

A CRIME OF PASSION

Agnes Robertson lay sprawled across the couch. A line of blood had dripped down her chin and onto the white blouse. A button had popped open to reveal a white bra. Her hands were gnarled and bent as if she had tried to fend off the assailant who had strangled her. The skirt was pulled halfway up her thighs but there were no obvious signs of sexual assault. She was approximately fifty years old.

Jennifer frowned as she checked the victim's watch.

The same age as my mother.

It could have been her mother, who also had a preference for white blouses and black skirts, Jennifer's mother had always impressed on her three daughters the importance of looking good without overdoing it. Simply stylish she called it. Her two oldest daughters had moved into banking and computer science respectively; Jennifer had joined the police force. Her mother had frowned when she walked into the house wearing her uniform.

"You look like a man."

Her attitude had changed somewhat once Jennifer McInnes became a detective, it wasn't that she disagreed with her career choice, but one must look stylish if possible. It had become a bone of contention between mother and all three daughters, most days it took the form of idle banter, but now and then the comments became acerbic.

Jennifer slid a hand under her black blouse and adjusted the bra strap while she examined the corpse and the immediate area.

"Looks like a robbery," Donald nodded at the handbag on the floor.

"Maybe," Jennifer bent down and examined the contents of the handbag, which had been scattered over the floor.

A moment later she shook her head.

"No, we have credit cards, Switch card, store cards, even cash, so robbery is not part of the equation."

She stared at the wide staring eyes and shook her head.

Who killed you, and why?

They had been called to the ground floor flat after the woman's daughter had called. Her mother hadn't turned up for her regular babysitting session and she had left her key in the flat by mistake last week, otherwise she would have checked herself. A tired DCS had given the word to Jennifer. "Get out there and see what's up," he had nodded at Donald, "take Donald with you."

Donald, she had winced. He was new to CID, having just been promoted six months ago; she had been a detective for the last five years. The implication was obvious, she was the babysitter.

"Revenge?" Donald offered.

"How?" Jennifer rolled her eyes, "she was probably a harmless old woman, I'd include the motive on my list however, somewhere at the bottom," she smirked.

Two hours later she was leaning against the wall staring at a young man in his early twenties. Danny Rogers had been seen in the area according to locals and when they had run his name through the database they found a string of assault and burglary charges. Jennifer had already put through a request for a search warrant but as she studied his reactions to Donald's questions she doubted the search warrant was necessary. Danny was stupid, arrogant even, but he was no murderer.

"You were seen in the area," Donald pressed him, "in the same street."

"I was waiting for my pal," he pulled a face, "I dinnae ken nothing about this!"

"About what?" Donald pulled out a photo and Danny winced. Jennifer straightened up slightly, there was a bead of sweat on his brow as he glanced at the photo.

"You ever seen this woman?"

Danny stared at the photo.

"Maybe."

"Yes or no?"

"Aye," he threw up his hands, "so what's this all about?"

"She was found murdered this morning."

“Murdered?”

His eyes shifted and Donald pounced.

“So why did you do it?”

Danny licked his lips and swallowed.

“I had nothing to do with no stabbing.”

Jennifer closed her eyes and exhaled as she pushed a lock of shoulder length hair over her ear, not guilty with a capital G.

“Where were you between midnight and two in the morning?” she opened her eyes.

“At my girlfriend’s.”

“Give me a number I can get her on and if she confirms it you’re free to go,” he pushed away from the wall. Danny eyed her cautiously and reached for the pen in front of Donald. She took the piece of paper and studied it.

“Wait here,” she smiled and walked out.

Twenty minutes later Danny was free and Donald was staring moodily at the wall.

“I could have sworn.”

“Sworn nothing,” she shook her head, “he was wearing a Celtic top last night, the street where the victim lived are all Rangers supporters. That makes him either incredibly brave or stupid to commit an act like that wearing colours, why make yourself that obvious?”

Donald gazed up at her and nodded imperceptibly as she pulled at the cuffs of her blouse and buttoned them, she was annoyed at the waste of time. It had been Donald’s suggestion that they lift Danny and she was regretting having listened to him in the first place, now they had wasted a day.

“Your witness placed him there at the time of the murder,” she looked up accusingly.

“My witness said he was hanging around there all night, I never mentioned the time of the murder,” he shot back.

