

RED MIST

by

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'I awoke full of hope. Hope for a better day. Hope for a brighter future: we'd been getting on better lately.' Steed's glazed eyes looked up at me. His cuffed hands lay motionless on the desk between us. His lawyer, fresh out of law school and immediately out of her depth, sat silently next to her client. She would let him speak. Now, after several minutes of prodding and probing without response, Steed was finally talking.

I held his eyes for a few seconds, and held my words. The silence would crack him.

'She wasn't next to me. I called her name but she didn't answer. I got up. My head felt light: empty.' His head was bowed again now. Remorse, or remembrance?

I turned my head to view my partner listening intently to Steed's words. She looked a little flushed. Like the lawyer, she was young. Unlike the lawyer, she was attractive. Away from work, DS Booth was blonde and bubbly. Sitting here, she was all business: an alluring combination. I found my mind wandering to thoughts of the couple of nights we had shared together.

My concentration on the job in hand returned when she spoke.

'Go on, Mr Steed.' She positively hissed the words. An understandable reaction considering the man we were dealing with. Previously we had, on several occasions, arrested Steed for domestic violence. He was, for want of a better description, a serial wife beater. I had spoken at length to his wife, Jackie, each separate time. Try as I might, I could never get her to testify against her husband.

Now Rachel Steed was dead, and it looked as if her husband had finally overstepped the mark in yet another of his drunken rages.

'That's when I saw the knife, at my feet, covered in blood: her blood.' He looked directly into Booth's eyes. His pallor matched the grey of his jumper. He looked like what he was: a drunk, wife beating, no-hoper. He looked old, unkempt, and feeble.

'What did you do?' She asked him.

'I picked the knife up. I didn't know how it got there.'

'But you knew it was Mrs Steed's blood?'

'Yes...I mean no....not straight away. She was downstairs. How could I know it was her blood?'

'How did the knife get to be by your bed?'

'I don't know.'

'Why don't you know? Surely, you put it there? Took it up to your room after you had killed your wife?'

'I don't know, I was drunk. We were drunk. I can't remember.' His anger was growing at Booth's questioning.

'We have witnesses who saw you and your wife arguing in the pub, just before she walked out and you chased after her' Booth stated matter-of-factly.

'I think I would like five minutes alone with my client' the lawyer cut in. Booth was now on a roll, and ignored the request.

'You got drunk, argued, chased Rachel home and stabbed her to death in the kitchen. Is that how it happened?'

Steed rose to his feet, banged his fists on the desk.

'She was having an affair! The bitch, she was screwing someone else, she was...' he lost his voice as his lawyer pulled him back to his chair.

'Detective Booth, I must protest. You are baiting my client, and I said I want five minutes privacy with him.'

Booth smiled, and rose to her feet. She was calm, and strong.

‘Of course.’ She looked at her watch. ‘Five minutes.’

We left the room together. It wasn’t until we had walked the length of the corridor and were standing in the sunlight that she spoke.

‘You were spot on, he rose to the bait. I think we’ve got enough.’

‘Men like him? They always rise to a female’s challenging’ I said ‘You leading the questioning was always going to be the way to go. When we go back in, continue to work on his anger.’

‘It would be good if we could get a confession,’ she stated. This was true, of course, but not necessary.

‘We’ve got enough.’ I said. ‘Drunken rage in the pub, he chased after her, fingerprints on the knife, her blood on his clothes. It’s a done deal.’

She stubbed her cigarette underneath the toe of her black patent size six.

‘Let’s get back in there. I want this finished,’ she said. She could sense the end game approaching. She was ready to take this bastard down.

On the way back to Interview Room 1, I made a detour via the toilets. Checking they were empty, I locked myself in the booth furthest from the door.

I felt inside my top pocket and pulled a small manila envelope from it. It contained a photo, which I took out and held in my hands, staring at it and remembering the time it was taken. I ripped it up, put it down the pan and flushed. Twice, to make certain it was gone.

Rachel Steed should never have tried to use it against me. She should have had her fun, enjoyed our little dalliance for what it was, and left it at that. Blackmail is so belittling.

But when she wouldn’t back down last night, when she told me how she would ruin my career, ruin me, unless I coughed up, I lost my temper. The knife was just laid there, on the kitchen worktop. Placing the blame on her drunken bum of a husband was easy. The rage just took me. A red mist, like her husband had described every time we had him up for his assaults on her.

Like him, I didn't see it coming.