

The End.

The newspaper office was still, silent. No noisy staff chattering around the water cooler, no shouts from the management office; no bursts of laughter from unfunny Harry in accounts.

The air conditioners whispered their goodbyes as I turned off my life, switch by switch. The lights, seem startled by this and flickered their annoyance row by row until only the kitchen light stayed on, safe from this interruption, saved by a separate circuit.

I walked to the kitchen, noticing as if for the first time what a haven this little room was. A space for comforting the sad, calming the angry and hiding from the over enthusiastic. A dying rubber plant competing with drab cupboards and sticky linoleum certainly wouldn't be troubling any office design awards.

Curious, I peered into the fridge and saw a forgotten piece of cake, already drying in the darkness on its lonely little paper plate. It seemed to epitomise my situation. I picked it up and said out loud to the desperately sad, dark office:

'Were you forgotten too, left to dry on a dark lonely shelf? Them's the breaks in the newspaper business.'

As I pressed the pedal of the bin and prepared to send the cake to its final resting place, I noticed the contents already bulging upwards. Tangled paper streamers fighting with each other and discarded food. Paper plates squashed into pathetic shapes. A mess, a metaphor for my life contained in a sad metal bin. I dumped the cake to join that party and, turning around, switched off the kitchen light.

Starting a newspaper in a small town had been my dream. The one thing in my life I could be proud of. Forgetting the divorces, the diva moments and the drink driving charges, I poured my savings and my soul into a community newspaper. I recruited talented people and we reflected small town life and values in our pages. Not for us the celebrity gossip of the glossies, but advertisers said different.

The end, when it came was swift and brutal. A bank calling in its loan immediately. We all tried to make the best of things, with pathetic paper streamers and cake for the last sad day. My only responsibility now was to switch off the lights and hand the keys to the bank. Suddenly the front door bell announced a visitor. I shouted 'Come in'. I had nothing left to lose or steal. The young postman, chewing gum and listening to his headphones, silently handed me an envelope, demanding a signature by shoving a plastic pen in my hand. I signed his screen, muttering at the lack of manners in young people and he left, not caring.

Opening the envelope, I discovered a large cheque from a long-forgotten Bond. I laughed hysterically, realising I had missed the only deadline in my life that mattered. It was 24 hours too late for the business and for me.

492 Words