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Blind Fury

Lynda La Plante

Prologue

Eva walked between the few parked cars at the London

Gateway service station off the M1 motorway. Although the car park was not badly lit she was nervous in such an alien, silent place. In total contrast were the blazing lights from all the various cafés, paper shops and games machines. Yet at this hour of the night everywhere was empty, and no matter how well lit it was, she felt uneasy being alone as she passed through.

The ladies' toilets were white, vast and cold, and the strip-lighting gave the empty cubicles sinister shadows. There was an orange cone with a sign warning customers of the wet floors, but she didn't see anyone cleaning.

Eva waited patiently for the solitary man serving at the coffee bar to acknowledge her. When he eventually glanced towards her, she asked for a hot chocolate. He stared at her as he used the hot milk machine and the only words he spoke were to enquire whether or not she wanted chocolate sprinkled on top of the froth.

Eva carried her drink to a table close to a window overlooking the car park. She was the only customer. Her boyfriend Marcus had instructed her to wait for him there, saying he would join her as soon as the AA came and the car was fixed.

Eva and Marcus were on their way to Manchester to meet his parents after announcing their engagement. He had borrowed a friend's car to use for the journey.

It had started to backfire as soon as they drove onto the M1, and by the time they turned into the service station it was obvious that something was very wrong. It was one o'clock in the morning and freezing cold, so Marcus had insisted that Eva go inside and keep warm. The only reason the couple were travelling so late was that they both worked in a restaurant and had to wait until it closed for the night before they could start off.

Taking out her mobile phone, Eva placed it on the Formica-topped table by her hot chocolate. From the window she watched a car draw up with a family inside – a couple with two small children, one crying and one asleep. She saw the woman carry the sleeping child towards the ladies' toilets as the man carried the by now screaming child into the café. He ordered from the same truculent attendant. Eva watched him put the child down as he selected cakes and drinks, packets of crisps and Coca Cola. The family sat at a table at the far side of the café away from the window.

Eva sipped her hot chocolate, taking another look at her watch. She fingered her mobile, wondering if she should call Marcus to see if the AA had turned up yet, but then decided against it.

Staring from the window, she noticed a woman walking across the car park smoking a cigarette; as she came closer she tossed the butt aside. Eva did not see if she had come from a car, but watched her enter the station and head towards the toilets. It was quite a while before the same woman walked out. She had done something to her hair and even though it was very cold outside she carried her coat. She was wearing a tight-fitting T-shirt, a mini-skirt and high-heeled shoes. Eva watched her zig-zag across the car park, then stop and light another cigarette before disappearing towards the petrol station.

She must be freezing, the girl thought.

Now, looking over at the family, she watched as they opened up the crisps and whispered to each other as one child still remained sleeping, cradled in the woman's arms. It was almost one-fifteen and there was still no sign of Marcus. Opening her bag, Eva began checking through the pockets for something to do. She took out a glossy lipliner and traced her lips. She checked receipts and the contents of her purse, and then glanced down at the small overnight bag she'd placed beside her.

Just then, Eva's attention was caught by a man entering the café. She turned immediately, hoping it would be Marcus, but it wasn't. She heard him order a sandwich and a cup of tea. Tall and well-built, he was wearing some kind of donkey jacket and dark trousers. She quickly looked away as he surveyed the café dining area, and was still gazing out of the window when she heard the chair scrape at the table directly beside hers.

She could hear him unwrapping the cellophane from his sandwiches and then she jumped as he said, 'Cold, isn't it?'

She half-turned towards him and gave a small nod.

'You driving?' he asked.

She didn't want to be drawn into conversation and just nodded her head again.

'Where you going to?'

She kept her eyes on her empty hot-chocolate beaker. 'Manchester,' she said quietly.

'Manchester,' he repeated.

Eva picked up her phone and turned completely away from him, hoping he would leave her alone.

'You from there?'

'No.'

'I'm sorry, I don't mean to intrude - was just wondering what a pretty girl like you is doing here all on her own at this time of night.'

She made no reply, thinking that if she did it would simply draw him into making more conversation, but her lack of response didn't stop him.

'If you need a lift, I'm going to Manchester. I drove down to London this morning.'

Still she made no reply. Then she heard the scrape of his chair again and hoped he was leaving. She physically jumped when he leaned on her table.

