

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...**

# **The Little One**

Written by Lynda La Plante

Published by Simon & Schuster

All text is copyright © of the author

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

---

# The Little One

Lynda La Plante



**SIMON &  
SCHUSTER**

London · New York · Sydney · Toronto · New Delhi

A CBS COMPANY

First published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2012  
A CBS COMPANY

Copyright © Lynda La Plante, 2012

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 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](http://www.simonandschuster.co.uk)

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney  
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

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

ISBN: 978-0-85720-920-7

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 by M Rules  
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

I dedicate **The Little One** to  
Sara, Louis and Jacob

# Chapter One

Barbara Hardy stared out of her office window at the heavy grey sky. It had been raining all day and London looked dreary and depressing. Without any warning, her heart suddenly started to beat wildly and she found it hard to catch her breath. Before she knew it, she was in the middle of a full-blown panic attack.

She tried to breathe deeply, she tried to empty her mind, but it was impossible. Instead she burst into tears. Too many things were going wrong in her life at the moment.

Her relationship with Gareth had just broken up. Even thinking about the rat made her gasp for breath again. Barbara had really believed that this relationship might last longer than her usual six months. And for almost a year things had been good between them. Then in the wine bar last night he told her that he'd met someone else.

Not only was she losing Gareth, but that morning she'd also been cornered by her landlady. If Barbara didn't pay the three

months' rent she owed, she would have to leave her room.

And now she had to worry about her job. As a freelance, it was tough getting work these days. At present she was employed by a women's magazine and the editor, Mike Phillips, wanted to see her. Apparently her most recent piece had created some legal problems. She hadn't checked out the facts about a rock star's pregnancy and the magazine was in trouble.

Barbara was worried that this might affect her latest project. She had come up with an idea that she hoped would make her a great deal of money. She wanted to track down former soap opera stars for a 'Where Are They Now?' series. Mike had seemed keen when she first mentioned it and she had already approached a photographer friend called Kevin Shorter. He was to take shots of the actresses looking less than their glamorous best.

Barbara was not exactly looking glamorous herself when she went into Mike's office. It was hard to look good when she kept bursting into tears. Her eyes were red-rimmed and her nose was running as if she had a cold. What's more, her roots needed retouching.

Barbara had chestnut hair cut in a short bob, with auburn highlights. She was actually rather

pretty, with a heart-shaped face, big blue eyes and a snub nose. Only her tight-lipped mouth took the edge off things. At thirty-eight years old she was still very skinny. She usually wore good casual clothes – short skirts, black tights and boots. Today she had chosen a tweed suit for her meeting with the editor.

Despite all her efforts, Mike barely looked at her. He simply told her that she was fired. What's more, because of the legal problems she had caused, the magazine would not be paying her the amount she had expected. Barbara was told to leave the building immediately.

As she made her way through the rain to the tube station, Barbara called Kevin, her photographer friend. She had intended to tell him that her idea for the series would have to be postponed. Instead, she found herself pouring out all her other problems.

It took a while for the awful truth to hit her and then she flushed with shame. She was not talking to Kevin at all, but to his partner, Alan. Alan was an actor and he hardly knew Barbara. However, he was a kind man and he told her that she could stay at their place. There was room just now because Kevin was away on an assignment.

Barbara could not believe her luck. Here was a chance to live rent-free, probably with decent food thrown in. Both men were very good cooks, while she could only just scramble an egg. She had no boyfriend, no job and only £250 in the bank. What's more, she had no family or close friends to turn to. As far as she could see, other people had such easy lives. It was about time something went right for her.

She thanked Alan and hurried back to her rented room. Ignoring another demand from her landlady, she packed up her belongings and left.

Alan and Kevin shared a small but lovely terraced house in Kingston, close to Richmond Park in south-west London. Alan showed Barbara to the spare bedroom. It was more like a box room really, a place for Kevin to store his equipment. Barbara was tearful as she told Alan how grateful she was. He smiled and said that she was welcome to stay until she found a new place to live.

Alan was a very good-looking man in his late thirties. He was blond and tanned, and he obviously worked out. He spoke in a deep baritone and did a lot of voice-overs for adverts on TV.



