

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Blood Line

Written by Lynda La Plante

Published by Simon & Schuster Ltd

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

BLOOD LINE

Lynda La Plante



London · New York · Sydney · Toronto

A CBS COMPANY

First published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2011
A CBS COMPANY

Copyright © Lynda La Plante, 2011

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.
No reproduction without permission.
® and © 1997 Simon & Schuster Inc.
All rights reserved.

The right of Lynda La Plante to be identified as author of this
work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78
of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor
222 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8HB

www.simonandschuster.co.uk

Simon & Schuster Australia
Sydney

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Hardback ISBN: 978-0-8720-180-5
Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-0-85720-181-2

*This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either a
product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people
living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.*

Typeset in Bembo by M Rules
Printed in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD

Prologue

The first blow to his head made his body lurch sideways, striking his face against the bedside cabinet. The pain was excruciating. As he tried to fend off his attacker, the punch to his ribs forced him back against the pillow. He couldn't even cry out – the gag made sure of that. Over and over again the punches slammed into his body, but now it wasn't a fist that hit him, it was a club hammer, and he could feel the bones in his face splinter. Blood seeped into his eyes and streamed from his nose as yet again the hammer struck, this time with such force that his head lolled over the side of the bed. Incapable of moving or seeing, he could feel the sheet being dragged over him and around his inert body, like a shroud. His attacker was using the blood-sodden sheet to slide him from the bed onto the floor. Moments later he realised he was being dragged out of the bedroom.

As he was dumped into the bath, the taps struck him and part of the sheet covering his face fell back, but still he was incapable of making a sound. Even when the water began to run over him he could do nothing to help himself. A terrible darkness swamped him as he sank into unconsciousness. Blood clotted his nostrils, and his mouth was swollen from the beating, which had broken his front

Lynda La Plante

teeth and forced them into his lip, and yet he was still alive as his body was rolled over and the sheet drawn away from him. The blood mixed with the running water, swirling down the plughole beneath his broken face.

Sometime later he felt something being poured over him, and hands patting and rubbing at his limbs. For a brief moment his mind woke as if there was a glimmer of a chance he would survive. This hope gave him the strength to try and move his limbs; he thrashed and kicked, but his attempts were thwarted as he felt hands squeezing at his throat. Then his head was wrapped so tightly that he could no longer breathe and there was no hope.

Chapter One

The small dapper man in the navy pin-striped suit had been waiting in the Hounslow police station reception for over an hour. He had not complained, but sat patiently reading his newspaper. When Anna Travis eventually walked into the room he folded the paper.

‘DCI Travis?’

‘Yes – and you are?’

‘Edward Rawlins.’

Anna sat opposite him and apologised for keeping him waiting. The truth was she’d been so busy wrapping up an investigation for a forthcoming trial that she’d quite forgotten he was there.

‘That’s perfectly all right, and understandable as I did not have an appointment. Thank you for agreeing to see me.’

There was a pause. In many ways she was unused to such cordiality, but at the same time impatient to know why he had specifically asked for her.

‘I work at the Old Bailey, I am an usher,’ Mr Rawlins said quietly.

‘Why do you want to see me?’

‘I have watched you at trials many times and you have always impressed me.’

Lynda La Plante

‘Well, thank you very much, Mr Rawlins, but could you tell me why you wanted to speak with me?’

‘Yes. I think my son has been murdered.’

Anna opened her briefcase and took out a notebook. She demonstrated little reaction to his statement.

‘Have you reported this elsewhere?’

‘No.’

‘Can you give me a few details? Firstly, what is your son’s name?’

‘Alan. He’s twenty-six years old and lives with his girlfriend in a flat not too far from here.’

‘The address?’

‘Newton Court in Hedges Street. He occupied a ground-floor flat, it’s number two.’

‘When you say “occupied”, do you mean he’s no longer living there?’

‘He’s supposed to be. I believe all his belongings are still there, but I haven’t been to the flat. I’ve just telephoned there many times.’

‘His girlfriend’s name?’

‘Tina Brooks.’

‘You said you believed your son has been murdered?’