'I'm going to have another cup of tea,' he said. 'Can I get you something? What were you drinking - coffee?'

'No, thank you.'

She didn't turn to watch him head back to the counter, but continued to stare out of the window, willing Marcus to appear. She heard the stranger laughing and asking how long the muffins had been on display. She didn't, however, hear him heading back to the table and was startled when he placed down a hot chocolate beside her.

'He said this is what you ordered. I've got sugar if you need it.'

'No, thank you, I don't want -'

Before she could finish he drew out a chair to sit opposite her, putting down a tray containing two muffins and his tea.

'Have one of these. He said they were fresh - I doubt it though. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they were the same muffins I saw laid out when I was last here,' he chortled.

'I don't want another hot chocolate or a muffin, thank you.'

She bent down as if to pick up her overnight bag and could see his thick, rubber-soled shoes, the reason she hadn't heard him approach the table.

'Don't make me eat both of them – go on.'

'No, thank you.'

She felt uneasy, but he was completely relaxed, taking a large bite of his muffin and wiping the corners of his mouth with his forefinger.

'Where are you from? I detected a bit of an accent.'

'I'm from the Ukraine.'

'Really? I've never been there. What work do you do?'

'I work in a restaurant, but I am studying English.'

'Good for you. Must be hard coming to a different country and finding a job when there's not a lot of work around. Mind you, you're a very pretty girl so I doubt if you'd have any trouble.'

She looked away from him as he continued eating his muffin and picked up her mobile.

'Excuse me, I have to call my boyfriend.'

Eva scrolled through to Marcus's mobile number, but the screen registered no signal.

'Not getting through?'

'No.'

'What make of phone is that?'

'Nokia.'

'Is your battery fully charged?'

'I'm not sure.'

He sipped his tea as she tried again to contact Marcus. She could feel the man watching her.

'I've got a Nokia,' he said. 'If you like, you can recharge it from my van.'

She looked at him and shook her head. Again she made as if to pick up her overnight bag.

'You see that woman coming across the car park?'

Eva turned to see the same woman she had noticed earlier smoking another cigarette and tossing it aside as she headed once more for the ladies' cloakroom.

'Hard to believe, isn't it, but she's a tart. Works the trucker stop, goes into the ladies' to wash up, then she's back out again chatting up the drivers. It's disgusting. The security around here is pitiful. I know the police move them on, but they're like homing pigeons and I've seen her around here for years.'

Eva picked up her overnight bag and rested it on her knees.

'I look out for young girls like you. Gimme your phone and let me make sure I've got the right extension to recharge it for you.'

'No, really.' She half-rose from her chair.

'What's the matter with you? I'm only being helpful and my van is just across the car park.'

He leaned towards her and she smelled his smoky breath. 'You're not scared of me, are you? Listen, love, on a night like this, freezing cold out there, I'm only trying to be helpful.'

'My boyfriend is coming any minute.'

The man rocked back in his chair, shaking his head.

'What kind of boyfriend is it that leaves such a lovely-looking girl all on her own at this time of night? Come on, I'm just being friendly.'

'No. You have been very kind and I appreciate it.'

Eva stood up, incredibly relieved as she saw Marcus pulling up directly outside in the car park. For the first time she smiled, picking up her mobile and slipping it into her handbag. She left the hot chocolate and the muffin untouched as she hurried out of the café.

The man watched her as she ran over to the beat-up Ford Escort, the young handsome boyfriend climbing out and opening the passenger door for her to get inside. He saw her reach up to kiss him and then she turned to give a small wave towards him as Marcus got in beside her. Their headlights caught the man staring towards them, but the car had driven off before either could see the look of blind fury pass over his face. He clenched his fists.

It was a while before he had finished eating the second muffin, but he didn't touch the hot chocolate. Instead he placed it onto the tray with his empty tea beaker and tipped the waste into the bin provided. He then stashed the tray and walked out, turning up the collar of his black donkey jacket, almost hiding his face that still had such anger etched across it.

He had been certain about the girl. Seeing her lit up in the service station's café window she had excited him; she was enticing him – she was no better than the cheap whore washing herself in the ladies' toilet.

She would have been exactly what he was looking for.