“I’m pulling CCTV footage,” she reached for her jacket, “tomorrow we go over it with a fine tooth comb, I want to know who walked up that street and why.”

She pulled the jacket on and flicked the collar of the blouse over the jacket.

“In the meantime try to get some sleep, I’m away to the gym,” she buttoned the jacket and picked up her overcoat and scarf, “look, I’m sorry, but we wasted a good two hours with that ned in there, two hours that could have been spent going over CCTV or questioning other people.”

“The first twenty four hours are the time you are closest to the murderer,” she threw the scarf around her neck and knotted it loosely, “after that your chances of catching the killer decrease dramatically.”

She pulled the overcoat on and buttoned it slowly,

“You’re new at the game,” she glanced across, “so I’ll let this one go, but don’t let it happen again, I’m not sure we have much of a chance the now.”

Donald stared and finally nodded.

“Okay, I’ll pay attention, I wasn’t even thinking of that.”

Jennifer said nothing as she picked up her briefcase.

“Can you do me a favour and run me back to the garage? I’ve left my car there.”

“Sure,” he rose quickly, “sorry, you should have told me.”

“My mistake,” her mouth twitched, “I wasn’t thinking.”

Their eyes met.

“Touché,” she winked.

Jennifer did most of her thinking on the run. Exercise seemed to unlock the hidden chambers of her mind that remained closed whenever she was stationary. It was true that it got the blood flowing to the brain according to the latest medical evidence, but even so there was no accounting for the change that came over her whenever she was exercising. She would find her mind turning problems over and over until suddenly the solution would hit her and she would have to stop what she was doing and return to her problem. Even as a child she used to pace her bedroom while she did homework, at first she had been accused of putting things off, but after a while the accusations stopped and people left her alone.

Thus it was that Jennifer had only completed three laps of the pool at the university when she saw the solution staring in front of her.

Of course!

The DCS looked up in surprise as she opened the door to her office; he checked his watch.

“I thought you were off duty?”

“Forgot something, won’t be long, John,” she smiled.

DCS John Roberts nodded as she stepped inside and glanced around.

“How did Donald get along?”

“Eh?”

She turned around and shrugged.

“Okay, a little wet behind the ears but I’ll keep my eye on him.”

John ran a hand through his greying hair as he leaned against the wall, Jennifer was flicking through reports only vaguely aware that he was still standing there. She had seen it earlier, a bill, one of many papers picked up earlier that day.

“Donald’s a strange boy,” he mused, “he showed a lot of promise earlier in his career but then something happened that affected him.”

A bill from a tradesman, a plumber.

“What?”

Their eyes met and she softened slightly as he licked his lips.

“Keep an eye on him, this is his big chance to prove himself.”

He made as if to exit the room when Jennifer spoke up.

“What happened?”

“A stabbing,” he replied, “he was stabbed on duty, it affected him badly and we moved him onto CID rather than lose him.”

“I didn’t know,” she studied the bill, the timing was right and a plumber would have had a chance to scout the place out, but why would he kill an old woman?

“I’ll keep an eye on him.”

“Thanks,” he moved towards the door when her eyes fell on an insurance policy.

“No bother,” she murmured as she picked it up and studied the name, “Stuart,” she closed her eyes, “sole beneficiary was her son,” sky blue eyes widened, “two daughters, one son, so why is he the sole beneficiary?”

John stopped with his hand on the doorknob as she moved to the computer, their eyes met and he smiled tiredly.

“Keep up the good work, look after my boy for me.”

“Aye, no bother,” she murmured as she sat down at the computer and typed in the plumber’s name and waited for the database to retrieve the results. Her eyes lit up as she saw the charges.

“Well,” she murmured again, “you have been a bad boy.”

Stuart Radcliffe had been a radical in his younger days, born in Belfast, he had run with a crew from the Falls Road and had been jailed twice for sectarian offenses before moving to Scotland. Once here he had been jailed once more for receiving stolen goods. After that however he had been relatively quiet, if you called losing your licence five years ago for drunk driving, quiet. He was married with three kids although according to the neighbours, there had been constant rows over the spat of a few months; Stuart liked a drink but his wife had other ideas.

