moved around the table to stand by her empty chair.

‘DI Tennison, I must apologise to you for not being available to welcome you and introduce you to everyone, but I am sure DC Burrows has already done that for me. I would just like to welcome you and give you a brief outline of how we usually work. We normally have a once-a-month informal morning’s briefing, but today there’s something a bit different.’

She drew back her chair and sat down, giving Jane a warm smile, before opening a large, initialled, leather notebook.

‘Detective Paul Lawrence is due to arrive any moment to give a talk about a major breakthrough in forensic science. I felt it would be beneficial for everyone to listen and take notes.’

Jane knew Paul Lawrence well, and when a moment later he was ushered into the boardroom by Miss Phillips, she was really pleased to see him. Paul had hardly changed from when they had first worked together, when she was a probationer at Hackney, although his wavy blond hair was now thinning a little. He gave Jane a quick smile of recognition as he went to stand beside Hutton.

Paul opened a thick file, thanked DCI Hutton for the invitation, and began.

‘I am sure many of you have heard of the new scientific breakthrough: DNA. DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid, which is a complex molecule that contains all of the information necessary to build and maintain an organism. All living things have DNA within their cells; in fact, nearly every cell in a multicellular organism possesses the full set of DNA required for that organism. Although 99.9 per cent of human DNA sequences are the same in every person, enough of the DNA is different that it is possible to distinguish one individual from another with a DNA profile. To make any test, a smear or swab has to be taken from

inside the cheek or mouth. Or you can use blood, saliva, semen, vaginal lubrication and other bodily fluids, or even personal used items like hairbrushes, toothbrushes and razors, which can all have traces of DNA, as well as stored items such as banked sperm or biopsy tissues.'

Paul looked up from his notes and asked if anyone had any questions. Hutton was the first to speak.

'Do twins have the same DNA?'

'Only if they are monozygotic, which means identical. Anyone else have questions, or shall I go on to give you an example, which will hopefully help you fully understand this amazing breakthrough?'

'Please go on,' Hutton said, when no one spoke up.

Paul nodded. 'When a sample such as blood or saliva is obtained, the DNA is only a small part of what is present, so before DNA can be analysed it has to be extracted from the cells and purified.'

It was Hutton again who raised her pen to indicate she wanted to ask a question.

'Could you give us an example of a case that has recently used DNA to obtain a result?'

'Sure. As I have said, this is still a very new science but very soon it's going to become a vital tool, particularly in solving murder and rape cases. In July last year a young girl was murdered, and from the MO the officers were certain the same killer had murdered another young girl in 1983. The police already had a suspect arrested, and a sample of his DNA was compared with the DNA from blood samples recovered at both crime scenes. He was released because his genetic code did not match.'

There were frowns around the table as the officers wondered how DNA evidence had helped solve the case.

Paul waited for a moment before continuing. 'Hard to believe, but a woman in a bar overheard two men talking – one of them saying he had got away with murder because the police had arrested someone else for the crime. The man was traced and his DNA was

found to match both crime-scene samples. He admitted to the murder and also pleaded guilty to previous rapes.'

The conclusion of Paul's story was met with unanimous applause, and the meeting broke for coffee, during which Paul answered more questions before continuing for another twenty minutes, focusing on how important it was to observe a strict protocol to protect DNA samples from contamination, and make sure any samples taken were transferred correctly to the laboratories.

When he finished, Jane was keen to talk to him, but he only managed a quick 'Let's catch up soon' before being ushered from the room by Miss Phillips and on to his next appointment.

DCI Hutton asked for everyone to stay and have their usual update meeting but to keep it as brief as possible. Jane opened her notebook as officers began talking about various cases. Jane was surprised that there seemed to be no murder enquiries or investigations into any other serious criminal offences, and instead most of the discussion was about petty crimes and disorderly conduct. The most serious case involved a teenage cannabis possession arrest. DCI Hutton glanced at her wristwatch, and that appeared to be the unspoken signal for the team to get to work. Notebooks were closed and chairs pushed back as Hutton gestured to DC Burrows.

'I'd like you stay, DC Burrows, and brief DI Tennison on the dispute at Clarendon Court.'

Burrows moved his chair to sit beside Jane as Hutton left the boardroom and opened a file bulging with documents.