Chapter One

Detective Inspector Anna Travis held up her ID to a uniformed officer, who directed her along the narrow muddy lane. Parking up on a gritted area alongside numerous other police vehicles, she stepped out of her Mini and swore as her foot was immediately submerged in a deep puddle. Opening the boot, she took out a pair of Wellingtons and, balancing with one hand resting on the roof, she removed her shoes and put them on.

'Talk about off the beaten track,' she muttered.

Despite the heavy traffic thundering by on the M1, the field had been hard to reach, even though it was not far from London Gateway Services. Anna could see the group of men at the far side of the field and she recognised Detective Chief Inspector Mike Lewis; standing beside him was the rotund figure of Detective Sergeant Paul Barolli. Both men turned to watch her plodding towards them.

'What's the shout?' she asked as her feet squelched beneath her.

Mike gave her a brief rundown: the victim was a white female, discovered by a van driver called Brian Collingwood who had parked on the hard shoulder to relieve himself up against the hedge. Collingwood told the police that he was just turning to go back to his vehicle when he spotted the body, lying in the adjacent field. At first he thought there had been an accident, so he climbed through the hedge and crossed over the ditch. It quickly became obvious that the girl was dead, so he did not approach any closer, but immediately rang the police on his mobile phone, then went back to wait beside his van until the traffic police reported the discovery.

'Is that him?' Anna nodded towards the man being questioned. He was making a lot of gestures, pointing back towards the motorway.

'Yeah. By the time we got here he was pretty agitated. He knew he was illegally parked on the hard shoulder, but continued to explain that he had been busting for a

piss. He's been unable to give any further details, having seen no other vehicle or witnessed anything suspicious. He also said repeatedly that he had not gone right up to the body but had remained about four feet away from her. When he's finished giving all the details I'm going to let him finish his journey to Birmingham.'

'You think this is one for us, then?'

Mike nodded. 'We're waiting for the forensic team to arrive. We've made only a cursory check of the victim as I think the less contamination of the area the better.'

Barolli rubbed his hands together. It was icy cold out here.

'You are going to freeze,' he said to Anna. 'Didn't you bring a coat with you?'

'If I'd known we'd be in the back of beyond, I would have. Luckily my wellies were in the boot.'

'Here you go.' Barolli took off his fleece-lined jacket and hung it round her shoulders. Anna was wearing a black suit and white collared shirt. Her wardrobe was full of similar suits, almost like her own uniform.

'Oh, thanks.' She hugged it around herself as Barolli turned to the lane.

'We've had Traffic cordon off one motorway lane to allow the police vehicles access ... Here come the lads now.'

A forensic van drew up, followed by an ambulance.

'So what are you not telling me?' Anna wanted to know, and smiled as she said it. Having worked together on previous cases, the three of them were very relaxed with each other, and she knew there had to be an agenda.

Mike said that the reason they had answered the shout was because on two of his previous, unsolved, cases it appeared to be virtually the same MO. The two earlier victims, discovered a year apart, had both been dumped beside the motorway. Their first victim had been hard to identify due to decomposition, but they had checked her prints and found she had a police record as a prostitute; the second girl remained unidentified.

'Is she on the game?' Anna asked, looking over at the corpse.

'No idea. She's young though - I'd say late teens.'

Anna watched the forensic team suit up and bring out their equipment.

'Can I take a closer look?' she asked.

'Yeah, go ahead. We've put some stepping plates out, so keep to them. It's a flipping mud bath.'

Anna headed towards the victim, carefully moving from plate to plate as if she was using stepping stones. There were two flags positioned where the van driver had stood, a few feet from the body, and the closer Anna got, she could see that from his position on the motorway's hard shoulder, he would not have been able to see it.

The dead girl lay on her right side, half in and half out of the ditch, one arm outstretched as if she was trying to claw her way free. Her left leg was crooked over her right, again appearing as if she had tried to climb out of the ditch. She was, as Mike had suggested, very young; her long red hair, worn in a braid, was similar in colour to Anna's. The girl was wearing a pink T-shirt, a denim mini-skirt and a denim bomber jacket with a bright pink lining and an unusual embroidered motif of silver flowers on the front pocket. She wore one white sandal. There was no handbag and from their initial search, nothing that could identify her.

Anna returned to Mike, who by now had a cup of coffee in his hand.