The other part of the equation revolved around Frank, the sole beneficiary in spite of the fact she had two daughters. She had bequeathed her entire estate to her eldest child, Frank, leaving Rena and Heather with nothing.

Donald had been intrigued by the new development and suggested they call in the son.

“I’d rather call in the plumber first,” she mused, “and in the meantime we can go to work on the daughter who called us in the first place, find a weak link and keep hammering it. If she stands to gain nothing out of the death of her mother the chances are she’ll crack first and open herself up.”

Stuart Radcliffe was a hard man. Bald, heavily tattooed, and middle aged, he stared resentfully at the young man sitting opposite him, he had been called off the job an hour ago and it was only the threat of further investigation that had convinced him that cooperation was the name of the game. The woman had been quite clear that his past was very much in the forefront of her mind. Twenty five years ago he would have run from them, but age and a fifty a day habit had caught up with him. Best to go along and see what they had to say.

“So what’s this all about?”

“Where were you Tuesday night between midnight and three in the morning?”

“Shagging my wife,” he shrugged, “or sleeping, take your pick.”

“And she can verify this?”

“Aye,” he stared through the young man, “she can verify it.”

“He’s lying,” Donald stared out the window as a snow flurry gusted past the window, “his wife would be the first to back him up.”

“Maybe,” she shifted in her seat, “but it doesn’t make sense.”

Heather had seemed quite controlled when she was interviewed at home, although her eyes had narrowed when she was told the sole beneficiary was Frank.

“He was her first son, mum was married twice and outlived both husbands.”

“So Frank is from her first marriage?”

“Aye,” she nodded, “Rena and I are from the second marriage, mum’s first husband died of heart failure when he was quite young, it was something she never quite got over.”

“And her second husband?” Jennifer pressed on quietly, “how was the relationship with him?”

“Good,” she replied, “they had their fights.”

“How did he die?”

“Cancer.”

“When?”

“Late last year.”

“Did your mother have any problems, health problems?”

“No,” she stared past her, “she was active and healthy, she’s a, was a beautiful woman,” she brushed at her eyes, “she was a former nurse and seemed to love caring for others. She could be nearly dead on her feet with the cold but she would be first out the door to look after one of us or our friends. She met both her her husbands at hospital funnily enough and it seemed like she would live forever.”

“So why?” Jennifer, frowned, “would she leave all her possessions to Frank and nothing for you and Rena? It sounds strange coming from someone who was so caring.”

“You dinnae ken mum,” she wiped her eyes, “she offered, even begged us but we both said we wanted nothing from her, maybe small things, sentimental things but nothing big. Frank was a different case; he has health problems, he has a heart murmur. I guess we all agreed that he needed the most care, he may not live to see his fortieth birthday.”

“How old is he now?”

“Thirty eight,” she replied, “two years older than his father when he died.”

Jennifer turned back from the window as Donald spoke.

“I think we should call Frank in, think about it,” he locked his hands behind his head, “he has possibly two years to live, his mother will probably outlive him, she’s left him a sizeable fortune, so why not kill her or hire someone like Stuart to do the killing? He collects the money as a grieving son and goes on a spending spree and enjoys the last few years of his life.”

Jennifer straightened up and ran a hand through her hair as she contemplated the scenario, it made sense so why wasn’t she buying it?

“Okay, we’ll pay him a visit but don’t put his head on the block, we’ll just ask a few pertinent questions and see what we can find out.”

Fifteen minutes later they were standing in the living room while Frank rolled a cigarette, Jennifer straightened her skirt and pursed her lips.

“How are you taking this?”

“Not good,” he sighed, “I shouldn’t even be smoking these,” he nodded at the tobacco pouch, “I gave up a few years ago. I’ve got a heart murmur but it was the first thing I thought of,” he licked the smoke and rolled it.

“You live alone here?”

“Been on my own since my wife left me two years ago,” their eyes met, “I’m paying this place off, but with my life expectancy I doubt I’ll live long enough to pay it off.”

Jennifer pursed her lips and was just about to open her mouth when Donald spoke.

“You aware that you are the sole beneficiary to your mum’s estate?”

"I was told a few months ago," he looked past him, "why, what has this got to do with anything?" Donald's eyes narrowed and Frank winced.

"Christ, you think I had something to do with this, don't you?"

"Did you ever meet a Stuart Radcliffe?"