‘Yes. We speak at least twice a week and I haven’t heard from him for nearly two weeks now.’

‘This is unusual?’

‘Very.’

‘You haven’t reported him missing?’

‘No.’

‘Well, Mr Rawlins, that is the first thing you should do. As he is over eighteen and until we have more details, specifically if you think a crime has been committed, then you should make a Missing Persons report.’

‘Whatever you think is necessary, but Alan is a very

Blood Line

studious and caring young man. He has always kept in touch with me.'

'Have you spoken to his girlfriend?'

'Yes, numerous times. She in actual fact called *me*, asking if I had seen him as she was worried because he hadn't come home.'

'Did she give you any possible reason for Alan's disappearance?'

'No, just that it was unlike him.'

'Do you know if he has withdrawn any money from his bank account recently?'

'His bank said they're not allowed to tell me. I asked Miss Brooks if his passport was at the flat and she said that it was. Then later she told the police it wasn't there.'

'The last time you saw him or spoke to him, did he seem concerned about anything?'

'No. He said we should go and see a film one Sunday and that he'd check what was on and call the following week. He never did.'

'What work does he do?'

'He's a mechanic. He works for an auto-repair shop. I rang them, and they were surprised that they had not seen him. They too had called his flat to find out where he was, so it's been of some concern to them also.'

'Why do you think that something as bad as murder has happened?'

'Because this is totally out of character.'

Anna stood up. 'I can get a local officer from the Missing Persons Unit to take a report and investigate the disappearance, but they would have to make the decision as to whether it was suspicious or not.'

'But it's been almost two weeks already!'

'That may be so, but your son is over eighteen and in

many cases we discover that nothing untoward has happened. He may for personal reasons have decided to just take off.'

'It doesn't make sense, it's not like him to ...'

'It has happened before. Did he have a good relationship with Miss Brooks?'

'Yes, they were going to be married. Well, that's what he told me, but that was six or seven months ago. He hasn't mentioned it to me or my wife since.' Mr Rawlins hesitated. 'That is the other reason I am deeply concerned. You see, my wife is suffering from Alzheimer's and Alan always found the time to talk to her. She is at home with a carer and he would make conversation with her a few times a month, even though she has reached a stage where she doesn't really recall who he is or who I am, for that matter.'

Anna felt sorry for the dapper little man as he gave a sad small shrug of his shoulders.

'I'll push this through for you, Mr Rawlins, but as I said it will have to go through the correct channels as I am attached to the Murder Squad and not the Missing Persons Unit. It's they who will need to have all these details.'

'But I know something bad has happened. He wouldn't behave this way – he's a wonderful son.'

Smiling in reassurance, Anna extricated herself from the interview. She did as she promised, arranging for an officer from the local Missing Persons Unit to take a detailed report from Mr Rawlins, but then she became completely consumed by her preparation for the forthcoming trial. Mr Rawlins was not exactly forgotten, just filed away as he had no direct connection to her department.

Three weeks later, Anna saw Mr Rawlins again. It was at the Old Bailey, and he was ushering a prosecution witness

into the court. She was about to skirt past him, not wishing to get into a conversation, when he hurried over to her.

‘Alan is still missing – my son. You recall me talking to you about my son? I reported him missing as you instructed.’

‘Yes, of course I remember you, Mr Rawlins, but I have not been contacted by Mispers so I assume the case-file has not been raised to a high-risk category. I’m sorry, but unless I am officially tasked to investigate your son’s disappearance as suspicious, there is nothing more I can do.’

Anna then headed into the court and Mr Rawlins turned away. She saw him a number of times during the remainder of the trial, but tried to avoid him as much as possible. Although she felt compassion for the little man, the reality was that she would be allocated her next murder enquiry and couldn’t choose it herself.

As her trial veered towards a conclusion, Anna saw Detective Chief Superintendant James Langton coming up for a case in another court. He smiled warmly at her and she joined him.

‘How are you doing?’ he asked.

‘Fine, thank you.’

Langton made no mention of the tragedy that had happened – the murder of her fiancé, Ken Hudson, a prison officer who had been planning to become a child psychologist. Ken had been killed by a prisoner, Cameron Welsh, who had become obsessed with Anna during a previous investigation.