'Right, this has been quite a lengthy investigation involving a dispute between neighbours that has been ongoing for many years, and is basically about one of them building a fence around his property and a set of gates allowing access into his garden. There were letters and all sorts of insults and lawyers getting involved, until the planning board eventually gave permission for the fence to be built, which is apparently when the dispute escalated, culminating in an incident

that left one man in hospital on a life-support machine. I've spent many hours interviewing the families of both parties to try and find out what happened. I have also had a brief interview with the neighbours living opposite, but they were not at home when the incident occurred.'

After initially being disappointed that this seemed to be a case of neighbours quarrelling over a fence, Jane's interest was now piqued, especially when Burrows explained that the victim was still in a critical state and that it therefore could turn out to be a murder case, even though the alleged assailant, Mr Caplan, armed only with a garden spade, was claiming he'd acted in self-defence. She started looking through the documents.

'His wife claims that he was not in any way intent on using it; it just happened to be leaning against a wall when the two men began to argue,' Burrows explained.

Jane turned a page and tapped it with her finger.

'Is this his statement when he was brought into the station? Did Mr Caplan have any injuries consistent with being hit with an iron bar? I see he claimed that he only used the spade to protect himself, as his neighbour had an iron bar and struck him first.'

'Yes, but there was no bruising or other marks where he said he was struck, and no iron bar was recovered from the scene. So Mr Caplan looks like he's going to be facing an assault charge at the very least.'

'I'd like a map of the area,' Jane said. 'It's difficult to visualise the exact layout of the properties. And also the letters regarding the dispute.'

Burrows collected all his documents and handed them to Jane. Then he pushed his chair back and suggested they go into the CID office where a drawing was pinned up on the board.

The large room was busy and Jane put the file on her desk and went to join him in front of the board, where she saw a rather amateurish drawing in crayon showing a large square marked TARMAC.

On one side were the outlines of two substantial properties, along with drives and garages, numbered 4 and 8. On the right-hand side of the tarmac were two smaller properties numbered 10 and 7 respectively, with MARTIN BOON PROPERTY written prominently and in brackets VICTIM.

Then, opposite numbers 4 and 8, there was the most substantial property of all. This was number 12 and the owner was marked as DAVID CAPLAN.

‘As you can see it’s a very secluded courtyard,’ Burrows explained. ‘We have an estimate of the value of the properties. Numbers 4 and 8 are fairly new builds and we reckon to be worth £500,000 each, if not more, as they both have extensive back gardens. The two smaller ones, numbers 10 and 7, are more likely around £300,000 as their rear gardens are not up to much. The big property, number 12, would have been the original twelve-bedroomed manor house, with indoor swimming pool, two large gardens and a triple garage – valued at about three to four million. I would say that all the properties around it had been built when the land was sold off by the original owner’s heirs. It’s now owned by David Caplan. He bought it five years ago.’

Jane stifled a yawn, trying to concentrate, as Burrows tapped the number 12 with his pencil.

‘This is the fence and the gates that have been the cause of all the bad feeling between them. Mr Caplan had been given planning permission to take down the fences and replace them with a high wall and a pair of electric gates, even though Boon had objected to the wall and complained to the council. Boon also claims that where the fence is now is four inches over the boundary!’

Jane chewed her bottom lip, then pointed to the tarmacked courtyard.

‘Who owns that, or do they all share it?’

‘They’ve all got right of way, but they are not allowed to park there. It’s owned by number 10.’

‘What? The tarmac area belongs to that small house? That doesn’t make much sense.’

Burrows shrugged. ‘You tell me! It’s owned by Mr and Mrs Larsson, and she is a nasty piece of work; very rude and unhelpful. According to Mr Caplan, her husband has threatened his wife because she had parked outside their own double gates. She was also unpleasant when they moved in, and claimed the new double gates would not be allowed to open outwards as she owned the courtyard.’

Jane shook her head. It all sounded like a very odd situation.

‘So, this woman, Mrs Larsson, has she got any involvement in the assault?’

‘No, but we think that she is pulling Mr Boon’s strings. He seems to have been very friendly with her and easily influenced.’

Burrows looked at his wristwatch. ‘I ought to be going to the hospital. If Mr Boon dies, obviously it puts a whole new slant on the enquiry. I’ll leave you to go through the file, and we’ll get back together in the morning to discuss the next steps. I think Stanley should be back soon, and he’ll be able to answer any queries you might have.’