"Never heard of him."

"How about this man?"

Frank stared at the picture of Stuart and shook his head, "I've seen him once or twice in town but can't be sure, lots of guys with bald heads," he ran a hand through his thinning hair.

A moment later he rose and walked to the window.

"I loved my mother," he spoke quietly and then turned around, "so why would I kill her? I have a good job, enough savings, no real debts to speak of, you can't afford big debts when you have a heart murmur. So why would I kill my mother?"

"We're not saying you did," Jennifer stared at him, "but you must understand that in the absence of any other motive, we have to exhaust every other possibility, it's a routine line of questioning. We'll leave you in peace now but call us if you think of anyone who might have wanted her dead."

"He's lying," Donald stared moodily at the house as she slid the key into the ignition, "did you see how cool and collected he was? I bet he had all the answers for us, we should put a trace on him, see where he goes."

Jennifer frowned. It was possible, the prospect of death could do strange things to a person, but murder? Somehow she doubted that Frank had much to do with the killing, but maybe he knew someone who was capable of murder.

"Run a check on his bank details," she started the car, "see if his story checks out, make sure he's debt free and then we do the same for Stuart Radcliffe's details. Ask around and see if anyone has seen those two together."

She pointed at a CCTV camera as they pulled into the main street. "CCTV, pull up footage going back in increments of a month, see if Stuart has been near Frank's place. Go over his books, see if he's been near him at any time."

"So you think Stuart Radcliffe is our man then?"

"No, but I think he knows something we don't and he's covering for someone, with his record all we have to do is turn up the heat and see if he explodes."

Stuart stared at the picture of Frank.

"I ken him, I did some work at his place twelve months ago."

"You what?" Jennifer swivelled in her chair.

"A broken pipe," he replied, "he lives in a council flat, I do a bit of work for the council," he smiled, "it pays well."

"And when you did this work," Donald leaned forward expectantly, "did you meet him?"

"Aye," he replied, "he was still in his pajamas when I knocked on the door; moody kind of guy, I've seen him in the village a few times but he never says a word to me, fucking snob if you ask me," he slipped his hands behind his head.

"So, you think this is the guy who killed the old wifie?"

Jennifer's face registered a sly grin.

"We're not sure, but considering the fact that he claimed never to have seen you, we do need to look at your books, your list of clients," she hesitated, "and we need details on where you have been for the last thirty days, times, dates, places," she leaned forward.

"Be very precise, we can hold you on suspicion but with no evidence we have to let you go," she flicked her hair over her shoulder, "the more you tell us, the better informed we are and you may even be dropped from the list of suspects."

"You bastards," he swallowed, "you bastards."

"No," Donald leaned over him, "you ken something, but you aren't telling us, someone got into the woman's flat without breaking in and killed her. Someone she knew or at least trusted enough to let them in, now that could have been a plumber coming to check on some work he did there recently, couldn't it?"

"So, who is that guy?"

"Her son," he picked the photo up, "sole beneficiary to her will and here's you, with a history of

violence,” he looked across, “how much money was it worth.”

“You’re nuts,” he threw his hands in the air, “both of you are nuts.”

A grim faced DCS stepped into their office two hours later whilst they were sorting through Stuart’s records. Jennifer looked up expectantly as he closed the door behind him.

“We’ve got another one.”

“A what?”

“Another murder,” he replied, “a young woman, a student, she lived in the same street as Agnes Robertson.”

“Jesus,” she slipped her hand down her blouse and adjusted the strap, “we’ve got a serial killer.”

“Possible,” he replied, “but I think she saw something and was knocked on the head.”

“Name?”

“Kathleen Johnson.”

Kathleen Johnson lay sprawled across the bed. Her nightie had been pulled up and Jennifer noted the telltale bruising that indicated sexual assault. John was right, this was no serial, she had seen something.

“I don’t remember talking to her,” she bent down to examine the slash wounds on her throat and then straightened up, “I was next door,” she mused and looked across at Donald.

“You questioned her, did she seem upset or like she was hiding something?”

Donald frowned.

“She claimed to have seen a van driving slowly up the street earlier that night but couldn’t give an accurate description.”

“I remember that,” she nodded, “anything else, did she start to say something and then stop?”

Donald stared past her and frowned.