‘I’ve been meaning to call you, but I’ve had a shedload of cases to deal with.’ Langton said apologetically.

‘That’s okay, I understand.’

He cocked his head to one side. 'Well, let's have dinner one night.'

'Yes, I'd like that, but I've been caught up on this case we're here for.'

'Time moves fast.'

'Yes, it does.'

She couldn't mention to him that time had, in fact, moved unbearably slowly for her, and that it had done nothing to heal her loss. Work had helped; she had thrown herself into her present case, outwardly succeeding in burying the gaping pain that sat inside her.

'Do you know Edward Rawlins?' Langton went on. 'He's a court usher here. Apparently his son Alan is missing. Shame – he was a lovely young guy. I met him a couple of times.'

'Yes, Mr Rawlins actually spoke to me about his concerns.'

'Bit more than concerns – it's been almost six weeks now. I said I'd find out what Mispers have come up with.'

'I'd better get back in – the prosecution are summing up.' She was eager to leave.

'I'll call about dinner. Bye now.'

Langton moved off. He was very aware of the case she had headed up, her first as Detective Chief Inspector. It was a cut-and-dried investigation, one he knew would not place too much pressure on her as the suspect had admitted his guilt. Langton had also monitored her handling of the investigation, even down to making sure she had a team around her who had worked with her previously. Not that she had any intimation of all this; he had deliberately chosen not to be too visible. Anna was heading up her first murder enquiry, and though he was fully behind her promotion to DCI, he felt she needed time to acclimatise herself.

Blood Line

Ten years ago, Langton had been emotionally bereft at the unexpected death of his first wife, so he was more than aware of what Anna was going through. He himself had returned to work almost immediately after the death, but it had remained a painful scar that even now affected him deeply. Although he and Anna had once been lovers, although he was now married once more and with children, the psychological trauma still troubled him. In fact, he often thought it stunted and overshadowed his life. He had therefore attempted to encourage Anna to take time out, but she had refused, just as he had done all those years ago. He had deliberately made sure her enquiry was one he felt she could handle.

Anna returned to court and after two days the jury gave their verdict of guilty to murder and not manslaughter as the defence had argued. Case closed.

Anna was packing up the incident room with her colleagues when Langton appeared. He first congratulated her on the successful outcome of the trial and then asked if he could have a private word.

As DCI, Anna now had her own office. She suspected that maybe he was going to ask about the dinner date, but instead he brought up the Misper enquiry regarding Alan Rawlins. It was on the same turf as her last case and he suggested that she take a look at the possibility that Edward Rawlins was right, and that his son was not missing, but dead.

‘I’m basically looking over it because I like the man – have known him for years – so can you talk to Mispers for me and see what they have to date? If it looks as if it could be high risk and a possible homicide, I’d like you to over-see it.’

‘What is the general consensus?’

‘Well, according to his girlfriend there was a possibility he had someone else and was about to leave her. She thinks he was seeing another woman and just took off. There is no movement in his bank account, nor any contact with the place he worked at – and apparently it is totally out of character that he would go away without letting his dad know. To be honest, it does have a bad feeling about it – at least in my estimation – so check it out for me, please. And if you want to retain the same team you’ve been working alongside, go ahead.’

‘Will do.’

Langton again mentioned that they should have dinner together one evening, but as before made no date. He had had a few words with her team and had received only positive feedback. It appeared, at least on the surface that Anna was dealing with the crisis in her personal life, perhaps even better than he had done himself.

The following morning, Anna selected a clean white shirt and navy blue pin stripe suit to wear. Looking in the mirror she noticed that the suit jacket had a stain on the lapel and the shirt could do with a quick once over with an iron. She thought about how much she had neglected her appearance since Ken’s death and decided it was time to try and smarten herself up again, so she changed into a brown jacket and black trousers. Impatient to get to work, to give the team briefing on the disappearance of Alan Rawlins, she didn’t bother to iron her shirt and placed the navy suit in a plastic bag to drop off at the dry cleaners.

