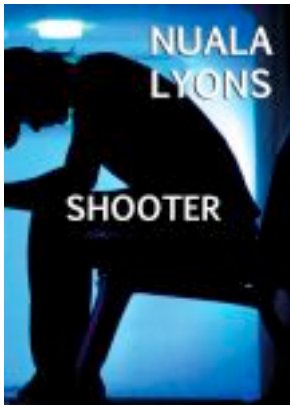




**NUALA
LYONS**

SHOOTER



When you've been used to the laughter and love of an older sister it's difficult when she changes and becomes a slave to drugs. Orla tries to adapt to the changes in her life and the life of her addicted sister.

Orla's love for Ann makes her a target for criminals.

Shooter

by Nuala Lyons

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N U A L A L Y O N S

Shooter

Nuala Lyons

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First Edition

Shooter

FOR

AOIFE GRACE

Nuala Lyons

BOOKS BY NUALA LYONS

YOUNG ADULT

Shooter

CHILDREN

Call of Friendship

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1

The Kawasaki rider dressed in black leather motorbike gear, sat on the seat of the big red machine. His boots pushed the ground on each side as he walked it through the ‘pedestrian-only’ passageway towards Temple Bar Square. He reminded me of a Star Wars storm trooper with his dark visor covering his face.

As he bumped onto the road I remembered the role I was playing. I leaned back; raised the brown paper bag to my lips and pretended to drink.

I overbalanced falling backwards. Two short sharp cracks hit my ears when the engine backfired before it roared off.

Moisture ran down my chin while tiny pricks of pain stung my face.

The bottle must have broken. Why? What happened?

“Don’t move Ann,” a man’s voice whispered close to my ear.

My lashes fluttered but firm fingers held my eyelids shut.

“Keep your eyes closed until I’ve cleaned the shards of glass away.”

There were glass splinters on my eyelids? What about my face? I’d felt stabs of pain on my cheeks and nose. Was my face cut? Would I need stitches? What would Mum and Dad say?

Nuala Lyons

Feathery touches brushed my skin from the nose outwards.

“She’s been shot. Her dress is covered in blood.”

2

“No, she’s all right. That’s red wine,” the man who was helping me said, “I think I’ve got it all off. You can open your eyes now,” he informed me in a gentle voice.

I sat up and bent forward hoping any stray bits of glass would fall off. Taking my time, I slowly lifted my eyelids and looked into the deep blue eyes of the man who bent over me.

The damp tissue in his hand had collected the spikes of shattered glass from my face and I looked hard at the red stains in the white paper not knowing if they were blood or wine spots.

He drew back quickly with a startled expression on his face. It was as if he’d seen a double and couldn’t understand how it had happened.

“I’m sorry, I mistook you for someone else”

I stared at him wondering how he knew Ann, but before I could collect my scattered wits to ask him, he moved away.

I heard the act of contrition being murmured.

Carefully in case any larger bits of glass had caught in the neck of the dress, I turned my head to where a crowd of people had gathered beside another man who was lying on his

back. One black trouser leg was twisted under him while the second pointed towards me. His white short-sleeved shirt was stained with blood. It pooled by his left side.

It was Gerard!!

He was meeting me here.

What was I going to do?

Moments passed into minutes, while the whispering middle-aged woman continued to petition God to save his soul by murmuring prayers for the dying down his ear.

The man, who had helped me, knelt down and pulled open Gerard's shirt. He took a wad of paper tissues from the woman's outstretched hand and pressed them over the wound endeavouring to stop the flow of blood from the side of his chest. At the same time he put his two fingers on Gerard's neck and felt for a pulse.

The light blue summer jacket that he always carried draped over his shoulders had fallen to the ground beside him. This man picked it up with his free hand and laid it over the lower part of his body.

I sat deep in self-misery while the smell and dampness of cheap wine soaked into the long green Indian dress; pushing the saturated paper bag containing the broken bottle to the side of the step with Ann's scuffed boot, I sat and moped.