“A few cars, she did look like she was going to say something but then stopped.”

“What was the conversation?”

“I asked about cars,” he replied a moment later, “she said she had seen what she thought was a man in a car delivering pamphlets, but when I asked if he knocked at Agnes’s door she went kind of strange like she was hiding something.”

“She would’ve had a perfect view of the flat from here,” she parted the curtain, “God, I can see right into the place from here.”

Donald moved up behind her and she moved instinctively away her mind going over the possibilities. *A young female student found dead, raped*, she picked up the handbag and flicked through the purse.

Student ID card, debit card, no cash.

She frowned and kept searching, a student diary yielded some names and she copied down her mother’s number and put it down. She turned suddenly, aware that Donald was peering over her shoulder.

“Find anything?”

“No obvious signs of burglary,” she sighed, “I think we have our motive over there,” she nodded at the flat across the road.

“You don’t think it was a simple rape?”

“It would make it simpler, I agree,” she replied, “but two murders within a stone’s throw of each other is a bit much for coincidence, don’t you think?”

“We can question her boyfriends,” he replied, “I think we’ll find she was into rough sex and it just got out of control, you never know what people do behind closed doors. I knew this lassie from my school who everybody thought was sweet and innocent,” he glanced down at the body.

“But one of my pals was with her one night and she liked to be throttled while having sex, I read somewhere that it increases the orgasm.”

“Yes, I’ve read that too,” she pointed at the body, “but she’s had her throat cut, so your theory goes out the window.”

“He might have still strangled her and then cut her throat to make it look like an intruder did it.”

Jennifer shook her head a moment later.

“No, but I’ll keep an open mind,” she glanced across, “so what happened to your sweet innocent lassie who liked to be strangled?”

“She married a minister.”

Jennifer smiled and turned away.

John leaned back in his chair while Jennifer arranged herself opposite him, Donald was closing the door and she waited until he was sitting before speaking.

“It looks like a straight rape and murder,” she began, “but that flat has a perfect view of the Robertson residence, she would have had a good view of what went on in that flat.”

“You sure you’re not reading anything into this?”

She shook her head and turned to Donald, “tell him what you told me this afternoon.”

Donald stared at her and she felt the hairs on the back of her neck prickling.

“I was mistaken,” he told them both, “like I told you, she looked like she was going to say something else when I questioned her but then her phone went off, a text message I think and maybe that’s what it was, but who knows?”

Jennifer stared blankly at him and then at John.

“I didn’t know that.”

“Slipped my mind,” he replied defensively.

“A lot of things have slipped your mind lately,” John stared through him, “you sure you’re capable of continuing with this investigation or would you like me to assign someone else?”

“Trouble sleeping,” he replied, “I’m going to see a doctor about it tonight.”

“Try sleeping pills,” John shot back, “it works for me.”

Donald blushed.

Jennifer picked up the pile of CCTV tapes and dropped them into a bag, the footage from the time of the first murder had drawn a blank but maybe the footage shot around the time of the second murder would show something. Donald looked up expectantly.

“Fancy a pint tonight?”

“I, em,” she fluffed her hair out, “maybe later, I want to drop these off and put in a bit of overtime.”

“Overtime,” he frowned, “I should do a bit myself.”

“Feel free,” she gathered up her jacket and a few minutes later stepped out into the hallway and headed for the main doors her head bent deep in thought. She was so busy thinking she collided with a uniformed officer coming the other way. The bag dropped from her hand and the tapes spilled out onto the floor.

“Shit,” she cursed.

“Sorry,” the man bent down, “here, I’ll help you.”

“Thanks,” she mumbled, “it’s my fault.”

A piece of paper had fallen out too and a moment later the officer handed it to her with a puzzled look on her face.

“It says you’ve collected six videos but there’s only five here.”

“Huh?”

She stared at the piece of paper a frown on her face, vaguely recalling that Donald had been using them last.

“What the hell?”

A few moments later she was standing in the office looking around, Donald looked up in puzzlement and she managed a wry grimace.

“What’s wrong?”

“I, em, I think we picked up six videos and I’ve only got five.”

“Oh,” he glanced at the video recorder, “nothing in there, you sure?”

“Positive,” she handed him the piece of paper and started rifling through the clutter on the desk, “now that’s strange, they were all right here.”

