

Andrée Roby

DOUBLE VISION

A creative crime drama

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INTRODUCTION

As she was getting ready to go on her date, sheer excitement warmed her body in a way never experienced before. Her pulse was racing, her hands were trembling as she applied her make-up, little bubbles of laughter kept popping in her throat and, by the feel of it, her stomach was doing somersaults; all these amazing sensations at the thought of meeting him, this Adonis she had fancied for some time. Well, in less than an hour she would be with him.

In fact, she had felt brave booking him for the night. She longed for love, romance, sex, the full Monty really. Why shouldn't she? Why would she not have it all? Who had thrown the dice of her particular life and decided she should not be loved the way she deserved and wanted? Who knows? The thought that she was middle-aged and had never been loved sounded pathetic even to her own ears.

In her innocence, she thought loving, wandering hands would make her body come to life, make her feel all woman. She yearned to be hugged, to let herself wallow in love, to share her life, in mind, body and soul.

It would have been feasible all those years ago, had her life not been plagued by the anger inside of her. She felt she had spent her life fighting against it. The more she fought it, the worse it got, as if her inner conflict was the perfect fuel to keep the fire burning. She knew it consumed her, in every fibre of her being. Her anger burned red hot in her heart, mind and soul.

True, nothing good would happen in her life until she silenced the volleys of angry arguments and insults which often erupted in her head like a volcano, targeting anyone who had ever slighted her. Arguments so damaging and intense, her limbs would go numb and her heart heavy, as if her blood only sustained the red hot anger and no longer her body. Anger so rampant inside that she felt herself tensing, ready to pounce on anybody who happened to be nearby.

Right at this point, anything might tip her over, making her lose her sanity and all notion of right or wrong. She felt like lashing out, kicking, hitting, and at worst, maiming someone to death.

She had been warned many times to stay out of trouble and, without a doubt, that was her intention tonight...

CHAPTER 1

Vince was what you would call a handsome young man with a sunny personality but rather immature for his 23 years of age. Popular with the ladies, charming when needed, able to tell a good joke, yet not afraid of showing his vulnerable side.

Neither ambitious nor educated, he had left school at 16 to work at McDonald's, then held a variety of low paid jobs up to two years ago. All in all, not a successful man by today's standard. But Vince considered himself a good man and an honest man. The one good thing going for him, really, was his physique on which he had worked for a few years, going to the gym several times a week, working with weights to increase the bulging muscles on his arms and legs.

At 18, he had indulged his childish, irresponsible streak by buying a motorbike which he dubbed his "bird-pulling" machine. Despite his pitiful wages, Vince had saved some money, allowing him to fork out £5,000 for a long-desired second-hand Harley. His greatest pleasure was to ride it down the streets of his native South London town, where women would invariably stare at him. He would travel up to London whenever he fancied, extending his hunting ground. Vince was so obsessed by his bike that he would ride it regardless of the unpredictable British weather.

Flaunting all safety regulations, Vince liked nothing better than to ride his Harley without a helmet so that his unusual, beautiful red shoulder-length hair would float in the air, attracting attention from passers-by. He knew it was illegal, as well as not practical as his hair flew in his face, but Vince loved the fact that most women he came across were glancing at him appreciatively or even with lustful stares sometimes. When he liked the appearance of a particular woman, he would slow down to give them both a chance to appraise each other... He thrived on the stares and attention he was getting. However, it did bother him a bit that sometimes men also studied him with interest and even with lust in their eyes but "heh! Live and let live" he would think. He was a ladies' man and men had never been, and never will be, his thing, but he was powerless to stop them staring at him.

Two and a half years ago, a lucky break came his way and he started working as a barman in a night-club. The good years thus began.... because of his red hair, club-goers (mainly women) would always strike

up a conversation with him, asking if the colour was real etc. He had been born in a family of Irish descent who all possessed magnificent red manes just like his. His grand-parents and his mother all sported a head of flaming red hair.