Anna briefed the team explaining that the Missing Persons report virtually said what Langton had told her:

they had found nothing incriminating and had no evidence to indicate foul play. They suspected that Alan Rawlins had simply decided to take time out, and although they had interviewed his girlfriend and his work-mates, no one could give any reason for his disappearance. His current passport was missing, but there had been no withdrawals from any of his accounts. Anna's team was a trifle confused as to why they had been brought in to investigate the case, and Anna suggested that it was down to Langton's intuition and friendship with the father of the missing young man.

'If we uncover any possibility of foul play we'll act on it,' she told them at the briefing, 'but I think uppermost is showing an interest and seeing if Mispers have missed any lines of enquiry. If not, we can then move on and out of this station as planned.'

Anna, accompanied by her DS, went to meet with Tina Brooks that afternoon. Newton Court was only fifteen minutes' drive from the Hounslow police station, a 1980s modern-build with six flats, a garage each, parking spaces and a well-kept horseshow drive and forecourt with tubs of plants. The reception area was neat and clean, but with no resident doorman, just a plaque that listed the occupants of the six flats.

Tina Brooks opened the door to flat 2 with hardly a beat after Anna had rung the bell. She was an exceptionally attractive young woman, with thick, dark-reddish hair caught in a scrunchie and scraped back from her face. She had big dark eyes, wide cheeks and full lips, and a small sculptured nose. Barefooted, she wore a pale blue tracksuit and had a white towel around her neck.

'I was out running, so please excuse me.' She gestured for them to follow her into the lounge. The flat was very

tidy, with white walls and pine furniture. Nondescript paintings and prints hung on the wall. The large coffee table had a bowl of fruit on it, with a couple of fitness magazines beside it.

‘Can I offer you tea or coffee?’ she asked them.

‘No, thank you. I am DCI Anna Travis and this is Detective Sergeant Paul Simms.’

They both sat on the sofa, while Tina chose a beige armchair opposite. Paul Simms was rather skinny, with curly blond hair that gave him a baby-faced appearance, but he in fact was one of the best officers Anna had worked alongside. He took out his notebook as she kicked off the interview, asking Tina to give them details of when she had last seen Alan.

‘It’d be almost eight weeks ago, the fifteenth of March. He called from the garage where he works and said he had a migraine. He knew I wasn’t due at work until later that day.’

Tina explained that she ran a hair and beauty salon and on Mondays only ever did a half-day as she was open until late on Saturdays.

‘I drove to his garage and collected him. He often had these headaches and didn’t like to drive, so he left his car there and I brought him home. He said he just wanted to get into bed and draw the curtains, and I think he took some painkillers to help him sleep it off. When they came on, his headaches could last for hours, sometimes a couple of days. I wasn’t that bothered because he had had them before; I just made him a flask of tea so that if he felt like it, he could have a cup later. I put it on the bedside table; he had an ice-pack on his head and I said that I’d phone him in a while and see how he was. I got home just after six or maybe a bit later. I had tried his mobile a couple of

times beforehand, but he didn't answer. I just presumed he was sleeping it off.'

Paul wrote copious notes as Anna listened, not interrupting as Tina went on to describe how, when she got home, the bedroom door was closed so she made herself a salad, not wanting to disturb him, and didn't check on Alan until around eight o'clock. She said he wasn't in the bed and she presumed that he had felt better and gone to collect his car from the garage. At around ten or ten-thirty she called his mobile again, but got no answer and left a message. She eventually went to bed and waited.

'I must have fallen asleep because it was about three o'clock when I realised he had still not come home. I came in here, thinking that maybe he had slept on the sofa so he wouldn't disturb me. I waited until around seven-thirty in the morning to call his work, but he was not there and the other mechanic who worked with Alan told me he hadn't returned there or collected his car.'

Paul lifted his pencil to indicate he had a couple of questions. He first asked if the bed had been remade when Tina had come home from work and she said that she thought the covers had just been put back, but it wasn't exactly made up. He then asked for the name, contact address and phone numbers of the mechanic and the garage Alan worked for.