Once she had packed away her clothes, Barbara joined Alan in the kitchen. She burst into tears all over again as she explained how hurt she'd been by Gareth and then by losing her home. She didn't mention being fired. When Alan asked about the 'Where Are They Now?' series, Barbara found herself getting a bit carried away. She told him that it was a big commission for *OK* magazine, and the more she talked the more she began to believe her own story.

Alan offered her a cup of tea, then showed her around. He told her to make herself at home and gave her a spare key before leaving the house. He had a voice-over job in the West End now and would be out for a couple of hours at least.

Barbara returned to the box room and flopped on the small single bed. It was almost four o'clock and she felt exhausted after everything that had happened today.

When she woke up some time later, she was briefly confused until she remembered where she was. Then, picking up her laptop, she went downstairs and back to the kitchen. The room was warm and cosy even though there was no one there. An old dresser stood against one wall and there were red cushions on pine chairs round a scrubbed pine table.

Barbara made herself another cup of tea and was about to check her emails when she noticed several cards lined up along a shelf. They were mainly invitations to film premieres and private views. One in particular caught her eye and she took it down to read.

*Darling Alan,  
I'd adore working with you again. If anyone  
can persuade her, you can. The party is on for  
next Friday – a big surprise for her birthday.  
Everyone will be there.  
Love and kisses,  
Felicity*

There was a folded sheet of paper tucked inside the card and Barbara couldn't resist opening it. A small black-and-white photograph fell to the floor. When she picked it up, she saw it showed a group of people in Victorian costume. She was amazed to recognize Alan in a butler's uniform. The sheet of paper was headed 'To all the cast'. It read:

*As you know, we have often discussed bringing  
the series back. Two weeks ago I had a  
meeting with a producer who expressed terrific  
interest. He said they would consider it, but*

*only if Margaret Reynolds agreed to be part of the cast. I know we were all saddened when she left, and her departure did, in the end, cause the series to finish. Could we persuade her? It would be so wonderful. They won't consider the show without her, so let's hope enough time has passed.*

*Felicity*

Barbara was a good enough journalist to know there was a story here. Opening her laptop, she went immediately to Google and typed in 'Margaret Reynolds'. She faintly recalled the name but had no idea why.

A second or two later, everything fell into place. Margaret Reynolds had started her career as a stage actress with the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. She had then gone on to star in *Harwood House*, a long-running television series. It had started in the late 1990s and achieved the highest viewing figures of any period drama. Photographs showed a very attractive dark-eyed woman. There were rave reviews of her playing Lady Helen Montague, the tortured heiress of Harwood House.

It seemed that the actress had married a leading French film actor called Armande

Dupont in a private ceremony. There were many pictures of the beautiful couple. But tragedy struck and he died in a helicopter crash two years after the wedding. A famous photograph showed Margaret holding up a hand to shield her face from the camera. One report stated that she'd collapsed on set while filming. Then came a series of screaming tabloid headlines:

'Further Heartbreak as Star Loses Baby'

'Actress Attempts Suicide'

'More Tragedy for Star as TV Series Folds'

Barbara read on and pieced together the story. Clearly Margaret had left *Harwood House* after her miscarriage and suicide attempt. Viewing figures dropped week by week. Finally, to the sadness of all the cast, the show was taken off.

Barbara slammed shut her laptop and rang Mike Phillips. Even though he had just sacked her, this was too good an opportunity to miss.

When Mike answered her call, he sounded surprised. He started to remind her that she no longer worked for the magazine, but Barbara interrupted him.

'Listen, Mike, what if I could get hold of

Margaret Reynolds? She's the star from *Harwood House*. I may be able to come up with some inside information about the BBC bringing back the show.'

Mike hesitated and then said, 'If you get some good material I might consider it. Only "might", mind you.'

'It could really be an amazing opening to my "Where Are They Now?" series. I could email you the list of all the other stars—'

Mike stopped Barbara, telling her to produce the Margaret Reynolds piece first.

'I've got Kevin Shorter to do the photographs,' Barbara went on.

'Well, he's one of the best. Let me know how it pans out and I'll make a final decision.'

When she put down the phone Barbara was flushed with excitement. She could already imagine herself winning an award for Journalist of the Year. The fact that she had not contacted Margaret Reynolds yet, and didn't even know where the woman lived, was not important.

She began to plan exactly how she would persuade Alan to take her to the surprise party.