“Maybe the killer swiped it,” he joked.

“Aye, right,” she grimaced, “well, there’s copies anyway, but it’s a worry, here see if you can find it for me. I’ll have to explain at the centre.”

Jennifer went through the sequence numbers. They had been numbered according to date and times, starting with six o’clock and finishing with two in the morning when the murder had taken place. It was the second last one that was missing and she frowned worriedly. She stared out the window of the car, she had seen some of them but not all them; had she viewed that one? And where had it

gone?

Look for what's missing. A woman is found dead in her bed, no signs of forced entry so she either knew the killer or trusted him enough to let him in.

Jennifer swallowed.

Carl was the watch supervisor on duty when she walked into the control room half an hour later.

"They're over here," he pointed to the videos she had requested earlier.

"Thanks," she dumped the videos on the table and looked past him, "one has gone missing, the time slot between 1200 and 0200 hours," she blushed, "I don't suppose?"

"You want another copy?" he frowned, "highly irregular but I suppose we can arrange something."

"I was thinking of viewing it here," she replied, "no sense taking it back, it's probably lying around on the desk somewhere."

"Sure."

The DCS answered the phone on the second ring and Jennifer closed her eyes as she mentally prepared herself.

"Hiya, it's me."

"Hi me," he replied, "where are you?"

"CCTV control room."

"Oh, aye, when are you due back?"

"I've found our murderer," she swallowed the fear, "I think you need to see this."

"Bring it in then."

"I can't," she bit her lip.

"How no?"

"You need to come here and see it."

She could practically feel the tension oozing down the line.

"That serious? You want Donald along as well?"

"No dinnae bother, the poor guy needs to relax," she replied calmly, "besides, I'm meeting him for a pint at his local, I'll call him when I'm ready to come, no need for him to see this footage."

"Okay, I'll let him know."

"Don't bother, I'll call now and let him know, promise me one thing?"

"That depends on what it is," he replied guardedly.

"You won't tell anyone I've found the murderer."

There was a dead silence.

"I'm there in fifteen minutes."

Donald looked at his watch one more time and eyed his pint. She had called him from the CCTV room and arranged to meet for a pint after all. She had apologised for her coldness the last few days and complained about the workload. She had slagged off the DCS and he had agreed, he could be a slave driver. She had promised to meet him at the pub and hinted that maybe they could grab a curry later on.

Jennifer stepped into the bar and Donald felt his penis hardening. The white blouse seemed to shine under the lights and she offered him a quick smile as she fluffed out her hair.

"Hiya," she slid onto a stool next to him, "I am so knackered," she nudged his leg, "hey, sorry about the late arrival, the DCS nailed me in the hallway and wanted to talk about things."

"What kind of things?"

"Oh," she nodded to the barman, "the usual, the case, how Donald is progressing, he really seems to think you're still wet behind the ears. I told him you were doing fine even though you've made a few mistakes."

"Like losing that video," he sighed, "God, I searched everywhere for it."

"Don't worry," she replied, "I once lost a crucial piece of evidence when I first started, a pair of blood soaked knickers, I got disciplined for that one."

"So I'm in good company, am I?"

"You are," she smiled.

An hour later Donald was pleasantly pissed and Jennifer was loosening up. Once or twice she had patted his leg absently, reassuring him that all was well and when he glanced at his watch she shot him a soulful smile.

“Time for a curry?”

“Aye,” he smiled blearily.

“Then let’s go,” she drained her drink and slipping her hand into his arm, pulled him off the bar stool and headed for the door.

Donald lived a few hundred yards from the pub and when she got to the door she leaned up and kissed him gently.

“Don’t lock the door, I’ve run out of fags.”

“Smoke mine?”

“It’s okay,” she smiled, “I’ve got something else to get.”

“What?”

“Cream,” she whispered, “whipped cream.”

John looked across as she slid into the passenger seat.

“Took your time.”

“Sorry,” she muttered, “I had to get him pissed.”

“Any more clues?”

“No,” she replied, “he thinks you’re a slave driver.”

“He’s right.”

He stared out the window sadly.

“I never thought I’d be calling in a raid on one of my own, a double murderer, the press will have a field day with this one.”

“It’s motive I can’t understand,” she lit a cigarette in spite of the no smoking sign in front of her.

