

# RECKLESS OBSESSION

## CHAPTER ONE

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2001**

Detective Chief Inspector Andy Flood never got used to waking up with a cold, empty space by his side. He stumbled to the bathroom, trying not to make a noise and wake up his daughters.

His mother, who'd moved in after his wife's murder, would wake the girls later, give them breakfast, take them to school and pick them up in the afternoon.

He shaved, dressed and left home as the sun rose to drive to his office at Southwark Police Station. He took his customary route, driving his beloved Honda through a little used B-road close to Greenwich Park. Sunlight dappled through skeleton trees, melting the sheen of frost on the tarmac.

Flood thought about the overwhelming number of live cases filling his in-tray, giving him less time to work on a particular closed case; the one closest to his heart. His deliberations were interrupted when he spotted a Ford Focus smashed into a tree fifty yards ahead.

'What the fuck... just what I need.'

The severely crumpled bonnet and shattered windscreen confirmed a severe collision. Smoke poured from the engine and flames flickered underneath the car.

The Honda skidded to a halt as Flood slammed his foot on the brakes. Pulling his mobile from his pocket, he called the emergency services as he dashed towards the driver's door.

A young woman's head lay slumped against the headrest. Blood poured from a deep gash on the bridge of her nose. It dribbled down her mouth and chin onto her white blouse turning it crimson. Her lips moved, trying to say something.

He yanked the driver's door handle. It didn't budge. The impact had jammed the door. He noticed the bonnet's paintwork bubbling in the intense heat, like stew in a cauldron.

On his fifth adrenaline-fuelled tug, the door gave way. Leaning in, he noticed smoke pouring through the air vents. The acrid smell of burning tyres and plastic caught in his nostrils and throat.

Flood shouted, 'Can you hear me?' The woman gave the slightest of nods. He reached over her body to grab a coat lying on the passenger seat and used it to apply pressure to the head wound still oozing blood. Realising he had little time, he unfastened her seatbelt, gently eased her out and placed her limp body on the grass verge. Her eyes rolled upwards.

He put his lips close to her ear. 'C'mon, stay with me. Help's on the way.'

A minute later, he flinched, as the car exploded, shooting flames and white-hot metal fragments skywards. Lying over the woman's body to protect her, Flood felt the shards land on the back of his jacket. He stood and shook them off but not before they'd scorched his skin.

As he knelt down again, he heard the sound of increasingly strident sirens followed by screeching brakes as an ambulance and a fire engine arrived. He put his lips close to her ear again. 'Hang on. You'll be OK now.'

The paramedics took over as Flood explained that he was a police officer. They applied a dressing to her gaping wound and checked her for other injuries. When they'd set up a drip and applied an oxygen mask, they lifted her onto a stretcher. As they manoeuvred her into the ambulance, one of the paramedics turned to Flood.

'Did you know there's a bullet wound in her chest?'

'What? I assumed the blood on her blouse came from the head injury.'

'No. I'm certain,' the paramedic said, as he jumped into the back of the ambulance as it roared away, sirens blaring.

Flood called his sergeant. 'Tom, I've got a car crash and shooting incident. I need a Crime Scene Manager with the team here, urgently. I'll secure the area until they arrive. We're on

Cripps Hill, two hundred yards short of the junction with the A206.’

Turning to the car wreck being damped down by the firemen, he added, ‘Better organise a low-loader. Forensics and the Traffic Unit will need to check out the wreck.’

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When Flood arrived at the police station, he walked up the stairs feeling blisters stinging his hands and back. He entered the toilets and peered into the mirror. Grimy streaks ran down the side of his face. Looking more closely, he noticed the tips of his hair and eyelashes were singed. After running his hands under the cold tap, he cleaned himself up as best he could and returned downstairs.

When he reached his office, Flood typed out notes on what he’d witnessed in case they may prove useful later. The image of the woman’s blood-covered face and body never strayed far from his mind. He asked DS Tom Jordan several times for an update on the investigation.

‘Sorry, Guv. Nothing to report. We’re working flat out to reconstruct what happened.’

Later that afternoon, Superintendent John Fox put his head around Flood’s office door.

‘Just heard about your victim. She didn’t make it, I’m afraid.’

Flood grimaced as he looked up at his boss. ‘I’m not surprised. Do we know who she is?’

‘Her name’s Jenny Cahill. Ring any bells?’

‘Should it?’

‘She’s one of us. An authorised firearms officer. Recently acquitted at the Old Bailey for fatally shooting a major villain, Terry Connor.’

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