He had realised that women favoured straight shoulder-length hair and that style framed his oval face very well. He also had piercing green eyes that he had learnt to use to connect with women's nurturing side. He was fond of using what he called his "puppy dog eyes", gazing straight at them, head tilted to the side, with childish puzzlement on his handsome face.

This was a seduction tactic he perfected when he first worked in the club two years ago as a means to get women to think he was a bit lost, a bit vulnerable and that, like a dog, he would be so grateful if they took care of him. And so started his new career as a gigolo (or as a male escort to be politically correct).

Well who would have thought? HIM! Vince O'Shaunessy!

Making a living by escorting single, lonely women to shows, art galleries, restaurants etc. and quite often offering extra "night-time" services. When he had first started his escort job, he had carried on working at the club which provided him with a good supply of eager clients, but he became so busy and tired that he had to resign.

Still it had served its purpose and he was now an established male escort.

Life was good for Vince. He had bought his own place in a leafy little street of Anerley with the added bonus of his own parking space for his cherished bike, no longer fearing that it would get damaged or stolen when left on the road. At the very beginning, he had gone out with women just to get a free meal, to spend an evening in someone's company and sometimes to get laid. But as he became popular, he decided to make his hair, his body and his handsome face work for him.

For two years now he had been paid to eat with women in trendy places, to go to fashionable places and, above all, to have sex with them and this suited him well. He certainly did not know many people who, like him, were getting paid very well to eat, go out, have fun and get laid! During that period, there had been a few young women whom he had found

attractive enough to have become attached to, had he not kept to his goal of earning as much as possible, for as long as possible - and certainly he envisaged doing this "job" until he was at least 40 years old.

His reputation as a male escort had grown this last year, as word of mouth was providing him with more and more ladies of any age and background, eager to avail themselves of his services. Many of them were professional women who were career-focussed and did not have time to date, but still enjoyed going out with an attractive, interesting man and spending a very pleasant evening.

Most of the women who contacted him did so by phone. One evening he took a call from a lady called Vanessa, whom he had never heard from before. She requested his company for an impromptu alternative art exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, then dinner also in Dulwich afterwards. Arrangements were made to meet one Thursday night at the end of October. He gave her a description of himself and instructions as to where he would wait for her.

When he met her at the agreed time outside the Dulwich Picture Gallery, Vince was a little surprised by the blonde woman who had requested his services. Not exactly attractive, tall but not over-tall, a bit heavy, with slightly angular features on a longish face. Her smoky voice when she introduced herself reminded him of a late-night radio presenter.

"Hum, unusual woman!" he concluded.

Her hair was blonde and styled in a long bob. He guessed she might be in her late 40s. Because of the make-up she wore, it was challenging to give her a definite age. Somehow he was feeling a bit uneasy about her. The reason for the uneasiness eluded him but he was convinced that something was not quite right. Not willing to lose the £500 (or more) that he would earn escorting Vanessa tonight, he decided to put his uneasiness at the back of his mind and to concentrate on what Vanessa was saying.

Very early on in his new career, Vince had realised that being a good listener was a key skill to ensuring his success, followed by being knowledgeable about a variety of subjects so that conversation flowed during his meetings with clients. Skills all the more important, as he lacked academic qualifications.

Going around the exhibition, Vanessa revealed herself to be an interesting companion, knowledgeable about art, current affairs and most probably gastronomy. She had chosen a gourmet restaurant in Dulwich near the Picture Gallery. When booking him for the evening, she had made it clear that she wanted the extra “night-time services” he offered. Vince had duly booked a room at the four star hotel he favoured in Forest Hill, the Woodman Inn.

The weather that evening was quite mild and dry for an October evening so they agreed to walk the short distance from the restaurant to the hotel. Walking alongside Vanessa towards it, Vince was asking himself why her voice was a bit strained. Thinking she was maybe feeling a little nervous and uncomfortable herself, he made small talk to alleviate her concerns.

