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# **No Name Lane**

Written by Howard Linskey

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NO  
NAME  
LANE

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# Prologue

Girl Number Four

*County Durham – 1993*

He watched the girl until he was certain she was perfect. Only then did he risk approaching her. It was never difficult to get them to come with him. The hard part was staying calm, even as his heart was thumping so hard in his chest he was convinced she must be able to hear it.

He drove her somewhere quiet then stopped the car, waiting until he was sure they were entirely alone. Sometimes he'd bundle a girl into the boot so he could drive her miles away but this lane was isolated enough, so he'd climbed into the back seat to get to her. He ignored her terrified pleas and reached for her, easily brushing her weak little hands aside, forcing her head back until the flesh of her tiny neck was exposed. He clamped his hands around her throat and began to squeeze, tightening his grip as her desperate struggle began. He closed his eyes. It was better if he could not see the little girl's face, for she did not understand. How could she even begin to comprehend what he was doing for her? He squeezed harder and harder and wouldn't let go until the moment when her struggles finally ceased and her tiny body went limp.

He looked down at the lifeless young girl in his arms and whispered the special words he always used when he had saved one.

*'Suffer the little children to come unto me.'*

# Chapter One

It all began with a phone call, as these things tend to.

'Hello.' Tom answered and there was a pause, as if the person on the other end had suddenly realised the magnitude of what they were doing and decided against it. 'Hello?' he prompted.

'I've got a story,' the woman blurted and he strained to listen to her against the sound of dozens of journalists talking over the tap-tap-tap of busy fingers hitting keyboards while the insistent ringing of competing phones could be heard all across the room.

'Okay,' answered Tom, 'what kind of story?'

There was another pause until finally she said, 'a bloody big one,' and there was something about the nervous, agitated way in which she spoke that made Tom Carney take the woman seriously.

Tabloid stories generally start with a tip-off. This one began because a woman chose the biggest red top in the country to tell her side of it. Aggrieved men and women called its London office every day. Some were wronged, others desperate, some just plain demented. It was Tom Carney's job to perform *triage* on them, as his legendary editor Alex 'the Doc' Docherty put it; 'from the French verb *trier*, meaning to sift and select,' he was told. 'Your job is to separate the shit from the sugar.'

The people who called always assumed their story was

worth a life-changing amount of money. It was rare however for their particular grievance to actually make it into print. The tabloid Tom Carney worked for had a daily circulation of four million copies. Everyone wanted to be in the paper; politicians from all sides, models, actors, rock bands, the wannabes, gonnabes, has-beens and never-wasses, along with many thousands of what their foul-mouthed editor called ‘the great unwashed’, by which he meant the general public. Only the really juicy stuff ended up in the paper. Sometimes though, one of these callers would turn out to be peddling neither shit nor sugar but genuine gold.

The anonymous woman who phoned that morning was randomly connected to one of a large number of journalists manning the news desks. Afterwards, Tom Carney would often wonder about the direction his life might have taken had he not been in the office that morning or if the call had gone to one of the many other reporters in the newsroom. The simple act of answering the phone that day changed everything for Tom, though he could never have known it at the time.

‘What’s it about then?’ he prompted when she was not immediately forthcoming, ‘this story of yours?’

‘A very famous man, someone high up.’

‘Right,’ he replied non-committedly, ‘can I take your name, Miss?’

‘No names, not yet, just listen.’

He could have played hard ball, told her to give him her name or he’d hang up but if she really did have a story to tell, he’d only read about it later in a rival newspaper. Besides, there was something about the way she spoke,

the urgency in her voice that compelled him to keep her on the line.

‘So, what’s this famous man been up to then?’

‘Something he ain’t ought to have been,’ and she snorted a laugh then immediately became serious again. ‘He’s married, see, and he’s been seeing us and he ain’t supposed to have been doing that, not in his position.’

‘Who’s us?’ he asked, though he was beginning to get the idea.

‘Me and some others,’ she said, sounding cagey.

‘I see. You and some others,’ his tone was thoughtful. ‘Would I be right in saying that you have been seeing this man in your professional capacity?’ He was trying to be delicate.

‘You mean, am I on the game?’ she snapped.

‘Yes,’ he said simply.

‘Well, say what you mean then,’ she told him. ‘Yes, *we* are,’ course we are.’

‘And who is this family man who has been spending time with you?’

‘I can’t say until I know how much it’s worth.’

‘How can I tell you that unless I know who he is?’

There was a long pause on the line while she weighed up this dilemma. ‘He’s important, like I said, and I’ll tell you everything, for the right price.’

‘I understand.’ If she was legit then this could be just the kind of kiss-and-tell story the paper might be interested in but who really cared if some town councillor, minor actor or daytime game-show host had been dipping his wick where he shouldn’t? ‘Is he someone I will have heard of?’

‘Everybody has heard of him.’

‘He’s not a politician then?’ The public were notoriously awful at recognising politicians unless they were either the Prime Minister or some lunatic with flog-em and hang-em views that turned them into a ‘character’, and eventually, a national treasure.

She must have grown tired of his questions. ‘He’s only in the bloody government, all right?’ she snapped at him, ‘the cabinet. Now how much is that worth to you?’

Tom Carney straightened. He gripped his pen firmly in his hand and let it hover over the page of his notepad. If this woman really was telling the truth and she could prove it then this was dynamite. The Tory government with its back-to-basics, family values had a cabinet member who was shagging hookers? It couldn’t be better. ‘Quite a bit I should think,’ he said in a voice that was a lot calmer than he was, ‘if you can prove it. Now, why don’t we meet to discuss this further?’

‘I asked how much,’ her voice was hard, with a trace of fear behind it.

At this point, Tom wasn’t about to let her know his true status at The Paper, a probationer on a six-month contract so the editor could see if he ‘had the chops’ to make it there, and so he blagged it. ‘Top end of five figures, six even, maybe, but you have to be able to prove it.’ There was a silence on the line that told him she was still interested. ‘So why don’t you tell me where you want to meet and I’ll be there. That’s what you want isn’t it, to sell your story?’

Maybe it was the use of the word *sell* that finally landed her.

‘All right,’ she said.