'You say you've had two previous cases?' she asked quietly.

'Not me personally. I had the most recent, but the first was a couple of years ago. So then we also took on the first discovery as a possible linked double murder. If this has the same MO, that'll make three.'

'Were the first two girls killed in the same way?'

'Yes. They were strangled, raped, no DNA, no weapon, no witness – and like I said, my girl remains unidentified.'

'Both found by motorways?'

'Yep.'

'And the first victim was a prostitute?'

'Yes. She worked the service stations, picking up lorry drivers, doing the business in their cabs and then often getting dropped off at the next service station along the M1 to find new clients before heading back to the first.'

Anna stood watching while photographs were being taken of the victim and the area, before a tent was erected around the dead girl.

It was two hours later before they arrived at the incident room. This had been set up at the police station closest to the crime scene, in a new building in Hendon, North London, with an entire floor given over to the murder team. Already a group of technicians were setting up the desks and computers. Anna was pleased to see she'd be joined by DCs Barbara Maddox and Joan Falkland. Mike Lewis and Barolli had also worked with the women on previous cases, and it promised to be a friendly atmosphere.

'Nice to see you again,' Barbara said to Anna as she prepared the incident-room board.

'Long time. I've been on three other cases,' Anna told her.

'Joan and I have sort of stuck with Mike and Paul.' Barbara nodded over to Joan.

'Were you on the other murders Mike told me about?' Anna asked.

'Yes, both of us were. I'm going to get the board set up with all the previous case details as apparently this one looks like it's got the same MO.'

Anna shrugged, since until they had the post-mortem report they wouldn't know for sure.

'Mike said she was very young,' Barbara commented.

Anna nodded. She was taking her time arranging her own desk, relieved to have such new equipment at hand.

'They've got a terrific canteen,' Joan informed her as she wheeled in a trolley stacked with the old case files.

Anna had time to sample the canteen at lunch and it was not until early afternoon that she began to select files to catch up on the two earlier cases. By now the board was filling up with photographs and details. Anna still felt they might be presuming too much without confirmation. Although the victim had been removed to the local mortuary for a post mortem, Anna was told they would have to wait twenty-four hours before they would get any further details.

Meanwhile, Mike Lewis had set up his office and Barolli had installed himself at the desk opposite Anna.

'How's life been treating you?' he asked affably.

'Okay - I've worked a few other cases. How about you?'

'Well, we've been on the other two for about a year and then I went on to something else over at Lambeth.'

'So to all intents and purposes the cases were shelved?'

'Yeah. Without getting one of the victims identified it was tough. The first one ...' Barolli turned to gesture to a photograph '... was Margaret, or Maggie, Potts, aged thirty-nine, string of previous arrests for prostitution, drug addict and known to work the service stations. We had no handbag, no witness, but got her ID'd from fingerprints. She was raped and strangled.'

Anna looked at the mug shot posted up. Maggie Potts had been a dark-eyed, sullen-faced woman, her dyed blonde hair with an inch of black regrowth.

When she sifted through the crime-scene photographs, she could see the similar pattern. Potts's body had been dumped in a field not far from the M1 motorway. She had been wearing fishnet stockings, which were torn, and her shoes were found beside her body. She had on a short red jacket and a black skirt which was drawn up to her waist, and her knickers had been ripped apart. The satin blouse was stained with mud and wrenched open to reveal a black brassière.

Anna glanced at the thick files representing the hundreds of interviews with people questioned about the last sightings of Maggie Potts. The team had interviewed call girls, service-station employees – from the catering staff to the petrol-station attendants – lorry drivers and others in an endless round of enquiries and statements.

'This is the one we never identified,' Barolli said, tapping the second victim's photograph. 'We tried, but whatever we put out came back with fuck all. We had her picture on the TV crime programmes, in missing persons magazines – you name it, we tried it to find out who she was – but with no luck. She was a pretty little thing too.'

Anna turned her gaze on the Jane Doe, and as Barolli had said, she was exceedingly pretty, with long dark hair down to her shoulders, a fringe, a pale face with wide-apart blue eyes, and full lips. She didn't look jaded or hard; on the contrary, she looked innocent.

'How old was she?'

Barolli said they couldn't be certain but had her aged between twenty to thirty.