On arrival at the Woodman Inn, Vince picked up the key to their room from reception. On the way in, he had slipped a generous tip to the concierge who would ensure that a taxi would be waiting for the client when she left the hotel in the morning. He always made a point of leaving before sunrise and letting the lady have the room to herself until the morning. A rule, he had set himself from the beginning which gave him a failsafe if necessary. He also always organised for room service to bring breakfast to the lady, so he had asked Vanessa at what time it should be brought to her. Whenever possible, he left his bike at the hotel, then made his way to meet his date either on foot, by taxi or by tube depending on where their meeting took him. This way he just left when he wanted.

They took the lift to the 5th floor in silence. This part of the evening often filled him with apprehension.

What would she be like naked and in bed? Would he be able to perform? Would she have strange requests or be so boring that he would not be able to rise to the occasion? Well there was no point wondering anymore as they had reached the 5th floor and were now walking towards room 505.

CHAPTER 2

Vanessa was enjoying her evening and her companion. She had noticed him many times before tonight, at the club where he used to work, or recklessly riding his bike in the streets of Anerley, with his distinctive red hair floating in the wind. She had often thought that it was lucky he had not been stopped by the police whilst riding without a helmet so many times. He always appeared so carefree. She had taken a fancy to him. She would have loved to ride with him on his flashy bike and to feel his gorgeous hair floating in her face.

On a visit to the club a year ago, she had even managed to take a picture of him. She had pretended to take a selfie whilst he was standing behind the bar. Of course, he had not even noticed her so he was unlikely to realise that she had taken a picture of him. Then, during subsequent visits, she had noticed his repeated absence so she had asked the manager about him. She had been both surprised and delighted to learn that he was now a full-time male escort. What a stroke of luck! She was realistic enough to know that she would never be able to attract the attention of such a handsome, much younger, man by herself. In truth she had very little chance of going out with him for an evening unless she paid for his services.

Vanessa knew that, in the looks department, she had been somewhat short-changed. She was tall but a bit stocky. Her voice, a touch irritating to some people, was husky most of the times. When asked about it, she would blame it on having smoked since her teens. She told them that she had now stopped but the huskiness in her voice had remained. She thought her face was slim and interesting, though not pretty. Shame that she tended to be a bit heavy handed with her make-up. She had never taken the time to learn how to apply it properly but it did not bother her. Her hair tonight was blonde but it was not always that colour. Vanessa had assumed that blondes were more likely to be Vince's type.

As a result of her less than pleasing appearance, by the age of 45, she had never married. No-one had ever taken enough interest in her to offer a long-term relationship or marriage. She was considered too aloof and too much of a loner. In truth, relationships had been a major issue since puberty - not only did she lack self-confidence but she had an almost pathological fear of rejection. This fear, she knew, stemmed from being bullied repeatedly throughout her schooling resulting in deep emotional

scars. She had been breathing shame and guilt every minute of her time spent at secondary school.

Vanessa had never felt that she “fitted in” with the other kids at primary school, then at secondary school and even later on at university. She was always dubbed “a freak” because of the way she dressed, and because she just did not relate to people well. Being so uncomfortable in her own skin made her a magnet for loud-mouthed bullies who enjoyed tormenting her for years. The regular taunts of “freak, weirdo, and sicko” were still resounding aloud in her head all those years later.

She had learnt to silence the voices but, on occasions, the memories resurfaced and that would make her angry with the bullies, and sometimes with herself, for not standing up to them. She often felt like a volcano ready to erupt at any moment.

She had not been lucky either in her professional life and had not achieved what she had dreamt of doing as a young person. Work was not fulfilling and had proved to be a big disappointment a few months back.

But tonight, walking on the arm of handsome Vince, through the exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, and then sitting in a trendy restaurant talking to him during the meal, she was feeling happy. Of course she chose to ignore the fact that his charming presence was costing her a hefty £500. She even had had the courage to tell him that she wanted some of the other services he provided, the one he gallantly called the extra “night-time services”.

