

Smokescreen

Richard was a good kind man; reliable, rarely told a lie, and had only once been in trouble. As a teenager he had been the passenger in a stolen car. He was investigated but never charged as it was obvious that he had been innocent.

Now, fifteen years later he was married to his childhood sweetheart Olivia, and as an engineer, earned enough money to keep her and their beautiful daughter Maisy happy.

Livvy had just announced that she was expecting their second child. Richard should have been delighted; however, he had found out that same day that he was being made redundant with immediate effect. He had no idea how or when to deliver this devastating news, but today was definitely not the right moment. That moment never arrived.

For three weeks Richard left home at 6.30am as usual. He wandered the streets and spent hours in the local library using their computers to look for work. He was so stressed that he bought himself a packet of cigarettes. His first in ten years, but perhaps one or two cigarettes would calm his mind. It wasn't his normal newsagent; he didn't want to go anywhere he would be recognised. He couldn't help noticing the huge wad of notes in the till.

The mortgage was due, he had no money, he couldn't tell Livvy. He was terrified.

He couldn't quite believe what he was planning. The next morning, Richard left the house in the dark at 6am. He wrapped a scarf around his face, picked up a banana from the fruit bowl, placed it in his jacket pocket and headed across town. Smoking a cigarette to calm his nerves, he flicked the end onto the pavement and walked calmly into the newsagent as it was opening. Quietly but firmly he instructed 'Hand me the money or...' He indicated the gun shaped bulge in his coat pocket with a flick of his head. And that was how easy it was.

He tried but could not stop thinking about what he had done three weeks earlier, or the consequences had he been caught. He would have gone to prison and lost his wife and daughter. It went round and around his head creating ever expanding circles like the repetitive pattern of skates scratching into ice. He could not stop the thinking. 'I should confess to a Priest; this is driving me mad.'

He distracted himself by switching on the television. It was a programme he normally enjoyed, a documentary showing criminal investigations leading to prosecution. He had just seen a clip where the police had received DNA results from a cigarette end which had been discarded at the scene of a crime. 'Oh shit.....' he tried to convince himself 'NO, I am worrying for nothing'

As he angrily pressed the controller's "off" button, there was a sudden very loud bang on the front door. Maisy woke and screamed '**Daddy!**' which was followed by a male voice bellowing 'Police, open the door.'