Jane went to her desk. It all seemed so tedious, she had not really been paying much attention to what Burrows was saying. She decided to go and have some lunch before returning to her desk and making some notes.

It was after two when Jane returned to her desk and started wading through the contents of Burrows’ file. Jane turned her head when she heard the door opening. She could hardly believe it! DI Stanley stood there, wearing a smart dark suit and black tie, his usual wild hair cut neatly, and with no moustache. He looked older, with lines etched on his face. On seeing Jane, he gave her a wide grin and walked over to her desk.

‘Long time no see, Jane!’

He leaned over to give her a kiss on the cheek. She could smell the alcohol on his breath, and he looked quite flushed.

‘I didn’t expect to see you here!’ she said, as he pulled up a chair.

‘I could say the same about you! I’m just waiting out the last couple of years for my pension. And then my knee needs replacing . . . same old injury . . . so what’s your excuse?’

Jane blushed. ‘I haven’t really got one, Stanley. I wanted to be transferred closer to home. I live in Chislehurst now.’

He rolled his eyes. ‘Yeah, actually I don’t live that far from here either . . . but I never thought I’d end up in this tin-pot excuse for a cop shop.’

Jane kept her voice low, moving closer to him. ‘I expected we would have our own offices, even more so now I know you’re here.’

‘Fraid that’s down to me. I’ve always liked to be in the thick of things. I was shown a poxy office, far end of the corridor, so I asked to have a desk here. The office is now used as a storage cupboard. It’s better to be in here.’

He leaned forwards to look over the papers on her desk.

‘Christ, you been put on this with Burrows. I’ve been doing the rounds on it, but it’s just a bloody load of domestic shite . . . unless the bastard dies, of course . . . then there’ll be piles of paperwork.’

‘Have you been able to obtain any previous medical history?’

‘Not yet. I was going to talk to his GP this morning, but it was Dexter’s memorial service, and I wasn’t going to miss that.’

Jane felt as if she had been punched in the stomach. She could hardly get the words out.

‘A memorial service for Alan Dexter?’

Stanley nodded, his emotions clearly close to the surface.

Before Jane could say anything more, DCI Hutton entered the room and called Stanley over. He stood abruptly and hurried to join her. Jane watched Hutton place a comforting hand on Stanley’s shoulder. Then Stanley went to his desk, took a file from a drawer and before Jane could say anything, walked out of the room. Hutton went into her office and Jane got up from her desk and hurried after Stanley.

The corridor was empty. Jane was not sure if he had gone to the gents' or whether he had left the station. Then she spotted young DC Thompson coming down the corridor.

'Have you seen DI Stanley?'

'He just passed me as he headed out of the station.'

'Thank you.' Jane raised her hands in a confused gesture.

'Straight down the corridor and through the car park exit, ma'am.'

Jane ran to the indicated exit, pushed the door open, and went down three steps into the rear yard of the station that was used by the patrol cars. She could see Stanley striding towards a Morris Minor and called out to him. He turned, swinging the car keys in his hand, as she joined him.

'Boss gave me the rest of the day off. I'm sober enough to drive now. Left my car here and got a taxi back from the memorial.'

'I need to ask you about Dexter,' Jane said. 'I hadn't heard anything, and didn't know about his memorial.'

Stanley pursed his lips, then opened the passenger door to toss in the file he had taken from his desk.

'What happened?' Jane asked.

'Get in, it's cold out here. There's always a nasty wind whistling through . . . The high walls act like a wind tunnel.'

Jane climbed into the passenger seat, picking up the file and putting it on her knee as Stanley went round to sit in the driving seat.

'Was it a bomb disposal incident?' Jane asked.

'No, love. Dexter sort of sidestepped from working for that unit. He was on a six-month sabbatical, or sick leave, whatever you want to call it. He got badly burned, but he was recovering well when I last saw him.'

'So what happened?'

