



Kelly Reilly as detective Anna Travis and Caerán Hinds as James Langton in new Lynda La Plante thriller *Above Suspicion*

SUSPICIOUS MINDS

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Lynda La Plante's dark new thriller will keep viewers on the edge of their seats

There is a scene in Lynda La Plante's gripping, new crime thriller in which callow rookie DC Anna Travis collapses while witnessing her first post mortem.

Lynda says the scene took no research at all. "I based it entirely on what happened to me years ago when I was writing my first *Prime Suspect* and I asked to be allowed to watch an autopsy so that I would know what I was talking about.

"The pathologist asked me, 'Have you seen a post mortem before?' And, of course, I lied! 'OK,' he said, breezily, 'Gown up and we'll get on with it.'

"What I hadn't taken into account was the unbelievable stench that comes from a rotting corpse and also the amount of gas that accumulates inside a dead body. When the knife went in, a great puff of foul, noxious air came out and the next thing I knew I was out cold on the floor.

"I knew that someday I'd be able to use that scene and now, of course, I have. It is exactly what happens to poor Anna."

Travis, then, La Plante's latest female

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detective, is no Jane Tennison – a woman for whom the words "tough" and "ballsy" might have been invented.

"Well, no," says La Plante. "Although, as it turns out, she does have a great deal of inner steel. But she's also a young, inexperienced detective with everything to prove, whereas Tennison was a cop at the very top of her profession.

"I wanted to create a character at the start of her career rather than at the peak of it," explains Lynda.

Anna Travis, as La Plante fans will already know, first appeared in the novel version of *Above Suspicion* – the first of the writer's three crime thrillers to revolve around the young detective.

"That made casting her a bit more of a challenge," admits La Plante who adapted the novel herself. "People who've read the book will have a picture of her in their minds. We just got incredibly lucky."

Enter actress Kelly Reilly, who, in a neat bit of symmetry, started her career as a teenage actress playing a young Jane Tennison in an early episode of

Prime Suspect. She also happened to be the physical epitome of Anna Travis – slim, beautiful and red headed.

"Kelly walked in and that was it. I knew immediately we'd found our Anna Travis," says La Plante. "It was almost spooky."

Kelly spent the last few years developing an increasingly successful screen and stage career. In 2004, aged 27, she became the youngest actress to be nominated for an Olivier award for her performance in *After Miss Julie* and she went on to garner several gongs for *Mrs Henderson Presents*.

More recently she's been seen alongside top Hollywood talent including Colin Farrell in the movie *Triage* and is now working with Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes*.

She's also starred in TV dramas such as *He Kills Coppers*, but until now has resisted attaching herself to roles that might wind up as a series.

"I normally like to dip in and out and I've tended to shy away from roles where I'm flying the flag for the drama," she says.

"But there were so many elements to

this that attracted me I couldn't say no."

There was, for example, the character of Travis herself. "I thought she was very different from other female cops on TV. Usually they're depicted as women who are trying to crack it in a man's world, banging their heads against decades of sexism. But that isn't Anna at all."

"People ask, 'Is she the new Jane Tension?,' but I have to say no. Tension didn't have that freedom. But without Tension and her ilk beating down the path, you couldn't have someone like Anna now. Let's just say that Travis is, kind of, Tension's upstart little sister."

In a modern police environment her female qualities are celebrated and not suppressed. "She has tremendous female intuition, for example," reveals Kelly, "and that proves really useful."

In *Above Suspicion*, the team need all the help they can get to solve a gruesome series of killings that shock even the most hardened detectives.

The murders started eight years ago and as we join the story, the body count is up to six. The method is identical, and the victims are all drug-users and prostitutes. But when the seventh victim is found, she seems to be an innocent young student. Why has the killer switched pattern and who could be in the frame for the murders?

"Those are questions the audience will ask along with the police," says Lynda. "If anyone gets the answer right in the first 20 minutes I'll have failed miserably!"

Leading the complex investigation is Detective Chief Inspector Langton (Ciaran Hinds).

"He brings in Anna because her father was a great policeman and personal mentor," says Ciaran. "He gives her a chance,

ANNA TRAVIS IS FLAWED AND OUT OF HER DEPTH, BUT SHE FINDS HER FOOTING, DISCOVERS HER STRENGTH AND EARNS RESPECT

KELLY REILLY

Right: Kelly as Anna Travis, dating murder suspect Alan Daniels (Jason Durr)

Below: Kelly won praise for her performance in ITV's *He Kills Coppers*, starring alongside Rafe Spall (left) and Liam Garrigan (right)



perhaps, because he feels that beyond her gaucheness and inexperience, and all that puking and fainting she may well be a chip off the old block.

"But at the same time, he won't make allowances for her. He throws her in at the deep end to see whether she'll sink or swim. And, of course, Lynda doesn't tend to write female characters who go under in these situations, does she?"

Indeed not. But, for Kelly Reilly at least, one of the attractions of playing a La Plante heroine is that she invariably has vulnerability as well as strength.

"God yes, she's flawed and out of her depth," says Kelly. "But her arc is all about how she finds her footing, discovers her strength, earns respect and manages to live up to the memory of her father, who was a legendary murder investigator."

In another strange symmetry, Kelly's own father was a police officer and even visited his daughter on set during filming. "I think dad was pretty proud to see me playing someone on the right side of the law instead of a prostitute, which I've done my share of," she smiles. "It was lovely to have his input."

"He told me, for example, about the secret alarm that runs along the walls of interrogation rooms in case the suspects get violent. Having him there felt pretty special."

Unlike Travis's father, Kelly's was not

a murder investigator. "He was a PC working in Brixton and Lambeth for 25 years," she says. "I remember him being at the Brixton riots. He was incredibly sturdy, committed and hard-working and that had a big influence on me. I grew up working hard and being honest and that's definitely something I've taken with me into my own mad, crazy job."

While some might see murder investigations as the glitzy end of police work, dramas like *Above Suspicion* suggest there's more gore than glamour.

As usual, La Plante will not be pulling her punches as she unfurls the dark tale of a serial killer on the loose. "But there again," she says, "I don't think my dramas are nearly as shocking as many shows I'm looking at right now. On the other hand, we do have scenes in which a body is found in woodland, with maggots wriggling in its nostrils and eye sockets."

"But that is what you get with a decomposing body," Lynda states.

You wonder if such grisly images stalk the writer at night. But she insists not.

"I'm far more troubled by stories I read in the paper. The death of Baby P at the hands of adults who tortured him has been haunting me for weeks now."

"You realise there are things in the real world that are as bad as anything conceived of in a drama," she concludes.

And, of course, she has a point.

Daphne Lockyer

