

I was three sips into my bitter cup of coffee when I got a call about a murder. "Cut and dry domestic," my partner, Stu, said down the phone. With a sigh and a creaking ache in my hip, I pushed myself from my decaying leather chair and headed over to 47 Downend Road.

The weather was miserable. The rain slashed at the glass panes and intermittent flashes of white lightning burned the room, leaving bright afterimages behind my eyelids. I rubbed my forehead. I should have just finished the coffee. It's not as if the corpse was going anywhere.

Annie Rovira laid on her back, a blank expression staring upwards towards the nicotine-stained ceiling. Bruises peppered her face and neck. She wore an old oversized black top with red shorts. Her bare legs were similarly painted with contusions, old and fresh. Dull blonde hair, seemingly a very distant friend to a brush, fanned out like a lion's mane from her head. Her skin was pale, gray almost. Thirty years on the force and sights like these never grew easier to see. Stu and I stared at her. His hands were buried deep in his pockets, fighting the deep chill that enveloped the flat like a wet blanket.

"Picked up the husband at The White Horse just down the road," he said, his Bristolian accent was stubbornly strong despite his decades living in London. "Even had the gall to act surprised."

I chewed on my lip; I could really do with a cigarette. I asked, "Did he say anything?"

"Nope," Stu said. He pulled his hands from his pockets and paced slowly around the body. "Insisted he didn't do anything, then when we gave him the '*you do not have to say anything*' speech, he took that on board and very quickly shut up."

I grunted and walked to the corner of the room, next to an ugly standing lamp. I asked, "Who called this in?"

"Her sister," Stu said. "Said she was supposed to pick up some cake tonight."

"Cake?" I asked.

"Carrot." Stu nodded and pointed his thumb towards the small kitchen, the door was slightly ajar. "Looks good too."

I fully took the room in. The flat was barely habitable. A broken sofa with tears in the fabric was tucked against the wall, a dirty window sitting above it. There was a small television,

but it didn't take a genius to figure out it was broken, just a set of eyes to see the tape holding it together. Beer cans littered every available surface, cigarette butts jutted out from full ashtrays. The smell of alcohol, tobacco, dust, and unwashed clothes mingled and fermented inside my nose. Even the aroma of a fresh body couldn't cut through. The door on the far end of the room led to the linoleum-lined kitchen, with a flickering light and eerie atmosphere. The door next to it led to a small bathroom, with a grimy shower and questionable toilet. The final door led to a moderately sized bedroom that looked like a landfill had somehow made its way up three flights of stairs.

To my right was a table, large enough to take up the entire length of the living room. It was laden with unwashed dishes and cups with unidentifiable liquids. Chocolate wrappers, utensils, and unopened letters filled in the gaps between food waste. It took some digging to see that the table itself was an old oak piece. I scanned the surface, mentally filtering out the rubbish. Standing out among the piles of refuse was a crumpled piece of paper. Scratchy handwriting poked past the creases. I reached over, careful to keep my coat out of a puddle of congealing food. I picked up the paper with my fingertips and slowly unfolded it.

7 DAYS

YOU WILL BE SORRY !!!

"Hey Stu, look at this," I said. Immediately Stu's phone started ringing. He quickly pulled it from his pocket and brought it to his ear. His face dropped, his usually calm demeanor slipped away.

"Yeah, we'll be right there. Bye."

"What?" I asked, eyebrows furrowed. I felt my heart begin to race.

"The husband has been found dead in his cell," he said quickly. "Slit throat."

I should have finished that coffee.