'Well, you know what a mad keen racing driver Dexter was. He went over to France to have a private session at Le Mans. Apparently, he'd driven the Sarthe circuit there a couple of times, which

is well known for being very fast. He took a sharp right corner, near the River Sarthe. There was another safer circuit he could have driven, the Bugatti, but anyway, he was on the main track driving his Porsche 917 . . . they reckoned he was doing over 120 miles per hour when he lost control. I'm just repeating what I've been told, so I don't know all the details. It was a fatal accident. A family member had his body brought back for a private funeral, then the lads got together for the memorial today. It never made it into the press. I suppose he went the way he lived . . . right on the edge.'

Jane was struggling to swallow; her mouth felt bone-dry. She didn't know what to say, and it was hard to take it all in. Stanley had talked as if he had repeated the story many times.

She took a deep breath.

'Thank you for telling me. Feeling a bit shell-shocked.'

Stanley watched Jane walk back towards the station, feeling relieved that she hadn't broken down in tears. He doubted he would have been able to handle that. He had cried for his crazy, adrenaline-fuelled and fearless friend, even though he had not been that close to him. Not many people had really got to know Dexter, as he always kept himself at a distance, but he could also turn on the charm and be a warm and charismatic man. He had been a real ladies' man and always had a different beauty hanging on his arm; in fact, there had been three ex-girlfriends at the memorial.

Stanley sighed as he saw Jane turn at the station door to look back to him. Her face was drained of colour. He wondered if Dexter had ever screwed her, but he doubted it; she didn't seem his type. He chuckled to himself, realising he didn't know what Dexter's type was; like everything about that man, it was a mystery.

He started the engine and noticed that Jane was still standing by the door. She had pressed her face to the glass panel, and he now suspected that Dexter must have had sex with her. But it didn't matter one way or the other. Now crazy Dexter was dead and buried, it was all in the past. He drove out.

Chapter Two

Jane finished reading all the statements in the file. She made copious notes, and put together a list of suggestions about how they should proceed in the morning. Burrows came to tell her that Mr Boon was still unconscious but stable, and then Jane left the station, trying to block thoughts about Dexter from her mind. She still felt very raw inside but she couldn't allow her feelings to surface until she had some time alone.

To distract herself she went food shopping on the way home. Eddie was parking his van outside the house when she drew up.

'Hi there,' he said cheerfully. 'I've just got to unload some cans of paint I need for the morning. I'll put them in the garden shed.'

Jane let herself in through the front door, went straight to the kitchen and then opened the backdoor. Eddie had built a small shed that dominated the garden, which he used for storing building supplies and garden equipment. Not that he actually did any gardening, as there wasn't much of a garden, other than a flower-bed that she tended to at weekends.

Jane hadn't been particularly enthusiastic about the shed, but Eddie claimed it would save him a lot of time by not having to go to his storage unit. There were numerous ladders stacked against it, which had been there for some time, as there were tiles on the roof that needed replacing. Jane had learned that Eddie's best intentions weren't always followed through, as he was constantly working, often even at the weekend.

From the kitchen window she could see him carrying large cans of paint down the small path at the side of the house. She started preparing dinner while Eddie made trips back and forth between the shed and his van. He appeared at the kitchen door to say that

he was going to drop something off at his storage unit and would then be coming straight back.

‘How long are you going to be? I’ve got that pork with crackling in the oven,’ she said.

‘Fifteen to twenty minutes . . . Is that OK?’

Before she could answer he had closed the backdoor and had disappeared. She peeled the potatoes and put them on to boil, then filled the kettle with water for the fresh broccoli. She had bought the ‘meal for two’ pork from Waitrose, which had separate crackling to place under the grill.

By the time she had taken a quick shower and changed into some joggers and a sweatshirt, the potatoes were almost done. She drained them and put them onto a baking tray with some olive oil and seasoning to roast them. She took out the Bisto gravy tin and put two heaped tablespoons of granules into a jug, then checked the pork.

Finally the table was laid, she had opened a bottle of red wine, and the plates were warming on top of the cooker.

Ten minutes later Jane took the pork out, placed the crisped crackling on top of it, and put the potatoes and broccoli into a serving dish. There was still no sign of Eddie. She was just about to lose her temper when she heard the front door slam. Eddie appeared at the kitchen door.

‘Perfect timing!’ He grinned.

She watched him cross to the sink and run the water to wash his filthy hands. He had what looked like brick dust in his hair, and his jacket was covered in it as well.