Vince took her to a hotel, the Woodman Inn. She waited for him whilst he spoke to the concierge. He had told her that he would organise a taxi for her to get home in the morning as he would be leaving during the night. She was not pleased with the prospect of waking up alone. She did that every morning. By paying for his services she had expected a long, romantic, sex filled night... Well at least, she would get breakfast in the room at eight o'clock, small consolation in her opinion. She swallowed her disappointment, something she had become better and better at doing over the years, and followed him into the lift, up to the 5th floor and along the corridor to room 505.

Vince, always a gentleman, opened the door to a bright and modern room, let Vanessa in, and took her coat off for her. As requested, a bottle

of champagne left by the maid was chilling in an ice-bucket on the small desk opposite the bed. Vince offered her a glass which she drank with anticipation. In all honesty, she hoped the champagne would give her some Dutch courage. Paying for a male escort and for sexual services was a new experience. She had felt very brave to have contacted him but, as the moment she had dreamt of for so long was approaching, she was feeling both scared and excited.

Vince came closer and gently kissed her. So far this evening there had been no physical contact apart from holding his arm in the art gallery, and him helping her to take off, and put on, her coat at the restaurant. Vanessa, a bit of a traditional sort, thought that Vince was the perfect gentleman so she was enchanted by him. She had fancied him for so long that, at last to be on the verge of having sex with him, gave her butterflies in her stomach.

She wondered if he felt anything towards her in the way she did towards him, but she put that thought out of her mind. No point asking for the moon. She would not get a boyfriend from this encounter, but at least she will be having sex with a handsome younger man. The memory of their sexual encounter might keep her warm during lonely nights ahead. Uneventful, lonely, cold nights had been her lot every night forever.

She was not a virgin as such, but that shameful and traumatic encounter with a fellow university student 25 years ago, did not qualify her as being sexually knowledgeable. That was an experience she had not wanted to repeat. But, tonight, she had high hopes for something magical with handsome Vince.

“Let’s face it, for £500 I expect fireworks and all the trimmings”. She almost laughed to herself.

After the champagne and the gentle kisses, Vince took Vanessa in his arms and kissed her with apparent fervour. He had no romantic thoughts towards her, rather he was thinking instead that it was midnight already, and he needed to get on with the job in order to leave at three am as planned. He had become very skilful in the art of pretending feeling romantic and of being excited by his client, so Vanessa did not notice that he was somewhat distracted.

She was enjoying herself and waited impatiently for their sexual encounter although her apprehension level was high. The unfortunate sexual experience of years ago was foremost in her mind.

Vince led her to the bed and laid down next to her, fully clothed for now. He was starting to undress her, he unbuttoned her blouse very slowly, kissing her neck at the same time and she eagerly returned his kisses. Once the blouse was undone, Vince was about to undo her bra when Vanessa gently pushed him away.

“Sorry, I would prefer to keep my bra on. I feel a bit embarrassed”. Vanessa’s voice was a coarse whisper. “I am afraid that I have had a double mastectomy and I am waiting for reconstructive surgery, so for now I am using prosthetics”.

Vince’s eyes narrowed and he examined her with a mixture of compassion and understanding but also confusion. With her clothes on, she had appeared to have a reasonable-size chest and he would never have guessed her breasts had not been real.

“Of course, no problem. Sorry to hear that”. Vince moved his hands away from her bra fastening and started to unzip her skirt.

The feeling of uneasiness, which he had experienced when he first met her, reappeared and he wondered what it was about Vanessa that made him uneasy. Had he sensed that she was not a “complete” woman? This was absurd, as he had no way of guessing what she had just explained to him.

