

THIRTY

Ronnie Weir drove his Bentley up the long drive to the front door of his red bricked mansion. Ignoring the garage and leaving the car parked on the wide expanse in front of the house, he let himself in through the elaborately wrought front door. Once inside, he found his wife watching television in their home cinema.

She looked up as he entered. "Hi, Ronnie," she smiled.

He looked at her somewhat strangely and gestured to the television. "Do you like this?" he asked.

Puzzled, she asked, "This programme?"

"No. This fifty-six inch, widescreen, with all the latest in Dolby surround sound."

She wasn't sure why he was asking her this, but she said, "Yeah, it's great."

He nodded, the same strange expression on his face. "Okay! Come with me now."

He led her to their magnificent lounge, a symphony in white – two expensive white leather sofas and matching armchairs, heavy white pile carpet, off-white brocade drapes on the windows, designed in complicated folds, a magnificent mirror with a heavy gold frame on the wall above an ornate white marble fireplace. They had had the room redesigned over two years ago, yet he said to her now, "Well, what do you think?"

Growing increasingly uneasy but striving not to show it, she said, "I think it's gorgeous."

"Uh huh! Only the very few are fortunate enough to live in this kind of luxury."

She strove for some enthusiasm. "Yeah, I'm really lucky, Ronnie. I love our beautiful home."

He just looked at her, the same strange stare, and said again, "Follow me now." He led her down along the blue and gold carpeted hallway, down past the elaborate staircase that led to the upper floor, and into the kitchen. Here again were all the signs of opulence. A dark brown ceiling, inlaid with several small, strategically placed, halogen lights, looked down on a kitchen straight out of *House and Home*. Cleverly designed cupboards, shining wall tiles, mostly in different shades of oyster shell, Italian tiles on the floor, all exuded wealth. Weir waved an arm sideways, as if showing the room to a visitor. "Most women would kill for a kitchen like this."

The game, whatever it was, was making Mrs. Weir distinctly nervous. Not sure what was expected from her, she said, "Yes, it's all beautiful, Ronnie. The whole house. I love it."

He came close to her, his lips pursed, shaking his head slowly from side to side. "And yet, it's not enough for you."

"Wh ... what?"

His arm lashed out and the loud smack to her face was as shocking in its suddenness as it was in its brutality. Her head snapped back, tears springing to her eyes, her cheek already reddening from the force of the blow.

"Ronnie ..."

"Don't Ronnie me, you bitch." He buried his right fist in her abdomen, and when she involuntarily bent double from the force of the blow, he whacked his knee into her face and slammed his other fist into the side of her head, knocking her back against the kitchen wall. She bounced sideways, blood flowing profusely from her

nose. She had now turned her back to her husband, gasping for breath and clinging to the wall for support.

"It just wasn't e-fucking-nough for you, was it?" he gritted, breathing heavily now. He hammered two further vicious blows into her back, and she began to slide to the floor in agonising pain. He seized her arm roughly, meaning to drag her towards him, but because her body was falling awkwardly away from him, and he had seized her with such vehemence, a bone in her arm snapped with a loud crack. "Fuckin' bitch," he snarled. "You did that on purpose."

Mewling piteously, she tried to crawl away from him, but he seized her by the hair and, pulling her head back, delivered a murderous blow to the side of her face. Her head smashed against the wall, leaving an immediate splash of blood on the tiles and spatter on the floor. Weir stepped back, wanting no trace of blood on his shoes or his clothes but, carefully selecting a dry spot, he continued to kick his now unconscious wife in a paroxysm of fury as she lay defenceless on the floor. All veneer of sophistication fell away as his accent and language reverted to his days as a brutal UDA enforcer. "Any fuckin' nosy cops pokin' around, you tell them that it was a couple of thieves what broke into the house and done this to you, you filthy slag." Out of breath, he stepped away from the prone body of his wife on the kitchen floor and spat, "If you need a bloody ambulance, phone for it yourself." Straightening his suit jacket and tie, he left the kitchen and went back out to his car.

Two policemen, parked some forty yards away, watched him leave. One took out a notebook and noted the date and time of departure, *Tuesday, 21st October, ten twenty pm*. The one in the driver's seat said, "He didn't stay long."

"No, but at least she's still in there," his companion replied.

"So we stay." He sighed. "Another long bloody night by the looks of it." And adjusting his seat backwards, he began to stretch out.

"Hey! Don't you be going to sleep."

"Just making myself comfortable."

Conversation then became desultory, interspersed with long silences. Sometime over an hour later, headlights swept the street, and Weir's Bentley returned, idling in front of the black, electric gates as they slowly opened. Although the arched gates were tall and the pillars to which they were attached were close to eight feet high, the wall leading from them on either side was barely five foot in height. Thus the watching officers were able to keep sight of the car as it drove up the drive, past the many shrubs and small bushes that bordered the immaculate lawns.

The officer in the passenger seat again noted the time. *Eleven thirty-five*. Putting his notebook away, he said, bored, "I'd say that's the end of the excitement for the night."

His companion was nodding acquiescence when they heard the sound of a siren in the distance. He cocked his head, listening. "More like an ambulance than one of ours," he guessed.

Even as he spoke, the electric gates to the Weir residence began to open again, and an ambulance came barrelling up the street towards the house. Both policemen sat bolt upright, wide awake now.

"What the f...?" the driver said.

The ambulance turned into the Weir gate and hurtled up the drive. Two paramedics jumped from the cabin, ran to the back of the ambulance, and pulled out a wheeled stretcher and a rug.

By this time, Weir was standing at the open front door. "This way," he was shouting urgently. "Down to the kitchen."

The paramedics chased after him, and the watching policemen saw them return a few moments later carrying a supine figure on the stretcher.

“What the hell do you think’s happened?” the policeman in the passenger seat asked, neck craning as the figure was loaded into the ambulance.

“Could she have fallen or had a heart attack or something?”

“Aye! Or maybe the bastard’s beaten the shit out of her.”

The driver stared through the windscreen as the ambulance began turning to leave the drive. “What the bloody hell are we supposed to do now?” he asked, tense with shock.

“There’s nothing we can do. Maybe follow the ambulance. But we can’t break our cover,” his companion answered, anxiety dripping from the words. “We’ll just have to report it in.”

They hunkered down in their seats as the ambulance sped past them, anxious not to be seen in the wash of the vehicle’s lights.