‘Can you take your jacket off because you’re covered in dust. I don’t want you getting it over the food,’ Jane said.

‘Right . . . I had to haul a few things from off a tarpaulin in the yard. This all looks delicious . . . I’m starving.’

Jane got up from the table.

‘I’ll carve, you take your jacket into the hall, and leave it at the bottom of the stairs. And take your boots off while you’re at it!’

‘Right, you’re the boss!’

Jane snatched up the carving knife. It really irritated her the way he constantly left a trail of dust when he got back from work, and he always forgot to remove his work clothes before tramping through the house. She served them both then sat down and took a gulp of her wine.

‘Is there any apple sauce?’ he asked.

Jane got up, went to the cupboard and took out a jar of Bramley’s and plonked it on the table beside him. Eddie poured himself a glass of wine as she sat back down.

‘Had a good day?’ he asked.

‘Not really. For starters, I don’t have my own office . . . I suppose I could request one, but the other DI isn’t bothered . . . added to that, I’m working on this tedious assault situation with two warring neighbours.’

Eddie grinned. ‘Is it about boundaries?’

‘Yes, one property is worth a few million and is in a private courtyard. The other property is much smaller and modern; apparently, they’re rather cheap-looking houses. For some crazy reason the man accused of the assault has an obsession about people parking on a large, tarmacked area to the rear of the expensive property. He opposed planning permission for years, but it eventually came through recently, resulting in an assault which left one of them in a critical condition in hospital.’

Eddie winced. ‘What was the planning permission for?’

‘To have electric gates and a wall around his property.’

‘So, if it’s his land, what’s the problem?’

‘The neighbour, Mr Boon, claims that Mr Caplan cannot have a wall or gate as it is not in keeping with the other properties. He also claims that the existing fence is one inch over his property boundary and three inches over a tarmacked area in front of all the other properties, which is basically used as a car park. He’s been writing abusive letters for years, so when the council at long last approved

the application for Caplan to go ahead, Mr Boon went ballistic. That was according to Caplan's wife, at any rate, although Boon's wife insists he is a caring, quiet man who would never get into a confrontation. But I haven't had a conversation with any of them yet.'

Eddie crunched into some crackling. 'Blimey! I almost broke my front tooth!'

'Maybe I did it for too long under the grill, but it's good, isn't it?'

'It is, my beloved one, and you're getting to be a dab hand at the roast potatoes . . . they're really crispy.'

'That's down to your mum telling me how she does them. Anyway, this case . . . the situation is now serious because if Boon dies then it potentially becomes a murder.'

'Listen, I've seen open warfare over property lines and usually it's fences being erected that create the problems. How did he hit the bloke?'

'With a spade.'

'On the back of his head?'

'No, in the face apparently, but he went down hard. Mr Caplan swears he only picked up the spade because Mr Boon had an iron bar and was threatening him. Says he just swung the spade in self-defence.'

'Did they find the iron bar?'

'No, not yet.'

'Well, I'd say Boon just got unlucky.'

'I think part of it is jealousy. I mean, Caplan's property is huge. At one time it would have been the only manor house in the area.'

'Whereabouts is it?'

'I can't tell you; it's illegal if I do.'

'For God's sake! I might even know the place.'

'Maybe, but just forget it.'

'Fine, have it your way. Forgive me for even asking. But how come you as a detective inspector for the CID are dicking around with this kind of nonsense?'

‘I am “dicking around” with it, Eddie, because it has serious consequences if the victim dies and it becomes GBH or even murder. The question is whether it’s section 18 or 20.’

‘All a bit domestic, though, isn’t it? I’d have thought you would have been assigned something with a bit more grit.’

‘Believe me, I can’t wait to get something with more “grit”, but right now this is all I’ve got.’

Eddie put his dirty plate beside the sink, then drained his wine glass.

‘Well, I’m going to take a shower, then I wouldn’t mind going over some of my accounts with you. Since you encouraged me to keep an invoicing diary, I think I am in better shape than ever, financially. Before, I was constantly waiting on payments.’

Jane shrugged as she cleared the table, annoyed that he had not put his dirty plate and glass in the dishwasher. After clearing everything away and switching on the dishwasher, she went into the hall and picked up his dusty jacket which he had left on the banister. His boots were lying where he had kicked them off, so she fetched an old newspaper, spread it on the floor near the front door and put his boots on top. She then went into the closet beneath the stairs and took out the Hoover to clean the hall carpet. By the time she had finished tidying up it was after ten thirty.