All my plans had gone wrong.

Ann was waiting, depending on me.

It was then I realised that those two sharp cracks were not the Kawasaki backfiring. They must have been *gunshots*.

Shooter

The gunman had fired at me.

Why would anyone want to kill me?

I'm an ordinary sixteen-year-old, school girl and don't understand how my death would help anyone. No one would *kill me*.

But what if the killer knew who I was! If that were true he could come back to finish the job.

I had to get away from here.

How could I leave without getting Ann's fix?

I pulled myself together, left the vinegar smelling plonk on the ground for someone else to clean up and went to see what was happening.

Slowly I moved through the group of curious people that had gathered watching Gerard as he lay bleeding on the pavement in Temple Bar Square.

3

My blue eyed, fair-haired stranger was holding the pad over the wound. It seemed to be working. The blood appeared to have stopped flowing. I didn't know if that was a good or a bad sign. All I knew was that Ann needed the fix that Gerard had in his pocket.

By this time I was in the centre of the large crowd but I had eyes only for the wounded man on the ground. *I needed those drugs. How could I get them?*

I sank down and knelt near him on the opposite side from the man who had brushed the glass from my face.

"Do you know him?" the man who knew Ann, asked in a quiet voice that didn't carry beyond us.

"Yes."

"Were you meeting him?"

"Yes."

"His jacket's on his legs."

I stared at him.

Shooter

His blue eyes held mine. It was as if he knew what I wanted but wasn't going to help me. Yet I understood he wasn't going to stop me either. And he was aware the drugs were in the pocket nearest to me.

Who was he? What was he? *It didn't matter.*

Ann needed a fix.

I had to get it for her.

I fluffed the skirt over Gerard legs, quickly put my hand into his jacket, felt the package, pulled it out and slipped it into the big side slit pocket of the Indian dress.

"That's the ambulance," he informed me in a murmur only I could hear, "it might be wise for you to vanish before the Gardaí arrive."

I got to my feet. I didn't feel one bit sorry for Gerard even though he'd been shot. If I felt anything for him it was contempt because of what he'd done to my big sister.

"Go," he commanded, when I hesitated wanting to ask him why he was helping me.

The sudden screech of brakes told me I should do as he said and vanish before the Gardaí began asking questions.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome, perhaps we'll meet again. Sometimes I can help."

He could help? Who me?

What a strange, unusual person he was, as if he knew something more than he should about my life.

He confused me.

Nuala Lyons

But I couldn't stay.

The Gardaí and the ambulance men rushed forward prepared to save Gerard's life. I wondered if they knew the type of person he was, would they be quite as concerned about saving him?

4

I melted into the gathered crowd of multinational tourists.

Different people speaking many languages moved aside as I pushed through them.

If he died who would supply Ann?

I walked quickly past the Bad Ass Cafe, crossed Dame St winding my way between parked cars to the opposite side of the road. I ran down Sth. Great Georges St. along Aungier St., whipped through Wexford St, and began to slow down in Camden St, then I was in Lower Rathmines. I didn't know the other streets I ran along but didn't stop to read the names.

The wine stained dress stuck to my chest. I felt dirty.

Of course I blamed this feeling on the man who had brushed my face with the damp tissue and *that* woman who entreated God to have mercy on the dying, to secure a safe passage for this wicked criminal into the next life.

Why should she ask God to assist him when it was Ann who needed all the help she could get? Both of them were helping a crook. The man certainly knew what he was even if the woman didn't, or else he wouldn't have told me what I wanted was in the pocket of the jacket. So why was he trying to save Gerard's life when he'd brought misery and even death to others.

This injustice drove me mad.

My own situation in the triangle of Gerard, Ann and I, became as clear as the screech of our house security alarm.

If I hadn't pretended to drink at that precise moment, I'd be dying and the praying woman would be whispering down my ear. The blue-eyed man would have put a pad on my chest to stop the flow of my blood.

Why?

Who would want me dead?