Vanessa had moved towards him and was kissing him whilst pulling him to her urgently. He disengaged himself from her embrace, stood near the bed and undressed, removing first his shirt, exposing a well-defined torso. Next his trousers came off, revealing strong thighs and long legs as well as smart blue Calvin Klein underwear. In a quick gesture, he removed his underwear. All the while, her lustful stare had been locked onto his body, and now that he was naked, onto his, not so private, parts. Never in his career had he felt so uneasy about being naked in front of a client. What was going on with him? He was finding it difficult to conjure up an erection which would prove to her that he was as eager to make love as she was.

Vanessa got off the bed to let Vince remove her skirt, then stood a few paces away from him, in her bra and tights. She lowered her gaze, almost sheepishly. Misunderstanding her emotions, Vince thought she was scared or embarrassed, so he gently pulled her to him, held her tight in his arms to soothe her anxiety.

Whilst pressed against her, Vince was overcome by an almighty realisation that he knew what had made him uneasy. For there, staring down at her genitals, was a clear bulge, albeit squeezed compactly inside the tights and tight underwear, which was not at all feminine.

Vince's eyes widened at the unexpected sight and he pushed her away from him, recoiling in horror:

"What the hell? You're a bloke! Why the fuck didn't you tell me, you freak! You are sick, pretending to be a woman. Why didn't you warn me? Did you expect to fuck me or that I would give you a blow job or something?? You make me sick..."

By now Vince was furious, even shocked to find himself in this situation. He felt sick to his stomach and repulsed by this man pretending to be a woman, wanting HIM to make love to HIM. Never had this happened before! He had nothing against gay people or cross dressers, or transvestites for that matter, but it was not his inclination. Vince, shaken, suddenly intensely nauseous, wanted out of this nightmare scenario. He bent down to gather his clothes. He was so agitated that he was struggling to pick them all up. He did his utmost to avert his gaze from her crotch area, thinking that it was all surreal.

"I am leaving. Do what you want but I have no intention of staying here with you. God almighty what a night!" he moaned, finally having gathered his clothes, staggering away from Vanessa to get dressed and leave the hotel as soon as possible.

CHAPTER 3

Vanessa, equally shocked, had stood rooted to the spot, all the while processing the fact that Vince was walking away from her, showing her his back, clutching at his clothes. This was not supposed to happen. She felt a brief, intense sadness at this new rejection. An unbearable pain seared her heart. An upsetting childhood memory crossed her mind. It reminded her of her favourite ornament being destroyed by her dad with a hammer, tiny fragments of porcelain shattered on the table. At this very minute, her heart too was shattered to smithereens.

Then as quick as a bolt of lightning, the sadness gave way to a much stronger feeling. The anger was spreading its destroying fingers through her brain. The familiar thoughts now crowded her head; the relentless taunts of “freak”, the traumatic memory of the unwelcome sodomisation suffered at the hands of a drunk fellow university student, the feelings of humiliation and de-gradation which had plagued her for months afterwards. All of it crystal clear in her mind.

In every cell of her body, she felt the anger, the humiliation, the isolation, the “not belonging”, the need to sneak out dressed as a woman, the rejection by society and by men, of her, as a woman, the frustration of the lack of sexual intimacy, the lack of identity.

All these spiralling feelings drove her out of control. Finally the hot rage, the hot iron marks left on her heart, the hurtful words taunting her like a red rag to a bull, all erupted from her tormented mind, seeking revenge, intensifying the desire to hit out, to maim.

The intense repulsion she had witnessed on Vince’s face, his body recoiling from her as if touched by something disgusting and repulsive, brought her to the tipping point. Her nostrils widened as they flared in and out and in that moment, she lost all rational thinking and jumped on Vince’s back, seized him by the neck, forcing him down on the bed, unsure what to do next but unable to stop herself from inflicting harm.