Eddie was still in the bathroom when she went upstairs to the bedroom. She sat on the bed and opened her briefcase, checking what meetings she had the next day. Wearing boxer shorts and with his hair still wet from the shower, Eddie walked in carrying his dirty work clothes.

‘Should I put these in the laundry basket in the bathroom, or downstairs?’

‘Downstairs. I wash them separately because of the dust and grime. The basket is by the washing machine.’

‘Right, then are we going to go over the accounts?’

‘I’ll be down in a minute; I’m just sorting out my schedule for tomorrow.’

Eddie walked out and Jane pursed her lips. How many times had she told him that it would be easier if he took off his work clothes downstairs and put them in the laundry basket by the washing machine? Eddie occasionally did what he was asked, but he constantly had to be reminded. Just as he had to be reminded that when he took a shower, he should put the wet towels over the towel rail, not leave them in a pile on the floor. Jane looked into the bathroom and was surprised to see the towels on the rail, although the sodden bathmat was left scrunched up on the floor.

Eddie was whistling in the kitchen when she eventually joined him. He had made two cups of coffee and had laid out his account books and invoices, along with a stack of potential job offers. Jane sat down and checked over the invoices and dates and smiled.

‘This is looking good, Eddie, and the new jobs are quite substantial. Which one are you thinking of taking on?’

‘Well, I have to do the estimates, but I think the biggest job is that new block of flats by the station. They want all of the interior and exterior decorated. I would have to take on extra hands to do it, but I dare say I could stall the smaller jobs. What do you think?’

‘I would check how much you’d make from the three smaller ones and see what you’d earn. If it’s close to the station project, then there would be no need to take on extra workers, which would mean additional wages out of the profits. I’m sure there are a lot of men out of work right now, but you are such a perfectionist, and you don’t want to run yourself ragged.’

He nodded. ‘I’ve been talking to Dad about helping me out. If he could oversee the smaller jobs while I concentrate on the station job, that would really help, but he’s getting on a bit. What do you think?’

Jane sighed. It seemed that Eddie had already made up his mind and just wanted her to confirm he was doing the right thing.

‘It’s your decision, Eddie. As you said, your dad is getting on, but he’s always handled his own business, so just talk it through with him.’

Eddie gathered all the papers and placed them in a folder with different tabs for banking, work and invoices.

‘I think we might be able to get a bigger house soon,’ he said. ‘You could sell this one for quite a good profit after all the work that’s been done on it.’

Jane sighed. ‘I don’t know . . . we’ve only just got this one finished. Are you thinking of buying a property that needs doing up again?’

‘Of course, but this is your house, Jane, and I want us to have one that we share between us . . . like a family home. I would do all the renovations, and we could stay living here until it’s done up, although that would obviously be quite a big investment. What do you want to do?’

Jane suddenly felt really tired. ‘I don’t know, Eddie. I’ll need to think about it. Right now, though, I’m ready for bed.’ Eddie picked up their coffee mugs and put them by the dishwasher before getting his diary up to date. By the time he headed upstairs to the bedroom, Jane was already in bed, her bedside light turned off. He switched the main bedroom lights off and climbed in beside her, leaving his bedside light on.

‘You going to sleep?’

‘Yes.’

Eddie switched his bedside light off and pulled the duvet up, turning towards her.

‘You all right?’

‘Yes, just tired.’

‘No, there’s something else. I can tell. Is it about not wanting to move or sell your house?’

‘No, it’s not that. I got some sad news today, but I can’t really talk about it.’

‘Why not?’

She gave a long sigh, and when he put his arm around her to draw her closer, she pushed him away.

‘Not tonight, Eddie.’

‘For God’s sake, I don’t want sex. I’m just concerned. You said you had some bad news, so tell me what it is?’

‘Sad news, Eddie. There was a memorial service for someone I knew today, and I should have been there. I just feel bad that I didn’t know anything about it.’

‘Who?’

There was a long pause while Jane chose her words. ‘Someone I cared about, but hadn’t seen for some time.’

Eddie was unsure how to respond.

