

Twelve Hours Earlier

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January

Philip Walker reckoned he had less than twenty-four hours before the police arrived to tell him they'd discovered his wife's body hanging upside down in a dense tangle of undergrowth; better get a move on, he thought.

He slid from the bed and snapped off the condom. He'd never been a fan, but Angie had refused point-blank to entertain the pill. He dropped it into the bin where it lay, perched on a fold in the translucent polythene liner. Normally he'd have disposed of it in the bathroom, but tonight he was happy to leave it where it lay.

The top pane in one of the room's two sash and case windows rattled in its frame as the storm battered against it. An accompanying squall sluiced against the glass, followed hot on its heels by another, repeating so frequently that individual drops didn't stand an earthly. The news for days had warned of severe weather for Edinburgh, in fact the entire east coast of Scotland from Berwickshire to Caithness. This storm, eighty mph winds with all the accompaniments, was due to hang about for thirty-six hours if the forecast was to be believed.

Philip looked out onto the street, but the rain blurred the image. And despite being framed in the window, it was unlikely he'd be spotted; even if someone was crazy enough to be out on a night like this, they'd have their shoulders hunched up around their ears, head down and eyes fixed on the ground.

But loitering wasn't a luxury he could afford. He stretched up and hauled down the two top panes until they jammed, exposing about a foot of fresh air on either side. Immediately, the right-hand curtain billowed into the room, flattened against the panes then flopped back to neutral. He dropped to one knee, twisted the radiator thermostat to zero then returned to the bed.

He sat, side-saddle, studying his wife. She lay on her side on top of the duvet, facing away from him. The light filtering through the rain-spattered glass picked out the smooth contours of her hip, waist, and shoulder; a scattering of moles across her back resembled isolated rocks on a pale Hebridean beach. He leaned over and gently kissed the soft triangle of flesh in between her shoulder blades. 'I'd love to cuddle up beside

you, darling, but I have so much to do.' He glanced past her to the bedside table and the luminous green display.

21:27. Bang on schedule.

He sighed, moved her hair to the side and slid his fingers under the PVC coated cable that was tight against her throat. With his other hand, he slipped the knot. The white pillowcase that had formed a makeshift hood contrasted with a lock of her hair; damp due to their recent exertions. It had ridden up, so he lifted her head, and tugged the cotton material down until it fitted neatly across her scalp. He retightened the ligature and let her fall back onto the bed. Her hair had to stay in place, for now at least.

'Well, Angie, time to get you cleaned up and dressed.' Philip shivered from the howling gale blasting through the open windows and winced as another slash of wind-driven rain battered into the front of the house. The roof tiles rattled and groaned under the onslaught. 'I know it's a shitty night, but sorry to say we'll be going out later.'

He opened a deep drawer in the base of his wardrobe and lifted out a sizeable bundle of mid-grey clothing: two hooded sweatshirts and four pairs of joggers. Same brand, same material, same colour. He pulled on one set and threw the other four garments onto the bed, then disentangled her underwear from the pile of clothing she'd stripped off less than half an hour earlier.

'Come on, then. Can't have you lying there all night. Things to do, places to go.' He smiled. 'Bodies to dump.'

He grabbed his wife's feet and dragged her corpse onto the floor. He knelt next to her, exhaled, then the bell dinged to signal the opening round of the one-sided wrestling match that would end half an hour later with Angie in the boot of their car.