'Looks younger, doesn't she?'

'Yeah, that's what made it so tough to deal with, that no one came forward, no one recalled seeing her at any of the service stations. According to the post mortem, her body was very bruised and there were signs of sexual activity, suggesting she was raped. She was also strangled. She had nothing on her – no bag, no papers, nothing. If you think we made extensive enquiries on that old slag Potts, with this girl we tried every which way to find out who she was – Interpol, colleges, universities, but after six months we flatlined.'

Anna looked over the details of the young woman's clothes. They were good labels, stylish but not new, and she had been wearing black ballet-type shoes; she had tiny feet, a size three.

'I hope to Christ we get this new girl identified,' Barolli said quietly.

'You reckon the same killer did both previous cases?'

He shrugged. 'Same MO, but who knows without any DNA? Only thing we got was a few carpet fibres, but where she came from, who she was, how she came to be murdered is still unknown.'

'Did you check out the Jane Doe's clothes?'

'What do you think?' Barolli glared. 'Of course we did, but it didn't help. We actually traced where the shoes came from, but they sold thousands.'

'Yeah, they were quite fashionable a year or so ago; now it's all stacked heels.'

Anna continued to read the files all afternoon, but when it got to five-thirty and there had still been no word from the mortuary, she went home. It was quite a drive from the station to her flat over at Tower Bridge, and although it had not been a particularly tough day's work, she felt tired. She meant to read up on more details about the previous cases but instead watched some TV before going to bed. There was nothing on the news about their victim. Anna sincerely hoped she would not turn out to be another murdered girl who would remain unidentified.

The following morning the post-mortem details had still not come through. Anna did not get asked to join Mike Lewis and Barolli when they went over to the mortuary, and so she spent the entire morning examining the extensive files, reading the thousands of statements culminating in no arrests. She constantly looked up at the incident board, where the two dead women's faces were now joined by their new victim's crime-scene pictures.

It was after lunch when Mike Lewis called a briefing. Their victim had died from strangulation, he announced. She had been raped, and had extensive bruises to her vagina and abdomen. There were no signs of drug use. Her last meal had been a hamburger and chips and Coca Cola. She was in good health. A fingerprint search had proved negative but it was hoped that dental work would bring a result as she had very good teeth, with two caps that appeared to have been done recently. These were her two front teeth so she could have been in an accident; that again might narrow the field. Her hair was in good condition and she had no broken nails or defence wounds.

The dead female's T-shirt was from Miss Selfridge and her skirt from Asda. Her white sandals, the second of which had been found under the body, were hardly worn and still had the price tag on her left sole. Again, this would mean they might get a clue to her identity. Mike Lewis said that her age was between sixteen to twenty-five and they would be going to the press to try and get a result.

By the late afternoon the press office had sent out cleaned-up photographs of the victim and requests for anyone with information to come forward. The details were also passed on to the television news, while officers armed with the victim's photograph were still questioning everyone at the nearest service station. They had given out a direct line for anyone with any information to call. Usually after such

press coverage they would be inundated with callers, but although they had a small number, none gave them a clue as to who the young woman was. Many were time-wasters, but the team nevertheless had to take the personal details and information of every single one.

Two days later, and with continued requests for anyone able to identify their victim to get in touch, the team still had no clue. It was unbelievable to think that, like the second case, the third girl appeared to have no one reporting her missing, no one seeing her at the service station or perhaps thumbing a lift. As the team continued to question drivers and service station personnel in an attempt to identify her, it was deeply disappointing that they were getting no result.

On the fourth day, Anna received a letter. Barbara placed it on her desk, raising her eyebrows as she did so.

'Fan mail?' the DC asked.

Anna turned over the envelope; stamped on the back was the address of Barfield Prison. She looked up at Barbara and joked, 'It's probably from someone I helped get locked up.'

Anna slit open the envelope and took out a blue-lined thin sheet of writing paper. Typed in the right-hand corner was the prison's address and the name CAMERON WELSH Prisoner 6678905 Top Security Wing.

She knew who it was immediately: Cameron Welsh was an exceptionally evil sadistic killer given two life sentences – with no possibility of being released – for the murder of two teenage girls five years previously.