The urge was too great, the force inside was gathering momentum, the need to inflict retribution to this man left her devoid of any humanity and compassion. Nothing would stop her now; her suffering had to be avenged once and for all; her rage was finding its voice at long last. She had caught him by surprise so he lost his footing toppling down on the

bed with Vanessa on top of him. He was as shell-shocked as she was enraged and his reflexes were too slow. He had no idea what was going on. He had wanted to leave and put this behind him but Vanessa's reaction stunned him. Violence had never featured in his life so the viciousness of her assault was bewildering him.

Right at this moment, the years of going to the gym and of body building paid off though. With unexpected strength, Vince managed to overthrow this tornado of rage and hysteria.

"Who the fuck is this woman? euh man? " he thought as cold shivers crept up his spine like an army of ants.

He ran to the bathroom, scared, confused, and dumbfounded by what was happening. Despite her stockiness, she sprang forward with surprising agility, following him closely, just as he reached for the shower curtain. He spun around, grabbed her in an arm-lock around her arms and chest with his left arm, all the while pulling on the shower curtain with his right hand. He yanked it down, pulling the rail down too. Despite her attempts at freeing herself, Vince drew Vanessa tighter towards him and wrapped the curtain around her neck and chest, then toppled her over into the shower. Holding her down with his foot pressing on her back, he opened the cold tap, hoping that some cold water would calm her rage. He attempted to pacify her by pleading with her:

"Calm down, will you! We can talk about this. I am sorry I have offended you but you must admit that this is not usual. Come on, stop this, you are scaring me". Fear was imprinted on his face, like an ugly mask. His hands were flailing in front of him as if to shoo her away.

Clearly she was in a very angry mood; his words and reactions had had a far worse effect on her than he had imagined. She was demented, hysterical, vicious, all at the same time. The only sounds coming out of her mouth were animal-like grunts and sporadic angry words thrown at him. He did not even understand what she was grumbling, so intent was he to avoid more physical contact with her, wanting to remove himself from this crazy happening and leave the hotel as soon as possible. Right now, he was shit-scared of what she was going to do to him.

Managing to get out of the shower, wet but burning with hot rage, she wrenched the seat off the toilet with a strength he had not anticipated. She

raised the seat over her head and brought it down repeatedly on his arms, his back, around his legs. He was moving backwards, away from her, all the while trying his best to prevent the forceful blows she was raining on him. Her strength was phenomenal. The blows all the more painful as he was devoid of the clothing which could have softened some of the impact.

“This is not happening”. Baffled thoughts kept going around in Vince’s mind. “This is not for real. Bloody hell, I’ll wake up in a minute and it’ll be fine”.

His thoughts were going a hundred miles an hour in his head, his stomach was so tight and full of knots that he found it hard to breathe as he lunged towards the bedroom to escape further blows.

Rage propelled Vanessa further forward and she rugby-tackled Vince around the legs, just as he was nearing the bed. He fell face down on it. She was on top of him, on his back, in a flash.

Although stocky, and possibly as heavy as him, her main advantage was the searing hot rage which gave her an uncharacteristic physical strength. She pressed on the small of his back with her right knee and raising herself slightly with her left leg on the bed, she grabbed Vince’s left arm, yanked it up and back with such force she almost wrenched it out of its socket. Vince cried out in sheer agony as he tried to manoeuvre his body to face her, his mind befuddled, clouded by the pain.

Letting go of his arm, she used that opportunity to straddle him, grab a pillow and press it on his face with all her strength. Vince fought back, punching her body at random, trying to catch his breath to be able to fight her off. He was using his arms and legs, and twisting his body to shake her off him.

Eventually, by moving his head from side to side, he managed to loosen her grasp and get the pillow off his face. The air entered his lungs in a welcome rush. But just as he thought he had managed to overthrow her, she gave him an almighty kick in the balls. He lost his grip on her, his body twisting in more agonising pain.

In that instant, without hesitation, Vanessa put her hands around Vince’s neck and squeezed with all her might, letting all the rage explode from her mind, heart and soul into her hands. She had finally reacted after being called “a freak and a sicko” once too often.