'Stanley Fairfax owns the garage but he's never there, and the sort of head mechanic's name is Joe, although I'm not sure of his surname.'

Tina gave the phone numbers and Paul wrote them down as Anna looked around the rather bare room. Tina told them how she had contacted Alan's father to ask if Alan had gone round to see him, but Edward said he hadn't heard from him. She then explained to Anna and

Paul that she had continued to phone around all his friends, the garage again, and that his father had rung her a few times.

‘Nobody had seen him or heard a word from him,’ she concluded.

Anna leaned forward. ‘Mr Rawlins said that you had found his passport, but according to Missing Persons you said that it was not here at the flat.’

‘Right. I looked in the drawers in our bedroom and I saw Alan’s passport and I told his father it was still in the flat. It wasn’t until I spoke with the missing persons officer that I looked closer and realised it was an out of date one and his current one was actually missing.’

‘Did Alan go abroad a lot?’

‘Maybe once a year. We went to Spain for a holiday and Turkey once, but he didn’t go frequently. He did spend a lot of his free time in Cornwall surfing. Most of the time we didn’t have the money because we were saving up to get married and buy a place. We only rent this flat.’

She wrinkled her pert little nose. ‘I suppose it’s obvious, but we didn’t want to waste money doing this place up.’

‘Has Alan ever left before without leaving you a contact address?’

‘No, never. I agreed with his father that this was totally out of character for Alan, since he was always very caring and thoughtful. But ...’

She licked her lips.

Anna waited and eventually Tina gave a sigh.

‘I had been a bit worried about him? I mean, not too much, but he’d stayed late at work a lot recently and one time I phoned when he said he’d been at work, but the garage was closed so it wasn’t the truth.’

‘So what did you think?’

‘Well, I started to wonder if there was someone else, another woman, but he only did it once or twice, and when I asked him about it he said that he was working on his own car. It’s a 280SL Mercedes – an old one – and he was always doing this and that to it. He planned to do it up and then sell it to make a big profit as he’d got it cheap.’

‘This was the car he used to go to work in?’ Paul asked.

‘Yes, but the bodywork needed respraying and the engine was a bit dodgy – well that’s what he told me. It’s a convertible and I know he was getting a new soft top as the old one was damaged.’

Tina went on to say how she had gone to Alan’s garage and was told that if he didn’t show up for work, Mr Fairfax would have replace him. Alan’s car was still parked there and they had not heard from him. His mobile phone had been left inside the glove compartment.

‘Which is why he didn’t answer when I called,’ she said, and got up to open a drawer in a side table. She took out the mobile and handed it to Anna, adding, ‘It’ll need recharging.’

‘Tell me about his friends.’

‘Alan’s?’

‘Yes.’ Anna found it strange that Tina was so unemotional – helpful, yes, but she showed no sign of distress. Everything was very matter-of-fact. She had left the room to return with Alan’s address book and passed it to Anna.

‘He didn’t have that many close friends, and we didn’t really socialise that much as we were saving. We spent most of our time together watching DVDs and didn’t go out a lot.’

‘Did he drink?’

‘Not really, just the odd glass of wine.’

‘Drugs?’

‘Good heavens, no. Alan was very straitlaced; he didn’t even like taking the medication for his headaches as he said it made him feel woozy.’

‘What about enemies?’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘Did anyone have a grudge against him?’ Anna then glanced at Paul, indicating she was leaving any further questions to him.

‘No. You only had to meet him to know that he was a really nice guy. He hated confrontation of any kind – took after his father. They were very close.’

Tina then went at some length into how good a relationship Alan had with his parents, and how caring he was towards his mother, often phoning her two or three times a week and visiting her.

‘She’s in another world, doesn’t really know who anyone is. It’s very sad, but he adored her and he was an only child. He reckoned he owed his parents a lot. They’d paid for his education and I think his dad had given him the money for the Mercedes.’

‘What about his bank balance?’

Tina got up again and crossed to the same drawer, taking out copies of their bank statements. They had a joint savings account – just over seventy thousand – pounds.