Anna had been on the case with the then DCI James Langton. The latter was now Detective Chief Superintendent, and as usual, whenever his name cropped up, she felt a surge of emotion. Having been in love with him, lived for a short time with him, helped him recover from a terrible wounding and then split up with him, she had been through a lot of hurt and painful self-analysis. His intensely strong hold on her had been almost impossible to get over for a long time – in fact, up until the last case they had worked on; however, they had at last reached a more amicable relationship, one born out of her admiration for him, even though at times the situation was still tough for her to handle. It was only during the last year that she had truthfully been able to put their past relationship behind her and to treat Jimmy Langton as a confidant. And he had, as he had promised, been supportive at all times during her recent cases.

Barbara rocked back in her chair. 'Who's it from?' she asked.

Anna wafted the letter in the air, saying, 'As I suspected, from a real shit bag. I've not read what he wants yet.'

She opened the single folded page. Written in felt-tip pen, the writing was looped and florid. It read:

Dear Detective Travis, Anna,

I don't know if you remember me, but I recall you were very attractive when you were part of the murder team that arrested me. I have written to you before but you have never replied, though I do not hold that against you. I am not sure if you are attached to the present hunt for the killer of the girl found close to the M1 motorway. If you are, then I think I can be of assistance to you. I have been following the murder enquiry and I have made copious notes, as I am certain the same killer has two previous victims. I believe it would be very beneficial for you to have a meeting with me.

Yours faithfully,

Cameron Welsh

Anna's blood ran cold. Welsh had made her skin crawl when she had been present at interviews with him. He was extremely well-educated and she knew he had subsequently gained a degree in Child Psychology whilst in prison. She also knew that he had been held in solitary as he had refused to be placed on a wing. He had been moved into the prison within a prison at Barfield due to his constant antagonism of other inmates. Whilst in prison he had also had many altercations with officers, and even in the small Secure Unit he still managed to be a loner. Anna knew because she had received three previous letters from Welsh and had even called the prison to gain further details about him. But there had been no contact for at least a year – until this letter.

She was about to toss it into the rubbish bin beside her desk, but then stopped herself. She stared at the blue-lined paper and the looped felt-tipped writing, flattening the crease out with her hand. Could this creature really have something that might be, as he said, beneficial? She doubted it. In the end, Anna decided that she would discuss the letter with Mike Lewis. On previous cases she'd been warned by Langton that she hadn't acted like a team player – and she had no intention of making that mistake again.

Mike Lewis was not in his office so Anna returned to her desk, just as Barbara came past, wheeling the tea trolley with some doughnuts and buns.

'You want a coffee?' the DC asked. 'It's fresh.'

'Yeah, thanks, and I'll have one of those,' Anna said, pointing to a bun.

'I've lost four pounds,' Barbara said, turning to indicate her flat stomach. She was still a little overweight with a round, pretty face, and she had lightened her blonde hair and had it cut short.

'You look good.'

'Thanks. It's been hard. I've got my old man working out with me as well. He's lost half a stone, but he doesn't have the canteen goodies where he works. It's the doughnuts that do me in.'

Anna helped herself to the pink iced bun and placed it on a napkin on her desk as Barbara poured her coffee and passed it over.

'What did the letter-writer want?'

'It was, as I suspected, from someone I played a small part in putting away for the rest of his life.'

'Gets me, you know, how they are allowed to write letters. In the old days they'd never have let a prisoner have a stamp, never mind bloody phone cards. Was it something unpleasant?'

'Thinks he can help with our enquiry. Cheeky sod wants me to visit.' Anna bit into her iced bun.

'I wouldn't go anywhere near him. Go on, chuck his stupid letter in the bin.' Barbara started to move off.

Anna stopped her. 'There was a lot of press about the two previous victims, wasn't there?'

Barbara nodded. 'All we could get, to try and find out the second woman's identity – but nothing. Beggars belief, doesn't it, that not one person has come forward. I think she was maybe an au pair or foreign, you know, over here on some kind of work ... Still, didn't make sense that no one recognised her, and she was lovely-looking. Not the kind you'd forget.'

Barbara went off to give Joan her morning coffee as Anna finished her iced bun and sipped her drink. Unlike a lot of the stations she'd worked in, the canteen here was well-organised, with a good breakfast and lunch menu. While it didn't solve cases, it certainly helped with morale.