That first shot had broken the bottle, which had been over my head when I'd crumpled backwards. That was why the glass had sprayed across my face and the wine had washed over me.

I brushed my hand over my wet chest unaware that I was trying to clean myself.

But it was too late for that. I'd done what I'd had to do. There was no point in trying to relive my life. For the past two years I'd been on the edge of the drug scene, playing an unwilling part but I had made that decision myself.

No one else was responsible.

Mum and Dad would probably never understand why I did it. Why I'd had to become involved when they'd spent the last few years checking I was safe. Talking to me, explaining their reasons and giving me all the information they had.

They didn't deserve this but *I had no choice*.

I loved my sister; she asked me for help; I gave it to her; was I wrong?

Shooter

5

That Saturday morning Ann had rung my mobile, she didn't ring the house phone any more in case Mum or Dad answered it, and cried that she was so ill she needed help.

She knew I'd do what I could.

I always did.

So I got dressed and walked as fast as I could to the Bus Stop.

When I reached her tiny apartment she was curled up on the bed moaning. The sweat was rolling down her face and her hair was saturated.

“Orla I need a fix. Gerard said he'd give me some last night but he didn't have any. He's getting a supply at work and said, I'd be all right, I could hold out until he got back. But I'm not and I can't. I think I'm dying. Please get it for me. Please.”

“He won't give it to me. You know Dad told him if he gave me drugs that he'd kill him, and he was prepared to spend the rest of his life in prison for murdering him. If Dad found out that he was still feeding your habit he'd take him apart.”

I put a dry cloth on her forehead mopping up the moisture, giving her what comfort I could. It was not much but it was the best, the very best I could do for her.

Shooter

Ann really needed help and I wasn't able to give it to her. She needed to get professional care.

"You could pretend you were me. You're nearly as tall as I am and we take the same size ten. No-one would recognise you if you wore my clothes and boots."

We were alike.

If we'd been nearer in age we could have passed for twins. I was two years younger and anyone who saw us together knew we were sisters. The only difference was I had blue eyes while Ann's were hazel and her hair was a darker blonde than mine. We'd always been regarded as the brainy blonde Carpenter sisters in school and among our friends.

Ann, being older, had taken care of me, her little sister and had made sure no one bullied me in or out of school. Now the situation was reversed.

But would I get her drugs?

I never had before and I didn't want to do it now. I hated to see her like this. Her tiny kitchen area was a mess and because I wasn't going to get her drugs, I started to clean it.

"Stop that," she screamed, "if you're not going to help me go away. Leave me alone to die in peace."

I stared at her.

She'd never shouted like that before and never looked so dreadful.

A sudden spasm grabbed her body as I watched in horror. She curled up. Tiny drops of perspiration beaded the skin I'd just dried. She moaned in pain. I was terrified.

Was she dying?

I ran to her side, wiped her face trying to help – but I didn't have what she wanted, what she needed. After a while she whispered something. It was so low I had to put my ear to her lips.

“Please Orla, please get me the fix,” she moaned, tears running down her cheeks.

That was when my big sister broke my heart. I had to help her against all the promises I'd made to Mum and Dad.

“I'll go. Hold on, hold on tight until I get back.”

I dressed in her clothes and boots, took the key and locking the door carefully behind me I jogged as fast as I could to get the drugs from Gerard.

He was killing my sister.

I hated him.

6

It was a clear day, with a blue sky holding a brilliant sun. The heat brought scents from the hedges, weeds and the freshly mowed grass as I walked to the Bus Stop.

Normally I would enjoy the fragrances drifting on the air but today was a bad day and they did nothing to console me. Instead of waiting for a bus I carried on to Rathmines Catholic Church, slipped inside and lit a candle for Ann. I said a quiet prayer to ‘St. Jude the patron of hopeless cases’.

A wedding party arrived and when I looked at the bride my eyes watered. The contrast between her and my sister made me ache inside.

She was lost, deep in the centre of a drug scene I’d sworn to avoid.