He took out his cigarettes and lit one as well. The radio crackled to life and he picked up the microphone and issued two words.

“Blackbird is home, repeat, blackbird is home.”

“Roger that.”

“You said he went funny after the stabbing.”

“Aye, but murder?”

“Strange world, we found the missing tape in his locker.”

“Why wouldn’t he take it with him, ditch somewhere between the station and here?”

“The power of the fanny?”

“Subject is coming out,” a voice broke in over the radio, “we have a diary in our possession.”

He pulled her head down onto his thigh while Donald was driven past.

Donald’s flat was clean and tidy even though it had been searched, for a bachelor he was meticulously clean, no dirty dishes in the sink, and a pile of magazines in the rack were all in chronological order. She frowned at the cover. So he was into German porn, who wasn’t? She glanced across at John who was bent over a laptop, their eyes met and he coughed as he motioned her across. Hesitantly she crossed to the sofa and took a seat beside him.

“You ready for this?” he looked across tiredly.

“Aye,” she swallowed, “hit me with it.”

He turned the laptop in her direction.

“His diary, for want of a better word.”

She stared at the last entry in the diary dated that day.

I love her, I love her, I love her. My darling Jennifer, soon we will be together. I commit the crimes and together we solve them. Tonight she is coming here, we will be together forever, no one can drive us apart, together in life, together in death.

She swallowed the fear and stared out the window at the lonely windswept hills.

“It was me?”

“You were the card he drew,” he picked up a deck of cards and shuffled them, “it could have been the girl next door or even me, if he was that way inclined.”

He drew a card and grimaced.

“Ace of spades,” he tossed it onto the table and sank back into the sofa, “take some time off, as much as you need, this is my fault not yours. He was never right after the stabbing, it was like he needed a mother.”

A tear inched its way down her face and she wiped it away angrily.

“Two people dead because of his love for me?”

“You call that love?” he leaned forward and rubbed her back, “there’s a fine line between love and obsession, take it from someone who’s seen more than you think,” he let his hand fall and rising slowly, crossed to the window and leaned against the sill. A sad look drifted across his care worn features as he contemplated the scene that must have greeted Donald every morning and every night.

“He never had anyone he socialised with,” he spoke quietly, “I had pulled him aside once or twice but he kept saying he had his interests, I’m betting they involved a great deal of bird watching, the two legged kind,” he glanced back.

“No one can live alone, not for too long. There was a man I knew once who broke up with his long time girlfriend. He used to be a happy go lucky, carefree kind of guy, he had lots of friends but when Jenny left it was like his whole world collapsed. He couldn’t face them again without her by his side, nor could he answer questions about why they weren’t together.”

Jennifer’s face tightened as he turned his back on the window and folded his arms.

“I used to drop into see him every other week, we’d sit and watch the football and he’d fall into a drunken stupor,” he looked down and frowned, “my visits became more and more infrequent, he became more and more depressed. God I was worried then, I even called a friend who was a psychiatrist and asked her to look in on him, she couldn’t because of her ethics.”

He swallowed and smiled sadly.

“One day he turned up at my house, laughing and joking, kept saying he was over her. I had a strange feeling about it all, it all seemed too forced. Kathy, my wife came out with an odd statement that night in bed, she said that man is ready to die. I didn’t believe her until I got a call two days later to attend a pedestrian fatality,” he grimaced.

“My brother had come out of a pub in town, walked down to the train tracks just south of Stirling station and laid down to die.”

She gulped.

“In hindsight, David’s love for Jenny wasn’t love, it was obsession. He hadn’t rearranged the furniture since she walked out, he still set a plate for her at dinner time and taped all her favourite shows for her, it was a bizarre setup,” he glanced at her.

“Obsession left to its own end eventually ends in tragedy, in this case it was the death of two innocent women, with my late brother it ended with his own death.”

He moved away from the window, “my wife and I aren’t much company but how’s about you come back for a meal tonight. My wife needs a bit of female company and at least I’ll get to watch the Old Firm game in peace.”

Love, desire, obsession, three steps away from disaster, the waters of passion boiled over and who knew where it would end?

She uttered a silent prayer for Donald as they drove towards Bannockburn.

Save him from himself.

Written by Alastair Rosie 2007 ©