She collapsed on top of him, trembling from the aftermath of her rage. His body below hers was motionless. Regardless, she held him in a romantic embrace. She pressed her lips on his lifeless face, then gently pulled a lock of his lovely red hair between her fingers, stroked it and smelled it. She had the sensation of being close to him now, her skin touching his, holding him in the loving way he had denied her a short while ago. Right now, for the first time in her life, there was no rejection, he was all hers. She laid with him a little while longer. Her rage finally spent, reality sunk in. What had happened just then?

This man she had fancied for some time had been repulsed by her. She had not imagined that scenario when she had asked him to be her escort. In her naivety, she thought there might be some awkwardness but nothing like the tornado that had just struck them both. The enormity of the situation hit her. She had killed a man! Driven by the poison inside her heart and mind, she had actually killed a man! That thought gave her a jolt, like an electric discharge coursing through her. She suddenly leapt away from his cold body, her nostrils all of a sudden aware of the smell of death surrounding him, feeling disgusted by his inert body, with his flaccid penis, nesting in pubic hair no woman will ever stroke again. He appeared almost indecent now. She was unable to bear the sight of Vince any longer.

Checking her watch, she realised that it was already one o'clock in the morning, so she had to get out of the hotel without arousing suspicion. Vince's beloved bike, parked below in the hotel car park, was unlikely to be discovered until the morning. Still, she had to get out as quickly and as safely as possible. She knew that, when it came to it, the police would be searching for a woman. A plan began to form in her head. She had to act quickly before rigor mortis started to set in. Maybe she had read too many detective stories, but she knew how to turn Vince's death into a sexual game of strangulation for pleasure gone wrong.

She snatched a bathrobe from the bathroom, using the belt to tie Vince's arms above his head. Then she placed the pillow over his deathly white, inert face again, oblivious of the now pathetic lock of red hair sticking out from under the pillow. His body was laying on its back, naked, slightly twisted so the theory of a sexual game was plausible.

She grabbed the bedding around him, crumpling it all into a ball which she threw on the floor, as if the lovers had been in a hurry to play unhampered and had stripped the bed. Then she finally sat down to think clearly how to leave the hotel unnoticed.

CHAPTER 4

Ray Stevens had been in the police force since shortly after leaving university, first as a police officer then, somehow managing to pass the required tests, he had climbed to the position of Detective Inspector, which he had held for twenty years now. In his heart, though, he knew he was not very likely to ever make it to Detective Chief Inspector. One of his colleagues had just been promoted despite being in service for less years than Ray. That really rankled.

As a child, Ray had always wanted to be a carpenter but, changed his mind at the age of 16. Having watched a lot of detective series and films over the years, he decided that he wanted to be a policeman, preferably a detective. He felt that it was his duty somehow to help maintain the peace and to solve crimes. He also wanted to make something of himself after having failed to achieve good results throughout his schooling. He had not enjoyed school at all and, when his parents forced him to go to University, he was not pleased as the education system had been a nightmare for him. All he had wanted to do was to enter the police force at the age of 18 and skip university altogether. But he complied with his parents' wishes and studied Criminal Justice and Policing as well as Forensic Science at Nottingham Trent University.

Now in his forties, Ray was unmarried and living alone in a small terraced house in a Gypsy Hill, a South London suburb, and was working in Croydon police station. He was not a handsome man but he was fairly tall. For some reason unknown to him, he had never been able to attract women. Clearly, there was something in his physique, or in his personality, they did not find attractive. He had always felt that he lacked the right social graces to please women. He felt extremely clumsy and shy around them. It didn't help that he was useless at making small talk. He liked conversation with a purpose so he never understood the necessity to just chit-chat with women or with anyone. That had not made him popular with either the opposite sex or with his work colleagues. At times he felt a bit like he lived in a different world than the rest of humanity. Given all this, it was hardly surprising he had never met the right woman and, so far, had remained single.