

## A Dreadful Truth

Standing at the front desk of the prison visitors' building Lucy's heart was pounding so hard, she could barely make out what the security clerk was saying to her.

"ID please", the clerk repeated, tapping his pen.

She handed over her passport, phone and keys, her hands slippery with sweat.

He regarded her with disinterest "First visit" he said: a statement not a question. She nodded. Today she hoped to finally know the truth and the thought terrified her.

She was given an ID badge and directed to the waiting room.

"Lucy Wolstenholme". A guard called, scanning the room for acknowledgement.

She stood after a moment's hesitation - her maiden name still sounded unfamiliar to her.

"Visiting Neil Chamberlain?" The guard continued, beckoning her to follow him.

She had divorced Neil five years earlier after the abduction of their 13-year-old daughter, Kitty had destroyed their marriage. After months of not knowing and heartbreak she had buried her grief in work while Neil had a series of barely concealed affairs. She thought his behaviour was due to guilt, because Kitty had disappeared when she was with him, but now she was faced with contemplating the unthinkable.

She hadn't seen him since his highly publicised trial three years ago for the abduction and murder of two schoolgirls in the local area. When he had been found guilty, she found herself the subject of pity and speculation.

"I was surprised to get your visitor request" he said conversationally as she sat across from him, as though they were old work colleagues catching up.

When she didn't answer, he asked "So why are you here, then?"

"The police have been in contact" she said flatly, "they say there's more information - they are going to excavate again."

He curled his lip.

"Still sniffing around, are they? They don't believe I'm innocent any more than you do," he continued "I don't know why you still live there"

"You know why. Lucy said steadily, "I can't move without knowing what happened to Kitty. I'll stay in the house until she's found or...." Her voice trailed off, the words lost to the sounds coming from the next visiting room: a woman sniffing, a baby crying.

At the sound of his daughter's name a muscle twitched in Neil's jaw – a tic that Katie knew well. Although the movement no longer caused her an involuntary flinch anticipating a fist; instead, she felt a surge anger.

She looked at him squarely, saying:

"This is the first and last time I'll visit you here so you might as well tell me the truth"

He hesitated.

"I don't care if you never admit it to anyone else but tell me. You owe me that..."

She leaned in aware of the security guard watching them.

"Was she.....? She hissed "...our daughter, was she your first victim?"

Next door the woman sniffed again loudly.

Neil closed his eyes briefly, the façade gone and his face blank.

And she knew then.

497 words