I’m sorry Mum and Dad, I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.

In order to look the part I was playing I bought a bottle of cheap red wine from an off licence. They didn’t even ask for ID or proof of age. I got them to put it in a brown paper bag and took the bus to Dame St.

It was a short walk from the Bus Stop to Temple Bar Square and I kept my head down.

As today was Saturday and my school friends visited Temple Bar at weekends, I was aware I might bump into some of them. I hoped not. I didn't want them to see me dressed as Ann getting drugs from a pusher.

Gerard worked as a barman in one of the pubs. Ann had told me to wait in the Square. His employers had no idea he was a pusher or they'd sack him on the spot but he needed the work as a cover for his dealings.

No one knew how much money he had but he must have a fortune. Ann told me he'd started selling drugs at fifteen. He'd been at it for a year before he introduced my sister to drugs.

He'd told her it was a soft recreational pill and everyone was using it. She was only fourteen going on fifteen and when she got seven A's in her junior cert. she celebrated by using for the first time.

She'll be eighteen next month and should be sitting her Leaving Cert. this June but instead she's living in a tiny ground floor apartment in one of the back streets in Rathmines with her brain turning to mush.

I lied to my parents when I called them saying I was going downtown with Grainne. I said we might meet with Cathal and Eamon, but I'd be back by teatime.

Then I'd rung Grainne and told her I was going to help Ann. Grainne's my best friend and will help me if I need her, but I'm not going to get her involved.

Now as I walked with Ann's fix in the pocket of her Indian dress I continually looked back over my shoulder expecting the motorbike gunman to be following me.

Shooter

He must have known by now that he's hit the wrong person and was hunting me, the girl in the green Indian dress.

Who was he?

Why did he want to kill me?

These questions remained in my head seeking an answer. One thing I knew beyond doubt was that man on the Kawasaki was a killer and I needed to stay far away from him.

This was the first time in my life I'd been exposed to a murderer. It was scary – very scary – and I had to put it at the back of my brain or else I'd be paralysed with fear.

Before going down the street where Ann lived I checked repeatedly scanning in all directions to make sure I wasn't being followed.

I didn't want to die.

Oh God, please God don't let me die.

When I was certain I was in the clear and the shooter was nowhere around I put the key in the lock.

What if Ann had died while I was gone?

Wanting to turn the key and not wanting to find her dead made me hesitate.

Ann please, please be alive.

Taking a deep breath I forced myself to open the door and slam it closed immediately creating a barrier between me, and the world outside of Ann's apartment.

She was lying on the bed not moving.

I froze.

My body trembled. I forced myself to lean over her, to put a finger on her neck.

There was a pulse.

She was breathing.

“Ann, Ann, it’s me Orla. Wake up.”

She opened her eyes.

“Have you got it?”

“Yes.”

She never asked about how I’d got it but grabbed the package from my hands and tore it open.

I felt so alone.

My sister didn’t love me any more. I was nothing to her. I wiped the tears from my cheeks but my heart was broken. There was nothing I could do to ease the pain.

After I’d showered I checked the glass hadn’t cut my face and I didn’t need to go to hospital for stitches. I washed the dress and watched as the water turned red. It could have so easily been my blood instead of cheap plonk that swished around in the white cracked sink.

Ann wouldn’t have cared.

7

I dressed in my own clothes and felt cleaner but I also felt sadder than ever before in my life. I knew in my heart and soul that I couldn't do this again. If I did she would rely on me to supply her and I wasn't stupid enough to believe he'd give them to me for nothing.

It would be in his interest to get me addicted as well. Then he'd have the two sisters under his control. Dad would definitely kill him and go to jail for the rest of his life. Mum would be alone – broken hearted. It would destroy our family.

I'd have to say good-bye to Ann if she ever asked me to get her a 'fix' again.

"I'm going home now. 'Bye."

She ignored me.

The tears flowed down my face. I couldn't help it. I was saying goodbye to my big sister who I'd loved all my life.