‘He was a bomb disposal expert. His name was Alan, but everyone called him by his surname, Dexter. I worked with him a long time ago. Anyway, he was racing his Porsche in France, or using a racetrack over there, and he crashed. I can’t stop thinking about it.’

Eddie made a commiserating sound, and Jane continued in the same soft, unemotional voice.

‘He had this great flat that was very modern, and a flamboyant style that I had never seen before. I remember I asked about these three plaques he had on his wall. They were carved wood with gold-painted dates. He said the first date was when James Dean crashed his Porsche and died, the second was the date his brother had died in a skiing accident, but the third one had no date. I asked him why not, and he said that would be the date when he died.’

‘Isn’t that a bit freaky?’ Eddie said, yawning.

‘Yes, I suppose so, but now the date can be added.’ Jane spoke through her tears but she didn’t want Eddie to know that she was crying.

‘Did you have a fling with him?’

Eddie leaned up on his elbow, but Jane turned away.

‘I mean, was this plaque thing in his bedroom? It sounds to me like he was crazy or had some kind of death wish.’

‘You don’t understand . . .’

‘So why don’t you try telling me? You’re crying, Jane. Did you have some kind of thing with this guy? Jane? Jane, look at me . . .’

He tried to turn her face towards him, but she jerked away and started sobbing in earnest. He threw off the duvet and turned on his bedside light. She curled up her knees and wouldn’t look at him, hugging herself tightly.

‘For Christ’s sake, Jane, was this going on while you’ve been with me? I need to know! Were you fucking this guy while living here with me, letting me run around after you doing the house up while you were out shagging this Dexter bloke?’

‘Eddie, it was a long time ago,’ she said between sobs. ‘I haven’t seen him for years, and certainly not since I moved in here.’

‘How long did it go on for?’

Jane sighed and gritted her teeth. ‘For God’s sake, it was not a real relationship, Eddie. He was someone I was very fond of and we just saw each other occasionally.’

‘I don’t believe you, Jane. Why are you crying your eyes out then?’

‘Because I didn’t know that he had died until today, all right?’

‘If it was just someone you saw occasionally, why are you getting so angry with me for asking about him?’

‘Please, just leave me alone, Eddie. I don’t want to talk about it anymore.’

‘Fine, I’ll leave you alone. I’m going to sleep on the sofa.’

He walked out, slamming the bedroom door behind him. Jane sighed. She knew that at some point she would have to try and explain to Eddie just what Dexter had meant to her, but that brought on another spate of tears. Eventually she threw back the

duvet, got out of bed, put on her dressing gown and slippers and went downstairs.

Jane poured a glass of brandy and walked into the sitting room. Eddie was on the sofa with a rug wrapped over him. She went and sat on the edge of the sofa.

‘Is that for me?’ he asked.

‘No, it’s for me. I thought I owed you an explanation . . . not that I think you really deserve one. If you must know, Alan Dexter was someone I met very early on in my career. He was with the bomb squad, and I was with him the night he had to defuse a bomb, on Good Friday, the night of the annual CID dinner. He was a real daredevil character, fearless and charismatic. I think I fell in love with him on that night, but it was more like a schoolgirl crush. To be honest, it was sort of like that all the time I knew him. It wasn’t a relationship. I’m not saying that I wouldn’t have wanted one because I did, but Dexter was a real womaniser and never gave the slightest indication that there would ever be anything serious between us . . .’

Jane hesitated and sipped her brandy. She had known that whenever she parted from Dexter, they might not see each other again for weeks or even months. Then there were times when he seemed to intuitively know she needed him to be with her, and those nights . . .

Eddie reached over and took the glass from her hand. ‘Carry on, Jane.’

‘He met someone special, and she moved in with him . . . so I never saw him again.’

Eddie drained the brandy glass and handed it back to her. He smiled. ‘And then you met me!’

Jane looked away. ‘I need to go back to bed and get some sleep. Why don’t you stay put as I know you will be out early, so then you won’t wake me up.’

She leaned over and kissed him, drawing up the blanket around him as if he were a little boy.

‘Night-night.’ She walked out, leaving the empty glass on the table, and hurried up the stairs to her bedroom. She snuggled down, curling up beneath the duvet, and cried for Dexter, who she knew had loved her in his own way, or the only way he had known how.