There was a current account that was used to pay the rent, and into which Alan’s wages were paid directly, so it was clear how much he withdrew to live on. Not a lot. Tina also had a separate account for her beauty salon; this was overdrawn by thirty-five thousand.

We saved the seventy thousand between us. Alan did well out of doing up and selling on old classic cars and the salon had a good turn over being in Hounslow High Street.’

‘Your salon looks in trouble.’ Anna said quietly.

‘Yeah, well, it’s the recession. We do hair, nails and beauty treatments, but when money is short, women don’t make appointments. I think the business is picking up though – thank God, as I’m on my overdraft limit and the bank doesn’t like it.’

‘Do you own the salon?’

‘No, I only rent it – but on a five-year lease. I work hard, but like I said, it’s been a bit worrying, which is why I’ve been spending so much time there and taking a cut in wages. I really want to make it successful.’

‘How long have you had the salon?’ Anna asked, still glancing over the bank statements.

‘Almost two years. Before that I was a beautician at Selfridges in Oxford Street. I employ two good hair-dressers, one a stylist, and the other can do beauty treatments as well as hair. I’ve also got two trainees plus a girl on reception, and business is picking up. Well, you can see that from the accounts.’

Anna suspected that Tina’s business probably had a far bigger turnover than she wanted to reveal and she was using the overdraft as an excuse to hide the fact.

Tina told them all about her salon, about buying the equipment and redecorating, and how Alan had helped, spending many nights working there before she was ready to open. When she ran out of things to say, Anna spoke again.

‘Let’s go back to your feelings that Alan may have been seeing someone else.’

‘Well, like I said, it was just because I caught him out lying about working in the garage. I never found out if he *was* seeing someone else – it was just a suspicion, and now obviously I think it could have been more.’

‘Why is that?’

‘Because he’s disappeared,’ Tina said, tight-lipped with impatience.

‘When you discussed these late nights with Alan, how did he react?’

She shrugged and said that he just told her she was being stupid, as he was working on his Merc and if the phone wasn’t answered at the garage it was because he was outside.

‘So he didn’t get angry – you didn’t argue?’

‘Alan wasn’t that type. I don’t think we ever really had a cross word, to be honest, which is why I don’t understand how he could just leave me without saying something.’

‘But he hasn’t taken any money?’

‘Not that I know of, but when he sold the cars he did up it was often for cash deals.’

‘What about his clothes? Has he taken anything – a suitcase even?’

‘I can’t be certain. I mean, I don’t know every item of clothing he’s got – but I suppose he could have taken a few things.’

‘Have you checked?’

‘Yes of course. I told the missing persons officer his washing bag and toiletries have gone, but I wouldn’t really know exactly what clothes were missing.’

‘Why didn’t you report him missing?’

‘I thought he might have gone off with another woman and I was waiting for him to contact me. When his dad said he’d reported him missing, I thought he’d done the right thing.’

Anna stood up and asked to be shown around the flat. Tina looked at her watch saying she wouldn’t have much

more time as she had to shower and get to work. She led them down a narrow corridor and gestured at a small box room.

‘We use this to store a few things as it’s so small.’

Anna looked into the room. A single bed and a dresser stood beside a row of fitted wardrobes. There was the same beige carpet in there too, and matching curtains.

‘Did Alan have a computer?’

‘No. He was always going to get a laptop, but never got around to it.’

Tina then led them to the master bedroom. This was as nondescript as the rest of the flat. It contained a king-sized bed with a duvet and a Moroccan throw across it. The double wardrobes were crammed with Tina’s clothes and shoes. Alan’s side had only a few things in it; a couple of suits, shirts, and in a row of drawers were socks, underpants, two pairs of jeans and three T-shirts.

Anna thought that a man of Alan’s age would have had more clothing, particularly informal wear.

‘What sort of casual clothes did Alan dress in?’

‘Mostly jeans, black or blue denim with a white or blue T-shirt. I don’t know how many pairs of jeans or T-shirts he had so that’s why I don’t know exactly what clothing he could have taken.’

‘What about work-clothes – mechanic’s overalls?’

