

# A Twist of Fate

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## *Suspended Sentences*

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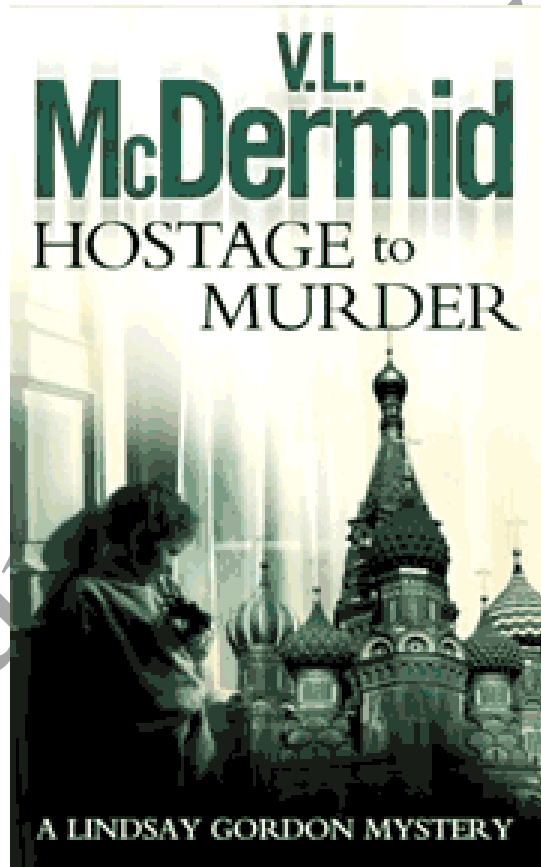
by Jim Napier

This week's crime novel is set in Scotland and in St. Petersburg, Russia, with passing references to California and Northern Ireland. At the hands of a less experienced author, such a crazy-quilt of settings could easily lose focus; but Val McDermid is no stranger to crime fiction.

### *Val McDermid*

I first met Val McDermid at a crime writing conference in Oxford, in 1997. She was—and remains—a formidable figure (forgive me, Val). About as wide as she is tall, she could easily play linebacker for any team in the NFL. But coupled with that imposing physical presence is an engaging personality, open and generous, and—like her protagonists—a passion for plain speaking: whatever Val is thinking, you're sure to know it. And beneath her persona lies a consummate skill in telling a good tale, preferably over a wee dram of fine single malt, or if pressed, a Russian vodka. An evening with Val McDermid is never dull.

Since 1987 Val has written some 21 books, including a non-fiction study of real-life female private investigators, *A Suitable Job for a Woman*. The Tony Hill/Carol Jordan series are, in her own words, dark psychological thrillers. The Kate Brannigan series are about a smart-mouthed PI based in Manchester. The Lindsay Gordon Mysteries are classic British mysteries, but with a contemporary twist: the protagonist is a lesbian



journalist. *Hostage to Murder* is the sixth in the Lindsay Gordon series, and stems in part from a visit she made to Russia under a British Council grant.

In addition to her series novels, Val has produced two standalone thrillers, *A Place of Execution* and *Killing the Shadows*. Along the way her books have garnered many awards, including the prestigious Barry Award, given at the Bouchercon mystery convention for the Best British Crime Novel of 2004. TV dramatisations of her works, starring Robson Green, have been aired in

Britain and North America, under the title *The Wire in the Blood*, and are available on DVD. *A Place of Execution* is currently being adapted as a TV film. Val lives with her partner and their son in Manchester, England.

***Hostage to Murder*  
(HarperCollins, 2003)**

Lindsay Gordon is a 39-year-old ex-journalist returning to Glasgow from California with her partner, Sophie, after a fifteen year absence, so that Sophie can take a teaching post in obstetrics at Glasgow University. When Lindsay is out jogging one day, she badly sprains her ankle after colliding with a young woman, Rory McLaren. Tending to Lindsay's ankle, Rory discovers that they are both freelance journalists. Since Rory is overworked and Lindsay is at loose ends, they decide to join forces. Lurking in the background is Sophie's overwhelming desire to have a child of her own. Lindsay is apprehensive, fearful that her relationship with Sophie will suffer, and angry as well that Sophie is absolutely committed to having the baby, regardless of Lindsay's concerns.

Meanwhile, in Belfast, IRA capo Patrick Coughlan has learned that his former mistress, Bernadette Gourlay, has surfaced in Glasgow – a matter of some concern to him as she fled several years earlier with his young son, Jack. Coughlan wants the boy back at any cost, and dispatches two of his goons to track her down. But before he can act, Bernie's ex-husband, Bruno Cavadino, appears at Jack's school, spirited him away to St. Petersburg, Russia. When Bernie's present husband, Tam Gourlay, wants to rescue Jack, Lindsay and Rory, realising that he cannot accomplish this on his own (and sensing a good story),

join forces with him and travel to Russia. Meanwhile, Patrick Coughlan is lurking in the background, waiting for their return home with his son.

When Lindsay and Rory are drawn together into an intimate relationship during their time in St. Petersburg, Lindsay tries to sort out her feelings. The situation is worsened when Sophie suspects her infidelity, and Lindsay admits it. Sophie throws her out of their home just as Patrick Coughlan is moving in for the kill....

***A smashing good read***

*Hostage to Murder* contains a refreshingly original plot line, as do all of Val McDermid's novels. The story moves effortlessly and enjoyably to its conclusion, while raising along the way issues of loyalty, betrayal, and honesty that transcend the gender boundaries of this tale. Whether you pick up *Hostage to Murder* as a study in contemporary relationships, or simply as a smashing good read, you will not be disappointed.

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