A sob broke from my lips as I tried to control myself.

I had to stop, put my head against a wall, closed my eyes and hugged myself trying to get control over my emotions. I had to take three deep breaths before I could continue.

I was still sniffing as I passed a small lane when someone said:

"Hi Ann's sister?"

I turned.

Standing by the side of the lane was a boy about my age dressed in smart casuals and to die for red Reeboks. He was good looking in that blond kind of way and he had a friendly smile on his face.

“How do you know Ann?”

“We’re friends.”

“What’s your name?”

“Chris.”

“Chris what?”

“We never use second names around here.”

“Who do you mean by we?”

“You know all us druggies.”

“I’m not a druggie.”

“Course you are. You’re Ann’s sister.”

“*I’m not a drug addict* and anyway what business is it of yours if I am or not?”

“I need some.”

“I don’t have any.”

“Course you do. I have money.” He took out a wad of twenty-euro notes and offered them to me. There must have been at least a hundred euro there.

I moved back out of the lane.

“What’s wrong? Is that not enough?”

Shooter

“I don’t have drugs.”

He put his money back in his pocket.

“Ann promised me if I was hurting I was to go to her and she’d help me out. I knocked and knocked on the door but she didn’t answer. I waited here to see if she’d come home and then I saw you in her dress going into the house. You must have got her drugs. I know you got her drugs. I want some. I need some. Give me the drugs or I’ll give you a few smacks and take them off you.”

He followed me out of the lane.

I turned to walk away when he grabbed me from behind and dragged me back.

He put his face right into mine.

“This is your last chance. I’ll buy them or I’ll take them off you. What way do you want me to do it?”

“I don’t have drugs. And if you don’t let me go I’ll make you sorry you ever put your hands on me.”

“Stupid slapper,” he said and drew his fist back to punch me in the face.

But he was right handed and in order to thump me he had to let go of the back of my sweater. That was not his first mistake but it was his last.

I’d been going to Karate since I was eight years old and I know how to take care of myself.

“Be careful,” I warned him. “I’m a karate black belt. I’ll hurt you.”

He laughed.

“Give me those drugs.” He threw a punch but I’d moved away.

I kicked his face. He fell backwards, got his balance and came at me again. I kicked his face again and followed through with a kick to his thigh.

He grunted, moved away from me and aimed a blow to my stomach. I stopped it with my arm and moved to the side. He kept his eyes on my feet.

I punched his face with a left right, and moved out of his reach.

Still he came at me.

I was fed up with him. So this time when he came at me I blocked his arm swiped his feet from under him and hit him on the back of the neck as he fell to the ground.

“S...,” he said, lying at my feet. “Beaten by a f...ing slapper. Go away. I won’t fight you any more.”

“If you follow me, I’ll break your bones and put you in hospital,” I promised him.

“What’s more if I ever find out you’ve been near my sister I’m put you in a coma. *Do you understand me?*”

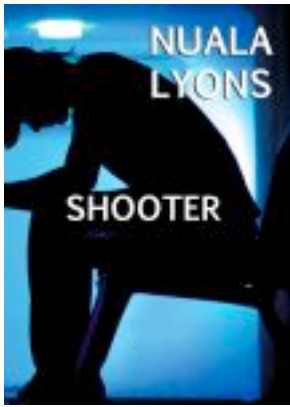
I pushed the last words out through my clenched teeth. He was the second male to try and damage me this day. I’d had enough. I *was* a black belt but I’d given up doing Karate with only the occasional practice at home so I was rusty. I remembered the moves, yet there was no way I’d have beaten him into a coma.

Hey what did he know? He knew nothing. Perhaps he’d put it about that Ann’s sister was a black belt and the other druggies wouldn’t attempt to knock me about for drugs.

Shooter

“I’m sorry,” Chris said, from the ground where he was lying probably afraid to get up in case I hit him some more. “I won’t annoy you again.”

God I hated Gerard Maloney!



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