Tina nodded and said they were kept in the small utility room as he would take off his dirty clothes and put them straight into the washing machine when he returned from work. They trooped in there to look, and sure enough, there were some work-boots, a couple of denim jackets and jeans and two oil-stained overalls.

The kitchen was immaculate, with a juicer on the Formica top and a bowl of more fresh fruit. Nothing

looked as if it was used very often, and the cream and black floor was highly polished, as was everything else. Anna sniffed; there was a distinct smell of bleach mixed with a heavy lavender room spray. They next went outside to look into Alan's garage. This was almost as neat, with all his equipment hanging on hooks and Tina's VW parked inside.

Anna said little as they drove back to the station. When Paul brought a coffee into her office he said, 'You're very quiet,' putting the drink down on her desk.

'Yeah. Tell me what you got from the interview.'

'Not very much. I think she's a bit of a clean freak. Their flat might be rented, but it was as if they had just moved in – everything spotless and nothing out of place.'

'Bit like her,' Anna said, sipping her coffee.

Paul sat opposite and flipped open his notebook.

'Nice cash deposit. Joint account, so I suppose she can fix her overdraft in her beauty salon.'

'That would only leave thirty-five thousand which isn't a big deposit for first time buyers.'

'I've only got about two grand saved. She makes Alan out to be a really boring guy – never argued, never a cross word, hardly ever went out, didn't drink or take drugs. He sounds too good to be true. Unless he did have another woman stashed somewhere.'

'Well, if he did,' Anna said, 'he wasn't taking out extra money to pay for her, and the fact that there's been no money withdrawn from any of the accounts is worrying. I don't think we can walk away just yet. We'll do a few discreet interviews at his place of work and ...'

'Maybe the hair salon. If he was helping Tina do it up he'd have come into contact with the other females

working there, so you never know – he might have run off with one of them.’

Anna nodded, but she doubted it.

‘Okay, we’ll start with his place of work.’ She said. ‘Check out a few of the friends too and see if they come up with anything.’

‘What about talking to his parents?’

‘Doubt if they can shed any more light on his disappearance. In fact, his father asked me to look into it weeks ago.’ She sighed.

‘So we have no motive . . .’

‘Unless there is something we overlooked. Let’s get a list of the calls and texts on his mobile.’

Paul left Anna to finish her coffee. She hadn’t mentioned her gut feeling to him – that she didn’t like Tina. Even though the girl had been helpful, she showed no emotion. Tina and Alan were arranging to buy a place and get married in a few months’ time and yet she hadn’t shed a single tear or even appeared anxious. It was almost as if she just accepted that she’d never see her fiancé again.

Helping their enquiry was one thing, and it would mean a couple more days of legwork checking out Alan’s friends and so on, but with no hint of anything untoward having happened, Alan Rawlins could remain on the Missing Persons files along with the thousands of other people.

Anna put in a call to Langton and gave him the details of their meeting with Tina. He listened without interruption until she said they would give it a couple more days before moving on.

‘Okay, give me your gut feeling,’ he said.

She hesitated. The fact that she had not liked Tina was not enough for them to instigate a murder enquiry. She

repeated that they did not have anything incriminating or anything that hinted at foul play. It was a possibility Alan Rawlins had just taken off; it had been done before.

‘Yeah, many times, but carry on. As you said, give it another couple of days.’

Langton was about to end the call when Anna asked him, ‘What’s *your* gut feeling?’

‘You need a body,’ he said and laughed. As always he hedged the issue. ‘We should have that dinner soon.’ Then he hung up.

Anna replaced the phone and sat back in her chair.

‘It’s all too neat,’ she mumbled to herself. She closed her eyes, picturing the flat. It was as if there was deliberately nothing out of place. If there had been some kind of altercation or an argument, something that had forced Alan Rawlins to take off, maybe all evidence of it had been tidied away. According to Tina though, nothing unusual had happened, apart from Alan returning home from work that Monday morning with a migraine. If he had, as Tina suspected, simply walked out on her, there had to be a reason.

Anna left the station. Even though she had suggested to Paul that they leave Alan Rawlins’s parents out of their round of interviews, instinctively she knew they needed to talk again to Edward Rawlins.